Fig. 1: archaeological sites in central Kingston referred to in the text

The elusive *vill*: in search of Kingston's late Saxon manor

Hana Lewis

Introduction

Kingston upon Thames' late Saxon royal *vill* (manor) complex, its minster (church) and a possible associated settlement, all remain enigmas in the archaeological record. In built-up cities such as London, the loss of potential archaeology can be significantly attributed to truncation caused by medieval, post-medieval and modern building developments, as well as the general limitations imposed on archaeology in an urban environment.

Whether it has been concealed by later buildings, or destroyed by development, no direct archaeological evidence of the *vill* has yet been discovered, though it is known to have existed through a variety of sources. It is generally assumed that the manorial complex, along with its minster church, would have been located under or in the vicinity of All Saints parish church, on Kingston's central 'island'.[1] Without direct archaeological evidence, it is only possible to hypothesise the characteristics and physical layout of the late Saxon *vill* at Kingston, by comparing the features of other excavated Anglo-Saxon royal and thegnly (noble) manors and palaces.

Historical and archaeological background

During the Anglo-Saxon period, Kingston was part of Surrey, a region which never enjoyed the wealth of the other south-eastern Anglo-Saxon kingdoms. Evidence of activity from this period in Kingston is relatively scarce and suggests that the region was largely rural in character throughout the period. An early Anglo-Saxon rural settlement, occupied from *c.* AD 400–700, was identified on the small south 'island' of Kingston, during excavations at East and South Lanes between 1996 and 1998 (SLK96, ELK96, ELA98) (Fig. 1). Here, at least one timber hall, an intact pottery drinking vessel and evidence of antler working were uncovered.[2]

With the development of the borough and shire system during the late Saxon period, the number of *vills* and palaces grew rapidly in number across England. In essence, manors were a physical manifestation of the control, ownership and prestige of the royal, noble and ecclesiastical
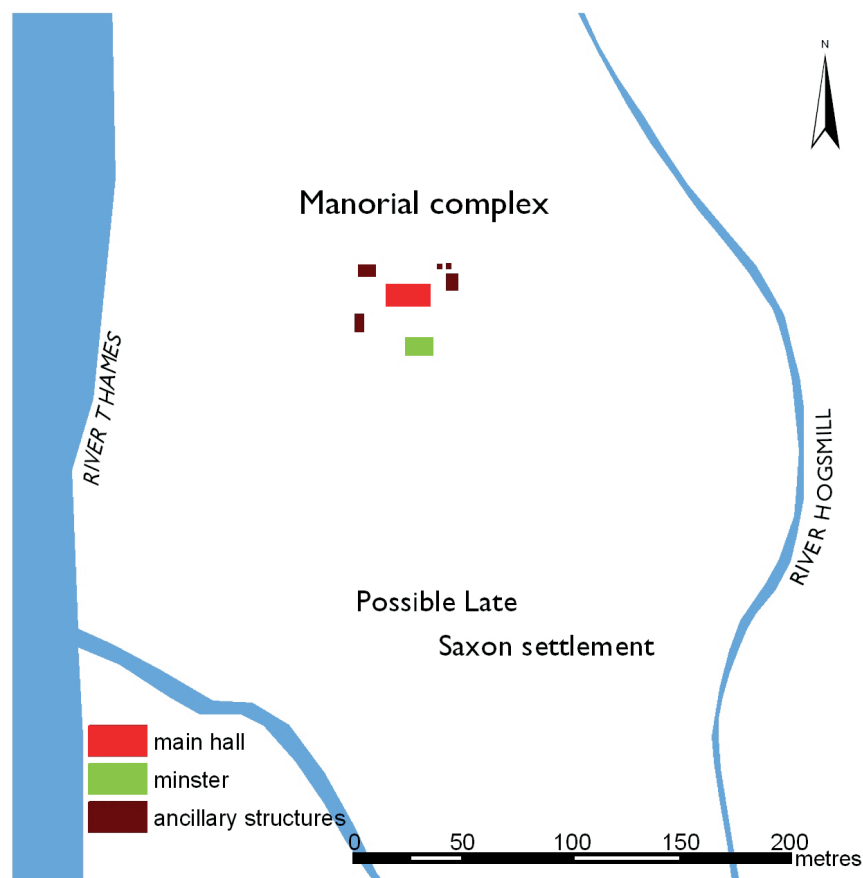
Fig. 2: postulated location and layout of the late Saxon *vill* at Kingston

authorities, whose powers had rapidly escalated by this time.[3]

The earliest documentary source referring to Kingston's *vill* dates from AD 838, and records that an important *cynengeston*, or great council, was held at "that famous place which is called Kingston in the region of Surrey".[4]

This statement indicates that the manor was already prospering by the middle of the ninth century, though its actual foundation date may never be established without archaeological evidence. During the tenth century, Kingston is mentioned in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* as the coronation place of Athelstan in 925 and of Athelred II in 979, and it is also known to have hosted a *witan* (government) meeting in 972.[5]

Evidence of later Saxon activity in Kingston remains fairly scarce. A middle to late Anglo-Saxon rural settlement was discovered during excavations in 1990 and 2001 at The Bittoms (BIM90) and The Bittoms, High Street (KHR01), where at least one sunken-featured building (SFB) and several pits with eighth- to tenth-

century pottery were excavated.[6] Unfortunately, any proposed association between this settlement and the royal *vill* in the late Saxon period cannot be determined. However, since the Bittoms settlement did go out of use as early as the tenth century, it is possible that its inhabitants had joined a *vill* settlement located to the north, which would have been prospering during this period, and used its associated minster church as an ecclesiastical focal point.

The lack of Anglo-Saxon material from Charter Quay (CQY98), excavated between 1998 and 1999, in particular, remains puzzling. The site is located on the central 'island' between the Thames, the market place and High Street, and precisely in the area where the late Saxon *vill* is thought to have been located.[7] Near Charter Quay, late Saxon boundary ditches have been uncovered at 29 Thames Street, Eden Walk and 21–23 London Road (LDK01), though the ditches at Eden Walk may instead be Saxo-Norman and could have been used for drainage as opposed to demarcation.[8] It has been

suggested that these ditches could represent evidence of the postulated *vill* settlement, though without irrefutable evidence of either a settlement or the manor, this remains an hypothesis.[9]

The late Saxon *vill*: postulated features and characteristics
Without existing archaeological evidence of Kingston's late Saxon royal *vill*, its location, nature, status, size and layout can only be postulated from indirectly related archaeological finds. It seems reasonable to conclude from previous scholarship and archaeology that the *vill* was located on Kingston's central 'island', in the vicinity of All Saints church (Fig. 2). Unfortunately, extensive excavation here in the near future is unlikely since the area is heavily built up, and the manor and minster may have already been destroyed by building developments.[10] This particular location would have been desirable, since royal complexes were often established in prominent locations and the central 'island' of Kingston was a raised area of land, bounded by rivers and overlooking parts of the surrounding territory.[11]

Though the Kingston *vill* was a wealthy and influential royal estate in the late Saxon period, boasting a minster church and large land holdings, there is no reason to assume that the manorial complex itself was large, despite its significant status.[12] Anne and Gary Marshall's analysis of early and middle Anglo-Saxon buildings in England has shown a general pattern of buildings increasing in size over time. The majority of Anglo-Saxon buildings were 4.5 to 5.5 m or 6 to 6.5 m in length and no more than 7 m in width.[13]

Larger or high-status settlements typically possessed a greater proportion of large buildings, with the planning of the settlement clearly based around one main structure, which usually had dimensions exceeding 22 by 7 m.[14] Examples include several buildings at the middle Anglo-Saxon palatial complex at Yeavering (Northumbria) and the late Saxon Period II West Hall at Cheddar (Somerset), which were 24 m in length and exceeded 7 m in width (Fig. 3).[15] The survey also concluded that post-in-trench and plank-in-trench buildings were never

YEAVERING *in the time of King Edwin* *(616·632)*

fort

assembly place-grandstand

Temple/Church

sunken-floored building

hall

after Colvin 1963

N

?Church

HATTON ROCK I *(?8th century)*

(from air photographs)

?Church

HATTON ROCK II

(?8th century)

(from air photographs)

ditch

Hall complex

ditch

N

0·25 HECTARE

sunken-floored building

Hall complex

N

CHEDDAR

PERIOD 1 *(up to c.930)*

PERIOD 2 *c.930 – c.1000*

storm-water drain

overflow

storm-water drain

entrance

P

N

fowl house

Chapel

Long Hall

N

west boundary

latrine

main entrance

S

?fences

West Hall 1

?flagstaff

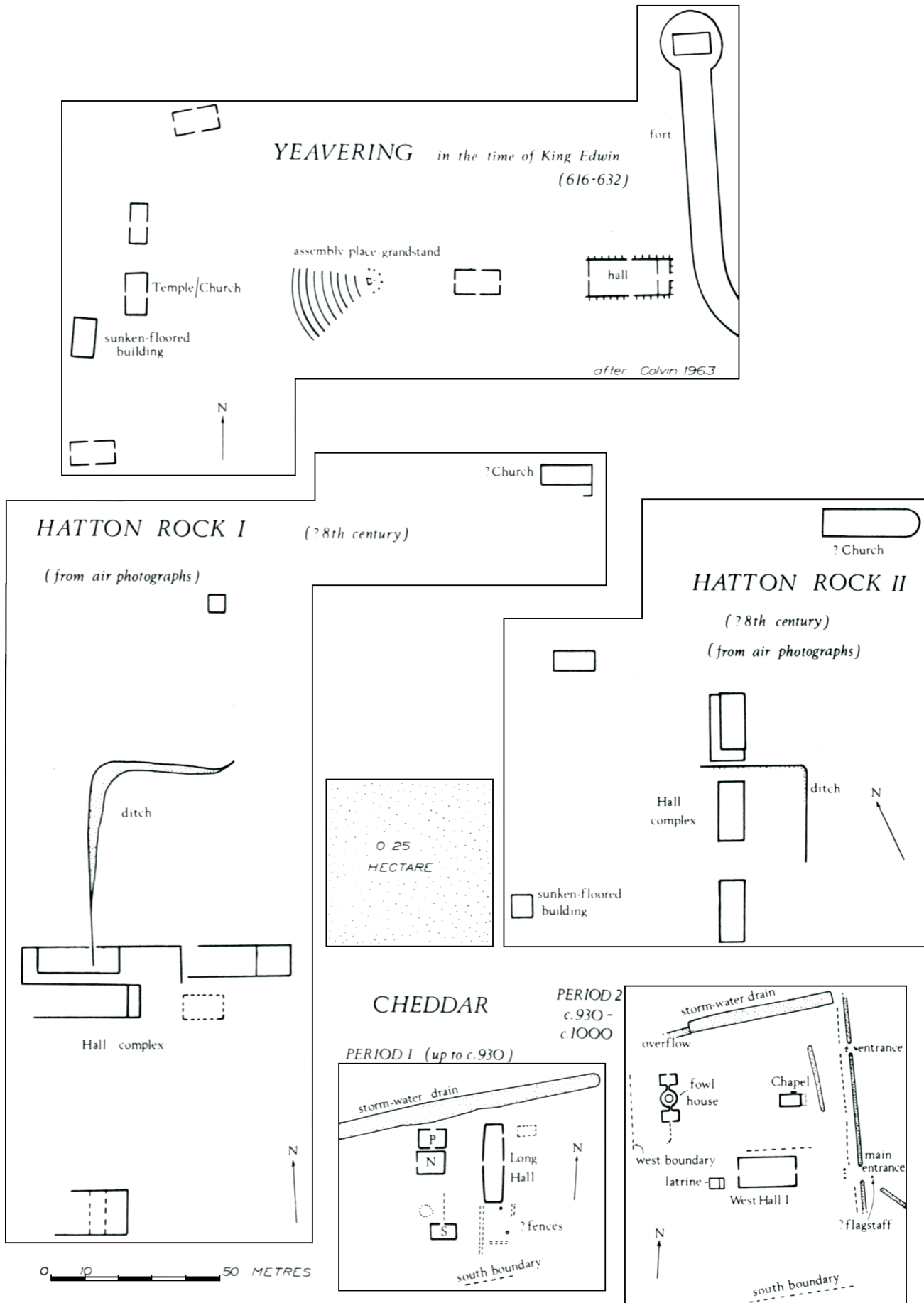south boundary

N

south boundary

0   10   50 METRES

Fig. 3: the late Saxon rural palaces at Yeavering (Northumbria), Cheddar (Somerset) and Hatton Rock (Stratford-upon-Avon) were all focused on a large main hall (from P. Rahtz 'Buildings and rural settlement' in D.M. Wilson (ed.) *The Archaeology of Anglo-Saxon England* (1981) Cambridge University Press)

RAUNDS FURNELLS, NORTHAMPTONSHIRE
Saxo-Norman Manorial Complex

cornbrash
quarries

quarry
pits

aisled
hall

0 metres 30

WICKEN BONHUNT, ESSEX
Middle Saxon Phases

0 metres 30

Fig. 4: The Saxo-Norman manorial complex at Raunds Furnells included an unusually large aisled hall, over 18 m in length
(from A. Reynolds *Later Anglo-Saxon England: Life and landscape* (1999) 134 © A. Reynolds)
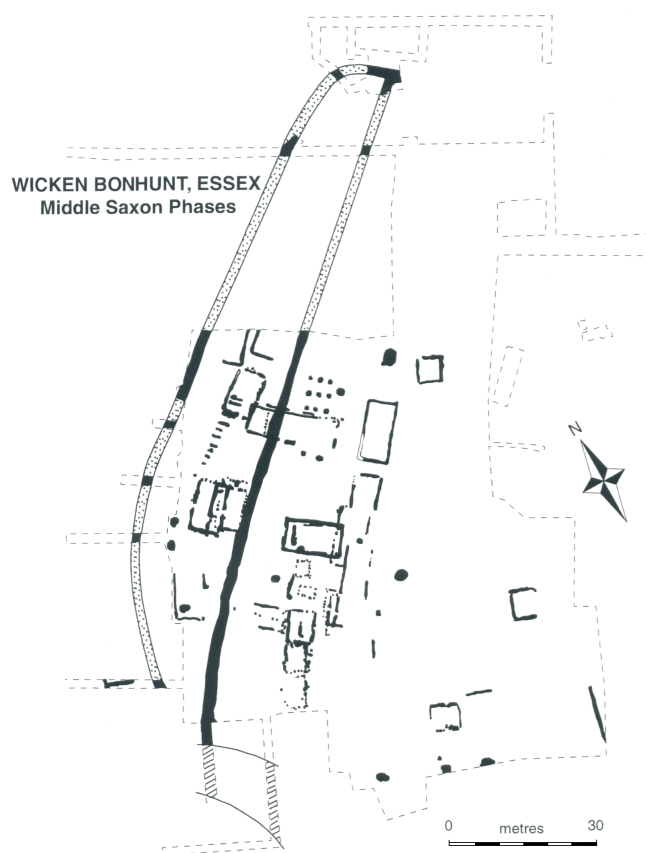
Fig. 5: The middle Anglo-Saxon settlements at Wicken Bonhunt (Essex) featured an impressive main building, over 18 m in length
(from A. Reynolds *Later Anglo-Saxon England: Life and landscape* (1999) 142 © A. Reynolds)

longer than 15 m, though this was still quite an impressive size, and such structures were therefore usually associated with larger or wealthier settlements. Structures over 18 m in length were rarer still, including the main buildings of the Anglo-Saxon manorial complexes at Raunds Furnells (Northamptonshire) and Wicken Bonhunt (Essex), and would have indicated a high-status settlement (Figs 4 and 5).[16] It therefore seems likely that, given the constraints of the All Saints area, the main hall at Kingston probably ranged from 15 to 18 m in length and would have been no more than 7 m or so in width.

A comparison: manorial and palatial arrangements

It is likely that the Kingston *vill* would have been arranged in a similar layout to other late Saxon manorial complexes or aristocratic residences, albeit on a smaller scale than some of them. Based on the evidence from excavations of

other Anglo-Saxon manor and palace sites, it can be assumed that the *vill* would have comprised a main timber hall and subsidiary buildings, used for accommodation and ancillary purposes, a minster church, a settlement arranged in regular plots with property boundaries and possibly a ditched enclosure to protect the complex (Fig. 6).[17] Typically, long-distance trade and some form of industry, such as textile or metalworking, would have been performed within the *vill*'s settlement as well.

If Kingston's *vill* was limited in size and scope to the area around All Saints, then its subsidiary buildings need not have numbered more than around half a dozen.[18] Kingston probably resembled a more modest version of the Period I royal residence at Cheddar. Before Cheddar was remodelled in *c.* AD 930, the palatial nucleus comprised a post-in-trench Long Hall, 24 by 5.5 m in extent, and four associated timber buildings, all set on rough north-south

alignments to a storm water ditch (Fig. 7).[19] Other late Saxon manorial complexes that may have mirrored the arrangement of Kingston include Faccombe Netherton (Hampshire), Goltho (Lincolnshire), Raunds Furnells and possibly Hatton Rock (Stratford-upon-Avon) (Fig. 8). These manorial buildings were arranged around a courtyard, with an aisled timber hall as the focus of settlement, accompanied by a separate kitchen and various other ancillary structures, including agricultural buildings.[20]

The location of the manorial churches differed in each estate arrangement, since they were usually acquired or built some time after the manors had been initially established. The late-ninth-century church at Raunds Furnells, for example, sat outside the east entrance of the manorial enclosure until it was sectioned off in the middle of the tenth century, while it has been theorised that the eleventh-century flint and masonry

tower at Portchester (Hampshire) actually served as a private chapel or other religious building for the manor.[21]

It is known from various sources that the royal *vill* at Kingston had an accompanying minster church. It has been postulated from the large size of Kingston's medieval parish, which were often similar in size to their Anglo-Saxon predecessors, that the minster would have been substantially large and influential.[22] Though no archaeological evidence of it has yet been uncovered, it is probable that the minster would have been located near the *vill* in the vicinity of All Saints. The church's status as a minster would have set the *vill* apart from some contemporary manorial complexes, such as Raunds Furnells, which instead had private churches owned by their lords.[23]

It is reasonable to conclude that, as with the above manors excepting Portchester, the halls, minster and subsidiary buildings at Kingston would have been constructed of timber, since stone was rarely used as a building

material during the Anglo-Saxon period, even for churches. Along with Portchester, exceptions include the stone buildings at Sulgrave (Northamptonshire) and the royal centre of Northampton (Fig. 9). The manorial complex at Sulgrave consisted of a remarkable stone and timber hall, a nearby kitchen and the foundations of another eleventh-century stone rectangular building, which has alternatively been interpreted as the base of a tower.[24] Excavations at St Peter's Street, Northampton, uncovered late Saxon buildings associated with several mechanical mortar mixers, radiocarbon-dated to the eighth century. A large timber hall on the site had also been replaced sometime in the early eighth century by a rectangular stone hall, *c.* 3.75 by 11.5 m in extent, which itself appears to have gone out of use by the late ninth or early tenth centuries.[25]

Settlements usually grew up around Anglo-Saxon manorial complexes, since they functioned as focal points for the countryside, offered protection and

provided livelihoods for the populace, primarily through their demand for goods, which stimulated trade and industry.[26] The boundary and drainage ditches at 29 Thames Street, Eden Walk and 21–23 London Road and the pottery and daub fragment from Tiffin Boys' School (TIF95)[27] in central Kingston, suggest that a late Saxon settlement may have developed around the *vill*, and it is possible that the middle to late Anglo-Saxon settlement at The Bittoms was absorbed into this growing community. Such a regularly arranged settlement was established during the middle Anglo-Saxon period at the manor of Wicken Bonhunt. A substantial boundary ditch ran north-south across the site and another one ran parallel to it to the west. Set within this boundary, at least 28 structures have been uncovered which sat at right angles or parallel to the north-south ditch. The buildings themselves ranged in size from a floor area of 36 sq. m to 190 sq. m.[28]

Although many manorial settlements engaged in trade and

Fig. 6: a reconstruction of an Anglo-Saxon aristocratic residence with communal hall, ancillary buildings and a bell tower. The Kingston *vill* would have been arranged in a similar, though more modest, fashion
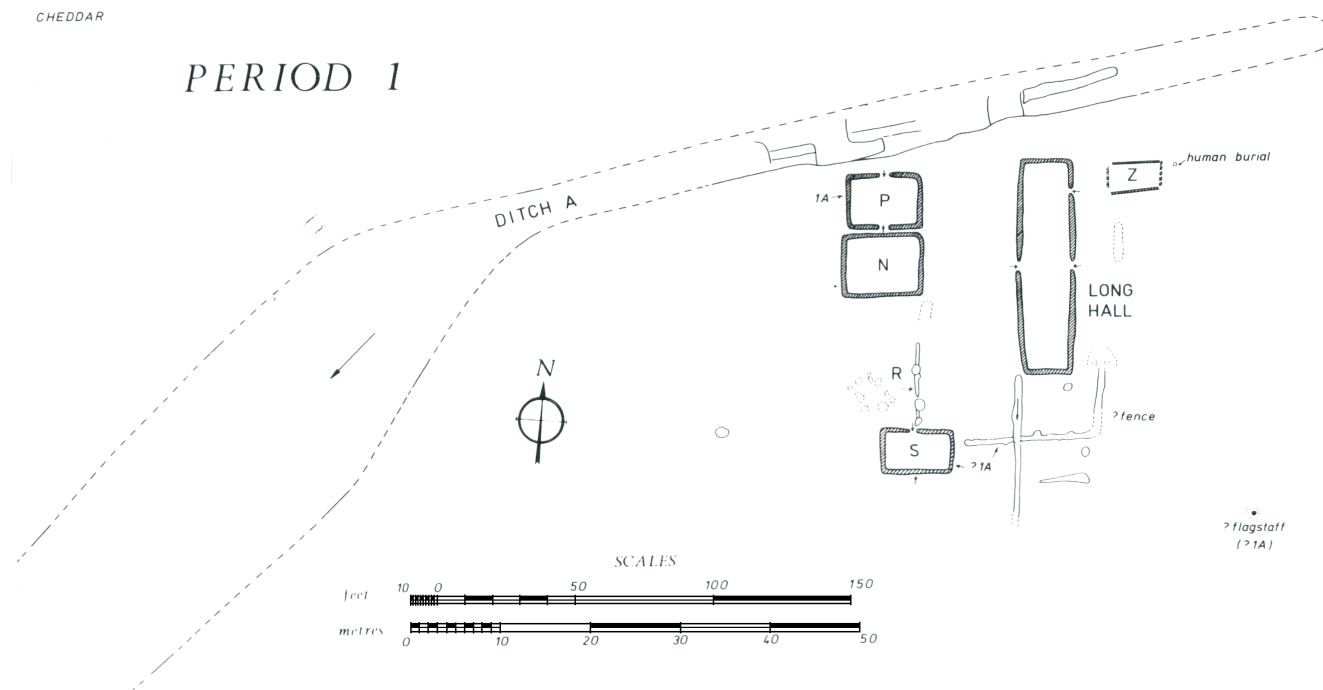(from A. Reynolds *Later Anglo-Saxon England: Life and landscape* (1999) 123, © A. Reynolds)

Fig. 7: The Period I Anglo-Saxon royal residence at Cheddar (Somerset). The Kingston *vill* **may have looked like a similar, smaller scale version of Cheddar** (from P. Rahtz The Saxon and medieval palaces at Cheddar: excavations 1960–62, British Archaeological Reports 65 (1979) 50)

production, again there is no conclusive evidence for these activities at Kingston. Typically, these settlements engaged in textile working, metalworking and sometimes more specialised industries, such as egg production, which is attested to at Wicken Bonhunt by the discovery of large quantities of bird bone.[29] The manor at Faccombe engaged in woodworking as well as metalworking and textile production, while crucible fragments and slag indicate bronze-working took place at Cheddar during the tenth century.[30] Continental pottery, such as Rhenish ware, are also common finds on manorial and palatial sites, typically sought after to enhance the prestige of the king or the manor's lord, though the late Saxon pottery assemblages from Kingston have so far yielded only predominantly English wares. Kingston's lack of international wares is presumably due to the fact that the *vill* itself was not situated on any important international trading routes and it was also close to the international port of London. The flourishing late Saxon burghal towns, including London, Winchester and Southampton, monopolised international trade, and commonly only fostered commercial links with one another, hence they rarely redistributed traded goods with other settlements in England.[31]

Another characteristic of Anglo-Saxon manorial and palatial complexes were ditched enclosures, which surrounded the residence and often its settlement as well. No evidence exists at Kingston for an enclosure of any nature, and the *vill* probably did not have one at all. This is not necessarily unusual, since some manorial enclosures were built as non-defensive structures, indicating that they were not integral elements of a manor's design. The Period I palace at Cheddar, for instance, was only defended from floodwater by a complex drainage system which ran across the northern side of the site, and the late tenth-century ditches at Faccombe only flanked the manor on three sides, with the eastern side simply bordered by a small terrace bank.[32]

Conclusion

Based on comparisons with other Anglo-Saxon palace and manorial sites, it can be postulated that Kingston's royal *vill* complex, strategically located on the higher ground of Kingston's

1. P. Andrews, J. Lowe, K. Nichols, Dr. C. Phillpotts and A. Powell *Charter Quay the spirit of change: The archaeology of Kingston's riverside* (2003) 10.

2. G. Glover *An archaeological evaluation at East Lane, Royal Borough of Kingston upon Thames* Pre Construct Archaeology unpublished report (1998); D. Hawkins, A. Kahn and K. Woolridge 'Archaeological investigations at East Lane and South Lane, Kingston upon Thames, 1996– 8' *Surrey Archaeol Collect* **89** (2002) 185–210.

3. D. Hill 'Towns as structures and functioning communities through time: The development of central places from 600–1066' in D. Hooke *Anglo-Saxon settlements* (1988) 197–212.

4. S. Butters *The book of Kingston* (1995) 33.

5. D. Hawkins 'Anglo-Saxon Kingston: A shifting pattern of settlement' *London Archaeologist* **8**, no. 10 (1998) 271–8; M. J. Swanton (trans & ed) *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* (2000) rev ed 12–13.

6. N. Shepherd *The Bittoms, Kingston College, Kingston upon Thames, London: Archaeological evaluation report* Oxford Archaeological Unit unpublished report (2001) 19–20.

7. *Op cit* fn. 1, 3.

8. L. Darton *Assessment of an archaeological excavation at 21–23 London Road, Kingston, Royal Borough of Kingston upon Thames* Pre Construct Archaeology unpublished report (2002); B. Richardson 'Excavation round-up 1976' *London Archaeol* **3**, no. 2 (1977) 36–39.

9. *Op cit* fn. 1, 11.

10. D. Hawkins *pers. comm*; *op cit* fn. 4.

11. M. Lapidge, J. Blair, S. Keynes and D. Scragg (eds) *The Blackwell encyclopedia of Anglo-Saxon England* (1998) 399–400.
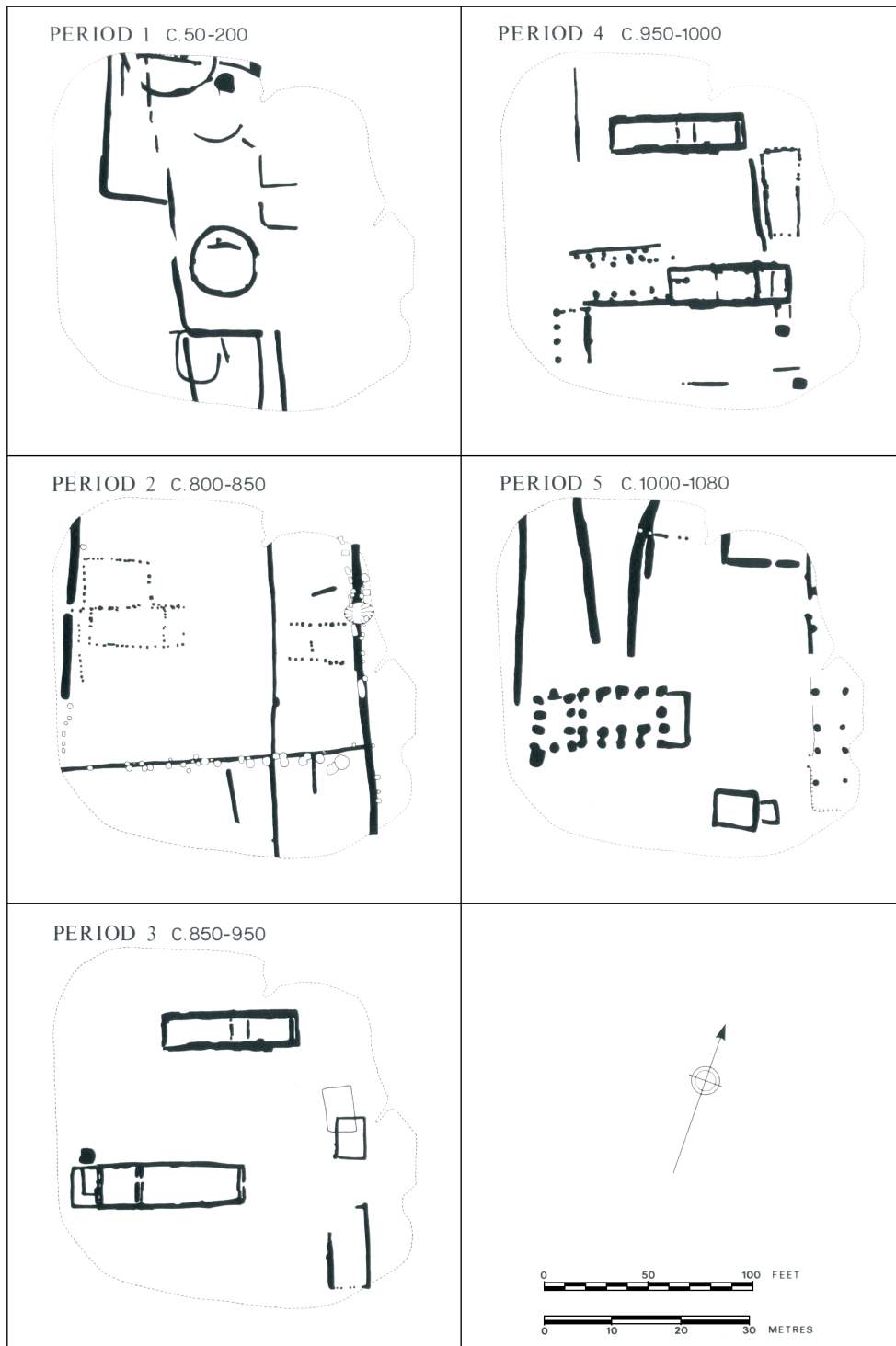
12. *Op cit* fn. 4. 32–33.

13. A. Marshall and G. Marshall 'A survey and analysis of the building of early and middle Anglo-Saxon England' *Medieval Archaeol* **35** (1991) 29–43.

14. *Ibid.*, 30–31.

15. *Ibid..*, 36–37.

16. *Ibid..*, 37–39.

17. P. Andrews 'Kingston – Saxon royal estate centre to post-medieval market town: The contribution of archaeology to understanding towns in Surrey' in J. Cotton, G. Crocker and A. Graham (eds) *Aspects of archaeology and history in Surrey: Towards a research*

PERIOD 1 C.50–200

PERIOD 4 C.950–1000

PERIOD 2 C.800–850

PERIOD 5 C.1000–1080

PERIOD 3 C.850–950

| 0 | 50 | 100 | FEET |

| 0 | 10 | 20 | 30 | METRES |

central 'island', remained unenclosed and would have been relatively small in size, consisting of a modest main timber hall, no more than 15 to 18 m in length and 7 m or so in width, and five or six subsidiary buildings for accommodation and ancillary purposes. The royal *vill* was clearly an important and wealthy estate, hosting several coronations and great councils during the ninth and tenth centuries, as well as boasting a minster church, a large parish and substantial land holdings. The manor and the minster would have been focal points for the countryside, encouraging a late Saxon settlement to grow up around the complex, where at least a proportion of the community would have engaged in trade and craft activities.

Acknowledgements

Fig. 8: The arrangement of the Kingston *vill* may have been comparable to the late Saxon manorial complex periods of occupation at Goltho (Lincolnshire) (from G. Beresford *Goltho: the development of an early medieval manor c. 850–1150* (1987) 9, © English Heritage)

framework of the county (2004) 172.

18. D. Hawkins *pers. comm.*

19. P. Rahtz *The Saxon and medieval palaces at Cheddar: Excavations 1960–62* BAR **65** (1979) 49; A. Reynolds *Later Anglo-Saxon England: Life and landscape* (1999) 113–115.

20. *Op cit* fn. 17, 122; G. Beresford *Goltho: The development of an early medieval manor c. 850–1150* (1987) 12; J.R. Fairbrother *Faccombe Netherton: Excavations of a Saxon and Medieval manorial complex, Volume I* (1990) 57–62.

21. A. Boddington and G. Cadman *Raunds Furnells: The Anglo-Saxon church and cemetery* (1996) 8–11; B. Cunliffe *Excavations at Portchester Castle: Volume II*

Saxon (1976) 60.

22. P. Hill *The age of Athelstan* (2004) 60.

23. Boddington and Cadman, *op cit* fn. 21.

24. P. Rahtz 'Buildings and rural settlement' in D.M. Wilson (ed) *The archaeology of Anglo-Saxon England* (1981) 63.

25. A. Dorner *Mercian studies* (1977) 141–146; J. Williams and M. Shaw 'Middle Saxon "palaces" at Northampton' *Current Archaeol* **85** (1992) 38–41.

26. A. Vince 'The growth of the market centres and towns in the area of the Mercian hegemony' in M. Brown and C. Farr (eds) *Mercia: An Anglo-Saxon kingdom in Europe* (2001) 187.

27. *Op cit* fn. 8; R. Cowie *Tiffin Boys' School, London Road,*

Kingston, Royal Borough of Kingston upon Thames: An archaeological evaluation and excavation Museum of London Archaeology Service unpublished report (1995).

28. Reynolds, *op cit* fn. 19, 140.

29. *Ibid.,* 140–141.

30. Fairbrother, *op cit* fn. 20, 252–272; P. Rahtz 'The Saxon and medieval palaces at Cheddar, Somerset – An interim report of excavations in 1960–62' *Medieval Archaeol* **6** (1962) 66.

31. D.G. Russo *Town origins and development in early England AD 400–950* (1998) 193; P. Stafford *The East Midlands in the early Middle Ages* (1985) 50–60.

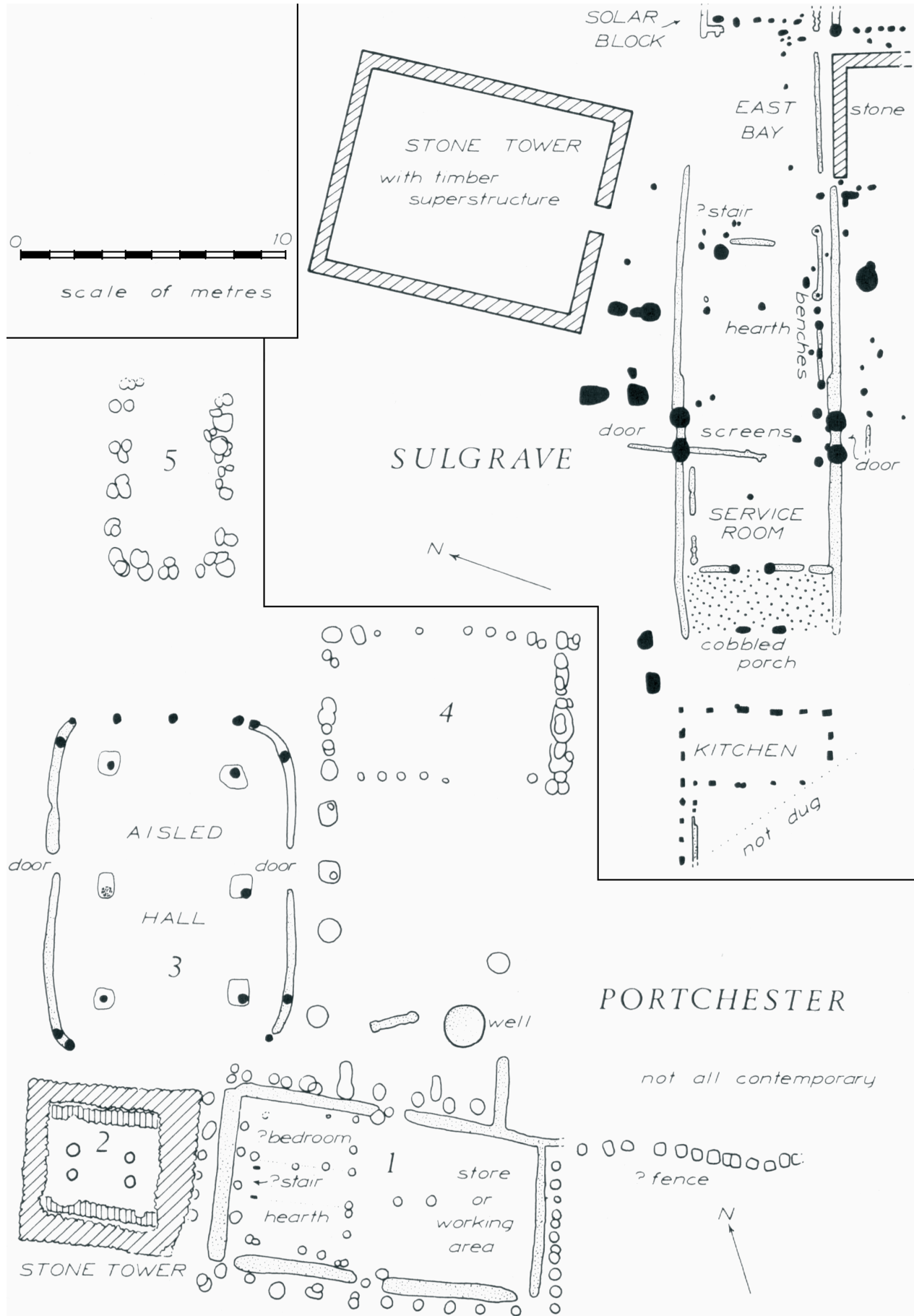32. Fairbrother, *op cit* fn. 20, 228–231; Rahtz, *op cit* fn. 30, 59.

Fig. 9: It is unlikely that the Kingston *vill* would have included any stone buildings, as the majority of Anglo-Saxon manors were timber constructions. Exceptions include the tower at Portchester (Hampshire) and the stone and timber hall at Sulgrave (Northamptonshire)
(from P. Rahtz 'Buildings and rural settlement' in D.M. Wilson (ed.) *The Archaeology of Anglo-Saxon England* (1981) Cambridge University Press)