

## THE ANGLO-SAXON BOUNDARY OF SWINFORD

For anyone interested in local history there is a great fascination in old boundaries. To be able to trace the same boundary through the centuries and still find evidence of it today in name or geographical feature is a source of wonder and satisfaction. Anglo-Saxon boundary charters provide some of the best opportunities for such research but their survival is comparatively rare. Any Anglo-Saxon charter for Hagley has long since disappeared and the nearest one to Hagley is that of 'Swinford' dated AD 951-955. Several attempts to trace these Anglo-Saxon boundaries have more or less followed the boundaries of the later 'Old Swinford' which once included Stourbridge, Lye, Wollescote, Wollaston and Norton. One of the chief supporters of this theory was R.L.Chambers, MA writing in *Oldswinford, Bedcote and Stourbridge Manors and Boundaries* (1978). His interpretation was based on that of G.B.Grundy in *Saxon Charters of Worcestershire* (1931) *Birmingham Archaeological Society*.

Writing in *Worcestershire Anglo-Saxon Charter Bounds* (1990) Della Hooke at first follows the Old Swinford boundaries but later diverts to trace the charter 'markers' to include much of the modern parish of Pedmore. An article by Eric Richardson *Swinford – in search of a boundary* in the *Blackcountryman - Winter 1997/8, Vol.3 No.1* follows a route similar to Della Hooke.

Faced with a choice between 'Old Swinford' and 'Oldswinford plus a part of Pedmore' the members of the Archaeology Section of Hagley Historical and Field Society set out in 1997 to work out their own solution. By no means claiming to be any more accurate our interpretation is slightly different and is offered as another alternative from which other researchers can make up their own minds!

By the Charter of AD 951-955 King Eadred granted land to his minister Burhelm '6 *mansae*' in extent. However, the Domesday Survey of 1086 gives the extent of Swinford as only 3 *hides* (the equivalent of 3 *mansae*). Neighbouring Pedmore also extended to 3 *hides*. If added together Swinford and Pedmore would equal the 6 *mansae* of the Charter. On this basis our Boundary Route includes almost the whole of the present-day Pedmore, following the high ground of Hodge Hill and Wychbury Hill, which also forms a more likely boundary from a defensive point of view. If this is an accurate reading of the Charter Bounds it means that the southern boundary of Burhelm's estate granted AD 951-955 was the southern boundary of modern-day Pedmore and so, probably, the northern boundary of Hagley. Hagley in Anglo-Saxon times was probably attached to Clent as part of a larger estate.

## THE ANGLO-SAXON CHARTER

Differing translations from the Anglo-Saxon present some difficulties. The Charter was at some time copied and errors may have crept in

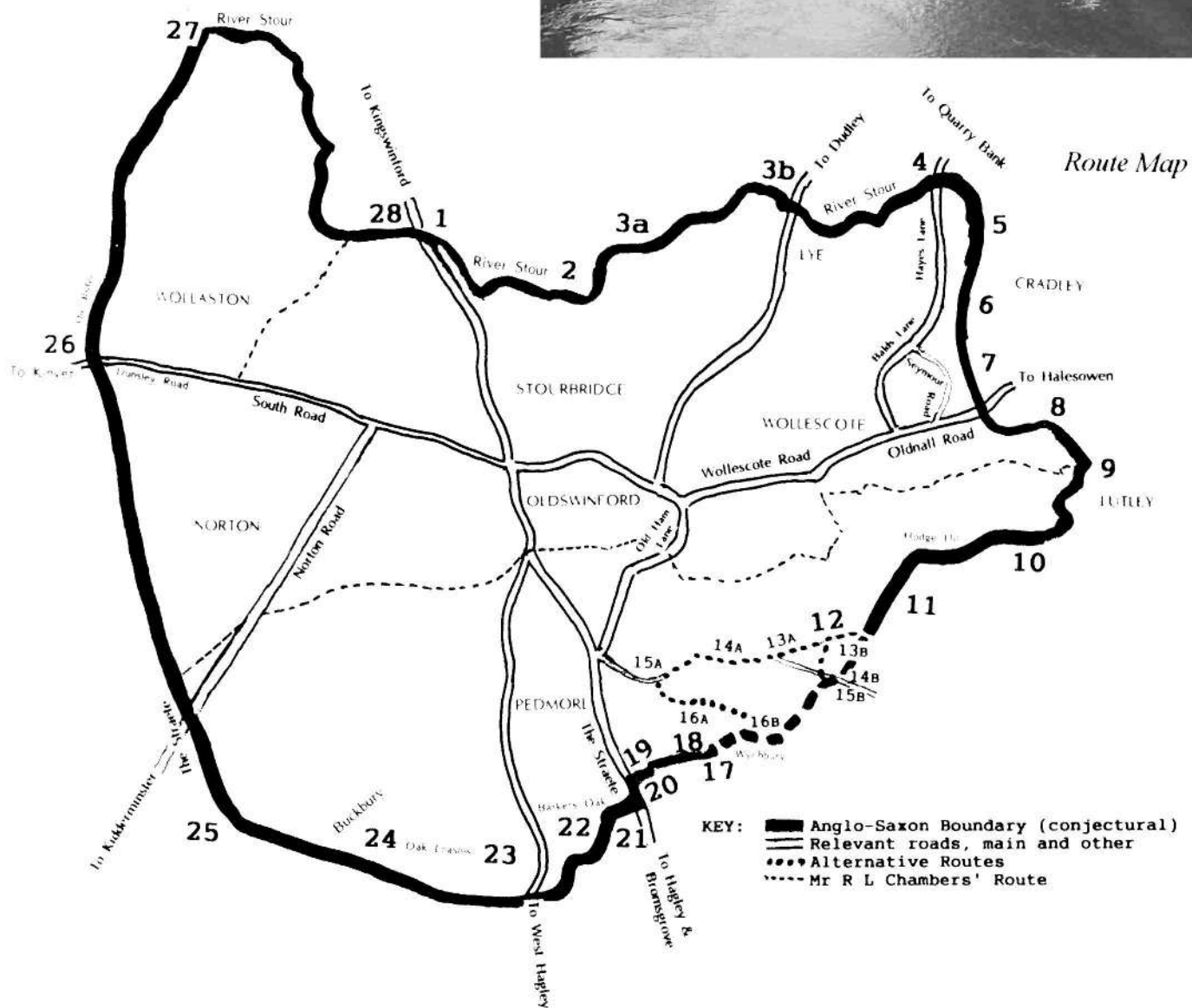
The Charter was divided into 28 marker points, with instructions. Each instruction leads from one marker point to the next.

## THE MARKERS

(Anglo-Saxon first, with suggested translations where necessary).

1. Swine Ford
2. Pecges (or Pigs) Ford
3. Theonfan (Thief's) Ford or Deopan (Deep) Ford
4. Deonflincford (Deon's Bank Ford or Deanford)
5. holan bæce (hollow, sunken, or intermittent, stream)
6. eorth brycge (earth bridge or causeway)
7. tigwellan (Tile Well or Spring)
8. ymmanholig (Ymma's holly)
9. cudan dene (Cuda's dene or valley)
10. dic bufon Foxcotun (the dyke above Foxcote)
11. ylong dices to them broce (along the dyke to the brook)
12. to tham stangedelfe (to the stone-digging or quarry)
13. be thaere efese to palacrofte (by the caves of a wood (or the hill-foot) to Welshmen's croft)
14. in thone sutherann holan bæce (the southern hollow, or sunken stream)
15. ylong bæces with neothan eastacote (along the stream below the priest's cottage)
16. ylong dices in grelendels mere (along the dyke to Grendel's Mere – alternatively Green Lea Pond or gravelly stream)
17. in stancofan (to the stone chamber, or cave)
18. ylong dune on stiran mere (along the hill to stiran (possibly sturgeon's) mere or pool)
19. on the strete (to the street, or road)
20. ylong straete on the stapelas (along the road to the poles)
21. on windofer (to Wind Edge or Wind Bank)
22. in acleg (to Oak Wood, or Lea)
23. to lusedune (to Louse Hill, possibly Down)
24. Sicanbyrig (Sica's fortification)
25. on the straete (to the street, or road)
26. to meredic (to the boundary dyke)
27. on sture (to the Stour)
28. ylong sture on Swinford (along the Stour (and so back) to Swine Ford) – and Marker No.1

*River Stour at  
Marker No.1,  
Lower High Street,  
Stourbridge*



## WALKING THE ROUTE

As the whole route is some 20 miles long few people would wish to walk it in one day. The Archaeology Group walked the route in several sections.

Some marker points are very conjectural. The exact location of markers along the River Stour is debatable but the River Stour itself certainly formed part of the Anglo-Saxon boundary although its course may have changed slightly over the centuries. In flood it is a fierce little river.

Where it is not possible to follow the exact route, nearby roads, lane or footpaths are utilised. Where the boundary crosses farmland without public footpaths a detour has to be made. Certain stretches are easily accessible, others may require a car at each end for transport. The landscape varies considerably from flat to steep, from farmland to heavily urbanised areas. It is a wonderful way to discover the local environment and contains not a few surprises.

Three of Dudley Planning & Leisure Department's leaflets of Countryside Walks are helpful: *Stour Valley*, *The Lutley Walk* and *Pedmore Walk*. They give information on parking, pubs and transport, old industrial sites and wildlife. They also provide attractive sketch maps, although the *Stour Valley* leaflet in particular walks in the opposite direction to the Anglo-Saxon Boundary itinerary.

1 **Swine Ford** The boundary walk begins at the major crossing point of the Stour near Lower High Street, Stourbridge, on an ancient routeway now interrupted by the ring road. The river, which is the boundary, is followed upstream through factories and alongside the Birmingham Street car park towards Stambermill. Go and look at it quickly! If plans go through the River Stour will be artificially moved back to make room for an extension of the ring road.

2 **Pegg's (or Pig's Ford)** This is thought to be near the Viaduct. A pub and housing estate up beyond the high bank on the right commemorate a ford here in the later name of 'Stepping Stones'. The next stretch is a surprisingly pretty and secluded walk. There are also traces of Yardley Forge which once made edge tools, demonstrating the curious juxtaposition of the rural and industrial in the old Black Country.

3 Because of uncertainty about the original Anglo-Saxon word, there are two suggestions for Marker 3 made by Chambers, Richardson and ourselves:

- (a) **Bagley's Mill** if it is *theonfanford* **Thief** or **Robbers' Ford**
- (b) **Thorns Road** if it is *deopanford* **Deep Ford**

(a) Near the site of **Bagley's Mill** where Bagley Road crosses the Stour (Grundy favours this). Bagley Road used to be little more than a lane but is now a fast road, sweeping round into Caledonia and joining

Thorns Road. The River Stour follows a similar course and it is not possible to walk along the banks until after it passes under Thorns Road. However, the *Stour Valley Walk* leaflet offers a short cut which is sign-posted and comes out near the Swan With Two Necks in Thorns Road. Not such an attractive stretch! The river is a short walk down the hill.

- (b) **Thorns Road** is an old route from Pedmore to Dudley. Unless it has changed its nature since Anglo-Saxon times the river here corresponds more to **Deep Ford**. There follows an attractive walk through Meer's Coppice and along meadows to Bob's Coppice.

4 **Deon's Bank Ford** To equate this with the modern Dunn's Bank near here is probably wishful thinking. As the Charter goes on to follow a stream hollow this Marker must be for the entry of the Saltbrook into the Stour. This is now piped in near the Dewfall Inn (formerly the Saltbrookend Inn). A small bridge spans the Stour and near here was once Cradley Mill, originally a 'rod' or 'slitting mill'. Della Hooke places Marker 4 a little further upstream where the road from Cradley to Quarry Bank crosses the Stour. She bases this on the field name 'Deanford' on Cradley Tithe Map (1843). Perhaps at one time the entry of the Saltbrook into the Stour was marshy and spread out.

5 **Hollow Stream** The route now changes direction and strikes South. The Saltbrook is shown on old maps and forms the boundary between Lye and Cradley. It is probably impossible to follow the course of the Saltbrook through the factory and housing complexes. The closest route is to follow Hayes Lane to Birmingham Road. The modern piped Saltbrook would be a short distance to the East.

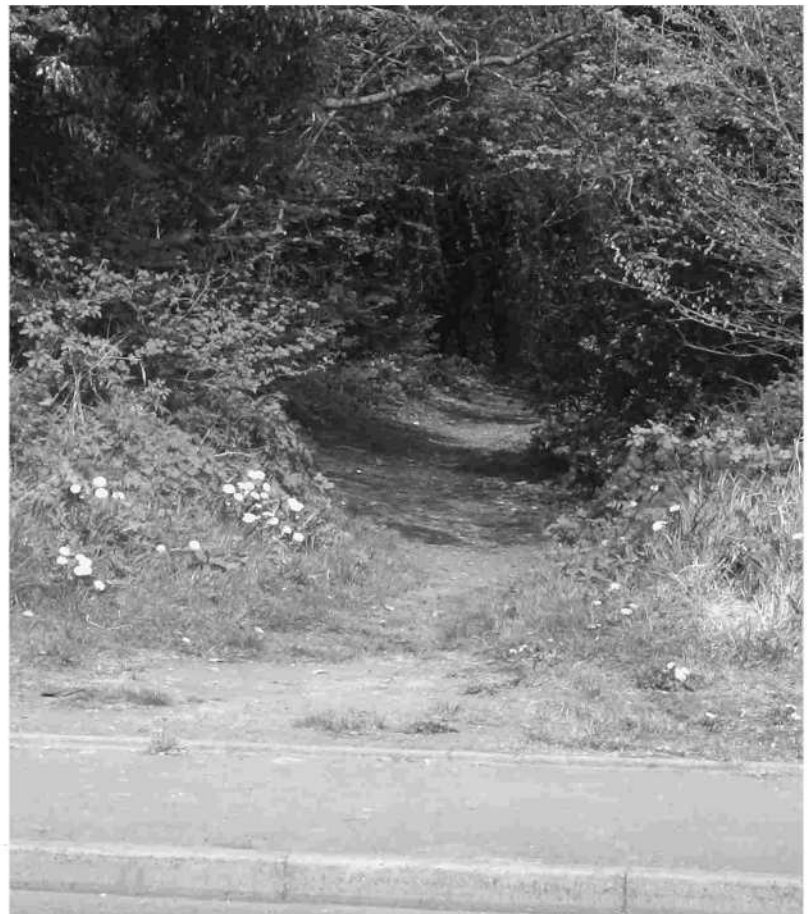
6 **The Earth Bridge or Causeway** This may have been near the present Birmingham Road where the ground could have been marshy, the Saltbrook draining as it did from the high ground to the South. There was not likely to be a permanent road on this low ground but there was one on the top of the hill (Oldnall Road). From Hayes Lane cross over to Balds Lane and continue up the steep hill. Turn Left into Seymour Road. Cars might be useful here! Over to the Left the Saltbrook would flow down, perhaps intermittently, from or near Waste Bank. There have long been clay pits and brick works in the area, which may account for the next Marker.

7 **Tile Spring or Well** The exact location is not known but it could be near Waste Bank. Della Hooke points out the Old English *tigel* as meaning *crook or tile*.

Continuing up Seymour Road the route meets with the Dudley Borough's *Lutley Walk*. The leaflet is useful for the next section of the boundary walk. A small path can be picked up with access from Seymour Road. This is the old parish boundary between Cradley and Oldswinford. Our route continues South but it is worthwhile following a



*Saltbook enters the Stour  
near Marker No. 4*



*Marker No. 8 may have been near  
the junction of Oldnall Road and  
the footpath to Foxcote Farm*

path East to look at the remains of the old inclined plane which was used to send tubs of coal down to the Hayes from Oldnall and Beech Tree Collieries in Oldnall Road. There are spectacular views across the Black Country – a good vantage point for the Anglo-Saxons. Return to the path – an old medieval holloway – to Oldnall Road, passing which might be the remains of Oldenhall Farm on the right.

**8 Ymma's Holly (Tree)** Chambers suggests that this may have been situated where the lane comes out on to Oldnall Road. Alternatively it may have been a few hundred yards further on. Cross the road and go down the field, with Foxcote Farm on the right. Here the boundary cuts off Left to Foxcote Lane near where may have been Ymma's Holly Tree. Our route follows the public footpath to a boundary hedge between Foxcote Farm and Foxcote House Farm. Turn Left to Foxcote Lane.

**9 Cuda's Dene** Cross over Foxcote Lane, down a driveway, to a small glacial pond. Near here the boundaries of several parishes meet – Cradley, Lutley, Pedmore, Oldswinford (later Wollescote) and not far away, Hagley. This area is part of Lutley Gutter, probably *Cuda's Dean*, and contains evidence of centuries of human activity. Mesolithic flints have been found in the vicinity. There are ancient boundary hedges and medieval ridge and furrow all around.

**10 The Dyke Above Foxcote** From here to Wychbury Hillfort is the most controversial and difficult section. Grundy, Chambers, Hooke and Richardson go due West along the present Wollescote boundary between Foxcote Farm and Foxcote House Farm. We suggest staying for as long as possible on the high ground of Hodge Hill near the present boundary of Hagley, which is also the modern county boundary between Worcestershire and Dudley. From Cuda's Dene follow the hedge paths which lead to near Grange Farm (now a barn conversion development). Over stile into Lutley Lane, turn Right, continue into Wynall Lane South, then Left into Wassell Grove Road. Continue up the hill. Look down over Foxcote. The actual parish boundary does not have a public footpath on it in parts but it is possible to walk along the top of Hodge Hill.

**11 Along the Dyke to the Brook** Continue along the top of Hodge Hill to the barrier of Hodge Hole Dingle. (The county boundary carries straight on to Pedmore Lane). Leave the high ground by taking a footpath Right.

**12 To the Stonedigging (Quarry)** The footpath leads into Oakfield Road. Turn Left for a short way then take the footpath Left to Pedmore Lane. This passes alongside a field (Right) shown in the Pedmore Tithe Map as 'Quarry Piece'. This may be a much later quarry but it does indicate that quarrying is possible in the area.



*A.491 Road to Bromsgrove referred to  
in the notes on Markers 19 and 20*



*From Marker 24 at Sica's Fort  
looking back to Wychbury Hill  
Fort and Markers 23 - 18*



We propose alternative routes for the next four Markers, 'A' following the hillfoot and 'B' returning to the higher ground. In both cases, begin by following the footpath to Pedmore Lane. The Dudley Borough's *Pedmore Walk* begins to be useful here 'though it tends to be in reverse of our route.

**Route A** (following the hill-foot)

**13 By the Eaves (of a wood), or By the Hill-foot, to Welshmen's Farm** Della Hooke states that the Old English *walh* means 'Welshman'. The name survives in the field name Wallcroft on the Pedmore Tithe Map covering an area in the angle of Pedmore Lane and Gauden Road, now mostly built on.

**14 The Southern Hollow (or sunken) Stream** Perhaps the stream flowing down the side of Pedmore Lane.

**15 Along the Stream to below Eostacote** The translation assumes misspelling and favours the 'priest's house' which leads Grundy, Chambers and others to suggest Prescott House, much further to the North. We suggest a spot near Pedmore Church, if one existed then (there was a priest listed in the 1086 Domesday Survey).

**16 Along the Dyke to Green Lea Pond or Grendel's Mere** There is a confusion in the translation. Green Lea Pond would favour a pond somewhere near Pedmore Hall where there is evidence of old ponds. From here the route heads SE to the high ground of Wychbury Hill.

**Route B** (following the higher ground)

**13 By the Eaves (of a wood), to Welshmen's Farm** Although there is no field name to offer as evidence, the Welshmen's farm may have extended higher up Pedmore Lane nearer the present Hagley boundary.

**14 The Southern Hollow (or sunken) Stream** This may be the most southern end of Hodge Hole Dingle.

**15 Along the Stream to below Eostacote** Translated as 'east cottage' this could be some lost building at the eastern end of the estate.

**16 Along the Dyke to Green Lea Pond or Grendel's Mere** From Pedmore Lane near the end of Hodge Hole Dingle the county boundary runs up the side of Round Hill Wood to Wychbury. There is another footpath slightly to the West through fields direct to Wychbury. The latter passes the remains of a farm where there could have been a pond. Another candidate is a slight depression where the two footpaths meet near the hill fort. Grendel was a mythical monster, so the mysterious hill-fort might attract such a name.

**17 From Green Lea Pond or Grendel's Mere to the Stone Chamber (or cave)** We are probably now on the highest point of the walk. The Marker might indicate a feature of the Iron Age hill fort of Wychbury such as a guard-house, or possibly a burial chamber (unknown now). The South-west entrance to the fort provides a good site. The walk gives wonderful views all round. Almost the whole of the Anglo-Saxon estate could be viewed from here.

**18 From the Stone Chamber along the Hill to Stiran Mere 'stiran'** *is translated as sturgeon.* This is not as unlikely as it sounds. There is a small fresh-water sturgeon a 'sterlet' which can be kept in large ponds. Also, Oliver Rackham in *The History of the Countryside* p 364 (1986), in discussing reservoirs behind dams quotes O G S Crawford *Archaeology in the field* (1953) on *styrian pol*, which means pool of the 'sturgeon' Could there have been an Iron Age or an Anglo-Saxon reservoir somewhere on Wychbury Hill? There is certainly a modern one (covered) marked on maps.

**19 From Stiran Mere to the Street (or road)** It may be necessary to make a detour, but follow as closely as possible the present county boundary down to the A491, the ancient route from Bromsgrove to Kingswinford. Artefacts from a Romano-British farmstead have been found near Round Hill close to the boundary. (Robin Jackson and Annette Hancocks *Archaeology on the Frankley to Norton Link Main in Transactions of the Worcestershire Archaeological Society Third Series, Vol 16, 1998 pp49-55*).

**20 Along the Road to the Poles** The present boundary between Pedmore and Hagley follows the road for a short way towards Hagley before turning West. The poles of the Charter may have been along this road.

**21 From the Poles to Wind Edge (or Bank)** 'Winds Point' now a road in a housing estate, formerly the name of a house in Worcester Road, Hagley, has been suggested by others as the Marker. But in discussing the translation of the Anglo-Saxon word *ofer* in *windofer* (Wind Bank) Della Hooke quotes Gelling's translation of *ofer* as 'tip of promontory, flat-topped ridge'. We favour this as a description of the Stourbridge Road towards Hagley where ribbon development has taken place. *Ofer* also seems to be connected with saltways or trading routes (Pedmore Leaflet, Point 17, and an article by Ann Cole in *Journal 22 (1989-1990) The English Place-Name Society*).

**22 From Wind Bank to Oak Wood or Oakleigh** Field names of 'Barkers Oaks' on the Pedmore Tithe Map, sited on the Pedmore/Hagley boundary, suggest an oak wood between Stourbridge Road and Worcester Lane. A field name further West (Oak Leasowe) could indicate an even greater extent of oak wood. Hooke favours an oak wood in this area.

23 **To Louse Hill** The only candidate is a slightly raised hump near Treherns Farm, perhaps a 'louse-shaped' hill. As an alternative we draw attention, tentatively, to Field's *English Field Names (1989) p.130*, which quotes Lousey Field and Lousy Hill as 'land with a pig-sty' where the pigs might have benefitted from an oak wood.

24 **To Sica's Fortification** Probably where several Pedmore field names contain 'Buckbury' (Bucca's fort), a later fortified site. The translations of *Sicanbyrig* as 'Camp of the Watercourse' or even 'the dry hill-fort' are confusing. The land is high, with extensive views in all directions and with abundant bird life. There is no evidence of a stream except down by Treherns Farm where a row of willows stand in water in wet weather only. A path from Winds Point in Hagley follows the boundary to just above a house called The Birches. Take the hedge path to the Right, then Left. This point can also be reached from Brake Lane, Hagley, passing The Birches on the Right. Over the stile and straight on, then Left, and on to –

25 **The Street** Part of the Roman saltway from Droitwich to Greensforge. Turn Right into the lane. There follows a long straight stretch more or less on the line of the Roman road and also the Dudley Borough boundary, heading North.

26 **To the Boundary Dyke** Follow the saltway to Norton Road. Cross carefully. Continue past Norton Covert and the junction of Greyhound Lane and Sugar Loaf Lane. The Roman road veers NW, but continue on the modern boundary, which is unmade, alongside fields. Follow a path on the East side of Little Iverley Covert and up fields to Dunsley Road /Gibbet Lane. From here it is possible to walk through the wood which crowns The Ridge. Alternatively, turn Left into Gibbet Lane for a short way, then Right on to public footpath, past Cherry Tree Cottage and over the fields at the hill-foot to the A458 Bridgnorth road. The high ground of The Ridge would have been the start of the boundary dyke, which probably carried on to the River Stour.

27 **To the Stour** It is not possible to walk the boundary for some distance now, but turn Left down Bridgnorth Road to Wollaston Road. Turn Right, up hill to footpath sign. Turn Left into the housing estate. The path continues from the top Left corner of a cul-de-sac. Follow through two fields. Stile. Follow footpath to Left down to the canal. Cross bridge. Turn Right on to towpath. (The canal has to be followed as the river is inaccessible, but the two run almost together as far as the Bonded Warehouse). The direction of travel is now mainly SE Then E. At Wordsley Canal Junction turn Right over bridge on to Stourbridge Arm of canal. Follow the towpath to the Bonded Warehouse. There is interesting evidence of canal life and former industrial activity as well as wildlife to be seen, and so –

28 **To Swineford** where we started

We rest our case here, but a brief resume' of the route suggested by R.L.Chambers in particular may be appropriate. He identified the Anglo-Saxon boundary as coinciding almost exactly with the Oldswinford boundary of 1733 and did not consider Wollaston would have been included in the Charter.

#### R.L.CHAMBERS' ROUTE

**From Marker 11 onwards, Mr.Chambers used slightly different numbering in his publication as he combined our 11 and 12 into 'along the dyke to the brook to the stone-digging'. Our numbering is used below.**

From Swineford (1) to Cuda's Dene (9) is the same as that suggested by other researchers. From here he makes use of the 1733 map of Oldswinford. He turns West, taking a path between Foxcote Farm and Foxcote House Farm (10). This path continues on behind a new private housing estate, recently built on the site of the Foxcote Arm public house. The route crosses over Wynnall Lane then down Sensall Road. This area is covered with a pre-war housing estate but the path continues behind the houses in Central Avenue, reaches almost to Wollescote Road, then turns South along the East bank of the Ludgbridge Brook (the 'brook' of (11)) which leads into Wassell Road, then right into Hob Green Road. Mr.Chambers makes no suggestion as to the site of the *stangdelfe* (quarry) (12). The *walacrofte* (Wall Croft) of (13) he suggests lies just North of Ham Dingle behind the gardens of the houses on the East side of Old Ham Lane.

The old boundary of Oldswinford (1733) can still be traced by using pathways left when the Mucklow housing estate was built. A pathway leads from Walker Avenue (near the end of Hob Green Road) into Mayfair, then Dorchester Road. The path can be picked up again in Dorchester Road into The Riddings and Sandhurst Avenue. From Sandhurst Avenue a path leads to the bottom of Old Ham Lane. This must be near the Wall Croft (13) identified by Mr.Chambers.

The 'southern hollow stream' (14) he suggested flowed through Ham Dingle and then under the road towards Oldswinford Church. Although Mr. Chambers mentions Prescott House (demolished but formerly on the corner of Grange Road and Wollescote Road) as a relic of the name of Priest's Cottage (15) he also suggests Doctor's Hill as a site. This would better fit the Marker of 'along the stream beneath the Priest's Cottage'. From then on it becomes more difficult to match Mr.Chambers' route with the Charter landmarks. He can make no concrete suggestions for Green Lea Pond or Grendel's Mere (16), the Stone Coves (17) or Stiran Mere (18). To accommodate these he makes a very tentative suggestion of a route North beyond Oldswinford Church, turning West (Glasshouse Hill) to a 'Made Road' (19) then South back towards Pedmore. This, of course, excludes Oldswinford Church from Oldswinford which is not logical. He offers no logical solution for the 'Poles' (20) or 'Wind Bank' (21). Mr.Chambers admits these difficulties and in fact shows on his sketch map (pp62, 63) a route which could follow the course of Ham

Dingle towards the Junction Station and across the former Mary Stevens Hospital grounds, to emerge more or less opposite Oakleigh Road. He seems happier with this interpretation of 'Oaklea' (22). He then follows a route on the line of the modern Pedmore boundary on the Stourbridge Golf Course for Louse Down (23). 'The Camp of the Watercourse' (24) he suggests was near the Norton Road. The 'made road' of (25) is the Roman Road which runs to the West of Norton Covert. Here he has rejoined the route suggested by other people to (26) *meredie* the 'boundary dyke'. Mr. Chambers then excludes modern Wollaston, cutting off the NW corner which other enquirers include. His route more or less follows Dunsley Road into South Road, then NE along the Playing Fields, Swan Street, Bowling Green Road, Mamble Road, over the main Enville Road to the Stour (27) then follows the river back to Swineford (28).



*View of the Boundary Dyke referred to in notes on Marker 26*

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### Useful References:

Dudley Planning & Leisure Department Countryside Walk Leaflets:  
 Stour Valley  
 The Lutley Walk  
 Pedmore Walk  
 Birmingham A - Z

### Tithe Maps:

Cradley Tithe Map (1843) WRO  
 Pedmore Tithe Map (1846)

### Ordnance Survey Maps:

1980 Stourbridge Sheet 88/98  
 1955 Stourbridge

### Plans of Stourbridge & Oldswinford

1828 Survey of Oldswinford  
 1699 Bach's Plan, referred to by Chambers

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