Post-Roman continuation in the White Peak and influences on the identity of the 'Peak Dwellers'

Extended Project for a Diploma in British Archaeology

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July 2025

Introduction

The events following the end of the Roman era in Britain are obscure. The traditional understanding of the period derives from a limited series of historic sources such as Gildas and Bede, and described how once the Romans 'left', the native Britons invited Angles and Saxons to Britain as mercenaries, who then usurped power and established a series of kingdoms in southern and eastern Britain. The Anglo-Saxons and Britons are treated as discrete peoples, who engaged in a binary struggle for control of the island, with the new Anglo-Saxon kingdoms ultimately succeeding and eventually together controlling a territory which in later centuries would become England (Morris, 2022, 27 – 30).

The current understanding of this period is more complicated. The Romans did not 'leave' Britain, rather the Roman field army left the province and never returned. The province was never formally abandoned, though from the early 5th century the Roman state was never again able to assert its control over it (Adams, 2021; 54–67, Mattingly, 2007; 529–539). This time was certainly a turning point, with decreases in the abundance and variety of material in the archaeological record between the late 4th century and the late 5th century implying a transition to a simpler society (Esmonde-Cleary, 2011; 13). Roman urban life generally ended, albeit there is evidence for substantial continuation in some cities. For example, there documentary evidence for religious conferences in St Albans in the 5th century (Mattingly, 2007; 535), and archaeological evidence of continuation in Wroxeter, where evidence has been found indicating the bath and basilica complex being redeveloped as late as the early-6th century using Roman measurements. Additional evidence has also been found for occupation across the site of the city (White and Barker, 2011, 118 - 136).

The earliest evidence of Anglo-Saxon archaeology appears in eastern England, mainly in the form of burial evidence, such as the large cremation cemetery at Spong Hill, Norfolk. Some notable early Anglo-Saxon settlements include West Stow, Suffolk and Mucking, Essex (Dark, 2000, 58 – 68). These earliest settlements are characterised archaeologically due to the presence of structures usually understood as residences; so-called 'sunken feature buildings' (SFB's). The mapping of these features shows a concentration to the south and east of Britain, though this should not be taken to mean that all the people in these areas were 'Anglo-Saxon' or identified as such (Blair, 2018, 24 - 35).

How exactly the first Anglo Saxons arrived in Britain, and how they came to control what would become England, is still unknown. Nevertheless, by the 6th century, these Anglo-Saxon groups coalesced into a series of kingdoms in the eastern and southern areas of Britain. This was not a simple replacement of one group of people by another, rather a gradual spread of their new culture. Recent genetic and isotopic evidence is contributing to the understanding of Anglo-Saxon migration in this period. One suggests that there was a substantial degree of Anglo-Saxon migration, possibly even preceding the end of the Roman era (Gretzinger *et al*., 2022). However, isotopic research has identified that there is little cultural separation between migrants and non-migrants based on funerary practice and diet, suggesting populations of mixed origins (Leggett, *et al*., 2022). As such, evidence suggests the spread of an Anglo-Saxon culture was not uniform across southern and eastern England, with a patchwork of different 'Anglo-Saxon' and 'Romano British' communities, with the 'Anglo-Saxon' culture becoming dominant in later centuries (Higham and Ryan, 2015, 110).

By the mid-7th century, the dominant power in central England was the Kingdom of Mercia. The exact origins of the kingdom are vague, possibly forming sometime in the 6th century. The original core territory of Mercia roughly encompassed the Trent valley across Leicestershire, Nottinghamshire,

southern Derbyshire, northern Warwickshire and Staffordshire. The name of Mercia means 'people of the borderlands' and reflecting perhaps its general location between earlier Anglo-Saxon kingdoms to the east and Romano-British areas further to the west. (Fleming, 2011, 111 -112). An early Anglo-Saxon settlement, evidenced by the presence of three SFB's and dated to the 6th century has been identified at Willington in southern Derbyshire. This is the only known settlement from this early period present in Derbyshire (Wheeler, 1979).

Terminology

In archaeological and historical contexts, the people of this period are roughly categorised into two main groups. The native inhabitants of the former Roman province are referred to as the 'Romano-British', 'British', or 'Brittonic' and may have spoken a language of which one form later developed into Welsh. The people of the Germanic culture that began to occupy eastern and southern Britain are referred to as 'Anglo-Saxon', or in the context of the Midlands in some sources, 'Anglian', and spoke Old English (Adams, 2021, 223).

These terms, and their derivatives, are the ones which have already been used above and will be used below. However, it is important to understand that these terms are used in the modern day to understand and describe these groups. They do not necessarily reflect how individuals at the time identified themselves. Indeed, they may not have had any understanding of the concept of the division between 'Anglo-Saxons' and 'Britons' or their contemporary equivalent terms, instead prioritising local identities.

The Pecsaetan and the landscape of the Peak District

By the end of the 7th century, the Peak District was occupied by a group known as the *Pecsaetan*, 'the Peak-dwellers'. The main source describing the *Pecsaetan* is the Tribal Hidage, a document dating from sometime between the late 7th and 9th centuries comprising a list of groups in England and a corresponding number of 'hides' allocated to each group. Mercia is divided into its core lands in the Trent valley of 30,000 hides, and the various groups possibly under their control (Fig 1). The largest of these, the *Wrocenseate*, the Wrekin-dwellers of modern Shropshire and Cheshire, have 7000 hides, with the smallest territories having only 300 hides. The *Pecsaetan* were allocated 1200 hides (Fig 1) (Adams, 2021, 239 – 240; Higham and Ryan, 2013, 139 - 140). Given their inclusion in the Tribal Hidage, and a general lack of archaeological evidence of prior settlement, the *Pecsaetan* are traditionally thought of as an 'Anglo-Saxon' group. They have been described as 'colonisers', migrating to and inhabiting a largely uninhabited Peak District (Sidebottom 11 – 12; Hodges, 1991a, 112 - 113).

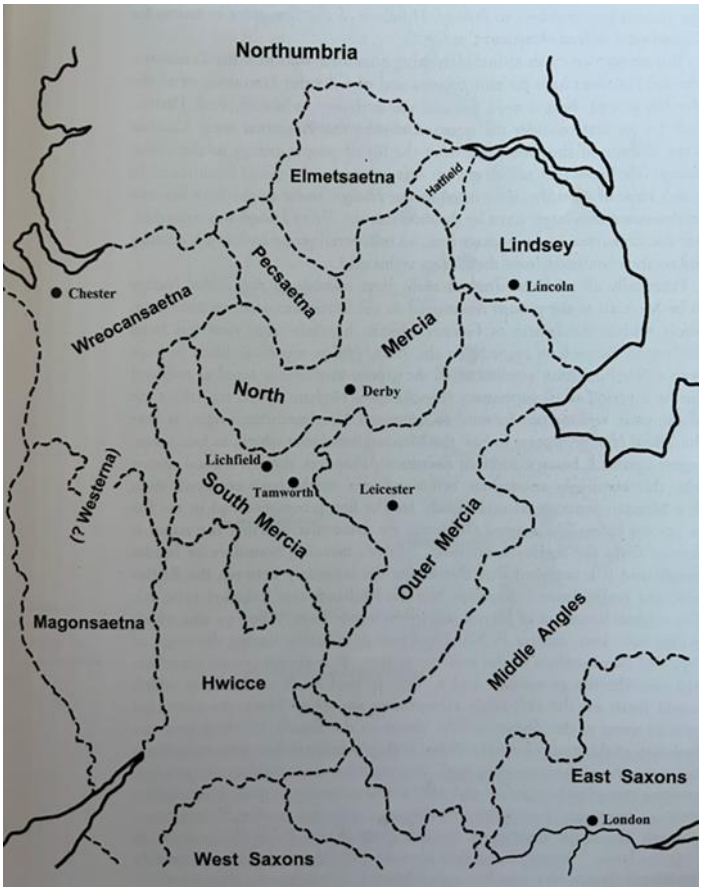

Figure 1: Simplified map of the territories listed in the Tribal Hidage (Sidebottom, 2020, 21)

The Peak District contains several distinct landscapes. It is an extensively upland and rural area, bordered to the west, east and south by lowlands which in the modern era became predominantly industrialised. The Peak District can be divided into two geological regions; the Dark and White Peak. The Dark Peak to the north comprises a geology of Millstone Grit. Though exploited for agriculture in prehistory, this landscape is ill-drained with thin soil and has been generally unsuitable for agriculture throughout history. The geology of White Peak, at the southern-most extent of the Pennines comprises a plateau of Carboniferous Limestone. In contrast to the Dark Peak, the land is relatively well-drained and has historically supported some arable activity though somewhat limited by a scarcity of fresh water due to a relatively low water table. The boundaries of the modern National Park, founded in 1950, includes much of the area of the Dark Peak and the White Peak, though many areas included within these geological zones are located outside of its formal boundaries, with the White Peak also designated a National Character Area (Fig 2). Most of the early-medieval archaeology in the area is present in the White Peak, and therefore it is this landscape which will be the focus of this project (Barnatt and Smith, 2004, 1 – 9; Sidebottom, 2020, 1 – 4).

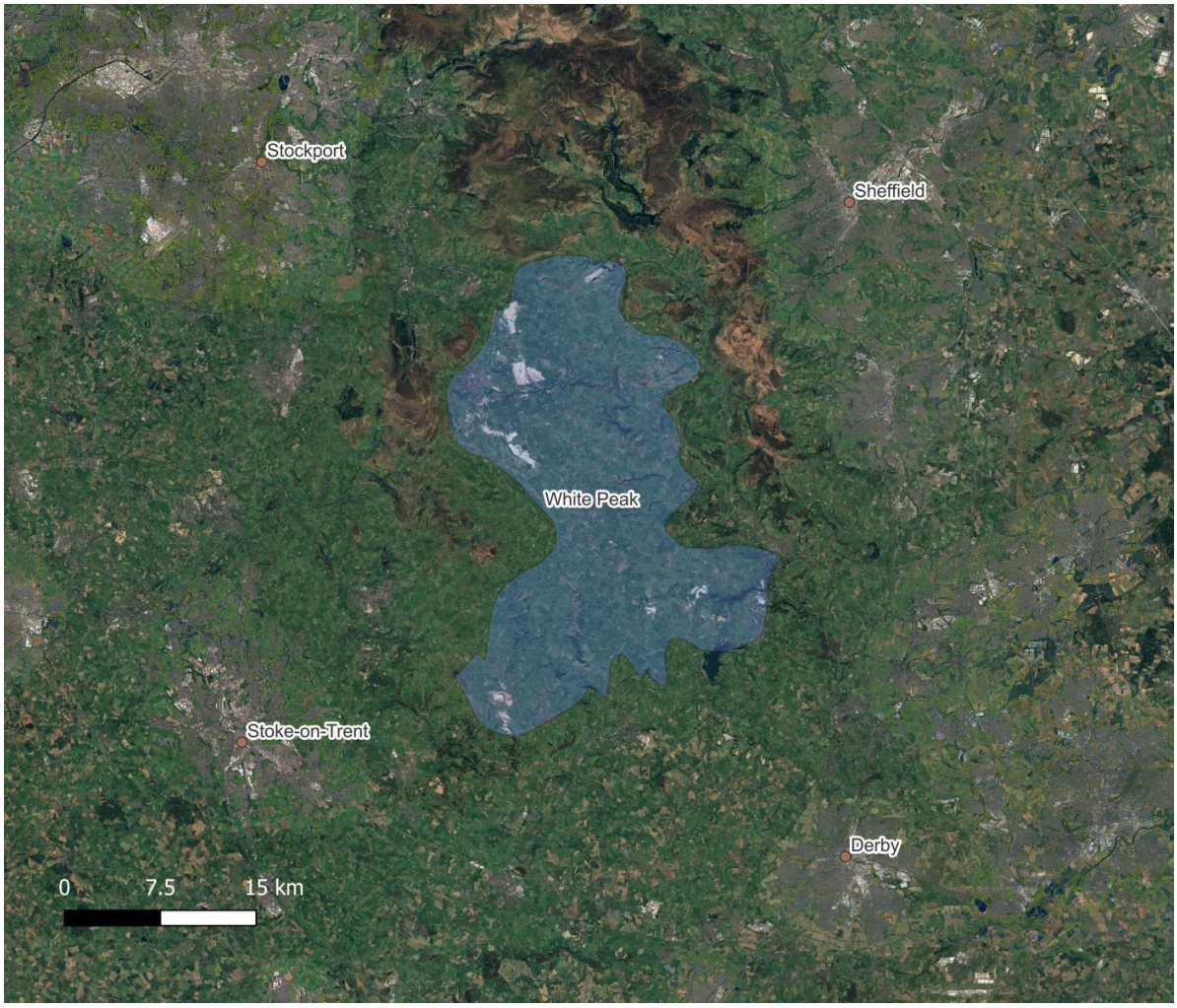

Figure 2: The White Peak National Character Area with some modern settlements for context (Author's own QGIS image with Google base layer).

A 'hide' is an area of land capable of supporting one family and has etymological links to the term 'household'. At the time of the Domesday Book, a hide equated to around 120 acres, though this almost certainly varied in size. The degree to which this 11th century calculation can be used for the centuries prior makes any assessment of the territory sizes for the Tribal Hidage incredibly imprecise (Ryan, 2011). Nevertheless, using this figure and converting to hectares means the 1200 hides of the *Pecsaetan* equates to 58,200 hectares. As a comparison, the area of the White Peak National Landscape area is 52,860 hectares.

Research Aims

Taking into account how the understanding of this period has evolved in recent decades, the purpose of this project is to assess archaeological evidence from the 4th to 7th centuries for the White Peak. This will allow an evaluation of any evidence of continuation from the Roman period, and what this might imply about the identity and origins of the *Pecsaetan*.

The Roman Context

The Romans first colonised the White Peak after their conquest of the Brigantes tribe in the 70's AD, the White Peak lying between Brigantian territory to the north and the Corieltauvi tribe to the south

and east, it is possible that the area was controlled by either one of them. Roman forts at *Derventio* (Little Chester, Derby), *Navio* (Brough), and possibly *Aquae Arnemetiae* (Buxton) were built at this time, all of which supported associated *vici* (Fig 3). The forts were later abandoned, but the civilian settlements seem to have survived into later centuries. The main resource for the Romans in the area was lead, with the main lead mining settlement being *Lutudarum*. The exact location of this settlement, and its exact nature has been disputed. A number of locations have been proposed, including Carsington and Matlock (Barnatt and Smith, 2004, 46 – 48; Millward and Robinson, 1975, 119 – 124; Sidebottom, 2020, 6 - 9). However, the most likely candidate is the town of Wirksworth, this reasoning discussed below. Based on inscriptions found on lead pigs, the people of this settlement have been described as the *Lutudarenses*, with these possibly a sub-tribe of the Corieltauvi given the eastern facing direction of the main river valleys (Higham, 1993, 34 - 35).

These settlements were connected by a series of Roman roads (Fig 3). The principal Roman road across the White Peak was The Street, which extended from *Aquae Arnemetiae* to *Derventio*. The southern portion of the route of this road is disputed, with some opinion that it passed via Carsington. However, this view is lacking in archaeological evidence, and recent research has concluded that it in fact extended through Wirksworth (Wirksworth Archaeological Society, 2023a). Archaeological evidence has been found of the Roman road surface along The Portway, an ancient route part of which extended from *Navio,* through Wirksworth and onwards to *Derventio* (Wirksworth Archaeological Society, 2021). Here it adjoined Rykneild Street, a road connecting *Derventio* to the south, and north to a presumed fort at Chesterfield. Some evidence has also been found for a further road extending north from Wirksworth to Chesterfield (Wirksworth Archaeological Society, 2017). A road was present connecting *Aquae Arnemetiae* and *Navio*, known as Bantham Gate (Derbyshire HER, 2025a).

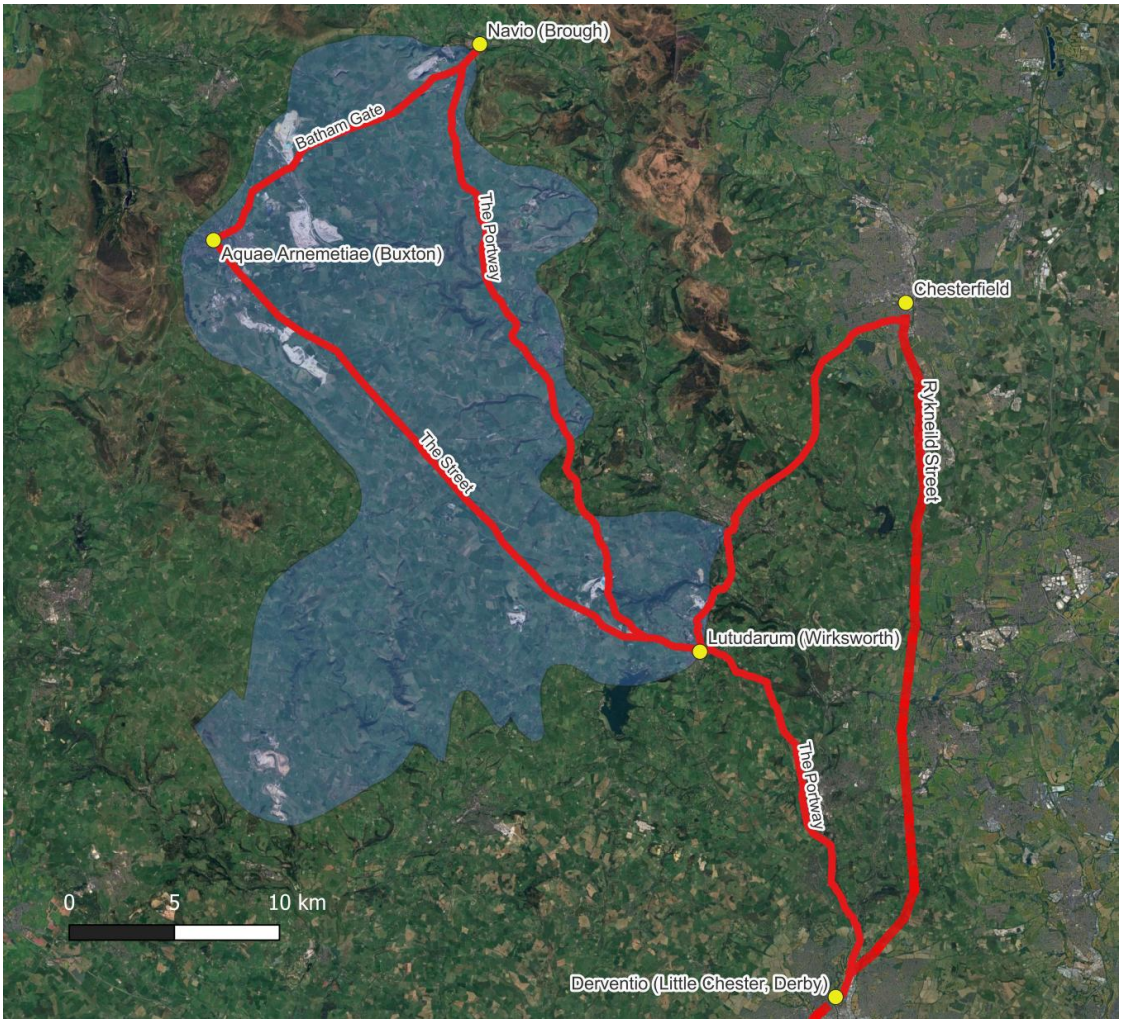

Figure 3: Principal Roman roads and settlements around the White Peak (Author's own QGIS image with Google base layer).

Earthworks

The emergence of an area reflecting the extent of the *Pecsaetan* prior to the 8th century is evidenced by the presence of sections of earthwork dykes which potentially demarcates the territory of this group. Two sections of dykes are present in the White Peak; the Grey Ditch and the Calver Cross Dyke (Fig 4).

The Grey Ditch is located near the village of Bradwell at the edge of the limestone plateau of the White Peak, roughly perpendicular to the route of the Batham Gate with *Navio* a short distance to the north-east. The remains cover a total distance of 1.6km, with 0.9km comprising sections of dyke. It was partially excavated in 1992 during the construction of a pipeline which cut through the route of the dyke. The dyke comprises both a bank and a ditch, with the excavated cross-section revealing evidence of the dyke being recut on at least five occasions, The first of these ditches extended as deep as up to 2.6m, with the bank extending up to 1.m above the natural surface behind the ditch. The bank was a purely sandy clay construction with no evidence of revetting, and evidence suggests it was constructed in one phase, as opposed to the repeated recutting of the ditch in front. The dyke was constructed across pre-existing agricultural land, with the pre-bank ploughsoil sealed by the bank containing sherds of Romano-British Derbyshire Ware dating to the mid-2nd to 4th centuries, suggesting the bank must

have been constructed after this date. Therefore, although not certain, it is likely that the Grey Ditch was constructed after the Roman period, especially given the fact that the ditch crosses the route of the Roman road (Guilbert and Taylor, 1992).

The Calver Cross Dyke is another short section of earth dyke present to the south. These remains comprise a much smaller section of dyke, extending to around 60m in extent. This dyke was once likely to have been much longer but has been impacted by historic mineral extraction in the area and now meets local paved lanes to the north and south. This dyke is not located near a Roman road, though hollow-ways extend up the valley in which it was located, indicating the presence of local routes in the early-medieval period. Similar to the Grey Ditch, this dyke is present at the edge of the limestone plateau of the White Peak, facing onto a lower elevation landscape to the east (Derbyshire HER, 2025b; Sidebottom, 2020, 53 - 54).

A further defensive feature may also be located at a natural escarpment to the east, known as Carl Walk (Fig 4). This rocky hilltop site has evidence of ramparts and revetting on its southern and western side. Traditionally this feature was considered to be Iron Age in date, though an early medieval date has been suggested based on a design of revetted stones bonded to a wall of turf (Millward and Robinson, 1975, 118). The exact route of the Roman road from *Navio* to the east is unknown, though one possible route takes it past Carl Walk to the south (Welch, 1984).

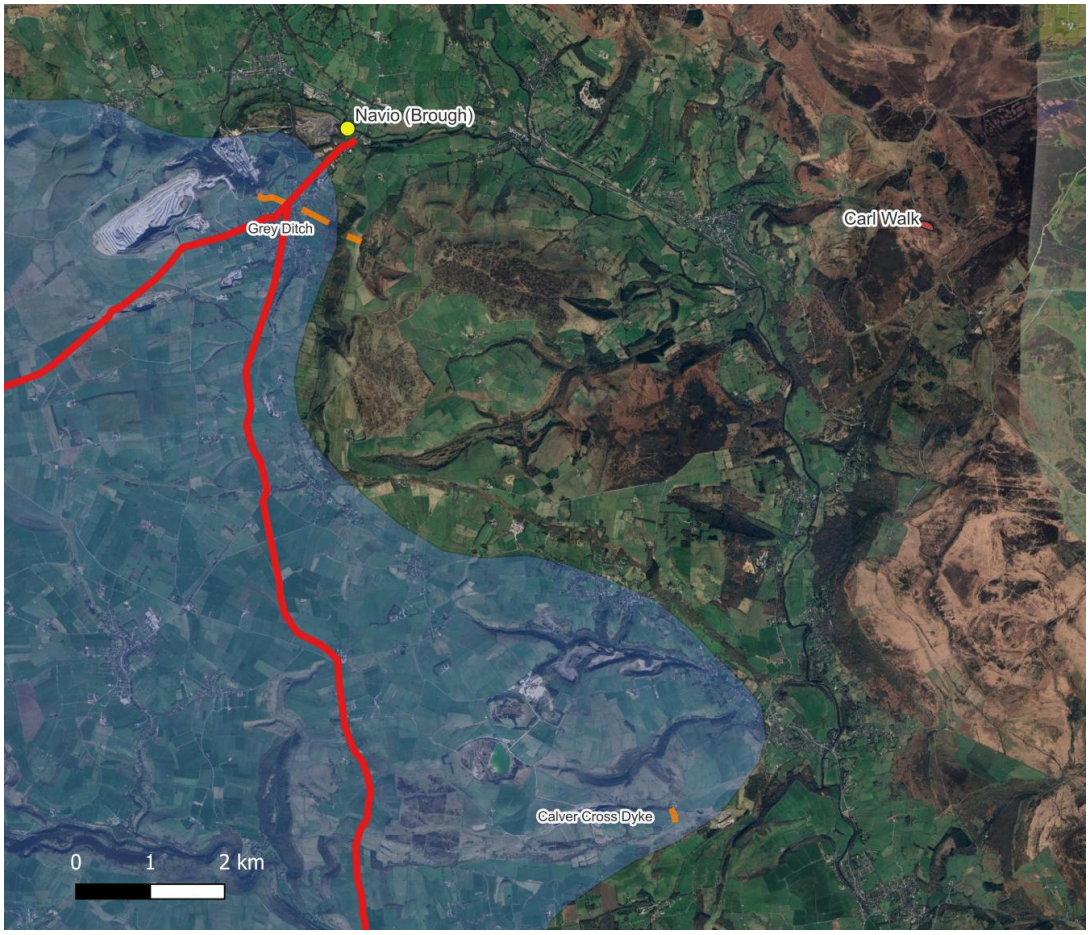

Figure 4: Location of the Grey Ditch, Calver Cross Dyke and Carl Walk, with Roman features and the White Peak for context (Author's own QGIS image with Google base layer).

These features may have been constructed to provide some kind of defence or barrier from the lower valleys to the north and east, with a higher elevation landscape behind them present to the south and west. With the Grey Ditch built across the Batham Gate, it can be thought that it was constructed after the Roman period to monitor traffic travelling along the Roman road. If an early-medieval date, the fortification at Carl Walk may represent the eastern extent of the territory of the inhabitants of the peak in this period. Therefore, it seems some kind of frontier had established here in the period of political instability from the 5th to 7th centuries, and raises questions who the builders were, and who they were excluding.

Early medieval dykes are present elsewhere in England. The most famous, such as Offa's Dyke, dates from later centuries. However, other earthworks dating from the centuries directly after the end of Roman rule have also been identified, one of the largest being the Wansdyke, which runs in sections east-west through Somerset and Wiltshire, partly along the route of the Bath-London Roman road. The view that these are defensive structures is now seen as simplistic; the dykes are too large to have been manned, and too easy to circumnavigate. They may have deterred smaller raiding groups, though they were likely symbolic boundary markers built by the leaders of groups in a fragmenting post-Roman province in an attempt to consolidate an area of territory. They do seem to have been built along frontier zones between Anglo Saxons and Britons and therefore may have served to emphasise a divide between increasingly differing cultural groups (Higham and Ryan, 2013. 53 - 54).

The area of the Grey Ditch and the Calver Cross Dyke had been located close to a political boundary of the Brigantes and the Corieltauvi before the Roman period. There is evidence to suggest that a sense of tribal identity lasted through the Roman period, re-emerging following the collapse of central Roman authority and influencing how Britain fragmented into different territories. It is noted how the Wansdyke lies along the tribal boundary of the Dobunni to the north and the Belgae and Atrebates to the south, and that these pre-Roman boundaries may have even informed the extent of the early Anglo-Saxon kingdoms, with the territory of the Cantii and the Iceni being remarkably similar to the extent of the Kingdoms of Kent and East Anglia respectively (Laycock, 2008, 141 – 143, 241). It seems an oversimplification that early-medieval territory boundaries can all be linked to pre-Roman ones. Though this raises a possibility that some residual memory of the boundary along the eastern edge of the White Peak was persistent into the early-medieval period, explaining the formation of a boundary separating the White Peak from the lowlands to the south and east. Perhaps a more obvious explanation, however, is the simple difference in landscape characteristics between these two areas.

Barrow burials

One of the most characteristic features associated with the *Pecsaetan* is the practice of inhumation within barrows, either as primary burials or secondary burials in Bronze Age barrows. Barrow burials are common across the Peak District, with 'low', from the Old English *hlaw*, meaning burial mound being one of the most common place name elements in the area, such Minninglow and Arbor Low (Millward and Robinson, 1975, 142 – 143). There are differing estimates on the number of early-medieval barrow burials, ranging from 22 to 70 in the White Peak area, though Figure 5 includes the location of approximately 30 with definite evidence from this period defined by Brown (2024). Many of these were excavated in the 19th century, a major limitation in trying to understand the nature of these burials and the identity of those buried within them (Sidebottom, 2020, 47).

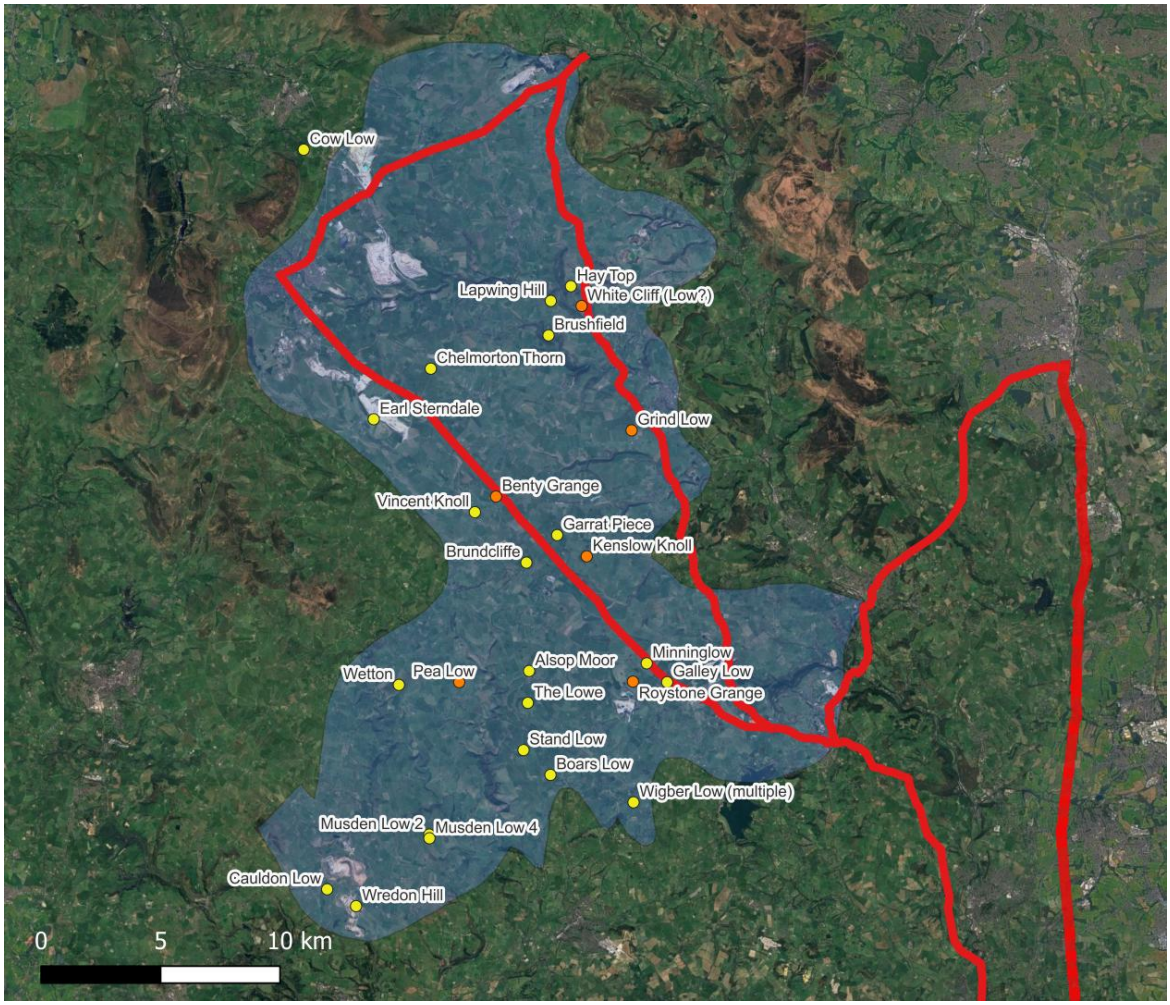

Figure 5: Locations of barrow burials, with the Roman roads and White Peak area for context. Barrow burials referred to below are marked in orange (Author's own QGIS image with Google base layer).

Much of the interpretation about the identity of those interred is based on the grave goods present within them. Most of these grave goods were commonplace items, such as beads, knives, textiles, combs, metalwork and other day-to-day items, and do not provide much information concerning those interred (Brown, 2024). An analysis of the dating of these grave goods has indicated that these barrow burials date from the 5th-7th century, based on their artefact-type classification in Hoilund Neilsen's typology (Hines and Bayliss, 2013, 519). The variety of the artifacts found within these barrow burials are too numerous to describe here, however a number are more notable, with varying interpretations of these resulting in differing conclusions of the identify of those interred.

One of the most well-known is the Benty Grange helmet (Fig 6), found within the barrow of the same name. This supports a silver Latin cross and a boar, found alongside the remains of a leather cup with silver cross decoration. In an analysis of the Peak District barrows by Ozzanne (1962), this helmet is interpreted as 'Anglian', based on the presence of the cross, therefore interpreted as originating after the traditional dating of the re-introduction of Christianity in the area in 650's, with the helmet being compared to artifacts from Sutton Hoo. Benty Grange also contained the escutcheon of a hanging bowl, something found at several other barrow burials. The decoration on this was compared to other similar artefacts found elsewhere in England, such as Winchester.

Figure 6: The Benty Grange helmet (left) and a modern replica (right) (Sheffield Museums Trust, 2025)

Examples of artifacts also determined by Ozzanne to be evidence of an 'Anglian' elite were the finds at White Low, which contained a gold filigree pendant cross and a filigree and pendant disc, their design being compared to similar finds excavated in Kent. While not directly matching with the styles of these, Ozzanne concludes this is due to Mercians having their own craftsmen. These conclusions therefore correlate with the traditional understanding of the *Pecsaetan*, that they were an 'Anglo-Saxon' people with the styles of these artefacts being introduced from elsewhere in Britain where similar artifacts have been found. An Anglo-Saxon origin of these barrow burials is perhaps evidenced by the fact that Anglo-Saxon barrow burials are also found across England to the south and east. That said, in the immediate south and east in the traditional Mercian 'core territory', flat graves and cremation burials were more predominant, (Williams, 1997), therefore if following the traditional understanding that the *Pecsaetan* elite were colonizers, you might expect burial practice to be the same.

A differing interpretation of the origin of these barrow burials, based on a different selection of grave goods was proposed by Fowler (1954). Noting the range of grave goods and a confusing mix of material types, she acknowledged that while some artifacts are indicative of an 'Anglo-Saxon' culture, she also highlights artifacts within others which might indicate a 'Romanising', and therefore British influence. Individuals are known to have been interred in barrow burials in the Roman period. Most evidence of this comes from the south-east, such as the barrow burials at Bartlow Hills in Essex (Dark and Dark, 1997, 66). There is, however, evidence for possible Roman activity in one barrow burial in the White Peak at Roystone Grange, the site of a Roman farm (Fig 5). Here, pottery and metalwork characteristic of the Roman period was found within a Bronze Age barrow, and it is presumed that this material was deposited at this time by those living nearby (Historic England, 2025a; Hodges, 1991b, 84). It is also recorded that 48 Romano-British coins were found within Pea Low, though these were subsequently lost (Brown, 2024).

One specific form of artefact which Fowler concludes to be indicative of 'British' influence are hanging-bowls, vessels of bronze with decorative escutcheons. Four in total were found in the White Peak, including one at Benty Grange, and one within the Grindlow barrow. Fowler considered these artifacts suggestive of a British influence due to post-Roman decorative motifs on the escutcheons, though she acknowledges that most hanging bowls are found within Anglo-Saxon graves in different parts of England. The understanding of the origin and dating of these artifacts is diverse, with opinions shifting

over time. Fowler may have been influenced by earlier assessment (Leeds, 1936) that concludes that these were a product of 'sub-Roman' Britain. However, later studies have suggested a later 6th or 7th century dating, with other possible origins even including Scotland (Lucy, 2000, 54 – 55).

Another artifact taken as evidence of a British influence are penannular brooches, found at Kenslow Knoll and Wigber Low (Loveluck, 1995). One findspot of a large penannular brooch was recorded at a site in Pikehall located adjacent to The Street, this large brooch featuring zoomorphic designs and has been dated to the 6th century (Derbyshire HER, 2025c), suggestive of the presence of a small Romano-British community continuing after the end of the Roman era (Hodges, 1991b, 96). These artifacts were later classified by Fowler (1960), with her categorising them into a range of types dating from the Iron Age to the late-Roman period. Some of these, such as 'Type G' brooches' have been seen as characteristic of a continuation of Roman society in the south and west of Britain due to their design (Dickenson, 1982). However, Fowler characterised these based on the available knowledge at the time. More recent analyses have concluded that their influences are far more complex, influenced by parallels on the continent (Booth, 2025).

Some, but not all, of the barrows which Fowler (1954) concludes to be indicative of British influence date to the 6th century or earlier. Several theories are proposed for these traits; that they are the graves of Britons with Anglo-Saxon artifacts acquired by trade, that they represent a mixed group of Anglo-Saxons and Britons, or that they exclusively originate from an Anglo-Saxon elite. Loveluck (1995) favoured the theory of a mixed group, though given a potential range of over 200 years for the dating of these barrows, it may be that multiple explanations apply.

Perhaps a more objective view of the identity of the individuals interred needs to be considered. The existing interpretations of these artifacts, and what they might imply about identity, involves the application of the modern understanding of these artifacts. Taking the Benty Grange helmet as an example, the modern understanding of it as an Anglo-Saxon piece of craftsmanship is used to infer that the person it was buried with identified as an Anglo-Saxon. However, this may not have been the case. The individual to whom it belongs may not have had an understanding of the concept of being an 'Anglo-Saxon', or that the helmet was produced by Anglo-Saxons. It may indeed be an Anglo-Saxon artifact, but this does not mean that the individual identified as such. He may have had no understanding of the meaning of the cruciform on the helmet, instead seeing it simply as an ornate piece of craftsmanship and an indicator of wealth.

What can be said with more certainty is that these burials indicate the presence of a substantial elite class and a presence of a degree of wealth. While many date from the 7th century, the dating summarised by Brown (2024) suggests that many date from much earlier, with approximately half possibly dating from the 6th century. This seems too early for them to purely originate from an 'Anglo-Saxon' elite, given the traditionally understood chronology of Anglo-Saxon expansion across Britain.

Lead-mining

As discussed above, one of the principal Roman settlements thought to have been located in the White Peak was *Lutudarum*, a lead-mining town. The knowledge of this settlement comes principally from two sources. It is listed within the Ravenna Cosmography, reputedly compiled by an anonymous cleric in the city around the year 700, a time in which Ravenna was still within the Roman (Byzantine) Empire, and was drawn from a variety of earlier Greek and Roman sources. It is possible that there is a degree of inaccuracy in the record due to factors such as a lack of understanding of the sources by the author,

and the fact that no original copies remain, the existing versions dating from the medieval era. However, *Lutudarum* is listed between *Vernemeto* (Willoughby on the Wolds, Leicestershrie) and *Derventio* (Rivet and Smith, 1981, 188 – 200, 206). The second principal source for the town, and its association with the lead industry come from lead ingots themselves. A total of 112 lead ingots have been found from the Roman period, with 33 of these attributed to *Lutudarum* based on inscriptions on the ingots. Typical for Roman inscriptions, most are abbreviated, with *Lutudarum* appearing as 'LVT' or 'LVTVD', or on one, 'LVTVDARES' (Wirksworth Archaeological Society, 2024). This is a substantial proportion, indicating that *Lutudarum* was one of the principal centres for the lead industry in the Roman period (Higham, 1993, 34).

The exact location of *Lutudarum* is disputed. It has long been attested that the town was located at the site of Carsington Water, based on the finding of the remains of buildings prior to the construction of the man-made reservoir in the 1970's (Derbyshire HER, 2025d). This assumption is part of the reason why The Street was often thought to pass through Carsington, bypassing Wirksworth (for example, as depicted in Sidebottom, 2020, 10). However, this was not supported by actual archaeological excavation, with recent work showing the Roman Road network extending to Wirksworth (Wirksworth Archaeological Society, 2023a). The knowledge of Roman finds in general in the area also shows a strong cluster around Wirksworth (Wirksworth Archaeological Society, 2023b).

Wirksworth has been a centre of mining for most of history, with detailed records dating from the 16th century, Today, it is the only remaining town to hold a Barmote Court, which supervises mining rights. Cockerton (1962) notes how the modern Barmaster can be seen as a virtual successor to the Roman *Procuratores Metallorum*, the officer with jurisdiction over the mines. The lead industry seems to have been thriving in the time of the Tribal Hidage. By the early 8th century, the town had links to the abbey of Repton, with a record of a coffin made of Wirksworth lead sent by the abbess of Repton to St Guthlac of Crowland in 714. The Wirksworth charter of 835 describes how the abbess of the time gave Wirksworth to a Humbert, on the condition he give an annual gift of 300 shillings worth of lead to Christ Church, Canterbury (Wiltshire and Shone, 2016, 13), equating to approximately 160 tons (Wirksworth Archaeological Society, 2024). Whether this gift was given or not, it suggests that such a quantity was considered possible.

There may be a depiction of a lead miner from this period. The 'T'owd Man', (Figure 7), a stone-carved depiction of a lead miner inlaid in the wall of the church in Wirksworth, originally from nearby Bonsall, is described as being around 1000 years old. Its appearance however seems older, and its actual dating is unknown, raising the possibility that it depicts an early-medieval lead miner, or someone of an even older origin (Seddon, 2019).

Figure 7: The ‘T’owd Man’, present within the Wirksworth church (Author’s own image).

Direct evidence for a continuation of this industry, or any production of lead between the 4th and 7th centuries is difficult to discern, with little definite evidence. The isotopes of lead can be analysed in metal artifacts from this period to try and date the metals within them. Lead is often associated with silver as lead ores contain quantities of silver. One study of silver artifacts from Kent from the 5th to 7th centuries used quantities of lead isotopes to determine that these artifacts were crafted from recycled Roman metals (Martin and Ponting, 2025). However, it must be noted that although this may have been the case in Kent, this may not necessarily have been the case elsewhere in the country. A study of isotope data from York concludes that lead from the North Pennines was a source for an industry extending across the North Sea from at least the 8th century. This same study also concludes that Derbyshire may have been the one of the only sources of lead in earlier centuries, with the establishment of religious houses in the 7th century facilitating an increased need for production, and that the area was a possible source of lead to York at the time of the Viking takeover in the 9th century (Kershaw and Merkel, 2023).

Another method is to analyse atmospheric lead pollution by looking at concentrations within peat deposits. One such study using measurements extracted from Lindow Bog near Manchester shows that lead deposition dropped at the end of the Roman period, this being expected given the collapse of the Roman state. However, they do not drop off completely, remaining higher than the pre-Roman levels until the early 7th century, and with a slight increase at the end of the 5th century compared to the mid-4th century (Le Roux *et al*., 2004). Lead pollution has also been analysed in Greenland ice cores. One study analysed the evidence of pollution in a Europe-wide context, which exhibited a similar pattern. Deposition was substantial until a reduction they associate with the Antonine Plague in the 2nd century. Pollution levels increased again, extending beyond the traditional end of the Roman era, until a second drop off which they correlate with the Justinian Plague of the mid-6th century

(McConnell *et al*, 2018), with another study suggesting pollution specifically from north-western Europe (McConnell *et al*, 2019). Obviously, the degree to which these levels from European wide sources can be linked to activity in the Peak District is very limited, though it does suggest a level of pollution from the 4th – 7th centuries, and this pollution, albeit limited compared to other time periods, must have had a source.

As noted, the evidence for a continuation of a Roman industry beyond the early 5th century is very limited. This may be due to limitations with scientific methods, or a lack of archaeological research in the area. Direct evidence of lead mining may also appear similar to earlier Roman activity and mis-attributed. However, it could be inferred that with such a prominent industry in both the Roman period and the later Anglo-Saxon period centred on Wirksworth, some continuation, at least at a local level, might be possible. Such an economic resource, in an area where agriculture is less abundant than the Trent valley to the south and east, was possibly an evident source of revenue for inhabitants of post-Roman *Lutudarum.*

Place-names

Christianity was the Roman state religion, and there is much evidence that it was widespread in Britain by the end of the 3rd century, particularly in urban areas. The early Anglo-Saxons were pagan, and in the 5th and 6th centuries, much of eastern Britain had converted to Germanic paganism. Christianity however, survived in the western part of the island (Fleming, 2011, 121- 131). The Anglo-Saxon kingdoms began to convert to Christianity from the end of the 6th century onwards, with Mercia thought to have begun to convert from 658, following the conversion of King Wulfhere (Adams, 2025, 50 – 52)

Place-names can imply surviving Christian communities as Anglo-Saxon paganism spread further to the west and north. One of these is the 'Eccles' place name, an Old English loan-word of Latin origin. It derives from a Brittonic term *egles*, which in turn derives the Latin *ecclesia*, meaning 'church', and can be compared to the modern Welsh *eglwys*. Therefore, 'eccles' placenames refer to places with a surviving Roman church, which in time passed into Old English. These place names tend to be more common in the north-west in Lancashire and Cheshire, indicating a possibility that Romano-British Christian communities persisted in these areas into the 5th and 6th centuries, with limited examples also in the south of Britain (Cameron,1968, 87 – 92).

On this basis, there are hints of a surviving Christian community in the White Peak. The River Ecclesbourne is a tributary of the Derwent (Fig 8), with its source at Wirksworth and joining the Derwent at Duffield, north of Derby. With 'bourne' deriving from the Old English *burna*, meaning 'stream', the name Ecclesbourne means 'stream of the Roman church' (Gelling, 1997, 98; Gelling and Cole, 2014, 9). Where exactly this church may have been located has been speculated upon, though given the evidence described above that it was a Roman settlement an obvious candidate is Wirksworth, with this Christian community being prominent enough that the Anglo-Saxons in the lowlands referred to the stream that flowed from there as the Ecclesbourne (Millward and Robinson, 1975, 139). With this in mind, to the north-west of Derby and in the direction of Wirksworth is the placename of Cumberhill. This drives from the Old English *cumbre*, meaning 'Welsh', and can be compared to the Welsh for Wales, *Cymru*. This may be further evidence of Old English speakers in the Trent valley referring to a British population in the hills of the White Peak (Gelling, 1997, 93, 95).

Direct archaeological investigations in Wirksworth are very limited, especially at the site of the current church for obvious reasons. No evidence of a church predating the existing church is known, though assuming that there was one, it seems logical it may have been located on the same site. Similarly, there is no evidence for a Roman fort, though, as noted above, given forts are known to have been present at other Roman settlements in the area it is not impossible that one was present in Wirksworth forming the basis of the town, and that an early church was constructed within this. It was common for early churches to be built in Roman forts in Britain, with twenty-five identified in total. Most of these are located in the south, such as the Saxon Shore forts and founded after the conversion of the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms, however there is evidence for post-Roman churches along Hadrians Wall, and the possible remains of a Saxon church have also been identified within the Roman fort in Dodderhill in Droitwich. The difficulty of identifying early churches is due to the decline in masonry construction at the end of the Roman period and a prevalence of timber, or a simple lack of excavation (Bell, 1998; Robson and Hurst, 2000, Snyder, 2003, 112).

In addition to the Ecclesbourne, other Eccles place names also surround the White Peak (Fig 8). An Eccles Cross is present in Hope, close to the site of the Roman fort of *Navio* and the Grey Ditch (Historic England, 2025b). An Ecclesall and an Ecclesfield are also located further afield in the suburbs of modern Sheffield. Most place-names in the White Peak are Old English in origin, as is the case with the rest of England. However, some place names of Brittonic origin survive in the wider area. Of note is Crich, located to the east of Wirksworth on the other side of the Derwent Valley. This name derives from *crug*, a Brittonic term for ‘hill’, and still a word in modern Welsh (Gelling, 1997, 138).

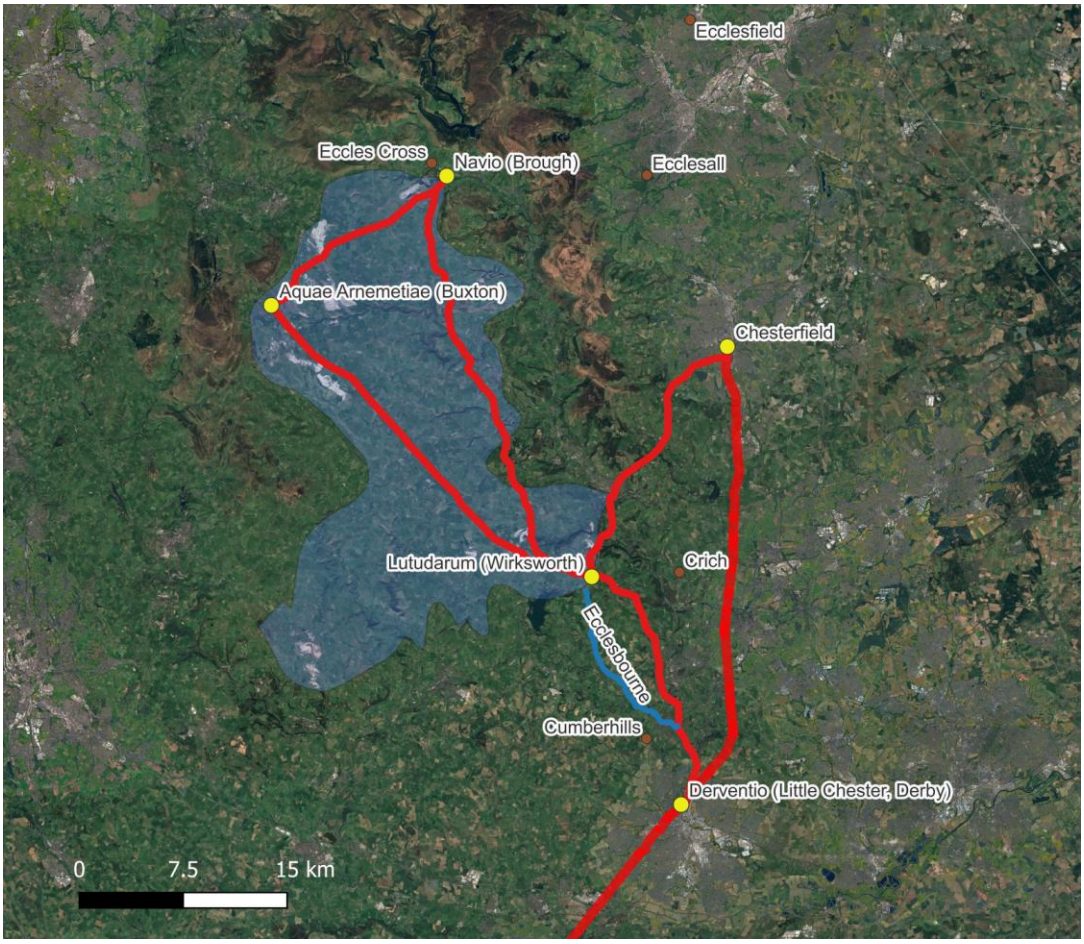

Figure 8: 'Eccles' and other Brittonic place names within the White Peak and surrounding area, with Roman roads and settlements for context (Author's own QGIS image with Google base layer).

By far the predominant source of place names in the White Peak is Old English, with a significant degree of Scandinavian place names deriving from later centuries. However, these few remaining Brittonic place name elements provide some clues about the nature of settlement prior to the Anglo-Saxon period and may be indicative of the degree of continuation of Romano-British settlement (Gelling, 1997, 87 - 88).

Stone Monuments

Set into the north wall of the church at Wirksworth is a stone carving called the Wirksworth Stone or Slab (Fig 9). This artifact comprises a stone tomb lid, and was discovered face down, over a stone-built grave during works in the early 19th century. The decoration consists of an upper and lower register of figural design, depicting a series of scenes from the life of Christ, including the Crucifixion, Resurrection and the Ascension. The sculpture is not complete, with the left-hand side broken off, with two or three of the panels possibly missing. This sculpture is generally dated to the late 8th century and is included as part of the wider corpus of 'Anglian' stone monuments of Derbyshire and Staffordshire (CASSS, 2022a).

Figure 9: The Wirksworth Stone (Author's own image)

The design of the stone has elicited much discussion of its dating and origin. Figural ornament is common across the area, with carvings present in settlements near Wirksworth such as Bakewell, Bradbourne and Eyam. However, what seems to set the Wirksworth Stone apart is the fact that its figural design is narrative, compared to the iconic representation of figures across many stone crosses in the region (Hawkes, 2018). The sculpture which the Wirksworth stone is most closely compared to is one at Bakewell (CASSS, 2022b), though this is a fragmentary piece and very worn. Other decorative styles common across stone carvings in Derbyshire and neighbouring Staffordshire include plant-scrolls, animal ornaments and some examples of knotwork, all of which are absent from the Wirksworth Stone (Hawkes, 2018, 72 - 73).

The dating of the Wirksworth Stone is generally accepted to be sometime from the late 8th century, with this conclusion been reached in other evaluations across the 20th century. These conclusions seem to derive from the fact that given the Christian iconography, the stone must derive from a period after the conversion of Mercia. The description in the church itself states that it derives from Christian preachers from Northumbria. However, most assessments acknowledge the stone has an apparent complex variety of influences, resulting in debate about its exact dating (Durham University, 2022a – Wirksworth 5) (Armstrong *et al*., 47 - 48).

Kurth (1945) rejected comparisons with later stone crosses and concluded that the stone cannot date from later than the year 800, given features such as 'deep parallel folds of drapery', 'ribbed wings of angels' and 'doll-like heads' and noted how it shows analogies with many early-Christian sarcophagi. Cockerton (1962) proposes a much earlier date for the carving, with much of this conclusion derived from one key detail; the presence of an *Angus Dei,* a sacrificial lamb on the crucifixion cross. Here, it is proposed that the carving has Byzantine influences, and given that depictions of a sacrificial lamb were banned in 692 by the eastern church, the carving may date from before this. It is also noted that if the

missing panels were present, the cross would be located to the centre of the panel, perhaps increasing the importance of this imagery.

Armstrong *et al*. (1996) compared the Wirksworth slab to three other stone monuments, which they refer to as all 'Anglian' the other three being stone cross fragments from Bakewell, Bradbourne and Eyam. They reject Cockerton's conclusion, stating that the edicts of the Eastern church had little bearing in the West, and that the presence of a lamb cannot be taken as evidence of an earlier date. They consider the Wirksworth stone to date from around the year 800 and associated with the other three sculptures based on some aspects of the style. However, they also describe design features on the three cross fragments that are notably absent from the Wirksworth stone, such as vinework decoration. The cross fragments do feature some figural decoration, though these are individual figures, rather than the array of figures on the Wirksworth stone. While accepting the traditional dating, this study acknowledges that the Wirksworth stone does seem to have some unique influences, with many puzzling aspects to its religious iconography and possible Eastern influences. It is noted that their conclusions are based on the view that all these monuments must have been crafted after the conversion of Mercia after the mid-7th century.

One other interesting comparison can be made to another tomb lid present in the Derbyshire region, found in the vicarage garden of the church in Repton (Fig 10). This is dated to the late 8th to early 9th century, sometime after the 'accepted' dating of the Wirksworth stone. As mentioned above, the church at Wirksworth had links with the church at Repton. You might expect these two tomb lids to bear at least some similarity in design. However, the difference between them is obvious, with the Repton tomb lid featuring knotwork and interlacing designs common across much Anglo-Saxon stone sculpture, with no figures present (CASSS, 2022c).

Figure 10: The tomb lid found at Repton (CASSS, 2022c)

Existing discussion of the Wirksworth stone acknowledges its uniqueness, though attempts to 'fit it in' to the known corpus of Anglo-Saxon stone sculpture. Therefore, given the possibility that, as discussed above, Wirksworth was the site of *Lutudarum*, and supported a Christian community beyond the Roman period, it raises the possibility there could be alternative explanations for its origins, or the influences on its design. Kurth (1945) notes how it resembles Roman sarcophagi, and it has been compared to the Sacophagus of the Twelve Apostles in Ravenna (Wiltshire and Shone, 2016, 9). If an early Christian community was present in *Lutudarum,* and remained present into the 5th and 6th centuries, it may have facilitated the conditions for such a sculpture to have been produced, with several possibilities. It could derive from this Christian community in the 5th or 6th centuries, ether an original production or inspired from an earlier, now lost, Roman piece of sculpture. Alternatively, even if it was produced in later centuries and Anglo-Saxon in origin, if a Christian community was present at Wirksworth, it could still have been inspired by earlier sculpture remaining from the Roman era or this continuing Chirstian community. This is all speculative, though surely the possibilities should be considered. At the very least, the very presence of such a piece of sculpture suggests the importance of Wirksworth by the 8th century.

Conclusions

As with the rest of Britain, Post-Roman archaeology in the White Peak is obscure. Archaeological evidence across the area is limited, due to a lack of opportunities for investigation given the lack of development, and a general lack of archaeological work historically in Derbyshire, with only 151 records in the Derbyshire HER for the period 401 – 1066 out of a total of 8000 (Barrett, 2000). As such, the topics discussed above are limited in evidence and taken individually they may not suggest much. However, together they may hint at a greater whole.

Earthworks, though very limited in extent, imply the formation of a fragmented territory soon after the end of the Roman era, this territory connected by a series of former Roman roads and possibly corresponding to the *Pecsaetan* territory listed in the Tribal Hidage. Such earthworks must have required a significant degree of organisation and manpower to facilitate, with barrow burials across the White Peak providing evidence of an elite class which may have organised such works. These barrow burials exhibit a degree of wealth in this class and have been dated from at least the 6th century. One source of this wealth may have been a continuation of lead mining in the former Roman town of *Lutudarum*, with evidence that this may have been one of the few, if not only, sources of lead in this period, therefore a unique economic resource forming the basis of this territory. Place name evidence also indicates that there was a continuing Christian community in *Lutudarum*, this possibly a source of inspiration towards the design of the Wirksworth Stone, as well as the design of the Benty Grange helmet.

A possible continuation of Roman settlement, industry and religion, and a possibility it preceded the traditional dating for the emergence of Mercia, hints that this territory originated as and could best be understood as a 'Romano-British' or 'Brittonic' kingdom, though it is noted this does not necessarily mean this is how the people of this area may have identified themselves. The evidence from the barrow burials has been variously described of implying an Anglo-Saxon or British identity of the elite. Kingdom may be too grandiose a term; if it existed it was likely no more than a territory under the control of a warlord or chief. Yet the term is used for other minor territories in this period such as Powys and Lindsey (Fig 11) (Williams, 2022).

This ‘Kingdom of the Peak’, as we might call it, could perhaps be best compared to Elmet, a Brittonic kingdom to the north-east of the *Pecsaetan* thought to have been centred around the area of modern Leeds. This existed from the 5th to 7th centuries and possibly originated around former Roman forts and settlements. A possible king of Elmet is recorded in Old Welsh sources, and the name of this kingdom has been found on the Aliortus Stone in North Wales, as well as preserved in the modern placenames of Barwick-in-Elmet and Sherburn-in-Elmet, in West and North Yorkshire (Williams, 2022, 31 - 59). Elmet is typically included on maps of the generalised kingdoms of Britain around the year 600 (Fig 11), and they are recorded as the *Elmetsaete* in the Tribal Hidage (Higham and Ryan, 2013).

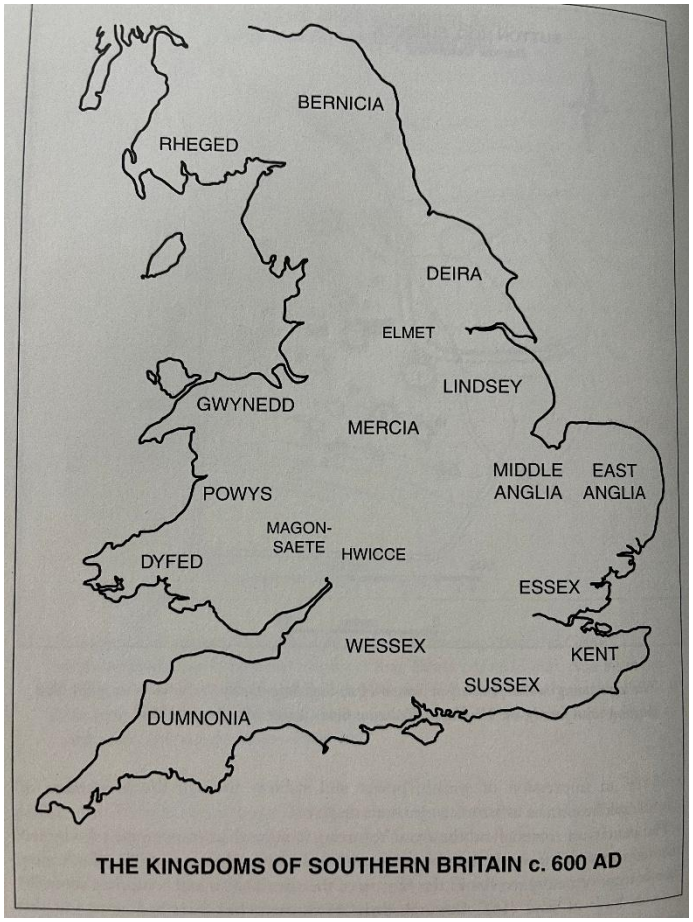

Figure 11: Map of Britain depicting the various kingdoms at year 600 (Reynolds, 1999, 54)

A chronology of this kingdom can be speculated at. It perhaps emerged as one of many fragmented territories following the collapse of Roman Britain, centred on the lead-mining settlement of *Lutudarum*. The *Lutudareses* did not know that Roman government had ended, therefore a continuation of settlement may have led to the consolidation of a territory centred on the White Peak during the 5th century, developing into a ‘kingdom’. This kingdom may have retained some form of independence until the early 7th century following a series of wars between Mercia and Northumbria during the reign of Penda of Mercia (c.626 – 655). Mercia is recorded as having alliances with various Brittonic kingdoms during this time on the Mercian side during battles such as Hatfield Chase (633) and Maserfield (642) (Adams, 2025, 14 – 41). Both Mercia and Northumbria began to incorporate smaller kingdoms surrounding them at this time. This was the fate of Elmet, incorporated by Northumbria in the 7th century (Williams, 2022, 49 – 50). Could the aforementioned ‘Kingdom of the Peak’ have fought on the Mercian side, later being absorbed into Mercia with a new Anglo-Saxon elite?

Ultimately, we may never know the origins of the *Pecsaetan*. Further archaeological works may reveal more evidence, though early medieval archaeological remains are relatively rare, especially in an upland area like the Peak District. What may be more likely is the identification of Roman remains within Wirksworth, something which local archaeologists are working towards. Such remains may give more credence to the possible continuation of *Lutudarum*, and the hypothesis presented above.

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