

## **KINGSTON UPON THAMES REVISITED: FURTHER THOUGHTS ON ITS ORIGINS AND EARLY MEDIEVAL DEVELOPMENT**

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The June 2017 Medieval Studies Forum visit to Kingston upon Thames allowed those present to focus on one of the most important places in medieval Surrey. If anything, its importance was greater in the period before the Norman Conquest than after, given its status as the coronation site for at least two tenth-century kings and the named promulgation place of half a dozen known charters. The visit was also timely as 2017 saw the publication of perhaps the most in-depth examination of the origin of the place-name, and by extension of the early medieval settlement that first bore it. Jill Bourne's book, *The Place-name Kingston and Royal Power in Middle Anglo-Saxon England*, brings to a conclusion a lengthy period of research that has previously generated a journal article (Bourne 1987-88) and a book chapter (Bourne 2012), in addition to the 2011 Nottingham PhD thesis of which the new monograph is an updated version. In between these publications, other name-studies scholars proffered useful new contributions to the debate (Hough 1997; Probert 2008).

That Bourne has been able to develop a thesis subsection into a whole book chapter dedicated to contemplating why Kingston upon Thames is such an anomaly among English place-names of the "Kingston"-type says something about the volume and complexity of the available evidence. Nevertheless, there are aspects of her argument that do not convince, and the purpose of this essay is to evaluate these and, by adding some new perspectives into the debate, advance a new reading of the knotty body of evidence for Anglo-Saxon Kingston. With reference to history and archaeology as well as toponymy, it seeks to explain the origins and early phases of development of Kingston upon Thames. In doing so, it is hoped that some of the conjectures put forward may serve to fuel the next phase of research into the early medieval history of this significant yet shadowy place.

### **Of the king, not kings**

Something struck me towards the end of the study day, and which so far as I am aware has not been factored into any previous discussions of the place-name, but which serves to make the point that Kingston on Thames may have had a decidedly ordinary origin despite its storied later Anglo-Saxon-period history. If Kingston's well-known role as a (if not *the*) coronation-place of England in the tenth century is in some way connected with its name (as it seems to have been in the minds of some commentators: Keynes 1999, 272, might be read as inclining towards this view, for example), then we might expect that the anticipation it would be the site of multiple coronations would have inspired a name in which Old English (OE) *cyning* 'king' was inflected in the genitive plural, i.e. \**Cyningatūn* 'tūn of the kings'. But the earliest known spellings of the place-name, beginning with *Cyninges tun* 838 (found in an original charter, S 1438; Bourne 2017, 69 footnote 6 provides subsequent OE-period spellings), are all consistent with a genitive singular, hence

\**Cyningestūn* ‘tūn of the king’. In semantic terms, therefore, this makes the OE name formation behind Kingston upon Thames identical to a large number of other English place-names, despite none of these namesakes coming close to it in terms of date of first attestation or later status.

So, just how special was Kingston upon Thames after all?

### The Bourne interpretation

Bourne’s various published reviews of the available evidence have culminated in various conclusions as to the original significance of Kingston-type place-names. In her first interim report, she conceded that her research had ‘not revealed the precise significance of function of a settlement to which the name Kingston became attached’ (Bourne 1987-88, 35-36). Fast forward a quarter of a century, and she was in a position to articulate some possibilities as to the key functions of such settlements, such as supporting the administration of the kingdom through the provision of horses and sustenance for royal messengers, and sites of temporary or permanent incarceration for criminals (Bourne 2012, 280). Bourne develops these postulations further at the end of her new book, to posit two distinct types of *cyningestūn*: one ‘original’ type linked to the ‘small petty-kingdoms’ from which the major Mid-Anglo-Saxon polities like Mercia and Wessex were later formed; the other ‘road/string Kingstons’ distributed along former Roman roads and other lines of terrestrial travel in a way that suggests they were ‘markers of hegemony’ (Bourne 2017, 75-80). As will become clear below, cases can be made for Kingston upon Thames to belong to either type.

In the penultimate sentence of the final paragraph of her chapter focusing on Kingston upon Thames, Bourne (2017, 73) attempts to reconcile the unparalleled earliness and context of its first record with its far from unique name. Although tentatively expressed, and building from similar postulations made by previous authors (e.g. Edwards 1988, 286; Blair 1991, 20), her advocacy of a ‘simple explanation that the scribe muddled the name Kingston with the generic term *cyninges tūn*’ and consequently omitted the name of the royal vill in question does not wash for multiple reasons:

- The phrasing of the relevant clause in S 1438, *in illa famosa loco que appellatur Cyninges tun* (‘in the famous/celebrated place named Kingston’; cf. *in illo famoso loco qui appellatur Cingestun* in S 281, a charter bearing the same date but generally believed to be a later fabrication, possibly using a copy of S 1438 as a template) is not structured in a way consistent with the misidentification of a common OE term for a toponym. Moreover, it is hard to think of a truly credible context in which the transmission of the information concerning the location of the charter’s promulgation, even when crossing from OE to Latin, might lead to the omission of the relevant place-name. (Bourne (2017, 73) does herself and her readers a disservice by incorrectly emending

the text so that the pronoun *illa* becomes the noun [v]*illa*; this is not immediate from her translation, which abridges the Latin.)

- Unusually — perhaps uniquely? — S 1438 exists in three original and near-identical single-sheet versions (in addition to much later transcriptions), representing the contemporaneous documentation of the agreement between Archbishop Ceolnoth and the West Saxon kings, and two copies made for the records of the Archbishop and the West Saxon rulers (for a useful overview of the sequence of production, see Keynes 2013, 26-27). Bar the name spelling *Kyninges tun* in one of the versions, all three contain identical versions of the relevant passage, to the extent that all three exhibit the same erroneous inflectional endings (see Brooks and Kelly 2013, 653). It is hard to conceive that a major drafting error such as Bourne proposes might be replicated in further copies, however much the Latinity of the original author has been criticised ('the whole document is so clogged with poor orthography and grammar that it is almost untranslatable': Brooks and Kelly 2013, 657).
- Finally, by doubting the accuracy of the information stated in this portion of the charter, Bourne's proposal grossly undervalues the toponymic and historical evidence that shows Kingston not only existed but was an important central place in the later Anglo-Saxon period.

Fortunately, despite these fundamental errors almost undoing all of the good work contained in the preceding paragraphs, Bourne's final sentence saves the day, by concluding that 'in origin Kingston upon Thames began life serving the same, or similar, purpose as the rest of the Kingstons in the corpus' (Bourne 2017, 73).

Taking Kingston upon Thames to be a "normal" *cyningestūn* therefore allows us to move onto another important conclusion proffered in Bourne's book, concerning the distinctive distribution pattern of such place-names. She argues that those of the 'road/string' type in the area of 'greater Wessex' — where they are found in the greatest number — may reveal vital information about their date and circumstances of origin. After positing 'a purposeful, royal, hand' having been behind the observed distribution of the place-name through the West Saxon realm, Bourne argues that the most likely 'architect' of such a system was Ine, king of Wessex between 688 and 726 CE (2017, 80). Ine is likely to have wielded control in Surrey for most of the period between Caedwalla's abdication in 688 and his own journey to Rome in 725; the papal privilege of the period 708 x 715 for abbot Hædda of Bermondsey and Woking locates the two monasteries in no uncertain terms *in prouincia West Saxonum* "in the West Saxon province/kingdom" (Kelly 2009, 361).

Bourne's West Saxon connection is well argued, but has less than cast-iron applicability so far as Kingston upon Thames is concerned. On a purely geographical level, it is interesting to note that the phrase *cyninges tun* appears in the earliest Kentish royal law code, of king Æthelberht, thereby dating it to no later than 616 CE (sub-clause 5: Attenborough 1922,

4). There are varying shades of scholarly opinion as to the extent to which the OE language of the received version of Æthelberht's law code is substantially in the Kentish dialect, with the balance currently shifting (back) in favour of an early Kentish origin (compare Lendinara 1997, 217-19 with Hough 2015, 141-53). Notably, *cyninges tun* has been treated as an authentic vernacular phrase (Hough 1997). However, Lendinara's conclusion that the extant Kentish law texts are written in Late West Saxon OE (1997, 217), and hence that *cyninges tun* could be attributable to West Saxon practice or influence, should not be dismissed altogether — the compound is found in the law code of King Alfred, after all (e.g. Bourne 2012, 275).

The two OE elements are also to be found alongside one another in the phrase (*ab oriente*) *cyninges tuntih*, a cardinal point in the boundary clause of an authentic Kentish charter of the year 808 (S 163, apparently unknown to Bourne). The final element perhaps stands for OE \**tig* 'narrow strip of land' (see Brooks and Kelly 2013, 493-94). However — and the following distinction is a small but significant one — the compound is more realistically a combination of *cyninges* + \**tūntig* than *cyningestūn* + \**tig*, otherwise we might have expected the manuscript form to be \**cyningestunes tih*. In other words, it embodies something of the extent of direct royal associations with features in the Kentish landscape (and of the flexibility of *tūn*, that most ubiquitous of OE place-naming elements) rather than incontrovertible evidence for currency of the name-forming phrase *cyningestūn* in the Kentish realm by the dawn of the ninth century.

Ultimately, the Kentish evidence may not be without its drawbacks, but it is not beyond the realms of possibility that "Kingston"-type place-names in Surrey might be of earlier vintage than admitted by Bourne, perhaps dating from the period between (and inclusive of at least the majorities) of the reigns of Æthelberht and Ecgberht, supposed founder (maybe re-founder?) of the monastery at Chertsey in the later 660s (Kelly 2015, 6). It is unlikely that place-names in OE *tūn* were coined prior to the latter stages of the sixth century CE (an opinion founded on research currently being conducted by the author). Whether the balance of probability tilts in favour of a West Saxon or Kentish origin may rest on how one views the chronology of control exercised by the respective kingdoms over the area we can later identify as the historic county of Surrey, coupled with a preference for Kingston upon Thames having originated as an 'original' or a 'road/string' *cyningestūn*. Archaeology suggests the majority of the historic county area looked towards West Kent more than "Wessex" in the later sixth century (Hines 2004). However, if the 568 annal of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle is to be believed at a basic factual level at least, it is likely that any Kentish political control may have been ceded to the *Gewissae* of the Upper Thames Valley towards the end of the sixth century (when the annalistic evidence is cross-referenced with other more reliable documentary testimony, it can be concluded that this almost certainly did not happen before the 580s: Briggs with Turner 2017, 14-15).

## The archaeology of Anglo-Saxon Kingston

If the historical context of earlier Anglo-Saxon Kingston remains open to debate, it is hard to argue on the basis of the pre-Norman archaeological evidence known from the so-called 'central Kingston island' (after Hawkins 1998; this label will be used in this essay, as will the shorter 'central island' employed by Andrews 2004, 170, when the context merits it) for any interpretation other than that there is nothing directly commensurate with royal prestige, be it of the seventh or tenth centuries CE. Hana Lewis made a valiant attempt to postulate how a royal centre *might* have been configured, but her article is in essence a paper exercise, using far-flung correlates to augment what little relevant evidence there is from central Kingston (Lewis 2009). Even so, it is worth reviewing the body of evidence such as it is, for most of it has been obtained in the course of archaeological excavations done to modern professional standards.

At the outset, a few words are needed about the Roman-era archaeology of Kingston. Hawkins (1996, 50) identified two key nuclei of activity around the margins of central Kingston: a rural settlement spanning the first to fourth centuries CE to the north, at what later became the site of Kingston power station (including the excavated remnants of a possible post-built building: Andrews 2004, 171), and a Late Roman-era settlement of possible high status 'and/or a shrine' at Eden Street. A small stone altar reputedly found in the Eden Street area in the 19th century has since been discounted from the supposedly votive elements of the material from the latter site (Bird 2004, 66), but what is perhaps more significant so far as Eden Street is concerned is the recent identification by Malcolm Lyne of grog-tempered pottery dating from 350-400+ CE, possibly as late as 450 CE (Lyne 2015, 141, 160, 172). This pottery represents two non-local industries: one centred on the Hampshire area, the other on West Kent. Kingston is noteworthy for having such ceramic evidence that was properly excavated and hence can be credibly dated.

The evidence from the 'Anglo-Saxon' centuries (later fifth century CE onwards) consists of the following sites, beginning in Kingston town centre and then moving on to its margins:

**Eden Walk:** A number of 'Late Saxon or Saxo-Norman ditches' at the eastern edge of the 'central Kingston island', along with chaff-tempered pottery, which might be contemporaneous but is more likely to be of Early Anglo-Saxon date (Hawkins 1998, 276; Cowie and Blackmore 2008, 114).

**29 Thames Street:** On the west side of the 'central island', a ditch associated with artefacts consistent with an eighth- to tenth-century date (Cowie and Blackmore 2008, 114; cf. Andrews *et al.* 2003, 11, where it is stated multiple ditches of ninth- to tenth-century date were found).

**Charter Quay:** A site at the mouth of the Hogsmill River, the subject of extensive excavations which yielded only two sherds of Anglo-Saxon pottery and no contemporary features (Andrews *et al.* 2003, 10; Cowie and Blackmore 2008, 114).

**23 Brook Street:** Just beyond the south-eastern extremity of the 'central island', a 'vast quantity' of sherds of sixth-/seventh-century wares, associated with 'tenuous evidence' for a sunken-featured building (Hawkins 1998, 276).

**76 and 82 Eden Street:** East of the 'central island', fifth- to seventh-century ceramics that in the case of 82 Eden Street were associated with a pit or possible sunken-featured building cutting a 'substantial' north-south ditch of probable Roman date (Hawkins 1998, 276; Cowie and Blackmore 2008, 108-109).

**Tiffin School:** Further away to the north-east of the 'central island', a daub fragment and pottery sherds apparently of Late Anglo-Saxon date have been found in excavations (Lewis 2009, 123).

**South Lane:** On a low sand and gravel ridge that has become known as the 'South Lane island' (Hawkins 1998; Cowie and Blackmore 2008, 59) across the Hogsmill from the 'central Kingston island', excavations uncovered perhaps slightly less than half of the footprint of an earthfast timber building, four metres in width and at least seven metres in length (Hawkins, Cain and Wooldridge 2002; Cowie and Blackmore 2008, 59-61). The estimated dimensions of this structure are not sufficient to merit its characterisation as a 'substantial "Hall"' by Hawkins (1998, 276), although its structural type is a rarity for Surrey. Close to this probable building, a large pit containing pottery and cattle bone, a tight grouping of postholes, and two gullies were found. The absence of Ipswich Ware of *circa* 720-850 CE may not be such a chronological determinant for the end of occupation of this settlement as has been claimed, given a recent study has concluded Surrey has not produced any sherd that can be credibly identified as belonging to this type of pottery (Blinkhorn 2012).

**The Bittoms (Kingston College):** A single pit at the north-western extremity of the site, dated to the Early to Mid-Anglo-Saxon period on account of a single sherd of pottery, with further sherds of comparable date found in soils and fills. It has been posited to be a non-structural feature at the periphery of the South Lane settlement (Norton and Shepherd 2008, especially 305, 308, 309).

**The Bittoms (Oaklea Passage):** Due south of the Kingston College site, a possible sunken-featured building with adjacent pit, both of which yielded Early Anglo-Saxon-period pottery sherds (Cowie and Blackmore 2008, 109-113).

**19-23 Woodbines Avenue:** Further south on the 'South Lane island', an extensive complex of stake- and post-holes associated with chaff-tempered pottery assigned a fifth to eighth-century dating (Bishop 2002). While it is possible the postholes stand for buildings,

the author of the excavation report concludes it is ‘more suggestive of ancillary structures, such as fencelines, storage areas or even animal pens, than of domestic buildings’ (Bishop 2002, 239).

In addition to the above, some consideration must be given to the evidence from Kingston parish church. This takes two forms: the carved cross-shaft fragment now housed inside the church, and the enigmatic St Mary’s Chapel immediately to its south. The carved stone was long considered to be of eighth-century date (Finny 1927, 212; Blair 1991, 99), but expert stylistic reappraisal has adjudged it to be of tenth- or 11th-century fabrication, and this remains the prevailing view (Tweddle, Biddle and Kjølbye-Biddle 1996, 146).

St Mary’s Chapel was excavated in 1926 in a less-than-optimal piece of church archaeology by Finny and accomplices, from which was adduced dating evidence that places the chapel building in the mid-11th century, ‘the foundations of which rested on the virgin soil’ (Finny 1927, 217). This was taken up by Hawkins (1996, 274 Fig. 2, 277), who used 17th-century engravings of the exterior of the chapel to apportion it a pre-1100 date of construction. It is certainly the case that a date towards (or even a bit beyond) the end of the 11th century would be more in line with the appearance of what would seem to be the original fenestration in the engravings, consisting mostly of simple single-light windows formed of squared blocks of stone and lacking monolithic heads. Although much remains unclear about when St Mary’s Chapel was first built, it is harder than ever to follow Finny and seriously admit the possibility ‘that the Chapel of St. Mary was the Church of the Coronations of the Anglo-Saxon Kings of England’ (Finny 1927, 219). Caution should also be urged in interpreting it as a former minster church building (Andrews *et al.* 2003, 10); again, the evidence is too ambiguous to support such conjecture.

Lastly, there are a number of pieces of metalwork to consider, all of which have been recovered from the Thames at Kingston but in circumstances outside of controlled excavation or similar archaeological work. The standout find is a quantity of Byzantine gold coins, specifically tremisses of Justin I (518-27 CE), found in 1848. Bourne (2012, 275-76 and now 2017, 71) claims it was a hoard of eight coins, but other authorities enumerate ten or more (e.g. Hines 2004, 94). Whatever the true figure, the find is without equal in Britain in terms of both size and early date. More thought might be given as to the derivation of this collection: an accidental loss, a hoard intended for retrieval, or a purposeful ritual deposition into the riverine environment? In a similar vein, greater notice might have been paid to the spearheads from the River Thames for which Kingston is given as their provenance. Michael Swanton (1974, 60) lists these, which comprise single examples of his types C1, D3, E2, F2, L, together representing a broad date-range from the fifth century to Late Anglo-Saxon period. In a recent survey, however, John Naylor (2013, 130, 141) ascribes all five to the Early Anglo-Saxon-period, alongside noting an additional spearhead of Late Anglo-Saxon-period type from the same vicinity (a further spearhead of Swanton I2 type is recorded as coming from the Thames just upstream at Surbiton: Swanton 1974, 86).

Such artefacts go a considerable way towards indicating that the river, and hence perhaps the adjacent riverbank, was not devoid of significance in the earlier Anglo-Saxon period. Some have speculated that Kingston was a favoured meeting-place because it lay beside what was then the tidal limit of the Thames, and thus was ‘significant for a [West Saxon] dynasty that claimed to be kings of the sea’ (Andrews *et al.* 2003, 10). The location of the tidal head in this period has not been established, however, and may have lain much further downriver. More credibly, Naylor sees commonalities between the material from the Thames at Kingston and equivalent assemblages from other sections of the river close to important royal centres, opining that the ‘clusters of finds ... appear to be an important feature of the depositional geography’ of the river as a whole in the early medieval period (Naylor 2013, 132). But artefacts dredged up from the riverbed are a long way from unproblematic direct substantiation of the existence of an adjacent riverside elite centre.

The archaeological evidence presented above suggests a number of things. The most important known concentration of Early Anglo-Saxon settlement and other activity is to the south of the Hogsmill on the ‘South Lane island’, with Brook Street as another focus of probable settlement activity. Thus far, the ‘central Kingston island’ has produced much less material of the same date. Nevertheless, the Thames Street ditch is of interest because of its suggested date *vis-à-vis* the earliest attestations of Kingston. In a similar way, the date and nature of the metal objects recovered from the Thames are of interest because of the way their approximate dates correspond to the excavated occupation sites on and beyond the riverbank. Taken together, there are obvious chronological disparities between the archaeology and the textual evidence. The settlement(s) on the ‘South Lane island’ pre-date(s) the earliest attestations of Kingston, as do the various occupation sites in and around the ‘central Kingston island’ — with the possible (and rather humble) exception of 29 Thames Street. At the very least, it must be concluded that archaeology thus far has failed to recover clear proof of the location of the *cyningestūn*.

### ***Freoricburna* found — and lost?**

To get around the above impasse, which seems as if it is a meaningful trend given the amount of archaeological work that has taken place in central Kingston in recent decades, Bourne cast her net somewhat wider. In doing so, she has reignited the search for another of Anglo-Saxon Surrey’s most significant places, the lost Mid-Anglo-Saxon royal vill of *Freoricburna*. It is impossible to separate the search for the “original” Kingston from the search for *Freoricburna*; too many distinguished scholars have come out in favour of a connection between the two places for them not to have been closely associated in some way or ways. But where was *Freoricburna*, and how was it related to Kingston?

The name-spelling *Freoricburna*, used throughout this essay, is found in a diploma of the reign of Offa of Mercia (757 x 796), extant as a faithful copy of 12th-century date (S 144; Kelly 2009, 198-202). The grant in question is described as having been made *in regione Suthregeona . villa regali . nomine Freoricburna* ‘in the region/district of Surrey [at] the roy-



al vill named *Freoricburna*. This single spelling is sufficient to inform a straightforward etymology of OE \**Frēorigburna*, a compound of the adjective *frēorig* ‘freezing’ — seldom encountered in toponymy — and the noun *burna* ‘stream’ (Bourne 2017, 72). Two later charter texts have been suggested to contain the same place-name: one dated 838 but of dubious authenticity (S 280 — *in bica regali . que dicitur Frericburna*), the other a much more trustworthy 13th-century copy of an 861 grant (S 330 — *in loco preclaro qui nominatur Fregetburna an hsuðrium*). The differences between the name spellings can be explained (*Freget-* might represent influence from Latin *frigidus* ‘cool, cold, frigid’) and as such they can be accepted as pertaining to the same place (cf. Briggs 2008c; also Kelly 2009, 200).

Bourne advances a most convincing argument for *Freoricburna* having taken its name from what is now known as the Hogsmill or Hogsmill River (the former will be utilised henceforth in this essay), founded on two observations in particular. Firstly, the present river-name is a 17th-century introduction; it (or at least a stretch of it) was *Lurtebourne* ‘filthy stream’ in 1439 (*PNS*, 4). Although the first element in this name is of a very different meaning, this does not take away from the fact that the Hogsmill was apt to be described as a *burna* (whence the Middle English-period spelling *bourne*). Second, Bourne cites an 1895 article on river temperatures, in which the average water temperature of the ‘Malden River’, i.e. Hogsmill, was four degrees Fahrenheit colder than the Thames in the late 19th century, and would have been twice that were it not for influence of mill ponds (Guppy 1895, 8-9; Bourne 2017, 72). Together, these facts establish a basic locational relationship between the river and the royal vill.

In her 2012 chapter, Bourne inadvertently ended up making what, on first impressions at least, reads like a solid case for *Freoricburna* being equivalent to Ewell (2012, 277). But this is dubious given its name represents the Kentish dialect *ēwell* ‘(river) source, (copious) spring’, and so is unlikely to have arisen in the context of enduring West Saxon control of Surrey after 825 (*CDEPN*, 220-21). In her new chapter, Bourne sets out an extended discussion that eventually alights upon a one-hide parcel of land in the Malden area at the junction of the boundaries of four hundreds as a potential site for the royal vill of *Freoricburna* (2017, 72-73). Unfortunately, this proposal is anything but convincing.

What Bourne fails to mention in her eagerness to make a case for focusing on the Malden site is that the land in question lay beside Beverley Brook, not the Hogsmill. The former is attested as (*to*) *bæueriðe* ‘beaver (small) stream’ in a set of bounds for Battersea, appended to the text of a non-related diploma of 957 but lexically consistent with being of similar date (S 645). The use of OE *rīp* ‘small stream’ rather than *burna* ‘stream’ (as is independently attested for the Hogsmill by its ME-period record as *Lurtebourne*; on *rīp* see Gelling and Cole 2014, 29) can be seen as corresponding to Beverley Brook being the shorter of the two, but there is no sign that a watercourse had to be of a certain length or width to qualify as a *burna*. Indeed, Beverley Brook likewise may have had an average water temperature cold enough to warrant the description *frēorig*. Ultimately, however, the salient facts are surely that Bourne’s proposed site for *Freoricburna* lies at least a mile to

the east of the watercourse from which it supposedly took its name, and right next to another of a very different name.

Bourne has identified an interesting site, one not previously considered in discussions of the geography of Anglo-Saxon Surrey, but it seems to have been an open-ground location, not a place of permanent high-status occupation. Recent works on places of assembly have emphasised locations like this as being liminal in situation, rather than “central places” in a permanently-occupied sense. As a consequence, if it was indeed a significant place in the pre-Conquest period, perhaps it was one used for inter-hundredal or inter-estate meetings (see Pantos 2003). Acknowledging that the following is a judgement based on an absence of evidence, rather than evidence of absence obtained from archaeology, the location proposed by Bourne does not convince as much as it should given the body of other information to hand. It is at this point that we take a step back and bring in some additional evidence, not considered by Bourne, to offer a fresh evaluation of the likeliest locations of the two charter promulgation places named in 838.

### **A fresh consideration of the options for the sites of *Freoricburna* and *Cyningestun***

If we are to seek *Freoricburna* in the environs of Kingston, it is worth considering at the outset the extent of the search area. Kingston was a very large medieval parish with multiple chapelries, from Shene (Richmond) in the north to East Molesey in the south-west. Kingston Hundred was even bigger, although at no point is it recorded as encompassing East Molesey (Blair 1991, 99-101). It is true these facts open up the possibility that the Mid-Anglo-Saxon royal vill might have been sited anywhere within the Hundred, but all the same it seems acceptable that common sense should prevail at least to the extent that a shortlist of candidate locations can be drawn up and evaluated.

Before I go any further, I must address my own past missteps in this area, mostly made in a contribution to *Surrey Archaeological Society Bulletin* 410 (Briggs 2008a) written so long ago that I had forgotten most of what it covers! In particular, I now find two of my arguments to be untenable. First, that Frithuwald’s vill can be linked to *Freoricburna* on onomastic grounds, in as much as the first element of the latter name represents a shortened personal name of comparable composition to the name Frithuwald (Briggs 2008a, 20; I am equally happy and regretful to report this is wholly without merit). Second, the hopelessly overly-imaginative postulation that *Freoricburna* was located in Carshalton parish (Briggs 2008b, 21). I wish to use this essay to withdraw both assertions, but also to retain and re-fashion/refine elements of the host piece, in particular the belief that there is no compelling reason to see *Freoricburna* and Kingston as two names for the same settlement/location (Briggs 2008a, 18).

In beginning the renewed search for both *Freoricburna* and Kingston of 838, I want to start with another contention put forward in my *Bulletin* pieces; the premise that *Fullingadic* and hence Frithuwald’s vill, specified as being proximate to the former, were somewhere in the

Kingston/Ditton area — even that Frithuwald’s vill is remembered in the place-name Ditton (Briggs 2008a, 19-20). The search for the ‘the ancient ditch/dyke, that is *Fullingadic*’ (the manuscript spelling *Fullingadich* is an attempt to represent the palatalized final /c/ of OE *dīc*), mentioned solely in the copied text of S 1165 but universally agreed to be a credible seventh-century feature from a lost source charter, is another recurrent favourite pursuit of early medieval studies in Surrey. Unfortunately, the recent scholarly edition of the charter and its counterparts from the Chertsey archive by Susan Kelly did not provide the anticipated benchmark reappraisal of the evidence, meaning there are still key issues that remain inadequately explored and explained (Kelly 2015, 5-6, 102-103; cf. Briggs 2017, 329). Talking about *Fullingadic* in the context of the subject matter of this essay may seem counterintuitive, but there is a good reason for doing so.

It might be hypothesised that Frithuwald’s vill of the 670s was one and the same as *Freoricburna*. After all, they were attested maybe not much more than a century apart, both times in conjunction with Mercian kings — Wulfhere and Offa — who exercised power over Surrey (or at least what was reckoned as Surrey at the time). The reason I was moved to first write about *Fullingadic* was to introduce the idea that it was not a boundary dyke but an embanked section of former Roman road (or at least a stretch of road that owed its name to an embanked subsection), specifically the one between London and Winchester (Briggs 2008a). This was based in part on the logic that a relatively direct route to the south of the Thames would pass close to the river on its way through this locality, thereby resembling the description in S 1165 that has *Fullingadic* defining the easternmost limit of the Chertsey endowment and the Thames forming its northern limit. The minor water-course draining into the Thames known as The Rythe may have formed the physical link between the two, but was too short or undistinguished to merit being named in the boundary clause.

Upstream of its confluence with the Thames, The Rythe runs through Ditton Marsh, as does Portsmouth Road (earlier *London Waye*, and representing the approximate line of the putative Roman road). Therefore, there would have been considerable practical advantage to be gained from a raised causeway crossing this marshland (see the map in Richards 2015, 12). Another case of an “old ditch” attested in an early charter boundary description is at Bibury in Gloucestershire (S 1254, of 718x745). In this case, the OE passage *on ða aldan dic æt lec* “to the old ditch at Leach” has been posited to be a reference to ‘a Roman canalisation of the stream [...] with a banked causeway over the boggy river’ (Bishop 1984, 18). Of course, the name *Fullingadic* may have applied to a longer length of Roman road than just the stretch traversing Ditton Marsh. There is a possibility that Frithuwald’s vill stood away alongside the Roman road elsewhere — for instance, in the vicinity of the Roman remains on Kingston Hill — but the emphasis placed upon *Fullingadic* as a ditch (*fossa*) strongly suggests that it was close to a section that meshed morphologically with this noun (there was no shortage of alternative Latin words for a road after all: *via*, *strata* etc.). Unhappily, there is currently no recorded archaeology from the

Ditton parishes that might pinpoint the seventh-century elite centre (for a scatter of grass-tempered pottery adjudged to derive from field manuring, see SHHER\_4759).

Although at first glance, the Ditton area has much to recommend it as the site of Frithuwald's vill. But was this also the royal vill of *Freoricburna*? The etymology of the latter name contains an explicit reference to a watercourse. It might be considered that this is connected to The Rythe but, as with the Beverly Brook mentioned above, its name is in all probability derived from OE *rīþ*, not *burna*. The link between *Fullingadic* and the derivation of the name Ditton (OE *Dīctūn* 'ditch *tūn*') has been advanced before (Bird 2006, 49), but acceptance of this link does not answer the question of whether the former was indeed the former London-Winchester Roman road. Others have suggested that it was the lengthy north-south ditched earthwork that serves as the parish boundary separating the two Dittons (note Field 2004, 47, is not alone in incorrectly making a link between the name Long Ditton and the 'long ditch' separating it from Thames Ditton – the affix *Long* is a 13th-century development describing the physical character of the village or parish: see *PNS*, 57). There is no evidence for the ditch pre-dating the Anglo-Saxon period, but nor is there any for it being a creation later than Frithuwald's charter and hence vill. Therefore, perhaps it is best to omit further discussion of the location of Frithuwald's vill from the evaluation in hand, whilst acknowledging that a location in the same general area is perhaps more credible than some of the previously-published suggestions (e.g. Blair 1991, 21).

The analysis can now be limited to two issues: the location of *Freoricburna*, and the location of *Cyningestun*. The two are of course interlinked, but it is worth first considering the options separately, then evaluating the most credible joint explanation.

Regarding *Freoricburna*, excluding the Dittons, there are two options worthy of consideration. The first focuses on central Kingston and its immediate environs, the only portion of the wider Kingston area that, based upon its known post-Roman archaeological record, comes anywhere close to giving a material cultural signal of high status that might be consonant with a royal centre of the eighth to ninth century CE. The excavated evidence from the 'South Lane island' and The Bittoms is of neither the appropriate date nor status as to be capable of association with the royal vill of *Freoricburna*. Just about the only place left which has not received extensive exploration, at least not to modern archaeological standards, is the area beneath and around Kingston parish church. This location has received support from Lewis (2009) for being the epicentre of Late Anglo-Saxon-period activity, so why should it not have slightly earlier roots — especially if the eighth/ninth-century vill took its name from the watercourse that ran around the island on which it stood? All that can be said against this for the time being is that it is founded on the presumption, not proof, of archaeological evidence. Thus, such conjectures could be borne out by future discoveries.

One immediate counterpoint to placing the royal vill of *Freoricburna* in the vicinity of the medieval parish church building is the overriding association between the location and the name Kingston. The second option, by contrast, puts distance between the vill and church

sites while preserving the relationship between vill site and eponymous watercourse — but in doing so it introduces a big dollop of archaeological obscurity to proceedings.

To explain it requires beginning with a fresh conjecture. To the north-east and south-west of Kingston, extended stretches of Kingston Hill (as far south as its junction with Cambridge Road) and Portsmouth Road (as far north as the Seething Wells area) respectively run along noticeably similar north-east to south-west alignments. Therefore, between the two, a “missing link” can be projected. Could this represent the original Roman-era line of the London-Winchester road? The projected line crosses the Hogsmill, credibly once known as *Freoricburna*, and it is hardly a stretch of the imagination to propose that the proximity of the royal vill would therefore account for the place-name. Moreover, by not-illogical extension, it could also bear out the applicability of the name *Fullingadic* to (another) raised stretch of former Roman road. Clearly *Freoricburna* was named from its proximity to a watercourse, although simultaneously it may have been ‘*iuxta*’, but not **on**, the *Fullingadic* road.

As in the case of the Dittons, no Anglo-Saxon-period settlement site has been excavated along the Hogsmill above central Kingston, but the land either side of this stretch of the Hogsmill seems to have seen very few archaeological interventions, and so is generally something of a blank on distribution maps. Nevertheless, there is one isolated find that indicates some form of activity hereabouts in the Anglo-Saxon period. An iron spearhead in the collection of Kingston Museum, identified as being of a form corresponding to Swanton series E, was found by a Mr R. W. Randall in 1954 ‘by the allotments on the Hogsmill River’. The Greater London Historic Environment Record (GLHER) entry for this find, apparently the solitary reference to it, speculates that the allotments in question were the ones beyond the eastern terminus of Athelstan Road (GLHER MLO10529; from consultation of mid-20th-century Ordnance Survey maps it would be more accurate to describe the provenance as lying at the northern edge of the Hogsmill Sewage Treatment Works).

An alternative and arguably more applicable identification for the riverside allotments at which the spearhead was found would be those that formerly existed about a mile downstream on the north side of Denmark Road, on a site now occupied by a block of flats named Agar House. Interestingly, the “traditional” provenance of the spearhead (i.e. that given in the GLHER) would be well to the east of the putative line of the London-Winchester road, whereas the site of the Denmark Road allotments would be more or less bisected by it. The Hogsmill spearhead is not among the examples from Kingston Museum included by Swanton in his 1974 corpus (unless the typology given in the GLHER entry is inaccurate — three belonging to different series are calendared as coming from Kingston but not from the Thames: see Swanton 1974, 60). Swanton identified four varieties of series E spearheads, collectively enduring from the fifth century to the late Anglo-Saxon period. Therefore, on the basis of the available information, the example under discussion provides a very ambiguous contribution to the discussion in hand, but a potentially relevant one nonetheless.

A short 1996 note by Shaan Butters asked ‘Was Kingston once “Moreford”?’ The question might be usefully posed again in a reordered and expanded manner; ‘Was “Moreford” once *Freoricburna* or Kingston?’. The etymology of the name Moreford is fairly transparent: OE *mōr* or ME *mor* ‘marsh’ + OE or ME *ford* ‘ford’. Its earliest record, however, is of 1610, in the second edition of William Camden’s *Britannia*, and was one of the many additions introduced by its editor, Philemon Holland. Butters’ own reading of the passage in question (‘Kingstone, called in times past Moreford, as some will have it...’: 1996, 155) was that it represents a piece of post-medieval local ‘hearsay’, and this does not seem unreasonable. A Kingston deed of 1323 mentions land against ‘*le More*’, apparently located beside the Thames south of Kingston town (Hawkins 1998, 273). But “the marsh” need not have been in the same place as the “marsh ford” — especially when there are multiple watercourses in the wider Kingston area. Could it have been a crossing of the Hogsmill that had long since been eclipsed in importance but retained some level of fame locally because it lay close to the ancient royal vill site?

At the risk of complicating matters yet further, it is worth seeking an answer to the question posed in the second sentence of the preceding paragraph before addressing the one that forms its final sentence. It is not impossible that *Freoricburna* **and** Kingston lay close to Moreford, perhaps on opposite sides of the Hogsmill. Two general observations made by Bourne might be used in support of this position. Firstly, her identification of the frequent correspondence between Kingston-type place-names and the courses of Roman roads and other important Roman-era routes of the sort that might remain in use in the early post-Roman centuries, in a way that suggests functional dependence (Bourne 2012, 264-70; 2017, 55-58). Secondly, the recurrent close physical proximity between *cyningestūnas* and central places that are either recorded as royal vills or may once have functioned as such (Bourne 1987-88, 19, 29-30; 2017, 50-51). (Bourne (2017, 57) also notes a number of Kingstons that are found in close proximity to Roman small town sites; she does not mention Kingston upon Thames among these, but it might be noted that a ‘substantial settlement’ of Roman date has been suggested not all that far away at Kingston Hill (Bird 2004, 66-67; cf. Hawkins 1996, 50, who interprets the evidence as that from ‘a country estate rather than any nucleated settlement’).)

With all this in mind, it might be posited that the settlement which gave Kingston its name was on the same lost stretch of Roman road and, like many of its namesakes, the original function of this place was tied to the route as much as to the nearby royal vill of *Freoricburna*. In time, a new royal centre was established on the site or close enough as to cause the reuse of the place-name, effectively taking advantage of the royal connotation of the existing place-name. John Blair, using historical documentary evidence, identified a rapidly-growing class of ‘West Saxon royal centres of long-term importance’ — Kingston upon Thames included — emerging after 830 (Blair 2005, 325). This would have taken place towards the end of the reign of king Ecgberht (802-839) and during that of his son, Æthelwulf (839-58). If the succession of *Freoricburna* by a new centre at its former

*cyningestūn* is reckoned as part of this process as well (which, in view of the documentary testimony, it should probably be), it tends towards understanding the primary period of *cyningestūnas* already being over by the middle of the ninth century. Perhaps in West Saxon territory their functions were absorbed by the new, more durable royal centres, although it is probably too much of a leap to infer this from the sub-clause of the Laws of Alfred stipulating oath-breakers ‘will remain forty days in prison *on cyninges tune*’ (Bourne 2017, 47).

Inherent in this line of interpretation is a second shift, from the roadside *cyningestūn* site to the ‘central Kingston island’. The indications are that this occurred by the mid-tenth century — indeed, the coronation of Athelstan in 925 may represent a *terminus ante quem* — but could it have happened several decades earlier? A suggestion that rears its head from time to time, most recently in a major study by John Baker and Stuart Brookes (2013, 303-304), is that Kingston was the site of a Viking Age burh or stronghold, part of a ‘remarkably even distribution’ of similarly not-directly-attested sites along the Thames between Wallingford and Southwark, both of which are named in the so-called Burghal Hidage. Archaeology has of course failed to find any credible evidence of this stronghold, and this may not be because it has been looking in the wrong places. Being in an appropriate location for making up a regular regional-level pattern is far from the requisite proof for the existence of such a defensive network, and Kingston’s subsequent royal significance sets it apart from other supposedly cognate sites.

A different way of approaching the same issue — in short, what (if anything) was on the ‘central Kingston island’ in the ninth century? — is to see Kingston church having roots as a Mid-Anglo-Saxon-period minster church. It certainly displays several characteristics consistent with a former minster church (Blair 1991, 99-101). The *cyningestūn* may have been a secondary, perhaps even parasitical, secular element of a riverside minster settlement on a island-cum-confluence site. This was eclipsed and recast as a royal vill — again, no earlier than the 830s to judge from the charter testimony. A considerable amount of documentary testimony exists showing or hinting at encroachment upon formerly-independent minster communities in Surrey. This ranges from the (archi)episcopal annexing of minsters, seen most clearly at Farnham (which S 1263 shows was in the gift of the Bishop of Winchester by 814 at the latest) but maybe also Croydon (thereby reconciling S 164 of 809 and S 1202 of 870 x 889?), through to Offa of Mercia’s appropriation of Woking and seemingly Chertsey (S 144 and 127 respectively; see Kelly 2015, 12, 127).

Another relevant charter reference, and moreover one that may offer an explanation for why a *cyningestūn* might be grafted onto an existing minster nucleus, pertains to (Old) Basing in Hampshire. A diploma text of 945 records the sale by King Eadmund to Æthelnoth, a royal priest, of ‘a monastic mansion at Basing called King’s Horse Croft’ (*mansionem monasticam ad Basyngum que nostro dicitur famine Cyninges Hors Croft*. S 505; Miller 2001, 67-71, especially p. 71; Blair 2005, 302; also Rumble 1983, 266, who is overly sceptical when arguing for a translation more faithful to the 15th-century manuscript

source of ‘Cynnig’s horse-croft’). This name-cum-description is at first sight incomprehensible, but might it be explicable through the idea of *cyningestūnas* serving in part as places where the horses needed for covering long distances along key overland routes were exchanged, with tired ones being left to graze and recover in the ‘horse-croft’ (after Bourne 2012, 280, although she does not make any reference to S 505 in her published research). Basing lay close to the line of the Roman road between Silchester and Chichester, but it may be its midway position between Winchester and Reading/Sashes/Cookham that is of more relevance when attempting to explain the name and status of *Cyninges Hors Croft*.

Whether or not one accepts that there was a road of Roman origin running in a straight line between Kingston Hill and Seething Wells, it is undeniable that the medieval London-Winchester road passed through historic Kingston. This could have arisen because of the “pull” of a minster-based settlement and/or attendant *cyningestūn* on the ‘central Kingston island’. Either possibility entails the drawback of making the latter somewhat later in origin than posited by Bourne for the height of the use of the place-name compound. So is there another way of explaining the situation, one that is compatible with Bourne’s work as well as the archaeological evidence?

The post-Roman archaeological profile of central Kingston may not be especially rich, but it does boast certain interesting facets. The grog-tempered pottery from Eden Street and the early finds dredged from the Thames, above all the Byzantine coin ‘hoard’, point to the insubstantial Roman-era settlement east of the ‘central island’ (if that is what it was – some have preferred to see the artefactual evidence deriving from a masonry shrine, e.g. Andrews 2004, 171) having had a continued existence in the immediate post-Roman period. Whatever its precise nature, the Eden Street site was not isolated in its economic connections; it was very much plugged into regional and supra-regional networks of exchange. So, despite being set back slightly from the side of the Thames, it could be argued that the river was the settlement’s *raison d’être*. It may, however, be more appropriate to conceive of it as an interface, a nexus between riverine and terrestrial routes of local and supra-local economic importance.

In origin, any such settlement was too early to be a *cyningestūn*. The royal connection and thus the name arose later, probably following its linkage to an inland elite centre (whether at Ditton or *Freoricburna*), for which the *cyningestūn* might have acted as a transshipment-cum-taxation place. An analogy could be *Sandtun*, the seasonal coastal trading settlement founded *circa* 700 CE and associated with the regional royal centre and later major monastery at Lyminge (see Brooks and Kelly 2013, 326-32, and references therein). The superior connectivity of the *cyningestūn* makes it easy to understand why it (re)gained precedence over *Freoricburna* and thereafter developed into a key West Saxon royal centre. Another factor may have been the physical deterioration of the Roman-era London-Winchester road, to the point where its original course was increasingly impassable; might this also allow the description of *Fullingadic* as a ditch rather than a road to indicate that its function as a means of overland travel had already been lost?



## Discussion/synthesis

There are various pieces of the puzzle (or perhaps it would be more accurate to say various puzzles) to consider in seeking the sites of *Freoricburna* and the first place to bear the name that would become in due course Kingston. The constituent details of each has been set out above, and now it is time to evaluate the merits of the various options in order to try and generate a new model of the settlement geography of Kingston upon Thames between the fifth and 11th centuries CE.

The charter testimony makes it eminently likely that the entirety of the area of Kingston may have been known previously as *Freoricburna*, meaning that we can limit our search for the site of the royal vill known by the latter name to within its attested hundredal and parochial bounds. Beyond that, archaeology takes us a little further, but nowhere near far enough as to have any certainty about the locations of the two charter promulgation places. This is to go without mentioning the implication of the credibly-original description of the land grant recorded in S 1165 being promulgated *iuxta* ‘next to’ *subregulus* Frithuwald’s vill. The clause could fit with the notion of a nearby but not immediately adjacent assembly-place utilising the ‘central Kingston Island’. However, it has more than a whiff of special pleading about it, and is very hard to square with the subsequent detail that the vill was *iuxta supradictam fossatam Fullingadich* “next to the aforesaid ditch *Fullingadic*”, whatever the true form of that feature.

A position has been taken that it is more likely that the royal vill of *Freoricburna* lay close to the watercourse of the same name, rather than that the two were distant from one another but shared a name because the latter was the defining feature of the estate pertaining to the former. What is more certain, provided one accepts that *Freoricburna* and Kingston were names attached to much the same area of land, is that the *burna* in question was what is today known as the Hogsmill. These two points limit the search for *Freoricburna* to a corridor along the axis of the Hogsmill.

The idea that, prior to the Late Anglo-Saxon period, the main epicentre of activity (i.e. *Freoricburna* and the original *cyningestūn*) lay upstream from the site of historic Kingston suffers for its speculative complexity, requiring as it does not one but two as-yet unidentified major settlement sites, plus a subsequent shift to the ‘central Kingston island’. Even so, it is not hard to counter such a critique; for instance, from the perspective of archaeological excavations in central Kingston having recovered clear evidence for a pattern of contemporaneous dispersed settlements in the Early Anglo-Saxon period. Likewise, the sites of the satellite *tūnas* of Norbiton and Surbiton have still to be pinpointed, despite the implication from their names of the existence of some form of agricultural settlement foci related to Kingston if not also *Freoricburna* before it (being respectively the north and south *beretūn* ‘barley farm’, although the compound probably carried a broader sense of ‘outlying grange, demesne farm’ from early on: Parsons and Styles 1997, 86-87, noting both

place-names, neither of which is on particularly early record). Nevertheless, even counting the (?) Agar House spearhead, the dearth of suitable archaeological testimony from what is a heavily-developed area offers stronger support to the conclusion that there were not two discrete elite settlement sites located to the east of the medieval centre of Kingston.

The other options presented above avoid the accusation of being over-complex in terms of the number of settlement sites they entail, by suggesting a shift from a site at or close to the *Freoricburna*/Hogsmill to a focus at Kingston that is recognisable both archaeologically and historically – or between two proximate locations around the mouth of the Hogsmill. Where these options differ is in what was there prior to the shift. One hypothesis sees the *cyningestūn* as a secondary element of an antecedent settlement focused on a minster, whereas its counterpart makes the *cyningestūn* the primary function, or rather a part-natural evolution of a well-connected post-Roman riverside (or river-linked) settlement. This leaves the date and location of the first minster church at Kingston moot, with all of the available evidence being of the tenth/eleventh century or later, and a proposal will be made in this regard below.

Arguably, therefore, the scenario of a “primary” *cyningestūn* has more merit, or at least offers more reason to explore it further. Of potential relevance in this conjunction are the three Kingstons in Sussex (Kingston between Littlehampton and Worthing; Kingston by Sea; Kingston south-west of Lewes), which Bourne reads as belonging to a possible ‘string’ linked by one or more east-west Roman road (2012, 270). However, the common denominator may also or instead be the English Channel, as well as the Rivers Adur and Ouse, and some form of association with movement between land and water. Seeing them as part-terrestrial, part-waterborne trade and/or travel regulation points complements the reading of Kingston upon Thames as a place that built upon longer-distance connections which survived the “Roman” to “Anglo-Saxon” transition.

The importance of the River Thames as a transport route in the Anglo-Saxon period is hard to gauge, although some level of usage across the centuries is almost guaranteed. Few river-going vessels have been found (although a handful are known), but the distribution and quantity of artefacts from along the shoreline and on dry land close to the river-bank would seem to indicate movement of goods and people by water (Naylor 2013). So too the locations of events such as the Viking winter camp at Fulham in 878-79 (Baker and Brookes 2012). It cannot be known precisely how the Byzantine gold coins from the Thames at Kingston, or the grog-tempered pottery belonging to extra-regional industries from Eden Street, were brought to the locality, but a mixture of overland and waterborne methods seems nearly certain (for the movement of Byzantine goods to Britain, see Harris 2003, Chapter 6). Arguably, therefore, the use of the OE appellative *cyningestūn* indexes in the first instance the economic rather than sacred importance of its location — although it should always be borne in mind that such activities may have overlapped in practice and might take place simultaneously at a single site (just as later Kingston was a local centre of both secular and Christian power).

But *why* did they gather *there*, at Kingston upon Thames, in 838? Holding a major assembly at a riverside site would have a very strong parallel in Chelsea, venue for a number of synods and councils in the later eighth century. Interestingly, like Kingston in 838, the charters associated with these meetings are said to have been witnessed *in loco (famosa, celebri)* rather than in/at a royal vill (S 70, 123, 125, 128, 130-31, 136, 150-51, 166, 1430). The same is the case for Brentford in a charter of 780 (S 118). (The speculation introduced by Michael Wood and repeated by Butters (1996, 155) that Kingston upon Thames was earlier the major Mid-Anglo-Saxon assembly-place of *Clofesho* need not detain us, not least because the meaning of the place-name does not fit with the topography of the Kingston locality.)

Taking a trusting view of the vocabulary of the charter testimony means the description of Kingston as a *locus* rather than a *villa regalis* (like *Freoricburna* in 838) or *monasterium* (hence S 164 being promulgated *iuxta monasterium quod dicitur Crogedena* ‘next the minster that is called Croydon’ in 809) could be used as the basis for suggesting there was no major ecclesiastical or royal centre on the ‘central Kingston island’, just whatever buildings and/or other types of structures as made up the *cyningestūn*. For what it is worth in view of the uneven spread of relevant archaeological investigations at Kingston, there is no signature for a monastic settlement of the ninth century or earlier equivalent to the material indications for its early post-Roman significance. The minster here and any associated complex of secular buildings (cf. Lewis 2009, 120 Fig. 2) may not have been established until late in the ninth century or early in the tenth century — hence Athelstan’s coronation in 925, the charter attestations of Kingston as a (*regali*) *villa* (S 450, 420, 520), and the sculptural fragment in the parish church. Certainly, claims that the parish church overlies a major Mid-Anglo-Saxon elite centre seem more tenuously rooted in fact than ever, although nor can they be dismissed altogether until such time as the appropriate archaeological work is conducted.

It is useful to consider the nature of the agreements behind the relevant charters as another means of understanding why Kingston appears all of a sudden as a major assembly-place in 838:

- S 1438 (Kingston) documents agreements reached between Archbishop Ceolnoth and Ecgberht of Wessex and his son Æthelwulf concerning land named *æt Mallingum*, and between bishops and secular patrons over the election of abbots and abbesses (but not the formal submission of all of the kingdoms south of the Thames as well as Essex to West Saxon dominion, despite what Bourne has repeatedly stated: 2012, 274; 2017, 69).
- S 281 (Kingston) details the grant by Ecgberht of Wessex of 40 hides at Shalfleet on the Isle of Wight to the see of Winchester, on the condition that Bishop Ealdhun of Winchester and his successors are loyal to Æthelwulf, the king’s son.
- S 280 (*Freoricburna*) records the grant by Ecgberht of Wessex of four hides plus pastures and a property in Rochester to Bishop Beornmod of Rochester.

In terms of its subject matter, S 280 is a run-of-the-mill bookland grant, whereas S 1438 is a more complex record of conciliar proceedings. S 281 occupies a middle ground, but its resemblances to S 1438 suggest it was a fabrication based upon an original West Saxon copy of that charter (Brooks and Kelly 2013, 658-59). It has been observed that the witness-lists of the three charters contain many of the same names, suggesting the temporal and spatial proximity of the Kingston and *Freoricburna* assemblies (Edwards 1988, 286-87). Furthermore, although Edwards offered a sceptical judgement on S 280's claim to authenticity, she did conclude it is acceptable evidence for an assembly at *Freoricburna* in the year 838 (1988, 288).

One way of reading the charter evidence is that the Kingston council was a major meeting convened for a particular political purpose (or purposes), prior or subsequent to which there was another gathering at nearby *Freoricburna* to deal with more everyday matters. Kingston's superior riverine and terrestrial communication links may have been important influences on its selection as the council site, but symbolic, even ritual, considerations may also have been at play (note the argument for the 'central location' of Kingston upon Thames within the nascent English state made in Andrews *et al.* 2003, 10). Alongside the practical advantages, therefore, the use of an island for a major assembly may embody powerful symbolism regarding the appropriation of the natural landscape for displays of political power. Possibly it was the additional factor of the site's proximity to *Freoricburna* that won out in the choice of Kingston rather than Chelsea or Brentford as the venue for the 838 council.

## **In conclusion**

The evidence presented and discussed over the course of this essay is as excessively complex in some regards as it is excessively scanty in others. A few things are reasonably clear. *Freoricburna* is highly likely to represent an earlier name for the Hogsmill, and as such the eponymous royal vill recorded in charters of the eighth and ninth centuries should be expected to have lain close to it. The archaeological evidence, however, does nothing to bear out the idea *Freoricburna* was situated near its confluence with the Thames; as such, we might postulate a site away to the south-east, perhaps where the postulated former London-Winchester Roman road crossed the Hogsmill. The 'central Kingston island' at this date played host to nothing more than a *cyningestūn* associated with the important royal vill of *Freoricburna* (and perhaps the vill of *subregulus* Frithuwald — in the Thames and Long Ditton area? — before it), although there is no proof that this settlement was located on the island rather than on the other side of one of the branches of the Hogsmill that defined it. Beyond the interrelationship between *Freoricburna* and the *cyningestūn*, it is hard to determine to which of Bourne's 'original' or 'road/string' types the latter belonged — especially since her work underplays the significance of water-based travel and trade.

The recorded name of the meeting-place reflected what was proximate to the site — it was named after the *cyningestūn*/Kingston, an appellative derived from its function as a very different kind of place of royal authority. We cannot and should not make a direct link between the 838 council and the recorded name of its venue, any more than those of the major assemblies held downriver at Brentford (OE *Bregentford* ‘ford over the River Brent’: Mills 2010, 31-32) or Chelsea (OE \**Cealc-*, \**C(i)elcehyb* ‘chalk landing-place’: Mills 2010, 51). We might be able, on the other hand, to explain another piece of name evidence by linking it to other forms of testimony. Rumours of an Anglo-Saxon palace in the area to the south of the ‘central Kingston island’ have been greatly exaggerated, even if, as Hawkins (1998, 275-77) noted, they have been echoed in the partial excavation of the settlement of Early Anglo-Saxon date at South Lane. What has been found thereabouts thus far is in no way palatial, yet the archaeology might serve to explain the local lore about Moreford as an erstwhile place-name for Kingston. The titular crossing might be placed at the southern edge of the ‘central island’ in the vicinity of *le More* (Hawkins 1998, 273; cf. Hawkins, Kain and Wooldridge 2002, 187 Fig. 3). If so, was it the precursor to the late 12th-century Clattern Bridge (dating as per Andrews *et al.* 2003, 10)?

It should be acknowledged that it is something of a leap in interpretation to go from understanding that the 838 council was held in the vicinity of Kingston to proposing that it took place *on* the ‘central Kingston island’. Nonetheless, there are reasons for attributing greater probability to the idea than hypothesising an assembly site set back further from the Thames. The former ‘central island’ is the locus of an archaeologically-attested concentration of activity towards the end of the Anglo-Saxon period, which may be one roundabout reason for thinking the 838 council took place there. Certainly, in areal terms, it was capacious enough to host a large gathering. The eight- to tenth-century ditch (or ditches) excavated at 29 Thames Street could represent a feature associated with the assembly site, or an element of the *cyningestūn* (Andrews *et al.* 2003, 11, posits use for drainage and to serve as a plot boundary). An island site at the braided confluence of two rivers may not seem a commodious location for a major assembly, but in this case it was far from cut-off; indeed, the existence of the *cyningestūn* on or close to the island may betoken its connectedness to networks of overland and river travel. Parallels with Chelsea downriver on the opposite bank of the Thames have been drawn already. Other possible analogues include the site of the 961 *witan* meeting at Hamsey near Lewes (*æt Hamme wip Læwe*: S 1211) and arguably the island that gave its name to Runnymede ‘?council-island meadow’ (*in Prato quod vocatur Runimed*: Carpenter 2015, 68).

Brooks and Kelly (2013, 656) developed the work of others to propose that the 838 council may have ‘acted as precedent for later ceremonial activity’ at Kingston. But was there direct precedent or other precursory significance at play in the choice of the council site? Precisely why that major assembly was held at Kingston rather than *Freoricburna* is impossible to know, although suggestions can be made. As in the cases of Chelsea and Brentford, the Thames-side location perhaps was imbued with a specific symbolic significance in a way that *Freoricburna* and its environs were not. The metal objects recovered

from the riverbed may attest to a long tradition of deposition rituals associated with riverside gatherings, although it must be cautioned that there are several other possible explanations for their provenance. Kingston, however, had the advantage over the aforementioned assembly places downstream of adjacency to a major royal vill. It might furthermore offer an insight about the rationale between the type of assembly and type of location in which it was held — a significant assembly deserved a significant site.

The above analysis not only offers a new understanding of why Kingston came into existence, but also about the chronology of its development. Previously it has been proposed, seemingly on the basis of the known archaeological evidence from the Kingston area, that ‘the focus of settlement’ in the form of a ‘royal complex’ shifted to the ‘central Kingston island’ during the eighth century, and in time this attracted permanent non-elite settlement close by, perhaps to its north (Andrews *et al.* 2003, 10-11). Much of this no longer seems tenable in view of a closer reading of the charter material (and indeed the archaeological data, too). There can be no dispute that the area of modern-day central Kingston was the site of significant activity before the end of the Anglo-Saxon period onwards. However, it gives no compelling sign of having been especially important or intensively settled between the later seventh and later ninth centuries, let alone a “palatial” royal vill commensurate with the documentary evidence. The shift most likely took place in the late ninth or early tenth century; as yet, there is no concrete evidence that this was spearheaded by the establishment of a burghal fortification (much the same conclusion was reached, using later archaeological evidence, by Andrews 2004, 181).

Careful scrutiny of the documentary evidence has revealed that Blair (2005, 325) was somewhat incorrect in grouping Kingston with other “stable” West Saxon royal centres — for instance, Wilton and Southampton — of the 830s onwards. The charter promulgations of 838 mark either the start of the eclipse of *Freoricburna* by Kingston or a point midway through the process, but not the end result; as is clear from the 861 charter (S 330), this would not come until decades later. It is, however, tempting and perhaps not altogether unjustified to read into the use in S 330 of the words *in loco* as indicating that *Freoricburna* may have ceded some of its erstwhile status to Kingston by that date (although this may be to place too much stress upon word choice in a period notorious for its poor Latinity). Indeed, one might go even further and posit that this shift was catalysed by king Æthelwulf, although any such initiative was evidently far from accomplished by the time of his death in 858.

It seems most probable that the estate of *Freoricburna* was renamed *Cyningestun* in this period, after the demise of the estate centre linked to the rise of the riverside site formerly within its orbit. Part and parcel of this was the establishment of a royal vill at a location congruent with or close to the place that (had) fulfilled the function(s) of a *cyningestūn*. Evidently, the place-name was sufficiently well established, and sufficiently removed from its somewhat workaday original associations, that it was accepted to be worth retaining and repurposing to identify a highly significant centre of royal authority instead of being re-

placed by a new, “accurate” appellation. Kingston upon Thames is unusual in having relatively rich corpora of documentary and archaeological evidence from the Anglo-Saxon era, but the two are mismatched; the former is richest when the latter is scantest, and vice versa. It is to be hoped that future archaeological excavations and research will recover evidence that can serve to finesse — or rewrite — this new reading of the origins and growth of early medieval Kingston upon Thames.

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