

Research Strategy

by Keith Wade and Nigel Brown

I. Introduction

Each of the organisations forming the steering group (p.1) has been closely involved with research in the eastern counties. Production of the *Research Framework* was driven by a desire to provide a firm foundation for archaeological endeavour in the region both with regard to work arising from implementation of PPGs 16 and 15, and more specifically research-orientated projects. Once the *Resource Assessment* had established the extensive nature of the resource and the *Research Agenda* had demonstrated the scale and potential for future research within the region, the steering group clearly recognised a need for an explicit and coherent *Research Strategy* for the future.

The strategy set out below concentrates on those areas considered to be particularly important. It makes no pretence to be all-embracing, but aims to recommend priorities for research and ways in which these could be achieved. The research agenda has, amongst other things, identified a range of key gaps in our knowledge and the need to characterise the resource adequately. These are important issues, but data collection cannot be carried out, nor gaps filled in a conceptual vacuum, and the aim of research should be to increase understanding. Accordingly, project proposals arising from this framework will be constructed with synthesis and interpretation, both popular and academic, in mind. It is also recognised that development-led work will continue to form a very important contribution, and the framework should assist in providing a research focus for such work. Synthesis of the results of PPG 15/16 work, and

integration with other specifically research-orientated projects, will be essential.

If a truly integrated approach to future research in the eastern counties is to be achieved, all organisations carrying out projects in the region will need to be in broad agreement about how work is to be enabled and co-ordinated. This includes consensus about:

- organisation of future co-ordination
- communication
- approaches to Project Design
- partnerships
- IT and networking
- science-based archaeology
- education

Co-ordination

The long established Eastern Counties Regional Co-ordination Group, whose members have a fundamental curatorial role in the area, will continue to play a key role. In addition, it is considered advisable, that the group set up to prepare this framework should continue to meet. It may be appropriate to co-opt others to review and discuss progress in implementing the framework.

Communication

There is a continual need to raise general awareness of archaeological work taking place in the region, and promote and publicise the importance and interest of its archaeological resource. In the longer term, the steering group will aim to encourage a range of meetings and other methods of promoting and disseminating research in the region.

Approaches to Project Design

There is a need to initiate new research projects within the region and this is considered further below. However, it is important, while in no way discouraging individual initiative, that from the beginning a consistent approach is established to the organisation and development of these projects. Across the region there is already general agreement on an approach integrating PPG 16 style brief and specifications and English Heritage MAP II. This approach should be extended and developed, and embrace:

- identification and defining of a specific research topic with reference to the *Research Agenda and Strategy*
- production of a research project brief/outline
- agreement on a research design/specification
- project implementation
- monitoring procedures
- progress reports depending on length or scale of project
- production of full report(s), synthesis and communication of results

Partnerships

While the Eastern Counties Group in itself represents a major partnership for the organisation of future research in the region, it is recognised that many groupings will need to be developed to progress a wide-ranging programme of research. For many years local societies and individuals have made, and will continue to make, a significant contribution. Projects developed from this research framework should aim to encourage, develop, and where necessary revitalise, local involvement in archaeological work. Many links with agencies, societies and academic institutions representing specialist fields of interest, will need to be established. This should extend beyond regional and national boundaries to the level of Europe, since the eastern counties represent a key part of a region based on the North Sea basin.

IT and networking

It will be essential to ensure that the results from the diverse range of projects envisaged are readily accessible to all levels of users; this will be crucial to the creation and execution of projects. Accordingly, in the context of implementing 'Unlocking the Past for the New Millennium', the Eastern Counties Co-ordination Group should work to ensure that information is integrated with the appropriate existing national (NMR) and local (SMR) databases, and that there is compatibility of information

held on the region's SMRs. It is also essential that steps are taken to ensure that this information is accessible to a range of potential users.

Science-based archaeology

The resource assessment has established the complex nature of the archaeology of the eastern counties and many research questions on the agenda will only be progressed through a wide range of integrated projects. These will call upon many other disciplines, particularly in the fields of geomorphology, biology, geophysics (Bayley ed. 1998). This will involve both the application of existing techniques and the development of new ones. It will be necessary to establish links, to facilitate project development with appropriate partners and assist in the preparation of applications for projects in the region to the Science-based Archaeology Strategy Group for NERC grants and support. The English Heritage structure is vital in supplying regionally based advice on these issues.

Education

Developing the vast educational potential of the archaeology of the eastern counties will be a primary task. Initially this is likely to be low key and linked to specific projects where there can be either site visits or lectures to selected groups. In the long-term this will be broadened, along with other general communication initiatives, in order to reach a much wider audience. Museums will have a vital role here in developing interpretative displays, publishing collections, and developing greater access to collections for all members of the community. Funding bodies, especially the Heritage Lottery Fund, must see public benefit demonstrated within any project which it supports. It will therefore be necessary to ensure development of the full educational potential of all archaeological projects. This should include threat-led work — already within the region, development control officers in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough regularly include requirements for site visits and talks in their briefs for developer-funded work. If the full educational potential of archaeological work within the region is to be realised, effective partnerships with a range of institutions, including schools, universities, museums and libraries, must be developed.

II. Current initiatives

An analysis of current archaeological initiatives (Appendix) indicates that within the region:

- most projects are undertaken by the county archaeological services.
- most projects rely on external funding, especially from English Heritage and RCHME.
- most projects are concerned with management of the resource rather than specifically addressing academic research issues or gaps in knowledge of particular periods.
- most of the research projects, not being undertaken by county archaeological services, are low budget, using volunteers, students, etc.

The county archaeological services have always been conscious of the research value of their work, even though development pressure and limited funding has led to a largely reactive approach. For this reason local

authority-based research in the region has essentially followed national initiatives offering grant aid. Regional priorities have tended to be a secondary consideration. Similarly, discussion of the relevance and value for money of research projects has been dominated by national considerations.

III. Selecting priorities for research

What is abundantly clear, from the foregoing research agenda, is that the resources currently available are well below the level required to address all of the research recommended. This is always likely to be the case and priorities must be identified for research in the region.

The current widespread agreement in the archaeological profession about the need for research frameworks is a positive step in the direction of targeting resources to the areas of greatest need in relation to archaeological research.

If this exercise is to be successful, however, there needs to be a mechanism to decide how priorities are to be selected and agreement by the funding bodies to align their policies to satisfy regional requests for funding.

At a national level, English Heritage's criteria for selecting priorities is evolving. Its funding criteria for rescue projects, as set out in *Exploring Our Past* (English Heritage 1991), was the same as those which define a monument as being of national importance for the purposes of scheduling, namely:

- *Period*: it is important to consider for the record the types of monuments that characterise a category or period.
- *Rarity*: there are monument categories which are so rare that any destruction must be preceded by a record.
- *Documentation*: the significance of a site may be given greater weight by the existence of contemporary records.
- *Group Value*: the value of the investigation of a single monument may be greatly enhanced by association with a group of related contemporary monuments or with monuments of other periods. Dependent on the nature of the threat, in some cases, it is preferable to investigate the whole rather than isolated monuments within a group.
- *Survival/Condition*: the survival of archaeological potential is a crucial consideration.
- *Fragility/Vulnerability*: important archaeological evidence can be destroyed in some cases by a single ploughing or similar unsympathetic treatment and must be preceded by a record.
- *Potential*: on occasion the importance of the remains cannot be precisely specified, but it is important to document reasons for anticipating a monument's probable existence and so justify the investigation.

The more recently drafted research agenda (English Heritage forthcoming) builds upon these criteria for national importance, with the aim of developing an approach reflecting 'the greater determination to pursue research themes' and 'wider interests (e.g. in landscapes)'. Projects seeking English Heritage resources should now seek to address five primary goals, 'rather than merely identifying a site-type, period or theme' cited in their research agenda.

These goals are:

1. Advancing understanding of England's archaeology.
2. Securing the conservation of archaeological landscapes, sites and collections.
3. Supporting the development of national, regional and local research frameworks.
4. Promoting public appreciation and enjoyment of archaeology.
5. Supporting the development of professional infrastructure and skills.

Useful though these criteria are, it is necessary to attempt to address the concept of value for money in relation to the continual erosion of the resource. In prioritising projects in the context of regional research frameworks, it is recommended that in addition to the above points, the following five criteria are also considered:

1. The extent to which a project records data which would otherwise be damaged or destroyed (and which cannot be preserved *in situ* by more cost-effective means).
2. The extent to which a project addresses research questions (as outlined in the *Agenda*).
3. The extent to which a project utilises local knowledge and supports local expertise to further regionally specific research aims.
4. The extent to which a project benefits a wider public.
5. Cost effectiveness.

In relation to these criteria, certain projects can immediately be seen to offer better value. For example, it can often be argued that survey is better value than excavation, and multi-period survey is better value than themed survey as it allows the sharing of limited resources (organisation, travel) and inconvenience to landowners.

Research projects will fall into one or more of three categories:

- Management research — to inform management decisions about the conservation and presentation of the resource.
- Research which addresses threats to the resource — responding to specific potential damage from development, agriculture, afforestation, and natural erosion.
- Pro-active research — designed to further understanding of the region's archaeology by addressing issues highlighted in the research agenda.

IV. Management research

The list of current archaeological initiatives (Appendix), indicates that most of the research in the region currently falls into the first category, and is largely sponsored by English Heritage. The Cambridgeshire County Farms Estate Survey (Malim 1990) is a recent example of good practice from within the region, and has led to the beneficial management of twelve Scheduled Ancient Monuments and a number of non-scheduled plough-damaged sites.

The importance of preserving the resource which has not been explored is critical to the success of future research. The largest sums of money are currently being invested in Urban Databases and Extensive Urban Surveys, which are proving useful for management, conservation and generating proposals for further

research. Whilst the urban archaeology of the eastern counties is of great interest and importance, the region is predominately rural. In relation to certain other agents of destruction at work within the region, development might be regarded as a minor, if high profile, problem.

Ploughing and sub-soiling since the Second World War is by far the most serious cause of damage to the resource. In Suffolk, for example, where 66% of land is arable, it follows that a large proportion of the archaeological resource has been denuded. Nationally, cultivation is considered to be the single biggest hazard to the long-term survival of archaeological monuments, yet it is cited as the reason for carrying out just 4% of rescue excavations (Darvill and Fulton 1998, 236–237).

In addition, the surface scatters of artefacts which are crucial evidence in the pursuit of many of our research agenda topics are being constantly dispersed by ploughing and collection by metal detectorists, who, for a variety of reasons, often do not report their finds. Some areas of the region, *e.g.* Norfolk, have long had effective liaison with metal detectorists, and this issue is currently being addressed by the Portable Antiquities Scheme (DCMS 1999), with schemes in operation in Suffolk and Norfolk and proposals to extend it to other counties under consideration.

The Rural White Paper (DOE/MAFF 1995) seeks a doubling of the woodland area in England in the next 50 years. In Suffolk, for example, this could mean 15% of land in the county as opposed to the current 7.4%. Forestry has an important role to play in enhancing the region's environment, and the need to address potential conflict with preservation of archaeological remains is recognised in *England's Forestry Strategy* (Forestry Commission 1999), and the MARS report (Darvill and Fulton 1998, 241).

At present only a small proportion of the resource can be protected from damage using voluntary agreements, and there will never be a mechanism which fossilises the majority of evidence (*i.e.* on arable land) in its current state of preservation. There is, therefore, an urgent need for extensive survey projects before the evidence is further degraded or destroyed, as a precursor to selective protection and recording. Priorities for such survey include:

Coastal erosion

This is one of the most serious issues in the region as most of the coastline is eroding. English Heritage have recently agreed to initiate a project to survey the Norfolk and Suffolk coasts, a baseline survey project having previously been carried out on a large part of the Essex coast (Wilkinson and Murphy 1995).

Earthwork erosion

In this highly arable region earthwork survival is of the utmost importance. Little systematic survey of ancient pasture and woodland has yet been undertaken. This should be a priority as a precursor to a management and protection strategy (extensive survey in Norfolk and limited work in Hertfordshire and Suffolk indicates the high potential of such surveys).

Identification of monument classes

The region has many important monuments of unknown date — mainly cropmark enclosures and field systems, but including some major earthworks, only some of which are actually scheduled (e.g. Clare Camp). Establishing the date and function of these monument classes must clearly be a priority. The Essex Cropmark Enclosures Project (see Appendix) could be extended across the whole region as a precursor to their protection.

Historic landscape characterisation

Characterisation of the region's historic landscape types is a priority, and is already underway within the region (see p.57 and Appendix). A focus on landscapes offers many opportunities for academic and popular appreciation of the region's archaeological resource (English Heritage 1998, 1 and 14–15).

V. Threat-led research

Recording, funded by developers and achieved through the implementation of PPGs 15 and 16 in the planning process, will continue to be the source of most research in the region. How then should the research agenda influence development control decisions?

The problem with creating research priorities is that they lend importance to particular archaeological sites or geographical zones to the detriment of others at the point in time when they are agreed. This, after all, is their purpose. This would not be a problem if the archaeological resource was only being diminished by archaeological research. The reality is that rescue archaeology will continue to be necessary and decisions about the importance of the archaeological resource threatened by development will still need to be made. Any research strategy must, therefore, consider the implications for rescue archaeology.

In summary, the problem is that the research strategy lends a *relative* importance to parts of the resource, at a point in time, but development control/rescue archaeology has to try to deal with *absolute* importance (as far as that is possible in relation to the current state of knowledge and archaeological theory).

'Absolute' importance

PPG 16 places an emphasis on *in situ* preservation rather than excavation to preserve sites for future interrogation. In situations when preservation is not a feasible or reasonable option (in planning terms), a developer is expected to provide for a record of the site to be made, *i.e.* the data is transferred from the ground in which it lays to a series of records and finds stored in an alternative, secure, environment.

Although it has been little discussed, and no coherent theory has evolved, empirical evidence suggests that the response to a planning application specified by archaeological curators bears a relation to the perceived 'importance' of the deposits and/or structures.

The only yardstick of archaeological importance with any legal status is that used by the Secretary of State for Culture, Media, and Sport to determine whether a site is of national importance and qualifies for scheduling as an Ancient Monument. It seems likely that it is these criteria which influence current curatorial decisions, *e.g.* period,

rarity, documentation, survival/condition, fragility/vulnerability, diversity, potential, group value.

There is little doubt, however, that sites at the top of the activity hierarchy are those classed as the most 'important', because they are artefact and structure rich, such as historic towns, large Roman settlements or Anglo-Saxon cemeteries. This bias is reflected both in the sites scheduled and those excavated on a large scale. It is hard to deny that such sites provide data quantity and in many cases data quality, but this huge quantity has always posed problems for the profession. The perceived obligation to publish all the data retrieved proved too big a task in some cases, and in others led to a seemingly endless stream of data with little in the way of analysis in relation to research questions.

This has resulted in repeated attempts to introduce selectivity into analysis and publication, from the *Frere Report* back in 1975 to the more recent *Cunliffe Report* in 1982. These principles are expanded in *Management of Archaeological Projects* (English Heritage 1991). There has been, over the last few years, an assertion that rescue archaeology, following the introduction of PPGs 16 and 15, has been poor value in relation to research, and that more selectivity should be employed over interventions related to development threats. Indeed Richard Morris has recently suggested that 'archaeological remains deemed irrelevant to the questions are ignored' and destroyed without record (Morris 1997). This view, if it gained support, would present the archaeological curator with a major problem because it is only sustainable if the data which is not retrieved will either never be required, or is preserved. As it is universally accepted that research priorities will change over time, it is difficult to define what data will never be required and the only sustainable strategy, therefore, is to preserve (*in situ* or by record) the resource which is not to be interrogated.

In a situation when an area of a site (or all of it) cannot be reasonably preserved *in situ*, the obligation to preserve by record is paramount. Analysis and publication, however, should be restricted to data collected with potential to answer current research questions.

The broad variety of research aims included in the research agenda are intended to be the principal means through which the research framework will support and inform the curatorial decision-making process. This should focus development-led archaeology towards clear academic aims and systematised dissemination of information. English Heritage (forthcoming) have highlighted the need for synthesis in their research agenda. Synthesis of work undertaken as a result of the implementation of PPG16 and 15 is a high priority, and this might be best approached on a thematic basis.

Sites affected by non-development threats

The problem of recording sites threatened by agriculture, afforestation and coastal erosion has been largely ignored, probably because it is so big. However, a number of initiatives are taking place, or have been undertaken, within the region, including the Cambridgeshire County Farms Survey (Malim 1990), Fenland Management Project and survey in the coastal zone. Once the appropriate surveys have been completed (see Management Research p.53 above), management strategies can be prepared for each of these problem areas, recommending sites for preservation

and those for excavation with reference to the issues set out in the research agenda.

VI. Pro-active research

Aerial survey

Of the current initiatives, aerial survey is the only long-term research which is producing valuable new data about the archaeological resource on a regional basis.

Field survey

Despite the major Fenland Survey (Hall and Coles 1994), a variety of amateur work — much of it of high quality, survey carried out for evaluation purposes (Medlycott and Germany 1994), and projects such as those at Fransham, Norfolk, and in south-east Suffolk; systematic field survey projects have been virtually absent from large parts of the region.

In a highly arable region such as East Anglia, where surface scatters are crucial for the location of sites, field survey should be a priority. As all of the period papers in the research agenda recommend field survey, there is clearly a need to prioritise work. Highest priority should be given to:

- work on soil zones where surface scatters are known to be disappearing most rapidly.
- projects with multi-period objectives.

Excavation

Very little research excavation has taken place in the region in recent years, with the exception of those at Sutton Hoo, funded by the British Museum and Society of Antiquaries.

Currently (see Appendix), excavation is being undertaken by Cambridge University in the Lark Valley (Suffolk), at Sedgeford (Norfolk) by the Sedgeford Hall Archaeological Research Project, and at Cressing (Essex), by Essex County Council. In addition, various sites in the region are being excavated by local archaeological societies. There is clearly enthusiasm within the profession for new research projects to address elements of the research agenda, some of which have been a source of frustration for many years. Such projects are, however, very expensive and there are unlikely to be sufficient resources available for more than one project at a time. Consideration should be given to at least one regional/international project designed to make use of European Commission funding opportunities.

Themes for regional/international research projects

- origins and development of the agrarian economy.
- regionality and territoriality.
- origins of towns and trade.
- interaction around the North Sea basin.

VII. Review

The *Research Framework for the Eastern Counties* is a point-in-time statement which will require review at regular intervals.

Certain lessons for the future can be learnt from the process of assembling this document.

The *Resource Assessment* (Glazebrook ed. 1997) was made more difficult than necessary by two constraints.

Firstly, data about the current state of knowledge is not easily accessible:

- SMRs have backlogs.
- some data exists in paper copy only (drawings, photographs, etc.).
- some major excavations and surveys have not been published and do not have accessible archives.

Access to SMR data and project archives must be improved, including the digital imaging of finds drawings/photographs.

The backlog post-excavation/publication of major sites must be dealt with as a matter of urgency, e.g. Ipswich, Brandon, Pakenham and West Row, Suffolk.

Secondly, there has been a lack of synthesis of data, especially from the hundreds of evaluations and excavations conducted since the introduction of PPGs 16 and 15 (see *Resource Assessment* and Introduction, above).

VIII. Funding

This will also be a major issue and if there is to be a successful future programme of archaeological research in the region, reinforcement of the partnership approach will be required. Currently, most projects are resourced by a range of organisations who contribute a mix of direct finance and/or resources in kind, often with significant funding by English Heritage and, with the merger of RCHME and English Heritage, there is a single organisation which is the principal funding body for archaeological research in the country.

It is envisaged that this kind of arrangement will continue for many new projects, particularly smaller ones. However, larger, more complex integrated projects will need significant levels of support requiring 'new' sources of funding. This will involve discussions with organisations in a position to sponsor archaeological projects like the period societies, trusts, NERC, English Nature, Environment Agency, and Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF).

The HLF is potentially another major funding body for archaeological projects, and its *Archaeology Guidance Notes* were issued in September 1998. HLF will accept applications for the funding of archaeological work in five categories:

1. Fieldwork of all types in connection with heritage which is threatened by, or in the process of, environmental erosion. Environmental erosion as defined includes coastal erosion, ploughing and water desiccation.
2. The non-destructive record of vulnerable, little known, or poorly understood heritage of local significance. Examples cited include hedgerows, graveyards and artefact collections.
3. The enhancement of existing Sites and Monuments Records services in order to make information more accessible to users.
4. Synthesis of the results of past fieldwork or research exercises in a discrete geographical area.
5. The completion of analysis and the dissemination of the results of nationally significant excavations in cases where the excavator is no longer practising.

There is also a major opportunity to explore the potential for EU funding. The eastern counties, as an integral part of a region centred on the North Sea basin, are in a very good position to develop European partnerships.

IX. Future action

The present and the future are of course inextricably products of the past, and we cannot properly understand where we are going and why, without understanding our cultural origins. We have a duty to cherish and protect our historic environment, and I can assure you that our Government is committed to doing so. Alan Howarth (1999a)

I know that This World Is a World of imagination and Vision. William Blake (letter to Dr Trusler 23 August 1799)

Publication of this framework is not an end in itself but a first step, from which programmes of work will be developed to enhance understanding, conservation and appreciation of the region's archaeological resource. This final section of the framework sets out a range of issues and objectives, which all those organisations represented on the steering committee intend to pursue over the next few years.

Future work will be developed within a holistic vision of the region's historic environment, and as such is in line with current government thinking recently expounded in three ministerial speeches, to the European Association of Archaeologists (Howarth 1999a), the English Historic Towns Forum (Howarth 1999b) and the European Archaeological Council (Howarth 1999c). The importance of moving from a site-based approach to addressing the historic environment as a whole is clearly set out in *Sustaining the historic environment: new perspectives on the future* '...it is too easy to look only at separate sites, and to ignore the fact that the whole of our environment has been shaped and created by people and their work. The past, and its impact on the landscape, can be appreciated in every part of the country, not necessarily because of particular buildings or monuments but because of the detail, the fundamental grain and the basic character of the landscape in its entirety.' (English Heritage forthcoming, 3). Central to this approach is the concept of sustainability, the key principles of which have been summarised elsewhere (English Heritage forthcoming) and include:

- developing stronger understanding of the historic environment, and promoting wide awareness of its role in modern life.
- looking at the environment as a whole.
- deciding which elements of the environment are to be conserved at all costs ('critical' assets), or subject to limited change provided that the overall character of the resource is maintained ('constant' assets), or suitable for exchange in return for other benefits ('tradable' assets).
- ensuring that decisions about the historic environment are made on the basis of the best possible information.

Implementation of the framework will be governed by these principles. In particular the research framework has a key role to play in defining, for the region, 'critical, constant and tradable' assets.

The research framework represents a contribution to developing regional strategies which are concerned with the historic environment in the east of England. As such, publication and implementation of the framework are key objectives of the ALGAO East of England regional strategy (ALGAO 2000). The ALGAO strategy and the framework are complementary documents, which should be read and used in conjunction. Both documents may be viewed as supporting and augmenting the East of England Cultural Forum's draft Cultural Strategy (EECF 1999) and the East of England Development Agency's draft Economic Development Strategy (EEDA 1999).

It is intended that the steering committee which produced this framework will continue to meet, to develop, review and eventually revise it. It is important to realise that the framework is not intended to be exclusive, and it is anticipated that anyone undertaking work within the region will wish to refer to it. In order to encourage use of the framework, and effective review and updating, the steering committee will seek to augment and extend its representation.

As noted above (p.2), English Heritage's three key concepts for 'Advancing Understanding of England's Archaeology' (forthcoming, 16), together with the principles of sustainability, will underpin all work arising from the research framework. In addition, set out below are a number of key objectives central to the implementation of it.

Maximising the resources available

- Financial. As set out above (p.54) this will be crucial to the successful pursuit of research within the region. The eastern counties have a vital role to play as part of a region based around the North Sea and efforts will be made to develop projects with European partners. At a national level funding will be sought from English Heritage, NERC, the HLF and the period societies. Efforts will be made to explore opportunities for funding arising from the developing East of England regional structures. Locally there are a number of trusts and societies which can support archaeological work, and efforts will be made to engage them in research within the region. Most archaeological work within the region is now, and is likely to continue to be, developer funded. This framework has an important role in ensuring that the full research value of developer funded work is realised and it is anticipated that this will largely be achieved through implementation of the key objectives set out here.
- Personnel. Endeavour to ensure that the expertise and interest of all those working within the region are deployed and developed, to achieve best value in understanding the archaeological resource. In particular, to encourage local groups, societies and individuals to direct their efforts, expertise and enthusiasm towards achieving the aims of this framework.
- Academic. Encourage academic institutions within and beyond the region to pursue their research through engaging with the archaeological resource in the eastern counties.



Plate XI Aerial photograph of the causewayed enclosure on a gravel terrace overlooking the Thames estuary at Orsett, Essex. The corner of an Iron Age rectangular enclosure can be seen to the left of the photograph, the group of ring-ditches are of Anglo-Saxon date. Cropmarks of a trackway and rectilinear fields/enclosures can also be seen. The existing hedgerows and sinuous road are elements of a rectilinear pattern of land division, of ancient origin, characteristic of large parts of south and east Essex. Ostensibly a photograph of a Neolithic site, the complexity revealed is typical of much of the region, and is a good example of the need to move from a site-based approach to one which considers the historic environment as a whole.

(Cambridge University Collection of Air Photographs: copyright reserved, K17-U 117, 13 June 1970)

Synthesis

The need for synthetic research is constantly reiterated throughout this framework, and the pursuit of synthesis and interpretation is central to its implementation.

- Ensure that the wealth of information in the region's museum collections, SMRs and excavation archives is appreciated and accessible.
- Develop projects which utilise these resources to offer interpretations of the region's past.
- Ensure that where proposals for analysis are being prepared, opportunities for the inclusion and interpretation of the results of earlier interventions are explored.

Preservation by record

Ensure that threat-led fieldwork addresses clear research issues.

- Ensure that briefs prepared by curators identify areas of key research potential.
- Ensure that specifications prepared by contractors address areas of key research potential.
- Ensure that proposals for analysis explore appropriate ways in which data can be used to address key areas of research.

Research themes

Ensure that the potential of the region's archaeological resource to address major research issues is appreciated and developed. Many of these are set out in the *Agenda* (above), but it is anticipated that those for immediate attention will include:

- Origins and development of an agrarian economy. This region is central to an understanding both of the adoption/development of agriculture in the Neolithic and Bronze Age, and for later developments in the medieval and post-medieval periods.
- Settlement patterns and field systems. The region's distinctive patterns of fields, farms, hamlets and villages are vital to an understanding of past social organisation and economy, and form the matrix of the historic environment.
- Urban development. The region has a key role to play in study of the origin and development of towns, at a local, regional and European level.
- Finds Studies. There is a strong tradition of artefact studies within the region, and these will be developed both for their contribution to wider research questions and for their intrinsic interest.

Even before publication, preparation of the framework has set in train a range of initiatives, all supported by English Heritage, which cover the region as a whole or deal with specific areas of it. A Historic Landscape Character Project, whose work is complete in Suffolk, is underway in Hertfordshire and Essex and will be extended to include Cambridgeshire and Norfolk, and this will provide an important new baseline survey. This project will allow fresh appreciation and understanding of the rich

diversity of the region's landscape, and will underpin a range of other initiatives. Indeed, a Field Systems Project is already being developed which will run in tandem with the Historic Landscape Character Project (see Appendix). It will provide an opportunity to investigate the origins and development of the distinctive field patterns of the region for comparison with work already undertaken on the fields of the Midlands.

The framework is also providing a context in which attention can be focused on areas which had previously been somewhat neglected, since they form boundary zones between different jurisdictions. The Stour Valley Project is examining a large area of the Stour valley as part of MARS implementation (see Appendix). The first phase of work is underway and will provide a GIS-based synthesis and interpretation of the remarkable range of cropmarks in the valley. The area, which forms part of the boundary between Essex and Suffolk, is relatively unaffected by development threats but has seen intensification of arable cultivation. Later stages of the project will seek to engage all those with an interest in the Stour landscape in developing better management and protection of the cropmark landscape.

A project to consider the surviving extent and potential of the environmental deposits in the Lea Valley, and other northern tributaries of the Thames, is also under consideration. This will involve co-operation not only between Hertfordshire and Essex but with Greater London, beyond the area covered by this framework. The long coastline and numerous creeks and estuaries of the region are also a focus for current research initiatives. A baseline desktop survey of the Suffolk and Norfolk coasts is currently underway, and further work is also being undertaken around the Essex coast to augment the results of the Hullbridge survey (see Appendix). Amongst other things this work will enhance our understanding of the eastern counties as part of a European North Sea region, a concept which is being pursued in Europe with the development of Intereg projects.

These represent some of the major areas of new work which will further the aims of this framework. Numerous other initiatives are underway, many of which are outlined in the Appendix. There is a symbiotic relationship between the projects being developed, and the framework will have an important role to play in developing a dynamic and collaborative research culture, which will ensure that the archaeology of the eastern counties is increasingly appreciated and understood at a local, national and European level as the 21st century progresses.

Returning to the quotations at the start of this section, for our present purposes the key words from the first are 'understand' and 'understanding', from the second 'Vision' and 'Imagination'. To realise the full potential of the research framework, we must aim to prepare interpretations of the region's archaeological resource which advance *understanding* of the past at every level. To do this successfully will require *vision* and *imagination*.

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