THE WATERGATE AT PORTCHESTER AND THE ANGLO-SAXON PORCH AT TITCHFIELD: A RE-CONSIDERATION OF THE EVIDENCE

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ABSTRACT

During the last thirty years, attention has been drawn on a number of occasions to similarities between the Watergate at Portchester and the porch at Titchfield church. The purpose of this paper is to consider the various arguments that have been put forward and to suggest that although there are certain similarities, the two structures are not contemporary in date. The porch at Titchfield is early, probably dating from the late seventh or eighth century, while it is considered that the Watergate is most likely to have been constructed shortly after the Norman Conquest.

RECENT STUDIES

Dr R M Butler (1955) was the first to draw attention to the similarities between the east gate or Watergate at Portchester and the porch at Titchfield (Figs 1 and 2). In a brief note he proposed a Roman date for the Watergate. He drew attention to the similarity in building materials between the Watergate and the Titchfield porch, in particular the use of green sandstone and of ironstone, though he was also careful to note the difference in scale between the two structures. He suggested that the Saxon porch was 'built of many of the stones from the inner front of the missing west gate (or Landgate) at Portchester, taken down, removed by water to Titchfield, and re-erected there on the old pattern, but on a smaller scale'.

Further support for Butler's argument was put forward in a note published shortly afterwards by Professor E M Jope (1958). He drew attention to the fact that the use of green sandstone and brown ironstone at Titchfield was unusual, 'for nearly all the numerous examples of Saxon masonry over a wide area round the Hampshire Basin have dressings of a very characteristic broken shell limestone'. This note was in fact the first published reference to what is now recognised as Quarr stone from the Isle of Wight, a stone used over a wide area from the tenth century onwards (see most recently Tatton-Brown 1980). Jope suggested that 'This contrast between the stone used at Titchfield and that of the other Saxon work in the region thus supports Dr Butler's contention that this work incorporates some of the dressed stone from a Roman gate at Portchester'.

From 1961 to 1972 Portchester Castle was the subject of an intensive research and excavation programme by Professor B Cunliffe. The results were published in three volumes, devoted respectively to the Roman, Saxon and Medieval periods (Cunliffe 1975/6/7). The Watergate was examined in 1961–3 and excavation demonstrated conclusively that the present Watergate was post-Roman. No clear dating evidence was found but Cunliffe concluded (1976, 13–14) that 'Structural similarities to the Titchfield porch strongly suggest a broad contemporaneity which would therefore imply a late Saxon date for Portchester, a suggestion which is further supported by the dissimilarity of the gatehouse to the rest of the medieval work at the castle, dating to the early twelfth century and later'.

Almost simultaneously with the publication of Cunliffe's Saxon volume, the present writer published a detailed survey of the Anglo-Saxon fabric at Titchfield church (Hare 1976). In this paper arguments were put forward for an early date for the porch at Titchfield, probably in the late seventh or early eighth century. Particularly close parallels with the early churches of Northumbria were noted, but it is important to record that the argument for an early date stands independent of any Northumbrian connection.

The most recent contribution to the debate has been provided by D A Hinton (1981, 61). As

Fig 1. The Watergate at Portchester from the west (Photo: B.W. Cunliffe).

his conclusions bear on the date of both structures, his arguments are reproduced here in full:–

> 'Mr. S.E. Rigold has recently re-affirmed his suggestion that Portchester was given to Bishop Wilfrid for use as a mission centre in the late seventh century, in the way that so many other Roman forts were granted to churchmen by their royal patrons (Rigold 1977, 73). Mr. M.J. Hare has plausibly argued that at nearby Titchfield there survives part of a church built by Wilfrid, the west porch being Northumbrian in style (1975, 34–8). The similarity between the doorway arch and the quoins at Titchfield and the Watergate arch at Portchester has long been recognised (Butler 1955); Cunliffe did not know the argument for an early date for Titchfield, and ascribed the Portchester arch to the late Saxon or very early Norman period (1976, 14).

Hare accepted Cunliffe's date and suggested that the re-used Roman stones at Titchfield came from another site (1975, 32). More plausible, since Cunliffe's excavations produced no direct dating evidence, is that Wilfrid found Portchester's Roman gates in a state of collapse, demolished what remained, rebuilt them, and had the surplus stones removed to Titchfield and re-erected there. The similarity between the buildings is too striking to ignore, and it would have been in character for Wilfrid to have acted in this way. The 'pinkish, gritty mortar' described by Cunliffe in the Watergate tower (1976, 11) is not however paralleled by any yet seen at Titchfield (Hare 1975, 26 for a hard, white mortar). There seems to have been a time-lag at Portchester between the demolition of the Roman gate-houses and the building of the Saxon gate tower, for a turf-line built up (Cunliffe 1976, 11, layers 12 and 30). This does not affect the argu-

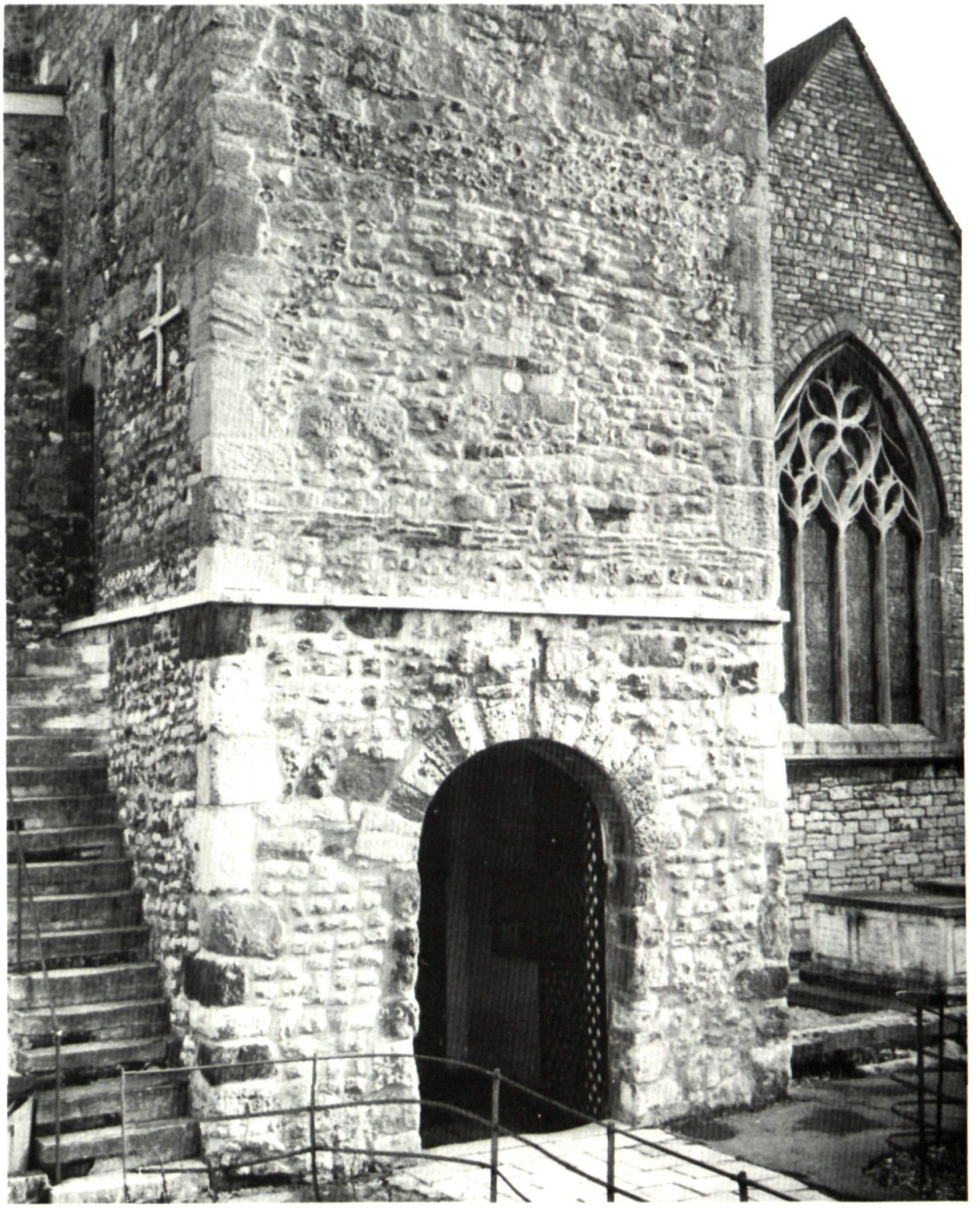

Fig 2. The Anglo-Saxon porch at St Peter's church, Titchfield, later raised to form a tower (Photo: Author).

ment, however, for it merely shows that for a period the defences were left incomplete. As no finds are recorded from these layers, it might be thought that the early Saxon period, when there was least debris being scattered, is the most appropriate for this interlude. The archaeological evidence, both below the ground and what is visible as standing remains, therefore allows both the Watergate at Portchester and the church porch at Titchfield to belong to the pre-Viking period; but the archaeology cannot, almost inevitably, either prove the connection with a particular individual, in this case Bishop Wilfrid, or provide exact calendar dates. Nor are the excavated remains of any of the early and mid Saxon structures within the Portchester walls specifically ecclesiastical; unfortunately the characteristics of ancillary buildings at a minster are unknown, and they may have been no different from other domestic structures.'

In the light of these new ideas, it is clear that a re-assessment of the evidence is necessary.

HISTORICAL EVIDENCE

Two independent studies (Hase 1975 and Hare 1976) have both concluded that Titchfield was the site of an early minster church, and the detailed arguments do not need to be repeated here. The present writer also argued that it was probable that the inhabitants of the Meon Valley, the Meonware, were converted to Christianity during the 680s by Bishop Wilfrid at the time of his conversion of the South Saxons; it was suggested that Titchfield may well have been built by Wilfrid or at least under his auspices (Hare 1976, 5–7 and 37–39).

The evidence for Portchester is more tentative. The earliest certain reference to Portchester in the Saxon period occurs in a charter dated 904 (Sawyer 1968, no 372). By this charter King Edward the Elder obtained Portchester from the Bishop of Winchester in exchange for Bishop's Waltham. This exchange must be seen in the context of the defensive measures implemented as a result of the Danish invasions of the late ninth century. Portchester is indeed recorded in the royal memorandum known as the *Burghal Hidage,* a document traditionally dated after 914. However Professor R H C Davis (1982, 807) has recently argued plausibly that the *Burghal Hidage* is to be ascribed to the reign of Alfred, probably between the years 886–890. If Davis' arguments are accepted this would imply an arrangement between king and bishop before the formal transfer of ownership. Just such an arrangement is in fact described in a document relating to the defence of Worcester and datable to the years 884 × 901 (Sawyer 1968, no 223); this document records a grant of rights within the town to Bishop Waerfrith by Aethelred, ealdorman of the Mercians, and his wife Aethelflaed, soon after they had built the fortifications at the bishop's request. (I am grateful to D A Hinton for the suggestion that Portchester may have been a *burh* whilst still in episcopal hands – a suggestion first put forward before publication of Davis' article).

There is no surviving record of the original acquisition of Portchester by the see of Winchester, but S E Rigold (1977, 73) has argued that in all probability Portchester came into ecclesiastical hands at an early date; he suggested that a church could well have been founded at Portchester by Wilfrid. In his paper Rigold demonstrates the probable use of most of the Saxon Shore forts as mission stations in the seventh century. At a time when the realm was not under any external threat, sites of this nature were not required by kings for defensive purposes and were eminently suitable for ecclesiastical foundations. The proposed association with Wilfrid is certainly plausible. However, as at Titchfield, the association is not an essential link in the chain of argument; if there was an early establishment at Portchester, a foundation by an unrecorded cleric is also possible.

It must be emphasised that there is no clear indication in the historical or archaeological record for the existence of an early minster church at Portchester. The nearby minster parishes of Titchfield and of Waltham (now Bishop's Waltham) can still be traced, at least in broad outline. However Hase (1975, 114–119) has demonstrated the difficulties of detecting early boundary patterns in the area to the north of Portsmouth Harbour and of Portsea Island.

In 1133–53 an Augustinian priory was founded at Portchester and a twelfth-century church with a large churchyard occupies the south-eastern corner of the fort. The foundation char-

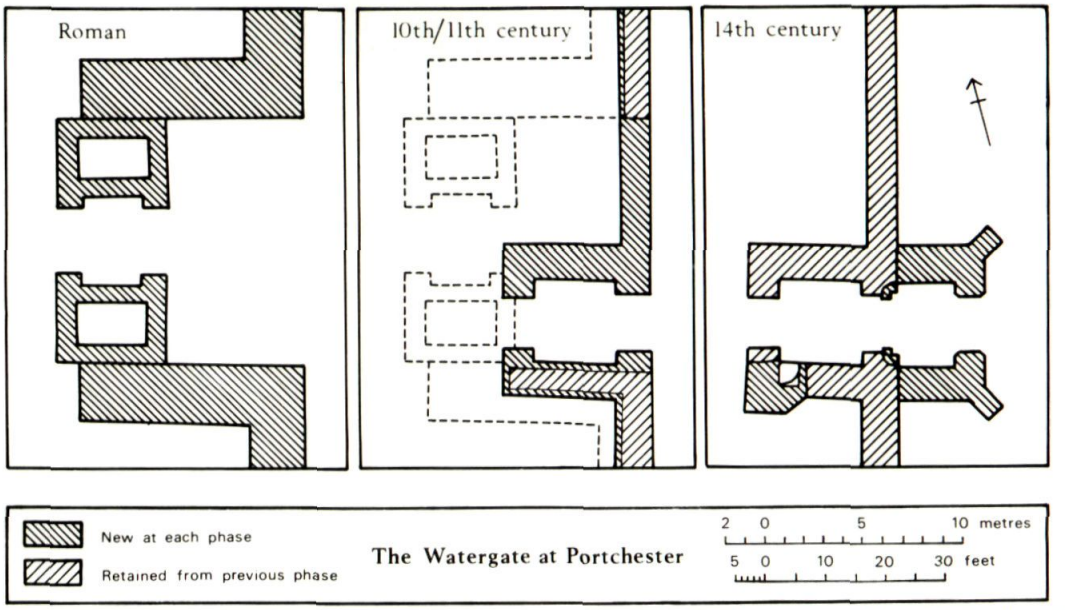

Fig 3. The development of the Watergate at Portchester (after Cunliffe 1976, Fig 7 and 1977, Fig 4). The plan shows: (1) the Roman gate; even though this was only partially excavated, enough was established for its plan to be completely re-constructed, (2) the late Saxon or early Norman gate; the dotted lines show the position of the Roman gate in order to illustrate the relationship between it and the early medieval gate, (3) the gate at the end of the 14th century. No attempt has been made to indicate late medieval buildings which apparently existed to north and south of the Watergate (Cunliffe 1977, 14–16).

ter suggests the existence of an earlier church at Portchester (Cunliffe 1977, 105), though its site is unclear. Unfortunately little excavation has been possible in the area of the church and churchyard (Cunliffe 1977, 97–120), the most likely site of any minster church.

THE WATERGATE AT PORTCHESTER

The excavation of the post-Roman and Saxon phases of the east gate or Watergate is described in Cunliffe's second volume (Cunliffe 1976, 9–14). The report contains a brief architectural account of the standing structure. However the arguments to be deployed later in this paper are dependent on a number of detailed architectural features, and it is therefore necessary to give a fresh description of the structure of the Watergate.

The excavation showed that in the Roman period, the Watergate (like the Landgate) was set at the inner end of a deep and wide recess formed by inturning the curtain walls; guard-chambers flanked an arched passage-way some 10ft (3·05m) wide (Fig 3). At some unknown date in the Saxon period (or at latest shortly after the Norman Conquest), the Roman gate was demolished to foundation level.

Subsequently a new gate was erected. Unlike the Roman gate, the new gate was built with its outer arch flush with the outer face of the curtain wall. This new gate was placed not centrally but at the southern end of the recess in the Roman curtain wall, the southern wall of the gate apparently making use of the south Roman inturned wall (Fig 3). A new stretch of curtain wall 5ft (1·53m) thick was built to fill the space between the gate and the north Roman inturned wall. The thickness of this stretch of curtain wall (and of its foundation) indicates that the Watergate was built at a date after or contemporary with the reduction in thickness of the inner face of the curtain wall (Cunliffe 1977, 7). The

structure of the gate measures about 13ft 6in (4·12m) square internally with walls 5ft 6in (1·68m) thick, a measurement which can readily be checked at the surviving inner (west) arch. The walls of the structure are built largely of flints, with occasional blocks of greensand and ironstone and a few pieces of Roman tile. The structure was heightened and extensively altered in the fourteenth century, but its salient features still survive.

There were plain arched openings of a single square order in the east and west walls. The outer (east) opening has been largely destroyed, but basal blocks of ironstone survive and show that the opening was 9ft 2in (2·79m) wide. The inner (west) arch survives intact. It measures 8ft 2in (2·49m) wide and stands approximately 10ft 2in (3·10m) high above the modern road surface. The thick jambs are built of a variety of stones – limestone, greensand and ironstone. The jambs are not built of through-stones, though one massive block of limestone in the northern jamb does pass almost through the full thickness of the wall. The construction of the jambs is irregular, consisting of different-sized blocks of different types of stone not laid in any discernible pattern. There are no imposts, and the arch is built of small voussoir facing stones with rubble infill, 26 voussoirs forming the west face, 24 the east face. The western face (towards the interior of the enclosure) is built of alternate blocks of ironstone and sandstone, with two adjacent ironstone blocks at the apex; the eastern face consists almost entirely of ironstone except for a few stones near the apex.

Originally the gate had two western quoins. However only the north-west quoin survives, the south-west quoin having been destroyed during the construction of a fourteenth-century stairway. Like the jambs of the arch, the quoin is built of a variety of stones – limestone, greensand and ironstone. The quoin is built in side-alternate fashion. It may be noted that some of the quoins are 'doubled', that is to say a second dressed stone is set alongside the stone which actually forms the corner.

The re-entrant angle between the Watergate and the curtain wall on the south side is built of dressed stone, largely in ironstone blocks which indicate that this feature is almost certainly contemporary with the fabric. Two surviving blocks of ironstone may indicate that similar 'internal' quoining existed on the north side, but if so, the stones have been largely robbed. There is no trace of 'internal' quoining inside the Watergate.

In the fourteenth century extensive alterations were made to the Watergate (Fig 3), apparently in two main phases (Cunliffe 1977, 10–14). First of all the existing gate was raised and a stairway inserted, probably in the period 1321–5. Secondly an entirely new structure was erected in 1369 east of the curtain wall.

DISCUSSION

We may now consider the similarities between the Watergate and the Titchfield porch in order to attempt to determine whether they may be considered as contemporary structures. There are two main similarities:–

(1) The freestone dressings at both structures contain a similar mixture of stones – limestone, greensand and a dark brown ironstone. It may be noted that the use of ironstone is much more prolific at Portchester than at Titchfield where there are only a few blocks of this material.

(2) At both sites there are round-headed arches, without imposts, of similar general proportions. The Titchfield arch is a little smaller in size, measuring 6ft 0in (1·83m) in width and 9ft 5in (2·87m) in height above the present external ground level.

However, there are also considerable differences between the two structures, which may be summarised as follows:–

(1) The character of the fabric at the two sites is entirely different. At Portchester the walls are built of flint and are of substantial thickness (5ft 6in, 1·68m). By contrast the walls of the Titchfield porch are only 2ft 3in (0·69m) thick. The porch is built of coursed limestone rubble, probably in its turn robbed from a Roman site like the freestone dressings; the fabric contains both Roman tiles and occasional burnt flints.

(2) The two arches differ in constructional detail. The jambs and head of the Titchfield arch are built entirely of through-stones, the arch itself consisting of 14 voussoirs. At Titchfield the springers of the arch are tilted on the under-side, a characteristic Anglo-Saxon detail. This feature is not present in three of the four springers at Portchester, and while the springer at the south-east corner of the arch is very slightly tilted, this appears to be more by accident than by deliberate design. The head of the Titchfield arch is built entirely of limestone blocks, while the outer ring of voussoirs at Portchester contains alternating blocks of ironstone and greensand; this latter feature has important implications for the dating of the structure, discussed below.

(3) The quoins, though generally similar, are built of larger stones at Titchfield. The 'doubling' of quoin stones which may be seen at Portchester does not occur at Titchfield, and there is also no trace at Titchfield of 'internal' or 're-entrant angle' quoining.

It is the view of the present writer that the similarities between the Watergate at Portchester and the porch at Titchfield, while striking at first sight, are nonetheless superficial. The similarity between the two arches is no more than a general similarity of proportion, coupled with the absence of imposts. It would be unwise to attach any special significance to the absence of imposts; arches without imposts may be found, albeit sporadically, in work of almost any period. The mixture of stones may be explained by the robbing of materials from a similar, possibly a common, Roman site. While Portchester may have been the source of building materials for Titchfield, there are plausible alternative sites in the vicinity (Hare 1976, 32), though it is fair to recognise that these sites have not been examined in detail and that we do not know the materials which they could have supplied.

The robbing of stones from a similar or common source in no way implies contemporaneity. Indeed it is worth noting that a re-used block of greensand is incorporated in the foundations of Building S18 at Portchester, a structure probably to be assigned to the eleventh century (Cunliffe 1976, 49). In addition ironstone, presumably re-used, may be observed in a twelfth-century context in the castle itself. The lower part of the internal buttress to the east wall of the extended chapel (the south forebuilding to the keep) is built mainly of good, finely dressed limestone but incorporates ironstone blocks just above modern ground level. (I am grateful to Professor Cunliffe for drawing my attention to this use of ironstone. In the new keep sequence, to be published in the forthcoming fourth volume of Portchester studies, the extension of the chapel is assigned to the end of Period 1 in the twelfth century). The implication from Building S18 and from the castle chapel is that robbed stone was still being used towards the end of the Saxon period and in the Norman period, even if only sporadically. We are therefore free to consider the dates of the Titchfield porch and the Watergate independently.

There is no reason at present to challenge the pre-Viking date assigned to the Titchfield porch. However the Watergate does not happily belong to this context. Even if there were a closer similarity to Titchfield, it would be difficult to see why Wilfrid – or some other, unknown, cleric — would choose to erect such a massive defensive work, involving not only the construction of the gate itself but of a considerable length of curtain wall. Substantial earthworks were certainly undertaken in seventh and eighth century England (for instance Offa's Dyke); however there is neither historical nor archaeological evidence to suggest that major defensive works in masonry were built at this period. The only defensive structure in stone recorded from the pre-Viking period, the Anglian Tower at York, is a flimsy building by comparison, with walls 1ft 6in to 2ft (0·46 – 0·61m) in thickness (Radley 1972, 43). It is certainly clear that in the 680s, the southern part of Hampshire and the Isle of Wight were in turmoil, but the situation was local, typical indeed of the tribal warfare frequently recorded in seventh-century England. This local warfare is hardly sufficient to explain masonry work on the scale of the Portchester Watergate.

We may therefore accept that the balance of

evidence favours the late-Saxon or very early Norman date proposed by Cunliffe, and several features tend to support a late date. Cunliffe himself suggested (1976, 14) three main alternative dates:–

(1) In the early tenth century when the fort was used as a *burh* (though in the light of the historical evidence set out above, we should now also allow for the possibility of a late ninth century date).
(2) In the late tenth or early eleventh century when the fort was occupied as a residence.
(3) At the very beginning of the Norman period before the start of the main phase of castle building and before the construction of the Norman Landgate (which is of entirely different character).

In the present writer's view the third alternative appears most probable.

During the last 25 years the defences of the *burhs* of late-Saxon England have come under archaeological scrutiny for the first time. Masonry works, sometimes of substantial character, have been located at a number of *burhs,* usually as a later addition to an earlier rampart. This sequence has been observed at Cricklade, Hereford, Lydford, Wareham and Wallingford, while at South Cadbury (datable to *c* 1010) the bank and wall are contemporary and traces of an impressive gate also survive (for a convenient summary of the evidence see Radford 1970). There can also be little doubt that repairs, perhaps extensive, were carried out to the walls of Roman towns occupied as *burhs,* such as Bath, Chichester, Exeter and Winchester, though there are considerable difficulties in dating the successive repairs of a defensive circuit. Reconstruction of gates may have been necessary in some cases, and it has indeed been suggested that the north-west corner of the (otherwise Norman) west gate at Winchester may incorporate pre-Conquest masonry (Biddle 1975 pt IV.2,vi). There is thus ample evidence to indicate the possibility of a date as early as the beginning of the tenth century for the Watergate at Portchester. Nevertheless no close parallels can yet be adduced for the Watergate in the pre-Conquest period, whereas the building of substantial defensive works became commonplace immediately after the Norman Conquest. For instance the recently excavated East Gate at Gloucester (Heighway 1983, 53), probably to be dated to the period shortly after the Norman Conquest, appears to have been a very similar structure.

It is also important to note that the Watergate was built at a date after or at least contemporary with the reduction in thickness of the inner face of the curtain wall. At the Landgate this reduction in thickness is considered to be broadly contemporary with the building of the new Norman gate (Cunliffe 1977, 18). At the Watergate this process must have begun earlier, but it seems most improbable that such a systematic removal of the inner wall face would have begun as early as the seventh century. It is significant that the Roman curtain wall retains its full thickness where it serves as the enclosure for the inner bailey of the Norman Castle, and Cunliffe associates the reduction in thickness elsewhere with the provision of building materials for the Norman defensive works (Cunliffe 1977, 7). This may suggest that the major Norman works were already in contemplation when the Watergate was built, and that its date is only a generation or less before the main phase of castle building.

A more positive indication of a Norman date for the Watergate is provided by the presence in the arch of alternating blocks of greensand and ironstone for decorative purposes. Butler (1955, 220), in proposing a Roman date for the Watergate, was able to point to Roman parallels for this feature, particularly on the Continent. This tradition appears to have been preserved on the Continent in sub-Roman, Merovingian and Carolingian times in church architecture, with alternation most commonly between stone and re-used Roman brick. However such alternation of colour is not a feature to be observed in any building that can be ascribed to the Anglo-Saxon period. A thorough perusal of the literature on Anglo-Saxon churches has failed to produce a single arch or doorway with voussoirs of alternating colour. While it would be dangerous to say that this feature did not exist in

Anglo-Saxon England, it seems safe to say that if it did exist, it was extremely rare. On the other hand the use of voussoirs of alternating colour is a commonplace of Norman architecture and may be observed in the doorways and arches of numerous parish churches.

The details of the quoining also tend to support a late-Saxon or Norman date. The 'doubling' of quoin-stones, which may be seen at the north-west corner of the Watergate, is not a feature that can be observed in any surviving early Anglo-Saxon church; by contrast it may be seen in late-Saxon buildings such as the tower of Singleton church (West Sussex), while after the Norman Conquest it occurs frequently in work of all periods. Similarly the use of 'internal' or 're-entrant angle' quoining may be indicative of a late date. This paper is not the place to discuss in detail the origins of this feature, a constructional detail which is rarely mentioned but which further study may well show to be a useful dating element. It does not occur in Roman building and the writer has not observed its occurrence in any church likely to be earlier than eleventh century in date. It is found in late-Saxon churches such as Boarhunt (Hants) and Singleton and Stoughton (West Sussex), while after the Norman Conquest it is a technique employed extensively throughout England, Wales and (by the thirteenth century) Ireland.

It remains to consider the purely archaeological arguments deployed by Hinton. I am very grateful to Professor Cunliffe, as the excavator, for commenting on these arguments and for elaborating on his published excavation account (pers comm dated 27.1.83). He does not consider that the thin turf-line referred to by Hinton indicates a time-lag between the demolition of the Roman gate and the construction of the early medieval gate. Cunliffe draws attention to the angle of rubble on which the turf-line developed, together with the fact that more robbing continued to the south of the line of the Roman road after the turf-line had formed. These points, taken in conjunction with the very insubstantial nature of the layer, suggest to Cunliffe that the turf-line was a transient episode during an extended period of robbing. In other words the entire process of robbing may have taken a number of years; this would be consistent with a period of activity at the date proposed in this paper. Cunliffe does not feel that any significance can be attached to the absence of finds in view of the small size of the area excavated. Full excavation of the southern guard-chamber of the Roman gate would doubtless shed light on the problem, but this is unlikely to be practical in the foreseeable future, as the guard-chamber lies largely beneath the modern road.

It should be noted that the arguments that have been put forward in this discussion are for the most part based on essentially negative propositions, capable of being disproved. Nevertheless the evidence in favour of a date after 880 for the Watergate is considerable, while there are indications that the best interpretation is that the building belongs to the period immediately after the Norman Conquest.

CONCLUSION

In this paper an attempt has been made to demonstrate that the widely-held belief that there is a link between the Portchester Watergate and the Titchfield porch does not stand up to close examination. There are some similarities between the two structures, but these may be ascribed to re-use of building materials from a similar or common Roman source. The two buildings are in fact very different, both in general character and in constructional detail. There is no need to challenge the dates recently proposed either for the Titchfield porch (Hare 1976) or for the Watergate (Cunliffe 1976).

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