

Not as dark as it was

Until now the evidence for London's Early and Middle Saxon rural settlement and economy has received little attention. A new MoLAS monograph to be published in July provides a long-awaited overview of the subject.

Robert Cowie and Lyn Blackmore provide a preview.

Despite being known from decades of archaeological fieldwork across London, much of the material on rural Saxon settlement uncovered between 1945 and 2005 has previously been available only in site archives or as brief summaries in excavation round-ups.

The 26 occupation sites in Greater London and six fish traps at four Thames foreshore sites discussed in the new monograph produced evidence for aspects of Early (*c* AD 410–650) and Middle Saxon (*c* AD 650–850) rural settlement and economy. They are considered in relation to location, topography, place-name evidence, documentary sources, dating and material culture, both individually and in their regional context.

The earliest occupation, from *c* 425–*c* 475 AD, was at Clerkenwell, Hammersmith, Ham and possibly Kingston. There was also a 5th-century settlement at



St Mary Cray, while others had been established by the late 5th or early 6th century at Harmondsworth, Keston and Tulse Hill, and by the mid 6th century at Brentford. Occupation at Clapham and Enfield appears to be possibly late 6th- or 7th-century. The settlements at Harmondsworth, Kingston and Hammersmith continued beyond AD 650. New settlements of this date in the countryside, outside the urban trading port of Lundenwic, are harder to identify (from the paucity of distinctive artefacts), but new sites were evidently established at Battersea, Chelsea, Feltham and Whitehall.

The preferred location for occupation was on well-drained land in relatively low-lying areas close to water. The distribution of buildings in the most extensively excavated areas suggests that settlements were diffuse and not nucleated, comprising isolated farms or hamlets with few households. More than 50 sunken-featured buildings (SFBs) have been identified across the region, many of the two-post variety, on average *c* 2.60 wide by 3.40m long. Very few had identifiable internal features such as hearths, but one at Mortlake had a projecting oven. The rectangular earth-fast timber buildings well documented in Lundenwic are poorly represented on these rural sites, but have been discovered at Barking, Harmondsworth, Hayes, Northolt and Whitehall, with possible examples at Chelsea and Hammersmith. They are generally *c* 5m wide, but a 9th-century AD hall at Whitehall was nearly 10m wide. The large size of this building, and its proximity to Lundenwic and contemporary activity on Thorney Island, Westminster, suggest it may have been a royal hall.

Evidence for the agricultural economy includes possible enclosures and a droveway at Harmondsworth and a corn dryer at Feltham. The small animal bone assemblages demonstrate that cattle dominate the faunal assemblages from west London sites, while pig was particularly well represented at some sites in south-east London. The



RIGHT:
Archaeomagnetic
sampling of the oven
at the Mortlake site.

FAR RIGHT:
Decorative bone
come case / mount /
wrist guard from
Battersea

OPPOSITE PAGE:
Middle Saxon fish
trap at Isleworth

six fish traps found in survey work on the Thames foreshore have been dated by radiocarbon assay to both the Early (Putney and Barn Elms 1) and Middle Saxon (Isleworth, Barn Elms 2 and Chelsea 1 and 2) periods. The largest assemblages of plant remains suggest that free-threshing wheat and six-row barley were the main cultivated cereals, although oats and rye were also grown.

The study of the combined pottery assemblages includes a review of the fabrics, forms, decoration and dating, within their regional context and with emphasis on the Early Saxon ceramics. Importantly, scientific analyses have shown that the chaff-tempered wares, thought to have been made at or near individual settlements, may have been made in centres supplying the region. Most of the scant non-ceramic finds catalogued here are associated with textile production, with few but varied dress accessories.

This new survey is designed as a guide to researchers and will pave the way for more specific studies in the future.

Early and Middle Saxon rural settlement in the London region by Robert Cowie and Lyn Blackmore, MoLAS Monograph Series 41

Photo: Natalie Cohen, TAS



Available July 2008 from MoLAS (tel 020 7410 2200 or email bookshop@molas.org.uk) or the Museum of London bookshop (tel 020 7600 3699 or email shop@museumoflondon.org.uk).

National Archaeology Week in London

For the first time London Archaeologist will be participating in National Archaeology Week. To mark our 40th anniversary, we are working with the Institute of Archaeology and Archaeology South East at the Institute. Visit us and the rest of the Time Detectives on 12th July. A few of the London highlights are listed below. For latest information on all the activities happening in the London region visit the website: nationalarchaeologyweek.org.uk.

Sat 12 July 10.30-5

Time Detectives at Institute of Archaeology, 31-34 Gordon Square, London WC1 (Sarah Dhanjal, 020 7696 7495)

Fun family activities including digging for finds, a computer quiz, making mosaics and pots, looking at rubbish, handling artefacts, and a time travel trail.

Sat 12 July 13.00-16.00

Treasures of the Thames at Visitor Centre, Old Royal Naval College, Greenwich SE10

Sort and identify finds on the foreshore with Thames Explorer Trust.

Sat 12-Sun 13 July & Sat 19-Sun 20 July 11.00-18.00

NAW at the Rose at Rose Theatre, Park Street London SE1
Guided talks and videos at the archaeological site of the first Elizabethan theatre on Bankside.

Sat 12 & Tues 15-Sat 19 July 9.00-17.00

Finds from the Greenwich Area at Greenwich Heritage Centre, Woolwich SE18
Display of local finds.

Mon 13, Tue 14 & Wed 15 July 19.00 (pre booked only)

Excavation open evenings at Prescott Street, City of London
Site tour, talk, GIS and information work, finds.

Call Lorna Richardson: 0207 770 6045.

Tue 15 July 11.00-16.00

Midden of Mystery at Benjamin Franklin House, 26 Craven St, London WC2

Hands-on activity for all ages: how ordinary objects give clues to the past.

Wed 16 July 19.00-20.30

Discovering Archaeology at the Institute of Archaeology, 31-34 Gordon Square, London WC1

Series of midweek talks

Sat 19 July 11.00-14.00

Hidden Secrets at Fulham Palace, Bishops Avenue, SW6

Have a go at a real excavation, sort and identify finds.

Sat 19 - Sun 20 July 11.00-16.30 Sat, 12.30-17.00 Sun

Fun and games at the Museum of London, EC2

A weekend full of family activities, with lots of tours and handling sessions looking at games and sports throughout history.

Sun 20 July 11.30-16.00

Archaeology under your feet at Forty Hall, Enfield EN2

Family fun day with displays, finds work, arts and crafts activities.

Sat 26 - Sun 27 July 11.30-16.00

COLAS at HM Tower of London, The Wood, Queen's Stairs and also **Tower of London Foreshore Open Sessions**

Experience the archaeology of the foreshore. Search spoil heap, handle finds, make mosaics, dress up as a Roman Briton.