

THE BATH REGION

from Late Prehistory to the Middle Ages

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Introduction

This essay is concerned with a city in its region over a long period. Bath is a good example to study, for two reasons. Firstly, the city itself and the region around have been well examined by antiquarians over several centuries – very many sites have been located from late prehistoric to medieval times. Much of the early landscape also remains in the form of earthworks and abandoned field systems. Secondly, Bath itself has been occupied for a long, but reasonably certain length of time. Unlike most towns and cities, something is known of the origins of the place and how and why it developed. Its close relationship with its hinterland over two millennia has, however, not been studied and that is the aim of this essay.

The Physical Background

Bath lies at the southern end of the Cotswolds, on the river Avon and 30km inland from the Severn estuary. The surrounding region is very 'unEnglish' in terms of its scenery. The city lies in a deep valley with steep slopes all around, rising to almost level flat-topped plateaux at Lansdown (to the north-west), Charmy Down (to the north-east), Bathampton, Claverton and Combe Downs (to the east and south-east), and Odd Down and Southdown (to the south and south-west). There is little flat land in the stream and river valleys in the Bath region, except at Bath itself and around Bathford and Bathampton. The sides of the valleys are steep, with deep combs everywhere.¹

THE BATH REGION General Features

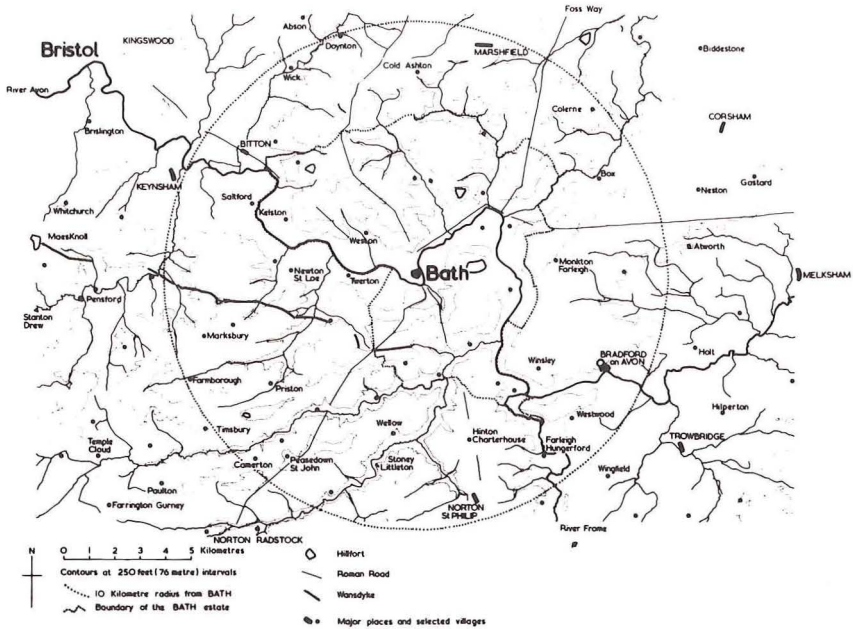


Figure 1

The river Avon dominates the drainage of the area, but its course is strange. It flows westwards, out of Wiltshire, to Freshford, where it is joined from the south by the river Frome. It then flows north to Bathford, where it is joined by the Bybrook from the east; here it turns abruptly westwards. At Bath it flows in a large loop, so that the city has water on all sides but the north. The river emerges from its deep valley at Kelston and Saltford to flow across lower but still broken country to Bristol and the Severn Estuary. The main streams joining the river, in addition to those already mentioned, are the Midford Brook and the Cam Brook in the south, and the streams from St. Catherine's and Batheaston, and from Langridge and Swainswick (the Lam Brook) in the north.

Topographically, this region is like much of the Cotswolds, but the country is much more broken and varied. The escarpment at the edge of the Cotswolds runs through the area from Dyrham,

Tog Hill and Freezing Hill down to Little Down and Kelston Round Hill. South of the Avon the scarp is much less apparent, since it is not so much an escarpment as a series of peninsulas with valleys between. The dip slope is not as obvious as it is further north, but it can be traced away south-eastwards into the plains of north-west Wiltshire. The river pattern and deep valleys cutting across this general scarp and dip slope country break it up and present the rather 'foreign' appearance of the Bath area.

The geology is, of course, relevant to this topography.² Bath lies between the clay vales of Triassic and Liassic rocks to the west, and the Oxford clay, Purbeck beds and Gault clay of north Wiltshire to the east. Not far away, to the south-west, are the Somerset coalfield and the Carboniferous limestone and older rocks of the Mendips, while to the east and south-east are the chalk escarpments and greensand of the Downland country of Wiltshire proper.

More locally, the hills around Bath are, as in the Cotswolds, formed of Jurassic rocks, the oolites, cornbrash and fullers earth, but in the locality of Bath itself much of the surface geology is covered by slumped material of a broken and mixed nature. In the 1790's the varied geology of the Bath region led William Smith, the father of British geology, to develop his ideas on the principles of stratigraphy and here the now familiar geological terms were first employed by Smith and his co-worker, the Reverend Joseph Townsend.

The varied geology has also provided a variety of rock resources and different topographical regions for man's exploitation over several millennia: Bath stone has been quarried since Roman times, latterly from the Box area to the east, and the fullers earth deposits were an important element in the early wool and textile industries.

Bath in its Region

Geographers have long been concerned with looking at cities in their regions and over the years have developed complex models to show the distribution of central places and their relationship to a hierarchy of settlements around. More recently, archaeologists have turned their attention to urban origins and the relationships

THE BATH AREA Topographical Features

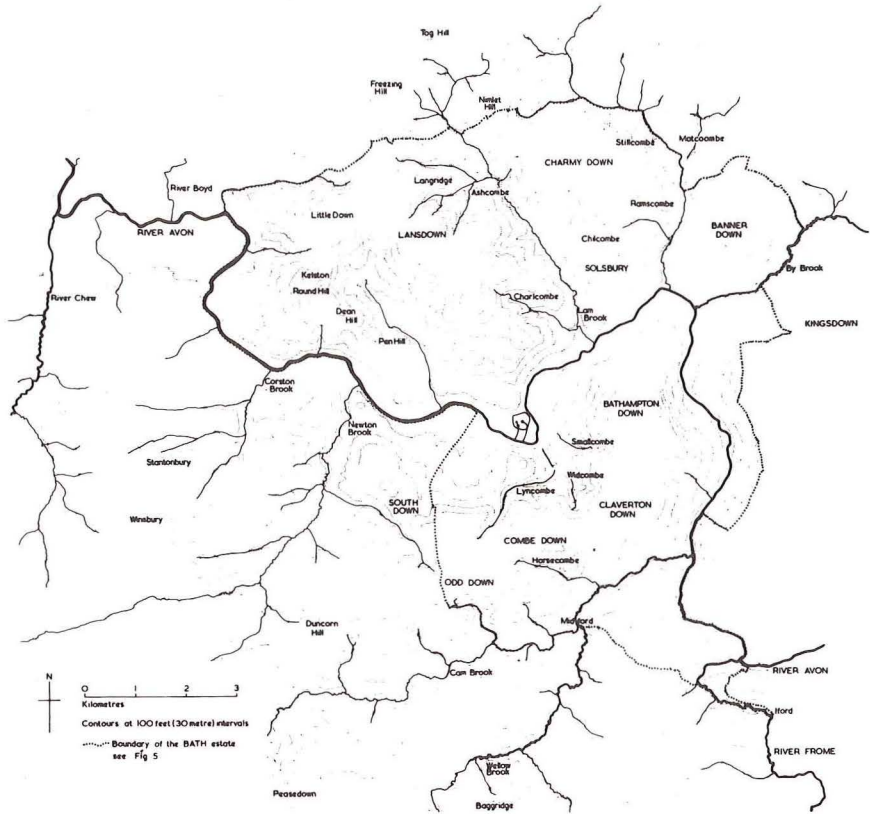


Figure 2

between particularly important places, which can be called 'focal places', and the areas around them. Ideas can be discussed for four main periods and this study will look at each of these using the example of Bath in relation to its region. They are firstly the relationship between hillforts and their local landscape in the late prehistoric period, the relationship of a Roman town to its region, the situation in the mid- and late Saxon periods, and Bath as a medieval city in its region. In each period, we shall be concerned with Bath, or a nearby site, as a 'focal place' within a region at a particular time. The term 'focal place' is meant to imply

something about the status of a place, its position in the local settlement hierarchy and, by implication, the lesser or dependant status of other places in that locality. No urbanism is necessarily implied in the term, since, as will be shown, in some periods the most important focal place in the Bath region was not necessarily densely occupied.

The 'region' around a place like Bath can be variously defined and there is little consistency in the areas examined at different times in this study. To some extent, it depends on which function of the focal place is being examined. The administrative or judicial role of a place within its region may well result in a different area being examined from that defined by commercial relationships; the religious hierarchy may be different again. Indeed, we must distinguish between those functions which enable a place to have dominance over its region, such as ownership, administrative and judicial control, and those where influence is extended, such as markets and fairs, which may be in competition, but through which rural settlements exchange goods with their local focal place and beyond. It is encouraging that so much research is now going on into the relationship between particular areas and important 'centres' in the landscape. Bath and its region provide a good case study. Here, as elsewhere, definition of the situation right at the beginning of the documented period, in the 7th century, helps to show the origins of relationships in late Saxon and medieval times, as well as the possibility that here too these early arrangements may have some relevance to the situation in earlier, Roman, and indeed prehistoric, periods.³

The Bath Region in Later Prehistory

As far as is known Bath was not an urban centre in the pre-Roman period and it was probably not even permanently occupied. The main centres of population lay elsewhere. In particular, there was a group of hillforts and a number of contemporary farmsteads, of which only a small number have been recognised so far.

It will never be possible to reconstruct the territorial divisions of the pre-Roman landscape in detail, but archaeologists are now making valiant attempts, using what information they have

available, to calculate the likely areas attached not only to farmsteads and villages⁴ but also to hillforts.⁵

In the Bath region there are a number of good examples of hillforts and a few doubtful cases. Some distance away are Maes Knoll on Dundry, Stantonbury and, to the south west, Tunley. Along the Cotswolds to the north are Hinton and Old Sodbury. Within the immediate vicinity of Bath are Little Down, Solsbury⁶ and Bathampton.⁷ Freezing Hill or Royal Camp is not accepted now as a hillfort but is probably a linear earthwork, and there is

THE BATH AREA in Later Prehistory

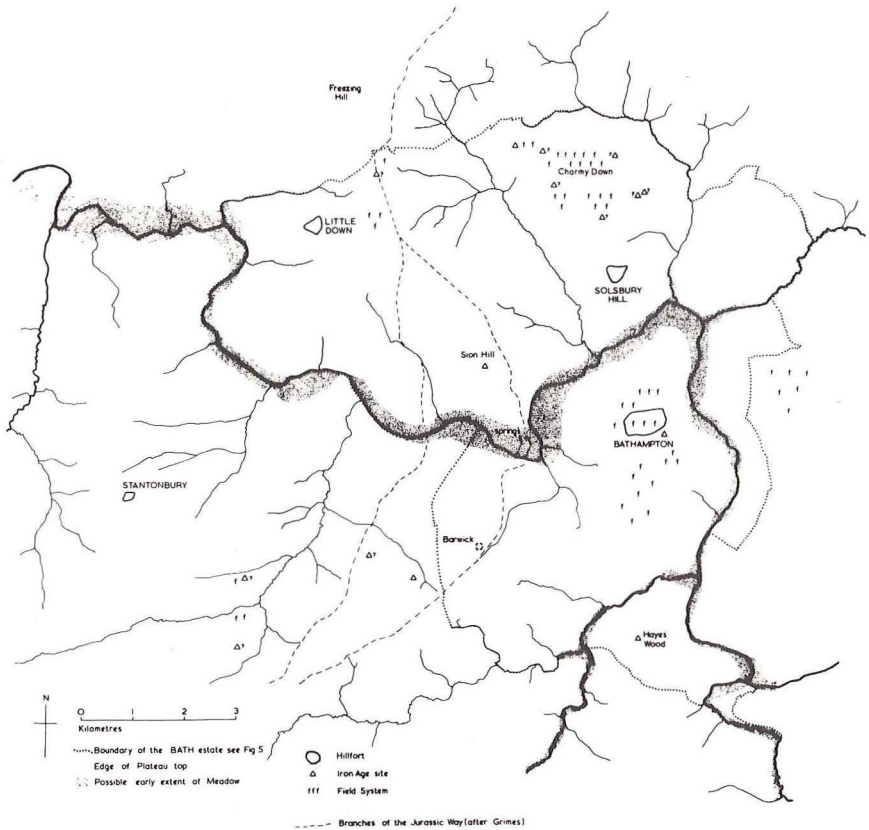


Figure 3

considerable doubt as to the former existence of Berwick Camp within the southern suburbs of Bath. Few of these hillforts have ever been excavated and none of them have produced enough data to be able to say when occupation began or ceased, or to indicate the nature of that occupation in the pre-Roman, or any other, period.

These last points are important to bear in mind in relation to any analysis. We do not know if all of the hillforts in the Bath region are contemporary, or even equal in status, and so comparison is difficult and perhaps unwise. With these caveats, however the placing of the hillforts in the region does pose some interesting potential relationships. The areas suggest that the river Avon was the boundary between the lands of Little Down, Solsbury and Bathampton and that the uplands of Lansdown and Odd Down were shared between sites. This was certainly the case in later periods when such uplands were used as sheep pastures. This use may have had early origins, but these areas are covered with 'celtic' field systems which might be expected to have had arable usage and be contemporary with the hillforts. Each hillfort probably had access to uplands, valley pasture and meadowland; the more gentle slopes could have been used for arable and pasture, while steeper land might have supported woodland.

It is likely that the preoccupation of the inhabitants of the hillforts was with controlling an area which could be exploited for economic, principally agricultural, gain. The hot springs at Bath may have belonged to one or have been shared between several hillforts. Cult and religious facilities may have been shared on the site of the present day city of Bath. Interestingly there may have been some relationship between the territories of one or more of the hillforts and a postulated later estate of the 7th century AD. This suggests not only that the same areas were of economic importance in the post-Roman as in the pre-Roman period, but also that the lands of the hillforts surrounding Bath were incorporated into a later unit, which we can perhaps recognise in the 7th century AD and later. In this connection, it is worth noting that Ilchester, the other major Roman centre in Somerset, may also be related to the territories of three local hillforts – South Cadbury, Ham Hill and Dundon – and may well have taken over the lands of these forts.⁸ The later hundredal and estate arrangements there also seem to be related to postulated earlier territories.

It is rather easier to reconstruct something of the landscape of the Bath region in the pre-Roman period. A number of farmsteads and small enclosures have been recognised and recorded, particularly by Professor W.F. Grimes on Charmy Down,⁹ and there are earthworks of former field systems widespread across the area. Those on Charmy Down and Bathampton Down have been recorded well and suggest regularly laid-out patterns of field blocks within linear boundaries, reminiscent of the late Bronze Age reave systems on Dartmoor. As well as these well-preserved fields, there is evidence almost everywhere in the Bath region of earlier field banks and lynchets beneath medieval and later field boundaries. More survey work and examination of air photographs needs to be undertaken before the former pattern can be fully reconstructed.

Finally, there is the matter of roads. In a pre-documented period, it is always difficult to be sure of definite road courses and much fruitless research has been undertaken in the past, particularly into prehistoric upland trackways and straight Roman roads. Rather than identify as many of the settlements as possible and then look for the possible and probable links between them, researchers have merely tried to find the roads or tracks from lines on maps, usually in a settlement vacuum.

Several attempts have been made to locate early roads in the Bath region, the most competent being Professor Grimes' pursuit of the Jurassic ridgeway.¹⁰ This dry land inter-regional route is reckoned to pass through the Bath region along the edge of the Cotswolds, with branches crossing the river Avon at Bath and further west near Twerton; other branches are suggested around Charmy Down.¹¹ Clearly, in any consideration of a centre in its region, communications are critical. The river Avon is very important in this context, as it was probably navigable to Bath until the early Middle Ages. However, as far as roads are concerned, it should be possible to locate by fieldwork as much of the early settlement pattern as possible, determine the theoretical pattern of communications between settlements, and then compare this with what is, or was formerly, on the ground. This has not yet been done for the Bath region.

The Roman Period

In the Roman period, with the establishment of a town at Bath, we can at last begin to examine an urban site in its region. The relationships between towns and their hinterlands have long been a topic of interest to geographers, but recently theoretical attempts have begun to be made by archaeologists as well. Several studies can be cited which include the Bath region. Hodder and Hassall using theissen polygons have suggested possible service areas around Roman centres in southern England, taking walled towns as examples.¹² This gives crude theoretical service zones around towns and suggests that Bath lay within the overall orbit of Cirencester, the cantonal capital, and that its own region included much of north-east Somerset, south Gloucestershire and north-west Wiltshire. The first point is reinforced by Hodder's study of the distribution of mosaic 'schools', which also suggests that the Bath area lay within the Corinium 'sphere of influence'.¹³ The latter point may be reflected in the density of villas in the Bath area, equalled only by the regions around the Roman towns at Cirencester and Ilchester.¹⁴

Such theoretical analyses, useful as they are, may be taken a stage further by applying geographical locational theory. This has been attempted for Gloucestershire, and the Bath region. Sarah Wool, using ideas of Ian Hodder, has been able to compare a theoretical pattern of settlement based on Christallers transport principle with the actual distribution of Roman centres in Gloucester and its environs.¹⁵ This model again suggests the pre-eminence of Cirencester in the region, as the cantonal capital, and that Bath lies within its overall sphere of influence. It implies that in marketing terms Bath ought to be a second-order centre, along with such places as Gatcombe and Mildenhall, but more important than, locally, Camerton or Sandy Lane (Verlucio). There are attractions in this model, particularly as it draws attention to places and areas where there might be sites of greater interest and importance than was formerly thought, such as Bitton, to the west of Bath. However, in the case of the Bath region there are difficulties. While the Roman town there may have been closely related to other marketing centres in the region, it clearly had attributes of far wider importance. Unlike Roman centres to the north, east or south, Bath is on a navigable river

in Roman times – as a local market centre probably with many other related local functions, as a regional trading centre, and as an international religious, medical and probably recreational centre based on the cult focus at the hot springs.

Considerable attention has been paid to the Roman roads in the area.¹⁶ The Fosse Way crosses the Bath region, and definite roads include that to Sandy Lane (Verlucio) in the east and a route via Bitton and Sea Mills (Abonae) to the west. Other probable routes ran south towards the Frome area and north across Lansdown to the Jurassic ridgeway. Several other suggestions have been made.¹⁷ It is likely, for example, that there was a route south of the river Avon, since much Roman material has been found at Keynsham. As with earlier periods, in order to understand the full network of local routes in the Roman period we need to locate the nodes, the settlements themselves, in order to see the way they were linked and, fortunately, for the Bath area this can be done.

There is another aspect concerning Roman roads in relation to regions around towns. Much research has been undertaken on the Antonine Itinerary, or road books, which are probably of early 3rd century date, to locate Roman roads and the places they linked.¹⁸ In the Bath region, the only route included runs from Caerwent in South Wales (Venta Silurum) to Sea Mills, Bristol (Abonae) to Bath, with the distances being 14, 9 and 6 Roman miles respectively. From Bath eastwards, the next place is Sandy Lane, 15 Roman miles away. As Rivet has pointed out, there are problems with this route and it looks as if reference to the crossing of the Severn has been omitted. More useful for our purposes is Warwick Rodwell's suggestion that shortfalls in the mileages between towns relate to 'territoria' or 'town zones'. He has also been able to show that mileages were measured from the boundaries of such zones rather than from town centres.¹⁹ In theory this allows for the definition of a town's land, but for Bath nothing is indicated in the Antonine Itinerary. The 6 Roman miles to Bitton and the 15 Roman miles to Sandy Lane (taking 1 Roman mile as 1618 yards or 1480 metres) corresponds exactly to the 8.9 km to Bitton and 22.2 km to Sandy Lane, centre to centre. This does not mean that Bath did not have a town zone, only that the Antonine Itinerary, or indeed any other source, does not indicate it.

Over the last 200 years, because of the facilities offered, Bath has been visited by many well-educated and intelligent people. During that time, much of the city has been redeveloped and large areas around built on, cut through, covered over and generally altered in one way or another. Roman pottery, artefacts and stone structures are in general easier to recognise and probably of more interest to a classically-educated elite than earlier or later remains. All of these factors added together mean that almost every hole and development in the Bath area over the last two centuries has probably been watched by an antiquary, and anything Roman which was unearthed was noted. In the Bath region, the distribution of Roman finds recorded probably does reflect to a great extent the actual former distribution of Roman sites in the area. The types of sites recognised range from well-developed villas with luxurious fittings particularly at Keynsham, Newton St Loe, Wellow, Monkton Combe and Atworth, through stone-built buildings which may be villas or just substantially-built farmsteads, to rural agricultural sites, often with no stone used at all in their construction. The nature of early recording and excavation frequently makes the distinction between such sites difficult or impossible.²⁰ There are also large numbers of stone coffins recorded, often isolated, but sometimes in groups and occasionally associated with settlements. Where several coffins or burials have been found, but no settlement remains, it can be assumed that there was a settlement nearby. Single burials have not been so treated on map 4, although they may have been part of a cemetery and accompany an unrecognised settlement.

In south Somerset, Roger Leech found that in well-researched areas there was a Romano-British settlement every 750–1000 metres across the landscape.²¹ Drawing 1000 metre radii around sites in the Bath area shows the same sort of density, suggesting that the landscape around Bath had many settlements in the Roman period. There are gaps, but in view of the general density these are more likely to represent gaps in our knowledge than gaps in reality. Such gaps warrant intensive field research, an obvious example being the Twerton area. Also, it is noticeable that most of the more impressive sites were located on the valley sides, and in the valleys of the main rivers, while on the plateaux more native-like settlements have been found. This differential

distribution is not mutually exclusive, but it does perhaps suggest different land uses and economies between the lower land and the uplands.

A remarkable feature of the Bath area is the correlation between Romano-British sites, particularly those with stone buildings, and the later Saxon and medieval settlements. This is noticeable at Keynsham, Bitton, North Stoke, Kelston, Weston, South Stoke, Monkton Combe, Bathampton and Bathford. It suggests very strongly that Romano-British settlements persisted to emerge as the late Saxon and medieval pattern of villages and hamlets. This has been noted elsewhere in Somerset²² and has been studied in Gloucestershire.²³ The implication is that Roman material can be expected at the other medieval centres, particularly Twerton, Claverton, Batheaston and Swainswick.

Finally, in the immediate vicinity of Bath it is noticeable how three areas of Roman inhumation cemeteries outside the city are associated with three medieval churches, two of which have Anglo-Saxon dedications. St Winifred's chapel and well stood on Sion Hill within a Roman cemetery; Walcot church, St Swithin, is associated with both extra-mural settlement and a cemetery, and the ruined church of Bathwick also sits in a Roman cemetery. Surely, these could be further examples of late Roman mausolea within Roman cemeteries which survived and emerged as late Saxon and medieval churches, just as at St Albans, Wells and probably Canterbury.

Bath – A 7th Century Estate

Except for the reference to Bath being taken from the British by the Saxons after the Battle of Dyrham in 577 AD, Bath as an estate first enters recorded history in 676 AD in an Anglo-Saxon charter in which Osric, king of the Hwicce, a sub-kingdom of Mercia, granted 100 hides (an early variable land unit) of land around Bath to found a monastery for women. Glanville Jones, in a series of important articles, has drawn our attention to the early importance of the 'multiple estate' in the landscape.²⁴ Such estates were made up of numerous separate territories attached to particular settlements. There was a 'caput', or head place, sometimes a royal establishment and later often a monastery,

which was the 'focal place' of the estate. Settlements and lands around were dependent on this place and were required to render commodities and services to the 'caput'. Other scholars have demonstrated that the focal place, as the centre of the estate, often had a topographical place-name referring to the local physical nature of the site rather than to any specific individual owner. Frequently, this is the earliest recorded place-name in the area. Subsidiary settlements are more likely to have habitative place-names ending in '-tun', '-wick', '-stoke' and so on.²⁵ Glanville Jones suggests that such estates may have had earlier origins in the Roman, or even pre-Roman, period and while some

THE BATH AREA Probable 7th century Bath Multiple Estate

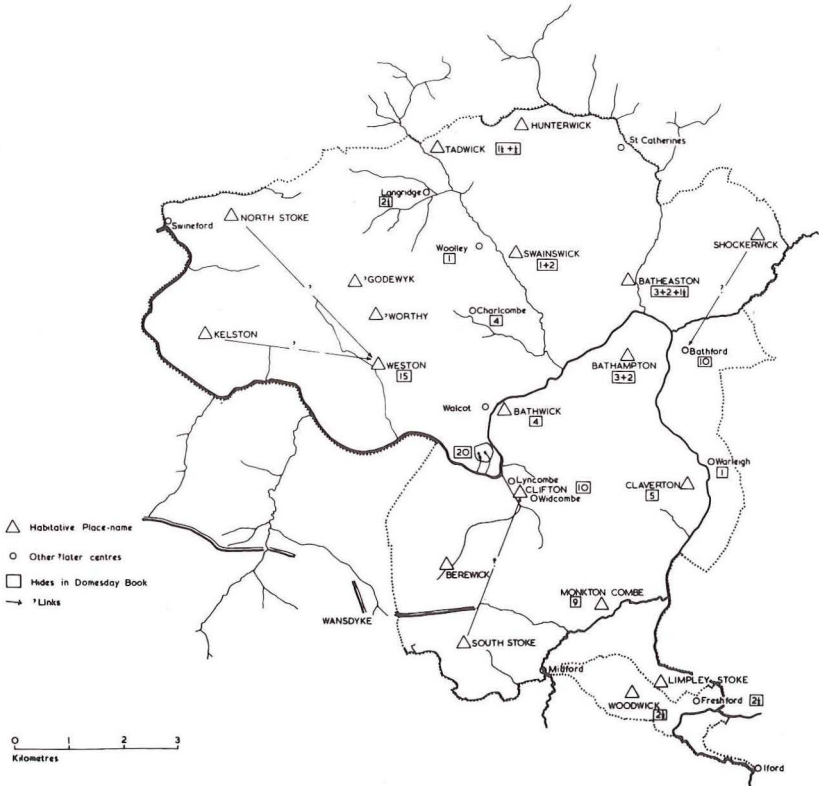


Figure 5

indication of the dependant nature of the subsidiary settlements to the main caput is the most conclusive evidence for the early existence of such multiple estates, later hundredal arrangements, hundredal manors and ecclesiastical relationships between minster and daughter churches can all be used as corroborative evidence.

Is it possible to show that the 100 hides at Bath in 676 AD formed an early multiple estate? In 1327 in the lay subsidy, the hundred of Bath, called Bath forum or Bath Foreign, consisted of the later parishes of Kelston, North Stoke, Langridge, Woolley, Swainwick with Tadwick, St Catherine's, Batheaston, Bathford with Shockerwick and Warleigh, Bathampton, Bathwick, Claverton, Monkton Combe, Freshford with Woodwick, South Stoke and Lyncombe and Widcombe (formerly Clifton).²⁶ This area is a well-defined unit with a block of land north of the river, taking in the uplands and valleys facing Bath and defined on the north by valleys. On the east the land defined is in the valleys of the Avon and Bybrook, but below the scarp top; while on the south, Midford Brook, the stream in Horsecombe, and direct lines across the uplands are used. Limpley Stoke is excluded from the hundred as it was by then in Wiltshire, but it may originally have been included in the estate. In 1086 when Domesday Book was compiled, the hidage of these lands can be defined as 103 or possibly 95 units.²⁷ This bears a remarkable resemblance to the 100 hides of 676 AD and suggests that the 7th century estate survived later changes of ownership and re-arrangement as the hundred looking to Bath. This idea is perhaps reinforced by the fact that a number of the land units in the 10th and 11th centuries are multiples of the 5 hide unit suggesting an early, regular arrangement.

There has been much written on hundreds and their origins and it is not the purpose of this paper to go over this ground.²⁸ Suffice it to say that hundreds which were not created in the post Norman Conquest period may have early origins as land units, and that those estates which were granted to ecclesiastical landholders may have had a greater likelihood of remaining stable within such corporate ownerships.

Let us look at this estate in some detail. The boundaries are probably of 7th century date at least. When Bath was taken over by the Saxons in 577 AD, along with Gloucester and Cirencester,

it is likely that in addition to the city itself, a block of land was acquired which was, considered anachronistically, part of Gloucestershire. In 628 AD the area of later Gloucestershire was certainly in Mercia and it was a Hwiccian king who founded Bath as a monastery in 676 AD; in 864 AD Bath was still in Mercia.²⁹ Within Wessex to the south, Somerset had probably been defined as a shire by 845 AD.³⁰ More importantly, with the death of Bishop Aldhelm, the diocesan boundary of Wells had probably been laid down before 709 AD. Bath is included in the Burghal Hidage of c. 909 AD and Professor Finberg suggests that its large assessment of 1000 hides is meant to relate to a large part of Gloucestershire. It was only in about 918 AD with the death of Aethelflaed, lady of the Mercians, that Bath was transferred to Wessex and into Somerset.

It is thus possible that even in 577 AD Bath was thought of as a land unit rather than just a city, although a larger area than the probable 7th century estate may have been associated with it. The diocesan boundary and the Somerset county boundary follow the hundred boundary however, and although these were defined to the south of Bath before the transfer of Bath to Wessex and Somerset, it is perhaps significant that after 918 these boundaries followed the later hundred boundary rather than any other division.

Is it possible to indicate the site of a 'caput' or head place on this Bath estate? The city itself with its Roman walls might seem the obvious choice, but, by analogy with other important Saxon estates, it is likely that the administrative headquarters at this early date was rural rather than urban. The best examples locally are Somerton and Cheddar in Somerset. The former clearly was an important centre of a large estate and the latter had the great range of Saxon palace buildings, but neither had town functions or indeed resembled anything 'urban' at all. Commercial and trading activities were carried out some way away from the caput, at Ilchester and later Langport for Somerton and at Axbridge for Cheddar.³¹ An even closer example to Bath is Bristol, founded by the 11th century as a small planted fortified commercial and trading centre, on the Avon, but on the edge of a vast royal estate later called Barton Regis. The original caput, the administrative and agricultural centre of this estate, was probably some distance from Bristol in the present Barton Hill suburb of the city.

At Bath there may have been the same arrangement. To the north of the walled area there was a group of Barton names relating to fields, before they were built over in the late 18th century.³² Was this a pre-urban centre of the estate, sited above the low-lying flooded part of the old Roman city? Another possibility, particularly in the light of the research into Somerset's hillforts by Ian Burrow, is that some local hillfort was reoccupied in the late/post-Roman period. Of the three local hillforts, Little Solsbury would be a good candidate. Perhaps it is significant, therefore, that this fort is in Batheaston parish and that in the Domesday Book Batheaston is linked with Bath in the assessment, much in the same way as Langport is an appendage of Somerton and Axbridge is of Cheddar.³³

Within the area of this probable estate, the place-names seem to reflect the organisation of an early estate, although there is no evidence at Bath for the lower status of settlements, or of the dependent relationship of churches to the minster or monastery. Evidence of customary renders or dues has not been found so far, although further research might alter this.

Around Bath, a topographical name itself, there is a cluster of 'tun' (homestead) names – Kelston (the calf's 'tun', which preserves the hard k of the Mercian dialect – compared with Chelston in Wessex to the south), Weston (the west 'tun', west of Bath), Batheaston (the east 'tun', east of Bath), Clifton (now Lyncombe and Widcombe – on the cliff overlooking Bath), Claverton, and Monkton (the monks' 'tun' – a name that must be later than the nunnery founded in 686). Each of these settlements lies in the valley with easy access to a range of different landscapes and resources. They contrast in name and siting with the '-wick' and '-stoke' names which ring the estate further up the valleys and on the higher land. Perhaps significantly, several of these, such as Woodwick and Godwyk, had disappeared by the later Middle Ages. We may, therefore, have within the estate a group of main 'tun' settlements in the valleys, with outlying places on higher and less accessible land on the edge of the estate.

This early estate around Bath would not have existed in isolation. It is difficult, without considerably more research, to describe accurately the adjacent estates, but early centres can be picked out together with later hundredal and estate changes. To the north and west, there were early centres at Marshfield,³⁴

Bitton and Pucklechurch, where there was formerly a Saxon royal palace, and to the east there was an important early monastic estate centred on Bradford-on-Avon. To the south and west of Bath, there was a vast royal estate based on Frome and another at Keynsham. The Frome estate seems originally to have included the hundreds of Wellow and Kilmersdon, which were only detached as separate hundreds after the 11th century.³⁵

One further piece of evidence, that of Wansdyke, needs to be considered. Early, romantic, writings about this linear earthwork³⁶ have now been revised by Cyril and Aileen Fox. After detailed field research, they suggest that the West Wansdyke running from the Bath area to Maes Knoll bears no relationship to the more impressive Wansdyke in Wiltshire and that it was constructed probably between 628 and 635 AD 'when the West Saxons had to give way to the growing power of Mercia'.³⁷ It is significant that Wansdyke is associated with the southern boundary of the probable multiple estate and that it is used as a territorial boundary of two 10th century estates indicated in charters with boundary clauses.

If it is accepted that there was a defined estate around Bath by the 7th century and that this can be recognised principally from later sources, is it possible that it also related to Roman, or even pre-Roman, arrangements? Research elsewhere suggests this, but the case in the Bath region is not certain, since so little is known of any territory attached to Roman Bath and so little excavation has been carried out on the hillforts in the region.

The Late Saxon Period

By the late Saxon period the putative early estate granted to the Bath minster had been partly fragmented. This could have happened with the demise of the early monastery before the 10th century or during the troubles of the Viking period.

The abbey was re-founded by circa 963 AD, if not before, but its estates were arranged differently from then on³⁸ (see map 7). Shaftesbury Abbey, the great nunnery in Wessex founded around 888 AD, had by the late Saxon period acquired Kelston, and by 1010 AD Bradford-on-Avon with its former monastery and other lands, including Limpley Stoke, also belonged to the nuns. From

the time of Aethelstan (925–40 AD) and Edmund (940–94), new grants of land or confirmations were made to St Peter's abbey and a new estate, much more scattered and discontinuous, was built up from the 10th to the 13th centuries.³⁹ Particular pieces of land can be traced from Anglo-Saxon charters, especially when the boundaries are given. These estates and lands form part of the Bath region in so far as they were under the control of Bath abbey. There was close economic and administrative involvement between them and Bath, but, certainly by the Middle Ages, they take us well beyond the boundaries of Bath itself.

As has already been remarked, nothing can be seen of the relationships between Bath and the lands around, particularly with regard to customary dues and obligations, which might reflect on the earlier estate structure, or indeed between Bath minster and any dependent churches and chapels on the surrounding estates. There are, however, a number of Saxon sculptural and cross fragments in the Bath region and a few examples of structural remains. The best impression of a late Saxon minster church in the area can perhaps be gained from Bitton, where substantial pieces remain, including a porticus and a rood over the chancel arch. Bradford-on-Avon, of course, retains a complete Saxon church, while Limpley Stoke has a doorway, and probably walling, incorporated into the nave.⁴⁰ The Bath region, like Somerset generally, has little Saxon work remaining; much must have been removed in the great rebuildings of the Middle Ages. Portions of crosses remain at Kelston, possibly at Twerton and at Colerne, while others from Lansdown and the minster itself are kept in Bath. Saxon dedications probably indicate other churches in existence before the Norman Conquest. Examples include St Winifred's chapel and well on Sion Hill, Bath, St Werbergh's oratory, north of the city centre, St Swithun at both Walcot and Bathford, and the well, but no known chapel, of St Alphage on Lansdown. These saints reflect the relationship of the Bath region firstly to Mercia and later to Wessex. St Winifred was a female saint from Holywell in Flintshire, and abbess of the nunnery there, who died c. 650 AD. St Werbergh, another female saint, died in c. 699 AD. She was abbess of Ely and daughter of the Mercian king Wulfhere. Cults of these saints cannot be expected before the late 7th or 8th centuries. Their Mercian background stands in contrast to St

THE BATH AREA in the Late Saxon Period

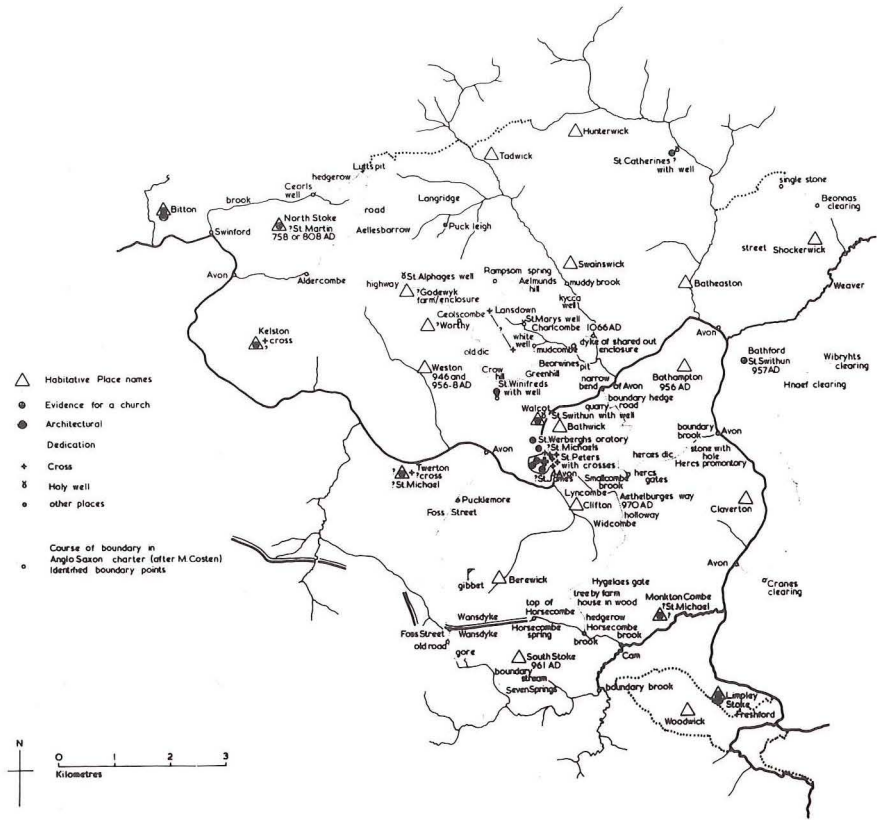


Figure 6

Swithun, formerly prior then Bishop of Winchester, who died in c. 862 AD and whose body was translated to Winchester in 971, and St Alphege – both of whom have strong Wessex backgrounds and whose cults are of 11th and 12th century date. St Alphege was closely associated with Bath abbey. He was born in 954 AD, brought up at Deerhurst, but then moved to Bath, where he spent some time in retreat. Was this time spent up on Lansdown in

some lost oratory marked by St Alphege's well? Eventually he became Bishop of Winchester, and then Archbishop of Canterbury. He was martyred by the Danes, who pelted him with animal bones at a feast, in 1012 after he refused to be ransomed.

Other possible early saints' sites might include St Michael at Monkton Combe, in Bath itself, and at Twerton and St Martin at North Stoke. Particular wells, like St Mary's at Charlcombe, might indicate other early sites. It is surprising in this area that there is no reference to St Aldhelm, the great 7th and early 8th century bishop of Somerset, but it may be because the area was then in Mercia, not Wessex.

Bath itself may not have been an urban central place until the 9th century,⁴¹ but it must have functioned as a focal place for the area around in certain spheres of activity. The existence of a royal house, and later a minster, would have provided the religious and administrative focus for the area, as well as economic incentives to supply and exchange goods and services. The hundred courts would have met somewhere in the vicinity and no doubt by the 10th century, at least, exchange activity at markets and fairs would have been centred at and controlled by Bath itself. By the early 10th century, the burghal hidage document, with 1000 hides attached to Bath, suggests administrative and defensive considerations for a wide area based on the defended circuit of Bath itself. It is probable that this region can never be accurately defined, although it must include a large area of Gloucestershire and in particular may relate to the '7 Hundreds of Grumbalds Ash' covering much of south Gloucestershire. By Domesday Book, links between Bath and manors in rural areas having houses in Bath city show that its influence stretched over a wide area of north Somerset from Backwell and Bishopsworth in the west to Chewton Mendip and High Littleton in the south-west and Keynsham, Weston and Hinton nearer at hand.⁴² The definition of such 'urban fields'⁴³ at least allows some idea of late Saxon urban centres and their hinterlands; Bath dominates north Somerset. In the absence of adequate data on marketable commodities such as pottery at this time, or indeed the distribution of the coins from the Bath mint, such 'urban fields' at least may indicate something of the economic region around Bath on the eve of the Norman Conquest.

The Bath Region in the Middle Ages

With the Norman Conquest, more documentary evidence becomes available, firstly with Domesday Book, and then from the 13th century various lists of settlements and their values are available. It is not difficult to reconstruct for the Bath region the distribution of most medieval settlements from such documents as Kirby's Quest of 1284 (a list of knights' fees), the *Nomina Villarum* of 1316, the Lay Subsidies of 1327 and 1334 and the Poll Tax of 1377. In some of these sources, other, smaller settlements are implied in the surnames of the people paying subsidies.

From these sources it can be shown that most of the settlements around Bath have existed from the early Middle Ages; indeed, as has been shown, they were probably Roman settlements at least. Very little of this medieval settlement pattern has disappeared in the later and post-medieval periods. Woodwick, near Freshford, is the most spectacular failure. There was a separate vill here with its own church. This church was united with Freshford in 1444 and now only field names mark the site. There are earthworks indicating the settlement, near to Peipards Farm. Four places of far lower status have also disappeared. None of these, as far as is known, had a church and they were each too insignificant to appear regularly in medieval tax lists. Barrow or Barrow Mead in Englishcombe was excavated in 1953-4 and 1964 and is now built over.⁴⁴ Berewick, below Odd Down, was a vill in 1284, but any possible settlement earthworks have now been built over. Godewyk, described as a hamlet of Weston in the *Nomina Villarum* of 1316, may be the Old Wick site above Weston on the road to Lansdown. The enigmatic Aumarle Chaumflour of the 1327 Lay Subsidy, with at least 25 people paying the subsidy, may never have been a separate settlement but merely that part of Batheaston parish east of the stream. Nevertheless there is no doubt that other deserted medieval settlements still await discovery in this area as elsewhere.

Similarly, something can be ascertained of the churches in existence in the early Middle Ages, both from documentary sources and from the surviving structures. Romanesque work exists at Twerton, Langridge, which has a very fine Norman chancel arch, Swainswick, Bathford, Charlcombe and South

Stoke. By the mid 14th century there were churches at all the main places within the Bath region. Many of these have been rebuilt, so that only a very few near Bath have medieval work remaining – Widcombe is perhaps the finest. Others have disappeared; Woodwick church has disappeared along with the village, the probable Lyncombe church has gone, the old church at Bathwick is derelict and many chapels listed above have been demolished. On Lansdown, the shell of St Lawrence's chapel remains converted to a farmhouse and in Holloway, St Mary Magdalen's chapel, albeit part of a medieval hospital, remains. We cannot rule out the possibility that other medieval centres also had churches or chapels once. Possibilities include Tadwick in Swainswick and Warleigh and Shockerwick in Bathford.

The estates belonging to Bath abbey in the late 11th century can be ascertained from Domesday Book and additional properties acquired through to the 13th century can be traced. These augment those granted to the refounded monastery in the 10th century and show the influence of the abbey spreading across lands in Somerset and south Gloucestershire, with isolated estates in Devon, Hampshire and Wiltshire. The priory at Dunster, in Somerset, was granted to Bath abbey by William de Mohun in the 11th Century and from 1204 the abbey acquired various Irish properties, beginning with the hospital of St John at Waterford and eventually including priories at Cork and Youghal as well as numerous churches.

In this respect, Bath abbey and its estates are typical of monasteries and their lands in the Middle Ages. Estates tend to be scattered as grants were made by landowners in different areas; frequently, there is a concentration of the original lands granted around the monastery site itself. Over the years, monasteries acquired numerous estates, manors, land, rectories and advowsons of churches, extending and consolidating their hold over a wide area. What is needed to reconstruct the full picture at Bath, as elsewhere, is the sort of detailed estate study which James Bond has carried out for Evesham abbey and Abingdon abbey.⁴⁵

What is not so clear in the Bath region in the Middle Ages is the relationship between the city itself and the surrounding countryside. At the time of Domesday Book, Bath was the only urban place for miles around, the nearest neighbours being Bristol,

HISTORIC TOWNS
in the West Country

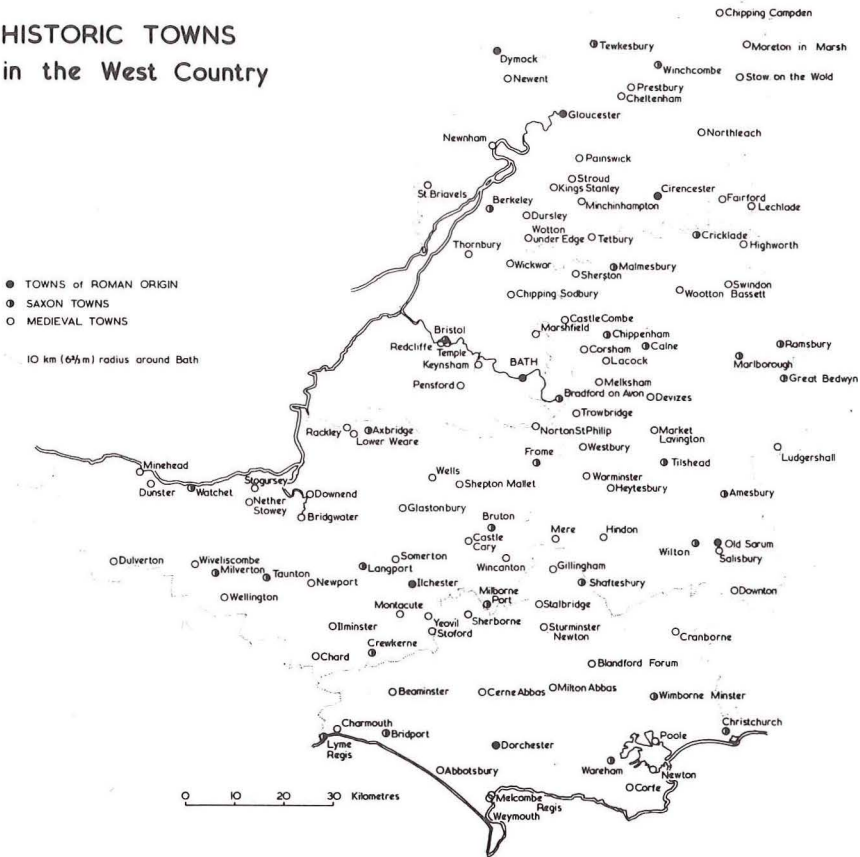


Figure 8

market granted in 1239,⁴⁶ Chippenham, a parliamentary borough from 1295, Lacock, from c. 1230, Melksham, granted a market and fair in 1219, and Trowbridge, probably by 1139, although a market and fair were granted in 1200.⁴⁷ Bristol and Bradford-on-Avon were in existence as market centres in late Saxon times, while Pensford, not far from Bath, developed into a market centre in late medieval times. Most of these places are some distance away from Bath and even the nearest, Keynsham, Marshfield and Bradford, are 10 kilometres away, or the 6 2/3 miles suggested as a safe distance between markets by Henry of Bracton in the 13th

century (indicated by the dotted rings in maps 1 and 8). There must have been some competition between all of these new centres and Bath, but the only recorded conflict was between Bath and Marshfield, significantly the closest of the new centres.

Several points arise from this distribution of towns with their markets and fairs. Firstly, not all such markets and fairs were directly comparable, or indeed in competition with one another. It depended which day of the week for markets or day of the year for fairs they were held on. It is considerably more difficult to find out such information, especially when comparing the situation in towns with the numerous rural markets and fairs granted to villages in the 12th and 13th centuries. Similarly, it is not at all clear which markets and fairs were ever implemented after a grant, which ones failed and when, which were successful or indeed which others were of longstanding duration or were held illegally, without a licence. Thirdly, we have little idea what was going on at such markets, in particular which commodities were being exchanged. Despite this being a documented period, only painstaking examination of material derived from archaeological excavations will eventually show us the imports and their distribution around a region. The same applies to the movement of animal products and crops between rural areas, markets and their places of consumption. Finally, even with a market or fair grant, some places were likely to be more frequented than others because of other activities which were carried out in them and the facilities they provided. Visits to the market or fair could be combined in such places with administrative, judicial or ecclesiastical business. Bath clearly falls into this category and retained successfully its 'central place' functions in its region throughout the Middle Ages to emerge as an important city down to the present day.

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