

A TOPOGRAPHY OF ALFRED'S WARS IN WESSEX.

By the late DR. J. P. WILLIAMS-FREEMAN.

THE field archaeologist must not expect to find any defensive earthwork enclosures of early Saxon make : their stronghold was the stockade of wood which has left no trace except in the place-name suffix. As regards the protection of their dwellings there are, however, in the eastern counties numerous little wet moats, mostly square and only large enough to contain a small wooden house and yard, which are often called Saxon and very likely may be so. They are easily to be distinguished from the larger and more important mediaeval or Elizabethan moated houses which succeeded the residential castle. A few are to be found in the low-lying parts of Wessex, one or two large enough to contain a farmhouse, and it is quite possible that coins or pottery may some day give proof of their Saxon date. Even so I doubt if they were earlier than the 9th century.

Strong linear earthworks, however, the Saxons certainly did make, both long tribal frontiers and short cross-corridor entrenchments, as well as, in all probability, some of the minor banks and ditches.

The pitched battles both of Saxons and Danes seem to have been open fights with shock tactics, desperate charges and hand-to-hand contests, though in the long campaigns between the two one must suppose they made temporary stockaded camps which must have necessitated some earthwork if only a "palisade trench." None of the minor earthworks which are so common all over the country have, so far as I know, been proved to be definitely related with their battle sites, at any rate in Wessex. Too often the sites themselves, even where the name of the locality is recorded, are not known, sometimes because no such name can now be recognised but more often because there are so many possible modern derivatives to choose from.

The best help that field archaeology can hope to give is a local study of the roads by which the contending forces can have travelled, and the most likely battle spots according to the lie of the country, and in the following pages I have attempted to examine the course of Alfred's wars against the Danes in Wessex based on the topography of the region.

The Ashdown to Wilton Campaign.

In 870 the Danes had been wintering in Thetford and before the winter was over rode suddenly to Reading, evidently coming along the Icknield Way and the Chiltern Ridge. They crossed the

Thames and made their fortified camp in the fork between that river and the Kennet, constructing a "vallum" between the two rivers—a favourite peninsular position. The first of the nine general battles of the campaign was fought within three days at Englefield when the ealdorman of Berkshire fell on a party of Danes, killed one of their Jarls and drove them back to their stronghold. Four days later King Ethelred and Alfred led a large force to Reading, probably from Winchester by the Roman road to Silchester, and attacked the Danish camp with great slaughter on either hand. But the Danes "burst out against them like wolves" and drove them back, according to one account, as far as Wicelet, which may have been Whistley Green, four or five miles east of the camp at Reading.

Again, four days later, about January 8th, came the great battle of "Ashdown," 20 or more miles to the west. The name is a general one for a long stretch of the Berkshire Downs which begin west of the woods between Streatley and Aldworth and the actual site of the battle is quite uncertain. The Danes were evidently bent on pushing rapidly west along the great Ridgeway, the most open and the easiest road into the heart of Wessex, and must have given the Saxons a stern chase. When they came up with them the Danes, on the morning of the battle, were occupying a high position, but Alfred with his part of the army promptly attacked, "charging up the hill like a wild boar" without waiting for them to take advantage of the ground or for his brother to finish his prayers. The Danish defeat was a crushing one—the fighting went on all day—one of the two Danish kings, five Jarls and many thousand men were killed and the Danes were pursued back to their base at Reading all through the night and into the next morning.

Two place-names are inviting for the site of this battle—"Kingstanding Hill" on Moultsford Down two miles west of the woods, and Ashdown Park in Ashbury parish 18 miles further west. The long pursuit suggests a distant site and Ashbury is well over 30 miles from Reading, but the name "Ashdown" Park is said not to be early enough, and the earthworks round it, which have been suggested as possibly connected with the battle, are certainly mediaeval.

It is pretty certain that the Danes must now have received reinforcements, for 14 days later they fought a successful battle at "Basing" against the royal brothers. The traditional site of this battle is on the Harroway near the N.E. corner of Hackwood Park, about 18 or 19 miles from Reading. It is a likely enough spot, for presumably the Danes were making for Winchester and their objective was to reach the Roman road where it crosses the saddle at Oakley. The modern road from Reading through

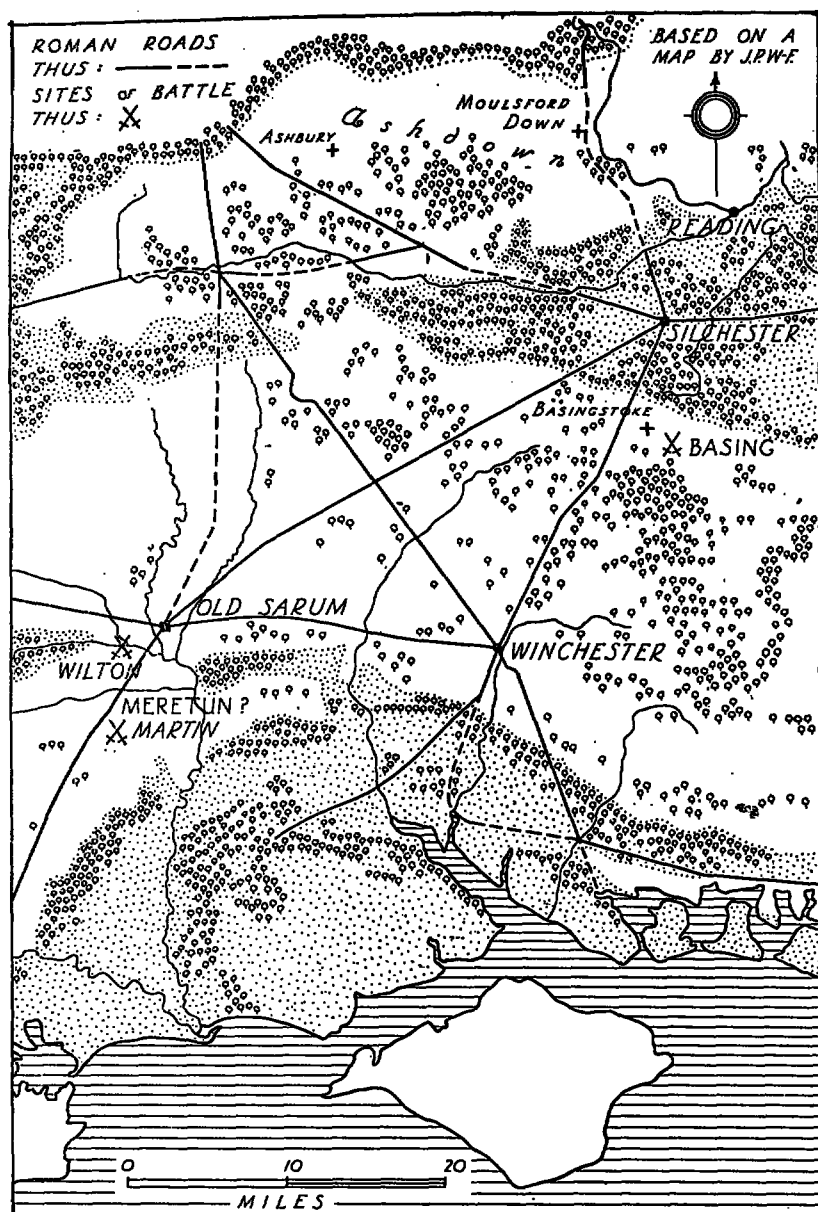


Fig. 1. Map to illustrate the Ashdown to Wilton Campaign.

Basingstoke probably did not exist ; it is nearly all on the heavy London clay of the Loddon Valley, naturally impenetrably wooded and impassably wet in winter. But by taking the road by Shinfield, crossing the Loddon by Swallowfield and going on by Heckfield to the heathy ridge running due south through Rotherwick and Newnham to the west end of Hook Common, the Danes could avoid most of it, and that there was such a track the lanes, footpaths and parish boundaries suggest. Greywell Hill on the chalk would be the immediate objective and the unavoidable band of London clay along the edge of this formation is on high ground here and only about a mile wide. Beyond Greywell Hill the line of the down swings to the west and the track joins the Harroway at Five Lanes End. On this old road, about two and a half miles west, is the traditional site of the battle.

The Saxons, to reach the battle-spot, would have a much more open country, if they had remained in Berkshire, to watch the enemy. They would reach Newbury, the best crossing of the Kennet, by any of the tracks running south down the chalk from the Berkshire Ridgeway. Thence the present Winchester road across dry, open, scrub country, would take them through Kingsclere with only two or three miles of clay to cross to the North Down Ridgeway at Cottington's Hill and thence along the chalk to the Harroway at the Oakley saddle. From the Berkshire Downs the total distance is about 30 miles to the supposed battle-field which is about four miles east of the Roman road to Winchester.

Though the *Chronicle* distinctly says that the Danes "gained the victory" at Basing it does not seem to have been a decisive one for they never pushed on to Winchester as they surely would have done if the Saxons had been routed. The campaign seems to have taken a westerly direction into Wiltshire ; quite possibly the Danes were deliberately drawn in that direction by a strategic retreat of the brothers to save the capital, for though unhappily they never together gained another victory, they evidently had too strong a force for the Danes to ignore. The "large force," which Ethelred had brought up to Reading within a week of the appearance of the Danes to join the Berkshire men already in the field, can hardly have been more than that of Hampshire or perhaps Wiltshire. The losses already suffered must have been great ; it was probably to get fresh troops from the west that Ethelred took the line he did to west Wiltshire and Dorset.

The events of the next three months, according to the *Chronicle*, may be thus summarised : about March 22nd the Danes gained a success at "Meretun," and, reinforced by the arrival of the "summer army" at Reading, were soon afterwards able to defeat Alfred at Wilton. Ethelred had died in the meantime, to be succeeded by his brother. Ethelred died after the battle of "Meretun" and

about Easter. Easter Day in 871 fell on April 15th and we must therefore put the date of "Meretun" not later than early in April for the King was not killed at the battle though some of the later chroniclers say he was wounded; others say he died from exhaustion "worn out by the exertions of his numerous battles," as well he may have been.

There is no room in the time-table in which to place three unnamed general "battles" mentioned in the *Chronicle* or the incursions similarly referred to made by Alfred and other leaders except the two months gap between Basing and "Meretun," and the one month between "Meretun" and Wilton. These skirmishes may perhaps have been fought early and not a great distance from Basing, but most of the casual fighting probably took place along the line of retreat.

There are three high and dry roads along the chalk by which the Saxons could have retreated to Wimborne and Wilton: the Harroway to Salisbury Plain west of Andover, the Roman road from Silchester direct to Old Sarum, and the great West Hants Ridgeway curving round the Test basin by Inkpen "Beacon."

The first two run close together as far as Andover. They are more direct, but run through some rather wooded country. The last would be in every way the best if the Saxons were retreating and had free choice. It is by far the best going and the easiest to defend at any point along the ridge that they might choose for a rearguard action. It would draw the Danes further from Winchester and the richer farming country of the Test Valley. By leaving it and going straight down the Plain to Old Sarum there would be no difficult rivers to cross except the Avon at Harnham, which is the best ford. They might of course have followed the watershed road along the east of the Bourne and crossed the Avon at Downton, or Fordingbridge, or even gone along the New Forest Plain direct to Wimborne by Ringwood, but the crossing at Ringwood is wide and bad; it has not even a ford place-name, but is a "wade" and the valley of the Moors river beyond is often flooded even now. By leaving the ridgeway and crossing to the Plain over the little Winterbourne stream at Upper Collingbourne—never a bad crossing even when the springs are up—they would have a hard, dry, chalk track by Everley to Harnham and beyond it over Cranborne Chase to Wimborne. And finally there are two villages upon this road whose names may be legitimate descendants of "Meretun"—Marten, not far from Bedwyn, and about 30 miles from Basing, and Martin on Cranborne Chase, about 60 miles from Basing and only 14 from Wimborne.

The claims of Marten (favoured by Grundy¹) to have been the site of the battle seem to be simply that it is a short mile from

1. *Arch. Journal*, XXV, 192.

the ridgeway and even on the track that the Saxons would have taken to cross the Bourne at Upper Collingbourne. (The fact that it is also on the Roman road from Winchester to the north seems to have nothing to do with the case.) About Martin, a fair-sized village about two miles from the Roman road along Cranborne Chase and a mile on the Wiltshire side of Bokerley Dyke, there is a good deal more to be said. The arguments for it are well set out by Warne who attributes the suggested identification to Hutchins' *History of Dorset*. By far the most important point in its favour is its position only 14 miles from Wimborne where Ethelred was buried a short time after the battle. Warne mentions a tradition that he died at Wichampton, a village only five miles from Wimborne on the road from Martin, and this tradition seems likely to have been existent in Camden's time, for he makes the erroneous statement that the King was killed at the battle of "Whittingham." There seems enough here to make proximity to Wimborne of great weight in the identification of "Meretun." But Warne goes further and states that there is a strong tradition amongst the villagers of a king having been slain at "Hanham" Hill close to Martin, and quotes the words of a poor man who told him that "in old days when there was a King in every county a battle was fought on Hanham Hill and a King was slain." And, moreover, that he himself had actually dug on the hill to find the gold crown and other treasures said to be buried there.

The last battle where Alfred unsuccessfully attacked the army of the Danes with a small band was at Wilton, the capital of Wiltshire, only six or seven miles north from Martin, and was fought no doubt, as Asser seems to say, on the hill south of the valley in which the Wylde and Nadder join, with the town at their confluence. There is no need to find roads for him as the hard chalk of the Chase between Wimborne and Wilton is good going anywhere, but he would probably follow the line of the Roman road, cross the Ebble at Stratford Toney, and find the Danes waiting for him on the ridge, somewhere about the present race-course. Two detached entries in the *Chronicle* at the end of its account of that campaign are pathetic in their brevity: "And after this battle ('Meretun') there came a great army in the summer to Reading"; "And that year the West Saxons made peace with the army."

The four months' campaign had not kept up the glories of Ashdown, but the young brothers had not altogether failed. They had saved all Hampshire, including Winchester and Southampton, they had kept the Danes to the Downs in Wiltshire, and they had kept them away from Wareham, Poole Harboir, and all Dorset, and the West. Now the summer farming had to be seen to and the hay got in. And Wessex had peace for five years.

The Wareham and Ethandun Campaigns.

The five years' respite was not wasted. Alfred reorganised the army and began to found a navy. In the summer of 875 when a Danish raid was made on the coast, for the first time in history it was not allowed to land. Alfred himself "went out to sea with a fleet and fought with the forces of seven ships and one of them he took and the rest he put to flight." It is probably to this battle, or to the second which took place in the Solent in 897, that we must attribute the ancient and undying tradition of the "Danish ship" on the Hamble river, now sunk beneath the mud at Wreck Creek above Bursledon. It is true that competent authority has proved this particular ship to be the *Grace Dieu* of Henry V, laid up and accidentally burnt in 1439, a quite respectable time ago. But no true-bred mariner from the little estuary will ever renounce his birthright to believe the story handed down to him that "some-when in old days" a Danish ship was driven up the river and sunk.

The Wareham to Exeter Campaign.

The next attack on Wessex was another lightning one. In 876 the Danish army rode suddenly from Cambridge to Wareham. There can be no doubt as to the road they took—along the Chilterns by the Icknield Way then along the Berks. and Hants Ridgeway across the river at East Kennet to Wodensbeorh and across the Pewsey Vale to Broadbury; then straight down the Plain to Old Sarum and the ford at Harnham, along the Chase to Wimborne, and by the road over the heath to Wareham—about 180 miles of grass tracks with no rivers to ford that would be impassable to cavalry.

Alfred would not be likely to get reports of the advance until they had crossed the Thames and there was no possibility of intercepting them in their last hundred miles across Wessex. But he promptly brought a large force to Wareham and effectually shut them up in that strongly entrenched town.

The Danes were met at Wareham by a very large fleet of their western brothers whose normal occupation was piracy in the Irish Sea. They doubtless ravaged much of the country round and apparently reinforced the garrison in the town, but were unable to break up the siege. After a considerable time the army was obliged to make a very solemn peace and swore speedily to leave the kingdom. "And notwithstanding this that part of the army which was horsed stole away by night" to Exeter. They were pursued by Alfred but he was "unable to overtake them before they were in the fortress where they could not be come at."

After the New Year (877) the rest of the Danes in Wareham embarked in the ships and set out west to join the contingent in Exeter, but fortune favoured Alfred; they were overtaken by a great storm almost before they were out of harbour and 120 ships

were wrecked under the cliffs by Swanage and their crews drowned. None of them appear to have reached Exeter. There the siege lasted until the summer of 877, but eventually the Danes "delivered hostages to Alfred as many as he would have and swore many oaths and then they observed the peace well." The Danes departed at harvest time, but only as far as Gloucester.

It was on the whole a successful campaign for Alfred and it is interesting on account of the growing use of mounted troops and the co-operation of sea and land forces, but archaeologically it is barren. One might perhaps look for some remains of Alfred's line of investment across the neck between the Piddle and the Frome, but none of the banks and ditches which exist there seem to fit the situation. There are folk memories round Swanage of Alfred's great destruction of the Danish fleet, but as there can be no doubt that he was at Exeter at the time and had, as yet, no fleet fit to bring against them, one must give thanks not to him but to their bad seamanship in leaving their best harbour for their ships in England and putting to sea on one of the worst lee shores with a gale coming up from the east.

The Ethandun Campaign.

The peace so lavishly sworn to at Exeter did not last 18 months. The Danes spent this interval in dividing up and settling the eastern half of Mercia, that kingdom being already in their hands.

Then they began their third and last attack upon Wessex, adopting the same plan as before of arranging for a simultaneous attack by the fleet of the western pirates. The army, under Guthrum, suddenly stole away in the second week of January 878 to Chippenham, the chief market town in the rich district of North Wilts. fortified itself there and began to ravage far over Wessex, while a Viking fleet, evidently acting in concert, descended on the Devon coast.

The effect was disastrous. "They overran the land of the West Saxons and many of the people they drove beyond sea and of the remainder the greater part they subdued and forced to obey them, except King Alfred and he with a small band with difficulty retreated to the woods and fastnesses of the moors."

It was the darkest time of his life, but it lasted only three or four months. Before Easter (March 23rd in 878) the ealdorman of Somerset had got together a small force in the forest part of his shire and the seaborne Vikings raiding over Devon had been slaughtered or forced to seek the safety of their ships. By Easter "Alfred with a small band made a fort (Geweorc) at Athelney and from it with that part of the men of Somerset that were nearest to it from time to time fought against the army." By the seventh week after Easter (say the second week in May) his plans were ready. He rode to Egbrytes Stan (Egbert's Stone) on the east

side of Selwood "and there came to meet him all the men of Somerset and the men of Wiltshire and that portion of the men of Hampshire that was on this side of the sea and they were joyful of his presence." On the following day he went from the place of assembly to "Aeglea" or "Iglea" and the day after this to "Ethandun, and there fought against the whole army and put them to flight and pursued them as far as their fortress, and there he sat down fourteen days." Then Guthrum, starved out, surrendered and consented to become a Christian. Three weeks later he came to Aller, near Athelney, and was christened there, Alfred standing god-father. Then the King royally entertained him at Wedmore, a royal manor a few miles from Wells, loaded him with gifts and concluded a treaty of peace with him, the chief condition being that he should leave his kingdom for good. This he loyally kept, in spite of all temptations, to the end of his life.

That is a brief account of the campaign as given in the *Chronicle* and Asser's *Life of Alfred*, the only contemporary accounts; but not one of the localities mentioned can be identified with absolute certainty except the bases of the campaign—Athelney and Chippenham. Unfortunately attempts to reconstruct the campaign have been entirely fought on the field of place-name study and not that of topography, with the result that one of the earliest conclusions has been disastrously misleading, and one of the latest, from the point of view of topography, in the highest degree improbable.

The places to be identified are (1) "Ecgbrytes Stan," the place of assembly, (2) "Aeglea" or "Iglea," the camp at the end of the first day's march, and (3) "Ethandun," the place of the battle.

The first point is Ecgbrytes Stan, the place of assembly—it is now a place-name frankly pronounced to be unidentifiable. Brixton Deverill, Camden's choice, long held the field and misled Sir R. Colt Hoare into abandoning Cley Hill as "Aeglea" as being too near it. Topographically it is not an impossible choice, for it is quite accessible from all directions, though a very improbable one since it is not a natural meeting place of known roads nor indeed on one of any importance. But place-name study has settled the question. It is stated in Domesday Book to have been held by Brictric, who is an historical personage of the 11th century, and it is undoubtedly the "Brichrichteston" of the Testa de Nevill and therefore must have received its name 200 years after the date of "Aecgbrightes Stan"² of the *Chronicle*.

On topographical grounds I think the rendezvous is likely to have been round about the present Kilmington Common—an open level space of a square mile or so about one mile east of Alfred's Tower, a monument built in the 18th century to commemorate the King's arrival.

2. W. H. Stevenson, *Asser's Life of Alfred*, 268.

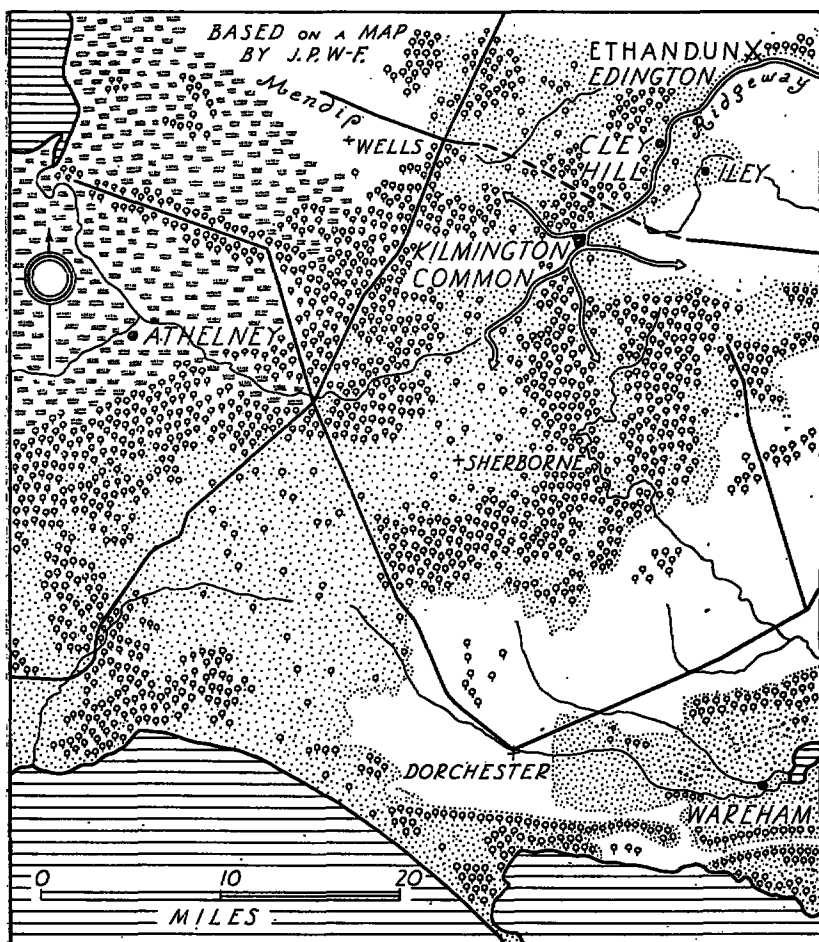


Fig. 2. Map to illustrate the Ethandun Campaign.

Kilminster is a great nodal point where no less than six ancient and important tracks converge from all directions. Taking them from north to west against the sun there are :

1. The main British and Roman road from the north-west along the ridge of the Mendips.
2. The road up Kingsettle Hill coming from the west along the Hardway from Somerford, Castle Cary and the Somerset fens—by which Alfred would come.

3. The watershed road from Sherborne and West Dorset through Wincanton.
4. The road up from Bulbarrow and South Dorset along the Corallian ridge east of the Blackmore Vale, joined by that from Shaftesbury and East Dorset, and running up by Penselwood along the western scarp of the steep valleys of the sources of the Stour.
5. The wide track over the chalk by White Sheet Hill coming from Salisbury Plain and Hampshire.
6. The main east-west Wilts. and Berks. Ridgeway to the crossings of the Thames. From Kilmington eastward it follows the watershed to Maiden Bradley and Parsonage Farm, passing east of Park Hill, Cley Hill and across Norridge Common to Upton Scudamore and up the spur to the western edge of the plain past Bratton Castle. It is the obvious and direct way to Edington Hill in Wiltshire.

The next point is to identify "Ethandun" and from every point of view, geographical, historical and place-name, Edington about three miles east of Westbury is the obvious choice. Edington Hill is within a mile of the ridgeway from the West Country along the edge of the Plain, 17 miles from Kilmington and 14 due south from Chippenham.

Alfred's line of march to Edington needs little further description. He would follow the main ridgeway road (described as No. 6 above) from Kilmington Common. It is an open chalk road to a little beyond Parsonage Barn, near Horningsham, beyond that it passes through plantations on a greensand hill, but the natural growth would be scrub, not wood, and the ground is dry. The present road comes out half a mile S.E. of Cley Hill and it probably passed over its foot and beyond it over "Norridge" (North Ridge) Common, where there is said to be still a disused green track,³ and ascends the chalk spur of Upton Cowdown to the edge of the Plain.

The road from the Danish base would be along the present main road through Melksham. It is true that the northern half of this road lies in the Avon Valley, but it was probably not so wet in May as to have been impassable. If it was a wet season the road along the hills half a mile south of Heddington and through Devizes would be about seven miles longer.

The topographical claims of the Wiltshire Edington are incontestable—distances, obvious line of march of both forces to the place of battle, and the pursuit to and siege of the Danish stronghold at Chippenham all fit in so well with straight-forward common sense, when the lie of the land and the roads are considered, that they leave no doubt. There is not the slightest need to suppose

3. Hippisley Cox, *Green Roads of England*, 32.

that the Danes were driven to take refuge in any old British earth-work—Bratton Castle or any other—as has often been suggested ; indeed the account of the spoil taken by Alfred outside the stronghold is hardly compatible with it. The account of the pursuit as given in Asser's *Life of Alfred* is as follows : " He overthrew the heathen with the greatest slaughter and pursued the fugitives to their stronghold, and everything that he came upon outside the stronghold he took, men horses and cattle—immediately killing the men ; and he boldly made his camp with his whole army before the gates of the heathen stronghold. And when he had remained 14 days the heathen harassed by hunger and cold and fear to extreme desperation sought peace on this condition that the King should receive hostages as many as he might wish and he should give them none."

The course of events seems simple enough. Alfred deliberately marched against Guthrum, who was not surprised on any raid, but would undoubtedly have got tidings of his movements. Guthrum marched out from Chippenham with his whole force to meet him and gave him battle probably on the open down on Edington Hill. He was defeated, driven back to his stronghold and, after a fortnight's siege, surrendered.

The place-name evidence is also conclusive and is especially interesting as showing the value of prolonged search, even of late documents. "Ethandun" (the hill on the "Waste") was a royal manor and an Edington was left in King Alfred's will to his widow with those of Wantage and Lambourn. But Edington in Berks. is also a royal manor and may be the one referred to. Indeed it has a rather better claim to be the manor so bequeathed as it actually joins Lambourn and, with the manor of Wantage a few miles off the three seem to comprise all the King's private estate in Berkshire.⁴

Further evidence is therefore required and is fortunately forthcoming. Edington, Wilts., was left by King Edgar in 968 to Romsey Abbey, but again in the Charter it is called Edington and, though all references to it are in a form consistent with "Ethandun," it is not till 1280, in an inquisition concerning the Abbesses' wood there, that it is again called "Ethandun." On the other hand no reference to Edington, Berks, has been found in the form Ethandun ; on the contrary, it is Eddivatone in Domesday Book and again in the 12th century, evidently from "Edgifa'stun," so it has no etymological claims.

There remains to be identified the third place mentioned in the accounts, the spot where Alfred and his force encamped at the end of his first day's march from the rendezvous, and from which he marched to Ethandun at dawn the next day. It is given as "Iglea" in three of the MSS. of the *Chronicle*, as "Aeglea" in

4. W.A.M. (May—Dec., 1893), 111.

the other two and as "Aecglea" in the Cottonian MS. of Asser. There are two identifications which must be seriously considered. Cley Hill because its topographical claims are very strong and its place-name case almost apologetically weak, and Iley because the conditions are exactly reversed.

We will take the topographical evidence first. *Cley Hill* is right on the ridgeway as it goes across the flat ground of Norridge Common to Salisbury Plain ridge. It is a solitary high hill, an out-lier of the chalk in the Warminster Gap, which rises steeply 300 feet above the surrounding country with a roomy, level top—an impregnable position for a camp. It is also an ideal spot for a look-out, commanding wide views all round and overlooking the whole country to the north as far as Chippenham and beyond, and even the ridgeway to the N.E. as far as Bratton Castle. It is nine miles from Kilmington Common and eight from Edington Hill.

Sir Richard Colt Hoare, whose knowledge of the country as a whole has probably never been surpassed, was a strong champion of Cley Hill though as he accepted Brixton for the rendezvous he was puzzled at the short distance (four miles) Alfred took for his first march and abandoned it.

Now as to the place-name difficulties. Mr. Stevenson, quoting Gough's suggestion that "'Cley Hill' by the sound might bid fair to be this Aeglea," roundly says "with which it cannot possibly be connected" phonetically. (I will not insist on the Wiltshireman's power of overcoming almost any phonetic impossibility.) Mr. Stevenson goes on to discuss the problem at length.

He enumerates the various forms of the place-name—three MSS. for Iglea, two for Aeglea and one for Aecglea—and concludes that the Aeglea of the two *Chronicles* is either a mis-copying of an Iglea in a lost early copy "or arises from an erroneous identification of Iglea with some other local name"—whatever that may mean. He also suggests that "the form Aeglea may be merely a misreading of Iglea which would be a more regular West Saxon spelling of Alfred's time than Iglea if the first part of the compound is derived from ieg, later ig, island, wateryland," and that "the Aecglea of the Cottonian MS. of the Life (of Alfred) and of Florence (of Worcester) is an attempt to rationalise the inexplicable Aeglea by substituting for the first member of the compound the word aecg, a late spelling of ecg, edge, edge of a cliff."

Mr. Stevenson does not discuss the possibilities of Cley Hill being a case of "Popular Etymology," the change in the form of a name from one that has lost any meaning for the local people to one that contains a word that they can understand. It is a very potent factor in local names that do not often appear in written deeds nor get their form and spelling fixed in print.

If the word *aecg*, an edge, was applied to Cley Hill—and I know of no hill on the whole chalk that has a more striking edge at the top—when that word passed out of use, would not the shortening into “Clay,” a word very familiar to every countryman, be a very likely change? As a matter of fact there is some clay on the top of the hill or the gorse would not grow as it does.

Finally Mr. Stevenson comes down heavily for a place called in 1439 “*Ilegh*” as being “the legitimate descendant of *Iglea*.” The “*Iley Oak*” was the spot where the courts of the hundred of Warminster and Heytesbury met near Southleigh Wood in the parish of Warminster. It was contiguous to the camp called The Buries and was known traditionally as late as 1872 as being “close to the Lord Heytesbury’s lodge at Sowley Wood of which wood *Iley Wood* forms the eastern part.” Canon Jackson, however, who identified it, did not accept it as the site of *Aeglea*. The place is not on the map or known to any but antiquaries. It lies about a mile west from Sutton Verney.

Topographically this spot, like Brixton, cannot be totally rejected as it is not difficult to find a road down to it from Kilminster Common. The so-called British trackway runs down the Deverill valley to Kingston and Monkton Deverill; thence one can go down the valley to Longbridge and over the rise to Southleigh Wood, or on over the down by the Heytesbury track and then turn north along the ridge and down to “*Iley*.” The distance from Kilminster Common is about 12 or 13 miles.

The next day’s march from *Iley* to Edington Hill, crossing the Wylfe where Boreham Mill now stands and up on to the Plain west of Battlesbury is about seven miles—a total of 19 or 20 miles as against 17 by the Cley Hill route.

But it is not the distance that matters; neither would be an unreasonable march, even for tired men who would presumably have made long journeys the day before, but why choose a valley road with a river to cross when the high road along the watershed across the foot of Cley Hill was available? It was more open and better in every way and must have been in constant use and well known to the King. The disadvantages of the *Iley* route are obvious. At least five miles are along a bottom and unmetalled valley roads, though not impassable even in wet weather, are never as good as down roads; the going when trampled is often heavy, they are more open to surprise and their position is a disadvantage in case of attack. The crossing over the River Wylfe itself at Boreham Mill would probably not be formidable in May, but there is a considerable width of alluvium, always in early pre-drainage days boggy, treacherous, and very slow going both for men and horses. Contrasted with the watershed road I can see no advantage at all.

Nor can the position of Iley pretend to any defensive advantages as a temporary camp in a possibly enemy country, except that of having a river round two sides of it but over a mile off. The spot where the Iley Oak stood is on the eastern slope of a low hill on a rounded corner of the downs, round the west and north sides of which flows a bend of a small upper part of the Wylve River. It had no claim to be called an island site to account for a possible "Ieg" in Iglea or to give a false idea of strength, for the bend has a radius of a mile and a half and the highest part of the low hill enclosed is less than 100 feet above the neck which is quite a mile wide, and joins it to the steep slope of the downs to the south. The fact noted by Mr. Stevenson that a part of the Deverill Valley, one and a half miles off on the other side of the hill, is marked "liable to floods" is really worth nothing to make this an "Island site"—if it were many of these valleys might be called Archipelagos! Indeed if an "Island Site" is a necessity for Igley, Cley Hill has a far better claim to the title, for the hill does rise like a great island from the level floor of the Warminster Gap.

The spot noted as that of the Iley Oak and the ground round it would, as the "oak" implies, all naturally be wooded ground as Southleigh and Eastleigh Woods still are. The soil is heavy greensand and wet. Surprise would be easy and there are no positions for look-outs comparable to those on Cley Hill. The woods might be good for concealment but I doubt if Alfred would be seeking it; he was seeking the enemy and anxious to give battle, but he would not choose wooded country to be attacked in.

Archaeologically the place is interesting. The position of the Iley Oak is contiguous with the remarkable earthwork of "The Buries." It is very large in area and has a bank many feet above its ditch in places, but the ditch is inside the bank and the earthwork appears to belong to the Durrington Walls class, generally supposed to be a prehistoric religious or ceremonial enclosure and certainly not made for defence. It might, however, have been used as an enclosure for the Saxon Camp. Other "earth works" are marked on the map in the woods near "Iley" spot. They appear to be slight but I have not examined them.

Summing up the rival claims of Cley Hill and Iley to the site of Aegley I must, contrary to the views of Stevenson and Hodgkin,⁵ give the palm to Cley Hill, despite the difficulties about its strict right to the name and none at all about the legitimate descent of its rival.

The site of Guthrum's stronghold at Chippenham is not recorded. "Entrenchments" are marked on the 6-inch ordnance maps at Rowden Farm to the south of the town—a likely site on the west of the Avon. The archaeological remains consist of

5. R. H. Hodgkin, *A History of the Anglo-Saxons*, 568.

(1) a slightly raised platform about 45 yards square called "The Castle," surrounded by a partly wet moat 5 feet deep and 15 feet wide, (2) an outer moat with the remains of a bank in one place, traceable by ponds and enclosing the farmhouse and buildings, and (3) on the slope of the grass field west of these are the slight remains (C.D. vert : 2ft. to 3ft.) of a bank and ditch enclosing three sides of a square of about 100 yards, the west side of which is made up by the lane to the house cut 5 feet deep in the ground. The soil is all clay and the overall width of the wasted entrenchment is from 30 feet to 50 feet. The upper west side of this slight entrenchment is continued northwards along the slope for a quarter of a mile as far as a hedge and deep ditch running down to the Avon. On the east side of the river are meadows marked on the map "Englands" and "Little Englands."

The whole remains might be explained as an early mediaeval castle site, and an Elizabethan house and gardens, but the earthworks are at least very suggestive of the Danish Camp and would be well worth investigating both for traditions and possible finds.
