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# Anglo-Saxon Studies in Archaeology and History

13

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# Foreword

Anglo-Saxon Studies in Archaeology and History is an annual series concerned with the archaeology and history of England and its neighbours during the Anglo-Saxon period.

ASSAH offers researchers an opportunity to publish new work in an interdisciplinary forum which allows diversity in length, discipline and geographical spread of contributions. Papers placing Anglo-Saxon England in its international context, including contemporary themes from neighbouring countries, will receive as warm a welcome as papers on England itself.

Papers submitted to ASSAH must be accurate and readable without detailed specialist knowledge. They must now also conform to the new house style which has been introduced to bring a common set of referencing conventions to the journal. This new format has been used in this issue. A style sheet is available in hard copy or electronic format from the editor. All papers are peer-reviewed.

Volume 13 can be said to be truly interdisciplinary carrying papers from diverse disciplines such as place-name studies, art history, historiography and archaeology. A strong theme in this current issue is the early Anglo-Saxon period with a range of papers touching on aspects of migration. Another shared theme is the complexity and multiplicity of meaning in iconography and art, whilst military strategy and military kit take this volume into the Late Anglo-Saxon period.

The contributors to this issue have been extremely patient and the Editor would like to thank them for their tolerance and fortitude. The Editor and the Oxford University School for Archaeology would also like to record their gratitude to all those who read and commented upon the contributions to this volume. Thanks also go to Hertfordshire Archaeological Trust who made a generous subventions towards the publication costs.

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# King Alfred and the Vikings: Strategies and Tactics 876–886 AD.

Jeremy Haslam

## Introduction

The decade 876–886 AD saw a total reversal of the position of King Alfred of Wessex in his relations with the Viking armies, from one of near subjugation to one in which Alfred had become the undisputed lord of the whole of central and southern England. The understanding of these developments has been significantly advanced by a range of recent studies examining Alfred's relationship with Mercia,<sup>1</sup> the economic history and the coinage,<sup>2</sup> the military background,<sup>3</sup> and by several biographies of Alfred that take rather different viewpoints.<sup>4</sup> Keynes has furthermore, explored the concept of the 'kingdom of the Anglo-Saxons' as an expression of a new political order in the early 880s that encapsulated much of what had previously been the separate kingdoms of the West Saxons and Mercia.<sup>5</sup>

A combination of the physical evidence of the fortifications which Alfred deployed in this process, and the relevant documentary evidence that may be regarded as being contemporary, in particular the Treaty between Alfred and Guthrum and the Burghal Hidage document, casts the strategies which Alfred had in mind, and the tactics he employed to achieve his military and political goals, in a rather different light than has hitherto been accepted. In doing so, this analysis provides an explanation as to how the new 'kingdom of the Anglo-Saxons' came about.

It is argued here that as a result of the Partition of Mercia by the Vikings in 877, King Alfred was deprived of the interests and influence in the London area, and probably in the rest of Mercia, that he had enjoyed since his alliance with Burgred. In the period immediately following his victory over Guthrum's army at Edington in early 878, Alfred implemented military and political strategies, the aims of which were to remove the Viking armies from Mercia and from London, over which they still exercised control, and from the bases at both Cirencester and Fulham, from where they also directly threatened Wessex. This strategy involved two complementary aspects. The first of these was the

construction and garrisoning of a system of fortresses in Wessex and central Mercia, which both defended Wessex in depth and acted as offensive instruments against the Vikings in Mercia. The second involved the assumption by Alfred of the overlordship of Mercia in a way which could be interpreted either as a *coup d'état* within Mercia itself, or as a more gradual process which involved Alfred taking control of Mercia after the demise of King Ceolwulf. It is suggested that these tactics enabled Alfred to confront and to dictate terms to the two potentially hostile Viking armies stationed at Cirencester and Fulham, with the consequence that they were forced to leave Mercia. Guthrum's army in Cirencester retreated to East Anglia, and the Fulham army left for more rewarding prospects on the Continent. Both these moves are recorded in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle as occurring in late 879. It is also suggested that the document known as Alfred and Guthrum's Treaty, in which the limit of Guthrum's kingdom of East Anglia is defined by a boundary drawn to the east of London, is a contemporary record of the agreement reached between Alfred and Guthrum at this time.

The second part of this paper presents the view that both the original Burghal Hidage document, which records some details of the rapidly executed system of fortresses in Wessex and central Mercia, as well as the Calculation attached to version A, were contemporary with the creation of the system in 878–9.

## PART I

### The Defeat of the Vikings in Mercia and London

#### *Alfred and Guthrum's Treaty*

A unique window on Alfred's strategies in the decade in question, which centred on his relationship with the Viking leader Guthrum, is provided by the undated document known as Alfred and Guthrum's Treaty.<sup>6</sup> To

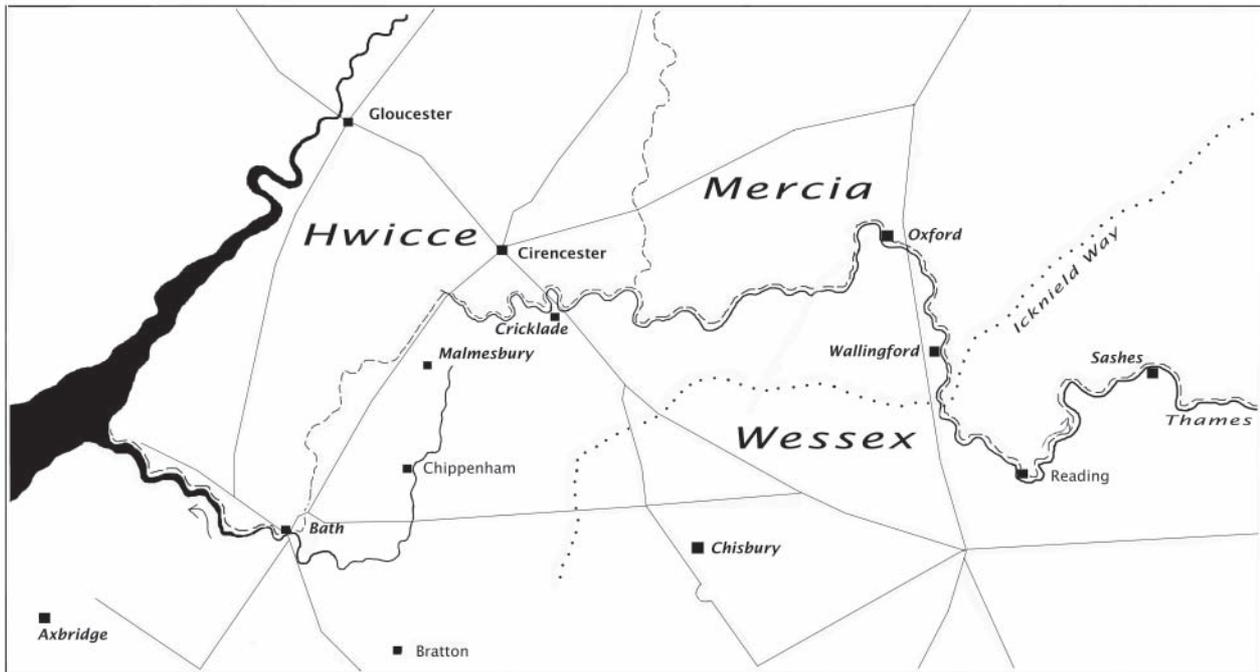


Figure 1. The position of Cirencester, occupied by the Vikings, 878–9. The area of north-west Wessex, western Mercia and the Hwicce, to the Severn Estuary to the west, showing the fortresses of the Burghal Hideage (bold italic type), Roman places (bold type), and other place relevant to Alfred's movements. Roman roads are shown by straight lines (diagrammatic) and the Icknield Way and Ridgeway by a dotted line.

appreciate the importance of this document for the present discussion it is necessary to determine the events which can be reasonably inferred to have resulted in the situation the document records. Dumville has argued that the terms of the Treaty – and in particular its boundary clause, which is drawn around the eastern and northern sides of London – are those appropriate to the context of the conference between Alfred and Guthrum at Wedmore and Aller in May 878, soon after the Alfred's victory over the Viking forces at Edington.<sup>7</sup> He thus sees the boundary as defining Guthrum's territory in Mercia to the west, with Alfred's territory to the east (Fig. 1).

Some misgivings regarding Dumville's thesis have been voiced by Simon Keynes,<sup>8</sup> but the strategic implications of the Treaty have not been analysed. It is argued here that the two principal premises underlying Dumville's interpretation are open to question. The first is that the terms of the Treaty must be associated with a known treaty between both parties (i.e. one recorded in documentary sources) which might reasonably be inferred to have included these terms. This leads Dumville to examine all the known occasions of such meetings and treaties, leading by a process of elimination to the conclusion that the Treaty must belong to the occasion of the agreement between the two parties at Aller/ Wedmore in May 878.

The circumstances leading to the Treaty are not, however, indicated in the terms of the document itself

and thus it is difficult to demonstrate any connection between the events and any occasion in which a treaty – known or unknown – was entered into by the two parties. Furthermore, Dumville's assumption that the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle contains a complete record of all the treaties agreed between Alfred and the Vikings seems unsafe in the light of the well known gaps and omissions in the document. It is likely that there were other treaties which the Chronicle did not record, to which the terms of the extant Treaty might be equally or perhaps more appropriate.

Since the Vikings still held Mercia in 878, Dumville reasons that the Treaty gave the area to the east and north of the boundary to Alfred, while giving Guthrum territory to the west, i.e. all of Mercia. There are however several strategic considerations which cast doubt on these arguments. If, as Dumville argues, the terms of the Treaty implied that Guthrum ceded the whole of Essex because it had always been part of Alfred's kingdom, then it would be expected that the boundary in the Treaty would have been more-or-less coterminous with the land boundaries of Essex. Instead, however, the agreed boundary progresses from the Thames along the common border of Essex and Middlesex and along (up) the river Lea, but departs from this line to swing westwards to follow the Lea to its source, then northwards to Bedford on the Ouse and then westwards again to Watling Street. It thus leaves to Alfred not only Essex but also the whole of north-east Hertfordshire as well as eastern and

northern Bedfordshire, including Bedford itself (Fig. 1). Without making any assumptions about the courses of the boundaries of the east Midland ‘shires’ (or even the existence of discrete Viking armies based on shire centres) in the later ninth century, this would have left to Alfred an irregular and narrow strip of land between the agreed boundary on the south and it is presumed, the southern borders of Northamptonshire, Cambridgeshire and Suffolk on its northern edge – areas which Alfred can never have held at any time. If Alfred obtained this territory under the terms of the Treaty, it also raises the question of why the agreed boundary did not define its continuation northwards and eastwards from the point at which it joins Watling Street; a difficulty pointed out, but not resolved, by Dumville. This would have given Alfred control of a narrow strip of territory to which Wessex had no historic claim, that offered him no strategic advantage and to which he had very limited access. It would have severely taxed his resources to ‘defend’ this against the Viking forces ranged along nine tenths of the boundaries even with the formal allegiance of the population. From Guthrum’s point of view, the fact that Alfred would have had access to this wedge of territory would have considerably weakened his own hold on areas to the north (East Anglia), west (Mercia), and south (London and its region), particularly since Alfred’s territory impinged on the strategic corridor of Watling Street. This arrangement makes no strategic sense from either the viewpoint of either Alfred or Guthrum.

It may be doubted, for similar reasons, whether King Alfred had any meaningful control in Essex in the later 870’s. From the partition of Mercia in August 877, when Guthrum’s Vikings took effective control of Mercia,<sup>9</sup> it is probable that London (as part of Mercia) was taken over by the Vikings. From this point onwards, passage for Alfred’s ships up and down the Thames would have been severely restricted. His position was aggravated by the arrival in the Thames in the summer of 878 of a large Viking army which settled at Fulham. This according to Asser<sup>10</sup> ‘made contact with the army further upstream’, by which it may be reasonable inferred that it came to support Guthrum’s attempted take-over of Wessex, just as the army led by ‘the brother of Ivar and Healfdene’ had attacked Devon earlier in the year in support of Guthrum.<sup>11</sup> It thus effectively consolidated the annexation of London and must have prevented any access along or across the Thames by forces in Wessex. Essex was therefore surrounded by Viking-held territory to the north and west and by the Viking-dominated Thames estuary and the sea to the south and east. The proposition that Alfred controlled Essex after the partition of Mercia in 877, even before the arrival of the army at Fulham, in the sense of either receiving military allegiance from its people or being able to exact tolls and taxes and other revenues, cannot really be credited. In view of these considerations the assertion that the

record in the Chronicle of the Vikings leaving Alfred’s kingdom in 878 must merely mean that they left Wessex for Mercia.

Finally the events recorded in the Chronicle make it clear that Alfred was negotiating at Aller and Wedmore from a position of strength. Alfred was the undisputed victor at the battle of Edington, and had received Guthrum’s submission in a solemn ceremony of Christian baptism. It is therefore unreasonable to suppose that in the negotiations Alfred would have accepted control of an indefensible rump of territory in Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire in which he had no historic interests or strategic advantage, while allowing Guthrum to take all of Mercia, as well as London, in which Alfred only a little while previously had had considerable economic and perhaps strategic interests. Furthermore, if Alfred himself had agreed the treaty which gave the Vikings control of Mercia and London, this raises the question of why these same Vikings abandoned these newly acquired lands approximately 15 months later to return to East Anglia, and why the army encamped at Fulham also chose to abandon their position at the same time.

Since these arguments make it difficult to accept Dumville’s interpretation it is necessary to follow Keynes and return to the ‘orthodox’ interpretation of the Treaty: that its terms gave Alfred control of lands to the west of the boundary and Guthrum control of the area to its east.<sup>12</sup> The Treaty cannot therefore have arisen from the circumstances of the negotiations at Aller and Wedmore in mid 878, since at this time the Vikings still held London and Mercia, and Guthrum was to spend the next twelve to thirteen months or so in Cirencester,<sup>13</sup> a position which (as will be discussed below) left him poised threateningly on the borders of Wessex. A context for the Treaty must therefore be sought in a situation in which the Vikings were about to leave or had just left Mercia altogether.

This is indeed what happened in late 879, when the Chronicle records (*sa* 880) that Guthrum’s army ‘went from Cirencester into East Anglia and settled there and shared out the land’, and that ‘the army which had encamped at Fulham went overseas...’. There are grounds for arguing (as have both Keynes and Abels) that the Treaty originates from these circumstances. There are however several problems with this context. The fact that the Treaty was agreed between ‘King Alfred and King Guthrum and all the councillors of the English race and all the people which is in East Anglia’ has led both Keynes and Thomas Charles-Edwards to suggest that it was drawn up after Guthrum had settled in East Anglia – i.e. around 880.<sup>14</sup> While the present form of the document might well be a memorandum drawn up after the agreement itself, there are several reasons for believing that the terms represent those agreed between the two parties in mid or late 879, before Guthrum and his band had finally left Mercia, and that its ratification was a central part of this process.

Firstly, reasons are given below for regarding East Anglia as a *de facto* Viking state from the early 870s if not rather earlier, in the control of which Guthrum, who had overwintered in Cambridge in 874, would have played an important part. It is also argued below that the 'Partition' of Mercia in 877 extended this Scandinavian control to the whole of Mercia, including London as well as Essex. Certainly by the late 870s Scandinavian influence in East Anglia had led to the rapid growth of a market economy in the region and of urban communities in for instance Thetford, Norwich and Cambridge, and the domination of the relatively dense rural population.<sup>15</sup> The Vikings applied to both Mercia and Wessex the lesson they had learnt in East Anglia: a relatively small band can capture, depose or execute the head of the kingdom, and thereby control the land – a situation repeated on countless occasions in preceding and later centuries around the world.

This provides the essential context for the recognition of Guthrum as King of East Anglia. This must have preceded Guthrum's move away from Mercia into East Anglia, in order to have made possible the move in the first place. Guthrum would hardly have retreated into a political vacuum, and he must certainly have made sure that he would in fact be received as king before he got there. This recognition would therefore have formed the basis on which both the wording of the Treaty and its ratification were finally agreed by both parties. As with every successful treaty, this one ignored the reasons which forced the two parties to an accommodation, and gave each what they wanted. Guthrum gained status and legitimacy, as well as the title, as king of a sovereign Viking state, in the recognition of which Alfred gained legitimacy for his assumption of power and kingship of all Mercia, which at this juncture included the resumption of control of London. He also contained the Viking threat by giving them a 'homeland'. Furthermore, it would not be too far-fetched to suggest that this supplies the reason for the fact that Alfred did not kill Guthrum when he had the chance in 878. By sparing him and facilitating the formation of the sovereign state of East Anglia, Alfred gave himself an enhanced status as king of the Anglo-Saxons. In short, there is every reason for believing that the Treaty in its original form represents the agreement which made possible the outcome recorded in the Chronicle. It was at this point – and not before – that the Vikings were forced to accept that they did indeed have no choice other than to leave Mercia for good. This implies that the conference in which all these agreements were reached was held somewhere in Mercia, or even possibly at a place on or near the border defined by the Treaty, sometime in the late summer or early autumn of 879.

It is generally assumed that Guthrum and his army agreed to the terms of the Treaty as a natural extension of their alliance with and submission to Alfred established at Aller and Wedmore earlier in the previous year,

or even that the substance of the terms had been agreed at this stage.<sup>16</sup> In this case, it would be expected that they would have moved back to Gloucester, their base from the summer of 877. As such, it is likely to have acquired the accoutrements of a settlement with probably streets, houses, some semblance of organised spaces and refurbished (and possibly extended) Roman defences. It must be asked therefore why the Vikings, still formidable and largely intact, chose not to return there but to create a new base within the former walled Roman town of Cirencester, where they stayed for a further year.<sup>17</sup> It can be suggested that there were two reasons for this move – the first economic, the second strategic. As a royal *tk'n*, the site of a large minster church, and the collecting place of produce from a wide area,<sup>18</sup> Cirencester would have had a natural attraction to a Viking army requiring sustenance over the winter. Secondly, as a probably still adequately walled Roman town, Cirencester represented the most readily defensible site within *Hwiccian* territory nearest to the borders of Wessex. The settlement occupied a nodal position on the Roman road system which, in addition to being connected directly to Gloucester to the west and to the Mercian heartland to the north-east, commanded the easiest and most direct access into Wessex – to the south-west along the Fosse Way, and to the south-east along Ermin Street. It is quite clear from the map (Fig. 1), that no other position outside the borders of Wessex posed a greater threat to the continued security of that kingdom. By moving with his army to Cirencester Guthrum fulfilled the condition that he would move out of Alfred's kingdom, but in doing so, he showed himself to be essentially two-faced. He had accepted an alliance with Alfred for his own convenience, if not also his political aggrandisement and the validation it gave him of his own importance and acceptability, and yet he was still ready, in some sort of alliance with the army at Fulham, to attack Wessex again. It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that he positioned himself quite deliberately at Cirencester as the spider controlling the web of communications along which he could most easily pounce on his intended prey. The terms of the Treaty a year later therefore represent a new understanding and a new response to a new situation.

The extraordinary nature of the retreat of the two armies from Mercia in late 879 is brought into focus even more sharply when it is considered how the political and military relationship between Alfred and Guthrum must have been drastically altered by the arrival in the summer of 878 of the second Viking army which settled at Fulham, within a fortified enclosure of Roman origin on the river Thames upstream of London.<sup>19</sup> It is clear that the Vikings were able to achieve this without the encumbrance of a fortified bridge over the Thames at the site of the old Roman bridge, which Alfred probably created in association with the fortress of Southwark less than a year later (see further below). It is likely that this move, as Asser pointedly remarks,<sup>20</sup> was intended

to reinforce Guthrum's army in Cirencester. The army at Fulham occupied a position which secured and reinforced Viking domination of both London itself and its territory, as well as the whole of the Thames estuary and the river upstream of London. Equally importantly, it commanded Akeman Street, which led westwards into the heart of Wessex over a crossing of the Thames at Staines at the very south-west corner of Middlesex, the ancient kingdom of the Middle Saxons, and the westward extent of the territory dependent on London. The army therefore placed itself in the most advantageous position from which it could both control the London area and directly threaten Wessex. From this it can be inferred that it was intent on further conquest in Wessex, especially when these tactics are seen in the light of its subsequent damaging exploits on the continent. Since the two Viking armies together comprised a significantly greater threat to Alfred's control of Wessex than that posed by Guthrum's army on its own, the circumstances which governed the dealings between Alfred and Guthrum immediately after the latter's defeat in early 878 were radically changed. The Fulham army had no treaty agreement with King Alfred, were bound by no alliance, and had no memory of defeat in battle by Alfred. The balance of power had therefore shifted decisively in the Vikings' favour. The threat posed by the two forces of Guthrum's army at Cirencester and the new army at Fulham, poised on the borders of Wessex, must have had a powerful and galvanising effect on Alfred and on the whole population of Wessex. As Professor Whitelock has observed, 'With Danish armies so uncomfortably close as Cirencester and Fulham, the year from the autumn of 878 to that of 879 ... must have been an anxious one for the West Saxons'.<sup>21</sup> The fact that both armies were persuaded to leave Mercia in 879 demonstrates that by this time there was a new set of factors that has given Alfred a degree of power and leverage which was more radical and far-reaching than that which had allowed him to dictate terms to Guthrum alone in mid 878. This retreat to East Anglia represented for the Vikings a painful abrogation of their military, political and economic domination of the whole of Mercia, which they had begun to regularise in the partition of August of 877 (see below). It also deprived them of any hope of further conquest of Wessex, a territory they had fought so hard to subdue for the previous few years, and which they had in part begun to settle. It was, with hindsight, a crucial turning point in Alfred's dealings with the Vikings, which was comparable in significance to his victory at Edington at the beginning of the previous year, and an event which clearly set the stage for Alfred's subsequent political domination of Mercia and the emergence of the 'kingdom of the Anglo-Saxons'. As Whitelock has observed, had the information in the Chronicle been more complete, 'we might have known by what means the two Danish armies were persuaded to leave Mercia'.<sup>22</sup>

Before moving on to consider why the Danish armies were dislocated from their strategic hold over Wessex, it is worth examining several alternative arguments which have been put forward to account for these developments. Stenton for instance merely repeats what the Chronicle says without further comment, and provides no explanation as to why the Fulham army left in 879. Whitelock, in spite of her reservations noted above, assumes that the retreat to East Anglia by Guthrum's army was a direct result of Alfred's victory at Edington.<sup>23</sup> Charles-Edwards suggests that the move of both the Fulham army to Ghent and Guthrum's army to East Anglia was the result of the 'alliance' with Alfred forged with Guthrum in 878, and, furthermore, that the Fulham army moved to the Continent to take advantage of the succession struggle of the Franks from the spring of 879.<sup>24</sup> The fact that the second army arrived at Fulham only after the alliance had been forged between the Saxons and Guthrum shows that it saw some military advantage in doing so, in spite of this alliance. This alliance could hardly therefore have been the cause of its retreat. It may well have been drawn to the Continent in 879 by an eye for the main chance, but then this is precisely why it must have been attracted to the London area and why it had chosen a position poised on the borders of the West Saxon kingdom in 878. Smyth (also bypassing the problem of why this army came to Fulham in the first place) has also argued,<sup>25</sup> that the removal of the Fulham army to the Continent was in some way the consequence of the strength of the peace agreed between Alfred and Guthrum and, on the premise that Asser is not a contemporary witness, dismisses the strength of his evidence for cooperation between the two armies. Lastly, Richard Abels has a novel explanation for this episode. He dismisses Asser's evidence, and suggests that the arrival of the Vikings at Fulham 'may have persuaded Guthrum to look to his interests in East Anglia', and that Guthrum's departure drove off the Fulham Vikings to Ghent soon after.<sup>26</sup> In other words, Abels suggests that these events had an inbuilt momentum of their own and had nothing to do with Alfred's strategies.

None of these suggestions, however, explains why the second Viking army – which to judge from its subsequent exploits recounted in the Chronicle and in Frankish annals<sup>27</sup> was large, powerful, well-equipped and ferocious – came to winter at Fulham in a strategically threatening position in the first place. Most commentators seek to diminish Asser's near-contemporary witness for the Fulham army's collusion with, if not active support for Guthrum, and none acknowledge the strategically advantageous positions of these two armies on Roman roads leading into Wessex as an intention of further conquest. No explanation seems adequate for the fact that both armies abrogated these commanding positions, apart from their recognition of some decisive military advantage on Alfred's part. This

being so, the agreement of the terms of the Treaty requiring Guthrum to move back to East Anglia would have deprived the Fulham Vikings from their expected support in their designs on Wessex, which in turn would have encouraged them to seek new conquests elsewhere.

It seems clear that many writers have conflated into a seamless process a series of events played out in essentially two separate stages over 18 months or so. The first stage is represented by the defeat of Guthrum, his submission to Alfred and retreat to Cirencester. The second comprises the retreat of Guthrum to East Anglia a year later and of the Fulham army to the Continent at the same time, the creation of a Viking sovereign state in East Anglia, and the resumption of the control of both London and the rest of at least southern Mercia by Alfred. The events and outcomes of the second stage are by no means an inevitable consequence of those of the first. As is argued in detail below, when he moved to Cirencester. In 878 Guthrum still controlled all of Mercia, including London, having successfully and very effectively over-ridden Alfred's long-term interests in both. He could for instance have chosen to stay, ready to pounce again on Wessex when the time was ripe. It is argued below that the events of the second stage were brought about by new factors initiated by Alfred in the intervening period, specifically the implementation of a programme for the strengthening the defences of Wessex and by the consolidation of his position and power within Mercia itself.

In summary, it is argued that retreat of the Viking armies from Mercia in late 879, recorded in the *ASC*, can be associated with the (undated) record of an agreement (the Treaty), whose terms and provisions would be the appropriate and expected outcome of a negotiated agreement between Alfred and Guthrum at this juncture. The Treaty can perhaps thus be inferred as a contemporary record of the position agreed by both parties at negotiations which took place in the summer of 879, when the Vikings agreed to leave Mercia and London. It can also be inferred that Alfred was able to dictate the terms implied by the existence of the Treaty from a position of military superiority which was recognised and acknowledged by the Vikings. It is necessary to seek an explanation for the extraordinary nature of these events and outcomes in terms of processes that can be anchored within a short period of time between May 878 and the late summer of 879.

### The Strategies of Alfred and Guthrum

The basic premise of these arguments is that Alfred negotiated the Treaty in late 879 from a position of such strength that Guthrum and his army, still with hostile intentions towards Wessex, had no choice but to accept his terms. This position was of course a total reversal of that in January 878, when the West Saxon kingdom was

in very real danger of becoming a Viking client state. In the previous year, the Viking army had moved to Gloucester, in the territory of the *Hwicce*, a manoeuvre which is shown by the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle to have been made in the context of a partition of Mercia imposed on the client King Ceolwulf II. In this process the Roman fortress of Gloucester would have formed a natural focus as a port within Mercia for the Vikings, as a bridging point of the Severn connecting Mercia and south Wales, and as a secure base from which the Viking armies could threaten central Wessex from the north, to which they had easy access along the Roman road system.

The partition of Mercia in August 877 was clearly part of this strategy to take over the kingdom. In this process, discussed below, the Vikings were able to assume direct control of London and its area, central Mercia (present-day Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire), and western Mercia (essentially the old kingdom of the *Hwicce*) dependent on a 'capital' at Gloucester. Furthermore, this process of partition can be seen as interrupting a longer process, evidenced by both the coinage and charters, which had begun in the 860s if not earlier, of involvement of the West Saxon kings in the affairs of Mercia as a whole and of London in particular: an alliance in which King Alfred had become the dominant partner.<sup>28</sup> Viking control of London provides a necessary context for the arrival of the second large army which sailed up the Thames past London in the summer of 878 to encamp at Fulham. This situation is somewhat at variance with the hypothesis argued by Hart<sup>29</sup> that Essex 'remained under West Saxon administration throughout the period of Danish autonomy in East Anglia'.<sup>30</sup>

The inference from these strategic considerations is clear – that for a time the Danes held control of Essex and the London area (arguably also comprising Middlesex and Hertfordshire). This must be seen as part of a wider super-kingdom which they were in the active process of extending over Mercia, and in which they wished to forcibly include Wessex. It may well be that Essex kept its 'English' (West Saxon) Ealdorman, as Hart suggests, but this must have been for a short period under Danish control – just as the Vikings seem to have persuaded Ealdorman Wulfhere of Wiltshire to serve their interests after the rout of Alfred at Chippenham and their assumption of control in part of Wessex from early 878.<sup>31</sup> That the West Saxons had any meaningful control in Essex as a whole from 879 to 917 seems to be gainsaid by the efforts of Edward the Elder, recorded in the Chronicle, to gain control of the area from 911 onwards by a sustained programme of military campaigning and fortress-building, which the writer has argued<sup>32</sup> was designed to ensure the permanent submission of the population to the West Saxon king. Furthermore, the very existence of the Treaty between Alfred and Guthrum shows that Alfred had to concede any sole rights he may have thought he had in Essex to the control of the Vikings at the time it was drawn up,

albeit in return for his regaining control of London and its region.

The consolidation of the Scandinavian interests in the London area after 877 has suggested to the present writer the existence of a boundary between their territory around London to the east and the rest of Mercia to the west.<sup>33</sup> This, however, would not have been a defensive frontier, since the Vikings effectively held Mercia to the west as well, but it can be suggested as the delimitation of a particular area of administration. At the time of the Partition, Guthrum's Vikings must have felt that they had begun to realise their goal of creating an enlarged Scandinavian 'kingdom' of East Anglia. The course of this boundary between the central and eastern areas of (former) Mercia can be most reasonably suggested to have run along the western side of the ancient shire of Middlesex (the territory of the Middle Saxons), along the River Colne northwards from Staines. This must represent the western limit of the area formerly dependent on London. The boundary is likely to have continued directly northwards to the source of the Colne and across the Chiltern Hills to the River Ouzel. This river was certainly an important boundary between the Vikings and the West Saxons in the early tenth century.<sup>34</sup> Its logical course would have been to follow the Ouzel to where the latter crossed Watling Street at Fenny Stratford, and thence northwards along Watling Street. Its course to the north of this has been suggested by Margaret Gelling as following Watling Street along the eastern border of Warwickshire, branching northwards off Watling Street to follow the eastern borders of Staffordshire and Cheshire.<sup>35</sup>

From a strategic point of view the establishment and consolidation of Viking domination within the territory defined within this boundary would have given the Vikings control over both a wide area around London, as well as a considerable length of the Roman roads leading into London from the north, the northwest (Watling Street) and the west (Akeman Street). The existence of this boundary of 877 supplies the explanation for a fact which has puzzled many historians in the past: that the boundary recorded in Alfred and Guthrum's Treaty stops short at Stoney Stratford (where the Ouse is crossed by Watling Street), instead of continuing northwards. In fact the Treaty would not be expected to have mentioned any such continuation, if a pre-existing boundary beyond this point had been left unaltered by the new agreement. From this it can be inferred that the area to the east of this – in effect, most of present-day Northamptonshire, Bedfordshire and areas to the east – had been part of Viking-held East Anglia at least from the partition of 877. The boundary in the Treaty can therefore be best interpreted as the modification of an earlier boundary to the west and north-west of London (which therefore had included London within Viking-held territory), a change forced on the Vikings by Alfred to give him strategic control of London and Watling

Street. The nature of this Treaty boundary as a modification of an already existing situation is one of the clearest indications from which the existence of the Scandinavian control of London, which included the surrounding area to its north and west, can be inferred before this time.<sup>36</sup>

It is however the numismatic evidence, discussed most recently by Blackburn and Keynes,<sup>37</sup> which clarifies the situation. Keynes has concluded that 'Alfred was recognised, at some time before Ceolwulf's demise ..., as one of the two kings who had superior authority' in Mercia.<sup>38</sup> Blackburn has demonstrated that Alfred's interests in both the London mint and another in southern Mercia in the mid 870s, which can be taken back to Burgred's reign, were superseded by a coin series issued by Ceolwulf alone.<sup>39</sup> He concludes on the internal evidence of the coinage that Ceolwulf's London coin issues start in 877/8, and finish with the end of the reign in probably 879.<sup>40</sup> From this he also draws the inference that during the duration of the issue of the Cross-and-Lozenge type from 875 to 879, i.e. for both the Alfred-and-Ceolwulf and the Ceolwulf-alone phases, 'London was in Anglo-Saxon rather than Viking hands'.<sup>41</sup> This conclusion is also accepted by Keynes, who appears to favour, amongst several alternative explanations, the idea of the reform of the coinage at this time being planned by Alfred, a process in which Alfred then persuaded Ceolwulf to participate.<sup>42</sup>

While this conclusion seems to be at variance with the idea that London must have been in Viking hands in the two years from the Partition of Mercia in the summer of 877 to the summer of 879, the evidence of the coinage, if viewed from a slightly different perspective, in fact offers remarkable support for this interpretation. It is significant that the Ceolwulf phase of Mercian coinage begins at around the time of the Partition of Mercia in 877. This clearly represents a complete reversal of the situation in which Alfred had become the dominant partner in a monetary union between Mercia and Wessex which had been established by his father Aethelred with Burgred in the 850s, and which was maintained in the implementation of a far-reaching and drastic reform of the coinage in 875. In *c.* 877 the loss of his rights to issue coins in his own name in Mercia and in particular London, its largest mint, meant that Alfred was deprived of not only the enormous revenues this practice must have given him but also his former political and economic clout. It cannot therefore, have been through his own choice in the matter. It must be concluded that at this juncture the Vikings succeeded in denying to Alfred the political power and the economic interests he had exercised in Mercia and London up to that time, while assuming control of the management of the Mercian government and economy through their client King Ceolwulf alone. In this way the Vikings would seem to have acted as a ninth-century mafia, creaming off the profits of the day-to-day economy for their own use, in

this case without the awkward interference of Alfred. This scenario provides the essential background to an understanding of the motives which lay behind Alfred's ultimately successful efforts to oust the Vikings from their position of parasitic control in Mercia and London in the next two years or so.

### The Liberation of London and Mercia

It is suggested that there were two distinct but interconnected factors which between them provided both the means (the first factor) and the opportunity (the second factor) by which Alfred was able to liberate Mercia and London by causing the retreat of these armies away from Mercia in 879. The first is that in the period between Alfred's victory at Edington and the retreat of the Vikings in September 879 from Cirencester and Fulham (a period of some 15 months), the West Saxons constructed a system of fortresses around Wessex, which included others at Oxford and Buckingham in eastern Mercia and Bath in Western Mercia; a system which is listed in the Burghal Hidage document. It is argued that these fortified places would have been part of a broadly two-pronged strategy: as an in-depth defence of Wessex, and as an offensive system of secure, garrisoned fortresses built in positions which acted as a counter-threat to the Viking armies poised at both Cirencester and Fulham. It can therefore be inferred that the principle aim of this strategy was the removal of the Vikings from both western Mercia and the London area. As well as threatening the Viking armies' hold on Mercia, the rapid completion of this fortress system would have shown the Vikings quite clearly that they had little hope of achieving their goal of taking Wessex.

The second factor, the success of which must have to a large extent been dependent on the effectiveness of the first, is the possibility that King Alfred, taking advantage of his former standing and close connections with Mercia, either initiated or sanctioned what could be interpreted as a *coup d'état* in Mercia shortly before the Treaty was signed. This ousted or led to the assassination of King Ceolwulf of Mercia, who disappears from the historical record in this moment.<sup>43</sup> The alternative, that Ceolwulf could merely have died at this point without any drastic intervention, would similarly have decisively favoured Alfred's political and strategic intentions, and correspondingly disfavoured those of the Vikings. At this point Alfred must have swiftly filled the political vacuum.<sup>44</sup> This can be suggested as the motivation for the submission of the Mercians to Alfred, and the rise to power of Aethelred as Alfred's sub-regulus within Mercia.<sup>45</sup>

### The Burghal System

It has been suggested by Patrick Wormald that the immediate result of Alfred's victory at Edington was the implementation of the 'most sustained programme of military and administrative change in the West since Charlemagne'.<sup>46</sup> Nicholas Brooks has discussed the 'crash building programme' of fortresses and the organisation of their garrisons.<sup>47</sup> Martin Biddle has argued for some time that the construction of the burghal system in Wessex can best be placed in the period between 880 and the 'capture' of London in 886,<sup>48</sup> a conclusion broadly accepted by Keynes and Lapidge.<sup>49</sup> It could however be observed that the placing of the construction of the fortresses in this period, after the Vikings had left Mercia and London altogether in late 879, would have been the military equivalent of locking the stable door after the horse has bolted. It is argued here, however, that it was the successful implementation of this programme of fortress-building in the short period of fifteen months or so between May 878 and August 879 which was the single most important and decisive factor which led to the Viking withdrawal from Mercia and London. It was the cause, rather than the consequence, of this development. While the suggested coup d'état in Mercia may have been an adroit and perhaps opportunistic political move, the construction of the system of garrisoned fortresses, together with the reorganisation of the army, was the result of a well thought-out strategic plan.

The fortresses described in the Burghal Hidage show characteristics which have an important bearing on the question of Alfred's strategic thinking at this time. In the second part of this paper arguments are developed to support the inference that the logical order in which the forts were listed,<sup>50</sup> indicates their existence as a unitary system at the time of the composition of the Burghal Hidage. As such, not only would the military functions of each of the separate fortresses have complemented those of their neighbours, but all the fortresses in the system would have been the built to achieve a single goal – to implement a single overall strategic concept and to ensure a single outcome. This system was, at the time of the composition of the document, considered as being complete, in other words there were no other original components of the system, nor are any of the fortresses mentioned in the Burghal Hidage later additions. As a system it contrasts with the fortresses built by Edward the Elder in the East Midlands in the early decades of the tenth century, and by Aethelred and Aethelflaed and latterly by King Edward in the West Midlands from the late 880s onwards. All of these comprise several piecemeal and non-contemporary series, the construction of which reflected quite different sets of military strategies. While the idea of such fortresses and the arrangements for their construction, garrisoning and upkeep were not new in either Mercia or Wessex,<sup>51</sup>

and had clear precedents in Francia in the 860s, there is no indication that the pre-Alfredian fortresses, at least in Wessex, had formed part of such a system. The creation of an entirely new system (at least for Wessex), must imply that the military objectives which brought this system into being were also new. It is therefore necessary to search for a suitable historical context for the implementation of this new strategy that was appropriate to the use of all the elements in the system.

Some insight into these strategies is given by an analysis of the positions of the northern line of the West Saxon fortresses in relation to the Viking forces. Just as the choice of both Cirencester and Fulham by the two Viking armies in the summer of 878 demonstrates their hostile intentions towards Wessex, so the siting of the fortresses on at least the northern side of Wessex demonstrates the implementation of a strategy to counter precisely this combined threat (Fig. 1). Bath, although technically in Mercia at the time, defended the common border of Wessex with the southern and south-western part of the *Hwicce*, and commanded the Fosse Way which led directly from Cirencester south-westwards into western Wessex. Bath (before the existence of Bristol) also blocked access up the Avon for any Viking ships approaching from the Bristol Channel. The hilltop fortress at Malmesbury was also sited close to the border of Wessex with the *Hwicce* and to the Fosse Way, thus on the direct route (which the Viking army must have taken) between the battle sites at Chippenham and Cirencester.<sup>52</sup> Cricklade was sited on the Wessex side of the common border with the *Hwicce* at the crossing of the Thames by Roman Ermin Street, which led south-eastwards in a straight line from Gloucester through Cirencester into Wessex.<sup>53</sup> These three fortresses therefore blocked the main routes of access to the Viking army in both Cirencester and Gloucester; all the direct Roman roads into northern Wessex, and also the route by sea from the Viking-dominated Bristol channel.

The positions of fortresses at Wallingford, Sashes and Eashing are equally significant in blocking access into eastern and central Wessex by the newly arrived army encamped at Fulham. The island site at Sashes with its bridge would have effectively controlled both the crossing of the Thames by the Roman road leading from St Albans (and Watling Street) to Silchester,<sup>54</sup> as well as passage up the Thames itself by the Viking army at Fulham. Wallingford was placed on or near the crossing of the Thames by the Icknield Way which leads from the north-east and Watling Street into central Wessex<sup>55</sup> and its bridge would have complemented that at Sashes in functioning as a defence of the upper reaches of the Thames against passage by Viking ships. Similarly, the fortress at Eashing blocked navigation up the River Wey, a tributary of the Thames, which represented another good route into Wessex from the London area.<sup>56</sup> The context for the construction of this series of fortresses in these particular positions around northern Wessex

thus becomes rather less appropriate to the period after 879 when Mercia was no longer a Viking client state.

There are also grounds for viewing the construction of the fortress at Southwark, together possibly with a defensive bridge over the Thames, as a key element in this strategy.<sup>57</sup> Various writers have suggested that this fortress was built in 886 or soon after, to complement the defensive function of the City and bridge, which was 'captured' in that year.<sup>58</sup> However, it could be argued that since it would have been a direct challenge to the Vikings both on the north bank of the Thames in London itself, as well as to those encamped at Fulham; the period 878–9 would be a more appropriate context for its construction. It would have curtailed the freedom of movement of the Fulham Vikings along the Thames, and would have given Alfred strategic control over the lowest crossing-point of the river and the most important entry point into eastern Wessex from Viking-held territory in the north.

Southwark is the only fortress in the Burghal Hidage List which was used as an element in a system of two fortresses linked with a bridge over a river, a military device used frequently in the decades both before and after 879, in England and on the continent.<sup>59</sup> In some cases in England the second fortress in the fort-bridge-fort system was only built after the primary fortress had been captured. Such was the situation in Hertford in 912, Bedford in 914, and Nottingham, captured in 918 with the second fortress built in 920 (*sa ASC*). However, fortresses were also used offensively, in that their construction resulted on several occasions in the submission of the Viking armies in entrenched positions nearby. This process is seen in the construction of two fortresses built in 914 during Edward the Elder's stay at Buckingham, which led directly to the submission of part of the army at Bedford and some of the people in the territory of the Northampton army. The whole army of Northampton submitted to Edward the Elder when Towcester was 'walled' in 917, and the whole of East Anglia and Cambridgeshire submitted to Edward when he occupied and restored Colchester in 917. Lastly, the submission of the army in the fortress at Stamford in 918 was apparently achieved by the building of an opposing fortress on its southern side. Although all these examples are later in date, it would be appropriate to the military realities of the time to see the construction and garrisoning of the fortress at Southwark in 878 or early 879, together with the rebuilding of London Bridge, as one of the proximate causes of the capitulation of the Viking military presence in the London area and the retreat of the Fulham army back to the continent in the summer of 879.

There are also reasons for regarding both Oxford and Buckingham, the two fortresses in the Burghal Hidage not in Wessex proper, as part of this initial system. Oxford, although on the Mercian side of the Thames, was strategically placed to control access along the

important north-south routeway between Wessex and Mercia, which connected middle Saxon Hamwic on the south coast with Northampton and northern Mercia,<sup>60</sup> as well as reinforcing Wallingford and Eashing in controlling access up the Thames. The evidence of the coins from Oxford, discussed by Blackburn,<sup>61</sup> shows that the mint at Oxford was producing coins at the same time as the celebratory issues produced by Alfred in both London and Gloucester soon after the Vikings left Mercia in late 879 (see below). This being so, Oxford is likely to have been 'refounded' by Alfred as a defended urban place in probably the spring or early summer of 879 as part of the fortress system described in the Burghal Hidage.

A fortress at Buckingham would also have played an important if not crucial role at this time. This would have been ideally sited to command the northern stretch of the Watling Street corridor.<sup>62</sup> Its construction can therefore be seen as an important factor both in forcing the Vikings back from a boundary on the west side of Watling Street to the line defined in the Treaty to its east and in maintaining Alfred's hold over this crucial area once gained. Since the presence of a West Saxon garrison in Buckingham in 914 was enough to cause the submission of part of the army in both Bedford and Northampton (*sa* ASC) it could be inferred that the construction of a new fortress at Buckingham in 879 would also have acted as part of an offensive strategy to ensure the West Saxon domination of the northern sector of Watling Street which was taken into Alfred's hands at the time of the Treaty. It would also have confronted a possible Viking presence in Bedford itself, the only place mentioned in Alfred and Guthrum's Treaty. The fortresses at Southwark and Buckingham are thus best be interpreted as essential elements in an offensive strategy that culminated in the retreat of the Vikings from Mercia and London reported in the Chronicle for 879. Their inclusion as elements in the system of fortresses described in the Burghal Hidage gives further support for the hypothesis of the origin of this system as a whole in the period 878–9.

It is also of some significance that the combined hidage figures of the 8 fortresses placed around the northern border of Wessex in the Burghal Hidage – Bath, Malmesbury, Cricklade, Oxford, Wallingford, Buckingham, Sashes and Southwark – (totalling 12 500) is nearly as much as the combined hidage figures (totalling 15 671) of all the other 22 fortresses put together. It must be inferred that the border of Wessex with Mercia was, at the time of the construction of this system, the frontier line to which most of the manpower resources of the relevant shires were channelled. This is further emphasised by the fact that Bath and Wallingford, situated on this northern border, are the only two fortresses which are allocated more hides than the known circuit of the defences would have required under the formula in the Calculation attached to the Burghal

hidage. There would have been little point in committing these huge resources along a border between two areas owing allegiance after 879 to the same king, and against an adversary which had by this time effectively disappeared.

This evidence suggests that Alfred, had set out to implement an overall strategy in which the individual fortresses were acting both on their own and as part of a coherent system which was designed from the outset to put the West Saxons on the offensive against the Vikings who controlled Mercia and the London area. The role of both Buckingham and Southwark in particular focuses attention on the offensive function of many of the other Wessex fortresses, especially those around its northern borders. Of key significance is the way the construction of these fortified and garrisoned strongholds in Wessex would have appeared to the Vikings. If Guthrum's army perceived their own occupation of the fortress of Cirencester as being an offensive act, as must be inferred from its position on the Roman road system in close proximity to the Wessex border, then the construction of the fortress at Cricklade, backed up by that at Malmesbury, must have appeared to Guthrum's army for what it clearly was – part of an offensive strategy directed against themselves. They were faced with the distinct possibility of being attacked at any time by the West Saxon forces garrisoned in a securely defended fortress only a few hours' march down the Roman road, backed by similar garrisons in neighbouring fortresses. In this way Sashes, Wallingford and Oxford would have complemented the offensive functions of Buckingham and Southwark. An important aspect of this offensive role would have been to guarantee the permanence of the intended military and strategic outcomes. Seen in this light, the context of the construction of the fortress at Buckingham is more appropriate to a time immediately before Guthrum's army retreated behind the boundary to the east of London and Watling Street, rather than after this had taken place. Similarly, the construction of the fortress at Southwark makes more sense in a military context before the Viking army at Fulham retreated to the continent in late 879. It would have directly threatened the position of that army upstream at Fulham, ensuring that it could not reoccupy London. Similarly the most appropriate context for the construction of the fortress at Cricklade would have been at a time when Guthrum's army was in occupation of Cirencester just a little way up the Roman road, thus destabilising the Viking presence there and preventing a direct foray into Wessex along Ermin Street, whilst creating a situation which would have made the army's return to either Cirencester or Gloucester impossible.

A system of garrisoned fortresses constructed at this time would therefore have achieved four distinct but interconnected strategic goals:

a) the provision of an adequate protection for most of

- the population and territory of Wessex and a counter to Viking foraging parties or raids;
- b) the prevention of foreseeable adverse military outcomes from taking place;
  - c) the provision of offensive instruments designed to bring about required military objectives;
  - d) the establishment of the means to make certain that these outcomes, when achieved, would be sustained.

The construction of Alfred's burghal system in the short period before August 879, designed to fulfil this four-part strategy, is quite distinct from the prevailing view which sees the initial system of fortresses described in the Burghal Hidage as being built in the 880s and perhaps into the 890s as a purely preventative measure 'to protect the kingdom from the threat of further Viking attack'.<sup>63</sup> As an explanation for their construction this is a necessary but not a sufficient condition, because it leaves the reasons which drove the Vikings from Mercia in the first place both unacknowledged and unexplained.

### *The Burghal Hidage forts*

The logistics of the construction of the individual fortresses in the system give some support to the idea that all the fortresses in Wessex (including Oxford and Buckingham) could have been built within a relatively short time span. In the case of Cricklade, where excavations on the defences over the last 50 years have produced some significant data,<sup>64</sup> it is estimated that all the elements in the defensive circuit could have been constructed by 1000 men working for about eight months. The calculations are as follows: given a wall length of 2280 yards [2083 metres] (the longest estimate), an average width of 6 m, and an average (estimated) height of 2.5 m, the bank would have comprised around 34 200 cubic metres of material. Excavation has determined that the bank was of simple dump construction with turf revetments, built from material derived from the three ditches and with turves stripped from the area of the bank and berms. On the premise that a team of 4 men could have built 2 cubic metres of bank in a day's work, the whole defensive circuit would have been completed in 68 400 working days, or by 1000 men working for 68.4 working days, or 13.6 weeks of 5 working days – say around 4 months. The defences also comprised an intra-mural walkway made of laid stones that would have been quarried and brought some distance,<sup>65</sup> and a possible simple timber revetment on top of the bank.<sup>66</sup> If a similar amount of manpower was needed to have constructed these elements sequentially with the bank (in the order: walkway; bank and ditches; palisade), this gives an estimated total of eight months for a team of 1000 men to have constructed the basic defensive system.<sup>67</sup>

The period available was some fifteen months – from May 878 until August 879 – which would have given eleven or twelve months with reasonable weather. Even

allowing for other works utilising the available human resources (building a bridge and causeway, laying out streets, constructing gateways and watchtowers, and general supportive provision for the workers) and allowing extra time for surveying and laying out the site, bad weather, general inefficiency and human wastage; the whole enterprise, if reasonably well organised, would have been comfortably completed with the manpower resources available from the 1400 hides appurtenant to Cricklade in the Burghal Hidage, at the rate of one man being conscripted from each hide. Cricklade was perhaps a special case as the nearest fortress in Wessex to the Vikings in Cirencester. However, given the pressures on Wessex from the two Viking armies on its borders, it can reasonably be assumed that a similar degree of political will and local organisation would have been applied to the construction of all the other fortresses in the system. It is therefore entirely plausible that all the fortresses in Wessex as set out in the Burghal Hidage could have been in place as a functioning military system by the summer of 879.

The possibility that the fortresses were built in a comparatively short time-span is further corroborated by the records of fortress-building in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, in particular of those built by Edward the Elder in the period 912–20. While not all instances of fortress construction in the Chronicle give an indication of a time scale, in some instances it is recorded that these were built in a matter of weeks, or at most a few months. The fortresses at Towcester and *Wigingamere* were constructed in 917 in time to withstand sieges not more than three months later. The Danish fortress at Tempsford was completed in a similar time-span in 917, sufficiently quickly for it to be considered a safe refuge for a Danish king and an earl with his two sons, even though the fortress was overrun by King Edward's forces. Maldon was also complete enough to withstand a siege in the autumn of 917, only a little more than a year after the start of its construction in the summer of 916. Two further examples of the speed of fortress construction are given in the Chronicle for the year 895. The Danes built a fortress on the river Lea in probably the autumn of 894 which was able to withstand a siege in the summer of 895. In the later summer of that year Alfred started work on a double fortress linked with a bridge to prevent the Vikings from escaping with their boats down the Lea. This appeared to have had such an immediate impact that the Vikings abandoned their ships and fled to Bridgenorth before the winter. Lastly, Alfred's fortress at Athelney, completed by a 'small force' in Easter 878, was in use as an apparently effective military stronghold only a few weeks later.

In other instances (Witham in 912, two at and near Buckingham in late 913, Towcester [stone wall] in 917 and Bakewell in 920) the construction of these fortresses was clearly sufficiently far advanced after only a matter of six or possibly even four weeks to compel the

submission of earls, armies and/or the neighbouring populations – and in the case of Bakewell the Scots, the Northumbrians and the Strathclyde Welsh. As the author has argued elsewhere<sup>68</sup> the annals in the period 911–17 seem to have been written in order to establish a pattern which reflected a real strategy; the submission of the Danes to King Edward in person throughout various conquered areas, as a result of the building of a fortress in that area. The fortresses need not have been complete in all aspects before this happened, however, the construction of their defences and the establishment of garrisons were sufficiently far advanced in the 4–6 week period in which Edward was recorded as having stayed in the area to have forced a desired outcome.

It can be argued that the period immediately after the battle of Edington would have been, for political reasons, the most appropriate time for the fortress system to have been constructed. Several writers have emphasised that the creation of this system in the late ninth century, together with the establishment of the burghal territories and the arrangements for their garrisoning and settlement, would have been an essential component in the exercise of royal power and therefore in the consolidation of the state. Nicholas Brooks has pointed out that ‘the development of royal authority in England was directly connected with the successful enforcement of public works and general military obligations so that an adequate defence against the Vikings was provided’,<sup>69</sup> This conclusion is amplified in his later discussion of the physical and social effects this military programme must have had on the population.<sup>70</sup> Richard Abels considers that the processes by which royal interests in minting, marketing and the exercise of justice, as well as defence, were concentrated within the fortresses, was an essential means by which royal power was centralised and underpinned.<sup>71</sup> After his defeat of the Vikings at Edington in May 878, the victorious Alfred was able perhaps for the first time to count on the undivided loyalty of the ealdormen and thegns in every shire in Wessex. The two fortresses in Wessex which had already proved their worth in action against the Vikings, Athelney (constructed by Alfred in early 878) and Countisbury (unsuccessfully stormed by the Vikings also in early 878), must have demonstrated to Alfred how effective such fortifications could be, just as he doubtless appreciated how their absence in Wessex had facilitated the successes of the Vikings. The population too, faced with a common enemy on its borders and with the memory of the ease with which the Vikings had nearly overrun Wessex in the very recent past, would have been most prepared to submit to the enormous scale of conscription and coercion which such a programme demanded.<sup>72</sup> Conversely, raising the motivation for this massive project would have been immeasurably harder at a local level if there were no standing Viking armies anywhere near Wessex, which was the situation after late 879.<sup>73</sup>

The programme of fortress-building might be considered as the principal means whereby Alfred’s prestige and power were maintained and consolidated within Wessex after victory at Edington. It was also the primary factor which underpinned the power and standing which had allowed him to assume the overlordship of Mercia, including London, soon after. Richard Abels has observed how the construction of the fortresses enhanced ‘the institutional power of the West Saxon Monarchy over its subjects’, and how they reinforced and regulated ‘the traditional connection between landholding and the military obligation to the Crown’.<sup>74</sup> The creation of the system in 878–9 is thus supported both by its appropriateness to the internal political dynamics of the state and by the need for a response to the perceived and real threat from the two Viking armies poised on the borders of Wessex. While the fortress-building programme was clearly a complex process rather than a single event, and whether or not the construction of all the fortresses had been entirely completed, it is suggested that by the middle or late summer of 879 its implementation was sufficiently far advanced to have had the effect of persuading two relatively large and potentially dangerous Viking armies to accept that they had no future in prosecuting any further hostilities against Wessex and of forcing them to abandon London and Mercia altogether.

### Alfred and Mercia

By the time the agreement between Alfred and Guthrum’s Vikings was ratified and recorded in the extant Treaty, arguably in the summer of 879, Alfred must have been in a position of domination throughout Mercia. Ceolwulf had gone the way that ineffectual parties to unequal power struggles have tended to depart throughout history.<sup>75</sup> Alfred could now, unlike any ruler before him when confronted with the Vikings, virtually dictate his own terms. This juncture marked the end of an era which was characterised by political uncertainty if not actual chaos, which had been dominated by a lack of any strategy to combat the unexpected Viking raids and by the resulting financial burden of Danegeld. It was, however, also the beginning of a new era which saw the Vikings contained, when Alfred had achieved his strategic and political goals of the overlordship of the whole of Mercia and Wessex and the repossession of London, this time without having to accommodate the interests of a Viking client king in Mercia. It could be said that by the end of 879 the ‘kingdom of the Anglo-Saxons’ was well on the way to becoming a reality.

This context provides a particularly appropriate explanation for the issue of the London Monogram coinage of Alfred.<sup>76</sup> This was a ‘celebratory issue struck intensively over a short period’,<sup>77</sup> and although traditionally associated with the reoccupation of London in

886, must now be placed rather earlier for numismatic reasons. The issue can now be dated soon after Ceolwulf's demise, when the Mercian mints reverted to Alfred, and marked an Alfredian monetary reform.<sup>78</sup> Blackburn concluded this type did not celebrate the 'occupation' of London and the submission of all the English people to Alfred in 886, but seems to give publicity to Alfred's assumption of authority over London after Ceolwulf's demise.<sup>79</sup> In view of the strategic considerations put forward above, this is certainly likely to have been so, and dates this issue to the last few months of 879 and the first few of 880. The issues of similar coins from both Gloucester and Oxford at the same time however, imply that this reform had a deeper meaning. It suggests that together they marked and truly celebrated Alfred's defeat of the Vikings in Mercia and London in late 879 and his full assumption of power within Mercia, represented symbolically by the three principal places of eastern, central and western Mercia. It must have been intended to be a clear and unequivocal signal to his subjects of his power and newly-won prestige: a piece of true propaganda. Perhaps it is at this point that Alfred did in fact receive the submission of all the English people, for he had now achieved his long-held strategic and political goal, and the people would certainly have had something to celebrate. It could be said that the issue of these series of coins was the most potent signal to the population as a whole of the beginning of a new era: 'kingdom of the Anglo-Saxons'.

It is in the context of the extension of Alfred's lordship over the whole of Mercia, that the rise of Aethelred must be viewed. His probable rise to power at this time,<sup>80</sup> suggests that he was already the natural successor to Ceolwulf and the Mercian 'Crown', waiting in the wings for the removal of the Vikings. Keynes has demonstrated how he functioned almost as a king of Mercia in his own right, although always with acknowledgement of Alfred as his overlord. This could be interpreted as the behaviour of a legitimate aspirant to kingship with perhaps his own independent power base and/or family connections, who nevertheless had to accept that his own position and power could only be maintained under the overlordship of a more powerful ruler, especially as this powerful ruler was instrumental in bringing about the conditions that allowed him to rule in the first place. Whether Aethelred was perceived as being a political rival to Alfred within Mercia, or whether he was entirely Alfred's protégé without any realistic claims of his own, his marriage in the mid 880s to Alfred's daughter<sup>81</sup> certainly cemented this subordinate relationship. This must have had the effect of containing the ambitions of Aethelred's circle (whether legitimate or not), and of strengthening Alfred's power and his hold over Mercia.

The events of 886, as recorded in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, can also be viewed afresh in the light of the strategic intentions of Alfred discussed above. It is possible that Aethelred may have assisted Alfred in what

could be interpreted as a long see-saw struggle against the Vikings for possession of London in the period 880–886,<sup>82</sup> so that Alfred's gift of London to Aethelred, recorded in 886, could be seen as a just reward for services rendered. However, many indications – in particular Alfred's economic and political interests in London prior to the Viking partition of Mercia in 877, his perception of London as his ultimate prize as shown by the strategies to regain the city from Viking domination, and the issue of the London Monogram coinage to celebrate its recapture – all indicate that possession of London was Alfred's long-held strategic goal, the potent symbol of his prowess, power, stature and triumphs. This being so, it is both too altruistic and too sentimental to assert, as many historians have tended to do,<sup>83</sup> that Alfred handed London back to a true Mercian in the spirit of benign generosity. Alfred had gained his prize and consolidated his power; if he was giving anything away, there must have been some form of substantial return.

It is suggested that some insight into this process is indicated by the circumstances in which Mercia became divided after Alfred's death. Aethelred and Aethelflaed maintained control of Mercia until the former's death in 911, when control of only London and Oxford and their dependent territories passed to Edward the Elder. The evidence already discussed above suggests that soon before late 879 – and indeed possibly rather earlier – Alfred took over direct control of the eastern part of Mercia (probably as a result of his deposition of Ceolwulf), thus giving himself the ability to negotiate directly with Guthrum, while allowing Aethelred (with his base in Gloucester), some control over western Mercia at a slightly later stage. It seems possible that in or before 886 – before the marriage to Aethelflaed, or as a 'dowry' on the occasion of the marriage – some of the economic benefits from London and Oxford and their dependent territories (present day Oxfordshire, Buckinghamshire, Middlesex and much of Hertfordshire) would have been granted by Alfred to Aethelred as personal estate for his lifetime. Some similar arrangement must have been made later by Alfred to allow Aethelflaed to maintain control of the rest of Mercia for her own lifetime after her husband's death. It can be suggested that in return, King Alfred required Aethelred to take direct responsibility for the defence of the eastern borders of Mercia with Viking East Anglia. That Aethelred had sole responsibility for these matters until his death seems to be indicated, firstly, by the role that he played in 893 in supplying prince Edward with reinforcements from London in the latter's engagement with the Vikings at Farnham, as reported by Aethelweard;<sup>84</sup> and secondly, by the fact that it was only after Aethelred's death that Edward the Elder was able to take the offensive against the East Anglian Vikings by the building of a series of fortresses to the north and north-west of London, which was to culminate in the

submission of the whole of Viking East Anglia to Edward in 917.<sup>85</sup> The record of the events of 886, in which Alfred ‘entrusted the borough [of London] to the control of Ealdorman Aethelred’,<sup>86</sup> aptly describes the culmination of this process of transference of responsibility (though not of power) in the context of a general reaffirmation of allegiance of both the Mercians and the West Saxons to Alfred. This is perhaps underscored by the possible connection between this event and Aethelred’s marriage (or at least betrothal) to his daughter, which would in practice have represented a contractual as well as a ceremonial consolidation of Aethelred’s allegiance to Alfred.

### Conclusion

The first fundamental conclusion of this paper is that Alfred was deprived of the considerable control he exercised in both Mercia and London prior to 877 as a result of the Partition of Mercia by the Vikings. The second is that the lifting of the continuing threat to Wessex by the retreat of the Vikings from Mercia and London in late 879, described in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, was neither a historical accident nor the inevitable outcome of earlier events or agreements. It was, rather, the direct result of military strategies thought out and implemented by King Alfred and his circle, which involved the construction and garrisoning of a system of fortresses over Wessex and eastern Mercia in the period between early 878 and late 879. This system is recorded in Burghal Hidage, which in Part 2 is argued as being contemporary with the system of defence it describes. It is also argued that the agreement which regulated this retreat was documented in the contemporary Treaty between Alfred and Guthrum. This event – the recapture of London and the liberation of Mercia from Viking domination – was also marked by the celebratory issue of a new coinage from London, Oxford and Gloucester, the three ‘capitals’ of southern Mercia. Other processes and events, such as the displacement and/or death of Ceolwulf of Mercia, Alfred’s assumption of the mantle of political power within Mercia and his relationship with Aethelred, were clearly important – perhaps vital – to the unfolding of events and the success of the overall strategy. From all this Alfred emerges (or rather is confirmed) as a determined, single-minded, energetic and ruthless operator, a clever political opportunist, a far-sighted strategist, and a king in the true Saxon mould in his concern to maintain and augment his economic resources, his military power and in his political control over the territories he had come to rule.

## PART 2

### The Burghal Hidage: A Reassessment

The date, historical context and military function of the Burghal Hidage document can now be reassessed in the light of the new observations presented in Part I.<sup>87</sup> It is important to recognise the limits of the available evidence. Neither the form or the content of the Burghal Hidage document itself, nor any evidence from the fortresses listed in it, gives any direct support for the construction of the system in the period AD 878–9 or for the contemporaneity of the document. Although the dating of the fortresses have been used to infer the date of the document and *vice versa*, neither can in reality be dated by inference of the other. This common misconception has resulted in the current paradigm (discussed in detail below) which views the origin of the document itself as entirely independent of the genesis of the system it describes. Any view about the date of the document will therefore be a ‘best fit’ model of its appropriateness to both the general and the particular military and political strategies of which the document, as well as the fortresses listed in it, are a product. There is thus an inherent danger of circularity of argument, in that the strategies are to some extent – though not entirely – inferred from the existence of the fortresses, which are in their turn seen to be the outcome of a particular set of strategies. Without the evidence of the document, however, neither the association of the fortresses with a system, nor the strategies indicated by the existence of this system could be inferred from the remains of the fortresses alone – for a few of which there is no physical trace, for some of which there is no certainty about their precise location, and for most of which there is no independent evidence of date.

Several significant observations can, however, be made about the Burghal Hidage document itself. Firstly, as David Hill identified,<sup>88</sup> one of its most remarkable aspects lies in the systematic order of citation of the fortresses in the List in a clockwise circuit. Secondly, Buckingham, Oxford and Bath, none of them in Wessex proper, were included as an integral part of this circuit. Thirdly, it is remarkable that the Burghal Hidage is not a direct transcription from the primary lists of fortresses based on the shires which have been postulated elsewhere.<sup>89</sup> Not only does the document not list the fortresses in shire order; it also disregards any ranking of the fortresses within each shire by the size of their hidage assessments – which might be expected in separately produced shire lists. The citation of the circuit is therefore a primary factor in the composition of the document. While this shows that the List is likely to be secondary to the process of the construction of the individual fortresses themselves and is unlikely therefore to be a prescriptive planning brief, it also demonstrates that it had some wider purpose than being merely a tran-

scription of separate lists of shire totals prepared as a mere tally for administrative convenience.

Of great significance, is that at the time of its composition, the fortifications were together regarded as a single system, in the sense that the functions of each fortress were a complement to the rest. All the fortresses included in this system, whether they were reused fortified sites of an earlier period or built anew for the purpose were designed to achieve a single goal: to implement a single overall strategic aim and to ensure a single outcome.<sup>90</sup> From this it must be concluded that this strategic plan was implemented over a short period of time, and that all the elements in the system were therefore contemporary. By maintaining as its priority the rational order of citation around Wessex its author was not only making a statement that the fortresses functioned as a self contained and workable military system; he was also announcing the implementation of a set of important strategy decisions which had implications for greater Wessex as a whole. As a result we may infer that the composite which can be reconstructed from the two surviving versions is likely to be complete; it contained no additions and no places have been omitted.<sup>91</sup>

A further indication of the completeness of the List is the absence of any arrangements for the defence of Kent. Attempts to locate the unidentified *Eorpeburnan* – the first place in the List – has led several scholars to assume it was positioned near the eastern borders of Sussex.<sup>92</sup> Brooks argued in 1964 and again recently for *Eorpeburnan* to be identified with the fortress stormed by the Vikings in their raid on south-western Kent in 892, although a precise location is not offered.<sup>93</sup> This is reinforced by Davison who has identified *Eorpeburnan* with both the fortress stormed in 892 and with Castle Toll, near Appledore, although the issue of the position of the latter in Kent rather than in Sussex was not addressed.<sup>94</sup> The placing of *Eorpeburnan* in Kent is of great significance for this discussion. If it was in Kent, there is no reason for it to have been located in the far south-western corner of the county – it could logically have been anywhere. If, however, *Eorpeburnan* was not in Kent, then its identification with Castle Toll must be abandoned.<sup>95</sup>

Several factors imply *Eorpeburnan* might have been situated in Sussex rather than in Kent. If the fort was positioned in Kent, it remains inexplicable why other fortresses in the shire such as Canterbury and Rochester were excluded from the List. Recent work has shown that the Burghal Hidage List is a compilation of hidages based on the long established hidage totals of the separate shires.<sup>96</sup> It seems unlikely that the systematic protection given to Wessex by this system would not also have been extended to Kent. It must be concluded that these fortresses in Kent, with their own separate assessments, have for some reason always been treated separately, rather than being severed from a once complete List of

fortresses which originally included them. It is of course possible that the shire assessment on which arrangements for the defence of Kent would have been based was not available to the compilers of the Burghal Hidage document. Such inefficiency seems strongly at odds with the detailed and highly organised composition and listing of the Wessex system. It seems the Kentish defences, if a coherent system for that shire, were not originally part of the Wessex system.

It is possible that by the time the Wessex fortresses were constructed a separate system of garrisoned fortresses had already been established in Kent. The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle shows that Kent was repeatedly subjected to Viking raids from the early 840s until the last mentioned episode in 865, in which year all of the eastern part of the shire was ravaged, in spite of a ‘peace’ bought by the ‘people of Kent’.<sup>97</sup> Since it is clear that the people of Kent were quite capable of acting as a body (and doubtless raising the necessary payments) in their attempts to contain the Viking threat, it would be not unreasonable to suggest that Kent was provided with a system of fortresses in the later 860s subsequent to these raids, and that this system was able to prevent any further sporadic raids by the Vikings by the deployment of the same tactics that King Alfred was later able to use so successfully in Wessex. It seems particularly significant that this would place the suggested Kentish system in the period when Kent was firmly within the hegemony of the West Saxon kings – in particular of Aethelbert, Alfred’s eldest brother,<sup>98</sup> and at a time when the West Saxon kingdom itself was furnished with some effective fortresses of a kind and a degree of military organisation to implement their defence. Alfred may have seen such a system of fortresses in Kent as well as the Carolingian examples,<sup>99</sup> as a model and a prototype for implementing a similar system throughout the whole of Wessex as soon as conditions allowed him to do so.

It has been suggested in Part I that the system of fortresses described in the List in the Burghal Hidage is complete and that inferences about the strategies which were implemented by King Alfred in the period 878–9 can be made from the siting of the fortresses. An important general premise is that the fortresses comprising this system must have been created within the time-frame which is historically the most apposite to the strategic context which the system was designed to address. Although the arguments presented thus far do not necessarily demonstrate that the composition of the List in the Burghal Hidage was contemporary with the system it describes, a further consideration does lend support to this inference. Many of the fortresses which comprise the List are of a temporary or emergency nature: 12 such places can be identified (42% of the total of 31 places mentioned in the List) whose hidages comprise around 23% of the total number recorded.<sup>100</sup> The inclusion of these forts in the overall system, most of which probably reused earlier fortifications, shows that

the scheme described in the Burghal Hidage was rapidly put together to fulfil the widest and most effective strategic role within a finite allocation of resources. In the context of the 880s, when the Viking threat was no longer as pressing as it was in the period 878–9, the isolated nature of these fortresses would have meant that their upkeep and garrisoning would have been unlikely to have been maintained – a factor graphically described by Nicholas Brooks.<sup>101</sup> Furthermore, if these emergency fortresses were built and garrisoned to implement a strategy which was soon superseded by its own success, the integrity of the original system is unlikely to have been sustained much beyond the circumstances which brought it into being. Since all the fortresses were perceived as being a unified military system at the time of the composition of the List of the Burghal Hidage, the document must therefore be contemporary with the circumstances in which the system was still performing its military and strategic roles, thus in 879 or possibly 880.

There are indications too that the more isolated fortresses in the system were soon replaced by small fortified, market centres which were rather more conveniently situated as places with a local if not regional ‘central place’ function and which demonstrate the implementation of a more developed defensive strategy. Although there are few indications as to when exactly these places developed, the writer suggested more than twenty years ago that these new fortified urban centres – and others not directly or obviously replacing the Burghal Hidage fortresses – were built by King Edward the Elder as part of a radical new defensive policy in southern England in the first decade of the tenth century.<sup>102</sup> However, it seems more probable that once the immediate Viking threat to Wessex had passed in late 879 (at least for the time being), King Alfred himself encouraged the development of new defended urban centres on more accessible sites in the 880s and 890s which effectively replaced the ‘emergency’ forts of the Burghal Hidage. These appear to have expanded and consolidated aspects of the internal and coastal defensive policies seen in a number of the sites in the initial scheme.<sup>103</sup>

The siting and character of some of these places is relevant to the arguments presented here. Although the period after late 879 was relatively free from the immediate threat of invasion by Viking forces, the detailed record in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle of the subsequent exploits of the Fulham army (of 878–9) on the Continent testifies to the concern, if not fear, in royal circles of the consequences of a return of this or any other ship-borne army. One of the strategies shown by the Burghal Hidage system was the siting of several fortresses next to bridges in positions that would have both controlled river crossings and prevented access by Viking warships up the larger rivers. The widespread deployment at this period of defended sites that exemplify

the strategic association of fortress and bridge has been emphasised by both Brooks and Abels.<sup>104</sup> A number of small forts of the initial Burghal Hidage system (of which the two at Pilton and Halwell in Devon are good examples) were too far from rivers to have been an effective defence against Viking ship-borne armies. Not only would it have been impractical to have maintained garrisons in these forts on a long-term basis; but also any garrison in them would have been unable to prevent Viking warships from sailing up the nearby rivers or estuaries. Such forts could have served only as refuges, or at best rallying points for the local militia, in the event of such an attack. Alfred would therefore have found it necessary to develop a more appropriate strategy for the long-term defence of Wessex in the face of the perceived threat of renewed Viking attack from the sea.

It seems more likely therefore that the new populated defensive sites on navigable rivers and river estuaries associated with bridges would have replaced the small unpopulated forts at an early stage in this general process in the 880s, rather than in the early tenth century as argued elsewhere by the writer,<sup>105</sup> or indeed in the 930s, as suggested by Hill.<sup>106</sup> Thus the populated fortress at Totnes associated with a defensive bridge would have replaced the isolated fort at Halwell, and, in a precisely similar way, Barnstaple would have replaced Pilton.<sup>107</sup> The systematic development of these defended places, with permanent inhabitants occupying burgages, would have been an essential part of the economic revival of the 880s which is indicated by the restoration of a pure silver currency after the battle of Edington in 878.<sup>108</sup> It would have constituted an upgraded system of permanently-garrisoned fortifications which would have both constituted a strong deterrent to the Vikings contemplating attack from the sea, and provided a solution to the problem of the long-term sustainability of the unmanned fortresses alluded to above.

It has been widely accepted that the lull in direct Viking hostilities in the 880s provided the opportunity to address the needs of the defence of Wessex by the building of the Burghal Hidage system of fortresses, and that the Chronicle’s reference in 892 to a half-built fortress occupied by a few peasants, combined with Asser’s reference under 893 to uncompleted fortresses, implies that this system was perhaps even incomplete at this date.<sup>109</sup> The alternative argument presented here is that it was the ongoing development of a secondary series of more securely-sited fortified places built on many new sites in Wessex in the 880s which helped to discourage Viking attentions and which prevented the renewed Viking invasions of the 890s from achieving much lasting success. The view that these secondary fortified sites such as Totnes and Barnstaple were not developed until the ‘calmer days of the mid-tenth century’,<sup>110</sup> cannot be accepted. Since the Viking threat was a receding memory at this time, these forts would not have been needed. Furthermore defensive con-

siderations clearly governed their layout and location – in particular the strategic use of the *burh*-bridge combination, which was specifically targeted to the Viking threat. Furthermore, the social and military organisation, as well as the political motivation required to build these defended urban places, often on new sites, is more appropriate to the later ninth century rather than the mid-tenth century. Asser's observation could have referred to one of these uncompleted secondary sites and his more general remarks about the many towns which Alfred had constructed could as equally well have referred to the widespread development of the secondary centres in the period from 880.

This line of argument does not of course mean that there were no fortresses in Wessex before this time. Alfred himself oversaw the construction of one at Athelney in the early months of 878, and a fort at *Arx Cynuit* (Countisbury) in North Devon was used successfully against a Viking force which stormed it in early 878. With these exceptions, and the possibly isolated example of Winchester, there is no evidence however for the existence of large newly-created fortresses on new sites in Wessex prior to 878–9. It is commonly believed, as implied by Asser, that Wareham was fortified before the Vikings came on the scene in 877,<sup>111</sup> although there is no evidence for this in the archaeological findings. There are no grounds for believing that Reading and Chippenham were fortified before being used as fortresses by the Vikings. It seems likely therefore that these three non-Roman places used by the Vikings in the 870s were newly fortified by them for their own purposes. It is one thing to have the institutional framework in place (royal rights to fortress-work and bridge-work etc.), but quite another to infer from this the existence of a particular fortress (such as Wareham), several fortresses, or even a system of fortresses.<sup>112</sup> On the other hand, it is possible – indeed probable – that some of the small so-called 'emergency' forts of the Burghal Hidage (all, like Countisbury, probably reusing earlier fortifications), as well as others, were in use before 878–9 as rallying places for the local *fyrð* in times of emergency, that these were supported by specific allocations from the county hidage totals and that a few of these customary places were then included in the more organised system created later and set out in the Burghal Hidage List.

The general model presented here is that the system of fortresses listed in the Burghal Hidage was only one stage in the construction of an expanding series of fortresses and fortified towns by the king in the 880s and 890s (and by his son Edward the Elder in the early tenth century) in response to the need to provide more securely defended places against the changing Viking threats. This must be seen as part of a wider developing process, which can be characterised as occurring in three phases: a) forts of various types were possibly utilised and maintained in an organised way by the local

populations from the 860s or possibly earlier; b) some of these were then incorporated into a new system alongside some newly laid-out urban or proto-urban places. This new system was created by royal command in 878–9 and was listed in the Burghal Hidage; c) the creation of new fortified settlements, defended by permanent garrisons, in the 880s and 890s which were laid out to combine the functions of settlement, administration and trade as well as defence. This process can be argued as having involved the replacement of the more isolated and less permanent elements in this system, as well as the creation of new places on new sites. Within this latter phase the ongoing internal organisation and development of the larger places of the previous phase can also be included. The writer has also argued that this augmentation of the defensive capability of Wessex by the addition of new sites is to be associated with the replacement of the perhaps decaying turf or timber revetted banks of some with new stone walls in the 890s (shown in the archaeological record at Cricklade, Lydford, Wareham, Wallingford and Christchurch), probably in response to the new Viking raids at the time.<sup>113</sup> This can be associated with a similar programme in some of the major fortresses in Mercia at the same time, which is attested archaeologically at Hereford and Oxford.<sup>114</sup> This general programme appears therefore to have been achieved by the continued, systematic and effective allocation of manpower resources to provide both refurbishment of defences of already established fortresses, as well as the creation of new defended places.

As well as being an essential part of the defence of the kingdom, these new, usually urban fortresses represented on the one hand a means of exercising and augmenting royal power and control and on the other, a way of developing the resources of the kingdom as an income-generating resource, a policy which had already begun with the larger Burghal Hidage sites.<sup>115</sup> As with the earlier fortresses, the defence and upkeep of these secondary places must have involved the whole population through a similar method of hidage assessments, although put on a sounder basis by the economic interests of their inhabitants. The creation of all of them would have involved a local reorganisation of the pre-existing County hidage allocations, which would in some cases have been directly inherited from the arrangements evidenced in the Burghal Hidage but must in other cases have involved a more radical readjustment.

An illustration of the problem of understanding how the hidage figures were adjusted to the development of the secondary sites in the 880s and 890s is shown by Dorchester (Dorset), which can best be interpreted as being planned and laid out as a new fortified urban centre in this later phase. As David Hinton has pointed out,<sup>116</sup> the expected hidage assessment of Dorchester would have been much the same as the combined totals of Bredy/ Brydian and Shaftesbury in Dorset in the primary List of the Burghal Hidage. However, it seems

most likely that an original fort at Bredy was replaced by the fortified town at Bridport in the secondary phase of reorganisation.<sup>117</sup> Since there is no reason to believe that either Bridport or Shaftesbury were abandoned at any stage, and since both would have needed manpower resources for the upkeep and garrisoning of their defences throughout the 880s and beyond, the suggestion that their combined hidage allocations were transferred to Dorchester merely creates two more problems. It is therefore a puzzle as to where Dorchester obtained the extra hidage resources within the fixed assessment of the shire.

One answer to this is that some or all of the manpower requirements for the upkeep of the defences of some of these places were provided by the new populations within their defences. This could explain how for instance under-resourced Exeter could have functioned effectively as a garrisoned town; or how a number of places in the List in the Burghal Hidage (e.g. Wallingford, Christchurch and Wareham) were given a hidage assessment which ensured the upkeep of only a part of the complete circuit of defences from the resources of their surrounding districts. The river sides of these fortresses, if a distinct entity, could therefore have been the special responsibility of the new inhabitants of the town, the *burhwaru*. The possibility that the upkeep of the enlarged defences of Oxford were supported in part by internal 'mural mansions' is suggestive of how this could have been arranged.<sup>118</sup>

A further factor to consider is the possibility that the County hidage allocations for Shaftesbury and Bredy (amongst other places) were used in the secondary stage to provide the initial manpower to repair the Roman defences of Dorchester and to set out the town, the garrisoning and upkeep of which would then have become the ongoing responsibility of the *burhwaru*. If labour and military conscription were due on all estates on an annual basis, then there would have been manpower enough to establish many more fortresses in each shire over a period of 15 years or so in the 880s and into the 890s than were set up initially in the system listed in the Burghal Hidage, using this sort of flexible distribution of labour.<sup>119</sup>

In short, it seems probable that in many cases the Burghal Hidage List gives only the shire assessments, and leaves out the *burh* contributions. That there was a radical reorganisation of the original arrangements described in the List seems to be required by the fact that, as pointed out by Brooks,<sup>120</sup> a large proportion of the population living in the country must have migrated to the new fortified towns in this period. It is inconceivable that the 'gift' by the king of a plot of land (which would have become an estate in miniature with its own bundle of rights and privileges) to an aspiring townsman in the king's fortress, would not have required reciprocal responsibilities for the defence of that fortress, which might well not have shown up in a more general

hidage assessment. By creating centres of population within these fortifications King Alfred, for the first time in the late Saxon period, took the radical step of ensuring their upkeep on a permanent basis. The creation of the system of fortresses described in the Burghal Hidage therefore marks a new stage in which the responsibilities for sustaining and maintaining the upkeep of the fortifications were to devolve more closely upon the men of the town, the *burhwaru*, rather than the men of the shire.

In summary, the view put forward here postulates the rapid construction of the system of fortresses in 878–9, probably utilising earlier elements, to implement a combined defensive and offensive strategy for the greater Wessex which was recorded in the contemporary List of the Burghal Hidage. The equally rapid decline of this as a unified military system came about when the strategy which brought it into being proved successful in achieving its intended outcome: the removal of the Viking armies from Mercia which threatened Wessex. Some of the same strategic goals implied by the Burghal Hidage were more fully implemented in the 880s and 890s (and probably into the early tenth century) by the development all over Wessex of new defended market centres at new sites which were more advantageously positioned from both a strategic and commercial point of view. The Burghal Hidage document therefore captures a specific moment in this unfolding process, which represents the stage at which the primary fortresses were about to give way to the secondary fortified markets.

Since this overall view about the date and context of the Burghal Hidage is clearly at variance with generally accepted opinion, several aspects of this dissonance require further discussion: the received weight of historical opinion; the origin and context of the fortresses at both Buckingham and Oxford; and the question of Portchester.

## Previous Viewpoints

The weight of widely-accepted opinion and interpretation concerning the origin of the Burghal Hidage, which places it firmly at some point in the second decade of the tenth century, is truly immense. It has become fossilised as one of the most static and persistent paradigms in the whole field of early medieval history.<sup>121</sup> This is graphically emphasised by the very first sentence of the introduction to the most recent book devoted to a discussion of the Burghal Hidage and the Wessex fortresses: 'The Burghal Hidage is the name given in 1897 by W.F. Maitland to a document composed in the early tenth century'.<sup>122</sup> The assumption is usually made that the document is a palimpsest to which some additions were made to an original number of fortresses of Alfredian origin,<sup>123</sup> with the corollary that others might have been removed. This interpretation has been so

widely accepted for such a long time that it has prevented any serious discussion of the case that the List in the Burghal Hidage (plus the Calculation) is a unitary document whose original version is contemporary with the creation of the system it describes.<sup>124</sup>

There are however several considerations which together call in question the received paradigm. Part of its inherent problem is that there has been a confusion of primary and secondary contexts for the origin of the document. In calling attention to the prescriptive character of the 'conversion formula' or Calculation in the appendix of version A, Richard Abels has concluded that the Burghal Hidage is 'a summary of West Saxon practice compiled by Edward the Elder to aid the extension of the system into Mercia'.<sup>125</sup> This view has also been championed for many years by David Hill and others.<sup>126</sup> Hill has argued that since 'the thrust of the document is towards enabling new [hidage] assessments to be made on the basis of wall length' its origin must be sought in the process of the shiring of Mercia around AD 919.<sup>127</sup> He suggests that it was 'drawn up in Wessex from assessments and measurements made in the shires, checked to see if it would have worked, roughly, for the Wessex shires (hence the List) and then applied to Mercia as a basis for its shiring when Wessex took over control of that country in 919'.<sup>128</sup> In particular, Hill argues that the equivalence of the Burghal Hidage figure of 1200 hides for Worcester with the length of the defences as determined by excavation, the County Hidage figure (1200), the Domesday Hundreds (12), and the Domesday hides (1189) shows that, 'the Burghal Hidage lies behind the calculation of the area to be dependent on the west Mercian fortifications and therefore the shiring of Mercia'.<sup>129</sup> However, Hill's arguments from the equivalence of these figures (certainly very clear in the case of Worcester) is not in itself evidence that the Burghal Hidage, or any other one of the sources, is the progenitor of any of the others, and appear to ignore the clearly documented origins of the fortifications of Worcester some 30 years earlier.<sup>130</sup> This theme is further expanded in his paper of 2001, in which he discusses the hidages needed to support the defences of the major shire towns of western Mercia. As a result of this analysis he reinforces the conclusion drawn above, that 'the Burghal Hidage was a document derived from the survey undertaken in Wessex for the purpose of carrying out the shiring of Mercia in a relatively systematic way'.<sup>131</sup>

On a more fundamental level these arguments ignore the fact that by the tenth century the principle of the responsibility of the inhabitants of surrounding areas for the upkeep of the fortresses was already a practice of some antiquity in both western Mercia and Wessex.<sup>132</sup> The record of fortress-building in the Mercian Register in the period 907–19, as well as the evidence of the Worcester charter of the 890s,<sup>133</sup> shows that Aethelred and Aethelflaed had been busy building fortresses in Mercia for nearly 30 years before Aethelflaed's death in

919. None of these fortresses could have been conceived, let alone built, without having had a hidage assessment to enable the available human resources to be allocated to its construction and manning. By the time Edward the Elder took control of Mercia in 919, there must have already existed a well established system of the allocation of hides relating to the needs of its overall defence. It is therefore quite improbable that the suggested organisation of shires in c. 919 around the major fortresses would have involved the imposition of new assessments, either selectively on individual fortresses or generally on the whole of Mercia, or that a system used in Wessex was imported to facilitate this arrangement. This implies, for instance, that Worcester's assessment of 1200 hides would have been in place by the time of the creation of its defences in the 890s, if not earlier. In the context of c. 919 the Appendix to version B would merely have been stating the long established assessment.<sup>134</sup>

The hypothesis that the Burghal Hidage was created to implement this process in Mercia must therefore be questioned, especially in view of the fact that the Calculation appended to version A says nothing about burghal territories or regions or shires, but is all to do with wall lengths and hides and manpower resources. The unlikely nature of the hypothesis is further emphasised by a disparity between the unified system of the Burghal Hidage fortresses which reflect a strategic concept appropriate to one period in Wessex, and the fortresses of Mercia, which at no time constituted a system but rather formed a disparate and non-contemporary series whose individual elements were created to implement a quite different set of political, economic and military strategies. The Burghal Hidage List must therefore be seen as a particular manifestation of an ancient and universal practice, rather than the blueprint for the practice itself. That the Burghal Hidage assessments were based on long-established County hidages in Wessex has already been argued elsewhere.<sup>135</sup> It is unlikely, therefore, that any connection can be made between the origin of the Burghal Hidage and the origin of any system or programme of hidation or cadastral reorganisation, in either Wessex or Mercia. It must be concluded that the shiring of Mercia, if indeed it can be placed in the period immediately after 919, was an internal affair which involved a rearrangement, rather than a change, of long-established hidage assessments, for the establishment of which the Burghal Hidage document would have been irrelevant.

Furthermore, the Calculation, as Abels and Hill point out, is not a means for estimating wall lengths from hidages but rather hidages from wall lengths.<sup>136</sup> Hill concludes from this that the document enabled 'new assessments to be made on the basis of wall length',<sup>137</sup> and therefore that the Calculation had a general prescriptive value beyond its context as an attachment to the List of Wessex fortresses. This line of argument ignores the practicalities in a the relationship between

hidages and the creation of defences. Since the establishment of a length of wall would have required a prior hidage assessment to determine both the source and the use of the manpower resources with which it was constructed, maintained and manned, it seems doubtful whether there would have been any need for subsequent reassessment.

It seems, however, that the calculation of the hidages from wall lengths is only half the story, since the first and last clauses of the Calculation in fact show how the hidage figures were then used to work out the numbers of men required to construct and garrison the defences for a given wall length, using this formula:

If 1 man can be supplied from 1 hide, and the resources of 4 hides support 1 pole length of wall, therefore 1 pole length of wall requires 4 men.

An assessment based on hidages alone would have been meaningless unless it was understood how the hidages converted to manpower. The goal of the Calculation was therefore not the assessment of hides needed for a particular defensive circuit (which would anyway have had hides allocated to it before its construction), but rather the estimation of the number of men needed for a given situation. The conversion of hides to wall-lengths might be a priority for present-day archaeologists, but for the ninth-century ealdormen and thegns the most pressing concerns would be estimating manpower for the execution and completion of the work and recruiting, organising and distributing a workforce. Indeed, the Calculation would read perfectly logically if 'men' were substituted for 'hides' in every paragraph. It can be inferred therefore that the Calculation was conceived and indeed set out as an instructional 'ready reckoner', which enabled any of the three factors of wall-length, hidage and manpower resources to be calculated from the other two. Hill's thesis that the Calculation was 'intended to explain how new assessments of fortifications are to be added' is part of the story, but his conclusion that it was 'used for calculating the hides to be attached to the Mercian fortifications of Worcester and Warwick, which means that it was in use after 919 ...'<sup>138</sup> cannot be sustained. There is also no independent evidence that the Calculation, appended to Version A, had anything to do with Warwick and Worcester, whose hidages are appended to Version B. It is furthermore difficult to see the relevance of the List, which does not even mention wall lengths, to a situation in Mercia where already established wall lengths were supposed to have formed the basis of a new hidage assessment.

Finally, a difficulty with the 'late' interpretation of the origin of the Burghal Hidage document as 'a summary of West Saxon practice' originating at any time in the period 914–919 is that it requires the acceptance of the proposition that all the fortresses were still working together as a functioning system, in exactly the same way as they had been some 30 or 40 years earlier when

they were first built. Not only was this system supposed to have continued in use well after the death of Alfred into the period in which Edward the Elder, as well as Aethelflaed and Aethelred in Mercia, were building whole series of new and larger urban fortresses of their own, but Hill's hypothesis also requires that the shire lists of the fortresses had survived in their original form into this later period.<sup>139</sup> It also raises the problem of why Buckingham in particular was included as part of a system which was supposedly first recorded at this time. As outlined above, the integrity of this system is unlikely to have been maintained much beyond the creation of the system itself, although of course the majority of places in the system survived because of their developing urban and administrative functions. It is proposed above that the inclusion in the List of the temporary or emergency forts indicates that the List is more-or-less contemporary with the origin of the system as a whole, including Buckingham. Again, the relevance of the Wessex system as a model for the different circumstances of the early tenth-century in Mercia must be questioned.

In summary, a document which listed a group of fortresses as a military system set up to meet particular strategic goals, appropriate to the context of *c.* 879 in Wessex, would be unlikely to have been applicable to a quite different situation in another kingdom which was significantly later in date, was not even a system, and had no equivalent or even comparable military or strategic purpose. There is thus a seemingly unbridgeable disparity between on the one hand the appropriateness of the system to the context of the late 870s in Wessex, and on the other hand the context of *c.* 919 in which the document was supposedly written down for the first time. The fossilisation of the contents of a document, albeit in this case in incomplete variants, is a much more acceptable proposition than the continued use of the Wessex system of fortresses which must have soon become outmoded by the very success of the strategy it was designed to implement. It must be concluded that neither the original List nor the Calculation of the Burghal Hidage would have had anything to do with the defensive or administrative arrangements in western Mercia, at any period.

### Buckingham and Oxford

A major difficulty with the acceptance of a context earlier than 914 for the composition of the Burghal Hidage has always been the inclusion of Buckingham. Since this is first referred to in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle in that year as being a place where King Edward stayed and built two fortresses, it has almost universally been taken for granted by generations of historians that the fortress at Buckingham was newly constructed in this year.<sup>140</sup> This however appears to be based on the questionable premise that an event or process in the past cannot be

accepted as being earlier than its first mention in documents. Thus Professor Whitelock states bluntly that ‘The document ... known as the Burghal Hidage is not earlier than 914, since it includes Buckingham’.<sup>141</sup> The writer has argued elsewhere<sup>142</sup> that this reference in the Chronicle neither states nor implies in any way that a fortress at Buckingham (the presumed one of the pair) was newly constructed by Edward at this time. It is just as plausible to accept (in the absence of any archaeological evidence) that there was an Alfredian fortress at Buckingham, thus supplying a reason why the king and his army went there in the first place. This leaves no grounds on which to argue that the composition of the original Burghal Hidage was no earlier than the first part of the tenth century.

This difficulty with Buckingham was discussed nearly 40 years ago by Nicholas Brooks,<sup>143</sup> who regarded it as anomalous both because of its position in lying north of the Thames (in presumed distinction to Oxford, which also lies north of the Thames but rather nearer to it), and in belonging to ‘the system of *burhs* planned by Edward and Aethelflaed’ rather than in the proper context of ‘the defence of the south’. However, he did allow that most of the fortresses in the main part of the List were earlier in origin, and that there could well have been an earlier draft of the Burghal Hidage, to which ‘a few burhs, completed later, were added ... in the reign of Edward the Elder’.<sup>144</sup> In a more expanded discussion of the problem more than 30 years later, Brooks still sees Buckingham as an ‘anomaly in the List’ for exactly the same reasons, reinforcing this conclusion by pointing out that the entry for Buckingham in the B version appears more anomalous in being corrupted.<sup>145</sup> He allows for the outside possibility that there could have been a fortress at Buckingham before 914 but concludes that it is a post-914 addition to an original list, and introduces the possibility that it was a replacement for Sashes – in doing so raising another problem as to why both Sashes and Buckingham are included in the same system described in the List. His reasoning leads inevitably to the conclusion that the Burghal Hidage was a palimpsest: if Buckingham represents ‘an isolated piece of updating’,<sup>146</sup> then none of the other fortresses in the Lists can be assumed to have been part of the original system.

There are three principle considerations which argue against the premise that Buckingham is an anomaly in the List. Firstly, Brooks argues that Buckingham should be excluded from the List in order to more nearly equate the sum of the hides in all the places in the List with the total hidage figure for the West Saxons given in the appendix to Version B (27 070)<sup>147</sup>. This line of reasoning is however somewhat circular. It is generated by, and dependent upon, the premise that Buckingham is in fact anomalous, and cannot therefore be taken as evidence for this premise. The exclusion of Buckingham from the original List on this basis is merely an easy way out of

a particular difficulty with the figures. However, Hill’s demonstration that many if not most of the hidage figures of the fortifications have been rounded up to the nearest 100 means that the original ‘real’ figures, and therefore the ‘true’ total, cannot now be recovered – quite apart from the uncertainties about any total arising from the variants recorded in the available texts. It could even be that the stated total represents the sum of all the recorded hides of the 31 fortresses before these figures were rounded up. These considerations mean that no certain conclusions can be drawn about whether any place should be excluded from the List to bring the added total and the stated total into line.

Secondly, the concept of an ‘anomaly’ in the text is itself somewhat relative. There are other anomalies in the text, both between the two versions A and B, and between different versions of B, which are more than merely variations in the hidage figures for particular places. These relate to entries (or the lack of them) for Burpham, Shaftesbury, Wareham and Brydian (omitted in either version A or B), and Hastings, Lewes, and Chichester (omitted in different MSS of version B).<sup>148</sup> It is a matter of opinion therefore as to whether the entry for Buckingham is significantly ‘more anomalous’ than these other instances to a degree which demonstrates that it is not an original component of the List. This perception appears itself to be dependent on the premise that it is in fact a later addition to an earlier list, and is not therefore evidence for this premise.

Thirdly, there is a fundamental counter-argument to set against Brooks’ argument from textual corruption. If Buckingham was a later insertion into an earlier list (let us say that the version into which the insertion was made is called version 1), then the version of the List written by the scribe who included Buckingham for the first time (which we may call version 2) would by definition have had no textual anomalies in its entry for Buckingham, because the only copied components would be the contents of version 1. Once circulated, the entry for Buckingham in version 2 is then corrupted through an unknown number of individual copy stages to give our earliest surviving copy of version 2 (version 2 + x). It is simply not possible that these later corruptions can reflect changes from version 1 to version 2 (the inclusion of Buckingham) except by complete coincidence, since, in a world in which every manuscript copy is unique, the text in version 2 was the original used by the scribe who created the next copy (version 2 + 1). It necessarily follows that any textual corruption in the surviving version (version 2 + x) such as the entry for Buckingham cannot have arisen as the consequence of the addition of Buckingham to version 1. It is not valid therefore to infer from the textual corruption apparent in the earliest surviving version (2 + x) that a secondary insertion of Buckingham was made into version 1 to give version 2. It is significant that the version of the List as we have it (2 + x) includes Buckingham in its rightful place in the

circuit: although the text is corrupted at this point, the order of citation has not been altered.

Brooks' arguments raise other problems. If Buckingham is identified as a later insertion, then Oxford should, from its same 'anomalous' spatial location, be excluded from the original canon, since the two fortresses are positioned on the Mercian side of the boundary with Wessex, which ran along the Thames. In this context it should be remembered that Bath was also a Mercian town. The same set of political circumstances which enabled Alfred to include Bath in the scheme of fortresses for the defence of Wessex must also have allowed him to include Oxford and Buckingham.

The acceptance of the hypothesis of the later insertion of Buckingham into an original document as an isolated piece of updating also raises a number of issues which require an explanation.<sup>149</sup> Firstly, it must be asked why it was updated at all in *c.* 919. Secondly, it must be asked why only one of all the fortresses built by Edward the Elder mentioned in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle in the period 911–17 was included and why all the others were systematically excluded. Thirdly, the fact that Buckingham is included in its rightful place as part of the circuit in the List raises the issue of why this particular grouping of fortresses which included Buckingham, rather than any other, was treated in the document as a unified system. Fourthly, there seems little reason to add an isolated fortress to a document which sets out a system which in 914–19 was already arguably more than 30 years out of date, especially since the new fortress at Buckingham of 914 was part of an entirely different series of Mercian fortresses whose components were constructed over a period of six or seven years. In short, the easy (and usual) assumption that Buckingham is a later addition to an earlier list raises more problems than it provides solutions.

The arguments encapsulate two key strands: either the Burghal Hidage cannot be earlier than 914, the year in which Edward the Elder stayed at Buckingham and built two fortresses (one of them presumably at Buckingham), or Buckingham is an insertion into a largely earlier list. If Buckingham were to be regarded as part of the original scheme, it would, as Brooks has pointed out, be necessary to find 'an appropriate historical explanation' for its inclusion.<sup>150</sup>

In Part I the construction of a fortress at Buckingham was postulated as an essential element in the implementation of the strategy aimed at forcing the two Viking armies from Mercia – the successful outcome of which is documented as occurring in late 879. It was a vital component in the reinforcement of the northern part of the boundary agreed between Alfred and Guthrum which ran east and north of London, behind which the latter's army was arguably forced to retreat at that time. It would have served to reinforce the strategic control of the corridor of Watling Street, one of the principle routes connecting north and east Mercia with London, which

the establishment of this boundary was designed to give to Alfred. It was in an area of eastern Mercia of which Alfred is likely to have taken control at the time as a result of the demise or overthrow of Ceolwulf. Without the establishment of the fortress at Buckingham, Alfred would have found it difficult to have controlled the integrity of the northern part of the boundary which he had established as the western limit of Guthrum's territory in East Anglia. It would, as Alfred Smyth neatly puts it,<sup>151</sup> have been vital to 'holding down a conquered territory'. From this standpoint it ceases to be an anomaly in a list of fortresses drawn up in around 879. Rather, it is this particular time which provides the only plausible context in which Buckingham would have played an essential role in the system of fortresses listed in the Burghal Hidage. Contrary to general opinion, therefore, it is the inclusion of Buckingham in the Burghal Hidage List that provides one of the key factors supporting the origin of both the system and the List in 878–9,<sup>152</sup> but which generates the most problems for the generally-held hypothesis of the origin of the List in the early tenth century.

The question of the origin of Oxford clearly has a bearing on this discussion. If, as is argued by the writer, the area of eastern Mercia represented by the later shires of Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire was taken over by King Alfred in the period before late 879, the siting of a fortress at Oxford at this period would make good tactical sense, not least because of its site at a place where an important north-south routeway crosses the Thames.<sup>153</sup> Recent opinion appears however to be divided on the question of its origin. While there is plenty of evidence to show that Oxford was an important central place from the Middle Saxon period,<sup>154</sup> archaeologists working in the town favour (with some equivocation) an early tenth-century origin for the layout of the fortress,<sup>155</sup> while the present writer has entertained the possibility of its origin as a fortress built as part of an earlier Mercian system by Offa, a century earlier than Alfred.<sup>156</sup> A Mercian context for its construction – by Aethelred and/or Aethelflaed in the late 880s or early 890s – has however recently been put forward by Blair<sup>157</sup> in explanation of the coinage of Alfred, and is an hypothesis also taken up by Reynolds.<sup>158</sup> The archaeological evidence for the construction of the defences<sup>159</sup> shows that it has close similarities to that at Cricklade, where a turf-revetted bank of probably Alfredian origin was replaced by a massive stone wall along the whole length of the front of the bank in arguably the last decade of the ninth century.<sup>160</sup> However, the numismatic evidence, discussed by Blackburn,<sup>161</sup> shows that the mint at Oxford was producing coins at the same time as the celebratory issues produced by Alfred in both London and Gloucester, soon after the Vikings left Mercia in late 879. This implies that Oxford is likely to have been 'refounded' by Alfred as a fortified urban place in spring or early summer of 879 (after the demise of Ceolwulf)

and that it was included with Buckingham within the Wessex system to further Alfred's defensive and offensive strategies against the Vikings in eastern Mercia and in London at the time.

A further reason has been advanced by some writers for placing the origins of the Burghal Hidage in the time-slot of 911–19 is the belief that the only plausible context in which fortresses at Oxford and Buckingham could have been constructed by the West Saxons was the occasion when Edward the Elder took control of the lands belonging to Oxford and London in 910 on the death of Aethelred of Mercia.<sup>162</sup> This seems to miss the point that the context that saw King Alfred in control of the lands to the west of the boundary in Alfred and Guthrum's Treaty also suits the construction of these two fortresses by King Alfred. Even given the traditional dating of the Treaty to 886 (see above) – and it obviously cannot be later than Guthrum's death in 890 – this clearly undermines this line of argument, especially since the Chronicle shows that Alfred was in control of London in 886. The solution offered above is that the control of the area of Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire and the construction of the two fortresses at Oxford and Buckingham by Alfred were necessary preconditions for the signing of the Treaty, and that all of these factors best fit an earlier context of mid to late 879.

### Porchester

The inclusion of Portchester in the original system of Alfredian fortresses has also posed some problems, in that the Roman fortress and its estate were only acquired by the king from the bishop of Winchester in 904. This has been interpreted as being one element in a policy on the part of Edward the Elder to consolidate the defensive arrangements for the south coast against further Viking attack.<sup>163</sup> This does not mean, as both Tait and Stenton have suggested,<sup>164</sup> that it was the first time the Roman fortress at Portchester had been used for this purpose. Since all landowners, including bishops, were liable for military obligations which included fortress work and garrison duty,<sup>165</sup> it would have been perfectly feasible for King Alfred to have required the bishop of Winchester to have put in hand the arrangements for the defence of Portchester without requiring the king to have owned the site himself.<sup>166</sup> It seems likely that this would have been part of some *quid pro quo* for privileges given to the bishop in the division of assets attending the fortification of Winchester, in the manner documented in a similar process at Worcester in the 890s.

### Conclusion

In conclusion, it can be argued that there are no inherent problems in regarding the original version of the List of

the Burghal Hidage as being more or less contemporary with a primary system of fortresses arguably constructed by King Alfred in the period May 878 to August 879. There are, furthermore, some features in it, such as the inclusion of Buckingham and the exclusion of London as well as other early tenth-century fortresses, which positively support this early date for its origin. It is also of some importance that there are two instances where a place mentioned in the Burghal Hidage can be shown to have existed in *c.* 879–80 in a historical context which implies a date of foundation not long before. Evidence has been discussed above for a new mint of King Alfred at Oxford *c.* 879–80, from which a date for the foundation of the urban fortress of around 879 can be reasonably inferred, based on the date that Alfred is likely to have taken control of Mercia. The evidence of the stone inscription of *c.* 880 from a gateway of Shaftesbury has been discussed by Keynes<sup>167</sup> and illustrated by Sturdy.<sup>168</sup> The existence of this stone demonstrates that the gateway was in place by 880 and, using the calculations about the speed of construction of the defences used above, shows that the fortifications were likely to have been constructed in the previous two years. The fact that these two places were an integral part of the unitary system of fortresses constructed in one fairly narrow time slot, supports the hypothesis that the whole system to which these places belong was created at this time.

As Brooks has pointed out the inclusion of Warwick and Worcester in the appendix to version B is a separate issue to the origin and context of the main List itself.<sup>169</sup> The explanation of the fact that the List did not include London or any of the other fortresses of Mercia (except the two in the appendix to version B) lies in the fact that it described a successful system put in place before London was retaken from the Vikings in late 879, and within a context which existed prior to, and which was soon superseded by, the changes in the political, economic and military circumstances in Mercia after this time which mark the development of what Simon Keynes has termed the 'kingdom of the Anglo-Saxons'.<sup>170</sup>

The suggested function of the List follows from this context. It has for a long time been assumed to have been a 'working document' used in Wessex.<sup>171</sup> In this vein Alex Rumble has suggested that it was an official memorandum which was intended for the use of its draftsman or his successors in administration;<sup>172</sup> and David Hill has suggested that it 'may not have arisen for any other purpose than as a stock-taking of the situation and [may] not be linked to a particular crisis or decision'.<sup>173</sup> It could be argued, however, that its purpose was far more significant, and that it was as important to the implementation of Alfred's strategic intentions as was the scheme that it describes. Nicholas Brooks has emphasised the direct connection between the successful enforcement of public defensive works against the Vikings in the ninth-century and the development of royal authority,<sup>174</sup> and Richard Abels

has observed how the construction of the fortresses enhanced the institutional power of the West Saxon Monarchy over its subjects and how they reinforced and regulated the traditional connection between landholding and the military obligation to the Crown.<sup>175</sup> The composition and dissemination of the List can therefore be seen as an essential propaganda exercise, in the sense that its ‘publication’ or circulation would have been an integral aspect of King Alfred’s drive to consolidate his authority and control over his kingdom. Given its strategic significance, already argued above, it would be reasonable to suggest that copies of the List were widely circulated in Wessex,<sup>176</sup> possibly to the ealdormen of all the shires. This would have served to regularise, systematise and disseminate the outcome of a rapidly executed strategy, many elements of which would have had to have been worked out and implemented at a local level.<sup>177</sup> It would also have reinforced both the allegiance of the population as a whole to the processes of royal government, as well as their willingness to participate in the general conscription required for the implementation of the king’s overall strategies.<sup>178</sup>

## APPENDIX A

### The Calculation

These new thoughts on the context of the Burghal Hidage provide the need for a re-evaluation of the context of the Calculation in the Appendix to version A of the Burghal Hidage. It is suggested that the Calculation represents the formalisation of the calculations of the original surveyors who created Alfred’s new burghal system in 878–9, which were then written out as an instructional guide to ensure that all the elements of this system were constructed according to a central plan. This formula therefore determined the way that the lengths of the walls of the chosen sites comprising this system could be supported by the hides available from each shire. As argued above this was then used to determine the manpower resources available to construct and garrison the fortresses. Its character as an instructional ‘ready reckoner’ would have facilitated the setting up and building of the new system by local construction teams who may well not have had continued access to the expertise of the royal Office of Works.

This view is inferred from two significant features of the primary royal site of Winchester in the Burghal Hidage List. Firstly, this has the largest share of hides (apart from Wallingford, significantly on the northern border of Wessex); secondly, its hidage total in the List most nearly matches the length of its defences when calculated by the formula given in the Calculation. It can be inferred from this that Winchester was the model by which the relationships between the wall-length, hidage assessment and the allocation of manpower

resources were determined in Alfred’s new system of fortifications.<sup>179</sup> It follows from this that, once established, this formula (which we might call the ‘Winchester Model Formula’) was then applied to the determination of the sizes of all the other forts in the system, the combined total of which was based on the hides available from each shire, in such a way as to make the fullest use of the finite human resources available for the enterprise. The varying degree of misfits in this relationship in different places in the scheme, pointed out by many commentators,<sup>180</sup> does not alter this conclusion. It means that the number of hides available was the determining factor in the local disposition of the human resources.<sup>181</sup>

The process by which the Winchester Model Formula was worked out can be examined in more detail. There were five different quantities which comprised the factors in the equation: a) wall length, b) hidage assessment, c) the number of men available from each hide, d) the number of men available from the shire, and e) the number of men disposed along each unit length of the wall in their role (it must be supposed) as both builders and defending garrison. In the case of Winchester, the first of these was of course a fixed quantity, and the second, ~~and~~ third and fourth in all probability inherited from earlier times;<sup>182</sup> only the fifth was a potential variable. At Winchester, however, the need to equate or balance all five factors could have only led to one choice – the variable turned out to be four men per pole rather than three or five. The way all these factors dispose themselves into such a neat formula does, however, raise issues as to whether this involved a readjustment of the assessments by Alfred<sup>183</sup> or whether some or all of these factors, and possibly the basis for the formula itself, were inherited from previous centuries. On new sites however, the fifth factor could have been a variable, but the formula established at Winchester determined that the wall lengths were matched to the allocated hides (and therefore the manpower available) to reflect this equation as much as local conditions allowed, with the resulting approximate but uneven correspondence between the two seen in practice.

There are several aspects of the Calculation which give an indication of this context. As has been argued above, the goal of the Calculation appears to have been to establish how many men were needed to defend a wall of a given length. All the five factors, apart from the fourth, mentioned above are contained within the first paragraph of the Calculation, while subsequent paragraphs merely illustrate the same equation for walls of different length. This format is one which would therefore be most appropriate to the stage at which the practicalities of the creation of the new system in 878–9 were worked out by the royal surveyors to provide the optimum number of men to garrison the Roman walls at Winchester. It seems likely that this was then drafted as an ‘instructive ready reckoner’ which not only gave the

number of men who were to be allocated to a given length of wall in all the other fortresses in the new system, but also made it easy to calculate the lengths of wall, and therefore sizes of the fortresses, which could be built and sustained from the often fixed number of hides (and therefore men) available. However, as discussed below, it may well have been that in the subsequent application of the formula to other places there would have been considerably more flexibility in the allocation of available men to sites.

In the context of the creation of this new system by Alfred in 878–9, the Calculation allowed the development of different types of sites in such a way that there was in practice a potential for an accommodation between all the factors, to the end that a workable system of manned fortifications of different types, sizes and functions could be created in a variety of situations in a short space of time.<sup>184</sup> These ended up as a set of best-fit solutions to the exigencies of their particular sites and the available human resources. The fact that only at Winchester was the full complement of four men available for every pole of wall reflects its primacy in Alfred's scheme of things. The other places (apart from Wallingford and Bath) were provided, and were in practice constructed and defended, with fewer men per pole. This inbuilt flexibility would have allowed room for local decisions to be made concerning the exact correspondence between the size of an individual fortress and the fixed number of hides (and therefore men) it was allocated. As Brooks has observed, the figures 'have the appearance of a very mixed bag of individual decisions reflecting differing local administrative needs'.<sup>185</sup>

In summary, the overall picture is complicated by a number of considerations. Firstly, the number of hides for places in the List is greater than the County hidages for most counties, a factor discussed at length by Brooks.<sup>186</sup> This disparity shows that the human resources required to create the system were deployed to meet local needs on the ground in a less than systematic fashion, and, as Brooks suggests, that men assigned to one fort were possibly shared between others as the need arose. Secondly, the same teams of men would have been required not only to garrison the defences but also to construct and repair them, to lay out and construct street systems, bridges, causeways, gateways and other physical components of the fortresses, not to mention finding, chopping and carting wood, and mining and carting stone – the list is almost endless. As well as this the enormous support system required to feed and shelter the workers would have had to have been drawn from the overall totals. The neat equation of men, hides and lengths of defences seems therefore to have been more of the nature of an administrative convenience, if not contrivance, rather than an operational reality. Thirdly, the creation and development of new defended places in the 880s and 890s, referred to above, would have required

their own extra manpower needs over and above the County hidage allocations – although, as suggested above, this could have been achieved by shifting allocations from place to place. Fourthly, the addition of massive stone walls to many (possibly most) of the original fortresses in arguably the 890s would have required another substantial programme of labour conscription based on hidage assessments. All these considerations militate against the temptation to propose neat solutions to the problems faced by the administrators of these public works in finding men to do the job, and suggest that there was far more operational flexibility than the figures given in the List might suggest. This being so, the neat notion of men being strung out along the defences at a spacing of four (or in most cases fewer) per pole does not reflect the reality of the situation as it must have been on the ground. It is also one reason for suggesting that the resources of the inhabitants of those places which were set up as permanent settlements with 'urban' pretensions were called into service as a condition of their tenure of burgages to make up any numbers represented by the shortfall, and why the small forts without an established or sustainable population would have had a comparatively short life.

From a logical or methodological viewpoint, this also means that because there was in practice no exact or standard correspondence in any of the fortresses between wall-length and resources. Inferences about the presence or absence of defences in any place, or of the exact courses of defensive circuits, cannot be made by reference to the strict equations between the various factors in this model alone. The archaeological and/or topographical and field evidence must always be a determining factor.<sup>187</sup> It is not therefore a valid reason for arguing the absence of defences on the river sides of for instance Christchurch and Wareham. The danger of this approach is demonstrated with reference to the circuit at Christchurch, where the interpretation of archaeological evidence is based on assumptions about the close match between the Burghal Hidage figures and the length and location of the defences as actually built. On the east and south sides the absence of defences has been inferred from the shortfall in the Burghal Hidage figures,<sup>188</sup> and the archaeological evidence for the existence of defences on the east side has been interpreted by the excavator as post-dating the Burghal Hidage (in this case after *c.* 919) with this assumption in mind.<sup>189</sup> However, in the writer's view both the primary Alfredian timber-revetted defences and their strengthening by a stone wall as on the western side can be reasonably inferred from the archaeological evidence to have existed along the eastern side of the defended enclosure.<sup>190</sup> Hill's statement that 'the excavations confirmed the Burghal Hidage prediction.'<sup>191</sup> cannot be sustained, because the excavations have arguably invalidated the prediction derived from the figures in the Burghal Hidage, in that the length of the original defences appears to have been considerably

greater than is indicated by the application of the general formula to the number of hides allocated to it.<sup>192</sup>

This begs the question as to the precise stage at which both the List and the Calculation as we have them were created in the practicalities of the setting up of the working system both in the minds of the surveyors – its conception – and in the dissemination of the formula to facilitate the construction of the individual fortresses in this system – its implementation. This was very much a multi-stage process rather than an event, even though perhaps telescoped by the urgency of the circumstances which brought it into being. It has been argued above that the List is not a prescriptive planning brief but rather the record of a system already in place, a conclusion based on the observation of the logical order in which the fortresses are described in the List, and the inference from this that the List therefore sets out a unitary system with a single strategic aim. If this is so, the original of the Calculation – or at least its formulaic first paragraph – could therefore be earlier in origin than the final composition of the List, since the establishment of the formula would have been an essential preliminary to the choice of suitable sites by the surveyors of the royal Office of Works of a size and type which fitted the local topography, the strategic requirements of the system as a whole, the manning needs for each site, and the availability of manpower resources within each shire. This in turn raises the question as to whether either was ‘issued’ or circulated separately. That the Calculation survived in combination with the List in one document (version A of the Burghal Hidage) must be a reflection of the fact that it supplemented the information in the List and aided its understanding as a working document. This being so, the List could well have been first issued in its logically ordered sequence as a general instruction to all the shire ealdormen to tell them how many men were available with the fixed hidage resources of their shire (even though these were in most cases rather inflated) and how these were to be allocated for each of the sites in the system. The actual length of wall on some of the smaller sites could therefore in some cases have been local decisions as to what it was possible to do in the time available and with the manpower from the allocated hidage assessment. However, the fact that the List contains information which could only have come from the analysis of information from a detailed assessment or survey of the topography and other factors relating to each site, combined with the variable relationship between allocated hides and wall length, implies that there was a dynamic interplay between the directive originating at the centre and the realities of the operational situation on the ground.

These considerations serve to emphasise the nature of the List as the statement of a *system*, conceived at one point in time to fulfil definite strategic aims, worked out in terms of realistic and achievable means, and imple-

mented over a short period. This view is also at variance with current assumptions which see the List as being assembled from results collected from the shires, in the manner of a census return, by a compiler<sup>193</sup> – perhaps an inevitable outcome of the premise that the List was written in the early tenth century. The arguments made above suggest that the List was, on the contrary, formulated by the royal Office of Works and sent out to the shires – a view which presupposes the existence of multiple copies from the start.

The whole process would have involved a complex inter-reaction of the various factors, since the determination of the sites and their distribution and grouping of the sites to form the system as a whole would have required the matching of their location, siting, sizes, details of their layout, and their intended function (urban or non-urban, or with temporary or permanent inhabitants) to the availability of manpower (determined roughly by the hides available from each of the shires), so that all of them both separately and together met the specific and general strategic needs which the creation of the system was designed to address. Rather than seeing both the Calculation, and then the List, as a general descriptive summing-up of the situation when everything was in place and completed, the creation of both at some point (or points) during this process would explain both the form of the List, which only allocates hides to sites without mentioning wall-lengths, as well as the prescriptive and instructional aspects of the Calculation. Whatever the precise sequence, the existence of both the List and the Calculation are testimony to the overriding controlling force of the royal Office of Works, presumably at Winchester. Some one person, who no doubt had the king’s ear, must have been responsible for the extraordinarily difficult and complex task of balancing all the varying factors mentioned above to create a system which was both effective in addressing the strategic needs of the moment as well as being workable in practice, and for disseminating best-practice instructions to the local administration in the shires.

It seems a reasonable inference that the List and Calculation in combination were also used to determine the principles which governed the layout of subsequent fortresses built, as argued above, in the 880s and 890s. The reorganisation of local resources to facilitate the new defensive arrangements at this time must still have required the active cooperation of the reeves, ealdormen and thegns, and indeed the population as a whole, in each of the shires. There seems every reason for regarding this programme of reorganisation, and the strengthening of old earth and timber defences with stone walls, as a development of the practical arrangements, in terms of the conscription of the population and the distribution of the workforce, which created the original system itself. In short, the Burghal Hidage and the Calculation were not merely idle memos recorded by a tidy-minded clerk

and consigned to the ‘file-it’ tray in the royal Office of Works. The two, either separately or together, were arguably significant instruments in the practical implementation of a redevelopment programme which was centralised, highly organised and wide-ranging, and which showed the capacity to develop organically, to reflect changing circumstances and perhaps more developed strategic thinking, as well as being an important instrument of royal propaganda. Of all the non-archaeological sources available, the two documents together perhaps bring us closest to the way by which the means to create an effective defence against the Vikings was matched to the actual physical and human resources of the kingdom. Both the Calculation and the List therefore have important social, economic as well as strategic implications for any view of the development of Alfred’s authority and control over his kingdom.

## Notes

1. Keynes 1998a.
2. Maddicott 1989; Blackburn 1998.
3. Abels 1988; Peddie 1999.
4. Smyth 1995; Abels 1998.
5. Keynes 2001, 44–5, 57–62.
6. Keynes and Lapidge 1983, 171–2.
7. Dumville 1992a.
8. Keynes 1998a, 31–4.
9. ASC *sa* 878; Whitelock 1979.
10. Asser, ch. 58; Keynes and Lapidge 1983.
11. Smyth 1995, 55–7.
12. Keynes 1998a, 33; 2001, 45–8.
13. See the detailed chronology suggested in Appendix A. The wording of the Treaty is somewhat equivocal, and the implications for this chronology not at all clear.
14. Keynes 1998a, 31–4; Keynes 2001, 45; Abels 1998, 163–4; Charles-Edwards 1998, 56.
15. Margeson 1996; Rogerson 1998. See also Haslam 1984c.
16. E.g. Whitelock 1979, 31; Smyth 1995, 92.
17. Loyn 1977, 59; Smyth 1995, 85–92.
18. Darvill and Gerrard 1994, 90–1.
19. Vince 1990, 83–4 and fig. 42.
20. Asser, ch. 58; Keynes and Lapidge 1983.
21. Whitelock 1977, 13.
22. Whitelock 1977, 9.
23. Whitelock 1979, 31.
24. Charles Edwards 1998, 49.
25. Smyth 1995, 87.
26. Abels 1998, 163, 175.
27. ASC *sa* 880–85; Smyth 1995, 101–16; Charles-Edwards 1998.
28. Keynes 1998a, 7–13.
29. Hart 1992, 115–25.
30. *Ibid.*, 125.
31. Abels 1998, 152.
32. Haslam 1997.
33. The existence of this boundary has been discussed more fully by the writer (Haslam 1997, 118–23). The writer recognises today however that the inference of its existence as a political reality is rather more speculative than was perhaps originally thought.
34. Haslam 1997, 119.
35. Gelling 1992, 128.
36. In the discussion of the boundary of the Treaty the writer has pointed out (*ibid.*, 121 and Fig. 5) the artificial nature of its northern half, which follows no natural features between the source of the Lea and the Ouse at Bedford. This implies that it was set out not so much to define a discrete area of land, but rather to give to Alfred control of the maximum length possible of the strategic corridor of Watling Street as it approached London. This should be clear from the map (Fig. 2).
37. Blackburn 1998; Keynes 1998a, 15–18.
38. Keynes 1998a, 16.
39. Blackburn 1998, 117–20.
40. *Ibid.*, 119–20.
41. *Ibid.*, 120.
42. Keynes 1998a, 17–18.
43. Dumville 1992, 7 n. 37; Keynes 1998a, 13–14 and n. 54.
44. The timing of this can be inferred from the likely sequence of subsequent events. Guthrum’s army must have travelled to East Anglia at the latest by the end of October 879 (880 in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle) in order to avoid too much autumnal bad weather, but after the harvest in Mercia. They must therefore have concluded the agreement recorded in the Treaty by the end of August. In order to finally pin them down, Alfred would have had to have put in place the construction of fortresses at Oxford and Buckingham (see further below). In view of the commanding presence of the Vikings in Mercia after the Partition, he is unlikely to have been able to do this before taking charge of at least central Mercia after Ceolwulf’s death. The latter event must therefore have taken place in the spring of 879 – say March or April. This would have still given Alfred time to have substantially completed the rest of the system of fortresses in Wessex, which gave him the strategic leverage he needed to dictate terms to the Vikings.
45. Dumville regards it as a coincidence that Ceolwulf’s reign ‘ended in the year in which Alfred’s triumph had revolutionised the political situation’ (1992, 7 n. 37). It must be said, however, that invoking coincidence is not an explanation. The alternative is, as here, to recognise cause and effect, and to acknowledge that it was as a direct result of Ceolwulf’s death – whether assisted or not – that Alfred was able to turn the tide of events in Mercia to his advantage. Richard Abels has suggested (1998, 146) that ‘Alfred had taken advantage of Burgred’s deposition to extend his control over London and parts of eastern Mercia, or even that Ceolwulf had allowed this as the price for Alfred’s ‘friendship’.
46. Wormald 1982, 149.
47. Brooks 1979, 17–20.
48. Biddle and Hill 1971; Biddle 1973, 251; Biddle 1976, 273 and n. 7.

## Acknowledgements

This paper, in one or another of its various drafts, has been read by several people, including David Hinton, Nicholas Brooks, Simon Keynes and Richard Abels, for whose comments I am most grateful. In the two parts of this paper the writer uses the neutral term ‘fortress’, rather than *burh*, to describe the fortified sites of the period, following the comments on the matter by David Hill and Alex Rumble (1996, 3) – notwithstanding the pertinent comments of Martin Biddle that many of these places were not merely fortresses but fortified towns (1996a, 124 and n. 197).

49. Keynes and Lapidge 1983, 23–5; 212, n. 16; 340, n. 6.
50. Hill 1969; Hill 1981, 86.
51. Brooks 1996b, 129.
52. Haslam 1984b, 111–17. It must be born in mind that Bath was also a Mercian town, situated on the northern side of the river Avon which at the time formed the border between Mercia and Wessex. The Abbey, for instance, with a 100 hides to the north of the Avon, had strong associations with Offa, and Burgred of Mercia held court there with his Queen Aethelwith (King Alfred's sister) in 864. See Manco 1998 for further references, and Aston 1986.
53. Wainwright 1960; Haslam 1984b, 106–10; Haslam 2003.
54. Brooks 1964, 74–81; Astill 1984, 63.
55. Astill 1984, 61.
56. Aldsworth and Hill 1971; O'Connell and Poulton 1984, 43, 46.
57. Keene 2003, 144.
58. E.g. Biddle and Hudson 1973, 23; Keynes and Lapidge 1983, 266, n. 200; Keynes 1998a, 24, 26–7, n.119. The existence of a fortress at Southwark associated with the bridge in the ninth century is questioned by Tony Dyson (1990, 110, n. 57) on the premise that the composition of the Burghal Hidage document could well be earlier than the foundation of the fortresses it lists. He suggests that the uniqueness of the name in the document implies that it was a 'paper expression ... earmarking a proposed *burh* fortress on a hitherto unnamed site whose future construction and maintenance was to be the responsibility of the men of Surrey.' Reasons are given in the second part of this paper for rejecting the notion that the Burghal Hidage was merely a prescriptive planning brief; rather, it is likely to describe a system which was already in the process of construction, and which therefore included Southwark.
59. Hassall and Hill 1970; Brooks 1979, 17–20; Haslam 1983; 1984a; 1987a; 1987b.
60. Hassall 1987; Blair 1994, 87–92.
61. Blackburn 1998, 111; 2003, 214.
62. In an earlier paper the writer pointed out that the construction by Edward the Elder of two fortresses when he stayed at Buckingham in 914 (one of them presumably at Buckingham itself and the other at Newport Pagnell) was one of the first actions of his campaign against the East Anglian Vikings after 911 (Haslam 1997). It was argued that this was part of a strategy to consolidate control over the vital Watling Street corridor into London. Precisely the same strategy is shown by the initial construction of a fortress at Buckingham in 879, in consolidating Alfred's hold over the Watling Street corridor which he gained in the terms of his Treaty with Guthrum. An analysis of the Roman road network in the vicinity of Buckingham is given in Baines 1985.
63. Keynes and Lapidge 1983, 25, 212, n. 16.
64. Radford 1972; Haslam 1972; 1984b, 106–10; 2003.
65. Haslam 2003, Part 1 > Period 0–1 > Intra-mural walkway, Figs 8 and 8a.
66. Haslam 2003, Part 1 > Period 0–1 > The bank, Figs 8 and 8a.
67. This is a particularly generous estimate compared with Abels' estimate of 120,000 man-hours of labour – approximately 20,000 working days – for the construction of the rather larger fortress at Wallingford (1998, 206). On the assumption that four men could have built four cubic metres of bank in a day – the basis of Abels' estimate (pers. comm.) – the total time estimated above for the construction of the defences at Cricklade would have been halved.
68. Haslam 1997, 114–8.
69. Brookes 1971, 84.
70. Brooks 1979, 17–20.
71. Abels 1988, 79–80 and passim; Abels 1998, 208–9.
72. Brooks 1979, 17–20.
73. The psychological, social and religious factors in the dynamics of the interplay of the perceived threat of Viking attack and the motivation for work on the public fortifications are emphasised in no uncertain terms by Asser himself (ch. 91), (see Abels 1988, 75–8).
74. Abels 1998, 208.
75. Keynes has aptly remarked (1998, 20) that the reference to Ceolwulf as a 'foolish king's thegn' in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle 'could have arisen from a desire in Alfredian court circles to justify a turn of events which had ousted Ceolwulf from power'. Ceolwulf was dismissed in death as he was in life. There are, however, grounds for interpreting these events in a way which is rather different to the picture presented in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle. This alternative scenario would suggest that the Viking exploits in Mercia and Wessex were instigated and facilitated, if not actually controlled, by Ceolwulf – in effect, that the Vikings were used by Ceolwulf as mercenaries.
76. Blackburn 1998, 120–2.
77. Archibald 1991, 286.
78. Blackburn 1998, 120; 2003.
79. Blackburn 1998, 121, 122.
80. Keynes 1998, 19ff.
81. Keynes 1998, 27.
82. *Ibid.* See also pertinent comments in Keene 2003.
83. E.g. Stenton 1971, 259.
84. Keynes and Lapidge 1983, 190.
85. Haslam 1997. This inference of Aethelred's responsibility for the defence of eastern Mercia from a base in London has also been made by Tony Dyson (1990, 102).
86. ASC *sa*; Whitelock 1979.
87. For an edition, translation and in-depth discussion of both the Burghal Hidage and the Calculation, readers are referred to the various essays in Hill and Rumble 1996.
88. Hill 1969; Hill 1981, 86.
89. Hinton 1996; Brooks 1996b.
90. The strength of this point seems to have been missed by a number of writers on the subject. Keynes refers in several places to the fortresses in the Burghal Hidage List being a series, with Shaftesbury belonging 'among the earliest in the series' (1999a, 38) and Southwark perhaps built a few years later (1993, 24, 26–7 n. 119). Brooks refers on more than one occasion to the addition of fortresses at varying times to an original group, which may or may not therefore have constituted a system in the sense used here (eg. 1964, 86–7; 1996a, 90), as well as to the suggestion that possibly most of the fortresses had anyway been in existence since the 850s (1996b, 129). In his rather brief discussion of the Burghal system, John Peddie has also recently made the same assumptions. He not only regards the fortresses at Cricklade and Wallingford, somewhat inconsistently, as being in existence in the early 870s (1999, 83, 87–8, 127–8, 151), but also sees Southwark as being built after Alfred's assumption of control of London in 886 (*ibid.*, 166). Hill and Rumble however emphasise that the Burghal Hidage 'demonstrates that, at a fixed point in time, thirty-three sic places in southern England were fortified, maintained and defended as part of a coherent national system' (Hill and Rumble 1996, 2). But in a later piece Hill seems to have lost sight of this important conclusion by advancing an extreme version of the gradualist approach in suggesting that '... it would be unsafe to assume that all the burhs listed in the Burghal Hidage of c. 919 were built by Alfred. Some were built before his reign, some known from his reign did not survive to be recorded, and some were founded after his death' (2003, 233). This is clearly based on the questionable premise that the date at which certain fortresses are first mentioned in documents (such as Bath, Christchurch and Portchester – Buckingham being omitted) signifies the dates of their construction. This extreme view is also held by Dodd (2003, 19–20). Lastly, Barbara Yorke has concluded that the Burghal Hidage List 'does not relate to just one campaign of building', and that 'the idea of a defensive circuit around Wessex may only have evolved gradually' (1995, 116, 121) – suggestions apparently made on the basis of the premise of the later inclusion of Buckingham and Portchester to an earlier list.
91. Excepting of course the possibility that some places may have been left out in both surviving versions through scribal errors.

92. E.g. Dodgson 1996, 99.
93. Brooks 1964, 81–6; Brooks 1996b, 137.
94. Davison 1972.
95. F. Kitchen has suggested the identification of *Eorpeburnan* with Rye in east Sussex (Kitchen 1984). This is supported by further work by the writer, who will argue that Rye originated as a late Saxon planned and fortified urban settlement. As a working hypothesis it is suggested that *Eorpeburnan* may be identified either with Rye or, more probably, with an unknown fortress of which Rye was the urban successor, and Castle Toll in Kent identified with the half-finished fortress stormed by the Vikings in 892, but that *Eorpeburnan* cannot be identified with the latter fortress. It is however possible that Castle Toll could have been in Sussex in the late 9th century, in which case it seems most likely that this can be identified with *Eorpeburnan*. I am grateful to Roland Harris for discussing this with me.
96. E.g. Hinton 1996; Brooks 1996b.
97. Whitelock 1979, 187–91.
98. Keynes 1993b, 128–30.
99. Smyth 1995, 141–2.
100. Figures are based on Table 4:5 in Brooks 1996a, 88. See note 103 below.
101. Brooks 1996b, 144–5.
102. Haslam 1984a, 262–7, 276–9.
103. These places include *Eorpeburnan*, suggested above (n. 95) as being a fort replaced by Rye; Burpham, possibly replaced by Arundel; Clausentum, replaced by Southampton; Chisbury, replaced by Marlborough (Haslam 1984b, 94–102); Brydian, replaced by Bridport; Halwell replaced by Totnes; Hlidan, a small fort at Lifton, replaced by Lydford (Hill 1996d, 209); Pilton replaced by Barnstaple; a fort in a hillfort above Watchet replaced by Watchet; Lyng (a bulwark for Athelney) possibly a fort at Athelney being replaced by Lyng itself; Sashes, possibly replaced by Staines; and Eashing replaced by Guildford. These will be discussed by the writer at a later date. The arguments in this paper, in this and other paragraphs, are contrary to views put forward in a recent paper by David Hill (2000) about the origins of towns in the tenth century and their relationship to those listed in the Burghal Hidage. Hill postulates a period of urban formation in the reign of Athelstan, in the late 920s or 930s, in which some of the small forts mentioned in the Burghal Hidage were replaced by defended urban places on new sites. This phase saw the creation of such places as Barnstaple, Totnes and Guildford in Wessex, replacing respectively Pilton, Halwell and Eashing, and the creation of other new towns on Roman sites such as Exeter, Dorchester and Ilchester. This view was first put forward in Hill's paper of 1969, and has been repeated subsequently by other writers (e.g. Biddle 1976a, 131; Abels 1988, 69; Brooks 1996b, 137). A detailed examination of Hill's thesis will be set out by the writer elsewhere. Its basic premise is that the Burghal Hidage represents the situation existing in Wessex in c. 919. Any developments in town formation which appear to supersede the arrangements described in the Burghal Hidage must therefore be later than this date. The arguments developed in this paper, that the Burghal Hidage belongs in its entirety to c. 879, removes the primary support of Hill's thesis. Another premise relied upon by Hill is that evidence of the beginning of minting at a centre or centres is taken to be evidence for the supposition that a place or group of places was brought into being at this time. This is however, potentially only a record of the bringing into being of new mints, not of towns newly formed to accommodate these new mints. Similarly, the laws of Athelstan implying the existence of many small market towns governed by Port Reeves (*ibid.*, 14–5) says much about the situation in the time of the laws, but nothing about the origin of these places.
- Hill argues, furthermore, that this phase of urban foundation, which is considered contemporary with the creation of many new mints, was driven by economic and trading considerations. One of the objections to this thesis is that the topography, siting and layout of all Hill's examples – and of others as well – indicate that defence was a primary driving factor. For instance, the fortified sites of Totnes and Barnstaple, replacing the small forts of Pilton and Halwell are sited to command defensive bridges on major estuaries. The context of their creation is therefore more appropriate to the late ninth (or possibly the early tenth century) than to the period of relative peace from the 930s onwards.
104. Brooks 1971; Abels 1988, 72.
105. Haslam 1984, 262–7.
106. Hill 2000, see note 103 above.
107. Haslam 1984, 252–6, 259–67.
108. Maddicot 1989, 14–17; Blackburn 1998.
109. Asser ch. 91. E.g. Keynes and Lapidge 1983, 23–5; 212, n. 16.
110. Abels 1988, 69.
111. E.g. Smyth 1995, 68; Brookes 1996b, 131.
112. Nicholas Brooks (1996b, 129) infers from this that 'some, perhaps most, of the West Saxon Boroughs in the Burghal Hidage had been having their defences built or repaired by customary annual labour services since the 850s'. Brooks' view begs the question as to the circumstances in which these fortresses were built in this early period, whether they formed a system in the sense that the Alfredian fortresses would have constituted a system with a single strategic goal, and what enemy this system of fortresses were designed to guard against. That most of the components of the system described in the Burghal Hidage just did not exist as fortified and garrisoned places earlier than the period 878–9 would appear to be demonstrated by the rather ad hoc method of warfare against the Vikings conducted by Alfred himself in the earlier 870s, and by the specific strategic intentions which can be inferred from the siting of some of them which only fit the circumstances of the period 878–9. Seemingly in contrast to the view expressed above, Brooks however suggests that the construction of the fortresses in Devon 'should be attributed to the years following 878' (*ibid.*, 141). See also further discussion of the existence of forts of the Burghal Hidage earlier than 878–9 by David Hill (2003, 222–3, 229–33).
113. Haslam 2003 > Part 3 > Discussion – the historical setting > Period 2A > the historical context.
114. The geographical spread of these fortresses in Wessex, and the similarities in the stratigraphic relationship of the new stone walls to the primary defences, shows that this phase of refurbishment was the result of a policy aimed at the general renewal of the defences of all the fortresses in Wessex. It is estimated that the labour involved in the construction of the wall at Cricklade would have been in the same order of magnitude as that involved in the initial construction of the defensive system as a whole (Haslam 2003 > Part 3 > Period 2 / Period 2A). In this report the writer is somewhat equivocal about the dating of the added stone walls at Cricklade and these other fortresses in Wessex, suggesting in some places a context in the early tenth century (Haslam 2003 > Part 3 > Discussion – the historical setting > Period 2A > the historical context, and *passim*). On further reflection the most likely historical context for the addition of these stone walls is seen as the early 890s, as part of a general reorganisation of the defences of Wessex during this period, perhaps in response to the new Viking raids. As with the initial construction of the defensive system in the period 878–9, the social organisation and motivation to undertake this massive project would have been greatly facilitated – indeed motivated – by the imminent threat of Viking assault after 893. This interpretation in fact makes more sense of the archaeological observations at Cricklade in particular. The new stone defences at Cricklade show close similarities in both construction and scale to the added stone walls at Hereford. While this evidence cannot be discussed in detail here, it seems that the various phases in the defensive sequence (stage 2 – construction of timber-framed earth rampart, dated to the late ninth or early tenth century; and stage 3 – refurbishment with stone walls, dated to the first half of the tenth century) (Shoemith 1982, 73, 76–82; 1992) could be an exact

- parallel in terms of both date and physical characteristics. It would not be inconsistent with the archaeological evidence to suggest that the stage 2 defences were constructed soon after Alfred took over the control of Mercia in 880, serving the purpose, amongst others, of reinforcing his overlordship of the Welsh kingdoms, and that the stage 3 reinforcements and refurbishments with stone belongs to the period of renewed Viking hostilities in the 890s. This also seems likely to be the most appropriate context for the addition of the stone wall to the earth and timber defences of Oxford (Durham *et al.* 1983, 14–18), which the writer has argued in the first part of this paper was part of the scheme of the defence of greater Wessex in 878–9. The defences of both Oxford and Hereford were therefore arguably strengthened as part of an overall policy for the defence of Mercia as a whole. The addition of the stone walls to the defences of the fortresses in both Wessex and Mercia, both of which can be reasonably ascribed to the 890s, indicates the existence of a realistic and practical policy on the part of King Alfred – by this time the ruler of the extended and unified ‘kingdom of the Anglo-Saxons’ covering former Wessex and Mercia (Keynes 2001, 44–5 and 57–62). This policy ensured that the whole of this enlarged kingdom was adequately protected against the new Viking threat in the 890s. This context also fits the documentary evidence of the provision of defences at Worcester at this time (Whitelock 1979, 540–1).
115. Abels 1998, 215–8. See also comments by Brooks on the significance of the Worcester charter of the 890s (1996b, 143–4).
  116. Hinton 1996, 153–4.
  117. Keen 1984, 234; Hill 1996d, 192–3; Brooks 1996b, n. 32, 147–8.
  118. For the ‘mural mansions’ of Oxford, see Brooks 1996b, 142–3. Tait has pointed out (1936, 19, n. 1) that a distinct class of permanent residents in the *burhs* became a feature of the wars of the 890s. He goes on to suggest (*ibid.*, 21) that the duty of repairing the walls at Worcester fell upon the inhabitants of the newly-created *burh*, and that ‘the military connexion between the hides and the *burh* were confined to personal service when required’. From a logistic point of view, however, the fortifications and other physical components of the new *burh* can only have been constructed by levies raised on the 1200 hides, in order to supply the physical framework in which the inhabitants and the market (the port) were then established. If Tait is correct, the long-term maintenance of the defences was the remit of the inhabitants themselves. That the manning requirements for places such as Winchester were provided in part by settlers in the nascent urban communities has recently been argued by Brooks (2003, 160–2). For a discussion of the hides allocated to Exeter, see Brooks 1996b, 138–41.
  119. This flexibility of distribution has been suggested by Brooks as applying to the construction of the original fortresses of the Burghal Hidage (2003, 160–2). In this context the arguments indicating that the defences of Cricklade could well have been laid out and constructed in a few months means that there would have been labour to spare in succeeding years for both garrison duty and for the ongoing development and consolidation of the physical and other elements of the townscape.
  120. Brooks 1979, 20.
  121. E.g. Dumville 1992, 24–7; Smyth 1995, 135; Hill 1996a.
  122. Hill and Rumble 1996, 1. This consensus is further emphasised by Hill and Rumble, who go on to say (*ibid.*, 2) that most scholars would appear to have settled for a date of 914 or some small period of time later for the origin of the document. The subliminal text appears to be that those who disagree with this consensus are very much out on a limb. Hill’s paper in the same volume (Hill 1996a) explicitly sets out to reinforce this consensus by charting its development.
  123. E.g. Keynes 1998 n. 119, 26–7; Brooks 1996b, 137–8.
  124. This paradigm is reinforced by discussions of the date of the Burghal Hidage by both David Dumville and Alfred Smyth (Dumville 1992, 24–27; Smyth 1995, 135). Patrick Wormald, however, has suggested that the Burghal Hidage ‘may well date to Alfred’s reign’, and specifically to before 886 (1982, 152–3). A tentative dissenting viewpoint is also put forward by Keynes, who has suggested (without further analysis of its implications) that the Burghal Hidage ‘might ... reflect a position in the 880s, with the network of fortresses conceived within the political context of the “Kingdom of the Anglo-Saxons”’ (1999, 76). One of the main theses of this paper however is that the system of fortresses was conceived within the context of the ‘new’ kingdom of Wessex – after the battle of Edington in early 878, but before the enlarged ‘kingdom of the Anglo-Saxons’ which emerged under Alfred after late 879. In other words, the creation of the fortress system was arguably the cause rather than the consequence of these political developments.
  125. Abels 1988, 75.
  126. Hill 1969, 92; Biddle and Hill 1971; Biddle 1976, 126; Hill 1996c; Hill 2001.
  127. Hill 1996c, 96.
  128. *Ibid.*
  129. *Ibid.*, 96–7.
  130. Whitelock 1979, 540–1.
  131. Hill 2001, 158.
  132. Brooks 1971.
  133. Whitelock 1979, 540–1.
  134. Brooks 1996b; Hinton 1996.
  135. A further consideration, which is not discussed by Hill, is that the Mercian Register records the building of other *burhs* by Aethelflaed which were not shire towns (e.g. Bremesbyrig 910, Bridgenorth 912, Scergeat 912, Tamworth 913, Eddisbury 914, Chirbury, Wardbyrig and Runcorn 915). All of these (and there is no reason to suppose this a complete list of fortresses built in this period) must have needed hidage assessments to determine the manpower required for their construction and garrisoning. Not only would these assessments have been established before Edward was supposed to have caused the shiring of Mercia (and before the Burghal Hidage is supposed to have been composed to work out these and other hidages); but these assessments would also have been required to have continued in force, whether or not the Shire fortresses were reassessed, while these fortresses were continuing their defensive functions into the 930s. Nicholas Brooks has given a salutary warning (1996a, 91–2) that the figures for Warwick and Worcester do not belong to the Burghal Hidage, and should not be used in any discussion about its origin or purpose.
  136. Abels 1988, 75; Hill 1996c, 93.
  137. Hill 1996c, 93.
  138. Hill 1996c, 93.
  139. Nicholas Brooks also appears to accept the proposition that the temporary forts only passed out of use when the military crisis eased in the 920s (1996b, 137), but see above in n. 103.
  140. The only exception is the paper by Professor Davis (1982), in which he posits (without any further discussion) a date in the 880s for its foundation. As Brooks has pointed out, Davis’s suggestion that Buckingham was recaptured from Viking control in 914 is mistaken.
  141. Whitelock 1979, 33.
  142. Haslam 1997, 125 n. 23.
  143. Brooks 1964, 86.
  144. Brooks 1964, 86–7.
  145. Brooks 1996a, 90.
  146. *Ibid.*
  147. *Ibid.*
  148. Rumble 1996a, 38.
  149. Brooks 1996a, 90.
  150. *Ibid.*, 89.
  151. Smyth 1995, 139.
  - 152 This is a predictive, and therefore a testable, hypothesis. Until such time as late ninth century defences at Buckingham have been disproved by excavation, the probability that there were must be allowed – even if it is not fully accepted.

153. Blair 1994, 87–92; Dodd 2003, 13–16.
154. *Ibid.*
155. E.g. Hassall 1986, 116; 1987, 15; Durham *et al.* 1983; Durham 1994, 482; Dodd 2003, 21–3, 31–2.
156. Haslam 1987a.
157. Blair 1994, 99–10.1
158. Reynolds 1999, 90–1; Dodd 2003, 31–2. However, the most recent discussion on this matter by Dodd (*ibid.*) takes into account neither the early date for the Burghal Hidage which is argued in this paper, nor the existence of the coin minted in Oxford which is contemporary with the London and Gloucester Monogram coins of c.880, nor the fact of the extension of Alfred's dominion over Mercia very soon after 879, rather than after 886, to form the 'Kingdom of the Anglo-Saxons'.
159. Hassall 1987, 17; Blair 1994, 148–9; Durham *et al.* 1983.
160. Haslam 2003, Part 1 >Period 2; Part 3 >Period 2.
161. Blackburn 1998, 111.
162. ASC, *sa*; Whitelock 1979; Chadwick 1905, 204–19; a view repeated by Robertson (1939, 49), and more recently by Hassall (1986, 116) and Smyth (1995, 135).
163. Fleming 1985; Dumville 1992.
164. Stenton 1971, 265. Tait has suggested (1936, 18 and n. 4) that while Buckingham and Portchester may be seen as 'anachronisms', both may have had earlier origins. He remarks that, 'Portchester, though belonging to the see of Winchester, may, like Episcopal Worcester, have been fortified in the public interest under Alfred.' The view that the creation of a fortress at Portchester cannot be earlier than 904 has however been reiterated recently by Hill (2003, 233).
165. Brooks 1971.
166. This point has also been made for instance by both Nicholas Brooks (1964, 87 n. 50) and David Hinton (1977, 32.)
167. 1998, 38, ns. 41 and 43.
168. Sturdy 1995, 189.
169. Brooks 1996a, 90–1.
170. It could however reflect the fact that London, like Kent, was assessed as a separate entity. An important element in the arguments presented here, however, is that London was probably removed from Alfred's direct control in the summer of 877, was certainly out of his hands by the middle of 878 on the arrival of the Viking army at Fulham and was only regained by him in late 879. By this time the system of fortresses described in the Burghal Hidage had (it is argued here) already been put in place, and the document written and circulated.
171. E.g. Brownhill 1911, 2–3.
172. Rumble 1996b, 69.
173. Hill 1996c, 96.
174. Brooks 1971, 84.
175. Abels 1998, 208.
176. With probably a lost introductory sentence – as suggested by Rumble (1996b, 69).
177. Brooks 1996b, 133. David Hill refers to the figures as having been collected or returned from the shires, rather than being determined at the centre and sent out (1996b, 80–1) – a premise in line with his thesis that the figures were only compiled in c.919.
178. Brooks describes the social and other aspects of this conscription (1979, 17–20), and Abels has pointed out how the system, which was 'extraordinarily expensive in execution', required 'the creation of a sophisticated and effective administrative system' for its upkeep (1988, 74).
179. This argument has also been suggested by David Hinton (1996, 156) and Alex Rumble (1996b, 71) and alluded to by Nicholas Brooks (1996b, 130) – although in all these cases without further discussion.
180. E.g. Brooks 1996b, 129–32.
181. A Winchester origin for the Calculation is also indicated by the use of the OE *ymbgang*, 'circumference' – see Rumble 1996b, 71.
182. Brookes 1996b, 129–30.
183. This suggestion has been entertained for instance by Brooks 1996b, 132–3.
184. The varieties are described in Biddle 1996a: Roman, where the circuit already existed; new urban fortresses, with ordered internal layouts; and small forts on awkward sites, perhaps not built for permanent habitation.
185. Brooks 1996a, 131. The exception to this relationship is Bath, where more hides were provided than the formula required. This exception therefore proves the rule: the situation only arose because the length of the Roman walls was fixed. The extent of local autonomy in the laying out of the fortresses can however be over-emphasised. It is clear from the regular layout of Cricklade that there must have been a considerable degree of central control in its construction by surveyors from the royal Office of Works from the start (Haslam 1986). The ways in which the layout of streets and other internal features follows regular patterns in these places (eg. Biddle and Hill 1971) also points to the same conclusion.
186. Brooks 1996b, 129–38; 2003, 158–62.
187. These reservations have also been made by Nicholas Brooks (1996a, 129–32), and re-emphasised in his more recent paper (2003, 158 n.19).
188. Hill 1983, 22–7; Hill 1996b, 85–6; Hill 1996c, 198–9.
189. Davies 1983, 29, 55.
190. See a reinterpretation of this evidence in Haslam 2003 > section 3 > Christchurch.
191. Hill 1996b, 86.
192. The reservations in this paragraph are also aired by Brooks (1996a, 132).
193. Hill 1996b, 80.

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