Placing the burh in *Searobyrg*: rethinking the urban topography of early medieval Salisbury
by Alex Langlands

Legend and myth have played as much of a role in the popular understanding of the topography of early medieval Salisbury as have formal archaeological and historical analysis. Early poetic works, episcopal propaganda and various re-tellings of local folklore have painted a colourful picture of Old Sarum as a windswept hilltop where water and space were in short supply and where antagonisms between church and state disrupted the liturgical life of the diocese. These factors pressed the bishop into seeking a new location for his cathedral and arrows fired from ramparts, a vision of the virgin Mary and gossiping nuns have all been seen to play their part in the choice of the new site in the valley bottom, which, if we are to believe the texts, was an earthly paradise of luscious vegetation abundant with wildlife. This at times imaginative rationalisation of an apparently straightforward shift in urban focus from hillfort to valley bottom is at odds with certain historical references and ignores topographical irregularities in the gridded street system of the 13th-century city. Furthermore, the silence of documents from the Anglo-Saxon period has meant that the pattern of settlement and development in such a central and well-connected part of Wessex has remained, for the most part, unexplored.

This article reviews the evidence for a fortified burh at Old Sarum in the late Anglo-Saxon period and, on the basis of later cartographic and toponymic evidence, presents a case for a substantial foundation immediately southwest of the hillfort. In considering the fortunes of this apparently planned settlement, and that of the later Norman period, this paper moves on to question the assumption that the medieval city of Salisbury was set out across a virgin landscape. In evaluating a range of evidence, a hypothetical case is presented for a settlement – perhaps minster-related – on the site of what was to become the later city.

The *burh* of Salisbury

Recent analysis of archaeological and historical evidence for Old Sarum has focused on the urban character of Romano-British *Sorviodunum* (James 2002) and the post-Conquest 'borough' (Chandler 2004), with both now well established as settlements just outside the hill-fort ramparts, to the east and along the course of the Port Way running southwest to the Avon. Archaeological evidence for Old Sarum's role in the early medieval period is extremely limited and the few historical references

give little insight as to the nature of the settlement, if any, associated with this commanding hill-fort. The *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* informs us that in 552 Cynric of the Saxons fought against the British at *Searobyrg* and in 1003, King Sweyn of Denmark is said to have plundered and burnt Wilton and then moved on to Salisbury before returning to his ships (Swanton 1996, 16-17 and 134-35). Domesday Book then picks up the historical narrative and payment of the Third Penny to the King suggests some urban functions, perhaps a borough, in the Salisbury region (Williams and Martin 1992, 162).

Evidence for the plan, layout and scale of this

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Fig. 1 1793 map of burgages at Old Sarum (Wiltshire Records Office Chapter/CC/14)

'borough' though has proven elusive. The later Norman borough was traditionally assumed to have occupied the bailey of the Norman castle (most recently contended by Stroud 1986) and Henry of Avranches's line that, *In castro stabat urbs castrum in urbe* (in the city stood in the castle, the castle in the city) (Malden 1898/9, 211, 216) did much to influence this view. Archaeological investigation however has yet to find any significant evidence for urban occupation within the hill-fort (Montgomerie 1947) and furthermore, excavations in the 1950s and 60s demonstrated that a substantial settlement, dating from the twelfth century, lay outside the bank and ditch of the hill-fort (Musty and Rahtz 1964). The 'suburbs', as they were originally termed, are now thought to represent the 'borough' and the form of this settlement consisted of an area outside the east gate extending in a south-west direction along both sides of the Port Way towards a crossing of the Avon (Figure 2 and Chandler 2004). The consensus would appear to be however, despite the suggestion of urban status in 1086, that the 'borough' at Sarum was a planted new town of the early Norman period (Haslam 1976, 48; Chandler 2004, 26). Old Sarum's apparent urban status in Domesday is explained

essentially as a cause of it sharing urban functions with Wilton, the shire capital, with the defences of the hill-fort providing the locality (and mint) with an 'emergency *burh*' in times of greatest need (Hill 1978, 223-5; Haslam 1984, 122-8). Revenue from Salisbury market, recorded as passing through the accounts of the Wilton Farm in 1130, may represent a continuing economic connection (Hill 1962, 52), and it is clear that after the events of 1003, the mint moved more permanently from Wilton to Old Sarum (Dolley 1954; Blunt and Loyn 1990). David Hill, in his discussion of Old Sarum's role as an 'Emergency *burh*', suggested that, although unsubstantiated on archaeological grounds, it may be the case that the *burh* church and 'town' actually lay outside the walls of the hill-fort (Hill 1978, 223). On the ground however, the question needs to be asked as to whether the clear evidence, both archaeological and historical, for a Norman borough represents the location for the late Anglo-Saxon urban settlement referred to in Domesday or whether this should be sought elsewhere.

The case made here for an Anglo-Saxon *burh* abutting the ramparts of Old Sarum to the immediate south-west is based primarily on topographic and
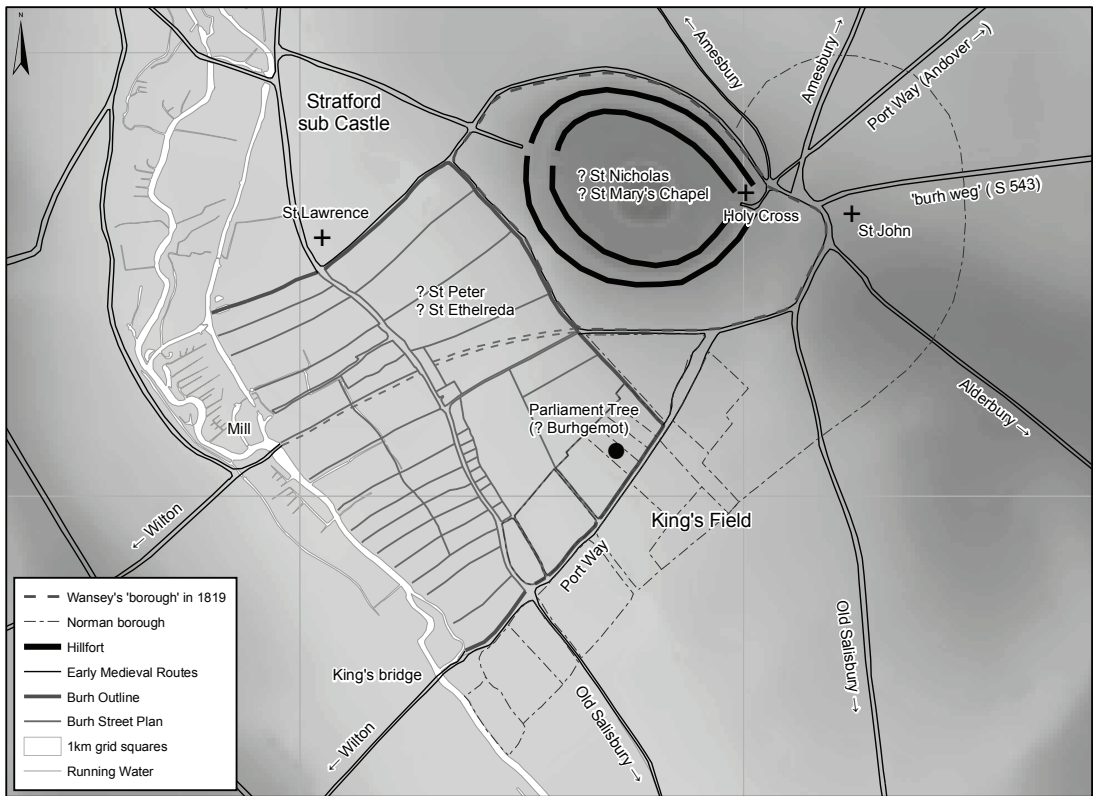
Fig. 2 Conjectural topography of Old Sarum in the early medieval period showing plan of Anglo-Saxon burh

toponymic evidence derived from a late 18th-century map of burgage plots pertaining to the later 'rotten' borough (Wiltshire Records Office Chapter/CC/14). A section of the map is reproduced as Figure 1 and those elements believed to relate to the *burh*; a rectilinear ground-plan with internal divisions perpendicular to a central street, have been redrawn, along with the main lines of communication, in Figure 2. The morphology of this proposed *burh* fits closely with the specifications outlined by Martin Biddle and David Hill (1971) and its proximity to an earlier set of earthworks is reminiscent of a similar scenario proposed for Avebury (Reynolds 2001). In terms of size, the proposed *burh* at Old Sarum compares most favourably with Winchester against which further comparisons can be made, as well as Wallingford, where in all three cases parallel lanes bounding the rear of primary frontages along a central street can be observed (see Fig. 3 for comparisons).

In Figure 1, The Port Way, the name given to a stretch of Roman road running from Andover to Old Sarum (where it is first recorded in 1364; Gover,

Mawer and Stenton 1939, 16-17), can be seen to continue past the entrance to the hill-fort and down towards the southern end of the proposed *burh*. Some analysis of the 'port-' element is required here as its interpretation is important to our understanding of late Anglo-Saxon urbanism. Although *port* is ultimately derived from the Latin *portus*, referring to a harbour, in the Anglo-Saxon sense of the word it can relate to an urban centre of trade at a coastal or inland location and by the 11th century it had become almost synonymous with the word *burh* (Tait 1936, 25, 27; Britnell 1996, 12). Unlike *cyping* (trading) and *ceapman* (trader), *port* only appears to have been more widely used from the tenth century onwards (Sawyer 1981, 158-62). It features in the laws first in a code of Edward the Elder where *na man ne ceapige butan porte* (no one shall trade except in a port) and later in the laws of King Æthelstan where ðe *mon ceapige butan porte* (one is not to buy outside a port) (I Ed. 1; II As. 12, 13.1; Attenborough 1922, 114-5, 134-5).

Elsewhere it has been argued that the 'port' element when used in conjunction with 'way'
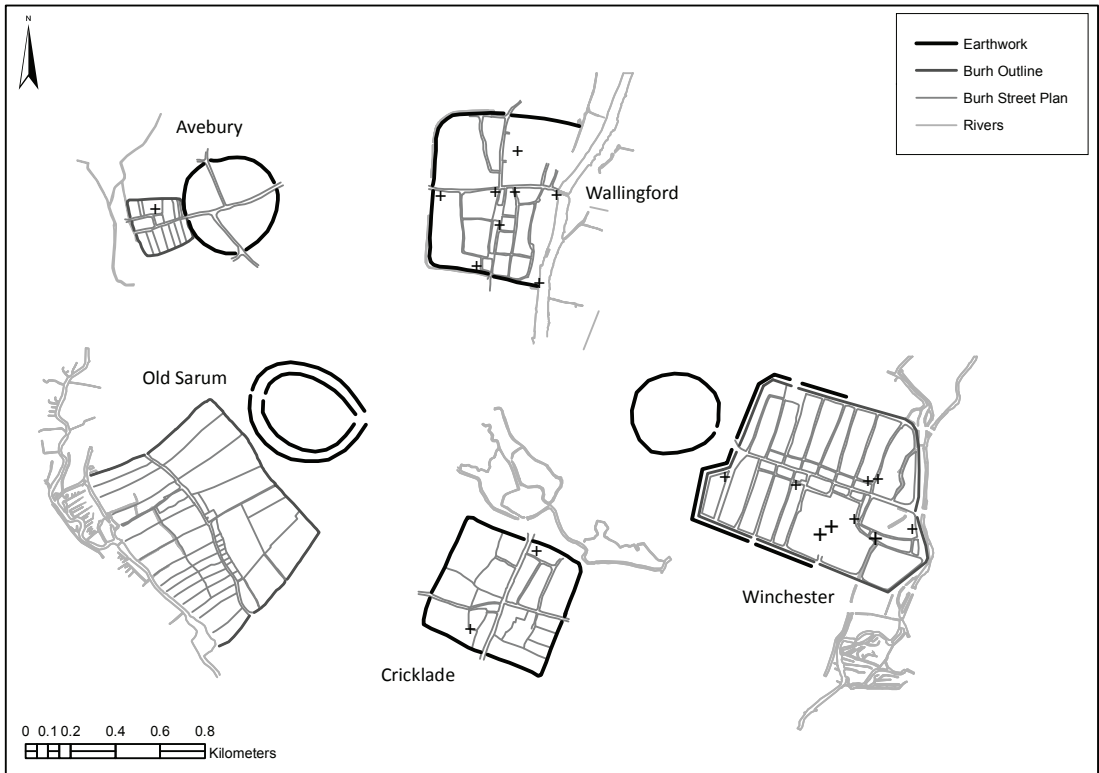
Fig. 3 Some burhs of Wessex compared

or 'street' represents a distinctively late Anglo-Saxon type of routeway and one that replaced the ubiquitous *herepath* in the tenth-century before itself being surpassed by the notional 'highway' and 'kingsway' in the 12th century (Langlands 2013, 236, 244). Indeed, Alan Cooper's justification for projecting back into the Anglo-Saxon period the legal definition assigned in the *Leges Henrici Primi* to the *via regia* as a route that runs from *burh* to *burh* is based on Edward the Elder and Æthelstan's restriction of trade to royal boroughs (Cooper 2002). What is important for our purposes here is that the law codes and the legal definition of a *via regia* are critical in making the link between the use of the term 'port' and royal instigation. Put literally, 'port' refers not just to trading, but to trading that has been instigated and sanctioned by royal control. Elsewhere, this royal involvement can be observed in two further place-names on the 1793 map of burgages.

Firstly, the meadow at the south-westerly extent of the Port Way is referred to as Kingsbridge Meadow (Figure 2 and see *B 119* on Figure 1). A useful

comparison can be made here with Kingsbridge in Devon. On the basis that the Devonian example is not mentioned in a 9th-century charter (S 298, from here on 'S' denotes the catalogue number in www.esawyer.org.uk), but is mentioned in one of 10th-century date (S 704), it is implied that this structure, and a proposed associated *burh*, have their origins in the early 10th-century as a royal foundation for the protection of the south Devon coastline (Haslam 1984b, 271-3). The king's bridge at Old Sarum may, however, have been an integral part of the later Norman borough and if so, we might envisage the Anglo-Saxon crossing of the Avon to have been from within the precinct of the proposed *burh*.

Furthermore, the 'King's Field' referred to on the 1793 map appears to extend across a number of plots relating to the Norman borough and is bounded by the Port Way to the north and to the east and west by routes running south to Salisbury. The use of the -field element infers an open space suggesting that this name predates the arrangement of Norman plots proposed by Chandler (2004). Again, the synonymity between 'port' and 'king' is important

in understanding the function of these sub-urban open spaces. At Wallingford, for example, a large open space south-west of the town is referred to as Portmanmore, while a Portmanfield lies immediately outside the walls of the town (Dewey 2009, 23, fig 4.3). A cursory examination of other Anglo-Saxon towns in southern England reveals portfields at Chichester, Christchurch, Langport, Marlborough and Wilton, with king's fields at Bradford-on-Avon and Faversham.

The king's field outside of the *burh* at Old Sarum was at some point either in the ownership of the king and not, as Domesday tells us in 1086, in the hands of the Bishop – or that as a place-name it has its origins in the period before the land was granted to the church. It has been postulated that the boundaries of the later borough had to be carved out of Stratford, perhaps as a reservation made by the Kings of Wessex when they endowed the bishoprics seated at Ramsbury or Sherbourne with what went on to become the 50 hide estate of *Sarisberie* recorded in Domesday (Hill 1962, 51-3). Two charters may have some bearing on this proposition. Edgar's grant in 978 of four hides æt *Auene* (at Avon) are instructive in that the recipient, Wynstan, is described as the king's *burðene* (*burh* thegn) (S 789). The charter has an attached boundary clause and Desmond Bonney has identified these four hides with a block of land immediately north of Stratford-sub-Castle in an area known today as Little Durnford (Figure 4) (Bonney 1969, 56-9). It is distinctly possible however that the bounds describe the limits of the *burh* and the hill-fort. Three factors argue in favour of such an interpretation. Firstly, to achieve Bonney's reading, we have to accept that the 'old *burh* dyke' (the second landmark mentioned in the clause) refers not to the proposed *burh* or hill-fort ramparts but to a now lost *burh* 1.5km to the north of Old Sarum. Secondly, the bounds must be perambulated in an anti-clockwise direction. It is rare, but not unheard of, for boundary clauses to do this (see S 543, Langlands 2009, 306-8 and S 861, Grundy 1920, 96-7 for two local examples). Thirdly, in returning to its starting point, we are told that the boundary travels up, rather than down, stream. In a revised reading, perambulating 'west to bill combe' (Figure 4) from a point 1km south on the Salisbury road circumnavigates the proposed extent of the King's Field (i.e. it is incorporated within the granted *burh*), but requires the 'old wood ford' to be placed on the location of the King's bridge (and not at Woodford to the north). So this reading, like Bonney's, is not without its problems. But if we accept this interpretation of the boundary clause,

the '*burh* dyke' was already considered 'old' in 978 and the Anglo-Saxon bounds incorporate only the proposed *burh*, the King's Field, the hill-fort and the limits of the later borough as prescribed by a wall identified by Henry Wansey in the early 19th century (his 1819 map is reprinted in Shortt 1965, 29).

The title *burðene* (and its Latin equivalent *cubiculario*) is comparatively rare in the documentary evidence. It does, however, turn up 16 years before, in another grant by Edgar of land æt *Afene*, to Titstane (S 706). In this instance, the grant is assessed at eight hides and the landmarks in the boundary clause can only very vaguely be orientated with those of the later 978 charter (see Appendix 1 for the text of clause and Figure 4 for the landscape within which it needs to be applied). It seems logical that Titstane and Wynstan, with their '*burh* thegn' office, were being granted some kind of jurisdiction, along with the land itself (depending on how you read the boundary clause), over an urban settlement and whilst Titstane's eight hide grant covered an earlier, larger area, Wynstan's four hides may have reduced this control to the urban place alone.

It is widely accepted that the name of Underditch hundred, within which Old Sarum is located, is derived from a dyke that ran east from the Avon up over the downs between Little Durnford and Old Sarum to the Amesbury to Salisbury road (*e.g.* Anderson 1939, 147; Gover, Mawer and Stenton 1939, 371). But this view is based solely on the work of Richard Colt Hoare and his association of a now lost linear monument with the *windryðe dic* that features in the earlier *Afene* charter (S 706 – Appendix 1; Colt Hoare 1826, 133). Desmond Bonney is unconvinced and pointed to Hoare's tendency to join up stretches of unconnected ditch (1969, 60). Indeed, Colt Hoare's claims are unsubstantiated and furthermore, the linking of this ditch with another on the west bank of the Avon running into Grovely Wood (1812, 214-5) somewhat undermines the case for the hundred taking its name from a monument that purportedly stretched across a number of hundreds.

Olof Anderson draws attention to the *wyndrede dic* recorded in a tenth-century grant of land in Shaftesbury (S 655; 1939; 147). It is clear in this instance that the grant covers an area – likely to be a suburb – of Shaftesbury (Keen 1984, 223; Kelly 1997; 93-4) and that the *wyndrede dic* may very well refer to the abbey or *burh* enclosure. The same might also be said of the *windryðe dic* of the *Afene* charter and a reading of the boundary marks could feasibly place this landmark in the immediate vicinity of the

Fig. 4 Boundary clause of King Edgar's grant of four 'hides' to Wynstan (S 789)

hill-fort. Thus the hundred name may just as well have derived from a meeting place associated with the *burh* or hill-fort ditch. We may therefore have an example of a hundred meeting place that also served as the location of a *burhgemot*, recorded in one of Edgar's law codes (iii, 5) as being held three times a year (Liebermann 1903, 202). Thinking more precisely about where this meeting place may have been, the most likely location is suggested by the 'electing acre'; a burgage plot marked on a *c.* 1700 sketch map (Crittal 1962, 66) and the site of the infamous 'Parliament Tree', finally cut down in 1905 but today marked by a bronze plaque mounted on a sarsen stone. This location for a hundred/*burh* meeting place fits with evidence from other former Roman cities such as Canterbury, Gloucester and Dorchester, as well as important towns of Anglo-Saxon origin, where meeting places are located at the main gateways into the settlement (Baker and Brookes, forthcoming).

Having set out the case for an Anglo-Saxon *burh* at Old Sarum, attention needs once more to be drawn to an account describing the refortification of Old Sarum in the reign of King Alfred. Jeremy Haslam has remarked upon this vignette of historical narrative as recorded in Colt Hoare's *Ancient History of Wiltshire* and reprinted the text in full (Haslam 1984a, 124). Yet, he was at pains to point out the fact that Colt Hoare gives no other reference for his source other than that it was taken from 'some ancient manuscripts in the Bodleian and Cotton libraries' (Colt Hoare 1812, 224; Haslam 1984a, 143, n. 54). The provenance is undoubtedly Francis Price's 1774 *Account of Old Sarum* wherein the exact text reprinted in both Haslam and Colt Hoare is provided (and reprinted here as Appendix 2).

The outline of the proposed *burh* at Old Sarum lends some meagre credibility to what is otherwise a very dubious source. In the account it is not only the preservation of the castle that is referred to, but also to the construction of another ditch, 'to be defended by a palisade'. It may be, if there is a grain of truth in this record, that this new, palisaded ditch was the outline of the rectilinear *burh* on the valley floor whilst the 'castle' represented the hill-fort. It could equally be however that a confused antiquarian has back-projected the Norman motte and castle beyond the 9th century and then attributed the surrounding rampart to Alfred. Ultimately, the source remains too untrustworthy to employ with certainty, but it does highlight the need for detailed survey work in the area surrounding the hill-fort. The outline of the *burh* today is marked only by substantial

field boundaries, holloways and shallow banks but detailed micro-topographical survey along with geophysical and LiDAR survey must represent the next step in establishing the horizontal stratigraphic relationships between these linear features in order to confirm or repudiate the morphology of this proposed *burh*.

One of the most perplexing issues concerning the medieval topography of Old Sarum is the location and date range for the many churches that are mentioned in later historical sources. Today, the only remaining church in the area is that of St Lawrence (Figure 2), but the churches of St Peter, St Ethelreda, St John, Holy Cross, St Nicholas and a chapel of St Mary are all described as being at Old Sarum. The evidence for all of these churches is discussed by Benson and Hatcher (1843, 59-63) and reviewed again by Musty and Rahtz (1964, 131-2) with the locations of Holy Cross and St John now accepted as being, respectively, over the east gate of the hill-fort and in the eastern suburb. The likely location for the Chapel of St Mary is believed to be in the tower of the Norman keep itself and a record of the maintenance of a lamp at St Nicholas (Musty and Rahtz 1964, 131) suggests a location with good visibility and one therefore within or on the ramparts of the hill-fort. Whilst the dedication to St Ethelreda, recorded in 1351 and 1361, suggests a pre-Conquest foundation (Hatcher 1843, 63; Hill 1962, 65), no indication is given in the historical sources as to its whereabouts. The location of St Peter's church is suggested by its mention alongside the mill of Old Sarum in a *post mortem* inquisition of 1255 (Benson and Hatcher 1843, 59) and it may be that by reference to the locations of St Peters at Winchester and Wallingford it can be placed more securely on Figure 2. In the case of Wallingford, the parish boundary of St Peter's extends across the bridge, and was thus believed by Judy Dewey to indicate origins associated with the foundation of the Alfredian *burh* (Dewey 2009, 25).

Exactly when the proposed *burh* at Old Sarum took the form preserved in the 1793 map of burgage plots remains a matter of conjecture. It may, possibly, have its origins in the Roman period and, like Winchester, a Roman antecedent has influenced the shape and form of the later topography. In excavations in Castle Close, a substantial feature, thought to be a linear ditch, was observed apparently turning through 90° within the purported area of the *burh*. The upper edge of the feature was 5.5m broad with a projected depth of 3m (Moffat 2002, 7, fig. 2). A similarly substantial feature was recovered in an evaluation conducted to the immediate

southwest of this at a property lying adjacent to Stratford Road (Moffat 2001, 6-7). Neither feature would appear, from the small sample excavated, to bear an alignment with the configuration of the *burh* proposed here and because they were not excavated to their primary fills, they are not securely dated or characterised. The level of residual and stratified Romano-British artefacts from these and other excavations undertaken in the area suggest a substantial urban settlement of the first to fourth centuries, although the exact focus of this settlement is unknown. What is clear, from both excavation, geophysical survey and parch marks evident in aerial photographs, is that the Port Way between the east gate of the hill-fort and the crossing of the Avon does not represent the original course of the Roman road and that this lies parallel, some 70m to the north (James 2002; Moffat 2010).

It may also be that this distinctly urban configuration of plots, (*insulæ* set out perpendicular to a central street) has its origins in the post-Conquest period and represents the initial arrangement set out by the Norman kings. In such a scenario, the pattern of plots depicted in an early 18th-century sketch map employed by John Chandler (2004) represents the final form of this ailing town after it had migrated towards the major thoroughfares of both the Port Way and the north/south route between Salisbury and Marlborough. This would then presume that the *quasi*-urban status in evidence in Domesday book was a reference to a lingering urban community housed in the hill-fort and a remnant of Æthelred's 'emergency *burh*'. If we accept the case, however, that the arrangement of linears in the valley bottom bears many of the chief characteristics set out in Martin Biddle and David Hill's 'Late-Saxon Planned Towns' (1971), we might question whether the 'emergency' moniker should be applied at all. There can be no doubt that events recorded in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* for 1003 would have had a devastating effect on Wilton and the surrounding area and that the hill-fort at Old Sarum would have provided the perfect refuge at such times. But the 'planned' element to the *burh* would suggest a much more sustained response and one with clear economic ambitions at its heart. The appearance of a mint at Old Sarum in the early 11th century, probably as a result of the attack on Wilton (Dolley 1954; Blunt and Loyn 1991), provides a likely context for the setting out of burgage plots and the founding of a settlement designed to profit from the cash flow that a mint might provide. Certainly, the scale of the operation reflects increasing royal power and control

in the late 10th and early 11th centuries and the need to generate funds as well as provide protection. Whilst the removal of key institutional functions to 'emergency *burhs*' might be seen in some cases as a return to the 'defence-in-depth' policy of Alfred (Baker and Brookes 2013, 406), in the case of Old Sarum, the fact that certain urban fiscal obligations remain at Domesday, mark it apart from the other 'emergency' forts of the 11th century.[1] There can be litte doubt that the Burghal system inherited by Æthelred was overhauled in the 11th century to meet with renewed Viking attacks (Yorke 1995, 139), but was Old Sarum a completely new arrangement of this time?

In the most recent and comprehensive assessment of civil defence in Anglo-Saxon England, John Baker and Stuart Brookes (2013) have outlined a periodisation of Anglo-Saxon strongholds and illustrate, amongst other things, that the program of civil defence implemented by Alfred and his successors was very much more complex and idiosyncratic than the impression given by the *Burghal Hidage*. The system of forts described in this document, believed to date to the early 10th century (Hill 1969; Hill and Rumble 1996), represents an *ad hoc* arrangement of sites of varying character ranging from re-used Roman cities such as Winchester to small Iron Age promontory forts such as Halwell (Devon), to '*de novo*' structures such as Cricklade and Wallingford. Other contemporary defended sites also existed at the time Alfred's forts were operationally active, but the even spacing between the forts of the *Burghal Hidage* would seem to suggest that location and good lines of communication, rather than stature and existing defences, appears to have been the underlying strategy. In such a scenario, the political prominence of Wilton might explain why it, rather than Old Sarum, is mentioned as the refuge for central southern Wiltshire.

Placing the imaginative account retold by Francis Price aside, and considering Alfred as responsible for the urban layout of the *burh* at Old Sarum, we are reminded of the fact that Winchester was not the first and only Roman city to find itself re-instated in the late 9th and early-10th centuries. Other refurbished Roman forts include Portchester and *Clausentum* (Hamshire) and *Portus Lemanis* (Kent)(Baker and Brookes 2013, 397). At Worcester,

1 The four thegns who before 1066 owned land in South Cadbury, alongside Alfwold the Bald (Page 1906, 514-15), perhaps echo the arrangement articulated in the charters recording Titstane and Wynstan as *burh* thegns (S 706, S 789).

an Alfredian-period refortification is thought to relate to an area extending beyond the limits of the Roman fortified citadel (S223; Baker and Holt 2004, 113; Creighton and Higham 2005, 58). Most well known is Alfred's 'restoration' (*instauratio*) of London within the walls of the Roman capital city (S 1628; Dyson 1990). Here, plots (*iugera*) were laid out between Cheapside and the River Thames in a 'core' of urban foundation and similarities can be drawn, in terms of dimensions, with plots in the proposed *burh* of Old Sarum. If the city walls of Roman *Londinium* were not at that time capable of providing protection to the planned 'core', the '*burh* of the Ealdorman', preserved in the parish and street name Aldermanbury (Schofield and Dyson 1980, 42), the site of the Roman fort of Cripplegate might have served a similar refuge role to the hill-fort at Old Sarum. So, was Roman *Sorviodunum* 'restored' to *Searobyrg* in the same way that *Londinium* was to *Lundenburh* in the late 9th century?

Exploring the origins of the proposed *burh* at Old Sarum might however be better served by shifting the focus away from civil defence. A perennial issue in discussions of Anglo-Saxon urbanism lies in detaching military necessity from economic ambition (Yorke 1995, 309). We have already discussed the relationship between the Anglo-Saxon use of the term *port* and the role of the king in the early medieval economy, but it may also be significant that Æthelstan's impressive *Grately law code* (Keynes 1990, 237), the 'major 'official' statement of his reign' (Wormald 1999, 300), resulted from an assembly held next to the Port Way between Old Sarum and Andover (Lavelle 2005). Æthelstan's code is particularly concerned with coinage, minting and the functioning of boroughs. One of Anglo-Saxon England's most Europe-oriented kings, it seems credible that a Roman road and a Roman town might be used by Æthelstan to reinvest Sarum, as Winchester, with the greatness of Roman *imperium*. *Burh* thegns recorded in Edgar's reign as holding land in or around the *burh* itself provide the most convincing evidence of activity at mid-10th-century Old Sarum. Only detailed survey, comparative analyses and excavation, however, will enable further commentary on the date and development of urbanism there. Ultimately, both the Norman borough and the proposed Anglo-Saxon *burh* failed as urban centres and in considering why this may have been so, the case for an early medieval proto-urban settlement on the site of the later city cannot be ignored.

'Old Salisbury' and a possible 'minster' on the site of the current city

The first suspicion that a settlement known as Salisbury existed in the pre-Conquest period outside the ramparts of the hill-fort at Old Sarum is based on 12th and 13th century references to 'Old Salisbury' as the place where the new cathedral was to be constructed. The Annals of Dunstable, for example, record the church of Salisbury being translated *ad veteram Salesbiriam, juxta cursum aquæ fluentis constituta* (to old Salisbury, by the course of the flowing water) (Luard 1866, 62). Similar references to 'Old' Salisbury can be found in Pope Eugenius III's 1146 papal bull and pipe rolls for 1166-7, 1184-5 and 1187-8 (Hill 1962, 51-3). That 'Old' Salisbury may have been a poly-focal settlement is suggested by a charter of 1218 issued at a *Novum Locum* (new place) at *Veteras Sarisbirias* (the old Salisburies) (Jones and Macray 1891, 82). That reference is made to the 'new place' suggests that at least one of the 'Old' Salisburies occupied the site of the new cathedral and palace. Further possibilities for pre-existing sites are that of the church of St Martins, Salisbury, believed to have been in existence in the 12th century (Cave-Penney 2004, 11), or perhaps even the site of the proposed *burh* discussed above. In either case, evidence for more than one Salisbury is provided by Domesday Book where Salisbury is being taxed as a manor and an urban place (Williams and Martin 1992, 162, 166, 235).

Doubt that settlements existed around the cathedral site prior to the setting out of the new city lies in repeated descriptions of this area in near-contemporary poems as being devoid of human occupation. Henry d'Avranches and Peter of Blois describe a fertile place with luscious vegetation, brimming with wildlife and abundant with fresh flowing water (Torrence 1959; Hill 1962, 61; Frost 2005). By comparison, the hillfort of Old Sarum is presented as barren, dry and windswept. It has been argued that creating this contrast between the two locations was a necessary part of the case made by the church for moving to the new site (Frost 2005), a myth designed to perpetuate the symbolism of the shift – one with biblical parallels – from an inhospitable rock to an earthly paradise (Frost 2009, 105). The notion of a wilderness to be settled is a powerful motif present in the foundation myths of many monastic establishments during this period,
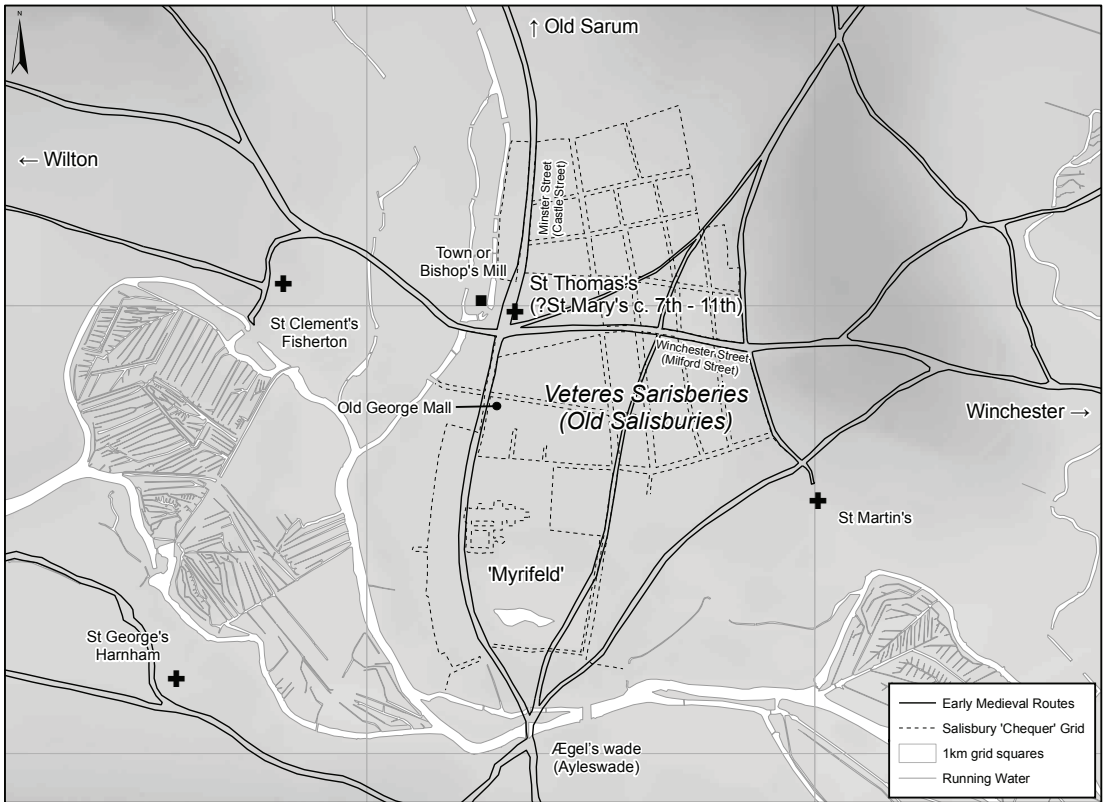
Fig. 5 Conjectural topography of Salisbury in the early medieval period

particularly, for example, those of the Cistercian Order. Cîteaux itself, was regarded as a locality in the diocese of Chalon 'where men rarely penetrated and non but wild things lived' and explicit parallels were drawn at the time between this place and the destination to which God led his people after their escape from slavery in Egypt (Matarasso 1993, xii, 5). In the case of Salisbury, to fit with contemporary myths of church foundation, there was a vested interest in playing down existing settlement on the site of the intended cathedral.

Early Anglo-Saxon inhumation cemeteries at Bourne Hill, Kelsey Road and Harnham (reviewed in Cave-Penny 2004, 20), among others, attest occupation between the 5th and 7th centuries, while settlement of the middle and late Anglo-Saxon periods is slight (discussed below). Indications of occupation on the city site prior to the setting out of the cathedral precinct are suggested by topography. The gridded street pattern of the medieval city was clearly constrained by an existing configuration, which has lead most commentators to propose

settlements at the Town or Bishop's Mill, Fisherton and St Martins (Haslam 1976, 51; Chandler 1983, 22-7, 206; Cave-Penney 2004, fig. 12).

Attempts have been made to reconstruct aspects of the topography of the Salisbury area in the early medieval period (RCHM 1980, xxx; Chandler 1983, 23, fig. 4) and Figure 5 builds on these and the evidence from charter boundary clauses (Langlands 2013, 166-70) in a bid to set out some of the possible routes through this landscape. The crossing of a major east-west route with a north-south route (the location of the Town or Bishop's Mill) is of particular interest to this discussion. The route from the east, known today as the Clarendon Way, connects Winchester to the Salisbury area and Wilton beyond (Beaumont James and Gerrard 2007, 12). Today known as Milford Street, originally Winchester Street (Crittal 1962, 68; RCHM 1980, xxxvii), this route is the only public right of way through Clarendon Forest, all of which suggests that it was a major thoroughfare prior to the establishment of the preclusive Norman royal hunting ground.

The north-south route that crosses the Avon at the location of a fording place indicated by the later street name 'Ayleswade', continues north along the High Street before becoming Minster Street (Chandler 1983, 22), the original name for what is today Castle Street (Crittal 1962, 68; RCHM 1980, xxxvii). The crossroads of these major routes is marked by St Thomas's church, a building whose earliest architectural fragments date to the 13th century (Tatton-Brown 1997). Circumstantial evidence, however, suggests that this site may have been the focus for earlier activity. The topography bears all the hallmarks of the locations of other Wessex minster churches: low ground, proximity to running water, good communications and location a mile or two from a hill-fort (Hase 1994, 54-60). Minster Street to the immediate east of St Thomas's church may well refer to the later cathedral site to its south, although 'minster' is a term that by the early 13th century (*i.e.* the date of the cathedral foundation) had slipped from common usage, with the minster system of parochial care subsumed by the local parochial system based on the parish church by the late 12th century (Blair 1988a, 10-13). John Blair has demonstrated that minsters founded in the late 7th century were foci for 'commercial activity' and the likely settings for markets (Blair 1988b, 47-8; 2000, 250-1). It may be significant that the crossroads location of the later church of St Thomas, and the likely location for one of Salisbury's Domesday mills, is also that of the medieval and present day market place for the cathedral city. Excavations at Old George Mall to the south yielded pottery of the 7th to 8th century from pre-structural horizons (Butterworth 2005, 238, 242). These sherds of organic tempered pottery were recovered from one of a series of layers of coarse loamy gravels believed to represent yard surfaces. In another part of the site, the orientation of a ditch/gulley at odds with the axis of the later medieval city suggests earlier sub-divisions.

The first reference to a church of St Thomas à Beckett occurs in 1238 (Jones and Macray 1891, 246) and the parish appears well developed by the middle of that century (Crittal 1962, 81). Until now, there has been no reason to doubt that the church was built as part of the planned early 13th-century city. The location of the building, however, sitting across the old road, is clearly at odds with the principal alignments of the medieval town plan (Frost 2009, 73). Even taking into account the debated extensions to the chancel and nave in the 14th and 15th centuries (RCHM 1980, 24, Tatton-Brown 1997, 101), the main body of the church straddles the north-south road through the city. Surely, if a church was placed anew on this site within a gridded street system would it not, like St Edmunds, have been given a spacious 'chequer' within which to accommodate both church and cemetery? In conclusion, there may well have been a building here before the new city was laid out.

'Old' Salisbury was well positioned to benefit from the trade that flourished in the *Age of Emporia*. All of Wessex's major trading centres in the middle Anglo-Saxon period lay at the point of transhipment between riverine and coastal vessels[2] and this is a key indication that bulk goods, surpluses from the Solent river system hinterland, were being floated down stream to be processed and exchanged with prestige and specialist goods at the *emporia*. The gravel bank upon which the current city sits is one of a series of river gravel terraces eroded out in the Quaternary period (Cave-Penney 2004, 5), but crucially, in contrast to the proposed *burh* at Old Sarum, it represents a dry platform well placed to capitalise on goods floated down stream on the rivers Avon, Wylye and Nadder. The various ridgeways and Roman roads that converge on this locale provide further accessibility to a large hinterland and, in total, the position of 'Old Salisbury' in the wider landscape of movement and trade, as well as it's similarity to places where other minster churches developed, makes it a possible candidate for a site of settlement and trade in the middle Saxon period. Some newly rediscovered Anglo-Saxon charters relating to Old Sarum may have some bearing on the discussion here. Not listed in P. H. Sawyer's *Anglo-Saxon Charters: An Annotated List and Bibliography* (www. esawyer.org.uk), these documents survive in the form of introductory lines, written in contemporary English, in Francis Price's *Account of Old Sarum*, published in 1774. Price refers to three charters as 'records in the Bodleian and Cottonian libraries' and they concern grants purportedly made by King Ine, his wife Ethelburga and Queen Edith, wife of King Edward the Confessor (texts reprinted in full as Appendix 3). It remains for others better qualified to provide detailed commentary on the veracity of these

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2   All of the documented minsters of the 8th century and other known trading sites sit at the mouths of rivers: Christchurch on the Avon (into which the Nadder, Wylye, Ebble and Bourne flow), Nursling and Eling on the Test, Hamwic on the Test and Itchen, a *mercimonium* (mentioned in Hugeburc's *Vita Wynnebaldi*) at the mouth of the River Hamble and finally, Titchfield on the River Meon.

documents and to suggest their likely provenance.[3] At this stage, therefore, extracting reliable detail from them can only be done so on the presumption that they are not complete fabrications of Price or some fellow antiquarian. The beneficiaries of the charters, however, are a church of St James and a church of St Mary, both in *Sarisbyrig* and, if found to be trustworthy in any way, these texts might allow us to place churches in the area known as Salisbury as early as the 7th century.

Discussion

We have already reviewed how episcopal propaganda portrayed the site of the new cathedral church as an earthly paradise and the deleterious impact these historical sources have had on the archaeological pursuit of early medieval settlement on the city site. There are more than biblical parallels to be made here, however, and it seems likely that this tale is little more than a smoke screen behind which to conceal the church's economic ambitions. Even those commentators keen to play up the 'immense symbolic significance' of the move and the clash between *regnum et sacerdotium* are alert to the 'the pragmatic reality'; the financial advantages of such a move (Frost 2005, 155; 2009, 53-54). John Chandler talks of the Bishop cloaking his 'commercial acumen under the guise of divine guidance' (1983, 19) and considers the proven success of towns in the 12th century as one of the main factors that influenced the decision to move (1983, 17-8). The draw of the new location may not, however, have been its 'earthy paradise' or even that it was necessarily a good place to found a market. It may well be the case that 'Old' Salisbury was *already* a place of bustling commerce. When Chandler therefore argues that 'For much of its history the city … cannot deny that it was the Cathedral that was the city's *raison d'être* and not the other way round' (1983, 21), the review of the evidence presented here puts forward the possibility that it was in fact the other way round and that the reason for locating the cathedral on its present site was to capitalise on its centrality and location on such key axes of overland and riverine communication, a lure for trade – whether legally sanctioned or not.

Taking a long-term perspective on the development of urbanism in the Salisbury region, from the 7th to the 13th centuries, Wilton has also to be considered. It seems likely that an economic tug of war between Wilton, Salisbury and Old Sarum spanned these centuries with each place grappling to attract traders from near and far. Ultimately, Old Salisbury, the site of the current city, won out with the construction of a bridge at Harnham in 1245, undoubtedly sounding the death knell for Wilton's aspirations for economic superiority. This Salisbury region, therefore, becomes an important test case in our understanding of urban processes and not just those of Anglo-Saxon England. In his study of the hinterlands of three middle Saxon *emporia*, Ben Palmer asserted that the success of towns in the 10th to 11th centuries was dependent on existing communications and minsters founded in the 8th and 9th centuries (2003, 50). This view is shared by Grenville Astill, who emphasises pre-existing, pre-*burh* patterns of trading and assembly places (linked to minsters and royal *vill*s) that, 'despite royal efforts to the contrary, continued to determine the social and economic relationships of the majority of the population' (2006, 254). Such a perspective forces us to reverse the popularly held view, epitomised by H. R. Loyn, that the development of the 'powerful little town' in Late Anglo-Saxon England was the 'supreme' achievement of Alfred, Edward and their successors (1971, 128). In the case of the Salisbury region, if we accept the hypothetical development of early medieval urbanism put forward in this paper, people and place – not Kings –ultimately determined the success or failure of a town.

Finally, whether Salisbury takes its name from the hillfort, the proposed *burh* or the settlement at Old Salisbury remains a matter for speculation. The ramparts of an Iron Age structure might provide the '-bury' element in the name, as attested most locally at Figsbury, a circular earthwork with exterior ditch and inner ring-ditch yielding finds suggesting occupation in the Neolithic and Iron Age (Guido and Smith 1982). It could conceivably also result from the suggested planned Anglo-Saxon *burh* – an attempted *port* foundation with a limited lifespan in the late Anglo-Saxon period. It is increasingly being demonstrated, however, that the place-name element *burh* was used to describe a range of place-types (Draper 2008; 2009; Baker and Brookes 2013, 95-9) and amongst these a sense of private and ecclesiastical enclosure is prominent. John Blair, in particular, has drawn attention to the fact that a high percentage of early (i.e. before the mid-8th

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3 The shelf marks provided by Price are, 'Vid. Bib. Bodl. n. e. 2. 19. Cotton. 23.' but neither the Bodleian Library nor British Library can validate that these identifiers refer to actual charters or to the account of Alfred's refortification of Old Sarum.

century) recorded *burhs* are also minster sites (2005, 250). Locally, Alderbury is an example of this, but elsewhere in Wiltshire (Amesbury, Ramsbury, Avebury and Westbury) are early sites where the element is applied to aristocratic, ecclesiastical or royal compounds (Draper 2012). If the case for an earlier proto-urban site in the valley bottom is accepted, then it may be that 'Old' Salisbury, a nucleated settlement around a church and monastic enclosure, gave its name to the modern city of Salisbury.

The case put forward here both for a *burh* in the immediate vicinity of the hill-fort at Old Sarum and a middle Saxon – possibly minster-related – settlement on the site of the current city is speculative and conjectural. Yet, it aligns this important part of Wessex with the processes of change and development better evidenced elsewhere in the kingdom. It is hoped this paper serves as a starting point for a wider consideration of the Salisbury area in the early medieval period.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Bounds of Edgar's grant to Titstane (S 706)

[Ðis s]ynt þa land gemæro to afene . ærest of þam . . . [missing text]. . . ng cumb andlang cumbes on geferþes hlæw of þam hlæwe andlang weges on þone bradan [h]erepa∂ of þam herepa∂e on windry∂e dic of þære dic . . . [missing text] . . . rinne adune on þone þorn of þan þorne 7lang afene eft on þone ealdan forda

These are the land boundaries to [land at] Avon. First from the . . . ng combe, along the combe to Geferth's mound, from the mound along the way to the broad *here*path, from the *here*path to Windryth's ditch, from the ditch . . . ?rinne down to the thorn, from the thorn along the Avon back to the old ford

Appendix 2: Account of Alfred's refortification of Old Sarum (Price 1773, 42)

'I Alfred, king and monarch of the English, have ordered earl Leofric, of Wiltunshire, not only to preserve the castle of Sarum, but to make another ditch, to be defended by palisades; and all who live about said castle, as well as my other subjects, are immediately to apply to this work.'

Appendix 3: Three Anglo-Saxon charters relating to churches at Old Sarum (Price 1773, 41-2)

I, Ina, King, for the salvation of my soul, grant unto the church of St James, in Sarisbyrig, the lands of Tokenham, for the use of the monks serving god in that church. If he ever shall presume to infringe this my munificence, let him, on the day of judgement, be placed on the left hand of Christ, and receive the sentence of damnation with the devil and his angels

I, Ethelburga, wife of Ina, King, Etc for the salvation of my soul, grant to God, and the nuns serving God in the church of St Mary, in Sarisbyrig, the lands of Bedington, with their appendages, Etc

I, Editha, wife of King Edward, give to the support of the canons of St Mary's Church in Sarum, the land of Sceorstan, in Wiltshire, and there of Tor?nanburn, to the monastery of Wherwell, for the support of the nuns serving God there, with the rights thereto belonging for the Soul of King Edward.

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