

Chapter 18

The Post-Medieval and Modern Period (AD 1540 onwards): Research Agenda

by Jill Hind

18.1 Nature of the evidence

The wealth of evidence for this period is immense, much of it from documentary records, contemporary illustrations and eye-witness accounts. The archaeological record is expanding, although excavations are still much rarer than survey work. All types of evidence only provide a partial record, and the documentary sources have a bias away from ordinary people and their lives. Ways in which the various data sources are used in combination need to be improved, as follows:

- 18.1.1 Areas where the physical and documentary evidence is contradictory need to be identified for further investigation.
- 18.1.2 The strengths and weaknesses of the various types of evidence across the region should be assessed.

18.2 Chronology

The documentary records for this period mean that chronology and dating should be better understood than for earlier ones. However, this does not mean that there is no uncertainty over the timing of events, particularly those affecting changes to the rural environment and land use. Opportunities to obtain reliable dates for structures or landscapes elements should therefore be taken whenever possible. Specific aims should include the following:

- 18.2.1 The reliability of chronological markers, particularly for the 16th to 18th century, needs to be tested.
- 18.2.2 Architectural typologies and dendrochronology should be compared to check consistency.
- 18.2.3 The precision of ceramic sequences should be tested.

18.3 Landscape and land use

One of the major influences on the rural landscape during this period was enclosure, either by agreement or parlia-

mentary act. Enclosure began during the medieval period and still continues at a very low level with loss of commons for example, although the majority had happened by the late 19th century. The changes in the landscape and increasing urbanisation were also influenced by major developments in the transport infrastructure. Listed below are some issues of particular importance for research:

- 18.3.1 The possible social and economic forces responsible for the distribution of 'champion' and 'ancient' landscapes within the region need to be explored.
- 18.3.2 Environmental evidence needs to be collected routinely to gather information on the origins of fields and changes in agricultural practice, which may have occurred at different times in different areas.
- 18.3.3 The impact of large towns (and of London) on their hinterlands would merit further investigation.
- 18.3.4 Studies of significant gardens and parks, particularly those which are not on the Register of Parks and Gardens, should consider social issues, such as their roles as status symbols and in competition between members of the elite, as well as their design components.
- 18.3.5 The development of agriculture in the Isle of Wight may inform debate on the perceived insularity of the Island.
- 18.3.6 Evidence for the impact of the Little Ice Age on the coastal and marine environments should be sought.
- 18.3.7 The impact of the Little Ice Age on daily life and the wider economy may also be found in the environmental record.
- 18.3.8 Survival of woods and commons is good across the region, particularly in south Buckinghamshire, but the reasons for this are not well understood.

- 18.3.9 The date and impact of industry on the landscape needs to be established.
- 18.3.10 The impact of the agricultural revolution on the landscape needs to be explored.

18.4 Social and administrative organisation

The archaeology of social organisation and administration for this period lies mainly in associated buildings and structures. These can range from a village pump to a large hospital complex. Smaller features are often removed for road schemes or redevelopment, while the larger buildings are frequently seen as unsuitable for modern requirements. This results in major alteration, change of use or even demolition. The following areas of research merit particular attention:

- 18.4.1 The balance between insularity and population movement should be studied, particularly in the context of the Isle of Wight.
- 18.4.2 Social hierarchy in settlements should be investigated, through built infrastructure, decoration, symbology and material culture manifestations of social, economic and cultural/racial variation within urban and rural settlement.
- 18.4.3 More work is needed on changes in standards of living for the lower classes. For example, to what extent was such change uniform or was defined by local circumstance (such as the priorities of major landlords).
- 18.4.4 The relationships between urban morphology, prosperity and backyard enterprise merit investigation.
- 18.4.5 The provision of public utilities across the region and its relationship to social hierarchies would merit further investigation.
- 18.4.6 Evidence should be gathered to illustrate how the proceeds of capitalism were divided and used, both across the region and over time.
- 18.4.7 Indirect and direct influences on the environment of the region by the monarchy, parliament, the growth of London and the growth of empire, especially with respect to the region's location in the hinterland of London and Southampton, need to be explored.

18.5 Settlement

In rural areas settlement and landscape cannot be

regarded separately. HLC can lead on to more detailed consideration of the development and character of settlements, as it has in Buckinghamshire. Study of towns is a better established discipline, with a number of county based projects in the 1970s and 1980s which are being updated at present through an EH initiative. Key among the areas needing research are the following:

- 18.5.1 The factors leading to the mix of settlement types across the region should be investigated.
- 18.5.2 Environmental evidence for the quality of the urban environment should be collected, and used to investigate possible zoning and evidence for social improvement in the later part of the period.
- 18.5.3 The reasons why some towns failed during the post-medieval period, and the rationale for new ones to be established, are not fully understood.
- 18.5.4 More parish surveys are needed which explore the development of settlements in more detail, including relationships with outlying farms and hamlets, morphology etc.
- 18.5.5 Evidence for differences between the rural and urban economies should be collected and analysed.

18.6 Built environment

The types of building materials and building styles used across the region vary considerably, although modern developments seldom maintain this diversity, especially outside Conservation Areas. The work of many leading architects is represented across the Solent-Thames region, in individual houses as well as churches and larger corporate buildings. The efficient communications network and proximity to London led to the creation of commuter belt suburbs in Berkshire and Buckinghamshire, while other major suburban developments have followed industries such as the Harwell and Aldermaston research establishments. Avenues for further study are listed below:

- 18.6.1 Investigation should be carried out to test whether the nature of the built environment reflects differences in settlement patterns.
- 18.6.2 Whether anciently enclosed landscapes display greater diversity and innovation than surviving open field areas need to be explored.
- 18.6.3 Further study of public buildings (local government and justice; schools, hospitals etc) would illuminate their origin, develop-

ment, aspects of their operation and their social context.

- 18.6.4 A better understanding of when building materials and techniques change across the region is needed.
- 18.6.5 The role of built infrastructure, decoration, symbology and material culture as manifestations of social, economic and cultural/racial variation within urban and rural settlement would benefit from systematic study.
- 18.6.6 The impact of London and other major conurbations on regional building styles, particularly through suburban developments, could be tested.

18.7 Ceremony, ritual and religion

The nature of religious beliefs and practices across the Solent-Thames region has undergone massive changes during the post-medieval and modern periods. The beginning of the period saw the conversion of the established Church from Roman Catholicism to Anglican Protestantism. The new religion itself underwent a series of changes in rite and acceptable church decoration, fittings and furnishing over the next few centuries. Catholicism was never completely eradicated and it was re-established in the 19th century. The number and variety of non-conformist denominations also varied across this period. At all periods, but particularly from the 2nd half of the 20th century onwards, immigrants from abroad have brought a variety of different religions or sects, producing, even within this limited geographical area, a multi-cultural society. The following aspects of evidence of ritual and religion merit further study:

- 18.7.1 The churches, churchyards and memorials of the region should be studied to provide information about their connections with major architectural and artistic figures, and the roles played by the inhabitants of the region in the wider environment.
- 18.7.2 The region, in particular Berkshire, was home to a significant Catholic recusant community, and evidence for this movement should be collated.
- 18.7.3 Systematic study of non-conformism could determine whether its spread reflected socio-economic factors.
- 18.7.4 Early evidence for places of worships linked to non-Christian groups should be sought, particularly around the major ports.

18.8 Warfare, defences and military installations

The Solent-Thames region has played a major role in Britain's defences throughout this period. The naval bases along the south coast have been in continuous use since Henry VIII began to establish a permanent navy, and the heathlands of Berkshire, Hampshire and neighbouring Surrey saw the development of the country's standing army. Airfields were a 20th century addition to the landscape, and in our region many survived the end of World War II and came to prominence during the Cold War, including Greenham Common, Upper Heyford and the NATO HQ at High Wycombe. Secret establishments such as Bletchley Park also existed within the region. Areas of particular potential include the following:

- 18.8.1 The many sites connected with the Civil War, including garrisons, skirmishes sieges and defences, should be identified and their archaeological potential assessed.
- 18.8.2 More work remains to be done on 17th to 19th century military sites and World War I defences, including upon the issues of continuity and re-use.
- 18.8.3 The scope of information about the region's wide range of World War II defensive arrangements should be extended to include more on civilian defence, particularly air-raid shelters, and should include both identification and recording of sites and accompanying oral testimony.
- 18.8.4 Further studies of cold war operations and defences should be pursued, partly in order to identify features for future protection.

18.9 Material culture

Material culture generally is not receiving the attention it deserves, but this is particularly true for the post-medieval and modern periods. The close study of ceramic assemblages, grave furniture or the inventory of goods surviving in a building is seldom carried out and finds are often regarded as obscuring the more interesting earlier layers below. Historical archaeology in the USA has demonstrated the value of studying more recent material culture, but adoption of these ideas in the UK is slow. The following measures urgently need implementation or reinforcement.

- 18.9.1 Post-medieval below-ground archaeology tends to be investigated only as a by-product of sites identified for their medieval interest, in urban situations where later levels may have been extensively disturbed. There is a case for

more emphasis in planning conditions upon the proper investigation of sites likely to be productive for their post-medieval interest, both to provide the data for detailed studies of contexts and associations and help to build up a better picture of ceramic and other artefact sequences. This will be particularly productive for urban sites in Oxford, Aylesbury, Reading, Winchester or Cowes.

- 18.9.2 In particular, more detailed work should be concentrated on ceramics as a dating base, particularly for the 15th/16th century, and on helping to establish patterns of sources and manufacture for the market towns of each county.
- 18.9.3 Studies are also needed on further developing detailed understanding of non-ceramic artefact types found in excavation, especially bottle glass and tobacco pipes.
- 18.9.4 It would be helpful to establish a methodology for the analysis of probate records, hearth tax returns etc., in order to improve the integration of documentary and archaeological evidence, including that from building recording.
- 18.9.5 Patterns in material culture can contribute to the understanding of patterns of trade across the region, the influence of the major south coast ports and the influence of London and royalty on society.

18.10 Crafts, trade and industries

The Solent-Thames region is not usually associated with industry, a term which tends to suggest the heavy manufacturing and extraction processes of the Midlands and North. There has in fact been a wide variety of industries including ship and aircraft manufacture, cloth working and brick and tile production, as well as the furniture production of Buckinghamshire, needle making, straw plaiting and other cottage industries, most of which did not survive when mechanisation was introduced. Ways to enhance our understanding of these practices include:

- 18.10.1 Collection of environmental evidence for particular industries eg. salt-making.
- 18.10.2 Exploration of the distribution of industry, the reasons for its existence and, where appropriate, its demise.

- 18.10.3 Recording of surviving industrial complexes and small-scale rural enterprises before closure.
- 18.10.4 Further investigation of the leisure and recreation industries, including those associated with the coast, which are changing rapidly.
- 18.10.5 Searching for environmental evidence for the use of exotic imports such as spices.

Transport and communications

The Solent and its various harbours established the region as an important part of the maritime transport network. The River Thames continued to be a major link in the transport network into the 20th century, while the importance of the River Kennet was increased when it was incorporated into the Kennet and Avon Canal. The A34 continues to act as one of the major north-south routes in southern England, linking the Solent to Oxford and from there to the M40 and the Midlands. At Newbury this road intersects with the principal route from London to Wales, the A4 and now the M4. These and other long established major routes have been a big influence on the development of the region. Better understanding of the development of the region's transport networks requires the following:

- 18.11.1 More information about the pre-turnpike road network.
- 18.11.2 Exploration of the effects of the development of the communications network and related technology upon settlement patterns, land use and local economies.
- 18.11.3 Evidence for the development of the maritime network, including environmental evidence.

Conclusion

The range of resources available for studying the post-medieval periods is vast, and wherever possible archaeological investigations should be tied to the documentary sources. For the very recent past oral history can also contribute. Post-medieval and modern studies need therefore to operate as collaborations between archaeologists, local and social historians, historical geographers and other interested parties. There are numerous groups and individuals involved in this work, many of them amateurs, and this interest and enthusiasm must be harnessed to provide the best data, and to ensure the continuation of this interest for the future.