Chapter 3
North-West Mercia AD 871–924

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In this paper, F. T. Wainwright gives an account of the events occurring in north-west Mercia during and after the Scandinavian settlement. He then discusses the impact of that settlement on the place-names. Some of the material originally used by Wainwright has been made obsolete by the appearance in more recent years of John Dodgson's volumes on The Place-Names of Cheshire, *and adjustments have been made to the text to take the findings of this authoritative work into account. Other material not strictly relevant to the Wirral has been silently omitted. The sub-headings are editorial.*

The Scandinavian invasion and settlement

During the half-century which is covered by the reigns of Alfred the Great (871–899) and Edward the Elder (899–924) there occurred a terrible calamity, the Scandinavian invasions, which exercised a profound and permanent influence upon the history and racial composition of Britain. The outline of events is reasonably clear, for we possess a contemporary account in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*. Unfortunately the *Chronicle* scribes, interested primarily in the West Saxon angle of the story, were unwilling or unable to describe conditions or events remote from the central theme. Amongst those regions of which a fuller knowledge would be especially welcome we must include north-west Mercia, that is to say modern Cheshire and parts of adjoining counties. The present paper attempts a popular survey of this area. It should be remembered that the story of Cheshire can be understood only when, in its proper setting, it is co-ordinated with the story of England. This, no less than the paucity and inferential nature of the evidence, demands that Cheshire be regarded as part of the kingdom of Mercia which was, in its turn, faced with a menace common to all the English states.

In all probability the main Scandinavian settlements in Cheshire occurred during the reigns of Alfred and his son. It is extremely unlikely that any Scandinavians had settled in Cheshire before Alfred's accession, and we have no reason to suppose that such settlers were numerous after Edward's death. Indeed, it is a fairly safe assumption that most of the Scandinavian settlements in Cheshire were made between 871 and 924. Thus these fifty years are years of tremendous importance. Moreover, there is evidence which suggests that this area, north-west Mercia, played a vital part in the campaigns which led to Edward's destruction of the immediate Scandinavian menace.

Place-names (see below) have long made it obvious that there occurred at some date a considerable influx of Scandinavians into Wirral. They were

Norsemen from Ireland and they settled in such numbers that Wirral became a densely populated Norse colony. The Danish influence on Cheshire is, by comparison, almost insignificant. Unfortunately this movement escaped the notice of English chroniclers, probably because it did not take the form of an organized army intent upon the conquest of the whole country. It seems to have been a steady flow of men who were settlers by instinct and desire, warriors only by necessity. Irish traditions preserve a most interesting account of the arrival of one group of settlers and of their subsequent behaviour. Occasionally reference has been made to this account, especially by Scandinavian scholars, but it has never been quoted in any detail and it has never been given the attention which it merits. The only printed edition in which it occurs is now very rare,[1] and for this reason it has been thought desirable to print in full the translation of such parts as concern the present survey.

First, however, it is necessary to add a few notes regarding the reliability of this Irish account. The MS which was edited over eighty years ago by O'Donovan is a copy of a copy made in 1643 by the famous Dubhaltach Mac Firbisigh (Duald MacFirbis) from a certain vellum MS. This latter was then in the possession of Nehemias Mac Egan but has since been lost. Thus it is not possible to trace the descent of the MS beyond the seventeenth century! Also the orthography is frequently modernized. Therefore modern specialists are unable to pronounce the tradition ancient. In fact the best modern opinion so far available tends to regard the *Three Fragments* as untrustworthy. I am very incompetent to deal with Irish sources, but at present, I am inclined to believe that the account of the Norse invasion of Wirral represents a genuine tradition of great antiquity. While it is impossible to prove the existence of an ancient MS behind the copy of Mac Firbisigh, it seems equally impossible to disprove it; the insertion or removal of archaisms by later scribes is a common occurrence. There is much which seems to be of a legendary and romantic character, but, on the other hand, one feels that the general structure and tone of the story are ancient. Moreover, the same leader, Ingimund, appears at this time in the Welsh Chronicles,[2] a fact which may be considered as some kind of corroboration since it has not yet been possible to trace any connection between the *Three Fragments* and the English and Welsh annalists. It has been pointed out that place-names prove a Norse settlement in Wirral, and, on the whole, the story preserved in the Irish source is very probable. Since communication was no doubt maintained with the Norsemen of Ireland from the moment of settlement, it is not surprising that the story should find its way into the Irish annals. One is unable to say more at the present stage, but it is vital that this question of reliability should be settled, for important material lies buried in the *Three Fragments*. For example, there is evidence of a hitherto unnoticed alliance of Æthelflæd and the Celts against the Scandinavians, which is, if reliable, a momentous addition to our knowledge of the reign of Edward the Elder.

[1] *Annals of Ireland. Three Fragments*, ed. John O'Donovan, Irish Archaeological and Celtic Society (Dublin, 1860).

[2] *Annales Cambriae, s.a.* 902: *Igmunt*; *Brut y Tywysogion s.a.* 900: *Igmond.*

where it will be easy to kill them; and when they will be swearing by their swords and by their shields, as is their custom, they will lay aside all their missile weapons.' They all did accordingly, and they put away their arms. And the reason why the Irishmen did this to the Danes was because they were less friends to them than to the Norsemen. Many of them were killed in this manner for large rocks and large beams were thrown down upon them; great numbers also [were killed] by darts and spears and by every other means for killing man.

But the other forces, the Norsemen, were under the hurdles piercing the walls. What the Saxons and the Irishmen who were among them did was to throw down large rocks so that they destroyed the hurdles over them. What they did in the face of this was to place large posts under the hurdles. What the Saxons did was to put all the ale and water of the town in the cauldrons of the town, to boil them and pour them over those who were under the hurdles so that the skins were stripped from them. The answer which the Norsemen gave to this was to spread hides on the hurdles. What the Saxons did was to let loose on the attacking force all the beehives in the town, so that they could not move their legs or hands from the great numbers of bees stinging them. Afterwards they left the city and abandoned it. It was not long after that [before they came] to wage battle again.

Thus is the story told in the third of the *Three Fragments*. Even if one can accept the source as trustworthy, the account, as it stands, still bristles with difficulties. We cannot have much confidence in the accuracy of the details: the measures and countermeasures taken by the opposing sides during the attack on Chester (rocks, posts, boiling liquid, hides and bees) have a distinct legendary flavour. There are many other difficulties, but our distrust of these superfluities and questionable data need not destroy our faith in the whole story. Much of it appears to be sound enough and much of it rings true, as, for example, the last sentence with all its ominous significance: *It was not long after that before they came to wage battle again.* Interesting evidence is provided on some obscure points. The almost ridiculous emphasis laid on Æthelred's illness gives support to the view that he was incapacitated for some time before his death, although it is not easy to believe that he was an invalid for so long as is implied, unless he suffered from a recurrent disease, such as that mysterious malady which afflicted his father-in-law, Alfred.

Not the least of the difficulties is that of chronology. The text supplies but a few inaccurate dates, and none at all in the present passage. The scribe moves easily and without order over a period of years, equating in time some events with others, from which they must, in reality, be separated, often by ten years or more. It is hopeless to attempt to evolve a satisfactory chronological structure from the confused evidence of the source itself. Other sources must be used, and, even so, the resulting structure lacks precision. Briefly, it appears, the Scandinavians were expelled from Ireland, failed to gain a foothold in Wales and then approached Æthelflæd who granted them lands near Chester. After a period of peaceful settlement the colonists became aggressive; Æthelflæd installed a considerable garrison in Chester, and there followed the struggle for the city. The expulsion of the Norsemen from Dublin occurred in 902. *Annales Cambriae* and *Brut y Tywysogion* record the attempt on Wales which was

frustrated. This probably occurred in or soon after 902.[13] Then, according to the *Three Fragments*, the Norsemen came to settle near Chester. In 907 Æthelflæd restored Chester.[14] It was an admirable base against the Danes of Northumbria and the Midlands. Another reason for its fortification may well be that suggested in the *Three Fragments*, i.e. to control the Norse colonists in Wirral. It is clear that they were becoming numerous and dangerous. Collaboration between Danes and Norsemen on a large scale was not unlikely, and the result would have been disastrous. If the introduction of Æthelflæd's hosts into Chester (*Three Fragments*) can be identified with the restoration of that city in 907 (*Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*), a most reasonable assumption, we then have a fixed date. The attack on Chester, described in such detail, followed the fortification and took place in or soon after 907, or at least before Æthelred's death in 911. It is, indeed, highly probable that Chester was endangered by recurrent attacks between 907 and 911, for this area was not free from trouble for many years.[15] These problems of chronology are fascinating and it ought to be possible to establish, for the late ninth and tenth centuries, a corrected dating of events in the *Annales Cambriae* and *Brut y Tywysogion* which seem less complicated than many parts of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*. This need not concern us here; it is sufficient to assume that Ingimund's settlement in Wirral fell in the early years of the tenth century and that by 907, or within five years of his arrival, he was able to lead an attack on the recently fortified Chester.

Perhaps more important is the inference, from the *Three Fragments*, that before 907 the number of Norse settlements in Wirral was formidable. It will have been noticed that when Ingimund coveted Chester he made contact with other leaders and explained their common position. To his plan *all the leaders of the Norsemen and the Danes agreed*, a statement which suggests a considerable number of settlers. It might be argued that this consultation was held in Ireland and that Ingimund had returned for reinforcements. The wording of the passage makes it very clear that the meeting took place in England: efforts were made to keep the gathering secret, an unnecessary precaution if it had been held in Ireland, but knowledge of it reached Æthelflæd, Ingimund was able to present the lack of Chester and good lands as a grievance common to all the leaders, and he *then came to his house, with an assembly following him*. It is obvious that these leaders and their followers were already settled in England. Indeed, the possibility of any other interpretation need not have been mentioned, if it were not imperative to examine carefully the very important deductions possible from these few sentences. We have here direct evidence that there were many colonies of Scandinavians, each under its own leader, settled in this region. Ingimund's invasion was not an isolated one: the movement had already reached serious proportions before the attack on Chester.

It is interesting to note the racial composition of the new settlers in Wirral. Undoubtedly the Norsemen preponderate, but among them we find Danes and

[13] See above, note 2.

[14] ASC (*Mercian Register*) *s.a.* 907.

[15] William of Malmesbury tells of trouble at Chester immediately before Edward's death in 924, *Gesta Regum* (Rolls Series) I, 144. In this affair the Britons played some part.

even native Irish, if the *Gaill-Gaedhil* were men of Irish birth and blood. Such a racial mixture in the Norse settlement of north-west England has never been stressed, but that it characterized the movement is *prima facie* a reasonable supposition. We should certainly expect to find Danes and other sea-faring adventurers among the Norsemen, for there must have been many smaller expeditions than those which have been recorded in the chronicles. It is known that Danes long preyed upon Ireland, for the Irish annalists distinguish between Norwegians (*Finngaill*, 'Fair Foreigners') and Danes (*Dubhgaill*, 'Dark Foreigners').[16] English sources seldom make such a distinction: they are content to describe all raiders as 'heathen', or they use the terms 'Danes' and 'Northmen' of any band of Scandinavians, generally without discrimination. From Irish and Welsh chronicles we know that the Danes had previously visited this region. Under the year 855 the *Annals of Ulster* record that a certain Orm, 'leader of the Black Gentiles' (*Dubgennti*, i.e. Dark Foreigners or *Dubhgaill*), was slain by Rhodri Mawr. This episode may be related to the devastation of Anglesey by the 'Black Gentiles' (*Annales Cambriae* and *Brut y Tywysogion*, *s.a.* 853). From a charter of 855,[17] *quando fuerunt pagani in Wreocensetun*,[18] it has been suggested that Orm's expedition had penetrated into the West Midlands. Whatever may have been the extent of Orm's raid, the Danes continued to afflict the country between Caernavon and the Dee (*Annales Cambriae* and *Brut y Tywysogion*). Thus one is not surprised to learn that the Scandinavian settlers in Wirral included Danes among their numbers.[19]

This lengthy discussion of Ingimund's settlement in Cheshire has been deliberate. For Cheshire the Norse immigration is of such great consequence that a brief reference is insufficient to preserve the balance between the highly important but obscure Norse settlement and the well-documented but relatively insignificant Danish raids from the east.

Mercian defence

While Edward was building a series of forts in the southern Midlands (at Hertford, Witham, Buckingham, etc.), Æthelflæd was developing a parallel programme in western Mercia. Chester had been restored in 907, and a fort at *Bremesbyrig* was built in 910, probably after the raid which culminated in the Battle of Tettenhall had further emphasized western Mercia's vulnerability to sudden Danish attacks. There followed fortresses at *Scergeate* (May, 912), Bridgnorth (summer, 912), Tamworth (early summer, 913), Stafford (July, 913), Eddisbury (early summer, 914), Warwick (probably first or second week in September, 914), Chirbury (probably January, 915), *Weardbyrig* (early 915) and Runcorn (late in 915, probably December).

Some of Æthelflæd's forts have not yet been satisfactorily identified although suggestions have been made from time to time. Their general purpose is, however, fairly clear. In the first place, they were convenient bases for either

[16] A distinction which was not, of course, based on physical characteristics.

[17] W. de G. Birch, *Cartularium Saxonicum*, 3 vols (London, 1885–99), no. 487.

[18] *Wreocensetun*. The *Wreocensætan* originally occupied the country around Shrewsbury (i.e. Wroxeter and The Wrekin).

[19] See below for the place-name evidence.

offensive or defensive action. The Danes had often demonstrated the military value of fortified positions, and the English under Alfred had learned the lesson. Fortification, however temporary or rudimentary, held a prominent place in the strategy of the Anglo-Danish wars, and the series of forts formed an important part of the English military organization. Secondly, these forts were the only effective counter-measure to the sudden and devastating Danish raids. Vulnerable areas were thus protected: it would be hazardous for any Danish force to penetrate English territory leaving unreduced fortresses in its rear to cut off retreat. The fort-system provided a permanent defence, and undoubtedly it was more effective than a standing army alone even if the difficulties of maintaining in the field a large permanent and mobile force had not again and again proved insuperable. Stafford, Tamworth and Warwick protected the Mercian border against the line of Danish armies holding Derby, Leicester and Northampton.[20] Chester, Runcorn and Eddisbury guarded the estuaries of the Dee and the Mersey, strengthened the northern frontier and probably served to awe the Norsemen in Wirral. Chirbury stood on the Welsh border[21] and Bridgnorth controlled an important Severn crossing much favoured by the Danes. Thus did Æthelflæd's forts increase the security of north-west Mercia, the vulnerability of which had hitherto been most dangerous. Thirdly, the fort system of north-west Mercia probably had another object — to erect a barrier between the Danes and the west. It was obviously desirable that an impenetrable wedge should be thrust between the large and restless Scandinavian population in Wirral and the Scandinavians in eastern England. To increase the menace of the Danish hordes in the Midlands and Northumbria, Norsemen from Ireland were now arriving in the north. In or about 919 Ragnald captured York and set himself up as king, but he had gained possession of parts of Northumbria some five or six years before this date, as is shown by the details preserved by the anonymous writer of the *Historia de Sancto Cuthberto*.[22] It was highly likely that the estuaries of the Dee and the Mersey would become the main lines of communication between Ireland and the Norsemen in northern England, and the building of forts at Eddisbury in the early summer of 914 and at Runcorn in the winter of 915 no doubt closely followed the arrival of Ragnald and the Norsemen in Northumbria. These two new forts, aided by Chester, helped not only to safeguard the northern frontiers of north-west Mercia but also to bar the route from Ireland via the two western rivers. They were later, in 919, reinforced

[20] It is perhaps worthy of notice that the forts at Stafford and Tamworth were built within a few months of one of the few Danish expeditions which the *Chronicle* at this date considers important enough to be recorded. It was an expedition, really two expeditions, of the combined armies of Leicester and Northampton and it probably occurred in April 913. Cf. ASC (A) *s.a.* 917. This significant juxtaposition of dates has been overlooked because of the chronological confusion of Edward's reign. The present chronology is, in general, that suggested by W. S. Angus, 'The chronology of the reign of Edward the Elder', *English Historical Review* 53 (1938), 194–210, at p. 194, who has cleared away many problems which have long delayed a close study of the reign of Edward the Elder.

[21] It would seem that relations between Mercia and the Welsh were not good, at least during the period under review. Chirbury was built apparently in anticipation of trouble from Wales.

[22] Symeon of Durham, *Historia Regum* (Rolls Series), I, 164–214. Cf. F. M. Stenton, 'The Danes in England', *Proceedings of the British Academy* 13 (1927), 4–5.

by another fort at Thelwall and by the restoration of the defences in Manchester, probably after Ragnald's position had become more secure and, consequently, more dangerous to the English. Indeed, one cannot doubt that this series of forts in north-west Mercia was primarily intended to interrupt the Scandinavian lines of communication through Cheshire. Without these strongholds the Dee and Mersey might have become mere channels for Scandinavian reinforcements, and Wirral might have become an alien recruiting ground and a 'second front' against Mercia.

Scandinavian influence in Mercia

It remains now to estimate the extent and importance of Scandinavian influence upon this region of north-west Mercia. The documentary evidence is, as we have seen, fragmentary and difficult to interpret. The *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, on which we may safely rely, tells only of two or three desperate Danish raids, the effects of which seem to have been ephemeral: there is no hint of permanent settlement. Otherwise we are almost reduced to following an Irish tradition of doubtful authority. This Irish account at first glance appears to be very complete, but, after cutting away the legendary details such as those which adorn the attack on Chester and which are of little historical value whether true or false, we find ourselves left with the meagre information that a group of Scandinavians from Ireland had settled in the neighbourhood of Chester. The rest, the theories of mass-migrations and thickly populated colonies, is mere inference. It is desirable, therefore, to produce other support for these inferences before insisting on their acceptance. If great numbers of Scandinavians settled in Cheshire — for practical purposes the following survey is limited to Cheshire — we should expect to find traces of them at a later date. They certainly left their mark, but this mark has many facets, each requiring for its interpretation a close and specialized study. At present it is impossible to do more than suggest where traces of Scandinavian influence may be found.

Many archaeological remains have survived and are available for study. No attempt is here made to deal adequately with the archaeological evidence because, first, most of the material seems to be of a date considerably later than the limit of our chosen period, and, secondly, because the subject requires a more complete and a more specialized treatment than is possible here. It is to be hoped that the whole question of Scandinavian stone monuments in Cheshire will be fully dealt with elsewhere. Here it must suffice to note that the Scandinavian settlement, especially in Wirral, was so intense that it has coloured the development of sculpture and art-forms in the area and has left abundant evidence for the archaeologist.

Native customs and institutions were also modified by Scandinavian innovations in areas where the alien settlers were numerous. This new influence may be seen most clearly in the Danelaw counties but the customs of Cheshire did not remain unaffected. It is probable that the *xii iudices ciutatis*[23] of Chester were lawmen such as are found in the Danish boroughs. The term 'lawman', *lagemannus*, is derived from ON *lǫgmaðr* which means 'skilled in law'; both the

[23] *Domesday Book*, fo. 262b.

office and its name are Scandinavian. Lawmen or doomsmen appear more than a hundred years after Domesday in the *Magna Carta of Chester*[24] and again near the end of the thirteenth century in a charter of Abbot Simon.[25] It is perhaps noteworthy that the *Magna Carta of Chester* refers to the *iudices de Wich*;[26] this suggests that other towns in the neighbourhood had also adopted the Scandinavian institution of lawmen.[27] Another official whose name reveals Scandinavian influence is the *sacraber*.[28] This is the ON *sakaráberi*, well recorded in Scandinavian law as a prosecutor or formal accuser.[29] The use of this word and the survival into the thirteenth century of ancient Scandinavian customs, not uncommon in Danelaw proper, show quite definitely that Cheshire did not escape Scandinavianization. In the *Magna Carta of Chester*[30] there also occurs the term *thwertnic*, 'absolutely no', a formal denial of guilt by an accused person. Another form, *thwertutnay*, occurs in the Danish borough of Leicester. It is derived from ON *þvert út nei*. A considerable number of Scandinavians must have been present to effect the introduction of new customs and terms into the native legal procedure. Scandinavian influence upon mediæval institutions in Cheshire seems to offer an interesting field for future research.

It is well known, however, that Scandinavian influence in Cheshire was not sufficient to change the bases of land assessment from hides to carucates. Cheshire, unlike the Danelaw counties, remained a hidated area, but one or two faint traces of the Scandinavian system are recognizable in the Domesday survey. Handbridge, Cheshire — in the vicinity of which, it may be noted, tradition fixes Ingimund's settlement — is assessed in carucates, three in number. Professor Tait[31] has calculated that these three carucates are equivalent to one hide, an equation not evidenced elsewhere.[32] No other carucates appear in the Cheshire Domesday, but 15 bovates have been noticed and accepted as 'evidence of Scandinavian influence upon the subdivision of the fiscal hide'.[33] It may be added that of these 15 bovates four (at Overpool) are found in the Norse area of Wirral and the remaining eleven (at Sutton by Middlewich, Over Tabley, Nether Tabley and Lower Peover) are found in the Danish area of east Cheshire as marked on the accompanying map (fig. 3.1).

It will have been noticed that the lawmen of Chester numbered twelve, that the three Handbridge carucates are said to equal one hide and that in Lancashire south of the Ribble the hide is equivalent to six carucates. This illustrates another Scandinavian characteristic, a preference for the duodecimal system of reckoning. The English counted in fives and tens whereas the Scandinavians preferred sixes, twelves and eighteens. It should be emphasized that this is a gross over-

[24] J. Tait, ed., *The Chartulary or Register of the Abbey of St. Werburgh Chester*, 2 vols, Chetham Society New Series 79 and 82 (1920–23), I, 102–107.

[25] Ibid, II, 341.

[26] Ibid, I, 106, *et peticionem de misericordia iudicum de Wich triginta bullonibus salis.*

[27] They appear in some manorial rolls.

[28] *Chartulary of the Abbey of St Werburgh Chester*, I, 103.

[29] Cf. 'The Danes in England', p. 35.

[30] *Chartulary of the Abbey of St Werburgh Chester*, I, 103.

[31] J. Tait, *The Domesday Survey of Cheshire*, Chetham Society New Series 75 (1916), p. 10.

[32] The 'Lancashire' hide apparently contained six carucates.

[33] *The Domesday Survey of Cheshire*, p. 13.

simplification of the question, and that in any case such evidence is often fanciful and coincidental. At the moment one may only suggest that a careful collection of evidence, compared with results from other areas, may perhaps give to this point a definition which it now lacks. The vague preference may often be more than coincidence, but, at least, examples of duodecimal reckoning are common. H. J. Hewitt has shown that during the fourteenth century the number of salt-pans or cauldrons in a Cheshire salt-house tended to be standardized.[34] Twelve was the usual number, and smaller salt houses with six pans were frequently called a 'half wich-house' or a 'half saltwork'. Other examples are readily available but patient research is required before one can use such evidence as a positive indication of Scandinavian influence. It may be remarked, before leaving this point, that the ancient systems of land measurement in Cheshire seem to be a fruitful field for future investigation.

More definite is the system of monetary computation which in the Cheshire Domesday shows distinct traces of Scandinavian influence. The Scandinavians in Cheshire may not have been able to displace the hide in favour of the carucate in land values, but in money values there is ample evidence that the system was largely Scandinavian or Scandinavianized. The Scandinavian system revolved around the *ora* and greatly complicated the English practice.[35] Thus:

1 *ora* = 16 silver pennies.
10 *oræ* = 1 mark (13s 4d).
120 *oræ* = a long hundred of silver (£8).

The *ora* is mentioned by name only twice in the Cheshire Domesday — in the city fire-fine[36] and in the T.R.E. valuation of *Hurdingherie*[37] — but it seems to be at the root of the many manorial valuations.[38] Cuddington, for example, is worth 16d (i.e. 1 *ora*) and the bishop's manor of Wybunbury was worth 5s 4d. T.R.E. (i.e. 4 *oræ*). It is not necessary to give a complete list of such instances: it is sufficient to notice that sums of money, fines and valuations frequently appear as multiples of the *ora* of 16 silver pennies. We find amounts like 1s 4d, 5s 4d, 6s 8d, 9s 4d, 10s 8d., 13s 4d and 17s 4d which mean respectively 1, 4, 5, 7, 8, 10 and 13 *oræ*. In the above cases the awkward sums make our conclusion so definite that we may feel justified in regarding more common amounts as multiples of the *ora*, e.g. 4s, 8s, 12s, 16s and 20s etc. may well represent 3, 6, 9, 12, 15 *oræ*, while in £8 we may see the long hundred of silver (120 *oræ*).

To turn from money to moneyers we again find evidence of a Scandinavian settlement. Many of the Chester moneyers have Scandinavian names. Glancing through the list one at once notices such names as Thurstan (*temp.* Æthelstan) which is really ON Þorsteinn. In the hundred years before the Norman Conquest we find names like Colben (ON Kolbeinn), Colbrand (ON Kolbrandr), Croc (ON Krókr), Fargrim (ON Fargrímr), Huscarl (ON Húskarl), Sweartcol (ON

[34] *Mediaeval Cheshire*, Chetham Society New Series 88 (1929), p. 109.
[35] Cf. 'The Danes in England', p. 37.
[36] *The Domesday Survey of Cheshire*, p. 82.
[37] Ibid, p. 120.
[38] Ibid, p. 44.

Svartkollr), Sweartinc (ON Svertingr), Swegen (ON Sveinn), Thorald (ON Þóraldr) and Thurmod (ON Þormóðr). This Scandinavian strain of personal nomenclature survived the Conquest, and among Chester moneyers in the century after 1066 we have Sunoulf (ON Sunnúlfr), Ravenswart (ON Hrafnsvartr), Thurbern (ON Þorbiǫrn), and Unnulf (ON Hundólfr). Even more interesting perhaps is the surprising number of Irish personal names among the Chester moneyers: Mældomen (*temp.* Æthelstan), Mælsuthan (*temp.* Edgar), Macsuthan (*temp.* Cnut), Gillichrist (*temp.* Harold I and Harthacnut) and Gillemor (*temp.* Henry I). There can be no doubt that the Norsemen who introduced these names had long lived in Ireland; perhaps also the Scandinavian hordes which settled in Wirral included many native Irish adventurers, as indeed is suggested by the *Three Fragments*.[39] The above lists are not complete: they are intended only to illustrate the strong Scandinavian element in the personal names.

Scandinavian personal names

The personal names of the pre-Conquest Domesday landholders give the same impression. A complete list[40] of such personal names in the Cheshire Domesday is given here because no such list is available elsewhere[41] and because it may be useful to Cheshire students of Domesday Book. From it we see how very powerful was the Scandinavian element in Cheshire personal nomenclature at the end of the Old English period. It will be noticed, incidentally, that some of the Chester moneyers appear in the list.

ON Arngrímr, ODan Arngrim (DB Haregrim, Aregrim)
ON, ODan Arni, OSw Arne (DB Erne, Erni)
ON Arnkell, ODan Arnketil (DB Archil)
ON Ásgautr, ODan, OSw Asgut, Asgot (DB Ansgot, Osgot)
ODan Auti (DB Outi)
OIr Beollán (DB Belam)
ON, ODan Bersi (DB Bers)
ON *Frani (DB Fran)
ON Gamall, ODan, OSw Gamal (DB Gamel)
ON Grímkell, ODan Grimkel (DB Grinchel)
ON Grímr, OSw Grim (DB Grim)
ON *Gunningr (DB Gunninc)
ON Gunnarr, ODan, OSw Gunnar (DB Gunner)
ON Gunnvǫr, ODan, OSw Gunwor (DB Gunnor)
ON Guðleikr, OSw Gudhlek (DB Gotlac)

[39] See above, note 12.

[40] To the list should be added ON Haraldr, ODan, OSw Harald, and OSw Morkar. Although the king and earl bear Scandinavian names it would be misleading to include them among the ordinary Cheshire landholders for our present purpose.

[41] Professor Tait has marked some, but not all, of the Scandinavian personal names by an asterisk in the index to his *Domesday Survey of Cheshire*. Notable omissions are the common Erne and Erni, Dedol, Hundulf, and Bers. Further information should be sought in Olof von Feilizen's *The Pre-Conquest Personal Names of Domesday Book* (Uppsala, 1937), on which the present list is to a great extent based.

ON Hákun, Hákon, ODan, OSw Hakun, Hakon (DB Hacon, Hacun)
ON Hálfdan, ODan, OSw Halfdan, Haldan (DB Halden, Alden)
ON Hásteinn, ODan, OSw Hasten (DB Hasten)
ON Hrafn, ODan Rawn, OSw Rampn (DB Rauen(e))
ON Hrafnkell, OSw Ramkel (DB Raue(n)chel, Rauecate)
ON Hrafnsvartr (DB Rauesuar, Rausue)
ON Hundingr (DB Hunding, Hundin)
ON Hundólfr (DB Hundulf)
ON, ODan Karl(i), OSw Karl(e) (DB Carle)
ON Ketill, ODan Ketil, OSw Kætil (DB Chetel)
ON Kolbeinn, ODan, OSw Kolben (DB Colben)
ON Loðinn, ODan Lothæn, OSw Ludhin, Lodhin (DB Loten)
ON *Morfari (DB Morfar)
ON Ormr, ODan, OSw Orm (DB Orme)
ON Ragnaldr, ODan Regnvald, OSw Ragn(v)ald (DB Ragenal)
ON Sigríðr, ODan Sigrith, OSw Sigridh (DB Segrid)
ON Steinkell, ODan, OSw Stenkil (DB Steinchetel)
ON Steinn, ODan, OSw Sten (DB Stein)
ON Steinólfr, OSw Stenulf (DB Stenulf)
ON Þióðólfr, ODan Thiuthulf, OSw Thiudhulf (DB Dedol, Dedou)
ON Þórðr, ODan Thorth, OSw Thordh (DB Toret, Toreth)
ON Tóki, ODan Toki, OSw Toke (DB Tochi)
ASc *Uhtbrand (?) (DB Ostebrand)
ON Úlfkell, ODan Ulfkil (DB Ulchel, Ulchetel)
ON Úlfr, ODan, OSw Ulf (DB Ulf)
ON Vetrlíði (DB Wintrelet)

To these some scholars might add:

ON Biǫrnulfr (DB Bernulf)
ON Brúnn, ODan, OSw Brun (DB Brun)

Bernulf and Brun, however, might have developed from OE Beornwulf and OE Brun respectively. The usual slight indications of origin, such as those for example which make us prefer ON Guðleikr to OE Guðlac as the origin of the Cheshire Gotlac,[42] are absent. It is perhaps worthy of note that Domesday landholders with the names Bernulf and Brun occur only in Scandinavian areas.[43] Furthermore, the seven manors held by men called Bernulf and Brun in Cheshire are all, without exception, in *Hamestan* Hundred, the most eastern and the most Danish part of the county. More trouble is Dot, the name of a man who held some 17 Cheshire manors. Feilitzen favours a Scandinavian origin,[44] but perhaps it is safer to leave his name out of our present calculations.

[42] Feilitzen, p. 278, states that OE Guðlac is not found after 824.

[43] I.e. Cheshire, Derbyshire, Lancashire, Nottinghamshire, Staffordshire, Suffolk and Yorkshire. Feilitzen, pp. 200, 209.

[44] Feilitzen, p. 226.

The Scandinavian personal names listed above represent a considerable proportion of the total number of pre-Conquest personal names in the Cheshire Domesday. Of the total of 96,[45] 45 are English and 41 are Scandinavian. To the latter may be added two perhaps three, doubtful names. That is to say, we find roughly as many Scandinavian as English names among the T.R.E. landholders. This proportion is unexpectedly high for Cheshire, and it is, of course, a staggering proof of Scandinavian influence.

Beyond this point, however, it would be hazardous to draw any historical conclusions. For example, it would be unjustifiable to argue that equal numbers of Scandinavian and English names imply equal numbers of Scandinavians and Englishmen in the population. Apart from the fact that by 1066 AD, 150 years of racial intermingling had occurred, we know that Scandinavian names showed a greater variety and a greater vitality than did native English names. Our above equal proportions, therefore, probably represents a preponderance of English blood. We are hampered by not knowing if a recurrent name belongs to the same individual. The likelihood that the same name covers more than one individual is greatly increased when we are dealing with the English element,[46] and any guesses as to relative populations on a mere 'name-for-name' basis would certainly exaggerate the Scandinavian element at the expense of the English element. Moreover, it would be quite impossible to transfer our data to a map.

If some kind of map is desired its basis must be the manor. If we mark each manor by a man with a Scandinavian name and, by a different symbol, each manor held by a man with an English name, we shall have a distribution map of Scandinavian and English personal names. These results, still notoriously unreliable, will at least be less prejudicial to the English element of the population than a 'name-for-name' argument. We shall learn nothing more about the relative numbers of Scandinavians and Englishmen in Cheshire,[47] and what we may learn of their distribution will be vague and inconclusive in the extreme. If there exists any justification for proceeding further with this design it must be that the results are interesting rather than useful.

[45] Omitting Harold, Morcar, etc. Also seven of the 96 names are Old Welsh or Old German. We are dealing only with the 89 English and Scandinavian names of smaller landholders.

[46] Not more than half a dozen of the Scandinavian names occur more than three times even if we include the common Arni (7) and Tóki (6) and the doubtful Brún (5). By comparison the English names recur frequently, e.g. Leofnoð (15), Godric (13), Godwine (12), Wulfgeat (11), Eadwine (10), Eadweard (8), etc. It is rarely possible to decide how many men shelter under each of these names; the common practice of transferring undivided all the lands of a T.R.E. holder to a single new tenant is of limited assistance to us. On the other hand OE Eadric, which occurs four times, seems to cover at least two men: this is the impression conveyed by the entry that Broomhall was held by 'Edric and Edric' (265b). Even here we should not ignore the possibility of a scribal error for we should expect some distinction to be made between two men of the same name and so closely associated.

[47] It is impossible to say more than that, as pointed out above, the unexpectedly high proportion of Scandinavian pre-Conquest personal names in Domesday Book proves that the Scandinavian influence had been very powerful.

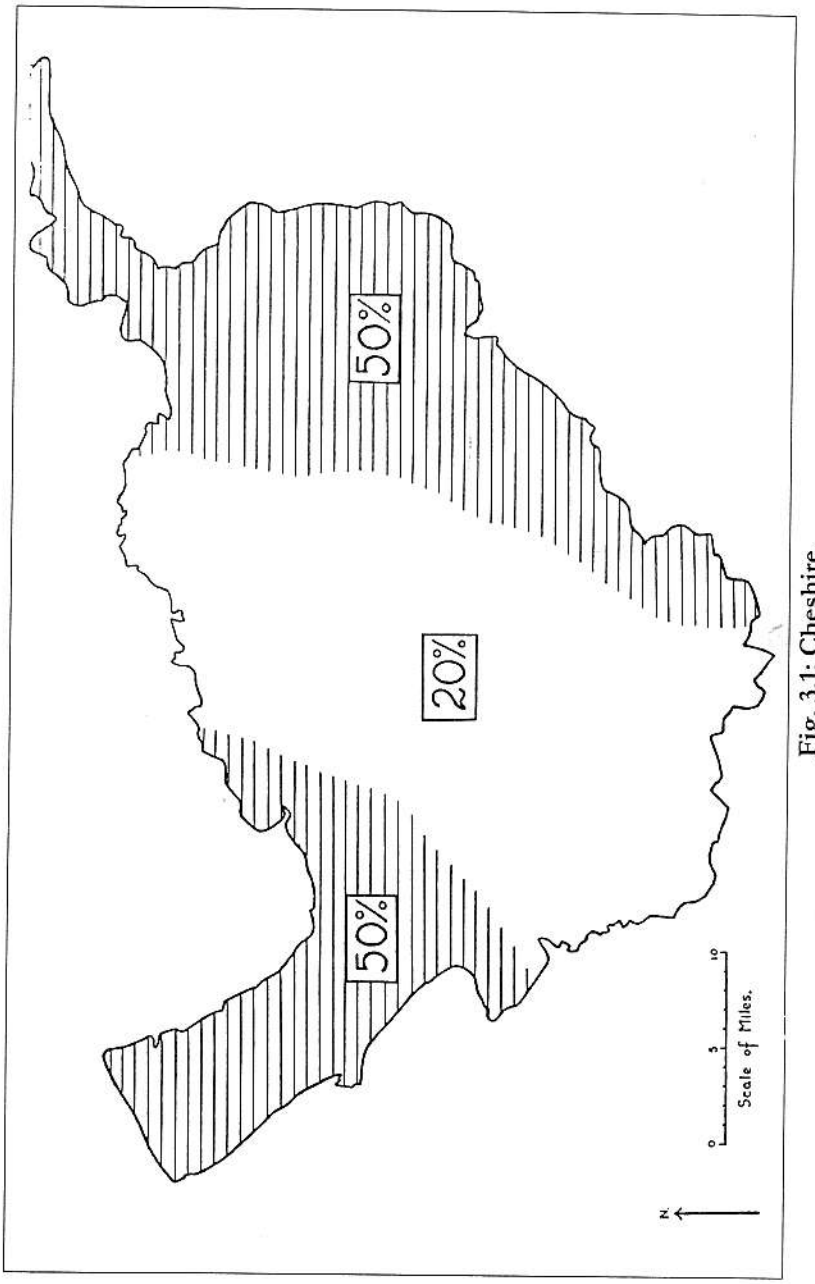

Fig. 3.1: Cheshire.
Map based on the proportion of Domesday manors held by men bearing Scandinavian names, 1066 AD.

On counting the 'English' and 'Scandinavian' manors[48] we find that the proportion is seven to three, i.e. that 30% of them are held by men with Scandinavian names. This is the average for the whole county and it is interesting to see how the percentage of 'Scandinavian' manors in each hundred compares with this average. In *Wilaveston* and *Cestre* Hundreds the Scandinavian proportion is somewhat over 45.5%. This is to be expected since Wirral was heavily settled by Norsemen. *Hamestan* Hundred lies in the extreme east of Cheshire and in what we know from place-names to have been a Danish area. It is therefore not surprising to find the highest proportion of Scandinavian names here. The seven manors of the doubtful Brun and Bernulf complicate calculations, but, even if we ignore them, 47% of the manors are 'Scandinavian'. If we count them as 'Scandinavian', as indeed we ought, the proportion rises to 62.5%. Leaving the known Scandinavian areas we find 27% in *Warmundestrou*, 25.5% in *Dudestan*, 25% in *Mildestvic*, 21% in *Tunendune* and less than 10.5% in *Bochelau*; notice that all are below the county average of 30%. In *Roelau* Hundred the proportion is 31.25%, but it is important to note that four out of the five Scandinavian names are in the extreme west, i.e. virtually in the Norse area of Wirral. Of *Risedon*, with the rather high proportion of 43.75%, the same difference is very marked: in the Norse western half of the hundred 'Scandinavian' manors preponderate by three to one (i.e. 75%) but in the eastern half 'English' manors preponderate by two to one. It might be remarked, too, that of the 27% found in *Warmundestrou* almost all lie in the eastern half of the hundred, i.e. in the Danish area, and also that in *Dudestan* most of the 'Scandinavian' manors are in the north-west and none in the south-east which is remote from the Norse in Wirral.

From the above details concerning the hundreds of *Roelau*, *Risedon*, *Dudestan* and *Warmundestrou* it will be apparent that the hundreds do not form good bases for calculation. It is far more satisfactory to divide Cheshire into three belts, western, central and eastern. The results are recorded on the sketch map of fig. 3.1. In the two shaded areas 'Scandinavian' manors are as common as 'English manors': there are about 50% of each. In the central belt 'English' manors are in the majority of four to one, i.e. the Scandinavian proportion falls to 20% and the English proportion rises to 80%. It will be noticed that the two shaded areas bear a close relation to the Norse and Danish areas as revealed below by place-names. In spite of the general belief that by 1066 racial intermingling had robbed the Scandinavian personal names of any value for distribution purposes,[49] yet we have been able to construct this interesting looking map.

After all, however, our map is based upon a shaky experiment in calculation, and it should perhaps be taken as a warning against the dangers of ingenious statistical manipulation. The results may be accurate, but the foundations are not very firm and we are left with an uneasy feeling that statistics, if conveniently interpreted, will prove anything. We must therefore insist that the above proportions are not offered as a proof of anything: they are offered as a matter

[48] There were 272 names T.R.E. in the hands of non-noble laymen with English or Scandinavian names. Of these the holders of 185 had English names and the holders of 80 had Scandinavian names. The remaining seven manors were held by Brun and Bernulf which are probably Scandinavian names. Dot's manors are excluded from these figures.

[49] *The Domesday Survey of Cheshire*, p. xv.

of interest together with a warning that it would be unwise to build any historical conclusions upon them. But, although they may be useless as a proof in themselves, it is a different matter to point out that they coincide neatly with the more solid evidence of place-names. The map should be compared with the place-name map below (fig. 3.2) and its significance will be at once apparent.

Before leaving the subject of personal names as revealing Scandinavian influence, it may be noted that Scandinavian personal names continued in living use long after the Norman Conquest. No collection is available but one frequently meets Scandinavian names in medieval documents. In the Chester Chartulary[50] are found names like Anketill, Anschetill, Asschetill (ON Áskell, Asketill), John Gamel (ON Gamall), Gunwara (ON Gunnvǫr fem.), Gutha (ON Gyða fem.), Rauen (ON Hrafn), Orm (ON Ormr), Osgot (ON Ásgautr), Steinolf (ON Steinólfr), Sweinn (ON Sveinn) and Toki (ON Tóki). These belong to the twelfth and thirteenth centuries and they shown that the Scandinavian influence on English personal nomenclature was neither slight nor transient.

Scandinavian place-names

More reliable evidence of Scandinavian settlement in Cheshire may be recovered by a study of topographical names. They reveal a dense Norse population in Wirral and they provide a confirmation of the tradition which lies behind the story of Ingimund's arrival; they allow us to fix racial boundaries with some degree of precision, and, above all, they prove a sparse but definite Danish settlement in east Cheshire which has escaped the notice of all chroniclers. This is not the place for an exposition of the technical methods of place-name study, and only such explanations will be given as are necessary to an understanding of the arguments and conclusions. First, it is necessary to remember that it is usually possible, after examining ancient spellings, to decide whether or not a place-name has been created by Scandinavians. If a place-name has been created by Scandinavians it will contain Scandinavian words or perhaps a Scandinavian personal name, and it may even preserve traces of Scandinavian grammatical inflections. The detection of these clues need not concern is here. Sometimes it is possible to show that certain English place-names have been pronounced by Scandinavians and have therefore developed along different lines: Scandinavianization of English sounds is a common phenomenon. It will be agreed that such evidence presumes the existence of Scandinavians — many where a place name has been wholly created by Scandinavian-speaking people, and at least more than a few where the development of an English place-name has been modified by Scandinavian influence.

Furthermore, from certain language differences it is occasionally possible to decide whether a Scandinavian place-name is Danish or Norse. The whole question of what constitutes a safe Danish 'test' is still unsettled, and many suggested criteria are controversial, but the distinction exists and, as will appear later, it is a vital distinction. There are other place-name formations which are half English and half Scandinavian. These hybrids have a special significance

[50] *Passim.* All the names quoted above may be found in the index, except Gunwara (II, 275) which has been omitted.

which will be explained below. The historical interpretation of many place-name types presents difficulties even when a philological explanation has been achieved. It should be emphasized, therefore, that certainty in these matters is seldom attainable.

The number of Scandinavian place-names in Cheshire, while not inconsiderable, is not particularly impressive in itself. At present we cannot point to 30 definite examples, and their total will not be substantially increased by the inclusion of doubtful cases and by the additions of future research. Compared with the Danelaw counties Cheshire does not possess many Scandinavian place-names, but the location and nature of those which exist are of the highest historical value.

A map will immediately reveal a heavy concentration of Scandinavian place-names in Wirral. In fact, this is the only area where they are at all numerous. They are concrete evidence of a densely populated Scandinavian colony which extended across the Mersey into Lancashire[51] and across the Dee into north Wales, and as such they have long been recognized. We find the following fairly safe examples.[52]

Arrowe, ON **erg** (Gael **áiridh**) 'a shieling'
Claughton, ON **klakkr**, 'a lump, a hillock', and OE **tūn** or ON **tún**
Frankby, ME 'the Frenchman's **by**'
Gayton ON **geit**, 'goat' and ON **tún**
Helsby, ON **hjallr**, 'ledge' and ON **býr**
Irby, ON *Írabýr*, 'the **by** of the Irishmen'
Kirby, West, ON **kirkja**, 'church' and ON **býr**
Larton, ON **leirr**, 'clay' and OE **tūn** or ON **tún**
Meols, Great and Little, ON **melr**, 'sandbank, sandhill'
Noctorum, OIr **cnocc**, 'hill' is the first element
Pensby, ON **býr**. The first element may be a personal name or PrW **pen(n)**
Raby, ON **rá**, 'boundary' and ON **býr**
Storeton, ON **stórr**, 'big' and OE **tūn** or ON **tún**
Thingwall, ON **þing vǫllr**, 'place of assembly'[53]
Thurstaston, ON Þorsteinn, and OE **tūn** or ON **tún**
Tranmere, ON **trani**, 'crane' and ON **melr**,[54] 'sandbank'

[51] E.g. Aigburth, Burscough, Crosby, Croxteth, Cunscough, West Derby, Formby, Kirkby, Kirkdale, Lathom, Litherland, Lunt, Ormskirk, Roby, Skelmersdale, Thingwall, Toxteth etc. A complete list may be compiled from Ekwall's *Place-Names of Lancashire*, (Manchester and London, 1922), p. 250, and *passim*. Many minor names are also Scandinavian; Ekwall's work, although not complete in this respect, contains many examples.

[52] [The list and subsequent paragraphs have been adjusted in the light of John Dodgson's work in PN Ch. See further chapter 10 below.]

[53] Probably marking, as has often been stated, the centre of the Wirral Norse settle-ment.

[54] Some of the early spellings of Tranmere contain *-mor* instead of the more usual *-mel*, *-mol* etc. The *-mor* forms have evidently developed into the modern *-mere*.

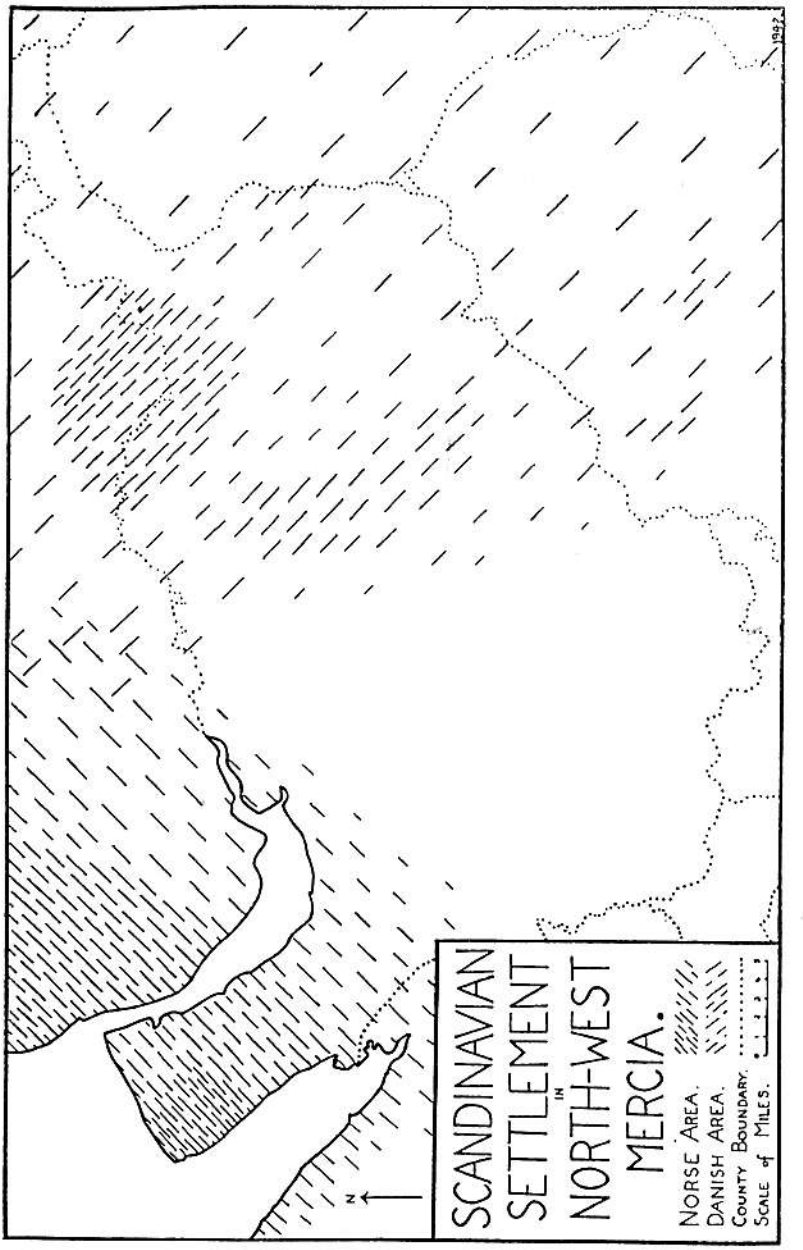
SCANDINAVIAN
SETTLEMENT
IN
NORTH-WEST
MERCIA.
NORSE AREA.
DANISH AREA.
COUNTY BOUNDARY.
SCALE of MILES.
N
1927

Fig. 3.2.

To these may be added certain English names which reveal Scandinavian influence. Whitby and Greasby are Scandinavianized forms of OE place-names which appear respectively in the late eleventh century as *Witeberia*, and in Domesday Book as *Gravesberie* (both with the second element OE **burh**). West Kirby arose as a Scandinavian translation of an earlier OE **cirice**, 'church', with ON **býr**. Other possible examples might be found, e.g. Birkenhead.[55]

The above evidence is the place-name evidence for a Scandinavian settlement in Wirral.[56] The immediate task is to translate this evidence into history. First, it may be pointed out that many place-names are strict Scandinavian creations, e.g. Arrowe, Helsby, Irby, Meols, Raby, Thingwall and Tranmere. These, being completely Scandinavian, were obviously formed by a Scandinavian-speaking people. They are incontrovertible proof that Scandinavians settled in great numbers in Wirral, an assertion which becomes comprehensible when it is realized that a place-name usually originates in the speech of surrounding settlers rather than among the inhabitants of the place, and when it is realized that therefore a single strict Scandinavian place-name may imply that the whole of the neighbouring district was thickly peopled by Scandinavians. Including Greasby and Whitby one may count eight Cheshire place-names containing the popular and distinctive Scandinavian element **-by**. This number may seem small when it is known that there are some 250 **-by** place-names in each of the counties of York and Lincoln and that Leicestershire can boast 66 examples.[57] It is very significant that all the Cheshire **-by** place-names are found in the comparatively small district of Wirral — there are only twice as many in the whole of Lancashire. It is very probable that the majority of **-by** place-names arose within a generation or two of 900 AD, but whatever their date[58] it is certain that they are always found thick upon the ground in areas most thoroughly occupied by the Scandinavians, e.g. the Wreake valley in Leicestershire, and the land intersected by the tributaries of the Ouse in Yorkshire. Thus the location in the Wirral of all the Cheshire **-by** place-names takes on a new significance.

Among the place-names listed above there will have been noticed a number of possible Anglo-Scandinavian hybrids: Claughton, Larton, Storeton, Thurstaston, and perhaps others. The precise historical significance of these hybrids is not yet clear, but it seems certain that they point to a racial intermingling as well as to Scandinavian influence. Strictly, if the final element is **tūn**, it reveals that the above examples are English place-names, possibly

[55] The first element is OE **bircen**, 'birchen', but it has been influenced by ON **birki**.

[56] The area described as Wirral in this study extends beyond the boundaries of Wirral Hundred to include the Frodsham-Helsby district.

[57] Derbyshire, a Danelaw county, has like Cheshire only eight **-by** place-names; Durham has nine.

[58] The word **-by** continued as a living place-name element in some areas for a very considerable time. For example, in Cumberland **-by** is often found in combination with French personal names, e.g. Aglionby (Agyllun), Allonby (Aleyn), Johnby (John), Moresby (Maurice), and Rickerby (Richard). This survival, however, does not appear to have been usual. We may believe that the majority of **-by** place-names arose in the first phase of Scandinavian settlement. An attempt to throw light upon the date of Scandinavian place-names is proceeding. This involves an investigation into the chronology of Scandinavian personal names found in place-names. Results are not yet complete, but general conclusions are becoming increasingly plain.

attached in the first place to pre-Scandinavian villages. One might argue that the English population was so Scandinavianized that it adopted Scandinavian words like **klakkr, leirr** and **stórr**. On the other hand, it is perhaps more likely that the Scandinavians early accepted OE place-name elements like **tūn**.[59] From either argument, however, it follows that racial fusion occurred. Englishmen and Scandinavians were so closely related by race as well as language that we may believe intermarriage and intermixture to have begun almost with the first alien settlements. An Anglo-Scandinavian language and an Anglo-Scandinavian personal nomen-clature developed along with an Anglo-Scandinavian race. More must be written of hybrid place-names below, after which their historical interpretation will still be far from complete. In the meantime we may safely use them to indicate Scandinavian influence and Anglo-Scandinavian fusion.

More interesting, perhaps, is the attempt to decide the racial composition of the Scandinavian settlers themselves. In this delicate problem our most reliable information is derived from place-names. Normally it is impossible to distinguish between Norse and Danish place-names, for the dialects were so closely related that the great bulk of words and personal names found in Scandinavian place-names may be either Danish or Norwegian. Occasionally it is possible to point to words or side-forms which are characteristic of only one branch of the Scandinavian language, and occasionally it is possible to point to personal names which appear, for example, in Old Danish but not in Old Norse.[60] Furthermore, the Norsemen arrived in England from Ireland where they had stayed long enough to adopt certain Irish words, Irish personal names, and Irish methods of place-nomenclature.[61] Such Irish influence may be taken legitimately to prove the existence of Norsemen. The whole work of building up reliable 'tests' of this nature is highly technical and far from complete. Much remains controversial but here we can only avoid technicalities and interpret as well as we are able the material at our disposal.

As to be expected, very few of the Scandinavian place-names of Wirral may be ascribed individually to a specifically Norse or Danish origin. They are just Scandinavian. One or two names are definitely of Norse origin and it must be emphasized that, in the absence of Danish equivalents, these are sufficient to persuade us that most of the other Scandinavian place-names in Wirral are Norse. Arrowe contains the element **erg** which was borrowed by the Norsemen from the Irish. Another adopted Irish word is **cnocc** which appears as the first element of Noctorum. Irby, 'the **by** of the Irishmen' also points to an invasion from Ireland. Minor names offer some additional evidence. Since there are no

[59] **Tún** was used in Iceland.

[60] If a personal name is found in Danish sources but not in Norse sources it is fairly safe to regard the name as specifically Danish. The reverse, that a name appearing in Norse but not Danish sources is specifically Norse, is by no means a reliable assumption because the Danish material is comparatively scanty.

[61] Irish words like **áirge** in Grimsargh and Goosnargh (Lancs.) etc.; Irish personal names like Dubgall in Duggleby (Yorkshire), Dubán in Dovenby (Cumberland), Gusán in Goosnargh etc. Irish methods of place-nomenclature were also adopted, in particular the Irish habit, later found among the Welsh, of inverting the usual order of elements in compound place-names, e.g. Kirkoswald, Kirkandrews, Kirkbride etc. in Cumberland. In English the defining element is placed first.

definite Danish place-names we are safe in stating that the Scandinavians in Wirral were mainly Norsemen who had spent a considerable time in Ireland. One need not emphasize that this evidence strongly supports the Ingimund tradition discussed above. Moreover, there may well have been native Irishmen among the alien settlers, as is suggested by the *Three Fragments*. Their presence would help to explain the easy adoption of Irish place-name characteristics by the Scandinavians.

It has been stated above that there are no certain examples of Danish 'tests' or Danish place-names in Wirral. That is true, at the present stage of research, but there are one or two possible indications that the Danes settled among the Norsemen, as was suggested, it will be remembered, by the *Three Fragments*. Thus Irby is a strict Scandinavian place-name meaning 'the **by** of the Irishmen', and it might be reasonable to argue that such a name could have arisen only in the speech of non-Irish Scandinavians, that is to say, of Danes. Other explanations, however, are possible,[62] and it would be hazardous to build any elaborate historical structure upon this place-name alone. The above indications of Danish influence may be very interesting but they are not yet definite enough to carry much conviction.

It is *a priori* very likely that some Danes settled in Wirral but it is not easy to produce concrete proof that this was the case. On the other hand, we are fairly safe in denying the existence of any considerable Danish element among the Wirral Scandinavians. It is very significant that the common Danish *thorp* does not occur.[63] In short, Danes must have been rare in Wirral or we should find clearer traces of them. In view of the tradition preserved in the *Three Fragments* one of the most useful tasks of future research will be to investigate the question of Danish settlements among the Wirral Norse — for there can be no doubt that Norsemen predominated.

J. H. Round, usually so meticulously accurate, blundered when he dismissed J. R. Green's suggestion of a 'little group of northern villages' in Wirral with a curt 'I cannot find them myself'.[64] He added, 'Raby is the one place I can there find in the peninsula with the "bye" termination.' It is clear that Round was thinking only of Domesday Book from which Frankby, Irby, West Kirby and Whitby are absent and in which Greasby appears in its English form, *Gravesberie*. Since inclusion in Domesday Book is a fair test of importance, the absence of these Scandinavian place-names may mean that many Scandinavian villages

[62] Irby may contain the genitive singular *Íri*, perhaps used as an ordinary personal name for a man who had been to Ireland, or it may contain the genitive plural, *Íra*, as assumed above. Although it would seem natural that such a place-name was created by men who had not been to Ireland, this becomes less obvious if the first element is a personal name. Moreover, this particular place-name may have been created at a later date, perhaps by the second generation of Norse settlers, and applied to newcomers from Ireland. There are numerous other possibilities but it is not safe to demand an acceptance of any of them. It is only clear that it was created by a Scandinavian-speaking people and that, if it contains *Íra*, the **'by** of the Irishmen' was a name sufficiently distinctive in a Scandinavian area.

[63] *Thorp* was rarely used by the Norwegians and it may be regarded as a Danish 'test'. A fairly common OE *thorp* (*þorp, prop*) exists to complicate the problem, but a Scandinavian *thorp* in England is almost certainly of Danish origin.

[64] *Feudal England* (London, 1895), p. 86.

remained small and insignificant. They probably represent new Scandinavian settlements which did not rival in importance the earlier English villages. It is probable that the Scandinavians arrived peaceably and were content to create new settlements of their own, often in comparatively undesirable areas. The existing English villages often retained their English names, e.g. Eastham, Hooton, Ledsham, Leighton, Mollington, Prenton, Puddington, Sutton, Upton etc., and it may be that they were not molested.[65] Skirmishes, such as the traditional attack on Chester, may well have occurred, but in general it would appear that the Scandinavians quietly settled in uninhabited districts. They would easily find sufficient unclaimed land for their needs since the pre-Scandinavian settlers in Wirral cannot have been numerous. According to figures in Domesday Book about a quarter of the population of Domesday Cheshire was concentrated in Wirral, but this was a century and a half after the Scandinavian settlement, and there is no reason to believe that even the most favoured parts of Cheshire could support any very dense population. It has been said that Cheshire was 'comparatively unproductive and comparatively thinly populated',[66] and there can be no doubt that Wirral possessed its full share of forest and marsh. It seems likely that, before the Scandinavian settlement, this remote corner of England was but scantily peopled. Thus the Scandinavians would certainly find many areas unclaimed by the earlier English settlers. If they were generally content with uncultivated and unwanted lands they were a potential, but not an effective, obstacle to the schemes of Edward the Elder. Although the presence in Wirral of alien colonists may well have constituted a grave threat to the English of Mercia, we cannot readily believe that any such danger arose from the deliberate and intentional policy of the immigrants.

A close study of the minor names of this area will do much to confirm the impression of a very dense Scandinavian settlement. Although many of these names which were given to fields, woods, hills, streams, etc. do not date from the tenth century, it will be obvious that the ultimate adoption of Scandinavian terms for insignificant fields and woods presumes a strong Scandinavian element in the local population and a mixed language which persisted for centuries. Among the minor names of Wirral we find such Scandinavian words as **holmr**, **kiarr**, **flǫt**, **þveit** etc. Further examples and details may be obtained elsewhere.[67] Even at the outset of a survey of Cheshire field-names it is abundantly clear that in Wirral 'we are dealing with an alien population of mass-migration proportions and not with a few military conquerors who usurped the choicest sites'. In passing it might be added that Wirral field-names contain some confirmatory evidence that the Scandinavian settlers were Norsemen from Ireland.[68]

To turn from the thorough Norse occupation of Wirral we find, by contrast, evidence of a less intensive but distinctly Danish penetration of east Cheshire. In this area, by a fortunate chance, the few place-names which alone preserve a record of Scandinavian settlement reveal clear evidence of Danish influence. The

[65] Names like Thurstaston and Greasby may suggest sites adopted by the invaders.

[66] *Mediæval Cheshire*, p. 6.

[67] F. T. Wainwright, 'Field-names', *Antiquity* 18 (1943), 57–66. The Cheshire material will be found mainly on pp. 59–60; see below, chapter 8.

[68] Ibid.

difficulties surrounding the recognition and application of 'tests' have been discussed briefly above. In east Cheshire there are perhaps a dozen 'Scandinavian' place-names and the majority of these contain words which, under the circumstances, may be legitimately interpreted as Danish. There is no doubt that east Cheshire is a Danish area, and the distinction between a Norse colonization of Wirral and a Danish colonization of east Cheshire is a significant fact. On the other hand, it should be made quite clear that this Danish overlap was not heavily settled. No comparison should be made with the thickly populated Norse colonies in Wirral.

In conclusion, therefore, place-names reveal an intensive Norse settlement in Wirral and a weak Danish penetration of east Cheshire, the former an invasion on the scale of a mass-migration and the latter a faint overlap from the Danish Midlands. These facts are important and they must figure prominently in any attempt to estimate conditions in pre-Conquest Cheshire.