

THE ORIGIN AND EARLY DEVELOPMENT OF SEDFORD, NORFOLK.



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I am also grateful to my girlfriend Marion McCabe for keeping me sane this year.

DISCLAIMER

The data presented and discussed in this dissertation have been drawn from numerous sources, all of which are fully referenced and acknowledged in the text. However a sizeable part of the data is derived from the work of the Sedgeford Historical and Archaeological Research Project, which has worked extensively in Sedgeford since 1996. I first became involved with the Project in 1997, became a supervisor in 1999 and a co-director in 2000, I now hold responsibility for the entirety of the Project's landscape archaeology work. Therefore, whilst this dissertation uses data collected over many years by many hundreds of volunteers, some of them under my direct supervision, it represents my own analysis and interpretation of the available evidence and, except where stated, is all my own work.

NOTE ON TERMINOLOGY

For chronological convenience the terms Early Saxon (c.450-650), Middle Saxon (c.650-850) and Late Saxon (c.850-1066) are used in this discussion. No cultural connotations are implied by these terms.

INTRODUCTION

This dissertation uses many different forms of archaeological evidence to examine the origin and early development of the modern village of Sedgeford in north west Norfolk. The results of many years' intrusive and non-intrusive archaeological research allow the foundation of the modern settlement to be confidently dated to the Middle Saxon Period, set against a background of earlier, but discontinuous, settlement activity. The archaeological work conducted to date has successfully identified multiple phases in the village's early development, fortunately preserved *in situ* by later changes in the morphology of the settlement. These later changes have also been the subject of extensive archaeological study, the results of which elucidate the Late Saxon and Early Post-Conquest periods of the settlement's history.

The evidence provided by Domesday Book, the earliest historical source pertaining to Sedgeford, suggests that much of the structure of the settlement as it survives today was largely in place by the eleventh century, and as such, this study concentrates upon the origin and development of the settlement during the Anglo Saxon period. In order to demonstrate the Middle Saxon origin of the village, a detailed examination is made of the dispersed nature of the Early Saxon evidence so far discovered in the area, contrasting it with the nucleated evidence of the new Middle Saxon period settlement. Associated place name evidence is also drawn upon to demonstrate the foundation date of the settlement. The later development of the settlement during the Anglo-Saxon period is also traced using a variety of excavated and surface find evidence from throughout the village, examined in the context of the wider landscape evidence of the period. The study culminates with an examination of the settlement structure described in Domesday Book and subsequent historical documents of the early Post-

Conquest period, assessing the relationship that this structure had with the formation of the parish and the later manorial structure of the village.

In addition to charting the development a single settlement, wider consideration is also given to the ongoing debates surrounding the origin of the English village as a feature in the landscape and its causes. During the last fifty years a great many theories addressing the issue have been postulated in an attempt to built an explanatory model. Several models have been arrived at, with varying degrees of coherence and applicability, and they are discussed here and measured against the evidence from Sedgeford. The debate surrounding such issues is ongoing, and this work contributes another case study to that debate, but before a detailed discussion of the evidence can be entered into it is first necessary to introduce the site and examine its physical background.

LOCATION, GEOLOGY AND TOPOGRAPHY

The parish of Sedgeford lies in north west Norfolk, several kilometres inland of The Wash, and is surrounded, clockwise from the north, by the parishes of Ringstead, Docking, Fring, Snettisham and Heacham (Figure 1). The four thousand acres of the parish are contained within Ordnance Survey grid squares TF 69 34 to TF 75 40 and the present parish church lies at TF 7071 3647, with the modern settlement focussed around it. Sedgeford is situated in a landscape region of Norfolk which commentators have dubbed the *Western Escarpment* (but which is also known as the *Greensand Belt*)¹, a low terrace of Cretaceous rocks that runs north-south along the western edge of the county. Tilted along its length, the *Western Escarpment* is c.70m above sea level in the north and merges into the fens at its southern

¹ Dymond 1985, 28.

extent. Along its length it is dissected into discreet blocks of land by numerous westward draining river valleys cut into the chalk. Throughout the region villages are typically sited on these blocks or their flanks and it is one such valley, that of the River Heacham, that Sedgeford straddles².

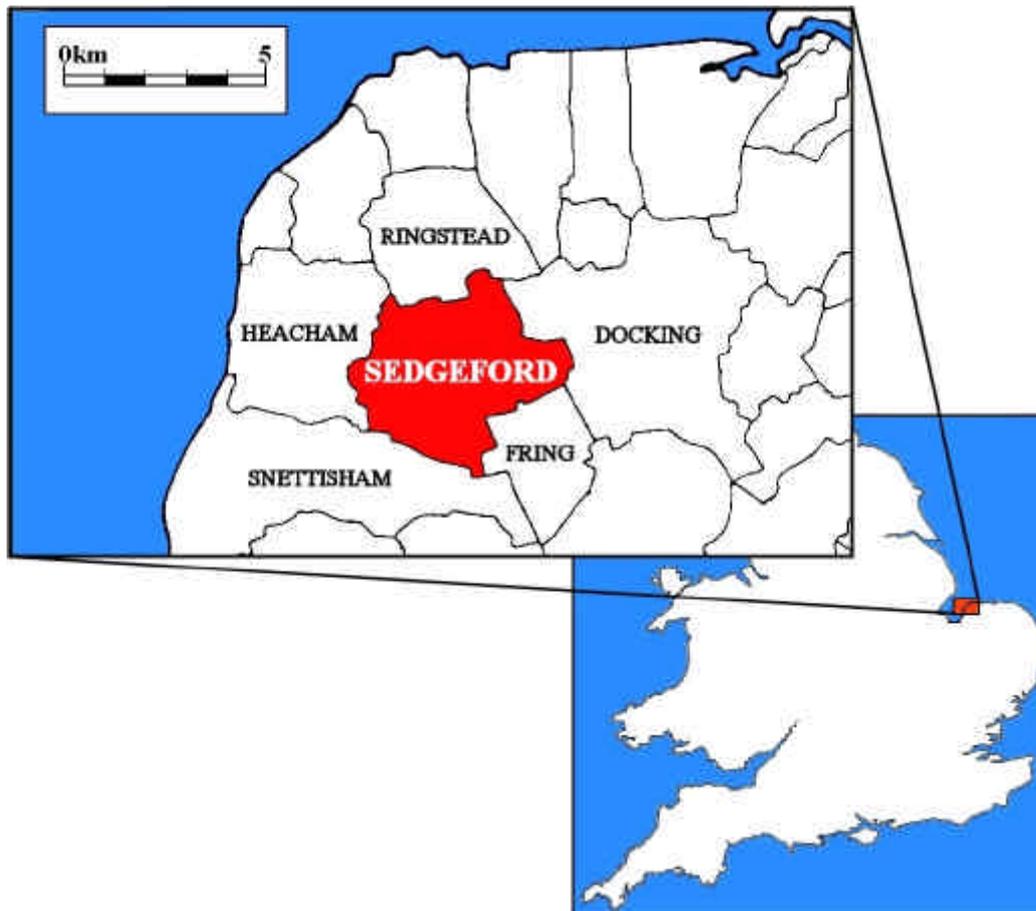


Figure 1. The location of the parish of Sedgeford. (After Wade-Martin 1993).

Geologically Sedgeford lies upon a 400m thick base of Upper Cretaceous Middle Chalk, a hard, bedded white chalk with modular and tabular flints and a few seams of marl³. As Figure 2 shows, within Sedgeford this chalk bedrock is overlain in many places by glacially deposited sands, gravels, loams and boulder clays. All of these deposits result from the series of glaciations that affected Norfolk during the Upper Pleistocene, the last of which was the

² Dymond 1985, 28-30. Williamson 1993, 7-14.

Hunstanton Glaciation of c.8000 BC⁴. Whilst a tighter chronology for these glacial deposits would be desirable, as West states “in many instances it is impossible to correlate ... particular deposits with the general East Anglian sequence”⁵ and such is the case in Sedgeford, where there has to date been no detailed analysis of the local geological sequence. Consequently the chronologically vague and slightly dated map upon which Figure 2 is based remains the most detailed survey currently available.

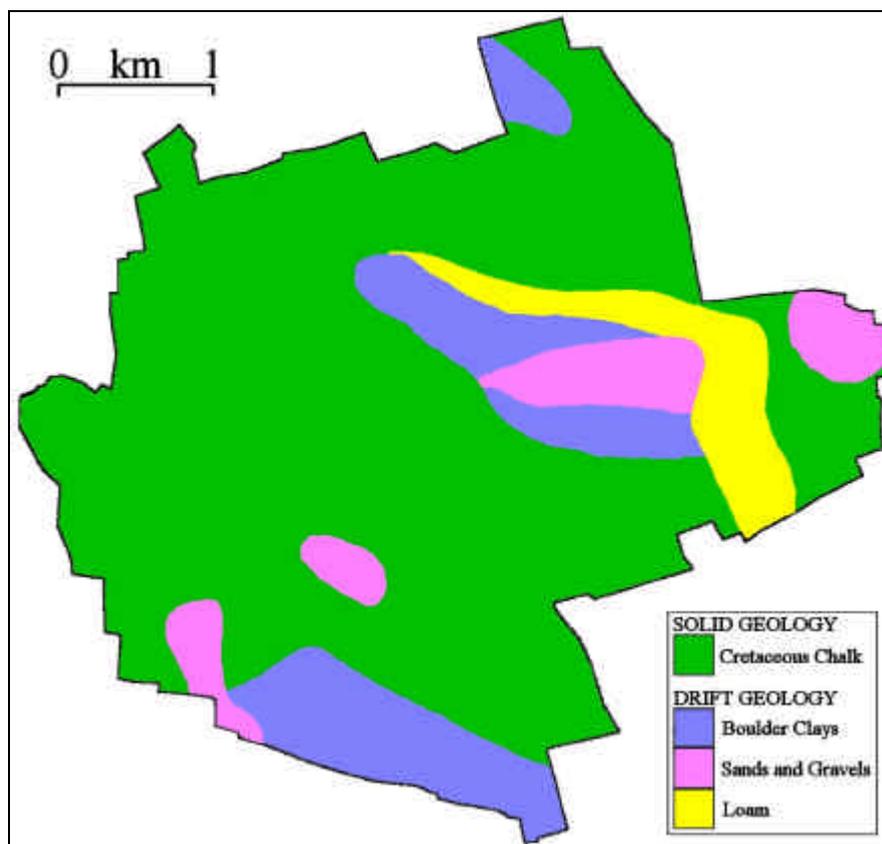


Figure 2. The solid and drift geology of Sedgeford (After British Geological Survey 1948).

Topographically, Sedgeford is dominated by the water worn valley of the River Heacham, which rises in the parish of Fring and flows through the parish, emptying into The Wash at Heacham. Along the eight miles of its length the river is fed by many tributaries and springs,

³ Larwood and Funnell 1961, 21-24.

⁴ Larwood and Funnell 1961, 25-29.

⁵ West 1961, 365.

although it has suffered greatly from the over-extraction of water during the last forty years and is now a shadow of its former self. The dried up courses of two tributaries can be seen in Figure 3 feeding into the river from the north, one at the western end of the parish and a smaller one towards its centre. Extensive documentary study has demonstrated that the river was a major factor in the village's economic prosperity in the Post-Conquest period⁶, as it almost certainly was during the Pre-Conquest period too, and the name Sedgeford would also suggest that the river crossing was an important factor in the foundation of the settlement.

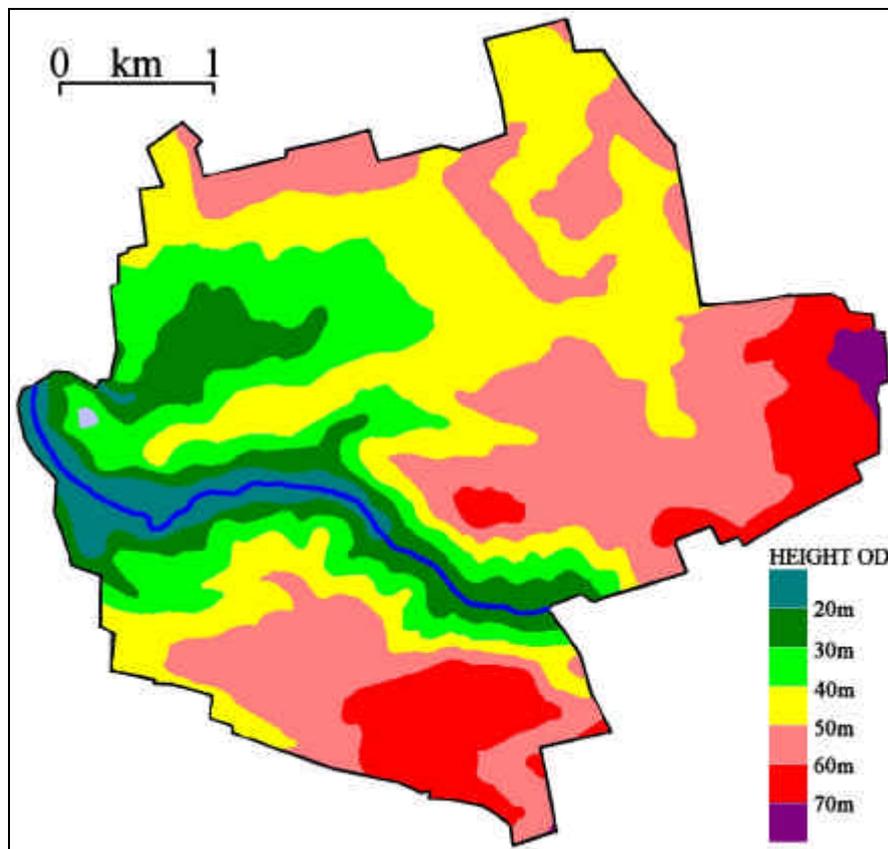


Figure 3. Contour map of Sedgeford parish. (After Ordnance Survey 1996).

The parish is currently very lightly wooded, a result of the generally poor calcareous soils that prevail throughout the region, and the majority of the present trees cluster along the more fertile lands of the river valley. It is no surprise then that the present settlement is also to be

found in the river valley on the south facing slope of the northern bank of the river (see Figure 4 and Plate 1). The entire settlement is sited below the forty metre contour line and is flanked on the north, east and south by 60-70 metre high chalk hills. To the west the river valley meanders away towards the coast, around a thin belt of lower chalk hills that are the only high point immediately between the settlement site and the sea.

Even a preliminary analysis of the topographical evidence has identified three strong reasons behind the location of the settlement. The entire area is effectively contained within a natural chalk basin, sheltered from the elements and yet sufficiently close to the sea. The river valley is fertile, compared to the surrounding chalk uplands, and the area contains one of very few fording points on the river. These factors were surely significant in choosing the settlement site and are suggestive of environmental determinism, a point that will be returned to below.

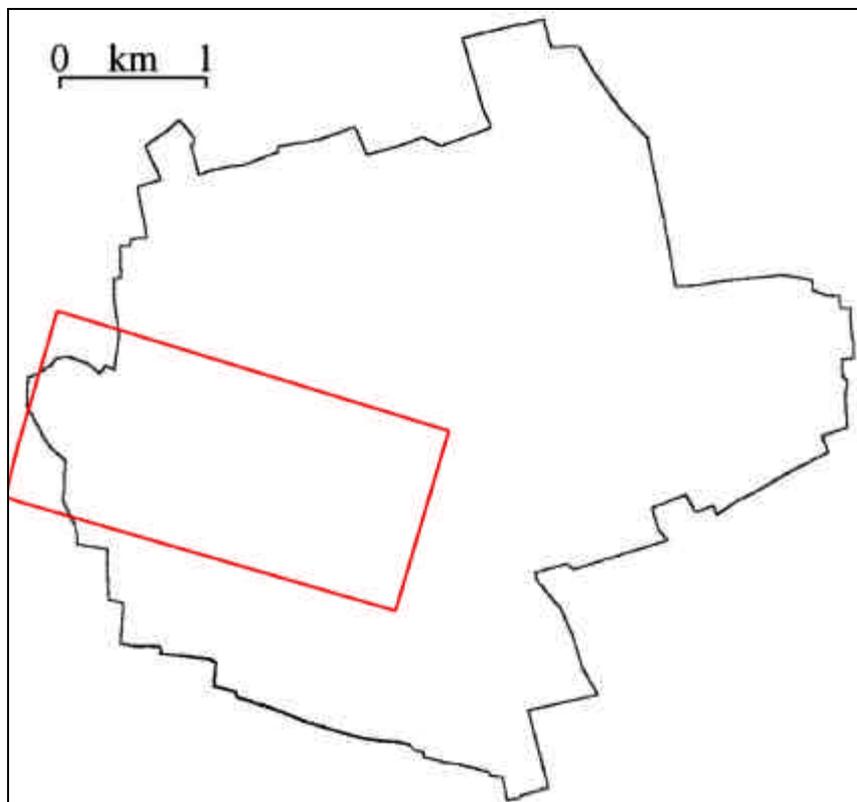


Figure 4. The area shown in Plate 1 and its subsequent variations.

⁶ Hammond and Barnett 1997.

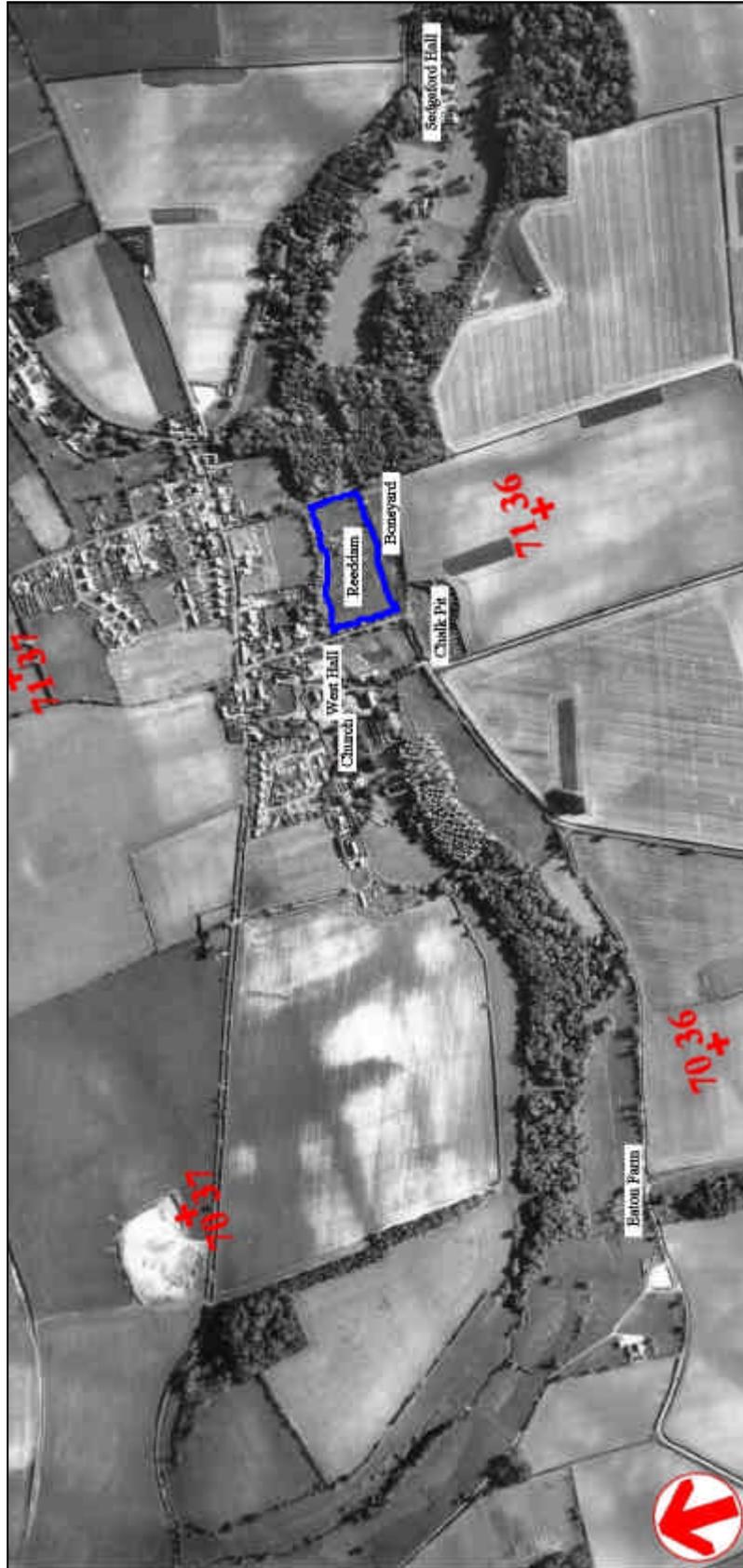


Plate 1. Detail of a black and white aerial photograph of Sedgeford and the river valley in 1996. The main Ordnance Survey intersections and places mentioned in the text are shown. The waterlogged area of the Reeddam is outlined in blue. Taken by R.A.F. Marham on behalf of SHARP.

SEDGEFORD'S ARCHAEOLOGICAL RECORD

In a study such as this, which uses the work of many to study a wide area, it is important to heed the warning that the use of such data creates distribution maps which 'only depict the activities of individual archaeologists or field societies up to any particular date'⁷. Whilst this is very true, the parish of Sedgeford has been a subject of extensive archaeological study for the last one hundred and fifty years and during that time most of the settlement area has been subjected to some form of archaeological examination. This work has produced an enormous quantity of data of various quality and in order that it may be usefully employed, it is necessary to assess the relative reliability of the methods employed and their results. Such a task is made more difficult by the fact that very little of this work has ever been published in anything more than note form, but fortunately the Norfolk Sites and Monuments Record (SMR) has been very thoroughly compiled and is well referenced throughout. We can confidently state that we are aware of the vast majority of archaeological activities that have occurred in Sedgeford and can trace their results, as the following paragraphs will serve to demonstrate.

During the second half of the nineteenth century the parish was administered by the Reverend James Ambrose Ogle, an antiquarian clergyman who took a great interest in the history and archaeology of his parish. He wrote extensive accounts of his work, transcribed the parish registers and, although he did not excavate, was responsible for many archaeological pieces being lodged with Norwich Castle Museum⁸. In the early years of the twentieth century the archaeology of the parish became a subject of interest to the then owner of Sedgeford Hall, Holcombe Ingleby, who excavated extensively throughout the parish in 1913. Ingleby wrote

⁷ Aston 1985, 53.

⁸ Ogle's unpublished manuscript *Sedgefordiana*. Sedgeford Parish Chest.

and published two accounts of his discoveries⁹, but although they are quite general in nature the archaeological detail is sufficient to reconstruct his work and findings. In addition Ingleby lodged some of his excavations' skeletal archive with the Royal College of Surgeons, London¹⁰.

The mid twentieth century saw Sedgeford become a hive of archaeological activity. Local antiquary C.H. Lewton Brain made extensive studies of the archaeology of the Heacham river valley and discovered fifty one archaeological sites and small finds along its length. He published an account of these findings and lodged his material with the museums at Kings Lynn and Norwich¹¹. In 1953 he also conducted the limited excavation of the site of a 'hut' in the Reeddam area, interpreting it as Saxon, however, a subsequent re-examination of the site has suggested a probable prehistoric date for the building¹².

Lewton Brain's work opened the archaeological flood gates in Sedgeford. After ploughing in 1954 revealed human remains on the Boneyard site, the Norfolk Research Committee was called in to evaluate the site and identified the existence of a Middle or Late Anglo-Saxon inhumation cemetery¹³. The Boneyard site was further evaluated by transects of test pits in 1957 which identified areas of settlement and cemetery¹⁴, subsequently investigated more fully in 1958 by Dr. Peter Jewell on behalf of the Ministry of Works¹⁵. A significant site in the development of the settlement, the Boneyard is discussed in much greater detail below.

⁹ Ingleby 1917. Ingleby 1920.

¹⁰ Rob Kruszynski, Natural History Museum, *pers. comm.*

¹¹ Lewton Brain 1967.

¹² National Monuments Record MONARCH Database 640406. Cabot 2000, 25.

¹³ National Monuments Record MONARCH Database 641022.

¹⁴ National Monuments Record MONARCH Database 641021.

¹⁵ National Monuments Record MONARCH Database 640659.

The discovery of the Snettisham Treasure in the late 1940s and subsequent discoveries of Iron Age hoards and torc fragments in the area¹⁶, including Sedgeford's own torc in 1965¹⁷, has led to a great increase in the amount of local metal detecting. Fortunately, the Norfolk Museums Service has always taken a positive view towards metal detecting, having run an identification and recording service for many years, now integrated into the national Portable Antiquities Scheme. As such these finds have greatly augmented the Norfolk SMR, indeed Gurney estimates that metal detecting accounts for more one third of all SMR entries made every year and the identification service handled nearly 14,000 objects during 1997-1998¹⁸. From the point of view of this study, we can be confident that most of the finds resulting from legal metal detecting in Sedgeford have been included in the Norfolk SMR. Of course, it is impossible to estimate the quantity of illegal metal detecting finds that are irretrievably lost.

In the past decade the size of the modern village has greatly increased, with numerous new houses being constructed and pipelines laid. The requirements of PPG 16 have ensured that the archaeology encountered during these works has been sampled and recorded, again increasing the available dataset. During 1991 new drains were laid in the area of the churchyard¹⁹ and a pipe trench was also cut around the perimeter of the Boneyard, through the Chalk Pit and away towards Snettisham²⁰. The pipe trench encountered Saxon settlement features which will be discussed below with the other Boneyard material. Further watching briefs and evaluations were conducted ahead of new buildings and barn conversions in West Hall Farmyard in 1993²¹ and 1999²², and also ahead of new buildings along the main road at

¹⁶ Rainbird Clarke 1954. Stead 1991.

¹⁷ Eastern Daily Press, 11 May 1965.

¹⁸ Gurney 1997, 529. Portable Antiquities Annual Report 1997-1998, 9.

¹⁹ Norfolk SMR Number 1615. Watching Brief 9th January 1991.

²⁰ Bates 1991.

²¹ Leah 1993.

²² Hoggett 2000.

TF709366²³. Indeed, it has now become standard practice for all proposed building works within Sedgeford to require archaeological evaluation and such works are ongoing.

The most recent major phase in the archaeological study of Sedgeford began in 1995 with the foundation of the Sedgeford Historical and Archaeological Research Project (SHARP). Dedicated to the long term, multi-disciplinary study of settlement and land use in the parish, SHARP's first annual season of excavation began in 1996, when a new trench was opened on the Boneyard site to complement the excavations of the 1950s. This trench continues to be worked and its findings are discussed below. From 1996-2000 a trench was excavated at West Hall, and was complemented by geophysical and standing building surveys in the area. Its findings shed light upon the Late Saxon and Early Post Conquest phases of the settlement and are also discussed below. In addition to the Project's two main excavations so far, smaller scale archaeological and historical work has been conducted throughout the parish on a variety of sites, and, in an effort to widen the archaeological coverage of the Parish, SHARP has been conducting an orchestrated campaign of fieldwalking since the autumn 1996. Whilst this work encompassed aspects of all periods in the settlement's history, results relevant to this study will be introduced where necessary.

Figure 5 shows the areas of the parish that have been subjected to campaigns of orchestrated fieldwalking by SHARP and others over the years, whilst Plate 2 shows all of the areas that have been subjected to archaeological excavation. As can be seen, the upshot of all of this previous archaeological work in Sedgeford is that enough of the settlement area of the parish has been subjected to archaeological study to provide a detailed and representative dataset from which accurate conclusions may be drawn. The relative completeness of the

²³ Norfolk Archaeological Unit, report forthcoming.

archaeological coverage and archaeological record having been demonstrated, the Anglo-Saxon settlement evidence from Sedgeford will now be presented.

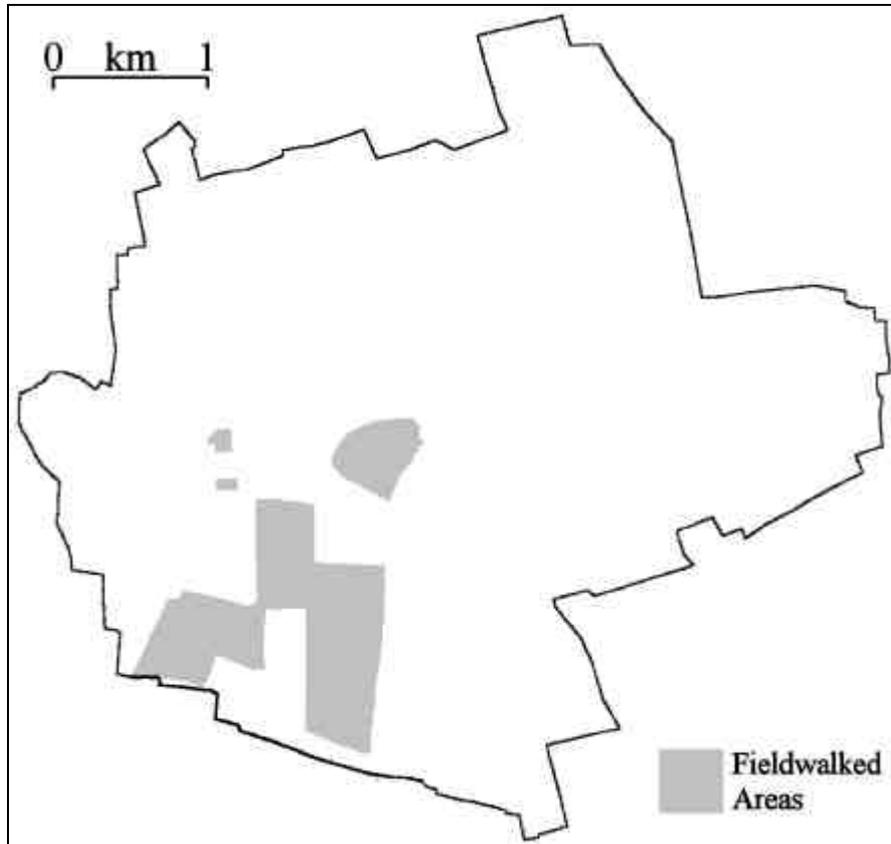


Figure 5. The areas of the parish that have been systematically fieldwalked in the past.



Plate 2. Detail of a black and white aerial photograph of Sedgeford showing the areas of all of the known archaeological excavations that have ever taken place.

THE EVIDENCE

Whilst the archaeological coverage of Sedgeford is wide, in order to enable comparability of evidence due consideration must be given to the different types of archaeological evidence recovered. To this end, the evidence to be discussed below has been divided into several categories, specifically *Stray Surface Finds*, *Fieldwalked Surface Finds* and *Excavated Finds and Features*. The first category should be seen as being the least weighty, due to the unreliability of the grid references provided and the fact that such finds are on the surface and out of context. The second category should be seen as being much more weighty, given the accuracy with which the finds are recovered and the fact that they are viewed as a part of a surface assemblage. However, the fact that they are surface finds still means that they are viewed out of secure contexts. The final category should be considered the most weighty, as all excavated features and finds are very closely located and viewed *in situ* as part of a secure assemblage, although one cannot be sure that the entirety of an archaeological site has been recovered, particularly when settlement evidence is concerned. These categories identified, the evidence will be dealt with period by period: Early Saxon, Middle Saxon and Late Saxon, with the latter including the evidence from Domesday Book. Firstly however, the evidence provided by the place-name Sedgeford will be discussed.

THE NAME SEDGEFORD

The earliest documentary reference to Sedgeford is in Domesday Book, where the name is recorded twice with two different spellings, *Secesforda*²⁴ and *Sexforda*²⁵. The local 16th/17th century antiquarian Sir Henry Spelman expressed a belief that the name was literally derived from the settlement's position on a ford where sedge was grown, a suggestion given some

²⁴ Brown 1984. 10, 20.

²⁵ Brown 1984. 66, 88.

weight by the evidence of reed production in the area during the Medieval period²⁶. This hypothesis was recounted and supported by Blomefield and Parkin, who also comment that the Domesday form of the name is suggestive of a ford on a river called *Set* or *Snet*, although it would appear that they had mistakenly transcribed *Secesforda* as *Setesforda*²⁷. In his *Dictionary of English Place Names* Ekwall states that the name is ‘hardly Sedge Ford’, but is rather derived from the personal noun **Secci*, a variant of *Secca*, making Sedgeford ‘the ford that belongs to Secci’ or is at least significantly associated with him²⁸. However, Ekwall also suggests that the name may be the Old English **saece* ‘stream’ derived from *sican* ‘to trickle’ and cognate with the Old High German *seich* ‘urine’. As such, making Sedgeford ‘the ford on the trickling stream’²⁹.

The latter of Ekwall’s explanations is dismissed by Wilcox as being unacceptable due to the evidence for the river being much more than a trickle during the Medieval period³⁰. This dismissal is perhaps a little flippant, as there is no real evidence regarding the size of the river before the thirteenth century and of course any definition is dependent upon the relative quantity meant by ‘trickle’. Ekwall’s first hypothesis, an OE personal name + ford, is echoed by Mills in *The Dictionary of English Place Names*³¹ and Willcox considers it to be plausible, although she herself prefers ‘the obvious ‘ford where the sedge grows’ (OE *secg* + *ford*)’ hypothesis³². It is likely that this debate will never be fully settled, although the balance is currently weighted in favour of the name Sedgeford being derived from ‘Secci’s Ford’, however, it could be argued that more can be learnt from the undisputed ‘ford’ element of the name.

²⁶ Hammond and Barnett 1997.

²⁷ Blomefield and Parkin 1809, 385.

²⁸ Ekwall 1960, 410. Cox 1999a, 369.

²⁹ Ekwall 1960, 410.

³⁰ Willcox 1997, 21. Citing Hammond and Barnett 1997.

³¹ Mills 1991, Sedgeford.

³² Willcox 1997, 21.

In the field of place-name studies there has been much debate regarding the construction of chronologies and the consensus is that the earliest English place-names are toponyms, those names which define a settlement 'by describing its situation without making reference to the habitation'³³. It is into this category that the name Sedgeford falls. Topographical names generally contain two elements, the specific and the generic, and in this case it is the specific *Sedge* that has been debated so much, whereas the undisputed generic *-ford* is one of the earliest and most prevalent of the Anglo-Saxon place names³⁴.

Cox has demonstrated that the place-names recorded up until c.730 AD contain a range of topographical elements of which *-ford* is one of the four most prevalent, along with *-cg* (dry ground surrounded by water), *-burna* (stream) and *-hamm* (land in a river bend). It has been commented that the prevalence of these terms creates an impression of a farming people concerned about dry ground, water supply and water crossings³⁵.

This agricultural trend is also noted in a recent study in Suffolk where Gelling claims to have identified two distinct classes of *-ford* place-names. The first class comprises the vast majority of sites, all located on small streams, considered to only be of interest to people in the immediate neighbourhood and therefore assumed to be earlier settlements. The second class of site are located on larger rivers and more long distance routes, are therefore thought to have been of much wider concern and are presumed to date to after the formation of the kingdoms, when this wider framework became applicable³⁶.

³³ Gelling 1992, 58.

³⁴ Cox 1999a, 369.

³⁵ Cox 1999b, 450-1.

³⁶ Gelling 1992, 59.

Whilst Gelling's model is rather superficial, needing much more invasive work to confirm its hypothesis, at surface value it would seem that Sedgeford falls into the former class, given its location on a relatively small river in the north west corner of Norfolk. On balance it is probable that the name derives from *Secci's Ford*, gradually becoming Sedgeford as the original meaning was forgotten and reed growing became more prominent. In addition, as a textbook toponym, Sedgeford is far more likely to have been founded in the period before c.730 AD than after. As will be seen, these conclusions are broadly supported by the archaeological evidence to be discussed now.

EARLY SAXON

The Early Saxon evidence so far recovered from Sedgeford is scant, but is of sufficient quantity for some conclusions about the nature of the Early Saxon activity in the area to be drawn. The earliest recorded Early Saxon finds date to the nineteenth century, with a few from the twentieth century and some recovered during modern fieldwalking. It is interesting to note that none of the major excavations conducted to date have produced any evidence of Early Saxon activity, although this does contribute strong negative evidence.

The first category of evidence to be discussed here are the *Stray Surface Finds*, although in this instance it is necessary to consider several 'excavated' finds under this category, due to their poorly recorded nature. Firstly, at a date recorded only as *ante 1826*, an Early Saxon cremation urnfield was discovered by a labourer working in a gravel pit probably located on the north side of the River Heacham. Although a more detailed location is not recorded, the most likely site lies at Point I shown in Plate 3, where a gravel pit was dug in the early nineteenth century. Whilst working, a fall of gravel from the side of the pit revealed an unspecified number of urns, which stood in a line, mouth upwards and without covers. The

urns were recorded as having bosses around the body and containing burnt bones, however, they were all destroyed, except for two now empty examples held by Norwich Castle Museum (accession number 1826.173)³⁷. The event is listed as Norfolk SMR Number 1611 and one of the two urns has been published by Myres, who illustrated it³⁸ and described it thus:

“[A] bossed biconical urn with narrow neck and inverted rim: smooth black/red/fawn ware. Decorated with a row of stamps demarcated above by three close-set lines and below by seven. Below are five long hollow bosses carrying a curved row of stamps at the top. The panels were originally filled with vertical corrugation, but two were changed, one to contain a large area of feathering and the other a three line pendant triangle enclosing three-line hängende Bogen and a scatter of stamps. One stamp is used.”³⁹

Unusual for having had its decorative scheme altered between drying and firing, Myres dates this style of urn to the sixth century⁴⁰. A photograph was published by Ingleby in 1920, reproduced here as Plate 4, and from the available evidence there is no reason to suppose that its companion in Norwich differs greatly in style, although unfortunately, it has not been possible to verify this due to the temporary closure of Norwich Castle Museum for refurbishment.

³⁷ Meaney 1964, 181.

³⁸ Myres 1977, Figure 250.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 282.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 40-42.



Plate 3. Detail of a black and white aerial photograph of Sedgeford showing the find spots of the Early Saxon evidence.

A single cremation urn was excavated by the Reverend Ogle circa 1875 in the area of Eaton Farm (Point II in Plate 3), although again an exact find spot is not given. Ogle noted in his memorandum book that the urn contained burnt bone, although he did not describe the urn itself. The vessel appears to have been kept at Sedgeford Vicarage, from which it was subsequently lost and its whereabouts and status are currently unknown. The event is listed as Norfolk SMR Number 13882 and no further information is known.

Norfolk SMR Number 11262 records the finding of a plain Early Saxon cremation urn at an unknown 19th century site. The urn was deposited in Norwich Castle Museum in 1974, by which time it was almost complete and its supposed contents were absent. An approximate location of TF720360 is given for the find and is shown at Point III in Plate 3. Again, it has not been possible to examine this urn due to the temporary closure of Norwich Castle Museum for refurbishment.

A further Early Saxon cremation urn was excavated by Holcombe Ingleby in 1913 ‘on the west side of the valley’⁴¹, a location which is problematic due to the fact the river flows east-west through the parish. However, the river turns to the south in the vicinity of Ingleby’s home, Sedgeford Hall, allowing for a western side of the valley. This site identification is supported by a hand drawn map from the period, annotated with the legend ‘bodies found’ next to a gravel pit near to Sedgeford Hall (Point IV in Plate 3). Norfolk SMR Number 1612 states that the urn, described by Meaney as ‘with neck ridges’⁴², was formerly kept in Sedgeford Hall, but is now lost. It is noted however that it was very different to those urns from Sedgeford currently in Norwich Castle Museum, as can be seen by comparing Plate 5, showing Ingleby’s 1913 urn, to Plate 4.

⁴¹ Ingleby 1917, 119.

⁴² Meaney 1964, 181.



Plate 4. Early Saxon cremation urn, discovered ante 1826⁴³. Approx 1/3 actual size.



Plate 5. Early Saxon cremation urn, discovered in 1913⁴⁴. Scale not known.

⁴³ Ingleby 1920, 31.

⁴⁴ Ingleby 1917, between 118 and 119.

In addition to the urns discussed above, in 1952 a socketed iron spearhead was discovered at TF69933608, on the lane leading from Eaton to Sedgeford (Point V in Plate 3)⁴⁵. Whether or not the find was laying on the surface or had been weathered out of the river bed is unclear. Currently in Norwich Castle Museum (accession number 1952.187), the spearhead is shown in Figure 6, and is identified by Norfolk SMR Number 1473 as being ‘probably AD’. However, Swanton confidently dates the spear to the late sixth / early seventh centuries, using comparative examples from throughout the south east⁴⁶.



Figure 6. The Early Saxon spearhead from Sedgeford. Shown 1/3 actual size⁴⁷.

The final early Saxon stray find from Sedgeford was discovered by a metal detectorist, C. Hodder, in 1987. Described in Norfolk SMR Number 24149 as ‘a large copper alloy keyhole shaped buckle, gilded on the sides and with the surface silvered with a niello inlay, stamped decoration and two confronted style animal heads’. The moveable tongue plate, shown closed in Figure 7, may have been enamelled and there are loops on the rear of the piece for bars to retain a belt. The piece was identified by Margeson as possibly being a reliquary buckle, with the tongue plate being intended to hold a relic, and she stylistically dated the piece to the seventh century. The find spot was identified by the finder as TF69303680 (Point VI in Plate 3), a spot which lay within Sedgeford until the parish boundary was changed in 1989. The reliability of this grid reference has been questioned and the piece has never been lodged with a museum, only having been recorded before being returned to the finder⁴⁸.

⁴⁵ Lewton Brain 1967, 8.

⁴⁶ Swanton 1973, 87-89.

⁴⁷ Swanton 1973, 88, Figure 29b.

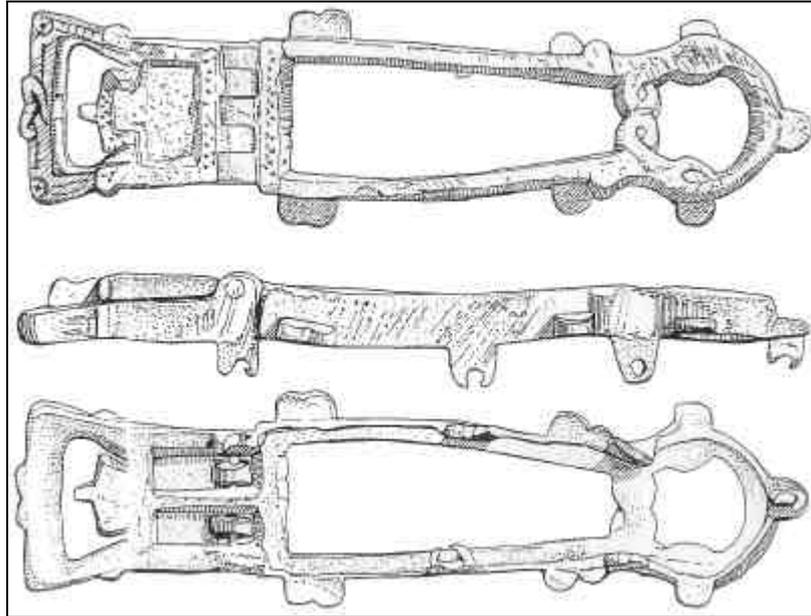


Figure 7. The Early Saxon ?Reliquary Buckle from Sedgeford. Shown 1/2 actual size⁴⁹.

In addition to the stray surface finds, fieldwalking surveys conducted by SHARP have produced one further Early Saxon artefact, half of an annular brooch discovered in the field to the south of the Boneyard (Point VII in Plate 3). The brooch, shown in Figure 8, is paralleled in the Westgarth Gardens inhumation cemetery at Bury St. Edmunds. There, a pair of such brooches, made with two soldered parts with iron pins, were found with a female inhumation dated to the sixth century⁵⁰.

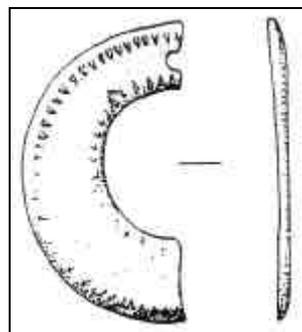


Figure 8. The Early Saxon Annular Brooch from Sedgeford. Shown at actual size⁵¹.

⁴⁸ Dr Andrew Rogerson, Norfolk Landscape Archaeology, *pers. comm.*

⁴⁹ Drawing by Norwich Castle Museum Staff, now in Norfolk SMR.

⁵⁰ West 1998.

⁵¹ Drawing from Ludford 2001.

The Sedgeford annular brooch is broken and disassociated from any context and could easily represent a chance loss rather than any association with a burial. The chance loss hypothesis is given extra credence by the fact that the fieldwalking campaigns conducted throughout the area have produced no further evidence of Early Saxon artefacts in any of the areas studied, neither further metalwork or any pottery. Whilst the Early Saxon period in East Anglia is not aceramic, it *is* ceramically less visible than later periods, with much smaller quantities of pottery having been employed. In addition the small quantity of domestic pottery is very poorly made and as such breaks up and weathers more in ploughsoil, making it difficult to detect sites through fieldwalking⁵².

More significantly, none of the archaeological excavations conducted in the area have recorded Early Saxon finds, save those described above, and there has been no trace of even residual Early Saxon pottery. Whilst the survival factors of Early Saxon pottery are equally applicable, it would be expected that if such sherds were present they would be recovered during the excavation process. It can therefore be confidently stated that there was no Early Saxon settlement in any of the areas so far excavated and in all probability none in any of the areas fieldwalked. It remains only to look at how the evidence that has been recovered should be interpreted.

Assuming that those Early Saxon finds so far recovered are representative of Early Saxon activity within the area, and it would appear that this is a fair assumption, then there are two foci of activity - one around what is now the Sedgeford Hall area and the other around the Eaton area. The dating of all of the urns discovered around the Hall can be broadly said to be sixth century and is suggestive of a cremation cemetery serving some form of contemporary settlement, of which no trace has yet been discovered. Comparative evidence to suggest that

⁵² Dr. Neil Faulkner, SHARP, *pers. comm.*

settlement and cemetery were located close to each other can be drawn from the sites at Mucking, Bishopstone and West Stow, some of very few sites where Early Saxon settlements and cemeteries have been excavated together⁵³. It would therefore seem logical to expect to find the Early Saxon settlement in or around the Sedgeford Hall area.

The possible reliquary buckle from the Eaton area is difficult to interpret as being anything other than a high status piece, although as it is a metal detected find it is hard to say what context it was deposited in. Presumably it was a chance loss rather than a part of a richly furnished inhumation, as a metal detector would have surely picked up other artefacts in association with it, but beyond that little can be said.

The second focus of Early Saxon activity, that at Eaton is a little more open to speculation. Swanton states that the majority of the parallels for the Early Saxon spearhead are from late sixth / early seventh century funerary contexts and so it is tempting to suggest that the find results from a disturbed inhumation burial of that period⁵⁴. It is however difficult to confirm this on the basis of the evidence available. It is also a shame that Ogle did not record the Eaton urn in any great detail, as on the basis of his description it is possible that it may have been an accessory vessel to an inhumation rather than a cremation urn.

Such is the nature of the Early Saxon evidence from Sedgeford and the areas of activity that can be interpreted from it. As is apparent, it is impossible drawn too many conclusions from the available evidence, beyond that tentatively speculated here, but a fuller discussion of this period in the settlement history of Sedgeford will be entered into in the final chapter. In the meantime, it is time to examine the Middle Saxon evidence so far recovered from the area.

⁵³ Hamerow 1991, 9.

⁵⁴ Swanton 1973, 87-89.

MIDDLE SAXON

Archaeologically the settlements of the Middle Saxon period are more easily recognised than those of the Early Saxon, in the main part due to the appearance in the archaeological record of Ipswich Ware, a hard, well-fired fabric whose production is thought to have dated from c.720 to c.850 AD⁵⁵. A great number of Ipswich Ware sherds have been recovered from Sedgeford, both as surface finds and during excavation, as well as a large assemblage of Middle Saxon metalwork. This evidence is discussed below, along with the more detailed findings of the excavations that have encountered Middle Saxon features.

The locations of the stray surface finds of Ipswich Ware sherds recorded in the Norfolk SMR records are shown in Plate 6. Surface scatters are recorded at TF71003630 by SMR Number 1079, Point I in Plate 6, and also at TF71033612 by SMR Number 1604, Point II in Plate 6. A single surface sherd is also recorded at TF69823595 by SMR Number 1472, Point III in Plate 6. The only other Middle Saxon stray surface find is a set of bronze tweezers with an expanded terminal, decorated with punched rings recovered by metal detector from TF71353622 and recorded in SMR Number 14367. The location of this find is shown as Point IV in Plate 6. Obviously redeposited sherds of Ipswich Ware were also recovered during the small scale excavation of Medieval stone building at TF70473639, recorded as SMR Number 13952 and Point V in Plate 6, they are recorded here as a reflection of their secondary nature.

The fieldwalking conducted by SHARP has produced very little positively identifiable Middle Saxon pottery, except in the area to the south of the Boneyard, shown as Point VI in Plate 6. Upwards of thirty sherds were found during the winter of 1996/97, concentrated towards the northern edge of the field in question and suggestive of an area of Middle Saxon activity

⁵⁵ Faulkner 1999.

which, as will be seen, is confirmed by the excavated evidence that has been recovered from the Boneyard⁵⁶.

As was discussed in the introductory chapter, there has been a great deal of excavation conducted within the area of the Boneyard since the 1950s, and this work has produced evidence of both Middle and Late Saxon phases of activity. Although drawn from the results of the same excavations, these phases will be discussed separately in their relevant chronological sections. For clarity and convenience, Plate 6 shows the outline of the area shown in detail in Figure 9, which depicts the locations of the trenches to be discussed here.

The excavation of a ‘hut’ in 1953 thought to be of Saxon date by C.H. Lewton-Brain has already been referred to above, and the location of his excavation is shown in Figure 9. Although during the course of this excavation pottery and a bronze pin of Middle Saxon date were recovered⁵⁷, doubt still remains as to their exact context and the very existence of the ‘hut’ is open to question. It would appear more likely that the finds are redeposited and derived from other contexts in the vicinity⁵⁸.

Likewise already referred to is the small scale excavation that took place after ploughing in the Boneyard disturbed human burials in 1954. It has not been possible to examine the archive of this excavation in detail, again because of Norwich Castle Museum’s closure for refurbishment. However, the MONARCH database of the NMR records that ‘Early Medieval’ inhumations were recovered⁵⁹, which in the light of subsequent work on the site, would be of a Middle Saxon date.

⁵⁶ Ames 1997.

⁵⁷ Letter from R.R. Clarke to C.H. Lewton-Brain, 12/09/1953. Norfolk SMR Number 1605.

⁵⁸ Cabot 2000, 25.

⁵⁹ National Monuments Record MONARCH Database 641022.



Detail of a black and white aerial photograph of Sedgeford showing the find spots of the Middle Saxon evidence. The
iled in Figure 9.

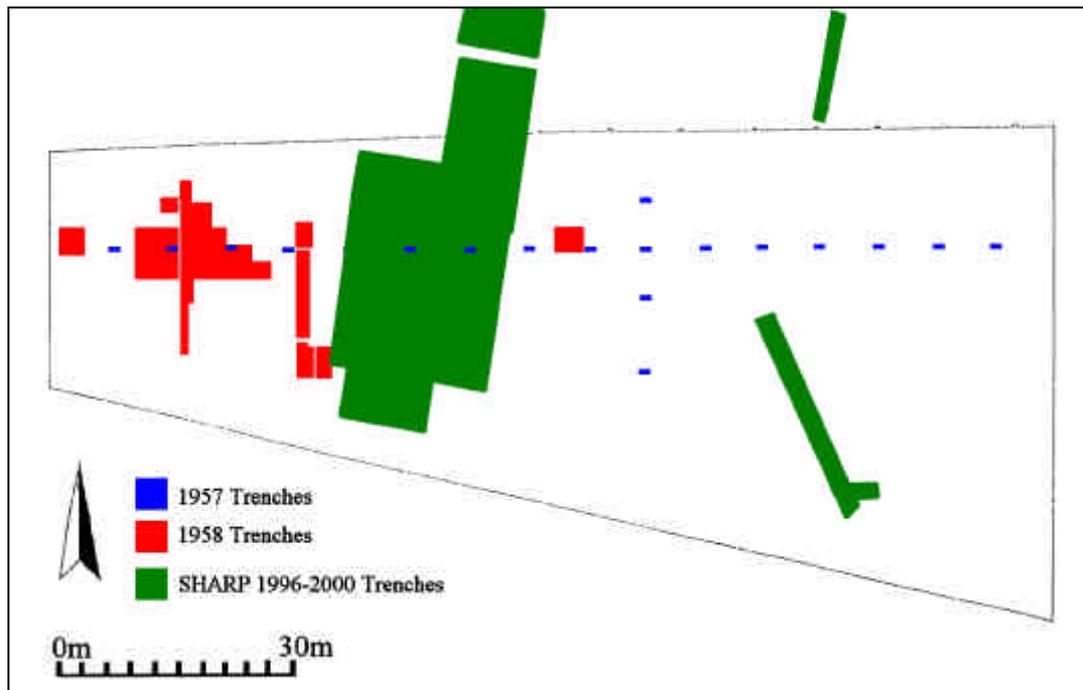


Figure 9. The location of trenches referred to in the text.

Further excavations were carried out in the Boneyard in 1957 under the direction of J. Hurst. The location of the transects of test pits that were laid out across the site are shown in Figure 9, but no further record of these excavations survives. Again, the MONARCH Database records the discovery of ‘Early Medieval’ human remains and also of settlement evidence, of which the human remains are almost certainly Middle Saxon and probably much of the settlement evidence is too⁶⁰.

The most significant excavation of the 1950s was that conducted by Dr. P. Jewell in the summer of 1958. The excavation was never published, bar a note in *Medieval Archaeology* 3⁶¹, although SHARP was fortunate enough to procure Jewell’s notes and draft excavation report before his death in 1998. The rest of his excavation archive currently lays beyond reach in Norwich Castle Museum. As can be seen in Figure 10, Jewell excavated areas of both

⁶⁰ National Monuments Record MONARCH Database 641021.

⁶¹ Wilson and Hurst 1959, 298.

cemetery and settlement and, although he was unable to link the two areas stratigraphically, he was able to identify several discernable phases within each area. With regard to the burial phase, it was noted that several of the skeletons excavated were underlain by sherds of Ipswich ware and all of them lay east-west in unfurnished graves - suggestive of Christian burials of Middle Saxon date. None of the excavated burials were overlain by any discernable settlement deposits although Jewell was confident that there 'was little doubt that the cemetery was contemporary with the habitation'⁶².

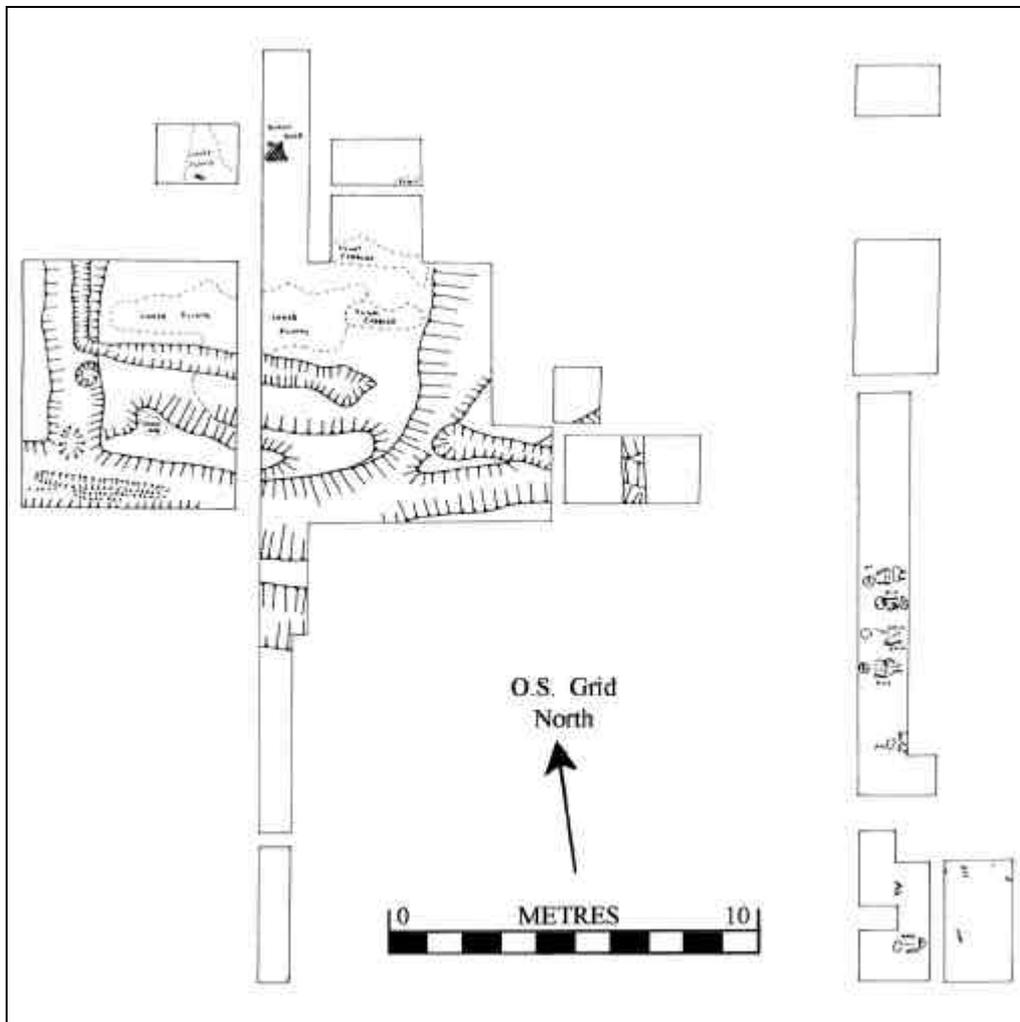


Figure 10. Jewell's excavation plan⁶³.

⁶² Wilson and Hurst 1959, 298. Jewell, Date Unknown, 12-13 (Quote 12).

⁶³ Jewell, Date Unknown.

As can be seen in Figure 10, there were two phases of activity detected in the settlement area of the site. The first phase was a series of interconnected gullies, one running east-west with several smaller gullies running north-south off it, down the slope. Interpreted as drainage gullies, once these features had silted up, a second phase of activity occurred involving the construction of a long timber building, half of the foundation trench of which was completely excavated. Traces of burnt daub were found within parts of the foundation trench, as were traces of organic soils, and the building contained a two metre wide doorway along its southern side, flanked by large post pits. As to dating, Jewell states that the predominant pottery type was Ipswich Ware, although there were 'some' sherds of later Thetford Ware too⁶⁴. In his analysis of the pottery assemblage Wade is happy that the first settlement phase, the gullies, can be confidently dated to the Middle Saxon on the strength of their Ipswich Ware assemblage alone. With regard to the foundation trenches of the timber building, he is less confident as they contain Ipswich Ware and the later Thetford Ware in the rough quantity of 1:3, suggesting a Late Saxon date for their being filled in after the building fell out of use. However, there is no accurate way to ascribe a date to the building's construction and a late Middle Saxon date is assumed here on the strength of the *Terminus Post* and *Ante Quems* provided by the pottery assemblages of related features⁶⁵.

Further Middle Saxon settlement evidence was excavated from the Boneyard area during excavations ahead of the laying of a pipeline in 1991. Traces of Middle Saxon settlement debris were found in areas along its length and in the area of the Chalk Pit (Point VII in Figure 6) the remains of a Middle Saxon oven / kiln were excavated by the Norfolk Archaeological Unit, the plan of which is shown in Figure 11. The artefactual dating is very

⁶⁴ Wilson and Hurst 1959, 298.

⁶⁵ Wade, Date Unknown.

tight and the excavator claims that there is no comparative example to be found in England, hence the rather tentative interpretation as either an oven or a kiln⁶⁶.

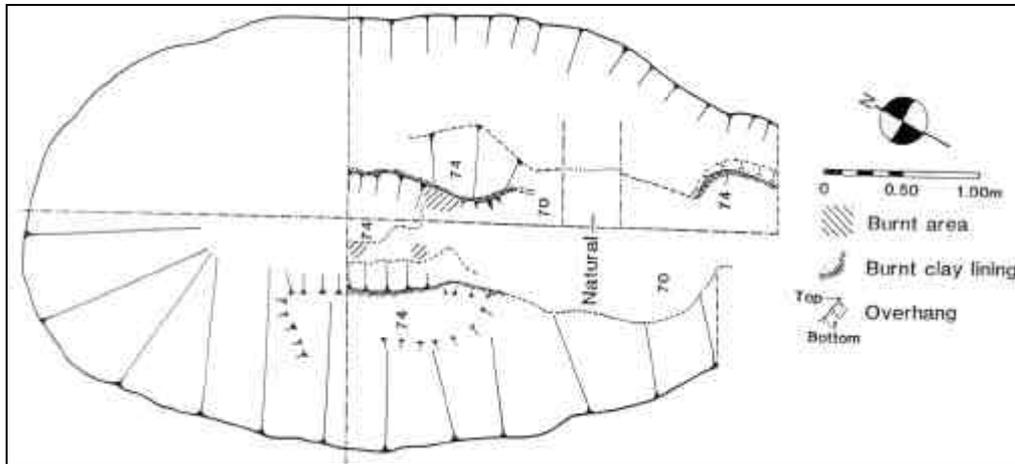


Figure 11. The Middle Saxon Oven / Kiln from Sedgeford⁶⁷.

And so to the evidence excavated by SHARP, whose own Boneyard excavations began in 1996 and have continued ever since. The locations of the SHARP trenches are shown in Figure 9 and, as can be seen, they were deliberately sited in order to complement the areas investigated by Jewell's trenches. The 2001 season saw the expansion of the SHARP trench to link it with Jewell's, although no significant results have yet been produced by this work and it is excluded from this discussion. Evidence for several phases of Middle and Late Saxon activity has been excavated during the past six seasons, a brief summary of which will be given here in the relevant sections.

The earliest phase of activity is represented by 170 inhumations, which must be considered alongside those excavated by Jewell and others and given a Middle Saxon date, a fact confirmed by a calibrated radiocarbon date of 662-881AD obtained from a skeleton early in the stratigraphic sequence. All of the burials are unfurnished, laid east-west in the Christian

⁶⁶ Bates 1991.

style and the initial results of ageing and sexing suggest a relatively normal cross section of society: roughly equal percentages of males and females and some juveniles. As can be seen in Figure 12, the most concentrated area of burials is in the northern portion of the site, nearer the river and on the flatter ground. The burial sequence in this portion of the site has been fully excavated and presumably represents one of the most utilised areas of the cemetery, perhaps even an initial focus that was re-used. There is certainly a heavy degree of intercutting in this area, up to six times in one instance, and some of the earlier burials appear to be respect a contemporary gully feature. However, later burials in this northern area are more uniformly aligned and buried in rows, perhaps suggestive of a shift in focus or change in burial practice. Likewise, burials extending further up the slope to the south seem to be a lot more dispersed, rarely intercut each other, and follow the contour of the hill. In addition, some of the burials from southern portion of the site are coffin burials, whereas burial posture and the association of 8th / 9th pins with burials suggest that shrouds were more usual.

After some areas of the cemetery have fallen out of use, there are a number of Middle Saxon settlement features on the site. Figure 13 shows the Boneyard 'all features plan' on which the features coloured red are those Middle Saxon features that truncate earlier features, whilst those coloured green are Middle Saxon features that do not. As can be seen, the main structural evidence clearly falls into two hotspots, one to the north and one to the south, both of which have been circled with dotted blue lines. The northern settlement hotspot contains a number of pits containing fired clay and a probable Sunken Featured Building which only contained Ipswich ware and 8th-9th century metalwork. The southern settlement hotspot contains 22 post-holes and two east-west gullies containing post depressions. These probably represent a timber hall structure, with posts for internal divisions and beam slots surviving.

⁶⁷ Bates 1991, Figure 5i.

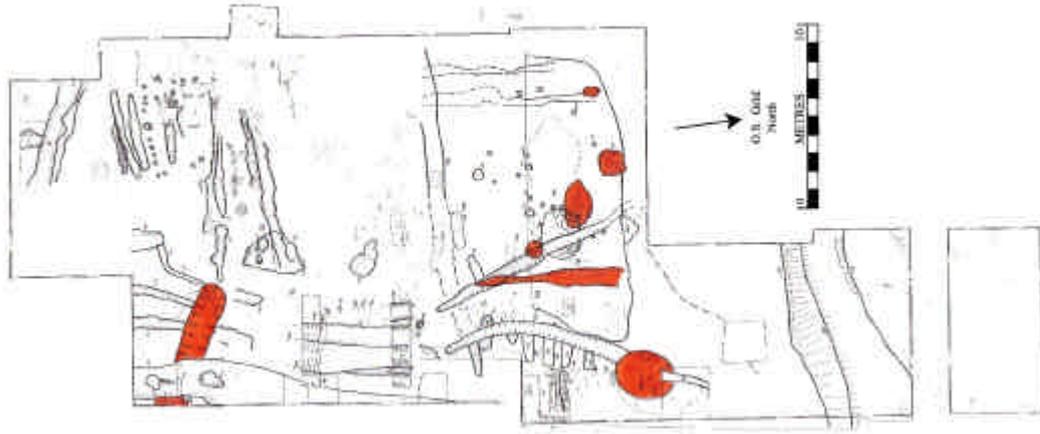
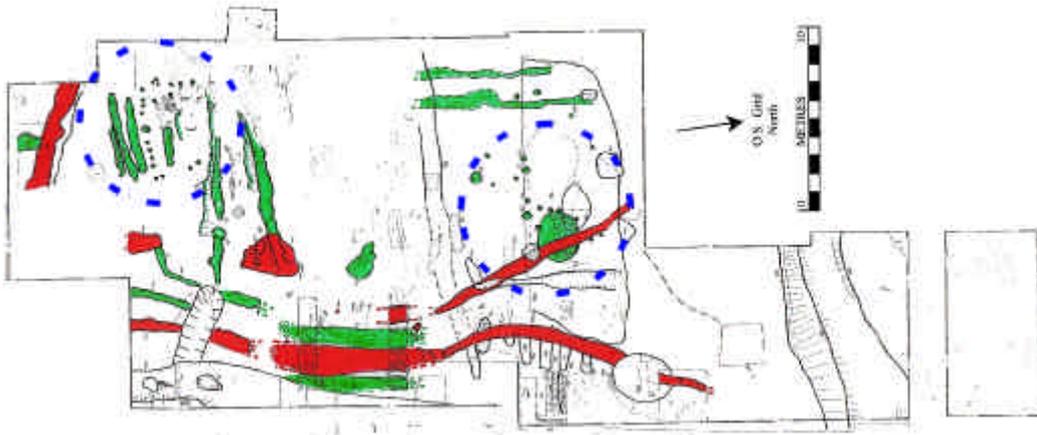
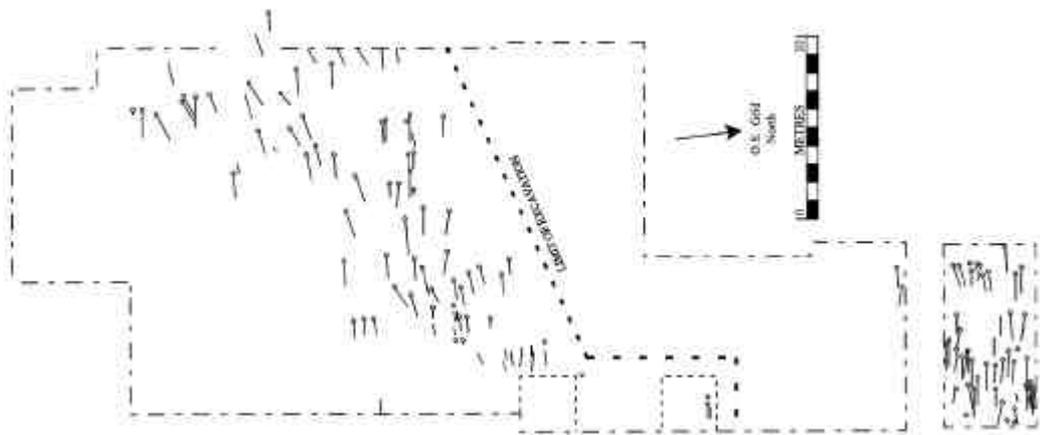


Figure 12 (left). Plan of SHARP's excavations showing the locations and relative completeness of the burials.

Figure 13 (centre). The all features plan with Middle Saxon features coloured.

Figure 14 (right). The all features plan with probable Late Saxon features coloured..

Many of the features within this stratigraphic phase post-dating the cemetery have produced artefacts predominantly of the late 8th / early 9th century, such as two styli, bone comb fragments, dress pins and an Anglian silver penny of King Eadwald (769-798 AD). Although, in contrast to the lower slope, the structural material on the upper slope seems to be dated to the late Middle to Late Saxon periods, producing quantities of both Ipswich Ware and later Thetford Ware, although some of the pottery is likely to have derived from beyond the Southern limits of the excavation. The fuller implications of these contexts will be discussed further below⁶⁸.

Such is the Middle Saxon evidence so far recovered from Sedgeford, but what can we infer from it? We can be certain that the evidence so far recovered is only a flavour of the full extent of the Middle Saxon phase of the settlement and in all probability some of the evidence has been lost to later phases of the settlement's history. However, that evidence that we do have allows many conclusions to be drawn. Firstly, with regard to defining a settlement area, Plate 6 shows quite clearly that the settlement is contained within the area immediately surrounding the Boneyard site and extends towards the West Hall area, as fieldwalking further from the site has failed to produce any occupation evidence.

We can also be certain that the earliest Middle Saxon phase of the Boneyard is the inhumation cemetery, demonstrated by both Jewell and SHARP, and these burials are undeniably Christian, suggesting that the population had already converted before the settlement was founded. Although we cannot be precisely sure of the limits of the cemetery, we know that the eastern side of the Boneyard field is free of burials and the 1991 pipe trench showed the area to the south of the field to also be free of burials. Jewell's excavations may have shown the western extent of the burials, so it is only the extent of the site towards the river that needs to

⁶⁸ Davies and Hoggett 2001.

be ascertained, although this is currently unviable, as the damming of the river has caused extreme waterlogging (of which more below). These approximate boundaries suggest a relatively large burial area and it is not unrealistic to think in terms of several hundred burials within the cemetery. How large a community we are looking at is more difficult to ascertain, we could be looking at a smaller cemetery in use for many generations as opposed to a large short-lived site. The different styles of burial may also suggest differing social status within the cemetery, although much further work is required to be able to draw conclusions on this. It is clear, however, that the cemetery has distinct foci - one burial area respects a contemporary enclosed area, whilst later burials appear to change focus mid-way through the burial sequence.

With regard to contemporary settlement features, Jewell was confident that the earlier drainage gully phase of his excavation was contemporary with the burial phase, although he was unable to demonstrate this stratigraphically. Certainly, none of the features excavated by SHARP appear to be contemporary with the burial phase, and it would seem prudent to conclude that the settlement contemporary with the cemetery lies to the west, where, hopefully, further excavation will reveal it.

Both Jewell and SHARP have identified a second phase of settlement within the Boneyard, which in places overlies the cemetery, although this does not have to mean that the entire cemetery had fallen out of use before their construction. Artefactual dating of SHARP's later features suggests that at least some of this phase is solely Middle Saxon, although it may date to the later end of the bracket and there is evidence of some features straddling the Middle and Late Saxon periods. It would therefore seem prudent to examine the Late Saxon evidence from the parish before discussing the settlement evidence further.

LATE SAXON

Already referred to in passing, the archaeological record of the Late Saxon period in much of East Anglia is dominated by the presence of Thetford Ware, a hard, well fired fabric, much finer than the earlier Ipswich Ware. Thetford Ware's production is thought to have dated from around 875 to 1100 AD, although this is being revised as more excavated evidence comes to light. It is likely that there was a period of overlap during which both Ipswich and Thetford Wares were being produced, although for the purposes of this discussion, the presence of Thetford Ware is taken to be an indication of Late Saxon activity⁶⁹. Large quantities of Thetford Ware and other Late Saxon finds have been recovered from Sedgeford over the years and that evidence is presented and discussed here, along with the documentary evidence contained in Domesday Book. Plate 7 shows the locations of the finds discussed in the text.

The Norfolk SMR records stray surface finds of Thetford Ware at TF71003630 (Record 1079 - Point I in Plate 7), TF70553626 (Record 1598 - Point II), TF69873627 (Record 11263 - Point III), TF70683627 (Record 16493 - Point IV) and TF70553652 (Record 30416 - Point V). These pottery finds are complemented by the finding of a small iron chisel, a bronze fitting with dot punched decoration and eight nails, all of which were recovered with a metal detector from TF71403630 and identified as Late Saxon in style (SMR Record 14369 - Point VI in Plate 7). A Late Saxon Scandinavian influenced Urnes style bronze mount was recovered from TF71353622 (Record 14367 - Point VII). The piece has been published and 'depicts a quadruped with a snake-like body coiled in a loop and with a protruding head'⁷⁰. The mount is shown in Plate 8 and may have been attached to the cover of book or a box, for it has a pierced lug to attach it to a flat surface.

⁶⁹ Faulkner 1999 and *pers. comm.*

⁷⁰ Owen and Trett 1980.



Detail of a black and white aerial photograph of Sedgeford showing the find spots of the Late Saxon evidence.

Orchestrated fieldwalking campaigns have also produced evidence of Late Saxon occupation, although, as with the Middle Saxon material, the vast majority of the fieldwalked areas did not produce any Saxon material. However, there is again a decided concentration of material in the field to the south of the Boneyard, although it spreads further to the south and is denser than the Middle Saxon spread in the same area (Point VIII in Plate 7)⁷¹. The spread largely consists of Thetford Ware sherds, although a Late Saxon copper alloy disc brooch with Borre style decoration was also recovered from the field (shown in Figure 15), as well as a pair of shears considered to be Late Saxon (shown in Figure 16)⁷².

Turning to the excavated evidence recovered from the parish, both Jewell's and SHARP's work identified Late Saxon phases of occupation on the Boneyard site. As was discussed above, the pottery assemblage from the foundation trenches of Jewell's east-west aligned timber hall consisted of a mixture of Ipswich and Thetford Wares, suggesting that they became redundant and silted up during the Late Saxon period. This is also the case with some of the features excavated in the SHARP trenches and Figure 14 shows the stratigraphic phase of Boneyard features interpreted as being Late Saxon on the basis of their assemblages. The features appear to be much less structural than those of the Middle Saxon period, suggestive of the settlement element of Late Saxon Sedgeford having moved away from the area of the trench. It is also interesting to note the quantity of Late Saxon pottery and domestic material that was recovered from the topsoil during the initial excavation phases - the majority of which is derived from further up the slope, in the field where fieldwalking has detected the surface spread of Late Saxon settlement. This is strongly suggestive of the settlement moving to higher ground, away from the river, which may have been rising at the time (see below)⁷³.

⁷¹ Ames 1997.

⁷² Ames 1997. Ludford 2001.

⁷³ Davies and Hoggett 2001.



Plate 8. The Late Saxon Urnes Style mount from Sedgeford. Shown three times actual size⁷⁴.

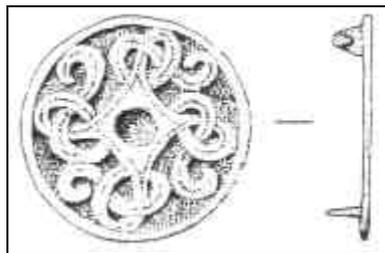


Figure 15. The Late Saxon interlace brooch from Sedgeford. Shown actual size⁷⁵.

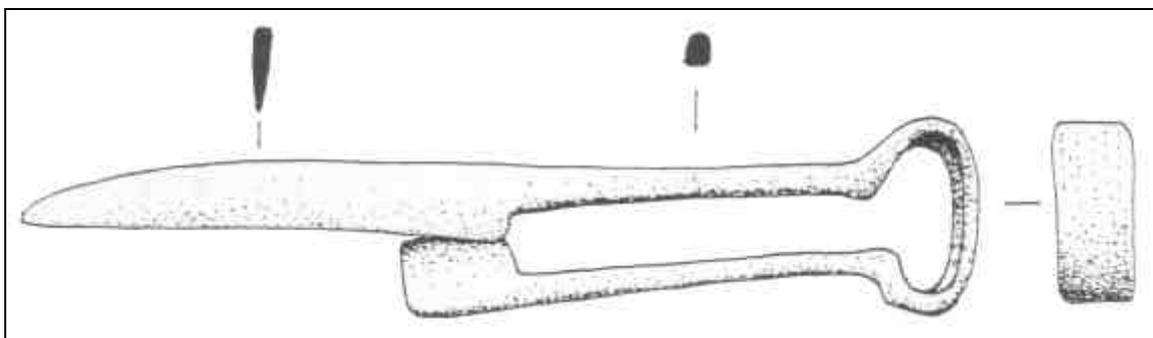


Figure 16. The Late Saxon shears from Sedgeford. Shown actual size⁷⁶.

⁷⁴ Owen and Trett 1980, Plate IV.

⁷⁵ Ludford 2001.

⁷⁶ Drawing by Ray Luford, from Ames 1997.

Significant Late Saxon settlement evidence has also been excavated in the West Hall area to the west of the Boneyard (Point IX in Plate 7). SHARP excavated in the paddock of West Hall from 1996-2000 and recovered a stratigraphic sequence stretching back two thousand years. A part of this sequence contained several clues to the climatic and environmental nature of Late Saxon Sedgeford and also recovered what are thought to be the remains of a Late Saxon chapel⁷⁷.

There is archaeological evidence that for a period of time ending in the Late Saxon, and possibly beginning in the Roman period or a little later, the area of West Hall was gradually waterlogged to the point that detritus mud layers were able to form. Environmental sampling has identified these layers as having formed in a slow moving body of water and a lack of material remains suggests that the area was uninhabited throughout the period of inundation. Significantly, these mud layers are overlain by a substantial layer of Late Saxon occupation debris, with clear indications that layers of soil and sand were dumped on the site in order to reclaim the land before the settlement expanded onto it. In order for such dumping layers to have been effective the flow of water through the area must have been curtailed, allowing the land to be reclaimed. There is no obvious indication that the water table dropped and so one is forced to conclude that the area was protected by an upstream dam⁷⁸.

As was shown in Plate 1, there is currently a significant waterlogged area upstream of West Hall known as the Reeddam. Already referred to in the context of the post-depositional waterlogging of the Boneyard, the body of water is held behind an earthen causeway bank, along the top of which the main road crosses the river. The construction date of this dam has been a subject of discussion for many years, although the consensus has always been in

⁷⁷ Cox 2000.

⁷⁸ Andrea Cox, SHARP, *pers. comm.*

favour of a thirteenth century date, when the Reeddam is first mentioned in the Sedgeford Manor Bailiffs' Accounts⁷⁹. However, no mention is made of the Reeddam's creation date, it is clearly in existence by the time of its first mention and the archaeological evidence from the West Hall trench would suggest a Late Saxon date for the construction of at least some form of dam across the river, protecting the West Hall area and flooding the upstream area to some extent.

To return to the excavated evidence from the West Hall site, on top of the reclamation layers a rammed chalk surface was constructed to support a building. Little evidence remained of the structure, bar a posthole, an area of mortared flint hardcore with a defined straight western edge, and three equally spaced graves. The central grave was found to contain the remains of a thirty year old woman with severe skeletal deformities, whilst the northern grave was found to have been robbed of its contents and immediately backfilled. Although artefactual dating was sparse, the female skeleton produced a calibrated radiocarbon date of 1010 to 1180 AD, potentially dating the burial and its building to the Late Saxon period.

No building debris lay above the mortar hardcore and burial layer and it appears that the building was carefully dismantled, rather than demolished, and it is probable that some of the building materials were reclaimed in the process. It would also appear that the northern grave was emptied at this point, the burial taken elsewhere, and that the site then remained unoccupied until the thirteenth century, when a new sequence began. It has been suggested that the structure represents a private chapel of Late Saxon date pertaining to the manor of Sedgeford or possibly even a precursor to the present parish church, which lies in close proximity to the site and almost certainly dates to the twelfth century⁸⁰.

⁷⁹ Hammond and Barnett 1997.

⁸⁰ Cox 2000. Hoggett, in preparation.

For this summary of the evidence of Late Saxon Sedgeford to be complete it remains only to examine the entry for Sedgeford recorded in Little Domesday Book, the first historical source pertaining to the settlement. The entry for Sedgeford is long and convoluted, even by the standards of Little Domesday Book, which is much more cumbersome than the main Domesday Book due to the fact that the returns for Essex, Suffolk and Norfolk were never edited down into the final form taken by the rest of the book. Surviving as a separate volume Little Domesday Book contains much more local detail, although it is often ambiguous and generally seen as more difficult to interpret than the main Domesday Book. However, for the purposes of this discussion, only those aspects which shed light upon the character and organisation of the settlement in 1066 and 1086 will be examined⁸¹.

Sedgeford lay in the Domesday Hundred of Smethdon, which comprised several of what are now the parishes of north west Norfolk and is discussed in more detail in the next chapter. The Little Domesday Book entry indicates that there were in fact two manors in Sedgeford in 1066 and 1086, but due to the fact that both were held by the Bishop of Thetford in 1086, they are combined in the same entry and may have operated as a combined complex⁸².

The major manor of Sedgeford was held before 1066 by Earl Gyrrh, a brother of King Harold who was killed with him on the battlefield at Hastings, and was held in 1086 by William de Bellofago (Beaufeu), ex-chancellor to William the Conqueror and Bishop of Thetford⁸³. In 1066 William appears to have granted the manor to the then Bishop of Elmham, Ælmer, for the entry is listed under the separate heading of lands acquired by him for the bishopric after

⁸¹ Darby 1957, 97. Brown 1984, 10,20.

⁸² Dr. David Roffe, *pers. comm.*

⁸³ The see transferred from Elmham to Thetford in 1070.

the Conquest⁸⁴. Little is said about the nature of this manor in 1066, however we are told that one outlier appertaining to the manor lay in Fring and that Æmer had subsequently created a second outlier from its lands. Æmer is also recorded as having created three other outliers from the 1066 holding, although the text does not specify where they were and they as yet remain unidentified. Æmer was succeeded by Herfast in 1070, so this division of the manor's lands must have taken place very soon after the Conquest⁸⁵. In addition to these unnamed outliers, we are also told that Ingulf holds one carucate of the land once held by Gyrth, and elsewhere in the Little Domesday Book reference is made to a 60 acre holding in Shernborne that appertained to Sedgeford before 1066, but no longer did in 1086. In 1086 the whole manor was required to pay five shillings of the twenty shillings tax placed upon the hundred⁸⁶.

The entry for the minor manor is more vague and is added to the end of the text, indeed, were it not for the separate tax assessment, it could be easily overlooked altogether. It too was therefore owned by the bishopric at Domesday and presumably acquired by Æmer, although no previous owner is referred to. We are told that eight freemen had always appertained to this second manor and in 1086 it was required to pay 17½d. towards the twenty shilling tax on the Hundred⁸⁷.

Blomefield and Parkin expressed the belief that Æmer held manors in both Sedgeford and Fring during the reign of Edward, which he held until his fall from grace in 1070 and which then passed to later bishops so that his holdings are listed as belonging to Bishop William in 1086. They also comment that as Chancellor to King William, William de Bellofago had been awarded Gyrth's holdings, and that the two different elements of Sedgeford became united

⁸⁴ Brown 1984, Note 10,20.

⁸⁵ Crosby 1994.

⁸⁶ Brown 1984, 10,20 66,88.

⁸⁷ Brown 1984, 10,20.

under him in 1086⁸⁸. Although this might be seen as a naïve interpretation, given that it was published the best part of two hundred years ago, it may be that the authors had access to information on the subject that has since been lost.

At this point it is prudent to mention the manor of Gnatingdon, which is also recorded in Little Domesday Book and also lay within the boundaries of the modern parish of Sedgeford. Gnatingdon was held by Godwin Haldane (Half-Dane) before 1066 under Gyrth and was still held by him in 1086 from the King⁸⁹. Gnatingdon has proved problematic to historians in that it was ‘partly forgotten, as its identity merged with that of Sedgeford’⁹⁰, but it can be confidently identified with the area of Sedgeford now known as East Hall (complementing West Hall) lying at TF726372⁹¹. The reasons for its becoming merged with Sedgeford will be discussed below.

Such is the Late Saxon evidence, but what can be made of it. We can be confident that some form of occupation in the area in and around the Boneyard continued from the Middle Saxon period, although there are suggestions that the character of the settlement in that area had changed and that the focus had moved further from the Boneyard. Evidence from fieldwalking also suggests that that the settlement area had expanded further to the south, where quantities of Thetford Ware have been discovered, but although these sherds are found in greater numbers, this cannot be seen to represent an increase in the intensity of the settlement - Ipswich and Thetford Wares are normally found at a comparative ratio of approximately 1:10⁹². The excavated evidence from the West Hall site is particularly elucidating, as it clearly demonstrates that the area was flooded for some of the Late Saxon

⁸⁸ Blomefield and Parkin 1809, 385-6.

⁸⁹ Brown 1984, 61,3.

⁹⁰ Hammond 1984, 10.

⁹¹ Hammond 1984. Yaxley 1988, 20-27.

and probably some of the Middle Saxon too, but that the area was reclaimed through the dumping of material and presumably the damming of the river. Archaeological evidence would suggest the construction of a chapel also occurred in this period, possibly a precursor to the parish church.

As for the evidence from Little Domesday Book, whilst it provides a detailed account of the locality in 1086, it is very vague in some essential details and only provides two tantalising snapshots of a very complex picture. The situation recorded in the book may never be fully understood, but it would appear that the most logical explanation of the sequence is that proffered by Blomefield and Parkin: that the first Sedgeford manor belonged, along with Fring, to Bishop Ælmer in his capacity the Bishop of Elmham and they passed to Bishop William with the office, whilst the second manor was passed from Gyrrh to William in 1066 and was merged with the Episcopal manor when William became bishop in 1086.

There can be no doubt that Sedgeford was a major estate centre in the eleventh century, although the historical documentation to elucidate this is lacking and the archaeological evidence recovered to date does not do this status justice. However, it is at this point in the settlement's history that this study stops. Once the two manors of Sedgeford were held by the bishopric they effectively merged into one and the manor was granted to Norwich Cathedral Priory by Bishop William Turbe c.1146-1174. By 1205 the fee farm rent on the manor was released and the priory had total control. In addition, Gnatingdon (East Hall) had been acquired by the Priory in the early twelfth century. As an upshot, from the thirteenth century the two manors were treated as a double manor, the Priory effectively controlled the entire parish, and the study of the settlement becomes a much more documentary exercise⁹³.

⁹² Dr. Neil Faulkner, SHARP, *pers. comm.*

⁹³ Fogarty, forthcoming.

DISCUSSION

The archaeological evidence discussed in the previous chapter has allowed a model for the origin and early development of Sedgeford to be developed. It would appear that the Early Saxon period saw a focus of activity located to the east of the present settlement, towards what is now the Sedgeford Hall area, with a probable second focus of activity in the area of Eaton Farm. In the main the surviving evidence is burial related, as is the case with most Early Saxon sites⁹⁴, however, the assumption is that related settlement evidence should be found in its vicinity⁹⁵. We can be certain that there is no Early Saxon settlement evidence in any of the areas so far excavated and intensive fieldwalking has failed to recover any more surface evidence than that discussed above, so we can be reasonably confident of having identified the areas of Early Saxon activity⁹⁶.

In the Middle Saxon period, at a date late in the seventh century or very early in the eighth, the settlement pattern in the area changed and a Christian settlement was founded on the Boneyard site and the area to the west of it. The archaeological evidence suggests that this area of the settlement remained populated well into the Late Saxon period, moving through the phases of occupation which were discussed above, until the focus of the settlement, rather than the settlement itself, moved to the West Hall area⁹⁷.

Having been waterlogged, areas of West Hall were reclaimed by the dumping of material and at least one high status building was constructed upon this reclaimed ground. It would also appear that some form of dam had been constructed upstream of the West Hall area during this period, to aid in the reclamation of the land. Inevitably this would have flooded areas

⁹⁴ See Meaney 1964 for an impression of the extent of this fact.

⁹⁵ Arnold and Wardle 1981, 145.

⁹⁶ See pp.17-25 above.

upstream, but the southern extent of the Boneyard was above the waterline and continued to be utilised during the same period. The reasoning behind this Late Saxon shift of focus is not obvious, but there is a chalk outcrop in the area, upon which much of West Hall sits, along with the parish church and much of the later medieval settlement⁹⁸. This gives a strong impression that the settlement moved to the more solid ground as more permanent and extensive buildings than those of the Middle and early Late Saxon periods were constructed, such as those that would have been required by the extensive manorial structure described in Little Domesday Book⁹⁹.

Such is the occupational sequence of Saxon Sedgeford as identified from the archaeological evidence discussed in the previous chapter. On its own this evidence provides a coherent sequence for the development of the settlement and the continuing work of SHARP will only elucidate this sequence further. However, this work on the Sedgeford material also contributes to several wider discussions pertaining to the origins and early development of Anglo-Saxon rural settlements, particularly in East Anglia, and a summary of Sedgeford's position in those discussions is given in this section.

The first issue to be considered is that of settlement mobility between the Early and Middle Saxon periods and the widely debated concept of the 'Middle Saxon Shuffle', for it would appear that the evidence from Sedgeford fits some of the proposed models very nicely. Secondly, the problems associated with the characterisation of rural Middle Saxon settlements are addressed and several comparative sites are examined in an effort to shed more light upon what we might be seeing on the Boneyard site. The third part of the discussion will consider the issue of the vikings, notably absent from this work so far, and the part their presence

⁹⁷ See pp.26-36 above.

⁹⁸ Hoggett 2000. Hoggett, In Preparation.

played in the development of Sedgeford. Especially as, although there is no break in the archaeological sequence, the Danelaw was enforced in the region for some time and must have had an impact upon the settlement. Finally, the effect of the English re-conquest upon the settlement is considered, with particular reference to the creation of the Smethdon Hundred, and issues pertaining to the development of the Late Saxon manorial structure examined.

THE EARLY TO MIDDLE SAXON SETTLEMENT SHIFT

The evidence of the Early and Middle Saxon settlements from Sedgeford is quite clear and it can be securely stated that there is a definite shift in settlement focus from the Early Saxon site(s) to the Middle Saxon site in the Boneyard area. This shift is not a local phenomenon. The desertion of Early Saxon settlements during the seventh or early eight centuries in favour of new sites is not unusual and many excavated sites have exhibited such a sequence, among them Bishopstone (Sussex), Cassington (Oxford), Charlton (Hampshire), Thirlings (Northumberland), West Stow (Suffolk) and Witton (Norfolk). Instances of this process has been recognised throughout Anglo-Saxon England and commentators have dubbed it the *Middle Saxon Shuffle* or *Middle Saxon Shift*¹⁰⁰. Essentially the term describes an observed effect and its potential causes remain the subject of much conjecture. Many factors have been suggested for triggering the Shuffle, including agricultural, economic, environmental, political and ecclesiastical factors, although in all likelihood a combination of factors is responsible.

The concept of the Middle Saxon Shuffle was most fully developed by Arnold and Wardle in a 1981 article which developed a theoretical framework within which the shift from Early to

⁹⁹ See pp.37-46 above.

Middle Saxon sites was explained in the context of the observable evidence. They worked from three tenets, derived from the then extant corpus of excavated Anglo-Saxon settlement material, specifically:

- Nucleated Early Saxon settlements existed and excavated evidence suggests that in the main the sites were located on light, well-drained soils, especially chalk and gravel, with an adjacent cemetery.
- That settlements with early place name elements are situated on richer soils, in more suitable locations, particularly valleys and are not closely associated with pagan cemeteries.
- That these pagan cemeteries tend to be located on or near parish boundaries, as was demonstrated by Bonney (1966) and subsequently by Goodier (1983)¹⁰¹.

From these observed facts they developed a model which explained them and also addressed the desertion of sites founded in the fifth and sixth centuries and the emergence of new sites in the seventh and eighth centuries. The summary diagram of the model is shown in Figure 17, in which the changing relationship between settlements (black dots), cemeteries (open dots) and land units (large circles) during the seventh century period of desertion are depicted.

‘A’ represents the situation as it stood before the shift, i.e. settlement and cemetery near each other on poor ground. ‘B’ shows the transition of settlement from the original site to a new site on the better soils of the river valley. ‘C’ shows the resultant abandonment of both the earlier settlement and cemetery and the creation of a new land unit centred on the new

¹⁰⁰ Hodges 1989, 62.

¹⁰¹ It should be noted that although their conclusions regarding the formation of boundaries were undeniably wrong, both Bonney and Goodier demonstrated a statistical significance between the location of pagan cemeteries and parish boundaries. Welch 1985.

settlement. As the diagram shows, the writers believe that ‘the major shift in settlement location is not merely concerned with the relocation of settlements within a defined land unit, but with the reorganization of such territorial units, some of whose new boundaries later become fossilized as parish boundaries’¹⁰².

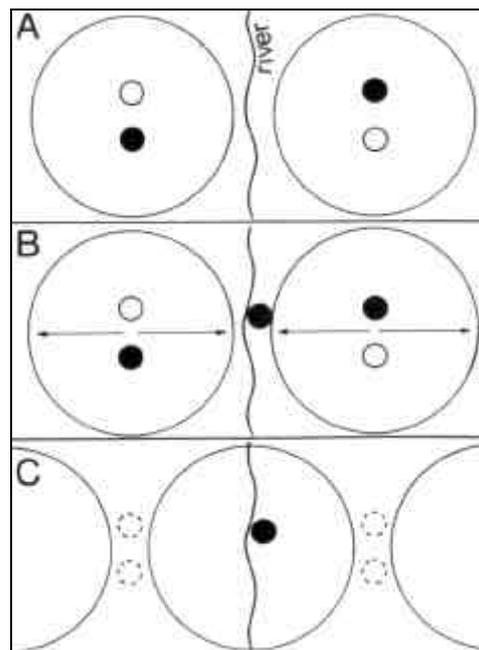


Figure 17. The Arnold and Wardle Model¹⁰³.

Arnold and Wardle suggest that ‘new landscape requirements’¹⁰⁴ are the causal factor behind the shift, a notion enthusiastically supported by Hodges, who typically sees communities uprooting themselves in order to control superior resources. He views the Middle Saxon Shuffle as reflecting a new attitude towards territory, which caused the long term potential of land to be evaluated for the first time and precipitated the shift. In particular Hodges cites the demanding of tributes by an elite and also by the church as the driving force behind this

¹⁰² Arnold and Wardle 1981, 148.

¹⁰³ From Hodges 1989, Figure 19, after Arnold and Wardle 1981, Figure 3.

¹⁰⁴ Arnold and Wardle 1981, 148.

change in social attitude to land, seeing it as a part of the wider social and political re-organisation that was in progress during the seventh century¹⁰⁵.

There are those that disagree both with the Arnold and Wardle model itself and also Hodges' interpretation of it. Foremost among the dissenters is Welch, who in a lengthy 1985 paper acknowledged the existence of the underlying tenets of the model and stated that it 'represents a move in the right direction', but went on to level three criticisms at the model¹⁰⁶. His first criticism is that the use of stylised symbols in the diagram is misleading in its portrayal of the size of settlements and his second, related, criticism is that the diagram portrays the settlement to be at the centre of the land unit, when in many excavated cases it isn't¹⁰⁷. Neither criticism can be taken that seriously when one remembers that it *is* a stylised diagram rather than a cartographic representation. Welch's third criticism is more academic and takes issue with what he interprets as Arnold and Wardle's association of their model with the more controversial issue of the date of the emergence of strip field agriculture¹⁰⁸. In fairness, Arnold and Wardle only mention in passing in their paper Hall's suggestion that he identified open fields in eighth century Northamptonshire¹⁰⁹, but it is certainly not an intrinsic part of their model. Despite this, Welch critiques Hall's work at length, damning Arnold and Wardle by implication, and he then simply changes subject, considering his case made. He later states that there isn't enough Early and Middle Saxon evidence to even hope to understand the issues involved, but is sure that 'simple solutions of the kind offered by Arnold and Wardle are of little help'¹¹⁰. In all quite a vehement attack on the model, but one without any demonstrable substance when subjected to analysis.

¹⁰⁵ Hodges 1989, 61-3.

¹⁰⁶ Welch 1985. Quote p.20.

¹⁰⁷ Welch 1985, 20.

¹⁰⁸ Welch 1985, 20.

¹⁰⁹ Arnold and Wardle 1981, 145 & 147.

¹¹⁰ Welch 1985, 20-21.

A more reasoned discussion of the model and associated issues was given by Hamerow in 1991. She stated that the phenomenon of new centres being founded in the seventh and eighth centuries ‘may in many cases be more apparent than real, and a consequence of the limited size of field surveys and excavations’¹¹¹. The implication of her comments is that limited research puts us in danger of confusing a more likely continual process of settlement migration with a single settlement shift, because pieces of the migration sequence remain unexcavated, unrecognised or are simply not represented in the material record. She concludes that rather than a shift from poor to good land, the perceived settlement shift represents a fundamental change from mobile settlements to more permanent ones and that this change is undoubtedly linked with changes in agrarian organization that made stable settlements more desirable¹¹².

Hamerow’s arguments appear to be ambiguous, on the one hand she advocates the gradual migration of settlements, whilst on the other she acknowledges a definite shift in settlement in her conclusion. Whilst settlement migration within Early Saxon settlements has been demonstrated at sites such as Mucking and West Stow, where there were different phases of occupation on adjacent sites, even at these extensively excavated sites there is a distinct settlement shift from the Early to Middle Saxon settlements, apparently with no intervening stages. What Hamerow’s paper does draw attention to is the inherent insecurity in developing wide ranging theories from a handful of excavated sites and expecting them to fit all of the sites all of the time. Not every site is going to fit into any one theory and it would seem obvious that if we want to understand a single settlement then it is necessary to start at a very local level, gather as much evidence as possible and work upwards, looking to wider and

¹¹¹ Hamerow 1991, 12.

¹¹² Hamerow 1991, 16-17.

wider spheres of influence for causal factors behind the observed effects. Such is the process that has been employed in Sedgeford and it is now time to examine the place that the Early and Middle Saxon settlements occupy in relation to the theories discussed here.

In their papers both Welch and Hamerow acknowledge that the Early and Middle Saxon settlement patterns of East Anglia are more easily identified than those elsewhere because of the presence of well surviving Saxon handmade wares, Ipswich Ware and Thetford Ware¹¹³. In these circumstances we can be more certain that the evidence of a settlement shift from Sedgeford is real and is not simply the result of lack of archaeological coverage or a lack of material remains. It can be categorically stated that there *is* a discontinuity between the Early and Middle Saxon settlements of Sedgeford and this is a trend which is reflected throughout Norfolk, where, as Rogerson has stated, ‘there is no evidence for the continuity of site use between the Early and Middle Saxon periods’¹¹⁴.

If we examine the presumed locations of the Early Saxon settlement sites, it is clear that they lie in what Arnold and Wardle describe as poorer ground. In the area of the Sedgeford Hall this is on a hillside of the thin, freely draining, chalky soil that covers much of the parish, whilst in the area of Eaton Farm the area is low lying and marshy and can be considered to be very marginal. By contrast the site of the Boneyard area settlement is clearly sited in one of the most fertile areas of the parish. Most significantly there is no overlap in period of the recovered surface or the excavated material, signifying entirely separate phases of settlement.

Having conclusively identified a definite example of the Middle Saxon Shuffle in Sedgeford, the factors behind it remain more elusive. If we accept Hamerow’s suggestion that settlements

¹¹³ Welch 1985, 21. Hamerow 1991, 13-14.

¹¹⁴ Rogerson 1996, 60.

shifted as a result of the need for a nucleated settlement in order to facilitate better agricultural practice, then the present choice of location makes a great deal of sense. As was discussed in the introduction, the entire settlement area is contained within a sheltered natural chalk basin, within a fertile river valley and on one of very few fording points in the river. All factors which would make the site preferable as a permanent location. It must also be borne in mind that the location would have far wider ranging benefits than just those related to agriculture. Settling on the ford would have also allowed the control of both the road and river communication networks within the area, whilst the evidence from Boneyard suggests that the Middle Saxon settlement was already Christian when it was founded and there may have been strong religious factors behind the change in settlement location. We may never know for certain which factors or combination of factors precipitated the change in settlement location, we can only definitely state that the shift did happen. However more light may be shed on the subject by an examination of the character of the settlement evidence on Boneyard and this is the subject of the next section of this discussion.

CHARACTERISING THE MIDDLE SAXON SETTLEMENT

There has been a marked increase in interest in the archaeology of the Middle Saxon period over the last twenty years, although it is fair to say that despite this interest very little is really understood about the nature and character of Middle Saxon settlements. This lack of understanding is in the main part due to the general paucity of extensively excavated sites, in turn the result of a lack of identifiably Middle Saxon surface finds to identify sites and the tendency of archaeological work to be conducted in a development context¹¹⁵. In this context the work conducted at Sedgford is of vital importance to the further development of the Middle Saxon dataset, although even it can only contribute to the wider discussion and

¹¹⁵ Andrews 1992, 13-14.

definite answers remain a long way off. All that can hope to be achieved in this section is to look at the Sedgeford material in the wider context of the Middle Saxon sites of East Anglia and discuss comparative material.

It has often been commented that the settlements of the Early Saxon period exhibit no social or economic hierarchy, with the exception of the seventh century royal centres, and that the only indication of social identity comes from the furnishing of burials. This situation is in stark contrast to the evidence provided by the recovered Middle Saxon settlement evidence, from which it is clear that a number of different types of site existed, of differing function and with different material assemblages. No one has yet agreed on the structure of the Middle Saxon settlement hierarchy, but one of the most coherent attempts to date is that of Andrews (1992) which draws upon the then extant body of material from Norfolk, traditionally one of the best places to study such matters for the reasons discussed above, i.e. the Saxon pottery types, the arable landscape, and the good relationship with metal detectorists.

Andrews identifies the smallest type of Middle Saxon site as that of the village or farming settlement, which he typifies as being represented by a surface scatter of Ipswich Ware around a parish church. These churches, he postulates, would have Saxon precursors, but despite this the absence of coins and metalwork indicates an essentially low status settlement¹¹⁶. The next type of site he identifies are market / exchange sites, which bear a superficial resemblance to village sites, but are differentiated by the presence of non-ferrous metalwork and a concentration of coinage¹¹⁷. Next is the so called 'productive site', a term introduced by numismatists to distinguish sites with exceptionally high concentrations of coins and high quality non-ferrous metalwork, and the subject of much debate. Both Andrews and Margeson

¹¹⁶ Andrews 1992, 14-15.

¹¹⁷ Andrews 1992, 15-19.

categorised Sedgeford as a 'productive site' in 1992 on the strength of the evidence then available, and a fuller discussion of the character and productivity of productive sites will be entered into below¹¹⁸. Andrews then considers Middle Saxon urban centres, the only two possible examples of which in Norfolk are Norwich and Thetford, where the evidence consists of material in quantity but not of quality. However, he relies very heavily upon the evidence of their Late Saxon importance to define the urban centres, and the definite evidence is generally pretty vague. Andrews' final type of site are emporia, which, in contrast to the other categories of site, are very large production centres concerned with manufacture and trade. There are as yet no known emporia in Norfolk, and they will not be considered further here¹¹⁹.

The main problem with synthetic work such as that of Andrews, is that the settlement categories are largely derived from stray surface finds and very occasionally the results of limited, and often poorly published, excavations. Apart from the inherent problems discussed at length above about how representative this evidence is ultimately going to be of any sub-surface archaeology, there are also the related issues of just how complete the coverage which has produced the data is and how easily this data can be compared from site to site. However, despite these legitimate concerns about the dataset, there is an overwhelming tendency amongst those writing on Middle Saxon settlement archaeology to categorize sites and ascribe settlements a definite function and character on the strength of this surface evidence alone. An extensive study of this kind has recently been conducted in Lincolnshire by Ulmschneider, who does a thorough job of data gathering, but then ambitiously uses this evidence to attempt a reconstruction of the Middle Saxon settlement pattern and economy of the region¹²⁰.

¹¹⁸ Andrews 1992, 19-24. Margeson 1992, 30.

¹¹⁹ Andrews 1992, 24-26.

¹²⁰ Ulmschneider 2000.

Whilst the intentions of such papers are good, one wonders if they really help the understanding of the situation in any meaningful way, beyond the gathering of surface data? What Middle Saxon archaeology would really benefit from is the use of this widely discussed surface evidence to identify sites which could then be excavated on a large scale, for at present the dataset is far too limited to begin to draw even the most basic of conclusions about settlement types and their roles.

It has already been noted that Sedgeford was described as a ‘productive site’ on the strength of the evidence available in 1992, which must have included the excavated evidence from the 1950s. However, rather than embark upon a discussion of the nature of the surface assemblage of Sedgeford compared to that of other sites accorded the same label, a discussion vulnerable to so many variables of preservation and collection as to make such an exercise meaningless, only those excavated sites which most resemble the Middle Saxon features and finds recovered in Sedgeford will be considered here. Specifically, the sites of Brandon (Suffolk)¹²¹ and Flixborough (Lincolnshire)¹²² will be considered.

The Middle Saxon settlement at Staunch Meadow, Brandon, was excavated by the Suffolk Archaeological Unit from 1980 until at least 1988, when the only report on the site so far was published. Work continued beyond that point and has now finished, but there have been no further publications forthcoming. The site consists of a ‘complete settlement with buildings, industrial area, church and attendant cemeteries, all contained within a readily defined island’¹²³. The settlement features all date to the Middle Saxon period, although as can be seen in the excavation plan (Figure 18), there are multiple phases of building in areas of the site. Although they state that interpreting the function of the settlement is not possible on the

¹²¹ Carr *et al.* 1988.

¹²² Loveluck 1998.

strength of the available evidence, the excavators have commented that the site is of 'high social status with strong ecclesiastical ties'. Despite this, specific consideration is given to the possibility of the site having been monastic, a recurring issue in the subject of Middle Saxon settlements and one which will be discussed further below¹²⁴.

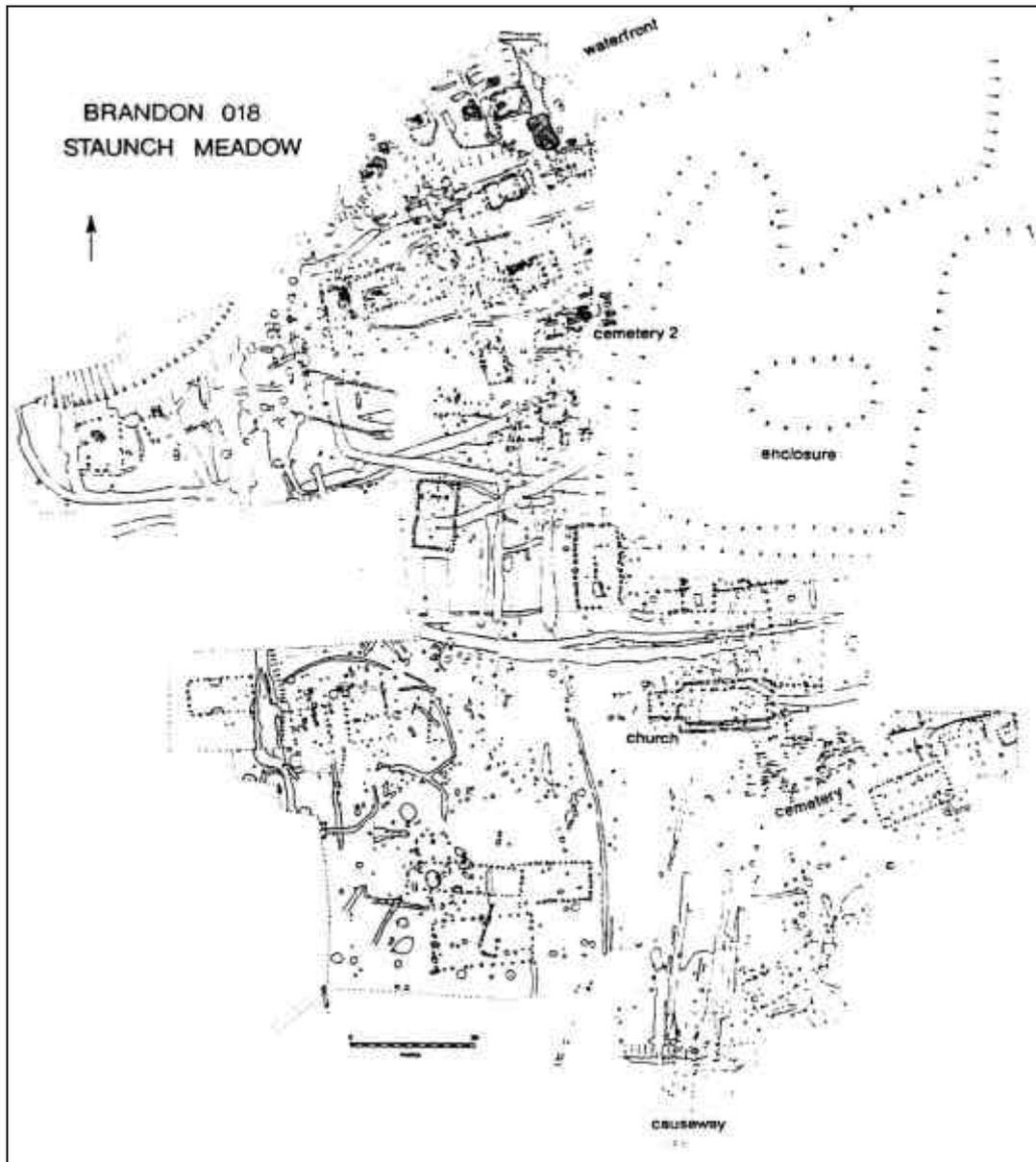


Figure 18. The all features plan of the excavations at Brandon. Scale approx 1:3000¹²⁵.

¹²³ Carr *et al.* 1988, 371.

¹²⁴ Carr *et al.* 1988, 371 & 376-377. Quote 371.

¹²⁵ Carr *et al.* 1988, Figure 2.

An area of Middle and Late Saxon settlement was excavated at Flixborough between 1989 and 1991 by the then Humberside Archaeological Unit. Again, only a preliminary report on the site has been published to date, but a full site report is imminent. Although the excavation did not recover the entire extent of the settlement, it did recover the complete or partial foundations of over thirty timber buildings, boundaries and structural features, together with an extremely rich artefactual assemblage¹²⁶.

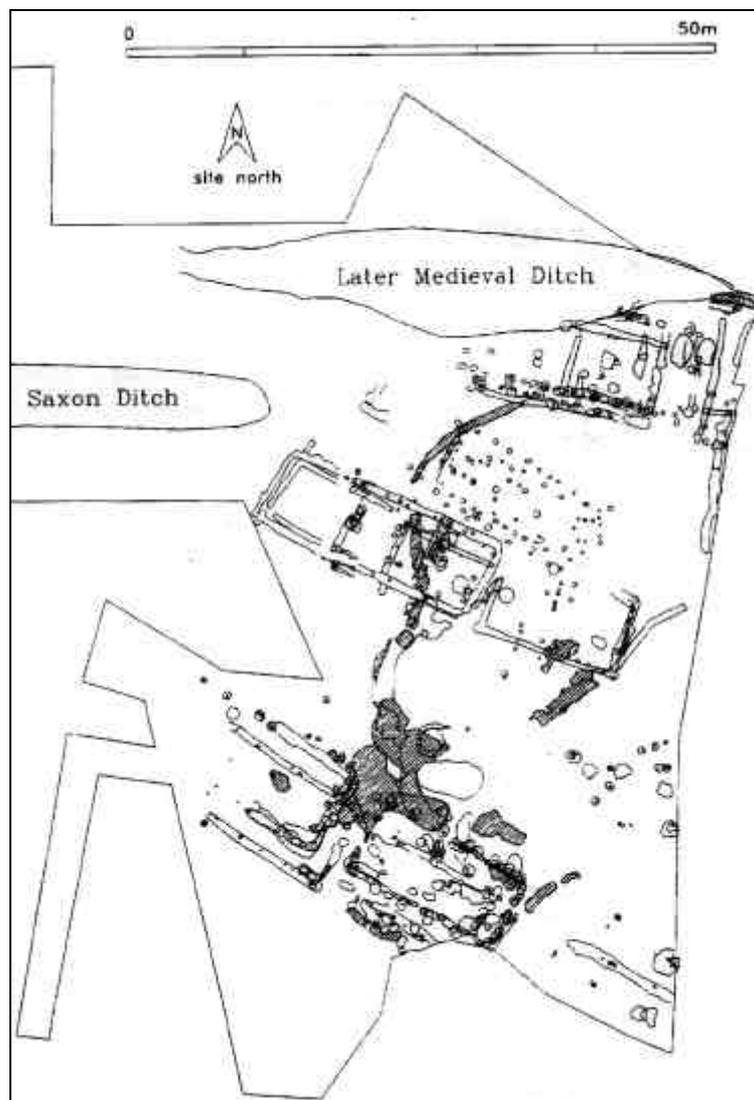


Figure 19. The all features plan of the excavation at Flixborough. Scale approx 1:750¹²⁷.

¹²⁶ Loveluck 1998, 146.

¹²⁷ Loveluck 1998, Figure 3.

As was the case with Brandon, the settlement at Flixborough was originally ascribed a monastic character by the excavation team, although this conclusion is disputed by Loveluck, who has been responsible for the writing up of the site. Loveluck writes that he is tempted to see the various phases of the settlement representing ‘a high-status vill centre which became a monastery, prior to a further transformation back to a secular estate centre’¹²⁸. However, he is reluctant to state his conclusions in any definite way due to the ambiguous nature of Middle Saxon settlement archaeology and the inherent dangers in attaching poorly evidenced labels to such sites.

As can be seen in Figures 18 and 19, the excavations at Brandon and Flixborough were both considerably larger than that of the current Boneyard excavation and as such excavated a much greater quantity of Middle Saxon settlement features than SHARP has so far. By 1988 over 12500 square metres of the site had been excavated and Brandon and c.5000 square metres were excavated at Flixborough, demonstrating how limited the Boneyard excavation is at a mere 1000 square metres. However, the plans serve to demonstrate that although the area and quantity of the evidence recovered is much higher, the *feature density* in many areas of both the Brandon and Flixborough sites is much the same. This is particularly apparent if one looks at the peripheral areas of the settlements, particularly the cemetery areas of Brandon, and this would seem to suggest that the features in the Boneyard trench represent peripheral areas of a settlement that extends to the west where presumably the focus of the settlement lies. It should be remembered that excavation has shown that the settlement does not extend far to the east.

This similarity of feature density between the Brandon, Flixborough and Sedgeford sites is also mirrored in a similarity of feature type. When Figures 18 and 19 are compared to Figures

¹²⁸ Loveluck 1998, 159.

10 and 13 the similarity between the arrangements of pits, ditches and burials of the three sites is clear to see, as is the similarity in design and construction between the Middle and Late Saxon buildings from the sites. This similarity is true of the finds assemblages too, where again, once factors of excavation area have been taken into consideration, the quantity, quality and type of finds from all three sites is very similar. Indeed it has been commented that the finds from Sedgeford ‘could be placed with the finds from Brandon, Southampton or any other Middle Saxon assemblage around England without looking out of place’¹²⁹. The observation of such similarities is all very well, however their existence must cause one to begin to question how valid factors such as feature type and finds assemblages are in the attempt to define types of Middle Saxon settlement, their function or hierarchy.

Firstly, to look more closely at the similarity between the buildings of the Middle Saxon period. There have been a number of studies made of these structures over the years¹³⁰, although for the purposes of explaining the similarity in style the best account is that given by Marshall and Marshall (1991). They entered details of the dimensions of all of the known Anglo-Saxon buildings into a computer database and interrogated it to find that the standard ratio for the plan of a Saxon building is a two square rectangle, although there is variation from unity up to just under three squares. They conclude that most buildings are under seven metres wide, postulating a limitation posed by the roofing method, and that larger buildings are generally later than smaller ones, although they also comment that larger buildings may also denote a higher status¹³¹. With regard to identifying settlement types and hierarchies from individual buildings, it would appear that the Marshalls’ comment that ‘structures on the sites were stylistically similar, sharing rectangular plans and earthfast foundations, [although] the

¹²⁹ Ludford 2001, Discussion.

¹³⁰ Such as Radford 1957 and Addyman 1972.

¹³¹ Marshall and Marshall 1991, 42.

settlements themselves take a variety of forms'¹³² would suggest that we must look beyond individual structures if any definite conclusions are to be formed. Sadly, this conclusion does not bode well for the immediate future, for as we have seen, Brandon is by far the most extensively excavated settlement of the period and at the moment remains the only real example of the type.

We turn now from building type to examine the implications of the finds assemblages recovered from Middle Saxon sites, for it is these which have most often been used to identify a site's character and are therefore also at the root of many of the problems regarding these identifications. Not least amongst these problems is the general tendency to view every Middle Saxon site as a monastic site, a phenomenon commented upon above, and one whose genesis clearly lies with the early excavations of the documented monastic sites of Monkwearmouth, Jarrow and Whitby¹³³. As known and documented monastic sites the appearance of the Middle Saxon phases of these sites and their finds assemblages immediately became synonymous with monasticism, as one would expect with the definition of a type-site. However, there has been a singular failure to address the bias in these identifying criteria and redefine them as more sites have come to light, so every site that exhibits similar features and assemblages is considered to be monastic. The tendency is widespread, but here only the example of styli will be considered, not least because Sedgeford, Brandon and Flixborough have all produced them.

Referring to these early monastic excavations Blair has stated unequivocally that 'Middle Saxon styli have now been found on several sites which are certainly or highly probably

¹³² Marshall and Marshall 1991, 30.

¹³³ Peers and Radford 1943. Cramp 1969. Cramp 1976. Rahtz 1976.

monastic. ... Outside such contexts they are rare if not unknown¹³⁴ and his comments typify a situation in which styli have come to symbolise monasticism. However, to turn the argument such as it is on its head, how certain are we that writing with a stylus was the preserve of the monastic communities? Pestell covers this issue at length in his Ph.D. thesis and considers the evidence of lay literacy to be too strong for literacy to have been the sole preserve of the Church, unequivocally stating that 'styli cannot be seen as a specifically monastic or religious implement'¹³⁵. Indeed, he goes as far as to say that there are 'no obvious categories of artefact that can be used to identify a site as purely 'monastic' or religious'¹³⁶, a conclusion which echoes that of Loveluck in his assessment of the evidence from the Flixborough site¹³⁷.

Such is the current situation surrounding the characterisation of the settlements of the Middle Saxon period. From a limited body of evidence it has at least been agreed that settlements which exhibit a high quantity and quality of finds and features, such as those at Brandon and Flixborough, are generally of high status, although the ability to identify whether this status is derived from ecclesiastical or secular importance remains elusive. This ambiguity of interpretation has recently been graphically demonstrated by the ease with which Blair was able to reinterpret the 'palace' sites of Northampton and Cheddar as 'minsters'¹³⁸. However, it would appear that the notion of settlements of this type containing elements of both ecclesiastical and secular authority, or even changing from one to the other during their period of occupation, is now not beyond the realm of possibility and may even be the norm. It is a subject that will only truly be resolved through more and extensive excavations of Middle

¹³⁴ Blair 1996, 101.

¹³⁵ Pestell 1999, 57-68. Quote 67.

¹³⁶ Pestell 1999, 68.

¹³⁷ Loveluck 1998, 158-160.

¹³⁸ Blair 1996.

Saxon settlement sites and it is in this context that the Sedgeford excavations will be invaluable.

The Middle Saxon settlement evidence so far recovered from Sedgeford is strongly suggestive of a settlement of the type seen at Brandon and Flixborough, although as yet the excavated area is far smaller than these other sites. There is sufficient evidence to suggest that there was at least a strong enough ecclesiastical element to the settlement for it to act as a centre for numerous burials, but there is also plenty of evidence of a mixed population engaged in agricultural production. It would appear that there was at least some form of integration between ecclesiastical and secular authorities during the Middle Saxon period. It has been further suggested that Middle Saxon Sedgeford was almost certainly an estate centre during this period¹³⁹, although as yet examination of the available evidence has failed to shed more light upon this supposition. It may simply be that by the time of the first written records of Little Domesday Book, in which the only real hope of identifying these earlier land units is to be found, the estate had fragmented to such a degree that it is unrecognisable. This fragmentation may in part be a result of the imposition of the Danelaw and the effects of the English reconquest, both of which are discussed in the following section.

THE DANELAW AND THE ENGLISH RECONQUEST

The *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* tells us that in the year 865AD ‘...a great heathen raiding-army came to the land of the English and took winter-quarters from the East Anglians, and were provided with horses there, and they made peace with them’¹⁴⁰. Although the exact location of this incursion is not specified, it is generally seen as being at least in part in Norfolk, and the fact that ‘...the raiding-army went from East Anglia over the mouth of the Humber to York

¹³⁹ Williamson 1993, 103

city...'¹⁴¹ in 866AD strongly suggests that their route would have included the north Norfolk coast and The Wash. As can be seen in Figure 20, the Danes returned to the region in 869AD when, according to the Peterborough Manuscript of the *Chronicle*, they ‘...went across Mercia into East Anglia, and took winter-quarters at Thetford; and in that year St Edmund the king fought against them, and the Danish took the victory and killed the king and conquered all that land, and did for all the monasteries to which they came’¹⁴².

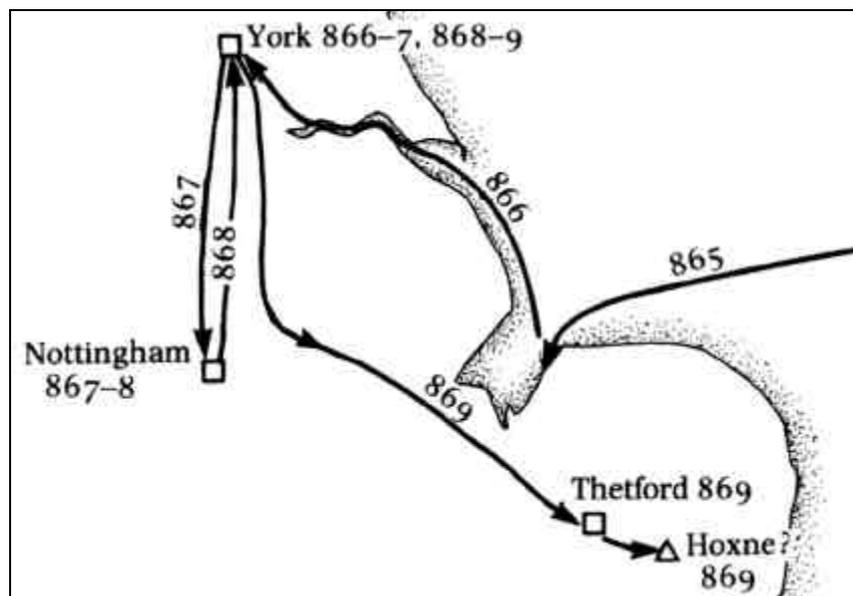


Figure 20. The viking conquest of Northumbria and East Anglia, 865-9AD¹⁴³.

Following the killing of King Edmund the army moved into Wessex and the *Chronicle* makes no further mention of East Anglia until 879AD when, under the terms of the Treaty of Wedmore, ‘...the raiding-army went from Cirencester into East Anglia and settled that land, and divided it up’¹⁴⁴. The Eastern Danelaw, as it became, remained an independent kingdom ruled by Guthrum and his successors until it was reconquered by Edward the Elder in 917AD

¹⁴⁰ Swanton 2000, 68 & 69.

¹⁴¹ Swanton 2000, 68 & 69.

¹⁴² Swanton 2000, 71.

¹⁴³ After Campbell 1982, Figure 142.

¹⁴⁴ Swanton 2000, 77.

and absorbed into the growing West Saxon state¹⁴⁵. However, this was not the end of the Danish incursions and the *Chronicle* records a resumption of raiding in the 980sAD, followed in 1004AD by the Danish King Swein's attacks on Norwich and Thetford. Swein was met in battle by the East Anglian earl Ulfcytel Snelling and '...great slaughter fell on either side.'¹⁴⁶. The Danes withdrew, but returned in 1009AD, sacking Thetford again in 1010AD and defeating the East Anglians in a great battle at *Ringmer*. In 1013AD all of the Danish settled areas of England surrendered to King Swein and King Ethelred fled abroad. Swein died early the following year and the kingship passed to his son Cnut, who initially shared the kingdom with Ethelred's successor Edmund, although he later took the whole kingdom for himself¹⁴⁷.

As has been seen, during the period of this study East Anglia experienced two major periods of Scandinavian conquest and was effectively under a strong Scandinavian influence from the late ninth century onwards. The account of the Danish incursions given above is entirely derived from the text of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, which provides the only major account of them. It paints a vivid picture of a time of major upheaval and destruction, but how do we recognise these events archaeologically, if indeed we can? And what effect, if any, did these events have upon the settlement at Sedgeford?

The fundamental factor behind the archaeological signature of the vikings is the extent to which the settlement of the Eastern Danelaw should be seen as representing a large scale movement of people from the Scandinavian home countries or simply a change in the controlling elite. This is a subject which has polarised opinion for many decades, although the subject has been most recently debated in the context of Norfolk by Williamson (1993) and Margeson (1996). If, as Margeson argued, there was a large scale folk movement, one would

¹⁴⁵ Williamson 1993, 106.

¹⁴⁶ Swanton 2000, 135.

expect to see a great discontinuity of material culture and a heavily Scandinavian record. However, if it is merely a change at the top, as Williamson argues, then one could expect a lot less disruption in the material record, with an adoption of Scandinavian influenced culture.

The two most hotly debated categories of evidence are Scandinavian place names and material culture, with both camps using the same evidence to make their cases. To consider place names first, East Anglia has a large number of Scandinavian place names, which Margeson has argued are 'the most concrete testimony of the Viking's presence in Norfolk.'¹⁴⁸. As has been seen, there was a considerable period of Scandinavian influence in East Anglia, up until Domesday when many of these names were recorded for the first time. During this time many names may have been ascribed, and there is no evidence to suggest that they all originated from a single influx of Scandinavians. Williamson prefers to see the Scandinavian names being ascribed to fragmenting pieces of existing estates as they first attained tenurial independence at a point after the late ninth century, a fact supported by the widespread survival of earlier English names¹⁴⁹.

If there was such a large scale immigration of Scandinavian settlers, founding and naming settlements, then the material evidence would be expected to reflect this. It does not. Margeson stated that the quantity of Scandinavian style metalwork finds recovered from Norfolk 'reflects a far more densely populated county than has previously been supposed'¹⁵⁰ although her distribution maps clearly show that there very little correlation between the place name evidence and the material, even allowing for the bias in the sample identified by

¹⁴⁷ Swanton 2000, 138-145. Williamson 1993, 106-7.

¹⁴⁸ Margeson 1996, 49.

¹⁴⁹ Williamson 1993, 108-9.

¹⁵⁰ Margeson 1996, 97.

Gurney¹⁵¹. There is also a prevailing lack of evidence for Scandinavian settlement and burial types throughout East Anglia, a stark contrast to other areas of known Scandinavian immigration where such features are commonplace. Pestell sums up the situation with the statement: 'These diverse elements all tend towards the viking involvement in East Anglia being one concentrated on the upper echelons of society in which mass immigration did not occur.'¹⁵². The prevailing view, based upon the available evidence, must be that despite an undeniable ethnic Scandinavian presence in East Anglia, its extent should not be exaggerated and we should expect to see a continuity in Christian Anglo-Saxon society.

It has been argued that the similarity between the Middle Saxon secular and religious estate centres (as far as the two can be differentiated at all) would have made them both equally vulnerable to a change in the upper levels of society¹⁵³, although with a change at the top we should expect an administrative change rather than a material one. This makes the identification of Scandinavian precipitated changes particularly problematic, as it is difficult to identify abstract, administrative concepts archaeologically, particularly in East Anglia where the first historical source is Little Domesday Book.

It would appear that this is certainly the case with the settlement at Sedgeford, where there is a continuous occupation sequence, despite the vagaries of the material dating, and there is no readily discernible change in the settlement type. Although there is evidence of a Scandinavian influence in the area, with the two surface finds of Anglo-Scandinavian metalwork discussed above¹⁵⁴, it would appear that from a material perspective the settlement continued with very little disruption. However, there may have been wider administrative

¹⁵¹ Gurney 1997.

¹⁵² Pestell 1999, 100.

¹⁵³ Pestell 1999, 93.

¹⁵⁴ See pages 37-39, Plate 8 and Figure 15.

changes within the estate associated with the settlement, although, as was stressed with regard to the Middle Saxon estate, the reconstruction of this framework is difficult because of the lack of pre-Domesday documentary material.

On a wider scale, very little is known for definite about the organisation of East Anglia under the Eastern Danelaw. Hart has made a detailed examination of the subject and suggests that the multiple estates of East Anglia ‘...originated in Anglian times, that they gave rise to administrative units (call them wapentakes or what you will) during the period of Danish rule in East Anglia, and that subsequently ... they helped to determine the bounds of their parent hundreds.’¹⁵⁵. The first record of the hundredal system of East Anglia is given in the Little Domesday Book and it appears to have survived almost intact into the nineteenth century. As was discussed above, Sedgeford lay in the Domesday hundred of Smethdon and it has been suggested that Sedgeford was the manorial centre of the hundred, for, to quote Hart again, ‘...at the time of Domesday ... their jurisdiction was nearly always in royal hands’¹⁵⁶. In the case of Sedgeford, the royal hands would be those of Earl Gyrrh, and Hart concludes that most local jurisdiction was permanently in royal hands from 917AD onwards, by implication making Sedgeford a royal estate from the early tenth century¹⁵⁷. As has been stated time and again, this is entirely conjectural and there is no definite evidence, historical or archaeological, one way or the other.

In addition to the general lack of evidence, one of the main reasons for the difficulty in reconstructing the Late Saxon administrative framework is the degree to which it had fragmented by the time of the Domesday records. Williamson discusses the issue of this fragmentation at length and identifies at least two mechanisms for its occurrence. On the one

¹⁵⁵ Hart 1992, 72.

¹⁵⁶ Hart 1992, 77.

hand he sees the East Anglian kings and their Danish and West Saxon successors granting away portions of estates to aristocratic families, who in turn sold or granted away further fragments or divided them through inheritance. On the other hand he sees peripheral areas of estates passing into the ownership of what he calls 'local cultivators', who also divided them through inheritance¹⁵⁸. Williamson is confident that the former process may have begun as early as the Middle Saxon period and the latter as a result of the Scandinavian upheavals. What does seem clear is that the hundredal administrative structure described in Domesday, whilst a creation of the early tenth century, incorporated much older elements dating back as far as the Middle Saxon period¹⁵⁹. The irony is that although we are able to demonstrate this antiquity on a general level, when it comes to being able to reconstruct the framework on a local level, there is not sufficient historical or archaeological evidence to do so.

¹⁵⁷ Hart 1992, 77.

¹⁵⁸ Williamson 1993, 121.

¹⁵⁹ Williamson 1993, 133.

CONCLUSIONS

In an effort to understand the origins and early development of the north west Norfolk village of Sedgeford, this study has extensively examined all of the available archaeological and historical evidence for the duration of the Saxon period and used it to construct a model of the early settlement. The name probably derives from *Secci's Ford*, gradually becoming Sedgeford as the original meaning was forgotten and reed growing became more prominent in the area. As a textbook toponym the foundation of the settlement is more likely to have been founded in the period before c.730 AD than later, a conclusion supported by the archaeological evidence. The Early Saxon foci appear to have lain to the east and west of the Middle Saxon settlement, on poorer ground, and the transition to the better ground of the new site in the late seventh or early eighth centuries represents a classic example of the Arnold and Wardle model for the Middle Saxon Shuffle.

The impetus behind the Shuffle is difficult to ascertain, but the new location is topographically suited to better agriculture practice, was contained within a sheltered, natural chalk basin and lies on one of very few fording points in the river, allowing control of both the road and river. The fact that the community had already converted to Christianity before the shift is also suggestive of a religious factors behind the change in settlement location, although this is more difficult to demonstrate archaeologically. The earliest excavated phase of the settlement is the large, Christian inhumation cemetery, which bears signs of social stratification in the burial rite. The cemetery also exhibits a distinct change of focus during its period of use, one burial area respects a contemporary enclosed area, whilst later burials appear to change focus mid-way through the sequence. To date the settlement phases associated with the burials remain unexcavated, bar a series of drainage gullies identified in 1958. Hopefully, further excavation will reveal them.

Later phases of settlement have been identified within the Boneyard, which in places overlies the cemetery, and consist of buildings of SFB and hall type. The Middle Saxon settlement evidence is strongly suggestive of a settlement of the type seen at Brandon and Flixborough and there was undoubtedly a strong ecclesiastical element to the settlement. However, there is also plenty of evidence of a mixed population engaged in agricultural production and Middle Saxon Sedgeford was almost certainly at the centre of a large estate, although an examination of the available evidence has failed to shed more light upon this.

With regard to the effects of the vikings upon the settlement, although there is evidence of a Scandinavian influence in the area, the settlement continued through the Danelaw period with no evidence of disruption. However, there may have been wider administrative changes within the estate associated with the settlement, although again the reconstruction of this framework is difficult because of the lack of evidence.

Occupation in the area in and around the Boneyard continued into the Late Saxon period, although the character of the settlement changed and the settlement focus moved to the more solid chalk outcrop of West Hall as more permanent and extensive buildings were constructed. Being waterlogged, areas of West Hall were reclaimed in the Late Saxon by the dumping of material and at least one high status building was constructed upon this reclaimed ground; probably a chapel. Some form of dam must have been constructed upstream of the West Hall area during this period, to aid in the reclamation of the land and flooding the area of the Reeddam.

Sedgeford also appears to have been the manorial centre of the Smethdon hundred during the Late Saxon period, by implication making it a royal estate from the early tenth century, although there is a great difficulty in reconstructing the Late Saxon administrative framework due to the degree to which it had fragmented by the time of Domesday. Sedgeford was certainly a major estate centre in the eleventh century, although the historical documentation to elucidate this is lacking and the archaeological evidence recovered to date does not do this status justice. The evidence of Little Domesday Book is very vague and only provides two tantalising snapshots of a very complex picture, but it would appear that the tenurial sequence of the two Sedgeford manors of the mid eleventh century ran thus: that the first Sedgeford manor belonged, along with Fring, to Bishop Ælmer in his capacity the Bishop of Elmham and they passed to Bishop William with the office, whilst the second manor was passed from Gyrrh to William in 1066 and was merged with the Episcopal manor when William became bishop in 1086. Once the two manors of Sedgeford were held by the bishopric they effectively merged into one and the manor was granted to Norwich Cathedral Priory by Bishop William Turbe c.1146-1174.

Several themes have emerged from this study of early Sedgeford and it has been possible to reconstruct a coherent settlement history from the archaeological and (some) historical evidence. However, two main themes have emerged above all. Firstly, it is increasingly apparent that Sedgeford was an important manorial centre in the Middle Saxon period and that it retained this status under the Danelaw and at least until the mid-eleventh century. It would appear that during this time the estate gradually fragmented and sub-divided into the state described in Little Domesday Book and this gives rise to the second theme. It has become increasingly apparent throughout this study that archaeological evidence alone is not sufficient to be able to reconstruct the administrative frameworks of Middle and Late Saxon

estates, even in a place like Sedgeford where the archaeological record is rich and its recovery very high. As has been seen, such a task is greatly hindered by the fact that the earliest documentary source pertaining to the estate is Little Domesday Book, from which it would appear that much of the estate had broken down beyond recognition by the mid-eleventh century. Work on Sedgeford will be continuing under the auspices of SHARP, and doubtless much more evidence will come to light, allowing a more detailed version of the story to be told. However, as this study has served to demonstrate, a multidisciplinary study provides a more cohesive account, although it can only do this if the evidence exists to be studied in the first place.

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