



KING ETHELRED'S COLLEGE OF ENGINEERING

Established in 978 (ish)

DEPARTMENT OF LANDSCAPE ARCHAEOLOGY,
LIDAR AND ARGUING WITH THE INTERNET

MINUTES OF A MEETING NOBODY CAN PLACE: AN ENGINEERING SURVEY OF CHECKLEY'S CLAIMS TO A COUNCIL, A BATTLE AND THREE BISHOPS

Being an examination of whether a Staffordshire village of three hundred and sixty people held a synod, fought a battle and buried three bishops, and whether it is in Domesday, which it is



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HILD M. WOLSTANTON-TEAN

M.Eng. (Hons.), Ph.D. (King Ethelred's), F.S.A. (declined)
Reader in Field Boundaries & Standing Stones

*Fortitudine.
Ingenio.
Tea and biscuits.*



UPPER PIDDLINGTON - SEPTEMBER 2026

ABSTRACT

In 2022 a contributor to a local-history group in the next town but one announced that Checkley, a village on the River Tean in Staffordshire, is not in Domesday Book.[1] It is. It is on folio 250v, between Stramshall and Croxden, under the name Cedla, with half a hide, three and a half ploughs, three villans, two acres of meadow, a league of woodland and a value of five shillings.[2] The College, which was founded in 978 and therefore regards anything first recorded in 1086 as recent, was nevertheless moved by the assertion to open a file, and found in it two older and larger claims that the village has made about itself for four hundred years: that a battle was fought there in which three bishops died, and that a council of the Mercian church was held there under Offa. This paper examines all three.

The Department treats the claims as three engineering problems. The Domesday question is one of records management, and is settled by reading the record. The battle is a forensic problem, and is examined with the Department's Standard Battle Site Assessment, which weights place-names, tradition, reported remains, earthworks and the distance to the nearest licensed premises. The council is a siting problem, and is examined with the Convenience Index, which asks how far everybody would have had to walk. The paper also considers the three churchyard stones that Camden called pyramids and Plot called Danish, and which the Corpus of Anglo-Saxon Stone Sculpture now assigns to a tenth-century workshop shared with Ilam.[3,4]

The Department finds that Checkley is in Domesday and that the contributor is wrong in good company, Open Domesday having filed the entry under Cheadle;[5] that the stones are real, fine and about a century too late to commemorate any bishop killed in Offa's time; that a battle at Dead Man's Green is likely, undatable and supported chiefly by a Victorian schoolmaster repeating what the sexton told him; and that the council of Cealchyth was held at Chelsea, regrettably, though the College has surveyed an alternative site behind the Red Lion and left the pegs in. It also finds that the story contains three kings called Æthelred, and resolves the question of which is ours by the usual method.

Research status. This is a fictional King Ethelred's College survey. Domesday Book, the AngloSaxon Chronicle, Camden, Plot, Whitaker, Redfern, the Corpus of Anglo-Saxon Stone Sculpture, the Historic England scheduling entries, the Staffordshire Historic Environment Record, the Checkley Village Trail and the distances are real and referenced. The Department, its Reader, the Standard Battle Site Assessment, the Convenience Index and the survey pegs behind the Red Lion are not. The contributor who started it is not named. The resident who supplied the battle-site tradition has asked not to be identified, on the grounds that everyone knows who he is.

Keywords: Checkley; Cedla; Domesday; Cealchyth; Calcluith; Offa; Hygeberht; Anglo-Scandinavian sculpture; Dove Valley school; three bishops; Dead Man's Green; Naked Field; Park Hall; lidar; Æthelred; the Red Lion.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author thanks Major (Retd.) Alistair B. F. MacTavish, Senior Research Fellow in Infantry Systems, Field Craft and Practical Engineering, for walking both candidate battlefields in September and reporting that either would do, that the ridge is the thing, and that whoever was on it should not have come down. He has asked that this be minuted as the Department's founding principle in two subjects now.

The Bursar declined to fund an excavation on the grounds that the last time the College dug a hole it found a drain, and the time before that it found the Bursar's predecessor. He has approved the purchase of one spade, unused, for display. He asks the Department to note that the Domesday value of Checkley, five shillings, is less than the College currently pays for a tin of biscuits, and that in his view the village has been over-assessed ever since.

The Department of Defensive Engineering, Crown Works and Applied Stubbornness lent its copy of Domesday and asked for it back the same afternoon. The Department of Strategic Geography checked the distances in Chapter 6 and observed that a papal legate in 786 did not travel in a straight line, and that neither, on the evidence of the Chronicle, did anybody else. The Department of Applied Economics confirmed that half a hide is not a unit of currency and asked that the Bursar be told.

The Trebuchet Research Group asked whether the Council of Cealchyth had been fortified. It was informed that it had been a church council. It replied that this was not an answer, and has been minuted.

Mrs Enid Partridge of the Senior Common Room, told that three bishops were said to have died in a battle at Checkley, asked what three bishops were doing in a battle. The Department has been unable to improve on the question and has made it the title of Section 5.3.

Gerald was asked for the Department's copy of Plot's Natural History of Staffordshire, 1686. He has brought a copy of the Checkley Village Trail, which is more use, and a jar of something from Dead Man's Green. The jar has been sent for analysis and the Bursar has been sent the invoice.

The author thanks the resident of the parish who supplied the Department with the location of the battle as it was told to him as a boy, the lidar tiles, the folio references, the Historic Environment Record numbers and a photograph of the stones. He has asked not to be identified. The Department has agreed, and observes that it is the first time in its history that a source has been more careful about anonymity than the College.

Statement on impartiality. The College takes no side between Checkley and Cheadle, between Saxon and Dane, or between Chelsea and Staffordshire. The humour in this paper is directed at antiquaries, at the Department, at the Bursar and at the internet, in that order, and at nobody who has ever posted in good faith about a village they love.

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NOMENCLATURE

Symbol	Meaning
Cedla	Checkley as Domesday spells it; 'Checkeleg' in 1196; Ceacca's clearing, or a clearing near a hill, depending on which dictionary is open
Hide, carucate	Units of assessed land, notionally about 120 acres each; Checkley is half a hide, Cheadle is one carucate, and neither is the same field
Villan	A Domesday villager who holds land from the lord and owes labour; Checkley had three; none has complained
Folio 250v	The page of Great Domesday on which Cedla sits, between Stramshall and Croxden; Cheadle is on 246v, which is a different page, in a different hand, about a different place
Pyramid	Camden's word (1607) and Plot's (1686) for a tall tapering stone in a churchyard; a broken cross-shaft, as it turns out
Checkley 1, 2, 3	The Corpus of Anglo-Saxon Stone Sculpture's numbers for the three shafts, the southern and tallest first; Checkley 1 carries the three figures in a row
Dove Valley school	The group of tenth-century sculptures at Checkley, Ilam, Norbury, Roston and Alstonefield identified by Sidebottom; the workshop that cut the stones
Cealchyth	The place of the contentious synod of 787 and the council of 816; Chelsea to nearly everybody; 'Calclinth' to Whitaker, 'Calcluith' to Redfern's printer
Geflitfullic	The Chronicle's word for the synod of 787: contentious, quarrelsome; Whitaker read it as 'flitting', which is the same word going the other way
Naked Field	The field a quarter-mile east-north-east of the church where, per Plot, the dead lay naked and unburied; agricultural nakedness is not excluded
Dead Man's Green	A hamlet half a mile east of the church, where the battle is said to have been; 'Tetterton Green' in an old register, per Redfern, and per nobody else
Lidar	Laser survey from the air, which shows earthworks the eye cannot see and, in the Department, several it should not have
SBSA	The Standard Battle Site Assessment, Table 5.1: six criteria, weighted, one of which is the pub
Convenience Index	The total distance six parties to a council would have had to travel to reach it; Figure 6.1; a low number is convenient
The three Æthelreds	Of Northumbria (killed 796), of Mercia (died 911) and the Unready (from 978); the College is named after one of them and has views on which
The spade	Purchased, not authorised for use

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 The post

In 2022 a member of a local-history group based in Cheadle, four miles from Checkley, posted that Checkley does not appear in Domesday Book.[1] The post was made in good faith, was supported by a reputable website, and was wrong. The College does not name the contributor, who is entitled to be wrong in private, and notes only that the website in question had filed Checkley's entry under Cheadle,[5] which is the kind of mistake the College's own Registry makes with the post most mornings.

The assertion was drawn to the College's attention by a resident of the parish, who had by then assembled a file of folio references, antiquarian extracts, Historic Environment Record entries and lidar tiles that ran to a quarter of a gigabyte, and who asked whether the College would care to look at it. The College would. It found, beneath the Domesday question, two older claims: that a battle was fought at Checkley in which three bishops died and were commemorated by the three stones in the churchyard, and that the contentious synod of Cealchyth, at which Offa of Mercia made Lichfield an archbishopric, was held not at Chelsea but here. The first has been in print since 1607.[6] The second was proposed by a Lancashire vicar in 1801 and has been repeated locally ever since.[7,8]

1.2 The village, as found

Checkley stands on the north bank of the Tean where the Cheadle to Uttoxeter road crosses it, a mile south of a Roman road and four miles from the fort at Rocester.[9] The church of St Mary and All Saints is Grade I, with twelfth-century fabric, a Norman font with a donkey on it, a fourteenth-century knight, and grooves in the south buttresses where, the Village Trail says, archers sharpened arrows at compulsory practice.[9,10] South of the porch stand three tapering stones, which are the finest Anglo-Scandinavian sculpture in the county and a scheduled monument.[3] The village had about 360 people in 2011, two public houses and a first school. Half a mile east is the hamlet of Dead Man's Green, which has about thirty houses, a former chapel, a former transport café and a name.

The Department records that the village has, in the course of its history, been a Domesday manor worth five shillings, a turnpike stage, a Nonconformist outpost, a lorry park, and a sewage works with its own railway, and that at no point in any of this has it stopped believing that three bishops are buried by the porch. The College regards this as institutional continuity of a high order and has asked the parish for its secret. The parish's own account of its position, recited by its children within living memory, runs: 'Upper Tean, Lower Tean, Beamhurst and Fole, Leigh Church and Park Hall, and Checkley in the Hole.'[30] The Department has checked the contour lines and confirms the last line.

1.3 The College's standing

The College was founded in 978, the year Æthelred came to the throne in circumstances the College prefers to describe as a vacancy. It has therefore been in existence for the whole of the period in which Checkley has been written down and for two centuries of the period in which it was not. It was not present at Cealchyth in 787, having not yet been founded; it was not present at the battle, the date of which is unknown; and it was not consulted by the Domesday commissioners in 1086, which it regards as their loss. It has, however, a Department that has argued with the internet since Tuesday and with antiquaries since 1801, and it is that Department's survey which follows.

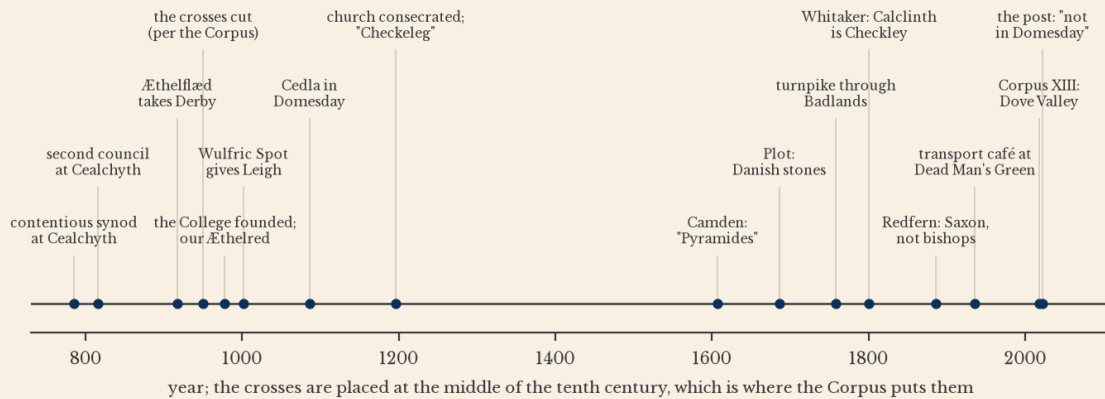


Figure 1.1 - Everything that has happened to Checkley's three claims, 785 to 2022. The College's foundation and the accession of its Æthelred are the same event; the Department has checked.

1.4 Scope and method

Chapter 2 sets out the apparatus. Chapter 3 settles the Domesday question by reading Domesday. Chapter 4 examines the stones and what they have been called by whom. Chapter 5 examines the battle, the bishops and the two candidate sites, and scores them. Chapter 6 examines the council, computes the Convenience Index, and records the College's alternative fix. Chapter 7 resolves the Æthelred question. Chapter 8 tests every claim the village has made in a single table. Chapter 9 concludes. Nothing in this paper was dug up. The spade is in the Department, with the receipt.

College hypothesis. A village that has believed three things about itself for four centuries is probably right about one of them, wrong about one, and has confused the third with a meeting. The Department's task is to find out which is which, without upsetting the village, the vicar, or the landlord of the Red Lion, in ascending order of risk.

2 APPARATUS

2.1 The instruments

The Department has used six instruments, none of which is a spade. The first is Great Domesday itself, read in the National Archives' images and in the translation, and not in any website's index of it.[2] The second is the place-name evidence, which the Department takes from the standard dictionary and treats as what it is: a good guess by a careful person about what a word meant to somebody who could not write it down.[11] The third is the Corpus of Anglo-Saxon Stone Sculpture, volume XIII, which has looked at every carved stone in Derbyshire and Staffordshire more closely than anyone has looked at anything in the College since the Bursar found the wine ledger.[4] The fourth is the lidar survey of the parish, supplied by the resident, which shows ridge and furrow, the Park Hall moat, a barrow at Lower Tean, and the line of a road that was moved into the churchyard in 1883.[9] The fifth is the antiquarian record: Camden in 1607, Plot in 1686, Whitaker in 1801 and Redfern in 1886, each of whom looked at the stones, listened to the village, and wrote down something slightly different.[6,12,7,8] The sixth is the village's own Trail booklet, which knows where the chapel was and when the café shut, and is in the Department's experience more reliable on both than any learned society.[9]

2.2 The Standard Battle Site Assessment

Where two sites are proposed for one battle and neither has been excavated, the Department scores them on six criteria, each from 0 to 3 and each weighted: documentary tradition (weight 3), place-name evidence (3), reported human remains (2), earthworks and lidar (2), a standing structure of the right period (1), and licensed premises within a mile that keep the story (1). The last criterion is not frivolous. Battles are remembered where people gather to remember them, and the Department has never found a tradition that survived a mile from a bar. A bar that has closed keeps nothing and scores nothing. The maximum is 36.

2.3 The Convenience Index

Where two places are proposed for one council, the Department sums the straight-line distance that each of the parties known to have attended would have had to travel to each site. The lower total is the more convenient venue. The Index does not prove where a council was held; it shows where a reasonable king would have held it, which is not the same thing and never has been. The arithmetic is in Appendix A.

Departmental observation. Every instrument in this chapter was available to Redfern in 1886 except the lidar, the Corpus and the internet, and he reached the same conclusions the Department reaches in Chapters 4 and 5 without any of them. The Department has recorded this and has asked that it not be repeated to the Bursar, who is already asking what the lidar cost.

3 CEDLA: THE RECORDS-MANAGEMENT PROBLEM

3.1 The entry

Folio 250v of Great Domesday, in the Staffordshire section, carries three entries in sequence: Alric holds Stramshall; Alweald holds Croxden; and then, in the translation the National Archives supplies, 'Otto holds Checkley. Wulfgeat held it. There is half a hide. There is land for three and a half ploughs. In demesne is half a plough, and three villans. There are two acres of meadow, and woodland one league long and as much broad. It is worth five shillings.' [2] The Latin has Cedla. The three places are neighbours on the ground, Stramshall three miles south-east and Croxden two miles north-east, and they are neighbours on the page, which is how Domesday works: the commissioners went round in an order and the scribe wrote it down in the same order, so that a place's neighbours on the folio are usually its neighbours in the field. [13]

Wulfgeat, who held Cedla in 1066, is identified in the Prosopography of Anglo-Saxon England as Wulfgeat of Checkley, not of Cheadle. [14] Otto, who held it in 1086, appears in Redfern as Otha, and the Department notes that the two names are interchangeable and both mean, approximately, a small wealthy person, which on five shillings a year he was not. [8]

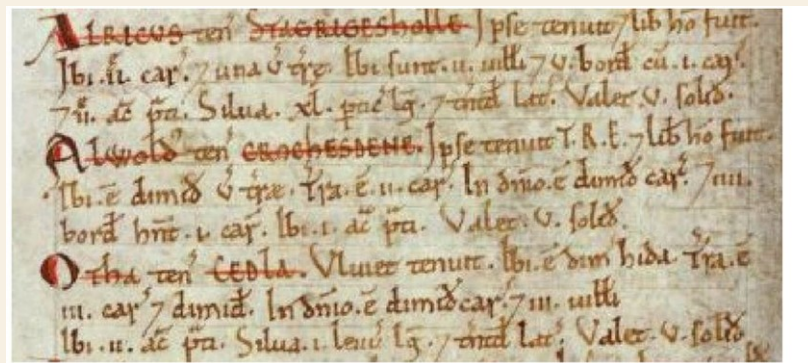


Figure 3.1 - The entry for Cedla on folio 250v, with Stramshall and Croxden above it, from the National Archives' image of Great Domesday. Otto's name is in the margin and the value is on the last line. The Department has read it four times and the value has not gone up.

3.2 The Cheadle question

Cheadle has its own entry, on folio 246v, four leaves earlier: 'In Cheadle, one carucate of land. Wulfheah held it.' [2] It is a different page, a different unit of assessment, a different holder in 1066, and, when the places on each folio are plotted, a different cluster: the 246v entries sit to the north and east of the Pirehill hundred and the 250v entries to the south and west. [13] The Department can find no reading of the two entries under which they are the same place, and no scholar who has tried one. Eyton in 1881 read Cedla as Checkley and Celle as Cheadle; the William Salt Society's volume of 1916 followed him in so many words; the Staffordshire Historic Environment Record, the county council, the ARCHI database and the Prosopography all agree. [15,16,17,14] Open Domesday alone has attached the Cedla entry to Cheadle's page, and it is from there, the Department believes, that the contributor took the view that Checkley had none. [5]

The index offers one more clue to its own mistake. It names the 1066 lord of its Cheadle entry as 'Wulfgeat of Madeley'. There is a large Madeley in the north of the county, but there is also a small one two miles east of Checkley church, inside Checkley parish, which Domesday records as Madelie and the county record places at SK 05 36; it is Madeley Holme today. [17] If the Wulfgeat who held Madelie is the Wulfgeat who held Cedla, which the Prosopography's 'Wulfgeat of Checkley' makes likely though nobody has proved it, then the index took a man with two holdings in Checkley parish and filed him under the next town. The same index gives the same Wulfgeat as lord in 1066 of Tean, two miles west, and Bramshall, four miles south-east, both of which passed to Robert of Stafford; the village's own oral history had noticed this before

the Department did.[5,30] A man whose four holdings all lie within four miles of Checkley church is, the Department submits, a Checkley man, whichever Madeley the index has in mind. It records this as an inference, and as the most Checkley thing in the paper: the village is in Domesday twice, and the internet could not find it once.

Authority	Year	Cedla is	Note
Great Domesday, folio 250v	1086	Checkley	the primary record; half a hide, 5s
Eyton, Domesday Studies: Staffordshire	1881	Checkley	'Celle' is Cheadle
Redfern, Uttoxeter	1886	Checkley	held by Otha
William Salt Society, Early Staffordshire History	1916	Checkley	'I follow Eyton'
Prosopography of Anglo-Saxon England	current	Checkley	Wulfgeat of Checkley
Staffordshire Historic Environment Record	current	Checkley	settlement recorded in Domesday
ARCHI archaeological database	current	Checkley, SK 02 37	'place called Checkley and known as Cedla'
Open Domesday	current	filed under Cheadle	the source of the confusion
A contributor in Cheadle	2022	not there	wrong, in good company

Table 3.1 - Where Cedla is, according to everyone who has looked. The Department scores this nine to one and notes that the one did not look at the folio.

3.3 The neighbours

The parish of Leigh, whose Park Hall appears in Chapter 5, has a record older than Checkley's. Between 1002 and 1004 Wulfric Spot, a Mercian thegn rich enough to be called an earl by people who wanted something, made a will that founded Burton Abbey and gave it, among some seventy estates, the chapelry of Leigh.[18,19] Domesday in 1086 records Burton Abbey holding Leigh with a free man, ten villein holdings and five ploughs.[19] The Department notes that the year of Wulfric's will was the twenty-fourth of the reign of King Æthelred, the College's founder in all but the paperwork, and that the parish next door was therefore recorded under the College's own king before anybody had written down Checkley at all. The consequences of this are taken up in Chapter 7. The Bursar has noted that Burton got seventy manors and the College got a motto.

Departmental finding. Checkley is in Domesday Book, on folio 250v, as Cedla, held by Otto, worth five shillings. Cheadle is on folio 246v, as Celle, held by Wulfheah, and is somewhere else. The contributor was misled by an index. The Department has been misled by indexes itself, and by a footnote, and once by the Bursar, and bears no grudge.

4 THE PYRAMIDS

4.1 Camden, 1607

The stones enter the record in the 1607 edition of Camden's *Britannia*, in Philemon Holland's English of 1610, where in 'Checkly Church-yard there stand three stons upright erected in maner of Pyramides; two of them have little images engraven upon them, but that in the midst is highest.' Camden reports the inhabitants' tradition of a battle between two hosts, 'of which the one was armed, the other unarmed,' in which three bishops were slain and for whom the stones were set up, and adds, with a candour the Department admires, 'But what Historical truth indeede lieth heerein enfolded I know not as yet.' [6] He never found out. Neither, four hundred years later, has anybody else, and the Department's contribution is to say so with charts.

4.2 Plot, 1686

Robert Plot, the first keeper of the Ashmolean and Professor of Chymistry at Oxford, engraved the stones for his *Natural History of Stafford-shire* in 1686, which makes them among the first Anglo-Saxon sculptures in England to be illustrated at all. [12,4] He called them pyramids and thought them Danish, part of a manner of burial 'to erect over the graves of all persons of quality tall pyramidal stones', and likened them to stones at Leek, Draycott, Chebsey and Ilam. He took them at first for 'the epistylia of so many crosses', saw correctly that they were broken cross-shafts, and talked himself out of it. He records the inhabitants' account that they were 'the memorials of three Bishops slain in a battle fought here about a quarter of a mile East North East from the church in a place called Naked Fields', where the bodies lay naked and unburied for some time after. [12] The stones, Plot's engraving shows, were in the same state in 1686 as they are today, which the Department regards as the best-documented case of nothing happening in the county.

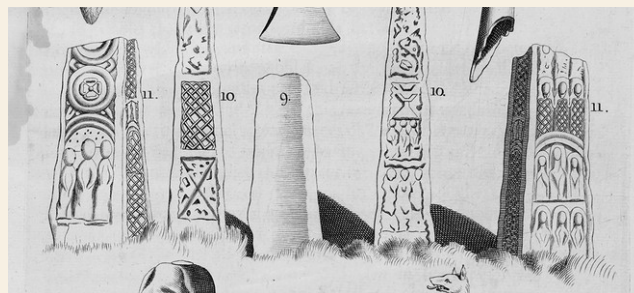


Figure 4.1 - Plot's engraving of 1686, figures 9 to 11 of his plate, showing the three stones as they were and are. Plot called them pyramids; the Department calls them the earliest thing about Checkley that anybody drew.

4.3 Whitaker and Redfern

Thomas Dunham Whitaker, vicar of Whalley in Lancashire, used the stones in his *History of Whalley* to support the argument, examined in Chapter 6, that the council of Cealchyth was held at Checkley: the tradition of a battle and three slain bishops was, he thought, 'an exaggerated account' of a synod that the *Chronicle* itself calls contentious. [7] Francis Redfern, schoolmaster and historian of Uttoxeter, quoted him at length in 1886 and then, in the same paragraph, declined to follow him about the stones. Redfern thought them 'pillarstones of the Saxon, if not of the Norman period, although I think of the former, of the ninth century', and doubted 'whether the stones have any connection, in any way' with a battle, 'notwithstanding that such is the popular belief.' [8] The Department records that Redfern, with no instrument but his eyes and the sexton, was a century out on the date and right about everything else.

4.4 The Dove Valley school

Philip Sidebottom's doctoral survey of 1994 grouped the stones at Checkley with those at Ilam, Norbury and Roston and Alstonefield as a Dove Valley school of sculpture, distinguished by an interlace pattern he called E1+1, a raised-arm figure type, a clergy figure type and plaited bodies, all of which Checkley 1 has.[20] The Corpus volume of 2018, by Jane Hawkes and Sidebottom, finds the decoration of the Ilam shaft echoing that of Checkley 1 and 2 so closely that the shafts 'seem to emerge from a shared campaign of production'.[4] Historic England schedules the three as Anglo-Scandinavian; the southern shaft is 1.6 metres tall, the central 1.35, the northern 1.43, and the two carved shafts are decorated on all four sides with full-length figures and plaitwork.[3,10] Three figures in a row appear on Checkley 1, and the village has known for four hundred years who they are. The village has also wondered, in print, whether the three stones were once one large tapering stone;[30] the Corpus's answer is that they are three shafts from one workshop, which the Department regards as the village being right about the workshop and wrong about the arithmetic.

The date matters. Anglo-Scandinavian work of this school belongs to the tenth century, when the Danes who had settled the east Midlands were being converted, absorbed and taxed, and when their patrons wanted monuments in the new style. A tenth-century cross cannot be a memorial to a bishop killed in Offa's time, a century and a half earlier, unless the village waited a very long time to order it, which the Bursar observes is not impossible where stonemasons are concerned.



Figure 4.2 - The three stones south of the porch as they stand today, numbered 1 to 3 from the left as the Corpus numbers them. The three figures in a row are on the nearer face of Checkley 1; the Department has counted them and agrees that there are three.

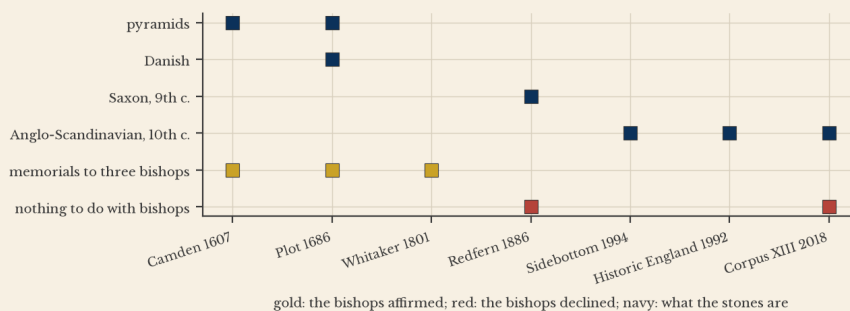


Figure 4.3 - What the stones have been called, by whom, 1607 to 2018. Everyone before 1886 affirmed the bishops; everyone since has declined them; nobody has told the village.

Departmental finding. The stones are three tenth-century cross-shafts of the Dove Valley school, cut in the same campaign as Ilam's, standing where they were put. They are not pyramids, probably not Danish, and too young by a century to commemorate a bishop of Offa's day. Whether they commemorate three bishops of anybody's day the Department cannot say, and Camden could not either, and he was there first.

5 THE BATTLE: THE FORENSIC PROBLEM

5.1 The record

The battle has four witnesses and no date. Camden in 1607 has two hosts, one armed and one not, and three bishops slain.[6] Plot in 1686 has the site a quarter-mile east-north-east of the church at Naked Fields, and the bodies left where they fell.[12] Redfern in 1886 has the Danes and the English, the English victorious, one army 'totally unharmed', the site at Naked Field and at Dead Man's Green, which he says the old Checkley register writes as Tetterton Green, 'where the dead strewed the ground, and where a human skeleton has been dug up'; and, in a single sentence with no date, no informant and no location closer than the farm, 'A considerable quantity of human remains have been found in the course of draining near to, on the Park Hall farm.'[8] The fourth witness is the parish, which has told the story to its children without interruption, told it to a collector of village memories in about 1992, who printed it as Saxons against Danes at Naked Fields near Dead Man's Green with the three stones as the memorial,[30] and told it, in the 1960s, to the resident who brought it to the College: the battle was south of what is now the waterworks at Dead Man's Green, which is the sewage works of 1955, and it was not, whatever a later informant said, the Civil War.

The Department notes that every printed witness after Camden agrees on the bishops and on nothing else, and that Redfern, the only one to mention remains, cites nobody for them. It notes also that Tetterton Green appears in no source the Department can find except Redfern, so that the village's most ominous name rests on one man's reading of one register; and that if the reading is right, Dead Man's Green is a later name that the story may have been fetched to explain. The Department does not find this fatal. It finds it normal.

5.2 The date

Four dates are on offer and they exclude each other. If the battle was Whitaker's synod gone wrong, it was 787 and nobody fought anybody; a contentious synod is a meeting at which people shout. If it was a battle of Offa's reign, as the resident was told, it was the eighth century and the stones cannot be its memorial. If the stones are its memorial, it was the tenth century, when Æthelflæd's Mercians were fighting the Danes of the east Midlands and took Derby, thirty miles east of Checkley, in 917.[21] If it was the Civil War, it was the seventeenth century and the Department has been misinformed about the bishops. The Department's view is that the tenth century is the only date on which the stones, the Danes and the bishops can all be in the same field at once, and that this is the same as saying that the village has, over four centuries, edited its story until it fitted the monument. Villages do. So do Colleges.

5.3 What were three bishops doing in a battle?

Mrs Partridge's question has no answer in the sources and the Department offers three. First, that the 'unarmed host' was a synod, as Whitaker thought, and the bishops were its casualties, which would make Checkley the only place in England where a church council has an associated body count. Second, that the three haloed figures on the tallest shaft, Checkley 1, were read by a later village as three bishops, and the battle was supplied to explain why they were dead. Third, that there were three bishops, and a battle, and the Department has simply not found the chronicle. The Department prefers the second, because it requires the fewest bishops, and records that the first is the most fun. It notes for completeness that the only bishops with a documented route through the parish are the abbots of Croxden, whose path to Checkley was still called the Bishop's Walk in 1940, and that the last of them, Thomas Chawner, is buried in the chancel and not under a pyramid.[30]

5.4 The two sites

Naked Field lies north of the New Broom, a public house built as the Cock Inn on the new turn-pike between 1843 and 1850.[9] Plot put the battle there in 1686 and is the earliest witness to a location. A Saxon site has lately been identified in the next field east; it requires further analysis, which are the three most expensive words in archaeology. Dead Man's Green and Park Hall lie half a mile east and a mile south-east of the church. Park Hall is a scheduled moated site, an island fifty metres square within a waterlogged moat up to sixteen metres wide and three and a half deep, the manor house of the Leigh family, who held a third of the manor of Leigh in the thirteenth century, and later of the Astons of Tixall by marriage.[22,19] Beside it is Hell Clough, whose name the resident observes would suit a field of the unburied. The Department applied the Standard Battle Site Assessment to both.

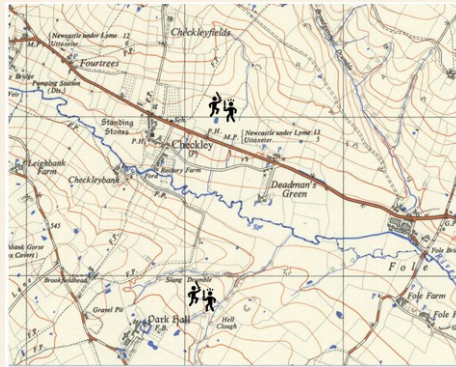


Figure 5.1 - The two candidate sites on the Ordnance Survey sheet, each marked with the Department's symbol for a battle: Naked Field north of the main road, and Dead Man's Green with Park Hall and Hell Clough to the south-east, with the church and the three stones between them. The Department has not marked the Red Lion, which is on every map already.

Criterion	Weight	Naked Field	Dead Man's Green
Documentary tradition	3	3 (9): Plot, 1686, the earliest siting	2 (6): Redfern, 1886, and the parish
Place-name evidence	3	2 (6): 'Naked Field', which may be agricultural	3 (9): 'Dead Man's Green', 'Hell Clough'
Reported human remains	2	1 (2): Redfern's skeleton, shared with the other site	2 (4): Redfern's skeleton and the Park Hall drainage
Earthworks and lidar	2	1 (2): a Saxon site to the east, not yet analysed	1 (2): ridge and furrow; the moat; an anomaly
Standing structure of the period	1	0 (0)	1 (1): the moat, thirteenth century
Licensed premises within a mile, keeping the story	1	3 (3): the New Broom, since 1843	0 (0): a transport café, 1936 to about 1990, closed, and a millennium late
Weighted total	12	22	22

Table 5.1 - The Standard Battle Site Assessment: each criterion scored 0 to 3, weighted points in brackets, and a tie at 22. The Department has checked the arithmetic twice and referred the tie to a resident.

5.5 What has been dug up

The Department assembled everything recorded as found in the ground within two miles of either site: a Mesolithic pebble macehead with an hourglass perforation a kilometre from the church; a Bronze Age pebble hammer; an axe-hammer found in 1910 in the foundations of a barn nobody now remembers; barrows at Fole and Lower Tean, the latter visible on lidar and to the naked eye; a stone battle-axe, a bronze axe and a palstave at Upper Leigh; and Redfern's two undated reports of bones.[17,23,8] Figure 5.2 arranges them by age against the window in which the battle could have happened.

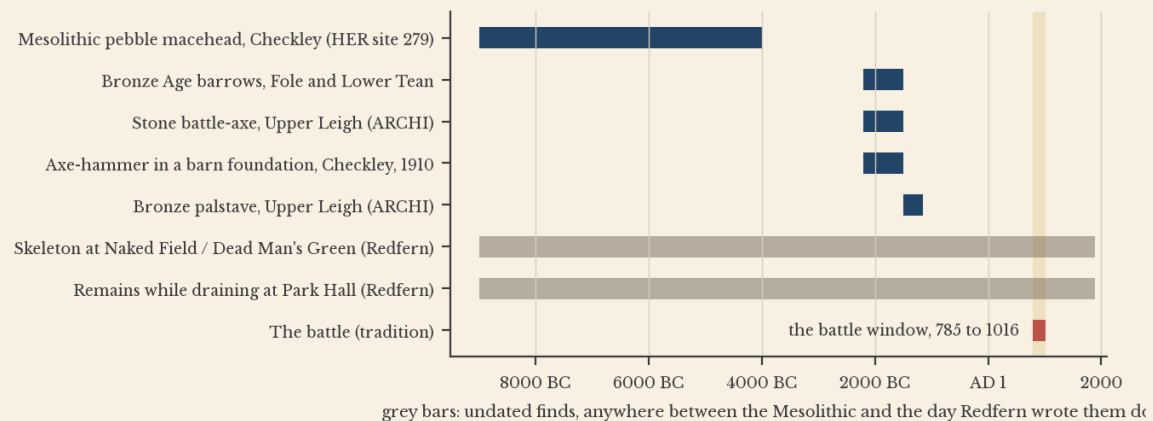


Figure 5.2 - Everything dug up near the battlefield, by age. Every dated find is between two and nine thousand years too early; the two undated ones are Redfern's, and could be anything. The only weapon ever recovered is a stone battle-axe from the Bronze Age, which the Department has titled 'evidence of a battle, other than that one'.

The Department also has, from a search engine's memory of a post that no longer exists, a mention of a barrow at Leigh dug by a Victorian vicar, with bones.[24] It cannot read the rest of the sentence. It records the item as unverifiable, ranks it below Redfern, who at least signed his name, and notes that a barrow dug by a vicar is, once again, a Bronze Age cremation and not a Dane. The parish's most productive source of bones is in any case not a battlefield but a spring between Upper and Lower Tean, the Well in the Wall, which Plot recorded in 1686 as yielding small bones 'of young sparrows or very young chicken' in every month but July and August, and which he identified, after comparing them with a fountain at Trentham, as frogs.[12,30] The Department has ruled the frogs out as bishops.

5.6 Fieldwork

The Bursar having declined to fund a trench, the Department worked from the lidar. The tiles show the Park Hall moat on three sides with its north-western arm filled; ridge and furrow south of the Tean, which is medieval ploughing and not a battle; the barrow at Lower Tean; a second anomaly of the same size and shape near Checkley Fields Cottage; and the line of the old road through what is now the churchyard, discussed in Appendix C. They also show, three kilometres west of the church and nowhere near either candidate site, a second scheduled moat at Blithewood, so that the parish has two medieval moats and the Department is permitted to dig neither.[29] They do not show a battle. Lidar does not show battles. It shows what people built afterwards, which at Dead Man's Green is a chapel, a café and thirty houses.



Figure 5.3 - Four views of the same ground: the barrow at Lower Tean on the lidar, the ridge and furrow south of the river, the Park Hall moat, and the aerial photograph. The Department has asked that nobody dig any of it up until the Bursar is on leave.

Departmental finding. A battle at Checkley is likely, its date is not, and its best evidence is a Victorian schoolmaster repeating what the sexton told him. On the Standard Battle Site Assessment Dead Man's Green and Naked Field tie at 22, and on the casting vote of a resident who was told where it was before he could read, the Department places the battle south of the waterworks and declines to say when. Nothing found in the ground supports it, and everything found in the ground is real.

5.7 Subsequent use of the battlefield

Whatever happened at Dead Man's Green, a great deal has happened since, and the Department has tabulated it because nobody else has. The site has been fought over, in the civil sense, continuously since 1758.

From	Use	Note
1758	Turnpike, Uttoxeter to Newcastle-under-Lyme, along Old Lane	then called 'Badlands'; a raised footpath for pedestrians beside it
1821	Ebenezer Chapel, Independent, on Old Lane	closed by the 1851 census, a store thereafter, demolished 1992; plaque on a bungalow
1822	Bypassed by a new turnpike, now the A522	the village has been bypassed twice; it has noticed neither
1930s	Transport café on the A50, 'the Road House', with bar, beds and fuel	up to seventy lorries overnight; the largest host ever to camp on the site
1955	Blithe Valley sewage works, off Uttoxeter Road, with a two-foot-gauge railway; now Severn Trent's Checkley Sewage Treatment Works	named for the Blithe valley it was built to drain, sited on the Tean, which is the Dove's; the sewers reached the village in 1954, and the school attendance officer said "we can say goodbye to the Checkley we have known"; a Lister rail truck served the beds and survives at Mill Meece; the resident's "waterworks"
mid-1980s	A50 bypass to the south; the café loses its trade	closed about 1990; now Green Park, with a 1936 plaque on number 7
1992	Park Hall moat scheduled; the chapel demolished	the same year; the Department suspects a committee

Table 5.2 - Subsequent use of the battlefield, 1758 to 1992, from the Village Trail and the Narrow Gauge Railway Society.[9,25] The Department notes that the lorries outnumbered the bishops.

6 CALCLUITH: THE SITING PROBLEM

6.1 The contentious synod

The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle records, under a year modern historians correct to 787, a contentious synod at Cealchyth at which Archbishop Jænberht of Canterbury gave up part of his province and Hygeberht was chosen by King Offa, and Offa's son Ecgfrith was consecrated king.[26] The synod created a third English archbishopric at Lichfield, with Hygeberht as its first and only archbishop, and gave him Worcester, Leicester, Lindsey, Hereford, Elmham and Dunwich.[27] It followed the visit in 786 of two papal legates, George of Ostia and Theophylact of Todi, who had landed in Kent, toured Mercia and Northumbria and reported to Pope Hadrian. The archbishopric was abolished at Clofesho in 803, and a second council was held at Cealchyth in 816.[26] Cealchyth is generally identified with Chelsea, on the Thames, then in the Mercian sphere and convenient for Kent.[26] The Department notes that Offa, having divided Canterbury's province out of enmity for its archbishop and the people of Kent, held the meeting at which he did it within a day's ride of both, which is either confidence or a very good body-guard.

6.2 Whitaker's argument

Whitaker's case, as Redfern reports it, has three legs.[7,8] First, philology: the Saxon initial C was pronounced ch, so Calclinth was Chalclinth; invert two letters in the middle and you have Chacli, which is Checkley. Second, geography: Checkley 'was far within the limits of Mercia', and it is 'highly improbable' that a council in which Offa had so near an interest would meet anywhere but in his own territory. Third, tradition: the village's story of a battle and three slain bishops, compared with a synod the Chronicle calls geflitfullic, a word Whitaker read as 'flitting' and Redfern glossed as violent, leaves 'no doubt that the tradition is an exaggerated account of that event, whence it must follow that Calclinth is Checkley.'

The Department has examined each leg. The first requires two letters to change places, which the Department's Registry does daily and the Department does not accept as evidence. The second is sound as far as it goes: Chelsea was not far within Mercia. It was, however, within Offa's reach, on the river, and next to the province he was dismembering, and a king who wants to divide Canterbury's province does well to do it where Canterbury can watch. The third leg is the village's story, which Chapter 5 has found to rest on a tenth-century monument and a Victorian schoolmaster, and which therefore cannot carry an eighth-century synod as well. Redfern, having quoted Whitaker at length, adds the detail that Whitaker was arguing not against Chelsea but against Culcheth, 'an obscure place near Manchester, as hitherto believed', and the Department observes that a case built to defeat Culcheth may not have been built to defeat the Thames.[8]

6.3 The Convenience Index

The Department computed the straight-line distance to each candidate for the six parties known or reasonably supposed to have attended: Offa from Tamworth, Hygeberht from Lichfield, Jænberht from Canterbury, the bishops of Wessex from Winchester, a Northumbrian delegation from York, and the legates of 786 from the Kentish coast. The totals are 568 miles to Chelsea and 613 to Checkley (Figure 6.1, Appendix A). Checkley wins handsomely for the Mercians and the Northumbrians, and loses handsomely for everyone who had to come from the south, which was everybody Offa was trying to impress. The Index is therefore inconclusive by forty-five miles, which is more than Whitaker managed and less than the Department hoped.

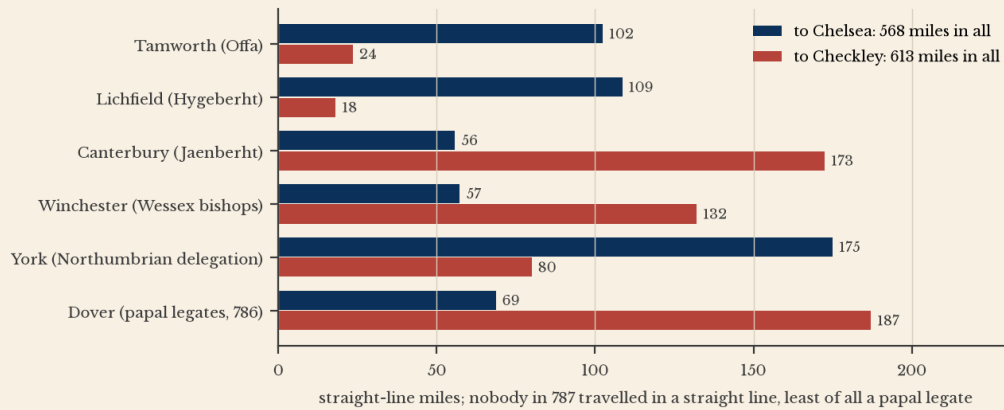


Figure 6.1 - The Convenience Index: straight-line miles for each party to Chelsea and to Checkley. Chelsea wins by forty-five miles in aggregate. The Department notes that the Archbishop of Canterbury, whose province was being carved up, would have been asked to walk three times as far to watch it happen at Checkley, and that this may have been the point.

6.4 The Red Lion fix

The Department, which does not like to leave a siting problem without a site, resolved the position of Cealchyth at Checkley by triangulation from three antiquarian opinions, one lidar anomaly and the shortest walk to a bar. The lines intersect behind the Red Lion on Church Lane, a late-eighteenth-century building that the Village Trail says 'possibly stands on the site of a much older hostelry' updated for the turnpike trade, which is beside the church, beside the stones, and, the Department notes, beside the only place in the village where three bishops could have been given lunch.[9] The Department drove in survey pegs on 14 September and has asked the landlord to leave them. He has agreed, on condition that the College does not come back with the spade.



Figure 6.2 - The triangulation: two Fellows with a theodolite and a ranging pole behind the Red Lion, the church tower beyond, and three bishops watching from the churchyard wall with the patience of men who have been dead since the tenth century. The peg is out of frame. The landlord knows where it is.

Departmental finding. The contentious synod of 787 and the council of 816 were held at Chelsea. Whitaker's case rests on two transposed letters, a sound point about Mercia that proves too much, and a village tradition that Chapter 5 has already spent. The College's alternative site behind the Red Lion is recorded here as fiction, surveyed, pegged, and available should the historians change their minds.

7 THE ÆTHELRED QUESTION

The Department did not set out to find its own king in a Staffordshire churchyard and has found three. The first is Æthelred of Northumbria, killed by his own people in 796, whose slayers appear in the Latin note Whitaker attached to his Checkley argument, fighting Eardwulf near Whalley two years later; he is in the story because Whitaker was vicar of Whalley and could not help it.[7] The second is Æthelred, Lord of the Mercians, who died in 911 and whose widow Æthelflæd fought the Danes across the east Midlands, took Derby in 917 and died at Tamworth in 918; if the battle at Checkley was fought in the decade the stones were cut, it was fought in her war, and the bishops, if any, were hers.[21] The third is Æthelred the Unready, king from 978, in whose reign the College was founded and Wulfric Spot gave Leigh to Burton, and who on 13 November 1002, the year of that gift, ordered the killing of the Danes in England, which the Department mentions because the College's founder-king's judgement is a recurring theme of its papers and it would be noticed if it were left out.[18,28]

The College has never stated which Æthelred it is named after, its foundation charter having been drawn up with a care for ambiguity that the Bursar describes as prudent and the Registry as typical. The Department resolves the question as follows. The first Æthelred was murdered and is in the story by accident. The second is in it by marriage. The third is in it by date, by the parish next door, and by the fact that the College was founded in the year he came to the throne, which the Department regards as conclusive and the Registry as a coincidence. The Department therefore records that the College's king was on the throne when the nearest parish to Checkley was first written down, twenty-four years after the College and eighty-four before Domesday, and that the College was, on paper, in the neighbourhood before anybody else.

Departmental finding. Of the three Æthelreds in this paper, one was killed, one was married, and one was ours. The Department has chosen by the usual method, which is picking the one it likes, and notes that this is also how the village chose its bishops.

8 THE VILLAGE'S CLAIMS, TESTED

Table 8.1 tests every claim the village has made about itself, in print or in the parish, against the record assembled in Chapters 3 to 7, using the five categories the College applies to any statement: verified fact, sourced estimate, reasoned inference, disputed claim, or College fiction.

Claim	First made	Best evidence	Verdict
Checkley is in Domesday	1881 (Eyton)	folio 250v; Eyton; Salt; PASE; HER; ARCHI	verified fact
Checkley is not in Domesday	2022	an index entry filed under Cheadle	wrong, in good company
The stones are Danish pyramids	1686 (Plot)	the Corpus: tenth-century cross-shafts, Dove Valley school	wrong about pyramids; arguable about Danes
The stones commemorate three bishops	1607 (Camden)	three figures on Checkley 1; nothing else	tradition, unproven; a century too late for Offa
A battle was fought here	1607 (Camden)	four printed witnesses, no chronicle, no date	reasoned inference: likely
It was at Naked Field	1686 (Plot)	the earliest siting	SBSA 22
It was at Dead Man's Green	1886 (Redfern)	the name; the parish; Redfern's remains	SBSA 22; preferred on the casting vote
Remains were found at Park Hall	1886 (Redfern)	one uncited sentence	sourced estimate, weak
The synod of Cealchyth was held here	1801 (Whitaker)	two transposed letters and the battle	disputed; Chelsea preferred
The synod was held behind the Red Lion	2026 (this paper)	three opinions, an anomaly and a bar	College fiction, pegged
The College's king was in the neighbourhood first	2026 (this paper)	Wulfric Spot's will, 1002 to 1004	reasoned inference; the Registry dissents

Table 8.1 - The claims tested. The village is right about Domesday, probably right about a battle, wrong about pyramids, and has confused a council with a fight, which the Department has also done at Faculty Board.

Departmental observation. The College hypothesis of Chapter 1 predicted one right, one wrong and one confused. The result is one right, one probably right, one wrong and one confused, which is a better score than the hypothesis and a better score than the College usually gets.

9 CONCLUSIONS

- Checkley is in Domesday Book as Cedla, on folio 250v, held by Otto, half a hide, five shillings. The contributor who said otherwise was misled by an index that filed it under Cheadle, and is in the company of a website, which is where most of us are.
- The three stones by the porch are tenth-century cross-shafts of the Dove Valley school, cut in the same campaign as the shaft at Ilam, and the finest of their kind in the county. They are not pyramids. Whether they are three bishops nobody has known since 1607.
- A battle at Checkley is likely; its date is not; its evidence is tradition, one skeleton and one undated sentence of Redfern's. Dead Man's Green ties with Naked Field on the Standard Battle Site Assessment and is preferred on the testimony of a resident who was told where it was as a boy.
- Everything ever dug up near the battlefield is real and thousands of years too early. The only weapon is a Bronze Age battle-axe.
- The contentious synod of 787 was held at Chelsea. The College has surveyed an alternative behind the Red Lion and left the pegs in, in case.
- The story contains three kings called Æthelred. The College's is the third, by date, by the parish next door, and by preference.

Principal finding. Of the village's three claims, the Department confirms the one nobody doubted, supports the one nobody can date, and declines the one a vicar invented, and records that the village has held all three for four hundred years with a consistency the College would like to learn. The Bursar adds that the village was worth five shillings in 1086 and has, in his opinion, been living on it since.

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Sources were consulted on 17 September 2026. The College, the Department, its Reader, the Standard Battle Site Assessment, the Convenience Index and the pegs behind the Red Lion are fictional; the village, the stones, the folio, the schoolmaster and the lorries are not.

APPENDIX A - SAMPLE CALCULATIONS

A.1 The Convenience Index

Straight-line distances are computed by the haversine formula on a sphere of radius 3,958.8 miles from the coordinates of each party's seat: Tamworth 52.634 N 1.695 W; Lichfield 52.683 N 1.828 W; Canterbury 51.280 N 1.080 E; Winchester 51.063 N 1.308 W; York 53.959 N 1.082 W; Dover 51.128 N 1.313 E; Chelsea 51.487 N 0.169 W; Checkley 52.930 N 1.972 W.

Party	To Chelsea	To Checkley
Offa, from Tamworth	102	24
Hygeberht, from Lichfield	109	18
Jænberht, from Canterbury	56	173
The Wessex bishops, from Winchester	57	132
A Northumbrian delegation, from York	175	80
The legates of 786, from Dover	69	187
Total	568	613

Table A.1 - The Convenience Index in miles. Chelsea wins by 45 miles in total, or about eight per cent, which the Department describes as inconclusive and the Department of Strategic Geography as a walk.

A.2 The Standard Battle Site Assessment

Each criterion is scored 0 to 3 and multiplied by its weight. Naked Field: tradition 3 x 3 = 9; place-name 2 x 3 = 6; remains 1 x 2 = 2; lidar 1 x 2 = 2; structure 0; premises 3 x 1 = 3; total 22. Dead Man's Green: tradition 2 x 3 = 6; place-name 3 x 3 = 9; remains 2 x 2 = 4; lidar 1 x 2 = 2; structure 1 x 1 = 1; premises 0, the transport café having opened eleven centuries after the battle and closed before the survey; total 22. The maximum is 36. The scores tie, and the Department has referred the tie to the resident, whose evidence is not scored because it is the only evidence in the table that was given in person.

A.3 The Domesday assessment

A hide and a carucate are each notionally about 120 acres of assessed land, though neither was ever a measured area. Checkley at half a hide with land for three and a half ploughs, three villans and a league of woodland, worth five shillings, is a small manor; Cheadle at one carucate is a different small manor. Five shillings in 1086 is sixty pence, which the Bursar has converted at every rate he can find and declines to publish, the answer being in each case less than the College spends on biscuits.

APPENDIX B - THE BURSAR'S CARD

For Fellows asked about Checkley at High Table, in the Red Lion, or on the internet.

If asked	Answer
Is Checkley in Domesday?	Yes. Folio 250v, Cedla, Otto, half a hide, five shillings. Cheadle is on 246v and is somewhere else.
Are the stones pyramids?	No. Tenth-century cross-shafts, Dove Valley school, same workshop as Ilam. Camden called them pyramids in 1607 and it stuck.
Were three bishops killed here?	Tradition since 1607. The stones are a century too late for Offa's day. Nobody knows. Camden said so first.
Was there a battle?	Probably. Nobody knows when. Dead Man's Green and Naked Field tie; a resident has the casting vote and has used it.
Was the synod of Cealchyth held here?	No. Chelsea. Whitaker swapped two letters. The College's pegs are behind the Red Lion if anyone asks.
Which Æthelred is ours?	The third. By date, by the parish next door, and by preference.
What was found in the ground?	A macehead, some axes, two barrows and a palstave, all thousands of years too early, and two sentences of Redfern.
May the Department dig?	No. The spade is for display.

Table B.1 - The Bursar's card. To be produced when the conversation turns to Staffordshire, and retained when it turns to the bill.

APPENDIX C - THE LOST ROAD ACROSS THE VALLEY

The resident's file records one more thing the village has lost, and the Department includes it because it is the only claim in this paper that lidar can actually settle. Until the 1880s the road through the village did not stop at the church: Church Lane turned where the war memorial now stands and swept north across what is now the churchyard to meet the road that became the A522. The turning is on the tithe survey of 1841. The churchyard was extended in 1883, New Road was cut beside Bank Farm to replace the lost section, and the gate was moved to serve the new ground.[9] The old line is still a footpath at either end, is still passable along most of its length, and is visible on the lidar as a shallow hollow way running through the graves, which the Department regards as the most Anglican piece of civil engineering it has surveyed. The village remembers the same thing: the lane through the churchyard was filled in when the churchyard was extended and New Road was built, 'hence its name', and the bridle road beyond it to Leigh was kept open until the bypass by a resident who drove it in a horse and trap once a year so that it could not be closed.[30] The Department has recorded him as the parish's first Reader in Applied Stubbornness and regrets that the post was not pensionable.

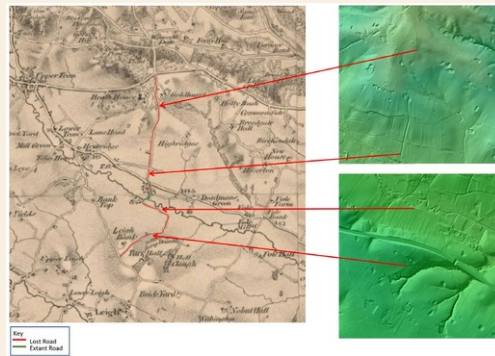


Figure C.1 - The old route across the valley: the lost road in red and the extant road in blue on the Victorian sheet, with the lidar tiles showing where it still runs. The Department notes that the road went into the churchyard and did not come out, which is true of a great many things at Checkley.

The Department records that the village has therefore, since 1758, been bypassed twice by the turnpike trust, once by the Ministry of Transport, and once by its own churchyard, and that it is in the Department's experience the only settlement in England to have been bypassed by the dead.

APPENDIX D - DEPARTMENTAL NOTE

The Department of Landscape Archaeology, Lidar and Arguing With the Internet was founded with the College in 978, the year its Æthelred came to the throne, and inherited on its first day a dispute already two centuries old: the minutes of the synod of 787 were contentious then and are contentious now, and the Department has been in continuous dispute with somebody ever since. Its early quarrels were with Culcheth, which it regards as settled, and with the Danes, which it regards as ongoing. It acquired lidar in the present century and the internet shortly after, and has found that the second supplies more to argue with than the first.

The Department's method is to take a claim that a village, a website or a vicar has made, read the primary record, walk the ground, draw a chart, and say what it found, in that order, with the humour kept for the captions. It holds that a tradition is evidence of a tradition, that an index is not a folio, that lidar shows what was built and not what was fought, and that the nearest bar is a legitimate variable. It has one spade, unused.

The Department thanks the parish of Checkley for four hundred years of consistency and asks it, with respect, to look at the folio before posting. It has left its pegs behind the Red Lion and will collect them when the historians have finished.

Persevera Etelred