



A historical timeline of Wirksworth: Mercian provincial capital to market town

| Date | Event |
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| 714AD | Abbess Ecburg sent a lead coffin and a linen sheet for St Guthlac to Crowland Abbey. The Abbess is usually thought to have been the Abbess of Repton, though it is 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. Saxon 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, Prince of the Tomsaete (the Mercian province around Tamworth) providing a rent of lead was paid to Canterbury cathedral. 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 is Abbess of Repton). There are two other unrelated "earlier" charters actually naming Repton, but they are both forgeries. |
| 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. 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 (Aethelflaed 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. 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 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 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. 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 Pecsaeete. Without this written evidence it had been formerly thought (the charter was only rediscovered in 1985) that The Pecsaeete 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 Pecsaeete 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. 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. Some Normans turn up. |
| 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. 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 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, Thomas Earl of Lancaster |
| 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. |
| 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. |

Interpretation kindly provided by the Wirksworth Roman Project

Recommended reading:

Letters S (2003) Gazetteer of markets and fairs in England and Wales to 1516, University of London, Centre for Metropolitan History.
 Riden P (1978) The population of Derbyshire in 1563, Derbyshire Archaeological Journal
 Sidebottom PC (1999) Stone Crosses of the Peak and the Sons of Eadwulf, Derbyshire Archaeological Journal
 Stroud G (2001) Derbyshire Extensive Urban Survey: Wirksworth: Archaeological Assessment Report, Matlock, Derbyshire County Council
 Thorn C & T (2007) "Derbyshire Wapentakes" in the Introductory commentary on the Phillimore edition of Domesday Book (Derbyshire), Hull, University of Hull.
 University of Cambridge (2005) Prosopography of Anglo-Saxon England, Kings College London and University of Cambridge