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**THE BRISTOL REGION IN THE
SUB-ROMAN AND EARLY
ANGLO-SAXON PERIODS**



THE BRISTOL BRANCH OF THE HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION
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The Bristol Region in the Sub-Roman and Early Anglo-Saxon Periods is the one hundred and eighteenth pamphlet in this series.

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Cover illustration: A fifth-century Saxon war-band before the walls of a Roman town (from the ninth-century Utrecht Psalter)

THE BRISTOL REGION IN THE POST-ROMAN AND EARLY ANGLO-SAXON PERIODS

Introduction

Personal names are primary elements of human language; their role as social signifiers extends easily into the realms of the symbolic. Surprisingly close and familiar to us still in Britain lies the Roman period of our history (43 AD to 410 AD). This familiarity is not simply a function of the widespread material remains of Roman roads and villas throughout our Island but, more intimately, of the surviving names of the Romano-British forebears of the Welsh, recorded in the early history and legend of their nation and, for the most part, still in circulation: Aircol (Agricola), Cystennyn (Constantinus), Gereint (Gerontius), Maccsen (Maximus) and Emrys (Ambrosius). On the other hand, in the history of English names, the Classical past is a cultural veneer of later centuries, reverently recuperated and bequeathed, but connected to no genuinely ancestral antecedents: Ambrose (Ambrosius), Claud (Claudius), Horace (Horatius), Magnus, Septimus, Tertius and even Terence (Terentius). Perhaps dated and sometimes pretentious, they belong nevertheless to the canon of English names. The fact is, they are regarded as more familiar and 'English' than many of the names of our authentic forebears in the Anglo-Saxon period itself (fifth to eleventh centuries AD): Duda, Stuf, Aethelthryth, Higbald, Ulfketel; and equally foreign appear even the names of those who once ruled over that part of the Bristol region which once lay in the Kingdom of Wessex: Cynegils (king), Seaxburh (queen), Bugge (princess and abbess), not to mention, in this monarchical context, the notorious regicide of Pucklechurch, Leofa. This patronymic remoteness of the Anglo-Saxon period is symbolic of the deeper and wider problems of its historiography and perhaps of the contradictory unpopularity of its study.

Before their seizure of Britain, the Anglo-Saxons of the migration period had occupied lands, as far as the Romans of the Mediterranean world understood, somewhere to the north of those of their more numerous Germanic relatives, the Franks. The 'Saxons', as the Romans

generically called them, irrespective of their exact tribal identity (Angle, Saxon, Jute or Frisian), were still an illiterate people who by the third century of our era could aspire no higher than to the use of a primitive runic script (*futhorc*) cut into stone or metal. They could produce no discursive written accounts of their history in the early centuries of their existence, nothing of their migrations from the Euro-Asiatic land-mass to northern continental Europe and then to Britain, and were apparently so averse to the notion of literacy, that they occupied the lands of a civilised nation, the Romano-British, for two hundred years before learning to love education. In the dawn of their literacy, an Englishman, the Venerable Bede, grumbled (probably prejudicially, as we shall see) that the native Romano-British church had never even tried to convert the Anglo-Saxons to Christianity. As a great religion of the Book, there could have been little that the early Anglo-Saxons might have found attractive in the first place. But fighting they venerated and enjoyed.

The Anglo-Saxons were known to other peoples, therefore, as a restless, warlike race with a sea-going capability, in thrall to a pantheon of gods governed by the warrior deity Woden-Grim. It is now understood that in that unique migratory period they were driven by remote population pressures from Huns and Slavs in eastern Europe and by the general rise in sea-levels, which caused inundations of their coastal and riverine homelands in north Germany (Angeln and Lower Saxony), Jutland and Frisia. It was this common predilection for war and sea-faring which brought them into the cognisance of the Roman world as a useful source of auxiliary troops of foreign extraction (*laeti* and *foederati*). They were therefore employed generally as *limitanei* in border commands - those of a land border (*limes*) such as Hadrian's Wall in Britain (where a German - probably a Frisian - with the name of Notfried commanded a unit), along river borders such as the Rhine and the Danube, and in coastal defence such as that of the *Litus Saxonicum* (Saxon Shore) of eastern Britain and the Channel Coast. The Saxon Shore was furnished with a series of powerful forts of the third and early fourth centuries AD, stretching from Brancaster in Norfolk to Portchester on Southampton Water, where enlisted Anglo-Saxon ship-folk must have provided experienced crews for the blue-painted *speculatores* (naval patrol ships) of the Roman Fleet in Britain (the *Classis Britannica*), on the watch for sea-borne intrusions of Saxons from their continental homelands or later of *Picti* ('tattooed people') from Caledonia, north of Hadrian's Wall.

In the course of time the Germanic mercenaries, provided with a lower rate of pay than regular soldiers and probably first billeted on the civilian population, are known to have settled on British soil near their bases, supplied with land-grants by the Romano-British authorities. When, as

inevitably happened, the British 'Shore against the Saxons' became the British 'Shore of the Saxons' (*Litus Saxonicum*, a fifth century term, is ambivalent and can be understood in either sense), a new chapter of British history had begun, with equally profound - if delayed - implications for the West Country of which our Bristol region is part.

From the Rescript of Honorius to the Siege of Mount Badon

For the purposes of this account, which will also embrace the early Saxon period, the Bristol region of the post-Roman phase is defined as an irregular quadrilateral of territory contained by the northern limits of the ancient Forest of Kingswood (approximately along the banks of the Stroud Frome), by the Fosse Way which runs north to south along the Jurassic Ridge of the Cotswolds to Bath, and by the Roman road (Margary no. 45) which runs westwards from the Fosse Way below Bath to the small port of Uphill at the mouth of the River Axe; the western edge of the Bristol region is naturally determined by the coast and shore of the Bristol Channel and the Mouth of the Severn. The region so described is thus divided along an east-west axis into two units (70%:30%) by the Bristol Avon (see centre-fold map).

By about 550 AD the Anglo-Saxons were at the door of the Bristol region as their seizure of sub-Roman lowland Britain was nearing completion. Their movement westward from the eastern and south-eastern shores of the country (an arc from the Humber to the Southampton region) was characterised both by Bede (early eighth century) and by the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* (late ninth century) as inexorable, although the advance had not in fact been smooth and without reverses. Beginning probably about 430 AD, the invasion of Britain resulted from the rebellion of the Saxon mercenaries against their British pay-masters over alleged broken promises concerning supplies; in reality, it was driven by motives of territorial gain. A series of aggressive probes by élite Saxon forces on land was followed by intermittent sea-borne migratory pulses from the Continent as more troops, accompanied by their families, sought settlement in largely rural locations. Thereafter, the incomers' way appears to have been opened by loosely interdependent military groups, born, hardened and religiously dedicated to battle who, as oceanic sea-farers, easily exploited the largely east-west river systems of the country (Humber, Trent, the four rivers of the Wash, and the Thames), uniting as occasion demanded in order to assemble *ad hoc* armies for assaults on walled towns and set-piece battles. The largely fragmentary character of the incoming groups, arriving mostly in small flotillas of ships, accounts for the multiplicity of early Anglo-Saxon 'kingdoms' in what was to become England.

Amongst the early war-leadership of the Anglo-Saxon invaders must have been Germanic veterans trained in the tactics of the late Roman army.

If, as is likely, the late Romano-British towns were opportunely re-manned and defended as refuges (despite, as archaeology has conclusively shown, their often neglected condition), a rudimentary knowledge of Roman siege-craft amongst a professional minority of the invading Saxons must similarly have survived. On the whole, the sub-Roman British were hampered by a lack of a tradition of warfare, lost over four centuries of mostly stable Roman rule. Weapons amongst the civilian population had been routinely banned by the Roman State. This may partly account for the reputation of the British in the Roman world as a people who were both unwarlike and unreliable. When in 407 AD the usurper Constantine III with his British general Gerontius ('bendigeit Custennin' and 'Gereint' of Welsh legend) withdrew the last of the active legions from Britain to Gaul in his challenge to central Roman authority, only what the late Greek historian Zosimus deemed old men and boys were left to undertake military duties in the militias which archaeology has deduced from a certain sort of late military equipment found in our region and elsewhere. An appeal by loyal British civilian leaders for help from the legitimate Emperor in Rome, Honorius, who would soon be engaged in a life or death struggle against Constantine on the field of battle, was not unreasonably rebuffed in his written reply of 410 AD, the so-called 'Honorian Rescript'. The British people must look to their own defence.

Despite the paucity of the surviving contemporary literature which deals with the period, the historic reality of the alleged Romano-British leaders of the first half of the fifth century must be accepted. The earliest is only known by his appellations: *tyrannus superbus* ('proud tyrant') in the work of the sixth-century British writer Gildas and as *Vortigern* (Celtic: 'Over-lord') in Bede's writings. Like St Patrick perhaps a century earlier, Gildas is an eye-witness of a slice of events between the departure of the Romans and the final, unwelcome arrival in western Britain of the Anglo-Saxons. This he records in his partly historical, partly polemical and prophetic *De Excidio Britanniae (On the Destruction of Britain)*, written in a still unconquered part of Britain in about 544 AD. It is by no means, from an historical point of view, a flawless account but nevertheless precious beyond words to the modern historian. Gildas informs us that the Anglo-Saxon invasion had already caused a wave of British emigration to the Continent when, he ruefully informs us, most of the written records of the period accompanied the refugees. Vortigern is an historical figure and must have been active during the lives of Gildas's grandparents. During his time, in the wake of Roman withdrawal, Britain's east coast was plagued by the nuisance raids of the now seaborne Picts from north of Hadrian's Wall and, in the south-west, by *Hiberni* from Ireland. The latter were active not least in the Bristol region, where the River Avon offered ready access to the still

productive Romano-British villa-estates and farms of our hinterland. Vortigern's policy to oppose the Picts in the eastern part of Britain was initially fruitful. His employment of war-bands of settled Saxons (those classifiable as *foederati* i.e. bound by formal treaty) on the 'Saxon' shore of eastern Britain, with their sea-going experience and capacities, met with success. The closest source of Saxon mercenaries in our part of the west of Britain at this time would have been at Dorchester-on-Thames - migrants who, from cemetery evidence, had pushed westwards early on into the valleys of the upper Thames. These may have been employed in local militias in the small-scale civil wars amongst the Romano-British which broke out after the departure of the Romans and which Gildas condemns. In our own region, some were perhaps raised against sudden river-borne Irish raids on the wealthy villa-estates of the Avon basin, such as that at Keynsham. If the dating is correct, a small cemetery of six or more furnished Anglo-Saxon graves nearby at Saltford, on the river edge, may indicate their early presence (Rahtz and Fowler 1972). A few early Germanic spear-heads and arrow-heads have been recovered even from the hill-top forts of Cadbury-Congresbury, Dolebury and Worlebury - either Romano-British war-trophies, fashionable weaponry or else material indicative of a unit of Saxon mercenaries (Burrow 1981).

In our western region of Britain, the wider problem of foreign raids was intrinsically different from that in the eastern regions of the country. As has been said, the Bristol region with its still productive sub-Roman estates, which bordered the banks of the Avon from King's Weston through Bedminster, Brislington, Keynsham and Newton St Loe to Bath (even if the villa buildings were now mostly run-down or derelict and agricultural production relatively low) would have been attractive to ship-borne Irish war-bands for slaves and for material booty comprising silver, lead and pewter from farmhouse-industries dependent on the surviving productivity of Mendip. Drawn to the coasts of the Bristol Channel and the Severn estuary along sea-ways perhaps known to them for centuries, with the object of booty and even settlement, the evidence is that the sea-borne thrusts of the *Hiberni* must have been ultimately contained and then thwarted in our region. The reason for this must have lain in the improved coastal defences of the Bristol Channel and the Severn Estuary in the century which began with the departure of the Romans, something which will be dealt with later.

The role of the former Roman port of *Abona* at Sea Mills, in this fraught period of sea-borne raiding into western Britain, therefore demands our attention. It may never be known, in this sub-Roman period, to what degree the former military and naval relationships had shrunk between *Abona* and the important coastal fort and harbour at Cardiff, which had probably been the main naval port of the *Classis Hibernica* (the western command of the

Classis Britannica: Mason 2003). But sufficient remnants of that fleet and even veteran naval crews or their descendants, both in the Cardiff and the Bristol areas, must have survived to deter the detested Hibernian *scotti* from pillaging and settlement. Similarly obscure must remain the role that Vortigern played in the defence of the Bristol region against the Hiberni. However, the status of Vortigern in the West is hinted at in the annals of the twelfth century monk William of Malmesbury (Abbey), who under the year 652 AD refers to a battle between Britons and Saxons 'at Vortigern's *burg*'. In the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* under the same year, what appears to be the same battle is reported as having been fought at Bradford-on-Avon (Whitelock 1961). William's sources and their reliability are unknown, but he was not entirely indiscriminate as an historian; and Malmesbury where he wrote lies only sixteen miles away from Bradford-on-Avon along the Fosse Way. The magisterial Roman villa recently discovered in the grounds of St Lawrence's School in Bradford-on-Avon, with its early Christian baptistery and evidence of occupation into the 6th century (Corney 2006), must have been the property of some powerful sub-Roman ruling family such as that of Vortigern. The same ruling family must have also controlled the adjacent bivallate promontory fort of Budbury, overlooking the Avon, which has provided evidence of both Roman and post-Roman occupation. However, Vortigern's policy of employing Saxon poachers as gamekeepers resulted in the piece-meal loss of his country to the spreading power of the incoming Anglo-Saxons. As Gildas pithily remarks, spurred on by omens and portents of their gods, the Anglo-Saxons 'first of all fixed their dreadful claws on the east side of the island, ostensibly to fight for our country, in fact to fight against it'.

Encouraged by the confusion, pusillanimity and not least by the civil wars amongst the Romano-British inhabitants (arising from both political - pro-Roman or anti-Roman - and religious differences), the Anglo-Saxons had moved into most parts of eastern, northern and midland Britain before conspicuous resistance was mounted, according to Gildas, by a 'gentleman' (*vir modestus*), an apparently genuine descendant in Britain of the aristocratic Roman family of the Aureliani. This was Ambrosius Aurelianus, whose high-ranking parents, Gildas reports, had been slain in the Saxon advance. Gildas names the *dux* ('duke') Ambrosius as the heir to the last imperially-appointed Roman army *supremo* of these Islands, the *Dux Britanniarum*. Ambrosius therefore appears as the younger, more orthodox and Roman rival to the perhaps more British and possibly heretical Vortigern. And it was probably as Vortigern's successor that Ambrosius, uniting resistance in the west of Britain (including the Bristol region), halted the Anglo-Saxon expansion westwards at the Siege of Mount Badon (*Badonicus Mons*). The consensus of historical opinion dates the battle to

ca 500 AD and locates it in the south-west of Britain, perhaps at one of the major fortified summits overlooking Bath, or at Budbury promontory fort in Bradford-on-Avon, or possibly further east at Liddington Castle on the Ridge Way above Badbury in Wiltshire (but there are philological problems attaching to all these attributions). According to Nennius (not Gildas who might also have known) Mount Badon was also the greatest battle of the twelve against the Saxons fought by Arthur, no king amongst British kings but their *dux bellorum* ('War Leader'). On the other hand, Nennius does not mention the presence of Ambrosius Aurelianus at Mount Badon, although he denominates him elsewhere in his works as the 'Over-King' (*Magnus rex*) of all the surviving British 'kings' of unconquered western Britain. As to who has the better claim to historical veracity, Ambrosius or his *dux bellorum*, that enticing Arthurian trail will not be pursued here. Suffice it to say that the British-imposed treaty which must have followed Mount Badon secured peace and prosperity in the south-west of Britain for the best part of fifty years. Gildas wrote during what has been termed the 'golden age' of that peace and makes no bones of its reality - or of its inherent fragility.

Military dispositions in the Bristol Region: (i) The Roman Legacy

The event which prefigures the breaking of the treaty following the siege of Mount Badon is the battle joined in 552 AD at the impressive multi-vallate hill-fort of Old Sarum, the focus of several Roman roads and the earliest site of Salisbury. It is the conflict which registers the beginning of the fall of the Romano-British south-west of Britain. From the historiographical point of view, Mount Badon is also perhaps the first credible battle recorded in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* in which the forces of the Gewissae (the early tribal name of the West Saxons) make their appearance. Here Cynric of the West Saxons (alleged grandson of Cerdic) first broke the peace with what must have been an opportunist's victory over the British of the region. Four years later the West Saxons, having taken the whole of the area of Salisbury Plain, moved a stage further westwards towards the Bristol region. The *Chronicle* next records the battle at Barbury Castle in 556 AD, a hill-fort which lies on the Ridge Way as it climbs over the northern edge of the Marlborough Downs, some eight miles north of the earthworks of the East Wansdyke. At this defensive battle fought by the Romano-British armies - which may have included contingents drawn from our own region - the Saxon leadership comprised both Cynric and his elder son and heir apparent, Ceawlin; but the *Chronicle* does not actually specify the outcome of the struggle to which some historians nevertheless attribute the surrender to the West Saxons of what was to become Wiltshire.

The *Chronicle* is patriotically sparing of accounts of defeats inflicted upon its own folk, therefore the implication of a drawn contest at Barbury

Castle cannot be dismissed. Yet the mere proximity of West Saxons in battle mode must have caused some concern in our region, whose inhabitants during the long years of peace following the victory at Mount Badon may have been lulled into complacency. If indeed it were a drawn contest at Barbury Castle, then a mood of relief may have followed, enhanced by news of the withdrawal of the West Saxons towards London in a campaign mounted against the heir to the Saxon kingdom of Kent. This resulted in the West Saxons' victory at the battle of Wimbledon in 568 AD. But within nine years the founders of the Wessex royal line, if the regnal lists from which the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* drew are to be credited, were again lured towards the west and again, if the *Chronicle* is reliable at this juncture, were drawn up in battle order on the Jurassic Way at Dyrham, six miles north of Bath, looking down avariciously upon the rich lands of the lower Severn and Bristol Avon Valleys.

The annals of the early years of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* must be treated with discretion: apart from the problems of dating, its accounts of the events and personalities of the initial Anglo-Saxon invasions and settlement hint at underlying, conventional patterns of atavistic folk mythology. This includes the element of numerology: heroic leaders with the dual qualities of courage and cunning reflecting their dual god Woden-Grim; the dual leadership of figures with a penchant for equine names - *Hengist*, *Horsa* - reflected in the aristocratic dual leader-with-horse burials recovered by archaeology; triple boat-loads of warriors at the earliest Saxon land-falls and so forth. Also debatable are its king-lists and royal genealogies, which record a royal leadership descended from warrior demi-gods and spurred on by deterministic auguries of unstoppable conquests. These are ancient thematics often skewed to a current political purpose, such as justifying the seizure or control of territory. It is not opportune to expand on these important historico-anthropological issues here, but merely to note that the same sort of academic suspicion falls upon the claimed origins of the royal line of Wessex, the *Cerdingas* ('family of Cerdic'), who governed the northern part of the Bristol region for fifty years and the southern part for nearly five hundred years before the Norman conquest. The account of their first landing on the Hampshire coast almost certainly comprises a politically inspired foundation myth: it enters the *Chronicle* in the annal of 514 AD, but its insertion was made as late as the reign of king Ine (d. 726 AD).

On the other hand, the annal of 577 AD which reports the Romano-British defeat at Dyrham, surrendering the northern half of the Bristol region to the West Saxons, lies on the grey border between bardic invention and historicity. By this time the Gewissae-West Saxons of the Upper Thames Valley, around Dorchester-on-Thames, are emerging from legend into history as a distinct people under proto-royal leadership,

perhaps beginning with Ceawlin, the victor of Dyrham, whose subsequent ousting and exile by his nephew are mentioned in the *Chronicle* entry of 592 AD. Ceawlin has been claimed as the historically genuine protagonist of some now lost epic poetry, but he is of some annalistic substance also; with considerable consistency he is recorded three times before Dyrham and three times afterwards - or is this also numerology? But he is also recorded once by Bede as Over-king (termed elsewhere *Bretwalda* 'Ruler of Britain'), exercising universal lordship over England south of the Humber. By and large, therefore, Ceawlin seems genuine enough and it is as well to consider that any educated Anglo-Saxons who later consulted the *Chronicle*, with their sense of the absurd and their love of irony, the root of modern English humour, would have been tolerably able to distinguish foundation myth (with its all its colour and conventions of presentation) from reality; capable in the modern idiom of distinguishing a Flashman from a Cardigan of Balacalava or a Blimp from a Haig of Passchendaele.

Historical linguistics, also, has shown that the three defeated Romano-British 'kings' of the *Chronicle*'s report of Dyrham - Conmail, Condidan and Farinmail - at least bear genuine Old Welsh or Welsh-Latin names (Sims-Williams 1983), even if the given forms, from a philological point of view, seem later than the date of the annal itself, while the term 'king' in this instance is probably erroneous and should best be understood as *rector* (Gildas): i.e. governor and chief legal officer. The towns are authentically those of *Britannia Prima*, the western province of the 'Diocese of the Britains': Gloucester (*Glevum*), the capital Cirencester (*Corinium*) and Bath (*Aquae Sulis*), which were at this time, it is generally but not unanimously agreed, still in Romano-British hands. Cirencester, for example, to judge from the number and proximity of pagan Saxon settlements and cemeteries around it, may have fallen prematurely to the Saxons. Yet the walls of all three towns must still have been standing and defensible, whilst if nothing else more elevated or legal bound them, the Romano-British leadership may well have cooperated simply as compatriots (Celt. *combrogii*, Modern Welsh *cymry*) in the overwhelming need to keep the Saxons at bay. On the other hand, after the dismissal of Roman administration, Gildas in general notes and condemns the growth of local and regional rivalries and even small civil wars in the still independent parts of Britain - an historic Celtic weakness for internal dispute noted as much by authors of antiquity as of the medieval period, for example by Giraldus Cambrensis (Gerald of Wales) in the 12th century (however, Gerald did approve of their harmonious part-singing). Even religious disputes were alight in free British territory, such as that between the heretical Pelagians and the Orthodox Catholics over the nature of grace and the problem of free will,

a bitter and enduring wrangle which may have underlain the rivalry of Vortigern and Ambrosius and which was hardly settled in 429 AD by the personal intervention in Britain, at the Pope's behest, of St Germanus, Bishop of Auxerre.

Finally, nothing rules out the possibility, indeed probability, of a large-scale reversal of British fortunes in our region, in or around the late sixth century, at the hands of the West Saxons who, since their breaking of the treaty following Mount Badon, had enjoyed a run of previous victories, undisputed by scholarship, at Old Sarum, Wimbledon and perhaps Bedford. Only archaeology amongst the relevant disciplines concerned fails to find support for the fall at this time of the three major towns in question - Gloucester, Cirencester and Bath - if indeed force rather than 'negotiation' had been employed. On the other hand, archaeology does not possess incontrovertible material evidence to support a contrary assumption: viz. that the three towns remained immune at this time from Saxon domination. Indeed, there is a tradition that the momentum of the Saxons' military thrust westwards in our region only came to a halt in the early 580s AD, with their check by the British, under king Mouric of Glewissig (later Glamorgan), at 'Tintern Ford' (Brockweir) on the river Wye (Morris 1973, Gardner 2003).

The military dispositions of the Bristol region on the eve of the alleged battle of Dyrham require elucidation. The Roman towns of its northern area, whatever the state of their public and domestic buildings, must still have provided refuge for the Romano-British well into the 6th century: Bath with its substantial walls, *Abona* the walled Roman port at Sea Mills and, now known more fully to archaeology, the technically 'small' walled Roman town of Hall End near Rangeworthy on the Roman road from Bitton to Cambridge (Margary no. 541a). Further north the Bulwarks of Minchinhampton must also have played their part (Reid 2002). *Abona* may well have contributed still a useful military and naval role, if much reduced from its high imperial days. As has been stated, archaeological finds provide evidence that militias of veterans and even of Saxons had already been established in towns and other settlements in the last years of Roman rule and probably also in the early years of British independence. Perhaps a skeleton flotilla of the old *Classis Hibernica* still existed, sufficient to play a naval role in cooperation with similar units along the old Roman shore of South Wales at Cardiff's powerful shore-fort and possibly still at Caerleon. With its still wealthy surrounding estates (still productive of quality foodstuffs and other goods even if its villa-buildings were in decline) and with its available tied manpower, Bath in the sixth century was still worth defending (Cunliffe 1995). It would probably have assumed the role of Cirencester as capital

of the Bristol region, and it must have maintained a military capability, under the leadership of one of Gildas's *rectores* (the *Chronicle*'s 'kings') of an aristocratic family - perhaps that of Farinmail. If Bath survived, there is a strong case for supposing that in the later sixth century *Abona* also survived, which was still effectively the sea-port of Bath, easily reached by boat along the Avon or by substantial roadway (Margary no. 54).

Military Dispositions in the Bristol Region: (ii) Wansdyke

By the time of the alleged encounter at Dyrham in 577 AD, there are good grounds for supposing that the north part of the Bristol region would have been adequately defended. Even less vulnerable from a military point of view, must have been the area of our region to the south of the Bristol Avon. Here lay the western stretch of Wansdyke, an earthen rampart with ditch, which is still conspicuous along the high ground of the south bank of the river Avon upstream to Bath. East of Bath the Dyke continues with an impressive stretch across Wiltshire from near Calne to the Marlborough area - but this part has its discrete history which will be summarised later. Until recently, archaeological orthodoxy had insisted that the westernmost end of Bristol's Wansdyke lay at the hill-fort of Maes Knoll above Whitchurch (south Bristol) - a wholly unsatisfactory strategic conception which left an inexplicable and unacceptable defensive gap across Ashton Vale. But the latest ground and desk-survey (Gardner 1998) strongly indicates the existence of a defensive spur, which runs from Maes Knoll westwards via Dundry and Ashton Court to join the hill-fort at Stokeleigh, overlooking the Avon Gorge opposite Clifton. This proposed extension satisfactorily closes the obvious strategic lacuna and opens the way to a more constructive hypothesis concerning the whole purpose of the Bristol region's historic rampart of West Wansdyke.

Whatever else Wansdyke may or may not signify, it was an enterprise which would have demanded conspicuous resources of capital and manpower; it would have needed also a developed grasp of military design, a considerable technical ability in land-surveying and an experienced supervision of labour. These factors, together with the necessary authority to raise the required labour, suggest that the moving force for the construction of the Bristol region's Wansdyke would have been a high-ranking late Roman official with Procuratorial authority. Recent transects effected between Maes Knoll and Bath have revealed Roman pottery sherds from within the rampart (Gardner 1998), confirming opinion which had proposed Wansdyke's late Roman or early post-Roman construction (Dark 2000, Rahtz 2003) and its similarity to standard Roman linear defences, with forts at regular intervals for the assembly of frontier troops (Burrow 1981).

The 'forts' of West Wansdyke were already in existence, provided by the pre-Roman Iron Age hill-forts of Stokeleigh, Maes Knoll, Stantonbury and perhaps by an anchoring defensive structure at or near Berwick Camp, now sadly obliterated, on Odd Down above Bath.

But what was the purpose of Bristol's Wansdyke? On the face of it, no such defensive rampart or boundary would have been required or permitted for the purposes of normal internal security under the integrated Roman regime in Britain before 410 AD. And it must be said straight away that if the recent essay at dating its construction is reliable, it could not of course have been purposed by West Saxons of the seventh century in contention with their dominant northern neighbours, the Mercians (although they must certainly have made use of it). Nor, given a late Roman or early sub-Roman date of 400-420 AD, could it have been constructed in anticipation of any general Saxon rebellion and widespread invasion of Britain. It would have been a far-sighted leader indeed who, at such a time in the very distant south-west of Britain, could have anticipated the need for a substantial earthwork of the dimensions of Wansdyke, with a totally inflexible north-facing defensive capability, against the disaffected Saxons of eastern Britain. The Saxons who settled under treaty in the upper Thames valley were not yet on the horizon in 410 AD and, given their maritime capability, if bent on conquest, they might just as easily have arrived in our region from landings on the south or south-west coast of Britain (the flawed anticipation behind the fixed seaward-facing heavy batteries of Singapore in World War II, easily outflanked in 1942, spring to mind). With a late Roman or an early post-Roman date for the commencement of Bristol's Wansdyke now available, it must have been built to withstand a different enemy. Historical evidence suggests that the hostile forces in question were the sea-borne Hiberni from Ireland.

According to late Classical sources (Claudian), the Hiberni had been the traditional enemies of western British shores from before the Barbarian Conspiracy of 367-368 AD. Gildas named them *scotti* (lit. 'plunderers'), whilst the late Roman historian Ammianus Marcellinus noted that they had been causing devastation in their raids on the West from at least the reign of Constans I (333-350). He also linked the *scotti* with the *attacotti*, a name now understood correctly as deriving from Old Irish *aithechthúath*, unstable lower-caste tribal groups of Munster under tribute to the dominant *túath* of the *Eóganachta* (Rance 2001). There was also the problem of folk-migration from Ireland, probably induced by climatic deterioration (colder and wetter winters and springs) in the late fourth and fifth centuries (Jones 1996). For some time Irish settlement, undertaken by the tributary tribes of the Uí Liatháin and the displaced Déisi, had been occurring on the Welsh shores of *Demetia* (Dyfed). This gave rise to the early Welsh kingdoms, under Irish

kings, of Dyfed and Gower (Thomas 1986, Dark 2000 with reservations) and of Brycheiniog (undisputed). To a lesser extent, this sort of settlement appears from place-name evidence to have been taking place also nearer to home in Cornwall and north Devon. Our own region, south of the Avon, harbours archaeological traces of an Irish dimension from an early but as yet unspecified date: for example, the cluster of three small class III cliff-top forts running north-east from Cadbury-Congresbury (Cleeve Toot, Tap's Combe at Brockley, Backwell) have 'anomalous' Irish characteristics (Burrow 1981), while eight or more Irish-type domestic rounds or *raths* have been recently discovered in Bickley Wood beside Cadbury-Congresbury hill-fort itself (Gardner 2006). This points to a pre-Roman Iron Age connection, perhaps of kinship, with Ireland - even an ancient one, indicative of what has been called an 'Irish Sea Province', as if Ireland's early cultural frontiers had lain legitimately on the west British coastal plains (Moore 1970). The early fourth-century Irish expeditions into our region in Roman times may have been part of a centuries-old pattern of communications which collided, for historical reasons quite beyond Irish control, against imperial Rome. The Hiberni, in one sense, may simply have been calling to claim their own - but the inevitable result was hostility and, argued here, the conception and construction of West Wansdyke.

Any new (or renewed) Irish occupation of Roman *Demetia* (Dyfed) may have been accommodated in part by the Romans' recognised procedures of diplomatic bribe and enlistment. The former (bribe) raises the question whether the contemporary Roman hoards of silver - scrap, cut plate, ingots or coin - found in Ireland at Balline (Co. Waterford), Ballinrees (Co. Derry) and Coleraine - were not such payment, like the Roman silver of Traprain Law in southern Scotland, rather than booty. Enlistment under treaty (*foedus*) was certainly employed: the policing of the threatened region with units of *Attacotti*, who begin to appear for the first time in late Roman military records (the *Notitia Dignitatum*). But, with the onset of regular famines in Ireland, the migrations must have increased in frequency and assertiveness. Early sources used by the ninth-century Welsh author Nennius, in the *Historia Brittonum*, report migrant ships of thirty men and thirty women (a feasible ship's complement of sixty). According to early Irish sources, open attacks led by the High King of Ireland, Niall of the Nine Hostages, on Romano-British shipping and coastal locations came to a head in 395 AD. These bold thrusts were aimed at the west coast of Britain as a whole: Chester (*Deva*) was plundered and then, across the Channel from Bristol, the former legionary fort and harbour of Caerleon (*Isca*). As has been said, this deterioration in the coastal security of western Britain arguably led to the construction of West Wansdyke, the efficacy of which was proved by the subsequent history of our region. No conspicuous

destruction by force or fire is detectable in the archaeological record of our territory from the time of the rampart's construction in (probably) the first years of the fifth century. The feared *Hiberni* - Gildas's 'impudent' *grassatores [et] scot(t)i a circione* ('pirates and plunderers from the north-west') - made what may have been one of their final attacks in 405 AD, when, led by Niall at the height of his power, they were defeated at sea by a Romano-British flotilla of probably the *Classis Hibernica*, drawn most probably from the major naval base at Cardiff fort and also from *Abona*.

Once in operation, Bristol region's Wansdyke clearly prevented the Hibernian *scotti* and *attacotti* from mounting incursions into the 'soft underbelly' of north Somerset. Earlier Irish raids had been content with plunder: movable wealth of all sorts including slaves. St Patrick as a boy, for example, had been thus netted and transported to Ireland a century before, perhaps from our region, although the local evidence for this is so far circumstantial and the entire Patrician chronology quite ambiguous. After Niall, the Irish threat to our region may have declined if it did not at once disappear. Having established a ruling dynasty in Brecon, the Hiberni took control also of the important hill-fort at Dinas Powys on the south Welsh coast above Penarth, opposite to and visible from the Bristol region. This 'Irish [military] elite settlement' (Dark 2000) must have posed a continued threat to our region in the period following the Roman withdrawal, even if nothing came of it because of the West Wansdyke barrier. The south bank of the Avon in these early years would still have needed protection for its people on their agricultural and industrial sites in and around the walled settlement of Camerton and at the heavily-walled Gallic-type settlement of Gatcombe at Flax Bourton, which appears to have picked up production once again and probably functioned as a garrison for military reservist patrols along West Wansdyke, soon under the direction of the hill-fort at Cadbury-Congresbury.

The Bristol region's section of Wansdyke appears therefore as a classic Roman defensive rampart probably conceived in the crisis-ridden final decades of the fourth century and built in the first years of the fifth century. Two historic scenarios for the project suggest themselves, either of which may have included plans also for the construction of the walls of Bath, which may well date also to the late fourth century (Cunliffe 2000). The first planning period could have occurred in 368-369 AD, following the Barbarian Conspiracy when, under the dynamic leadership of Count Theodosius and his distinguished military team, a total review and replanning of the whole of the defences of Britain took place. This included the last great repair of Hadrian's Wall: when, in other words, static defences were very much in the minds of the leadership. The second suitable time for the conception of Bristol's Wansdyke would have

been under the imperial *magister militum* Stilicho, regent in the West of the emperor Honorius. Stilicho was in Britain in 396-399 AD, following an urgent appeal to restore order following the incursions of Picts and Saxons in the east and, significantly, of Irish *scotti* and *attacotti* in the south-west of Britain, circumstances recorded in a poem written by Claudian in honour of Stilicho. If Bristol's Wansdyke was part of a new fixed-defence enterprise to be manned by *limitanei*, in a Britain that was being depleted of its regular Field Army by a series of usurping Romano-British Emperors, then it could have been not only conceived but also undertaken and completed before the end of the final decade of Roman power. A late Roman administration centred in nearby Bath, with imperial authority still over labour and resources, would have been available. The detailed planning, surveying and direction of (largely native) labour in the field would have fallen to the Army, and either Cardiff or Caerleon suggests itself as the source of all this expertise at this period.

Historically, Caerleon had been the base of the II *Augusta* Legion with its accumulated experience of military wall-building, one of the three legions employed in the construction both of Hadrian's Wall and, in the mid-second century, also of the short-lived Antonine Wall to the north of Hadrian's. The north-facing Antonine Wall (see photograph) is a military feature which lies between the Firths of the Clyde and the Forth and which, with its turfed ramparts and the frequency (not the typology) of its forts, bears some resemblance to Bristol's Wansdyke. Overlooking the rivers Kelvin, Bonny Water and Carron from the south side of the Central Scottish Rift Valley, it is sited very like the Bristol region's Wansdyke, with its domination of the Avon Basin. The Antonine's regular Roman forts were initially planned at standard eight-mile intervals (a legion's half-day's march with full packs), while the forts of Wansdyke stood fortuitously, as described, at slightly shorter but regular five-mile intervals determined by their construction in the late Iron Age. The core of the II *Augusta* Legion had left Caerleon ca 290 AD to man the new Saxon Shore Fort at Richborough, but vexillation units of the Legion had remained behind at the important shore-fort and naval harbour of Cardiff, with perhaps a nominal presence also at Caerleon. Here the Legion's traditional expertise of fortification construction, with the necessary surveying and management skills, could have been tapped.

Obviously the eastern and south-eastern shores of Roman Britain, facing the Continent, needed a greater defensive capability than its western shoreline. The ten Saxon Shore forts from Brancaster to Portchester (completed by 370 AD) had supplied this necessary defence from raids which emanated from the north German, Jutish and Frisian coastlines. But the fourth and fifth-century military picture of the western British shores indicates a growing frequency of sea-borne barbarian raiding. Only Cardiff and *Abona*



West Wansdyke just to the east of Maes Knoll Fort at O.S. ST60336590



The Antonine Wall at Watling Lodge, near Falkirk

sited on the Bristol Channel offered significant fortifications and ocean-going harbours for the maritime defence of the long south-western shoreline of our Island; Carmarthen, Caerleon and Gloucester, with limited harbour-room, could offer only minor sea-borne defensive capabilities (what there may have been at Pembroke awaits discovery). Overall, this represented a significant imbalance in the British Diocese's defences of the late fourth-early fifth centuries, which the construction of Bristol's Wansdyke was arguably intended to rectify.

Lying between Bristol and Bath, West Wansdyke might therefore be seen as part of a grand defensive strategy for the entire basin of the Bristol Avon, gateway to the wealth of Bath and the villa estates and smaller industrial sites of the river valley and its hinterland (see diagram). It is important to bear in mind that the defences of Roman Britain, even at the lowest point of the Island's military capacity under the usurping emperors of the early fifth century, would have still been formidable. In 407 AD, for example, Constantine III had transported to the Continent only the legions of the Mobile Field Army, leaving behind the *limitanei* of the Frontier Army under the command of the *Comes Litoris Saxonici* ('Count' of the Saxon Shore).

There would therefore have been no lack of effective defence in our region until the Roman Army was altogether withdrawn at some time after 410 AD. The two towns of *Abona* and Bath would have garrisoned a sufficient defence-force for the north bank of the Avon, enjoying swift passage and unimpeded views along the river from the major Roman road which linked them (Margary no. 54), with a reserve of troops probably available at the small walled town of Hall End, near Rangeworthy. This defensive triangle (*Abona* - Hall End - Bath) was probably replicated on the south bank of the Avon, in the first instance, by the defensive triangle of Stokeleigh - Gatcombe - Bath, employing the high ramparts of Wansdyke as an unimpeded passage for the *limitanei*, parallel with the course of the river. Reserve troops would have been available in the rear, firstly stationed at the apex of the triangle in the massively walled villa-settlement of Gatcombe, the industrial life of which had resumed in the early fifth century after an apparent hiatus perceived in the archaeological record. In the later sub-Roman period, at Gatcombe's abandonment (if the archaeological record can be relied on), the hill-fort at Cadbury-Congresbury, refortified by ca 450 AD, would have provided both the oversight of the defences of the south bank of the Avon and the source of reserves.

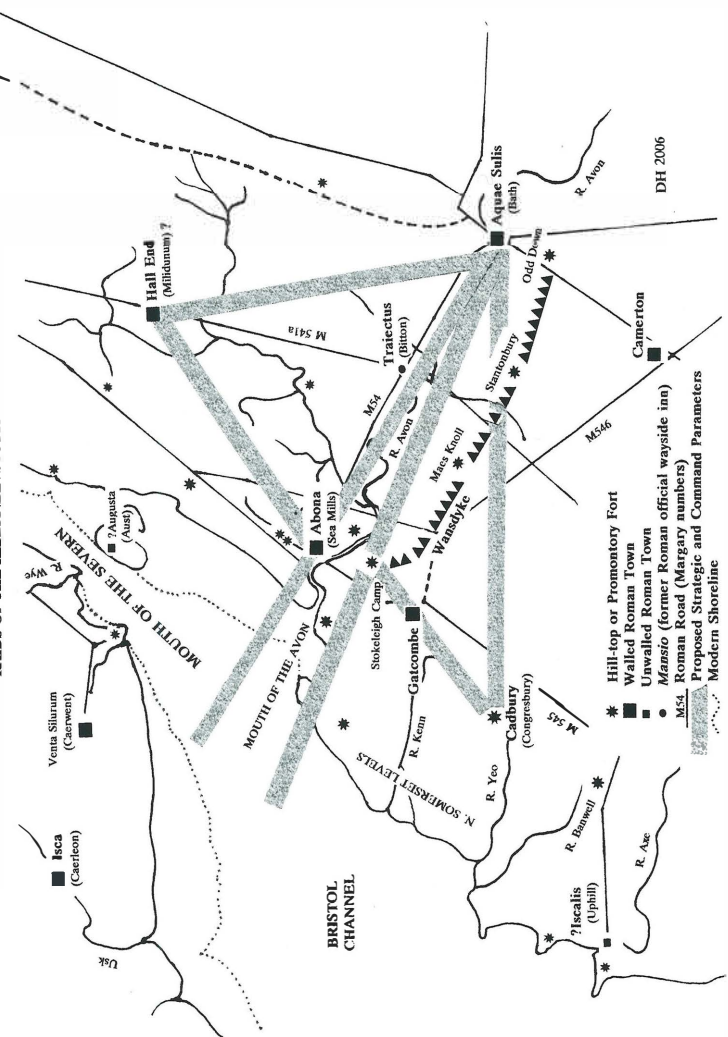
The construction of Bristol's Wansdyke, therefore, answers best to the defensive questions posed in the first place by the sea-borne Hiberni, in both late and sub-Roman Britain, who used the fixed highway of the Bristol Avon as their entry-point into our region. Any flotilla of hostile

ships negotiating entry into our region along the River Avon, would have discovered, perhaps too late for withdrawal, that they were entering the jaws of a trap, a funnel patrolled on both sides by Roman *limitanei* or their British successors, which concluded at the walled city of Bath, where troops of a defending *numerus* would have been stationed. Further penetration by river past Bath would have been easily prevented by means of a chain barrage at perhaps Twerton, if not at some conveniently strategic part lower down-stream. The killing-field would have been at any place the defenders chose. Therefore, the defence of our region along the Avon, until the advent of the Saxons in the late sixth century, must have been dictated by a strategy agreed between the polities of both banks, an exception to what Gildas characterised as the otherwise politically fissiparous nature of the sub-Roman period.

The Anglo-Saxon Annexation of the North Bristol Region

Wansdyke, with its attribution to Woden-Grim, relates to the many 'Grimdykes' of the English countryside. Grim was the mask-bearer, the aspect of the war-god who worked deception and change - and change is the defining characteristic of all boundaries. Our earthwork was certainly already in existence when the West Saxons entered the north Bristol region as masters allegedly in 577 AD. It is what prevented them from overrunning the south of our region in the same campaign, being diverted westwards instead, to receive a decisive check by king Mouric, two or three years later, on the banks of the Wye near Tintern - if the source in the *Liber Landavensis* is reliable. Many of the West Saxons were probably already Christians, or on the path to Christianity, on first entering our region (see below), when to lend a pagan god's name to the dyke would have seemed inauspicious, even blasphemous. Its name, therefore, may well have been given some fifty years later, defiantly, by the Mercians under Penda, who took control of south Gloucestershire away from the West Saxons. The Mercians were still pagans and they were, after all, 'peoples of the boundary' (A-S *mearc*) themselves, naming the dyke in tribute to the most appropriate god of their own pantheon. Much later, the major dyke of their converted Anglian kin would be accorded the name of its builder, their anointed warrior-king Offa. It was the Bristol region's Wansdyke, therefore, this great West Country defensive work of pre-Saxon England which, although not expressly built for the purpose, successfully held up Saxon incursion into the vast, well-defended hinterland of north Somerset. West Wansdyke therefore remains as both the symbol and the means of one of the last significant stands of late Roman Antiquity against the migrating Germanic peoples in the Northern European arena.

THE BRISTOL AVON AND WANSDYKE IN THE SUB-ROMAN/PRE-SAXON PERIODS:
PROBABLE DEFENSIVE AND ENTRAPMENT STRATEGIES AGAINST SEABORNE
RAIDS OF THE HIBERNIAN SCOTTI



The West Saxons' acquisition of our region was a goal that they were bound by augury, avarice and finally existential necessity to achieve. The theory of 'immobilism' which has been sweeping through archaeological intellectual circles - that it was Anglo-Saxonic *acculturation* of the Romano-British inhabitants rather than an Anglo-Saxon *presence* which accounts for the Englishing of the West Country - is surely exaggerated. In this light, the Saxon 'conquest' of Gloucestershire has been likened to that, as it were, by uncouth neighbours from the Upper Thames Valley - otherwise very much like the Romano-British (except for their incomprehensible dialect and more fashionable body-accessories) - *refraining* from moving, uninvited, into more civilised, spacious and agriculturally advanced accommodation across the Fosse Way. However, scientific DNA (Y-chromosome) analysis has shown that whereas there has not been complete replacement, anywhere in Great Britain, of the indigenous Romano-British population by later intrusive peoples (Germanic or Scandinavian), there is an identifiable pattern of regional difference. For example, York, the Midlands and Norfolk show the highest degree of population replacement by historic incomers (sufficient to indicate a catastrophic event), whilst Chippenham, just outside our region, is about a third less Germanic than these locations. On the other hand, Chippenham itself is about a third more Germanic than the survey's Welsh location of Haverford West in Dyfed (Capelli 2003). In other words, we must infer that the Saxons arrived in our region in significant numbers, quite sufficient to bring about the total transformation of its language and toponymy within a century or so (the 'Englishing' of the landscape down to the smallest features is already conspicuous in the earliest surviving land-charters of our wider Wessex region in the 670s AD). Acculturation alone, therefore, need not (cannot) account for the major changes in types and names of settlement, in social habits and in language evident in the Bristol region in the period of the advent of the Anglo-Saxons. The 'rights of conquest', which included imposing laws and (if politically expedient) language, were paramount and indisputable in the ethical canon of this and other warlike European races of the Migration Period (Todd 2001).

The resentment of the British towards their Saxon invaders is a recurrent theme of their early legends and poetry. Their descendants, the Welsh, still nostalgically name England 'Lloegr' - which, despite its etymological obscurity, is generally understood as the 'Lost Land'; it was not lost lightly or wantonly. But it appears that the Anglo-Saxons had learned something to their advantage in the long period of their apprenticeship as a conquering people, now far in time and space from their north German homelands. British gold was soon a scarce commodity in the hands of their leadership, whose own reputation and survival amongst their warrior élites depended essentially on their 'gold-giving' capacity (a fact which is commonly

recorded in their sagas); indeed, the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* notes in the annal of 418 AD that the last of the departing Romans 'gathered all the gold-hoards there were in Britain, some of which they hid in the earth so that no man may find them and some they took with them into Gaul': an early annal, admittedly, but one which nevertheless has the ring of truth. Thirty hoards of gold and silver from 388-410 AD alone have been unearthed in Britain, out of seventy-seven in the whole of the Roman Empire in this period (the many finds of late bronze coin hoards, at a stretch, might include the magnificent Thornbury hoard, recently unearthed, of twenty thousand pieces largely of Constantine I). In their long trek across Britain, the Saxons had surely finally learned what the Romans had known from the start, four hundred years before, that the wealth of Britain actually lay in its natural resources rather than in its random moveables, that is to say, in its industrial minerals and above all in its cultivated land, now potentialised by the finely-honed agricultural practices which the Romans had introduced into the countryside over a period of nearly four hundred years. The Saxons' inevitable destiny, confirmed by their priesthood, would therefore be best accomplished with as little destruction as possible of the wealth-producing countryside which they were poised to enter and control.

But a clear political statement of willingness to do battle to the death, the visible threat of violence, needed incontrovertibly to be made in order to pave the way for the annexation of the territory of the remaining free Romano-British peoples in the West. No landowner in history is known who peacefully handed over his lands, which alone could provide the basic needs of himself, his family and his heirs, without due compensation or due force - unless it were by some powerful symbolic gesture of force which alone justifies uncontested submission. The truth of the *Chronicle's* annal of 577 AD may never be known. Heroic history - the sort of history that we encounter not least in those early Anglo-Saxon annals - requires both the mysteries of numerology and patriotic victories on an heroic scale. The perhaps 'poetic' triad of British rulers of Gloucester, Cirencester and Bath, recorded as slain in the battle, may have been the victims of a ritual death engineered by the Saxons or their agents. Such was the traditional sacrificial nature of primitive kingship, that their ritual slaying may well have been accepted by both Saxons and by the Romano-British as the sufficient motive for a bloodless annexation of the region. Even battle could be formalised. The smooth displacement of most (if not all) of the Romano-British estate-owning classes and their replacement by a Saxon military élite, with their soldiers and later their families, may also have been part of the bargain to spare the lives if not the properties of the native inhabitants, a pact which may even have been underwritten by bishops of the Romano-British church, who must also have been seeking an accommodation. DNA analysis

indicates that a lesser proportion of the population of the north Bristol region was to remain of British stock (if the Chippenham comparison may stand). This harmonises with the evidence of the Laws of king Ine of Wessex which, promulgated a century or so later in ca 710 AD, allow the British to be, if not first-class citizens, at least a small legitimate land-owning class within a predominantly West Saxon society. There was clearly some sort of accommodation with the British before Dyrham - even if a lop-sided one. The speed with which characteristically furnished, pagan Anglo-Saxon burials disappear from the archaeological record in western Britain after ca 600 AD may well argue for Saxon sympathy for the Romano-British and their Christian church and, not perhaps surprisingly, the swift conversion to Christianity of the incomers themselves (the relative 'invisibility' of Vikings in the archaeological burial record of Danelaw will prove to be comparable). The result would have been the relatively bloodless (if not slave-free) annexation of our region by the Saxons, together with the survival of part of the British land-owning aristocracy with some of their lands.

Nevertheless, the completeness of the submission of the northern half of the Bristol region is indicated by its being eventually swept almost clean of Romano-British town and settlement names. The evidence indicates that the Anglo-Saxons were wholly averse to learning the language of the native British, whereas their Germanic cousins in Gaul, the Franks, unhesitatingly adopted the spoken Latin of the Gallo-Romans whom they had conquered. Only a small handful of Celtic (Brittonic) words entered the Old English lexicon, suggesting that if a period of Celtic and Anglo-Saxon bilingualism supervened, the effort was quite one-sided and was made by the British. This is epitomised in our region by the place-name 'Churchill': the Saxon overlord who imposed the name clearly did not understand the meaning of the first (Celtic) element he had picked up from his British informant ('Church' is a total misunderstanding of *crūg* which simply means 'hill') and, to compound confusion, quite redundantly added to it the Anglo-Saxon word 'hill' (*hyll*), creating the monstrous tautological hybrid 'Hill-hill'. The conclusion must be, therefore, that it was only the subject British, many of whom must already have been bilingual in Brittonic and Latin, who perforce mastered both languages. Within a century or so, however, to judge by place-names and by early Anglo-Saxon land-charters, the British had abandoned their own Celtic tongue. The Anglo-Saxon Church, which gradually replaced the old British Church in the West after the Synod of Whitby in 664 AD, must have hastened this movement to linguistic homogeneity.

Much was lost from the countryside when this uniformity in language occurred in our region: *Abona* as a Latinised Brittonic toponym must have soon disappeared after the Saxon annexation, to be replaced, if ancient local anecdote can be trusted, by Old English **Portcaester* ('Portchester': Seyer

1821) and later still of course by 'Sea Mills' ('saye' or 'serge mills'). The (technically) 'small' walled town of Hall End near Rangeworthy (perhaps the *Milidunum* of the Ravenna Cosmography), given the early Saxon distaste for townships, must soon have disappeared from the countryside together with its name. The post-Roman British name of *Aquae Sulis* is lost to history, as is also its pre-Roman form. 'Bath' and its recorded alternative *Acemannceaster*, 'the fortified town on Akeman Street', derive from Early English. Romano-British settlement names which survive intact, without Saxon manipulation or modification, number only Cam (named after the river), Ingst (< Celt. *ynys* 'island, dry high ground') and Aust (from Latin *August[in]us*, perhaps the sixth-seventh century Saint's name, or more persuasively from *Augusta* the cognomen of the Second Roman Legion of Caerleon). It might be inferred for Aust and Ingst that, rather than for political reasons, they were left untouched by local Saxon overlords because of their marsh-land remoteness, accidentally ensuring the survival of their native name-forms. If the twenty or more small villas, farms, rural settlements and agro-industrial sites of the north Bristol region in Roman times, which archaeology has discovered, had Romano-British names, none survived, even though there may well have been a continuity of activity (if not of ownership) at or near the locations themselves. Amongst these, with their Early English names, may be numbered sites on the Avonmouth and Severn Levels at Crook's Marsh Farm, Rookery Farm, Brynleaze Farm (probably <A-S pers. name *Bryni* or *Brūn* + pl. of *lēah* 'open land'), Washingpool Farm, Rockingham Farm; also the settlements at Shirehampton, Pilning, Lawrence Weston, Henbury, Horfield, Winterbourne, Bradley Stoke, Bailey's Court Farm at Little Stoke, Emerson's Green, Rodway Hill, Whitchurch and Hengrove (bibliography of sites in Higgins 2005). Stone Hill at Hanham appears from its archaeology to have had a continuous history into the Saxon and medieval periods; again, its British name is unknown but the simple elements of its English name suggest that 'Stone Hill' is a straightforward Saxon calk formed on Celtic **cam* (<*cornū*) 'stone, rock, crag' + **brigā* 'hill' (cf. the Cornish place-name 'Carn Brea' which is literally 'Stone Hill'). This sort of transformation from British to Old English may underlie most of the simple topographical place-names of our region.

On the other hand, four of the so-called *wīc* names in our region, for example Wickwar, Wick (on the river Boyd), Swainswick and Tadwick (above Bath) may well derive from Latin *vicus* (civilian settlement, emporium). Significantly, they are all hard by known Roman villa-estate centres, which they must have serviced. The same holds true for Wick St Lawrence on the North Somerset Levels, with its apparently sub-Roman oval church-yard, indicating an ancient community which may have serviced either Wemberham villa or the one which perhaps lay in the vicinity of

Worlebury. In other words, the term *wīc* was probably applied by the Saxons as descriptive of contemporary Romano-British settlements whose British names were known neither to them nor to their British interpreters. On the other hand, a *vicus* derivative which is suffixal - e.g. *Northwick*, *Redwick*, *Berwick* in our north region - tends to indicate a dependent farming unit of wholly Saxon origin, such as a dairy or a stock-yard. Way Wick and West Wick in our southern sector, although 'suffixal', need more investigation; their proximity to the villas at Locking and Banwell respectively may be significant. Other Romano-British settlement names survive in subordinate apposition within the more common Celto-Saxonic hybrid toponyms, implying Saxon dominance in the relationship with their British neighbours. These include, in our northern territory, *Nymphsfield* (<Celtic *nimet*/Latin *nemetus* 'shrine' + A-S *feld*) and both *Gatcombe* [Park] in the Stroud area and *Cattybrook* near Almondsbury (< Celtic theme *cat[u]-lga[u]-* 'battle/military/fortified' + A-S *cumb* 'valley' and *brōc* 'brook, stream' respectively). *Catbrain Hill* (Henbury) derives from the same Celtic *catu-* theme + Celt. **brenn* 'hill' + A-S *hyll* - a tautological hybrid.

Apart from the cases of Aust and Cam mentioned above, the only important toponyms left unmodified in the ancient tongue are those of the larger landscape features. These include watercourses: Severn, Avon (2), Frome (2), Coln, Cam, Boyd, Corse and possibly Churn at Oldbury-on-Severn (cf. 'Churnmead Farm' there which, despite appearances, may not indicate simply 'dairy'). Some of these rivers or streams later gave their names, suitably modified with Saxon habitative suffixes, to what probably were, at this early post-conquest period, exclusively Saxon settlements: *Cam-bridge*, *Framp-ton* (3), *Bit*-[i.e. Boyd]-*ton*, *Cors-ton*, *Frenc-hay*, *Fro-cester* and *Wood-chester*, (where *-ton* indicates farm or settlement, *-hay* enclosure, *-cester* a Roman villa, walled estate or walled town). As the name seems to imply, *Avening Green* near Tortworth, with its early A-S *-ing[as]* suffix, lies on the Little *Avon* river, whilst *Avening* near Nailsworth, although also containing 'Avon-', lies on the Coln, a tributary of the Stroud Frome. The two *Avenings*' literal meaning (<*afoningas*: 'afon-dwellers'), reveals therefore not the rivers' original indigenous names, but the Celtic word *abon/afon* meaning simply 'river'. Prominent hills are also included in this category of Celtic survivals: *Pen* of Pen-Pole in Shirehampton (<Celt. **penn* 'hill-top' + A-S *pyll* stream, pool, creek) and *Dundry* (<Celtic *din* 'fortified hill' + A-S *draeg* 'steep slope, drag-way', associated with the ancient quarrying industry there). Before the advent of written land-charters in the late seventh century, the Anglo-Saxon 'land-register' was oral. However, rivers and hills functioned as landmarks or surveying points as much in the pre-literate as in the literate period. The continued use of the

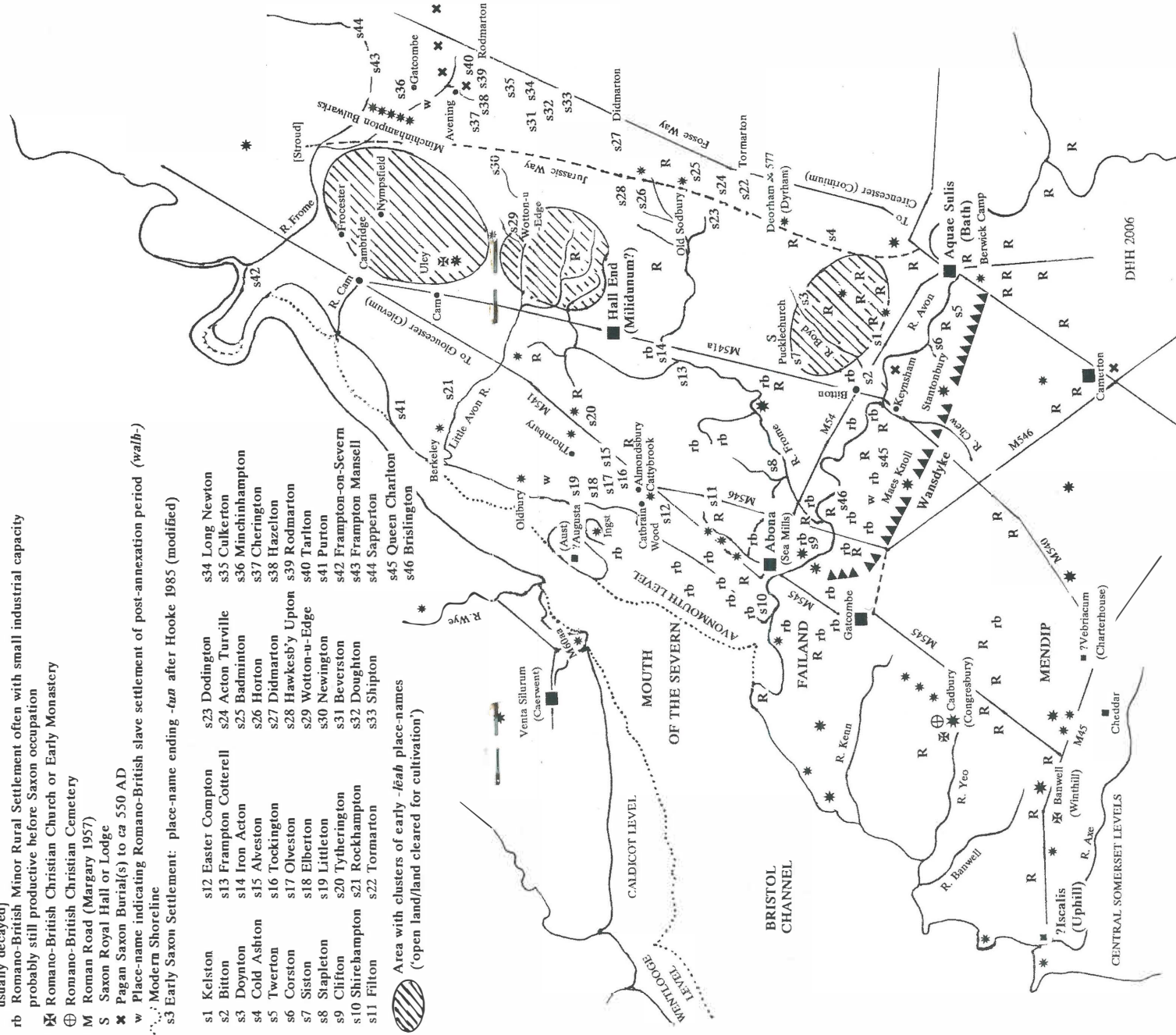
Brittonic (Celtic) names of such prominent landscape features, rather than the Anglo-Saxon name, was almost certainly a political decision on the part of the Saxons. In other words, such names were necessarily retained in the native language so that the location of lands and properties, now mostly owned by the Germanic newcomers, would henceforth and for all time be unmistakable to the natives who had been dispossessed of them, in case they cared or dared to cavil or dispute ownership at a later date.

Significantly, the basic meaning of the Anglo-Saxon term for the native Britons, *Walas*, meant 'strangers', 'outsiders', 'not of our people or race'; its meaning then shifted later to 'slaves' (since enslavement was the common fate of a captured 'outsider'), before it finally designated 'Welsh[men]', either bond or free. Certain Saxon toponyms prefixed with the root *Wal[h]-* (for example *Walton* or *Walford*) are especially significant in this respect. They probably signify places of officially tolerated refuge for the defeated *Walas*: either for the surviving British property-owners for whom the apartheid laws of king Ine of Wessex (ca 700 AD) later find sympathetic if not entirely egalitarian space, or more sinisterly, for the defeated British gathered in *lagers* into which land-owners could dip for free labour. They appear, ominously, with some scarcity in the Eastern and Midland counties, where in the flush of early conquest, slaughter rather than capture must have been common; but they increase in frequency towards the west of our Island as the Saxons perhaps become more enlightened. Although this holds true for north Gloucestershire and the Welsh Border counties, only two or three such place-names appear from charter evidence to have been established in the Bristol region of south Gloucestershire (Hooke 1985). There is also possibly *Wallow Green* at Nailsworth which may signify their interments (<A-S *wala* + *hlaw* 'the foreigners' burial mound'). This meagre survival - which would have accounted for only a handful of native British families - must be significant, given the wider national context of such place-names. On the one hand it may indicate that our region was relatively depleted of its population, in harmony with the archaeological picture of the abandonment, before the Saxon advent, of almost all the Romano-British small villas, farms and rural settlements already mentioned. This may have occurred - if it did occur - through a variety of causes: the widespread plague of 543 AD with associated famines, which may have derived from a now scientifically proven cometary event; flight in anticipation of the inevitable Saxon advance or, if Dyrham's battle had taken place as the *Chronicle* insists, the massacre of the Romano-British army drawn from the wide 'kingdoms' of Gloucester, Cirencester and Bath, whose 'kings' were likewise slaughtered. In the circumstances, there would have been no need to establish many 'Waltons' of the sort mentioned. On the other hand, the virtual absence of *Wal[h]-* settlement

**BRISTOL REGION ca 570 TO 658 AD
FOLLOWING SAXON ANNEXATION OF
TERRITORY NORTH OF WEST WANSDYKE**

- * Hill-top fort, Promontory-fort or Cliff-top fort
- Roman Walled Town with functioning defences
- Roman Built Settlement (unwalled)
- Former Roman Way-station (*mansio*)
- ▲▲▲ Late Roman or sub-Roman Fortified Earthwork
- R Former Roman Estate [still in production before Saxon occupation but with villa fabric usually decayed]
- rb Romano-British Minor Rural Settlement often with small industrial capacity probably still productive before Saxon occupation
- ✠ Romano-British Christian Church or Early Monastery
- ⊕ Romano-British Christian Cemetery
- M Roman Road (Margary 1957)
- S Saxon Royal Hall or Lodge
- * Pagan Saxon Burial(s) to ca 550 AD
- w Place-name indicating Romano-British slave settlement of post-annexation period (*walh-*)
- ⋯ Modern Shoreline
- s3 Early Saxon Settlement: place-name ending *-tū* after Hooke 1985 (modified)

- | | | | |
|------------------|------------------------|---------------------|------------------------|
| s1 Kelston | s12 Easter Compton | s23 Dodington | s34 Long Newton |
| s2 Bilton | s13 Frampton Cotterell | s24 Acton Turville | s35 Culkerston |
| s3 Doynton | s14 Iron Acton | s25 Badminton | s36 Minchinhampton |
| s4 Cold Ashton | s15 Alveston | s26 Horton | s37 Cherington |
| s5 Twerton | s16 Tockington | s27 Didmarton | s38 Hazelton |
| s6 Corston | s17 Olveston | s28 Hawkesb'y Upton | s39 Rodmarton |
| s7 Siston | s18 Elberton | s29 Wotton-u-Edge | s40 Tarlton |
| s8 Slapleton | s19 Littleton | s30 Newington | s41 Purton |
| s9 Clifton | s20 Tytherington | s31 Beverston | s42 Frampton-on-Severn |
| s10 Shirehampton | s21 Rockhampton | s32 Doughton | s43 Frampton Mansell |
| s11 Filton | s22 Tormarton | s33 Shipton | s44 Sapperton |
| | | s45 Queen Charlton | s46 Brislington |
- Area with clusters of early *-leah* place-names ('open land/land cleared for cultivation')



names in the north Bristol region could argue for a peaceful annexation - but one which included a widespread imposition of servitude. The losers *en masse* would have been efficiently parcelled out to the forty-plus surmised primary and secondary Saxon settlements indicated by the early place-names of the region (see centre-spread map). It is important to consider that Saxon armies were not necessarily large. In the laws of king Ine of Wessex already mentioned, a group of thirty-five Saxon infantry-men composed an 'army' (*here*) - although royal armies would certainly have been larger and those of three 'kings' in a national crisis larger still. There was probably an average of only three slaves per hide of Saxon land (statistics in Jones 1996). One hide (about 120 acres but depending on soil-quality) was deemed sufficient to feed one family over the year. If each of the (say) forty-five early Saxon settlements in the north of our region was composed of five family-dwellings, a probably normal cluster, the total required hidage would be two hundred and twenty-five and the slave population would total six hundred and seventy-five. The remainder of the British would have fled further westwards beyond Severn and Wye or, if wealthy enough, may have emigrated to the continent - to Armorica or even Galicia in northern Spain - rather than be forced to occupy a *lager*-type settlement, totally deprived of freedom. Exodus from the northern half of the Bristol region would have occurred through our major regional port of *Abona* at Sea Mills, during the town's last days bearing its Roman name.

However, landscape archaeology indicates that the Saxons did not march into a wilderness in the British south-west, to have to begin 'pioneering' - the traditional thematics of Victorian historians in a period of vigorous colonialism. The Saxons moved the rather into what was, or what within a generation or two had been, a moderately well-populated land characterised essentially by a developed agricultural economy vastly superior to that of their own north German homelands. As has been said, it had been deprived only of some of its relatively affluent and therefore more mobile people who, Gildas records, had adopted the route of emigration: what Breton scholars call the 'second wave' of immigration by insular Britons to Armorica (Giot 2003, Todd 2001). They would, of course, be a loss to the human resources of our region, an influential group hankering after the benefits of a late Gallo-Roman continental civilisation still under Christian Breton counts. They would have included some landowners whose wide villa estates may still be discernible in the parish boundaries of Henbury, Westbury-on-Trym, Clifton, Bedminster, Brislington, Keynsham and probably elsewhere in our region. From their villas they would have overseen their labourers at work, for example, on the Celtic fields of Clifton Down (Russell 1999), while they or their forebears would have contributed to the agricultural development of our region, acquainted with the farming

treatises, for example, of Cato the Censor (*De Agri Cultura*), Varro and Columella (*De Re Rustica*) and Virgil (*The Georgics*) - or provided with the epitomes of these works. The livestock of Romano-British farms, cattle and sheep, would have been larger and heavier than those in the Saxon homelands; the grain crops, given the more developed Roman plough, of higher yield. This exodus of an élite was a loss to the management of the region's economy but it was perhaps not entirely insurmountable. The land, in the eyes of reconstructed Anglo-Saxons, was certainly worth preserving, with as little pause in production as it was possible to devise in the practicalities of conquest and settlement.

The British Church was already an active influence in the Bristol region as a whole in the late sixth century, a presence prefigured by the earlier Roman iconography of the mosaics of villas such as Brislington, Keynsham and Newton St Loe (dove, peacock, dolphin, chalice and the Orpheus myth) and, most importantly, in the south of our region, by the floriated mosaic cross at Wemberham villa and by the fourth-century glass bowl with Christian motifs found at Winthill (Banwell). No fifth or sixth-century church buildings have been found in our region, but reliable indicators of their existence are firstly the curvilinear shape of church-yards now deemed typical of early Christian sites (for example, at Horfield in our northern sector and Wick St Lawrence in our southern sector) and secondly, early Christian interments. Such burials are indicated at Henley Wood (adjacent to Cadbury-Congresbury hill-fort), Worlebury, Portbury, Portishead and Blaise; also at Wint Hill (Banwell) and Brean Down (both probably early monastic settlements); finally at Uley (West Hill) and, from ca 600 AD very probably at Bath (both great pagan religious centres with strong evidence of a Christian evolution). These traces are underpinned by an entire context of vigorous early Christian activity at prestigious sites, just beyond our region, at Wells (its locus evolving from a Roman mausoleum site) and at the early monastery of Leigh in Street (*Lantocai*), with its anchoritic outliers at Glastonbury Mount and Glastonbury Tor (Aston 2003). The British polemicist Gildas, writing ca 540 AD, implies a continuous Christian church tradition from late Roman times with bishops, priest and deacons. Further evidence of early British Christian influence in the south-west is to be found in the reported activities of Celtic missionary saints in our coastal regions (see below), one of whom, Maildubh, founded the important monastery of Malmesbury (just beyond our region) in the mid-seventh century. Bede's detailed account of St Augustine's unproductive parley with the clergy of the independent West in 603 AD indicates not only a viable British Church but a well-organised one with seven bishops. In fact, the British clergy - already by the early seventh century

- refused to submit to Rome at the Saint's first appeal because of the 'customs' (i.e the long traditions and practices) of their own Church, which by then had become confined to the west of Britain.

There are good indications, therefore, that in northern half of the Bristol region the British Church would have survived the Germanic 'storm'. As already hinted, the paucity in the British West as a whole of pagan Anglo-Saxon graves (conventionally identified by the presence of socially indicative grave-goods) indicates that the conversion of Saxons by the British Church may well have begun before the alleged date of Dyrham. There are only a handful of identifiable pagan Saxon graves in the Bristol region to the north of Wansdyke, some at Saltford on the Avon where, if the diagnostic evidence is correctly understood, an early 'small-scale Germanic presence' existed (Rahtz and Fowler 1972); more important are those in the Stroud Frome area at Chavenage, Avening and Rodmarton, which form part of the far more important cluster around Cirencester at Lechlade, Fairford and Kemble. Germanic presence in the West and South-West which, whether Anglian or Saxon, must surely have been numerous, simply disappears from the archaeological record of burials ca 600 AD. These interments become, unfurnished and mostly oriented east-west, indistinguishable from those of the ordinary Romano-British dead. In the period of the fifty-year peace following Mount Badon, approximately from 500 to 550 AD, the border between the British and the Saxons (perhaps Gildas's *divortium* or 'separation' of the races) lay along the Jurassic Way: the toponym Kemble derives from the Celtic word for 'boundary', whilst the Saxon settlements at Rodmarton, Didmarton and Tormarton derive their middle syllables from Early English *maer* with the same meaning. But in the long peace in question, that border must have become increasingly porous. Rather than the fruits of acculturation, the few furnished burials on the edges of our region may well derive from opportune purchases of, or marriages into, British property by Gewissae-West Saxons, some way from their main homeland settlements in the Upper Thames Valley around Dorchester-on-Thames.

All the evidence, therefore, points to the conclusion that the disappearance of the Saxons from the burial record of the north Bristol region at this time may be explained (despite Bede's complaint of the evangelical costiveness of the British Church) by their conversion to Christianity with its plain burial practice. In anticipation of an egalitarian Christian After-life, such unadorned interment did not disclose racial differences or social status. And the British Christian Church was, after all, on the side of the angels: the much more powerful kingdom of the Saxons' Germanic cousins, the Frankish Merovingians in Gaul - now *Francia* - had bowed to the inevitable in 496 AD with the baptism of

Clovis. The future of Europe would be Christian and indeed, in this sense Roman again, and the Saxons had probably sensed the inevitability of this. There may well have been a growing appreciation amongst their leaders of the benefits of a qualified accommodation with the remaining British kingdoms of the West, during the peace which followed the decisive and probably unexpected Romano-British victory at Mount Badon, when Christ had conquered Woden-Grim. The Anglo-Saxons must surely have come to terms with the need *not* to persecute Christian Britons in the name of Woden in order to achieve their political and territorial aims. The Mercians later acquired the northern part of their kingdom in the West, for example, without too much shedding of blood (Bassett 1989); and the British Church may well have played a part in this in 655 AD (see *Chronicle*) by persuading the acolyte sons, Peada and Wulfhere, of the House of the pagan Penda, that a few large, former Romano-British estates were worth a Mass or two. In the same way the pagan Saxon kings soon learned to countenance politically inspired marriages to Christian queens: the pagan Aethelberht of Kent's marriage to the Christian Merovingian princess Bertha and his later baptism brought political and commercial gains to the royal family of Kent by opening trading opportunities with the Christian continental empire of Merovingian *Francia*.

The Anglo-Saxon Conquest of the South Bristol Region

The siege of Mount Badon in the late fifth or early sixth century had resulted in a British victory and at the same time confirmed that the Saxon tide, if and when resumed, would fall upon the west from a northerly quadrant. The latest authoritative thought on East Wansdyke, the visible remains of which run from near Calne to Marlborough, conceives of it as 'an unfinished Roman [-mode] military earthwork for a non-event', assigning its construction to the 490s against the Thames valley Saxons (Fowler 2001). Fowler's thwarted 'event' is the Saxons' planned overrunning of Wiltshire following the confrontation at Mount Badon (that would have to wait for a further fifty years and would begin in the south). Importantly, Fowler correctly refrains from associating the genesis of Bristol's West Wansdyke with the genesis of the East Wansdyke on the Marlborough Downs, even though both sections are of Roman inspiration. The Irish threat to our region of the fourth and early fifth centuries, which arguably brought about the construction of West Wansdyke, appears simply to have disappeared in the course of the century in which Wansdyke was constructed. East Wansdyke's strategic function, on the other hand, must have been altogether different and may argue for a difference in dating. Its military objective was less complex

than that of West Wansdyke: merely the defence of open post-Roman British territory (which is now Wiltshire) against an enemy arriving overland from the north along the Ridge Way. In the event, the attack in question, which was envisaged by the West Saxons, failed to materialise because of the probably surprise outcome at Mount Badon. Fowler points out that both East and West Wansdyke remained unfinished: although the completeness of West Wansdyke, now better understood, perhaps outstrips that of its eastern counterpart. Both Fowler and this author can agree, however, that each earthwork found its conceptual origin in Roman military thought. In one way, East Wansdyke is a 'purer' Roman conception than its western counterpart, because of the Roman-inspired military regularity of the siting of its 'gates', which Fowler's examination confirms. This faithfulness to a Roman antitype was permitted by its construction on the relatively obstruction-free ground of the Marlborough Downs, whereas West Wansdyke inevitably differs for geomorphological and infrastructural reasons. Here the profile of the turf wall along the defended ridge above the Avon was pre-determined by already existing features: the three or four pre-Roman Iron Age hill-forts (which were turned to the wall's advantage), the valley of the river Chew and the three pre-existing Roman roads (Margary nos. 546, 540 and the Fosse Way). Nevertheless - and despite some anomalies of visual interdiction - the regularity of its fortifications at approximately five mile intervals is militarily impressive.

The West Saxon hold on the north Bristol region was broken in 628 AD, at a battle fought outside Cirencester against the Anglian king Penda, operating from the Mercian strongholds of the Trent valley. Shortly afterwards, the north of our region, including Bath, became part of the sub-kingdom of the Hwicce, effectively under Mercian authority, with a dynasty that lasted for five generations into the eighth century. Its boundaries were to be approximately coterminous with the later diocese of Worcester, which city became its capital after Winchcombe had fulfilled that role in the early years of its existence (Hooke 1985). It was Penda's formidable expansionism (for Bede *vir strenuissimus*) which, threatening the capital town of the Gewissae at Dorchester-on-Thames, directed the latter's energies towards the south and the south-west. By 643 AD the West Saxons, united under their stubborn, ambitious and courageous king Cenwealh, had begun to move out of Penda's orbit, finally establishing their new capital of Wessex (later also their main Diocesan seat) at Winchester. At the battle of *Peonnan* (probably correctly identified as Penselwood in Somerset), the political map of the South West was radically changed when Cenwealh 'fought against the Britons ... and put them to flight as far as the river Parrett' (*Chronicle* 658 AD). Within eighty years of Dyrham, therefore, the

West Saxons, cast out of the north Bristol region, had begun if not concluded the conquest of its southern part.

Resistance to the Saxons had been mounted for those eighty years from the major regional centre of Cadbury hill-fort, just north of Congresbury (Burrow 1981). From an élite hill-top centre such as this, political, military, social and religious control would have been exercised. The same would have been true at Cannington, Glastonbury and South Cadbury in the south-west of Britain, at Dinorben and Degannwy in North Wales (under the pressure of third and fourth-century Irish raids), and more widely in Gaul, Upper Germany and finally in Italy, where ancient Roman towns in vulnerable river valleys were frequently abandoned in favour of *incastellamenti* (fortified settlements) on neighbouring hill-tops - now the glory of the Italian landscape. The larger of the satellite hill-forts in the territory of Cadbury-Congresbury lay at Burledge (West Harptree), Dolebury, Banwell, Worlebury, Clevedon, Cadbury-Tickenham, Tunley, Portbury and Bathampton, and included those along the south bank of the Avon integrated into West Wansdyke, already mentioned. In contrast to the sub-Roman urban and 'bureaucratic' polities north of Wansdyke (Dark 2000), rule to the south of the dyke appears to have been exercised through military autocracies. For Gildas, however, whatever title these post-Roman British rulers assumed, *rector* or *rex*, they were always, in the constitutional sense, *tyranni* because their authority had not been ratified by imperial authority at Rome. The names of the minor monarchs of this southern part of our region are lost to history, whilst their relative status is not fully known vis-à-vis the leadership of adjacent independent British 'states', whether of the 'kingdom' of the Durotriges, centred now at the great hill-fort of South Cadbury, or of the 'monarchs' of Dumnonia (Devon and Cornwall), whose 'whelp' king Constantine was savagely upbraided by Gildas in ca 540 AD. Dumnonia, which gives its name to Devon (with late Celtic sound-shift -m/mn->-v-), was probably the only 'kingdom' known in Constantinople, capital of the Roman Empire following the demise of Rome.

In the high-status timber 'halls' of Cadbury-Congresbury (not to be compared in size or quality with those of South Cadbury), within the relative isolation of their lofty fortress, the leaders from the fifth to the seventh century were clearly still Romanised and in contact - commercially and even politically (if marginally) - with the Mediterranean world, enjoying a continued level of education, comfort and style appropriate to the élite classes of the late Roman world, to which culturally they still belonged. Archaeological opinion (not the majority) which sees the hill-top settlement of Cadbury-Congresbury as an exclusively 'ritual centre' is unconvincing; it does not square with Welsh or continental examples and it is probable that in hill-forts secular and religious roles were not mutually exclusive; for

example, the base of a buttressed bastion discovered by archaeology at Cadbury-Congresbury emphasises the overall military nature of the site, whereas the cairn with its pit of votive offerings recalls similar Christian phenomena in Co. Kerry, Ireland (Gardner 2006). The sacred nature of all hill-tops in ancient civilisations, regardless of their other functions, should not be forgotten. At some unknown date, probably the seventh century, the religious function was divorced from the secular and transferred to the monastic site below, hard by the river, in what is now Congresbury (in 886 AD, King Alfred gave to his Welsh chaplain Asser the oversight of the monasteries of both Banwell and a 'derelict' Congresbury). This replicates the development of monasteries which similarly began on fortified hill-tops such as those at Banwell and, just outside our region, at Cannington on the river Parrett and Sherborne in Dorset (Aston 2003).

Nearby at Henley Wood, on the site of an abandoned pagan Roman temple, the sixth-century leadership must have established their dynastic Christian mausoleum in a populous cemetery of east-west burials that would have contained the remains of some of the two hundred regular occupants of the adjacent 'palatine' hill-top site: priests (often with bureaucratic roles), leading warriors and humbler 'courtiers'. Other hypotheses regarding the quality of the leadership are probably otiose: that it was composed of rebellious but heroic proletarian elements (*bacaudae*), or of opportunistic war-lords of low social provenance and violent proclivities, rather than of 'regular' Romano-British dynasties from such obvious aristocratic sources as Gatcombe (both Gatcombe and Cadbury are linked by the initial elements of their names from elite Celtic-warrior terminology: *catu-* 'battle, military, fortified'). At the hill-fort, archaeology has recovered the materials of an educated and sophisticated class of leadership: a *stylus* (a pen for writing on wax tablets), a score of knives, together with much glass-ware, jewellery and other elaborate metal-work, fine bone combs and foreign ceramics.

The pen is a significant indicator of a literate culture. Far from abandoning their Latin legacy, the Romano-British compatriots of the still independent south-west, which would have included our south Bristol region, appear to have delighted still in the secular literary culture of Late Antiquity. For example, it has been persuasively argued that a splendid fifth or sixth century copy of the *Vergilius Romanus* was made and illuminated in the south-west of Britain (Dark 2000). The *scriptorium* in question must have been part of an early Christian monastery; at this time both Glastonbury (Tor or Mount) and Wells suggest themselves in the first instance. But Cadbury-Congresbury itself may have provided such a facility under sympathetic elite patronage, whilst an equal claim perhaps could be made for the early monastery at Banwell in our region. Suggestions that St Patrick may have been kidnapped as a child by Irish slave-raiders from his

family's *villula* in an educated, wealthy late Roman Christian milieu, such as Banwell, have not yet been substantiated either by persuasive documentary or archaeological evidence. Yet Patrick's father might well have exercised his duties as Decurion at Bath or Ilchester. More substantial is the opinion that St Gildas wrote his polemical history *The Ruin of Britain* in the south-west, in old Dobunnic territory, when again Cadbury-Congresbury's and Banwell's *monasteria* cannot be ruled out.

But the best claim for the presence of a significant early Christian figure, resident and active in the south Bristol region, derives from Congresbury itself, both from its place-name (*Cungresbyri* in the ninth century - 'fortified place associated with [St] Cyngar') and from its later Saxon minster church with his shrine on the banks of the River Yeo, mentioned in 11th century pilgrim guides (Rollason 1978). Early Romano-British Christian kingship, if Continental parallels obtain, embraced both a secular (political and military) and sacerdotal role; hence Gildas's deep and bitter resentment at the spiritual backsliding of the five surviving, independent British kings whom he apostrophises, one of whom had vowed, emptily, to enter a monastery, while another was accused of incest and domestic murder. Governorship, military command and religious leadership were interchangeable features of the lives of saints and bishops in Italy and Gaul in the years of the Germanic invasions, as central Roman authority collapsed: St Germanus of Auxerre, already mentioned, and St Martin of Tours are appropriate examples. The heterogeneous religious and military nature of the Cadbury-Congresbury site should come as no surprise, nor the similar qualities of some if not all of its leadership. St Cyngar, who may have received his theological training in Wales, was recorded in a later Welsh genealogy as of royal descent from the kings of Dumnonia (Radford 1962). Monastic education as an oblate was part of the normal curriculum for royal and aristocratic offspring in post-Roman Gaul (Francia), a tradition that was also to mark the education of King Alfred; thereafter a courtly training in politics and warfare followed. St Cyngar was active in his missionary work in the south part of our region, in the sixth century, when the hill-fort was still so conspicuously occupied by the British.

St Cyngar can be numbered with other early Celtic saints, whether British, early Welsh or Irish who, with reasonable historical certainty, may be said to have created and maintained Christian communities in Somerset and Devon. Early church dedications indicate that the coastal evangelisation of the Bristol region took place largely in the sixth century, from the direction of Wales and the Irish Sea: St Cyngar is recalled thus at Congresbury and Badgworth, St Nectan at Cheddar, St Paternus (Padarn) at Nailsea and St Bridget at Chelvey and Brean. The attributes of St Bridget have clearly been contaminated with Celtic myths of the goddess

Brígh, but the cults of both her and St Paternus were promoted by the very active monastic community at Glastonbury (Burrow 1981, Farmer 1997, Pearce 2003, Rees 2003). As an evangelist of perhaps royal blood, St Cyngar may have been both bishop and *dux bellorum*, either guest at the ruler's high table in the timber 'halls' on Cadbury Hill or, if Dumnonian influence extended as far, the ruler himself.

Familiar therefore to him would have been the *amphorae* of wine, oil and spices, the glass-ware and the fine table-ware found at the fort, the latter indicative of active trading still with the Mediterranean, perhaps through *Abona* (Sea Mills) until the fall of the northern Bristol region to the Saxons, and thereafter probably through Uphill (*?Iscales*) on the Axe, the main port of the south Bristol region. The fine North African red-slipped ware of the sixth century, with Christian basal motifs, found also at Tintagel, South Cadbury hill-fort and along the western seaboard of Britain (but not, significantly, in the now Saxon-held northern half of the Bristol region), strongly suggests diplomatic gifts from the emperor Justinian, who perhaps still needed Cornish tin and Mendip lead for his war-effort as he strove to restore the lost regions of Western Europe to the late Roman Empire (Harris 2003). Through his gifted general Belisarius, Justinian had been successful in wresting North Africa from the Vandals and both Sicily and Italy from the Ostrogoths, although these military successes were unfortunately not destined to be repeated in the distant British Isles. After Justinian's death in 565 AD, the imports of Byzantine fine-ware in Britain diminish and also die. The Saxons remained.

There is no doubt, to judge from the later, more reliable entries in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, that the West Saxons were soon in fighting mood again, following their scornful treatment by Penda of Mercia after the battle of Cirencester in 628 AD. Defeated and then exiled to East Anglia by Penda, their king Cenwealh only contrived a successful return to his people in 648 AD, when Penda was fully occupied elsewhere, in the end fatally, against the Northumbrians. Influenced by king Anna of East Anglia during his exile, Cenwealh publicly embraced Christianity on his return to the West Country. In 652 AD he led his people closer to the Bristol region, engaging in battle at Bradford-on-Avon in 652 AD. The *Chronicle* does not mention either the enemy or the outcome of the battle, but William of Malmesbury's record in that year of an unspecified West Saxon battle, with an unspecified outcome, speaks of the still independent British as the antagonists. The *Chronicle*, for propaganda reasons, rarely records other than Saxon victories; therefore it is not unreasonable to assume that the outcome was a draw if not an actual defeat of West Saxon arms. A further full six years elapsed before the *Chronicle* records the next West Saxon feat of arms: their victory over the British at Penselwood in 658 AD. It is therefore reasonable to

consider Bradford-on-Avon as a victory - if only a temporary one - for the British of the still independent western kingdoms, including that of the south Bristol region centred on Cadbury-Congresbury.

Cenwealh, whose father king Cynegils had received baptism from Bishop Birinus in 635 AD, had himself finally accepted baptism from the same bishop in 648 AD. But as early as 632 AD, Birinus, sent expressly by pope Honorius I in Rome, had been allowed by the king to preach to his West Saxon people. Cenwealh is also known to have had political affiliations and religious sympathy with king Alhfrith of Deira in north-eastern England, a major protagonist of the Roman Christianity which had produced Birinus. Gildas emphasises the continuity of the British Church from its Roman origins under Constantine; on the other hand, the sort of Christianity that St Cyngar preached was naturally biased towards what might already be deemed 'Celtic' practice, still diocesan (with bishops) but with its virtually autonomous monasticism and ceaseless missionary outreach. It is an open question, therefore, to what extent their recent conversion to Christianity might have impelled the West Saxons, still militarily and territorially expansionist, towards relatively charitable accommodation with the already Christian British of the south Bristol region; and to what extent the different (Christian) sectarian stances of Saxon and British might have aggravated hostility.

Sub-Roman and Early Saxon Toponymy and Archaeology in the Bristol Region

Ignoring for a moment the likelihood of chronological drift, skaldic mysticism and political 'spin' in the early annals of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, Dyrham in 577 AD and Penselwood in 658 AD were different sorts of battle with different outcomes and with arguably different implications for ensuing Saxon place-names and even settlement patterns. If the *Chronicle*'s account of the possibly ritual 'triadic' slaughter of three British 'kings' at Dyrham can be credited, the event could have led to the relatively clean and wholesale annexation of the north Bristol region with least damage to its agricultural infrastructure and religious life. Certainly the *Chronicle*'s annal of 577 AD mentions no obstacle to the ensuing surrender of the three major walled towns of old *Britannia Prima* - Gloucester, Cirencester and Bath - nor to the surrender, abject or defiant, of the lesser walled towns of *Abona* and Hall End in our region. Archaeology has shown that no defence of the north part of our region was actually contemplated beyond that provided by the walled settlements: not one of our several hill-forts there indicate any defensive refurbishment at all, let alone on the scale of Cadbury Hill in our southern sector. The only fort to the north which displays any potential for resistance at this time lies at distant Crickley Hill

near Gloucester - merely a palisaded earthwork, in any case. Siege warfare, which was not a strong suit in Saxon armies, may well have been anticipated and avoided in some sort of covert agreement reminiscent of the machinations of a modern *Anschluss*. Saxons, together with the other largely uneducated Germanic races of the migration period, were not exponents of the technological warfare of the Greek and Roman civilisations; they were not, for example, particularly adept in the construction of the necessary weaponry nor knowledgeable of the techniques of siege warfare. The evidence for sieges by the Anglo-Saxons recorded in Gildas's account seems to deny this - but the Saxon armies abroad in the east of England, in the early invasion period to which he refers, may have employed the advice and experience of surviving German veterans, a diminishing pool, of the late Roman army. The dismay evinced by a typical Saxon war-band before the massive walls of some provincial Roman town is well caught by the limner of the Utrecht Psalter (see cover illustration). The reduction by siege of no less than five Roman walled towns after Dyrham, the two major locations of the *colonia* of Gloucester and the capital city of Cirencester, plus the three in our region at Bath, *Abona* and Hall End, would not have been the work of an afternoon. Either well co-ordinated treachery or a far-sighted diplomatic *démarche* must have played a decisive part in their surrender to the Saxons.

Not only the circumstances of the battle of Pensewood of 658 AD but also its outcome must have been different from the alleged encounter of 577 AD at Dyrham. The defeated British commanders at Pensewood are not mentioned at all - no slaughter of the leadership, ritual or otherwise, appears to have occurred, of the sort which seems to have led to a relatively peaceful annexation of territory in the north of our region. In 658 AD the British may well have conceded victory on the field of battle to the experienced and ambitious king Cenwealh, surrendering to him the south Bristol region and the whole of the old kingdom of the Durotriges, with its powerful hillfort of South Cadbury; but the top leadership is not reported as totally destroyed. The flight of the British to safety beyond the River Parrett, recalled in the annal, may have allowed some of their leadership to escape into the south Bristol region and offer something like Alfredian resistance in a countryside so very different from that north of the Avon.

The south part of the Bristol region would have been ideal territory for localised resistance over the three years between Pensewood and the next recorded conflict of arms between West Saxons and the still free British of the south-west of Britain. This battle, which was arguably the decisive and final battle for the control of our part of the West Country, wresting it from the triple alliance with the Durotriges of South Cadbury and the Dumnonii of Devon and Cornwall, took place at *Posentesbyrig* (probably Posbury Camp near Crediton) in 661 AD. The Bristol region to the south of

Wansdyke is moderate upland with lowland features towards the sea. Relatively lofty hill-tops and promontories characterise the high ground, which is threaded by deep, secretive wooded combs. It is bordered in the east by an impenetrable Selwood, and in the south by high, inhospitable Mendip. On the other hand, in the west at that period, it was delimited by marshland, which would have been virtually impenetrable to land armies. The marshes were those of the re-flooded North Somerset levels, the sea-dykes between the mouths of the rivers Banwell and the Land Yeo having been compromised even before the end of the Roman rule which had planned their construction. This left a sizeable portion of once productive, reclaimed land subject again to tidal inundation from a marine transgression that had started in the course of the second century AD (Rippon 2000). Just as importantly from the point of view of defence in depth, the south Bristol region is marked by a plethora of *burhs* (fortified hill-top, cliff-top and promontory forts) and by other less well-defended places revealed by archaeology and place-name evidence.

Major, class I hill-forts (groupings in Burrow 1981), many still with ancient names of Celtic origin, are to be found as follows: at Congresbury and Tickenham (where their identical name 'Cadbury' derives from the Celtic theme *catu-* 'battle, military, fortified' + A-S *byrig* [dative case] <*burh* 'fort'); at Banwell and Dolebury on Mendip; at Maes Knoll (<A-S *maer* 'boundary, frontier' + A-S *cnoll* 'hill-top') and Stantonbury on Wansdyke; on Tunley Hill above Camerton (<Celt. *dīn* 'fort' + A-S *lēah* 'open land'); at Portbury and Worlebury on the Bristol Channel coast; and on Bathampton Down (the so-called 'Caer Badun') and on Odd Down (Berwick, now destroyed) above Bath. The less powerful class II cliff-top forts comprise Burrington and the group of three, which seem to show Irish influence, along the western edge of Broadfield Down at Cleeve (Cleeve Toot <A-S *clif* 'slope, cliff' + *tōte* 'look-out'), Brockley (Tap's Combe) and Backwell (its Camp above Cheston Combe now destroyed by quarrying). Class III promontory forts include Brean Down, Burlage (West Harptree), Clevedon (Wain's Hill), Highbury Hill (Clutton), Stokeleigh (opposite Clifton Camp which is class II) and those on west Mendip at Elborough above Hutton (formerly Celt. *Cedern* or possibly *Cadern* <*catu-* 'fortified camp',), at Dinghurst and Rowberrow. This latter group might also include Dundry (see above for etymology), Dunkerton (probably <Celt. *dīn* 'fort' + Celt. **creig* 'crag' + A-S *tūn* 'settlement'), perhaps Regilbury, but certainly Marksbury below Wansdyke, whose derivation is A-S *mearc[s]* 'boundary' + A-S *byrig* <*burh*: the *-burh* element having probably been transposed from Stantonbury hill-fort on the Dyke or from intervening Winsbury Hill with its minor earthwork (just as Congresbury's *-burh* suffix had probably been transposed from the hill-fort of Cadbury to the monastic site by the river).

Other settlements with 'bourton' names (<A-S *burh* 'fort' + *tūn* 'farmstead' or 'enclosure of farms') may indicate fortification or proximity to a fortification. Bourton, on the flats of the North Moor just to the east of Weston-super-Mare, may derive its name from its proximity to the major fortress of Worlebury Camp or its outlier Castle Batch; Flax Bourton may be so named from its proximity to Backwell Camp just above it or from the strongly fortified Romano-British settlement of Gatcombe nearby, when its walls were still standing.

In the north Bristol region, the incidence of hill-forts and place-names with a 'fort' element are fewer than in the south, even though the north is more than twice the area. More importantly, the northern strongholds are far less impressive from a topographical if not a strictly technical, defensive point of view. Exceptions are the class I major hill-top forts of Uleybury, Bury Hill (Winterbourne) and Blaise Hill at Henbury (the latter toponym from A-S *hēan* [dative of *hēah* 'high, chief'] + *byrig*<*burh* 'fort', transposed from the fortress sited above the settlement). The lesser constructions include the class II cliff-top forts at Combe Hill (Henbury), Clifton Camp and the class III promontory forts of King's Weston Hill, Cattybrook Camp and possibly Gatcombe (Park) near Stroud. Then also, by their *burh* suffixes, suggesting ancient fortifications are Almondsbury (which lies hard by Cattybrook Camp and probably derives its *burh* suffix from it), Thornbury, Oldbury-on-Severn, Old Sodbury and Brackenbury Ditches. Westbury-on-Trym and Hawkesbury probably gained their *burh* status by virtue of having been major Anglo-Saxon manors with early minster churches. Other hill-forts of different classes, whose Celtic *catu-* prefixes were not preserved by Anglo-Saxon culture, are to be found at Elberton, Berkeley (beneath the medieval castle site), Horton, Tytherington and finally around Bath to the north of the Avon, at Little Solsbury Hill (possibly <Celt. *Sul*, patron goddess of *Aquae Sulis*: but the seeming antiquity of its name is not above suspicion), Little Down and Oldbury. Altogether the hill-forts of the south Bristol region, together with high Mendip, Selwood and the impenetrable marshlands of the coastal area, would have offered a more formidable obstacle and stiffer opposition to Saxon occupation and control following Penselwood in 658 AD, than the north Bristol region some eighty years earlier - had the defences of the north Bristol region not already been compromised by what may perhaps be construed as a primitive form of diplomacy on the part of the Saxons.

Recent investigations in palaeobotany indicate that in the sub-Roman period of lower agricultural production, there was (perhaps counter-intuitively) an insignificant regeneration of woodland (Dark and Dark 1997, Härke 2002). With their inefficient scratch ploughs, the early Saxon settlers, in common with other warrior races, appear to have preferred pasture to

arable, cattle and sheep to grain. Meat gave them the extra inches a soldier needed - something discernible in their skeletal remains. Widespread clearing of, at the most, low-growing secondary vegetation on the old 'set-aside' portions of the wide post-Roman villa-estates must have been a major feature of their early farming effort. New Saxon settlements on cleaned-up Romano-British estate lands are probably indicated by toponyms ending in *-lēah*, an element which, deriving from an old Germanic root, indicates 'open land' (the ultimate source is Sanskrit 'open space'). Understanding amongst toponymists of this element has become quite distorted, to the point that it is commonly lent, at one and the same time, the contradictory meanings of both 'woodland' and 'clearing in woodland'. For example, the many toponyms with final *-lēah* in the south Bristol region between Banwell and the Avon are taken to indicate the presence of extensive woodland in the sub-Roman period, when the element should indicate open or largely uncluttered land, suitable for pasture or cultivation after rehabilitation. There is therefore no incontrovertible argument in favour of dense woodland cover from late Roman to early Saxon times, as has been surmised, between Banwell and the Avon, with the exception perhaps of the perennial tracts of growth which still cloak the north-west facing slopes of Broadfield Down and the south-facing slopes of Failand Ridge. As palaeobotanic research has now confirmed, there is no evidence of any mature woodland regeneration following Roman withdrawal from our region.

In the north Bristol area capitulation arguably entailed a relatively peaceful Saxon take-over, as has been proposed. As the centre-fold map shows, the toponyms with final *-lēah* indicate, as in the south of our region, settlements on the cleaned-up ground of parts of the former Roman villa-estates, whose surplus farm-production had become redundant in the coinless society of the decayed post-Roman townships. They would have been secondary 'pioneer' settlements to the majority with suffix *-tūn*, many of which were probably renamed British farmsteads. Much arable and pasture must have become scrub in the early sub-Roman period as the *annona* (corn-tax in kind) and other routine imposts in kind or in specie were no longer demanded by the State. In the north Bristol region at this time and for many years to come, before the tardy re-introduction of an economy based on Saxon coinage and, essentially, on agricultural surpluses, life must have fulfilled the pastoral-idyllic dreams of many a footsore West Saxon migrant from the north German coastal plains or the bleak Frisian islands of his ancestors.

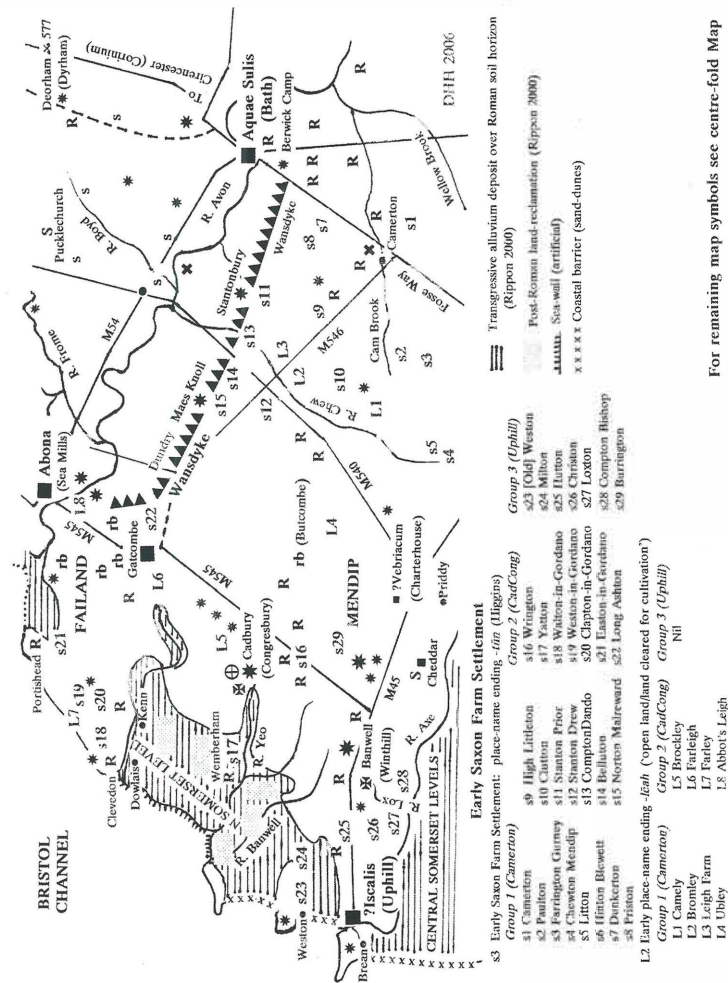
Taken together, *-tūn* and *-lēah* place-names, since the pioneering work of Copley (1986), are now generally accepted by historical linguists as chronologically neutral, rather than flawless indicators of late Anglo-Saxon settlements established after 700 AD. Also place-names ending with the

-ham and -ing or -ingas of the Germanic homelands can no longer be considered necessarily diagnostic of the earliest settlements in Britain. These three suffixes seem, in any case, to have lost their atavistic appeal for the Anglo-Saxons by the time they appear in the west of our country; they account for only 5.1% of place-names in the north of our region and 5.5% in the south (see Appendix). On the other hand, taken together also, the number and locations of the clusters of what may be understood as early -tūn and -lēah settlements in the north and south of the Bristol region are significant, representing 32.7% and 31.4% respectively of all place-names. Their locations also suggest that the Romano-British strongholds of the north Bristol region, to which the West Saxons would have naturally repaired after their military success, became centres of their early pre-literate administration, where land was apportioned orally by Cenwealh to the victorious Saxon leadership and from where Saxon 'pioneers' struck out to found (or simply to find, depopulate and Germanically rename) their settlements.

Foremost among what are now deemed 'central places' would have been Bath, where to the north-west of the city -lēah settlement-names are dispersed within a grouping of five former Roman villa estates. *Abona*, its walled port still viable, together possibly with Bury Hill, may have administered to settlements s8-12 at Stapleton, Clifton, Shirehampton, Filton and Easter Compton (see centre-fold map). Almondsbury (hard by Cattybrook Camp, the *burh* from which the eponymous Saxon leader Aethelmund must first have operated) may have had the oversight of s15-19 at Alveston, Tockington, Olveston, Elberton and Littleton. Either Hawkesbury or the bivallate hill-fort at Sodbury was probably the 'central place' for s13, 14, 23, 26, 28 at Frampton Cotterell, Iron Acton, Dodington, Horton and [Hawkesbury] Upton; the small Roman walled town at Hall End may have overseen sites in the NE sector of its former *territorium* where there lies a another cluster of -lēah settlements; while the former great Roman estate at Frocester, having redeveloped its villa buildings in the sub-Roman period, may have acted as the administrative focus for the group of -lēah settlements of Saxon 'pioneering' enterprise lying southwards of the Stroud-Frome basin. Interesting is the relative lack of early Saxon settlement names on the south bank of the Avon overlooked by West Wansdyke, suggesting that this was perhaps vulnerable land subject to British raiding from behind the dyke's turf defences. The Saxon **Cēgin*, who founded Keynsham on the curving banks of the Avon (<-*hamm* 'land enclosed by a river bend'), may only have settled after the battle of Penselwood (658 AD) on the potentially excellent land of what had been a very wealthy Roman villa.

Saxon occupation of the south Bristol region, revealed by place-name evidence, offers a different history from that in the north. In the end it

SOUTH BRISTOL REGION FOLLOWING SAXON ANNEXATION
AT BATTLE OF PENSELWOOD IN 658 AD



For remaining map symbols see centre-fold Map

appears that West Wansdyke, constructed to protect the vulnerable north Somerset hinterland from Irish raids along the Avon, was not finally breached by the West Saxons but outflanked. This occurred, as has been said, with their victory over the British at Penselwood in 658 AD, some 20 miles due south of Bath, on what is now the border with Wiltshire. Their military campaign, moving from south to north, thus totally compromised the whole of Wansdyke with its north-facing defences. A line of their earlier settlements, revealed by their cemeteries, lay along a similar vertical axis, but ominously further west, extending from the Camerton area just south of Bath through Buckland Dinham and Evercreech to Compton Pauncefoot (Camerton's role is discussed below). These indicate the man-power sources of the West Saxon armies which won at Penselwood and which then engulfed and neutralised the magnificent hill-fort of South Cadbury, the focus of power of the post-Roman kingdom of the Durotriges, assumed allies (if not overlords) of the British of the south Bristol region.

The locations of what might be deemed the early Saxon settlements in *-tūn* and *-lēah* indicate three central places from which the Saxons, after Penselwood, moved into the south Bristol region: Camerton, Uphill and Clevedon. The major military objective of the Saxon invasion must have been to take Cadbury-Congresbury in the centre of the south Bristol region, something that could best be achieved by an encircling strategy from easily accessible points of entry into the territory. It is not known how long the walled town of Camerton may have held out against the Saxons after the British defeat at Penselwood - or if indeed it offered any resistance at all. Comparatively recent review of its so-called 'Saxon' cemetery of 109 graves (some furnished, others plain) just outside the town indicates fifth, sixth and seventh-century occupancy of mainly the town from late-Roman to Saxon (Rahtz and Fowler 1972), a dating span which must have covered Penselwood. The presence of an unreliable Saxon 'fifth column' in the town, in control of its gates, therefore cannot be ruled out. Certainly there would have been urgency on the part of the Saxons to gain control of the major forts integrated into West Wansdyke. From henceforth West Wansdyke would be the northern border of Wessex against Mercia, between whose leadership, that of Cenwealh and Penda respectively, relationships had been dangerously strained. It would be the best part of two centuries before Wessex, under its king Egbert, would reverse this situation and gain dominance once and for all over Mercia.

From new settlements at s11, 13, 14 and 15 at Stanton Prior, Compton Dando, Belluton and Norton Malreward, perhaps under a centre of control at Marksbury (<A-S *mearc* 'boundary' + *burh* 'fortification' with reference to Wansdyke itself), the West Saxons would no doubt have fulfilled a patrolling function along the dyke and, with Mercian agreement at this time,

the policing of river traffic on the Avon. Saxon Camerton must also have encouraged new settlements along the Roman road (Margary no. 546) as far as Stanton Drew, and (perhaps on old Romano-British sites) at s4, 5, 6 and L4 in the upper reaches of the Chew valley (Chewton Mendip, Litton, Hinton Blewett and Ubley), from which control could be exercised over the rich pastureland of the Vale of Wrington with its former Roman villa estates at Havvatt and Lower Langford, and also the native British farm complexes at Butcombe and possibly Ridgehill (hybrid toponym <A-S *hrycg* 'ridge' + Primitive Welsh *īal* 'high plough-land').

The other two points of entry into the south Bristol region, Uphill and Clevedon, indicated by adjacent clusters of early *-tūn* and *-lēah* settlements, imply Saxon access from the sea. The necessary shipping and the easiest access to the Bristol Channel would have been available, following Penselwood, either at Uphill (?Roman *Isnalis*, A-S *Uppan pyll*) on the Axe or Crandon Bridge on the Parrett, both of which were fed by spurs from the Roman Fosse Way and were now in the hands of the West Saxons. The former Roman port of *Abona* (possibly now renamed 'Portchester' by its Mercian or Hwiccan overlords) may also have been exploited if, as is possible, political relations with Mercia and its subordinate kingdom of the Hwicce had been repaired, following Penda's death in 655 AD and Wulfhere's accession in the year of Penselwood itself. From Uphill the West Saxons would have pushed out to subdue the hill-forts at Worlebury, Banwell and, probably against stiffer opposition, at the superbly sited hill-fort of Dolebury. Their settlements would have finally lain at Worle itself (<A-S **wōr* 'grouse' + *lēah* 'open land'), at s23-24 ([Old] Weston and Milton), and at s25-28 (Hutton, Christon, Loxton and Compton Bishop). An unequal accommodation between Saxon and Briton may be discerned in the surviving hybrid Celto-Saxon place-names in the vicinity of Dolebury hill-fort: at Christon (<Celt. *crūg* 'hill' + A-S *tūn* 'settlement') and Churchill (see above). On the other hand, the cluster of hybrids just to the north of Camerton may be due instead to early familiarisation between the races on a perhaps porous frontier. These number Dunkerton and Tunley, both of which derive from Celt. *dīn* ('fort') with a common A-S suffix and refer to the hill-fort on Tunley Hill. To be included here also are Priston (<Celt. **prisc* 'copse' + A-S *tūn* 'settlement'), Pendown (<Celt. **penn* 'head, end' + A-S *dūn* 'hill') and Duncorn Hill (<Celt. *dīn* 'fort' and *corn* 'horn [-shaped]' + A-S *hyll*).

The third point of entry for the Saxon conquerors appears, from place-name evidence, to have been Clevedon. Here the Saxon war-bands would easily have made land and, from here, would have secured the British hill-forts at Wain's Hill overlooking Clevedon Pill, at Cadbury-Tickenham and at Portbury; then not perhaps without lengthy opposition, if such were

mounted, they would have undertaken the reduction of the impressively walled Roman settlement of Gatcombe. Early Saxon settlement appears to have occurred at Clevedon itself and at s18-22. The latter are situated in or around the marshy valley of Gordano (<A-S *gor* 'mud, filth' + *denu* 'valley') and include the settlements of Walton, Weston, Clapton and Easton, and finally Long Ashton. It should be noted that Walton-in-Gordano is not a British 'slave-settlement' of the *Wahl-* type, but from clear linguistic evidence, derives its name from A-S *weall* ('wall'), referring most probably to the Saxon farm-wall which may have been constructed from relict stones of the nearby Neolithic hut circle or the early 'banjo' type enclosure situated on the summit of Common Hill. From place-name evidence, therefore, it may reasonably be argued that the final reduction of the imposing central hill-fort of Cadbury-Congresbury came about in an irresistible encircling movement from north, east and west of the increasingly Saxon-dominated territory of the south Bristol region, ending centuries-old British (Dobunnic) and Romano-British possession.

It is known that the forms of the Celtic place-names in the Bristol region occasionally indicate that the British language, before its replacement by the Old English of the Saxons, had already evolved to a stage corresponding to Primitive Welsh (Smith 1965). Otherwise, this Celtic heritage is more conspicuous in the south of the Bristol region than in the north. For example, old British settlement-names uncontaminated by Germanic are slightly less frequent in the north. The north has Cam, Aust and probably Ingst. The south has Kenn, Chew (Magna and Stoke), Brean (<Celt. **brenn* 'hill, high place'), Priddy (<Celt. **priih* 'earth' + *tī* 'house') and perhaps the farming settlement of Dowlais on the banks of the Land Yeo below Clevedon, which may not be a modern Welsh intrusion but a derivative of Celtic 'dark stream', as also Dawlish, Dewlish and Dowlish in the West Country.

It is not that the north of the Bristol region lacks a certain Celtic flavour but, because of its much greater area, that 'Celticity' is diluted: for example the major river-names, which are Celtic, are approximately equal in number in both parts of the region: the north includes, besides the common pair of Severn and Avon, also the Little Avon, Frome (2), Coln, Cam, Boyd, Corse and perhaps the Churn at Oldbury-on-Severn; our area south of Wansdyke numbers besides the common grand Celtic pair, also the Chew, Kenn, Wring (later A-S *Yeo*), Lox, Cam [Brook] and Axe. Again, Celto-Saxon hybrid names, often of riverside settlements and of hills, are of more or less of similar number in both north and south but, compressed into an area less than half that of the north, they lend to the south of the region a more insistent Celtic flavour to the countryside. Amongst its riverine place-names, the north possesses the quadruple Frome derivatives of Frenchay, Frampton-on-Severn, Frampton Cotterell and Frampton Mansell, the *Avon/afon*

derivatives of Avening and Avening Green, together with derivatives from the rivers Boyd (Bitton) and Corse (Corston). The north has a hybrid hill-name in Catbrain Hill at Henbury and a Celtic forest name in Catbrain Wood near Almondsbury, together with a further hybrid hill-name in Pen-Pole at Shirehampton (see above). The far smaller south can cite, from its Celto-Saxon lexicon, a hardly less equal haul: the riverside settlement names of Axbridge, Cameley, Camerton, Chew Magna, Chew Stoke, Loxton, Wrington and, amongst its hills, the major *massif* of Mendip (<Celt. *mōnūth* 'mountain' + A-S *yype* 'upland, plateau'), Brean (<Celt. **brenn* 'hill, high place'), Duncorn, Dundry, Pendown and Wilmington in Priston parish, which derives its name from Celt. *ūindomago* 'white ridge' + A-S *dūn* 'hill', with reference to the minor plateau upon which the village sits (Turner 1952).

The name of Bristol, of course, does not figure at all in the early Anglo-Saxon period treated here. It makes its first appearance in the Anglo-Saxon records of the eleventh century, within a hundred years or so of its foundation. It is a toponym of plain, wholly Anglo-Saxon origin (<*brycg* 'bridge' + *stow* 'place', therefore 'place or settlement by/at the bridge'). It is a utilitarian formation with no necessary religious or socio-political overtones, contrary to what is commonly thought, and is unfortunately deprived of any sense of the significant Romano-British past of its own region. On the other hand, a place-name which is found in both the north and the south of our region and which trails a sense of deep history is Gatcombe which, with its employment of both the Celtic and the Old English languages, and with its reference to ancient fortifications, is truly symbolic of the history of the Bristol region in the distant but perhaps not entirely 'dark' centuries of the sub-Roman and early Anglo-Saxon periods.

APPENDIX: RESEARCH ON THE CHRONOLOGY OF ENGLISH PLACE-NAMES

In 1986, Gordon Copley published the results of his exhaustive and scientifically-based enquiry into the chronology of English place-names which, definitively compromising the well-established orthodoxies of the subject in place for half a century or more, are now generally accepted by the profession. Space here only permits the enunciation of his major conclusion: that historic place-name taxonomy favours no particular class of toponym in terms of its antiquity. Displaced, especially, from the crowning position in elite place-name indicators are the *-ham* and *-ing/-inga[s]* type suffixes, allegedly diagnostic especially of the Anglo-Saxons' Germanic homelands, while *-tūn* and *-lēah* suffixes, by far the most common amongst Germanic toponymic elements in England, are released from their academic strait-jacket of 'post-700 AD' and may be confidently assigned to place-name formation from the fifth to the eleventh century. This does not indicate 'open season' in the discipline of toponymy; fine, informed academic distinctions are still numerous and necessary, with which readers may become familiar not least through the works and bibliographies of Copley (1986) and Gelling (1997).

In the table opposite are listed the frequencies of early place-name elements from Copley's widespread research in fifth and sixth century contexts (516 in number, broadly from Kent to the vale of the Warwickshire Avon) together with this author's examination of 159 diagnostic place-names from the Bristol region north of Wansdyke (70% of area) and 161 from south of Wansdyke (30% of area), which must have been formed, respectively, in the late sixth century (ca the alleged battle of 'Dyrham') and the mid-seventh century (following the battles of Penselwood and Posbury Camp). It can be seen that this author's frequencies from the Bristol region are closely but, given the different chronological parameters, not completely conformable to Copley's, giving interesting hints of evolutionary gradients which are not simply derivative from variations in the geographical contexts.

	Copley (1986)		Higgins (2006)	
	5th cent.	6th cent.	late 6th cent.	mid-7th cent.
	England (E-W Transect)		N. Bristol Reg.	S. Bristol Reg.
Habitative suffixes				
-ham	4.4%	3.5%	1.3%	4.3%
-inga(s)	14.0%	8.9%	1.9%	0%
-ing	0.6%	0.6%	1.9%	1.2%
-tun	14.9%	11.9%	25.2%	22.4%
-leah	2.2%	6.0%	7.5%	9.0%
Total	35.8%	30.5%	37.8%	36.9%
Topographical suffixes				
-bury burh/byrig (fort)	2.2%	6.5%	6.3%	12.4%
-chester/-cester (Roman site)	2.9%	3.5%	1.3%	0%
water-courses (rivers, streams)	20.9%	7.9%	11.3%	8.7%
-ford	3.8%	9.0%	0.6%	5.0%
-well (spring)	2.5%	3.5%	2.5%	3.7%
-hamm (water-meadow)	3.5%	2.0%	2.5%	1.2%
hills	9.6%	11.4%	4.4%	11.2%
-coombe	0%	3.0%	1.9%	6.2%
woodland	10.5%	6.0%	3.1%	6.2%
Total	55.9%	52.8%	33.9%	54.6%
Personal name as first element				
	34.0	36.3	22.0	11.0
Topographical term as first element				
	[56.0	53.7]*	58.0	50.0
* incl. other				

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