

Anglo-Saxon Rural Economy

A SURVEY OF THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVIDENCE AND A SUGGESTION

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THIS paper is intended, first, to present a picture of Anglo-Saxon rural economy as it is at present revealed in the archaeological evidence. In the second place it suggests a research programme which might substantially further the archaeological study of the subject.

Archaeologically our knowledge of the Anglo-Saxon period depends largely on the material from thousands of graves excavated over the last two hundred years. These objects are a typologist's dream; with their Continental counterparts, they provided the basis for one of the most important archaeological books of this century, Bernhard Salin's *Die altgermanische Thierornamentik*.¹ By means of a minute typological study of the brooches and other objects from graves of the migration period, Salin was able to erect a chronology for European archaeology from the fourth to the ninth century. Salin's chronological system remains to this day the basis of migration period studies, and most major archaeological contributions to the understanding of this period have been on a typological base. Grave goods—swords, spear-heads, and brooches—to a large extent dominate research in this field today. For this reason one might almost say that any illumination archaeological material throws on Anglo-Saxon agricultural practice occurs in spite of the archaeologist, rather than because of his work, for ploughs and hoes are not found in graves and the excavation of settlement sites has, until recently, been much neglected. Most of the evidence quoted here has been found accidentally.

I shall divide my data into two groups: material and monuments. Under the first heading I shall examine the tools, etc., found in museums and collections; under the second I shall include all the physical remains of human activity revealed either by field survey or excavation.

MATERIAL

Of the primary tool of the farmer, the plough, remains are so scanty as to

¹ *Die altgermanische Thierornamentik. Typologische Studie über germanische Metallgegenstände aus dem IV bis IX Jahrhundert*, Stockholm, 1904.

be almost non-existent. From Thetford¹ and St Neots² come shares, and from Westley Waterless a share and what is possibly a coulter.³ All were found in middle or late Saxon contexts. Much has been made in the past of the introduction by the Anglo-Saxons of the heavy plough into England, but, as Payne has said, "Evidence for the development of British ploughs during the Dark Ages and the Middle Ages is scanty. This is less serious, however, now that we have the testimony of the early asymmetrical shares to confirm the evidence for the use of the fixed mould-board during the Romano-British period."⁴ The Thetford and Westley Waterless shares are probably the precursors of the Wingless 'pike' share used on the normal mould-board plough down to the early nineteenth century. I have little doubt that the mould-board plough was in use in Anglo-Saxon England, but this is practically impossible to prove. One or two indications are present, however.—

(i) At Jarlshof, Shetland, in a ninth-century Viking level, was found a worn pebble⁵ very much like those inlaid on the land side of the Tømmerby plough (a Danish mould-board plough, tentatively dated to the pre-Roman Iron Age).⁶

(ii) Asymmetrical ploughs are attested in Viking contexts in Norway⁷ and there seems no reason to doubt that the Vikings would have used them when they came to England.

Archaeologically, however, it is impossible to say whether the asymmetrical plough had a continuous history from the Romano-British to the Anglo-Saxon period, or whether it was reintroduced by the Viking invaders.

Other agricultural implements which survive in Anglo-Saxon contexts are mainly minor tools.

Scythe blades were found at Hurbuck, near Lanchester, Durham, in a

¹ *4000 Years of Norfolk Farming, An Exhibition at the Castle Museum, Norwich, Norwich, 1960*, pl. II.

² T. C. Lethbridge and C. F. Tebbutt, 'Huts of the Anglo-Saxon Period', *Proceedings of the Cambridge Antiquarian Society*, xxxiii, 1933, pp. 145-6.

³ C. Fox, *The Archaeology of the Cambridge Region*, Cambridge, 1923, p. 300; Cambridge: Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology.

⁴ 'The British Plough: Some stages in its development', *The Agricultural History Review*, v, 1957, p. 79.

⁵ J. R. C. Hamilton, *Excavations at Jarlshof, Shetland*, Edinburgh, 1956, p. 173.

⁶ P. V. Glob, *Ard og Plov*, Aarhus, 1951, fig. 89. Steensberg ('North West European plough-types of prehistoric times and the Middle Ages', *Acta Archaeologica*, vii, 1936, p. 254), who first drew attention to this plough, and most of those who follow him, have been extremely cautious in their dating of this plough (cf., for example, J. G. D. Clark, *Prehistoric Europe*, London, 1952, pp. 105 f.).

⁷ J. Petersen, *Vikingetidens Redskaper*, Oslo, 1951, pp. 175-80.

tenth-century hoard of weapons and tools.¹ The blades are straight and up to two feet long. The tang is in the same plane as the blade, but at right angles to it, protruding on the cutting side. On one of them the tip of the tang survives; it is upturned and was probably hammered into the handle to give greater security. The scythes were presumably of the long-handled type and were sharpened with whetstones, some quite large examples of which have been recorded.

In the Hurbuck hoard are a couple of picks, one double-ended and one single-ended, which may have had some agricultural application.

The shoe of a spade was found at Sandtun, Kent.² It is of square form and indicates that the blade of the spade was of wood. Manuscripts indicate shoes on both double and single-sided spades,³ and there seems no reason why the two types of spade should not have been used alongside each other in a manner that is documented in northern peasant communities in Europe in modern times.

A bill was found in the Westley Waterless hoard,⁴ and what is surely a pruning-knife at St Neots.⁵ It is perhaps interesting to note that sickles have not been found in Anglo-Saxon contexts.

A certain amount of consideration has been given to the crops produced by the farmers. But the investigation has been very localized and the results are barely of statistical value. Jessen and Helbaek's work, *Cereals in Britain* (Copenhagen, 1944) included some evidence from the Anglo-Saxon period. By taking impressions of grain left during manufacture on hand-made pots of all periods, Jessen and Helbaek produced the following results.—

On thirty-seven pots yielding results were found impressions of naked barley, hulled barley, oat, flax, and woad in the following proportions:

- 3 impressions of naked barley;
- 80 impressions of hulled barley;
- 14 impressions of oat (*avena sativa*);
- 1 impression of wild oat (*avena fatua*);
- 2 impressions of flax;
- 1 impression of woad.

Most of the examples came from pots found in Anglo-Saxon cemeteries in the Oxford and Cambridge regions. In fact only one pot was examined outside this region (it was found in Yorkshire) and this was one of the three

¹ D. M. Wilson, *The Anglo-Saxons*, London, 1960, fig. 11.

² *ibid.*, fig. 14.

³ E. M. Jope, 'Agricultural Implements', *A History of Technology*, II (ed. C. Singer, E. J. Holmyard, A. R. Hall, and T. I. Williams), Oxford, 1956, fig. 66.

⁴ Fox, *op. cit.*, p. 300.

⁵ Lethbridge and Tebbutt, *op. cit.*, p. 139 and fig. 3.

examples yielding naked barley. These results, therefore, may be true of only a small part of England. But in a general manner the results reflect quite closely the proportions found in prehistoric England.¹ This is a field that could be more thoroughly investigated and which might produce real results susceptible of statistical analysis. One negative result is of interest. No trace of wheat of any sort was found, although it was known at an earlier period (it was, for example, the most important grain in the Neolithic period), but this may be an accidental result.

So far all our knowledge of grain in Anglo-Saxon England depends on the analysis of grain-impressions on pots. The palaeobotanists have not yet turned their attention to the Anglo-Saxon period, largely, I am afraid, because the archaeologists have not yet provided them with the material.

Little is known from archaeological sources about the treatment of grain after harvesting. Granaries of some sort obviously existed, and Winkelmann has suggested that certain buildings at Warendorf served in such a capacity.² Neither threshing nor grain-drying has left any trace in the archaeological evidence. Querns have rarely been found—or rarely noted—in Anglo-Saxon contexts. However, quern fragments of basaltic lava have been recorded at Anglo-Saxon sites at St Neots, Huntingdonshire, at Thetford, and in Anglo-Saxon contexts at Canterbury, Crossgates, and Southampton. The lava was probably imported from Mayen in the Eifel;³ at the same time English stone must have been used in great quantity for this purpose.

The only known Anglo-Saxon mill was recently excavated at Old Windsor.⁴ It was a large, sophisticated water-mill with three wheels working in parallel in a leat cut across a loop in the Thames. The leat was three-quarters of a mile long, twenty feet wide, and had a maximum depth of twelve feet. The mill building itself was a substantial timber-framed structure and dated from the end of the Anglo-Saxon period. Little can be said concerning the typicality or otherwise of this mill: judging from the hundreds of examples recorded in Domesday—sometimes two or more in a parish—it must be presumed that it was exceptionally elaborate.

¹ It should be emphasized that these results apply only to the pagan Anglo-Saxon period, when there is an abundance of hand-made pottery. They must not be taken to apply to the whole period.

² W. Winkelmann, 'Eine westfälische Siedlung des 8 Jahrhunderts bei Warendorf, Kr. Warendorf', *Germania*, xxxii, 1954, fig. 13, 3-4.

³ G. C. Dunning, 'Trade relations between England and the Continent in the Late Anglo-Saxon Period', *Dark Age Britain*, ed. D. B. Harden, London, 1956, p. 232. Also found at Maxey, Northants, *Archaeological News Letter*, vii, p. 22.

⁴ Only published in note form in D. M. Wilson and J. G. Hurst, 'Medieval Britain in 1957', *Medieval Archaeology*, ii, 1958, p. 184.

There is no archaeological evidence of the fruits used or cultivated by the Anglo-Saxons, but it may be assumed that those present in Roman-Britain were still harvested in the post-Roman period. Applebaum records the following fruits in Romano-British contexts: cherry, plum, damson, bullace, apple, and mulberry.¹

Excavation has as yet yielded little information concerning animal husbandry in the Anglo-Saxon period. The only site in the south of England at which it has been possible to analyse the domestic animal bones, in a statistically acceptable form, is Cassington, a pagan Anglo-Saxon village near Oxford.² The results can be tabulated thus:

Ox	43 per cent
Sheep	12 „ „
Pig	29 „ „
Horse	8 „ „
Dog	8 „ „

In the north of England, the pagan Anglian settlement of Crossgates, near Scarborough, produced the following results:³

Ox	60 per cent
Horse	30 „ „
Pig	10 „ „
Sheep	a few.

The few animal bones from the Wykeham, Yorkshire, settlement site have been analysed, but are not yet published. Yeavinger, Northumberland, produced a majority of sheep/goat, but the analysis is not yet complete.⁴ The Old Windsor, Berkshire, site has produced a vast quantity of animal bones, but here again no analysis has yet been made. This evidence then is of little use. Until many more sites, concentrated in small regions, have been investigated, little purpose can be served by attempting to analyse these results. A few qualitative conclusions can be drawn. For instance, both at Sedgeford in Norfolk⁵ and at Crossgates in Yorkshire there is evidence that the size of cattle was well up to that of the Romano-British cattle. Results based on such a miserable statistical basis are not conclusive, but may indicate the

¹ S. Applebaum, 'Agriculture in Roman Britain', *Agricultural History Review*, II, 1954, p. 71.

² I am grateful to Mr E. M. Jope, one of the excavators of the site, for providing me with the results of his wife's work on these remains.

³ J. G. Rutter and G. Duke, *Excavations at Crossgates, Scarborough*, 1947-56, Scarborough, 1958, pp. 60-1.

⁴ Information from Mr Brian Hope-Taylor.

⁵ Information from Dr Peter Jewell.

retention of a high standard of animal husbandry in the post-Roman period. Horses all seem to be of a standard New Forest or Mountain pony size.

Comparison with continental animal analysis is extremely difficult. The Cassington results agree approximately with those from the Viking age town of Haithabu in North Germany,¹ but there is no real worth in such a comparison owing to the differing ecology of the two areas and the different character of the two sites. Ultimately continental animal analyses must be compared with results from similar areas and sites in Great Britain, but for the moment such comparisons are of coincidental value only, for they are not statistically acceptable.

REMAINS IN THE FIELD

An examination of the field monuments presents the agricultural historian with problems that are almost insoluble. Compared with the prehistoric and Romano-British periods, the Anglo-Saxon material is extremely sparse.

The most recent study of ancient fields, that of Colin Bowen,² is critical of much of the work of the last twenty or thirty years, and offers more suggestions for future work than concrete information on the form of fields in different periods. Bowen suggests that strip-lynchets are of Anglo-Saxon origin. A strip-lynchet is "a long, narrow, often prominent terrace. By definition they are always found on slopes but many were originally surrounded by other strip fields, either flat or ridged belonging to the same system. . . They differ from the Celtic fields by their attenuated proportions." A proportion of 1:50 in fields only three or four yards wide is not uncommon; although there are many exceptions of different form, strip fields are often open-ended. They tend to lie close to nucleated settlements, and where archaeological evidence is available, they appear to belong to the post-Roman period. In north Wiltshire, for example, strip-lynchets have been found overlying a filled-in Romano-British ditch, while at Blewburton, Berkshire, they lie over parts of an earlier hill-fort. In all known instances of contact with 'Celtic' fields the strip-lynchets are later.³

Estate, enclosure, and tithe maps give innumerable instances of strip-lynchets cultivated as strip fields as late as the nineteenth century. Other documentary evidence is sparse, and even the well-known and often repeated suggestion that strip-lynchets are mentioned in the laws of Ine appears to be false.⁴ Nevertheless there seems to be a strong likelihood

¹ W. Herre, *Die Haustiere von Haithabu*, Neumünster, 1960.

² *Ancient Fields*, London, 1961.

³ Most of this evidence is derived from Bowen, *op. cit.*

⁴ This hare was started by F. Seebohm, *The English Village Community*, London, 1883, and

that strip-lynchets were already being formed in the Anglo-Saxon period.

The only fields so far traced by excavation and proved by their associated finds to be of Anglo-Saxon date are certain drove-ways and pasture land excavated by Mr Addyman in January 1962 at Little Paxton, Huntingdonshire.¹ No traces of Anglo-Saxon plough marks, similar to those found on the Continent in contemporary contexts,² have yet been found in this country. Apart from the examples quoted here, there is no evidence of Anglo-Saxon field shapes in the archaeological material. The work of the committee of the British Association on ancient fields has given us a considerable amount of information about the physical appearances of fields; but, despite the large number of available archaeological surveys, few historians or archaeologists have tried to correlate the documents with the surviving physical features. There should be more attempts, for example, to follow up incidental material available in charters. Dr Finberg has given an example of the value of such work in his recent discussion of the Hallow-Hawling charter, in which he has been able to recognize traces of ancient pasture, and hints of other field boundaries.³ Such work is of necessity long-drawn-out, but in some cases may be well worth while to the agricultural historian. In the Highland Zone—and perhaps elsewhere—Anglo-Saxon shieling sites must be investigated. Mr Gelling's work on such sites in the Isle of Man may, when published, encourage similar work in Anglo-Saxon contexts.

The study of the actual agricultural settlements of the Anglo-Saxons also bristles with problems. A large number of small Anglo-Saxon domestic sites have been investigated in England, but few of them have been subjected to thoroughly scientific archaeological treatment. Since the war a handful of settlement sites have been investigated, but, with one or two minor exceptions, particularly the Crossgates, Scarborough, site,⁴ they have not yet been published in more than summary form. The key-site for a long time has been the village of Sutton Courtenay, which was excavated by E. T. Leeds between 1921 and 1937.⁵ Leeds was working under the most difficult conditions has been repeated ever since, up to Bowen, *op. cit.* Professor Whitelock's translation (*English Historical Documents*, I, London, 1955, p. 368) of the critical clause in the laws of Ine uses the word 'shares' instead of 'strips'. Miss Whitelock has kindly confirmed to me that Seebohm's translation 'strips' can no longer be accepted.

¹ Traces of Late Saxon ditches close to Little Paxton were recorded by T. C. Lethbridge and C. F. Tebbutt, 'Ancient Lime-kilns at Great Paxton, Hunts.', *Proceedings of the Cambridge Antiquarian Society*, xxxv, 1935, pp. 97-105. This site is obviously worth re-investigating.

² e.g. T. Ramskou, *Lindholm Høje*, København, 1960, pp. 37-8.

³ H. P. R. Finberg, *The Early Charters of the West Midlands*, Leicester, 1961, pp. 184-96.

⁴ Rutter, *op. cit.*

⁵ Three reports of his excavations were published: *Archaeologia*, LXXIII, pp. 147-92; LXXVI, pp. 59-79; XCII, pp. 79-93.

tions; the site was being developed commercially and he was only able to investigate a single house at a time, after it had been uncovered by gravel-diggers. He was hampered by lack of money and time, and no criticism of his work should be read into any statement made here concerning the excavations. Leeds managed to examine thirty-three buildings, all presumably dating from the pagan Anglo-Saxon period. Small finds consisted largely of pottery, but an equal-armed brooch of silver was found in one hut, indicating that poverty in the village was not absolute. The buildings apparently fulfilled a variety of functions, weaving sheds, pottery workshops, etc. Ten or twelve houses were so badly damaged that no proper plan could be recovered. The typical building, to use Leeds's own words, was constructed in the following manner: "An excavation of varying size was made into the ground to an average depth of $1\frac{1}{2}$ to 2 feet, with a preference for a gravel floor where this was procurable. . . Above this was erected a gabled superstructure supported either by slanting poles secured to a ridge pole, as at Bourton-on-the-Water, or by a ridge-tree proper borne on a pole inserted some 2 feet into the gravel at either end of the excavation, either in the floor itself or in a recess cut into the bank, as was frequently the case at Sutton Courtenay. . . From the position of the holes intended to receive the lower ends of the rafters, the roof must have come down to the edge of the excavation, leaving no head-room against the sides of a mere tent-like structure."¹ The size of the Sutton Courtenay huts varied between ten feet and twenty-one feet in length.

Buildings of similar form occur at various sites in this country: Bourton-on-the-Water, Gloucestershire; West Stow, Suffolk; Witton, Norfolk; Waterbeach, Cambridgeshire, and West Row, Suffolk; Buckden and Orton, Huntingdonshire; Dunstable, Bedfordshire; Radley, Berkshire, and, possibly, Harston, Leicestershire, and Salmonby, Lincolnshire.²

¹ E. T. Leeds, *Anglo-Saxon Art and Archaeology*, Oxford, 1936, pp. 21-4.

² This list does not pretend to be complete. G. C. Dunning, 'Bronze Age Settlement and a Saxon Hut near Bourton-on-the-Water, Gloucestershire', *Antiquaries Journal*, xii, 1932, pp. 284-7; (W. Stow) Wilson and Hurst, *op. cit.*, pp. 189-90; (Witton) 'Medieval Britain in 1961', *Medieval Archaeology*, vi, 1962 (*forthcoming*); T. C. Lethbridge and C. F. Tebbutt, 'Huts of the Pagan Saxon Period at Waterbeach and West Row', *Proceedings of the Cambridge Antiquarian Society*, xxxiii, 1933, pp. 133-7, and T. C. Lethbridge, 'An Anglo-Saxon Hut on the Car Dyke at Waterbeach', *Antiquaries Journal*, vii, 1927, pp. 141-6; (Buckden) Information from Mr P. Addyman; (Orton) T. D. Kendrick and C. F. C. Hawkes, *Archaeology in England and Wales*, 1914-31, London, 1932, p. 323; (Dunstable) Information from Dr John Morris; (Radley) Leeds, *op. cit.*, p. 21; G. C. Dunning, 'Anglo-Saxon Discoveries at Harston', *Transactions of the Leicestershire Archaeological Society*, xxviii, 1952, pp. 48-54; (Salmonby) Information from Mr G. Taylor, *per* Mr D. F. Petch, *cf.* D. F. Petch, 'Archaeological Notes for 1958', *Lincolnshire Architectural and Archaeological Society, Reports and Papers*, n.s., viii, 1959-60, pp. 19-22.

Two sites have produced agglomerations of such buildings: St Neots, Hunts., which produced eight houses of similar form and of ninth- or tenth-century date,¹ and Cassington, Oxfordshire. At Cassington (a hitherto unpublished site) a large number of houses of the same type as those found at Sutton Courtenay were excavated and no other form of house was found.² Houses of this form are well known on the Continent, where they are known as *Grübenhäuser* or *Grübenhütten*. They are known at various dates from the Iron Age to the Carolingian period in an area which stretches from Basel to the North Sea.³ Of these houses Tischler has said "their function as weaving huts, kitchens, store-houses, workshops, eating-places, and dormitories is well-known."⁴ As in England (at London and Canterbury) such huts are also known in continental towns (some have recently been excavated by Dr Winkelmann in the *Domplan* at Münster). They seem to have been a general utility type of house and are usually found, in their continental contexts, in association with other forms of building. The type site may be taken as Warendorf, near Münster in Westphalia, which was occupied during the late seventh and early eighth century.⁵ Seventy-five buildings were completely, and eight partially, excavated here, in an area of some ten thousand square metres. Nine types of building were recognized by the excavator. As well as the *Grübenhäuser*, there were also large rectangular buildings, ranging in size from 14 to 29 metres in length by 4·5 to 7 metres in breadth. All had side-entrances; some had a porch. Some houses had hearths and must have been dwelling-houses, but others were undoubtedly agricultural buildings, barns, byres, etc. Other buildings included barns, cow-houses, and covered stacks for fodder or grain. It has been presumed that the large dwelling-houses must have belonged to freemen and the smaller ones to serfs, an economic pattern which is paralleled elsewhere on German and Dutch sites. The long-houses have a long ancestry in western Europe and have continued in use until the present day in one form or another.

On the basis of the continental sites Raleigh Radford has suggested that

¹ Lethbridge and Tebbutt, *op. cit.* More houses have since been discovered here.

² Information from Mr E. M. Jope.

³ W. U. Gyan, 'Einige Karten zur Verbreitung des Grübenhäuser in Mitteleuropa im ersten nachchristlichen Jahrtausend', *Jahrbuch der schweizerische Gesellschaft für Urgeschichte*, 1952, pp. 174-97, and F. Tischler, 'Der stand der Sachsenforschung archäologisch gesehen', *Bericht der Römisch-Germanischen Kommission*, xxxv, 1954, p. 137, are the best sources for this material on the Continent. Most of the continental sites are listed or referred to here. The geographical extent of these huts has since been widened to include north Jutland, where an example was found at Lindholm Høje, cf. T. Ramskou, *Lindholm Høje*, Nationalmuseet, København, pp. 29 and 36.

⁴ Tischler, *op. cit.*, p. 137.

⁵ Winkelmann, *op. cit.*

Anglo-Saxon villages may have been of similar form. He suggests that the *Grübenhäuser* were used as utility sheds, but while he does not deny that they were also used for dwelling purposes, he is rather sceptical in his acceptance of such a function for them.¹

Evidence of larger houses in Anglo-Saxon England exists. All the sites are unpublished, but their details are fairly familiar to specialists. Two are royal sites: Cheddar and Yeavinger. The site at Cheddar, which is at present (April 1962) being excavated by Mr Rahtz, has so far produced two pre-Conquest buildings, one apparently of tenth- and one of eleventh-century date. Both are rectangular and are of considerable size. The eleventh-century building, however, is, at the time of writing, only partially excavated, but the earlier one appears to have been some eighty feet long. It is delimited by a sleeper beam trench, within which are post-holes set at an angle; the post-holes may indicate a first-floor hall, or a barn with a raised floor. The site was apparently the home of a religious community, or perhaps a royal manor, and is really atypical, as is the extraordinary royal residence at Yeavinger, excavated by Mr Hope-Taylor, with its massive timber hall and the lesser structures which surround it.² Rectangular long-houses were found at Thetford and portions of similar buildings have recently been excavated at Maxey, Northants., by Mr Addyman and at Sedgeford, Norfolk, by Dr Peter Jewell.³ The large rectangular house of the type found at Warendorf is thus shown to exist in England, but it is not clear whether such houses existed in all the humbler villages. At Cassington, for instance, Mr Jope has told me in conversation that he considers it improbable that there were any large long-houses; so many houses have been excavated, and such a large area has been investigated, that he thinks it unlikely that traces of long-houses would have been missed. There is really no reason why Anglo-Saxon villages should follow exactly the continental pattern: there seems to be no getting away from the fact that many Anglo-Saxons did live in rather miserable houses of the *Grübenhäuser* type, and I would suggest two alternatives: (a) that the 'manor house', or the larger houses, may have been placed at some distance from the main village, which consisted of *Grübenhäuser*; or (b) that many Anglo-Saxon villages really did consist entirely of poor peasants' houses and that there was never a richer house in them.

Certain loose ends remain, even in so scanty a material. A number of

¹ C. A. R. Radford, 'The Saxon Home. A Review and some Parallels', *Medieval Archaeology*, I, 1957, pp. 37-8.

² Summary report, D. M. Wilson and J. G. Hurst, 'Medieval Britain in 1956', *Medieval Archaeology*, I, 1957, pp. 148-9.

³ *Medieval Archaeology*, v, 1961 (*forthcoming*), and *Archaeological News Letter*, VII, p. 22; *Medieval Archaeology*, III, 1959, p. 298.

houses fall into neither of the two main categories. The 1961 excavation at St Neots, Hunts., produced various substantial, rectangular, timber-framed buildings, one possibly with a floor raised on joists; while at Buckden, Hunts.,¹ Mr C. F. Tebbutt has recently found a timber-framed house of boat-shaped plan (forty-six feet long, fifteen feet wide at the ends, and seventeen feet wide at the centre), which is described as "probably of Anglo-Saxon date." This latter type of house was also recorded at Thetford, and among its many obvious parallels are the Danish Viking houses of the Trelleborg type.² Whether these houses are of an agricultural character is at present not clear: those at Thetford were almost certainly town houses. They represent a greater capital investment than the *Grübenhäuser* and are obviously closely related to the more substantial rectangular long-houses. It is interesting that at Thetford,³ St Neots, and Buckden, *Grübenhäuser* were also found. There are a number of indications that *Grübenhäuser* were not universal. The pagan Anglo-Saxon huts at Crossgates, for example, can hardly, according to the published section of hut 55,⁴ be catalogued under this heading. But information concerning this and other similar sites is vague.

It should be emphasized that more and more attention is being turned to the problem of Anglo-Saxon houses at the moment, and the next few years should produce a considerable body of evidence. When more material has been published it should be possible to compare these houses in detail with their continental counterparts, particularly with regard to the ecology of the areas compared and to the comparative chronology of the various sites. I sometimes wonder whether it is possible to compare Sutton Courtenay with Warendorf, when one has a central date in the late fifth century and the other in the late eighth century, and when one is on sand and the other on gravel!

THE USE OF MANUSCRIPT ILLUMINATION

An extension of the archaeological method is to use manuscript illustration as a source for agricultural practices and implements in the Anglo-Saxon period. It is a source which has often been used uncritically by both archaeologists and historians. One of the illuminations most frequently used by agricultural historians is the wheel-ard in the *Aratea*, British Museum manuscript Cotton Tiberius B. v.⁵ Kendrick, in his art-historical discussion of

¹ Information on both sites from Inspectorate of Ancient Monuments, the Ministry of Works, and Mr P. Addyman.

² P. Nørlund, *Trelleborg*, København, 1948, pp. 69-104.

³ *Archaeological News Letter*, II, 1949-50, p. 119.

⁴ Rutter and Duke, *op. cit.*, fig. 9.

⁵ F. G. Payne, 'The Plough in Ancient Britain', *Archaeological Journal*, CIV, 1947, pl. ix.

this manuscript,¹ has said: "The English book (i.e. Tiberius B. v) is not taken directly from the antique, but was copied by the Saxon artist from a Carolingian manuscript of the late ninth century that is known to have been at Canterbury in the late tenth century and still survives (British Museum, Harley 647)." As an example of the artist's sources Kendrick discusses the Aquarius figure in this manuscript. "It is," he says, "a classical figure with garments in the antique fashion; and, though the dress is in fact inaccurate and drawn with a certain Winchester licence, it is clear that the Saxon artist was nevertheless reproducing with reasonable faithfulness the French model before him." Might not the same apply to the plough illustrated in the same manuscript? Although it was painted by an Anglo-Saxon artist it is unlikely that he had a plough in front of him when he painted the picture; he most probably used as a model a plough from a book available in his scriptorium. The plough has no mould-board, and instead of saying that it provides evidence for the use of the wheel-ard in tenth-century England, it might be fairer to say that such a plough would be most suitable for the lighter soils of the Mediterranean world (whence its model may have come) than for the heavier soils of north-western Europe. It is possible that the plough is indeed English, but such sources must be used with great caution. These dangers have already been pointed out by Payne, following Miller,² but they cannot be too strongly emphasized, for manuscript sources such as this are still used for this purpose. Further, it is dangerous to rely on the detail in such illustrations. Even Payne has fallen into this trap;³ he criticizes Steensberg's interpretation of the draught animal depicted with the plough in the Caedmon manuscript as a "pair of pigs," but he himself says that no yokes are shown in this manuscript. He complains also about the position of the driver in another manuscript and has failed to comprehend the general compositional problems of the artist. Economic historians often fail to take into account artistic licence in their discussion of manuscript illuminations. Much ink has been spilt in discussing the absence of a mould-board from Anglo-Saxon drawings of the plough, but, with the exception of that depicted in British Museum manuscript Cotton Tiberius B.v, no plough has been drawn in sufficient detail in an Anglo-Saxon manuscript to emphasize this feature. After all, a mould-board is a difficult object to depict in a formal linear drawing.

How far is it possible to use manuscript evidence in this way? It seems probable that simple tools (spades, scythes, hoes, etc., even the harrow in the Bayeux tapestry⁴), which appear in these sources may be used to indicate, in

¹ T. D. Kendrick, *Late Saxon and Viking Art*, London, 1949, p. 23.

² *Op. cit.*, p. 103.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 105.

⁴ F. M. Stenton (ed.), *The Bayeux Tapestry*, London, 1957, pl. 12.

a cautious fashion, the type of tools used in Anglo-Saxon England, for such objects can be drawn from memory. A complicated machine like a plough, however, is not easy to draw from memory. Such objects should therefore be treated with caution when they appear in manuscripts. But even with simple tools we must be careful; is it possible, for example, to trust the pruning-hooks portrayed in Bodleian manuscript Junius A. vi, when it is realized that the labourers seem to be pruning vines in a period when English vineyards were apparently rather rare?¹

An example of a possibly genuine picture of an Anglo-Saxon agricultural implement occurs in the British Museum MS. Harley 603. This manuscript is a copy of the famous ninth-century Utrecht Psalter, which was written on the Continent and based on an eastern Mediterranean prototype. Mr Jope has pointed out that the short-handled scythes in the Utrecht Psalter were replaced in the eleventh-century manuscript by long-handled scythes. He suggests that this is an indication of the change-over from one type of scythe to the other between the ninth and eleventh centuries in Western Europe.² All that can be said, however, is that there is a likelihood that the Anglo-Saxon copyist of the eleventh century was accurately depicting the type of scythe in use in England at that period. The scythe which appears in the Utrecht Psalter may be no more than the type of scythe used in eastern Europe and copied faithfully by the scribe.

A SUGGESTION

Lastly we must consider the investigation on a small regional basis of areas of settlement. No thorough archaeological investigation of the area surrounding the houses in an English village has yet been undertaken. The nearest approach to such an investigation was Dr Finberg's study of Withington,³ a valuable exercise, which went about as far as it could go without the use of excavation and other similar methods. It should be possible to follow up this type of work, in specific cases, by archaeological means, which would entail the adaptation of methods at present being used in Scandinavia.

The concept of 'total archaeology' has not been adequately canvassed in this country. By 'total archaeology' is meant the thorough and complete examination of a unified area, a parish for example, by excavation. Such an examination investigates not only the obvious individual features, but examines them in relationship to each other. Methods such as these are being

¹ According to Roach Smith, only thirty-eight vineyards are recorded in Domesday.—C. R. Smith, 'The archaeology of horticulture', *Collectanea Antiqua*, vi, 1868, p. 93.

² Jope, *op. cit.*, p. 96 and figs. 61 and 62.

³ H. P. R. Finberg, *Roman and Saxon Withington*, Leicester, 1955.

used in Sweden by Dr Märta Strömberg, and to a more limited extent in Denmark by Mr Viggo Nielsen. Dr Strömberg has started to examine and excavate completely the parish of Hagestad in Skåne. Working with geographers, geologists, historians, and other scientists, on a site which is archaeologically well documented, her aim is, if I may freely translate, "to recover the settlement history of Hagestad from the Old Stone Age to the Middle Ages."¹ It is obvious that such a method, if used in England, would only in very rare cases reveal a specific historical phase in an area, as most sites are palimpsests of different agricultural systems. But if the right site were selected such an investigation could be of especial value in the Anglo-Saxon period where documents can help us.

If an Anglo-Saxon or medieval investigation is to be undertaken, the historian and archaeologist must first agree on a promising site. Before a spade is put in the ground the area should be subjected to a thorough archaeological and historical examination. First, the historian should thoroughly analyse the relevant documents. This analysis should be on the lines of Dr Finberg's survey of Hallow-Hawling, and should take into account *all* documents, including tithe and enclosure maps and the existing deeds. After this survey has been completed, the archaeologist should carry out an intensive field survey of the site so that as many as possible of the places mentioned in the documents—field boundaries, quarries, ponds, cottages, woods, etc.—may be traced. If the historian and the archaeologist (together, preferably, with some uncommitted outsiders) can agree that enough evidence has been produced to justify further investigation, then the money must be raised to explore the site thoroughly. After the area has been mapped, every physical feature should be examined, starting with those mentioned in the documents, by archaeological methods. The archaeologist should work with a geologist and use all possible modern scientific aids to excavation, such as pollen-analysis, dendrochronology, and resistivity surveys. When every field boundary and bump in the ground has been investigated in relationship to its neighbours, when any settlements, cemeteries, barrows, and the like, have been completely excavated, the topsoil should be removed by bulldozer to find ancient features which have been levelled. Much will obviously be found from many periods, but if the initial work has been good enough it should be possible to produce for analysis, say, an excavated Anglo-Saxon village and its field-system.

¹ M. Strömberg, 'Österlensk fornbygd', *ALE, Historisk tidskrift för Skåneland*, I, 1961, p. 21. This is a semi-popular article; the first of a series of scientific progress reports on this work will be published in the forthcoming issue of *Meddelanden från Lunds Universitets Historiska Museum*.

This sounds like an ideal programme, but if sufficient imagination is displayed by those in authority, it should not be difficult to realize. Mr Nielsen has investigated prehistoric field systems in Denmark with very little money and time at his disposal. But his investigations have tackled limited problems and a programme more like that of Dr Strömberg should be initiated—financed perhaps by a foundation or by a firm or corporation developing land. Dr Strömberg reckons that it will take her about five years, excavating nine months of the year, to complete her programme. Besides her own services and those of various academic assistants, which are given free by the University of Lund, she has to employ a certain amount of full-time labour. Cannot we finance a similar scheme from a University in this country, breaking away from the idea that excavation is a part-time occupation and putting the resources of many sciences into one archaeological project at a time?

This ideal programme—for such it is—could contribute substantially to many branches of economic and social history, but I think in no field could it be more helpful than in that of agrarian history.

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Notes and Comments

THE BRITISH AGRICULTURAL HISTORY SOCIETY

The annual conference of the British Agricultural History Society was held from 11–13 April 1962 at Sidney Sussex College, Cambridge. On the first evening a paper was given by Mr B. M. Camm and Mr P. E. Graves, of the Cambridge University Farm Economics Branch, on changes in East Anglian farming as seen from the results of the farm management survey. The following day the conference was taken on a tour of village ports of the southern Fenland by Miss Edith Whetham and Dr Peter Eden. In the evening Mr D. M. Wilson of the British Museum gave a paper entitled 'The archaeological evidences of Anglo-Saxon rural economy'. The conference con-

cluded on Friday morning with two papers, the first by Dr Peter Eden, of the Royal Commission on Historical Monuments, entitled 'Small houses of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in Cambridgeshire: an essay in classification', and the second by Mr R. B. Smith, of Leeds University, on 'Landownership and Social Structure in the West Riding of Yorkshire in the earlier sixteenth century'.

At the Annual General Meeting held on Thursday morning, Mr R. V. Lennard was elected President of the Society. The meeting expressed its appreciation of the services of Sir Keith Murray for the previous three years. Professor Edgar Thomas was re-elected Treasurer and Mr J. W. Y. Higgs,

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