Introduction

GENERAL

The recent increase in the pace of development within many of Britain's historic towns has given rise to concern for the survival of the physical evidence of the past. In 1965 the Council for British Archaeology (CBA) issued a select list of historic towns and suggested that the inclusion of a town on the list was sufficient argument for preparing for that town a comprehensive survey of the historic environment as an aid to making planning decisions. Only one of the towns among those studied in this report was included in the CBA's select list, namely Farnham.

In 1966 the CBA published a further memorandum on the preparation of archaeological surveys for towns and, in the same year, the first survey on these lines appeared—that for Oxford (Benson and Cook 1966). This survey became a model for a series of reports on individual towns, including York, Tewkesbury, Gloucester, Banbury, Abingdon, and Hull. Often the preparation of the report was associated with the formation of an excavation committee to organise the recovery of archaeological evidence in advance of redevelopment, a problem highlighted by the report in every case. In Surrey, reports were prepared for Reigate and Dorking, on behalf of the Surrey Archaeological Society, but these were only given limited circulation. The former led to the formation of the Reigate (now Reigate and Banstead) Archaeological Co-ordination Committee. In 1972 the CBA published *The erosion of history* (Heighway 1972), a study of historic towns affected by modern development in England, Wales and Scotland. Since then, surveys of certain historic towns in the present county area of Oxfordshire (Rodwell 1975), Avon (Leech 1975), Sussex (Aldsworth and Freke 1976) and Hampshire (Hughes 1976), have been published and surveys of historic towns in other areas are being prepared.

The nine historic towns studied in this report (Blechingley, Chertsey, Dorking, Farnham, Godalming, Guildford, Haslemere, Leatherhead and Reigate) were included in the list for Surrey published in *The erosion of history* and each of them satisfied at least three of the twelve criteria for urban status presented in that document. These may be summarised as:

1 *Defences:* wall, bank or ditch

2 *Internal street plan:* deliberate planning or provision for a market place

3 *Market:* perhaps the only indispensable criterion, but insufficient in itself. The date of the market charter has usually been taken in this report as an indication of the date by which the place had become a town

4 *Mint:* the existence of a mint often signifies a town

5 *Legal:* the date of a borough charter, records of taxation as a borough or parliamentary franchise may provide a date by which a place may be called a town

6 *Position:* its central position in a network of communications. This involves a knowledge of the age of the road system, past navigability of rivers and other related problems

7 *Population:* high density and size compared with surrounding area

8 *Diversified economy*

9 *Types of house and shape of plot*

10 *Social differentiation:* including especially a middle class

11 *Complex religious organisation:* more than one parish church; a monastic building

12 *The holding of a court:* assizes, quarter or petty sessions.

The towns studied all lie within the modern administrative county of Surrey. The historic county extended from the Blackwater and Farnham in the west, along the southern bank of the Thames eastwards to Deptford. Under the Local Government Act, 1888, the north-east of the county became part of the new county of London. In 1965, under the London Government Act, 1963, the county of London was abolished and the administrative area of Greater London (under the Greater London Council) was extended, taking in additional areas of Surrey. At the same time the only area of the county of Middlesex not to become part of Greater London was transferred to the administrative county of Surrey. This is the present district of Spelthorne which includes the ancient town of Staines. The archaeology of Staines is the responsibility of a different section of the Department of the Environment and has therefore not been considered in this report.

FORM OF THE SURVEY

The body of this report consists of nine town studies which summarise the archaeological, historical and topographical information and the implications of past development and future redevelopment for each town.

Two basic maps are used in each section:

Map I shows:

   a   Conservation areas, listed buildings and other buildings of historic or architectural interest

   b   Areas where archaeological evidence has been destroyed by development within about the last thirty years. In some cases older major developments have been included

   c   Areas likely to be destroyed by future development.

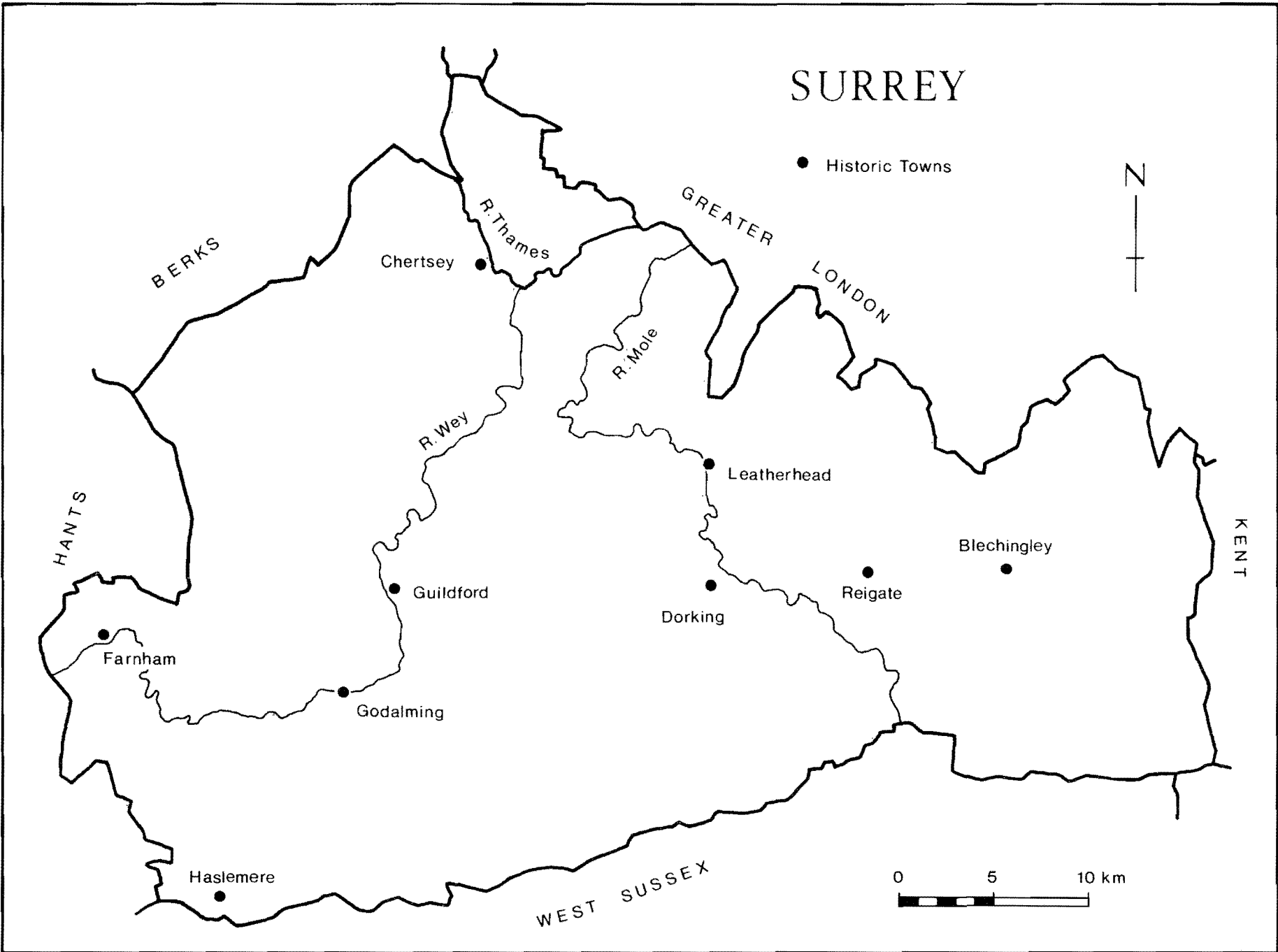   d   The area of greatest archaeological interest.

Fig. 1. Map of Surrey, showing the historic towns.

Map II is based upon the first edition of the Ordnance Survey 1:2500 plans, surveyed c 1870, and shows plot boundaries. The following information has been added to this map:

a Archaeological information
b Buildings of three different periods:

1 pre c 1550 (red)
2 c 1550–1700 (yellow)
3 c 1700–1850 (green)

Two further maps have been included: one shows the prehistoric, Romano-British and Saxon find spots in the vicinity of Farnham (Fig. 9), while the other shows the relationship between the medieval borough of Haslemere and the postulated settlement at Haste Hill (Fig.18).

HISTORY

Because of the general nature of this survey and the limited time available, little original research has been attempted, and the study of the history and development of the towns is based mainly on secondary sources, including the *Victoria County History of Surrey;* Manning and Bray's *History and antiquities of the County of Surrey;* the *Surrey Archaeological Collections;* the *Surrey Archaeological Society Bulletin;* and the Surrey Record Society publications of the *Chertsey Cartularies, Guildford Borough Records* (1514–1546), *Surrey Quarter Sessions Records, Surrey Hearth Tax* (1664) and *Surrey Taxation Returns.* Some problems have arisen in the interpretation of the *Surrey Taxation Returns* which have been used to give an approximate indication of the relative wealth of each town during the 14th century. Inconsistencies and errors have been found in the taxation record due to carelessness on the part of the Collectors. For instance, Kingston (now in Greater London) had long been a borough by the 14th century but is called a village in the tax lists, although its inhabitants were charged the town rate of one tenth of their property (Willard 1933, 101). Farnham had also possessed borough status for at least a century but was listed among the villages whose property holders paid only one fifteenth, the rural rate of taxation, instead of one tenth which might have been expected. Again, it is not possible to estimate the relative wealth of Godalming or Haslemere because no separate entries were given of their tax returns.

The archaeological information is derived from the Index of Sites and Finds maintained by the Surrey Archaeological Society. Traces of prehistoric occupation have been found in the vicinity of most Surrey towns but the finds belong to a pre-urban landscape, which although it is of importance in its own right, has little relevance to the development of the urban centres and, since the scope of this survey is limited, no general description of the archaeology of Surrey is attempted here.

Only at Guildford is there evidence of an urban community before the 12th century. Place-name and documentary evidence indicates the existence of small settlements at Blechingley, Chertsey, Dorking, Farn-

ham, Godalming, Leatherhead and Reigate (Cherchefelle) before the Norman Conquest, but nothing conclusive is known about the earliest settlement at Haslemere before the 13th century. In the period following the Conquest, castles were built at Blechingley, Farnham, Guildford and Reigate. In the 12th and 13th centuries pre-Conquest settlements developed into urban communities and two new towns, Haslemere and Reigate, were created (probably in the 13th century). All the towns in the present survey possessed a market and an annual fair by the beginning of the 14th century. Five achieved borough status in the Middle Ages and four of them (Blechingley, Farnham, Haslemere and Reigate), established during the 13th century, owed their status and wealth to the interest and influence of powerful lords. Guildford was probably a borough some time before 1130 (*VCH* 3, 560), and owed this status to the Crown. The markets at Blechingley, Haslemere and Leatherhead were in decline by the 16th century. Most of the towns studied were modest communities during the Middle Ages, and there was no walled town in Surrey. Although Guildford and Farnham were clearly the most important of the urban centres during the late Middle Ages they were small in comparison with, for example, Chichester or Arundel. The coaching trade of the 17th and 18th centuries stimulated much rebuilding, and the Wey Navigation eased the transport of goods including corn, hides, skins, timber and gun-powder from south-west Surrey to find a market in London. Nevertheless the population of most of the towns was still quite small at the beginning of the 19th century.

Before the Industrial Revolution and the coming of the railways, only a small proportion of the population lived in towns. Furthermore many of the places which enjoyed some of the trappings of urban status had little in common with today's towns. The major cities like London, York, and Canterbury exhibited a complexity that was truly urban, but many small boroughs, complete with market and charter, burgesses, and representatives in Parliament, were hardly more than villages. The inhabitants tilled the fields that began at the bottom of their gardens and there was little specialisation of labour. None of the towns considered here was heavily built up and in many cases there was vacant land between the houses. When the railway age brought a dramatic change, leading to the growth of the Surrey towns as we know them today, that change was one of expansion rather than intensification. The only towns to fill in their backlands were Guildford, extensively, and Farnham, to a lesser degree.

Town Layout

The street pattern is often the oldest surviving element and the medieval town plan may still be seen in most of the towns (see Fig. 2). The five boroughs (Blechingley, Farnham, Guildford, Haslemere and Reigate) show signs of planning. This involved laying out long uniform strips of land with a narrow frontage onto the main streets, which were known as burgage plots and let out at a fixed rent. In some cases the plots were defined by a back lane as at Blechingley. At Guildford, and
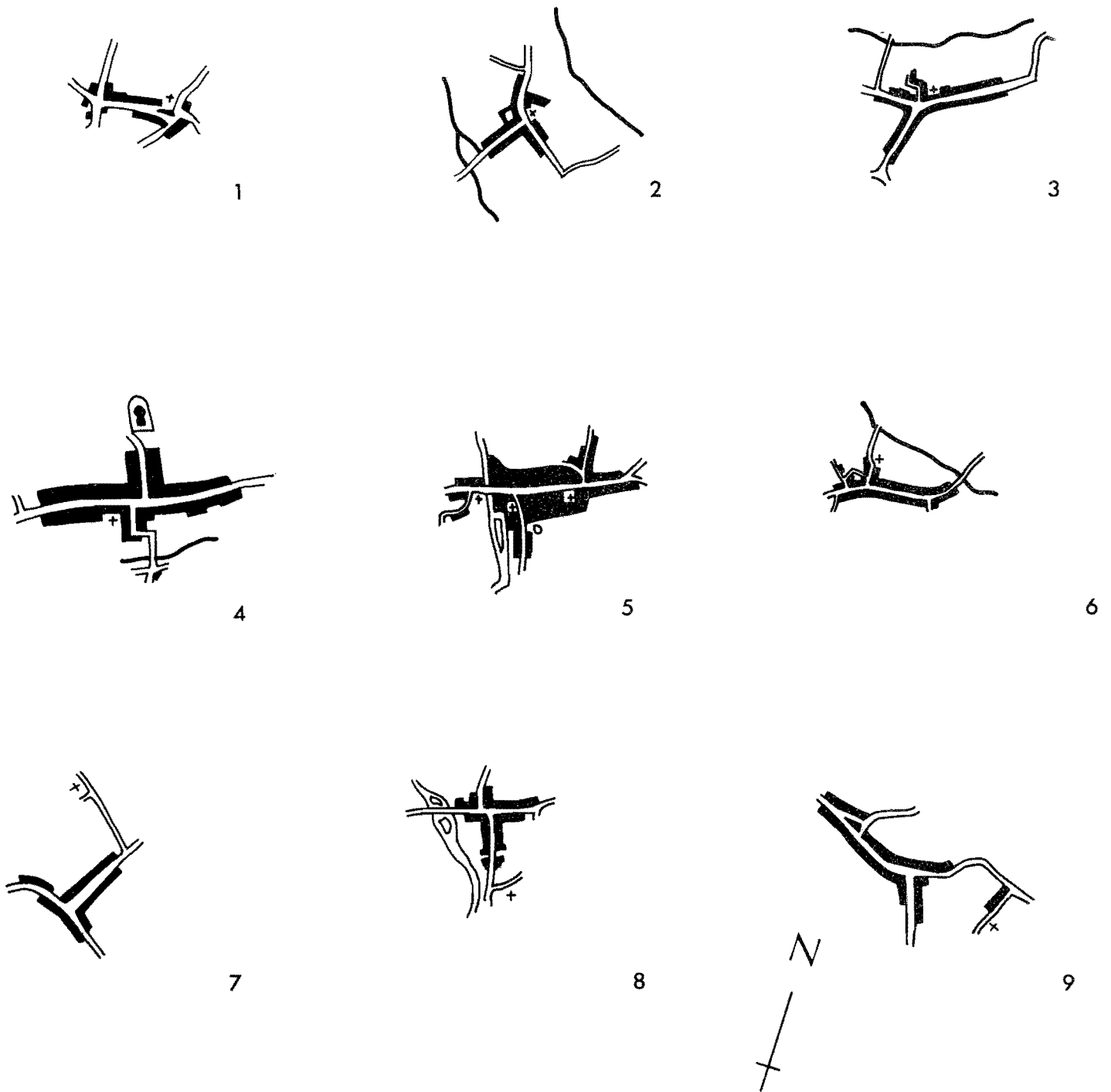
The Historic Towns of Surrey
according to Rocque c. 1762

1. Blechingley	4. Farnham	7. Haslemere
2. Chertsey	5. Guildford	8. Leatherhead
3. Dorking	6. Godalming	9. Reigate

Scale 1:2500 approx.

Fig. 2.   The town plans according to Rocque, c 1762.

possibly Farnham, the strips were enclosed by the town ditch. Elsewhere the towns appear to have been largely the result of unplanned growth.

The market-place was often an important element in the plan. There are a number of types but the funnel-shape is the commonest, as seen at Blechingley, Reigate and Haslemere. Dorking's market-place was spindle-shaped while the market at Guildford was simply held in the main street. Originally they were all open areas but encroachments took place in the later medieval and post-medieval periods at Leatherhead, Blechingley and Reigate.

The relationship of castle to town is varied. At Guildford the castle appears to have intruded into a pre-existing plan. Those at Blechingley and Farnham lie detached from an antecedent settlement, while at Reigate the castle apparently preceded the town. Religious foundations were usually sited on the edge of medieval towns, for example, the friary at Guildford and the priory at Reigate. The limits of the town at a given date can often be detected by the presence of almshouses and hospitals on the outskirts of the community. However, at Chertsey the abbey preceded the town and largely dictated its layout.

Development—Past and Present

Proximity to London has rendered many of the Surrey towns particularly vulnerable to redevelopment. Large areas have been destroyed without any record of the archaeological information which they probably contained. Historically important buildings have been swept away with inadequate record. In some cases facades have been retained in sentimental homage to the past while the information and interest contained in the body of the structure has been sacrificed to the present. In other cases mocking pastiches of historic forms have been built in place of the genuine structures, while in others totally unsympathetic buildings have been erected in complete disregard of the principles of neighbourliness. 'Relief' roads have been proposed for Dorking, Farnham, Godalming, Haslemere, Leatherhead and Reigate. Commercial redevelopment is likely to destroy even more of the historic street frontage of many of the towns. Some of these proposals are now being reconsidered in the light of the present economic situation but have not yet been abandoned, and in any case are likely to be revived later on. Each of the towns is fortunate in having a designated Conservation Area which should protect at least some of the buildings along the street frontages. There is some hope, therefore, that their architectural and historic character will not be totally destroyed.

Summary and Recommendations

Throughout this survey it is emphasised that the origins and development of the medieval towns of Surrey are obscure and that this early stage in their history is the one most in need of research. Nearly all the settlements appear to have begun in the Saxon period, yet virtually nothing is known about their size or even their exact location. Documentary research can provide important information, particularly for the post-medieval period, but only excavation can significantly enlarge our understanding of the early development of the towns, since it can cover every period. Any activity which leaves a physical trace can appear in a controlled excavation unless the site has been heavily disturbed. Archaeologists recover information on the origins of a settlement, its growth, its economy and also its physical appearance at different dates. Aspects of the daily life of its inhabitants can also be reconstructed.

None of the towns considered has received systematic archaeological attention and the programme outlined in the sections on each town, updated as necessary, should be implemented where the historic core is threatened by redevelopment. It would be economically impossible and academically unjustifiable to excavate every area threatened and each site should be judged on its merits. Full-time excavation would seldom be feasible. The medieval towns discussed were small and concentrated on either side of two or three main streets. Stratified deposits are not very deep and in many instances they have been disturbed or even completely obliterated by post-medieval and later development. The site at the Wheatsheaf, Dorking,

recently excavated (O'Connell, in preparation), is a case in point, where post-medieval activity had removed almost all earlier evidence. A programme of full-time excavation can only be considered when a large, relatively undisturbed, area of the historic street frontage becomes available. Again, in the present economic situation few major redevelopment schemes, which would make large areas available for intensive archaeological investigation, are proposed and it is the small private schemes for office and shop improvements or extensions that pose an immediate threat. The foregoing discussion indicates that a programme of small-scale, low-cost excavations, together with site observation during construction work, would provide the most satisfactory means of dealing with most of the proposed development schemes. Thus the situation may be summed up as follows:

Full-time excavation should be considered at:

Chertsey. Site of a major Benedictine abbey. A large redevelopment scheme is imminent in the town centre.

Dorking. Important market centre in the Middle Ages. The area of probable development coincides with the area of greatest archaeological interest.

Guildford. Urban origins in the Saxon period; the most important medieval town considered. Continuous piecemeal erosion by development within the historic core; much of the archaeological evidence has already been lost.

A programme of small-scale excavation, together with site surveillance during construction work, is recommended for:

Godalming. Prosperous wool town in the later Middle Ages. Much of the proposed development, including the relief road, skirts the core of the town but one or two proposals are known within the main area of interest.

Leatherhead. Complex growth and development in the medieval period. A major redevelopment scheme is proposed which is unlikely to require full-time excavation, but investigation should be carried out wherever possible, particularly in the area between the High Street and the church.

Reigate. Probable pre-Conquest settlement at Cherchefelle. A new town and important market centre in the Middle Ages. Excavations required by the proposed development are already being tackled by the local group.

There are no immediate development proposals within the historic core of the remaining towns but any opportunity for archaeological investigation that does arise should be taken:

Blechingley. Small medieval borough. The only failed town discussed in this report; now a village. Care is needed to avoid gradual unrecorded erosion of the archaeological evidence.

Farnham. Important medieval market centre and a seat of the bishops of Winchester. A successful centre for wheat in the later medieval and post-medieval period, with a flourishing hop industry in the 18th century.

Haslemere. Complex early history. A small medieval borough and market centre. There is a need for field-work in the Haste Hill area where the original settlement may have been.

General

Detailed fieldwork is needed in the areas around the towns in an attempt to identify evidence for their origins. Several seem to have moved from an original settlement, for example Guildford, Haslemere, Leatherhead and Reigate. The Anglo-Saxon period is at present a major gap in our knowledge.

Standing Buildings

Standing buildings form an important part of the archaeology of a town and cumulatively reflect its economic fortunes, its prosperity, growth or decline, but the lists of buildings of special architectural or historic interest compiled by the Department of the Environment can be incomplete and inaccurate where they have relied on facades, which often indicate only the latest phase of a building's development. Many buildings have undergone a gradual process of renewal and reconstruction and an 18th or early 19th century frontage often conceals earlier structures. A very good

recent example was the discovery of a 'Wealden' type house of c 1450 behind a Georgian facade at 7-9 Deanery Place, Godalming. A detailed survey of the buildings is required in each of the towns discussed in this paper.

A survey of cellars and deep basements would also be an important and useful exercise because (a) where they have been constructed they are likely to have destroyed most of the previous archaeological deposits, and (b) further examples of medieval undercrofts might be found, such as those identified at Guildford and Reigate.

Role of Planning Departments

Local Planning Authorities should be aware of the archaeological potential of any area about to be developed and the maps are designed to demonstrate this. Detailed advice should be obtained from the County Archaeological Officer and suitable conditions applied, or arrangements made before planning consent is given to any scheme within these areas which involves disturbance below the present ground level, in order to ensure that the appropriate kind of archaeological investigation or observation is undertaken. (It is not of course intended to suggest that the preservation of standing historic buildings should not also be regarded as historically and archaeologically important.)

Implementation of Recommendations

Where full-time excavation has been recommended a small professional team of archaeologists will be needed to carry out the work. It should also be noted that to be effective, site surveillance must often be carried out full-time, and local groups may not be able to provide the necessary cover, so that ideally professionals should be available to observe where necessary. Every encouragement and support must be given to local archaeological groups, which have already shown the value of planned small-scale excavation in Godalming, Guildford and Reigate. In towns where no active local team exists every effort should be made to set one up and professional directors will be needed to supervise the initial excavations and other related work. The detailed survey of standing buildings and cellars recommended should be carried out on a local amateur basis. The Surrey Domestic Buildings Research Group has for some years carried out much useful work in the recording of buildings, particularly those threatened with demolition, and could provide guidance for local groups in the historic towns.