

Letters

Southwark Priory

IN SIMON Roffey's article on Southwark Priory (*LA* 8, no. 10 (1998) 255-61) he refers to it as the Priory of St Mary Overie; however, in the period he was dealing with it was never called this but referred to as St Mary's of Southwark.

While this may seem a pedantic point, it does raise the interesting point as to why this name came to be applied to Southwark Priory c. 1350 (the first use I have found of it is in 1354). As is well known, quite a number of City churches have similar suffixes applied to them, such as St Mary Wolchurch or St Martin Orgar, and many of these go back to well before 1350. It might, therefore, seem that it is a City habit moving into Southwark, and this could be connected to the fact that the City gained control of a small part of Southwark, but the part which included the Priory, in 1337.

This can, I think, be confirmed by consideration of what the name means. It has usually been interpreted as 'over the river', though there have been other suggestions such as that the 'ey' stands for island as in 'Bermondsey'. However, the first idea is certainly the true one since I have recently found the Priory being fined for default of court of the manor of Camberwell Buckingham in 1407, when it is called St Mary 'ultra ripa' (on the other bank), which is pretty close to 'over the river' and dates from a time when the name was fairly new.

Such a name could not, of course, arise in Southwark and must come from the City (or at least from the north bank) and may just be another name for Southwark from that point of view. However, the meaning of the name was lost, and a story was invented to explain it, involving Overs the ferryman whose daughter was said to have founded the Priory (not so outlandish since some of the City churches names do refer to founders or owners). Such stories must therefore date from sometime after the early 15th century when the true meaning was still known, and can tell us nothing about the true history of the Priory.

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The River Cray in Roman times

IN KIERON HEARD'S interesting account of the excavation of Roman pits and ditches near Downe, Kent (*London Archaeol* 9 (4) (2000) 110-6) he assumes that the river Cray was longer in Roman times, rising well south of its present source at Orpington. However, the actual evidence is much against that proposition. To summarise the arguments, which I have given more fully elsewhere ('The Size of the River Cray in Past Times' *Archives of the Orpington & District Archaeological Society* 20 (2) (1998) 21-6), they run somewhat as follows. It is well documented that the present source of the Cray has persisted unchanged at Orpington since the 16th century (see e.g. Symonson's 1596 map and Lambarde's 1570 *A Perambulation of Kent*). Thus even before the large modern water abstraction from the chalk, the river did not extend along the dry valley to the south. The Roman period is only about four times further away from us than is Lambarde's time; in terms of most aspects of geomorphology, an almost negligible interval. So could there have been any changed conditions between the 16th century and, say, the 3rd century which might plausibly have led to a longer, wider, Cray then? There is indeed a system of dendritic dry valleys stretching southwards from Orpington: could these have been filled in Roman times? Possible changes which might affect the Cray (and other rivers) would perhaps include the following.

How about increased rainfall? It is difficult to obtain rainfall data for the Roman period, and there seems to be no real evidence for a high rainfall in England then. Indeed, Strabo's account of exports of corn and cattle, evidence for viticulture, and the extensive 4th century villa system, all suggest a benign English climate. Indeed, it is rather difficult to see how even a much higher rainfall than at present falls on the permeable chalk, unless in freezing temperatures, could appreciably extend the river. These dry valleys are likely to have been formed and remained filled under periglacial conditions when the icy soil was impermeable; a proposition supported by the presence of palaeolithic implements and mammoth tusk in their gravels.

The rise of sea levels around southern England during and since Roman times can hardly be relevant to the upper reaches of the Cray, 13km or more from the Thames and 55m or more higher.

The locations of Roman sites and stray finds really do appear to be thickly concentrated in the Cray-side area as far south as Orpington, but no further except for a few strays. This does tend to suggest that the river extended no further. Of course, as Heard comments, urban development and the activities of archaeological organisations might influence the distribution map, but there does appear to be a genuine cut-off beyond Orpington; for example, field walks have yielded nil returns. However, there seems no reason why individual farmstead-type sites could not be supported by local streams or wells in this area. Incidentally, there is a later and thus more comprehensive account of sites and finds in the area than mentioned by Heard. It is *The Upper Cray Valley 700 BC-410 AD*, Orpington & District Archaeological Society, 1993 (one of a series covering all periods).

The story of the ancient, mighty, lengthy River Cray has an all too tenacious hold in this part of Kent, especially in the less modern literature. As to its origin, no less a historian than Hasted is almost certainly responsible. He states in his *History and Topological Survey of the County of Kent* (1797) that a chapel at Crofton, existing before 1547, was separated from Orpington by an impassible flood. Unfortunately, Hasted evidently confused Crofton, 'Kanc' with Croston 'Lanc', and the chapel and the river never existed, but the damage had been done (see G. Copus 'An Entire Myth: The Rufford Chantry at Crofton in Orpington' *Bromleage* (Journal of the Bromley Borough Local History Society) March 1999, 20-4). It is to be hoped that archaeologists may in future be suitably cautious before helping to perpetuate the myth.

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Science First

I HAVE BEEN interested in Archaeology for many years now and would like to form a party which advocates the issues and interests of all science subjects including the former which I feel strongly about. I would like to know whether your readers would be interested in acquiring further information information on 'Science First'.

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