

Medieval Berkshire, c. 1000-1600 Grenville Astill, October 2006

This review of existing information is designed to emphasise what is distinctive about the county, and how that information could contribute to some national themes of enquiry.

It is usual to divide the county into three areas which are essentially geologically determined: the river valley systems of the Thames, Kennet and their tributaries, the London clays and the Bagshot and Bracklesham Beds which dominate most of the eastern half of the county, and the Berkshire Downs to the west. These divisions have important cultural implications which are normally seen in the variations of landuse and settlement.

However, there are important underlying tenurial structures that reinforce these regions. For example, Domesday shows the unparalleled amount of royal property in the county (and later reflected in the predominance of royal parks) which appeared to exclude the presence of major lay and ecclesiastical lords, and to a certain extent maintained the pattern of the later tenth and eleventh centuries. Berkshire lacked a major baronial presence, a diocesan centre and had only one monastic precinct at Abingdon. This is unusual for the south and would have influenced the development of the overall medieval settlement and landuse.

Domesday also shows that Windsor Forest was already in existence and extended over the majority of the country (remaining until 1225). It also demonstrates William I's high degree of control over the woodland resources within the forest area, including putting lands which did not belong to him 'in foresta'. In short, the county appears to have had a high royal involvement, with a comparatively low seigneurial and religious influence, all of which added to the distinctiveness of the county's landscape.

Re Chronology

In archaeological terms, so much still depends on pottery. The term 'Saxo-Norman' is still useful in reminding us of the difficulty of using the medium to obtain dating to within a century. The same could also be said of most of the middle ages. It is unexceptional to see pottery grouped to the twelfth-thirteenth centuries, or the fourteenth-fifteenth. Dendro has had a significant impact in neighbouring areas, particularly on vernacular architecture, but its county impact has largely been in urban excavations and the work at Windsor Castle. The drive for more accurate dating – which must come from deeply-stratified urban sites – should continue, but in the interim we should accept that the tension between local pottery sequences and macroeconomic trends will

continue. In the absence of finely dated archaeological data, much of the archaeological sequence has been constructed in relation to the major landmarks in the documentary record which has the danger of giving a falsely accurate impression of archaeological 'events'.

Landuse and settlement

The absence of a residential lay baronage and monastic centres may also reflect the paucity of documentary information (the manorial documentation has been termed 'slight and conflicting'), which has also had an impact on the archaeological study of the county. Archaeological approaches could consequently make a huge independent impact on the study of the medieval landscape - this potential has seldom been realized and must be for the future. One of our major concerns is to reconstruct changes in landuse, in particular phases of land intensification. We normally regard the twelfth and earlier thirteenth centuries as a major period of colonization on the basis of the documentation, but this does not exist for the county. The little that does survive shows that assarting took place in the valleys of the Thames, Kennet, Loddon and Lambourn rather than in the more 'marginal' areas. Environmental evidence could make a huge impact on the sequence of landuse for the middle ages, especially if methodologies could be extended to investigate the arable core areas as well as the more acid and the chalk areas.

The county has been relatively well-served by overviews of the stock of medieval material, normally as part of multi-period surveys which were such a characteristic attempt to assess the archaeological resource in the late 1970s to 1980s - for example for the Berkshire Downs, the lower Kennet valley, the Loddon valley and the East Berkshire Survey, as well as an appraisal of towns. Many of the rural surveys used similar methodologies permitting some comparison. However, few of the recommendations of these surveys were pursued, with the result that many of the issues have marked time for over twenty years. Ideas have since changed, reflecting more detailed and sophisticated datasets generated elsewhere. We do, of course, have new information, and most excavations have taken place within the urban centres, while the rural interventions have been mainly in the form of evaluations or the recording of pipelines or roads, giving inevitably partial and fragmentary results.

In all the rural surveys the comments about the paucity of medieval material are remarkably consistent and therefore do not reflect the variation in medieval landuse. In some cases there is a tension between independent knowledge that some areas were intensively farmed and the lack of archaeological material, in others the lack serves to support claims for an essential stability in some landscapes in terms of landuse - for example the Downs - or in terms of

settlement location. We do not really know if such field surveys are an appropriate way of identifying medieval rural landscapes – few of the low-level scatters of fieldwalked material were able to be investigated by excavation, for example. In the Kennet surveys there were opportunities for the repeat fieldwalking of the same fields 5-10 years later, and consistently less material was recovered, despite the similarity of field and weather conditions. While human variability may be an explanation, it does, however, raise the possibility that such an exercise in the future may be neither cost- nor knowledge-effective.

It is difficult to study the county in terms of the dominant settlement and landuse types that usually characterise the study of medieval rural landscapes. The main regions of the county are essentially variations of established landscape types and we do not know the extent to which the variation has distorted the norm for landuse and settlement. For example the Downland area seems to have been more dissected and contained many tracts of woodland to the extent that the landscape type of chalkland valleys supporting low-lying nucleated settlements set amongst openfields with extensive sheep pastures on the uplands may be inappropriate. The Lambourn valley should be such a chalk valley, and indeed it does have the characteristic strip-parish pattern – but such parishes are in the minority. Some like East Garston were probably created by the eleventh century while others have subsequently been amalgamated distorting the linear arrangement (East Shefford, ?Welford, Boxford). They are interspersed with larger and more rounded landblocks – such as the parishes of Lambourn, Bradfield and Bucklebury which may represent the residue of those minsters' parochiae.

Valley bottom settlements are classified as nucleated, with some significant evidence for shrinkage and desertion (such statements indicate the limitations of enquiry over most of the county), but this probably marks a final stage in a dynamic settlement sequence which was dominated by dispersed settlement, both in the valley bottoms and on the sides as well as on the downs. The late Saxon charter material demonstrates the creation of smaller estates (and concomitantly other settlements) from the later tenth century. And while the parish churches may indicate a twelfth-century phase of settlement change, the later fourteenth and fifteenth centuries are regarded as the main period of shrinkage and contraction in the valley. However, this is compatible with further settlement creation in the context of the leasing of demesnes and the post-Dissolution dispersal of monastic properties in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.

The wooded areas in the southern part of the downs may have less capacity for switches from nucleated to dispersed settlements, but the potential for shifts in the location of hamlets – and of change between hamlets and farmsteads - should

be regarded as a real possibility. While farmsteads are often regarded as a late medieval part of the dispersed settlement pattern, often in the context of heath or common colonisation in the late fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, this could be happening much earlier. The dating of surviving farmstead buildings thus takes on another purpose other than refining the chronology of vernacular architecture.

Just as we should consider greater variability and change in settlements for this area, so we should not be blind to significant changes in landuse. The lack, or low density, of medieval pottery scatters from the area has encouraged the idea that the downs were mainly a pastoral, sheep-producing area for most of the medieval period. But this may not be the case in this variant of the orthodox chalk landscape. The late Saxon charters paint a picture of a countryside with numerous enclosures, detached areas of woodland in the uplands and meadow lands in the valley. The charter bounds mention arable features of headlands, acres and furlongs which are normally taken to indicate open fields – but if this were the case, it is not necessary to go further and argue we are dealing with associated villages so typical of classic chalkland. Common fields were present in dispersed areas of settlements, and indeed it is significant that by far the majority of -leah names in this part of the county relate to farms and hamlets.

A recent excavation on the chalk to the north of the Lambourn valley recovered some ditches and pits associated with twelfth- and thirteenth-century material indicating perhaps settlement on the downs, but more intriguingly, the horizon was sealed by c.1m of colluvium – an important hint that some post-twelfth century downland was arable (similar sequences have also been identified in the Kennet valley). Most classic chalk downland also has that building type which is so indicative of late-medieval pastoralism and agricultural specialisation – the sheepcote, often with associated enclosures and droveways. Such features have been rarely identified from the Berkshire Downs.

Many of these comments apply to the other regions of the county. The Kennet valley, for example, has sometimes been treated as a bigger version of the Lambourn, with strip parishes that straddle the flood plain (meadowland), the river gravels (where the arable fields were located), the sides (where nucleated settlements were mainly to be found) and the plateau gravel uplands for rough pasture, and later heathland settlement. The parishes are, however, more varied and some like Thatcham and Aldermaston, were the remains of minster parochiae, while others probably indicate a process of fragmentation and amalgamation. The Kennet Survey emphasises the large number of post-medieval farmsteads and hamlets on the valley sides, and that most of the parish churches are peripheral to villages or are associated with hamlets or farmsteads – all indications of dynamic landuse and settlement. Some evaluations have shown

a further settlement variability – for example what appear to be elements of a twelfth-to thirteenth-century dispersed settlement in the valley bottom.

One of the distinctive developments in the late medieval/sixteenth century is the revival of the textile industries based mainly in Newbury which the documentary evidence suggests had a profound effect on the valley itself. It had one of the most diversified agricultural economies in the region and attracted a large force of wage labourers. If the valley was making a faster economic recovery than other areas of the county, the archaeological correlates – eg intensification, more extensive and specialised settlements – would be worth examining.

If we have no template for valleys the size of the Kennet, it is even more true of the Thames. The Thames valley is one of the best prospected and excavated areas of the country and yet we have no real idea how such major river valleys were exploited or settled in the medieval period – those DMVs yet to be identified in the Berkshire list are often in the Thames valley. The medieval landuse sequence identified at Eton starts with an eleventh-century droveway and associated building which develops into a large curved stock enclosure (of a ‘size untypical of medieval rural farmsteads’), again associated with a single building in the twelfth-early thirteenth century. In the later part of that period the enclosure was further enlarged, with more buildings inside and out and apparently incorporated into a larger ditched field system. Curiously, from the later fourteenth century when we are accustomed to think of a shift from arable to pastoral husbandry, the enclosure (and buildings) were abandoned, and the area was incorporated into a rectangular field system. The nature and scale of the landuse features appear to be similar to those of the later prehistoric and Roman periods and we may wish to re-examine (and perhaps redate) such ‘earlier’ evidence for landuse (cf Yorkshire wolds).

The other distinctive region is the eastern part of the county. Even though it was within the forest of Windsor, this should not distract us from characterising the area as essentially one of woodland pasture with significant amount of enclosure supporting a dispersed settlement pattern. The late Saxon charters show the area to have been exploited by the later tenth century – areas to the north (the Walthams) with a heavy commitment to arable farming while those to the south were more pastoral. As with other areas, the hamlets and farms groups (eg Paley Street) may give a chronological guide to the dispersed settlement sequence. The East Berkshire Survey raised the possibility of shifting dispersed settlement, and this is confirmed in the nearby excavations at Wraysbury.

In all areas there is a case for desk-top surveys which look at townships or parishes as the minimum area of study in order to try and understand the nature

of landuse and settlement and how they changed from the later tenth century. This work has been done in some neighbouring counties, often with an emphasis on the morphological character of medieval settlements and using a retrogressive approach. We should also try to understand how the landscape worked – the relationship between different settlements and the character of landuse – eg to confront the issue of detached resources of woodland or meadow we need to concentrate on means of access and communication, building up from the abnormally high references to ‘straets’ and paths in the Saxon boundary charters. Such an approach would develop from the characterisation project for the west of the county and Oxfordshire.

Aristocratic landscapes

Given the emphasis here on dispersed settlement, it is important to consider all potential foci for settlement, ranging from distinctive environmental zones (heathland, woodland clearings) to particular settlements such as churches and chapels. Most of all, perhaps, there is a need to integrate the seigneurial landscapes which are often studied in isolation. The county has few fortifications, one of which, Windsor Castle, has received great attention but can hardly be regarded as representative of the settlement type. It did, however, support a large household and garrison, reflecting the increasing amount of time the royal entourage spent at Windsor from the mid-fourteenth century. To consider the relationship between the castle and the numerous lodges and parks in the forest – many dating from the fourteenth century, when the building campaigns at the castle were matched by similar work in the parks – would help us appreciate the dynamics of settlement in the east of the county, and may help understanding in other parts of the region, such as the New Forest. Windsor Forest has little sign of the industry which is characteristic of some royal forests, but that should not make us think that it was an exclusive royal preserve – the management of the local resources, particularly of woodland and water would have meant that settlement was necessary – but of what type? Indeed, in Windsor’s case, religious foundations of hermitage and hospital would have had a mediatory role in bridging the different functions of royal hunting preserves with the agricultural and commercial needs of the resident population.

Similar considerations should apply when evaluating the aristocratic palace. The royal palace at Old Windsor survived, according to the interim excavation report, to the eleventh century after which royal interest transferred to New Windsor. It was associated with a park, and the possibility that a building group survived or was rebuilt during the middle ages remains a possibility. A park was also associated with the Bishop’s Palace at Sonning which existed within a large moated enclosure on the banks of the Thames (cf Bisham and Hurley). An outline plan of the main complex was established by Keyser and Brakespear through trenching, with the main building phase taking place in the thirteenth

century, although there were extensive alterations in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. All the available information needs collation, coupled with an extensive geophysical survey as our knowledge of such site types is poor. It is located next to the village of Sonning which is clearly of medieval origin and there are claims for a chapel attached to a grange. The character of the two settlements and their interrelationship needs investigation.

Adding a dynamic to aristocratic landscapes may help an understanding of the relationship between the various elements, such as mottes, moated sites and parks or chases (some 40 are documented), some with fishponds. While this is only possible in a few cases here (such as the recently surveyed three mottes and the later park at Hamstead Marshall), it should encourage us to think in terms of these features being attractive or repulsive to other settlement, and how that relationship changed through time, particularly as many parks were short-lived. Given that a high proportion of the moated sites in the county were probably noble residences, we should include them with (ignoring any distinctions) other manor houses (such as Ockwells Manor) for this purpose – the East Berkshire Survey noted that such sites were foci for small-scale settlement.

We should also include the influence of outlying properties of monasteries and less well-endowed foundations which did not usually have such a formalised arrangement of the ritual centre. The work in Lincolnshire has shown all too clearly that many granges had a very close proximity to the other rural settlements in that area, and that relationship could change many times before the Dissolution, for example when such properties were leased by several farmers/lessees leading to new settlements, as with the leasing of demesnes. Rather than being isolated properties, these monastic farms could be integrated into the settlement pattern which they could influence and be influenced by – hence the need for an holistic approach that includes the post-Dissolution sixteenth century.

Built environment

Little sustained work has been done on the built environment other than for the listed schedules. The stock of vernacular architecture is dominated by timber-framed structures of three main building types: the full cruck and the crown post which are usually thought to be the preferred types until the late fifteenth or sixteenth centuries, and then replaced by the box-framed queen post structures. To judge from dendro dating programmes in neighbouring counties, the stock of thirteenth- to fourteenth-century buildings may have been underestimated, and it would be useful to know how secure the later medieval end-dates for crucks and crown posts really are. The utility of buildings to help date particular phases of settlement development has already been mentioned (the numerically dominant queen post structures in the county could give an important snapshot

of the latest medieval settlement), but it is also important to investigate further the social aspects of the structures. The identification of a distinct building group associated with demesne lessees in Hampshire is an important precedent which might be extended. The variety of building types within villages (such as the wealdens existing next to crown-post structures in Waltham St Lawrence) could indicate an increasing social stratification which has always been difficult to appreciate from excavated structures. The possibility that environmental information gained from the original smoke-blackened thatch that still survives in some structures should also be considered.

Building variability within settlements that had the status of a borough or market at some time during the middle ages – for example the Bishop of Winchester’s thirteenth-century borough of Wargrave has a group of fourteenth- and fifteenth-century jettied buildings with halls – could be compared with that in other settlements (both rural and urban) in an attempt to investigate further the relationship between urban and rural buildings which has been developed in Kent.

The potential for investigating agricultural buildings exists within the county, and a start should be made by looking at those on monastic properties such as Hurley and Bisham and the Reading Abbey properties.

Monasteries

With the exception of Reading Abbey (where there is a strong case for all the information to be brought together), little archaeological attention has been paid to monastic institutions within the county. They do, however, deserve attention because there is an opportunity to study the more minor religious institutions, most of which have twelfth-century origins. Benedictine priories such as Hurley where church, claustral (some of which have been excavated) and outer buildings survive would benefit from a collation of existing information and structural and geophysical surveys, and a similar potential exists at Bisham, but with the additional interest that the site changed from being a Templar preceptory to an Augustinian priory, finally ending as a Benedictine abbey. Both sites have an interesting topographic location, on the banks of the Thames, with some of the buildings within an extensive moated enclosure – a characteristic of other monastic sites in the middle Thames region (and may warrant work in the context of similarly-positioned Anglo-Saxon minsters).

Other sites in the county emphasise the faltering history of some foundations which have received scant national attention. This would apply to Benedictine nunneries (Broomhall, Ankerwyke), alien priories (Stratfield Saye), and those Augustinian priories (Poughley, Sandleford) and Hospitaller foundations (Greenham, Brimpton) most of which were abandoned in the fourteenth or

fifteenth centuries. Often the precise location of the complexes needs to be established, to be followed by an inquiry into monastic and post-monastic effect on the surrounding landscapes.

Churches and Chapels

The chronology of religious provision in Berkshire is curious. Very little survives of pre-Conquest and eleventh-century date (64 churches and one chapel are recorded for the old county), but a considerable number of twelfth-century churches survive – whether this could be interpreted as a late phase of the Great Rebuilding and/or the influence of the recently founded Reading Abbey needs consideration. However, we do know from documentary material something of the pre-parochial arrangement. John Blair has recently discussed the Thames-side minsters in terms of chronology and consistency of topographic position, but the tracing of their ‘territories’ has yet to be done, despite the remarkably prescient reconstruction of the parochia of Thatcham in 1967. The large parishes of Aldermaston, Lambourn, Bradfield, Bucklebury, Sonning, Cookham and Bray mark them out as unusual and are probably the residue of their parochiae – in the case of Lambourn the fragmentation was under way by the late eleventh century, but we have no indications of the circumstances for the development of the parish church, although the eleventh-century tower at Wickham may indicate a proprietary origin. The documented medieval springs (Newbury, Speen, Caversham) and chapels should be regarded as alternative origins for parish churches.

The place of the parish church in the settlement sequence remains to be established, and the role of chapelries has been neglected. We have evidence for the rationalisation and amalgamation of parishes and the abandonment of churches in the county (eg Ufton Nervet), but the implications for the settlement pattern has yet to be discovered. In some cases (East Shefford, Shottesbrooke) the survival of isolated parish churches in areas dominated by nucleated settlements presumably still indicates settlement abandonment, but for most of the county the parish churches are more likely to have been associated with some form of dispersed settlement. A study of the petrology of Berkshire churches is almost complete and will give us a useful guide to the stone sources which were drawn upon and how they changed through time.

Industry

Evidence for industry with its associated technologies remains slight. The towns of the county were mainly concerned with the processing of agricultural surplus from the Kennet and Thames catchment areas in the medieval and post-medieval periods, so the evidence for tanning, malting and baking is relatively plentiful, particularly from the fourteenth century. Metalworking, usually iron smithing and copper alloy working was conducted on a fairly small scale and is consistent

with the evidence from other small and middling towns. The physical evidence for the well-documented urban and rural textile industries remains elusive. The most productive sites are likely to be those located near to watercourses, for there should be found the dyeing and fulling establishments and perhaps the tenter grounds. The mechanisation of fulling has so far proved difficult to find, partly because the necessary mechanisms were also used for other industrial processes. A step forward would be the recognition of potential watermill sites – at the moment easier to find in the urban (Reading Oracle and Abbey Wharf) rather than rural landscape. The continued use of the same sites for watermills during the medieval and post-medieval periods remains a problem but the identification of mill sites on subsidiary streams by the recognition of earthworks representing the associated leats and by-pass channels remains a strong possibility. An alternative would be to locate potential mills at sites that were abandoned at some stage in the middle ages, such as palace and monastic sites.

Most evidence is related to ceramic production. The county has produced some substantial pottery workshops (Camley and Ashampstead), but they seem unexceptional because we only have the information about the kilns and not the associated processes or buildings. We lack the landscape context. However, the discovery of two sites have shown us pottery workshops that operated at a smaller scale and which are more rarely encountered. Work in advance of the Newbury bypass located two pottery-producing sites (Enborne Street, Wheatlands Lane), both on the London Clay in woodland areas within 3km of Newbury. Both sites seem to have operated sporadically during the thirteenth century producing the chalk and flint tempered 'Kennet valley' wares which are commonly found along the valley from Hungerford to Reading. The low technology and the episodic nature of the productive process is to be contrasted with the big mark the products have made on the material culture – we need to be more aware of variability in the scale and complexity of the pottery production process. The characterisation of designs and fabrics of decorated floor tiles has yet to be attempted

Brick production is documented in the east of the county with references to brick kilns at Slough in the 1440s, perhaps supplying the material for the construction of the cloister buildings at Eton College in the 1440s, and the nogging of the timber-framed buildings of the 1470s in the Lower Ward of Windsor Castle. The gap between brick use in the area between the fifteenth century and the construction of brick church towers from the 1630s needs attention.

Trade and Communications

In terms of the wider economy, the changing directions of trade need investigation over the historic periods. The dominance of the Thames would be expected, but in the eighth and ninth centuries for example it was supplemented

by a pronounced north-south route (stretching from Southampton to Oxford), the evidence for which fails in the later Saxon period. The Later Saxon Shelly Wares reinforce the importance of the Thames route between Oxford and London, but the role of intervening settlements as ports is not at all clear.

During the eleventh and twelfth centuries the sand-tempered wares are commonly found in the middle Thames area including Reading, Henley Maidenhead and Windsor, but the scarcity of such pottery upstream of Caversham needs investigation as it may demonstrate the existence of such obstacles to navigation as weirs and mills which have been documented from the thirteenth century. The difficulties of navigation between Oxford and Reading is thought to have led to the increased importance of Henley as the transshipment port for the cereal grown in the south midlands and destined for London.

The extent to which trade along the Kennet valley was integrated with the Thames again needs attention. At the moment it is only possible to compare the ceramic assemblages between Newbury, Reading and the Thames towns. The ceramics from Newbury essentially emphasise the town's connections to the regions to the west and north and are in contrast to those found in Reading and places to the east which indicate the growing influence of London. This east-west division starts to break down in the later fourteenth and fifteenth centuries when the assemblages along the Kennet and Thames become more homogeneous – demonstrated best by the increasing dominance of Surrey whitewares. Nevertheless, the discovery of large-scale wharfage constructed at Reading from the fourteenth-century onwards could indicate that the town was the docking place for deeper-draught vessels that could not get further up the Kennet until the construction of the Kennet and Avon Canal. Our knowledge of riverside activities and structures remains inadequate, especially at those bridging points along the Thames that are at some distance from the nearest settlements and their suburbs – such as Reading and Caversham or Windsor and Eton.

Towns

Berkshire is essentially a county of small towns, and it is these centres which have received the greatest amount of archaeological attention. Relatively large-scale (one tenement or more) excavations have taken place in Reading Newbury and (New) Windsor. Some have dealt with quite specialised parts of the towns, such as the river-side sites of the Abbey wharves and the Oracle at Reading or the Thames-side sites in Underore at Windsor, and these have given important information about these particular urban environments. Only at Newbury has it been possible to investigate tenements in the core urban areas, although there have been tantalising evaluations in Reading and Windsor. Chris Gerrard has written a useful archaeological review of work in these towns. In some cases it has been possible to tackle some of the issues identified as important in the 1978

assessment, but this remains the only overview and is in need of major revision, if only to take account of changing methodologies or ideas about urban development. For example, there is a real need to apply a much more sophisticated analysis of the topography which could be used to chart a more complex urban sequence. We tend to assume that the presence of major institutions which have left their mark on the urban topography had a beneficial effect on the towns' fortunes – but in some cases, such as Windsor and its royal castle the opposite may have been the case, and the same might be said of Reading and its abbey.

We lack most information about those places which may have received their urban stimulus from the presence of a minster (or less often a royal residence, such as Old Windsor) – such as Cookham, Aldermaston, Thatcham. Our knowledge often comprises an early (7-9th century) reference to the existence of a minster and then nothing until the same place acquires borough status or market rights in the early thirteenth century. Some of these places have a distinctive topography, such as Lambourn, but we know nothing about the origin or pace of their urban development. In the few places where the settlement history of such minster 'towns' has been investigated, for example at Steyning or Bicester, there is very little evidence of dense occupation until the later eleventh or twelfth century, suggesting that sometimes we are not dealing with a continuous urban presence or indeed a continuous urban stimulus from some minsters.

Newbury, with its unusual Domesday entries which suggest that the town was being created in the later eleventh century, should perhaps alert us to the possibility that those of a thegnly status were abandoning the former royal towns and setting up towns of their own throughout the region– the archaeological sequence from Bartholomew Street shows the development of the frontage in the late eleventh century.

The excavated sequences from Newbury, Reading and Windsor demonstrate that townspeople did not start to manipulate or control their environment until some time in the twelfth century, in such ways as the building of frontages on the main streets and the stabilisation and then colonisation of watercourses by revetments and wharves.

The later medieval sequences alert us to the different conditions existing within the towns, from the extensive redevelopment of plots in Newbury from the late fourteenth to sixteenth centuries, perhaps indicative of the town's renewed engagement with the textile industry, to the empty frontages in Friar Street, Reading in the later fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. The extensive excavations of properties that belonged to Reading Abbey also give us the opportunity to start to investigate the effect of the Dissolution on the urban fabric of relatively

small towns. Elsewhere most work so far has been done on the post-Dissolution use of the precincts, but here the material exists to extend the enquiry into waterside properties and neighbouring tenements.

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