7
Sūpre-gē – the foundations of Surrey

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The county name of Surrey has an Anglo-Saxon root, meaning 'southern district'. This has been taken to mean that Surrey originated as a subordinate attachment to some other area, such as Middlesex. A review of the Anglo-Saxon archaeology of Surrey, however, shows that the early sites here were at the core of the distribution of prestigious artefact-types of the 5th and 6th centuries. The location of the sites at Croydon, Mitcham and Ewell implies a successful take-over of the Late-Roman infrastructure of London's southern hinterland. Even up to the end of furnished burial in the second half of the 7th century, when historical sources show that Surrey had fallen successively under the rule of Kentish, West Saxon and Mercian kings, the archaeological record reveals a strikingly diversified but geographically coherent community. Surrey may be a good example of a type of smaller political entity that could flourish in the earliest Anglo-Saxon period, but did not expand and could only be swallowed up in the consolidation of the major kingdoms.

The 'southern district'

There is a specific and significant sense in which the very idea of 'Surrey' can only trace its origins to the Anglo-Saxon period. In the 5th century AD nearly four centuries of Roman rule over a large part of the island of Britain came to an end, to be followed by a period of dramatic and extensive change. This saw the introduction to Britain, starting in the south and east, of material culture, Germanic language, and notions of inherited identity previously found in northerly parts of the Continent – in particular from northern Germany and southern Scandinavia. It was precisely these changes that laid the foundations of England and Englishness.

The name of what is now the county of Surrey is thoroughly Germanic in its origins. Its original form can be reconstructed with complete confidence as early Old English *Sūpræ-gē*, meaning 'southern district' (*þ* and *ð* were used in Old English to spell the sounds we spell *th* in Modern English). The element *gē* is a neuter noun rare in Old English, but familiar from modern German, Dutch and Frisian as *Gau, ga* and *goo* (Gover *et al* 1934, 1–2; Gelling 1978, 123). The final *-æ* of the neuter nominative singular ending of the adjective meaning 'southern' became *-e* as a normal sound-shift of Old English. Old English and Latin spellings of the name of the area often in fact have the vowel *-i-* here, eg *Suprige, Sudrica*, a form that represents the raising of the point of pronunciation of the vowel *-e-* under the influence of the following sound, the palatalized or 'softened' *g-* of *gē* (Hogg 1992, §§6.41–2). This variant is recorded as early as the 8th century, and is of some importance as it implies that the name was by then no longer analysed and treated as a descriptive phrase but rather perceived as a single word, the proper name of the area. In practice, most of the earliest records of the name present it in a derived, plural form, representing 'the people of Surrey'. Hence in the 13th century copy of a Latin charter dated to AD 672–4 it appears in the phrase *prouinci[a] Surrianorum* (Birch 1885, no 34; Sawyer 1968, no 1165),

while 8th century copies of Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum*, completed in the 730s, refer to the *regio Sudergeona* or *Suðrigeona* (Bede, *HE*, iv.6).

A good deal can be inferred from the early references to Surrey in precisely such ways, but that process inevitably also defines a series of finer, supplementary questions concerning the foundation of Surrey. Just when and why, in the period between the early to mid-5th and mid- to later 7th century, did the term come into use? What exactly did it refer to, in terms of the geographical extent of the district (*gē*), and what form and level of social organization was there within that area itself? Most specialists have been content to interpret the relative geographical term (*Sūpræ*) as a sign of subordinacy: most probably to a Middle Saxon territory (Middlesex) which was of importance to ambitious Mercian kings in the second half of the 7th century (Cameron 1961, 54; Poulton 1987, 214 and note 44; Bailey 1989; Blair 1989; Dumville 1989); Morris (1973; 322–3 and 587–8), thought that it must imply the sometime existence of a complementary Norrey (a form that is reconstructed rather than historically recorded). Just as the area of Surrey seems to lie somewhat indeterminately in between the *civitates* of Cantium, the Atrebates and the Regni in the late Iron Age and Roman period (Bird 1987, esp fig 7.1), it is treated as a left-over area, finally defined, named and organized only to tidy up the administration of a much larger territory centred elsewhere and to the north. This partly reflects and partly reinforces an underlying view that the origins of Anglo-Saxon Surrey are not a matter of any great historical consequence. That, however, is somewhat at odds with the archaeological evidence for the early Anglo-Saxon period in Surrey. A consideration of the full range of evidence from this, Surrey's 'protohistoric' period, introduces us to an area and a case-study of special interest in the quest for a better general understanding of the transition between Roman Britain and Anglo-Saxon England.

The archaeological evidence

In other parts of England a comparison of 5th to 7th century archaeological evidence with the political geography of the following phase of Mercian over-lordship has shown that, rather than radically redrawing the map of England, the process of establishing that large-scale political order could include the appropriation of substantial and viable territorial units and social networks that already existed (Hines 1999a). This is essentially what we can also claim for Surrey. From early in the Anglo-Saxon period, certainly no later than the second half of the 5th century, there are sites within the historical county that have a special place in the national Anglo-Saxon archaeological record. Absolutely nothing comparable has been found within a corresponding distance and area north of the Thames from London at this time. On the gravels along the Thames itself, on both sides of the river, a number of recent finds have provided us with important insights into settlement sites with characteristically Anglo-Saxon artefact and structural types from no later than the 6th century and quite possibly the second half of the 5th century onwards (fig 7.1). Within the area of our particular interest, a band of these now runs from Shepperton downriver to the Covent Garden area just outside the Roman city of London to the west (eg Canham 1979; Andrews & Crockett 1996; *Current Archaeology*, Special London Issue, July 1998; Cowie & Harding 2000, 178–81). West of Surrey, early Anglo-Saxon finds are very few indeed in a large area bounded by the Wey and the Kennet to the east and west, and the Thames and the Itchen valleys to the north and south. To the south of Surrey, the great Wealden forest separated the southern coastal lands of the *Meonware* in Hampshire and the South Saxons of Sussex from the Thames basin. To the east, meanwhile, it has long been recognized that early Anglo-Saxon Kent east of

the Medway shows a markedly different archaeological profile from those parts of the historic county west of the Medway, and that in western Kent the earliest sites show much greater affinities with their contemporary counterparts in Surrey (Hawkes 1982; Blair 1991, 6–9). While in comparison with the quantitative wealth of eastern Kent, the material record from the early Anglo-Saxon period in the area between the Medway and the Wey appears restrained, perhaps controlled, we can still identify significant patterns in the material cultural remains within this whole territory, a notional 'Greater Surrey'.

A group of items of metalwork that is crucial not only to an understanding but also to an evaluation of the Surrey/west Kent area in this early period does, however, occur in significant forms both west and east of the Medway. This is the corpus of what is known as quoit-brooch-style metalwork. This is metalwork drawing on a technical repertoire of decoration rooted in late Roman skills and practices. It is found in Anglo-Saxon contexts from the mid-5th century onwards, subsequently also appearing on the far side of the English Channel (Inker 2000; Suzuki 2000; Ager 2001). While the exact history of this style remains a matter for debate – a debate that is often keen, not least because of the crucial historical implications of different interpretations of these early instances of late Roman influence on Anglo-Saxon culture – both technically and typologically, the earliest instances of this style group are probably, as Peter Inker stresses, the quoit-brooch-style fixed-plate buckles, these being the closest relatives to the artefact types on which the style's Roman-period sources are most widely found. The findspots of the relevant quoit-brooch-style buckles are Mitcham in Surrey, Orpington in the Cray Valley (West Kent), Bishopstone (East Sussex), and Mucking overlooking
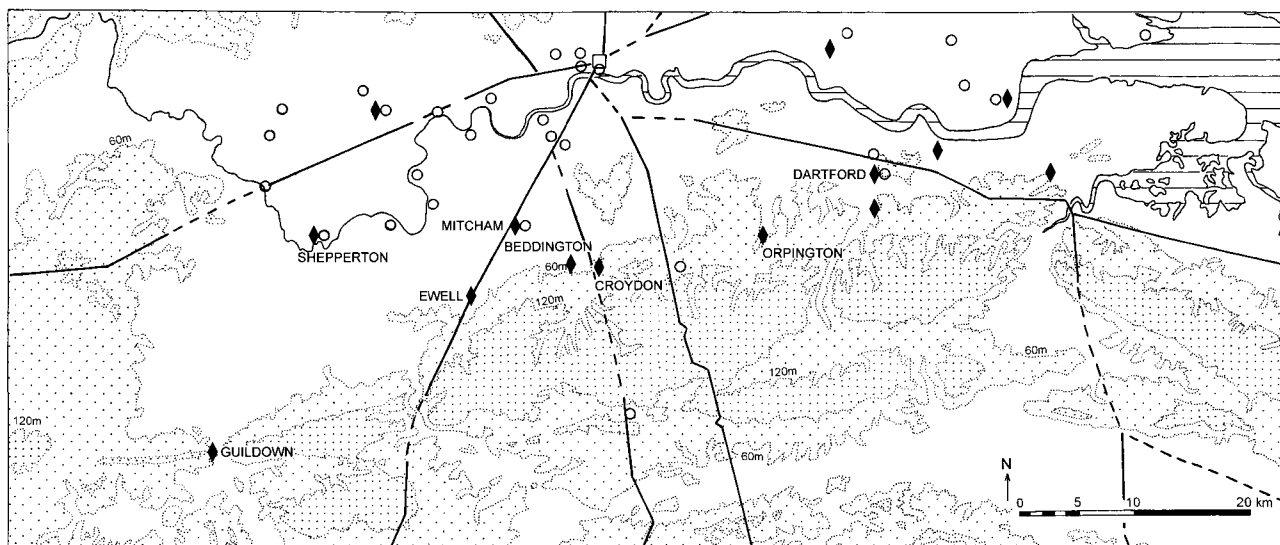

Fig 7.1   Surrey, West Kent and adjacent areas: Anglo-Saxon settlement sites (circles) and Migration-period burial sites (lozenges). The solid lines indicate the alignments of Roman roads. (© Crown Copyright NC/04/25242)

the Thames Estuary in Essex (Evison 1968; on the Mitcham and Orpington cemeteries see Bidder & Morris 1959; Tester 1968; 1969). Croydon, meanwhile, produced a quoit-brooch-style strap distributor from a belt (Griffith 1897; Shaw 1970). West of the Medway and south of the Weald, however, occurrences of the style are predominantly in the form of brooches and other dress accessories, which we may argue represent a secondary phase of application of the style.

This allows us to be confident that the Anglo-Saxon burial sites at Mitcham, Croydon and Orpington originated around the third quarter of the 5th century and that those buried there were provided with some of the earliest products in a new, technically proficient and elegant style of metalwork emerging from a Roman-influenced milieu in south-eastern England. A range of other finds at these sites is consistent with such early starting dates – for instance a Saxon applied brooch and pedestalled bowl at Mitcham (Welch 1975), an early form of francisca (throwing axe) of Frankish character at Croydon (Griffith 1897, figure on p 20, lower; Siegmund 1998, 106–7 (FBA-1.1); Nieveler & Siegmund 1999) and a variety of early brooch types, predominantly Saxon, at Orpington (Dickinson 1979; Hines 1999b, 24). Mitcham and Croydon are located on major Roman roads running southwards from Londinium; early predecessors of the modern A20 and A21 passing Orpington have been suspected but remain unproven. The three sites are approximately 14, 15 and 20km from London Bridge respectively (fig 7.1). Croydon and Mitcham are both by the river Wandle and Croydon and Orpington both on the northern dip slope of the North Downs. It is impossible too to overlook the probable importance of all three of these locations in the late-Roman infrastructure of the territory south of Londinium. Relatively little is known about the precise character of Croydon and Mitcham as Roman-period sites, and speculation about their status in terms of the modern classification of Roman settlement sites is not particularly helpful. However, whether as a 'village' or even a 'small town' – like that of which rather more is known at Ewell, almost exactly the same distance out of London along Stane Street as Orpington – in these locations they are intrinsically likely to have fulfilled a common function in this hinterland as posting stations, or *mutationes* (Bird 1987, 168–9; Perring & Brigham 2000, 150–7). Close to Croydon is the Roman villa site of Beddington, and the Orpington cemetery is immediately adjacent to the Roman villa of Fordcroft (Bird 1987, 171–8; Philp & Keller 1995).

We can consequently regard these sites as having been located upon nodes within and indeed serving the communications networks south of Londinium.

As long as the latter flourished, the city must have placed considerable demands on these nearby areas and upon such sites within them. It is interesting to note that Nicholas Brooks and James Graham-Campbell, discussing a Viking-period coin hoard from Croydon, explain its presence there by attributing precisely the same function to the area during the late 9th century Viking occupation of London (Brooks & Graham-Campbell 1986). It is perfectly plausible that such sites could have continued to function as focal sites in the exploitation and redistribution of produce from the local area even if the network they originally belonged to had lost its heart or head at a now-defunct city of London. Such de-urbanization is indeed widely and authoritatively argued to have been characteristic of the functioning structure of late Roman Britain as a whole (Reece 1980; Esmonde Cleary 1989, 131–61; cf Dark 1994, 12–19).

Beyond this, the quality of retrieval and recording of finds from the sites means that it is not, unfortunately, possible to say much about the Anglo-Saxon communities at Mitcham and Croydon. Both cemeteries were probably in use for between 150 and 200 years. That at Mitcham contained at least 238 burials. If we assume a mean life expectancy of 25 for this period, it would appear, therefore, to represent a small burying community with an average of only some 25–30 adults living at any one time. Various excavation campaigns at Orpington have so far produced just over 80 graves from a period of use of about a century. Both Croydon and Mitcham, however, are impressively furnished with weapon graves, especially in terms of swords of which thirteen are recorded from Mitcham and about six from Croydon (including the limited excavations conducted in 1999: McKinley 2003). The size of the visible burying community implies that these were the burial places of a special group in this area, not of the total population linked to these foci. That group was clearly associated with power and authority, although we should be cautious about identifying these burials as those of members of the regional social élite themselves. What they unquestionably represent is social and territorial dominance at key nodes within the area. This dominance was established early in the Anglo-Saxon period, and lasted there to the eve of the historical period.

From such significant 5th century beginnings, it is remarkable how limited is the increase in the number and the expansion of the distribution of known Anglo-Saxon burial sites in Surrey from the following century. This is not least the case when we compare the situation here with the virtually unrestrained increase in the number of sites over much of the rest of southern and eastern England (Hines 1990). Within the distinctive phase of Anglo-Saxon material

practices we can call the Migration period, which came to an end around the 560s, the only further securely dated examples of Anglo-Saxon burial sites coming into use in Surrey are at Beddington, Ewell and Guildown (fig 7.1; Lowther 1931; 1935; Poulton 1987, 197–200). There is a string of more doubtful cases, from which very little evidence has been preserved and which therefore are uncertainly datable (Morris 1959; Meaney 1964, 237–45), together with the uncontextualized evidence of metal-detector finds of artefacts definitely of this date from a few further locations (Welch 1996). Among the sites that were certainly cemeteries, only the finds attributed to Watersmeet at Fetcham look at all capable of representing a further burial site in use by the mid-6th century, as these include a number of Type-H spearheads with concave-sided blades and a shield boss of Dickinson & Härke's group 3 that could well be of this date (Smith 1907; Cotton 1933; Swanton 1974; Dickinson & Härke 1991; Härke 1992, 94–6). In western Kent, meanwhile, a group of important sites of the same date emerges in the Darent valley with burials near Dartford and at Horton Kirby (alias Riseley), together with a cremation cemetery at Northfleet, and a few more stray finds such as a button brooch from East Malling (Cumberland 1938; Wilson 1957; Walsh 1981; Kelly 1989, 312; Batchelor 1990; Tyler 1992).

Once again, Beddington and Ewell had been prominent sites in the map of Roman Surrey, as the locations of a villa and a small town respectively. Darenth too is the site of a Roman villa (Philp 1973, 119–54). The expansion of Anglo-Saxon burial sites in this area is thus not only remarkably limited, but also reveals all the more clearly the dominance of the northern dip slope of the Downs, which includes agriculturally the most attractive light soils in a narrow strip overlying the Reading Beds, as the basis for the settlements of communities demonstrating their presence by adhering to the conventional Anglo-Saxon furnished burial rite. No contemporary evidence of places of occupation has yet been found in these areas, although such settlements have been found on the riverine gravels (fig 7.1). Regrettably we have far too little information to be confident how to interpret the possible hoard of at least ten early 6th century Byzantine gold coins (*tremisses*) of Justin I apparently found in the river bed at Kingston upon Thames (Rigold 1975, nos 3–12). Their deposition here very probably represents significant activity along the river in this period, but does not allow us to infer the presence of any specific type of site there.

It is, however, not only in terms of access to and control over the most advantageous land locally, but also in terms of long-distance connections and influence, that the few and small communities represented by the furnished burials seem to have been at the heart of a widespread and important social network. While it is in this area that we may find our first small cluster of manifestations of the quoit-brooch style in the 5th century, from the very early 6th century we can trace even more certain and considerably more expansive influences emanating from here through an ostentatious type of woman's brooch, the great square-headed brooch. At the head of the genealogy of a distinctively Saxon group of these brooches, Group I, stand brooches from Dartford and Mitcham (fig 7.2A–B; Hines 1997, 17–32, pls 1–9), in effect as a pair of prototypes of which the descendants in subsequent generations of brooch design spread out over an area from Sussex to the Upper Thames and Warwickshire Avon valley, and eventually as far north as to Rutland and the Peterborough area in the East Midlands (figs 7.2C and fig 7.3). The Dartford and Mitcham brooches also represent particularly clearly the direct Scandinavian influences that underlay the adoption of this brooch type in England around the beginning of the 6th century. We can be less certain about the status and relationships of another great square-headed brooch fragment from grave 116 at Mitcham (fig 7.2D), but there is enough there to suggest very strongly that this may equally be the earliest specimen yet found of Group VII (Hines 1997, 67–76, pls 23–9). Group VII is itself an early descendant of Group I, and has much the same overall distribution in southern England.

Over most of southern and eastern England where the introduction of Anglo-Saxon material culture during the Migration period is marked by conspicuously furnished burial rites, both inhumation and cremation, the known number of burials and burial sites diminishes markedly from the late 6th century and through the 7th, in the 'Final Phase' (Leeds 1936, 96–114; Boddington 1990; Geake 1997). In a few areas, such as East Kent, however, there is quantitatively little difference between the two phases, while in a number of locations around the country the inverse is the case, with an increase in burial finds from the later phase. Examples include areas on or just beyond the boundary of visible Anglo-Saxon culture prior to this date, eg in Somerset and Dorset, the Derbyshire Peak District, and Northumberland and south-eastern Scotland, and also some 'enclaves' within the anglicized Lowland Zone, including Hertfordshire north of London and Surrey to the south (eg Ozanne 1963; Kennett 1972; 1973; Rahtz *et al* 2000, 96–8). The substantial increase in the number, area and diversity of burial sites in the Final Phase in Surrey and West Kent is represented by sites at Merrow just east of the Wey at Guildford (Saunders 1980); Hawk's Hill near Fetcham as well as further burials from Watersmeet in what may be one extended cemetery; the Goblin Works cemetery, Ashtead (Poulton 1989); Headley Drive, Tadworth
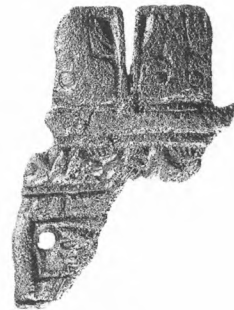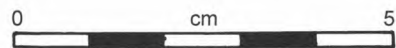
Fig 7.2   Great square-headed brooches. A: Dartford (Group I). B: Mitcham, grave 225 (Group I). C: Guildown, grave 116 (Group I).
D: Mitcham, grave 116 (Group VII). Scale 1:1. Copyright (A) The British Museum, (B) Museum of London, (C, D) the author
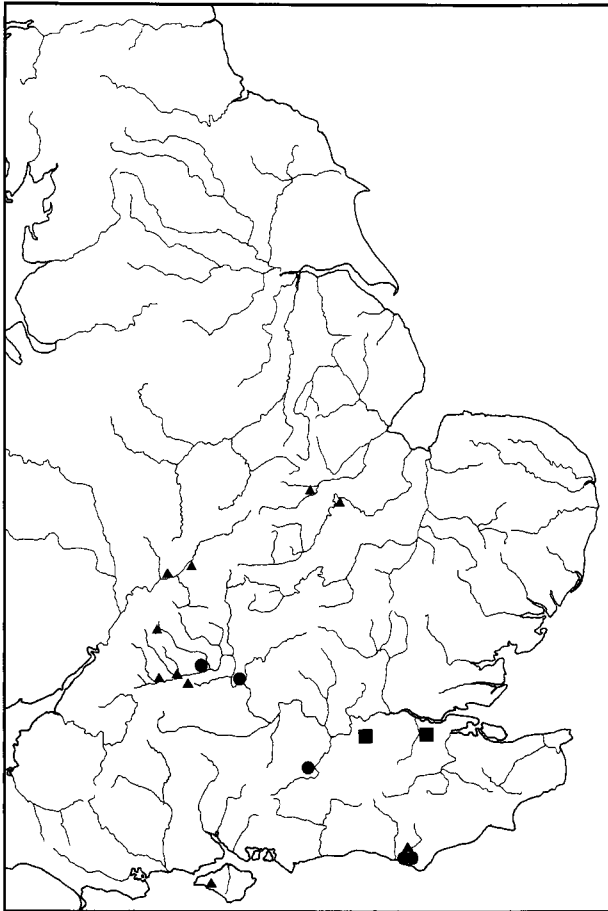
Fig 7.3   Group I great square-headed brooches, distribution in three stages of development. Squares: first stage; circles: second stage; triangles: third stage. It should be noted that another early Group I great square-headed brooch is from the cemetery at Alveston Manor, by Stratford-on-Avon, Warwickshire. However it is unclear whether this brooch should be assigned to the first or the second stage (Hines 1997, 27).

(Harp & Hines 2003); Quelland, East Ewell; Gally Hills, Banstead (Barfoot & Price Williams 1976); and Farthing Down, Coulsdon (Flower 1874; Hope-Taylor 1950). In Kent west of the Medway there is a barrow cemetery in Greenwich Park, a

series of further sites in and around the Darent valley at Farningham, Polhill (Philp 1973, 164–214) and Wrotham, as well as further burials at Horton Kirby, and several sites close to the Medway itself, eg at Cliffe-at-Hoo, Holborough (Evison 1957), Snodland, Strood and within what is now Rochester itself. While burial continues in this period at Croydon and Mitcham, there is, curiously, no evidence for the continuing use of the Migration-period burial sites at Guildown, Ewell, Beddington and Orpington.

Despite the local shifts and apparently regular relocations of burial sites around the late 6th to early 7th centuries that we can thus make out (cf Hyslop 1963), in the area that was to become the county of Surrey, the dominant topographical zone for furnished burial – Mitcham on the Wandle apart – continued to be the strip of land along the dip slope of the Downs eastwards from the crossing of the Wey at Guildford (fig 7.4). Other finds show activity in different zones leaving other types of archaeological deposit. Only at Shepperton and Hanwell north of the river, and, through very recent finds, Mitcham, are any of the known settlement remains of this general period sufficiently close to known furnished burials that the two may be directly associated. In the 7th century we have coin finds showing activity at Brockham, where the Mole crosses the greensand belt south of the North Downs scarp, and a particularly important hoard from Crondall (Hampshire), just 5km north-west of Farnham, which included two coins of the same type as that found at Brockham, one possibly even die-linked to it (Sutherland 1948; Rigold 1975, no 56). Furnished burial thus continues to be curiously restricted to a specific and dominant zone in a variegated landscape. While the changes that take place as we enter the Final Phase are undoubtedly striking, there is no reason to see them in any terms other than evolutionary ones: as a consis-
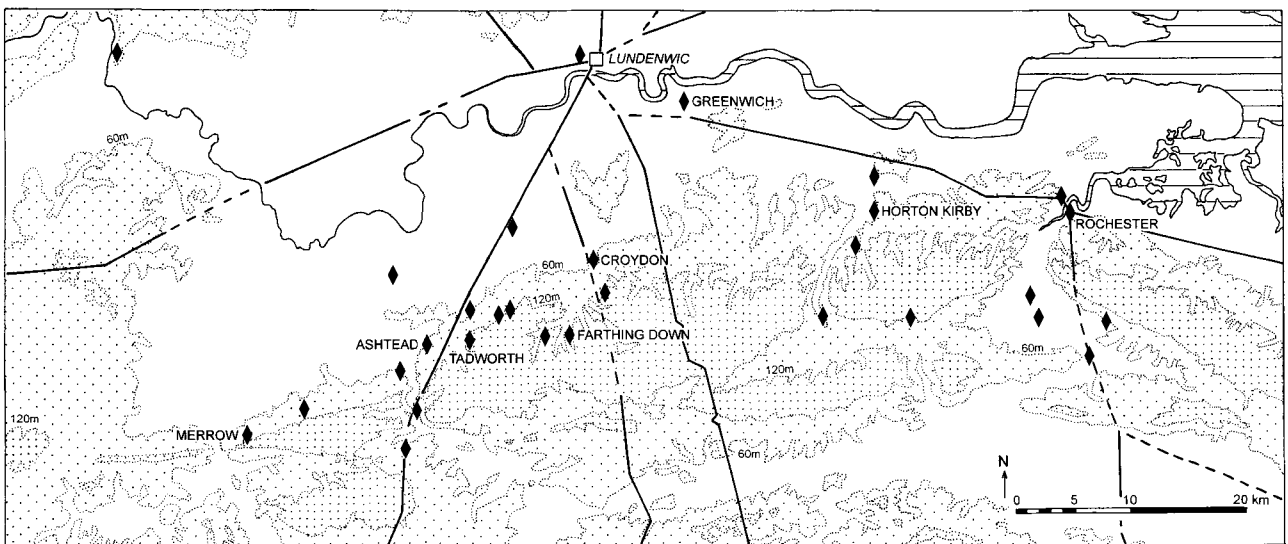

Fig 7.4   Surrey, West Kent and adjacent areas: 7th century burial sites. The solid lines indicate the alignments of Roman roads. (© Crown Copyright NC/04/25242)

tent development from what had gone before. It is possible that there were substantial changes of personnel in the commanding positions of society in the region south of London at this date, but the pattern of territorial exploitation there remained essentially the same. If the embryonic region of Surrey was taken over, that would appear to have been as an effectively organized and functioning entity.

Within the wider range of sites to examine from this period, however, we can now observe more diversity and even a hierarchy between burial sites. Most impressive to us now, and presumably intended to be equally so then, are the barrow burials with specially crafted and precious, prestigious grave goods (cf Struth & Eagles 1999). The most striking examples are Farthing Down and Gally Hills, within a distance of 6km of one another up on the Downs and 7–8km south-south-east of the Croydon and Mitcham cemeteries respectively. The one excavated barrow at Gally Hills revealed a weapon grave furnished also with a hanging bowl. The sugar-loaf-type shield boss from this grave is closely paralleled nearby at Quelland, East Ewell, and at Farthing Down (cf Evison 1963). Weaponry dominates the finds recovered from Farthing Down, including one sword, although well-furnished female burial here is also represented by an example containing a gold composite disc pendant, six small monochrome beads and a disc-headed pin. Given the almost uniformly haphazard retrieval of material and its consequently highly fragmentary character, it is difficult to be confident that the Gally Hills and Farthing Down barrows represent a distinctly more richly furnished stratum than, say, Quelland or the Merrow barrows; but we are certainly here looking at a deliberately richer range of material deposits than those from the more populous cemeteries with no recorded barrows at Fetcham and Ashtead. Meanwhile the prevalence of weaponry among the diagnostic artefacts from these sites and thus a military emphasis is quite striking – all the more so if we can attribute the vaguely dated, presumed Anglo-Saxon burial sites at Carshalton, Cheam, Coulsdon, Cuddington, Dorking, Mickleham and Ripley (Morris 1959; Meaney 1964, 237–46), all tentatively identified from the finding of one or more Anglo-Saxon spearheads, to the same period as the attested majority of Anglo-Saxon graves in the county. A corresponding situation is encountered in Hertfordshire and south Bedfordshire.

The newly published cemetery at Headley Drive, Tadworth, with more than 40 adequately investigated graves and not a single item of weaponry, is thus a conspicuous exception (Harp & Hines 2003). Yet this cemetery is well-ordered, and the sparse grave goods it yielded include a rare and quite fine double-tongued buckle, and an imported, wheel-thrown pot, so that on the internal evidence of the cemetery we have no good reason to regard the community burying there as a generally deprived and low-status one. It seems more appropriate to consider what sort of systematic differentiation of cemetery types within this region might have provided a distinct place for a site such as Headley Drive. With the proviso, of course, that some of this site remains unexcavated, we need to consider why weapon burial may have been neither needed nor appropriate here, without simply invoking subordinacy in social status. Among the other very poorly recorded burial sites from Surrey, that at Sanderstead – just a little further from Farthing Down than Headley Drive from Gally Hills – where a dozen graves produced one small pot, a tooth pendant, and two knives, looks the most credible equivalent.

The progressive introduction of Anglo-Saxon culture into Britain in the 5th and 6th centuries is revealed to us primarily by material remains: by archaeology. In the 7th century written records – history – gradually take over the narrative. The proper way to work towards an answer to the questions just formulated is to integrate these two forms of evidence, and to compare the inferences that may be drawn from those with what has more wisely been suggested concerning general processes and conditions of change in the earliest centuries of Anglo-Saxon England. Although we have had a series of fine and authoritative surveys of early Anglo-Saxon Surrey, both archaeological (Morris 1959; Poulton 1987) and historical (Blair 1989), these have all shown considerable diffidence about the importance to be afforded to the evidence for the foundations of Surrey, either in the national perspective or in terms of its significance to the key themes identified in the historical record generally. This has now to be challenged.

Despite the early, powerful, and significantly located introduction of Anglo-Saxon groups at Mitcham, Croydon and Orpington, the archaeologically visible Saxonization of the area south of the Thames was limited. As we have seen, compared with most of the rest of southern and eastern England the Migration-period burial sites are unusually few. Interestingly this is no longer the case in respect of settlement sites with characteristic Anglo-Saxon structural types (sunken huts) and pottery forms, where again the known examples are consistently confined to certain topographical zones. As Poulton recognized (1987, 216), the whole scenario, synchronic and diachronic, lends itself to the idea that an extant sub-Roman social and economic infrastructure in the territory was taken over as a going concern rather than the area being an abandoned landscape which saw just a few pockets of 5th and 6th

century occupation. Surviving British Celtic place-names such as *Leatherhead* (Coates 1980), English place-names incorporating Latin elements apparently locally adopted as loanwords (eg *Croydon*: Gelling 1978, 66, 75–6, 81–2), and ethnically specific place-names (*Walton*: Cameron 1961, 42–3), lend support to the general view of interaction and gradual transition between one period and population and its successor. In contrast to what can be argued for the same period in Sussex, however (Welch 1971), the overall impression here is of the early Saxon settlers merely taking what they found and acting as if free to do just what suited themselves best, not of a surviving sub-Roman system governing or even dictating the shape of the nascent Surrey. The Roman villas in the west of Sussex were rooted in a rich agricultural area, whereas the villas of Surrey depended considerably more on production and trade of an industrial character. Like the Alice Holt potteries west of Farnham, these must simply have failed as the Roman period came to an end (Bird 1987, esp 178–87).

The strength and importance of the Saxons of Surrey and west Kent at the very beginning of the Anglo-Saxon period are reflected not so much in the volume or density of their furnished burial sites but rather in their evident influence within a network of contacts and exchange over a large area of Saxon southern England. While the archaeological picture changes quite substantially during the later 6th and early 7th centuries, one may reasonably suggest that this should be perceived in terms of continuity and evolution rather than a dramatic interruption, restructuring and redirection of social development in Surrey. Hierarchy both within and between communities seems to become deeper, or at least more regularly marked. Such changes were indeed taking place throughout Anglo-Saxon England at this time, and their outcomes were more substantial and consequential outside of the London area. In the great kingdoms of Wessex, Mercia and Northumbria in particular, they led to a new scale of political ambition and expansion. A clear economic manifestation of such pressures was the establishment – in some cases re-establishment – of urban ports, at *Hamwic* (Southampton), Ipswich, York and, of particular relevance to Surrey, London. In the religious-ideological sphere, the conversion of England to Christianity is an entirely comprehensible concomitant to these developments.

The historical questions

Documentary sources give us no precise information about the political and religious history of Anglo-Saxon Surrey before the mid-660s, a date undoubtedly close to that of the latest furnished burials in Surrey. These records evidently reveal only

the end points of a series of processes, the earlier mass of which can only be conjectured. The characterization of Surrey from the later 5th to mid-7th century offered above on the basis of the archaeological evidence implies that there was a well-ordered and influential community here across this period. We are not in a position to pre-suppose how this community and territory would have been governed – in other words we may not specifically postulate an early and historically unrecorded kingdom of (or in) Surrey. What we can do, however, is to dispute the pejorative conclusions too readily drawn from the negative evidence of the silence of our early sources, which, in the form of charters, Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica*, and the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, resolutely provide us with an external, Mercian, West Saxon and sometimes Kentish view of the area: that (as its name is supposed to imply) Surrey was always marginal and subordinate to places where all the important developments were taking place and all the important things were happening. It is, for instance, inappropriate to read the Chronicle entry for 568, reporting that the West Saxon king Ceawlin (with Cutha) then drove Ethelberht back into Kent, as evidence that there was nothing of note or name between Wessex and Kent in southern England at that time (cf Blair 1991, 6). We can accept the part-contemporaneity of these two powerful kings and thus the plausibility of their fighting a battle in southern England, albeit not as early as in AD 568; but there is no doubt whatsoever that the West Saxon Chronicle's account of the creation of the West Saxon kingdom suppresses a good deal about constituent groups and territories melded into that polity (Yorke 1989). Whatever it may have been known as and however it may have been constituted, there is no historical reason to object to the archaeologically derived view of a significant entity of 'proto-Surrey' in the 5th to 7th centuries.

When *Sūþre-gē* does appear in history, however, it is under external control. Around the mid-660s Eorcenwald, subsequently bishop of London, founded the monastery of Chertsey with the permission and support of King Egbert of Kent (664–72). However the charter of 672–4 that records this fact while endowing the monastery with more land was issued by Frithuwold, ruling Surrey as a sub-king of King Wulfhere of Mercia. In the 680s Caedwalla, king of Wessex, granted land at and around Farnham for another monastery (Birch 1885, no 72). By this time, as the charter of Frithuwold explicitly notes, the port of London had been re-established. From this period onwards until the irruption of the Vikings in the second half of the 9th century, London and Middlesex, and indeed Essex and East Anglia much of the time, were firmly under Mercian control. Not

only in the case of London, however, but also now in respect of Surrey, we can argue that the Mercian royal power annexed territory and sites that were already well established. Anglo-Saxon Surrey came into being through the survival and maintenance of at least elements of the structure of the southern hinterland of Roman Londinium. Developments in Surrey and west Kent – more, so far as we can tell, than anything that happened in Middlesex and Essex – thus seem to have played a key role in maintaining the life and influence of the London area. It is as reasonable as anything else, although also as unprovable, to hypothesize that the concept of *Sūpre-gē* emerged as the designation for the southern half of the large area around the practically empty hub of London on either side of the Thames (Bird *et al* 1975, 141). And there is no reason at all why this should not have taken place around the same time as three or four districts of the early Kentish kingdom west of the Medway were defined as *gē* units, centred upon Eastry, Sturry, Lyminge and probably Wester too (Brooks 1989, 68–71). The absence of any known 'northern district' as its counterpart can reflect the simple fact that only on the southern side did an efficiently organized community establish itself.

But even the archaeological evidence sheds only uncertain light upon how that southern district was organized within itself. Historians such as the late Eric John have found it difficult enough to draw a clear and coherent picture of the tenurial, territorial and social arrangements underlying the period of our earliest reliable Anglo-Saxon charters of the later 7th and 8th centuries, let alone to extrapolate back from those to the state of affairs in the earliest centuries of Anglo-Saxon England (John 1960; 1966). John Blair (1989; 1991) has more recently worked within the framework of such historical studies in endeavouring to make a realistic reconstruction of the earliest elements out of which Surrey was formed. He has demonstrated the practical logic of a pattern of four major blocks of territory subdividing the county of Surrey. Of most direct relevance to the early Anglo-Saxon period are two oblong blocks in the east of the county which he associated with historically identifiable centres at Croydon and Leatherhead respectively, both the locations of later minster churches (Blair 1991, esp 12–24); these two areas contain nearly all of our known 5th to 7th century Anglo-Saxon sites. The two blocks run south from the Thames into the Weald, and thus form the final pair in the north-west of a larger series of such units comprising also the 'lathes' of Kent and the 'rapes' of Sussex. Blair was willing to consider these territories as possible ' "primary" provincial units', and gives a number of reasons for regarding them as old enough to precede the historical horizon of the charters.

It is understandable that when a historian finds it possible to divide early territories into coherent constituent elements it is tempting also to believe that one is stripping away historical accretions and uncovering chronologically earlier strata. This is, however, a perspective that tends to atomize historical reconstructions of very early Anglo-Saxon society (Bassett 1989; cf Scull 1993), and which I would argue sits uneasily with the archaeological evidence. Indeed, purely as a matter of historical reconstruction, it is far from problem-free. This is not the place for an extensive critique of that model, but in brief one may note how, for instance, Eric John's reasoned case for the creation and introduction of individual landholding rights in the 8th century struggles with the problem of determining what arrangements these practices superseded. Even the dimly attested phenomenon of an earlier *folcland* and its communal rights is subject from the earliest available evidence to the political control of kings who could apportion access to and even give such rights away. Rather than revealing the growth of kingship over polities that gradually merged and swelled in size, kingship appears to have been primary in the historical record, and the elements we can observe which are manifestly innovations are the definition of identities and roles at intermediary levels in the social hierarchy.

Certainly, when we attempt to find any counterparts to Blair's suggested pattern in the early archaeological evidence, the greatest difficulty lies in identifying anything that convincingly represents important boundaries between primary units rather than a network of relationships between and across them. It is, as Blair notes, interesting to observe that a particular cluster of rich 7th century weapon graves and barrows (few of which, however, have been proved to house Anglo-Saxon burials) lies around the boundary between these two territories in the Ewell Downs/Gally Hills area. There are, however, several more barrows along the Downs of quite unknown character and date, while for the Farthing Down barrows to the east, the ad hoc hypothesis of 'a lost lathe boundary destroyed by the creation of the Croydon estate' has to be mooted. The common grave goods of these sites and their probably narrow date range hardly lend themselves to a hypothetical sequence of development of this kind. Meanwhile the Croydon and Mitcham cemeteries lie within a single unit, not, complementarily, one in each, and, contrary to what Blair tentatively suggests, there is little evidence overall in the form of later parochial land interests to suggest early formal territorial links between the clayey, low-lying plain of the Eocene Basin where Mitcham is situated on the river Wandle and the Downs themselves and the Weald – none at all in the specific case of Mitcham. Finally, the great square-headed brooch evidence points to a concrete

association between Dartford and Mitcham, in the early 6th century, reminding us of the vital importance of looking beyond the historical county in seeking to form an image of this early phase.

As yet we cannot identify the individuals in the richest barrow and weapon graves of 7th century Surrey, nor properly explain the motivations for making these burials. We do not know whether those buried there were genuinely local men and women, from families seeking to assert their superiority over lower ranks in the area, or seeking to put on a show of strength against their neighbours, or even to defy the expansive forces of the Kentish, West Saxon or Mercian kings. These might be the burials of the henchmen of those kings, either outsiders or still from local stock. In the period of considerable historical change we know of, it is unlikely that we shall ever be able to date these burials quite precisely enough to be confident of the exact circumstances of their formation, while the symbolism of their contents gives us insufficient clues in this respect. What we may, however, confidently assert is that the archaeological background out of which they emerge is at least as useful in enabling us to talk about what they represent as the still highly fragmentary historical framework into which they may eventually be fitted.

Archaeology has its own innate tendencies, of course. By looking at sites collectively, and comparing their material features, it is predisposed to focus upon relationships between them – although these may as well be contrastive as matters of similarity: usually, indeed, we can expect a combination of the two. By comparing across time the archaeology of the 5th and 6th centuries in Surrey and its neighbouring areas with that of the 7th century, we can nonetheless be particularly confident that we can observe significantly changing patterns of relationship. In the earlier phase, the pattern is wide-reaching and expansive: not just because the sites are few and far between, and we have to look over considerable distances to reach their nearest comparable neighbours, but also as positively expressed by the artefactual evidence of the quoit-brooch style and the Group I great square-headed brooches. The increase in the number and density of burial sites in the 7th

century with what, it has been suggested here, is a strikingly differentiated local system, appears, by contrast, to throw much greater emphasis on local relationships, and on marking the central zones of the extended resource areas, or 'territories' as Blair suggests we may see them. Here there does indeed seem to be a shift to a system in which status and security are defined far more by one's local, land-based, social position, rather than by an extensive network of social connections. It is suggested here that to try to interpret specific archaeological sites in terms of the precisely conceptualized social and economic systems postulated by historians, such as the multiple estate, is to ask too much of that evidence. That there is a general agreement between the trends separately indicated by the two disciplinary perspectives seems undeniable, however, and to be a positive observation that should be welcomed.

A study of the very origins of Surrey at the beginning of the Anglo-Saxon period can only ever be an attempt to read or reconstruct a story from an extremely fragmented script. It is proposed here that the archaeological and the historical evidence do harmonize, and, most encouragingly, do not have to be made to do so by forcibly reading one in the light of the other. By allowing the early archaeological finds their full autonomous value, we can postulate a transitional period from Roman Britain to Anglo-Saxon England in which the earliest 'men of the southern district' occupied a distinctly secure and influential position. It is conceivable that their exceptionally early establishment here subsequently served to lock them into a way of life that did not develop dynamically as Anglo-Saxon society and culture did elsewhere in England, and so led to the gradual diminution in significance of this area, and eventually its political subordination. There is a great deal in this picture that can only be tentatively suggested; much that is far from certain. Yet these very uncertainties show how vital it is for the archaeology of this period to be valued and cared for, so that the clumsy neglect so many of Surrey's early Anglo-Saxon burial sites have suffered – even a recently discovered site such as Headley Drive – will itself become a thing of the past.

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