

Early medieval 'places and spaces': breaking down boundaries in British archaeology

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Abstract

British medieval archaeology is becoming increasingly integrated as new methodologies, research programmes and data sets encourage researchers to cross the boundaries between the study of settlements, burials, and landscapes. This paper reviews, through a series of case studies, new approaches to 'social landscapes' and in particular assembly sites, including fairs, legal assemblies, cemeteries and places of execution. These studies illustrate how a greater willingness to 'trespass' into other disciplines such as place-name studies and legal history is yielding new insights into the archaeological record. The paper concludes that it is becoming increasingly difficult to separate the study of early medieval burial, settlement and landscape into distinct sub-disciplines, especially for the period between c 600-1000, a time when conceptions of 'community' were rapidly changing.

Keywords

Early medieval Britain, boundaries, interdisciplinarity, landscape archaeology, assembly sites

1. Introduction

Several excellent overviews of the development of medieval archaeology in Britain have appeared in recent years, notably in volumes marking the fiftieth anniversaries of the founding of the Society for Medieval Archaeology (GILCHRIST, REYNOLDS 2009; see especially papers by Rosemary Cramp and Chris Gerrard), and the publication of W.G. Hoskins' *The Making of the English Landscape* (GARDINER, RIPPON 2007). In the first of these volumes, Andrew Reynolds takes medieval archaeologists to task for becoming overly specialised, perpetuating the boundaries between, for example, settlement archaeology, cemetery archaeology, landscape archaeology and artefact studies, and failing to engage with researchers in other areas of expertise. What is needed to counter this fragmentation, he argues, is 'a far more integrated study of medieval archaeology, where scholars...engage with source materials beyond their traditional remit' (REYNOLDS 2009b, 429). Rather than provide simply another overview of medieval archaeology in Britain, the present paper attempts to respond to Reynolds' critique by offering what is necessarily a highly selective and personal reflection on the way in which innovative methodologies, excavations and research programmes are beginning to break down these boundaries and, in doing so, are transforming our understanding of early medieval society. The main focus here – admittedly reflecting ~~the present author's~~ ^{my} own area of research -- is on England between c 400-1000, although glimpses into early medieval Wales and Scotland are also offered.

It is first necessary to note how fundamental changes in planning legislation and the way in which archaeological finds are recovered and recorded have reshaped the practice of British archaeology over the past 25 years or so, because these to some extent lie behind the boundary-breaking, integrative

research that is the real focus of this paper.¹ In 1990, a government document known as 'Planning Policy Guidance 16: Archaeology and Planning' (PPG 16) set out how archaeological remains in England and Wales were to be either preserved *in situ* or recorded -- the level of recording ranging from a watching brief to full-scale excavation -- with the requirement that the developer pay for that recording. As is well known, British archaeology has since become overwhelmingly developer-led, although PPG 16 merely accelerated a trend towards 'rescue archaeology' that had begun some decades earlier. This has had a range of impacts on archaeological research, the most striking of which is the deluge of new sites and finds now available for study compared to even a few years ago. This growth in the data available is happening at breath-taking speed and on a scale that makes it virtually impossible for any one researcher to keep pace, as Richard Bradley observed some years ago in relation to prehistoric archaeology (BRADLEY 2006).

In 1997, the Portable Antiquities Scheme (PAS) was established by the UK government in order to record the growing numbers of archaeological finds made by members of the public in England and Wales, primarily thanks to the use of metal-detectors. Over one million finds have so far been recorded, 13% of which are medieval. The PAS database (www.finds.org.uk) is searchable and has a basic mapping facility. The impact of the scheme on archaeology in general and medieval archaeology in particular has been profound. Given its modest and regrettably shrinking funding base, the PAS has provided exceptional 'bang' for the UK Government's 'buck', providing -- according to the PAS website -- the stimulus for some 600 research projects. This impact goes well beyond merely identifying new sites or recording the occasional spectacular find, such as the extraordinary assemblage of Anglo-Saxon gold objects known as the Staffordshire Hoard (LEAHY, BLAND 2009). The PAS has quite literally transformed our understanding of the early medieval economy, above all during the seventh to ninth centuries. Thanks to metal-detected finds, we now know that the silver coins commonly referred to as sceattas were used on a scale vastly exceeding what was suspected even as recently as thirty years ago (NAYLOR 2012). Furthermore, certain types of object previously found only in cemeteries and in certain regions, can now be seen to have been used much more widely. For example, early Anglo-Saxon burials containing garnet-inlaid metalwork are concentrated in southern and eastern England, especially in East Kent, whereas PAS finds demonstrate much more widespread use, including in regions where furnished burial was not the norm (LEAHY 2015; HAMEROW 2017). The PAS thus provides a salutary lesson that early medieval cemeteries may not provide a good proxy for the overall distribution of material culture, as there appear to have been parts of England where certain types of ornamental metalwork were used but not -- or only rarely -- deposited in graves. This is a lesson that has yet to be fully learned.

Attempts to make use of these rich -- indeed overwhelmingly abundant -- sources of data are further impeded by the lack of any requirement for archaeological contractors to publish their results; there is no central database or digital repository where researchers can go to discover what has been coming out for the ground.² Last but not least, the quality of the 'grey literature' that emerges from this planning process is, to say the least, variable. In the words of Bradley, 'field archaeology has drifted out of control', although he goes on to observe that 'this is simply part of an information explosion that characterizes much else in modern society. More is published, more is spoken, more is circulated on the internet, and no one can hope to assimilate it all.' (BRADLEY 2006, 7). Despite this rather pessimistic conclusion, the

¹ Similar developments of course affect archaeological research in many other European countries: Schemes similar to the PAS are, for example, now being established in the Netherlands, Flanders and Denmark, and developer-led excavation has for some years been dominant in many EU countries. But Britain may be seen as providing a 'test case' in which their impact on medieval archaeology can be traced over several decades.

² It should be noted, however, that websites such as PastScape (www.pastscape.org.uk), which allows the archaeological records of Historic England to be searched, and the Archaeological Investigations Project (csweb.bournemouth.ac.uk), effectively a catalogue of archaeological 'grey literature' between 1990 and 2007, provide invaluable starting points for researchers.

'information explosion' has also brought with it unprecedented opportunities to utilize archaeological data in innovative ways and to work on a larger canvas than previously possible, allowing more vibrant images of the medieval world to emerge.

These developments have, indirectly at least, fostered several new conceptual approaches that form the subject of the rest of this paper. Rather than being focussed on artefacts, settlements or cemeteries, these approaches seek to understand how different types of site were interrelated both with each other and with the natural landscape, and how these interrelationships were expressive of a 'sense of place'. It is the study of the early medieval landscape that illustrates ~~most clearly~~ how researchers are transcending narrow archaeological specialisms and boldly combining ~~a range of~~ written and non-written sources, ~~adapting and applying analytical methods and~~ approaches from across the social sciences and humanities. The following is an attempt to consider how these new approaches are changing our views of early medieval Britain. best
white

2. Social Landscapes: Places and Spaces in Early Medieval Britain

Interest in the human dimension of the landscape has been growing in British prehistoric archaeology in recent decades. This approach recognises the distinction between a physical 'space' that was utilised and exploited in various ways by past communities, and the 'sense of place' that imbued these spaces with particular meanings and linked them to group identity (HUNZIKE et al. 2007; BRADLEY 1998). Inspired by these approaches, early medieval archaeologists are increasingly integrating analyses of settlement and burial archaeology with the evidence provided by place-names and documents to explore the ways in which humans interacted with the landscape, not merely as biological beings, but as social beings.

One of the most significant outcomes of this approach has been the recognition of a category of site that is neither settlement nor cemetery, although it can be associated with either ~~of these types of site~~. These are places of open-air, public assemblies where the hundred court would meet, legal cases would be heard, the king's representative would conduct business and markets or fairs might be held (PANTOS 2004). Despite their essentially administrative nature, their nomenclature -- which sometimes references deities, spirits and shrines -- and occasionally other evidence indicates that they also lay in supernaturally charged locations, reflecting the interplay of religion and authority (SEMPLE 2011, BLAIR 2005). Assembly sites ~~would thus have~~ represented and re-enforced a sense of collective belonging. The existence of such places has long been known from written sources and place names, but until recently they have not been examined systematically in terms of their archaeological landscapes and topographical settings. The evidence of early medieval charters and narrative sources reveal that such places were often marked by natural or manmade features, most of which -- such as trees, stones and hilltops -- may be archaeologically invisible in conventional terms. Only by bringing together topographical and cartographic analysis with finds recorded on the PAS, place-names, charter evidence and excavated evidence, is it possible to tease out the multi-functional nature and, ultimately, social meaning of such places. 99

Several innovative projects, inspired in part by Bradley's 'archaeology of natural places', are doing precisely this (BRADLEY 2000; SEMPLE 2011; SEMPLE, SANMARK 2013). One such project, entitled 'Landscapes of Governance', has produced an online catalogue of all Anglo-Saxon meeting places documented in early written sources, drawing on archaeological, written and toponymic evidence, in order to understand their form, topography, (in)accessibility, ~~relationship to other types of site~~, natural resources and pre-existing landscapes (BAKER et al. 2011; BAKER, BROOKES 2015; BROOKES, REYNOLDS 2011). Although not yet complete, this is a landmark project in the sense that it was conceived from the outset as a multi-disciplinary collaboration between place-name scholars, archaeologists and historians. as well as the

The project's methodology systematically integrates place-name analysis with field survey, cartographic analysis, excavation and phenomenological approaches such as viewshed analysis and landscape character recording, to understand why certain places were selected for assemblies and what kinds of activities took place there. The starting point for the identification of assembly sites is usually provided by written sources, above all by Domesday Book, the great survey of land holdings completed by the Normans in 1086. It is particularly valuable because it names the main administrative districts – hundreds and wapentakes – which in turn were usually named after their assembly sites. Charters, law codes and even local folklore provide additional valuable evidence. Archaeological survey and excavation can then be used to 'ground-truth' the provisional identification of an assembly place and clarify its character. Place-names – which may contain the names of pre-Christian gods or practices or refer to the physical characteristics of an assembly place -- reveal further aspects of the nature and function of such sites. The name of Mutloes, in Gloucestershire, for example, derives from the Old English *mut-hlaw*, meaning 'meeting mound' (BROOKES, REYNOLDS 2011; BAKER, REYNOLDS 2011).

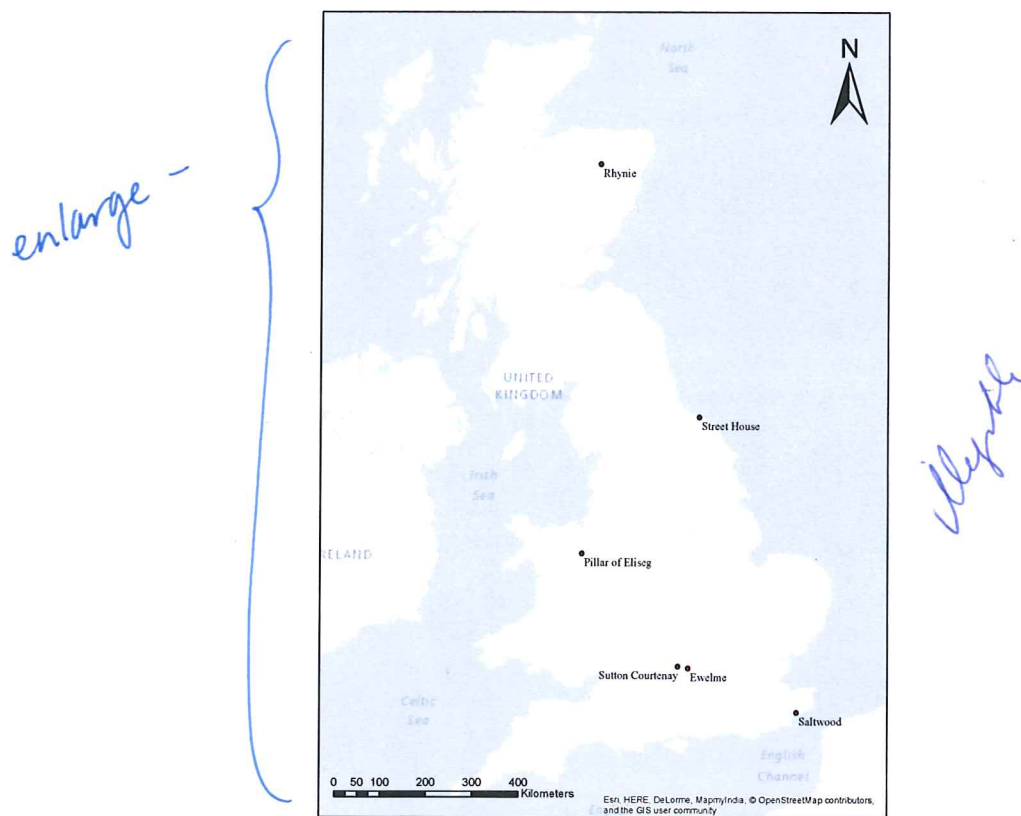


FIG. 3.1 MAP SHOWING THE LOCATION OF THE MAIN SITES MENTIONED IN THE TEXT.

Hundred/

The meeting places of hundreds often attracted periodic fairs or markets. While little or no structural evidence survives from such activities, metal-detected discoveries of the coins accidentally dropped by merchants and their customers can point to the existence of assembly sites. The village of Ewelme in Oxfordshire is one example of such a place that has been investigated as part of a larger inter-disciplinary

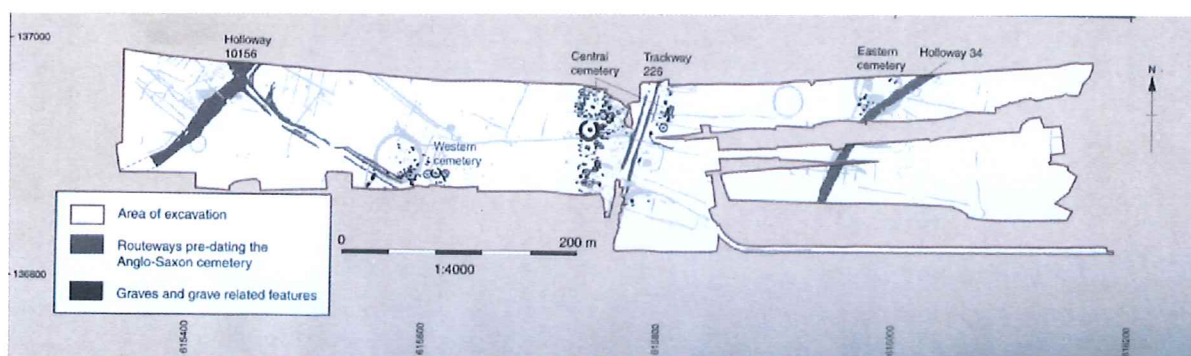
project to examine changing perceptions of landscape over the period c. 500-1650 (MILESON, BROOKES 2014). A cluster of metal-detected finds of ~~Anglo-Saxon~~ coins and ornamental metalwork, mostly of the eighth and ninth centuries and including fittings that may derive from purses, combined with historical, place-name and cartographic analysis, has led to the identification of the site not only as the location of a periodic market, but also as a meeting place, probably associated with a documented royal ~~estate~~ ^{estate} centre at the neighbouring settlement of Benson (Figs. 3.1 & 3.2).³ A ninth-century charter refers to 'Ceolwulf's tree' located a few hundred metres north of the metal-detector finds. This is just the kind of landmark – in this case, bearing the name of a local ruler – often associated with hundred meeting places. Intriguingly, metal detector finds of mid-fifth to sixth-century brooches and other ornamental metalwork at Ewelme also indicate the existence of a pre-Christian cemetery at or near the site of the later market.



FIG. 3.2 METAL-DETECTOR FINDS FROM EWELME, OXFORDSHIRE: TOP, LEFT: A SIXTH-CENTURY DISC-SHAPED MOUNT, COPPER ALLOY, ORIGINALLY GILDED, POSSIBLY FROM A SHIELD; TOP, RIGHT: A MID FIFTH- TO MID SIXTH-CENTURY COPPER ALLOY SAUCER BROOCH; BOTTOM: A NINTH-CENTURY COPPER ALLOY HOOKED TAG, INLAID WITH NIELLO. PHOTOS: I. CARTWRIGHT, SCHOOL OF ARCHAEOLOGY, UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD.

³ One outcome of this growing awareness of the role of assembly sites, ^{the} is a re-interpretation of certain types of 'stray' archaeological finds. For example, large numbers of medieval weapons recovered from the River Thames near a crossing point and close to the Anglo-Saxon and Norman town of Wallingford were long assumed to be the result of 'chance losses'. Thanks to a growing awareness of assembly sites and their locations – often associated with 'watery places' – these are now regarded as more likely to reflect the ritualized deposition of metalwork in the river, perhaps at assemblies, over a period of several centuries (HAMEROW 2013, 64-5; SEMPLE 2011, 748-9).

Occasionally, excavation ^{may} serve as the catalyst for recognising an undocumented assembly site. Three early Anglo-Saxon cemeteries were uncovered during the construction of the Channel Tunnel Rail Link at Saltwood in Kent, spanning an area of some 400m (Fig. 3.3. BOOTH et al. 2011). Cemeteries of this period are conventionally treated as discrete entities and rarely considered within their broader chronological and topographical context. In the case of the Saltwood cemeteries, however, analysis of this broader context has proved highly fruitful. This context included Bronze Age burial mounds – each Anglo-Saxon cemetery associated, seemingly, with one mound -- and a series of ancient long-distance routeways, two of which formed a crossroads near the cemeteries. The existence of coastal landing places and trading sites nearby are indicated in place-names and charters. By situating the cemeteries within this nexus of sites of varying date and function, it became evident that they are likely to mark the site of the meeting place of the local hundred, which was called 'Heane' hundred, a place-name that may refer to a mound or 'high place' (BOOTH et al. 2011, 366). Such a location would have achieved maximum prominence by appropriating earlier burial monuments and being situated at a crossroads. A series of pits (some cut into earlier graves) and surface pottery scatters dating to the Mid and Late Saxon periods reflect continuing use of the site after burial ceased in the later seventh century. While such material is notoriously difficult to interpret, it has tentatively been suggested to relate to mid-late Saxon assemblies on or near the earlier cemeteries, in a manner reminiscent of the site at Ewelme (BAKER, BROOKES 2015; BOOTH et al. 2011). The evidence from Saltwood thus hints at the 'sacred origins' of at least some assembly sites (BOOTH et al. 2011, 367). Such insights can emerge only when early medieval cemeteries are considered together with evidence for earlier and later activity in the immediate locale and are seen as forming part of an evolving 'sense of place'.



Like assembly sites, landmarks – natural and man-made – help groups to 'establish a clear representation' of places (HUNZIKER et al. 2007). Some landmarks, of course, also served as places of assembly. Both provided a locus for social memory, places where the past could be imagined or appropriated. Customary practices carried out at cemeteries, commemorative monuments, and distinctive natural features would have served as 'technologies of remembrance', a means for communities to establish or reinvent the relationship between the past and the present (WILLIAMS 2003). A new appreciation of the significance of landmarks – particularly those that served as places of assembly -- has led to several multi-disciplinary studies that boldly cross traditional disciplinary boundaries. Sarah Semple's pioneering study of the significance to early medieval communities of one type of landmark -- prehistoric monuments -- integrates the study of burials, place-names, field survey, literary and narrative sources with evidence from manuscript illustrations [depicting ^{seemingly} burial mounds (SEMPL 2011 & 2013). In doing so, she has elucidated how early medieval perceptions of pre-

apparently

7 Christian burial monuments altered in response to new religious and political ideologies. From regarding burial in ~~or near~~ these ancient places as a means of conferring prestige upon one's ancestor and legitimizing authority in the seventh century, Anglo-Saxon society had, by the tenth century and under the growing influence of the Church, come to perceive ancient burial mounds as heathen places associated with the underworld; they were transformed into frightening, liminal places suited only for the burials of criminals and outcasts. Even the Sutton Hoo cemetery, burial ground of the East Anglian ruling dynasty in the seventh century, became in the later Saxon period the site of an execution cemetery – in the words of Martin Carver, 'a gulag for the disposal of dissidents' (SEMPLE 2013; CARVER 2002, 143; see also REYNOLDS 2009a).⁴



FIG. 3.4 THE PILLAR OF ELISEG. PHOTO: H. WILLIAMS.

67 Even thoroughly studied monuments can yield new insights when subjected to cross-disciplinary investigations that combine data gleaned from excavation, landscape survey, and text. The ninth-century Pillar of Eliseg has recently been the subject of one such study. The Pillar -- almost certainly originally a stone cross -- was erected on a mound positioned just West of Offa's Dyke, the great linear earthwork that marked the ~~hotly~~ contested frontier between the Welsh kingdom of Powys and the Anglo-Saxon kingdom of Mercia (Fig. 3.4). It bears a Latin inscription honouring the military exploits of a local ruler

⁴ Even for the essentially 'prehistoric' early Anglo-Saxon period of the fifth to seventh centuries, it is possible to discern changing attitudes in the growing popularity during the seventh century of ancient monuments as locales for burial and, perhaps, of assembly (WILLIAMS 1997).

and his ancestors. By contextualising the Pillar fully within its landscape setting, however, aspects of its significance beyond the simply commemorative begin to emerge. Excavation has demonstrated that the mound on which it sits is a Bronze Age funerary monument. The appropriation of this monument's supernatural, ancestral associations together with the propagandising inscription would have invested the monument 'with heroic and legendary associations' (MURRIETA-FLORES, WILLIAMS 2017, 71). The application of GIS to analyse the Pillar's visibility and accessibility further elucidates its history and function, revealing it to be in a 'gateway' location rich in both natural and supernatural resources (the latter in the form of burial monuments), suggesting it was not only a landmark in a contested landscape, but also a place of assembly, possibly associated with royal inaugurations. By exploiting the full range of evidence, this approach reveals the Pillar to be an 'early medieval text and context operating in dialogue; the inscription, stone cross and mound working together as a multimedia technology of remembrance' (ibid. 71).⁵

Such approaches have also led to a growing awareness of the significance of early medieval cemeteries, not only as spaces for burial, but as places of assembly. The work, above all, of Howard Williams has led archaeologists to recognise cemeteries of the fifth to seventh centuries – a period for which there is no written evidence of assembly sites – as arenas of social activity, not merely as 'final resting places' for human remains (WILLIAMS 1997, 2003, 2004). The large cremation cemeteries of East Anglia are particularly important in this regard. These cemeteries contained hundreds, even thousands, of burials from numerous settlements, 'making the burial site a focus for different communities to come together...and forge relationships with the place of burial, the dead, and each other' (WILLIAMS 2004, 114). Drawing on descriptions of early medieval funerals found in written sources ranging from Beowulf to the accounts of Ibn Fadlan, as well as ethnographic analogies and topographic analysis of the locations of such cemeteries (generally in prominent locations, along major routes, near Roman towns and near pre-existing monuments), Williams argues that they served as early places of assembly.

Anyone who doubts the strength of this argument has only to examine the extraordinary layout of the seventh-century Anglo-Saxon cemetery at Street House in Yorkshire (Fig. 3.5; SHERLOCK 2012). The cemetery – containing 109 graves – displayed a unique layout, with single and double rows of inhumations defining a rough square. Gaps in what was effectively an enclosure formed by burials indicate the existence of one or two entrances. A small number of graves lay within the enclosure. These included a richly furnished female burial, Grave 42, a ring ditch indicating the presence of a mound and a possible 'mortuary house'. The enclosure formed by the burials would have provided an exclusive and formal setting for Grave 42. The site as a whole, as Semple and Williams have observed, appears to reflect 'the structuring principles and organization of burial within and outside a church; important graves acted as foci within the enclosed sacred space' (SEMPLE, WILLIAMS 2015). It seems highly likely that, in the age of Conversion, this cemetery served as a form of assembly place that was transitional between the cemeteries of the pre-Christian period and the more formal, highly structured burial settings later provided by monasteries and, later still, by churchyards.

As the earlier discussion of the sites at Ewelme and Saltwood indicates, some early medieval cemeteries also had an 'afterlife' as places of assembly. A further example – and the number of such places is steadily increasing – is indicated by the discovery of a substantial number of eighth-century coins at the site of a

⁵ A similarly inter-disciplinary study is being undertaken of the royal complex at Rhynie in northern Pictland. Like the Pillar of Eliseg, the eight decorated standing stones at Rhynie – Class I symbol stones – lie in an enclosed valley that forms a natural 'amphitheatre' as well as along major communication routes, maximising their visual impact to travellers through the area (MITCHELL, NOBLE 2017). This kind of topographic analysis offers great potential for exploring the connection between movement, visibility, social memory and power, especially in upland environments.

former sixth- to seventh-century cemetery adjacent to a great hall complex at Sutton Courtenay (which was itself set amid a Bronze Age barrow cemetery), in the Upper Thames Valley. This concentration of coins suggests that after the cemetery was no longer in use as a place of burial, a market – and perhaps other forms of gathering -- was held there (HAMEROW, HAYDEN, HEY 2008; BRENNAN, HAMEROW 2015). Places like Sutton Courtenay, Ewelme and Saltwood reveal the extent to which distinctions between the sacred and the secular were blurred: a market or fair held amid the mounds and monuments of a former ancestral cemetery can hardly be regarded as a purely 'secular' activity. Indeed, the supernatural charge provided by such surroundings may have made cemeteries particularly suitable locales for sensitive and potentially *socially explosive* transactions.

volatile social

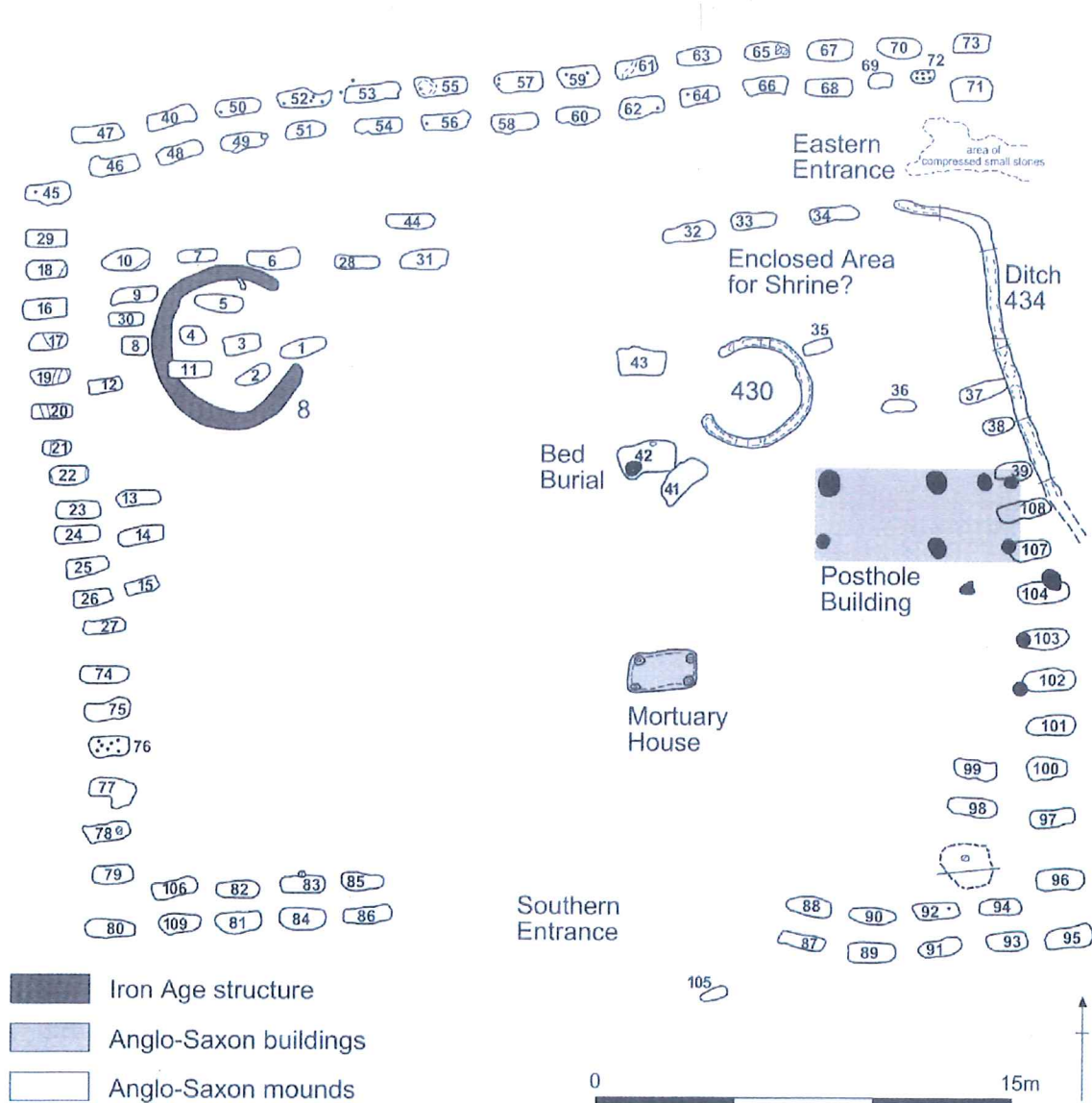


FIG. 3.5 THE ANGLO-SAXON CEMETERY AT STREET HOUSE, YORKSHIRE. AFTER SHERLOCK, 2012, FIG. 2.1.

Recognition of the role of cemeteries as places of gathering where the links between ^{ancestral} ~~ancestors~~ and group identity were reinforced has led to a renewed interest in the unfurnished inhumations of early medieval Wales, Scotland and later Saxon England. The lack of grave goods has, ^{perhaps/} ~~arguably,~~ encouraged the development of more nuanced, multi-disciplinary approaches to the analysis of such burials and their wider meaning. In northern Pictland, for example, the fifth and sixth centuries saw the appearance of the first monumental barrow cemeteries and the burial of high status individuals in prominent locations beneath mounds or cairns. Analysis of the cemeteries' local topography and relationship to routeways strengthens the proposed link between these developments and kingdom formation (MITCHELL, NOBLE 2017). A broader assessment of mortuary practices across Scotland during the period AD 400-650 suggests that regionally variable burial practices are evidence of the construction of local group identities, with 'punctuated' episodes of burial at particular places and times reflecting periodic gatherings (MALDONADO 2013).

^{by/} Interest in the changing relationship between cemeteries and associated settlements, particularly in Anglo-Saxon England, has encouraged integrated consideration of types of sites that are usually examined separately, ^{by} ~~as the preserve of specialists~~. When a cemetery is found, it is no longer adequate simply to ask 'where and how large was the associated settlement(s)?' Rather, analysing settlements and cemeteries together allows changes in the relationship – topographic and symbolic – between communities of the living and the dead to be examined. For example, during the fifth to seventh centuries, and in contrast to the large East Anglian cremation cemeteries already mentioned, some settlements appear to have been served by multiple, small, closely-spaced burial grounds (Saltwood appears to be an example of this). While it is not at all obvious what determined who was buried in which cemetery, it is clear that notions of what constituted a burial community varied widely and did not always correspond neatly to a group of households living in close proximity ^{in a single settlement} ~~in a single settlement~~. Nevertheless, most early Anglo-Saxon cemeteries were used by groups of households for between one and two centuries (HAMEROW 2012). By c 700, nearly all of these early, communal cemeteries had been abandoned, although what replaced them and where the remains of majority of the population were disposed of remains unclear (HADLEY 2007). Nevertheless, the distinction between settlement and burial zones became less clear-cut, and it is quite common for later settlements to contain at least a few burials or even small, formal burial grounds. An example of the latter was excavated at Bloodmoor Hill in Suffolk, where around the middle of the seventh century, a small cemetery – eventually containing 26 graves -- was inserted into a settlement that had been established sometime in the sixth century (LUCY et al. 2009).

The burial of individuals or small groups within settlements implies the abandonment of larger, longer-lived cemeteries established in the fifth and sixth centuries in locations that may have been near contemporary settlements but were nevertheless distinct from them. What led communities to incorporate, literally, the burials of particular ancestors into settlements themselves? By examining settlements and burial practices together, it has been possible to observe a changing attitude towards the dead and their proximity to the living (HADLEY 2007). Christianity of course encouraged a closer relationship between the communities of the living and the dead, yet adoption of, or indeed resistance to, a new religious ideology may only be part of the answer. One possibility is that closer spatial relationships between the living and the dead reflect increased competition for landed resources. It is certainly the case that the mid Saxon period (seventh to ninth centuries) saw growing pressure on farmers to produce regular surpluses to meet the demands of landlords and markets and that this led to new ways of managing land (HAMEROW 2012). Associating settlements more directly with certain ancestors and their veneration may thus have been one way of strengthening claims to land and its resources.

The multi-disciplinary analysis of execution cemeteries containing the remains – often prone, decapitated or otherwise mutilated -- of individuals convicted of capital offences has revealed how the emerging early medieval state enforced its authority by carrying out public executions in ~~certain kinds of~~ landscape settings (REYNOLDS 2009a; 2013). Integrating the archaeological evidence with that contained in charter bounds -- descriptions, usually in Old English, of the boundaries of the territory ~~that is the subject of the charter~~ -- which mention well over one hundred execution sites, allows for a fuller appreciation of the performative aspects of Anglo-Saxon justice. Gallows were positioned and corpses displayed in places that were both liminal – for example near earlier, 'heathen' monuments such as burial mounds or linear earthworks -- and highly visible, enabling the spectacle of execution to serve as 'a powerful reminder of the long arm of rulership' (REYNOLDS 2013, 707). As with the study of assembly, the integration of written and non-written evidence enables archaeology to expand into, and make original contributions to, areas of enquiry long regarded as the exclusive domain of legal historians (REYNOLDS 2009a and 2013).

carefully chosen in question

Both assembly places and execution cemeteries thus tended to lie on or near boundaries. In the case of assemblies, boundaries provided neutral locations, e.g. for the resolution of disputes (PANTOS 2003), whereas the boundary locations of execution cemeteries might better be described as dangerously liminal. Boundaries were thus important features of the Anglo-Saxon landscape, yet their study has traditionally been neglected, perhaps because it falls somewhere between 'settlement archaeology' and 'cemetery archaeology', and requires the integration of written, topographical and archaeological evidence. It is perhaps appropriate to conclude, therefore, by briefly considering how a new interest in the study of boundaries itself represents a breaking down of disciplinary insularity. The importance of boundaries – physical and symbolic -- in Anglo-Saxon society was recognised in an edited volume published in 2003 which contains several papers that adopt an explicitly multi-disciplinary approach (GRIFFITHS et al. 2003). For example, analysis by Semple of a group of isolated barrow burials in North Wiltshire reveals these to have been deliberately positioned in visually prominent locations, near major routeways, associated with – and sometimes inserted into -- prehistoric monuments (SEMPLE 2003). By drawing on place-name, charter evidence and narrative sources, a region famous for its prehistoric remains, such as the stone circles at Avebury and Stonehenge, comes more clearly into focus as a contested early medieval frontier zone, initially between Britons and Saxons, and later between Wessex and Mercia, a frontier given emphasis by distinctive burial practices. More obvious physical boundaries in the form of enclosures – mostly ditch-and-bank but sometimes fenced -- are associated with early medieval settlements, both secular and monastic; these restricted access to and emphasised control over 'defined parts of the landscape' (TURNER 2003). Such boundaries first emerged in Anglo-Saxon England in the late sixth century, initially associated only with high-status settlements; by the eighth century, however, they were also associated with ~~seemingly~~ ordinary settlements, at least in eastern and southern England. It seems clear that these networks of enclosures reflect new attitudes towards landholding and property, but also new forms of crop and animal husbandry (REYNOLDS 2003; HAMEROW 2012). The construction, maintenance and re-definition of these kinds of boundaries would have been hugely labour-intensive, requiring the coming together of households in ways not previously seen. In this way, the very act of constructing boundaries must have contributed to the shaping of community identities in new ways.

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4. Conclusion

This brief and highly selective survey of themes and research projects makes no claims to originality. It does, however, serve to illustrate current research trajectories and to demonstrate that it is gradually becoming more difficult in British archaeology to separate the study of early medieval burials, rural settlement and landscape into wholly distinct sub-disciplines. This is particularly true for the period

between c 600-1000, when burial, settlement and farming practices changed rapidly and in diverse ways, reflecting changing conceptions of 'community'. In his 2009 paper, Reynolds criticised the 'almost total lack of discourse between "burial" archaeologists and "settlement" archaeologists' (REYNOLDS 2009b, 415). Yet the research outlined in the preceding discussion cannot be neatly pigeonholed into these categories and reflects a growing willingness by archaeologists to integrate evidence and approaches from other disciplines, indeed, to 'trespass' upon the territory of, for example, legal historians and place-name scholars, previously regarded as the exclusive domain of 'specialists'. Just as historians are increasingly coming to the view that 'archaeology is too important to be left to archaeologists', the reverse is equally true. This is surely to be welcomed as early medieval archaeology in Britain leaves behind its reputation as a rather conservative, highly specialised and theoretically-averse field, to being regarded as an innovative, confident subject that is shaping compelling new understandings of the medieval world.

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