

Churches on Roman Buildings: Christian Associations and Roman Masonry in Anglo-Saxon England

By TYLER BELL

HUNDREDS of churches in Britain and Gaul are directly associated with Roman structures, most frequently villas but also martyria, forts and signal stations. The superimposition of churches on Roman structures remains a problematic aspect of post-Roman archaeology in Britain, and an explanation for their coincidence is certainly required in the light of the apparent discontinuity between the Roman and early-medieval landscapes. A number of possible explanations exist which range from the purely functional re-use of existing masonry to more abstract Christian associations with Roman ruins. This paper examines some possible circumstances in which Roman secular structures might have become the foci for Anglo-Saxon churches in the early-medieval period. In doing so it cautions against interpretations based on proprietary models, and suggests that other factors, not immediately evident in the archaeological record, may have played a significant role.

Over 160 churches in Britain are known to be associated with Roman structures, the majority of which served a secular function in the Roman period and appear to have been abandoned and in ruins before being used for a subsequent Christian purpose.¹ The particular association between the Roman and medieval phases of these sites is frequently tenuous archaeologically: in Britain the existence of Roman origins is revealed only by small-scale, sub-surface exploration — grave-digging, drainage or heating installation, and less frequently keyhole excavation. In contrast, Continental excavations, and church archaeology in general, are traditionally undertaken on a much larger scale. As a consequence of Britain's small-scale and often chance discoveries, the corpus of known churches on Roman buildings may only be a fraction of the total number. The lack of full-scale excavation at the time of these discoveries, and the want of policies that otherwise might allow a retrospective investigation today, obfuscate our understanding of these sites, both in their individual development and the patterns which together they might reveal. As a result, any discussion of churches on Roman buildings will of course be subject to the limitations of the evidence; however, it is still possible to make observations which can stimulate speculation. In doing so, this investigation

¹ T. Bell, *The Anglo-Saxon Re-use and Reinterpretation of Roman Structures* (Unpublished MPhil Thesis in European Archaeology, Oxford University, 1995).

attempts to address some alternative explanations for the presence of Christian churches on long-abandoned, derelict Roman structures.

These churches are usually found on three distinct classes of Roman site: villas, military installations, and funerary monuments, although of course the exact nature of the structure is often not known for certain. They commonly, although not exclusively, exist outside the dense building occupation of a Roman town, a structural co-incident which suggests (and frequently demonstrates) a distinct and purposeful re-use of the site. These churches are found throughout Britain (Fig. 1), but appear to occur in specific concentrations according to the type of underlying Roman building: the few instances of re-use of *martyria* seem to be restricted to Kent, with a possible exception in the SW. of England; churches in military installations occur in Roman military zones, from Anglesey to Essex to S. Wales, but a noticeable pattern of re-use can be seen in the Saxon Shore Forts, Stanegate and the Hadrian's Wall forts near Carlisle, and the signal stations on the N. Yorkshire coast. The re-use of villas is widespread throughout Britain, with concentrations in the Bristol area and Essex, although the latter is due in part to Rodwell and Rodwell's detailed survey there.²

Little is known of the mechanics and exact processes underlying the transformation of these Roman structures into their eventual role as Christian churches, but the evidence appears to suggest a variety of reasons behind their eventual re-use, which in turn perhaps reflects the wide range of possible (and developing) responses of the Anglo-Saxons to their inherited landscape. The term *landscape* herein refers to a collection of visible features that define a physical area; it also entails a more abstract concept of place, the knowledge of a given area as defined by its relationship to a monument, or a group of people.

PREVIOUS RESEARCH

Recent investigations of these churches in both Gaul and Britain have been undertaken within the framework of research on either churches or villas, rather than exploring these sites as a specific type in their own right. A notable exception is Morris and Roxan's work of 1980 which includes a 'Sample List' of churches on Roman buildings, incorporating those sites for which the evidence of an underlying structure is deemed likely, if not necessarily proven. Morris's *Churches in the Landscape* reprises some of these cases but concentrates on the possible monastic development in the SW.³ Further studies examine specific instances of this phenomenon in England or Gaul. In France the occurrence of churches on Roman structures is more common, and excavations of churches, especially those with Roman or early-medieval aspects, have been undertaken on a comparatively large scale since the beginning of this century.⁴ John Percival's recent paper discusses the development of early monasteries in Gaul and includes an appendix of 22 monasteries

² W. Rodwell and K. Rodwell, *Historic Churches: a Wasting Asset* (CBA Res. Rep. 19, 1977), fig. 30.

³ R. Morris, *Churches in the Landscape* (London, 1989), 100-2. Cf. Morris and Roxan, *op. cit.* note 14.

⁴ E.g. L. R. P. de la Croix, 'Les Dernieres Decouvertes Trouvaille d'une Villa Gallo-Romaine d'un Nymphaeum', *L'Ami des Monuments et des Artes*, 14 (1900), 120-31.

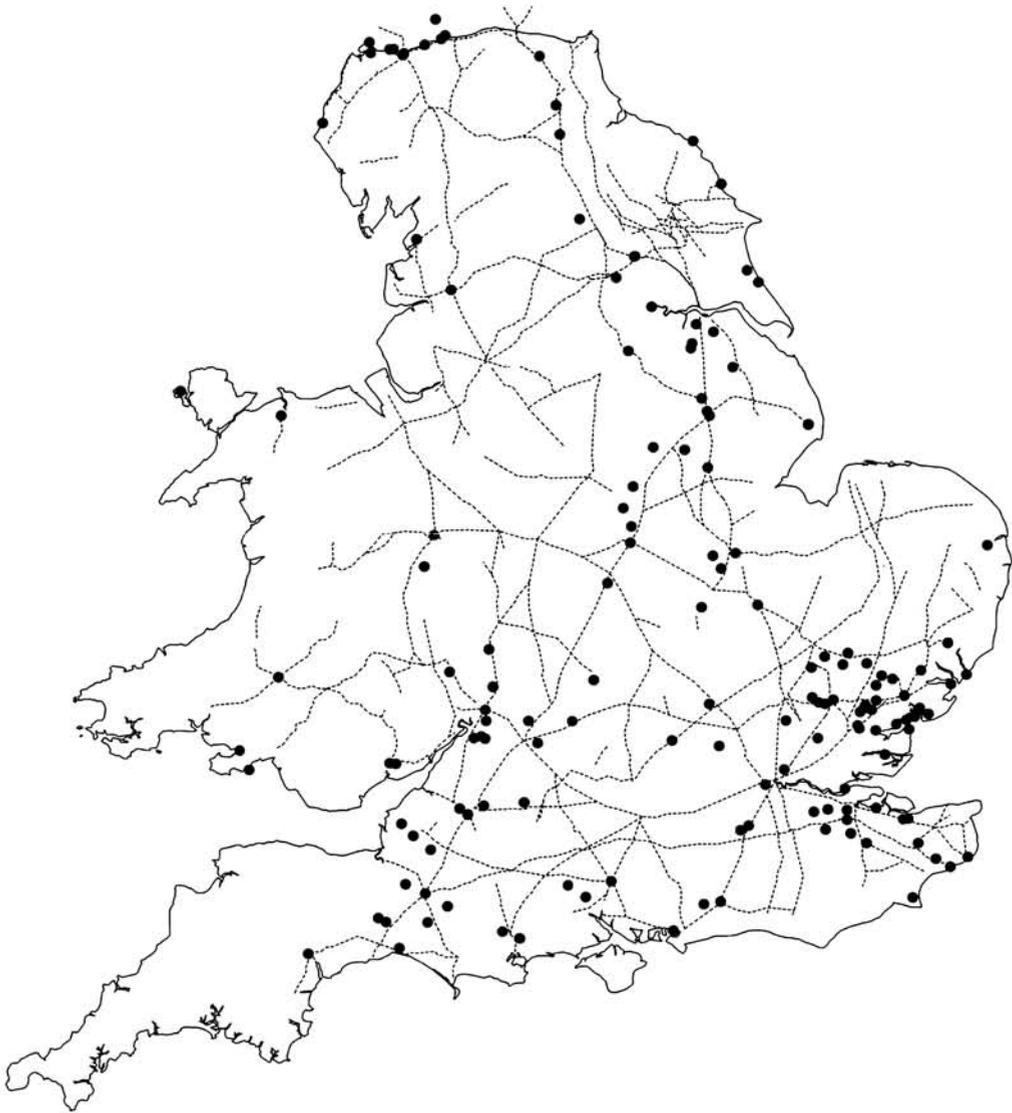


FIG. 1

Distribution of churches on Roman buildings in Britain, with Roman roads.

demonstrating a Roman structural origin.⁵ This examination holds particular importance for any discussion of a continuing Christian community in Britain. Additional research is in progress by the author to compile an exhaustive list of churches on Roman buildings in Britain; the early stages of this research are summarized in an unpublished MPhil thesis.⁶ Related research associated with the apparent continuity between Roman villa estates and medieval parish boundaries includes Carolyn Heighway's discussion of the siting of churches in Anglo-Saxon Gloucestershire, Susan Pearce's work in Dorset and Gloucestershire, and Chris Taylor's research in Dorset.⁷

ROMAN RUINS

In attempting to envisage the condition of Roman buildings in the Anglo-Saxon period we must remember that many masonry structures were over a hundred years old by the late Roman period. John Higgit shows that enough Roman architecture survived to influence the art and architecture of the Middle Ages,⁸ and a handful of sites exist which demonstrate the maintenance of Roman structures into the 5th century, but on the whole Roman masonry buildings by A.D. 450 are best understood as a class of aged structures that had been subject to over a century of weathered neglect. Yet these ruined structures were re-used for Christian purposes, in many cases centuries after the structures' desertion. Acknowledging this period of abandonment we must ask what possible aspects of the Roman site or structure could have attracted the attention of Anglo-Saxon Christians in the period of conversion.

Specific geographical factors may have contributed to the re-use of some sites: the church at Wells, for instance, is surrounded by the three springs that apparently give the town its name.⁹ The church of St Bride's outside the walls of Roman and medieval London is also aligned with a Roman building: here, although there is no direct tie between the Roman building and the earliest church (believed to be Late Saxon),¹⁰ it remains possible that the Late Saxon church was built to monumentalize the well of 'Bride' or 'St Bride', believed to be in existence before the Phase I church was built; this was remembered in the early 20th century to be the focus of a formal procession, reflecting perhaps the tradition of a water-oriented ceremony.¹¹ Other alternative, more linear, explanations behind the St Bride's Roman/Christian coincidence are possible — such as the possibility of an earlier timber mortuary chapel on the site which may have been associated with a late

⁵ J. Percival, 'Villas and Monasteries in Late Roman Gaul', *J. Ecc. Hist.*, 48 (1997), 1–21.

⁶ Bell, *op. cit.* in note 1

⁷ C. Heighway, *Anglo-Saxon Gloucestershire* (Gloucester, 1987); S. Pearce, 'Estates and Church Sites in Dorset and Gloucestershire: the Emergence of a Christian Society', in S. Pearce (ed.), *The Early Church in Western Britain and Ireland* (British Archaeol. Rep., British Ser. 102) (Oxford, 1982), 117–43; C. Taylor, *Dorset: The Making of an English Landscape* (London, 1970).

⁸ J. C. Higgit, 'The Roman Background to Medieval England', *J. British Archaeol. Assoc.*, 3rd ser., 36 (1973), 1–15.

⁹ W. Rodwell, 'From Mausoleum to Minster: the Early Development of Wells Cathedral', in S. Pearce (ed.), *The Early Church in Western Britain and Ireland* (British Archaeol. Rep., British Ser., 102) (Oxford, 1982) 49–59.

¹⁰ G. Milne, *St Bride's Church, London: archaeological research 1952–60 and 1992–5* (London, 1997).

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 110.

Roman cemetery there — but these must remain speculative. The first Christians at Bath were probably drawn as much or more to the hot spring than to the ruins of the Roman town and temple:¹² wells and springs are commonly known to be associated with churches and it is not unlikely that some instances of what appear to be churches on Roman buildings are in fact two distinct phases focusing upon a third, common element, such as St Bride's well.¹³ With this in mind, it is important to realize the potential existence of peripheral factors which can contribute to the *apparent* continuity of a site, many of which are unlikely to be uncovered in a small-scale excavation.

We should attempt to identify alternative explanations that go beyond the conceptually static relationship of Roman structure to early-medieval church, and address instead a range of possibilities in which the site of a ruined Roman structure could have retained some presence in the Anglo-Saxon landscape. This includes identifying, or at least suggesting, any possible non-material causes behind a structure's re-use — certainly topographical factors were at work; an advantageous or commanding position within the natural landscape can be an attractive location for a church. Many such re-used Roman forts command similarly prominent positions (Dover, Scarborough, Nether Denton, etc.), and the mausoleum at Lullingstone is located on the rise of a hill, which may be one factor which influenced the church's specific placement on that earlier monument.

There are of course other elements which are less tangible and certainly more difficult to quantify. Clearly, without human activity, sites cease to serve a functional purpose and are therefore unable to play economic or political roles in the landscape after their abandonment. Could one, however, maintain an ephemeral, passive presence in the landscape — that is a non-material continuity in the community which could possibly exist for several generations, even after the structure's physical demise? The evidence seems to suggest that these non-material associations did exist and were demonstrated in a developing early-medieval association of Christianity with Roman structures. Richard Morris, for example, proposes that 'a sense of history' could have made some contribution to the development of York as an ecclesiastical centre, the baptism of Edwin there being perhaps an attempt to parallel the rule of Constantine, the first Christian king.¹⁴ The limited nature of the evidence in this type of investigation allows only speculative examination, but this important yet elusive aspect of the study deserves exploration as far as we may sensibly go.

The underlying tenor of Old English geographic toponyms suggests that the Anglo-Saxons' first introduction to and association with their landscape was largely conditioned by physical observation. The remnants of a dilapidated Roman structure with its artificial shape and right angles clearly made a distinct impression upon the Anglo-Saxons, illustrated by place-names which include the word *ceastre*, an element of the language which describes some form of masonry construction

¹² B. Cunliffe and P. Davenport, *The Temple of Sulis Minerva at Bath* (Oxford, 1985–88).

¹³ For churches and their wells see Morris, *op. cit.* in note 3, 87–89.

¹⁴ R. Morris and J. Roxan, 'Churches on Roman Buildings', 175–209 in W. Rodwell (ed.), *Temples, Churches and Religion: Recent Research in Roman Britain* (British Archaeol. Rep., British Ser., 77) (Oxford, 1980), 182.

and is most often used in the context of Roman towns and forts (Wroxeter, Doncaster, Winchester, Dorchester, etc.), but it is also found within the names of *Woodchester* (Gloucs), *Frocester* (Gloucs), and *Castor* (Northants): all Roman villas which, perhaps not coincidentally, are associated with later churches.¹⁵ Given this association between Roman masonry and the *-chester* place-name it appears that stone buildings were viewed by late 6th- and 7th-century Anglo-Saxons as a distinctive class of structures which played a central role in their conception and definition of the landscape. From the 7th century we might further suggest that *Roman* was largely considered synonymous with *Christian*. This association appears to be one of design rather than coincidence: Gregory's vision of Christian England is clearly influenced by the layout of Roman Britain, and shortly thereafter we see instances of former Roman centres presented as royal gifts to Christian fathers.¹⁶ From the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*:

619: . . . Aethelbert gave Mellitus an Episcopal see in London, and to Justus a see in Canterbury. . .

626: . . . There [York] the king gave Paulinus an Episcopal see, and afterwards ordered a large church to be built there of stone. . .

669: In this year Egbert gave Reculver to Bass the priest to build a church there.¹⁷

Moreover, there appears to have been a special association between masonry construction and the Church. Bede tells of Benedict Biscop's sending for Gallic masons to construct a church 'in the Roman way', and Gregory of Tours describes the replacement of a ruined wooden church with a stone one as being 'worthy of the Pontiff'.¹⁸ Both suggest that stone construction had a particular association with Christianity. The archaeological evidence seems to support this association: a number of parish churches overlying Roman buildings in Kent have *stān*-derived place-names: Stone-by-Faversham, Lullingstone, Cuxton, Stone-by-Dartford, and Folkstone.¹⁹ Other examples throughout the country include Stanford-on-Soar (Notts), Stanstead Abbots (Herts), Stanstead Mountfitchet (Essex), King's Stanley (Gloucs), Whitestaunton (Somerset) and Stanwix — *stone walls* — Roman fort in Cumbria. Other more localized, *stān*-based place-names may well have been lost: one can be suggested at Drax (Yorks), where a chapel mentioned in a 959 charter is referred to being on or near 'Stan Hill', identified with the site near the Roman villa in the field now known as 'The *Stannels*'.²⁰ Further suggestions of this association are demonstrated by the *whit-* prefix, presumably referring to plastered

¹⁵ A. H. Smith, *English Place-Name Elements, Part I* (Cambridge, 1956); E. Ekwall, *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of English Place-Names* (Oxford, 1960).

¹⁶ Bede, *Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum*, ed. C. Plummer (Oxford, 1896). Trans. L. Shirley-Price, *A History of the English Church and People* (New York, 1968), i. 29; J. Blair, 'Anglo-Saxon Minsters: a topographical review', 226–66 in J. Blair and R. Sharpe (eds.), *Pastoral Care Before the Parish* (Leicester, 1992), 237, esp. notes 43–49.

¹⁷ *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, ed. and trans. G. N. Garmonsway (London, 1953).

¹⁸ Bede, 'Lives of the Abbots of Wearmouth and Jarrow', 185–210 in J. Webb and S. Farmer (ed. and trans.), *The Age of Bede* (London, 1965); E. James, 'Archaeology and the Merovingian Monastery', 35–55 in H. Clarke and M. Brennan (eds.), *Columbanus and the Merovingian Monasticism* (British Archaeol. Rep., Internat. Ser. 113) (Oxford, 1981), 38 and note 17.

¹⁹ S. Rigold, 'Roman Folkstone Reconsidered', *Archaeol. Cant.*, 87 (1972), 31–42, p. 38.

²⁰ K. Wilson, 'A Survey and Excavation within the Area of Scurff Wall Farm, Drax, near Selby, Yorks', *Yorkshire Archaeol. J.*, 41 (1966), 670–86.

or white-washed stone: Bede tells us that the see at Whithorn (although not a Roman site itself), was called *Candida Casa*, or 'White House', because the church was built of stone.²¹ It is possible that other parishes with churches on Roman buildings may have obtained their place-names from similar associations with visible masonry remains: the aforementioned Whitestaunton combines both of these elements, probably referring to the white stones of the church, as does Whitchurch Canonorum (Dorset), another apparent reference to the church fabric.²²

This Christian association with Roman monuments appears to have existed from the 7th century and probably continued into the 10th when stone construction became more commonplace in Anglo-Saxon secular society and slowly began to obscure the distinctive aspect of Roman ruins. Within those four centuries, and indeed for a time afterwards, it is not unlikely that Anglo-Saxon missionaries were drawn to the ruined remains of Roman structures partly as a result of these retrospectively applied Christian associations. Gregory of Tours tells of how St Senoch 'found . . . old walls on the ruins of which he constructed suitable buildings', suggesting that the Christian re-use of ruined Roman structures has a Continental precedent from at least the late 5th/early 6th century.²³ James further interprets a passage describing the monastery of Jumièges (founded on a bend in the Seine c. 654–55) from the Life of St Philibert: 'In that place Divine Providence built towered walls in the shape of a square [or rectangle] rising up in a great mass, and enclosure for reception [or 'of wonderful capacity'] convenient for those who came'; the term *Divine Providence* suggesting, continues James, that the walls were already in existence before Philibert founded the monastery. He concludes that the site described in the *Vita* was possibly a Roman fort, although excavation at Jumièges has yet to detect evidence of such a structure.²⁴

These two recorded instances suggest that we are dealing with a re-use of Roman ruins for their structural element, particularly the walls or enclosure in the case of Jumièges. It is important to note that there are no references to the site of a church being chosen for the availability of building materials, which of course would have been of little importance in a time when most churches were built of wood.²⁵ Morris argues against this common assumption, concluding that 'Roman materials were far more commonly taken to the site of a church than were the sites of churches taken to the materials'.²⁶ The little evidence we have would seem to support this suggestion: the earliest church at Rivenhall and the pre-conquest chapel on the Roman villa at Drax were both of timber construction. It is not unlikely that we might expect to find many more first-phase timber churches on villa sites which have yet to be excavated.

²¹ Bede, *Historia Ecclesiastica* iii, 4.

²² Ekwall, *op. cit.* in note 15, 440.

²³ James, *op. cit.* in note 18.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ C. Thomas, 'Recognising Christian Origins: an Archaeological Dilemma', in L. A. S. Butler and R. Morris (eds.), *The Anglo-Saxon Church* (CBA Res. Rep. 60, 1986), 121–25.

²⁶ Morris, *op. cit.* in note 3, 102.

The specific intentions behind the re-use of a particular Roman structure are difficult to prove, but the possible influence of this association cannot be summarily dismissed. When viewed together, the number of examples throughout Britain pushes the observation past coincidence into probability: it appears likely that there was some sort of early association between Roman stone buildings and church sites that developed in the SW. in the 7th century and spread throughout England in hand with the Roman mission. Churches on Roman buildings located in areas geographically independent of the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms (particularly in the SW. and Wales) may have developed Christian associations from the late Roman period; a situation which is discussed in greater detail below.

THE VILLA AND CHURCH IN GAUL

Although the social and political conditions of late- and post-Roman Gaul and Britain differed greatly, an investigation of the Continental situation can elucidate the manner in which churches may have developed on Roman buildings in Britain. Individual cases of such churches, particularly those on villas, have been more thoroughly examined in Gaul than in England, and have been so since the beginning of the century.²⁷ Within the general study of the villa-to-church transition in Gaul it is acknowledged that some villas appear to have adopted a Christian, often monastic, character during the late Roman period, which continued, at times altered but uninterrupted, into the early-medieval period.²⁸ Archaeologically, a Christian community's adaptation of a villa complex into a monastery can be difficult to distinguish from domestic Christianity; any differences between the two hold a very ephemeral relationship to the villa complex itself: even artefacts with Christian symbols, or inscriptions found within the villa do not in themselves suggest the presence of an organized monastic community.

The best evidence we have of this situation outside the archaeological record is revealed in a letter of Sidonius Apollinaris, bishop of Clermont in 469, whose writings provide particular insight into the political and social conditions of late 5th-century Gaul. Here he describes the appearance of Maximus, a formal acquaintance, and his villa:

His dress, his step his modest air, his colour and his talk, all had a religious suggestion . . . three-legged stools served as seats, his doorways had hangings of hair cloth, his couch was devoid of down, his table of purple . . . I quietly asked those standing near which way of life from among the three orders he had suddenly adopted — was he monk or clergyman or penitent? They said he was filling the office of priest. . .²⁹

The passage shows the manner in which a late 5th-century villa estate had physically come to reflect the Christian disposition of its owner, instantly

²⁷ C. Bonnet, 'Les Églises Rurales de la Région de Genève: Origins, Développement Architectural et Environment', in M. Fixot and E. Zadora-Rio (eds.), *L'Environnement des Églises et la Topographie Religieuse des Campagnes Médiévales* (Paris, 1994), 22–26; Percival, op. cit. in note 5.

²⁸ Percival, op. cit. in note 5.

²⁹ Sidonius Apollinaris, letter iv, book 24 (vol. II) in W. B. Anderson, *The Letters of Sidonius Apollinaris* (London, 1936). The exact date of this letter is uncertain, but sometime after 469 is suggested (Percival, op. cit. in note 5, note 1).

recognized as such by Sidonius. Here we are probably seeing a reference to the earliest stages of a villa-to-church transformation, of which only the later and final stages appear within the archaeology.

Perhaps even more importantly, we should note that Sidonius' writing introduces an alternative social condition which could fit the archaeological evidence that commonly details the last years of a Roman villa: Sidonius recognized immediately the Christian role that Maximus had adopted, and had only to inquire into the specifics of his position. A less informed viewer, such as an archaeologist, would undoubtedly see Maximus' condition (and perhaps more importantly, that of his villa and estate) as demonstrating a decline into poverty, perhaps associated with a lower standard-of-living and the re-use of once-luxurious rooms for domestic and agricultural purposes. Contrary to this assumption we are told earlier in the passage that Maximus was a moneylender, clearly not one who had been forced into this position for lack of funds. It is not unlikely that, in addition to the purple linen from his table and the down from his couches, he removed — in his pursuit of Christian temperance and chastity — the fine tableware, the African Red Slip and other potential archaeological indications of wealth and prosperity. This is not to suggest that such was the eventual fate of all — or even most — Roman villas, but rather serves as a reminder that evidence reflecting this type of conscious decision to convert to a spartan lifestyle in the name of Christianity could easily be hiding within some final-phase villa contexts.

THE VILLA AND CHURCH IN BRITAIN

Could a transition matching the Gallic model have occurred in late Roman Britain? Most evidence points towards the decline of organized Christianity in Britain after about 480, except perhaps in the SW. and W. where it continued in a sub-Roman form.³⁰ Elsewhere in Britain the decline of the villa, while varying in date and by region, can largely be placed in the late 4th century. If these villas were undergoing Christian transformation in the late Roman period it appears unlikely that they survived it: there are no certain instances, apart from St Albans, of a Roman church or Christian complex that begins its life in the Roman period and remains in use in the early-medieval period.

If there were a continued Christian tradition in Britain, the villas, on the whole, were not able to support it. We have no British sources to parallel Sidonius' account of 5th-century Gaul, but at the time of Sidonius' writing the greater majority of British villas appear to have been largely defunct, and indeed Imperial Roman Britain had ceased to exist as both a political unit and as a way of life. It remains unlikely that this gradual transformation from villa estate to Christian complex could have occurred in Britain unless it were to do so sometime in the first half of the 4th century. Of course no rule is complete without important exceptions:

³⁰ C. Thomas, *Christianity in Roman Britain to AD 500* (London, 1981); for the continued Roman and Christian traditions in the SW. and Wales see K. Dark, *Civitas to Kingdom: British political continuity 300–800* (Leicester, 1994), and more recently K. Dark, 'Centuries of Roman Survival in the West', *British Archaeol.*, 32 (March 1998), 8–9, which summarizes and introduces further evidence.

the SW. of Britain may have maintained a religious and social climate fertile enough for the growth of a Christian complex from a Roman villa, of which the churches at Oystermouth, Llandough and Llancarfen are possible examples.³¹ At Llandough the church of St Dochdwy stands upon the site of a Roman villa which is also associated with a late- and post-Roman cemetery. Although earlier excavation reports suggest that the villa was abandoned in the early 4th century and the earliest suggestions of a Christian community are from the 8th, the late-Roman burials and a mid 6th-century radiocarbon date suggest that this remains a viable candidate for a post-Roman Christian community.³²

Lullingstone

The villa at Lullingstone is perhaps the only certain English example of a late Roman villa-to-church transition based on the Continental model, but one which did not survive into the early-medieval period. In the mid 4th century, the site at Lullingstone consisted of a villa complex with a circular shrine and a clearly pagan memorial mausoleum to the NW. Sometime in the third quarter of the 4th century several upper rooms in the main villa building were converted to a Christian chapel, access between the chapel and the interior was blocked, and a new external entrance was probably constructed. Soon thereafter the mausoleum was allowed to decay to such an extent that one of the coffins was exhumed for its lead, and in turn the rest of the structure was robbed or dismantled — all of this occurring while the villa remained in use.³³ This pagan structure in the back garden apparently proved something of an embarrassment: its neglect and the abandonment of its associated burial rites at a time when the villa was still occupied presents a striking picture of the late 4th-century owner's attitude toward the villa's pagan past.

The suite of Christian rooms was probably in use into the late 4th century but was abandoned along with the entire villa sometime in the early 5th; here at Lullingstone, on the evidence of the physical restructuring of the villa, we must be seeing the beginnings of a developing monastic complex along the lines of the Continental examples similar to Maximus' transformation of his own villa.

The Romano-Christian adaptation of Lullingstone villa was a composed, deliberate process that ultimately failed to outlive the political climate of 5th-century Britain. Yet, remarkably, this did not mark the end of Lullingstone's Christian history: sometime in the medieval period, after several centuries of abandonment, a Christian church was constructed upon and even aligned with the remains of the mausoleum's *cella* foundation. The excavator concludes that 'little, if anything, is likely to have remained above ground when the [medieval] Christian church came to be built'.³⁴ The composition of its fabric and its first mention in the

³¹ Morris, *op. cit.* in note 3, 100.

³² A. Selkirk, 'Llandough', *Current Archaeology* 146 (January, 1996), 73–77; H. S. Owen-John, 'Llandough: The Rescue Excavation of a Multi-Period Site Near Cardiff South Gamorgan', in D. M. Robinson (ed.), *Biglis, Caldicot and Llandough* (British Archaeol. Rep. British Ser. 188, 1988), 123–77.

³³ G. Meates, *The Lullingstone Roman Villa* (Maidstone, 1979).

³⁴ Meates, *op. cit.* in note 33, 124.

Chrim Rent Roll of the diocese of Rochester in 1115 suggest a Saxon origin.³⁵ The church was abandoned by 1412, and was in ruins by 1750.

What association, if any, was there between the Roman and medieval Christian churches at Lullingstone? The strict alignment of the medieval church upon the Roman *cella* seems to rule out simple coincidence, yet if the excavator is correct in his observation there would have been few physical remains to call attention to the mausoleum: clearly there must have been something remaining for the *cella* to be identified and the church aligned upon it, although not necessarily very much. At the time the church was built it is possible that Lullingstone was believed to have been a Roman site through a continued local tradition supported, perhaps, by the existence of upstanding villa ruins and the remains of the mausoleum. It also remains possible that Lullingstone was known in medieval period to have been a site of Christian significance. Outside of these explanations it is difficult to account for the intentional and distinct re-use of the mausoleum foundation. The possible Christian associations of Roman ruins suggest that the first explanation should remain a plausibility. The second suggestion entails the continuation of a Christian cult or community from the late Roman to the medieval period. This is uncommon in Britain, but not entirely unknown.

Included in the *Obsecratio Augustini* of the *Responsiones* is a reply from Gregory addressing Augustine's concern that the relics of a local cult of Sixtus may be of dubious origin: no miracles were performed at the shrine, and the elders did not know the circumstances of the saint's martyrdom. To remedy the situation Gregory sends Augustine relics of a proper saint, the martyr Pope Sixtus II, to replace those of the local cult.³⁶ This missive has particular relevance to our discussion because it describes what appears to be a native, pre-Augustinian, Christian cult, albeit one that has been somewhat separated from its roots. If this kind of community could exist through sub-Roman Kent, then perhaps we should entertain the possibility of additional preserved Christian traditions there — these may not entail 'Christian continuity' in the strictest sense, but rather the preservation of small, localized Christian associations. With this in mind, there is a possibility that Lullingstone could have been one of these places. A Christian association could explain the presence of a medieval church which, attempting to monumentalize an earlier Christian location, ironically re-used the foundations of a decidedly un-Christian structure.

MAUSOLEA AND MARTYRIA

Perhaps the best instance of Christian continuity in sub-Roman Britain is the cult of St Alban, whose martyrdom was in existence outside of Verulamium by the first half of the 5th century and was visited by St Germanus in 429.³⁷ The Late

³⁵ H. M. Taylor and J. Taylor, *Anglo-Saxon Architecture* (Cambridge, 1965), 402.

³⁶ N. Brooks, *The Early History of the Church of Canterbury* (Leicester, 1984), 20; M. Deanesly and P. Grosjean, 'The Canterbury Edition of the Answers of Pope Gregory I to Augustine', *J. Eccl. Hist.*, 10 (1959), 29–32.

³⁷ S. Frere, *Verulamium Excavations* (London, 1983), 24; Bede, *Historia Ecclesiastica* 1, 18.

Roman basilica erected over the grave of the saint continued in use through the early Anglo-Saxon period.³⁸ Bede tells us that a church was built here 'when the peace of Christian times was restored' and 'where frequent miracles take place to this day', implying an active Christian tradition in the 730s.³⁹ Undoubtedly the grave and shrine of St Alban served to attach the Christian faith tenaciously to that one particular place in the landscape immediately outside Verulamium, outlasting the cultural and political vicissitudes of the late Roman and early Anglo-Saxon periods.

St Albans is worth citing as Britain's primary example of a surviving Romano-Christian tradition, but it also introduces into the discussion the re-use of funerary structures for Christian worship, a process particularly common on the Continent in the late Roman and medieval periods. Britain by contrast offers few examples of the Christian re-use of Roman martyria: the churches at Wells (Somerset), Stone-by-Faversham (Kent) and Lullingstone are built on this kind of funerary structure, and the church of St Martin at Canterbury is considered to be another example (Fig. 2).⁴⁰ However a similar structure at St John's Abbey, Colchester, often cited as further example, is described by its excavator as being 'very unlikely' to fit this category.⁴¹

An often overlooked fact regarding these martyria is that, unlike Alban, there is no evidence to suggest that the original occupants were Christians, and the pagan nature of the Lullingstone inhumations is clearly inconsistent with any such assumption. As with all churches on Roman structures, one should be cautious of employing the most convenient explanation, based on the straightforward re-use of a structure for reasons compatible with its original purpose. We may instead suggest that the decisions behind the construction of these churches at Lullingstone, Wells, Stone and Canterbury were in part influenced by the associations of Christianity with Roman structures that existed in the early-medieval period, associations which may have furthermore been applied retrospectively to the original inhumations within such structures, despite the occupants' original religion. This seems to make sense in light of the evidence at Wells, in which the Roman martyrrium appears to have had an intermediate Saxon burial chapel built upon it before the subsequent construction of St Mary's church, suggesting that the first re-use of the structure was for a place of Christian burial and veneration.⁴² In Gaul there are a greater number of Roman martyria that eventually became churches, such as Grand Saconnex (Genève) at which a Roman funerary edifice was later enlarged to accompany Christian burials from the 6th and 7th centuries,

³⁸ M. Biddle and B. Kjolbye-Biddle, 'The Quest of Alban Continued: Excavations South of the Abbey, 1995', *The Alban Link*, 45 (1996), 10–22.

³⁹ Bede, *Historia Ecclesiastica*, i, 7.

⁴⁰ T. Tatton-Brown, 'St Martin's Church in the 6th and 7th Centuries', 12–18 in M. Sparks (ed.), *The Parish of St Martin and St Paul, Canterbury* (Canterbury, 1980); E. Fletcher and G. Meates, 'The Ruined Church of Stone-by-Faversham, Second Report', *Antiq. J.*, 49 (1977), 273–94.

⁴¹ N. Crummy, C. Crossan and P. Crummy, *Excavations of Roman and Later Cemeteries, Churches and Monastic Sites in Colchester, 1971–88* (Colchester Archaeological Report, 9, Colchester, 1993), 215.

⁴² Rodwell, *op. cit.* in note 9.

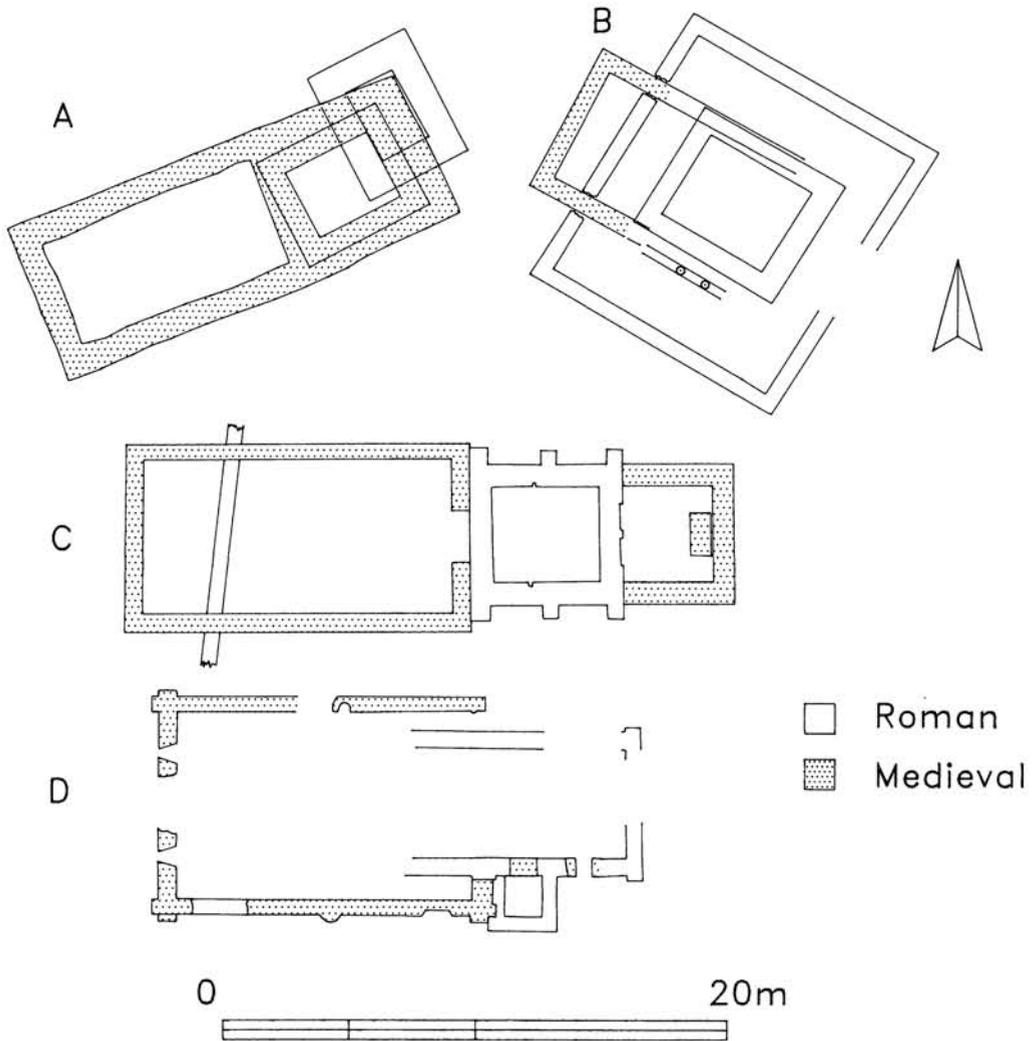


FIG. 2

Churches on Roman mausolea. A) Wells, Somerset (after Rodwell 1982: fig. 5.3); B) Lullingstone (after Meates 1979: fig. 31); C) Stone-by-Faversham, Kent (after Fletcher and Meates 1977: fig. 1); D) St Martins, Canterbury (after Tatton-Brown 1980: fig.5), where the earliest phase is possibly 6th-century.

a situation which we may ascribe partly to the comparative ease with which Christian practices were adopted in Gaul.⁴³

Without further excavation, the mechanics and underlying perceptions behind the change from a secular Roman ruin to a medieval Christian centre will remain largely unknown in Britain. However the process is often explained by

⁴³ Bonnet, *op. cit.* in note 27.

attributing a proprietary origin to the church, suggesting that 'the decisive link . . . is likely to have been that which existed between villa and hall, rather than villa and church';⁴⁴ this model would entail an initial secular presence on the villa site: a continuation or a revitalization of some sort of administrative or economic institution, which in turn could facilitate or initiate the development of an associated church. It should be acknowledged that Morris accepts this model as simplistic, and offers it as a starting point in the investigation of specific cases rather than a general rule, but nonetheless it is a conjecture often proposed in the face of a body of evidence that demonstrates very few instances of secular occupation. Such a proprietary model conceptually divorces an ecclesiastical centre from any independent economic or administrative function of its own. This was clearly not the case.⁴⁵ There are also chronological questions that need to be addressed regarding these dates and the geographical contexts of early church foundation: because the body of evidence from the early 7th century clearly shows the re-birth of former Roman sites as *ecclesiastical* centres, one must wonder how a model that suggests first a secular development on these sites can best fit into this picture. Archaeological investigations have been few in number and small in size, but in the instances where we do see evidence of a hall, such as Cheddar, it appears to be a late infringement upon a pre-established religious area centred upon an apparently already well-established church.⁴⁶ As we have so little knowledge of the specific history of these sites, it would be erroneous to assume the general foundation dates as being associated primarily with the development of a manorial household and its estate, as this level of territorial organization appears to occur onwards from the 9th century only. We may instead entertain the idea that Roman structures, even in a ruinous state, were re-used for reasons associated with aspects of their appearance and Roman masonry, many of which will have left little trace within the archaeological record.

CHURCHES IN ROMAN FORTS

The sites of abandoned forts seem to have played a very large part in the developing civil and ecclesiastical English landscape. Churches are known to be associated with over 25 Roman forts in England, perhaps the earliest acknowledged class of Roman structures to have been consistently re-used for Christian purposes.⁴⁷ While the precise reasons for the siting of many of these churches on forts still remain in question, Rigold has shown that nearly every fort along the Saxon shore is likely to have been occupied by a church sometime after the Roman period: in East Anglia, Bradwell became the home of Cedd's church sometime in

⁴⁴ Morris and Roxan, *op. cit.* in note 14, 191; Heighway, *op. cit.* in note 7; W. Rodwell, 'Churches in the Landscape: Aspects of Topography and Planning', 3-9 in M. L. Faull (ed.), *Late Anglo-Saxon Settlement* (Oxford, 1984).

⁴⁵ J. Blair, 'Minster Churches in the Landscape', in D. Hooke (ed.), *Anglo-Saxon Settlements* (Oxford, 1988), 35-58; Blair addresses the re-use of Roman centres for ecclesiastical rather than secular purposes, the latter of which is only seen from c. 900 onwards (*op. cit.* in note 16, notes 55, 67, 77).

⁴⁶ J. Blair, 'Palaces or Minsters? Northampton and Cheddar reconsidered', *Anglo-Saxon England*, 25 (1995), 97-121.

⁴⁷ Bell, *op. cit.* in note 1.

the 650s and another was built sometime after *c.* 669; Burgh had a church from sometime in the late 7th or early 8th centuries, and Walton Castle (Felixstowe) in Suffolk may have been the see of East Anglia in the mid 630s.⁴⁸ Further south in Kent, Richborough and Dover probably also held 7th-century churches, and Reculver also received a new lease on life as a royal foundation in 669. Rigold suggests that this type of reoccupation had little to do with defence, and that the 'popularity' of these sites was based largely on their symbolic rather than practical appeal; it is not unlikely that the Christian missionaries may have simply perceived their re-use and re-occupation as Roman re-habitation: symbolic to them, significant to the Anglo-Saxons, and otherwise in accordance with the ideas of Gregory.

Like other Roman masonry remains, these substantial masonry complexes may have been associated more with the Roman Church than the Roman Empire from the 7th century. Rigold reminds us that Bede understood any walled site to be a *civitas*, and we may note that there would have been little perceptible difference between various classes of Roman site in the 7th century: it is unlikely, for instance, that the fort at Caerleon would have been functionally or visually distinguishable from the nearby town of Caerwent: each is a rectangular enclosure of distinct Roman masonry, and although Caerleon is a fort, the area it encloses (20.5 ha) is slightly larger than the town of Caerwent (18 ha).⁴⁹ Their role in the post-Roman world appears to have been defined by the existence of the masonry walls, probably in a similar manner to those on the Saxon shore: Caerleon and Caerwent both acquired churches, and that of St Cadoc in Caerleon sits upon, although is not aligned with, the Roman *principia*.

It appears that in the case of walled sites, the focus of re-use was the area defined by the walls rather than any particular structure within them (Fig. 3). The convenience of standing Roman masonry appears to be an important aspect of re-use in this case, and this is what may have happened at Jumièges. Roman walls would provide a ready boundary that could delineate the area of a bishop's corporeal authority. The walls, even if in a ruined condition, would have provided some degree of defence from natural threats if not against a concentrated attack. This element of security may also have made Roman forts attractive outposts for missionary activity.

It is worth noting that the Saxon Shore forts were either chosen or suggested by direct emissaries of the Roman mission: Augustine, Mellitus, Paulinus and Justus; what we see in Britain is the beginnings of an Insular ecclesiastical association based in the Continental Christian tradition. The Christian re-use of Roman forts was not isolated to the Saxon Shore: viewing the re-use of Roman

⁴⁸ Rigold discusses each of these forts in turn and their probable roles as Christian centres: S. Rigold, 'Litus Romanum: the Saxon Shore Forts as Missionary Stations', 70-75 in D. E. Johnston (ed.), *The Saxon Shore* (C.B.A. Res. Rep., 18, London, 1977). On the role of Walton Castle as Felix's see of East Anglia see Rigold's 'The Supposed See of Dunwich', *J. British Archaeol. Assoc.* 3rd Ser., 24 (1961), 55-59 and 'Further Evidence About Dummoche', *J. British Archaeol. Assoc.* 3rd Ser., 37 (1974), 27-37.

⁴⁹ *Civitas*: Rigold, *op. cit.* in note 48, 70; Caerleon: C. G. Boon, *Isca: The Roman Legionary Fortress at Caerleon, Mon.* (Cardiff, 1987); Caerwent: N. Edwards and A. Lane (eds.), *Early Medieval Settlements in Wales AD 400-1100* (Cardiff, 1988), 35-38.

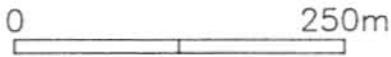
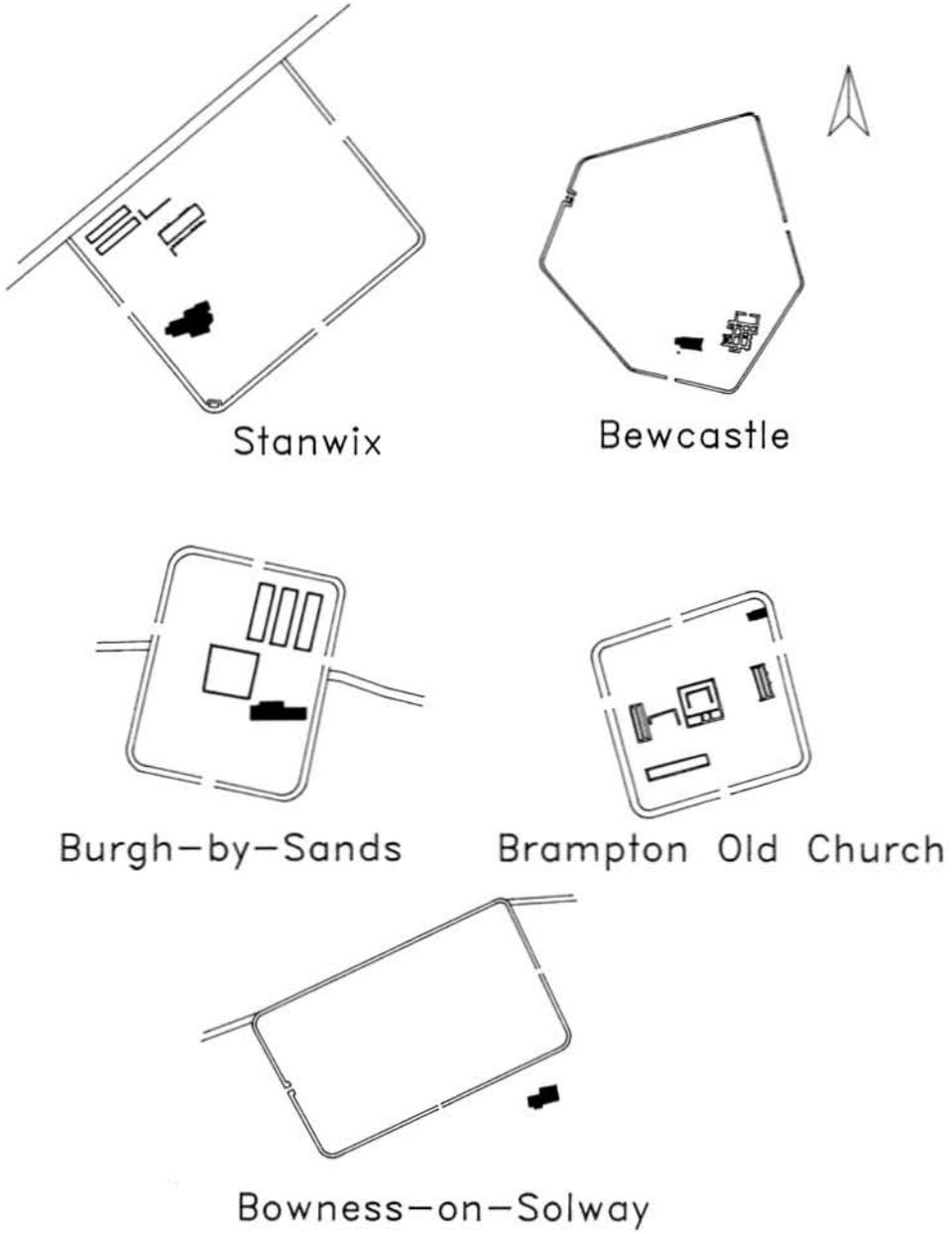


FIG. 3
Comparative plans of five Cumbrian Roman forts with later churches.

military installations in its entirety, we can also note a similar use of the Roman signal stations at Scarborough, Whitby and perhaps Filey, on the N. Yorkshire coast.⁵⁰ More dramatic and enigmatic is the unusually high proportion of Stanegate and Hadrian's Wall forts near Carlisle which have associated churches.⁵¹

We know comparatively little about the first Christian presence on these Cumbrian sites: most of the churches on the Carlisle sites are Victorian in date, but in most cases it is quite clear that these replaced earlier structures. The existing rural church within the Stanegate fort at Nether Denton dates from 1865, but the current structure replaced an earlier example on the same alignment.⁵² Without documentary evidence or excavation it is impossible to know the date of or initiative behind these churches, but a reference in the Lanercost Cartulary takes the earliest Christian occupation of Nether Denton back at least to the 12th century if not earlier.⁵³ Another church nearby in the fort at Old Brampton is also known to have been in existence at this period.⁵⁴

The particulars of the earliest churches on these sites are almost wholly unknown but pending further detailed examination of these forts, we may suggest that these and other examples of churches in Roman forts throughout England might have served missionary functions similar to the Saxon Shore forts described by Rigold.

CONCLUSIONS

In light of the evidence it would be unwise to begin general examinations of these churches on Roman buildings with a proprietary model foremost in mind. It is better to understand first the intrinsic aspects of Roman buildings, most importantly their Christian associations, and then to examine the more specific possibilities which might have existed in each case. These ephemeral associations are difficult to grasp within the archaeological record, and any model incorporating them may therefore first seem less attractive than one which can ascribe specific architectural reactions to political, social and economic stimuli. Nonetheless they remain essential to our understanding of these sites and the manner in which they were understood by the Anglo-Saxon communities in whose landscapes they were situated. It is unlikely that churches on Roman buildings in Britain were the result of one specific process. They more probably reflect the range of developing responses to the Roman landscape from the 7th century.

It is certainly possible that some of these churches on Roman buildings, particularly those in Kent, could be the products of a re-established or revitalized native Christian community. If this were to happen in England, we might expect it to do so in Kent: The preservation and re-vitalization of Christian traditions is

⁵⁰ T. Bell, 'A Roman Signal Station at Whitby', *Archaeol. J.*, 155 (forthcoming).

⁵¹ M. Biddle, 'Towns', 99-150 in D. Wilson (ed.), *The Archaeology of Anglo-Saxon England* (Cambridge, 1976), note 100.

⁵² 6" Cumberland 12 SE: surveyed 1862.

⁵³ M. Todd, *The Lanercost Cartulary* (Cumbria and Westmorland Antiq. and Archaeol. Soc. Record Ser., 11, 1997), 98.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 51.

certainly more plausible here than elsewhere in England, and is in part related to Kent's 6th-century Gallic ties, primarily those demonstrated by Bertha's apparent associations with the Romano-Christian church and ultimately by Augustine's arrival in 597. The evidence presented in this paper shows a strong trend towards the SE., and Kent in particular: three of the four known churches on mausolea are in Kent, half of the *-stān* place-names of churches on Roman buildings are in Kent, and the continuation of the cult of St Sixtus is located there; all appear to suggest that Christianity in Kent may have been more tenacious than elsewhere in early Anglo-Saxon England.

Yet despite the abortive instance of Christian continuity at Lullingstone we can maintain that the Christian adaptation of a villa complex was unlikely to have produced a Christian presence lasting through the late Roman and into the early-medieval period, unlike the Gallic model. This is indeed quite possible in the SW., where a series of churches on villas could represent the continuation, in some form, of a Christian community.⁵⁵ It is difficult to claim that the final phase of activity on these sites is masked by the same spartan, possibly monastic, dedication to which Sidonius was witness, but the idea deserves consideration.

Without modern, large-scale excavation it remains difficult to identify the exact causes behind the re-use of a specific Roman structure in the medieval period, but we should acknowledge that it remains likely that more than one influence lies behind the churches we see on Roman buildings and in Roman enclosures today. The greatest progress towards the solution will be made with excavation, but at this stage we must first aim to embrace a wider variety of possibilities before relying on the attractive yet inaccurately simple models of proprietary church development and the material re-use of available masonry.

⁵⁵ Morris, *op. cit.* in note 3, 100–2; Pearce, *op. cit.* in note 7; S. Pearce, *The Kingdom of Dumnonia* (Padstow, 1978).