

# Information Sheet

Archaeology Series No. 21

## ANGLO-SAXON LINCOLNSHIRE 600-870 AD



*St. Paulinus baptizes the people of Lindsey in the River Trent (D. Vale)*

### INTRODUCTION

The period of 600-870 AD was critical to Lincolnshire's outlook and development. It saw the rise of the new kingdom of Mercia and the submergence of the old kingdom of Lindsey, the arrival of Christianity, and finally the coming of the Danish Vikings, first to raid and later to settle.

Lincolnshire was at the beginning of the period a much-divided area. The old tribal area of the Coritani which had survived under the Romans and which comprised a large part of the East Midlands seems to have broken up, and now the northern part of present-day Lincolnshire lay in the kingdom of Lindsey, the southern part being a group of minor states such as that of the 'Spaldas' (Spalding area) and the 'Gyrwas' who occupied the Fens bordering the Wash. These were later swallowed up by Mercia as it developed in the early 7th century.



*The principal Kingdoms of Anglo-Saxon England.*

Over the next two centuries or so Lindsey fell under the influence of its powerful neighbours, Northumbria to the north and Mercia to the west. It still retained its name, however, and probably a measure of independence and is today commemorated by the districts of East and West Lindsey. By the 9th century it lay in the front line of Viking invasion and settlement, which in time broke the power of the northern and midland kingdoms and opened up the way for the rise of Wessex.

Various places might be suggested as the capital of the kingdom of Lindsey. Lincoln is an obvious choice, defended as it was by the surviving Roman walls, but Caistor or Horncastle are other possibilities. Indeed it is clear from other kingdoms that there might be a number of 'palaces' situated in strategic points.



*Coin of King Aldfrith of Lindsey c 790AD.*

A silver coin struck in the name of 'Aldfrith' may belong to King Aldfrith of Lindsey, a sub-king under the control of Mercia, who witnessed a charter of King Offa c. 790. A number of the earlier kings are known by name, but their dates and actions and even in some cases, actual existence, are obscure.

Geoting	Cueldgils
Godulf	Cueldgilsing
Godulfing	Caedbaed
Finn	Caedbaeding
Finning	Bubba
Friothulf	Bubbing
Friothulfing	Beda
Frealaf	Beding
Frealafing	Biscop
Woden	Biscopping
Wodning	Eanferth
Vinta	Eanferthing
Vinting	Eatta
Cretta	Eatting
Cretting	Aldfrith

We know little about the other centres of power in the area now covered by South Lincolnshire, but one small piece of evidence exists: an elaborate ceremonial whetstone was found at Hough-on-the-Hill near Grantham, and may indicate a princely owner in that area.



*Ceremonial Whetstone, Hough-on-the-Hill.*

In the 9th and 10th centuries the whole of eastern England fell gradually under Danish control and Lincolnshire now lay in the area known as the Territory of the Five Boroughs; two of these Boroughs were Lincoln and Stamford.

## BURIALS

A great deal of our information for the early Anglo-Saxon period comes from the burial of the dead. Both cremation and inhumation were practised and it is often the offerings or grave goods buried with the dead which give us the most information on dress, clothing, weapons and the status of individuals. A number of the great pagan cemeteries run on from the 5th to the late 6th or early 7th centuries but the arrival of Christianity in the middle of the 7th century eventually put a stop to the practice of burying grave-goods. However, it is unlikely that the whole population became Christian at once, or that burial with grave goods ceased instantly. Indeed the discovery of a robbed grave in the early church of St. Paul-in-the-Bail, Lincoln, where the robbers had missed or ignored an elaborate hanging-bowl, suggests the opposite.



*Elaborate brooches from Ruskington and Partney.*

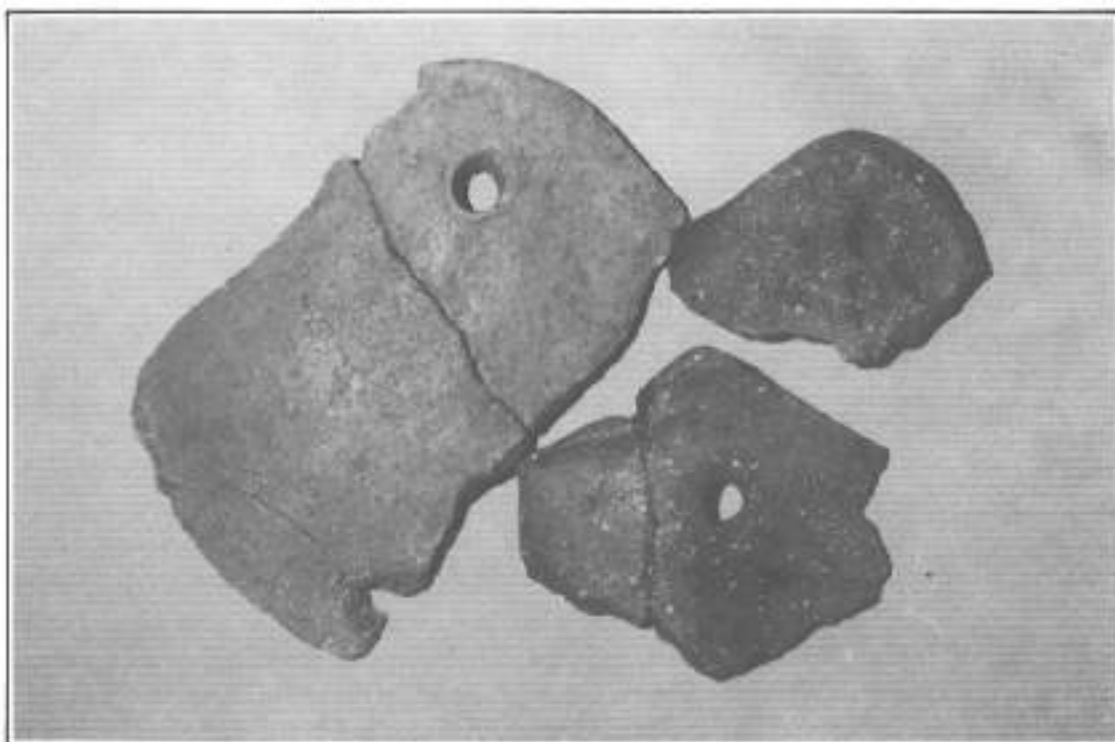
Among the latest pagan burials excavated in Lincolnshire are those at Ruskington, Partney and Laceby, all dating from the period around 600 AD, and notable for their large and elaborate brooches. Others at Riby and Tetford may belong to the period of pagan/Christian overlap. A burial excavated in 1850 at Caenby lay under a large barrow and its elaborate grave-goods suggest that the person buried there was of high - perhaps princely - rank. The style of the ornamental silver items from this site suggests a date in the 7th century. The finds are in the British Museum but the City and County Museum has replicas of some of them.



*Replica of silver roundel from the Caenby barrow*

## SETTLEMENT

It is only in recent years that settlement sites of this period have been recognized in Lincolnshire, though it is undoubtedly the time when many of our present-day villages and in some cases churches began to take shape on their present sites. The difficulty has lain in identifying datable finds at a time when coins are excessively rare and metal-work of distinguishable decoration is far from common. Various distinctive types of pottery and of weaving equipment have now been recognized and so domestic sites etc. can be identified, though houses and villages must have been very much more numerous than present evidence can prove. Surface finds from the areas of a large number of deserted medieval villages now underplough indicate how widely settlements of the period abound. One of the major discoveries has been the recognition of a number of Middle Saxon settlements near the old coastline of the Fenland, an area where there was previously little evidence for early settlement after Roman times. Clearly areas of the Fen were being resettled by the 7th century.



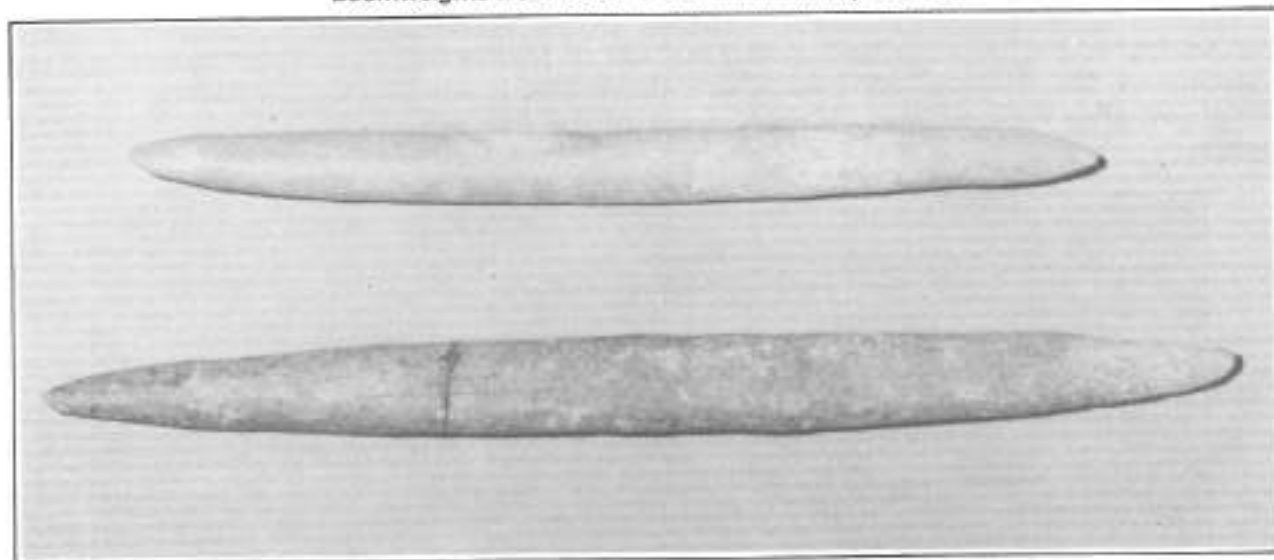
*Pottery sherds from Normanby-le-Wold, showing holes for suspending the vessels from cords.*



At Normanby-le-Wold, on the western edge of the Wolds, a site was excavated in 1968-9 after the discovery of Middle Saxon material, and this to date has been one of the most substantial rural excavations in Lincolnshire on a site of this period, though excavations in Lincoln have produced some evidence for life in the ancient urban centres. At Normanby hearths and a rubble layer, possibly a trackway to a spring, were found together with pottery, a bone weaving pin and a number of loomweights for use on a vertical loom. It should be noted that at this period virtually all cloth had to be manufactured in the home, so the discovery of loomweights is a clear indication of nearby dwellings. The site of the village of Osbournby and the manorial earthwork at Goltho with its superimposed buildings have also been excavated in recent years, and will greatly add to our knowledge when the results are fully published.



*Loomweights from North Witham and Bishop Norton.*



*Bone pin-beaters, used in weaving, from Normanby-le-Wold and Nettleham.*

## TOWN LIFE

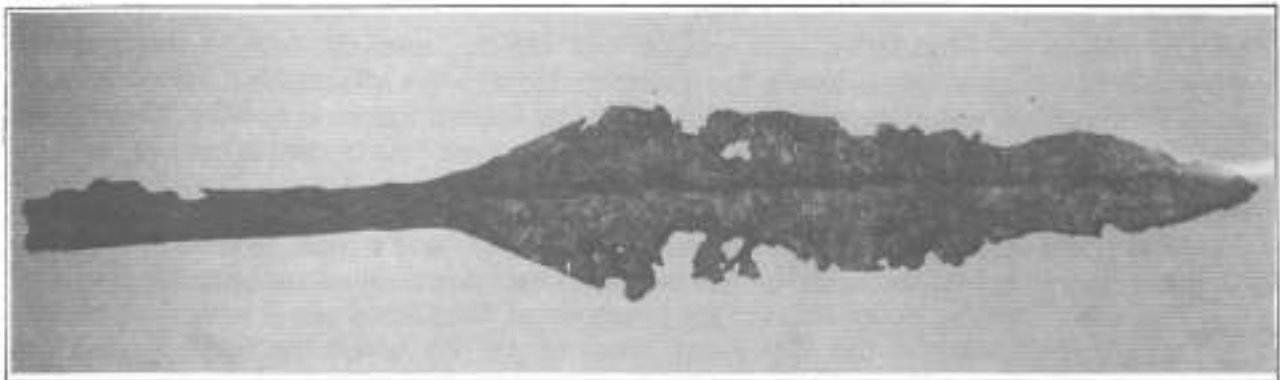
The nature of town life in this period is still largely unknown. Roman walls undoubtedly survived at Lincoln, Horncastle, and Caistor and possibly elsewhere. There is now no reason to suppose that these walls held the Anglo-Saxons at bay or provided Romanized enclaves within the county. New evidence shows that Anglo-Saxons were in and around both Lincoln and Horncastle before 600 AD. Probably sufficient Roman buildings survived alongside the newer and less durable huts to house the reduced population and it is likely that patching and making-do continued for several centuries. At Lincoln a stone church rose in the ruins of the old Forum and its site was excavated by the Lincoln Archaeological Trust in 1978. It was almost certainly the church referred to by Bede in his **Ecclesiastical History**:

'Paulinus also preached the work of God in the Province of Lindsey - - -. His first convert was Blecca, **Praefectus** of the city of Lincoln, with all his family. Here he built a beautiful stone church, which today, either through neglect or enemy damage, has lost its roof, although the walls are still standing - - -'.

These events took place in 628. The mention of a **Praefectus**, a Latin word meaning 'Reeve' or even 'Sub-King', suggests some sort of organized town life, though too much stress should not be placed on this one word. It certainly need not imply a survival of Roman town government. Little is otherwise known of the internal arrangements or population of Lincoln. At Chester there is evidence of a much reduced population and open spaces within the walled area. Even less is known of other Lincolnshire towns which were post-Roman in origin; at Stamford most of the archaeological evidence belongs to the centuries immediately preceding the Norman Conquest. The survival of towns depended on the surviving though rapidly decaying Roman road system, and on the continuing need for markets and centres of specialized industry.

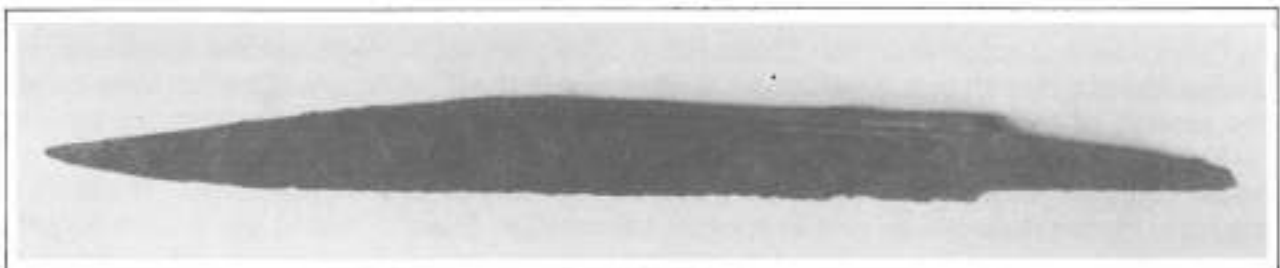
## WEAPONS AND WARFARE

There are no historically recorded battles in the area of Lincolnshire during the stormy years of the 7th century, though three important engagements took place in the frontier zone with Mercia and Northumbria at Austerfield and Hatfield near Doncaster, and on the 'Winwaed' (now the River Went). Lindsey may have been something of a backwater, watching the Great Powers fighting at a distance, and ultimately one of the prizes of the victor.



*Iron spearhead from Partney.*

Most of the evidence of weapons comes from late pagan graves, such as the spearhead from Partney. Swords are never common finds and there are none of this date known from Lincolnshire. A 'sugar-loaf' shield boss was found in the River Witham in 1787-9 (see Information Sheet no. 13) and is one of the few datable weapons found in Lincolnshire belonging to the Middle Saxon period. Warfare was carried out principally by infantry armed with spears and shields, though long knives (known as 'seaxs') were also used. One such was found in the River Witham in 1787-9 but is now lost, while another was found in the same river at Saltersford, near Grantham, and is to be seen in Grantham Museum.



*Scramasax from the River Witham at Saltersford, Grantham.*

## ORNAMENTAL METALWORK

Several splendid items of metalwork of 8th century date were found in the River Witham in 1816 and 1826, such as the Fiskerton triple-pins or the Washingborough hanging-bowl (see Information Sheet no. 13). A more recent find was that of a small 7th century gold pendant decorated with gold filigree and two garnets. This pendant, found at Glentham in 1979, is unlike any previous Lincolnshire finds but has similarities with examples from Kent and Derbyshire. All these items have been found out of context, but serve to show the wealth and command of craftsmanship which existed in some of the yet-to-be excavated farms, villages and towns.



*Gold pendant, set with garnets, from Glentham.*

## THE COMING OF CHRISTIANITY

The conversion to Christianity was carried out rapidly, and depended mostly on the conversion of the King. How deeply the common people were affected is hard to estimate. Pagan Northumbria was converted to Christianity by Bishop Paulinus and the King (Edwin) lost little time in organising the conversion of Lindsey, at that time under his control. In about 628 the conversion began, according to Bede:

'The priest Deda, abbot of the monastery of Partney and a most reliable authority, --- told me that one of the oldest inhabitants had described to him how he and many others had been baptized by Paulinus in the presence of King Edwin, and how the ceremony took place at noon in the river Trent, close to the city which the English call Tiovuifingacestir - - -'.

'Tiovuifingacestir' is usually equated with Littleborough, a village and former Roman town on the Nottinghamshire bank of the Trent some fourteen miles from Lincoln.

Edwin was later killed in battle and the pagan Mercians overran Northumbria and its satellites, but in turn their king Penda was killed in 655 and Christianity returned to both kingdoms. There were further changes and conversion may have had only moderate effects. (King Raedwald of East Anglia worshipped God and 'devils' - ie pagan gods - side by side in his temple). A Bishopric of Lindsey was established, but the site of the early Cathedral is unknown. Lincoln and Caistor are both strong contenders for the site, though Stow and Louth have at various times found favour.

At Caistor an inscription found on Castle Hill in 1770 (now lost) seems to have referred to the dedication of a church by a man named Egberecht in the 8th century. The 7th century saw the growth of monasteries at Bardney, Partney and elsewhere, and St. Guthlac took up residence at Crowland in 699 where centuries later a great Abbey was to stand. Many of our parish churches may go back to this time and immediately succeeding centuries. The story of the early monasteries will be told in another Information Sheet. During the 9th century the initial raiding and later settlement of Danish Vikings took its toll and the face of Lincolnshire was overlaid with new names and customs. The old kingdoms disappeared and the monasteries lay desolate till the 11th century.





*The last inscription from Caistor.*

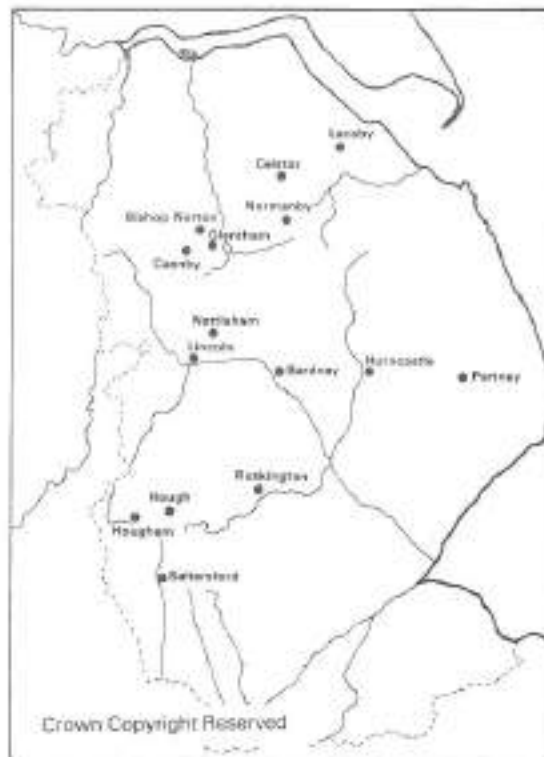
## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The writer would also like to thank Mr. P. Everson for reading and commenting on this text; any errors are the writer's own.

## SOURCES

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September 1980



*Places mentioned in the text.*

## LINCOLNSHIRE MUSEUMS INFORMATION SHEETS

Archaeology series - designed to provide details of the archaeological collections of Lincolnshire Museums and the contexts from which these collections have been drawn, for the general reader.

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- No.18 *The Bishop's Palace, Lincoln* by Timothy Ambrose (1980) 16pp
- No.19 *St. Mary's Conduit, Lincoln* by Andrew White (1980) 10pp
- No.20 *Lincoln: A Viking Town* ed. by Timothy Ambrose (1980) 8pp



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