A probable late Saxon burh at Ilchester

by Jeremy Haslam

It is the purpose here to examine the hypothesis that the former Roman town at Ilchester, Somerset, was included as part of the system of burhs built all over Wessex by King Alfred in the late ninth century which, apart from Ilchester itself, are listed in the Burghal Hidage document. These were constructed as a strategic and defensive measure to prevent Viking attacks against Wessex, and to exert a new level of political control by the king. This has been considered for some time as being a document written in the early tenth century, though listing burhs originally built in the time of King Alfred, perhaps in the 880s. I have, however, presented arguments to the effect that these burhs were built as a unitary system in the period 878-9 to defend Wessex against the Vikings and to counter the Viking presence in Mercia and London at the time (amongst other strategic objectives), and that the Burghal Hidage document itself was produced at the same time as the initial development of the system (Haslam 2005; Haslam forthcoming a; Haslam forthcoming b). These 31 burhs, of varying types, occupied strategic positions over the whole of Wessex (Biddle 1976; Hill 1996). They were associated with burghal territories, created for their support and maintenance, which were interlocking districts which in all cases, except Berkshire, Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire, appear to have been determined by reference to the earlier shire boundaries. This in itself is a powerful reason for regarding these burhs as a unitary *system*, built over a short period of time to fulfil definite political and strategic objectives and to facilitate and put in place hoped-for military, economic, social and political outcomes. Many of these military objectives can be inferred from the siting of these burhs in relation to features of the historic landscape such as Roman roads and river crossings (Haslam 2005, pp. 129-33).

Since Ilchester is not included in the List of the Burghal Hidage document, the reasons for regarding it as a burh which was created as part of the same system as the others in the List are therefore based to a large extent on inference and analogy. David Hinton indeed refers to Ilchester as being 'the obvious absentee' from the List of the Burghal Hidage (Hinton 1996, pp. 155), and Peter Leach ascribes the creation of Ilchester as a defended stronghold to the tenth century – presumably after the system listed in the Burghal Hidage was brought into being (Leach 1994, p. 12). However, the reasons for including Ilchester in the original system of burhs of the Burghal Hidage are in the writer's view compelling in combination, even without the certainty of inclusion in the document, and even if one line of argument on its own might well not be enough to establish the case. These reasons will be discussed in turn.

The Burghal Hidage

The omission of a burh at Ilchester - or indeed any other burh - from the List given in the Burghal Hidage would not be anomalous, nor would it be entirely unexpected. Different versions or archetypes of the various manuscripts in existence exclude different places, for various reasons to do with the complex (and unrecoverable) ways in which the text has been copied and transmitted. Version A omits Shaftesbury, with various MSS in this line omitting Hastings, Lewes or Chichester, while Version B omits Burpham, Wareham and Bridport (Rumble 1996, pp. 37-8). With this degree of variation, it would be hardly surprising if at least one place was excluded from both versions, perhaps by its omission from an early progenitor from which both archetypes were descended.
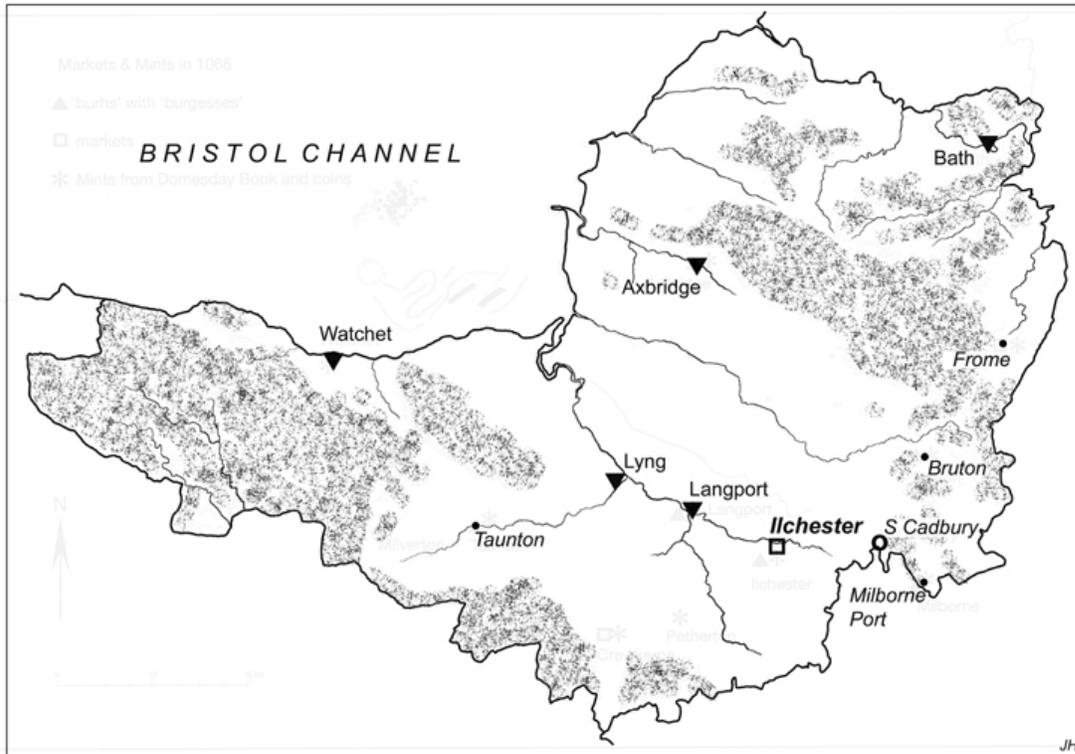

Fig. 1 Ilchester, and the burhs of the Burghal Hidage in Somerset; also showing other places mentioned in the text. Land over 120m OD is shaded. North to top. Low res image

The second aspect of the documentary context for the suggested burh of Ilchester lies in the fact that it would have had a burghal territory of several hundred hides, by means of which it would have been constructed, maintained and garrisoned. All these functions would have been supported by the obligations and services of one man from each hide The exclusion of this territory of an un-named burh in Somerset with a burghal territory of this size from the List of the Burghal Hidage would supply an explanation for the somewhat anomalous status of the shire, in relation to other shires in Wessex, in having fewer hides assigned to it in the Burghal Hidage than appear in Domesday Book. All the other shires (with the exception of Oxfordshire, Berkshire and Buckinghamshire, which are anomalous for different reasons - see below) have a greater number of hides in the Burghal Hidage than in Domesday Book. The addition of the hides belonging to the

burghal territory of this suggested missing burh at Ilchester would remove the apparent anomaly in these totals. This is shown in the figures tabulated below.

Hidages of the shires of Wessex (figures taken from Brooks 1996, 135-6, table 6.1)				
Shire	*A* - Burghal Hidage	*B* - Domesday shire	*C* - A minus B	*D* - C as percentage of A
Sussex	4344	3225	1119	25.76
Hampshire	3520	2588	932	26.47
Dorset	3060	2321	739	24.15
Devon	1534	1119	415	27.03
Somerset	2613	2951	- 338	-
Wiltshire	4800	4050	750	15.62
Surrey	2400	1830	570	23.75
Average of percentages (column D) for 5 shires (excluding Wilts & Somerset)				25.43
Average of percentages (column D) for 6 shires (including Wilts but excluding Somerset)				23.79
Somerset (+ 800 hides)	3413	2951	442	15.00
Somerset (+ 1000 hides)	3613	2951	662	18.31
Somerset (+ 1200 hides)	3813	2951	862	22.6
Somerset (+ 1300 hides)	3913	2951	962	24.58
Somerset (+1400 hides)	4013	2951	1062	26.46

Some discussion is required to interpret the true significance of these figures. Oxfordshire, Berkshire and Buckinghamshire are omitted from this exercise, since the Domesday shires bear little relationship to the Burghal Hidage burghal territories. Both Keith Bailey and David Roffe have shown how the burghal territory of Sashes is likely to have comprised a part of south Buckinghamshire as well as eastern Berkshire, and that of Wallingford a part of south Oxfordshire (Bailey 1996; Roffe 2009, pp. 42-5). I have shown elsewhere that the initial burghal territory of Oxford also included part of northern Berkshire, thereby also straddling the Thames (Haslam

forthcoming a). The two situations (the territories evidenced in the Burghal Hidage and the shires of Domesday Book) are not therefore directly comparable in these three instances.

The pattern which emerges from the figures given above is of a reduction in the hidages between the time of the Burghal Hidage and the time of Domesday Book at a level which is broadly consistent over all the other shires in Wessex, with the notable exception of Somerset. Nicholas Brooks has examined an explanation for this observation which has been put forward by Peter Sawyer – that the decrease in total hidage values for each shire from the Burghal Hidage figure is caused by some burhs falling out of commission by the time of Domesday Book (Brookes 1996, pp. 134-8; Brooks 2003, pp. 159-62). Although Brooks gives reasons for arguing that this particular explanation is untenable, this line of reasoning has been followed by subsequent commentators ((Lavelle 2007, p. 22; Baker and Brookes 2011, pp. 105 & n.12). His preferred explanation for the anomalies in these figures is that it is the Domesday Book hidage assessments which are the 'ancient ones', and that the larger assessments in the Burghal Hidage represent increases from these base levels in each shire made in a time of emergency, using hides which did not in fact exist on the ground, or that hides (and therefore men) were moved around at will between burhs which were brought into being at different times as the need arose. Brooks suggests that the observed anomaly of Somerset could be caused by its 'more fragmented social and estate structure than most of Wessex . . ', though without showing the essential connection between this observation and the resulting inference. However, there is no reason to see Somerset as being more 'fragmented', unless this is shown by its pre-Conquest administrative structure which appears to have been based on twenty-one royal estates, or 'hundredal manors', which themselves formed the basis for the larger number of eleventh-century hundreds (Loud 1989, p. 12). But this arrangement is no different to that of other shires, particularly in the Wessex heartlands, as is well brought out by work on the administration of the royal estates (Stafford 1980; Lavelle 2007).

Brooks' views, however, ignore the clear evidence that the burhs of the Burghal Hidage formed a *system*, in which all the different elements were supported by territories of fixed hidage values which must have interlocked in space, and which were therefore set out and organised on the ground at the same time, although this perception has been jettisoned in the recent study by David Baker and Stuart Brookes (Baker and Brookes 2011). This being so, it is the hidage figures in the Burghal Hidage, and not the Domesday Book figures, which have to be considered as primary. A more satisfactory explanation for these discrepancies, which is simpler and more economical in avoiding untestable assumptions, would need to take into account two factors which have been overlooked by Brooks. These are a) that between the late ninth and the late eleventh centuries a number of estates were subject to beneficial hidation in their assessment for geld, thus decreasing the total hidage pool; and b) that the hidage totals for the core territories of royal estates, as well as probably other demesne lands of various tenants-in-chief (both lay and ecclesiastical), are omitted from the Domesday Book assessments, which are of fiscal or geldable hides only. This last reason seems likely to have been a process affecting most of England (Roffe 2007, pp. 199-203). In both Wiltshire and Hampshire, for instance, the additions of the 'missing' hides, which can

be recovered by estimating the original assessments on the royal estates and by taking beneficial hidation into account, give figures which almost exactly match those in the Burghal Hidage. These arguments are set out elsewhere (Haslam forthcoming, ch 3 & 4).

In Somerset there are no values for hidation assessments on royal estates in 11 of the 31 entries for royal manors in section 1 of Domesday Book, where they are described in such terms as 'It has never paid tax, nor is it known how many hides there are' (DB Som, 1,1-10; 1,20) (Round 1907; Loud 1989, pp. 12-14). There would, however, be no reason to suppose that the considerable population on these royal estates, who tilled the numerous ploughlands and who provided the king with the wherewithal for his one night's farm, would have been exempt from military duties and obligations at an earlier period when their labour would have been desperately required for the construction and maintenance of the system of burhs around the shire. This is especially so in view of the probability that the territories of these burhs would have been organised on the basis of the areal extent of these same royal manors, and when it is considered that these royal manorial centres would in all likelihood have functioned as the 'proto-hundredal' administrative centres in the organisation of both the supply and the mustering points for work on King Alfred's defensive initiatives, which is suggested by the close correspondence of the later hundreds to these royal estates (Aston 1986, pp. 53-4; Loud 1989, pp. 12-14). It must be concluded that the hidage figures in the Burghal Hidage therefore represent the 'original' military hidations of the shires, which were later modified in various ways by subtraction in the two centuries before the time of Domesday Book for reasons to do with the vagaries of the application of fiscal assessments.

It can be concluded on the basis of the analysis of the figures given above that the addition of a burh and its territory of around 10-1200 or possibly 1300 hides or thereabouts to the totals given in the Burghal Hidage for Somerset would be consistent with the pattern of the reduction of hidage assessments between the time of the Burghal Hidage and Domesday shown by other shires. A territory of between 900 and 1400 hides would fit within the range of variation shown by the figures, even if the decrease from the time of the Burghal Hidage to the time of Domesday Book for Wiltshire is well below the average for the other shires. Reasons are given below for suggesting that this burh with its associated territory was located at Ilchester. It is of course entirely possible that there were two burhs in Somerset which were omitted from the List, each with a burghal territory of a proportion of the suggested size. For various reasons, it might be considered that this second burh could have been located at Taunton. This is, however, another question. No attempt is made here to relate these hidage values to the length of the defended perimeter of Ilchester, since, as I have argued elsewhere, any conclusion drawn from this exercise has no evidential value in determining anything (Haslam 2009, pp. 111-4; cf Hinton 1996, p. 155, Brooks 1996, p. 132).

The issue of the apparent shortfall in the hidage assessment in Somerset in the Burghal Hidage can be approached from another direction. I have demonstrated elsewhere that the shortfall in the hidage values for Wiltshire in Domesday Book (around 4000 hides) compared with the Burghal Hidage assessment (4800 hides) can be accounted for by adding to the former the

reconstructed hidage values both from unhidated royal estates, and from other royal estates in particular which show beneficial hidation (Haslam forthcoming, ch. 3). These 'missing' hides can be estimated by comparing the ratio of ploughlands, which are given for virtually all estates, to hides. David Roffe has argued that figures for ploughlands provide 'a measure of the rate of hidation' in unhidated land, and an index which provides 'a firm datum established by the commissioners themselves . . which is more valid that those normally employed' (Roffe 2007, 206, 209, 310). Where both ploughlands and hides are given in sample fees, the ratio is approximately 1.5 hides to 1 ploughland. Using this ratio, it can be estimated that there are approximately 800 extra hides, primarily in these royal estates, which are unaccounted for in Domesday Book. This brings the total hidage assessment to the level of the 4800 hides given in the Burghal Hidage. This establishes the principle that a significant proportion of the hides in the late eleventh century have disappeared from the record, but not from the land.

Applying the same logic and methodology to the figures for Somerset gives a similar conclusion – though because the Burghal Hidage values are in question there is no fixed benchmark to establish the veracity of the inferences which can be drawn. The total for the ploughlands for the eleven unhidated royal estates in the Somerset Domesday is 460. The ratio of ploughlands to hides, where both are given, in a sample fee of the 61 manors of the bishop of Coutances is 449 ploughlands to 348 hides (DB Som section 5), which gives a benchmark ratio of 1.29 ploughs to 1 hide. This compares with a ratio in Wiltshire of between 1.77 and 1.53 hides to 1 ploughland. Even with the apparently greater proportion of ploughlands to hides in Somerset, this can be used to determine the approximate numbers of unrecorded hides in the Domesday record. The 'missing' hides in the 11 unhidated royal manors can be reconstructed by applying this proportion to the 460 ploughlands, which would indicate that 357 hides are unrecorded. The total of 264 hides on the remaining royal manors which are hidated are assessed at 563 ploughlands, which gives a ratio of 2.13 ploughlands for 1 hide. According to the proportion on the bishop of Coutances manors of 1.29 to 1, these 563 ploughlands on the hidated royal estates would, therefore, indicate an 'original' hidation value of around 436 hides, which in turn indicates a beneficial hidation of a total of 172 hides. On all the royal estates, therefore, there are likely to have been around 529 'original' hides which have not been recorded in Domesday Book. Adding this figure to the known hidation value in DB of 2951 (Brooks 1996, 135) gives a figure of 3480, which can be compared to the Burghal Hidage figure of 2613 hides – representing a shortfall of 867 hides. Allowing for the factor of beneficial hidation in other non-royal estates, this figure might well be somewhat larger – say a round-figure estimate of 900 or even 1000. This would therefore represent the size of the burghal territory of the putative burh at Ilchester which is omitted from the Burghal Hidage. This compares well in order of magnitude with the 9-1300 hides estimated above by different means, and is of similar order of size to the territories of Langport (600 hides) and Bath (1000 hides).

The entries in Domesday Book

The brief mentions of Ilchester in Domesday Book are arguably diagnostic in significant ways of its status as a former burh. In Milborne Port, a royal manor paying three quarters of one night's revenue, there are '56 burgesses who pay 60s with the market', which are distinguished from the '107 burgesses who pay 20s' who live 'in Ilchester'. This latter set of burgesses had a market paying £11 which is mentioned as a separate entity, and was presumably also located in Ilchester (DB Som 1,10), making it of higher value than that at Milborne Port. Since Ilchester has no separate entry, it is not readily apparent whether these 107 burgesses living in Ilchester were the customary burgesses who pay dues to the king, or whether they were equivalent to the non-customary burgesses occupying tenements which were appurtenant to the 'parent' manor of Milborne Port, to which they paid their rents and dues.   One other entry, however, records the payment of 16½ pence by a burgess 'in Ilchester and another in Bruton' to the manor of Castle Cary (DB Som 24,17). (Another way of putting this would be so say that a burgess living in Ilchester, and another in Bruton, were both appurtenant to Castle Cary, or that Castle Cary contributed burgesses to both Ilchester and Bruton.)   The probability that this lone instance is the survivor of many more non-customary burgesses appurtenant to surrounding rural estates shows that Ilchester should be included within the class of Domesday boroughs which exhibit what Maitland has described as 'heterogeneous tenure' - being, in other words, made up of a population of whom some owed dues and services to a number of lords or tenants-in-chief, besides those owing dues to the king (Roffe 2007, pp. 110-1, 120; Haslam forthcoming). The corollary of this is that the 107 burgesses in Ilchester attached to Milborne Port should be seen as being equivalent to the customary burgesses of the king, a pattern shown to be characteristic of other burhs elsewhere in Somerset, discussed below. Of the 62 places noted by Ballard showing heterogeneous tenure (Ballard 1904, pp. 24-31), with tenements or burgesses appurtenant to rural estates, all were burhs of late ninth or early tenth-century origin (or earlier), with only ten exceptions. These exceptions were all either early royal trading places or the centres of early royal multiple estates, or both (Haslam forthcoming).

Another significant part of this jigsaw is provided by the entry for (Abbas) Combe (DB Som 14,1), which records that six burgesses who paid 50s to this manor were contributory to Milborne Port. Another way of expressing this relationship would be that the six burgesses 'in' Milborne Port were appurtenant to the rural manor of Combe, and paid their dues with that manor. Furthermore, Milborne Port also had two tenements appurtenant to, or contributed by, Goathill (DB Som 19,70), and a further five burgesses appurtenant to a small un-named manor of one hide which was probably one of its dependencies nearby (DB Som 19,71). This pattern is repeated in the case of Bruton which, as well as having an appurtenant tenement in Castle Cary, also had five burgesses of its own (DB Som 1,9). These relationships are shown diagrammatically in fig. 2. These are examples of heterogeneous tenure shown by a royal centre, as well as of the widespread incidence of the concentration of administrative and marketing central-place functions at these royal centres (Haslam 1984; Aston 1984; Aston 1986, pp. 58-63). Milborne Port and Bruton, both royal manors, are two of the ten instances referred to above where heterogeneous tenure is shown in places which were not former burhs.
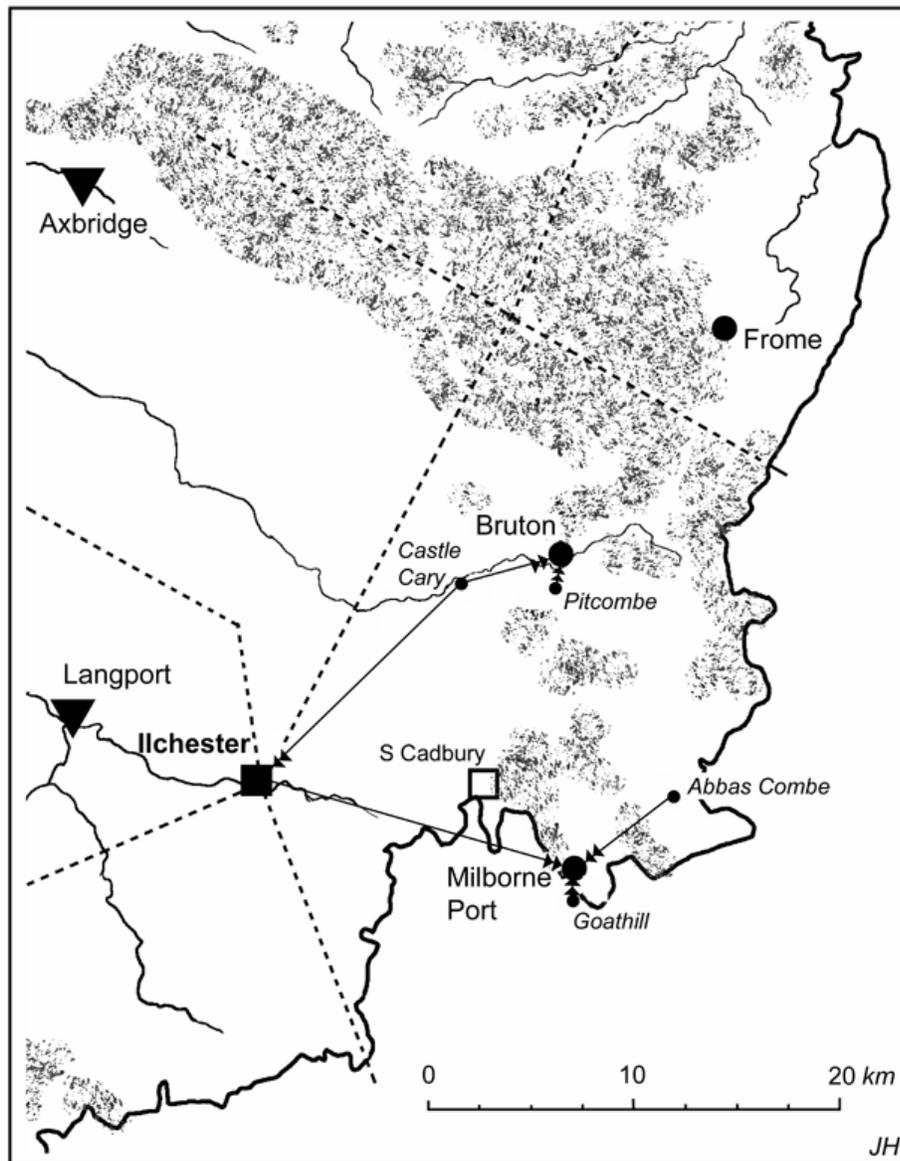
Fig. 2 Location of Ilchester, and connections of burgesses with Ilchester and other places in eastern Somerset, as shown in Domesday Book. Roman roads - dashed lines. Arrows show the relationship of contributory manors to the centre. Land over 120m shaded. *Low res image*

Although the number of these connections is such a small sample compared to the connections for instance between rural manors and the various centres in Wiltshire to the east, or in Gloucestershire to the north, the incidence and distribution of these connections in E Somerset is particularly significant. In another publication I have formed the conclusion, based in part on the evidence of the spatial relationships between these contributory manors and their centres, that these connections which are shown in Domesday Book and in earlier charters are the attenuated remains of a more complete set of such relationships whose formation can be taken back to the earliest stages of the formation of burhs and of early royal estate centres. This amounts to a reworking of Maitland's original 'garrison theory' (Maitland 1897, pp. 186-92), in terms which

8

accommodate recent developments of the understanding of the origin of burhs and their place in the administrative and geographical landscape. In origin, these are argued as developing as a result of the contract between the king and the thegns of the shire to facilitate and consolidate the support and upkeep of burhs, through the establishment and reinforcement of lordship bonds which arose out of obligations derived from the holding of land. In all other cases where these connections exist between rural manors and a royal central place, the same origin can be reasonably postulated (Haslam forthcoming). These functional explanations stand in contrast to the prevailing and long-standing explanatory paradigm, which sees these connections as arising from the needs of the thegns or other landholders of the shire to provide themselves with ready access to the nearest burghal market or centre of administration, for whatever reason (Tait 1897; Round 1902; Round 1907; Stenton 1907, p. 303; Stephenson 1930, p. 184; Tait 1936, p. 64; Stenton 1971, p. 531; Biddle 1976, pp. 382-3; Darby 1977, pp. 309-13; Martin 1987, p. 60; Roffe 2007, pp. 120-7; Holt 2009).

These patterns are shown in microcosm in these few instances in E Somerset, in which, as Mick Aston has pointed out, each is 'only one part of dispersed central place functions in its region . .' (Aston 1986, p. 59). The functional relationship of Ilchester to the royal manorial centre at Milborne Port shown in the Domesday evidence discussed above is similar if not identical to the relationship of Axbridge to the royal manor of Cheddar, where there are 32 burgesses who pay 20s 'in' Axbridge (DB Som 1,2), or the royal manor of Somerton, which has 'a borough which is called Langport in which 34 burgesses live who pay 15s' (DB Som 1,1). The two burhs at Axbridge and Langport - which are included in the Burghal Hidage - were clearly considered to be part of the royal manors. The burgesses, although technically appurtenant to the royal manor and therefore on the face of it equivalent to the general class of non-customary burgesses, would in practice have been identical to the customary burgesses seen in other burhs who paid dues and rendered services to the king alone.

A similar relationship is clearly indicated, therefore, in the case of the burgesses who were attached to the royal centre of Milborne Port, but who lived in Ilchester. This is emphasised by the entry under Milborne Port which suggests that a market at Ilchester, considered for fiscal purposes as being separate from the market at Milborne Port itself, nevertheless paid its tax at Milborne Port (DB Som 1,10). In all of these three places, furthermore, the respective burhs (given the hypothesis of the existence of a burh at Ilchester) were placed on the edges of the royal manors themselves. Mick Aston has shown this clearly in respect of the spatial relationship of Langport to the royal manorial centre of Somerton (Aston 1984, p. 187). The fact that Ilchester had at least two non-customary burgesses who owed dues to the rural manor of Castle Cary shows it to have had at least the vestiges of heterogeneous tenure, as in the case of Langport which had five burgesses appurtenant to North Curry, one of Earl Harold's estates (DB Som 1,19) (Loud 1989, p. 12). In the case of the burh at Axbridge, for which no contributory burgesses or tenements are given, there is of course no knowing whether it would not originally have had burgesses contributed from other manors in its burghal territory. In exhibiting the same spatial and functional relationships to its

'parent' royal manor as both Axbridge and Langport, Ilchester therefore shows crucial characteristics which give considerable weight to the overall hypothesis of its status as a burh.

Some support for these conclusions is given by other examples of similar relationships in other areas. A variation on the pattern of the connections to outlying royal manors of burgesses or tenements who were 'in' burhs is seen in the cases of Warminster and Tilshead in Wiltshire (DB Wilts 1,4. 1,7). Although I have considered these to have been true Domesday 'boroughs' with urban attributes on the basis of their 'having' burgesses (Haslam 1984, 87, pp. 117-21), it now seems more likely that the 30 burgesses in Warminster and the 66 burgesses in Tilshead were in fact non-customary burgesses who were resident in the former burh at Wilton, in whose burghal territory they were situated, but who paid their dues to - i.e. were appurtenant to - their respective royal manorial centres. A similar relationship is likely to have obtained between the 25 burgesses which 'belonged' to the manor of (Great) Bedwyn (DB Wilts 1,1), but who are more likely to have been resident 'in' the nearby borough of Marlborough (arguably the site of a burh which replaced the Burghal Hidage burh of Chisbury) (Haslam 1984, pp. 94-102).

Other comparable examples could be drawn from many other parts of the country. In Gloucestershire, the former royal manor of Deerhurst held a *haga* in Gloucester, where there were 30 burgesses which were appurtenant to the parent manor at the time of Domesday (Heighway 1988, p. 11; Baker & Holt 2004, pp. 115-7). An analogous example is the royal manor of Tewkesbury, which had 13 of its own burgesses as well as 8 burgesses which were contributory to Gloucester (DB Glos 1,4) (Haslam forthcoming). Particularly close analogues to the relationships of the burgesses or tenements in Ilchester to Milborne Port, in Axbridge to Cheddar and in Langport to Somerton respectively are provided by the large number of burgesses living in Bristol who were appurtenant to, or contributed by, the nearby royal manor of Barton Regis (DB Glos 1,21), or the 24 burgesses held by the king in Gloucester who were appurtenant to the adjacent royal manor of Kings Barton (DB Glos 1,2 & Evesham K1) (Haslam forthcoming).

There are, furthermore, indications in the relationships of the connections between the centres and rural estates in E Somerset of the overlapping of orbits of connections between these different centres, which is found on a larger scale in the cases of the overlapping of orbits of connections between such places as Worcester and Droitwich, and between Gloucester and Winchcombe. As well as having burgesses contributed to Ilchester, Milborne Port also had a number of burgesses of its own, in addition to having burgesses appurtenant to or contributed by three surrounding manors (Combe, Goathill, and one of its dependencies) (fig. 2). Similar conclusions could be drawn from the case of Bruton, another royal manor, which had 5 burgesses of its own, as well as a burgess appurtenant to Castle Cary and another to Pitcombe (DB Som 1,9. 24,17. 36,1). Castle Cary is therefore contributory to both the royal centre at Bruton, as well as to Ilchester. This carries the implication, which can be drawn from other examples in other shires, that the orbit of these connections - represented in this case by the single connection of this manor to the ancient royal centre at Bruton - has been overlaid by the establishment of a new connection to

10

the putative new burh at Ilchester at a later date. This is a similar interpretation to that which can be adduced to explain (to take only a few instances) the overlap of orbits of connections between Worcester and Droitwich (where 3 manors share connections with both), in which connections with the earlier royal and industrial centre of Droitwich (some of which can be taken back to the early ninth century) have arguably been overlain by connections to the new burh at Worcester in the late ninth; or, just over the border in Wiltshire, where the connections of rural manors to the early royal centre of Calne have been overlaid by new connections to the new burh at neighbouring Cricklade, in the burghal territory of which it would most probably have lain (Haslam forthcoming). This relationship is also shown by the manor of Bishopsworth in north Somerset which contributed 10 houses to Bristol and 2 to Bath (DB Som 5,20). This conforms to the model established elsewhere (Haslam forthcoming, ch. 4) whereby part of the burghal territory of Bath was subsumed by that of Bristol at a later date, with burgesses contributing to Bristol being added to those already contributing to Bath.

It has been argued above that these relationships between the centres and rural estates represent primary connections established to facilitate the performance of obligations of the landholding thegns to the king at the early stages of the formation of burhs or of royal estate centres. This being so, the patterns of connection shown in the various Domesday entries for Somerset can be most reasonably interpreted by hypothesis that, in a similar way to Axbridge and Langport, Ilchester was a burh set up as a dependency of the royal manor of Milborne Port. The inference must be drawn from these connections, furthermore, that its burghal territory would have comprised the extent of at least the royal estates of Milborne Port and Bruton, as well as probably Frome, which was associated with Bruton in the payment of one night's revenue (DB Som 1,8; 1,9) (Round 1907, pp. 394) – although this association may not have been all that ancient (Stafford 1980). The suggestion that Ilchester would have been part of the manor of Somerton, made originally by Dunning on the basis of a statement to this effect in the later Hundred Rolls (Dunning 1974, p. 183; Dunning 1975, p. 44; see also Aston 1984, 186-7, 179; Aston 1986, 58-9), would appear to be directly contradicted by the clear evidence in Domesday for its status as an appurtenance of Milborne Port, discussed above – a relationship which was anyway clearly articulated and established more than a century ago by J H Round (Round 1907, p. 394), and pointed out more recently by Loud (Loud 1989).

A similar set of relationships is shown by the spatial and functional relationships of the burh at Watchet to the nearby royal vill at Williton, which lay in the same parish of St Decuman's, a church of Celtic origin (Calder 2004). Williton itself was associated at the time of Domesday with other neighbouring royal estate centres at Carhampton and Cannington, all of which were regarded as one composite manor paying together one night's revenue (DB Som 1,6). The 'borough right' of these places (which Tait interprets as the payment of the third penny, payable to the earl of the shire, in relationship to Watchet – Tait 1936, p. 61 n.5) was linked with North Petherton and was attached to the comital manor of Old Cleeve (DB Som 1,13) (Loud 1989, p. 15; Haslam 2012). It would appear probable that these arrangements reflect the original burghal territory of Watchet,

from which obligations would have been due at the centre. As Mick Aston has emphasised, the other burhs of the Burghal Hidage at Watchet, Axbridge and Langport would all have acted as the redistribution centres of their respective royal estates (Aston 1986, pp. 49-53). A burh at Ilchester would have been particularly well placed to have performed the same functions in relation to the royal centres at Milborne Port, Bruton and Frome, an aspect which will be brought out below.

In conclusion, therefore, it can be argued that the evidence of these various connections and relationships between Ilchester and its neighbours shown in the evidence from the time of Domesday can most easily be explained by the hypothesis that Ilchester was created as a burh in close functional relationship to the royal manor of Milborne Port at a considerably earlier period.

Archaeological and topographical evidence

Siting (fig. 3)

Several aspects of the site and location of Ilchester would make it a particularly good candidate for consideration as a later Saxon burh. As Michael Costen has recently emphasised, the preservation of the lines of the Roman roads leading towards and from it (fig. 2) imply that the former Roman town had never lost its importance as a focus of the way people moved around within, and therefore utilised, the landscape, and that these factors therefore underlie its later significance in the Saxon period (Costen 2011, p. 8-9, 13, 29, 148-9; cf Dunning 1975). The importance of Ilchester as a centre of communications has been well brought out by Leslie Alcock in relation to his discussion of the significance of nearby South Cadbury in the landscape of late tenth century Wessex (Alcock 1995, p. 165-70). Although the situation and developments he describes are a century later than the foundation of the putative burh at Ilchester, the importance of Ilchester at a nodal point in the landscape of communications, based to a large extent on the use of former Roman roads, would have been very similar in the earlier period. Its control of both road and river communications would have marked it out as a place of central importance throughout the Saxon period, as it clearly did in the Roman (Leach 1994, p. 6-7). The comments of Peter Leach on the early development of a Roman civil settlement, that 'Ilchester's position astride a major routeway and river crossing, at the centre of a rich and populous region . . . ensured its eventual success . . ' (Leach 1994, p. 5), applies as much as an explanation of its foundation and growth in the Saxon period as it does to the early Roman period.
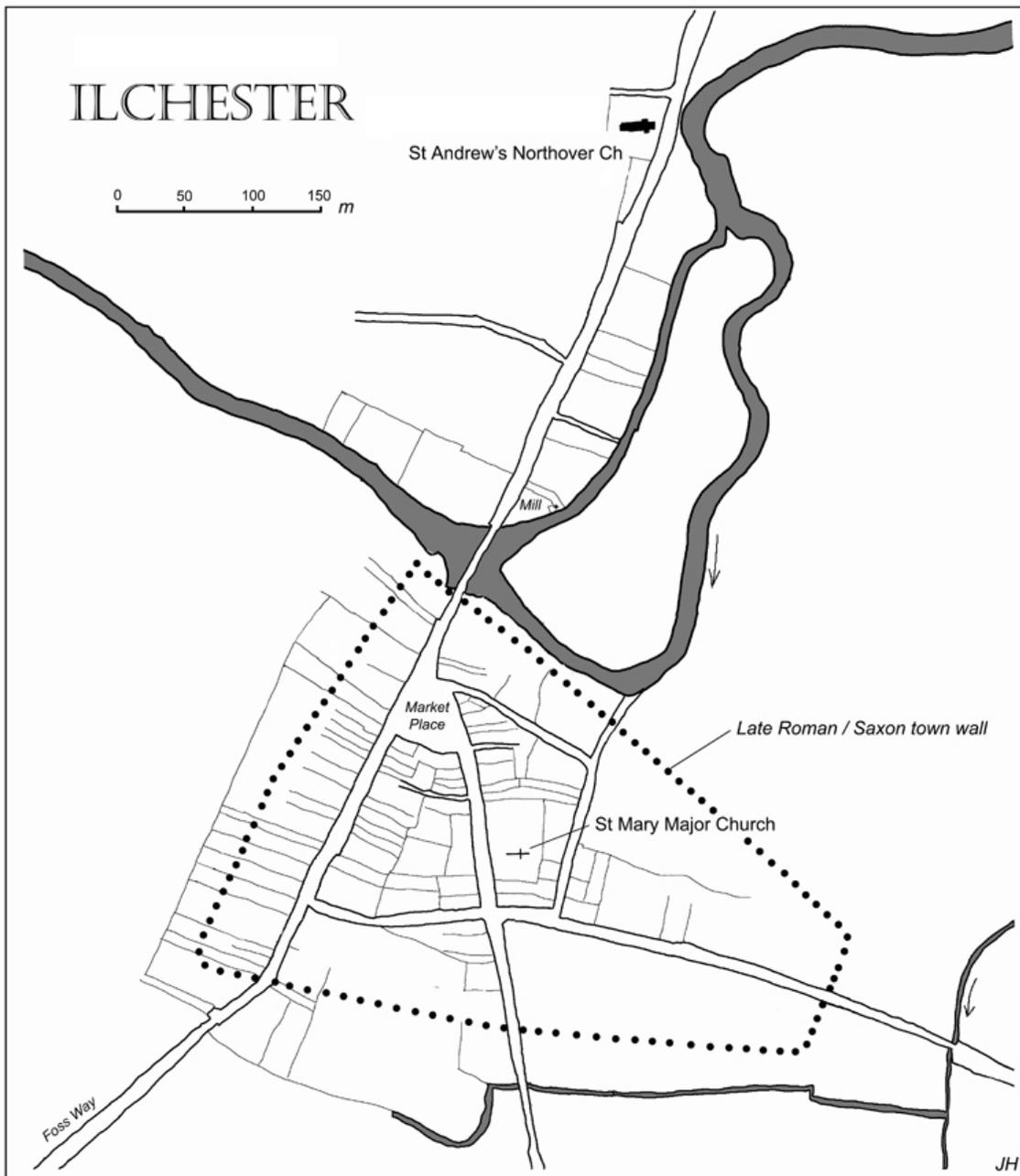
Fig. 3. Ilchester, showing late Roman and Saxon walls (after Leech and Leach 1982 and Richardson 2003), and post-medieval property boundaries. North to top. (Low res image)

Furthermore, it would not be stretching the evidence too far to suggest that the development of a burh at Ilchester merely carries forward the central place functions of this particular site which here, as in many other instances in Somerset, can be taken back to well before the Roman period (Aston 1986, p. 53), though perhaps for a different set of reasons. Mick Aston has remarked that 'The royal prerogative with its judicial and administrative functions at the hundred and royal focus had the effect of attracting or developing other central place attributes for these royal vills.' (Aston 1986, p. 53). This places the relationship of Ilchester to the royal centre at Milborne Port in an important perspective, insofar as this particular development shares these characteristics over a wider area. The early development of a minster at Northover, on the site of a

large well-organised Roman cemetery of late fourth-century date to the north of the former Roman town (Dunning 1975, pp. 44-6; Leach 1994, p. 10; Richardson 2002, p. 9, 11; Costen 2011, p. 148-9), to which it was perhaps functionally related, would have played a key role in the maintenance of Ilchester's status as a central place throughout the middle Saxon period.

Another factor in the importance of Ilchester at this time would have been its position on the river Ivel or Yeo, which would have given access to trading activity up the Bristol channel via the river Parrett throughout the post-Roman period (Costen 2011, pp. 13, 29, 148-9). The importance of this as a routeway from the pre-Roman Iron-Age has been emphasised by Leach (Leach 1994, p. 6). One important function of this in the later Saxon period would have been in helping to prevent access up the river system to Viking ship-borne armies, perhaps with an associated bridge. The importance of the last factor has been emphasised by a number of writers (see for instance Hassall and Hill 1969, pp. 191-4; Brooks 1971, p. 76; Biddle 1976b, p. 136; Haslam 1984, p. 263; Abels 1988, p. 72; Gilmour 1989; Smyth 1995, pp. 138-45; Cooper 2006; Haslam 2009; Haslam 2010, p. 130-7). If, however, this had been the only factor in the strategic considerations which helped determine the siting of burhs, it might be wondered why a new burh at Ilchester would have been required so close to the burh at Langport, which was downstream on the same river system. While this factor might have played some part in the strategic considerations of the time, in particular in providing some sort of immediate defence for the royal centres at Milborne Port, Bruton and indeed Crewkerne against Viking attack from the west, the importance of Ilchester probably lay more in the fact that it would have provided a secure port serving the commercial or redistribution interests of these royal manors located further inland. The commercial functional attributes of these middle Saxon centres have been discussed by Mick Aston and Michael Costen (Aston 1986, pp. 49-54; Costen 2011, pp. 139-158). In particular, Costen has used the distribution of finds of coins and other metalwork to suggest that the site of the minster church of St Andrew, immediately to the north of Ilchester, is likely to have functioned as a market site for traders in the middle Saxon period (Costen 2011, pp. 148-50). As such , it would have functioned as a redistribution site for the royal manor at Milborne Port, just as an early market at Langport functioned in relation to the royal site at Somerton, and a market and port at Watchet functioned in relation to the royal centre at Taunton. It is interesting to note how this picture of land use and the economy has developed from that painted by Peter Leach nearly 20 years ago (Leach 1994, pp. 11-12)

The functional relationship of Ilchester to its putative burghal territory which would have include those in surrounding estates (suggested above), combined with its suitability for re-fortification in the late Saxon period (discussed further below), would have been major factors in its choice for the site of a burh. Costen has even gone so far as to suggest - though without going so far as to call Ilchester a burh - that 'the repopulation of the town with burgesses was a deliberate act on the part of the king', which had the effect of depriving the minster market at Northover, and hence the minster itself, of much of its earlier importance (Costen 2011, p. 163). Given that the burh of Langport was considered as an appurtenance of the royal manor of Somerton, a burh at Ilchester as an appurtenance of the royal manors of Milborne Port and Bruton (as well possibly as Frome) in the

eastern part of the shire would have provided a good balance in the provision of strategic, administrative and commercial functionality in the region. In a similar way the burh at Watchet on the northwest coast of the shire would have served the same interests in its relationship to the royal sites at Williton, Carhampton and Cannington, as well as Taunton, already discussed.

The archaeological evidence

In comparison with the wealth of inferences which can be drawn from the documentary and the landscape attributes of Ilchester, the archaeological evidence is in itself not particularly revealing. As both Peter Leach and Miranda Richardson has pointed out, the absence of large-scale excavations within the town has meant that few observations have been made which bear on its physical development in the late Saxon period (Leach 1994, p. 12; Richardson 2002, pp. 10-11). However, there are several features which, while not in themselves necessarily indicative of an episode of planning associated with the formation of the putative burh, are nevertheless arguably best explained by the operation of the same process of burghal formation which can be recognised in other places (cf Biddle and Hill 1971). These include the regular development of burgage plots along High Street and Church Street which are noted by Richardson from the evidence of 18th century maps; the presence of a primary market area at the junction of the two major Roman roads in the town (Leach 1994, p. 12; Richardson 2002, p. 11); the fact that West Street, High Street and Church Street follow Roman alignments (Leach 1994, pp. 7-8); the regular pattern of the street grid post-dating the Roman period and pre-dating the medieval (Leach 1982, p. 13; Leach 1994, p. 17); and the siting of the church of St Mary Major in an area formerly used for an important Roman public building, possibly a *forum/basilica,* which was approached directly by the Roman street leading from the east gate (Leech and Leach 1982, 79; Leach 1994, p. 8),

Of equal value as diagnostic evidence is that the late Roman stone defences of probably the early fourth century around the whole town, found in excavations in a number of places (Leach 1994, p. 9; Richardson 2003, p. 7 para 2.5.c), were only demolished in the twelfth century (Leach 1982, p. 13; Richardson 2003, p. 11 para 3.3.b). This would imply that any late Saxon defences would have been able to have utilised the Roman circuit with little need for a major episode of construction other than the repair of the existing structure. The established importance of the place within its local and regional landscape by the late ninth century, in particular its close spatial and functional relationship to the royal site at Milborne Port, discussed above, would have made the site of the Roman town, with its still-standing defences, an obvious choice as the site of a burh at this period. A further significant factor is the preservation of the alignments of a number of Roman streets within the town (Richardson 2002, p. 10 para 3.3.a; Leach 1994, p. 12), which mirrors the preservation of the line of the Roman roads outside. This implies some sort of physical (but not necessarily functional) continuity of land use which would certainly have been attractive to the planners of the late Saxon period who will have wished to have re-formed the place to suit their defensive and settlement needs. As Richardson states, these streets 'have been continuously maintained at the core of the post-Roman settlement structure. The width of these roads may have

been altered but the alignments appear to have remained.' (ibid.).   Similar inferences can be made concerning the preservation of the alignments of the Roman roads outside the town, alluded to above.

The mint

The existence of a mint at Ilchester in late tenth and early eleventh centuries (Aston 1986, p. 60) is often taken as evidence of its existence as a defended town or burh (e.g. Richardson 2003, 11 para 3.3.b). This is, however, not so. In Somerset, mints of the this period are also known at Bruton, Crewkerne, Milborne Port, South Petherton and Taunton, with another at nearby Warminster (Wilts). All of these were royal centres (or latterly episcopal, in the case of Taunton), without the public defences characteristic of burghal formation in the late ninth century. Furthermore, various lines of evidence point to the later tenth century as a period in which the old defences of many burhs had ceased to function in the way they had in the late ninth and early tenth centuries, a process common to western Mercia as well as Wessex. By the 970s or perhaps even earlier these burghal defences had in many cases been abandoned and in some cases been allowed to collapse (Haslam 2012). While mints were invariably associated with defended burhs in this earlier period (Loyn 1961; Blackburn 1996), this was clearly not so from the reign of Edgar in the middle of the tenth century. The development of the mint at Ilchester from the 980s (Aston 1986, p. 60; Sylloge) is indicative of its importance at this time as a royal administrative and marketing centre, but does not necessarily imply its origin as a burh in the early period. This development is, however, entirely consistent with this hypothesis, since it shares the possession of a pre-Conquest mint with all the other burhs of the Burghal Hidage in Somerset (Aston 1986, p. 60).

However, the move of the minters in Ilchester, Bruton and Crewkerne to the secure hill-top burh at S Cadbury in the early years of the eleventh century may well have been to re-establish the primary royal functions of minting within a more secure environment, as Leslie Alcock has suggested (Alcock 1995, p. 164-70). But this may also have been the result of other factors, such as the status of the new burh at S Cadbury as a new kind of royal enclave where the control of royal administrative functions could be exercised more closely than in places such as Ilchester and Bruton, both of which showed heterogeneous tenure (see above; Haslam 2012). Little can be safely inferred, therefore, about the state of Ilchester as a defended place at this time or earlier. Neither does it rule out the possibility that it would have shared in the general programme of the redefence of the realm in the very late tenth or early eleventh century which was instigated by King Aethelred all over Wessex, as well as probably Mercia, in response to the new Viking invasions of the time (Haslam 2012).

Conclusions

The hypothesis that Ilchester was a burh built as an original component of the system of burhs in Wessex constructed by King Alfred in the late ninth century, but omitted from the List of the Burghal Hidage document, gains support from a variety of historical, landscape, topographical and

archaeological evidence. Its relationship to the royal centre at Milborne Port, demonstrated in the various entries in Domesday Book, is analogous – if not entirely similar – to the relationships of other burhs in Somerset and elsewhere to their parent royal manors. Indeed, it could be said that the Domesday evidence is not consistent with its non-existence as an earlier burh. The evidence relating to the way it fits in with what is known of the development of the landscape in the late Saxon period, such as the continued use of the Roman roads leading to and from it, the proximity to the middle Saxon Minster and probable early trading site at Northover, and its place in relation to neighbouring royal estates and their centres, provides strong supporting evidence for its use in the middle Saxon period as a focal central place of its immediate area. These factors themselves would be an important if not crucial background to its choice as a burh in the late ninth century. The archaeological and topographical evidence relating to the various components of the townscape, in particular the survival of its late Roman stone defences into and beyond the late Saxon period, also lend support to this hypothesis. Although none of these various features, taken singly, provides an unequivocal demonstration of this overall hypothesis, in combination these features represent a body of diagnostic evidence for which this hypothesis arguably provides the only reasonable explanation for the functional development of these characteristics in real time, which processes can also be recognised in other places.

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