

Anglo-Saxon Oxfordshire

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1. Introduction: nature of the evidence, history of research and the role of material culture

Anglo-Saxon Oxfordshire has been extremely well served by archaeological research, not least because of coincidence of Oxfordshire's diverse underlying geology and the presence of the University of Oxford. Successive generations of geologists at Oxford studied and analysed the landscape of Oxfordshire, and in so doing, laid the foundations for the new discipline of archaeology. As early as 1677, geologist Robert Plot had published his *The Natural History of Oxfordshire*; William Smith (1769-1839), who was born in Churchill, Oxfordshire, determined the law of superposition of strata, and in so doing formulated the principles of stratigraphy used by archaeologists and geologists alike; and William Buckland (1784-1856) conducted experimental archaeology on mammoth bones, and recognised the first human prehistoric skeleton. Antiquarian interest in Oxfordshire led to a number of significant discoveries: John Akerman and Stephen Stone's researches in the gravels at Standlake recorded Anglo-Saxon graves, and Stone also recognised and plotted cropmarks in his local area from the back of his horse (Akerman and Stone 1858; Stone 1859; Brown 1973). Although Oxford did not have an undergraduate degree in Archaeology until the 1990s, the Oxford University Archaeological Society, originally the Oxford University Brass Rubbing Society, was founded in the 1890s, and was responsible for a large number of small but significant excavations in and around Oxfordshire as well as providing a training ground for many British archaeologists. Pioneering work in aerial photography was carried out on the Oxfordshire gravels by Major Allen in the 1930s, and Edwin Thurlow Leeds, based at the Ashmolean Museum, carried out excavations at Sutton Courtenay, identifying Anglo-Saxon settlement in the 1920s, and at Abingdon, identifying a major early Anglo-Saxon cemetery (Leeds 1923, 1927, 1947; Leeds 1936). From the 1970s, the Oxford Archaeological Unit has been responsible for conducting a number of major open-area excavations which have contributed to our knowledge of Anglo-Saxon England, in particular the early Anglo-Saxon cemetery at Berinsfield; the early Anglo-Saxon settlement at Barrow Hills, Radley (though full publication of the Anglo-Saxon period is still awaited) and more recently large-scale excavations at the mid to late Anglo-Saxon settlement at Yarnton (Boyle et al 1995; Barclay et al 1999; Hey 2004).

The Anglo-Saxon archaeology of Oxfordshire has also been well served by a number of dedicated, scholarly studies, in particular Sonia Hawkes (1986), John Blair (1994, 2000) and Helena Hamerow (1999), while more regionally and chronologically diverse studies have also provided valuable information on Anglo-Saxon Oxfordshire, (Benson and Miles 1974; Brigs et al 1986), and the recent *Thames Through Times* volume includes surveys of the latest archaeological discoveries from Oxfordshire's Thames Valley, where most of the Anglo-Saxon archaeological evidence is concentrated (Booth et al 2007 and see below). The inclusion of Oxfordshire in Tania Dickinson's unpublished D.Phil thesis has also been crucial for our understanding of Anglo-Saxon Oxfordshire (Dickinson 1976), while the recent survey of evidence

relating to Oxford before the University has pulled together a century of observation and excavation relating to the late Anglo-Saxon burh (Dodd 2003).

2. Inheritance

The Anglo-Saxon archaeology of Oxfordshire offers important evidence to fuel the continuing debate about the extent of continuity between Romano-British and Anglo-Saxon England. The traditional idea of *laeti, foederati* or mercenary soldiers being active in fifth-century Oxfordshire has been supported by the finds at Dyke Hills, Dorchester of early burials with Germanic belt fittings dating to c. 400, discussed in detail by Sonia Hawkes (1986). Excavations at the Romano-British villa at Shakenoak have produced similar belt fragments, though they were not found in the context of a Germanic burial ritual and need not be related to Anglo-Saxon 'mercenary' activity (Brodrigg et al 1972; Blair 1994, 5). However, excavations here also revealed considerable quantities of Anglo-Saxon material, including mid-5th century, wheel-made and hand-made pottery, suggesting continued use of the site, if not continuity of ownership (Brodrigg et al 1973). Similar evidence for continued use of a Romano-British villa comes from excavations at Barton Court Farm near Abingdon, though again, this is evidence for use, not continuity. At Barton Court Farm, fifth century settlement did not respect Romano-British ditches, and the villa itself was used for burials in the sixth century (Miles 1986). At Kingston Bagpuize, evidence from a known high-status Romano-British farmstead point to the resettlement of the site in the earlier Anglo-Saxon period (Moore 2001b). Radio-carbon dates from the Romano-British cemetery at Queenford Farm, to the north of Dorchester indicates the continued use of late Roman extra-mural cemeteries into the sixth century (Blair 1994, 4).

The presence of an important Anglo-Saxon ecclesiastical foundation at Dorchester may be linked to an earlier Romano-British Christian cult centre, though this hypothesis cannot be proven (Doggett 1986). However, the presence of this Romano-British town served as a focus for some very early Anglo-Saxon settlement activity, and may have been selected by the Church for its seventh-century bishopric, as were Roman towns in other counties, probably because of their (assumed?) links with Romano-British diocesan centres, and investigations in Dorchester and its immediate hinterland are continuing (Keevil 2003).

Evidence for the collapse of the Romano-British way of life, including the abandonment of villas, is much more persuasive in Oxfordshire than evidence for continuity. At Wantage, excavation has revealed Roman settlement fronting onto the main road to Frilford and Alchester, but in the early Saxon period a number of ditched enclosures were dug on new alignments (Holbrook 1997). Whether paved Roman roads were maintained as the provincial administration fell apart cannot be known, but perhaps they remained passable if anyone wanted to use them; palaeoenvironmental findings indicate that the countryside was never entirely abandoned (Hands 1970, Brodrigg 1972).

Other 'inheritances' are prehistoric monuments and earthworks. The Rollright Stones Anglo-Saxon cemetery is in close proximity to the prehistoric monument (and on the boundary of several parishes), and the connection between Bronze Age barrows and burials dating from the 7th century (examples occur at Stanton Harcourt, Field Farm,

Burghfield, and near Chimney) has been discussed by Blair as has the later Anglo-Saxon use of such sites for church foundations, evident at Bampton, for example (Lambrick 1988 130; Blair 1994 32). Early monuments were also used for later Anglo-Saxon execution cemeteries, such as the Roman Villa at Shakenoak, and the prehistoric dyke at Aves Ditch (Brodrigg 1973; Sauer 2005). Roman villas were also used for more formal early Anglo-Saxon cemeteries, as at Barton Court Farm (Miles 1986). At Great Tew and Frilford, isolated seventh century graves deliberately reused Roman building debris (Blair 1994: 33). Anglo-Saxon Oxfordshire churches, however, are not notable for use of Roman *spolia* in their construction.

3. Chronology

Chronological evidence for this period in Oxfordshire is relatively good. Coin evidence has been useful to extend the date the final phase of Romano-British activity, such early fifth century coins at Barton Court Farm, Shakenoak and Dorchester found in association with Romano-British settlement structures. Coin evidence is not particularly useful for dating the early Anglo-Saxon period, but artefact typologies, particularly Tania Dickinson's study of saucer brooches in Oxfordshire, allow fifth, sixth and seventh century settlements and burials to be dated with some confidence. Pottery studies are more problematic. The hand-made locally-sourced Anglo-Saxon pottery of the early period seems to extend without change or form into the eighth centuries and later: pottery found at the mid- to late-Anglo-Saxon settlement site of Yarnton, for example, was indistinguishable from earlier pottery, and the site relied on radio-carbon dates for periodization (Hey 2004, and see Mellor 1994 for detailed discussion of problems relating to Oxfordshire pottery).

Radio-carbon dating has made a significant contribution to studies of Anglo-Saxon Oxfordshire. Radio-carbon dates obtained from skeletal material from the cemetery site at Chimney, for example, allowed the site to be dated to the later Anglo-Saxon period, making this the first known rural late Anglo-Saxon cemetery to be identified in the county. A recent radio-carbon date from a wooden stake at the centre of the Roman amphitheatre at Frilford provided a surprising mid-Anglo-Saxon date, which will undoubtedly lead to new interpretations of the associated archaeological evidence (Zena Kamash, pers. comm.). Radio-carbon dates from skeletal material at Dorchester has also provided surprisingly late dates for the Romano-British cemetery at Queensford Farm (Chambers 1987).

4. Landscape and land use

There are five major bands of underlying geology across the county from north to south (with the oldest in the north): in the Cotswolds there is great oolite limestone overlain by clay; the Oxford Clay Vale is made up of clay overlain by oolitic gravels; the Oxford Heights are made of corralian limestone, with the Gault Clay Vale lying to the south and east, and the Chilterns, made of chalk and overlain by clay-with flint making up the last geological band. This variable geology has an impact on the visible archaeology of the period. The dry gravel terraces of the Thames Valley offer better conditions for aerial photography, and are relatively easy to excavate compared to the wet clays, so the concentration of known Anglo-Saxon sites on gravel terraces may be as much to do with archaeological recovery as a reflection of genuine Anglo-Saxon settlement patterns. Oxfordshire's underlying geology ensured that the county

was rich in woodlands, pastures and clay in the Anglo-Saxon period, and these resources formed the basis of its economic growth.

For the early Anglo-Saxon period, cemetery distribution remains the best indicator of settlement distribution, although we have the additional evidence of cropmarks and excavations. To date, cropmarks and excavations are largely showing us the settlement pattern on the gravels, and this is probably a serious shortcoming in our understanding. Place-name evidence and palaeobotanical evidence suggest that the grassland of the floodplain was increasingly exploited for hay meadows to support a growing Anglo-Saxon economy, and careful study of some of the excellent surviving charter boundaries for Oxfordshire allow detailed understanding of Anglo-Saxon land use (Blair 1994, 130). In the lower Windrush Valley, for example, charters show that the estates were divided into woodlands, with a logging area, a hunting area, a park-like woodland, and open fields (Blair 1994, 130). By the late Anglo-Saxon period, it is likely that woodlands on the edge of Wychwood had been developed as a royal hunting ground (Blair 1994, 108), an argument supported by place-names such as Wootton (the *tun* in the wood) and Woodstock (the stockade in the wood); King Æthelred II twice issued laws from Woodstock.

Oxfordshire clays, combined with plentiful woodlands for fuel, meant that Anglo-Saxon Oxfordshire archaeology is rich in locally-produced pottery, which developed into a major pottery industry by the late period. Maureen Mellor's work on early medieval Oxfordshire pottery has ensured that the county's Anglo-Saxon pottery is well-documented and comparatively well-researched, although it remains problematic (Mellor 1994 and 2003).

Oxfordshire's geology also provided it with sources of stone for building, which were certainly being exploited by the later Anglo-Saxon period. A stone quarry (*stangedelf*) was mentioned in a document of 1002 at Standhill, and the word also occurs a dozen times as a field name (Blair 1994, 122). Stone quarried from Oxfordshire is found in late Anglo-Saxon churches at Tredington (Warks.) and Swalcliffe (North Oxfordshire Ironstone), and quarries at Taynton and Burford supplied the Great Oolite stone for St Michael's church, Oxford (Blair, 1994 122; Jope 1964 106-7).

By 1086, Oxfordshire had large numbers of water mills, the majority on the Thames, Cherwell, Windrush and Evenlode, though there were others along smaller streams too, and archaeological evidence for a possible mill leat in use in the eighth century has been found at Oxford's Trill Mill Stream: many of the mills recorded in Domesday and charter boundaries may have earlier origins (Blair 1994, 63). By 1086, Oxfordshire also had an abundance of fish-weirs; documentary sources indicate that eels and salmon were caught in abundance on the Thames, and the picture of a thriving fishing industry is supported by the faunal remains found in late Anglo-Saxon deposits in Oxford. The probable location of some of the major fish-weirs on the Thames has been posited by John Blair, though no archaeological evidence has yet been found (Blair 1994, 124; see also Blair 2007).

Evidence for growing markets in the later Anglo-Saxon period, as well as routes for accessing these markets, lies in a number of 'port' names in Oxfordshire. Akeman Street and former Roman roads across Boars Hill and Otmoor, for example, were

termed 'port-way' and 'port-street' at various times, and Oxford's Port Meadow hints at the destination of some of these routes (Blair 1994 121).

Throughout the Anglo-Saxon period, the Thames and its Oxfordshire tributaries were central to communication and transport, and certainly by the later Anglo-Saxon period, steps were being taken to control and improve the navigability of the waterways. The monks at Abingdon, for example, cut a channel across the meadow between Abingdon and Culham (Bond 1979 69). The whole issue of water management, and in particular the construction of canals, is, as John Blair has remarked, a neglected one (Blair 1994 121).

5. Social organisation

Dickinson's study of brooches demonstrated that the Anglo-Saxons settled Oxfordshire via the Thames, and that fifth century Oxfordshire contacts were with Surrey, Essex, west Kent and Sussex. (Dickinson 1976; Blair 1994, 8). Graves at Abingdon and Long Wittenham also suggest contacts with the Franks (Blair 1994, 9). By the second half of the fifth century, Anglo-Saxon Oxfordshire shows a relatively high number of Anglo-Saxon cemetery sites (Blair indicates eight sites; Blair 1994, 9), largely concentrated around the Thames, though with outliers up the Cherwell and Windrush rivers. The sixth century saw developing links with the East Midlands along the Icknield Way, and the set of balances associated with a cemetery at Watchfield may indicate more widespread trading links: finds of similar balances are largely concentrated in Kent (Scull 1992). The majority of known early Anglo-Saxon cemetery sites are concentrated in the Thames Valley, and consequently grave goods show links with the Saxon south, but further north in Oxfordshire, there may have been different links. The grave goods from the Anglo-Saxon cemetery at Rollright in the Cotswolds, dating to the sixth or seventh centuries, have closer affiliations with Anglian areas to the north and east, suggesting the importance of the Cotswold ridgeway (Lambrick 1988). Fifth and sixth century cemetery sites show diversity of grave goods, but the links between social status and mortuary treatment are not clear. The clearest 'signals' offered by grave goods relate to the sex and age of the deceased. Female grave goods, in particular costume items, suggest ethnic or tribal affiliations. The earliest identifiable group in Oxfordshire are named as the 'Gewisse' by the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, who say they were dominant through Oxfordshire's Thames Valley. The settlement sites of this period, consisting of sunken featured buildings acting as peripheral workshops to timber-framed halls, show little signs of hierarchy, either within or between sites. Early and ground-breaking excavations by E.T. Leeds of the settlements at Cassington and Sutton Courtenay are well-known; more modern open-area excavations include New Wintles (Eynsham), Barrow Hills (Radley) and Barton Court Farm (Gray 1974; Barclay and Halpin 1999, Miles 1986). The absence of enclosures and the lack of any obvious focal building suggests that social hierarchy at this time was local, familial and tribal.

In the early seventh century, exotic imports were arriving in women's graves via Kent, such as the Kentish gold and garnet composite brooches from the North Field (Milton II) cemetery, discovered in 1832 and 1852 (MacGregor and Bollick 1993). This exotica may be related to new cemetery sites and more demonstrative burials suggest greater emphasis on elites which occur in the seventh century, and which

were causally linked (though in ways we do not yet understand) to the introduction of Christianity. These special graves are distinguished from their contemporaries by isolation, range and quality of goods; other people were in what are called 'Final Phase' cemeteries, often with more graves than the earlier ones, but with fewer objects – a knife and small copper-alloy buckle, perhaps a pin or two, but usually with nothing at all. Precisely how wealth is to be assessed from grave-goods has been much discussed; gold was more available in the later sixth and first half of the seventh centuries, so those who stand out for its possession need not have been relatively richer than earlier people with gilt bronze (e.g. Geake 1999, 4).

The separation of the elite and the appearance of new political power structures was signalled by isolated barrow burials such as the rich burial excavated at Cuddesdon in 1847. The evolution of a more stratified society is mirrored in the appearance of very high status isolated burials in the region, generally known as princely burials. This is the only surviving find from the burial at Cuddesdon; another celebrated princely burial - this time a cremation - is known from Asthall (Dickinson 1974; Dickinson and Speake 1992). Although they have been known about for some time, the princely burials have also recently received relatively little attention. It is worth noting here, however, that recent excavations at Taplow in Buckinghamshire have demonstrated that the hill fort site of the spectacular early 7th century barrow burial found there had in fact been reoccupied during the early to mid Saxon period (Allen et al, forthcoming). Amongst the finds was a sherd of Mediterranean pottery of a kind usually associated with reoccupied hill forts in the British-controlled west. Some of these sites may yet have much to tell us.

At the same time, more complex settlement sites start to emerge. No 'palace' sites have been excavated in Oxfordshire, but crop marks showing an L-shaped layout of linear structures at Drayton and Long Wittenham indicate the presence of elite palace sites (Benson and Miles 1974). Drayton is currently under investigation as part of the Sutton Courtenay project conducted by Professor Helena Hamerow and Gill Hey; a recent magnetometer survey has further defined timber halls and sunken featured buildings. A hierarchical social structure dominated by a princely elite was in place when the Mercians invaded and took over Oxfordshire from the 7th century, consolidating their control under King Offa from 779, and causing the Gewisse (whose earliest leaders may be associated with the princely burial at Cuddesdon) to migrate southwards to Hampshire, where they became the West Saxons. During the middle Saxon period, however, Oxfordshire was part of the territory of the Mercians, ruled by Mercian kings and their agents, and almost certainly under strong Mercian cultural influence. Lundenwic was the chief port under their control, and evidence for exchange contacts with and through London are probably the clearest evidence we yet have for this important political and cultural shift (Maddicott 2005). Excavation in other parts of Anglo-Saxon England have revealed the development of 'wic' sites: planned 'proto-urban' settlements specialising in production and trade. No such site has been found in Oxfordshire, though place names - such as Eastwick Farm, Oxford - suggest that such sites existed and have yet to be identified. The large hoard of sceattas found at Aston Rowant, dating to the early 8th century, illustrates that Oxfordshire was part of the economic development associated with the growth of wics (Blackburn and Grierson 2007, 167). Recent finds at Black Bourton, are also indicative of a significant Middle Saxon trading site. Excavations of a shallow feature and postholes at Black Bourton produced only the fourth group of Ipswich ware

pottery yet found in Oxfordshire. This site may be connected to the minster at nearby Bampton, but the presence of butchered animal bone suggests that there was a substantial trading settlement here (Hart 2003 61).

At Shakenoak, near Wilcote, thirteen unaccompanied burials probably date between 7th and 11th centuries, and have been convincingly argued to represent an execution cemetery on the basis of charter evidence referring to the place 'where the lads lie' (Blair 1994, Brodribb 1973). Apart from this, we have, to quote John Blair, 'virtually no evidence for administration and landlordship in Oxfordshire between the seventh and ninth centuries' (Blair 1994 79).

Viking raids had less direct effect on Oxfordshire than some other areas, but measures to strengthen the kingdom's defences are documented, including maintenance of defended places. Viking presence in Oxfordshire is evident from finds of Viking metalwork on the banks of the Cherwell at Magdalen College School, Oxford and the Hook Norton Hoard, found in 1848, both perhaps the remains of a burial (Blair and Crawford 1997, Biddle and Blair 1988). Burhs were established at Oxford and Wantage. Stabilisation followed; coinage was systematised again, the Church flourished and manor-houses begin to show a land-holding elite dependent upon landed estates for their income and prosperity.

Usually, our only opportunity to study the origins and growth of villages from the late Saxon period comes from small-scale excavations within the built up areas of modern settlements. The archaeological information from such excavations is often very scrappy indeed - a few ditches, perhaps a fence line, some pits, some incoherent groups of postholes, and a small assemblage of finds. Such, for example, were the results from TVAS's excavation in the heart of the village of Brighthampton (Ford and Preston 2002), though here, at least, we can say that there was possible 10th- and certain 11th- and 12th-century occupation, and that the area appeared to go out of occupation in the later 13th century. We can even perhaps associate it with the documentary record of King Aethelred's grant of an estate at Brighthampton to his minister Aelfwine in 984, and Domesday Book's description of an estate of 1.5 hides at Brighthampton with 1 plough in demesne, a slave, a villein and 5 bordars.

Late Saxon government can be explored through the landscape is the meeting-places of the hundreds. Around 1007, Oxfordshire was divided into 24 hundreds, though some of these had been amalgamated by the time of Domesday. Hundred meeting places focussed on open, upland sites, often centred on barrows (Blair 1994: 108). Such sites include *Shotteslawa* ('Sceot's barrow'); Ploughley ('baggy barrow') and *Chenewardesberge* (Cyneweard's barrow): hundredal meeting places for Headington, Kirtlington and Shipton respectively.

5. Settlement

That some settlements were established at or very close to Roman villas has been noted above. Excavation of such Romano-British places has not so far shown any use that can be taken far if at all into the fifth century.

A number of early Anglo-Saxon settlements have been identified and partially excavated in Oxfordshire, as noted above. Early settlement consisted of timber

framed buildings and associated sunken-featured buildings, usually without evidence for boundaries, enclosures, or re-building of structures. Precise dating is problematic partly because pottery is not very datable and partly because even sunken-featured buildings do not always have very much if anything in them. Radley Barrow Hills, excavated over 20 years ago, remains the largest Anglo-Saxon settlement site to have been excavated in the county. SFBs and occasional post-built structures have been encountered elsewhere quite frequently, but usually only in the course of small-scale excavations, from which it is impossible to reconstruct their original context. As a consequence, there has been little progress in our understanding of early Saxon settlement in recent years. At present data are building up quite extensive inventories of find spots for certain places - such as Abingdon, for example, but more needs to be done in terms of analysing what this evidence means within a wider landscape context.

It is possible that some of our supposed early Anglo-Saxon sites are not wholly of that date. There is a persistent tendency amongst excavators to date sites to the late 5th to early 7th centuries on the basis of the presence of SFBs and post-built halls, along with a few sherds of early Saxon decorated pottery and much more undecorated, often organic-tempered, ware. The result of this has been to suggest a hiatus in settlement in the early 7th century, with many sites going out of use, and very little evidence for their successors (Maddicott 1997). However, the radiocarbon dating results from Yarnton demonstrate that these types of buildings and pottery can be present on sites of the 8th and 9th centuries, raising the possibility that other settlements traditionally dated to the 7th century may have persisted into the later Anglo-Saxon period.

Excavations at Eynsham and Worton Rectory Farm, Yarnton, show mobility within a restricted area. Worton Rectory Farm was occupied from the late sixth or early 7th century to the 9th century, and it was a typically creeping, moving settlement over time. The settlement also shows changes in the use of boundaries: the introduction of fenced enclosures in the later phases of the site's use suggests a new sense of property rights, giving physical expression to private ownership; as this extended to ordinary domestic dwellings, individuals' legal possessions became more fixed and another reason for stability of location (Reynolds 1999 for overview).

At Yarnton, wide area excavations have shown a decisive change in the form of rural settlement during the 8th century, which then persists into the 9th. Here, the 8th century sees the creation of a much more ordered settlement, with paddocks, a droveway, and buildings set out within enclosures. Amongst these, we can recognise a granary and a fowl house as well as at least one hall and a number of SFBs. During the 9th century a second hall was built within a new enclosure, and a small cemetery was present on the site. These changes are associated with environmental evidence for the intensification of arable farming, the resumption of hay cultivation and the expansion of the area under cultivation to include heavier clay soils. Perhaps the change to a new settlement form and the evidence for intensification of farming reflect the need to provide grain, poultry and perhaps other produce as renders to the nearby minster at Eynsham. Elsewhere in the Thames Valley there is similar evidence for increasing specialisation and intensification of agriculture; cattle farming at Lechlade in Gloucestershire, perhaps sheep farming at New Wintles near Eynsham and at Shakenoak, pig farming and horse rearing on the Buckinghamshire bank of the Thames, and fishing at Wraysbury.

Documentary evidence suggests that, from the tenth century, land was administered in smaller manorial units. There is little archaeological evidence for the emergence of small manors in Oxfordshire, but fragmentary evidence exists at Cogges, where post-hole evidence of a presumed house lying near to a small two-cell stone church offers a 'classic grouping' (Blair 1994 135).

The current extensive urban survey is providing an excellent opportunity to reassess the evidence for the status of smaller towns in the late Saxon period. The first record of towns at many of these places comes much later, in the 12th and 13th centuries, and in some cases it is reasonably clear that they were deliberately promoted as boroughs at that time. Perhaps the most important recent result from Abingdon has been the discovery that a late Saxon ditch following the same alignment as the late Iron Age defences appeared still to be marking the settlement's limits. Recent results suggest that occupation did not begin to spread beyond this point until perhaps the 12th century. Similarly, recent developer-led excavation within Bicester is producing evidence for settlement at the site from the early Anglo-Saxon period to the 11th century - finds include early pottery at Chapel street, and 10th to 11th century rubbish disposed of in the marsh to the rear of the Causeway; further work at Bicester may produce more information on the development of this urban site (Moore et al 2001; Casey et al 2001). There is strong evidence in Oxfordshire that minsters formed the nucleus for town development; Anglo-Saxon towns such as Thame, Charlbury, Lambourn, Eynsham, Bampton, Bloxham and Ramsbury all share a similar topographical layout, with the ecclesiastical foundation forming a core, surrounded by streets and house-plots to accommodate a growing lay settlement (Blair 1994 119). Excavations at Eynsham have given a glimpse of the origins and form of a minster church, which seems to have been in existence in the early 8th. At Oxford, a 7th-century radiocarbon date on a burial at Christ Church Cathedral adds weight to the argument for the existence of St Frideswide's minster there, too, at around the same time.

Two of late Saxon England's larger towns - Oxford and Wallingford - lie within the county. Understanding of Wallingford is still seriously hampered by lack of publication, although it is hoped that the Leicester University's current 'Burgh to Borough' project will address this. Urbanisation at Oxford is better understood. Oxford has elements that suggest a firm controlling hand, regulating streets and perhaps creating an enclosure. Within the new town were houses set in fairly generous plots with back yards and gardens for rubbish-pits and a few hens and pigs (Dodd 2003). At Oxford, the recent castle excavations have provided key evidence for the western defences of the late Saxon town. This is associated with some very unusual evidence for elaborate uncellared buildings, and sizeable deposits of very clean grain from within the rampart soil itself. Although we now know quite a lot about the defences and streets of these major late Saxon towns, and about the types of tenements and buildings that were associated with their commercial frontages, we know much less about what went on in more remote parts of the town, and much less about other kinds of buildings and activities. There is clear evidence of leather working in late Anglo-Saxon Oxford: ninth century leather shoes were found in the silts of a deliberately-constructed clay bank at St Aldates. Debris in an associated gully may indicate flax-retting and the making of linen nearby: weaving and

leatherworking were Oxford's main manufacturing industries in the 12th century, and it would seem that they had a long history at the site (Blair 1994 89).

6. Religious sites

Pre-Christian Anglo-Saxon ritual or ceremonial sites (excepting cemetery and settlements) are notoriously difficult to identify. John Blair has made a case for the existence of small shrines in this period, including possible examples at Bampton (Blair 1995).

Probable early monastic sites have been identified in Oxfordshire; sites include foundations associated with St Frideswide at Oxford and Thornbury, Binsey, and at Abingdon on the basis of documentary, place-name evidence and metalwork finds (Blair 1988; Blair 1988b; Biddle, Lambrick and Myres 1968). The foundation of the ecclesiastical site at Dorchester has been discussed above.

A number of small rural timber and stone-built later Anglo-Saxon churches have been identified by small-scale archaeological work, much of it carried out by the Oxford University Archaeological Society; examples include Westcot Barton, Wood Eaton and Cogges (Blair 1994 136). Standing church buildings in Oxfordshire with substantial Anglo-Saxon stonework include the tower of St Michael's, Northgate (Oxford), the St George's Tower, Oxford, Caversfield and Swalcliffe (Blair 1994 137). Late Anglo-Saxon sculpture has been found at several sites, including Oxford, St Aldate's Church (a mid/late 10th century carved interlace cross-shaft, and Langford with two late Anglo-Saxon crucifixion sculptures (Tyler 2001 62; Blair 1994 136).

In addition to the many early Anglo-Saxon cemetery sites mentioned above, a number of later Anglo-Saxon burial sites have been excavated in Oxfordshire. These include the rural cemetery at Chimney, possible used as an overflow cemetery of the minster churchyard at Bampton (Crawford and Blair 1991), and church burial at Bampton (including a charcoal burial); Christchurch College, Oxford (Scull 1988 33), and recent excavations at St Martin's churchyard, Wallingford, which included 2 charcoal burials and some 'ear-muff' burials. This excavation also revealed a mortar-mixer which pre-dates the 10th century cemetery, indicating a pre-10th century stone-built church (Soden, Jones, and Westgarth 2005). Further charcoal burials were found at St Aldate's Church, Oxford, suggesting a regional concentration of examples of this rite (Tyler 2001 62).

7. Research Themes

Anglo-Saxon Oxfordshire has been well served by archaeologists, and is the location of sites of national significance. However, it is a recognised feature of Oxfordshire archaeology that the majority of excavations and known sites are concentrated along the gravels of the Thames Valley, or within a day's cycle ride of Oxford. The advantage of the concentration of work in the Thames Valley is that it is possible to build up an increasingly detailed picture of Anglo-Saxon settlement, development, economy and society within this area, and from this point of view, new discoveries such as the recent finds of early Anglo-Saxon settlement evidence at Oxford Science Park, or the early Anglo-Saxon furnished burial at Headington, Oxford, should not be given less priority because they replicate other known cemeteries or settlement data

(Moore 2001; Boston, 2004). This said, there is an obvious need for further research work to concentrate on the north of the county in particular, at least to establish whether the relative absence of Anglo-Sites in the north is due to a lack of Anglo-Saxons, or to a lack of archaeologists.

One of the most important questions we still have to answer, and still cannot, is who were the people who were buried at Berinsfield, Barton Court Farm and other sites in the region? Were they Germanic immigrants, the descendants of immigrants, British, or a mixture of both? The Upper Thames Valley has some key sites and extensive contextual information for this study, even if much of it was discovered and excavated rather a long time ago. However, there has been no discovery of a major cemetery in the county for 20 years or so. The last major studies and publications of cemeteries were those of Berinsfield, Didcot and Watchfield, all now well over 10 years ago. As a result, cemetery studies are now much less prominent than they were here 10 years ago, although discoveries of single burials or smaller numbers of burials continue to be made.

Some work has been carried out recently using skeletons from Berinsfield for a study of diet using stable isotope analysis. More could be done to explore ways in which we could use scientific techniques such as radiocarbon dating and stable isotope analysis to take us beyond the boundaries currently imposed by the limitations of the traditional art-historical approaches to understanding and dating artefacts. Existing archival material is available that could be used for such studies even if new sites are not forthcoming.

Careful analysis of environmental evidence, as has been done for example for Yarnton and Barton Court Farm, can provide key information. Early Saxon animal bone and plant remains from Yarnton and Barton Court Farm provide good evidence that the early Saxon period in this area saw a reversion to small-scale, relatively self-contained agricultural and pastoral economy with no evidence for the production of a large surplus. Elsewhere in the Thames Valley region different factors may have been at work, with the abandonment of land previously used for large-scale arable farming.

We are starting to recognise greater diversity in settlement types. Once again, much of this information is not new, but these sites have received relatively little attention in recent years - except from the metal detecting fraternity. Recent partial excavation of an early Anglo-Saxon settlement at Littlemore, with at least 10 sunken-featured buildings, is indicative that new settlement sites are still there to be excavated, though the constraints of modern archaeological strategies mean that sites are now identified, not subjected to open area excavation (Moore 2001). It is a significant point, of course, that the current emphasis on preservation *in situ* often means that the most important and significant sites are the ones that we never get a chance to excavate.

There appear to be a number of specific changes in diet and farming practice in the early Anglo-Saxon period compared with the Roman. The most important of these is the change in the type of wheat cultivated - with the replacement of the spelt wheat favoured in the Roman period by free-threshing bread wheat. Other apparent changes include an increase in the importance of pigs and sheep or goats, compared with cattle, in the early Saxon period, and an increase in evidence for fishing and for the keeping of domestic poultry. Conversely, dogs, cats and horses are all much less

common than in the Roman period. Another contrast is that weaving equipment, in the form of loom weights particularly, is ubiquitous on early Anglo-Saxon sites, but absent from Roman ones. Evidence such as this may hold clues about the nature of the changes taking place at this critical time. More targeted work to collect and compare animal bone, environmental and craftworking assemblages from Roman and early Anglo-Saxon sites might yield some informative results. The problem at the moment, of course, is that such sites tend to be studied in isolation from each other, rather than comparatively.

There are many research questions relating to the growth and development of small towns and here, as at a national level, we have less information about them than about their larger contemporaries. The places that seem to have been developing earliest, interestingly, are associated with the Thames, at the sites of the Benedictine abbeys at Abingdon and Eynsham, and the minster at Bampton; John Blair's interventions at Bampton provide a model for investigating sites such as this.

One problem with understanding late Anglo-Saxon town development is that the majority of these towns are covered and disturbed by later building and deep medieval stratigraphy. In this context, Wallingford provides an important research resource, which the Wallingford 'Burh to Borough Research Project' will exploit (Christie et al 2002)

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