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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The Organisation of the Mid–Late Anglo-Saxon Borderland with Wales

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With hardly any written documentation concerning the creation of Offa's Dyke or for the contemporary communities that it affected, the intricacies of how the Mercian-Welsh frontier was organised during the late eighth and early ninth century and afterwards can seem entirely unknowable. This article addresses the question of the likely variable character of the long and undoubtedly complex frontier in reference to some location-specific existing archaeological evidence and close study of the form of the Dyke and other contemporary features in the landscape. One of the key elements of this attempt at detection of early frontier organisation therefore involves looking at the potential role of the inherited Roman road network especially where it runs parallel with the Dyke. Two examples based upon archaeological excavations in Herefordshire are noted here as providing clues as to the diversity of frontier structuring. The first example is the uncovering of a mid–late Anglo-Saxon fortified enclosure at Breinton just to the west of Hereford in 2018 that has at last added some substance to the possibility of the past existence of sophisticated military infrastructure including fortresses close to the Mercian/Welsh frontier. A key factor in the organisation of the pre-Norman frontier at least from the English side could have been the location of 'quasi-military personnel' close to the Dyke and to the inherited routeway system. Certain entries in the county-based Domesday surveys of Circuit V for the border counties are briefly re-examined here to consider the implications of the spatial distribution of a single category of specialised freemen. This highlights the importance of Leintwardine and the Roman road south from Shrewsbury as a key location: a possibility underlined by discoveries made during an excavation in the 1990s.

Keywords: Anglo-Saxon, borderlands, Mercia, Offa's Dyke, Roman roads, Wat's Dyke

Introduction

Offa's Dyke was created as a linear earthwork some 130 miles (210 km) long running north to south and facing westwards into Wales from the lands to the east that were appropriated by the Mercian kingdom from the seventh century AD onwards (Fox 1955; Hill and Worthington 2003; Ray and Bapty 2016). Its attribution to King Offa (reigned 757–796) conventionally dates it to the period of Mercian hegemony within southern Britain in the eighth and early ninth centuries, although some lengths at least may have originated before Offa's reign. The frontier itself has been the subject of recent re-evaluation as a collaborative as well as contested Anglo-Welsh space, based upon new readings of the literary sources (Brady 2017).

In this article, the aim is to focus upon how Offa's Dyke may have related to the organisation (by the Anglo-Saxon political authorities) of a frontier landscape that was likely to have been far from uniform topographically, culturally, politically and in terms

of its inheritance. What is explored briefly here is how archaeological discoveries (and importantly not only on the Offa's Dyke earthwork itself or on Wat's Dyke) may offer novel ways to approach how the frontier was organised both during and after the period of the construction and primary use of the Dyke. The intention is to demonstrate how such clues as are coming to light about key locations may begin (potentially also in conjunction with the limited available documentary evidence) to afford glimpses of the role of certain fortified locations and the disposition of personnel whose extra-farming activities (at least by 1066) may have included militia-style military and security services.

The importance of the inherited Roman road network to communications along the early medieval frontier is highlighted first in reference to the Wye valley west of Hereford, and then to Leintwardine on the border between Herefordshire and Shropshire. Discoveries from excavations other than on Offa's Dyke itself and clues from the Domesday survey as to surveillance and escort duties are used to indicate possible variable depth and breadth of the frontier.

Roman roads and the rear of the Anglo-Saxon and Welsh frontier

The continuing maintenance and use of Roman roads and an inherited network of less formal routes within southern Britain in the early medieval period can in some areas be inferred from surviving Anglo-Saxon land charter evidence. Until recently, the best-documented case in this regard has been the landscape of the diocese of Worcester (including west Warwickshire and north Gloucestershire) in the former kingdom of the Hwicce. Here, the mention for example of *straet* (Roman road) lengths and salt-ways in such charters has enabled something of the former existence of a road network in the south-west midlands to be reconstructed (Hooke 1985: 58–63 and 120–128).

More recently, research into communications networks has focused upon developments across the later West Saxon landscape from Devon in the west to Kent in the east (for example, Baker and Brookes 2013: 137–213; Langlands 2019). The importance of major inherited routeways has been emphasised in such research, along with more informal trackways. The significance of roads designated as 'army-roads' (for example, *here*-paths) and the various associated terminologies have been explored in some detail (Baker and Brookes 2015b), and the former existence of beacons and (for instance) places of assembly/army mustering has been explored using combinations of onomastic, diplomatic, topographic and archaeological clues (see below regarding fortifications).

Routeways passing through the landscape to link up places of shelter from marauding military groups have been identified as being of especial importance, given the way they linked up former Roman towns and burgeoning royal administrative centres: Winchester being of particular importance in Wessex for this reason. In west-central Britain the Roman road known as Watling Street (the historic A5 trunk road) was a case in point. This road had throughout the Roman period (and probably also for much

of its length thereafter) enabled movements of messengers, troops or supplies between London, the southern midlands, and the Dee valley (towards Ruabon and Llangollen) and Chester. These 'southern midlands' regions included the area centred upon Wall (the site of a former Roman posting station, *Letocetum*), Lichfield (the chief Mercian episcopal centre) and Tamworth (the Mercian secular capital) — in other words the very heartlands of the kingdom (White 1998; 2013).

So far, no studies have been made equivalent to those concerning Wessex to try to establish the relationship between defensive systems and routeways in the Welsh marchlands, nor have detailed studies been carried out of how the long-distance Dykes of the Welsh marchlands related to the surviving (and augmented) inherited Roman road system. And yet both east–west and north–south Roman roads situated mainly to the east of the uplands undoubtedly had potential utility for military and civil defensive movements.

If we were to seek to identify the best candidate for a route that could have served to mark the inner limit of an 'Offan' frontier zone along a significant part of its course, the most obvious example would be the Roman road known as Watling Street West (Silvester and Toller 2010: 96, fig. 4.3; denoted as RR6a, RR6b and RR6c). This road is currently understood to have extended for at least 95 miles (150 km) from the Wirral north of Chester, southwards to that walled former legionary base, then south to Whitchurch (Shropshire) and thence to Wroxeter (*Viroconium*, another former legionary base). From there it continued southwards to Stretford Bridge (south of modern-day Church Stretton), then south again to Leintwardine (*Branogenium*), and on to Kenchester (*Magnis*) west of Hereford before crossing the Wye and continuing further on south-westwards into the Golden Valley and down towards Abergavenny (*Gobannio*). The northern three-quarters of this route could therefore have been significant to the rearward definition of much of the northern and central parts of the Mercian-Welsh frontier (a point that will be returned to below).

The 'Offa's Dyke' frontier west of Hereford: roads, river crossings and fortifications

In the same way that parts of the River Severn (near Welshpool) and River Dee (near Chirk) and the River Wye south of Hereford were apparently regarded integrally as part of the Anglo-Welsh frontier at least from the eighth century, so too may have been the Wye westwards of Hereford. However, it now seems likely that at some point it was felt necessary to make this to some extent a defensible line. There was until recently no evidence for such a circumstance. However, the discovery and exploratory investigation of a defensive enclosure at Breinton with features that are closely similar to the defences of the well-documented Anglo-Saxon walls and ditches surrounding Hereford itself (and with items present that indicate mid/late Saxon occupation and/or usage) has the potential to radically affect this situation.

In the course of an informal study of some remarkable survivals of evidence for early field systems on the left (north) bank of the River Wye in Breinton parish, the available Lidar

Figure 1: Lower Breinton (Lidar mapping). The inner 'ring' is the (moated) AD twelfth- to sixteenth-century site of the walled summer residence of the Treasurer of Hereford Cathedral; the square enclosure to its east is the redefined nineteenth-century churchyard; the broad ditched feature, over which the twelfth-century church partly stands, is the fortified *burh* enclosure (the excavation site was located on the better-preserved NW inner corner, in the grounds of Breinton House. Mapping: Liam Delaney

data was examined, and a remarkable apparent defensive structure was revealed (Figure 2; see also Delaney 2021). At the centre of this enclosure there was a more pronounced sub-circular ditched mound that previous excavation had established was a medieval residence in the ownership of the Dean and Chapter of Hereford Cathedral (Heys 1963). Two features of the larger enclosure however attracted particular attention: the breadth and uniformity of the ditch, and the apparent location of the mid-twelfth-century parish church, which had in part been built over the outer lip of the north-eastern angle of this broad ditch.

This discovery clearly merited closer investigation and a modest archaeological excavation was carried out in 2018 in the grounds of a private residence built adjacent to the north-western angle of the ditch, where the earthwork appeared to be best preserved. This excavation produced unequivocal evidence for the former existence of a stone and turf faced earthen bank and a relatively shallow-profiled but broad fronting ditch. Moreover, the pottery found in bank deposits and in the basal ditch infills close

to the southern edge of the ditch in the 2018 Breinton House excavation was of Hereford form D1 (limestone-tempered Cotswold/Gloucester cooking pots), the date-range for which is thought to extend from the late ninth to the early eleventh century (Vince 1985: 54–55; Boucher *et al.* 2015: 60–62; S. Ratkai in Ray and Delaney 2022).

This fortified enclosure had been carefully positioned on a bluff high above the north bank of the Wye, two miles west of Hereford, and was defended by both a turf-fronted earthen bank originally faced in stone and a broad ditch (Figure 1). The bank was of slighter proportions, but of almost the same width, depth and profile, as the bank and projected mid-/late Anglo-Saxon period ditch around Hereford that was encountered at Victoria Street in the 1960s (Shoesmith 1982: bank with stone wall at 30–35 and 73–74, ditch at 35; and the included microfiche files M1.E1–M1.E7). Thus, the Breinton defensive enclosure has the appearance either of a fort or a defended settlement of similar mid-/ late Anglo-Saxon date.

The whole question of the naming of settlements and their history in a marchland that underwent several transformations through the later first and early second millennia AD is inevitably fraught with difficulties (Parsons, this volume). Place-names as they have come down to us today have often been subject to considerable alteration, and may at first seem only poorly comprehensible, if at all. 'Breinton' is a case in point. It emerged as a named settlement in the thirteenth century — as, for instance, *Bruntune*, *Breuntuna* (*c.* 1210), *Brahintone* (1252), and *Broyntun* (1242). Ekwall (1960: 62) deduced that it derived from OE *Brȳning(a)tūn*, the *tūn* of Brȳni's people. This was on the assumption that it was an *-ingas* placename that just happened not to have been recorded before 1200. Coplestone-Crow (2009: 53) added further documentary references to the name: *Breynton(e)* (1272, 1332, 1316, 1328 and 1341), *Brenton* or *Brounton* (1291), *Braynton* (1375) and *Breyngton* (1377 Poll Tax). One suggestion he then made for its derivation was that it had descended from primitive Welsh *breg* borrowed into Old English as *braeg*, genitive *braegan*, here referencing the 'brow' (of a hill). Coplestone-Crow ended his Breinton entry with a dismissal of the main DEPN entry that has a derivation from *Brȳning(a)tūn* ('settlement of Brȳni's people') because it 'does not suit the spellings.'

The inspection of the Lidar mapping for the Lower Breinton area (Figure 1) transformed understanding of this site; it showed the extraordinary broad-ditched three-sided fortified enclosure discussed above. Examination of William Rees's (1933) map of 'South Wales and the Border in the XIV Century' indicates that despite all these compiled medieval references, another version again may have been current. Rees marked Breinton as 'Burgnton' or 'Burghton', which would place it in the 'Burton' category, in this case with surely an argument to suggest that it was once either a 'burh-settlement' or a fortification associated with one such place (for which, see Blair 2018: 228).

On an estate map of 1783 of Lower Breinton, moreover, the orchard immediately to the north of the enclosure is termed the 'Burfields Close' — in this case clearly referring to
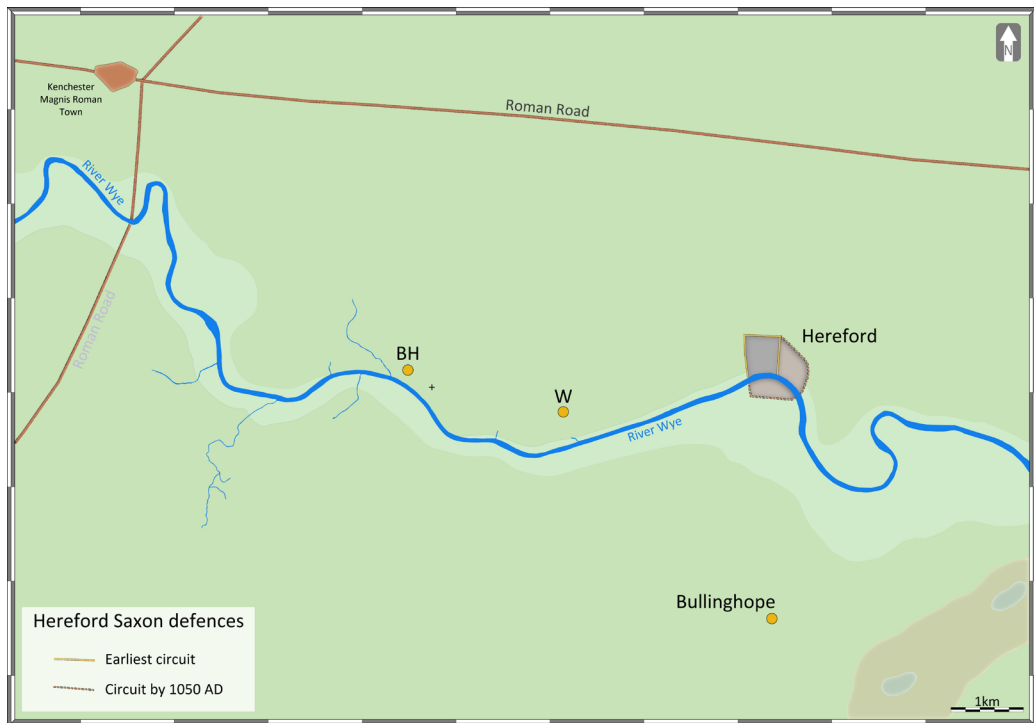
Figure 2: The landscape west of Hereford, showing the relationship of the Roman town at Kenchester, the Breinton House site (BH), Warham (W: mentioned in Domesday Book) and Hereford. Bullinghope has produced what is so far the earliest evidence for Anglo-Saxon settlement in the Hereford area

the presence of a *burh* — whatever was signified by this term. It therefore seems likely that there never was a person called 'Bryni' who lent his name to this riverside location, and as in so many cases the *-ingas* inference is spurious. Nor, despite its topographical position above the river, was there a derivation from an earlier Welsh form translated into OE to refer to the hill-brow concerned (it is, rather, part of a near-continuous bluff above the river here). Whether or not John Blair (2018: 199–200) is correct in thinking that, where the name occurs, the *burh-tun* refers to the *burh* (fortified settlement) or its watch-place or outpost, the dual place-name and land-parcel naming at Breinton would appear to confirm that the memory of an Anglo-Saxon riverside fortification here persisted into the medieval period (although it must be accepted that the *burh* element can signify a range of kinds of place in Anglo-Saxon England: see Draper 2008; Gelling 1992: 119–122 discussed the occurrence of *burh-tun* or 'Burton' names specifically in relation to the possible organisation of frontier defence: see below).

The existence and date of this enclosure serves to emphasise the role of the Wye (flowing west to east in this part of the valley) as the primary defining feature of this part of the frontier across this six-mile span west of Hereford. Moreover, while the presence of mid-/late Anglo-Saxon pottery and clay items demonstrates the *use* of the 'fort' in this period,
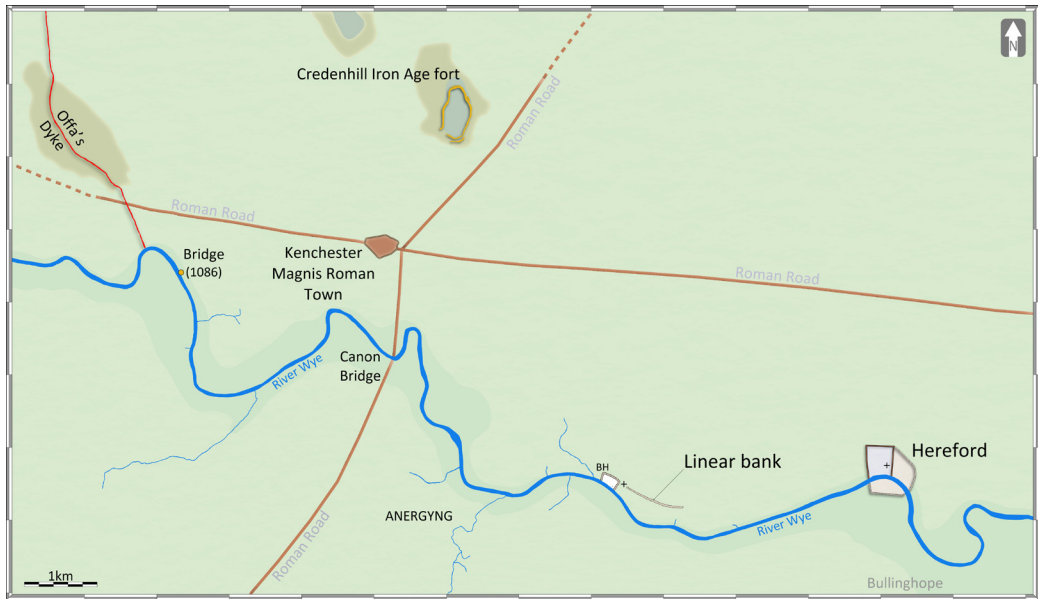
Figure 3: The frontier west of Hereford. This map emphasises the relationship between the north-south course of 'Watling Street West', the course of Offa's Dyke, 'Bridge' mentioned in Domesday Book, Breinton House and potentially associated bank (BH), and Hereford. The conjunction of east-west and north-south routeways, at least one bridge (the Roman bridge was located at Canon Bridge was possibly also still in use) and the defensive locations at Breinton and Hereford is clear

it does not automatically date the period of its *construction*. Of the early medieval defences at Hereford, it has been said: 'The possible time span for the date of construction does not allow the attribution of the defensive work to a particular event or to the reign of an individual king. The likelihood is that it is of pre-Alfredian date and it could be as early as the reign of Offa' (Shoesmith 1982: 77; and see Bassett 2008, although this reappraisal did not materially affect Shoesmith's provisional conclusions as to dating the origins of the defences). As such, the possibility cannot be discounted that the fort at Breinton was first built as part of the original, late eighth-century, scheme for the creation of a Mercian-Welsh frontier – of which Offa's Dyke was of course the chief component (Figure 2).

There does exist, moreover, a short length of linear earthwork surmounting the bluff on the left (north) bank of the Wye immediately to the east of the Breinton fortification, and this may feasibly have been constructed alongside the fort to reinforce a defensive line hereabouts (Ray and Delaney 2022). What is also to be found nearby, moreover, is a former east-west Roman road (RR63) only a mile and a half (3km) north of Breinton at Stretton Sugwas. This linked Worcester on the Severn with the Roman fort at Brecon Gaer and, passing through the Roman walled town of Kenchester, would have provided a significant route from the Hereford area westwards up the Wye valley. If the river and any defensive works above it served as a defensive system in place of the Dyke alone in the area immediately west of Hereford, the Roman road could be seen to have

defined the rear of the frontier locally (Figure 3). It may also have provided a routeway along which Mercian forces could have travelled (either to and from military campaigns westwards, or in response to potential incursions across the Wye fords from the west or south-west). As such, the road may have been a key element of what might be termed a 'logistics and supply' infrastructure used in support of the military 'hardware' represented by the Breinton fortification and any associated works.

Leintwardine: a communications centre at a key location on the frontier?

Just as the probable frontier line along the Wye west of Hereford may have been backed by the former Roman road running parallel with it, so too did the Roman road Watling Street West trace a course northward from Hereford, by the eighth century therefore parallel with the course of Offa's Dyke. As noted above, the road continued all the way north to Wroxeter. A branch then led north-west to its successor regional centre at Shrewsbury. However, of especial interest here is the stretch between Wroxeter and Kenchester, in part because these former walled towns both appear to have had a continuing existence (if not exactly as flourishing market centres) into the late Roman to early post-Roman periods (White 1998).

Among the places located along this Watling Street West route, Leintwardine seems likely to have had a particularly important strategic role in the mid- to late Anglo-Saxon period (see below, and Figure 4). During the Roman period, it had seemingly operated as a waystation for the imperial post, replete as it was with a colonnaded *mansio* (post-house) and an adjacent bathhouse (Brown 1996). By the mid-eleventh century (and potentially before this), it was a royal manor and had become the head of an extensive tract of land, the Leintwardine hundred (Figures 4 and 5).

The importance of Leintwardine in the early medieval period has moreover been underlined archaeologically, having produced unequivocal archaeological evidence for prestige settlement activity in the later Anglo-Saxon period. Excavations that took place at the site of a modern abattoir located immediately to the west of the High Street in Leintwardine, close to where the Roman road bisected the walled settlement, discovered a post-hole, a well and a gulley on an ancient land surface that was otherwise unremarkable. However, the pottery associated directly with these features was surprisingly (given its location within a Roman period settlement) almost entirely of early medieval date (Brown 1996: 540). There were several sherds of Stafford-type ware (also known as Chester-type ware, named after the place with sites where the ceramics were first recognised in quantity: Ford 2000), a single sherd of Stamford-type ware, and some further sherds of a previously unrecognised ware of early medieval character (Brown 1996).

The floruit of the production and distribution of Stafford-type ware is currently thought to have been between the late ninth and the late eleventh century (Ford 2000; Carver 2010: 102), while Stamford-type ware had a similar date-span for its production. The

Figure 4: Leintwardine from the south, as viewed from Brandon Camp. Roman road RR6c ('Watling Street West') extends up the ridge in the middle distance going northwards towards Wroxeter (and in the direction of Shrewsbury to the left of and past the parish church at right-centre here. Brandon camp is a strong candidate for having been an assembly point and muster location for Leintwardine hundred

key point to emphasise here is that, although Stafford-type ware is present, sometimes in quantity, in the fortified proto-urban centres that became county-towns of the Marches and West Midlands (Chester, Shrewsbury, Hereford, Gloucester, Worcester and Stafford itself), it is extremely rare on rural sites and tends to be found only in high-status places, usually with documented royal connections (Ford 2000).

It was concluded from these finds that 'As a strategic defended site close to the Welsh border, Leintwardine may have been incorporated into the system of border control accompanying the construction of Offa's Dyke', and that, although no indications of the re-fortification of the settlement have yet been found, the presence of slag from early medieval ironworking indicates ongoing activity indicative of a settlement of some strategic importance (Brown 1996: 564).

Leintwardine hundred extended mostly westwards towards, and in some places across, Offa's Dyke – taking in for example manors at both Knighton and Selley that were located on the Dyke itself. Ackhill (a place near Discoed in the same hundred) is meanwhile situated immediately eastwards of the Dyke, overlooking the Lugg valley from the north, and Cascob, located up a Lugg tributary valley (and on the eastern flank
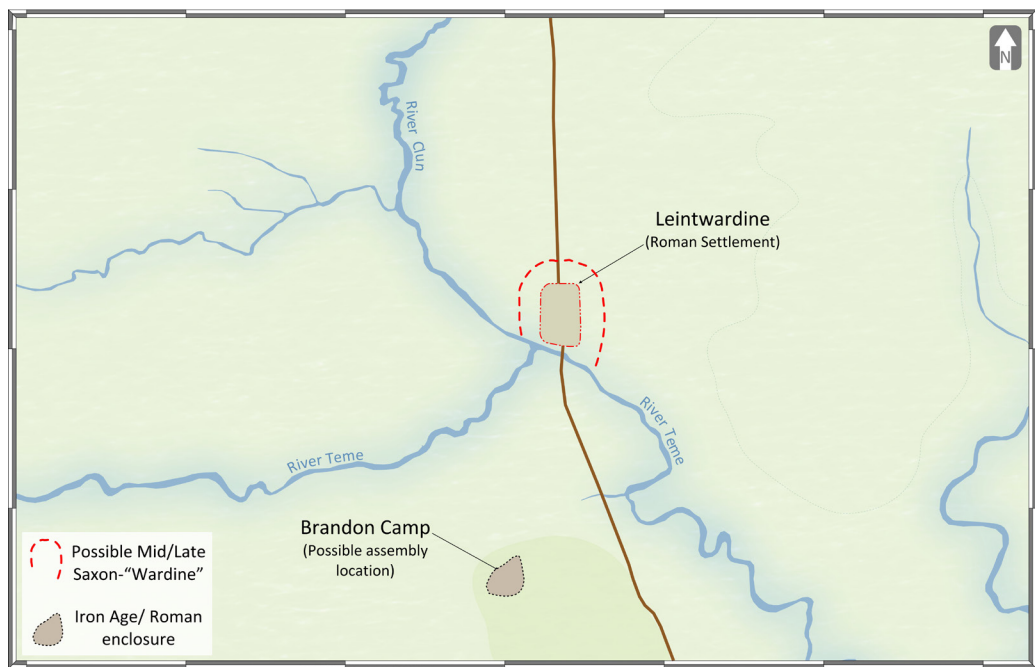
Figure 5: The local context of Leintwardine in reference to the north-south Roman Road ('Watling Street West') and the Iron Age hillfort at Brandon Camp. Aerial photographs and early maps indicate the existence of an outer enclosure beyond the Roman defences, and it may have been this feature that gave rise to the '-wardine' name

of the Radnor Forest massif) lies two miles (4 km) to the west of where the Dyke crossed the Lugg to the west of Discoed (and adjacent to a part of Radnorshire that remained a detached part of Herefordshire until the nineteenth century).

Northwards towards Shrewsbury, Leintwardine hundred also included locations such as Acton (Scott), close to the route of Watling Street West. Although compiled about three centuries after the presumed building of Offa's Dyke in the late eighth century, the Domesday Survey entries may enable us to glimpse something of the way that at least in the late Saxon period the Leintwardine district was organised administratively in part at least to provide communications and military services for the greater lords and the king on the frontier (see Roffe 2007: 147–162 for discussion of the relation of the Domesday Inquest to service arrangements in place during the later Anglo-Saxon period).

In 1086 (*DB Shropshire*: 6,11) Leintwardine had 10 villagers, a reeve, a priest, a church and two 'radmen' (riders, or riding men). The latter are important in this context because *radmanni* and *radchenistri* (the terms were evidently equivalents) appear in 1086 in the Domesday Circuit V (5) entries as a category of freemen (people holding land from a lord as a tenant in return for services) almost exclusively in the frontier counties (Nelson 1966). As with several other categories of freemen, *radmanni* and *radchenistri* were

described as farmers, in many cases being identified specifically as possessing plough-teams. These freemen were listed as *radmanni* in the Cheshire folios (145 individuals) while in Shropshire there were also *radchenistri* (167 *radmanni* and 3 *radchenistri*). Although these two terms were clearly simply equivalents, *radchenistri* was the term more commonly used in the south of the frontier, such that in Gloucestershire 137 *radchenistri* and no *radmanni* were listed. Meanwhile, both terms were used in Herefordshire (30 *radmanni* and 47 *radchenistri*).

Exactly what this class of person represented has long been debated, but it has generally been accepted that they comprised 'A sub-group of the *liberi homines*, 'free men', of higher status than a villager; originally a man who rode with messages, or on escort-duty' (*DB Herefordshire*: Technical Terms; see, for example, Stenton 1947: 468). The key question is, what were they doing in these counties? The distribution of this category of originally Anglo-Saxon 'riders' or horsemen *within* both Cheshire and Shropshire is skewed heavily towards the west and in Herefordshire towards the centre and the north-west. The conclusion that there was a close connection somehow with the way in which the frontier was by then organised appears inescapable. Many of the places in which these farmer-horsemen were based, including Condover (with its three riders), and Dorrington, Pulley (also with three riders) and Meole Brace, just to the south of Shrewsbury near Bayston Hill (respectively, *DB Shropshire*: 4,1,2; 4,15,2; and 6,30), are located on a routeway to that town that links directly southwards to Watling Street West. Another settlement with *radmanni* was Woolston. This is located between Church Stretton and Craven Arms (*DB Shropshire*: 4,20,18) immediately next to Watling Street West itself, and on the way north towards Acton Scott and Shrewsbury. The sense that these farmer-horsemen were integral to the royal administration is also underscored by their association in several manors both with reeves and with clerics (represented by some of the few churches and priests identified in the Shropshire part of the Survey).

The notion that there existed 'radman villages' in Shropshire in the mid-eleventh century and earlier, and that these men had some quasi-military role in frontier organisation and communications has previously been suggested (Nelson 1966: 44–46; Atkin 2015). Atkin (2015: 17–18), noted especially the linear distribution of settlements featuring *radmanni* in 1066/1086 and their likely relation to routeways. In reference to the later Castlery of Clun, Suppe noted that 'There has been considerable debate as to the social position of these radmen and the nature of their duties, but they were probably of some military value in 1086, although the class was well on the way to extinction. Their name appears to imply that they were trained horsemen.' While suggesting that the district of Clun 'would appear not to have had any systematic military organisation at this early date (1086)', he also conceded that this could have been due to the devastation of the area by Welsh raiding in the immediately preceding decades (Suppe 1994: 39).

There is furthermore a unique reference to Leintwardine in the Shropshire Domesday, in the customs pertaining to Shrewsbury (by then the county town). This is found in
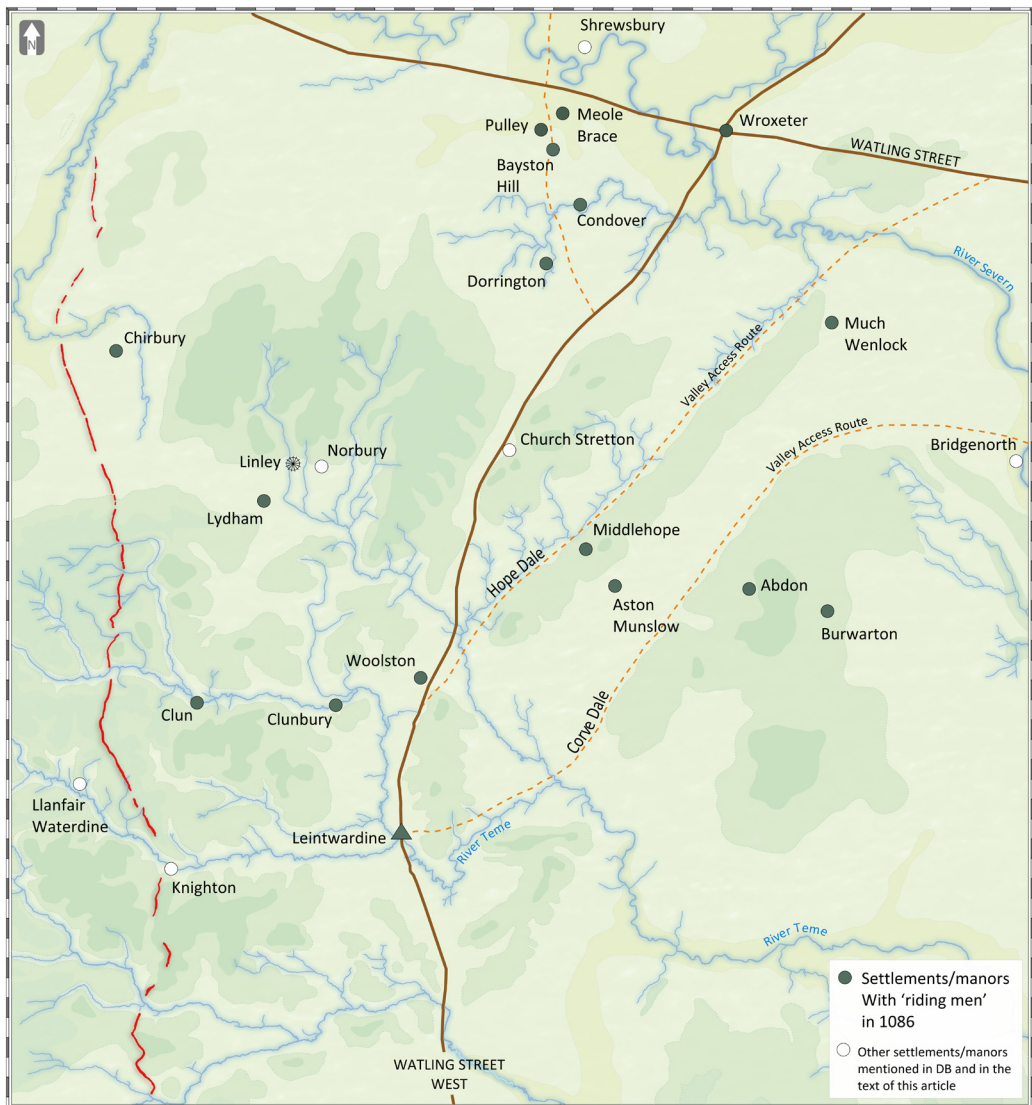
Figure 6: The relationship of the inherited road and routeway network to Offa's Dyke, Leintwardine, and the distribution of 'riding men' mentioned in the Domesday Book in the area between Leintwardine and Shrewsbury

one of the opening sections of the survey (*DB Shropshire*: C10), where it is stated: 'When the King left the City, the Sheriff sent him 24 horses from Leintwardine and the King took these as far as the first manor in Staffordshire.' The journeys concerned would almost certainly have involved travel northwards along 'Watling Street West' to either Shrewsbury or Wroxeter (which itself featured a riding man along with a church and four priests), and then eastwards along the 'midlands' Watling Street towards the Mercian heartlands around Wall in Staffordshire. This surely identifies both horses and their riders as part of a military escort, or bodyguard, ensuring safe passage for the king

on 'tours of inspection' of the frontier districts, rather than (although conceivably also as an adjunct to) military expeditions.

If we trace the attested presence of *radmanni* and *radchenistri* elsewhere in this part of the frontier in 1086, other links and patterns emerge. For example, it may also not be entirely coincidental that in 1086 Lydham – located close to a lead-working area at Linley Hill known to have been in operation in Roman times (Mattingly 2007: 409) – featured no fewer than six *radmanni* and a reeve (*DB Shropshire*: 4,1,14). This clearly points to royal interest in, and possible direct control over, the local lead-mining and processing industry (although there is as yet no other specific documentary or indeed archaeological evidence to support the idea of continuity of exploitation beyond the Roman period). It may additionally be significant that further such 'riding men' are listed for places situated in valleys leading to and from the line of Offa's Dyke, or along valleys and routes leading eastwards from Watling Street West (Figure 6). In the former category, there was one rider listed at Clunton in the Clun valley, and two more riders who 'pay 2 cattle in dues' at Clun (respectively *DB Shropshire*: 4,20,3; and 4,20,8).

Clun itself lies within sight of (and down the valley from) the point at which, at Spoad (next to the medieval and later village of Newcastle-on-Clun), Offa's Dyke makes a dramatic north–south crossing of the steep-sided valley. Yet more riding men were to be found along Hope Dale and Corve Dale, eastwards of (present day) Craven Arms, at Middlehope and at Abdon (the latter, *DB Shropshire*: 4,3,7). Along the route from Ludlow to Bridgenorth, meanwhile, another riding man was located at (Aston) Munslow, and yet another at the interestingly named Burwarton nearby (OE 'burh-guardian's settlement'; Blair 2018: 207; *DB Shropshire*: 4,11,9).

Albeit that the Domesday Book records a situation about three hundred years after the likely initial phase of use of Offa's Dyke integrally with the frontier, there may nonetheless be some merit in envisioning a communications and control network based upon (or articulated through) Leintwardine and occupying this part of the Mercian/Welsh frontier with origins potentially going back to the late eighth or early ninth century. In such a scenario, Watling Street West, and its links to Wroxeter and Shrewsbury northwards, could have marked the rear of the frontier zone and provided the means to communicate northwards and southwards within and beyond this part of the frontier. The network that it stood at the centre of also included the provision of horsemen (mounted messengers or fighting men, given that *chenistri* is a word incorporating 'knights') along routes leading from the rearward zone of the frontier locally westwards to (and beyond) the Dyke and eastwards into central Mercia (with, for example, another concentration of Shropshire Domesday places with riding men in the Bridgenorth area itself).

In parenthesis, it should be noted that reeves were present in several important manors and settlements both westwards and south from Shrewsbury, and that both *milites* (rendered variously as men-at-arms and mercenary soldiers: see Abels 1988: 142–145) and

men of the status of *cnight* were also present (cf. Coss 1993: 12: 'The *cniht*, then (in 1086), was a retainer in the personal service of a nobleman, providing escort, hunting and similar duties... (but) the military side was obviously important and should not be neglected'). So, consequently, the naming of the settlement known as 'Tref-y-clawdd' in Welsh, which is actually sited on Offa's Dyke, could well have been meaningfully (and not coincidentally) named in English 'Knighton' ('the settlement of the *cnihtas*' – see below).

There were yet other named officials potentially operating in the Anglo-Welsh early borderland that are mentioned, if somewhat obliquely, in sources including the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle. As well as the familiar ordinary 'reeve' listed for several royal manors in Shropshire, it was for example pointed out by John Earle over a hundred and seventy years ago (Earle 1857: 205–206) that such officials could include people such as one Wulfric, denoted by the term *wealhgefera* or *wealhgerefa*, meaning 'Welsh companion', or 'Welsh reeve', in manuscript A of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle (*s.a.* 896). Earle regarded this official as having had specific responsibility under King Alfred for patrols along the Welsh marches, although alternative deductions are possible (see Williams 2009: 47–48; and Ray and Bapty 2016: 226–227 for detailed discussion of this point).

Meanwhile, a charter of 855 in King Burghred's reign (S 207) that specified exemptions from dues relating to military service identified 'those men who in English we call *wahlfaereld*' who were included in a list of soldiers or officials (including mounted 'riders'), whom the charter recipients were excused from feeding and lodging (Williams 2009: 47–48; Ray and Bapty 2016: 226).

If Leintwardine hundred did in this way comprise an identifiable sector of the frontier, we can envisage it possessing (by 1086) a command centre at the former walled settlement at Leintwardine itself, a functioning (and guarded) state-controlled minerals processing location (at Linley Hill, Norbury), and a series of associated outposts, some of which were serviced by a military, communications, and no doubt armed escort cadre of officials termed *radmanni/radchenistri*.

Military organisation, trade and communications

The Dyke itself was a means of intercepting and controlling trade on the frontier, and in particular resources 'on the hoof' eastwards from the Welsh uplands to the (by this time) Mercian-controlled lowlands, thereby providing (via gateways and customs posts) a means to exact tolls. These exactions were most probably taken in cattle (Brady 2017: 85–86) and were only subsequently converted to bullion. As with the Mercian regime's placing of tolls upon continental traders at coastal ports when seeking markets in England (Naismith 2012: 34), this revenue-raising activity provided income directly into the royal coffers, creating an alternative to the more normal raising of cash for example through the commutation of dues for labour-service.

There were undoubtedly some parts of what was an extremely long frontier region that came under significant pressure from attempts to regain control of lands formerly occupied by Welsh-speaking communities. One such area was the Vale of Montgomery and the immediately neighbouring parts of the Severn valley. In support of his 'Welsh patrol' thesis, John Earle cited an entry in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle (in the C version) for 1053 which recorded the killing by the Welsh of a large number of 'weardmen' (which he rendered as 'watchmen' or 'guards') at Westbury in Shropshire (Williams 2009: 48). The response of the Anglo-Saxons was probably to reinforce defensive places, to which we have several references: for example, Chirbury (*Cyrichbyrig* in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle *s.a.* 914), named as *Ciriberie* in 1086 (*burh* with a church). This was in 1086 a substantial place with 13 villagers, two churches and a priest (*DB Shropshire*: 4,1,10). Moreover, it is surely not surprising by now to note that in this area, too, there is mention of the presence of more riding men. At Alberbury itself, the centre of the hundred within which many of these latter settlements were located (*DB Shropshire*: 4,1,9), only one is listed. However, just to the south of that manor there were another two located in two manors, both of which were (perhaps revealingly) denoted 'Marche' (*DB Shropshire*: 4,4,17 and 4,5,10, respectively). Meanwhile, on the other side of the Long Mountain in another potentially weak location, another was located at Trewern in another place that was in a good situation to protect a 'pass' towards Alberbury and Shrewsbury south of The Breiddin (*DB Shropshire*: 4,1,8).

John Blair (2018: 198–246) drew out the implications of his own *burh-tun* thesis concerning a network of defensive locations with reference to a series of case-studies. One of these focused upon a set of place-names located close to the frontier near Knucklas in the Teme valley west of Knighton (Blair 2018: 207–209; cf. Parsons elsewhere in this volume). Here, his focus was upon places with names such as Trebert (that is, 'tref-burh' or '*burh*-settlement') and Treverward (*tref-burhweard* or '*burh*-guardian's tun'), which he considers may be represented by the polygonal ditched enclosure at Treverward immediately to the east of the Dyke and the fortified intervisible sites at Trebert close to Llanfair Waterdine and at Knucklas across the Teme. These could have formed a militarised cluster of strong-points that acted defensively to protect the frontier and the Dyke itself here (Figure 9):

> One implication of these arrangements is that the Mercians controlled a border strip, including Knucklas, on the Welsh side of the Dyke. Another is that there was an official called a '*burh*-guardian' and that his *tūn* – wherever that may have been – was additional and complementary to the *burh-tūn*. This cannot be decoded clearly, and in any case defensive arrangements along Offa's Dyke may well have been more elaborate than elsewhere. For the present argument, the essential point is that the *burh-tūn* of Trebert was a component in a manifestly purposeful system; the linear and topographically-rational linking of *burh*, *burh-tūn* and *burhweardes-tūn* cannot be coincidence (Blair 2018: 208).

Figure 7: Knucklas in the upper Teme valley, viewed from the north-east behind Offa's Dyke at Cwmsanaham Hill. Llanfair Waterdine is situated nearby slightly higher up the valley off to the right

Greater frontier depth in the north

Further north, the relation of the two long linear dykes that extend over many miles to the north of the middle reaches of the River Severn has of course long been debated. Cyril Fox regarded the relationship to have been solved by his investigations, plumping for an ascription of Wat's Dyke to King Æthelbald (Fox 1955: 273–275). Apart from the question of their dating relative to one another, the precise relationship between Offa's Dyke and Wat's Dyke has rarely been discussed in print. So, for example, the only discussion of the exact relationship between Wat's Dyke and Offa's Dyke in all the various publications arising from the 'Offa's Dyke Project' of the late twentieth century (e.g. Hill 1977; Hill 2000; Worthington 1999; Hill and Worthington 2003) was in Margaret Worthington's article specifically on Wat's Dyke (Worthington 1997; republished as Worthington Hill 2019). Here, among other things, she attempted to solve the conundrum of the various past labellings of what would now be regarded as Wat's Dyke as instead 'Offa's Dyke' in the northern lengths of the former in Flintshire south of Holywell.

Figure 8: The panorama westwards towards the Bryniau Clwyd/Clwydian Range from the slopes beneath Moel-y-Gaer hillfort at the south-western end of Halkyn Mountain. The newly-traced line of Offa's Dyke lies in the middle distance halfway between the two areas of upland

The relationship of the two dykes in Flintshire has been the subject of recent discussion following the recognition of lengths of linear earthwork north of Treuddyn that are plausible surviving sections of an otherwise continuous Offa's Dyke work northwards to the Irish Sea between Prestatyn and Gronant (Ray *et al.* 2021). This is not the place to rehearse these relationships, but it does seem possible that in this northernmost part of the frontier there existed a 'neutral zone' between Wat's Dyke in the east and Offa's Dyke in the west (Figure 8). The creation of such a 'buffer' territory could have been the outcome of over a hundred years of disputed control of the area between the Conwy River in the west and the Dee Estuary in the east, fought over by the kingdoms of Gwynedd, Powys and Mercia and their local proxies.

This part of the frontier was also fluid: there may, for example, have been an attempt by Mercia in the ninth century especially to annexe the Vale of Clwyd and dominate Gwynedd politically and turn it into a client state. A key site here was Rhuddlan, with indications of an Anglo-Saxon presence not only in the tenth century (with the establishment of the burh of *Cledemutha* by King Edward the Elder in 921), but also before that, apparently with the presence of both rectangular plank-walled and sunken-featured buildings (Quinnell and Blockley 1994).

Conclusion

The capacity of mid/late Anglo-Saxon rulers to mobilise forces in response to immediate threats has in recent years come under greater scrutiny (see, for example, Baker and Brookes 2015a). The so-called 'burghal hidage' document and the study of its fortifications has quite reasonably been seen as key to an understanding of the thinking behind defensive strategy not only in the later part of the reign of King Alfred in Wessex, but later on during the extension of the network to embrace parts of southern and north-western Mercia (Hill and Rumble 1996). The question of whether the implementation of a system of larger strategic fortifications was supported by the creation of more local networks of purpose-built minor forts has largely remained unaddressed, however.

The discovery of the Breinton fortification in 2018 is potentially transformative of our understanding of how the Anglo-Welsh frontier may have operated in the relevant period more generally. The building of such a fortification at Breinton, located in a strongly defensible position high above the left bank of the River Wye and overlooking a ford across the river, could easily have been in response to the threat of viking military incursions from the ninth century onwards. Its location, however, almost exactly midway between Hereford (to the east) and Bridge Sollers to the west (close to where Offa's Dyke meets the River Wye) does also nonetheless fit well with what we can deduce to have been the scheme for integrating Hereford within the Offa's Dyke frontier. The apparently insecure dating of the Breinton enclosure is potentially troubling in this regard, since it may suggest that the fortification was only built in the tenth century. However, we need to be clear as to what is implied by the items found (pottery and rough clay slabs) amidst the collapsed 'wall' debris. The presence of this material indicates that the fortification was in use (occupation) during this late Saxon period: it does not date its first construction.

It is in this light, also, that we should perhaps review the documentary evidence for military responses to marauding viking armed forces during the ninth century and subsequently in west-central Britain. One familiar entry from the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle is that concerning an early tenth century attack on the coast of Wales (Anglo-Saxon Chronicle A, *s.a.* 916, Garmonsway 1972: 98; Worcester Chronicle *s.a.* 914, Garmonsway 1972: 99). The entry reads: 'In this year a great pirate host.... sailed west until they reached the estuary of the Severn, and harried at will everywhere along the Welsh coast. They seized Cyfeiliog [*sic*], bishop of Archenfield [on the borders of Herefordshire and Gloucestershire] and took him with them to their ships, but king Edward ransomed him afterwards for forty pounds. Then after this the whole host went inland with the intention of renewing their raids in the direction of Archenfield: they were opposed by the men from Hereford and Gloucester and from the nearest fortresses who fought against them and put them to flight.' This last statement has passed almost without comment, but the assumption (*pace* Whitelock 1961) that it referred to other major regional 'burhs' is not credible, since were these to have included Winchcombe
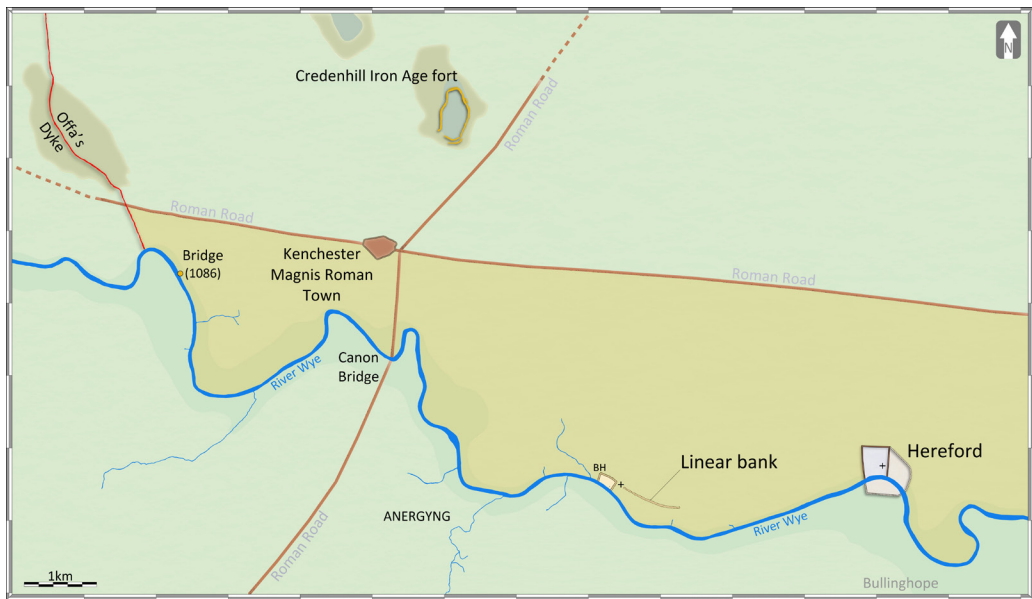
Figure 9 A possible 'control zone' west of Hereford

or Worcester, for example, these surely would have been named. The reference to 'the nearest fortresses' appears more likely, therefore, to refer to more minor sites like that at Breinton that have hitherto remained undiscovered.

The proximity of the Roman road to the north of the River Wye, and the chain of facilities that existed or were created along the north bank of (or over) the river may be coincidental. Nonetheless, the presence of the road would have enabled supplies to be moved and mounted forces to travel relatively easily out westwards from Hereford to both the nearer and the further parts of the frontier. This enabled the creation of a length of the frontier west of Hereford that in breadth in effect spanned both sides of the river, was reinforced on the north bank, and the rearward side of which was marked by the line of the Roman road (which also provided a means of moving forces along the line of the 'control zone') (Figure 9).

The Leintwardine evidence that has been brought into focus here equally serves to reinforce the idea that the Roman road marked a rearward communicative artery supporting what the Mercians could have regarded as the 'forward areas' of the frontier, including the line of Offa's Dyke itself. Moreover, it may have been that, in this area at least, the frontier zone had considerable east–west depth. It is unsurprising perhaps, in this context, that there are hints of the operation between the eighth and eleventh centuries of a system for mounted escort, for messaging and possibly also for patrolling that linked the frontier with the Mercian heartlands.

What these 'case studies' have hopefully demonstrated is something of the potential to bring together disparate clues from archaeology, documentary re-appraisal and place-name studies to try to generate new insights into the operation of a frontier that is in other terms practically undocumented. It is arguably high time that both a more thorough going and more nuanced approach to the archaeology and history of this important early medieval frontier should be promoted and conducted.

Acknowledgements

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