

AN INVESTIGATION INTO THE ORIGIN AND CONTINUITY OF THE PARISH BOUNDARY OF CARISBROOKE, ISLE OF WIGHT

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ABSTRACT

Father S.F. Hockey first identified the earliest parishes, or parochiae of the Isle of Wight. Their boundaries were roughly linear, running north/south and were seemingly created in this way to divide the Island into regular territories. There is very strong evidence that one of these 'transect parishes' was centred on a church at Carisbrooke. There is a growing weight of evidence that many parish boundaries were based on the limits of pre-existing estates, but finding the exact origin of these secular territories is often difficult. This paper uses such academic concepts as the 'Roman villa estate', the 'Anglo-Saxon Villa Regalis', and the 'minster church' to evaluate when the boundary, coterminous with that of the parochia of Carisbrooke, was first created. It critically evaluates previous research with differing perspectives on the origins of parish boundaries, especially that which focuses on Wessex and the Isle of Wight. A case is made as to when the boundary could first have become incorporated into the physical landscape.

INTRODUCTION

A key theme in the study of territorial boundaries in Britain is continuity. Where evidence is available, the conclusion that is often drawn is that the land divisions present in the landscape today have persisted for hundreds, if not thousands of years. The earliest historical sources that testify to physical boundaries in Britain are the Anglo-Saxon land charters. These charters were used to grant land to the Church and to favoured laity by the Saxon kings and often the later examples from the 9th and 10th centuries have a boundary clause which describes the geo-

graphical boundary of the subject land unit. Research has shown that often these boundaries are still present in the modern landscape in the form of ecclesiastical parishes. This has led to a logical conclusion typified by Margaret Gelling's statement, 'If these units have kept their identity for a thousand years or more, surviving upheavals of industrial and agricultural revolution, it is reasonable to assume that they were already of some antiquity when the boundaries were written down for incorporation in Anglo-Saxon land grants' (Gelling 1978, 191). However attractive this idea is, direct evidence for the existence of these same boundaries prior to late-Saxon period is usually lacking. This is because the fences, hedges, footpaths and watercourses that mark these boundaries today offer little for the archaeologist to investigate. Therefore much of the research into pre-late-Saxon origins for these boundaries is theoretical.

Rather than a detailed examination of a particular aspect of the subject, this paper is a critical evaluation of previous research with differing perspectives on the origins of parish boundaries, especially that which focuses on Wessex and the Isle of Wight. Academic speculation regarding early boundary origins has used concepts such as the 'Roman villa estate', the 'Anglo-Saxon *Villa Regalis*', and the 'minster church', and these themes will be discussed in an attempt to discover the origin of the boundary of the land unit identified as the initial parochial area subject to a church at Carisbrooke. A case will also be made as to when this boundary could first have become incorporated into the physical landscape. The parish boundary underwent considerable changes during the Medieval period, and the narrative of these changes will be followed.

THE PARISH STRUCTURE OF THE ISLE OF WIGHT

In his book *Insula Vecta*, S.F. Hockey proposed that six parishes of the Isle of Wight were created by Bishop Daniel in the early 8th century, and that their boundaries ran continuously 'from sea to sea' (Hockey 1982, 2). The parish of Carisbrooke was one of those six. However, the modern ecclesiastical parish is considerably smaller and completely land-locked. This is due to the creation of 'daughter' parishes that were carved out of the original *parochia*, or mother parish of Carisbrooke after the Norman conquest. Although the historical evidence relating to the split up of the *parochia* is often indirect, there are plenty of other reasons to suppose that Hockey was correct in identifying the early north/south boundaries that once defined the limits of Carisbrooke's pastoral care. Additional support for his hypothesis comes from Saxon charters and the presence of similar 'strip-parishes' on the Isle of Wight and elsewhere in Britain.

The coast-to-coast, or transect parishes identified by Hockey can still be traced in the field boundaries, paths and watercourses of the Isle of Wight today (Fig. 1). Hockey's research led him to believe that six of these parishes had been created: Freshwater, Shalfleet, Calbourne, Carisbrooke, Newchurch and Brading. The area between Carisbrooke and Newchurch was not mentioned by Hockey because there is no historical evidence to suggest that it was ever a complete transect parish. However, when compared topographically to the form of the similar neighbouring parishes, it seems likely that it was, at some stage, based on a church at Arreton which was recorded at Domesday and possibly retains some Anglo-Saxon architecture (Basford and Tomalin 1979, 131). The original transect parish of Newchurch remained intact until the 19th century.

It is a feature of many adjoining parishes all over the country that some provision was made to share different land-types such as woodland, pasture and arable (Orwin 1938, 24-6). The reasons behind this can only be presumed to reflect the agricultural needs of the communities they contain and adds weight to the charter evidence which is

suggestive of secular origins for parish boundaries. The term 'strip-parish' is usually associated with this type of parish that transects chalk downland. They are common in counties such as Wiltshire, Dorset, Berkshire, Lincolnshire and Cambridgeshire (Rackham 1986, 19). This same term could be used for the transect parishes mentioned by Hockey, since they seem to have been employed to take advantage of different geological zones (Fig. 2). Most of the strip parishes enjoyed a portion of the fertile greensand, good for arable farming; the chalk downland which could be used for pasturage, and occasionally arable if pressed; and also the northern clay band that was, and in parts still is, largely woodland. Carisbrooke was the largest of these strip-parishes. In the north, woodland in the form of Parkhurst Forest still survives, but it is a pale reflection of its former self since it once covered 3,000 acres and stretched from the river Medina to the Newtown estuary to the west (VGH, 227). The transect parish of Carisbrooke is bounded in the east by the river Medina, whose source is in the very south of the Island in the parish of Chale and the river course is reflected in the meandering linear boundary seen most clearly in Figure 1. The western boundary is relatively straight and appears on the ground predominantly as roads, paths, hedges and fences.

THE ROMAN VILLA ESTATE

There is insufficient published research into the prehistoric settlement on the Isle of Wight to be able to relate it known historical boundaries. The investigation into the origin of this territorial unit begins with evidence for the Roman period. As yet no boundaries on the Isle of Wight have been archaeologically identified as being Roman. However, seven Roman villas have been detected, and in some cases, excavated. These villas are all situated on the southern side of the lateral chalk ridge near to a water supply and seem to have been placed to exploit both the pasture afforded by the downland and the fertile greensand belt to the south. However, caution should be taken in ascribing the term 'farm' to all the Island villas since it is by no means proven that all villas were farms.

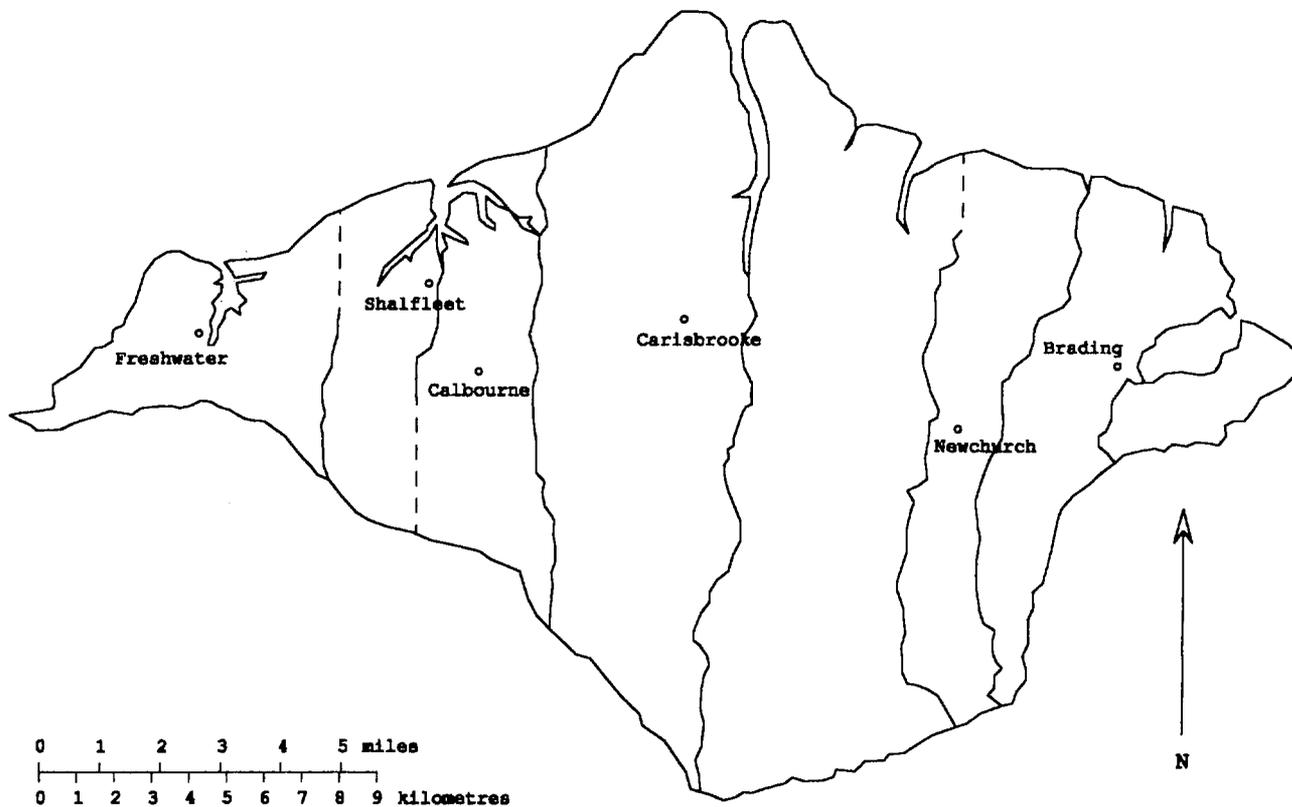


Fig. 1 The transect parishes of the Isle of Wight

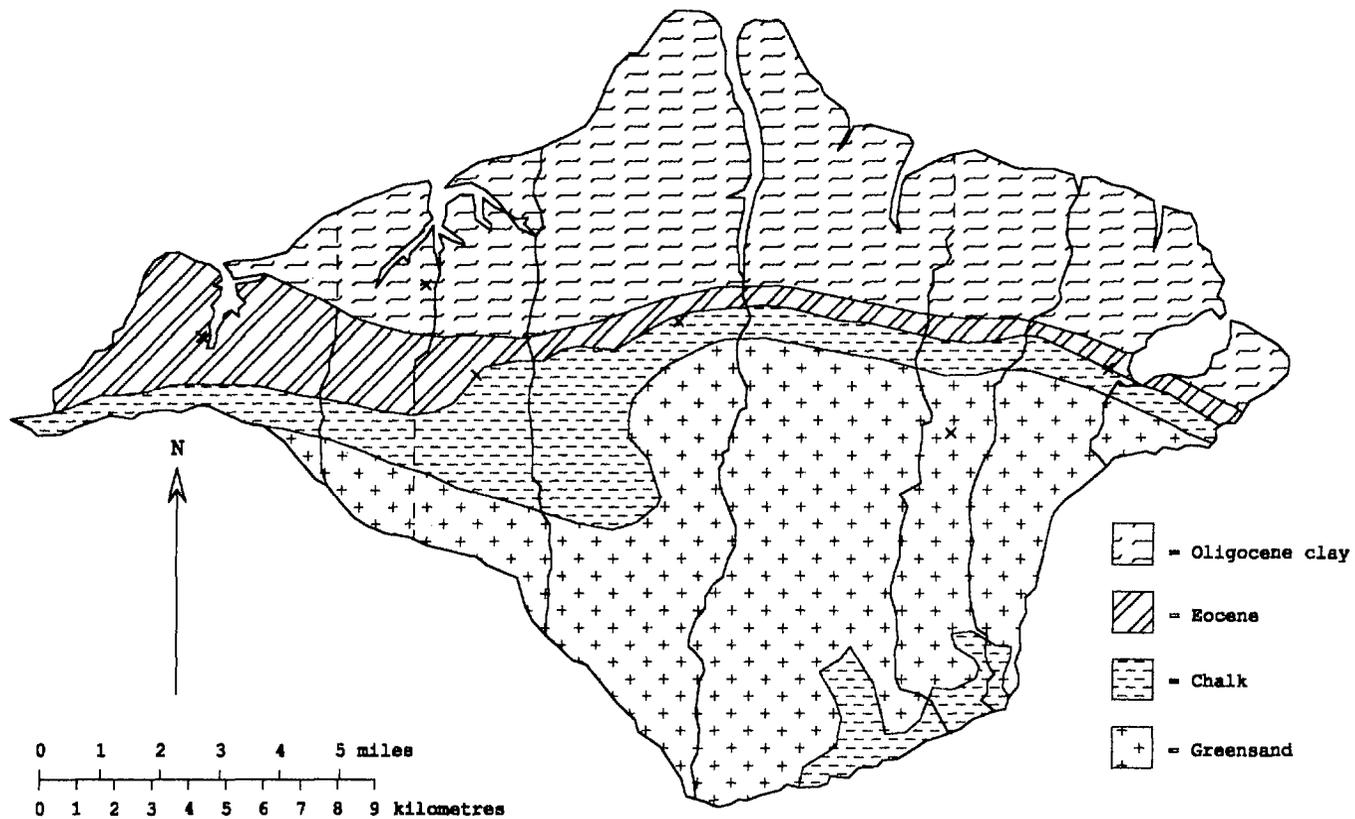


Fig. 2 The transect parishes with simplified geological zones

Table 1 Villas with hypothetical estates (source: Tomalin unpub.)

<i>Villa Estate:</i>	<i>Brading</i>	<i>Rock</i>	<i>Combley</i>
Size:	c. 3420 ha.	c. 3200 ha	c. 4730 ha
Geology/Eco-zone:			
Clay - oak/hazel forest	64%	69%	61%
Chalk-pasture/arable	6%	25%	4%
Greensand/arable	30%	6%	35%

Four of the villas are within the transect parish of Carisbrooke. Another substantial Roman building was investigated during the last century at Gurnard on the northern coast of the transect parish, just before the remains were destroyed by the sea. Due to its coastal position, situated on poor soils, it is less likely to have fulfilled an agricultural role. Archaeologically, Carisbrooke has yielded more evidence of Roman occupation than any other parish including a suspected fortification on the site of the Late-Medieval castle (Basford and Tomalin 1979, 123).

David Tomalin has proposed that the transect boundaries on the Island could have been based on previous Roman villa estates. Although Carisbrooke has a comparatively high concentration of Roman settlement, the Calbourne, Arreton and Brading transect parishes have one villa each, being respectively Rock, Combley and Brading villas. Apart from a topographical analysis, Tomalin uses the evidence of faunal assemblages found during excavations at the Island villas. He forwards the hypothesis that the percentages the different land-types, or eco-zones found within each transect parish are relative to the percentages of bones from the different animal species associated with each of these eco-zones (Tomalin unpub.). Table 1 represents three of the Island's villas with hypothetical estates that match the early parishes of Brading, Shalfleet and Arreton:

From these figures he relates the percentages of different types of animal bones: For example, Brading has ovicaprid (sheep/goat) bones representing eight percent of the assemblage, whilst deer bones represent 64%, which closely corre-

sponds to the villa estates proportion of pasture and forest respectively; Rock has the most pig bones, and also has the largest wooded area suitable for pannage. These figures are compelling.

However the evidence from Maddle Farm on the Berkshire Downs creates a more complex picture of the land usage of a villa estate. An attempt was made to reconstruct a villa farm economy. Extensive surface survey was undertaken, the data from which provided the following interpretation of land usage:

- a) manured area: 211 ha (from artefact scatters believed to have been deposited with manure)
- b) summer grazing: c. 39 ha
- c) system at farm was intended to maximize grazing

All of this within a potential estate of 850ha, with the manured and summer grazing areas together representing just over 29% of it. (Gaffney & Tingle 1989, 219–33). Of the 211ha believed to be put to arable use, 50% of it was calculated to be left as fallow at any one time. The clear point made in the Maddle Farm research was that the area of the estate that was in use at any point was far less than its total area.

The results of Tomalin are based on a comparison between the relative percentages of the eco-zones within the *total* area of each transect parish and the relative percentages of different animals within each total bone assemblage. If a pattern of usage similar to that found at Maddle Farm existed on the Isle of Wight, where considerably less than the total area of the estate was

ever used, this has a serious impact on the statistics forwarded by Tomalin. The size of the transect parishes suggests that they were not completely utilised, simply because they would have made for massive farm estates, even by modern standards. If the villas were the centre of such estates, the transportation of arable products to the estate centre and subsequent processing would have been a formidable proposition, especially as the time within which the harvest of cereal crops could take place each year, as calculated by Gaffney and Tingle, falls within a window of ten to twenty days. The greensand area alone of the Brading transect parish represents c. 1140 ha. From a survey of villa dispersal in northern Gaul, Malcolm Todd came to the conclusion that estates of between 50 and 100 hectares were the modal agricultural units of the Roman period in that area (Todd 1989, 17).

Romano-British field systems have been identified on the Island, although none have been archaeologically dated to the Roman period. However they are all situated close to archaeologically confirmed Roman settlements, and most are adjacent to villa sites and take the form of lynchets on nearby chalk down-land. At Brading and Rock villas, these fields are situated on the part of the downs that would have been most accessible to the villas (Tomalin unpub). It is presumed that these fields survive to be recorded in the 20th century because the plough has not subsequently been used on the thin soils of the chalk down. If we suppose that these fields were contemporary to the villas, then the question arises as to why Romano-British farmers used lynchets on the poor soils of the downs when they had access to so much fertile land to the south? Similar lynchets from the late-Medieval period are also present on the Island and are thought to represent land that was pressed into service due to population pressure. This is one possibility for the presence of Roman lynchets. However, due to their close proximity to known villas, it is possible that they were used out of convenience. Perhaps it was more economic to retrieve a poor yield close to home than to travel a long distance for a bigger harvest. If so, this strengthens the argument that there was a limit to the practical size of a villa estate. So it appears most likely that the bone

assemblages found at the Island villas came from animals that were active in an area considerably smaller than any of the transect parishes, and the results of Tomalin cannot be used to verify the presence of these linear boundaries during the Roman period.

Although Tomalin uses the transect boundaries as a statistical basis from which to compare the villa faunal assemblages, his view is not that the villa estates grew to the full and precise limits of the mother parish boundaries, but that the expansion of the individual Roman estates could only have been directed in a north and south direction due to the positioning of the villas along the lateral chalk ridge (pers.comm. David Tomalin), and that this expansion would be governed by the eco-zones. However, future research into the relationship between the villas and the transect parishes should also take into account the possibility of a connection with villa estate boundaries and Medieval manorial boundaries. An investigation in the villa estate at Gorhambury, near St. Albans suggested that the Roman estate was roughly coterminous with the manor of Westwick (Neal, Wardle & Hunn 1990, 99). There has been very little published research on the reconstruction of manorial boundaries on the Isle of Wight, but since the transect boundaries are most likely too large for farm estates, further work on this subject should try to establish if there is any connection between the Island villas and manorial boundaries. However, in the search for continuity of settlement and boundaries, caution should be exercised. Territories and settlements are often formed where they are because of geographical considerations, such as topography and geology. In the last few millenia, these factors have changed little in the history of settlement on the Isle of Wight and it is perfectly plausible that different people at different times would choose to settle in the same place or partition a territory in a similar way.

ROMANO-SAXON OVERLAP

The relatively even spacing of Rock, Brading and Combley villas and their central location within the transect parishes is still interesting, especially

as the phenomenon of finding one villa per parish occurs elsewhere in the country (Gaffney & Tingle 1989, 69; Lewis, Mitchell-Fox & Dyer 1997, 79). This model breaks down completely within the transect boundary of Carisbrooke since it contains four. However, this fact need not destroy the significance of the parish/villa dispersal elsewhere in the Island. Because there are so many Roman structures within the area, including the possible fortification, it certainly suggests that Carisbrooke was of unique importance on the Island during the Roman period making the settlement pattern there the exception rather than the rule. It is still possible that the villas on the Isle of Wight were placed in territorial units that were the forerunners of the Medieval transect parishes. Since they are unlikely to have been farm estates, these boundaries could possibly relate to a pattern of ownership or administration. There have been other studies suggesting continuity between Roman and Medieval territorial boundaries. In a study of Claybrooke on the Leicestershire/Warwickshire border, it was suggested that the *territorium* of the Roman roadside settlement of Venonae survived through to the Middle Ages (Phythian-Adams 1978, 30). The linear nature of the divisions on the Island suggest that they were created as a single act by a central authority, rather than in a piecemeal or organic fashion. Although one would imagine that the Roman government would have had such power, the earliest historical evidence which provides any information on the landscape of administration and ownership on the Isle of Wight relates to the Saxon period.

The only sign of settlement continuity between the Roman and early-Medieval periods in Carisbrooke is the presence of Roman artefacts in a cemetery on Bowcombe down which indicates 5th and 6th century occupation (Cahill 1980, 53). The grave goods are some of the most lavish of this period found in Britain. The close proximity of the cemetery to the concentration of Roman structures in the Carisbrooke area suggests that it may have remained a focal point of occupation for the ruling elite after the end of Roman Britain.

The work of Bonney and Goodier is associated with the identification of boundaries from the early-Medieval period. Using statistical studies,

they have propositioned that the instance of pagan Saxon burials occurring on historic boundaries is too high to be accidental, and that there was a deliberate policy from the 5th to 8th centuries to site some burials on boundaries (Bonney 1972; Bonney 1976; Goodier 1984). Their general conclusion is that some early-Saxon boundaries can be identified by the presence of pagan burials. Bonney states that four of the eight pagan Saxon burials he identified on the Isle of Wight were close to boundaries (Bonney 1976, 45). However, no pagan Saxon burials are close to the boundary of the transect parish of Carisbrooke. If Bonney and Goodier are correct in their hypothesis then the absence of burials on the transect boundary suggests either that the boundary did not exist at this time in any form, or that this particular burial practice was not conducted in the area. It should be noted that the sample from the Isle of Wight is small in comparison to other counties. Kent also has a very small number of burials on boundaries which could be relevant because of the traditional link between similar 'Jutish' material culture in Kent and the Isle of Wight (Basford & Tomalin 1979, 35). However, there has been sharp criticism of the conclusions drawn by Bonney and Goodier, even to the point that the same statistics have been used to show that there is no link between pagan Saxon burials and boundaries (Welch 1985, 19).

There is very little archaeological evidence of settlement during the Anglo-Saxon period on the Isle of Wight. The only known evidence, save for burials, is the discovery of some post-holes dated to the 6th century on the site of Carisbrooke Castle (Young 1983), and masonry of Anglo-Saxon workmanship identified in the parish churches of Freshwater and possibly Arreton. Some place name evidence is suggestive of Saxon settlement on the Isle of Wight, especially names derived from the Old English elements of -ham- and -ing-. Although the place names of the Island have been relatively well researched (Kokeritz 1940; Arnold 1975; Cahill 1980; Margham 1982; Margham 1983; Mills 1996), there is no published material which uses them directly to establish the existence or absence of territorial boundaries during the Saxon period. A comprehensive analysis of the relationship between place names and the evolution

of settlement patterns across the Isle of Wight is currently being undertaken by John Margham. When published this could provide useful indicators for the presence or absence of the transect boundaries during the Saxon period.

THE MINSTER HYPOTHESIS

Territorial boundaries created during the Mid-Saxon period is often associated with the concept of the minster church. The minster hypothesis, as forwarded by John Blair, revolves around creation of a mother church that housed a religious community similar to a monastery, except that this community had the responsibility for the pastoral care of the local inhabitants within a defined territory or *parochia* (Blair 1988). Patrick Hase has taken this theory further for the Hampshire area and has proposed that the West Saxon Kings, Caedwalla and Ine (685–726) had a deliberate policy of setting up minsters next to royal administrative centres, or *villae regales*. This process was an attempt, 'to ensure that the social, political judicial and religious life of the countryside centred on the same point' (Hase 1988, 48). He believes that the church was deliberately made part of the state to form a system where the king's reeve as the administrator of a *villa regalis* would support the priests of the minster, whilst the ecclesiastical establishment preached that obedience to the state was a condition for the curing of souls, and so a close working relationship was formed between church and state.

Hase identifies Carisbrooke as a possible centre for one of these mother churches and the Carisbrooke transect boundary as its *parochia* (Hase 1994, 53). The 'minster hypothesis' follows the idea that each *parochia* was based upon the administrative limits of a *villa regalis* existing prior to the foundation of the minster. This would therefore mean that the *parochia* of Carisbrooke reflects a more ancient secular estate that existed as a territory subject to a *villa regalis* at the time the minster was founded. The king's reeve was based in each of these estates to collect the *feorm* or food-rent from the local population. The evidence for the boundaries of these royal administrative areas is based upon the reconstruction of *parochiae* and is

sometimes supported by similar coterminous boundaries being present in the royal land charters. There is no surviving Anglo-Saxon charter with boundaries coterminous with Carisbrooke *parochia*. This fits in with Hase's theory since he believes that the West Saxon mother churches were rarely granted their own land by the crown in a deliberate policy to restrict their independence (Hase 1994, 61). However, this assumption is derived from negative evidence.

Criticism has been levelled at the 'minster hypothesis' in its supposition that pastoral care was initially provided by these early ecclesiastical institutions (Cambridge & Rollason 1995). Hase uses the transect boundary of Carisbrooke to show the limits of the *parochia*, but there was no evidence that allowed him to confirm that this boundary was present in the early 8th century. This is a common problem with research into pre-conquest *parochiae* since very rarely do contemporary documents survive, and this makes the precise dating for when pastoral care was first provided almost impossible. It is most often the case that Anglo-Saxon *parochiae* are reconstructed using post-Conquest documentation, and it is important to note that there is properly sufficient evidence to do this in only a few parts of the country (Bassett 1997, 37). We are lucky in the case of Carisbrooke to have sufficient surviving Medieval material to state with relative confidence that there was a pre-conquest *parochia* matching the transect boundary.

There is also comparatively good evidence existing for the area around Southampton Water directly to the north of the Island, which Hase uses to hypothesise regarding the West Saxon creation of minsters based at Eling, Southampton (Hamwic), Bishops Waltham, Titchfield and possibly Romsey, all with *parochiae* (Hase 1988). Hase advocates that an ecclesiastical foundation existed at these places in the late 7th or early 8th centuries, that they were each associated with a royal estate, suggesting the presence of a *villa regalis* and at some point were recorded as having a religious community.

There is no direct historical evidence for the pre-Conquest presence of a church at Carisbrooke. The existing structure is based on a 12th century construction. The Domesday Book

records a church being at Bowcombe in 1086, but research has shown that Bowcombe was the former name of the settlement of Carisbrooke (Margham 1992, 2–3). The name ‘Caresbroc’ first appears in 1114. Bowcombe was certainly a royal estate in the late-Saxon period as it was first recorded as being held by Edward the Confessor. It was passed directly to William I after the Conquest (VCH, 228). It is quite possible that Bowcombe had been held by the crown for some time and was a *villa regalis* of the West Saxon kings because it was certainly the chief manor and hundred on the Island at Domesday. There is no evidence that any pre-Conquest church at Carisbrooke could have held a religious community, but it did become a priory in the mid-12th century. Although far away, it is interesting to note that in Shropshire some minsters of collegiate status became priories at a similar time (Groom 1988, 74–5). If a minster church of Hase’s description was to be set up on the Isle of Wight, Bowcombe seems the most likely place. However unlike the proposed minsters around Southampton Water, there is no direct archaeological or historical evidence which indicates an ecclesiastical building in the Carisbrooke area in the late seventh or early 8th century.

Although a minster cannot be definitely placed at Carisbrooke at such an early date, the evidence for a church being built there *at some point* during the Mid to Late-Saxon period with a *parochia* matching the transect boundary is strong. Since a church was recorded at Carisbrooke (Bowcombe) in the Domesday Book, it is quite likely to have been a Saxon foundation. Domesday records Carisbrooke being the chief settlement on the Island. Because Anglo-Saxon architecture has been identified at settlements of lesser importance (Freshwater and perhaps Arreton) it strengthens the argument that Carisbrooke would also have had a pre-Conquest church. The *parochia* of this church can be expected to be the transect boundary because it is clear from the documentary evidence that exists, that all other churches on the Island that had to go to Carisbrooke to seek their parochial independence were built within this area starting with Chale in 1114, and the subsequent boundaries of their parishes respect the limits of the transect boundary. Hase provides no evidence

for other minsters and *parochiae* on the Isle of Wight. Future research should try to establish what kind of pastoral care was in operation in the other parts of the Island during the mid-to-late-Saxon period, so that the nature and the relationship of the parochial boundaries can be better understood.

RELEVANT CHARTER EVIDENCE

There is no charter or any other historical means to reconstruct the eastern bounds of Carisbrooke. However, the great majority of the course of this boundary is defined by the river Medina. A Saxon charter that is relevant to the western boundary of Carisbrooke *parochia* is that of a grant of the estate of Calbourne purporting to date from 826AD (S 274). Chris Arnold, as part of his undergraduate dissertation, reconstructed the charter bounds of this document (Arnold 1975, 63). The description of the boundary is very simple:

‘These are the boundaries of the 30 hide estate at Calbourne on the Isle of Wight. Starting from the sea up to the place of the ash trees, thence to the moot mound. From that mound to Swine’s head, thence to the south sea at Eadgils’ river mouth, along Eadgils’s Mount to Bicca’s (or the wedge-shaped hill spur) valley, thence to the Caul Bourne, along the Caul Bourne to the north sea’ (pers. comm. John Margham & Margaret Gelling).

Arnold interpreted this eastern boundary of Calbourne as being the same as the western boundary of Carisbrooke, and this represents the first possible direct historical reference for the presence of the Carisbrooke transect boundary. This charter is comparatively early. In general, later charters, especially those of the 10th century, have longer and more accurate descriptions in their boundary clauses.

PAROCHIAL TITHES

It is not until the late-Saxon period that the need for physical parochial boundaries arises. The concept of tithe is attributed to the Carolingian rulers

and their ecclesiastical reforms in 8th and 9th centuries. These changes were an attempt to extend preaching to the laity and to improve the organisation of the church. The payment of a tithe was the method by which the ecclesiastical system could support itself (Cambridge and Rollason 1995, 97). The adoption of this system in Wessex appears to have been a slow process. The legatine council of Cloveshoh proposed the payment of tithe by the population in 786, but the first law code to enforce it, including severe penalties for non-payment, was produced by King Edgar (959–75) (Stenton 1971, 155). That this law was created so late to underpin a system that had been introduced nearly 200 years previously, probably indicates that it was initially adopted by the population with less than enthusiasm, and that the secular authorities did not immediately feel the need to support the church in their collection of it.

The tithe seems to have differed from any recorded form of rent or tax that preceded it during the Saxon period. The system of payment of royal *feorm*, or food rent that existed prior to the introduction of the tithe, was believed to be collected from the local inhabitants through the *villa regalis* or royal vill. It was designed to support the king and his reeve. The *feorm* and the unit that it was assessed from, the hide, have defied attempts by modern scholars to define them as set measurements. Seemingly, the assessment of food rents was connected inexorably to the assessment of the wealth of households or more specifically, people (*Ibid.*, 287–9). David Harvey has suggested that the advent of the tithe brought about a change in the way territoriality was understood (Harvey 1997, 17). Under the new system it was the land itself which was taxed and its owner became only a conduit through which it was to be paid. For each unit of land to be correctly assessed for tithe, a physically recognisable boundary of some kind would have been necessary. This new emphasis on land boundaries could have focussed the mind of the land owner more on defining the physical dimensions of his property, and consequently could have affected the way in which people thought of territoriality.

The evidence provided by Saxon charters and the boundary clauses they contain, is roughly contemporaneous with the imposition of tithe in

Wessex. One reason for the later Saxon charters to have ever more detailed descriptions of physical boundaries may have been because the imposition of tithe made the clear demarcation of land increasingly important. As well as collecting it, the local church was the destination for the tithe and so it was they that had the interest in defining the boundaries between adjoining parishes, so that every field could be unquestionably assigned to a church. This is the first point in the history of the Isle of Wight when the physical boundaries separating parishes became important. So from the extant evidence, it seems most likely that it was the legal imposition of tithe that was responsible for the establishment of the physical boundaries between the parishes of the Isle of Wight. This would mean that the transect boundary of Carisbrooke most likely became a part of the physical landscape of the Island during the slow adoption of the tithe system between the early 9th and late 10th centuries.

PRE-CONQUEST FRAGMENTATION

Although the only clear historical evidence for the break-up of the *parochia* comes from the Norman period and later, it should not be discounted that the disintegration could have started earlier. There is a suggestion of possible pre-Conquest fragmentation provided by two charters relating to two small estates within Carisbrooke. Firstly the estate of Atherfield on the south coast was granted to Calbourne by King Edgar (959–75) (Finberg 1964, 103), which was held in desmesne by the Bishop of Winchester in the 10th century. Some estates held by the bishop at this time in other parts of Hampshire are believed to have become parochially independent from their local mother church (Hase 1988, 48). Atherfield is now part of Brightstone parish which itself was probably carved out of Calbourne during the late-Medieval period, and this relationship could reflect the transferral of Atherfields parochial obligations to Calbourne with the 10th century charter. Watchingwell was granted to the nuns at Wilton in 968 (S.766) and was held by the Abbey of Wilton in 1086. Although no direct evidence exists, it cannot be discounted that because ownership was transferred

to another ecclesiastical institution, the parochial relationship between Watchingwell and Carisbrooke could have been disrupted.

POST-CONQUEST FRAGMENTATION

It appears not only likely that the transect boundary of Carisbrooke had been created and fixed in the landscape as a *parochia* prior to the Conquest but also possible that its integrity could have been interrupted by this time. William I gave the lordship of the Island to William Fitz Osbern, which included control over the manor of Bowcombe, along with whatever Norman fortification was then present on the site of Carisbrooke Castle. The parochial system that he found on the Island was soon to change dramatically. Fitz Osbern donated the mother church of Carisbrooke to the abbey of Lyre in France along with all tithes (Hase 1994, 65). A priory was formed in the mid-12th century which was responsible for the construction of the extant church.

What seems to be responsible for the break-up of parishes in the later Medieval period in Wessex was the desire for lords to found churches on their own estates (Fig. 3). On the Island, Chale is the first known example, founded in 1114, and the boundary of the new parish reflected exactly the founding lord's estate. The price of Chale's independence was that the mother church of Carisbrooke was to receive all tithes, mortuaries, alms of the serf and half the glebe, or church land, granted to it by the founding lord (Hockey 1981, 20). The creation of the parish of Shorwell has been dated to the 14th century. However, there are two entries in the *Cartulary of Carisbrooke Priory* concerning the patronage of the chapel of Shorwell dated 1205 (Hockey 1981, nos. 174, 175). These entries lay down the terms and conditions for the creation of the chapel. The parson of Shorwell was allowed to retain all tithes and payments from the village folk (*villenagiis*), however Carisbrooke kept the rights for mortuary and mass on burial day until the 14th century when Shorwell gained its own cemetery. It is unknown when the church at Northwood was built, but it appears to have been dependent on Carisbrooke until it gained its parochial freedom during the reign of Henry VIII

(1509–47) (Worsley 1781, 231). There is no historical document stating an ecclesiastical link between Carisbrooke and Gatcombe, however the church of the latter was founded by the Norman lord de Estur, and the parish is coterminous with his estate. The origins of Kingston are obscure, but the parish is believed to be created from a portion of Shorwell (Hockey 1982, 5). There are also 'outriders' within the transect parish of Carisbrooke. This term relates again to the fact that the parishes of dependent chapels often mirrored the estate of the founding lord. The lay estate could have detached portions reflecting a history of complex changes of ownership. Therefore there are small areas within Carisbrooke *parochia* that belong to parishes outside its boundaries. Chillerton was owned by the de Insula family whose estate centred on Wootton in the eastern half of the Island (*Ibid.* 3). The most complex picture is of that provided by the parish of St. Nicholas chapel which comprises of lands belonging to Carisbrooke castle and was the combination of thirteen individual parcels of land spread across the Island (*Ibid.* 5). There is also the extra-parochial area of the forest of Parkhurst. Watchingwell is presumed to have been part of the early *parochia* of Carisbrooke, based solely on the evidence of topography when compared to the charter bounds interpreted by Arnold. Although Watchingwell was the property of Wilton Abbey at Domesday, it was absorbed by the manor of Shalfleet in the 12th century and is now part of that parish (Hase 1994, 77). By the late-Medieval period, the transect parish of Carisbrooke had been truly fragmented leaving the mother church with a much smaller area of pastoral care, although it seems to have retained official allegiance from, and certain rights over the churches of the daughter parishes. This complicated break-up appears to be the rule rather than the exception in Wessex.

THE POTENTIAL CONTRIBUTION OF ARCHAEOLOGY

An area of research that could be undertaken to date the physical boundaries themselves is archaeological fieldwork. The eastern boundary as already mentioned consists almost entirely of the river Medina, and the western boundary is now a

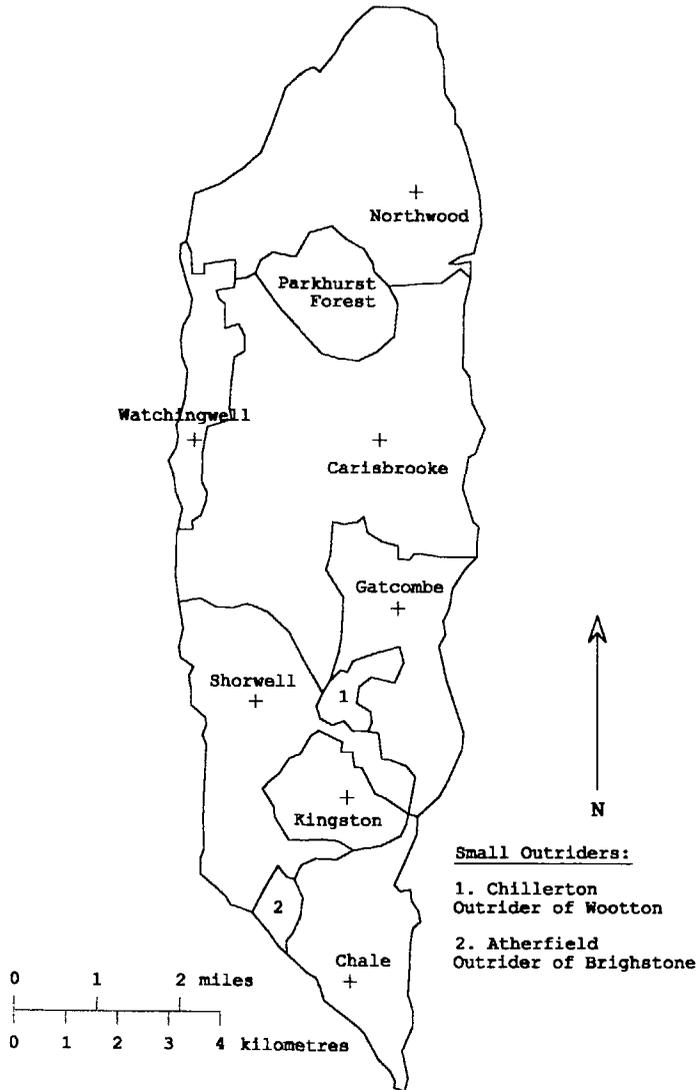


Fig. 3 The parochia of Carisbrooke with late-Medieval parishes

mixture of footpaths, hedgerows and fences. Hedgerow dating is a particular problem on the Island. Possibly due to the unique environment of the Isle of Wight, the usual method of identifying and counting species has been shown not to work there (pers. comm. Frank Basford). Archaeological excavation is only relevant where a feature

such as a bank and ditch has been identified. The only known excavation of an historic boundary on the Island was in 1992 at Standen Heath, east of the river Medina. As part of an evaluation, Wessex Archaeology put three trenches through a linear bank and ditch. The artefactual evidence was insufficient to date the

feature (Wessex Archaeology, 15). This is no surprise since the dating of such earthworks is notoriously difficult. The main problem is that it is hard to differentiate between artefacts that were already present in the soil used for the construction of the feature and those artefacts that were deposited during construction. For example, at Standen Heath, flint tools were found within the bank of the boundary. However, surface survey also found significant numbers of worked flints in the immediate area. Therefore it is no surprise that worked flint appeared in the bank if soil from the immediate area had been used in its construction. The Neolithic and Bronze age flints only provided a *terminus post quem*. The way to find a more accurate *terminus post quem* was suggested by Robert Scaife who undertook the pollen analysis for the Standen Heath evaluation. He recommended that a date could be obtained by radiocarbon dating the charred organic remains that had been found on the old land surface underneath the linear bank (Scaife 1992). This proposal was sadly never followed up. Opportunities of this kind which present themselves in the future should be taken, since rarely do instances occur which allow the scientific dating of a historical boundary which could provide relatively accurate results.

CONCLUSION

As is often the case, the origin of this territorial boundary is obscure. David Tomalin's proposal that the villa estates could have been the forerunner to the transect parishes is tenuous at times, by his own description, however his investigation was undertaken with the knowledge that elsewhere in the country links have been suggested between Roman and Medieval territorial boundaries. The areas are simply too large to be considered as farm estates. If they existed at all at this time they could have represented limits of administration or ownership, however there is insufficient information to confirm the existence of the transect parishes during the Roman occupation of Britain. The important cemetery at Bowcombe seems to confirm that the area of Carisbrooke had a significant settlement of some kind soon after Roman rule had ceased in Britain.

It is not until several hundred years later that both Hockey and Hase propose that the transect boundary of Carisbrooke was formed as a *parochia* during the first half of the 8th century. Hase infers that Bowcombe was a *villa regalis* of the West Saxon kings, which seems quite likely, and that a minster church was placed there as part of a system of such churches across Wessex. A major part of the criticism of the minster hypothesis is based on the fact that there is so little evidence that they actually had a *parochia* from the outset, and there is currently no direct historical or archaeological evidence that Carisbrooke had a church or a *parochia* as early as the 8th century. However, the combination of Anglo-Saxon church architecture, post-Conquest documentation and comparisons to early churches in Wessex, creates a good argument that the Carisbrooke *parochia* was formed at some point during the mid-to-late Saxon period with a controlling mother church in the area of the current village. The physical boundary of the *parochia* probably became part of the landscape during the late-Saxon period based on the argument that the imposition of the tithe would have made one necessary, since it would have been difficult for tithe to have been calculated without the clear demarcation of land. Although it is possible that the *parochia* had started to disintegrate prior to the Conquest, the mother church lost most of its area of pastoral care during the later Medieval period due to the pressure from Norman lords who desired to build churches on their secular estates. The subsequent parishes of these chapels have left complex parochial relationships in the landscape today. There is still much to be discovered about the transect boundaries on the Island, and research into the others is likely to bring us closer to finding the truth about their origin as well as providing interesting individual stories of continuation.

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