

H. M. CHADWICK MEMORIAL LECTURES 24

JOHN BLAIR

The British Culture of Anglo-Saxon Settlement



DEPARTMENT OF ANGLO-SAXON, NORSE AND CELTIC

UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE

Hector Munro Chadwick (1870–1947) was Elrington and Bosworth Professor of Anglo-Saxon in the University of Cambridge from 1912 to 1941. Through the immense range of his scholarly publications, and through the vigorous enthusiasm which he brought to all aspects of Anglo-Saxon studies — philological and literary, historical and archaeological — he helped to define the field and to give it the interdisciplinary orientation which characterizes it still. The Department of Anglo-Saxon, Norse and Celtic, which owes its existence and its own interdisciplinary outlook to H. M. Chadwick, has wished to commemorate his enduring contribution to Anglo-Saxon, Norse and Celtic studies by establishing an annual series of lectures in his name.

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A non-Celticist who tries to explore the indigenous British background to Anglo-Saxon culture risks misreading signposts in unfamiliar territory. But a purely Anglo-Saxon theme would do less than justice to the wide interdisciplinary interests of the Chadwicks, and indeed of the Department of Anglo-Saxon, Norse and Celtic. My main excuse for being here is that I have spent the past three years on a major research project investigating the settlement archaeology of England between 600 and 1100 in the light of data retrieved during four decades of developer-funded excavation.<sup>1</sup> It would be sad if an exercise on that scale had nothing new to say about the cultures with which the English interacted, and although my subject has been the Anglo-Saxon zone within Britain, I could not avoid asking how that zone should be defined in relation to the various neighbours of the Anglo-Saxons.

An important part of the project has been the plotting of sites and objects on maps. Studying cultural phenomena spatially is a different matter from studying them qualitatively, or even quantitatively. As Paul Harvey observes in the context of local historical studies, a map is the best possible antidote to scholars' often subconscious tendency to focus on what is there to be studied, and to airbrush out the gaps in knowledge:

The map will have none of this. It gives equal emphasis to every part of the whole and there can be no sliding over doubtful points. ... Faced with the questions posed by any reconstruction on a map one realizes just how imprecise one's knowledge is, how many gaps there are that on the map will have to be represented by blank spaces or the most hesitant of outlines.<sup>2</sup>

We are familiar with historians' maps of early Britain, but they tend to be political, with labels naming kingdoms and folk-groups defined as 'Anglo-Saxon' or 'British' in different type-faces. When it comes to asking how political identity — or even a combination of political, ethnic

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<sup>1</sup> This project, 'People and Places in the Anglo-Saxon Landscape', has been supported by a Leverhulme Major Research Fellowship. The main results will be published as a book entitled *The Foundations of Anglo-Saxon Society*.

<sup>2</sup> P. D. A. Harvey, 'Mapping the Village: the Historical Evidence', in D. Hooke (ed.), *Medieval Villages* (Oxford, 1985), 33–45, at p. 33.

and linguistic identity — relates to expressions of cultural distinctness in buildings and artefacts, such maps leave unlimited scope for ‘sliding over doubtful points’. And although archaeologists are keen on distribution maps, the slight and fragmentary evidence has discouraged them from attempting to map Anglo-Saxon material culture, apart from grave-goods and certain categories of small-finds and sculpture. The explosion in developer-funded archaeology since the 1990s, however, means that we now have more to work with, and the exercise has become feasible: even if it still shows ‘just how imprecise one’s knowledge is’, it points towards some unexpected, and unexpectedly interesting, conclusions.

*Mind the gap: regional patterning and invisibility in material culture*

Although most scholars nowadays accept that a high proportion of the eventual English were genetically British, and that English identity was often acculturated,<sup>3</sup> this identity is usually envisaged as something fairly clear-cut and consistent, defined by a package including language, building forms, dress accessories, and — most visibly — burial practice. Traditionally, the mapping of early Anglo-Saxon material culture has been the mapping of the furnished burial rite, and of the grave-goods that it preserves. Partly that has been *faut de mieux*, in the absence of coherently available remains of any other kind. Studying this prominent facet of collective self-expression is of course both legitimate and important, but it can lead insidiously to the assumption that furnished burial denotes a thoroughgoing and irreversible ‘Anglicisation’ of the regions where it occurs. In a recent work of synthesis, a map of furnished burials and cemeteries is reproduced as evidence that the ‘distribution of Saxon settlements of the fifth to seventh centuries reflects the division of Britain into an eastern and western zone’.<sup>4</sup> But is the division really so clear-cut? And did people become completely ‘Anglo-Saxon’ by adopting a specific cultural signifier such as furnished burial? Even the tripartite scheme sometimes used — intense Anglicisation in the east, British survival in the west, and a middle zone of transition and assimilation — makes assumptions about the completeness and uniformity of the first, and again tends to define it according to burial rite.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> B. Ward-Perkins, ‘Why did the Anglo-Saxons not Become more British?’. *English Historical Review*, 115 (2000), 513–33.

<sup>4</sup> B. Cunliffe, *Britain Begins* (Oxford, 2013), Fig. 12.10.

<sup>5</sup> I did this myself in J. Blair, *The Church in Anglo-Saxon Society* (Oxford, 2005), 14–15; cf. A. Lambourne, *Patterning within the Historic Landscape and its Possible Causes* (Oxford, 2010), 34–8.

Rather than envisaging discrete cultural regions that were either ‘British’ or ‘Anglo-Saxon’ and can be identified by standard combinations of data-sets, we should take each data-set on its own terms, as an individual manifestation of what was probably a very complex patchwork of political, ethnic and economic cores and peripheries. Being a community with exceptionally good access to long-distance trade and transport, or a frontier community, could have been more important determinants of material expression than ethnic labels. And clearly, as many other cultures show, portable objects can spread much further and faster than more embedded manifestations of social or technological practice such as settlement organisation or building forms.



Figure 1: One of the ground-level halls in the sixth-century Anglian settlement at Thirlings, Northumberland. (Reconstruction at Bede’s World, Jarrow; photograph John Blair.)

By 600, the settlements that we label ‘Anglo-Saxon’ had long been dominated by building types that are consistent and very well-known: on the one hand, the rectangular ground-level ‘hall’ with foundations of post-hole or post-in-trench construction (Fig. 1); on the other, the ‘sunken-featured building’ (*Grubenhaus*) comprising a sub-rectangular pit with a pair of major posts supporting a gabled roof. In recent years, excavations have been accumulating settlement sites with these

distinctive building forms, and accompanying manifestations of domestic culture, on a scale that starts to allow comparison with the long-available grave-goods.<sup>6</sup> Mapping is still in the early stages, but it has begun. To take a general example, Helena Hamerow's recent *Rural Settlements and Society in Anglo-Saxon England* does not attempt to list all Anglo-Saxon settlements, but does include a map plotting the more extensive and significant excavated sites.<sup>7</sup> This reveals strong concentrations in certain areas — the upper Thames, Norfolk, the Wash and Humber catchments, east Yorkshire — and an equally notable absence of them from others. To take a much more specific one, Paul Blinkhorn's study of the eighth- and ninth-century Ipswich pottery shows that it had a huge market in Norfolk, but a negligible market in other coastal zones that were no further or less accessible from Ipswich.<sup>8</sup> These cases — and one could cite several others — delineate specific cultural zones that were 'Anglo-Saxon' in their different ways, but that were seemingly smaller than the zone delineated by the furnished burial rite. They also suggest an exercise of choice to which the portmanteau 'Anglo-Saxon culture' model does less than justice.

So far, scholars have been slow to draw broad conclusions from such data because of entirely reasonable doubts about the representativeness of the samples. Metal-detected finds concentrate heavily in eastern England, but so do the huge, flat expanses of intensively farmed arable beloved by detectorists. And since excavation is led by development, there is a risk of mapping building activity in the decades around 2000 rather than in the first millennium. It is also often suggested that because large excavations are rare in historic village cores, settlements become hidden from our view after their shift onto still-continuing sites. These problems never left my mind as I reviewed the excavated data county-by-county in 2011–12, but in the end I was convinced that regional disparities are genuine and very substantial. At the time of writing the conclusions are still somewhat broad-brush, as a good deal of processing and plotting remains to be done, but they are no less decisive for that.

A good starting-point is a data-set that while highly selective, and less fine-grained than I hope my own eventual catalogue to be, is

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<sup>6</sup> A stimulating recent survey of settlement and its social context, setting the scene for arguments pursued here, is G. Thomas, 'The Prehistory of Medieval Farms and Villages: from Saxons to Scandinavians', in N. Christie and P. Stamper (eds.), *Medieval Rural Settlement: Britain and Ireland AD 800–1600* (Oxford, 2012), 43–62.

<sup>7</sup> H. Hamerow, *Rural Settlements and Society in Anglo-Saxon England* (Oxford, 2012), 4.

<sup>8</sup> P. Blinkhorn, *The Ipswich Ware Project* (Medieval Pottery Research Group Occasional Paper 7, Dorchester, 2012), Fig. 36.

internally consistent and capable of being mapped. The Archaeological Investigations Project (AIP), supported by English Heritage and based at Bournemouth University, was set up primarily to list the fast-accumulating body of unpublished developer-funded excavation reports (the 'grey literature'), and to make summaries available on-line in a searchable form. From these summaries it has been possible to generate a map on which reliable Anglo-Saxon settlement sites are plotted against a trend-surface background representing *all* archaeological sites, of whatever period, recorded by the AIP (Fig. 2 (p. 6 overleaf)).<sup>9</sup> It must be emphasised that a sorting based on summaries poses severe problems, and requires a process of cleaning-up and selection that will certainly have excluded some valid entries as well as weeding out the invalid ones. Only those sites that are firmly assigned to the 'early', 'middle' or 'late' Anglo-Saxon periods have been plotted. Sites merely designated 'early medieval' are excluded (which is why, for instance, some recent excavations in Northumberland do not appear), as are cemeteries and non-structural finds.

The data plotted in Fig. 2 (p. 6 overleaf), imperfect though they are, show interesting patterns. 'Early' and 'middle' Anglo-Saxon settlements concentrate in a triangle, pointing south-westwards from the Wash and Humber, with 'late' settlements spreading outwards into a broader zone. The 'early' and 'middle' concentrations are congruent with the distributions both of the sites selected by Hamerow, and of those recognised in my own data-collection exercise. But more significant than the agreement of the Anglo-Saxon samples with each other is their combined contrast with the *total* AIP sample: as the background shading in Fig. 2 clearly shows, the aggregation of all sites from prehistory through to post-medieval produces concentrations around and to the north of London, in the west midlands, and in south-west Yorkshire. These bear little resemblance to the Anglo-Saxon pattern: if Anglo-Saxon settlements had left frequent remains in these regions, there is no reason why these should not have been found. Evidently the limited range of visible English-style settlement between 400 and 850 is not a mirage from inadequate data, but a reality.

The oddity of this is highlighted by a further mapping exercise (Fig. 3 (p. 7 overleaf)) in which the 'middle' Anglo-Saxon sites from the

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<sup>9</sup> For the AIP see <http://csweb.bournemouth.ac.uk/aip/aipintro.htm>.

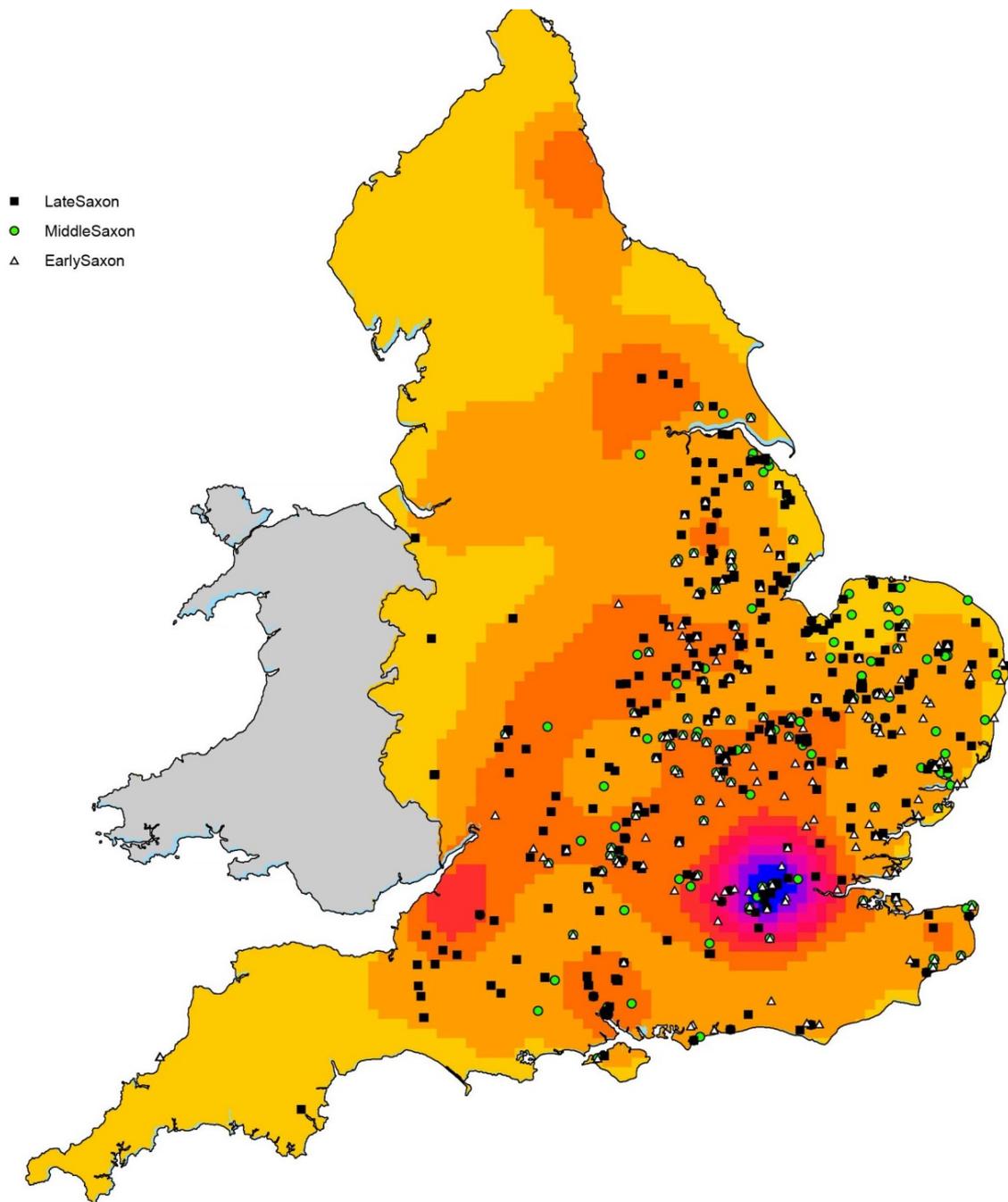


Figure 2: Developer-funded excavations reported in the 'grey literature'. This map illustrates how the incidence of Anglo-Saxon settlement sites capable of being classified as 'early', 'middle' or 'late' (plotted as symbols) does not correlate closely with the aggregate incidence of sites from all periods (plotted as a background trend-surface). (Archaeology Investigations Project data from English Heritage and Ehren Milner; graphics by Stuart Brookes.)

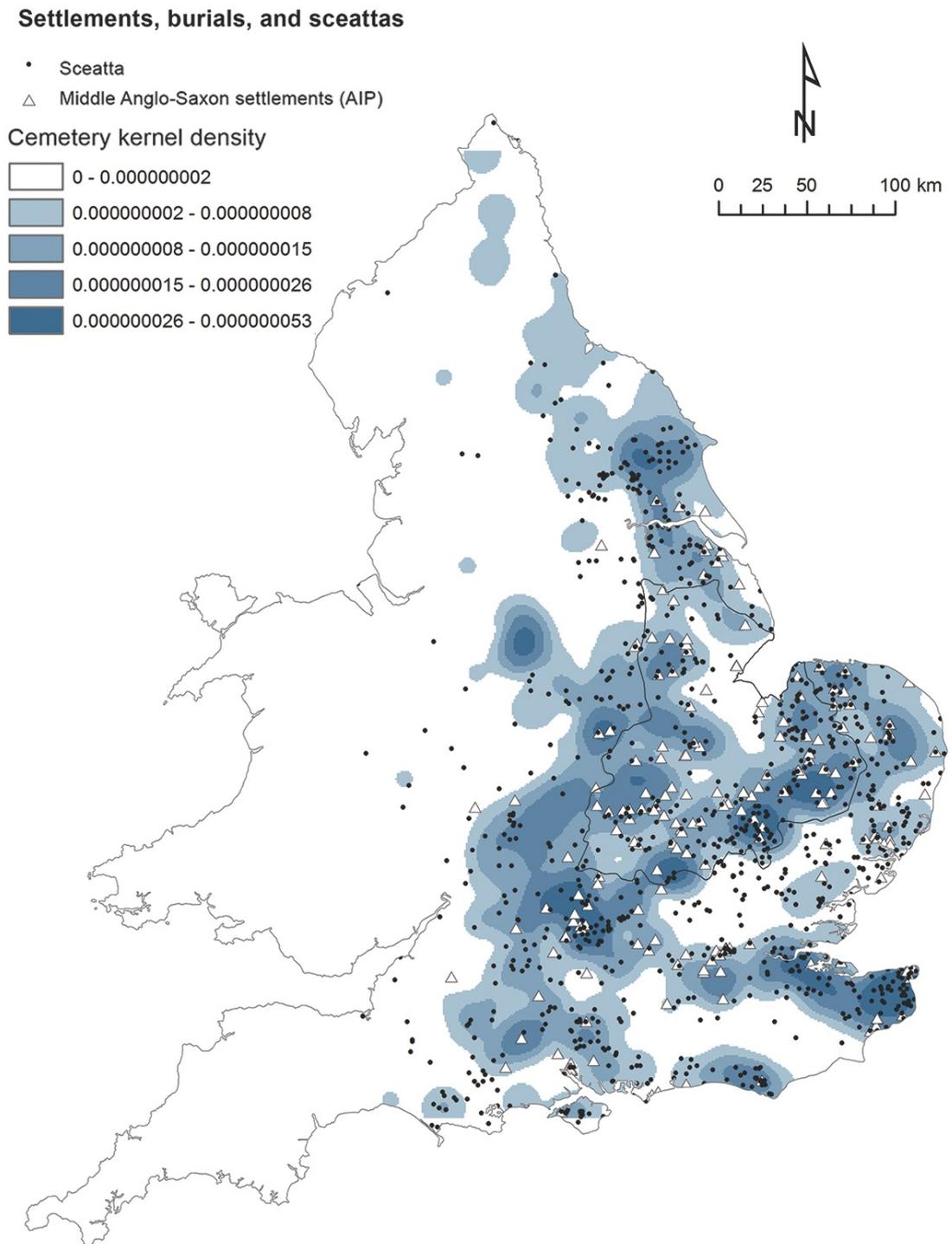


Figure 3: The incidence of ‘middle’ Anglo-Saxon settlement sites in the ‘grey literature’ as Fig. 1 (white triangles), and finds of the sceatta coinage (black dots), plotted against a background trend-surface of furnished Anglo-Saxon cemeteries. (EMC data from Martin Allen; cemetery data from Sam Lucy; graphics by Stuart Brookes).

AIP are combined with the find-spots of silver pennies ('sceattas') minted during *c.* 670–740, and with furnished cemeteries expressed as a background trend-surface.<sup>10</sup> It is striking how closely (with a few exceptions that, apart from the northwards limit of coinage, are relatively minor) the geography of sceatta use matches the geography of the furnished burial rite two centuries earlier: taking just these two data-sets, one would be tempted to conclude that, in broad terms, they together delineate a consistent English cultural zone. However, it is immediately obvious that the geography of the AIP settlements is more limited: substantial areas of the west midlands, central Wessex and even the south-east had furnished burial in the fifth to early seventh centuries, and coin use in the late seventh to eighth, but few visible settlements during *c.* 650–850. This generalises the point made, with reference to a specific region, by Hamerow: 'It would appear that, despite in some cases adopting an 'Anglo-Saxon' burial rite from the seventh century onwards; post-Roman communities in Somerset and Dorset nevertheless continued to reject the Anglo-Saxon timber building tradition'.<sup>11</sup>

My own investigations have broadly confirmed, though to some extent modified, the AIP distribution of settlements. The AIP selection shown in Fig. 3 proves to include some mis-dated cases, as well as installations such as mills, ovens and forges that do not really count as domestic settlement. Several of these are outliers, and around the fringes, so that a corrected version of Fig. 3 would omit many of the white triangles in more southerly and south-westerly regions. On the other hand my reading of many reports, and my discussions with practising archaeologists in commercial units and local authorities, have convinced me that 'Anglo-Saxon' sites really are found much more frequently in some areas than in others, and that this is not an artefact of development and excavation. In most regions, small village-centre interventions are now accumulating to the stage of constituting either positive or negative evidence. While some results and responses predictably reflect the broad west-east contrast (more data from east Yorkshire than west, more from Leicestershire than Derbyshire), others are less predictable. Why is so much more found in Cambridgeshire than in Essex? Why are relatively few eighth- and ninth-century rural settlements found in the heartland of

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<sup>10</sup> Sceattas from the Corpus of Early Medieval Coin Finds: <http://www.fitzmuseum.cam.ac.uk/dept/coins/emc/>; cemeteries from a database kindly provided by Sam Lucy.

<sup>11</sup> Hamerow, *Rural Settlements and Society*, 33. An exception is a post-hole building, with one if not two end annexes and very Anglo-Saxon in appearance, found at Shapwick (Somerset): C. Gerrard with M. Aston, *The Shapwick Project, Somerset: a Rural Landscape Explored* ([Leeds], 2007), 409–25. This was an important manor of Glastonbury Abbey, and the building may have a monastic context.

Wessex, so prosperous and successful?<sup>12</sup> Why does Kent, so rich in cemeteries and high-status sites, produce scarcely any ‘ordinary’ settlements? Although these contrasts have had little impact on academic syntheses, local professionals are well aware of them, and often find them puzzling.

But a further point emerges that is even more unexpected and puzzling: both the AIP sample and my own sample suggest that the range of archaeologically visible material culture actually *contracted* during the seventh century. Definition of this phenomenon is still in progress, but it can be illustrated with three examples. First, northern Northumbria (Bernicia) has a spectacular range of settlements from the period *c.* 550–650, comprising not just the famous hall complexes of Yeavinger, Milfield and Sprouston, but also the more ‘ordinary’ sites at Thirlings and (recently) Shotton, Lanton and Cheviot Quarries; between 650 and 1000, by contrast, the region is an almost total archaeological blank apart from Bamburgh and the major monastic sites.<sup>13</sup> Secondly, the upper Thames gravels of south Oxfordshire and north Berkshire have a remarkable concentration of early Anglo-Saxon cemeteries and settlements (this indeed is where domestic buildings of the period were first recognised), whereas significant rural settlement remains between 650 and 900 are still confined to a single, probably monastically-associated, site at Yarnton.<sup>14</sup> Thirdly, a 15-km. road corridor across southern Essex located one site with Anglo-Saxon features and seven more with pottery in the fifth- to seventh-century range, but then nothing until after 1000.<sup>15</sup> There is also an impression — if still an ill-defined one — that in some areas, including these three, widespread use of hand-made pottery gave way to

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<sup>12</sup> There are occasional exceptions, for instance Collingbourne Ducis and Trowbridge: J. Pine et al., ‘The Excavation of a Saxon Settlement at Cadley Road, Collingbourne Ducis, Wiltshire’, *Wilts. Arch. And Nat. Hist. Mag.* 94 (2001), 88–117; A. H. Graham and S. M. Davies, *Excavations in the Town Centre of Trowbridge, Wiltshire, 1977 and 1986–88* (Salisbury, 1993), 21–30. It may eventually turn out that central Wessex is closer in this respect to the ‘Anglo-Saxon building culture province’ than anywhere else outside it.

<sup>13</sup> For advice on this point I am very grateful to Colm O’Brien, Sam Turner and Rob Collins.

<sup>14</sup> Hamerow, *Rural Settlements and Society*, *passim*.

<sup>15</sup> R. Dale et al., ‘Archaeology on the Mid Essex Clay’, *Essex Archaeology and History*, 36 (2005), 10–54. The earlier of the two Stansted Airport projects (for the other see below, note 18) produced a similar result: R. Havis and H. Brooks, *Excavations at Stansted Airport, 1986–91* (East Anglian Archaeology 107: Chelmsford, 2004), 346–54.

phases, between the late seventh and mid ninth centuries, that were substantially aceramic apart from occasional imports.<sup>16</sup>

A closer focus only strengthens the impression of a consolidated core zone of visible settlement during *c.* 650–850 outside which settlements below the monastic and aristocratic level are thin on the ground, and even when found are often near-fugitive. In their simplicity, small scale, flimsiness and paucity of finds, the ground-level buildings recognised at Carlisle Northern Development Route (Cumberland) and Dale View Quarry (Derbs.) are exceptions proving the rule.<sup>17</sup> An area of some 34 hectares in Essex, excavated before the expansion of Stansted Airport, was relatively rich in prehistoric, Roman, and late- to post-medieval archaeology, but for the period 400–1000 produced just one light post-hole building and one hearth.<sup>18</sup> Yet more striking is the long slice cut through non-Wealden Kent — scarcely a ‘marginal’ area — by the Channel Tunnel Rail Link, where the richness of the cemeteries contrasts resoundingly with the two feeble, incoherent scatters of small post-holes that were the only settlements encountered.<sup>19</sup> This is not a story of uninhabited terrain: the recent ‘Fields of Britannia’ project reveals the essential stability of land-use in most parts of Britain through the late Roman to early medieval periods, and radiocarbon determinations are increasingly pointing to occupation in areas where no buildings and few artefacts are apparent.<sup>20</sup> An indicative case may be Catholme

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<sup>16</sup> See for instance Eynsham in the upper Thames: P. Blinkhorn in A. Hardy et al. (eds.), *Ælfric’s Abbey* (Oxford, 2003), 172–4.

<sup>17</sup> ‘Carlisle Northern Development Route, Cumbria: Post-Excavation Assessment’ (unpublished report, Oxford Archaeology North, 2011); ‘Dale View Quarry, Derbyshire: Report on an Archaeological Excavation’ (unpublished report, Archaeological Research Services, 2008).

<sup>18</sup> N. Cooke, F. Brown and C. Phillpotts, *From Hunter Gatherers to Huntsmen: a History of the Stansted Landscape* (Oxford and Salisbury, 2008), 182–4.

<sup>19</sup> Boarley Farm and Mersham: P. Booth et al., *On Track: the Archaeology of High Speed 1 Section 1 in Kent* (Oxford and Salisbury, 2011), 378–84. (Here I am excluding the remarkable late seventh-century mill at Ebbsfleet, which must be monastic or aristocratic.) The 80-km. length of this investigation can be contrasted with an 8-km. length of new road between Bedford and St Neots, which found decidedly more Anglo-Saxon settlement evidence than the transect through Kent ten times its length: J. Timby et al., *Settlement on the Bedfordshire Claylands* (Oxford and Bedford, 2007), 159–77.

<sup>20</sup> S. Rippon et al., ‘The Fields of Britannia: Continuity and Discontinuity in the Pays and Regions of Roman Britain’, *Landscapes*, 14 (2013), 33–53; M. Aston et al., ‘New Radiocarbon Dates from Early Medieval Somerset’, *Proc. Somerset Archaeol. & Nat. Hist. Soc.* 154 (2011), 185–9. Inevitably the radiocarbon results are mainly from burials, as it is these rather than structures that tend to be found: obtaining dates from pits and ditches that produce animal bone but not pottery is an unappealing but now necessary task.

(Staffs.), the only coherent rural settlement known from the Mercian heartland, where a substantial, pottery-using settlement of *c.* 600–750 was succeeded by occupation that lasted through the ninth century and perhaps beyond, but is only evidenced by carbon-dated charcoal from pits and hollows.<sup>21</sup> If some inhabitants of ‘Anglo-Saxon’ polities never adopted Anglo-Saxon domestic culture, others adopted it only to give it up again.

The proposed core zone, which I shall call the ‘Anglo-Saxon building culture province’, is delineated schematically on Fig. 9 (p. 36). Its western and south-western boundaries — towards the Vale of York, the central midlands and the Thames valley — seem to be very clearly marked, and south of the Humber it is at least partly coterminous with the river-catchment of the Wash. In East Anglia, by contrast, the geography of building culture remains hard to pin down, since the scale of excavation is still (essentially for local reasons) remarkably small. The region is, however, exceptionally rich both in pottery and in small-finds from the mid-Saxon period: the strong concentration of these in Norfolk, especially western Norfolk towards the Wash,<sup>22</sup> may delineate a zone that had more in common with the ‘building culture province’ than with the rest of East Anglia, though until we have adequate excavations this must remain hypothetical.<sup>23</sup>

As contraction and consolidation were getting under way, one of the most extravagantly demonstrative episodes in English material culture seems to have occurred in striking disjunction from the emergent geographical patterning. During *c.* 600–30, as is well-known, rich and competitive elites invested in opulently furnished barrow-burials and in

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<sup>21</sup> S. Losco-Bradley and G. Kinsley, *Catholme: an Anglo-Saxon Settlement on the Trent Gravels in Staffordshire* (Nottingham, 2002). Although the report leaves this issue unresolved, it seems unlikely that the two sunken-featured buildings (AS20 and AS48) yielding post-800 radiocarbon dates from charcoal in their upper fills were still in use at that stage: otherwise invisible occupation utilising the part-filled hollows is a more plausible scenario. I am grateful to Gavin Kinsley for discussions.

<sup>22</sup> Most clearly in the case of Ipswich Ware, which was sucked into north-western Norfolk in huge quantities: above, note 8. The recent test-pitting exercise in Essex and East Anglia suggests a similar pattern (setting aside the exceptional rich site at Coddendam): C. Lewis, ‘Exploring Black Holes: Recent Investigations in Currently Occupied Rural Settlements in Eastern England’, in N. J. Higham and M. J. Ryan (eds.), *Landscape Archaeology of Anglo-Saxon England* (Woodbridge, 2010), 83–105, esp. Fig. 5.2.

<sup>23</sup> Important recent excavations in Norfolk villages, with results reminiscent of the more numerous settlements found in Cambridgeshire and Lincolnshire, are Whissonsett and Shipdham; I am grateful to Andrew Rogerson for discussions of this problem. East Anglia was exceptionally developed economically, and within the commercial pull of Ipswich, so its settlement culture may have been correspondingly complex.

ceremonial ‘great hall complexes’. More sites in both categories doubtless remain to be found. So far, however, it is striking that their distributions — mostly in northern, central and south-eastern England — show virtually no overlap with the ‘Anglo-Saxon building culture province’ (Fig. 9 (p. 36)), although they do sometimes overlap with areas (notably Northumberland and the upper Thames) from which visible ‘ordinary’ settlements were receding. Various — and mutually compatible — explanations are possible. These forms of ostentatious display could have emerged (as Chris Loveluck suggests for the slightly later barrow-burials of the lead-rich Peak District<sup>24</sup>) in heartlands where production and control of lucrative natural resources generated elite wealth, rather than in the socially and commercially developed eastern zones. Or could they be reactions to the ostentation of neighbouring British rulers? Or perhaps they were deployed in fluid and eclectic cultural milieux near frontiers,<sup>25</sup> where they asserted English identity, while being superfluous in core zones where the built landscape looked unambiguously English. This point will be pursued below; here should be noted the paradox that the largest and most ambitious timber buildings in the Anglo-Saxon mode seem to have occupied landscapes where that mode had little or no continuing presence at grass-roots level.

All of this adds up to a formidable — and hitherto unacknowledged — puzzle. It would be perverse to deny that the zones of England where the Germanic furnished burial rite was in normal use in the sixth century, and where Anglo-Saxon coinage circulated from the late seventh, had a significant English identity, and written evidence makes their political and linguistic Englishness abundantly clear thereafter. Yet it is only in parts of those regions — and parts moreover that seem to contract during the seventh century — that we can recognise ordinary domestic settlements and buildings of Anglo-Saxon or any other kind. It will no longer do to assume that the sites await discovery: as the results of commercial excavation build up across Britain, it becomes progressively less likely that the gaps will ever be substantially filled. The people who buried their dead, and who used money, must have lived

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<sup>24</sup> C. P. Loveluck, ‘Acculturation, Migration and Exchange: the Formation of Anglo-Saxon Society in the English Peak District, 400–700 AD’, in J. Bintliff and H. Hamerow (eds.), *Europe between Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages* (BAR Int. Ser. 617, Oxford, 1995), 84–98.

<sup>25</sup> Loveluck, ‘Acculturation, Migration and Exchange’, has stimulating thoughts along these lines in relation to the Peak District barrow-burials. While his ascription of some of these to the late- and post-Roman periods might be questioned, he makes a good case that the quartz pebbles and antler tines found in a few definitely seventh-century barrows are indigenous British traits, which in the present context is interesting.

somewhere: the explanation cannot be that the settlements never existed, so it has to be that they existed but are invisible to us. Thus the situation with the English outside the ‘Anglo-Saxon building culture province’ is precisely as with the post-Roman western British: their everyday material culture is below the horizon of archaeological visibility.

It is helpful here to recognise that more recent societies in other places, for instance on the northern and eastern edges of Europe, have lived below that horizon. Archaeologists of medieval England understandably study what they can see, not what they cannot, but in the open-air museums in Scandinavia, Hungary, Romania or Finland one enters worlds of useful, comfortable and often highly decorative houses and objects executed in timber and textile. Buildings of horizontal logs, stabilised by their interlocking corners and simply resting on the ground-surface, would leave little or no archaeological trace. Cooking-pots of metal, and tableware of turned or coopered wood and hardened leather, can be as convenient and elegant as pottery (and far more so than Anglo-Saxon hand-made pottery),<sup>26</sup> but again would be invisible archaeologically. Even in England, we are closer to those worlds than we think: the miraculously preserved assemblage on the *Mary Rose*, sunk in 1545, reveals a preponderance of perishable items startling to anyone used to the archaeology of normal Tudor sites.<sup>27</sup>

We cannot recreate lost worlds, but it is a disastrous misjudgement to ignore their existence. In the case of early England, the evidence (and absence of evidence) pushes towards some important conclusions. There was no homogeneous ‘Anglo-Saxon package’, but a range of local experiences. The furnished burial rite, and the portable objects using it, were disseminated relatively easily; the archaeologically-visible domestic repertoire of posthole and sunken buildings, and of hand-made pottery, also spread in the ‘colonial’ phase, though to a somewhat more restricted zone; but only in the core zones of particularly intensive economic vitality, or of continuing exposure to the socio-economic influences of the North Sea, did that repertoire consolidate itself to the point of becoming permanent and ubiquitous through the seventh to ninth centuries. Elsewhere, monastic and royal complexes of visibly Anglo-Saxon type were abnormalities in settlement landscapes that are otherwise lost to us.

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<sup>26</sup> The sophistication and fine craftsmanship of Anglo-Saxon works in the medium of wood, from large halls to maplewood drinking-cups, is demonstrated repeatedly in the contributions to M. D. J. Bintley and M. G. Shapland (eds.), *Trees and Timber in the Anglo-Saxon World* (Oxford, 2013).

<sup>27</sup> J. Gardiner (ed.), *Before the Mast: Life and Death Aboard the Mary Rose* (Portsmouth, 2005).

A point often made about Anglo-Saxon art is that prestige items, such as deluxe manuscripts and stone crosses, are hard to categorise because they are the end-product of experimentation, and interchange of ideas, worked out in perishable media. The same is surely true of settlements and buildings, for instance in any accommodation or cross-influence that might have occurred between the equally invisible traditions of the post-Roman British and the Anglo-Saxon peripheries. This reflection encourages some lateral thinking: once we recognise that the linkages between extant items of evidence are likely to be both remote and indirect, we may start to glimpse the formative developments in some unexpected contexts.

*Parallel trajectories and the transformative seventh century: settlements*

For obvious reasons, the search for continuities between Romano-British and Anglo-Saxon settlement forms and patterns has concentrated on the fifth century. The present approach, which is to concentrate instead on the seventh to eighth centuries, takes its lead from the transformations in material culture that were widespread across north-western Europe during the decades after 600: bobbing around in that melting-pot, some ingredients that had been latent for two centuries may become visible once more. Across both the eastern and the western seas, the inhabitants of Britain faced neighbours whose settlements were also being restructured in these decades. The watershed in settlement planning that is now apparent in several different regions is best seen as a continuum, not a series of unconnected experiences, and the British and Anglo-Saxon developments cannot make full sense unless viewed in relation to each other.

In northern France, Edith Peytremann's survey of excavated sites identifies the seventh to eighth centuries as a period of dislocation from Gallo-Roman organisation, growth and intensification of nuclei, and more clearly demarcated and specialised settlement layout.<sup>28</sup> In eastern and east midland England, the 'Anglo-Saxon building culture province' (Fig. 9 (p. 36)), it is intriguing to find a transformation that was both contemporaneous and very similar, with a move from the open, drifting settlements characteristic of the fifth and sixth centuries to more structured forms articulated by ditched enclosures. In so far as we can currently generalise from what is still rather fragmentary evidence, north Lincolnshire was the boundary between two rather different traditions,

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<sup>28</sup> E. Peytremann, *Archéologie de l'habitat rural dans le nord de la France du IV<sup>e</sup> au XII<sup>e</sup> siècle* (2 vols., Saint-Germain-en-Laye, 2003), I, 355–7: 'À partir du milieu du VII<sup>e</sup> S., des changements et des innovations convergent, pour aboutir à une modification de l'habitat rural.'

both of which seem to have started in the early-to mid-seventh century (Fig. 4). Eastern Yorkshire and the Humber basin have now produced several examples of so-called ‘Butterwick-type’ sites: complex agglomerations of sub-rectangular and curvilinear enclosures whose re-cut ditches and internal trackways have a distinctively spaghetti-like configuration on aerial photographs. Further south, in a broad arc of east midland counties around the Wash (and largely corresponding to its water-catchment zone), settlement enclosures are characteristically more rectilinear, sometimes even displaying signs of technically precise grid-planning.<sup>29</sup>

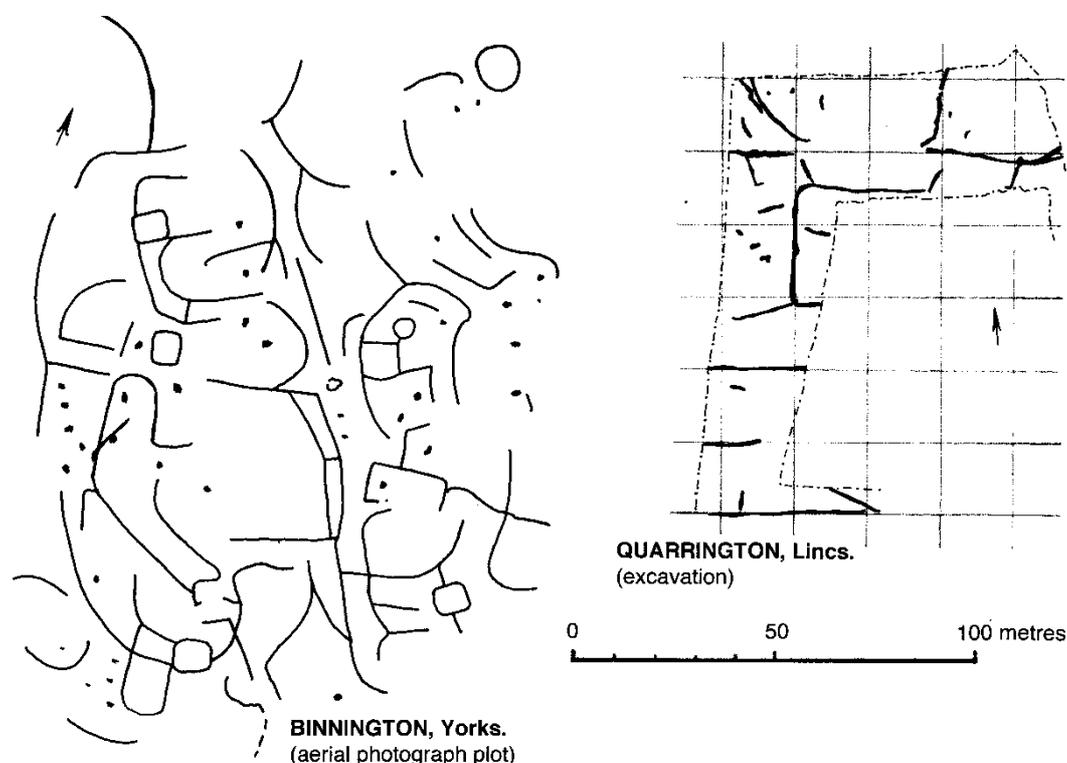


Figure 4: Regional contrast in the settlement enclosures of seventh- to eighth-century eastern England. Binnington illustrates the ‘Butterwick-type’ settlements of east Yorkshire; Quarrington, based on a grid of four short perches (i.e. 18.3-m. squares), illustrates the rectilinear and frequently gridded settlements of the east midlands. (Binnington after Wrathmell (ed.), *History of Wharram Percy*, p. 111; Quarrington after sources in note 56).

<sup>29</sup> Hamerow, *Rural Settlements and Society*, 88–94; S. Wrathmell (ed.), *A History of Wharram Percy and its Neighbours* (York, 2012), 99–180; J. Blair, ‘Grid-Planning in Anglo-Saxon Settlements: the Short Perch and the Four-Perch Module’, *Anglo-Saxon Studies in Archaeology and History*, 18 (2012), 18–61, at pp. 31–5.

Two kinds of visible influence underlie these arrangements. First, some of the seventh-century English systems are based on relict prehistoric and Roman ones that survived as earthworks: this is clear at West Heslerton (Yorks.) and West Fen Road, Ely (Cambs.), where the Anglo-Saxon ditched enclosures ‘nest’ within Roman ones.<sup>30</sup> Secondly, the formal grid-planning seems ultimately to reflect the techniques of the Roman *agrimensores*, transmitted through the milieux of ecclesiastical high culture and at this stage mainly found on monastic and monastically-associated sites.<sup>31</sup> Straight-sided enclosures are more easily conjoined in structured settlements or field-systems than curvilinear ones,<sup>32</sup> and it is easy to see how observation of relict Romano-British rectilinear boundaries, informed by imported surveying techniques, could produce the Southumbrian tradition of seventh- to ninth-century settlement planning. The ‘Butterwick’ complexes are odd-looking collocations of multiple curvilinear enclosures which individually — except for their rectilinear buildings — would not look out of place in Iron Age Britain. It seems possible to see in them the re-invention of a late prehistoric form, adapted to the needs of larger and more concentrated settlement complexes like the southern English ones.

Debts to both prehistory and Rome, of rather different kinds, are also evident on the opposite side of the British Isles. In Devon and Cornwall the tradition of late Bronze Age/ Iron Age curvilinear enclosures containing round-houses was perpetuated through and beyond the Roman period in variant forms, best illustrated by the excavations at Trethurgy Round.<sup>33</sup> Then, in the early post-Roman period, this tradition tailed off: none of the so-called Cornish ‘rounds’ has been shown to originate later than the third century AD, even though some of them were still occupied into the sixth to seventh centuries.<sup>34</sup> A group of rectilinear enclosed settlements in north-west Wales, which developed through the

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<sup>30</sup> Pers. comm. Dominic Powlesland, who has kindly discussed the West Heslerton project with me; R. Mortimer, R. Regan and S. Lucy, *The Saxon and Medieval Settlement at West Fen Road, Ely: the Ashwell Site* (Cambridge, 2005), 25–8.

<sup>31</sup> Blair, ‘Grid-Planning’, 21–2.

<sup>32</sup> R. Bradley, *The Prehistory of Britain and Ireland* (Cambridge, 2007), 238–40.

<sup>33</sup> S. Turner, *Making a Christian Landscape* (Exeter, 2006), 72–9; S. Pearce, *South-Western Britain in the Early Middle Ages* (Leicester, 2004), 30–9; H. Quinnell, *Trethurgy: Excavations at Trethurgy Round, St Austell* ([Truro?], 2004).

<sup>34</sup> A. Preston-Jones and P. Rose, ‘Medieval Cornwall’, *Cornish Archaeology*, 25 (1986), 135–85, at pp. 145–6. O. J. Padel, *Cornish Place-Name Elements* (English Place-Name Soc. 56–7, Nottingham, 1985), 50–2, proposes that occurrences of the element *\*ker* support continued use of the ‘round’ as a Cornish settlement type into the sixth century and later. For this element in Wales and Cornwall meaning ‘enclosed farmstead’ rather than ‘fortified place’ see T. Charles-Edwards, *Wales and the Britons, 350–1064* (Oxford, 2013), 286, 605–6.

first to early fifth centuries and show exiguous traces of later occupation,<sup>35</sup> tell the same story of Roman-period adaptation of prehistoric models followed by a shadowy early medieval presence.

In Ireland, the trajectory is slightly different. On the one hand, while there is growing evidence that the late Bronze Age tradition of curvilinear settlement enclosures survived up to the Roman-period Iron Age,<sup>36</sup> it still remains doubtful if there was any continuum into the early middle ages. On the other hand, recent radiocarbon evidence strongly suggests that the start of the very widespread and well-known tradition of round-houses grouped within curvilinear settlement enclosures of the *ráth* and *caisel* type (traditionally mis-named ‘ring-forts’), which so closely recall that late prehistoric tradition, should be placed in the decades around 600 AD (for instance Drumthacker, Fig. 6 (p. 21)).<sup>37</sup>

That this ancient tradition petered out in western Britain around 600, whereas in Ireland it revived at much the same point after an apparent hiatus, looks paradoxical. Given the regions’ contrasting economic fortunes at this point, a building-boom in Ireland but not western Britain would be unsurprising. Nonetheless, the emergence of settlement forms resembling ancient ones looks as distinctive in Ireland as in eastern England, and despite the new evidence that narrows the gap, the idea that the revival of the curvilinear settlement enclosure in Ireland was encouraged by its survival in sub-Roman western Britain may still have something to be said for it.<sup>38</sup> Perhaps not coincidentally, this was

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<sup>35</sup> N. Edwards and A. Lane (eds.), *Early Medieval Settlements in Wales AD 400–1100* (Bangor and Cardiff, 1988), 6; L. Laing, *The Archaeology of Celtic Britain and Ireland* (Cambridge, 2006), 45–6; M. A. Mason, P. J. Fasham and R. S. Kelly, *The Graeanog Ridge* (Aberystwyth, 1998).

<sup>36</sup> C. Corlett and M. Potterton (eds.), *Life and Death in Iron Age Ireland in the Light of Recent Archaeological Excavations* (Dublin, 2012). I owe this reference, and advice on this point, to Richard Bradley.

<sup>37</sup> T. R. Kerr, *Early Christian Settlement in North-West Ulster* (BAR British Ser. 430, Oxford, 2007), 98–100; T. Kerr et al, *Early Medieval Dwellings and Settlements in Ireland* (2 vols., Early Medieval Settlement Project Report 4.2, 2010, accessible at [http://www.ucd.ie/archaeology/documentstore/allreports/emap\\_report\\_4.2](http://www.ucd.ie/archaeology/documentstore/allreports/emap_report_4.2)), i.68–9. A major recent study of Irish enclosed settlements, deconstructing the ‘ring-fort’ paradigm and emphasising the survival of the form into the late middle ages and later, is E. Fitzpatrick, ‘Native Enclosed Settlement and the Problem of the Irish ‘Ring-Fort’’, *Medieval Archaeology*, 53 (2009), 271–307.

<sup>38</sup> For this debate see N. Edwards, *The Archaeology of Early Medieval Ireland* (London, 1990), 17–19. The present account tells a complex story briefly: for a more extended over-view of the Irish evidence in context see Thomas, ‘Prehistory of Medieval Farms and Villages’, 47–9, 50–1.

also the point at which cultural borrowings from Britain to Ireland stimulated a spectacular revival of late Iron Age La Tène art.<sup>39</sup>

The near-simultaneous adoption of enclosed and structured settlement by the Franks, the English and the Irish admits both general and specific explanations. The general one would point to other contexts in which long-term social and economic change triggers fundamental restructuring of settlement, for instance the somewhat comparable shift in some parts of Britain from dispersed to organised settlements during the late Bronze Age to early Iron Age:<sup>40</sup> similar social pressures can occur in different places without necessary connections between them. The specific explanation would emphasise the morphologically precise parallels and borrowings in what has appropriately been called this ‘age of migrating ideas’:<sup>41</sup> curvilinear settlements revived alongside La Tène art, the copying of ancient forms in both Ireland and Yorkshire, the importation of enclosed settlements to Ireland from west Britain and of surveying techniques to England from the Continent.

These are not incompatible approaches. There certainly was economic intensification in seventh-century England, especially in the eastern zones where the enclosed systems are evident, and where the adoption of enclosures and droeways probably reflects intensified agriculture and stock management<sup>42</sup> — sometimes in ways reminiscent of late prehistory. The same is true of northern France.<sup>43</sup> Where the south-west is concerned, an important study of pollen sequences relates the hiatus of settlement forms to major changes in land-use, perhaps associated with the advent of ‘convertible husbandry’, during the seventh to eighth centuries.<sup>44</sup> In Ireland too, the proliferation of so-called ‘ring-forts’ has been linked to the intensification of the cattle economy during

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<sup>39</sup> L. Webster, *Anglo-Saxon Art* (London, 2012), 100–2; R. Bradley, *The Idea of Order* (Oxford, 2012), 62–4. Cf. R. Ó Floinn, ‘Patrons and Politics: Art, Artefact and Methodology’, in M. Redknap et al. (eds.), *Pattern and Purpose in Insular Art* (Oxford, 2001), 1–14; S. Youngs, ‘Britain, Wales and Ireland: Holding Things Together’, in K. Jankulak and J. M. Wooding (eds.), *Ireland and Wales in the Middle Ages* (Dublin, 2007), 80–101.

<sup>40</sup> Cf. Bradley, *Prehistory*, 236–8; G. Lambrick et al., *The Thames Valley in Late Prehistory (The Thames Through Time: The Archaeology of the Gravel Terraces of the Upper and Middle Thames, 2: Oxford, 2009)*, 91–131, 380–92, for a regional study. For discussions on this point I am grateful to George Lambrick and Roger Thomas.

<sup>41</sup> R.M. Spearman and J. Higgitt (eds.), *The Age of Migrating Ideas* (Edinburgh, 1993).

<sup>42</sup> Hamerow, *Rural Settlements and Society*, 88–90.

<sup>43</sup> Peytremann, *Archéologie de l’Habitat Rural*, I, 355–7.

<sup>44</sup> S. J. Rippon, R.M. Fyfe and A. G. Brown, ‘Beyond Villages and Open Fields’, *Medieval Archaeology*, 50 (2006), 31–70.

c. 580–620 (and their decline to the decline of that economy two centuries later).<sup>45</sup> On the other hand the transformations in the British Isles were both rapid — essentially within the first half of the seventh century — and had distinctive features in common, such as the careful artifice that was now being applied to the replication of ancient and long-available phenomena.<sup>46</sup> Here western Britain shows a striking contrast in moving from enclosed to unenclosed settlements rather than vice versa.

*Parallel trajectories and the transformative seventh century: buildings*

The post-built halls and *Grubehäuser* on fifth- and sixth-century English sites are amply paralleled in the late Iron Age and Roman-period archaeology of Scandinavia, Germany and northern France, and their importation by Anglo-Saxon settlers is not in doubt.<sup>47</sup> But once they arrived, did they have any opportunities for hybridisation with traditions already established in Britain? There are two serious possibilities: the round-house tradition of late Iron Age Britain, and the rectilinear traditions of parts of prehistoric Europe and then the Roman Empire.

The circular form, in domestic and monumental architecture, has occurred in world cultures at many different times and places, and coexisted in parts of prehistoric Europe with rectangular forms. Richard Bradley describes how round architecture, which had supplanted the rectilinear tradition of the earlier Neolithic along the Atlantic coastline, eventually gave way once more to rectilinear forms but survived longest in the British Isles. While it lasted, it must have been fundamental to people's perceptions of domestic and social space: 'It was only when their lands were taken over by Roman, Saxon, Viking or Norman invaders that the situation changed. Until that happened, they remained

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<sup>45</sup> F. McCormick, 'Cows, Ringforts and the Origins of Early Christian Ireland', *Emania*, 13 (1995), 33–7; idem, 'The Decline of the Cow: Agricultural and Settlement Change in Early Medieval Ireland', *Peritia*, 20 (2008), 209–24. McCormick associates the change from 'flat' ring-forts surrounded by banks and ditches, to the more lightly enclosed 'platform' ones, with a late eighth-century shift from cattle to sheep. His comment ('Decline of the Cow' p. 215) that 'ring-forts' are unique in contemporary western Europe, and 'a unique response to the value system of Ireland ... in direct contrast to the unprotected farmsteads of contemporary England' may need some modification in the light of the (admittedly very different) enclosure systems now being found in eastern England.

<sup>46</sup> There are other signs of this, such as the early seventh-century barrows that replicate Bronze Age ones, and the Roman 'theatre segment' at Yeavinger.

<sup>47</sup> H. Hamerow, *Early Medieval Settlements* (Oxford, 2002), 12–51; Hamerow, *Rural Settlements and Society*, 18–24.



Figure 5: An Iron Age round-house. (Reconstruction at the National History Museum, St Fagans, Wales; photograph John Blair.)

the last inhabitants of a circular world.<sup>48</sup> In the British Isles, where the round-house had been ubiquitous in late prehistory, this transformation from round to rectangular occurred broadly during the first millennium AD, but on a range of different trajectories (Fig. 5).

In Ireland the Iron Age round-house continued, as the ubiquitous domestic type, until it finally hybridised into sub-rectangular forms in the ninth to tenth centuries.<sup>49</sup> The same is true of at least parts of northern Britain, though in Pictish territory the round-house diversified during the sixth to ninth centuries into complex and sometimes curious forms.<sup>50</sup> In western Britain hybridisation had happened earlier, under

<sup>48</sup> Bradley, *Idea of Order*, 215.

<sup>49</sup> This hybridisation is illustrated by the rural houses overlying the chambered tombs at Knowth (G. Eogan, *The Archaeology of Knowth in the First and Second Millennia AD* (Dublin, 2012), 85–7, 701–6), and arguably by the urban houses at Dublin (Edwards, *Archaeology of Early Medieval Ireland*, 182–5). The reasons for the change are, however, complex and still debated: see Kerr et al., *Early Medieval Dwellings*, i.21–2.

<sup>50</sup> L. Alcock, *Kings and Warriors, Craftsmen and Priests* (Edinburgh, 2003), 265–9; M. Carver, *Surviving in Symbols* (Edinburgh, 1999), 36–7.

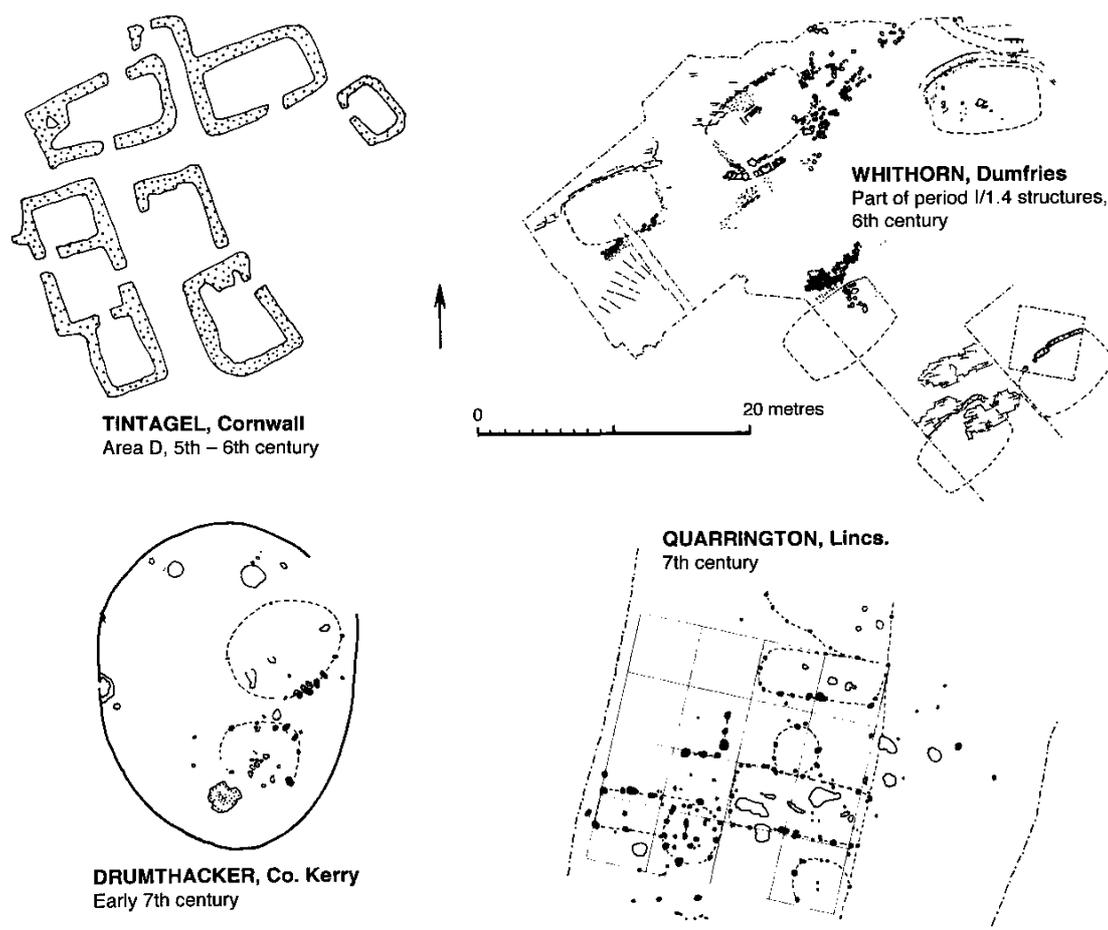


Figure 6: Examples of small domestic buildings in British, Irish and Anglo-Saxon zones. The Quarrington group, from the phase preceding the gridded layout shown in Fig. 4, is based on a grid of short perches (i.e. 4.57-m. squares). (Sources as in notes 37, 51, 56, 74.)

Roman rule, producing a range of forms on the spectrum from perfect round to perfect rectangle, including sub-ovals and rectangles with rounded ends or corners (Fig. 6). In Cornwall, both round and oval houses were built or adapted in Trethurgy Round at every stage during the fourth to sixth centuries, while the tight clusters of small, sub-rectangular cells at Tintagel (fifth to sixth centuries) and Mawgan Porth (ninth to tenth centuries) look like squared-up versions of the compact, heavily built 'courtyard houses' of western Cornwall.<sup>51</sup> Welsh evidence remains thin, but Trostrey near Usk provides a sequence of Roman-period round-houses replaced, probably in the fifth to seventh centuries, by three

<sup>51</sup> Quinnell, *Trethurgy*; R. C. Barrowman, C. E. Batey and C. D. Morris, *Excavations at Tintagel Castle, Cornwall, 1990–1999* (London, 2007); R. Bruce-Mitford et al., *Mawgan Porth: a Settlement of the Late Saxon Period on the North Cornish Coast* (London, 1997). Pearce, *South-Western Britain*, 36, notes the difficulty of finding a 'pure' round-house in Roman-period Cornwall.

oval-plan houses with double wattle walls:<sup>52</sup> a glimpse of a tradition combining the construction of contemporary Irish round-houses with the Cornish plan type. That tradition can in turn be traced, much further north, in the wattle, rounded-corner houses built intermittently at Whithorn during the fifth to tenth centuries (Fig. 6 (p. 21 above)).

Rectangular house-plans are the most distinctively ‘Anglo-Saxon’ trait, but it is becoming apparent that the round-house was not extinct among the English.<sup>53</sup> The early Anglo-Saxon settlement at Lanton Quarry (Northumberland) contained a round-house dated by radiocarbon to AD 420-640;<sup>54</sup> the Thirlings settlement, also in Northumberland and of similar date, includes the post-holes of at least one other.<sup>55</sup> An especially suggestive case is Quarrington (Lincs.), where three flimsy buildings of sub-circular plan were replaced by three rectangular structures — one with rounded corners — within a formal gridded layout that points to a date after 600.<sup>56</sup> (Fig. 6 (p. 21)). Quarrington is deep in the ‘Anglo-Saxon building culture province’, but the complex would not look out of place (apart from this grid-planning) in western Britain: it raises suspicions that Anglo-Saxon developments at a vernacular level were not wholly divorced from the post-Roman British continuum. The potential significance of this observation becomes greater when we remember how difficult it is, even in the zones with rich archaeological data, to see the settlements and houses of low social groups such as estate workers and slaves, or agricultural structures that could have perpetuated archaic forms longer than dwellings. For all we know, the round-house and its derivatives could indeed have continued long into the post-Roman era in central and eastern England, but in the invisible sector of domestic building culture.

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<sup>52</sup> A. G. Mein, ‘Trostrey, Trostrey Castle’, *Archaeology in Wales*, 32 (1992), 12; 33 (1993), 52, 79; and 34 (1994), 71.

<sup>53</sup> For these purposes I am disregarding the circular structure(s) overlying building D3 at Yeavinger (B. Hope-Taylor, *Yeavinger: an Anglo-British Centre of Early Northumbria* (London, 1977), Fig. 47), where the context suggests a ritual identity.

<sup>54</sup> D. G. Passmore and C. Waddington, *Archaeology and Environment in Northumberland: Till-Tweed Studies 2* (Oxford, 2012), 295–6. I am very grateful to Clive Waddington for bringing this to my attention.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.* 297.

<sup>56</sup> G. Taylor et al., ‘Early to Middle Saxon Settlement at Quarrington, Lincolnshire’, *Antiquaries Journal*, 83 (2003), 231–80, Fig. 7; Blair, ‘Grid-Planning’, 33–4. In the first of two successive phases of grid-planning (for the second see the present Fig. 4), the round-houses seem to have been systematically replaced by rectangular buildings. Here it needs to be said that the ten-metre scale on Taylor’s Fig. 7 actually represents *twenty* metres, with the result that I illustrated these structures in ‘Grid-Planning’ (Fig. 11) at half their true size. The gridded interpretation remains valid, and is shown correctly in the present Fig. 6.

The possibility of post-Roman British influence on Anglo-Saxon building forms has in fact been much discussed, but in relation to the highest rather than the lowest social level. In the decades around 600 the building repertoire diversified into more imposing and architecturally ambitious forms, including much larger halls (for instance Cowderys Down C12, Fig. 7 (p. 24 overleaf)), end annexes, different forms of wall and foundation construction, and the grouping of buildings into the formal linear and rectilinear configurations of the ‘great hall complexes’.<sup>57</sup> Given especially the use of the ‘two-square’ planning module both for Anglo-Saxon halls and for some Romano-British rural buildings, the possibility that Germanic immigrants adopted a surviving post-Roman tradition has seemed attractive.<sup>58</sup> In contrast, Helena Hamerow has now observed that many of the supposedly British features can be paralleled in settlements on the Continental littoral, including (within and just beyond the former imperial frontier) the ‘two-square’ module.<sup>59</sup>

Important and convincing though Hamerow’s points are, we are not forced to choose between influence from the Anglo-Saxon homelands and influence from post-Roman Britain. Like the north-western Continent, Britain straddled the frontier of the Empire: it need not have been excluded either from the ‘widespread and long-lived correlations between templates or modules used in the layout of buildings throughout these regions from the Iron Age to the Middle Ages’,<sup>60</sup> or from the hybridisation of that tradition with architectural ideas diffused outwards from the collapsing Roman world. Rather than a single moment of contact, we could envisage an extended continuum, during which influences both from southern Scandinavia (which may well have had an abiding influence on the ‘Anglo-Saxon building culture province’) and

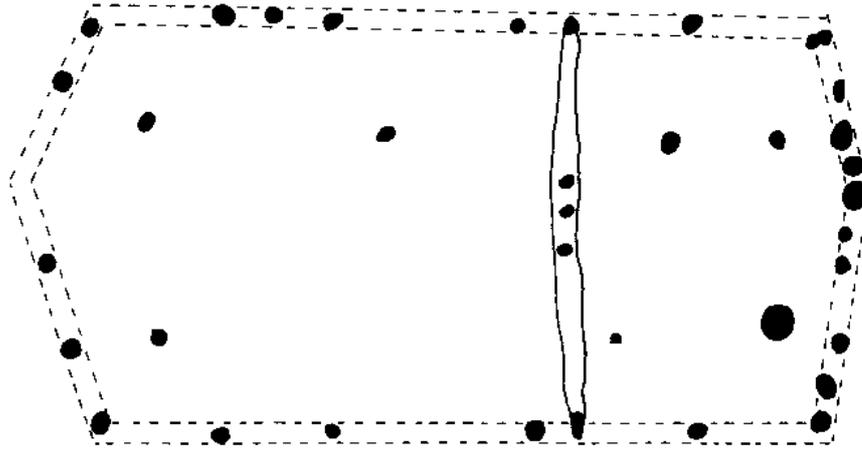
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<sup>57</sup> For the interplay of rectangular halls and circular structures in ritual and domestic ceremonial architecture, including some discussion of halls in early medieval Scandinavia, see R. Bradley, ‘Houses of Commons, Houses of Lords: Domestic Dwellings and Monumental Architecture in Prehistoric Europe’, *Proceedings of the Prehistoric Society* (2013 forthcoming). As Bradley concludes, ‘enormous structures of the kind discussed in this paper are a special feature of periods in which new networks were forming’.

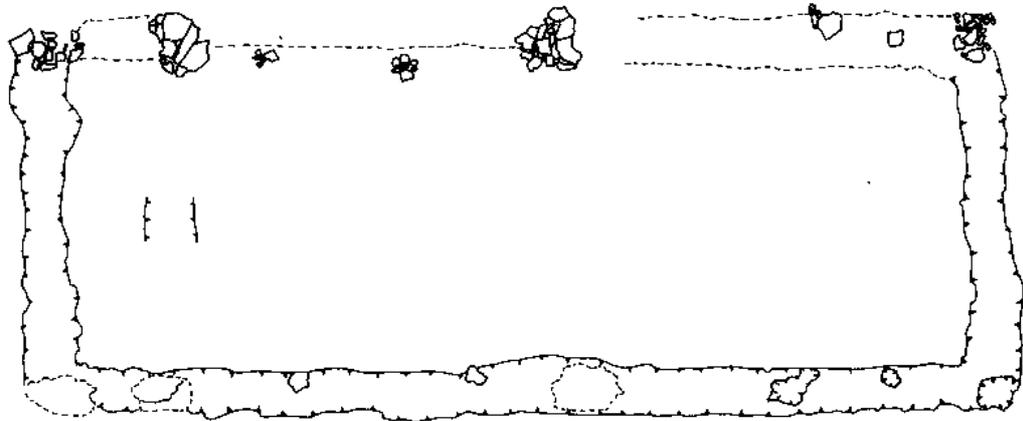
<sup>58</sup> For a wide-ranging and balanced discussion see S. James, A. Marshall and M. Millett, ‘An Early Medieval Building Tradition’, *Archaeological Journal*, 141 (1984), 182–215.

<sup>59</sup> Hamerow, *Rural Settlements and Society*, 18–22.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.* 20.

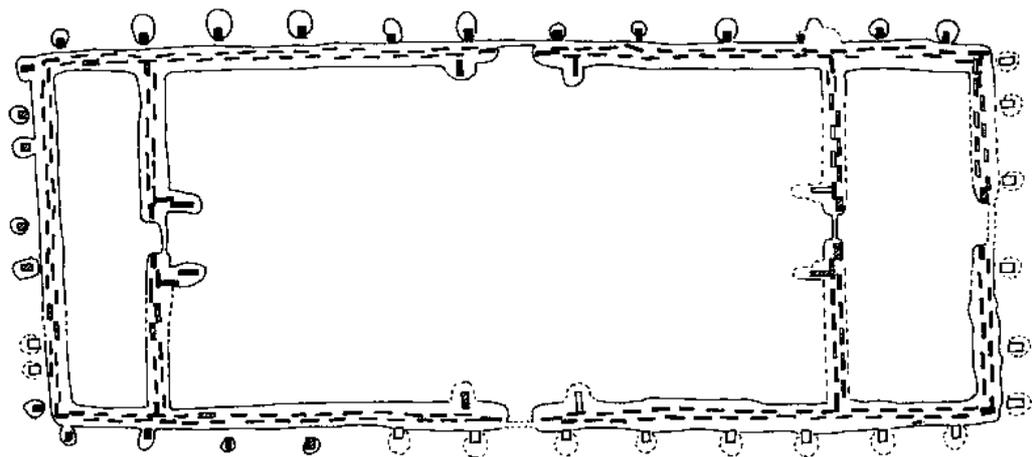


**CADBURY CASTLE, Building L1**  
Western British, 5th – 6th century



**BIRDOSWALD, Building 200**  
Northern British, late 5th – 6th century

0 10 metres



**COWDERYS DOWN, Building C12**  
Southern English, early 7th century

Figure 7: Examples of large-scale and formal timber architecture in British and Anglo-Saxon zones. (Sources as in notes 58, 63–5.)

from the British remained available for use when socio-economic circumstances permitted.

As we have seen, the ‘great hall complexes’ were built by early seventh-century elites outside the fringes of the ‘Anglo-Saxon building culture province’. Assertions of English identity though they surely were, it is equally true that these constructions took place in mixed milieux from which British building traditions cannot have been absent. The juxtaposition can be close: the ‘great hall complex’ at Atcham (Shropshire) is less than two miles from the post-Roman timber buildings at Wroxeter (below), while the biggest concentration of these sites is in northern Northumbria and south-eastern Scotland, a zone of intense competition and interaction between British and Anglian leaders.<sup>61</sup>

The transmission of fugitive Romano-British traits by such routes presupposes a tradition of constructing grand, formal buildings in timber that was maintained during c. 400–600. This is less unlikely than it might seem. We now have a small but well-attested group of post-hole and sill-trench rectangular structures, unequivocally in British territory, from the fifth to seventh centuries. The most impressive case, if it could be accepted unreservedly, would be the complex of monumental timber buildings claimed to overlie the abandoned Roman city of Wroxeter (Shropshire); the reconstructions and dating have attracted serious criticism, however, though the reality of some of the smaller post-Roman timber buildings is still accepted.<sup>62</sup> Less controversially, hall-type structures at Cadbury Castle (Somerset) and Poundbury (Dorset) would not look anomalous on an Anglo-Saxon site in scale and proportion, despite their rather different technique of light and intermittent post-holes for the main walls combined with transverse beam-slots (Fig. 7 (p. 24)).<sup>63</sup> The Cadbury building shares with the ostensibly Anglian Hall at Doon Hill, Dunbar, the highly unusual and distinctive feature of end walls on a V-shaped plan.<sup>64</sup> Further evidence comes from the Hadrian’s Wall fort at

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<sup>61</sup> Alcock, *Kings and Warriors, Craftsmen and Priests*, 234–56.

<sup>62</sup> P. Barker et al., *The Baths Basilica, Wroxeter: Excavations 1996–90* (London, 1997). But for more sceptical views see M. Fulford, ‘Wroxeter: Legionary Fortress, Baths, and the ‘Great Rebuilding’ of c. AD 450–550’ *Journal of Roman Archaeology* 15.2 (2002), 639–45; A. Lane, ‘Wroxeter and the End of Roman Britain’, *Antiquity*, forthcoming. I am grateful to Mike Fulford for advice on this problem.

<sup>63</sup> Cadbury structure L1 (L. Alcock, *Cadbury Castle, Somerset: the Early Medieval Archaeology* (Cardiff, 1995), 30–43); Poundbury structure PR 3 (C. Sparey-Green, *Excavations at Poundbury, Dorchester, Dorset, 1966–1982: I: The Settlements* (Dorchester, 1987), 77–8).

<sup>64</sup> See the comparison between these two buildings, and with Cowderys Down C12, in Alcock, *Cadbury*, 132–9.

Birdoswald (Cumberland),<sup>65</sup> where the demolition in the mid fourth century of granaries adjoining the principal west gate was followed by two phases of large rectangular timber buildings, their footprints defined partly by shallow beam-slots and partly by rubble post-pads (Fig.7 (p. 24)). Dating is imprecise, but it is clear that at least the later timber phase should be placed well into the fifth and perhaps into the sixth century.

It cannot be stressed too strongly that only the highly exceptional conditions at Birdoswald and Wroxeter, where the surfaces consisted of flattened and fragmented rubble rather than soil, enabled the features to be seen at all. The excavator of Birdoswald writes:

The methodology employed for the latest deposits was of enormous importance in the recognition of these buildings... [Surface stripping] revealed a stone spread made up of overlapping layers of collapsed stone, rubble, laid surfaces, and wall tops of varying periods and functions. These surfaces were then drawn in detail, and the recognition of anomalies, usually differences in colour, angularity, composition, and compaction resulted from close observation by the draughtspeople. The interpretation of small, and seemingly unconnected, anomalies on the ground was greatly facilitated by the existence of the tower of Birdoswald farmhouse... This overhead view allowed the gradual appreciation of the pattern formed by the Site Phase 12 features, and their interpretation as buildings. As Barker... found at Wroxeter, the subtleties of the surfaces could best be appreciated by observing them from a variety of viewpoints while moving around them.<sup>66</sup>

Neither these ground conditions nor these excavation standards are in any way typical of normal sites — or (especially in the commercial sector) practices. For all we know, structures of this kind could have been very common indeed: excavation in almost any other kind of context would miss them. It is abundantly clear that not merely small vernacular buildings, but very large and ambitious ones, may lie below the threshold of visibility.

These cases, and especially Birdoswald, attest to a British tradition that grew directly out of Roman military construction, but survived for up to two centuries after Roman rule collapsed. This is the kind of timber

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<sup>65</sup> T. Wilmott, *Birdoswald: Excavations of a Roman Fort on Hadrian's Wall and its Successor Settlements, 1987–92* (London, 1997), 203–31; T. Wilmott, 'The Late Roman Transition at Birdoswald and on Hadrian's Wall', in T. Wilmott and P. Wilson (eds.), *The Late Roman Transition in the North* (BAR British Ser. 299: Oxford, 2000), 13–23.

<sup>66</sup> Wilmott, *Birdoswald*, 213.

architecture that British leaders familiar with Roman buildings, but lacking the infrastructure and technology to replicate them in masonry, were capable of planning and achieving. The ephemeral character of the remains is entirely compatible with an architectural style that was both imposing and decorative: there are analogies in recent wooden architecture across the world, for instance in colonial New England or Eastern Europe (Fig. 8).<sup>67</sup>



Figure 8: A nineteenth-century house in Jyskyjärvi village, Russian Karelia. It illustrates how a light timber structure, lacking ground-set foundations, can be well-finished and decorative, with architectural pretensions. Like the hall-type buildings on post-Roman sites in northern and western Britain, its archaeological traces would be fugitive. (Photograph John Blair.)

Balancing the relative importance of two different traditions of large and formal rectangular buildings — one British, the other from southern Scandinavia — is formidably difficult. It is symptomatic that the major building C12 in the ‘great hall complex’ at Cowderys Down (Hants.) has the same footprint as building 200 at Birdoswald (Fig. 7 (p. 24)), but also has close similarities with house XV at Wijster in the

<sup>67</sup> Cf. Barker et al., *Baths Basilica*, 169–91, 235

Netherlands.<sup>68</sup> It can at least be said that some features of the English tradition have no known Continental prototypes, but emerge in the ‘great hall complexes’ during the transformations of *c.* 600–20. Since the Continental tradition is so much better understood than the British one, a British origin must be a serious possibility. In particular, earth-fast vertical planking is a puzzlingly impractical technique, resulting in rapid decay, whereas vertical planking on sill-beams, and as infill walling for solidly framed structures, makes good structural sense. The fusion of two distinct construction modes — framed walls, sill-beams and plank cladding from the Romano-British tradition,<sup>69</sup> earth-fast posts from the Germanic — could help to explain the sometimes complex double-plank walls, and post-in-trench or plank-in-trench foundation systems, found in the English halls. If Romanising techniques were thought prestigious, the prestige may have outweighed practical shortcomings.

The evidence reviewed above suggests two different lines of influence from the British past: on the one hand the pure Iron Age round-house, so vernacular as to be barely visible; on the other the overtly Roman tradition of grand architecture on the rectilinear plan, translated from masonry to timber and mediated through high-level contacts. The ostensibly late date of this mediation, nearly two centuries after the first Anglo-Saxon invasions, raises difficult questions. Did the fusion actually start much earlier, but in architectural media that we cannot see? Or did the rapid emergence of Anglo-Saxon elites, simultaneously attested by the ‘great hall complexes’ and the princely burials, generate new cultural contacts with British potentates at a high aristocratic level?

The present argument for ephemeral building cultures certainly accommodates the first. On the other hand, the rich fusion with Anglian art styles that so quickly followed the La Tène renaissance in western Britain and Ireland, expressed in finds assemblages from sites such as Dunadd and, a few decades later, in the art of the Insular gospel books,<sup>70</sup> points to exchanges in the milieu of early seventh-century princely magnificence. In further support of this is the contemporaneous assimilation into Anglo-Saxon ritual practice of pagan shrine forms

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<sup>68</sup> Hamerow, *Rural Settlements and Society*, 20n.

<sup>69</sup> There seems at present to be no evidence for vertical planking in the external walls of Romano-British timber buildings, but the sample is too small for this to tell us much. From the Roman world there is abundant evidence for timber structures both with and without sole-plates, but the superstructure is only indicated in a small minority of cases: see I. A. Richmond, ‘Roman Timber Building’, in E. M. Jope (ed.), *Studies in Building History* (London, 1961), 15–26, at pp. 19–23. The routine fabrication of planks of broad, thin cross-section may have been more a Roman than a Germanic practice.

<sup>70</sup> A. Lane and E. Campbell, *Dunadd: an Early Dalriadic Capital* (Oxford, 2000), 243–7; Webster, *Anglo-Saxon Art*, 99–111.

apparently derived from the Romano-Celtic temple tradition.<sup>71</sup> If the new wealth fuelled a monumentalisation of existing structural types, making them archaeologically visible, both interpretations could be true.

As with the synchronous and fundamental changes in rural settlement structure, long-term socio-economic factors must have interacted with some quite specific cultural ones, including purposeful imitation and revival. What were these borrowings trying to achieve? At the most educated end of the spectrum, of course, the accurate replication of Roman culture is explicit in the writings of Bede and the artistic works of his mentors. To the extent that the formally-planned settlements of eastern England (and indeed northern France) were influenced by monastic culture, the same could be true there. Borrowings from the British west are not inherently implausible either, once we discount Bede's prejudices, but on the face of it look more secular: the interactions of an aristocratic warrior elite whose shared culture of magnificence mattered more than language or ethnicity. On the other hand, a common impulse of 'trying to look Roman' need not have required any academic understanding of Roman art and architecture. If Lloyd Laing is right to suggest that La Tène art was revived so enthusiastically in the seventh century because the transmission of motifs through Romano-British art made people perceive it as Roman,<sup>72</sup> the same could be true of the buildings and settlement forms that had grown from Iron Age and Romano-British roots.

*Reversion and consolidation: the emergence of the 'Anglo-Saxon building culture province'*

The trajectories of Anglo-Saxon territorial dominance and the diffusion of Anglo-Saxon building forms did not have a linear relationship, but diverged over time. In the early stages, up to c. 500, the two were in step: burials and buildings delineated the still rather limited zone that the immigrants are likely to have dominated. In the sixth century, as the Anglo-Saxon advance continued but then temporarily stalled, the spread of the furnished burial rite fell behind and so, even more markedly, did the spread of building styles. In the seventh to eighth centuries, as English polities triumphed, furnished burial died out while the building styles contracted, but consolidated, into a strongly marked eastern zone.

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<sup>71</sup> J. Blair, 'Anglo-Saxon Pagan Shrines and their Prototypes', *Anglo-Saxon Studies in Archaeology and History*, 8 (1995), 1–28. The point is emphasised at Yeavinger, where the elaborate articulation of domestic with cultic structures incorporates one of the clearest cases of this characteristic 'circle-in-square' shrine type.

<sup>72</sup> L. Laing, 'The Roman Origins of Celtic Christian Art', *Arch. Jnl.* 162 (2005), 146–76.

Two linked dynamics help to explain this puzzling contraction into a culture-province that cannot reflect either political geography or ethnic identity: a ‘post-colonial’ balancing-out, as the cultural package imported by immigrants was gradually modified and overlain by the reassertion of indigenous traits; and the occasional tendency of vernacular technologies to consolidate in core regions but die out in others, generating strongly-marked distribution patterns. In the Anglo-Saxon case the consolidation must be bound up with economic and geopolitical factors, including riverine communications to the Wash, Humber and North Sea, that made parts of eastern England special. The modification and overlaying evidently occurred in some areas that were firmly incorporated within Anglo-Saxon polities, not just on their frontiers, but it seems very likely that an interplay between British and Germanic traditions was everywhere the main dynamic.<sup>73</sup>

A relatively late (but therefore documented) illustration of these processes in a frontier context is Whithorn (Dumfries and Galloway): an established British settlement whose reconstruction as a Northumbrian minster, in the early eighth century, had a transformative but transient impact.<sup>74</sup> Into a complex of light bow-sided or sub-oval buildings around a circular shrine, the Anglians introduced a formal alignment of churches and other rectilinear structures on the Northumbrian pattern known from sites near the east coast. But as time passed, and the high monastic culture waned, there was a reversion to earlier norms. In the later ninth to tenth centuries the buildings resumed the squat proportions, bowed sides and exiguous construction modes of their sixth- to seventh-century predecessors (Fig. 6 (p. 21)): except to some extent in size, there is little to distinguish the wattle- or wicker-walled buildings of Period I/0 (probably fifth to sixth centuries) from those of period III/3 (late tenth to early eleventh centuries).<sup>75</sup> Even after careful excavation in good conditions, the traces of this long-lived tradition were fugitive apart from the slight hollows in which the buildings were constructed, whereas the rubble footings, post-holes and wall-trenches of the Northumbrian phase were obvious. Notwithstanding some mutual influence, there is a stark contrast between the imported, archaeologically prominent but short-lived Anglian tradition and the indigenous, archaeologically fugitive but enduring British one. If this represents a working-through of the earlier

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<sup>73</sup> An important discussion of these issues for north-west Britain, using models of frontier cultures (notably ‘self-shaping’) first formulated with reference to north America, is F. H. Clark, ‘The Northumbrian Frontiers, c.500–c.850’ (unpublished D.Phil. thesis, Oxford University, 2009).

<sup>74</sup> P. Hill, *Whithorn and St Ninian: the Excavation of a Monastic Town, 1984–91* (Stroud, 1997).

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.* 69–70, 74–9, 201–7.

cultural dynamic in Anglo-British contacts, the apparent seventh-century contraction in the range of identified sites starts to look less puzzling.

Another relevant point from Whithorn is the ‘Anglicisation’ of the finds assemblage, which in the Northumbrian monastic phase ‘shows no evidence of contacts beyond Northumbria, indicating that life within the enclave was thoroughly Northumbrian’; in the later ninth to tenth centuries continuing Anglian and Anglo-Scandinavian contacts are indicated, with Irish and Hiberno-Norse material gradually appearing in the later tenth century. ‘This picture of evolving cultural contacts’, observes the excavation report, ‘contrasts with the continuity evident in the design of the buildings, which indicates a stable population developing without strong influences from elsewhere’.<sup>76</sup> Portable culture travels much more quickly and easily than the culture of domestic buildings, and can be adopted with no interference to lifestyle or social space (and indeed without necessarily disrupting religious beliefs and practices, even when added to burial ritual). This is a helpful reminder that dress-fittings, coins and even grave-goods are far less substantial indicators of social and cultural identity than embedded design norms for houses and settlements.

Turning to a region that forces a rather stark confrontation with the concept of ‘frontiers’, Kent is one of the unlikeliest places to be considered marginal in a conventional view of Anglo-Saxon England. Why, with such spectacularly rich cemeteries and minsters, such an abundance of metal small-finds, and the opulent sixth- to seventh-century aristocratic culture now displayed at Lyminge, is ordinary rural settlement so elusive?<sup>77</sup> A continuing British — and thus invisible — domestic tradition is perhaps not quite so implausible as it might seem, given the unusually persuasive hints of a British ecclesiastical tradition in late sixth-century Kent.<sup>78</sup> But that is hardly an adequate explanation for such a major aspect of life in a region so cosmopolitan, and so open to

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<sup>76</sup> Ibid. 47, 52; cf. Clark, ‘Northumbria’s Frontiers’, 168–71.

<sup>77</sup> The point has been made in relation to Eastry, with its outstanding concentration of sixth-century cemeteries: ‘it is striking that multiple interventions in the past two decades, carried out or observed by a number of experienced archaeologists, have failed to produce evidence of substantial Anglo-Saxon occupation to complement the testimony of the historical and burial records’ (T. M. Dickinson, C. Fern and A. Richards, ‘Early Anglo-Saxon Eastry’, *Anglo-Saxon Studies in Archaeology and History*, 17 (2011) 1–86, at p. 62). Gabor Thomas’s recent excavations at Lyminge seem to have found a ‘great hall complex’ of the kind one might expect at Eastry: G. Thomas, ‘Life before the Minster: the Social Dynamics of Monastic Foundation at Anglo-Saxon Lyminge, Kent’, *Antiquaries Journal*, 93 (2013), 109–45. Nonetheless, the top-level royal and then monastic culture of Kent is still not visibly accompanied by anything that might be classed as ‘ordinary’ settlement.

<sup>78</sup> Blair, *Church*, 24.

contacts by sea and river. Perhaps the message from Kent is that it is not the absence, but the *presence*, of visible Anglo-Saxon settlement forms that requires explanation.

What now looks so striking about the zone of continuing and consolidated settlement visibility — in the AIP distributions and still more in my own investigations — is the relative sharpness and clarity of its western and south-western boundaries. If counterintuitive at first sight, this contraction into a discrete culture-province has a direct analogy in the frontier between the cruck-framed and box-framed technologies of timber building in late- and post-medieval England. The distinctive form of the cruck-truss has encouraged architectural historians to compile inventories and distribution-maps, from which a hard eastern boundary, with abundant crucks to its west but none whatever to its east, emerges with growing clarity as new examples are added. It is tempting to see this boundary as ancient, and especially tempting in the present context to suggest that the ‘Anglo-Saxon building culture province’ foreshadows the zone of box-framing. In fact the two frontiers are not sufficiently congruent (see the ‘cruck boundary’ line marked on Fig. 9 (p. 36)), and in any case dendrochronology now suggests a more complex intersection of building technologies through the thirteenth to fifteenth centuries, when regional differences may have consolidated rather than weakened.<sup>79</sup> It is more useful to note how this consolidation parallels the seventh-century developments, when a different but equally decisive frontier between the domestic-building cultures of an easterly zone of England on the one hand, and the rest of England and Wales on the other, crystallised out of a more disparate pattern. These intimations of provincial self-shaping, several centuries apart, may have lessons for some broader aspects of English regional diversity.<sup>80</sup>

### *Fortified princely citadels*

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<sup>79</sup> N. W. Alcock, *Cruck Construction: an Introduction and Catalogue* (London, 1981), for the distributions; B. Meeson, ‘Structural Trends in English Medieval Buildings: New Insights from Dendrochronology’, *Vernacular Architecture*, 43 (2012), 58–75.

<sup>80</sup> They may have profound implications for the model of provincial regions classically set out in B.K. Roberts and S. Wrathmell, *Region and Place* (Swindon, 2002), and critiqued by Lambourne, *Patterning in the Historic Landscape*. In particular, the relationship between the ‘Anglo-Saxon building culture province’ proposed here and Roberts and Wrathmell’s ‘Central Province’ needs clarification.

One final comparison of trajectories highlights a difference between the English and their British neighbours.<sup>81</sup> In both northern and south-western Britain in the post-Roman era, the reoccupation of Iron Age hillforts and the construction of new fortified citadels are very well-attested. Often these sites were centres of consumption (especially when they were near the Atlantic coasts and had access to continuing Mediterranean trade) and of craft production. But except in the context of transfers of territorial power from British to English rulers, Anglo-Saxon sources both written and physical are remarkably lacking in evidence either for fortified places or for siege warfare involving them.<sup>82</sup> Whatever the explanation (and a combination of different socio-economic regimes with different conventions of ritualised violence may offer the best one), the leaders of sixth- and seventh-century Anglo-Saxon polities apparently did not defend themselves and their peoples, or concentrate their resources, in this fashion. Only with the advent of complex monastic sites from the 660s onwards, and thus in a rather different context, did the English acquire settlements that were highly developed and strongly bounded.

Eventually, Anglo-Saxon kings did rediscover the hillfort habit, though two or three centuries after the British. An important signpost is the decree issued by King Æthelbald of Mercia in 749 at Gumley (Leics.), which specifies for the first time the obligation of bookland estates to maintain forts and bridges.<sup>83</sup> Famous though this passage is, its subtle distinction between *constructions* of bridges (*instructionibus pontium*) and *necessary defences* of forts (*necessariis defensionibus arcium*) is not usually noted. Arguably it expresses a distinction between timber bridge-causeways, which had to be built from scratch, and the Iron Age hillforts that were scattered widely across the landscape and merely needed refurbishment. A surprising number of hillforts have in fact produced evidence for post-Roman phases in their ramparts and Anglo-Saxon finds from their interiors (though at present no coherent picture is available), and some other places have defences that can plausibly be

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<sup>81</sup> For this paragraph see Blair, *Church*, 268–70; Laing, *Archaeology of Celtic Britain and Ireland*, 33–41, gives an over-view of fort types.

<sup>82</sup> The post-Roman hillfort culture of the British south-west may have extended as far east as Oldbury Castle in Wiltshire (A. Reynolds and S. Semple, ‘Digging for Names’, in R. Jones and S. Semple (eds.), *Sense of Place in Anglo-Saxon England* (Donington, 2012), 76–100, at pp. 81–2), but there are currently no indications that it survived the English takeover.

<sup>83</sup> P. H. Sawyer (ed.), *Anglo-Saxon Charters: an Annotated List and Bibliography* (London, 1968) (hereafter ‘S’), S 92; *Councils and Ecclesiastical Documents*, ed. A.W. Haddan and W. Stubbs, iii (Oxford, 1871), 386.

dated to the Mercian period.<sup>84</sup> The reign of Offa provides two solid pieces of written evidence: a charter of 779 in which the king grants land appurtenant to the ‘town’ (*urbs*) of Salmonsbury (Glos.), and another of 780 which he confirms (between 787 and 796) at Irthlingborough (Northants.).<sup>85</sup> Both of these places are Iron Age forts, and — remarkably — fieldwork at Irthlingborough has identified pottery and a timber building of appropriate date.<sup>86</sup>

This is still some way short of the hillfort cultures of the north and the south-west: no hillfort in an Anglo-Saxon milieu has yet produced evidence for consumption or production on the scale of a Cadbury Congresbury or a Dunadd. Nonetheless, place-name and other evidence is now emerging for quite elaborate and complex infrastructures of satellite settlements around Iron Age hillforts and other centres in Mercia and its dependencies.<sup>87</sup> Why did Mercian kings from the 740s onwards adopt this mode of regional administration and defence? Although it is customary to ascribe Mercian innovations to Frankish influence, precise Continental prototypes for these English arrangements are hard to find. In a context of growing capacities and ambitions for political and economic control, the building of fortified centres is hardly surprising and could easily have been spontaneous.<sup>88</sup> But did Æthelbald and Offa take directions from the Welsh rulers on their western frontier with whom they so often interacted and competed: a final phase of British influence on the culture of English settlement? If so, they must have had new and specific reasons: Penda, more than a century earlier, surely knew the citadel habit through his north Welsh alliances, but there is no evidence that he copied it.

### *Conclusion*

The importance of the phenomena described above for understanding Anglo-Saxon settlement *as we see it* should not be exaggerated. If hybridisation with a British tradition contributed something to building forms, the traditions of the Anglo-Saxon homelands contributed more.

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<sup>84</sup> For a recent review of the evidence, see J. Baker and S. Brookes, *Beyond the Burghal Hidage* (Leiden and Boston, 2013), 49–63.

<sup>85</sup> S 114, S 1184; the Irthlingborough confirmation cannot be earlier than 787 because Ecgfrith occurs as king of the Mercians

<sup>86</sup> S. Parry, *Raunds Area Survey* (Oxford, 2006), 139–46.

<sup>87</sup> The constellations of functional place-names in *-tūn*, especially the compound *burh-tūn/ byrig-tūn*, will be discussed in a monograph by John Blair and Ann Cole.

<sup>88</sup> The slightly later emergence of fortified sites in central Europe offers some analogies: H. Herold, ‘Fortified Settlements of the Ninth and Tenth Centuries AD in Central Europe: Structure, Function and Symbolism’, *Medieval Archaeology*, 56 (2012), 60–84.

The heavy and continuing concentration of visible settlement in the east midlands and along the east coast displays a society that overwhelmingly looked across the sea, towards Scandinavia, the Rhine, the Low Countries and northern France. If Romanising traditions from the British interested Anglo-Saxon elites in the decades around 600, they were quickly swamped by the incomparably more powerful Romanising influences from the Continent. The patterns of artefact and pottery use are also those of an eastern heartland with a westwards periphery. In all of this, the British contributions were ultimately deeply buried.

Nonetheless, there are two ways in which the British context may help us to understand the formation and character of Anglo-Saxon settlement. First, it enables us to see that the radical changes in the organisation of space in English settlements during the seventh century were part of something larger, tracking topographical developments in Ireland and on the Continent in a way curiously reminiscent of the tendency of contemporary Anglo-Saxon art to track artistic developments in Ireland and on the Continent. The shock-waves of cultural contact running through the British Isles in the seventh century affected settlement forms, just as they affected other phenomena with which we are more familiar.

Secondly, it forces us to confront the elephant in the room: Anglo-Saxon settlement *as we do not see it*. As Fig. 9 (p. 36) illustrates, the region where the English between 650 and 850 are visible to us in their domestic settings is considerably smaller than the region where they had been visible in death during the previous century, and comprises only a third of the area of the established English kingdoms. The huge expansion in excavation is starting to show us how at least a large section of the population lived in areas such as Cambridgeshire, Northamptonshire, Norfolk and Lincolnshire (though even there another large section must remain below the line). But in areas such as Kent, Sussex, Warwickshire, Worcestershire and Staffordshire we still have virtually no idea of how most of them lived, despite their ancestral burials in the Germanic mode and the written sources attesting their ascribed English identity. Was it in framed buildings with ground-sills? Was it sometimes still in round-houses? What did their household goods look like, and what did they use instead of pottery? Probably we will never be able to perceive their living environment, because it was constructed using methods and materials that leave no archaeological trace; that need not mean that it was uncomfortable, plain or crude. As with so much in Anglo-Saxon England, we will never have more than fragments of the jigsaw, but at least it is useful to discover where to place the fragments that we do have.

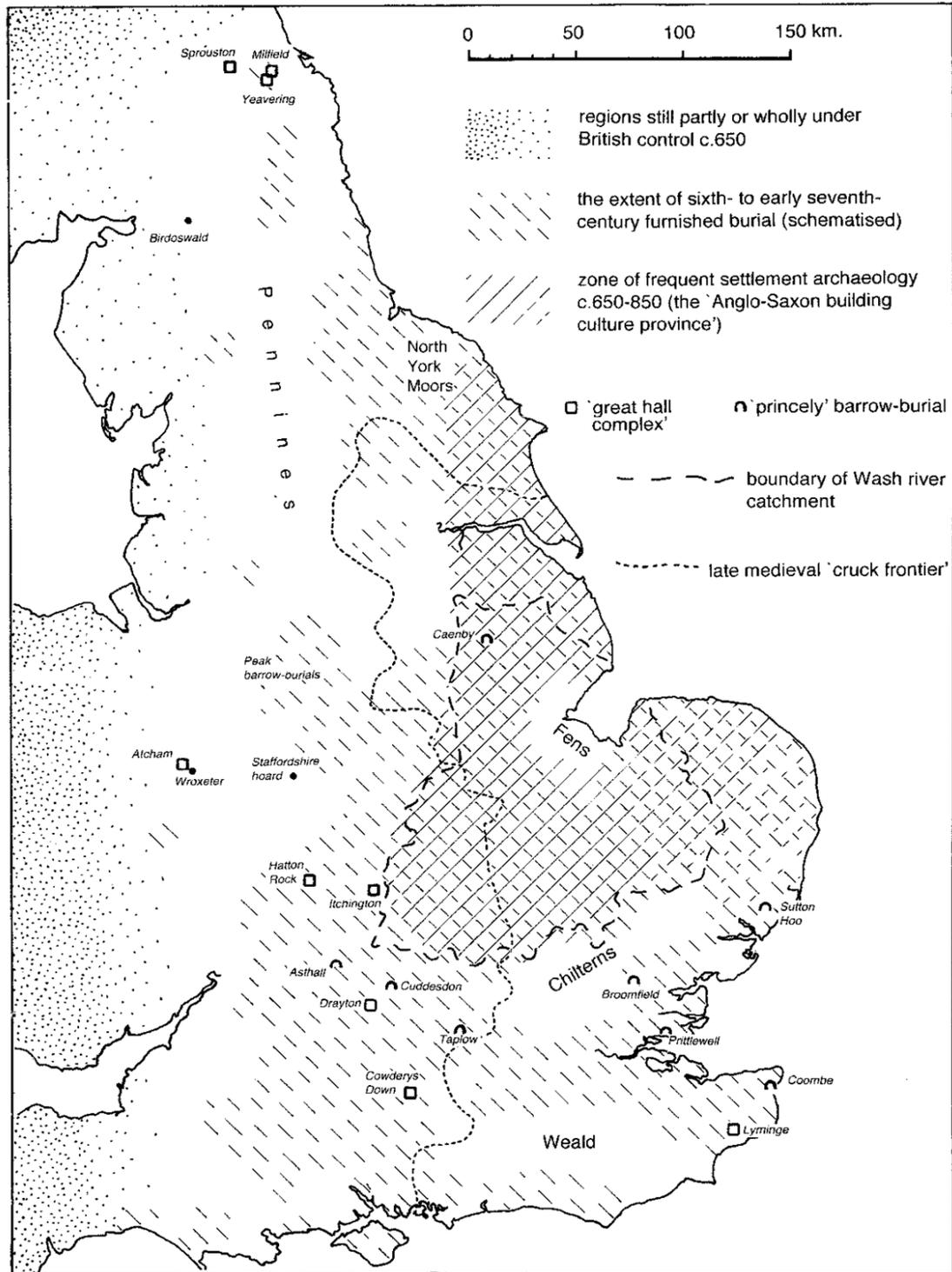


Figure 9: Interpretative map of visible Anglo-Saxon material culture during c. 500–850, illustrating the mutually-exclusive distributions of 'great hall complexes' and rich barrow-burials on the one hand, and the 'Anglo-Saxon building culture province' (shown as clearly demarcated towards the west and south-west but ambiguously towards Suffolk) on the other.

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