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Review of progress on 2006 Surrey Archaeological Research Framework (SARF) for the Anglo-Saxon period

Progress on understanding the key issues identified in the 2006 for the Anglo-Saxon period has been incremental rather than subject to any specific major breakthroughs. The thinking behind the majority of the key issues identified at that time remains valid, although many points can now be specified more precisely, mainly as a result of growing understanding of the period on a national and European scale rather than of particular discoveries in Surrey. Overall, progress in academic research not generally focused on Surrey has allowed better formulation of questions in a number of areas. However, individual work has led to progress in understanding of, for example territorial units within Surrey, boundaries, and causeways (even when accurate dating is not possible). The Portable Antiquities Scheme has permitted access to a growing amount of information on artefacts from the period.

A revised version of the text taking into account developments in thinking and understanding, which may form part of a future Surrey Historic Environment Research Framework (SHERF) is appended to this review.

Few of the archaeological sites excavated in Surrey in the subsequent period have been of predominantly Anglo-Saxon interest. Neither has Surrey featured prominently in recent published literature on the period. A list of major discoveries appears at the end of this note.

Research projects identified in 2006

The SARF identified a number of possible projects that might be attempted. The included to:

- Collate existing archaeological evidence about administrative boundaries (including negative evidence) and carry out targeted fieldwork;
- Carry out a thorough survey of topographical place-names to suggest location of features in the Saxon landscape;
- Establish a corpus of Anglo-Saxon finds from Surrey and maintain an up-to-date digital version, including evidence from the Portable Antiquities Scheme.

None of these has got off the ground.

In addition, a number of lesser possible projects were identified:

- Location of watermills mentioned in Domesday Book;
- Causeways and river 'canalisations';
- Pagan ritual sites and early Christian churches;
- Re-examination and re-dating of cemeteries with both pagan and later 'execution' burials;

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- Sites with evidence of the Roman to Saxon transition should be accorded the highest priority, including use of place-name evidence to identify possible sub-Roman settlements.

Although some individual work has been carried out on some of these subjects, no systematic projects have been taken forward.

In identifying why such work has not been generally taken forward, there are a number of possible explanations, including;

- Few members of the Medieval Studies Forum have expressed a particular interest in the Anglo-Saxon period rather than the later Middle Ages;
- The specific skills required (e.g. in place name studies, which in the past have attracted much unsustainable speculation) are not widely held;
- Anglo-Saxon archaeological sites, particularly settlement, can be hard to identify;
- Documentary sources are comparatively few compared with subsequent periods.

It may well be that the number of possible projects identified in 2006 was overambitious. On the other hand, it may still be worth pointing to some possible future projects along comparable lines that could spark ideas for work even with the knowledge that most will not be attempted.

Discoveries since 2006

[The following short list of recent archaeological sites is derived from the articles published in the *Collections* by Tony Howe et al. These go up to 2010. It is much shorter than a comparable list for the post-Conquest medieval period would be.]

Bermondsey: PCA excavation in Bermondsey Square. Saxon features, notably pits and a hearth, which may have been associated with a Saxon minster. Large number of early, middle and late Saxon artefacts, suggesting a prospering community.

Bletchingley: North Park Farm. Five Anglo-Saxon features, suggesting domestic occupation and industrial or craft activities in a multi-period site.

Coulsdon: Farthing Down. Re-excavation of one Anglo-Saxon barrow, one of 16 in two barrow cemeteries.

Leatherhead: St Andrews School, Grange Road. 4 sherds of 5th to early 7th century pottery (unstratified) in a multi-period site.

Thorpe: TESIS England. Pits, wells and ditches indicating continuing occupation since the late Anglo-Saxon period.