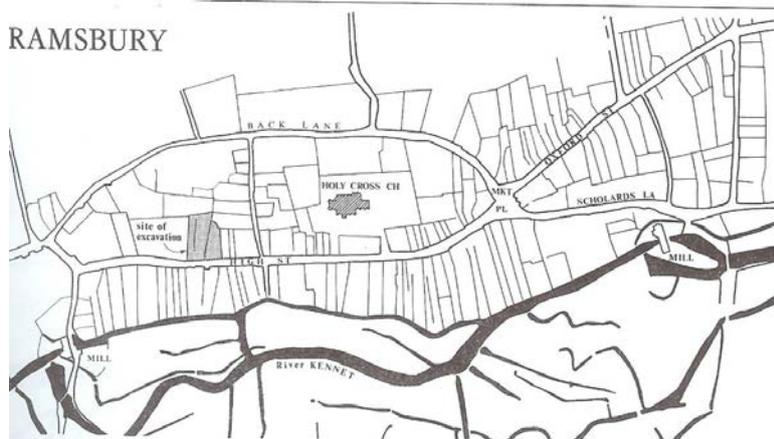


Ramsbury, Wiltshire: archaeology and history (notes for visitors, prepared by the Royal Archaeological Institute, 2017)

The road on the north side of the River Kennet east of Marlborough follows the river closely, until suddenly doing a series of right-angled turns, a typical deviation by a rich late seventeenth-century landlord in order to create a secluded park around his mansion, in this case Ramsbury Manor; the road runs past its grandiloquent gates (the house is private).

Ramsbury has an interesting oval of roads at its core, which may perpetuate a mid Anglo-Saxon perimeter around the minster church and (probable) royal estate centre. There are no early charters, but sculptures in the present church date to the ninth century and show



that it was already a major ecclesiastical centre before it was given to the newly created Bishop of Ramsbury in 909, the see serving Wiltshire and Berkshire until 1058 when it was combined with Sherborne and then transferred to Old Sarum. Also within the oval was a major eighth-/ninth-century iron-producing

complex, excavated in the 1970s, where ore was smelted – the most complete such Anglo-Saxon site yet found (Haslam 1980; map from Haslam 1976)



Inside the church, which presumably overlies the Anglo-Saxon cathedral, sculptures were found during rebuilding in 1891 either built into the walls or buried close by. All are 'Bath' limestone, so had been transported over 25 miles – comparable to some of the iron ore, which had come from about 20 miles away in the same direction. Horse bones at the site indicated their use for heavy transport. The sculptures include parts of cross-shafts and grave-covers, carved with animals and interlaced plants; one has a very worn Lamb of God. They are comparable to other Anglo-Saxon work, but are unique in the south of England for their quantity (Cramp 2006, 228-34; illustrations, coped ninth-century grave-marker with animal heads linked by a knot; reconstructed cross-shaft). None is inscribed, but the grave-covers, and probably also the crosses, must have marked the burial-places of important and wealthy people, and are attributable to various dates in the ninth and tenth centuries, but



owe nothing to Scandinavian influence as is sometimes claimed. Other features inside the church include tomb-chests, brasses and good examples of Purbeck marble.

References and further reading

CRAMP, R. 2006. *Corpus of Anglo-Saxon Stone Sculpture Volume VII: South-West England*, Oxford: Oxford University Press

HASLAM, J. 1976. *Wiltshire Towns. The Archaeological Potential*, Devizes: Wiltshire Archaeological and Natural History Society

HASLAM, J. 1980. A middle Saxon iron smelting site in Ramsbury, Wiltshire, *Medieval Archaeology*, 24, 1-68

These notes were originally prepared for the annual summer meeting of the Royal Archaeological Institute held in July 2016; see www.royalarchinst.org for further information. RAI members have access to the printed Report which contains syntheses of the significance of recent research to archaeological understanding of the county. The notes were prepared by David A. Hinton. Other on-line entries can be accessed through the RAI web-site.