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Bassett, Steven

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The hidation of the Hwicce: investigating its halving between the eighth century and 1086

STEVEN BASSETT

ABSTRACT

The total hidage of land in the Anglo-Saxon kingdom of the Hwicce at its greatest extent appears to have been halved at an unknown date between the eighth century and the late eleventh. The article examines the relatively small number of surviving original texts of charters and leases which relate to land both in that kingdom and in all other parts of the kingdom of the Mercians into which it was at length subsumed. With other apparent instances of major hidage reductions having been found thereby elsewhere in the latter area, the article then argues that they were all effected either by the West Saxon kings of England in the course of the tenth century or, arguably more likely (even though the evidence is meagre), at a much earlier date by Mercian kings following the piecemeal enlargement of their kingdom by the absorption of formerly independent neighbouring polities.

In the course of an investigation into the probable location and extent of the territory inhabited by the *Arosate*, and into their relations with their much larger neighbours the Hwicce, a tentative conclusion was reached which, if accepted, would have major implications for our understanding of the history of Mercian rule in midland England.¹ The *Arosate* are known to us solely from their inclusion in the Tribal Hidage, a probable late seventh- or eighth-century Mercian tribute list.² It assigns to them an assessment of 600 hides, while the Hwicce (of whom they appear still to have been independent at the time of compilation of the list's original elements), were assessed at 7000 hides.³ By the end of the eighth century

¹ S. Bassett, *An Anglo-Saxon Minster and its Chapels in their Evolving Medieval Landscape: the Wootton Wawen Project* (in preparation), ch. 5, 'The *Arosate* and the *Stoppingas*'.

² There has been much discussion of its probable date of composition: e.g., W. Davies and H. Vierck, 'The Contexts of Tribal Hidage: Social Aggregates and Settlement Patterns', *FS* 8 (1974), 223–93, at 226–7; S. Keynes, 'England, 700–900', in *The New Cambridge Medieval History. Volume II, c. 700–c. 900*, ed. R. McKitterick (Cambridge, 1995), pp. 18–42, at 24; J. Blair, 'The Tribal Hidage', in *The Blackwell Encyclopaedia of Anglo-Saxon England*, ed. M. Lapidge, J. Blair, S. Keynes, and D. Scragg (Oxford, 2001), pp. 455–6; N. J. Higham and M. J. Ryan, *The Anglo-Saxon World* (New Haven and London, 2013), p. 139; J. Baker, 'OE *sate* and the Historical Significance of "Folk" Names', *EME* 25.4 (2017), 417–42, at 432–3.

³ D. Dumville, 'The Tribal Hidage: an Introduction to Its Texts and Their History', in *The Origins of Anglo-Saxon Kingdoms*, ed. S. Bassett (London, 1989), pp. 225–30; A. Rumble, 'An Edition and

the *Arosate*, whose territory seems to have been centred on Alcester (Warwicks.),⁴ had been absorbed into the kingdom of the Hwicce and the coterminous diocese of Worcester. It is very likely, then, that as a result of this amalgamation of the two peoples the Hwicce were thereafter assessed at 7600 hides.

This, however, greatly exceeds the sum of the assessments recorded by Domesday Book for all land in the late eleventh-century diocese of Worcester (which arguably represents the area of the former kingdom of the Hwicce at its greatest extent). The total for 1086 has been calculated by the author as 3875¼ hides, which is the sum of the hidages of the following four areas (Fig. 1): (1) the putative former territory of the *Arosate*, which appears to be effectively mirrored by the interlocking Domesday hundreds of Ferncombe and Pathlow (236¼ hides);⁵ (2) the rest of the part of Warwickshire situated within the medieval diocese of Worcester (337½ hides); (3) Worcestershire, minus the parts of Doddingtree Hundred which were in the medieval diocese of Hereford (1121½ hides);⁶ and (4) Gloucestershire, east of the River Severn (2180 hides).⁷ It is the case that the total recorded assessment in 1086 of all land in the former kingdom of the Hwicce (3875¼ hides) amounts to almost exactly fifty-one per cent of the total of 7600 hides at which the area is arguably assessed in the Tribal Hidage. Calculating the Domesday hidage of any large area, such as a medieval shire or, as here, a diocese, is often fraught with unresolvable difficulties, and so this degree of reduction between the earlier and later totals can not be considered an exact one. Nevertheless, even if every quibble raised about how the calculation of the Domesday total was to lead to such and such a change being made, the resultant outcome would be sure to remain near enough to a halving for such an estimate to be taken as a reasonable working hypothesis.

The fact of a very substantial reduction is, then, undeniable; but when and why it was made, and by whom, are questions which will prove very difficult, if not impossible, to answer convincingly. The one way of proceeding which offers a chance of at least partial success is to study the assessments recorded in grants of

Translation of the Burghal Hidage, together with Recension C of the Tribal Hidage', in *The Defence of Wessex: the Burghal Hidage and Anglo-Saxon Fortification*, ed. D. Hill and A. R. Rumble (Manchester and New York, 1996), pp. 14–35.

⁴ Bassett, *An Anglo-Saxon Minster and its Chapels*, ch. 5.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ For the shire's total assessment of 1200 hides in 1086: *Domesday Book. 16: Worcestershire*, ed. F. Thorn and C. Thorn (Chichester, 1982), Appendix 1. The manors in Gloucestershire which belonged to the diocese of Hereford in 1086 had a combined assessment then of seventy-eight and a half hides.

⁷ For Gloucestershire's total assessment of 2391 hides in 1086: *The Gloucestershire Domesday*, ed. A. Williams and R. W. H. Erskine (London, 1989), p. 15. In 1086 the area west of the Severn was in the diocese of Hereford and consisted of the hundreds of Botloe, Longbridge, Westbury, Bledisloe, Lydney, Tidenham and Twyford. This area's combined assessment then was 211 hides.

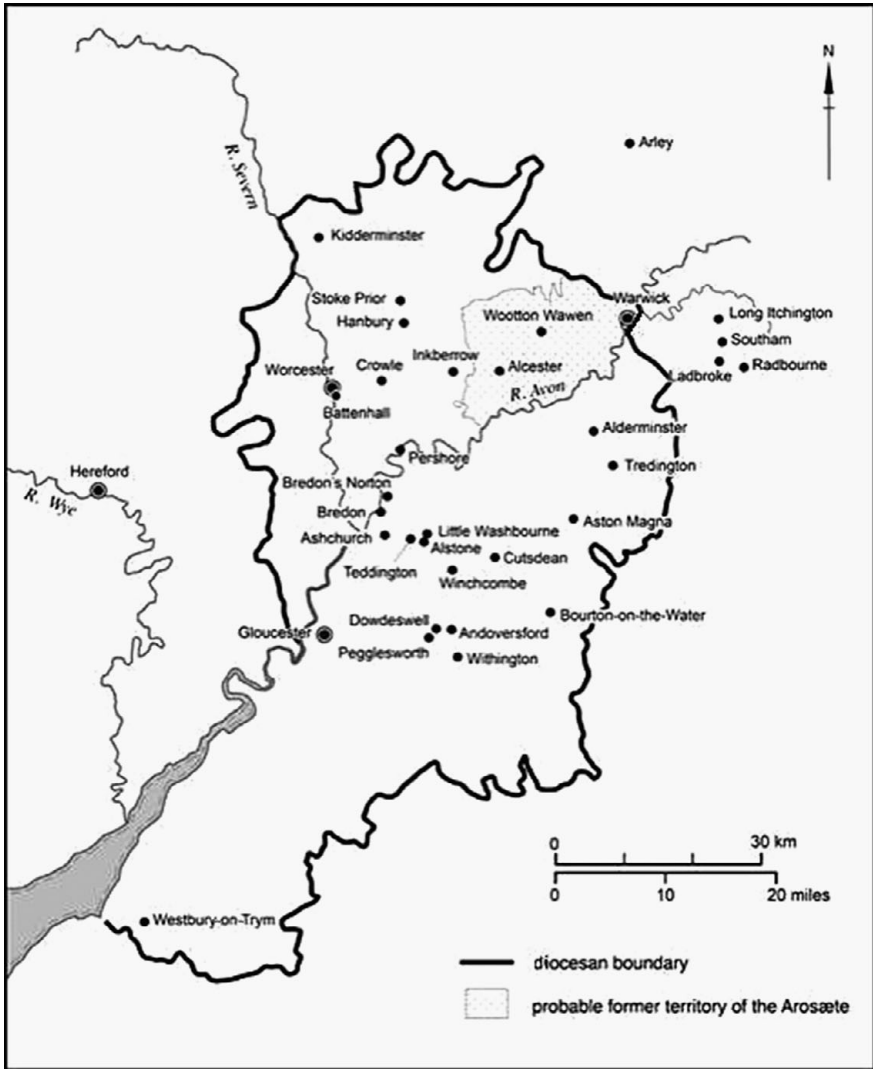


Figure 1: The diocese of Worcester at its estimated extent in the eighth century, when it was arguably coterminous with the kingdom of the Hwicce. The putative area of the formerly independent polity associated with the *Arosæte* is also shown. Named places are those referred to in the article. Map by author.

land of the intervening period. There is little point in looking at those given in the texts of grants and leases which are known to us only from later copies, no matter how good any copy's reputation is in general terms. Once the assessment of a

given area of land had been reduced, it would have been in its ecclesiastical possessor's urgent interest to ensure that its written title to it specified the new hidage, given that this figure was the basis on which the amount of future renders would have to be paid.⁸ In Worcester's case, therefore, we must assume that the contents of all three of its cartularies give revised assessments, not the original ones. If this is indeed so, the assessment of the land granted in 716 × 737 to the minster at Wootton Wawen, for example, would originally have been in the region of forty hides, not twenty as reported in Worcester's early eleventh-century cartulary.⁹

Accordingly, to stand any chance of identifying unrevised assessments, and thus of ascertaining if they are likely to have been substantially revised downwards in due course, we must look at the few surviving original charters for land in the area of the kingdom of the Hwicce, or else as second best at those texts which are generally thought to be near-contemporary copies (Fig. 1).¹⁰

This entire exercise is, however, fraught with difficulties. First, it is very likely that, in the form in which we have it, the Tribal Hidage is a compilation of at least two different periods,¹¹ so that there can be no certainty about the date by which the area associated with the *Arosate* had been formed. The list begins with the Mercians, however, and much of its content appears to relate to the inhabitants (or, in some cases, the dominant ones) of areas which were geographically close to the core of the Mercian kingdom and therefore likely to have become subordinate to its kings at an early date.¹² This makes it reasonable to view the area associated with the *Arosate* as one which existed, and was so called, by no later than the early eighth century. A second difficulty is that it is an essential premise of the present study that the Tribal Hidage was in origin an assessment list; but not everyone accepts that this is so.¹³

A third one concerns the single-sheet manuscripts which form the evidential basis of this study. There can be no certainty that they all have an incontestable

⁸ Cyril Hart also noted this likelihood, but saw it as an exceptional practice, not a normal one: C. Hart, *The Hidation of Northamptonshire* (Leicester, 1970), p. 34.

⁹ P. H. Sawyer, *Anglo-Saxon Charters: an Annotated List and Bibliography*, R. Hist. Soc. Guides and Handbooks 8 (London, 1968), no. [hereafter S] 94, supplemented by <http://www.esawyer.org.uk/about/index.html>.

¹⁰ As will become obvious from the detailed case studies which follow, where a hidage assessment is apparently the same in Domesday Book as in an earlier authentic charter or lease, any reduction which occurred must have done so by the date of issue of the charter or lease concerned. Where, however, it is different, the possibility exists that a reduction was made after that date of issue.

¹¹ Most recently, Baker, 'OE *sate*', p. 433.

¹² P. H. Sawyer, *From Roman Britain to Norman England* (London, 1978), p. 111.

¹³ For example, B. Yorke, 'Political and Ethnic Identity: a Case Study of Anglo-Saxon Practice', in *Social Identity in Early Medieval Britain*, ed. W. O. Frazer and A. Tyrrell (London and New York, 2000), pp. 69–89, at 83.

claim to be valid. Not knowing the circumstances (including exact date) of each one's creation makes it impossible to rule out the possibility that some were fraudulently composed in support of a claim, whether legitimate or otherwise, to disputed land. The ongoing publication of the texts of charters in their archival context, under the auspices of the British Academy, is affording us the necessary expert opinion on such matters,¹⁴ but few of those on which this present study depends are yet available in the series.

A fourth difficulty must also be mentioned – that of there usually being no way of knowing beyond doubt that a land unit recorded in Domesday Book (or a group of adjacent ones believed to have been formed by the fission of a larger one), had the same extent as an earlier, eponymous land unit granted by charter. This adds a further uncertainty to a comparison of the assessments borne by what is allegedly the same area at different periods.

Difficulties of these sorts necessitate a detailed and therefore often lengthy discussion of each charter or lease being considered. They also make it essential for readers to view what follows as a more than usually speculative exercise. This article's hypothesis is being offered, warts and all, in order to stimulate discussion. As ever, individuals must decide for themselves whether or not to go along with its inevitable leaps of faith and assumptions, and whether to accept or reject its tentatively presented conclusions. It is to be hoped that any debate which may ensue will further our understanding of the relations between early kingdoms and lesser polities and, secondly, of the role of assessments in Anglo-Saxon statecraft.

ASSESSMENTS GIVEN IN SINGLE-SHEET MANUSCRIPTS

Unfortunately, of the dozen or so such texts which date to before 1000 most are unusable for this purpose for one reason or another, as will now be shown.

STURE IN ISMERE

S 89, the earliest of these texts, records the grant in 736 of ten hides (*cassati*) of land in the territory named *Husmeræ* and another four hides at *Brochyl*. They were to be used for a minster's foundation, probably at Kidderminster (Worcs.).¹⁵ The land's extent is unknown, however;¹⁶ and even though four other charters refer to this

¹⁴ As listed at <https://www.thebritishacademy.ac.uk/publishing/specialist-scholarly-publications/anglo-saxon-charters/>.

¹⁵ London, British Library [hereafter BL], Cotton Augustus ii. 3, which is in an early eighth-century hand.

¹⁶ The included statement of its extent is a brief, very generalized one, so that no solution can be offered: D. Hooke, *Worcestershire Anglo-Saxon Charter-Bounds* (Woodbridge, 1990), pp. 61–3.

land, none includes a statement of its bounds.¹⁷ It is impossible to identify the land in the late eleventh-century landscape, therefore,¹⁸ and as a result to compare its assessment in and after 736 with what is recorded in Domesday Book for the same area.

ASTON IN STOKE PRIOR

Three versions exist of the text of a grant made in, it seems, 767 of five hides of land at Aston, which the boundary clause shows to have been in the parish of Stoke Prior (Worcs.).¹⁹ S 59 (dated 770), a single-sheet manuscript in a late eighth- or early ninth-century hand, was convincingly argued by Patrick Wormald to be a very early forgery.²⁰ The second version, S 58 (dated 767), is known only from two seventeenth-century copies,²¹ which both give the assessment – as does S 59 – as five hides. The copies are considered authentic; but in the absence of S 58's original manuscript it is impossible to know if this is the assessment which it always recorded or if, instead, it represents an emendation. Finally, S 60, dated 770 (which is known only in a late eleventh-century copy, which is based on S 59, and which grants all of Stoke Prior as a ten-hide estate), is universally seen as being spurious.²² Accordingly, we can not be sure what Aston's assessment actually was in the late eighth century. It may indeed have been five hides, arguably halving to two and a half hides at a later date; but in any case there is no way of our determining what assessment it carried when simply named as one of Stoke Prior's berewicks in 1086.²³ (Nor, of course, do we know the eighth-century assessment of the area of the Domesday manor of Stoke Prior, since S 60 must be assumed to reflect its late eleventh-century one.)

¹⁷ S 1826 (datable to 716 × 757), which gives no assessment; S 1411 (datable to 757 × 775); S 1257 (781); and S 180 (816), which records the Mercian king Coenwulf's grant of privileges to Worcester for a number of his estates in return for the surrender to him of fourteen hides in two places named *Sture* (*duobus in curtis in loco quæ appellatur at Sture*). Boundary statements are given for all the lands concerned except *Sture*.

¹⁸ M. Gelling, 'Stour in Ismere', in *Myth, Rulership, Church and Charters. Essays in Honour of Nicholas Brooks*, ed. J. Barrow and A. Wareham (Aldershot, 2008), pp. 83–7.

¹⁹ It is now represented by the area within Stoke Prior known as Aston Fields.

²⁰ It is among Worcester DC, Add. MSS 'in the safe'. P. Wormald, *How Do We Know So Much about Anglo-Saxon Deerhurst?*, Deerhurst Lecture 1991 (1993), pp. 20–2. He says, 'S59 must be either an accurate copy of a conflated text or a bogus conflation of lists from the 760s and 780s. Confirmation by queen and children alone is otherwise unparalleled, so the latter possibility seems likelier.' *Ibid.* p. 21.

²¹ BL, Cotton Vitellius C. ix, fol. 129r (which is incomplete), and BL Harley 4660, fol. 4r.

²² BL, Cotton Tiberius A. xiii, fols. 145r–146r (in an early eleventh-century hand). On the boundary statements: Hooke, *Worcestershire Anglo-Saxon Charter-Bounds*, pp. 281–6 and pp. 356–8. The two half-hide estates share a long common boundary.

²³ *Worcestershire*, ed. Thorn and Thorn, 2, 81.

The hidation of the Hwicce

SALMONSBURY

S 114, dated 779, is known only from a single-sheet manuscript in a late eighth-century hand. It records a grant of four hides of land at Salmonsbury and is reckoned to be an authentic original text.²⁴ A ninth- or tenth-century endorsement notes that this land was at Bourton [on-the-Water] (Gloucs.), a manor which was assessed at ten hides in 1086.²⁵ However, although the land's probable extent is known from S 114's boundary statement,²⁶ the late eighth-century assessment of the whole area of the Domesday manor of Bourton is not; nor, of course, is the proportion of the latter's assessment which is represented by the area granted in 779.

WESTBURY-ON-TRYM

There are three versions of S 139, a grant of fifty-five hides of land at Westbury-on-Trym (Gloucs.) made in 793 × 796. One of them is a single-sheet manuscript, contemporaneous and probably original,²⁷ and the others are copies of the early eleventh century and the seventeenth century respectively. In 1086 the extensive manor of Westbury was assessed at fifty hides;²⁸ but with no boundary statement having been included in the text it is impossible to know what portion of the area of the Domesday manor this booked land represented – whether only a part of it, that is, or its effective entirety.²⁹

CROWLE

This somewhat depressing survey continues with S 190, dated 836, which survives as a single-sheet manuscript in an early ninth-century hand, widely regarded as an original text,³⁰ and as three later, incomplete copies. It records a grant of privileges

²⁴ BL, Cotton Augustus ii. 4. A. Scharer, *Die angelsächsische Königsurkunde im 7. und 8. Jahrhundert* (Vienna, Cologne and Graz, 1982), pp. 245–6; D. N. Dumville, *Wessex and England from Alfred to Edgar* (Woodbridge, 1982), p. 41, n. 58.

²⁵ *Domesday Book. 15: Gloucestershire*, ed. J. S. Moore (Chichester, 1982), 12,3.

²⁶ G. B. Grundy, *Saxon Charters and Field Names of Gloucestershire* (Bristol, 1935–6), pp. 49–53; J. Blair, *Building Anglo-Saxon England* (Princeton and Oxford, 2018), pp. 218–19 and map on p. 214.

²⁷ BL, Add. Ch. 19790. Scharer, *Die angelsächsische Königsurkunde*, pp. 274–7; P. Wormald, 'Charters, Law and the Settlement of Disputes in Anglo-Saxon England', in *The Settlement of Disputes in Early Medieval Europe*, ed. W. Davies and P. Fouracre (Cambridge, 1986), pp. 149–68, at 155–6.

²⁸ *Gloucestershire*, ed. Moore, 3,1.

²⁹ John Moore contended that Westbury's true assessment in 1086 was seventy-six and a half hides, not fifty (*ibid.* 3,1 note); but (as he himself admitted) the 'satellite' versions all agree with Domesday Book.

³⁰ BL, Cotton Augustus, ii. 9. P. Wormald, 'The Ninth Century', in J. Campbell, E. John and P. Wormald, *The Anglo-Saxons* (Oxford, 1982), pp. 132–57, at 138–9; P. Sims-Williams, *Religion and Literature in Western England, 600–800* (Cambridge, 1990), p. 107.

in respect of the lands of the minster at Hanbury (Worcs.). These include Crowle, assessed at ten hides. In 1086 there were two manors at Crowle, each assessed at five hides, one held by the Church of Worcester and the other held (as in 1066 too) by a layman.³¹ This, then, may represent an instance of an assessment which was the same in 1086 as it had been in 836 – if, that is, the Hanbury minster held all of Crowle in 836, and if Worcester (which took over control of the minster's lands)³² had subsequently lost half as a result of an insufficiently well supervised leasing out of it. However, there is no mention of any such loss in Worcester sources, and so it is just as likely that Hanbury, and then Worcester, had held only one of the two Crowle estates, and that its assessment had been halved at an unknown date after 836. No resolution of this issue is possible.

ASTON MAGNA

S 1281, another text known only from a single-sheet manuscript, in an early tenth-century hand, is also regarded as an original. It records the leasing of one hide of land at *Easttune*, reliably identified as Aston Magna (Gloucs.), in 904,³³ and probably referred to again in a lease of 977 (S 1333). There is no entry for it in Domesday Book, however, and so nothing can be said about this assessment.³⁴

TEDDINGTON AND ALSTONE; CALDINCCOTAN IN BREDON

A lease for three lives of Teddington and Alstone (Worcs., now Gloucs.), dated 969, survives as a single-sheet original, but omits the hidage of the land concerned.³⁵ Similarly, another such original records the lease of two and a half

³¹ *Worcestershire*, ed. Thorn and Thorn, 2,78, 19,14.

³² S. Bassett, 'The Landed Endowment of the Anglo-Saxon Minster at Hanbury (Worcs.)', *ASE* 38 (2010), 77–100, at 82–8.

³³ BL, Add. Ch. 19791. P. Chaplais, 'Some Early Anglo-Saxon Diplomas on Single Sheets: Originals or Copies?', *Jnl of the Soc. of Archivists*, 3 (1968), 315–36, at 315, n. 3. On its location: H. P. R. Finberg, *The Early Charters of the West Midlands* (Leicester, 1972), p. 60 (no. 123); R. Faith, *The English Peasantry and the Growth of Lordship* (London, 1997), p. 171, where it is identified as *inland*.

³⁴ It was almost certainly an unnamed part of Worcester's manor of Blockey: *Worcestershire*, ed. Thorn and Thorn, 2,38 and note.

³⁵ BL, Add. Ch. 19792; S 1326. For a digital image: www.bl.uk/manuscripts/Viewer.aspx?ref=add_ch_19792_f001r, where the space left for the hidage is clearly visible. None of the three endorsements supplies the missing information; nor does the copy of the text in Worcester's early eleventh-century cartulary: BL, Tiberius A. xiii, fols. 83v–84r. Teddington, still in Worcester's hands in 1086, was assessed then at three hides: *Worcestershire*, ed. Thorn and Thorn, 2,3. Domesday Book has no entry for Alstone. It was presumably included in the manor of Teddington, given that it is still a hamlet in the latter's parish.

The hidation of the Hwicce

hides at *Caldinccotan* in Bredon (Worcs.) in 984 (S 1347); but Domesday Book has no identifiable entry for the place, which by 1086 must have been part of the large episcopal manor of Bredon. In both instances, then, the absence of a key piece of information prevents any comparison being made of the hidages concerned.

INKBERROW

In 1010 × 1023 (probably 1023), a dispute was settled in respect of the tenure of part of a five-hide estate at Inkberrow (Worcs.), which belonged to Worcester but was currently – and, as it was adjudicated, correctly – in the bishop of Hereford's hands. The evidence comes from a single-sheet manuscript (S 1460). This has been identified as Worcester's portion of a three-part chirograph, and is widely seen as being contemporary and authentic.³⁶ In 1086 Worcester held a five-hide manor at Inkberrow, with the bishop of Hereford as sub-tenant.³⁷ It is very probable that these two records relate to the same estate. If so, the putative reduction in hidage had occurred by 1023.

PYRIAE IN ST MARTIN'S-WITHOUT-WORCESTER

Another lease, recorded in a single-sheet manuscript in an early eleventh-century hand (S 1385) and dated 1003 × 1016, confirms that the reduction had occurred by early in that century. It relates to a half hide of land at *Pyriae* in the parish of St Martin's-without-Worcester, a name which survives as Perry Wood.³⁸ By use of the associated boundary statements this land has been decisively identified as half of a one-hide estate named Battenhall which had been leased by Bishop Oswald of Worcester for three lives in 969 (S 1327).³⁹ Domesday Book records that in 1086 Worcester had a one-hide manor at *Pirian*, but it contains no entry for Battenhall. Accordingly, S 1385 corroborates the evidence of S 1460 that the hidage reduction had been made by early in the eleventh century.

³⁶ BL, Cotton Ch. VIII 37. On the manuscript: N. R. Ker, 'Hemming's Cartulary: a Description of the Two Worcester Cartularies in Cotton Tiberius A. xiii', in *Studies in Medieval History presented to Frederick Maurice Powicke*, ed. R. W. Hunt, W. A. Pantin and R. W. Southern (Oxford, 1948), pp. 49–75, at 50–1, n. 4 and 65, n. 1. On the date: *Sermo Lupi ad Anglos*, ed. D. Whitelock, 3rd ed. (London, 1963), p. 11, n. 4, which opts for 1010 × 1011; and F. E. Harmer, *Anglo-Saxon Writs* (Stamford, 1989), p. 40, and P. Wormald, 'A Handlist of Anglo-Saxon Lawsuits', *ASE* 17 (1988), 247–81, at 264 (no. 77), which both opt for 1023.

³⁷ *Worcestershire*, ed. Thorn and Thorn, 2, 16.

³⁸ BL, Add. Ch. 19795. On the name: A. Mawer and F. M. Stenton, *The Place-Names of Worcestershire*, EPNS 4 (Cambridge, 1927), p. 161.

³⁹ BL, Cotton Tiberius A xiii, fols. 64v–65r.

This does not mean, however, that it had only just occurred, since not one of the many earlier texts discussed above has allowed a clear-cut, reliable comparison to be made between the assessment of the piece of land concerned at the time of its pre-Conquest grant or lease and its hidage as recorded in 1086. The *terminus ante quem* for the reduction is capable, it seems, of being pushed earlier.

EVIDENCE OF AN ASSESSMENT REDUCTION PRIOR TO THE EARLY
ELEVENTH CENTURY

In 972 King Edgar is alleged to have issued a general confirmation of its lands and privileges to the monastic community at Pershore (S 786). The authenticity of the single-sheet manuscript on which the earliest version of this grant is to be found continues to be debated, with opinion ranged between regarding it as an outright forgery and accepting that it is authentic and original; but it is almost unanimously regarded as being in a contemporary or near-contemporary hand.⁴⁰ Therefore, whether or not the confirmation is authentic, it is arguably safe to take the stated assessments as being those which the forty named areas of land bore in the late tenth century or, at latest, in the earliest part of the eleventh. A comparison of these assessments with ones given for the same places by Domesday Book produces the following results: six are not recorded there or else are named as the berewick of another manor with no separate hidage being given; seventeen unquestionably have the same assessment as S 786 assigns; another seven can be accepted as having the same assessment, once a case has been made;⁴¹ and, finally, there is no match in ten instances.⁴² This degree of correlation indicates that the hidage reduction had very probably been made by the late tenth century.

⁴⁰ BL, Cotton Augustus ii. 6. For discussion: S. Keynes, *The Diplomas of King Æthelred 'the Unready', 978–1016* (Cambridge, 1980), pp. 98–100; M. Lapidge, 'Æthelwold as Scholar and Teacher', in *Bishop Æthelwold: his Career and Influence*, ed. B. Yorke (Woodbridge, 1988), pp. 89–117, at 94, n. 43; P. Wormald, 'Æthelwold and his Continental Counterparts', in *Bishop Æthelwold*, ed. Yorke, pp. 13–42, at 39 nn. 106–7; *The Charters of Abingdon Abbey*, ed. S. E. Kelly, Anglo-Saxon Charters 7–8 (Oxford, 2000–1), pt 1, cvi–cxi; P. A. Stokes, 'King Edgar's Charter for Pershore (AD 972)', *ASE* 37 (2008), 31–78.

⁴¹ For example, S 786's list includes *Wihltafestune* (i.e. North Piddle: Hooke, *Worcestershire Anglo-Saxon Charter-Bounds*, p. 189), assessed at five hides. In 1086 two manors named *Pidelet* (North Piddle) – both held of Westminster Abbey (to which Pershore Abbey had lost a great amount of its lands) by Urso the sheriff – were assessed at five hides and four hides respectively (*Worcestershire*, ed. Thorn and Thorn, 8,15 and 8,18). It is reasonable to assume that the first of them was the one listed by S 786.

⁴² In the majority of these ten cases the assessment recorded by Domesday Book is higher, and usually considerably higher, than the one given in S 786.

The hidation of the Hwicce

The information available for two areas of Gloucestershire, if found convincing, will limit the date range within which this reduction occurred to between the late eighth century and the late tenth or, arguably, the mid ninth.

DOWDESWELL

A single-sheet document, widely accepted as being original and genuine, records a grant of ten hides of land at *Onnanforda* in 759 (S 56).⁴³ It includes a very brief statement of the bounds of the area concerned, from which it appears that it comprised Upper Dowdeswell (which is the northern half of the ecclesiastical parish of Dowdeswell), including Andoversford (the text's *Onnanforda*) and Pegglesworth.⁴⁴ The grantee was an abbot, Headda, who already had possession of Lower Dowdeswell. At an unknown date in the last two decades of the eighth century he granted his lands at Dowdeswell (including Andoversford) and at *Tyreltune* to his descendants, with reversion – or so the early eleventh-century copy of the text alleges – to the see of Worcester (S 1413).⁴⁵ By the late eleventh century Dowdeswell and Pegglesworth, together assessed at four and a half hides, were being held by Worcester as part of its manor of Withington.⁴⁶ Dowdeswell's share of this assessment was later recorded as three hides and Pegglesworth's as one and a half hides;⁴⁷ but the latter's had also been three hides in 981, when Bishop Oswald issued an extension to a lease of it.⁴⁸ This shows that Worcester had lost about half of Pegglesworth by the late eleventh century. Accordingly, given that ten hides is the stated assessment of only a portion of Dowdeswell in 759, and that most of Dowdeswell (including Pegglesworth) was assessed at four and a half hides in 1086, with another one and a half

⁴³ BL, Add. Ch. 19789; F. Tinti, *Sustaining Belief: the Church of Worcester from c.870 to c.1100* (Farnham, 2010), p. 104.

⁴⁴ H. P. R. Finberg, 'Roman and Saxon Withington', in his *Lucerna: Studies of Some Problems in the Early History of England* (London, 1964), pp. 21–65, at 22, n. 4; Sims-Williams, *Religion and Literature*, pp. 155–6.

⁴⁵ BL, Cotton Tiberius A. xiii, fol. 26r–v. Unfortunately, no hidage is reported for these lands. *Tyreltune* may be either Dowdeswell's neighbour Withington or an unidentified estate somewhere between Cheltenham and Tewkesbury: Finberg, 'Roman and Saxon Withington', p. 7; Sims-Williams, *Religion and Literature*, p. 156, n. 65.

⁴⁶ *Gloucestershire*, ed. Moore, 3,5.

⁴⁷ *The Red Book of Worcester*, ed. M. Hollings (London, 1934), p. 367.

⁴⁸ S 1343, of which there is an early eleventh-century copy: Cotton Tiberius A. xiii, fol. 112r. There is a statement of the boundary of Worcester's manor of Withington, including the whole of Dowdeswell, in its early eleventh-century cartulary (S 1556): Cotton Tiberius A. xiii, fol. 114r. For its solution: Grundy, *Saxon Charters and Field Names of Gloucestershire*, pp. 262–71; and for suggested improvements: Finberg, *Early Charters*, pp. 84–5, and Finberg, 'Roman and Saxon Withington', pp. 23–4, n. 5.

hides at Pegglesworth having been lost since 981, it is clear that by 981 there had been a substantial reduction – arguably by at least fifty per cent – in the assessment of the land at Dowdeswell which Abbot Headda had held from 759 onwards.

CUTSDEAN

The final evidence to be presented here in support of the hypothesis that hidages of lands in the area of the kingdom of the Hwicce were substantially reduced, arguably by around a half, at an unknown date between the late eighth century and the late tenth – or perhaps (as will be seen) the mid ninth – concerns the Cotswold manor of Cutsdean (Gloucs. since 1931). In 1086 it was a detached piece of Worcestershire and the Church of Worcester's triple hundred of Oswaldslow, assessed at two hides.⁴⁹ We have copies, apparently authentic, of two leases of Cutsdean, issued by Bishop Oswald: S 1335 (datable to c. 974) and S 1353 (987).⁵⁰ Each is accompanied by a boundary statement; these show separately that the area concerned coincides with the chapelry's full extent.⁵¹ In both instances the estate's assessment is given as five hides.⁵²

By contrast, a grant to the minster community at Bredon (Worcs.), made in 780 by King Offa, of four estates (*villulis*) including Cutsdean gives the latter's assessment as ten hides (S 116). Although only later copies survive, the charter's text is considered authentic by most commentators.⁵³ The other three estates were at Teddington, Little Washbourne (both Worcs.), and *Norðtun*, which is widely and understandably identified as Bredon's Norton (Worcs.).⁵⁴ The assessments

⁴⁹ *Worcestershire*, ed. Thorn and Thorn, 2,24.

⁵⁰ Respectively, BL, Cotton Tiberius A. xiii, fol. 79r–v, and BL, Cotton Tiberius A. xiii, fols. 78r–79r.

⁵¹ The earliest of which is in Worcester's early eleventh-century cartulary: BL, Cotton Tib. A. xiii, ff. 11r–12r. Cutsdean has always been a chapelry of Temple Guiting (Gloucs.): F. A. Youngs, *Guide to the Administrative Units of England. Volume I: Southern England* (London, 1979), p. 171.

⁵² The reduction from five hides to the two hides which Domesday Book records may mean, as Francesca Tinti has suggested, that the majority of Cutsdean formed part of the bishop's demesne in 1086: Tinti, *Sustaining Belief*, p. 182.

⁵³ E. John, *Orbis Britanniae and Other Studies* (Leicester, 1966), p. 52; Finberg, *Early Charters*, pp. 40–1 (no. 42); Sims-Williams, *Religion and Literature*, pp. 153–4 and p. 163; Tinti, *Sustaining Belief*, pp. 100–1; but also see Scharer, *Die angelsächsische Königsurkunde*, pp. 247–9.

⁵⁴ This is on account of its parochial association with Bredon and, along with the other three named estates, its eventual tenurial one with the Church of Worcester. However, the text describes *Norðtun* as being *iuxta rinulum qui nuncupatur tyrl* ('beside the stream called Tyrl'), a river-name which is unknown in the vicinity of Bredon's Norton. Accordingly, Della Hooke, aware of several references to a river of this name in an area of north Gloucestershire, suggested that it lay on the R. Swilgate (*The Anglo-Saxon Landscape: the Kingdom of the Hwicce* (Manchester, 1985), pp. 83–4). If she was correct in thinking that *Norðtun* was not Bredon's Norton, a more probable location than

recorded for them in Domesday Book were, like Cutsdean's, lower: Teddington's was said to be five hides in 780 but only three in 1086; Little Washbourne's had gone down from ten hides to three, and *Norðtun*'s (if it was Bredon's Norton) from ten hides to two.⁵⁵ Given that there is no other entry in Domesday Book for any of these places, and that a very considerable reduction in hidage assessments is known to have taken place between the late seventh century and (as has been shown here) the tenth century, it is likely that S 116 offers us instances of the original hidages of four estates, while, in most if not all cases, Domesday Book reports their reduced ones. An alternative hypothesis – that in every instance the difference between the two recorded assessments reflects the Church's retention in demesne in 1086 of the 'missing' part of each manor – is less persuasive. If this argument is acceptable, S 116 shows that the hidage reduction had not yet been made in 780.

One final piece of evidence relating to Cutsdean might allow us to determine that it had been made by 855, but, as will be seen, such a conclusion depends on a degree of special pleading. Nonetheless the case is worth presenting. S 1273 is a Worcester lease of Cutsdean and *Sture*, which are said to be assessed together at eleven hides.⁵⁶ It is, of course, possible that only a single hide of land was being leased at *Sture*; but an alternative explanation is that the land being granted at Cutsdean had had its assessment reduced from ten to five hides since 780, and that the land at *Sture* was assessed at six hides. Various transactions involving *Sture* were made in the late eighth, ninth and tenth centuries. Even though none of them was of land assessed at six hides, in each case the land concerned had a different

her suggested one is on the Swilgate's major tributary the Tirl Brook (A. H. Smith, *The Place-Names of Gloucestershire*, pt 1, EPNS 38 (Cambridge, 1964), 13), which rises in the south-west part of Beckford (Worcs.) and runs westwards through Teddington (Worcs.) and Ashchurch (Gloucs.), joining the Swilgate in the east part of Tewkesbury. It is hard to envisage the location in that area of an estate meriting the name 'north *tūn*' unless it was in the vicinity of Ashchurch (for which Domesday Book has no entry). In 1086 Ashchurch formed the eastern part of the major royal manor of Tewkesbury; and in its parish (formed out of Tewkesbury's soon after the Dissolution) is an area named Northway, first recorded in the early twelfth century as *Northbihaia*, *Nordibaia* (A. H. Smith, *The Place-Names of Gloucestershire*, pt 2, EPNS 39 (Cambridge, 1964), 54). This area appears a possible candidate for the location of S 116's *Norðtun*, even though there is no known Worcester connection. However, it is at least as likely that in the late eighth century a stream in the Bredon's Norton area was called *hryl* – arguably, 'that which turns or rolls along, a stream' (Smith, *The Place-Names of Gloucestershire*, pt 1, p. 19; A. H. Smith, *English Place-Name Elements*, 2 pts, EPNS 25–26 (Cambridge, 1987) II, 201) – as it is that *Norðtun* was elsewhere. The name is not an uncommon one in the region: Mawer and Stenton, *Place-Names of Worcestershire*, pp. 15–16.

⁵⁵ *Worcestershire*, ed. Thorn and Thorn, 2,23, 2,27 and 2,29 respectively.

⁵⁶ This *Sture* is almost certainly not *Sture* in Ismere but the one in the middle part of the valley of the R. Stour on the Worcestershire-Warwickshire border, in the vicinity of Tredington and Alderminster.

assessment.⁵⁷ This suggests that several parts of the extensive *Sture* district were being handed out, and that Worcester and Pershore were both accumulating land there in piecemeal fashion. It is a reasonable proposition that here we have evidence of an assessment having been reduced – by one-half in this case – by 855.

Two of the other transactions concerning land at *Sture* could conceivably limit the period within which the reduction was made to between 757 (but in reality 780, because of S 116) and 814, but every assumption needing to be made would have to be right for this to be the case. S 1829, known only from a seventeenth-century summary, is a reversionary grant of sixteen hides of land at *Sture* made to Worcester by Offa (datable only to his reign, 757 × 796), at the end of a lease for two lifetimes.⁵⁸ In 814 Coenwulf granted – or, arguably, confirmed – to Worcester eight hides of land at *Sture*, free from all but the three common burdens (S 171). He described it as a portion of his own land (*aliquam partem terræ juris mei*), which may allow its identification as the same land at *Sture* (or, if this argument fails, only half of it) as Offa had previously allowed Worcester to repossess. Here, then, we might be hearing about the same piece of land, first with its original assessment and then with its newly halved one. In this case it does not matter whether the land concerned was at *Sture* in Ismere or the medieval diocese's other *Sture*, so long as it is the same one in both cases. What does matter, however, is that the copy of Coenwulf's charter made in the early eleventh century (which is the only text we have), preserves the assessment given in the original manuscript – arguably left unaltered because the scribe was uncertain about the identity of the land concerned – rather than presenting us with an updated one, as we must assume to have been his and his colleagues' normal practice.

DISCUSSION

On the basis of the albeit meagre evidence presented here it appears that the proposed reduction in the assessment of all land in the area of the kingdom of the Hwicce was not effected until late in the eighth century or thereafter, but that it had certainly been made by the late tenth century. Indeed, it had been by 855, if the land at Cutsdean of which Worcester issued a lease, together with some at *Sture* (S 1273), already had its new assessment of five hides. (The argument for pushing back the *terminus ante quem* to as early as 814, on the plainly uncertain evidence of S 1829 and S 171, although arguably worth presenting, is too flimsy to be more than merely noted in passing as a possibility.)

If it had been made by the middle part of the ninth century this reduction was almost certainly done by the Mercians. Even in the middle part of the eighth

⁵⁷ The others all relate to land at *Sture* alone: in chronological order, S 1257, S 1187, S 1273, S 786, S 1371.

⁵⁸ Finberg, *Early Charters*, p. 93 (no. 220).

century the rulers of the Hwicce lacked the independence needed to effect such a major change, and by the end of it their former kingdom was under direct Mercian rule. By contrast, the Mercians themselves would have had both the power and, as will be shown in due course, the motive. If, however, this reduction was not made until the tenth century, for most of which period the area served by the see of Worcester was under the control of West Saxon kings, the latter would have to be seen as its perpetrators. The change would have been made as part of a process of reforming the existing territorial basis of local government so as to produce the layout of shires and hundreds first fully discernible in 1086.⁵⁹

Both propositions are feasible, but the second of them is most unlikely to be valid if the reduction was confined to the area of the former kingdom of the Hwicce. Unfortunately, other parts of the Mercian kingdom at its greatest extent offer hardly any opportunities for a thorough investigation of this hypothesis of a substantial, widespread reduction of assessments – one for which (as we have already seen) even Worcester's plentiful medieval archives have yielded only a little wholly reliable evidence. The very few relevant charters which relate to lands in the other Mercian provinces may be of value for this exercise, however (Fig. 2).

EVIDENCE OF ASSESSMENT REDUCTIONS IN OTHER PARTS OF THE
FORMER MERCIAN KINGDOM

Three grants of land within the former Mercian provinces out of which Herefordshire, Shropshire and Cheshire were formed are of potential value for this investigation. Each one's text survives as a single-sheet manuscript and thus can be trusted to record the estate's contemporary assessment.

FROME

S 1270 is a grant, made in 840 × 852 by the bishop and his church of Hereford, of four hides of land at Frome (Herefs.), with reversion to the minster at Bromyard.⁶⁰ In 1086 the former had a ten-hide manor at Bishops Frome, six hides of which were in Radlow Hundred and the other four in Plegelgate Hundred.⁶¹ Bromyard is also in the latter, and so it is probable that these four hides represent those of the charter. The fact that in 1086 it was in the same hundred as Bromyard, whereas

⁵⁹ S. Bassett, 'The Administrative Landscape of the Diocese of Worcester in the Tenth Century', in *St Oswald of Worcester: Life and Influence*, ed. N. Brooks and C. Cubitt (London, 1996), pp. 147–73.

⁶⁰ Hereford, D.C., A 4067.

⁶¹ *Domesday Book. 17, Herefordshire*, ed. F. Thorn and C. Thorn (Chichester, 1983), 2,21. A further hide in the parish of Bishops Frome, held by Roger of Lacy in 1086, is also recorded as being in Plegelgate Hundred (*ibid.* 10,67), and therefore may also have belonged once to Bromyard's minster and subsequently to Hereford.



Figure 2: The midland shires in 1086 and, mapped onto them, the contemporary dioceses of Hereford and Worcester, all shown at their estimated extent. The two dioceses arguably mirror the extents of the former Mercian provinces of, respectively, the Magonsæte and the Hwicce. Named places are those referred to in the article. Map by author.

three other, adjacent manors named *Frome* all belonged to Radlow Hundred, supports this conclusion.⁶² From this, if considered a legitimate conclusion, it seems that any hidage reduction in the Mercian province of the Magonsæte (see *Appendix*)⁶³ had occurred by the middle of the ninth century.

YARKHILL

It may already have occurred as early as 805 × 811, if one particular interpretation is accepted of the sources which relate to Yarkhill (Herefs.). S 1264 records the grant, made at that time by Wulfred, archbishop of Canterbury, to his cathedral community, of various areas of land in Kent in exchange for ten hides of land at Yarkhill which he had gained for the church from Queen Cynethryth, Offa's widow. The charter survives as a single-sheet manuscript, and so this statement of its assessment is wholly reliable.⁶⁴ Domesday Book, however, assigns only two hides to Yarkhill.⁶⁵ This might well be taken to mean that any major reduction of hidages in the area had occurred at a later date; but there is an alternative hypothesis which offers the opposite conclusion. Situated immediately to the west of Yarkhill are Westhide and Weston Beggard: given their directional names, both can be reasonably construed as having been formed by the fission of a larger area including – and, arguably, named – Yarkhill. In 1086 they were assessed at two and a quarter and six hides respectively.⁶⁶ Together

⁶² All three were held in 1086 by Roger of Lacy: (Canon) Frome: four hides (*Herefordshire*, ed. Thorn and Thorn, 10,33), (Castle) Frome: five hides (*ibid.* 10,30), and (Halmonds) Frome: four hides (*ibid.* 10,29). These many Frome manors were evidently formed by the fission of an extensive early riverine territory named from the R. Frome.

⁶³ An exercise, replicating the one undertaken for the kingdom of the Hwicce at its greatest extent, was carried out for this former kingdom, with a comparison being made of the assessment assigned to it in the Tribal Hidage and the total hidage reported in Domesday Book of all land in what I estimate to have been the same area in 1086. The results are set out in the *Appendix*. For a recent discussion of the date at which the name Magonsæte may have been formed: Baker, 'OE *sate*'.

⁶⁴ BL, Cotton Augustus ii.47; *Charters of Christ Church Canterbury*, ed. N. P. Brooks and S. E. Kelly, 2 vols., Anglo-Saxon Charters 17–18 (Oxford, 2013) I, 119 and 506–12 (no. 43).

⁶⁵ *Herefordshire*, ed. Thorn and Thorn, 10,28.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.* 8,8; 10,27. Yarkhill, Westhide and Weston Beggard appear to have been served originally by the minster at Stoke Edith, to judge by the extent to which this area's early nineteenth-century parochial geography comprises an intricate interlocking of the main areas and detached portions of the parishes concerned. This conclusion about Stoke Edith's role as a minster and about membership of its original parish was also presented in J. W. King, 'Two Herefordshire Minsters', *Trans. of the Woolhope Naturalists Field Club* 48 (1995), 282–94, at 287–90; but I can not concur with the author's inclusion of Ashperton, a chapelry of Stretton Grandison, in that original parish. The early nineteenth-century disposition of these various parishes and chapelries is helpfully mapped in *ibid.* Plan 2 (entitled 'Stoke Edith *parochia*') at 288.

with Yarkhill's own two-hide assessment this amounts to ten and a quarter hides, almost exactly the one which S 1264 assigns to the place early in the ninth century.⁶⁷ This line of argument is attractive, given the well supported model of increasing territorial fission in the later part of the Anglo-Saxon period; but it depends on acceptance that in 805 × 811 Westhide and Weston Beggard had not yet become independent of Yarkhill.

STANTON LONG AND PATTON

That the reduction had certainly occurred by the start of the tenth century is shown by another text known from an original single-sheet manuscript. In 901 Æthelred and Æthelflæd granted to the minster at Much Wenlock (Shrops.) ten hides at Stanton Long and another estate, Patton, in Stanton Long's parish, in return for two other, adjacent, estates (S 221).⁶⁸ The Shropshire folios of Domesday Book have three entries for *Stantune*, all securely identifiable as representing manors in the parish of Stanton Long. The sum of their assessments is eight hides; and this rises to nine hides if the manor of Patton, also in its parish, is added.⁶⁹ This total is close enough to the ten-hide assessment recorded in the 901 charter for it to be securely concluded that the *Stantune* area had the same assessment in 901 as in 1086. As Frome and Bromyard also were, Stanton Long and Wenlock were in the Mercian province which had been formed from the once independent kingdom of the Magonsæte. Although the evidence is undoubtedly less plentiful or strong than what has been found in the Hwiccian province, there may have been, then, an equivalent major reduction in assessments, and it may have taken place at much the same time.⁷⁰

⁶⁷ Westhide's assessment in 1086 shows that the land unit's area and taxable resources must have increased since its name was coined, presumably by piecemeal assarting over several centuries.

⁶⁸ BL, Cotton Charters viii 27. It is generally considered to be original and authentic, e.g. Chaplais, 'Some Early Anglo-Saxon Diplomas on Single Sheets', p. 315, n. 3; Sims-Williams, *Religion and Literature*, p. 145.

⁶⁹ *Domesday Book*. 25, *Shropshire*, ed. F. Thorn and C. Thorn (Chichester, 1986), 4,8,6, 4,21,5 (later called Holdgate), 4,21,6 (ditto), and 4,8,4 respectively. Patton was assessed at five hides in 901 but at only one hide in 1086 – a trend which is repeated in respect of Easthope, another of the estates involved in the exchange of 901. It was assessed at eight hides then but at only two hides in 1086. However, to judge from the small size of its late medieval parish, Easthope is very likely to have included land in 901 which in 1086 lay in the immediately adjacent manor of Wenlock. Similarly, neither Caughley (in the parish of Barrow), the last of the estates involved in the exchange, nor Barrow itself is recorded in Domesday Book, with both very probably being among Wenlock's unnamed members in 1086: *Shropshire*, ed. Thorn and Thorn, 3c,2 note.

⁷⁰ The next latest charter concerning land in the province of the Magonsæte which survives as a single-sheet manuscript (Wells D & C, Cathedral Charter 1; S 677; *Charters of Bath and Wells*, ed. S. E. Kelly, Anglo-Saxon Charters 13 (Oxford, 2007), 214–20 (no. 31)), is one by which King Edgar granted six hides at Staunton-on-Arrow (Herefs.) in 958. In 1086 there were two manors at

There are no suitable charters for Cheshire and the northern half of Shropshire, which together seem to have formed the area which became the Mercian province of the Wreocensæte. However, it is not impossible that there are some for the northern part of Oxfordshire, a region which appears to have been subsumed into the kingdom of the Mercians even earlier than were the Hwicce and the Magonsæte.⁷¹

ISLIP

When considered together, two grants of land in the vicinity of Islip, allegedly both made in the late seventh century, might conceivably reveal another substantial reduction in hidage prior to the tenth century, but only if one of them is fabricated. S 1167, datable to 680, relates to twenty hides of land by the River Cherwell. Thought to be very largely authentic, its text survives only among the mid twelfth-century entries in Bath Abbey's cartulary.⁷² It can not be established for sure, therefore, what assessment was specified in its original text – whether twenty hides or another, larger one. The other grant (S 1168, in the same cartulary) concerns forty hides of land at *Slæpi*, usually identified as Islip (which is on the Cherwell), to one of S 1167's two recipients.⁷³ For a long while it was thought by many scholars to be a fabrication, closely modelled on S 1167,⁷⁴ but Susan Kelly's recent re-evaluation makes a strong case for seeing it, too, as being essentially authentic.⁷⁵

If both texts do indeed represent very largely reliable copies of late seventh-century originals, Dr Kelly's argument that they refer to different areas of land cannot be ignored.⁷⁶ The *Slæpi* of S 1168 must have included a great deal more land

Staunton, one assessed at two hides and one at four hides (*Herefordshire*, ed. Thorn and Thorn, 9, 11, 24, 8), which presumably together represent the area granted by Edgar.

⁷¹ J. Blair, *Anglo-Saxon Oxfordshire* (Stroud, 1994), pp. 49–56.

⁷² 'iuxta flumen quod appellatur Ceruelle': Cambridge, Corpus Christi College 111, pp. 60–1; *Charters of Bath and Wells*, ed. Kelly, pp. 66–8. Patrick Sims-Williams identified the minster as Bath (*Religion and Literature*, p. 112), but it is probably Eynsham: *Charters of Bath and Wells*, ed. Kelly, p. 5 (where she also explains how S 1167 and S 1168 may have ended up at Bath).

⁷³ Cambridge, Corpus Christi College 111, p. 59; *Charters of Bath and Wells*, ed. Kelly, pp. 62–6. For the identification of *Slæpi* as Islip: F. M. Stenton, 'St Frideswide and her Times', in *Preparatory to Anglo-Saxon England, being the Collected Papers of Frank Merry Stenton*, ed. D. M. Stenton (Oxford, 1970), pp. 224–33, at p. 225; M. Gelling, *The Early Charters of the Thames Valley* (Leicester, 1979), p. 123 (no. 258); *Charters of Bath and Wells*, ed. Kelly, p. 65.

⁷⁴ For example C. R. Hart, *The Early Charters of Eastern England* (Leicester, 1966), pp. 21–2 (no. 2); P. Sims-Williams, 'Continental Influence at Bath Monastery in the Seventh Century', *ASE* 4 (1975), 1–10, at 3, n. 2; Scharer, *Die angelsächsische Königsurkunde*, p. 34, n. 73.

⁷⁵ *Charters of Bath and Wells*, ed. Kelly, pp. 63–5.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.* p. 66. This argument has been made before: e.g. Gelling, *Early Charters of the Thames Valley*, p. 123.

than the Domesday manor of Islip, assessed at five hides.⁷⁷ However, if S 1168 was to be fabricated – a possibility for which Dr Kelly allows⁷⁸ – a case can be made for seeing the two texts as referring to the same area, the original assessment of which had been reduced from forty to twenty hides.⁷⁹

The value of this discussion of S 1167 and S 1168 lies entirely in its demonstration that a halving of hidage assessments could have occurred within the area concerned – an area which, arguably, had been an integral part of the kingdom of the Mercians from a much earlier date than were the kingdoms of the Hwicce and the Magonsæte.

TADMARTON

A later north Oxfordshire charter which survives as a single-sheet manuscript appears to show that any such major reduction of the area's hidage assessments had occurred by the mid tenth century. S 618 records King Eadwig's grant of five

⁷⁷ *Domesday Book. 14, Oxfordshire*, ed. C. Caldwell (Chichester, 1978), 55,1. The whereabouts of S 1167's twenty hides is unknown; but either they or S 1168's forty hides may have included Water Eaton, where the Eynsham minster is believed to have had land: S 210; *Charters of Bath and Wells*, ed. Kelly, p. 66.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.* p. 63 and p. 67.

⁷⁹ This is that the land referred to in both texts was exactly the same, and that its original assessment of forty hides had been reduced to twenty hides at an unknown date after S 1168's fabrication by the community of the unnamed minster – probably Eynsham – which was S 1167's recipient. Accordingly, it is interesting to note that Islip's three adjacent neighbours along the bank of the Cherwell had a combined assessment of fifteen hides in 1086. These were, from south-east to north-west, Hampton (Poyle) and Hampton (Guy) – a single manor in 1086, assessed at ten hides, but comprising five manors in 1066, each one held by an unnamed thegn – and, thirdly, Shipton-on-Cherwell – two manors in 1086, each assessed at two and a half hides (respectively, *Oxfordshire*, ed. Caldwell, 58,16 and *ibid.* 7,26; *Domesday Book. 21, Northamptonshire*, ed. F. Thorn and C. Thorn (Chichester, 1979), 23,18). They, together with the five hides of Islip itself (*Oxfordshire*, ed. Caldwell, 55,1), may have made up S 1167's twenty hides of land located next to the Cherwell. To clarify, if this area (or whatever other area was meant) was originally assessed at forty hides, and if the putative reduction had not yet been made when the spurious replacement charter was created, it would explain why that assessment, and not the one recorded in the late twelfth-century text of S 1167, was given in a fabricated S 1168. Bath Abbey, the unnamed minster's successor, held no land in Oxfordshire in 1086, and it may not have done so for a long time by then. Therefore, when both charters came to be copied into its cartulary in the late twelfth century, it was not thought necessary, uncharacteristically, to alter the assessment of the land at *Slæpi* from forty hides to twenty in the text of S 1168. The latter's putative fabrication is likely to have been done by the recipients of S 1167, who presumably realized that it was inadequate as evidence of their right to the land in the Islip area and, accordingly, who took the necessary steps. The fact that the broad, let alone specific, time of its fabrication can never be determined matters far less, however, than the realization that it had probably been done while the Islip area, and north Oxfordshire in general, were still under Mercian political control (Blair, *Anglo-Saxon Oxfordshire*, pp. 54–6 and pp. 93–7 and *passim*).

hides of land at Tadmarton to one of his officials in 956.⁸⁰ It is one of a group of four charters relating to Eadwig's distribution of Tadmarton's land in that year. Two of the other three grants are known from copies in Abingdon Abbey's late thirteenth-century cartulary and are considered to be authentic: S 617 records his grant of ten hides there to another of his officials, and S 611 his grant of five hides there to Beorhtnoth *princeps*.⁸¹ The fourth charter was forged at Abingdon Abbey (to which all of Tadmarton passed at an unknown date between 956 and 1066). Purporting to be Eadwig's grant to the abbey of all twenty hides of Tadmarton's land,⁸² its value for this present study is that it confirms that the land there which Eadwig granted in 956 comprised the whole of Tadmarton, which in turn confirms that any reduction of assessments in the region had already occurred by then.

In the part of Warwickshire which lay in the diocese of Lichfield, and which had therefore belonged to the core of the Mercian kingdom, two charters issued at the turn of the eleventh century survive as original manuscripts.

SOUTHAM; LADBROKE AND RADBOURNE; LONG ITCHINGTON AND ARLEY

In 998 King Æthelred granted the ealdorman Leofwine three hides of land at Southam and four and a half hides at Ladbroke and Radbourne (S 892).⁸³ There are statements of the bounds of both areas embedded in the charter's text, written by the same hand and therefore manifestly contemporary. The one for Southam (which encompasses the entire parish),⁸⁴ is preceded by a statement that it was assessed at ten hides, of which three – presumably what Leofwine was receiving – had been forfeited to the crown by a previous holder, Wistan. In 1086 the whole manor of Southam was Coventry Abbey's, assessed at four hides; but this is an obvious case of beneficial hidation, since there were ten ploughs at work and it had two mills and a substantial area of woodland.⁸⁵ By then Ladbroke and its neighbour Radbourne (which were both encompassed by the boundary statement included in S 892), were subdivided into six manors with a combined assessment of eight and a half hides.⁸⁶

⁸⁰ London, BL, Cotton Augustus ii. 43; *Charters of Abingdon Abbey*, ed. Kelly, II, 279–83 (no. 66).

⁸¹ Respectively, BL, Cotton Claudius B VI, fols. 48r–49r, 49v–50r; *Charters of Abingdon Abbey*, ed. Kelly, II, 283–6 (no. 67), 305–8 (no. 73).

⁸² S 584; *Charters of Abingdon Abbey*, ed. Kelly, II, 286–90 (no. 68).

⁸³ Oxford, Bodleian Library, Eng. hist. a. 2 (S.C. 31346), no. VI.

⁸⁴ D. Hooke, *Warwickshire Anglo-Saxon Charter-Bounds* (Woodbridge, 1999), pp. 71–4.

⁸⁵ *Domesday Book*, 23, *Warwickshire*, ed. J. Plaister (Chichester, 1976), 6, 8.

⁸⁶ Hooke, *Warwickshire Anglo-Saxon Charter-Bounds*, pp. 74–7; *Warwickshire*, ed. Plaister, 16, 47, 17, 18, 17, 21, 17, 23, 17, 33 and 18, 9. Since Della Hooke's solution indicates that a substantial western-most part of Ladbroke was excluded from the 998 grant (when the land was assessed at four and a half hides), it seems likely that the 998 assessment of the whole area of the two parishes, albeit unknown, was already close to eight and a half hides.

There is no reason to doubt, then, that if there had been a major reduction of assessments in this part of Mercia, it had already occurred before the end of the tenth century. This is corroborated by S 898, by which King Æthelred granted twenty-five hides at Long Itchington and Arley to Clofi in 1001, the sole record of which is also generally considered to be authentic and original.⁸⁷ In 1086 these two areas were held by the nun Christina, Edmund Ironside's grand-daughter, with Long Itchington being assessed at twenty-four hides and Arley at one hide.⁸⁸

MADELEY

There is only one pre-Conquest grant of land in Staffordshire, also part of the core of the kingdom of Mercia, of which we have an original text. In 975, or perhaps 974, King Edgar granted three hides of land at Madeley, in the north-west of the shire, to Æthelwold, bishop of Winchester (S 801).⁸⁹ The boundary statement included within the body of the text appears to take in the whole parish,⁹⁰ and thus also included Heighley, a royal demesne manor in the late eleventh century but now merely a district within Madeley. In 1086 Heighley was assessed at the plainly beneficial rate of one-eighth of a hide, and Madeley was held by Robert of Stafford, assessed at one hide.⁹¹ The difference between the assessment of Madeley (including Heighley) as recorded in the mid 970s and in 1086 is most unlikely, then, to have resulted from the effecting of any widespread reduction in the intervening period.

AREAS OF THE MERCIAN KINGDOM WHICH CAME UNDER SCANDINAVIAN CONTROL

Finally, the parts of the kingdom of Mercia at its greatest extent which passed under Scandinavian control in the ninth century yield, unsurprisingly, very few appropriate charters (Fig. 2).

WOTTON UNDERWOOD

One such charter is S 204, of which there is a single-sheet manuscript in a mid ninth-century hand.⁹² It records a grant made in 844 × 845 by the Mercian king

⁸⁷ BL, Cotton Augustus, ii. 22.

⁸⁸ *Warwickshire*, ed. Plaister, 42,2–3.

⁸⁹ BL, Harley Charter 43 C 6.

⁹⁰ C. Hart, *The Early Charters of Northern England and the North Midlands* (Leicester, 1975), pp. 95–7;

D. Hooke, *The Landscape of Anglo-Saxon Staffordshire: the Charter Evidence* (Keele, 1983), pp. 106–9.

⁹¹ *Domesday Book. 24: Staffordshire*, ed. A. Hawkins and A. Rumble (Chichester, 1976), 1,36 and 11,20.

⁹² Canterbury DC, C1280. It is held to be trustworthy: *Charters of Christ Church Canterbury*, ed. Brooks and Kelly, II, 697–703 (no. 75), at 701.

Beorhtwulf of nine hides of land at Wotton Underwood (Bucks.); and in so far as the accompanying boundary statement can be solved it seems to have incorporated the whole area of the ecclesiastical parish.⁹³ In 1086 Wotton Underwood was assessed at ten hides;⁹⁴ but this increase from nine may be reasonably seen as being insufficient to undermine the conclusion that any major reduction in assessment here had already occurred by 844 × 845.

CONINGTON; ELY; STANTON-IN-PEAK; ASPLEY GUISE

Of the handful of other charters which are useable for this exercise four appear to show – as do many of those examined already – that any hidage reduction had undoubtedly occurred by the middle part of the tenth century. Land at Conington (Hunts.) which King Eadwig granted to a thegn, Thorkell, in 957 (S 649) was assessed at nine hides both then and in 1086.⁹⁵ In the same year he granted forty hides at Ely to Oda, archbishop of Canterbury (S 646). The very close correlation between this assessment and the assessments, totalling forty and a quarter hides, of the manors in one of Ely's two hundreds in 1086 – the one which contained Ely itself – show that any reduction had occurred here too by 957.⁹⁶ Similarly, Stanton-in-Peak (Derbs.), granted by King Edgar in 968 (S 768), was still assessed at one hide in 1086;⁹⁷ and the combined fourteen-hide assessment given by Domesday Book to Aspley Guise and its neighbour Holcot (Beds.) is very close to the one of fifteen hides for Aspley (including Holcot, as

⁹³ Gelling, *Early Charters of the Thames Valley*, pp. 184–7.

⁹⁴ *Domesday Book. 13: Buckinghamshire*, ed. E. Teague and V. Sankaran (Chichester, 1978), 14,14.

⁹⁵ Winchester DC, Library Showcase, a single-sheet manuscript in a mid tenth-century hand, which is widely considered to be original and authentic: e.g. Hart, *Early Charters of Eastern England*, p. 23 (no. 9); Keynes, *Diplomas of King Æthelred*, p. 17 and p. 67; C. Hart, *The Danelaw* (London, 1992), pp. 447–8. For 1086: *Domesday Book. 19: Huntingdonshire*, ed. S. Harvey (Chichester, 1975), 20,1.

⁹⁶ Oxford, Bodleian Library, Eng. hist. a. 2 (S.C. 31346), no. V, a single-sheet manuscript in a tenth-century hand, reckoned to be original and authentic: e.g. P. Chaplais, 'The Origin and Authenticity of the Royal Anglo-Saxon Diploma', *Jnl of the Soc. of Archivists*, 3 (1965), 48–61, at 59–60; Hart, *Early Charters of Eastern England*, p. 41 (no. 52); S. Keynes, *Facsimiles of Anglo-Saxon Charters* (London, 1991), p. 4. For 1086: *Domesday Book. 18: Cambridgeshire*, ed. A. Rumble (Chichester, 1981), 5,55–56 (Wisbech: ten hides), 5,57 (Ely: ten hides), 5,58 (Hainey: half a hide), 5,59 (Downham: four hides), 5,60 (Witchford: three hides), 5,61 (Wentworth: three and a half hides), 5,62 (Witcham: four and a quarter hides), and 5,63 (Sutton: five hides). For the composition of Ely's two hundreds: *Cambridgeshire*, ed. Rumble, 'The Hundreds'.

⁹⁷ Stafford, William Salt Library, 84/2/41, considered authentic and contemporary: *Charters of Burton Abbey*, ed. P. H. Sawyer, *Anglo-Saxon Charters 2* (Oxford, 1979), 38–9. For 1086: *Domesday Book. 27: Derbyshire*, ed. P. Morgan (Chichester, 1978), 6,73.

the boundary statement proves), when King Edgar granted it to Ælfwold in 969 (S 772).⁹⁸

However, it is impossible to say when any major reduction of assessment had occurred – if, indeed, it ever had done – in these and the other shires which were subsequently created in the parts of the former Mercian kingdom which were under Scandinavian control in the late ninth and early tenth centuries. This issue will be discussed in this article’s final section. In the meanwhile, however, it is necessary to draw attention to one final instance of a charter of which there is a surviving single-sheet copy.

BADBY, DODFORD AND EVERDON

S 495 records the grant by King Edmund to Ælfric, bishop of Ramsbury, in 944 of thirty hides of land at Badby, Dodford and Everdon (Northants).⁹⁹ The boundary statement, which is an integral part of the text and so may be safely regarded as contemporary, shows that the land concerned also included an area named *Celverdescote* in 1086 (and Newnham today), as well as one named Snorscombe in the parish of Everdon.¹⁰⁰ The entries in Domesday Book which cover the area granted by S 495 report a combined assessment of twelve hides.¹⁰¹ There is very little likelihood that any of these six holdings had a beneficially reduced assessment in 1086, given that each one’s assets appear to justify its hidage. It is salutary to note that, at twelve hides, their total is exactly two-fifths of the assessment borne by the land which Edmund granted in 944, while the total of their reported ploughlands, thirty, is the same as its hidage then. This conforms to a consistent pattern noted by Cyril Hart throughout south-western Northamptonshire whereby, he argued, the number of ploughlands stated in every land unit’s entry

⁹⁸ BL, Add. Ch. 19793, an apparent original: *English Historical Documents*, ed. Whitelock, p. 563; Gelling, *Early Charters of the Thames Valley*, p. 18 (no. 3), where the bounds are also discussed; Keynes, *Diplomas of King Æthelred*, pp. 77–8; but for a dissenting voice: D. N. Dumville, *English Caroline Script and Monastic History: Studies in Benedictinism, A.D. 950–1030* (Woodbridge, 1993), pp. 70–3. For 1086: *Domesday Book. 20: Bedfordshire*, ed. V. Sankaran and D. Sherlock (Chichester, 1977), 23,17 (Aspley: ten hides), 25,1 (Holcot: four hides).

⁹⁹ BL, Cotton Augustus ii. 63, which is in a mid-tenth-century hand and is considered to be authentic and original: Hart, *Early Charters of Northern England and the North Midlands*, p. 55 (no. 2); Keynes, *Diplomas of King Æthelred*, pp. 24–5.

¹⁰⁰ J. E. B. Gover, A. Mawer and F. M. Stenton, *The Place-Names of Northamptonshire*, EPNS 10 (Cambridge, 1933), 10, n. 1; C. Hart, ‘The Badby Charter’, in his *Hidation of Northamptonshire*, pp. 35–7. Newnham, now a parish in its own right, was formerly a chapelry of Badby’s church. It is sandwiched between the three named land units.

¹⁰¹ *Northamptonshire*, ed. Thorn and Thorn, 2,10 (Everdon: half a hide), 11,6 (Badby: four hides), 18,11 (*Celverdescote*: four hides), 18,58 (Dodford: three hides), 18,60 (Snorscombe: one and a half virgates), and 18,97 (Snorscombe: half a virgate).

in Domesday Book reflected each one's geld liability prior to a reduction of it by sixty per cent which was made a few years after the Norman Conquest, while the hidage reported there was in each case the new, reduced one.¹⁰² Hart believed that this south-western area's hidation in the tenth century could perpetuate its pre-Scandinavian one, since the district, comprising a block of eight adjacent hundreds, was mostly separated from the rest of the shire by Watling Street, which he considered to mark the frontier of Scandinavian control in the vicinity of Northampton.¹⁰³ If he was right in his contention that the land at and around Badby had always been in English hands, and that therefore the thirty-hide assessment assigned to it by S 495 was its original one, then the charter shows that in 944 no hidage reduction had yet taken place in this area. On the other hand, Hart's argument can no longer be thought secure, given that it is now accepted that we know even less about this frontier's course through the area concerned in the late ninth and early tenth centuries than we thought we did when Hart was writing.¹⁰⁴ The whole area of what became Northamptonshire may have been under Scandinavian rule at that time. If so, it is possible that its mid-tenth-century hidation was of only recent imposition,¹⁰⁵ but this is a contentious proposition. Given how sparse relevant sources are for the area in the ninth and tenth centuries it is no less possible that the hidages which Northamptonshire estates bore in the mid to late tenth century – to the north of Watling Street as much as to the south of it – were still broadly representative of what the estates had had before the Scandinavian armies' arrival.

WARKTON

Indeed, these pervasive uncertainties are emphasized by the contents of a charter by which King Eadred granted seven hides at Warkton (Northants.) in 946 (S 520).¹⁰⁶ It lies in the north-east of the shire, in an area which was

¹⁰² Hart, *Hidation of Northamptonshire*, p. 21 and pp. 25–6.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.* p. 13 and pp. 39–40. Many others have held this view, too, of course.

¹⁰⁴ R. H. C. Davis, 'Alfred and Guthrum's Frontier', *EHR* 97 (1982), 803–10; P. Stafford, *The East Midlands in the Early Middle Ages* (Leicester, 1985), pp. 136–7; and, most recently, S. Ashby and A. Marriott, 'Territorial Division in the Alfred-Guðrum Treaty: a Ninth Century Diplomatic Innovation?', *Aparðjón Jnl for Scandinavian Stud.* 1 (2020), 22–53, at 39–40.

¹⁰⁵ Hart, *Hidation of Northamptonshire*, p. 9, p. 14 and p. 39.

¹⁰⁶ It survived as a single-sheet manuscript in the Somers collection until the latter disappeared c. 1700, and is known from a text published by John Smith: *Bede, Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum*, ed. J. Smith (Cambridge, 1722), p. 772. On the Somers collection and its publication: S. Keynes, 'Anglo-Saxon Charters: Lost and Found', in *Myth, Rulership, Church and Charters*, ed. Barrow and Wareham, pp. 45–66, at 58–9. The grant is generally considered to be an authentic one: e.g. Hart, *Early Charters of Northern England and the North Midlands*, p. 56 (no. 3); *English Historical Documents*, ed. Whitelock, pp. 372–3 and p. 551. There is no boundary

indisputably under Scandinavian rule until reconquered by Edward the Elder in late 917. In 1086 Warkton was assessed at three and a half hides and was said to have nine ploughlands.¹⁰⁷ As with S 495, so too here: it is impossible to say what assessment the land in question carried on the eve of the late ninth-century Scandinavian conquest of the eastern midlands, let alone whether or not it had already been reduced by then from its original one.

CONCLUDING DISCUSSION

The contents of some thirty charters have been examined in this lengthy discussion, most of them known to us through their survival as a single-sheet manuscript which in almost all cases is widely thought to be original and authentic. It was found that, for various reasons, over a third of them could not be used in the present exercise. The rest can be divided into a number of sub-groups according to the geographical location of the land being booked or leased by each charter or, alternatively, according to when the charter was issued. The geographical division is a straightforward one between areas of land which lay in those parts of the kingdom of Mercia, at its greatest extent, which were always in English hands and the parts which came under Scandinavian control in the late ninth and early tenth centuries. The chronological division, a more complex one, will be considered in due course.

It appears that if major reductions of hidage were made in the Scandinavian areas, they had already happened by the later 950s. This is indicated by charters which relate to land in Derbyshire (S 768), Huntingdonshire (S 649), Cambridgeshire (S 646), and Bedfordshire (S 772).¹⁰⁸ Two other similarly authentic charters, relating to land in Northamptonshire (S 495, S 520), show that a large reduction occurred there after the mid 940s.¹⁰⁹ However, it would be most unwise to conclude from this that what happened in Northamptonshire after 946 must also have happened in those other four shires – and have done so, moreover, by the late 950s, the date of the earlier two of the four relevant charters (S 646, S 649). If such reductions did occur as a general rule across the Scandinavian areas – and there is no compelling evidence that they did – they are doubtless directly attributable to measures taken by English kings and their agents after the re-acquisition of the regions concerned.¹¹⁰ But the piecemeal nature of this reconquest, and also the

statement, but the charter's alliterative text suggests that a well established estate was being granted: 'terram VII manentium ... certis tramitibus ... terminatam ad Wurcung tune'.

¹⁰⁷ *Northamptonshire*, ed. Thorn and Thorn, 8,13.

¹⁰⁸ See above, pp. 23–4.

¹⁰⁹ See above, pp. 24–6.

¹¹⁰ As argued by, for example, Hart, *Hidation of Northamptonshire*, p. 42; Stafford, *East Midlands*, pp. 141–3; S. Keynes, 'Edward, King of the Anglo-Saxons', in *Edward the Elder, 899–924*, ed. N. J. Higham and D. H. Hill (London, 2001), pp. 40–66, at 59; R. Lavelle, *Alfred's Wars: Sources*

likelihood that different local circumstances may have led to different measures being needed, may mean that no such reductions were made in some areas (as, for instance, in some of the shires listed above where there seems to have been no change of assessment between the middle decades of the tenth century and 1086); or else they were made in different ways and/or at significantly different times. Finally, S 204, which relates to land at Wotton Underwood (Bucks.) booked to one of his thegns by the Mercian king Beorhtwulf, indicates that any reduction of its assessment had already occurred by the middle years of the ninth century.¹¹¹ Here again, however, there is no evidence that such a reduction of the estate's hidage had ever been made: its assessment may always have been ten hides or thereabouts. In summary, the evidence of hidage reduction in the parts of the kingdom of Mercia which came under Scandinavian control throws no light on what prompted the seemingly equivalent reductions in the area of its western provinces. If any such reductions had been made before the Scandinavian occupation, they are hidden from us.

In the parts of the kingdom of Mercia which were always in English hands a more coherent picture comes from this examination of the texts of original charters. They yield adequate reliable evidence of a major hidage reduction having occurred in the province of the Hwicce by the mid to late tenth century (S 786, S 56);¹¹² and the same appears to be true of other parts of Mercia, including its core area (S 618, S 801, S 892, S 898).¹¹³ If there were no other, earlier instances of such reductions, it would be straightforward to account for them in terms of measures taken by the West Saxon kings of England so as to extend their system of local government, managed through shires and hundreds, over the parts of Mercia which had escaped Scandinavian control. Indeed, this may be the correct explanation of the reductions identified in Staffordshire, Warwickshire and, conceivably,

and Interpretations of Anglo-Saxon Warfare in the Viking Age (Woodbridge, 2010), p. 100; but cf. D. M. Hadley, *The Northern Danelaw: its Social Structure, c. 800–1100* (London, 2000), p. 104.

¹¹¹ See above, pp. 22–3.

¹¹² See above, pp. 10–12. One of this article's anonymous referees asked if major landowners such as the bishops of Worcester might have been liable for a certain number of hides which they could redistribute among their estates as they chose, and, secondly, if this could be part of the changes in estate management of the episcopal estates which Francesca Tinti proposed (Tinti, *Sustaining Belief, passim*). The article's other anonymous referee, having seen these two questions, commented as follows: 'One might add a further question: is it possible that the apparently widespread reduction in hidage was the result of more than one initiative? Could some properties have been reduced in the ninth century and others in the early tenth? This might help account for the cases where there was apparently not a reduction; one would thus imagine a scenario in which hidages were adjusted in waves, leaving some holdouts, perhaps along the lines suggested by the other reviewer (i.e. changes being organised based around the properties of major landholders).' Although unable myself to provide an adequate answer to these questions, I consider it important to record them here.

¹¹³ See above, pp. 20–2.

Oxfordshire. Another explanation is possible, however, for the instances apparently identified in the provinces of the Hwicce and Magonsæte which predate the extension of direct West Saxon royal control over these two areas.

The reduction seen in Shropshire at Stanton Long and Patton by 901 (S221) is always likely to be controversial, given the debate about the extent of King Alfred's powers of intervention in Mercian affairs in the late ninth century.¹¹⁴ However, the charters, discussed above, for land at Dowdeswell (Gloucs.) (S 56) and Cutsdean (Worcs., now Gloucs.) (S 116, S 171, S 1273) and at Yarkhill and Frome (Herefs.) (S 1264, S 1270) were granted while the Mercian kings were still in full control of the two provinces concerned. If it is considered safe to generalize from them – and the sample is admittedly very small and is no doubt capable of being explained differently – these instances of major hidage reduction in the provinces of the Hwicce and the Magonsæte occurred in the last four decades of the eighth century or the first two of the ninth.¹¹⁵ This marks the beginning of the period when the once independent kingdom of the Hwicce was at last fully subsumed into the kingdom of the Mercians and subject to its kings' direct rule;¹¹⁶ and the same is presumably true of the far more shadowy kingdom of the Magonsæte.

If there were indeed wholesale reductions of the assessments carried by all land in what had become by then two new Mercian provinces, its purpose can only be guessed. Whenever the original element of the Tribal Hidage was compiled, the Mercians were understandably unconcerned that the Hwicce (with the *Arosæte*) and the *Westerne*/Magonsæte bore assessments at the levels which this source reports;¹¹⁷ but – if the hypothesis being offered here has any validity whatever – once they formed an integral part of the Mercian kingdom it may be reasonably imagined that there was a disparity which could not be ignored. If so, a possible explanation of it is to be found in an extension of the Mercian kings' putative network of defended settlements into these two newly acquired provinces. Tamworth and Nottingham may already have been fortified, arguably among other places; so, too, were Hereford and Winchcombe in the late eighth or early

¹¹⁴ Keynes, 'England, 700–900', pp. 31–41; Bassett, 'Administrative Landscape', pp. 147–51 and pp. 172–3; S. Keynes, 'King Alfred and the Mercians', in *Kings, Currency and Alliances: History and Coinage of Southern England in the Ninth Century*, ed. M. A. S. Blackburn and D. N. Dumville (Woodbridge, 1998), pp. 1–45; S. Keynes, 'Mercia and Wessex in the Ninth Century', in *Mercia: an Anglo-Saxon Kingdom in Europe*, ed. M. P. Brown and C. A. Farr (London, 2001), pp. 310–28; Lavelle, *Alfred's Wars*, pp. 24–5 and p. 232.

¹¹⁵ For the latter area see the [Appendix](#).

¹¹⁶ S. Bassett, 'In Search of the Origins of Anglo-Saxon Kingdoms', in *Origins of Anglo-Saxon Kingdoms*, ed. Bassett, pp. 6–17; C. Wickham, *Framing the Early Middle Ages. Europe and the Mediterranean 400–800* (Oxford, 2005), pp. 344–5.

¹¹⁷ If it is to be relied on, that is, to offer a realistic record of actual assessments.

ninth century.¹¹⁸ As was certainly so of the ‘burhs’ set up in Wessex in the late ninth century, each of these albeit only dimly visible Mercian ones is likely to have had assigned to it a well defined hinterland. Not only would the ‘burh’ have been responsible for this territory’s security, but it may also be supposed to have received material support from it in goods and services, with each estate liable for an amount determined by its own assessment. For this reason a general equivalence in the assessment of land across the whole kingdom would have been thought necessary so as to spread the load fairly.¹¹⁹

This is a very bold conclusion to be based on so small and uncertain a body of evidence as has been presented here. However, the effective halving of the hidage borne by the lands which made up the kingdom of the Hwicce at its greatest extent, effected at some time between the late seventh century (at the earliest) and 1086, has been established here; so, too, has the apparent reduction by around two-thirds of the hidage of the land of the kingdom of the Magonsæte.¹²⁰ The evidence of such reductions which has been found in the texts of authentic, mainly original charters can not be similarly accepted as establishing a fact, given the impossibility of proving exact correspondence of extent between the land booked in any of the charters concerned and the apparently same area recorded in Domesday Book, as well as that of showing that the assumed assessment reduction was never merely the result of beneficial hidation. Nonetheless, among the thirty or so charters examined here is a handful in which the reported assessment is significantly lower than the one given in Domesday Book. While they are too few to establish a clear trend, this can not be ignored. As regularly emphasized throughout this article, the significant uncertainty affects, not the reality of the reduction, but the dating of it and its cause. The two explanations offered here – one which dates it to the tenth century and attributes it to the West Saxon kings of England, and one which sees it as having happened by the early ninth century and explains it in terms of Mercian statecraft – are both unsubstantiated.¹²¹ Other, potentially better explanations may well be devised. Nonetheless,

¹¹⁸ S. Bassett, ‘Divide and Rule? The Military Infrastructure of Eighth- and Ninth-Century Mercia’, *EME* 15 (2007), 53–85; S. Bassett, ‘The Middle and Late Anglo-Saxon Defences of Western Mercian Towns’, *ASSAH* 15 (2008), 180–239; Blair, *Building Anglo-Saxon England*, pp. 233–5 and pp. 243–5; but cf. J. Baker and S. Brookes, *Beyond the Burghal Hidage: Anglo-Saxon Civil Defence in the Viking Age* (Leiden, 2013), pp. 73–9 and pp. 85–6.

¹¹⁹ Sarah Wager helpfully reminds me that ‘Reducing the hidage did not mean reducing taxation, as kings could levy at a heavier rate and/or more often. Disparity might also have arisen if lands in newly acquired provinces were granted to the king’s followers from the heart of Mercia and they objected to the relatively high level of hidage assessment on their new landholdings. A reduction in hidage might have helped to reconcile the province to the Mercian takeover.’

¹²⁰ In the [Appendix](#).

¹²¹ Worcestershire’s notional assessment in 1086 was 1200 hides, the figure also given in the perhaps slightly earlier ‘County Hidage’ (*Worcestershire*, ed. Thorn and Thorn, Appendix 1; F. W.

it is to be hoped that, if nothing more, this article has opened up what in due course will become a productive debate.

In closing, it should be noted that even if the Tribal Hidage list gives notional, not actual, hidages (perhaps compiled for a Mercian overlord who wished to impose them on subject, tribute-paying peoples whose lands currently had other – or, conceivably, in some cases no – assessments on their lands), the charters which have been studied here reveal evidence of a major hidage reduction. This appears to be of the order of a halving in the kingdom of the Hwicce at its greatest extent, which echoes the difference between the Tribal Hidage's calculations for the Hwicce and *Arosate* together in or after the late seventh century and the total hidage of the same area in 1086. Accordingly, while the possibility that this is mere coincidence can not be excluded, it is far more likely that the discovery that the hidage recorded in the Tribal Hidage and also in a handful of original charter texts is about double what is recorded for the same respective areas in Domesday Book lends further credibility to this putatively early tribute list. Even if it were not to be thought to do so, the evidence of the charters remains and can not be ignored.¹²²

Maitland, *Domesday Book and Beyond* (Cambridge, 1897), p. 456; *Blackwell Encyclopaedia of Anglo-Saxon England*, ed. Lapidge *et al.*, p. 126). This tallies with the 1200 hides assigned to Worcester in the 'Burghal Hidage' (S. Keynes and M. Lapidge, *Alfred the Great* (Harmondsworth, 1983), pp. 193–4). An anonymous referee has commented, 'It is very tempting to see a likely reconsideration of public hidage services as linked with the arrangements for a burh at Worcester made by Æthelred, Æthelƿaeld and Waerferth in the late ninth century (S 223). 1200 units occur elsewhere in the Burghal Hidage, of course: Winchester, Wallingford and Warwick are assigned exactly double at 2400 hides (while Gloucestershire has 2400 in the County Hidage). However, the evidence is not necessarily incompatible with your preferred option of adjustment under earlier Mercians kings. Is it possible that, after Gumley, when the nature of the public services attached to hides was re-assessed, it was eventually found desirable to adjust hidage allocations to suit the new circumstances – with payments due to, or organised from, burghal centres? Wessex (or at least some of it) was under the overlordship of Mercia in the reign of Offa and ruled by his son-in-law, and so it is not impossible that a Mercian duodecimal system of hidage demands was introduced there in his reign as well as (putatively) among the Hwicce.' I am most grateful for these insights.

¹²² As a postscript, it is salutary to note that the Tribal Hidage assigns 600 hides to the inhabitants of the Isle of Wight (the *Wibtgara*), whereas according to Bede they were assessed at 1200 hides – information given in his account of how in 686 the island was captured by the West Saxon king Cædwalla, who attempted to kill its entire population and replace them with West Saxon settlers (Bede's *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, ed. B. Colgrave and R. A. B. Mynors (Oxford, 1969), pp. 382–3 (IV.16)). The *Wibtgara* had been defeated previously, in 661, by the Mercian king Wulfhere, who had assigned control of them to the contemporary king of the South Saxons (*Two of the Saxon Chronicles Parallel*, ed. C. Plummer and J. Earle, 2 vols. (Oxford, 1892–9) I, p. 32). Since the compilation of the Tribal Hidage's earliest portion is of unknown date (so that we do not know whether it preceded or succeeded that of Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica*), we are unable to tell which of these two assessments is the earlier one. Nonetheless, this substantial alteration of the *Wibtgara*'s assessment suggests that from an early date the nature of a subject people's relationship with their overlord could lead to a substantial alteration – in this case, either punitive

APPENDIX. HIDAGE REDUCTION IN THE PROVINCE OF THE MAGONSÆTE

The pre-Conquest diocese which came to be centred on Hereford was set up to serve the presumed kingdom of the Magonsæte, an area which by *c.* 800 was a Mercian province. At its late medieval extent,¹²³ the diocese was undoubtedly larger than it had been when, in or after the late seventh century, the *Westerne* (i.e. the Magonsæte) were assessed at 7000 hides.¹²⁴ This enlargement was the result of its having acquired lands beyond its western border by, in all probability, the military actions of the Mercians and of others thereafter.¹²⁵ When the west midland shires were formed, most of the diocese's territory was assigned to Herefordshire and the southern half of Shropshire, but there are also sizeable parts of it in north-west Worcestershire and in Gloucestershire, west of the River Severn.

A comparison of the Domesday hidage of the area concerned, equivalent to the one made for the area of the kingdom of the Hwicce at its greatest extent, has proved challenging. This is primarily because of the need to exclude the parts of the diocese which had not yet been added to it in the late seventh century, but which are hard to identify with certainty. There is also the apparent problem of the significant discrepancy which occurs between the hidage assessments assigned to Shropshire in, respectively, the probably early eleventh-century County Hidage (2400 hides) and Domesday Book (*c.* 1245 hides).¹²⁶ If it is not the result of a clerical error in the former source (with 2400 being written in error for 1500), there must have been a substantial reduction in the assessment of the shire's manors at an unknown time in the eleventh century.¹²⁷ If so, the hidages which Domesday

(a doubling) or beneficial (a halving) – of their assessment. I am grateful to an anonymous referee for drawing my attention to the *Wibtgara's* two recorded hidages.

¹²³ Mapped in C. R. Humphery-Smith, *The Phillimore Atlas and Index of Parish Registers* (Chichester, 1984), maps 15 and 29.

¹²⁴ Dumville, 'Tribal Hidage', pp. 226–7; Davies and Vierck, 'Contexts of Tribal Hidage', p. 231. There is no academic consensus that the Tribal Hidage's *Westerne* are the Magonsæte: see the discussion in Sims-Williams, *Religion and Literature*, p. 18. (I am unpersuaded by his tentative conclusion, followed by Margaret Gelling [*The West Midlands in the Early Middle Ages* (Leicester, 1992), pp. 83–5], that the *Westerne* may have occupied the Cheshire region.) However, the fact that their entry follows the one for the Wreocensæte, rather than precedes it (as might have been expected if the compiler had been adhering to a rigidly clockwise geographical ordering), ought not to disqualify this identification. (The position in the list of his entry for the Hwicce shows that he evidently was not doing so.) A stronger argument, which favours the identification of the two peoples, is to be found in the pre-Conquest diocesan geography of the western midlands.

¹²⁵ On which see F. Thorn and C. Thorn, 'The Welsh Border and Herefordshire', Introductory Notes 1–2, in *Herefordshire*, ed. Thorn and Thorn, and F. Thorn and C. Thorn, 'History and Political Geography', Introductory Note 1, in *Shropshire*, ed. Thorn and Thorn.

¹²⁶ For these hidages: Maitland, *Domesday Book and Beyond*, pp. 400–1 and p. 456.

¹²⁷ It has been described as being likely to reflect 'beneficial hidage, admittedly on a formidable scale': H. Loyn, *Anglo-Saxon England and the Norman Conquest* (London, 1962), p. 308. Also see F. Thorn and C. Thorn, 'Shropshire Notes', at <https://hull-repository.worktribe.com/output/>

Book reports for the Shropshire manors located in the diocese of Hereford do not reflect the ones which they carried in the tenth century, let alone in the eighth. Nonetheless, the results of the calculation need to be reported and considered.

The hidage of Herefordshire as recorded in Domesday Book has been calculated as 1324 hides.¹²⁸ In 1086, however, the shire undoubtedly contained, on its western side, land which had not belonged to the kingdom of the Magonsæte in the eighth century. Accordingly, it is necessary to deduct from this total the hidages of lands which appear likely – or at least the likeliest – to represent such additions. These consist of all lands which, although in Herefordshire, belonged to the diocese of St David's, any others which are recorded in the shire's Domesday folios but lay in Wales, and those which the folios place in castelries and their vicinity.¹²⁹ As a result, the assessment for Herefordshire in 1086 which has been considered useful for the present exercise reduces to *c.* 1220 hides. There are similar difficulties in calculating what proportion of Shropshire's Domesday assessment should be included in this exercise in comparison. The sum of the hidages of all the lands which belong to the diocese of Hereford, except for those situated in Wales, is *c.* 706 hides (but this must be viewed as no more than an approximation, given that, as in Herefordshire's case, the western extent of the kingdom of the Magonsæte in the eighth century can not be reliably determined).

The sum of these two totals is *c.* 1926 hides. To it needs to be added a further *c.* 290 hides, so as to account for the portions of the diocese of Hereford situated in, respectively, Worcestershire (*c.* seventy-nine hides) and Gloucestershire (211 hides). This produces an overall total of *c.* 2216 hides in 1086 for the land in the loosely estimated area of the former kingdom of the Magonsæte.

The equivalent calculation for the area of the former kingdom of the Hwicce at its greatest extent showed that the total Domesday assessment was almost exactly half of the one given for the Hwicce and the *Arosæte* in the Tribal Hidage. The reduction in the case of the area of the former kingdom of the Magonsæte is a greater one, however, with the Domesday figure representing a little under one-third of the much earlier one.

Even if every known variable was allowed for, there would still be a clear difference between the scale of reduction in the two former kingdoms. An obvious example of such an adjustment would see an increase in the total in 1086 for the portion of the former kingdom which lay in Shropshire, raising it from *c.* 706 hides to *c.* 1130 hides, in order to make appropriate allowance for a possible reduction of

458870 (which is an expanded version from 2007 of their notes in *Shropshire*, ed Thorn and Thorn), at C13, 'Hides'.

¹²⁸ Maitland, *Domesday Book and Beyond*, pp. 400–1.

¹²⁹ Domesday Book distinguishes between lands in Herefordshire and in Archenfield, but none of the land in the latter district was hidated in 1086 and so it can be easily disregarded for present purposes.

the shire's hidages in the course of the eleventh century. That is to say, if the County Hidage's statement is to be trusted – that Shropshire's assessment was a notional 2400 hides in the early part of that century – and if it is assumed, as it often is, that in 1086 it was a notional 1500 hides, it might be considered legitimate to increase the calculated sum by a factor of 1.6.¹³⁰ This would yield a total of *c.* 2630 hides for the area of the former kingdom of the Magonsæte, which is a little over one-third of its Tribal Hidage assessment.¹³¹ However, as already noted, the County Hidage's figure for Shropshire may be a clerical error; and so no such increase can be reliably applied. Similarly, if any of the other credible variables was to be applied – such as the exclusion of yet more land on the area's western side or, indeed, the restoration of some of that which has already been excluded – the resultant total would still represent a reduction to approximately one-third of the Tribal Hidage's assessment of the *Westerne*/Magonsæte. It is an open question, however, as to whether it was achieved in a single operation (as appears to have been the case in the province of the Hwicce), or instead was more incremental.¹³²

¹³⁰ That is to say, $1500 \times 1.6 = 2400$, and $706 \times 1.6 = 1129.6$, say 1130.

¹³¹ Although precise percentages have no validity in these calculations, they do provide a rough guide to the difference between what I describe as 'a little under one-third' (31.7%, if no adjustment is made for the discrepancy between the total hidage given for Shropshire in the County Hidage and in Domesday Book), and 'a little over one-third' (37.7%, if such an adjustment is made).

¹³² I am most grateful to John Blair, Susan Kelly and Sarah Wager, and to two anonymous referees, for their very helpful comments on the first draft of this article. I take full responsibility, however, for the views expressed here and for any errors. The maps were brought to publication standard by Lesley Collett.