

Anglo-Saxon Kingston: a shifting pattern of settlement

Duncan Hawkins

The purpose of this paper is to review the documentary, antiquarian and archaeological evidence for Anglo-Saxon settlements in Kingston upon Thames, and examine the origin of Saxon settlement in central Kingston.

Geology and topography

The geological and topographical background to central Kingston has been set out in a previous article on Roman Kingston¹. However, a number of refinements can be made on the basis of recent excavations. Most notably an archaeological investigation on the northern side of Kingston Railway Station² revealed a succession of small river channels, comparable in size to the modern Hogsmill

river, running from east to west. The most recent of them had apparently been backfilled during the construction of the railway embankment in 1862/3. This last river channel was more than 3m wide, 1.5m deep and had a timber revetment on its northern side (the southern limit of the watercourse lay beneath the railway). The water course represented by these small river channels appears to have formed a linking channel between the Latchmere stream (an existing water course) and the Downhall ditch (a watercourse known from documentary evidence), suggesting that all of them once formed a single stream or river (hereafter referred to as the Latchmere/Downhall Channel).

Throughout the Saxon period central Kingston is likely to have comprised a large but relatively low-lying island surrounded on all sides by water courses; on the west by the Thames, on the south and east by the Hogsmill and on the north by the Latchmere/Downhall Channel (Fig. 1).

Archaeological investigations at South Lane Kingston during 1996 revealed the presence of a further gravel 'island' or perhaps a headland, south of the Hogsmill. Although significantly smaller than the 'central Kingston island' the 'South Lane island' is slightly higher (at ap-

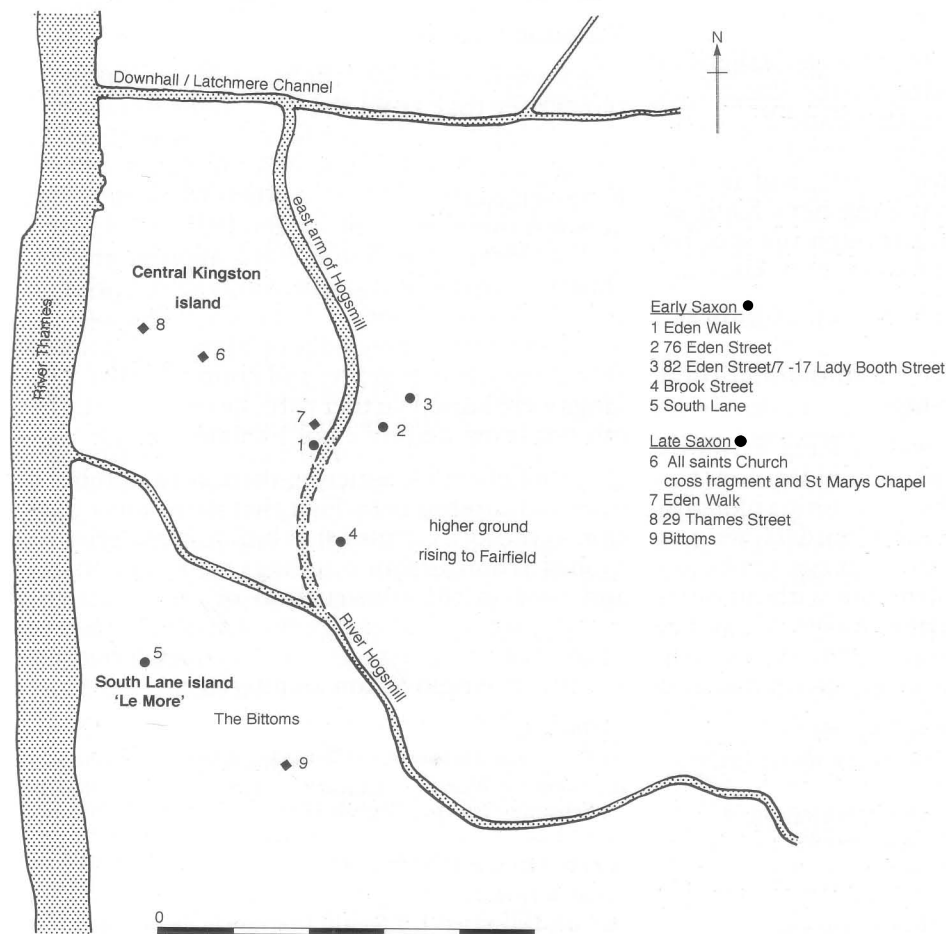


Fig. 1: sites mentioned in text.

1. D. Hawkins 'Roman Kingston upon Thames a landscape of rural settlements' *London Archaeol* 8, no 2 (1996) 46-50.
2. D. Hawkins SWK96. Unpublished report. See *LA* 8, supp. 2 (1997) 50.

proximately 8.3m OD as opposed to approximately 7.6m OD). Examination of the modern topography by the author suggests the 'South Lane island' would have been bounded by the Thames on the west, the Hogsmill on the north and a low lying area known as the Bittoms on the east. On the south the 'South Lane island' merges into the higher ground which rises towards Surbiton.

The documentary evidence: pre-Conquest sources

The earliest written reference to Kingston is from 838 when a synod attended by Egbert of Wessex, the Archbishop of Canterbury and many of the bishops of Egbert's domains was held at:

"illa famosa loco quae appeletur cyningestun in regionae sudregiae"³

Blair⁴ has suggested that *Cyningestun* may be a new name first used in 838 for an existing settlement: the 'lost' ...

"villa regali nomine Freoricburna in regione suthregeona",

which is last mentioned in that year.

Kingston is recorded again in 925 when Athelstan was consecrated here as King of the English. A now lost charter of 946 states that Eadred was also consecrated King at Kingston⁵. A meeting of the witan was held at Kingston in 972, and in 978⁶ Ethelred II was consecrated King here. Knut issued a charter at Kingston although the specific year in which this was done is not now known.

The documentary evidence: post-Conquest sources

By 1086 Kingston was clearly a substantial rural settlement in royal ownership:

"Kingston in lordship, it was in King Edwards revenue. Then it answered for 29 hides, now for nothing. Land for 32 ploughs. In lordship 2 ploughs, 86 villagers and 14 smallholders (bordars) with 25 ploughs, a church, 2 slaves, 5 mills at 20s, 2 fisheries at 10s, a third fishery, excellent, but without dues; meadows, 40 acres; woodland, 6 pigs. Value before 1066, later and now £30. Of the villagers of this village Humphrey the chamberlain had and

has one villager in his charge for the collecting of the queens wool. He also took 20s from him as ingoing when his father died"⁷.

Roger of Wendover states that a fourth king, Edwy (955) was consecrated at Kingston, and from his description of the Coronation night suggests the existence of a Banqueting Hall and a bedchamber⁸. William of Malmesbury⁹ and Florence of Worcester¹¹ appear to provide no information on Saxon Kingston that is not contained in earlier documents.

Post-Conquest evidence indicates that the area of the royal demesne administered from Kingston comprised the two hundreds of Kingston and Elmbridge and it is possible that this was also the case before the conquest¹².

Blair¹³ has argued on the basis of post-conquest sources for an important church at Kingston, perhaps an early Minster serving all of Kingston hundred and perhaps Elmbridge hundred also.

The Antiquarian sources

Leland¹⁴ after describing the Roman remains at Kingston records:

"And when men began the new town yn the Saxon tymes they toke from the very clive of come park side to build on the Tamise side and settle a new bridge hard by the same. The tounisch men of Kingston contend that wher their town church is now was sumtyme an abbay. But I se no likelihod of it. For Henry the Second did appropriate ther church as a paroche church, not as abbay, priory or celle, to Marten Abbey in Southerey. The tounisch men have certen knowledge of a few kings crounid ther afore the conqueste; and contende that 2 or 3 kings were buried yn ther paroche church, but they can not bring no profe nor likelihod of it".

Despite Leland's scepticism, there are a number of points of interest here. First that there was a tradition in the 16th century that building material was robbed from Roman buildings on Kingston Hill and used in the construction of structures in a 'new' Saxon settlement by the Thames. Such reuse of Roman building material is of course a common feature of Anglo-Saxon architecture.

3. J. Wakeford *Kingston's past rediscovered* (1990) 4.

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

5. D. Whitelock et al *The Anglo Saxon Chronicle* (1961) 68.

6. D. Whitelock *English Historic Documents Vol 1 500-1042* ed. David C. Douglas (2nd edition 1979) 551.

7. *Op cit* fn 5, 80.

8. *Domesday book, Surrey* ed. John Morris (1975) 30c.

9. Roger of Wendover -- *Flowers of History* J A Giles DCL Vol I

(1849) 257.

10. William of Malmesbury's *Chronicle* J A Giles DCL (1847) 128.

11. Florence of Worcester 'Chronicon exchronicis' Vol I (1848) 130, Benjamin Thorpe, English Historical Society Publication, 1848-49.

12. *Op cit* fn 3, 4; *op cit* fn 4, 20.

13. *Op cit* fn 4, 20.

14. John Leland (ed. L T Smith) *Itinerary in England and Wales in or about the years 1535-1543* (LTS IV, 85)

The contention of the 16th-century men of Kingston that their parish church lay on the site of an abbey may have been founded in the church's probable origins as a Minster, perhaps arising from confusion over the Latin word for both Minster and abbey¹⁵.

The Tudor townsmen rightly believed that a 'few' Anglo-Saxon kings were crowned in Kingston, but we cannot know at this distance what the foundation was for their belief that two or three kings were buried in the church. The members of the 10th and 11th century West Saxon royal house were interred at Winchester, Glastonbury, Malmesbury and London. However, while royal burial in these centuries within a church at Kingston would seem unlikely, the burial of royal officials or other members of the Court attendant on the king at Kingston might not.

The assertion of the townsmen that Kingston Bridge originated in the Saxon period does however appear to be false. The earliest documentary evidence for the 'Great' or 'Thames' bridge at Kingston is from 1193¹⁶. Archaeological evidence from the bridge excavations suggests a construction date of no earlier than 1170¹⁷. This archaeological evidence along with the failure of Domesday book to record a bridge in 1086 would seem to dismiss the possibility of a Saxon bridge. However, this is not to say that the Thames could not be crossed at Kingston in the Saxon period for it was fordable here until the early modern period.

William Camden in his *Britannia*¹⁸ adds to Leland's description:

"After Tamis hath taken unto him the Mole, he Carithe his stream Northwardly and runneth fast by Kingstone, called in times past Moreford, as some will have it which toun had beginning from a little toun more ancient than it of the same name, standing upon a flat ground and subject to the inundation of Tamis. In which when England was almost ruined by the Danish wars, Athelstan, Edwin and Ethelred were crowned Kings upon an open stage in the Market place, and of these kings here crowned it came to be named Kingston as one would say the Kings Town".

Camden's description has little in common with Leland but rather introduces 'new' traditions. A

deed of AD 1323 refers to land against 'le More' which Wakeford believed lay upstream (south) of Kingston town centre alongside the Thames¹⁹. Perhaps 'Moreford' was a crossing point in this area. Archaeological evidence has recently shown this area, which forms part of the 'South Lane island', to contain extensive 6th and 7th century settlement remains (below). One wonders if Camden's account might be a rendering of a local tradition that the earliest Saxon settlement lay in the area then known as Moreford.

The crowning of kings on an open stage in the Market Place seems improbable. The Market Place is first recorded in 1242. If, however, a Minster Church stood under or close by the site of the existing parish church (located on the north side of the Market Place), and if such a Minster church were the crowning place during the documented Anglo-Saxon coronations, then the acclamation of these kings, in the area now occupied by the Market place is perhaps not so implausible.

John Speed's *The Histore of Great Britaine*²⁰ contains the following comment on Saxon Kingston:

"Ethelstan, the eldest sonne of King Edward (as hath beene said) . . . was crowned with greater solemnitie than any of his ancestors ever before him. The place was Kingston upon Thames in the County of Surrey the yeere . . . 924. Where, in the midst of the toun a high scaffold was built, and thereon the Coronation performed to the open view of all."

This seems to be an echo of the tradition recorded by Camden.

John Aubrey²¹ writing in about 1670 records of Saxon Kingston:

"its ancient name was Moreford that is, the great way over the river. But the Saxon Kings making it sometimes their place of residence occasioned the name of Kingston to be given it . . .

. . . Several of the Saxon Kings have been crowned here . . .

. . . In St Mary's Chapel (Fig. 2) which adjoins the south side of the chancel (of the parish church) are the pictures of the Saxon Kings crowned here . . ."

Reigate, Surrey (1975) 156.

19. *Op cit* fn 3, 7.

20. John Speed *The History of Great Britain* (3rd edition George Humble 1632).

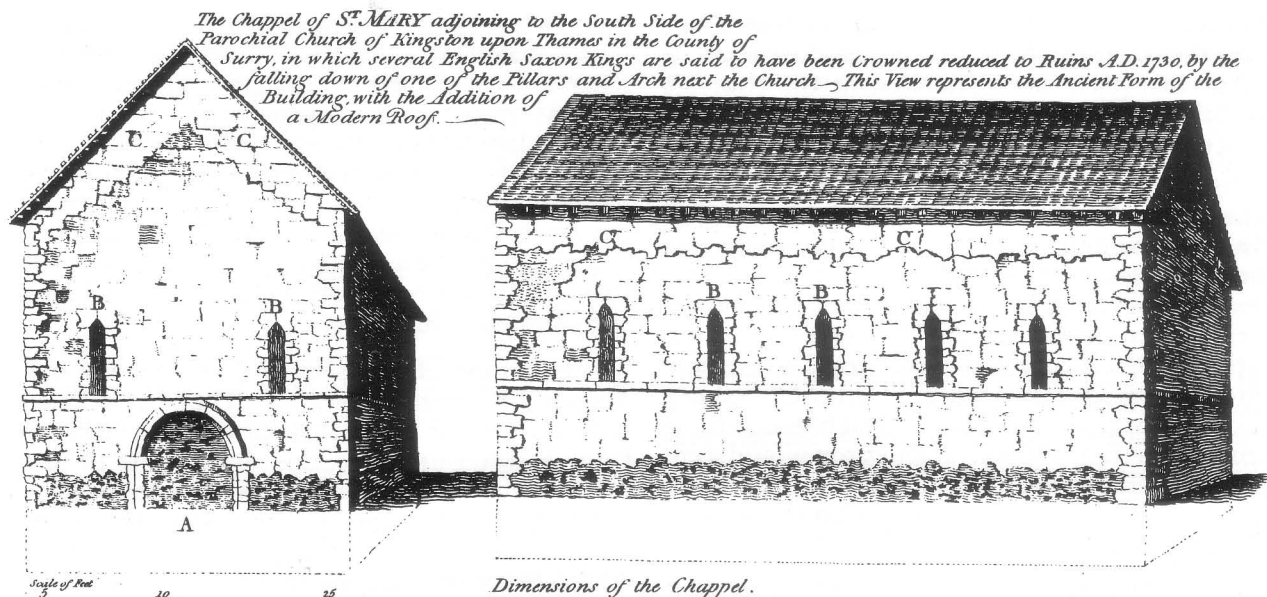
21. John Aubrey *Natural History and Antiquities of the County of Surrey* Vol 1, 18-21. First published 1718-19 reprinted 1975.

15. *Op cit* fn 3, 5.

16. *Op cit* fn 3, 8.

17. 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.

18. Sixth Edition of 1610. Reprinted by William Bernard Adeney and John Madden at the Reigate Press Ltd, South Park,



*The Breadth of the West Front. 25 Feet. Length of the South Side.....60 Feet.
Breadth of the Chappel within...20. D^o Length of the Chappel within 55. D^o
A The Antient West Door. BBB. The Antient Windows. CCC. The Modern Roof.*

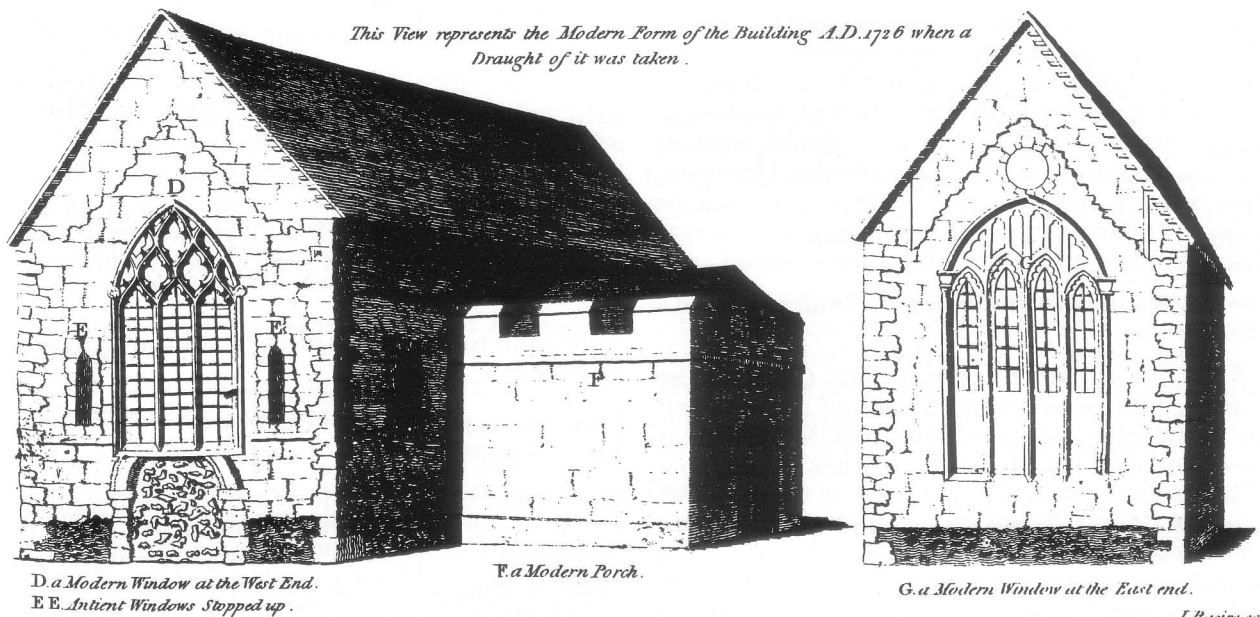


Fig. 2: 17th-century engraving of St Mary's Chapel.

- | | | |
|--|---|---|
| 1
King Athelstan
Anno 925
Crowned in the Market Place in
this town | 2
King Eadred
Anno 946
Crowned in this Chapel of St Mary
the Virgin | 3
King Edwy
whose sceptre is broken.
Anno 955
Crowned in this town. |
| 4
King Edw, the Martyr
Anno 974
crowned in this Chapel of St Mary | 5
King Ethelred
Anno 978
Crowned in this chapel of St Mary | |

Aubrey's account echoes Camden, though the paintings of the Anglo-Saxon kings seems an entirely new element (perhaps they were painted after Camden's publication). It is interesting to note that by this date Kingston was claiming to be the crowning place of five Anglo-Saxon kings.

In the 1793 edition of the *Ambulator* is to be found the following description of Kingston:

"Some of our Saxon Kings were also crowned here; and close to the north side of the church is a large stone, on which according to tradition, they were placed during the ceremony. Adjoining to the same side [in fact the south side: author] was formerly a chapel which contained the images of the Saxon Kings that were crowned here, and also that of King John, who gave the inhabitants their first charter. In the inscriptions over these figures, some of them were said to have been crowned in the Market Place and others in the Chapel; but no particular spot is mentioned in the old chronicles that record these coronations. These figures were destroyed by the fall of the chapel in 1730; ..."²²

This appears to be the earliest reference to the so called 'Kings stone' a large block of silicified sandstone which now stands outside Kingston's Guildhall. If the ambulator account of 1793 was consistently wrong in its location of the chapel and stone, then the kings stone originally stood on the south side of the existing church, in the area of St. Mary's Chapel.

In or around 1825 the 'Kings Stone' was removed from the churchyard and placed by the door of the Old Guildhall for use as a mounting block. When the old Guildhall was demolished in 1840 the stone was removed to the corporation yard; later, through the exertions of alderman Frederick Gould, a notable antiquary, the stone was set up on display in 1850 (Fig. 3). It should be noted that it is only from 1850 that Kingston is claimed as the crowning place of seven 10th-century kings. Presumably the 'kings stone' was in fact nothing more than part of the fabric of St Mary's Chapel.

Most 19th-century historians' and antiquarians' comments on Saxon Kingston are an amalgam of earlier work. However W. D. Biden, writing in 1852²³, stated that a Saxon Royal palace stood south of the modern town centre, and that an Episcopal

palace of Saxon date lay at Bishops Hall, west of the parish church. The latter appears to have resulted from Biden misinterpreting the origin date of the name Bishopshall. This name in fact stems from the acquisition of a House in this part of Kingston by the Bishops of Winchester in 1202 and which was apparently used by them directly until 1391 and finally demolished c 1600²⁴.

Biden's suggestion of an Anglo-Saxon palace south of the modern town centre appears, as far as I can ascertain, to have no earlier documentary or place name basis, though curiously recent archaeological investigations in this area have revealed evidence of Saxon activity (below). Possibly Biden was aware of finds of 'Saxon' material in this area for which we now have no record. This is possible as both Biden and his acquaintance Frederick Gould were collectors of 'antiquities'.

Modern archaeological research

The period of modern archaeological research into Anglo-Saxon Kingston commenced early this century with the work of W. E. St Lawrence Finny and Philip Mainwaring Johnston. Scores of archaeological interventions have been undertaken in and around the town centre and Saxon remains spanning several centuries have been identified at several locations.

The early Saxon period 400-700

Wakeford²⁵ has drawn attention to the survival of two *wahl* place names in the fields of Kingston, and it is not impossible that a 'British' community survived in this area into the 5th century. The earliest Saxon activity seems to be from the period c 400-700 and is focused in four distinct locations.

In the 1974-76 excavations at Eden Walk, the 1978 excavations at 76 Eden Street and the 1989 excava-

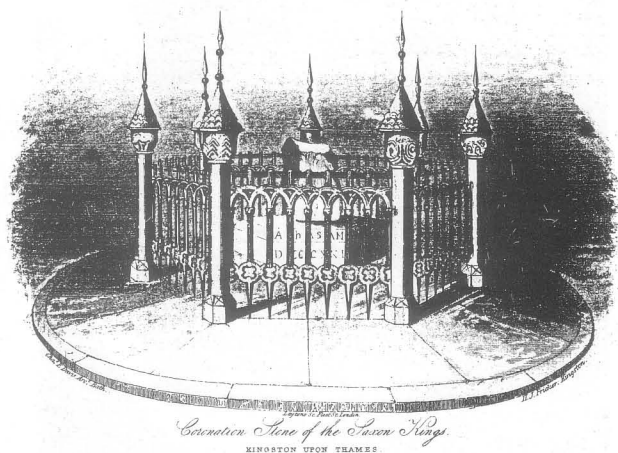


Fig. 3: 19th-century engraving of Kings stone.

22. *The Ambulator* (Sixth Edition, 1793) 153-4.

23. W. D. Biden *The History and Antiquities of the Ancient Royal town of Kingston upon Thames* (1852) 9-10.

24. *Op cit* fn 3, 27.

25. J. Wakeford 'Two wahl names in the fields of Kingston' *Surrey Archaeol Collect* 75 (1984) 251-6.

tions at 82 Eden Street/7-17 Lady Booth Street, on the east of the modern town centre (Fig. 1), quantities of chaff-tempered pottery of 5th- to 7th-century date were recovered. While the material at Eden Walk and 76 Eden Street may have been residual within a water-lain 'brickearth', that at 82 Eden Street/7-17 Lady Booth Street was clearly *in situ*, being recovered from a truncated pit and a V-shaped ditch²⁶. In 1985 excavations at 23 Brook Street to the south of Eden Street/Lady Booth Road produced tenuous evidence for a *grubenhaus* dwelling. However, the remains of at least twelve 6th- and 7th-century pottery vessels were recovered as a vast quantity of broken sherds²⁷.

The 82 Eden Street/7-17 Lady Booth Street and 23 Brook Street finds are from east of the 'central Kingston' island and would have been separated from it by a former arm of the river Hogsmill²⁸.

In 1996 investigations at South Lane, south of the modern town centre revealed the remains of a settlement dating to 400-700. At least one substan-

tial hall building of post and stakehole construction was represented and large quantities of pottery recovered, including an intact drinking cup²⁹. This settlement appears to have been entirely domestic, with evidence of weaving and antler working. The settlement was located at the northern end of the 'South Lane island'. Contemporary pottery probably originating from this settlement and probably deposited through 'manuring' was encountered further south on the 'island' in 1995³⁰.

From this early- to mid-Saxon period we can therefore suggest the 'central Kingston island' was largely unoccupied. To the south the 'South Lane island' was clearly occupied by at least one substantial 'Hall', possibly the main residence of a farmstead. East of the central Kingston island lay an area of further activity, possibly a settlement, possibly agricultural, on the higher ground rising toward the modern Fairfield.

The Later Saxon period 700-1066

The most significant find of this period comes

26. See P. Emery, 1989 DGLA unpublished report EDE89; J. Heathcote 'Excavation round up 1989: part 2, London Boroughs' *London Archaeol* 6, no 7 (1990) 188-195.

27. Unpublished excavation record S. Nelson Kingston Heritage Service ERGL.

28. *Op cit* fn 1.

29. A. Kain and S. Farid 'Excavations at South Lane, Kingston', forthcoming.

30. P. Jones, Portsmouth Road/Milner Road. Evaluation and Watching Brief, site code PHR95, unpublished report, Surrey Archaeological Unit 1995.



Fig. 4: carved stone cross fragment.

All Saints Church

Kingston-upon-Thames

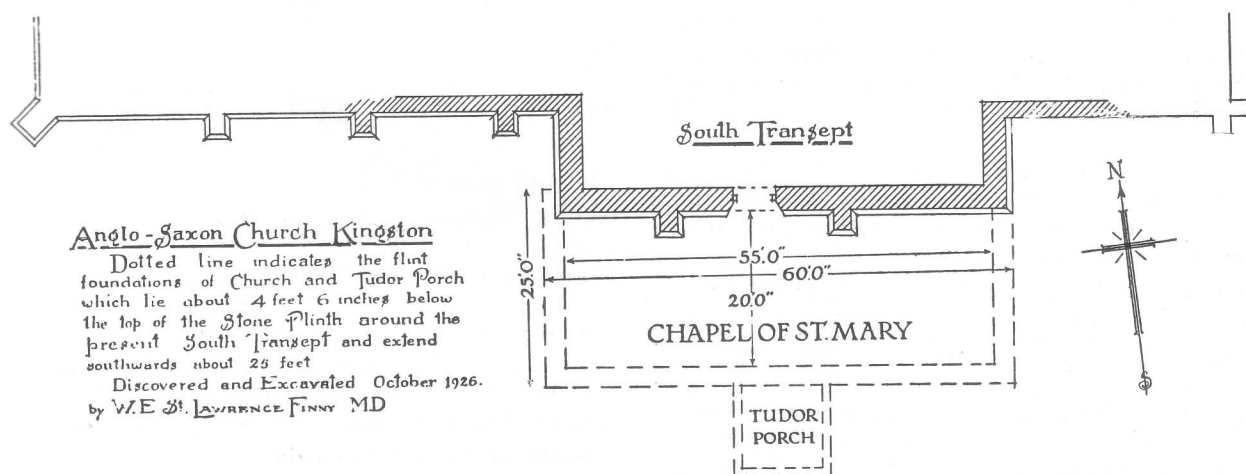


Fig. 5: Finny's drawing of St Mary's Chapel floor plan.

from the 'central Kingston island' site. It is a fragment of a carved stone cross (Fig. 4) recovered from the fabric of the north chancel of the existing parish church and identified by Mainwaring Johnson as of Mercian type of the 8th century but more recently by Dominic Tweddle as of 10th- or 11th-century date³¹. Although this find was not *in situ* and could have been brought into Kingston later, it might indicate an earlier church on the site of the existing parish church.

The settlement at South Lane appears to have passed out of use by the close of the 7th century, as shown by the complete absence of Ipswich type wares. The 'South Lane island' on which it lay appears to have been abandoned for several centuries thereafter. At Eden Walk, on the eastern side of the 'central Kingston island', two late Anglo-Saxon or Saxo-Norman ditches were cut into the 'brickearths', possibly for drainage of the marshy land (this area is known to have been 'wet' until c 1500). At 29 Thames Street, again on the 'central Kingston island', an 8th- to 10th-century boundary ditch was identified running at right angles to the river Thames³². The property boundary which this

ditch represents survived into the post-medieval period.

At the Bittoms, east of the 'South Lane island', two pits of 8th- to 10th-century date were identified during investigations in 1990. The pits were located in an area of relatively high ground, effectively a gravel headland, on the south-east of what was at the time a low-lying marsh. Both pits probably had a craft function and one may have formed part of a structure used for weaving³⁴.

Finny's 1926 excavation work³⁵ on the site of St Mary's Chapel (Fig. 5), the supposed chapel of the Saxon coronations, to the south of Kingston Parish Church, led Philip Mainwaring Johnson (who visited the site) to give a date of between 1030 and 1050 for its construction. Unfortunately we now do not know what the basis for this dating was. The surviving engravings of this building suggest a Romanesque or earlier structure with a pre-1100 date for its massive western doorway (Fig. 2)³⁶. The late Saxon dating of St. Mary's Chapel must therefore remain unproven though possible.

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

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

C) W. E. St Lawrence Finny 'The Saxon Church at Kingston' *Surrey Archaeol Collect* 37 (1926) 211-9.

D) W. E. St Lawrence Finny 'The Church of Saxon Coronations

at Kingston' *Trans South Eastern Union of Scientific Soc* (1941).

32. 'Archaeology in Surrey 1976-78' *Surrey Archaeol Collect* 72 (1980) 245.

33. *Ibid*.

34. P. Thompson, BIM90 DGLA unpub. report.

35. *Op cit* fn 31, B, C and D.

36. Richard Morris/Andrew Harris *pers comm*.

Discussion and conclusion

From documentary sources alone we can suggest that from at least the first half of the 9th century through to the late 11th century Kingston was a significant Royal Estate centre. The land administered from this estate centre, probably the hundreds of Kingston and Elmbridge, may also have formed the territory of an early Minster church.

Clearly, the earliest Saxon activity for which we have firm archaeological evidence was not within the 'central Kingston island' which was to become the core of the medieval and modern town. The earliest settlement evidence, dating perhaps from 400 to 700, is from the much smaller but slightly higher 'South Lane island' to the south. Contemporary activity, probably an agricultural settlement, is evidenced from east of the 'central Kingston island' on slightly higher ground toward the Fairfield. By at least the 10th or 11th century, however, we can suggest on sculptural evidence that a church had been established on the 'central Kingston island', on the site of the existing parish church. Some time before this the settlement on the 'South Lane island' was abandoned while broadly contemporary activity on the 'central Kingston island', in the form of the cutting of a property boundary and later drainage ditches, is evidenced. It seems likely that it was the foundation

37. *Op cit* fn 36.

of Kingston church which led to a settlement shift from one island to the other.

If we accept that the existing parish church of All Saints is likely to be the successor to a Saxon church, possibly a Minster, then what interpretation do we place on the potentially late Saxon chapel of St. Mary? It could be that the existence of a church actually occasioned the creation of St. Mary's as a subsidiary. Both buildings perhaps forming part of a complex of ecclesiastical and secular buildings at the core of the Royal Estate Centre. In this context it is even possible that St Mary's originated as a masonry hall rather than as an ecclesiastical building³⁷. Certainly this building was regarded as very special by the people of Kingston as is shown by its retention as an anachronistic lateral lady chapel through every major remodelling of the parish church, the antiquarian records, and the general dismay recorded in the town at its destruction in 1730.

Acknowledgements

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Excavations and post-excavation work

City of London. Museum of London Archaeology Service, Walker House, 87 Queen Victoria Street, London EC4V 4AB (0171-410 2200).

Croydon & District, processing and cataloguing of excavated and museum collections every Tuesday throughout the year. Archaeological reference collection of fabric types, 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.

Greater London (except north-east and south-east London), by Museum of London Archaeology Service. Excavations and processing in all areas. General enquiries to MOLAS, Walker House, 87 Queen Victoria Street, London EC4V 4AB (0171-410 2200).

Borough of Greenwich. Cataloguing of excavated and other archaeological material, the majority from sites in the borough. For further information contact Greenwich Borough Museum, 232 Plumstead High Street, London SE18 1JT (0181-855 3240).

Hammersmith & Fulham, by Fulham Archaeological Rescue Group. Processing of material from Fulham Palace. Tuesdays, 7.45 p.m.-10 p.m. at Fulham Palace, Bishop's Avenue, Fulham Palace Road, SW6. Contact Keith Whitehouse, 86 Clancarty Road, SW6 (0171-731 4498).

Kingston, by Kingston upon Thames Archaeological Society. Rescue sites in the town centre. Enquiries to Kingston Heritage Centre, Fairfield Road, Kingston (0181-546 5386).

Surrey, by Surrey County Archaeological Unit. Enquiries to Rob Poulton, Archaeological Unit Manager, Old Library Headquarters, 25 West Street, Dorking, RH4 1DE (01306-886 466).

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