GREENING BEAUTIFUL BERKSHIRE

Medieval Berkshire is the third of a series of publications exploring the rich heritage of the county. The first two publications in the series, Prehistoric Berkshire and Roman Berkshire are still available. The series will conclude with the Industrial Revolution in Berkshire.

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Royal County of BERKSHIRE

MEDIEVAL BERKSHIRE

Babtie Public Services Division

PREFACE

For the last decade Berkshire County Council has been caring actively for the county's rich archaeological heritage. During this time the County Council has had a crucial role in advising others about the importance of archaeology, especially in the fields of mineral extraction and development control, working in partnership with the Borough and District Councils. To enable the best possible advice to be given, the County Council has also developed and maintained a computerised database record of all sites and monuments in the county. Technological advances have allowed the non-destructive investigation of archaeological remains below ground level, although archaeological excavations still have to be mounted when development and archaeology prove to be mutually incompatible.

As a result of this and other influences, new ideas about how our forebears lived their lives and how their cultures operated have emerged. In particular, evidence of continual changes in the countryside has emerged from multi-disciplinary studies about man's influence on past environments and, in turn, the environment's direct effect on man; lessons which we could all heed today.

Great changes have also taken place in public information about archaeology and the preservation of our heritage. Berkshire County Council has been a leading advocate of site and monument management coupled with increased access and understanding through information and on-site interpretation. This involves partnerships with district and borough councils, landowners and English Heritage. The County Council is grateful to many people for their willing co-operation.

***Front cover**: A 12th century capital from the cloisters of Reading Abbey. © TG/RM.*

MEDIEVAL BERKSHIRE

INTRODUCTION

Much of the interest in the county's environment understandably is focused on the protection and enhancement of the existing environment. This includes, for example, the preparation and promotion by the County Council of planning policies which seek sustainable forms of development, as well as its support for a wide range of specific initiatives within the 'Greening Beautiful Berkshire' campaign. However, there is a historic dimension to the modern environment of the county which archaeology can illuminate by studying man's impact on the landscape in the past.

To help explain Berkshire's archaeological heritage the County Council has launched a series of publications on defensive and military sites in the county entitled Bastions of Berkshire. The Council has also decided to produce four booklets on the prehistoric, Roman, medieval and industrial archaeology of the county. Medieval Berkshire is the third of the series of these booklets. It is based on records held in the County Sites and Monuments Record, the numerous investigations in the last decade and on a rich tradition of archaeological fieldwork going back to the end of the last century. Medieval Berkshire begins with the arrival of the first Saxon settlers in the immediate post-Roman period and outlines Saxon settlements and burials, and Norman castles and medieval abbeys, towns and villages. It stops at the time of the Dissolution of the Monasteries in 1539. This book does not set out to present a history of Berkshire in medieval times but to consider the evidence from archaeological excavation of Saxon and medieval sites in the county.

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From Roman into Saxon

The transition from Roman Britain to Saxon England was a slow, uneven and largely undocumented process with its roots in the 4th century AD.

At the time of the death of the Roman Emperor Theodosius in 395AD Britain was firmly part of the Roman prefecture of the Gauls. The Empire was left to Theodosius's two sons and in effect it became divided into eastern and western empires, the latter being under the control of Honorius. Honorius died in 423AD by which time the influence of Rome over Britain had declined dramatically.

There were power struggles in the western empire but all the resources of men, money and military supplies lay in the east. Coinage stopped being produced in Britain and mass production of pottery ceased. The rump of the Roman army was withdrawn to continental Europe. The army in Britain in the 4th century had been supplemented by mercenary soldiers from northern Europe and some may have stayed on either through choice or through gifts of land instead of cash payments for their services. Britain no longer was part of a centralised military and administrative system under Roman authority and was probably run by the remaining upper and administrative classes who managed their estates and districts for their own interests.

The town of Silchester was a major influence on Berkshire in Roman times but the evidence is unclear as to how long and to what extent organised civil life in the town lasted into the 5th century. It may be that a structured

Ogham stone from Silchester.
© TG/RM.

urbanised community survived until about 450AD. The archaeological evidence is inconclusive but one of the more unusual discoveries was of part of a Roman column re-used as a tombstone found in a well. It is inscribed in the Celtic Ogham script, which uses horizontal lines relative to a vertical axis instead of a Latin script. Evidence for rural settlement in Berkshire at this time is very scarce; there is some 5th century pottery from Beenham but rural activity is best observed on the Thames gravels at Bray and Wraysbury.

Saxon Settlement and Burials

Anglo-Saxon cremation pots found near what is now Thames Valley Business Park. © TG/RM.

A necklace of glass and amber beads accompanying one of the Saxon burials at East Shefford. © TG/NM.

At Bray a Roman settlement continued into the 5th and 6th centuries with evidence recorded for cobbled surfaces, structures and burials. Finds included the chaff- or organic- tempered pottery typical of the 5th and 6th centuries. There has been occupation in the Wraysbury area since prehistoric times and there is some evidence to suggest that the area was settled in the 5th and 6th centuries.

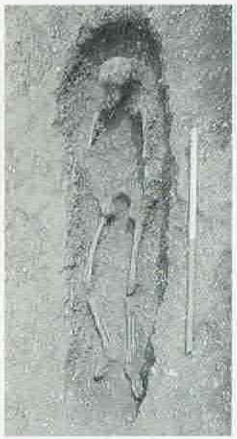
In the Reading area there must have been a Saxon settlement in the 5th century which may have been strategically located to control the confluence of the Thames and the Kennet. A mixed cremation and inhumation cemetery was discovered in 1891 on the railway line near Thames Valley Business Park and early to middle Saxon pottery and metalwork have been found under Reading Abbey on the gravel spur between the Thames and the Kennet.

Burials are often the main evidence for activity in the early Anglo-Saxon period. In 1890 construction of the Lambourn Valley Railway led to the discovery of thirty burials at East Shefford. In 1912 a further twenty six

A 7th century Anglo-Saxon saucer brooch ploughed up on the Berkshire Downs. © TG/NM.

were excavated. The cemetery occupied a square area of about one quarter of an acre and so the burials were not densely packed. The cemetery contained adult men and women and children. Many of the burials were accompanied by grave goods of pots, axes, brooches, pins and necklaces. Further up the Lambourn Valley, in the area of the so-called Seven Barrows, Anglo-Saxon inhumations were found in the barrow mounds built some 2000-2500 years earlier in the Bronze Age. In 1977 a saucer brooch of 7th century AD date was ploughed up from the downs above Lambourn.

There was activity in the Kennet Valley in the 6th and 7th centuries. A sunken floored hut typical of many Saxon sites has been excavated at Ufton Nervet. At Field Farm, Burghfield, a cemetery of over 50 inhumations seems to have been that of a community whose dead were buried with weapons and items of everyday use. This cemetery was on the site of an earlier Bronze Age barrow. Eight of the burials were accompanied by spears and two of these also had shields. The shafts and other wooden and organic parts of the weapons had disintegrated, but mineralised traces of wood in the hafts of six of the spears shows that

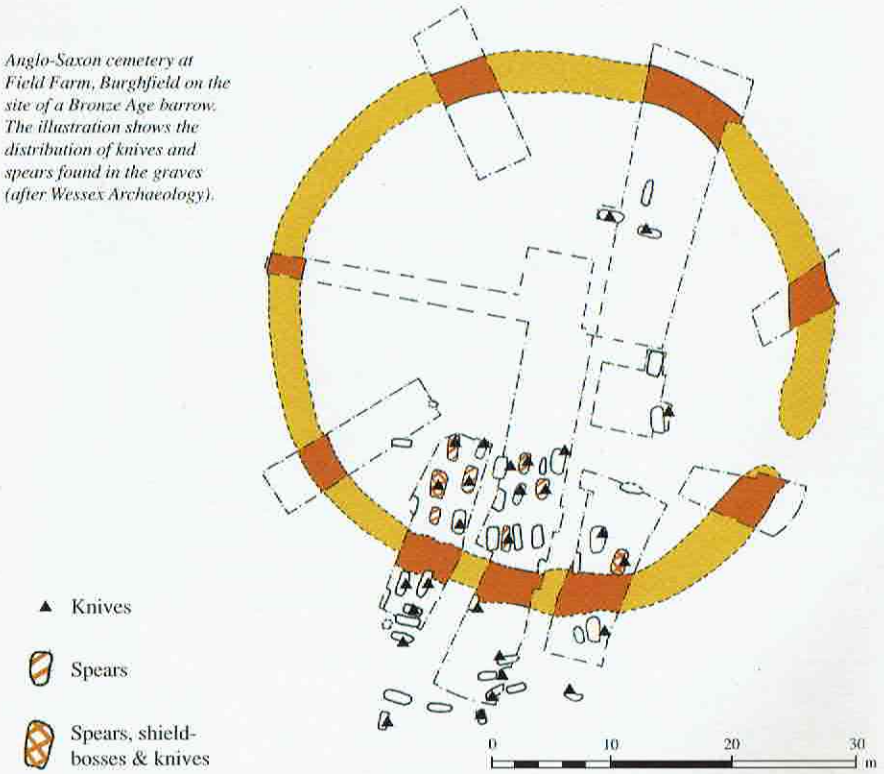


Anglo-Saxon burial from the cemetery at Field Farm. © WAIRM.

two were ash, two either poplar or willow, one hazel and one probably holly.

At least 26 knives were buried, the majority with horn handles and leather sheaths. In one case wood was thought to be present between the blade and the sheath. Two of the knives had fly pupae mineralised on them.

Towards the end of the seventh century coins started to be used again and the best known type is the sceatta. Four are known from Wraysbury and one from Newbury. The Newbury example had been minted in Southampton, although coins from that mint were not usually found so far inland. An even rarer coin, found at Donnington, is a tremissis from the 8th century Merovingian kingdom in France. Typical pottery of the 5th to 7th centuries was either baggy bowls and cooking pots made with a



Anglo-Saxon cemetery at Field Farm, Burghfield on the site of a Bronze Age barrow. The illustration shows the distribution of knives and spears found in the graves (after Wessex Archaeology).

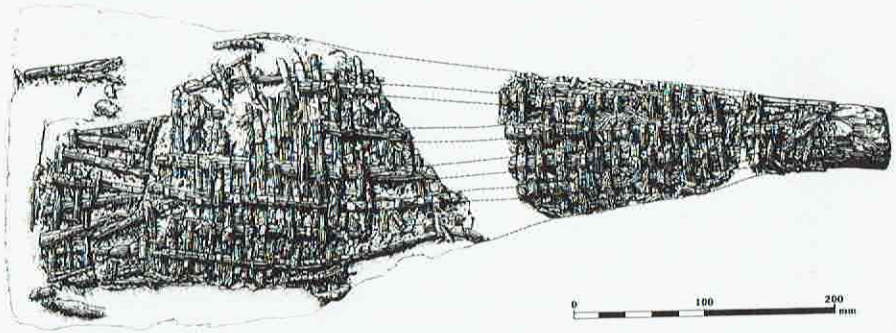
distinctive organic tempering or more elaborate vessels with shoulders, bosses and lots of stamped decoration. The stamps were usually made from animal bone and impressed into the clay of the pots before firing. The organic tempered pottery seems to have been used for everyday domestic vessels while the more fancy pots frequently ended up accompanying burials.

Christianity had become established during the 7th century with the creation in 634 of the bishopric of Birinus in Dorchester-on-Thames. Such an establishment must reflect power and influence over the north-west of Berkshire.

In the east of the county excavation at two sites on the Thames gravels have revealed the remains of contrasting types of settlement. At Wraysbury archaeological evidence collected over the last twenty five years has indicated much of the character of the rural settlement from the mid Saxon period onwards. Wraysbury is located on a tract of river gravel rising to a low knoll on which St Andrew's church was built. The archaeological evidence suggests that Saxons first occupied the edge of the high ground 100m west of the modern church. During the 9th century the settlement moved eastward and took the form of timber built structures within a series of ditched enclosures, presumably property units. By the 11th century this area had reverted back to agriculture and the focal point of Wraysbury had moved north; a clear demonstration of the mobility of settlement in earlier times. Animal bones found during the excavation indicate that animal husbandry was a major component of late Saxon life at Wraysbury and that cattle were the most important livestock. It has been suggested that the cattle herds were culled for meat but with some animals retained for dairy produce and pulling power. The proportion of pig bones is higher at Wraysbury than at many other contemporary sites. This may reflect the local environment as the Domesday Book records woodland here on both sides of the Thames. The value of the woodland was assessed by the number of pigs it could support. Bread wheat seems to

have been the major arable crop. Fish and waterfowl were exploited from the surrounding watercourses and over 80% of the fish bones excavated from one of the major excavations were of eel. The Domesday Book records that there were four fisheries at Wraysbury.

There is plenty of evidence for manipulation and management of rivers in Saxon times in Berkshire. At Anslows Cottage near Burghfield the control of channels and streams of the Kennet with wooden structures has been dated to the 7th and 8th centuries. In a later 10th and 11th century phase it is possible that some form of water meadow system may have been attempted. Fishing was also important and a fish or eel trap was recovered. It was made in a twined basketry technique with a close weave using split hazel stems complete with bark. Radiocarbon measurements indicate an 8th or 9th century date for its construction. Stakes of Saxon date have also been found in channels or in the edge of channels in the Coley Brook, in south Reading, in the Kennet Valley at the Arlington Business Park and in the Thames Valley at Bray and Cookham.



A fish or eel trap of eighth or ninth century date found in a channel of the Kennet Valley near Burghfield. © WA/RM.

Royal sites

William the Conqueror's motte-and-bailey castle, now known as Windsor Castle, was begun about 1070 in an area named *Clivore* in the Domesday Book. The original Windsor (*Windlesora*), however, lay two miles to the south-east - at Old Windsor. There, the Saxon Edward the Confessor is known from documentary evidence to have maintained his most favoured royal palace, the scene of major council-assemblies. It was at Windlesora, indeed, that the Confessor made his will.

Large-scale excavations and geophysical survey, in 1952-58, revealed that Windlesora had become the site of high-status settlements at least nine centuries before 1066. From vast quantities of Roman tile scattered over the site, with mosaic pieces, pottery and metalwork, it is clear that a major Romano-British villa-estate had centred on the area around the present parish church of St Peter and St Andrew at Old Windsor. The actual Roman-period buildings have yet to be located, but the villa's flue-tiles and tesserae show it to have been luxuriously appointed and equipped with a large bath-house. Certainly part of the villa survived, upstanding and conceivably still habitable, well into the period that saw the building of Anglo-Saxon timber halls close by. Final demolition of the villa clearly did not take place until well after the making of Windlesora's most monumental Anglo-Saxon feature - an embanked canal that virtually transformed the inhabited area into an island in the 7th century.

This canal is the most considerable feat of early Anglo-Saxon engineering known in Berkshire. Windlesora stood at the neck of a huge loop of the River Thames which was completely cut off by the digging of a formidable ditch, up to 30 feet wide, 10 feet deep and over a mile and a quarter long. The upcast soil was heaped to form a massive rampart sheltering the ancient centre of occupation, and,

Human remains of Saxon date disposed of in an unusual way in a pit at Kintbury. © TVAS.

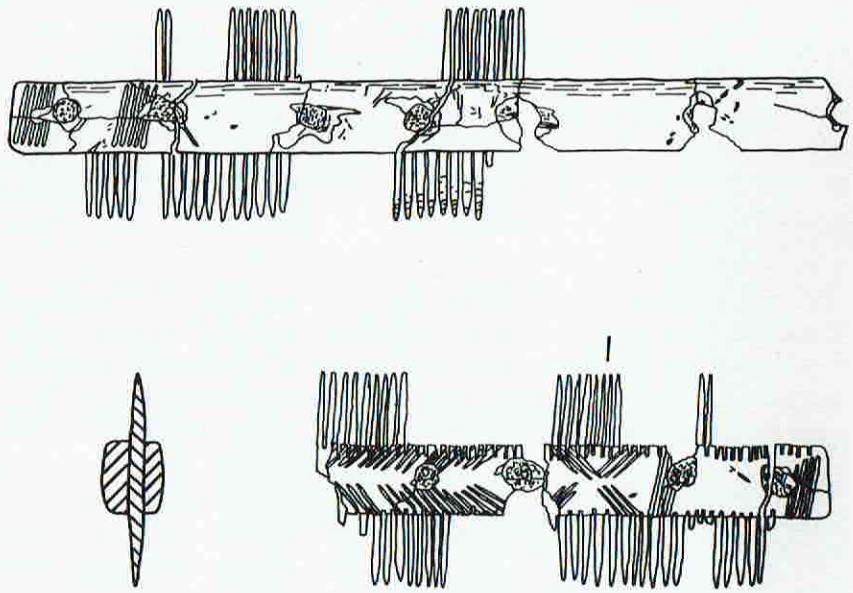
with the ditch waterfilled, the whole was clearly more than a simple boundary earthwork.

Among its other functions this feature (nicknamed "The Great Ditch" by its modern investigators) was useful and productive too. Excavation disclosed the foundation-timbers of a sophisticated grinding-mill with three vertical water-wheels which worked in parallel. These timbers have been tree-ring dated, and all the evidence indicates use of the mill by 700AD. After the Great Ditch had become clogged with silt, large quantities of Roman building-material from the demolished villa were tipped into its soggy bed. The damaging by fire of an Anglo-Saxon hall, in the same phase, tempts thoughts of an unrecorded Viking raid, but the evidence is inconclusive. What is clear is that the largely infilled Great Ditch was revived at a later stage, by the digging of a narrow channel along one side which housed a single horizontal water-wheel.

Thereafter, major and minor Saxon buildings attest to the continuing life of Windlesora until 1066. It did not come to any sudden or catastrophic end, but simply faded away gradually after the Conqueror's own royal centre had been established at what became New Windsor - still preserving the name transferred from the ancient Windlesora.

Occasional discoveries of Saxon material at Cookham support the suggestion that there may have been a late Saxon royal palace there. Bucklebury is a candidate for a late Saxon Royal Manor and large estates are believed to have been established in the late Saxon period at Thatcham and Lambourn.

Kintbury was a Saxon settlement and excavation in 1995 near the church revealed late Saxon settlement remains of pits, post holes and gullies. In one pit there was a deposit of human bone comprising two skulls, long bones and a pelvis.



Bone comb fragments of Saxon date from recent excavations in Kintbury. © TVAS.

Reaction to the Danes

When the Danes arrived in Berkshire in 870 they would have found Saxon towns established at Old Windsor, Cookham, Reading, Aldermaston, Thatcham and Lambourn and possibly semi-urban settlements at White Waltham, Sonning, Bucklebury and Kintbury. With the exception of Old Windsor there is almost no archaeological evidence for these sites. In 871 AD the Danes wintered at Reading and repulsed the attacks of King Ethelred and his brother Alfred the Great. Writing in his work 'The Life of Alfred' Asser notes that there was a royal 'vill' in Reading and that the Danes built a rampart, for their winter quarters, between the rivers Thames and Kennet and on the right hand side of the 'vill'. There is no substantial archaeological evidence for any of the 9th and 10th century Danish activity in Reading. In 1831, however, workmen excavating a ballast pit for the railway uncovered the skeletons of a horse and a man and a well-preserved 9th century sword with Viking decoration.

By 892 Alfred had completed a defensive network across southern England to cope with the Danish invasions. The network involved a series of fortified settlements or 'burghs'. These were mainly developed and designed for permanent occupation and most survive as towns today. Wallingford is the closest of the Alfredian burghal towns. Alfred also put in place some forts, usually smaller than the burghal towns, and not designed for permanent occupation. One such fort may be on the island of Sashes near to Cookham.

Norman Conquest and Castles

Montem Mound - a possible motte in Slough. © BG.

The Norman Conquest does not seem to have had a dramatic impact in Berkshire. Old Windsor lying on the floor of the Thames Valley was not one of the most defensible sites so William I built himself an earth and timber motte and bailey castle on a chalk ridge 3km upstream from the royal Saxon residence of Old Windsor. The New Windsor castle was started about 1070 and the site has remained in the Crown's possession ever since.

Motte and bailey castles were the first defensive works to be constructed by the Normans. They consisted of an earthen mound, the motte, built with material dug out from its surrounding ditch. There was usually a timber palisade on the top of the motte. The bailey was a bank and ditch enclosure attached to the motte in which people lived and worked to service the owners of the motte. It is possible that Montem Mound in the middle of Slough north of the Thames was a precursor to or contemporary with the building of the New Windsor motte and bailey castle.

The castle at Windsor was the only conquest motte and bailey to be reconstructed as a stone castle in Berkshire. The motte at Windsor Castle would originally have been surmounted by a timber palisade which was replaced by the stone shell keep in the 12th century. Recent archaeological investigation

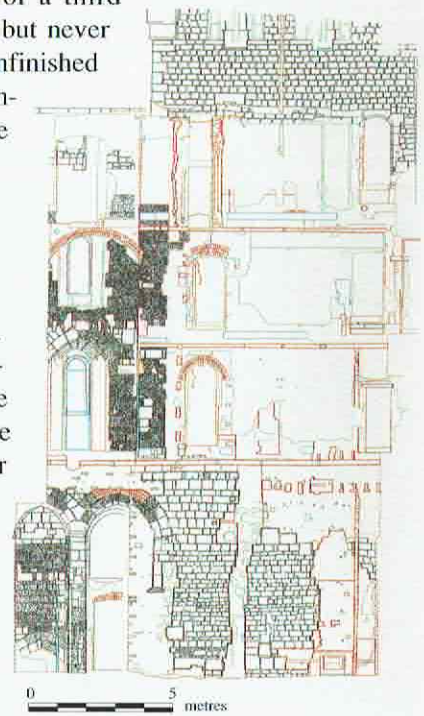
The footings of the original 12th century stone keep on the motte of Windsor Castle; to the right, the battered flint plinth of the first keep surmounted by the hearthstone plinth of the second keep; to the left the medieval mantlet wall topped by the thinner 17th century parapet of the Carronade. © EH.

Windsor Castle Kitchen: This hearth, buried about 1354, comprised a mixture of stone, including re-used architectural fragments, and pitched tile. © EH.

related to underpinning the keep and refurbishment of the existing buildings led to the identification of a version of the keep wall built earlier in the 12th century; its battered plinth foundation, lying outside the existing shell keep wall, has been traced for most of its circuit. The motte has suffered from stability problems almost from the moment it was built. Excavation also recorded a sequence of buildings on the top of the mound, within the shell keep, dating from the late 12th to the mid 14th century and including a kitchen. By the end of the 14th century there were four ranges of buildings around a central rectangular courtyard on top of the mound.

Following the 1992 fire at Windsor Castle a detailed survey of the fire and water damaged parts of the structure has been carried out. Quite extensive late 12th-13th century masonry has been exposed and recorded for the first time around the former Kings Cloister and in the Chester and Prince of Wales Towers. The kitchen also has fabric of this date and has been in continuous use as a kitchen for 800 years. In the middle of the 14th century Edward III had work done on the castle and extensive remains from this period have been recorded in the kitchen, kitchen gatehouse, St Georges Hall and the Prince of Wales Tower. Undoubtedly one of the most remarkable discoveries following the fire was the medieval roof to the kitchen. Dendrochronological dating of roof timbers indicate a construction date in the later half of the 15th century - sometime after 1479 by Edward IV - with some late 16th century repairs.

Most of the mottes and motte and bailey structures in Berkshire date to later periods of unrest particularly to the 12th century during the time of the power struggle between Stephen and Matilda. Mottes were reportedly built in Reading and Newbury during Stephen's reign (1135-54). The mound in the Forbury Gardens in Reading may be the site of the motte erected in the grounds of Reading Abbey in 1150 and destroyed in 1152. It was in the latter year that King Stephen stormed Newbury Castle. Although there is no direct archaeological evidence for a castle in Newbury a possible site has been suggested on the south side of the Kennet, in an area subsequently used for canal basins. A more radical suggestion is that Hamstead Marshall may be the site of what is recorded as Newbury Castle. At Hamstead Marshall two motte and bailey castles are situated on low spurs overlooking and controlling the Kennet Valley just below the site of the contemporary village of Hamstead Marshall. The larger of the two castles may have been built to replace the smaller one to the east. Some 800m east-south-east construction of a third motte was started but never completed. This unfinished structure has been interpreted as a siege work which may well relate to the period of anarchy when John Marshall supported the Empress Matilda against King Stephen. A possible motte stands on the north end of a spur overlooking the village of Hampstead Norreys in the Pang Valley. It is about 25m diameter and a little over 4m



A photogrammetic drawing of the west elevation of the Prince of Wales tower in Windsor Castle clearly showing 13th century windows. © EH.

*Impression of a seal of the de la Beche family. From the top it reads clockwise *:S:ISABELLE:DE:LA:BECH © TG/NM.*

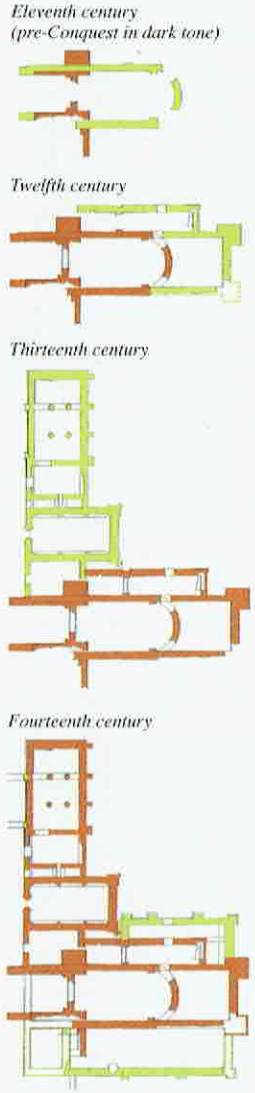
high, but there is no clear indication of its date. Following the anarchy and the royal disputes with the Barons leading up to the signing of Magna Carta in 1215 the Royal household went to considerable pains to discourage private ownership of castles or fortified sites. Indeed only two licenses to crenellate were issued in west Berkshire and both were granted to Lord Nicholas de la Beche in 1338 for his manors at Aldworth and Beaumys. Very little remains are visible at the former site but decorated floor tiles and other finds indicate the status of the site. Beaumys Castle is a subrectangular moated site still well-preserved even though the manor house itself was dismantled in 1420.

The rectangular moated site at Ufton Nervet is flanked by fishponds, two in line to the south-east of the base platform and one to the north-west. Excavation in the 19th century revealed timber piles for a bridge, a gateway and other foundations. In east Berkshire moated sites were related closely to the Royal Forest of Windsor and other royal holdings.

An unusual view of the moated site of Ufton Nervet during site clearance works under archaeological supervision. The corner of the moat is clearly visible with a fishpond beyond in the top right hand corner. © BG.

Donnington is the only other stone castle in Berkshire but this is very much a castle design of the 14th century. It was in 1386 that Richard II granted Richard de Adderbury a licence to "crenellate and fortify a castle at Donyngton Berks". Donnington is strategically located to control east-west traffic in the Kennet Valley and north-south traffic crossing the valley. It was originally built in stone and consisted of a sub-rectangular curtain wall with four round corner towers, two square intermediate towers and a substantial gatehouse with a range of internal buildings around a rectangular courtyard.

Abbeys

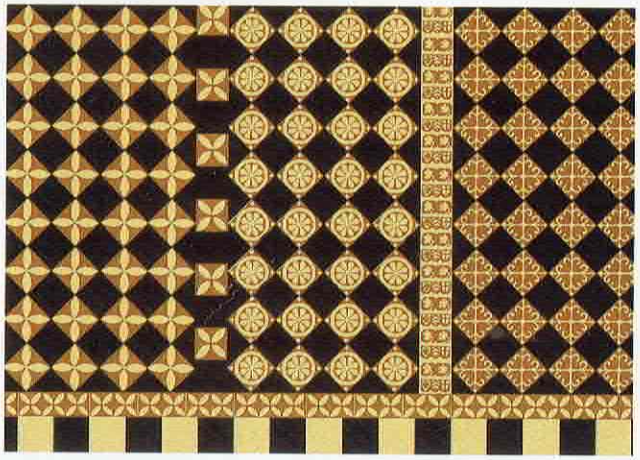


The development of the excavated part of St Mary's Priory at Hurley.

The evidence for pre-Norman ecclesiastical buildings comes purely from documents, but the majority of the monastic houses and monasteries in Berkshire were founded after the Norman Conquest.

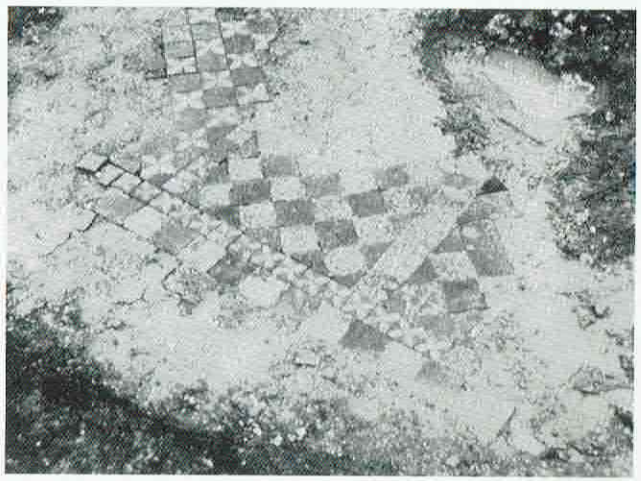
Ankerwycke is about one kilometre south of Wraysbury on the east bank of the Thames opposite Runnymede. In 1160 the Benedictine Nunnery of St Mary Magdalene was established at Ankerwycke. It was never a rich establishment and the visible remains today comprise two walls of standing masonry of 13th-15th century date and two fishponds. Recent investigation as part of a programme of site consolidation and management has shown that the ground levels of the main part of the site have been raised by about a metre at some time since the 16th century, thus obscuring earthwork details of the nunnery buildings.

The Abbey at Bisham and the Priory at Hurley are just two kilometres apart on the south bank of the Thames. The Benedectine Priory at Hurley was established in 1086 and occupies a 200 acre precinct which was defined by a moat. It is possible that there was an earlier pre-Norman church on the site. The Priory had a conventional arrangement with a cloister garth with the priory church on the south and the refectory to the north. The east side of the cloister was occupied by the chapter house in line with the north transepts of the church, and dormitory. The refectory buildings still stand and are used for private residential accommodation. Within the moated area two fishponds still survive. Excavation in the 1930s revealed considerable details of the plan and sequence of development of the priory buildings including a decorated tiled floor in the church. In the north aisle the tiles were laid in narrow panels divided by lines of single patterned tiles. Within each panel the tiles were laid diagonally, patterned and black ones alternating. Only small patches of tiled pavements survived in the cloisters where the tiles had been laid in a continuous block.



Computer generated reconstruction of a tiled pavement in the north aisle of the church at St Mary's Priory.

Bisham Abbey has the rare distinction of being occupied successively by three different monastic orders. The first institution for the military Knights Templars was founded in the reign of King Stephen (1135-54) and survived until 1307 when the order was dissolved. In 1337 an Augustinian Priory was established which lasted until its dissolution by Henry VIII in 1536. Very unusually a Benedictine Abbey was founded in 1537 after the dissolution but only survived for a year. The site then passed into private ownership and today is in the control of the National Sports Centre. The site is enclosed by a moat and the great hall of the Templars structure still survives as well as a late medieval circular dovecote, tithe barn and grange.



St Mary's Priory Hurley, tile pavement in the north aisle as excavated. (Reproduced from The Berkshire Archaeological Journal, 1938).

A 12th century capital from the cloisters of Reading Abbey. © TG/RM.

Augustinian Priories were also founded at Poughley now under RAF Welford and at Sandleford south of Newbury. No substantial remains survive at the former but the chapel at Sandleford Priory survives as a school building.

Reading Abbey was founded by Henry I in 1121 "for the salvation of my soul, and the souls of King William, my father and of King William, my brother, and Queen Maud, my wife and all my ancestors and successors". With such strong royal patronage Reading Abbey not only dominated the town but also became one of the richest religious houses in England. The enormous abbey church, only 50 feet shorter than St Paul's Cathedral, lies under the south-east corner of the Forbury Gardens and Abbots Walk to the south with the east end extending under the prison. The cloisters were to the south of the church and contained elaborately decorated tiled pavements and exquisitely carved capitals on the columns supporting the cloister roof. The Abbey precinct extended from the Forbury to the river Kennet. In 1539 at the Dissolution the last Abbot of Reading, after being found guilty of high treason by Henry VIII was dragged through the streets of Reading and hanged, drawn and quartered in front of the Abbey church. Within ten years looters had started to use the Abbey as a quarry for building materials and by 1642 most of the church and cloisters had been reduced to foundation level. Some of the columns from the Abbey were used to roof the Holy Brook near Bridge Street.

Decorated tiles from Reading Abbey. © TG/RM.

Reading Abbey from the air showing excavations on the Abbey wharf. © WA.

The visible remains of the Abbey today are part of the south transept, the chapter house, the reredorter (the monks' dormitory) an arch from the Abbey mill and the reconstructed Abbey gateway.

Rural Settlement

Rural settlements comprise villages, smaller settlements and farms. During most of the Middle Ages much of East Berkshire was part of the Royal Forest of Windsor and in the early 13th century a large part of the county was known as the Forest of Berkshire. Royal Forests had their own royal jurisdiction applied through the Forest Law. Within the royal forests were village communities and cultivated lands. In 1227 there was extensive forest clearance and many new parks were created such as Aldermaston and Upton. In the Kennet Valley it is thought that open fields stretched along both sides of the river with meadow on the floodplain. The plateau gravels may not have been cultivated at this time. About 70 existing villages have their origins in the Middle Ages, some of them are mentioned in the Domesday Book of 1086.

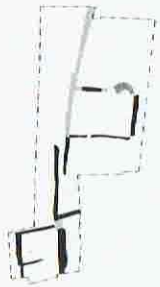
The only investigations into rural medieval settlements have been the recognition of a medieval village boundary at Peasemore and at Meales Farm, Sulhamstead. Meales Farm is thought to be the site of the medieval manor of Meales around which a watching brief and excavation recorded a number of ditches of medieval date. As there has been so little excavation of rural medieval settlement it is difficult to assess the impact on rural settlement of the Black Death in 1348-9. The epidemic was only one of several factors leading to a reduction in the rural population in the 14th century.

Towns of Medieval Berkshire

A dozen sites have been classified as medieval towns of which Old Windsor was predominantly a Saxon settlement. In the last twenty years there have been minor archaeological investigations in Wokingham and major ones in Newbury, Reading and Windsor.

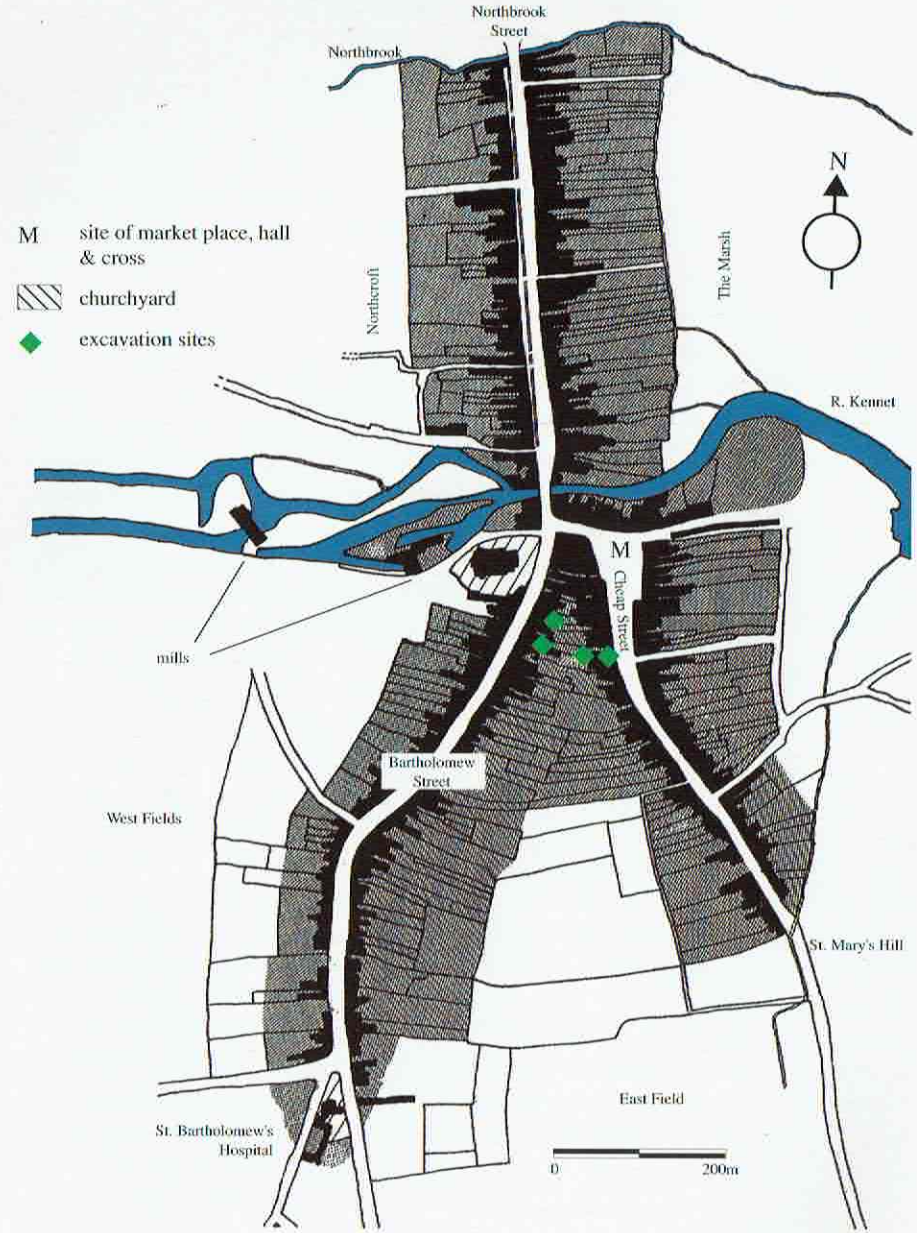
The plan of medieval Newbury is an inverted Y with Northbrook Street as the upright and Cheap Street and Bartholomew Street as the arms, and the junction at the crossing of the river Kennet. The earlier parts of the town are likely to have been on the south by the church and the market place. The main archaeological evidence comes from excavations on Cheap Street and Bartholomew Street and demonstrates how adjoining properties developed differently. Occupation on Bartholomew Street had started by the late 11th century implying that this was part of the original layout of the town. At this stage Cheap Street seems to have been marshy and occupation may not have started until the 12th century. In Bartholomew Street parts of two adjoining properties have been investigated. Both were occupied in the 11th-12th centuries with timber buildings of post-hole construction but by the late 12th century there is no evidence for a building on the southern property. In the late 13th-14th century buildings were constructed on dwarf walls at the front of both properties and other structures were briefly erected at the rear. From the 15th century onwards buildings covered the whole of the northern property. Again in Cheap Street the excavation was of two plots. The earliest archaeological evidence was for pits, post-holes and two grain dryers with indications of periodic flooding. In the middle of the 14th century a stone wall divided the site into northern and southern plots and building levels were raised by dumping gravel. On the southern plot a single roomed structure was built while the northern property was developed with a substantial timber building on dwarf

Developments of adjacent plots in Cheap Street, Newbury (after Wessex Archaeology).



14th - 15th century

15th - 17th century



Medieval Newbury, after Astill

(extent of medieval town shown in grey)

Richly carved late Medieval ceiling bosses from the former Kings Head Inn, Market Place, Newbury. © TG/NM.

The silver seal and its impression of Geoffrey the Barber. © TG/NM.

walls with a series of peg tile hearths and ovens to the rear. In the mid 15th century the northern property was extended to the rear and the southern building enlarged.

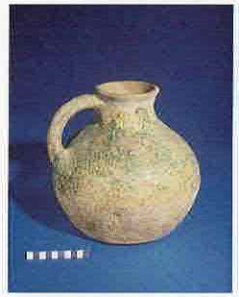
The expansion of sites in both Cheap Street and Bartholomew Street about the middle of the 14th century seems to reflect an improvement in the town's fortune culminating in its economic prosperity in the late 15th and 16th centuries. This successful period was based on wool and cloth production from which some merchants became prosperous. The best known of these was John Smallwood, "Jack of Newbury", whose house was one of many adorned with richly carved woodwork, in a local tradition of woodcarving.

Tools involved in the wool and textile industry have been discovered in both Cheap Street and Bartholomew Street in the form of bone points - thread pickers - and spindle whorls. One of the trades that must have been carried out in Newbury was hairdressing and in 1979 a silver seal

Imaginative reconstruction of the merchants house and Windsor in the late 12th century. © WA-LJ.

matrix was discovered at Speen Moor. The seal shows a pair of loop-handled scissors surrounded by the legend + SIGILL: GALFRIDI: LE: BARBUR - the seal of Geoffrey the Barber. The style of lettering dates it to the late 13th or early 14th century. This unusual silver seal may be one of the earliest depictions of a pair of scissors.

In Windsor a Thames-side site, just upstream from the Eton bridge, was excavated in the 1980s. Sometime between about 1175 and 1200 a substantial merchants house was constructed. Located on the river bank it was approached from the town side by a causeway between two waterfilled ditches. The house, with foundations 1.4m wide, was at least partly stone built. Only part of the building lay within the area available for excavation but it is estimated that it was 28.5m long and 15m wide. It was not possible to excavate the Thames side of the house but on the town side there was an external staircase and an integral garderobe or latrine shaft. This may be the earliest integral garderobe recorded in England and as such is a reflection of the status and importance of the house and its owner. The building was demolished in the early 13th century, certainly by 1250. It is possible that the building was a victim of the siege of Windsor Castle in 1216.



Later medieval pottery from Reading. © TG/RM.

Medieval wooden bowl from Reading. © TG/RM.

Apart from being an important item of everyday use pottery can demonstrate various trade contacts. At Newbury pottery in the 11th and 14th centuries seems to have been made in the area of Savernake Forest and traded up and down the Kennet Valley between Reading and Marlborough. From the late 14th and 15th centuries the use of pottery produced on the borders of Surrey and Hampshire increased. In Reading pottery from the 11th - 14th centuries comes from Savernake but there is also a sandy pottery type made somewhere between Oxford and Reading. Another pottery type found in Reading and which occurred also in Newbury and Oxford is believed to have been produced in the area between the three towns. A recently discovered kiln at Ashampstead seems to be the source of the latter pottery. Three sherds found in Reading come from the Lavestock Kiln, Salisbury. At Windsor the largest single source is the local kilns at Camley Gardens, Maidenhead which produced pottery in the 13th and 14th centuries. A range of pottery produced from in and around London was traded to Windsor and one shelly pottery type from London has been found at Windsor and as far up-river as Henley. In the 11th-13th centuries, pottery found in Newbury came from sources to the west, at Reading from sources to the north-west and at Windsor predominantly from London and the east. Imported continental pottery is rare: three 12th century sherds from the Ardennes region have been discovered in Reading, two sherds from the Saintes region and five from Rouen have been discovered in Windsor, and in Newbury one sherd from Saintes.

Away from the Abbey archaeological investigations in medieval Reading have mainly concentrated on sites along the river Kennet with the exception in 1995 of a small site on Friar Street where floors and walls of buildings fronting the medieval street were uncovered. At the Abbey Wharves excavations showed that not only the Holy Brook flowed into the Kennet but also another watercourse which can be regarded as an overflow channel for the Abbey Mill. The excavation showed how the bank of the Kennet had been stabilised and then pushed

General view of the Reading Abbey waterfront excavation looking across the river Kennet. The post and wattle waterfront in the foreground was built after 1314-15 with the post and plank structure constructed in 1395-96 and repaired after 1407-11. The dark material in the section reflects a period of commercial disuse following the dissolution of the monasteries. © WA.

eastwards from the 12th century to its present course. A series of timber waterfronts had been constructed with rubbish dumped behind to provide the stable base for each wharf. In medieval times one of the major alterations and realignments involved a waterfront of paired posts, mainly oak, with wattle cladding, which was excavated for 27 metres. Dendrochronology for two of the posts indicates a felling date of about 1314-15. Sometime after 1395-96 a post and plank revetment was erected 1.2m east of the wattle example. The sawn planks were up to 3m long, 0.4m wide and 0.05m thick. Dendrochronology shows that this waterfront was repaired after 1407-11. The Holy Brook by the Abbey Stables was channelled between timber revetments. Over 1400 items of leather were collected from the Abbey Wharf excavations and a high proportion of the medieval leather spanned the period from the early 14th century to the Dissolution in 1539. There were some pieces of primary waste - unusable discarded pieces from the hide - including pieces of belly skin with udder, and there were also pieces of secondary waste from the cutting and trimming of shoe pieces. From this period there were over 100 soles from shoes and various uppers included one piece ankle boots, low cut shoes with or without fastenings and front and side lacing shoes. A fragment of a knife sheath was also recovered.

Fish bones show that not only freshwater fish such as stickleback, burbot and bullhead were to be found in Reading but that marine fish were also imported from the coast - bones were recovered of shark, ray, conger eel, cod, whiting, haddock, ling, gurnard and flat fish. Examination of the oyster shells from the Abbey wharves suggests that oysters were farmed at 3-4 years age and came from the coast of East Anglia, whence they could be easily moved inland up the river Thames.

In the Bridge Street area of Reading the north bank of one of the channels of the river was revetted in the 12th and early 13th centuries. The bank was moved 5m south in the later 13th or early 14th centuries.

The excavations along the river Kennet in Reading also looked at the archaeology of the post-medieval town. Near Bridge Street investigation close to the site of the Courage Brewery uncovered tanning pits and at the Abbey wharves the development of the Kennet and Avon Navigation and Canal were investigated.

In 1715 the Kennet Navigation Act was passed with the support of towns such as Newbury and Trowbridge. The idea was to make the Kennet navigable as far as Newbury. By this time the medieval patterns of urban and rural settlement were consolidated and the Industrial Revolution was about to happen. The Kennet & Avon canal forms an important part of the industrial archaeology of the county which will be considered in the final publication in this series.

15th century spur found during excavations of Reading Abbey waterfront. © TG/RM.

Berkshire County Council runs a campaign to conserve and enhance the county's environment and to encourage others to do the same, under the banner of *"Greening Beautiful Berkshire"*. The campaign promotes a range of initiatives concerned with:

Reducing pollution, including litter

*

Helping to conserve global resources

*

Promoting environmental understanding

*

Making Berkshire's environment safe, diverse and attractive

For further information about the *"Greening Beautiful Berkshire"* campaign please contact County Environment at Berkshire County Council, Shire Hall, Shinfield Park, Reading, RG2 9XA (Tel. 01734 234158).

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