"From Norman estate centre to Angevin Town": Kingston upon Thames urban origins

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Introduction

Extensive archaeological excavation in and around Kingston town centre has revealed little evidence for 10th- or 11th-century settlement,[1] while the 12th and 13th centuries are relatively well represented. In particular, the major archaeological excavations at the Horsefair, north of the modern Kingston Bridge,[2] and on the Charter Quay site,[3] between Kingston market place and the River Thames, revealed no evidence of late Anglo-Saxon or early Norman activity. The evidence from these excavations is instead for mid- to late-12th-century colonisation and development of previously undeveloped land.

Such archaeological evidence as we have for the late Anglo-Saxon and early Norman periods appears to be consistent with the limited documentary evidence. While Kingston was an important royal estate centre in the 10th and 11th centuries, and is recorded as such in Domesday Book,[4] it was clearly not a town.[5] Kingston's urban origins can now be seen as belonging in the mid- to late-12th century, when it can be argued that key elements of Kingston's urban topography, its bridges and Market Place, were grafted onto the earlier estate centre, and the parish church of All Saints was comprehensively rebuilt. So rapid is the settlement's economic growth in the 2nd half of the 12th century, that the suspicion must be that much of this development was artificially stimulated, in order to generate additional revenue for the major landholder, the Crown.

The urban origins of Kingston are therefore wholly consistent with the pattern of urbanisation seen across much of southern and central England between the Norman Conquest and the mid-13th century.[6]

The Norman estate centre

In the Domesday Survey of 1086 Kingston appears as the estate centre for a vast agricultural land holding, as well as for the Hundred of Kingston. The estate administered from Kingston had a relatively large population, but a significant proportion of these would have lived in the many satellite settlements scattered throughout the land holding.[7] There is therefore no clear documentary evidence for a substantial population at Kingston itself in 1086.

We know from archaeological evidence that what is now the central core of Kingston in the late 11th century lay on a large low gravel island.[8] This island was bounded on the east and south by channels of the River Hogsmill, on the west by the River Thames and on the north by braided channels associated with the Hogsmill, Downhall Ditch and Latchmere Stream. On the north, east and south of the island, extending around the watercourses, were extensive areas of low-lying marsh though the drainage of these had by this time commenced.[9] In the late 11th century the River Thames at Kingston was significantly wider than now, extending inland to the east of the modern river bank by some 75m at its confluence with the Hogsmill, some 50m in the area of Bishops Hall and around 25m in the area of Horsefair and Turks Boatyard.[10] The late-11th-century Thames at Kingston appears to have been significantly shallower than the modern river, though it is unclear if the river was tidal here at this time.

Few elements within Kingston's modern urban topography can be suggested as having an origin before 1100. One which possibly can is the churchyard of the Parish church of All Saints (formerly All Hallows). Within the churchyard, until the 18th century, stood a small Romanesque building, then in use as the Chapel of St Mary and attached to the southern side of the existing parish church of All Saints. The chapel was provided with a massive western doorway which stylistically dates the building to before 1100.[11]

The churchyard, which lies at the centre of Kingston was originally very much larger than

today and late medieval and post-medieval encroachment can be suggested on the basis of cartographic evidence on its eastern, southern, western and north-western sides. On the north-west of the churchyard this encroachment has been proved archaeologically (Fig. 1).[12]

A church is recorded at Kingston in the Domesday Survey which could perhaps have been the building which we now know as St Mary's Chapel. Alternatively, the Domesday Church may have been a building on the site of the existing and adjacent All Saints Church. It has been argued on post-conquest evidence that Kingston possessed a powerful early minster church,[13] and it is difficult to equate such a church with St Mary's Chapel. One possibility is that for some reason the minster church had been destroyed or demolished before 1100 (perhaps in the Viking wars of the late 10th and early 11th centuries) and replaced with a smaller structure. This was the interpretation of W. E. St Lawrence Finny who excavated St Mary's Chapel in 1926.[14] The identification of All Saints with the site of the Domesday Church (and perhaps with the

earlier minster) may however be supported by the recovery of a reused 10th- or 11th-century cross fragment from inside the existing building.[15] Finny had believed this cross-fragment to date from the 9th century. It is possible therefore that a precursor to All Saints together with St Mary's chapel lay at the core of the Norman estate centre.[16]

West of All Saints churchyard, on a north-south alignment parallel to the Thames, runs Thames Street. At 29 Thames Street archaeological investigations revealed an 8th- to 10th-century boundary ditch (which survived as a property boundary into the post-medieval period) running at right angles between the River and Thames Street.[17] This feature may indicate both that Thames Street had originated by the 10th century and that the area between it and the River Thames was at least partly settled. It can perhaps be conjectured that Thames Street continued southwards towards the (by this date) well-established town of Guildford. Whether any of the other roads in Kingston predate 1100 is wholly unclear.
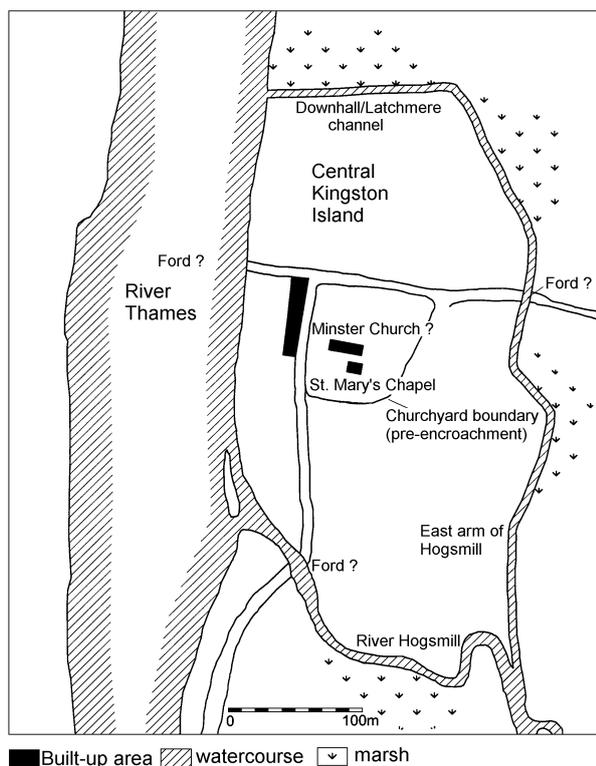
Twelfth-century urban expansion and ecclesiastical reconstruction

In 1100, therefore, the central Kingston island comprised a relatively narrow north-south aligned rectangle of land surrounded on all sides by watercourses and marsh. At the centre of this island may have lain an estate centre enclosure, now represented by All Saints churchyard, and at the centre of the enclosure the building which became the chapel of St Mary, with probably a separate church alongside. There may have been a small settlement between the estate enclosure and the Thames, with a road running southwards to Guildford.

The form of pre-12th-century access to the central Kingston island is unknown. In the absence of any evidence we can only conjecture that the surrounding watercourses were crossed by fords. Even the Thames, the largest of the watercourses surrounding Kingston, was fordable until the early modern period.

These is no documentary evidence for Kingston Bridge over the River Thames before 1193. In the Pipe Roll for the year ending Michaelmas 1193

Fig. 1: reconstruction of the Norman Estate Centre at Kingston

Downhall/Latchmere channel

Central Kingston Island

Ford ?

River Thames

Ford ?

Minster Church ?

St. Mary's Chapel

Churchyard boundary (pre-encroachment)

East arm of Hogsmill

Ford ?

River Hogsmill

0   100m

■ Built-up area ▨ watercourse ▾ marsh

the Sheriff of Surrey, accounting to the exchequer for the 'farm' or annual rent of the county, deducts from it £2 13s 6d, spent by him, by the king's order, on the repair of Kingston Bridge when the king's army was there. Clearly this is a repair to an existing structure. Evidence from the 1985-87 archaeological excavation of the bridge at the Horsefair provides a dendrochronological date for one of the timber piles of 1170 which most probably represents the first construction of the Bridge.[18]

Kingston Bridge carried the main road into the settlement from the west. We cannot be certain of the mid-river form of Kingston Bridge in the 12th century. Archaeological excavation has shown that in its earliest form, the Bridge was approached by a masonry and earth causeway on the Kingston bank,[19] and this may have been the case on the Hampton Wick bank also, but the evidence is unclear.[20] As first constructed, the Kingston side of the bridge ran from its approach causeway out over four masonry piers, but there is no clear evidence for the superstructure. Documentary evidence shows that the main structure of the bridge was timber from at least the early 16th century and this seems likely to have also been the case in the late 12th.[21] Early modern engravings of Kingston Bridge before its replacement in 1826-27 show the mid-river bridge as a low timber structure with narrow, irregularly spaced piers. Manning and Bray recorded a description of the bridge in the early 19th century.[22]

"The Bridge in its present state, is an ordinary structure of timbers so inartificially put together, as would warrant us in pronouncing that, whatever changes it hath undergone in its materials, from frequent repairs, there has been no deviation from the plan on which it was originally built. The supporters, which are more than twenty in number, on each side, occupy the space of a hundred and twenty six yards exclusive of about forty yards of masonry employed at both ends."

The construction of Kingston Bridge in the later 12th century may have formed an obstacle to the passage of larger vessels between London and riverside settlements upstream, such as Windsor. Consequently the bridge's construction may have helped establish Kingston's role as an inland port,

by making it an unavoidable transhipment point for larger cargos being carried up and down the Thames. The building of Kingston Bridge certainly made Kingston a strategically important point from the late 12th century as the bridge was the first crossing point above London until the construction of Putney Bridge in 1727-29.

Broadly contemporary with the earliest phase of Kingston Bridge is the still extant Clattern Bridge which crosses the River Hogsmill at the southern end of Kingston Market Place, carrying the Guildford Road into Kingston from the south. Although not mentioned before 1293 this bridge contains late twelfth century fabric.[23]

Two other medieval bridges are recorded at Kingston.[24] They are *Bowebridge* or *Stonebridge*, first recorded in 1383, which carried the main road into the town from the east; and *Barre Bridge,* first recorded in 1355, which carried the main road into the town from the north. Neither Bowebridge or Barre Bridge now exist, and we cannot be certain at what date these two bridges were originally constructed. It is however tempting to speculate that, like Kingston Bridge
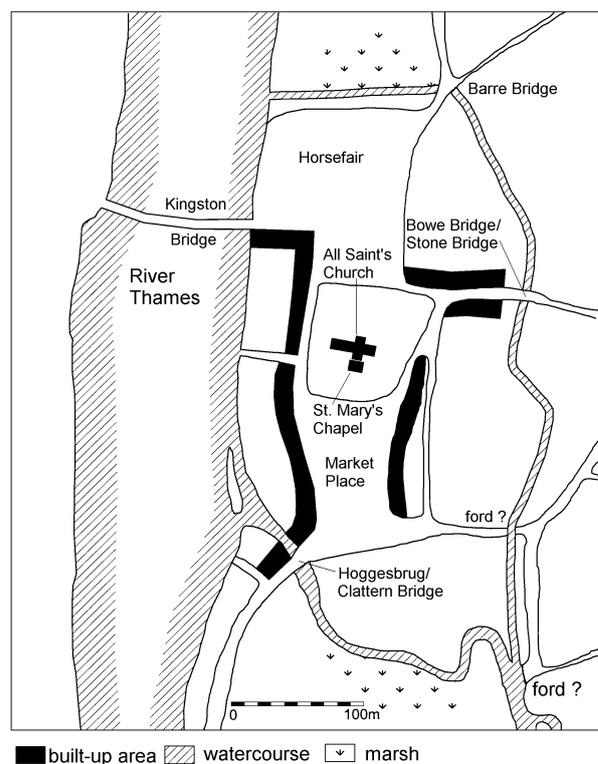

Fig. 2: reconstruction of the town of Kingston *c.* **1200, based on the Kingston tithe map**
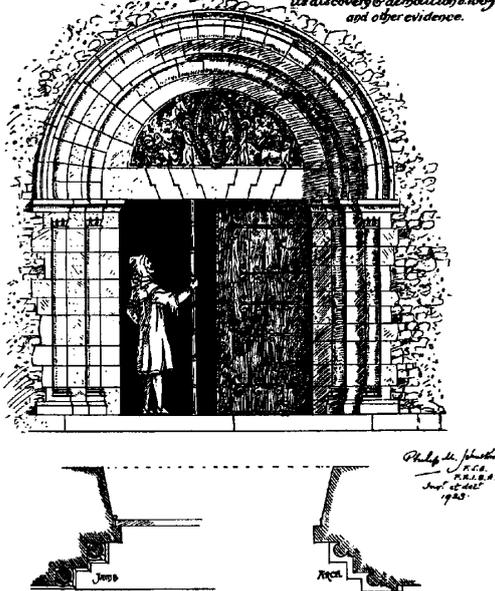
Fig. 3: reconstruction of late-12th-century arch, west end of All Saints Church, by Philip Mainwaring Johnson, 1926

and Clattern Bridge, they were broadly contemporary constructions of the later 12th century.

The four roads carried by the four medieval bridges at Kingston converge onto the central Kingston island. The construction of the bridges clearly facilitated access to the interior of the is-land over the surrounding watercourses and must have enhanced the opportunities for economic development.

Kingston Market Place, south of All Saints churchyard, like Kingston Bridge and Clattern Bridge also appears to have originated in the later 12th century, although first recorded in 1242.[25] The archaeological excavations at Charter Quay, Kingston[26] indicated that the western frontage of the Market Place was being developed (from an apparently virgin site) no earlier than the mid-12th century.

As with the churchyard, the extent of the Market Place has probably been much reduced by late medieval and post-medieval encroachment, and perhaps originally extended from the old southern limits of the churchyard on the north, down to the northern bank of the River Hogsmill at Clattern
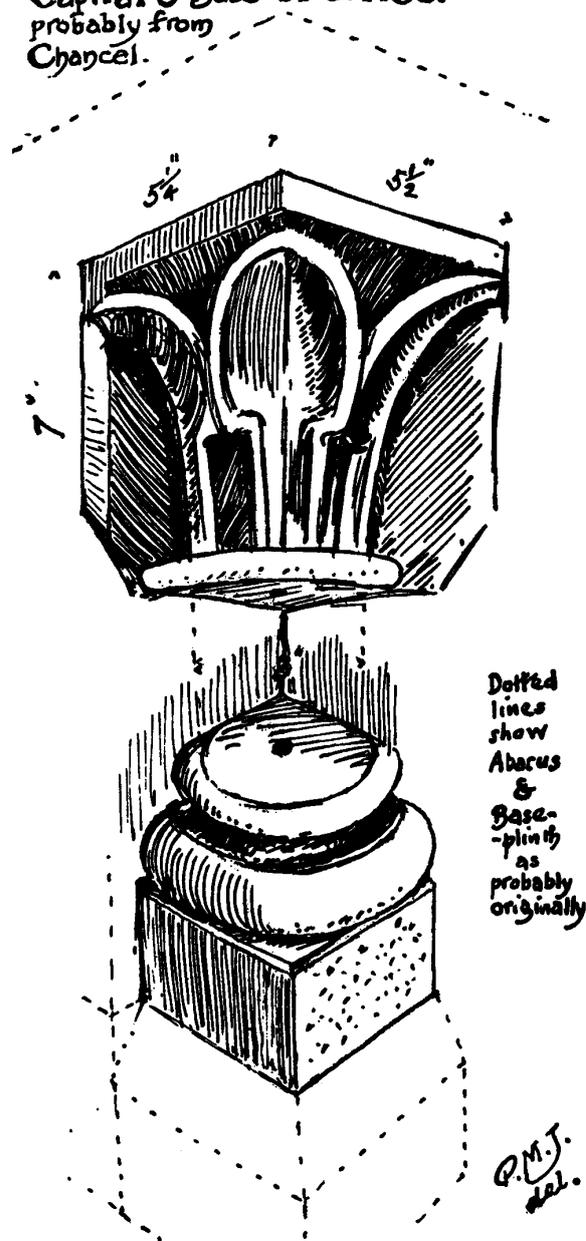

Fig. 4: late-12th-century capital, by Philip Mainwaring Johnson, 1926

Bridge on the south, and from a point approximately 10m west of the modern Market Place frontage on the west to the line of what is now the eastern side of Apple Market on the east (Fig. 2).

To the north of All Saints churchyard, running northwards to the Downhall ditch and
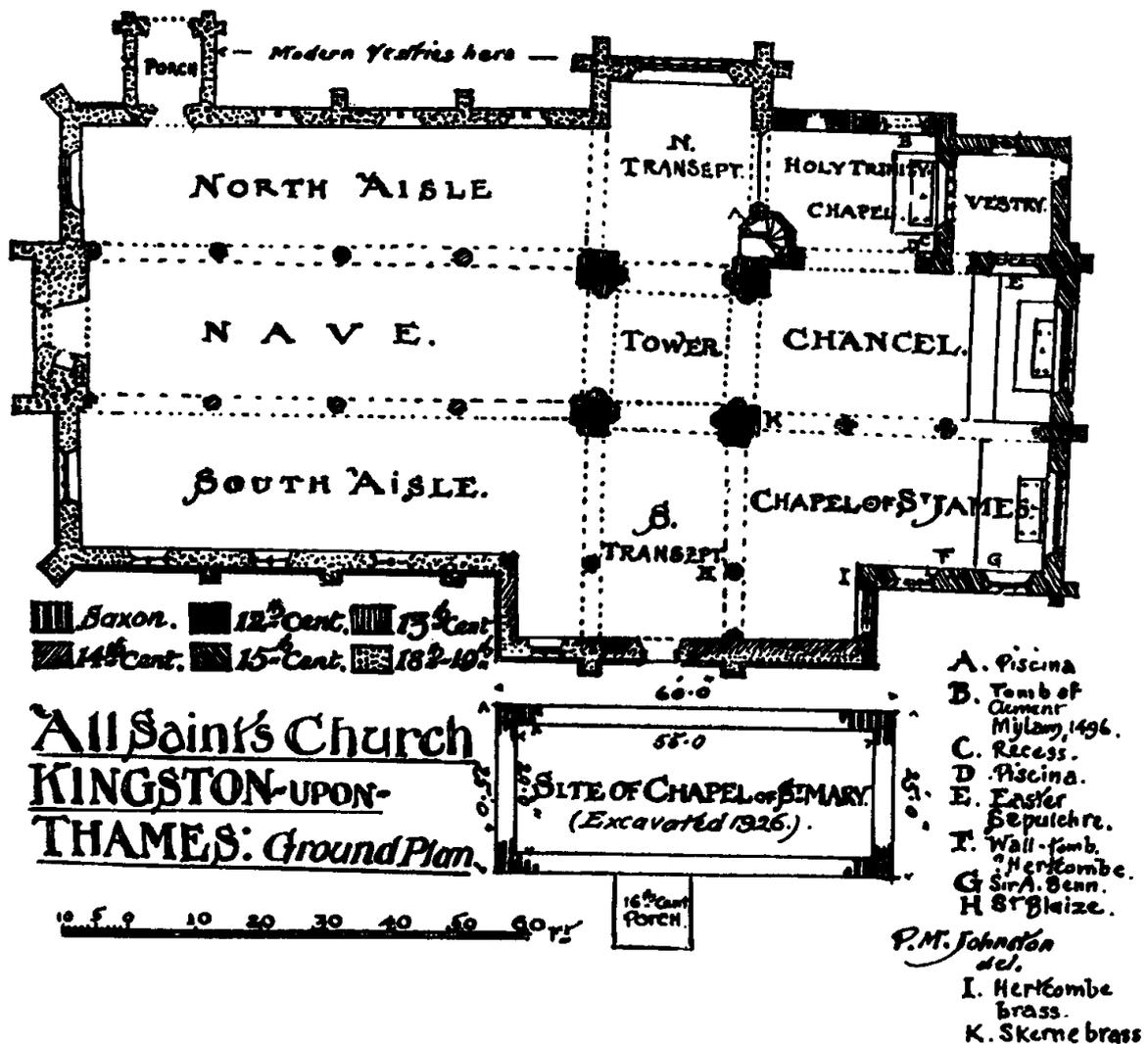
NORTH AISLE

NAVE.

SOUTH AISLE.

N. TRANSEPT. **HOLY TRINITY CHAPEL.** **VESTRY.**

TOWER. **CHANCEL.**

S. TRANSEPT. **CHAPEL OF ST JAMES.**

Porch

— Modern Vestries here —

Saxon. 12ᵗʰ Cent. 13ᵗʰ Cent.
14ᵗʰ Cent. 15ᵗʰ Cent. 18ᵗʰ-19ᵗʰ

All Saints Church
KINGSTON-UPON-
THAMES: Ground Plan.

60·0

55·0

SITE OF CHAPEL of St MARY
(Excavated 1926).

16ᵗʰ Cent.
Porch

A. Piscina
B. Tomb of Clement Mylaw, 1496.
C. Recess.
D. Piscina.
E. Easter Sepulchre.
F. Wall-tomb, "Hertcombe.
G. SirA.Benn.
H. St Blaize.

P.M. Johnston del.

I. Hertcombe brass.
K. Skerne brass

Fig. 5: All Saints ground plan by Philip Mainwaring Johnson, 1926

sandwiched between the River Thames on the west and the eastern arm of the River Hogsmill on the east, lay a rectangular block of land later known as the Horsefair. The Horsefair excavations show that the first phase of Kingston Bridge, and a similarly-orientated late-12th-century ditch were the earliest features within what had previously been undeveloped land. A number of fair activities appear to have been held here in the late medieval and early post-medieval periods, and it is possible that this space may also have been deliberately laid out in the late 12th century, and that it was originally intended for market or fair functions.

Documentary evidence indicates that Henry I gave the parish church at Kingston to Gilbert the Sheriff, who in turn granted it before 1130 to Merton Priory.[27] On the available evidence this parish church would appear to have been a precursor of the existing parish church of All Saints, but on the same site.

The earliest fabric known to have existed, *in situ*, within All Saints church was a late (and much altered) Romanesque arch at the western end of the Nave. Although dismantled during the 1862-6 restoration of the church, a surviving early photograph[28] indicates a probable date of 1160-

1180 for this feature.[29] A reconstruction drawing was made by Philip Mainwaring Johnson in 1926 (Fig. 3), who in the same paper also recorded some contemporary stonework from the church (Fig. 4).[30] Although the earliest visible fabric in the tower of All Saints is 13th-century, it has been suggested that elements of an earlier building may be encapsulated in the core of the later structure.[31]

Mainwaring Johnson was the first to suggest that the 12th-century church had a nave co-terminus with the existing nave, and that the existing tower was a replacement of a 12th-century structure, though since the 19th century it has been suggested that in its earliest form All Saints church was cruciform in shape with a chancel, transepts and a narrow, aisle-less nave. If these interpretations are correct then Kingston's parish church may have been rebuilt on a massive scale in the later twelfth century (Fig. 5).

Elements of urban planning?

The construction in the later 12th century of Kingston Bridge over the Thames and Clattern Bridge over the Hogsmill would have involved a considerable initial outlay of capital, together with the long term commitment of resources for maintenance and management. If the four medieval bridges at Kingston were all constructed at broadly one and the same time then the expense involved would have been prodigious. Archaeological evidence indicates that the market, one of the chief factors of Kingston's medieval economy, was being developed from the mid-12th century onwards while the Horsefair, another area which may have had market or fair functions, was being established at or around the same time. Contemporary with this, at the centre of the central Kingston island, All Saints parish church was apparently undergoing a large scale reconstruction, at what must have been considerable cost.

Are all these factors coincidental arising from organic growth within an existing settlement or are we witnessing the impact of outside influences?

In the case of All Saints the later-12th-century rebuilding of the church can be attributed to the dynamic impact of Merton Abbey's acquisition of this church. In the case of the bridges and market, we cannot know for certain. However, it is not impossible that these features were deliberately contrived elements of urban planning, added as an investment to the earlier royal estate centre in order to stimulate economic growth and thereby maximise its potential to generate revenue for the Crown. The order of the King to the Sheriff to arrange for the repair of Kingston Bridge in 1193, might perhaps be seen as the safeguarding of this investment rather than an act of generosity. If the emergence of Kingston as a town in the 12th century was planned then the exercise was successful. In 1086 the whole vast agricultural estate of which Kingston was simply the centre was valued at £30. In 1200 in the first recorded charter to the town of Kingston, the annual rent paid by the men of the town (the area effectively of the central Kingston island) directly to the exchequer was £40.

1. D. Hawkins 'Anglo-Saxon Kingston: a shifting pattern of settlement' *London Archaeol* **8**, no 10 (1998) 271-8.
2. G. Potter 'The Medieval Bridge and Waterfront at Kingston upon Thames' *in* G. L. Good, R. H. Jones, M. W. Ponsford (eds) *Waterfront Archaeology* CBA Res Rep 74 (1988) 140.
3. Wessex Archaeology. Monograph; forthcoming.
4. *Domesday Book, Surrey* (ed.) John Morris (1975) 30c.
5. S. Butters *The Book of Kingston* (1995) 40-1.
6. R. Bartlett *England under the Norman and Angevin Kings, 1075-1225* (2000) 331-5.
7. *Op cit* fn 4; *op cit* fn 5, 39-40.
8. *Op cit* fn 1, Fig. 1, 271.
9. 'Archaeology in Surrey, 1976-78' *Surrey Archaeol Collect* **72** (1980) 245; 'Two recent excavations at Kingston upon Thames' Pre-Construct Archaeology. *Surrey Archaeol Collect*, forthcoming.
10. C. Phillpotts *The Charter Quay site, Kingston*, unpublished interim documentary research report; *op cit* fn 3; *op cit* fn 2; D. Hawkins *Archaeological investigations at the Steadfast Sea Cadets site, Kingston*, unpublished report.
11. *Op cit* fn 1, Fig. 2, 274.

12. The Archaeological Gazetteer Series Vol 2. *Archaeology in Greater London, 1965-90; a guide to records of excavation by the Museum of London* A. Thompson, A. Westman and T. Dyson (eds) Museum of London (1998) 118, CLA88.

13. J. Blair *Early Medieval Surrey, landholding, church and settlement before 1300* (1991) 20.

14. W. E. St Lawrence Finny 'The Church of the Saxon Coronations at Kingston' *Trans South Eastern Union of Scientific Soc, published in the south eastern Naturalist and Antiquary* (1941), 16.

15. D. Tweddle, M. Biddle, B Kjolbye Biddle *Corpus of Anglo Saxon Stone Sculpture Vol IV, SE England* British Academy (1995), 146.

16. *Op cit* fn 1, 278.

17. *Op cit* fn 9a.

18. *Op cit* fn 2.

19. *Op cit* fn 2.

20. *Op cit* fn 12, 169, HAW89.

21. *Op cit* fn 2, 141.

22. O. Manning and W. Bray *The history and antiquities of the County of Surrey* (1804-14) Volume 1, 346.

23. I. Nairn, N. Pevsner and B. Cherry *The Buildings of England. Surrey* (2002) 334.

24. J. Wakeford *Kingston's past rediscovered* (1990) 'Within the Four Bridges of Kingston', 10-16.

25. *Victoria County History Surrey* Vol III (1911) 501.

26. *Op cit* fn 3.

27. *Op cit* fn 13, 99.

28. *Op cit* fn 5, 44 bottom left illustration.

29. *Pers. comms.* Andrew Harris, Jonathan Edis, Nick Doggett.

30. P. M. Johnson 'The Parish Church of All Saints, Kingston upon Thames' *J Brit Archaeol Assoc* **32** (1926) 232-8.

31. *Op cit* fn 30, 237; *op cit* fn 5, 42; L. W. Cowie *A History of the Parish Church of Kingston upon Thames* (undated

Excavations and post-excavation work

London Archaeological Archive and Research Centre, Mortimer Wheeler House, 46 Eagle Wharf Road, London N1 7EE. Contact Archive Manager, John Shepherd (020 7566 9317).

Croydon & District, processing and cataloguing of excavated and museum collections every Tuesday throughout the year. Archaeological reference collections of pottery fabrics, domestic animal bones, clay tobacco pipes and glass ware also available for comparative work. Enquiries to Jim Davison, 28 Blenheim Park Road, South Croydon, CR2 6BB.

Borough of Greenwich. Cataloguing of excavated and other archaeological material, the majority from sites within the Borough. Contact Greenwich Borough Museum, 232 Plumstead High Street, SE18 1JT (020 8855 3240).

Hammersmith & Fulham, by Fulham Archaeological Rescue Group. Processing of material from the Borough. Tuesdays, 8 p.m. to 10 p.m.. At Fulham Palace, Bishops's Avenue, Fulham Palace Road, SW6. Contact Keith Whitehouse, 85 Rannoch Road, W6 9SX (030 7385 3723).

Kingston, by Kingston upon Thames Archaeological Society (KUTAS). Processing and cataloguing of excavated and museum collections every Thursday (10 a.m.) at the North Kingston Centre, Richmond Road, Kingston upon Thames KT2 5PE. Enquiries 020 8546 5386.

Surrey, by Surrey County Archaeological Unit. Enquiries to Rob Poulton, Archaeological Unit Manager, Surrey History Centre, 130 Goldsworth Road, Woking GU21 1ND (01483 594 634).

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