Anglo-Saxon Rochester: Gordon Ward on the topography of the city

Gordon Ward, MD, FSA, "died suddenly at his home at Sevenoaks on 10th July, 1962, at the age of 77" (Roper 1963:224). Having joined the Kent Archaeological Society in 1927, he contributed numerous papers to *Archaeologia Cantiana*, covering a wide range of topics. Among them there are several which deal with Anglo-Saxon charters.

One paper in particular has had a long afterlife -- a study of some of the written evidence relating to the Anglo-Saxon topography of Rochester (Ward 1950).* It ought to carry a warning: Not to be swallowed whole. Some of the things that Ward had to say were not just original but also exactly right; some were thoroughly, even perversely, wrong. Here I aim to go over the evidence again, eliminating Ward's mistakes, but giving him full credit for those insights which remain valid.

* Through some oversight, this paper of Ward's was omitted from Sawyer's (1968) bibliography; and accordingly Campbell (1973) was ignorant of its existence. Not just in this respect, his edition of the Rochester charters is flawed by a lack of local knowledge -- and, one might add, by a failure (perhaps for lack of time) to ask for help from someone who had such knowledge. (I am thinking of Bernard Wigan, who would, I imagine, have been glad to help by reading the book through in advance, rather than having to complain about its shortcomings afterwards (Wigan 1974).)

1

Of the "four charters" which formed the basis for Ward's paper, the "first" is not a charter at all. It is a seven-line paragraph standing at the head of a twelfth-century list of donations made to the church (*Privilegia*, insert A, fos 177r--8r). Most of this list is a shortened version of a list copied into the cartulary by the original scribe (fos 215r--16r): that list began with a donation of king Eadberht in 738 and ended with the donations of Willelm II. This new list, added by a different scribe, has an extra paragraph at the end (concerning the donations of Henric I) as well as this extra paragraph at the beginning. This is my translation.

> In the six hundredth year from Our Lord's incarnation,*
> king Ethelbert founded the church of Saint Andrew the
> Apostle of Rochester, and gave to it Priestfields, and all
> the land which is from the Medway as far as the east gate
> of the city on the south side, and other lands outside the
> wall of the city towards the north side.

* The date is a surprise, but I doubt whether we should take much
notice of it. The word "quarto", I suppose, was unintentionally
omitted. (Perhaps the scribe was so pleased with himself for
completing "sexcentesimo" successfully that he went and forgot the
next word.) Everybody knew that the church was founded in 604,
not in 600. (Ward's comment is characteristic: "It is true that
this [supposed charter] is often dated in the year 600 but for
reasons too long to discuss here the date 604 is to be
preferred" (1950:37). This "often" is disingenuous, to say the
least.)
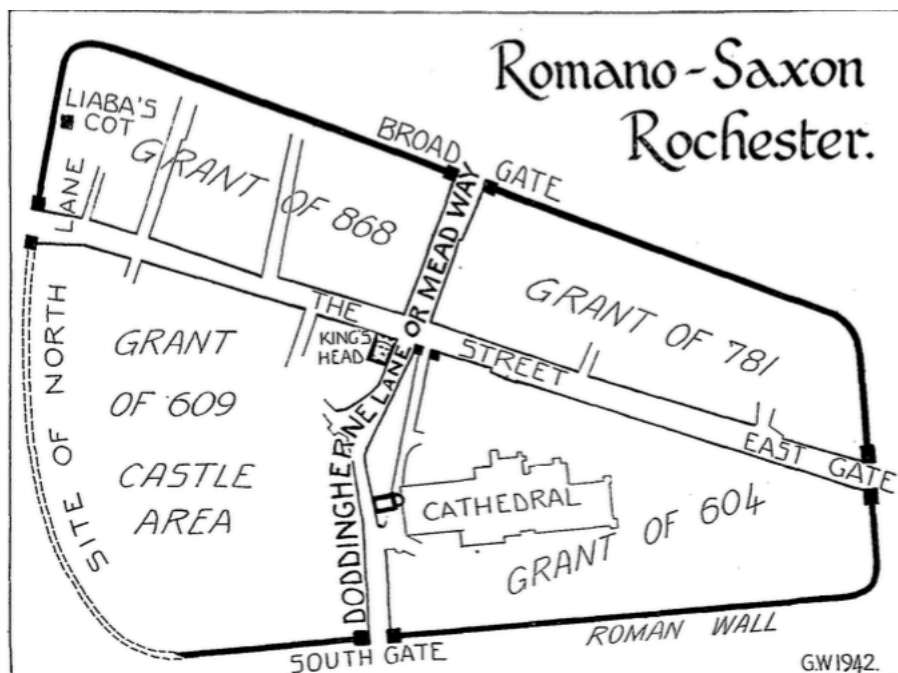
Gordon Ward's map of the city, drawn in 1942, published in 1950.

Before looking at Ward's interpretation of this evidence, I note
that we have another record of king Ethelbert's donations, in a
list of the church's benefactors which dates from around 1220 (BL
Cott Vesp A xxii, fo 81v).

   King Ethelbert gave Priestfields, and the land from
   Doddingherne as far as Eastgate, and the land where
   Rochester castle is, and four acres of meadow outside the
   wall, and a marsh on the north side which lies between two
   ditches, namely 'Peartree creek' and 'Ship creek'. He
   also gave all the land where the church is founded, and
   Wouldham.

There is no verbal agreement between these two paragraphs, nor
much agreement in the substance. The respective authors do not
appear to have had any common source, only the shared thought that

it would be ungrateful not to say something abour king Ethelbert
-- who was, after all, as everyone knew, the first founder of
their church. Starting with that thought, they improvised, each
in his own way. They were both -- the second more than the first
-- willing to give Ethelbert credit for donations which they knew
(or ought to have known) were made by other kings.*

* The "four acres of meadow" come from a charter of king
Æthelberht of Wessex (no 11), the "marsh on the north side" from a
charter of king Æthelred of Wessex (no 26), Wouldham from the
Wouldham memorandum (no 34) -- which is referring to the eighth-
century king of this name, not the first king Ethelbert.

(On one point, by the way, they agree. They both state that the
land called Priestfields was given to the church at the very
beginning.* Perhaps they were right; there is nothing to prove
that they were not; but it is very unlikely that they had any way
of knowing this for a fact. The name itself implies that this
land belonged to the church before the 1080s, when the priests
were replaced by monks; otherwise nothing is known about its early
history. I have never seen a map of the Priestfields estate, but
it seems to have consisted of the wedge of land bounded on the
north by Vines Lane,† on the west by the Borstal road, and on the
east by the Maidstone road. In a lease dated 1599, it is reckoned
to consist of 90 acres (DRc/Ele/115); possibly that is half a
sulung with the usual 10 per cent deduction. Though the fields
have all gone, "Priestfields" survives as the name of a road (a
link-road laid out in the 1920s) and of the recreation ground to
the south of that (TQ 7366). This represents, I imagine, the
southernmost part of the estate, bounded on the south and west by
Borstal,‡ on the east by Upper Delce.)

* The name, in my experience, is always "Priestfields" in the
plural. (If you hear people talking about Priestfield, they are
not talking about this place: they are talking about the football
stadium (TQ 7868) in Gillingham.)

† On one occasion (Thorpe 1769:581--3) the citizens alleged that
the monks' vineyard should be counted as part of Priestfields.
But they were just making mischief. (I hope to comment further on
this episode elsewhere.)

‡ Borstal also became the property of the church of Rochester. It
was given to bishop Beornmod by Coenwulf king of the Mercians in
811 (no 17). (The boundaries are only described by one word each:
that towards the north is *mearateag*, which means "horses'
paddock"; we learn nothing useful from that. More interestingly,
in the Wouldham charter (no 31) the southern boundary of Borstal
is called "the brethren's boundary" -- which seems to prove, as I
said before, that this estate belonged to the community at the
time (Flight 1996:131n17). Later it belonged to the bishop.)

None of this would have seemed relevant to Ward. The only
evidence which interested him was a passage from this supposed
"first charter" for which he suggested the following translation:

    All the land which is on the southern side from the Mead
    Way as far as the east gate of the City. (Ward 1950:37)

In his interpretation, the name "Meduwaie", as it was used here,
did not refer to the river: it referred instead to a north-south
road which divided the city into two roughly equal parts.

Pump Lane, looking south towards College Gate, drawn by Herbert
Railton (Tristram 1888:240). A photograph showing almost the same
view is reproduced by Marsh (1974:54).*

* The jettied house on the corner (59 High Street) was drawn from the front by William Twopeny in 1828 (BM, 1874,0214.318-415, listed by Binyon (1907:220) as no 69, reproduced but misidentified by Swain (1986, pl 60)) and more accurately by John Wykeham Archer in 1849 (BM, 1874,0314.474). It was a notable feature of the townscape -- "of Jacobean age perhaps" (Robertson 1887:xl) -- until it got demolished.

It would be a waste of time to go about proving that this was a mistake. In fairness, however, I would not want to say that Ward went wrong without saying <u>how</u> he went wrong. For a start, he let himself think that this statement by a twelfth-century monk had the same evidential value that it would have had if it had come from a seventh-century charter; and then he latched onto the idea that this and the "second charter" were complementary, with respect to the southern half of the city, in the same way that the "third" and "fourth" charters are complementary -- as indeed they are -- with respect to the northern half (see below). For that to be true, he had to suppose that the "Mead Way" was the line separating the south-east from the south-west quadrant.

As it appears on Ward's plan,* the "Mead Way" is partly a road which follows the outer edge of the castle ditch, and therefore (on the face of it) did not come into existence till after that ditch was dug.† Only the stretch of Ward's "Mead Way" closest to the High Street, the stretch alongside the King's Head, has any claim to be regarded as part of the Anglo-Saxon street-plan (Flight 1997, figs 21, 23).‡ On Ward's plan, moreover, the "Mead Way" continues north of High Street, as a broad straight street connecting King's Head Lane with the north gate. There was, of course, a street on the inside of the gate, but there is nothing to suggest that it was ever called by this name.§ Besides, the street in question -- Pump Lane, as it was called in the nineteenth century -- did not point in the direction shown for it on Ward's plan.

* The plan, I notice, is dated 1942; so these thoughts had been on Ward's mind for several years before he committed them to print.

† A wall running across the line of this street, close to the diocesan registry, was discovered accidentally in 1861. Charles Roach Smith, who saw it at the time, described it later as "a well-constructed, thick, Roman wall" (Smith 1891:5). The street was thus proved, as he pointed out (in a paper quoted by Payne which I have not seen), to be "comparatively modern" (Payne 1895:6). Those are not the words which I would have chosen; but it does indeed follow, if the facts are correctly reported, that the existing street is post-Roman. But we hardly need proof of that.

‡ In the fifteenth century, this street was called Doddingherne Lane (Thorpe 1769:584, from DRc/T281, with the spelling "Dodyngesherne"). Though never quite forgotten, that name dropped out of use. By the 1560s, the street was called Horse Lane ("Dodingherne Lane, now Horse Lane", DRc/Ele/141/1). By the 1670s the name had changed again, and the street was called King's Head Lane ("Dodingherne Lane, since Horse Lane and now Kings' Head Lane", DRc/Ele/140/2).

§ As far back as the thirteenth century, this street was called Cheldegate Lane (Thorpe 1769:540, from DRc/T278). In 1422 it was referred to as "Boundeslane, alias Chaldegatelane" (Thorpe 1769:565). The author of Fisher's *History* knew it as Pump Lane (Fisher 1772:4-5): the earlier names had been forgotten by then, but he came across them in Thorpe's book and worked out what they meant.
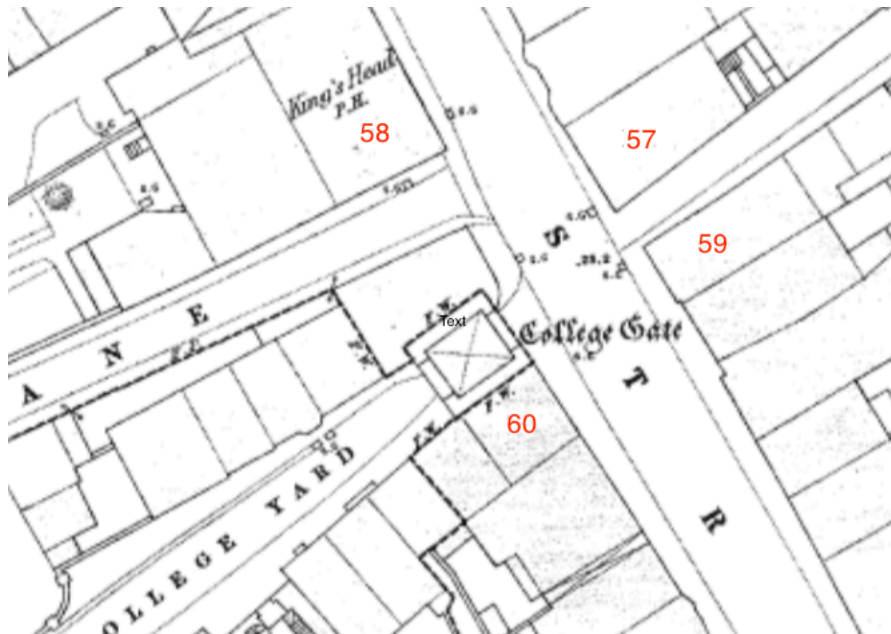
Doddingherne in the 1860s (from the Ordnance Survey's 1:500 plan of the city). (The red numbers that I have added are the new numbers introduced by the Post Office in the 1890s.)

Until the city engineers went to work on them, King's Head Lane and Pump Lane were both narrow streets, and they were not even nearly in alignment. Entering the High Street from one of these side-roads, one had to turn right and advance ten yards or so before turning left into the other. King's Head Lane was widened eastwards in the 1880s, with the demolition of the line of houses which stood between it and College Yard (Hope 1900 pl V); College Gate has looked ridiculous ever since. Pump Lane was widened westwards about fifteen years later,* with the demolition of the house on the corner (which had lasted just long enough for the

Post Office to give it a new number, 57 High Street).† Despite
the engineers' efforts, the two streets, even now, are not quite
aligned with one another: there is still a slight zigzag to make
in crossing the High Street. It was only on Ward's drawing-board
that they were brought into perfect alignment; and he only
achieved that result -- dishonestly, it has to be said -- by
twisting Pump Lane around, to make it point in the direction that
he wanted it to point.

* A photograph taken in the interim -- the west side of College
Gate exposed, the building on the corner of Pump Lane still in
place -- is reproduced in a booklet published in 1903 (Hodder and
Stoughton 1903:34).

† After this, just to make things more difficult, somebody decided
that Pump Lane should be called "Northgate" -- not "Northgate
Street", just "Northgate" -- although, as a matter of fact (see
below), the north gate was not called "Northgate". Another inept
change was made more recently, when King's Head Lane ceased to
have its own name and was merged with Boley Hill -- not "Boley
Hill Road", just "Boley Hill". In the hope of regaining some
clarity, I use the extinct names.

(Though Ward does not say so, I suspect that his plan was
influenced by the plan drawn by Livett as a frontispiece for
Payne's (1895) paper about Roman Rochester. Assuming that the
sites of the north and south gates were known (true for the
former, false for the latter), Livett drew a broad straight street
connecting the one with the other. (But at least he had the
decency to draw it with dotted lines. It must, I suppose, have
seemed puzzling to him that the Saxon church which he had
discovered sits squarely across the line of this conjectural
street.) As for Livett's plan, that was certainly influenced by
the inaccurate and fanciful sketch-plans produced by Beale Poste
(1848, 1859) to illustrate the daft idea that he was trying to
promote -- that Rochester began its existence as an oblong
earthwork encampment, just the right shape and size to accommodate
a Roman legion. "Faint traces of the Via principalis, anciently
one of the most important features in a Roman camp, and invariably
of the breadth of a hundred feet, are still to be seen, though of
reduced dimensions" (Poste 1859:67). This is all make-believe.
Regardless of where one puts the Roman south gate -- where Poste
wanted to put it, or where Payne and Livett wanted to put it,* or
where I am inclined to put it -- there never was a north-south
boulevard running through the middle of Rochester.)

* The "Roman road" which George Payne thought he had discovered
under the diocesan registry in 1900 (Payne 1902:lix--lx) is
plainly nothing of the kind. [Alan Ward suggests to me that the
paved surface found by Payne was made with some of the ashlar
blocks robbed from the outer face of the Roman town-wall. If that

is right (and it seems a very attractive idea to me), I would
infer that the paving cannot be earlier than the mid fifteenth
century.]

College Yard, looking north, drawn by Alfred Rimmer (1877:126),
with the jettied house on the corner of Pump Lane visible through
the arch. The row of buildings on the left was demolished shortly
afterwards, so that King's Head Lane could be made wide enough for
two-way traffic.

2

Ward's "second charter" is indeed a charter -- or at least it was.
The original was (apparently) still in existence in the fourteenth

century, but is not in existence any longer. We know what the charter said, but we have no idea what it looked like. And that makes a very great difference.

We know what it said because, on two occasions, somebody decided to make a copy of it. In the 1120s, one of the monks compiled a cartulary of the church of Rochester, to which he gave the title *Privilegia aecclesiae sancti Andreae Hrofensis concessa*, "Privileges granted to the church of Saint Andrew of Rochester"; and this is the document which he put in first place, with an elaborate initial and two lines of display script to emphasize its importance. (In other words, it was definitely <u>not</u> his intention to try to replicate the appearance of the original.) Two hundred years later, a scribe working in the bishop's registry made another copy -- proof (I take it) that the original still existed at that time.

The charter was first printed by Dugdale (1655:27), from a transcript supplied by William Somner; it has been reprinted frequently since then. It is no 1 in Campbell's edition (1973). The printed texts are all derived, directly or indirectly, from the copy in *Privilegia*. Nobody has taken much notice of the other copy.*

* With the possible exception of Bernard Wigan, no one that I know of has ever made a thorough study of the copies of Anglo-Saxon charters in the *Registrum temporalium*. Campbell (1973) printed the two charters which only survive as copies in that register; he also cited variant readings for some of the other charters; I have never understood how he could do that much and yet not know that the manuscript was in Maidstone. (It had been transferred to the Kent Archives Office in 1958.) But in general he thought it safe to ignore the copies in *Reg. temp.*, because he allowed himself the facile assumption that those copies were taken from the copies in *Privilegia*. At best, that assumption might be partly true; I doubt if it is true at all.

To judge from the wording, which is all that we have to go by, this charter was a strange piece of work. It is, ostensibly, a charter of king Ethelbert, dated precisely to 28 April 604.* Much of the text looks as if might consist of fragments copied from a genuine document: I have a few thoughts on the subject, and hope to get them written up, but this is not the place for them.

* *... sub die iiii. kl' maias, indictione vii.* By "indiction" was meant a cycle of 15 years. Before 604, the previous seventh indiction was 589, and that is obviously too early (the missionaries did not arrive in England till 597). After 604, the next seventh indiction was 619, and that is obviously too late (king Ethelbert died in 616). Without saying why, Ward dated this charter to 609 (which would be *indictione xii*). No doubt he had

his reasons; but I do not see that it is my job, or any reader's job, to work out what those reasons might have been.

In the form in which we have it, however, this document is certainly a forgery, and the passage of immediate interest here -- the English passage describing the bounds of the land supposedly in question -- is certainly not derived from any seventh-century charter.* As Ward perceived, this description takes us on a clockwise tour of the south-west quadrant of the city -- that is, the quadrant which, in the 1060s, was mostly cleared of people and buildings to create a space for the castle. It is conceivable, therefore, that the forgery was made at just that time,† by the priests of Saint Andrew's church, in a bid to persuade the bishop of Bayeux that they were entitled to some compensation for whatever assets they had lost.‡ Considering how little we know about the history of the church, it would be foolish to assume that this was the only occasion when the priests might have been tempted into fabricating a charter of this kind. But at least we can say that this was one such occasion. The production of this pathetic little forgery could have been one of the priests' last acts, before they were themselves induced to move out, so that the monks could move in.

* It is easy to forgive the man who created this forgery, very hard to forgive the man who allowed or caused the genuine charter to vanish.

† Brooks (2006:10) makes a similar suggestion, but does not specifically put the blame on the priests (rather than the monks who replaced them in 1083).

‡ Perhaps including "the haws west of the church" donated by Leofwine Ælfheah's son in 995×1005 (no 37).

"This", says the person pretending to be the king, "is the boundary of my gift." He says that in Latin; then he switches into English:

    From south gate west along the wall as far as north lane
    to the street, and so east from the street as far as
    Doddingherne over against broad gate.

That is all. This man, whoever he was, can be assumed to have known his way around the city; but he expressed himself very poorly. For one thing, he fails to complete the circuit. We are left to find our own route from Doddingherne back to south gate,* and it is doubtful (since Poste's "via principalis" did not exist, since Ward's "Mead Way" did not exist) what road we ought to take, or what landmarks we ought to look out for along the way. That is a severe disappointment. Again, it is strange that he speaks of

"street", not as a line, but as a point ("to the street, ... from
the street"). What he means by "street", it seems, is not the
high street itself: it is the junction between "north lane" and
the high street. As I understand him, therefore, he was trying to
say something like this:

    From south gate west [and north] along the wall as far as
    [where] north lane [joins] to the street, and so east from
    [there] as far as Doddingherne over against broad gate,
    [and so south ... ... to south gate].

As I read it, "north lane" could be the same street which we find
called "north way" elsewhere (see below) -- a street, as the name
must surely imply, joining the high street from the north (like
North Street in Strood, to look no further than that).

* Or perhaps he ought rather to have started at Doddingherne and
made this the first leg of the circuit. Either way, one leg is
missing.

More importantly, this charter is the only written evidence we
have for the existence of a gate, presumably a Roman gate,
somewhere in the middle of the south wall, called by the apt but
unexciting name of "south gate". (Its exact site, I will say
again, has not yet been ascertained.) Another gate, called "broad
gate", is also mentioned, but only incidentally, because it was
visible from Doddingherne -- more precisely from the spot on
Doddingherne now occupied by College Gate. We hear of this gate
again (see below). On the negative side, there is no mention of a
"west gate"; but what this silence might signify I think we are
going to find it hard to decide.

3

Ward's "third charter" survives as a single sheet (BL Cotton
charter vi 4, Campbell 1973, no 11), written in an awkward, uneven
script -- of ninth-century date according to Campbell, but not
everyone is of the same opinion. Ward speaks of it only as "a
corrupt copy" (1950:39); it needs to be looked at a little more
closely than that.

First impressions are not favourable. It starts out (seemingly)
as a grant by king Æthelberht of Wessex and Kent (860--6); but
then it jumps backwards in time and becomes a grant to bishop
Deora (occ 772--81). Towards the end, similarly, the date is
given as 861, and the witness who signs first is king Æthelberht;
but then, once again, there is a backward jump in time. The
archbishop whose subscription follows the king's is Iænberht
(765--92); the bishop of Rochester whose subscription comes next
is Deora.

This is all very odd. What can it possibly mean?* Is the document a forgery, later, perhaps much later, than the given date, spliced together from two genuine documents which the forger had in front of him -- one of them a charter of king Æthelberht, one of them a charter of an eighth-century king of Kent (probably Ecgberht)?† But why would any forger think it a good idea to produce a piece of patchwork such as this, copying different bits from different exemplars, regardless of any disparities in date?‡

* Brooks (2006:13--15) discusses this charter at some length, and I take his comments as read.

† Four charters of Ecgberht (occ 765--79) survive from the Rochester archive (nos 7, 9, 10, 15). One of them exists as a single sheet (no 9), which is, I think, agreed on all sides to be authentic. The others are known only from copies, but I do not see anything wrong with them -- except that I would regard one passage in no 15 (*Adiectis denberis ...*) as a later interpolation, written into a space made for it by erasing the date. In the absence of the original, however, that can only be a guess.

‡ Why indeed? And yet, as Barker (1978) proved, one of the Bromley charters (no 29) is just such a piece of patchwork.

In the end I can see no reason why this should not be a genuine charter, written by a scribe who had so little confidence in his own Latinity that he copied much of the wording from some earlier document which he happened to have to hand.* For this scribe, the only operative parts of the text were the king's name and title, the date,† and the description, in English, of the land that was being donated. These were the only bits that people would want to look at -- people, that is, who found Latin about as difficult to read (if they could read at all) as he found it difficult to write. The rest was only there for show.

* I print the passages which seem to have been borrowed from an eighth-century charter in an appendix below.

† But the date was altered later -- by somebody, it seems, who wanted to make it compatible with the names of the archbishop and bishop. To do a thorough job, he would have had to change the king's name and erase the words "of the West Saxons and", thinking up some phrase to fill the gap. If he had done all that, the single sheet would have looked very suspicious; a copy, however, if that was all we had, might have seemed passably convincing. (Originally the date was *dccclxi.* By erasing the third "c" and adding "xx" above the line (in visibly different ink from that of the original text), this corrector changed it from 861 to 781, *dcc(_)l(xx)xi*. A similar alteration was made in another charter (no 24), where the date was altered from *dccclx* to *dcc(__)x(c)*. Possibly both changes were made by the same man; but how anyone

could think that "corrections" of this kind were changes for the better is hard to comprehend.)

As topographical evidence, even so, the charter ought to be reliable. The king (whichever king it was) is made to say that he is granting to the bishop (whichever bishop it was) this

> little something of land belonging to me within the walls
> of the city just mentioned, on the north side, that is,

and then (as is normal) he switches from Latin to English, so as to describe the boundaries of the land in a language which everyone will understand:

> from Doddingherne [north]* as far as the broad gate,† east
> by the wall and then afterwards south as far as the east
> gate, and so west by the street as far as Doddingherne,

which, as Ward saw, conducts us around the north-east quadrant of the city; and then he adds two extra donations:

> and three haws east of the town outside the wall, and in
> addition four acres of meadow west of the river.

These extras, it seems to me, are not the sort of thing which a later forger would have thought of including.

* The word "north" is required by the sense, but the scribe leaves it out (as he is prone to do with little words). We are being taken on a clockwise tour of this quadrant, "[north] ... east ... south ... west", ending up at the point from which we started. The existence of a street between Doddingherne and the north gate is implicit here, explicit in the following charter.

† Construed as plural by Brooks (2006:20n35). I have my doubts (see below).

4

The "fourth charter" discussed by Ward is a charter of (Æthelberht's brother and successor) king Æthelred of Wessex and Kent (866--71). It is dated 868. It survives as a copy in the cartulary (*Privilegia*, fos 140v--1v); as far as one can judge from a copy, it seems to be perfectly authentic. The original scribe -- the man who drafted this document for the king -- was unsure about some of the niceties of Latin grammar, but his vocabulary was more than adequate, and mostly he managed to make his meaning clear. Æthelberht's charter was a timid piece of work: this is a very bold one.*

* It is also the only charter in which Rochester is referred to by
a recognizable approximation to its Roman name. So this must be
the charter which Robert Talbot says was shown to him by the
prior, Walter Boxley, just before the dissolution. (The original,
it seems, was still in existence at the time.) "That Rochester
was formerly called Durobrivae the foundation charter of the
monastery, which the prior (who is now the dean there) showed me
some time ago, reveals in explicit terms." *Quod Rochester olim
Durobrivæ vocabatur, Charta fundationis Monasterii, quam Prior
(qui nunc Decanus est ibidem) mihi aliquando ostendit, disertis
verbis aperit* (Talbot ed Hearne 1711:141).

Speaking for the king, in the sort of language which is normal for
Anglo-Saxon charters, he says that

> I, Æthelred, king of the West Saxons and Cantware, give
> and grant to my friend Cuthwulf, bishop of the church of
> Rochester, some share of land belonging to me, that is, in
> two places, one in the city of Dorobroevia* and the other
> to the north of the city ...

and then, abnormally, he launches into a description, still in
Latin, of this second piece of land. After that, normality
returns. The scribe switches into English, as we would expect him
to do, and gives us a description of both pieces of land, first
one and then the other. Thus he describes the second piece of
land twice over. That is strange enough. Stranger still, both
descriptions are in verse -- in the stilted alliterative language
of Anglo-Saxon poetry. (That is true just as much for the Latin
as for the English: it is a piece of Anglo-Saxon verse with Latin
words instead of English ones.) Peter Kitson, the first person to
point this out, believed that the charter was unique in this
respect (Kitson 1987:147); "unique" is the word applied to it also
by Brooks (2006:13).

* As was pointed out by Wigan (1974:229), scribe 3 -- like other
good scribes at the time -- distinguished between the diphthongs
"ae" and "oe" by using two different cedillas. The one that he
uses here is his "oe" cedilla.

The English paragraph begins with a sentence -- "Here are the
boundaries, as far as the Medway" -- which sounds like a line of
verse;* but then it subsides into prose:

> From Doddingherne west along the street, out as far as the
> wall, and so by the north way, out as far as Liabing's
> huts,† and so by Liabing's huts as far as where the wall
> runs east,‡ and so east inside the wall as far as the
> great gate§ opposite Doddingherne, and so then straight
> south from the gate, along the lane to the east of the

land, south as far as Doddingherne.

Again as Ward saw, that takes us on a clockwise tour of the north-
west quadrant of the city.

* The scribe seems to be fascinated by the sound of the name
"Medway". Instead of naming the river once and then calling it
"the river", he keeps repeating the name. (By the way, he spells
it differently each time.)

† I am not sure what sort of buildings we ought to envisage, but
the word is certainly plural.

‡ Ward (1950:39) has "to where the wall turns east"; Brooks
(2006:20n32) has "until the wall turns east" . But *sciat* is
literally "shoots", and that makes one think of a straight line,
not a change of direction. Perhaps "veers" might be allowable.

§ Again construed as plural by Brooks (2006:20n32).

So much for the first piece of land. "Then, to the north of the
wall,"

    Marsh and meadows,   as far as the Medway,
    these are the boundaries,   from the Medway
    between two creeks,   rightly they are named
    Peartree creek and Ship creek,*   that delimit the land
    westwards and eastwards,   as far as the wall-fortress,†
    thus it is encircled,   with tax-exempt status,‡ AMEN.

As Kitson suggested (it had never been suggested before, as far as
I know), as Brooks agreed, I think we can be certain that this is
the block of land bounded on the west by Common Creek ("Peartree
fleet") and on the east by Blue Boar Creek ("Ship fleet").§ (How
"Ship fleet" got its name I do not know; but I am sure that we are
not permitted to infer, from the name alone, that this was once
the site of the town quay. That, I think it can be safely
assumed, was always close to the bridge.)

* In standard West Saxon spelling the word is *fleot*: this scribe
prefers "ia" (three times) or "io" (once). (A "fleet" is the
channel cut by a tributary stream through the floodplain of a
tidal river. Towards the land, its position is fixed. Towards
the river, its course is liable to vary, unless the sides of the
channel have been embanked.)

† A poetic name for the city-wall. (We are travelling southwards,
"from the Medway ... as far as the wall-fortress".)

‡ Literally "with freedom"; Kitson has "with privilege". He is
(needless to say) not to blame for the liberties that I have taken

with his translation. The Latin verses are much harder to make sense of, but do not seem to say anything significantly different.

§ "Ship fleet" is mentioned again in another charter (no 24), where it forms the western boundary of the next block of land along. (The Blue Boar no longer exists -- it used to be a pub on the High Street -- but Blue Boar Lane is still there.)

*

There are, in the end, only a few features of the townscape of which we can speak with any confidence. At the centre of the city was a corner called Doddingherne, which means something like "Dodda's corner".* (Who Dodda was was forgotten a long time ago.) From this point of view, the area inside the city wall could be thought of -- and sometimes <u>was</u> thought of -- as being divided into four quadrants. Standing near this corner, one could look westwards and eastwards along the High Street, northwards along Pump Lane, southwards along King's Head Lane. Looking north, one had a clear line of sight as far as the north gate. What one could see looking south ... we are not told.

* In the strangulated language of place-name specialists, the -ing- in the middle is a "connective particle implying 'associated with' or 'called after'" (Mills 2003:525). (All the way through his paper, for no reason that I can understand, Ward keeps calling it "Doddinghyrnan". The word for "corner" is *hyrne*, and he knew that perfectly well; *hyrnan* is the inflected form required after prepositions like *fram* and *oð*.)

We do not need the charters to tell us that the Roman town-wall -- identified by George Payne in 1892--3 (Payne 1895) -- remained largely intact. In one area where we would be glad of some help, we do not get it. From this evidence we cannot tell how much of the wall survived on the riverward side of the city.* In one charter, we are told to head westwards from Doddingherne "out as far as the wall"; but that seems less significant than the fact that there is no mention of a gate here. Arriving at this point, we get lost. We do not know where we stand in relation to the bridge and the river: it is only when we head northwards and reach the north wall that we find our bearings again.

* Towards the north-west angle, it appears that the original (Reculver-like) wall may have had to be replaced with a new wall (of Richborough-like construction). Something was seen here in 1889 (Payne 1895:8, Livett 1895:18), something again in 1903 (Payne 1905:lxix--xx). More recently, there have been trial excavations here, just to the west of Horsewash Lane in 2004--5 and just to the east of it in 2008, which discovered strangely-shaped portions of Richborough-like masonry. But the site would need to be opened up on a much larger scale before we could hope

to see how these pieces fit together, and how they connect (if they do) with the Reculver-like north wall (the closest visible stretch of which, sectioned by Harrison in 1967--8 (Harrison 1971:96--8), ends roughly 25 m from Horsewash Lane).

Concerning the gates, we learn a little, but not a lot. There is, it bears repeating, no mention of a west gate, in either of the charters where we might hope to find one. If a gate facing the bridge did ever exist, it would seem, sooner or later, to have disappeared; we are probably never going to be able to decide.*
The south gate, called by that name, is mentioned once, but without any clue which would help to fix its location. The east gate, similarly, is mentioned once: it stood -- as we hardly need to be told -- at the point where the High Street intersected with the east wall.

* Since the construction of the new bridge in the 1850s, there is not much hope of any archaeological evidence surviving here, let alone of anyone ever having access to it. (There is a report, so vague that I hesitate to mention it, of discoveries made during the construction of the new hotel (2 High Street) which inherited the name of the medieval Crown inn. John Ross Foord is on record as saying that "foundations of buildings had been found, with indications apparently of a water-gate near the corner of the present street; Samian ware and other Roman relics had been also collected" (*Archaeological Journal*, 20 (1863), 390). If that site is ever cleared, somebody should take a look at it.)

The north gate is more problematic. It has puzzled some people (including me) that the two ninth-century charters seem to put special emphasis on the size of this gate. In the third charter we head north from Doddingherne "as far as the broad gate"; in the fourth charter we head east along the wall "as far as the great gate opposite Doddingherne".*   Yet the north gate was, one would have thought, decidedly less important than Eastgate or Southgate.† The answer is, I suggest, that there were <u>two</u> gates in the north wall, and that it was necessary for the charters to distinguish between them. As well as "the great gate opposite Doddingherne", there was a little gate somewhere else. As well as "the broad gate", there was also a narrow gate -- in other words, a postern.‡ I see nothing unlikely in the idea that there might have been a postern somewhere; but I would rather not be asked to guess at its position.

* Both passages are construed in the plural by Brooks (2006): *oð ða bradan gatan* (no 11) is "as far as the broad gates" (20n35), *oð ða miclan gatan* (no 26) is "as far as the big gates" (20n32). (But he then translates *fram ða gatan* as "from the gate".) For myself, I have to confess that I cannot get a grip on the syntax. Some expert advice would be welcome. Meanwhile I venture to think that the scribes were lapsing into a colloquial form of English

which did not take much notice of the rules which applied to the literary language.

† Archaeologically, despite some excavation just to the west of it (Harrison and Flight 1969:70--3, Harrison 1982:95--7), we have no clue as to the design of the Roman gate.

‡ At Canterbury there were three posterns in the city-wall, in addition to the six great gates (Somner 1640:16).

Unlike Eastgate and Southgate, "Northgate" is not an authentic medieval name. The ninth-century charters seem not to know of any name for this gate which people will understand. "Broadgate" in the late forgery (no 1) does seem to be intended as a name; but it was not the name which lasted. At least as far back as the early thirteenth century, the north gate was called "Cheldegate": for as long as it existed, that was the name it was known by.* The name "Northgate" did not become current till after the gate had disappeared, and did not refer to the gate.

* It was never called "Childergate" (Ward 1950:40): that is a bogus spelling, adopted only by people who hoped to convince themselves that the name meant "Children's gate". ("Cheldergate" is also bogus.) The first element (as Ward understood) seems to be the rare word *celde*, entered in the dictionary as "A spring (?)". Perhaps it might also mean "a stream"? I take it to denote the stream, or the source of the stream, which flowed out into Common Creek.

(Until the 1830s, "Northgate" was one of the wards -- "boroughs", as they were called -- into which the city was divided. These boroughs are not heard of before the seventeenth century. There seem to have been six of them at first.* By the 1690s, however, the number had been increased to eight, with the addition of "New" and "Northgate" (Waite 1749:45). These arrangements all lapsed in the 1830s (Smith 1928:133-5), and the boundaries of the boroughs were quickly forgotten -- so thoroughly that Arnold (1914:14--15) had to resort to guesswork.† But at least it is clear that "Eastgate Borough" and "Southgate Borough" were the built-up areas outside the city walls, to the east and south respectively. So "Northgate Borough" seems to be an invented name for a newly built-up area towards the north. (If anyone asks, the answer is no: I do not know where "New Borough" was.) After the 1830s, the boroughs having ceased to exist, the name "Northgate" ceased to have any assigned meaning; but then it was revived, after 1900, as a name for the widened street which had taken the place of Pump Lane. In that modern, artificial sense, the name "Northgate" still exists.)

* Smith (1928:443) has a list of eight "boroughs" existing in the 1620s; but that list includes "The Bully" and "Strood", which

resembled boroughs, but were later not officially counted as such.
On the last occasion when the eight "borsholders" were appointed,
their respective boroughs were St Clement's, Middle, South, East,
Eastgate, New, Southgate, Northgate (Smith 1928:135).

† This is Augustus Alfred Arnold (1835--1932), who only arrived in
Rochester in 1859, when he joined the firm of solicitors which
occupied the diocesan registry. Over time, however, he came to
know more than anyone else about the history of the city. If
Arnold did not know where the borough boundaries were, it is safe
to say that nobody did.

We hear repeatedly of "the street", the High Street, which formed,
as it has always formed, the main axis of the city. Of other
streets we hear very little. Apart from Pump Lane and King's Head
Lane, the only side-street mentioned is "north way" -- possibly
Horsewash Lane, though I am far from sure about that.

(One notable feature of the north-west quadrant, as it appears,
for example, in Russell's map (1717), is the presence of a number
of narrow lanes connecting the High Street with the Common. White
Hart Lane, now George Lane, is still there; the others, what with
railways and new roads, have been so hacked about that they are
barely recognizable any longer. In the north-east quadrant there
was only one similar lane, River (or River's) Alley. East of Pump
Lane, this was the only short cut between the High Street and the
Common -- until it was partly blocked off by the construction of
Theobald Square. Remarkably, these lanes are all characterized by
a total disregard for the city's defences. They slice through the
line of the city-wall and soar across the line of the city-ditch
as if neither of those obstacles existed. On the face of it,
therefore, they cannot be earlier than the mid fifteenth century.)

South of the High Street, the Anglo-Saxon town-plan was so
thoroughly obliterated at the end of the eleventh century that we
cannot even guess what it might have looked like. In fact, if
these charters were the only evidence available to us, we would
have not the least idea where Saint Andrew's church was situated.
That is a disappointing note on which to end. I regret it; I
cannot help it. There are a few more things that I hope to say,
but they do not fit within the confines of the present paper --
which is, in any case, long enough already.

Appendix

These are (what I take to be) the disjointed fragments of a lost
eighth-century charter, probably of king Ecgberht, which survive
through having been copied into a later charter (BL Cotton ch
vi 4, Campbell 1973, no 11). I have supplied two words required

by the sense but omitted (I suppose) by the copyist; I have not corrected the spelling.

> + In nomine domini nostri Iesu Christi, cui patent cuncta penetralia cordis et corporis, ego .... concedo [tibi] Hrofensis aeclesiae antistiti Deoran aliquantulum terre iuris mei intra menia supradicte ciuitatis in parte aquilonali ... Hoc in aucmentum monasterii tibi concessi Sancti Andree ... Ut mea donatio inmobilis permaneat semper ... Et siquis hanc meam donationem augere uoluerit, augeat dominus ei uitam. Siquis uero tunc minuere presumserit, sit separatus a conspectu domini in die iudicii, nisi prius emendauerit ante eius transitum quod nequiter gessit. Actum [anno] dominice incarnationis .... + Ego .... rex hanc meam donationem signo sancte crucis confirmaui. + Ego Geanberht archiepiscopus corroboraui. + Ego Deora episcopus consignaui. + Signum manus Uualhard. + Signum manus Aban. + Signum manus Udan. + Signum manus Ealhere. + Signum manus Dudec. + Signum manus Wullaf.

I find it stated by Brooks (2006:13) that the name *Deoran* is written over an erasure. Not having seen the original, I hesitate to disagree, but there is nothing visibly suspicious in the image that I am looking at. (An erasure is distinctly perceptible in the next line, however, where three or four letters have been rubbed out from the middle of the word *me___nia*. In fact, the copyist seems to have written *in trame???nia*, without asking himself what this mysterious word might mean.)

References

Arnold 1889   A. A. Arnold, 'Mediaeval remains at Rochester', *Archaeologia Cantiana,* 18 (1889), 196--201.

Arnold 1914   A. A. Arnold, 'The poll tax in Rochester, September 1660', *Archaeologia Cantiana*, 30 (1914), 1--33.

Barker 1978   E. E. Barker, 'The Bromley charters', *Archaeologia Cantiana,* 92 (1978), 179--85.

Binyon 1907   L. Binyon, *Catalogue of drawings by British artists,* vol. 4 (British Museum, 1907).

Brooks 2006   N. Brooks, 'Rochester, A.D. 400--1066', in T. Ayers and T. Tatton-Brown (eds.), *Medieval art, architecture and archaeology at Rochester* (British Archaeological Association Conference Transactions 28, 2006), 6--21.

Campbell 1973   A. Campbell (ed.), *Charters of Rochester* (Anglo-Saxon Charters I, 1973).

Dugdale 1655   W. Dugdale, *Monasticon Anglicanum,* vol. 1 (London, 1655).

Fisher 1772   T. Fisher (publ.), *The history and antiquities of Rochester and its environs* (Rochester, 1772).

Flight 1996   C. Flight, 'Four vernacular texts from the pre-conquest archive of Rochester Cathedral', *Archaeologia Cantiana*, 115 (1996), 121--53.

Flight 1997   C. Flight, *The bishops and monks of Rochester, 1076--1214* (Kent Archaeological Society Monograph Series VI, Maidstone, 1997).

Harrison 1971   A. C. Harrison, 'Excavations in Rochester', *Archaeologia Cantiana*, 85 (1971), 95--112.

Harrison 1982   A. C. Harrison, 'Rochester 1974--75', *Archaeologia Cantiana,* 97 (1982), 95--136.

Harrison and Flight 1969   A. C. Harrison and C. Flight, 'The Roman and medieval defences of Rochester in the light of recent excavations', *Archaeologia Cantiana,* 83 (1969), 55--104.

Hearne 1711   T. Hearne (ed.), *The itinerary of John Leland the antiquary,* vol. 3 (Oxford, 1711).

Hodder and Stoughton 1903   Hodder and Stoughton (publ.), *Charles Dickens* (London, 1903). A 48-page booklet with numerous illustrations. The letterpress was supplied by G. K. Chesterton (1--17) and F. G. Kitton (18--39).

Hope 1900   W. H. St John Hope, 'The architectural history of the cathedral church and monastery of St Andrew at Rochester, part 2', *Archaeologia Cantiana*, 24 (1900), 1--85.

Kitson 1987   P. Kitson, 'Some unrecognized Old English and Anglo-Latin verse', *Notes and Queries*, 232 (1987), 147--51.

Livett 1895   G. M. Livett, 'Medieval Rochester', *Archaeologia Cantiana*, 21 (1895), 17--72.

Marsh 1974   R. Marsh, *Rochester: the evolution of the city and its government* (Rochester, 1974).

Mills 2003   A. D. Mills, *A dictionary of British place-names* (Oxford, 2003).

Payne 1895   G. Payne, 'Roman Rochester', *Archaeologia Cantiana*, 21 (1895), 1--16.

Payne 1902   G. Payne, 'Researches and discoveries in Kent, 1900--1901', *Archaeologia Cantiana*, 25 (1902), lix--lxxii.

Payne 1905   G. Payne, 'Researches and discoveries in Kent, 1902--1904', *Archaeologia Cantiana*, 27 (1905), lxv--lxxii.

Poste 1848   B. Poste, 'Observations on the ancient city walls of Rochester', *Journal of the British Archaeological Association*, 4 (1848--9), 30--7.

Poste 1859   B. Poste, 'Ancient Rochester, or Durobrivae, viewed as the site of a Roman camp and station', *Archaeologia Cantiana*, 2 (1859), 65--72.

Rimmer 1877   A. Rimmer, *Ancient streets and homesteads of England* (London, 1877).

Robertson 1887   W. A. Scott Robertson, 'Notes for a perambulation of Rochester', *Archaeologia Cantiana*, 17 (1887), xxxix--xli.

Roper 1963   A. Roper, 'Gordon Reginald Ward, M.D., F.S.A.', *Archaeologia Cantiana*, 77 (1963), 224--6.

Russell 1717   G. Russell, *A plot of all and every the messuages and tenements belonging to Rochester Bridge ... situate in the city of Rochester ... as they were surveyed Anno Domini 1717.* -- George Russell (d. 1722) was the under-master of the Free School. This map was reproduced (with some added annotation) by Arnold (1889:200). An image of the original can be found online at http://estate.rbt.org.uk/estate/Rochester/images.htm

Sawyer 1968   P. H. Sawyer, *Anglo-Saxon charters: an annotated list and bibliography* (London, 1968).

Smith 1891   C. Roach Smith, *Retrospections, social and archaeological,* vol. 3, ed. J. G. Waller (London, 1891).

Smith 1928   F. F. Smith, *A history of Rochester* (London, 1928).

Somner 1640   W. Somner, *The antiquities of Canterbury* (London, 1640).

Swain 1986   E. R. Swain, *William Twopeny in Kent* (Doddington, 1986).

Thorpe 1769   J. Thorpe, *Registrum Roffense* (London, 1769).

Tristram 1888   W. O. Tristram, *Coaching days and coaching ways* (London, 1888).

Waite 1749   J. Waite (ed.), *An authentic copy of the charter, and bye-laws, &c. of the city of Rochester, in the county of Kent* (London, 1749).

Ward 1950   G. Ward, 'A note on the Mead Way, the street and Doddinghyrnan in Rochester', *Archaeologia Cantiana*, 62 (1950), 37--44.

Wigan 1974   B. Wigan, [Review of Campbell 1973], *Archaeologia Cantiana*, 88 (1974), 229--30.

Additional references

Draper 2016   G. Draper, 'New life in towns, c.800--c.1220', in S. Sweetinburgh (ed.), *Early medieval Kent*, 800--1220 (Woodbridge, 2016), 67--102.

Tatton-Brown 1984   T. Tatton-Brown, 'The towns of Kent', in J. Haslam (ed.), *Anglo-Saxon towns in southern England* (Chichester, 1984), 1--36.

Tatton-Brown 2006   T. Tatton-Brown, 'The topography and buildings of medieval Rochester', in T. Ayers and T. Tatton-Brown (eds.), *Medieval art, architecture and archaeology at Rochester* (British Archaeological Association Conference Transactions 28, 2006), 22--37.

Ward 2005   A. Ward, 'The Mead Way, the street and Doddinghyrnan in Rochester revisited', *Archaeologia Cantiana*, 125 (2005), 311--22.

C.F. Mar 2018, last revised Feb 2025

The Blue Boar pub (119 High Street), demolished c 1970. The shop
on the corner went too; so did the big building across from it,
the Mathematical School.