The Two Anglo-Saxon *Burhs* of Oxford

Jeremy Haslam

SUMMARY

This article puts forward a new context and chronology for the development of the two parts of the late Saxon burh at Oxford, using archaeological, topographical, and historical evidence. It argues that the original burh was created in c.878–9 and that the eastern extension – effectively a second burh – was added in the early tenth century. Both dates are earlier than those usually proposed. The results of recent excavations on the site of the Norman castle have made it possible not only to establish the original extent of the primary burh, but also to identify a phase of the re-defence in probably the early eleventh century as a response to renewed Viking raiding.

Ageneral hypothesis which has emerged from work on the development of Oxford over a century or more is that an original defended nucleus centred on the cross-roads at Carfax was augmented by a secondary defended area which formed an eastern extension at some later date. Observations of various kinds, mainly of an archaeological and topographical nature, have been adduced in support of this hypothesis, some aspects of which have recently been discussed by Julian Munby.[1] Although many – but by no means all – of the arguments put forward in support of this hypothesis are compelling in combination, important aspects of Oxford's early urban development remain uncertain or controversial. By applying what Anne Dodd has described as 'a critical archaeological examination' to the available evidence,[2] it is possible to articulate a new model and revised timeframe for the origin and development of both of the primary and secondary *burhs* and to place them within their wider political and strategic contexts. Support for this reassessment is provided by a reconstruction of the tenurial development of the eastern extension by reference mainly to the evidence from Domesday Book. It is suggested that this new model represents a considerable paradigm shift from views which have held the stage virtually unchallenged for the last few decades.

THE EXISTENCE OF AN EASTERN EXTENSION

One aspect of the evidence for the hypothesis of the eastern extension is that the lines of the defences of each of the parts are aligned neither on the northern nor the southern side, and that the 'join' between them exhibits topographical characteristics which can best be interpreted as arising from the former existence of a zone between them comprising a defensive bank plus one or two ditches of the primary *burh* (see Fig. 1). These features have influenced the development of the above-ground topography of the two parallel lines of streets (Schools Street/Oriel Street on the west and Catte Street/Magpie Lane on the east), the former line representing the intra-mural or wall street of the primary *burh* to the west, the latter an alignment outside the line of the possible outer ditch. Catte Street and Magpie Lane bear a remarkable resemblance to the *twichene* of Winchester, a series of extra-mural streets of early medieval origin running around

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[1]   J. Munby, 'Eastern Extension', in A. Dodd (ed.), *Oxford Before the University*, Thames Valley Landscapes Monograph, 17 (Oxford, 2003), pp. 24–5. The background to much of the discussion that follows, including essential reference plans, is presented in syntheses by Anne Dodd in ibid.; J. Blair, 'An Introduction to the Oxfordshire Domesday', in R.H.W. Erskine and A. Williams (eds.), *The Oxfordshire Domesday* (London, 1990), pp. 1–19; J. Blair, *Anglo-Saxon Oxfordshire* (Stroud, 1994).

[2]   A. Dodd, 'Synthesis and Discussion', in Dodd (ed.), *Oxford Before the University*, p. 32.
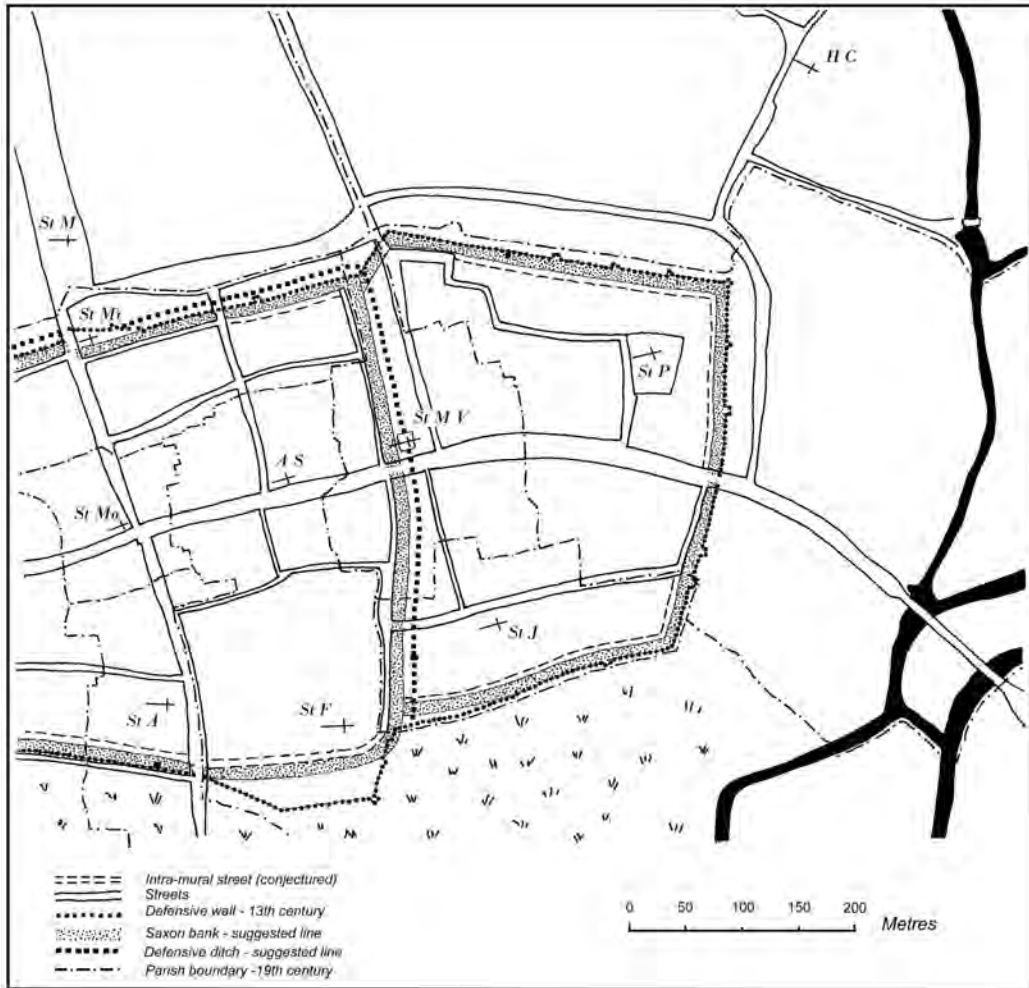
Fig. 1. Detail of eastern half of the defended *enceinte*.

Churches: St M – St Mary Magdalen. St Mi – St Michael's. HC – Holy Cross. St P – St Peter's. St MV – St Mary the Virgin. AS – All Saints. St Ma – St Martin's. St A – St Aldate's. St J – St John's. St F – St Frideswide's.

the outside of the zone of ditches,[3] although the archaeological evidence of the street surfaces of Catte Street (discussed below) shows it to have been an integral part of the layout of the eastern *burh*. The eastern extension may be considered as beginning at, and including, the eastern line of these two pairs of streets.

This topographical hypothesis is supported by several aspects of the archaeological evidence. Perhaps most significant has been the observation of stone wall defences which ran southwards to the west of the alignment of Catte Street and Magpie Lane, excavated on the site of the Clarendon quadrangle in 1899. This has been taken by most commentators to have been the eastern line of the defences of the primary *burh* which was later extended to the east.[4] Julian Munby's analysis has shown quite clearly that this stone wall was an addition to an earth and turf bank on its western, inner, side. In other words, this must represent the north-east corner and the eastern side of the defences of the original *burh*. This secondary wall was also found in several places to extend westwards on the northern side of the defences. It parallels the finding of a secondary stone wall fronting an earth bank on the northern side near the north gate,[5] and at another excavated stretch a little further to the west in St Michael's Street.[6] In both of these sections the evidence shows that this wall was inserted against the front of a timber-revetted bank. A similar relationship between the fronting stone wall added to a primary bank of earth and turf has also been found recently in an exposure of what appears to have been the line of the original defences on the site of the castle.[7] This will be described in more detail below.

The inferences which can be made from the above-ground topography about the existence of a bank and ditches along the suggested line of the eastern defences of the primary *burh* are very much strengthened not only by the archaeological evidence of the wall along this line, but also by the evidence of a ditch or ditches along this alignment. Observations have been made, firstly, of a ditch in Corpus Christi front quad 'more than 4 m deep and … filled with unstable black mud', aligned north-east to south-west,[8] and, secondly, of a tilt observed during the building of the tower of St Mary's church in the thirteenth century.[9] This ditch appears to have taken advantage of the natural re-entrant in the line of the southern edge of the second gravel terrace just to the south-east and east of St Frideswide's church (the original St Mary's). This would have formed a topographically well-defined site which was clearly utilized by the early minster church, with the edge of the gravel terrace forming natural defences to the south and east.[10] Observations in the vicinity of St Mary's church have also suggested the presence of at least one defensive ditch crossing the line of High Street. This presumed ditch, into which St Mary's tower subsided, appears to be represented by a negative feature located at point G in recent archaeological observations

[3]   M. Biddle, 'General Topography', in M. Biddle (ed.), *Winchester in the Early Middle Ages*, Winchester Studies, 1 (Oxford), pp. 274–5.

[4]   A. Dodd, 'Appendix 1', in Dodd (ed.), *Oxford Before the University*, p. 396, no. 9; J. Munby, 'Excavations on the Line of the City Wall in the Clarendon Quadrangle, 1899', in Dodd (ed.), *Oxford Before the University*, pp. 172–83. But note the dissenting voice of E.M. Jope, 'Saxon Oxford and its Region' in D.B. Harden (ed.) *Dark Age Britain* (London, 1956), p. 241.

[5]   B. Durham et al., 'Oxford's Northern Defences: Archaeological Studies 1971–82', *Oxoniensia*, 48 (1983), 13–40; Blair, *Anglo-Saxon Oxfordshire*, pp. 148–9.

[6]   D.R.P. Wilkinson, 'Excavations at 24A St Michael's Street, 1985', in Dodd (ed.), *Oxford Before the University*, pp. 140–52; Dodd, 'Appendix 1', p. 412, no. 106.

[7]   D. Poore et al., 'Excavations at Oxford Castle: Oxford's Western Quarter from the Mid-Saxon Period to the Late Eighteenth Century', *Oxoniensia*, 74 (2009), pp. 3–5. A full report is in preparation, and I am grateful to Andy Norton for a preview of some of its conclusions. This evidence updates Dodd's discussion of the problem of the line of the western defences (*Oxford Before the University*, pp. 23, 27).

[8]   Dodd, 'Appendix 1', p. 401, no. 36; T. Hassall, 'Excavations at Oxford 1972: Fifth Interim Report', *Oxoniensia*, 38 (1973), pp. 273–4. The circumstances of the excavation of the ditch in Corpus quad make both the stated size of this ditch, and indeed its orientation, somewhat equivocal.

[9]   T.G. Jackson, *The Church of St Mary the Virgin*, Oxford (Oxford, 1897), pp. 82–3.

[10]   J. Blair, 'St Frideswide's Monastery: Problems and Possibilities', *Oxoniensia*, 53 (1988), pp. 228–31; Blair, *Anglo-Saxon Oxfordshire*, p. 147, Fig. 86.

along the High Street, where the original road was lower than expected, and which is interpreted as the presence of 'a late-Saxon defensive ditch for the eastern [line of the] defences'.[11] This ditch would have been substantially filled in to create the continuous line of the High Street joining the primary and the secondary *burh*. It is probable that an original second ditch also ran to the west of the Catte Street/Magpie Lane alignment, and that this would have been, again, at a lower level.

The archaeological observations of the defences of the eastern extension are few but significant. At New College the earth and turf bank was observed in several places,[12] though the front part of the Saxon defences had been replaced by the early thirteenth-century wall. The defences have also been observed near the north-east corner,[13] to the south of the east gate,[14] further to the south,[15] and possibly on the south side.[16] Although this accumulated evidence, apart from Booth's evidence from New College, is somewhat equivocal, it seems likely on balance that the earth-bank defences of the three sides of the eastern extension would have been faced with a stone wall, presumably as part of their initial construction. An excavation further to the west on the south side appears to suggest that the line of the original Saxon defences lay further to the north – in other words, that the early thirteenth-century defences diverged southwards at this point from the earlier alignment.[17] This would be consistent with a tendency for the medieval alignment to veer southwards to meet the continuation of these defences around the southern part of the primary defended enclosure. In other words, it seems likely that the disjunction between the southern part of the original defences of the eastern extension and the earlier alignment was even more marked than later evidence would suggest, and reinforces the suggestion that the low ground represented by the natural re-entrant to the line of the gravel terrace at this position, pointed out above, was a major determinant in the layout of the Saxon defences.

Several observations of the make-up of some of the primary street surfaces of the two *burhs* are also of significance for any assessment of both the internal layout and the date of the eastern extension. An observation of the primary street surface of Catte Street shows it to have been laid out with the same materials as were used in the primary street surfaces of several other places within the primary *burh*, including a length of the High Street both inside and outside of the primary *burh* in the vicinity of St Mary's church (see Fig. 1).[18] This observation, together with the presence of St Neot's-type ware from one of the resurfacings, shows not only that Catte Street originated as one element in the layout of the secondary *burh* to its east; it also demonstrates that it is very close in date to the layout of the primary *burh*. The disjunction between these observations and the hypothesis that the eastern extension is of early eleventh-century date has been discussed in detail by Anne Dodd.[19] However, this evidence is far more consistent with an origin for the eastern extension in the early tenth century, which is argued in detail below.

There are other arguments which have been put forward for the existence of this eastern extension which are, however, difficult to sustain. The first derives from the supposed distribution of defaulters to the duty of wall repair in a writ of 1227, who appear to be concentrated in the

[11]   Dodd et al., 'The Town: Detailed Studies of Sites within the Late Saxon and Medieval Town', in Dodd (ed.), *Oxford Before the University*, pp. 264–7.

[12]   P. Booth, 'Excavations on the Line of the City Defences at New College, Oxford, 1993', *Oxoniensia*, 60 (1995), 205–24; P. Booth, 'Excavations on the Line of the City Wall at New College, 1993', in Dodd (ed.), *Oxford Before the University*, pp. 183–6.

[13]   Dodd, 'Appendix 1', p. 406, no. 69; Durham et al., 'Oxford's Northern Defences', pp. 26–7. At this site the thirteenth-century stone wall is interpreted as being somewhat off-line in relation to the late-Saxon defences.

[14]   Dodd, 'Appendix 1', pp. 405–6, no. 68.

[15]   Ibid. p. 405, no. 66.

[16]   Ibid. p. 401, no. 39.

[17]   T. Hassall, 'Excavations in Merton College, Oxford, in 1970', *Oxoniensia*, 36 (1971), pp. 34–48; Dodd, 'Appendix 1', p. 405, no. 67.

[18]   Dodd, 'Synthesis and Discussion', p. 28, and 'The Town', pp. 260, 264, in Dodd (ed.), *Oxford Before the University*.

[19]   Dodd, 'Synthesis and Discussion', pp. 28–9.

eastern extension.[20] Julian Munby draws two conclusions from this meager evidence: that most of the 'mural mansions' of Domesday Book were situated in this quarter, and that they were given the duty of repairing the wall on the occasion of the building of the defences of the eastern extension. The first of these inferences is not sustainable, for reasons which will be discussed elsewhere. The second may well be sustainable, but for different reasons. The evidence presented by Hilary Turner is, however, more consistent with the proposition that *all* the non-customary burgesses of the whole town (those attached to rural manors and paying dues to the holder of the manor rather than the king) were responsible for wall work. The whole question is of importance in any consideration of the origin of the *burh*, and since it has been used in evidence for the original 'garrison theory' of the origin of the Anglo-Saxon *burh* or borough by F.W. Maitland, it will be examined in detail in a wider context elsewhere.[21]

Another of the reasons for holding that the eastern part of the walled area is an extension to a primary *enceinte* is the fact that the length of the defences of the primary, western, circuit appears to fit loosely with the calculations which can be derived from the figures given in the Calculation attached to the main List of the Burghal Hidage. These are used to suggest that the eastern circuit is an addition to a primary defended circuit whose length formed the basis of the hidage given for Oxford in the document.[22] However, the present writer has given detailed reasons why the Burghal Hidage figures cannot be used in this predictive way.[23] There are so many variations in the degree to which the known lengths of some defences correspond to the expectations derived from the figures, that such predictions are meaningless. Any argument from a supposed match or mismatch with the Burghal Hidage figures cannot be regarded as having evidential value in deciding the issue. Neither can these figures be used to support or contradict inferences or conclusions about the presence or absence of defences on the south side of the *burh*.[24]

The archaeological evidence does in general, however, provide good evidence from which the existence of the eastern extension as a secondary expansion to an earlier defended *enceinte*, as well as its early date which is argued below, can be reasonably inferred.

THE EXTENT OF THE PRIMARY *BURH*

The extent of the primary *burh* on the east and northern sides has been discussed above. There is little room for any differences of opinion as to the details of the line of the boundaries here. Views on the course of the defences on the south and west have been, however, the subject of considerable debate. The argument that the original Saxon defences were absent on the southern side,[25] leaving the early minster of St Frideswide entirely unprotected, makes little sense from a strategic point of view. As John Blair has argued in detail, it would seem most probable that the primary defences

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[20] H. Turner, 'The Mural Mansions of Oxford: Attempted Identifications', *Oxoniensia*, 55 (1990), 73–9; Munby, 'Eastern Extension', p. 24.

[21] J. Haslam, 'Urban-Rural Connections in Domesday Book and the Late Anglo-Saxon Town', forthcoming.

[22] Munby, 'Eastern Extension', p. 24. Similar arguments are made in Jope, 'Saxon Oxford and its Region', pp. 241–2, where it is suggested that the eastern extension was not a separate entity on the basis of the figure given for Oxford of 2,400 hides (now recognized as being incorrect). See also T. Hassall, 'Excavations at Oxford, 1969', *Oxoniensia*, 35 (1970), p. 18; Hassall, 'Excavations in Merton College'; R.H.C. Davis, 'The Ford, the River and the City', *Oxoniensia*, 38, pp. 265–6 and n. 30; *VCH Oxon.* 4, p. 8; D. Hill, 'The Shiring of Mercia – Again', in N.J. Higham and D. Hill (eds.), *Edward the Elder* (London, 2001), pp. 144–59.

[23] J. Haslam, 'The Development of Late Saxon Christchurch, Dorset, and the Burghal Hidage', *MedArch*, 53 (2009), pp. 111–14.

[24] Note also the comments to this effect about the defences of Wallingford in D.R. Roffe, 'Wallingford in Domesday Book and Beyond', in K.S.B. Keats-Rohan and D.R. Roffe (eds.), *The Origins of the Borough of Wallingford: Archaeological and Historical Perspectives*, BAR BS, 494 (2009), p. 42.

[25] T. Hassall, 'Archaeology of Oxford City', in G. Briggs, J. Cook, and T. Rowley (eds.), *The Archaeology of the Oxford Region*, Oxford University Dept. of External Studies (1986), pp. 118–19; T. Hassall et al., 'Excavations in St Ebbe's Oxford, 1967–76', *Oxoniensia*, 54 (1989), p. 272 and Fig. 80; Dodd, 'Synthesis and Discussion', p. 23.

followed the edge of the gravel terrace on the southern side to enclose the site of the early minster, and that the original bank and wall were replaced in the early twelfth century, and again in the thirteenth century, by stone wall defences on a different alignment.[26] The existence of defences on this line appears anyway to be demonstrated by the presence of an intra-mural road in the south-east corner – to the east and south of the minster – which was a feature of the precinct of the minster in the early twelfth century.[27] At the site of Littlegate, at the southern end of St Ebbe's Street, Brian Durham's excavation on its western side has demonstrated the absence of the Saxon bank, with the early thirteenth-century wall being built over an area of domestic occupation,[28] while to the east, the line of a probable defensive bank and wall was observed on the southern side of Pembroke College.[29] The most natural explanation for the absence of the Saxon bank at Littlegate is that the alingnment of the thirteenth-century wall was pushed southwards from the earlier line, for reasons to do with local topographical or tenurial constraints. This is reflected in the modern topography, which shows that the alignment of the western part of the southern wall of the Pemboke College precinct – the northern wall of Brewer Street – veers southwards towards the site of Littlegate.

The line of the defences on the south-western and western sides of the *burh* has been considerably clarified by recent excavations at the site of the castle, which have in several places exposed a length of the primary defences underlying the works associated with the building of the castle in 1071.[30] The defences lay at the western edge of the gravel terrace, and consisted here of a primary bank of dumped clay, earth, and turves laid on an area of gravel. Against the outer face of the bank a ragstone wall of two phases had been built. The similarity of this to the defences seen in St Michael's street in 1985 suggests that these are the primary defences of the original Alfredian *burh*.

This conclusion is reinforced by the presence on other parts of the site of extensive middle- and late-Saxon occupation, including houses ranged along streets as well as the surface of a possibly intra-mural street of similar character to early streets elsewhere. This evidence appears to confound the more general and widely supported paradigm that an original rectangular *burh*, laid out on the model of Wallingford or Cricklade (Wilts.) and centred on Carfax, was extended at a later date to the west.[31] To hold that the defences of the western part of the town extended to the edge of the gravel terrace where possible would be a much more appropriate solution from a strategic point of view than to suggest that a pre-determined plan-form was imposed onto a site without regard for its topography. In other words, the general model that late-Saxon towns were basically rectilinear in form, current since the publication of the work of Biddle and Hill in

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[26]   Blair, 'St Frideswide's Monastery', pp. 222 (Fig. 90), 228–31 (esp. Fig. 92); Blair, *Anglo-Saxon Oxfordshire*, pp. 147 (Fig. 86), 149. These are counter-arguments for the view expressed by Ann Cooper that the course of the defences ran to the north of St Frideswide's minster.

[27]   Blair, 'St Frideswide's Monastery', pp. 236–7.

[28]   B. Durham, 'Littlegate Site D', in Hassall et al., 'Excavations in St Ebbe's', pp. 130–40.

[29]   Dodd, 'Gazetteer', pp. 407–8 (no. 81).

[30]   Poore et al., 'Excavations at Oxford Castle', pp. 3–5, and p. 8, Fig. 4 (revised map of *burh*); further information from Andy Norton (2010).

[31]   The details of the development of this paradigm, one of the more interesting sidelines in medieval urban topography, can be found in Durham et al., 'Oxford's Northern Defences', pp. 32–5; T. Hassall, 'The Topography of Pre-University Oxford' in C.G. Smith and D.I. Scargill (eds.), *Oxford and its Region*, (Oxford, 1975), p. 31; Blair, 'St Frideswide's Monastery', p. 222, Fig. 90. See also Durham et al., 'Oxford's Northern Defences', p. 35, where late-Saxon occupation under the castle mound found by E.M. Jope is seen as an undefended suburb, and Hassall et al., 'Excavations in St Ebbe's', pp. 269–72, where the western defences are taken as following a north-south line at the position of the castle ditch (followed by Blair, *Anglo-Saxon Oxfordshire*, pp. 146–9). The most recent discussion takes a similar line, but admits as an outside possibility that the western defences extended to the river: Dodd, 'The Town', p. 202, Fig. 5.1.

1971, needs to be modified to take account of the operation of a wider range of factors, including adaptation to the strategic opportunities and possibilities offered by each site.[32]

THE RE-DEFENCE OF THE *BURH* IN THE EARLY ELEVENTH CENTURY

The excavations on the site of the castle, described briefly above, also provide further insights into the development of the defences in the later tenth and early eleventh century, putting the more elusive evidence from elsewhere into perspective.[33] As discussed above, there is clear evidence in several places for the addition of a stone wall to the front of a turf and earth bank, which appears, as in other places on the northern side of the defences, to have replaced an original turf and/or wooden revetment. A new phase of walling was then built on top of the truncated remains of this wall, the collapsed remains of the first phase wall having apparently also spilled out to the front. At the base of the construction trench to the rear of this secondary phase of wall was a sherd of pottery of Oxfordshire fabric OXY, usually placed in the later eleventh century, but here stratigraphically earlier than the construction of the castle in 1071. The construction trench of this wall also truncated at least two burials which had been cut into the bank, which had calibrated radiocarbon dates of 949–1028 and 979–1050.

This important sequence can be interpreted by reference to the model for the historical development of the *burh* which is discussed in the following section. As in other places on the northern side of the defences, the probably unstable revetment of the primary bank was replaced soon after by a stone wall, which in this case was built into a shallow cut which was lower than the base of the bank.[34] These observations would be consistent with a context of the general strengthening of the primary defences in the early or mid 890s argued below. A phase of the abandonment of the defences, probably in the latter half of the tenth century, is indicated on the castle site both by the 'collapse' of the stone wall to the front over a layer of earth which had built up after its construction, and by the extension of the graveyard of St George's church over the area of the bank in the late tenth century.

This phase was then succeeded by the reconstruction of the wall on the same alignment, the construction trench at the back of which cut into the bank and truncated the fill of the graves. This evidence is consistent with a phase of refurbishment of the defences in years around 1000, in which the wall was rebuilt as part of a general programme initiated by King Aethelred involving the re-defence of the country against renewed Viking attack, which is indicated by both historical and archaeological evidence in other places.[35] In this instance, the date of the pottery from the construction trench of the second-phase wall, usually assigned to after *c*.1075, needs to be revised to accommodate the general force of the implications of this developmental model.

The identification of a phase of consolidation of the defences in the early eleventh century after a period of abandonment in the late tenth also puts in context other observations of the defensive sequence in the south-western part of the town. A section of the wall near the former Westgate

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[32]   M. Biddle and D. Hill, 'Late Saxon Planned Towns', *Antiquaries Journal*, 51 (1971), pp. 70–85. Cf. Haslam, 'Christchurch', pp. 95–108.

[33]   Dodd, 'Gazetteer', p. 416, no. 124.

[34]   For a summary of some of the points in this paragraph see Poore et al., 'Excavations at Oxford Castle', pp. 3–5 (with some differences in interpretation).

[35]   R. Abels, *Lordship and Military Obligation in Anglo-Saxon England* (London 1988), pp. 88–9; R. Abels, 'English Tactics, Strategy and Military Organization in the Late Tenth century', in D. Scragg (ed.) *The Battle of Maldon AD 991* (Oxford, 1991), pp. 143–55; R. Abels, 'From Alfred to Harold II: The Military Failure of the Late Anglo-Saxon State' in R. Abels and B.S. Bachrach (eds.), *The Normans and their Adversaries at War* (Woodbridge, 2001), pp. 15–30; J. Haslam, 'The Late Saxon *Burhs* at Daws Castle near Watchet, Somerset, and their Context', *Archaeological Journal*, forthcoming. The archaeological sequence described here is remarkably similar to that at Cricklade: J. Haslam, 'Excavations at Cricklade in 1975', *Internet Archaeology*, 14 (2003).

excavated in 1969 showed two phases of walling, one built on top of the other.[36] Tom Hassall has interpreted the upper wall as possibly representing the remains of the thirteenth-century wall, overlying an earlier wall of post-Conquest date which had 'nothing to do with the late-Saxon defences of the town'. This latter interpretation is predicated on the assumption that the course of the town wall at this point was a 'realignment', when the walls had to be 'brought in to meet it [the castle works]'.[37] This assumption, however, is questionable: the wall at this point heads straight for the position of the Saxon wall near St George's church, and was anyway built as near to the edge of the gravel terrace as it could have been. A realignment at this point would have been both difficult and unnecessary, and was anyway outside the area of the town directly affected by the works associated with the castle.

Given these considerations, it seems equally likely that the lower part of the wall at this point was the equivalent to the first phase wall in the sequence recorded at the castle, and that it therefore represents the fronting revetment to the primary bank of 878–9 (for the date see below). The evidence from this site is therefore consistent with the hypothesis that this secondary wall built on top of the first represents the remains of the wall rebuilt in the early eleventh century, which is seen so clearly at the castle site.

There are other indications in the archaeological evidence relating to some sites on the northern side of the defences for processes ascribed here to the later tenth and eleventh centuries which can be demonstrated more clearly on the castle site. At St Michael's Street the secondary stone wall which replaced the timber revetment or breastwork of the primary bank was observed to have been overlain by another wall of different build, slightly offset from the alignment of the earlier wall.[38] David Wilkinson has postulated 'an intervening construction phase or phases between the first stone wall … and the thirteenth-century work'.[39] The fact that the walls in question are similar in many respects to the two-phase wall at the castle site described above provides good reason for inferring that this secondary phase wall at St Michael's Street represents the same rebuild of the defences in the early eleventh century.

The recognition of this same phase can also provide a new and particularly appropriate historical context for the sequence of events shown in the construction of the tower and church of St Michael's in the Northgate, whose development has been the subject of considerable discussion.[40] Anne Dodd has suggested that 'the tower may have formed part of a complex defensive arrangement associated with the creation of a forward enclosure... [which was] constructed in a single campaign that provided the church with an extended graveyard, all enclosed by a new defensive wall'. This would appear to be supported by the observation at the site of St Michael's church, excavated in 1972–3, of a secondary wall of probably defensive function built within the late Saxon ditch to the north of the primary bank and its stone wall revetment. The constructional details of this feature are remarkably similar to those recorded at the castle site. It would seem consistent with the archaeological, structural, and topographical evidence as a whole to suggest that this secondary wall was part of this new 'complex defensive arrangement', and that the whole may well have been associated with the new phase of the re-defence of the *burh* in probably the early eleventh century.[41]

[36]   Dodd, 'Gazetteer', p. 412, no. 103; Hassall, 'Excavations at Oxford, 1969', pp. 15–18.

[37]   Hassall, 'Excavations at Oxford, 1969', p. 16.

[38]   Wilkinson, 'Excavations at 24A St Michael's Street', p. 147 (phase 6, section of trench II in Fig. 4.8, feature 23). In the cellar watching brief this was observed to have been topped by large blocks of probably another wall suggested as belonging to the thirteenth-century phase of construction (ibid. p. 148).

[39]   Ibid. p. 151.

[40]   B. Durham et al., 'St Michael at the Northgate Tower Survey', in Dodd (ed.), *Oxford Before the University*, pp. 152–64.

[41]   For the defensive sequence at St Michael's, see Durham et al., 'Oxford's Northern Defences', pp. 14–18. Durham ascribes this wall to the mid eleventh century on the evidence of one sherd of pottery from its construction trench which

John Blair's hypothesis of the identification of the tower of St Michael's as part of the official residence of one of the earls of Mercia would also be quite consistent with the processes shown by the cooperation of the earls with the king in the formation and upkeep of the defences of *burhs* in the late Anglo-Saxon period,[42] which is evident in historical sources.[43] This may indeed represent a situation in which a church, with its graveyard, which was associated in some way with the gate of the primary *burh* in the late ninth century, was expanded to occupy part of the area of the bank and possibly the berm in front of it during a period of disuse of the defences in the later tenth century, which complex was then enclosed and consolidated, to be provided with new and enlarged defences in the early eleventh. This in turn would be consistent with the importance of St Michael's church at the time of Domesday, and also with the suggestion, made below, for its function as one of several 'sub-minsters' with large extra-mural parishes in the formative stages of the development of the ninth-century *burh*. Indeed, it would not be stretching the evidence beyond the bounds of possibility to suggest that a similar pattern can be recognized in the development of St George's church and its tower and graveyard adjacent to the west gate, alluded to above, though the present tower appears to be no earlier than the 1050s.[44] A similar pattern could also explain the holdings of Earl Aubrey before the Conquest at St Mary's next to the east gate of the primary *burh*, discussed below.

THE CONTEXT OF THE FORMATION OF THE PRIMARY AND SECONDARY *BURHS*

The establishment of an appropriate context for the creation of this eastern extension involves a reconsideration of the date and context both for the creation of the primary *burh* and for the subsequent re-facing of its original timber-fronted defences with a stone wall. A strong body of opinion has for some time held that the origins of the primary *burh* of Oxford belong to the last few years of the ninth century or the reign of King Edward the Elder in the early tenth century. John Blair has argued in several publications that the setting up of the *burh* should be seen in a Mercian context as the creation of Aethelflaed and Aethelred, sub-regents of Mercia under King Alfred, in probably the closing years of the ninth century.[45] This is based in part on the presence of the *Ohsnaforda* coin of King Alfred, thought to be of this period,[46] notwithstanding that logically this provides only a *terminus ante quem* for the existence of the *burh*. It is also seen as being consistent with the dating of the Burghal Hidage (in which Oxford appears) which until recently has been thought to date to the second decade of the tenth century; the mention in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle of Oxford as an important military centre in 911; and the fact that Oxford is not mentioned in 886 when Alfred 'regained' London. This line of argument and its evidential basis are broadly accepted in Anne Dodd's recent survey, though with some reservations.[47] This view has it seems been set in stone by the presence of a coin of Edward the Elder of *c*.920 found pressed into the primary street surface of New Inn Hall Street.[48] This, however, represents only a *terminus ante quem* – the origin of the street could be considerably earlier than the time that the coin was dropped.

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is assigned to this period. The uncertainties inherent in any close dating based on pottery evidence should, however, be born in mind.

[42]   J. Blair, 'Date and Context [of the St Michael's Tower]' in Dodd (ed.), *Oxford Before the University*, pp. 162–3.

[43]   J. Tait, *The English Medieval Borough* (Manchester, 1936), pp. 30, 61–5, 141–8; F.M. Stenton, *Anglo-Saxon England*, 3rd edn (Oxford, 1971), pp. 534–5; N.P. Brooks, 'The Administrative Background of the Burghal Hidage', in D. Hill and A.R. Rumble (eds.), *The Defence of Wessex: the Burghal Hidage and Anglo-Saxon Fortifications* (Manchester, 1996), p. 143.

[44]   Poore et al., 'Excavations at Oxford Castle', pp. 5–6. The association of St George's tower with the earls of Mercia is discussed in the forthcoming excavation report on the castle excavations.

[45]   Blair, 'Introduction to the Oxfordshire Domesday', p. 8; Blair, *Anglo-Saxon Oxfordshire*, pp. 99–101, 146–52.

[46]   *VCH Oxon.* 4, pp. 7–8; Blair, *Anglo-Saxon Oxfordshire*, pp. 100–1.

[47]   Dodd, 'Synthesis and Discussion', pp. 31–2.

[48]   Dodd, 'The Town', pp. 261, 311–12.

More recently, however, the writer has presented detailed arguments to the effect that the Burghal Hidage system of *burhs*, of which Oxford is one component, was created by King Alfred in the period immediately after his victory over Guthrum's Vikings at the battle of Edington in early 878, and that the successful implementation of this scheme on the ground by late 879 was one of the deciding factors which compelled two Viking armies to vacate Mercia and London, an event described briefly in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle for that year.[49] It is pointed out that all the *burhs* listed in the document formed a system in which all the components were complementary and therefore contemporary. It is also argued that the Burghal Hidage itself was produced as part of the process whereby this system was set up on the ground.

After his victory over the Vikings in 878 King Alfred took control of the central area of Mercia – essentially the area of the later shires of Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire – and this allowed him to include *burhs* at Oxford and Buckingham as part of the Wessex system. The year 886, when Alfred supposedly regained London from Viking control, cannot, therefore, be taken as the earliest date for the foundation of Oxford, as suggested by Anne Dodd.[50] By this time Alfred had had control of all of Mercia for at least six years. The inclusion of Oxford in the Burghal Hidage shows that the foundation of the *burh* at Oxford must therefore belong to this time (*c*.878–9). This date fits the strategic context of its creation, with the *burh* at Buckingham, to assert control of areas immediately to the west of eastern Mercia, which included London, held by Viking forces at the time. This dating is also supported by the redating of the *Ohsnaforda* coin to the period immediately after late 879, to place it in the context of the production of coins from mints in London and Gloucester to celebrate both King Alfred's newly-achieved control of London and Mercia at this time and his establishment of a unified polity which contemporaries called the 'kingdom of the Anglo-Saxons'.[51] This revised model also carries the implication that *burhs* were built at both London and Gloucester at this time as well.[52]

The premise that the original earth-bank defences were built at this time – between early 878 and late 879 – allows the phase of its refurbishment with a stone wall to be put in the context of a general programme which arguably involved the consolidation of the earth and turf defences of a number of other *burhs* in Wessex with stone walls. This process has been observed archaeologically at Cricklade (Wilts.), Lydford (Som.), Southampton, Christchurch (Dorset), Wallingford, Wareham (Dorset), and Wilton (Wilts.).[53] In all these cases it is clear – as John Blair has pointed out in relation to the defences of Oxford – that the turf and/or timber fronts to these earth-bank defences would not have survived intact for any appreciable length of time.[54] The writer has put forward the case that the most appropriate period for this process of consolidation would be the early or mid 890s, as a concerted and systematic response to increased Viking raiding at the time. In addition, it is argued that this programme of upgrading the defensive capability of all the *burhs* in Wessex also involved the replacement of ungarrisoned forts by new fortified and garrisoned *burhs* at different locations.[55] This whole programme must have been every bit as

[49]   D. Whitelock (ed.), *English Historical Documents*, vol. 1 (London, 1979), p. 196. See J. Haslam, 'King Alfred and the Vikings: Strategies and Tactics, 876–886 AD', *Anglo-Saxon Studies in Archaeology and History*, 13 (2005), pp. 122–54; Haslam, 'Christchurch', pp. 95–108; J. Haslam, 'King Alfred, Mercia and London, 874–886: a Reassessment', *Anglo-Saxon Studies in Archaeology and History*, 17 (2010).

[50]   Dodd, 'Synthesis and Discussion', pp. 31–2.

[51]   M. Blackburn, 'The London Mint in the Reign of Alfred', in M.A.S. Blackburn and D.N. Dumville (eds.) *Kings, Currency and Alliances: History and Coinage of Southern England in the Ninth Century* (Woodbridge, 1998), pp. 105–23. Blackburn has suggested that a mint in southern Mercia established by Alfred in 875–80 was located at Oxford: M. Blackburn, 'Alfred's Coinage Reforms in Context', in T. Reuter (ed.) *Alfred the Great* (Aldershot, 2003), pp. 207–8.

[52]   S. Keynes, 'King Alfred and the Mercians', in Blackburn and Dumville, *Kings, Currency and Alliances*, pp. 1–45; Haslam, 'King Alfred, Mercia and London'; J. Haslam, 'The Development of London by King Alfred: a Reassessment', *Trans. London and Middlesex Arch. Soc.*, 61, forthcoming.

[53]   Haslam, 'Christchurch', pp. 98–102.

[54]   Blair, Anglo-Saxon Oxfordshire, p. 148; Haslam, 'Cricklade'; Wilkinson, 'St Michael's Street', pp. 146, 150.

[55]   Haslam, 'Christchurch', pp. 103–4.

expensive, in terms of the organisation and utilisation of the available human resources, as the initial programme of *burh*-building of 878–9.

The dating of the completion of the two-stage development of the defences of the primary *burh* at Oxford by the mid 890s allows a proper discussion of the historical and strategic context of the eastern extension. As Julian Munby has shown, this had to have been built after the addition of the stone wall to the face of the eastern defences of the primary *burh*.[56] It is clear that this extension was a well-defended and planned addition to the original burghal space which was laid out for permanent occupation. Its defences were of earth, probably fronted by a stone wall, though the evidence for this has been removed by the construction of the early thirteenth-century stone wall defences along the same alignment.[57] Its eastern and southern lines were defined by the edge of the second gravel terrace on which Oxford stands.[58] The awkward junction of the defences of the primary and secondary *burhs*, pointed out above, would have been determined by the necessity of having to join onto the northern and southern lines of the primary defences, the southern line determined by the variations in the physical topography which the eastern line of the primary defences would have utilized. The existence of a fronting stone wall around the earth bank of the extension seems to be required by the fact that these defences were not replaced until the early thirteenth century, and by the fact that, except on the south-west side (and probably in the north-east corner), this replacement stone wall appears to have exactly followed its line (see above).[59] In area it is more than half the size of the original defended *enceinte* (see Fig. 1), and its construction must have involved a proportionate degree of planning, political will, and human effort, as well as the social and military reorganization of Oxford's burghal territory. It is also (with probably one exception – that of Hereford) unique in the whole of England: there are no other instances in which a primary *burh* of the late ninth century has been extended by what was in effect the construction of another pre-Conquest *burh* by its side. Its creation, therefore, must reflect a political and strategic context which was also unprecedented.

As with the dating of the primary *burh*, the dating of this eastern extension has been the subject of continued discussion. The widely held and long-standing view is that it is of early eleventh-century date, possibly built after the sack of Oxford in 1009.[60] It could indeed be reasonably seen as part of a somewhat belated response of King Aethelred to the increased Danish threat which had been building up for some years previously. Aethelred certainly took the trouble to counter this threat by the building of several hill-top *burhs* in the south of England, such as at South Cadbury (Som.), Old Sarum (Wilts.) and Cissbury (Sussex), as well as probably Daws Castle near Watchet (Som.).[61] The ninth-century stone-wall defences and the ditches of Cricklade were also brought into a new state of preparedness arguably at this time after a considerable period of neglect,[62] and arguments have been presented above that a similar pattern of the refurbishment of the defences of Oxford at this time can be recognized at the site of the castle and elsewhere.

There are, however, no examples of new urban *burhs* built by Aethelred, although some towns in the south-east and east, such as Hythe and Sandwich in Kent, were possibly expanded by the king as undefended naval garrison towns. It is probable, therefore, that though the defences of

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[56]   Munby, 'Excavations in the Clarendon Quadrangle', pp. 172–83.

[57]   Booth, 'Excavations on the Line of the City Wall', pp. 183–6; Dodd, 'Synthesis and Discussion', pp. 22–3, and 'Gazetteer', p. 406, no. 70.

[58]   Jope, 'Saxon Oxford and its Region', p. 237, Fig. 53.

[59]   An exception may well be the area around the north gate, the complexities of which need not be detailed here: Dodd, 'Synthesis and Discussion', pp. 21–2.

[60]   Hassall, 'Topography of Pre-University Oxford', p. 33; *VCH Oxon.* 4, pp. 22, 301; Durham et al., 'Oxford's Northern Defences', p. 32 (where the so-called 'western extension' is also seen to be of this date); Hassall, 'Archaeology of Oxford City', p. 122; Blair, *Anglo-Saxon Oxfordshire*, p. 158; Dodd, 'Synthesis and Discussion', pp. 22–3.

[61]   L. Alcock, *Cadbury Castle, Somerset: the Early Medieval Archaeology* (University of Wales Press, 1994), pp. 165–70. For Daws Castle see Haslam, 'The Late Saxon Burhs at Daws Castle', forthcoming.

[62]   Haslam, 'Cricklade', periods 2b–c.

Oxford were repaired and put in order at this time, they are unlikely to have been extended. The suggested early eleventh-century origin of the eastern extension is, furthermore, inconsistent with several archaeological observations within the extended *burh* of early tenth-century occupation. These include the street surfaces of Catte Street and High Street east of St Mary's which are very similar to those of the primary *burh*, referred to above; evidence of tenth-century occupation found at Queen's College;[63] and the tenth-century origin of St Peter's church, its principle parish church,[64] which is seen as an integral part of the foundation of the new extension.

Neither does the second half of the tenth century provide any suitable occasion for the building of a new defended urban *burh* of the type which had successfully countered the Viking threat in Wessex and Mercia in the late ninth and early tenth centuries. The archaeological evidence from Cricklade shows that after a considerable period of use up to the mid tenth century the defensive system as a whole was allowed to degrade until recommissioned in probably the early eleventh century. Furthermore, historical sources suggest a period of general abandonment of burghal defences around the country.[65] The putative *burh*-building activities of King Athelstan, mooted by David Hill,[66] have been argued by the writer to be somewhat earlier than Hill allows, and to have been the result of the enterprise of King Alfred in the early or mid 890s.[67] This leaves the reign of King Edward the Elder, the *burh*-builder with a mission, as the most likely time for the construction of the eastern extension at Oxford. This thesis has indeed been suggested, albeit in somewhat equivocal terms, by Anne Dodd, who has argued for a re-evaluation of the current archaeological model for the early development of the *burh* and its extension.[68] If this is so, it must be placed early in the sequence of the construction of *burhs* over the rest of Mercia by both Edward and his sister Aethelflaed, which began in 912, and which appear to have consumed Edward the Elder's energies and activities until his death in 924. Dodd has mooted the most obvious context for the construction of this extension, which is the occasion of the assumption of control of the lands belonging to Oxford and London by Edward the Elder on the death of ealdorman Aethelred, his brother-in-law, recorded in the Chronicle under 911,[69] and has pointed to the operation of strategic, political, and economic factors which could have lain behind this.

A reconsideration of the circumstances which attended this event, however, makes it possible to be rather less equivocal than Dodd. As has been pointed out above, the eastern extension of the original *burh* must have originated in a political and strategic context which was itself unprecedented. It is indeed arguable that the year 911 marked a turning point in the process by which the annexation of at least eastern Mercia to the interests of the dynasty of the West Saxon kings became a significant reality, and as such would represent the most appropriate occasion for the construction of the new *burh* at Oxford.[70]

Since late 879 King Alfred had assumed control of Mercia as well as Wessex, creating what contemporaries described as the 'kingdom of the Anglo-Saxons'.[71] The present writer has argued that at this time Alfred created a new burghal foundation in London, as well as another *burh* at Gloucester, forming the three *burhs* at London, Oxford, and Gloucester as regional administrative centres for southern Mercia.[72] In 886 Alfred appears to have given Aethelred, a Mercian ealdorman,

[63] Dodd, 'Gazetteer', p. 419, no. 119.
[64] Ibid. p. 416, no. 124; D. Sturdy, *Historic Oxford* (Stroud, 2004), p. 52.
[65] Abels, *Lordship and Military Obligation*, pp. 92–3.
[66] D. Hill, *An Atlas of Anglo-Saxon England* (Oxford, 1981), pp. 143–4; D. Hill, 'Athelstan's Urban Reforms', *Anglo-Saxon Studies in Archaeology and History*, 11 (2000), pp. 173–85.
[67] Haslam, 'King Alfred and the Vikings'; Haslam, 'Christchurch'.
[68] Dodd, 'Synthesis and Discussion', p. 32.
[69] Whitelock (ed.), *English Historical Documents*, p. 211.
[70] Haslam, 'King Alfred and the Vikings'; Haslam, 'King Alfred, Mercia and London'.
[71] Keynes, 'King Alfred and the Mercians', pp. 24–6, 34–9, 43–4; S. Keynes, 'Edward, King of the Anglo-Saxons', in Higham and Hill (eds.), *Edward the Elder*, pp. 44–8.
[72] Haslam, 'King Alfred, Mercia and London'; Haslam, 'Development of London by King Alfred'.

responsibilities for the defence of London and eastern Mercia (an area which from later evidence included Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire) against the Vikings in East Anglia, while still holding western Mercia with his new wife, Alfred's daughter, whom he may well have married at this juncture. Although Alfred's son Edward became king of the West Saxons from the time of Alfred's death in 899, his control of Mercia as Alfred's successor was in practice, to judge from later events, less clearcut. It is no coincidence that it was only on Aethelred's death in 911 that Edward was able to secure complete control of eastern Mercia and London and to start the process of his conquest of the Danish occupied territory, which suggests that Aethelred had exercised some kind of direct rule in this area by a personal dispensation from Alfred which was to last for his, Aethelred's, lifetime.

The year 911, therefore, was of particular significance for King Edward the Elder. From that year he began the sustained campaigning against the Vikings in central, eastern and northern England, in the process of which he constructed a series of *burhs* at key points which enabled him to win back territory which had been under formal submission to Viking rule. The layout of the annals of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle for this period appear to have been constructed to emphasize the political as well as strategic importance of the sequential submission of the former Viking territories to his own rule, which he facilitated by the construction and garrisoning of *burhs*.[73] Aethelflaed, Aethelred's widow and King Edward's sister, undertook a similar campaign in western Mercia which to a large extent mirrored Edward's activities in the east.[74]

The creation of a new *burh* at Oxford in 911 as a new and separate entity, yet attached to and therefore subsuming the identity of the already existing *burh*, can therefore be seen as a highly significant strategic and political statement which would in the circumstances of the time have been designed to consolidate his control over the whole of the south central Midlands. Its construction cannot have failed to have been appreciated at the time as a tangible symbol of the new political order which King Edward was able to establish following Aethelred's death. As in the case of other *burhs* in the following years, its construction would have entailed the formal submission of the population of its burghal territory to King Edward in person,[75] and one which would have enabled Edward to have staked his claim, both literally and symbolically, to overlordship of Mercia as a whole. This new *burh* would have been at the forefront of King Edward's political and strategic drive to consolidate his control over this central area of the southern Midlands, and would have given him what Abels has described as the 'institutional coercive power' which enabled him to push forward this process.[76]

The hypothesis of the construction of the eastern extension of the original *burh* at Oxford at this time therefore provides a model which is both internally coherent and appropriate to the strategic and political circumstances of the time. It also appears to resolve what Anne Dodd has described as 'the unsatisfactory and apparently contradictory evidence for the proposed division of late-Saxon Oxford into a primary *burh* and eastern extension'.[77] Firstly, it fits in with (as a subsequent development to) the context of the sequence of a timber-fronted earth bank which was revetted and strengthened with a secondary stone wall – as in other *burhs* – within a relatively tight time frame between late 879 and the early-mid 890s. Secondly, it puts into context the similarity between the construction of the bank of the primary *burh* and the secondary extension, noted in a number of places – particularly on the northern side in an excavation at New College

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[73] Abels, *Lordship and Military Obligation*, pp. 79–96; J. Haslam, 'The Location of the Burh of Wigingamere – a Reappraisal', in A.R. Rumble and A.D. Mills (eds.), *Names, People and Places* (Stamford,), pp. 114–18.
[74] F.T. Wainwright, 'Aethelflaed Lady of the Mercians', in P. Clemoes (ed.), *The Anglo-Saxons* (London, 1959), 53–69; S. Bassett, 'The Middle and Late Anglo-Saxon Defences of Eestern Mercian Towns', *Anglo-Saxon Studies in Archaeology and History*, 15 (2008), pp. 180–239.
[75] Abels, *Lordship and Military Obligation*, 79–96.
[76] Ibid. p. 80.
[77] Dodd, 'Synthesis and Discussion', p. 32. Cf. Munby, 'Eastern Extension', p. 25.

– which is flagged up as a particular problem by Dodd.[78] Thirdly, it provides a context for the observation that the first road surfaces along the eastern part of High Street, as well as in Catte Street, are very similar to the first road surfaces observed in other parts of the primary *burh*,[79] in that it is likely that the same road-surfacing techniques were used for the same purpose in the secondary *burh* not long after the formation of the primary *burh*. Fourthly, it provides a context for the archaeological observations in the crucial watching brief of the course of the mid-road drainage ditch along High Street for the probable ditch near St Mary's church. Fifthly, it provides a suitable context for the topographical and archaeological observations relating to the junction of the southern side of the defences of the new enceinte with the old. Lastly, it provides a context for the tenth-century dating given for the foundation of St Peter's in the East, its principle parish church,[80] together with the inferences which can be made about its early tenurial history, which are discussed further below.

THE CHURCH OF ST PETER'S IN THE EAST

St Peter's in the East, located within the circuit of the eastern extension of the primary *burh* of Oxford (Figs. 1 and 2), stands out amongst the churches of Oxford for the relatively detailed references to its status and ownership in Domesday Book. The development of the church and its parish is for this reason of particular interest in understanding how the new *burh* of probably *c.*911 was laid out and organized as a sustainable community. The inferences and deductions which can be made from this evidence, combined with an analysis of the topography of its parish and the archaeological evidence for its early origins, can give a clearer idea about how the secondary *burh* was formed, and how it related to and fitted in with the existing tenurial arrangements.

The passages in the Oxfordshire folios of Domesday Book concerning the church are found in two places in the section detailing the estates of Robert d'Oilly. The first is sub-section 28,28:

St Peter's Church, Oxford, holds 2 hides in HOLYWELL from Robert. Land for 1 plough. 1½ ploughs there, and 23 men who have gardens. Meadow, 40 acres. This land did not pay tax and did not pay any dues.

The second is sub-section 28,8:

Robert also has 42 inhabited houses in OXFORD, both inside the wall and outside. 16 of them pay tax and tribute; the others pay neither, because they cannot through poverty. He has 8 unoccupied messuages. Meadow, 30 acres, near the wall; a mill, 10s. Total value £3. He holds them as one manor, with the benefice of St Peter's.[81]

These entries suggest that the two hides which St Peter's church held from Robert, which had a distinct agricultural component as well as the twenty-three men 'who have gardens', comprised what had become known by the time of Domesday as the manor of Holywell. This appears to have been distinct from the rest of Robert's holding, which had its own agricultural component and included the houses both inside and outside the wall, and which was held as one manor with St Peter's. The use of the word *habet* in this context shows that the source of the information in 28,8

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[78]   Booth, 'Excavations on the Line of the City Defences'; Dodd, 'Synthesis and Discussion', pp. 22–3, and 'Gazetteer', p. 406, no. 70.

[79]   Dodd, 'The Town', p. 264.

[80]   Dodd, 'Gazetteer', p. 416, no. 124.

[81]   The translation and section numbers are from the Phillimore edn of Domesday Book, available online at http://edocs.hull.ac.uk/muradora/browse.action?parentId=hull%3A723&type=1. The word 'tenement' is used here as a useful portmanteau word for an urban holding; the Phillimore translation uses 'messuage', a word which is not in everyday use. For Robert d'Oilly and his political and tenurial context, see K.S.B. Keats-Rohan, 'The Genesis of the Honour of Wallingford', Keats-Rohan and Roffe, *Origins of the Borough of Wallingford*, pp. 52–67.
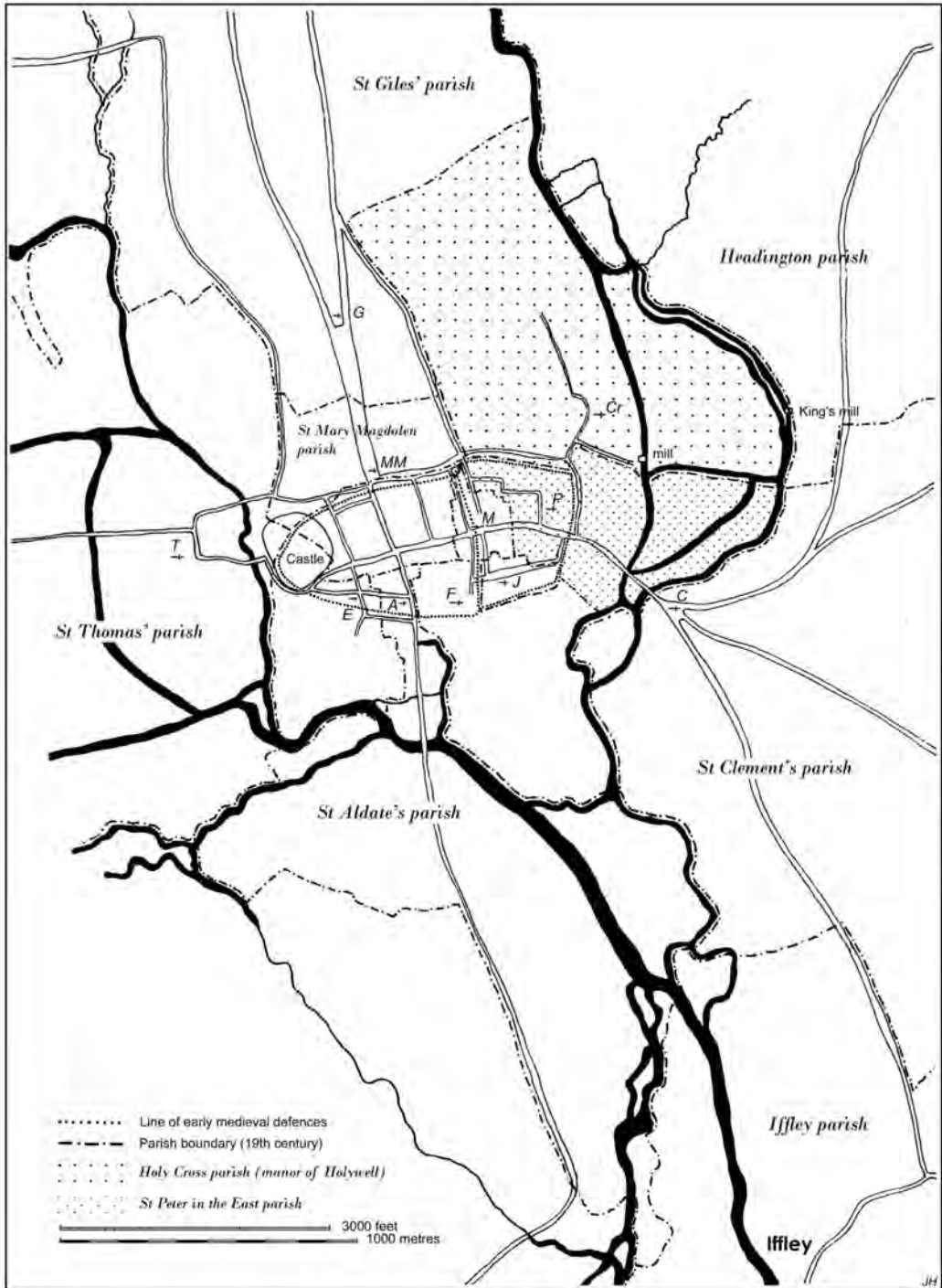
Fig. 2. Oxford, showing some intra-mural and extramural parish boundaries (nineteenth century).

is a return from the borough, and that the manorial caput of the latter was therefore at St Peter's – in other words, intra-mural.[82] The exact meaning of 'benefice', rarely used in Domesday Book, is unclear, but possibly implies that the priest of St Peter's was Robert's appointee, and that the priest derived at least part of his living from the agricultural revenues from the two hides assigned to the church in Holywell.[83] It seems significant that not only was Robert not paying dues on the manor of Holywell, but was also paying the customary 'tax and tribute' on St Peter's manor to the king's revenues. This implies, firstly, that the manor of Holywell was of some special status, and secondly, that St Peter's manor was not a non-customary holding of the type which was attached to a rural manor paying revenues to the lord of that manor – in other words, it was a specifically urban fee.

However, it is not clear from the evidence in Domesday whether Robert's intra-mural tenements would have been contained within a single large *haga*, perhaps near the church, or whether they were strung out along the new High Street to occupy key positions within the new burghal space. While the former alternative remains a possibility, it would be more consistent with the way that the *burh* would have been originally set out to see these tenements as the primary element in the foundation of the new burghal space, laid out along the High Street and perhaps occupying a similar space outside the gate on the street leading to the bridge. This hypothesis is perhaps strengthened by the fact that these fifty tenements are approximately the same number as the primary tenements within St Peter's parish on the High Street which have been identified by H.E. Salter.[84] This would also place in context the fact that, in paying customary dues, these tenements would have been equivalent to the primary customary tenements of the king in other parts of the *burh*, which may be considered as being the 'backbone' around which other developments within the *burh* were laid out. That these were not the king's customary tenements implies that they originated as a comital development, reflecting the way that the *burh* could have been set up by the earl of the time on behalf of the king, for which he would have received the 'earl's third penny'. This hypothesis is entirely consistent with the arrangements which can be inferred from other lines of evidence to have supported both the setting up and the upkeep of *burhs* in general. In all these, the earl of the time would have had considerable responsibilities which were recompensed by his third share of the proceeds due from the new *burh*. This was one aspect of a process described by F.M. Stenton as 'a normal feature of Old English borough finance', and by Nicholas Brooks as 'a financial carve-up between the king...and the interested great lords'.[85]

The extent of this Domesday estate, however, presents some problems of interpretation, quite apart from the location of Robert's fifty tenements, and is not defined by the references in Domesday alone. All or part of the manor of Holywell was at some time soon after Domesday turned into the separate parish of Holy Cross, the earliest fabric of whose church dates to *c*.1100.[86] That the area of this parish in the nineteenth century was around 235 acres indicates that this comprised the 2 hides held from Robert by St Peter's church.[87] That it was a dependency of St Peter's in later centuries also shows that it was carved out of the original extent of St Peter's 'parish',[88] and therefore out of Robert's original holdings (see Fig. 2).

[82]   Roffe, 'Wallingford in Domesday Book', p. 31. My interpretation here and elsewhere in this section has benefitted greatly from discussions with David Roffe.

[83]   See notes attached to the Domesday translation online (note 81 above), at 28,8, and also notes on the Derbyshire text at 3,6.

[84]   H.E. Salter, *Survey of Oxford*, 2 vols., OAHS, NS 14, 20 (1960–9), vol. 1, maps of wards NE III, IV, V, and SE III, IV, V (unpaginated).

[85]   Stenton, *Anglo-Saxon England*, pp. 534–5; Brooks, 'Administrative Background of the Burghal Hidage', p. 143. As Janet Cooper has pointed out, at Chester the lands of both the king and the earl were customary, and were distinguished from lands which were not (*VCH Oxon.* 4, pp. 6–7).

[86]   RCHM, *An Inventory of the Historical Monuments in the City of Oxford* (London, 1939), pp. 128–9.

[87]   For the area see *VCH Oxon.* 4, p. 271.

[88]   For the ecclesiastical relationship see ibid.

The area of this parish was probably originally more extensive than it later became. Even in the nineteenth century it occupied most of the area of the eastern extension of the Saxon walled town, abutting the parish of St Mary the Virgin on the High Street to the west and that of St John's to the south (Fig. 1). The parish of St John's occupied a somewhat restricted area within the walls in the southern part of the burghal extension, serving a group of houses largely based along the south side of the present Merton Street. The church itself was of twelfth-century origin, associated with a soke of St Frideswide's minster,[89] from which it can be inferred that the parish was carved out of St Peter's during a period of expansion of the population within the walls to occupy tenements in the space behind those on the frontage of the High Street and the city wall, the church possibly created as an ecclesiastical dependency of St Frideswide's. It would appear therefore that the original intra-mural area of St Peter's parish would have been largely co-extensive with the eastern extension discussed above.

The exceptions to this are the few tenements on both sides of the High Street surrounding St Mary's church within its medieval parish (see Fig. 1), which may be the remnants of an early *haga* centred on St Mary's with both intra-mural and extra-mural components (as at St Peter's). That this was an arrangement which was possibly earlier than the date of the eastern extension is suggested by the fact that this was appurtenant to the manor of Iffley,[90] an important component of the original multiple estate which was centred on the royal manor of Headington.[91] Iffley manor, together with St Mary's church and its associated tenements, was held before Domesday by Earl Aubrey (DB section B6). It is perhaps significant that Headington and Iffley parishes are separated at the eastern end of the bridge by that of St Clement's, which is of early eleventh-century origin,[92] all of them on the east side of the Cherwell and Thames (see Fig. 2).

The spatial relationship of these three parishes suggests that St Clement's parish can be considered to have been carved out of those of Headington and/or Iffley, with Iffley manor/parish being secondary to the central royal *caput* at Headington. The topographical proximity of the pre-eleventh-century Iffley parish to the eastern end of the bridge over the Cherwell therefore carries the implication that the tenure of this manor, together with its association with its urban appurtenance at St Mary's adjacent to the east gate of the original *burh*, was in some way important in the original defensive arrangements of the primary *burh* itself. Indeed, it would not be unreasonable to infer from this that St Mary's church could possibly have performed the same functions as is suggested for St Peter's, before the foundation of St Peter's church and the creation of the new burgal extension, its parish originally extending over the area later occupied by that of St Peter's.

That Robert d'Oilly held the soke of St Peter's, and that he was paying customary dues on it, is of some significance for the inferences which can be made about the early development of the area. Robert held most, possibly all, of his estates through his marriage to Eadgytha, the daughter of Wigod of Wallingford, who as a staller was an administrator of the king's lands.[93] For this reason it may well have been considered part of the honor of Wallingford which had strong antecedents in a royal concern for defence and communication in the upper Thames region, dominated since the early eleventh century by trusted royal kinsmen such as Wigod.[94] It appears quite possible, therefore, that the whole area of St Peter's parish had once been royal land, perhaps comprising part of the elusive 'eight virgates' of the king carved out of the hundred of Bullingdon (which

[89]   Ibid. 7, 271.

[90]   Blair, *Anglo-Saxon Oxfordshire*, p. 158, n. 63.

[91]   *VCH Oxon.* 5, p. 1.

[92]   Blair, Anglo-Saxon Oxfordshire, p. 170; J. Blair and B.E. Crawford, 'A Late-Viking Burial at Magdalen Bridge, Oxford?', *Oxoniensia*, 62 (1997), pp. 135–43.

[93]   Keats-Rohan, 'Genesis of the Honour of Wallingford', pp. 57–61.

[94]   Ibid. pp. 61–3.

included the royal manor of Headington), on which Oxford was founded (DB B9).[95] As such, it would appear to be a reflection of the foundation of the eastern extension as a new *burh* by the king.

An alternative possibility is that the soke of St Peter's had come to Robert as the successor of the pre-Conquest Earl Algar who had received the 'third penny' from Oxford before 1066 (section B1). That no such division is recorded at the time of the Domesday survey (section B3), at which time the king held twenty wall tenements which had been Earl Algar's (section B5), shows that the revenues formerly received by the earl now went to the king. It seems at least possible, therefore, that the holdings of Robert d'Oilly in 1086 had been passed on to him by the king as the inheritor of the estates of Earl Algar, reflecting both Robert's position as sheriff of the shire and castellan of Oxford castle, as well as the need to secure the defence of the eastern approaches to Oxford. This might supply the context for the fact that before 1066 Earl Algar had held a mill (section B1) as part of his third share of the revenues, which might possibly be the same as the mill held in 1086 by Robert as part of his holdings in the east of Oxford (28,8).[96]

The transfer of a comital holding, if such it was, to Robert seems to be a significant parallel to the development of the castle by Robert on holdings he had acquired around the area of the west gate, and which enabled him to refound the suggested minster of St George's within the castle precincts as a secular college in 1074. St George's has indeed been recognized as the church of a comital manor, which included St George's tower, which had possibly been held by Earl Ralph, the nephew of King Edward, before the Conquest.[97]

Whether the manor of St Peter's had come to Robert d'Oilly through marriage to Wigod's daughter, or by royal gift from the estates of the former Earl Algar, it is difficult to see how Robert could have acquired such a large and valuable slice of urban property occupying the heart of early medieval Oxford – as well as a good proportion of its valuable extra-mural agricultural hinterland – without it being in some way a royal or comital inheritance from the formative stages of the foundation of the original *burh*. A very similar arrangement appears to have obtained in Leicester, where the much larger holdings of the pre-Conquest earls within the borough had by 1086 passed into the hands of Hugh Grandmesnil, who like Robert d'Oilly was the new Norman castellan and sheriff of the shire and the successor in function to the earls of Mercia.[98]

These inferences, though admittedly somewhat tenuous, make sense of the situation recorded in Domesday, and shed some light on the way the eastern extension was in all likelihood set out. The archaeological evidence from excavations in St Peter's church in 1972 is consistent with the conclusion that the church was founded in the early tenth century over an area which had previously been covered by domestic occupation.[99] However, the lack of publication of the evidential basis from which this dating has been deduced makes it difficult to accept it as anything more than a broad generalization. The likelihood, however, is that St Peter's church was built on the occasion of, or soon after, the foundation of the eastern extension of the *burh*, and that the new soke with its manorial caput at St Peter's became its parish (the area of its ecclesiastical jurisdiction).

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[95] *VCH Oxon.* 5, p. 3.
[96] This mill was not the same as the King's Mill on the Cherwell (Fig. 2), which belonged to the royal manor of Headington (*VCH Oxon.* 5, p. 158).
[97] J. Cooper, 'The Church of St George in the Castle', *Oxoniensia*, 41 (1976), pp. 306–8; Dodd, 'Synthesis and Discussion', pp. 49–50; S. Baxter, *The Earls of Mercia*, (Oxford, 2007), pp. 68, 102.
[98] C. Phythian-Adams, 'Leicester and the Emergence of its County', in C. Phythian-Adams (ed.), *The Norman Conquest of Leicestershire and Rutland* (Leicester, 1986), pp. 9–11.
[99] Dodd, 'Gazetteer', p. 416, no. 124. D. Sturdy, *Historic Oxford*, p. 52 refers to the excavation of a stone church of *c*.950–1050, an earlier timber church of *c*.800–950, and even earlier post-built huts, but no other information is given.

St Peter's can thus be seen as a new urban sub-minster of the type discussed in relation to similar developments in London,[100] and would have been provided as a 'public' church for the ecclesiastical needs of the new inhabitants of the *burh* rather than as a private chapel for the use of the holder of the soke. It may therefore have been a foundation of the earl at the time, acting on behalf of the king, which facility would have been amongst those services for which he would have been granted his third share of the revenues of the *burh*.

However, the suggestion that St Peter's church was a major minster whose *parochia* originally included the later parishes of St Mary Magdalen and St Giles outside the north gate and St Thomas outside the east gate seems highly improbable,[101] though its minster status seems unassailable.[102] A more reasonable hypothesis would be that St Peter's parish developed out of that of St Mary the Virgin just outside the original east gate (as suggested above), and that this pattern can also be recognized in the relationship of early churches of the 'sub-minster' type to the other three gates. It seems probable that St Giles's parish, occupying a large area to the north of Oxford, was carved out of that of St Mary Magdalen just outside the north gate, which itself was formed from that of St Michael at the north gate itself;[103] that St Thomas's parish developed out of that of the probable pre-Conquest minster of St George's in the castle near the west gate; and that St Aldate's was another church of similar status near the south gate. That all of these had extensive extra-mural parishes with intra-mural components (Fig. 2) is consistent with the hypothesis that each of these represented urban sub-minsters, developed in a secondary relationship to the primary minster of St Frideswide's, and that their *parochiae* represented subdivisions of the land around the original *burh* which were formed at an early stage in its creation in the late ninth century, perhaps out of the king's eight virgates. This process can, it is suggested, be best interpreted as reflecting the need to establish the provision for the defence and garrisoning of its main gates and neighbouring walls on a territorial basis.

CONCLUSION

This article has sought to adduce historical and archaeological evidence for a new model of the development of Oxford in the Anglo-Saxon period, and to place this within a framework of the development of other *burhs* in southern and central England in the late ninth and early tenth centuries. Oxford's primary layout as a *burh* can be seen as the result of strategic, administrative, and probably economic initiatives of King Alfred in the period 878–9, as one element in a defensive system which covered the whole of Wessex and central Mercia. The analysis has emphasized both the importance of the archaeological and other evidence for the extension of this primary *burh* to the east in the early tenth century, as well as the results of the recent excavations at the castle and elsewhere, which have established beyond doubt the full extent of the burghal defences on the western side.

It is submitted that the overall model offered here makes sense of many hitherto disparate details of Oxford's archaeology and topography, in relation to historical processes and strategic and other functions. A re-examination of the evidence relating to the development of the defensive system in the later tenth and/or early eleventh century has also suggested that Oxford was refortified at some point in this period as one component of a new strategic initiative on the part of King Aethelred in response to the increasing intensity of Viking aggression against the Anglo-Saxon state.

[100]   J. Haslam, 'Parishes, Churches, Wards and Gates in Eastern London', in J. Blair (ed.), *Minsters and Parish Churches: the Local Church in Transition*, Oxford University Committee for Archaeology Monograph, 17 (1988), pp. 35–44.
[101]   *VCH Oxon.* 4, p. 263; Dodd, 'Synthesis and Discussion', p. 41; Fig. 2 (above).
[102]   Blair, *Anglo-Saxon Oxfordshire*, p. 113.
[103]   St Michael in the Northgate parish may have originally included that of St Mary's, or, somewhat less likely, vice versa.