

# Views of the Anglo-Saxons and Vikings

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Fig.1. Treaty of Jutes showing Hengist and Horsa with Prince Vortigern of Kent.

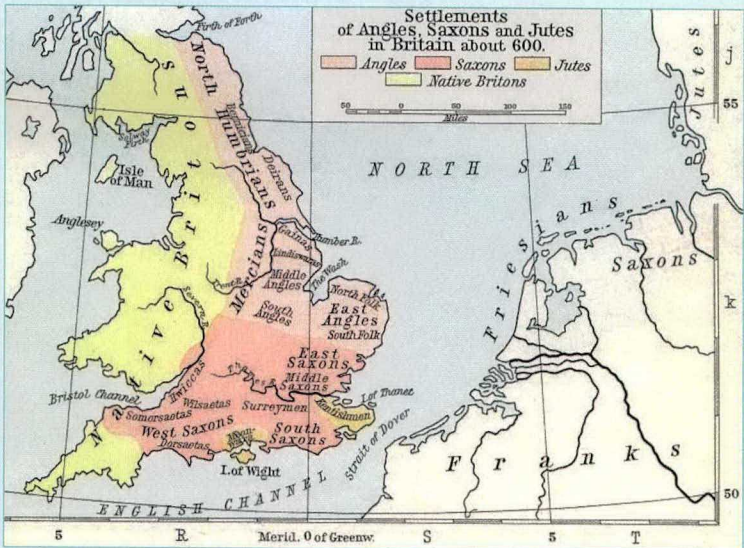
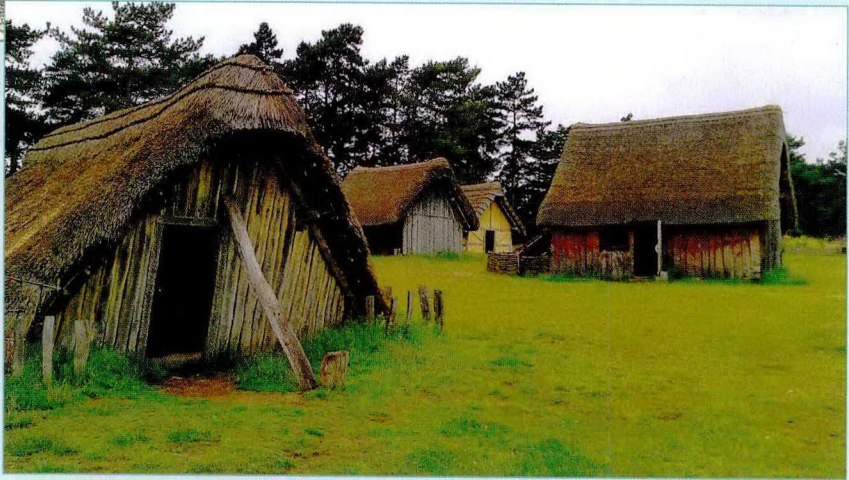


Fig.2. Britain about AD 600.

Fig.3. West Stow reconstructed Anglo-Saxon village. Photo © Midnightblueowl; used under a Creative Commons License.



The withdrawal of the Roman legions in the early 5th century left Britain less well defended against invaders from Scotland and those from the sea routes. These sea borne invaders consisted of bands of Angles, Jutes and Saxons, who had designs on plunder and rich agricultural lands. They continually raided the South and East coasts as they had done under the Romans.

From about AD 450 they settled in small independent communities, supplied by sea from their homelands. The *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* tells us the Jutes, led by the brothers Hengist and Horsa, were invited to assist the native Britons repel the invading northern Scots and Picts, in exchange for food, money and land (Fig.1). This arrangement worked well until the Jutes decided conquest was preferable to servitude and joined forces with the Picts and Scots against the Britons. The Jutes took the land of Kent, Southern Hampshire and the Isle of Wight.

Meanwhile the Angles and Saxons colonised the East and South coasts, spreading westwards and northwards until by AD 600 only Cornwall, Devon, Cumbria, Scotland and Wales remained of the old British or Celtic kingdoms (Fig.2). The Angles, Saxons and Jutes were

neighbours in their Germanic homeland with similar cultures and for simplicity I will call them all Anglo-Saxons. They probably understood the Roman civilisation, but fiercely rejected the model as unsuited to their agricultural communities and way of life. As the migrants advanced, they sacked and burned the old Roman towns and villas, massacring or enslaving the Britons.

The Anglo-Saxons constructed simple buildings of timber and thatch in villages and small towns near centres of agriculture, at river crossings or sites suitable for ports (Fig.3). They adopted the Roman system of agriculture and Anglo-Saxon finds are often made on late Roman rural sites (Fig.4). The most significant early Anglo-Saxon landscape



Fig.4. Copper-alloy cruciform brooch, 5th century.



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feature was the re-introduction of the earth barrow for pagan burials, which replaced Roman Christian interments. Prehistoric barrows were re-used and new barrows constructed in cemeteries, usually located close to a river, estuary or the sea. The elite were buried in barrows with grave goods, often within an elaborately constructed chamber or a complete boat, such as that discovered at Sutton Hoo beside the River Deben in Suffolk (Figs.5 & 6). Tæppa's mound, another high-status barrow burial near the River Thames, is the origin of Taplow in Buckinghamshire (Fig.7).

Known barrows and cemeteries are normally scheduled and out of bounds to detecting but many have been

ploughed-out and may be accessible, with permission. Those interred in barrows and cemeteries would have lived nearby and some cemeteries were dug out and the contents used to manure farmland in the 18th century. So you only need to search land around these barrows and cemeteries to find Anglo-Saxon coins and artefacts (Fig.8). An excellent Internet resource for locating barrows is ARCHI UK, the archaeological sites index, <http://www.archiuk.com>

You can use the free search term 'Barrow' to reveal burial mounds within up to 10km of the UK place, postcode or map co-ordinates you enter (Fig.9). Following 150 years of pagan burials with potential grave goods, St Augustine

arrived in AD 597 to convert Anglo-Saxons to Christianity eventually bringing an end to such practices. Change didn't happen overnight, it was a top down conversion process starting with kings who welcomed recognition and support from the great Roman church. The kings passed their new religion down to their families and the aristocracy, while land, often on royal estates, was given to build Minster churches. These in turn sent monks out into the surrounding communities to preach and convert the common people. Crosses were often erected to mark where preaching took place ahead of church building; a few stone crosses survive (Fig.10).

As an interesting approach to

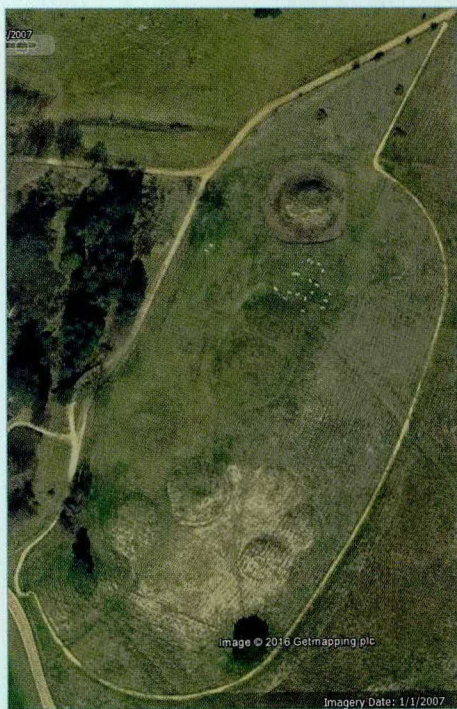


Fig.5. Sutton Hoo Anglo-Saxon cemetery. Map Data © 2016 Google, Getmapping plc.



Fig.6. The gold Great Buckle from Sutton Hoo. Photo © Jononmac46; used under a Creative Commons License. (Not shown to scale)

Fig.8. A few Anglo-Saxon brooches recovered from Kent barrows in the 18th century. (Not shown to scale)

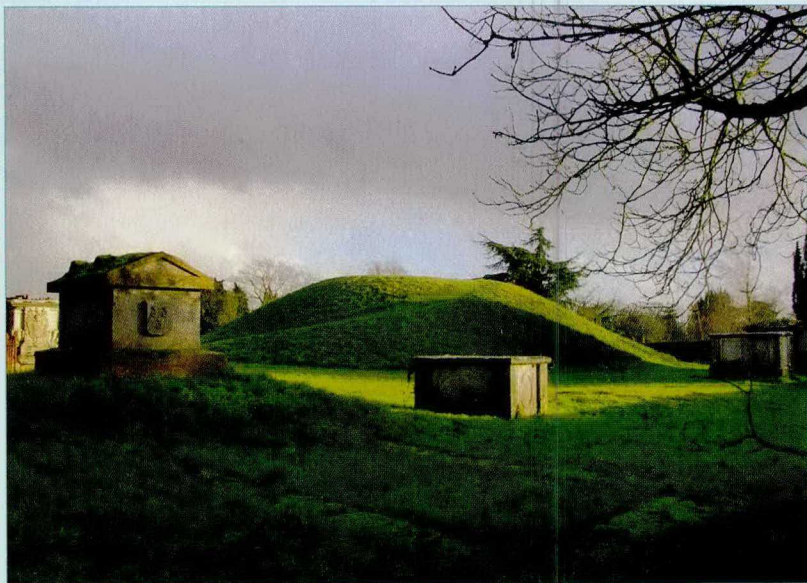


Fig.7. Taplow burial mound amongst more recent tombs. Photo © Stefan Czapski; used under a Creative Commons License.



replacing paganism, churches were often built at pagan holy sites such as springs, wells and burial places. This displaced the old deities and commandeered some of the sanctity attributed by the common folk. Just search any fields around a church with Anglo-Saxon origins and you are likely to make finds from that period (Figs.11-17). ARCHI UK again offers free help in locating Anglo-Saxon church sites; just enter the keyword 'Church' and all will be revealed (Fig.18).

The policy of building churches on former holy sites continued well into medieval times so searching around old churches may turn up finds pre-dating the church (Figs.19-22). By the end of

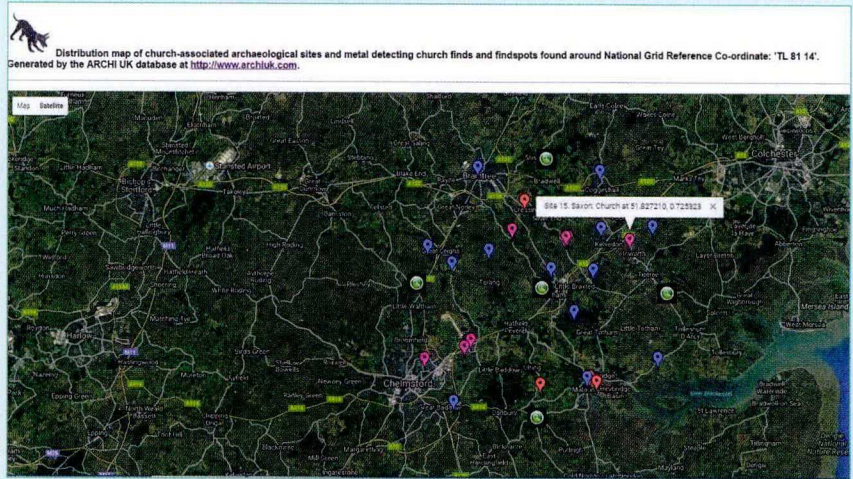


Fig.18. Old churches around Witham, Essex. Blue markers = Roman (reused Roman building material); Pink markers = Anglo-Saxon; Red markers = Medieval; Icons = centre and limits of search. © 2016 ARCHI UK (Archaeology) Ltd.



**Fig.14.**  
**Edward the**  
**Confessor**  
**penny, 1042-**  
**66.**



Fig.15.  
Cnut cut  
halfpenny,  
reverse,  
1016-35.



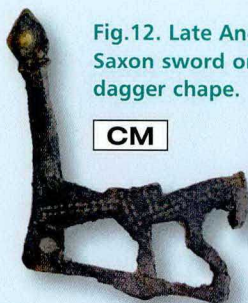
**Fig.17. Late Anglo-Saxon copper-alloy buckle.**



**Fig.16. Copper-alloy Anglo-Saxon strap end.**



Fig.13.  
Anglo-  
Saxon  
hooked  
fasteners.



**Fig.12. Late Anglo-Saxon sword or dagger chape.**



Fig.11. Harold II penny, 1066.



**Fig.9. Anglo-Saxon barrow distribution in England.**  
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(Archaeology)  
Ltd.



**Fig.10. Eym  
Anglo-Saxon  
Cross. Photo  
by Dave  
Pape.**



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the 8th century, the Anglo-Saxons had organised themselves by aggression or alliance into seven independent kingdoms (Fig.23).

Meanwhile, the expanding Catholic Church had amassed significant amounts of gold and silver in coin and religious artefacts, which were mainly kept in the monasteries and minster churches. From AD 793, the Vikings, who were pagan Scandinavian pirates, from Denmark, Norway and Sweden, made hit-and-run raids against the British Isles (Fig.24).

They targeted the undefended isolated monasteries for their rich pickings, particularly Lindisfarne, Wearmouth, Jarrow and Iona (Scotland) (Fig.25).

The Vikings attacked Scottish and Irish coastal districts in the first decade of the 9th century, southern England in AD 835 and the Welsh coast from the 850s. From AD 865 the Vikings changed tack, seeing the British Isles' mild climate and fertile soil as a place for colonisation rather than plunder. Despite fierce resistance, Wales saw minor colonisation in coastal areas, while Scotland and the Irish coast were colonised relatively quickly compared to lowland Britain. All four countries of the British Isles have their own colourful history of the Viking invasions although I only have space to relate something of the fortunes of what became England.

The 'Great Heathen Army' arrived in numerous ships, capturing York, which became the Viking capital. King

Aethelred of Wessex, fought against the Vikings, until his death in AD 871, when he was succeeded by his younger brother, Alfred the Great. From AD 876 several Anglo-Saxon kings gave in to Viking demands for land, including Northumbria, Mercia and East Anglia. King Alfred continued to fight the invaders and defeated the Viking king Guthrum of East Anglia at the Battle of Edington, Wiltshire. The Treaty of Wedmore, followed in AD 886, between East Anglia and Wessex, establishing a boundary between the Anglo-Saxons and the Viking area, called the 'Danelaw', since most Viking settlers were Danish (Fig.26).

Alfred formed a navy, organised a militia system and constructed a series of defended towns or burhs, providing secure refuges within a day's walk for the rural population. These burhs, some of which were re-fortified Roman towns, also served as regional market centres and mints (Fig.27). Wessex's modified



Fig.19. Gold bracteate pendant, 6th century.

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Fig.20. Copper-alloy Anglo-Saxon bridle cheek piece fragment.

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Fig.21. Copper-alloy Anglo-Saxon belt loop.

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Fig.22. Silvered, copper-alloy Anglo-Saxon equal armed brooch, 7th-9th centuries.

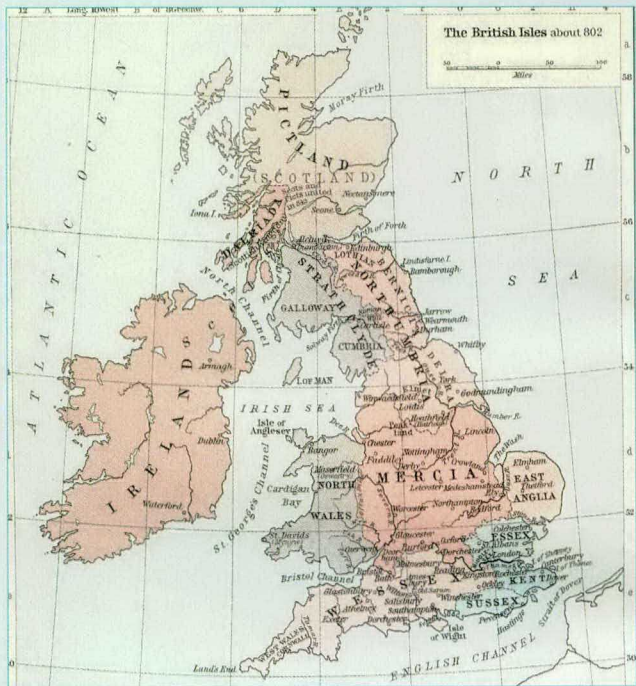
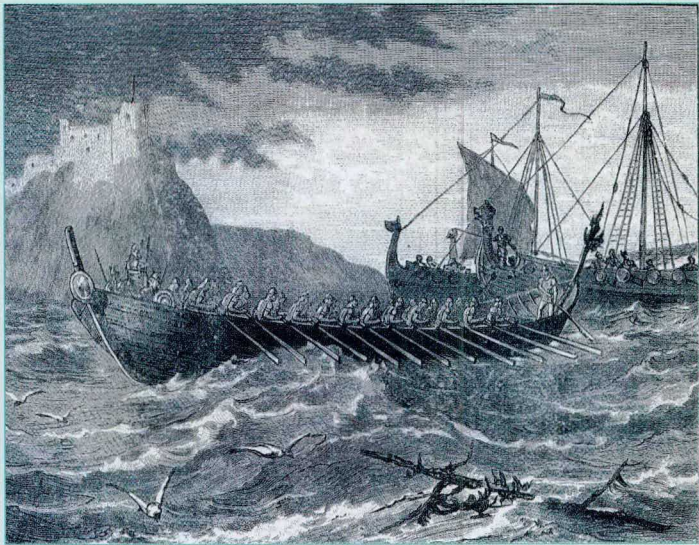


Fig.23. Britain about AD 802.

Fig.24. Viking raiders.





defences were successful against renewed Viking attacks and in AD 896 the invaders dispersed, settling in East Anglia, Northumbria and Normandy.

Opposition to Viking settlers continued under Alfred's successors. In AD 920 the Northumbrian and the Scots governments both submitted to the military power of Wessex. In AD 937 the Battle of Brunanburh, Cheshire, led to the collapse of Viking power in England and the eventual expulsion of the last Viking King of York, Erik Bloodaxe. Under the reign of Edgar the Peaceful, England was politically unified and Edgar recognised as king of all England by both Anglo-Saxons and Vikings.

Pagans were being converted to Christianity at home and abroad and there was a revival of the monasteries. However, during the reigns of his sons, Edward the Martyr, followed by Aethelred the Unready, the English monarchy declined in power and in AD 980 Viking raiders once again attacked England. The English government decided that the way to stop these attacks was to pay the Vikings protection money and, in 991, they gave them £10,000 in Danegeld. This payment proved insufficient, and over the next decade the Vikings demanded increasingly larger sums of money.

Many English called for hostile action

to be taken against the Vikings, leading to Aethelred's 1002 cull, known as 'The St Brice's Day massacre'. The number killed is unknown but the event enraged the Vikings, precipitating more raids. In 1013 King Sweyn of Denmark, who had previously made several attacks against England, invaded with a large army. Aethelred fled to Normandy, leaving Sweyn to take the English throne. Sweyn died within a year and Aethelred returned, but in 1016 another Viking army invaded, under the control of the Danish King Cnut. After defeating the Anglo-Saxons at the Battle of Assandun, Essex, Cnut became king of England as well as Denmark until his death in



Fig.25. Remains of St Paul's Monastery, Jarrow. Map data © 2016 Google.

Fig.27. Anglo-Saxon Burhs. Photo © Hel-hama; used under a Creative Commons License.

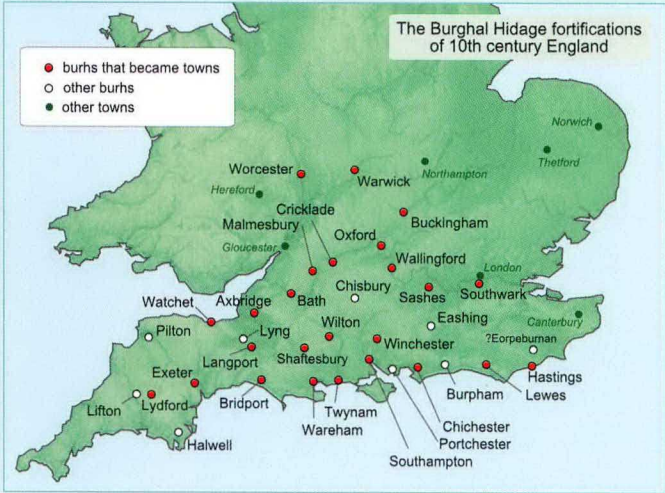


Fig.26. England after the Treaty of Wedmore.

Fig.28. The Llandwrog, Gwynedd, Viking Hoard. Photo © Portable Antiquities Scheme, Ref: NMGW-038729.





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1035, when England became independent again.

Edward the Confessor, Ethelred's son, reigned from 1042 and died in 1066, with neither heir nor a clear successor, but with three rival claimants to the throne. The king's council chose Harold of Wessex, Edward's brother-in-law, who was crowned Harold II. Later that year, Harald Hardrada, king of Norway, another claimant to the English throne, invaded Yorkshire and was defeated by Harold at the Battle of Stamford Bridge. Before the English Army had recovered, the Viking Normans, led by William the

Conqueror, the third claimant to the throne of England, invaded from the south and triumphed at the Battle of Hastings. The Vikings won after all!

These were turbulent times that were bound to put losses in the ground for us to find. Various hoards of treasure were buried, some deposited by Anglo-Saxons attempting to hide their wealth from Viking raiders and others buried by Vikings to protect their loot (Fig.28). Whether it is hoards or casual losses you are looking for, you can increase your finds rate by doing your research and searching as close as you can to places

subjected to raids, such as monasteries and battle sites. While known sites will probably be scheduled, the actual sites of battles in this period are mainly uncertain.

You could set the record straight with your metal detector, establishing routes of marching armies. The 'Great Heathen Army' travelled England for 14 years, which would have required many temporary camps. Vikings did not build temporary forts like the Romans so have left no clear trace in the landscape. However, they did make camp for the winter in several places such as Thetford, Repton and Torksey and searching for these camps could make great metal detecting opportunities. All battles would have involved marching armies and camp sites for both sides. The *Burghal Hidage*, a 9th-10th century land tax document lists some 30 burhs in Wessex.

We don't know the scope of the document and Kent is excluded, despite having several fortified towns. There are over 90 mint towns, which if they weren't burhs, would at least have been defended to protect the mint and its associated bullion and coin. A list of mint towns can be found at: <http://www.englishhammered.com/anglosaxon/anglosaxon.html>

Within a day's walk of these towns there would have been several Anglo-Saxon settlements, some of which may be lost. To trace such places you could follow all old routes by land and water radiating out from the towns. Many Viking place names end in 'by', 'thorpe' or 'toft' (Fig.29). A few useful Anglo-Saxon place-name elements to look out for are 'bury', 'ford', 'ham', 'port' and 'stow'.

<http://kepn.nottingham.ac.uk/> has an interactive map of 14,000 place names in England. You can filter by county and by source language to select Anglo-Saxon (Old English) or Viking (Old Norse) place names. To find Welsh, Irish and some Scottish Viking place names there

Fig.29. Deserted Viking village of Knaptoft, Leicestershire. Map Data © 2016 Google, Infoterra Ltd & Bluesky.



Fig.30. Aerial image and map showing watercourse changes. Map Data: Aerial image: © 2016 Google, Kent County Council; Map: Ordnance Survey, 1898.



Fig.31. Copper-alloy casket key, AD 900-1100.



Fig.32. Primary sceat, c.AD 680-710.



is another interactive map produced to aid an exhibition, at [http://www.britishmuseum.org/whats\\_on/exhibitions/vikings/vikings\\_live/old\\_norse\\_origins.aspx#mulie](http://www.britishmuseum.org/whats_on/exhibitions/vikings/vikings_live/old_norse_origins.aspx#mulie)

It is customary to end the Anglo-Saxon and Viking period in 1066; however, the Norman victory gave rise to a tax document, which is also an essential guide to late Anglo-Saxon England. William I had a detailed speech with his counsellors in 1085 and sent men all over England, to each shire to find out what or how much each landholder held, in land and livestock, and what it was worth. In 1086, the King's Commissioners set off on horseback to survey almost all England, except Cumberland, Durham, Lancashire, Northumberland and Westmoreland. The Commissioners recorded details of every manor and estate, who held it, the area of land, the number and class of adult males, every church and every mill.

Much can be learned from studying the translated pages of the Latin *Domesday Book* such as the location of Anglo-Saxon churches, settlements and markets, size of settlements and number of mills. Mill sites have major potential for metal detecting searches. The survey lists hundreds of mills, and since windmills came later, all the mills mentioned were probably water powered. They were so important as a source of income for their operators, usually the Lord of the Manor or the Church, that mills would sometimes be located on inadequate water sources that only powered them for a few months of the year.

Much trading will have taken place at these sites, while the watercourse itself would have seen considerable human activity for sustenance as well as possible religious, food, leisure and transport uses. The *Domesday* survey had no need for maps and most of these, largely wooden, mills will have disappeared, so a

little research is necessary to locate them. A few years ago you would have had to pop down to your local library or county archives but nowadays you can do most research on the Internet. If you want to try such research but you are not a computer user, you can easily become one, at your local library.

We are only considering watermills here but any post-medieval mill on a watercourse is likely to have developed from a *Domesday* mill. To get the full picture, we need to consult the *Domesday Book*. There are at least two free online versions; I prefer <http://www.domesdaymap.co.uk> that includes mapping so you can follow a watercourse.

If you don't use a computer, you will be able to look at a printed version at your local library. Although, as essential reading for serious medieval researchers, you could get your own copy covering the counties that interest you. The most popular version is published for each county by Phillimore in paperback. If you are interested in more than one or two counties, a cheaper alternative is *Domesday Book: A Complete Translation*, published

by Penguin, also in paperback. Only the total numbers of mills in each manor are recorded as, over 900 years ago, there would have been little need to identify precise locations. This is not a great problem since watermills must have been built on a watercourse of some sort, which reduces the search area considerably.

If a half of a mill is listed, the mill sits on the boundary with a neighbouring manor, also listing a half, and will be relatively easy to find, as modern parish boundaries often follow those of the earlier manor. Antiquarian, and more recent, local history books and maps, may also be helpful in pinpointing watermill sites. Watercourses may have changed over time, so it is wise to consult old maps and aerial photography to try to determine if there was an earlier course (Fig.30) then follow that to locate your mill and fill your finds bag (Figs.31-40).

**Acknowledgements:** I would like to thank Chris Kutler, ARCHI UK (Archaeology) Ltd, for facilitating the distribution maps and for permission to reproduce them. TH



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Figs.38 & 39. Gilt copper-alloy chip-carved button brooches, 6th century.



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Fig.40. Gilt copper-alloy small radiate head brooch, 6th century.



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Fig.37. Viking copper-alloy horse harness pendant (top arm missing).



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Fig.36. Copper-alloy Anglo-Saxon pin with polyhedral head.



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Fig.33. Copper-alloy Viking stirrup mount.



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Fig.34. Aethelred II (The Unready) penny, c.AD 991-7. Photo © Portable Antiquities Scheme.

Fig.35. Gilt copper-alloy cloisonné enamel brooch, 10th-11th centuries.



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