

# The Story of Eastbourne

## Saxon Eastbourne

Use this box to explore and uncover the Saxon story of Eastbourne and the surrounding area.

Find a selection of real Saxon artefacts used and made by people in Eastbourne as well as suggested learning activities. This box also features digital files including an introduction to Saxon Eastbourne



Hundreds of burials dating from the early-mid Saxon period (c410-750AD) have been excavated in Eastbourne on the hilltops of the lower slopes of the South Downs. Many of these people had been buried with grave goods that ranged from iron bladed weapons to fragile and stunningly beautiful glass beakers. These artefacts show Frankish, Saxon and Romano-British influences and the study of the chemicals within the bones themselves show a largely local population, with a small proportion of migrants from northern Europe and individuals from Kent and Wales.

In contrast to the evidence of the people, evidence of settlement from this period is very scarce. In fact until 2015 there were just a few scattered finds. The Pockocks Field excavation revealed a number of sunken-featured buildings, associated with weaving tools and the footprint of a larger wooden hall that remains a mysterious enigma. The science from the bones and the fact that the only known settlement is on a site already occupied on and off for over 1000 years, would suggest a stable population, enhanced by but not replaced by migration.

The Hundred of Eastbourne was made from six Borghs or Boroughs. Upwick, Mill Beverington, Chalvington, Upperton, Lamport and Esthall.

Upperwyk and Upperton get their names from the settlements built on the banks of the Bourne stream. Other parts of Eastbourne get their names from the Saxon families who settled there, the Beoferings (sons of the Beaver) at North and South Beverington, the Ceolings (Sons of the Ship) at Chollington, the Eoferings (sons of the Wild Boar) at Yoverington or Yeverington.



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## Medieval Eastbourne

In 1086 as part of William the Conqueror's great tax record, The Domesday Book, Eastbourne, or more correctly Borne was a fairly large settlement with 88 households (at the same time Willingdon, now a much smaller settlement had 122 households) considerable agricultural land, a mill, fishery and 16 salthouses.

As only the head of each household was counted, the actual population of Eastbourne in the years after the Norman conquest is likely to have been around 400. We may assume that Borne was situated in the same location as the present Old Town but there is little actual evidence for this.

100 years later between 1160-90 a new Church, dedicated to St Mary the Virgin was constructed using Caen Stone from Normandy and this was overseen and at least partly funded by the Treasurer of Chichester Cathedral. For the next 500 or so this Office would have a great influence on the Church and held a large amount of land in the area.

It can be assumed that at this point the Town grew around the Church along the crossroads adjacent to it. However, Eastbourne has always been a Parish made up of a number of settlements and areas such as Horsey, Upwick and Lamport were all populated. Archaeological and historical evidence points to considerable growth of the Town over the 200 years

following the Domesday survey. The population of Eastbourne by the mid 1340's may have been over 1000, a figure that it would not attain again for almost 300 years.

By 1350 famine, war with France and devastating plagues, particularly the Black Death of 1348-9, had reduced the local population possibly by as much as 60% to around 400 or fewer. There is archaeological evidence of the abandonment of some houses at this time but despite the decrease in population, a further programme of building is carried out at St Mary's Church in the decades after the Black Death, leaving the exterior of the building pretty much as it can be seen today.

During the Medieval period, we start to see the names of individuals who lived or worked in Eastbourne for the first time. Indeed we can go back as far as 1054 when the names Levigar and Edgar are mentioned as priests at the Church in Burne.

Most of the personal names we have are from legal documents or those relating to the Church itself (there is a comprehensive list of Vicars of St Mary's). Some of the most enigmatic names relate to various legal affairs and these include John the Skinner, Thomas the Weaver, Ancelm atte Hulle, Richard le Rede and Britius Corneys.

Though most of the buildings of Medieval Borne were swept away by later developments, there is still evidence to be found. St Mary's Church is more or less a complete medieval building of 1160-1400, parts of Langney Priory may date from the 1100's, the undercroft of the Lamb Inn dates to the late 1300's and parts of The Old Gildredge Manor from the mid 1400's.



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All of the objects in this box were buried with people in the St Anne's Road Saxon Cemetery



2 x Saucer Brooches buried with a female aged 18 - 29. Saucer Brooches were usually worn in pairs at the front of the shoulders to secure a peplos style garment, usually worn by women.



Square Headed Brooch buried with a male aged between 30 - 45 and dating to late 5th or early 6th century. These brooches are often worn on the top of the shoulder to secure clothing by both men and women.



Button Brooch buried with a female aged 45+ dating to the 6th century. These brooches are usually decorated with human face designs.



Belt Buckle buried with a male aged 30 - 45 dating to the 6th century. It was found at the waist so probably held up a pair of trousers or over a woollen top.



Clothing pins found with (top to bottom) Pair of pins - child 6 - 7 years

Unknown sex 12 - 17 years

Female 30 - 45

Female 18 - 29

These pins would have held clothes together or in place

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Small pot buried with a child aged between 1 and 5 years old. We don't know what this pot was used for, it may have been buried with the child to take to the afterlife - perhaps storing food or drink for the journey.



Belt plate buried with a male aged between 18 - 29 years old dating to 6th century. This belt plate would have a buckle attached on the end and was found at the waist so would have been for securing a smaller strap or belt - perhaps for suspending a bag.



Toilet set of tweezers and ear scoop buried with a male aged between 30 - 45 years dating to 6th or 7th century.



Small buckle buried with a male aged 18 - 29 from the late 6th or early 7th century. Probably part of a bag