An Archaeological Resource Assessment of Anglo-Saxon Lincolnshire

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Introduction

In The Present State of Archaeology in Lincolnshire, Phillips (1934,137) stated that, 'The history of Lindsey during the Pagan Anglo-Saxon period is very obscure'. This article was, for the Anglo-Saxon period, as for the other periods being reviewed, the first to bring together the wealth of information which existed at that time.

It has long been recognised that, in the past, biases have existed within the national study of the Anglo-Saxon period and that these have been equally present in Lincolnshire. Principal among these, was the tendency for early researchers to concentrate on cemetery sites and the artefacts that they produced, rather than settlements which were less archaeologically visible. It has been noticed that, to some extent, the lack of information for this period outside of these areas has necessitated the perpetuation of these biases into relatively recent research (Steedman 1995, 297).

Lincolnshire has also seen a particularly geographical bias in the research for the Anglo-Saxon period. There has been an understandable tendency for previous work to focus on the Kingdom of Lindsey and not on the county as a whole. This has also been true in relatively recent work, with The Lost Kingdom exhibition at Scunthorpe Museum in 1987 (Leahy and Coutts 1987) and the publication of Pre-Viking Lindsey in 1993 (Vince ed. 1993). It must be stressed that this is by no means a criticism, as Lindsey, being a contemporary land division, makes a logical area of study. However, it has meant that the Kesteven and Holland districts of Lincolnshire have been less well represented in much of the more recent work.

The focusing of attention on Lindsey means that the county as a whole has received little in the way of an overview since it was included in a more general work on the East Midlands thirteen years ago (Stafford 1985). The long awaited, and shortly to be published Anglo-Saxon volume in the Society for Lincolnshire History and Archaeology's History of Lincolnshire series will, therefore, provide the first complete review specifically of the whole county since Phillips' work fifty-four years ago.

The nature of the previous work in the county is typical of the national picture. Some of the first evidence comes from antiquarian investigations, for example Jarvis' excavation of the Caenby barrow in 1850 (discussed by Everson 1993, 94). Equally, isolated finds, such as the silver pins from the River Witham at Fiskerton and the bronze hanging bowl from Manton Warren have played an important role. Together, these sources provided the core of information at the time of Phillip's work and have subsequently formed the foundation of our current knowledge.

Against a background of continually improving techniques and methodologies, the second half of this century has seen a variety of excavations in the county. These include settlement sites, such as Goltho (Beresford 1987) and Flixborough (Loveluck & Dobney 1998), and cemeteries such as Castledyke and Cleatham, which have greatly advanced our understanding. In the south of the county the work of the Fenland Survey, from 1981 to 1995, has provided important information on the density and pattern of settlement in the fens and on their margins. The work of independent groups and individuals carrying out fieldwalking and responsible metal detecting continues to provide knowledge of new finds and sites.

The bulk of the current fieldwork in the county consists of developer funded projects. These include major excavations like those Riby Cross Roads (Steedman 1995) and Quarrington (Walker and Lane 1996) which provide a wealth of information. Smaller projects, especially watching briefs are continuing to provide extra or new information where it would otherwise be lost. For example, a watching brief at Eastgate in Louth produced the first Anglo-Saxon evidence from the town centre (Field and George 1996, 58). Post-excavation work on nationally important Lincolnshire sites is

ongoing and includes the Flixborough settlement (Loveluck and Dobney 1998) and Cleatham cemetery (Leahy, pers. comm.).

As can be seen the archaeological evidence for Anglo-Saxon Lincolnshire is drawn from a range of sources. It can be broadly divided into cemetery, settlement and ecclesiastical sites for the purposes of discussing distributions. The distribution of cemetery sites shows a marked trend towards the high ground, with concentrations along the Wolds, and the Cliff and Heath to the north and south of Lincoln. The distribution of settlement sites is, by comparison, poor and not as easily interpreted. It does however clearly show the impact of the work of the Fenland Survey. It should not be forgotten that the archaeological information must be viewed alongside important documentary and place-name evidence for the period.

Social Organisation

The archaeological and documentary evidence shows that the political and social organisation of Lincolnshire during the Anglo-Saxon period was subject to several major changes.

A small amount of late 4th century Germanic metalwork, mainly buckles and brooches, has been found in the county. It has been suggested that these artefacts may indicate the presence of, and early settlement by Roman soldiers of Germanic origin or foederati. These finds are not on the whole associated with the large early cremation cemeteries and do not appear to represent the first phase of major settlement. (Leahy 1993, 29-44).

The greatest source of information for the Anglo-Saxon settlement of Lincolnshire comes from the large cremation cemeteries of the early period. The pottery burial urns from these cemeteries can be directly compared to examples in the Germanic homelands. It has been suggested that they show that the settlers were a mix of Anglian and Saxon traditions before they left the continent (Stafford 1985, 91). The present evidence seems to suggest that no substantial Anglo-Saxon settlement occurred in Lincolnshire before the middle of the fifth century (Leahy 1998, 24).

The continued presence of a British population at Lincoln during the early Anglo-Saxon period has been suggested based on a number of pieces of evidence. The absence of any cremation cemeteries close to the city, in marked contrast to other colonia and municipia such as York, has been taken to suggest that the city and its hinterland were controlled by a non Anglo-Saxon authority. Further evidence of continuity comes from the survival of the Roman name Lindum Colonia in its modern form as Lincoln.

Metalwork finds have provided important evidence of links with the west of Britain early in the period. Most important are the hanging bowls, which occur in greater numbers in Lincolnshire than anywhere else in the country (Bruce-Mitford 1993, 45-70). Additionally, a number of 5th to 6th century British penannular brooches have been found in the north of the county (Leahy 1993, 30).

Initially, the county may have consisted of a number of small tribal units, perhaps represented by the main cremation cemeteries (Leahy 1998, 26). There is some documentary evidence to suggest the existence of a Humbrensian people around the area of the Estuary in the early Saxon period (ibid, 27). The Tribal Hidage, a late 7th century tribute list, shows two small lordships surviving in the extreme south of the county, the Spaldas and Bilmingas.

The smaller tribal groups in the north of the county were joined together around the start of the 7th century to form the kingdom of Lindsey. The documentary sources show that Lindsey was a disputed kingdom. It changed hands between Mercia and Northumbria a number of times before finally coming under Mercian control after the Battle of the Trent in the year 679. The Tribal Hidage shows the Kesteven area of the county lay within the northern part of Outer Mercia.

The first documented Viking attack on Lincolnshire was in the year 841 and a period of increased raiding followed in the 860's culminating in the overwintering of the Great Viking Army at Torksey in 872-3. The raids and presence of the army caused political instability throughout the region. Lincolnshire and the East Midlands passed between Viking and English control up to the middle 10th century when King Edward finally gained control of the region.

The 9th century saw the start of changes in the structure of estates resulting in the formation of parishes, a process which increased during the following two centuries. Coupled with this process was the formation of the wapentakes and of Lincolnshire itself, which is first mentioned in 1016 (Stafford 1985, 141-142).

Settlement (Rural)

The evidence for early and middle Saxon settlement in Lincolnshire is sparse. The county lacks the large scale excavations which have taken place elsewhere in the east of England (e.g. West Stow in Suffolk and Mucking in Essex). Until recently most of the excavations which had been carried out had been of single or small groups of structures. Two of these excavations which are of particular importance are Salmonby (Everson 1973) and Nettleton Top (Field and Leahy 1993) where grubenhauser associated with early Saxon pottery were found.

Larger excavations of important early to middle Saxon sites have been carried out at Riby Cross Roads (Steedman 1995) and Quarrington (Walker and Lane 1996). Both of these sites consisted of ditched tracks and enclosures. The structural evidence varied between the two sites. The remains of five possible grubenhauser, at least two of which were of middle Saxon date, but no clearly post-built structures were identified at Riby (Steedman 1995). Quarrington, produced the remains of a number of post-built structures of rectangular and sub-circular form and one possible grubenhaus (Walker and Lane 1996).

Smaller excavations have also produced evidence for this continuity of settlement from the early to middle Saxon periods. Excavations at Cherry Willingham produced pottery finds ranging throughout the Saxon period suggesting continuing activity on the site. However only one grubenhaus, associated with ninth century pottery, was identified (Field 1981).

Excavations have been carried out at two major middle Saxon sites and a number of smaller sites in the county. The excavations at Goltho, in the early 1970's, produced the remains of two post-built farmsteads within enclosures, dated to the first half of the 9th century. These were followed by a series of superimposed ranges of buildings running through the 10th and 11th centuries. The buildings consisted of wooden halls, kitchens, bowers and weaving sheds within a fortified enclosure (Beresford 1987, 22-84).

At Flixborough the remains of a high status settlement site, possibly an estate centre, were excavated between 1988 and 1995. Although the site was not fully excavated, the remains of at least thirty buildings were revealed. Many of these were constructed in succession on the same plots, and included halls and a possible church or mortuary chapel. The site dates from the 7th to 10th centuries and, when post excavation work is completed, it will provide an extremely important view of high status rural settlement for the period (Loveluck and Dobney 1998).

Smaller sites, such as St Nicholas School, Boston (Palmer-Brown 1996), where two 8th century grubenhauser were excavated, are probably more representative of the bulk of rural settlement for this period. Excavation at Whitehouse Lane, Fishtoft produced the remains of possible turf-built rectangular buildings and associated ditches. These structures appear to have had a very short life from around the late 9th to middle 10th centuries and would seem to have burnt down (Palmer-Brown and Johnson 1997, 37-38).

Settlement (Urban)

A recent review of the archaeology of post-Roman Lincoln up to the 9th century showed that some activity continued in the remains of the city during this period (Steane and Vince 1993). The evidence seems to point to Lincoln surviving in an administrative and ecclesiastical role as opposed to as an urban centre. The potential survival as an administrative centre has briefly been mentioned above. The absence of any major cremation cemeteries close to the city and the survival of the Roman name have been given as evidence for this suggested continuity. In addition, Bede makes reference to Blaecca as the prefect of the city in the early 7th century and this use of a Roman title is seen as further evidence of Lincoln as an important political centre, perhaps even that which controlled Lindsey.

Small quantities of Anglo-Saxon pottery and metalwork have been identified from sites in the city and along with the possible cultivation of some of the 'dark earth' layers may suggest that at least some settlement activity was taking place. However, some of this material could be later in date and may actually belong to the Anglo-Scandinavian settlement (Steane and Vince 1993, 76-78).

The evidence for Anglo-Saxon settlement in the Roman towns and small towns in the county is slightly less limited. Sites in the walled towns of Caistor (Field and Leahy 1993, 36) and Horncastle (Field and George 1995, 42) have both produced quantities of early Saxon pottery and artefacts. Evidence in the form of burials adjacent to the towns, such as the 5th century cremation cemetery at Ancaster (Stevens and Shotter 1996, 23), may indicate some form of continued settlement close to, if not on, these sites.

The late 9th century saw the revival of Lincoln as an urban centre which accompanied its establishment as one of the Five Boroughs. The evidence from pottery finds shows that the development started in the south-east quarter of the lower city. By the middle of the 10th century there had been rapid expansion including the suburb of Wigford south of the river and into the upper city by the end of the century (Vince and Young 1991a). The Flaxengate excavations of the 1970's have provided a sequence for the development of the south east part of the city. Remains of rectangular wooden domestic buildings dating from the late 9th century, and buildings of both domestic and industrial use from the late 10th century onwards were revealed (Perring 1981).

Stamford, also one of the Five Boroughs, saw urban development, commencing in the late 9th century, which was centred around the Viking and English fortifications there (Stafford 1985, 46-47). The development of many of the smaller towns in the county also took place during the late Saxon period. Excavated evidence is generally lacking but the presence of late 10th century mints at Torksey, Caistor, Louth and Horncastle has been taken as evidence of their urban status by this time (ibid). The importance of Lincoln, Stamford and Torksey by the end of the period is clearly shown by these being the first three entries in the Lincolnshire section of the Domesday Book. These were not the only urban centres, with burgesses recorded in Grantham and Louth, and markets at a number of other settlements (Darby 1957, 78)

Material Culture and Technology

The material culture and technology of the Anglo-Saxon period is well represented by a wide range of artefacts. For the early and middle Saxon periods these are principally from the cemeteries and from isolated finds.

The artefacts which have, perhaps, received the most attention in the past are those made of non-ferrous metals. These cover a wide range of brooch types, sleeve fasteners, buckles, girdle hangers and more unusual objects such as work boxes and bucket mounts. Iron artefacts range from common finds such as knives, through spearheads and shield bosses to rare examples of high quality weapons like the 9th century sword from the River Witham.

When fully analysed, the large assemblage of material from Flixborough, consisting of thousands of artefacts, will provide a wealth of new information for the middle and late Saxon periods.

The evidence for metalworking in Lincolnshire during the early and middle Saxon periods is fairly limited. The Quarrington excavations produced important mould and crucible fragments, slags and hearth linings, showing that both ferrous and non-ferrous metalworking was taking place on the site in the early Saxon period (Walker and Lane 1996, 30). Further evidence for metalworking activity at settlement sites includes an iron smelting furnace of probable Saxon date excavated at Cherry Willingham (Field 1981). The extensive excavations at Flixborough have provided evidence of iron, copper-alloy and leadworking at the site in the form of slag, waste materials and tools (Loveluck & Dobney 1998, 162-163). Isolated finds, such as an unfinished small long brooch from Winterton (Leahy, pers. comm.) are gradually adding to our knowledge.

Probably the best insight into the metalworking technology of the period is the finds from the 7th century smith's grave at Tattershall Thorpe. This isolated grave included two bundles containing metalworking tools and other materials. The tools included hammers, tongs, files, a draw plate and a small anvil. The other material included iron, copper alloy, silver and lead scrap and a tiny piece of gold. Roman coins, glass fragments and very small worked garnets were also present. This assemblage

of material is of great importance in understanding contemporary metalworking technology and the skill of its owner who may well have been an itinerant smith.

Metalworking in the late Saxon period is well represented on urban sites such as Flaxengate. This site produced evidence of both ferrous and non-ferrous production including crucibles, ingots, moulds and part finished dress hooks (Stafford 1985, 56).

Pottery production showed clear technological advances during the Anglo-Saxon period. Early and middle Saxon vessels are well represented from the cemeteries. These were hand made and frequently decorated with stamped or incised patterns. The late Saxon period saw the greatest advances in pottery technology, with a return to more standardised wheel thrown vessels and mass production. Nationally important pottery industries were established at Lincoln, Torksey and Stamford by or during the 10th century. Lead glaze was used on some 9th century Stamford ware vessels, representing a major technological advance (McCarthy and Brooks 1988, 147-156).

Wood-working is poorly represented due to the low survival rate of its finished products. However, there are some examples from the county such as the remains of a small box or case made of ash containing a small long brooch found at the Fonaby cemetery (Cook 1981, 55). An important collection of middle to late Saxon carpentry tools was found at Flixborough. The tools was buried in two lead tanks and included axes, adzes, spoke-shaves, spoon-bits and a bill hook (Leahy 1995, 352).

Textile production is well evidenced throughout the period, principally by loomweights, spindle whorls and pin beaters from many of the excavated sites and from fieldwalking. Small fragments of fabrics often survive attached to brooches and other metal artefacts in graves where they have been preserved by the corrosion, for example at the Fonaby cemetery (Crowfoot 1981).

Many glass beads and the occasional fragments of glass vessels have been found in the county, again mainly from cemetery sites of the early and middle period. It is not until the late Saxon period that clear evidence of production is found. Again, this evidence comes from Flaxengate, where crucibles, rings and beads were found (Stafford 1985, 56).

Items made of other materials, such as bone, antler and stone, are well represented throughout the period. Evidence of the manufacture of many of these items, in the form of waste material and unfinished products, are equally common.

Economy

Like its Late Iron Age and Romano-British predecessors the economy of Anglo-Saxon Lincolnshire was predominantly agrarian throughout the period. Some evidence for the agrarian practices of the period comes from the few excavated rural sites. That the layout of these sites, consisting of enclosures and droveways, is strongly reminiscent of Late Iron Age and Romano-British farmsteads is perhaps to be expected.

The evidence from Riby and Quarrington points to the rearing of stock as a primary activity. At Riby cattle appeared to be the main stock reared, with sheep in lesser quantities. There is evidence to suggest that cattle were being overwintered during the middle Saxon period. Quarrington shows a shift in emphasis, from mainly cattle early in the period, to mainly sheep in the middle of the period. At both sites the evidence indicates that most of the sheep were being killed relatively young for their meat and not kept for wool or dairy produce (Steedman 1995, 295-296; Walker and Lane 1996, 28-29). The presence of cattle, sheep/goats, pigs, geese and chickens have been identified from the bones recovered during the excavations at Flixborough (Loveluck & Dobney 1998, 162).

All of these sites have produced some evidence for arable farming and processing. Charred grains of cereals and pulses were found at Flixborough and charred barley at Riby (Loveluck & Dobney 1998, 162; Steedman 1995, 296). Both of these sites, and Quarrington, have produced fragments of lava quernstones and an iron plough coulter was found at Flixborough (ibid.; Walker and Lane 1996, 29). Further evidence for the types of cereals produced comes from the middle Saxon St. Nicholas School site at Boston. At this site 93% of the identifiable grain was barley with lesser quantities of free-

threshing wheat also present. Pulses were also represented (although only horsebean could be identified) as were flax seeds (Giorgi and Rackham 1996, 15). Evidence for the growing of horsebeans, peas and possibly hemp were identified at a middle Saxon site at Gosberton (Murphy 1994).

The methods of exchange of goods in the early and middle Saxon periods consisted of the payment of tribute, looting and a limited amount of trade (Stafford 1985, 42). Long distance trade took place as items from graves clearly show. Lincolnshire graves have contained ivory from Siberia and garnets, cowrie shells and coral from India and the Indian Ocean (Leahy & Coutts 1987, 7). Other finds from graves are from less far afield, a 7th century ceramic jug from the Castledyke cemetery at Barton on Humber was of Frankish manufacture.

Geographically, Lincolnshire was well situated for Continental trade via the North Sea and its navigable internal waterways. Settlements like Barton on Humber were well placed to serve as points of access and the internal waterways no doubt influenced the development of Lincoln, Stamford and Torksey. Finds from the late Saxon urban sites provide evidence of the far reaching trade networks of the Scandinavian settlers. Excavations in Lincoln have produced sherds of imported Syrian and Chinese pottery dated to the 8th to 9th century as well as later continental wares (Mann 1982, 47).

Petrological analysis of Anglo-Saxon pottery from Lincolnshire and beyond has shown that vessels moved over some distance even in the early Saxon period. Pottery found in North Lincolnshire had been produced in the Charnwood Forest area of Leicestershire (Vince and Young 1991b).

The mass produced wares of the late Saxon pottery industries in the county, at Torksey, Lincoln and Stamford, were traded over long distances. The main distribution of Stamford ware is in central England but it has been found on sites as far afield as Aberdeen and Perth (Richards 1991, 90).

The best picture of the overall economic importance of Lincolnshire during the middle to late Saxon period is provided by the numismatic evidence. The earlier coin finds from Lindsey have recently been reviewed by Blackburn (1993). His findings showed that there was minimal circulation of coins in the kingdom before the 8th century. Lincolnshire has a high number of Anglo-Saxon coin finds compared to most other counties in England which provides clear evidence of its wealth during the middle Saxon period (ibid).

Mints were established at Lincoln and Stamford before the middle 10th century (Stafford 1985, 44). By the 11th century they were the major mints of Mercia and Lincoln in particular was producing at least ten per cent of English coinage (ibid, 45). The importance of these mints and the presence of the temporary mints at the smaller towns clearly points to the prosperity of the county during the late Saxon period.

Ritual and Religion
Little is known about pre-Christian Saxon beliefs apart from some aspects of their burial customs. The principal burial rite at the start of the Anglo-Saxon period was cremation. Burials appear to have been focused on a relatively small number of large cemeteries such as Cleatham, Elsham and Loveden Hill. These cemeteries appear to have served large areas and, as has already been suggested, may be representative of tribal groupings (Leahy 1998).

The late 5th century saw the start of a widespread change in the main burial rite to inhumation. This change took place over a long period and the resulting overlap means that some cemeteries, such as Cleatham and Castledyke at Barton on Humber, contain both burial rites. The inhumation cemeteries were smaller and more numerous with over 40 known from Lindsey alone (Leahy 1993, 37).

Inhumation burials differ greatly exhibiting wide variation in the orientation of the grave, position of the body and the presence, position and type of grave goods. In addition to the cemeteries there are examples of isolated higher status burials such as the Caenby barrow burial (Everson 1993, 94-98).

The origins of Christianity within the county, and Lincoln in particular, can be traced back to the later Roman period. The St. Paul-in-the-Bail site provides important, if ambiguous, evidence for early Christianity in Lincoln. Apsidal buildings of timber construction may be late Roman churches in the forum and are overlain by burials . The empty cist burial, containing the 7th century hanging bowl, lay within a single cell structure also interpreted as a church (Steane 1991).

Clearer evidence of early Christianity in Lincoln comes from Bede's reference to the visit of St. Paulinus in the year 627. He converted Blaecca, the Prefect of the city, built a stone church and held a mass baptism in the Trent at an unknown place called Tiowulfingcastir.

Outside of Lincoln the earliest evidence consists of a number of certain and possible monastic sites. These date from the late 7th and 8th centuries and include the well documented sites such as Barrow, Bardney and Crowland and sites like South Kyme, the existence of which is assumed from finds of stone sculpture (Stocker 1993). Minster churches like St Mary's at Stow, existed in addition to the monasteries and together each centre served a wide area.

Accompanying the changes in land holding, from the 9th century onwards, which resulted in the formation of parishes was the establishment of parish churches. Lincolnshire has good evidence of late Saxon churches. Examples of churches with surviving architectural details include St. Peter's at Barton on Humber and St. Margaret's at Marton. There are many more examples which contain Saxon architectural or carved stonework either reused and built into their fabric or loose within the church.

Urban parishes were formed at around the same time and there are a number of examples of early churches in Lincoln. These include the surviving towers of St Peter-at-Gowts and St Mary-le-Wigford which also has a Saxon inscription on a re used Roman tombstone (Ambrose 1979, 4).

Transition to Norman England
The end of the Saxon period is marked by possibly the most memorable date in British history and the national events of the time need no introduction. Inevitably Lincolnshire played an important role in the political changes in the 11th century preceding the Norman Conquest. For example, in 1013 King Swegn of Denmark landed at Gainsborough and received the submission of the people of the East Midlands (Stafford 1985, 124).

The Norman Conquest brought with it major changes, particularly in laws and land holding. The changes in the latter, and the state of the county in the 11th century, are recorded in the Domesday Book. This survey is the standard source for the end of the Saxon period and provides the starting block for the study of the rest of the medieval period.

Acknowledgements.
I would like to thank Alan Vince for his comments and help with this paper. Sincere thanks are also expressed to Mark Bennet, Tom Lane and Kevin Leahy for their assistance, and to the Lincolnshire, North Lincolnshire and North East Lincolnshire SMRs for providing information and distribution maps.

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Late Anglo-Saxon images of evangelists and authors often show them working at what looks more like a lectern than a board or desk. Specific information on the storage of Anglo-Saxon books is predictably exiguous. Book production presupposed long-distance contacts. There is the methodological point that reconstructing the elusive realities of Anglo-Saxon book production requires a holistic approach to the available evidence, such as it is. It is essential to take codicological, documentary, art-historical, and archaeological evidence together, along with the experience of modern scribes, testin