

BOROUGHES
in the Chester County Pleas,
CHES 29/1–22
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The only known settlements in Roman times outside Chester in (what became) Cheshire were Condote and Saline, the positions of which are roughly known from the Antonine Itinerary and the Ravenna Cosmography, and were at or near Northwich and Middlewich respectively. Certainly, the saltpits in the wiches will have attracted population from an early age, and by our period they were still thriving, and Middlewich and Wych Malbanc (Nantwich) seem to have become boroughs by prescription.

The only other possible town recorded here before Domesday was Davenport, said to have been broken into by Sihtric the Dane in 920 (Symeon of Durham); if so, so effectively that it never ever after re-emerged as even a village. There are a number of –bury placenames that suggest settlements that amounted to more than a township; and the Anglo Saxon Chronicle for 914 (C) says that the fortress *æt Eades byrig* was strengthened in early summer.

Most of the Cheshire boroughs were 13th-century innovations, created out of manors by their lords as a species of improvement. In two cases, Altrincham and Macclesfield, the number and size of burgages and holdings in the fields were specified in the founding charters, suggesting the actual creation of new settlements. Minor barons could give little to a new borough to help its development, because freedom of toll throughout their lands did not amount to much: the Crown could be persuaded to grant the new borough a market and fair. The new portmote courts were very little different from the old manor courts in terms of powers and jurisdiction.

The Crown (earl or king), however, had the power of granting considerable privileges to boroughs of their own creation, such as Macclesfield; and the charter for Stockport borough claimed to be wielding powers granted to the baron by the earl. The effectiveness of the boroughs created by the Cheshire barons was limited by the demise of the baronies themselves. Whether a settlement becoming a borough was a stimulus to development is uncertain: Altrincham and Over became proverbial as vestigial. The Crown certainly encouraged the planting of boroughs together with castles in conquered Welsh territories.