

◆ Bosham

A KEY ANGLO-SAXON HARBOUR

by Philip MacDougall

Evidence from the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle demonstrates the existence of a substantial fleet of ships possessed by the Godwine family during the early eleventh century. The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle further reveals that the port area for these ships was that of the waters of Chichester Harbour while specifically mentioning the Manor of Bosham. This article explores this evidence while examining the necessary extent of such facilities and their possible exact location. In particular, the site of a likely protected harbour is indicated together with additional areas that might have hosted facilities for the building, maintenance and winter protection of this fleet. It is also noted that it was this same fleet that came into possession of Harold Godwine, the last Saxon king of England.

When writing about naval developments, the majority of historians are inclined to concentrate on the actions of seagoing fleets. In doing so, they are unlikely to consider and probe into the incredible organizational infrastructure that was necessary for the purpose of building and preparing the ships that made up those fleets. Although these aspects of naval history have received more attention for the modern period, scholars are increasingly turning to the complexities of earlier naval dockyards and the procurement of supplies — a result of more recent archaeological discoveries.¹ Similarly, a number of studies have been made of the support facilities available to most navies of the last 200 years.² Whether all historians will make full use of such material is a point of less certainty. However, with regard to the intervening period, a clear gap exists. In particular, the building yards and supply bases that supported the national and semi-national fleets of Anglo-Saxon England are particularly neglected: few historians refer either to the certainty of their existence or to their likely geographical location.³ Whether writing about King Canute and the Viking fleet that he used to support his monarchy or of the extensive building programme implemented by the Duke of Normandy on the eve of his invasion of England, the starting point is always the same. The ships are counted, the number of men who served on board is noted, but arrival at a particular point of assembly is achieved as if by magic.⁴

None of this would be worth a second thought were it not for the simple fact that the creation of a war fleet and its subsequent use in a successful campaign was often of considerable historical

significance. Furthermore, ownership of a powerful fleet of warships, even if they were not used in battle, was an essential means by which the power and authority of the crown could be projected into areas that were otherwise difficult to access. In addition, a number of powerful nobles, such as the clan chiefs in Scotland and the thegns of England, also possessed large operational fleets that they used to extend or project their own landholdings while making these same vessels available to their respective overlords when called upon.⁵

In southern England, during the eleventh century and prior to the Norman Conquest, considerable power had devolved into the hands of the Godwine family. The first of that house to be readily identified was Wulfnoth, the father of Godwine, Earl of Wessex. A South Saxon (Sussex) thegn, Wulfnoth, in 1009, following a general call by King Æthelred II (968–1016) for a fleet muster, brought a number of his own warships to Sandwich. Here, a disagreement arose between Wulfnoth and the Mercian thegn, Brhtric. As a result, Wulfnoth withdrew from the muster, taking with him 20 ships.⁶ The wording used by the chronicler was that Wulfnoth ‘enticed ships too him’, suggesting that not all these vessels were directly in his possession.⁷ Most likely, those who owed vassalage to him held some of these vessels. Under Wulfnoth’s command, this small fleet began to ravage the south coast, inflicting a good deal of damage on various coastal habitations. The outcome was the banishment of Wulfnoth from the kingdom with Brhtric given command of 80 ships to hunt him down. However, Wulfnoth proved himself to be a highly able commander — he took

advantage of difficult weather conditions to destroy this opposing fleet completely.⁸

Precisely what became of Wulfnoth is uncertain. He possibly allied himself with Æthelred's Danish enemies. It is more certain that his son, Godwine, both remained in the country and cemented a number of important alliances. In particular, Godwine became closely associated with Atheling Athelstan, the king's eldest son. It was through this friendship that Godwine regained some of the property that his father had probably lost on being outlawed. One potential example of this was the estate of Compton, located in the hundred of Westbourne. It seems that Athelstan had gained the property upon the outlawry of Wulfnoth, bequeathing it to Godwine on his death: his will declared, 'I grant to Godwine, Wulfnoth's son, the estate at Compton which his father possessed'.⁹ In subsequent years Godwine continued to enlarge the family possessions, most successfully through becoming a favourite of King Canute. As such, he was granted the earldom of Wessex, an honour that was eventually to include all lands in England south of the Thames. Like his father, Godwine also held a sizeable fleet of ships, some of them likely to have been used by Canute in an invasion of Norway that took place in 1028.¹⁰

That Godwine most certainly possessed a number of warships is more clearly shown upon the accession of Hardecanute in 1040. On that occasion, Godwine presented the new king with 'a skilfully made galley' that was possessed of an ornately decorated 'gilded prow' and equipped with 'the best tackle'. Although we are not given its actual dimensions, it was of a sufficient size to carry 'eighty picked soldiers'.¹¹ Two years later Godwine gave a further magnificent ship to King Edward upon his accession; the eleventh-century writer of the *Life of Edward* provided a description,

'A loaded ship, its slender lines raked up
In double prow, lay anchored on the Thames.
With many rowing benches side by side,
The towering mast amidships lying down
Equipped with six score fearsome warriors
A golden lion crowns the stern. A winged
And golden dragon at the stern affrights
The sea, and belches fire with triple tongue.
Patrician purple pranks the hanging sail, ...
The yard arm strong and heavy holds the sail.'¹²

The descriptions given for these two vessels are rare. In fact, we know very little about English

warships of this period, other than that they had some resemblance to Danish Ships.¹³ Conversely, it must also be recorded that there were a number of apparent differences. One version of the Anglo-Saxon chronicle records that ships ordered by King Alfred in AD 897 were, when compared with Danish ships of that time, 'swifter, steadier and with more freeboard'. The same source further notes that they were built neither after the Frisian design nor after the Danish.¹⁴ Beyond this a further discussion of their likely differences is not possible, no wreck of an English warship of this period having been discovered.

As well as Godwine, other members of his family also possessed their own personal fleet of ships. Among them was Earl Sweyn, his eldest son. A headstrong and somewhat ill-disciplined young man, he kidnapped and possibly raped the Abbess of Leominster, a crime for which he was sent into exile. Evidence of Earl Sweyn, whose lands included Somerset, Hertfordshire and Gloucestershire, and who possessed his own fleet, comes with his return to England in 1049: 'Earl Swein came into Bosham with seven ships and made his peace with the king and he was promised that his legal right to all former lands would be recognised'.¹⁵

However, the Chronicler continues to explain that there were objections to this from other members of the Godwine family, who had subsequently come into the possession of his confiscated lands: 'Then Earl Harold, his brother, and Earl Beorn [a cousin] objected, [saying] that he could not be regarded as having a legal right to any of the things the king had granted them; but his safety was secured for four days to return to his ships [at Bosham]'.¹⁶ Forced, once again, to flee the country, Sweyn sailed for Bruges, but not before he had taken his revenge on Beorn, imprisoning and subsequently murdering his cousin.¹⁷

More particular evidence that Godwine had a sizeable fleet comes from actions that took place in 1051. As a substantial landowner, the king considered Godwine an increasing threat. This, at least, is the supposed reason why Edward chose to outlaw Godwine and all his sons during the autumn of that year.¹⁸ The action that had sparked this particular response from the king was Godwine's refusal to punish the citizens of Dover for an act for which he considered them blameless. On hearing that he was to be exiled, Godwine immediately fled to the south coast and joined

other members of his family on Thorney Island: 'And he [Godwine] went to Thorney with his wife and Swein, his son, together with Tostig [a younger son] and his wife, who was kinswoman of Baldwin of Bruges, and Gurth, his son.'¹⁹

Thorney was part of a manor that was also owned by Godwine and which immediately bordered the manor of Bosham. Here ships that had been held in readiness at Bosham were launched and sailed across to Thorney where the waiting members of the family were collected and taken to Bruges: 'Then Earl Swein went to Bosham, and launched their ships and went overseas and sought the protection of Baldwin, and stayed there all winter.'²⁰

The fleeing party not only included Godwine and his wife but also his eldest son Sweyn because Sweyn had received both a royal pardon and the eventual restitution of much of his former lands. However, for his part, Harold, the son who was eventually to succeed Edward as king, left the country through the port of Bristol, from where a further ship, held there in readiness, immediately took him to Ireland.²¹

Over the next six months the Earl of Wessex and his family prepared for a return to England. Both Godwine in Flanders and Harold in Ireland had fled to territories where they had powerful friends. In Flanders, Godwine was able to call upon the support of Count Baldwin V, a ruler with whom he was connected by marriage. Similarly, in Ireland, Godwine received the support of King Diarmait with whom the House of Godwine may also have had family connections.²² While the Godwines, both father and son, were extremely wealthy, having brought with them some of their moveable assets, it was the ability to call upon such international support that really ensured their being able to take on the king of England and ultimately win. In both the Flemish port of Bruges and the Irish port of Dublin, the two separate strands of the family began building fleets of considerable size, using their wealth both to purchase existing ships and to call for the building of new vessels. In June, Godwine sailed for England at the head of his newly-created fleet and crossed to Dungeness. Here, having now entered his own territory, he was received with considerable enthusiasm and others joined them with their own ships. Assembled to oppose him was a royal fleet consisting of 40 vessels. However, this met with disaster when a

number of the ships that made up this fleet were lost in a storm. From Ireland Harold set out with nine vessels and these eventually joined with Godwine's fleet off the south coast. With the king's fleet having returned to the Thames to make good its losses, Godwine's now very numerous and powerful fleet also sailed for London. The king, aware of his much-weakened situation, agreed to negotiate, returning to the House of Godwine all lands previously confiscated.²³

Godwine was only to outlive the family triumph for a little over six months. On Easter Monday 1053, while dining with the king at Winchester, he collapsed and died. In earlier circumstances, Sweyn would have succeeded to the earldom, but he had died a few months earlier. Indeed, the eldest son having embarked on a pilgrimage to the Holy Land had not been part of the expedition that returned the family to their lands. Here, in September 1052 while in Constantinople, he had died. The result was that Harold was given the Wessex earldom, a title that only the king could bestow.²⁴ Edward may perhaps have preferred the honour to go elsewhere, but this was not possible given the recently demonstrated strength of the House of Godwine.

The new Earl of Wessex continued to centre his naval operations upon the Manor of Bosham: the chroniclers refer to one more important expedition that set out from this particular south-coast harbour. This was the famous cross-Channel voyage that placed Harold in the clutches of the Duke of Normandy. The Bayeux tapestry is a particularly useful source, depicting Harold arriving at Bosham on the eve of the voyage, showing him at prayer in the church and feasting in the upper hall of his manor house. Harold and his warriors apparently remained in the manor house until a messenger informed them that the tides were suitable and the group are shown wading out to a waiting long ship. Having boarded the vessel, the steersman is seen using his full weight to control the side rudder while others are setting the sails. The vessel, soon under way, is depicted with a dragon's head that is set on the bow when the ship is at sea.²⁵

The particular vessel boarded at Bosham raises a few questions as to the precise design of warships possessed by Harold. In particular, and unlike those of the Norman fleet depicted in the tapestry, Harold's ship is shown as having

no oar ports in the waist of the ship. If this were a full and accurate description while also being representative of other ships of the Godwine fleet, it would indicate that English vessels of the period placed greater reliance on sail power. An alternative possibility is that the vessel shown was more akin to a pleasure yacht and was not typical of Harold's fleet.²⁶ However, overriding all such discussion is that of the tapestry's accuracy. While it is of interest to note that the single English ship depicted is clearly different from the Norman vessels, this could be for reasons other than that of a regard for technical detail.

The actual year in which Harold crossed the Channel is often assumed to have been 1064 with Harold ascending the throne two years later. Although he was to retain the throne for approximately nine months, it was a time during which Harold considerably extended his wealth and power. Apart from the acquisition of landholdings previously owned by Edward, it also meant that Edward's warships became part of Harold's personal navy. Conversely, of course, Harold's fleet of warships was now technically part of the fleet owned by the crown. For the manor of Bosham, this may have resulted in its becoming the home of the largest part of the royal fleet.

Irrespective of its use by an enlarged fleet when Harold became king, the evidence of Bosham's earlier use as a harbour for warships is worth exploring. To sustain such a role, it would have been necessary for a range of facilities to have existed, not least of which would have been a few storehouses, repair shops and possibly an area set aside for the building of ships. So where exactly might such facilities have been located? To answer this question, it must first be recognized that the use of Bosham as a geographical location in the eleventh century assumes a much wider area than that covered by the modern-day parish with that name. In the time of the House of Godwine, it referred to the entire manor of Bosham which also encompassed the neighbouring peninsula of Chidham.²⁷ It is an important observation, as the area of Chidham possessed a number of advantages for the harbouring and protection of long ships that the same area within the modern-day parish of Bosham simply did not possess. In addition, Thorney Island, which is accounted a separate manor in Domesday Book, is specifically connected with the maritime activities of Bosham.²⁸ It was

from here, in October 1051, that Earl Godwine and his family boarded the long ship that took them to Flanders.²⁹ In view of these observations, any assumption that those ships owned at various times by the House of Godwine were maintained and harboured in an area delimited by modern day Bosham is incorrect.

However, both the precise nature of how the harbour area was used and its precise layout are contestable. Most certainly any facilities in place would not have been particularly sophisticated. With the enclosed water used as an anchorage in the summer and the beach for the laying-up of warships in winter, additional stretches of the shoreline may also have been used for new construction work. By their very nature, any vessels built would have been shallow-drafted and lightweight. This means they could actually have been built on any stretch of coast that had both good access and the means by which such vessels, once constructed, could easily be placed in the water. In addition, such a location would have to have been reasonably protected from the elements while the point of construction would have needed to be above the level of high tide. Bosham, as it happens, not only provides all of these advantages but many additional ones required for shipbuilding operations thereby possibly permitting the Godwines to maintain, over the long term, a fleet fit for purpose. A particularly important asset would have been the need for abundant timber supplies, the raw material of shipbuilding. Once again Bosham met this criterion; the area of the manor and immediately beyond was heavily wooded.³⁰

However, to carry out the work of ship construction and maintenance, a number of more substantial buildings would have been necessary including additional storehouses, one or more building slips, workshops, sawpits and workforce accommodation. While a construction site, with its necessary facilities, could have been located elsewhere, or even shared by a number of nearby coastal communities, it seems unlikely. For one thing, the items needed for building a warship were also the very same that would have been essential for its subsequent maintenance upon the return from any warlike expedition.

Reference once again to the Bayeux Tapestry gives an interesting insight into the workings of a building yard at this time. In one of its panels, ships

of William's invasion fleet are seen in various stages of construction. The first scene in connection with the building of this fleet shows instructions being given by the Duke of Normandy to his master shipwright. The shipwright depicted is likely to be representational rather than a specific individual. A highly skilled artisan, a shipwright of this calibre would have taken overall responsibility for a number of the new ships to be built. In company with several foresters, his first task would have been to scour the countryside for the purpose of selecting the necessary timber. In this task particular care was required, the selected oak having to be of a shape appropriate not just to the angle of bend required for the frame, but to the strakes, supporting knees and the sternpost of vessels to be built. Such trees would have been scored with an appropriate mark, the tapestry shows foresters at work upon the actual felling of these trees. In some cases, the curved upper branches of a selected tree are being cut, these timbers being particularly prized for the forming of a sternpost. Once felled, the timbers were hauled to the building yard where each frame and strake was more precisely shaped by axe and adze, rather than by saw. Again, this is depicted in the tapestry where shipwrights are seen at work both in the preparation of timber and the making of final adjustments on nearly-finished hulls.

A further depiction of a master shipwright, this time within the building yard, shows him in the act of sighting a line along the hull of one vessel. The exact proportions of vessels under construction were never measured in the eleventh century but were dependent on the critical eye of an experienced artisan. Although boat-ells and levels were used to confirm the conclusions of an experienced shipwright, it was the practised eye that dominated. In construction of one large royal galley, the *Long Serpent* built for King Olaf Trygvason, the *King's Mirror*, written in Norway about 1250, provides an interesting account. Thorberg 'Skafhogg' (or 'Trimmer'), the master shipwright overseeing her construction, went home after laying the initial lines while the planks were added to her hull. On his return Skafhogg was unhappy with the lines. Although the king and everyone else refused to see any need for alterations, Skafhogg stole out at night and marked notches all the way down one gunwale. The next morning King Olaf demanded to know who had vandalised his ship, threatening the direst of punishments. Thorberg admitted

responsibility and then proceeded to make good his damage by trimming the length of the gunwale to the depth of the notches. On reviewing the alterations, all admitted it was a great and necessary improvement.³¹

The launch of these completed ships is also to be observed in a panel of the Bayeux Tapestry. Seemingly, they were brought closer to the water through the tedious procedure of wetting taut ropes that had been tied at one end to a stake in the ground and at the other to the prow of the vessel to be launched. Through the process of wetting the rope it shrank and, in doing so, drew the vessel closer to the water. A repetition of this process would eventually ensure that the vessel was close enough to be floated on a rising tide. However, in a harbour for warships the assumed size of Bosham, such a procedure would have been unnecessary. Instead, enough of the crew either of the vessel to be launched or of other ships, would have been available to move the vessel. Only 'great ships', such as those gifted to Hardecnut and Edward, might, when being launched, require the strength of an entire crew for the task.

While, of course, the Bayeux Tapestry depicts the shipbuilding practice of the Normans, any ships built at Bosham would undoubtedly have used the same constructional methods. The building of ships across northern Europe was not an isolated process. In using, as the Godwines would certainly have done, the most knowledgeable shipwrights in the country, they were using men with a great deal of boat-building experience. Many of them would have worked at a number of different yards and would have taken a professional interest in vessels from both foreign and other home yards. Throughout the early middle ages others quickly copied ideas developed by one shipwright. This can be seen through the universality of the galley design. Local shipwrights, sometimes improving upon the original design, quickly adopted developments initiated by the Norse folk, wherever their influence prevailed. For shipwrights employed by the Godwines, this would have been particularly easy: the family had long-time connections with the kingdom of Dalriada and Flanders and were familiar with the building yards of those territories.

The suitability of the Bosham area for ship- and boat-building is amply demonstrated, from at least the eighteenth century onwards, through

the existence of a vibrant boat-building industry centred on Bosham. A series of yards are known to have existed immediately to the north of the church with a further yard in the slightly more distant Furzeffeld Creek.³² Both sites offer possibilities for the location of the Godwine's building yard, with the area immediately to the north of the church having the advantage of being close to where the workforce would most probably have been accommodated. Equally, however, the north of the church is also the most probable location for the manor house and the great hall depicted in the Bayeux Tapestry.³³ Should this have been the case, it seems unlikely that the building yard, with all of its noise and fumes, would have been located in quite such close proximity to the manor house.

Looking around for other possible sites, early maps of the area are worth considering. The Bosham manorial map of 1784 marks the site of what is claimed as an 'old quay' positioned within the Bosham Channel and on a westerly axis with the church.³⁴ Similarly, the Yeakell and Gardner map of 1778 appears to show a long groyne in the same area.³⁵ While it is not being suggested that either of these features have anything to do with Anglo-Saxon maritime activities, they are indicative of earlier waterfront structures further up the Bosham channel in areas now regularly covered by the tidal flow.

Furzeffeld Creek and its more recent boat-building yard, is also worthy of consideration. The area is well-situated, on the edge of the deep-water channel but sufficiently far from the manor house to leave its occupants unaffected by the resulting noise and pollution. In addition, tucked away in a more secluded area, it would have been easier to defend in the event of attack by enemy maritime forces. That this is a possible location is suggested by certain archaeological remains whose physical evidence would support such a claim. Among these is the existence of a stone wall to the east of Furzeffeld Creek, which may date to the earlier medieval period.³⁶ Curved in shape and 132 ft in length, it could only have served as an unloading quay for cargo-carrying vessels. Such a feature would certainly have been useful for any shipbuilding enterprise, vessels bringing timbers (for both the masts and hull) needing such a quay for unloading. The failure to identify a quay or jetty in any other area would further strengthen

the likelihood of this being the location of the building of the Godwine family long ships. In addition, mortar remains have been discovered on the east side of the creek, and it is not inconceivable that this may also be associated with Saxon-period buildings necessary in a shipbuilding yard.³⁷

While neither the curved wall nor other mentioned features could definitely be stated to be of the Anglo-Saxon period, they are worthy of investigation. A series of boat-shaped indentations that lie within the creek and immediately to the north of the same woodland area that adjoins Furzeffeld Creek are also worthy of attention. Although it has been suggested that they mark the remains of either Roman or late-medieval ships, this seems an unlikely explanation, given the paucity of evidence for this having been an area active in the maritime trade during either of these periods.³⁸ The author of a recently published book on Bosham, Angela Bromley Martin, while claiming that these are of Roman origin, explains their survival 'for two thousand years with no vegetation growing anywhere within the indentations' because the 'Romans painted the hulls of their boats with bitumen, bitumen does not deteriorate nor will any plant grow above such material.'³⁹

Most certainly Bromley-Martin is correct in making the statement that nothing grows within these indentations, while the area around provides contrasting growth for a range of grasses and other vegetation. For all growth to have been excluded from the area of the indentation the soil there, at some point, must have been subjected to a high level of acidity. One possible cause is that the indentations were formed by the abandoned tarred hulls of Harold's fleet. Vessels of this period were well payed with grease, pitch and tar (this latter drawn from the sap of fir trees and boiled to thicken) and subsequently painted.⁴⁰ The thirteenth-century *King's Mirror* contains advice that newly-built vessels should be coated with tar in the autumn and, if possible, kept tarred all winter; but should the ship be placed on timbers too late to be coated in the autumn, it should be tarred when the spring opens and let to dry thoroughly afterwards.⁴¹ Such a concoction would certainly have contained high levels of acid. Vessels remaining on a foreshore for an extended period of time would have suffered the rotting of their timbers with acid from the tar coating being absorbed and trapped in the

underlying mud. The dimensions of some of these indentations strengthen the claim that they might well represent the resting place of Harold's long lost fleet.⁴² Two of the largest, in common with most of the other indentations to be found on the southeast side of the creek and approximately 10 m from the tide line, closely resemble the likely hull dimensions of a Saxon warship in both having a breadth of 2.5 m and lengths of 14 m and 16 m. In both cases the hull to length ratio is 6:1, this more or less replicates that of known warships of the period.⁴³ However, not all of the indentations so neatly fit this formula: three of the other larger indentations measure 7.5 m by 3.2 m, 10 m by 4.7 m and 8 m by 1.8 m. However, should these particular indentations reflect, not the exact underwater measurements of any vessel, but rather the areas where acidity took its greatest effect, then the argument still holds. Alternatively, these more rounded shapes could represent the remains of other vessels of Saxon age, vessels used for the carriage of cargo and military supplies.

Furzeffeld Creek, while having possibilities for the long-term laying-up of vessels, would have been less advantageous for use by a seagoing war fleet when held in readiness for immediate action. At any time when the country lay under threat from hostile forces, it would have been necessary for such a fleet to be ready at a moment's notice. For this reason, crews would need to have been kept in readiness and vessels anchored in water of a sufficient depth to allow them to be navigated into the Channel on any state of the tide. This is not a feature of the water either around Bosham village or Furzeffeld Creek (although the creek does lie close to a deep water channel). It would have been much more suitable for a fleet active in the summer months to be moored somewhere off Chidham, possibly close to Cobnor Point. Here, vessels would still have been sheltered but always afloat. From here, it would have been a relatively easy task to reach the Solent. The Bayeux Tapestry, in depicting Harold's departure for the Continent, shows a long ship moored in water of less than one metre in depth with the party boarding the vessel by wading out to it, indicating that wherever the fleet was moored, there was no existing jetty to facilitate a dry boarding.⁴⁴

A further clue to the nature of naval operations at Bosham is that of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle's* account of the Godwine family's flight from the

country in 1051. The use of Thorney Island is particularly instructive, suggesting it may well have been a regular stopping-off point for long ships. Because it was closer to open waters, it was possibly a major point of communication between the family at Bosham and the fleet when at sea. Possibly too, storehouses for the replenishment of food and arms may also have existed at the northern tip of the island.⁴⁵ Unfortunately, this part of the island has seen considerable activity in the building of sea walls, so that evidence of early maritime activity has probably been obliterated. However, on the east side of the island, at Stanbury Point, something much more tangible does exist: a crescent-shaped feature that could be of late-Saxon date. The HER refers to this as a mound or burgh from this period, but its shape is suggestive of a small harbour or boat shelter. Maybe it was from here that the Godwines fled the country in 1051. In noting this particular feature, a survey of foreshore structures conducted in 2007 for Chichester Harbour Conservancy, considered that an urgent study of this site was required, considering it to be possibly 'of some regional importance' while noting it had only a limited future due to erosion.⁴⁶

Prior to collecting the Godwines from Thorney Island, the vessels that took them to Flanders are described as being held at Bosham and 'launched' from there.⁴⁷ This makes a good deal of sense. From the sequence of events described, it is clear that the departure from Thorney Island must have taken place in October.⁴⁸ By that time the campaigning season had ended and Godwine's fleet of long ships would have been brought on shore for the winter. Again, an obvious area for this would have been somewhere close to Cobnor Point. Here, vessels could quite easily be hauled on to the beach until launched into a sufficient depth of water irrespective of the state of the tide. Maybe, also, in common with Viking practice, these vessels would have been held under cover — coverings made of timber and able to offer further protection from the elements.⁴⁹ Godwine, who was actually being pursued by those loyal to King Edward, had little time to get out of the country. The ships he was relying upon, while beached, were still at a high point of readiness, and able to be launched with little apparent delay.

Returning, for a moment, to the waterfront area of the modern-day village of Bosham, there is one seemingly unlikely building that may have played

a dual role in the workings of the naval base. This was the church, a building originally constructed during the mid-tenth century. Evidence from Norway shows that church naves were frequently used for the drying of sails. Seemingly, during the tenth century there was less of a division between the secular and spiritual world, with seafarers comfortable in their use of churches for such a purpose. While it can only be supposed, the height of the roof would have been ideal for the hanging of sails prior to winter storage. The second possible use of the church within the context of naval use was that of it being a possible seamark. This is a suggestion put forward by Hutchinson,

The siting of churches in positions where they could be useful for navigation perhaps suggests a maritime economic factor in ecclesiastical foundations. It is surely more than a coincidence that the church at Bosham, the seat of Earl Goodwin, which appears on the Bayeux Tapestry as a record that Harold sailed from here in 1064, lies directly in line with the 1.5 km of the narrow navigable channel in Bosham Creek. Many other churches served as sailing marks.⁵⁰

Unfortunately, while overwhelming evidence exists that Bosham served the House of Godwine as a naval facility, the nature and layout can be no more than conjecture. While Furze Field Creek has a strong claim to being the area where construction might have taken place, there is no hard and fast evidence. The existence of a quay, additional signs of buildings and of indentations in nearby mud banks is far from conclusive that this was the site of the building yard. Similarly, the advantage of Cobnor Point, as a place for the temporary laying-up of the fleet, is equally unproven. Surprisingly, however, no attempt has ever been made to clarify the situation. The contemporary evidence for Bosham having served a naval purpose is beyond dispute. Yet, at no time, has a full archaeological survey ever been undertaken to investigate more fully those areas suited to the naval needs of the House of Godwine.⁵¹ Perhaps the nearest was a geophysical survey of the Harbour area carried out in November 2005 and sponsored by the Chichester Harbour Conservancy Board. Unfortunately, none of the most likely sites for a Saxon naval presence were included. A determined and systematic ground survey directed to areas of maritime potential would certainly reveal something of Harold's harbour facilities. While

they might not have been as sophisticated as the later dockyards of the industrial period, the structures required were not, in themselves, insubstantial, making a quest for evidence a far from difficult task. Almost certainly, somewhere on the south side of Chichester Harbour evidence of actual work areas (including those needed for the sawing of timbers and the boiling of pitch used for the coating of ship hulls) and storehouses must be located. A determined archaeological survey is likely to uncover discarded ship's nails or even preserved timbers, these likely to be found under the mud of the harbour.⁵²

Following the Norman Conquest, the value of Bosham as a harbour for warships rapidly declined. The new king, together with his immediate successors, placed little importance on the need for a navy. The Normans were more or less exclusively a land-based force, using the sea only for the purpose of transport. As a result, they were considerably disadvantaged, for not only did their armies lack mobility and speed, but also their geographical reach was greatly restricted. It is a point made by the naval historian, N. A. M. Rodger: 'Though they were rulers of a substantial part of continental Europe, and employed an economic and political weight far greater than that of their Anglo-Saxon predecessors, their authority in the British Isles was in important respects sharply restricted ...'⁵³

In this respect Bosham lost much of its former importance. No longer required for the building and safe harbouring of warships, it took on the much-reduced role of ferry port. While William may not have required a purpose-built fighting fleet, he still needed ships to convey himself and his court to and from Normandy. In conjunction with Portchester and Southampton, a frequent royal transport service was operated from Bosham. According to Rodger, there were at least 50 royal crossings in the 80 years that followed the Conquest. Many of these would have begun or ended at Bosham, but the precise number is unknown.⁵⁴ That the manor retained this role was undoubtedly the result of the continued existence of Harold's former manor house. As in 1065, and Harold's crossing of the Channel, the main hall of this building continued to serve the role of a glorified waiting room, with banquets presumably served to the royal travellers as they awaited the correct wind and tide.

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NOTES

- ¹ For a general overview of some of the more recent discoveries relating to land-based naval facilities see David Blackman 'Naval installations', in Robert Gardiner (ed.), *The Age of the Galley* (London: Conway Maritime Press, 1995), 224–33.
- ² For a listing of published material on the more recent history of naval dockyards see Philip MacDougall, *Naval Dockyards: a Bibliography* (Naval Dockyards Society, 2002).
- ³ While it is accepted that the physical location of such sites remains unknown, it will be demonstrated that use of available source material permits acceptance and recognition of a very real infrastructure.
- ⁴ Specifically, both Trow and Douglas, in their respective biographies, have much to say about the importance of warships and naval fleets for both King Canute and William of Normandy, but little on the sophisticated infrastructure for their creation. See M. J. Trow, *Cnut* (Stroud: Sutton, 2005) and David C. Douglas, *William the Conqueror* (New Haven (CT): Yale University Press, 1999).
- ⁵ James D. G. Davidson, *Scots and the Sea* (Edinburgh: Mainstream Publishing, 2003), 21–30.
- ⁶ A more detailed account of events occurring in 1009, together with a brief analysis, can be found in Emma Mason, *The House of Godwine: the History of a Dynasty* (London: Hambledon & London, 2004), 24–5. Wulfnoth carried the nickname *Cild*, which Mason indicates to have carried the overtone of 'the aristocratic young hero'.
- ⁷ *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, 1009. See D. Whitelock et al., 'The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle', in *English Historical Documents*, vol. 1 (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode).
- ⁸ Mason, 24–5.
- ⁹ Ian W. Walker, *Harold, the Last Anglo-Saxon King* (Stroud: Sutton Publishing, 1997), 5.
- ¹⁰ John Pullen-Appleby, *English Sea Power, c. 871 to 1100* (Hockwold-cum-Wilton, Norfolk: Anglo-Saxon Books, 2005), 67. The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle records Canute going to Norway, from England, with 'fifty ships of English thegns'. Anglo-Saxon Chronicle F sa 1028. All references to the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle (hereafter ASC) are drawn from the following: G. M. Garmonsway, *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* (London: J. M. Dent, 1977).
- ¹¹ Patrick McGurk (ed.), *The Chronicle of John of Worcester: the Annals from 450–1066* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), vol. 2, 530–31; Walker (1997), 16.
- ¹² *Vita Edwardi*, 1042; Walker (1997), 17.
- ¹³ Gillian Hutchinson, *Medieval Ships and Shipping* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1994), 4–5.
- ¹⁴ ASC A 897. It seems also that the word *langscip* (meaning longship) was a term reserved for Anglo-Saxon rather than Danish vessels, reinforcing the idea of a variation in design. See Katrin Their, 'Altenenglische Terminologie für Schiffe und Schiffsteile', in *Archäologie und Sprachgeschichte 500–1100* (Oxford: BAR International Series 1036, 2002), English summary, 119.
- ¹⁵ ASC E1046 (1049).
- ¹⁶ ASC E1046 (1049).
- ¹⁷ ASC E1046 (1049). It is of interest to note that, at about that same time as these events were taking place, Harold, Godwine's second eldest son, was also involved in various naval activities. In AD 1048 he had sailed with the English fleet against German raiders and was probably still involved in similar activities during the following year. Most probably, the ship he commanded was either his own or that of his father.
- ¹⁸ Ian W. Walker, *Harold, the Last Anglo-Saxon King* (Stroud: Sutton Publishing, 1997), 34–5.
- ¹⁹ ASC D1052 (1051).
- ²⁰ ASC E1048 (1051).
- ²¹ ASC D1052 (1051).
- ²² Mason, 65.
- ²³ ASC C1052.
- ²⁴ Mason, 83.
- ²⁵ Bayeux Tapestry, www.bayeuxtapestry.org.uk searched on 28.2.09.
- ²⁶ That the vessel was a pleasure yacht is the view adopted by Rodger, see N. A. M. Rodger. *The Safeguard of the Sea* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1997), 15.
- ²⁷ Chidham in the eleventh century was part of the manor of Bosham and did not become a separate manor until the early twelfth century.
- ²⁸ John Morris (trans.), *Domesday Book, Sussex* (Chichester: Phillimore, 1976), 6.1.
- ²⁹ ASC D1052 (1051).
- ³⁰ Chichester Harbour Conservancy, *Chichester Harbour Geophysical and Augur Survey* (February 2006), 137.
- ³¹ L. M. Larsson (trans.), *The King's Mirror* (New York: American-Scandinavian Foundation, 1917), 60.
- ³² Angela Bromley-Martin, *Bosham: a Village by the Sea*, (Hughenden Publications, 2006), 102–10.
- ³³ Bromley-Martin, 17. The present-day manor, which is sited immediately to the north of the church, has within its grounds evidence of a substantial Saxon-period building having existed here.
- ³⁴ WSRO MP1389.
- ³⁵ WSRO Add Ms 9470, 'An actual topographical survey of the County of Sussex' by T. Yeakell and W. Gardner, Surveyors (1778–1783).
- ³⁶ Bromley-Martin, 219. Evidence for such a date comes from James Kenny, Archaeology Officer for Chichester District Council, who passed a sample of the stone to a local geologist who confirmed that stone of this nature was in use as building material at that point in time.
- ³⁷ The discovery of mortar has been affirmed by Bromley-Martin in a conversation with the present writer.
- ³⁸ Bromley-Martin, 220. Bromley-Martin indicates one to be the possible site of an abandoned fourth-century Roman vessel, with the shape preserved by the hull's having been painted with bitumen, so preventing the growth of vegetation on the site.
- ³⁹ Bromley-Martin, 220.
- ⁴⁰ Denis Rixson, *The West Highland Galley* (Edinburgh: Birlinn, 1998), 151.
- ⁴¹ Larson, 60.
- ⁴² The fate of Harold's fleet after the Battle of Hastings is not known. Rodger simply refers to it as 'withering away'. See Rodger, 38.

- ⁴³ Skuldev 5, one of a group of Viking period boats, excavated off Roskilde, Denmark, and generally supposed to have been a warship, has a length of 17.4 m and a 2.6-m beam (1:6.7). See Robert Gardiner (ed.), *Cogs, Caravels and Galleons* (London: Conway Maritime Press, 1994), 12–18.
- ⁴⁴ Bayeux Tapestry. The shallow draught of long ships has been long recognized, this gave them considerable advantages when operating in rivers and near to shore. O'Sullivan and Breen confirm that these ships had a draft of approximately 1 m. See Aidan O'Sullivan & Colin Breen, *Maritime Ireland: an Archaeology of Coastal Communities* (Stroud: Tempus, 2007), 143.
- ⁴⁵ ASC D1052 (1051).
- ⁴⁶ Maritime Archaeology Ltd, *Chichester Harbour Survey of Foreshore Structures* (January 2007), 18 & 79.
- ⁴⁷ ASC D1052 (1051).
- ⁴⁸ According to the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, the decision to outlaw Godwine was taken either at the end of September or the beginning of October, and Godwine rode to Thorney Island immediately he received news of his being outlawed. Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, D1052 (1051).
- ⁴⁹ In Norway, some 90 ship houses have been excavated, many of them dating to the Viking period. The dimensions of one of these shows it to have been large enough for a ship of 80 ft in length and 15 ft in breadth, indicating that it was most likely to have been constructed for a ship of war. The use of such a building, which was of timber construction, implies that such vessels, when not in use, were kept under cover for the purpose of protecting them from the extremes of northern winters. See Roald Morcken, 'Longships, knarrs and cogs', *The Mariner's Mirror* **74:4** (1988), 396–7.
- ⁵⁰ Gillian Hutchinson, *Medieval Ships and Shipping* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1994).
- ⁵¹ The lack of actual physical evidence confirming the location of the Saxon naval base is primarily a product of an overall lack of archaeological attention to Chichester Harbour. It is a point confirmed by the Museum of London Archaeology Service (MOLAS) in their report *Uncovering the Past: Archaeological Discoveries in Chichester Harbour AONB, 2004–2007* (June 2007), 29. The report particularly highlights the need to assess sea defences and the position of quays which would help to determine both past use and changing physical shape. In carrying out such work, a reassessment of the likely site of a naval base might also be carried out, either affirming or contradicting my own hesitant conclusions as to a precise location.
- ⁵² Iron clench nails would perhaps be the most likely first sign of real evidence. Such items have been found in Dublin and other tenth-century ship repair areas. See Aidan O'Sullivan & Colin Breen, *Maritime Ireland: an Archaeology of Coastal Communities* (Stroud: Tempus, 2007), 120.
- ⁵³ Rodger, 48.
- ⁵⁴ Rodger, 39.