THE CHURCH IN ANGLO-SAXON BUCKINGHAMSHIRE c.650–c.1100

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This paper discusses the scanty evidence for the history of the church in Buckinghamshire between the start of the conversion period around the middle of the seventh century to the onset of Norman rule after 1066. A handful of charters, some architecture and archaeological discoveries, and some saints' lives constitute the available material, most of which has been subject to earlier, piecemeal investigation. Taken together, however, the evidence is capable of yielding a more detailed story than has sometimes been assumed. In particular, the network of minster churches is examined. The beginnings of the creation of local, later parish, churches are also discussed.

I

In terms of its effect on the history of society, and indeed the landscape, the conversion of the various Anglo-Saxon kingdoms to Christianity in the century or so after the arrival of St. Augustine in 597 was one of the crucial events in English history. Not only was a new system of belief introduced, replacing the paganism which the incomers had brought from their German homelands, but with it came also a wider spread of literacy, albeit restricted for centuries to churchmen and the highest echelons of lay society. The new religion required far more in the way of buildings: churches, monastic complexes and so on, and these were to become one of the most enduring features of both town and country, albeit frequently rebuilt. Not only did the church demand accommodation, it also needed substantial tracts of land to provide sustenance for the clergy and their lay servants, and a key feature of the conversion period was the granting by kings of very large estates to the newly-founded minsters. To do so they used the land-book or charter, itself an innovation brought from the Continent by the first churchmen. This process continued throughout the Anglo-Saxon period. The result was a significant reduction in the amount of land in royal hands in most counties, Buckinghamshire among them.

Unfortunately, although the importance of the church during the five centuries after 600 is clear, the survival of sources for this area is extremely patchy, as is the archaeological record and the survival of standing architectural features. Kingdoms like Kent and Northumbria are far better served in

these respects, notably through the pages of Bede's *Ecclesiastical History*, completed in 731. Bede has little to say about the conversion of the large tracts of central England which coalesced to form the kingdom of Mercia, and which at the time of his death in 735 was the major power in England, a position it maintained until eclipsed by Wessex after 820. During this period, the area of Buckinghamshire was divided between extremely shadowy 'tribes', whose territories followed the north-east to south-west grain of the geology in the Chilterns and the Vale of Aylesbury.[1] The *Cilternsætan* and the *Hendrica* covered the south and north of the later shire respectively. In the later seventh century they were part of the Middle Angles, a loose grouping of peoples between the Wash and the Upper Thames.[2] Each polity would have had its own ruler until this region was absorbed by Mercia, which was expanding from its core in the Trent valley. In doing so, it had to contend with established southern kingdoms such as those of the West Saxons and Kent for control of the region around London. Not until 653 was a single ruler imposed on the Middle Angles, when Peada, son of Penda of Mercia was given control. This was presumably to secure the area from takeover by Penda's numerous enemies, who were soon to destroy him at the battle of the *Winwæd* in 655.[3] Although Peada himself was dead within three years, the area remained under Mercian control. No further rulers of Middle Anglia are recorded, although there were certainly Mercian sub-kings of parts of it, some of whom played a key role in its conversion to Christianity.

The process by which the assorted Anglo-Saxon kingdoms were converted to the new faith seems to have been quite standardised.[4] First, a missionary would arrive with a group of followers, seeking audience with the king and his leading noblemen. Discussion would then ensue about the new faith and its advantages, compared with the paganism hitherto endorsed, apparently without much depth of conviction for the most part. Baptism of the core group would follow, after which the establishment of monastic centres, suitably endowed with land, would take place, from which the conversion of the population at large would proceed. That this was often a political rather than a spiritual process is evidenced by the number of cases in which kings apostatised when circumstances changed: for example, in Essex after the death of Æðelberht of Kent in 616, and again during an outbreak of plague in the 650s.

Sometimes the missions were offshoots from the original one of 597, sometimes, as with Birinus converting the West Saxons of the Upper Thames Valley, Fursey in East Anglia and the Irish missions to Northumbria, they were independent. If the course of events was similar, it was not always smooth and straightforward. Everywhere the seventh century was the critical period. When it began, the great majority of Anglo-Saxons were pagan (even if some of their British subjects had been Christians from the Roman and post-Roman periods), whereas by 700, the majority were at least nominal adherents of the new faith.

Buckinghamshire was affected by several of these missionary drives, although there is little evidence of precisely what happened and when, as it was not the scene of any activities known to Bede, nor was it in the core territory of any of the major kingdoms. Bede does offer a few glimpses of the process by which Middle Anglia was converted, although none refers to the later shire. The same is true of Eddius Stephanus's *Life* of St. Wilfrid, written soon after the death of its hero in 709. Wilfrid played an important role in the conversion of the Midlands, the South Saxons and further afield in Europe. A much later source for events in seventh-century Buckinghamshire is the *Life* of St. Osyth (OE Osgyð), which for all its failings as a piece of later medieval hagiography, does seem to present a plausible picture of the earliest days of Christianity around Aylesbury.[6]

II

First, however, we must consider the wider framework of the conversion, since several of the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms impinged on the region around London. Kent, whose king Æðelberht also exercised some kind of *imperium* over the southern kingdoms, was the first objective of Augustine in 597. Within ten years, bishops had been installed at Canterbury, Rochester and London. The latter was under the control of the East Saxons.[7] The new bishoprics coincided with the boundaries of the various kingdoms, moving with the ebb and flow of their fortunes in the continuing struggles for supremacy. East Saxon territory included not only Essex, but also Middlesex and much of Hertfordshire.[8] The death of Æðelberht in 616 represented a setback, as both Kentish and East Saxon kings began to backslide, perhaps because the political advantages were now less apparent, rather than any deep-seated attachment to the pagan gods.

In the 620s, the focus moved to Northumbria, whose king Edwin (616–632) also claimed overlordship in the southern kingdoms.[9] He married a Kentish princess and was converted as part of the marriage settlement. Paulinus from Canterbury became bishop of York, working to convert the southern parts of the kingdom, Deira and Lindsey. This process was abruptly halted with the death of Edwin. His successors, Oswald and Oswiu, were also described as *Bretwalda* (lit. 'wide, or Britain ruler'). They belonged to the northern part of the kingdom, Bernicia. Oswiu's reign saw the resolution of the problem of Easter celebration between the differing Celtic and Roman traditions in favour of the latter, at the synod of Whitby in 664.[10]

The close interrelationships between the ruling families meant that several still-pagan kings encountered the new religion away from their own territories, and were persuaded to convert, not least if there was a dynastic marriage involved. In this way, the kings of East Anglia began to be converted in the 620s. They also had their own mission in the form of the Irish priest Fursey.[11] Overlordship of the sort practised first by Northumbria and later by Mercia was an important factor in the conversion process. For example, when Birinus began his mission to the West Saxons of the upper Thames Valley in the mid-630s, the baptism of their king Cynegils and the grant of the Roman site at Dorchester for the new bishopric was witnessed by Oswald.[12]

III

The resolute paganism of Penda meant that Mercia and Middle Anglia formed the last significant territory in England to attract the attention of missionaries, a process which did not really commence until the early 650s. It seems, however, that Penda both tolerated existing Christian communities, and did not obstruct missionary activity, especially after the conversion of his son Peada. Rather, he opposed any tendency to apostasy on the part of those who *had* been converted.[13] Given the number of missions operating by 650, it was always likely that the conversion of Mercia would be complicated, and it is unfortunate that the records are so scanty.

Penda's successor Peada was murdered in 656, providing Oswiu with a convenient excuse for annexing Mercia to his empire. In 657, however, a group of nobles who had been concealing Penda's son Wulfhere from the ever-present threat of assassination placed him on the throne. This marked the start of Mercia's rise to become the dominant power in Anglo-Saxon England from the late-seventh to the early-ninth century, and more immediately the final push towards converting its territory, including the later Buckinghamshire.

Wulfhere's sisters played a key role in this. The upheavals of the 650s meant that there was no firm episcopal succession in Mercia/Middle Anglia. The first bishop, Diuma, an Irishman, came with the priests Adda, Bett and Cedd from Northumbria in 653 to convert Peada and his people. He died c.655 and was buried at Charlbury in Oxfordshire.[14] Cedd went on to reclaim the East Saxons from one of their periodic episodes of apostasy, but the other two are not heard of again. Diuma's diocese stretched from the Humber to the Upper Thames and from Staffordshire to the Chilterns, and it seems unlikely that he had made much headway in converting the population at large. The key event in this period seems to have been the foundation of the monastery at *Medeshamstede*, later Peterborough.[15] Diuma's successor, Ceollach, was also of Scots-Irish origin, but soon returned to Iona. He was followed by Trumhere, the first English bishop of the Mercians. He came from Northumbria, and was of royal blood, as were several other early English prelates.[16] Trumhere had been requested by Wulfhere, and was bishop of all Mercia from c.658–c.672. It was not until the late-670s, under the reforming archbishop Theodore, that Mercia was divided into five dioceses, corresponding with the broad folk divisions of the kingdom: Lichfield, Lindsey, Hereford, Worcester and probably Leicester, although there is no record of its bishops before the 690s.[17]

The most likely period for a serious attempt to convert the peoples in the region between the Thames and the Ouse was the 660s, and this agrees with evidence from other sources.

IV

First, however, we must consider the possibility that some conversion was undertaken by the surviving British population of the region, and especially that centred on post-Roman *Verulamium* or St. Albans. Archaeological evidence clearly shows that the Roman town was inhabited well into fifth century, and probably later, with a level of amenity indicating both organised government and reasonable prosperity.[18] Given that fourth-century Christianity had been an urban religion first and foremost, it follows that the population would have been Christian. This, together with the presence of the tomb of the third century Alban, the first major British martyr, would suggest not only the presence of priests and churches, but also the possibility that *Verulamium* was the seat of a bishop. It was visited by St. Germanus of Auxerre in the 430s (and possibly again a decade later),[19] to combat the Pelagian heresy, which was popular with the Britons. He also became involved in the early struggles between the natives and the Saxon invaders. Bede, writing three centuries later, says that there had been no break in the importance of Alban's cult, despite all of the political upheavals of the period.[20] Offa of Mercia [757–796] was said to have refounded and richly endowed the monastery which had been built at the site of the martyrdom, on a hilltop overlooking the Roman town.[21]

It seems likely that the continuing strength of the post-Roman polity in the St. Albans area was responsible for the apparently slow penetration of the area by Anglo-Saxon settlers and their rulers.[22] Given the later hostility between British and Anglo-Saxon clerics, it is perhaps not surprising that we have no evidence of any attempt to convert the newcomers, even after their presence became an irreversible fact of life. The very rich burial under the barrow at Taplow, which dates from c.600–625, and has parallels in Kent and Essex, provides further evidence that paganism remained in an area at the outer margins of

Kentish influence and overlordship.[23]

If the writ of St. Albans ran outside the immediate environs of the Roman town as late as AD500–550, this may have involved some conversion of Anglo-Saxon settlers whose presence was tolerated, whether as mercenaries or as peasant cultivators. If so, some archaeological evidence may await discovery. Unfortunately, we know nothing of the circumstances in which control of St. Albans finally passed from Britons to Anglo-Saxons, nor when this might have happened. The battle said to have taken place in 571, which saw West Saxon control extended as far as Limbury [Luton] and its hinterland might have impinged upon St. Albans, although the chronicler omitted to mention it, which seems strange in view of its importance.

The Taplow burial indicates that high-status Anglo-Saxons were present in some capacity in the far south of Buckinghamshire by 600. Around 700, the East Saxons controlled the district called Hemel, which may have included St. Albans.[24] It is not, however, clear, when or how such a link developed. By then most of what later became Buckinghamshire was under Mercian control. North of the Chilterns, there was a mixture of Saxon and Anglian influences during the sixth and seventh centuries, and this was reflected in the fragmented political geography of the region prior to its annexation by Mercia. The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, with its West Saxon bias, omits any reference to the area after 571. The extension of their territory from the upper Thames to the headwaters of the Lea probably lasted for two generations, and there may have been some missionary activity by Birinus after 635. Thereafter, the centre of gravity of the West Saxon kingdom moved from Dorchester to Winchester, coinciding with the spread of Mercian influence as far as the Thames.

V

Given the south-eastern bias of Augustine's mission, it seems likely that the conversion of Buckinghamshire did not begin in the early seventh century. The foundation of a see at St. Paul's London in 604 was aimed at the conversion of the East Saxons. This makes it unlikely that the middle Thames valley was much influenced from that direction. It seems that whatever the relationship between the Taplow burial and Kent and Essex, this area remained pagan until at least the first quarter of the seventh century.

The first sure evidence for the presence of Christianity locally dates from around 660, when a minster church was founded at Aylesbury. The evidence is contemporary, but in the much later medieval account of St. Osyth. Women of royal birth played a crucial role in the early history of the church in Anglo-Saxon England. Some of them, like Æþelðryð (St. Audrey, founder of Ely) played a part in the endless round of dynastic marriages, but many remained unmarried. They had the necessary status and connections to ensure the firm foundation of the new monasteries which were so important in spreading Christianity from its original foci at royal courts to reach the mass of the population.

The first abbess at Aylesbury was Eadgyð, one of four daughters of that doughty pagan, Penda of Mercia. These sisters occupied a key role in centres across the whole of Middle Anglia from Adderbury in Oxfordshire to Castor near Peterborough. It seems likely that the foundation at Aylesbury was an initiative of Wulfhere, king of Mercia 657–675. With his brother and successor Æþelred (675–704), he played a key role in the spread of Christianity in Mercia. Aylesbury was an important central place, both in the 570s when it was taken by the West Saxons from the Britons, and after 650. As such, it was a natural choice for a minster site. The church and its extensive burial ground, which would initially have been used by people over a wide area, occupied much of the area of the reused Iron Age hillfort (Ægel's burh).[25] Nearby Kingsbury may be an echo of its original purpose, but it seems that by the late-seventh century the royal centre, or villa regalis, was a couple of miles away at Quarrendon. Bicester, linked to Aylesbury by Roman Akeman Street, had another early minster, ruled by Eadgyð's sister, Eadburh.[26] Eadgyð's new minster may have been a double house for monks and nuns, a common feature of the early English church. One of its key purposes, however, was to provide priests to convert and minister to the surrounding area, covering a radius of ten-fifteen miles around Aylesbury, and abutting similar territories around churches like Bicester, Luton and St. Albans.

St. Osyth was Eadgyð's niece, the daughter of Wilburh (yet another of Penda's progeny) and the sub-king Friðuwald. Her father exercised control of western Surrey in the 660s, and may have performed a similar role in the Chilterns.[27] Osyth was

probably educated by her aunt, and was ultimately buried and venerated at Aylesbury. She married Sigehere, one of several East Saxon co-rulers (reigned 664–688), probably around 670. Their son, Offa, was unique among East Saxon kings of the seventh-ninth centuries in not bearing a name beginning with S-. He was named after a fourth-century ruler of the Anglian homeland in Schleswig, evidently under Mercian influence. Offa ruled from 704–709, and had links with the Hemel area.

Unfortunately, Bede seems to have had little or no information about the conversion of southern Mercia. The vast extent of the territory ruled by the Mercian bishop, with his see at Lichfield, must have left much of the initiative to the abbots and abbesses of the minster churches, although we are equally ill-informed about the location of these. It seems probable that Buckingham was a foundation of the missionary period, although the story of St. Rumwold, who was associated with it is even more fabulous than that of Osyth.[28] There was a later medieval link between Buckingham and the royal centre at King's Sutton in Northamptonshire.[29]

Another candidate for an early minster church is Wing, still one of the most notable survivals of Anglo-Saxon architecture, albeit probably only dating in part from the seventh century.[30] The village takes its name from a group called the *Weowingas* or *Wiðungas*, whose territory may have been equivalent to the later triple Hundred of Cottesloe. (Such polities formed the lowest level of a hierarchy within each kingdom. They seem to have been selected as the foci of the new missionary districts, with Aylesbury covering the later Hundreds of Aylesbury, Stone and Risborough and Buckingham those of Stotfold, Lamua and Rowley.[31]) A close link between local rulers and the heads of the new minsters was as important to the success of the conversion process as that between kings and bishops.

Other candidates are even less easy to discern. A chance remark in Domesday Book reveals that North Crawley church, with its unusual dedication to St. Firmin, a fourth-century continental bishop, was a minster, although of what vintage is unclear.[32] There are no other obvious candidates to cover the Hundreds of Seckloe, Bunsty and Moulsoe. The three Hundreds of Ixhill, Waddesdon and Ashendon probably represent the territory dependant upon the royal centre at Brill, although

the major church was at Oakley.[33] The three Chiltern Hundreds do not even have this sketchy information. Based on the values recorded in the papal *Taxatio Ecclesiatica* of 1291 (see below), there are several possibilities: Amersham, Burnham, Chesham, and High Wycombe, none of which has other evidence pointing to possible minster status, although Burnham has a very large church in relation to the size of the community it serves. (Amersham, Chesham and Wycombe were market towns, so the size and value of their churches may not reflect any early medieval significance.) In 1086, there was a link between Burnham and an otherwise unknown minster at Staines in Middlesex. There was also a tenurial link between Boveney and the minster at Cookham in Berkshire.[34] It may therefore be that the dip slope of the Chilterns had been converted from centres outside the later county, including St. Albans, although that is even more conjectural.

It seems, therefore, that Buckinghamshire acquired half-a-dozen minster churches during the initial conversion period, c.660–725. Only Aylesbury definitely belongs to this phase, while Buckingham possibly does so. It may be that there were early churches which did not survive the upheavals of the Danish wars and settlement in the century and a half after 850, and whose endowments were either lost to the church, or re-assigned to later foundations. Wing has only physical evidence of its early importance, but the ring crypt which survives below the chancel suggests that it once housed important relics. The problem is whether these remains were those of a local saint, possibly the founder of the minster, or had been brought from a distance.

VI

There remains one individual who is likely to have played a role in the conversion of our area, although this is nowhere made explicit in the sources. Wilfrid was a Northumbrian of aristocratic origin born in the 630s, who became a bishop of a succession of sees, including York, Hexham and Leicester. After the death of his patron Oswiu in 670, however, Wilfrid was engaged in a series of acrimonious disputes with successive kings and their consorts. This led to several periods of exile, during which he became involved in the conversion of pagan areas such as Sussex, parts of Mercia, and even Friesland in the present-day Netherlands.[35]

The principal account of Wilfrid is contained in a biography by his priest Eddius Stephanus, written soon after his death in 709. The latter occurred at Wilfrid's church at Oundle in Middle Anglia. Unfortunately, Eddius' *Life* is as much hagiography as biography, and is short on dates and often imprecise as to the location of the events it records.

Wilfrid was educated at the Irish missionary centre on Lindisfarne. He travelled to Canterbury and Rome in the 650s, and was tonsured at Lyon in 658. He had a Roman view of the way in which the English church should develop, including a central role and high status for the bishop. He founded a monastery at Ripon around 660, and was ordained priest c.663, by Agilbert, the Frankish bishop of Dorchester, who was visiting Northumbria. He may have given Wilfrid an awareness of the task facing the church in the south Midlands.

A crucial point in Wilfrid's life came soon after, when he was a key player in persuading Oswiu to adopt the Roman method of Easter calculation at the synod of Whitby (664).[36] That year Wilfrid became bishop of York, with authority over the whole of Northumbria. His lifestyle and evident relish for political intrigue led to his deprivation after only a couple of years, however, and he retired to Ripon. Eddius states that Wilfrid responded to 'frequent invitations from king Wulfhere [of Mercia] to carry out episcopal duties'.[37] Mercia suffered from a dearth of bishops and an over-extended realm. Following Jaruman (c.662–c.667) there was a gap until Chad, who had been ousted from York to readmit Wilfrid, became bishop at Lichfield in 669.

Wilfrid could have answered Wulfhere's appeals between 667 and 669. Eddius gives no clue to the location of any churches founded by Wilfrid in Mercia on the 'many pieces of ground in various places' which Wulfhere granted to him. One of them was probably Oundle. Other possibilities include Brixworth, where a great basilican church survives, and even Wing.

The arrival of archbishop Theodore in 669 led to changes in the English church. Wilfrid regained the see of York and soon founded another monastery at Hexham, like Ripon built on a lavish scale in stone. Both had crypts for the veneration of relics (cf. Wing and Brixworth).[38] Theodore at last began to subdivide the unwieldy English dioceses in the 670s, creating three new sees in Northumbria and two in Mercia. Wilfrid set off to Rome to appeal, although he spent a year in Frisia converting pagans, and did not return until 680. He soon incurred the enmity of King Ecgfrith and was in exile again from 681–6. He began the conversion of the South Saxons and the Isle of Wight, acting as the first bishop of Selsey. First, he had been received in Mercia by the *præfectus* Berhtwald, a nephew of king Æþelred.[39] Here Wilfrid founded a monastery which Eddius says was occupied by his monks 'to this day' (i.e. after 709). A charter of 686 granting land in Gloucestershire to Malmesbury calls Berhtwald sub-king, probably with authority in the far south-west of Mercia.[40] Although not of direct relevance to the conversion in our region, this episode follows the same model of minster foundation and endowment already noted at Aylesbury c.660.

In 686 Wilfrid was reinstated by Theodore, but a dispute about Ripon developed, and Wilfrid again left for exile in Mercia. He stayed from 691 until 702, acting as bishop at Leicester, the see for Middle Anglia.[41] He continued to establish new churches. As usual, Eddius does not specify where these were, but some may have been in or near the later Buckinghamshire. Again, Wing is a possibility, as are North Crawley and Oakley. Wilfrid returned to Northumbria, but was deposed again in 703, and set off once more to Rome, an extremely arduous journey for a man of seventy. He returned in 705, and assumed the bishopric of Hexham.[42]

Wilfrid thus spent much time in Mercia between 665 and 709, and may well have played a role in the conversion of our region, although this cannot be verified in the absence of charters. Royal involvement in the founding and ruling of minsters such as Aylesbury and Bicester, especially the role played by royal women as early abbesses, is consistent with what we know from Bede and other contemporary sources about kingdoms from Kent to Northumbria. The sub-kings who ruled Mercia under Wulfhere and Æþelred also played an important role in creating the network of primary minsters: Friðuwald was associated with Chertsey in Surrey, Friðuric with Breedon in Leicestershire, and Berhtwald with Malmesbury. The early bishops of Anglo-Saxon origin, most of whom came from a royal/aristocratic milieu, also played a key role in founding and endowing new churches. Eorcenweald, bishop of London from 675–693 played a role in three of the four kingdoms in the London area, as Wilfrid did through much of

England at various times.[43]

The minster at Staines, known only from a chance reference in Domesday Book, may have been either a direct foundation of a seventh-century bishop of London, or a colony of Eorcenweald's church at Chertsey. In either case, it could have acted as the missionary centre and mother church for south-east Buckinghamshire, giving rise in turn to new churches like Burnham.

VII

Having examined the initial conversion to Christianity, we turn to the period up to the upheavals caused by Scandinavian incursion and settlement after 850, and to the subsequent two centuries to the Norman Conquest. Here we are on even more difficult ground, as the sketchy sources make those of the seventh century seem prolific.

Between 700 and 850, our region was fully integrated into the Mercian kingdom. For most of this period Mercia exercised hegemony over southern England, especially under Æþelbald and Offa (716–796). Buckinghamshire suffers from an almost complete dearth of charters for this period and is likewise ignored by the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle and other narrative sources.

It seems that three, possibly six primary minsters had been established by c.750: Aylesbury, Buckingham and Wing, with North Crawley, Oakley and Burnham as possibles. It remains to consider any churches founded 725–850, and after 900, especially during the revival of monastic and pastoral activity from the mid-tenth century. A fourth phase includes the creation of what later became the "typical" village church in large numbers, which was a feature of the eleventh century and later, as individual landowners successfully eroded the monopoly hitherto enjoyed by the minsters. Before turning to the exiguous charter evidence, we will return to Domesday Book.

The Buckinghamshire folios contain very little information about the church, much of it enigmatic. It is the ancient minsters which mainly feature, because they possessed significant and valuable endowments. Thus, the church at Buckingham was held by the bishop of Lincoln (a see created in the 1070s with the removal of the diocesan centre from Dorchester).[44] It had land for four ploughs, together with a recorded population of sixteen (a total of 80–90 people), a mill, meadow land and wood for fencing. It was worth £6 per

annum (cf. £16 for the borough itself). Ten cottars were probably connected with the borough.[45] The bishop also held Gawcott, which we are told 'lies in the church of Buckingham',[46] part of the minster's endowment. Here two bordars and a slave farmed about 150 acres, probably a demesne farm. The name of the settlement means 'rent-paying cottage[s]' (OE *gafol, cot*).

The church at Aylesbury was also in the hands of the bishop of Lincoln, but its endowment is not mentioned. Its special status is alluded to in the entry for Stoke [Mandeville], which had been held by the bishop before 1066, together with the church.[47] This estate had 21 ploughs and a recorded population of 45 (c.230 people), of whom eighteen were bordars paying rent of 20/- per year, and probably associated with the urban life of Aylesbury. Old English *stoc* generally signifies 'secondary settlement', 'outlying farmstead', although it can also have religious overtones.[48] Its use in this case may derive from a long-standing connection between the minster and its estate beyond the edge of the royal manor. The key item states that 'from the eight hundreds which lie in the circuit of Aylesbury, each sokeman who has one hide or more pays one load of corn to this church'. As usual, this information conceals as much as it reveals. Latin *circuitus* may mean something technical, akin to the circuits of counties allotted to groups of Domesday commissioners, but equally might mean only the area surrounding Aylesbury. Also, it may not mean eight Hundreds, but rather lands assessed at 800 hides. The total assessment for the three Hundreds of Aylesbury is 382 hides, and for the three Chiltern Hundreds 366 hides, making a total of 748. Alternatively, the Cottesloe group totalled 371 hides (753 with Aylesbury). Given the uncertainty about the presence of a primary minster in the Chiltern region, the former would seem more likely. Sokemen virtually disappeared locally after 1066, so it is impossible to know how many such men had been affected. In Middlesex, where details of landholdings are given, 36 men were in this category in 1086, in a county assessed at 880 hides.[49] Applied locally, this might indicate that around thirty or so individuals owed the render of a load of corn to Aylesbury church.

A second tribute to Aylesbury minster is noted under Stoke. Prior to 1066, but not later, each sokeman owed one acre of corn, or fourpence. It is even

more difficult to estimate what this render might have been worth to the church, but it has all the hallmarks of antiquity, perhaps even before the concept of tithe was fully established. The ability to commute the render to a money payment, however, has a later, possibly eleventh-century feel to it. The apparently abrupt abolition under William I probably reflects the creation of more and more local churches by manorial lords (*eigenkirchen* – proprietory churches), whose owners would have objected to the continued flow of resources to Aylesbury.[50]

Haddenham had a church with a priest called Gilbert and its own assessment of three hides, one plough and four families, worth 60/- (cf. the whole estate £40).[51] Haddenham had passed to the archbishop of Canterbury since 1066. In the absence of any charters, it is impossible to guess when this church was founded, although given its proximity to Aylesbury, it must have been a "secondary" minster, perhaps established in the tenth century.

There are several references in Domesday to *homo domini*, 'a man of God', holding land in 1066.[52] These seem unlikely to have been parish priests, since *presbyter* is used for them, they may have been monks or hermits. At Clifton Reynes, Wulfwin held one hide in 1066.[53] At Soulbury, Dot held half a virgate (possibly 15–20 acres), with four oxen, worth four shillings.[54] On one of the numerous estates at Lavendon, Wulfric held five virgates jointly with Burgred in 1066.[55] They are both described as thegns, in this case a local usage denoting sokemen. This land was worth 20/-. Lavendon is one of the few churches to have possible Anglo-Saxon fabric (see below).

Monasteries outside Buckinghamshire had been endowed with land in the county for centuries, and this continued to and after 1066. Westminster abbey had acquired Denham in 1065, for example.[56] Its estate at East Burnham was in lay hands in 1066, although the three thegns who held it owed five ora (one ora=16d – so the render totalled 7/6) to the minster at Staines.[57] Staines was also a Westminster estate, although there is no reference in the Middlesex Domesday to a church. The bishop of Winchester held two major estates, at [West] Wycombe and Ivinghoe before 1066, although no charters survive to tell us when he acquired them, nor is any church mentioned in connection with either estate.

St. Albans was supposed to have obtained its estates at Granborough, Aston Abbots and Winslow, from Offa of Mercia in 792,[58] who was said to have had them from abbot Alhmund as a forfeit for not going on a military expedition. We do not know if Alhmund was the head of a local minster, or if these three estates had merely been part of the endowment of a church some distance away.[59] A grant by Offa in the 790s is possible, since he seems to have been concerned to promote St. Albans, although the estates may well have been lost in the uncertain times of the ninth and tenth centuries, before being granted anew by a later, west Saxon ruler, in a charter which has not survived.

The process by which the nuns of Barking in Essex acquired their sole local estate at Slapton is unfortunately lost to view. Given its remoteness, it seems unlikely to have been an original endowment. It probably came about after the abbey was refounded in the 970s.[60] Perhaps a lay owner of Slapton had some connection with Barking, possibly through a relative who became a nun there. The canons of St. Frideswide's church in Oxford had obtained their ten-hide estate at Upper Winchendon before 1002, when their original title was destroyed in the St. Brice's Day massacre.[61] A new charter was issued in 1004. Cookham minster possessed one hide at Boveney before 1066, but again there is no indication of how long-standing the link might have been. During the eighth century, Berkshire was debatable land between Wessex and Mercia, after which it remained with the former, south Buckinghamshire remaining Mercian.[62]

Buckland was in the hands of the bishop of Dorchester/Lincoln in 1066 and 1086. A characteristic strip-estate of the Vale and Chilterns, it was assessed at ten hides. The name derives from OE *bocland*, 'land granted by charter', but the document concerned no longer survives. Its relatively small size, together with the discontinuities in the history of the bishopric of Dorchester, suggest that this was a tenth/eleventh-century grant, Buckland being detached from Drayton Beauchamp, another ten-hide strip. Both had a common history as a detached part of Yardley Hundred.

It had been unusual for continental churches to hold property in England before 1066, but by 1086, one of the 2½-hide estates at Crafton in Wing had been given to the monks of St. Nicholas of Angers by its new tenant-in-chief the count of Mortain.[63] Similarly, the count had granted an eleven-hide

estate at Marsh Gibbon and six hides at Ickford to the monks of Grestain.[64] Walter Giffard, sheriff and largest lay landowner in post-conquest Buckinghamshire, had given five hides in Great Woolstone to the monks of St. Peter of Couture.[65] None was associated with the creation of new cells of their respective monasteries, and their total value was only £21 per annum, little enough when the cost of administering such remote properties is taken into account. The foundation of new religious houses in the county did not begin until the end of the eleventh century.

Another Domesday problem is the ownership of land in 1066 by the "men" of religious houses which passed thereafter to laymen. For example, three men of St. Albans held two estates at Pitstone, which passed to Mortain.[66] These seem likely to have been men who had commended themselves to the abbot in some way, the land remaining theirs to dispose of. More complicated is Godwin, a priest of archbishop Stigand, who held three virgates in Ivinghoe Aston, on which were four oxen (half a ploughteam) and one villein.[67] This passed to the count of Mortain after 1066. Was Godwin the priest of an otherwise unrecorded pre-conquest church at Ivinghoe? Or was he merely a sokeman of Stigand who had numerous "men", religious and lay, scattered across the county? Ivinghoe itself was held by the bishop of Winchester, and was a substantial twenty-hide estate. It may have had a church by 1066. The bishop until 1070 was none other than Stigand, a noted pluralist. This strengthens the case for Godwin being the parish priest, and his holding the glebe land.

Another priest called Godwin had held half-a-hide at Tyringham in 1066, which passed to William Peverel. Nothing before the twelfth century survives in the fabric of St. Peter's church, although there may have been an earlier building, whose priest was Godwin.[68] At Wingrave, Thurstan the priest held half-a-hide from Miles Crispin 1086, although he had not been there in 1066, when Leofmer held the land. It had four oxen and one villein, and was worth 10/- a year (cf. Ivinghoe Aston above).[69] There is no architectural evidence for a church at Wingrave this early, but it is possible that we have here an indirect record of its foundation between 1066 and 1086.

At Hartwell, Wulfmer, one of king Edward's priests, had held two hides in 1066, which passed to William the chamberlain. This seems more likely to have been an economic, rather than an eccelsiastical, link, since Wulfmer held land in three other shires.[70] More probable evidence of a local church is to be found at Wavendon, where Godwin the priest held one virgate from Leofwin of Nuneham, in both 1066 and 1086.[71] This land had four oxen and three bordars, and was worth 5/- per annum. It may represent glebeland.

The sum total of the Domesday evidence for churches in Buckinghamshire is meagre and more than usually allusive. The best that can be said is that Buckingham, Aylesbury, Haddenham and North Crawley had churches, and that Ivinghoe, Tyringham, Wingrave, Soulbury and Wavendon may have had them. To this small tally we may add Whitchurch, whose name denotes a church either built of stone, or of wood painted or plastered in some way.[72] Stone churches were not common at the parish level in the eleventh century, especially in areas lacking good quality building stone, so the latter meaning may apply, unless the two thegns who had held Whitchurch in 1066 were wealthy enough to afford a more enduring fabric.

VIII

Buckinghamshire is not well served by pre-conquest charters, and none of them provides direct evidence for the existence of churches in the county. Few of them even indicate ownership of local estates by churches located elsewhere. For example, the well-known grant of Winslow, to St. Albans in 792 tells us nothing of how this impinged upon the rights and pastoral duties of the minsters at Aylesbury and Buckingham. It is perhaps suggestive that the block of territory granted to St. Albans lay on the outer margins of their jurisdictions, and may have been intended to lead to the creation of a new, secondary minster. Although Winslow and Granborough were retained into the later medieval period, there was no link between St. Albans and Swanbourne in 1066. This was also true of Turville, which was said in a dubious charter of 796 to have been granted by Offa to St. Albans, although the VCH states that part of the parish *was* a St. Albans manor.[73]

In her will of 966x975, Ælfgifu, the widow of king Eadwig, left Bledlow to the New Minster at Winchester, Whaddon to Romsey abbey and Chesham to Abingdon.[74] In no case did the connection survive in 1066.[75] We have no clue as to whether Ælfgifu's beneficiaries took steps to pro-

vide churches on these estates.

Monks Risborough was subject to a complex series of transactions after c.990.[76] It was acquired by Canterbury some time after 903, when it had been granted by the rulers of Mercia and Wessex to a layman. It was given to bishop Æscwig of Dorchester by archbishop Sigeric of Canterbury in exchange for a substantial payment to buy off the Danes who were threatening to burn Christ Church, Canterbury. This position was formalised in a grant by king Æþelred to Æscwig in 994–5. The land was finally bequeathed to Christ Church by archbishop Ælfric in 1003–4. The church at Monks Risborough is dedicated to St. Dunstan, the only example in the county. This clearly marks it as a Canterbury foundation, although it is impossible to tell if this had happened before 1066.

In 1015, Æþelstan, son of Æþelred the Unready, bequeathed an estate at Marlow to the Old Minster at Winchester, which he had purchased from his father.[77] None of the four estates called Marlow were in the hands of Winchester in 1066. It is possible that the church at Great Marlow dates from the eleventh century. It appears that St. Wulfstan, one of the key clerical figures of the early eleventh century visited Marlow, and that may have provided the catalyst for a church there.[78]

The Wulfnoth who bequeathed Halton to Canterbury at some time in the 1020s or 1030s,[79] subject to a life interest for his son Toki, is just the sort of layman who might have founded an *eigenkirche* on his property. It was a five-hide estate, the minimum possession for a true thegn, and this was the time when the erosion of the ancient minsterlands, such as that of Aylesbury, was beginning in earnest. The same might have been true of Wulfstan, who gave his ten-hide estate at Denham to Westminster abbey in 1065, the last year before the arrival of the Normans.[80]

IX

Our sources indicate that there was probably a wave of church-building going on across Buckinghamshire in the second half of the eleventh century. The present parochial system was emerging from the old minster territories. The creation of a class of middling landowners by the break-up of the royal patrimony, the injection of a relatively free society in the Danelaw and the creation of new, nucleated settlements with communal open field systems all meant that the landscape after 900 was taking on many familiar characteristics. It was natural that new landowners, often based on their estates, with new villages, would want to round off their property with a church which was a source of profit to them, just like the village house plots and the mill.

Unfortunately, the survival of church fabric datable to the Anglo-Saxon period is even scarcer than the relevant documentation. There is however some benefit in that fabric, charters and Domesday entries rarely coincide, which lengthens the meagre tally of churches in the county in the late-eleventh century somewhat. There is neither space nor authorial expertise to allow for a detailed examination of the architectural evidence. For those who wish to pursue this aspect further, the volumes of Taylor & Taylor and the references therein are essential reading, not least because they highlight the perils and pitfalls of finding and dating fabric which has survived for a minimum of nine centuries.[81] Given the chances of rebuilding since 1086, absence of notionally Anglo-Saxon fabric should be treated with the same caution as a lack of documentary evidence.

All Saints Wing is obviously the largest and by far the finest survivor, a major basilican church of the seventh-eighth centuries, modified in the tenth-eleventh.[82] Stone churches in the earliest phase of the conversion were the exception, especially in an area where the local stone was not plentiful. The size of the nave, and the apsidal chancel with its ring crypt all bespeak the importance of Wing. Alas, we do not know whose relics were venerated there,[83] nor any details of its foundation. Wing may have been a daughter church of the minsters at Aylesbury or Leighton Buzzard. Equally, it may have been founded independently, for example by Wilfrid (see above). The local Hundredal meeting-place was in Wing parish, and the name derives from a group whose territory probably covered the same area, if not more. It clearly had significance as a central place. The main east-west route through Wing is a continuation of a track called the Edeway in Bedfordshire (OE þeod, weg, 'people's way'), and there may have been a north-south Roman road in the area.[84]

Pre-conquest remains in local churches other than Wing do not amount to much, even if we include Caversfield, which was a detached part of the county from before 1066 until the nineteenth century. Here, St. Laurence's church has late Anglo-Saxon work at the base of its tower. The

building of a church on this five-hide estate would be typical of the period 1050–1100, possibly by Edward, a man of Tostig who held it in 1066.[85] At the opposite extremity of the shire, Iver church (St. Peter) has some Anglo-Saxon work in the nave and chancel walls.[86] This was an important estate in 1086, and the church may have been a secondary minster foundation. The church was valued at fifty marks (£33/6/8) in 1291, one of the top dozen in the county.

St. Michael's Lavendon has some pre-conquest remnants in its tower, nave and chancel.[87] This was a highly fragmented vill, both in 1066 and after, and the church seems likely to have been built by one of the more important thegns. Burgred is a possible candidate, since he held about nine hides out of twenty. On one holding, the joint owner Wulfric is described in Domesday as 'a man of God', and may have been the local priest.

More marginal, in the sense that the fabric which remains could belong to either the pre- or post-conquest periods, are St. Mary, Clifton Reynes, and St. John the Baptist, Little Missenden.[88] The former has possible Saxon work in the nave and tower, but no early doorways or windows survive. At Missenden, there is possibly eleventh-century work in the nave and chancel. Judging from the later history of the advowson, the church would have belonged to the one hide held in 1086 by the count of Mortain as successor to Alwin.[89]

Anglo-Saxon fabric may survive in other churches, hidden from view by later plaster and paint, but it seems unlikely after decades of research that the tally would dramatically increase the number of churches in existence in 1066. It is perhaps unfortunate that the Norman Conquest took place at a time of vigorous new church building, and that the so-called Norman style took some time to filter down to the local level, perhaps not until the mid-twelfth century in some cases. Certainly almost all parochial churches in Buckinghamshire seem to have been erected by 1200, and some of those which appear to be Norman may be rebuildings of earlier, wooden edifices. Without much more in the way of archaeological and architectural evidence, however, it would be unwise to estimate whether the number of churches in the county after four centuries of Christian endeavour was fifty, or a hundred, rather than the score or so for which there is robust evidence.

X

Reference has already been made to the values of churches in the year 1291. These data come from the so-called *Taxatio Ecclesiastica* of Pope Nicholas IV, which provides the first comprehensive listing of churches in our area.[90] Certain churches stand out with especially high values, several of them known minsters. High values assigned to churches which are in otherwise unremarkable places may be indicative of an earlier special significance. That is, erstwhile Anglo-Saxon minster churches may still have retained assets and rights at the end of the thirteenth century which mark them out as different, even though by that time the full network of parochial churches had been created. It must be emphasised, however, that in the centuries which had elapsed since 1066, churches of all sorts had been endowed with lands and goods which may well skew the data presented in *Taxatio Ecclesiastica*.

The values in Table 1 have been converted to a common basis of marks, which is how many are expressed in the original (1 mark=13/4=£0.67). Details are given for 168 locations, although further churches and chapels are subsumed within some of the entries. Some of the minsters had such dependencies, indicating that they retained the ability to collect dues beyond the later parish in which they stood, and were also able to prevent some chapelries from attaining parochial status. Smaller churches have been grouped. Some groups contain more than ten or twenty locations, since large numbers of churches share a few common values: eleven have values of twenty marks, eight of fifteen marks, and no fewer than eighteen were assessed at ten marks per annum (£6.67).

The average value of all Buckinghamshire churches in 1291 was almost twenty-one marks (£14) per annum. This was very skewed by the large number of low-value churches, since only forty-eight had values above the average, and of these half were worth thirty marks (£20) or less. High-value churches were therefore very much the exception. Some of them are known to have been Anglo-Saxon minsters: Buckingham, Aylesbury, Wing, Haddenham and North Crawley, although the latter was assessed at only thirty marks, having apparently lost whatever significance it may have had when the Domesday survey was undertaken.

The problem remains: which other churches had once been minsters, either "primary", established

TABLE 1

Buckinghamshire 1291: Church values [marks]

Rank	Location/Group		Value	Average
1	Buckingham Prebend/Horley		270	
2	Aylesbury Prebend/Chapels		185	
3	Hanslope		70	
4	Amersham		68	
5	Burnham		61	
6	Chesham		60	
7	Ivinghoe		55	
8	Wycombe		52	
9=	Wendover		50	
9=	Olney		50	
9=	Great Marlow		50	
9=	Wraysbury/Langley		50	
9=	Iver		50	
14=	Haddenham		46.5	
14=	Wing		46.5	
16	Edlesborough		45	
17	Newton		41.5	
18=	Averingdown [W. Wycombe]		40	
18=	Oakley/Brill/Boarstall		40	
20	Newport Pagnell/Lt. Linford		37	
1–20		TOTAL	1367.5	68.37
21–30		Total	314	31.40
31–40		Total	242	24.20
41–60		Total	414.6	20.73
61–80		Total	367.5	16.70
81–100		Total	250.2	12.51
101–120		Total	245.3	10.22
121–140		Total	170.9	8.55
141–168		Total	115.3	6.07

during the conversion period c.660–725, or "secondary", founded after c.850 to fill in the extensive gaps in the primary network? Several high-value churches are in market towns, which from their population and prosperity might be expected to have well-endowed churches, even if they had not been founded before 1066. In this group are Amersham, Chesham, High Wycombe, Marlow, Olney, Wendover and Newport Pagnell. There is no evidence in Domesday Book that any but the last of these had any urban/commercial attributes. Some or all of the others may have had prescriptive markets. If they also possessed churches by 1066, these may have been minsters, probably later founda-

tions. Wycombe, with links to the bishopric of Winchester and to St. Wulfstan, its administrative importance, and evidence of archaic royal renders, is perhaps the best candidate here for a "primary" minster.[91]

Rural churches of high value are even more problematic, since they may have been endowed by pious benefactors after the Conquest, rather than having residual high status from before 1066. Hanslope, assessed at seventy marks, would certainly fill a substantial gap in the network of high-status pre-Conquest churches in the far north of the county, perhaps equating to the territory of Bunsty Hundred, itself named after a possible early religious site.[92]

Burnham, although of high value itself [61 marks; £40/13/4], seems to have been associated with an otherwise unknown minster at Staines in west Middlesex. (Staines and its daughter church at Laleham were assessed at 81½ marks in 1291, the most valuable in Middlesex.) It may be that Burnham was a secondary minster, serving the territory of the eponymous Hundred.

Iver was a large estate in 1086, and as such might have had a church by then, possibly serving as the minster for Stoke Hundred, although Wraysbury church was equally valuable and a potential candidate for this role. Ivinghoe, the seventh most valuable church in 1291 may likewise have been the mother church for Yardley Hundred. Neighbouring Edlesborough, however, was almost as valuable, although once again there is no clue to their origins. Ivinghoe was in the hands of the bishop of Winchester before 1066, and a church may have been founded in the late-tenth to early-eleventh century following the revival of Winchester itself.

It seems, therefore, that in addition to the five known minsters in Buckinghamshire, there are six places which may be considered "possibles": Hanslope; Brill/Oakley; Burnham; Ivinghoe/ Edlesborough; Iver/Wraysbury and High/West Wycombe. Taken together, eleven churches still represent an extremely attenuated provision for the whole shire. If it be assumed that each of the eighteen Hundreds which made up the shire had some kind of minster church at the end of the first millennium, then Lamua, Stotfold, Ashendon, Waddesdon, Mursley, Risborough and Seckloe Hundreds seem to lack this basic provision, although they may still have been under the control of the relevant "primary" minster. There are no real pointers in the church dedications of Buckinghamshire, always assuming these to be of great antiquity and not subject to change. With the exception of North Crawley (St. Firmin) and Monks Risborough (St. Dunstan), almost all come from a relatively limited stock of names and none commemorates an Anglo-Saxon saint apart from St. Swithin at Swanbourne. St. Andrew, Wraysbury may, however, be a pointer to early importance, as this dedication is suggestive of early foundation in England.[93]

Where these "missing" secondary minsters were can only be conjectured. In Lamua Hundred, Marsh Gibbon is a possibility. Its location on the Oxfordshire boundary need not invalidate its claim, since several known minsters occupy similar posi-

tions, having been founded before shire boundaries were crystallised in the tenth century. Buckingham town lies north of the Ouse and as such within the territory of Stotfold Hundred. It may therefore always have served as the local mother church for lands on both sides of the river. Leckhampstead, worth only 24 marks in 1291, is probably too close to Buckingham. A better candidate would be Stowe, although that too abuts Buckingham. Its name, while merely denoting 'a place' in Old English, often has a religious connotation (cf. Stow-on-the-Wold).[94] Unfortunately, nothing is known of its early history, although its location on a Roman road adjacent to Lamport (OE *lang port*, 'long market [town]') hints at some special significance. Perhaps it had once been associated with an unknown Anglo-Saxon saint.

In Ashendon Hundred, which had presumably been in the *parochia* of Oakley minster, Quinton was a possible secondary minster, worth 33 marks in 1291. Waddesdon, a 25-mark church in 1291 is the obvious candidate in the eponymous Hundred. In Mursley Hundred, the St. Albans estate of Winslow (28 marks) is most valuable church, but it should remembered that Mursley both gave its name to the Hundred, and to the later Rural Deanery. It also grew to be a market centre in the thirteenth century, albeit one which had already failed by 1279.[95]

In Risborough Hundred, Monks Risborough is probably the best candidate for the "mother" church, although the dedication to St. Dunstan can hardly date from earlier than the 990s. Princes Risborough (St. Mary) has a parish which is twice as large, and this may represent the location a new minster taking part of the old *parochia* of Aylesbury. Finally, in Seckloe Hundred, the only obvious choice is Wolverton church, albeit only with a value of 22½ marks in 1291. Like Iver at the opposite end of the county, this was a large unitary estate in 1066, although divided between three thegns. It had a large contingent of slaves and a demesne of nine hides out of a total of twenty, suggestive of a former royal possession, which would have enhanced the chances of a church being founded there before the end of the tenth century

XI

Having reviewed the various sources for the history of the first four centuries of Christianity in Buckinghamshire, it remains to draw together the evi-

dence. It must be re-emphasised at the outset that the county is badly served in almost every respect when it comes to this crucial aspect of its early medieval history. Whether it be the early background to the conversion, the survival of documents, Domesday Book, or architectural and archaeological remains, this area has little to show.

The timing and direction of the original impetus for converting pagan Anglo-Saxons is obscure, although it seems most likely that it began in the 650s and that the role of the Mercian royal house was probably most influential in founding the first minster churches. As such, Buckinghamshire came late to the conversion process, in part reflecting the obdurate paganism of Penda, but also the fact that it lay remote from the key foci of missionary activity. It seems likely that Wilfrid played a role in the early decades, perhaps even founding one or more minsters.

Compared with these few shafts of light, the period from about 725 to 1000 is even more obscure, although it must have seen at least the basic framework of primary and secondary minsters completed and nominal conversion of the bulk of the population. The spread of local, usually proprietorial churches which became the parish churches of the eleventh century and beyond is likewise shrouded in obscurity. With few exceptions, most of them minsters, Domesday Book passes over the provision of churches in the county at the end of the eleventh century, and it is not until 1291 that we have anything approaching a full list of churches and their relative values.

Despite this, the county was evidently converted and equipped with churches in the same way as other parts of seventh-century England, with the ruling elites providing both the initial converts and the early endowments for new churches, and often their earliest heads. The early bishops often belonged to this milieu, a fact which doubtless facilitated the process. How the new religion filtered down through the mass of the population can only be guessed at, although it seems reasonable to suppose that the average peasant in the local countryside had little or no regular contact with the church prior to the eleventh century, however efficient and energetic the pastoral care was. Even where they received instruction and the sacraments, the majority are unlikely to have had a very deep involvement, compared with later centuries, when the church was the focus of each local community, its priest, ideally at least, a resident member.

One fact which does emerge reasonably clearly is that the primary minsters seem to have been provided on the basis of one for each of the later triple Hundreds. This suggests that these units were of some antiquity, and certainly by the late-seventh century, that is at the time of the conversion, 300-hide territories seem to have been the smallest entities recognised as separate polities. They long predate the creation of the shire in the tenth century. Whether they were already subdivided in the way that is recorded in Domesday Book is not clear, but it seems that the individual Hundreds may each have had a secondary minster church, dating from the ninth-eleventh centuries. After c.1000 there was a trend away from district churches, using groups of priests and monks to cover extensive tracts of country, as landowners began to establish churches which they could control, and profit from. Some of these had certainly appeared in the county by 1066, but there were probably more than are mentioned in Domesday Book.

All in all, the church occupied a progressively more important role in society, and in the local landscape and economy from its first appearance around 660, and it is unfortunate that we know so little of the detail.

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