

King Alfred, Mercia and London, 874–86: A reassessment

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The status of London in the later ninth century has for some time been the subject of enquiry by historians, numismatists and archaeologists. The annal for 886 in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, with its perceived unambiguity, has loomed large as the key to any interpretation of the political and military status of London in this period.¹ A number of commentators have tried to make sense of the rather confused and incomplete entries in the *Chronicle* for the 880s.² Archaeologists and historians have investigated streets, properties and the evidence for trade in the ninth century,³ the middle Saxon *wic* along the Strand and its context,⁴ the strategic role of London Bridge,⁵ and the important transition between the extra-mural and intra-mural trading settlements.⁶ Numismatists and historians have re-examined the coinage of the period and the historical context of Alfred's mints⁷ as well as other documentary sources.⁸ The evidence of two other documents – the Burghal Hidage and the Treaty between King Alfred and Guthrum – has also been brought into play in this wider discussion.⁹ Recent work in all these fields has resulted in what Derek Keene has described as 'one of the most striking clusters of paradigm shifts to have taken place in English historical studies in recent years'.¹⁰

In some apprehension therefore of treading where angels have been before, the present writer puts forward a somewhat different view of Alfred's relationship to London as seen through spectacles which are focused on the strategic realities of the time, rather than being bound by the limitations of either the documentary, numismatic or archaeological record. What follows is essentially a development of a general historical model outlining Alfred's strategies in the years in question which I have developed elsewhere.¹¹ In that paper I argued that the control which Alfred had exercised in London and eastern Mercia before 877, evidenced in the pattern of minting, was curtailed by its annexation by the Vikings, who in this year incorporated London and the surrounding area (Middlesex, Hertfordshire, southern Bedfordshire and Essex) into their new kingdom of East Anglia and

established a Scandinavian/Mercian boundary to the west of London. I also argued that following his defeat of Guthrum's army at Edington in 878 King Alfred put in place the system of forts and fortresses in Wessex and eastern Mercia which is listed in the contemporary Burghal Hidage document, which system reflected a policy both for the defence of the West Saxons as well as a strategic offensive against the Viking presence in Mercia and in London. The construction of this burghal system was arguably one of the principal factors which forced Guthrum to retreat from Mercia and London to East Anglia in late 879, their respective spheres of influence being redefined by a new boundary to the east of London which was set out in the contemporary Treaty between Alfred and Guthrum (see Fig. 1). Thereafter Alfred once again took control of London and its surrounding area, and initiated the development of intra-mural London as a burh. The exploration of the implications of this new model, as it affects ideas about the development of London and its region in the years in question, forms the subject of this paper. A detailed analysis of the archaeological and other evidence relating to the formation of the new burghal space within the walls, which these political developments made possible, is given elsewhere.¹²

The generally accepted view of the development of London at this period has until recently changed little over the last few decades. F. M. Stenton, for instance, regarded it as axiomatic that the annal for 886 describes a 'West Saxon occupation of London' which had possibly 'contained a Danish garrison since .. 872'.¹³ Tony Dyson has argued that this annal shows that 'Alfred had not previously been in occupation of the town in any sense', drawing the 'inescapable' conclusion that 'its occupation essentially involved the replacement of a Danish presence by an English one'.¹⁴ This view has been shared by most other historians of the period, until questioned on the basis of evidence from the coinage in two papers by Mark Blackburn and Simon Keynes.¹⁵ In his analysis of the London mint of Alfred, Mark Blackburn has remarked how '... the coinage is probably our most direct and important

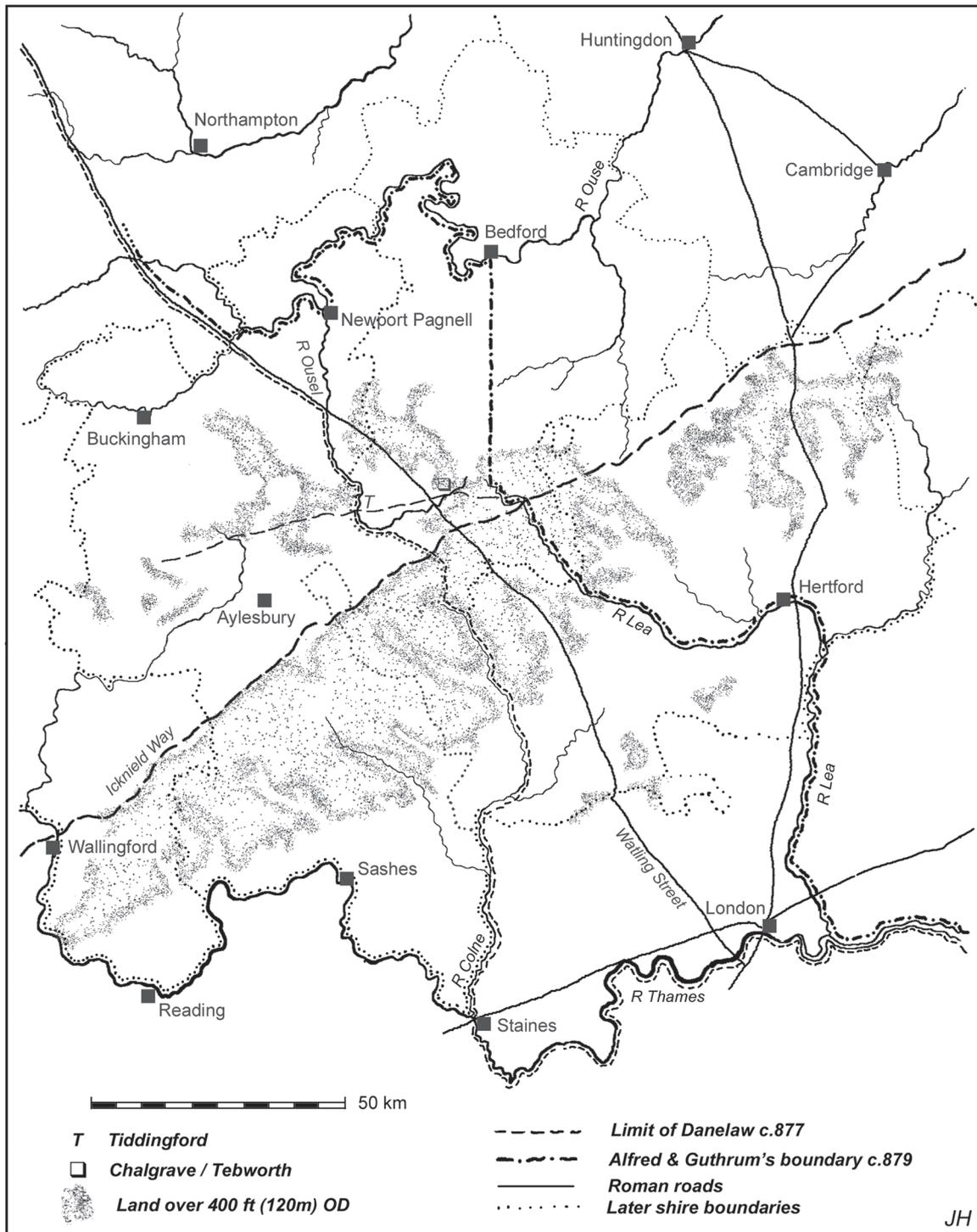


Figure 1. Suggested boundaries between Mercia and the Danelaw in the period AD 877–86.

source of evidence for London's status at this period, and when viewed independently it points to a quite different sequence of events from that traditionally accepted'.¹⁶ Similarly, Simon Keynes has suggested that '... the most natural interpretation of the numismatic evidence should be allowed to modify the received reading of the written sources'.¹⁷ On the basis of the evidence of the pattern of

coin production they argue that it was King Alfred, rather than the Vikings, who was in control of London from possibly the last part of the reign of Burgred of Mercia, with this control shared during the later 870s by King Ceolwulf of Mercia.

The established paradigm is, however, difficult to shift entirely. In spite of this reassessment of the importance

of Alfred's status and role in the period indicated by the evidence of the coinage, Simon Keynes has remarked that 'this need not detract in any way from the intended and perceived significance of the new measures which Alfred took for the defence and restoration of London in 886'.¹⁸ Similarly, Derek Keene still sees the 'events' of 886 as being the formative occasion in London's 'major transformation'.¹⁹ This of course leaves the period before this as a virtual blank, though without a Scandinavian presence. However, the writer has suggested, in an alternative view to some aspects of the interpretation of the evidence of the coinage by Blackburn and Keynes, that Ceolwulf's control of minting in London during the latter part of his reign was facilitated not by a closer alliance with Alfred but by a phase of Viking occupation of London in the period 877–9, to the exclusion of Alfred's own well-established interests.²⁰ The present paper puts forward the case that the difficulties with Blackburn's and Keynes' 'new' model are resolved by an alternative which sees Alfred's resumption of control of London in late 879 from Viking occupation in the previous two years as marking the first stage in London's transformation as a redefended and garrisoned urban burh.²¹

It is of course this assumption that the events of 886 were a turning point in London's development which has informed the equally tenacious view²² that the Treaty of Alfred and Guthrum, in which control by Guthrum's Vikings was limited to the area which lay to the east of a boundary along the River Lea to the east of London, must have belonged to this period, and that the Treaty was in some way the consequence of King Alfred's 'occupation' of London at this time.²³ As I have argued, however, this paradigm seems to disregard the implications of the clear statement in the *Chronicle* that the retreat of the Vikings to East Anglia took place not in 886 but in late 879, which date arguably forms the most appropriate context for the ratification of the Treaty.²⁴ The alternative conclusions of other historians and numismatists that London was an 'open city' which was controlled by no particular power for these years,²⁵ or that London occupied a 'neutral position between Wessex and Mercia',²⁶ or that it was controlled by the Vikings between 872 and 879,²⁷ or that it was never controlled by the Vikings at all after their occupation in 871–2,²⁸ or that it was regained by Alfred for the first time in 883,²⁹ or even that it was possibly captured by Alfred from Aethelred in 886,³⁰ merely emphasize the lack of due weight given to the strategic realities and the interplay of the power politics of the time, which alone would have been the major determining factor in its status. An example of this is the reactionary view of Alfred Smyth, who, in considering the views of Blackburn and Keynes, nevertheless argues from the coinage itself that 'it is not possible to envisage Alfred having any kind of autonomous hold on Mercian London' in the period before 886.³¹

I have, however, emphasized that the significance of London for all parties – Vikings, West Saxons and Mercians – lay in its strategic importance,³² which would

have made it the battleground and prize for all concerned. One of the main thrusts of this thesis is that the Vikings were very much part of the political dynamics in these crucial years, and were indeed one of the main causal agencies in these developments, acting out their own political and military agendas against and in relationship to those of both Ceolwulf and Alfred. Like the two Saxon kings, they would have regarded control of London as the key to the implementation of their wider strategies in their respective spheres of influence. Tony Dyson has emphasized that control of London was the key to the domination both of passage along the Thames and of routes which focused on its lowest crossing point at London bridge.³³ And as Derek Keene has pointed out, by the ninth century London had 'achieved a key position in an axis of power and circulation which extended from the Midlands down the Thames valley to the estuary and to highly commercial districts in eastern Kent and overseas ... which offered distinct advantages as a strategic node in such a system, attractive to rulers as a source of income, goods and power, and as commanding vital routes'.³⁴ Apart from the Roman roads driving into Wessex from London, the key vital route exposing the West Saxons to Viking predation from the east was of course the Thames, which London dominated. Its position during the period in question at the meeting point of the kingdoms of Mercia and the West Saxons, and of Viking East Anglia, would therefore have ensured that it would have been a place for whose control kings and would-be conquerors would have found it worth fighting. What happened to London, therefore, is in many senses the key to the understanding of wider political, military and economic issues in other parts of the country – and of course *vice-versa*.

King Ceolwulf and the Vikings in Eastern Mercia

These issues are put into proper perspective by considering the position of London in the context of the various political developments which affected it, and by analysing how these changes were reflected in the political geography of the area – although it would perhaps be more true to say that these political and geographic changes did not so much impinge on London as revolve around it. The account in the *Chronicle* for 877, which states that in this year the Vikings 'shared out some of it [Mercia], and gave some to Ceolwulf', provides an insight into developments in the eastern part of Mercia in the later 870s and 880s, including the area around London, which can be discerned from other lines of enquiry. There are, however, grounds for believing that this was the second stage of a process which had begun with the annexation of the north-eastern part of Mercia – effectively the area of the later five Boroughs – as a result of, and directly subsequent to, the invasion of Mercia by the Vikings and their occupation of Repton in 874. The common assumption that this process had to wait until 877 appears

to be based on the statement of the *Chronicle*, quoted above, that Mercia was shared out between the Vikings and Ceolwulf on their return to Mercia in that year.³⁵ The chronicler Aethelweard, however, refers to the division of the kingdom conquered by the Vikings in 874–5 into two shares.³⁶ Since the two entries covering Ceolwulf's reign in the *Chronicle* were, it is argued below, a politically motivated fabrication, there is room for entertaining an alternative scenario which is more in accord with the realities of the power politics of the time. It could be reasonably argued that the occupation of Repton in 874 was a far more significant turning point in Mercian affairs than the events of 877. At the point at which King Burgred was replaced by Ceolwulf, the Vikings had a chance to exert control over the Mercian kingdom and extend their territories to include a swathe of eastern England with little effective opposition, almost as though it had fallen into their lap. In view of the fact that the Vikings were so keen to gain control of kingdoms or parts of kingdoms to facilitate settlement and immigration, it seems inherently unlikely that they would have waited for three years to go on another spree around yet another kingdom, without formalizing the arrangement at this point. This being so, it follows that the events of 877, however they are construed, refer to a different set of processes.

Although received opinion holds that London 'remained under "English" control after the "partition" of 877',³⁷ there are several lines of evidence from which it can be inferred that the reference in the *Chronicle* to the 'sharing out' of part of Mercia in 877 referred to the annexation by the Vikings of the whole of the south-eastern part of Mercia to their already existing kingdom of East Anglia and the former north-east Mercia. This process would have involved the takeover by the Vikings of London and its surrounding area – effectively the shires of Middlesex, southern Bedfordshire, Hertfordshire and Essex (Fig. 1). This has been suggested by the writer in two earlier papers, but the evidence may usefully be drawn together here. There are strong arguments which support the view that King Alfred had been able to take control of the whole area of eastern Mercia, including the area of what later became Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire, as well as London and its surrounding area, at or soon after the abdication of Burgred in 874. The evidence for this will be explored below.

The 'new' model for the development of London is premised on the evidence of the coinage adduced by Mark Blackburn, in which the Cross-and-Lozenge coins produced for Alfred from the London mint in the period 874–7 were superseded by coins of similar type produced for Ceolwulf alone. The latter are dated to around the time of the 'Partition' of 877 on numismatic grounds.³⁸ This programme of minting for Alfred before *c.* 877 for instance included the production of coins representing Alfred as 'king of the English' and 'king of the Saxons and Mercians', which Simon Keynes has suggested might be interpreted as an 'attempt to signify that he was king of

both Saxons and Mercians, perhaps with the implication that the coins were struck before Ceolwulf's position was fully recognised in London'. He has suggested that, after Burgred's departure, Alfred was 'recognised as the legitimate ruler in London and some other parts of southern Mercia, which was followed by an extension of Ceolwulf's authority to these areas in the later 870s'.³⁹ Keynes has emphasized the closeness of the relationship between Mercia and the West Saxons, particularly in economic affairs, in the reign of Burgred,⁴⁰ which had allowed the minting of coins in London towards the end of Burgred's reign in the name of Alfred.⁴¹ It was presumably this cooperation which enabled Alfred to gain the foothold in Mercian London and its surrounding area which he clearly developed and consolidated from this time until 877. Blackburn entertains the possibility that the minting of coins by Ceolwulf alone in London after *c.* 877 may have been associated with the Viking–Mercian 'Partition' of 877, but considers that it is more likely to have been the product of a 'West Saxon–Mercian alliance promising mutual support, ... one term of which would recognise Ceolwulf's claim over southern Mercia'.⁴² Similarly, Keynes has suggested that the reform of the coinage in the 870s, which is accepted as taking place at the London mint, might be regarded as a 'joint economic venture' between Alfred and Ceolwulf, which although planned by Alfred alone was one in which 'he was able to persuade Ceolwulf to participate'.⁴³ Keynes' suggestion that Ceolwulf's power in London was belatedly 'recognised' in London after 877 is shared by Derek Keene.⁴⁴ The prevailing model therefore assumes that the Vikings had little or no part to play in the dynamics of the unfolding political situation in this period.

There are, however, inherent contradictions in the suggestion that minting in London by Ceolwulf alone after 877 was the result of a cooperative venture or power sharing, or indeed any sort of alliance, between Alfred and Ceolwulf. Why Alfred should have allowed Ceolwulf sole minting rights at this time, and under what circumstances he was prepared to abrogate his own well-established interests in a prime wealth-generating activity which the control of minting in London must have represented, is not explained. It is certainly true, however, that the 'fragmentation of authority' in Wessex mentioned by Keene, which resulted from the coup against Alfred by the Vikings at Chippenham in early 878, would have perfectly suited Ceolwulf's (and the Vikings') agendas. But, as is discussed further below, the suggestion that Alfred was in any way willing to recognize Ceolwulf's interests or to cooperate with him in any joint venture appears to be contradicted by the negative if not damning tone of what amounts to an obituary of Ceolwulf and his reign in the *Chronicle*. In this he is not only denied any status as a legitimate king of Mercia in his own right but is also downgraded to a 'king's thegn'. It is difficult to see these post-mortem judgments as anything other than an expression of outright hostility to Ceolwulf which reflects

an attitude which the Alfredian court had had to Ceolwulf while he was alive. Furthermore, given the realities of the power politics of the time played out between Alfred, Ceolwulf and Guthrum, it seems doubtful if any military or economic advantage would be handed over by one party to another without the application of a hefty degree of political – and ultimately military – leverage. As already pointed out, this scenario gives no recognition to the role played by the Vikings in the political dynamics of the time, or to the possibility that the Vikings may indeed have occupied London as part of the imposition of a wider political settlement.

In an alternative explanation for the numismatic evidence, the writer has drawn the inference that the introduction of the ‘Ceolwulf-alone’ coinage at the time of the Partition of Mercia in 877 signifies that Alfred was denied access to the mints which he had up to that point controlled, and that this was the direct result of the forceful intervention of the Vikings who took control of London between 877 and Ceolwulf’s death in 879.⁴⁵ It would of course be natural to draw the conclusion from this that the Vikings took some sort of decisive step against the wishes of Ceolwulf to the extent that they were able to take effective control of what at the time was the only entrepôt connecting Mercia with those of northern Europe. But the evidence discussed by Blackburn and Keynes concerning the pattern of minting in the preceding few years shows that it would have been King Alfred’s authority which would have been recognized in London and eastern Mercia after Burgred’s departure in 874, and that it was Alfred who initiated the reform of the coinage at some point in the period 874–7 in a programme which was implemented primarily through the mints in London.⁴⁶ By taking control of London in 877, therefore, the Vikings were able to exert a decisive blow against King Alfred’s influence and power in Mercia, which had developed from the situation inherited from the few years before Burgred’s forced abdication, rather than compromising interests which Ceolwulf had already established in the rest of Mercia. This scenario is perhaps emphasized by new evidence from the coinage, which shows that Ceolwulf was minting coins in London at the beginning of his reign, ‘as a partner with Alfred in the initial recoinage, continuing the monetary alliance that Burgred had formed with the West Saxons’.⁴⁷ That this alliance gave way to minting by Alfred alone suggests that a fundamental rivalry developed between the two kings in which Alfred had managed to gain the advantage by overriding Ceolwulf’s interests.

This rivalry is indicated by other factors, apart from the evidence of the treatment of Ceolwulf in the *Chronicle*, which will be discussed further below. During the period 878–9 it is argued that after his success in battle against Guthrum at Edington in early 878 Alfred reasserted the control of the eastern part of English Mercia which he had established before the ‘Partition’ of 877, in order to create the two burhs at Oxford and Buckingham as a

strategic offensive against the Viking presence to the east.⁴⁸ Furthermore, recent work by David Roffe has suggested that the original burghal territories of Wallingford and Sashes included a large part of southern Oxfordshire and southern Buckinghamshire respectively.⁴⁹ That the formation of these burhs at this time would have involved the submission of the populations of their respective burghal territories to Alfred shows that Ceolwulf was seen by Alfred at this stage very much as a weaker partner, or less worthy a king, whose interests he could override almost at will. A similar process of annexation of Ceolwulf’s territory must have occurred at Bath, which before Alfred’s time was a part of Mercia,⁵⁰ in order to create the burh and its burghal territory. These high-handed tactics indicate rivalry rather than an alliance of common interests, and stand in stark contrast to the picture of cooperation between Alfred and Ceolwulf at this period which Blackburn and Keynes infer from the pattern of minting in London. They therefore reinforce the alternative interpretation that Ceolwulf’s hold on London in the later part of his reign was only made possible by virtue of the fact that this was underpinned by the Viking presence there.

The suggestion of the annexation of the London area by the Vikings in 877 also throws light on other evidence on a wider canvas. In accounting for and explaining these developments, there are three alternative reconstructions. The first would be to follow the interpretation of Blackburn, Keynes and Keene, at least in part, in accepting that Ceolwulf could merely have been filling the political vacuum in London and its surroundings left by Alfred’s forced removal from the political stage after his rout at Chippenham in early 878. Whether or not the Vikings were involved in this particular development would not have very much affected the course of events. This would, however, be to ignore the implications of the evidence, argued by the writer in detail below, of the existence of a Viking–Mercian boundary which lay to the west of London, and for the association of the establishment of this with the ‘Partition’ of Mercia in 877. While this is to some degree inferred rather than unequivocally demonstrated, it supplies the only credible context for the establishment of the boundary in Alfred and Guthrum’s Treaty on a different alignment, in 879. This set of arguments (discussed in detail below) is a considerable stumbling block to this particular scenario. This alternative also disregards the fact that after Alfred’s defeat of Guthrum’s forces at Edington in May 878 he would have come back onto the political stage as a more powerful force than before.

The second alternative would be to suggest the following. In the period 874–7 King Ceolwulf was clearly an independent ruler of an autonomous kingdom⁵¹ – albeit one in which King Alfred of the West Saxons had managed to develop considerable recognition, influence and possibly actual power and control in London and eastern Mercia, and over which he may well have considered himself to have been the natural successor to Burgred. It would be

reasonable to suggest that Ceolwulf might have become not a little put out by Alfred's continuing interests in 'his' kingdom, particularly since Ceolwulf was from a different royal line to that represented by Burgred, Alfred's brother-in-law and political 'partner'.⁵² Ceolwulf's position as the beneficiary of Burgred's abdication, and as a protégé of the Vikings, would have made it difficult for Alfred to have shown anything other than antagonism to his reign in Mercia. Conversely, Ceolwulf would naturally have shown an equal degree of antagonism to Alfred's established interests in Mercia – and even his possible pretensions to the kingship of Mercia as the self-acknowledged successor of Burgred – shown particularly by the tightening of his control on London and its minting operations. He may well have felt threatened by Alfred's ambitions in Mercia, which would to a large extent have been underpinned by his close family ties with the old guard in Mercia. This situation would have contained the ingredients of a classic power struggle – which there is every reason to believe it turned into. It is possible therefore that Ceolwulf could have initiated some arrangement with his Viking 'hosts' by which they would exclude King Alfred from exercising any further control in Mercia so that its governance would be in his hands alone. This would be consistent with the numismatic evidence analysed by Blackburn and Keynes and summarized above, and would also explain the disdainful attitude of the Alfredian *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* to him (discussed further below) after Alfredian interests had won the day.

The third alternative would see the developments in eastern Mercia and London argued above as being a wholly Viking initiative. Guthrum's forces had spent two years from early 875 until early 877 barnstorming their way around Wessex in what turned out to be an unsuccessful attempt to subdue King Alfred and to achieve some control of the West Saxon kingdom. It could be construed as being significant that their return to Mercia to over-winter in Gloucester in 877–8 coincided with the incorporation of a chunk of eastern Mercia into the Viking superstate of eastern England,⁵³ almost as though Guthrum was twisting Ceolwulf's arm from his base in Gloucester. Apart from the conquest of the West Saxon kingdom itself, their annexation of London would have been the most damaging course of action they could have taken to undermine Alfred's political and economic interests in Mercia. It is as if the failure of Guthrum's army to overcome Alfred in Wessex was the trigger which precipitated the implementation of their 'Plan B'. The rout of Alfred at Chippenham early in the following year, which for a time left him politically and militarily immobilized, must have been seen at the time as the final blow in this strategy. If it were not for the unambiguous statement in the *Chronicle* that the Vikings partitioned Mercia in August 877 before overrunning Alfred in Chippenham in early January the following year,⁵⁴ it might be more naturally concluded that the removal of Alfred from the political arena was the opportunity the Vikings would

have needed to take over London and its surrounding area. It may be, however, that it was the Vikings' ability to undermine Alfred's support by the removal of his influence in London that left him in such a weakened position that he became more vulnerable to Viking attack. By these moves Ceolwulf retained – and perhaps even augmented – his power in Mercia, in particular in London where he appears to have assumed control of the minting of coins, without having to accommodate his interests to his rival Alfred. Whether these manoeuvres were worked out in this way or not, it is certainly the case that the developments which disadvantaged Alfred correspondingly augmented the interests of Ceolwulf – just as Ceolwulf's death in 879 was, as argued below, a significant factor in Alfred's political advancement and the Vikings' capitulation.

For the Vikings' part, the annexation of London would have provided them with access to the maximum number of trading links between the North Sea and the Saxon heartland, as well as to a functioning coinage system which facilitated these activities and the control of tolls and other taxes which were their perquisites. The fact that Ceolwulf still carried on minting coins in London in his own name does suggest that he had maintained a degree of control over these developments and that the profits of minting did not all go to the Vikings. The point has been made by Alfred Smyth that the Vikings, as overlords, would have facilitated the minting activities of their tributaries, since they were unfamiliar with this process themselves.⁵⁵ It might well be that the Vikings would have had access to a somewhat greater volume of silver bullion through their control of trade in this way than through raiding alone. It is possible that the developments of 877 were on the agenda in 874 when Ceolwulf succeeded Burgred and the Vikings became actively involved in Mercian affairs. But this scenario would then raise questions as to why Guthrum and Ceolwulf waited for three years to put this into effect, and how Alfred was apparently able in the meantime to exert even more hold on the joint Mercian/West Saxon monetary system than before. It is probable in this regard that Guthrum's main stumbling block in the way of enlarging his kingdom to include London and its surrounding area was not Ceolwulf's presence, but rather the control which Alfred until that time held over London.

The second line of evidence supporting arguments for the Viking takeover of London and its region in 877 lies in the complex question of the probable existence of a boundary between areas of Danish and Saxon jurisdiction that was established at this time, which the writer has argued lay to the west of London.⁵⁶ This is inferred from the course of the boundary set out in the Treaty of Alfred and Guthrum, which is datable to c. 880 or, in the writer's opinion, to late 879.⁵⁷ The boundary in the Treaty follows a line to the east of London in such a way as to give to Alfred both London and its immediate area, as well as a length of Watling Street to its north (see Fig. 1).⁵⁸ It is significant that, as defined in the text of the Treaty, the northern end

of the boundary stops short at the point where the Ouse is crossed by Watling Street. If this were defining a new boundary between the Scandinavians and the Saxons for the first time in the area, it would be expected that the text would have spelled out the continuation of this boundary northwards.⁵⁹ The fact that it did not suggests that the boundary of the Treaty was a modification of an earlier boundary between Scandinavians and Saxons – which is anyway implicit in the statement of the *Chronicle* for 877 that the Vikings ‘shared out’ some of Mercia. It must be inferred therefore that this earlier boundary lay to the west of London, and that the new boundary established under the terms of Alfred and Guthrum’s Treaty between the kingdom of East Anglia and Mercia was a modification of only part of the earlier boundary whose course along Watling Street northwards from the point where the new boundary crossed the Ouse remained unchanged (see Fig. 1). In other words, it can be concluded that the boundary given in the Treaty represents a realignment to the east of London of part of an earlier boundary which lay to its west, whose line carried on up Watling Street to the north-west as before. This realignment therefore represented a new political arrangement, giving Alfred control of a wedge of territory that included London and a length of the strategically important Watling Street, which he did not previously control. This in turn implies that London and its hinterland had been under Viking control in the period immediately prior to the time of the Treaty.⁶⁰ The writer has already made a case for suggesting that this earlier boundary to the west of London ran northwards from the Thames up the Colne river, which marked the western boundary of Middlesex – the area which for several centuries had been dependent upon London, and crossed the Chiltern hills to run northwards along the Ouzel river to where the latter was crossed by Watling Street.⁶¹

These arguments make it possible to reassess the context of the statement in the *Chronicle* under 877 that Guthrum ‘shared out some of it [Mercia], and gave some to Ceolwulf’. In the light of the evidence adduced above it is suggested that the most reasonable interpretation of this statement is that the boundary to the west of London described above represents a historical line of division within the old Mercia between a newly claimed Scandinavian area to the east, as an extension to the Scandinavian kingdom of East Anglia, and the rest of Ceolwulf’s Mercia to the west which was arguably established at this time.⁶² It also implies that this move was a political and demographic settlement, rather than merely a military occupation. It would fit with the numismatic evidence described above to interpret this statement in the *Chronicle* as referring to a situation in which, before this event, Alfred had control of London and its adjacent shires, including the part of Mercia now covered by Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire, while Ceolwulf had control only of the areas to the west and north. The Partition could thus refer to the division of Alfred’s Mercia, over part

of which (London and Middlesex and areas to the east) the Vikings took direct control, handing the other part (Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire) to Ceolwulf, with the new boundary discussed above established between these two spheres of influence. It can be inferred from later events that Alfred was able to regain the area to the west of this imposed boundary (*i.e.* Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire) as a result of his victory over Guthrum’s forces at Edington in early 878. The dating of the Treaty between Alfred and Guthrum to the time of Guthrum’s retreat to East Anglia in late 879 carries the implication, made above and elsewhere by the writer, that Alfred was able to regain London and its immediate environs from Scandinavian control at this time by virtue of his newly found political and military ascendancy. It is suggested below that an important aspect of this strategy was the elimination his rival Ceolwulf.

The view that London and its surrounding area were absorbed into the Scandinavian kingdom of East Anglia in this way receives some support from a direct reference to these events by John of Worcester in the early twelfth century.⁶³ He states: ‘After his [Ceolwulf’s] death, Alfred, king of the West Saxons, in order to expel completely the army of the pagan Danes from his kingdom, recovered [*recuperavit*] London with the surrounding areas by his activity, and acquired [*acquisivit*] the part of the kingdom of the Mercians which Ceolwulf had held.’ This information is not available in the extant versions of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*. Whitelock applies this reference to the events surrounding the so-called ‘capture’ of London in 886. However, since there is no suggestion that Ceolwulf reigned until 886, the natural interpretation of the word ‘after’ to mean ‘immediately following’, having the connotation ‘as a result of’, would place this in the context of the accepted date of the death of King Ceolwulf and the subsequent takeover of Mercia by Alfred in 879. The importance of this reference to the present line of argument is that it explicitly distinguishes the two parts of Mercia which were gained by Alfred as separate processes and by different means at this crucial juncture – London and its surrounding area which was ‘recovered’ from the Danes (which bears the connotation that in doing this he was regaining an area over which he had previously had control), and the rest of Mercia which Alfred ‘acquired’ after Ceolwulf’s demise. This could hardly be a more precise and concise statement of the situation which is inferred from all the other evidence set out here, and which has already been argued at length elsewhere.⁶⁴ That John of Worcester uses different and appropriate words to describe the different political and military processes involved, and that they characterize a situation which can be independently reconstructed and which is not documented in any other source, seem likely therefore to reflect the fact that this passage was derived from a written source which was more or less contemporary with these events.⁶⁵

Some confirmation of the existence, context and

significance of the new Scandinavian/Mercian boundary of 877 is given by evidence from the early tenth century. The northern part of the new boundary of Alfred and Guthrum's Treaty of 879 was drawn to the east of this original line of 877 to run in a straight line northwards between the source of the River Lea near Luton and Bedford on the Ouse, thereby following no natural features (see map). It seems therefore to have been a rather notional line which was designed to give Alfred strategic control of a wide area bordering Watling Street as it approached London, rather than exactly to define territory on the ground. This being so, it would have been difficult, if not impossible, to have maintained this line as a meaningful boundary in any practical sense, either in the ability of either side to enforce the various provisions set out in the Treaty, or in its supposed function of defining estates to determine the allegiance of the occupiers to one side or the other, let alone to maintain these functions over a long period. There is every reason to suppose therefore that this northern sector of the secondary boundary (where not defined by the course of the Lea) would have been likely to have reverted back after some time to its original western line along the Ouzel river, which flows northwards from the Chilterns into the Ouse. That this was so is confirmed by the fact that King Edward the Elder negotiated a treaty with the Vikings of East Anglia and Northumbria in 906 at Tiddingford, where an ancient east–west routeway crossed this boundary on the Ouzel river.⁶⁶ The event shows that this place was recognized as being on the boundary dividing Saxon and Scandinavian jurisdiction at the time.⁶⁷

This conclusion is supported by the fact that King Edward and Ealdorman Aethelred were instrumental in requiring a Saxon thegn to purchase an estate at Chalgrave and Tebworth in southern Bedfordshire from its Danish owners, an event which must have occurred before Aethelred's death in 911.⁶⁸ The estate lay to the east of the suggested 877 boundary but to the west of the Alfred–Guthrum Treaty boundary of 879.⁶⁹ The transaction appears therefore to have been the result of a policy on the part of the king to recolonize an area occupied by Danish landholders in order to ensure the allegiance of these new landholders in what was by then probably a disputed area. From this it can be inferred not only that the Danish owner of this estate (doubtless along with many others) had taken it over at a time before the establishment of the new Alfred–Guthrum boundary in 879 – and thus presumably from the time of the 'Partition' of 877 – but also that he had been allowed by the West Saxons to remain in occupation in 879 under the terms of equality between Danes and Saxons which were spelled out in the Treaty. A further implication of this, which is also supported by the statement in the *Chronicle* that Mercia was shared out between Ceolwulf and the Danes, is that this boundary of 877 marks the westward extension of Danish jurisdiction over an area which at least in part involved the displacement of a Saxon landholding population by

a Danish one. This process may therefore be seen as a deliberate act of colonization, and therefore represented in effect the establishment of a new and enlarged kingdom of East Anglia, both *de jure* and *de facto*. The inclusion of London in this area, as well as all of Essex, southern Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire, shows this to have been a substantial realignment of the political landscape of the time, and a major territorial gain by Scandinavian forces. It also serves to emphasize the achievement of King Alfred in regaining London, Middlesex and a good length of Watling Street as it approached London, the strategic and economic hub of Mercia, only two years later for the West Saxons.

Alfred and Ceolwulf in Mercia and London

It can be argued that the retreat of Guthrum's Vikings to their new state of East Anglia in 879, in which they were forced to give up their control of London and its immediate surroundings, was facilitated by the disappearance at this time of King Ceolwulf, who had ruled Mercia from a position of some independence for the past five years since the abdication of King Burgred, Alfred's brother-in-law, in 874.⁷⁰ As suggested above, there are grounds for believing, firstly, that as his reign progressed Ceolwulf would have become increasingly hostile to the consolidation of Alfred's interests in Mercia – if indeed it was not there from the beginning – shown particularly in the production of coinage; and secondly, that Ceolwulf had in consequence possibly cooperated with the Vikings to deprive Alfred of his influence in Mercia as a whole, including London. The circumstances of Ceolwulf's accession, as a Viking appointee, cannot have made Alfred's relationship with Ceolwulf anything other than strained, to say the least. Alfred's Mercian connections through his wife's family, as well as through his position as Burgred's brother-in-law, would doubtless have ensured the preservation of a significant pro-Alfred faction within the Mercian establishment throughout Ceolwulf's reign. It would have been only natural if at this point Alfred had considered himself the natural successor to Burgred as king of the Mercians as well as the West Saxons. All these ingredients add up to a classic three-way power struggle played out on the stage of London and eastern Mercia, the agendas of each party in conflict with those of the others. While this might seem fanciful, it is supported by an interpretation of subsequent events. A key aspect of this was the removal of any influence that Alfred had had in London which was, as argued above, successfully accomplished in the 'Partition' of 877. This perception in Alfred's circle that Ceolwulf was an actively hostile presence in league with the Vikings can only have been reinforced by the Viking occupation of Gloucester in 877 and the Viking assault on Chippenham only a little while later (whether or not instigated by Ceolwulf), as well as Guthrum's occupation of Cirencester in 878 – a position openly threatening to Wessex as a whole⁷¹ – after

Guthrum's defeat at Edington and his 'submission' to Alfred. Furthermore, this perception must have been further strengthened by the ease with which another Viking army was able to establish itself in 878 upriver from London at Fulham – at the time controlled by Ceolwulf and the Vikings – in a position which was, as with that at Cirencester, directly connected via the Roman road system to the heart of Wessex. It is these manoeuvres which arguably provide the essential context for the construction of the burghal system in Wessex in this crucial period from 878–9, in which a proportionally greater part of the resources of the West Saxons were concentrated along the West Saxon–Mercian frontier.⁷²

One solution to the question of what happened to King Ceolwulf in 879, when he disappears from the record,⁷³ is that as soon as Alfred had become powerful enough successfully to challenge Guthrum and his army through his victory at Edington in the spring of 878 and the construction of the burghal system around Wessex, Alfred staged what was in effect a *coup d'état* against Ceolwulf, having him removed in order to place himself in a position which allowed him to take control of the Mercian kingdom. Alfred's connections and influence in Mercia would have assured him at least some support within the Mercian establishment, particularly in view both of his former interests in London and eastern Mercia and, perhaps even more importantly, his perceived military prowess in his success in battle against the Vikings at Edington. Alfred's strategy in creating the system of burhs in the period after this battle could only have strengthened the perception in some Mercian circles that he, rather than King Ceolwulf, was the man of the future, and that only through his intervention could Mercia be rid of the destructive Vikings.⁷⁴

One direct result of this political manoeuvre (which was arguably intended) would have been that the Vikings would have lost their protégé, partner or willing political stooge – however his position is viewed – which would have meant that their position in Mercia would have been compromised. That it soon became untenable is shown by Guthrum's willingness to come to terms with King Alfred. Alfred's strategy in dealing with the Vikings in this way was, as Richard Abels has pointed out, to 'recreate [Guthrum] ... in the image of Christian Anglo-Saxon (or Carolingian) territorial rulers. Once defeated, their seakings had to be provided with a political ideology that emphasised stability and legitimacy.'⁷⁵ By arranging the terms of their accord set out in the Treaty, Alfred not only gained control of London but also gained an enhanced legitimacy himself in his assumption of power in Mercia after Ceolwulf's removal and the Vikings' withdrawal. For his part, Guthrum was able to retire to start a new life in East Anglia, perhaps grateful to have acquired a kingdom of his own which was formally recognized by Alfred, and set about reinventing himself as a Christian king and the promoter of a market economy. That the agendas of both Ceolwulf and Guthrum became derailed quite as

rapidly as they did after Alfred's comeback from exile in the marshes of Somerset was due to the wedge driven into this dynamic by the developing power, ambition and ruthless tactical and political skills of King Alfred. The events of 879 were to show that while Guthrum had an exit strategy to meet these changes, King Ceolwulf did not.

An indication of the deep currents resulting from the power struggle operating at this time – now virtually hidden from view – is the attitude of the writer of the *Chronicle*, who in emphasizing Ceolwulf's submission to the Vikings and in calling him a 'foolish king's thegn'⁷⁶ expresses the antagonism which Alfred must have felt towards Ceolwulf, suggested above, and made sure that in death Ceolwulf was deprived of any real existence of his own as king of Mercia. There are, however, several considerations which call the historicity of the chronicler's account into question. The principal one is that both the charter and coin evidence make it clear that Ceolwulf ruled in at least western Mercia from a position of authority and independence. This seems to be in spite of the fact, as the numismatic and other evidence shows, that Alfred wielded some influence and perhaps overall control in the eastern parts of English Mercia and in London. Ceolwulf appears to have enjoyed support from both the Mercian *witan* and the ecclesiastical establishment, and minted at least some coins in his own name.⁷⁷ There is therefore no evidence that he did not run a good government, and much independent evidence that he did. This appears to be in direct contradiction to the picture painted in the *Chronicle* of his status as a client king to his Viking overlords whose power was subject to their wishes, who was to wait for their bidding, and who then found it necessary to submit to them, no questions asked, on their return at the time of the 'Partition' of 877. There is also an inherent improbability of a scenario in which a relatively small band of Vikings – and an absentee one at that – could to this extent manipulate the highly developed political and social structures of an ancient kingdom in 874, with its built-in rafts of hierarchies, dynamic inter-reactions and competing factions, and then come back three years later with the realistic expectation that the situation would have developed to their liking, like a matured cheese on a shelf.

There are therefore several aspects of the brief treatment of Ceolwulf's reign in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* which require critical analysis. The reference to Ceolwulf as 'a foolish king's thegn' in the *Chronicle* is a significant key which is represented by most historians as a post-mortem disapproval of a Viking puppet-king.⁷⁸ However, there are aspects of the *Chronicle's* account which do not quite fit this interpretation. The epithet of Ceolwulf's foolishness, or lack of wisdom, must reflect the significance in Alfred's political thought of wisdom as a 'model of good lordship' and as a quality necessary for every ruler to have.⁷⁹ But the downgrading of his status from a king in his own right, with a respectable royal ancestry to boot,⁸⁰ to a

‘king’s thegn’ stigmatizes him on a deeper level.⁸¹ It can be seen as a necessary element in the story that Ceolwulf ruled as a ‘tributary’ only at the behest of the Vikings, rather than allowing him the dignity or the standing which enabled him to rule the kingdom in his own right. By fundamentally denigrating him in this way, this reference therefore denies him any independence and autonomy, and in doing so denies the Mercians a real past with a real king, thereby invalidating their sense of a national identity. It can also be argued that by making Ceolwulf’s very existence dependent on Viking power, Alfred’s chronicler also provided a justification for why he had him removed, which in turn legitimized his own assumption of power in Ceolwulf’s former kingdom as the natural successor to his former ally and kinsman, King Burgred (a point which he and Burgred may well have discussed), and as the torch-bearer of the opposition to the Vikings. Ceolwulf’s autonomy has been written out of existence by the writers of the *Chronicle* quite as deliberately as for instance the name of Tutankamun was literally incised out of ancient Egyptian records, or Trotsky literally airbrushed out of photographs of the principals of post-Revolutionary Russian history after his assassination. And this was for precisely the same reasons, that the acknowledgement of their political agendas was inconvenient or opposed to those being pursued by the history-makers. It was an episode which in many respects was the Anglo-Saxon equivalent to the Roman ‘damnatio memoriae’.

This propaganda exercise can therefore be seen as an attempt to undermine the credibility of any faction or movement supporting Mercian independence which might have wished to subvert the notion of the greater entity of the ‘kingdom of the Anglo-Saxons’ which had come into being under Alfred’s control in late 879 or 880. It was arguably to counter such developments that Alfred chose Aethelred, another aspirant to the Mercian throne, to head up Mercian affairs on his behalf, and why Alfred took such pains to formalize the submission of the Mercians and others – possibly after much internal opposition – at London in 886. Furthermore, Ceolwulf’s lack of wisdom is contrasted with its possession by Aethelred, who was entrusted with a share of Alfred’s wealth, the proceeds of Wisdom.⁸² There is every reason to believe that in the 890s, when this part of the *Chronicle* was written, this was still a live issue. Furthermore, the disparaging references to Ceolwulf in the *Chronicle* must reflect not only the judgments of the Alfredian court after his death, whatever the political motives for this attitude, but also its relationship with him during his reign. This implied antagonism makes it difficult to maintain that Alfred cooperated with Ceolwulf in any way, apart from perhaps a short period at the very beginning of Ceolwulf’s reign, and provides the context for Alfred’s tenacious grip on the control of London and its surrounding area in the period 874–7 in the face of its earlier history as a Mercian town, which is shown by the new assessment of the evidence of the coinage.⁸³

King Alfred and London in 879

As the sole Saxon party to the Treaty between himself and Guthrum, which the writer has argued was the accord reached between the parties which preceded the Vikings’ move away from the London area recorded in the *Chronicle* in late 879,⁸⁴ King Alfred now had complete control of London and its surrounding territories to the west of the River Lea. Since the 860s its political fortunes had changed from its being a Mercian town with a mint serving Mercian interests, to one in which after 874 King Alfred himself was able to develop considerable interests and control, especially in the production of coinage, to one which in 877 was taken over as the focal place of a newly enlarged Viking state of East Anglia (albeit one in which the Mercian king Ceolwulf still had some interests and influence), to one in 879 over whose considerable resources King Alfred now had sole control. Simon Keynes has shown that it was this juncture which was the key pivotal moment in the political development of the former kingdoms of Mercia and the West Saxons. It is argued here that it was also the key moment for both the physical and institutional development of the post-Roman city. This situation seems the most appropriate for the issue of the London Monogram coinage – now accepted by numismatists as belonging to this period – to emphasize the political significance of this event.⁸⁵ This was a short-lived celebratory issue, minted apparently in conjunction with similar issues from Oxford and Gloucester, places which would have been created as important regional centres in the new Mercia of c. 880 (discussed further below). As Keynes has suggested, the three mint-signed issues from London, Oxford and Gloucester were ‘a distinctive and highly significant group, which reflected and which might even have served to advertise King Alfred’s assumption of power and his control of commerce in “English” Mercia after Ceolwulf’s demise’.⁸⁶ The fact that this issue, together with those from Gloucester, Oxford and Winchester, marked the introduction of a new weight standard⁸⁷ demonstrates the association of the new political dispensation with new measures to regularize and encourage trading, and (as Blackburn has demonstrated) the concentration of these functions within established burhs.⁸⁸ The issue of this coinage can be seen as one of the tangible expressions both of Alfred’s (re)occupation of London in late 879, and the inauguration and celebration of what Simon Keynes has recognized as the ‘kingdom of the Anglo-Saxons’.⁸⁹

The processes which affected London in the next six years, for which the main source is the account in the *Chronicle*, cannot therefore be properly understood without establishing the importance to Alfred of the reconquest and reoccupation of London in late 879, from a position in which at one time it seemed inevitable that the Vikings would gain a degree of control over the whole of Wessex similar to that which they had achieved in Mercia. As discussed above, Alfred’s position of dominance in

Mercia and London before 877 is shown in the fact that the London mint was mainly an Alfredian operation, and that this position of power in London was a development of the situation which had already been established towards the end of Burgred's reign. This would have given Alfred a share of the income from these operations,⁹⁰ as well as other sources of income such as tolls on trading and marketing, and implies that Alfred exercised real political influence and power in London and its surroundings to the exclusion of the interests of King Ceolwulf. It is arguable, therefore, that the goal of regaining control of the resources which he had lost through the Vikings' intervention in London in 877 was one of the important motors which underpinned all Alfred's strategic thinking from the dark days of his enforced withdrawal to Athelney. Simon Keynes has emphasized that for the West Saxons at this period '... it was the importance of London and the river Thames to the economy of the whole of southern England which would determine the shape of any long-term political solution'.⁹¹ From this perspective it can be seen that King Alfred's victory at Edington, the creation of the new burghal system in Wessex and eastern Mercia over the next eighteen months or so, the elimination of Ceolwulf, and the eventual accommodation with Guthrum and the removal of the Vikings behind a boundary to the east of London in 879, were all aspects of the same overall long-term strategy which was geared to this end. Given that the control of London was King Alfred's prize, it would be expected that he would do all he could to ensure that these resources remained in his hands. This has implications for the interpretation of the events affecting the next six or seven years.

Although London was not part of the system of burhs around Wessex recorded in the Burghal Hidage – quite simply because, as already argued by the writer, this system had been put in place and recorded in the Burghal Hidage before Alfred gained London from the Vikings in late 879,⁹² – there are good grounds for believing that it effectively became part of this system from the time of its reoccupation by Alfred in late 879. This conclusion is essentially predicated on the existence of the new London Monogram coinage of Alfred of c. 880 which was produced in the London mint in association with other coins from mints in Oxford and Gloucester, and on the strategic realities of the developments of this particular period. In other words, it can be reasonably argued that Alfred cannot have failed to have created a new burh at London which would have been organized and laid out in a similar way to the new burhs he had set up in Wessex only a year or two earlier, of which Winchester might be taken as a comparable example. A new burghal foundation in London would have provided the focus of royal power and control not only in the newly reabsorbed territories of eastern Mercia, but also in English Mercia as a whole.

This model is, however, at variance with generally accepted opinion. The current received view, summarized by Simon Keynes,⁹³ still holds to elements of the 'old'

paradigm discussed above, and sees the significant re-establishment of occupation of London as occurring for the first time in 886. This is discussed in more detail elsewhere.⁹⁴ The process of the settlement of the walled area from c. 880 shown by the archaeological and numismatic evidence is characterized by Derek Keene merely as a process whereby Londoners 'may have begun to use the walled area as a place of refuge, perhaps even colonising whatever installation the Danes had made in their overwintering'.⁹⁵ This view, however, makes no reference to the agency of King Alfred in facilitating this process, gives only a passing glance at the formation of other burhs in Wessex by King Alfred in the 'years around 880', and does not consider the factor of the hostile Viking presence in the south-east during the early 880s as having any effect on the development of either strategies or institutions by Alfred. Keene's view reflects the position then current on the dating of the Wessex burghal system to the years between 880 and 886,⁹⁶ and on the dating of the Burghal Hidage document to the early tenth century, both of which views have been reassessed by the writer.⁹⁷ This particular aspect of the 'old' paradigm clearly implies that London cannot have become a burh in 879 because it would be seen as pre-dating the system in Wessex, and would also beg the question as to why London was not included in the system described in the Burghal Hidage. These obstacles are removed by the reassessment of the dating and context of the burghal system in Wessex and eastern Mercia to 878–9 – before Alfred regained London from the Vikings – and of the dating of the Burghal Hidage as being contemporary with the setting up of this system.⁹⁸ In the writer's view, this reassessment allows the developments in London to be accorded their true significance, as the culmination of a process which involved the consolidation of royal control over the West Saxons through the building of the system of burhs covering the whole kingdom, and the military recovery of London and its region from the Vikings and the extension of Alfred's authority over the whole of English Mercia.

There is every reason to believe that Alfred must have acted swiftly to fill the political vacuum created by the death of the Mercian king Ceolwulf, by whatever agency this took place. In the Treaty between himself and Guthrum the accord is described as '... the peace which King Alfred and King Guthrum and the councillors of all the English race (*ealles Angelcynnes witan*) and all the people which is in East Anglia is agreed on'. Alfred Smyth for instance sees this assumption of lordship by Alfred as reflecting events in 886, when he '... occupied London, and all the English people (*Angelcynn*) not under submission to the Danes submitted to him',⁹⁹ an assumption shared by most other historians of the period, including most recently David Pratt.¹⁰⁰ But it can be argued that this phrase would be equally appropriate to the circumstances of 879, when Ceolwulf had been removed (either by the hand of nature or of man) and when Alfred must have taken over not

only the style but also, it can be reasonably argued, the substance of lordship over the whole of ‘English’ Mercia. It must reflect Alfred’s view of himself and his new role as lord of the Mercians, which he arguably thought of as his due as the natural successor of Burgred.¹⁰¹ It is this year which would have been the most appropriate context for the signing of the Treaty, if only because the *Chronicle* records in this year the very outcome which the Treaty was arguably designed to ratify. The burhs at Buckingham and Oxford in eastern Mercia, which as part of the ‘Wessex’ system were contemporary with it, were arguably built as offensive fortresses whose garrisons were intended both to provide reinforcement in depth of the boundary recorded in the Treaty and to ensure the safety of passage along Watling Street (see Fig. 1). The view taken by Blackburn and Keynes on the evidence of the coinage, that Alfred had control of London and the eastern part of English Mercia before 879, provides a context for the construction of these two burhs in 878–9 as part of the Burghal Hidage system, and quite probably therefore before Ceolwulf was finally removed. The degree of political and military coercion underpinning their construction, and the formal submission to King Alfred of the populations of the burghal territories created to support the burhs which their establishment would have entailed, can be seen as the proximate cause of the realization on the part of Guthrum and his band that they would have no choice but to accept the terms offered by Alfred for their removal to a new kingdom in East Anglia behind (to the east of) the new boundary recorded in the Treaty. Indeed, the rearrangement of the political geography of south-eastern Mercia represented by the creation of the two burhs at Oxford and Buckingham and by the extension of the burghal territories of Wallingford and Sashes across the Thames into what later became southern Oxfordshire and southern Buckinghamshire, argued above, and the submission of the populations of their respective burghal territories to King Alfred, can be seen as the precursors of the use of such burhs to consolidate royal authority and control over newly won territory which both Edward the Elder and Aethelflaed were to use so effectively in their campaigns against the Scandinavians in the Midlands and East Anglia in the first two decades of the tenth century.¹⁰²

A further counterbalance to the possibility of open dissent in Mercia in response to the loss of autonomy through the formation of the ‘kingdom of the Anglo-Saxons’ appears to have been the appointment by Alfred of Aethelred as a virtual under-king in Mercia.¹⁰³ Although Aethelred first appears in documents in 881, this role would have fitted the circumstances of these uncertain times from late 879, which for Alfred was the crucial turning point in his relationship with Mercia, a conclusion supported by the succession of Aethelred following Ceolwulf in a Mercian regnal list which gave Ceolwulf a reign of five years.¹⁰⁴ Though not directly evidenced, it would seem more reasonable to suggest that Alfred took immediate

steps to install Aethelred as his ‘deputy’, occupying a grey area between co-regent and sub-king, than to suppose that Alfred was able to wait around for a year or two before realizing the need for such a move. In all his doings over the past few years, Alfred had shown himself as being a pro-active agent in the rapid unfolding of events, which appears to have involved as much political skulduggery (including assassination) as military prowess, tactical foresight and political insight. The arguments made above that this juncture was the culmination for Alfred of a process in which he had implemented a consistent strategy pursued over several years imply that Alfred would have acted swiftly to maintain his position. By giving Aethelred a considerable degree of autonomy in the running of the former kingdom, King Alfred – to whom he was almost always described in charters as being subordinate¹⁰⁵ – ensured that potential opposition to his overlordship was defused before it could gain momentum. It would also have been at this time – rather than waiting for the events of 886 (however they may be construed) – that King Alfred would have ensured the loyalty of all Mercians as well as West Saxons by requiring their submission to him. This general submission to Alfred would appear to be a fundamental prerequisite of the new polity inaugurated by Alfred at this time which Simon Keynes has characterized as the ‘kingdom of the Anglo-Saxons’.

A New Burh at London

That a burh at London was created by Alfred in late 879 or possibly early 880 is suggested by other considerations. It is clear that the movements of the Viking armies and the rather reactive and ill-conceived strategies in their campaigns of the 890s were governed by the fact that the burhs of Wessex were by this time fully operational with garrisons which were highly effective in preventing any large-scale penetration into the Wessex heartland.¹⁰⁶ The conclusion seems inescapable that in setting up the garrisoned burhs, King Alfred had brought into being a system which was intended to reflect or embody a particular strategic concept, which combined both defence and offence, and that this had in fact worked as it was designed to do, at least in the context of the wars of the 890s. It follows that these military and wider settlement and administrative functions were set up by the king as an integral part of the way that these burhs functioned from their foundation. These garrisons did not represent some sort of ‘add-on’ facility which were installed as the need arose.¹⁰⁷ Given that the burghal system was in place by late 879 at the latest, as argued by the writer,¹⁰⁸ the inference must be drawn from this that Alfred’s takeover of London in late 879 cannot have failed to have been perceived by him as an opportunity to put in place a secure defence of the Roman walled town as a new burh with refurbished defences manned by a functioning garrison. This must have been provided with at least the nucleus of a population which was to act as a

garrison and a nascent trading community with a viable and self-sustaining economic base, whose individuals (the *burhware*) were to hold land which gave them both privileges and obligations. This would have been a fundamental step in the transformation of the new burghal space into what Brooks has described as a ‘real town, ... a lasting centre of specialised labour’.¹⁰⁹ The new burh would, furthermore, have acted as a secure legal and administrative centre. Its nodal position on the borders between two kingdoms which were being absorbed into a new polity, near to the border of a new Viking state not far to the east, and its crucial strategic value as a powerful defence against access to Viking warships up the Thames estuary,¹¹⁰ cannot have failed to have been recognized and consolidated by Alfred and his advisers at this crucial juncture. Indeed, this perceived strategic value could be said to have informed all Alfred’s long-term planning since he had come to have control of London, possibly from the time of Burgred’s abdication. Given these considerations, it is just not realistic to conceive of a period between 879 and 886 in which Alfred would have done nothing to realize at London the means of achieving the strategic and organizational objectives he had been pursuing with so much success for the previous few years, particularly in view of the strong Viking presence at this time in East Anglia, the Thames estuary, various parts of south-east England and the English Channel in general.

The creation of such a burh at this time would, furthermore, have been perhaps the most powerful instrument in Alfred’s armoury of ways to ensure both a military and a political consolidation of his dominion over the whole of ‘English’ Mercia. It would have been supported by the military obligations, in particular, of those landholders in the adjoining areas which Alfred had liberated from Danish rule by his agreement with Guthrum set out in their joint Treaty, a practice which underpinned the formation of other burhs in eastern Mercia and East Anglia which were recovered from Scandinavian rule in the early tenth century by Edward the Elder.¹¹¹ Without the centre of power which this burh would have represented – particularly since it had been for many years (if not centuries) in some senses the hub of Mercia – it seems questionable whether Alfred would have been able to achieve the political consolidation which he clearly did over the area of English Mercia to bring into being the new ‘kingdom of the Anglo-Saxons’.¹¹² One of the defining characteristics of a burh in the late ninth and early tenth centuries was that it would be set up as a centre of royal control and administration.¹¹³ As Richard Abels has put this, the burhs were ‘islands of royal power through which the king and his agents, ealdormen, bishops, and reeves, were able to dominate the countryside’.¹¹⁴ In the early tenth century the burhs were seen as the key components of a policy which ensured the submission of the population of the reconquered Scandinavian-held territories to King Edward,¹¹⁵ which process Abels sees as ‘part of a deliberate policy of settling the newly-acquired

territories with men of known loyalties’.¹¹⁶ In this way the king was able to bring to bear what Abels has described as the ‘institutional coercive power’ of the Saxon state onto these former Scandinavian areas.¹¹⁷

Richard Abels has also suggested that ‘the burghal system’s most lasting consequence may have been the enhancement of the institutional power of the West Saxon monarchy over its subjects’ and that the burhs ‘reinforced the traditional connection between landholding and military obligation to the crown’.¹¹⁸ In view of the continuity of institutions and other aspects between the reigns of Alfred in the late ninth century and that of his son in the early tenth recently argued by Simon Keynes,¹¹⁹ it can be inferred that the creation of a new burh at London of 879, subsuming and developing its earlier functions into a new instrument of royal power, was endowed with a similar political force as the new burhs created in Mercia by Aethelred and Aethelflaed, as well as those of King Edward in his programme of reconquest of northern and eastern Mercia and East Anglia. The new burh at London would have been supported by the military obligations, in particular, of those landholders in the adjoining areas which Alfred had liberated from Danish rule by his agreement with Guthrum set out in their joint Treaty, who, like those in other reconquered Scandinavian territories in the early tenth century, would have been required to submit to the king. As such, it was clearly the precursor of the practice of using the burhs as instruments of submission by Edward and Aethelflaed.¹²⁰ As Tony Dyson has pointed out, it would furthermore be reasonable to suggest that the developments and functions which were involved in the creation of a new fortified burh at Worcester, recorded in detail in the charter of the late 880s,¹²¹ were equivalent to those which Alfred would have given its new *burhware* in London.¹²² The only difference between Dyson’s views and those of the present writer is that this process would have been initiated in the burh at London in 879 rather than in 886.

Another important strand of thinking in burghal studies has been the realization that the upkeep of these new burhs would have been maintained not only by the labour services of the landholders of the burghal district but also by those of its permanent inhabitants, the long-term sustainability of the burh being ensured by the economic functions and the enhanced institutional status and security given to these new urban dwellers.¹²³ Furthermore, as Richard Abels has emphasized, the creation of the burhs as military institutions would have been accompanied by the creation of a new standing army, the *fyrð*, whose availability and readiness would have been an integral part of the way the burhs would have been set up from the start.¹²⁴ In view of the strategic importance of London to King Alfred in 879, argued above, and the proximity of the Vikings in Essex and East Anglia just to the east of the River Lea, it would be quite unreasonable to hold that all these processes would not have been put in place in London by King Alfred at the earliest opportunity after

his assumption of control over London and the rest of Mercia in late 879.

Another essential characteristic of a burh was as a controlled space set up by the king in which to establish and facilitate the conditions which generated trade, in its broadest sense, in such a way that the king received not only tolls and taxes generated by this activity, but also the proceeds of fines levied for infringement of rules and ordinances set out in the laws. Its broad economic functions, not least the concentration of minting within it, would guarantee the sustainability of its other administrative and military functions. As David Pratt has observed, the central role of the burghal network, and the granting of fiscal and commercial privileges by the king to aristocratic interests, were a means of protecting and encouraging commercial exchange.¹²⁵ The king's control of trade and tolls from marketing in the burh is made quite explicit in the charter recording the establishment of the burh at Worcester in the late 880s or early 890s,¹²⁶ and in the charters of 889 and 898 relating to developments in London.¹²⁷ The 889 charter, most probably recording the granting of immunity from taxes in the trade in salt, is discussed elsewhere in the context of the evidence for the development of the burghal space. Archaeological evidence, also discussed elsewhere, shows that the foreshore adjacent to *Aethelredes hithe* or *Queenhithe* was being used as a landing and marketing area from the middle of the ninth century, and that trading was taking place in the early 880s and later.¹²⁸ Nicholas Brooks has argued that the various characteristics of burhs which are shown in later sources, such as the division of profits of activity within burhs to give the earl of the shire his 'third penny', and the control of institutions to give the king an income from various taxes, were part of the way that burhs were set up from their beginnings.¹²⁹ It was also the place where witnesses to transactions could be found which alone guaranteed the *bona fides* of traders, preventing for instance the handling of stolen goods.¹³⁰ That similar measures to guarantee the safety of traders and to ensure good order and social justice were features in the provisions of the Treaty between Alfred and Guthrum, of exactly this period, as well as in the Worcester charter of a little later, should be enough to demonstrate that Alfred would have taken every measure possible to establish the same provisions for the encouragement and control of trading and other activities in London as soon as he had the chance to do so (*i.e.* beginning in the autumn of 879) within a defended site which offered rather greater protection than that shown by the exposed *wic* to its east.

The Burhs of Southern Mercia

There are grounds for suggesting that the development of several burhs in southern Mercia can be recognized as an extension of the same burghal policy which led to the development of London from late 879, for very similar

political and strategic reasons. The existence of coins of the same type and period as the London Monogram coinage of *c.* 880 from mints in both Gloucester and Oxford is another instance where, in the matter of the creation of burhs at these places, '... the most natural interpretation of the numismatic evidence' should be given its due weight.¹³¹ The inclusion of Oxford in the Burghal Hidage carries the implication that, as is argued above, it had already been created as a burh by the middle of 879, and was therefore in a position to act as the administrative focus of an area of southern Mercia when Alfred took the decisive step to create the new 'kingdom of the Anglo-Saxons' in late 879 or 880.¹³² As Mark Blackburn has demonstrated, the *ohsnaforda* coin from Oxford can be dated to the early 880s, since it derives from a coin hoard containing the short-lived London Monogram type.¹³³

Although Oxford was a place of some importance in the middle Saxon period,¹³⁴ the dating of the foundation of the burh at Oxford to the 890s by John Blair is premised on the dating of this coin to this time,¹³⁵ and on the further premise that its foundation should, like that of London, be placed in a Mercian context – *i.e.* that it was founded by Aethelred and/or Aethelflaed.¹³⁶ But this dating is based on a number of further assumptions – that London, also on the north side of the Thames, did not become a burh until 886; that the burhs at Oxford and Buckingham in eastern Mercia recorded in the Burghal Hidage were developed gradually in the 880s and 890s, and were (by implication) not part of the original system; and that Alfred had little part to play in developments in Mercia in the 880s and 890s – on all of which points new interpretations have been put forward in recent years. Blair's views are, however, accepted without comment in Ann Dodd's recent synthesis of Oxford's early history, in which she has not accommodated recent views on either the coinage or the political context represented by the syntheses of Blackburn and Keynes.¹³⁷ Furthermore, Blair's arguments are based on the acceptance of Dumville's hypothesis that Alfred did not retain control of Mercia as a result of the Treaty between himself and Guthrum.¹³⁸ The inclusion of burhs at Oxford and Buckingham in the burghal system in Wessex recorded in the Burghal Hidage, which the writer has now dated to the period 878–9, is set in context by the interpretation of the coin evidence by Blackburn and Keynes (discussed above), which demonstrates that an area which arguably comprised Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire was under Alfred's control from possibly before Burgred's abdication in 874. This provides the essential basis for the understanding of the new interpretation of the extent of the original burghal territories of Wallingford and Sashes in ways which included areas on both sides of the Thames in Berkshire and Oxfordshire, arguably before the formation of these shires in their final form.¹³⁹

Received views on the origins of Anglo-Saxon Gloucester have also marched in step with those on the origins of Oxford. The account in the *Historic Towns*

Atlas, while stressing its importance from the early ninth century, assigns the origin of the Saxon town to ‘the line of forts built or refortified by Aethelred and Aethelflaed’.¹⁴⁰ Caroline Heighway has argued consistently for more than twenty years that the foundation of a burh at Gloucester with its ‘Wessex’ street plan can be assigned to the years around 900, and that it would have been the creation of Aethelred and Aethelflaed as a means of securing control of western Mercia, a view also shared by Alan Thacker.¹⁴¹ The foundation of the burh is associated with the foundation of the new minster of St Oswald, which is placed in the period between the mid-880s and 899.¹⁴²

However, there are a number of counter-arguments which support the rather different hypothesis that these three places in which minting was established in *c.* 880 (or four, if Winchester is included) were founded as garrisoned urban burhs by King Alfred before the end of 880. These include the existence of the mint-signed coin from Gloucester which is contemporary with those from London and Oxford of 879–80; the resumption of minting in Winchester; the existence of the burhs at Oxford and Winchester by 879 which is shown by their inclusion in the Burghal Hidage; and the arguments presented in this paper for the creation of a burh at London in 879–80. Since Oxford, created a burh in 878–9, was given a mint in *c.* 880, then the creation of mints at Gloucester and London at the same time, with in particular the issue of the special London Monogram coinage from the latter, carries the implication that these too were created as burhs at that time. This line of reasoning is strengthened by the independent arguments which form the theme of this paper, showing that it must have been the creation of a burh at London in 879–80 which formed the essential administrative context for the issue of the London Monogram coins. As Mark Blackburn has emphasized, the resumption of minting in Winchester at this time highlights the fact that these new issues from London, Oxford and Gloucester not only represent a monetary reform and the adoption of a new weight standard for coins at this time by the king, but also demonstrate the implementation of a new policy on the part of Alfred of consolidating and advertising his political and economic control by concentrating minting in secure burhs.¹⁴³ The creation of the three burhs at London, Oxford and Gloucester can be seen therefore as being important instruments in Alfred’s political consolidation over southern Mercia in the wake of the removal of Ceolwulf and the retreat of the Vikings to East Anglia. The new burhs at London and Gloucester, with their already-established partner at Oxford, can therefore be best seen as the extension of the Wessex burghal system of 878–9 into southern Mercia in 879–80 in a virtually unbroken line of development.¹⁴⁴

Oxford and Gloucester would also have been the centres for the organization of a newly established *fyrð* covering southern Mercia. The existence of mints at these places at this time should be given its due importance in establishing that by or in 880 King Alfred had created new defended

burhs at both places, which were set up with functions and physical attributes (new or refurbished defences, a street system and an internal layout which accommodated both a garrison and a new ‘urban’ population) along the same lines as had been put in place in London, and as had already been established in many of the burhs in Wessex listed in the Burghal Hidage. The formation of a burh at Gloucester in *c.* 880 by King Alfred would fit with the strategic need to secure control of the Severn estuary against passage of Viking ship-borne armies. The creation of a fortified bridge over the Severn which this would have entailed would also have protected the ancient cathedral site at Worcester further up the river at the same time.¹⁴⁵ The creation of a new burh at Gloucester, and its control of the territory which later became the shire of Gloucestershire, can be seen as a replacement for the defensive and administrative functions of a burh at Winchcombe, which can be demonstrated in the archaeological evidence.¹⁴⁶ And, not least, it would have done this by providing a secure focus for trade and other economic activity in both the town and surrounding countryside, which would have been severely disrupted by the Viking occupation of the town during the winter of 877–8. These new developments may well have been underpinned by the new sources of silver available to Alfred from tribute from Welsh princes,¹⁴⁷ and by the opening of new trading links with the ports of south and south-east Ireland.¹⁴⁸ The king’s interests in the exploitation of the Forest of Dean iron deposits shown in Domesday, in which Gloucester provided renders of horseshoes and iron rods for making nails,¹⁴⁹ seem likely to represent the survival of requirements which in the context of the conditions of the 880s would have originally been related to the practicalities of wider defensive needs. A similar relationship between the new royal markets within burhs and key local resources has been suggested in the case of sources of silver from the Mendips and the market at Bath (as well probably as the market at Axbridge near the royal site of Cheddar), and tin from Dartmoor and the market at Lydford.¹⁵⁰

In view of the strategic, symbolic, administrative and economic importance of Gloucester to Alfred from this time, it seems quite improbable that it would not have been developed as a burh before *c.* 900. That Gloucester came to have a central significance for Aethelred and Aethelflaed¹⁵¹ can be seen therefore as the consequence of the development of the burh from the early 880s, rather than the cause of its creation. The issue of the coins from both Oxford and Gloucester of *c.* 880 would, as with the London Monogram coinage, therefore represent an overtly political statement announcing the choice of these places, now formally constituted as defended and garrisoned burhs, as the administrative centres of the newly established political order, as well as acting as important propaganda tools in the process of the inauguration and setting up of the ‘kingdom of the Anglo-Saxons’.¹⁵² This view of Alfred’s role in Mercia in the early 880s, which emphasizes the degree to which he was able to exert

power and control within Mercia at this time, clearly has a bearing on any assessment of the independence or otherwise of Aethelred and the subsequent relationship between the two former kingdoms. This issue is discussed by Simon Keynes, and from a different perspective by Nicola Cumberledge, but is not pursued further here.¹⁵³

The development of the burh at Worcester can be best placed within this general context. It is possible that the formation of the burh at the instigation of the bishop, described in the agreement drawn up between Aethelred and his wife Aethelflaed on the one hand and Bishop Waerferth on the other,¹⁵⁴ was in response to the renewed attacks by the Viking armies from 892. On the other hand, Waerferth would have been quite aware of the formation of the burhs at London and Gloucester in *c.* 880, and of the continued Viking presence in the south-east in the early 880s and the potential threat to the west Midlands at that time. His direct involvement in the burh of London through his acquisition of the *haga* or *soke* at Queenhithe there in 889 shows that he was well aware, too, of the commercial potential which the creation of these burhs presented. Furthermore, he was described in the charter as Aethelred's friend, and therefore seems likely to have taken advantage of the new status of Aethelred as *sub-regulus* of Mercia after the latter's marriage to Aethelflaed, argued below as taking place in London in 886, to implement a development in which both parties would benefit through the same partnership arrangements which Alfred had fostered in the formation of the burhs of Wessex and southern Mercia only a few years before. It is reasonable to suggest therefore that the burghal arrangements were put in place at Worcester in the later 880s – at more or less the same time as his acquisition of the *soke* in London.¹⁵⁵

It is perhaps useful at this stage of the discussion to present a summary model of the main stages of the political developments during this time, as suggested by the evidence so far discussed, which will perhaps clarify the overall hypothesis advanced in this paper.

1. Alfred takes control of all of south-east Mercia, including London, after the abdication of Burgred in 874; develops minting in London in the next three years.
2. Ceolwulf given the rest – south-west Mercia and points north – as a Viking nominee.
3. Guthrum's Vikings try but fail to dislodge Alfred in Wessex, partly in order to gain control of 'his' part of Mercia, as well as Wessex.
4. Alfred deprived of control in much of south-east Mercia, including London, from the time of the 'Partition' of Mercia in 877. Vikings take control of London and its area; the rest – present-day Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire – is given to Ceolwulf. Ceolwulf takes up minting in London under his name alone.
5. Alfred stages a comeback from the coup at Chippenham (January 878) in stages: after a victory at Edington – a) assumes control again of Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire; creates the Wessex burghal system, which includes Oxford and Buckingham; b) negotiates the Treaty with Guthrum (mid-late 879), by which Guthrum agrees to leave both west Mercia and London and its area for East Anglia; c) Guthrum leaves for East Anglia; Fulham Vikings also decamp for Francia (late 879).
6. Alfred now in control of at least the southern part of Mercia, including London (late 879); creation of new burhs at London and probably Gloucester; issues celebratory coinage from mints in Oxford, Gloucester and London.
7. Alfred possibly regains Essex in early 880s – ?a prelude to the general submission at London in 886.

London in the 880s

The various landmarks in the documentary evidence relating to the development of London in the 880s and beyond – its 'restoration' in 886 and the formalization of the role which Aethelred was to play in its administration (discussed below), the grants of land at *Aethelreds hithe* by King Alfred to the Bishop of Worcester in 889, and the conference held in 892 between Alfred, Aethelred and the Bishop of Worcester to determine the future of London and the granting of a *soke* to the Archbishop of Canterbury¹⁵⁶ – can be seen as stages in a process which was arguably initiated in 879. They also demonstrate the continuing urge on the part of Alfred to maximize the political, military, administrative and commercial advantages of the burh at London throughout his reign. Indeed, Janet Nelson has suggested that one of Alfred's goals was to shift the metropolitan see from Canterbury to London.¹⁵⁷ That this was very much a process in which Alfred's initial expectations in 879 were perhaps not matched by the reality of the wider economic and political situation as it developed over the next half century is shown by several lines of evidence. These include the shift of economic focus to the west,¹⁵⁸ the decline of minting at London and the south-east in the late ninth and early tenth centuries,¹⁵⁹ the shift of the ceremonial focus of Alfred's kingdom to Winchester at the turn of the ninth and tenth centuries,¹⁶⁰ the archaeological evidence for both the decline of overseas trade in the later ninth and early part of the tenth centuries,¹⁶¹ and of the slowness of development of the street system and the apparent growth of the population only after the middle or later tenth century.¹⁶² This may have been either the cause or the consequence of Alfred's delegation of military matters in the 890s in the south-east to Prince Edward and Aethelred.¹⁶³

Nevertheless, since the creation of the burh at London in 879–80 would have been the physical and social manifestation of a state decreed, or a decision made, by the king, accompanied possibly by a written charter or memorandum to map out the perquisites which the king would have expected to receive from the operation (as

at Worcester), it would be unrealistic to suppose that this was not put into effect as soon as the king gained control of the town from its Viking occupiers in late 879. This does not imply, however, that either the physical or the social structures which were necessary to bring this into being were put in place overnight. The event, and the processes which the event would have set in train, need to be distinguished in practice. But the hypothesis of the creation of the institution which was a burh at this time, and the initiation of the process of the reorganization of the burghal space within the old Roman walls to facilitate defence, settlement, administration and trade, has important bearings on the relation of Londoners to the various Viking incursions which are recorded by the *Chronicle* in the next few years. The practice of the king in using new burhs to coerce the submission of populations, and the application of this principle to those estate-holders in Middlesex and other parts of the former Scandinavian-controlled territories which lay to the west of the new Alfred/Guthrum border, pointed out above, also imply that this is precisely what Alfred would have required of the population of the whole of non-Danish Mercia. The creation of the new burh at London in 879–80 can be seen as an essential part of the means whereby this would have been implemented as a condition of his recognition as overlord of the ‘kingdom of the Anglo-Saxons’. Again, it is arguable that it would be inconceivable that Alfred would have waited for a further seven years, when this is first stated as happening in the *Chronicle*’s account for 886, to have made sure that the ealdormen, thegns, nobles and other landholders of Mercia gave Alfred the formal submission which he would have required as their new overlord.¹⁶⁴

The new model of the creation of a burh at London within the Roman walls, in or soon after late 879, casts the recorded events of the 880s in a fresh light. It has been argued that two essential components (amongst other economic, military, social, demographic and town-planning innovations) of this new burh would have been the formation of a garrison, and the association with this burh of a new or reconstructed bridge over the Thames. By linking with the burh already existing at Southwark this would have acted as a defence of the river against the passage of Viking ships. The events recorded in the *Chronicle* in which London was involved have been discussed at length by Simon Keynes, Derek Keene and Richard Abels.¹⁶⁵ However, as brought out above, all three writers hold on to some elements of the ‘old’ paradigm which sees the secure defence of London being established for the first time in 886, which the discussions in this paper have sought to reassess. But there are good grounds for suggesting that from 879, rather than for the first time in 886, London would have had what Derek Keene aptly characterizes as ‘a strategic significance ... as a forward defence in a militarised zone’, as well as being ‘part of an ideological programme intended to promote it as a symbol of unity against a common enemy’.¹⁶⁶

Simon Keynes alludes to this paradigm of the recapture of London from the Vikings in 886 after a siege as a ‘natural tendency to create an extended and connected story out of the surviving scraps of information’, but nevertheless sees the reference of 883 in the *Chronicle*, in which Alfred ‘encamped against the [Viking] army at London’, as a short-lived Viking ‘occupation’ of the city in 883 which Alfred was able to relieve in a ‘combined West Saxon-Mercian operation’.¹⁶⁷ He goes on to suggest that, apart from this temporary blip, ‘Alfred had reason to feel that London was secure and the Londoners safe’ from 879 until 886 without the Vikings to bother them. It was only the dangers of Viking activity in the Thames estuary and the siege of Rochester in 885 that ‘brought home to Alfred the need for effective protection of London itself’ and impelled him to take decisive steps to organize its defences, to create an internal street plan and to install a garrison – in other words to establish a burh within the Roman walls.¹⁶⁸ This interpretation is of course premised on the deceptively exclusive nature of the reference in the *Chronicle* to the ‘events’ of 886, which are taken to imply that the ‘occupation’ and the ‘restoration’ were new at the time. It is also echoed in Keene’s view (quoted above) of Londoners filtering back into the walled area after 880¹⁶⁹ as though by a process of natural osmosis, a trickle of people filling a vacuum. It is, however, difficult to see how this perception of insecurity forced on the Londoners and/or King Alfred by the events of 885 some way away in the Thames estuary would have been any more urgent or different in kind from the perceptions of vulnerability which must have been engendered by the apparently far more devastating Viking ‘occupation’ in 883. Neither does this reconstruction explain how the ‘Londoners’ – whoever they were – were able to feel secure and safe without either defences or a garrison or streets, and living before 886 (apart from perhaps within the precincts of St Paul’s) in an unordered wilderness of undergrowth and the crumbling remains of abandoned Roman buildings, in the face of the hostile Viking army so near their doorstep in Essex and East Anglia, in the Thames estuary at Rochester and at Benfleet in 885, or in Surrey in 882.¹⁷⁰ This view that the arrangements for the defence of London were not put in place until 886, and that the creation of the burh there was also associated with a new burh at Southwark to which it would have been connected by a new bridge, are aspects of the ‘old’ paradigm that have clearly not appreciably shifted. The improbabilities and incongruities inherent in this paradigm therefore require a rethink.

The views of Keynes, Keene and Abels are predicated on the generally prevailing view that the burhs of Wessex were a creation by Alfred of the 880s, and certainly before 892,¹⁷¹ and that a similar provision for London in 886 would therefore, presumably, have formed part of this general defensive strategy. The present writer has, however, questioned this view in arguments which present a case that the burghal system in Wessex and

eastern Mercia was put in place by Alfred in the period 878–9, and that the Burghal Hidage (which does not include London) was a prescriptive instrument which was drawn up as part of the process of the implementation of this system.¹⁷² As shown above, this has implications for the status of London before 886. Derek Keene has, however, usefully extended the discussion by questioning whether the reference in the *Chronicle* to the ‘siege’ of London in 883 was in fact a siege at all, and whether the exact wording of the original Anglo-Saxon necessarily implies that the Vikings were ‘inside’ the city with Alfred besieging them from the ‘outside’.¹⁷³ Although Keene does not examine either the wider context of this view or its considerable strategic implications any further, these are discussed below.

The arguments presented above for the creation by Alfred of a burh at London from the time that he first reoccupied the city in late 879 cast an entirely different light on these events. As emphasized above, it is clear that one of the defining characteristics of a burh is that it will have been provided with a garrison. The *Chronicle*’s account of the siege of Rochester in 885, where the Vikings ‘besieged the city and made other fortifications around themselves’¹⁷⁴ until Alfred’s forces came to its relief, shows that a garrison in Rochester had by that time been sufficiently organized to have kept a hostile Viking army at bay.¹⁷⁵ This being so, it would hardly be credible that Alfred would not have put in place similar measures by that time in London itself. As pointed out above, the creation of a burh there, together with a defensive bridge over the river, would have been a key element in the defence of the whole of the Thames estuary and of the river upstream, and could be seen as an explanation of why the Vikings besieged Rochester rather than venturing further upstream. In view of the recorded presence of one or more Viking armies in the area of the Thames estuary and south-east England in the years before 886 (above), the proposition that London was not provided with a garrison and refurbished defences in the period 879–86 which were as equally effective as those at Rochester stretches credulity beyond its limits. Without such a provision at London, the whole of Wessex and southern Mercia, controlled by Alfred from late 879, would have been wide open to Viking depredations from the east.

Following Keene’s questioning of the meaning of the *Chronicle*’s reference to the events of 883 (above), the received view of this episode needs to be reassessed in the light of the likely existence of a garrisoned burh at London at this time. It can be reasonably suggested that it was this garrison which would have fought off an attack by the Vikings approaching from the Thames estuary, rather than the other way around. This interpretation is made more plausible by the chronicler’s muddle and lack of any consecutive narrative in the 880s concerning events on this side of the Channel. The success of the garrison at Rochester in repelling the Viking attackers is therefore not likely to be the reason for Alfred recognizing the need

for London to be defended in this way. Rather it would have been the reverse – the defences of Rochester would have been kept on the alert by the measures already put in place in London from 879, and in the other burhs in Wessex in the period 878–9.¹⁷⁶ The presence of a Viking army in Surrey in 882¹⁷⁷ also shows that the Vikings were active in the London area at this time, and supports the arguments given above that the defences of London would not have been ignored before 886. The presence of Alfred at the head of the army in Surrey in 882, as fighting in a naval battle also in 882¹⁷⁸ in (most likely) the Thames estuary, and as coming so quickly with an army to the relief of Rochester in 885, suggest that Alfred was himself stationed in London rather than Winchester during these crucial years. Alfred Smyth has warned that the silence of the *Chronicle* should not be allowed to obscure the fact that at this time the Vikings were probably as threatening and destructive a presence around the coasts of southern England and the Thames estuary in the period between 880 and 892 as were their fleets (by the account of the *Chronicle* itself) who targeted the coasts of Francia.¹⁷⁹

This reassessment of the status of London as a fully garrisoned burh in the period from Alfred’s reoccupation in late 879 also has implications for the interpretation of the events of 886 recorded in the *Chronicle*. The interpretation of this as the first occasion that Alfred was able to gain London from the Viking occupation has, as already discussed, had such an effect on historians’ views of the status of London as to render any alternative to its most literally construed meaning virtually unthinkable. The lid of this particular historical and conceptual box has for a long time been well secured. It is ironic that in the current revised paradigm the date of 886 is still seen as the first time that Alfred occupied the city, though the notion of its earlier Viking occupation is discarded. As already noted, this leaves a glaring blank in any assessment of what the situation had been before this.

There are three separate elements in this account. The first is that ‘King Alfred occupied London’; the second is that ‘all the English who were not under subjection to the Danes submitted to him’; and the third is that Alfred ‘then entrusted the borough to the control of Ealdorman Aethelred’.¹⁸⁰ The force of this annal has already been commented on above as being the keystone on which historians since the time of Asser, through Roger of Wendover, have interpreted this as the time when the Vikings were finally driven from London.¹⁸¹ The word describing the ‘occupation’ of London at this time is ‘*gesette*’, which as Derek Keene observes implies ‘a resettling of peoples or the physical reordering of a place’, and is translated by Asser as *Lundonium civitatem honorifice restauravit et habitabilem fecit*.¹⁸² The interpretation of this by Aethelweard to the effect that London was ‘besieged’, combined with the addition of Asser’s gloss, that the restoration followed the burning of towns and the slaughter of peoples, has served to create the outlines of the long-standing paradigm discussed

above, which has two components. The first is that this episode represented the occasion on which London was first liberated from the Vikings who were lodged within the walls,¹⁸³ and the second is that it was therefore at this time, and as a direct result of this perceived triumph, that London was first provided with adequate defences and other accoutrements of a burghal foundation such as a street system and a bridge across the river. The current paradigm holds that while the first part of this received view has had to give way to a reinterpretation of the political context derived from an analysis of the coinage, the second part has not changed in the slightest.

While it is true that the second and third parts of the *Chronicle's* statement under 886 – that all the English submitted to him, and that Alfred handed over London to Aethelred – fit very neatly into the context of the idea of the ‘restoration’ of London as a new beginning by Alfred subsequent to its capture from the occupying Vikings after a siege and heavy fighting, they do not fit with the new assessment that the Vikings did not play any role in these events, or that London was controlled by Alfred before this year. If this ‘event’ did not represent the dramatic (and traumatic) change in London’s political fortunes as is represented in the ‘old’ paradigm, this begs the questions as to not only what was going on in London before this ‘event’, but also why this particular juncture was perceived as being so significant by both the chronicler and Asser. Derek Keene has suggested that ‘In 886, Alfred may have exploited his control of London to proclaim a new sense of English identity.’¹⁸⁴ But this in turn also poses the questions as to how this ‘English identity’ was in any way different from that established by Alfred in c. 880 as a new polity represented by the establishment of the ‘kingdom of the Anglo-Saxons’, examined by Keynes,¹⁸⁵ and why this had to wait until 886. From all points of view, the paradigm articulated by Keynes, Abels and Keene leaves a rather wide disparity between their interpretation of this annal and the inferences which can be drawn from the wider historical and strategic considerations.

It is necessary therefore to take a rather different view which will resolve these issues. It is argued above that the creation in late 879 or 880 of a new burghal institution effectively transposes both the historical context and the processes of the second part of the ‘old’ paradigm characterized above from the ‘events’ of 886 to those of late 879. It is, significantly, at this time that King Ceolwulf of Mercia disappears from the historical record, the two Viking armies at Cirencester and Fulham retreat to East Anglia and to Francia respectively, a new boundary is agreed between Alfred and Guthrum in which the Vikings concede the area around London to Alfred, Aethelred is appointed Alfred’s regent in Mercia, a burghal system in Wessex as well as eastern Mercia has been set up and the *fyrð* reorganized, Alfred imposes a new political order on the whole of the English who were not under subjection to the Danes (with the general submission to Alfred as the new overlord of this enlarged estate which

this implies), and new coins are issued in London, Oxford and Gloucester to celebrate and articulate this new order of things. If all this took place in late 879, or as a direct result of events which took place at that time, the ‘events’ of 886 need to be re-examined afresh. The arguments given above, that the development of London in 879 as a burghal institution made it both the symbolic and actual hub in the political, economic and military spheres, bring all these historical movements together as a series of meaningful and connected processes in which causes and consequences can be examined in their true light. It also gives meaning to the idea that Alfred initiated these processes as part of a strategy, a concept which implies the prosecution of particular tactics to implement, and ensure the permanence of, a desired outcome.

It is suggested that the ‘event’ characterized as the *gesette* or ‘restoration’ of London in the accounts both in the *Chronicle* and Asser can be best seen as a condensing of what was essentially an extended and ongoing process to serve their narrative convenience – not that the *Chronicle* has much of a narrative at this point anyway.¹⁸⁶ It just reflects the inbuilt tendency for all annals in the *Chronicle* at this time to state events rather than to describe processes. Since the force of the chronicler’s statement derives as much from what it leaves out as from what it actually says, it carries the unstated (and arguably misleading) implication that what it describes was entirely new. For his part, Asser only appeared on the scene in 886, and might well not have realized the full significance of this ‘event’ as having had antecedents – particularly since his background and life experience as a monk in west Wales would hardly have equipped him to understand the political, strategic, organizational or physical processes involved in the formation of towns and fortresses. A man with his inexperience of the ways of the world, who could present such a skewed version of both Alfred’s sexuality and his development as a child, is hardly likely to have possessed any more balanced a grasp of complex political and strategic affairs. The perception of these events as part of a process means that the account neither in the *Chronicle* nor in Asser should be taken as evidence either that these processes were set in motion as a result of a particular set of circumstances which ‘occurred’ at this time, or, conversely, that they did not happen at a point in time which the chronicler does not mention. Since both the ‘reoccupation’ or the ‘restoration’ of London, in its aspects of the provision of a garrison, the reordering of the defences, the provision of a street system and the building of a defensive bridge, as well as the general submission of the population, had already arguably begun to be put in place in late 879 or 880, this reference in the *Chronicle* under 886 should perhaps therefore be construed as referring to circumstances which had a different emphasis and which were of a rather different origin.

The new element in this sequence of events characterized in the annal for 886 is the inclusion of Aethelred. After a long period in which he operated as Alfred’s under-

king in western Mercia he was, it appears, given some sort of new role in London which must have involved him taking over the control of a portion of some of its resources. The general and somewhat romantic assumption that this happened because Alfred decided to hand over control of London to a true Mercian, because it had always been a Mercian town,¹⁸⁷ ignores the significance of London to Alfred, which is implied in the control over minting and its income that he had exercised in London in the early years of his reign, as well as the force of the political and military ambition which drove him to regain London from the Vikings after having been deprived of this control in 877. However, in view of the new polity which had subsumed the separate identities of the West Saxons and the Mercians from c. 880 into the ‘kingdom of the Anglo-Saxons’, it could be seen as a clever political move designed to neutralize factional tendencies in the old Mercia. The writer has already suggested that this new order of things represented a time at which Alfred decided to enlarge Aethelred’s political brief by giving him the responsibility for the defence of London and its region against the Viking presence in East Anglia and their habitual incursions up the vulnerable Thames estuary, while Alfred kept for himself the overall control gained in his reordering of London in 879 – particularly in regard to minting and trade.¹⁸⁸ The continuing control of London by Alfred is demonstrated quite clearly in the grants of 889 and 898 (above), which involved aspects of the reorganization of London’s new burghal space.¹⁸⁹ The move to include Aethelred in the reorganization of London in 886, and in the grants mentioned above, would, as Tony Dyson has remarked, have established ‘a partnership ... between king, ealdorman and trusted ecclesiastics, comparable with a similar division of interests between Alfred, Aethelred and the bishop of Worcester’ in the setting out of the burh there at a slightly later date,¹⁹⁰ although Nicholas Brooks has observed that the role of Aethelred in the setting up of the burh of Worcester is more like a relic of the role of a Mercian king rather than that of a shire ealdorman.¹⁹¹ This aspect appears to mirror the action of Alfred in involving the ealdormen of the Wessex shires in a partnership with the king in the setting up of the system of burhs in Wessex, to which process Nicholas Brooks has attributed the origin of the ‘third penny’ taken by the earl from the profits of many of the boroughs at the time of Domesday.¹⁹² These partnerships appear to have been designed to share the military responsibilities for the defence of their respective territories, as well as offsetting some of the costs involved.¹⁹³ The puzzling absence of the Bishop of London in the proceedings involved in the creation and development of the burh from the late 870s until the end of Alfred’s reign has been remarked on by Derek Keene.¹⁹⁴ This partnership between king and bishop in the setting up of a burh can also be seen at Portchester, where the Bishop of Winchester and not the king owned the estate.¹⁹⁵ These moves in 886 and later can be seen, as Derek Keene has observed, as part of a

wider political strategy,¹⁹⁶ which would have certainly been one of the aspects Alfred would have had in mind in the earlier circumstances of 879–80. It was clearly part of this strategy to keep the minting (as with the tax income from the production, distribution and marketing of salt) in the new burhs in his own hands.

This shift in responsibilities for the defence of London implied in the assumption of a degree of control by Aethelred does not, however, by itself justify the apparently fundamental nature of the general submission of the whole population to Alfred ascribed to this event by the writer of the *Chronicle*. Neither does it justify the use of the description ‘*honorifice*’ by Asser which he ascribes to its ‘restoration’. As Janet Nelson has emphasized, this event of 886 was assigned a real importance at the time.¹⁹⁷ One possible answer to this issue is that the events which are compressed into the *Chronicle*’s brief account refer to the occasion of the marriage or betrothal of Aethelred to Alfred’s daughter Aethelflaed. This would have involved a ceremonial reaffirmation of the consolidation of the Mercian and West Saxon identities, symbolically represented by the union of a West Saxon princess and a Mercian prince, and embodying the political realities already established in the formation of the new ‘kingdom of the Anglo-Saxons’ in late 879 or 880 in a general submission to their overlord King Alfred at London. Although this event cannot be pinned down to a fixed date, it certainly took place around this time.¹⁹⁸ This time could also have marked an occasion in which Alfred intended that London should have become the royal *sedes* of the combined West Saxon and Mercia kingdoms, as Aachen was for the Carolingians, as well as an intention to shift the metropolitan see from Canterbury.¹⁹⁹

It is not impossible, furthermore, that by 886, or perhaps even in that year, Alfred’s forces at London and some of the Kentish burhs, such as Rochester, had succeeded in taking control of Essex, to include it within the lands belonging to London, thereby pushing the boundary agreed between Alfred and Guthrum effectively to (or at least further towards) the Essex/Suffolk border. This would have significantly enhanced the strategic security of the whole of the Thames estuary and access to Mercia. This alone could possibly have been seen as justifying the reference in the *Chronicle* to London being ‘occupied’ by Alfred. As Simon Keynes and Derek Keene have suggested, the new responsibilities given to Aethelred seem to have involved the assumption of some sort of control of London and its region, which area can be associated with the ‘lands belonging to London and Oxford’ which were taken over by Edward the Elder on Aethelred’s death in 911.²⁰⁰ The symbolic role of the occasion of this marriage between a Mercian ealdorman, now sub-king, to the daughter of the king of the West Saxons, now the overlord of the kingdom of the Anglo-Saxons – if indeed it took place at this juncture – would indeed have justified what seems to have amounted to a reaffirmation of the general submission to Alfred of ‘all the English people (*all angelcyn*) that

were not under the subjection to the Danes', which had arguably already been required in the context of the events of 879, when Alfred represented *all angelcyn* in his dealings with Guthrum.

This control of London and its surroundings, as well as no doubt his acquisition of a share in the profits of taxes and tolls from trade and general commerce of London which this would have entailed, can in this assessment be seen as a kind of dowry given by Alfred to Aethelred on this occasion.²⁰¹ This seems to be suggested by the fact that some degree of control of the area around London was kept by Aethelred for his lifetime, rather than being passed to Alfred's successor Edward the Elder, in a similar way in which Aethelred's new wife, Alfred's daughter, was able to control Mercia (less the area which had belonged to Aethelred) for the rest of her own life as well. The fact that Edward was, however, in overall control in military matters, as well as of minting,²⁰² could be taken as implying that these particularly personal regimes of both Aethelred and Aethelflaed were the result of a dispensation given to them both on this occasion by Alfred.

Conclusion

The overall historical model presented in this paper is based on a consideration of the strategic realities of the time, and can be characterized essentially as the playing out on the historical stage of an ongoing three-way power struggle between the Vikings (in particular under their leader Guthrum from c. 874), King Ceolwulf of Mercia, and King Alfred of the West Saxons. In these machinations, it is argued, London was in many senses the pivot, the focus and the prize, the control of which was strenuously contested throughout much of the 870s. The relationship between Alfred and Ceolwulf is seen as one of growing rivalry over the five years of the latter's reign, rather than of cooperation or political alliance, in which political and perhaps personal antagonism, jealousy and hunger for power and wealth played a fundamental part in the political dynamics of the time. Into this heady mix was thrown the loose cannon of the Vikings, who had their own agendas involving the acquisition of power and military – and ultimately political – control, and whose undoubted political and military clout, not to mention their lack of respect for the institutions and practices of the day, gave them a degree of leverage which fundamentally affected the way that events unfolded. It is argued that they too saw London as a political, economic and ultimately demographic prize, perhaps having moved on from their mindset shown in their occupation of London in 871–2, the principal purpose of which had it seems been to exact tribute.

The evidence of the coinage suggests that Alfred had come to exercise partial or complete control over London and its area (comprising all of eastern 'English' Mercia from the western border of later Oxfordshire eastwards) possibly from the time of (or a little while before) the

abdication of Burgred of Mercia in 874, by virtue of his family connections with the Mercian nobility. It is argued that after this control had been wrested from him in the 'Partition' of 877 by the Vikings, in which Alfred's portion of this area was divided by a new boundary between the Vikings to the east and Ceolwulf to the west, the regaining of London became the goal which determined Alfred's strategies against both Guthrum and Ceolwulf, whom he perceived to be in active collusion against the interests of the West Saxons. These measures included the military defeat of Guthrum at Edington, Guthrum's enforced absorption into the Christian 'Anglo-Carolingian' community, and the construction of the system of burhs around Wessex and eastern Mercia. These were targeted perhaps as much at Ceolwulf as at Guthrum. That Alfred was able to reaffirm control over the area of Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire after his defeat of Guthrum at Edington provides the context for the creation of burhs at Oxford and Buckingham as part of the systematic offensive against the Vikings in London and its surrounding area, and the establishment of new burghal territories of Wallingford and Sashes in Berkshire to include the southern parts of what later became Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire. The construction of these burhs as part of the system established over Wessex as a whole facilitated Alfred's suggested coup in 879 against Ceolwulf, and led to his eventual agreement with Guthrum in that year. This resulted in the latter's abrogation of control of London and his retreat to his own kingdom in East Anglia, as well as the retreat of the army based at Fulham at the same time. Indeed, it could be reasonably suggested that the recovery of London was itself only a component in the even grander strategy which had as its intended outcome the extension of King Alfred's control over the whole of English Mercia as its overlord, which he may well have felt was his expected inheritance as the most 'throne-worthy' successor to Burgred.

Allied to this political dimension was the pressing need to re-form London at this crucial juncture of 879 as a garrisoned burh within the secure space inside the Roman walls, on the model of those he had set up at other places in Wessex and eastern Mercia only a little while earlier. The detailed archaeological evidence allows the development of a model in which a direct functional and temporal association can be made between the activities of trade, marketing and new settlement within the old Roman walls, with the setting out of a system of streets, markets and trading places as primary components of the new urban landscape in 879–80.²⁰³ These developments led to the creation of a new burghal space which, together with a refurbished defensive bridge, served the needs of providing for the security of the eastern parts of his kingdom against Viking attack, particularly from the Thames estuary and from Guthrum's new kingdom in East Anglia. It also created a new institution which facilitated his perceived need to establish a stable and sustainable social, economic and indeed religious order, of which

trade and minting, together with the reform of the coinage, were important aspects. These developments at London allowed Alfred to maintain a degree of control over his new subjects both in Mercia and the kingdom of the West Saxons which he would possibly not otherwise have been able to achieve, and were supported by the extension of the burghal system and their new mints to the rest of southern Mercia at the same time. The burghal system of Wessex, arguably founded in the couple of years prior to this, and the creation of burhs at London and Gloucester as well as Oxford, can be seen therefore as connected stages in the development of a strategy whose goal was the enhancement and consolidation of Alfred's political, military, social and economic control of the population through the burhs, which set the pattern for subsequent developments in the later ninth and tenth centuries.

Whether all these outcomes were present in Alfred's mind as clearly mapped-out stages in a grand strategy from the outset, or whether they were the result of decisions taken on the hoof (literally as well as metaphorically), must of course be open to question. But the unfolding of these events does appear, with creative hindsight, as a

series of connected links in a process in which Alfred's proactive tactical and strategic interventions led to a succession of outcomes whose progress seems to have had a natural inevitability, the principal one of which appears to have been the consolidation of his own power over the former Mercian kingdom. The ingredients in the process which led to this position included outright skulduggery; a canny ability both to respond to the unfolding of events and to grasp the significance of the moment, as well as to manipulate situations to suit his needs; a strategic foresight combined with highly developed political and tactical skills; and a hunger for power, wealth and the control of institutions which gave him that power and aggrandizement. This culminated in the creation of the new political order of 879–80, of which London appears to have been a real and symbolic focus, which can arguably be recognized as the crucial and formative context in which the foundations for London's subsequent development were laid. It is argued that it was these foundations which were consolidated and extended in the new arrangements in 886 in which ealdorman Aethelred, now his son-in-law, was actively included in a new partnership with Alfred.

Notes

1. *E.g.* Dyson 1990.
2. *E.g.* Keynes 1998, 21–7; Abels 1998, 170–6; Keene 2003.
3. *E.g.* Horsman, Milne and Milne 1988; Vince 1990; Steedman, Dyson and Schofield 1992.
4. *E.g.* Biddle 1989; Kelly 1992; Cowie 2003.
5. *E.g.* Watson 2001.
6. *E.g.* Vince 1990; Dyson 1990; Blackmore 1997; Clark 1999; Keene 2003.
7. *E.g.* Blackburn 1998; Keynes 1998.
8. *E.g.* Dyson 1978; 1990.
9. Davis 1982; Haslam 2005.
10. Keene 2003, 235.
11. Haslam 2005.
12. Haslam 2010.
13. Stenton 1971, 198.
14. Dyson 1990, 100–1.
15. Blackburn 1998; Keynes 1998; Blackburn 2003. See further comments on the ubiquity of this view as an established paradigm in Blackburn 1998, 105–6 and Keynes 1998, 13–15 – the latter illustrating very nicely the difficulties in interpreting new evidence in the face of such entrenched paradigms. The traditional view is represented by, for instance, Dolley and Blunt 1961; Brooke and Keir 1975, 19–20; Loyn 1977, 60; Whitelock 1979, 199; Hill 1981, 47; Davis 1982, 803; Keynes and Lapidge 1983, 38; Dyson and Schofield 1984, 296; Tatton Brown 1986, 25; Hopley 1988, 76; Dyson 1990; Vince 1990; Blair 1994, 101; Smyth 1995, 46, 386–7; Blackmore 1997, 129–31; and Peddie 1999, 164–9. Others are cited by Keynes (Keynes 1998, 13, n. 49). This is clearly the standard 'received view' for every archaeologist discussing developments of this period in London.
16. Blackburn 1998, 106.
17. Keynes 1998, 15.
18. Keynes 1998, 18.
19. Keene 2003, 241–6, esp. 241–3.
20. Haslam 2005, 128–9.
21. The term 'burh' – widely used in many different contexts in the Anglo-Saxon period – is used here to refer to a late Saxon fortress which was created as a new institution by the king as a means of implementing defensive and offensive strategies against the Vikings, and which was provided with new or refurbished defences and a garrison. See discussion of this subject in Draper 2008. In the larger burhs the garrison was supported by a permanent population, as well as by mechanisms for ensuring legal, social and economic sustainability and stability.
22. As Simon Keynes has indeed observed (Keynes 1998, 13).
23. *E.g.* Stenton 1971, 260–2; Whitelock 1979, 416; Davis 1982; Stafford 1985, 111; Smyth 1995, 386–7.
24. Haslam 2005, 124–7. Until recently, James Tait has probably been the only historian who has accepted the possibility (following Lieberman) that the Treaty of Alfred and Guthrum belongs to *c.* 880, and that the repair of London's walls followed its recovery from the Danes at that time (Tait 1936, 17, 23).
25. Dolley and Blunt 1961, 81.
26. Keene 2003, 242.
27. Blackmore 1997, 128.
28. Blackburn 1998, 122–3; Keynes 1998, 18; Keene 2003, 240.
29. Brooke and Keir 1975, 19–20; Nelson 1993, 154–5; Foot 1996, 26.
30. Dumville 1992, 18, n. 85; Blair 1994, 97.
31. Smyth 1995, 48–50; cf. Keynes 1998, 18, n. 81.
32. Haslam 2005, 134; cf. Dyson 1990, 100; Keene 2003, 238.
33. Dyson 1990, 100.
34. Keene 2003, 238.
35. *E.g.* Whitelock 1979, 30; Hill 1981, 40, map 59; Keynes and Lapidge 1983, 12; Smyth 1995, 49.
36. Campbell 1962, 41.
37. Keynes 1998, 35; cf. Keene 2003, 240–3.
38. Blackburn 1998, 116–20.
39. Keynes 1998, 18; cf. Keene 2003, 240.
40. Keynes 1998, 11.
41. Blackburn 1998, 109.
42. Blackburn 1998, 120.
43. Keynes 1998, 18.
44. Keene 2003, 240. A new 'model' which is put forward by three historians of the standing of Keynes, Blackburn and Keene could perhaps be justified as being described as a 'paradigm'.

45. Haslam 2005, 128.
46. Blackburn 1998, 116; Keynes 1998, 15–18.
47. Blackburn 2003, 213.
48. Haslam 2005, 141–4 – and see further below.
49. Roffe 2009, 42–5.
50. Manco 1998.
51. Smyth 1995, 51–5; Keynes 1998, 12–14.
52. Smyth 1995, 52.
53. This is argued at length by the writer (Haslam 2005), and further below.
54. Whitelock 1979, 195.
55. Smyth 1995, 49–50.
56. Haslam 1997, 118–30; 2005, 128.
57. This is discussed in Haslam 2005, 122–7. Simon Keynes has suggested that the Treaty was signed after Guthrum had already moved to East Anglia – *i.e.* in 880 or later (Keynes 1998, 33–4, n. 146). But the writer has responded that Guthrum would have been recognized as the ‘king’ of East Anglia before the signing of the Treaty and before he even arrived there, otherwise he would have been retreating into an uncertain political vacuum (Haslam 2005, 125). The extant memorandum (in two versions, one of which may be a copy of the other – Keynes 1998, 31, n. 143) which is the form of the original Treaty which has survived may well be a description of the situation at the conclusion of the processes leading up to and including the final withdrawal of Guthrum to East Anglia in late 879, but the negotiations leading to the agreements which it enshrines must have begun probably as early as mid-879. David Hill dated the boundary to ‘*c.* 880?’ in 1981 (Hill 1981, 47).
58. A case against the arguments of David Dumville, that the Treaty boundary defines a Danish area to the west and a West Saxon area to the east (Dumville 1992), has been made by both Simon Keynes (1998, 33–4, n. 145), and by reference to strategic considerations by the writer (Haslam 2005, 123–4).
59. Its continuation northwards from this point is shown by Whitelock 1979, map 3, p. 39; Hill 1981, 45, 47; Gelling 1992, 128; Stafford 1985, 111; cf. Keynes 1998, 33.
60. This series of logical deductions might seem speculation to historians of the period who tend to downplay the significance of events and processes which are not documented. They are, however, a rather straightforward form of what might be termed landscape stratigraphy, in which the spatial relationships between historic landscape features and boundaries can be analysed in ways which demonstrate temporal relationships. For a particular example, see Desmond Bonney’s analysis of the relationship of parish boundaries to Wandsdyke in Wiltshire (Bonney 1976). Other special applications of this technique are in town plan analysis (*e.g.* Lilley 2000, with references).
61. Haslam 1997, 118–23; 2005, 128 – see map.
62. The writer has downplayed the reality of this boundary in the most recent paper (Haslam 2005, n. 33), but now sees this as a real political division within Mercia which represented a fundamental change in the political geography of the time.
63. This is quoted in Whitelock 1979, 199, n. 4, where John, or ‘Florence’, is described as ‘using some lost source’. See Darlington and McGurk 1995 for another translation.
64. Haslam 2005, 128.
65. This passage is also quoted by Keynes (Keynes 1998, 20, n. 86) and Keene (Keene 2003, 242). Keynes has commented that this might be merely ‘an inference from known events, drawn with the historian’s advantage of hindsight’. But if these events were known, then this passage is likely to be an accurate record; and anyway, all historical events are by their very nature described with hindsight.
66. Whitelock 1979, 209; Hill 1981, 55, fig. 82.
67. It would seem quite possible that the negotiations which are recorded in Alfred and Guthrum’s Treaty, which determined the conditions under which Guthrum’s army was to retreat to East Anglia and which the writer has argued took place in the summer of 879 (Haslam 2005, 126), were also held at Tiddingford.
68. Whitelock 1979, 546–7.
69. Hill 1981, 55, fig. 82.
70. Keynes 2003, 12–19.
71. Haslam 2005, 125.
72. The strategies of the Viking armies, and the case for assigning the construction of the burghal system in Wessex to the period between Alfred’s victory over the Vikings at Edington and the retreat of Guthrum’s Vikings to East Anglia and the Fulham army to Francia in late 879, have been discussed in detail by the writer elsewhere (Haslam 2005).
73. Simon Keynes accepts that the position of Ceolwulf in a Mercia regnal list from Worcester shows that he reigned for only five years, from 874–9 (Keynes 1998, 12).
74. This suggested coup could alternatively be seen as a ‘palace revolt’, in which the pro-Alfredian faction in Mercia got rid of Ceolwulf in favour of direct rule by Alfred.
75. Abels 1992, 29. In this paper Richard Abels also discusses the reasons why Alfred did not also get rid of Guthrum.
76. *s.a.* 874 – Whitelock 1979, 194.
77. Smyth 1995, 48–50, 52–5; Keynes 1998, 12–19.
78. *E.g.* Abels 1998, 146; Smyth 1995, 51; Keynes 1998, 20.
79. Nelson 1993, 145; cf. Pratt 2007.
80. Smyth 1995, 52; Keynes 1998, 12–13.
81. Most commentators – *e.g.* Smyth 1995, 52 – are disinclined to accept this at face value as an accurate description, but none appears to look for reasons why it should have been applied in this context in the first place.
82. Pratt 2007.
83. These conclusions differ from those of Simon Keynes, who holds the view that the tone of the references to Ceolwulf in the *Chronicle* ‘does not represent the West Saxon attitude to Ceolwulf which was current in the 870s’ (Keynes 1998, 19). But this view appears to be premised on his interpretation of the evidence of the coinage as indicating an alliance or partnership between the two kings – which view the writer questions in this paper.
84. Haslam 2005, 122–8.
85. Blackburn 1998, 110–12.
86. Keynes 1998, 31.
87. Keynes 1998, 30; Blackburn 2003, 205–7.
88. Blackburn 1996; 2003, 207–8.
89. Keynes 1998; Haslam 2005, 128–9.
90. Mark Blackburn has suggested that the king would have taken between five and twenty-five per cent of the value of coinage produced by London moneyers (Blackburn 2003, 200, n. 6).
91. Keynes 2001, 327.
92. Haslam 2005, 129. Similar arguments underlie an earlier attempt to redate the Burghal Hidage to the year before London was ‘recovered’ by Alfred in 886 (Davis 1982).
93. Keynes 1998, 35.
94. Haslam 2010.
95. Keene 2003, 241.
96. Biddle and Hill 1971; Biddle 1973, 251; 1976b, 273; Keynes and Lapidge 1983, 23–5, 212, n. 16, 340, n. 6.
97. Haslam 2005, 129–33, 135–44.
98. The arguments given above and in the writer’s paper of 2005 are summed up in the entry for the Burghal Hidage in Wikipedia (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Burghal_Hidage).
99. Smyth 1995, 888.
100. Pratt 2007, 106–7.
101. Simon Keynes has suggested that the use of the word *Angelcyn* could have been first used around 880, perhaps with the example of the Treaty in mind (Keynes 1998, 25). The matter is discussed in detail by Keynes (with references) on pp. 23–6. See also Foot 1996; Pratt 2007, 106–7; and Kershaw 2000. In the writer’s view, the loading of significance of the general submission to Alfred suggested by the *Chronicle*’s entry for 886 is more appropriate to the circumstances of 879 – see further discussion below.
102. Wainwright 1975; for the Burghal Hidage system, see Haslam

- 2005, 141–4; for the submission of the populations of the burghal territories, see Abels 1988, 79–91 and Haslam 1997; for Wallingford and Sashes, see Roffe 2009, 42–5.
103. Alex Woolf has made the intriguing suggestion that Aethelred is likely to have been King Alfred's nephew, descended from royal stock from his wife's lineage. In marrying Alfred's daughter, therefore, he would have been marrying his cousin (Woolf 2001, 90).
 104. Keynes 1998, 12, n. 48.
 105. Keynes 1998, 21, 27–9.
 106. Brooks 1971, 17–20; Brooks 1979; Abels 1998, 204–7.
 107. This is discussed by Nicholas Brooks, in relation to evidence in particular from the formation of Worcester (Brooks 1996, 143–4). For the function of garrisons as original elements in the setting up of burhs, see also Brooks 2003, 161–2.
 108. Haslam 2005, 135–44.
 109. Brooks 2003, 161.
 110. See further comments on these factors in Keene 2003, 238, and quoted above. The role of London bridge at this period is discussed in Haslam 2010; see also Gilmour 1989 and Cooper 2006 for a general discussion of the defensive role of bridges.
 111. Abels 1988, 79–91; Haslam 1997.
 112. Keynes 1998, 34–9.
 113. Brooks 1996, 143–5.
 114. Abels 1988, 80.
 115. Abels 1988, 79–91; Haslam 1997.
 116. Abels 1988, 90.
 117. Abels 1988, 80.
 118. Abels 1998, 208.
 119. Keynes 2003.
 120. Haslam 1997, 114–18.
 121. Whitelock 1979, 540–1.
 122. Dyson 1978, 210–12; see also Brooks 1996, 143–4.
 123. Biddle and Hill 1971, 83; Biddle 1976a, 125; Abels 1988, 68–78; Brooks 2003, 159–62; Haslam 2005, 139.
 124. Abels 1988, 71–8; 1998, 203–4.
 125. Pratt 2007, 104.
 126. Whitelock 1979, 540–1.
 127. Dyson 1978; 1990; 1992a; 1992b.
 128. The detailed archaeological and topographical evidence which supports this model of the development of London as a new burh in 879 is set out in a separate paper – see Haslam 2010.
 129. Brooks 1996, 143–4. This can also be inferred from significant attributes from Southwark in Domesday Book – see discussion in Haslam 2010, 130–7.
 130. Abels 1998, 214.
 131. Keynes 2003, 15.
 132. Haslam 2005, 143–4.
 133. Blackburn 1998, 110–11.
 134. Blair 1994, 87–92; Dodd 2003, 13–16.
 135. This reflects a received view shared also by Mark Blackburn – see Blackburn 1996, 163 – but clearly revised since.
 136. Blair 1994, 99–101. This view is also followed by Andrew Reynolds – see Reynolds 1999, 90–1.
 137. Dodd 2003, 31–2.
 138. Dumville 1992. See further discussion in the section 'The formation of Oxfordshire' in Blair 1994, 101–5.
 139. Roffe 2009, 41–5.
 140. Lobel and Tann 1971, 2.
 141. *E.g.* Heighway 1978, 121–2, 131, n. 58; 1984a, 366; 1984b, 40–5; 1985, 29; 1987, 43–4; 1988, 7–8; Heighway and Bryant 1999, 102–3; Bryant and Heighway 2003, 97; Thacker 1982, 209–11.
 142. Hare 1999, 34; Heighway and Hare 1999, 199.
 143. Blackburn 1996, 163–5; Blackburn 1998, 107; Blackburn 2003, 205–8.
 144. This general model is based on the hypothesis that the Burghal Hidage was produced as part of the process of the creation of the West Saxon system of burhs in 878–9 (*i.e.* before Alfred's assumption of control in western Mercia and London), as argued by the writer (Haslam 2005; 2009).
 145. The bridge would have been associated with a long causeway over the flood plain of the Severn – see Rhodes 2006.
 146. Bassett 2008.
 147. Maddicott 1989, 18–19; Pratt 2007.
 148. Maddicott 1989, 42.
 149. Lobel and Tann 1971, 3. DB (Glouc), G1.
 150. Maddicott 1989, 46; Haslam 1984, 258, 277. Similar arguments apply to the foundation of a burh at Hereford, which by analogy with the position of Gloucester in relation to possible sources of tribute from Wales may also have been created as a burh by Alfred at this period. See also the recent discussion of the West Mercian burhs in Bassett 2008.
 151. Heighway 1978, 118–23; Thacker 1982, 211; Keynes 1998, 30, n. 135.
 152. Keynes 1998, 30.
 153. Keynes 1998; 2001; Cumberledge 2002. Richard Abels, for instance, argues that the imposition of overlordship of Mercia by Alfred was a gradual process (Abels 1998, 182). The analysis in the paragraphs above would imply, however, that it was premeditated, decisive and absolute, and that Alfred did not wait around to exert his own stamp on a kingdom to which he probably thought he had a natural right as successor of Burgred.
 154. Whitelock 1979, 540–1.
 155. The acquisition of a large soke adjacent to the trading shore at Queenhithe by Bishop Waerferth in 889 (Dyson 1978) is argued by the writer elsewhere (Haslam 2010) as primarily an outlet in the new burh for the bishop's interests in the trade in salt from Droitwich, examined recently by John Maddicott – see Maddicott 2005.
 156. Dyson 1978; 1990; 1992a.
 157. Nelson 1993, 155.
 158. Maddicott 1989, 41–51. John Maddicott, for example, emphasizes the importance of the role of Exeter in the ninth and early tenth centuries, and suggests that Bath, which had a mint in the early tenth century, had been founded as an outlet for silver from the Mendips (Maddicott 1989, 46).
 159. Blunt, Stewart and Lyon 1989, 21; Blackburn 1996, 161; Lyon 2001, 75.
 160. Yorke 1984; Nelson 1993.
 161. Blackmore 1999.
 162. Vince 1988; Dyson 1990, 108.
 163. Abels 1998, 303–8.
 164. This general submission of 879–80 has been suggested, for instance, by Richard Abels – see Abels 1998, 183.
 165. Keynes 1998, 19–27; Keene 2003, 241–3; Abels 1998, 170–6, all with extensive references.
 166. Keene 2003, 242.
 167. Keynes 1998, 22–3. The 'recapture' of London in 883 is seen by Janet Nelson as the moment when Alfred finally recovered London from the Danes (Nelson 1993, 154–5), a view followed by Sarah Foot (Foot 1996, 26).
 168. Keynes 1998, 23; cf. Abels 1998, 174–6; Foot 1996, 26.
 169. Keene 2003, 241.
 170. Keynes 1998, 23, n. 101.
 171. Stenton 1971, 264–5; Biddle and Hill 1971; Biddle 1973, 251; 1976a, 124; 1976b, 273; Keynes and Lapidge 1983, 23–5, 212, n. 16, 340, n. 6; Abels 1998, 174; Keene 2003, 241. For comments on this view see Haslam 2005, 129.
 172. Haslam 2005, 129–32; 2009, 111–14.
 173. Keene 2003, 241.
 174. Whitelock 1979, 197.
 175. Abels 1998, 172–3.
 176. The writer has also suggested that a burghal system in Kent was established in the 860s, well before that in Wessex (Haslam 2005, 136).
 177. Keynes 1998, 22–3, n. 1; Abels 1998, 171.
 178. Abels 1998, 171–2.
 179. Smyth 1995, 110–11. See also pertinent comments on the warfare

- of this period in Abels 2003.
180. Whitelock 1979, 199.
181. The development of this idea has been described by Simon Keynes – see Keynes 1998, 22.
182. Keene 2003, 241.
183. Such an impression is fostered, for instance, in Dorothy Whitelock's comments on the text of the *Chronicle*, and her association of the passage from John (Florence) of Worcester, quoted above, with this episode (Whitelock 1979, 199, n. 4).
184. Keene 2003, 249.
185. Keynes 1998.
186. This aspect is discussed by Alfred Smyth – see Smyth 1995, 101–16.
187. E.g. Stenton 1971, 258–9; Keynes 1998, 26; Keene 2003, 242.
188. Haslam 2005, 134–5. Similar views are expressed by Tony Dyson (Dyson 1990, 102) and Simon Keynes (Keynes 1998, 26, esp. n. 119). Keynes refers to this phase as a 'loosening of the territorial integrity' between Alfred's sphere of influence in eastern Mercia and Aethelred's in western Mercia (Keynes 1998, 27).
189. Dyson 1978; 1990; 1992a, 15–19; Keene 2003, 243–4.
190. Dyson 1992a, 18; cf. Dyson 1978, 211. Derek Keene points out that the involvement of the bishop and archbishop, representing 'poles on the main axis of Mercian authority with which London had long been associated', suggests that 'the restoration of London was part of a wider political strategy' (Keene 2003, 244).
191. Brooks 2003, 159, n. 20.
192. Brooks 2003, 159. This is well exemplified by the case of Southwark, discussed above, and in Haslam 2010.
193. This could possibly also have had a parallel in the partnerships between the king and the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Abbot of St Augustine's in Canterbury, as well as the Bishop of Rochester, in the setting out of these burhs, which is suggested by the evidence in the Grately code of the early tenth century of the sharing of the profits of minting between these parties and the king (Blackburn 1996, 176–9). It is not impossible therefore that this could reflect a similar partnership in a phase of burh creation in the early ninth if not even the late eighth century in these two places. This does not appear to have been the pattern at London, where the 'partnership' between Alfred and Aethelred does not seem to have resulted in either the Bishop of London or Aethelred receiving a share of the proceeds of the most lucrative aspects of the income generated by the setting up of the new burh – at least as indicated by the fact that neither controlled the output of any moneyer.
194. Keene 2003, 244–5.
195. Brooks 2003, 161, n. 25; cf. Haslam 2005, 144.
196. Keene 2003, 244.
197. Nelson 1993, 154–5.
198. Simon Keynes has suggested that Aethelflaed may well have been of marriageable age by c. 885, and she first appears as Aethelred's wife in 887 – see Keynes 1998, 27, n. 121. Janet Nelson has also suggested that this event marks the occasion of Aethelred's and Aethelflaed's marriage – see Nelson 1993, 155.
199. Nelson 1993, 155.
200. Keynes 1998, 26–7, n. 119; Keene 2003, 242; cf. Haslam 2005, 134–5. It is perhaps significant that one of Edward the Elder's first priorities after this was to take steps to consolidate his control over Essex by the construction in 912 of burhs at Hertford and Witham.
201. Haslam 2005, 134–5.
202. Keynes 1998, 37–8; Lyon 2001, 77.
203. This aspect is discussed in detail elsewhere – see Haslam 2010, 130–7.

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