# IN SEARCH OF SAXON SURREY

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L ast week I concluded our 'pre-historic' history of Woking and heralded the start of our search for the 'history' of our area as told through written records. To be honest I was perhaps a little premature as when it comes to the early medieval period (known to some as the 'Dark Ages') there is not a huge amount of written records to look at!
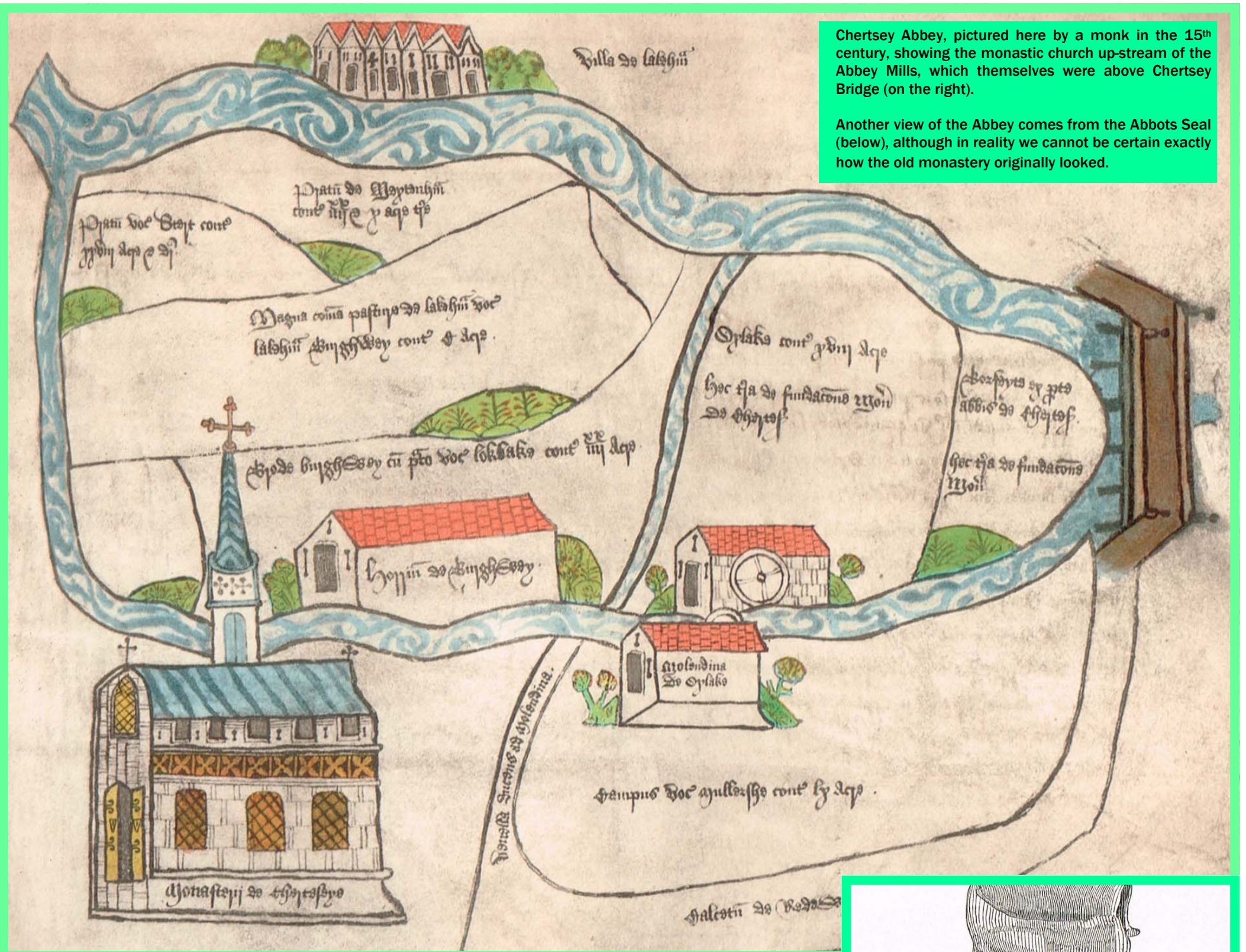
Chertsey Abbey, pictured here by a monk in the 15th century, showing the monastic church up-stream of the Abbey Mills, which themselves were above Chertsey Bridge (on the right).

Another view of the Abbey comes from the Abbots Seal (below), although in reality we cannot be certain exactly how the old monastery originally looked.

It is generally accepted that the first written record of the name 'Surrey' dates from about 673-5 AD when Frithuwald, a sub-king under Wulfhere of Merica, granted lands in Sutherie to the Monastery at Ceritiseye. The problem is that some doubt whether the document is authentic. It could be a later forgery, made up to help support Chertsey Abbey's claims to lands, and even if it is 100% original, it is clear that it is not the first time that Surrey was named – probably not even the first time it was recorded – it is simply the oldest known record to survive.

It appears that Surrey was a battleground throughout the Dark Ages. The name suggests that it was a southern region or province, with the ancient Middlesex north of the Thames being the obvious candidate for its 'northern' equivalent. But there are no records of a 'Middle Saxon' Kingdom. There were West Saxons (Wessex), South Saxons (Sussex) and East Saxons

(Essex), but no record of another Saxon Kingdom in the middle (or the North for that matter).

To the east another continental tribe, the Jutes, established the Kingdom of Kent, and to the north of the 'Saxon's of the East', the Angles occupied lands lived in by their 'South-folk' and 'North-folk'. But there is no record of a north-rie to our south-rie and to be honest there is even doubt as to whether all of what we now call Surrey was part of the original south region anyway!

It is said that Chertsey Abbey was founded by Ecgberht of Kent in about 666 – so most (if not all) of Surrey must have been under Kentish rule at that time. By 675 Wulfhere of Mercia (if the charter is to be believed) was granting Chertsey lands in North-West Surrey. Farnham, mentioned in 686, was part of Caedwalla's Wessex, who were apparently still in the Woking area in the early 8th century when Pope Constantine sent a letter to

the Abbot of Woking 'in the province of the West Saxons'. Some claim that the South Saxons had control of at least part of Surrey by about 722, before the Mercian's took over again under Offa in the 770's and finally Wessex gained the upper hand again in 825. It is all very confusing and relies on all the ancient documents being reliable and not later forgeries.

I say 'finally', but of course the Vikings had something to say about that as in about 871 Chertsey Abbey was attacked by 'The Danes' and (again depending on which report you read) killed the abbot and about ninety monks, before burning the buildings and laying waste the lands.

The abbey was re-founded in the 10th century, with major rebuilding taking place in 1110 under Abbot Hugh and again after 1235 when a massive fire destroyed not just part of the monastery but also part of the nearby town.

The abbey was evidently rebuilt before Abbot John Rutherwyck came onto the scene in the early 14th century, but later that century (July 1370) disaster again struck when 'the central part of the bell tower fell to the ground to the irrecoverable damage of the house'.

But the most famous event in Chertsey Abbey's history (apart from its dissolution) was the burial in 1471 of Lancastrian King Henry VI's body within the church – an act that brought pilgrims from far and wide, resulting in the body being removed to the grounds of Windsor in 1484, where the Yorkist Richard III could keep a close eye on him!

Two more possible views of Chertsey Abbey from the seals of Abbots Batholomew (left) and Medmenham (above)

St Peter's – Looking After the Sick for Over a Thousand Years.

St Peters Hospital, Chertsey, Surrey. 15086
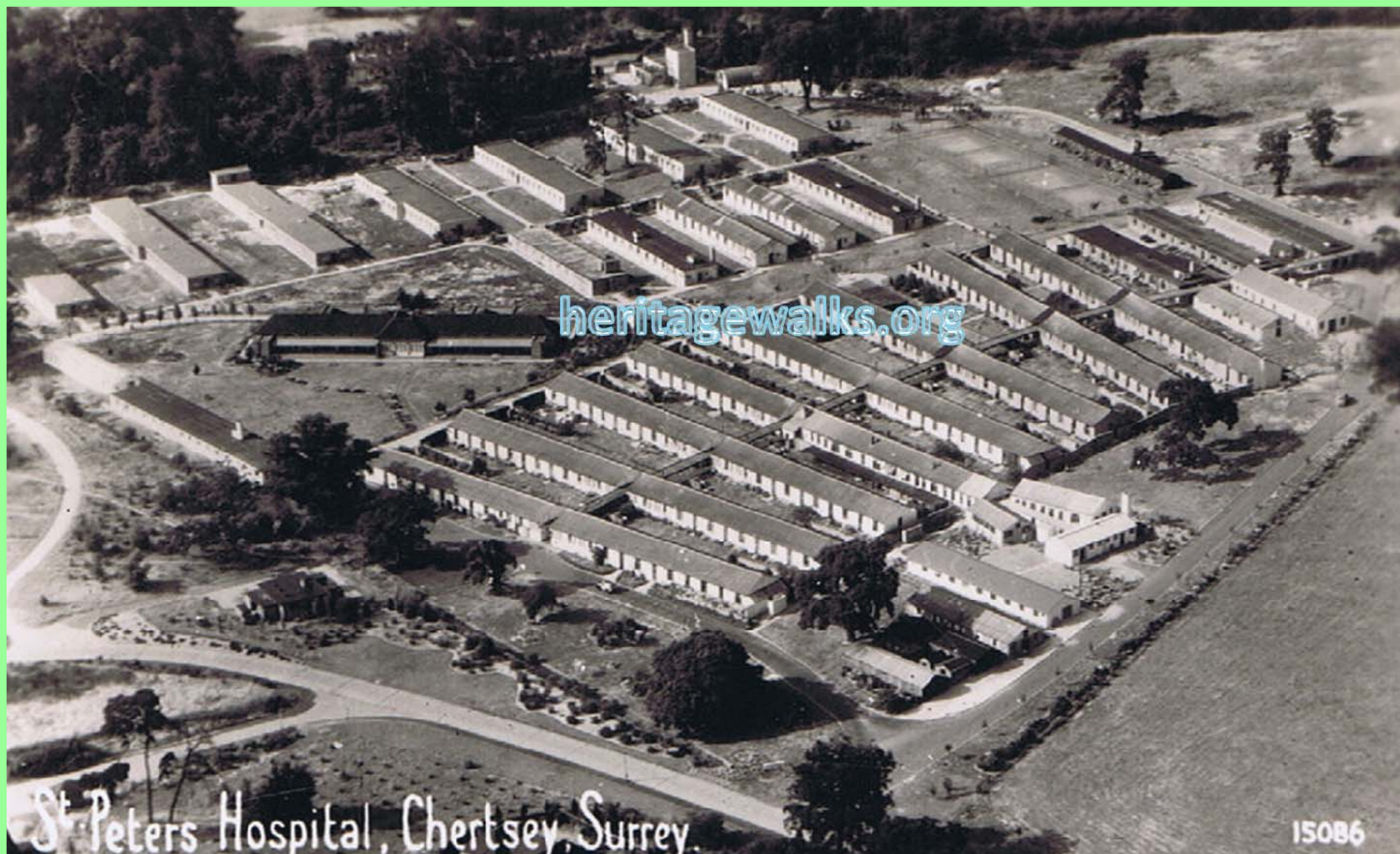
Both Chertsey Abbey and Woking's Monastery were dedicated to St Peter, and in medieval times one of the roles of a monastery would have been to help the sick, so it was entirely appropriate that the new hospital in the grounds of Botley's Park, should have been given the same name.

The story really goes back to 1929 when Surrey County Council purchased the Botley Park mansion from the Gosling family for the purpose of training, treating and caring for children and adults in what became known as the 'Botleys Park Colony for Mental Defectives'.

A lot has happened since then (in attitudes as much as bricks and mortar), with the building in the grounds of the emergency war hospital in 1939 and its conversion into a civilian hospital, pictured here in 1947 (just before being taken over by the new National Health Service).

The twenty wards that made up the main part of the hospital were originally linked by a central open corridor, 140ft long (and 24ft wide), but eventually this was protected from the elements, before finally being demolished bit by bit and replaced by the present complex of buildings.

The Building & Rebuilding of Chobham Mill

Town Millhead, Chobham.   Medhurst, Chobham.

The original mill at Chobham, known as 'Hurst Mill' was held in the late 13th century by a knight known as John de Hamme (and Aline his wife), who according to the records of Chertsey Abbey were 'bound in common to repair or rebuild the said mill as often as shall be necessary and to receive the profit of the same'. The records do not state why, but in February 1286 de Hamme gave up the mill, possibly because it was in bad repair. The Abbey records show that in 1308 the new Abbot of Chertsey, John Rutherwyck, constructed a new mill at Hurst Mill along with various other works in the village such as the making of a new Sheep-house, digging a moat around the manor, and building a turf-house on the heath (to name just a few things).

The mill was obviously rebuilt several times after that before the one pictured here was constructed in the late 18th century.