

## The early medieval territory associated with Cannington

By Stephen Rippon

During the early medieval period Cannington appears to have been the centre of a territory that extended from the Parrett Estuary up onto the Quantock Hills. Territories of this type have been recognised across Britain, and are occasionally recorded in contemporary documents as *pagi* or *regiones* (see Rippon 2012, Chapter 8 for a historiography of research into them). Perhaps the most familiar term for these territories is ‘multiple estate’ (e.g. Jones 1979), although that phrase is flawed as ‘estate’ implies the ownership of land, and ‘early folk territory’ is perhaps a better reflection of the kin-based social structure that lay behind them. Early medieval territorial arrangements can be reconstructed using a wide variety of sources including place-names, contemporary documents such as charters, and the relationship of parish boundaries to the historic landscape (e.g. see Rippon 2008, 95-102; Rippon 2012, 151-64), and the Cannington area provides a particularly clear example.

Cannington itself was a hundredal centre, ancient royal manor (*DB. Som.* 1,6), and minster church. It was included in King Alfred’s Will of 873-88 (Sawyer 1968, No. 1507), when it was spelt *cantūctūn* (‘the tun by the Quantocks’). The name *cantūc* may be derived from the British \**cantaco* (whose earliest form is not known), meaning ‘a district divided off’, referring to the way that the hills separate this area of land from the rest of Somerset (Costen 1992, 63; Watts 2004, 113). The close proximity of the hillfort at Cannington (which shows signs of occupation in the Roman period), the Sandy Lane villa, the late and post-Roman cemetery at the nearby Cannington Quarry (Rahtz *et al.* 2000), and the nearby royal manor and minster church provide the intriguing possibility of continuity in this locale as an estate centre. The parishes within Cannington Hundred were characterised by complex boundaries that zig-zag through field systems, with many parishes having detailed parcels elsewhere, a pattern that suggests they were once part of a single territory. Another territorial connection was that Idstock was a chapelry of Cannington (*DB. Som.* 1,6; 16,3 ; Youngs 1980, 420), something that is suggestive of Cannington having once been a minster church. Over time, early folk territories were divided-up, and one such sub-division may have been centred on Stogursey that was a very large parish (8,893 acres) and had a chapelry a Lilstock (Youngs 1980, 437) which again suggests that it was a former minster. It is noticeable that none of the territorial links that bound the parishes within Cannington Hundred together extended west of the Quantock Hills.

South of Cannington Hundred lay the small hundred of Andersfield (that included just the four parishes of Broomfield, Durleigh, Enmore, and Goathurst) and North Petherton Hundred. Once again, this was an area with a network of interlocking parishes and detached parcels such as Chilton Trinity (in North Petherton Hundred) having a detached parcel called Huntstile in Goathurst (in Andersfield Hundred). It is noteworthy that the web of territorial connections that binds this area together does not extend to the south of the northern boundary of the very large parish of North Petherton. The river+ton place-name of North Petherton is in itself indicative of an important early medieval centre, and this is confirmed by it having been an ancient royal manor with a church in Domesday (*DB Som.* 1,3; 16,7). Its former minster status is reflected in the large size of its parish (10,336 acres in the Tithe survey) and its having chapelries at Chedzoy (an island in the Somerset Levels), Durston, Huntworth, Michael Church, Newton Comitis, Newton Regis, Sherston, and Woolmersdon (Aston 1986, 75). Although later in Whitley Hundred, the island-based estate of Sowey (which was later divided into the parishes of Othery, Middlezoy and Westonzoyland) appears to have been carved out of the south-east corner of the Cannington early folk territory and it was probably transferred to Whitley when twelve *manentes* (an early medieval unit of assessment probably equivalent to the ‘hide’, or area of land sufficient to support a thane) were granted to Glastonbury Abbey in 725 (Finberg 1964, No. 379; Sawyer 1968, No. 251; Abrams 1996, 218-20). Another early charter, that is ‘only available in a later copy and while thought to include the substance of an original may include so material that is spurious, substituted or interpolated’ records a grant in 682 by Centwine, king of the West Saxons, to Haemgils, abbot of Glastonbury, of 23 *mansiones* ‘(another early medieval unit of assessment probably equivalent to the ‘hide’) by the wood called *Cantucwdu* (Quantock Wood)’ and three *cassati* (also probably the equivalent to a ‘hide’) ‘in the island by the hill which the British call *Cructan* and we *Crycbeorh*’: the boundaries of this estate are described and show that it included the whole of West Monkton and the western part of Creech St Michael (Finberg 1964, No. 361; Sawyer 1968, No. 237; Abrams 1996, 99-100). Both Sowey and *Crycbeorh* were at the very edges of the putative early folk territory based at Cannington and as such provide examples of how peripheral areas were often the earliest to be given away by early medieval kings.

Figure xx show how a web of territorial connections bind this putative early folk territory together, and how this is mutually exclusive to the connective webs that help in the reconstruction of two other early folk territories to the south. To the south east lay the Curry Valley where a large number of parishes had detached parcels, and Domesday records how various places paid dues to other centres: Cricket (St Thomas) paid (South Petherton) six sheep with as many lambs and one bloom of iron from each free man (*DB Som.* 1,5); Ashill ought

to pay Curry (Rivel) 30 pence (*DB Som.* 19,18), while the two manors of Bradon each paid Curry (Rivel) one sheep and a lamb (*DB Som.* 19,17; 19,23); Bickenhall paid Curry Rivel five sheep and as many lambs, while each freeman owed a bloom of iron (*DB Som.* 19,27); and Seaborough paid Crewkerne twelve sheep with their lambs, a bloom of iron from every freeman (*DB Som.* 3,1) (see Rippon 2008, 98 for a full discussion). To the west, Domesday also records that Taunton received customary dues from a large number of places (*DB Som.* 2,1-2,5).

These various strands of evidence suggest that there was an early folk territory bounded by the unenclosed uplands of the Quantock Hills to the west, the Bristol Channel to the north, the Parrett Estuary to the east, and the wetlands of the Somerset levels and west Sedgemoor to the south. There appear to have been two major royal estate centres - Cannington and North Petherton - with another probable minster at Stogursey. In total this putative territory covered around 350 km<sup>2</sup>.

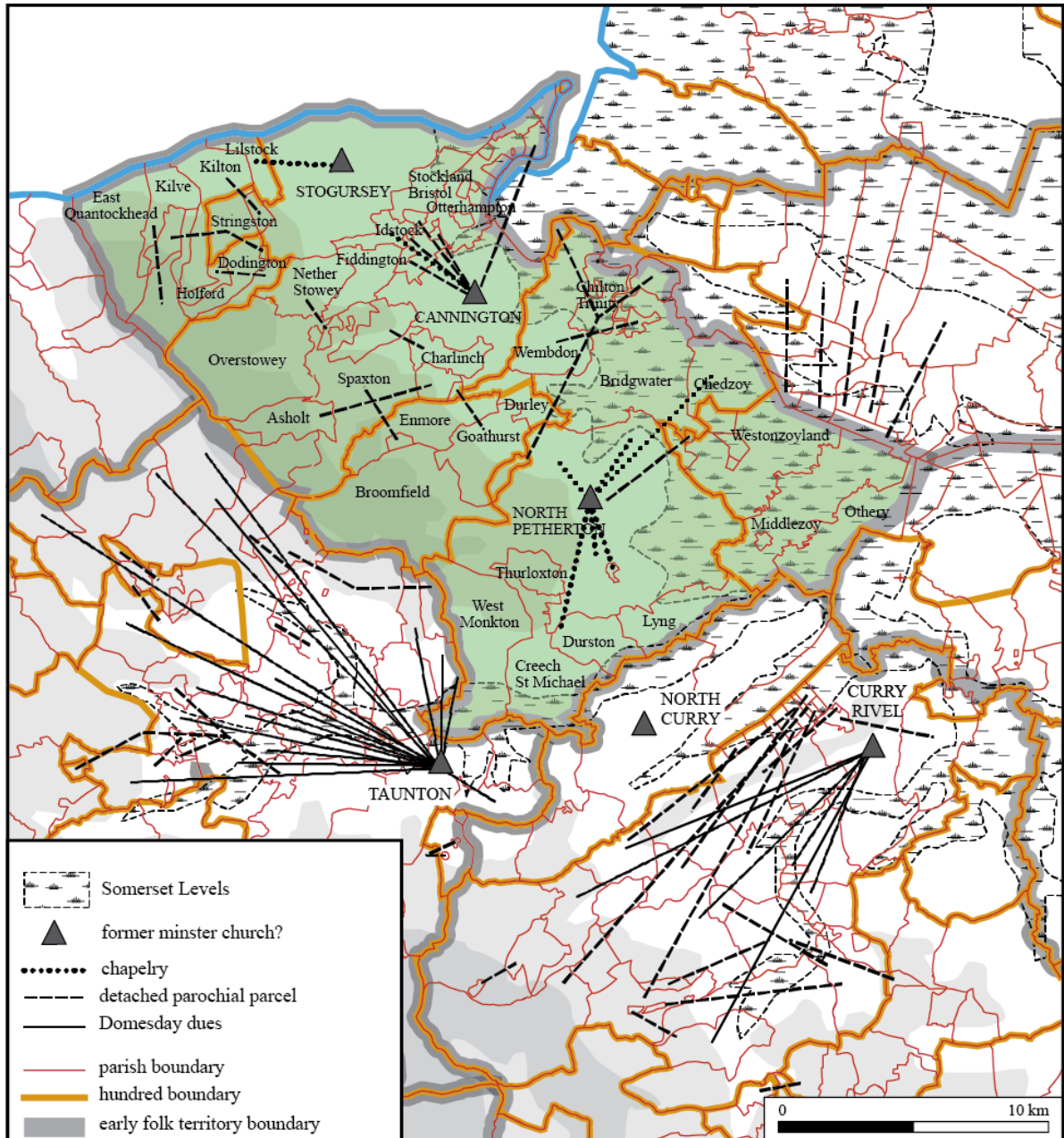


Figure XX: the early folk territory between the Quantock Hills and Parrett Estuary.

DB Som. Domesday Book, Somerset (Thorn and Thorn 1980)

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