

Saxon Settlements South of the Thames

— some further observations

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ONE MUST WELCOME Mr. Charles Titford's essay into the subject of Saxon settlements in Surrey in the last issue as an attempt to clarify some of the history of a very obscure period. At the same time, however, one must express reservations at some of Mr. Titford's points, since they appear to draw conclusions from both primary and secondary sources which the evidence will not in fact support. The purpose of the present note is to examine some of this evidence afresh to see what may justifiably be said about the history of Surrey during the early Anglo-Saxon period.

Firstly, one can look at the assertion that Sir Frank Stenton and others have advanced the view that Surrey was settled by the Middle Saxons. In fact, Stenton merely states that by the early 8th century Middlesex was almost certainly bounded on the south by the Thames, but that the name Surrey or south district strongly suggests that the area had at some time been a province of the Middle Saxons. There is no evidence for any kings of Middlesex, which in any case had fallen under the sway of Essex during the course of the 7th century, and there is a strong probability that, as Stenton says, the Middle Saxons formed "an independent group of closely related folks . . . for some generations after their settlement."¹ This idea, then, is not that Surrey was settled from Middlesex, but contemporaneously by groups of related Germanic people.

One cannot support the suggestion that Surrey appears in the 7th century as the south district of Essex, rather the original *raison d'être* for the name had by that time disappeared through force of political circumstances. In any case, Middlesex may be a secondary name derived in the period after 600 by analogy with Essex and Wessex, superseding an earlier name in the same way that we know *Gewissae* was supplanted by *Wessex*.² The link between Middlesex and Surrey may well have grown up either during the Arthurian upheaval in the early 6th century or prior to 500 and have been dissolved in the 560s during the expansion of Kent to the west under Aethelberht, which also included the London area of Middlesex. All these events occurred before the era of contemporary written records and are only cursorily dealt with in the Wessex-orientated *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* compiled from various sources after 850.

Secondly, despite Mr. Titford's ungracious attempt to belittle the scholarship and the audience of Bede, it is immediately apparent from the preface of the

Historia Ecclesiastica that Bede was an assiduous seeker after facts. In the preface he states that "my principal authority and adviser in this work has been . . . Abbot Albinus . . . educated in the church of Canterbury"³ Albinus was abbot of the monastery of SS. Peter and Paul at Canterbury from c.709 to c.732, exactly the period when Bede was collecting his historical material. Even if there was not this evidence of first-hand information reaching Bede at Jarrow, the foundation of Chertsey Abbey by Eorcenweald was a recent enough event—c.666—for Bede to know of it from many different sources. To say that Bede confused the area south of the Humber with the district which later became the county of Surrey is really begging the question. He was fully aware that Northumbria lay to the north of the Humber⁴, and although the term Southumbria was not in use as early as the 8th century, there is no reason to suppose that he meant anything other than Surrey when he wrote that Chertsey lay in *Sudergeona*.

Thirdly, Mr. Titford's statement that the area of England between the Thames and the Channel was a single unit in early Saxon times cannot be sustained. On the contrary, the Weald formed a formidable barrier to most movement and was not fully colonised until well after 1100. Sussex in earlier times was certainly a distinct unit, characterised by a long-lived independence from its neighbours and the lateness of its conversion to Christianity. Its links with Kent and Hampshire were slight except in the Hastings area. Even the different parts of Surrey not easily interconnected at this time; for instance, the settlements in the upper Wey and Mole valleys were isolated from the area around London for most purposes.

As for the links between Kent and north-east Surrey, these seem tenuous to say the least. Watling Street, for example, passes miles to the north of the settlements at Tooting and Mitcham where archaeological evidence proves the presence of Saxons in the 5th century. Apart from the battle between Kent and Wessex at *Wibbandun* (probably Wimbledon) in 568, there is only the arrangement of the east Surrey hundreds and the *iuga* mentioned in Ewell documents of the 13th century to suggest any close original links with the kingdom of Kent⁵.

Turning to place-names, the name Wandle is a back-formation from Wandsworth, the original name

3. Bede's Preface to *A History of the English Church and People* (Pelican ed.) 33.

4. Bede, *op. cit.*, Book I, Chapter 15. 56..

5. *Iugum*—a Kentish unit of land tenure, meaning a yoke.

1. F. M. Stenton, *Anglo-Saxon England* (2nd ed. 1947), 54.
2. *Ibid.* 21.

of the river being *Hlidaburn* or "loud stream."⁶ The village name is derived from the Old English name *Waendel*, and not *Wandelhelm* as Mr. Titford implies. Also, Beddington contains the personal name *Beadda*, whereas the Sussex name Beddingham and Beeding derive from *Beada*. The similarity of grave goods in widely separated areas does not necessarily indicate migration across the Weald using the Roman roads. There may have been independent parallel development in this country after the migration, or trade during the phase after settlement, or similar continental origins of the two groups prior to different routes of migration being used. The same may be said of the link between the Saxons of Northfleet in north-west Kent and those of Surrey, a fact not considered by Myres.

It has generally been thought, and with good reason, that the early *-ing* name complex in south-west Surrey (Woking; Godalming; Eashing; Tyting, etc.) represents a movement up tributary valleys from the primary Thames routeway, rather than a movement across the difficult terrain from west Sussex. Parish boundaries in the area generally disregard Roman roads which suggests that the latter played a relatively unimportant part in the Anglo-Saxons' landscape perception. Chessington does derive from the name *Cissa* but it is a late secondary name and cannot be associated with Chichester. Also there is no reason to suppose that the name of

AELLE's son was unique in English history.

Finally, in arguing against the settlement of Surrey from the south, the position of Ewell on a Roman road and the 6th century grave goods there merely suggest some affinity between the area and other parts of south-east England, not that it lay on the actual boundary of two folk-movements. In fact the apparently close ties between Ewell itself and Kent (see above) may date from the period after 568 when the defeated Kentish people attempted to consolidate their western frontier against West Saxon aggression.

The place-name evidence is not dependent on political geography, and the links between the terminology of the southern counties may merely indicate a primitive cultural province of people from similar European homelands. This could exclude the possibility of settlement in Surrey from the north, but it has been shown above that this is not really necessary in the explanation of the name "Surrey" anyway. The location of London would naturally act as a focus for the Saxon groups settling in the areas of later Middlesex and Surrey, and it possibly acted as the centre for some early political unit, soon in the very nature of things to be swallowed up by a succession of more powerfully-organised kingdoms aiming to take control of London.

6. All the following place-name derivations come from E. Ekwall, *Concise Oxford Dictionary of English Place-Names* (4th ed.)

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Northolt, by Northolt Archaeological and Historical Research Group. Work is continuing on the Saxon and medieval site—Saturdays 1-5 p.m. and Sundays 10 a.m.-5 p.m. Behind St. Mary's Church, Belvue Park, Northolt. Inquiries to Bob Lancaster, Gunnersbury Park Museum, Gunnersbury Park, W.3. (992 2247).

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