The Anglo-Saxon Agricultural Revolution in Norfolk

In memoriam

Dr Neil Faulkner (1958–2022)

The Anglo-Saxon Agricultural Revolution in Norfolk

Proceedings of a conference to mark the 25th anniversary of the Sedgeford Historical and Archaeological Research Project

Edited by

Richard Hoggett and Neil Faulkner

SHARP
SEDGEFORD HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL RESEARCH PROJECT

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Cover: Aerial view of the Sedgeford Historical and Archaeological Project (Hoggett). Back cover: Examples of pottery from the Wreningham kiln (Norfolk). (Photo: © Pre-Construct Archaeology)

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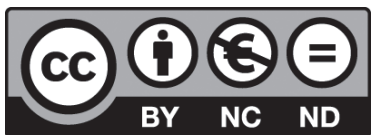

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List of Contributors

Dr Sue Anderson is a specialist in the post-Roman pottery of East Anglia and recently completed a PhD on this subject at the University of East Anglia. She worked for many years as Finds Manager and later as Archaeological Archives Manager for the Suffolk County Council Archaeological Service.

Andrea Beckham (née Cox) has worked in archaeology for nearly 30 years and in that time has been involved in commercial archaeology, community heritage projects and curatorial archaeological roles in the Westcountry and Norfolk.

Dr Eleanor Blakelock is an archaeometallurgist with a specialism in early medieval metalworking. She has been involved with SHARP since 2000, first as a volunteer and then as a supervisor, and has been a director of the malting-complex excavations since 2018.

Jeffrey Bonas read History at Oxford University before spending his career in industry. He is the founding chairman of the North West Norfolk History Society, a keen sponsor of SHARP.

Dr Hannah Caroe is an archaeobotanist who undertook work on the environmental evidence from the malting-complex excavations as part of her doctoral research undertaken at Oxford University between 2019 and 2022.

Dr Gareth Davies is Director of Archaeology at the York Archaeological Trust and a medieval specialist. He first attended the excavations at Sedgeford in 1998 and excavated the site for many years. He continues to maintain a research link with SHARP and served as its Chair of Trustees in 2023–24.

Dr Neil Faulkner was an archaeologist, historian, writer, lecturer, broadcaster and political activist. He was founder-director of SHARP and of the Great Arab Revolt Project (GARP), and a former editor of *Current Archaeology* and *Military History Matters*. Neil died in February 2022.

Brian Fraser is responsible for site safety at SHARP and worked extensively on the aerodrome project, as well as undertaking his own research into the local history of the East Riding of Yorkshire. He was a SHARP Committee member and Trustee until he retired in 2022.

Professor Helena Hamerow is Professor of Early Medieval Archaeology at the University of Oxford. Her research focusses on the rural communities, farming practices and economy of north-west Europe during the Early Middle Ages, between AD 400–1000.

Tiggy Harris is the eldest daughter of Neil Faulkner and Lucy Harris and has attended SHARP for her whole life. She took the BERT course as a teenager, but did not pursue a career in archaeology, instead qualifying as a veterinary physiotherapist in 2020. She joined the SHARP Committee in early 2023 and is also a Trustee.

Dr Richard Hoggett is a freelance heritage consultant, lecturer and writer specialising in Anglo-Saxon East Anglia and monastic landscapes. He first attended SHARP in 1997 and was responsible for the project's work on the parish church and wider landscape studies until 2022.

Dr Matilda Holmes has been a consultant zooarchaeologist since 1997. She worked on the inter-disciplinary *FeedSax* project (2017–22) and has taught zooarchaeology at University College London and the Universities of Leicester, Nottingham and Birmingham.

Dr John Jolleys is a General Medical Practitioner (retired 2013) and first came to SHARP as a volunteer in 1997. He was formerly SHARP's Chair of Committee and Trustees (2017–22) and Director of Historical Research (2018–22).

Kathryn Oliana attended SHARP as a volunteer, initially on the aerodrome project, and undertook much of the 'leg work', including wading along the river, to contribute to the writing of this conference paper.

Dr Keith Robinson taught archaeology for continuing students at Sussex University and was for many years a tutor with the Open University. He has been involved with SHARP since its first year, directing landscape projects and the aerodrome project, as well as being a contributing author and joint editor of the *Digging Sedgeford* monograph.

David Wood is a retired RAF Wing Commander and SHARP's Director of Remote Sensing, working in Hall Field, Chalkpit Field and Park Field in particular. He was formerly a SHARP Committee Member and Trustee until he stood down in 2022.

List of Sponsors

In 2021, SHARP carried out a fundraising campaign to install a power cable to the site. We were extremely grateful to those who donated, although ultimately the amount raised was not enough to carry out the work. Since then, we have started a larger sustainability project and received funding to cover 80% of the cost of our own solar array. The earlier contributions will be used to fund the remaining 20% of this work.

The following individuals and organisations donated towards this project:

Helena Aldis
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Valerie Boudet
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Graham Shuttlewood
Harry Taylor
Bronwen Trudinger
Charlotte Trudinger
Ronald J. Todd
John Ward
Sally Ward
Richard Wilkins
David Wood
Norfolk Archaeological & Historical Research Group

SHARP would like to thank all of the above for these donations. We would also like to thank those that have donated to our other fundraising campaigns, such as the sustainability project crowdfunder in 2024–5, and to all those who have donated to SHARP over the years.

SHARP is also incredibly grateful to the North West Norfolk History Society, who were originally planning to support our 25th-anniversary celebrations, which unfortunately had to be cancelled due to the Covid pandemic. Instead, they have funded the publication of this conference volume.

Introduction

Richard Hoggett

The year 2020 witnessed many important historical anniversaries, among them the 1,000th anniversary of the foundation of the Abbey of St Edmund in Bury St Edmunds, the 850th anniversary of the martyrdom of Archbishop Thomas Becket, the 800th anniversary of the translation of Becket's body into his shrine at Canterbury Cathedral, and the 400th anniversary of the sailing of the *Mayflower* from Plymouth. The year also marked the 25th season of fieldwork for the Sedgeford Historical and Archaeological Research Project (SHARP), a milestone celebrated with a silver-anniversary conference, the proceedings of which are presented in this volume.

Unfortunately, 2020 will also be remembered for the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic, the global impacts of which continue to affect us today and which ultimately prevented any fieldwork being undertaken during the 25th summer season. In early 2022, an even greater blow was dealt by the untimely death of SHARP's founder-director, Neil Faulkner, whose influence extended to every aspect of the project. As architect of the anniversary conference and the co-editor of these proceedings, this volume is published in his memory.

SHARP Focus

In the long, hot summer of 1996, the Three Lions were rampant, the Battle of Britpop raged and Cool Britannia ruled the waves. While John Major presided over the dying months of a tired Conservative government mired in scandal and divided over Europe, Gareth Southgate's infamous missed penalty saw the England football team knocked out of the Euros by a newly reunified Germany. The front-pages of the tabloid press were dominated by the Spice Girls and the bitter rivalry between Blur and Oasis, which culminated in Oasis performing to 250,000 people over two nights at Knebworth, an event which has since been mythologised as 'the landmark gathering for a generation'.

That same summer, a quiet corner of north-west Norfolk witnessed a different kind of 'landmark gathering': the first field season of what was then known as the Sedgeford Hall Archaeological Research Project, rebranded the following year as the Sedgeford Historical and Archaeological Research Project (Figure 1). The origins of SHARP have

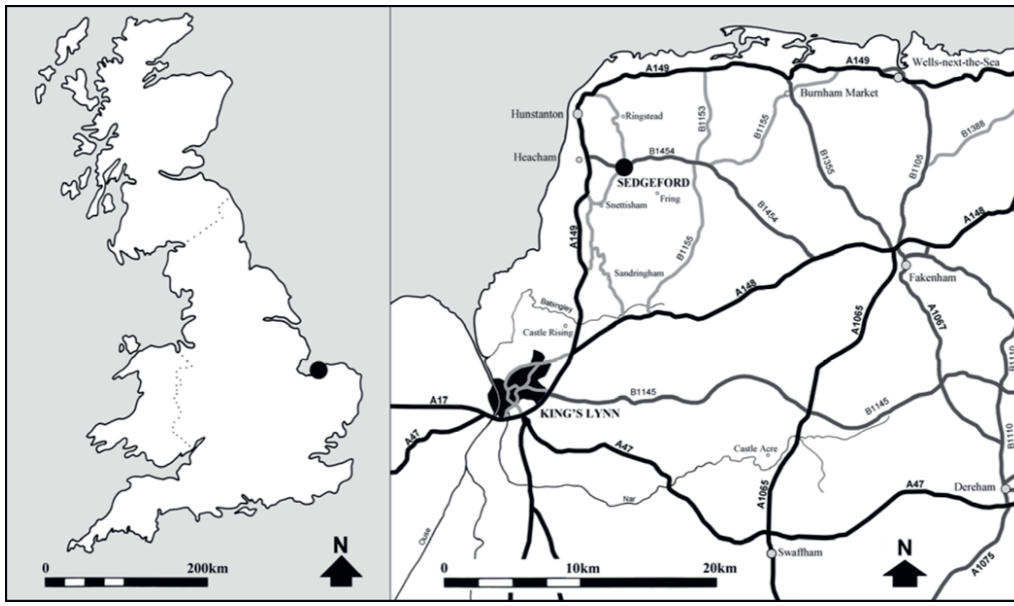

Figure 1. The location of Sedgeford in north-west Norfolk. (SHARP Archive)

been well rehearsed, resulting from a chance meeting between the then-landowners, Bernard and Susan Campbell, and founder-director Neil Faulkner in a bar overlooking the Bay of Naples (Faulkner *et al.* 2014: ix–x). Neil was looking for somewhere to start an archaeological excavation and the Sedgeford Hall estate encapsulated a rich archaeological landscape; the rest, as they say, is history (and archaeology)!

Since its inception, SHARP has been described, in adjectivally rich terms, as a 'long-term, multi-period, multi-disciplinary research project' focussed on investigating the full range of human history in a typical Norfolk parish, with the project's investigations being driven by a Mallory-esque 'because it's there' approach. During the last 25 years, the project has carried out extensive fieldwork across the parish, the locations of which are shown in Figure 2 and summarised below. Of course, SHARP isn't and was never just about historical and archaeological research. From its earliest days, Neil Faulkner wanted the project to be a socio-political experiment, in which everyone who participates in the project has an equal voice and vote in its running. Coining the phrase 'Democratic Archaeology' to describe this ethos, alongside the fieldwork results Neil keenly documented the development of the project itself, including the weathering of several 'political crises', with a social-anthropologist's eye (Faulkner 2000; 2002; 2009; Faulkner *et al.* 2014: ix–xiv).

In its early days, the main research focus of the project was the excavation of the Middle Anglo-Saxon Christian cemetery and associated settlement features in the Boneyard and Reeddam, on the southern side of the river valley (Figure 2, nos 2 and 3). These had first been investigated by John Hurst, Peter Jewell and Don Brothwell in the

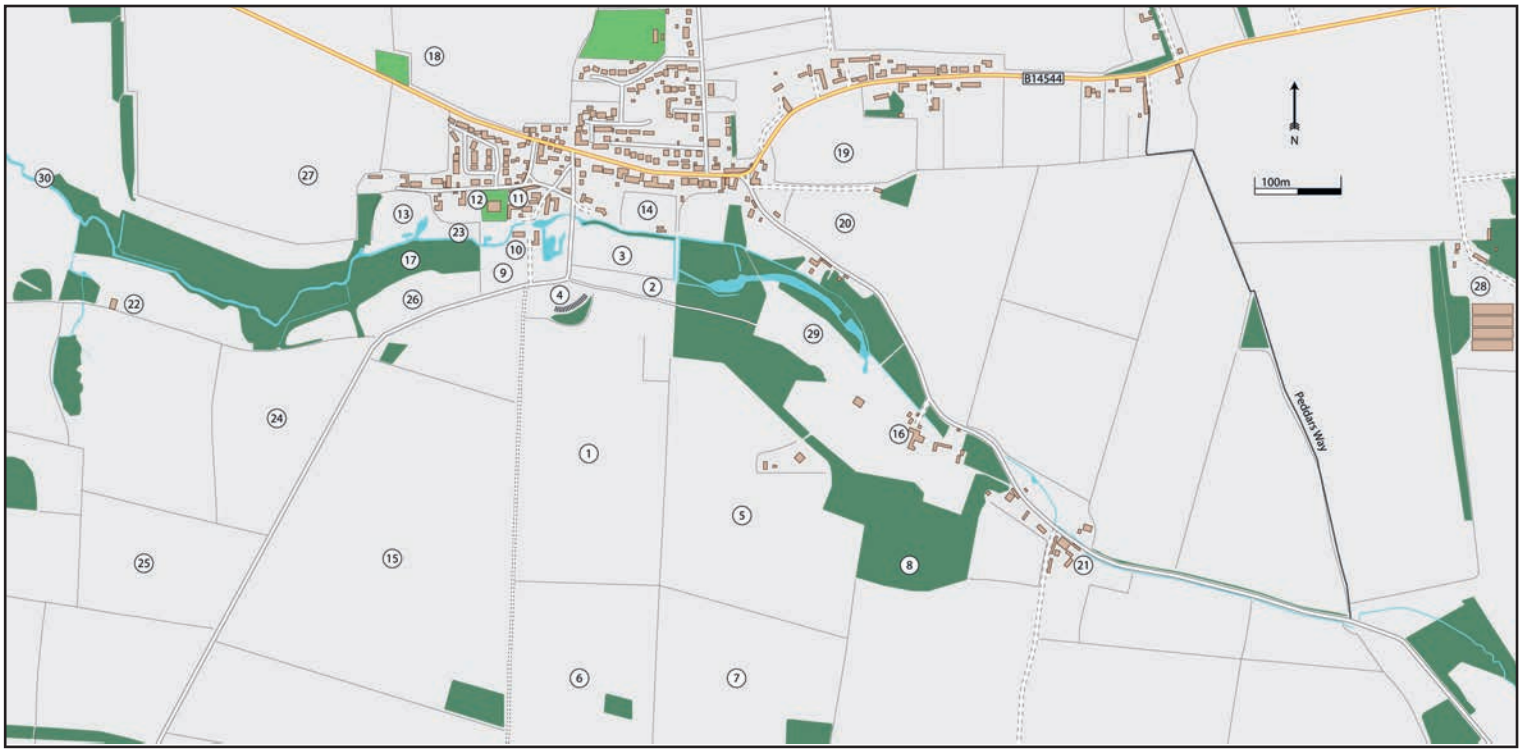

Figure 2. Locations within Sedgeford where SHARP has conducted fieldwork. (SHARP Archive)

1. Chalkpit Field; 2. Boneyard Field; 3. Reeddam; 4. Chalkpit Quarry; 5. Hall Field; 6. Shernborne Breck; 7. Polar Breck; 8. Hall Woods; 9. Saggy Horse Field; 10. West Hall; 11. West Hall Paddock; 12. Church of St Mary the Virgin; 13. Ladywell Field; 14. Allotment Field; 15. West Hall Field; 16. Sedgeford Hall; 17. Sedgeford Carr; 18. Susan's Field; 19. Manor Rise; 20. Almshouse Field; 21. Glover's Farm; 22. Eaton Barn; 23. Dovecote Field; 24. Jolly's Field; 25. Sedgeford Road; 26. West Hall Long Meadow; 27. Cemetery Field; 28. Sedgeford Aerodrome; 29. Park Field; 30. Kyme Mill

late 1950s and 1960s (Cabot *et al.* 2004; Faulkner *et al.* 2014: 79–136). Cemeteries of this date are rare survivals, the majority of them being buried beneath 1,500 years of later churchyard burials. The inhumations excavated by SHARP remain one of the most important skeletal assemblages from the Middle Anglo-Saxon period and have been used in a wide range of research projects (e.g. Gretzinger *et al.* 2022). As is explored more fully in this volume, during the course of the last 25 years the excavations on the southern side of the river have expanded to incorporate a much larger area, revealing evidence for an extensive Middle Anglo-Saxon malting complex (Figure 2, no. 1), which has formed the focus of much of the project's more recent fieldwork (Figure 3; Faulkner *et al.* 2014: 79–136; Blakelock and Faulkner 2020).

The survival of intact Middle Anglo-Saxon features and deposits on the southern side of the river is largely due to the fact that during the Late Anglo-Saxon period Sedgeford's settlement focus was relocated to the northern bank of the river, where the medieval manor and the parish church were established. In order to understand this settlement shift and its consequences, the investigation of the medieval settlement complex in and around West Hall (Figure 2, nos 10 and 11) and St Mary's church (Figure 2, no. 12) also became important early research objectives (Faulkner *et al.* 2014: 167–214).

From studies of historical mapping and the field-names preserved in manorial archives, to geophysical surveys undertaken using home-made resistance meters, extensive fieldwalking and metal-detector surveys, SHARP has always taken a progressive approach to studying the historic landscape of the parish and its surroundings. Inspired by Mick Aston's Shapwick project in Somerset (Gerrard with Aston 2007), SHARP was an early adopter of archaeological test-pitting within residents' gardens to gain a better understanding of those areas of the parish now buried beneath later settlement (Moshenska 2005; Faulkner *et al.* 2014: 215–24). SHARP began during the infancy of the internet, in a period when few people had mobile phones (and even fewer had reception on the Boneyard), but as new technologies have emerged during the last 25 years SHARP's volunteers have embraced the technicalities of GPS survey, the use of Geographic Information Systems to manage digital mapping and Lidar data, and drone photography to bring greater depth and understanding to the development of Sedgeford's historic landscape. The results of their labours are also presented in this volume.

Although the Anglo-Saxon period has been and remains one of SHARP's principal research foci, within the wider parish numerous other avenues of investigation have been explored during the last quarter-century. The discovery in 2003 of the Iron Age 'Sedgeford Hoard', comprising 20 gold coins concealed within a cow bone, prompted an exploration of the Iron Age remains in the parish (Davies *et al.* 2004; Dennis and Faulkner 2005). These included the discovery by metal-detecting in 2004 of the 'missing' terminal of the Iron Age gold 'Sedgeford torc', the rest of which had been ploughed up in 1965; the two pieces have now been reunited in the British Museum (Faulkner *et al.* 2014: 35).

Figure 3. Aerial view showing the spatial relationship between the cemetery, settlement and malting houses excavation areas. (SHARP Archive)

For several years, SHARP excavated a Roman farmstead (Figure 2, nos 6 and 7), which revealed the remains of a corn-drying oven containing burnt human bone (Faulkner *et al*. 2014: 53–68). Representing either a Roman murder mystery or an opportunistic cremation, the work highlighted the important and wide-ranging influence of the Romans on the landscape of west Norfolk. The Peddars Way passes northwards through Sedgeford on its way to the Roman fort of *Branodunum* at Brancaster, and the canalised river flows westwards through the parish linking the Roman villa complex at Fring to the Wash. The impact of these features on the development of the Anglo-Saxon landscape is explored in this volume, too.

SHARP's interests are not only ancient and one of the most successful strands of the projects research has been the investigation of the First World War aerodrome (Figure 2, no. 28), which was established at the eastern edge of the parish in 1915 and subsequently housed the Royal Flying Corps (Rossin 2018). Extensive historical research and fieldwork conducted between 2009 and 2018 resulted in the erection of a memorial on the site under the auspices of the Airfields of Britain Conservation Trust.[1]

[1] https://www.abct.org.uk/airfields/airfield-finder/sedgeford/

Wider Angles

As is explored more fully in the papers presented in this volume, the Middle (AD 650–850) and Late (AD 850–1066) Anglo-Saxon periods comprise one of the most fundamentally important periods in the establishment of the East Anglian landscape. This period saw the transition from the ephemeral, localised and largely transitory practices of the Early Anglo-Saxon (AD 410–650) period, which gave way to the emergence of the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms, the foundation of towns, bishoprics, monastic houses, churches and almost all of the settlements which we know today. It saw the conversion of the population to Christianity, the establishment of specialised means of production, the widespread use of coinage, significant advancements in farming and fenland drainage, and the implementation of laws, language and local administration. The period was also punctuated by the arrival of the Vikings and the imposition of the Danelaw, before East Anglia became part of the newly forged kingdom of England in the later tenth century. Indeed, by the time of the Norman Conquest in 1066, it is fair to say that much of the East of England as we recognise and understand it today was well established, as is reflected in the detailed entries recorded in the folios of Domesday book.

The dramatic increase in the evidence for and our understanding of Anglo-Saxon East Anglia which have occurred during SHARP's first 25 years are reflected in the various iterations of the *Regional Research Framework* which have been published since the late 1990s (Wade 1997; 2000; Ayers 1997; 2000; Medlycott 2011: 49–59). The latest version of the *Regional Research Framework* was revised between 2018–2020 and was published online in 2021.[2] In the new *Framework*, the Anglo-Saxon period is sub-divided into assessments of the Early Anglo-Saxon period, written by Catherine Hills,[3] and the Middle and Late Anglo-Saxon periods, written by the current author with significant input from Gareth Davies.[4]

Like all pre-industrial societies, the primary focus of the Middle and Late Anglo-Saxon economy was agricultural production, combining arable and pastoral regimes, with the vast majority of the population actively engaged in husbandry of some kind. While archaeological excavations have routinely collected and analysed faunal assemblages and environmental samples from Middle and Late Anglo-Saxon sites, enabling detailed interpretations to be developed on a site-by-site basis, until comparatively recently the vast majority of these data have sat in grey literature reports and archaeological archives. Fortunately, the past decade has seen a resurgence of interest in the fundamental subject of Anglo-Saxon agricultural practices, with a particular emphasis on farming regimes, and several studies have been undertaken which have attempted to use primary excavation data of this kind and synthesise it to produce regional and national overviews of the subject (Williamson 2013). These are subjects to which archaeological fieldwork is able to contribute a great deal, but the best

[2] https://researchframeworks.org/eoe/
[3] https://researchframeworks.org/eoe/resource-assessments/early-anglo-saxon/
[4] https://researchframeworks.org/eoe/resource-assessments/middle-and-late-anglo-saxon/

surveys have been those which are able to combine archaeological evidence with corroborative historical sources.

An overarching synthesis of Anglo-Saxon farms and farming practices has been published by Banham and Faith (2014), in which they present the evidence for the different agricultural practices undertaken by the Anglo-Saxons, the crops grown, animals reared and products obtained. These are complemented by landscape-type-based analyses of the balances struck between arable and pastoral practices in different regions across the country, including the East of England, from which numerous case-studies have been drawn. Their work is complemented by the ongoing work of Pam Crabtree (2010; 2012; 2013), who has published a series of analyses of animal husbandry across Middle Anglo-Saxon East Anglia, derived from faunal assemblages collected at key archaeological sites, including Brandon (Suffolk), Wicken Bonhunt (Essex) and Ipswich.

Perhaps the most significant, and certainly the most wide-ranging and detailed analysis of Anglo-Saxon farming in the East of England is that undertaken by Mark McKerracher, whose doctoral research at the University of Oxford (2014) and subsequent books (2018; 2019) examined the transformation of farming practices during the Middle Anglo-Saxon period. Taking the eastern region as one of two large case-study areas, McKerracher uses archaeological data – excavated features, faunal assemblages and environmental samples – from a wide range of East Anglian sites to present sub-regional analyses of farming practices, animal husbandry and crop cycles (McKerracher 2018). What emerges from the data is that the Middle Anglo-Saxon period in the East of England, like other places in lowland England and the Continent, witnessed an agricultural revolution which saw farming spread and intensify throughout the landscape, adapting its practices to differing terrains and landscape types in the process.

In order to better understand the mechanisms behind this agricultural revolution and address the questions of when, where and how these developments occurred, the European Research Council-funded *Feeding Anglo-Saxon England* (*FeedSax*) project was undertaken at the Universities of Oxford and Leicester between 2017 and 2022. The *FeedSax* project applied a suite of science-based techniques, such as stable-isotope analysis and functional-weed ecology, to preserved seeds, animal bones and pollen, in order to generate the first direct evidence for how crops were grown and livestock were kept in this transformative period of agricultural history.[5] The results of the project were presented at a two-day online conference held in December 2020, the proceedings of which were published in 2022 and are available via Open Access (McKerracher and Hamerow 2022).[6] Several of the contributors to the present volume were either directly involved with the *FeedSax* project or contributed Sedgeford-related papers to the *FeedSax* conference and the volume contains much which is of relevance to the ongoing research at SHARP.

[5] https://feedsax.arch.ox.ac.uk/index.html
[6] https://liverpooluniversitypress.co.uk/doi/book/10.3828/9781802077230

The 25th-Anniversary Conference

Since its inception, SHARP has held summer lecture series during the excavation season and has regularly hosted one-day conferences focussing on particular themes in the project's ongoing research, such as the Anglo-Saxon church (2001) and Anglo-Saxon burial practices (2003). These conferences have often attracted a range of speakers from across the discipline and have always been well attended. As SHARP's 25th fieldwork season approached in 2020, it was decided to hold a celebratory silver-anniversary conference to mark the occasion and, given the project's focus on agricultural production and malting in particular, it was considered appropriate that this conference should focus on the agricultural economy of the Middle Anglo-Saxon period.

Sponsorship for the conference was kindly provided by the North West Norfolk History Society, who have also sponsored the production of this publication.[7] Aptly, the Maltings in the Norfolk coastal village of Wells-next-the-Sea was booked and a panel of speakers duly arranged. The running-order of the conference was structured around three sessions, each focussing on a different aspect of the Middle Anglo-Saxon agricultural economy. The first session comprised a series of presentations setting out the latest results from the ongoing fieldwork and scientific analyses at Sedgeford. The second session took a broader view, setting the Sedgeford evidence within its regional context. The third session addressed the national context, and contained papers drawing upon large-scale research projects and offering models of the Anglo-Saxon economy.

Then, the Covid-19 pandemic struck. Overnight, all in-person events were cancelled as lockdowns and social distancing were enforced. The 2020 excavation season had to be cancelled and the plans for the conference were put on hold. Not to be deterred, like many groups and organisations facing similar restrictions, the organisers of the conference decided to switch the event to an online format, using Zoom, and the conference went ahead more-or-less as planned on 14 November 2020.

As many discovered during lockdown and since, while an online format somewhat reduces the personal contact inherent in such events, it does have the benefit of opening up the event to a truly global audience and enables people to participate who otherwise would not necessarily be able to make the in-person journey to the venue. Given the international character of SHARP's volunteer base and the relatively remote nature of Sedgeford itself, with hindsight this enforced switch of format was something of a blessing in disguise. Working on a pay-what-you-can basis and freed from the constraints of physical travel to north Norfolk in November, the online version of the conference attracted an audience of some 220 people from across the UK, and also participants from elsewhere in Europe, Canada and Australia.

[7] https://www.nwnhistorysociety.com/

The conference having been held to mark SHARP's 25th season in 2020, the publication of these proceedings coincides with the 30th season in 2025. Those familiar with publications such as this will appreciate that such a time-lag, while not desirable, is not unusual and we are fortunate that many of the original contributors to the conference and additional contributors were willing and able to supply written versions of their papers for this volume. Other speakers at the conference, including Debby Banham, Tim Pestell and John Blair, had or have since published the results of their researches elsewhere (e.g. Banham and Faith 2014; Pestell 2017; Blair 2018).

The decision to publish these proceedings with Archaeopress was made very early in the process, as their ethos is considered to be a very good fit with SHARP's own ideology. Consequently, this book is being published in paperback for those who wish to buy their own copy and is also being published online via Open Access, making the volume freely accessible to anyone who wishes to read it. This approach to 'access for all' is thoroughly in keeping with the tenets of Democratic Archaeology and many of SHARP's other publications are similarly available online via the project website.[8]

Like the conference, the papers in this volume fall into three groups, providing local, regional and national perspectives on the agricultural landscape and economy of the Middle Anglo-Saxon period.

Part I presents the results of two major strands of research undertaken by SHARP, focussing on different aspects of the Anglo-Saxon economy and landscape in and around Sedgeford. In the first paper, Eleanor Blakelock and Hannah Caroe combine their conference presentations to explore the archaeological remains and archaeobotanical evidence excavated from the Middle Anglo-Saxon malting complex on the southern side of the river. Their paper is complemented by an analysis of the development of the Anglo-Saxon landscape in the Sedgeford area, which has been compiled from a variety of different documentary sources and episodes of fieldwork by John Jolleys, Brian Fraser, David Wood and Kathyrn Oliana.

Part II takes a broader perspective and places the evidence from Sedgeford within the wider context of Anglo-Saxon East Anglia. Gareth Davies draws upon the fieldwork he conducted at SHARP and subsequently across west Norfolk to give an account of the changing approaches to and perceptions of the Middle Anglo-Saxon period which have occurred during the last 25 years. This is complemented by a commissioned paper from Sue Anderson, which provides an up-to-date assessment of Ipswich Ware, informed by the results of the Ipswich Ware Project (Blinkhorn 2012), more recent excavations in Ipswich and elsewhere, and the author's own doctoral research (Anderson 2024).

[8] https://www.sharp.org.uk/publications

Part III considers wider aspects of the Anglo-Saxon economy. Matilda Holmes and Helena Hamerow draw upon their research undertaken as part of the *FeedSax* project to provide a zooarchaeological perspective on agriculture and trade in Anglo-Saxon England. In our final paper, Neil Faulkner sets out in his characteristically ebullient fashion his hypothetical model for the development of the political economy of Middle Anglo-Saxon England which grew out of his fieldwork at Sedgeford. This paper forms a pair with that also published posthumously in the *FeedSax* conference volume (Faulkner 2022) and it is to be regretted that we will not get to see how this model might have been refined in light of further research and discussion.

Following the conference, Neil became very ill with an aggressive form of lymphoma and he passed away in February 2022. Neil remained industrious throughout the period of his illness and we are fortunate that he was able to provide a finished draft of his paper and was also able to play an active role in editing some of the other papers presented in this volume. In recognition of the great debt which the Sedgeford project and many of the individual contributors to this volume owe to Neil, the following section presents a selection of the tributes paid to Neil by members of the SHARP community, and we are pleased to be able to dedicate this volume to his memory.

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