

THE *CEORLS* OF HURSTBOURNE REVISITED

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ABSTRACT

The ‘ceorls of Hurstbourne’ are sometimes cited in discussions of late-Saxon social structure. The place-name ‘Hurstbourne’ is an element in two north-Hampshire Alfredian estates and later parishes, which have not always been clearly distinguished by commentators. The ceorls were not strictly of Hurstbourne but of Stoke, a hamlet in the parish of St Mary Bourne. This article will explore indications that Stoke and St Mary Bourne (formerly Bourne) preceded Hurstbourne Priors as an estate centre, thus giving to an area of late-Saxon Hampshire a geographical focus and a historical significance different from those which are normally assumed.

INTRODUCTION

The *ceorls* of Hurstbourne were first brought to national notice by Seebohm in the late 19th century (Seebohm 1884, 160–4) and reappear from time to time in discussions of late-Saxon social structure. *Ceorl*, which can be ‘a general term for any non-noble person’ (Faith 1997, 81) is sometimes translated as ‘peasant’, though the term is often left untranslated because of the difficulty of precise definition. The *ceorls* and their obligations are recorded in a short custumal appended to a charter for Stoke *be Hyssaburnan* dated 900, the authenticity of which was challenged by Maitland (Maitland 1960, 387–8) but convincingly defended by Finberg (Sawyer 1968, no. 359; Finberg 1964, 131–43; Finberg 1972, 452–3). The obligations of a *ceorl* are similar to those of a *gebur* (a peasant who was free but tied to an estate) in at least two other documents, *Rectitudines Singu-*

larum Personarum and the Tidenham custumal. The texts and historiography of these have been comprehensively discussed by P.D.A. Harvey (Harvey 1993, 1–22). The text of *Rectitudines* exists in Anglo-Saxon and several copied versions of a Latin translation. It is a record of the rights and duties of tenants and workers on a pre-Conquest estate, perhaps that of Bath Abbey, although it shows signs of revision which give it, in places, a more general application. The Tidenham custumal is preserved in a Bath Abbey cartulary, and is specific to Tidenham. English translations of all three documents are found in *English Historical Documents 1042–1189* (Douglas and Greenaway 1981, nos. 172–4). Despite the date-range of this volume, *Rectitudines* has been convincingly traced in origin to the mid 10th century, and the Tidenham custumal, which cannot be precisely dated, to a similar *terminus post quem*. Now that the ‘Stoke by Hurstbourne’ charter has been restored to grace, and to its date of 900, the pre-Conquest origin of the appended custumal has also been vindicated.

Interest has naturally focused on the duties which the *ceorls* owed to the estate centre at Hurstbourne, which commentators sometimes call Hurstbourne Priors, although the suffix ‘Priors’ is an anachronism for the *ceorls*’ period. Less attention has been paid to the estate itself, in particular its name and constituent parts (Fig. 1). Stoke, the subject of the charter, is a hamlet in the modern parish of St Mary Bourne, and lies about 7 km north-west of Hurstbourne Priors. There are some indications that Stoke and St Mary Bourne, rather than Hurstbourne Priors, may have been the focus of the late-Saxon estate,

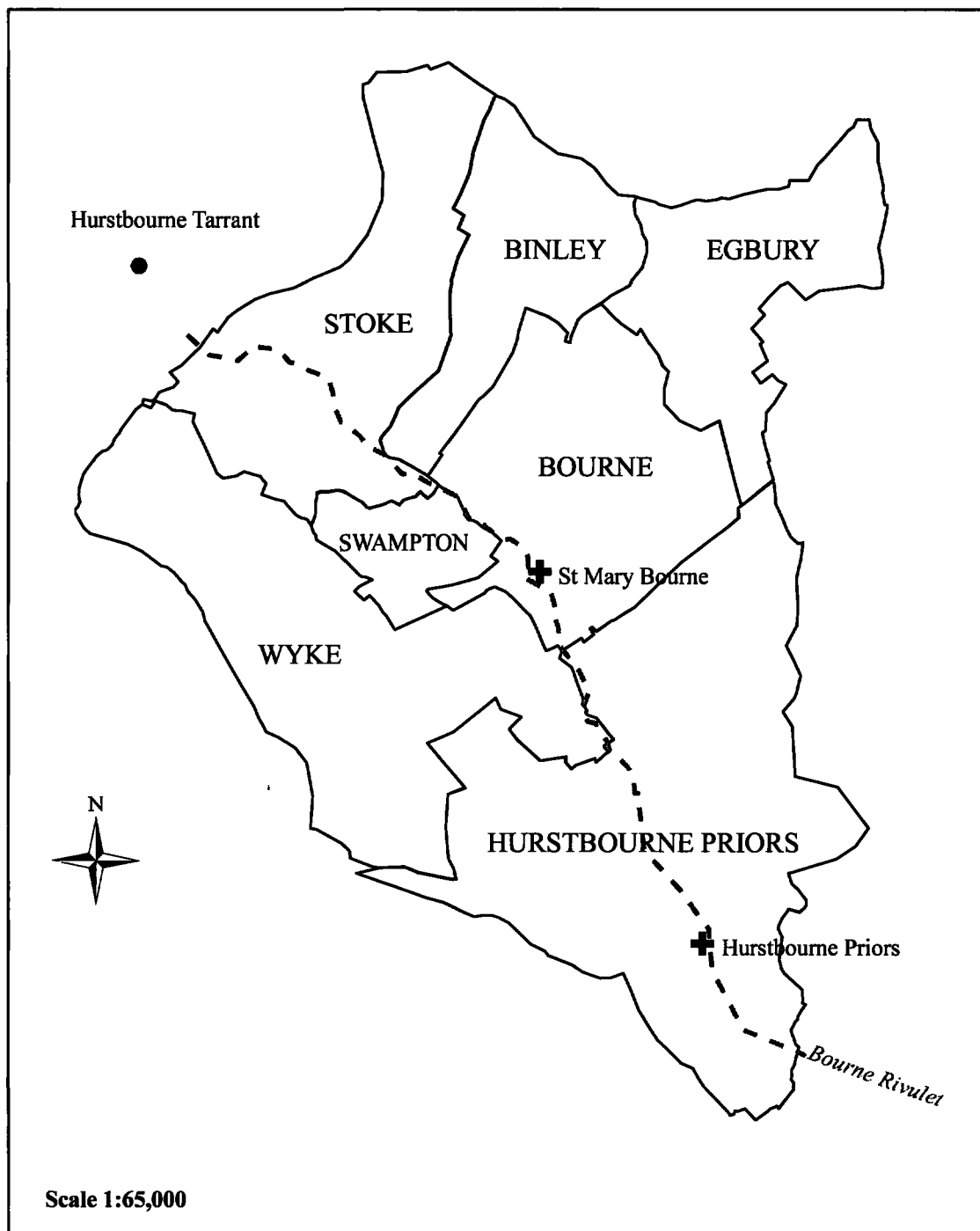


Fig. 1 The tithings of St Mary Bourne and Hurstbourne Priors (approximate boundaries)

which covered a larger area than is normally assumed. It is hoped that a detailed examination of the evidence may help to throw some light on a geographical area and a period of Hampshire history which are not yet fully understood.

THE *CEORLS* OF STOKE – AND BOURNE

The name Hurstbourne is an element in two separate estates mentioned in Alfred's will – Hurstbourne, which is generally identified as Hurstbourne Tarrant, and Nether or Lower Hurstbourne, generally identified as Hurstbourne Priors (Sawyer 1968, no. 1507; Miller 2001, no. 1). The lack of differentiation between the two Hurstbournes in pre-Conquest charters has been a cause of confusion both in ancient disputes about ownership and in modern commentaries (Edwards 1988, 195; Kelly 2000, 53), and Finberg's choice of title has obscured the fact that the *ceorls* were not strictly of Hurstbourne but of a unit within Nether Hurstbourne.

The placename 'Stoke' is not used in Alfred's will, but in that document the king bequeathed a *sundorfeoh* (usually translated as 'private property' or 'personal property') in the part of his estate called Nether Hurstbourne. According to the will, it had been entrusted during Alfred's lifetime to Ecgulf, a thegn or perhaps a reeve (Finberg 1964, 142; Finberg 1972, 452). The subsequent history of Stoke implies strongly that Stoke was the *sundorfeoh*. It was confirmed, together with Nether Hurstbourne, to Old Minster, Winchester, by Edward the Elder immediately after Alfred's death (Sawyer 1968, nos. 358–9). The pair of charters recording this transaction are placed consecutively in *Codex Wintoniensis*. They have several odd features which Maitland attributed to forgery but were demonstrated by Finberg to be scribal errors. He convincingly argued that 'the 12th-century copyist transcribed the main part of CS 592 [Nether Hurstbourne] into his Codex, then copied CS 594 [Stoke] in full, then returned to CS 592 and copied its dating clause and witness-list, thus producing

an apparent duplication' (Finberg 1964, 141). The list of witnesses in the Stoke charter is followed by the custumal, and then by a boundary clause. The rubric 'These are the territories of each piece of land' (*Haec sunt territoria utriusque terre*) is inserted at the head of the custumal, a paragraph too soon. Many of the boundary markers are topographical features which cannot now be identified. However, there are enough points common to the Stoke boundaries and those of neighbouring estates to show that the boundary clause covered not simply Stoke itself, but the whole of the monks' property at Nether Hurstbourne (Crawford 1922, 69–72; Grundy 1927, 210–6).

It must be admitted that 'Hurstbourne' is undifferentiated in these charters and that they are cartulary copies of an exemplar in which 'Stoke' may not have been specifically named. But the unit which became 'Stoke', together with the estate of Nether or Lower Hurstbourne, undeniably existed, and continued in the monks' possession until the Dissolution. It might be thought that as the boundary clause applied to the whole estate, so also did the custumal. However, if Finberg's interpretation of the textual history is correct, the custumal applied to Stoke alone; the *ceorls* were to perform their duties at Hurstbourne, but they were *ceorls* of Stoke. Moreover, there are grounds other than these charters for believing that tenurial conditions in Stoke were originally different from those on the rest of the Nether Hurstbourne estate.

Because Nether (Lower) Hurstbourne belonged to the Winchester monks throughout the medieval period, a number of account and court rolls for Hurstbourne manor and for Evingar hundred, in which it lay, have been preserved in Winchester Cathedral Library (WCL Hurstbourne and Evingar rolls, 1248 onwards, with gaps). In the rolls, the manor is always called simply *Husseburne* or *Hussebourne*. In medieval national records, it is *Hussebourne Prioris* to distinguish it from Hurstbourne Tarrant, otherwise known as *Husseburne Regis*. The tithings (administrative subdivisions) of Hurstbourne Priors are named in the rolls as Stoke, Bourne, Swampton, Wyke, Binley,

Egbury and Hurstbourne, not necessarily in that order. Stoke and Bourne tend to head the list in the earlier rolls with Hurstbourne at the end; in the later rolls Hurstbourne is usually first. There does not seem to be any particular hierarchy, and the order may originally have been geographical, moving from north-west to south-east along the valley of the Bourne rivulet, then round the outlying tithings and ending with the large southern tithing.

Apart from Swampton, for which there is a map showing enclosures (Stevens 1888, plate 15), the boundaries of tithings cannot be precisely determined, but they survive as hamlet names and their 19th-century boundaries are indicated on an estate map (HRO 54M98/E/P5, redrawn as Fig. 1). Hurstbourne tithing was the administrative and judicial seat of the medieval manor, centred on the manor house and church of Hurstbourne Priors. The name 'St Mary Bourne' is a late variant of the simple 'Bourne' and does not appear regularly until the 16th century, when both forms were used indiscriminately in surviving wills. The identification of Bourne with St Mary Bourne is confirmed by the foundation document of the Hospital of St Cross and by bishops' registers, in which the church of Hurstbourne Priors is listed with its dependent chapel of *Burna* or *Borne* (Holtzmann 1930, no. 250; Deedes 1924, 604, 796; Kirby 1896, 376). Bourne is the only tithing apart from Hurstbourne Priors with a medieval, or indeed any, Anglican church. Its dedication to St Peter appears to conflict with the place-name St Mary Bourne, but this is perhaps explained by a will dated 1503, in which the testator left endowments to the altars of both St Peter and St Mary in the church of St Mary Bourne (HRO Will Register vol. 1, 100). St Peter Bourne occurs occasionally as an alternative place-name (Greatrex 1978, nos. 19–20; WCL W40/4/10).

The tithings are also listed in two Hurstbourne Priors documents in the Winchester Cathedral Custumal, the first drawn up between 1273–80, though with later revisions, the second between 1316–22 (Hanna 1954, lv–vi). They are lists of the rents, services and amounts of land held by the tenants in all the tithings

apart from Swampton, which was the only one not in Priory ownership by 1086 (VCHH, 296). The dues from a sample individual of each type (virgaters and cottars) are stated, followed by details of all the holdings. Bourne, present in the 14th-century list, is absent from that of the 13th century. However, a comparison of the numbers of holdings and family names of the tenants in the two documents, combined with the residential evidence from Hurstbourne court rolls, reveals that the tithings of Hurstbourne and Bourne were entered together under the heading of Hurstbourne in the 13th-century document. It contains 81 names, of which about 25 can be identified as tenants in Hurstbourne tithing, and about 20 in Bourne. We are now in a position to consider the late 13th-century holdings in Bourne in more detail, together with those in Stoke, since the two tithings share a feature which scarcely appears elsewhere in the manor.

Ten of the Bourne and six of the Stoke tenants held virgates or half-virgates called *bourlond*. There was no *bourlond* in any other tithing in Hurstbourne Priors, apart from two virgates in Egbury, although there was some in another Priory manor, Chilbolton (Hanna 1954, xxxvii). *Bourlond* virgates varied between 24–8 acres (10–11 ha), whereas the range in variation in the rest of the manor was wider, between 22–32 acres (9–13 ha), and occasionally even more. However the majority were in the mid-20s. *Bourlond* virgates were thus very average in size, but the rent of 2s. 1d. for a virgate was much lower than the 6s. 8d. which was the norm for ordinary virgates in the manor. The services due from a *bourlond* virgate were in some respects more burdensome than those for ordinary virgates, for instance, there was more ploughing and mowing. On the other hand, virgaters did considerably more carrying services than holders of *bourlond*, so that the total obligations of the two types of tenure were reasonably balanced and unlike virgaters, holders of *bourlond* were recompensed for some of their services by sharing in the produce (Hanna 1954, 288–314, 334–40; Table 1: comparison of annual services).

By the 13th century, only about a third of

the land in either tithing was held as *bourlond*. *Bourlond* virgates could be held in conjunction with ordinary virgates, and five tenants did so, proving that by the 13th century, the status attached to the land rather than the holder. The status was maintained into the 14th century, when a *bourlond* holding transferred in court in 1364 was to be held in villeinage according to the custom of the manor (*secundum consuetudinem manerii native*) (WCL L37/14/73). The custumal, however, retains echoes of an earlier time. Phrases in the custumal such as 'like one of the *buri*' (*sicut unus ex buris*), 'together with the other *buri*' (*una cum aliis buris*) and 'the *buri* will have in common' (*habebunt buri in comuni*) imply that holders of *bourlond* formed a distinctive group. Etymologically they appear to be the descendants of the *geburs* found in *Rectitudines*, and tenurially, the descendants of the *ceorls* of the Stoke charter (Faith 1997, 77; Yorke 1995, 258–9). Nearly three centuries and the Conquest separated *buri* and *ceorls*, and the services of the *buri* were spelt out in a great deal more detail, but the nature of the obligations was similar. *Ceorls* paid money rent and the church tax called churchscot, and provided quantities of barley, split wood and fencing. They also washed and sheared sheep. Their ploughing and sowing services appeared to be lighter, but against this was the duty of working every week except three in the year, as they were bidden. Unlike the *geburs* of *Rectitudines*, they do not appear to have been provided with stock, tools and household utensils, but since *Rectitudines* allows for variations between estates, we need not expect complete consistency. The typical amount of land for a *gebur* to hold was a virgate, of about 30 acres but with local variations (Faith 1997, 76–9). A *ceorl*'s holding was called *hiwisc*, a word which means both 'hide' and 'household' (Bosworth 1898, 538). If the latter sense is intended here, the rent would have been higher in the Saxon period than in the 13th century, but still less than that of an ordinary virgate.

Confusion in Hurstbourne nomenclature is potentially compounded in the Domesday survey, where Hurstbourne Tarrant and

Hurstbourne Priors are similarly named (*Esseborne* and *Eisseburne*) although their separate ownership by the king and Winchester Cathedral Priory serves to distinguish them (Munby 1982, 1, 44; 3, 6). Three named tenants held Priory land in Hurstbourne Priors, but the main Domesday entry covers most of the tithings without naming them. Only Stoke and Swampton have separate entries, Swampton because it was not in Priory ownership. Stoke appears in the form *Stoches*, listed in the hundred of East Meon, although it is probable that its correct hundred name of Evingar has been omitted (Thorn 1988, 31). Domesday Stoke had two *villani* and Hurstbourne Priors 55, but we cannot tell how many of their holdings were in Bourne, and whether some were described as *bourlond* to the Domesday commissioners. *Villani*, a large miscellaneous group of peasantry intermediate between freemen and *bordarii* or smallholders, are generally thought to include *geburs*, who appear rarely in Domesday, and not at all in Domesday Hurstbourne Priors (Faith 1997, 86).

A MANORIAL CENTRE AT STOKE AND BOURNE?

The obvious presence of the priory's medieval estate centre at Hurstbourne Priors has obscured the faint intimations of another centre further north. There is some evidence that *geburs* were particularly associated with the inland of Saxon estates (Faith 1997, 77–84), and if this is the case with the *ceorls* of Stoke and Bourne, we should be seeking the original estate inland and centre in those tithings. The concentration of *bourlond* in Stoke and Bourne is the principal indication, but there are other signs. The first is an unusual object in the church of St Mary Bourne – a black Tournai marble font, one of four in Hampshire, the others being in the churches of East Meon and St Michael's, Southampton, and in Winchester Cathedral. The St Mary Bourne font, the largest of the four, is in very distinguished company. The group has been ascribed to the patronage

Table 1 Comparison of annual services (Hurstbourne, Stoke and *Rectitudines*)

	Hurstbourne virgate (source: Winchester Cathedral Custumal, ed. Hanna)	Hurstbourne <i>bourlond</i> virgate (source: Winchester Cathedral Custumal, ed. Hanna)	<i>hiwisc</i> (source: Stoke charter, <i>English Historical Documents</i> 1042– 1189, no. 173)	<i>gebur</i> (source: <i>Rectitudines</i> , <i>English Historical Documents</i> 1042– 1189, no. 172)
rent in money	6s 8d	2s 1d	40 pence	10 pence
rent in kind			3 lbs of barley	23 sesters of barley, 2 hens
ploughing (whole plough-team)	7 acres	5 acres + 7 acres	3 acres	1 acre + 3 acres boon-work + 2 for pasturage + 3 for tribute
ploughing (part plough-team)	<i>pro rata</i>	5 acres + <i>pro rata</i>		
harrowing	7 acres + 2 acres	5 acres		
sowing with own seed		1 acre	3 acres	3 acres
sowing with lord's seed		<i>pro rata</i>		
carrying	brushwood, timber, hay, corn with and without food	wool & cheese to Winchester		commodities not specified
timber		cutting timber, making & roofing pigsty		
fencing		2 hurdles	4 cart-loads of split wood & 16 poles of fencing	
threshing		quarter of oats		
shearing	shearing with 1 man	finding 1 man for washing & shearing	washing & shearing	
reaping, binding & stooking daily in autumn	¼ acre	¼ acre		
4 <i>precaria</i>	finding 1 man			

Table 1 (cont.) Comparison of annual services (Hurstbourne, Stoke and *Rectitudines*)

	Hurstbourne virgate (source: Winchester Cathedral Custumal, ed. Hanna)	Hurstbourne <i>bourlond</i> virgate (source: Winchester Cathedral Custumal, ed. Hanna)	<i>hiwisc</i> (source: Stoke charter, <i>English Historical Documents</i> 1042– 1189, no. 173)	<i>gebur</i> (source: <i>Rectitudines</i> , <i>English Historical Documents</i> 1042– 1189, no. 172)
carting & spreading dung		1 acre		
mowing meadows & spreading hay		with 1 man	½ acre	
tending sheep				at allotted times between Martinmas and Easter
unspecified work			every week except 3, as bidden	2 days per week as bidden, 3 days from Purification of BVM (Feb 2) to Easter
pannage	pannage	pannage		6 loaves
tallage	tallage	tallage		
licence etc for selling horse, cow	licence	licence		
merchet	merchet	merchet		
heriot	heriot	heriot		heriot
church dues	1½ bushels wheat, 3½ bushels bere	1½ bushels wheat, 2½ bushels + 1 tolhop bere	6 <i>mittan</i> ale, 3 sesters wheat	hearth-penny
sheep at Easter			2 ewes + 2 lambs	a young sheep or 2 pence
maintaining hunting dog				1 maintained between 2 <i>gebur</i> s
perquisites		11 withies, 1 sheaf of corn <i>per</i> carriage, timber from old pigsty, meal at priory, common use of a ram		2 oxen, 1 cow, 6 sheep, 7 sown acres, tools and utensils

of Henry de Blois, and the Cathedral example at least has been dated on stylistic grounds to the middle of the 12th century (Eden 1909, 20–1; Zarnecki 1986, 160). By that period the church was the *capella de Burna*, dependent on the church of Hurstbourne Priors; both were given by Henry de Blois as foundation endowments to the Hospital of St Cross, Winchester (Holtzmann 1930, no. 250). Assuming that the font is in its original location (and given its weight and bulk it is unlikely to be there by accident) we may ask why Henry should have favoured the chapel rather than the church in this way.

Structurally the earliest surviving parts of the church are 12th-century, although there may have been an earlier church on the site (Edwards 1995, 262). The chapel does not enter the documentary record clearly until that century, but there is an earlier reference to a church at Stoke. This is in Domesday Book, where the church of *Stoches* is valued at 15s. If this church existed as a separate entity, it did not survive, since Bourne had the only church in the medieval manor apart from Hurstbourne Priors itself. A possible explanation is that Stoke and Bourne were part of a larger pre-Conquest unit and that the church of Stoke and the chapel of Bourne were one and the same. An even more shadowy reference to this church may be contained in the will of Aethelmaer, ealdorman of Hampshire in the late 10th century (Miller 2001, no. 25). Among many other bequests he left sums of money to various religious houses, including a single pound to *Burna*. All the houses except *Burna* are readily identified, for example Glastonbury, Romsey and Bath. On linguistic grounds, St Mary Bourne has been suggested as the likely place-name here (Gelling 1979, 189). Aethelmaer's bequests were not solely to Hampshire houses, and there may be other candidates for *Burna*, but a search of Dugdale's *Monasticon Anglicanum* has not produced any clear identification among the variants on *Burna* place-names (Dugdale 1846). The medieval church of Bourne was certainly more than a chapel of ease; the font is evidence that it had baptismal rights, and the use of the

surname *de Cimiterio* by two Bourne tenants in the 13th century may be an indication that it had a graveyard by then (Hanna 1954, 301). However, the *ceorls*' dues to Hurstbourne included six *ciricmittan* of ale and three sesters of wheat, 'an eccentric version of churchscot if that is what it is' (Blair 2005, 445, n. 10), which implies that the chapel was already dependent by the beginning of the 10th century. By the time of the Cathedral custumal nearly 300 years later, the tenants of Stoke, along with the rest of Hurstbourne Priors, were paying a conventional form of churchscot to the church of Hurstbourne Priors in the form of wheat and bere (a type of barley or mixed corn).

It has become accepted, though not without some reservations, that an original system of royal minsters and vills in Wessex was broken up between the 10th and 12th centuries (Hase 1988, 48; Hase 1994, 62; Watts 1995, 19–20). In north Hampshire, this development resulted in relatively small hundreds with irregular boundaries, along with a proliferation of parish churches with 'marks of superior status' in the Domesday survey (Blair 2005, 300). The church of Hurstbourne Priors has been claimed as one such church, on the basis of its relatively large endowment of a hide and on the dependent status of the medieval *capella de Burna*. There is an apparent reference to its foundation in 902, which has been suggested as marking the splitting of a royal mother-parish into two parishes, royal and monastic (Blair 2005, 301). However, the foundation reference is ambiguous. The church at *Hysseburnan* occurs in a land transaction for Ebbesborne, Wiltshire, by Bishop Denewulf to Beornwulf (Sawyer 1968, no. 1285; Harmer 1914, no. 17). The transaction is in two parts, the first a lease with an explicit date of 902, the second a clause about estate workers at Ebbesborne. This clause, which appears to be contemporary with the lease, is dated by the sentence 'This was done when the church at Hurstbourne was consecrated' (*Dis wes gedon ða man þa cyricean halgode at Hysseburnan*). It is not clear why Hurstbourne should be mentioned in this context or even which Hurstbourne might have been intended. If indeed it was the

church of Hurstbourne Priors, it would have been two years after the *ceorls* were recorded as owing *ciricmittan* there.

The related names Hurstbourne and Nether Hurstbourne for adjoining estates imply the existence of an original estate called simply Hurstbourne, and the development of the northern portion into the royal estate of Hurstbourne Tarrant is a strong indication that the core of the estate was situated there. The church of Hurstbourne Tarrant may well have been an early minster, but Nether Hurstbourne was also a royal estate in the time of Alfred and of his father before him. Could this estate have had its own church, whether a lost church at Stoke or the extant church of St Mary Bourne?

The placename *stoc* is sometimes said to mean 'dependent farm' but it can imply rather more, as, for instance, at Sherborne, where *stocland* was inhabited land, associated with an ecclesiastical community and physically clustered around it (Faith 1997, 20–2). If Stoke is accepted as Alfred's *sundorfeoh*, this part of the estate would have assumed particular importance as his private property. Stoke is the only tithing with its own heading in the relevant part of Domesday Book. Assessed at ten hides in 900, it was a substantial holding, a sixth of the whole Nether Hurstbourne estate (Sawyer 1968, nos. 358–9, 384) and with its own church, wherever that may have been. Documents such as *Rectitudines* and the Tidenham *custumal* have been attributed to a review of estate management policies in Wessex from the 960s onwards (Faith 1997, 59). The Stoke charter is earlier and may have arisen from purely local circumstances. If, for instance, the Nether Hurstbourne estate was reorganised following its confirmation to Old Minster after Alfred's death, the manorial centre may have been moved to Hurstbourne Priors from an area further up the Bourne valley. It would then have been necessary to clarify the *ceorls*' obligations to the new centre and perhaps to a new church. The Stoke charter might, however, be seen in a slightly wider context. Alfred's wars with, and defensive measures against, the Vikings in the

last three decades of the 9th century had been expensive both in tribute and maintenance of the army, and he and his successor Edward the Elder looked to the Church for financial help. Denewulf, Bishop of Winchester from 878/9 to 909, was at times under considerable royal pressure to surrender or exchange land on unfavourable terms (Yorke 1995, 122, 194–5). It could therefore have been desirable, when occasion arose, to record Old Minster land in some detail if royal interests were potentially involved.

CONCLUSION

The bounds in the charter of 900 are said to be those of Stoke but the marker points encompass the whole Nether Hurstbourne estate and the combined area of the modern parishes of St Mary Bourne and Hurstbourne Priors. St Mary Bourne is the larger parish of the two; it consists of all the medieval tithings apart from Hurstbourne itself, and its church is certainly more central in the estate than Hurstbourne Priors. Admittedly the medieval estate was divided into a number of tithings, and medieval Stoke and Bourne did not quite adjoin each other. But Saxon Stoke and Bourne, with their royal inland, possible religious house, church and central location, together look more like the heart of Alfred's Nether Hurstbourne estate than does Hurstbourne Priors. If this could be established with more certainty, it would have a bearing on a larger question – the size and centre of the earlier undivided Hurstbourne estate – and hence on the status of the hundreds of north-west Hampshire before fragmentation.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I should like to thank Prof. Barbara Yorke, Dr. Rosamond Faith and the anonymous referee for reading and commenting on earlier drafts of this paper and for many helpful suggestions. I would also like to express my gratitude to Alex Lewis for drawing the map.

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