

**Impact case study (REF3b)**

<p><b>Institution:</b> University of Oxford</p>
<p><b>Unit of Assessment:</b> UOA30</p>
<p><b>Title of case study:</b> Anglo-Saxon archaeology and history: shaping policy, informing the public</p>
<p><b>1. Summary of the impact</b> (indicative maximum 100 words)</p> <p>John Blair’s research on the history and archaeology of early medieval England has had a major impact on central and local planning policy. It has made several significant contributions to current practice as regards historic landscapes and building preservation (especially churches), and it is at the heart of the on-going debate about future policy reform. His publications are read and used by planning officers, policy makers, and by the general public – who have also come to know of his work through Channel Four’s <i>Time Team</i>. Blair’s research demonstrates the influence that academic history and archaeology of the highest scholarly standards can have on planners, policy makers, commercial archaeologists, and conservationists. Its public benefits include improved understanding, cultural enrichment, and conservation policies which are more sensitive to the heritage embedded in landscapes.</p>
<p><b>2. Underpinning research</b> (indicative maximum 500 words)</p> <p>John Blair’s People and Places project uses published and unpublished archaeological reports in order to redraw the map of Anglo-Saxon archaeology. Linking texts, landscapes and place names, Blair’s work has revised knowledge of Anglo-Saxon settlement across the whole of England. He has created the basis for a new understanding of Anglo-Saxon society and politics in the period 600-900 AD. A thread running through his research is the rediscovery and understanding of the historic landscape, and how people interacted with both their natural and their man-made environments. His work is also informed by a life-long interest in architecture and the applied arts and crafts.</p> <p>Since 1993 Blair’s most influential research has been in the following areas:</p> <p><b>The close study of Church buildings, and the Church as an institution in local society</b>  Starting with the essential <i>Church Archaeology: Research Directions for the Future</i> (1997), this strand of Blair’s research culminated in the seminal 2005 publication, <i>The Church in Anglo-Saxon Society</i>: “ambitious, meticulously researched... the essential starting point for future debate” (<i>Speculum</i>); “the definitive study for many years to come...” (<i>Journal of Interdisciplinary History</i>).</p> <p><b>Landscape history and archaeology</b>  Blair’s research into this area has combined traditional approaches (such as close textual study, survey and excavation) with the flood of new data offered by geophysics, palaeo-environmental studies, the Portable Antiquities Scheme, and the huge number of developer-funded excavations, to enlarge our understanding in unprecedented ways. Initially focused on Oxfordshire, where the archaeological survey of Bampton (1983-present) set new standards for this sort of research, his current and highly innovative Leverhulme-funded project <i>People and Places in the Anglo-Saxon Landscape</i> (2010-13) turned to look at the whole of England, with particular attention paid to the Mercian Midlands. What has emerged – notably in his spring 2013 Ford Lectures given to a large audience of professional archaeologists, conservationists, planners and interested amateurs, as well as academic historians – is a completely new map of Anglo-Saxon settlement patterns, which amounts to a step change in our understanding of England’s historic landscape, and in consequence how it can be managed, conserved and appreciated.</p> <p><b>Waterways and Canal-Building in Medieval England</b>  Blair’s combination of textual scholarship and archaeology, published as <i>Waterways and Canal-Building in Medieval England</i> (2007), demonstrated for the first time that canals were widely built in England during c.950-1150, and played a significant role in transport of bulk goods, effectively opening up a new subject of historical research and adding another 1000 years to their hitherto</p>

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known history.

John Blair has been Fellow and Tutor at Queen's College, Oxford throughout this period and was elected FBA in 2008 in recognition of his work.

### 3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

Blair, J. (ed.), *Waterways and Canal-Building in Medieval England* (OUP, 2007). (Major university press) [Available upon request]

Blair, J., *The Church in Anglo-Saxon Society* (OUP, 2005). (Major university press) [Available upon request]

Blair, J., *Bampton Folklore* (Merton Priory Press, 2001). [Available upon request]

Blair, J, "Later Anglo-Saxon Oxfordshire, 700-1100", *Oxoniensia* 65 (2000): 1–6.  
[\[http://oxoniensia.org/volumes/2000/blair.pdf\]](http://oxoniensia.org/volumes/2000/blair.pdf)

Blair, J. (ed.), with Carol Pyrah, *Church Archaeology: Research Directions for the Future* (Council for British Archaeology, Research Report 104, 1997). (Major academic series) [Available upon request]

Blair, J., *Anglo-Saxon Oxfordshire* (Alan Sutton and Oxfordshire Books, 1994). [Available upon request]

Grant:

Blair, John, Leverhulme Major Research Fellowship 2010-13 (for project 'People and Places in the Anglo-Saxon Landscape'): £149,720.

### 4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

The impact of Blair's research can be seen clearly in three main areas of public life:

#### Current planning and policy

Blair's work on churches and the landscape is **regularly cited in local authority planning documents**, of which Oxford City Council's *Urban Resource Assessment and Research Agenda 2011* is a notable example, Blair's work being cited more than 96 times [i]. To quote David Radford (Oxford City Archaeologist): "I definitely use [Blair's] work on a regular basis when dealing with central Oxford sites" [1]. As Graham Keevil (Archaeological Consultant for Blackburn, Rochester, and Salisbury Cathedrals, Christ Church, Oxford, and Tewkesbury Abbey) confirms, Blair's work, notably *Church Archaeology: Research Directions for the Future*, of which he is co-editor and part-author, is **a standard reference for diocesan and cathedral archaeologists** [2]. His research on canals has had a similar influence in that area. He has been a long-term member of several bodies concerned with the conservation and planning care of churches and archaeological sites, and has taken a leading role in working-parties for individual conservation projects. He has played a significant role in a great many decisions relating to specific sites and buildings, as well as in developing and applying high standards and good practice. To take one example, his research on the Anglo-Saxon landscape of the Bampton region in West Oxfordshire has underpinned the conservation and management policy developed by the Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire Wildlife Trust for the National Nature Reserve at Chimney Meadows (<http://www.bbwt.org.uk/reserves/chimney-meadows>).

His active engagement in many fields of conservation is evident in his membership of public bodies: currently he is a member of the Board of Trustees of the Marc Fitch Fund, the Oxford Cathedral Fabric Committee, and the Oxford City and County Archaeological Forum. He has been a member of the English Heritage Research Panel, the Advisory Board for Redundant Churches, and the Oxford Diocesan Advisory Committee.

### Policy formation

Blair's research project, *People and Places in the Anglo-Saxon Landscape*, which was presented to a large public and professional audience in the 2013 Ford lectures, has given him an unrivalled insight into the challenges of how best to manage development-funded archaeology so that the data it produces is not lost but becomes a national asset for future generations. Roger M. Thomas (English Heritage) invited Blair to speak on this issue to the Annual Conference of the Institute for Archaeologists in 2013 [ii], and *English Heritage* have recently commissioned him to produce a report on this topic. Its conclusions are already being fed into the formulation of future policy [3]. As Roger Thomas states, "[Blair's research] has reinforced the policy case for development-funded archaeology, demonstrating that the data it has produced will not simply moulder unread, but has the potential to transform our picture of the past." He also points out, "Blair's work on the archaeology of village development, notably his insight that row villages are likely to be a post-conquest development, is set to have a significant impact on the on the application of planning policy in the future" [4]. Given that Britain's management of development-funded archaeology is watched with keen interest elsewhere in the world, the influence of this work is bound to spread far beyond the UK.

### Public awareness

Blair's publications on churches and landscapes are extremely popular with adult education classes, whose participants are regularly **inspired by his research on Oxfordshire to explore their own neighbourhoods with new eyes**. Blair "speaks on occasion to local audiences, is a valued contributor to projects such as the recent *Historical Atlas of Oxfordshire*, and advises and enables many local historical activities through, for example, membership of the Council of the Oxfordshire Record Society and as a Marc Fitch Fund trustee" [5]. His work on water transport has been a similar inspiration, winning both the Canal History Book of the Year Prize and the Transport History Book of the Year Prize in 2009 [iii]. He has worked closely with Channel Four's *Time Team* (1998-2009), and has spoken on television and radio, including such programmes as *Tony Robinson's Gods and Monsters* (2012) and Channel 5's *Mysteries of the Vampire Skeletons* (2011) [iv]. His books are standard reading on the Anglo-Saxon period all over the world.

### 5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

#### Testimony

- [1] Correspondence with Oxford City Archaeologist.
- [2] Correspondence with Archaeological Consultant for Blackburn, Rochester, and Salisbury Cathedrals, Christ Church, Oxford, and Tewkesbury Abbey.
- [3] Correspondence with Head of Strategic Planning and Management at English Heritage.
- [4] Correspondence with Head of Urban Archaeology at English Heritage.
- [5] Correspondence with Emeritus Fellow, Kellogg College, University of Oxford.

#### Other evidence sources

[i] Oxford City Council's *Urban Resource Assessment and Research Agenda 2011: The Anglo-Saxon and Scandinavian period* is available at

<http://consultation.oxford.gov.uk/consult.ti/OARAC/consultationHome>

[ii] Annual Conference of the Institute for Archaeologists in 2013:

<http://www.archaeologists.net/2013dividends>

[iii] Canal History Book of the Year Prize and the Transport History Book of the Year Prize in 2009:

<http://ukcatalogue.oup.com/product/9780199217151.do#.UcCdgNj-uAY>

[iv] Radio and TV: <http://www.channel5.com/shows/revealed/episodes/mysteries-of-the-vampire-skeletons-revealed>; <http://www.imdb.com/name/nm2665906/filmoseries>