

Inner Thames Estuary feasibility studies: call for evidence

Cliffe At Hoo Historical Society

The Historic Environment Factors To Be Taken Into Account In Respect To The North West Kent Estuary Airport

The CF Delft report entitled 'The Economics of Airport Expansion' prepared for the RSPB in March 2013 and submitted as evidence to the commission makes the point that the current CBA methods employed by the DfT do not apply cost estimates in relation to 'biodiversity, landscape, water, townscape and heritage of historic resources' (section 2.4.3 of the report). It is in the context of the heritage of the Hoo peninsular that I wish to make this submission.

Generally speaking the greater Hoo Peninsular covering the area from the mouth of the Thames to Gravesend in the West and Rochester on Medway in the South is an ancient landscape and importantly is also one that is well preserved by accident of history. Evidence of habitation exists from Palaeolithic, Mesolithic, Neolithic, Bronze Age, Iron Age/Roman, Saxon and Medieval right up to modern day. Homing in on the Cliffe area of the peninsular there is evidence of it being part of an Iron Age Civitas centre coexisting with intensive Roman industrial and farming activities. Also central to this importance was the crossing (ford) to Essex making this an important trading centre, port and market place creating passing traffic to from East Kent via the Thames and Medway crossing's. These factors of importance were to carry on and increase in significance during the Saxon period as described below.

The county of Kent was first established in the 5th century by Jutish peoples as the two kingdoms of East and West Kent. The royal estates of West Kent were established at Hoo (villa regalis) but was supplemented by additional royal estates as the Saxon Heptarchy coalesced into the kingdom of England. Thus Hoo came under Mercian royal control, Bròmgeheg under Kent royal control and Cooling and Cliffe by Queen Eadgifu dowager queen to Edward the Elder King of England. This meant that the peninsular increased its importance not only as an administrative and trading centre (+ port) but also as defensive position to prevent incursion to the rivers of the Thames and Medway.

The Hoo peninsular became of primary national importance with the reintroduction of Christianity by Augustine in 597 and the setting up of the dioceses of Canterbury, Rochester and London together with a parish peculiar at Cliffe at Hoo. The royalty donated lands to the Archbishop and the monastic establishments:

The Hoo royal estate gave land to Peterborough Monastery (Connected with St Wurburgh).

The Convent of Minster (St Sexburga wife of the King of Kent) given land at Grain.

The Priory of St Andrew Rochester was given land at Bròmgeheg and Cliffe.

The Archbishopric and Christchurch Priory given land at Cliffe and Cooling.

Because of this the peninsula became the meeting point of Church and State bordering the Mercian, Wessex and Anglian Kingdoms and set the scene for the Great councils of State called the Councils of Cloveshoo to take place on the greater peninsular. The locations were at:

Cloefs Hoas (Cliffe).

Cilling (co-located to Cliffe)

Chalkhythe (Chalk near Gravesend)

Acleah (near Higham).

Baccancelde (near Higham).

Hou (Hoo).

Heathfield (Stoke).

All of these being within the area of the Greater Hoo Peninsular.

The Church of St Helens at Cliffe has been recognised in the historic record as being a mister church established in AD 700 and subsequently as a Medieval Collegiate Church emphasising its importance in the foundation of the re-established church of St Augustine.

The Hoo Peninsular is probably the most important forgotten Anglo Saxon site in England and it lies in largely undisturbed geographical landscape which will contain important archaeological evidence critical to understanding the founding of the English state. It remains undisturbed due to the decline of the areas importance due to the waves of plagues from 1348 onwards, malaria, silting of the port and the disposal of the church lands and properties post the reformation.

This is only a very brief overview of some 7 years of study which is currently ongoing and will be placed in the public domain on final completion by a small group of amateur historians with some archaeological knowledge.

The nationally important heritage factor needs to be taken into account on any decision in choosing the estuary airport as an option as not only the hub airport but also the vast infrastructure that would need to accompany it would obliterate this forgotten history and its Archaeology.

Further reading:

Hoo Peninsula North Kent coast Thames Estuary A palaeoenvironmental review of the development of the Hoo Peninsula English Heritage.

English Heritage Report - HOO PENINSULA HISTORIC LANDSCAPE PROJECT

http://services.english-heritage.org.uk/ResearchReportsPdfs/021_2013WEB.pdf

Cliffe Airport Hoo Peninsula, Kent Archaeological Desk-Based Assessment Wessex Archaeology for Kent County Council 2002 County Archaeologists Office

Cliffe at Hoo Historical Society <http://www.cliffehistory.co.uk/>

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