

# SOLENT THAMES RESEARCH FRAMEWORK RESEARCH AGENDA LATER MEDIEVAL PERIOD

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## Introduction

The major geographical divisions of the region have been well described, and necessarily include a varied cross-section of southern English geology, soils and land forms:

- Downland scarp fronts/wooded backs
- Clay vales/gravelled river valleys: champion land
- Forested areas on clays/sands
- Sandy/clay heaths and wastes.

Environmental determinism is unfashionable but at some level is foolish to ignore where so often land-use reflects the soils, topography and situation. Political and economic factors of land-ownership also have an important role in this period, and there is often historical evidence allowing them to be better understood.

From large-scale regional considerations there is also a need for better understanding and definition of the local *pays* - e.g. Banburyshire, Otmoor, the Forest of Bere, the east Berkshire or Whittlewood, and the extent to which human land-use and zones of activity occupy or traverse the margins of physical edges such as scarp slopes and the boundaries of forests and wastes. Even such a relatively compact area as the Isle of Wight has great variety of landscape types.

The historic landscape character of these *pays* needs to be studied, but in greater depth than the contemporary HLC mapping, and with inputs from archaeology and landscape history, and the large quantity of post-medieval data for the early modern landscape. From this can arise an understanding of whether there were in reality typical settlement/landuse types for these areas, or if they were just as often variable and changing over time.

## The Nature of the Evidence

Within the setting provided by geography, soils and vegetation, the material culture of the medieval period is represented by extant, ruined, and buried remains; by visual representations in art (glass, painting, sculpture); and by description or indication in written sources (charters, surveys, accounts, narratives); environmental and scientific studies add another dimension.

None of these uniquely explains what happened, but while a combination of evidence may make a rounded story, it is still the case that any one type of evidence may provide a

unique witness of an event. It would seem unwise to promote an 'archaeological' research programme based solely on buried evidence for material culture, without considering the desirability of documentary and archaeological/art-historical/architectural studies.

There is an abundance of documentary sources, as there are buildings and art-works waiting the attention of those who take the trouble to find them.

- Evidence from documentary sources needs to be integrated with the physical evidence, and each allowed to challenge the other.
- Consideration of art and art-historical studies should be included.

### **Chronology**

The political and social shock of the Norman Conquest provides a firm enough date for the commencement of the later medieval period in England, if a slightly fuzzy one for significant change in material culture. Likewise for the end in the mid-16th century, the political and social shock of the 'age of plunder' was accompanied by a profound economic reorganisation of land and resources, which approximates to changes in housing (the end of the hall house).

In the bigger picture, however, and disregarding the rise and fall of feudalism, and the elimination of the small landowner, the cultural milieu of the English countryside (manor and church; beast-drawn ploughs and manual haymaking) may be seen as a continuum, established before and after the Norman Conquest, but broken only by the First World War.

- Milestones for the region within the continuum of economic and social development need to be identified.

### **Landscape and land use**

Field survey, excavation and collection of environmental data remain the most obvious approaches, though the wealth of documentary sources is a necessary adjunct. In many cases there is a requirement to define the precise nature of groundwater conditions and flooding of some of these river valleys to define areas that were suitable for settlement, or seasonal settlement or graze, or where evidence of medieval archaeology is sealed below alluvium, making it invisible by normal archaeological reconnaissance methods.

Assarting

- The chronology of development and character of field systems and their relationship to settlement across the region needs to be explored.
- The character and organisation of ridge and furrow; field drainage.
- The relation of surviving ridge and furrow to early field maps.

- Identification of 'lost' ridge and furrow from old APs and LIDAR survey.
- Evidence needs to be gathered for the extension of arable into forests and onto downland; assarts and early enclosure; hedge dates and types.
- The management of water resources: water meadows and leats for mills.
- The location of fishponds and fisheries; relation to weirs and mills/ bridges.
- Canals and artificial water bodies.
- Sea fishing and coastal fish weirs/traps.
- Deer farming and parks; deer leaps and traps; stud farms; rabbit warrens.
- Forests and chases; the bounds of the true (as well as the legal) forests; their topography and service buildings.
- Timber cultivation and transportation; woodland banks and divisions.
- Provision and marketing of firewood and charcoal.
- Use of different cereal grains; introduction of rivet wheat; brewing.
- The production of fodder such as the cultivation of common vetch and the importance of oats require further consideration
- The growth of horticulture; the development of trade in herbs and spices for both culinary and medicinal use.
- Rural settlements with anoxic conditions are rare - samples analysed with particular attention to site formation processes.
- Changes in fauna of major rivers in relation to pollution and habitat loss should be investigated.

### **Social organisation**

Documentary evidence is the major source of information about social organisation during this period, but it is seldom possible to rely on these to develop a picture of everyday life particularly for the lower ranks in society. Integration of archaeology and records is essential. Some aspects of life, such as migration patterns and diet, can be informed by modern scientific approaches.

- Stable isotope analysis of burials to investigate origins and diet may provide information of migration patterns and immigration from overseas.
- Variations in diet may also reflect differences in social status and location in town/country.
- Faunal remains can provide an indication of diet.

## **Settlement**

### ***Rural Settlement***

National and regional studies of settlement types and patterns are beginning to appear, especially valuable where they cross county boundaries, while it is as well to remember earlier multi-volume syntheses such as the *Domesday Geography* and the *Cambridge Agrarian History of England* which abound with useful information.

Topics and questions remain familiar from the Hoskins era (not to say Maitland, Seebohm, or Gray), though the data (on early field systems for example) has greatly increased.

- The origins and nature of nucleated village settlement.
- The need to extend village morphology studies (in Northants/Bucks) to other areas.
- The origins/continuation of dispersed settlement.
- Continuity and contrast between Chiltern and Berkshire downs (fringe settlements on scarp edges).
- Types of settlement on forest edges and commons.
- The nature of dispersed settlement as farms/granges/moats/hamlets.
- The character, distribution and chronology of moats.
- Village shrinkage and abandonment; change from hamlets to farmsteads.
- Evolution of 'farming counties', possibly origination before the Black Death.

### ***Manorial Sites***

Manorial sites have attracted attention because of their prominence, but fundamental questions remain a century after Maitland's death.

- The origins of manorial sites - chronology and relation to village formation.

- The abandonment of manorial sites.
- The character of manorial sites (moated, relation to village plan).
- Special types (royal manors, castles, ecclesiastical granges etc).
- Peripheral settlements attracted to moats, granges, etc.
- The character and status of manorial/gentry buildings.

### ***Towns***

This region has seen a quantity of excavations in large towns, some exemplary but still not all published. Small town surveys in the 1970s promoted agendas for action that have often been disregarded, and the successor surveys while more colourful are perhaps no more informative, while the questions remain.

- The survival and persistence of urban sites.
- The origins and growth of the principal towns.
- The development of the hierarchy of large and small towns, markets, ecclesiastical centres (former Minster towns).
- The distribution of markets and fairs.
- The topography and plan form of towns; small and great compared.
- Tenement patterns (in relation to field patterns).
- Town fields and commons; liberty and parish boundaries.
- Formation of new towns; town extension and retraction.
- Deposit survival: rubbish disposal and town size.
- Comparison of living conditions between small towns and larger conurbation.

### **The built environment**

#### ***Rural Building***

The study of vernacular architecture has been a remarkable instance of a popular academic endeavour over the last half century, achieved in the absence of any organised research framework as a self-supporting empirical activity and producing a huge increase in knowledge and understanding. The more recent addition of widespread dendro-dating

and more systematic research projects on specific topics has sharpened the edge of understanding.

- The quality of buildings, framing/roof types as indications of class/status.
- Rebuilding as reflecting wealth/agricultural change.
- Changing building techniques in timber, stone and brick; chronology and distribution of different materials.
- Crucks and box frames; chronology and distribution of framing types.
- Chronology of end of open halls and start of continuous jetties.
- Chronology and distribution of roof types; change from crown post to queen post.
- Dating of buildings in local areas/regions as guide to chronology of change (e.g. recovery from Black Death).
- Understanding regional differences in survival rates (e.g. extant stock of early peasant houses in Harwell and Vale of White Horse; hall houses around Winchester).
- The plan forms of farmsteads; the nature of subsidiary buildings; barns associated with monastic/institutional landlords.
- The identification of 'squatter dwellings' by commons and wastes.
- Buildings identified in written and pictorial sources.

### ***Urban Building***

As with rural vernacular, town houses and other buildings have benefited from a generation of close study, and much more is known, but more remains to be found.

- The origins and development of urban housing types (plan, gables and ridges in relation to streets).
- Character and ranking of town houses.
- Warehouses and storage cellars.
- Origins of inns (wealdens used as); taverns in special cellars.
- Halls of guilds and buildings of institutions.

- Hospitals, colleges and almshouses [hospital under-regarded as an urban indicator].
- Location and character of parish churches and friaries.
- Lost buildings identified in written and pictorial sources.

## **Ceremony, ritual and religion**

### ***Monastic houses***

Like castles, monasteries have attracted much archaeological attention, but continue to produce new aspects for study.

- Relation of pre-conquest to later churches and claustral buildings.
- Character and chronology of major buildings.
- Understanding of subsidiary buildings, economic activities, water management and gardens.
- Monastic life, diet, health and death.
- Minor monastic and related sites (moated monastic sites).
- Barns and granges.
- Failed or temporary monastic houses.

### ***Parish Churches***

The parish church stands at the fountainhead of modern archaeology, and yet even after 150 years of study has much to reveal. Very few aspects of the church as a cultural indicator have been mapped or studied in regional terms, even though church types (such as the 'wool' church, steeples, or the early two-cell parish church) are well known. The study of the spatial distribution of these and other patterns of church types, together with aspects such as the chronology of church building and rebuilding, the regional patterns of masonry and carpentry, decoration, tracery and sculpture would be worthwhile.

- The chronology of church building/rebuilding and the relationship to liturgy.
- Patrons and rectorial works to fabric.
- Regional patterns of church types and chronology.

- Location of church in village/parish plan.
- Change from *parochia* to parish; chapels.
- Regional patterns of masonry, decoration, windows, sculpture.
- Chronology and types of roof, screens and seating.
- Church monuments, plate, bells and windows.
- Churchyards and their features; burials.
- Rectory and Rectory farms; vicarages.

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

The early defences of the pre-conquest *burhs* were often the origin of later town walls, and though defended towns are few their standing remains have perhaps received less attention than buried sections.

Similarly much remains to be learnt from castles, which range from early earthwork constructions to royal and seigniorial centres such as Windsor. Their level of survival particularly in urban environments is not good. The modern fashion for discounting the defensive aspects of castles is given the lie by the upgrading of coastal defences in the light of invasion threats (e.g. Southampton, Portchester/Portsmouth, and the Isle of Wight).

- Surviving sections of town defences need to be recorded.
- Reconsideration of castle remains and sites, particularly in towns across the region is needed.
- Upgrading of defensive sites, particularly on the coast, might be linked to particular events in political relations with the continent.
- Given the importance of royalty in the region, castles should be considered in relation to major seigniorial establishments, such as the king's houses and the 'palaces' of bishops and magnates.
- More investigation should be made of the relationship of castles and their landscape setting as manors with adjacent villages and fields, parks and forests (e.g. Portchester).

## **Material Culture**

Perhaps the most interesting recent development has been the results of the Portable Antiquities Scheme, and the realisation of the quantity of small metal objects that have been found. Pottery dominates the excavated finds, and allows continuing study of the varieties and quality of pottery usage.

- Small finds can be seen as important indicators of consumer activity in rural and urban households, and evidence for the influence of overseas trade and proximity to London may be identifiable.
- Whether these influences also affected changes in use and status of pottery or whether they were the result of wider economic and social change should be investigated.

## **Trade and Industry**

Discoveries suggest that the pottery industry involved both large and small-scale production. There are important early examples of the use of brick (Eton and Windsor; Ewelme) and likewise floor tiles are very prevalent in institutional buildings. Stone quarrying is important in the Jurassic belt for fine limestone and stone slates, as also in chalk areas for chalk rubble and clunch. Stone types have been identified in some areas (e.g. Berks churches).

Cloth production was a major element in town economies and later in rural areas, but its archaeology is hard to identify whether for dyeing, fulling (mills) or tenter fields. Tanning was another major urban activity and in some places parchment was produced. Milling is widespread, and mills are best known from mill leats and post-medieval windmills.

Other products include coastal salt, iron and woodworking, from small domestic objects to ships. Despite good documentation and a wide assemblage of artefacts, the production sites and technology associated with these industries are not well understood.

- Means and location of manufacture of small metal objects.
- Marketing of small metal objects.
- The location of the more persistent and the temporary production sites for pottery.
- The means and places of production of brick and floor tiles.
- Distribution of structures using brick and floor tiles.
- Identification of quarry locations.

- The means of transport (coastal, river and road) for stone.
- Urban tanning sites and production of parchment.
- Origins of fibre production.
- Survival of horizontal mills.
- Distribution of coastal tidemills.
- Salt production sites and technology.
- Identification of ironworking sites.
- Production sites for wooden objects, including ships.
- Identification and study of shipwrecks.

### **Transport & communications**

Use of the south coast ports for overseas trade is an obvious topic, but the coastal trade may have been a greater bulk (demonstrated by the distribution of objects such as Purbeck marble mortars). Use of the Thames is harder to demonstrate, and the use of Taynton stone in the White Tower does not prove use of the Thames for stone transport. Weirs and mills were certainly a hazard to navigation (and so mentioned in Magna Carta), and 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, just as it was anyway for exporting Chiltern products such as firewood. The use of smaller rivers such as the Kennet is poorly understood, though it had wharfage in Reading.

Road transport was always more important than is allowed, whether by pedlar, packhorse or two-wheeled cart.

- Evidence for coastal and overseas trading ports will inform patterns of exchange within Britain and with the continent.
- Wharves and other evidence for river transport should be collected to demonstrate how the major rivers of the region functioned
- River craft from this period are not well recorded and evidence for Thames barges, 'shouts', punts etc. should be obtained.
- Evidence for the creation, diversion and maintenance of waterways and for industries such as milling and fisheries is needed.

- The extent of road transport and bridges in the region needs further investigation, including evidence from documentary records.