

Notes on the South-East Research Framework public seminar on the
Urban Theme (17/11/07)

Chair: John Williams

Speakers: John Williams, Helen Clarke, Sarah Pearson and Paul Bennett

Notes: Jake Weekes

The first paper is adapted from a text supplied by the speaker.

Approaches to urban archaeology – half empty or half full?

John Williams (JW)

Why a separate urban theme? – since towns are being dealt with under their various periods? – to look for the linking threads, the growth and decline of towns and consider the common methodologies needed for studying towns of any period. And today we are looking at what we know and what perhaps we want to know: hence the title.

Rather than checking attributes against a list of what a town is, perhaps we can accept Susan Reynolds definition: a permanent human settlement where a significant proportion of the population lives off non-agricultural occupations and which forms a social unit more or less distinct from the surrounding countryside. But what do we do with London suburbs?

In approaching towns, Carver, in Arguments in Stone, identified three approaches:

- The narrative – telling the story
- The processual – looking for economic, social and other cause and effect
- The structuralist – pursuing more symbols and meaning in towns.

I would go further and differentiate between single and multiple narratives (relating to individual towns and urban systems) and explanations and models for individual towns and groups of towns. All the approaches are valid, giving us a variety of answers. We ask different questions and get different answers.

With the above in mind I have attempted a rapid review of the urban landscapes of the four counties to try to get a feel for our current state of knowledge. In so doing I very much want you to challenge my understanding of the situation – this is what this SERF process is all about. I hope that I have by now some knowledge of Kent but in crossing into Surrey and Sussex my assumptions and perceptions may be flawed.

So if we start at the beginning, or at least in Roman times, we can see two major towns or cantonal capitals, Canterbury and Chichester. For both the issues of origins are interesting. Chichester is tied into the debate about Fishbourne and client kingdom. Canterbury also has a late Iron Age inheritance, perhaps in the form of an

oppidum but perhaps as a religious focus. What was the nature of any early Roman military presence at both? For both we have the main elements of a street pattern but at Canterbury we have rather more in the way of structural evidence, both public buildings and private properties. For both we have artefactual and environmental evidence. We interpret a lot of this evidence by reference to our understanding of similar-sized Roman towns elsewhere in Britain and throughout the Roman Empire.

In terms of small towns firstly do we have all the sites? There are quite a lot of blanks on the map. Then our perception of such 'small towns' also largely derives from outside the South-East. We have the evidence from large scale geophysical survey and excavation at Westhawk Farm near Ashford, we have the geophysical survey from Richborough, but we are not too clear about what lies within the walls of Rochester, and beyond that our knowledge is distinctly limited. Overall we may think that we have a feel for the Roman town and countryside in the South-East but we need to admit that we have to get beyond the general model for towns in the Roman Empire and fill in some more real detail.

In this respect the Anglo-Saxon period is even more challenging. Based on work at Hamwic, Lundenwic and Ipswich and continental sites such as Dorestad we search for the Middle Saxon emporia, or controlled ports of trade in our area, and latch on to place names such as Sandwich and Fordwich, but this particular glass is pretty well empty. No settlement evidence but a cluster of "sites" in East Kent, which Metcalf, on the basis of coin evidence, argues may have exceeded London in terms of population and business. But we are not really seeing them yet. If we move into the 9th century we can note that Canterbury is the dominant mint in England, producing 35% of the coinage, followed by East Anglia, London, Rochester and Wessex. Metcalf would argue that this, coupled with the loss pattern of the coinage is evidence for Canterbury, London and Rochester being engaged in long-distance trade. From that time we have important documentary evidence from Canterbury, - charters conveying city land, regulations on the distance between properties and the implication that the townspeople had formed themselves into some sort of corporate organisation. But what exactly did Canterbury look like on the ground?

In this period we are starting to move from controlled trade to commerce based more on supply and demand with the rise of urban craftsmen and traders. In changing to this more urban world John Blair has underlined the role of minsters but others might see the hand of secular authority. With our good documentary evidence for royal estate centres and also for minsters we need to see what the archaeological evidence is.

In the Late Saxon period recent thinking has been dominated by Wessex's Alfredian burhs and the towns of the Danelaw. Within our area the Burghal Hidage lists burhs at Eorpeburnan (Newenden or Rye?), Hastings, Lewes, Burpham and Chichester. Kent is out of area. Slightly later the Grateley Decree of Athelstan lists seven moneyers at Canterbury, three at Rochester, two at Lewes and one each at Hastings and Chichester. By Domesday mints had operated also at Cissbury, Steyning, Romney, Lympne, Hythe, Dover and Sandwich. It is interesting to look at a national ranking based on the surviving coins from each mint. Across the area a number of places can be identified as probable towns in the Late Saxon period, mainly it would appear linked to sea trade. These include, beyond those already mentioned, Dover, Fordwich,

Guildford, Romney, Sandwich and Steyning. Our best evidence for what the towns of the period would have looked like comes from plan analysis of Lewes and Guildford where the grid pattern typical of Wessex has been postulated. Is this in any case typical? Steyning certainly seems to show a less formal layout. The point is that we are largely trying to fit somewhat meagre archaeological evidence within a documentary framework and models derived from outside the South-East.

In Domesday Book the following places are identified as boroughs:

- In Kent – Canterbury, Dover, Fordwich, Hythe, Rochester, Romney, Sandwich and Seasalter
- In Surrey – Guildford
- In Sussex – Chichester, Hastings, Lewes, Pevensey, Steyning and Rye.

We can look at the number of properties or property holders in these towns. There are some other places that can be identified as markets or harbours.

Within the medieval period there is something of an urban explosion in the South-East, even if many of these towns are little more than villages. It is interesting to note that in the greater South-East in 1100 Kent had the highest density of towns but the slowest rate of increase afterwards so that by 1300 it had the lowest density – but the highest density of markets.

We can get an impression of the ranking of towns from taxation returns. We are now dealing with real people who have left us written evidence of their lives. We also have physical evidence in the form of castles, churches and other major structures in a number of places and towards the end of the period we have standing vernacular buildings. We are still, however, basing a lot on plan form analysis.

Although it is only in the 13th century that charter and other documentary evidence becomes abundant it is clear that royal, seigneurial or ecclesiastical initiative was driving forward the establishment and development of towns. Castles were placed at existing towns such as Rochester, Lewes and Hastings and new castles gave birth to towns such as at Tonbridge, Reigate, Blechingley and Farnham. Monastic houses initiated towns as at Battle and West Malling and Archbishop's palaces acted as stimuli, as at Charing and Mayfield. Gardiner would see Mayfield, and also Wadhurst, Ticehurst and Wartling as "permissive" settlements where towns grew up around a market. Some, such as Cranbrook and Tenterden, may owe more to the development of the cloth and other industries. Perhaps here and more generally we can note the major continuing economic influence of London – Londoners supplying dyers at Maidstone, Tenterden and Cranbrook. In Surrey relationship with London is a key theme.

We now have much more documentary data and pride of place here must go to the thirteenth century rentals of Canterbury, which Urry used to reconstruct the topography of the city, and there is good archaeological and buildings evidence. Sarah will be talking about buildings later.

Two projects are worth noting. At New Winchelsea the Martins have successfully brought together the evidence of the standing structures with that from archaeology

and documentary sources. The gridded plan with a clear foundation date is certainly beneficial. A team led by two of our presenters today (HC and SP) is currently working on Sandwich, again with excellent results but the absence of clear chronological horizons in the development of the town's plan, particularly the earlier phases, presents considerable challenges. Similar work is being progressed at Rye and many other places would benefit from it.

Guildford and Lewes have had a fair amount of archaeological work but little of real scale, and probably with a concentration on high status and religious structures. There is a need to pull the evidence together.

An aspect of towns that has fascinated me and where more effort is probably needed is the transition from the medieval to post-medieval period. With the disposal of large monastic estates one can see in a variety of places the virtual secularisation of the urban landscape. From the 13th century onwards towns had increasingly been gaining freedom from overlordship and now ecclesiastical influence was diminished. Anyway as we go through the 16th century and beyond perhaps we see a change in the urban landscape.

When we get into the post-medieval and modern period we have a wealth of evidence from a variety of sources, documentary, cartographical, not so much in the way of archaeology but a real wealth of the structures themselves. I am on less firm ground myself in terms of what systematic studies have been undertaken, my impression being rather of studies of individual places or syntheses, inevitably more selective on account of the quantity of information available. Perhaps a greater understanding will come out of Conservation Area Assessments and characterisation studies although the purpose of these is very much geared to active management of the historic environment resource.

Overall then there has been some excellent in depth work at a number of towns but it is very much confined, for archaeology, to the likes of Canterbury, Chichester, Lewes and then the smaller Roman settlements (no longer towns) of Westhawk Farm and Springhead (and the latter I regard more as a cult centre). More generally I get the feeling that we are basing our interpretations of urban evolution on:

- A general historical framework
- Reference to key type sites somewhere within England – or further afield
- Variable detailed documentary analysis
- Interpretation of surviving urban topography
- Limited intervention and sampling.

A key example of this is our perception of the re-emergence of towns in the later Anglo-Saxon period. We might know that we have mints and coin distributions, we might interpret the street pattern at the centre of Lewes as planned and gridded –but how did burhs work anyway? We can have a guess at the size of towns from Domesday Book statistics, we may glimpse the occasional urban structure but we are creating models rather than necessarily demonstrating reality. This is not meant to belittle some substantial achievements but it does underline the necessity not to follow blindly an inductive approach to understanding what our late Anglo-Saxon towns

looked like and how they functioned. We still have a need for good basic data. We have similar issues with our Roman towns but perhaps the situation is better for the medieval period although, particularly with the smaller towns, we are relying a lot on documentary evidence and plan form analysis.

What then are our key questions?

- Origins, decline, reestablishment and transition – where the evidence will not be constant across a town – the needle under the haystack
- Urban chronologies – individual and systems
- Political, economic, religious, social dimensions – use documentary sources also
- Urban forms
- Urban components
- Urban networks and the relationship between town and countryside
- Symbolism and meaning.

Are there are also further issues such as the use of interdisciplinary approaches, testing of hypotheses, matters of scale, accessibility and usability of information, regional standards for fabrics and forms in artefact studies, and regional standards for environmental evidence, to consider. There is more than one glass!

Discussion:

The need to articulate towns/hinterland/communications was pointed out, and also for: integration between the various aspects of each. Yet the town, suburbs and rural area are separate at the same time as being indivisible in certain respects. Often suburbs are where we find the greater part of the ‘urban’ population: so there is a dynamic picture to consider. We should also be dealing with perceptions of landscapes in the urban context.

Extensive Urban Surveys – strengths and weaknesses

Helen Clarke (HC)

HC had been asked to look at the Extensive Urban Surveys (EUS) and examine their strengths and weaknesses. The general principles that underlay these surveys have implications for the regional survey in which we are currently interested. Launched in 1992, they gathered additional purposes because of changes in thought. Late 1960s ideas of ‘The Erosion of History’ had led to an early 1970s response in the form of an initial series of urban surveys. These were useful small summaries, but only a handful were produced (for Surrey and Sussex towns: none were produced for Kent). Few counties produced them and distribution was also limited.

The later series of EUS treated with archaeology, standing buildings and historical sources (now within a PPG16 context), and produced more finished products for whole counties: Surrey and Kent are finished, and Sussex is almost completed. However, they were not formalised or standardised: HC gave examples of the

publications, which all subtly yet significantly had different titles and emphases, but whether this is a good or bad thing is open to debate. Again, the accounts (from a regional perspective) are differently structured: with the Kent volume early chapters present evidence, followed by aspects of the management of the resource, Surrey is similarly structured, but Sussex is different and uses a different terminology

In terms of overall strengths, the surveys have been fit for purpose in putting information across (especially in the form of Geographical Information Systems), and have entailed systematic collation of information from different source materials.

However, weaknesses are significant. Only about a third of the surveys have in fact been done: are we going to get them finished? There are also varying degrees of completion and dissemination of each survey, and the time between first and last survey will be decades, which has implications for the integrity of the project as a whole in terms of theory and methodology. The surveys only provide a 'snapshot' based on the level of understanding/research focus, at the particular time when each was compiled. They don't encourage new research work therefore, and few challenge accepted views of towns they are dealing with. This is all understandable given circumstances, but this is a missed opportunity. The surveys also rely in Department of Environment list, and indeed perpetuate such listings.

The static nature of the reports also means that information might well be treated by developers etc as a completed statement of fact, so there is a real danger of losing information in future. There is no mechanism for updating them with new information that changes our understanding. For example, results of dendrochronology carried out at Farnham in Surrey (there is no formal mechanism for doing this with all towns either) have transformed many aspects of our understanding of that town's development: will this be published as an updated EUS?

There is also no mechanism for evaluating the usefulness of the EUS in action, and they are County based, which is restrictive; we need to look at urbanisation in a regional and geological context.

Overall, the primary weakness of the EUS approach (its tendency towards an static and completed statement) is an object lesson for the South-East Research Framework. Resource assessments and research agendas need to remain dynamic and unfinished.

Discussion:

Why is Historic Landscape Characterisation (HLC) ongoing and EUS so static? Perhaps HLC is seen as a step change rather than a gradation? Or is this a resource issue? The problem of such a definitive statement is that it can be seen as out of date the day it is published (particularly when developer funded work is adding so much new information). Perhaps we need to make these surveys part of the Historic Environment Records, which allows continual updating because of its nature as a Geographical Information System, although it may be better to run publication and a constantly updated resource in tandem, providing for the needs of professionals as well as dissemination to a wider audience. The web provides an ideal opportunity to publish with low cost (need to cover server cost); this is a strategic issue, particularly

among funding bodies. Contractors and curators present at the meeting pointed out that they used EUS all the time; despite the fact that these documents can't keep up with rate of development, where they have been done they are gratefully received.

The following paper is adapted from a text supplied by the speaker.

The contribution of standing buildings to urban archaeology and history

Sarah Pearson (SP)

Since most other regional research frameworks apparently have not included standing buildings, you might ask why a building historian is talking at a seminar designed to explore research questions in urban archaeology. The answer is that once buildings start to survive they become an important part of the archaeological resource which is often not taken seriously enough. They are the most obvious material remains from the Middle Ages onwards, and what they can tell us about towns during the periods once they start to survive should not be overlooked. Thankfully, this research framework is dedicated to a multidisciplinary approach, and therefore standing buildings have their part to play. Before I continue I should apologise for the fact that since I live and work in Kent my knowledge is inevitably skewed towards that county, but I hope that what I shall say is equally valid for Surrey and Sussex.

What has so far been done on standing urban buildings? First, as everyone will be aware, there are the Lists of Buildings of Special Architectural or Historic Interest. Unfortunately, since towns were the first to be re-listed in the great re-listing of the 1970s and 80s, many of the urban lists are very poor. Because the lister did not go inside, the house on the left is dated 16th century when it is in fact a very important early 14th century house; while that on the right is listed as 18th when it is a fine 16th century building. Thus inclusion on the List often tells us little about the actual building, although it has value at least in alerting the conservation officer to the possibility that it may contain something interesting that requires exploration.

In some parts of the country, inventories, undertaken by the former Royal Commission, might have provided more detail, as in York, Salisbury or Stamford. But no such works exist for the South-East region. Only one major book, an extremely impressive volume on New Winchelsea by David and Barbara Martin, and a minor book on houses in Horsham, have yet been published in the South-East, and to this one might add a superb book on 18th century London houses by Peter Guillery, which includes work in Deptford, Greenwich and Woolwich, which were once part of Kent. In addition a book on Hampshire houses which includes a good deal on town buildings relevant to the South-East region, has been written by Edward Roberts, and published, to its credit, by Hampshire County Council. A number of other volumes, on Rye, Farnham, Faversham and Sandwich are under way, plus work on Battle and Hastings which is apparently being included in a study of buildings in the Rape of Hastings. To these may be added articles on individual towns and buildings.

Most of the day-to-day work by professionals on standing buildings is done under PPG15, and although some results see the light of day in short reports in county journals, there has been no chance as yet to turn this material into larger publications

on each city or town. I understand that the Canterbury Archaeological Trust would love to publish on Canterbury, but is handicapped by the nature of developer-funded work, which simply pays for individual buildings, or worse yet, parts of individual buildings, to be recorded, and has no resources to fill the gaps and undertake the necessary research, writing and publication. This is a huge pity, for although reports on individual buildings can help other researchers, we badly need more urban material to be synthesised and made available in order better to understand the development of towns and their similarities and differences across the region.

A big problem is that unlike mainstream archaeology, the study of standing buildings is almost non-existent in universities, and now that the English Royal Commission is no more, not a great deal of work is undertaken directly by central government. English Heritage is aware of this, and is supporting and publishing various initiatives, including the work on Hastings, Battle and Sandwich, but the lack of their own staff working in the field has reduced the opportunities for training which used to exist in the Commission. That leaves unit-based archaeologists, some of whom record buildings very successfully, but some of whom treat standing buildings as if they were archaeological sites, which leads to the use of inappropriate methodologies and a lack of understanding about what can be gained from recording standing structures. In addition Unit staff seldom have time to place their findings in context.

In the South-East region I would be hard put to name five professional recorders of standing structures. I may be wrong, but I doubt there are many whom I don't know. Consider that figure in the context of heaven knows how many archaeologists working in various capacities in the region, and you will see why amateurs have a hugely important role in this field. They do sterling work, but they seldom want to tackle town buildings which are often fragmentary, complex and extremely difficult of access.

Having given you a brief introduction I want to take you through some of the published or ongoing studies and show you the kind of things that come out of recording urban buildings, other than getting a report and drawings of an individual structure which, if properly used, may usefully inform the process of conservation.

The Martins' book on New Winchelsea is excellent because it combines below ground archaeology with above ground standing structures. In particular it has made an important national contribution to the study of early stone buildings, mostly undercrofts. It has also shown conclusively that many stone undercrofts had timber structures above, something which had been suggested in Southampton and Winchester, but which needs to be better appreciated if we are to understand the potential range and function of urban sites in the 13th century.

Through a combination of building recording and documentary analysis the Winchelsea work has allowed an estimate to be made of the number of undercrofts in the town, where they were located, what proportion of the population they served, and what kind of people owned them. They did not, as you can see, cluster in the centre but in a specific area known to be inhabited by the merchant class, while the market place, which has long gone, consisted only of timber structures. Elsewhere in England the recording of undercrofts has been much more spasmodic. Indeed, not all medieval

towns had them, and the Martins' work has raised a host of new issues on urban development.

In Farnham the first proper urban dendrochronology or tree-ring dating project is currently underway, funded by the HLF and local sources, and run by the volunteer Domestic Buildings Research Group, who have recorded nearly 4000 small buildings throughout Surrey. The Farnham project aims to tree-ring date about twelve buildings in the town, which will provide a framework for dating others. The results have not yet been fully analysed, but already augment the Extended Urban Survey. The red labels on the map mark the dated buildings and show that West Street, coloured yellow, had been developed by the 15th century, not later as indicated on the map, thus highlighting the importance of standing building recording, particularly when accompanied by tree-ring dating.

In addition, the Farnham results suggest that particular types of building may have occurred in towns before they appeared in the countryside. This was also the conclusion of Edward Roberts, who was able to commission dates for just under 150 buildings in Hampshire, ranging between the late 13th century and 1700. Here is his chart of dates for floored-over halls, showing how they appeared in towns a couple of decades before they are found in rural manor houses, and nearly a century before they appeared in other rural houses. This is extremely important for understanding the chronology of urban growth, and an indication of how essential it is to distinguish between towns and their hinterland. It also serves as a reminder to be cautious about dating urban buildings solely by analogy with rural ones of the same form.

A particularly good example of this is the type of open-hall house known as the Wealden, long thought to originate in the rural weald and only later to become common in towns across the country. Now we know that the earliest known example is in central Winchester, dated to 1339/40, while the earliest dated rural example, in Kent, was built only in 1379/80. This entails a refreshing rethink of the origin and development of the Wealden and the way ideas spread, suggesting that urban development was influencing what took place in the hinterland.

Far more work needs to be done on dating urban buildings. In his medieval paper, Jake Weekes showed a drawing of Newbury Farm, Tonge, an early rural open hall in Kent, dated between 1187 and 1207, i.e., like the Essex example on the same slide, to around or just before 1200. Two points about these buildings are important.

First, that through dendrochronology we now have a small corpus of rural timber houses surviving from around 1200. They were built by local landowners, men who were manorial lords, but were of only of local, not national or even regional, significance. Also, this has taken timber buildings back at least half a century earlier than was once assumed possible, perhaps to the limits of timber-building survival, since archaeology has shown that new construction techniques of the late 12th century, with a move from posts in holes to properly framed structures standing on plinths, for the first time allowed timber buildings to survive to this day. Unfortunately, no buildings of this period have yet been dated in towns, although one or two undated ones, including an aisled hall in Canterbury, probably survive from the first half of the 13th century. There was always more reason to rebuild in towns, especially to heighten or rebuild open halls, and I believe that before long fragments of urban examples will

be dated and will prove to be contemporary with the rural ones already identified. Secondly, these rural houses are all of one storey, with open halls plus open inner rooms, another reason why their urban equivalents will have been rebuilt. But during the 13th century multi-storeyed buildings started to be constructed, our first evidence, albeit documentary, coming from London, i.e., from a town. By the early 14th century houses of this sort were being erected in Sandwich in Kent. Their immense sophistication, with three storeys at the front and four behind the open hall, suggests they did not spring from nowhere but had a long history preceding them. It is my belief that the main 13th century and 14th century developments in timber building construction took place in towns, not in the countryside.

Such buildings can also be used to illustrate other points about which we need to know more. For example, how plots in towns developed, and where pressure on space was such that it caused buildings to rise upwards. In the centre of Sandwich narrow medieval houses are three storeys high. This is true in some other South-East towns, for example, Canterbury, but not in others, for example, Rye, where houses in the centre lie lengthwise to the street, as they do in Faversham and in most small towns in the South-East. Is this simply because Rye and Faversham were smaller towns than Canterbury and Sandwich, so that there was less pressure on the commercial centre? Or is the answer partly related to the period when the towns were first developed? Faversham's heyday was the early 15th century, whereas Sandwich's was the 13th and early 14th century. Once a town was established and substantial buildings erected did this constrain what could be built for ever more? What would the archaeology of these sites show? The differences in plot development and building types in towns of different kinds requires far more work.

In side streets and the outer parts of towns there was always more space, and by the 15th century houses and shops, occupied by small shopkeepers and craftsmen, begin to survive. Sometimes, as in Sandwich these were built singly or in pairs. Sometimes, as in Battle, they were erected in long rows for the tenants of institutional landlords. The question of who built urban dwellings and for what reason is important. How soon did the craftsmen themselves engage in speculative development? I have a suspicion this may have happened by the 16th century, but this is a point which requires documentary research. The importance of multi-disciplinary work to unravel such issues cannot be overemphasised.

There is a tendency among volunteer recorders to concentrate on the earliest examples of a particular place or region. Thus we know more about the medieval and early modern buildings of the South-East than we do about later ones. This makes Guillery's work in London especially important. By looking at the 18th century survivors of Deptford, Greenwich and Woolwich he has begun to chart the types of houses built both for the middling sort and for artisans and shopkeepers. He has identified what sort of accommodation was considered suitable for different classes, how well they were heated, what kind of decoration they aspired to, and so on. Although he has not yet published on the 19th century, he has already dropped hints of the way housing changed as the artisan class was squeezed into both higher and lower social groups, with the changing social structure leading to changing house forms suitable for the middle class on the one hand and the working class on the other. Buildings of this sort are often demolished because they may not be listed and are now so altered and sub-standard that they are not thought worth preserving, but the

information they provide about the history of the period is surely critical to historical and archaeological study. All four of our counties have towns which developed from the 17th century onwards, whether coastal resorts, railway towns, or suburban developments. In all cases there is much to learn, even if the finest buildings are already well known. Those who work on urban buildings in the United States are astonished at how our interest in the history of our towns seems to peter out about 1800. This is something that our successors will not forgive us for.

Towns, of course, do not just consist of houses, although that is what I have talked about. I have kept away from defensive buildings, churches, monastic buildings and hospitals, since these are types talked about elsewhere in these seminars or are reasonably well, although probably not adequately, studied as classes of building. In addition, and not just in this region, there is a dearth of work on schools and civic buildings, both early and late. I could also have talked about shops and warehouses, and other industrial buildings whose later manifestations may still stand, even if they are now likely to have been adapted to new uses. On the whole, urban industrial buildings have been better served in the north of England than the south, and in many cases we will already have lost vital information about how they functioned. But I am no expert and they will obviously be discussed further in the SERF seminar at the beginning of December.

At present we have not recorded enough to know whether our conclusions are drawn from a highly eccentric pattern of survival or whether what we know truly represents what was there. For this we need all possible resources: more buildings in more towns looked at, the surviving buildings considered in relation both to below ground evidence and documentary source material; syntheses in order that recorders can compare the development of different towns. We need a better understanding of the relationship between towns and their hinterlands, and comparisons between the evidence from different kinds of towns.

I am aware that what I would like to see done requires an army of building recorders and unimaginable resources. But what is concerning is that 20 years ago there were more young people interested in understanding standing buildings than there are today. Lack of university education leading to careers in this field is a problem. I know English Heritage is concerned and that apart from supporting projects undertaken by others, it is funding placements alongside the currently diminishing band of experienced building recorders, both in-house and elsewhere. But these are just drops in the ocean. There is still so much to do and without the support and pressure from initiatives such as SERF many more urban buildings will go, or be irrevocably altered, without our having much idea of what they could have told us about the past.

Discussion:

Various professionals (representing contractors and curators) echoed SP's concerns about building recorders, and lack of training and initiative generally to encourage people to look at standing buildings generally and in terms of recording. Linked to this is a lack of developer funding for synthesis and wider understanding: how can this be addressed when owner-occupier is the funder of the work? Nature of developer

funding, national firms, different to individual owner-occupier: should be more of a meeting of minds between curatorial archaeologists and conservation officers. It was argued that conservation officers tend to be district based rather than county based, although there are initiatives to encourage more dialogue, and further that the conservation ethos is being lost to financial concerns. Local authorities used to offer grants for owners, but are now looking much more to developers. One perceived difference between below ground archaeology and standing buildings is that below ground archaeology doesn't often stop developments. Pre-determination issues need to be addressed by SERF. In terms of conservation it was suggested it would be good to have a regional team to provide advice to counties. Attention was also drawn to industrial and military buildings: some remarkable 19th and 20th century buildings are not being recorded, this representing a national concern.

Archaeology and towns: are we getting it right?

Paul Bennett (PB)

With specific reference to Canterbury and personal experience, PB argued that in part we must be 'doing right'. He pointed out that the Canterbury Archaeological Trust (CAT), was the dedicated investigative body for the city; there are benefits to one organisation having done the work over the years, providing research continuity in terms of standing buildings and buried archaeology.

PB argued that this sort of organisational focus on an area was important, and that competitive tendering in fact belittles archaeology. It is even more essential within urban centres that there is continuity of investigative body. We need to have teams working within urban entities that have honed their skills within the particular urban entity, and therefore have had the opportunity to build up a detail personal knowledge of the morphology of its archaeological deposits. PPG16 was characterised by PB as allowing some abdication by Government in terms of funding. The model that has developed under the auspices of this legislation has been driven by price. The upshot is that the larger contractors rely on being able to mobilise a much more moveable work force. The result is far less archaeological continuity at a local level.

PB called for an increase in multidisciplinary work, giving examples of work carried out by CAT in association with historians, for example, but noting again that the development of local networks (for instance between CAT and the University of Kent) were vital in order again to provide local continuity.

Moving onto recent strategies for dealing with urban archaeology, PB argued that the new movement towards total mitigation of impact, rather than 'digging big holes', to save archaeology for the future, was in fact a false economy. Most of such projects that PB has known have actually failed to mitigate the impact and much has been lost. The recent Tannery site at Canterbury is a good example. Here there were many waterlogged deposits, ripe for very detailed analyses, but the funding was less than adequate. Simon Pratt has pioneered a strategy for dealing with the area based mainly on bore-holing. But if this is the future of archaeology then PB had some genuine concerns. Even beyond bore hole techniques, the current propensity to limit excavations as much as possible also leads to snapshots rather than fitting evidence

into a wider context. Arguably the golden age for urban archaeology was in the 1970s and 80s, when archaeologists managed to “persuade” developers, but much of the work that resulted still awaits dissemination (there just seem to be interim reports for everything). These excavations have much to tell us about the genesis and development of urban entities: it’s in the structural evidence and artefacts that we need to look for the story. PB echoed SP’s call for an increase in building specialists but in terms of urban archaeologists, and flagged up the importance of engaging volunteer groups.

The questions we still want to answer about Canterbury relate particularly to origins either as an *oppidum* centre or religious centre (or indeed both). Frere’s work in Westgate gardens provided significant information about this phase of Canterbury’s early development in the late Iron Age. If the mitigation strategy for investigation continues and we can’t get down to these levels how can we further understand them? The same applies the Roman evidence: for example, the forum/basilica area of the Roman town is still largely unknown. PB saw a tiny part of this area in a sewer tunnel beneath the modern High Street some years ago now: otherwise we have to defer to earlier work by Pilbrow and Frere for example. The same general principles are applicable to the Early Medieval, Medieval and Post-medieval phases of Canterbury, and are equally applicable to urban archaeology elsewhere in the region.

Discussion:

It was asked how long it might be until piling takes away the remaining archaeology in the towns? This can only be based on percentages and generalised ideas as to the level of significant deposits, as we don’t know where small islands of stratigraphy might survive at higher levels. Pilings also show 100% disturbance of the top metre or so in many parts of Canterbury, but this ‘formation’ layer is usually where excavation stops, as the impact of raft method buildings is designed to be limited to this level. However, successive truncation means that the undisturbed levels are decreasing over time (there is on average a maximum of about 3m of surviving stratigraphy in Canterbury). Church records even more rare than building records. As diocesan archaeologist, PB is desperate for people to assist.

The importance of encouraging amateur researchers and training volunteers was discussed as a very important way to forge more links between various people working in the field. Andrew Hann’s Medway Project (see notes on the SERF seminar on the Post-medieval and Modern periods) was put forward as an excellent example of the benefits of use of volunteers and encouragement of local interest. It was also thought that it would be good to look at relationship of urban and rural landscapes before looking at them separately. Symbolism and meaning of town layouts, in terms of access analysis for example, was briefly discussed but not developed any further as a topic.