

## Fieldwork Report of the ASKED Project 1999 – 2000

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The Anglo-Saxon Kent Electronic Database (ASKED) is a collaboratively-built research tool, developed to facilitate the respective PhD projects of Stuart Brookes, investigating trade and emporia in Anglo-Saxon East Kent, and Sue Harrington, examining aspects of gender and craft production in early Anglo-Saxon England. The period October 1999 to May 2000 was spent in museum stores and other venues, seeking to re-assemble the site archives of 47 partially and fully excavated cemetery sites from east Kent, dating to the period 450 – 750 AD, and catalogue finds from the few settlement sites of the period. From this base, the building of ASKED as a fully contextualised dataset will be carried out in the second phase of the project. The intention here is to enter as fully as possible all the artefactual data, structured back into discrete grave groups and dated according to the latest available information.

The fragmented excavation and publication history of this key area for early Anglo-Saxon archaeology has, however, made this exercise of data retrieval problematic. Published cemetery sites include, for example, those excavated by the antiquarian Brian Faussett, who, whilst demolishing swathes of seventh century barrow graves, did nevertheless record them to a standard in advance of his time. His collection was unfortunately dispersed, with some of the material from the extensive Ozengell cemetery not surviving the bombing of Liverpool City Museum in World War II. The excavations of the 1950s and 1960s have been variously published, particularly those carried out by Vera Evison and the late Sonia Chadwick Hawkes, although some more completely than others. More recently, the piecemeal excavation of East Kent cemeteries by various contracted field units, in advance of development, has further dispersed the archaeological material, occasionally separating the paper archive from the artefacts. Material from the important cemetery at Sarre has 6 different locations, with much of it now de-contextualised and mixed with that from other sites. Whilst approximately 300 published articles deal with material from these 47 sites, very few record to the level of detail required by our respective research projects. These details include the individual weights and raw material content of all the artefacts in a grave good assemblage, the textile fragments adhering to them in mineral replaced form, together with the exact locations thereof and the details of the tool types that appear in the graves from the sixth century onwards.

A backlog of unpublished excavation material from significant cemetery sites has built up over the last 20-30 years, during which time material may have been mislaid, misidentified, deteriorated or become subject to dispute regarding interpretation or ownership. Researchers have, in the interim, been allowed access to discrete parts of the material, pending publication, such as the spears and certain brooches. This has served, however, to restrict the research agenda to a dominant, perhaps historicist, one of typology and cultural affiliations. The major aim of the ASKED project, based on the readily usable Microsoft ACCESS database package, is to unify all of the disparate strands of the data to facilitate different theoretical approaches and broader

research agendas. Through the use of the computer, it is possible, also, to create new links to data generated by other disciplines, for example, geographical information systems and linguistics. Whilst such links may have been considered by earlier researchers, they were perhaps unrealisable before now.

### **Fieldwork**

Thanks to funding for travel expenses from Institute Awards, the following were visited for the purposes of data retrieval: The Royal Museum, Canterbury; Maidstone Museum and Art Gallery; The British Museum; The Ashmolean Museum; The Institute of Archaeology, Oxford; The Powell-Cotton Museum, Quex Park; Dartford Museum; Folkestone Museum; Rochester Museum; Thanet Trust for Archaeology; Wessex Archaeology and the living room of a well-known field archaeologist.

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#### **a.) Methodology**

The fieldwork methodology has been to aim at complete recording of the archive for any site included in the database. To this end, weights and raw material content have been recorded for all the artefacts from the following sites, together with textile and weaving equipment data, either as an extension of reports already in the public domain or completely new data from previously unexamined material:

Bekesbourne II; Bifrons; Breach Down; Broadstairs Bradstow School; Broadstairs Valetta House; Chessell Down; Dover Buckland; Eastry Butts; Folkestone II Dover Hill; Grove Ferry Wickhambreux; Half Mile Ride, Margate; Holborough; Howletts; Lyminge; Marlowe Car Park, Canterbury; Mill Hill Deal; Monkton; Ozengell; Reculver; Rochester II Watts Avenue; Sarre; Shelford Farm, Hackington; Stodmarsh; Stowting; Tesco's, Mount Pleasant; Westbere; Wingham.

#### **b.) Object identification and dating**

The ASKED project has identified approximately 150 different artefact types that were used as grave goods in the early Anglo-Saxon period. To facilitate ease of identification of these in the field, a reference handbook has been developed for the major types, including drawings and dating information. This has allowed, for example, an updated and comprehensive listing of spear types found in Kent. The total number of objects examined in this period of work is in excess of 5000.

### **Future work**

The process of data retrieval and creation is ongoing, with fieldwork planned in the period to the end of the year 2000, which will encompass the remaining sites and settlement evidence. In the longer term, it is envisaged that ASKED, in its present format, could constitute, as a minimum, the basis for more detailed typological analysis, particularly for the more mundane but nonetheless crucial artefacts such as

knives, chatelaines and keys. The extraordinary wealth of the East Kentish cemeteries has yet to be fully explored, with potentially significant results for analyses of the period. The ASKED project is in a unique position to carry this out.