

The Growth of Wessex

By the late E. T. LEEDS

IN 1925 I put forward the idea that the primary occupation of the future Wessex was the outcome of a Saxon drive from the Cambridge region in a south-westerly direction along the line of the Icknield Way. That view has during the past thirty years received a wide measure of support, and it is a matter of satisfaction to find that new discoveries and fresh archaeological research have done nothing to detract from the value of the arguments advanced in its favour.

That those arguments were mainly of an archaeological nature is not denied, but there still exists a body of opinion in whose eyes such evidence is of very secondary worth as opposed to an exposition of the problem dependent mainly on documentary data, even though the historians themselves are not entirely at one in regard to the value of the evidence on which their case is built up.

It seems therefore all the more desirable to restate the archaeological case in its entirety and to examine its relation to the historical interpretation. On the one hand we have a set of annals in the early part of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle compiled in the time of Alfred the Great and purporting to record early events in West Saxon history. These are arranged in a curious spacing at intervals of four or eight years, which can, if so desired, be fitted into a narrative that includes a handful of statements by contemporary or near-contemporary writers, and the near-contemporary can be as far away as two centuries. On the other hand there is a large and yearly increasing volume of archaeological evidence of ascertained distribution of settlements, evidence of occupation-sites, and cemeteries. These are undeniably contemporary with the period down to the close of the seventh century. The material forms a curious archaeological phenomenon to which it would be difficult to cite an exact parallel ; it consists of the contents of graves, arms and pottery, and more particularly ornaments, and these last derived principally from the graves of women, the static element in the population. It is the very limitation in time of the evidence that is so valuable, for it means that the material has to be analysed and co-ordinated to fit within the compass of 250 years. It allows us to trace the trend of certain forms of feminine fashion, regionally expressed, down to a point which must indicate the cessation of burial in pagan

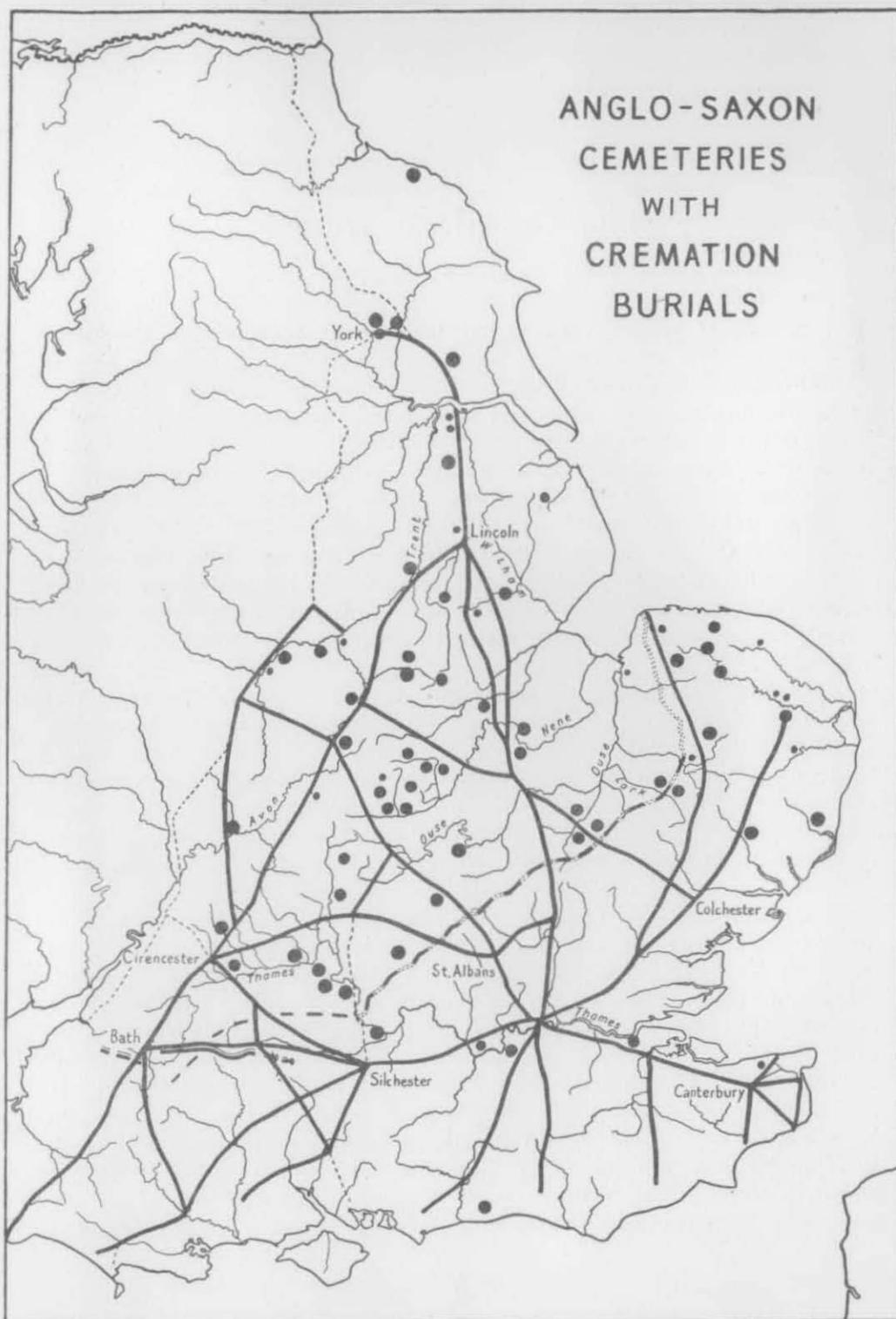


FIG. 13
Distribution-map of cemeteries with cremation-burials

THE GROWTH OF WESSEX

cemeteries, since beyond that point, typologically speaking, no successors to a long series of peasant jewellery are known to us. One of these series is the circular brooch, common to all Saxon occupation areas, whether in its saucer or its applied (composite) form. Its occurrence in any quantity at once labels that area as Saxon. That holds good for the East Saxons, South Saxons, and settlers in northern Surrey, but it is with the main block of Saxons that we are here concerned.

Nothing is more certain than that one of the most immediate landing areas for invaders starting out from the north German coast would be exactly the point at which the English shore first comes into view for any voyager from Esbjerg to Harwich on the south-westerly slant from the Frisian Islands, where the most prominent feature to the naked eye was, before the war, the lofty tower of Yarmouth Church. The whole coast of East Anglia from Lowestoft to the Wash must have been to those seafarers an open book and, it would seem, suffered by far the heaviest and the earliest impact of invasion, when once the full flood broke upon Britain. But the country behind the coast must already have been seriously devastated by intermittent incursions in late Roman times, and it is doubtful if the first wave of Saxons halted long in that district. As we shall see shortly, they must have had some foreknowledge of the country they purposed to occupy. It is hard to decide whether or not some of the large cremation cemeteries of Norfolk received the ashes of Saxon dead; there is little evidence beyond the single example of the north-German prototype of the saucer-brooch found in the mixed cemetery at Caister-by-Norwich. In general it would appear that the Saxons at once drove farther southwards until they found a halting-place in south Cambridgeshire, leaving all Norfolk and northern Suffolk to their Anglian followers.

The Saxons must be regarded in any event as the earliest arrivals. No other interpretation will account for the archaeological evidence of their extensive penetration of the country in many directions. It is not only a case of their unquestionable south-westerly advance *en masse* by the Icknield Way into Oxfordshire and Berkshire, an advance which evidently pursued two tracks. One of these along a more northerly route, carried them to Sandy, Kempston, and onwards by way of Toddington, Leighton Buzzard and Ashendon to their same goal, the corn lands of the Upper Thames valley. It would seem that this line of movement shed large numbers of its participants in the first part of its passage at Sandy and Kempston, so leaving less evidence of itself farther west.

This double south-westerly line of Saxon diffusion, however important—and indeed it was the predominant line—was not the only one along which the

E. T. LEEDS

people and their culture spread. The signs are not so numerous and possibly point to a movement from the Cambridge region subsequent to the main movement, but such as they are they indicate a marked infiltration of the Nene valley along its length from Peterborough to Northampton, and moreover up the Ermine Street northwards as far as the northern border of Rutland. They may even in this movement have found their way up the Welland valley and so down on to the Warwickshire Avon. In all these areas there is archaeologically an unquestionable Saxon element as distinctive as any that occurs in the future Wessex. Such differences as present themselves are due on the one hand to closer proximity to their starting-point in south Cambridgeshire, and on the other to their own regional development. That, though perhaps not fully appreciated by me in 1911, is the real meaning of the division I then drew in the history of the saucer and applied brooch in areas on either side of the Ouse and Thames-Cherwell watershed. The contacts between the two regions were never wholly severed, but they may have weakened as time went on.

At this point it will be well to consider the map of Anglo-Saxon cemeteries and grave-finds in relation to the penetration of Britain in various districts. So far as Northumbria is concerned the picture is comparatively simple. It amounts to this, that except immediately outside the Roman fortress of Eboracum, settlements are almost unknown west of the line of the Roman road from the Humber to the Border.¹ South of the Humber there is no sign of early occupation at first west and, farther upstream, north of the Trent. Indeed for some considerable time the Roman road in Northumbria and the Trent farther south must be accepted as the natural boundary between natives and invaders.

South, however, of a line drawn from the Upper Trent to the Wash the picture is very different. Westerly penetration, in which in the early period Saxons played a very leading part, is far deeper; as the map shows it extends southwards as far as another line drawn from the course of the lower Thames and from Reading westwards along the Roman road from Silchester to Cirencester, where the evidence of early occupation stops short of longitude W₂, though not all the signs of it are necessarily contemporaneous.

If this southern line of early occupation holds good, it is then significant that, excluding some slight occurrences in Kent, northern Surrey and Sussex, the distribution of cemeteries in which either cremation alone was practised or which showed a high proportion of that rite, has the same southerly limit. The subject of cremation has been fully discussed by Mr. J. N. L. Myres in *Antiquity*, 1942, pp. 330-41 by way of criticism of some rather fanciful theories

¹ D. B. Harden has drawn my notice to a small group of Anglian relics from Wensleydale, Yorks. W.R., preserved in the Museum at Bolton Castle.

THE GROWTH OF WESSEX

about the invasion partly based on the implications of the distribution of cremation. I fully endorse Mr. Myres's views and do not seek here to base any chronological conclusions on the occurrence of the rite. I am fully aware that that is rather a futile pursuit. Mr. Myres cites evidences of its persistence ; to them I can add the great square-headed brooch, crumpled by fire, found in a cremation-urn at Abingdon, the double of which was found in a grave at Luton, not to be dated earlier than the late 6th century, and, as I now believe, quite reasonably to be assigned to the early 7th. The cremation-cemetery at Lackford, Suffolk, has yielded other brooches of the same class and period. More pertinent perhaps is the equal-armed brooch from a hut-site at Sutton Courtenay contrasted with fragments of another from an urn at Abingdon. Thus one locality exhibits early and late use of the rite, while still later is the cremation-interment in Asthall barrow, with burnt objects accepted on stylistic grounds (the use of Salin's style II) as of the 7th-century date, but again probably to be set deeper in the century than was assumed at the time of discovery. It may by and large be said that cremation died hard. The conversion of the south Midlands came late, and even that would not halt the practice of cremation at once. It is difficult to assess the depth of conservatism in any people at any time, but it can safely be stated that the women-folk of the invaders were to be found among the most tenacious upholders of the ancient rite. For, as far as the invaders as a whole were concerned, cremation was beyond question the older rite in their homelands, and, as for the women cremated with Anglo-Saxon jewellery, one can, to use a parallel, say that they were no Sabine captives, but of full-blooded Roman (i.e. in this case Saxon) stock.

To return to the south-westerly advance of the Saxons. It swept onwards unchecked into the upper Thames valley ; there was little halting by the way. It is legitimate to conceive of a steady progress along the Icknield Way past the forest-covered Chilterns and the overgrown lower lands over the Oxford Clay subsoil towards a region of which they must have possessed a foreknowledge acquired by report from some source which had a previous acquaintance with the Oxford district. To any band so informed the sight of the spread of the Thames valley stretched out before their gaze from Ivinghoe Beacon would equal that which met the eyes of the Israelites or any Cortes on a peak in Darien. It was such a view, coupled with experience gained by archaeological research in the study and in the field, that evoked in 1925 the theory of the Saxon entry on to the upper Thames from the eastern counties in preference to the lower Thames route to which I could find no alternative in 1913, when I rejected as comparatively worthless any idea of a full-blooded Saxon penetration from the South Coast, such as could account for the mass of archaeological

E. T. LEEDS

evidence of their presence *north* of the Berkshire Downs and for the absence of any equivalent body of material *south* of that line.²

Whence then did the Saxons acquire the foreknowledge that led them to venture so deeply into the Midlands? For it must have been part of a deliberate policy, unparalleled at so early a date in any other part of the country.

We know that, even before the withdrawal of the legions, the Romans themselves introduced *coloni* of Frisian and kindred north German stock to act as garrisons not only on the coast itself but also farther inland. Until recently the well-known Dorchester grave-finds from the Dyke Hills have been regarded as the earliest relics of the invasion-period itself, and that in spite of some difficulty in regard to their date. For the accepted age of the elementary cruciform brooch is not later than *c.* A.D. 400, a dating which implied that a period of half a century at least must have passed before it was buried with its owner, presumably not a native, in one of the Dyke Hills. There was the added difficulty of the quantity of objects of Roman fabric found in the man's grave, which obviously were not the chance objects or 'pick-ups' not infrequently found in normal Anglo-Saxon graves. A second discovery at Dorchester at the northern end of the village has allowed a more reasonable evaluation of the earlier finds to be made.³ This latter grave contained a pair of applied brooches decorated with a design identical with that on a similar brooch found in one of the 'terpen' of North Friesland; the brooch has been assigned to the same period as that of the Dorchester cruciform specimen. The presence of these early relics must now be attributed to *coloni* accompanied by their women-folk, transferred in accordance with Roman usage from a Batavian source to a foreign soil for garrison duty. British archaeologists have long been fully conscious of the width of the gulf to be bridged; we can now set these finds in their proper context and pass on to those which from the circumstances of their discovery can at once be assigned to the period of the main invasion and subsequent settlement.

All along their route the Saxons left behind them memorials, one might call them milestones, to bear witness to their participation in this early thrust.

² It is incorrect to say that I never suggested the Thames Valley route; it was in 1913 the only apparent option, and though the evidence then, as it has since, appeared slender, not to say unconvincing, I followed Mr. Reginald Smith whose opinion was at that time widely valued. He, however, accepted my new theory when issued. How keenly I would previously have welcomed any archaeological evidence in support of an invasion based on the Saxon Chronicle or other writers may be shown by an episode that occurred about 1910. One day I saw in Mr. W. H. Young's workshop in the Ashmolean Museum a group of hand-made Anglo-Saxon urns which had been sent to him for cleaning and reparation. I asked where they came from, and naturally was interested when the answer was 'Weymouth'. Here at least was evidence of cremation on the south coast west of Southampton Water, even if farther west than expected. I suspended judgment until I could learn more details from the sender himself, but before I could do so Mr. Young told me he had got the name wrong and the vases had come from 'Weybridge'. That, as Kipling would have put it, was *another story*.

³ *Oxoniensia*, xvii/xviii (1952/53), 63 ff.

THE GROWTH OF WESSEX

We cannot judge much from the warriors' gear, it varies so little from start to finish ; but some of their women-folk brought their jewellery with them and were buried with it. A brief list will indicate that feminine fashion did not halt in its onward career.

(1) *A late variant of the prototype of the equal-armed brooch*, known by examples from Kempston and Luton, Beds., and from Linton Heath (grave 49), Cambs. The Luton example is the earliest ; Linton Heath the latest. Roeder's dating of the first two is Luton \pm 400 (very worn) ; Kempston \pm 425 (repaired).

(2) *Equal-armed brooch*. Kempston, Abingdon, Sutton Courtenay ; Little Wilbraham and Haslingfield, Cambs. The Kempston piece was formerly regarded as a decadent example of the type, but has been shown by Roeder to be a fifth century stage \pm 450; the Abingdon fragments from a cremation belong to the same stage. The Sutton Courtenay brooch is dated by Roeder to \pm 500, apparently belonging to a somewhat later arrival in Britain.

(3) *Early cruciform brooch*. As is well known these, though they had a long development peculiar to the Angles, have been found in north Germany in Saxon graves or in a Saxon environment, and could have been brought over by some of the earliest arrivals. In the present connexion examples from Kempston, and Frilford, Berks., are significant. But we may note others from Brixworth and Nassington, Northants, which illustrate the movement towards the Nene valley noted above, and possibly one from Baginton, Warwickshire, as evidence of the westward penetration. All these brooches can be dated to the 5th century, and Kempston and Frilford head the list.

(4) *Tutulus Brooch*. A damaged and repaired specimen from Abingdon, grave 106, associated with an applied brooch with spiral design, both known from the great Saxon cemetery of Westerwanna, dating from the early fifth century. From the same cemetery came a disc of an applied brooch embossed with the Star of David motif that occurred at Fairford on a saucer-brooch, and also for the same purpose the design of four  motifs arranged with their apices towards the centre, which in England develops into a design of four masks in the angles of a floriated cross—a design perpetuated and enlarged almost to the close of the pagan period, but in its initial form only recorded here on a saucer-brooch from Sussex.

It will be noted that in the above list a high proportion of the early pieces have been found at points well to the front of the great Saxon thrust, affording every indication that by the end of the fifth century the Saxons had gained a firm foothold on the upper Thames, and had begun to plant at least two large cemeteries south of the river. The map illustrates the limit of cremation in the south Midlands and that is for the time being the southern

E. T. LEEDS

limit for cemeteries of every kind. Such material as is known to us beyond that line, scanty enough in any case, belongs to a later date. I may recall the more important; Basset Down, probably *c.* 600; Mildenhall, Wilts., certainly seventh century. As for Harnham Hill, in the light of recent research which allows a more extended archaeological chronology than that formerly accepted, it cannot have come into use before 552, perhaps not until after 560. Yet cemeteries north of the line have yielded material dating from a period as far back as 450, and from then continuously onwards until they fell into disuse late in the seventh century.

Moreover, if we look at the map of cemeteries (FIG. 13) in relation to density and size, those at Reading and East Shefford can well represent an attempt to break through the left flank of the barrier blocking farther advance in a southerly direction. The former reached the Thames south of the Goring gap; the latter attained a point on the Downs not too far from the Silchester-Cirencester road, and the warrior's grave on Lowbury may be that of a chieftain who fell in that advance, while the graves in the mound near Blewbury can be those of the rank and file, or a small settlement at that point. But, having achieved so much, the invaders found themselves confronted by a resuscitated opposition that continued until after the battle of Mons Badonicus, whatever be its date, 493, 502, or 516, following which according to Gildas there ensued a period of forty years of comparative peace. Gildas also states that after their repulse by the British, the Saxons returned home. This has been interpreted to mean a return to north Germany itself; that may have happened in some cases, but by the middle of the sixth century the Saxons were well established in north Berkshire and had spread along the north side of the Thames from Oxford westwards to Fairford. Gildas's statement need mean no more than that the Saxons retired to their base. By 552 and 556 the problem of a further advance was settled for them in another way. They had, of course, not been left entirely unmolested in their initial occupation-base. This is clearly illustrated by the group of finds in the Abingdon area. On the one hand the Abingdon cemetery must have been opened very early to have received a cremation-urn containing an imported brooch-type (and a grave with two of other classes dating back to *c.* 450), and on the other hand the Sutton Courtenay village must have been established only a little later. For the occupant of one house also had an equal-armed brooch (*c.* 475) carefully stored behind one of the poles supporting the roof-tree, only to lose it in a raid that overwhelmed the village, where cooking pots, weaving gear, and even material for pottery-making were smothered up in the devastation that ensued. This affords clear signs of the rapidity of the British resistance, and the length of time it must have continued. For the village was certainly never re-occupied, while the Abingdon cemetery

THE GROWTH OF WESSEX

was still in use in the seventh century, presumably until well after 634 (Birinus).

After the initial occupation the Saxons evidently endeavoured to extend their sphere of settlement in a south-westerly direction, but, as already shown, very soon encountered a stubborn British resistance, so determined that after their defeat at Mons Badonicus, they found themselves compelled to rest on the laurels they had won for a period, the end of which can be placed at some point between 530 and 560. During this period the Saxons retained their hold on northern Berkshire and a long stretch of the Thames valley, in sufficient security to admit a certain amount of trade with the outside world. Thus we find at East Shefford, Cassington, and even at Dinton, Bucks., 5th- early 6th century conical glass vases of Low Countries fabric which probably passed through London and up the Thames. For this route was at any rate feasible for inter-tribal communication, even if it had not been that by which settlers in numbers first attained the upper Thames. It can here be categorically stated that none of the Saxon finds from sites between Reading and Weybridge exhibit early traits; they are for the most part insignificant or of poor quality.⁴

We thus have a province around the Upper Thames in the century following the first arrival with a life of its own, extending down to the middle of the sixth century. But then a great change ensued. What caused it? This is the point at which Gildas, Bede, Nennius and the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle with their disconnected and patchy information come into the picture.

There is no record of a landing on the south coast west of Southampton Water except in the early annals in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle. The credibility of those annals connected with West Saxon history has long been a matter of dispute. H. M. Chadwick in 1907 in *The Origin of the English Nation* argued strongly against their reliability and Professor Ferdinand Lot in 1935 in *Les invasions germaniques* goes so far as to condemn them as a late ninth-century forgery.⁵ The rights and wrongs of the case may never be solved, but there are certain points which must be borne in mind.

(i) Do we know what, if any people, made the landing? The *West Seaxa* in the annals for 514 and 519 are of no account. It is no more than a geographical expression of the ninth century. Bede certainly speaks of West Saxons, but by the time at which he wrote, Wessex was a kingdom of long standing. We do not even know that they were Saxon. Mr. G. J. Copley

⁴ Excluding the Taplow burial, which belongs to the seventh century.

⁵ Already stated in 1931 (*Proc. Brit. Acad.*, xvi, 327 ff.). I must at this point be allowed to refute any illusion that I have in any way retreated from the views I have always held in regard to the early annals concerning Wessex in the A.S. Chronicle. In what follows I have merely used them as working hypotheses in order to test whether archaeology permits one to make anything like a connected story out of them. In using them the dates have no more reliability than other statements.

E. T. LEEDS

(evidently accepting the annal) seems to hint at the possibility that they were by suggesting that they had formed part of the Saxons who are known to have descended in earlier years in piratical raids on northern France, and who had, presumably under pressure of the westward advance of the Salian Franks, elected to seek their fortunes elsewhere. Here may be mentioned one piece of evidence, noted by Professor Baldwin Brown, that points to some connexion between northern France and the West Saxon area. At Sigy, Seine Inférieure,⁶ and at Muids, Eure, there have been found the embossed plates of applied brooches with a very curious zoomorphic ornament, rather of a fantastic hippocamp nature, encircled in one case with an egg-and-tongue border, in the other by guilloche. This same design without any border recurs on a pair of brooches found at East Shefford, Berks. The date of the pieces is uncertain ; it may be early, that is to say, a reminiscence of a Gallo-Roman style. Against that, the size of the brooches points to late sixth or seventh century, since early applied brooches are usually quite small. Returning to the Chronicle, our newcomers are said to have landed at a point immediately west of Southampton Water in country which long afterwards was called Ytene-land, the land of the Jutes, the occupants of the Meon valley and the Isle of Wight. Any archaeological discoveries in west Hampshire one would expect to be akin to finds in those areas. The real difficulty lies in the fact that archaeologically outside those areas Hampshire in the pagan Anglo-Saxon period, is, as Mr. Reginald Smith stated over 50 years ago, 'virtually a blank'. It is hardly reasonable to picture a full-scale invasion from the south coast, if a county so fertile as Hampshire could and still can be so described. This is particularly true when the condition of Hampshire is compared with the density of occupation in a whole group of counties north of the Berkshire Downs. It is a weak argument that explains the absence of cemeteries by non-discovery. Up and down the Anglo-Saxon area hardly a year passes without some new cemetery being brought to light. The cemeteries are the solid proof of occupation and settlement. If there was real settlement in Hampshire in the first two centuries of Anglo-Saxon history, cemeteries are essential. Any folk who landed near Southampton Water were clearly heathen, for their rulers resisted conversion until 635.

Dr. Crawford claims that the primary settlement of the newcomers is to be located behind a series of earthworks at the southern end of the tongue of land lying between Southampton Water and Beaulieu River. It would be a great service to the progress of unveiling the mysteries of the West Saxon riddle if that could be proved to be correct ; a handful of Saxon or Frankish sherds would be a valuable confirmation.

⁶ Baldwin Brown, *Arts in Early England*, iv, 553, pl. CXLIX, 5.

THE GROWTH OF WESSEX

(ii) What was the size of the landing force? If the annals are to be trusted, it can hardly have been large. From their supposed enclave at *Cerdices ora*, the force managed by 519 to advance round the eastern side of the Forest and by the Cloven Way win the crossing of the Wiltshire Avon at Charford (*Cerdicesford*). Nine years later they are said to have fought at *Cerdicesleah*, which Dr. Crawford locates a short distance north in the direction of Salisbury. The twenty-five years after *Cerdicesleah* are on any reckoning a mystery, unless the force was so small as to be unable to advance, or because it, like the Saxons of the Thames Valley, was partaking in the forty-four years' lull in warfare recorded by Gildas, whose statement is worthy of all attention. It is here at last that we have definite signs of settlement of a northwardly moving body. In a curve from Coombe Bisset in the west to Winterslow in the east there is a series of cemeteries large and small, and these constitute the first solid sign of anything like occupation in Southern Wessex.

The recent exploration of the cemetery at Petersfinger has only served to confirm the opinion already held in regard to the earlier material from Harnham Hill—that archaeologically the culture they exhibit is closely akin to that of the Isle of Wight. This takes us back to the suggestion of Saxons from northern France. I have myself long suspected this might be the origin of the Hampshire newcomers. There still remains, at present, the same insuperable objection: No trace of late fifth- or even early sixth-century Saxon archaeological evidence is known from south Hampshire. Without such evidence or something of a Frankish complexion the early West Saxon annals simply record a tradition of a small group of Saxon adventurers about whose immediate origin the annalists leave us in complete ignorance. There are many records of Saxons in northern and western France, but the name Saxon in the history of early France is no more than a generic title used to cover any piratical invaders from an unspecified part of the north German coast.

Both Petersfinger and Harnham Hill in addition have yielded material of purely Saxon character as we understand the term in England. Brooches at Petersfinger are paralleled at Kingsey, Bucks., but such material belongs to an advanced use of the cemetery, as is the case also at Harnham Hill. A cemetery at Roche Court Down, Winterslow,⁷ containing bodies identified as of Saxon type, some of them decapitated, has been interpreted as evidence that the advance from the south was still meeting with determined opposition.

The cemeteries at Petersfinger with 64 graves and Harnham Hill with about the same number, though neither completely explored, together with outlying cemeteries of smaller size, do show one circumscribed area of settle-

⁷ *Wilts. Arch. Mag.*, XLV, 569 ff.

ment in the southern counties which can be accepted. If, as has been done, this is to be ascribed to Gewisse, the supposed combination of Jutes and Saxons, we cannot on the basis of the archaeological material be certain that the Jutish element was not predominant.

(iii) In 552 Searobyrig fell to the Gewisse, whose exploits up to this point resemble those of Pizarro and his small army in Peru in all but speed. How then was it that within four years they were able to inflict a thorough defeat on the British at Beranbyrig (Barbury Castle) on the north edge of the Wiltshire Downs? Obviously because in the interval before 556, they had got into close touch with the northern group of Saxons, who after many years of recuperating from their earlier disaster were ready to take issue once more with the British. What by this time was the political status of this northern group is unknown. Leaders they must have had of the rank usually indicated by graves of sword-bearers, as at Abingdon, Brighthampton and Fairford, the kind of men capable of directing pioneer immigrants pushing forward merely by weight of numbers and combining when necessary to repel native counter-attacks. Their lineage, however, could not match that of the southern leaders, and the older settlers were therefore ready to accept Cynric's kingship, and thus by their added strength contributed not a little to the success at Beranbyrig, and at a later date (565) helped Ceawlin to repel an attack by Aethelbert of Kent.

Before 556 no evidence exists to show that a force advancing from the south can at any point have been large. But the call on the fighting strength of the settlers in the Upper Thames valley gave the British east of Oxford the chance to rise against the Saxons in the hope of regaining their stolen lands. After 565 the rising, if not already in being, reached such a pitch that Ceawlin found himself bound to take action. The outcome was the battle of Bedcanford, which at long last the philologists graciously admit may be identified with Bedford. Few historians and no archaeologists have ever pretended that it could be located elsewhere.

The annal for 571 is, as it is recorded, confusing and will always remain so, since it is geographically absurd, involving a tactical *hysteron proteron*. But if that awkwardness is admitted, there is no reason to suppose that it does not present a true picture of the facts. The new addition to the realm was suffering from constant harassment on the north and east quadrants of its borders by the attacks of British guerillas still harbouring in the Chilterns and in the forests of Buckinghamshire, South Northamptonshire and North Bedfordshire.⁸ This pressure had evidently reached a pitch at which the Saxons had lost their grip, never very tight, on the country between the Thames and

⁸ Dr. Hodgkin's map in *A History of the Anglo-Saxons* is very instructive on this point (vol. 1, facing p. 109).

THE GROWTH OF WESSEX

Hertfordshire through which they had fought their way in their original descent into the Thames Valley, thereby losing contact with their fellow Saxons in Bedfordshire and Cambridgeshire. They had even lost hold on places close at hand. By the campaign of 571, this situation was repaired; places as far apart as Eynsham and Benson on the one hand, and Aylesbury and Limbury (Luton) on the other were recaptured, and the broken links in the chain of settlements that served to connect them with their kinsmen farther east were forged afresh. There is not the slightest necessity to alter the words of the annal in an endeavour to solve its apparent incongruities by substitution of fellow Saxons or Angles.

Here, let it be said at once, one fact cannot be too strongly emphasized. At no time before the Mercian attacks in the middle of the seventh century is there any warrant for suggesting that the aggressors could be Angles. The frontier eastwards between Angles and Saxons during the pagan period is archaeologically very well defined. It is true that the Angles of East Anglia had for a time exerted very strong pressure and influence on the Saxons of south Cambridgeshire during part of the sixth and seventh centuries, but, as I have shown elsewhere, everything indicates that the Saxons gradually regained their independence and by the latter half of the seventh century were again closely associated with Mid-Anglia, which initially had, as I have said above, been colonized from South Cambridgeshire. At the latitude of Northampton there was a belt of heavy forest land overlying the Oxford Clay of North Bedfordshire, and Huntingdonshire. South of this belt there is no trace of any Anglian influence whatever.⁹ The chain of purely Saxon settlements between South Cambridgeshire and the Upper Thames, thin at times, widely spread and often tenuously held, is one of the indisputable facts of the history of the time.

(iv) To return to the interpretation of the annal for 571, and the suggestion of an Angle attack, there can be no better proof than the later annal of 584 recording the battle of Fethanleag. If Sir Frank Stenton's recognition of the name in a north Oxfordshire field-name is tenable, then the battle would be just another stage in the same process of repelling the constant irritation of native guerrillas, presumably attacking from south Warwickshire, an area that, as shown by the Map of the Dark Ages, was never occupied by any of the invaders during the pagan period.

There are, however, grave objections to the equation of a place-name in north-east Oxfordshire with the site of the battle of Fethanleag. They lie in the language of the entry itself in the annal for 584. This reads, 'At this time

⁹ One pair of somewhat later cruciform brooches at East Shefford can result from a marriage. This argument Professor Hawkes uses to explain identity of design on great square-headed brooches found at Chessel Down, I. of W. and Linton Heath, Cambridgeshire.

E. T. LEEDS

Ceawlin and Cutha fought with the British at the place, which men call Fethanleag, and Cutha was slain. And Ceawlin took many towns (or villages) and uncountable spoils. In wrath he returned thence to his own (land).’ In the first place the wide-reaching campaign of 571 must already have covered the area adjacent to the forests of South Northamptonshire. Secondly, though not of great importance, there are several well-known Anglo-Saxon occupation-sites in the upper reaches both of the Cherwell (Marston St. Lawrence, Heyford and Souldern) and of the Nene (Badby and Newnham), some of them settled before the end of the sixth century. Thirdly, we are told that Ceawlin took many villages and uncountable spoils (*monige tunas* $\bar{\eta}$ *unarimedlice here reaf*). It is difficult to picture this part of the Midlands as containing the large population that *monige tunas* would imply; moreover it is almost impossible to conceive of the district or area yielding more than the barest amount of plunder. While holding no absolute brief for Faddiley, until some site is found that will accord better with the language of the Chronicle, I prefer to agree with Mr. G. M. Young, who writes that after the great victory at Deorham in 577, when Bath, Cirencester and Gloucester fell into his hands, Ceawlin ‘goes off conquering in some unknown direction (possibly to Uriconium)’. He must have ranged far and wide in the Severn valley in the next years; his campaign terminating at Fethanleag in 584 would anticipate and probably would initiate the opposition of the Mercians along the Trent which in Penda’s day resulted in the loss to Wessex of its holdings in the Severn valley. Finally, Ceawlin ‘returned thence to his own (land), *hwearf bonan to his agnum*, a strange phrase to apply to a battle site in an area already occupied by Saxons. Surely *his agnum* (the last a word unique in the Chronicle) is Wessex contrasted with a region well outside its hard-won boundaries, and may specifically point to South Wessex.

After Fethanleag we reach a stage in the progress of the West Saxons when, historically speaking, archaeology cannot contribute very much. Nevertheless that is not because the archaeological material fades out; on the contrary it can safely be estimated to continue for another fifty years, and would have continued to make its contribution to the cultural history even longer but for the comparatively early conversion of the West Saxon rulers at the coming of Birinus, and the foundation of the see at Dorchester in 634. In the matter of date there is no reason to believe that pagan burial ceased any more abruptly in Wessex than in mid-Anglia, where it can now be stated with some certainty that the old burial-rites persisted until 700 and possibly longer. Cenwal’s decision to begin the building of a cathedral at Winchester in 643 with the consequent termination of the Dorchester see may have had a considerable effect on the southern half of the Kingdom and may account for the rather extraordinary scarcity of pagan cemeteries in that area, as the few known

THE GROWTH OF WESSEX

examples such as Harnham Hill and Petersfinger have yielded nothing later than the early seventh century. If anything at all can be later, it is a pair of saucer brooches from Mildenhall near Marlborough, and that little cemetery, like that at Basset Down, is much more in the nature of an extension from the north than the resting-place of tribesmen advancing from the south.

Archaeology, however, still has valuable contributions to make to our knowledge of the West Saxon region and its people. It can be clearly seen that the seventh century witnessed a marked stage in the crystallization of the art-histories of the old tribal entities, Anglian, Saxon and Kentish. Each of them may borrow something from one another, but in the main they can be seen to have severally developed an artistic—or even an inartistic—style of their own. This is an important point, because history records invasions, for example, of East Anglia and Northumbria by Penda, or of Wessex by Wulfhere, in the latter case not merely as far as the Thames-Cirencester line, but right down to the Isle of Wight. But in spite of all such disturbances life went on. Women in Norfolk wear jewellery of a special Anglian fashion; in mid-Anglia, as might be expected, the ornaments have a mixed Anglo-Saxon character, while the Saxons—and this is true of the Saxon element in mid-Anglia—retain their original Saxon circular brooch-form brought over from north Germany in the middle of the fifth century. All the change that their jewellery underwent was the development of their own artistic motifs and the introduction of others borrowed from Kentish or Anglian sources. At the same time, determined not to be left behind in the universal vogue of increasing size, they enlarged the diameter of their brooches to more than double that of the prototype. There are quite a number of these large pieces known, but, if we except the Mildenhall pair, they have all come to light in cemeteries within the northern division of Wessex, the original settlement area of Saxons in the west. From first to last until the kingdom of Wessex shifted its focus southwards with the removal of the see from Dorchester to Winchester the older area of settlement retained its political primacy. Even when that passed away, everything goes to show that it clung hard to its old ways of life, and its cemeteries may illustrate the strength of that tenacity.

The overall picture of the growth of Wessex warranted by the archaeological evidence is on the one hand the penetration by a huge body of peasant immigrants of pure Saxon stock forcing its way into the heart of the Midlands with a definite purpose of settlement which in effect they carried out. On the other hand we have a band of adventurers apparently mixed Juto-Saxons advancing from the south coast but only in sufficient strength to make slow headway with a very moderate area of actual settlement. Only later, when they were able to join up with the established settlements farther north, could

E. T. LEEDS

they with the combined force solidify the structure of a West Saxon Kingdom. This, later on again, apparently owing to petty dynastic troubles, broke in two, leaving the northern group to fall eventually under the domination of Mercia, while the southern group sought expansion in a south-westerly direction.

SELECT BIBLIOGRAPHY

- G. BALDWIN BROWN. *The Arts in Early England*, III-IV (1915).
R. G. COLLINGWOOD, and J. N. L. MYRES, *Roman Britain and the English Settlements* (2nd ed.) 1937, especially pp. 383-410.
G. J. COPLEY. *The Conquest of Wessex in the Sixth Century* (1954).
R. H. HODGKIN. *A History of the Anglo-Saxons* (3rd ed.) 1952.
E. T. LEEDS. *The Archaeology of the Anglo-Saxon Settlements* (1913).
——— 'The West Saxon Invasion and the Icknield Way' (*History*, x (1925), pp. 97-109).
——— 'The Early Saxon Penetration of the Upper Thames Area' (*Antiquaries Journal*, XIII (1933), pp. 229-251).
——— and H. de S. SHORTT. *An Anglo-Saxon Cemetery at Petersfinger, near Salisbury, Wilts* (1953).
J. N. L. MYRES. 'Britain in the Dark Ages' (*Antiquity*, XI (1935), pp. 455-64).
——— *The Oxford Region* (ed. A. F. Martin and R. W. Steel, Oxford, 1954), ch. 10, 'The Anglo-Saxon Period'.
FRITZ ROEDER. *Typologisch-Chronologische Studien zu Metallsachen der Völkerwanderungszeit*. (Jahrbuch des Provinzial-Museums Hannover, N.F., Bd. 5, 1930.)
——— *Neue Funde auf Kontinental-Sächsischen Friedhöfen der Völkerwanderungszeit*. (Anglia, 57 (1933)).
R. A. SMITH. 'Anglo-Saxon Remains' (*Victoria County History, Hampshire*, I, 373-98).
J. F. S. STONE. 'Saxon interments on Roche Court Down, Winterslow' (*Wiltshire Archaeological Magazine*, XIV, 568-81).