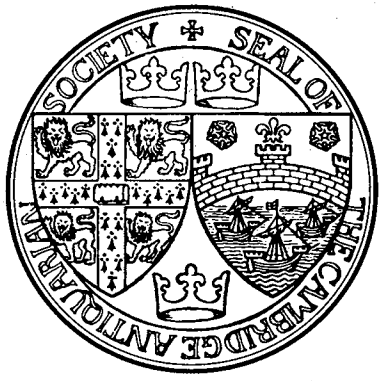
Proceedings of the Cambridge Antiquarian Society

(incorporating the Cambs and Hunts Archaeological Society)

Volume LXXXIX
for 2000



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This volume is dedicated to Susan Oosthuizen,
Secretary of Cambridge Antiquarian Society, 1996–2000

Editorial

After publication this Spring of the long-awaited report on the excavations of Roman Cambridge the Society is now able to issue its Proceedings within the correct calendar year, and as some celebration of this (and to have some respite from the Romans) we are pleased to have a themed volume, this time on the sort of landscape studies for which Cambridgeshire has become well known. In light of this subject and the contribution she herself has made to it (including co-authorship of one article printed here), this volume is dedicated to Sue Oosthuizen, who has just retired as our very hard-working Secretary after four quite difficult years.

As usual, this year saw a full programme of lectures and outings, and we also enjoyed the launch of Roman Cambridge and an exhibition by the University Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology on the same theme. As has also become customary, we organised two very different conferences. In November, the Fulbourn Conference, hosted by the County Council's Archaeological Field Unit, was a round-up of excavations that had taken place in the previous year, though the scale of work is now so great this now has to be quite selective (which is all the more reason why the Field Work section in this Proceedings is such an important contribution : it is the only source for those needing to know what is happening each year). As customary, most of the talks were given by those who had excavated the sites, a daunting task for many giving their first public lecture but enabling a lively appraisal of evidence that was still almost literally spattered with mud. The Spring conference is usually more traditional and this year followed our landscape theme. Entitled 'Two thousand years of Fen and Upland' and organised by Sue Oosthuizen it included a keynote speech from Harold Fox and talks by Oliver Rackham and David Hall on ancient woodland, fens and fields, topics which they have made so very much their own.

President's Address

A new millennium brings home the fact that CAS is overdue for some changes and new initiatives. In Spring 1997 Sue Oosthuizen wrote a letter to all members entitled "A Call to Arms". This action was in response to a decline in the level of heritage services from local authorities to which CAS and the general public had become accustomed. A very supportive response was given by members, which has succeeded in helping reverse this trend. Further issues have developed since then, however, in provision of expertise and facilities within both local authorities and the University, such as a reduction in research space at the Cambridgeshire Collection and a threatened closure of the Committee for Aerial Photography, to which CAS strongly objected. At present we are concerned about the way in which public consultation has been eroded and how interested parties such as CAS can become involved in ensuring, for example, that a proper record of archaeology is made prior to its destruction by development, and that such work is undertaken to the highest possible quality within an intellectual process which helps answer research questions. To tackle emerging areas of alarm CAS approved a Heritage Policy in 1998, and a strategy to deliver that policy has been adopted.

Membership is another area which we are concerned about. All societies need to attract new and younger members and so a number of initiatives are under way. A web page will be produced to publicize the society, and to keep people up to date with events and information. We hope to run workshops on specific topics so that areas of current research can be discussed in detail, and to have some meetings in other towns to provide better opportunities for those members who live outside Cambridge and cannot easily come to the evening lecture programme. I would also like to encourage active fieldwork so that some investigation is pursued that is not tied to the needs of development. Opportunities for amateur involvement in archaeology have become all too rare over the past decade and a lead from CAS in this area might help to encourage fresh membership, as well as giving a chance for many current members to get more involved. There are many ways in which we can give CAS added dimensions and with those I have suggested here I hope that we will see the Society continuing to flourish in the years to come.

Tim Malim

The Topography of Anglo-Saxon Huntingdon: a survey of the archaeological and historical evidence

Paul Spoerry

This is the first of two articles dealing with the pre-Conquest and the medieval town (Spoerry forthcoming). This is not an arbitrary division for in Huntingdon, as in many other urban places, there is a real difference between what existed before and after the Norman Conquest, initially due to measures taken to control routeways and the countryside. The creation of a castle too was often a key development.

In the case of Huntingdon the pre-Conquest settlement is rather obscure. What we do know suggests that, following the imposition of the castle onto part of the existing settlement, a new urban morphology was created which formed the skeleton around which medieval activities and institutions made their mark. Thus we do indeed have two different places to investigate, the pre-Conquest settlement and/or burh *and the post-Conquest town.*

Huntingdon or Godmanchester?

An existing model for pre-Conquest Huntingdon

According to the model of Hart (e.g. 1966), Huntingdon became the county town as a result of Edward the Elder's decision to adopt the Danish army territories as the model for land organisation following his reconquest of the eastern Danelaw around AD 917. Huntingdon appears to have been the central administrative and defensive location for one Danish warband (like Bedford, Cambridge and Northampton in adjacent areas). The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle for 917 (or 921 in the C Chronicle) describes how the Danish army from Huntingdon and East Anglia 'built the fortress (*burh*) at Tempsford, and occupied it after its construction, abandoning the other fortress (*burh*) at Huntingdon'. Some time later in that same year Edward the Elder, warring against the Danes, 'entered (or captured) the fortress (*burh*) of Huntingdon and afterwards repaired and restored it' (Garmonsway 1972, 103). Later that year he left Huntingdon and marched on to Tempsford, a fortified Danish camp built earlier that year some 20km upstream along the Ouse, where he appears to have had one of his more significant victories.

This passage has, probably rightly, been taken to mean that there was already a Danish *burh*, or fortress, at Huntingdon and, following the model seen elsewhere at centres such as Bedford and Cambridge, it is assumed that Edward's refortification would have meant the creation of a large, curvilinear defensive circuit at Huntingdon, as at other centres. The model is not one of direct comparison, however, as both Bedford and Cambridge were, it has been well argued by Haslam (1984, 13), the sites of 8th century Mercian *burhs*; this being positioned within the surviving Roman defensive circuit in the case of Cambridge. There is no evidence for an earlier Mercian *burh* at Huntingdon from either documentary or landscape data, but at Godmanchester the Roman town defences provided another location that could have been reused in this way. This is where the earliest evidence for Saxon activity in the immediate area of Huntingdon has so far been found.

If we return to the simple topographic model for Danish defences and Edwardian *burh* rebuilding then Godmanchester represents the south bank of the river crossing. The two areas of continually dry land upon which Godmanchester and Huntingdon are sited (Fig. 1) are separated by several hundred metres of seasonally flooded meadow. Thus, although Huntingdon and Godmanchester are not immediately opposite each other on the banks of the river, they represent the two dry land locations on either side of the river corridor between which a causeway and ford or bridge would have conveyed the road. It has become generally accepted that Edward the Elder's usual model for refortification of pre-existing Danish or Mercian *burhs* involved creating a double burh protecting two sides of the crossing, as documented in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle for example at Buckingham, Bedford, Nottingham and Stamford, and as postulated for Cambridge (Haslam 1984). If such a model were applied here it would have to incorporate both Godmanchester and Huntingdon.

Godmanchester

Green summarised the finds from Godmanchester that were known more than twenty years ago, to which little can be added (1977, 23–24). He described stray finds of early Anglo-Saxon pottery across the Roman town and in the late Roman inhumation cemetery to the south, and suggested a change in orientation of town morphology to an alignment along the east-west valley road in the post-Roman period. This may be contradicted, however, by the recent discovery

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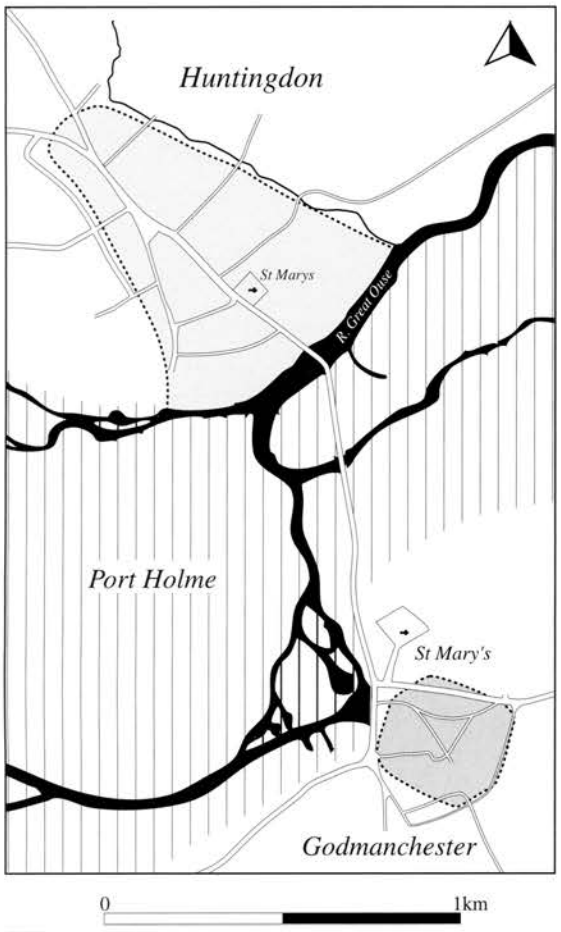

Figure 1. *Haslam's model for the burhs at Huntingdon and Godmanchester (after Haslam 1985).*

of several grubenhäuser at Cardinal Way, adjacent to the Roman Road to Cambridge and a few hundred metres southeast of Roman Godmanchester (information from S Kaner). Green rightly pointed out, however, the probability that the Roman defences may have offered a "defensible administrative centre for local authority and continued to provide a suitable base for a local ruler" in the Saxon period (*op cit*, 24). By 1086 the place name *Godmundcestre*, the first element probably from the early Saxon personal name Godmund (Mawer and Stenton 1969, 245), the second after the Roman town defences, illustrates that these walls were still a remembered, or even recognised, feature. This evidence all suggests that Godmanchester must have been a place of local significance in the early Saxon period, but how long this continued is uncertain. Green's summary only identifies a handful of middle Saxon Ipswich ware sherds found around the south gate area of the former Roman town (*op cit*, 24) and no other finds or landscape features can be attributed to the middle Saxon period from either Godmanchester or Huntingdon which may suggest a shift in and/or absence of settlement in this period. All in all there is no real evidence to suggest that Godmanchester, or Huntingdon for that matter, was a place of any great consequence before the arrival of the Danish warband in the latter part of the 9th century. Also the 'middle Saxon shuffle' is a well-known trait of settlements in this period (Hodges 1989), and there is every likelihood that the main local centre in this period lay not around the earlier Roman site but close by, the obvious candidate being somewhere within the later area of settlement at Huntingdon.

Green, like Haslam, suggests that the refortification at Huntingdon by Edward the Elder in 917 resulted in the creation of double-*burh* type defences encompassing both Huntingdon and Godmanchester. He also postulates the presence of earlier Danish harbour works on the river adjacent to the partially reused Roman town defences at Godmanchester (1977, 23–27). Green does not state that Godmanchester was the main base for the 9th century Danish army, but it is certainly implied if such major activity were going on there prior to Edward's reconquest. This suggestion must be countered by the fact that Huntingdon is the named refortified location which later becomes the county town. Archaeological evidence for Danish occupation and activity anywhere in the vicinity is at present non-existent.

Green recorded part of a defensive enclosure in the area immediately southwest of the Roman defences at Godmanchester (Fig. 5) and suggested this was an 11th century addition to the Edwardian defended area, based on stratified finds of pottery. He may well be correct in the position and general dating of a ditch here, however the evidence is again rather too ephemeral to be certain of his interpretation.

Roman Huntingdon

In the Roman period Huntingdon is usually seen as a suburb of Godmanchester and/or ribbon development northwards from the Ouse river crossing along Ermine Street. Evidence for Roman activity in Huntingdon derives from chance finds, mostly of some antiquity, and also from three key excavations that remain unpublished.

In the late 1960s a 3rd century corridor villa, with timber structures pre-dating it, was excavated by B K Davison and others with Ministry of Works support at 'Whitehills' on a prominent rise on the south side of Mill Common overlooking the Alconbury Brook (Davison & Rudd unpub). In 1974 Roger Smith excavated in the car parks of the new District Council offices at Pathfinder house, funded by the DoE, and found a variety of Roman features including a well surfaced gravel trackway (information from D Cozens). In 1975 a very small amount of excavation was carried out by Terry Betts in St Benet's Yard, again funded by the DoE (information A Taylor), with the intention of finding evidence for two consecutive lines

of Ermine Street that Michael Green had proposed. No evidence for the supposedly earlier, western line of Ermine Street was found, although a triangular-sectioned Roman period ditch further east was taken to be evidence for an easterly, later, line of the Roman road, which itself had been removed by later quarrying and building construction. Chance finds of Roman material in Huntingdon include two coins separately found near the waterfront, just southwest of the surviving castle boundaries, and a 2nd century cremation and stone coffin inhumation found respectively immediately west and north of the surviving castle boundaries. Another probable cremation urn of 1st century date was discovered in the early 19th century on the northeast side of Market Hill. There are one or two other chance finds of Roman artefacts from the town, however the pattern of burials, even with so few points, clearly implies a spread of roadside graves along the general line of Ermine Street. So far only a few pieces of 'Roman roof tile' found near the old laundry site on the downstream extremity of the historic town, and the Whitehills villa, indicate any Roman remains away from the line of the main road. The metalled trackway at Pathfinder House is almost certainly a spur road from Ermine Street to the Whitehills villa. The riverside bank location of the latter is a very desirable spot even now, as witnessed by the size of the houses constructed there over the last century despite the presence of first the railway and more recently the A14. It seems reasonable to suggest that the riverbank would have offered a favourable location for one or more Roman villa estate centres, but was not heavily occupied in the Roman period. It is entirely possible that there was ribbon development of structures along Ermine Street, although we only have evidence for roadside burials. None of the several recent evaluations or excavations close to the line of Ermine Street have revealed any Roman features[1].

Danish burhs, towns and defended places

The Danes usually chose riverine locations for their major settlements in England, and needing access to both land and water routeways the typical location commands or spans a ford or bridging point. The typical Danish defence work in southern Scandinavia is D-shaped, backing onto a body of water, the earliest examples being centres such as Hedeby or Åhus (Fig. 2) where the town defences are of this form. Defences are, however, wholly absent from all towns in the Viking homelands prior to the 10th century and it seems likely that the concept of urban defences was borrowed from those defended towns the Scandinavians encountered whilst campaigning abroad (Clarke and Ambrosiani 1991, 153 and [2]). Thus urban defences in the 9th century Danelaw cannot be attributed to the importation of a Danish model, but must be seen as a Danish response to what they had observed in southern England and continental Europe. The Danish great army is known to have overwintered at Repton, Derbyshire in AD 873–4 and there a small D-shaped enclosure of only about 0.75ha has been identified as the military defences constructed during that episode (Fig. 3). It is difficult to imagine what other form of defence an invading army with major concerns for water access might have constructed, but this has been taken to be a recognisably 'Danish' encampment.

Repton is, however, surely a different class of settlement to a defended trading and craft centre or a defended town. This latter is the type of centre most usually identified when places initially defended by Danish armies and then refortified by Edward the Elder are discussed. This category includes most of the *burhs*, or boroughs, of the Danelaw with examples

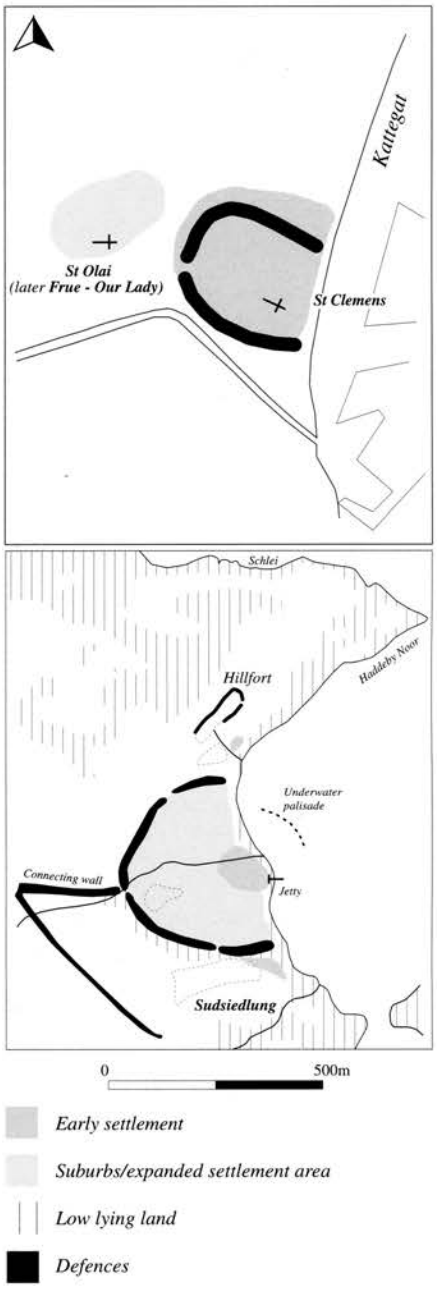

Figure 2. *10th century D-shaped defended enclosures around the earliest Scandinavian 'towns' (after Clarke and Ambrosiani 1991).*

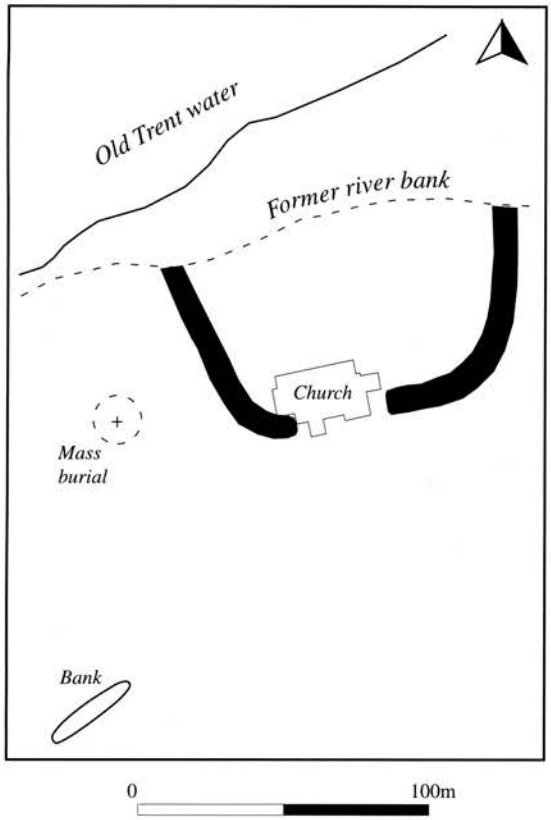

Figure 3. *The 9th century D-shaped camp of the Danish great army at Repton, Derbyshire (after Richards 1991).*

of the ultimately dual fortification being postulated at, for example, Cambridge (Haslam 1984) and Stamford (Mahany 1982). The notion that all those places 'refortified by Edward the Elder' in the early 10th century will conform to a model of dual defences, either side of a water barrier and with the smaller being earlier and representing a Danish defended settlement or burh is, however, too simplistic. The defended areas postulated for Stamford are both complete circuits some distance from the river crossing itself (see Fig. 4a), whilst Cambridge (Fig. 4b), if Haslam is correct, has a complete rectangular circuit in the 8th century (the Roman town defences) which is then reused by the Danes who added an elongated oval on the south side of the river, again not attached to the first works.

When the Danish host dispersed into small warbands or armies which settled and started the process of creation of the Danelaw counties around the 860s, each army appears to have based itself on a single main location. There is no doubt that the Danes moved out into the surrounding territory to exert direct control and ownership. The central places performed key functions as the main foci, but the locations chosen were not urban places beforehand and, in some cases were not defended either. Northampton can perhaps be presented as a good example of the type of place that was chosen. Whether it was a middle Saxon palace of royal or aristocratic

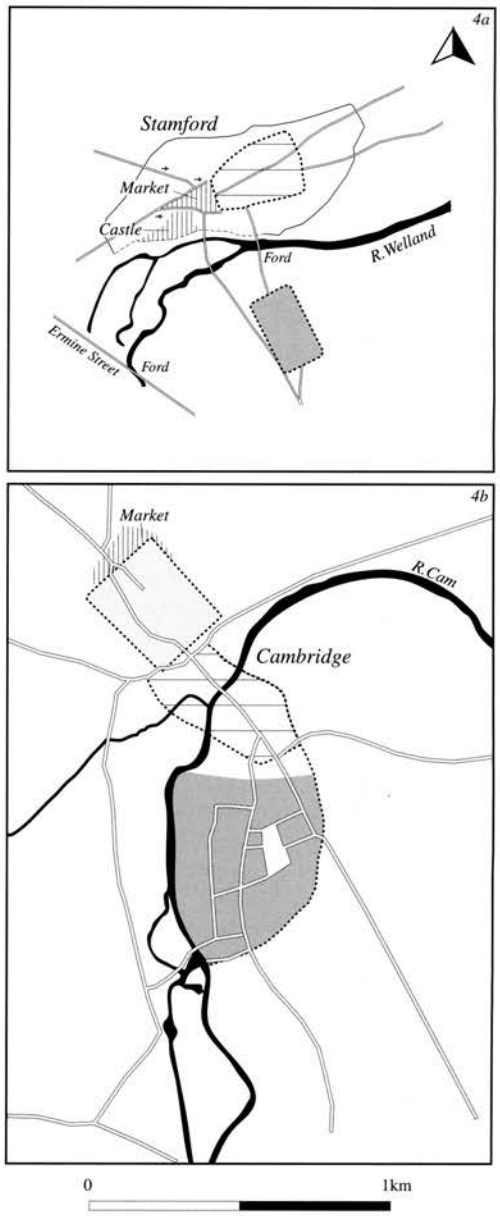

Figure 4. *a) Proposed Danish and Edwardian burhs at Stamford (after Mahany 1982); b) Proposed Mercian, Danish and Edwardian burhs at Cambridge (after Haslam 1984).*

origin, it certainly was a major estate centre, with possibly two churches and some associated dispersed settlement spreading over about 8ha. However it was not urban under the criteria normally adopted (Biddle 1976 and [3]) and not defended (Williams *et al* 1985). There is no evidence that the Danish period

settlement at Northampton was any different and it is only in the 10th century proper that industry, defences and other urban traits first appear. These are more likely to have been initiated through the early 10th century reconquest than the mid/late 9th century Danish occupation. There is no doubt that the Danish presence in the main Danelaw centres ultimately acted as a catalyst for urbanism, but the presence of a Danish warband and the subsequent few decades of their settlement within the local community did not necessarily result in these places quickly becoming defended towns. Those places like Repton or Thetford, where the great army overwintered during the 9th century campaigns evidently were fortified at this point but we should not assume that all the Danelaw 'boroughs' were treated in this way. Bearing in mind that Huntingdon commands the crossing of the rather larger river Ouse, it seems plausible that the Danes may have built fortifications here, as it seems they did at Stamford, for which the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle entry for 918 indicates a pre-existing Danish defended area. This should be defined as a fortified *burh*, rather than a town, however, as to assume that Stamford or Huntingdon were an *urban* place at this time may be incorrect. Again whether Huntingdon and Stamford were fortified by the Danes at the outset for their strategic importance or whether bank and ditch defences were created in 917 is not known. The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle indicates though that both were *known burhs* which tends to rule out the possibility that they had been newly constructed, in contrast with the *new* Danish fort at Tempsford which is described as such.

Alternative models for pre-Conquest Godmanchester and Huntingdon

The work of Michael Green on the Roman town of Godmanchester enabled him to view later deposits, and he thus formulated a model for Saxon occupation (Fig. 5). 5th and 6th century occupation in the centre of the Roman settlement seems to have been in the familiar form of small timber buildings and reuse of decayed earlier structures, and he sees this settlement being within the walls but aligned along an east-west axis, rather than with Ermine Street. In the middle Saxon period, finds of Ipswich ware around the south gate of the former Roman town suggest to Green that the main focus of settlement in the late 7th to late 9th centuries was here. Then with the arrival of the Danes and the Edwardian reconquest he suggests, reasonably but with little published supporting evidence, that Godmanchester would have been used as part of a normal Edwardian double burh with defences on two sides of the river. Green's model is however, taken further. He suggests that the Danes created a harbour on the Ouse at Godmanchester, citing similar examples at Willington and Longstock on the Ouse and Ivel respectively and he links these works to a later L-shaped extension to the Roman town defences that links them with the river to the southwest. This he describes as "a large ditched feature, of uncertain date, which is now marked by old boundaries and appears to provide an enclosed suburb south west of the walled town ..." (Green 1977, 27). Such ideas are interesting, but are only supposition and provide nothing more than a model to be tested, although that in itself is indeed worthwhile. More recently Susan Oosthuizen has published an aerial view of Godmanchester which she describes as showing the harbour, as suggested by Green, but she indicates that the Danish suburb may in fact be represented by an area of property boundaries, of apparent planned design, running east-west between the road northwards from the Roman town, and the river (Oosthuizen 1996). This model has little supporting data, but neither this, nor Green's hypothesis, should be dismissed out hand as they represent genuine attempts to resolve a real problem.

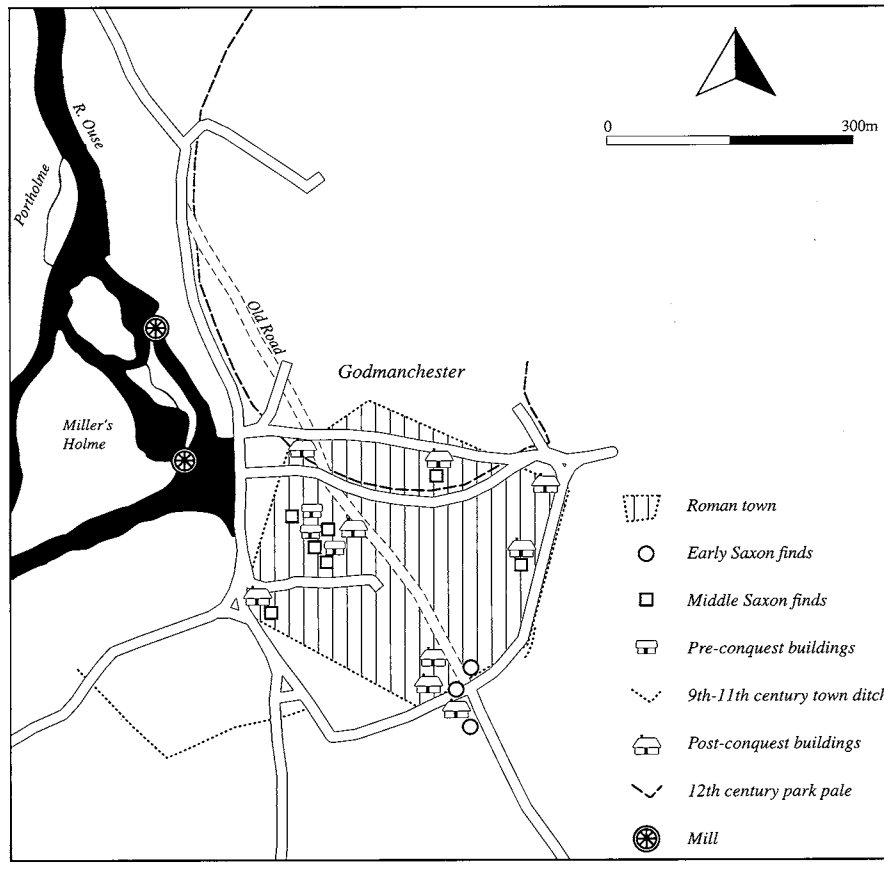

Figure 5. *Green's model for medieval Godmanchester (after Green 1977).*

In conclusion the simple model of Danish/Edwardian defended places as being composed of two D-shaped defences on either side of a river crossing is one of only several responses to the need for defences in these places at the time in question. On balance it seems that there was a pre-existing Danish *burh* at Huntingdon prior to 917 and this could have been either a regular fort commanding routeways or a D-shaped work backing onto the River Ouse. The fact that there were surviving Roman defences at Godmanchester should not be seen as reason enough to suggest that Godmanchester were in fact the main Danish defended place. There was probably Danish-period occupation here but it was a secondary place rather than the primary settlement that gave its name to the Shire, regardless of whether the surviving fortifications were reused in any way. The documentation of Edward the Elder's refortifications is quite specific in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle when a second defended area is created. The Huntingdon entry instead states that the *burh* was 'repaired and restored' perhaps indicating strengthening and extension of a pre-existing circuit on the north side of the river, rather than the creation of a second fortified place.

The Topography of the pre-Conquest Settlement

Now that we have a model of what the Danish and Saxon defences at Huntingdon were like, and where they are most likely to have been, we can look anew at what evidence there is for their existence and for the settlement within and around the 'burh itself'.

Inskip Ladds carried out an immense amount of documentary and landscape historical analysis of Huntingdon over 40 years in the first half of the 20th century, initially for his contribution to the Huntingdonshire VCH volume (Page, Proby & Ladds 1932). He utilised earlier documentary work, most notably a town historical summary by Carruthers (1824), and produced the first plans of the town's development. His proposals form the accepted model for where the pre-Conquest settlement was, but all evidence needs to be reviewed again as Ladds undoubtedly made assumptions which should not remain untested.

The accepted model for pre-Conquest Huntingdon consists of Roman cemeteries and possibly ribbon development along Ermine Street north of a fording point on the Ouse. Danish occupation and Edwardian reconquest result in a large cone-shaped enclosure delimited on the north side by a stream that later became known as the medieval 'town ditch' and, in Haslam's version of the plan, on the south side by John's Street/Walden's Road and a path across Mill Common to the waterside (Fig. 1). These joined in the northwest corner on Ermine Street at a place latterly called Balmshole, this being a corruption of an earlier version of the name as Baldwin's Hoo (Fig. 6).

The area encompassed by these defences is in line with the larger probable Edwardian defences of centres in this region, for example that of Cambridge. This model is also partially correct for the *post-Conquest* medieval town defences of Huntingdon, which probably ran further westwards as shown on Figure 6. However, actual evidence for this being the location and extent of either a Danish or Edwardian burghal settlement and its defences is rather thin on the ground.

Burh and town defences

The town defences are mentioned in several medieval documents. As Cyril Hart pointed out in his paper on the church of St Mary at Huntingdon (1966), an AD 1180 entry in the cartulary of the priory of St Mary states the location of the priory and its estate of 2 hides as "running even to the king's ditch and *Smerhill*, and all the houses within *Berneys*, and all the land which is within *Grymesdich*" (quoted in Hart 1966, 109). We know that the houses in the 12th century were essentially along the medieval High Street (Fig. 6). We also know where the priory itself was and Hart points out that the land referred to must lie between the High Street on its southwest side, the parish boundary on its northeast side and the river to the southeast (*ibid*). He equates *Grymesdich* with a stream to the northeast of the town and by implication the king's ditch must be the town ditch.

Another record, this time a feoffment from 1400 (HRO BR Box 1-1400), describes a tenement location that abuts the king's highway which leads towards the rampart (or ditch; *fossatum*) at one end and abuts the king's highway that leads to Brampton at the other end. If the latter is George Street and the road to Hinchinbrooke and Brampton, then the only conceivable location for this *fossatum* is west of the town.

A record of 1451 (HRO BR Box 1–1451), located in St Botolph's parish, which was probably on the west side of town, identifies a close called *Paradys* lying next to land owned by Hinchinbrooke Priory and located between the King's highway to *Barredych* and the road to the castle. In the survey of 1572 *Paradys* appears to be a close on the south side of Mill Common, towards the west end (Dickinson 1972). These two descriptions are different, but seem to both indicate the presence of *Paradys* and the *Bardyche* on the western side of town close to Brampton Road and part of Mill Common. In addition the 1572 survey mentions Bar Dyke as a lane across the western part of Mill Common which is without a doubt the north-northwest to south-southeast earthwork still present on Mill Common. Latterly part of the Civil War defences but, on this evidence, before that used as a lane, it would seem that earlier still it was the *burh* or borough ditch (the Bar Dyke, but see [4] for a discussion of other interpretations of this name). We therefore have the king's ditch on the northeast side of town and the Bar Dyke on the southwest side. The former meets the High Street/Ermine Street at Balmshole, but where the circuit continues from there to link up with the Bar Dyke is not clear.

This may not, of course, tell us anything about the *pre-Conquest* burghal defences if it is all in fact associated with defence of the medieval town during perhaps the 12th century. What it *does* tell us is that there

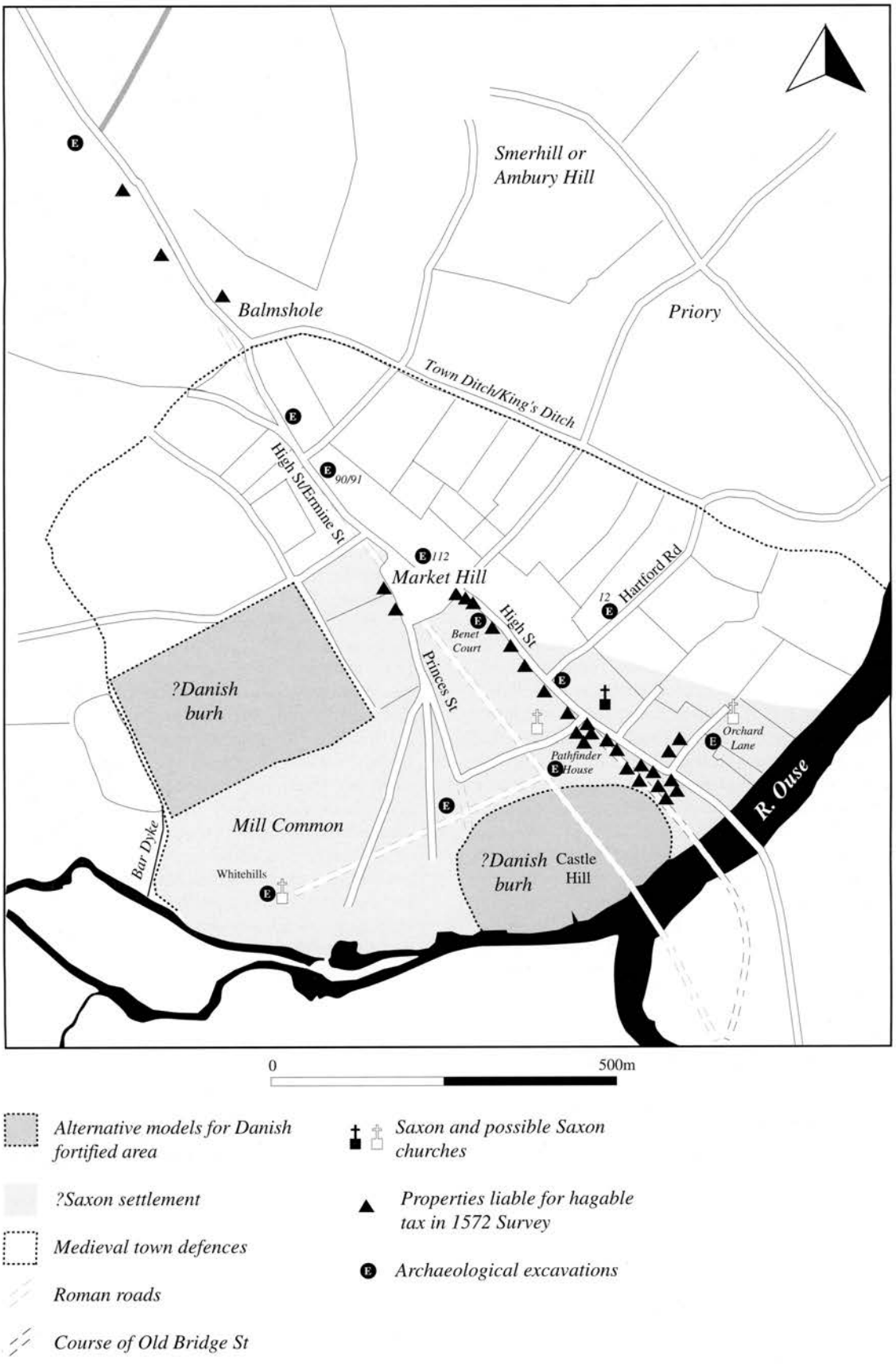

Figure 6. *Evidence and models for Danish and Edwardian burhs, and late Saxon settlement in general, at Huntingdon.*

were defences around the medieval town on the west side, and two 'ditches' were named on the eastern side of the town in the 12th century one of which, if Dr Hart is correct, is a stream at some distance from the town. In addition the name *Smerhill*, on the east side of town may be important. Hills in this location are not obvious, except for Ambury Hill which is the 19th century name for an area of slightly higher ground immediately northwest of the medieval priory site. This place name may be important as it is the only 'bury' name around Huntingdon and one alternative must be that it relates to either town defences or earlier burghal fortifications, although it is perhaps more likely that it simply identifies the hill element of the name. The 1572 Survey of the town and lands (Dickinson 1972) includes an entry that states a field location in this area as "Ambry Hill or Smore Hill" (*op cit*, 19). Smore Hill is obviously the same as *Smerhill* in the 1180 entry (Hart, *op cit*) which helps to confirm Dr Hart's model for the 12th century boundaries of the Priory lands. If Ambury Hill were a result of there being a Danish defensive work here then it is difficult to see why it should be located so far away from the river crossing and Ermine Street. This is, however, a very similar location, in relation to the river crossing, to that of the Danish burghal defences at Stamford as suggested by Mahany (1982). The difference at Stamford is, however, that the suggested burghal site continued to form part of the medieval settlement and had an effect on the street plan and town layout generally. Ambury Hill is some hundreds of metres north of the centre of medieval Huntingdon in an area that is open land in later centuries, with only the curving line of the field boundaries to possibly suggest any earlier origin (although this is again more probably of topographic origin).

Figure 6 shows the locations of the Roman ford and road, plus the southwesterly spur road recorded in the 1974 Pathfinder House excavations, heading for Whitehills villa. A prime position for any Danish defensive work would be straddling this, presumably still used, Roman fording point on the River Ouse.

The current bridge, of late medieval date, is the second post-Conquest bridge. The earlier (timber) structure was almost certainly located about 50m further south, the evidence for this being first collected by Ladds (Page, Proby & Ladds 1932). The first bridge was presumably placed here once the castle was constructed, the location for this latter being over the pre-existing fording point. Domesday Book details the twenty urban properties demolished to make way for the castle and these most probably fronted onto the old line of Ermine Street, although Ladds thought that the old High Street line may have been an creation of Edward the Elder and that these therefore fronted that road line (Ladds 1937).

Evidence for pre-Conquest settlement, including churches

Direct archaeological and other evidence for the position of the Danish and Edwardian *burhs* is virtually non-existent, however the general area of pre-Conquest settlement can be approximately defined from a few small pieces of data. Although the town's extent is not necessarily the same thing as the burh location, being aware of those areas that may have been part of the town by Domesday is in fact an equally valuable point to consider. We know that the river crossing is a key location and we know that the castle, positioned over that crossing, caused late Saxon properties to be demolished. There were at least two churches present at Domesday (two are mentioned in the survey) and it is very likely that one of these was St Mary's which is located in the southern third of the area delimited by the later town defences (Hart 1966). In addition St Clements parish is known from later medieval documents to have been between St Mary's and the river and Clement is a well-attested Danish dedication[5], the comparable topographical situation of St Clement's Church at Cambridge being previously discussed by Haslam (1984). The medieval graveyard partially excavated in 1995 on Orchard Lane may be from St Clements (Oakey 1997) and if this is really a dedication of Danish origin then it may be another Domesday church. What we may therefore have is a picture building up of pre-Conquest occupation in the riverside zone and along Ermine street. The Domesday book situation with 256 burgesses and 100 others in four quarters, with only 20 tenements being removed for the castle, suggests a town of some size in comparison to the numbers given for many other emergent towns in the region (including Bedford, Colchester and Northampton) and both Ladds and Hart suggest that the High Street/Ermine street divided the town into two halves, each of two quarters. We must turn to records of archaeological observation and excavation to see if anything further can be gleaned regarding the extent of this settlement.

Archaeological endeavour in Huntingdon has been fitful over recent decades. Many large developments in key parts of the town have had no involvement from archaeologists and many opportunities to develop our model have therefore been lost. Those excavations that have been carried out have mostly remained unpublished. The plan (Fig. 6) shows several locations of trenching along the High Street, mostly from the last five years. Although only one of these is a published excavation (rather than an evaluation or watching brief) they have provided information of great value. Recording at 90/91 High street identified dense 11th to 12th century pitting (Heawood 1994), but only a little activity of this date was seen at 112 High Street, 12 Hartford Road and almost none at Hartford Road/High Street corner. No earlier features were recorded at any of these locations. At Benet's Court little occupation of any date was evident and it may be that the excavation was within an area of gardens for much of the relevant periods. At Orchard Lane the earliest phase of activity was in the general period 900–1150 and this included a little pitting with the deposition of a large assemblage of unopened and undersize marine shellfish which have been interpreted as the non-usable sortings from a catch brought up-river from the Wash (Murphy 1997). This

re-emphasises the riverside location of this site.

Earlier excavations include several phases of observation and excavation around the edges of the castle which, surprisingly, seem to have confirmed the presence of a stone-built gatehouse and barbican on the northeast side, but did not investigate deposits predating the castle creation. The largest excavations were north of the castle, in an area that is now the District Council car parks and also in an additional area on the north side of St Mary's Street. Although DoE funded this work was never written up and the archive remains unlocated. A small amount of verbal information suggests that late Saxon pits were found in several locations and that late Saxon building remains were found on the second area north of St Mary's street, the structure being of wooden construction (postholes and beam slots surviving) and with an apsidal end thus presenting the interpretation that this was an early church (D Cozens, pers comm). The presence of this possible wooden church is of great relevance to attempts to reconstruct the early settlement morphology but, sadly, such an uncertain record must be viewed with extreme caution. It is certainly possible that this was a wooden Anglo-Saxon church, but it is equally possible that it was of post-Conquest date or that it was another wooden structure.

West of the castle a natural hillock at Whitehills was excavated in the 1960s and a confusing sequence of Roman to post-medieval activity was identified. Ignoring the 2nd–3rd century corridor villa, medieval landscaping works observed here were equated by the excavators with the documented siege castle constructed at Huntingdon in 1173 (Davison & Rudd unpub, Page, Proby & Ladds 1932, 130), but between these two episodes there was a period of use as a Christian burial ground with 400 inhumations of men, women and children. In addition records state that one, possibly two, phases of a stone church, of dimensions 38' by 14', were recorded here and a coin of Cnut (from around AD 1017) was recovered with some of the earliest burials (Fig. 7). If this is in fact a pre-Conquest church then it may be the second Domesday church, owned in 1089 by Bishop Geoffrey of Coutances but previously in the ownership of Ramsey Abbey. Alternatively it might be another church not documented in Domesday book. Therefore, alongside St Mary's church and the Danish-style dedication of St Clement's (perhaps the church in Orchard Lane), there are three, or with the very uncertain St Mary's Street building four, pre-Conquest churches currently known or postulated for Huntingdon. An under-reporting of the number of churches by Domesday book is fairly common, for instance at Cambridge (Taylor 1999, 45–50), so this should not be seen as a problem.

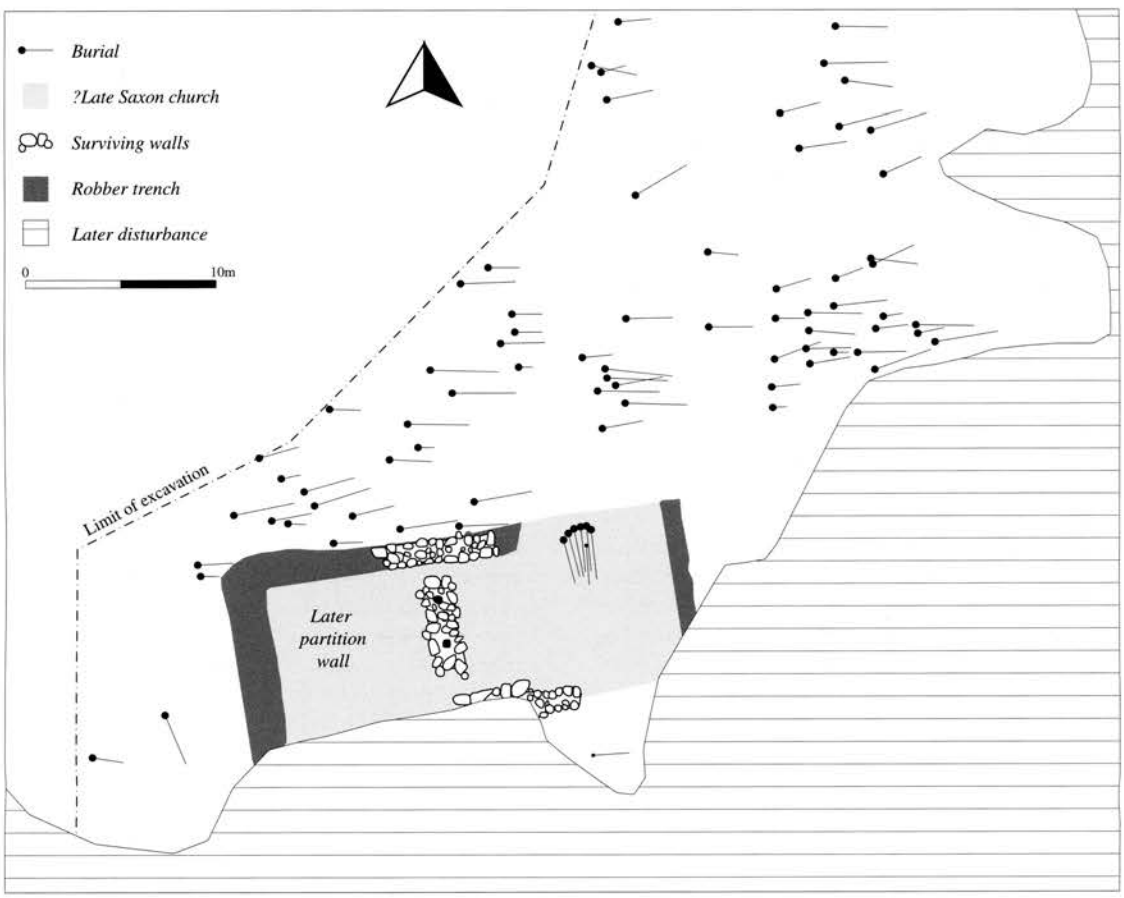

Figure 7. *Whitehills, Huntingdon; plan of late Saxon burials and robbed stone structures presumed to be a pre-Conquest church (after Davison, plan in archive in NMR).*

Of the churches known to be present in Huntingdon in the later medieval period, several have dedications that are commonly of Saxon origin. This includes St Botolph's, which it appears from later documents, was on the west side of town, which may in fact be the church found at Whitehills on Mill Common.

The assumption that Mill Common has always been a common is incorrect; the ridge and furrow evident across much of it demonstrating an arable function, perhaps (and perversely) during the medieval population peak prior to the mid 14th century, when the town extended more northwards and eastwards. It is conceivable that pre-Conquest settlement was found along a wider part of the riverside zone than previously thought, as it is unlikely that the church at Whitehills was entirely separate from the rest of the settlement. Mill Common may therefore represent the largest, and possibly most well-preserved, piece of pre-Conquest settlement remains in Huntingdon.

Another suggestion for the shape of late Saxon Huntingdon can be made if one applies the potentially analogous situation at Cambridge to Huntingdon's landscape. Alison Taylor has pointed out how, in common with almost all village plans in the region, Saxon Cambridge possessed a plan whereby the main road of the settlement (Trumpington Street) was laid out away from the major highway (the Roman road (Taylor 1999, 49). If this model is applied to Huntingdon, then the most appropriate candidate for the main road of the new settlement is the line of Princes Street and a continuation of that alignment alongside Mill Common to the Alconbury Brook. This theory fits well with much evidence described thus far and detailed below, however, it does not explain the position of St Mary's church which probably existed in the pre-Conquest period as the main church of the town. Whatever the detail, the data implies pre-Conquest settlement lay in that part of the later medieval town closest to the river and/or in the angle between Ermine Street and the Alconbury Brook.

Conclusions regarding the pre-Conquest topography of Huntingdon

In conclusion we must summarise what we have gleaned about pre-Conquest Huntingdon:

1 Other than at Whitehills no pre-Conquest occupation of any note has been found in Huntingdon. 11th to 12th century activity is present and dense in one location in the northern part of the town but in general such remains are sparse elsewhere.
2 A pre-Conquest church existed in the waterfront zone (Whitehills), and a later church with a Danish-type dedication (St Clement) also existed close to the river. Another timber church may have existed on St Mary's Street, whilst St Mary's is probably the original mother church of Huntingdon. A church with the Saxon dedication to St Botolph, often given to churches at gateways, was located on the western side of town.
3 The castle is known from Domesday Book to have been built on pre-existing tenements and these fronted onto the former line of Ermine Street that forded the river here and probably linked in with the current High Street line on the north side of Market Hill.
4 The Bar Dyke ran across Mill Common where it may have made a right-angled corner, and it may be part of the Saxon *burh* and/or medieval borough, defences.
5 Evidence for Late Saxon settlement seems to cluster in the angle between Ermine Street and the Alconbury Brook, plus the riverside zone on the western side of town.

This is not really 'much of a haul' and very little on which to base any developmental model. The overwhelming lack of evidence may, of course, point to the pre-Conquest settlement being, in the main, located elsewhere; however, I believe that careful attention to all new development in the south and west of the old town core, and in particular around Mill Common, will start to identify more positive evidence of 9th to 11th century occupation.

Negative evidence is always to be used with caution, however recent archaeological work in Huntingdon provides added weight to the suggestion that, the riverside zone aside, there was no pre-Conquest occupation in the area north of the modern High Street. Archaeological work in advance of, and during construction of a new supermarket resulted in a total of twelve evaluation trenches and four areas of recording. These lay in the zone between the Town Ditch to the north and the rear of the High Street properties to the south, covering a large portion of the area between Hartford Road and St Germain Street. This large amount of archaeological recording produced perhaps only one or two contexts of late Saxon/ Saxo-Norman date amongst hundreds of later features (Connell forthcoming).

Where was the pre-Conquest* burh *and settlement at Huntingdon?

If we return to the question of burhs and defences, one further point to consider is that of the nature of the *burh* itself. We are looking for a Danish settlement and defensive work and an Edwardian rebuild/*burh*. In looking for the former if we revert to considering Danish forts of the Repton type, then a D-shaped enclosure adjacent to the river would be most appropriate. Huntingdon Castle as it survives now has been shown by Ladds to be probably only part of the original defensive work. The motte and the extant bailey were almost certainly originally joined by a second, western, bailey which ran, as shown on Figure 6, from the river in an arc where there is now a raised area of land under bungalows into the grounds of Castle Hill House, now the Town Council offices. It is known that the earthworks in the grounds of Castle Hill House were partially flattened and received much landscaping in the 19th century and it seems likely that the original shape of the earthworks was much more curvilinear than they are now. The extent of the castle curtilage on Thomas Jeffery's Map of 1768

demonstrates this fact, although the western bailey had already been removed by then. If we reconstruct the whole of the castle curtilage and earthworks, as shown on Figure 6, then we end up with a D-shaped enclosure about 300m x 200m in maximum extent, encompassing perhaps six hectares. This area of land straddles exactly the pre-existing Roman ford and Ermine Street and is within the one zone where pre-Conquest archaeology has certainly been found. As a Danish defensive work this seems plausible, although it is very much larger than that constructed for the whole of the 'great host' at Repton. Alternatively, as an Edwardian *burh* it is very small in comparison to the areas within the curvilinear enclosures suggested at Bedford and Cambridge, but almost twice the area of the rectangular 'Edwardian fort' postulated for Stamford (Mahany 1982). It is worth noting that, if the tentative suggestion that the castle site perpetuates a Danish defensive work is indeed true, then the difference between these two fortifications is that the latter straddles the through route, whilst the former overlooks it.

A recent archaeological evaluation on a parcel of land that represents the southernmost third of this putative 'lost bailey' has provided evidence in support of there being former defensive works here (Cooper and Spoerry 2000). An apparently natural gravel scarp that curves away from the Alconbury Brook in a sinuous manner, but generally provides a west-facing bank, was steepened, and probably had a revetted bank piled above it to make it higher. Although dating is not conclusive, the abandonment phase was perhaps in the 13th century. It seems likely that this does indeed represent works associated with a second castle bailey, although whether they were first created as a Danish or Saxon burghal defence two centuries or more earlier is not resolved.

The most obvious candidate for part of the line of the Edwardian *burh* defences at Huntingdon is the later town ditch and specifically the Bar Dyke, or that part of the town ditch that is still visible as an earthwork on Mill Common, but this again raises the problem as to why virtually none of the archaeological excavations in the town have produced evidence for activity in this period. I have suggested above that it may be that the main area of pre-Conquest activity was in the angle between Ermine Street and the Alconbury Brook and thus much of it lies under Mill Common rather than under the medieval town. The Edwardian *burh* defences may have encompassed an area covering much of this land as suggested on Figure 6, with Ermine Street and the former Roman ford representing the main through route, with the town's economic functions aligned along Princes Street. If this were the case then the only piece of the Edwardian defensive line that is currently recognisable is the western arm of the Bar Dyke.

An alternative model proposed by Michael Green identifies a set of Alfredian-style regular, rectangular *burh* defences, reminiscent of those proposed at Stamford, running from the Bar Dyke to Walden's Road (also Fig. 6). Again this alternative has some merits, however, it may do little other than reinforce the point that we do not really know, and do not currently have enough data to know, where the Saxon *burh* was.

Haslam has also used parochial boundaries and the presence of blocks of crown land to help define burghal locations (e.g. at Newport/*Wigingamere* 1988, and Cambridge 1984). At Huntingdon the parochial picture is very confused. St Mary's, possibly the first and main pre-Conquest church, held most of the land along the riverside as far as the town centre in the 19th century, a block of land that includes most areas for which Saxon settlement has been postulated. We also know, however, that this parish absorbed several other medieval urban parishes (there were sixteen churches in the town by the early 14th century), thus it is thus not possible to equate the later boundaries of St Mary's with an early process of land division including the burghal area, even though this may seem a useful way forward. The 19th century bounds of the small characteristically urban parishes of St Benet and All Saints look, on the face of it, to retain some elements of their early form. All Saints may be a conflation of more than one medieval parish, but its northeastern boundary, with that of St Benet's, lies along the Town Ditch and this alignment is undoubtedly medieval in origin. This probably preserves the edge of the recognised urban area in the post-Conquest period. The southwestern edges of these parochial units are not identical in alignment, however the fact that both these and the two church sites are west of the High Street, whilst most of the parish land is to the east, may be significant. This may imply that these units were created before the High Street was laid out, as to site the churches on one side of the main road, with their land on the other, is not the most common arrangement. This model might then also imply a pre-Conquest origin for the eastern line of the Town Ditch, which is at odds with some of the other data postulated above. It is possible that the complete absence of pre-Conquest remains from the eastern half of this area might be explained through the occupied frontages being confined to Ermine Street and Princes Street, but it may be more correct to see the uncertainties of this interpretation as being symptomatic of the much altered and potentially misleading lines of the 19th century parish boundaries.

One final point worth mentioning regarding the location of the Saxon settlement is the presence and position of *hagable* or *higable* land in the 1572 Survey (Dickinson 1972), that is land subject to an obscure Saxon land tax levied on tenements *within* a borough. If those tenements still classified as *hagable* in 1572 are plotted it becomes apparent that of 31 tenements in the town that are *hagable*, 28 lie along the High Street between the castle and the south side of Market Hill (Fig. 6). This is undoubtedly of some significance. If this were the only *hagable* land it might also suggest that the original borough, the Saxon *burh*, were only located south of Market Hill. Domesday book identifies that eighty properties in the two quarters within which the castle was *not* situated were *hagable*. If one

uses Ladds' interpretation of the four quarters as being divided by the High Street and Germain Street/George Street, then the *hagable* properties should be in the northern half of the town, where only three were by 1572. I believe that this indicates Ladds was wrong in his interpretation of the location of the four quarters and it again requires us to look for another topographic model for the pre-Conquest settlement. The fact that so many *hagable* properties survive in one part of the town by the 16th century tends to suggest that late Saxon urban properties for the most part only ever existed in roughly this same part of town and we therefore have another reason to suggest that the pre-Conquest town and/or *burh* was located in the area closer to the river, perhaps within the bounds of Bar Dyke and High Street (at least, approximately) as already postulated. The problem with this new data set is that the *hagable* properties all lie along the High Street which, it has already been suggested, was initially laid out in 1067 and the southern part realigned in the mid 14th century. Thus for any properties to be taxed as hagable as a late Saxon survival, they must be so through survival of the land units themselves, regardless of the road re-alignment which may have re-located the actual frontage position and truncated or extended these pre-existing properties. Study of Figure 6 shows that this seems rather unlikely for the very major re-alignment away from Ermine Street postulated for 1087. The fact that the *hagable* properties are almost all along the southwest side of the High Street south of Market Hill does, however, suggest that the area northeast of this line was not deemed appropriate for the urban form of taxation in the late Saxon period.

Conclusions

The lack of direct evidence for pre-Conquest occupation across the whole northeastern half of the later medieval town area is striking and must imply that there was little or no activity here in the earlier period. In addition the few definite archaeological discoveries of pre-Conquest date do suggest a general focus along the riverside and south of Market Hill. The documentary evidence is equally sparse and perhaps more confusing but the key indications are again for settlement, perhaps from the Bar Dyke in the west to at least the later High Street in the east, if not as far as the Orchard Lane churchyard (St Clement's?). The way any of this will be confirmed or refuted is through a deliberate and active campaign of archaeological observation and recording when sites come up for development and during the laying of new services. In addition targeted research investigations, perhaps on and around Mill Common could answer such questions with a little more directness as it may well be that almost half of the pre-Conquest settlement lay in this area.

Acknowledgements

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Endnotes

1 Very recent evaluation evidence at Watersmeet, Huntingdon, a parcel of land lying on the north bank of the Alconbury Brook adjacent to the Norman castle and less than 100m form the presumed location of the fording point for Ermine Street over the Ouse, has revealed further remains of interest. One undated burial, probably Roman in date, and several features containing mid-1st century AD 'Belgic' pottery, plus a little later Roman material, all point to a greater range of activity close to the ford. This may include settlement, and the presence of some later Iron Age as well as 1st century pottery may imply a settlement and/or crossing point was here before the Roman road was constructed.

2 The origins of the double *burh* in Anglo-Scandinavian England have not been fully resolved. One view ascribes this defensive form to the Frankish Empire, however, how and why that was later adopted by Edward the Elder and others in England is not clear.

3 Defining criteria for urban places in medieval England have been published by several authors, but most notably by Martin Biddle in 1976. Despite the fact that Biddle's bundle of twelve observed, documented and/or inferred, criteria might seem outmoded and overly processual to some, it is doubtful whether a better alternative exists, or will do so in the near future. With regard to Huntingdon, a purely defensive Danish burh would probably fail to meet his requirements for urban status (possession of more than one of the twelve criteria), however, a settlement associated with this defensive work, or growing within it might, through population expansion, possession of a mint, deliberate settlement planning etc., attain such status in due course.

4 Derivations for the 14th century place name Bar Dyke / la Bare include the Burh Ditch (an origin relating to a memory of the pre-Conquest defences), the Borough Ditch (part of the medieval town defences) and the Barbican ditch. Although notes by Philip Dickinson held in both the HRO and Cambs. SMR describe foundations for a possible stone barbican on the immediate eastern side of the castle, the location of the Bar Dyke and/or la Bare in 14th century documents, where recognisable, is always on the western side of town, near the road to Brampton. This indicates that these records do not describe a barbican on the eastern side of the castle.

5 As Haslam drew attention to this point in a previous paper in this journal (vol. LXXII, 1984) the whole discussion will not be presented again here. The remarked-upon correspondence between parishes with the St Clement dedication and low-lying ground around bridges or early routes, within urban centres where a significant Danish input is expected, is merely re-enforced by another example being recognised at Huntingdon.

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