THE PROCESS AND PATTERN OF THE SAXON SETTLEMENT OF WEST SUSSEX

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The evolution of the villages of West Sussex from their Saxon foundation is a subject of special interest alike to the historian, the archaeologist, the etymologist,[1] and the geographer. This paper is an attempt to view the development of rural settlement in West Sussex from the angle of the historical geographer, in such a way as to show the interplay of natural conditions and the human response. Two aspects of the subject are considered here: the evolution of settlement from the arrival of Ælla, in the fifth century, to the division of Sussex into rapes under the Normans. Secondly, certain villages have been selected as examples of types of 'layout', and some explanation is offered of their form.

In the light of recent research[2] the direct penetration and settlement of Sussex in the fifth century must be regarded as limited at first to the Sussex Levels. (The paucity of archaeological finds west of Worthing is remarkable.) It has recently been suggested that here was an enclave of Saxon homesteads between the sea and the Downs post-dating settlements on the Jutish basis to the west.[3] E. T. Leeds's map and also the Ordnance Survey map of *Britain in the Dark Ages* (South Sheet) show that, with one or two exceptions, all the burial-grounds were on the Downs east of the Adur.[4]

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[1] See Miss P. A. Nicklin and Brig.-Gen. E. G. Godfrey-Fausset, 'On the Distribution of Place Names in Sussex,' *S.A.C.* lxxvi, 1935.

[2] J. E. A. Joliffe, *Pre-Feudal England: the Jutes*, 1933. Cf. also Dr. S. W. Wooldridge and D. L. Linton, 'Some Aspects of the Saxon Settlement in SE. England . . .', *Geography*, xx, 1935.

[3] Cf. Joliffe, 'A system like that of the Kentings exercised a strong influence . . . at least as far as the Hampshire Avon . . . and preceded the coming of the main stream of Saxons' (ibid., p. 73).

[4] E. T. Leeds, *The Archaeology of the Anglo-Saxon Settlements*, p. 49, and Fig. 1, p. 19.

The subsequent spread of Saxon settlement involved, therefore, not only a clean sweep of Celtic economic and agricultural traditions, but also possibly the steady assimilation of pre-existing elements of Jutish culture (if Joliffe's view is to be accepted). The significance of the part played by the loamy tracts in this phase, especially by the Sussex Levels, the Upper Greensand terrace at the foot of the Chalk escarpment, and also overlying the Sandgate beds of the Wealden Series, has been dealt with elsewhere.[1]

Place-name evidence bears out the early period of Saxon settlement and expansion over the Maritime Plain (e.g. Sompting, Goring, Patching, Poling, and Climping; Kingston, Preston, Middleton, &c.).[2] The subsequent infiltration northward followed the natural lines of movement offered by the river valleys (cf. the sites of South Stoke and North Stoke in the Arun valley; Coombes and Botolphs in the Adur), and also by the dry wind gaps (Findon, Up Waltham, and Singleton). Up Waltham, midway between East Dean (at the source of the Lavant) and Duncton, where spring water is available at the base of the Chalk scarp, is of special interest. Its early-twelfth-century church, below which a few farmsteads cluster, compares on a small scale with the pre-Conquest church of Worth, in the Mid-Weald, on account of their semicircular apses.

Once through the Downs, the damp oak-woods and ill-drained clay tracts of the Weald, poorly supplied with drinking-water, together with the uninviting character of the heath, birch-wood, or dry oak-wood tracts (the pine appears to be a comparatively recent introduction), served to deflect the Saxon farmers along the Upper Greensand bench, where spring water was

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[1] See S. W. Wooldridge and D. L. Linton, 'The Loam Terrains of SE. England and their Relation to its Early History': *Antiquity*, 1933.

[2] For a discussion of the *-ing* theory in relation to Saxon settlement, see Baldwin Brown, *The Arts in Early England*, p. 68 et seq., and also J. H. Round, *The Commune of London*, chap. i. The distribution of place-names ending in *-ham* and *-ton* has been plotted and discussed by Dr. Wooldridge and D. L. Linton in their paper on Saxon settlement in *Geography*, xx, 1935. See also *S.A.C.* LXXVI, 1935, and *An Historical Geography of England before 1800*, edited by Dr. H. C. Darby, 1936 (chap. iii, 'The Anglo-Saxon Settlement').

Peat
Alluvium
Brickearth
  Valley Gravel
  Hill "
  Marine "
Coombe Deposits
Clay-with-Flints
London & Reading beds
Chalk
Upper Greensand
Gault
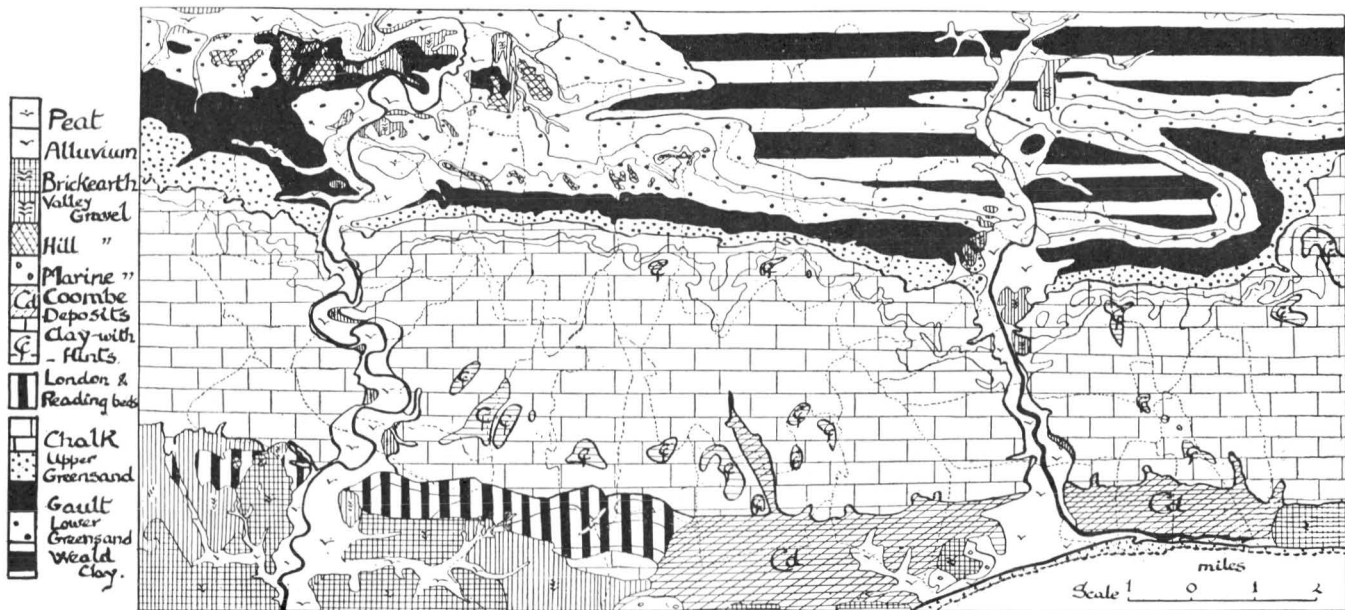Lower Greensand
Weald Clay.

Scale

miles

Fig. 1. Geological Map of Part of the West Sussex Downs.

available at the base of the Chalk, movement was easy along the open terrace, and the loam soils proved highly tractable under the Saxon wooden plough. Edburton, Wiston, Washington, Sullington, Bignor (a little distance from the Roman villa), Sutton, Barlavington, and Graffham are typical 'spring-line' settlements. From them evolved the customary strip parish, including downland pasture, a tract of arable, usually two fields wide and still traceable continuously along the foot of the South Downs, with the single exception of the grazing land attached to the stud farm near Heyshott. The division between the open chalk pasture and the arable fields extending from the lower slopes of the Chalk on to the Greensand terrace is marked by a natural hedge of beeches, juniper, whitebeam, yew, alder, and ash. A further element included within the parish boundary consisted of strips of oak-wood, associated with the clay belts of the Weald, a valuable source of fuel, timber, and pannage for swine. West of the Arun, however, the Rother valley, with its rich water-meadows, served to modify the normal course of settlement, and here a double belt of secondary settlement, parallel to the river, extended from east to west. South of the river, Coldwaltham, Selham, South Amersham, and Midhurst occupy firm valley gravel sites, commanding river crossings, while to the north, the loam soils, weathered from the Sandgate beds, proved an incentive to settlement in the case of Stopham, Fittleworth, Petworth, and Tillington, but at a comparatively late date, as the -*worth* endings suggest.

The development of the Saxon strip system of farming may be considered here in relation to its effect on the growth of settlement and of local communications.[1] (It may be noted that the strips, frequently a furlong in length, have their analogy in the continental 'Morgen', as the unit of the day's ploughing.) The essence of the medieval manor or Saxon 'vill' was that it was a self-sufficing unit, and the isolation of population groups is

[1] Cf. Dr. E. C. Curwen, *Antiquity*, 1932, for the significance of the Saxon wooden plough in relation to the new agricultural practices.

Labels on map: Brember (Adur) R., Tarente (Arun) R., conjectural coast line

Legend:
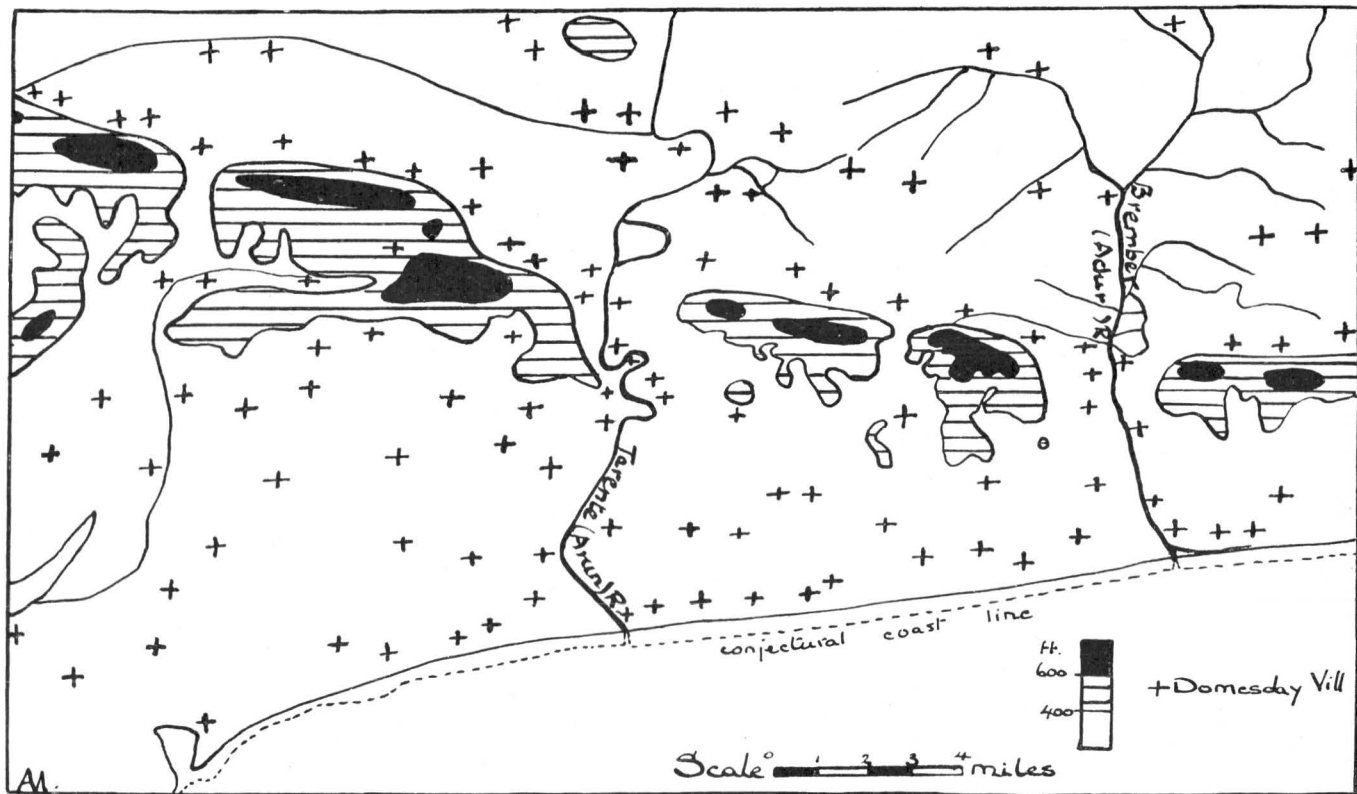Ft.
600
400
+ Domesday Vill

Scale 0 1 2 3 4 miles

FIG. 2. LATE SAXON WEST SUSSEX: THE DISTRIBUTION OF SETTLEMENTS ACCORDING TO THE DOMESDAY SURVEY.

reflected in the frequent alignment of villages north to
south, i.e. along a local 'borstal', e.g. Sullington, Graff-
ham, and Duncton, rather than east to west along the
'Underhill Road', at the foot of the Chalk escarpment.
As far as the Saxons were concerned, the purpose of this
road, to-day a mere track between ploughed fields west
of the Arun, resembled that of the prehistoric ridgeway,
in that it had only sectional importance, linking one
farm with another, often at mile intervals. It connected
also with the sunken ways used for driving stock from
hill to lowland pasture. A recent suggestion is that this
'Underhill Road' is partly of Roman origin, linking the
Roman road through Barcombe Mills with Stane Street
via Sandgate Park and Wiggonholt.[1] A westward branch
of this road, either through Rackham and Amberley to
Bury and Bignor, or via Greatham and Coldwaltham
again to Stane Street, has not been traced, although it
may perhaps be conjectured.

As the result of the Norman Conquest, the Saxon
pattern of settlement was confirmed, as is indicated by
the map showing the distribution of Domesday 'vills'.
West Sussex was divided into rapes (Bramber, Arundel,
and Chichester), and each was so arranged as to include
a strategic, defensible site in a river gap to serve as a
military stronghold, e.g. Arundel and Bramber; a port
to maintain easy contact with the Continent, e.g. Arun-
del Port and the two Shorehams. Chichester appears to
have included Bosham, Birdham, West Wittering, and
Pagham, available according to varying conditions of
wind and tide. In addition, each rape contained a
market centre linking Weald and downland, e.g. Steyn-
ing and Petworth; a number of upland farms and valley
villages, e.g. the two Stokes, Coombes, Botolphs, and
Erringham, together with those at the foot of the Downs.
Each rape also included a certain amount of forest or
waste land, e.g. St. Leonard's Forest (Bramber Rape),
Houghton Forest and Arundel Park (Arundel Rape),
and Charlton Forest (Chichester Rape).

[1] I. D. Margary, *S.A.C.* LXXVI, 1935, 'A Roman Road from Barcombe Mills
to the West, through Streat and Hassocks'.

FIG. 3. INDEX MAP TO PARISHES REFERRED TO IN THE TEXT.

The Forms of Settlement

The sketch-maps of selected villages illustrating different types of 'layout' call for some comment. On the coastal plain some 'ring' villages occur, e.g. Oving, Yapton, and Durrington, and 'road' villages, such as Sompting, Westergate, and Boxgrove; while 'nebular' non-nucleated villages are also common, e.g. Barnham, Walberton, Angmering, East and West Ferring. Here, in spite of the urban agglomerations of comparatively recent growth, such as Worthing, the rural character of the population is still evident, and is reflected in the wide dispersal of settlement and in the frequency of isolated hamlets.

On the Chalk, where accessibility to spring water-supply is the dominant factor, we find agglomerated settlements, often arranged round a more or less rectangular road layout, as in the case of Bignor, Slindon, and East Dean, and all lying at about 200 ft. O.D. The star-shaped road pattern of Cocking, and the close grouping of settlement at Singleton, where the main Midhurst–Chichester road meets the secondary approach from Petworth, reflect also local nodality. Graffham, in its spread along a winding road leading down from the scarp of the Chalk to the Rother crossing at Selham, illustrates the importance of location at the meeting-point of two types of farming country (pastoral downland and Greensand arable). It compares with Bepton, Sutton, and Sullington, and only where the 'spring line' settlement unites this characteristic with that of command of a river gap, as in the case of Amberley, is the village aligned east to west along the 'Underhill Road'.

Finally, the valley villages of the Arun and, to a less extent, of the Adur valley, present a third type of agglomerated settlement. North Stoke, South Stoke, and Offham all lie on patches of firm gravel above the water-meadows of the alluvial flood plain, and symmetrical in distribution, in conformity with the meanders of the Arun. Burpham ('the homestead by the burh') is of peculiar interest, for it lies wedged across the neck
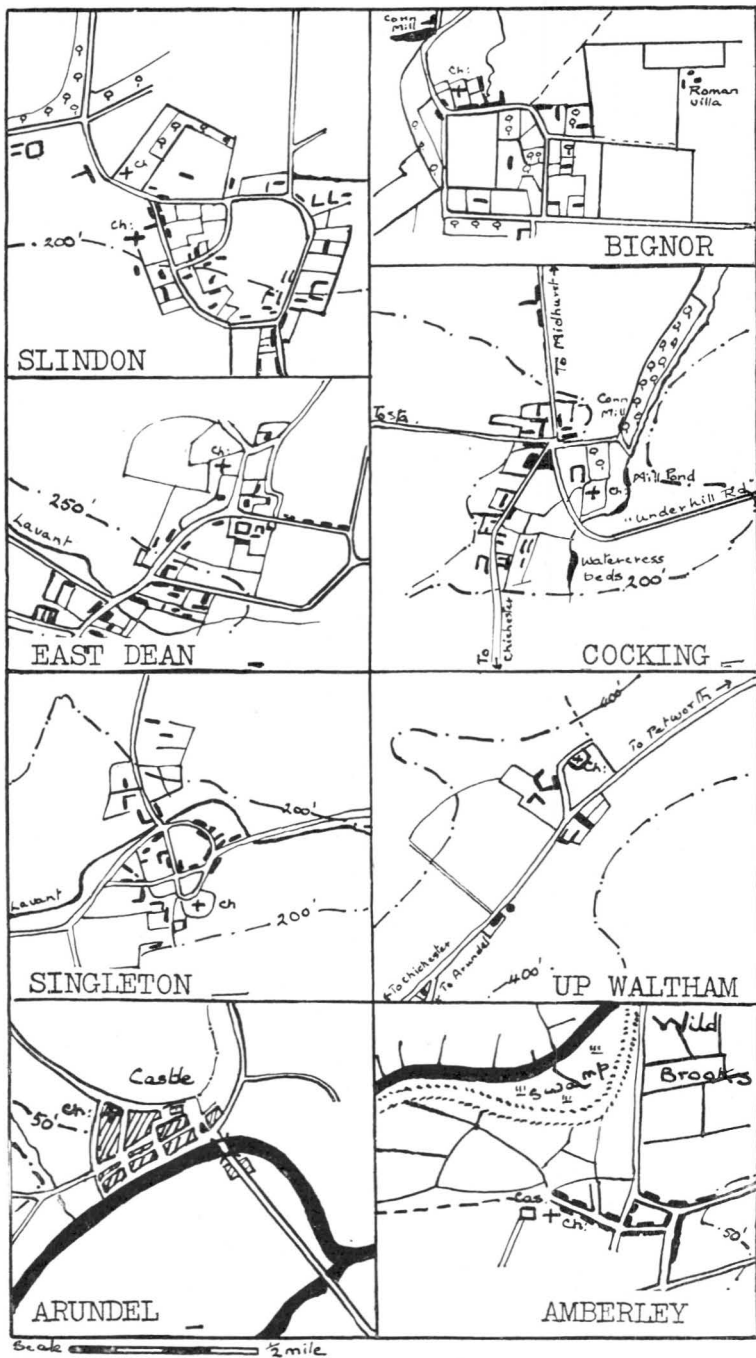
SLINDON

BIGNOR

EAST DEAN

COCKING

SINGLETON

UP WALTHAM

ARUNDEL

AMBERLEY

Fig. 4. Settlement Plans (Reduced from the O.S. 6-inch maps.)

Labels within the figure:

- GRAFFHAM (with Ch., Sch., chi, 200', 300')
- NORTH & SOUTH STOKE (with R. Arun, Ch., Roman ford, ch)
- STEYNING (with Ch., Sta., 100')
- BRAMBER (with R. Adur, Cas., ch, Sta.)
- PULBOROUGH (with Ch., 100', 50', R. Arun, R.H.)
- BURPHAM (with Peppering, ch, fort, Wepham, 100', 200', 300', 50')
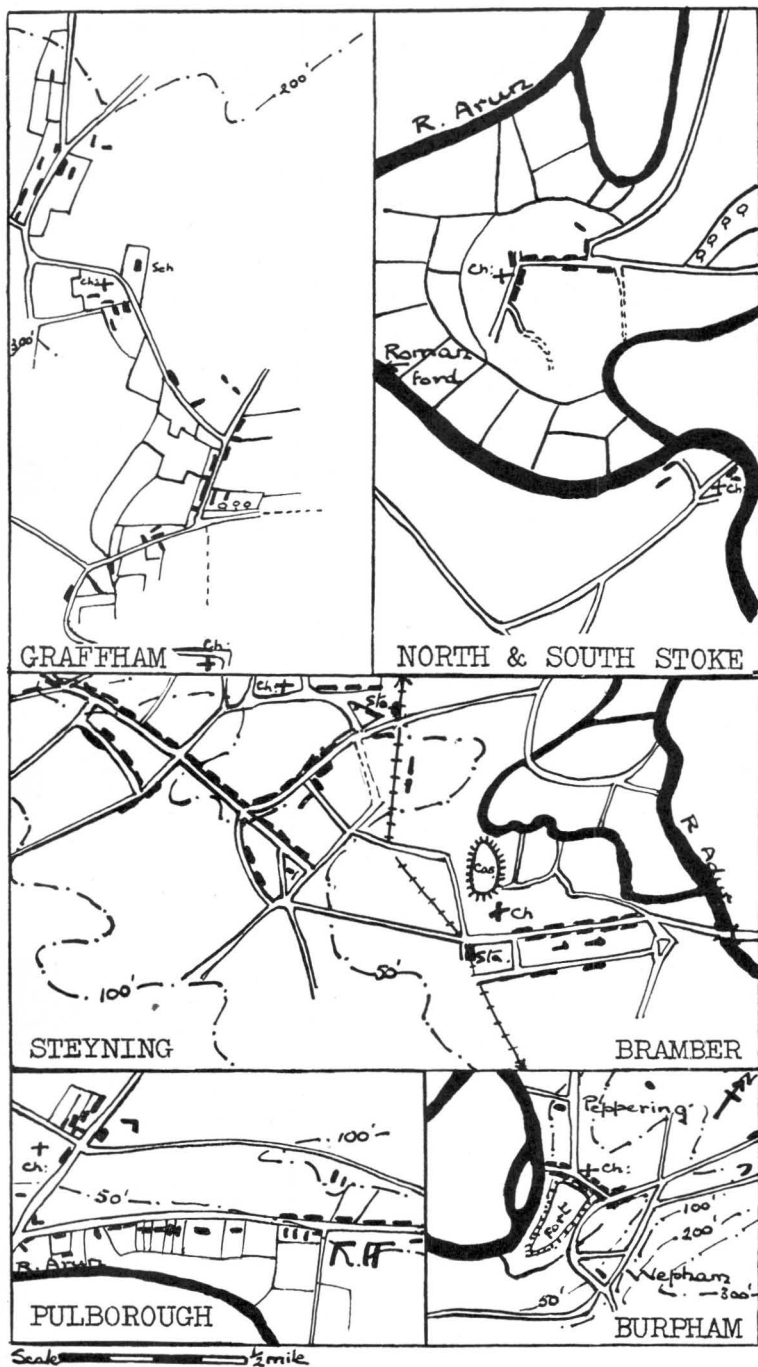
Fig. 5. Settlement Plans (Reduced from the O.S. 6-inch maps.)

Scale ⸺ ½ mile

C c

of a Saxon promontory fort (Allcroft, *Waters of Arun*, p. 80), while a spur of the Downs hems it in to the north. Pairs of settlements, represented by a hamlet on the valley floor and an isolated farmstead, are exemplified again by Burpham (*Lower* Burpham farm lying up a dry valley to the north-east of the hamlet and 100 ft. higher!). Peppering and Peppering Farm are a similar pair, to the north of Burpham, and Lower and Upper Beeding, Lower and Upper Buddington, Old and New Erringham Farms are instances from the Adur valley. The growth of the two Shorehams, Old and New, calls for more consideration than is possible here, but the influence of the 'strip' system of agriculture on the layout of the modern town of Shoreham-by-Sea is still evident, although a large part of the medieval port south of the High Street, has been submerged beneath the Adur estuary.[1]

Arundel and Bramber, as capitals of Norman rapes, had similar advantages of site, both being pre-eminently defensible and commanding a river-crossing. Arundel dominated the entrance to the Arun gap, and Bramber, like Amberley, at the northern end of a major breach in the Chalk, stood at a point where the Adur valley broadens into the marshes of Beeding Levels. However, the shape and plan of these two places are in striking contrast; Arundel having a grid street pattern, and Bramber akin to a 'Strassendorf' or street village, aligned east to west across the neck of the gap, linking Beeding and Steyning via the bridge over the Adur. From these examples it is evident, therefore, that not only has the distribution of rural settlement in west Sussex remained constant during the course of centuries, but the shapes of the villages had their origin in the Saxon settlement.

[1] See H. Cheal, *The Story of Shoreham*, 1921.