

SAXON GOSPORT AND A ROYAL CHARTER OF ALVERSTOKE.

By G. CIVIL (Captain, R.A.).

THERE exist certain uncorrelated accounts of the geology, archaeology, and recorded history of the Gosport locality.

The first of these was dealt with in a scientific manner by the Geological Survey of 1900, though in no great detail and with only an occasional reference in the Memoirs of 1913. During the past century the neighbourhood has produced a modest contribution to pre-historic knowledge and this aspect is represented in the British Museum. The written history of Gosport is even more fragmentary and the Borough holds no ancient documents or charters.

Subsequent to the close of the New Stone Age (here *circa* 1800 B.C.), the peninsula appeared to be unpopular and seems devoid of remains of the Bronze Age and of any indication of Roman occupation.

With the evacuation of the Romans in 410 A.D., events are cloaked in the general obscurity characteristic of the barbarous and chaotic period that marked the settlement of the country by the Angles, Saxons, and Jutes. There is reason to believe that the Isle of Wight and the south of Hampshire, including the Gosport area, were occupied during the sixth century by Jutes. Strong parties of these, who became known as the Meonwara, established themselves along the Meon Valley. It is significant that they pushed north away from the low-lying coastal clays to the more desirable and secure chalk downlands.

Of this period there is still missing a most important local link. From pagan graves in the Jutish kingdom of Kent and also from the Isle of Wight have been unearthed typical ornamental brooches, fastenings, studs, etc. So far the coastal strip of Hampshire has produced no corresponding evidence of Jutish occupation. It is possible that such relics have yet to be discovered; it is probable that they do not exist. A thickly-wooded, marshy seaboard, if settled at all, would have been left to inferior peoples that did not affect such ornaments, and of the danger from raids there is documentary evidence. The Domesday Book states that the Crown granted a reduction of assessment to the episcopal manor of Fareham from thirty hides to twenty "on account of the Wikings, because it is on the coast."¹

Also, at the beginning of the tenth century, Bedhampton was "laid waste by these heathens."

1. *Victoria County History.*

The first recorded reference to the neighbourhood was made in the early eighth century by Bede² in his *Ecclesiastical History*. This careful and critical historian speaks of Wight in the following terms :—

“The island is situated opposite the division between the South Saxons and the Gewissae, being separated from it by a sea, three miles over, which is called Solent. In this narrow sea, the two tides of the ocean, which flow round Britain from the immense northern ocean, daily meet and oppose one another beyond the mouth of the river Homelea (Hamble), which runs into the narrow sea from the lands of the Jutes which belong to the country of the Gewissae.”³

This invaluable contemporary description not only marks the first historic mention of the Solent, but produces evidence of the border between Wessex and Sussex, and of the settlement of the hinterland of Hampshire by the Jutes.

The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, a work of such great historical value, makes no reference to the Gosport locality until the year 1114, when King Henry I visited Rowner.⁴

It has always been understood that, after the Venerable Bede, the first mention of any part of the present Gosport was contained in the Domesday Book (1086) wherein are details of Rowner, Elson, and Alverstoke ; though Gosport, as such, was then non-existent. This idea persists to-day ; yet in the year 1918 there was published as a note in the *Proceedings* of the Hampshire Field Club, under the title of “An Unrecognised Charter of Alverstoke,” by the Rev. J. C. Hughes,⁵ an epoch-making disclosure which seems to have passed unnoticed. With due acknowledgment to the Editor of the *Proceedings* for permission to quote, that which follows ventures some mild elaboration and an attempt to relate named historic landmarks to present-day topography.

It is most fortunate that there have been preserved for posterity numerous Anglo-Saxon Charters that are concerned mainly with the granting of lands. The text of the particular charter under consideration was worked upon by the two most eminent decipherers of Anglo-Saxon documents. That printed by W. de G. Birch in his *Cartularium Saxonicum*, iii, pp. 7-9,⁶ and previously by J. M. Kemble⁷ in *Codex Diplomaticus Aevi Saxonici*, No. MCLXIII, is preserved in a chartulary of the Priory of St. Swithin, Winchester, which appears to have been compiled between the years 1130 and 1150.⁸ In the British Museum this chartulary is Add. MS. 15350, the document occurring on F. 69^b.

2. Born 673 A.D.

3. *Victoria History of Hampshire*.

4. *The Parish Church of Rowner*. (Sir H. Prideaux-Brune.)

5. *Papers and Proceedings of the Hampshire Field Club and Archaeological Society*, Vol. VIII, pt. ii.

6. Published 1893.

7. J. M. Kemble, 1807 - 1857.

8. Authority, the Keeper of Manuscripts, British Museum.

In transcribing this Charter, confusion arose over the place-name. In Hampshire there were many English stockaded settlements called "Stoke," usually with a distinguishing affix such as Basingstoke, Meonstoke, Bishopstoke, Alverstoke, etc. But this Charter refers to a place indicated solely as Stoke (Stocé). It is worthy of note that Birch, in his title, offers the alternatives "Stoke, or Bishop Stoke," which suggests that he entertained a certain degree of doubt as to the geographical location. Kemble gives the place simply as Stoke. The *Victoria County History* of Hampshire follows Birch, and under "Bishopstoke" quotes the Charter as the earliest reference to that place.

By this Charter, King Eadred, in the year 948 A.D., grants to Aelfric his thegn for eternal inheritance XI hides of land at Stoke (at Stocé); but, as originally observed by the Rev. J. C. Hughes, by studying the boundaries we are forced to conclude that they refer to Alverstoke.

Alverstoke is mentioned in the Domesday Book as "Alwarestock" and all are familiar with the story of the noble Anglo-Saxon lady, Alwara, after whom it is named. Nevertheless, the name "Stoke" persisted. In the thirteenth century a document concerning the payment of land charges states "except the land lying between the stream⁹ on which stood the Priory mill and that which ran by the parson's garden¹⁰—that land being charged to the Stokes, Forton, Brockhurst and Bury men."¹¹

A chart of the time of Charles II marks it as Stoke, and the adjoining bay as Stoke Bay.¹² To-day we have Stoke Road.

These are the boundaries as given in the charter:—

"This synt tha land ge mæro to Stocé. Ærest of saé ofer thone Stan hricg on thonæ easteran weg thonon on gagol mor, thonne north and lang thæs mores oth ruwan oringa ge mæro, thonne east on tha ealdan dic oth idel hiwisce easte weard, thonne north 7 lang mearcæ on tha withegas weste weard, thonne east be tham ealdan herpothe to Æthelswithes tuninga lea, thonon suth on tha ealdan dic. 7 lang dic út on saé thonon út on solentan west on midne stream. oth hit cymth upp thaer mon ær onfeng."

"These are the land boundaries to Stoke. First from the sea over the Stone ridge onto the eastern way, thence to Gale-Moor. Then north along the moor to the bounds of the men of Rowner. Then east onto the old dike to the empty house east-ward. Then north along the border (of Rowner probably) to the withies westward, then east by the old military road to the meadow of the men of Æthelswitheton, thence south to the old dike, along the dike out on the sea, thence out on Solent west on mid stream till it comes up where one first began."^{13 14}

9. Forton Creek.

10. Alverstoke Creek.

11. *A General History of Hampshire*, B. B. Woodward, circa 1868. Also quoted in *Victoria County History*.

12. Rev. J. C. Hughes, *Hants Field Club Proceedings*, Vol. VIII, pt. 2.

13. Modern rendering by Rev. J. C. Hughes.

14. The Appendix gives the complete Charter as printed by Birch.

There can be no doubt that this Stocé is indeed Alverstoke. Apart from the fact that the land granted is confined by the Solent, Rowner, Gale Moor (Gomer) and Æthelswitheton (Elson), which constitute the existing bounds of Alverstoke, by no stretch of the imagination could XI hides¹⁵ be extended from the Solent to embrace an area so remote as Bishopstoke, near Eastleigh.

Before attempting to follow the boundaries in some detail from the plan, it is of prime importance to note that the Charter carries back the names of Rowner and Elson to a date at least as early as that of Alverstoke; for, at the time of granting, Rowner is referred to as already existing with established bounds, while the men of Elson are acknowledged to have recognised claims to certain lands at the place so named.

The origin of the name Rowner is debatable. In the Charter it would appear to be "Ruwan Ora"; in the Domesday Book "Ruenore"; and the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle in 1114 gives it as "Rugenor." One authority¹⁶ quotes it as meaning "shore of Ruga"—an A.S. personal name—whereas another¹⁷ inclines to "rough landing-place," derived from Rúh óra.

Elson is a more surprising corruption of Æthelswithe tun. Aethel is frequently contracted to Al or El. Æthelswitha, a woman's name, was also the name of Alfred's Queen and of other ladies of the royal house of Wessex. On the maps of Isaac Taylor (1759) and Faden (1796) the place is indicated by the intermediate form, Elston.

The *Oxford Dictionary of English Place-names*, 1936, unhesitatingly quotes this Charter of King Eadred for the origins of Alverstoke, Rowner and Elson.

Most intriguing of all is the meaning of the name Gomer. Mr. Hughes, in delightful manner, traces it through Gamer—Gamoores—to its now revealed origin, Gagol mor, *i.e.* (Sweet) Gale Moor, the moor where the sweet gale, or bog myrtle, grew a thousand years ago.¹⁸

To "beat the bounds" of Alverstoke on the reconstructed map of the Gosport peninsula will call for imagination and tolerance, though there are helpful signposts *en route*.

"From the sea over the Stone ridge onto the eastern way, thence to Gale Moor."

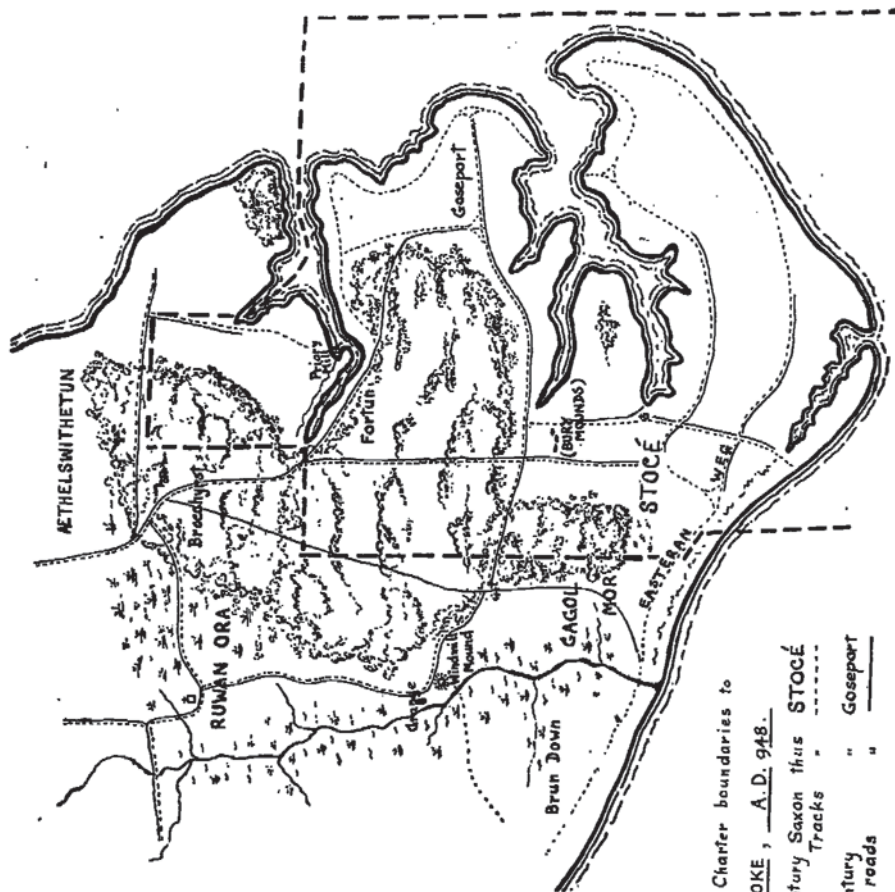
The stone ridge is, fairly obviously, the combined shingle beach and the debased gravel cliff which at that time, in its natural state, must have been more continuous and boldly defined in the

15. A hide was an elastic measurement which varied from 60 to 120 acres.

16. *Place Names of England and Wales*, 1915 (Rev. J. B. Johnston).

17. *Oxford Dictionary of English Place-names*, 1936 (Ekwall).

18. Rev. J. C. Hughes.



Conjectured Charter boundaries to

ALVERSTOKE, A.D. 948.

10th Century Saxon thus STOCÉ

Tracks " " " "

13th Century " " " "

Modern roads " " " "

Stokes Bay region. The map shows the shore line here, and at Haslar, further south than at the present time, for there has most probably been considerable encroachment. At an inquisition held at Winchester in 1341, the good men of Gosport complained that "since 1290 the sea had encroached upon fifty acres of arable." It is suggested here that Haslar was the chief victim.

The "eastern way," no trace or record of which remains to-day, was presumably a track following the edge of the low cliff along the sea front, with connecting paths inland to Alverstoke, Rowner, and Stubbington. Humans still evince a marked tendency to create such cliff-top footpaths and in Anglo-Saxon times there was urgent need of coast watching. Fort Road may represent a section of this ancient Eastern Way, but how very aptly named the existing Western Way is.

The Charter does not make it clear whether the boundary follows the Eastern Way to Gale Moor or crosses it directly north on to the moor. What is important is that Gomer, as the name testifies, was then very much as it is to-day—an area of thin soil on underlying gravel supporting a sparse growth of heather, gorse, and bramble. To gaze upon the wild expanse of the adjacent Browndown (Brun Down ?)¹⁹ is to recapture the Anglo-Saxon vista.

Attention is directed to one noteworthy detail ; no mention is made of the Alver River. Had the boundary passed over this stream, it is almost certain that the Charter would have referred to such an obvious feature. If, as some maintain, the Alver during historic times curved east and flowed into the creek by Alverstoke Church, then the given boundary *must* have crossed it. The inference is, therefore, that in Saxon times the river entered Stokes Bay, as now, west of and outside the boundary of Alverstoke.

"Then north along the moor to the bounds of the men of Rowner."

This northward run, apparently, continued roughly parallel with, and slightly east of, the present Gomer Lane and Military Road (for the whole of Grange Field was included in the Manor of Rowner) until it turned east in the neighbourhood of Cambridge Road.

Mention of Grange, some half-mile west, makes a diversion here well worth while. A farm building of sorts has occupied the site of Grange Farmhouse probably since Norman times or even earlier. The merits of the architecture of the existing farmhouse have been referred to elsewhere²⁰; and Grange Lane, locally known as the "private road," which connects Grange with Rowner Church, undoubtedly traverses a trackway equally ancient.

19. The Brune, or le Brun, family were Lords of the Manor from 1277 to 1925.

20. Guide to *The Parish Church of Rowner*.

Immediately south of the farm by Alder Moor and overlooking the reputed "Dead Man's Hollow" there is marked on the 6in. Ordnance Map one of Gosport's rare scheduled historic monuments with the significant title of "Windmill Mound." The mound resembles a round barrow, is tree-covered, overgrown, and suspiciously near the edge of an obvious old gravel digging. When, however, of Rowner one reads "in the South-east of the parish there are several disused gravel pits (Bluebell Copse ?) and also the site of an old windmill, probably the one belonging to the Grange Farm of Chark, at which the monks of Quarr were permitted to grind their corn in the twelfth or thirteenth centuries,"²¹ one may well pause and wonder.

"Then east onto the old dike to the empty house eastward."

The empty house will have vanished for ever ; but the old dike is surely the western end of Forton Creek which, within living memory, extended inland to the Ann's Hill area or beyond. Several present-day names are reminiscent of the Old Forton²² landscape—Mill Lane, Millpond Road, maybe Priory Road and the Priory at Hardway—bearing in mind the thirteenth-century quotation, "the stream on which stood the Priory mill." Isaac Taylor's map (1759) fortunately indicates a mill north-east of Forton Recreation Ground, situated on a small fork of the creek and into which flowed a streamlet from the north-westerly direction of Brockhurst. (O.E.—Brocc-hyrst, "badger-wood" ?)

The routes of Forton Road and the alternative main Stoke Road were natural and may well follow ancient tracks. The conjectured heathland and woodland of the map are based on geological data ; the former clothing the shallow humus of the Gravel, while sturdy, oak-like growth rooted in the Brickearth and Tertiary clays. Thus, the Stoke Road track, traversing the heath, skirted the southern edge of the central woods, while the Forton Road was forced round the north to hug the bank of Forton Creek.

"Then north along the border to the withies westward."

Beyond Brockhurst lie the waterlogged Bracklesham Beds. The marshy nature of the earth on either side of Rowner Road west of the railway is patent to the most casual observer. Indeed, over much of the area between the railway and the road, it is easy to visualise the withies still growing there. If these withies lay westward of it at this point, then the boundary must have turned east in the neighbourhood of Fort Brockhurst.

21. *Victoria County History*. See also Guide to Rowner Church.

22. Fortun—the "tun" (village) by the "ford" ?

"Then east by the old military road to the meadow of the men of Æthelswitheton."

The word herepath ("army path," or "military road") is a common designation of main roads in Anglo-Saxon charters,²³ and this east-west track from Elson to Rowner probably followed the course of the present Elson Road—Rowner Road; except that the western end of the former passed over the site of Fort Brockhurst to meet the Fareham Road a little to the north of the existing Rowner Road junction. A map of the seventeenth century depicts a Brockhurst manor-house at the north-west corner of this junction, but the end of the pre-fort road to Elson was several yards north of this point.

"Thence south to the old dike."

No clue is given as to how far east the boundary ran along the Elson Road before turning south to Forton Creek, but it would appear to have excluded much of Hardway and Priddy's Hard; for it had to continue "along the dike out on the sea" (Portsmouth Harbour) before proceeding "thence out on Solent west on mid-stream till it comes up where one first began."

Down through the centuries the men of Gosport and Alverstoke have proved ever loyal to the constitution; but withal, fiercely stubborn, independent, and jealous of their considered rights. Is not this in keeping with the ancient tradition of a free people maintaining a hard-won inheritance?

"*CARTULARIUM SAXONICUM*," Vol. III, pp. 7-9.

(WALTER DE GRAY BIRCH, F.S.A.)

No. 865.

(Kemble's "*Codex Diplomaticus*," 1163.

British Museum—Add. MS. 15,350, f. 69b.)

.865. Grant by King Eadred to the thegn Ælfric, of land at Stoke, or Bishop Stoke, co. Southampton, A.D. 948.

ÞIS IS ÐARA XI HIDA BOC "ÆT STOCE" ÐE EADRED CING
GEBOCODE ÆLFRIÐE HIS ÐEGNE ON BCE YRFE.

In nomine almi et agye sophyæ. Qui monarchiam mundi totius ac celsitudinem celorum abditamque profunditatem turgentis oceani in altis et in unis. Omnia cum suæ majestatis imperio nunc et in evum gubernat. cæn pupillarum obtutus per triquadrum mundum cotidie cernitur ac manifestata signa declarantur. quo modo transeuntis mundi vicissitudo diuturnis horis crescendo decrescit. et ampliando minuatur.

Tamen superno fulti adminiculo prosequi indigemus ad alta. . cujus scilicet fervoris igne.²⁴ Ego EADREDUS. basyleus Anglorum cæterarumque gentium in circuitu persistentium gubernatur et rector. cuidum meo fideli ministro

23. Rev. I. C. Hughes.

24. (succensus), added, K; but cf. No. 864.

vocitato nomine ÆLFRICO, devotionis ejus sollertia ejusdemque placatus obsequio; Dignatus sum impertire. XI. mansas, in illo loco ubi jam dudum solicole illius regionis nomen imposuerunt Æt STOCE, tali autem tenore hoc prefate muni-ficentiae munus tradendo concessi, ut possideat²⁵ firmiter teneat usque ad ultimum cursum vitæ suæ cum omnibus utensilibus quæ Deus cœlorum in ipso telluris gramine creavit, tam in notis causis et ignotis in modicis, et in magnis, Campis, Pascuis, Pratis, Silvis, silvarumque densitatibus, donans donabo libertatem, et postquam humani generis fragilitatem deseruerit²⁶ et ad desiderabilem jocunditatis viam per gratiam superni judicis adierit, succedentium sibi cuicumque libuerit æternaliter derelinquat, ceu superius prenotavi. Sit autem predictum rus liberum ab omni fiscali tributo seculari-umque servitutum exinanitum, sine expeditione, et pontis arcisvæ instructione. Si quis autem propria temeritate violenter invadere presumpserit, sciat se proculdubio ante tribunal districti judicis titubatem tremebundumque rationem redditurum. Nisi prius hic digna satisfactione emendare maluerit. Istitis terminis predicta terra circumgirata esse videtur.

Dis synt þa land ge mæro to Stóce. Ærest of sác
ofer þone Stan hricg on þonæ eastern peg þonon
on gagol mor. þonne norð and lang þæs mores
rupan oringa ge mæro. þonne east on þa ealden
díc of idel hipisce easte pearde. þonne norð]
lang mearcæ on þa piþegas peste pearde. þonne
east be þam ealden herpoðe to Æþelspiðe tunin-
ga lea. þonon suð on þa ealdan díc.] lang
díc út on sác þonon út on solentan pest on mid-
-ne stream. of hit cymð upp þær mon ær on
-feng.] firþ ora is on pudu to Stóce.] se wudu
be nordan þam.] séo lács] þæt mæsten is ge
mæne to þam an tpentigum hídum.

Acta est hæc prefata donatio. Anno ab incarnatione domini nostri Jhesu Christi DCCCCXLVIII.

Indictione. VI.

Ego Eadredus Rex Anglorum prefatam donationem sub sigillo sanctæ crucis indeclinabiliter consensi antque roboravi.

Ego Eadgyfu Ejusdem regis mater cum sigillo sanctæ crucis confirmavi.

Ego Oda Dorobernensis æcclesiæ archiepiscopus ejusdem regis principatum.

et benivolentiam sub sigillo sanctæ crucis conclusi.

Ego Pulfstanus Archos divinæ servitutis officio mancipatus Eboracæ

civitatis archiepiscopus sigillum sanctæ crucis impressi.

25. (et), added, K.

26. deseruerit, K.

Ego Peodred Lundoniensis æcclesiæ episcopus corroboravi.	
Ego Ælfheah Wintoniensis æcclesiæ æpiscopus testitudinem sanctæ crucis subscripsi et confirmavi.	
Ego Cenþald episcopus consignavi.	
Ego Ælfric episcopus consignavi.	
Ego Æþelgar episcopus corroboravi.	
Ego Ælfric episcopus confirmavi.	
Ego Þulfsige episcopus conclusi.	
Ego Æþel[s]tan Dux.	Ego Æþelgeard minister.
Ego Eadric Dux.	Ego Þulfric minister.
Ego Æþel[s]tan Dux.	Ego Ælfric minister.
Ego Þulfgar Dux.	Ego Æþelnð minister.
Ego Ealhelm Dux.	Ego Æþelsige minister.
Ego Æþelmund Dux.	Ego Byrhtsige minister.
Ego Ælfgar Dux.	Ego Ælfheah minister.
Ego Eadmund minister.	Ego Ælfric minister.
Ego Ælfstan minister.	Ego Æþered minister.
Ego Þulfric minister.	Ego Eadred minister.
Ego Ælfsige minister.	

THIS IS THE ELEVEN HIDE CHARTER OF STOKE THAT KING
EADRED "BOOKED" TO ÆLFRIC HIS THEGN.

In the name of the Blessed and Holy Wisdom which rules the realm of the whole world and the height of the heavens and the hidden depths of the surging sea, in the depths and in the heights. It governs all things with the rule of its majesty, now and evermore, and manifest signs reveal how the change of this passing world, through long seasons grows less by growing and is diminished by increasing.

So we have need of the help from the highest sustainer to press on to the heights, to wit from the warmth of that passion, I, EADRED, king of the English, governor and ruler of the other peoples living in the neighbourhood, to a certain faithful servant of mine called ÆLFRIC, pleased by the skill of his devotion and his ability, have deigned to give eleven measures of land in that place which the cultivators of the land have for a long time called STOKE. Also by drawing up such a clause of the aforesaid gift, I have conceded this favour that he may possess and firmly hold them until the last days of his life, with all the resources that the God of the skies created in the very crops of the earth. I have granted freedom in known and unknown causes, in small and in great, in fields, pastures, meadows, woods and in the depths of the woods, and after he shall have left behind the uncertainties of human life and shall have arrived at the attractive road of happiness through the grace of the Supreme Judge, he may leave them eternally to whichever of his successors he may have given them, as I stated above.

The land shall be free from all tax and from all peculiar services, except military service and bridge [fort ?] building.

But if anyone by his own rashness shall presume to trespass, let him know that he shall find distress and a terrible reckoning before the tribunal of the district judge, unless he chooses first to make full satisfaction.

Within these bounds the said lands appear to be contained.

These are the land boundaries to Stoke. First from the sea over the Stone ridge onto the eastern way, thence to Gale Moor. Then north along the moor to the bounds of the men of Rowner. Then east onto the old dike to the empty house eastward. Then north along the border [of Rowner probably] to the withies westward, then east by the old military road to the meadow of the men of Æthelswitheton, thence south to the old dike, along the dike out on the sea, thence out on Solent west on mid stream till it comes up where one first began.

And the first [?] boundary is in the wood to Stoke and the wood northwards along them. And [with ?] the pasture which is the most is equal to one and twenty hides.

The aforesaid grant was made in the year after the incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ 948 and in the 6th year of the Indiction.

- | | |
|--|--------------------------|
| I, Eadred, king of the English, have agreed and confirmed this grant under the seal of the Holy Cross. | |
| I, Eadgyfu, mother of the said king, have confirmed it with the seal of the Holy Cross. | |
| I, Odo, Archbishop of Canterbury, have established the kingliness and charity of the same king under the seal of the Holy Cross. | |
| I, Wulfstanus, appointed archbishop of York, have set the seal of the Holy Cross. | |
| I, Theodred, bishop of London, have confirmed. | |
| I, Ælfheah, bishop of Winchester, have subscribed and confirmed the testimony of Holy Cross. | |
| I, Cenwald, bishop, have signed. | |
| I, Ælfric, bishop, have signed. | |
| I, Æthelgar, bishop, have "strengthened." | |
| I, Ælfred, bishop, have confirmed. | |
| I, Wulfsige, bishop, have established. | |
| I, Æthel[s]tan, ealdorman [chief ?]. | I, Æthelgeard, minister. |
| I, Eadric, ealdorman. | I, Wulfric, minister. |
| I, Æthel[s]tan, ealdorman. | I, Ælfric, minister. |
| I, Wulfgar, ealdorman. | I, Æthelnoth, minister. |
| I, Balhelm, ealdorman. | I, Æthelsige, minister. |
| I, Æthelmund, ealdorman. | I, Byrhtsige, minister. |
| I, Ælfgar, ealdorman. | I, Ælfheah, minister. |
| I, Eadmund, minister. | I, Ælfred, minister. |
| I, Ælfstan, minister. | I, Æthered, minister. |
| I, Wulfric, minister. | I, Eadred, minister. |
| I, Ælfsige, minister. | |

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