

Early Medieval – AD 410-1066

The Early Medieval period in the AONB (Fig 16) was one of sharp contrast to the Roman period. In common with the rest of England, the end of the Roman period in Sussex was marked by an apparent decline in population and central authority, a decrease in agricultural activity and a shrinking number of settlements.

The period can be divided into two phases (Gardiner 2003). The first – AD 410 to AD 900 – corresponds to the collapse of the monetised Roman economy, and the second – from AD 900 – corresponds to the first stage of the growth of the medieval commercial economy. The first phase is characterised by declining population and the absence of significant levels of trade. Roman coins ceased to reach Britain in any numbers in the early 5th century. In fact, coin use may have ceased altogether (Esmonde Cleary 1989) in favour of a system of barter, tribute and gift-exchange.

The population was probably declining in this first phase. The strongest evidence of this is the reduction in settlement density compared to the Roman period when there were settlements on even the poorest soils. For the AONB in this period, the best evidence for settlement comes from Bosham. There is a marked contrast to the Roman period with Fishbourne palace and villas indicating a thriving rural economy. On the Downs, there is evidence that arable cultivation did not return until the 13th century in some places (Drewett 1982). The higher areas of downland seem gradually to have reverted to pasture and in some places woodland developed. Settlements withdrew from the slopes into the more fertile valleys.

Ports were established from AD 700 onward in Kent and Southampton (*Hamwic*) and this suggests that trade increased. Pagham has been identified as a possible port in Sussex – there is some historical evidence as well as a number of sceattas (coins). It is tempting to speculate that there may have been trade in Chichester Harbour in this period too, but the single 8th century silver sceat, porcupine type, from Frisia found at Bosham (Chi SMR 2437; 481010 104080) is not sufficient evidence alone. However, Mumby (1984) argues that because there is much evidence for commercial activity in the medieval period in the Port of Chichester (that includes Pagham as well as Chichester Harbour itself), it is not unreasonable to suggest that there was also trade in the Early Medieval period too. For the domestic economy, it is likely that the better soils in the AONB were used for arable, the poorer soils for pasture, the wet valleys for meadow and the woodland for timber and grazing.

In contrast to the lack of evidence elsewhere in the AONB for this period Bosham was centrally important. In fact, Bosham has a claim to being the most ancient site in Sussex with a continuous tradition of Christianity. According to Bede, when St. Wilfred came to convert the South Saxons in AD 681 a small monastery already existed with five or six brethren under the headship of Dicul. As late as 1637, ‘the ruynes [ie ruins] of an out worne foundation’ could still be seen and were attributed to ‘St. Bede’s Chapel.’

The main fabric for the famous Holy Trinity church (Chi SMR 2361; 480430 103880) is Anglo-Saxon, and consists of the west tower, the nave, the chancel arch and the west part of the chancel walls. It dates to the period 1050-1100. In the Norman and Early English period the chancel was lengthened and the north and south aisles and crypt were added. Recent work found that the Anglo-Saxon tower survives intact from plinth level to corbelled eaves course, though it has been altered and repaired on several occasions (Aldsworth 1990). A new belfry stage was added shortly after the Conquest. The present

spire was built in a single phase in the 15th century, using timbers felled in the winter of 1405/06 and the summer of 1406 (Aldsworth 2000).

The monastery is thought to be located near the Church (Chi SMR 2362; 480400 103900). According to tradition the Irish missionary Dicul settled in the hamlet of Creed with five or six brethren in AD 650. By the time of the Domesday survey, an establishment where canons following the Benedictine Rule was in existence. Bede mentions a monastery. Early medieval pottery was found in the garden of a Bosham cottage (Chi SMR 2424; 480700 104130).

Another ecclesiastical connection is St Cuthman who may have lived in the late 7th or 8th century. His story is told in the Latin *Life (Vita Sancti Cuthmanni)* that survives today as four (sometimes contradictory) manuscripts: one held at the Forschungsbibliothek in Gotha, a second at the Bibliothèque Municipale in Rouen, and two more are known only from the Bollandists' edition in *Acta Sanctorum: Feb II* (Antwerp 1658). St Cuthman's birthplace is not recorded in the story itself, but is identified as Chidham in a late 15th century memorandum where a note written on the flyleaf reads: 'Chydham a myll from Bosham, ther was Send Cudman borne. He is shryned at Vescom in Normandy' (Blair 1997).

The story relates that Cuthman was a shepherd who fell on hard times and was reduced to begging. He set out from his home with his crippled mother in a wheelbarrow or one-wheeled cart. On his journey, he is mocked by men in a meadow who are subsequently punished by God by driving rain. When the rope that partially supported the wheelbarrow broke at Steyning, some 25 miles from Chidham (and outside the AONB), he stopped and built a church. Conflicting versions relate that either St Andrew or Christ appeared to help construct part of the roof. Cuthman was venerated as a saint before the Norman conquest, and his church at Steyning was in existence in AD 857, the year King Ethelwulf was buried there. Steyning was an important religious centre and St Cuthman's grave became a place of pilgrimage in the 10th and 11th centuries.

There was a guild of St Cuthman in Chidham in 1522/3, and in 1541 there were complaints about the loss of the large oblations that had previously been made to his image there (Blair 1997). There is also place-name evidence linking Cuthman and Chidham. A Chidham glebe terrier (a record of land assigned to support the parish church) of 1635 includes an acre 'lyeing in a field commonly called St Culman's field neere St Cullman's Dell' which can be identified with modern Cullimer's Field and Cullimer's Pond on the Chidham Tithe map and Apportionment of 1846. An examination of parish records (Anon ?1960s) also seems to suggest that the name 'Cullimer's Field' in the southern part of the Chidham peninsula is a corruption of 'Cullinans Field' which itself is a corruption of 'Cuthmans Field.' Blair says that 'it seems highly likely that it [Chidham] was the place envisaged in the sources for the *Life*.'

However, Blair also points out that the field-names are problematic and leave unanswered questions. 'Cullman' looks more like the common early Irish name 'Colmán' than 'Cuthman.' The text of Cuthman's story also has a strong Celtic or especially Irish character, with its inclusion of topographical details and preoccupation with nature-miracles. Blair suggests a number of explanations: that 'Cullman' is simply a late garbling of Cuthman's name; that it is a folk-etymology from Cullimer(e) conditioned by knowledge of the local saint; or that it records a genuine St Colmán of Bosham whose legend has been conflated with that of St Cuthman, perhaps importing the Irish elements into the story. The Irish character also suggests the possibility of a link between Cuthman and the 7th century Irish monastery at Bosham.

There is an enduring myth connecting King Cnut (also known as Canute, 1016-1035) with Bosham (eg Bromley-Martin and Inman 1995). No historian has been identified earlier than Richard Gough in the 18th century who mentions the connection and the tradition probably started between 1776 and 1786 (Peckham 1970). Writing in his *Sepulchral Monuments in Great Britain*, Gough (1786) says, 'In Bosenham church, Sussex, is an antient monument, with a female figure on it supposed to be a daughter of King Canute,' quoting a bibliographic source that cannot now be traced. When Sir William Burrell had visited the church in 1776, the curate had told him that the carving in an arch in the north wall of the chancel was the daughter of a Saxon prince. However, Burrell thought it more likely to be 'one of the Mowbray family who were Owners of this Lordship,' (quoted in Peckham 1970). There is little disagreement today that this carving dates to the 14th century at the earliest, since the female figure wears a 'sideless cotte,' which did not come into fashion until then.

In the 19th century, the focus of the myth shifted from the carving to buried remains at the east end of the nave, on the south side, just outside the chancel arch. Bones in a stone coffin were exhumed and examined by the Vicar – the Rev. H. Mitchell – and others in 1865. Although this evidence convinced some (eg Macdermott 1912), there was no reported scientific analysis of the bones to determine age or sex and the coffin was pronounced 'undoubtedly the date of Canute' on the basis of its 'rude workmanship' alone. The myth has also become entangled with other stories. Cnut is best remembered in the popular imagination today for his attempt to turn back the waves of the sea. The story has grown up that Bosham was the location for this act, although there is no evidence for this.

Others insist that King Harold is also buried at the church. A second stone coffin dug up in 1954 contained 'the thigh and pelvic bones of a powerfully built man of about 5ft 6ins in height' (G W Marwood *The Stone Coffins of Bosham Church* pamphlet) that were attributed to the king. Harold (1066) does have a genuine connection with the church, since he prayed there before setting off to fight the Normans, but there is no evidence that the bones were his.

A petition to excavate graves in the church 'one of which may be the grave of King Harold' was rejected in 2003. The Consistory Court was told by Dr Joseph Elders of behalf of the Council for the Care of Churches that, 'After wide consultation, I know of no professional historian or archaeologist who considers it likely that King Harold is buried at Bosham,' and by James Kenny, archaeological officer with Chichester District Council that 'there is no evidence that King Canute, his (unknown) daughter, Earl Godwin or his son King Harold are buried in the church,' (ruling of the Chancellor of the Diocese of Chichester, the Worshipful Mark Hill, following a Consistory Court held at Bosham church on 24 November, published 10 December 2003).

Despite not being buried there, Bosham was probably the chief seat of Earl Godwin. Here in 1049, his eldest son Swegen murdered his cousin Beorn. It was from Bosham in 1064 that Harold set off on the voyage which ended in his falling into the hands of William of Normandy. Bosham church features on the Bayeux Tapestry. Before the Conquest, Bosham seems to have constituted a great lordship including not just Bosham itself but West Thorney and Chidham to the west and on the east New Fishbourne and Appledram. The western portion was attached to the church and was given by Edward the Confessor to his Norman chaplain Osbern, afterwards Bishop of Exeter. The remainder was obtained by Earl Godwin and consisted of 56 ½ hides, rated at 38 hides.

The second phase of the Early Medieval period dates from AD 900. In England, this phase is marked by a growing economy, and the establishment of towns for the first time since the Roman period. Trade began to develop based on small agricultural markets as demand from the town population increased. By the 13th century this had reached a stage where medieval accounts show that lords, and presumably peasants too, were growing crops for sale as well as subsistence. An increasing demand for salt is likely to have affected the AONB directly and although no Early Medieval salterns have been identified, salterns were listed in Domesday Book, so are likely to have existed.

Chichester was one of the five fortified sites mentioned in the Burghal Hidage that was probably compiled in *c.* AD 919. Chichester developed into a major town in the 10th century which undoubtedly impacted on the AONB. Increasing trade is likely to have led to the revival of the harbour as a port. Trade with France is known to have stimulated the growth of other Sussex towns such as Steyning, Rye and Winchelsea.

However, despite its long seaboard with numerous landing places, Sussex was rarely in the forefront of developments with foreign trade unlike neighbouring Kent (Gardiner 2003). Sussex may have been dwarfed in influence by Wessex and Kent. Sussex was a small independent kingdom until its conquest by Offa of Mercia in the AD 760s and early AD 770s. It may be that political authority in Sussex was fragmented and Sussex lacked powerful lords. As a result, Sussex developed no centre comparable to Canterbury or Winchester and the fragmentation of power was institutionalised by the Normans who divided the county into five rapes, each with its own lord and sheriff.

It is likely that village formation was also rejuvenated and there is some evidence at Bosham Hoe for a causeway that may have run from Longmore Point across to the east shore of Birdham (A Bromley-Martin pers comm. in SMR). The entry in the SMR records this as Saxon, adding that at low water there is a very stony bank noticeable (Chi SMR 2493; 481640 101220).

The harbour and some of the harbour villages feature in the Selsey charters that date to the 11th century and earlier (Kelly 1998). The charters (according to Kelly's scheme) and the subject of the charters are given in the table below.

1	Caedwalla, king (of the West Saxons), grants 55 hides in and around Selsey and 32 hides elsewhere in Sussex to Bishop Wilfred AD 673
7	a) Aethelberht, king of the South Saxons, grants eighteen hides (<i>manentes</i>) at Wittering, Sussex, to Diozsa [AD 733 x (747 x <i>c</i> 765)] b) Diozsa transfers the land to his sister [AD 733 x (747 x <i>c</i> 765)] c) Confirmation by Offa, king of Mercia [probably AD <i>c</i> 772 x 796]
20	Bishop Brihthelm restores to the South Saxon see 42 hides at Selsey, Sidlesham, Itchenor, Birdham, <i>Egesawyde</i> , Brinfast and Wittering, with seven hides at Aldingbourne and Lidsey, six at <i>Geinstidesgate</i> (Westergate), eight at Houghton, four at Coldwaltham, and nine at Mundham, all in West Sussex AD 957

Table 2: Selsey charters relating to the AONB area

The boundary clause in **1** refers to locations within the AONB. The boundary passed around 'Hormouth' (perhaps 'dirty estuary': *horh*, *mutha*) which seems to have been the old name for the mouth of Chichester harbour (it is recorded as 'Ourmouth' in Morden's 1695 map of Chichester, for example). According to the 1525 version of the boundary, 'Hormouth Haven' was then called 'West Wittering Haven.' This boundary then ran north along a creek (*fleot*) to 'wealh creek' (*wealh* probably means 'Briton') which it followed to

‘Bryni’s ditch or dyke.’ Kelly points out that although the 16th century survey equated *wealesfleot* with ‘Bosham depe,’ it is more likely that the creek in question was Chichester Channel, leading up towards Fishbourne. ‘Bryni’s ditch,’ Kelly argues, is likely to have been a ditch running from the vicinity of modern Chichester yacht basin along the northern edges of Birdham and Sidlesham parishes. This northern boundary also features in **20**, running east out of the AONB then south to Pagham Harbour.

Aethelberht’s grant to Diozsa referred to in **7** was intended to provide for the establishment of a minster at Wittering. Diozsa in turn seems to have passed this responsibility onto his sister. The grant of this land to Diozsa belies the tradition that King Aethelberht gave Bishop Wilfred the whole of the area that was later to form Manhood Hundred.

Research questions

Further detailed research into place-names, for example field names, would increase understanding of how the Saxons settled the AONB and may shed light on their interaction with the native Britons. (The place-name of Walton, near Bosham, is one of the few place-names in Sussex that derives from Latin and therefore is likely to have had a connection with native Britons, see below).

Trade in the Early Medieval period is not fully understood, and future research could address the question of how the Harbour was used as a port, and what maritime craft were used.

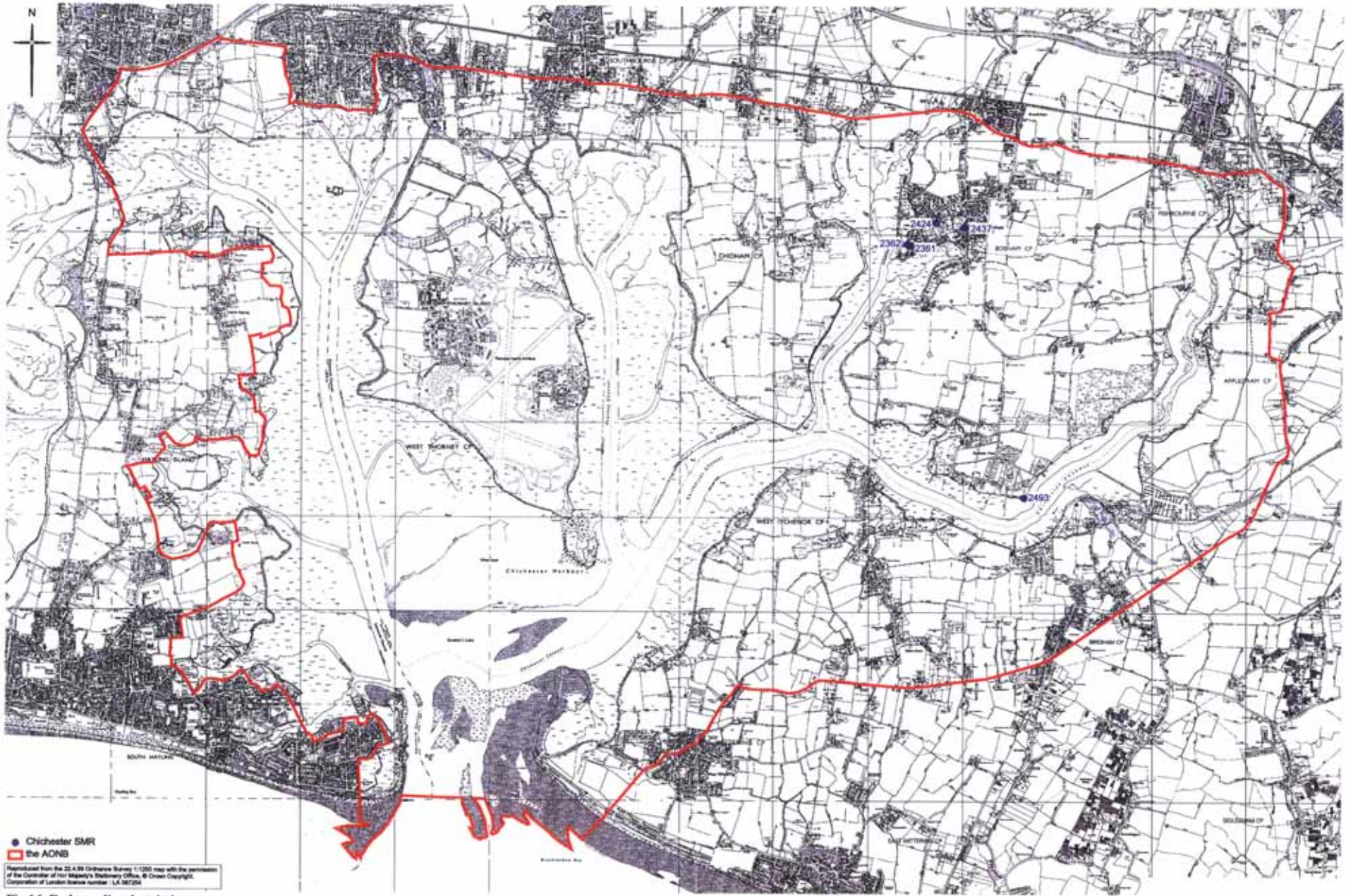


Fig 16 Early medieval period map