

# The idea of the ‘ensemble’ in urban morphology

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**Abstract.** *The idea of the ensemble – as encompassing areas within plans of composite medieval towns that can be recognized as being co-functional and contemporary in origin – is argued as being an important concept in enabling the course of urban development to be unravelled in a meaningful way. In a number of cases the use of this concept, as applied to the course of development of early medieval towns, can counteract the tendency for the interpretation of spatial distinctions between different ‘morphological areas’ within a town plan to be regarded as evidence of sequential development. This is exemplified in the discussion of a number of examples of town plans in which the application of this concept can generate new historical narratives concerning their early development.*

*Keywords: ensemble, town-plan analysis, medieval planned towns, Bridgnorth, Ludlow, Conzen*

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In an earlier issue of this journal Jeremy Whitehand introduced the idea of the ‘ensemble’ as a way of perceiving disparate features of the urban landscape as an ‘integrated entity’ (Whitehand, 2010). Although this was aimed at those analysts of the historical urban landscape who have tended to overlook the relationship of one architectural element to another, and who lack understanding of how these elements fit together, a case is made in what follows that this concept can be expanded and understood in a way which shows a wider and more fundamental usefulness in town-plan analysis.

## **The ensemble in town-plan analysis**

The idea of an ensemble in the analysis of town plans has a meaning as a model that enables the analysis of aspects of form, function and change (or its absence), in a way that is somewhat different from that in which these aspects

are often seen. The aim here is not so much to discuss the ways in which this concept has been used in current urban morphological discourse. It is, rather, to utilize it to explore one particular avenue of spatial analysis of town plans that would appear to offer a distinctive means of reasonably inferring past processes from spatial patterns within town plans, in a way which makes it possible to generate new historical narratives that are evidence-based. This can best be accomplished by drawing on concrete examples of the analysis of the plans of places that originated at different periods. The examples in what follows are from early medieval towns in England in *c.* 880–1200 AD, though this concept has relevance to town plans of almost any period.

This concept of the ensemble refers to groups of features in town plans that are spatially related in such a way as to show an original functional unity or connectivity as a contemporary group. The key aspect of this concept, as it relates to townscapes that

have been brought into being and planned through the agency of a particular polity, lies in its usefulness in showing how different and sometimes apparently disparate elements of a townscape can be recognized as being related in both time and function, and thus in origin. It can also, therefore, be used to distinguish elements of a townscape that are perceived to be unconnected or unrelated as contemporary entities. Excluded from this narrow meaning of 'ensemble' here are instances of a townscape which may have acted as a co-functional ensemble through the addition of disparate elements at different times, to make a new functional unity through the fact of this addition. This is a situation in which an ensemble becomes a palimpsest, which can be deconstructed or disaggregated into its component parts which comprise a number of ensembles, thus reflecting a true narrative.

Because it relates to situations and processes that have to do with activities in the past that are essentially unrecoverable by direct observation, this functional connectivity has always to be inferred or deduced from the footprints of the physical outcomes of these activities, as in the case of archaeological excavation. In the restricted sense of this paper, this is the historical town plan – as well, of course, as the town itself. It is recognized that historical, geographical and archaeological analysis of early medieval town development can seldom be a hypothetical-deductive exercise, where conclusions can be tested, validated or falsified by the next experiment. In this, model-building involves the reasonable ordering of disparate sources of accumulated evidence to reach a coherent account of processes that fits with those that can be inferred or observed to have taken place in other places. In this process, imputing functions to physical patterns (the evidence for which is always going to be incomplete) must always be a leap from the sphere of the testable to that of the reasonably imagined. The use of the idea of the ensemble can, however, create a basis for model-building that posits connections within regions in the medieval town in which disparate elements are recognized as being co-functional and contemporary in origin, rather

than separate and unrelated elements added one to another.

The concept of the ensemble has a powerful modelling function in the analysis of town plans, and the recovery and reconstruction of processes of town-formation that have operated in the past. This can be applied in two ways: first, particular sets of spatially inter-related features surviving into the present or the recent past (as in maps) can provide the evidential basis for demonstrating a functional coherence between various elements of the town plan; or secondly, an inferred functional unity between a set of such elements can elucidate their spatial relationships in new ways. The important point in this set of arguments lies in being able to postulate, and then reasonably demonstrate through sound analysis and hard evidence, the contemporaneity or temporal disjunction of a particular set of features within the particular town plan as a whole. This can be approached either from the evidence of these physical interrelationships themselves, or by reference to their perceived functional unity as a group at any one time.

This might seem to be a recipe for both having one's conceptual cake and eating it. It is, however, a way of becoming aware not only of what can be legitimately inferred, but also of what cannot. In essence, by postulating the existence of a particular group of features as an ensemble, one is setting up an analytical tool (or model) for investigating and reasonably determining whether or not these features are likely to be complementary in function and therefore contemporary in origin.

In the sense used here, an ensemble in a historical town plan is a group of features in which all the physical elements have played different roles in the common functionality of all of them, as the physical expressions of how people inhabited towns. It is a truism to say that towns were planned, or that they developed, to reflect human needs and patterns of behaviour. But since this is so, it should be possible to discern how towns were planned in the past by inferring how common patterns of behaviour on the part of both groups and individuals resulted in similar ways in which





development at this period (Haslam, 2017, pp. 7–9, 23–4). On the eastern side of the town the original defences, the eastern gate, the street joining this with the central High Street (Joy Street) and the street running inside the defences, and the series of interlocking burgages dependent upon these streets, form a group of features whose spatial interrelationships arguably demonstrate a functional and contemporary unity, which reflect the layout of its original plan. Because all the burgages between the High Street and Green Lane and its southern extension nest against each other – at least on the eastern side of the High Street – it can be inferred that all are the outcome of a contemporary episode of land allocation. In this case this is important in demonstrating that burgages were an original feature of the layout of the town. One inference from this and other evidence is that late-ninth and early-tenth century *burghs* (defended places) were new planned towns, a concept based on the ‘archaeological’ analysis of the spatial relationships of their constituent features (Haslam, 2014, pp. 157–9; 2015; 2016; 2017, pp. 23–4). This supports the interpretation of similar evidence derived from both topographic analysis and detailed excavation from several sites in Winchester (Ford *et al.*, 2011, pp. 34, 189–93).

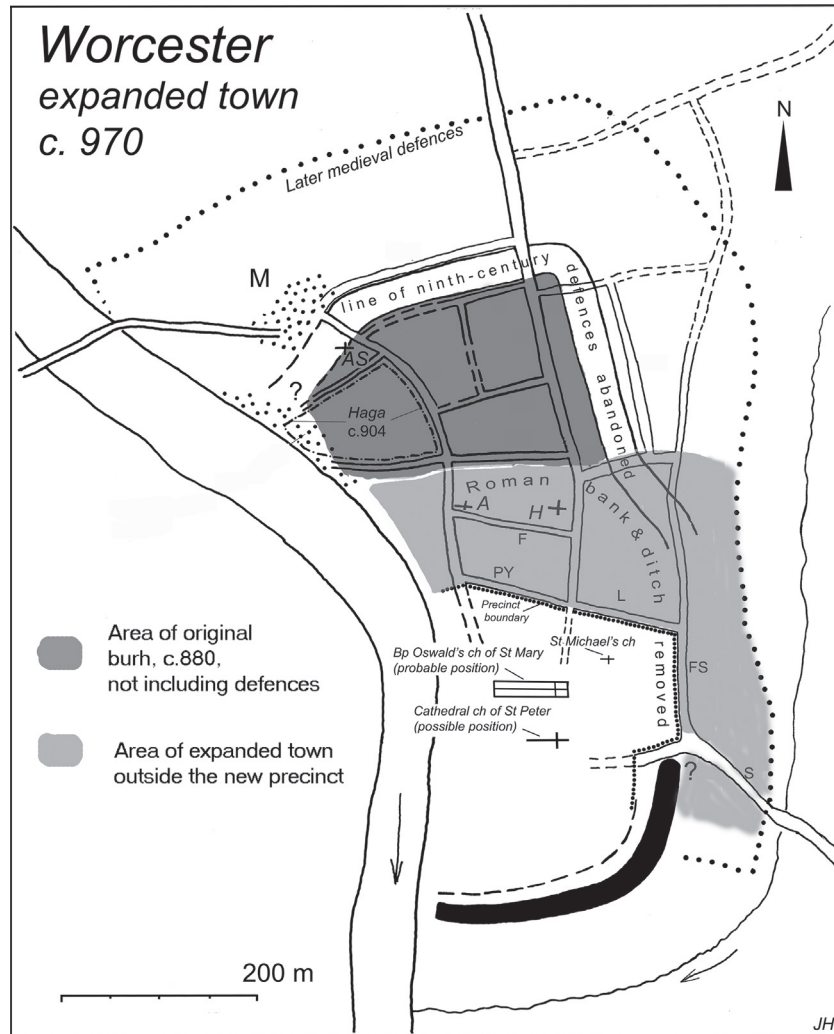
A further example from the pre-Conquest period is Worcester, the site of an early bishop’s seat and a late-ninth century *burgh* (Figure 3). Topographical analysis has suggested that the latter was added to by the laying out of a new planned urban and ecclesiastical development initiated by the bishop as part of the process of the formation of a new monastic church (Bishop Oswald’s church of St Mary) in the mid-tenth century. This comprised a new precinct which surrounded the new abbey church, which lay to the north of the cathedral. An analysis of the town plan has indicated that this was accompanied by a major development which involved the levelling of the bank and the filling-in of the ditch of the massive Iron Age hill fort in which the cathedral was originally sited (Baker and Holt, 2004, pp. 182–3). This was clearly the preliminary stage of what can be recognized

as the construction of a series of streets with their dependent burgages which were laid out around two sides of the new precinct (Haslam, 2014, pp. 164–6; 2017, pp. 9–12).

One significant aspect of this example is the close spatial relationship between different aspects of this development. Bishop Oswald’s new abbey church, its precinct (with a new cemetery church of St Michael within it), the gate in the precinct wall, the extension of the main High Street southwards to meet this gate and the north doorway of the abbey, the streets approaching from the eastern gate, and the burgages dependent upon these streets all interlock spatially in a way that demonstrates that these features were laid out as a co-functional and contemporary group. This, therefore, is a good example of an ensemble, in which all these disparate features can be recognized as resulting from a single act of land allocation, all playing a part in the functioning of the whole as a single new planned and distinctively urban development. In a very real way, this concept unites form and function. The interlocking forms imply a unity of function; and their context as a new monastic town validates the deductions made from the interconnections between the forms. One of the interesting aspects of this set of deductions is that the creation of this ensemble was the outcome of a process that can be tightly dated on other historical grounds to *c.* 960. It can also be inferred that this ensemble of new urban features was an extension of the earlier *burgh* of the 880s to the north. Its associated features (High Street, side streets and their associated burgages and the defences) formed its own ensemble, to which the new one was added, to form a true palimpsest (Haslam, 2014).

### The fissile tendency

The inbuilt assumption – for this is what it really is – that the internal development and growth of town plans in general can be inferred from the spatial differentiation of elements within them has, for example, formed the basis for M. R. G. Conzen’s work on Alnwick and Ludlow. This is alluded to in a number of

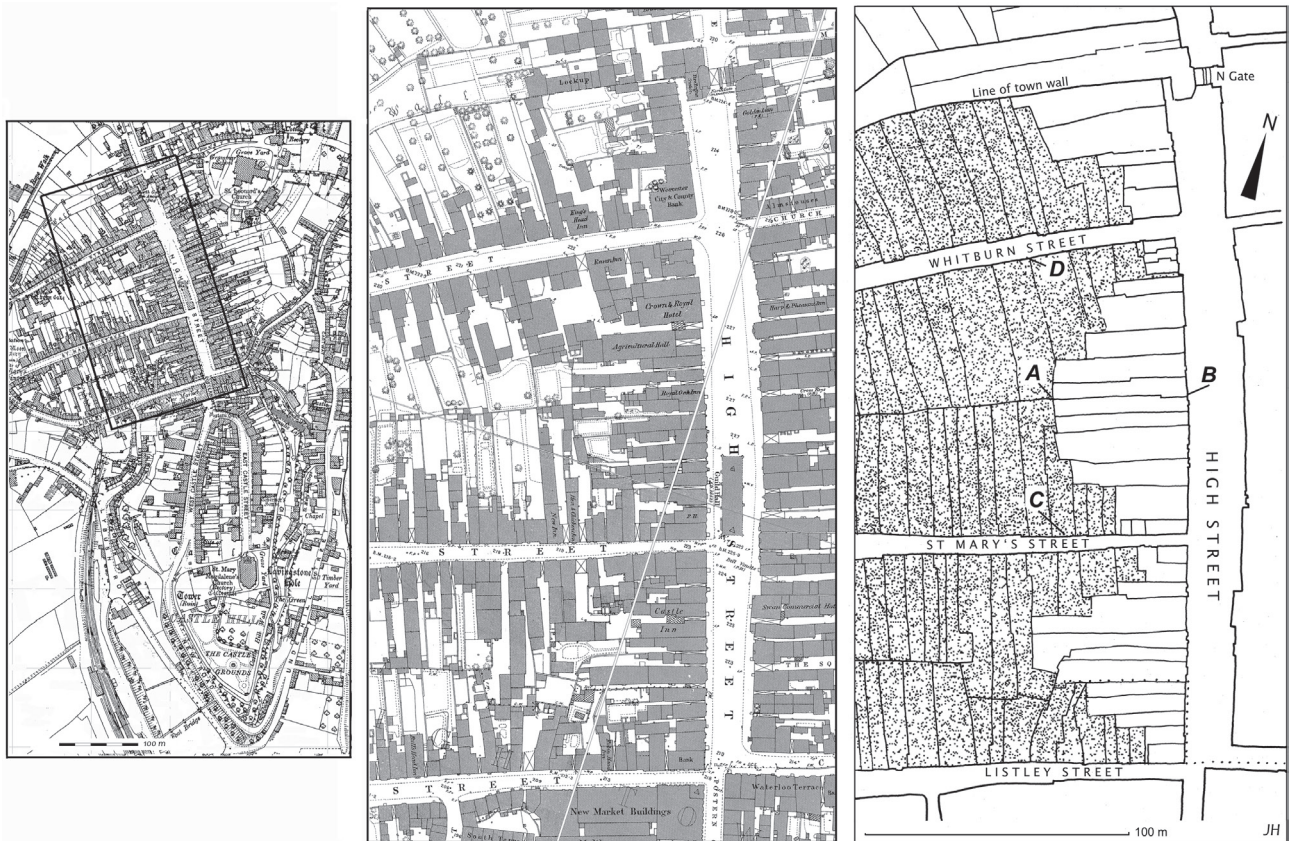


**Figure 3. Worcester, with areas of the *burh* of c. 880 and the planned extension of c. 960 shown in relation to streets and the early defences. Streets: FS – Friar Street; S – Sidbury; L – Lich Street; PY – Palace Yard; F – Fish Street. Churches: H – St Helen's; A – St Alban's.**

Slater's studies of composite town plans (for example, Slater, 1990). Other studies, such as the detailed analysis by means of plan units of the townscapes of Worcester and Gloucester by Baker and Holt (2004), have managed to avoid this particular set of assumptions. Even in this case, however, where the plan units are more an aid to detailed description and analysis of the fabric of the town, the very act of division of the historical townscape into plan units serves to emphasize spatial discontinuities and disconnections within areas which

on a wider view could more reasonably be regarded as having formed a larger ensemble.

An example of this fissile tendency can be seen in the interpretation of the town plan of medieval Bridgnorth, Shropshire (Figure 4). In studies by a number of writers a model has been put forward characterizing the development of the upper town in three separate stages: a primary area around the castle, followed by two successive stages of town layout on the flat land to its north in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. These essentially



**Figure 4. Bridgnorth, Shropshire. Extract showing the town centre on the Ordnance Survey plan of 1875, and the interpretation showing the spatial relationships between the interlocking burgages dependent on the side streets (shaded) and the High Street.**

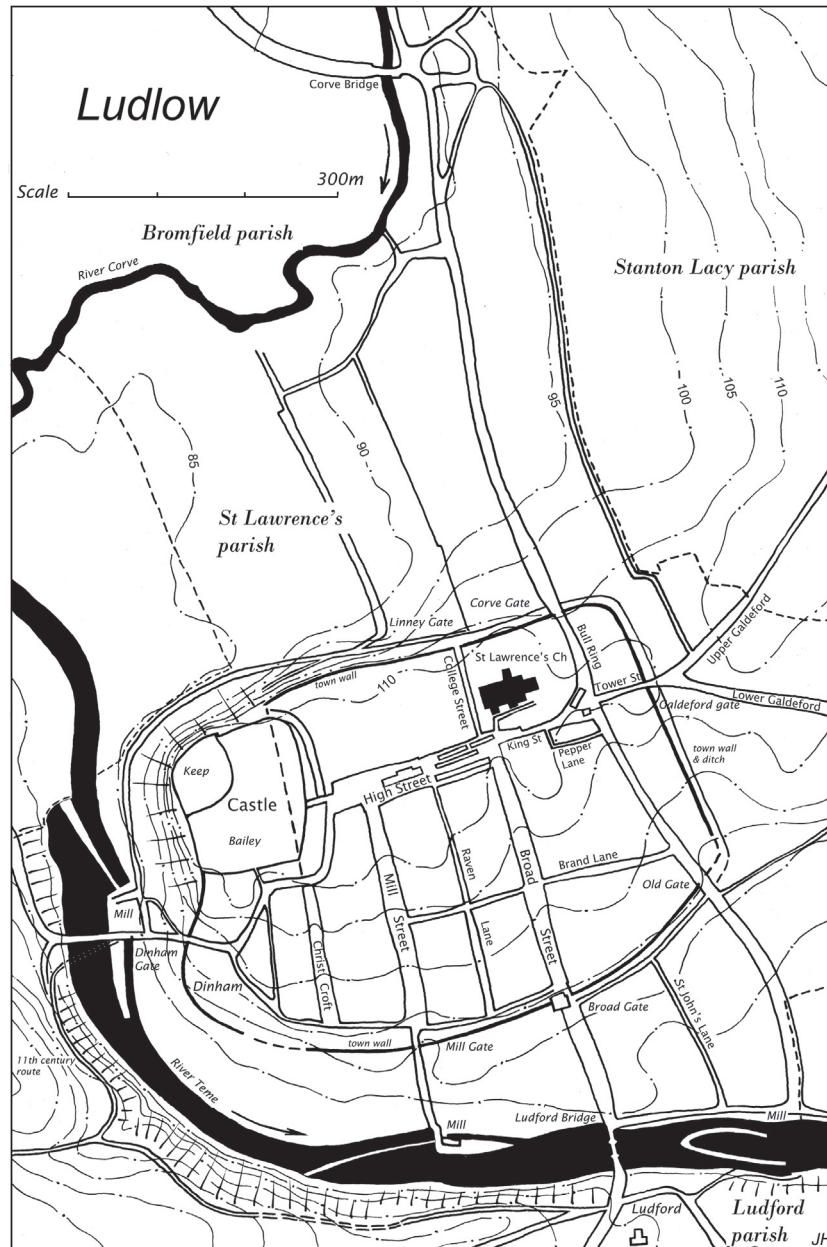
divided the high town outside the castle into two parts – the High Street and its side streets (Buteux, 2005; Croom, 1992; Lilley, 1999; Slater, 1988, 1990). The observation that each of these areas is characterized by different burgrave patterns is used as evidence that they were successive in origin, and that the side streets and their burgrave series were added to the primary High Street in a subsequent period of urban expansion. The division of the area of the upper town to the north of the castle into separate plan units is thus based on this presumption of successive growth, which derives from this perceived differentiation.

Analysis of the spatial relationship of the different series of burgages dependent upon both the High Street and its side streets has, however, shown that they interlock with one another at their rear ends in a way that is more consistent with a process by which they were

laid out as a unitary development (as shown in Figure 4) (Haslam, 2016). On this evidence the whole town to the north of the castle can be more reasonably interpreted as a single ensemble, laid out on a single occasion. Wider historical evidence suggests that this formed an undefended royal town founded very early in the twelfth century, soon after the capture of the castle by King Henry I. The combination of spatial and archaeological evidence shows that defences were added to this ensemble at a later date.

#### **The case of Ludlow**

An extreme exponent of this fissile tendency in town-plan analysis is M. R. G. Conzen, whose structural town-plan analyses of Alwicks and Ludlow (Conzen, 1960, 1968, 1988)



**Figure 5. Plan of Ludlow, showing streets and other features mentioned in the text. Contours are in metres above Ordnance datum.**

have been highly influential (Whitehand and Larkham, 1992). It is not the purpose here to provide a detailed critique of Conzen's methodology and conclusions. However, both raise a number of important issues in relation to the present discussion. Most of Conzen's basic concepts, terminology and detailed methodology are worked out in relation to his study of

Alnwick, and carried through to an analysis of Ludlow. The developed townscape of Ludlow (Figure 5) is seen in his view as the product of 'historical stratification', in which each period of development gave rise to different and contrasting forms. These are described as separate areas, defined as plan units, which are presented as having developed sequentially.

Furthermore, the plan of the historical core of Ludlow is broken down into at least 50 fifth-order 'morphological regions', all of which are seen as nesting within increasingly larger regions in an ascending hierarchy (Conzen, 1988, p. 258, Fig. 17.2). One problematic aspect of this approach is that the definition of these small regions (the 'morphotopes') is somehow determined by the different aspects of building types and land use which are amalgamated with those of the plan-form alone, using criteria which are less than transparent. Since the first two of these aspects have developed subsequently to the latter in different trajectories, as Conzen makes clear, the plan form and its division into plan units is seen from the top downwards, as it were, through the distorting lens of later developments. They bear little relationship to the primary elements of the plan form of the early town layout. In essence they embody the history of the building development of units as seen individually (ultimately as the 'morphotopes'), rather than as reflecting the origins of the townscape as a whole. The plan units into which the town plan is divided, as contiguous areas of concurrent development, are contrasted in their morphogenetic characteristics with adjacent plan units. The 'plan seams' by which the plan units are delimited are, however, in most cases a matter of judgement; they are not themselves part of the physical plan itself, unlike the walls of the rooms in our imaginary house illustrated earlier. Since the evidence for these divisions and subdivisions in the plan itself is mostly opaque to the point of invisibility, the grounds for arguing their distinctiveness would appear to be somewhat subjective, a matter of untestable opinion.

This methodology may well produce syntheses that can inform present-day issues related to the conservation of the historical landscape – 'a basis for rooting the future management of the urban landscape in its historical development' (Whitehand, 2001, p. 109). But this can be contrasted with an 'archaeological' approach, aimed at constructing an evidence-based historical narrative of the town's early development. This would involve the re-creation of the form and course

of development of the town plan elements from the point of their origin, and working out how these early patterns have determined, and have been modified by, those that have developed subsequently. This methodology is well exemplified in Martin Biddle's and David Hill's study of late-Saxon planned towns (Biddle and Hill, 1971). An important way in which this aim can be achieved is by examining the detailed spatial relationship between the burgages, streets, town walls and other features in the plan (Haslam, 2017). The physical and spatial relationships between these features comprise the essential evidence (together with archaeological and historical dating) which can demonstrate temporal relationships and developmental chronologies between early features of the historical urban landscape. The overall aim of this methodology is to provide the evidence for historical narratives of townscape development, with the outcome of enabling the construction of historical syntheses through comparisons on a wider canvas (see, for example, Biddle and Hill, 1971; Lilley, 1999).

As already indicated, the fissile tendency of much town-plan analysis has built into it the assumption of sequential growth. Based upon this premise, the whole developmental process in Ludlow is explained by Conzen as generating 'period-specific forms', characterized as 'morphological periods', which can be best understood by analysing them in terms of a 'hierarchy' of forms nesting together in a way that is premised on the thesis of evolutionary development (Conzen, 1968, p. 117; 1988, pp. 259–60). He writes, for instance, of composite plans being made up of 'a hierarchy of morphological regions, individual streets and specialized precincts' which 'combined locally so as to form the units of successive urban growth, each with its own street system, and these in turn combining to form the whole town' (1988, p. 265). Differentiation through growth by periods is elevated to a fundamental principle of town-plan analysis – that of the 'principle of morphogenetic priority' (Conzen, 1988, p. 260). In other words, in the development of all towns the passage of time implies growth, which will inevitably

produce differentiation, which is the evidence for the recognition of the sequential development of composite town plans. In Conzen's generalized formulation the evidential force of the way in which the spatial elements of the town plan are actually articulated, and how they must have functioned together, is subsumed by assumptions of differentiation and growth (Conzen, 1968, pp. 122–4; 1988, pp. 260–5). These assumptions have provided the interpretive framework in which the concrete evidence of the details of the town plan is fitted. This is a characteristic of all subsequent work on the early development of Ludlow (Hindle 1981; Lilley, 1999; Lloyd, 1979, 2008; Shoosmith, 2000; Slater 1988; 1990; Train 1999). This has determined how this evidence is presented, to the point where it appears to have lost its independent voice.

It is possible, however, to recontextualize the evidence presented by the town plan of Ludlow in a way that is not preconditioned by the primary assumption that different parts, of varying forms, necessarily represent successive growth stages. By examining ways in which different elements of the overall town plan relate together spatially, reflecting a multiplicity of functions as part of an ensemble, an entirely different 'archaeological' reconstruction can be put forward. This exercise has already been started by Slater, who has used evidence from both metrological and geometric analysis to advance a revised chronology for the 'morphogenetic evolution' of the town and its plan (Slater, 1990, pp. 70–9).

One of the areas where the spatial relationships between features provide crucial evidence for an alternative interpretation of Ludlow's town plan is that surrounding the eastern gateway (Galdeford Gate), which is included in two of Conzen's plan units (Figure 6). Apart from the identification of the multiplicity of the inter-nesting 'morphological regions' or 'morphotopes', one of Conzen's basic premises is that the burgages in this area were cut into by the later insertion of the town wall (Conzen, 1968, pp. 125–6; 1988, p. 269). This conclusion is to a large extent premised on the assumed date of the origin

of the defences as being indicated by the first references to murage grants in the early-thirteenth century in historical sources. This assumption is made by St John Hope in 1909, and repeated without question by all subsequent commentators (St John Hope, 1909, pp. 384, 386; Slater, 1990, pp. 74–9). In reality, however, this evidence only gives a date by which the defences were in existence. It does not define their point of origin.

There are, however, aspects of the spatial relationships between these features which call into question this assumption of the secondary development of the defences. It is clear that the burgages outside the wall and ditch which are dependent upon the two roads leading to the gate (Upper Galdeford and Lower Galdeford) are laid out on an alignment that is quite different from those laid out inside it (Figure 6). Those on the outside to the east and north-east wrap around the north-eastern corner of the defences, forming interlocking series which are aligned onto the two roads leading to the eastern gate (Galdeford Gate) and onto Corve Street which leads northwards from the north gate (Corve Gate). In contrast, the burgages on the inside of the wall abut onto its inner edge at right angles, with *no* alignments of boundaries carried from the inside to the outside. There is no evidence from these physical relationships in this or any other part of the town plan that any of these features were truncated, as has been generally assumed. The presumption has been that since the wall is later, they must have been.

Rather than showing a developmental sequence, these spatial arrangements are more consistent with a situation in which the positioning of the gate in the wall (Galdeford Gate) has determined the original position of the two roads approaching from the east. These roads are aligned directly onto the point at which one would expect a drawbridge over the ditch in front of the wall. In Conzen's reconstruction it is assumed that the junction of these two early routeways approaching the castle from the east would have been shifted eastwards on the occasion of the construction of the wall (Conzen 1968, p. 125). There is no evidence for this in the surviving topography.



**Figure 6.** Detail of the north-east part of the walled town of Ludlow, with burgages based on the OS 1:500 plan of 1865.

It would appear to be a clear instance of juggling the evidence to fit the hypothesis.

The same logic applies to the position of Tower Street inside the wall, which provides the only access routes from the east (Upper and Lower Galdeford Streets), connecting them westwards through the gateway directly to the central High Street, which from a

functional point of view arguably represents the primary market area. It is also clear that the wall, gate and roads (including Old Street) have between them determined the disposition of the burgages, both inside and outside the wall. All these features interlock spatially in a way that is entirely consistent with the conclusion that they were interdependent,

in the sense that the layout of each of these components was determined by that of all the others, and each was necessary for the proper functioning of all of them as a new defended town as a single unit. It can be deduced, therefore, that the wall (with its ditch) and the gate were the primary features which acted as the morphological frame for the layout as a whole. All of these features must therefore have been the outcome of a single act of planned land allocation, rather than individual developments which were laid out consecutively. This is notwithstanding the probability that Old Street was a pre-existing pre-urban north-south routeway (Shoosmith, 2000, pp. 7–9).

This conclusion contrasts with the ways in which the relationships between these and other elements of the town plan have been interpreted by previous commentators. It provides the key to a similar set of spatial relationships around the northern gate (Corve Gate), in relation to which the northern suburb along Corve Street has clearly been planned. Here too the positions of the wall and the gateway have determined the layout of the burgages on both its outside and inside. Exactly the same arguments apply to the position of Broad Street and the southern gateway (Broad Gate) through which it passes, as well as the bridge by which the routeway through the gate crossed the river. Given the primacy of the defences in the layout of the town, Broad Gate and Broad Street, as well as the bridge, must have been planned and laid out at the same time. Mill Street and the side streets (Raven Lane and Brand Lane), which are laid out in a symmetrical relationship to Broad Street, must therefore have been created in the same episode of land allocation. Mill Street and Broad Street are dependent, both topographically and functionally, upon the central market area (High Street), the position and alignment of which is itself laid out in relation to the eastern gateway (Galdeford Gate), Tower Street and the castle to its west, in a way which argues for its primacy within the town plan as a whole. Within this complex of features, all of which interconnect, the church of St Lawrence and its precinct was so placed

on the highest point of the town as to act as a primary focus for all of them. As I have shown elsewhere, the burgages too must have been laid out in a dependent relationship to the streets which meet at right angles as part of the same process (Haslam, 2017, pp. 17–20, 21–2). This alternative view of this set of relationships has already been hinted at by Slater (Slater, 1990, pp. 70–1), though he develops a revised interpretation of the town plan as a whole which posits a primary development along Old Street, Bull Ring and Corve Street, and which is based on the premise of the secondary insertion of the wall and the secondary development of the central market along High Street (Slater, 1990, 77–9).

These spatial relationships, particularly of the streets and burgages to the wall, gateways and the castle, can best be understood, therefore, as originating in a planning process in which *all* these features were laid out as part of a contemporary and co-functional ensemble, in the sense used in this paper. This ‘archaeological’ analysis of the interlocking spatial relationships between the different parts of the historical core of the town plan of Ludlow therefore provides the evidential basis for a somewhat different interpretation from that of Conzen’s original thesis, and of Slater’s reinterpretation. Conzen posited the sequential development of the various plan units which he was able to distinguish and identify by means of supposed period-specific characteristics and parallels. It must be said that this would seem to be a self-validating way of arguing in which the interpretation has ‘wagged the tail’ of the evidence. In particular, in relation to the issue of the date of the town wall, it can reasonably be asserted that the force of the spatial evidence which demonstrates its primacy (which has survived in its entirety in the town plan) must take precedence over an inductive or literal reading of the documentary sources, which cannot in the nature of things be a complete record of its historical development.

This arrangement can best be interpreted, therefore, as an ensemble in the meaning of the term used here, in that these different morphogenetic regions can be recognized as

comprising a single co-functional entity. In this reconstruction, the central market space (the High Street) can be seen as the town's primary focus, situated on the ridge top and forming (at least in spatial terms) an organic extension to the east gate of the castle. All the other features of the town plan, seen from both functional and spatial perspectives, were set out as appendages to it. In this the different spatial components – including the defences – are best interpreted as being arranged together as a single process of land allocation which optimized the use of the available space, to enable the town to operate as a complete but composite multifunctional unit. It is entirely consistent with this conclusion that the whole town, rather than any one part of it, forms the parish of St Lawrence (Figure 5). Among the many aspects of this reinterpretation is the consideration that this complex must have been set out by the lord of the castle as a development that was an organic adjunct to it. This factor is downplayed or ignored in many of the interpretations of the development of the town, including that of Conzen and in Slater's revised developmental model. This re-interpretation makes possible a rather different historical narrative of the origins and early development of medieval Ludlow: that it was a new defended town that was planned in its entirety in one phase as a unitary ensemble, in or around the middle of the twelfth century. This was laid out in close physical, tenuous and functional relation to the earlier castle and its primary satellite urban development at Dinham to its south.

## Conclusions

The examples given above show that the idea of the ensemble is a useful and illuminating means of considering plan forms. It allows connections to be recognized within a town plan that would otherwise be obscured by its apparent divisions. In these, the physical relationships between components of historical townscapes can be used in new ways as evidence which enables the reconstruction of past arrangements that have a coherent spatial

and co-functional identity as contemporary developments. In the case of Ludlow, for instance, it is argued that all of the major elements of the urban landscape described above were laid out to be part of a larger whole, or ensemble, at one moment in time. It is certainly true, however, as Baker and Holt point out, that the development of areas of contrasting forms within town plans would in some cases have arisen from the internal growth of the plan in time, and that these patterns need to be 'disaggregated' to properly enable their understanding (Baker and Holt, 2004, pp. 7–13). But this is just to acknowledge that the bringing into being of the kind of planned and more-or-less regular town plans discussed here was a process rather than an event, and that once laid out they were subject to forces which inevitably would have led to modifications of the original patterns.

However, the point of this discussion is to give reasons (with a range of examples from different periods) for asserting that period-dependent differentiation, or sequential development within medieval towns with seemingly composite plans, is not a *necessary* inference from the observation of differences in layout. This must, rather, be demonstrated by evidence that is not derived solely from the fact of this differentiation. If Conzen felt able to take St John Hope to task for his 'methodological weakness' in proposing the 'unitary origin' of Ludlow's medieval development in 1909 (Conzen 1968, p. 122), the time has now come around to question Conzen's reliance on aspects of differentiation to signify growth (such as variations in 'street styles') as his own methodological weakness. The recognition of co-functional aspects of a series of disparate but spatially-related morphological units has an important role in counteracting the tendency to break down historical townscapes into smaller and smaller units, which can obscure rather than illuminate past developmental processes and their embodiment in town plans. As in all the cases alluded to in this article, this is a way in which the evidential basis for new historical narratives can be articulated and explored on a sound basis that is free from inbuilt, and in many cases

misleading, assumptions concerning spatial differentiation and growth through time.

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