

## Early Medieval Berkshire (AD410 – 1066)

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### 1. Introduction

#### Nature of the evidence; history of research; role of material culture

This survey covers the administrative county of Berkshire as it existed between 1974 and 1998. The county boundaries in that period differed significantly from those of the 'historic' county that existed for over a thousand years. The most significant changes occurred in 1974 with the loss of the north-western area of the county to Oxfordshire and the acquisition of Slough, Eton, Datchet, Horton and Wraysbury from Buckinghamshire. Other changes to the exterior boundaries included a series of alterations in 1895 which saw the acquisition of Coombe from Hampshire and an exchange of lands with Wilshire on the south-western boundary. In 1911 Caversham was transferred from Oxfordshire (Hunter 1995, 11-12; Durrant 1998, 6-7). At the time of writing 'new' Berkshire is split into six unitary local authorities, with the county remaining as a functioning administrative unit only for ambulance drivers, firemen, strategic planners and archivists. The county is currently served by two local authority archaeology services and hence two Sites and Monuments Records, one for West Berkshire and another for the five unitaries in the east of the county (Reading, Wokingham, Bracknell Forest, Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead, and Slough)

Whilst it may be argued that Berkshire has always been an artificial 'unit', even in the Anglo-Saxon period, reviewing the Anglo-Saxon evidence for the 1974-1998 manifestation of the county inevitably throws up some peculiarities. In particular the most significant urban centre in Berkshire at the time of Domesday Book (Wallingford) and the late Anglo-Saxon shire meeting place of Berkshire at Scutcher Knob (*Cwicelmshlaewe*) now fall within the remit of Oxfordshire. Nevertheless, some of the boundaries of 'new' Berkshire still have their origins in the Anglo-Saxon period. The straight boundary sections with Surrey in the south east may have been formalised in the ninth century, reflecting earlier territorial divisions (Gelling 1976, 844). The southern boundary in general is thought to represent the limit of Mercian control in the early ninth century. This boundary includes a noticeable northern kink in the vicinity of Silchester, delineating an area around the Roman town. This peculiarity features on mid 18<sup>th</sup> century maps and might conceivably reflect some sort of territory around the Roman town of as yet unknown date. The western boundary of new Berkshire around the parish of Lambourn probably reflects the limits Anglo-Saxon shire, whilst the Thames has probably acted as Berkshire's northern boundary since its inception. The shire is first referred to in AD 860 and seems to have been a late and somewhat artificial creation; unlike many other southern English shires it is not named after a county town.

The Anglo-Saxon period is the first for which substantial written evidence for life in Berkshire survives. Although the documentary evidence is decidedly patchy in its scope and coverage, it remains our main source for many aspects of the period, despite the significant strides in archaeological techniques and knowledge in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The role of material culture in elucidating the early medieval period is beset

with difficulties. Anglo-Saxon pottery is rarely found, even in large scale fieldwalking exercises, partly no doubt because much of it was handmade and fired at low temperatures, making it susceptible to breaking up in the soil. An added complication is that even specialists sometimes find it difficult to distinguish between organic-tempered Anglo-Saxon pottery and similar later prehistoric material. Coins only begin to circulate again from the mid Anglo-Saxon period and in general are rarely found. Anglo-Saxon buildings were predominantly of wooden construction, leaving only the faintest of remains in the forms of post holes and occasionally sill beam slots. Frequently only the peripheral elements of settlements are detected in the form of pits and 'sunken featured' buildings cut into the subsoil (indeed until the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century these were regarded as the primary dwellings of the Anglo-Saxons).

Perhaps the most archaeologically 'visible' aspect of Anglo-Saxon material culture is the evidence of early burials accompanied by grave goods (once commonly referred to as 'pagan', although the term has apparently fallen out of fashion). Metalwork accompanying male inhumation burials includes spearheads, shield bosses, swords and large knives known as scramasaxes - reminding us of the potentially violent nature of this society - whilst female burials often include brooches, necklaces, beads and pins. Pottery accompanying early burials, including the urns used for cremations, is often of better quality with decoration which allows more precise typological classification and dating. Unfortunately many of the known cemetery sites in Berkshire were uncovered in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century, and much of this evidence is therefore inadequately recorded. Where Anglo-Saxon settlement sites are identified, modern excavation techniques have begun to elucidate the nature of farming from the study of animal bones and plant remains, although the number of sites with this quality of information remains relatively small in Berkshire. Wraybury is perhaps the best evidenced site in this regard, with an unusual collection of charred plant remains (Astill and Lobb 1989).

The written evidence for the Anglo-Saxon period only begins to emerge after the conversion of the area to Christianity, with the vast bulk of material surviving from the later Anglo-Saxon period, usually in later medieval compilations of church records. Berkshire is relatively well evidenced by Anglo-Saxon charters, thanks in large part to the archives of Abingdon Abbey concerning its estates in north and west Berkshire; the charter material for East Berkshire is somewhat sparser. Many of these charters contain boundary clauses which provide valuable insights into the topography and landscape of the peripheral areas of Anglo-Saxon estates. Insights into the political and administrative history of Anglo-Saxon Berkshire can also be gleaned by fleeting mentions in records such as the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle and the Burghal Hidage, whilst the first truly comprehensive source for patterns of land use, settlement and estate organisation is provided at the very end of the period by Domesday Book. The evidence of place-names, including minor names of fields and woods also provides a substantial tool for unravelling the story of settlement, land use and territorial organisation in the Anglo-Saxon period, since so many surviving place-names derive from this time.

Early reviews of the archaeological evidence for Anglo-Saxon Berkshire can be found within the Victoria County History (Smith 1906) and in Peake's *Archaeology of Berkshire* (Peake 1931) although both were forced to rely largely on the early burial evidence and the written documentation. The pattern of archaeological activity in the

19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries was largely influenced by antiquarian interest in visible monuments such as barrows and the chance discoveries associated with activities such as quarrying and railway construction (leading for example to the discovery of the East Shefford cemetery). In the post-war period the pressure for housing and gravel extraction within Berkshire has continued to drive patterns of archaeological work. Anglo-Saxon activity rarely forms the main component of archaeological sites in this 'rescue' environment, although a rare exception was the works (still awaiting full publication) at Old Windsor between 1952 and 1958 (Wilson and Hurst 1958). Housing development also led to the opportunity to sample a large area of Anglo-Saxon rural settlement at Wraysbury in 1980 (Astill and Lobb 1989). Town centre redevelopments of the 1970s and 80s within Berkshire produced relatively little of interest for the Anglo-Saxonist, with excavations on the Reading waterfront taking place outside the suspected area of Anglo-Saxon settlement (Hawkes and Fasham 1997), whilst excavations in the heart of Newbury (Vince *et al* 1997) merely revealed the rural background to the post-Conquest growth of this town. The assessments of the evidence for Anglo-Saxon towns in Berkshire by Grenville Astill (1978 and 1984) relied (out of necessity) heavily on topographical and documentary evidence and remain the most useful overall synthesis for this subject. The evidence base for urban archaeology in Berkshire is slowly being supplemented by piecemeal housing developments in some secondary centres within 'new Berkshire' (see section 6).

From the 1970s onwards a series of large-scale surveys were commissioned to assess the 'archaeological potential' threatened by the growing pace of development within the county. These included extensive fieldwalking surveys of large parts of the county, which produced a disappointing dearth of Anglo-Saxon material. Thus Julian Richards' Survey of the Berkshire Downs produced no Anglo-Saxon pottery from general fieldwalking and just 7 sherds from two site specific surveys in Lambourn (Richards 1978, 22-3). The Maddle Farm survey found 1 sherd of Anglo-Saxon pottery from the fieldwalking of 1792 hectares, with another 4 sherds found during an intensive collection exercise at Knighton Bushes (Gaffney and Tingle 1989, 245). Surveys in the lower Kennet Valley between Newbury and Theale throughout the late 1970s and 1980s again produced no recorded Anglo-Saxon pottery, although the publication of this volume did provide a useful summary of known evidence for this part of the county (Lobb and Rose 1996, 92-99). In the east of the county the Loddon Valley survey produced 12 sherds of Anglo-Saxon pottery from the 696 hectares fieldwalked, of which 11 were found in one cluster near Wargrave (Ford 1997a, 16, 22). The East Berkshire Archaeological Survey of a large north-south transect of this part of the county produced no Anglo-Saxon pottery from an area of over 21 sq. km examined by fieldwalking (Ford 1987). Unsurprisingly a survey of the cropmark evidence from air photographs of areas threatened by gravel extraction in the middle Thames area (Gates 1975) also failed to positively identify any distinctively early medieval sites. Some of the numerous cropmarks recorded in that volume and subsequent air surveys may date from the Anglo-Saxon period, but this would require excavation of surviving sites for confirmation.

With the era of PPG16 and developer funded archaeology the 1990s onwards has seen evidence emerge from a wide range of sites, although the development-focussed nature of excavations means that it often remains impossible to perceive a holistic picture of early medieval activity. Nevertheless, the trend towards redevelopment at greater density within existing 'settlement boundaries' has at least allowed

archaeological activity in areas which may be key to understanding mid and late Anglo-Saxon settlement patterns, with finds from recent excavations at Lambourn, Kintbury and Thatcham beginning to confirm long held suspicions about the antiquity of these settlements. Another recent and largely welcome development has been the concerted effort to improve the recording of metal detector finds in the county through the Portable Antiquities Scheme. One by-product of this information, and the increasingly popularity of detecting, is the potential to skew the distribution patterns of archaeological finds.

Indeed a key challenge for the assessment of the archaeological evidence for Anglo-Saxon Berkshire (or any other period) is the degree to which the map of sites and findspots reflects not early medieval activity but the activity of archaeologists, following the patterns of development over the last hundred years or so. An attempt has been made to assess this situation in Fig. 1 where the Anglo-Saxon evidence from the two Sites and Monuments record has been superimposed on a contoured map reflecting archaeological activity, as recorded in the National Monuments Record Excavation Database (see Morris 2005 for a similar approach in Essex). Whilst the NMR database is not a comprehensive record of archaeological activity (it fails to reflect, for example, the large scale fieldwalking programmes referred to above and activity after 2001) it does emphasise the degree to which excavations have been concentrated in modern centres of population such as Reading and Newbury. Whilst undoubtedly the pattern of Anglo-Saxon material tends to follow the pattern of archaeological activity there are some notable exceptions, for example the lack of material in the interior of East Berkshire, to the south of Reading and (in terms of sites) in the Kennet Valley, despite considerable archaeological intervention in these areas. Similarly, the Lambourn Valley is beginning to produce significant evidence for early-mid Anglo-Saxon activity despite a relative lack of work in that area. A cautionary note should also be added that distribution maps of archaeological sites and finds alone are clearly of almost no value for the later Anglo-Saxon period, when our documentary sources make it clear that settlement was far more widespread than the meagre material record would imply.

The documentary evidence for Anglo-Saxon Berkshire has been catalogued and analysed in a number of key publications. Chief amongst these are the three English Place Name Society volumes for Berkshire by Margaret Gelling, one of the first EPNS volumes to include a comprehensive catalogue and analysis of minor names (Gelling 1973, 1974, 1976). Gelling's third volume also analyses Anglo-Saxon charter bounds throughout the county and largely supersedes the earlier analysis of Grundy (1922-1928). The value of the records of Abingdon Abbey was recognised long ago by Sir Frank Stenton (1913) and these charters have recently been thoroughly analysed by Susan Kelly (2000 and 2001). The text of nearly all Royal Anglo-Saxon charters is now available (in Latin and Old English) on the *Regesta regum Anglorum* website (Miller 2001). A broader analysis of the written evidence for Berkshire's surrounding region can be found in Yorke (1995). Regrettably there is no modern synthesis dedicated to Anglo-Saxon Berkshire which combines the written and archaeological record. A summary of a selection of early medieval sites can be found in the early chapters of a booklet produced by Babbie in the 1990s (Babbie n.d.), whilst several surveys of surrounding counties or small parts of Berkshire have material of relevance (Blair 1991; Blair 1994; Clark 2005; Rutherford Davies 1982).

## 2. Inheritance

### Key features inherited from earlier periods

Describing and explaining the transition from 'Roman Britain' to 'Anglo-Saxon England' has long been one of the key challenges for English archaeology, not least since the change was clearly so far-reaching and yet the evidence for it is in so many respects deficient. What is clear is that there was a widespread, substantial and rapid decline in what may be thought of as distinctively 'Roman' culture. Hence villas fell out of use, the ability or inclination to build new masonry buildings disappeared, coinage ceased to be struck or imported, wheelthrown pottery ceased to be manufactured and so on. Despite this radical change it is worth remembering that high status, highly 'Romanized' settlements made up only a proportion of the Roman settlement hierarchy and perhaps some of this decline may have been underway before the fifth century. Much effort has been expended in search of 'continuity' from the Roman (or more accurately 'Romano-British') period to the Anglo-Saxon, based on the assumption that however significant the cultural changes, it seems unlikely there was a wholesale replacement of population and the basic functions of agricultural life must have survived. Describing the nature of any 'continuity' (whether 'British' survival, early contact between Britons and Saxons or direct succession of activity without contact) will always be a challenge, and is further hampered by the difficulty in detecting processes such as Romano-British to Anglo-Saxon acculturation. Perhaps the main lesson of research to date is that there is no single 'transition' story for England. Regional and local evidence is therefore vital to an understanding of this most impenetrable of periods.

The decline in Roman material culture paradoxically means that it is difficult to date precisely when certain aspects of Roman activity came to an end. For example it becomes difficult to date the abandonment of features such as the Roman rectilinear field systems of the Berkshire Downs if we assume that the last communities to farm within them were largely aceramic (Bowden et al 1993, 111). The analysis of settlements is beset by similar problems, but it does at least provide an opportunity to marshal the evidence for the latest known 'Roman' evidence and the earliest known 'Anglo-Saxon' evidence in the hope of identifying any significant patterns.

The most important local Roman settlement lay just outside the future boundaries of Berkshire at Silchester. Evidence for sub-Roman urban activity within the town walls appears to be lacking. The programme of excavation by Reading University at Insula IX has not produced anything later than the fourth century, and even the 'Ogam Stone' is now considered to date from the late Roman period. Beyond the town walls the picture is less clear. A series of earthworks, known as Grim's Bank, encircle the territory to the north of Silchester and were previously interpreted as marking out or defending a sub-Roman territory centred on Silchester, blocking the road to Dorchester (O'Neil 1944, 118-9). A more recent assessment concluded that the only identifiable stratigraphic relationship for these earthworks was with another undated earthwork. Excavations in 1978 failed to produce any datable evidence, although comparison of the environmental evidence with nearby sites suggested a more likely date in the late Iron Age or early Roman period (Astill 1980, 64-65). Further sets of

earthworks, one running west from Streatley and Aldworth ('Grim's Dyke') and a series of parallel earthworks on Greenham and Crookham Commons have also been interpreted as defending an earlier, larger territory (O'Neil 1944, 119-120) although these are also best regarded with similar caution.

Evidence for 'sub-Roman' (i.e. not necessarily 'Anglo-Saxon') activity has been identified from at least two rural sites in Berkshire. At the Hoveringham Gravel Pit excavation near Bray a Roman mixed rite cemetery appears to have been in use from c. AD 320-400, followed by a phase of industrial activity (probably metalworking) dated to the first decade of the fifth century (Over 1993, 28-31). An 'early Saxon' floor surface, cut by further burials was also identified. At Lowbury Hill the heavily worn late Roman coins and abraded pottery suggest that this temple site may have continued in use well into the sub-Roman period (Fulford and Ripon 1994, 201). The type of closely dated continuity visible at Dorchester-on-Thames appears to be elusive in new Berkshire, although it has been claimed that the Waylands Nursery site at Wraysbury may provide an example of late Roman and early Saxon activity with "no significant chronological break" (Pine 2003, 137).

Taking a broader view of rural settlement a key consideration must be the degree of settlement mobility in both the Roman and early-middle Anglo-Saxon periods. A comparison of known Roman and Anglo-Saxon settlement sites in the middle Thames valley has suggested that the transition saw continued, perhaps slightly accelerated settlement mobility, but nothing which could be categorised as a dramatic change linked to political events (Clark 2005, 79-81). Indeed, notwithstanding this settlement mobility at a local level the tendency in the Middle Thames valley was for both Roman and Anglo-Saxon settlements to occupy favoured areas, especially gravel 'islands' and terraces in and around the floodplain. The one noticeable exception to that pattern however occurs in north-east Berkshire where a settlement cluster seems to exist stretching from the area of the Weycock Hill temple (near Waltham St Lawrence) towards the Thames. The Sites and Monuments Record contains not a single reference to Anglo-Saxon material in this area, and it appears that the landscape may have seen a transition from a densely settled Roman area to a more wooded, 'remote resource' area in the Anglo-Saxon period (Clark 2005, 155-6). The suggestion that 'Waltham' place names can be dated with confidence to the earliest Anglo-Saxon period (Huggins 1975) seems somewhat doubtful to the current author and is certainly not yet supported by the Berkshire example (Clark 2005, 161-2).

A detailed comparison of settlement patterns and chronologies for the whole county of Berkshire could be a valuable exercise. Based on published Roman distribution maps for western parts of the county (Richards 1978, 46; Lobb and Rose 1996, 87) it would seem that significant Roman and Anglo-Saxon activity can be found in the Lambourn and Kennet valleys (perhaps attested somewhat earlier for the Anglo-Saxon period in the former). However some areas with moderate concentrations of Roman activity, notably on parts of the Berkshire Downs and the Pang Valley have yet to produce significant quantities of Anglo-Saxon material. The fact that fieldwalking in Berkshire has produced so little Anglo-Saxon evidence is particularly frustrating when seeking to compare activity patterns with the Roman period, but it is perhaps worth noting that the one Anglo-Saxon site found in the Loddon Valley survey also produced a concentration of Roman pottery (Ford 1997a, 22, 24).

Excepting the Hoveringham Gravel Pit cemetery site (see above), and given the reinterpretation of the Jack of Both Sides cemetery (now viewed as Norman and later) there are no clear examples of burial sites remaining in use from the Romano-British period into the early Anglo-Saxon. The poorly recorded Pangbourne/Shooters Hill site has been suggested as one possibility, whilst the 'Saxon sounding' burials discovered in the 19<sup>th</sup> century have been noted in the vicinity of Roman villas at Hermitage and Basildon (Greenaway 2007, 23). The 'pagan' Anglo-Saxon cemetery site at 'Dreadnought/Broken Bow' in Earley contained two Roman coins, which may indicate that people buried in the Anglo-Saxon fashion had curated Roman objects, especially if the 19<sup>th</sup> century interpretation of this site as 'late pagan' is accepted (Peake 1931, 127; Stevens 1894). The seventh century barrow burial at Lowbury Hill is an example of a burial site probably chosen for its association with the Roman past, in this case the Roman temple which must have still been visible in some form until its walls were robbed and backfilled in the late sixth or early seventh century. The burial has been interpreted as an attempt to legitimise Anglo-Saxon rule over an area still conscious of its Romano-British inheritance (Härke 1994, 205).

It is of course difficult to know whether some of the 'Anglo-Saxon' burials found in Berkshire or elsewhere in fact represent surviving Romano-British populations taking on Anglo-Saxon customs. Archaeological evidence for the survival of 'British' populations has normally been surmised from areas with a distinct lack of early Anglo-Saxon material, particularly for example in the Chilterns (Rutherford Davies 1982). The interior of East Berkshire (along with the adjoining area of north-west Surrey) and the Kennet Valley might be candidates for similarly 'empty' areas based on current patterns of 5<sup>th</sup> century evidence. The place-name and river-name evidence for British 'survival' and/or British-Anglo-Saxon contact throws up examples across the county, with a possible greater concentration in the east (Gelling 1976, 800-812). However, despite the fact that 'Berkshire' itself is a partly Brittonic name, the overall survival of this evidence is sparse compared with more western counties and Hampshire (Coates and Breeze 2000, 263-392; and see Coates 2000, 40-43 for a recent review of the place-name Speen).

The specific fate of Roman Roads in Anglo-Saxon Berkshire is also difficult to discern, and is not helped by the fact that the precise course of some major routes and the existence of more minor roads is not yet fully understood. Clearly some long distance routes may have fallen out of use after the places they linked together (for example Silchester) were no longer occupied. Nevertheless local stretches of road survived in places to be followed by the line of extant roads (e.g. the B4000) and a number of important places in the mid or later Anglo-Saxon period are located close to the line of now extinct Roman roads which have been archaeologically proven (e.g. Thatcham) or postulated (e.g. Cookham).

There is also evidence that the Anglo-Saxons consciously re-used prehistoric features in the Berkshire landscape. The most obvious example of this is the re-use of Bronze Age barrows for 'secondary' burials. Given the antiquarian investigations of many of these burial mounds it can sometimes be difficult to distinguish primary Anglo-Saxon barrow burials from examples of re-use (see for example the Cock Marsh barrow burial at Cookham). A clearer example is the insertion of a seventh century cemetery containing at least 50 burials into and around a Bronze Age barrow at Field Farm, Burghfield (Butterworth and Lobb 1992, 5-73). There is no obvious evidence in new

Berkshire for the Anglo-Saxon re-use or re-fortification of Iron Age hillforts, although burials were found within Blewburton Hill just outside the boundary (Collins and Collins 1959) and a small collection of Anglo-Saxon coins were recovered in the vicinity of Walbury Hill. It is certainly the case that Iron Age hillforts and Bronze Age barrows feature prominently as boundary markers in a number of Anglo-Saxon charter bounds, along with references to ‘stones’ which may refer to other, now lost, prehistoric monuments. These references are too common to be mere coincidences and suggest that the location of prehistoric monuments influenced the course of Anglo-Saxon boundaries.

### **3. Chronology**

#### **Note on Conventional Sequence; artefact chronologies; scientific dating**

In the broadest sense the Anglo-Saxon period is often divided into early (c.450-c.650), middle (c. 650-850 and late (c.850-1066) periods. Whilst these divisions are clearly arbitrary the advent of Christianity in the seventh century and the first serious Viking invasions of southern England in the mid ninth century were two influential factors which lend some meaning to these divisions.

The conventional archaeological (and historical) sequence can be briefly outlined with reference to Berkshire. As described above the fifth century saw the rapid decline of Roman culture, although continued fifth century activity can be reasonably claimed at a small number of sites (e.g. Bray, Lowbury Hill). The earliest arrival of the ‘Anglo-Saxons’, whether as invaders, settlers, or cultural influence, is mainly attested through the survival of burials accompanied by grave goods. The earliest activity in the region appears to have been in the upper Thames around Dorchester, Abingdon and Sutton Courtney. Areas within ‘new’ Berkshire including the middle Thames were probably peripheral to this initial focus of activity and the cemeteries at East Shefford and Reading may only have come into use in the second half of the fifth century. Settlement evidence which might be consistent with a fifth century date is present at Lambourn (later fifth to sixth century) and at the far eastern end of the county in Wraysbury, a site which perhaps should be seen as forming part of a loose concentration of fifth to sixth century activity with Harmondsworth and East Molesey (Foundations Archaeology 1999a and 1999b; Pine 2003; Andrews and Crockett 1996). Elsewhere in Berkshire the idea of short-lived ‘British survival’ cannot be entirely dismissed, particularly for the environs of Silchester, the Kennet Valley, parts of the Berkshire Downs and the interior of eastern Berkshire.

The sixth and seventh centuries saw the expansion of Anglo-Saxon burials and settlements throughout the county, although it remains difficult to chart this process with any degree of precision. The advent of ‘barrow burials’, seen in Berkshire at Compton, Lowbury Hill and Cookham are usually taken to signify the emergence of a new elite. The sixth and seventh centuries are also the periods to which we should probably assign the first discernable Anglo-Saxon political entities – ‘tribal’ territories of people linked to leaders, real or otherwise, whose names survive in the place-name record. Only one example, the *Sunningas* of East Berkshire, is independently corroborated by documentary sources (in this case a copy of a late seventh century charter). Other early territories may have included the followers of Reada (Reading) and Peaga (Pangbourne). ‘Yattendon’ is the only example of this place-name type in

the west of 'new' Berkshire, but so scanty is the evidence it would be unwise to assume that this part of the county was not similarly organised at some stage.

Not only was mid Anglo-Saxon Berkshire not a coherent unit, it is also clear the area was a 'contested territory', subject to influences from more powerful neighbours. The rich Taplow Burial on the opposite bank of the Thames from Maidenhead is suggestive of Kentish influence amongst the elite in the middle Thames valley (Webster 2000 and 2001). The eastern part of Berkshire, along with some or all of Surrey, may have formed part of a Middle Saxon polity which itself could have been controlled by Essex (see Bailey 1989 and Blair 1989 for fuller discussion). However the two biggest influences were the kingdoms of Mercia and Wessex (also known as the *Gewissae*). Charter and Chronicle references allow us to chart an oscillating power struggle from the seventh to the ninth centuries between the two kingdoms for control of lands including the Thames Valley and the Berkshire Downs. Against this background mid-Saxon Berkshire saw the emergence of important settlements and church sites ('minsters') which would develop into important royal and ecclesiastical centres. Documentary evidence attests a minster at Bradfield in the late seventh century and at Abingdon and Cookham by the eighth century, whilst archaeological evidence exists for mid-Saxon activity at Old Windsor, Thatcham and Reading.

The political situation was resolved in the ninth century when, following Egbert's victory at *Ellendun* in 825, much of southern England was brought within the West Saxon kingdom. Berkshire however appears to have remained in Mercian hands and it may be in this period that the county was territorially defined, being the only area of Mercian land south of the Thames (Gelling 1976, 839-40). A Mercian king was able to grant land at Pangbourne in 844, but is usually assumed that by the time of King Alfred's birth at Wantage in 849 Berkshire had been transferred (perhaps peacefully) into West Saxon hands. A key figure may have been Ealdorman Athelwulf, present as a Mercian ealdorman in 844 and also recorded in 860 leading the 'men of Berkshire' as part of a West Saxon army fighting the Vikings (this is the earliest actual reference to 'Berkshire'). Berkshire became the crucible of the Viking wars in 871 when a Viking army fortified an encampment at Reading, whilst plundering the locality. Battles followed at Englefield, Reading itself and Ashdown (i.e. the Berkshire Downs). The construction of fortified burhs at Wallingford and Sashes Island (probably near Cookham) formed part of the West Saxon reaction to these Viking incursions.

The later Anglo-Saxon period saw Berkshire become an integrated part of the West Saxon kingdom that expanded during the tenth century to become 'England'. It is probably to this period that we can ascribe the most significant growth in 'urban' centres such as Reading and the nucleation of some other settlements along the main river valleys. The charter evidence from this period provides us with a glimpse of the Berkshire countryside and also the development of new relatively small secular estates formed in some cases from the fragmentation of larger units which may have conformed to the 'multiple estate' model. This period also saw the creation of new churches and the fragmentation of the ecclesiastical territories and rights of many early minsters and mother churches, although neither process was straightforward. Berkshire suffered again during the second Viking wars of Aethelred II's reign, with the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle recording raids in 1006 and 1009, the former involving a provocative stopover by the Viking army at the shire meeting place (Scutchamer's

Knob). The impact of the Norman invasion of 1066 and subsequent wholesale replacement of the Anglo-Saxon ruling class eventually led to a number of important changes in Berkshire, including the abandonment of Old Windsor in favour of New Windsor and the development of new towns at Newbury and Hungerford.

Turning to the dating value of artefacts from the period, it has already been remarked that much Anglo-Saxon pottery is relatively undiagnostic. At a national level the earlier decorated pottery which turns up on both cemetery and settlement sites before the seventh century has been closely studied (Myres 1977), although recent opinion now tends to doubt whether this material can be very closely dated or ascribed to particular ethnic groups such as Jutes, Saxons or Angles (Hamerow 2001). Perhaps the most common type of pottery from domestic sites in Berkshire is 'organic-tempered', which is hand-made and usually assumed to be locally produced. This type of pottery is usually thought to be characteristic of the early-mid Anglo-Saxon period and therefore only broadly dateable in southern England to c.450-c.850. However this analysis has been questioned in light of the assemblage of sandy wares from the Waylands Nursery site at Wraybury, which is thought to be 5<sup>th</sup> century in date. The lack of organic-tempered fabrics at this site and other nearby early (i.e. 5<sup>th</sup>-7<sup>th</sup> century) Anglo-Saxon sites in Middlesex and Surrey has led to the suggestion that the organic-tempered tradition may have started later than previously thought, at least in some parts of Berkshire (Timby 2003, 127). From the middle Saxon period more diagnostic wheel-turned wares such as Ipswich ware appear (in production c. 725-850) although this has only been found at three sites in Berkshire to date. The later Saxon period has a number of diagnostic wares, although again some of those found in Berkshire have a relatively broad date range which in some cases spans the Norman Conquest (e.g. 'Cotswold-type' ware). It has been claimed that organic-tempered wares continued in use at Old Windsor into the eleventh century (Hurst 1959), although Blinkhorn (2005a) notes that such a tradition would be unique is therefore doubtful.

The re-emergence of coinage in the Anglo-Saxon period provides further dating evidence although the number of finds within Berkshire is relatively small - just 35 are recorded for new Berkshire on the Fitzwilliam Museum database of early medieval single coin finds, excluding hoards. No *sceattas* earlier than AD 700 have been found in Berkshire to date. Other metal finds, in particular jewellery such as brooches, buckles and belt fittings can be reasonably diagnostic for dating purposes, albeit not without their problems; these are mainly found as part of cemetery sites or as stray finds from metal detecting.

The main scientific dating technique of relevance to Anglo-Saxon Berkshire is radiocarbon dating. Inherent inaccuracies in the technique and several minor plateaus in the calibration curve for the early medieval period mean that radiocarbon dates for the Anglo-Saxon period often have a range of 200 to 250 years when quoted at the 95% (2 sigma) probability level. Whilst this inhibits close dating, the technique remains of some value in ascribing organic material to broad periods, especially in the absence of other finds. In Berkshire the radiocarbon technique has been used to date a mid Saxon well at Wickhams Field (cal. AD 650-870); possible mid Saxon fish traps (cal. AD 565-770, 550-760 and 640-880) and a mid-late Saxon eel basket (cal. AD 785-1160) at Anslow's Cottages; a mid-late Saxon timber stake (cal. AD 785-960 at 1s), possibly part of a fish trap at the Theale Industrial site; a possible mid-Saxon channel marker (cal. AD 655-760) in the Holybrook at Coley Park Farm; early-mid

Saxon burials (cal. AD 630-780 at 1s) at the Plummary Wall in Reading; a burial (cal. AD 591-655 at 1s) in the fill of the robbed out walls at the Lowbury Hill temple; and charcoal from a pit (cal AD630-960) at Forbury Square in Reading (Butterworth and Lobb 1992, 85, 171; Hawkes and Fasham 1997, 59-61; Fulford and Rippon 1994, 189). Dendrochronology has been used to date the large mill-wheels found at Old Windsor, suggesting a felling date after AD 676, rather earlier than assumed by the excavator (Tyers et al 1994, 14; Wilson and Hurst 1958, 184),

#### **4. Landscape and Land Use**

##### **Use of natural places, rivers (and related structures), woodland, designed landscapes, agriculture, fields and field systems, hunting and gathering strategies (including fishing)**

The study of the Anglo-Saxon landscape and land use remains heavily reliant on documentary evidence – principally place-names, charter bounds and Domesday Book. Whilst the concept that Anglo-Saxon incomers settled a wilderness landscape has long been discarded, there is evidence in the place-name record of a keen appreciation of local topography and natural resources. Topographical place-names appear to be in use from the earliest Anglo-Saxon period and suggest that land was carefully selected for farming and settlement. For example the element *eg* or *ieg* which frequently has the meaning of ‘raised ground in wet country’ was used to name gravel outcrops or marginally higher areas in the floodplain which today are shown as dry islands above the 100 year floodplain on environment agency maps (Clark 2005, 64-68). Place-name references in Berkshire also refer to various ‘natural’ resources such as the ‘clearing where bees swarm’ (*imbelea*) in the bounds of Winkfield or frequent references to small ponds (Gelling 1976, 647).

The intensive use of rivers and their floodplains is attested by written and archaeological evidence. The mid Saxon timber structures found at Anslow’s Cottages appear to be fish or eel traps, whilst later timbers from this site suggest management of water meadows (Butterworth and Lobb 1992, 176). Domesday Book frequently records mills and fisheries for riverside estates in Berkshire, with many estates on the Thames and Loddon having multiple fisheries. Both mills and fisheries were often assessed in renders of eels rather than monetary terms, and the importance of this species was shown in excavations at Wraysbury (see below). Archaeologically there is evidence that mill leats could be substantial undertakings from the mid Saxon period onwards – the earliest and largest leat at Old Windsor (now thought to date to c. AD 700) seems to have run for three quarters of a mile across a loop in the Thames (Wilson and Hurst 1958, 184). Unsurprisingly the riverside estates were also those with most recorded meadow in Domesday Book.

The Berkshire Domesday Book record of woodland (assessed by swine renders) suggests a strong distribution in the east (especially) and south of the county, with woodland also present in smaller quantities on estates occupying the southern slopes of the Downs (i.e. the west-central and northern parts of ‘new’ Berkshire) but very little in the estates occupying the Downs scarp slope and the Vale of White Horse (Campbell 1962, 263). The place-name evidence broadly mirrors this pattern, with a noticeable collection of *leah* names on the southern slopes of the Downs, taking in the Chieveley area (Gelling 1974, maps III and VI). Anglo-Saxon charter bounds by their

nature only tells us about the peripheries of estates, but again the Berkshire evidence shows a very clear concentration of woodland place-name elements in the east of the county and on the extensive lower southern slopes of the Downs in West Berkshire. The bounds in the former area tend to be simpler, suggesting a less complex, subdivided landscape in the late Anglo-Saxon period. Hooke (1988) classified the interior of East Berkshire as a relatively 'empty' region (along with the south-western part of the county) whilst the central-West Berkshire area was deemed an 'intermediate' region with plentiful woods, some heath, but also arable agriculture evidenced by the Domesday record and pollen evidence. Woodland names are rarer in charters of North-West of Old Berkshire, and indeed it is from here that the vast majority of charter references to open fields are found (Gelling 1976, 627).

In addition to common woodland-names such as *leah*, the charter bounds in the east, the south and, to some extent, the 'central-west' parts of Berkshire include linear features described as *haga* and *wyrtwala*. Whilst the former name may sometimes refer to hedgerows, both terms probably also denote woodbanks, and in some cases it is possible to trace the likely location of these banks in the modern landscape (Hooke 1998, 155-6). The combination of *hagae* names with personal names in late Anglo-Saxon charter bounds suggests that they may have demarcated private grounds fenced off for hunting (Hooke 1988, 147-50). In this respect the landscape of parts of east Berkshire may already have begun to resemble the post-Conquest situation with its numerous medieval parks. However, whilst Domesday Book records fines for men who ignored the summons to take part in 'game-beating' for hunting, and Edward the Confessor had foresters at Windsor and Kintbury, the concept of 'forest law' with exclusive royal hunting over large swathes of land (irrespective of ownership) appears to be a Norman introduction. The likelihood is that much Anglo-Saxon woodland in Berkshire was open in nature (i.e. 'wood pasture') which would also make it more amenable to hunting.

The Berkshire corpus of place-names in Gelling (1973 and 1974) represents a resource which may still have more to tell us about the late Anglo-Saxon landscape. An analysis of the proportion of Old English place-names of different land use types for eastern Berkshire allowed the identification of patterns not visible in Domesday Book, and allows the use of material which can be located within parishes but not more closely mapped (Clark 2005, 55-7). Whilst this approach lacks chronological precision it also allows the investigation of significant land use types (e.g. heathland and pasture) which Domesday Book overlooks. It is clear from this analysis that woodland and heathland place-names showed a strong local affinity, and these land-use types may have dominated large areas of south-eastern Berkshire covered by *-feld* parish names. In general the place-name evidence suggests that most parishes in East Berkshire contained a mix of land-use types, a factor also seen in the Kennet valley where it influenced the strip pattern of parishes and manors (Lobb and Rose 1996, x). The East Berkshire analysis also emphasises the dichotomy between the rich riverside estates and the poorer quality land in the interior where the geology (Eocene Beds, London Clay and Plateau gravels) is less conducive to agriculture. The London Clay extends across the south of Berkshire, and another band of *-feld* parishes, to the south and south-west of Reading, has been suggested as an extensive area of open heathland used for common pasture which may have acted as an early territorial boundary between the West and Middle Saxons (Gelling 1978, 125; but see Lobb and Rose 1996, 94 and Petts 1997 for two alternative views).

Evidence for Anglo-Saxon open field systems is sparse within 'new Berkshire'. Chieveley has one reference in a set of charter bounds to open field features on its boundary with Winterbourne. Crops such as flax and rye are mentioned in the bounds of Welford and Hawkrige Wood. The interior of estates however remains something of a mystery. It has recently been suggested that in areas of dispersed settlement and more wooded countryside early arable cultivation would take place in 'arable ovals', i.e. unrestricted enclosures around which farms and hamlets would be scattered (Roberts and Wrathmell 2002, 116). Whilst such a pattern has yet to be proved for Berkshire the topography of some villages is worth investigating with this possibility in mind (especially Peasemore, under investigation by the Berkshire Archaeology Research Group, and perhaps also Chieveley, Chaddleworth, Leckhamsptead, Brightwalton, Bucklebury, and, in east Berkshire, Fifield).

The basic pattern of nucleated villages and open fields has been mapped (mainly using later cartographic sources) for West Berkshire by the Historic Landscape Characterisation Project. This shows a concentration of nucleated villages surrounded by open fields on the Berkshire Downs and along the Lambourn valley, whilst in the lower Kennet valley open fields occupied the valley gravels, with settlement (which was generally not clearly nucleated) tending to be located on the valley sides. In the latter case it has been suggested that the 'strip system' of landholdings in place in the lower Kennet Valley by the late Anglo-Saxon period meant that land use types adhered carefully to geological variations, with settlements (represented by church sites) situated higher up the valley sides to be close to common grazing on heathland plateau gravels (Lobb and Rose 1996, 97-99). It is not clear to what extent the open fields and nucleated villages of the Lambourn valley and the Berkshire Downs had emerged by the late Anglo-Saxon period. One suspects that the system existed in places (Lambourn for example is likely to have been a nucleated settlement) and developed further in the later medieval period, but detailed fieldwork will be the only way to verify this. Away from these richer agricultural areas we cannot rule out the possibility that small open field systems emerged but were then rapidly enclosed in the later medieval period, too early to appear on the later map evidence for enclosure.

Despite the dominance of written sources for studying the Anglo-Saxon landscape, environmental evidence from excavations can throw some light on animal husbandry and crops in the period. Only a small number of Berkshire sites have sufficient animal bone remains to be worthy of statistical analysis. The most complete set of evidence comes from the late Saxon excavations near St Andrew's church at Wraysbury, where the expected collection of cattle, sheep/goat (usually indistinguishable archaeologically) and pigs was found, along with deer and hare (suggesting hunting), domestic fowl, freshwater fish (82% of which were eel) and smaller numbers of saltwater fish (e.g. herring). Crops (evidenced by charred remains) included wheat, barley and oats (probably for animal fodder). Hazel nuts were present, but fruit stones were lacking. One unusual feature of the site was that proportion of pig bones (30%), second only to cattle (Astill and Lobb 1989, 85-87). This trend was also seen in the early Anglo-Saxon animal bone assemblage from the nearby Waylands Nursery site where pig bones were the largest group (48%) (Pine 2003, 128-130). The lack of comparative material in Berkshire makes this hard to interpret but it has been suggested that the Thameside pastures in this area may have been more suitable for pigs (and cattle) than sheep, and that the presumed relative abundance of nearby

woodland may have provided ample autumn feeding grounds for pigs. Certainly there appear to have been economic links between Thames-side manors in this area of former Buckinghamshire and the wooded areas of the Burnham plateau, which may have influenced later Anglo-Saxon estate patterns (Clark 2005, 218-225).

Other sites can add minor details to the general picture. A small assemblage from the late Anglo-Saxon site at Kintbury Square produced the usual dominance of cattle, sheep/goat and pig, although this time sheep/goat formed the largest component, whilst deer was also present at a higher proportion than on urban sites such as Southampton (Ford 1997b, 87-89). The animal bone assemblage found with Anglo-Saxon pottery at Brimpton is not securely dated but again pig bones were second only to cattle (Lobb 1990, 51). At Ufton Nervet the contents of the late Anglo-Saxon pit are confidently stated to include goat rather than sheep (Manning 1974, 59). The Anglo-Saxon pit found at Wickham's Field produced a small number of cereal grains with barley surprisingly more common than bread wheat. The processed nature of the grain suggested this feature may have been a storage pit (Crockett 1996 160-62). Finally, excavations at Bartholomew St in Newbury showed evidence of plough marks which probably belong to the second half of the 11<sup>th</sup> century, forming part of the late Saxon field system of *Ulvritone* (Vince 1997, 10).

## **5. Social Organisation**

### **Society, hierarchy and social interaction, households and aspects of domestic-life, land tenure**

Evidence for social status and hierarchy within the archaeological record is relatively limited for Berkshire. For the earlier Anglo-Saxon period the grave goods of 'pagan' burials are viewed by some archaeologists as an indicator of wealth or status, but for Berkshire the majority of burial sites consist of single burials or small groups, hindering any analysis of site specific social stratification. The cemeteries at East Shefford (71 graves) and Reading/Earley (14 graves) might repay analysis in light of developments in theoretical thinking about grave goods. Swords, thought from their rarity to indicate higher status individuals, were found at both these sites, as well as the Noah's Ark site in Cookham. Weapon burials in general have been suggested as an Anglo-Saxon 'ethnic marker', whereas a lack of grave goods in early burials may indicate the presence of lower status individuals or 'British' ethnicity - indeed the two facets were probably linked (Härke 1997). Some undated burials found without grave goods outside of churchyards could fall into this category, although they will be hard to recognise without close scientific dating. The seventh century cemetery at Field Farm, Burghfield largely conforms to the general picture for 'final phase' cemeteries in the "paucity and simplicity" of its grave goods. Only one piece of jewellery was found and a third of burials were unfurnished, although the number of weapon burials was thought to be higher than usual. The unfurnished and non-weapon burials tended to be located on the periphery of, or outside, the Bronze Age ring ditch, usually on an east-west orientation. This could indicate lower social status for these individuals or alternatively a later phase to the cemetery, perhaps under Christian influence (Butterworth and Lobb 1992, 57, 70-72).

Single inhumations in barrows dating to the sixth and seventh centuries are usually thought to reflect the emergence of an 'elite' class, although in Berkshire only the

Lowbury Hill burial can really be classified as 'high status'. The Cock Marsh barrow at Cookham also seems to have produced a pottery drinking vessel, although there is some dispute whether this burial is a primary inhumation (Parker 1889, 339; Grinsell 1936, 49-50; Over 1994, 36). It has been suggested that the man found buried outside Reading in 1831, accompanied by a horse and a Scandinavian style sword, could be one of the Viking leaders from the encampment at Reading in 871 (Hinton 2005, 117). The lack of grave goods with churchyard burials means they have little to tell us about social status, although an eleventh century stone grave cover found at St Mary's in Mortimer shows that ways still existed of marking higher status burials (Blair 2005, 470; Tweddle et al 1995, 335-7).

Excavations of Anglo-Saxon settlements in Berkshire have not produced the type of large scale site plans which could be used to investigate social structure. It is usually assumed that for earlier settlements social stratification was found within households and it is not until the later sixth and seventh centuries that visibly 'higher status' buildings begin to appear. The evidence at Old Windsor, apparently from the ninth century phase, includes a stone building with window glass and roof tiles (Wilson and Hurst, 1958, 184-5).

The evidence for landholding and land tenure in the Anglo-Saxon period derives almost entirely from the documentary evidence. The Kentish Law codes suggest a land owning class of Anglo-Saxon nobles existed from at least the later sixth century, and from the late seventh century royal and noble endowments to the church are recorded for the first time. The majority of charters however date from the later Anglo-Saxon period and are probably linked to the splitting up of former large estates for a growing class of aristocratic land owners. These larger estates may have been organised along the lines of the 'multiple estate' model suggested by Glanville Jones i.e. important central places surrounded by functionally differentiated settlements and lands (Jones 1985). However, whilst we might be able to suggest possible 'multiple estates' based on documentary evidence for Berkshire, finding archaeological evidence for functional differences in their outlying settlements and lands is much more challenging. The pattern of late Anglo-Saxon estates is to some degree reflected in the nineteenth century (and thus probably medieval) parish patterns, although the late Anglo-Saxon manorial pattern was if anything more highly subdivided (witness for example Peasemore with its four 'halls' in 1066). The collection of small parishes, including some with distinctive 'strip patterns' in the Kennet Valley probably derive from later Anglo-Saxon territorial fragmentation, as do those on the slopes of the Burnham plateau (Lobb and Rose 1996, 97; Clark 2005, 218-221). Given the later Anglo-Saxon impact on the pattern of parishes and estates it is unsurprising that it shows no relation to the distribution of Roman villas in east Berkshire (Clark 2005, 107). This should not rule out the possibility of continuity between presumed Roman 'villa estates' and early Anglo-Saxon land units, but reconstructing either convincingly is a difficult task.

The evidence for social interaction, including the conduct of government is again dominated by documentary records. The system of government and justice in later Anglo-Saxon England included shire and 'hundred' courts. The shire meeting place for Berkshire at Scutchamer Knob consists of a mound (now much depleted) which seems to originally date from the Iron Age. A legal case over disputed lands at Bradfield, Hagbourne and Datchet was heard at the site in *c.* AD 990 (Baines 1990).

Hundred meeting places were also sometimes marked by mounds or other ancient features. None have yet been located with certainty for new Berkshire although the meeting site for Rowbury Hundred is thought to have been in the vicinity of either Rowbury Farm or Courtoak Farm in Boxford parish. (Gelling, 1973, 231; Gelling 1976, 847).

## **6. Settlement**

### **Rural settlement, urban settlement, settlement hierarchies, permanence and mobility**

Based on evidence elsewhere in the country the expected settlement pattern for early and middle Anglo-Saxon Berkshire is one of dispersed farmsteads and hamlets with a high degree of settlement mobility. To date the scarce evidence does not contradict this idea. The middle Anglo-Saxon period is when we expect to see the beginning of 'settlement hierarchies', with the creation of royal and ecclesiastical centres. Archaeological evidence from Reading, Thatcham and Old Windsor is beginning to confirm the existence of such higher status settlements at this time, based partly on the discovery of Ipswich ware at these sites. The later Anglo-Saxon settlement pattern remains something of a conundrum. Domesday Book suggests settlement was spread across much of the district, including all the main valleys and on the Berkshire Downs; only the interior of East Berkshire appears relatively 'empty'. The map of archaeological sites and finds for this period is, in contrast, very sparse. Partly this reflects that fact that earlier Anglo-Saxon material such as furnished burials and sunken featured buildings (SFBs) is much more 'visible', but it may also be the case that a great deal of later Anglo-Saxon evidence lies buried beneath the expanse of modern villages and towns. It is in the later period that we should probably expect more permanence in settlement location and in some cases a degree of settlement nucleation.

The difference between 'urban' and 'rural' settlements in Anglo-Saxon Berkshire is not clear cut. The search for complex 'urban' functions will rule out all but the largest sites based on current evidence, but Astill (1984) suggests that Berkshire did have a number of 'central places' of higher importance, often at the centre of secular or church administrative units, so it is worth considering these as a group. Settlements with characteristics of higher status centres in the mid and/or late Anglo-Saxon period include Aldermaston, Bucklebury, Compton, Cookham, Kintbury, Lambourn, Reading, Old Windsor and Thatcham (Wallingford will be covered within the Oxfordshire chapter). Since the evidence for these sites has been thoroughly presented by Astill (1978 and 1984) this section will focus mainly on archaeological finds in the last two decades.

Perhaps the most important royal site in new Berkshire is Old Windsor. The excavations of 1952-58 are regrettably unpublished and therefore only outline details are available. Roman activity, perhaps a villa, seems to have existed near the later church site, with remains possibly extant well into the Anglo-Saxon period. The earliest Anglo-Saxon phase has been dated tentatively to the later seventh century and was originally viewed as an unremarkable 'village or farmstead' (Wilson and Hurst 1958, 184), although the apparent re-dating of the mill wheel, and its substantial leat, to this period may require some revision of this idea. The site is thought to have been

transformed in the early ninth century into a high status, probably royal site, with a glazed and tiled stone building and higher quality small finds in evidence. This period came to a close in the late ninth or early tenth century when the stone building was apparently destroyed by fire and the mill leat fell out of use, prompting suggestions of a devastating Viking raid (Wilson and Hurst 1958, 185). A tenth and eleventh century phase at the site was characterised by timber halls on sleeper beams, a smaller mill wheel and recut leat, and high status finds such as a bronze sword guard (Wilson and Hurst 1958, 185). Recent excavations at the site have been less spectacular. A number of evaluations seem to suggest that the earlier Anglo-Saxon activity was focussed close to the church, with organic-tempered pottery being found in the churchyard itself, just to the south-west at Priory Cottage, and to the north-east of the church at the 'Manor' site (Ford and Hindmarch 2005, 152). This latter site has also produced evidence for stone buildings from the mid-eleventh century to the mid twelfth, although the suggestion, based on a lack of distinctive late Saxon pottery, that the site was abandoned between the Viking raid and the post-Conquest period (Blinkhorn 2005a, 175) would seem to contradict the original claim for a tenth and eleventh century phase. Moreover, documentary evidence suggests the site was a favoured residence of Edward the Confessor in this period. Full publication of Hope-Taylor's excavations is clearly crucial to unravelling this site.

Recent excavations at Reading have also tended to produce more organic-tempered pottery, but little in the way of structures for the Anglo-Saxon period. In addition to the pagan cemetery at Earley, Reading has some evidence for early-mid Anglo-Saxon activity from finds in the Abbey area, although again the pottery and metalwork could not be closely dated (Slade 1976, 61, 63). Organic-tempered pottery has been found in small quantities at the Castle St and 1 Friar St excavations, and in larger quantities at the Oracle site, Broad Street and the waterfront site (Blinkhorn 2005a, 173). This has firmed up Astill's original suggestion for the area of the Anglo-Saxon settlement, without telling us much of significance about the settlement itself. The town is already described as a royal estate in 870 when the Vikings arrived to set up an encampment, perhaps to the east of the town, between the Thames and Kennet. The late ninth century also saw the burial of a coin hoard alongside a coffin and inhumation in St Mary's churchyard, suggesting that the minster may have been in existence by this stage. A hiatus in the pottery evidence from the late ninth to the tenth century is unexplained (Blinkhorn 2005a, 175), although it is worth remembering that the later Anglo-Saxon town may have been somewhat smaller and less important than Wallingford, if judged by the short duration and low output of Reading's mint, in use c. 1044-46 (Freeman 1985, 53), and the smaller number of *hagae* listed in Domesday Book.

Both Old Windsor and Reading have produced sherds of Ipswich ware, a distinctive type of mid Saxon pottery which may indicate high status sites, especially when found towards the outer limit of its distribution range, such as the Thames valley (Wallis 2005, although see Hinton 2005, 93 for a note of caution). Excavations at 12 Church Gate, Thatcham, have found two sherds of this pottery in a ditch, suggesting the possibility of "a contemporary site of high status in the vicinity" (Blinkhorn 2005b). St Mary's Church at Thatcham has long been suspected as an early and important mother church (Kemp 1968) and Thatcham itself was a royal estate and the centre of a hundred in Domesday Book. Further excavations at this site also produced organic- and limestone-tempered pottery consistent with a middle Saxon settlement. Whilst

there is no suggestion that settlement started any earlier, Thatcham's location close to the line of a Roman road and a small Roman town has been remarked upon (Lobb and Rose 1996, 94).

Kintbury is another potentially important Anglo-Saxon centre in the Kennet Valley (again being a royal estate and the centre of a Domesday hundred). To date nearly all the evidence has come from the later Anglo-Saxon period, however. There appears to have been an extensive later Anglo-Saxon graveyard around St Mary's church and residual pottery from about 80m south-west of the church at 2 The Croft includes late Anglo-Saxon wares and one sherd of organic-tempered pottery which could be early-mid Anglo-Saxon (Cass 2006). Excavations at Kintbury Square in 1995 produced late Anglo-Saxon material associated with pits and postholes that appear to be peripheral to the main area of settlement (Ford 1997b, 90).

A contrast is provided by Lambourn, which was mentioned in King Alfred's will and was also the centre of a Domesday Hundred. It has been assumed that the Anglo-Saxon royal core of this settlement lay within the small oval marked out by a pattern of lanes, with the church at the southern edge and settlement perhaps extending slightly to the south of it (Astill 1984, 70-71). Archaeological evaluations at the Red Lion Hotel, just outside the oval but within Astill's predicted area of Saxon settlement, produced ditches and 'negative features' associated with Anglo-Saxon pottery. This includes 2 decorated sherds which may be from a bossed urn of 5<sup>th</sup> or early 6<sup>th</sup> century type and other organic tempered and sandy wares thought to be 'early' Anglo-Saxon (Timby 1999). The subsequent watching brief at this site produced evidence for post holes and flint surfaces, associated with less chronologically diagnostic early-middle Saxon pottery, which taken together suggests "substantial and long lasting settlement" (Foundation Archaeology 1999b). Settlement lasting for nearly the whole of the Anglo-Saxon period at one location would make Lambourn an unusual site, but would not be inconsistent with the early cemetery evidence from the Lambourn Valley. The Bourne House Stables site has also produced evidence for Anglo-Saxon activity (of undefined date) just outside the core area suggested by Astill (King 2000). Late Anglo-Saxon activity has been found at Upper Lambourn (about 1 km to the north), which, when taken with the Domesday site of Bockhampton about 1 km to the south, suggests the area surrounding Lambourn was well settled by this period.

Two other central or potentially 'proto-urban' Anglo-Saxon sites have seen recent small-scale investigations. At Bucklebury a gas pipeline was placed through the large oval 'enclosure' of lanes to the west of the village, finding a ditch and 28 sherds of mostly organic-tempered pottery (Timby and Stansbie 2004). At Cookham the Marlow Archaeological Society has used geophysics to search (so far without positive results) for a late Anglo-Saxon palace thought to lie close to the church. The basis for suspecting a palace site is a charter reference of 995x999 to a witan held at the site, although such gatherings could conceivably have taken place without the need for substantial buildings.

The direct archaeological evidence for rural settlement in Berkshire is rather sparse and somewhat fragmentary, usually consisting of SFBs and assemblages of pottery associated with ditches, pits or postholes. SFBs have been found at three rural sites and are thought to be representative of earlier Anglo-Saxon sites. The SFB at

Wellands Nursery, Wraysbury contained 171 sherds of 5<sup>th</sup> century pottery, a hearth fragment, a spindlewhorl, animal bones and a quern fragment (Pine 2003, 123). At Ufton Nervet the SFB contained a whetstone, an iron ring and 280 sherds of pottery including 10 decorated sherds which placed the site in the 6<sup>th</sup> century (Manning 1974, 49-54). At Charnham Lane the truncated remains of a SFB contained early organic-tempered and sandy ware pottery, animal bones including a cow skull and charcoal (Ford 2002, 27). The first two of these SFBs were found on the sites of Roman enclosures, but what all three sites have in common is that they were found positioned within relatively large areas of excavation and yet lack other contemporary buildings. A number of possibilities may explain this. Post built halls can be hard to detect during excavations and some are thought not to leave any trace in the subsoil, but more likely it seems these isolated buildings represent either activity on the periphery of settlements or evidence of highly dispersed settlement (Ford 2002, 81). The finds within the Berkshire SFBs do not offer much clue to their function, but it is generally thought that weaving or some other industrial use is likely.

A lack of dating evidence means it is hard to distinguish rural sites active in the mid Anglo-Saxon period, although one of the wells at Wickham's Field has been radiocarbon dated to cal AD 650-870 and provides evidence for what must have been a common feature on many settlements (Crockett 1996, 132). Evidence for later Anglo-Saxon rural settlement has been found on a small scale at the Hungerford Health Centre site (a 10<sup>th</sup>-11<sup>th</sup> century rubbish pit with pottery, animal bones, quern fragments, iron slag) and at Ufton Nervet (a pit filled a variety of finds including cremated animal bones, quernstone fragments, a loomweight and late Saxon metal work) (Smith 1996; Manning 1974, 54-57). However the outstanding example is Wraysbury, characterised by its excavators as an "unpretentious rural settlement", and containing two late Saxon rectangular buildings, one defined by post holes, the other of sill beam or post-in-trench construction (Astill and Lobb 1989, 79, 89-90). One of most interesting aspects of Wraysbury was how clearly it demonstrated the propensity for rural settlements to continue shifting into the late Anglo-Saxon period and beyond, albeit within a defined area of a gravel outcrop. The mid Anglo-Saxon settlement at Wraysbury seems to have been located about 100m west of St Andrew's Church, whereas by the ninth century it had shifted eastwards, continuing this trend in the tenth century and then shifting northwards in the eleventh century with previous settlement areas reverting to agriculture (Astill and Lobb 1989, 84).

## **7. The built environment.**

### **Buildings, communal structures, townscapes**

New Berkshire has only one clear example of a surviving Anglo-Saxon building – the church tower at St Swithun's, Wickham (excepting the uppermost levels) is thought to date to the late Anglo-Saxon period (10<sup>th</sup> or 11<sup>th</sup> century). The building is said to have originated as a watch-tower, evidenced by a blocked-in doorway high up on the south-side, presumably accessed by a ladder. Evidence from an admittedly different situation at St Michael-by-the-Northgate in Oxford would suggest that a defensive and ecclesiastical function could in fact co-exist (Dodd 2003, 163). The tower is also thought to have openings for beams which could have supported a beacon. (Anon n.d.). The place-name Wickham suggests Anglo-Saxon consciousness of a nearby Roman settlement and the church is situated on a Roman road and re-uses Roman tiles

and ballisters in its fabric. Claims have been made that various other churches in Berkshire incorporate Anglo-Saxon work into their later fabrics, including Boxford, Bucklebury, Cookham, Speen (said to be '11<sup>th</sup> century') and Stanford Dingley. At Hurley Priory excavations in the 1930s uncovered stone footings said to be from an Anglo-Saxon church underneath the early Norman priory, in addition to possible Anglo-Saxon work surviving in the nave (Rivers-Moore 1939, 24-25). It is quite possible that many parish churches in Berkshire stand on the site of as yet undiscovered Anglo-Saxon predecessors, although these are less likely to be found if they were of timber construction.

## **8. Ceremony, ritual and religion.**

### **Use of natural places, funerary monuments and cemeteries, ceremonial monuments, temples and religious buildings, votive deposition**

The evidence of Anglo-Saxon 'pagan' or furnished cemeteries for social status has been considered above (section 5), where it was noted that most sites in Berkshire consist of relatively few burials. The evidence is also hampered by the fact that so many of the sites were investigated before the advent of modern excavations and recording standards. Of the 35 Anglo-Saxon burial sites on the Sites and Monuments Records for Berkshire 16 were first investigated in the 19<sup>th</sup> century or before, whilst another eight were excavated before 1945. Three of the most significant, and possibly earliest, Anglo-Saxon burial sites are among those excavated long ago. The East Shefford cemetery consisted of at least 71 graves and may have been in use from as early as the fifth century until the late sixth century. The first excavations covering the bulk of the cemetery were not properly recorded, and the site suffered from looting according to Harold Peake who excavated 27 remaining undisturbed graves in 1912. Pottery found with these burials suggested a Frankish influence at the site (Peake 1931, 129-30). Although the cemetery appears to have been dominated by inhumations, one or possibly two funerary urns may also be attributable to the site.

With the revised dating of the 'Jack of Both Sides' cemetery to the post-Conquest period, the early burial evidence from Reading now mainly consists of the mixed cemetery from the Broken Bow/Dreadnought site near Earley, discovered (as at East Shefford) in the course of railway works. The site contained five inhumations and nine cremations and was attributed by its excavator to the 'late pagan' period (Stevens 1894), although one of the burials is thought to display 'sub-Roman' characteristics (Lobb and Rose 1996, 92), and Reading is mapped amongst the fifth (and sixth) century sites by Blair, following the work of Tania Dickinson (Blair 1994, 10, 15). Further down the Thames at Aston a confused set of records suggests a number of early burials at Aston. It is possible that three or more burials have been found, one accompanied by many weapons, although the site is attributed to the sixth century by Blair (1994, 15). Other potentially early - but poorly recorded - burial sites also tend to be found in the Reading area (for example at Pangbourne, Purley and the Oxford Road, Reading) and in the Lambourn Valley (a single inhumation between Eastbury and East Garston, and more recently a possible site in the valley brought to light by metal detector finds).

A cremation of possible late fifth-century date was found at Beenham in 1992 (although the SMR also lists it as Bronze Age), but despite this the basic pattern of

early cemeteries in Berkshire remains little changed since Peake remarked upon the lack of sites in the Kennet Valley, in contrast to the level of Roman activity there (Peake 1931, 129). Given that early cemeteries are probably still our best evidence for the earliest settlement pattern, it seems as if the Lambourn valley and Reading areas represent peripheral settlement expansion from the main focus of fifth-century Anglo-Saxon activity in the upper Thames valley. Indeed when the relatively modest number of well-attested early burials at Reading is considered the middle Thames valley in general does not appear to be an area of particularly concentrated early (i.e. 5<sup>th</sup> century) Saxon activity, although the Thames may have functioned as an important highway between foci on the upper and lower stretches of the river (Blair 1994, 14).

The expansion of Anglo-Saxon settlement is probably reflected in the wider distribution of 'pagan' burials and cemeteries, which in the main most likely date to the sixth century onwards. The only other large furnished cemetery found to date in new Berkshire is the final phase (probably seventh century) site at Field Farm, Burghfield, consisting of at least 50 inhumations in and around a Bronze Age cemetery. Although this is the only large cemetery recorded to modern standards unfortunately the acid soil conditions mean that the skeletal remains failed to survive in all but a couple of the graves (Butterworth and Lobb 1992). The Field Farm site is perhaps a rare example of a pre-churchyard burial ground where we can also identify the likely contemporary settlement site, in this case Wickhams Field, although this is only evidenced by two wells and a number of pits (Crockett 1996).

The advent of Christianity in Berkshire affected both the mode and location of burials. The transition towards churchyard burial, firstly in minsters and later in local churches is not well evidenced archaeologically in the county (partly because the disappearance of grave goods in Christian burials makes dating later burial difficult) but evidence from elsewhere suggest it was a slow process (Blair 2005, 228). The evidence for minsters in Berkshire comes largely from documentary sources which indicate that Bradfield was established by the 670s as a Mercian foundation (Kelly 2000, 3-7) and Cookham was in existence by c.750, with a charter of 798 recording a long tussle between the Mercian and West Saxon royal houses for control of the site. Sonning is recorded in 964 as a second seat of the Bishop of Ramsbury, suggesting an important church to go with the large landholdings attached to this estate. Domesday Book provides late evidence for the likely minster status of churches at Aldermaston, Bray, Compton, Bucklebury, Lambourn, Old Windsor, Reading, Streatley and Thatcham. Some of these churches may have been in existence from the late seventh, eighth or ninth centuries, others could however be the result of later foundations and reorganisations (Blair 1998). The majority of these churches retained large medieval parishes, although presumably still much shrunken from their original areas of pastoral responsibility. It also seems likely that the foundation of a minster church was a catalyst which encouraged the emergence of significant settlements at many of these sites, and the concentration of minsters close to the important 'highway' of the Thames was no coincidence (Blair 1996).

Churchyard burials positively dated to the Anglo-Saxon period are rare, and tend to depend on finds such the late ninth century coin hoard which accompanied a burial in St Mary's churchyard Reading, which has been interpreted as a Viking (and presumably therefore not necessarily Christian) internment (Blair 1998). A collection of tenth century coins was also found with a skull in Kintbury Churchyard in 1762.

Burials in the vicinity of this churchyard have been reported on at least six subsequent occasions, although all without grave goods and therefore not strictly dateable (Meaney 1964, 48). Nevertheless the suspicion is that these finds point to a late Anglo-Saxon churchyard, which may have extended beyond the limits of the current churchyard. Despite the lack of written evidence it is possible that Kintbury possessed a church of minster status, given the size of its medieval parish and its status as the centre of a Domesday hundred. An undated burial, suspected to be ‘Saxon or earlier’, has also been found outside the modern churchyard at Aldermaston, prompting suggestions that either the churchyard has shrunk or it was preceded by a pre-Christian burial ground (Chadwick 1985, 84).

Not all late Anglo-Saxon burials took place in churchyards. It is clear from evidence in Hampshire and Wiltshire that execution cemeteries existed in significant numbers, commonly situated close to hundredal boundaries at easily visible sites associated with prehistoric monuments, especially barrows and linear earthworks (Reynolds 1999, 79, 105-110). Evidence uncovered so far in ‘new’ Berkshire is limited, however. A set of disarticulated bones belonging to at least three individuals was found in a pit of possible Anglo-Saxon date at Kintbury Square. Although found relatively close to the centre of Kintbury these burials may have been execution victims, with one skull showing signs of weapon injuries and a perforation that might be consistent with the head being rammed onto a pole for display (Ford 1997b, 79-82, 85-87, 90-91). In light of the recent heightened awareness of execution cemeteries and their characteristics it would be worth reviewing the evidence of older excavations for any overlooked sites. One possibility is the unfurnished secondary inhumation of a decapitated man, (accompanied by a young female) in the ditch of a barrow south of Greenaway Cottages near Fawley, although this is sited on a parish rather than a hundredal boundary. At ‘Cross barrows’ a set of six inhumations each with a fractured skull was found in a barrow, possibly as secondary inhumations (Meaney 1964, 45). The location of this 1843 dig has been questioned but seems to have been near the Compton/Blewbury hundredal boundary. The burials contained no weapons although the presence of some grave goods perhaps argues against the site being late Anglo-Saxon. The place-name *heafod stoccas* (‘head stake’), found in the tenth century charter bounds of Oare could refer to another site which may have been on the boundary between Rowbury and Bucklebury hundreds (Gelling 1976, 656). Other sites and place-names of uncertain antiquity might reflect traditions dating back to Anglo-Saxon times – for example Coombe Gibbet, or the ‘Hangman’s stones’ at Upper Lambourn and the junction of Boxford, Welford and Leckhamstead parishes. The latter example is near the presumed hundred meeting place of Rowbury Hundred mentioned in section 5, although the tenth century charter bounds of Leckhamsptead suggest the spot was marked by a tree rather than a stone (Gelling 1973, 276; Gelling 1976, 662)

Whether the deposition of any objects in Anglo-Saxon Berkshire can be defined as ‘votive deposition’ depends largely on speculative interpretation. Aside from the two coin hoards found in Reading and Kintbury churchyards the other set of objects where this possibility should be mentioned is the large collection of spearheads dredged from the Thames over many years. An analysis of the date of these finds would be useful to distinguish early finds from later Anglo-Saxon (or perhaps ‘viking’) examples. However unless there are signs of the objects receiving particular treatment it must be impossible to tell whether they have been purposefully deposited or simply

lost. The location of many of the spearheads can only be attributed to the general stretch of river from which they were dredged, although an analysis of those from the middle Thames suggests that some very broad concentrations are perhaps detectable (Clark 2005, 86).

## **9. Warfare, defences and military installations.**

### **Military installations and military infrastructure, forts and defensive earthworks, castles and fortified houses, ships and shipping, battlefields, frontiers**

A number of linear earthworks in Berkshire have been tentatively ascribed to the post-Roman, pre-Conquest period, although so far none of them has been convincingly dated. These include Grim's Bank around Silchester, Grims' Dyke running west from the Thames at Streatley and the earthworks on Greenham and Croockham Commons (see section 2 above). To this list we can add two linear earthworks to the west of Reading both running south from the Thames. The earthwork closest to Reading (Coombe Bank) has been flattened by ploughing, while the second earthwork, which runs towards Beecham Hill, was recorded to be 5-6m high in places.

Documentary sources tell us about two fortifications in later Anglo-Saxon Berkshire. The first is the encampment which Asser tell us was constructed by the Danes between the Thames and Kennet at Reading (Keynes and Lapidge 1983, 78). Astill (1984, 73) suggests the most likely site for the camp is the area later occupied by Reading Abbey, with a defensive line running along what was to become the western Abbey Precinct wall as far as the 'Vastern' or 'stronghold'. Part of King Alfred's response to the Viking threat was a network of forts or 'burhs' across southern England, the details of which are recorded in an early tenth century document called the 'Burghal hidage'. For Berkshire the burh sites were Wallingford and *Scaftesige*, which is assumed on etymological grounds to have been located at Sashes Island, a site in the loop of the Thames adjacent to Cookham (Gelling 1973, 81). A map of the area dated to 1560 shows a bank called the 'warborow' blocking off the river channel closest to the Berkshire bank, which could conceivably have survived from the Anglo-Saxon period (Bootle and Bootle 1990, 10-13). A series of trial trenches opened in 1995-6 demonstrated that the land surface of Sashes Island has probably been stable since the Neolithic period, but to date no archaeological evidence for the fort has been found. However it is possible the site lies partially buried under many feet of soil and gravel which was seemingly spread across the southern half of the island during the construction of a lock cut in 1830 (Hill *et al* 2000). If the Sashes Island fort adhered to the formula laid down in the Burghal Hidage its defensive perimeter would measure 1257 metres, meaning it may have only occupied part of the island (i.e. a smaller area than that postulated by Hill and Rumble 1996, 216).

David Hill has suggested that southern England had a late Anglo-Saxon beacon system which could have complimented the network of burhs. Hill's reconstruction suggests beacons were located in Berkshire at Scutchamer Knob and '*weardan dune*', an Anglo-Saxon place-name on the boundary of Leckhampstead and Peasemore which may have the meaning 'beacon hill' (Hill *xxxx*). However Gelling (1976, 663) notes that the name could also be a personal formation and the site does not appear to be especially prominent in the landscape. If the suggested function of Wickham's

church tower as a beacon is correct it might make a more logical component of the system.

Whilst it is known that battles between the Viking and West Saxon armies took place in 871 at the Reading encampment, Englefield and the Berkshire Downs ('Ashdown'), the precise location of these sites cannot be identified, although various cases have been made for narrowing down the site of the battle of Ashdown, based on place-name evidence and local topography. There appears to be no identifiable evidence for the tradition, recorded on early ordinance survey maps, that Batlynge (or Bartle) Mead near Cookham was the site of a Viking age battlefield.

As outlined in Section 3 it is also clear from the documentary evidence that the Berkshire area was long contested between Wessex and Mercia, and it seems likely that at various times between the seventh and ninth centuries that the Thames, and perhaps the Berkshire Downs, must have formed a frontier line of some political significance. The Wansdyke which runs through Somerset and Wiltshire has also recently been suggested as a West Saxon frontier line, defending against Mercians to the north (Reynolds 1999, 85). The fact that the southern boundary of Berkshire (marked by the river Enborne) represents a continuation of this general line has also been noticed, although the steep scarp slopes several miles to the south would seem to make a more obvious defensive line.

## **10. Material culture.**

### **Domestic items, luxury goods and artefacts.**

Finds from Anglo-Saxon sites in Berkshire have produced the usual range of domestic items such as pottery, loomweights, quernstones, dress fittings etc. The Berkshire material has not been comprehensively synthesised anywhere, but it is not clear that there is anything distinctive or remarkable about it that would warrant such an exercise, except perhaps for the possible late tradition of organic-tempered pottery. The local chronology of Anglo-Saxon pottery (or rather the lack of it) has been referred to in section 3. The forms taken by Anglo-Saxon domestic wares include relatively simple cooking pots, jars and bowls.

Organic-tempered pottery is usually assumed to have been made using local materials and fired in a bonfire. However the study of pottery sherds from fieldwalking at Padworth has suggested that organic-tempered wares could be traded over some distance, in this case probably from the Abingdon area (Allen 2003). The middle Saxon period saw the arrival of Ipswich ware, a potentially 'high status' pottery fabric at Reading, Old Windsor and Thatcham, whilst an even higher status continental import – Tating ware from the Rhineland – has also been found at Old Windsor and the middle Saxon trading site at Lake End Road, Dorney (Wilson and Hurst 1958, 184; Foreman *et al* 1995, 35). This distinctive pottery was decorated with tin foil, and is believed to have been used in religious ceremonies (Blinkhorn 2005a, 175).

As noted in section 5, the funerary evidence in Berkshire has little that can match the rich combination of grave goods found at Taplow. The evidence for 'luxury goods' in Anglo-Saxon Berkshire will hopefully be improved when, or if, the finds from the royal site at Old Windsor are published. One chance find from the river Thames at

(New?) Windsor shows the potential quality of Anglo-Saxon metalworking – a late eighth- or early ninth-century sword pommel made of copper alloy and silver contained a central gold panel with intricate filigree wires making up an image of religious significance (Hinton 2005, 101-2).

## **11. Crafts, trade and industries**

### **Crafts, industries, raw material acquisition, sites or areas of production and consumption, markets and exchange**

The economy of Anglo-Saxon Berkshire would have been predominantly agricultural. The variations in land use across Berkshire (see section 4) presumably meant that the mix of farming types varied accordingly, although it is unclear whether this had developed anywhere into specialised farming for commercial production by the late Anglo-Saxon period. Certainly in the more wooded areas of the shire, especially the east, place-name evidence suggests that people may have been occupied, for part of their time at least, with activities such as bird rearing and catching and charcoal burning.

Apart from the presumably localised production of pottery and spinning/weaving the other Anglo-Saxon ‘craft’ shown by archaeological evidence in Berkshire is iron-working. Whilst a small amount of iron slag has been found at a number of sites the most conclusive evidence comes from the rural settlement near St Andrew’s Church in Wraysbury. Evidence for iron-smelting and iron-smithing was found from the late Anglo-Saxon contexts of this site, using local bog ores, and possibly higher grade ores from further afield too, although these might derive from the post-Conquest period which saw increased production (Astill and Lobb 1989, 87, 94-6).

Evidence for the acquisition of raw materials relies mainly on place-names and charter bounds. The place-name *crundel*, meaning a chalkpit, quarry or gully appears frequently among the late Anglo-Saxon charter bounds of estates in and around Rowbury Hundred (Gelling 1976, 773). The chalk geology here suggests that most of these names refer to chalkpits, although there was one stone quarry (*stancrundele*) on the boundary of Brightwalton and Farnborough.

Some idea of the geographical reach of the Anglo-Saxon economy can be gleaned from the coin evidence. Anglo-Saxon Berkshire had two mints, at Wallingford and Reading. As noted in section 6, the short-lived mint at Reading was formed during a period of re-organisation in Edward the Confessor’s reign. The site has produced only two or three coins, the two certain examples coming from Scandinavian collections (Astill 1984, 64; Freeman 1985). The main mint was at Wallingford, which seems to have been active from the reign of Edgar (AD 959-975) onwards, although production here actually peaked in the post-Conquest period. Although outside the town is outside the remit of this chapter it is perhaps useful for an understanding of the economy in the wider county to note that coins produced there in the Anglo-Saxon period have been found as far afield as Gwynedd, East Anglia, the Isle of Wight and Somerset. The majority of individual Anglo-Saxon coins finds within Berkshire have tended to turn up in the west of the county. Only nine of this corpus can be attributed to a particular mint, with 3 from London, 3 from Canterbury and one each from Bridport, Ipswich and Shrewsbury.

The later Anglo-Saxon period saw royal attempts to concentrate trade into larger towns, but with Wallingford being Berkshire's only large late Anglo-Saxon borough, the other centres outlined in section 6 probably had an important role as places of exchange, indeed Domesday Book records that Cookham had a 'new market' in 1086 (Astill 1984, 64). We cannot yet say when these urban or proto-urban centres first developed market functions. The recent excavations at Lake End Road, Dorney suggest that rural sites could be used as temporary markets in the middle Anglo-Saxon period, in this case probably in the mid 8<sup>th</sup> century (Foreman *et al* 2002, 69-70).

## **12. Transport and Communication.**

### **Transport networks, methods of transportation**

Charter bounds give us some idea of the road network in late Anglo-Saxon Berkshire, and it is often the case that these routes survive today as roads, bridleways and footpaths. The charters suggest that certain types of road were distinguished – the use of *straet* outside of towns seems sometimes to have referred to former Roman roads, whilst some routes (for example west of Brimpton) are called 'army-paths' (*herepaeth*). Although it is difficult to prove it seems perfectly possible that many rural lanes in Berkshire may have their origins as far back as the late Anglo-Saxon period; indeed one suspects that routeways may have had a greater permanence in the landscape than settlement sites.

River transport must also have been important, although in the absence of direct evidence this must be surmised from the concentration of important ecclesiastical and settlement sites along the Thames. Whilst travel along the stretch of the Thames between Oxford and Henley was problematic in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, this may have been caused by the build up of alluvial silts washed into the river as arable farming intensified from the ninth century onwards; navigation was therefore probably easier in the middle Anglo-Saxon period (Blair 1996, 14-15). The Thames was undoubtedly an important corridor for trade and exchange and John Blair has noted that the river must have played a crucial role in connecting the rich Kentish culture with the upper Thames Anglo-Saxons in the earlier Anglo-Saxon period, echoing an earlier Iron pattern where these two areas were centres of production and consumption (Blair 1994, 14). In comparison the middle Thames valley, especially the stretch between Reading and Staines, was perhaps "important mainly as a corridor", even into the middle Anglo-Saxon period (Blair 1996, 16).

## **13. Legacy**

The legacy of Anglo-Saxon Berkshire is, to say the least, enigmatic. Judged by its physical remains alone the period's legacy is unimpressive – only one substantial building survives, and with one or two notable exceptions the surviving objects are hardly spectacular. And yet we cannot overlook the fact that this is the period in which the linguistic, cultural and administrative foundations of England were laid down – indeed the period saw the birth of Berkshire as an administrative unit, which would survive largely unscathed until 1974. This is also the age in which many of the fields, woods, meadows and wastes of the county were named and the period from which the familiar pattern of settlements, manors and parishes emerged, albeit not yet

fully fledged. The last millennium has of course seen the rural and urban landscapes of Berkshire alter radically, such that it is difficult to gain an appreciation today of what the Anglo-Saxon shire must have looked like. However one suspects that much of the 'hard wiring' of the landscape – the network of roads and tracks and the basic pattern of settlement - has Anglo-Saxon origins.

The transition from the Anglo-Saxon to the 'medieval' or post-Conquest period is one area where further research in Berkshire would be welcome, since it is now recognised at a national level that processes such as the nucleation of villages, the formation of open fields and the development of a system of local churches spanned the centuries either side of the Conquest. Where nucleated villages exist in Berkshire one suspects that later medieval and modern settlements have often developed on top of late Anglo-Saxon sites. This could even be the case for some of the hamlets and farmsteads in those areas where a dispersed settlement pattern persisted throughout the medieval period. This phenomenon may be partly responsible for the discrepancy between the lack of known late Anglo-Saxon archaeological sites and the picture which Domesday Book paints of a widely settled and exploited landscape.

The arrival of the Normans clearly had an impact on some villages, for example at Peasemore the decades following the Conquest saw its four estates amalgamated into two and a new church constructed. The imposition of forest law, which for a time was applied to much of the county, was also a break with the past. However many of these processes of change were already underway in the countryside. It is quite possible that many parish churches with Norman or later fabrics have late Saxon predecessors buried beneath their foundations.

The most dramatic impact of the Norman Conquest was felt in Berkshire's urban geography. William I's construction of a castle at New Windsor would lead to the abandonment of the royal site at Old Windsor in the early twelfth century. The pattern of settlement in the Kennet Valley was also radically altered. The rural manor of *Ulvritone* gave way to the town of Newbury in the later 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> centuries, quickly overtaking the long-standing settlement at Thatcham in importance. The twelfth century rise to prominence of Hungerford overshadowed the Anglo-Saxon centre at Kintbury. Elsewhere late Anglo-Saxon towns were expanded with signs of deliberate post-Conquest town planning suspected from the topography of Reading, Lambourn, Thatcham and Cookham.

However 'artificial' the Anglo-Saxon shire of Berkshire may have been at its outset in the ninth century, the system of late Anglo-Saxon government was sufficiently stable and sophisticated that it was adopted and used by the Norman incomers. The extent to which a sense of cultural affiliation to Berkshire developed in the late Anglo-Saxon period is hard to judge – the sense of 'belonging' and 'place' may even have been more strongly cemented in the centuries after the Conquest. With the recent demise of Berkshire as an administrative unit an understanding of the county's historical distinctiveness and diversity has become, if anything, more important. Without it there is a real danger that new ways of thinking about the geography of the area will emerge which show no sensitivity to the past.

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