Anglo Saxon farming in the East Meon Hundred

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Introduction

Most Anglo Saxons were involved in farming. Agriculture formed the bulk of the economy: manufacturing as we know it hardly existed and, by our standards, trade played a minor if growing role. The forms of wealth and many interactions between individuals or groups were concerned with farming matters. Theft, for instance, in Anglo Saxon law is primarily theft of cattle. Commercial transactions are also mostly concerned with livestock. Rents, tithes and probably many other taxes were paid in foodstuffs. For the basic necessities life – food, clothes, and shelter – Anglo Saxon England was self-sufficient and this was also true of virtually all Anglo Saxons. The average Anglo Saxon was a peasant; the majority of people grew most of what they ate, and ate most of what they grew. Even those at the top of the social scale, although they garnished their lifestyle with imported exotica such as spices and silks, relied for the basics on their own lands, from which they extracted products by food rents and other obligations. For the average Anglo Saxon staying alive depended upon his or her own physical work, tilling the soil and caring for livestock. People lived on their arable crops, enlivened by whatever animal foods could be produced; clothing came from the backs of their own sheep, and roofing and bedding materials from the fields.

All Anglo Saxon farming systems were integrated. Livestock and arable farming were indispensible to one another; arable crops depended on the manure and labour of animals which in turn fed on the products of arable land as well as that lying fallow. During the Anglo Saxon period the landscape and food production of lowland Britain was in large measure transformed. By the end of the period something recognisable as “traditional English farming” had started and villages such as East Meon had been founded.

After the Romans

In immediately post-Roman Britain, farming was freed from the demands of imperial armies, elites, and towns; with large-scale cereal production no longer required, farming reverted to something resembling the past. Farmers went back to growing the crops that they themselves needed plus enough to support non-productive members of the local population. Their own needs were supplied by the hulled cereals that had been grown since farming began Britain. Meanwhile there was evidently a sufficient number of grazing animals to prevent the landscape reverting to wilderness on the large-scale. Given the thinly scattered human population at this time, livestock farming took on a renewed importance; using much less labour-intensive methods in either arable farming or the animal husbandry of later centuries, a small number of people could supervise fairly large numbers of livestock and extensive areas of land.

This “abatement” was the context in which Anglo Saxon settlement took place in the fourth and fifth centuries. There is no evidence that they bought new farming methods when they arrived. The Anglo Saxons did bring new ideas, seeds, even animals, but that there was no major change in the overall picture. Large-scale transformation only began later, probably gradually and in East Meon was almost certainly due to the ownership of the village by Winchester Minster.

Signs of change became visible around the middle of the Anglo Saxon period: free threshing cereals, especially bread wheat, were grown more widely as hulled cereals declined in importance. Arable farming as a whole began to expand in comparison to livestock husbandry; indeed the two became inextricably linked as increasing numbers of stock were kept close to human settlements. As human population expanded, the areas available for open grazing had to contract. More of England was being ploughed instead of being worked with hand tools and this may have been the time when the heavy mouldboard plough started to make an impact. Both of these developments meant that more oxen were needed for traction. These animals would be near the arable fields where they worked, allowing those fields to be fertilised with their dung. Growing human populations also increased the demand for animal food products, and more milking animals were kept close to settlements to facilitate dairy production. These milking animals, including sheep as well as cows, and large numbers of sheep must also have been kept in East Meon as the wool trade expanded. It is also in the Anglo Saxon period we start to see the widespread keeping of pigs with huge herds kept on wood pasture; the Domesday book records that there were over 200 pigs kept in East Meon by the end of the Anglo Saxon period.

Some of these changes, such as the transition to free threshing cereals can be observed beginning in the middle of the Anglo Saxon period or even before. Others, like the increasing importance of the mouldboard plough, can only be really detected at the end of the Anglo Saxon Period, but probably had earlier origins.

Saxons in East Meon

Archaeological evidence for Anglo Saxon period in this area is extremely limited. There are only 16 Anglo Saxon archaeological finds in the whole East Meon Hundred and most of those are on the Froxfield plateau. Written documentation, consisting of a few difficult-to-read Anglo Saxon charters and some oblique references in the Anglo Saxon chronicle, is very sparse.

Saxons or Jutes

There is a widespread belief that this area was colonised by Jutes who came from what is now Jutland rather than Saxons who originated in Germany. Bede provides the first direct written evidence for this area. He acknowledges the existence of Jutish province situated within southern Hampshire. He also mentions existence of a subgroup within the Meon Valley: the Meonwara (province of the dwellers of the Meon.) This suggests that the valley was home to a distinct group of Jutes settled within a wider Jutish province. In addition the place name Ytedene (valley of the Jutes) near East Meon was probably given by people of a different ethnicity living nearby, such as Saxons who may be identified in the place known today as Exton.

Wulfhere of Murcia, then overlord of Aethelwealh of the South Saxons, granted the South Saxon king the provinces of Isle of Wight and the Meonwara as a reward for his conversion to the Christian faith. Bede recounts its subsequent conquest and annexation by Gewisse (West Saxons) in the second half of the seventh century and explicit reference to the Meonwara suggest that the area retains some of its autonomy. Like many once independent areas, or small kingdoms, it certainly seems to have survived as an administrative unit under West Saxon control. The eighth and ninth century Meon charters and the lost name place name Ytedene may indicate the continuing need to define the settlement in terms of ethnicity. However, it is clear that following the conquest by the South Saxons the area was quickly assimilated into the overall Saxon culture.

Anglo Saxon takeover

After the Saxon migration, the language, place names, cereal crops and pottery styles changed from those of the existing Romano-British population to those of the Saxon migrants. There has been ongoing historical and archaeological controversy about the extent that the Saxons replaced the existing Romano-British population. Modern genetic studies show clear evidence of the Saxon migration but limit the proportion of Saxon ancestry excluding the possibility of long term Saxon replacement. The best estimate today is that the proportion of Saxon ancestry in Southern England is very likely to be under 50% and most likely to be in the range of 10-40%.

Initially the Anglo Saxons occupied downland sites but sites such as neighbouring Chalton Down were abandoned in the 8th century in favour of river valley sites. Was it due to exhaustion of the soils due to lack of land management or was it due to the introduction on the mould plough which enabled heavier soils to be cultivated?

Geology of the East Meon Hundred

The detailed geology of this area is very complex. But broadly speaking it is a mixture chalk downland and the Weald Margin, with the clay soils becoming ever heavier as you ascend from the Meon Valley onto the Froxfield plateau.

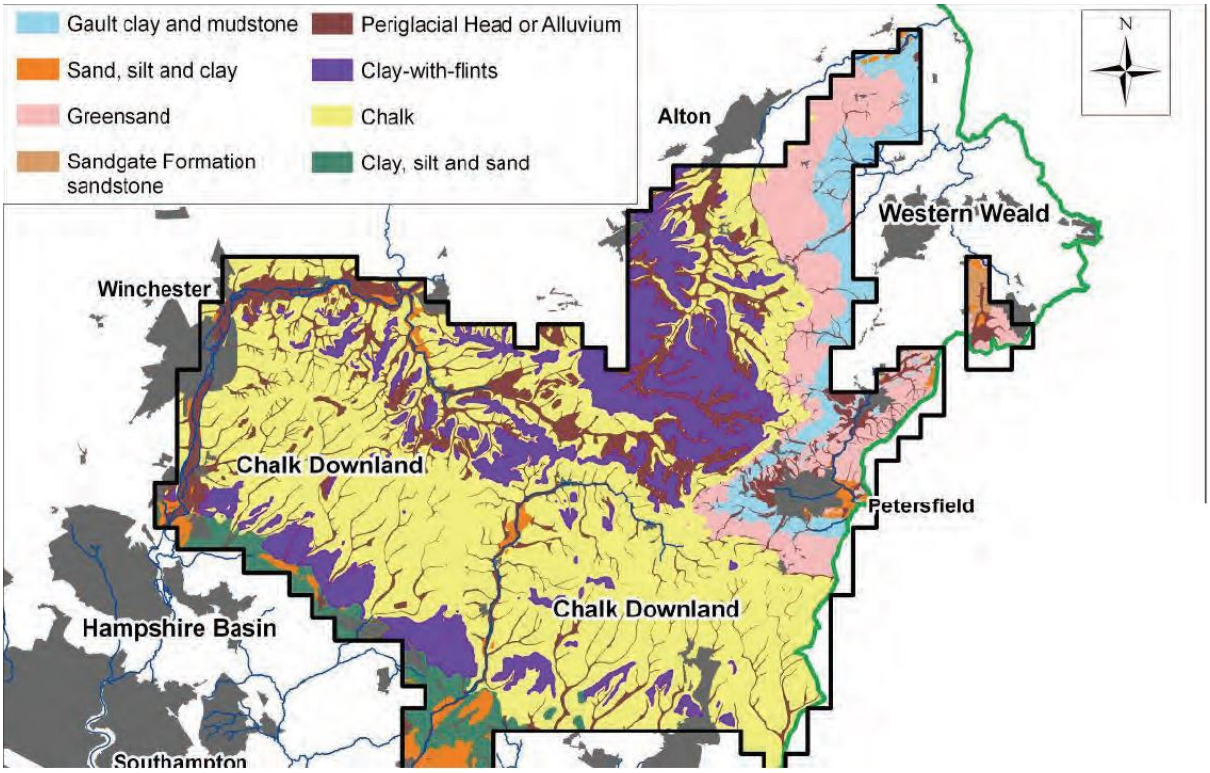

Figure 1 Source: Hampshire South Downs Mapping project

The dominant geological feature is a prominent spine of chalk running roughly west-east and dissected by the river Meon. The chalk formations are the youngest rocks in the geological sequence and they form an expansive rolling upland with little surface drainage. Large areas of clay-with-flints overlie the chalk bedrock on the upper slopes to the north. The downs end in a dramatic east-facing scarp descending into the Rother Valley where a prominent outcrop of greensand forms an escarpment below that of the chalk.

Soils

Most of the soil has developed since the end of the last Ice Age and is the result of complex interactions between geology, land use and climate.

On the downs the soils are characteristically shallow, lime-rich top soils overlaying chalk rubble. Where uncultivated they are dark and humus-rich soils which support herb-rich downland and chalk woodland communities. Over much of the area these soils are under cultivation and have been converted to a rubbly light brown mixture of topsoil and chalk. Freely draining, slightly acidic and heavier soils have developed on the northern plateau overlain by deposits of clay-with-flints. The soils on the Wealden Edge are complex with fertile free draining soils and more slowly permeable, seasonally wet basic loams and clay overlaying the mudstones of the Gault Formation.

Anglo Saxon cultivation

Climate

The early Middle Ages was a period like our own when the climate was in transition; as it worsened it probably aided the collapse of the Roman lifestyle and large scale cereal production. But by the end of the Anglo Saxon age, England was well on the way to the Medieval Warm Period that preceded the Little Ice Age.

Ploughing

Although it is possible to prepare arable fields with spades, it is much less labour intensive to use a plough. There were widespread variations in types of plough, but historians divide them into 2 main groups: ards and mouldboard ploughs.

Figure 2 The Ard

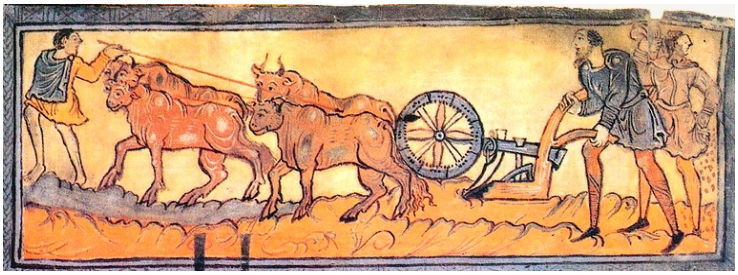

Figure 3 Saxon Mouldboard Plough

The crucial difference between the two is that the mouldboard plough turns the earth over, thus burying weeds and breaking up the clods as they fall. The ard is capable of effective ploughing on

light soils but needs several passes in different directions to break up the soil. It used to be thought that the mouldboard plough was introduced to England by the Anglo Saxons but that is not the latest thinking. However it is certainly true that the mouldboard plough came into widespread use by the Anglo Saxons and enabled them to plough heavier soils than had been possible with the ard.

In the East Meon Hundred this meant that the heavier soils on the Froxfield plateau could now be cultivated. Indeed that is where the vast majority of Anglo Saxon archaeology findspots are located.

The much heavier mouldboard plough needed teams of oxen to pull it (horses were only used for riding by high status individuals in Anglo Saxon culture.) All illustrations of ploughing in Anglo Saxon times show oxen working in pairs. A single pair of oxen would have been sufficient to pull an ard, but a more substantial team would be required to pull a mouldboard plough. It is thought that the plough teams documented in the Domesday Book were of eight oxen, but the evidence for this is remarkably thin on the ground.

Crops

The recovery of plant remains and animal bones from excavated sites provides the main resource for understanding agricultural practice during the Anglo Saxon period.

The early Anglo Saxon period saw a significant change in cereal production with the widespread adoption of free-threshing wheat (Triticum aestivum) in place of spelt which was generally cultivated during the Roman period (and earlier from the Iron Age onwards.) Barley was also a major crop; evidence for the cultivation of oats is ambiguous but it was probably grown along with beans, peas and flax. There is little evidence for the cultivation of rye.

Evidence from excavated corn driers in the chalk downlands presents the following picture:

Table 1 Source: Fields of Brittania

Crop	Early Roman	Late Roman	Mid Saxon
	%	*%*	*%*
Wheat	35	78	56
Oats	3	2	7
Barley	62	19	34
Rye	0	0	1

So it is clear that oats were always a fringe crop in this area; wheat production rose during the late Roman period presumably to provide bread for the Roman “well to do” at the expense of barley; the arrival of the Anglo Saxons saw a partial return to barley at the expense of wheat (it is thought that they planted barley as a winter crop as the mouldboard plough meant it was now possible to prepare the ground for winter sowing.) Rye was hardly grown at all.

A major difference of these early cereal crops to their modern equivalents is the height of straw. The average height of modern straw 40 cm whereas trials at Butser Ancient Farm have shown that ancient straw was of variable height but could be up to 2 metres long. This was important as straw was a valuable commodity being used for the feeding of stock, thatching and as bedding material for both humans and animals.

Cabbages, peas, parsnips and carrots were common vegetables in Anglo Saxon Britain. Blackberries, apples and raspberries were the most common fruits of the time.

Animals

There is only partial data for this area from archaeology excavations of animal bones, but we do have some data for the chalk downlands and the "clay with flints" soils so widespread on the Froxfield plateau.

Table 2 Source: Fields of Brittania

Area	Early Roman			Late Roman			Mid-Saxon		
	Cattle	Sheep	Pigs	Cattle	Sheep	Pigs	Cattle	Sheep	Pigs
	%	*%*	*%*	*%*	*%*	*%*	*%*	*%*	*%*
Clay with flints	47	40	13	75	17	8			
Chalk	30	64	6	43	51	7	48	42	9

So there was a large increase in the percentage of cattle on all soil types from early to late Roman times and a corresponding decrease in sheep. Clearly there were always more cattle reared on the heavier soils types. The increase in cattle continued on into Saxon times with a small increase in pigs. Cows however were much smaller in Anglo Saxon time being thought to be the size of modern Dexter cattle.

Domestic fowl, in the form of chickens and geese, and goats were also kept.

Woodland

Woodland was an important resource in Anglo Saxon times as it provided their primary building material. Woods were valuable properties for their owners, as a source of wood, fuel, timber and forage for pigs. In southern England, hazel was particularly important for coppicing, the branches being used for wattle and daub in buildings.

Ancient woods were well-defined, often being surrounded by a bank and ditch, so that they could be easily recognised. The bank may also support a living fence of hawthorn n or blackthorn to prevent livestock or deer entering as they are attracted by young shoots on coppice stools.

As we will see later, it was reported in the Domesday Book that the East Meon Hundred has woodland to support 200 pigs.

Farming on chalk downlands

For the greater part of our recent history chalk downland has been prime sheep country and many of our best-known images of the downs are of an empty landscape occupied by sheep with just a shepherd and his dog for signs of human life. However, that was not the scene when the Saxons arrived in this country. Since Mesolithic times, farmers used the chalk uplands to grow their crops, as can be seen from the extensive Celtic field systems in this area. It is thought that these field systems comprised two-thirds of the land that is cultivated today. These fields of light soils needed no woodland clearances to establish and were easy to cultivate with limited tools; initially that meant just spades but later it was ards. The farming systems were largely based on sheep which grazed the

downs and then provided manure which could be used to fertilise the fields for the growing of crops. Sheep had the special merit of being the animals least dependent on a regular supply of water and were also easier to maintain during autumn and winter.

The move away from the chalk

From the ninth century or thereabouts there was a gradual shift away from the upland settlements of the Chalton type in favour of valley settlements which expanded and became increasingly nucleated. Villages developed between the foot of the downs and the river lands and by the 10th century open fields were laid out on valley sides, where sheep-corn husbandry continued but less intensively by pasturing the sheep on the fallows.

By the end of the Anglo Saxon period most people had given up trying to cultivate the eroded soils on top of the chalk uplands where centuries of ploughing by the ard could well have contributed to the erosion that is still a problem today. They began to plough the heavier soils of the lower slopes and the "clay-with-flints" soils on the Froxfield plateau and put their cattle onto the lush river meadows in the valleys. The farmsteads moved too: we see today strings of linear villages along the foot of the South Downs, one of which is of course East Meon. The farms were prime candidates for the entire package of the heavier plough, open fields, and the much more organised form of pasturing on the fallows which open fields allowed. Animals spent the day on the downland and then deposited their manure on the fallows when they were brought in at night. This was part of a widespread move in this direction which began in the Anglo Saxon period and was to come to full fruition after the Norman Conquest.

There are several possible explanations for a general move off the chalk. The most important may have been the simplest: the thin soils of the chalk are only kept fertile by dint of much labour and stock-intensive manuring, and where erosion was a constant problem, had simply given up the ghost and were no longer fertile enough to feed the inhabitants. Another explanation may have been the introduction of the mouldboard plough that could cope with heavier and more fertile soils. While deep ploughing would have been have been of no benefit on the tops of the downs, as it only brought to the surface chalk which was inches below the thin top soils, as still happens today, it could well have been one of the benefits of moving cultivation to the lower slopes and riversides. In contrast to the ard, which needed only a pair of oxen and just a man or woman to pull it, the heavier plough needed the traction power which a team of oxen provided. Land in the valleys was more suitable for cattle, with longer grass in the meadows and the meadows themselves a source of winter fodder. The high chalk, which had been intensively farmed, was now being used purely as sheep pasture.

These changes added up to a revolution in farming that had profound and long-lasting effects on the farming of England and thus on many other aspects of economy, society and culture in succeeding centuries. If open field farming as seen in English local records in the 13th century onwards was not yet in full operation the elements were available – the crops, the tools, the techniques – which allowed its development after the Norman Conquest . Similarly the large-scale sheep husbandry which became such a feature of late mediaeval English farming and the trade which sustained it had its beginnings in the Anglo Saxon period. Many peasant farmers had flocks large enough to contribute surplus to the network of markets that were such an important aspect of England's wool trade.

Social organisation

Anglo Saxon farmers did not live in an egalitarian society. Anglo Saxon society was divided into a simple two-tier hierarchy, eorl and ceorl.

Eorls were the elite distinguished by birth, wealth and for the men, office; ceorls were all other free men who were farmers in one way or another. However a good deal of the work of Anglo Saxon farming was done by slaves who in early Anglo Saxon times were probably descendants of the native British population. By the end of the Anglo Saxon period, slaves had largely been replaced by dependent peasantry. However in Anglo Saxon times everyone worked hard so the life of a slave was not very different to that of their master.

Rise of Saxon estates

The early Anglo Saxon settlement was generally small, non-hierarchical and unenclosed rural, consisting of a few timber halls and ancillary sunken-featured buildings with perhaps 30-50 people.

The mid Anglo Saxon period saw important changes in the settlement pattern with:

- more specialised site types
- the expression of social status and ownership through the appropriation of significant sites
- the construction of more elaborate buildings
- the control of access to space, and closer control of livestock and crops, by the widespread creation of enclosures within settlement sites.

There was a significant change in landscape exploitation across southern Britain. There was an intensification in land use with woodland clearance and increase in arable cultivation practice caused by the introduction of new systems of farming. This period was also a time of investment in infrastructure projects such as large coastal fish traps and watermills. Such construction projects would have required considerable resources in terms of both labour and materials and the centralised authority that controlled them; most of the major infrastructure projects we know of appear to be either on royal or monastic estates. This is also the period when documentary evidence in the form of charters shows that the landscape was being divided up into discrete estates, which were granted by kings to the newly emerged Christian monasteries. Unfortunately Anglo Saxon charters were written in Old English and, in the absence of maps or plans, necessarily referred to physical features which are impossible to identify or even ceased to exist 1000 years ago. They also contain no information of what lay within their bounds or what crops were grown.

The archaeological record also sees the emergence of a far more stratified settlement pattern during this period and in particular high status settlements the type that were not seen in the 5th to 6th centuries. The collection and processing of food and other resources seen on these sites was on a far larger scale and was part of a far wider change in the landscape of lowland Britain which also saw the emergence of coastal trading session centres such as Hamwic.

Open fields

Late Saxon administration divided land into defined units with designated zones for pasture, arable, meadow and settlement and crop rotation was practiced; it did have its origins in the 7th century or possibly even earlier. The evidence is unclear as to whether Anglo Saxons first introduced open fields to England (either 2 or 3 field systems.) The creation would have required a wholesale

reorganisation of a community's land holding. This was much easier where the community's houses were clustered close together and it would also make working together much easier.

Open fields had large unfenced fields divided into furlongs, each in turn made up of long narrow strips running in the same direction. These strips were the fundamental units of landholding and also the units of ploughing; a mouldboard plough was long and thin and heavy and difficult to turn. So the best way of working is to plough as long as possible in one direction before turning. Each furlong usually had a headland at each end for turning.

Local archaeology

Anglo Saxon archaeology is extremely limited in the East Meon Hundred; a society that built mostly in wood doesn't leave too many lasting memorials. However there are interesting Anglo Saxon sites just over the border of the East Meon Hundred to both the west and south east which are very indicative of Anglo Saxon activity in our area.

Meonstoke cemetery

There is an extensive early Anglo Saxon cemetery close by the west border of the East Meon Hundred at Shavards Farm near Meonstoke. Burials come from early 6th century to the end of the 7th century; all are of pre Christian origin. The 7th century burials show a lack of cremations, a reduction in the number of grave goods and a concern with the external marking of the grave. A number of graves stand out as more "princely" burials. These are usually interpreted as the graves of regional leaders and are believed to indicate an increase in social stratification. Burial was now the arena for signalling the status of elites; kin based communities of the 5th and 6th centuries were gradually giving way to a more hierarchical society that were documented by Bede.

Meonstoke settlement

An Anglo Saxon settlement at Shavards Farm in Meonstoke was excavated in the mid 1980s. The site was not in great condition having been extensively ploughed, probably in the 19th century by steam ploughing. It is thought that the site was begun in the early to mid Saxon period but pottery evidence indicates its use in the second half of the Saxon period. One sunken floor hut proved to be very interesting as it had been used as a rubbish tip after it had gone out of use and the floor was rich in artefacts including three clay crucibles, an antler comb and bone needle, pottery and animal bones. Soil samples were also taken at various levels.

Analysis of the animal bones indicated the presence of cattle, pigs, horse, cat, sheep and the occasional bone of domestic fowl or geese. There was an unexpected number of young animals in contrast to the findings at Hamwic where more mature animals are the norm. Some of the pig bones were very large which suggests that either the pigs at Meonstoke were very much larger than those found at Hamwic or else they were wild boar.

Analysis of plant remains showed that barley was the most common cereal found on this site. Oats were recorded in fewer contexts but often in higher quantities than wheat or barley. The cereal grains recovered were all of free threshing forms with one exception of a hulled grain which is likely to have come from previous Roman activities on the site.

Chalton Down

An extensive Anglo Saxon settlement of some 15 acres at Church Down, Chalton was identified by Barry Cunliffe in the 1970s. The settlement contained substantial Saxon halls, probably the normal dwelling of the freeman, holder of a hide and put an end to the previously held theories that the Anglo Saxons lived in squalid hovels. A reconstruction one of the halls at Butser Ancient Farm is shown in the figure below:

Figure 4 Buster Ancient Farm: reconstruction of Anglo Saxon hall from Chalton Down

Examination of bones from excavated rubbish tips showed a high frequency of sheep, deer and pig. The relative infrequency of ox seems to indicate that the economy of Chalton Village depended more on hunting and sheep farming than on cattle raising.

Like many other settlements it was abandoned in the 8th century as part of the "move away from chalk" as the villages of Blendworth and Chalton became established. Perhaps a similar move from as yet unidentified Anglo Saxon sites in our area let to the formation of East Meon.

Markets

Opportunities for trade in the East Meon Hundred were represented by Hamwic (Southampton) and later Winchester which provided a market for agricultural surplus that were resulting from improved farming techniques.

Hamwic

Hamwic was founded in the 7th century, possibly by newly arrived West Saxons. It declined in 9th century due to coastal trade being affected by Viking raids and/or the new importance of Winchester as the Saxon capital.

The creation of the new football stadium at St Mary's provided a wealth of new archaeological evidence. Bone assemblies indicate that the animal economy was overwhelming based on cattle, sheep and pigs (and largely drawn from older cattle and sheep that had already been used for other purposes.) Some pigs and poultry may have been raised in the town and some fish and shellfish was eaten although fish does not appear to have been a major component of the diet.

A study of mineralised plant remains suggests that cereals formed the major part of the diet, though peas and beans were also consumed on a regular basis. A range of other foods consumed was found, including native hedgerow fruits, apples and pear or quince, plums, a few grapes, and plants used for flavouring including mustard and non-native species fennel, coriander and dill.

Although the main produce was thought to come from large royal or ecclesiastical estates, local peasant markets probably fed into the main market by local trading from one market to another; coins minted in Hamwic have been found at Lower Farm in East Meon.

Men who managed royal and ecclesiastical estates were knowledgeable shepherds who sent sheep and wool to market. Farmers who were supplying sheep and wool did not necessarily take the goods to market themselves: peasant production was generally mediated through a network of minor markets. Their products very likely reached the market indirectly by collectors of some kind since there was a legal minimum amount which could be sold at market. An important herepath ran along the Meon valley linking Winchester to Alton; there had been a cattle market at Neatham since Roman times which may have been operational in Anglo Saxon times.

Winchester

The market itself was changing in late Anglo Saxon times. Hamwic declined from the ninth century and Winchester grew in the tenth century with the foundation of the new Minster and its growing role as an administrative centre. Late Anglo Saxon minsters were the nearest equivalent England had to royal palaces. Towns in which they were situated becoming more like provincial capitals. Winchester's links with London drew in silver and by the end of the period it had its own mint. This may be partly because it creamed of trade profits which once would have been Hamwic's but a great many other factors must also have been involved. The rise of Winchester as a commercial centre was accompanied by the church intensifying exploitation of its lands. Both the Old and New Minster now had vast estates (including of course in the East Meon Hundred) and alert landlords were increasingly able and eager to tap peasant resources of livestock and labour.

Transition to Normans

The Anglo Saxon period ended with the Norman Conquest in 1066. Twenty years later the Domesday Book was commissioned to document late Anglo Saxon England so that the Normans could extract the maximum amount of tax from their new subjects.

At this time, the Anglo-Saxon economy was one of the richest in Europe and also the most advanced. The size of Britain, its location, its climate, its underlying geology, its fishing grounds and farmland, had made it one of the most valuable land-banks in the western world. England had changed from a half-wooded land into one that was occasionally wooded. Possibly as little as 15% of the 27 million acres of land covered in the 1086 returns were wooded, rather less than the proportion of woodland seen today in France.

In 1986, to celebrate the ninth century after Domesday, East Meon was chosen as 'The Domesday Village' by the Hampshire Museum Service, on the basis that the village had retained more of its layout and character from the Middle Ages than any other; a model was built to reconstruct the village at the time, according to the historians, and this was displayed at the Great Hall in Winchester; it is now in the Musee de la Tapisserie in Bayeux.

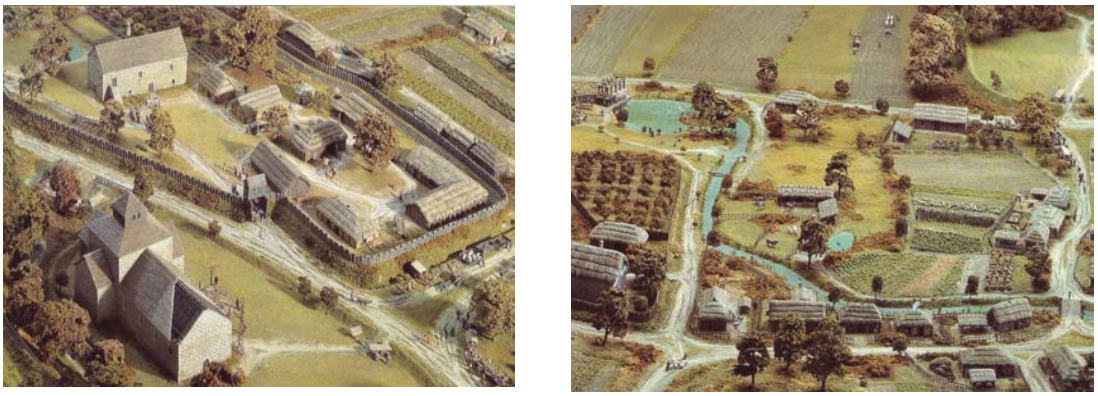

Figure5 East Meon was designated Hampshire's 'Domesday Village' in 1986, and this model shows how the village might have looked in Norman times. The image of the left shows the predecessors of All Saints Church, foreground, and of The Court Hall, top left. On the right, the simple housing, farm buildings and smallholdings typical of the time.

As the Domesday model shows, most dwellings were surrounded by plots of land, on which the owner could grow vegetables and rear pigs and chickens for his family. Each tithing was a cluster of such huts and houses, surrounded by a combination of arable fields, meadows by the river, and downs on which sheep grazed; Meon Ecclesia owned the bishop's hunting park to the east of the village and there were extensive woods and another park at Hyden. Arable land was laid out in large open fields, subdivided into small plots: no hedge, fence or ditch separated the strips; the furrows left by the plough were reckoned to be sufficient to distinguish the land cultivated by one tenant from that of his neighbour.

The Domesday Book

At the time of Domesday, East Meon was known as Menes, the Hundred of Meon. In 1066 the whole Hundred had been held by Stigand, who was both Archbishop of Canterbury and Bishop of Winchester. In 1070 he was deposed by William I and he died two years later. Menes Manerium was then appropriated by 'the Lord', the King, but the smaller manor of Menes Ecclesia remained the property of the new Bishop of Winchester, Walkelin, and its income went to monks of Swithun's Priory.

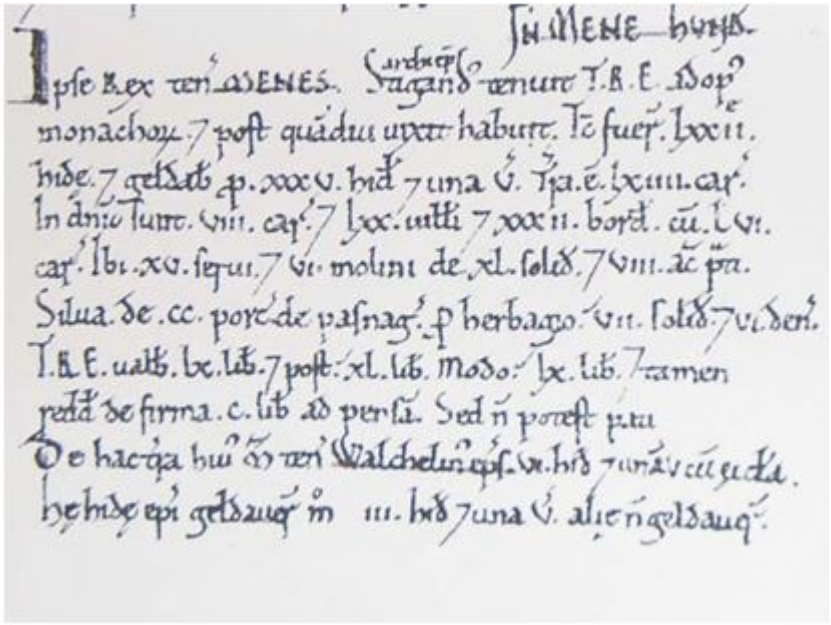

Figure 5 The Domesday entry for Menes Manerium

In Mene Hundred Menes Land of the King. Archbishop Stigand held it before 1066, for the use of the monks; later he had it for his lifetime. Then there were 72 hides; it paid geld for 35 hides and 1 virgate. Land for 64 ploughs. In lordship 8 ploughs; 70 villagers and 32 small holders with 56 ploughs. 15 slaves; 6 mills at 40s; meadow, 8 acres; woodland at 200 pigs from pasture; from grazing 7s 6d. Value before 1066 £60; later £40; now £60; however, it pays £100 by weight in revenue but it cannot bear it.

To decode the clerical shorthand: Norman officials used the original Anglo Saxon measurements by which a hide equals on average 120 acres, depending on the quality of the soil, and a virgate was a quarter of a hide or 30 acres. So, Meon Manor, which in 1086 belonged to the king, comprised seventy two hides (8,640 acres), but it only paid tax on thirty five hides (4,200 acres) and one virgate (30 acres) so the other half was not cultivated. It had land to support sixty four plough teams and seventy farmers, as well as thirty two small holders who had land for fifty six ploughs. Also on this land were fifteen slaves, six mills worth forty shillings, a meadow of eight acres, woodland to support two hundred pigs, and pasture earning seven shillings and sixpence from grazing. The value before 1066 had been £6, declining to £40, and by 1086 it returned to £60. However, 'the manor pays £100 but this appears too much for this manor'.

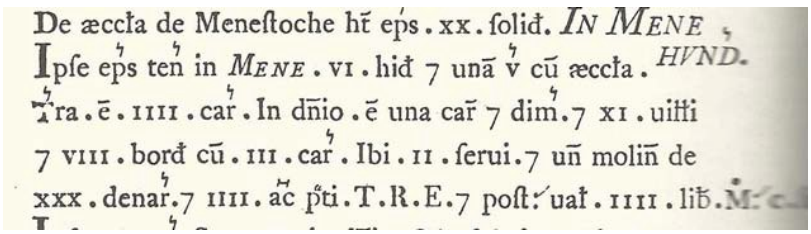

Figure 6 The Domesday entry for Mene Ecclasia 1

In Mene Hundred. The bishop holds 6 hides and 1 virgate with the church in Mene. Land for 4 ploughs. In lordship 1½ ploughs; 11 villagers and 8 small holders with 3 ploughs. 2 slaves; 1 mill at 30d; meadow, 4 acres. Value before 1066 and later £4; now 100s.

In Mene Ecclesia, Bishop Walkelin holds six hides (720 acres) and one virgate (30 acres) of the manor with a church. These hides of the Bishop paid tax on three hides (360 acres) and one virgate, the others did not pay tax. The value before 1066, and later, had been £4, and in 1086 one hundred shillings, or £5.

In summary, the two manors of Menes covered an area of more than 9,000 acres; these made up Mene Hundred, which included the tithings of Froxfield and Steep, with a population of over a hundred 'villagers and slaves'; it had 7 mills and 128 ½ plough teams. This was the legacy that the Anglo Saxons in East Meon created for their Norman conquerors to enjoy.

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