MEDIEVAL SETTLEMENT IN HAMPSHIRE AND THE ISLE OF WIGHT

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Delegates who attended the first Ruralia conference in Prague two years ago will have heard reference to a desk-top survey by the Royal Commission on the Historical Monuments of England (*RCHME*), in Hampshire and the Isle of Wight in southern England. This paper provides a review of the aims and methods used and describes some of the results of the work in Hampshire and the Isle of Wight.

1. Aims and Principles

In England, a long history of archaeological investigation into medieval settlement sites, combined with a wealth of documentary evidence and maps means that a considerable amount of information regarding medieval settlements exists. However, these various strands of evidence have too often remained separate, which has limited their ability to increase our understanding of the nature and evolution of settlement in the middle ages. Furthermore, this separation of historical and archaeological evidence has resulted in the ommission of many documented settlements from record systems designed to identify and protect historic sites.

Recent RCHME work in Hampshire and the Isle of Wight was intended to address these problems by bringing together and assessing archaeological, historical and geographical evidence for medieval settlement over a wide area. The approach develops that used in recent Birmingham University research into medieval settlement in the east midlands (*Lewis - Mitchell Fox 1992; 1993; Lewis - Mitchell Fox - Dyer 1996*). The approach was firstly to create a database with a separate record for every known medieval (410-1540 *A.D.*) settlement, and secondly to analyse and map the database information to identify and study patterns in the development and pattern of settlement in the medieval period.

The methodology devised for the project required that the database record for each settlement should include a range of historical, archaeological and geographical data, which would enable the extent of knowledge about each place to be immediately apparent and its likely character, status and type to be assessed. Following completion of the database, information on it had to be mapped, analysed and interrogated to produce a descriptive and interpretational review placing the evidence in its wider context. One of the strengths of the approach was that it could cover a large area rapidly, so that any county would take just three months to complete. Following completion, the database information had to be supplied to national and local heritage organisations to inform managerial and research initiatives. A detailed account of the findings also had to be prepared and a summary published in the annual report of the Medieval Settlement Research Group (MSRG).

A range of different archaeological, architectural and documentary sources were used in the pilot, which was conducted by two full-time staff (one historical researcher and one archaeological investigator) and one part-time volunteer with no previous experience who helped with data inputting. Field assessments were carried out over one week by one archaeological field investigator. One of the benefits of the approach used in the Medieval Settlement Project was the speed and economy of effort with which it could produce useful results.

The project comprised six main areas of activity summarised below. 1-3 and 5 were carried out in succession, concurrently with 4 (historical research). 6 (analysis) was carried out following completion of 1-5.

1.1. Historic place-names data input

The first task undertaken was the entry to the database of all documented historic places likely to have been settlements in the medieval period (410-1540 A.D.). One of the major inadequacies of existing heritage records (NMR and SMRs) is that most medieval settlements which are of documented medieval date but for which no archaeological evidence has yet been recorded are omitted. One of the aims of the Medieval Settlement Project was to remedy this deficiency.

For each place documented before 1540, eight items of information were input to the database as the first stage of the pilot. These comprised the modern place-name, the earliest form or spelling of the name, the meaning of the place-name, the date at which the name was first documented, the national grid reference (if identifiable, to six figures), the modern parish and county within which the place lies, and the project database record identification number. This created 2,289 records on the database and took 12 working days to complete.

Place-name surveys compiled by *Kokeritz* (*1940*) for the Isle of Wight, and by *Gover* (unpublished typescript *1960*) and *Coates* (*1989*) for Hampshire provided information for this stage. Modern Ordnance Survey maps at 1:50 000 were used to locate these places and provide grid references. Some additional references were found from 1:25 000 Ordnance Survey maps. Despite this fairly intensive effort, not all places could be located: some are only named on 1:10 000 maps, others only on older 6" maps, and others are even more obscure. Limited time did not allow the examination of any of these maps for missing grid references, consequently c. 500 historic places on the database still lack complete grid references.

1.2. Archaeological data

Four main sources were used to identify the physical evidence for medieval settlement in Hampshire and the Isle of Wight, namely the Sites and Monuments Records (SMRs) for each county, the National Monuments Record (NMR) held by RCHME and the archive of the Medieval Village Research Group (MVRG). All of these records are now at least partially computerised, but have been built up cumulatively over a period of time, and in most cases each newly discovered piece of information has been added as a separate record as it comes to light. Thus a standing medieval building is likely to be recorded in a separate record to an excavated building or a medieval pottery find from within the same settlement: rarely is such a place classified anywhere as a settlement. The archaeological evidence for medieval settlements is presently very dispersed and is thus almost impossible to identify, retrieve, quantify or assess. One aim of the RCHME research was to collate and synthesise this disparate information and create supplementary records of settlements. Each of these would show the range of evidence for the whole settlement, enabling the level of knowledge about each place to be immediately apparent, and its likely character, status and type to be easily identified.

1.2.1. SMRs:

The Hampshire SMR provided a print-out of all medieval (410-1540 A.D.) records classified under the following categories: farm, moat, manor, settlement site, building material, finds, cruck-framed building, hearth, house platforms, occupation hollows, pottery finds, kilns, sunken-floored buildings, parish church, deserted village, shrunken village and chapel. It was hoped that this would retrieve all records likely to contain settlement data (the large number of terms which had to be used to recover settlement information, illus-

trates the problem of trying to identify settlement information in existing record systems). The printout (including the descriptive text) was searched thoroughly and all information about medieval settlements was collated, synthesised with the place-name data and input to the database.

For the much smaller county of Isle of Wight all records of early or late medieval date were rapidly scanned for settlement evidence at the County Archaeological Unit, following which a full print-out of all records found to contain information relevant to medieval settlement was provided for detailed assessment and entry to the database at NMRC.

1.2.2. NMR:

From the NMR a short print-out of all records of medieval date (including both archaeological and architectural records) in Hampshire and the Isle of Wight was obtained. This was scanned to identify all evidence indicative of medieval settlement, which was then collated and added to the database.

1.2.3. MVRG:

A printout of the indexed information from the MVRG (held by RCHME) was used to cross-reference sites which had been recorded by the Medieval Village Research Group. The detailed archive information (which has not been computerised) was rapidly reviewed for relevant information regarding extent of earthwork remains.

1.2.4. Other sources

As the aim of the pilot was to identify, review, collate and assess the evidence for medieval secular settlement, information about standing domestic buildings of medieval date was included, and in some cases this provided the only physical evidence to support the documented medieval date of a settlement. The presence of a medieval church was recorded as an associated monument, but was not assumed necessarily to indicate the certain presence of a settlement. Pevsner and Lloyd's survey of the buildings of Hampshire and the Isle of Wight (*Pevsner - Lloyd 1967*) was used to establish the date of some churches and other buildings where this information was not included in the SMRs or NMR. Information about other types of medieval buildings such as religious establishments, castles, hospitals etc. was only included if the sites lay within settlements, in which case they might have affected the status and development of the settlement.

Any of this information which related to places recorded during the place-name data survey was added to the database record for that place. Any evidence about a site not already on the pilot database was added as a separate new record. Approximately 270 new settlement sites were added to the project database from evidence contained in the SMRs and NMR. Any additional information necessary to clarify or support the archaeological evidence was included in the free text memo field. Work collating and synthesising the pertinent information from the major existing archaeological records took 16.5 working days.

1.3. Nineteenth century settlement form

With the exception of deserted or very extensively shrunken settlements, historical and archaeological information reveals little or nothing about the size or layout of medieval settlements. However, an understanding of the likely morphological form of settlement in a region is often crucial in establishing its archaeological potential. For example, a place with a large documented medieval population which now exists only as a sin-

gle building may reasonably be posited as the possible site of a deserted medieval village if it is in an area where all other surrounding settlements are nucleated. If, however, all neighbouring settlements are of dispersed form it is more likely that the medieval record of a population under a single place name represents an administrative convenience. In this case it is unlikely that the named place was ever a large nucleated settlement, but was perhaps merely the site of the manor house with the peasant/tenant tofts scattered across the settlement territory.

The source used to characterise the form of the places recorded in the pilot project was the first edition 1" Ordnance Survey (OS) map published for the region by Colonel Mudge in 1810. This was selected because it was the earliest map which provided consistent and reliable coverage across the whole of the pilot area while also providing an adequate degree of detail. Earlier maps at the County Record Office were of insufficient detail, quality or coverage. (This OS map also confers an advantage for the future in that it covers the whole of England, allowing for consistency across a national project.)

For each historic place recorded on the pilot database from the place name survey and the archaeological records which could be identified on the 1810 OS map (a total of 1,518), the form of the settlement in 1810 was entered onto the database, using a simple range of morphological types which included compact/nucleated cluster, regular row, interrupted/irregular row, common-edge settlement and isolated farmstead. These (with the exception of isolated farmsteads) were subdivided into small, medium and large settlements, so that a cluster of less than 15 houses was classified as a small compact/nucleated cluster, rather than a hamlet, avoiding use of that term which has never been firmly defined.

In the course of the 1810 map survey a number of other places were noted which, despite the apparent lack of historic place-name evidence for their medieval existence, seemed likely on other grounds to have formed part of the medieval settlement landscape. A total of 193 of these were added (with the standard data range of name, parish, NGR etc data) to the database as new records, classified as settlements of post-medieval (but not medieval) date.

1.4. Historical data

Most of the historical data examined related to levels of population, wealth and agricultural development, but also included simple types of information (where available) about the economic and institutional status of settlements and also the agrarian organisation associated with them. This information substantiates the record created from the place-name and archaeological sources, and enables the varying size and importance of the recorded settlements in the medieval period to be identified, assessed and compared locally and regionally. Additional data relating to other aspects of settlement such as social and manorial structure was also reviewed and provided additional background information for the final synthesising report but was not included in the database because of its less reducible character.

1.4.1. Domesday Book

Domesday Book was used to extract and collate data pertaining to settlement for three categories:

1) Tenurial - including the number and size of holdings and the type of lord (royal, lay or ecclesiastical).

2) Agrarian and economic resources - including the numbers of ploughs (separated into demesne and tenant) and the extent of other resources including meadow and woodland.

3) Population - the number of people recorded at each place according to their various categories.

The total of all recorded plough teams and population, and an adjusted population figure (allowing an average of 4.5 people per recorded family for all categories except figures for slaves which were assumed to represent individuals) were then calculated for each ecclesiastical parish to allow the mapping of population densities accross the region. Some additional calculations have also been made using the Domesday Book data, including the relative proportions of demesne and tenant plough teams for each place, and the number of slaves and their ratios to demesne ploughs (there has been speculation that this should be 2:1, indicating that slaves acted as demesne plough men, but unusually, this is often much higher in Hampshire). The data

for population, lordship and ploughs was input to the database. Other information was used to produce county distribution maps and to inform the county report. The time taken processing the Domesday Book data was three weeks.

1.4.2. 1327/1334/1428 lay subsidies

The second task was to collect and synthesise data from the lay subsidies of 1327, 1334 and 1428. The 1327 subsidy was chosen because it is the earliest (and appears to be the only) record for Hampshire to provide lists of named tax payers for each place. As this roll has never been published the original, held in the Public Record Office was examined. The numbers of tax-payers listed for each place were counted and the overall tax assessments recorded. The names of the individuals were also scanned for evidence for additional contemporary settlement sites or other topographical information. These were added to the database.

The 1334 subsidy, though only listing the total sums paid by each settlement (rather than listing sums paid by individuals) was included in the pilot because it is one of the few medieval taxation records providing local evidence surviving for the whole of the country, and will therefore be important for making comparisons within the national project. The published edition of the 1334 data was used for this (*Glasscock 1975*). The figures for 1327 and 1334 were input to the database for each settlement and totalled by ecclesiastical parish to enable the densities of population and taxable wealth to be mapped across the region. The time taken collecting and processing the fourteenth century taxation data was two weeks.

The list of parishes with less than ten households in the lay subsidy of 1428 is a useful indicator of those settlements which were particularly small after the Black Death, particularly in Hampshire where the 1377 Poll Tax returns are not available. This information was also input to the database.

1.4.3. Nomina Villarum

Data has also been taken from the 1316 *Nomina Villarum*, providing evidence for the whole county of the number and type of lords then holding land in each vill.

1.4.4. 1524 lay subsidy

The latest taxation records employed were those of the Lay Subsidy levied in 1524-5 (*Sheail 1968*). The numbers of tax-payers for each place were assessed and input to the database and calculated by parish for mapping purposes in one week.

1.4.5. Settlement status

The identification of evidence relating to the status of settlements in the early or later medieval period involved trawling a miscellaneous collection of sources, in a more speculative search for evidence about institutional and economic status and agrarian organisation. Examination of pre-Conquest sources, including charters and the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, allowed identification of Anglo-Saxon royal vills, assembly sites and minsters. Post-Conquest sources examined include the calendars of royal charter rolls, the Victoria County Histories (*VCH 1900-1912*) and Beresford and Finberg's handlist of boroughs (*Beresford - Finberg 1973*), which has produced a list of over sixty medieval markets, boroughs and fairs. All Hampshire cartularies readily available in print have been scanned, principally for evidence of field systems, as well as additional evidence relating to settlement status. Published manorial records have helped illuminate social structure and the agrarian economy.

56 sites were selected for field assessment to ascertain the presence and extent of earthwork remains of former settlement. Most of these were historically attested sites in dispersed regions, which were revealed by the desk-top survey to be particularly poorly understood and often classified inaccurately or on inadequate evidence. For example, many sites have in the past been classified as deserted villages from historical sources alone, and it is now recognised that many places in non-nucleated regions which are documented as having taxable populations may have been merely the site of the manor within an area of scattering hamlet and farmstead habitation and never existed as nucleated villages: such sites require field verification to establish whether there really is any physical evidence for more extensive former settlement - if none is evident, such sites should not be classified as deserted or shrunken villages.

1.6. Analysis

Following completion of the data collection and database entry, maps were generated from the database using a computerised geographical information system. This facilitates evaluation of the geographical distribution of various settlement phenomena, such as dispersed and nucleated settlement types, deserted and shrunken settlements. It is possible to produce distribution maps of any query carried out on the database. The potential of this for the study of medieval settlements is only just beginning to be explored (*Lewis - Mitchell Fox 1996*; *RCHME in preparation*). All collected data was analysed using the database and maps - these are, independently and together, a very powerful but easily accessible research tool. The following pages provide an indication of the sort of analysis that can be conducted using the project data and maps.

2. Results:
Medieval settlement in Hampshire and the Isle of Wight

The project data, available on the database and as a series of maps enables a wide range of issues pertaining to the nature and development of the medieval rural landscape to be explored and assessed. Four issues are considered to provide examples of the sort of assessment that can be carried out using the RCHME project data.

2.1. Settlement pattern

A computerised mapping software system was able to provide distribution maps of different settlement types in 1810. These showed clearly that nucleated villages dominated the major river valleys of the chalkland, and the chalk massif of central Hampshire. Dispersed settlement types are very uncommon in these areas. In contrast, it is clear that the north, east and south of the region is largely characterised by dispersed settlement; nucleation in these areas is associated with pseudo-urban function (the presence of a market, etc.), or recent (nineteenth/twentieth century) expansion. Essentially the dispersed regions correspond to the area away from the chalk.

It is notable that there is some similarity in the distribution of evidence for dispersed settlement and that for settlements documented for the first time only in the later medieval period. The database confirms this observation: 64 % of dispersed settlements (interrupted row and common-edge) are documented for the first time post-1086, whereas for nucleated settlements (clusters and rows) the figure is only 40 %. Both figures, of course, reflect the expansion in written records in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries which led to many smaller settlements being recorded for the first time. But this does seem to indicate a greater degree of expansion in dispersed, woodland regions than in the nucleated champion regions.

The roots of this may lie in the relatively under-exploited nature of woodland/heathland regions in earlier centuries. In the pre-Conquest period, 32 % of all nucleated sites are referred to in the documents, but for the dispersed the figure is only 8 %. Interestingly, however, Domesday Book records similar percentages of both types (26 % of all dispersed settlements are recorded there, compared to 28 % of nucleated settlements), suggesting that woodland regions were "catching up" fast in the later pre-Conquest centuries. Certainly by 1086, they do not appear to have been vast uncharted and unadministered wastelands. Equally, the woodland and heathland regions seem to have seen a particularly great expansion in settlement in the post-Conquest era, an observation which is supported by documentary references to assarting on many of the later medieval manors, including those of the Abbey of Winchester, whose pipe rolls documents many details of estate activities.

The correlation of earlier documentary evidence with that for the nineteenth century settlement pattern suggests that, while some elements of the later pattern are of late origin (much of the present settlement around the Solent, for example, post-dates even the early nineteenth century), the post-medieval patterns of dispersed and nucleated settlement may in many cases give a fair indication of the medieval pattern. Another interesting figure can be noted is that only 18 % of common edge settlements are named in Domesday Book, while 20 % are named for the first time in the fourteenth century. For interrupted rows, in contrast, 30 % are named in 1086, and only 8 % appear for the first time in the fourteenth century. While a documentary reference does not, of course, date the origins of the settlement, the difference between the two types of dispersed settlement may indicate that common-edge habitation is a later form of settlement. Only further archaeological investigation could confirm or refute this suggestion.

2.2. Field assessment and identification of deserted sites

Few sites which can confidently be classified as deserted are known in the region. The possibility of using historical evidence to identify or predict likely deserted sites can be tested using the information recorded on the database. For example 119 sites are recorded in Domesday Book but omitted from 1334 lists: those with very limited settlement in 1810 are often classified as deserted medieval villages (DMVs). However, in Hampshire and the Isle of Wight only five such sites actually have any recorded archaeological evidence for shrinkage. The others therefore must be classified, on the basis of known evidence rather than presumed status, simply as settlements or documented place names. Sites whose population fell markedly between 1086 and 1327 might also be expected to be prime candidates for desertion in the later fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries, and to exhibit evidence for shrinkage. The recorded population of 10 sites fell from 50 % above average in 1086 to more than 25 % below average in 1327. However, these were all still paying tax in 1524 (albeit with a low average population of 13.5 compared to 29 overall for the region), and none have recorded evidence for shrinkage or desertion.

These sites could usefully be targeted for future field assessment, to ascertain whether or not they have any earthwork evidence for contraction. However, in the meantime, it must be suspected that these falls in population in fact reflect, at least in part, the widespread fragmentation of Domesday manors into smaller taxation units in the centuries following the Norman Conquest. Chilcombe, for example had 9 churches and a recorded population of c. 213 in 1086: the fall to just 4 inhabitants in 1327 must be due in part to the breakup of this large estate of the Bishop of Winchester into smaller taxable units.

During the project, 56 sites were selected for field assessment. Most were either isolated farmsteads whose names were documented in the medieval period or sites classified on archaeological record systems as deserted, in areas of predominantly dispersed settlement, for which archaeological evidence was particularly poor. Field assessment revealed that one in four had earthwork remains of settlement, but in no case were these extensive or substantial. The presence of other earthworks, including remains of ridge and furrow field

systems, at a number of sites suggests that settlement evidence, had it existed, should have been preserved. The absence of large areas of abandoned former settlement suggests that the regions where settlement was dispersed in the nineteenth century were probably, likewise, areas generally lacking large nucleated villages in the medieval period. As a substantial proportion of sites visited had previously been classified as deserted, the field assessment indicated that extreme caution should be exercised in classifying settlements as deserted on historical evidence alone.

2.3. The early medieval period - shift and success

Of more than 2,700 sites recorded in the pilot, only 299 have any evidence for occupation in the early medieval period. For 210 of these the evidence is purely documentary; and only 39 actually have definite archaeological evidence for settlement. No archaeological evidence at all is known for early medieval settlement from the Isle of Wight. While these figures may seem to indicate something of a dearth of evidence for settlement of this period, the region does include the sites of Chalton Down (in south Hampshire) and Cowdery's Down (in north Hampshire), both of which have been extensively excavated (*Addyman - Leigh 1973*; *Cunliffe 1973*; *Millet - James 1983*).

Overall, only a handful of attested early medieval settlement sites were deserted before the Norman Conquest - even in the case of early (i.e. pre-7th century) Anglo-Saxon sites, most known sites continued in occupation in the post-Conquest era. There are however 21 sites which produced pottery finds but which could not be confidently classified as settlements, and most of these are from places which were not flourishing in the later period. These include Up Somborne, where seven sherds of (possibly residual) Saxon pottery were recovered from a post-hole; a deserted site in Faccombe parish where 6 sherds of grass-tempered ware were found in a remote downland situation, similarly sited pits associated with animal bone and Saxon pottery in Romsey Extra parish, and a single sherd found in fields in Farringdon parish. The last 3 are from sites which are unoccupied in the post-Conquest period but the slight nature of the archaeological evidence means that they cannot realistically be classified as early medieval settlements, but as merely as pottery finds. Other pottery find spots are even less likely to represent settlement: some may be funerary vessels (such as at Compton and Hucklesbrook Farm (in Ellingham, Harbridge and Ibsley parish), many others such as at Lymington, Odiham or Barnes High (Isle of Wight) are dubious or unprovenanced. However the distribution of such evidence, and other deserted early medieval settlement sites does however generally favour the chalk downland and suggests an abandonment of these areas (which were extensively occupied in the Roman period) during the Anglo-Saxon period. This is supported by excavations at Chalton and Cowdery's Down, both downland sites which were abandoned by the mid-seventh century.

In other areas there is little or no evidence for deserted early medieval settlements. This is particularly significant in east Hampshire and the Avon Valley in west Hampshire which have been subject to intensive fieldwalking programmes (*Shennan 1985*; *Light et al. 1994*). The few abandoned early medieval sites which have been found in the Avon valley showed strong continuity with Roman pottery distribution. Most are also close to later medieval settlements, suggesting a process of gradual shift within the densely occupied river valleys. While the downlands seem to have been abandoned for settlement, elsewhere the assumption, based on present evidence, must be that settlement was either very sparse (which seems unlikely), or very conservative, mostly underlying or adjacent to later settlements. This contradicts current orthodoxy, based mostly on the work carried out in the midlands, where it is thought that small dispersed early medieval sites were abandoned in large numbers, probably around the ninth century, and replaced by nucleated villages set within regular open field systems. Settlement change in Hampshire seems to have been of a more limited extent, mainly comprising a much earlier (i.e. pre mid-eighth century) abandonment of the downland. Riverine settlement was always an enduring feature of the landscape in Roman, Anglo-Saxon and later medieval periods, but downland settlement was a feature only of particularly expansive periods, such as the Roman (and the high medieval, see *below*). It is of course, quite possible that Hampshire, whose terrain and political history over the Anglo-Saxon period were both very different to the midlands, did indeed have a correspondingly different process of settlement evolution during this period.

In fact, many early medieval settlements in the region seem, rather than being abandoned, to have survived and flourished. Examination of the project data suggests that there is a significant link between early occupation and enduring success. More than a third (12 out of 33) of early medieval settlement sites were

towns or market villages in the later medieval period and three-quarters (25 out of 33) were medium or large settlements in the early nineteenth century. Overall, 12 of the 50 late medieval towns and market villages have archaeological evidence for early medieval settlement, and this must suggest that many other similar sites may also have Saxon precursors.

Even early-established sites which did not become markets seem to have been larger than average. The average population for these sites in 1086 was 49 (compared to 25 overall), in 1524 it was 72.5 (compared to 29 for all settlements). Only 5 have evidence for significant shrinkage or desertion in the later medieval period (2 are shrunken, 3 deserted). While large or urban sites are perhaps more likely to have been excavated, (in advance of development) introducing a possible bias to the sample, the fact that documented early medieval sites show a similarly higher than average population of 40 in 1086 supports the general suggestion of a link between Saxon occupation and post-Conquest longevity and prosperity. Interestingly, 19 out of the 33 sites with evidence for early settlement were also documented in the pre-Conquest period - an unusually good correlation!

2.4. Later medieval settlement - variety in desertion

In many areas the downland remained devoid of settlement from the early Saxon period onwards. In others, particularly in central and north Hampshire, settlements such as Hatch near Basingstoke (*Fasham et al. 1995*), were established on downland in the late pre- and early post-Conquest period.

Few later medieval settlements with conclusive evidence for desertion are known in Hampshire and the Isle of Wight, but the figures for those which can be identified reveal some interesting patterns. The average population for all sites recorded in Domesday Book was 25; for settlements which were later deserted (excluding Old Highclere, to which we will return below) it was only 15. In 1327 the average number of taxpayers for all recorded sites was 16, but only 9 for later deserted settlements. It seems that a significant number of deserted sites were ones which had always been smaller and poorer than average. However, the data suggests considerable variation in the progress of depopulation. Lomer, for example, recorded 11 individuals in 1086, 7 in 1327, fewer than ten households in 1428, but still had 6 (8 are listed in the second survey) taxpayers in 1524. With early medieval occupation attested by pottery finds and a documentary reference in A.D. 802, Lomer, although always small, seems to have maintained quite a stable population for most of the middle ages, and must have declined to its 1810 farmstead status in the post-medieval period. Apparently more erratically, Westbury (in East Meon) recorded a reasonable population of 13 individuals in 1086, contained only one taxpayer in 1327. The population recovered by 1524 to 9, but fell again in the post-medieval and was just a single farm by 1810.

Other sites show a different pattern again. Durton (in Arreton), for example, recorded with 2 occupants (but with 2.5 ploughs, a very much higher ratio than normal) in 1086. Although, unusually, it rose in value between 1066 and 1086, it lacked a church, had vanished as an independently taxed unit by 1327, and was just a single, unremarkable farmhouse in 1810 (*Winter 1984*, 187). Durton has been classified as a deserted village by the MVRG and the NMR on the basis of its disappearance from documentary sources, but the evidence suggests that it may never have been more than a single farm. Contraction, if it did occur, probably dates to the eleventh century or earlier.

Old Highclere, in contrast again, stands out as the site of a probable Saxon minster and with 69 recorded inhabitants, had a much larger population than any other deserted site in 1086. Significantly, its abandonment was not a result of decline: it was forcibly depopulated [or, in effect, relocated to the existing site of (New) Highclere] when a park was created in the thirteenth century. Other large settlements which were later deserted are Merdon and Newton. Newton was a borough in the thirteenth century; while Merdon was associated with a castle and paid the highest sum of all deserted settlements in 1334, but was reduced to 9 taxpayers by 1524, and just 2 farmsteads by 1810. The decline of these settlements may be related to their commercial failure.

The evidence collected in Hampshire and the Isle of Wight points to considerable variation in the processes by which settlements came to be deserted. It is notable that there is no evidence for the sort of sweeping depopulation seen across vast swathes of the midlands. This suggests that depopulation generally occured on a settlement-by-settlement basis, for specific site-related reasons, and not as part of a widespread, chronologically distinct process involving rural recession.

The RCHME Project in Hampshire and the Isle of Wight has increased our knowledge and understanding of a range of aspects of the historical process of settlement between *A.D.* 410-1540 in the project region, which will be of value to those involved in curating, managing, studying, recording or surveying medieval settlement sites. The project has clarified the present extent of knowledge and highlighted a number of lacunae which exist in the archaeological evidence, particularly in areas of dispersed settlement, thus identifying priorities for future work.

The RCHME research has also created consistent, standardised records for all known or suspected medieval settlements which will improve the ability of county archaeologists to manage and protect settlement sites. Despite planning legislation, such sites are often particulary threatened by development ranging from modern village infilling to agricultural building construction, and most are at present excluded from archaeological record systems such as the National Monuments Record (NMR) or county Sites and Monuments Records (SMRs) and can thus fail to trigger appropriate mitigatory action.

The corpus of information available as a result of the RCHME project should also benefit the academic community for whom, it is hoped, the database, printouts, maps and report will provide evidence for, and stimuli towards, new research directions. As always, the most difficult part of any research is working out which questions should be asked of the data. The preceding pages have outlined a few of those which have suggested themselves during the project and which may stimulate debate, but detailed pursuance of research themes is beyond the scope of the RCHME project. One of the great merits of this approach, however, is that the data collected will henceforth be available for anyone to revisit and re-examine.

It is also hoped that the information will be of interest to the general public, many of whom live in the settlements which have been studied.

From a European perspective, it is important to note that one of the reasons why the RCHME work was carried out in southern England was to establish whether the methodology developed for the east midlands would work in a different region - and ultimately on a national scale. The work in Hampshire and the Isle of Wight has suggested that it would. Extending the scope of such research beyond the original east midlands focus allows comparison of a standardised set of information for very different regions which is vitally important if we are to understand the interplay of various factors in the evolution of medieval settlement in England. As a next stage it would be possible to compare and contrast these areas of southern and central England, and possibly to extend the project to other areas.

Could such an approach usefully be carried out in other European countries? RCHME research in southern England indicates that the basic principle - of methodically synthesising and analysing as much as possible of the information pertinent to medieval settlement from diverse sources to assess the present state of knowledge, create a consistent record and identify priorities for future work - could feasibly and usefully be applied to any European country, all of which have a historic pre-modern period. Such studies carried out in other European countries would allow evidence and ideas from different countries to inform and stimulate each other across the continent, for an era when cultural and territorial boundaries were in almost constant flux, when ideas could travel widely and European integration was less an issue than a fact of life. However limited and problematic the evidence for medieval settlement might be, assembling and addressing it in this manner is one way of making the most of it, wherever the work is being carried out.

Acknowledgements

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