The Development of Late-Saxon Christchurch, Dorset, and the Burghal Hidage

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ADVANCES IN THE understanding of the Anglo-Saxon burh in the last 25 years, a re-assessment of the date and context of the Burghal Hidage and a recent analysis of comparable archaeological evidence from Cricklade make it necessary to review the archaeological evidence of the defences of the late-Saxon burh at Christchurch. This enables a reconstruction of the urban landscape, which in turn allows a new view of the significance of hidage assessments in the Burghal Hidage for all the burhs in the system it describes. It also places the development of Christchurch in the context of that of other burhs in Wessex and southern Mercia, and throws a new light on general historical processes in the 9th to the early 11th centuries.

Christchurch lies near the coast of Dorset (formerly Hampshire) at the southern end on a broad spur of land that guards a broad estuary at the junction of the rivers Avon on the east and the Stour on the west (Fig 1). Its early name-form *aet Tweoxneam* — '[the place] between the rivers' (*Twynham* in the late Saxon and into the Norman periods) — reflects this situation.[2] Its status as the site of an early minster church and the centre of a large royal estate made it an ideal choice as the site of a fortress in the later 9th century as part of a system of forts and fortified towns (burhs) around Wessex and eastern Mercia created by King Alfred (AD 871–99).[3] Numerous excavations from 1970 onwards by David Hill, Keith Jarvis and Sue Davies have established the character of the defensive works on three of the sides of the Alfredian and later burh, providing a more than usually full archaeological sample of a defensive system of the period.[4] This makes it possible to compare the results of these excavations with those at other sites of the same period. Important among these is Cricklade, where the defences in particular have been widely explored in a number of excavations since the 1940s. The establishment of the true extent and course of these defences makes it possible to draw on the evidence of the spatial arrangements of the various elements of the layout of the new burghal space to

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[2] Dodgson 1996, 107.
[3] For comments on the use of the word 'burh' to refer to a late-Saxon fortified settlement, see Hill and Rumble (eds) 1996, 3, and Draper 2008.
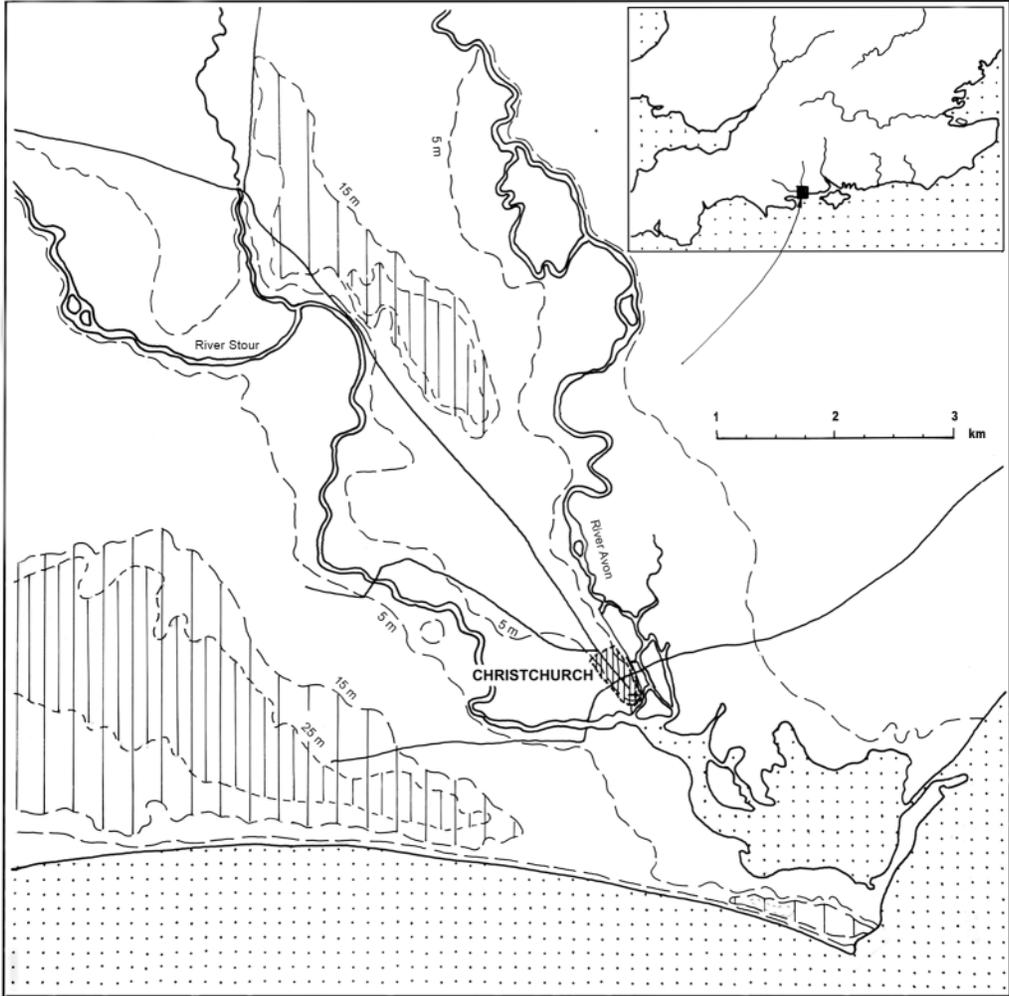[4] Jarvis 1983; 1985; Davies 1983.

FIG I

Christchurch, Dorset: location and setting. *Drawing by J Haslam.*

infer historical processes involved in the formation of the burh.[5] It also has implications for an interpretation of the assessment of the hides required for its construction and maintenance given in the Burghal Hidage.

THE BURGHAL HIDAGE

The Burghal Hidage is a short text that lists 31 of King Alfred's forts in Wessex, along with the hidage (land-) assessment of the territories required to support them. Many of the sites are 'remarkable products of early-medieval town

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[5] Throughout this paper, the defences and other topographical elements are referred to for convenience as being oriented N-S/E-W, with 'north' being towards the northgate (Bargate – G1 in Fig 2) and 'south' being towards the abbey, whereas they generally lie NW/SE.

planning, with formal street-grids and a consistent technology of rampart construction and road-metalling'. They are places of varied character, but all were chosen as strategically placed strongholds that were supported by levies based on a form of land assessment (hides).[6]

Hitherto, all commentators have dated this royal, centrally planned defensive system to some time in the 880s,[7] but I have argued elsewhere that this was planned and executed as a unitary system which should be dated to AD 878–9, and that it was constructed as a defensive and offensive system to counter the Vikings who were in control of London and the rest of Mercia before late 879, as well as the Viking threat from the sea.[8] Contrary to the generally accepted paradigm, which dates the composition of the Burghal Hidage document to some time in the second decade of the 10th century,[9] I have also argued that the document is contemporary with the system it describes.[10] This reassessment of the date of both the system and the document informs the discussions that follow.

As well as being important in understanding the processes involved in its origin and development, the establishment of the course of the defences of the burh has implications for an interpretation of the assessment of the hides required for its construction and maintenance given in the Burghal Hidage. Previous interpretations of the figures in the Burghal Hidage have invariably attempted to establish the course and extent of the defended circuits of burhs by reference in the Calculation attached to the document to the formula that converts hides to lengths of these circuits. This paper argues that this predictive methodological principle is fundamentally flawed: rather, the significance of the hidage assessments in relation to the relevant archaeological and topographical evidence needs rethinking in each case.

THE LATE-SAXON DEFENCES OF CHRISTCHURCH

The archaeological evidence of the structure of the defences at Christchurch shows a common sequence of developments, which is broadly divisible into three main periods:

1. the construction of an earth defensive bank some 6 m in width. There is no evidence of a fronting palisade, though one may have existed. A berm 4–7 m in width separated the bank from one or more ditches;
2. the strengthening of the bank by the addition of a stone wall cut into the length of its front edge; recutting of the ditches;
3. the dismantling of the stone wall and the spreading of its stones over the berm and into the ditches.

These structural phases mirror almost exactly those that can be recognised in the extensive evidence from Cricklade, and they reflect rather more fragmentary

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[6] Blair 2005, 330–1.
[7] Eg Keynes and Lapidge 1983, 23–5, 212 n 16.
[8] Haslam 2005, 135–9.
[9] Eg Dumville 1992, 24–7; Smyth 1995, 135; Hill 1996a; Haslam 2005, 139–44.
[10] Haslam 2005, 135–48. See supporting arguments in Wikipedia <en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Burghal_Hidage>.

evidence from other Burghal Hidage sites at Wallingford, Wareham, Lydford and Southampton.

Several issues arise out of these comparisons:

1. the extent and layout of the defences of the original Alfredian burh of Christchurch;
2. the dating and historical context of the added stone wall;
3. the dating and historical context of the subsequent destruction of the wall.

THE PRIMARY (ALFREDIAN) DEFENCES

As in all similar cases, there is no absolute dating evidence for the primary bank or ditch, but there seems no reason to doubt that on the W and N sides the defensive system is that of the original Alfredian burh of the late 9th century.[11]

David Hill argued that the assessment of 470 hides for *Twynham* in the Burghal Hidage implies that the original defences were built only on the N side and part of the W side, and that the western defences would have terminated at a marshy area part way down the spur to the south of Wick Lane.[12] However, two observations call this view into question. First, there are no low-lying 'tidal marshes' immediately to the south of Wick Lane, since the valley gravels extend at this point well to the west of the western defences (see Fig 2).[13] Second, excavations on the E side of the defences in 1982 and 1985 have confirmed the existence of defences on this side as well.[14] However, based on Hill's premise that the Burghal Hidage figures demonstrate the absence of defences on this side, Davies has suggested that these defences were a later addition to the primary defences and were constructed subsequent to the Burghal Hidage assessment — ie in the mid-10th century rather than the late 9th. This conclusion derives from the assumption that the Burghal Hidage was compiled in c 919.[15] On this evidence and its interpretation, Hill was able to suggest that 'the excavations confirmed the Burghal Hidage prediction' — presumably referring to his hypothesis of the presence of the original defences only on the N and W sides.[16] The circularity and the self-fulfilling nature of these arguments needs no further comment, though the lack of absolute dating evidence for the bank or the primary ditches means that no certain conclusions can be drawn about the context of this sequence.

THE ADDED STONE WALL

The practice of strengthening the original earth and turf defensive bank with a stone wall in late-Saxon burhs has been observed in nearly every situation in which archaeological observations have been made.[17] At Christchurch, the added stone wall has been observed on all three sides of the defences that have been excavated. At Cricklade (Wiltshire), where the evidence is rather better preserved, a stone wall was added on all four sides of the defences to the front of the original turf revetment of the bank, which had been cut back to a depth of the same width as the wall. This was associated with a slighter wall at the top of the rear of the bank, as at Hereford (Herefordshire).[18] At Lydford (Devon) a similar relationship obtained, while at both Wareham (Dorset)

[11] Hill 1983, 22–7.
[12] Hill 1983, 22–7; 1996b, 85–6; 1996d, 199, fig IV:8.
[13] See the 1:50,000 Geological Survey drift map 329, 1991.
[14] Site W10: Davies 1983, 29–30; Jarvis 1985.
[15] Davies 1983, 55. For further discussion of the context and purpose of the Burghal Hidage, see below. See also n 10, above.
[16] Hill 1996a, 86.
[17] Biddle 1976, 135–7; Radford 1978; Haslam 2003, period 2.
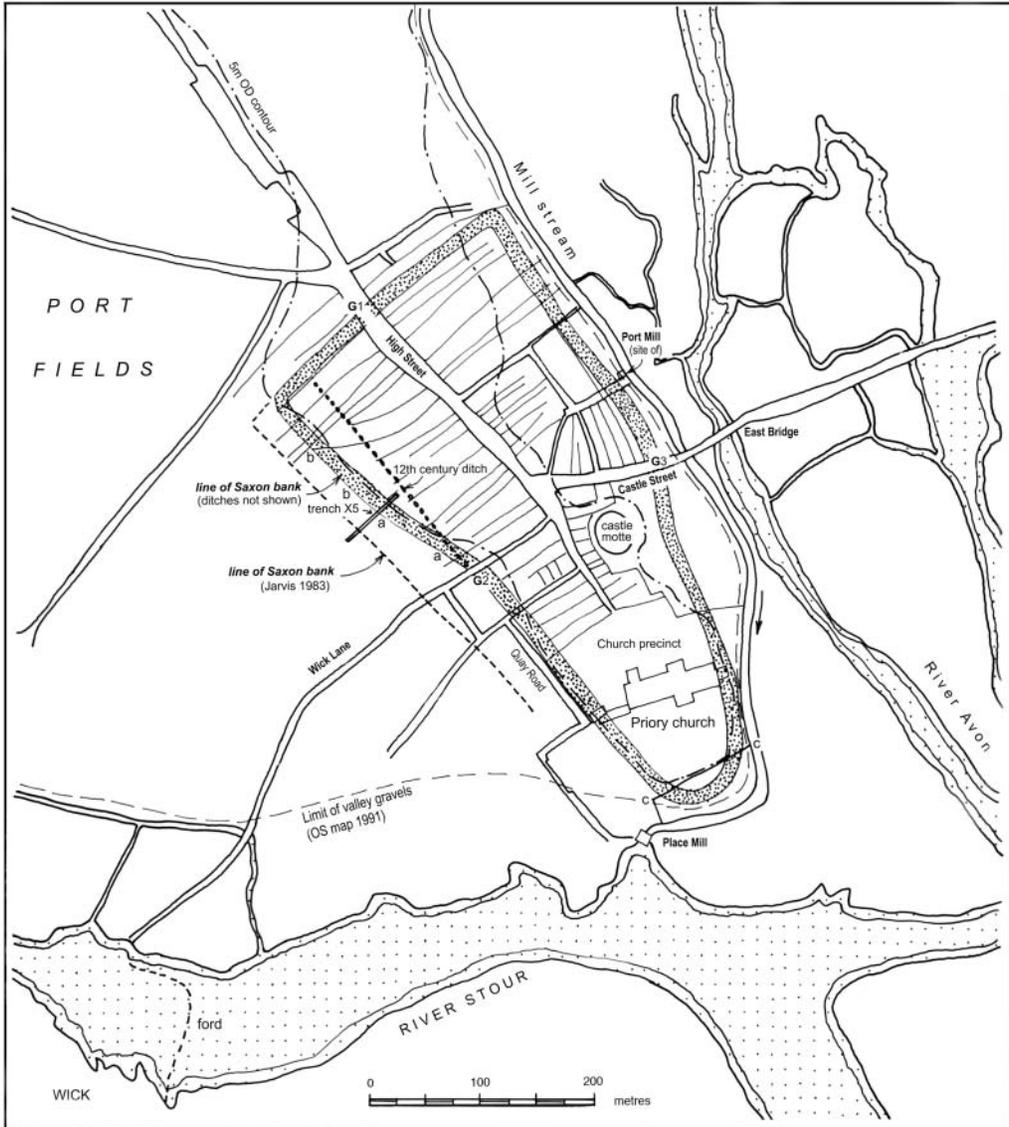[18] Haslam 2003, period 2.

FIG 2

Christchurch: early-medieval topography and features, with
reconstruction of the line of the late-Saxon defences.
a–a bank in car park. b–b bank in Druitt gardens. c–c S wall of priory precinct. G1 site of north gate
(Bargate). G2 site of west gate in Wick Lane. G3 site of east gate in Castle Street, probable 12th-century
gateway replacing late-Saxon gate on a different alignment. *Drawing by J Haslam.*

and probably Wallingford (Berkshire) a wall was added to the top of the existing bank.[19]
Recent excavations on the eastern defences of Malmesbury (Wiltshire) have not,
however, located much structural evidence of the Anglo-Saxon defences between the

[19] Lydford: Addyman 1966; Wareham: RCHM 1959; Wallingford: Brooks 1966, 20.

considerable Iron-Age defences and those of the early 12th century.[20] Excavations at both Southampton (Hampshire) and Oxford (Oxfordshire) have also found the wall fronting the bank in a number of places.[21] At both Christchurch and Cricklade, as well as at Wareham, the presence and character of the wall is evident as much in the deposits resulting from its destruction (discussed further below) as in the remains of the structure preserved in situ.

The ascription of an early 11th-century date for these added walls in Wessex fortresses has become something of a fixed paradigm, though at Hereford and Towcester (Northamptonshire) documentary evidence attributes them to the activities of Ealdorman Aethelred or Edward the Elder in the early 10th century.[22] In Wessex, Ralegh Radford and others have regarded them as having been built in response to the new Danish threats in the early 11th century, and they are seen as analogies to the reconstruction of the stone-wall defences of hillforts such as South Cadbury at this time.[23] Other writers accept this conclusion, also applied to findings at Southampton.[24] At Christchurch, Keith Jarvis considers the wall to date to before 1160, on the evidence of the absence of Purbeck marble in its destruction deposits.[25]

However, several considerations suggest that the secondary walls in all of the places already mentioned, apart from the hillforts such as South Cadbury, were additions to the original defences at a considerably earlier period. Since the original fronting of turves of the clay bank at Cricklade cannot have been maintained much structural integrity for very long, it must be inferred that the wall was inserted to strengthen the front of the bank not long after its initial construction. Other archaeological evidence, discussed elsewhere and summarised below, supports this conclusion.[26] Similar considerations apply to the added wall at Christchurch, and by inference to the other places discussed above. Nowhere are these walls dated absolutely, but the ubiquity of this feature suggests that the addition of stone walls to earlier defences originally revetted with turf and/or timber was the result of an overall policy aimed at augmenting and strengthening the defences of these late-Saxon burhs over the whole of Wessex.[27] Similar observations in equivalent archaeological contexts at Oxford and Hereford imply that this policy extended to Mercia as well.[28]

THE DESTRUCTION OF THE WALL

All archaeological observations on the line of Christchurch's defences have provided evidence for a spread of stones, rubble and mortar over the berm in front of the bank resulting from the demolition of the wall. In several places the defensive ditch or ditches have been partially or completely filled with stones. Jarvis interprets the ubiquitous spreads of rubble over the berm in front of the wall as indicating that the defences were 'robbed in one large operation with the best stone being removed for use

[20] Longman 2006, 160–1.
[21] Southampton: Russel and Leivers 2003, 90–7; Cottrell 2006. Oxford: Durham et al 1983; Blair 1994, 148–9, fig 87; Dodd 2003, 21–2, 31–2. Recent excavations on the site of the castle at Oxford show that the original Anglo-Saxon defences, to which the stone wall was added, extended as far west as the castle. I am grateful to Brian Durham for showing me these excavations.
[22] Shoesmith 1982; Bassett 2008.
[23] RCHM 1959, 137; Radford 1971, 103; 1972, 106; 1978, 139, 141, 150; RCHM 1972, 57. South Cadbury: Alcock 1995, 154–7. This paradigm also forms the basis for a recent discussion of the development of the defences of western Mercia: Bassett 2008.
[24] Eg Hinton 1977, 69–71; Wood 1981, 195; Hodges 1982, 178–9. I once also accepted this conclusion: Haslam 1984b, 109. Southampton: Russel and Leivers 2003, 97.
[25] Jarvis 1983, 19.
[26] Haslam 2003, period 2.
[27] Haslam 2005, 146.
[28] Hereford: Shoesmith 1982. Oxford: Durham et al 1983; Blair 1994, 148–9, fig 87. The date of the stone wall added to the timber-revetted-defensive bank at Hereford is given as early 10th century in Boucher 2002, 9–10. Bassett 2008 reassesses this evidence.

elsewhere'.[29] But evidence from the record of trenches X1 (N corner), X5 (SW side), X7 (SW side), X13 (W corner) and Davies' trench W10 (E side) shows that this cannot have been the primary motivation.[30] In all these cases, the existence of the spread of rubble, in places over a metre in thickness (as in trench X1), and the presence within it of many good ironstone blocks over 0.5 m in size, is more consistent with the hypothesis that the wall was deliberately and systematically razed to the ground in one operation. This interpretation is reinforced by the observation that stones, many of them also large, were tipped into the open ditch or ditches. This is clear in the evidence from trenches X1, X5, X7 and on the E side in W10.[31] It will be argued that this conclusion mirrors that derived from equivalent deposits in the defensive systems in other burhs.

The dating of this episode at Christchurch calls for some comment. Jarvis notes that 13th–14th-century levels sealed the rubble spread, and places the destruction of the wall to between the 10th and 14th centuries.[32] Hill has argued that this episode of destruction is later than the 13th century, on the basis of his interpretation of feature F3 in his trench X1, which is covered by these destruction deposits, as part of a 'possible barn structure of the 13th century', and that it can be associated with the building of the Bargate.[33] There are, however, difficulties in understanding how the substantial stone defences of the town could be completely demolished to provide stone for the building of another part of these same defences. Hill's report provides no evidence that F3 is part of any recognisable structure, least of all a barn, nor any independent evidence that dates it to the 13th century. This feature seems to be part of a layer of packed 'chalk' (?mortar) that can be associated with the wall's construction, and is overlain by the destruction deposits of the wall (layer 5). It is therefore early in the stratigraphic sequence. Davies dates the addition of the wall to the bank on the eastern side of the defences to the late 11th or early 12th century because she considers the defences on this side are mid-10th century or later (see above), perpetuating the circular arguments already commented on above. Jarvis also perpetuates the 13th-century date suggested by Hill.[34]

These observations from the archaeological evidence at Christchurch can be compared with that of the more extensive destruction deposits from Cricklade. This demonstrates a phase in which the whole defensive system was systematically razed to the ground in one operation.[35] This episode of destruction was preceded by two recognisable phases that succeeded the construction of the wall: a long period in which the wall remained standing, and was probably abandoned as a defence, and the inner two ditches silted up; and a phase in which these ditches were cleaned out and/or recut. I have interpreted these phases as resulting from a period of abandonment of the

[29] Jarvis 1983, 47–9, notes, for instance, in trench X13, near the western corner of the northern defences, that in the 'robbing' of the stone wall the ironstone blocks were preferred and removed, leaving heathstone and smaller pieces of ironstone. However, the published plan (fig 14) shows a concentration of large ironstone blocks up to 0.5 m in length among this deposit. X1 at Pound Lane shows similar spreads of large blocks (Hill 1983, fig 3, pls 8–9); blocks of similar size are shown in trench X5 (section fig 7, pl 11) and in site X7 (plan and section fig 8).

[30] Davies 1983, 30, fig 6. Jarvis's (1983, 49) interpretation of stones in layer 3, trench X9, as 'rubble from the [destruction of] the defences' cannot be sustained, since it seals a layer with 13th-century pottery.

[31] See further discussion below.

[32] Jarvis 1983, 19.

[33] Hill 1983, 27. Jarvis 1983, 18–20 dates the Bargate, demolished in 1744, to the early 12th century.

[34] Davies 1983, 29, 55. Jarvis 1985, 170, assumes a 13th-century date for this in his discussion of the Castle Hotel watching brief, and an 11th–12th century date for this feature is also postulated by Davies (1983, 29). Hill (1983, 25, 27) suggests that the wall was inserted into the bank in the pre-Conquest period or soon afterwards, on the evidence of three sherds of pottery of Saxo-Norman type from underneath one of the stones of the wall (F.17). However, the anomalous nature of this large block, the waterlogged nature of the site and the amount of disturbance associated with the destruction of the wall, raises doubts about whether this was part of the wall remaining in situ. Hill has however suggested (pers comm) that the wall must have been inserted not long after the bank was built, in order to stabilise the turf structure of the body of the bank.

[35] Haslam 2003, pt 3, period 3, discussion. The reservations on this point by Alcock (1995, 169–70) have been addressed in my report on the excavations at Cricklade (Haslam 2003, period 3).

defences as a functioning system in the second half of the 10th century, followed by an episode in which the earlier defences, including the still-standing stone wall, were recommissioned in the early 11th. The wall was then destroyed in its entirety and the ditches, still empty and clean, were filled with stones from its destruction, the debris of which was also piled onto the berm. Similar deposits occur at Lydford, Southampton and Wareham. At Lydford the published sections show an unstructured pile of large stones from the destruction of the wall spread out from the rear face of the wall for about 2 m.[36] This evidence shows that the wall was demolished in its entirety, except for one or two stones still in situ at the base of the rear of the wall next to the bank, and that it was not therefore robbed for its larger stones. This again is consistent with a phase of deliberate destruction of the wall at one period in time. At Southampton, the added wall on the south of the defences was slighted (though in one place not completely to its base), and in several other places ditches have been observed that were filled with stones from the wall.[37] At Wallingford, stones and rubble partly filled one of the ditches.[38] At Wareham, excavations on the W bank by Eric Gee in 1952–4 showed evidence of a layer of large stones (layer ix) forming a 'spill' down the front of the bank from the destruction of the wall on the top of the bank, which had been 'robbed' to its foundations.[39] This layer had been cut by later (medieval) rescarping. The presence of large stones at the top of this spill, combined with the complete destruction of the wall to its foundations over a short period, shows that this deposit resulted from a deliberate and systematic neutralisation of the defensive capability of the fortifications, rather than a phase of casual quarrying of the stone from the wall.

REASSESSMENT OF THE DATE AND CONTEXT OF THE DEFENCES OF CHRISTCHURCH

The foregoing review of the evidence makes possible a reassessment of the dates and hence the context for the equivalent phases of activity at Christchurch and the other Burghal Hidage sites. This model is one that future archaeological work can test.

The Alfredian defences

There are at present no archaeological grounds for suggesting that the original Alfredian defences do not date to 878–9, and, as will be discussed later, no topographical or archaeological reasons that they did not encircle the burh on all four sides. This implies that the defences found on the E side were part of the original late 9th-century *enceinte* rather than a later addition. The immediate or local purpose of these defences would have been both to protect an early ecclesiastical site, and to prevent Viking warships from using the harbour and from penetrating inland into Wessex up the inviting waterways of the Avon and Stour rivers. Another important function would have been to create both physical and institutional structures for the control of river trade to ensure an income from tolls and taxes for the benefit of the king. It will also be argued below that

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[36] Addyman 1966, 168–9, fig 71, section 1.

[37] Cottrell 2006. Russel and Leivers (2003, 90–1) describe ditches at site SOU 266.

[38] Excavations on the site of the Anglo-Saxon rampart in 1965 found evidence of a stone wall on the top of the bank that had replaced an original front revetment probably of turf. The existence of the wall was only deduced, however, from 'rubble and mortar that had fallen into the ditch' (Brooks 1966, 20). However, this ditch was assumed to be of period IV (1275–1300), but is not otherwise described. The lack of clarity about the relationship between the bank and secondary wall and the later (or contemporary) ditches does not make it possible to draw any independent conclusions about the dating of this phase of the destruction of the wall.

[39] RCHM 1959, 127. This is discussed further in Haslam 2003, pt 3, period 3, discussion.

the construction of the defences was part of the same programme of work as the layout of the streets and other features of the new burghal space, and that all these features are therefore contemporary.

The added stone walls

Given that the initial defensive system comprising the Wessex fortresses listed in the Burghal Hidage document (which of course included Oxford) were constructed in the short period in 878–9 to counter, among other aims, the Viking presence in western Mercia and London, it is easy to suggest an appropriate historical context for the addition of stone walls. The few years after Alfred's assumption of control in both Wessex and Mercia in 879/80, creating what Simon Keynes has termed the 'Kingdom of the Anglo-Saxons',[40] were relatively free from the threat of Viking invasion, apart from those concentrated in the Thames estuary, London and Rochester. From 892, however, the country was once again subject to more sustained invasion and raiding. It can be reasonably inferred that the strengthening of the now unstable, if not degraded, earth- and turf-fronted defences of existing fortresses around both Wessex and Mercia could have been a rapid, concerted response by King Alfred to provide an effective defence against the new Viking raids, as well as a strategic statement designed to consolidate his power and control over his kingdom.[41]

The scale of these works puts this broad conclusion into its proper perspective. The stone wall encircling the bank at Cricklade can be estimated as comprising as much as 7400 cu m of roughly mortared stonework, all of which had to be quarried, carted to the construction site and built, and the lime for the mortar burnt.[42] A threat of imminent destruction by Viking armies in the early 890s would have galvanised the population in a similar way to that which must have motivated them to perform their earlier, conscripted labour service on the construction of the original defensive system. If, as is suggested, this rebuilding programme was common to most if not all the fortresses in Wessex and southern Mercia, the whole undertaking would have been on a scale that matched the initial creation of the system a few years earlier.

This programme was arguably complementary to the continued efforts of the king to update and augment the defence of his realm by the replacement of the non-urban and more isolated 'emergency' forts of the initial system described in the Burghal Hidage by new urban burhs on key defensible sites. In discussing this in 1984, I placed this development in the first decade of the 10th century.[43] Subsequently, Hill has argued that this process should be assigned to

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[40] Keynes 1998. Blair 1994, 148, dates the added stone wall at Oxford to the early 10th century. This is, however, based on his premise that the defences of Oxford were first built in the 890s (Blair 1994, 101), thereby allowing a notional 15–20 year gap between the construction of the initial timber-fronted earth and turf defences and their strengthening with a wall. However, the date of the formation of the burh at Oxford is given by the dating of the Burghal hidage to c 878–9 and by the dating of the *ohsnaforda* coin from Oxford to the early 880s (Blackburn 1998, 110–11). See further discussion in Haslam forthcoming c, commenting on Dodd 2003, 31–2, and in Dodd 2003, 21–3 and Munby and Wilkinson 2003.

[41] Abels 1998, 208.

[42] Stones were derived, in approximately equal proportions (albeit determined in a very small sample), from quarries at Blunsdon Hill some 5 km to the south-east (Coral Rag), and from quarries 6 km to the north-west (Oolitic Limestone) (Haslam 2003, pt 3, period 2).

[43] Haslam 1984a, 265–7; 2005, 137–8.

the reign of Athelstan (AD 924–40).[44] I have more recently argued that the process of the creation of the secondary burhs can also be placed in the context of the new emergencies posed by the renewed Viking attacks on Wessex in the 890s.[45] This enterprise, comprising both the addition of stone walls to the earlier turf- or wood-revetted banks, as well as the building of a number of new urban burhs on new sites, must have been as expensive and far-reaching in terms of the deployment and organisation of the resources of the kingdom as was the creation of the initial system described in the Burghal Hidage.

The destruction of the walls

Leslie Alcock first suggested the most plausible historical context for the systematic programme of destruction of the stone walls of the defences, shown so clearly in the archaeological evidence from both Cricklade and Christchurch, in relation to South Cadbury. He argued that King Cnut, the new Danish king, instigated this to safeguard his position after he became king in 1016.[46] More recently, however — in an ironic reversal of the reinterpretation of similar phenomena offered in this paper — Alcock has recast his explanation of the evidence for the destruction of the recently built South Cadbury stone wall as representing merely a phase of casual robbing of the stones by locals.[47] However, he also details extensive evidence from which it can be inferred that the hilltop fortress was not merely abandoned, but systematically cleared of any buildings and tidied up to prevent its reoccupation. This process is therefore consistent with the interpretation that the destruction of the walls was in fact a deliberate military act, with the stones subsequently being quarried and removed piecemeal over the years. That equivalent and analogous deposits exist in all the places mentioned suggests that this episode of destruction resulted from a systematic policy implemented over most if not all of southern England at the time. In places other than South Cadbury, Cnut left the places to function and indeed flourish as towns, but without their defences, as at Cricklade.

The evidence from Christchurch is entirely consistent with this suggested early 11th-century date. This dating makes more sense, for instance, of the stratigraphic sequence noted by Jarvis on the eastern side near the eastern bridge, where road surfaces of the northern edge of Castle Street overlie the wall's destruction deposits.[48] This context suggests that these road surfaces are therefore likely to have resulted from the realignment of the street to the north on the building of the castle on its southern side in and after the 1090s. This evidence does not therefore imply, as suggested by Jarvis, that late-Saxon Castle Street

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[44] Hill 2000 (the appendix rebuts my arguments of 1984). He has taken this for granted without question for 40 years in his earlier papers: Hill 1967, 59; Addyman and Hill 1969, 89–90; Biddle and Hill 1971, 84; Hill 1978a, 187; Hill 1978b, 219. Hill has based his arguments on the reasonable premise that these developments must post-date the composition of the Burghal Hidage. His dating of this to c 919 therefore implies that the new developments must be placed after this, in the reign of Athelstan. The dating of the Burghal Hidage to c 878–9, however, considerably expands the time-frame for these processes.

[45] I take issue with Hill's earlier arguments in Haslam 1984a, 265–7, and his arguments of 2000 in Haslam 2005, 137, n 103.

[46] Alcock 1972 39. I took up this suggestion later: Haslam 1984a, 109–10.

[47] Alcock 1995, 169–70.

[48] Jarvis 1985, 169.

'either did not exist or was only a trackway'.[49] This is anyway contrary to the evidence that indicates the continuing importance of this route in the late Saxon and early Norman periods (see below).

THE LAYOUT OF THE BURH — THE NEW BURGHAL SPACE

The archaeological evidence discussed above demonstrates the existence of defences on three sides of the original burh, which implies that the defences formed a complete circuit. This makes possible a reassessment of the archaeological and topographical evidence of its early layout, allowing comparison with burhs of similar type (Fig 2). This arrangement is a more rational solution to the defence of the site as a whole than to suggest that the original defences only secured the landward side of the perimeter, which would have left the early minster church, the royal 'residence' and the whole of the rest of the town unprotected on its vulnerable seaward side to the south. The line of the proposed defences (see below), which differs from that suggested by previous commentators,[50] takes advantage of the natural contours of the site to enclose an 'urban' area to the north, laid out with streets and burgage plots, and a probably separate minster and royal precinct to the south. It seems significant that the line of the burh defences on the south-western side, partly defined by the 5 m contour, fits exactly to the corner of what may well have been an early defended enclosure around the minster defined by the extent of the precinct.

STREET LAYOUT

The spur on which the fortress was built is relatively flat, with no steep sides to constrain the primary layout. The distance from the centre of the High Street to the line of the eastern bank of the defences, as determined by Davies' trench W10, is very nearly equal to the distance from the same line to the line of the western bank (see Fig 2).[51] The gateway in the northern defences — the Anglo-Saxon *Egheiete* and the later medieval Bargate — is defined by the position towards which the roads from the north still converge, and is central to the line of the northern defences between the eastern and western lines (G1 in Fig 2).[52] It can be inferred from this that all these features — the western, eastern and northern defences, the gateway in the northern defences, and the alignment of the central spinal High Street — were laid out at the same time to form a planned and symmetrically structured space that was enclosed by these sides of the defences. With this in mind, it seems likely that the vulnerable S side of the site next to the estuary and around the church and the possible royal residence would have been provided with defences as strong as those on the landward side.

There are also grounds for inferring that the street leading from the High Street over the bridge to the east (Castle Street) was part of this primary layout. It is clearly earlier in date than the castle, built in the 1090s, since its alignment has been shifted northwards by the insertion of the castle and its ditch into the fabric of the town. This process appears also to have involved the realignment of the High Street to the west. Castle Street would have led out of the town through a gate in the defences and over

[49] Ibid, 170.
[50] Jarvis 1983, 10, fig 2; Hill 1996d, 199, fig IV:8.
[51] Davies 1983, 29. This is shown clearly in Jarvis 1983, 10, fig 2; compare Penn 1980, 40–1. The exact symmetry is however modified slightly by a reassessment of the position and alignment of the south-western defences, argued below.
[52] Jarvis 1983, 13–14.

bridges across the two branches of the Avon.[53] I argue below that the two bridges and associated causeway were an integral part of the primary layout of the burh. This being so, Castle Street itself, as the only approach road to these bridges, must be considered to have been part of this primary layout. The inferred original line of Castle Street aligns with that of Wick Lane on the other (W) side of the High Street, suggesting that this too was an element in the original layout of the burh. There is reason to suggest (below) that this street could have led through a gate in the western defences, possibly to another bridge crossing the Stour to the west. It is important to note that this planned street layout was imposed on a rather less regular natural site, which the line of the defences appears to respect more closely.

To the south of this crossing, the High Street must have continued to the site of the early (and pre-existing) royal 'residence' and minster church, demolished to make way for the construction of the new priory buildings in the early 12th century.[54] The inference from documentary records is that the later Norman church is likely to have been constructed on or very near the site of the earlier minster (Fig 2) rather than by its side, as at Winchester.[55] It can be inferred from the character of the natural and built topography that the southern defences of the enlarged burh of the late 9th century would have followed the contours of the edge of the spur of gravel in a curvilinear rather than a strictly rectilinear layout (as with the northern defences and the rest of the internal layout), and that it would have continued up its north-eastern side to include within its circuit this early church with its nine chapels, its graveyard and the houses of its canons,[56] together with the royal 'residence'. This alignment is discussed in detail below. It is probable that these elements would have been provided with their own defended enclosure at a date well before the late 9th century, and that the new burh defences included and perhaps augmented them.

THE LINE OF THE BURH DEFENCES

It is possible to identify the line of the burh defences with some degree of pro-bability, and with a degree of reinterpretation of the archaeological evidence, on all sides of the spur of land on which the burh was constructed. The line of the northern defences is established by the numerous excavations on its alignment, beginning with Hill's excavations in 1970 on the northern corner. This lay at the edge of a marked slope to the north, and in part followed and utilised a natural sandbank. The trench at site X13 defines the western line of the N defences.[57] The line of the western or south-western defences, however, is inferred from only one excavation in Druitt Gardens (site X5). The interpretation of this evidence in Jarvis's plan (shown on Fig 2), which has been followed in all subsequent depictions of the layout of the defences, is however, open to question.[58] Jarvis suggests that 'one possibility is that the bank was between 33 m and 42 m' (from the north-western end of the trench), but notes the absence of a 'robbing trench' of the fronting stone wall. The section, however, shows no obvious bank structure other than rather formless horizontal layers of sand and clay, neither does it show any evidence for a timber palisade (which Jarvis anyway describes as 'inconclusive') or for a fronting stone wall. This vagueness means that it is impossible to interpret this crucial section with any degree of confidence. The only certainty

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[53] Penn 1980 and Jarvis 1983, 11–13, note this, for instance. For the archaeological evidence for this, see comments given above on Jarvis's excavations by the eastern bridge (Jarvis 1985, 169–70).

[54] Harley 1973, 101; Hase 1988, 49–51; Blair 2005, 366, 515–18.

[55] Blair 2005, 515–18; Stannard 1999, 22–39. Note, however, the comments of Cockain and Tullett 2003 who conclude that parts of the original Anglo-Saxon church, including the N transept and N crypt, were retained in the building of the Norman church. Further discussion on the subject is in Cockain and Tullett 2004.

[56] Keen 1984, 214–15; Blair 2005, 515–18.

[57] Jarvis 1983, 10 fig 2, 49–51.

[58] Ibid, 10, fig 2, 31–2, followed by Davies 1983, 22, fig 1; Hill 1996d, fig IV:8.

appears to be the presence of the destruction deposits of the wall on the outer berm that spilled into a ditch.[59]

What is more certain, however, are the indications of a substantial bank within the present car park to the south and east of trench X5, a feature followed by a property boundary that appears on all early maps, including the Tithe Award Map of 1894.[60] This is defined and contained by a late-medieval or early post-medieval wall, and is marked by a distinct break in levels in the modern car park itself (a–a in Fig 2). That this feature follows the 5 m contour at this point, combined with the fact that it aligns at an angle both to the line of Wick Lane itself and to the alignment of properties facing onto the High Street, shows that it is an early feature in the urban landscape. This feature is also on the same alignment as a bank about 1.5 m high that carries on into Druitt Gardens to the north-west, and which also appears as a major feature in the 1st edition OS 1:500 map (b–b in Fig 2). Both these features align with the probable position of the north-west corner of the late-Saxon defences, which must have lain just to the west of Jarvis's trench X13 on the line of the northern defences. It is surprising that previous commentators have not noted either of these features in the car park and in Druitt Gardens. The natural interpretation of these as the remains of the late-Saxon defensive bank would mean that the bank that it was hoped to locate in trench X5 would have been at the north-eastern end of the trench, which was abandoned due to collapses in heavy rain, and which is not therefore shown on the published section. If so, the ditch observed at the south-western end of this trench would have been the outer ditch of a two-ditch system.

The reinterpretation of the alignment of the bank of the late-Saxon defences at this point removes a major difficulty inherent in Jarvis' interpretation — that the defences along this section shown in previous reconstructions do not align with any features of the built topography or the natural lie of the land, which is shown graphically by the course of the 5 m contour. Tactical considerations suggest that the course of the defensive bank is much more likely to have been sited part way up the natural slope, with the ditches at a lower level than the bank, than placed on flat land at its foot. As reconstructed with this premise in view, the line of the late-Saxon bank would have met Wick Lane to the south-east at a break in slope of the street, which must mark the position of a W gate in the defences (G2 in Fig 2). This analysis is consistent with the presence in trench X7 of stone rubble from the demolition of the wall, which at this point would easily have spread downhill for 40 m or so.[61]

This reassessment of the course of the south-western defences receives some support from the alignment of an early-medieval ditch dug along the whole length of the original late-Saxon defences and positioned on its inside (north and east) (see Fig 2). These are demonstrated in two excavations as well as by auguring, and are shown on plans by both Jarvis and Davies.[62] The dating evidence suggests that this ditch was filled in by the late 12th century, which is consistent with this ditch being one element of a phase of refortification of the town either on the building of the castle and the priory in the years around 1100, or possibly in the period of the Anarchy in the 1140s, and may well have been associated with the building of the Bargate. Davies' assumption that the wall added to the primary late-Saxon bank, on a different alignment to the two ditches discussed, is post-Conquest confuses her discussion of the dating of this feature.[63] If, as is suggested here, the wall added to the late-Saxon bank was built in the late 9th

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[59] Jarvis 1983, 31–2. Plate 11 clearly shows the tumble of stones on the berm and ditch. Jarvis notes that because of collapses of the trench due to heavy rain, the excavator abandoned part of the trench and, as a result, 'was unable to interpret the stratigraphy during the excavation and the main site record is a problematic section drawing' (p 31).

[60] Jarvis 1983, 16, pl 5.

[61] Ibid, 32–4.

[62] Ibid, 10, fig 2; Davies 1983, 22, fig 1; 53–4.

[63] Davies 1983, 55–6. The Bargate was built in stone in the early 12th century (Jarvis 1983, 18–20).

century and demolished in the early 11th, the two ditches on the inside of this line are likely to represent a Norman re-defence of the town in the early 12th century. The significance of this for the present discussion is that this Norman ditch on the western side of the town heads southwards for a point on Wick Lane, which the interpretation of the evidence described above suggests would have been the position of the late-Saxon gate (G2 in Fig 2). The implication of this is that while the late-Saxon defences themselves would not have survived into the post-Conquest period, the position of the gateway in Wick Lane seems likely to have influenced the course of the new Norman defences on a different alignment.

It is possible to trace the alignment of this suggested course of the late-Saxon defences further to the south and east, along the eastern edge of Quay Road, again following a line just below the 5 m contour, and suggested by a break in slope visible in the E/W-aligned Church Lane. It seems significant that this follows a line that is possibly the edge of the Anglo-Saxon precinct, its outer edge later followed by Quay Road to give access to the new Norman gateway to the west of the priory church.[64] This break of slope carries on to the south and south-east, following the 5 m contour as before, until it joins the wall running E-W to the south of the priory lawn (c–c in Fig 2). This contains higher ground to its north that is nearly 2 m above the level of the land to its south. It marks a major boundary, which it would be reasonable to suggest marks an early-Norman realignment of the line of an early bank and fronting wall representing the southern line of the burh defences and precinct boundary around a more natural sloping end of the gravel spur, which has been excavated away. Different phases of construction have clearly modified the natural lie of the land on the southern end of the eastern side of the spur (around the eastern end of the priory church). The E end of the structure and its surrounding ground had clearly been raised to keep its floor on a level with the rest of the building. Immediately to the north of the eastern end of the priory, the land now forming the present garden of remembrance also seems likely to have been disturbed by works associated either with the construction of the E end of the church or with the building of the castle and the excavation of its ditch just to the north. The line of the original defences along this side shown in Figure 2 is therefore somewhat notional.

The line is completed north of Castle Street to take in the line of the ditch and presumed bank on the N side of Castle Street, established by Jarvis at the site of the King's Arms Hotel,[65] and following the eastern edge of the gravel spur and the line of the Mill leet. It is possible that the wall observed at a deep level in Jarvis's trench X4D could have been the fronting wall of the late-Saxon defences, but the results here are inconclusive.[66] The line of both the bank and the ditch continues through Davies' trench W10.[67] I reinterpret Davies' results as being entirely consistent with the construction of a bank with an outer ditch on the eastern side, as the continuation of the primary defences around this side of the burh, as argued on topographical grounds, above.

BRIDGES

There are also grounds for suggesting that another important aspect of the primary layout of the burh at *Twynham* would have been its bridges. Some time ago Nicholas Brooks argued that burhs were invariably linked with bridges in such a way that 'Bridge and fortress were a single military unit; together they secured the river crossing for the armies of the kingdom and together they prevented the movement of enemy troops either by land or by river'.[68] Richard Abels has also pointed out that the

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[64] This inference is implicit in the brief discussion of the topography of the area by Jarvis 1983, 12.
[65] Jarvis 1985.
[66] Jarvis 1983, 31 and 29, fig 6.
[67] Davies 1983, 27–38.
[68] Brooks 1971, 72.

burhs were designed to operate with the reformed *fyrd*, Alfred's mobile field army, so that the associated bridges not only blocked access to rivers by the Vikings but also gave the *fyrd* the mobility they required to exercise properly their function.[69] Charles the Bald employed the strategic use of burhs associated with bridges in Francia from 862 to 877, and the entry in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* for 895, which describes the building of a burh and two bridges at a site north of London by King Alfred that led to the rout of the Vikings, show this too.[70] A number of 10th-century charters showing that boroughwork and bridgework were a joint service indicate the close association of burhs and bridges.[71] Of particular relevance to the situation at Christchurch was the development of two burhs in Devon at Barnstaple and Totnes (replacing Pilton and Halwell), which were sited strategically to protect bridges across river estuaries.[72] The creation of secondary burhs at Arundel and Steyning in Sussex, which arguably replaced a Burghal Hidage fort at Burpham, and which were associated with defensive bridges, are further instances of the pattern.[73] Another bridge associated with a burh at Kingsbridge, S Devon, mentioned in a charter of 962, seems likely to have functioned as a causeway that would have facilitated cross-country mobility as much as directly defending a navigable estuary.[74]

Brooks' model has a predictive value. The choice of site of a burh on a defensible spur of land linked with a bridge or bridges at Christchurch, which could prevent the passage of Viking warships up two major rivers leading into the heartland of southern Wessex, would have reflected the strategic thinking of the time. The defence of a royal site with a minster church would have been only part of the strategic rationale. This being so, it would suggest that at least the bridge and probable associated causeway to the east of the burh, which crossed the two branches of the Avon in two places, separated by an island, would have been an integral component of the planning and laying-out of the burh from its inception.[75] The siting of the castle adjacent to the bridge in c 1094 doubtless reflects the need to dominate the crossing, which implies that this was an important element of the topography of the town before this time.

The analysis given above infers the line of Wick Lane, to the west of the High Street opposite Castle Street, as part of the initial arrangement of the layout of the burh. The evidence of later sources shows that this led straight towards a crossing of the river Stour at Wick, about 500 m to the south-west of the suggested gateway (Fig 2). Wick Lane was aligned for most of its length outside the defences along the gravels of the spur, but would have required a built causeway to cross the tidal alluvium near the river. The crossing at Wick is marked as a ford on the 19th-century OS maps, and it is where the valley gravels on the southern bank of the Stour estuary are nearest to the water's edge.[76] Although there is no evidence of the former existence of a bridge at this point, it is possible there was indeed a defensive bridge at Wick associated with the burh in the Anglo-Saxon period, or at least that the crossing at this point had a defensive function.

[69] Abels 1988, 63–5.
[70] Hassall and Hill 1970; Brooks 1971, 81; Abels 1988, 72–3.
[71] Brooks 1996, 142, n 53.
[72] Haslam 1984a, 251–6, 259–62.
[73] Haslam 2005, 150–1, n 114; Haslam forthcoming a.
[74] Haslam 1984a, 271–5; forthcoming b; Luscombe 2006, 110–13. See further discussion of burhs and bridges in Brooks 1992 and 1994, and Cooper 2006; and a discussion on recent reviews on the origin of London bridge and the burhs at London and Southwark in Haslam 2009. Cooper 2006, 39–46 questions this model, however.
[75] The bridges and associated causeway are not shown in Hill's plan of Anglo-Saxon Christchurch (Hill 1996d, fig IV:8).
[76] Its earlier history is obscure; the relevant volume of the Victoria County History for Hampshire does not consider it, for instance. The land to the west of the lower reaches of the Stour was, however, part of the extensive royal estate of *Twynham* (Keen 1984, 228, fig 80).

MILL LEET

Another element in the layout of the original burh would arguably have been the mill leet, which ran down the eastern side of the land on which the town was built, immediately outside the defences. Its source was the river Avon north of the town, just above the tidal limit. This would have supplied power to the Port Mill, situated to the north of Castle Street.[77] Its name suggests that it was an early feature of the townscape, and its ownership by the king at Domesday and later supports the hypothesis that it was a component of the burh as originally laid out to meet the needs of the new towns-people and to provide an income for the king.[78] However, this leet carries on to the south-east, skirting the burh defences instead of flowing into the river at the Port Mill, and supplies Place Mill further south. That this mill was always in the ownership of the abbey suggests its possible attachment to the pre-burh community, including the royal residence, around the early minster church. It is likely therefore that the Port Mill itself is a secondary insertion into an earlier arrangement.[79] Portfields, an area of arable land to the west of the burh of about 125 acres, may also have been part of the provisions of the new inhabitants of the burh.[80] The existence of numerous examples of Portfields adjacent to other burhs in both Wessex and Mercia has been interpreted in this way, and reflects the importance of town fields to burghal communities argued, for instance, by both Maitland and Tait.[81]

A REASSESSMENT OF THE BURH LAYOUT

This suggested layout of the burh, arguably defended on all sides, provides a logical solution to the defence of the particular site, which included the earlier minster church, such that the area enclosed formed a securely defended space for settlement by new *burhware*. These men were, at least in part, responsible for ensuring its continued effectiveness as a defensive strongpoint in a national scheme of defence.[82] It would also have formed a secure market — presumably situated along the High Street — that would have been an income-generating resource for the king as lord of the manor and a means of sustenance for the inhabitants. Symmetrically placed streets and gateways on both sides of the central High Street mirror the existence of the primary rectilinear layout shown by the relationship of the defences on the E and W sides to the central High Street. The regularity of this planned defensive *enceinte* is emphasised by the link with the defensive bridges over the Avon to the east (and possibly the Stour to the west) and the straight alignment of the bridges and causeway over the Avon with that of Castle Street in its inferred pre-castle alignment. Taken together, these features show that from the start the burh was planned and laid out to function as a place of permanent settlement. Its nascent urban attributes guaranteed the permanence of its defensive and strategic role as a sustainable community, which was designed to play its part in the system of such burhs set

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[77] Penn 1980 41–3, fig 2.

[78] Jarvis 1983, 49, where the possible remains of the mill at the eastern end of Millhams St are described. A type-site for the association of a new mill with the construction of a burh is the King's Mill at Cambridge, the association of which with the new defences of the southern town of c 917, and the creation of a new leet – now the Cam along the Backs – shows it to have been an integral part of the layout of the new burh as planned in c 917 (Haslam 1984b).

[79] If so, its power would have been derived from an undershot or a horizontal rather than an overshot wheel, as with Place Mill. For other Anglo-Saxon mills, see Rahtz and Meeson 1992.

[80] The Portfield was the common field, first documented in 1300 (Harley 1973, 86).

[81] Maitland 1907, 200–202; Tait 1936, 68–77; Haslam 1984a, 127–8; Haslam 1985.

[82] Biddle and Hill 1971, 83; Biddle 1976, 125; Abels 1988, 68–78; Brooks 2003, 159–62; Haslam 2005, 139.

up by King Alfred and described in the Burghal Hidage. These aspects of the layout and organisation of the burh run counter to the view of Brooks that Christchurch was an 'emergency borough' that would only have served as a 'place of refuge' and whose 'prospects for permanent urban occupation were bleak'.[83]

CHRISTCHURCH AND THE BURGHAL HIDAGE ASSESSMENT

Based on the formula attached to the appendix in version A of the Burghal Hidage, it is clear that the assessment in the Burghal Hidage for Christchurch shows a 'mismatch' between the numbers of hides assigned to *Twynham* and the length of defences that would have constituted the complete circuit. This states that the burh should be provided with four men, at one man from each hide, to construct and maintain one pole length of defences.[84] As reconstructed in Figure 2, the complete circuit would have been about 1520 yards (1390 m) in length, which according to this formula would have required men from 1105 hides. The stated 470 hides assigned to *Twynham* therefore allowed the builders of the defences less than half the manpower that in theory was required to construct and garrison a complete circuit around the burh.[85] The reconstruction of Christchurch's primary layout means that the significance of the 'shortfall' in the hidage assessment in the Burghal Hidage needs rethinking.[86] It calls into question the neat correspondence between the totals of hidages of the more important Domesday boroughs and the number of hides in each shire at the time of Domesday, which Brooks champions.[87] This view disregards the development of many burhs that were founded in Wessex as defended urban places to replace the smaller 'emergency' forts of the Burghal Hidage (of which Barnstaple and Totnes are good examples) after the Burghal Hidage scheme was drawn up. These still had to be provided with men for maintenance of the defences, building and repairing the bridges and for garrison duty in the same way, and from the same 'pool' of hides of each shire, as were the larger burhs of the initial system.[88] The question of how the creation, upkeep and development of the defensive functions of particular places such as Christchurch, as well as of the wider defensive system around Wessex that developed from the system set out in the Burghal Hidage, were apparently so successfully managed on the ground from the available resources is discussed below.[89]

I have argued elsewhere that the Burghal Hidage figures are more a reflection of local administrative needs and arrangements than an exact prescription of the length of the defences as actually built.[90] It is clear that this formula was

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[83] Brooks 1996, 134–6; 2003, 159–60.
[84] I have commented on this at length in Haslam 2005, 146–7.
[85] Haslam 2005, 145.
[86] Similar arguments apply to the issue as to whether the riverside of the burh at Wareham or Wallingford had defences on all sides.
[87] Brooks 1996, 134–6; 2003, 159–60.
[88] Haslam 2005, 138–9. Barnstaple and Totnes: Haslam 1984a, 251–6, 259–62.
[89] For further comments on this question, see Brooks 1996; Haslam 2005, 146–7. For the replacement of the small forts with larger burhs, see Haslam 1984a, 262–7; Hill 2000; and comments on Hill's dating in Haslam 2005, 137–9, n 103.
[90] Haslam 2005, 129–34.

originally worked out in relation to the perceived defensive needs of Winchester, and that the available manpower was based on an estimate of resources required from the administrative area of the burh, which would have been loosely constrained by the number of hides available for each shire.[91] In Hampshire, Winchester's gain was clearly *Twynham*'s (and *Hamtun*'s — Southampton's) loss. It must be concluded that the reality of the situation on the ground meant not only that the construction, manning and maintenance of the defences of places other than Winchester (apart from Bath and Wallingford) were to be effected with fewer conscripted men than the formula required, but also that these men were indeed perfectly capable of doing the job. The suggested timescale for the construction of the fortress — I argue about 15 months from May 878 to August 879 — therefore implies that this was created as part of a well-planned, well-organised and intensive building programme. The shortfall in manpower implied by many of the assessments in the Burghal Hidage could have been met, at least in part, by the labour and services of the new permanent population of the fortresses as a condition of their tenure of their new properties.[92] Furthermore, if the manpower services available from each hide and from the tenure of the burgage plots were due on an annual basis, then there would have been manpower enough to have ensured an adequate level of maintenance and defence once the fortifications had been built.

The inherent flexibility of this situation, in which decisions could be taken at a local level for the implementation of a centrally organised plan for the strategic provision of a system of defended places within the kingdom, would have been one that would have best suited the conditions of the times. The corollary of this is that no conclusions about the presence or absence of defences of these Burghal Hidage fortresses, based on the formula in the appendix to version A of the Burghal Hidage, can be drawn by reference to their hidage assessments alone, unless tested against topographical, archaeological or other field evidence. Several instances of correspondences (of greater or lesser exactitude) between assessments and lengths of defences determined on the ground has led to the development of the paradigm that this was the intended norm for the compilers of the Burghal Hidage (or, more accurately, the creators of the original system of burhs), and that it is possible on this basis to make predictions. Hill explicitly states this as a methodological principle, particularly in relation to Christchurch.[93] But the wide variation in the degree to which the observed length of the defences of the burhs included in the Burghal Hidage, where known, match the 'theoretical' length derived from the Calculation means that the length of defences of any one of them cannot be predicted from the assessment.[94] This is emphasised by the precise assessments for the burhs of

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[91] Brooks 1996, 132; Brooks 2003, 161 and esp n 24; Haslam 2005, 146–7.

[92] See further comments on these points in Haslam 2005, 139–41.

[93] For instance Hill 1996b, 80, 86; Hill 1996c, 96; Hill 2001, 158. Hill 1996d shows this attempted matching of real and assumed circuits with the hidage figures in almost every entry in his gazetteer. This paradigm was, it seems, begun by Miss Robertson in 1939 in the early discussion of the document (see Hill 1996b, 80–6), where she established an enduring inductive methodological principle by pointing out correspondences of figures to lengths but ignoring mismatches. Hill 1996b, 82–3 explicitly endorses this, although in the context of a broader perspective. Many of these mismatches have been discussed by Brooks 1996, 129–32; 2003, 161–2 and Haslam 2005, 139.

[94] This point has already been made by Brooks 1996, 130–1. See further comments in Haslam 2005, 146 and n 185.

Devon in the Burghal Hidage that, as Brooks has convincingly shown, relate to the hidage assessments of their respective burghal territories (which include Cornwall) rather than to the lengths of the perimeters of the burhs.[95]

The idea that the Burghal Hidage assessments can be used as a predictive tool is perhaps engendered in part by another paradigm: that it was composed in the early 10th century, long after the establishment of the system it records, and that it was therefore 'compiled' by one person from figures collected from the shires, as with a census return.[96] This not only removes any direct relationship between the figures and the setting up of the system, but also carries the implication that these figures should directly reflect the lengths of the defences of the burhs as actually built. But given the arguments made above that the Burghal Hidage document is a product of the process by which the system it describes was implemented in 878–9, the list of the Burghal Hidage and its assessments can best be interpreted as a 'top-down' set of summary prescriptions from the originators of the system to those responsible for setting it up in the field. The assessments therefore reflect more-or-less closely the decisions already taken about which defended places should be placed at which sites, about their character and size, and about the ways in which such a complex system with so many variables was to be facilitated and supported by the resources available on a shire-to-shire basis. The Burghal Hidage can be interpreted therefore as a follow-on from an initial directive which determined the most suitable sites that matched the strategic objectives of the system as a whole. This was then circulated from the centre to the shires as an aid to marshalling the resources necessary to ensure that all the elements of the system would be put in place. It clearly leaves many decisions about how to implement these assessments on the ground to the ealdorman, reeves and thegns in each shire, who would have had the responsibility of conscripting the men required to do the work.[97]

Furthermore, this fixation with matching hidage assessments to lengths of defences (and vice versa), while perhaps built-in to the way the Burghal Hidage Calculation is set out and expressed, ignores the manpower requirements for all the manifold tasks of setting out the physical sub-structure of these new burhs (as well as their associated bridges). Many of these were set out from the start as planned settlements whose creation as sustainable communities was intended to guarantee their defensive function, shown by their ordered layout and their organisation for permanent habitation, all of which would have required conscripted manpower to set up.[98] This one consideration alone removes any direct correlation between hidage assessments and length of defences as such.

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[95] Brooks 1996, 139–41. David Roffe (forthcoming) has applied a similar principle to an examination of the burghal territories of Wallingford and Sashes, which arguably extended to the southern part of the later shires of Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire respectively.

[96] See further discussion on this point in Haslam 2005, 147.

[97] This hypothesis about the origin of the Burghal Hidage perhaps explains why there were originally at least two versions of the document, each of which (versions A and B) has followed its own trajectory of manumission. For the levels of conscription required to put in place the system of burhs, see Brooks 1979, 18–19, and for a discussion of related administrative problems see Brooks 1996. The system could, however, have been worked out by one person, though he would have had to have possessed a detailed knowledge of the both the administrative and physical topography of the whole of greater Wessex.

[98] Biddle and Hill 1971; Biddle 1976, 124–34.

Seen in this light, the hidage assessments for each of the burhs in the Burghal Hidage appear as something of an administrative convenience, if not an actual contrivance. The creation of the system as a whole would have been a major public building project in which probably most of the population would have been, at one time or another, directly involved.[99] The recognition of the fact that the implementation of all this on the ground must have been an ongoing and multi-faceted process lasting several years, rather than a single event, introduces a degree of flexibility into the ways in which the available resources were distributed within shires that the prescriptive nature of the Burghal Hidage figures obscures rather than illuminates. There would also have been many aspects of the physical structure of the burhs whose details might well have been determined by the realities of the availability of manpower on the ground, without compromising the effectiveness of the system as a whole. The generous provision given to Winchester, for instance, would have allowed the surfacing of 8.6 km of streets of the new burh with 8000 tonnes of knapped flints,[100] while those of under-resourced Christchurch may well have been made up with only a minimum treatment of irregular spreads of gravel dug from the nearest boundary ditch.

CONCLUSION

It has been the intention to show that it is not appropriate to use the Burghal Hidage figures in ways that make predictions either about the length or location of a defensive circuit of any burh in the Burghal Hidage, or the presence or absence of defences over any particular stretch. The direct application of the figures relating to Christchurch in this predictive way is demonstrably untenable. Nor is it possible, for the same reasons, to make any meaningful statement about the use in any of the assessments of one or other of two different rod (pole or perch) lengths, derived from supposed matches (or mismatches) of actual perimeter lengths to lengths calculated from figures in the Burghal Hidage.[101] To make any of these inferences without rigorous testing on the ground is not a valid procedure and has no predictive value. To go down any of these paths is to enter an Alice-through-the-Looking-Glass world where there are neither objective reference points nor agreed rules of interpretation, and where any figure or combination of figures can in consequence be harnessed to justify or bolster whatever a particular commentator cares to establish.[102]

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[99] Brooks 1979, 17–20.
[100] Biddle 1976, 124–34.
[101] As suggested, for instance, in Hinton 1996, 153–7.
[102] An illustration of the dangers of making untenable assumptions is provided by attempts to date an outlier on the northern defences of Bath as being late Saxon by reference to the nearly exact match with the theoretical length inferred from the Burghal Hidage figures, if this were included in the length of the defences (O'Leary 1981, 22). This feature may well be late Saxon, as O'Leary suggests, but on this evidence is not demonstrably so. A further example is the attempt to identify the Burghal Hidage burh at *Eorpeburnan* with Rye (Sussex) on the basis of the identity of the length of the medieval defended perimeter of the latter with the hidage of the former given in the Burghal Hidage (Kitchen 1984). See also the use of the Burghal Hidage figures to determine the extent of the original enceinte at Oxford in Munby 2003. In this instance the general arguments may well be sound, but the figures cannot be used as evidence in their support.

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Résumé

Les débuts du développement de Christchurch dans le Dorset à l'époque saxonne tardive et le *Burghal Hidage* par Jeremy Haslam

Au vu des avancées réalisées au cours des 25 dernières années dans l'étude du *burh* (ville fortifiée) anglo-saxon, d'une réévaluation de la date et du contexte du *Burghal Hidage* et d'une récente analyse de données archéologiques comparables provenant de Cricklade, il est nécessaire de procéder à un nouvel examen des données archéologiques des défenses du *burh* de l'époque saxonne tardive de Christchurch. En reconstituant le paysage urbain, il est alors possible de reconsidérer la portée des calculs de surface imposable du *Burghal Hidage* pour tous les *burhs* du système qu'il décrit. Cela permet également de comparer en contexte le développement de Christchurch à celui d'autres *burhs* du Wessex et de la Mercie méridionale, et de voir sous un jour nouveau les processus historiques généraux du IXe au début du XIe siècle.

Zusammenfassung

Die frühe Entwicklung des spät-angelsächsischen Christchurch, Dorset, und das *Burghal Hidage* von Jeremy Haslam

Nach den Fortschritten im Verständnis des angelsächsischen *burh* in den letzten 25 Jahren, einer Neubewertung des *Burghal Hidage* und einer neueren Analyse vergleichbarer archäologischer Beweisstücke aus Cricklade wurde eine Neubeurteilung der archäologischen Beweisstücke der Verteidigungsanlagen des spät-angelsächsischen *burh* in Christchurch notwendig. Dadurch wurde eine Rekonstruktion der städtischen Landschaft möglich, die wiederum einen neuen Blick auf die Bedeutung der *hidage*-Bewertungen im *Burghal Hidage* für alle dort beschriebenen *burhs* im System ermöglicht. Die Entwicklung von Christchurch wird auch in den Zusammenhang mit der der anderen *burhs* in Wessex und Süd-Mercia gesetzt und wirft neues Licht auf allgemeine historische Vorgänge vom 9. bis zum frühen 11. Jahrhundert.

Riassunto

Gli inizi del *burh* tardo sassone di Christchurch in Dorset e il *Burghal Hidage*
di Jeremy Haslam

Le nuove conoscenze sul *burh* (città fortificata) anglosassone acquisite negli ultimi 25 anni, una revisione della cronologia e del contesto del *Burghal Hidage* (elenco delle città fortificate) e un'analisi recente di testimonianze archeologiche analoghe rilevate a Cricklade, hanno reso necessario rivedere la documentazione archeologica delle difese del *burh* di Christchurch nel tardo periodo sassone. Questo permette di ricostruire il paesaggio urbano, e quindi interpretare in modo nuovo il significato delle stime catastali del *Burghal Hidage* per tutti i *burh* del sistema che descrive. Questa revisione permette inoltre di confrontare lo sviluppo di Christchurch nel contesto di altri *burh* del Wessex e della Mercia meridionale e arricchisce di nuove conoscenze il panorama generale dei processi storici del periodo che va dal IX agli inizi dell'XI secolo.