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RESEARCH ARTICLE

'A large population, famous for their military qualities': Londoners at war, *c.* 1000–1200

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Abstract

The scholarship of high medieval warfare tends not to emphasize the contribution made by urban communities, regarding cities as the passive objects of military campaigning. This article shows that the inhabitants of medieval London, however, had emerged as an organized military community from an early date, and were regarded by contemporaries as unusually disciplined, effective, fighters.

Urban communities, and in particular, the inhabitants of the city of London, played a more important role in the military history of high medieval England than has been understood.[1] While medieval military scholarship has presented us with an increasingly sophisticated view of how English armies worked, broadening out from the familiar question of knight service, to address the importance of the royal household in arms and the role played by mercenaries,[2] consideration of the role of urban communities in war has not yet received systematic attention from either military or urban historians of the High Middle Ages.[3] This is somewhat surprising, because scholars of the second Viking age, and of Alfredian Wessex, are highly aware of the military importance of the Anglo-Saxon *burhs*, and indeed of King Alfred the Great's (871–86) restoration of the defences of London.[4] Historians of the Late Middle Ages, meanwhile, have emphasized the

[1]A very early version of this article was given at the 'Medieval London and the World' conference hosted by the London Medieval Society in May 2015. I am grateful to the organizers of the conference, and to the delegates for their questions and comments, and to both of the anonymous reviewers and Dr Laura Crombie for their helpful comments on earlier drafts.

[2]Church's summary of the historiography on royal military households is indispensable. S. Church, *The Household Knights of King John* (Cambridge, 1999), 1–15.

[3]Even Susan Reynolds' classic *An Introduction to the History of English Medieval Towns* (Oxford, 1977) confines almost all of its discussion of cities and warfare to a few pages on the Late Middle Ages, 146–9.

[4]S. Keynes, 'Alfred and the Mercians', in M. Blackburn and D. Dumville (eds.), *Kings, Currency, and Alliances: History and Coinage of Southern England in the Ninth Century* (Woodbridge, 1988), 1–46, at 23–4. For a recent discussion that emphasizes the systematic organization of the Alfredian system and the degeneration of that system under his successors, see R. Abels, 'The costs and consequences of Anglo-Saxon civil defence, 878–1066', in J. Baker, S. Brookes and A. Reynolds (eds.), *Landscapes of Defence in Early Medieval Europe* (Turnhout, 2013), 195–222. For the role of *burhs* in both civil defence

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importance of forces from London and the Cinque Ports in particular, operating under tight royal control from the thirteenth century onwards.[5] Their colleagues working on continental history have emphasized the important role of cities from the mid-twelfth century on[6] and of urban organizations such as crossbow confraternities, especially in the age of the Hundred Years War.[7] There is an important and growing body of literature on city walls, considered both as defences and as markers of urban status and corporate identity.[8] It is a mistake, however, to focus on the importance of city walls to the exclusion of those that lived within them. The prevailing tendency is for cities to be discussed as the passive objects of medieval warfare, sites of strategic significance which the active players besieged or mistreated.[9] Much is written in the scholarship on the Laws of War that emphasizes the savage treatment of conquerors when medieval cities fell to storm, for instance.[10] Some scholars emphasize the role of war in stimulating urban economies,[11] while others emphasize that the citizenry of key cities were *politically* active.[12] It is far less common, however, to think of urban communities as themselves active agents in the arena of high medieval English military history.[13]

and the wider project of developing 'joined-up' government, see G. Williams, 'Military and non-military functions of the Anglo-Saxon burh, c. 878–978', in *ibid.*, 129–64.

[5]D. Bachrach, 'Urban military forces of England and Germany c. 1240 – c. 1315, a comparison', in J. France (ed.), *Mercenaries and Paid Men* (Leiden, 2008), 231–42.

[6]J. Verbruggen, *The Art of Warfare in Western Europe in the Middle Ages from the Eighth Century to c. 1340* (Woodbridge, 1997), esp. 144–59. Though he is dismissive in some places of non-knightly troops, he does regard the cities of northern Italy as producing 'the first good foot soldiers of the second half of the twelfth century'. Scholars of the Iberian Peninsula often place heavy emphasis on the role of urban militias in campaigning and raiding in the same period. For instance, J. Powers, 'Life on the cutting edge: the besieged town on the Luso-Hispanic frontier in the twelfth century', in I.A. Corfis and M. Wolfe (eds.), *The Medieval City under Siege* (Woodbridge, 1995), 17–34.

[7]For instance J. Verbruggen, *The Battle of the Golden Spurs: Courtrai 11th July 1302 – A Contribution to the History of Flanders' War of Liberation, 1297–1305* (Cambridge, 2005), and especially L. Crombie, *Archery and Crossbow Guilds in Medieval Flanders, 1300–1500* (Woodbridge, 2016).

[8]For instance, O. Creighton and R. Higham, *Medieval Town Walls: An Archaeology and Social History of Urban Defence* (Stroud, 2005), and J. Tracy (ed.), *City Walls: the Urban Enceinte in Global Perspective* (Cambridge, 2000).

[9]It is striking that survey and reference books on medieval military history do not generally identify the involvement of towns and cities in warfare as significant. The *Routledge Companion to Medieval Warfare* has no discussion of urban warfare in its 'Military Topics'. J. Bradbury, *The Routledge Companion to Medieval Warfare* (London, 2004). J. France, *Western Warfare in the Age of the Crusades 1000–1300* (London, 1999), also does not address the subject.

[10]J. Bradbury, *The Medieval Siege* (Woodbridge, 1992), 317–24.

[11]S.R. Jones, *York: The Making of a City 1068–1350* (Oxford, 2013), 316.

[12]L. Diggelmann, 'Chronicles and crowds: accounts of urban unrest in Norman cities, 1090–1160', in A. Brown and J. Dumolyn (eds.), *Medieval Urban Culture* (Turnhout, 2017), 111–23. With a slightly later emphasis, B. Weiler, *Kingship, Rebellion and Political Culture: England and Germany, c. 1215–1250* (Basingstoke, 2007), 152–9. Eliza Hartrich has suggested that the men of London were drawn into the abortive revolt of 1328–29 by their belief that they had a unique position as the guarantors of political order: E. Hartrich, 'Urban identity and political rebellion: London and Henry of Lancaster's Revolt, 1328–29', in W. Ormrod (ed.), *Fourteenth Century England*, vol. VII (Woodbridge, 2012), 89–105.

[13]An important exception is J. Beeler, *Warfare in England, 1066–1189* (Ithaca, 1966), 314–16. He also emphasized the exceptional status of London in this period, though the significance of his remarks do not seem to have been much recognized since. Sarah Rees Jones does indicate the active nature of York's citizens briefly in *eadem*, *York*, 117 and 127.

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It is possible, however, to learn a good deal about the influence and even the organization of military forces within some urban settlements from an early date. In the history of medieval urban development, and of the development of London in particular, two accounts of the medieval city have loomed large: the *Description of London* embedded in the *Life* of Saint Thomas Becket (*c.* 1120–70) by William FitzStephen, and accounts of the revolt of William Longbeard (1196). The latter in particular occupies an important place in the scholarship, where it often represents the emergence of a self-conscious, unruly and violently active urban populace for the first time.[14] The former is usually discussed as a formulaic example of *encomium urbis*. It is the contention of this article, however, that William FitzStephen's account of the military virtues of Londoners is much the more representative of the military history of the city in the period, and that the William Longbeard revolt was an aberration. We will show that that the men of London were militarily efficacious, well-organized, impressed contemporaries with their prowess and were an active element in the wars of the High Middle Ages to a degree that has been insufficiently recognized.

The life of St Thomas and the revolt of William Fitz-Osbert

The most famous account of high medieval London is William FitzStephen's *Description of London*, itself by far the best-known part of his *Life of Saint Thomas, Archbishop of Canterbury and Martyr*, though it has often circulated, and been edited and translated almost as a freestanding work. It claimed that:

> This city wins honour by its men and glory by its arms and has a multitude of inhabitants, so that at the time of the calamitous wars of King Stephen's reign the men going forth from it to be mustered were reckoned twenty thousand armed horsemen and sixty thousand footsoldiers.[15]

William also lavished praise on the city for its arms imports, for tournaments in which the young men of the city participated on horseback, javelin throwing, archery and wrestling. He even alleged that the city was since ancient days bound by prophecy to produce conquerors, including the Emperor Constantine, Henry the Young King (the eldest son of King Henry II) and St Thomas.[16] FitzStephen was

[14]For example, S. Cohn, *Popular Protest in Late Medieval English Towns* (Cambridge, 2013), 6, 25, 162, 177, 321, 326; C. West, 'Urban populations and associations', in J. Crick and E. van Houts (eds.), *A Social History of England, 900–1200* (Cambridge, 2011), 198–207, at 202. For a recent treatment that places Longbeard into the context of contemporary asceticism as well, see D. Alexander, 'William Longbeard: a rebel holy man of twelfth-century England', *Viator*, 48 (2017), 125–49.

[15]'Urbs ista viris est honorata, armis decorate, multo habitatore populosa; ut tempore bellicae cladis, jubente rege Stephano, bello apti ex ea exeuntes ostentui haberentur, et viginti millia armatorum equitum, sexaginta millia peditum aestimarentur.' William FitzStephen, *Vita Sancti Thomae, Cantuarensis Archiepiscopi et Martyris*, in James Robertson (ed.), *Materials for the History of Thomas Becket, Archbishop of Canterbury* (canonized by Pope Alexander III, AD 1173) (London, 1877), iii, 4. The English translation is taken from F. Stenton, *Norman London: An Essay with a Translation of William FitzStephen's Description by H.E. Butler* (London, 1934), 27.

[16]Stenton, *Norman London*, 30–2. On the role of activities such as this in the shaping of twelfth-century martial culture, see M. Strickland, *Henry the Young King, 1155–1183* (New Haven, 2017), 66–7.

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certainly exaggerating the number of troops that London could produce, but it is clear that he was keen to draw attention to both the military quality of the citizenry of London and the number of soldiers that could be mobilized there. If, as seems likely, William FitzStephen was particularly concerned to broaden the appeal of Thomas' cult, his unique emphasis on Thomas' martial qualities and his praise for the military qualities of Londoners may have been a two pronged attempt to convince a militarily proud citizenry to adopt Thomas as their preferred saint.[17] We might choose to dismiss this as typical of the period, either as a formulaic literary affectation or as part of a wider pattern of the military importance of English cities. Scholars have often emphasized the formulaic nature of depictions of cities in medieval narratives. FitzStephen's *Description*, in particular, has been intensively studied from this angle and shows influences from Plato to Geoffrey of Monmouth.[18] As we will see, however, FitzStephen's remarks are comparable to those made by a range of other writers in this period in their accounts of London, but quite different from descriptions of other cities.

A generation later, in 1196, while Richard the Lionheart was distracted by his wars against the Kingdom of France, some of the population of London went into revolt, led by William Fitz-Osbert (sometimes called William Longbeard). Roger of Howden described its origins in these terms:

> …a disturbance arose between the citizens of London. For, more frequently than usual, in consequence of the king's captivity and other accidents, aids to no small amount were imposed upon them, and the rich men, sparing their own purses, wanted the poor to pay everything. On a certain lawyer, William Fitz-Osbert by name, or Longbeard, becoming sensible of this, being inflamed by zeal for justice and equity, he became the champion of the poor, it being his wish that every person, both rich as well as poor, should give according to his property and means, for all the necessities of the state; and going across the sea to the king, he demanded his protection for himself and the people.[19]

[17]See D. Gerrard, 'Chivalry, war and clerical identity: England and Normandy c. 1056–1226', in R. Kotecki and J. Maciejewski (eds.), *Ecclesia et Violentia: Violence against the Church and Violence within the Church in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge, 2014), 102–21, and D. Gerrard, *The Church at War: The Military Activities of Bishops, Abbots and Other Clergy in England, c. 900–1200* (London, 2017), esp. 46–7.

[18]For an exceptionally full example, arguing strongly for the roots of the *Description* in classical literature, see J. Scattergood, 'Misrepresenting the city: genre, intertextuality and FitzStephen's Description of London (c. 1173)', in J. Scattergood (ed.), *Reading the Past. Essays on Medieval and Renaissance Literature* (Dublin, 1996), 15–36, at 25–36. For an excellent general summary of the place *of encomia urbis* in medieval European literature, including its roots in classical literature, see H. Fulton, 'The encomium urbis in medieval Welsh poetry', *Proceedings of the Harvard Celtic Colloquium*, 26/7 (2006/07), 54–72.

[19]'orta est dissensio inter cives Londoniarum. Frequentius enim solito propter regis captionem et alia accidentia imponebantur eis auxilia non modica, et divites propriis parcentes marsupiis volebant ut pauperes solverent universa. Quod cum quidam legis peritus, videlicet Willelmus cum Barba, filius Osberti, videret, zelo justitiae et aequitatis accensus, factus est pauperum advocatus; volens quod unusquisque, tam dives quam pauper, secundum mobilia et facultates suas daret ad universa civitatis negotia; et abiit ad regem trans mare, et impetravit ab eo pacem sibi et populo.' Roger of Howden, *Chronica magistri Rogeri de Houedene*, ed. W. Stubbs, 4 vols. (London, 1868–71), vol. IV, 5–6. This translation is taken

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Howden went on to say that the king's justiciar and archbishop of Canterbury, Hubert Walter, was furious at having his authority circumvented in such a fashion. He arrested a number of the city's merchants, and attempted to apprehend Fitz-Osbert, who resisted and fortified the church of St Mary le Bow against him. The archbishop's military force was too strong for the rebels, however. The church was soon surrounded and the rebels smoked out. Fitz-Osbert was stabbed, dragged through the streets of the city and executed.[20] William of Newburgh's account of Fitz-Osbert's revolt is more elaborate and far more aggressive. His version of Fitz-Osbert is a ranting demagogue who paraded around the city with his concubine and crowds of the poor, whom he ensnared with utopian promises. Howden at least acknowledged that Fitz-Osbert went first to the king to plead his case, and that he built on the *popular perception* that the poor were bearing an unfair portion of the government's financial exactions.[21]

This remains, however, the closest we get to an image of the London rebel as an aggressive social revolutionary in our period. It is the only occasion on which a party of Londoners are portrayed as acting under the influence of a named leader.[22] Crucially, it is the only occasion in the whole period under discussion where Londoners are presented as a socially divided community, and it seems unlikely to be a coincidence that it is also the only occasion on which they were seen to be defeated swiftly, decisively and without earning praise from chroniclers for their military qualities. As we will see, while the Fitz-Osbert revolt is well known, and a significant event in its own right, it is entirely atypical of the military history of London for the previous two centuries. Perhaps the most important treatment of Fitz-Osbert's revolt in the last few years, that by Alan Cooper, has sought to place the uprising not in the context of the long history of Londoners' organized violence, but in the context of unusual social stresses emerging in the late twelfth century as a result of the failure of the third Crusade, ongoing war with France and serious economic dislocation.[23]

These two accounts offer very different views of medieval London at war. The first suggests an orderly military community, with sound organization, capable of producing soldiers of sufficient skill and in sufficient numbers to impress contemporary observers as something both distinctive, and significant. The latter suggests that the city was home to a volatile mob, easily led by a demagogue who promised revolution and equally easily put down by firm government action.

from Roger of Howden, *The Annals of Roger de Hoveden Comprising the History of England and of Other Countries of Europe from AD 732 to AD 1201*, trans. H. Riley, 2 vols. (London, 1853), vol. II, 388.

[20]Howden, *Chronica*, 6; Cohn, *Popular Protest*, 162–3; Gerrard, *The Church at War*, 51.

[21]William of Newburgh, *The History of English Affairs*, in *Chronicles of the Reigns of Stephen, Henry II., and Richard I*, ed. R. Howlett, 2 vols. (London, 1884), vol. II, 270. For an important discussion of the different sources, see J. Gillingham, 'The historian as judge: William of Newburgh and Hubert Walter', *English Historical Review*, 119 (2004), 1275–87.

[22]Indeed, according to William of Newburgh, he briefly became the subject of a martyr's cult among the poor of the city. As Cohn, *Popular Protest*, 25, has pointed out, even in later medieval material, it is rare for English chroniclers to divide revolting city dwellers into social classes.

[23]A. Cooper, '1190, William Longbeard and the crisis of Angevin England', in S.R. Jones and S. Watson (eds.), *Christians and Jews in Angevin England: The York Massacre of 1190, Narratives and Contexts* (Woodbridge, 2013), 91–105.

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Longbeard's revolt was a watershed in the history of the city, but it makes a poor starting point for the emergence of military effectiveness or of a distinctive urban identity at London. Instead, a considerable range of evidence can be assembled that suggests we should be thinking of London as the site of an autonomous, well-organized military culture that commanded respect from contemporaries for up to two centuries before Longbeard's riot. On the other hand, William FitzStephen's report may well express values common to some medieval *encomia urbis*, but it also seems to be broadly accurate.

Urban defences and military organization to Henry I

As has been pointed out above, the development of the Alfredian *burh* system looms large in the military history of the pre-Conquest period. Though Rory Naismith has recently cautioned against over-reading the fragmentary Alfredian archaeological record,[24] it seems increasingly clear that Alfred's work at London was peculiar in its scale and importance, extending beyond merely removing the population from *Lundenwic* to back inside the Roman defences of *Lundenburh*. Jeremy Haslam has recently outlined the king's work there as the construction of a complicated interlocking system of planned streets, encircling walls and the new bridge across the Thames, linking the *burh* north of the river with Southwark, comparable to *burh*-bridge units in Frankia. In Haslam's view, this was critical both to control access up the Thames itself as well as land routes across southern England.[25] From the middle of the tenth century, the term *burh-thegn* began to appear as a title in English charters.[26] Edgar the Peaceable granted a charter to London's *Cnihtengild*, privileges that were later renewed in a writ of Edward the Confessor.[27] It is difficult to be certain what precise function the London *Cnihtengild* had, though we can make some well-informed speculations.[28] As we will see, the *Cnihtengild* was understood by the Normans as representing an association of warriors (*militum*). The regulations that survive from before 1000 of a Cambridge Thegn's Guild, much concerned with the consequences of bloodshed and the need to keep lower-rank retainers in line, are an important part of Richard Holt's argument that tenth-century *burh* society was dominated by the military aristocracy.[29] Edward the Confessor's writ,

[24]R. Naismith, *Citadel of the Saxons: The Rise of Early London* (London, 2019), 121–2.

[25]J. Haslam, 'King Alfred and the development of London', *London Archaeologist* (Spring 2010), 208–12. For similar remarks focused more on the national importance of the defences, see Abels, 'Costs and consequences'. On the importance and development of Southwark (a jurisdictionally distinct settlement in the post-Alfredian period, see Naismith, *Citadel*, 127–8.

[26]A. Langlands, 'Placing the burh in Searobyrg: rethinking the urban topography of early medieval Salisbury', *Wiltshire Archaeological and Natural History Magazine*, 107 (2014), 5, 8, 9. See *Prosopography of Anglo-Saxon England* (*PASE*) – Aelfsige 53, Aethelric 67, Edward 13, Hugelin 1, Titsan 1. See also Wynnstan 3 (not given the title in *PASE*), but that he held it is made clear in Electronic Sawyer 789. In the same period, it seems, the Thames was fortified with wooden stakes. T. Dyson and J. Schofield, 'Saxon London', in J. Haslam (ed.), *Anglo-Saxon Towns in Southern England* (Chichester, 1984), 285–314, at 298.

[27]C. Brooke, *London, 800–1216: The Shaping of a City* (London, 1975), 96–7. The first charter that notes the presence of a *Cnihtengild* at Canterbury dates from the mid-ninth century. There is, however, broad agreement that this earlier term did not denote a military organization: see Reynolds, *Introduction*, 28.

[28]On these problems, see Reynolds, *Introduction*, 82.

[29]R. Holt, 'The urban transformation in England', *Anglo Norman Studies*, 32 (2009/10), 57–78, at 70.

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meanwhile, established royal protection for the men of the guild.[30] They held lands in a well-defined strip at the eastern edge of the city, and, according to a later tradition, they had further rights on the south side of the river, 'as far as they could throw their lances'.[31] In short, the *Cnihtengild* was almost certainly a respectable, permanent association of aristocratic warriors endowed by Edgar with lands and rights that suggest it had a particular responsibility for defending the city from attacks coming from the Thames estuary, though what relation, if any, that association had with 'ordinary' Londoners when they were summoned to war is not attested in any of our sources.[32] The antiquarian, John Stow, who in his survey of 1603 evoked an order of 13 knights: 'welbeloued to the king and realme…[who] should victoriously accomplish three combates, one aboue the ground, one vnder ground, and the third in the water, and after this at a certaine day in East Smithfield, they should run with Speares against all commers'.[33] We do not, of course need to accept this picturesque description as accurate. It would, however, be very interesting indeed to know his source for that passage, not least because in the charter transferring the lands of the *Cnihtengild* to Holy Trinity, 15 knights are listed – which is similar to but different from Stow's figure. That aside, there is enough cause tentatively to suggest that the *Cnihtengild* of London were exactly what a fairly literal reading of the phrase 'Knights' Guild' would suggest, and they were planted where they could be militarily useful in the defence of the city.[34] Like most medieval guilds, the Knights' Guild doubtless had an array of religious and social functions beyond the narrow scope of its founder's concerns, and we might speculate that its military functions were already becoming outmoded in the eleventh century when Cnut may have installed *housecarls* in both London and the north,[35] and obsolete in the aftermath of the Norman Conquest. Though English troops were absorbed into the Conqueror's armies very early in the reign,[36] leaving the defence of London even partly in the hands of an organized association of Englishmen would have been risky at best. The construction of the White Tower, held by a Norman castellan, would protect the city's eastern approach in the future. Henry I (1100–35) did grant one confirmation of the guild's privileges, but in 1125, though the dignity of its members was still acknowledged and the *Cnihta gilda* were called both 'burgesses of London' and 'born of the ancient noble knights of the English',[37]

[30]The writ is quoted in full in Brooke, *London*, 97.

[31]*Ibid*., 98.

[32]It is worth noting that the bastions of the Roman defences of London had also been positioned with particular care to protect the city from the East. Dyson and Schofield, 'Saxon London', 286.

[33]J. Stow, 'Portsoken Warde', in C.L. Kingsford (ed.), *A Survey of London. Reprinted from the Text of 1603* (Oxford, 1908), 120–9, www.british-history.ac.uk/no-series/survey-of-london-stow/1603/pp120–129, accessed 9 Jan. 2020.

[34]Unwin once called this view 'not unlikely, but not proven': G. Unwin, *The Gilds and Companies of London*, 4th edn (Watford, 1968), 26.

[35]C.W. Hollister, *Anglo-Saxon Military Institutions on the Eve of the Norman Conquest* (Oxford, 1962), 13.

[36]Both D and E Manuscripts of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle attest that by 1074, English troops were already serving in William's armies in Maine. J. Earle (ed.), *Two of the Saxon Chronicles Parallel with Supplementary Extracts from the Others* (Oxford, 1865), 211.

[37]'Burgenses londonie ex illa antiqua nobilium militum Anglorum progenie', fos. cxxx–cxxxix, in R.R. Sharpe (ed.), *Calendar of Letter-Books of the City of London: c. 1291–1309* (London, 1901), 210–27, www.british-history.ac.uk/london-letter-books/volc/pp210–227, accessed 9 Jan. 2020.

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the guild was quietly dismantled and its lands given to the new foundation of Holy Trinity Priory, Aldgate.[38]

It is from this same period that evidence of a new military organization of the city begins to emerge. Like the rural hundreds, to which they were closely comparable, the city wards, supervised by aldermen, seem to have been the basis of military administration in twelfth-century London.[39] They are first attested in a survey of the lands of St Paul's in London, *c.* 1128–32,[40] very shortly after the dissolution of the *Cnihtengild.* In peacetime, these wards were responsible for organizing adult males to keep watch. In wartime, they were responsible for defending sections of the city wall, under the command of their aldermen. There is some fourteenth-century evidence (accepted as representing Norman practice by both Frank Stenton and John Beeler) that suggests the lord of Baynard Castle had responsibility for mustering the men of the city at the west door of St Paul's, where he would receive the banner of the city, appoint a marshal and organize the citizenry.[41] These arrangements seem to have been effective, for in 1145, King Stephen was able to lead a 'formidable and large army of the men of London' to capture Robert of Gloucester's fortress at Faringdon.[42]

So far, then, the general interpretation of the military history of London suggested here can be slotted very neatly into the general history of English government in the tenth, eleventh and twelfth centuries. Organizational structures developed in the mid-tenth century with clear parallels in other parts of the Anglo-Saxon kingdom, apparently adapted particularly to defence against seaborne opponents from the east. These were rendered somewhat obsolete by the Norman Conquest, when the key military challenge came to be the suppression of rebellion rather than the resistance of invasion, and in particular by the development of large stone castles, and were substantially replaced during the reign of the reform-minded Henry I. Indeed, after this point, it becomes impossible to separate the history of London's military organization from that of the wider English state. Though Henry II's *Assize of Arms*, for instance, specifies that burgesses should not retain armaments beyond those necessary to fulfil the requirements of royal service,

[38]See H. Davis, R. Whitwell, C. Johnson and H. Cronne (eds.), *Regesta Regum Anglo-Normannorum, 1066–1154*, 4 vols. (Oxford, 1913–69), vol. III, No. 1316 (p. 176), No. 1467 (p. 202) and No. 1793 (p. 269).

[39]Reynolds, *Introduction*, 119; Stenton, *Norman London*, 9. On the later history of the ward as a key administrative unit of the city, see C. Barron, 'Lay solidarities: the wards of medieval London', in P. Stafford, J. Martindale and J. Nelson (eds.), *Law, Laity and Solidarities: Essays in Honour of Susan Reynolds* (Manchester, 2001), 218–33.

[40]H. Davis, 'London lands of St Paul's, 1066–1135', in A. Little and F. Powicke (eds.), *Essays in Medieval History Presented to Thomas Frederick Tout* (Manchester, 1925), 45–60, remains key. See also A. Beaven, 'Aldermen of the city of London: Portsoken ward', in *The Aldermen of the City of London Temp. Henry III - 1912* (London, Corporation of the City of London, 1908), 179–88, www.british-history.ac.uk/no-series/london-aldermen/hen3–1912/pp179–188, accessed 9 Jan. 2020.

[41]Beeler, *Warfare in England*, 315–16; Stenton, *Norman London*, 28.

[42]'Lundonensium terribilem et numerosum exercitum', Henry of Huntingdon, *Historia Anglorum*, ed. and trans. D. Greenway (Oxford, 1996), 746. It is striking that when Henry related an account of a battle in 894 in which a group of Londoners and four king's thegns were massacred, he inverted the point of the story giving victory to the townsmen and death to four Viking leaders. It may be that Henry tended to assume that Londoners should be expected to win their battles. *Ibid.*, 294.

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there is no particular provision for Londoners, and later royal charters to the city do not suggest any unusual elements to its military organization.

The military record of the men of London before the Conquest

Charter evidence is a poor guide to military effectiveness. Chronicle accounts from the late tenth century on, however, strongly imply that contemporaries recognized not just the existence of warriors from London, but regarded them as more militarily effective than other Englishmen. We get the first hint of this in 994, when the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle discusses the inhabitants' successful defence of their city against Viking attack:

> In this year Olaf and Swein came to London on the Nativity of St Mary with 94 ships, and they proceeded to attack the city stoutly and wished also to set it on fire; but there they suffered more harm and injury than they ever thought any citizens would do to them. But the holy Mother of God showed her mercy to the citizens that day and saved them from their enemies.[43]

A Viking army that took 94 ships to carry it, under the leadership of Swein Forkbeard, king of Denmark, and Olaf Tryggvason was no small matter. In this account, the inability of the Danish besiegers to conquer the city is contrasted starkly with their success in ravaging the wider country. Over a century later, William of Malmesbury, writing in *Gesta Regum Anglorum*, was impressed by these events, presenting London's success in resisting siege as standing in marked contrast to the military failures of the reign of Aethelred the Unready. His account of the Danish campaigns presents a pitiful view of the English forces, whose general failure he understood as a product of broad national moral decline: 'The English were now so frightened that they thought no more of resistance; if any remembered their old traditions and tried to do battle, they were left in the lurch by the great numbers of the enemy and the desertion of their own allies.'[44] William allowed a caveat, however, for the Londoners: 'London was besieged, but defended bravely by the citizens. As a result the besiegers were hard hit, and in despair of capturing the city departed.'[45]

Swein, now king of Denmark, had no better luck fighting the Londoners in 1013. The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle entry for that year is another catalogue of English defeats, the Danes gaining the submission of Earl Utred and the Northumbrians,

[43]'Her on ðissum geare com Anlaf and Swegen to Lunden byri.g on Natiuitas Sanctę Marię. mid .iii and hund nigontigum scypum. and hi ða on þa buruh faestlice feohtende waeron. and eac hi mid fyre ontendon woldan. Ac hi þaer geferdon maran hearm and yfel þonne hi aefre wendon. þaet him aenig buruhwaru gedon sceolde.' Earle (ed.), *Two of the Saxon Chronicles*, 132. For the view that London was the base of Athelred II's operations against the Vikings, see J. Green, *Forging the Kingdom: Power in English Society, 973–1189* (Cambridge, 2017), 203.

[44]'Tantus timor Anglos incesserat ut nichil de resistendo cogitarent; si qui sane antiquae gloriae memores obuiare et signa colligare temptassent, hostium multitudine et sotiorum defectione destituebantur.' William of Malmesbury, *Gesta Regum Anglorum*, ed. R. Mynors, R. Thompson and M. Winterbottom, 2 vols. (Oxford, 1998–99), vol. I, 270.

[45]'Lundonia obsessa, sed a ciuibus probe defensa. Quocirca obsessores afflicti et desperantes posse capi ciuitatem discesserunt.' *Ibid.*

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the people of Lindsey, the people of the Five Boroughs and the populations of Oxford and Winchester. Only at London was Swein's advance checked, when some of his soldiers drowned trying to force a crossing of the Thames, and his army was stopped by a population that 'would not submit, but held their ground in full fight against him, because therein was King Ethelred, and Thurkill with him'.[46] Again, these events caught the attention of William of Malmesbury, who saw in them a triumph of English military virtue, prowess, and loyalty in the face of apparently insuperable odds:

> the Londoners, who had their lawful king safely inside their walls, shut their gates. The Danes, attacking furiously, raised their spirits high with the hope of glory; the townsmen charged to their deaths in the cause of freedom, thinking that they to whom the king had himself entrusted would never be forgiven if they were to desert him. Thus, after fierce fighting, the just cause won the day, for the citizens put all they had into the attempt, each man showing his mettle before the eyes of his prince and thinking that to die in his cause was a noble death.[47]

Even after Swein's forces had received the submission of Bath, the Londoners would not have surrendered to the Danes, had the king himself not shamefully fled the city.[48] Indeed, it is clear that William regarded the idea of the men of London surrendering to *any* opponent as a strange event that needed explanation, for these were 'admirable men to be sure, whom Mars himself in melée would not spurn'.[49] This passage had a long afterlife. Indeed, it was known to William Prynne, the Puritan polemicist and opponent of Oliver Cromwell. The passage so impressed Prynne that it became part of his argument for the fundamental and ancient liberties of the English people in 1657.[50] William also tells us that the men of London played a similar role in the following war in 1016 between Cnut and Edmund Ironside, heir to the English throne, fighting 'heroically' (*magnanimiter*) and driving off the invader's army.[51]

An armed force of Londoners was clearly something to be reckoned with. According to Osbern, the hagiographer of the archbishop of Canterbury, St Aelfheah, writing around 1080, King Cnut's translation of the relics of the saint from London to Canterbury in 1023 was very nearly a disaster as the king struggled

[46]'Þa nolde seo burhwaru abubgan ac heoldan mid fullan wige ongean. forðan Þaer waes inne se cyning Aeðelred. and Þurkil mid him.' Earle (ed.), *Two of the Saxon Chronicles*, 148.

[47]'Lundonienses, regem legitimum intra menia tutantes, portas occluserunt. Dani contra ferotius assistentes spe gloriae uirtutem alebant; oppidani in mortem pro libertate ruebant, nullam sibi ueniam futuram arbitrantes si regem desererent, quibus ipse uitam suam commiserat.' William of Malmesbury, *Gesta Regum*, vol. I, 302.

[48]William of Jumieges inverted this sequence of events, writing that it was the Londoners who abandoned the king, not vice versa. *The Gesta Normannorum Ducum of William of Jumièges, Orderic Vitalis, and Robert of Torigni*, ed. E. van Houts, 2 vols. (Oxford, 1992–95), vol. II, 18.

[49]'Laudandi prorsus uiri, et quos Mars ipse collata non sperneret hasta.' William of Malmesbury, *Gesta Regum*, vol. I, 302.

[50]W. Prynne, *The Third Part of a Seasonable, Legal, and Historical Vindication of the Good Old Fundamental Liberties, Franchises, Rights, Laws, Government of all English Freemen* (London, 1657), 196.

[51]William of Malmesbury, *Gesta Regum*, vol. I, 316.

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to control the city. Cnut had to line the bridge and the banks of the river with soldiers, and to arrange for a fake riot at one of the city gates (presumably to distract the attention of the Londoners from his act of *furta sacra*).[52] The body of the saint still had to be protected with a 'strong band of soldiers' and the way to Canterbury barred by the forces of the archbishop and the king. Even then, those escorting the body of the saint still feared pursuit by the Londoners.[53] Even after Cnut had been accepted as king of the English, and was one of the great warlords of western Europe, to remove important relics from London in defiance of the wishes of the citizens was a dangerous business. For a less formidable monarch, there was little that could be done to oppose the will of the Londoners, as was made vividly clear when Edward the Confessor was unable to prevent the citizens of London from streaming out of the city to embrace the forces of the exiled Earl Godwine in 1052,[54] forcing the king's surrender. The C and D versions of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle imply that careful negotiation between Godwine and the citizens preceded this coup, as he 'advanc[ed] toward London with his fleet, until at last he came to Southwark where he waited some time until the tide came up. In that interval he treated with the citizens so that they nearly all wanted what he wanted.'

Two key observations must be made of the late Anglo-Saxon material. The first is that contemporary chroniclers repeatedly note instances where rampaging Danish forces that were otherwise laying England waste met their *only* effective opposition when they collided with the city of London. The second is that William of Malmesbury, who over a century later was writing a grand, sweeping account of the moral degeneracy of the English under Aethelred II, and who was more than capable of taking considerable liberties with his material to fit it into that moral arc, was sufficiently impressed by these accounts that he allowed the men of London to stand as an exception to his argument.[55]

The military record of the men of London under the Norman kings

It is often pointed out that the Battle of Hastings was unusual in its scale, ferocity and impact.[56] By the time the sun set on 14 October 1066, a large part of England's warrior nobility lay dead on the field, as did King Harold II, and his two brothers, Gyrth and Leofwine. The battle did not, however, deliver London into the hands of William the Conqueror. Only after resting his troops and accepting the surrender of Dover, Canterbury and Winchester did William finally turn his attention to the city. The Londoners, meanwhile, perhaps recalling their successes against Swein and Olaf earlier in the century, had their own ideas. The population was swollen with English soldiers (presumably the elements of Harold's army that the king

[52]Osbern, 'Translatio Sancti Aelfegi Cantuarensis archiepiscopi et martyris', in A. Rumble (ed.), *The Reign of Cnut: King of England, Denmark and Norway* (London, 1994), 308.

[53]*Ibid*., 308–10.

[54]F. Barlow (ed.), *The Life of King Edward who Rests at Westminster, Attributed to a Monk of St Bertin* (Oxford, 1992), 42.

[55]See S. Olsen Sønnesyn, *William of Malmesbury and the Ethics of History* (Woodbridge, 2012), and D. Gerrard, 'William of Malmesbury and civic virtue', in R. Thomson, E. Dolmans and E. Winkler (eds.), *Discovering William of Malmesbury* (Woodbridge, 2017), 27–36.

[56]S. Morillo, 'Hastings: an unusual battle', *Haskins Society Journal*, 2 (1990), 95–104.

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had been unable to bring to the field with him at Hastings). Archbishop Stigand of Canterbury and some of the surviving English nobility attempted to rally these men and the Londoners behind Edgar Aetheling's claim to the English throne, and a minor battle was fought between them and the vanguard of the Norman army.[57] The Englishmen were forced to retire into the city and houses to the south of the Thames were set alight. William's biographer presented this as a quick and easy victory, but William the Conqueror had seen enough of the defenders to give him pause. Rather than trying to cross the single, wooden bridge over the Thames, perhaps still defended by Alfredian fortifications at Southwark,[58] and fight his way into the city against opposition, he turned west, famously crossing the Thames at Wallingford, and accepting the surrender of the remaining English leaders before he occupied the city in preparation for his coronation.[59] This minor battle is known to us only from a few lines in William of Poitiers' *Gesta Guillelmi*, and has unsurprisingly attracted little attention from historians. One particular sentence, however, sticks out from this short account: 'Although it is inhabited only by citizens, it abounds in a large population famous for their military qualities.'[60] Though there is scant information on the battle, we should take William of Poitiers' assessment seriously. Nowhere else in his text is a city praised for the fighting qualities of its inhabitants. Not only was he the Conqueror's chaplain, and the most significant chronicler of the military events of the Norman Conquest, he was a former knight.[61] David Bates has recently suggested that the pattern of destruction just south of the Thames implied by Domesday Book indicates that this engagement was indeed fought where William of Poitiers claimed.[62] That William of Poitiers regarded the citizens of London as 'famous for their military qualities' ought to command our attention, as should the fact that in a hostile country, with winter closing in rapidly, William the Conqueror was prepared to march his tired army at least an extra hundred miles rather than force a crossing against opposition from the men of London.[63]

[57]William of Poitiers, *Gesta Guillelmi*, ed. R. Davis and M. Chibnall (Oxford, 1998), 146.

[58]Keynes, 'Alfred and the Mercians', 24. This seems to have been the same bridge that half a century earlier had been important in the struggle to resist Viking armies. It was not rebuilt in stone until 1176. Green, *Forging the Kingdom*, 214.

[59]One of the most thorough and detailed accounts of this phase of the campaign is found in E. Impey, 'London's early castles and the context of their creation', in E. Impey (ed.), *The White Tower* (London, 2008), 13–26, at 15–19.

[60]'Cum solos ciues habeat, copioso ac praestantia militari famoso incolatu abundat.' William of Poitiers, *Gesta Guillelmi*, ed. Chibnall and Davis, 146.

[61]*Ibid.*, xv; Orderic Vitalis, *The Ecclesiastical History of Orderic Vitalis*, ed. M. Chibnall, 6 vols. (Oxford, 1969–80), vol. II, 258–60.

[62]D. Bates, *William the Conqueror* (London, 2016), 249.

[63]Bates is an honourable exception here. Nevertheless, he deals with this incident very briefly, perhaps not emphasizing enough just what a major strategic decision it must have been to turn William's army westward after this battle. A very different account of the subjugation of London is presented in the *Carmen de Hastingae Proelio*, which involves the encirclement of the city and a battle of wits between William and an English leader, Ansgar (presumably Edgar the Staller). Guy, bishop of Amiens, *The Carmen de Hastingae Proelio*, ed. F. Barlow (Oxford, 1972), 38–44. The *Carmen*, however, is generally reckoned to be unreliable as an account of military events. William of Jumièges seems to confuse matters somewhat, believing that the battle was fought after William had already crossed the Thames. William of

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Even after he had seen off the defenders, William could still not be sure that London was neutralized, and the Normans' actions afterward hardly suggest a confident handling of the city. William sought to present himself as the continuator of the Anglo-Saxon royal tradition. As such, a coronation at Edward the Confessor's church at Westminster was a sound political move, but perhaps a dangerous one given the proximity of the men of London. At William's coronation, the chronicler Orderic Vitalis recorded that 'a strong guard of Norman men at arms and knights was posted round the minster to prevent any treachery or disorder'.[64] Despite this tight security, the Norman soldiers remained fearful of the native population, and when the crowd acclaimed the new king in a language the soldiers did not understand, they panicked and set fire to the surrounding buildings. Many of the Conqueror's companions fled the church, and though he himself remained to complete the ceremony, he did so 'trembling from head to foot'.[65] That the men of London might have overwhelmed their Norman occupiers must have seemed very likely during those tense and dangerous hours, and who is to say that William's army, with its heavy reliance on cavalry and archery would have fought effectively in the cramped conditions of Thorney Island, which housed the complex of Westminster, or in the streets of the metropolis? William's later actions suggest a cautious posture too. Not only did he begin the construction of his castle on the site of the later White Tower and the fortification of the large site that later included Baynard Castle and Montichet's Tower,[66] but he made very clear to the Londoners that he would not threaten their interests. The very earliest surviving document issued by William as king is a famous writ, in English, probably issued just after the shambolic events of the coronation and confirming the privileges of the city and the right of the citizens to their fathers' property.[67] No similar provision survives for any other English city,[68] but then again, no other city had 'A large population, *famous for their military qualities*.'

The Londoners famously came to the forefront of English military history again during the civil wars that erupted after the accession of King Stephen (1135–54). Captured by the Empress Maud's forces at the Battle of Lincoln, in 1141 King Stephen's cause had all but collapsed when the empress entered the city. Maud managed to rejuvenate it with her startling lack of tact and diplomacy in demanding extraordinary taxes from the city while Stephen's wife terrorized the countryside to the south of the river.[69] The *Gesta Stephani*, in a passage written around 1148, presents a vivid picture of the empress confidently attending a 'well cooked

Jumièges, Orderic Vitalis, Robert of Torigni, *Gesta Normannorum Ducum*, vol. II, 170. Bates has suggested that this version of events is driven by rhetorical considerations. *William the Conqueror*, 252.

[64]Orderic Vitalis, *Ecclesiastical History*, vol. II, 182.

[65]*Ibid*., 184.

[66]On these fortifications, Impey, 'London's early castles', 22–6. Stenton also regarded this building campaign as a recognition of the challenge of holding onto a London made more dangerous by the military qualities identified by William of Poitiers. Stenton, *Norman London*, 7. Substantial effort was still going into the king's various works in and around the city a generation later. Green, *Forging the Kingdom*, 206–7.

[67]D. Bates (ed.), *Regesta Regum Anglo-Normannorum: The Acta of William I (1066–1087)* (Oxford, 1998), No. 180 (p. 593).

[68]F. Sheppard, *London: A History* (Oxford, 1998), 79.

[69]Anon., *Gesta Stephani*, ed. K. Potter (Oxford, 1975), 122.

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feast' and waiting for the Londoners to accede to her demands when: 'the whole city, with the bells ringing everywhere as the signal for battle, flew to arms, and all, with the common purpose of making a most savage attack on the countess and her men, unbarred the gates and came out in a body, like thronging swarms from beehives'.[70] Maud was forced to withdraw swiftly from the city and the Londoners plundered her property. The pro-Angevin William of Malmesbury (who may have been protesting too much) reported that Maud's forces left 'gradually and calmly and with some kind of military discipline'.[71] The anonymous *Gesta Stephani*, however, presents this as a disorderly rout, with Maud's supporters galloping away on swift horses. With this victory, King Stephen's party was effectively revived. The Londoners joined the queen's army in pursuit of the empress' forces, called by *Gesta Stephani* 'an invincible band of Londoners, who had assembled to the number of almost a thousand, magnificently equipped with helmets and coats of mail'[72] and by Henry of Huntingdon, in another near-contemporary account, 'the London army…with augmented numbers'.[73] We have already seen that the power of the Londoners was important for Stephen's victory at Faringdon in 1145. It should, however, be understood that ejecting the empress from the city was a substantial military triumph in its own right. *Gesta Stephani* had noted that the empress had come to the city with 'a vast army'.[74] Though this is hardly a precise description, there is reason to suppose that the forces she had assembled there were unusually strong. The empress was, after all, accompanied there not only by her half-brother and principal English supporter, Earl Robert of Gloucester but by her uncle, King David of Scots (who was also earl of Huntingdon and who had controlled much of the north of England since 1138), each presumably with his own substantial retinue of soldiers. One important question on which the sources are silent is whether the empress had occupied the city's castles, but her expulsion was no mere riot, and it was something more than the expression of a collective political will. This incident has a place in most discussions of the war and has recently been ably addressed by Lindsey Diggelmann,[75] but while his discussion highlighted the political intelligence shown by the Londoners, it does not emphasize the military significance of their achievement. The men of London drove out a very formidable military alliance, an alliance that had recently defeated the king himself. The Londoners went on to form the core of Stephen's campaign against Faringdon Castle. It was one of the most significant military achievements of the war, devastating for Maud's

[70]'omnis ciuitas sonantibus ubique campanis, signum uidelicet ad bellum progrediendi, ad arma conuolauit, omnesque unum habentes animum in comitissam et suos atrocissime irrruere uelle, quasi frequentissima ex apium alueariis examina reseratis portis pariter prodierunt'. *Gesta Stephani*, 124.

[71]'sensim sine tumult quadam militaria disciplina urbe cesserunt'. William of Malmesbury, *Historia Novella: The Contemporary History*, ed. E. King and K. Potter (Oxford, 1998), 98.

[72]'inuicta Lundoniensium caterua, qui fere mille cum galeis et loricis ornatissime instructi conuenerant'. *Gesta Stephani*, 128–30. Malmesbury notes that the Londoners were 'making the greatest efforts, and not letting slip a single thing that lay in their power whereby they might distress the empress'. 'Lundonensibus maxime annitentibus, nichilque omnino quod possent pretermittentibus quo imperatricem contristarent.' *Historia Novella*, 102.

[73]Huntingdon, *Historia Anglorum*, 740.

[74]'cum immenso militum apparatu'. *Gesta Stephani*, 120.

[75]Diggelman, 'Chronicles and crowds', 118–20.

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position and reputation,[76] and had it not taken place, it seems likely that Stephen's reign would have ended in 1141, rather than in 1154.

When in 1174–75 a quite different sort of author, the verse chronicler Jordan Fantosme, turned his attention to the behaviour of the men of London in the civil war between Henry II and Henry the Young King of 1173–74, he came to conclusions strikingly similar to those of his predecessors. Jordan was a well-informed author with wide-ranging interests, and it has been suggested that he may have been born in Italy. He went out of his way to emphasize the loyalty of London to the cause of Henry II in his battle against Henry the Young King. He undertook a substantial diversion to explain that there was nowhere between 'here' and Montpelier as fine as Norfolk:

> Leaving aside the city of London, whose equal nobody knows. There are none to compare with the barons of that town. At no time in war did you hear of anyone, however rich and strong he might be in landed estates, who dared to lay siege to them or point a finger at them, in imagination even, who would not have had a frightful retribution instead of whatever reward he expected to gain.[77]

On this basis, Jordan urged the elder Henry to love the citizens of London especially,[78] put a speech into the mouth of Gervaise of Cornhill (sheriff of Kent and former sheriff of London) saying that Londoners would prefer to have their limbs cut off than ever to commit treason,[79] and had the bishop of Winchester (Richard of Ilchester) tell Henry that the men of London are 'the most loyal of all your realm. There is in the town none of an age to bear arms who is not fully equipped.'[80] As Matthew Strickland has recently pointed out, after the experience of 1141, keeping the Londoners loyal in the war was of paramount importance, and both Henry II and his rebellious son competed for the city's allegiance.[81] Similar remarks could be made about the fall of William Langchamp in 1191, when the men of London would not support the autocratic chancellor despite the fact that he had previously granted them the right to appoint their own sheriffs, and despite the fact that he controlled the Tower.

Other cities at war: Exeter, York, Bristol and Rouen

London of course, was certainly not the only city of military significance. A very large proportion of the early Norman castles were built in cities. Domesday Book preserved the military customs of cities like Hereford, whose citizens were

[76] E. King, *King Stephen* (New Haven, 2010), 223, 162.

[77] 'Fors la cite de Lundres, u nul ne set sa per./As baruns de la ville ne pot nul comparer./Unques en ceste guerre n'en oïstes parler,/Tant fust riche de terre, kis osast asiegier/Ne tender verse ls le dei pur sulement penser,/N'en eüst malveis gueredun en lieu de sun luier.' Jordan Fantosme, *Chronicle*, ed. R. Johnston (Oxford, 1981), 68.

[78] In Jordan's portrayal, the king does exactly this and feels sorrow for the Londoners' concerns about the army of the king of Scots. *Ibid.*, 142.

[79] *Ibid.*, 144.

[80] 'La plus leale gent de tut vostre regné./N'I ad nul en la vile ki seit de tel ëé/Ki puisse porter armes ne seit tres bien armé.' *Ibid.*, 120.

[81] Strickland, *Henry*, 189–90, 204.

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bound to accompany the sheriff on his expeditions into Wales.[82] Nor was London the only city whose population was capable of military action. In 1068, for instance, Exeter was at the forefront of a rebellion of south-western cities against William the Conqueror's new regime.[83] In Orderic Vitalis' account of these events, the city had the advantage of location and defences. 'A great force of citizens held it, young and old seething with anger against every inhabitant of Gaul.'[84] It took the Conqueror just 18 days, however, to reduce the city to obedience, and he immediately began construction of a new castle there that would made future resistance impossible.

William of Malmesbury folds the resistance of Exeter smoothly into his account of the northern revolt and the siege of York:

> The city of Exeter, which was in revolt, he easily subdued, aided as he was by the help of heaven, when part of the walls collapsed of its own accord and gave him admittance; indeed he himself had assaulted it with particular ferocity, protesting that such irreverent men must surely be deprived of divine support, after one of them, standing on the wall, had bared his breech and made the welkin re-echo with the noise of his nether parts to show his contempt for Normans. York, the only remaining refuge for rebels, he almost wiped out, so many of the citizens perished by famine or sword; for that was where Malcolm, King of Scots with his forces, where Edgar and Morcar and Waltheof with English and Danish troops often made a snug nest for tyranny and often cut to pieces William's generals.[85]

In 1138, as England slid into the Anarchy, the men of Bristol also showed the capacity for military initiative, setting out to conquer the city of Bath. The hostile account of the *Gesta Stephani* emphasizes strongly that the men of Bristol were an untrustworthy rabble, ravaging the countryside and mistreating the bishop of Bath. The contrast with King Stephen's disciplined soldiers is intentional.[86]

We should not, however, assume that writers after 1066 simply neglected the fighting prowess of the men of other English cities out of a sense of Norman military superiority. While recent work on the Duchy of Normandy has emphasized the

[82] *Domesday Book: A Complete Translation*, ed. A. Williams and G. Martin (London, new edn 2003), 493–4, fo. 179. For a detailed discussion of the implications, see Hollister, *Military Institutions*, 89.

[83] Orderic Vitalis, *Ecclesiastical History*, vol. II, 210–14. This is almost certainly based on a lost passage from William of Poitiers' *Gesta Guillelmi.*

[84] 'Ciues eam tenebant furiosi, copiosae multitudinis, infestissimi mortalibus, Gallici generis puberes ac senatus.' Orderic Vitalis, *Ecclesiastical History*, vol. II, 210.

[85] 'Exoniam rebellantem leuiter subegit, diuino scilicet iutus auxilio, quod pars muralis ultro decidens ingressum illi patefecerit; nam et ipse audatius eam assilierat, protestans homines irreuerentes Dei destituendos suffragio, quia unus eorum supra murum stans nudato inguine auras sonitu inferioris partis turbauerat, pro contempt uidelicet Normannorum. Eboracum, unicum rebellionum suffugium, ciuibus pene deleuit fame et ferro necatis. Ibi enim rex Scottorum Malcolmus cum suis, ibi Edgarus et Marcherius at Waldefus cum Anglis et Danis nidum tirannidis sepe fouebat, sepe duces illius trucidabant.' William of Malmesbury, *Gesta Regum*, vol. I, 462.

[86] *Gesta Stephani*, 58–64. Sieges were of central importance to the civil wars of Stephen's reign. For an excellent exploration of the king's approaches, see J. Hosler, 'King Stephen's siege tactics' (2009), available online at www.academia.edu/13115296/King_Stephens_Siege_Tactics, accessed 24 Feb. 2020.

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central importance of Rouen,[87] and Rouen clearly played an important part in the military history of Normandy, sources like the *Gesta Normannorum Ducum* did not emphasize the military qualities of the citizens in any way or attribute military agency to them. It is a place that had fortifications and was fought over, not a place whose citizens themselves had a military role to play as a community.[88]

These remarks could be extended considerably. While there are a great many descriptions of English and Norman cities embedded in narrative texts of this period, some of them very elaborate, and while many of these praise cities for their commercial prosperity, the moral excellence of their citizens or their walls, *no* other English or Norman city (including those which played a role in military events) had a populace who were repeatedly praised for their fighting qualities. If the military agency of other towns was recognized, it was presented as an obstacle to be overcome by royal armies, and in every case it *was* overcome quickly and effectively.

Conclusion

We have seen therefore, that the history of London's military administration, fragmentary though the evidence is, seems to fit neatly alongside the general administrative history of England in this period. The evidence from narrative sources, however, is quite different. No other English city appears in the military narrative with anything like the frequency of London, and no other city is presented to us by contemporaries as a seat of comparable military power. Only Londoners were repeatedly described as possessing prowess, valour and loyalty in war, and indeed some of our authors express surprise at the military effectiveness of 'citizens' or contrast their success with wider military failures on the part of the English. Only London repeatedly saw off substantial armies, including royal armies. These stories have some other notable features in common too. They never name the leaders of London's warriors; these accounts instead present London at war as engaging in communal action, without even hinting at the presence of underlying organizational structures. On almost every occasion on which the men of London went to war, they did so conservatively, on the side of established power and in particular the power of anointed English kings. On those occasions when London did admit a conqueror, as in 1052, 1066 and 1141, it did so in a context where the conqueror's position seemed truly irresistible, and even so, the events of 1066 and 1141 show that a wise conqueror would handle the city with extreme caution. These features seem quite constant from the late tenth century on, long before any Londoner whispered the word 'commune'.

After the rising of 1196, London had entered a very different phase in its military history. There would be no going back from the 'crisis of Angevin England'. When Henry III decided to move against Hubert de Burgh and considered arming the Londoners to support him, he was not advised as his grandfather had been in 1174, that they were the most ferociously loyal and capable of his subjects, but was instead warned by the earl of Chester that they would likely become an

[87]This is one of the key themes of Mark Hagger's important recent book, *Norman Rule in Normandy, 911–1144* (Woodbridge, 2017).

[88]*Gesta Normannorum Ducum*, vol. I, 20–1, 28–9, 96–7, 108–9, 116–19; vol. II, 138–9.

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armed mob and ally with Hubert against the king.[89] Though Londoners continued to contribute large numbers to English armies, the chroniclers of the Late Middle Ages, more concerned with an exclusionary idea of chivalry, saw in London the potential for riot and revolt more than prowess and loyalty, especially in the turbulent days of the later fourteenth century.[90] Most of the narratives discussed in this article were not intended for a popular audience in the city, and can have contributed little to the memory of past reputation. Nevertheless, something may have remained of the memory of the days when Londoners were regarded among England's most effective military communities. Manuscripts of FitzStephen's *Description* continued to circulate, and influenced local historians well into the early modern period. Perhaps most interesting, however, is a case from 1303 when Robert FitzWalter claimed an elaborate role in leading the men of London to war.[91] FitzWalter claimed expenses for the performance of his duties, including a special payment for every siege the Londoners were to conduct. The precise design of the banner that he was to carry was described, as was the ceremony in which we would receive it. The account has certainly acquired the trappings of late medieval chivalric ritual (though both Frank Stenton and John Beeler suspected that it represented an elaborated practice from at least the Norman period).[92] Nevertheless, it is striking how much of the passage emphasizes that FitzWalter was leading a community to war. The ritual prescribes that FitzWalter serves 'the city',[93] that communal bells should be rung and that 'the whole community should follow the banner'[94] on a procession as far as Aldgate. Whatever chroniclers might think of the dangers of the mob, clearly something of the pride of a military community with a long history had endured.

We need, therefore, to account for a prolonged period in which authors of diverse traditions and perspectives, from monastic chroniclers to retired knights, writing in England and Normandy in Old English, Latin and French all regarded the men of London as particularly loyal, brave and good fighters. Such substantial agreement on a theme tangential to their purposes of writing invites a truly radical suggestion: perhaps it was simply true. We know frustratingly little, after all, about how the knowledge of how to fight was passed on in the west until the arrival of Fechtbücher in the Late Middle Ages. It is right that London looms large in the general urban history of England in the High Middle Ages – no other city can provide us with the weight of source material that London can, but perhaps in this London was not like other places. Verbruggen suggested that the impressive military record of northern Italian urban troops from the twelfth century on should be

[89]*Rogeri de Wendover Chronica sive Flores Historiarum*, ed. H.O. Coxe, 5 vols. (London, 1841–42), vol. IV, 249–50; Weiler, *Kingship*, 154.

[90]Jean Froissart, *Chronicles*, ed. and trans. G. Brereton (Harmondsworth, 1978), 216. Froissart's lurid accounts of both the Peasants' Revolt and the *Jacquerie* are well known. He thought that around 30,000 of the 'small folk' of London joined the rebels in 1381.

[91]*Munimenta Gildhallae Lundoniensis: Liber Albus, Liber Custumarum, et Liber horn,* ed. H. Riley (London, 1860), 147–9.

[92]Beeler, *Warfare in England*, 315–16; Stenton, *Norman London*, 28.

[93]'Service que jeo dei a la cite.' *Liber Custumarum*, 148.

[94]'e irrount tote la commune suwir la baniere'. *Ibid*., 149.

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attributed to a powerful sense of urban solidarity and identity.[95] That contemporaries saw something special about the military power of London in this period may suggest that the city had similar qualities at an early date, and this caught the attention of chroniclers who understood it as resulting in particularly ferocious qualities in battle. At the very least, we should acknowledge that while modern scholarship on the cities of this period is concerned overwhelmingly with cities as sites of economic development and specialization, what caught the attention of contemporaries above all else was the unusual capacity of Londoners for large-scale, unified, autonomous, and highly effective, violence.

[95]Verbruggen, *Art of Warfare*, 145.

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