# POST-ROMAN LONDON

*The Presidential Address*

*by*

SIR MONTAGU SHARPE, K.C., D.L., C.A.,
Vice-Lt., Middx.

at the Annual Meeting of the London and Middlesex Archæological Society, 26th February, 1936.

MUCH controversy has arisen as to the condition of Londinium, and the territory pertaining to it, between the middle of the fifth and the close of the sixth century.

As regards the city, the late Professor Haverfield has stated somewhat *ex cathedra* that "London doubtless fell in some unrecorded overthrow in the early fifth century, then it lay waste for a hundred years or more."

In this paper I seek to discover whether the archæology of the territory around Londinium can throw some light on this controversy.

In the first place, I proceed to consider what was the extent of territory assigned by the officials of Cæsar's domain to what they planned to be the chief city and commercial centre of Britain. From traces of the Roman survey of the locality, I am of opinion that in the hey-day of London's ancient prosperity, *circa* A.D. 350, its *territorium* was bounded on the east by the river Lea, on the north by that river, and thence across into what is now Buckinghamshire, and on to the Chiltern Hills; on the west by the Chiltern district, where the irregular courses of old roads indicate that the land had been left as *ager arcifinus*, or outer territory, in the possession of the native Britons, who throughout the Roman

occupation remained more or less apart, and were later known as the Chiltenseta. The southern boundary of the London territory would mainly be the Thames.

This territory may be described as consisting of two portions:—

(1) The surveyed lands cultivated after the Roman manner as described by Hyginus in common farm, having pasture and wood, and lying principally within Middlesex, though with extensions (*a*) west of the Colne river, into what is now Buckinghamshire; (*b*) on the east of the river Lea or Lyga in the vicinity of London; and (*c*) south of the Thames along Watling Street to the river Cray.

(2) The outlying fringes of the territory, being land mostly in a primitive condition were left in the hands of the natives.

Light may be thrown on these boundaries, because during the Roman era there was an Imperial Master of the Hounds: *Procurator Cynegii in Brittannis*, with quarters presumably in or near the capital city. This was an office somewhat similar to that of the Master of the Royal Buckhounds, who up to the close of the last century, hunted a country somewhat co-extensive with that suggested for the old Roman *territorium*.

Early Norman charters and Fitzstephen writing *tempo* Henry II indicate, that the liberties of the chase to the London citizens extended over Middlesex, Herts., the Chilterns, and in Kent to the waters of the Cray. A right surely based on an ancient privilege running with the land, and if so, then, who but the Roman Procurator was capable of assigning such an extent of territory to the capital city? After centuries of usage the extent of this freedom to hunt would be well known, having been handed down from generation to generation.

In the London Museum catalogue No. 6, Dr. Wheeler draws attention to three isolated Grims' dykes in the Chilterns, and contends that they were in affinity to the

western bounds of the London territory, the demarcation of a frontier line, and that their function was political and not military.

The probable solution of such lengths of bank and ditch constructed mostly in forestal districts is that they were erected to assist in the ordinary and necessary capture of numerous destructive wild beasts, which then ravaged the cultivated fields: such as, bucks, boars, bulls, harts, as well as wolves and foxes.

From Oppian we learn that:—

"There is a breed of hounds for hunting staunch
Small in their size, but worthy of great praise,
Which the wild tribes of painted Britons raise
And call them Agassei; such their name.
. . . . . .
But for their scent this breed is mostly prized,
And skill in tracing where the pad has passed,
Instinctive catching each aerial taint."[1]

The hunted beasts driven towards the bank were thus headed and killed or turned into bays or corals, where they could afterwards be dispatched. At either end of the Middlesex Grims' dyke or its sections, at Enfield and at Ruislip, were, as Domesday Book mentions, wild beasts' parks: "*Parcus est ibi ferarum silvaticarum.*" I may mention that in Scotland as late as the middle of the fifteenth century a thousand years later, if a man failed to appear three times a year at the district wolf drive, he forfeited a sheep to the sheriff. Even at the present day "the Pygmies of Central Africa hunt with nets which they join together to form a line half a mile long, towards which a whole tribe from far away make a noisy semi-circular drive."[2]

Aristides writing in the second century mentions that nobles and private persons frequently go over to Britain. From the Procurator of Cæsar's domain they could obtain an estate in land where amid peaceful and pleasant surroundings a *villa rustica* could be built. But when the Roman legions left Britain, and the protecting line of coastal forts of the Count of the Saxon

shore were abandoned, then these country houses were at the mercy of any roving band of Picts and Scots, and this mischief commenced about the year A.D. 361.

Two years later a migratory horde bent on plunder, having broken through the coastal defence, entered London territory. But Theodosius, a Roman general, having collected troops, marched, says Marcellinus, "upon the old town of London. Having divided his force into a number of separate bodies, he easily routed the enemy, and having recovered the booty taken from the wretched *tributarii*, he made a joyful semi-triumphal entry into the city, brought to life again with unexpected suddenness."[3] The erection of the five small rectangular forts in Middlesex may probably be ascribed to Theodosius, a memorial of those far distant days.

Roman military protection was gradually being weakened in Britain when troops were withdrawn during the years A.D. 383, 400 and 407, and followed doubtless by many families abandoning their now unprotected country homes.

Lastly, owing to the dire state of affairs in the Roman world, when Alaric the Visigoth had sacked Rome, the Emperor Honorius in A.D. 410 sent a rescript bidding the City-States of Britain to administer the government.

Judging from the number of high officers of State in Britain given in the Notitia, a regular system of government had been established in London, the capital city, during the three centuries of Roman rule in Britain, and so the principal merchants, clergy, and decurions with the remnant of the civil servants, were to some extent able to continue the government of the London State.

Its defensive power would at first be weak, until trained bands or a militia could be raised and armed, for hitherto it seems that under the *Lex Julia de Majestis* civilians were forbidden to bear arms. The boundaries of the London State were not based on military lines, for the Imperial troops in Britain were at hand ready to suppress any interstate disturbance. But its real and

strong lines of defence were natural ones, which lay mainly around the cultivated lands within the inner portion of the territory.

This on three sides was fenced by the rivers Lea, Thames and Coln or Ux, with their broad bordering marshes, then in a condition entirely different from that of to-day, now embanked, with their courses in confined channels, and the wide marshes drained. Along the fourth or northern border, amid a range of hills, stretched a wide and dense forest, known later as the Forest of Middlesex, only pierced by two military roads with easily guarded portals at Enfield and at Elstree. Centuries later Fretheric, an abbot of St. Albans, by blocking Watling Street, was able to cause a check to the march of the Conqueror's troops. Remnants of this great forest have survived to the present century, testified by over a dozen woodland names, including Ruislip Wood, Harrow Weald, Scratch or Devil's Wood, Hatch End, Coldfall, Bishop's and Ken Woods. While lastly Londinium itself, the *arx* or mother city of the *territorium*, was well protected by strong walls on both its land and river fronts.

Since writing this, I note that Mr. Hodgkin in his learned *History of the Anglo-Saxons*, inclines to this view. He writes: "The marshes which to the east stretched down to the Thames and up the Lea, impeded an enemy advancing in that direction, while dense forest was almost continuous from the Essex marshes to Buckinghamshire and southern Hertfordshire, and only became patchy and open woodland on the eastern slopes of the Chilterns. The London area was thus screened from the invaders who penetrated Britain from the Ouse and Cam."[4]

An estimate can be made of the probable fighting force within the inner territory now represented by the county of Middlesex, in which the Roman survey shows forty-eight village settlements.[5] Allowing to each an average of three *decaniae*, or thirty Romanised tillers of

the soil, the number of men paying *tributum solis* would amount to about 1,440. I may mention that seven centuries later, Domesday returns 1,780 landholders on four-fifths of Middlesex. Adding 10 per cent. for craftsmen, traders and all who paid the poll tax, the adult population may perhaps be provisionally returned at about 1,600 men. No estimate can be made of the population within the city's walls, which must to some extent have decreased on the departure of the Romans, but even then, the percentage of men left capable of bearing arms must have been considerable, and when united with those from the territory, they formed a considerable array.

What other city-state in Britain was then so well equipped, both by nature and art, and with the number of men able to withstand forays, attempted by isolated and wandering bands of plunderers. But in the course of a few generations, when these bands became settled and consolidated into a clan or nation under a leader or king, then would come the day of fierce strife for the capture for the old time and wealthy State of Londinium.

Let me turn for a moment to the Church, and see what light it throws on the controversy. During the early centuries paganism was rife in the rural districts, and around the village *compitum*. "Shrines and little temples," says Dean Milman in his *History of Christianity*," stood in every grove, for agriculturalists feared to offend the gods on whom depended the plenty and failure of the harvest."[6] On the other hand Christianity had its strongholds in the cities. In A.D. 314 the Bishops of London and York attended a Church Council at Arles. *Circa* A.D. 360 Angulus is mentioned as Bishop of Augusta when London bore that designation. Not long afterwards Theodosius in A.D. 379 undertook the extirpation of paganism. In A.D. 408 Honorius swept away the provision for pagan festivals, and Christians took possession of abandoned edifices, and consecrated them, and so

the Church gradually became a living force in Britain.[6] Germanus, Bishop of Auxerre, came over on a heresy hunt in A.D. 429, and held a council in the adjoining municipal State of Verulamium. A century later we have the names of Eleanus and Theonus as first and second Archbishops of London, ecclesiastics who would hardly have set up their episcopal stools in a long deserted city. Such sidelights tend to show that the City-State of London was in life and being in the sixth century.

But in less protected city-states than that of London, the times were becoming dangerous. Roving bands of invaders were constantly attacking isolated homesteads in search of plunder, and as time went on they became more audacious and the next to suffer were the unfenced towns and villages. Lastly, as the invaders increased in numbers and became united and powerful, the walled cities would fall though Chester survived as late as the year A.D. 606.

An unsuccessful appeal for aid against these raiders was made to Rome when Aetius was consul in A.D. 446, and an answer which has been suggested is, viz., that the British States should follow the former Roman practice, and bring over troops from the Continent for their protection.

I now turn to the adjoining and highly cultivated State of Cantium, of which the leading man there is known to us by the name of Vortigern. Suffering from coastal raids, he hired a band of Jutes from oversea and quartered them in the Isle of Thanet. But the remedy was worse than the disease, for the Jutish chiefs under the standard of Hengist and Horsa, the Stallion and the Mare, quarrelled with their employer and, says the Chronicle, fought against him, in A.D. 455, and again in the following year by the river Cray, the boundary between the States of London and Kent, when many persons for safety, fled across it into London and its territory.

It is unlikely that the Jutes would pursue them

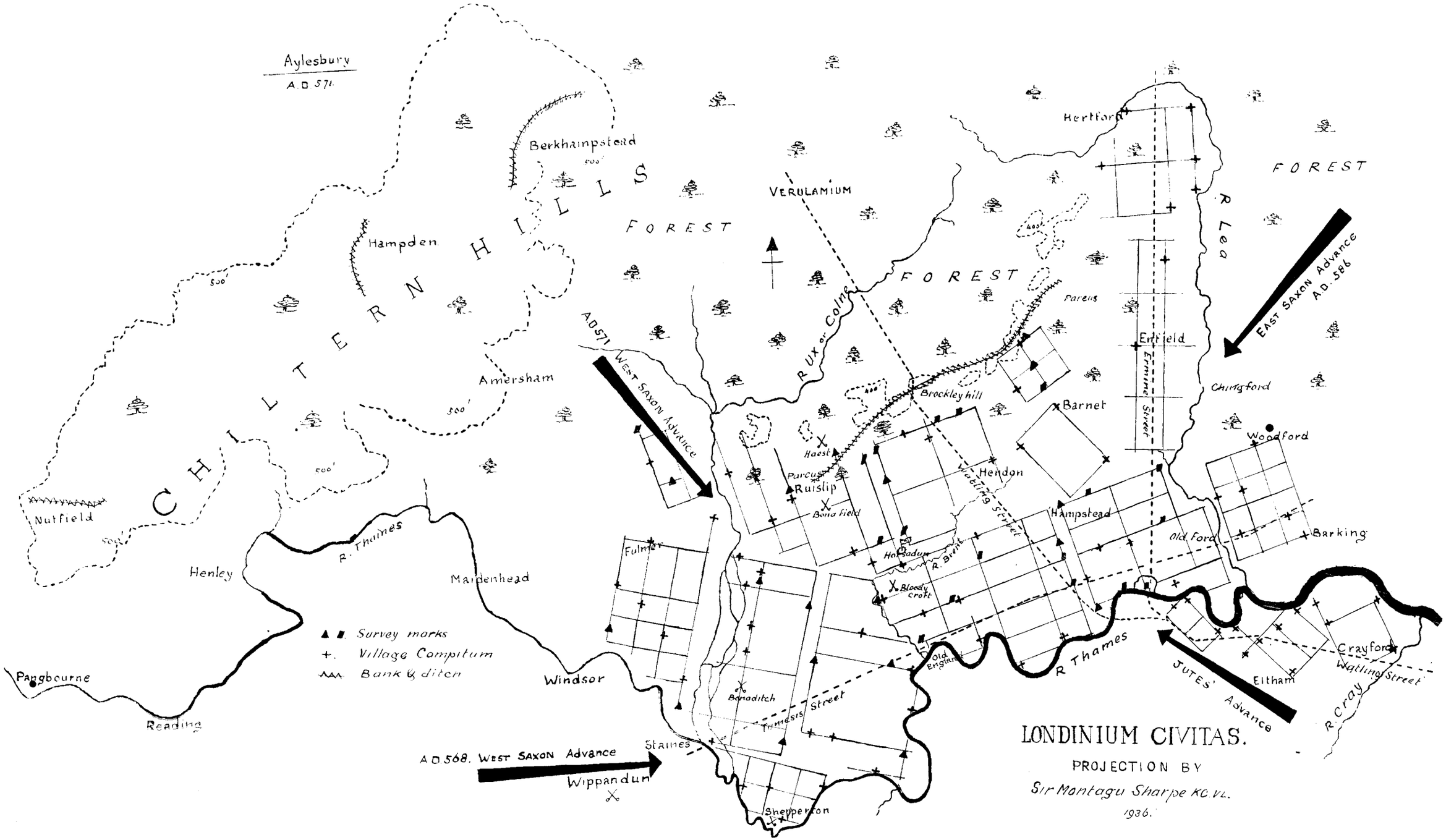
beyond the river Cray into London territory and so provoke the hostility of the State of London, besides, the standard of the White Horse was as yet none too secure in Kent, for further fighting took place there in the years A.D. 465 and 473, before the Jutes appear to have settled down side by side with the old Romano-British agriculturists in the garden state. "It looks," says Mr. Hodgkin, "as if there was something repellant to invaders in the proximity of London, and what else can this something have been, except the survival of a Romano-British population in and around London itself."[4]

Hengist was succeeded by Aesc in A.D. 488, and it was his great-grandson Ethelbert, King of Kent, of whom in the year A.D. 586 more will be heard.

A little cloud, in time to grow and to become a source of danger to the London State, was now arising below its south west horizon, for a band of West Saxon invaders landing on the Hampshire shore at the beginning of the sixth century had, in the space of fifty years, become a powerful clan under Ceawlin as their king. After capturing Calleva (Silchester) in A.D. 568, Ceawlin advancing south of the Thames defeated Ethelbert the young King of Kent at Wippandun and drove him back into Kent.

Three years later the men of Wessex under Cuthwulf, Ceawlin's brother, crossed the Thames, won the battle of Becanford in A.D. 571, and took with other towns, Aylesbury and the Chiltern district, the wild western border-land of the London State. The Militia or fyrd of the London territory, more accustomed to repress border raids, were apparently unable to sustain a regular campaign or stem the advance of the victorious West Saxons from entering south-west Middlesex.

Evidence of West Saxon settlement there is afforded —(1) By the existence of the word "farren" a Wessex term for a half-acre plot in the common pasturage on which a cow might be pastured. This term has been met




# LONDINIUM CIVITAS.

PROJECTION BY

*Sir Montagu Sharpe KC VL.*

1936.

with in Coway, Laleham, Shepperton, and in parts of Chertsey and Walton left on the north or Middlesex shore after the Thames changed the course of its channel; (2) The Saxon suffixes of Ham, Ton, and Worth, to the names of twenty-two vills and hamlets in south-west Middlesex, in comparison with nine bearing names of local significance; (3) At Shepperton in Upper West Field eight skeletons and some weapons were brought to light in 1867. They were considered to be Saxon remains. (4) Entering probably by the great ford of the lower Thames at Old England, the scene of so many conflicts, the West Saxons appear to have soon met with reverse on the slope of Cuckoo Hill, Hanwell, known even in my time as "The Bloody Croft." The field of battle apparently remained with the men of the London State, for not far distant, alongside an ancient trackway to the ford, have been found the remains of warriors buried in coarsely woven hemp garments, fastened over their breasts with round bronze brooches of the saucer pattern peculiar to the West Saxons. They were plated with gold and covered with characteristic designs. Evidently they had been persons of some note, and adjacent to them were found fifty rusted spear heads.

The West Saxon tide does not appear to have flowed into the central parts of Middlesex, where as against forty place names with various endings, there are but nine ending with Ton or Ham.

Evidence of strife in western Middlesex may perhaps be gathered from names such as Bonefield, Boneditch, Maesthill, Deadmen's Grove, etc. Bona meaning a spear, and Haest, conflict or fury. Some day I hope "The Place Name Society" will elucidate ancient names in Middlesex.

But the tide of West Saxon success was now beginning to ebb after the indecisive battle of Feathanleagh in A.D. 584 (to be followed five years later by Ceawlin's decisive defeat at Wanborough near Marlborough). The earlier check may have induced the East Saxons and the

Jutes to seize an opportunity to invade and seize the harassed State of London now crumbling to its close.

Early in the sixth century bands of Saxons from oversea, raiding into Essex and Herts., captured the City-States of *Colonia Claudia*, and *Verulamium municipium*. Later on they became known as the East Saxons, and an alliance with the King of Kent was brought about by the marriage of Ricula, sister of Ethelbert, with Sledda, King of Essex.

Their son Saebert was naturally ambitious to extend his kingdom over the cultivated and rich country around London, and his uncle, not forgetting his early defeat at Wippandun by the men of Wessex, may have helped his nephew to seize the Middlesex area and also prevent any West Saxon advance eastwards and nearer to Kent. Horsadun hill in central Middlesex perhaps indicates where once floated the standard of Horsa, the White Horse of Kent.

The end of the old State of Londinium came when its citizens, harassed by the West Saxons along the valley of the Colne, were unable to withstand the united pagan forces of Kent and Essex when they stormed the strong walls of its mother city in the year A.D. 586. The strife must have been fierce and terrible since Matthew Paris and other chroniclers record under that year that Theonus, Archbishop of London, fled into Wales after seeing the churches destroyed and taking with him those priests who had survived the massacres.

This terrible catastrophe was necessarily long remembered, for it brought to an end the old line of Romano-British Bishops of London, which, if commencing with Restitutus, had continued for nearly three centuries.

We learn that the East Saxons were victorious, and that Saebert annexed the territory of the old city-state now represented by Middlesex, for the Venerable Bede narrates, "that by A.D. 604 the City of London had become the Metropolis of the East Saxons, the mart of many nations resorting to it by sea and land. That

Saebert reigned over that nation, though under the subjection of his uncle Ethelbert, who had the command over the English nations as far as the Humber." It has been stated that the limits of early dioceses were those of the local kingdom or state. From its Saxon foundation in A.D. 604 the area of the see of London remained unchanged to the middle of the nineteenth century. The Valor Ecclesiasticus of Henry VIII shows that the diocese comprised Middlesex, Essex and parts of Herts.

Therefore by Saebert's and Ethelred's capture of the City of London its *territorium*, represented now by the Middlesex area, then became part of the East Saxon kingdom.

Amongst other changes that took place at this period, St. Augustine, who had been sent from Rome to preach again the word of God, having converted from their paganism both Ethelbert and Saebert, proceeded to the banks of the Severn to meet those British bishops and clergy who had fled into Wales. Owing possibly to want of tact, Augustine offended them and failed to persuade them to abandon a difference between the Celtic and Roman service traditions, and so the opportunity of having a united Church in Britain was lost for many subsequent years.[7] Augustine as Archbishop of Canterbury afterwards consecrated Mellitus, a monk who had come from Rome, as Bishop of London, and so its see was again filled after an interval of eighteen years.

*In conclusion, and with all respect to Professor* Haverfield's views, I submit from the particulars I have set forth in this paper that *ab urbe condita* after the insurrection by Boadicea in A.D. 61, the State and City of London, a merchant commonwealth, with its advantageous situation for trade by means of the Thames, Watling and other Streets, though at times suffering from various vicissitudes, can show an unbroken life and occupation for upwards of eighteen and a half centuries

to the present time. This is a fine record when compared with those of existing cities of the world. "Long may London continue to live and flourish," and also The London and Middlesex Archæological Society to record the past history of this city, and the ancient county surrounding it.

NOTES.

1. Oppian. A.D. 140. *Mon. His. Brit.*, XCIII.
2. Attilio Gatti. Administrator Belgian Congo Reserve. *The Times*, 8th February, 1936.
3. A. Marcellinus. *Mon. Hist. Brit.*, LXXIV.
4. *Hist. of the Anglo-Saxons*, Hodgkin, I, 139.
5. *Mx. in British Roman and Saxon Times*, Montagu Sharpe.
6. *Hist. of Christianity*, Dr. Milman, Dean of St. Paul's.
7. *Baptism, date of Easter, and service of the Mass.*