

## JOHN NORDEN'S 'SPECULUM BRITANNIAE: PARS – THE ISLE OF WIGHT' AND SOME ELIZABETHAN MANUSCRIPT MAPS OF THE ISLAND

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### ABSTRACT

*This paper introduces and presents a description of the Isle of Wight written in 1594 by the important cartographer John Norden. The provenance of his map of the Isle is discussed and several other contemporary manuscript maps are considered. One of these is suggested as the source of the well known map used by Speed in his atlas of 1611.*

John Norden was born about the time of the death of Henry VIII and after graduating MA from Hart Hall, Oxford began a career as a lawyer. The first twenty years of his practice seem to have been mainly for country gentry; an occupation which led him about the country and involved him deeply in land leases, tenures, management and survey. Early in the 1590s he conceived his *Speculum Britanniae* – The Mirror of Britain – a series of pocket guide books to the counties of Britain, each to have a county map (Ravenhill 1972, 14). In 1591 he prepared the first *Pars* of this work, a manuscript description of Northamptonshire which he presented to Lord Burghley in the hope of gaining his patronage (British Library Maps, c7, b20). This was not forthcoming but in 1593 the Privy Council did issue Norden with a warrant to allow him 'to travail through England and Wales to make more perfect description, charts and maps'. The Council instructed the 'Lieutenants of Counties, Mayors, Sheriffs, Justices of the Peace and all others of Her Majesties officers and loving subjects . . . to permit and suffer the said J. Norden quietly, and without any manner of let or hindrance, to travel and pass from place to place', and requested those who could to help with him 'sight and view' of any 'ancient muniments, books, rolls or records, that may further or help his work' (Historic Manuscript Commission, 7th Report, Lowndes Mss, 540).

By now Norden had completed a description of Middlesex but as no financial support had yet materialised he published it at his own expense, again dedicated to Burghley. The following year a third *Pars* of the *Speculum* – for Essex – was finished and Norden presented manuscript copies to the Earl of Essex as well as to Burghley (Ellis 1840, ix–xxv). However, neither Lord offered financial support so in 1595 he made a supreme effort with the production of a manuscript volume including descriptions and maps of Middlesex, Essex, Hampshire, Sussex, Surrey and the islands of Wight, Jersey and Guernsey. This volume was presented to the Queen with a pathetic covering letter describing his hardship and travails but Elizabeth was not moved.

Slowly Norden put the venture down. During the next ten years he wrote perhaps three more descriptions: of Hertfordshire, Cornwall and possibly Kent (Gough 1768, I, 441). Eventually he gave up the task to concentrate on his work as a land surveyor and, apart from a successful text on surveying, he confined his writing to devotional work and a traveller's guide promoting his invention of the triangular distance tables so familiar in road atlases today. He had a successful career both as surveyor and religious writer: he published some 14 religious books, one of which went to 40 editions and 'sold much better than the most successful of Shakespeare's *Quartos*' (Pollard 1926, 238). As a surveyor he became variously Surveyor of Crown Woods and Forests, of the Duchy of Cornwall, and in 1612, of the King's Castles (Cal SP Domestic, xii, 4; lxxi, 43).

Despite the failure of the *Speculum Britanniae*, the county maps Norden prepared for it had some success. Those for Hampshire, Hert-

fordshire, Kent, Middlesex, Sussex and Surrey were used to illustrate the 6th edition of Camden's *Britannia* and John Speed 'augmented' and used Norden's maps of Cornwall, Sussex, Surrey, Middlesex, Essex and perhaps Northamptonshire and Hampshire in his county atlas – *The Theatre of the Empire of Great Britain* – in 1611 (Laxton 1976).

The manuscript presented to the Queen which contained the description and map of the Isle of Wight was probably placed in the Queen's Library but it was removed, doubtless during the Civil War, and went through numerous adventures before most of the various parts into which it had been split were united in the British Museum in 1881 (British Library, Add MS 31853). Most of the various *Pars* of the *Speculum* which Norden completed have been published since his death, the exceptions being those for Sussex, Hampshire, Surrey, and the three islands.

Norden's description of the Isle of Wight adds little to our knowledge of the island in the late Elizabethan period, for on his own admission he did not visit the Isle, but it might be considered of interest if only for the light it sheds upon the confused state of knowledge of the island's past in 1595 and as a step towards the complete availability of this unique document.

#### SPECULUM BRITANNIAE: PARS – THE ISLE OF WIGHT

##### *A Brief Commemoration of the Wight, Garnsey & Jersey*

Islands united bothe in ecclesiasticall and ciuell gouernment unto Hamshire and in that regard I thought it fitt to remember them though I haue not traueyled in them but reporting the description as the workes of other men.

The Wighte, an Islande as it were removed or separate by the working of the sea from the prouince of the 'Vites', a people of Germanie of whom Bede sayth came also the Kentish men, which 'Vites' also possessing Hamshire,

parte of Wiltesex and other places, maybe supposed to receyue denomination as from them: 'Vite' or 'Wite' although ther appeare sundrie opinions of the name as of the Latines, or Romaynes, 'Vectis Insula'. As an Islande carried from the mayne wherof it seemeth most probable to take name which agreeth with the Britons who called it 'Gueid' or 'Guith' which signifieth 'diuorticum': a separation.

The soyle of the Islande is affirmed to be veric frutefull, aboundinge with cattel, corne, pasture, meadow, wood, fishe and fowle.

This Islande is now in length about 20 miles as appeareth and 10 miles in breadth. But Bede reporteth it to be in his time 30 miles in length & 12 miles in bredth, which argueth a decrease, confirming therby the separation.

In the Britons time it was gouerned by a particular Kinge from whom Vespasian, who was sent into Brytayne by Claudius, subdued it to the Romaynes from whom after it was by them manie years enioyed. It was wonne agayne by the sowth saxon kings who helde the same tributarie untill it was agayne enforced from them in the time of Athelwalde, a sowth saxon kinge, by Cedwallo who slew Arualde, Kinge of the Islande and helde the dominion therof in his owne handes, by means of this usurped title wherof after him his successors were accompted kinges.

This isle was firste conuerted to the Christian knowledge by Wilfride B[ishop]. of Yorke, to whome the same Cedwallo gaue 300 tenements in regarde of his preaching to then-habitanes.

In the time of H:1 [Henry I] it was belonging to Baldewine of Redvers, called de Reduerys, from whom K Stephen forceblye inuested the same. But was restored to his inheritance ther agayne by H:3 who made him Earle of ye Wight after warde it came to Willm de Fortibus by mariage of the dawghter of Willm Legrosse, E. of Awmarle [Albemarle], wife to the seyde Baldwin in whose righte he became E. of Wight, Awmarle & Deuon. In whose lynes it contynued untill Isabell de Fortibus, sole heir unto the former Earldomes, yielded the Wighte to E:3, contynunge in the possession of

the crowne till H:6 dignified Henrye Beauchampe, sonne to the Lo. Richarde, E of Warwike, with the crowne therof as also of Garnesey and Jarsey with other titles of high honour.

This island hath bene often assaulted by the French as in the 1 yeare of Ric:2, the 5 of H:4 & the 37 of H:8.

*Things conteyned in the mappe of the Whighte:*

The Nedles, certayne sharpe rockes at the w. ende of the Islande

Whitewell chyne	Browndowne	Wursley Towre	Sharpenode
Brooke	Worder	Fresh-water	Rowner
Motteson	Ashe	Wouluerton	Brixston
Shorwell	Swaynston	Quar	Shalfleete
Newton	Gurner	Pauue	Areton
ye Cowe, called W.Cow		E. Cowe	Northwood
Whippingham ye Castle	Wotton	Cairebroke	Newporte
Compton St.	Brading	Ryde	Nenwall
Kateryne hill	Sande heade	St. Helene	Bensted
Chale	Salter	Calburne	Gatcombe
Thorley	Kingstone	Whitwell St.	Godds hill
	Nighton	Laurence	St. Boniface
Appledore-combe	Butbridge	Binbridge	Sandham Castle

(There are no descriptions for Jersey and Guernsey, only an index to the maps.)

The map of the island mentioned above, together with matching small maps of 'Iarsey' and 'Garnesay', served as the right hand border of Norden's beautifully executed manuscript map of Hampshire in the Queen's volume, each island set in a barrel shaped cartouche, one above the other. As Norden obviously did not survey the Island, it seems likely that for his map he copied that of Baptista Boazio, the earliest printed map of the Island, which had been published in 1591 (British Library Maps, c2, a11). Like Boazio's map, Norden's is small (105 mm x 105 mm)

and full of detail with a heavy load of place names, but often with variant spellings to the above text and Boazio's inscriptions. Norden also softens the rather exaggerated hills of Boazio's map. (For a reproduction of both maps, see Turley 1976.)

It is not known when Norden's map of 'Hamshire' was published; the only extant state dates from c 1655 but it had obviously been printed extensively before for at this time the plate was showing clear and heavy signs of wear. This only known state of the printed map omitted the border which contained the maps of the three islands (Laxton 1976). It has been suggested that Norden's map of the Isle of Wight was copied by Mercator for his Atlas of 1595 and that, further, all three – Norden's, Mercator's and Boazio's – ultimately derive from 'a common original, no longer extant' (Turley 1974, 55). However, given that Norden's manuscript was only presented to the Queen with hope of publication under his own name in that year, it seems more likely that Mercator's was, like Norden's, based on the already published Boazio map; indeed, Mercator's is much closer in execution to Boazio's map than to Norden's. Like the earlier map, Mercator's island is heavily covered with hills; both exaggerate the undercliff in the south of the island which Norden did not show; and Mercator showed the same six fire beacons, marked with the same symbol of a laddered standard, whilst Norden showed only two beacons, marked with the 'three prick' mark that he used on his map of Hampshire. All of this suggests that both Norden's and Mercator's maps were based on Boazio's; Mercator's more closely than Norden's. There seems no need for the lost 'Ur' map, drawn perhaps, it has been suggested, in connection with the defence preparations against the Armada (Turley 1974, 55).

Certainly, many such maps were drawn to accompany surveys of the defences of various parts of England's coast in the 'Armada' years and a number have survived (see, for example, British Library Royal 18, D, iii or Add. MS 57494, a deputy Lieutenant's survey of the Sussex coast). As no part of the coast con-

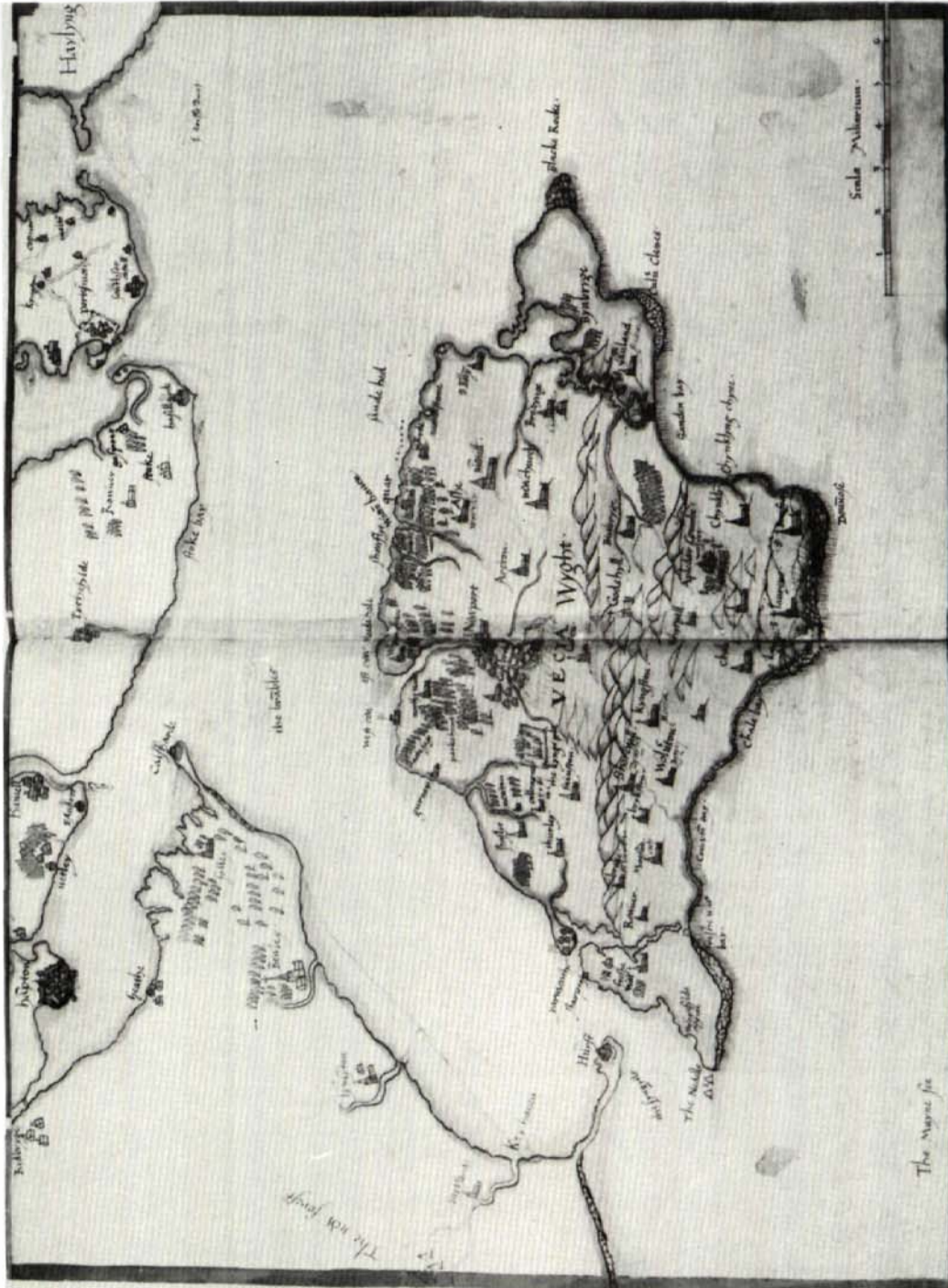


Fig 1. BL Royal 18, D, iii, 17/18. Reproduced with the kind permission of the British Library.

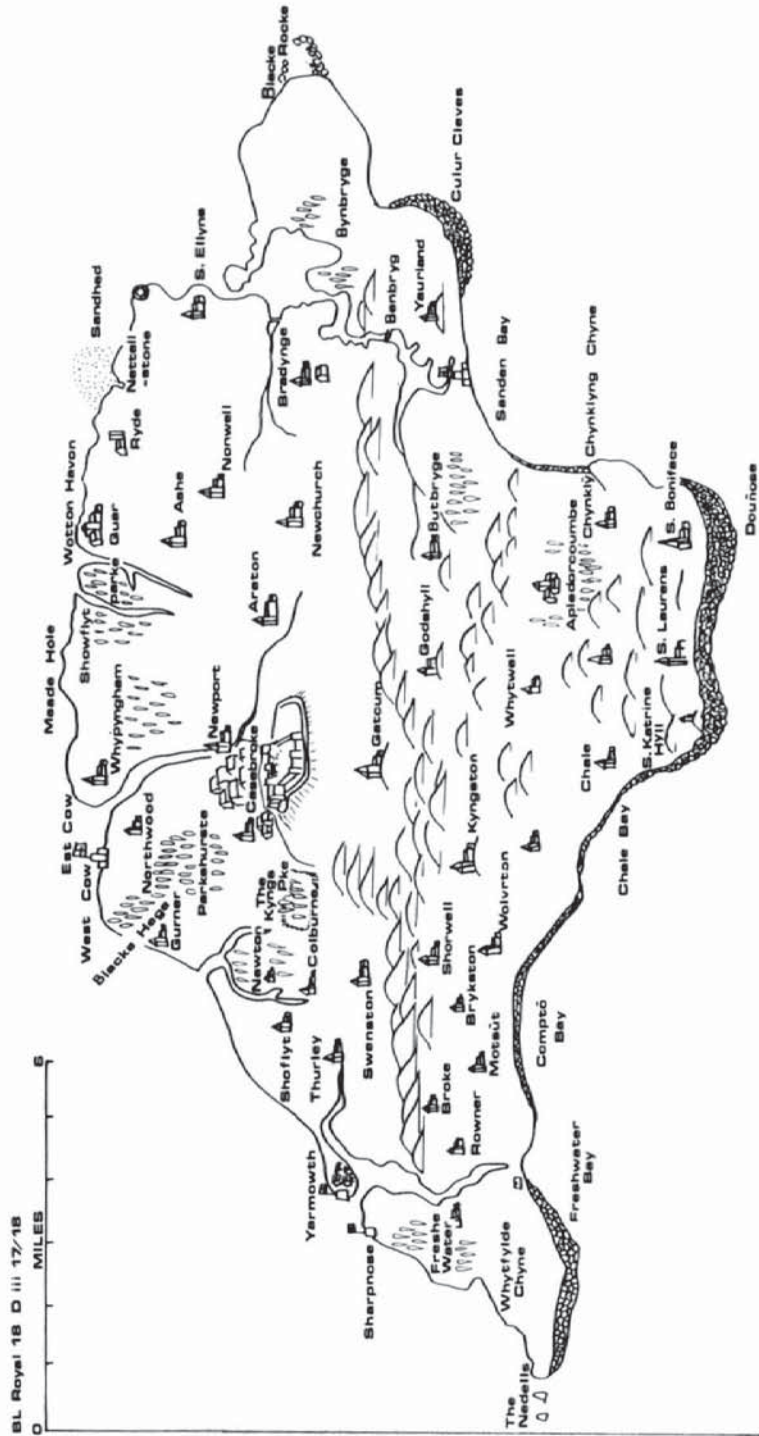


Fig. 2. Line drawing of BL Royal 18, D, iii, 17/18.

cerned the Privy Council in these years as closely as Hampshire and the Isle of Wight it is to be expected that some might have survived and, indeed, in the Public Record Office there are three such maps. The first dates from 1585 and was probably drawn by Richard Popinjay, Surveyor of Works at Portsmouth. He certainly drew the other two in 1587 and they were sent to the Privy Council by the Earl of Sussex, Lord Lieutenant of Hampshire in March. However, all three were concerned with the Spithead and Solent coasts and showed only very crude sketch outlines of the northern shore of the Island and could hardly have aided the cartographers (See French, 'Sea Beggars'). However, there are in the British Library two fine, clear sixteenth century manuscript maps of the island which probably pre-date Boazio's map. The first (figs 1 and 2) is bound with a set of pre-production proofs of Saxon's *Atlas* of 1579 along with a number of other manuscript maps (British Library Royal 18, D, iii, 17/18). This volume belonged to Burghley and to judge from the annotations in his hand to nearly all the maps, was well used. This provides a *terminus ad quem* for the enclosed maps of 1598, the year of Burghley's death, but it is likely that the map of the Isle of Wight, like the others, is very much earlier.

The map is well coloured, at a scale of  $\frac{3}{4}$  inch to the mile. With one exception, all the island's churches are conventionally shown with a square tower at the western end topped with a spire and a smaller chancel at the eastern end. Only a church marked at Ryde differs from this convention in having no spire or chancel and with its tower at the eastern end. However, as Ryde, Ashe, Nunwell and Budbridge did not have churches at this time, these signs must be read as conventional symbols for a village rather than a church. The island's gunforts are also treated conventionally: the Sharpnode bulwark and Yarmouth Castle are shown as squat cylinders; West Cowes and Sandown forts are slightly more elaborate. Only Carisbrooke Castle is given realistic treatment, the oblong earthwork that once led to belief in a Roman Carisbrooke fort showing clear before its conversion to a

'Italianate' bastioned trace after 1597. However, on the mainland, the forts at Hurst, 'Hasellorde' and Southsea are drawn in a very careful, exact manner, Southsea, finished in 1545, meticulously so. Haselworth Castle is shown complete and entire as a tall cylindrical tower surrounded by a lower circular curtain wall, much as shown on the Cowdray Print of the battle off Portsmouth in which the *Mary Rose* was lost in 1545. Haselworth Castle was reputedly 'beaten downe by King Philip' for not firing a salute when he sailed past towards his marriage with Queen Mary although a more likely fate was decommissioning and decay following a survey of Portsmouth's defences made in 1556 (British Library Add. MS 16371a; Colvin 1982, 514).

These events suggest that the map was made between 1545 and 1556, probably early within that span; the treatment of Southsea Castle suggests pride in a newly completed work, and on the island the park to the west of Carisbrooke is marked as belonging to 'The Kyng' – Edward VI died in 1553. Some of the settlements have owner's names affixed and all these are agreeable to these suggested dates. The only doubt is 'Mr Erlesman' at 'Colburne'. Earlesman bought half the manor of Westover alias Calbourne in 1556; the other half in 1564 (Victoria County History, 5, 219). However, it is possible that he was a tenant before he bought the manor.

As well as the forts already mentioned there appears to be an anonymous squat bulwark at Freshwater Bay although, unlike the others shown on the map, it does not fly a flag. It is possible that it represents a store house built in the 1550s 'for sauinge of Thordinaunce appointed in that place' (Kenyon 1979, 63). It is also possible that the curious device at Nettleston Point near St. Helens, apparently a masonry circle, was the small gun position built sometime between 1539 and 1552. The area was vulnerable to foreign incursion as the events of 1545 had shown (Colvin 1982, 549–50). The actual point is still known as 'The Old Fort' and was marked as such on a 1769 map of the Isle. A list of charges for the Royal forts made towards the end of Henry

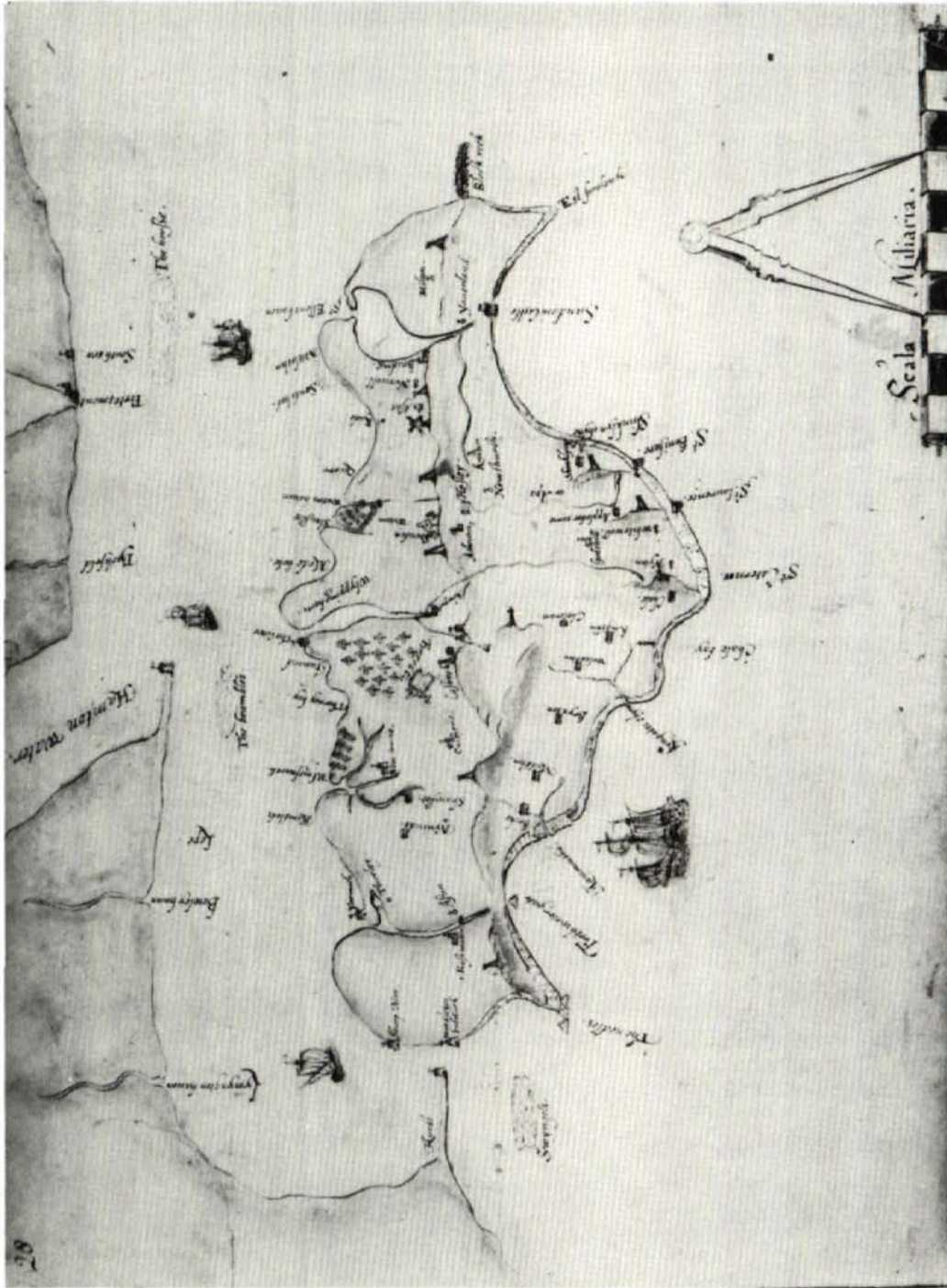


Fig 3. BL Cott. Aug. I, i, 28. Reproduced with the kind permission of the British Library.



VIII's reign and into Edward's refers to work carried out at St Helens (Kenyon 1979, 76).

The second manuscript map (figs 3 and 4) is in the Cotton collection of the British Library, labelled on the reverse 'Description of the Isle of Wight'. Although it shows towns, villages and houses of note, it gives great prominence to the Island's fortifications, even marking Worsley's Tower which was built in the 1520s and by the last years of Elizabeth's reign in a sorry condition. It was not marked on the above Armada surveys. The map also shows clearly a system of 11 laddered beacons. The map is 40 cm by 29 cm, the sea coloured with a light blue wash; the land in light green with light shading for the hills. A 'Scala Miloria' shows a scale of  $\frac{1}{2}$  inch to the mile.

The general shape and configuration of the map in Burghley's atlas clearly had no influence on the Boazio/Mercator/Norden 1590s series of maps and the Cotton map is even further removed: the hills, waterways, beacons and, above all, the outline of the coast, differ markedly from the 1590s series. Although the hills on the Cotton map might be thought to be a more accurate representation of the island's

topography, this cannot be said for the wild sweeping lines of the coast which, curiously, are more closely allied to the well known map 'described by William White Gent. Augmented and published by' John Speed in his *Theatre* in 1611. The coast line in both these maps exaggerates the depth of bays, prominence of headlands and width of waterways in a similar way and suggests a 'mental map' drawn by eye without even the relatively simple surveying techniques of the Elizabethan cartographer. Little is known about William White (Turley 1974) and even less of the provenance of this manuscript 'description' map, so the assumption of a relationship between them must be speculative, but could this be the 'description' by 'William White Gent.' that Speed 'augmented and published'?

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