

# The Ecclesiastical Topography of Early Medieval Bedford

JEREMY HASLAM

In the previous issue of *Bedfordshire Archaeology* the writer put forward a hypothesis for the origin of Bedford, which proposes that it was a planned urban place which formed one element in a system of fortified urban burhs instigated by king Offa (d.AD 796) throughout Mercia as a whole (Haslam 1983). This system is argued as having been conceived as a defensive measure against Viking sea-borne attack, which began at the end of the eighth century. As a general model this still provides, in the writer's view, the best explanation in historical terms for several topographical and archaeological observations relating to both Bedford and those other places which are considered as part of this system (Haslam 1984). In particular, the hypothesis of the existence of a burh at Bedford from the late 8th century places the occupation of Bedford (and other such centres) by the Danish army in the late ninth century for the first time in some sort of meaningful context.

In this article it is argued that this model also provides the best explanation for certain aspects both of the chronology and development of the historical landscape, and of the ecclesiastical topography of the northern and southern burhs of Bedford, in particular the topography of the town parishes and the physical relationship of these parishes to their neighbours. In addition, the analysis of this evidence throws some light, it is suggested, on the origin of both urban and rural parishes in general.<sup>1</sup>

The early ecclesiastical history of the county is shrouded in darkness, though the writer of the VCH at the beginning of this century (VCH i [1904], 309) suggested that the conversion of the area was well under way by the later seventh century. The association of named churches in Domesday with important royal manors is but one indication that the early ecclesiastical arrangements conformed to a pattern, common in other areas of the country, which consisted of the addition of minsters or mother churches to existing royal centres, the

extent of the parochiae of these minsters comprising the area of the royal estates or territories of which these places were the administrative centres. Domesday Book provides evidence in Bedfordshire for three of these centres (Leighton [Buzzard], Luton and Houghton Regis) apart from Bedford itself (see below). It is not the purpose here to examine this arrangement further, though this would be a particularly fruitful subject for the kind of detailed topographical and historical research that has been applied in other areas of England.<sup>2</sup>

The documentary information relating to the early history of the church at Bedford is sparse and for the most part circumstantial. From the information in Domesday Book it can be inferred that it was one of the best – if not the best – endowed churches in the county. The church was worth £5 (five pounds) before Domesday, before being robbed of its local endowment by the new bishop of Lincoln (Round 1904, 196-7). This compares with the endowments of churches at Leighton (Buzzard) with 4 hides worth £4 (four pounds), Luton with 5 hides worth £3 (three pounds), and Houghton Regis with half a hide worth 12 shillings (fol 209 b-c, paras. 1a, 2a, & 3; VCH i [1904], 222-3).<sup>3</sup> The church of St Paul, mentioned by name in Domesday Book, was a house of secular canons in the eleventh century (Round, *ibid.*), was ruled by an abbot in 971, and was the burial place of Oskytel, archbishop of York (and formerly bishop of Dorchester) in 956 (VCH i [1904], 311). All this evidence shows that it was an important minster church from at least the tenth century onwards.

Its pre-Danish history is more obscure. The evidence has been discussed by the VCH, the author of which suggests the possibility that in the late eighth century 5 hides belonging to the church (perhaps significantly approximately the same as its endowment in the mid eleventh century) were given by Offa to St Albans abbey (*ibid.*, 310). This land had apparently been given to Offa by one abbot

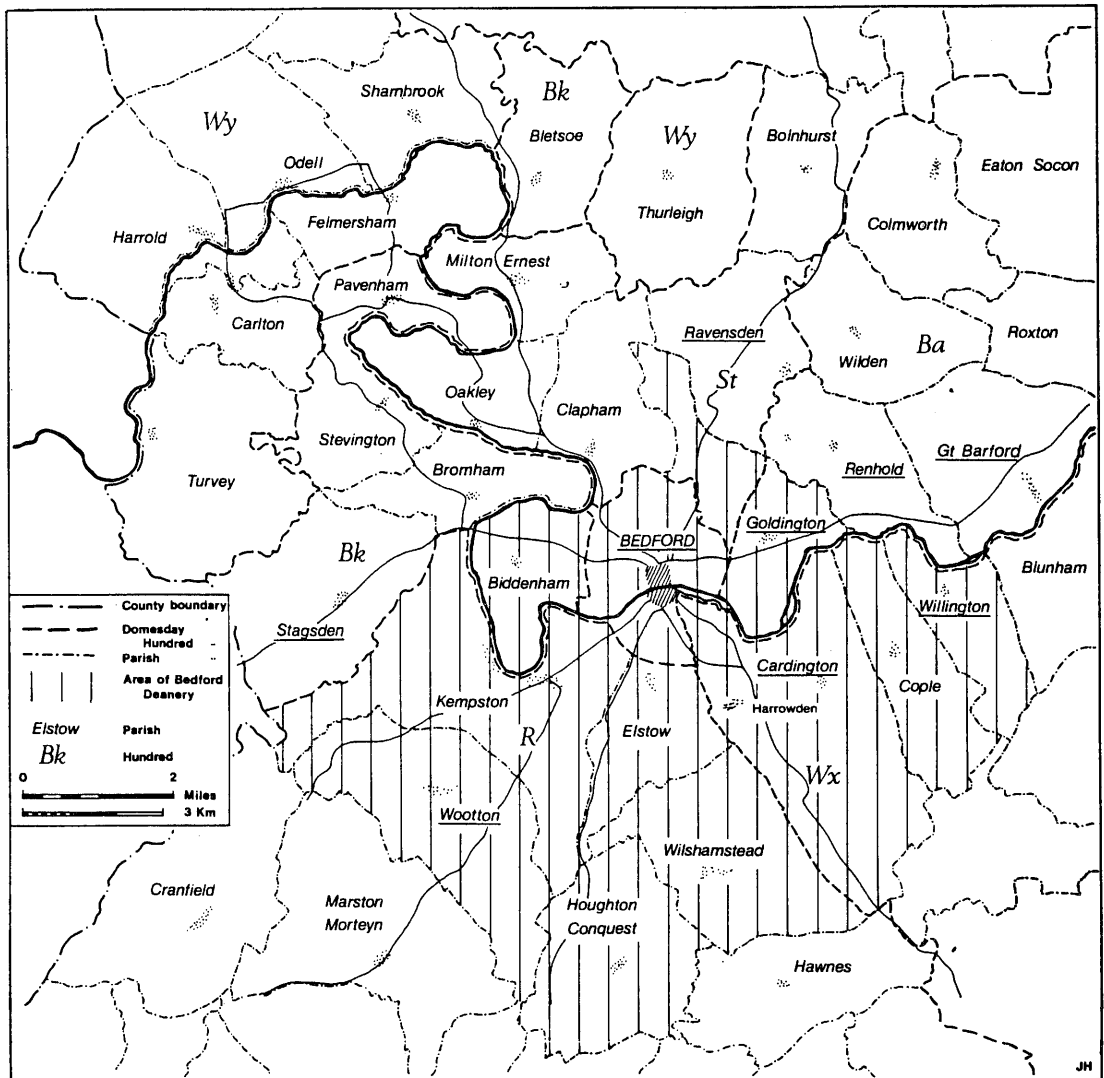


Fig 1 The Bedford Area, showing parishes, Domesday Hundreds and the Norman Deanery of Bedford. Names underlined show churches owned by Newnham Priory in the twelfth-century

Ahlmund, which could be taken as indicating that it formed part or all of the endowment of a monastic establishment at St Paul's at that time.<sup>4</sup> Bedford is also recorded by Matthew Paris as being the burial place of King Offa himself (*ibid.*) (see further below). This evidence provides at least some basis for the inference that St Paul's was also an early minster or mother church before the Viking occupation of Bedford, and that it was established no later than the reign of Offa, in the later eighth century.

This raises the question of the significance, and indeed the existence, of St Paul's church at an earlier date than this. One possibility is that, as recently

suggested by Dorothy Owen (1978, 10), it was an early minster founded during the conversion period in the seventh century, and thus the direct predecessor of the well-endowed minster of Domesday. However, there are several considerations which suggest an alternative hypothesis. This is that the early minster was located at Elstow, immediately to the south of Bedford (see Fig 1), and that St Paul's was a new church (a 'new minster') provided by Offa for his newly founded burh, to which the majority of the endowments of the early minster were transferred. Thus dual hypothesis provides in the writer's view the best explanation for a number of topo-

graphical and historical observations.

Firstly, from its central position in relation to the suggested burh of Offa it can be inferred that St Paul's functioned as the burh church, created to serve the ecclesiastical needs of its inhabitants, from the time of its original foundation. It is unlikely therefore to be earlier in date than the foundation of the burh itself.<sup>5</sup>

Secondly, the hypothesis provides a historical context for the circumstances of the possible burial of Offa at Bedford, first recorded by Matthew Paris in the twelfth century.<sup>6</sup> The relevant documentary evidence, however, raises certain problems (quite apart from its late origin and rather legendary form), in that the chapel in which he was supposedly buried is said to have lain outside the town on the banks of the Ouse, to have become eventually submerged by the river. This chapel may have been attached to a presumed royal palace located near the river (possibly on the site of the later castle), with St Paul's church provided as a separate foundation. A parallel for this process could exist at Cambridge, where the writer has argued (Haslam 1984b, 17) for the foundation of a church (St Giles) in the northern burh by Offa, its parish carved out of a wider territory dependent on a presumed mother church at the royal site of Chesterton nearby. On the other hand, it could equally well be argued that St Paul's church, which, it is suggested here, could have been founded by Offa as a new minster, was also his burial place. It is not impossible that the story of the washing away of Offa's remains is a later legendary accretion which has grown up to explain the documentary lacunae relating to his burial, and even the physical loss of his tomb and/or remains, which is likely to have been the result of the destruction of richly-endowed minsters of the Bedford type by the Vikings in the late ninth century.

Thirdly, there are several independent reasons for the identification of the site of the primary minster in the area with Elstow, an idea already put forward by Wood (1984, 29). These relate to evidence from its place-name, its early religious associations and ecclesiastical connections, and its location at the centre of a possible early parochia. These will be discussed in turn.

From the earliest forms of the place-name (the earliest is *Aelnestowe*, c.1050) it can be inferred that the first element is an Old English personal name — which in this case seems to be unconnected with St Helen, the dedication of the parish church. Such a name, when compounded with -stow, is usually that

of a saint (Mawer and Stenton 1926, 70-1). Later name forms appear to have been influenced by the dedication of the parish church to St Helen. Mawer and Stenton's suggestions fit neatly with the further inference, from the dedication of the nunnery to St Mary recorded in *Domesday Book* (f.217b, para. 53.4), that the dedication to St Helen may anyway well be secondary, possibly even itself suggested by the place-name, and perhaps post-Conquest in origin.<sup>7</sup>

This interpretation is further supported by the results of Margaret Gelling's recent analysis of place-names containing the stow element (1982). She concludes, firstly, that 'a place designated stow had some rare characteristic and was performing a special function in the life of a wide area' (*ibid.*, 189); and secondly, that an important early sense is that of a 'venue for a specific activity, meeting place', from which meaning arose the sense of 'Christian holy place' or 'site of special Christian sanctity' (*ibid.*, 188, 191 and *passim*).

The ascription of this sense to the name Elstow (the only place-name in Bedfordshire containing the -stow element) is given further support from its proximity to the pagan religious centre at Harrowden, only 1 km to its east. The place-name is one of a class of similar names denoting the presence of a pagan religious site (Gelling 1978, 158-61), which, as the -dun element in its name suggests, can be located on the slight hill now occupied by Shortstown (*ibid.*; Wood, pers. comm.). The wider relationships of Harrowden and Elstow are also significant in this context. Both the pagan and Christian religious foci lay close to each other in an estate whose centre was arguably located at Kempston. This was a significant settlement focus in the Roman and early Saxon periods (Wood 1984, 23-28), and the centre of jurisdiction at the time of *Domesday* for a large area which also included Elstow (f.217b, para. 53.4), Wilshamstead (f.217a, para. 53.3), Harrowden (f.217d, para. 53.32) and Cardington (f.217d, para. 53.33).

An overall model for the development of the area in the post-Roman period can be put forward to explain this evidence in functional terms. It seems reasonable to suggest that the pagan religious site at Harrowden functioned in a relationship which was essentially complementary towards the estate centre (and pagan cemetery) at Kempston. In the period of the conversion it seems likely that the religious focus of the area was relocated to Elstow in conscious Christian opposition to the pagan associations of the site at Harrowden, and that this new focus maintained the same or equivalent functional

relationship to the primary estate centre at Kempston. The meaning of -stow in Elstow must in this case have had the sense of a specifically Christian meeting place. This new ecclesiastical focus then became the minster church, which was probably dedicated (as were many other sites of the period) to St Mary.

An indication of the extent of the early parochia of the suggested original minster at Elstow is provided by the area of the deanery of Bedford, which in the thirteenth century comprised the following parishes: Bedford parishes, Biddenham, Cardington, Cople, Elstow, Goldington, Houghton Conquest, Kempston, Willington, Wilshamstead and Wootton (shown in Fig 1).<sup>8</sup> Though the deanery as an institution is probably only of eleventh century origin (VCH i [1904], 313), it seems at least a possibility that this grouping was based on an earlier arrangement of ecclesiastical dependencies. The validity of this hypothesis seems to be strengthened by a number of other considerations: firstly, that this area includes no less than five Domesday hundreds (see Fig 1), and is probably therefore earlier in date than the establishment of this pattern. From the arguments given below suggesting that the boundary between two of these hundreds to the south of Bedford were in existence by the early tenth century, it can be inferred that this area was also in existence by this time. Secondly, while Bedford itself is near the periphery of this area, Elstow lies at its centre.

A further indication of the extent of the early parochia attached to St Paul's Bedford – which it is argued here was transferred to it from the 'old minster' at Elstow by Offa – is given by the record of the churches which formed the endowments of the priory at Newnham. This was founded in 1166 by Simon de Beauchamp as an Augustinian priory attached to St Paul's itself, which was later moved in c.1180 to Newnham, immediately to the east of Bedford (Godber [ed.] 1963, x-xi). The regular canons of this priory were the successors to the secular canons of St Paul's, the holdings of the latter forming the priory's initial endowments (VCH i [1904], 377-8). These included the tithes and dues of fourteen churches in all, of which the following nine were situated within the immediate area of Bedford: St Paul's, Renhold, Ravensden, Gt Barford, Willington, Cardington, Wootton, Stagsden, and Goldington (*ibid.*, 380). These are marked on Fig 1. These churches all lay in vills forming the Barony of Bedford, held by Simon de Beauchamp. Domesday Book however records a far larger number of

properties (which may or may not have included the churches) held by his grandfather Hugh. It must be inferred from this that Simon gave to the priory only those churches originally held by the canons of St Paul's and no others, and therefore that the parishes of these churches represent the extent of its earlier parochia.

It is of some interest that amongst these churches are four which lie outside the deanery of Bedford (Stagsden to the west, and Ravensden, Renhold and Great Barford to the north-east). It is possible that this compact grouping formed the widest extent of this earlier parochia – though whether they were additions to an early 'core area' fossilised by the Norman deanery and centred on Elstow, or whether they formed its original extent, is on present evidence uncertain. That the latter is the case can perhaps be inferred from an early ecclesiastical connection between Elstow and Gt Barford, shown by an agreement in c.1180 by which Newnham priory paid Elstow abbey 20s p.a. in return from the latter's tithe from Great Barford (Godber [ed.] 1963, no. 148).

Those parishes within the deanery and suggested early parochia, but which did not form part of the endowment to Newnham priory, are of equal interest. Cople was also held by Simon de Beauchamp, and its church was given by him to Chicksands priory in the later twelfth century (VCH i [1904], 392). If this took place after the foundation of the original priory at Bedford, it would follow that Simon kept to himself the church at Cople out of the original endowments belonging to the canons of St Paul's. The churches of St Peter, St Mary and St Cuthbert at Bedford had already been given to the Augustinian priory at Dunstable by Henry I (*ibid.*, 371), their tithes presumably therefore having been taken from the endowments of St Paul's at this time. Houghton Conquest is problematical, but from the division of both the advowson and the rectory recorded in the thirteenth century (VCH iii [1912], 290), it can be inferred that the parish was a comparatively recent composite, of which possibly only a part (that belonging to Countess Judith) was within the ancient parochia of Elstow and/or Bedford. Lastly, the ownership and early ecclesiastical connections of the church at Biddenham are not known before the thirteenth century (*ibid.*, 39).

This leaves a block of three parishes unaccounted for (Kempston, Elstow and Wilshamstead). These formed part of a large estate which was owned by Countess Judith before Domesday, and which also included parts of Bromham, Stagsden and

Houghton Conquest (Wood 1984, 28-30, 33 and Fig 2). To this block may be added Cardington, which included Harrowden/Eastcottes (see arguments below). The vill of Elstow and Wilshamstead formed the major part of her endowment to a nunnery at Elstow which was founded by her before Domesday (VCH i [1904], 353-7; DB f.217a, paras. 53.3 and 53.4). The churches of both places were held by the nunnery in the thirteenth century, and there are grounds for inferring that their tithes and other dues also formed part of its original endowment. This seems to have been true of Kempston, since a substantial pension was paid to the nunnery, by inference for tithes lost to it, on the establishment of a vicarage there in 1218 (VCH iii [1912], 304).

The status of these churches before the Conquest is however not at all clear. It is possible that Countess Judith appropriated them, together with their dues, from the minster at St Paul's, to which these dues would formerly have been paid. If this is so there is remarkably little evidence, in Domesday Book or elsewhere, of what must have been a major act of reorganisation. The only evidence which could be interpreted in this light is the gift of 3 hides in Harrowden by Judith to St Paul's. As Wood has suggested (*pers. comm.*), this might have been given to the canons by Judith to satisfy a claim by St Paul's to be the legitimate successor of the original minster at Elstow, and to secure the canons' cooperation in establishing the nunnery — although, as Round has remarked (1904, 197), these three hides were worth the low sum of 'only' 30 shillings. There is also a further possibility that the church and tithes of Cardington, which would have included Harrowden, had been given to St Paul's by Judith. Although Domesday Book does not record such transactions, this would be a legitimate inference from the close connections of Cardington both with the estate centre at Kempston and with Judith, as shown in Domesday Book, and the ownership of the church by the canons in the twelfth century (see above). Even if this were so, however, it is difficult to envisage the logic of a transaction in which the appropriation of the tithes of several churches in a large estate from a minster would be recompensed by the gift back to that minster of only a small proportion of the original appropriation.

While it would be dangerous to place too much weight on the lack of evidence for this act of appropriation having taken place, an alternative model for the early ecclesiastical development of the area seems best able to accommodate all this evidence. This is that these churches (Kempston, Elstow,

Wilshamstead, and Harrowden/Cardington) had in fact always belonged to Elstow, in the sense that they had remained ecclesiastically dependent upon it even after the transference of other endowments from the original parochia centred on Elstow to the 'new minster' at St Paul's. This would imply that after St Paul's was founded there still remained a small ecclesiastical establishment at Elstow (the 'old minster'), which retained those tithes and other dues from the area of the old Saxon estate centred on Kempston. These tithes and dues were then utilised by Countess Judith (with the probable exception of those from Harrowden/Cardington which she gave to St Paul's) to form the endowment of her new nunnery at Elstow. In this case the nunnery would be the natural successor to, and in effect a refoundation of, the pre-Conquest establishment. It would furthermore be consistent with the available evidence to suggest that it was at this time that the old minster dedicated to St Mary acquired the additional dedication to St Helena.<sup>9</sup>

#### THE TOWN PARISHES

The fourth type of evidence providing further substantiation for the validity of the model proposed here for the origin of St Paul's as a 'new minster', which was created by Offa in the late eighth century, lies in the pattern of parishes of the Bedford churches.

The analysis of this pattern must however proceed from the more certain to the less certain — in this case from the arrangements which can reasonably be inferred to have existed in the early tenth century to those existing earlier. The key is the creation of the southern burh by Edward the Elder consequent upon his capture of the Danish stronghold in 917. It is argued that the foundation of this burh involved the creation of a planned settlement of urban character within a new defended enceinte, the whole forming an additional defence for an already existing bridge, which was itself defended by a burh on the north bank (Hassall and Baker 1974, 79; Baker and others 1979, 296-8; Haslam 1983). It can be inferred both from comparable evidence in other Edwardian burhs, and from its situation at the central crossroads of the burh, that the church of St Mary was a new foundation contemporary with the creation of the burh itself, and that it was therefore provided by the king as the church for its inhabitants. This is a process which can be recognised in many similar places in western and eastern Mercia, East Anglia and Wessex.<sup>10</sup>

This being so, it follows (at least in this case) that the parish of this church — that area from which the inhabitants and owners of fields paid tithes, burial and other dues to the church — was defined at the same time as the foundation of the church. It can be inferred from the relationships of this parish to others on the south side of the river (Figs 1 and 2) that this was carved out of two parishes (Kempston and Elstow). It is also clear that the parish of St John, sited at a peripheral location within the burh (Fig 2), was itself carved out of St Mary's parish, both the church and the parish being of later date.<sup>11</sup> The close temporal connection of the church and parish of St Mary's to the burh is also shown by the fact that its boundary follows a line some 1.5 km to the south and west of the church, mirroring the line of defences. The secondary nature of the parish is also indicated by its small size in relation to its neighbours.<sup>12</sup> Furthermore, the eastern boundary of St Mary's/St John's parishes follows the boundary of Cardington parish northwards to the river, instead of following the eastern side of the defences and cutting off the north-western corner of this latter parish. The explanation for this lies probably in the fact that this was also a hundred boundary, certainly at the time of Domesday (Sankaran and Sherlock 1977, map at end), and probably therefore as early as the early tenth century. This relationship again serves to emphasise the secondary nature of St Mary's parish.

There are two important inferences relating to the historic geography of the area which can be drawn from these relationships: firstly, that the underlying structure of the hundreds was already in existence in the early 10th-century as a pattern sufficiently well established to have influenced the layout of a new parochial unit of royal origin in c.917 or soon after. From this it can also be inferred (though this cannot be explored further here) that the origin of the basic structure of at least two of those hundreds near Bedford lies either with a programme of territorial reorganisation by Edward the Elder at that date, or that they had by the early tenth-century already been in existence for some time. Secondly, it can be inferred that the parish boundaries of the neighbouring rural settlements, truncated by a newly-created parish of early tenth-century origin, were also established as fixed boundaries at this time. These same parishes are, as ecclesiastical units, therefore likely to represent survivals from the pre-Viking, and probably therefore middle Saxon, period — although their status as parochial chapels to the mother church at Bedford is not necessarily in

doubt.<sup>13</sup>

The ecclesiastical geography of the northern burh is of similar interest. Such meagre documentary evidence as exists (see above) provides at least a reasonable basis for the hypothesis of the existence of a major church at Bedford by the end of the reign of Offa at the end of the eighth-century, and that the minster of St Paul's, documented from the tenth-century onwards, is its direct successor. The arguments supporting the presence of a pre-Viking burh at Bedford are also independent arguments for the existence of an associated church, which must have served the ecclesiastical needs of the inhabitants of that burh. The natural inference must be that the minster of Offa, and the church in the burh arguably created by Offa, are one and the same. Although of course one inference cannot validate the other, each one is independently tenable as accounting for the available evidence.

This series of inferences gives a particular significance to the relationship of the parishes of the northern burh (St Paul's, St Cuthbert's and St Peter's — see Fig 2) to those of neighbouring churches. A notable feature of their topography is that these combined parishes together form a remarkably regular 'envelope' around the town. The primary status of St Paul's church, argued above, together with both the peripheral siting of St Peter's and St Cuthbert's churches and the smaller size of their parishes,<sup>14</sup> show that the two latter have been carved out of the former area of St Paul's parish, which originally therefore must have comprised the whole area of this 'envelope'.

The relationship between these parishes is of some interest in itself. It has been argued elsewhere that the course of the division between St Paul's parish and St Peter's/St Cuthbert's parishes follows the line of an intra-mural or wall street on the northern and eastern side of the burh (Haslam 1983, 29-30). This suggests that the parish boundary was created when this feature was a functioning element in the layout of the burh. It must have been established before the Conquest, when this boundary was arguably deflected eastwards by the insertion of the castle. From this consideration, and from the common association of churches with extra-mural market areas, some of which are probably of early tenth-century date or earlier,<sup>15</sup> it can be inferred that St Peter's church and its parish were creations of the period immediately after Edward the Elder's 'restoration' of the burh in 917. The smaller size of St Cuthbert's parish and the peripheral position of its church in relation to St

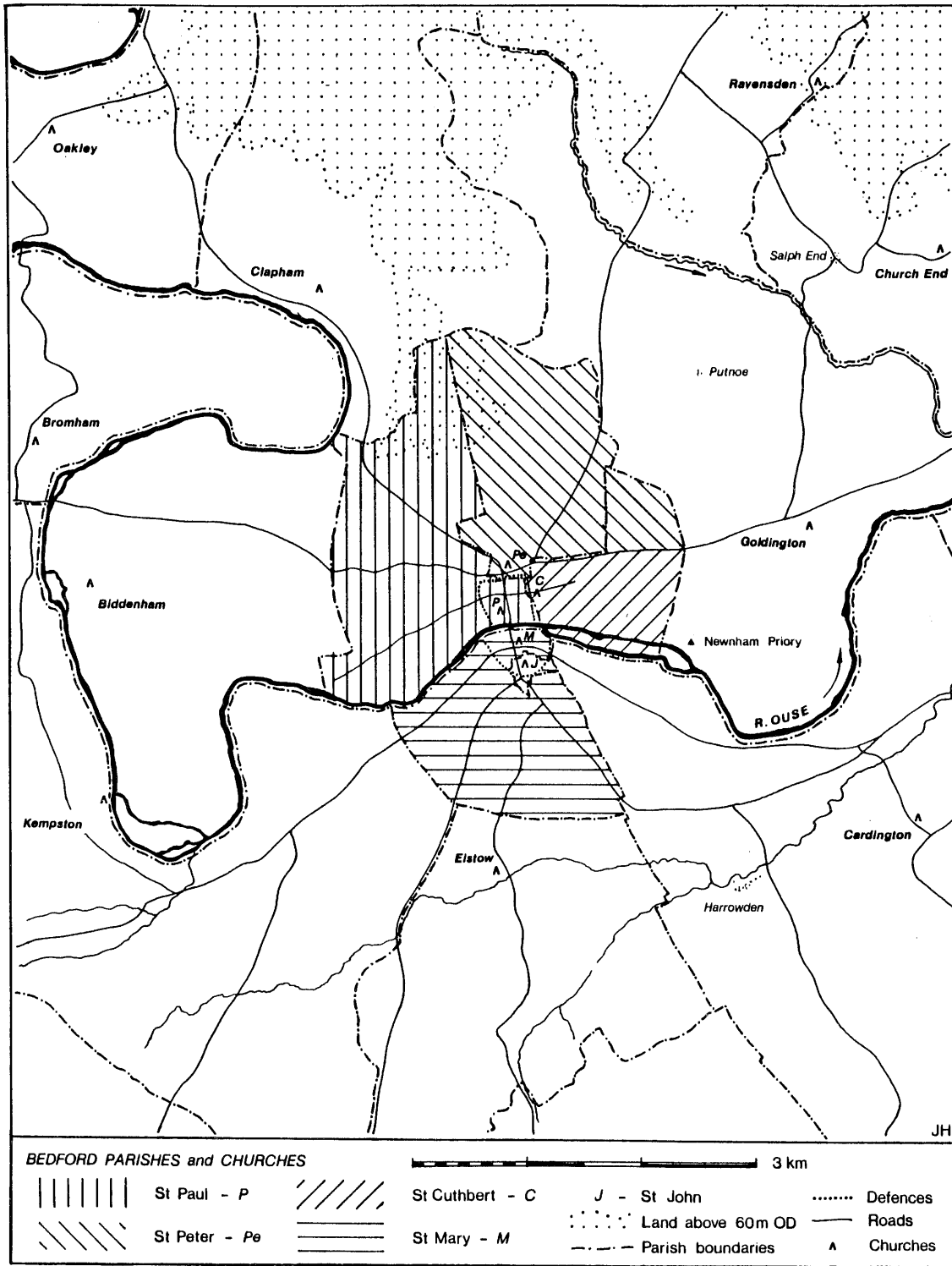


Fig 2 Bedford and neighbouring parishes

Peter's suggests that this could well be a subdivision of St Peter's parish at a slightly later date.

The regularity of the shape of this envelope, the whole of it originally comprising St Paul's parish, is evident when it is compared with the rather sprawling nature of the agricultural parishes nearby (Fig 1). This is a feature which requires explanation. The line of its boundary appears to mirror that of the defences of the burh some 1.5-2 km outside them. Although the original St Paul's parish is of the same order of size as many of its neighbours,<sup>16</sup> it can be inferred that the parish is likely to have originated as a later addition to an already existing pattern of established boundaries, as has been argued above in the case of the southern burh. A further argument in favour of the early date is that the regularity of the shape of this parish is only partly reflected by that of St Mary's parish around the southern burh. From this it could be inferred that the former is the primary feature, to which the latter has been added as a secondary development. Lastly, the middle Saxon origin of at least some of the parishes in the neighbourhood of Bedford has been argued above.<sup>17</sup> There is abundant archaeological evidence for middle Saxon occupation at Bedford as well as in some of the neighbouring villages (Hassall and Baker 1974, 77; Baker and others 1979, 154-5, 294 and *passim*). There is therefore no inherent difficulty in postulating the origin of St Paul's parish as a feature inserted into a landscape which was already articulated with parochial and territorial boundaries by the end of the eighth-century.

There is also some basis for the hypothesis that the area of this new parish functioned as the 'town fields', a new agricultural unit set aside (presumably by the royal founder) for the use of the inhabitants of the burh. This can be inferred from the record of the name 'Bury Fields', describing a large area to the north of St Peter's church and within St Peter's parish, in the early sixteenth-century (Henman 1947).<sup>18</sup> Such a function has already been postulated by the writer for the area attached to the suggested eighth-century burh at Cambridge (Haslam 1984, 15, 23-26). Similar names (including Portfield and its variants) are known from a number of other places which were also burhs, all of which denote the common fields arguably made available to the original burgesses by virtue of their possession of holdings within the burh (Haslam 1985, 20, 40, 42; forthcoming b).

#### CONCLUSION

It is argued here that there are a number of other-

wise unrelated observations and inferences about the topographical, archaeological and documentary evidence concerning Bedford's early history and its ecclesiastical development which are neatly and logically unified by a single historical model, which is explanatory in terms of processes which can be recognised in other parts of the country. These observations relate to (a) the place of St Paul's church in the development of the historic landscape in the middle and late Saxon periods, and its status as an ecclesiastical focus which is secondary to an earlier one at Elstow; (b) the secondary nature of its parish (in its original extent) with its neighbours; (c) the archaeological evidence for middle Saxon settlement in Bedford itself; (d) the documentary evidence possibly associating St Paul's with Offa; and (e) the possible origin for the burh at Bedford as a fortified urban place created as part of a unitary system in Mercia as a whole by king Offa.

The overall unifying model is that St Paul's church was founded by king Offa in the late eighth-century as a new minster, which was created as the ecclesiastical provision for the inhabitants of his new burh. This new church at least partly replaced the functions of an earlier 'old minster' at Elstow, and was founded by the transference to it of a large part of the original ecclesiastical endowments of the earlier minster. At the same time as this a new parish was defined around it by being carved out of existing parochial and territorial units. This formed an area which became in effect a new agricultural unit (the 'town fields') assigned for the use of the inhabitants of the new burh.

It must be emphasised however that while none of these classes of evidence by itself demonstrates the validity of the overall model, it nevertheless arguably provides the best explanation in historical terms for the series of observations and inferences as a whole. It would for instance be possible to suggest that the creation of the 'new minster' of St Paul's, together with its associated parish, should be assigned to the period of Edward the Elder's 'restoration' of the burh in 917, on the analogy of the creation of a number of other similar new minsters in burhs in the late ninth and early tenth centuries.<sup>19</sup> This would however still leave without adequate explanation the associations of Offa with Bedford, and the arguably necessary ecclesiastical provisions for the pre-Viking burh at Bedford and its archaeologically attested population in the middle Saxon period.<sup>20</sup>

NOTES

- 1 I am grateful to David Baker and Terry Slater for reading and commenting on an earlier draft of this paper. Terry Slater's comments have stimulated me to rethink many of my earlier ideas, in particular in terms of the existence of an early minster at Elstow. This idea was strengthened by useful comments in further correspondence from John Wood (see Wood 1984). Much of the work done for this paper was made possible by a research award from the Leverhulme Trust during the period 1982-4.
- 2 Particular studies include Hampshire (Hase 1975), the hundred of Blything, Suffolk (Warner 1984), the Cirencester region (Slater 1976), Dorset and Gloucestershire (Pearce 1982), and several large towns and counties in southern England (various chapters in Haslam [ed.] 1984). The writer is currently examining the early development of urban parishes for a book (Leicester University Press, forthcoming).
- 3 References to Domesday Book give the folio and paragraph numbers in Sankaran and Sherlock 1977.
- 4 Offa was also connected with Luton, another of Bedfordshire's early minster sites (VCH i [1904], 315 n.1). The historical connections between St Albans, the Bedfordshire minsters and Offa requires further detailed analysis.
- 5 There are of course a number of instances where new Saxon burhs not on Roman sites included within their defences minster churches which were established very much earlier. Examples include Christchurch, Dorset/Hants (the Priory) and Oxford (St Frideswide's church). In neither of these instances is the site of the minster church so closely related to the early street layout as at Bedford.
- 6 See Matthew Paris, *Chron. Majora* (Rolls Series) i 363; the evidence is discussed in VCH i (1904), 310.
- 7 The secondary origin of the place-name has also been suggested by Margaret Gelling (1982, 192), who has given other examples of the influence of place-names on church dedications. For the evidence of the separate existence of a chapel of St Helen, and archaeological evidence for early and middle Saxon burials, and therefore ecclesiastical use of the site, see Baker 1971, 55-6.
- 8 This is given in the *Taxatio* of Pope Nicholas IV in 1291. The Bedford churches of St John, St Cuthbert and St Peter are however omitted (VCH i [1904], 323 and 324 n.4). The area is given in A. Bryant's map of the county of 1826, and (VCH i [1904], map opp. p. 346).
- 9 See note 7 above.
- 10 The writer has argued for a similar process of church foundation in the southern burh at Cambridge (Haslam 1984b). The wider evidence will be discussed by the writer at a later date (Haslam forthcoming a). Mention could be made here of the provision of new minsters as new burh churches in the late ninth or early tenth centuries at Winchester (Biddle [ed.] 1976, 314), Gloucester (Heighway 1984, 371) and Chester (Thacker 1982).
- 11 St John's Hospital was founded probably in the late 12th century (VCH i [1904], 396). The formation of the parish was arguably the direct consequence of the ordination of a vicarage for the chapel of the hospital by the bishop in the early 13th century, the area of the parish comprising the extent of the hospital's holdings at that time (*ibid.*).
- 12 St Mary's parish comprises 535 acres, and St John's 29. Kempston parish comprises 5,026 acres, Elstow 1,617 acres, and the next parish to the east, Cardington (which includes the 19th century parish of Eastcottes), 5,339 acres. Source: Ordnance Survey 1:1,056 maps, index sheet, 1891; acreage to the nearest acre.
- 13 This hypothesis must, however, itself be further tested by the analysis of these parish boundaries in terms of the structure of pre-Conquest estates, as has been undertaken for instance in Lincolnshire by David Roffe (1984).
- 14 St Paul's parish comprises 799 acres, St Peter's 560 acres, and St Cuthbert's 300 acres. Source as in note 12.
- 15 It was stated in the writer's article on Bedford (Haslam 1983, 30) that there are few parallels to extra-mural market areas outside burhs in the south of England. Further research since this article was written (in 1979) has shown that this is in fact a common phenomenon: see several examples cited in Haslam 1984a and 1984b, and further evidence cited in Haslam forthcoming b. A church, probably contemporary with the foundation of the burh as a market centre, is associated with such a market at Axbridge, Somerset (Aston 1984, 172-3; Batt 1975). A further example nearer Bedford is at Newport, N. Essex, which is suggested as being the site of the burh of *Wigingamere*, built by Edward the Elder in 917. It is argued that a small defended enclosure was provided with a church which was placed on one side of an extra-mural market area, its parish carved out of an already existing parochial unit (and significantly called 'Bury Fields'), and that all these elements were created by the king of the occasion of the foundation of the burh (see Haslam forthcoming b).
- 16 St Paul's with St Peter's and St Cuthbert's: 1759a; Biddenham 1586a; Clapham 1995a; Goldington 2588a; Oakley 1786a; Ravensden 2290a; Renhold 2211a. Source: as n.12 above. This pattern is the same as that which can be inferred from the Domesday entries, with however a few important exceptions in the vills immediately to the northeast of Bedford. Renhold is not mentioned, but is the equivalent to Salchou, 1 km to the west. The church is at Church End, halfway between the modern settlements of Salph End and Renhold (Fig 2). Ravensden is also not mentioned, but has been taken as being the same as Chainhalle (Sankaran and Sherlock 1977, note for para 25.3). Putnoe (Putnor Farm) is a separate vill to Goldington, and although at present in Goldington parish (Fig 2), was in a different hundred in Domesday (Fig 1). The Domesday hundred boundaries (reconstructed from Sankaran and Sherlock 1977, map at end) are given in Fig 1. The entry for Bedford states that it was reckoned as a half hundred.
- 17 See also comments in Hassall and Baker 1974, 77.
- 18 Since the English Place-Name Society's volume (Mawer and Stenton 1926) does not include field names, there is no information available concerning the earlier history of the name. This can however be compared to the same name at for instance Colchester, recorded from 1196 onwards, which denotes an area worked in common by the burgesses (Reaney 1935, 531).
- 19 See note 10 above.
- 20 Paper submitted July 1985.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Aston, M. (1984), 'The towns of Somerset', in J. Haslam (ed.), 167-202.
- Baker, D. (1971), 'Excavations at Elstow Abbey, Bedfordshire, 1968-70', *Bedfordshire Archaeological Journal* 6, 55-64.
- Baker and others (1979), D. Baker, E. Baker, J. Hassall, and A. Simco, 'Excavations in Bedford 1967-77', *Bedfordshire Archaeological Journal* 13.
- Batt, M.R. (1975), 'The Burghal Hidage - Axbridge', *Somerset Archaeology and Natural History* 119, 22-25.
- Biddle, M. (ed.) (1976), *Winchester in the Early Middle Ages* (Winchester Studies 1).
- Gelling, M. (1962), 'Place-names and Anglo-Saxon paganism', *University of Birmingham Historical Journal* VIII, 7-25.
- ... (1982), 'Some meanings of stow', in S. M. Pearce (ed.), *The early church in western Britain and Ireland* (BAR British Series 102), 187-96.
- Godber, J. (ed.) (1963), 'The cartulary of Newnham Priory pt 1' (*Beds Historical Record Soc.* XLIII).
- Hase, P.H. (1975), 'The development of the parish in Hampshire, particularly in the 11th and 12th centuries', unpublished PhD thesis, University of Cambridge.
- Haslam, J. (1983), 'The origin and plan of Bedford', *Bedfordshire Archaeology* 16, 28-36.
- ... (1984a), 'The towns of Devon' in J. Haslam (ed.), 249-284.
- ... (1984b), 'The topography and development of Saxon Cambridge', *Proceedings of the Cambridge Antiquarian Society* LXXII, 13-29.
- ... (1985), *Early Medieval Towns in Britain* (Shire Archaeology Series).
- ... (forthcoming a), *Early Medieval Towns and Parishes* (Leicester University Press).
- ... (forthcoming b), 'The burh at Wigingamere'.
- ... (ed.) (1984), *Anglo-Saxon Towns in Southern England* (Phillimore).
- Hassall, J. and Baker, D. (1974), 'Bedford: aspects of town origins and development', *Bedfordshire Archaeological Journal* 9, 75-94.
- Heighway, C. (1984), 'Saxon Gloucester', in J. Haslam (ed.), 359-384.
- Henman, W.N. (1947), 'Newnham Priory, a Bedford rental, 1506-7', *Bedfordshire Historical Record Soc.* XXV, 15-81.
- Mawer, A. & Stenton, F.M. (1926), *The Place-Names of Bedfordshire and Huntingdonshire* (English Place-Name Society vol. III).
- Owen, D. (1978), 'Bedfordshire chapelries: an essay in rural settlement history', *Bedfordshire Historical Record Soc.* 57, 9-20.
- Pearce, S.M. (1982), 'Estates and church sites in Dorset and Gloucestershire: the emergence of a Christian Society', in S. M. Pearce (ed.), *The Early Church in Western Britain and Ireland*, (BAR British Series 102), 117-138.
- Reaney, P.H. (1935), *The place-names of Essex* (English Place-Name Society vol. XII).
- Roffe, D. (1984), 'Pre-Conquest estate and parish boundaries: a discussion with examples from Lincolnshire', in M.L. Faull (ed.), *Studies in Late Anglo-Saxon Settlement* (Oxford Univ. Dept. of External Studies), 115-122.
- Round, J.H. (1904), 'The Domesday Survey', in *VCH* i, 191-218.
- Sankaran, V. and Sherlock, D. (eds.) (1977), *Domesday Book, Bedfordshire* (Phillimore).
- Slater, T. (1976), 'The town and its region in the Anglo-Saxon and medieval period', in A. McWhirr (ed.), *Studies in the Archaeology and History of Cirencester* (BAR British Series 30), 81-108.
- Thacker, A.T. (1982), 'Chester and Gloucester: early ecclesiastical organisation in two Mercian burhs', *Northern History* 18, 199-216.
- VCH* i, iii, *Victoria County History (Bedfordshire)*, 1904 and 1912.
- Warner, P.M. (1984), 'The hundred of Blything', unpublished PhD thesis, University of Leicester.
- Wood, A.J.R. (1984), *Kempston* (Bedfordshire Parish Surveys 2, Beds. County Council).
- ... (1985), *Cardington and Eastcotts* (Bedfordshire Parish Surveys 3, Beds. County Council).

*The Bedfordshire Archaeological Council is indebted to Bedford Museum, the North Bedfordshire Borough Council for a grant towards the costs of this paper.*

