

THE HIDATION OF BUCKINGHAMSHIRE

Part II: Before Domesday

K. A. BAILEY

Part I of this study examined the relatively firm ground of the Domesday evidence,¹ but we turn now to the period before 1066 which has but few, fragmentary sources. No county-wide survey can be made which might help to explain some of the anomalies discussed in Part I. It is nevertheless possible to discover something about hidation which helps to flesh out the otherwise meagre evidence for Anglo-Saxon-Buckinghamshire, and also to suggest possible scenarios for early administrative entities.

Buckinghamshire does not feature in the *County Hidage*, which provides hidage totals for certain shires, probably in the early eleventh century.² The *Burghal Hidage*, which may be dated to 910–920, lists the *burhs* or fortified places of Wessex and the number of hides required to maintain their defences, including Buckingham.³

Buckinghamshire, like Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire is poorly endowed with Anglo-Saxon charters, which are vital for evidence of hidation before 1066. Most which do survive postdate 800. Prior to the end of Offa's reign (757–796) there are no surviving charters for Buckinghamshire; neither was there any large administrative entity equivalent to the later shire, whose hidage appears in the two principal historical sources – Bede's *Ecclesiastical History* (completed in 731), and the *Tribal Hidage*.⁴ This part of the study falls into three – a brief discussion of the charters and Burghal Hidage; a consideration of hundreds and their possible origins, and an examination of the Tribal Hidage in so far as it relates to this region.

It is not intended here to undertake a detailed analysis of the charters, their style, content and

boundaries, since that task has been admirably performed by Dr. Baines. Our concern is with hides, and Table I lists the details in local charters, in descending order of date, along with the Domesday hidage and an assessment of authenticity.

The quality of surviving Buckinghamshire charters is reasonable. Five belong to Group B, which means that the hidage figures are probably those of the ninth-early eleventh centuries. Where a comparable estate is mentioned in Domesday Book, there is no change in assessment in five cases out of ten (six if it is allowed that the nine hides at Wotton Underwood are a scribal error for ten). In this respect, Buckinghamshire belongs with Middlesex and Oxfordshire, where many more charters show the same phenomenon, and stands in contrast to Northamptonshire and Cambridgeshire, which experienced reductions of 50–60% in their hidation between the early tenth century and 1066.⁶

Nine grants are of regular five-hide units (64% – cf. 54% of Domesday estates), and one is within 10% of such a unit (7% – cf. 23% in 1086). The four estates granted to St Albans as part of Offa's re-endowment together form a thirty-hide estate, although they were not necessarily contiguous.⁷ The only substantial estates are (Monks) Risborough and Chetwode/Hillesden. No Buckinghamshire charters relate to the great estates of fifty or more hides which were typically granted by kings to newly-founded minsters in the period 650–750. Rather, most seem to represent a later stage in the breaking up of the royal patrimony by grants to churches or laymen for services rendered, to ensure the provision of adequate manpower for the late Saxon army and navy, or to foster the development of hitherto unsettled (or abandoned) land in wooded areas.

Table I
Buckinghamshire Anglo Saxon Charters

Location	Reference+	Date	Hides	Hides DB	Authenticity*
Amersham	1043	1065	½	½	E
Weedon	1043	1065	1	-	E
Granborough	1228	1042x9	5	5	C
(U) Winchendon	909	1004	10	10	C
Monks Risborough	882	994/5	30	30	B
Olney	834	979	10	10	B
Linslade.	737	966	10	15	B
Chetwode/Hillesden	544	949	20	29	C
Monks Risborough	367	903	30	30	B
Wotton Underwood	204	843x55	9	10	B
Turnville	150	796	10	5	E ^o
Winslow	138	792	12	15	D
Scelfdune	138	792	3	-	D
Scuccanhlau	138	792	10	-	D
Æt Lygetune	138	792	15	-	D

Notes: + numbers refer to P.H. Sawyer, *Anglo Saxon Charters: An Annotated Handlist and Bibliography* (1968). * - categories from M. Gelling, *Early Charters of the Thames Valley* (1979): A - Original; B - Later copy, but authentic; C - Later copy, basically authentic but some material added; D - Fundamentally a fabrication, may embody some authentic material; E - Complete fabrication.⁹ - thus Gelling p.73, although she acknowledges that the form used indicates a pre-Conquest source; Dr. Baines, however, advances good reasons for upgrading this charter to category C.⁵

Several of these grants, in common with those in other shires during the tenth and eleventh centuries, were of compact five or ten-hide estates, and Domesday Book confirms that this was the norm throughout Buckinghamshire. They represent one or two of the basic thegnly estates,⁸ and as such may have been intended to fulfil a dual purpose, providing produce and rents to the church or layman and manpower for the army and navy, exactly similar to the later knight's fee. These proto-feudal military arrangements were gradually put in place by Alfred, Edward the Elder and their successors to counteract the threat of Danish conquest and settlement. This process may have begun at the time when Offa resumed the Winslow estate from Abbot Ealhmund because of the latter's failure to provide resources for a military expedition. The king ensured that the so-called *trinodas necessitas* were not remitted when he granted the estate to St Albans, and this example was universally followed by his West Saxon successors.⁹ Toki, the landowner of Scandinavian origin who bequeathed Halton to Canterbury (1020 x 1038), had two cnihtas (not knights, but 'retainers', possibly equivalent to stewards), Sexa and Leofwine, who went into the service of the Archbishop at Risborough.¹⁰

The close relationship between land grants and military requirements is seen in the grant of twenty hides at Chetwode and Hillesden to Æpelmær præses ('guardian, chief') in 949, free of all but the three common dues. Two separate ten-hide estates had come into royal hands when Æpelflæd, Lady of the Mercians and daughter of King Alfred (d. 921) purchased them from Ælfstan. Similar ten-hide blocks were granted by Edgar to his kinswoman Ælfgifu in 966 (Linslade), and by Æpelfred to Ælfhere, ealdorman of Mercia in 979 (Olney).

III

The connexion between hides and defence is maintained by the *Burghal Hidage*, a list of fortified places in southern England, together with the number of hides necessary to provide the men to defend their ramparts.¹¹ This was arrived at by using a formula of four men per pole (16½ feet) of defences, and one man from each hide. For example, a length of 165 feet (10 poles) needed forty men or hides. It has been shown that there is a generally a good correlation between the length of defences and the territories assigned to them.¹² Many burhs were built or refurbished by Alfred and Edward the Elder,

and the latter built two fortifications at Buckingham in November/ December 914, one on each side of the Ouse, as part of his strategy to reconquer the Danelaw.¹³ This siting of two strong places on both banks of an important river crossing is repeated at Hertford and Bedford.

The ten manuscript versions of the *Burghal Hidage* are not consistent in the number of hides they attribute to Buckingham. Two manuscripts give 1,600 hides, two more 600 hides and the remaining six 1,000 hides. The variations may, of course, be nothing more than scribal errors arising from copying Roman numerals, a common enough problem. It may also be that two burhs are referred to, one allocated 1,000 hides (4,125 feet of defences), the other 600 hides (2,475 feet). In other words, all the texts contain elements of the truth. The 1,600 hides assigned to Buckingham compare with a total of 2,125 hides for the shire in 1086. If, as seems probable, there was no significant alteration in the county hidage between 920 and 1066, there is a shortfall of 525 hides. The territory from which Buckingham drew its defenders lay in the north and centre of the shire. Domesday Book gives details of estates which had burgesses and property there, and most lay in the hundreds immediately surrounding the town, although there were also links with Mursley, Stewkley and Quanton, indicating that the triple hundreds of Cottesloe and Ashendon were tributary to the borough.¹⁴ The total hidage of the northern triple hundreds (Buckingham, Newport, Cottesloe, Ashendon) is 1,375, which leaves 225 hides to find in order to make up the total for Buckingham. This balance cannot comprise the whole of the three Chiltern Hundreds, since the area south of the Chilterns was allocated to the defence of Sashes (see below), and their total of four hundred hides is too great. If it is assumed that the crest of the Chilterns formed a suitable strategic division between the two burghal territories, which seems reasonable in view of its woodland cover, then 235 hides in the Chiltern hundreds lie on the northern, "Buckingham" side, giving that burh a total of 1,610 hides. Although the later hundred boundaries do not coincide with this division, it is by no means certain that they were finalised as early as the second decade of the tenth century. In any case, Sashes was a purely temporary defensive centre which never developed commercial or ecclesiastical functions, and Buckingham was subsequently

eclipsed in importance by Aylesbury. This alone would have produced some administrative re-ordering, even if the overall long narrow shape of the shire was preserved.

The southern part of the county, that is south of the Chiltern crest, was assigned to *Scæftesege* (Sashes, a large island in the Thames near Cookham, on the Bucks. /Berks. border¹⁵), allocated a total of 1,000 hides in the *Burghal Hidage*. Its territory lay in the Buckinghamshire Chilterns and eastern Berkshire. The hidage of the relevant parts of the two shires in 1066 was: Buckinghamshire 513 hides, Berkshire 432 hides, total 946 hides. Sashes was remote from the principal strongholds of Buckingham and Wallingford, and evidently intended to secure the middle Thames from Danish incursions. The choice of that particular eyot was not fortuitous, however, since Cookham had a minster church and was probably a royal administrative centre (*villa regalis*). The St. Albans-Silchester Roman road may have crossed the river nearby.¹⁶ Evidence for a link between Cookham and south Buckinghamshire is found in one of the Domesday entries for Boveney, where Reinbald the priest held a hide *quæ jacet in æcclesia de Cocheham*, i. e. formed part of the endowment of Cookham church, a sure indication of higher status.¹⁷ Reinbald was one of Edward the Confessor's continental priests and had considerable estates in Berkshire, including a hide at Bray which belonged to the church.¹⁸ He also held Cookham church itself, together with 1½ hides. Cookham continued to be a central place, possessing a *novo mercato*, 'new market', in 1086, worth 20/-.¹⁹

Unfortunately, it is not clear at what date the whole of the later territory of Buckinghamshire came to be considered a single unit. It is possible that the name, which is not recorded until 1010,²⁰ a century after Edward the Elder constructed his burhs, originally referred only to the northern two thirds of the county. In that case, the thousand hides responsible for defending Sashes may have formed a separate shire, but one whose life was so brief that, unlike Winchcombeshire (now absorbed by Gloucestershire), not only its name, but even its very existence has been forgotten.²¹ It is clear that Buckinghamshire, like Oxfordshire, where the southern part of the county looked towards Wallingford, only became an administrative entity at some time after 920, and that the previous political landscape was largely erased (see below).

IV

Before discussing the hundreds of Buckinghamshire in more detail, a short digression on the subject of the hundred and its antiquity is appropriate. Although the hide appears to have been the basic unit of assessment for taxation and other purposes from at least 675, the hundred does not appear as an administrative entity until the late ninth/early tenth century.²² It is not mentioned by name until the reign of Edgar (959–73). The shire (O. E. *scīr* – ‘a cut, shorn piece’) equally appears not to have been an original administrative unit. Although Wessex was divided into shires before 800, in Mercia most shires, each tributary to an eponymous burh, appear both late and artificial.²³

The origin of the hundred, a key element in English government between the tenth century and the nineteenth, is obscure. By 1086, a ‘hundred’ seldom contained exactly that number of hides. We find half, double and one and a half hundreds, with an array of fractions so complex as to suggest that the ideal may never have been achieved. The origin of these units, in Mercia at least, seems to lie in the allocation of taxation and military burdens to blocks of territory, avoiding the need for central authority to treat with each vill and estate. As such, the hundred would have arisen like the burhs, in response to the crisis created by the Danish conquest and settlement of eastern England. If this scenario is valid, the hundreds of Buckinghamshire would have been created after the building of the burhs, although there is no reason why some at least should not represent much earlier administrative entities.

Our sources are completely silent about the relationship of Buckinghamshire hundreds to any such units. Three-hundred-hide territories seem to have been common in the seventh and eighth centuries in southern England, and the grouping of Buckinghamshire hundreds into threes, observable soon after 1086, although not necessarily containing three hundred hides, may be an echo of such arrangements. The smallest groups mentioned in the Tribal Hidage (c. 670–700) are assessed at three hundred hides, and many others are multiples of such units. Similarly, the original endowment of Chertsey minster at that time was 300 hides, while in the early ninth century a dispute between the Archbishops of Canterbury and the Mercian royal house involved a 300 hide estate at *lognes homme* (probably Eynsham, one of the four *tunas* captured by the West Saxons in ‘571’).²⁴

Table 2
The Buckinghamshire Hundreds, grouped in threes

Hundred	Hides (1086)	Notional Hides	Area (Ac.)
Stone	150.50+6ac.	150	28128
Aylesbury	150.75	150	25805
Risborough	99.25	100	14102
	S/T 400.50+6ac.	400	68035
Stoke	107.50	100	28705
Desborough	148.00	150	50329
Burnham	92.25	100	55140
	S/T 345.75	350	134174
Ixhill	121.00	100	24072
Ashenden	112.25	100	21992
Waddesdon	91.13	100	19027
	S/T 324.38	300	65091
Cottesloe	145.00	150	25148
Yardley	118.38	100	19393
Mursley	122.63	100	27244
	S/T 386.00	350	71785
Stotfold	98.50	100	20561
Rowley	101.00	100	15368
Lamua	127.00	150	10004
	S/T 326.50	350	55833
Seckloe	128.50	150	26174
Bunsty	98.25	100	26790
Moulsoe	113.25	100	27147
	S/T 340.00	350	80111
<i>Total</i>	2125.13+6ac.	2100	475029

Nine of the eighteen hundreds (Table 2) fall in the range 90–115 hides. Four may be considered one-and-a-half hundred units, forming a block of territory from the Thames across the Chilterns to the Ouse, of which Aylesbury and Stone together may represent a three hundred hide unit. Five hundreds have assessments in 1086 which approximate to ‘long hundreds’, i.e. 120 hides. They lie in the northern part of the county which might be expected to show some Danish influence.²⁵ The notional total of 2,100 hides is very close to the Domesday hidage of 2,125, and identical to the Burghal Hidage total for

Buckingham and half of Sashes.

Only one of the later triple hundreds (Ashendon) contains three hundred notional hides, one has 400 and the remainder 350 each. It is impossible to know whether the assessments had once been more exact, or if the process merely involved the gathering together of generally, but not always, contiguous estates which already had their own hidages. Certain areas may not have been hidated in the tenth century, only being incorporated later into the settled agricultural system. Given the imprecision inherent in such a system, and the length of time over which it had evolved, this is perhaps no more than should be expected.

Although there is no direct relationship between the hide and areas on the ground, it is still instructive to look at the size of the hundreds. Five groups fall in the range 55–80,000 acres (85–125 sq. mls.), while the three Chiltern Hundreds are about twice this size (210 sq. mls.). This may reflect the relative underdevelopment of the area when hidated, or beneficial hidation, so that it bore only half the expected taxation and royal dues. There is still a debate over the extent to which the Chilterns were developed in the post Roman and early Anglo Saxon periods. The evidence of villas is not matched by British and pagan sites and the highest slopes do appear to have remained wooded until the later medieval period and beyond.²⁶ This might argue for their not being fully hidated in the tenth century. The question of beneficial hidation, which often reflects former royal estates or the lands granted to an early minster church, is probably bound up with the fact that southern Buckinghamshire lay within the seventh-century territory of the *Ciltensætan* and may well have remained part of the Mercian kings' patrimony for several centuries. There is as yet no evidence of an early minster foundation in this part of the county, although Amersham, Chesham, Burnham and Wycombe are possible candidates, as well as Cookham (see above).

The areas of the other five triple hundreds are two to three times the size of those Romano British/Anglo Saxon territories which Everitt identified in Kent, and which seem to have formed the basis of both administrative units and also of 'minsterlands', his term for the *parochiæ* of minster churches, mostly founded in the first century after the conversion.²⁷ If, as seems probable, this model has wider application,²⁸ then it is likely that many of the hundreds of Buckingham-

shire are based on much older entities. Outside the Chilterns many of the component hundreds cover 20–30,000 acres, the same as Everitt's Kentish units. The average area of the hundreds (excluding Desborough and Burnham) is 23,098 acres and the standard deviation (σ) is 4,435 acres. All but four fall in the range $\pm 1\sigma$, showing that the distribution is more peaked than a "normal" one. If Desborough/Burnham are each counted as two, the underlying regularity of the pattern is further emphasised. In his recent study of the Roman-Saxon interface, Higham has suggested that the late Roman system of renders and taxation passed, by way of the Celtic successor states ruled by Gildas' *tyranni*, to a Germanic warrior aristocracy, whose direct involvement in the land eased the burdens on the farming classes and hence their own acceptance.²⁹ Labour services had always been used for such purposes as the construction and maintenance of town walls – which may be seen as the precursor of the *trinodas necessitas* so jealously guarded by Offa and his West Saxon successors. Higham further suggests that the Roman *iugum* ("yoke") may have become the basis of the hide, transformed from a land unit into one based on the household.³⁰ The hide on this basis was always a unit of taxation, but became increasingly divorced from agricultural reality over time. Support for this view comes from Kent, where the hide was replaced by the larger *sulung* (OE *sulh* – 'plough [land]'), divided into *iugera*, implying at least some connexion with the Romano-British past.³¹

Unlike the hundreds of Wessex, which are often named after royal estate centres, those of Buckinghamshire are named after their meeting places or apparently ordinary villas.³² Aylesbury is the only exception; it was an important royal *tun* before 600, and later acquired a minster. Buckingham did not give its name to one of the original hundreds, and other possible *villæ regales* and minsters, such as Brill, Wing and North Crawley are conspicuous by their absence from the list of hundred names:

1. **Stone** – 'stones', possibly some of the extensive Roman remains in the area; Everitt comments on the significance of "Stone-" names in Kent.³³
2. **Aylesbury** – after the hillfort within which lay the minster and royal vill.
3. **Risborough** – 'brush covered hill'; meeting place unknown. The Risboroughs were important royal and ecclesiastical estates.

- 4 **Stoke** – O. E. *stoc* has a variety of meanings, notably ‘place, religious site, secondary settlement’³⁴; meeting place unknown.
- 5 **Desborough** – a hillfort in West Wycombe. The name means ‘hill where penny royal grows’.³⁵ It is not central to the hundred but may have had an earlier administrative importance. Wycombe was a multiple estate which long remained in royal/episcopal hands.
- 6 **Burnham** – possibly ‘settlement by a stream’³⁶; meeting place unknown.
7. **Ixhill** – ‘Hicc’s hill’ in Oakley, which was the ecclesiastical centre of the Brill royal estate.³⁷
- 8 **Ashendon** – the prominent ‘ashen hill’ is an obvious central point.
- 9 **Waddesdon** – ‘Wott’s hill’, another prominent landmark.
- 10 **Cottesloe** – ‘Cott’s (burial) mound’ in Wing is central to the hundred, on the route from Linslade and Wing to Whitchurch. This hundred was part of the *parochia* of the minster at Wing.
- 11 **Yardley** – ‘clearing of Eorla or for the plough’ in Pitstone, now a farm.³⁸ It lies near Icknield Way, which links many settlements in the hundred.
- 12 **Mursley** – ‘Myrsa’s clearing’; the highest point in the hundred lies east of the village, and is centrally placed.
- 13 **Stotfold** – O. E. *stodfald*, ‘stud farm /horse enclosure’, also known as Stock (see Stoke above),³⁹ lay in Lamport (‘the long market’). Both are significant names, as is nearby Stowe, possibly a religious centre. All lie close to the Roman road from Dorchester and Alchester to Towcester.⁴⁰
- 14 **Rowley** – ‘the rough mound or hill’ in Lenborough. It is named in the bounds of Chetwode/Hillesden in 949,⁴¹ and is the highest point in the area.
- 15 **Lamua** – The first element is the Norman French definite article, the second probably signifies ‘a heap (of stones/earth)’, appropriate enough for a hundred meeting place, which lay traditionally in Park Meadow, Steeple Claydon.⁴²
- 16 **Seckloe** – ‘the warriors’s hill/mound’ is one of the few hundred meeting places to have been archaeologically investigated. It lies in Central Milton Keynes, on the Bradwell/Loughton boundary, central to the hundred.⁴³
- 17 **Bunsty** – ‘Buna’s *stow*’, a farm in Gayhurst, close to the Newport/Northampton road.⁴⁴ O. E.

stow generally has a religious connotation, and it is unusual to have it linked to a personal name which is not apparently that of a saint.⁴⁴ The site is not central, and probably had some special significance. It is not impossible that we have a ‘lost’ local saint commemorated here. The name Buna is not common, but an abbot of that name attended the synod at *Clofesho* in 742, and is named in the *Liber Vitae* of Durham.⁴⁶

- 18 **Moulsoe** – ‘Mul’s spur’, a prominent feature centrally placed. *Mūl* is an interesting name, meaning ‘half breed’, suggesting Anglo-British relations.⁴⁷ There is evidence that the element *hlæw* ‘(burial) mound, hill’, was once appended to the place name, and it is possible that such a feature on the spur marked the actual meeting place.⁴⁸

Up to eight of these names (allowing for the ambiguity of O. E. *hlæw* and *beorg*) are of hill features. Five are of man-made features, of which Aylesbury, Stone and Desborough almost certainly pre-date the Anglo-Saxon period. Cottesloe may be a sixth/seventh century pagan burial. Stotfold is likely to denote a specialised establishment on a royal estate, and other nearby names suggest that the area north of Buckingham formed a distinct territory, probably reaching into what is now Northamptonshire,⁴⁹ Yardley and Mursley are both settlements in areas of woodland clearance. Stoke and Bunsty may contain echoes of early Christian activity.

The archaeological record for Buckinghamshire indicates that, as in other areas, there was apparently little continuity of settlement sites between the early and late Anglo-Saxon periods. This suggests that the choice of natural or earlier man-made features for hundred names perpetuates older administrative and judicial arrangements, although we cannot know the extent to which their boundaries coincided with those of the tenth century hundreds. The fact that administrative and church centres only coincide at Aylesbury is not unusual, and a slight separation may have been specifically sought by both sides.⁵⁰ In any case, hundred moot-places were often located with reference to the pattern of routeways, and never attracted permanent settlement.

V

With the sole exception of the *Tribal Hidage* there are no records of hidation within Buckingham-

shire at any level prior to 792. This list of kingdoms and smaller groups or 'tribes', was drawn up under Wulfhere of Mercia or his brother Æþelred (657–704), in order to identify taxable capacity, measured in hides, ranging from Wessex with 100,000 to several very small groups with 300 hides apiece.⁵¹ The dating and content are significant in many ways. Two generations earlier, Mercia had scarcely begun to expand from its north Midland heartland. Under Penda (?626–655), it pushed into Gloucestershire and Lindsey and effectively prevented Wessex and Northumbria from further northward and southward expansion, respectively. At the end of his reign Christianity finally began to make its mark in central England. His sons Peada (briefly king of the Middle Angles), Wulfhere and Æþelred all supported the nascent church and endowed many minsters. During the 660s, Mercian influence reached London and beyond to the Channel coast in Sussex, the Isle of Wight and Kent, a mighty empire to govern and exploit.

The *Tribal Hidage* coincides with the earliest surviving charters, and it is clear that the hide as a unit of assessment based on agricultural resources was firmly established by 670, and used as the basis for levying tribute on subject peoples. Fortunately, this phase of Mercian history, generally so poorly documented, coincides with the introduction of the new religion, which brought literacy to the Anglo-Saxons, as well as the need for more definition in administration. Bishops and priests no doubt played a key role in drawing up the *Tribal Hidage*.

Some of the obscurest passages relate to the area north-west of London, including Buckinghamshire. The 7,000-hide kingdom of the East Saxons included Middlesex and much of Hertfordshire.⁵² The area to the north had apparently not coalesced into a kingdom prior to its annexation by Mercia. It was the southern fringe of Middle Anglia, briefly ruled as a whole by Peada between 653 and 655, but listed by its numerous components in the *Tribal Hidage*.⁵³

The *Ciltensætān*, 'those who dwell around the Chilterns', were uniquely assessed at 4,000 hides, about half as much as such kingdoms as Essex and Sussex. Their name resembles others denoting groups living on and around prominent hills, such as the Wrekin and the Peak. The second element was also used later elsewhere, for example Dorset and

Somerset, named after Dorchester and Somerton. The only reference to the *Ciltensætān* is in the *Tribal Hidage*. The extent of their territory has been discussed by several authors,⁵⁴ and is easier to consider than to try to reconcile their hidation with any later territory. They almost certainly occupied the territory between the chalk escarpment and the Thames and Colne valleys, and it seems reasonable also to allocate to them the area at the foot of the scarp as far as the Thame and the upper Lea. The area thus defined from the Goring Gap almost to Hitchin covers parts of four late Saxon shires, and contains about 640,000 acres, of which one third is now in Buckinghamshire.

This territory follows the south-west to north-east grain of the geology and relief. It was part of the Roman canton of the *Catuvellauni* centered on *Verulamium* (St. Albans), the heartland of which appears to have remained in British hands until well into the sixth century.⁵⁵ Much of this region came under West Saxon control c. 571, when Cutha fought the Britons at *Biedcanford* and captured four *tunas* (probably to be interpreted as *villæ regales*) at Limbury (near Luton), Aylesbury, Benson and Eynsham.⁵⁶ All except the last lie on or close to the northern boundary of the *Ciltensætān* suggested here, and control of them put their territories and tribute potential under Saxon control. The West Saxons practised joint kingship, and this region was no doubt allocated to one of several co-rulers until Mercia annexed it after 660.⁵⁷ There is no evidence of any independent kings of the *Ciltensætān*, but the quality of the grave goods shows that the individual buried at Taplow in the early seventh century was of royal status. Kentish and East Saxon parallels may indicate an attempt to annex the Thames-side area from the east.⁵⁸ He may equally have been a local prince. There is evidence elsewhere of embryonic dynasties which were stillborn as larger kingdoms annexed their territories.

The total hidage for the suggested territory of the *Ciltensætān* in 1086 is 2,175. There is, however, evidence for such major changes in other areas. The hidage of the South Saxons, whose territory did not change significantly, declined from 7,000 to only 3,193 hides, and that of the East Saxons from 7,000 to 4,130 hides. The Chiltern region shows a decline of about 45% in line with these. The fact that the Domesday assessment of the Chiltern hundreds was

less than half that expected from their area further supports a substantial reduction. If this also applied to the Aylesbury hundreds, seventh-century south Buckinghamshire would have contained about 1,400 hides (37% of the total for the *Ciltensætan*, cp. 870 hides in 1086). In Yardley Hundred, however, there is little apparent change in assessment. The reason for this variation must await a more detailed analysis of the Chilterns in the period c. 600 to 1086, building upon Mr. Chenevix Trench's seminal paper on Coleshill.⁵⁹ The reorientation of Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire probably dates from the Mercian period (?the eighth century), following the axis linking the Midlands with London – a vital trading outlet for a landlocked kingdom, in which successive kings took a great interest.⁶⁰

How Mercia governed this region is unclear. They did not apparently have joint kingship of equals, but employed high-ranking noblemen as *subreguli* or sub-kings, often allied by marriage to the king. A good example is Friþuwald who ruled Surrey in the latter part of Wulfhere's reign, and who seems to have earlier controlled part or all of the area known later as Buckinghamshire from a villa regalis at Quarrendon, a north-west to south-east link implying the first move away from the physical geography.⁶¹

In north Buckinghamshire we move into uncharted waters, as there is no consensus on which *Tribal Hidage* groups belong there. There are four candidates:

- | | | |
|--------|-------------------|-------------|
| 1. | <i>Ohtgaga</i> | 2,000 hides |
| 2. | <i>Noxgaga</i> | 5,000 hides |
| 3. | <i>Hendrica</i> | 3,500 hides |
| and 4. | <i>Unecung-ga</i> | 1,200 hides |

The first two together account for 7,000 hides, equivalent to a minor kingdom, while the *Hendrica* have exactly half that amount. The *Unecung-ga* are typical of Middle Anglia, being based on a multiple of 300 hides.

The *Ohtgaga/Noxgaga* may be allocated to east Surrey and west Surrey/Berkshire, respectively, an appropriate area (one million acres) for their 7,000 hides. The other two groups then occupy the remaining vacant area in the south Midlands. The *Ciltensætan*, *Hendrica* and *Unecung-ga* follow the *Hwicce*, whose kingdom lay mainly in Gloucester-

shire and Worcestershire.⁶² The *Ciltensætan* already have an identifiable territory, and it seems probable that the other groups lay north and north-west of them, also following the grain of the country, from west Oxfordshire through north Buckinghamshire (*Hendrica*) to north Bedfordshire (*Unecung-ga*). The name *Hendrica* has not been satisfactorily explained. One suggestion is that it relates to their position behind (hinder) the Chilterns, by analogy with the village name Hindringham (Norfolk), but this seems unlikely for a group covering such a large area.⁶³ The unique occurrence of the name makes it impossible to be definite. It may equally be of Celtic origin.

Bedfordshire is particularly artificial, including all or part of four *Tribal Hidage* groups. It was created in the tenth century (at the same time as Buckinghamshire) to support two burhs at Bedford, one captured by Edward the Elder in 915, who built the other south of the Ouse.⁶⁴ The new shire was assessed at 1,200 hides, coincidentally the same as the *Unecung-ga*, who may be placed in the northern two-thirds of the later shire, the rest belonging to the *Hicce*, *Gifle* and *Ciltensætan*.

The 7,500 hides of the *Hendrica* and *Ciltensætan* together form a unit which, but for the intervention of the West Saxons in the late sixth century and that of Mercia a century later, might well have become a kingdom in its own right, including Oxfordshire (except for the extreme north and west), Buckinghamshire, and much of Hertfordshire. The area was fully incorporated into Mercia by 800. The extent to which the West Saxons penetrated south Buckinghamshire along the Thames and up to Aylesbury is not clear. Most of the limited archaeological evidence from the county shows a Saxon provenance. There was probably an admixture of Anglian people coming from the east along the Icknield Way and up the Ouse and its tributaries. The *Hwicce* show similar mixed Celtic-Anglo-Saxon influences and this whole zone was evidently a melting-pot from c. 550 until it finally fell under Mercian control after 660.⁶⁵ The Taplow grave goods reveal a cultural corridor along the Thames, and it should be remembered that the apparently strong hostility between the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms and tribes often belied close cultural ties, and many dynastic matches occurred between ostensibly irreconcilable enemies.⁶⁶

VI

With the *Tribal Hidage* we have reached the impenetrable darkness which shrouds the administrative history before the rise of Mercia after 650. In all conscience, the sources available for any discussion of the hide in Buckinghamshire are scanty in the extreme. The sole exception being Domesday Book, whose flood of light is all the more dazzling because it falls on an essentially dark stage, occupied only by the few milestones of the charters and the *Burghal Hidage*.

It is however clear that from at least the last quarter of the seventh century the hide formed the basic unit of assessment in this area for tribute, taxation, and the provision of manpower for the Anglo-Saxon military, both mobile field forces and the protection of fortified places. Equally, there was a fundamental change in the nature of the highest-level administrative units between 700 and 1086. In the seventh century, the largest territories in this area lay south-west to north-east along the grain of the country, from the middle and upper Thames to the Lea and the Great Ouse. Already

when they make their unique appearance in the *Tribal Hidage*, these territories had changed from the cantons of Roman Britain, since they lie astride the territories of the *Catuvellauni* and *Dobunni*, centred on *Verulamium* and Cirencester.⁶⁷ We have no idea of the impact in this region of the breakdown of central government in the fifth century, nor how many of Gildas' *tyranni* may have operated there.⁶⁸ St. Albans itself seems to have survived as a Romanised enclave and a barrier to the complete Anglo-Saxon takeover of the Chilterns until c. 570. Early Germanic polities seem likely to have been small-scale localised annexations, which began to coalesce into kingdoms (or proto-kingdoms) in the late-sixth and seventh centuries.⁶⁹ In Buckinghamshire the higher-level units of the 670s were soon replaced by new sub-kingdoms ruled by Mercian nobles.

Recent historical and archaeological research into England between 400 and 700 suggests, however, that a reappraisal of the evidence for Buckinghamshire in this period may enable at least an outline

model of its history to be formulated, and it is hoped to attempt this in a subsequent paper.

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