

Wirksworth Roman Project

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A timeline of Wirksworth and the Peak

Discussion document: ideas, criticism and thoughts please.

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Introduction

The original purpose of this timeline (which looked at the Peak between 55AD and 679 AD in Part 1) was to provide a framework for the understanding the history of Wirksworth and The Peak in the seventh century in the context of what was happening around it.

It seemed to us that the failure to understand the sequence of events properly, coupled with a particular failure to comprehend the geography of the Mercian-Northumbrian conflict, and a regrettable tendency to use unsourced reference material, had resulted in some of the most fumbling dark-age mumbo-jumbo whose main outcome had been to fog the entire issue. For example, in the case of the series of battles between Mercia and Northumbria in the years between 613 and 679, all manner of locations had been suggested, and, by constant thoughtless repetition, believed. An example is the ridiculous view that Bede's Battle of Maserfelth could be Oswestry. In reality, the strategic imperative in this conflict was the control of the Rossington Gap and Doncaster, for this provides the route by which either Mercia, on the one hand, or Northumbria on the other, could be invaded by the opposing side. Therefore it is to the Roman road from York, via Aberford on the River Cock near Tadcaster, through Castleford and Doncaster and then either southeast to Bawtry and the Trent Valley or Southwest to Templeborough and the Trent Valley, that one should look for the battle sites.

The base information for Part 1 of the timeline is taken from Brook's assessment of the beginnings of Mercia: "The formation of the Mercian kingdom" (1989). In the case of sources such as Bede, the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, the Cambrian Annals or Marwnad Cynddylan, these cannot be taken in isolation without an appreciation of their acute limitations. Even Bede, however Venerable, must be read in the knowledge that he dislikes telling you about Northumbrian defeats, or about Mercian victories, he cannot bear to say anything positive about the British and he is rather biased, selective and apparently forgetful, particularly from the Mercian point of view. It is with such limitations in mind that the subject has to be approached.

Part 2 has since been added at revision and looks at 679AD to the modern day.

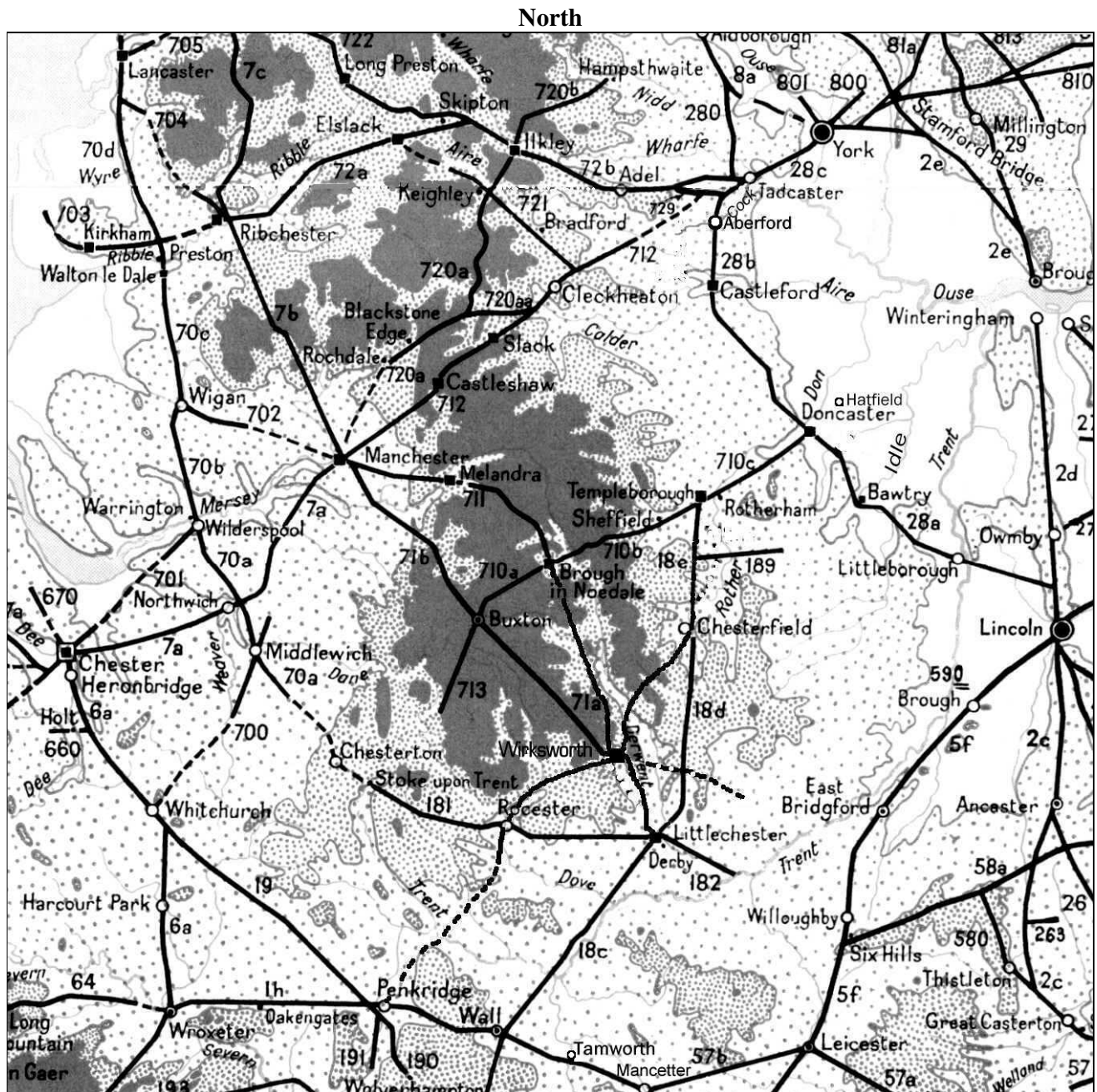
A historical timeline of Wirksworth and The Peak

Part 1: Iron Age oppida and Roman city to Mercian provincial capital.

Date	Event
55AD	The Romans establish forts at Broxtowe, Trent Vale, Little Chester and Templeborough (Myers, 2000): Roman presence in the south and east of the Peak. Lutudarum (Wirksworth) is probably an "oppida" at this time, that is the chief settlement or tribal capital of the area, and trade in goods such as lead may have been taking place between its inhabitants and the Romans for some time.
70	Romans establish forts at Middlewich, Brough and Melandra (Myers, 2000): Roman presence in the north and west of the Peak. Roman lead mining established: evidence is provided by a lead ingot inscribed to Tiberius Claudius Triferia dating to between 69 and 79 AD which was found at Matlock Bank (Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum, Vol VII, no 1215). The local inhabitants gradually become Romanised and Wirksworth probably developed from its status as an Iron Age oppida to become the civitas (district) capital: Roman pottery from the late first century has been found in the Hannages at Wirksworth.
312	Emperor Constantine adopts Christianity as the Roman state religion. By 359 Britain has bishops who are known to have attended a church conference in Rimini. By 390 all the western empire is Christian, and churches have been constructed in civitas capitals (Jones, 1993). Lutudarum (Wirksworth) is probably the civitas capital of the Lutudarenses (The Peak) and this is why there is a major church here, which continued into the Saxon period and why Wirksworth is at the centre of the Roman road network of the Peak District (Shone, 2006).
410 to c616	Rome falls to Alaric. British told to defend themselves by Emperor Honorius. Britain is invaded by assorted groups, some of whom were invited (to defend against the others). A long war of attrition begins, some parts of Britain are lost to invaders, some are kept by the (Romano) British until 616 including the Peak (Collins, 1999). The British may have established the Mercians as federates on the east and south border of the Peak to guard the Rossington Gap and the Trent Valley.
c616	Battle of Chester takes place in 616 at which the Northumbrians defeat the British, slaughter a large number of their clergy and monks who are close by, and gain control of a region as far south as the Trent including the Peak (the district of Wirksworth), Elmet (the district of Leeds), Heathfield (the district of Doncaster) and also Lindsey (the district of Lincoln) (Foot, 1993). Northumbrian rule of the Peak begins.
616	Battle of the River Idle. Northumbrians are defeated by King Raedwald of East Anglia. King Aethelfrith of Northumbria is killed, but this doesn't reduce Northumbrian power. The following year Edwin becomes King of Northumbria (Brooks, 1989).
626	Penda "succeeds to Mercia" and reigns until 655, but is weakened between 635 and 642 when the Northumbrians apparently attempt to install Eowa as King of Mercia (Brooks, 1989).
633	King Edwin of Northumbria is overthrown in 632. A year later Northumbria is defeated by Cadwallon of Gwynedd and Penda of Mercia at the Battle of Hatfield Moor near Doncaster. Cadwallon briefly becomes the last British overking. Northumbrians take Oswald as king, strike back and kill Cadwallon in 634 (Collins, 1999).
635	Northumbrians attempt to establish Eowa (Penda's brother) as King of Mercia under Northumbrian control. The Northumbrians do not seem to have taken Lichfield, Repton or Tamworth. This implies their "Mercia" is the part north of the Trent (The Peak) and Mercia is divided between the part the Northumbrians control and the part Penda still controls (Brooks, 1989). King Oswald of Northumbria establishes Aiden as Bishop of his kingdom and provinces (Bede).

c636	<p>From 635 many monks from Iona come into Britain at Aiden's request and preach "to those provinces over which King Oswald reigned". The Peak is a province of Northumbria at this time.</p> <p>Morfael, a British leader, attacks Caer Lwytgoed, takes the movable wealth of that city and kills a bishop and a number of monks. The received wisdom is that Morfael raided Lichfield. This is based on Henry Bradley's 1886 interpretation of the "Caer Lwytgoed" place name as equating to "Letocetum" - Wall by Lichfield (Greenslade, 1990). However Bradley created the name Letocetum from separate sources: he made it up.</p> <p>Bradley's Lichfield fiction might have been adequate in 1886 but it does not stand up to modern knowledge of early Mercia and its struggle with Northumbria. Lichfield is in Penda's Mercia, Penda is an ally of the British, why attack your allies? There is no evidence in Lichfield of the killing of a bishop. The Mercians are not converted to Christianity until 653 and until Chad establishes his see in Lichfield in 669 there is no church there either (Gelling, 1992). No Mercian bishop was ever killed in Lichfield, they are all known. It is the Northumbrians who represent the major threat to both the British and Penda's Mercians, so the attack must have been aimed at something Northumbrian. Morris (1973) observed that in 636 "the English rose against Oswald". In practice this can only have been Morfael and Penda, there appears to be no other known rising against Oswald.</p> <p>So, if Henry Bradley made up the Lichfield story, where is "Caer Lwytgoed"? The raid may have been against Lutudarum - Northumbrian Wirksworth. A bishop (or abbot) and his monks were killed in the raid. In St Mary's Church in Wirksworth is a unique early Saxon sarcophagus lid, found during building work under the altar pavement. The location and the style of the sculpture of the sarcophagus lid suggests a person of holy status such as a bishop was buried there.</p> <p>Northumbrian control of the Peak re-established after the raid.</p>
642	<p>Penda kills King Oswald of Northumbria and Eowa at the Battle of Maserfelth/Cocboy (Bede/Annales Cambriae), strategically the River Cock at Aberford near Tadcaster, and "separates" Mercia from Northumbria (Bede). This results in the establishment of Mercian overlordship of the Peak.</p>
653	<p>Conversion of Mercians to Christianity begins (Bede).</p>
655	<p>King Penda is killed at the Battle of the River Winwaed/Winwidfelda (Bede/Anglo-Saxon Chronicle), strategically the River Rother near Wingfield on Ryknield Street. The Mercians and their allies are defeated by the Northumbrians under Oswiu. Northumbrian overlordship briefly restored, Oswiu sets up Peada as King of Mercia under Northumbrian control.</p>
658	<p>Peada murdered by Mercian nobility in 658 who make his brother Wulfhere King of the Mercians. Northumbrian overlordship collapses due to Mercian rebellion. Mercians dominant under Wulfhere (Brooks, 1989) and Mercian overlordship of the Peak is restored.</p>
669	<p>Chad establishes the Mercian Bishopric at Lichfield (Gelling, 1992).</p>
674	<p>Northumbrian domination briefly re-established by Ecgferth (Foot, 1993). Death of Wulfhere, Ethelred becomes King of the Mercians (Colgrave, 1927). Northumbrian overlordship of the Peak again briefly restored.</p>
679	<p>Battle of the River Trent. The Mercians, under King Ethelred, are victorious. This battle marks the final resolution of the Mercian - Northumbrian conflict. Northern Bishoprics re-organised by Theodore, Archbishop of Canterbury (Foot, 1993). Mercian overlordship of the Peak is finally secure.</p> <p>One of the most interesting features of this long drawn out conflict is that there is no peace between the Mercians and the Northumbrians until the Mercians have recovered the Peak. Indeed Penda, Wulfhere and Ethelred repeatedly throw themselves at the Northumbrians until they succeed in securing the Peak. This possibly implies they were fulfilling an originally appointed role and that having done so were then the dominant power, the British having ceded authority to them on the departure of Morfael. This also explains why relations between early Mercia and the Welsh (the British) were entirely peaceful at this time: they were supposed to be.</p>

Figure 1



The south Pennines showing Roman and other settlements, roads and rivers. After Margery, 1967

Issues arising from the timeline: The Wirksworth Stone Slab

In the case of the early Saxon carved stone sarcophagus lid in St Mary's Church in Wirksworth, we have found no incident, except the one noted above, which might account for such a treasure being in the church. It was found in 1820 under the altar pavement, and its location suggests someone of holy status was buried there. The rest of the sarcophagus and its skeleton were, as far as we know, left where they were found and covered over with the new altar pavement. The "Bishop" may, of course, simply have been an abbot, and the very short timescale indicated between his arrival from Northumbria and his demise, as well as Bede's reluctance to mention a "British" victory and a precedent for killing clergy, would be why it is absent from the Ecclesiastical History. The confusing section of the (rather unreliable) Marwnad which deals with the bishop and raid on Caer Lwytgoed may be translated as meaning the bishop ran to the four "corners" before he was killed, the four corners might be inferred as the four corners of a fort precinct (to encourage or bless the Northumbrian troops), in which the church may lie. This possible implication is being considered as the

subject of a future archaeological investigation, as no fort has so far been found in the built-up area of the town in Wirksworth, though none has ever been looked for either.

Issues arising from the timeline: Transitions in the Wirksworth place name.

The place name changed during the time period we have examined and the timeline helps us understand the variations.

Lutudarum

The Roman name may, for discussion purposes, be considered to be “Lutudarum” as given in Latin sources (Ravenna Cosmography) and in inscriptions on lead ingots from the area. This is considered to mean Cindery Oakwood by Breeze (2002) being composed from the Celtic element *lludw* (cinders, ashes) and the Brittonic element *daru* (oakwood). Rivet and Smith (1981) have perhaps wrongly considered Lutudarum to mean “muddy river” but the lead mining district of Derbyshire contains few rivers (limestone is porous), and none of them muddy. The stream which runs through Wirksworth, the Ecclesbourne, however vigorous, is too small to be considered a river until it reaches Duffield, eight miles downstream.

Caer Lwytgoed

We conjecture the Romano-British (early Welsh) name of Wirksworth to possibly be “Caer Lwytgoed” arguably meaning City-fortress of the Cindery Wood, and in the sense that such an issue should not be excluded in the light of the time sequence being discussed above. Until recently “Caer Lwytgoed” has been associated with Lichfield. However, this association was made up by Henry Bradley in 1886 and has come to be accepted, despite its conflation by Bradley from “*Etocetum*” (the Roman town of Wall) and then followed by an equally spurious name transfer from Wall to Lichfield. (Bradley’s Lichfield story appears everywhere, even in English Heritage’s booklet about Wall). The Welsh source says that a bishop was killed in Caer Lwytgoed. There is no evidence of the killing of a bishop in Lichfield, but there may be in Wirksworth (the Wirksworth Slab).

Ludea

No Northumbrian name has been identified but should we be looking for “Ludea” or possibly “Ludchester”? Alternatively there may not be an “intermediate” name.

Wirksworth

The Mercian name is “Wirksworth”: Cameron in 1959 had listed two alternatives. The first was that Wirksworth contains a personal name “Weorc” (so, Weorc’s Enclosure/Manor), however the Prosopography of Anglo-Saxon England which contains the so far known Anglo-Saxon personal names from king lists, ecclesiastical histories, charter witness lists and so on, does not list any “Weorc” at all as a personal name. The alternative which Cameron noted and dismissed was “(ge)Weorcs” (fortification), so Fortress Enclosure or Fort Manor might result. It is possible to debate how the time-line might affect this outcome. If the Mercians had taken the location directly from the Romano-British, we might expect a “chester”, that is an element describing Roman fortifications. However, they didn’t, they took it from the Northumbrians and so the name may describe what the Mercians regarded as Northumbrian fortifications, hence “weorc” (Saxon fortification) rather than “chester” so our modern name “Wirksworth” could possibly result from the process of the town being first Romano-British, then Northumbrian and finally Mercian. Of course, pending more archaeological work we may never know and “Weorc’s Enclosure” is still the default.

Issues arising from the timeline: Location of Northumbrian and Mercian fortifications in Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire.

These perhaps should be considered in relation to the Northumbrian “*botl*” place-names (defence work) such as Bottlebrook on Rykniel Street and other similar ones e.g. Nobottle Grove Hundred and Adbolton in Nottinghamshire, and any others identifiable, and mapped on the grid of Roman roads of the area to see if anything useful emerges. The Mercian equivalent being “*bold*” as in Ankerbold at Tupton between Chesterfield and Wingfield (previously Winnefeld, see Cameron pp333-335) also on Rykniel Street. Chesterfield and the Scarsdale hundred were originally administered from Newbold in Brampton parish (immediately west of Chesterfield) (Riden, 1977). It might be worth a student project.

Issues arising from the timeline: Prefects and Kings of the Peak

Many, perhaps all, the Romano-British *civitas* districts appear later to have become small Anglo-Saxon kingdoms, a few of which, such as the Hwicce, are tolerably well documented, but the vast majority are not,

and have neither extant regnal nor ecclesiastical lists. However, the absence of such lists does not mean a district may have had no ruling dynasty, only that the documentary evidence is not present. In the case of the Peak, Yorke (1990) cites archaeological evidence: “A separate dynasty among the Pecsæte might be assumed from the series of rich burials in barrows, including that at Benty Grange which produced the only other “kingly” helmet found in an “Anglo-Saxon” burial besides that of Sutton Hoo”. Benty Grange is about half way between Wirksworth and Buxton on The Street, the Roman road between those two places. The helmet, in Sheffield Museum, is considered to date to about 650. For documentary evidence we have to return to the deeply obscure Morfael. Morris (1973, p243) in a book whose method of referencing is so obtuse that a second book is needed to identify the sources, and who unfortunately repeats Bradley’s Lichfield nonsense, observes that Morfael appears to have “moved” from Lwytgoed to South Wales. How should we make sense of this further fragment of information? In terms of the timeline, Morfael’s actions only make sense if he were the last Romano-British Prefect of the Peak when the Northumbrians defeated the British and slaughtered their clergy at the Battle of Chester. Like his colleague Ceretic of Elmet (Yorke, 1990) he would probably have been expelled by the Northumbrians at that time or shortly afterwards. Twenty years later, when, perhaps, he is looking to secure a comfortable retirement, and the Mercians are strong enough to help him, his last action in relation to his old district which is being occupied by the Northumbrians, is to return to it, raid it and strip out its material wealth (moveable treasure, cattle and other livestock) so he can retire to somewhere quieter and in the style to which he felt entitled. In the process his forces kill the Northumbrian clergy in Wirksworth to remind the Northumbrians of their actions towards the British clergy at Chester twenty years before. It is possible that some descendants of Morfael (the origin of the ‘retirement’ fragment is a genealogy) remained with Penda, and when presently Penda recovered the Peak, they may have continued as its local rulers with occasional Northumbrian interruptions, for some time. The Peak being another of the original component kingdoms, then later an aldermanry, of Mercia.

Part 2: Mercian provincial capital to Derbyshire market town

Date	Event
714AD	Abbess Ecburg sent a lead coffin and a linen sheet for St Guthlac to Crowland Abbey (Colgrave, 1956). The Abbess is usually thought to have been the Abbess of Repton or possibly Burton, though it is entirely possible there was a monastic settlement in Wirksworth itself (an issue which Sidebottom raises) and if so it is equally possible she was Abbess of Wirksworth not Repton - the charter makes no mention of the location of her abbey. The only place where lead was being mined in Mercia at this time was The Peak.
750	A Sceatta coin dating from 750 AD was found by Cath Housley in Church Street in Wirksworth in the spoil heap of an uncompleted archaeological excavation in 1986. A replica of the coin is in the Wirksworth Heritage Centre. Coins of this period are very rare and its presence in Wirksworth is considered quite significant.
835	A Mercian charter from Abbess Kenewara (sic) which specifically names Wirksworth grants her estate here to Duke Humbert (sic), Prince of the Tomsæte (the Mercian province around Tamworth) providing a rent of lead was paid to Canterbury cathedral. (British Academy, 2007). This is the earliest genuine charter for a named place in Derbyshire (again the assumption has always been that this is a charter for Repton Abbey owning an estate at Wirksworth, but as with the 714 charter it does not say Kenewara/Cynewara was Abbess of Repton). There are two other unrelated “earlier” charters naming Repton, but they are both forgeries (British Academy, 2007).
842	First Viking attack on the coast of Mercia in the province of Lindsey (Lincolnshire). Viking attacks increase in frequency and strength with the Vikings attacking London (a Mercian city) and in due course rout King Beorhtwulf and the Mercian army in 851 in the south. Burgred becomes king in 852 and is thought to have beaten off Viking attacks for many years, for example, Leicester resisted Viking attacks for 17 years before finally falling to them.
874	Viking “Great Army” overwinters at Repton. King Burgred of Mercia fails to dislodge them and is eventually driven into exile in Rome. Mercia falls into Viking hands and a large part of it later becomes the Danelaw. (Brooks, 1989 and 2000). The Danes establish a settlement

	on the opposite bank of the Derwent to Little Chester and this settlement becomes Derby.
917	Aethelflaed, Queen of the Mercians, recaptures Derby from the Danes. In an attempt to ensure the integration of the Danes of Derby back into Mercia and (thereby) the recovery of the whole of Mercia, a town charter is granted to Derby in the same year. This also explains why Derby never had its own Wapentake, the Wapentakes as an administrative form were based on the Mercian Hundreds and Derby was possibly not important enough before the Viking period to be the chief settlement of a Hundred, though there was a Romano-British settlement at Little Chester and a Mercian estate there known as Northworthy.
920	King Edward the Elder of Wessex and Mercia (Aetheflaed having died in 918) constructs a burgh (fort) at Bakewell, this is also probably more of a political move rather than a strategic one, again part of the approach to secure Mercia from the Danes (Gelling, 2002). It also represents the very beginning of the creation of shires, because the shire counties were probably created to support Edward's burghal fortresses. At this stage, the process was of little or no consequence to the administrative structure of the Mercian provinces, but in due course the shire counties would replace the Mercian provinces.
926	A charter of King Athelstan to Duke Uhtred confirms the purchase of land at Hope and Ashford from the Danes. Sidebotham (1999) takes the view that the "Mercian" town crosses found in the Peak district's principal towns date from this time and are political monuments re-stating Saxon supremacy and also explores the issue of the possible monastic settlement at Wirksworth in terms of the importance of St Mary's church as a Minster church.
963	The last known Mercian charter in the historical record is for an estate at Ballidon in the Peak (Brooks, 2000) prepared for King Edgar who was the last king of a "separate" Mercia, from 955 to 959. (England being split between Wessex on the one hand and Mercia and Northumbria on the other). In 959 his brother Edwig died (having been King of Wessex) and Edgar became King of all England. Brooks notes that the the Ballidon charter is unusual in that it retains the styling of Mercian charters and also, most importantly, records The Peak under its Mercian province title of the Pecsæte. Without this written evidence it had been formerly thought (the charter was only rediscovered in 1985) that The Pecsæte has ceased to exist before this time, and that "Derbyshire" had been created but simply not mentioned until 1048. However, the charter implies that The Pecsæte was still regarded by the Mercian Witan (Council) as a functioning entity, and that this position prevailed at least while King Edgar reigned (to 977) with the Witan itself still apparently operating during Edgar's reign.
1048	Derbyshire first mentioned (in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle). The process of creating the shire counties eventually resulted in the Mercian Province of The Peak being dismembered between four counties. The Province apparently having been comprised of perhaps eleven Hundreds/Wapentakes, one of which went to Cheshire, one or possibly more to Staffordshire, two to Nottinghamshire and the remaining seven forming the basis of Derbyshire.
1066	Battle of Hastings.
1086	Domesday Book mentions Wirksworth being the chief town of its Wapentake and notes that the manor or estate of Wirksworth was the property of the King and had both a church and a priest as well as three lead works (Thorn, 2007). The structure of the Domesday book confirms that the shire counties were now a more important administrative structure than the former Mercian provinces.
1200	Wirksworth is mentioned in the cartulary of Tutbury Priory (Saltman, 1962) in terms of a burgage plot (that is a plot of land owned by a person of important status), implying that Wirksworth was a borough at this period, one of only six in the county. The others being Derby, Chesterfield, Ashbourne, Bakewell and Castleton
1288	The Barmote Court is examined in an inquisition which is held in Ashbourne. The court is the means by which the lead mining industry is regulated. The inquisition found the court to be "of great antiquity". The court had (and still has) jurisdiction over the Soke and Wapentake of Wirksworth.
1297	The market at Wirksworth is mentioned in a will of the kings' brother, Sir Edmund. (Letters, 2003).
1306	The market at Wirksworth receives a new charter from King Edward the First. In so far as the market is mentioned prior to the charter being granted, it is probable that the charter simply re-iterated the existing position of the market.
1563	A diocesan census is taken of households in Derbyshire and records that Derby parish contained 507 households and Wirksworth parish, the second largest by number of

	households, contained 470 households. "Households" are thought to equate to about 5 people, thus giving a rough estimate of population for the Wirksworth parish of about 2,350 at the time (Riden, 1978).
1773	The Moot Hall is built opposite the Red Lion Inn to replace its crumbling Mediaeval predecessor. The style of the 1773 hall, a large and handsome Palladian two storey building of brick and stone, reflects the importance of the town and the lead mining industry of the time. At this point Wirksworth was still a major town in Derbyshire, and still one of the four largest in the county.
1815	The 1773 Moot Hall is demolished and replaced by a far smaller and far less handsome building. This in many ways represents the decline in the fortunes of Wirksworth and the demise of the lead mining industry. Lead mining had gradually shrunk during this period and limestone quarrying and tape making began to take over as the main industries. However, they did not employ large numbers of people and as the industrial revolution gathered pace many towns in Derbyshire grew much more quickly than Wirksworth, so that by the 1850s Wirksworth was no longer important as a key town in the county and much of its fine history and important role in the past was forgotten.

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