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**The Borough of Chipping Sodbury and the Fat Men of France
(1130-1270)**

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The Borough of Chipping Sodbury and the Fat Men of France (1130–1270)

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The borough charters of medieval England have long been recognised as documents meriting careful study and preservation. Indeed from the time that the royal chancery first began to keep copies of its outgoing correspondence, from the 1190s onwards, the inhabitants of England's boroughs were willing to pay substantial sums for the official enrolment of their charters and privileges.¹ Although no simple definition can be found, a borough was in essence a settlement possessed of special privileges and customs, sometimes deliberately planned and established, sometimes of more ancient and haphazard creation. The vast majority of boroughs had their privileges and customs enshrined in a charter from the king or their immediate local overlord. Some, such as London or Bristol, were destined to develop into major centres of international trade. Others enjoyed less success. Some were still-born or declined so drastically that they were rendered almost indistinguishable from surrounding villages and hamlets. In Gloucestershire, for example, we might know nothing of the special status of such places as Dymock or Minchinhampton were it not for chance references to their burgesses, or to plots of land designated as burgages, at some time in the 13th century.²

Nonetheless, where they could, the inhabitants of a borough would do their best to preserve their borough status.³ At least in theoretical terms, a burgess was a free man. In return for his rent, he could hope to enjoy certain privileges that raised him above the degradation of villeinage or serfdom. In the later Middle Ages, when boroughs were afforded the right to be represented in the king's parliament, many small communities would hover anxiously on the border-line between the borough and the mere vill or rural township. One such waverer was the Gloucestershire borough of Chipping Sodbury, the subject of this article. Chipping Sodbury was never a community of any great wealth or size, and yet at some time in the Middle Ages it acquired the right to call itself a borough. Quite when and why was this right acquired, and from what source? Answers to all of these questions were provided in the 18th century by Robert Atkyns and Samuel Rudder, the twin pioneers of Gloucestershire county history. Although demonstrably false, these same answers have continued to be quoted well into the present century.⁴ In what follows, I hope to dispel at least part of the misunderstanding that Atkyns and Rudder unwittingly created, to question the authenticity of various of the early charters of Chipping Sodbury, some of which have been lost to view for a century or more, and in addition to shed new light upon one of the more intriguing families of medieval Gloucestershire, the Norman family of Crassus or le Gros under whose lordship Chipping Sodbury acquired its status as a borough at some time between 1217 and 1227. We must begin, however, with the myth.

In his history of Gloucestershire first published in 1712, Robert Atkyns set out a remarkable genealogy of the lords of Chipping Sodbury, who were, he claimed, descended from Odo, count of Champagne, a follower of William the Conqueror. Odo was succeeded by his son Stephen

and his grandson William, known as 'le Gros' or 'the fat'. According to Atkyns, this William, who also acquired the English earldom of Holderness and the Norman county of Aumale, was the founder of the borough of Chipping Sodbury, granting it the same privileges as those enjoyed by the burgesses of Bristol. Following his death in 1179, William was succeeded by his daughter Hawise, married in turn to William de Mandeville, earl of Essex, William de Fortibus and Baldwin of Béthune. Hawise's son and heir, another William de Fortibus, also known as William le Gros, 'a great admiral', subsequently confirmed his grandfather's award to the borough of Chipping Sodbury at some time early in the 13th century.⁵ Writing some sixty years after Atkyns, Samuel Rudder copied out this same family tree, but added to it a precious piece of evidence: part of the Latin text of a confirmation charter issued by William Crassus, son of William Crassus the younger (the terms Crassus and le Gros being synonymous, literally 'the fat'), then (c. 1775) in the possession of the town clerk of Chipping Sodbury. Even in Rudder's day, this charter was said to be badly perished and illegible in parts.⁶

Although, as we shall see, Chipping Sodbury possesses a far richer collection of medieval sources than that shown to Samuel Rudder, Rudder's version of the confirmation charter has to date been the sole text available to academic historians. Even as it stands, it enables us to establish that the genealogy of the Crassus family set down by Atkyns and copied by Rudder is pure moonshine, the outcome of hopeless confusion between the lords of Chipping Sodbury, a family which was indeed named Crassus or le Gros, and the counts of Aumale, one of whose members, although unrelated to the le Gros family of Gloucestershire, was quite coincidentally known as William 'le Gros'.⁷ The nickname 'Fatty', it appears, was as common in the 12th century as it is today. The true history of the Crassus family of Sodbury is given in detail below. For the moment, however, we should make a preliminary survey of the charters which the family is said to have awarded to the newly founded borough of Sodbury. As we shall see, there are various problems associated with the loss and the possible forgery of various of these texts. In addition, Atkyns and Rudder assumed that the liberties set out in these charters were those of the city of Bristol. Here again, they were mistaken. Writing in 1900, Mary Bateson demonstrated that the customs referred to in the Chipping Sodbury charter printed by Rudder were those not of Bristol but of Breteuil in Normandy: a set of customs used as the basis for twenty or more borough charters elsewhere in England, Wales and Ireland, for such towns as Hereford, Shrewsbury and Drogheda as well as for Chipping Sodbury.⁸

As suggested above, Rudder's confirmation charter is only one of several early charters of Chipping Sodbury which have been seen, and in some cases published by local historians, but which have gone entirely un-noticed outside the immediate locality. Today, the ancient evidences of Chipping Sodbury are housed in the Gloucestershire Record Office. They include 16th-century transcripts of three borough charters ascribed to William Crassus (fl. after 1242), son of William Crassus the younger, including the text seen by Rudder, together with a 14th-century inspeximus of various private deeds, supposedly issued by this same William Crassus. Originally, however, the borough possessed several other evidences, including the original charter of privileges granted by William Crassus the elder (d. before 1242). This 'foundation' charter was shown in the late 16th century to the antiquary and deputy chamberlain of the royal exchequer, Arthur Agarde (1540–1615), whose transcript of it passed with other of his manuscripts into the keeping of his close friend and colleague Scipio le Squyer (1579–1659) and thence, eventually, to the John Rylands Library at Manchester, where it remains today.⁹ We might assume that the charter seen by Agarde was lost soon afterwards, in the 17th or 18th centuries, but, on the contrary, there is firm proof that the 'foundation' charter, or at the very least a local copy of it, survived well into the 20th century at Chipping Sodbury. An Irish antiquary of the 1820s was able to refer to the witnesses of the charter, suggesting that it may

well have been published at some time before 1823, whilst as recently as 1972, P.A. Couzens published the same Latin 'foundation' charter of William Crassus the elder, together with an English translation of a later confirmation by William Crassus his nephew, citing local evidences without any reference to Agarde's transcripts at Manchester, which were then unknown.¹⁰

There is an unsolved mystery here, but in essence it appears that several early charters of Chipping Sodbury have been lost in comparatively recent times. When the ancient borough of Chipping Sodbury was dissolved in the 1890s, its records and evidences were dispatched to the Charity Commissioners in London, who published a brief inventory, listing not only the original borough charter of William Crassus the elder, but at least three other early texts, including charters of his nephew, William Crassus the younger. These early texts were not amongst the records restored to the newly constituted Chipping Sodbury Town Trust in 1896-7, but their existence was noted by a local historian, Francis F. Fox of Yate House, an antiquary and collector of manuscripts, who secured their return from the Charity Commissioners in 1904.¹¹ With the help of Hubert Hall of the Public Record Office, Fox engaged a professional record agent, Miss E. Salisbury, to transcribe and translate the early charters, which were restored in October 1904, together with Miss Salisbury's transcripts and translations, to the chief trustee of the Sodbury Town Trust, Mr. J.W. Trenfield. In 1904, the four earliest charters are said to have been kept in an envelope, marked in red ink with the letter 'A'.¹² Trenfield, a local solicitor, dissolved his practice in the 1920s, whereafter various of the town's early records passed to his successor as town solicitor and thence to the Gloucestershire Record Office. However, in the process, some records, including the very earliest borough charter granted by William Crassus the elder, appear to have been lost. Likewise, the transcripts made in 1904 by Miss Salisbury can no longer be traced, although at some time they appear to have been made available to P.A. Couzens, to serve as the basis of the edition and translations published in 1972. The present whereabouts of the foundation charter and of Miss Salisbury's transcripts remains unknown. They have not been found in the record offices of Gloucester or Bristol, and no evidence of them survives at Chipping Sodbury itself.

Altogether, this leaves us in an unenviable position, unsure of precisely which records have disappeared since 1904, and uncertain whether the missing items have been merely mislaid or destroyed entirely. Nonetheless, by piecing together the correspondence between Francis Fox, Miss Salisbury and J.W. Trenfield, and by comparing the 16th-century copies now at Gloucester with the notes made by Fox and with Agarde's transcripts now at Manchester, we can reconstitute a fairly precise list of the original evidences, published in full below (Appendix). To judge from Fox's notes, the original borough evidences included the following items: the 'foundation' charter of William Crassus the elder (d. before 1242), published below from Agarde's transcript now at Manchester; a charter of John, count of Mortain, to the men of Bristol, almost certainly a transcript of Count John's well-known Bristol charter of which the original survives in the Bristol Record Office, presumably copied for the burgesses of Sodbury because of the confusion between the customs of Bristol and Breteuil, and therefore not reprinted here; a confirmation to the burgesses of Chipping Sodbury issued by William Crassus, son of William Crassus the younger, including a grant of a weekly court to the burgesses, printed below from a 16th-century copy still amongst the Chipping Sodbury borough records at Gloucester; and a fragmentary charter, relating to the privileges of the burgesses of Hereford, first recorded in the 16th century by Arthur Agarde and presumably stored at Sodbury because both Hereford and Sodbury derived their privileges from the customs of Breteuil.¹³ In addition, the surviving Chipping Sodbury evidences at Gloucester include 16th-century copies of a further two confirmation charters issued to the burgesses by William Crassus, son of William Crassus 'the younger', and an inspeximus of various private grants of land at Sodbury from this same William Crassus in

favour of Adam 'the white' (*Albus*). Being of incidental interest, these private awards are merely calendared below. All the other Crassus family charters, known from 16th-century transcripts, are here printed in full. Two of them have never before been published.

We shall see, in due course, that there is good reason to doubt the authenticity of various of these texts, and in particular of the supposed confirmation charters issued by William Crassus, nephew of William Crassus the original founder of the borough. This alone might explain why the texts themselves survive only in 16th-century transcripts, although it does not explain the disappearance, at some time after 1904, of the original 'foundation' charter, the text of which is considered in detail below.

Having established the basic documentary framework for our enquiry, we can now return to the Crassus family and their lordship at Chipping Sodbury. As we have seen, the Crassus's of Sodbury are not to be confused with the entirely distinct William le Gros, count of Aumale. To date, the most detailed history of the Gloucestershire family is that provided by Sheffield Grace, a distant descendant of the Crassus's or Gros's. Grace provides a peculiar mixture of truth and make-believe, according to which William Crassus of Sodbury was descended from Raymond (*recte* Reginald) fitz William le Gros, a leading Irish baron of the 12th century.¹⁴ In reality, William Crassus was a Norman, not an Irishman. In all other respects, however, his ancestry was just as distinguished as that claimed for him in any of the various mythical pedigrees (Fig.1).

His true history runs as follows. The family of Crassus or le Gros makes its first certain appearance in the 1120s, when a William Crassus occurs in the following of Robert, earl of Gloucester, a bastard son of King Henry I.¹⁵ In all probability the family and the family nickname had been established considerably earlier, since a confirmation to the monks of St. Etienne at Caen issued by William the Conqueror before 1077 refers to land at Villers and an otherwise unidentified place, *Mara*, perhaps now part of the town of Caen, once held by a man named William Crassus.¹⁶ The family's chief landholdings lay in the modern *département* of Calvados, for the most part between the towns of Bayeux and Caen. Before 1157, for example, a William Crassus is known to have granted tithes at Authie near Caen to the monks of St. Martin at Troarn, and in 1178 we read of a namesake granting rents at Cully, half-way between Caen and

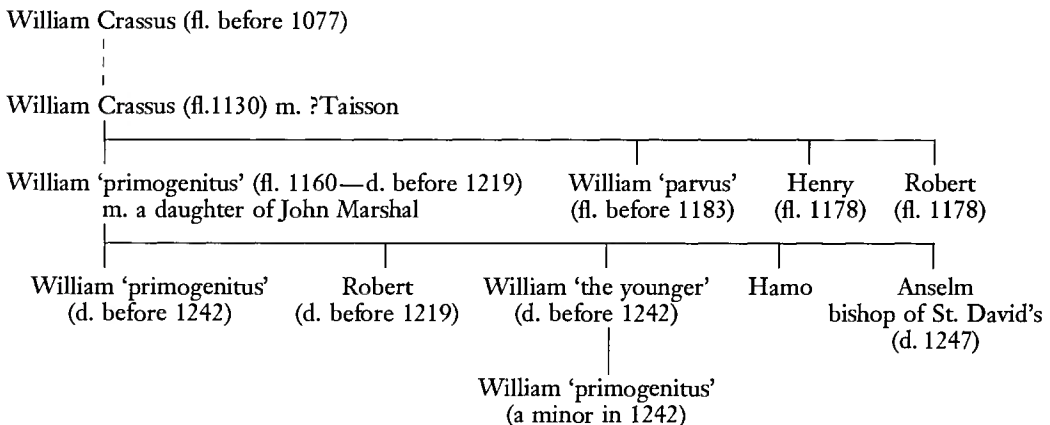


Fig. 1. The family of Crassus or le Gros.

Bayeux, to the church of St. Jean de Falaise.¹⁷ Already by the 1140s the family appears to have been established as tenants of Robert, earl of Gloucester, who was at this time engaged in seizing a great swathe of lands in lower Normandy, a large part of it confiscated from the cathedral church of Bayeux where Robert's son had been installed as bishop.¹⁸ One such estate, at *Ancariis*, possibly Asnières-en-Bessin south of Bayeux, was granted by Earl Robert to William Crassus who eventually restored it to Bayeux cathedral *c.* 1154 in return for a payment of 30 marks.¹⁹ With the death of Earl Robert and the succession of his son William to the earldom, William Crassus, perhaps the same William Crassus active since the 1120s but more likely his son, rose rapidly in the new earl's favour. He occurs as a witness to several charters of Earl William issued for his estates in Normandy, in one of which *c.* 1155 × 1160 he appears with the title *dapifer*, presumably serving as steward of Earl William's Norman lands.²⁰ William Crassus the elder, active in the 1120s and 30s, had married into the powerful Taisson family, native to Thury south of Caen and lords of St-Sauveur-le-Vicomte in the Cotentin peninsula. By 1178 he had fathered at least three sons, William Crassus the first born (*primogenitus*), Robert and Henry.²¹ Of these, Henry Crassus undoubtedly joined his brother William in the service of Earl William of Gloucester, appearing as one of the most frequent witnesses to the earl's charters both in Normandy and in England.²² From the 1170s onwards, our search for the family's descent is hampered by the fact that in each generation the Christian name William was granted to more than one son. By the year 1200, for example, we find ourselves confronted by at least three members of the family, all of them named William Crassus: William the father (who in his youth had also been known as William 'the first born'), and his two sons, William Crassus 'the first born' and William Crassus 'the younger'. Whilst providing an insight into the family's mentality, and its attachment to one particular ancestral Christian name, this lack of variety greatly complicates our task. Even so, most of the confusion can now be disentangled, thanks to the relative abundance of family charters and written evidences.

We have seen that from the 1120s the Crassus family was allied to that of the earls of Gloucester in Normandy. It was to be through this same alliance that the family became established in England. Quite when remains a mystery, but our evidence suggests that they were relative late-comers. The argument *ex silentio* is always a hazardous one, but the family's absence from the records of the English exchequer, and the fact that there is no trace of any sort of castle at the family's chief English manor at Sodbury, suggests that it was not until after the anarchy of Stephen's reign that the family acquired its principal English estates. The Crassus tenancy at Sodbury is unmentioned in the great survey of knight's fees, including the service of the honour of Gloucester, returned in 1166, and as late as 1172–3, when William, earl of Gloucester, granted the chapel of St. Peter at Sodbury to his newly founded abbey at Keynsham, there is no mention of a Crassus family interest in the award.²³ Nonetheless, our first certain reference to William Crassus's lordship at Sodbury comes a few years earlier, in 1167 when the king pardoned him and his man Alwold a fine of 40 shillings made against the vill of Great (or Old) Sodbury.²⁴ Four years later, in 1171–2, William was fined for forest offences in Gloucestershire, and in 1194 he faced the seizure of his rents and chattels at Sodbury, presumably as a result of his support for the rebellion led in that year by the king's brother John, holder by marriage of the earldom of Gloucester. The king's officials collected £11 as a year's rent from Sodbury, with William's confiscated stock, corn and perquisites there being valued at more than £20.²⁵ This William Crassus who held Sodbury (fl. *c.* 1160–*c.* 1210) was married to a daughter of John Marshal (d. 1165), castellan of Marlborough in Wiltshire, suggesting that by the time of this alliance the Crassus and Marshal families already shared some sort of common interest in the west country.²⁶ Besides Sodbury, he also came into possession of a minor estate in South Yorkshire and the manor of Little Dalby in Leicestershire, both acquired through the marriage of

his father, William Crassus (fl. 1130), to a member of the Norman dynasty of Taisson, tenants of the honour of Tickhill.²⁷ Even despite these English acquisitions, the Crassus family remained essentially Norman in its outlook. By the late 12th century most Anglo-Norman families had divided into distinct English and Norman branches, so that the political breach that opened up in 1204 between England and Normandy merely reflected a more widespread division of interests on either side of the Channel.²⁸ The Anglo-Norman families which sided with King John in 1204 were for the most part those with major estates in England and relatively little or no land to be lost in Normandy. This seems not to have been true of the Crassus family, who although they backed the Plantagenet kings of England in their wars with France, following King John into exile from Normandy after 1204, possessed only a handful of English manors to cushion the loss of their estates in France. Prior to the events of 1204, the family may have regarded Chipping Sodbury not as their home but as a distant source of income, far removed from their principal interests around Caen.

Certainly, it was in Normandy that the family continued to make its greatest impact. Here, at the turn of the 12th century, William Crassus, son of William and brother of Henry, played a brief and by no means glorious role in international politics. In 1203 William was promoted by King John to serve as steward for Normandy, following in the footsteps of his kinsman Ralph Taisson who had served as steward for the previous two years, but who in due course was to side with the French against King John.²⁹ The timing of William's appointment was unfortunate, since Normandy was on the verge of succumbing to a French invasion. In later years, under French rule, the period of William Crassus's stewardship was to be remembered by his fellow Normans as one of extortion and brutality.³⁰ Certainly, he appears to have done nothing to halt the collapse of Plantagenet rule. We should note, however, that contrary to various remarks made Sir Maurice Powicke, William was already a substantial Norman landholder by the time of his appointment as steward, related to the great baronial family of Taisson and married to a sister of William Marshal, lord of Longueville and Orbec in Normandy. Powicke believed that William Crassus was a parvenu, little more than a landless mercenary.³¹ In reality he was a well-connected Norman landowner of ancient lineage.

Late in 1203 King John fled to England. He was joined there shortly afterwards by William Crassus, his erstwhile steward, and by a large number of William's sons and relations. Presumably, William believed that his exile from Normandy would be short lived. In any case, his activities as steward had ruled out any prospect of a speedy reconciliation with Normandy's new overlord, the French king Philip Augustus. William Crassus was specifically excluded from the terms of a surrender extracted by Philip from his new Norman subjects, and over the next few years his Norman lands were confiscated and granted to supporters of the French.³² This left him in much-reduced circumstances, and appears to have inspired a series of grants from King John and from William's brother-in-law, William Marshal, intended to compensate him for the loss of his Norman patrimony. From the king William received the manor of Newton St. Loe in Somerset, seized from a Norman tenant of the earldom of Gloucester who had defected to the French.³³ The Marshal, and his son William Marshal the younger, granted the Crassus family a collection of lands in the Marshal's Irish honour of Leinster, including Tollathynernth in county Carlow, henceforward known as Castlegrace, and an estate at Great Burstead in Essex.³⁴

William Crassus, former steward of Normandy, died at some time before 1219, having fathered at least five sons; Robert, who predeceased him, William Crassus *primogenitus* who succeeded to the majority of the family estates in England and Ireland including the manor of Sodbury; William 'the younger' who is possibly the William Crassus found in possession of Newton St. Loe; Hamo Crassus, a knight, and Anselm Crassus, who pursued a career in the Church.³⁵ Four of these five sons are to be found in the service of William Marshal the younger,

earl of Pembroke (1219–31), their most powerful kinsman in England. Through the patronage of his cousin Henry Marshal, bishop of Exeter (1194–1206), Anselm Crassus was promoted treasurer of Exeter cathedral *c.* 1205. In 1229 he obtained election as bishop of St. David's, the cathedral church of Pembroke, and he died in 1247, having apparently become a Franciscan friar shortly before his death.³⁶ Hamo Crassus received land from the Marshals in Ireland and a mesne tenancy at Dormston in Worcestershire from the Marshals and Westminster abbey.³⁷ William Crassus *primogenitus* occurs as steward of the Marshal lands in Ireland during the 1220s, and at the time of William Marshal the younger's death, played a crucial role in the administration of the Marshal castles and estates in south Wales.³⁸ We can safely assume that he was related to a man named Henry Crassus, constable of the Marshal castle of Pembroke in 1231, although the precise degree of their kinship remains obscure.³⁹ This in turn suggests that the family may have remained in contact with their Norman homeland for many years after 1204. The brothers John, Robert and Henry Crassus are known to have held an estate at Stanstead Abbots in Hertfordshire, granted to them by the Marshal earls of Pembroke, and it may be that the John Crassus of Stanstead Abbots can be identified with a namesake, an illegitimate Norman, who abandoned Normandy for England at some time in the 1240s.⁴⁰

William Crassus's service as royal steward for Normandy did not prevent various of his descendants from participating in rebellions against kings John and Henry III. Together with other supporters of William Marshal the younger, Hamo Crassus appears to have joined the rebel barons against King John after 1215, being captured by the royalists and held captive at Berkhamsted in March 1216.⁴¹ In 1224 a man named William Crassus, perhaps William the younger, son of the former steward of Normandy, assisted the garrison of Bedford castle in its defiance of King Henry III. William is described as subconstable of Bedford, and as a result of his rebellion faced the confiscation of his land in Somerset, possibly to be identified as the manor of Newton St. Loe which we have already noted as a possession of William Crassus the steward.⁴² He was eventually pardoned and sent into Gascony with the king's brother Richard of Cornwall.⁴³ In the late 1220s a namesake, probably William Crassus *primogenitus*, was suspected of stirring up discontent against the king's government in Ireland.⁴⁴ Following the death of William Marshal the younger in 1231, the king toyed with the idea of confiscating the Marshal family lands rather than allow them to pass to Richard Marshal, William Marshal's brother and heir, long resident in France. Several Marshal knights sprang to Richard Marshal's defence, including Hamo Crassus, who was suspected of seditious activities in Ireland.⁴⁵ Eighteen months later, Richard Marshal's dispute with the Crown erupted into open rebellion, in which the two Williams, their brother Hamo, and Henry Crassus all sided with the Marshal and as a result were deprived of their estates, including the manor of Sodbury.⁴⁶ In 1233, when the king issued a formal sentence of diffidation against the Marshal and his supporters, he chose Anselm Crassus, bishop of St. David's, to deliver the sentence.⁴⁷ Richard Marshal was killed fighting in Ireland in the spring of 1234, whereafter his heir, Gilbert Marshal, and the Crassus family were speedily restored to their lands and to the king's allegiance. Hereafter, it becomes extremely difficult to distinguish between the two Williams, *primogenitus* and 'the younger', but it appears that both were dead by 1242, when their heir was yet another William Crassus *primogenitus*, son of William Crassus the younger, then a minor in the custody of Richard Seward, a Marshal family knight, subsequently given into the wardship of his kinsman Anselm Crassus, bishop of St. Davids.⁴⁸ It was this William who succeeded after 1242 and who is supposed to have confirmed his uncle's earlier award to the burgesses of Chipping Sodbury in three of the five charters printed below. Within another fifty years, the Crassus family had exchanged its lands in England for estates in Ireland, consolidating its Irish lordship in the Marshal fee first established at the beginning of the 13th century. By 1270 the family appears to have disposed of the manor of

Sodbury which was granted to William Weyland and in 1283 was permanently conveyed to William's brother Thomas Weyland and his heirs, in exchange for land at Tullaroan and elsewhere in Ireland.⁴⁹ In this way, the Crassus or le Gros lordship at Sodbury survived little more than a century, from the family's first appearance there as absentee Normans in the 1160s, through to their migration to Ireland in the 1280s. Sodbury remained only briefly with the Weyland family, being confiscated from Thomas Weyland, Edward I's chief justice of Common Pleas, who was disgraced and forced into exile in 1290 for protecting two of his men accused of murder. Thomas' wife and his son Richard regained possession of the manor in the following year, but in 1308 it was finally resigned by Richard Weyland to its overlord, the earl of Gloucester.⁵⁰

Various points emerge from all this. In the first place, we have the intriguing prospect of a family of Normans, exiled from their homeland after 1204 to lead a nomadic existence, hitched to the coat-tails of their more powerful kinsmen, the Marshal earls of Pembroke, in England, Ireland and Wales. So strong were the ties of loyalty within the Marshal following that on at least three separate occasions they carried members of the Crassus family into open resistance to the authority of the king. At the same time, set against this apparent solidarity between the Marshals and their Crassus cousins, we have the remarkable possibility that William Crassus, perhaps William Crassus the younger, participated in the rebel defence of Bedford in 1224. The garrison of Bedford was headed by Gilbert brother of Fawkes de Bréauté, like the Crassus family, a Norman refugee in England, but at the same time a long-standing enemy and rival of William Crassus's principal patron, William Marshal the younger. Here we may find the mutual ties of Norman birth triumphing even over William Crassus's loyalty to his Marshal kinsmen.

What, in light of all this, are we to make of the borough charters, issued by William Crassus *primogenitus* and William his nephew, bestowing privileges upon the burgesses of Chipping Sodbury? To begin with, we can establish the date of the first of these charters with some degree of certainty. The borough of Sodbury was certainly in existence by 1232, by which time William Crassus had conferred a burgage there upon the monks of St. Wulfstan at Worcester.⁵¹ William *primogenitus* succeeded his father, the former steward of Normandy, before 1219, whilst the appearance of William de Mandeville, earl of Essex, among the witnesses to the Chipping Sodbury charter provides us with outside dating limits of 1217 and 1227. Furthermore, we know that on 12 August 1218, whilst the king's court was at Oxford, William Crassus *primogenitus* was granted the right to hold a market at Sodbury every Monday.⁵² The royal letters setting out this award were authorized by William Marshal the elder, earl of Pembroke, then regent and guardian of the king, and it seems likely that it is this same William Marshal, rather than his son William Marshal the younger, who appears as a witness to William Crassus's charter to the Sodbury burgesses. The market privileges were renewed by royal charter in May 1227, with the market being moved from Mondays to Thursdays and with the addition of a fair to last for a week from 24 June each year.⁵³

In all probability the 'foundation' charter for the borough of Sodbury coincided closely with the king's licence for a market there in 1218.⁵⁴ As H.P.R. Finberg has pointed out, the market was established on a new site, away from the manor of Old Sodbury, on the road between Bristol and Cirencester, with the borough of Chipping Sodbury, literally 'Market' Sodbury, forming a special enclave of burgages within the wider manorial settlement.⁵⁵ Its establishment probably owed much to the close relations that existed in 1218 between the Crassus family and William Marshal, then effective governor of England. It coincided with the foundation of several other new boroughs, set up by prominent members of the minority council of Henry III.⁵⁶ As to the basic constitution of the borough, the choice of the customs of Breteuil was appropriate for a

Norman such as William Crassus, and formed part of a wider tradition in which the Marshal earls of Pembroke and their associates applied these same customs of Breteuil to their own private boroughs. Many of the new boroughs of Ireland, where the Crassus family held land, followed the customs of Breteuil, including the Marshal boroughs of Carlow and Kilkenny. In a charter witnessed by William Crassus *primogenitus*, William Marshal the younger confirmed customs derived from those of Breteuil to the new borough of Haverfordwest in Wales, and in this he was imitated by other members of the Marshal affinity such as the Brionne family at Laugharne and the FitzMartin family at Newport in Pembroke.⁵⁷ In Gloucestershire, the Breteuil customs had already been adopted, before 1211, at Tetbury, only a few miles from Chipping Sodbury, in the time of William de Braose, a close kinsman and associate of the Marshals in both Normandy and Ireland.⁵⁸

Chipping Sodbury was never to rival such neighbouring boroughs as Bristol or Cirencester. A century or so after its foundation it ranked nineteenth amongst the county's twenty four boroughs, with numerous burgage plots, but a tax rating of only £4.⁵⁹ However, as was suggested at the very beginning of this article, the fact that the inhabitants of the town enjoyed burgess status would have inclined them to preserve their borough liberties, even despite their relative lack of economic success. It is in this context that we need to view the various charters printed below, supposedly issued by William Crassus *primogenitus* and by his nephew and namesake, William the son of William Crassus 'the younger'.

The basic authenticity of the borough's 'foundation' charter, issued c. 1218, is not in doubt. There is independent proof that a borough was in existence at Sodbury by the 1230s, whilst the charter itself is witnessed by a group of men well known to have been active in the following of the Marshal earls of Pembroke: a group which no forger could simply have invented.⁶⁰ However, even this 'foundation' charter leaves room for a suspicion of later reworking. In particular, the application of the courtesy title *dominus* to each of the principal witnesses is a feature that we would not expect to find in a genuine text much before the 1230s. Moreover the use of the first person plural, 'we have given' and so forth, in an award by a relatively minor landholder would be most unusual at so early a date: even the Marshal earls of Pembroke continued to employ the first person singular, leaving the first person plural to the king, bishops and high ranking clergy. There can be no certainty here, but it is a strong possibility that the text as it survives has been reworked, possibly in order that a later forger might insert the charter's later clauses, granting the men of Sodbury licence to pasture their cows on William Crassus's land. As for the subsequent confirmations of this charter, supposedly issued after the coming of age of William Crassus's nephew, after 1242, and before the family's exchange of Sodbury for land in Ireland, before 1270, there are ample grounds to suspect forgery. None of these confirmations survives in the original. As they stand, filtered through the misconceptions of a 16th-century copyist, at least one of them is palpably forged, borrowing its entire witness list from the charter of c. 1218, although supposedly issued thirty or more years later. The motives for this particular forgery are not hard to discover, since the text in question purports to grant the burgesses of Sodbury extensive rights of common pasture, extending their licence to pasture a single cow in the lord's common, referred to in the original 'foundation' charter of c. 1218, to include an unlimited number of cows, pigs, horses, sheep and other animals. This in turn raises suspicions over an award composed in almost identical language to the forged charter, limiting the rights of pasture to the original one cow *per* burgess, but allowing that the borough court of Sodbury was to be held on no day other than a Saturday. The witness list to this second charter is more plausible than that of the undoubted forgery, but the extensive liberties which it confers nonetheless leave room for doubt. In turn, this charter shares the same witness list as another supposed charter of William Crassus (fl. after 1242), more limited in scope but permitting each

burgesses to pasture not only a cow but also a mare or a stallion. The word *cabo* employed here for stallion is probably anachronistic: elsewhere the use of *cabo* in this sense is unrecorded before the 15th century, suggesting that this text too is a forgery, or at the very least that it was substantially reworked many years after the purported date of its composition. All of the supposed confirmations conflate the use of the first person singular and plural, in a way that would have been unthinkable to a 13th-century scribe but which might well have slipped from the pen of a later forger.

Finally, and equally suspiciously, the various private deeds of William Crassus printed below in favour of Adam 'the white' (*Albus*) of Sodbury and his heir Robert 'the fair' (*le Fayre*) seem to fit into a similar pattern of deceit. 'White' and 'fair' are, to say the least, surnames that might have appealed to a forger, anxious to produce texts that would be difficult to verify. The texts themselves survive in a purported inspeximus, the form of which is extremely garbled, and appear to be written in a hand of the early to mid 14th century, too late to have been an original award by William Crassus who departed for Ireland before 1270. In its present form, the document has a fold at the bottom which would suggest that it was prepared for sealing, although no slit has been cut into the fold by which a seal could have been applied. Beyond these diplomatic peculiarities, the text contains other dubious elements, in particular a licence supposedly granted to Adam 'the white' to pasture beasts without number in William Crassus's pasture, prefiguring the similar rights of pasture conferred by the forged borough charter first recorded in the 16th century. Given the relatively early date of the supposed inspeximus to Adam 'the white', before c. 1350, this suggests that rights of common pasture at Sodbury were a bone of contention between the burgesses and their overlords for many years before the 'copies' of the borough charters were made, in the mid 16th century.

In this context, we should observe that in 1549 the then lord of the manor of Sodbury was accused of confiscating the burgesses' charter, presumably the original 'foundation' charter of c. 1218, in order to deprive them of their rights of commons and so that he might attempt to inclose a considerable portion of the manor. As a result the burgesses impleaded him before the Council of the Welsh Marches and obtained an order that their charter be restored and that the inclosure be discontinued.⁶¹ We lack precise evidence here, but it seems highly probable that it was this same 16th-century inclosure dispute which gave rise to at least some of the Sodbury forgeries, in which the burgesses concocted their supposed confirmation charters from William Crassus son of William Crassus 'the younger', now known only from copies of the mid 16th century, licensing them to pasture beasts without number on the manor's commons. Alternatively, though casting an equally damning light on the burgesses, it is possible that the confiscation of their charter in 1549 was a response, not the spur, to their acts of forgery. As we have seen from the supposed inspeximus in favour of Adam 'the white', forgery may have been rife at Sodbury from at least the 14th century. In this interpretation, the confiscation of the borough charter in the 1540s would have been intended to deprive the burgesses of rights of pasture that they had already sought to obtain by deception. In either case, we would do well to treat all of the supposed borough charters issued by William Crassus and his nephew with a great deal of caution. The fact that the Crassus family abandoned Sodbury for estates in Ireland less than fifty years after establishing the borough, and that thereafter their successors, the Weyland family, were troubled by legal disputes with the Crown, would have provided ample opportunity for the terms of the original foundation to be altered in favour of the burgesses had the burgesses so wished. By 1300 at the latest, it would have been difficult if not impossible to challenge any charter that claimed to be issued in the name of the Crassus family, by then long departed for Ireland.

One day, perhaps as a direct result of the present investigation, the evidences of Chipping Sodbury, including the original 'foundation' charter, lost since 1904, may be rediscovered. If so, it may be possible to deliver a more definitive judgement on their authenticity. In the meantime, the story of these charters remains an interesting one. It involves at least one and perhaps several acts of forgery, the loss or destruction of crucial pieces of evidence, and a great deal of myth-making by local historians and antiquaries. Some of these myths have now been laid to rest. Others retain their mystery. At the very least, it is to be hoped that the Crassus family—the fat Norman lords of the manor of Sodbury—can now be seen in their true light, participants in some of the more dramatic political developments of their day, founders of a market and a borough at Chipping Sodbury, but in essence a transitory phenomenon, settled only briefly in Gloucestershire on their progress from Normandy into Ireland.

APPENDIX

The Borough Charters of Chipping Sodbury

1. *Grant by William Crassus 'primogenitus' to the burgesses of Chipping Sodbury of the same privileges as enjoyed by the burgesses of Breteuil, together with licence to every burgess to pasture a cow in William's common.*

[1217 × 1227, ?c. August 1218. ?Genuine but Reworked]

Manchester, John Rylands Library MS. Latin 318 (Arthur Agarde's transcripts), f.5v., transcript s.xvi/xvii, headed: *Hoc antiquum scriptum monstravit mihi Robertus Warner de Chepinge Sodbury in comitatu Glouc' una cum antiqua carta de libertatibus concessis per ballivos civitatis Hereford quod burgenses de Sodbur' utant sicut burgenses Bristol'*. Followed by a note, but no text, of the confirmation of the same charter by William Crassus junior, nephew of William Crassus *primogenitus*.

Omnibus presentem cartam visuris et auditoris Willelmus Crassus primogenitus salutem. Sciatis nos dedisse burgensibus de Sobbeburia omnes libertates que spectant et pertinent ad legem de Brutoill' habendas et tenendas sibi et heredibus suis de nobis et heredibus nostris libere et quiete sicuti liberior villa tenet melius et liberius que sit de lege de Brutoill' sive tenere possit, ita quod nos nec heredes nostri aliquid possimus aliud exigere de predictis burgensibus vel heredibus suis nisi secundum tenorem carte pretaxate. Preterea dedimus cuilibet qui burgagium habet in predicta Sabbeburia licenciam habend(i) unam vaccam in nostro communi libere et quiete sibi et heredibus suis de nobis et heredibus nostris. Hiis testibus: domino Willelmo Marescallo comite Penbroc, domino Willelmo de Mandevilla comite Essessie, domino Radulfo Musard, domino Fulcone filio Warini, domino Willelmo Pantulfo, domino Hugone de Winonie, domino Roberto de Turwilla, domino Iohanne de Actona, domino Willelmo Crasso iuniore, domino Hamone^a Crasso, domino Waltero capellano de Sobbeburia, Iohanne de Greynvill, Hugone clerico qui hanc cartam scripsit cum multis aliis.

^a Simone in the ms., here corrected by comparison with no. 4 below.

2. *Confirmation by William Crassus son of William Crassus 'the younger' of the grants made to the burgesses of Sodbury by William Crassus 'primogenitus' his uncle, together with an undertaking that the court of Sodbury is to be held on Saturday and no other day.*

[1242 × 1270. ?Reworked or Spurious]

Glos. R.O., D 2071/T 2/2, copy s.xvi.

Omnibus presentem cartam visuris vel auditoris Willelmus Grassus filius Willelmi Grassi iunioris salutem. Noveritis nos concessisse et hac presenti carta nostra confirmasse burgensibus nostris de Sodburi et heredibus suis donum quod Willelmus Grassus primogenitus avunculus noster eisdem fecit et per cartam suam confirmavit, videlicet quod habeant et teneant omnes libertates que spectant et pertinent ad leges de Bristollia (*sic*) sibi et heredibus suis de nobis et heredibus nostris libere et quiete imperpetuum sicut liberior villa que sit de lege de Bristoll' (*sic*) melius et liberius tenet vel tenere possit, et quod quilibet qui burgagium vel aliquam libertatem ad burgagium spectantem habet in prenominate suburb(io) (*sic*), habeat unam vaccam in nostro communi libere et quiete sibi et heredibus suis de nobis et heredibus nostris prout carta prefati Willelmi Grassi primogeniti avunculi nostri quam inde habent testatur. Concessimus et(iam) pro nobis et heredibus nostris dictis burgensibus de Sodbury et heredibus suis quod curie in prefato suburbio teneantur sicuti temporibus antecessorum nostrorum teneri soliti erant, et hoc per diem sabbati tamen et non per alium diem contra voluntatem predictorum burgensium vel heredum eorum sine contradictione et impedimento, ita quod nos nec heredes nostri aliquo tempore aliquid aliud de predictis burgensibus vel heredibus suis extorquere vel exigere possimus contra tenorem presentis carte nostre. Hanc autem confirmationem, concessionem et donationem suprascriptam debemus nos et heredes nostri dictis burgensibus et heredibus suis warrantizare et defendere contra (omnes) mortales. Pro hac autem confirmatione, concessione et donatione dederunt nobis supradicti burgenses quatuor marcas argenti pre manibus, et quia volo (*sic*) quod hec nostra confirmatio, concessio, donatio et warrantizatio roboravitur et stabilitatis perpetue optineant, presentem cartam nostram sigilli nostri appositione roboravimus. Hiis testibus: domino Radulpho de Wyliton', domino Rogero de Lokynton', domino Iohanne de Galt' Marisco militibus, Iohanne de Aketon', Willelmo Grasso iuniore, Iordano Bissop, Willelmo de Cuigreson de Fremton', Stephano de Aketon' Turvile, Radulpho le Cu de Parva Sobbur' et aliis.

As pointed out to me by Nicholas Herbert, the reading *suburbio* in this transcript should be corrected to *Sobbeburia* as in the first text printed above, upon which the present text is modelled. The misreading here is another indication of forgery or reworking, as is the mixture of first person singular and plural.

3. *Confirmation by William Crassus the son of William Crassus 'the younger' to the burgesses of Sodbury, of the same liberties as are enjoyed by the men of Breteuil, together with rights to pasture a horse or a cow in his common pasture.*

[1242 × 1270. ?Reworked or Spurious]

Glos. R.O., D 2071/T 2/1, transcript s.xvi, much faded.

Omnibus presentem cartam visuris vel auditoris Willelmus Grassus filius Willelmi Grassi iunioris salutem. Sciatis nos dedisse burgensibus nostris de Sodburia omnes libertates que spectant

et pertinent (ad leges) de Bristoll' (*sic*), habendas et tenendas sibi et heredibus suis de nobis et heredibus nostris libere et quiete imperpetuum sicut liberior villa teneat que sit de lege de Bristoll' vel melius et liberius si teneri possit, et etiam concessimus dictis burgensibus et heredibus et cuilibet eorumdem licentiam habendi unum (equum) seu cabonum et unam vaccam in nostro marischo et in pratis nostris sibi et heredibus suis de nobis et heredibus nostris imperpetuum sine contradictione et impedimento, ita quod nos nec heredes nostri aliquo tempore aliquid aliud de predictis burgensibus vel heredibus suis extorquere vel exigere possimus contra tenorem presentis carte nostre. Hanc autem confirmationem, concessionem et donationem suprascriptam debemus nos et heredes nostri dictis burgensibus et heredibus suis warrantizare et defendere contra omnes mortales, et quia volo quod hec nostra confirmatio, concessio, donatio et warrantizatio robor firmitatis et stabilitatis perpetue obtineant, presentem cartam nostram sigilli nostri appositione roboravimus. Hiis testibus: domino Radulpho de Wiliton, domino Rogero de Lokynton, domino Roberto de Turwilla, Willelmo Grasso iuniore, Iohanne de Aketon, Iordano Bissop, Stephano de Aketon Turvile, Radulpho le Cu de Parva Sobbur' et aliis.

A similar mixture of first person plural and singular as in no. 2 above. The use of the noun *cabo* is probably anachronistic.

4. *Confirmation by William Crassus son of William Crassus 'the younger' to the burgesses of Sodbury of all the rights granted to them by charter of his uncle, William Crassus 'primogenitus', together with the right to pasture their beasts without number in his common pasture of Kingrove and Horwood.*

[Spurious]

Glos. R.O., D 2071/T 2/1, copy s.xvi.

Omnibus presentem cartam visuris vel audituris Willelmus Grassus filius Willelmi Grassi iunioris salutem. Sciatis nos dedisse, concessisse et hac presenti carta nostra confirmasse burgensibus nostris de Sodburia et heredibus suis donum quod Willelmus Grassus primogenitus avunculus noster eisdem fecit et per cartam suam confirmavit, videlicet quod habeant et teneant omnes libertates que spectant et pertinent ad leges de Bristollia (*sic*) sibi et heredibus suis de nobis et heredibus nostris libere et quiete imperpetuum sicut liberior villa que sit de lege de Bristoll' (*sic*) tenet melius et liberius sive tenere posset. Preterea dedimus, concessimus et hac presenti carta nostra confirmavimus pro nobis et heredibus nostris burgensibus nostris de Sodburia et heredibus suis et cuilibet qui burgagium vel aliquam libertatem ad burgagium spectantem habet in prenominato suburbio (quod) habeant seu habere possint per donationem et concessionem nostram equos, cabones et equas, vaccas et porcos, oves et boves et omnimoda catalla sine numero in nostro communi, videlicet in Kyngrove et in Horwode libere et quiete sibi et heredibus suis de nobis et heredibus nostris sine contradictione et impedimento, ita quod nos nec heredes nostri aliquo tempore aliquid aliud de predictis burgensibus vel heredibus suis extorquere vel exigere possimus contra tenorem presentis carte nostre. Hanc autem confirmationem, concessionem et donationem suprascriptam debemus nos et heredes nostri dictis burgensibus et heredibus suis warrantizare et defendere contra omnes mortales, et quia (volumus) quod hec nostra confirmatio, concessio, donatio et warrantizatio robor firmitatis et stabilitatis perpetue optineant, presentem cartam nostram sigilli nostri appositione roboravimus. Hiis testibus: domino Willelmo Marscallo comite Pembroc, domino Willelmo de Mandevilla comite Exsessie, domino

Radulpho Musard, domino Fulcone filio Warini, domino Willelmo Pantulfo, domino Hugone de Winone, domino Roberto de Turwillia, domino Iohanne de Actona, domino Willelmo Grasso iuniore, domino Hammone Grasso, domino Waltero capellano de Sodburia, Iohanne de Greynvill', Hugone clerico qui hanc cartam scripsit et multis aliis.

Clearly a forgery, since it combines the dispositive clauses of no. 2 above (after 1242) with the witness list of no. 1 (before 1227). Beyond this, the grammar is most inelegant, especially in the phrase from which the word *quod* is missing. The first person plural *volumus* supplied above may well have been written in the singular form *volo*, as in nos. 2–3 above.

5. *Inspeximus by William Crassus son of William Crassus 'the younger' of various awards that he had previously made to Adam 'the white' of Sodbury, of land and common pasture at Sodbury.*
[1242 × 1270. ?Reworked or Spurious]

Glos. R.O., D 2071/T 1. Mounted, dorse inaccessible. Approx. 292 × 175 + 20 mm. *Plica* for sealing *sur double queue*, but no sign of any slit, tag or seal impression. Much torn and perished in parts. Script of the early to mid 14th century. *Lacunae* in the existing ms. are shown in square brackets below, the missing words being supplied from a series of 18th-century English translations, taken from this deed and apparently also from the originals of nos. 1 and 2 below supplying the witness list to no. 2, all of these originals now missing, the translations being preserved in Glos. R.O. D 2071/E 41, a file of about twenty individual pieces.

INSPEXIMUS by William Grassus *primogenitus*, son of William Grassus *junior*, of certain charters in favour of Adam Albus, whose heir is Robert le Fayre, as follows:

(1) GRANT by William Grassus *primogenitus* son of William Grassus *junior* to Adam Albus of Sodbury (*Sobbury*) and his heirs and assigns in perpetuity, of half a virgate of land in the territory of Sodbury, and of three parts of an acre of land which lies near the great road, and the croft which Richard fitz Ralph used to hold, and two acres in the field called Mersche, namely those which John fitz Margery used to hold in place of the crofts, which lie near Holemed, and an acre of meadow in the pasture called Wrokhememed between the meadow of Adam Gardinarius and the meadow of Reginald del Brok, rendering two shillings and ten pence each year in four equal portions to William and his heirs and assigns. Warranty against all men and women. Witnesses: John de la Legrave, Ralph le Camera . . . , Henry . . . , William de Frempton, Roger de Wyke, Andrew de Wappeleygh, Robert chaplain who wrote the present writing.

Inspected and confirmed by William in commons, pastures and in all beasts, oxen and horses, cows and steers, pigs and sheep without number, in wood and plain, in feedings, pastures, water and in all other places within and without the vill. Witnesses: dom. Stephen the archdeacon, dom. Oliver le Cras, dom. Walter le Cras junior, dom. Reginald [of Wells], William de Fromphona, Silvester pincerna, William de la Legrave, Andrew de Wappeleygh, Richard clerk of Sodbury and many others. Also confirming another charter as follows:

(2) GRANT by the same William Grassus to the same Adam Albus of Sodbury and his heirs and assigns in perpetuity, of two fields [called Gallousfield], containing twenty acres of arable

land, and Tyrianes Rudingg' which contains eight acres of arable land, and a meadow called [Roth]med containing four acres, rendering sixpence each year to William and his heirs and assigns at Michaelmas. Adam has given William [30] marks and a palfrey in consideration. Warranty against all mortal men and women. Witnesses [Stephen the archdeacon, Sir Oliver le Cras, Sir Walter le Cras and Sir Reginald of Wells, William of Frompton, William of the Legrave, Robert the chaplain and many others].

(3) GRANT by the same to the same and his heirs and assigns in perpetuity, of the whole croft at [the Old Ditch] with ditches and hays, which Richard le Tanyur used to hold, and the land which used to belong to Richard de Rupe, which Richard exchanged with Richard de Quarrerria, and the whole meadow adjoining William's meadow at the head of the said croft, lying between the meadow which John [of the Rocke held, and the meadow] which Walter Gynego once held, as the meets and ditches divide it, granting also two [and a half] acres in the south field of Sodbury, namely those lying between the land which John de Sweteleigh held and the land which Hu[gh the Butcher] held, adjoining the road which leads to Estgrave from La Legrave, with licence to enclose the said croft and meadow, rendering annually five pounds of wax or thirty pence at five terms of the year in equal portions. Warranty against all mortals. Witnesses (not given).

Highly suspicious, bearing in mind the later disputes over commoners' rights at Sodbury, and the fact the first of the present texts appears to award the right to pasture beasts without number. Suspicious features include the fact that the document purports to be an original inspeximus, but seems never to have been sealed; the fact that the witness lists to the second and third documents are not copied out; the fact that the supposed inspeximus continues extremely awkwardly after the witness list to the original inspeximus *item alia carta*, and the fact the document ends with equal lack of sense with a note that the witnesses to the third charter may be found in the charter itself, and then the words *In huius rei testimonium supradictum est (sic)*. The date of the script is considerably later than the date of the supposed inspeximus. The witness named Stephen the archdeacon, presumably intended to stand for an incumbent of the archdeaconry of Gloucester, occurs in no other text of the period.

Acknowledgements

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Notes

1. For a general introduction, see A. Ballard and J. Tait, *British Borough Charters, 1042-1307* (2 vols., Cambridge, 1913-23); M. Beresford and H.P.R. Finberg, *English Medieval Boroughs, A Hand-List* (Newton Abbot, 1973).
2. Beresford and Finberg, *English Medieval Boroughs*, pp. 113-14.
3. See, for example, the local case of Painswick, cited by H.P.R. Finberg, 'The Genesis of the Gloucestershire Towns', in *Gloucestershire Studies*, ed. Finberg (Leicester, 1957), pp. 80-1.
4. See, for example, the remarks in *Trans. B.G.A.S.* 30 (1907), 179; 51 (1929), 9; F.F. Fox, *The History of the Parishes of Old Sodbury and of Little Sodbury and of the town of Chipping Sodbury* (Bristol, 1907), pp.19-25, repeated in the local histories by Couzens and Tily cited below.
5. R. Atkyns, *The Ancient and Present State of Glostershire* (London, 1712), pp. 660-1; (2nd edn., London, 1768), p. 347.

6. S. Rudder, *A New History of Gloucestershire* (Cirencester, 1779), pp. 672–3.
7. For the counts of Aumale, see *The Complete Peerage*, ed. G.E. Cockayne, revised by V. Gibbs, H.E. Doubleday, Lord Howard de Walden and G.H. White (London, 1910–57), 1, pp. 350–6.
8. M. Bateson, 'The Laws of Breteuil', *English Historical Review* 15 (1900), pp. 73–8, 302–18, 496–523, 754–7, esp. pp. 314–25. Excerpts from the charter printed by Rudder at p. 314 are reprinted from Bateson's notice by Ballard, *British Borough Charters 1216–1307* (Cambridge, 1923), pp. xxvii, 20.
9. Manchester, John Rylands Library MS. Latin 318, f.5v., printed in the appendix to this article. Besides the Agarde MSS at Manchester, another collection of Agarde's transcripts is deposited in the British Library as Stowe MSS. 527–31. When Agarde saw it, the Sodbury charter was in the possession of Robert Warner of Chipping Sodbury, who also owned 'an ancient charter of the liberties granted by the bailiffs of the city of Hereford'. Hereford and Chipping Sodbury were both boroughs founded according to the customs of Breteuil (Bateson, 'Laws of Breteuil', pp. 302–5), so that Robert Warner's Hereford charter had almost certainly been preserved as a guide to what these customs entailed. For Robert Warner of Vyne House in Old Sodbury, party to a lease in January 1595, see Bristol R.O., 08830(1a), with further leases involving (?his son) Richard Warner, dated 1610 and 1618 in *ibid.* 08830(1b) and 08830(2).
10. Sheffield Grace, *Memoirs of the Family of Grace* (2 vols., London 1823), i, p.10n.; P.A. Couzens, *A Few Chapters from the continuing story of 'the Sodburys'* (privately printed, 1972), pp. 35–7, 45–7, whence the account, copied almost word for word, by G. Tily, *The Three Sodburys, an Introduction* (Bristol, 1994), pp. 35–7, 41–2.
11. There is an extensive correspondence relating to these documents, in Bristol R.O., 08833–08837. Besides his work on Chipping Sodbury, Fox acquired various of the early charters of Kingswood abbey, purchased from Quaritch in the 1890s, and now in the Bristol University Library, Special Collections MSS. DM104, nos. 1–50.
12. Bristol R.O., 08833(19), Trenfield's receipt to Fox, dated 26 October 1904, and see *ibid.* 08837(5d); 08837(6); 08834(8–9b).
13. The most detailed of Fox's lists are to be found in Bristol R.O., 08837(7a) and 08837(46a–b), with the identity of the fourth document, relating to Hereford, specified in *ibid.* 08833(18). For this Hereford text, see also above n. 9. For John's charter to Bristol, now Bristol R.O., 01248, see *Earldom of Gloucester Charters; the Charters and Scribes of the Earls and Countesses of Gloucester to A.D. 1217*, ed. R.B. Patterson (Oxford, 1973), no. 10.
14. Grace, *Memoirs of the Family of Grace*, i, pp. 7–10.
15. *Calendar of Documents preserved in France, illustrative of the History of Great Britain and Ireland*, ed. J.H. Round (London, 1899), no. 1411, also in *Regesta Regum Anglo-Normannorum 1066–1154*, ed. H.W.C. Davis, C. Johnson, H.A. Cronne and R.H.C. Davis (4 vols., Oxford, 1913–69), ii, no. 1601, a confirmation by King Henry I to St. Etienne at Caen, to be dated 1124 × 1129, witnessed by Earl Robert and by William Crassus. See also *Antiquus Cartularius ecclesiae Baiocensis (Livre Noir)*, ed. V. Bourrienne (2 vols., Paris/Rouen, 1902–3), i, p. 50, for a grant to Bayeux cathedral 1135 × 1147 witnessed by Earl Robert and William Crassus.
16. L. Musset, *Les Actes de Guillaume le Conquérant et de la reine Mathilde pour les abbayes caennaises* (Caen, 1967), pp. 62, 64, and see p. 75, where a William Crassus witnesses a charter relating to the abbey, before 1082.
17. *Recueil des Actes de Henri II, roi d'Angleterre et duc de Normandie, concernant les provinces françaises et les affaires de France*, ed. L. Delisle and E. Berger (4 vols., Paris, 1906–27), ii, no. 28 (p. 126); Léchaudé d'Anisy, *Extrait des Chartes et autres actes Normands ou Anglo-Normands qui se trouvent dans les archives du Calvados* (2 vols., Caen, 1834–5), i, pp. 322–3 (no. 5).
18. For Earl Robert's acquisitions in lower Normandy, see *Earldom of Gloucester Charters*, ed. Patterson, no. 6 and n. There is a further copy of the text printed by Patterson in Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale MS. nouv.acq.Lat. 1828 (Red Book of Bayeux), ff. 46v.–47r. (no. 130).
19. *Regesta*, iii, no. 63; *Antiquus Cartularius ecclesiae Baiocensis*, ed. Bourrienne, i, p. 22.
20. *Earldom of Gloucester Charters*, ed. Patterson, no. 186; and see at least two further Norman charters of Earl William witnessed by William Crassus, not noticed by Patterson: Caen, Archives Départementales de Calvados H6510 (Cartulary of St. André-en-Gouffern), f. 22v. (no. 91); Caen, Musée des Beaux

Arts MS. Mancel 75, f. 462r. The second of these, in favour of the nuns of Villers-Canivet, is witnessed by William Crassus, Serlo his chaplain, William Crassus *parvus* and Reginald de St. Vincent 'the monk'.

21. Anisy, *Extrait des Chartes*, i, pp. 322–3 (no. 5), an award to St. Jean de Falaise dated 1178. I have assumed here that William *primogenitus*, Henry and Robert, the three brothers, were the sons of the grantor William Crassus. It is possible, though less likely, that they were the grantor's brothers, in which case the grantor might be identified with William Crassus 'the less' (*parvus*) who witnesses Earl William's grant to the nuns of Villers, above n. 20. For the suggested identity of their mother, see *The Cartulary of Bradenstoke Priory*, ed. V.C.M. London (Wilts. Rec. Soc. 35, 1979), no. 517 (misdated, in reality after 1203), where Waleswood in Yorkshire is said to have passed to William Crassus as a marriage portion from William (or in one version Ralph) *Taissy*. By the 1190s, the Crassus family also held the manor of Little Dalby in Leicestershire, which undoubtedly formed part of the Taisson fee held of the honour of Tickhill: Oxford, Bodleian Library MS. Wood empt.7 (Brooksby Cartulary), f.97r.; *The Red Book of the Exchequer*, ed. H. Hall (3 vols., Rolls Series, 1896), ii, 552. For the Taissons and their lands, see F.M. Powicke, *The Loss of Normandy 1189–1204, Studies in the History of the Angevin Empire* (2nd. edn., Manchester, 1961), pp. 352–3 and references there cited.
22. *Earldom of Gloucester Charters*, ed. Patterson, nos. 49, 100–1, 113, 115, 135, 159, 186.
23. N. Vincent, 'The Early Years of Keynsham Abbey', *Trans. B.G.A.S.* 111 (1993), p. 101 and n. The church of Old Sodbury had been awarded by Robert fitz Hamo to the monks of Tewkesbury, before 1107, and confirmed in 1148 by William, earl of Gloucester: *Calendar of Charter Rolls 1257–1300*, p. 490; *Earldom of Gloucester Charters*, ed. Patterson, no. 179. At the time of Domesday, Sodbury was a royal manor. It was apparently detached from the royal demesne before 1107, to form part of the honour of Earl Robert, son of Henry I.
24. *Pipe Roll 13 Henry II* (Pipe Roll Soc. 11, 1889), p. 146.
25. *Pipe Roll 18 Henry II* (Pipe Roll Soc. 18, 1894), p. 121; see *Pipe Roll 28 Henry II* (Pipe Roll Soc. 31, 1910), p. 26, and *Pipe Roll 31 Henry II* (Pipe Roll Soc. 34, 1913), p. 147, for further fines against William Crassus for forest offences in Gloucestershire, 1181–2 and 1184–5. For the confiscations of 1194–5, see *Pipe Roll 6 Richard I* (Pipe Roll Soc. new series 5, 1928), p. 3; *Pipe Roll 7 Richard I* (Pipe Roll Soc. new series 6, 1929), p. 59.
26. The date and the precise details of this marriage remain obscure. That William Crassus (fl. 1200) married a sister of William Marshal (d. 1219) is strongly suggested both by the award of Marshal land to the Crassus family, set out below, and by the fact that William Marshal the younger (d. 1231) refers to Anselm Crassus, son of William Crassus, as his *nepos*: D. Crouch, *William Marshal: Court, Career and Chivalry in the Angevin Empire 1147–1219* (London, 1990), p. 166 and n. See *Royal and other Historical Letters illustrative of the Reign of Henry III*, ed. W.W. Shirley (2 vols., Rolls Series, 1862–6), i, pp. 500–1 for a further reference by William Marshal the younger to his kinship to William Crassus. The date of the marriage can be estimated from the fact that in 1203 the king referred to William Crassus' sons as if none of them were married, suggesting that they were still relatively young: *Rotuli Litterarum Patentium in Turri Londinensi asservati*, ed. T. Duffus Hardy (Record Commission, 1835), p. 37.
27. Above n. 21.
28. In general, see D. Crouch, 'Normans and Anglo-Normans: A Divided Aristocracy?', in *England and Normandy in the Middle Ages*, ed. D. Bates and A. Curry (London, 1994), pp. 51–67.
29. *Rot. Lit. Pat.* pp. 33b, 37, 40b; Powicke, *Loss of Normandy*, pp. 52, 174, 229. In 1193/4 William appears as seneschal of Mortain in a charter issued by Count John: Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale MS. nouv. acq. franc. 21861, f. 200r. and v.; Archives Nationales MS. 4973, no. 830. Following his implication in the rebellion against Richard I, William had been restored to his lands and appears as a witness to a royal charter issued at Falaise in 1198: *The Itinerary of King Richard I*, ed. L. Landon (Pipe Roll Soc. new series 13, 1935), p. 141 (no. 550). By 1199–1200 he was serving as a royal justice of assize at Falaise: Alençon, Archives départementales de l'Orne H770 (drawn to my attention by Daniel Power). The same bundle contains a charter of William Crassus granting to the monks of St.-Evroul the whole fee of Robert de Soleng(nii) in St.-Evroul, bearing William's seal, a lion rampant, legend: SIGILLUM W^oLLELMI CRASSI.

30. Powicke, *Loss of Normandy*, pp. 174, 229n.
31. *Ibid.* p. 229.
32. *Ibid.* pp. 257 and n., 281; *Cartulaire Normand de Philippe-Auguste, Louis VIII, Saint-Louis et Philippe-le-Hardi*, ed. L. Delisle (Caen, 1882), nos. 76, 136.
33. *Rotuli Litterarum Clausarum in Turri Londinensi asservati*, ed. T. Duffus Hardy (2 vols., Record Commission, 1833–4), i, pp. 4, 101; *Rotuli Normanniae in Turri Londinensi asservati*, ed. T.D. Hardy (Record Commission, 1835), p. 127. The manor was subsequently restored to the St. Loe family, at some time before 1303: *Feudal Aids* (6 vols., H.M.S.O., 1899–1920), iv, pp. 279, 313.
34. For Castlegrace, see E. St. John Brooks, *Knights' Fees in Counties Wexford, Carlow and Kilkenny, 13th–15th century* (Dublin, 1950), pp. 71–4; *Letters of Henry III*, ed. Shirley, i, pp. 290–2. For Great Burstead, a Marshal fee, held in 1214 by William Crassus 'the younger', and subsequently, before 1231, by Richard Siward, another Marshal knight, see *Curia Regis Rolls of the Reigns of Richard I, John and Henry III preserved in the Public Record Office* (17 vols., H.M.S.O., 1922–92), vii, p. 163; viii, p. 323; *Placita de Quo Warranto*, ed. W. Illingworth and J. Caley (Record Commission, 1818), p. 237b.
35. *Bradenstoke Cartulary*, nos. 428–30, 517–19.
36. Matthew Paris, *Chronica Majora*, ed. H.R. Luard (7 vols., Rolls Series, 1872–83), iv, pp. 647, 655.
37. *Calendar of Ormonde Deeds I, 1172–1230*, ed. E. Curtis (Dublin, 1932), nos. 52, 76, 293; St. John Brooks, *Knights' Fees*, p. 72; *Curia Regis Rolls*, xiii, no. 117; *Victoria County History Worcestershire*, iv, p. 66; *Rot.Lit.Claus.* ii, pp. 63, 160; *Close Rolls 1227–31*, p. 264.
38. *Patent Rolls 1225–32*, p. 432; *Close Rolls 1227–31*, pp. 504, 541; *Calendar of Ormonde Deeds I*, no. 52; *Letters of Henry III*, ed. Shirley, i, pp. 290–2, 500–1.
39. *Patent Rolls 1225–32*, p. 437; *Close Rolls 1227–31*, p. 503; for his lands at Cheddar in Somerset, see *Close Rolls 1231–4*, pp. 383, 437.
40. *Placita Quo Warranto*, p. 170; *Calendar of Charter Rolls 1226–57*, p. 462.
41. *Rot.Lit.Pat.* p. 169b
42. *Patent Rolls 1216–25*, p. 454; *Rot.Lit.Claus.* ii p. 37; *Roll of Divers Accounts for the early years of the reign of Henry III*, ed. F.A. Cazel (Pipe Roll Soc. new series 44, 1982), pp. 1, 51; *Rot.Lit.Claus.* ii, p. 23b, this latter referring to William's lands in Somerset, perhaps to be identified as Newton St. Loe, previously recorded in the possession of William Crassus.
43. *Rot.Lit.Claus.* ii, p. 23b; *Patent Rolls 1216–25*, p. 574.
44. *Letters of Henry III*, ed. Shirley, i, pp. 290–2.
45. *Close Rolls 1227–31*, p. 587.
46. *Close Rolls 1231–4*, pp. 259, 271, 366, 383, 437, 543; *Calendar of Patent Rolls 1232–47*, p. 49; Public Record Office, C 60/32, m. 3.
47. Paris, *Chronica Majora*, iii, p. 249.
48. *Calendar of Patent Rolls 1232–47*, p. 304; *Close Rolls 1237–42*, pp. 384, 395, 448, referring to William's widow named Sibilla. William Crassus *primogenitus* the elder appears to have been still alive between 1234 and 1241, when he witnessed a charter of Gilbert Marshal earl of Pembroke: British Library, Add. Charter 8412. In 1248, a local jury stated that the manor of Sodbury was held by a William Crassus who was of age but not yet knighted: *Liber Feodorum. The Book of Fees commonly called Testa de Nevill* (3 vols., H.M.S.O., 1920–41), ii, p. 1407.
49. *Calendar of Charter Rolls 1257–1300*, p. 156; *Calendar of Documents relating to Ireland preserved in Her Majesty's Public Record Office*, ed. H.S. Sweetman and G.F. Handcock (5 vols., London, 1875–86), ii, no. 2158; St. John Brooks, *Knights' Fees*, pp. 73–4. In 1295, at the death of Gilbert de Clare, earl of Gloucester, Sodbury is described as being held of the honour of Gloucester as a single knight's fee, then in the possession of the heir of William le Gras: *Calendar of Inquisitions Post Mortem*, iii, pp. 236, 250 (no. 371).
50. *Calendar of Close Rolls 1288–96*, pp. 96, 147, 163; *Calendar of Close Rolls 1307–13*, p. 132; see *Calendar of Patent Rolls 1307–13*, p. 526. For Thomas Weyland, see M. Prestwich, *Edward I* (London, 1988), pp. 339, 368.
51. *Calendar of Charter Rolls 1226–57*, p. 173.
52. *Rot.Lit.Claus.* i, p. 368.

53. *Calendar of Charter Rolls 1226–57*, p. 43; see *Calendar of Charter Rolls 1257–1300*, p. 156, where in 1270 a Monday market and a fair from 28 to 30 August were confirmed to William Weyland, successor to the Crassus family as lord of Sodbury.
54. As suggested by M. Beresford, *New Towns of the Middle Ages* (London, 1967), p. 441, and see plate 6 for a splendid illustration of the borough's location.
55. Finberg, 'The Genesis of the Gloucestershire Towns', p. 66.
56. See, for example, the three new towns established after 1217 by Peter des Roches, William Marshal's colleague in the guardianship of King Henry III: M. Beresford, 'The Six New Towns of the Bishops of Winchester', *Medieval Archaeol.* 3 (1959), pp. 187–215.
57. Bateson, 'Laws of Breteuil', esp. pp. 517–22; for the charters of Haverfordwest, Laugharne and Newport, see *Calendar of Charter Rolls 1327–41*, pp. 227–8; *Archaeologia Cambrensis* 4th series 10 (1879), suppl. pp. xl–xliii; *Baronia de Kemeys from the original documents at Bronwydd* (Cambria Archaeol. Association, London, c. 1860), p. 49.
58. Glos. R.O., D 556/T 1/1–3, noticed by Beresford and Finberg, *English Medieval Boroughs*, p. 116. For a list of 10 of the burgesses at Tetbury granted to Aconbury priory c. 1230, see Arundel Castle, Duke of Norfolk MS. VC/101, all of which texts I hope to publish in due course.
59. Finberg, 'Genesis of the Gloucestershire Towns', pp. 81–2.
60. Apart from the Marshal's kinsman William de Mandeville earl of Essex, the inter-related Marcher barons Fulk fitz Warin and William Pantulf, and the grantor's, William *primogenitus*'s, brothers William and Hamo, the charter is witnessed by members of the families of Turville and Greinville, associated with the Marshal honour of Long Crendon, and by Ralph Musard, an adherent of William Marshal I. For various of these men, see Crouch, *William Marshal*, pp. 118, 129, 137, 140–1, 195; J. Meisel, *Barons of the Welsh Frontier* (Lincoln, Nebraska, 1980), esp. pp. 27, 37; *English Episcopal Acta IX: Winchester 1205–38*, ed. N. Vincent (Oxford, 1994), p. 203.
61. Glos. R.O., D 2071/L 1, whence the detailed account of the inclosure dispute by Fox, *History of Chipping Sodbury*, pp. 50–2.