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Settlement and Territories: Early and Middle Saxon Settlements and the Antiquity of Hundreds in Suffolk

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ABSTRACT

Despite the past debate surrounding the relationship between sites of Early and Middle Anglo-Saxon activity and parish boundaries, the relationships between Anglo-Saxon settlements, cemeteries and the boundaries of larger territorial units, particularly hundreds, remains little explored. This article investigates the important association between Anglo-Saxon settlements and hundred boundaries using data from the Suffolk Historic Environment Record (HER) and Portable Antiquities Scheme (PAS). It is argued that the relationship between Early and Middle Saxon settlements and hundred boundaries is variable, a pattern which may be associated with the differing origins and character of individual or groups of hundreds. This observation offers a method for distinguishing those hundreds that once formed post-Roman folk territories from those which were laid out later.

KEYWORDS

Hundred boundaries;
Portable Antiquities Scheme;
Anglo-Saxon settlement;
Anglo-Saxon cemeteries;
Territorial change

Introduction

The relationship between territorial boundaries, settlements and burial sites in the ‘Anglo-Saxon’ period has been the subject of intense debate, with the association between parish boundaries and ‘Early Saxon’ activity, in particular, much studied by landscape historians and archaeologists in the past. While some, such as Desmond Bonney (Bonney 1979), have suggested that this relationship should be viewed in terms of funerary activity located to demarcate territorial boundaries, others, including Arnold and Wardle (Arnold and Wardle 1981), have argued that this association emerged as the result of settlement desertion and organic territorial changes.

A recent article in this journal explored the recurrent association between parish boundaries and settlement and burial sites in early Anglo-Saxon Suffolk (Cox 2023, 123–139). It proposed that this relationship should be viewed through the lens of settlement, with the association between territorial boundaries and Early Saxon activity the result of territorial division in the wake of settlement desertion (Figures 1 and 2).

It was demonstrated, however, that the relationship between deserted settlement sites and parish boundaries has a much longer history, continuing into the post-Conquest period and beyond, manifested in the association between deserted Domesday villas and

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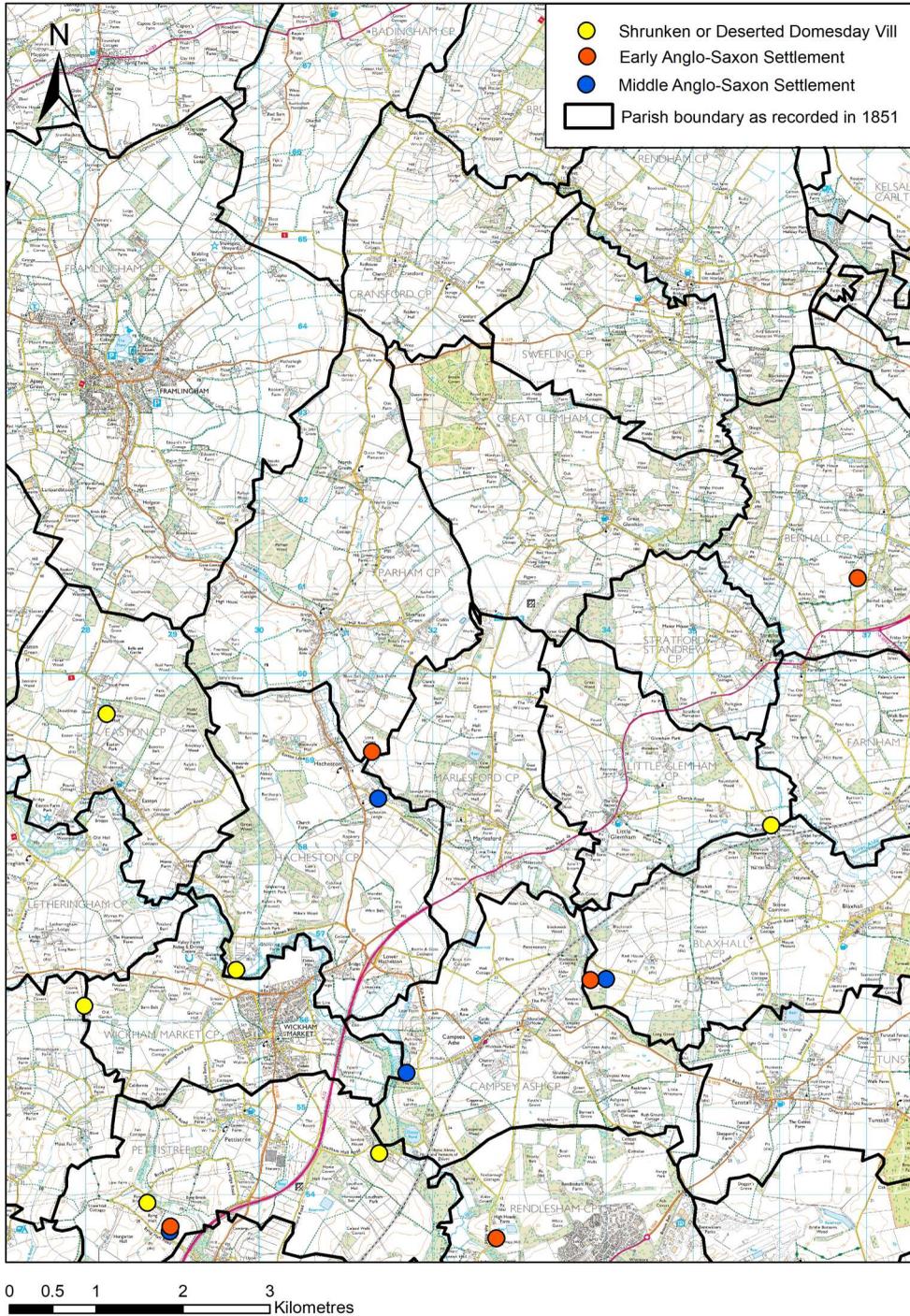


Figure 1. The distribution of Early and Middle Anglo-Saxon settlements and deserted Domesday vill in East Suffolk and their close spatial relationship with parish boundaries. It is proposed that this relationship is the result of territorial division after settlement change. © Crown copyright and database rights 2023 Ordnance Survey (100025252). Drawn by author.

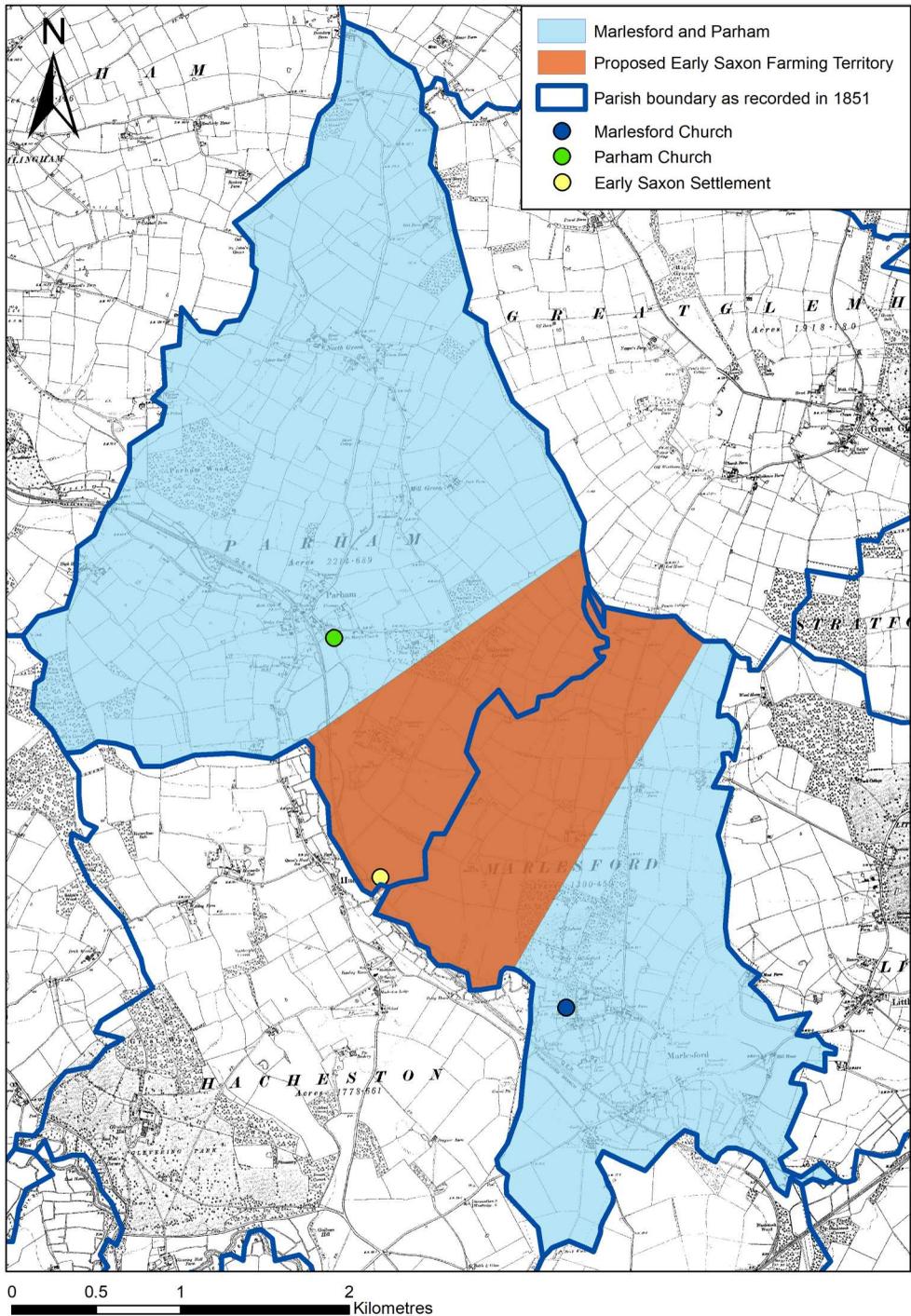


Figure 2. A case study of Marlesford and Parham in East Suffolk. An abandoned Early Saxon settlement lies near the boundary between the two parishes, approximately equidistant between the later occupation sites surrounding the parish churches. It is suggested that the Early Saxon settlement once had its own territory. When the settlement was abandoned, the territory of the failed site was equitably redistributed between nearby successful settlement sites to evenly share the burden of taxation with which it was associated (after Cox 2023). © Crown copyright and database rights 2023 Ordnance Survey (100025252). Drawn by author.

parish boundaries. The persistence of the link between failed settlement and territorial boundaries, it was argued, implies that this relationship was the result of territorial division in the wake of settlement desertion. When settlements shrunk or were abandoned, the demands for taxation from the state nevertheless persisted, and in order to share the burden of this taxation, the territory of the failed settlement, along with any dues and obligations owed to the elite, was equitably redistributed between surrounding successful settlements. This equal territorial division left failed settlements standing near the newly-formed boundaries. Such a model suggests that territorial boundaries likely post-date those settlements that lie on or near the boundary zone.

This present article provides a companion piece which examines the implications for other territorial units of the model laid out above. Much of the current debate surrounding the association between Anglo-Saxon activity and territorial boundaries has focussed on funerary activity rather than settlement (Reynolds 2002, 171–194; Williams 2006, 185–186). In this paper, the relationship between hundred boundaries and settlements is considered, with a focus on Suffolk. It is argued that exploring this association provides a novel way to trace the development of England's system of hundreds.

Debating Territorial Boundaries

The association between Early Saxon activity and parish boundaries was first brought to academic attention by Desmond Bonney. Working with burials in Southern England, he highlighted the close proximity between funerary activity and parish boundaries, with 49% of Early Saxon burials in Wiltshire located on or within 500 ft (152 m) of a parish boundary (Bonney 1979, 41). This suggested to Bonney that parish boundaries had emerged 'somewhat earlier than has been generally supposed', potentially in the Early Saxon period or before, with burials employed to demarcate and define territorial limits (Bonney 1979, 41).

Such notions were partly reaffirmed by Ann Goodier, who again noted the relationship between parish boundaries and Early Saxon activity, although Goodier suggested that only 17% of Early Anglo-Saxon burials were located within the boundary zone, a figure she proved to be statistically significant (Goodier 1984, 14). Goodier did, however, add a chronological dimension to the debate, arguing that burials are more likely to occur on parish boundaries after the beginning of the seventh century than before, although it must be acknowledged that the number of known Early and Middle Saxon burials has substantially increased since the time of her work, potentially affecting her conclusions (Goodier 1984, 12). In Goodier's view, the changing association between funerary sites and territorial boundaries implied that some parish boundaries were Early Saxon in date, with boundary burial linked to the establishment and formalisation of territorial units (Goodier 1984, 1–21).

More recently, the significance of boundary burial in the development and maintenance of territorial entities in Ireland has been highlighted by Elizabeth O'Brien, who suggested that funerary monuments were placed on the boundaries of early territories to demarcate their boundaries (O'Brien 2020). In an important review of the area studied by Bonney, Kate Mees has made similar arguments, suggesting that "Early-Middle Saxon' cemeteries actively marked out boundaries, as well as reinforcing them', although she argued for caution when associating cemeteries and "Middle-Late Saxon' estate boundaries' (Mees 2014, 393–4). In summary, researchers have continued to

suggest that the apparent link between the boundaries of territorial units and funerary activity is the result of a conscious decision among early medieval people to demarcate and reinforce existing and developing territorial units.

Others have nevertheless challenged this approach. Andrew Reynolds, for example, has argued that the relationship between funerary activity and parish boundaries is not as straightforward as Bonney and Goodier suggested. He noted that parishes in the area studied by Bonney were often so long and narrow in shape that the 500 ft distance that Bonney employed might include burials that were closer to the centreline of the land unit than to its edges (Reynolds 2009, 203). According to Reynolds, some of the funerary activity thought to be Early Saxon by Bonney and Goodier may instead be later deviant burials or execution cemeteries, whose location in marginal areas close to boundaries is well attested (Reynolds 2009, 203–206; Reynolds 2002, 171–194). Martin Welch and Simon Draper have similarly challenged the arguments of Bonney and Goodier, arguing that the relationship between parish boundaries and Early Saxon activity may be due to a preference among Early Saxon groups for burying their dead near pre-historic barrows or routeways (Draper 2004, 55–64; Welch 1985, 13–25). Such ‘obvious and convenient’ landmarks were later employed as markers when defining the bounds of Late Saxon estates that became fossilised into parish boundaries, resulting in the evident relationship between parish boundaries and Early Saxon activity (Draper 2004, 55–64).

Although many have viewed the relationship between Early and Middle Saxon activity and parish boundaries in terms of funerary activity, Arnold and Wardle offered a radical revision of these views, exploring the association between parish boundaries and Early Anglo-Saxon material through the lens of settlement rather than cemeteries (Arnold and Wardle 1981, 145–149). Arnold and Wardle argued that Early Saxon settlements and cemeteries often occurred together, usually in areas of poor, light soils that could be worked with the primitive ploughing technology available to farmers in the Early Saxon period. When these settlements were abandoned in the Middle Saxon period in favour of sites located on more fertile land that could be cultivated with improved agricultural technology, the area in which they were once located became marginal to currently occupied settlements; such zones, in time, came to form the boundaries between territories. Any funerary activity in the area surrounding parish boundaries was, they suggested, the result of the close spatial relationship between settlements and cemeteries, with the evidence for funerary activity highlighted by Bonney and subsequent researchers the result of cemeteries remaining fixed in the landscape even after the settlement they once served had drifted away. These ideas have subsequently been challenged, largely on the grounds that the proposed dislocation of occupation in the Middle Saxon period may be the result of the datasets used by Arnold and Wardle, rather than any real pattern (Hamerow 1991; Welch 1985, 13–25). The idea of a ‘Middle Saxon shift’, in particular, has come under intense scrutiny (see e.g. Wright 2015, 177–179).

As noted above, a recent article by the present author suggested that the relationship between settlement sites, burials and parish boundaries resulted from territorial reorganisation in the wake of settlement desertion. This implies that territorial boundaries are, in all likelihood, later than the settlements which lie on or near them. The implications of this model for the system of hundreds are considered here. It is argued that examining the association between Early and Middle Saxon settlement and hundred boundaries

offers a novel means to differentiate hundreds that once formed folk territories from those laid out later. In this article, data from the Suffolk Historic Environment Record and the Portable Antiquities Scheme (PAS) is considered in the context of 240 parishes in eastern Suffolk using GIS (Figure 3). This analysis highlights the association between settlement sites and hundred boundaries. The implications for the development of the system of hundreds in England up to the time of Domesday are considered.

The Origins of Hundreds

Many have discussed the origins of the system of hundreds that covered England in the last centuries of the Anglo-Saxon period. It is widely accepted that in their administrative form, hundreds are of Late Saxon origin, first appearing in 10th century law codes (Williamson 2013, 22). It has, however, long been argued that some hundreds may have significantly earlier origins, deriving their boundaries from the territories of earlier folk groups and their *regiones*. Among others, Steven Basset has suggested that the roots of some hundreds can be sought in the first centuries of the post-Roman period (Bassett 1997, 25–42; Short 1988, 8–15). Indeed, some have argued for significant continuity in patterns of territorial organisation and identity in the landscape, with Stephen Rippon arguing for broad, long-term continuity in large-scale territorial organisation from the Iron Age into the Anglo-Saxon period (Rippon 2018).

Many have attempted to identify the origins of individual or groups of hundreds. It has been suggested that hundreds such as Braughing in Hertfordshire or Loddon and Clavering in Norfolk took their boundaries and names from the territories of Early and Middle Saxon folk groups and their later *regiones* (Short 1988, 8–15; Williamson 1993, 128–130). Such notions have more recently been reinforced by Stuart Brookes, who has suggested that the hundreds of the Domesday book, or groups of them, may in some ways be equivalent to the *regiones* and *provinciae* that appear in sources such as Bede's *Ecclesiastical History of the English People* (Brookes 2020a, 276–293). Tom Williamson has suggested that 'the patterns and systems of extensive territorial organisation etched into the landscape are essentially of early/middle Saxon date' (Williamson 2013, 105).

Although much emphasis has been placed upon those hundreds that were formed from early territorial units, it is important to note that many such territories were remodelled or indeed created anew in the Late Saxon and High Medieval periods. As Stuart Brookes has pointed out hundreds like Droxford and Redbridge, Hampshire, were established in the Late Saxon period, imposed upon 'an earlier territorial arrangement' (Brookes 2020a, 287–288). Even once established, the boundaries of these territorial units were subject to change in the Late Saxon and High Medieval periods. Within the study area considered in this paper, for example, the half-hundred of Parham was absorbed into Plomesgate by the thirteenth century (Warner 1996, 157). The formation of territorial units was a 'constant and evolving process' (Brookes 2020a, 293); while some hundreds were likely derived from early territorial units, many are much later in date.

There has been extensive debate surrounding the patterns of long-term continuity in the landscape, particularly regarding the longevity of patterns of territorial organisation. Some researchers have suggested that the early medieval kingdoms of Western Britain were descended directly from Roman administrative units (Dark 1994), although such theories have been challenged (Rippon 2022, 44–46). Rippon has provided an alternative

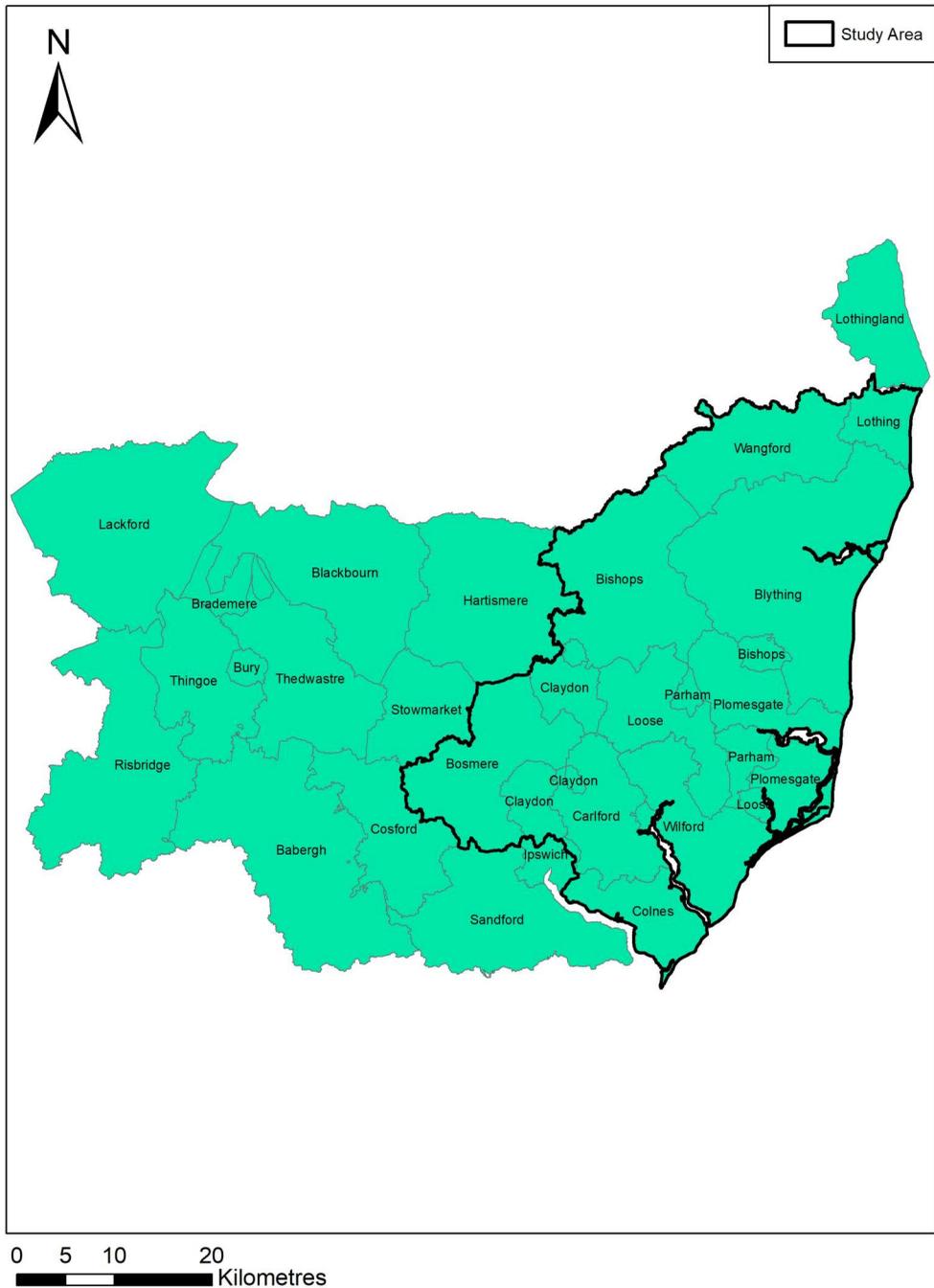


Figure 3. The hundredal pattern of Suffolk. © Crown copyright and database rights 2023 Ordnance Survey (100025252). Drawn by author using hundred boundary data from S. Brookes, *Atlas of Early Medieval England*, 2020. <https://doi.org/10.5284/1058999>.

model, suggesting that territorial continuity may have emerged as a result of continuities within the farming systems and communities of the lower classes, despite changes in the political elites (Rippon 2018, 2022, 44–47). It has also been suggested that there was a

significant degree of political and territorial fragmentation in the post-Roman period, with large territories, such as the *civitates* of Roman England, fragmenting into a series of ‘small autonomous, or semi-autonomous tribal territories, each extending over tens or hundreds, rather than thousands, of square kilometres’ (Williamson 2013, 21). These territories merged into the larger kingdoms of documents such as the Tribal Hidage through a process of warfare and competition, with smaller territories absorbed into their larger, more successful neighbours (Basset 1989).

Little consensus has been reached over the ultimate origins of Early Saxon territories, and the present study shifts the focus to a different issue. Here the association between settlements and hundred boundaries is considered with the aim of ascertaining whether a territory existed in the post-Roman period, regardless of whether it was newly formed or a descendant of much earlier entities. In essence, it is argued that by examining the relationship between settlements and territorial boundaries it is possible to distinguish individual or groups of hundreds that formed ‘small shires’ in the Early and Middle Saxon period from those laid out in the Late Saxon period or after.

Sources and Methods

The use of the term ‘Anglo-Saxon’ has proved controversial, not least owing to growing evidence for the survival of much of the Romano-British population (Rippon 2022, 3). Here, the term ‘Anglo-Saxon’ is used to describe all those living in the Suffolk area from the fifth to eleventh centuries, rather than to denote any ethnic identity. The division of the period 410–1066 into ‘Early, Middle and Late Saxon’ is similarly problematic but is deeply entrenched in scholarship on the English landscape and will be employed here as a convenient shorthand.

This article uses data from the Suffolk HER and the PAS. The Suffolk HER incorporates the results of research excavations, fieldwalking surveys, as well as developer-funded excavations in advance of development. Although it is inevitable that some scatters of material or settlement sites may be overlooked by the HER, the dataset is chronologically and spatially diverse and, when combined by data from the PAS, offers a representative insight into the development of the landscape. Much of the Suffolk landscape is covered by data from the Suffolk HER, limiting the impact of recovery bias on the following discussion.

The PAS database largely consists of metalwork, lithics and ceramics, often recovered by metal detectorists. This data is inevitably skewed towards metalwork and therefore largely represents funerary activity rather than occupation, particularly for the Early Saxon period, with assemblages located on hundred boundaries often consisting of brooches, wrist clasps and buckles, assemblages that are comparable to excavated cemeteries such as Spong Hill, Norfolk and Snape, Suffolk (Filmer-Sankey and Pestell 2001; Hills 1977). Domestic artefacts are notably absent from PAS data, but this seems likely to be partly a methodological issue. Domestic artefact assemblages, such as those from Mucking, Essex, largely consist of bone, ceramic material and iron objects, all of which are notably lacking in data retrieved by metal detectorists (Hamerow 1991). Metal detectors do not identify ceramics or bone, while many metal detectorists choose not to recover iron objects, meaning that domestic artefacts are noticeably lacking in PAS data. Although artefacts typical of excavated domestic assemblages, such as lead spindle whorls, are

recovered by metal detectorists, these objects are difficult to date in the unstratified, ploughzone contexts from which they are recovered and, as such, are rarely definitively dated to the Anglo-Saxon period.

Data from the PAS and HER were sorted and ‘cleaned’ following the method set out by John Blair (Blair 2018, 17), with spurious, poorly located or inaccurately dated finds removed. HER entries in which the exact quantities of material recovered were not stated were also discounted.

The connection between settlements and cemeteries in the Early Saxon period means the data from both the PAS and HER can cast light on patterns of settlement. In the Early Saxon period there was a close association between settlements and cemeteries as shown by sites such as Mucking, Essex and West Stow, Suffolk. Although it is clear that the much of the metalwork recorded by metal detectorists derives from funerary deposits, the PAS and HER data can be used as a proxy for settlement activity at a regional scale (Hamerow 1991; West 1985). The fact that concentrations of Early and Middle Saxon material recovered by fieldwalking, as well as excavated settlements, occur in similar locations to PAS assemblages, also suggests that this material offers a valid proxy.

Defining past activities from ploughzone assemblages, particularly pottery, has been the subject of much debate (e.g. Fleming 2016; Haselgrove 1985; Millet 1985), although there has been significantly less work on employing the results of metal detecting to understand historic activity (exceptions include Chester-Kadwell 2009 and Daubney 2016). Thresholds used to define activities must vary depending on the quantity and durability of archaeological material of any given period; a Roman farmstead, often archaeologically characterised in Suffolk by durable ceramic types that were plentiful in contemporary society, will evidently be denoted by more ploughzone material than a similar Early Saxon settlement, owing to the scarcity and friability of contemporary ceramics. The number of artefacts considered enough to indicate early medieval settlements and cemeteries range from ten finds considered as ‘strong’ evidence for funerary activity (Chester-Kadwell 2009, 80) to two pieces of pottery or metalwork (Fleming 2016, 23). Owing to the scarcity and friability of Early Saxon handmade ceramics and the relative rarity of contemporary metalwork, three pieces of Early Saxon cultural material has been taken here to indicate a site. Although Middle Saxon Ipswich ware proves more durable in the plough soil, this material remained relatively rare, particularly on rural sites; meanwhile the reduction in furnished burial from the seventh century resulted in less metalwork entering the plough soil in the Middle Saxon period. As such, three pieces of Middle Saxon pottery or metalwork will also be considered as evidence of settlement in this period.

Before exploring the association between Anglo-Saxon activity and territorial units, it is important to set out what distance between features is considered significant. Previous distances used in studies of territorial development have ranged dramatically. Bonney, for example, suggested features in the landscape must be within little over 150 m of each other to be related (Bonney 1979, 41), while Draper proposed that burials within 1 km of a routeway could be considered as linked (Draper 2004, 57; cf. Mees 2014, 194). Previously, a 200 m radius has been employed to explore the association between Early and Middle Saxon settlement and parish boundaries by the present author (Cox 2023), following the work of Mary Chester-Kadwell (Chester-Kadwell 2009, 121), and that distance is used here.

The Domesday hundreds used here are those mapped in the *Early Medieval Atlas* (Brookes 2020b). Although the precise boundaries of Domesday hundreds at a local level can be debated and the territorial units were liable to change, the boundaries used here provide a carefully-researched attempt to reconstruct the extent of the Late Saxon hundreds.

The Association between Settlement and Hundred Boundaries in East Suffolk

Striking relationships can be observed between Early and Middle Saxon activity and hundred boundaries when PAS and HER data is analysed. While 30% of parish boundaries in the study area also form Domesday hundred boundaries, only 12% of the 65 Early Saxon sites are within 200 m of such territorial divisions, a number that falls to 9% in the Middle Saxon period (Figures 4 and 5). Such figures are similar to that laid out by Mees in Wiltshire, although her work considered only those burials 100 m from a boundary (Mees 2014, 386). Nevertheless, even a cursory look at the Suffolk data reveals that this relationship is variable. While hundred boundaries such as that of Parham and Wilford are marked by numerous occupation sites, the boundaries of other hundreds in the study area are noticeably devoid of settlement. This variable association between settlements and Late Saxon administrative boundaries is arguably related to the origins and character of the individual hundreds.

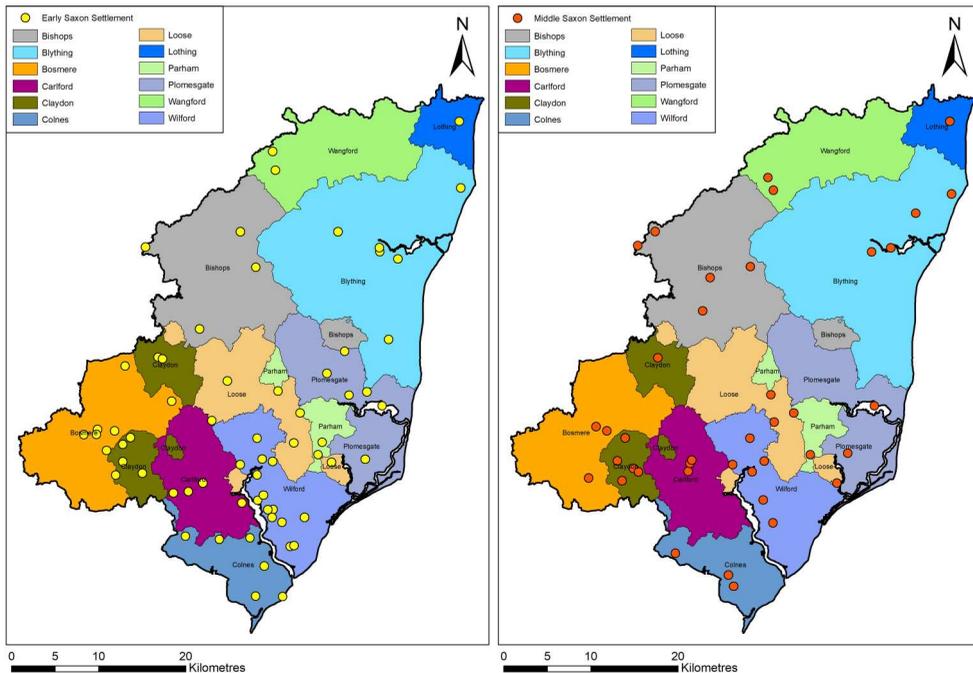


Figure 4. The distribution of Early Saxon settlements in the study area and their varying relationship with hundred boundaries. Left: Early Saxon settlements; Right: Middle Saxon. © Crown copyright and database rights 2023 Ordnance Survey (100025252). Drawn by author using hundred boundary data from S. Brookes, *Atlas of Early Medieval England*, 2020. <https://doi.org/10.5284/1058999>.

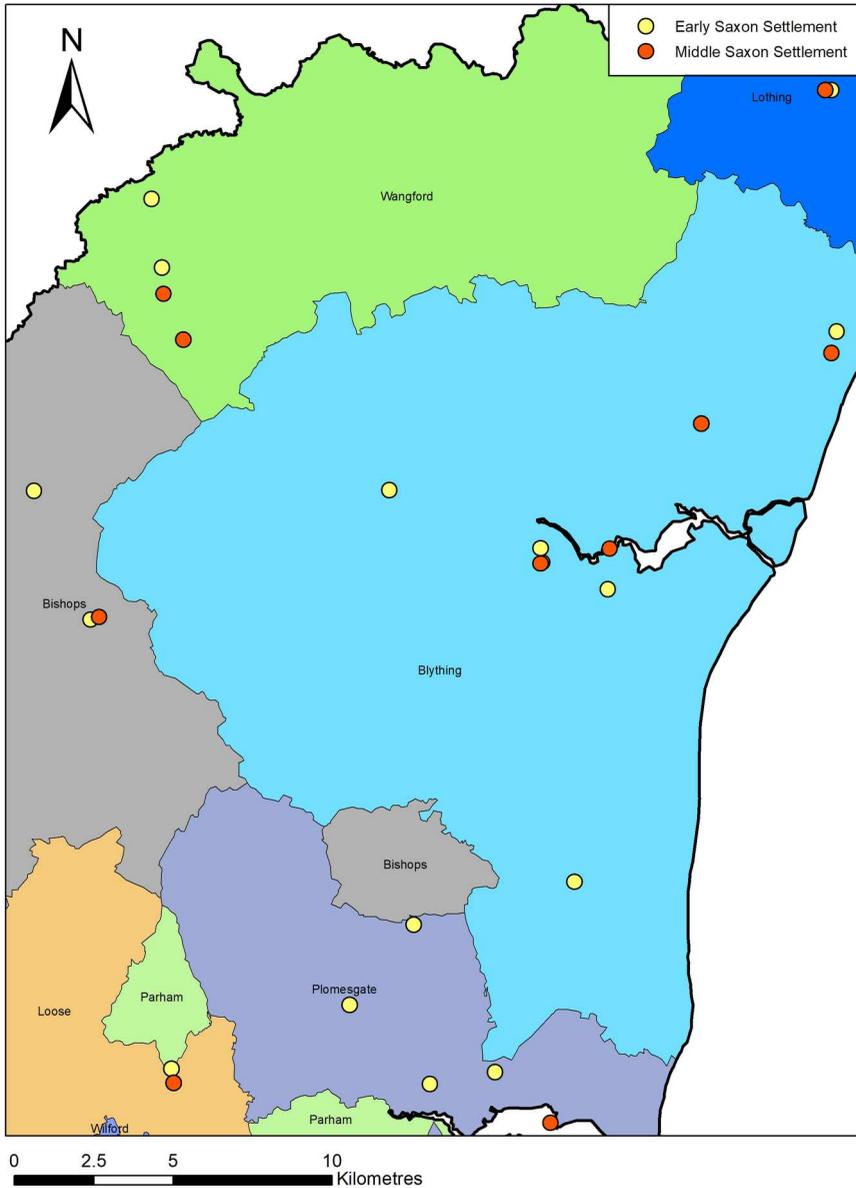


Figure 5. The distribution of Early and Middle Saxon settlements in the area surrounding Blything Hundred. It is clear that the boundary of the hundred was devoid of occupation. Drawn by author using hundred boundary data from S. Brookes, *Atlas of Early Medieval England*, 2020. <https://doi.org/10.5284/1058999>.

The hundred of Blything was probably formed from an earlier territorial unit. Peter Warner has convincingly argued that the roots of Blything hundred, whose boundaries are largely defined by the watershed of the river Blyth, should be sought in an Early and Middle Saxon folk territory focussed on the same river (Warner 1996, 157–159). Indeed, the name of the hundred itself means ‘the people of the river Blyth’, suggesting

that the hundred boundary and the territory it encapsulates was once the heartland of a folk group, the *Blythingas*. At the centre of this territory lies the hundredal meeting place of Blythburgh, a place-name that means ‘the stronghold on the River Blyth’, although Eleanor Rye and Tom Williamson have argued that the place-name might also signify a monastic site (Rye and Williamson 2020, 231–232). This settlement was the centre of an Early and Middle Saxon royal estate; indeed, it is likely that Anna, King of East Anglia, was killed in 653 or 654 defending the place from Penda of Mercia at the nearby Battle of Bulcamp. Such evidence strongly implies that the hundred of Blything once formed a coherent territorial unit that belonged to a folk group centred on the river Blyth whose central place was at Blythburgh. It is possible that Blything was atypical, since the hundred is significantly larger than its counterparts further south and west; indeed, Warner has convincingly argued that Blything may once have formed a double hundred (Warner 1996, 162). On the basis of limited evidence for conspicuously ‘Anglo-Saxon colonisation’, Stephen Rippon has also argued that this ‘putative early folk territory was largely settled by the native British population’ (Rippon 2022, 230), although numerous single finds of Early Saxon metalwork, such as the fifth century small-long brooch found near Halesworth, imply that the extent of Germanic settlement may have been more extensive than he suggests (e.g. PAS SF-22B1E2).

Despite the evidence for Early and Middle Saxon activity within the hundred itself, no occupation sites lie within 200 m of the boundary, barring a site in Friston. This site appears to break the pattern, but it seems clear that boundaries of the parish of Friston and Knodishall were remodelled in a late period with the division of the failed territory of Buxlow. This hints that the association between this settlement and the boundaries of Blything hundred is due to later territorial adjustment. Otherwise, the lack of settlement evidence on the boundary of Blything hundred suggests that this territorial unit was indeed cemented into the landscape in the Early and Middle Saxon periods.

Such territorial boundaries appear to have been socially marginal and therefore undesirable for settlement, being far from tribal or religious centres. Their boundaries also perhaps acted as zones of confrontation between rival tribal groups. Although the archaeological visibility of Early and Middle Saxon settlements is poor compared to both previous and succeeding centuries, the landscape in this period was sparsely settled, particularly compared to the Roman and Medieval periods (see, for example, Newman 2005, 482–483). With minimal pressure on resources, there was little impetus to settle in socially and agriculturally marginal areas as in preceding and later periods. That the boundary of Blything hundred was, therefore, avoided by Early and Middle Saxon settlements demonstrates that these bounds, and the marginality of such spaces, were already firmly established. These ‘small shires’ do indeed seem to ‘have deep roots and long lives’ (Faith 2008, 9).

It is important to acknowledge the significant relationship between the boundaries of territories and topography, as highlighted by Warner in the case of Blything hundred (Warner 1996, 156–159). This is part of a wider pattern explored by Alan Everitt and Charles Phythian Adams, among others, who posited a uniform relationship between territorial boundaries and the natural environment (Everitt 1977, 1–19; Phythian Adams 1987). They suggested that territorial units emerged nested within the topographic framework of any given region: the fertile, well drained soils of river valleys were intensively settled and cultivated, while the upland ‘wolds’ were largely unsettled owing to their

less fertile or waterlogged soils that were more suitable for woodland management or grazing. These ‘wolds’ often provided the boundaries for human interactions and formed the margins of territories, particularly in the post-Roman period; Rippon has argued that the boundaries of ‘early folk territories almost invariably followed watersheds’ (Rippon 2022, 51) while Williamson suggested that ‘social territories approximate to drainage basins’ (Williamson 2013, 56). Other models of territorial development that have been put forward, such as that of Brookes and Reynolds, are not mutually exclusive with the ‘river and wold’ model (Brookes and Reynolds 2019). It seems likely that settlements did often avoid boundary zones that did not repay arable cultivation. These issues are particularly pertinent for the boundaries of hundreds like Blything which pick their way across the agriculturally undesirable soils of the uplands.

If it is true that the infertile uplands of the Suffolk Sandlings, as well as the intractable wolds of the claylands, were unfavourable for settlement in the post-Roman centuries, it might be suggested that the lack of settlement apparent in these areas results from the marginality of the agricultural landscape in the boundary zone, rather than their social marginality. Even so, the areas close to hundred boundaries, including those that largely follow watersheds, are often environmentally diverse; few hundred boundaries do not extend down into the river valleys that are widely acknowledged as desirable for settlement (Figure 6). Indeed, while the boundary of Blything hundred largely follows the watershed of the river Blyth, it also reaches into the valleys of its tributaries, landscapes characterised by free-draining soils and abundant water supplies that were viable locations for early settlement and agriculture. Nevertheless, these areas also appear to be devoid of settlements, suggesting the relationship between Early and Middle Saxon settlement and hundred boundaries is not simply a consequence of environmental marginality.

To the south of Blything lies the Wicklaw hundreds (shown on Figure 7). This group of five and a half hundreds formed part of the Liberty of St. Etheldreda and were granted to Ely Abbey in 970 (Warner 1996, 152–153). It has been convincingly argued by Warner that this territorial unit may have significantly older origins, potentially as an ‘early shire’ centred on the royal settlement at Rendlesham and formed from the heartlands of the early East Anglian kings. Much like Blything hundred, the boundary of this territory largely runs through the upland wolds. Its name means ‘the burial mounds near the *vicus*’, likely the Roman town at Hacheston, with the mound in question perhaps Gallow Hill in the same parish (Warner 1996, 154). This Roman town is also referred to in the placename of nearby Wickham Market, incorporating the Latin loan word *vicus*, meaning the ‘settlement near the Roman town’. This may imply a degree of continuity between the Roman and Anglo-Saxon power structures in the area. While the Wicklaw hundreds once formed a coherent territory, its internal divisions are evidently artificial and much later. This is suggested by the interdigitated nature of many of the boundaries, for example that between Plomesgate and Loose, which also fails to follow any significant topographical feature in the landscape. It seems likely that these boundary lines were drawn onto an established landscape, rather than having developed organically in earlier periods. Hundreds with detached parts such as Parham also suggest that the division of the Wicklaw territory was a secondary development. This group of hundreds proves a useful case study for understanding the varying relationship between settlement and hundred boundaries and the implications of this for the origins and development of hundreds.

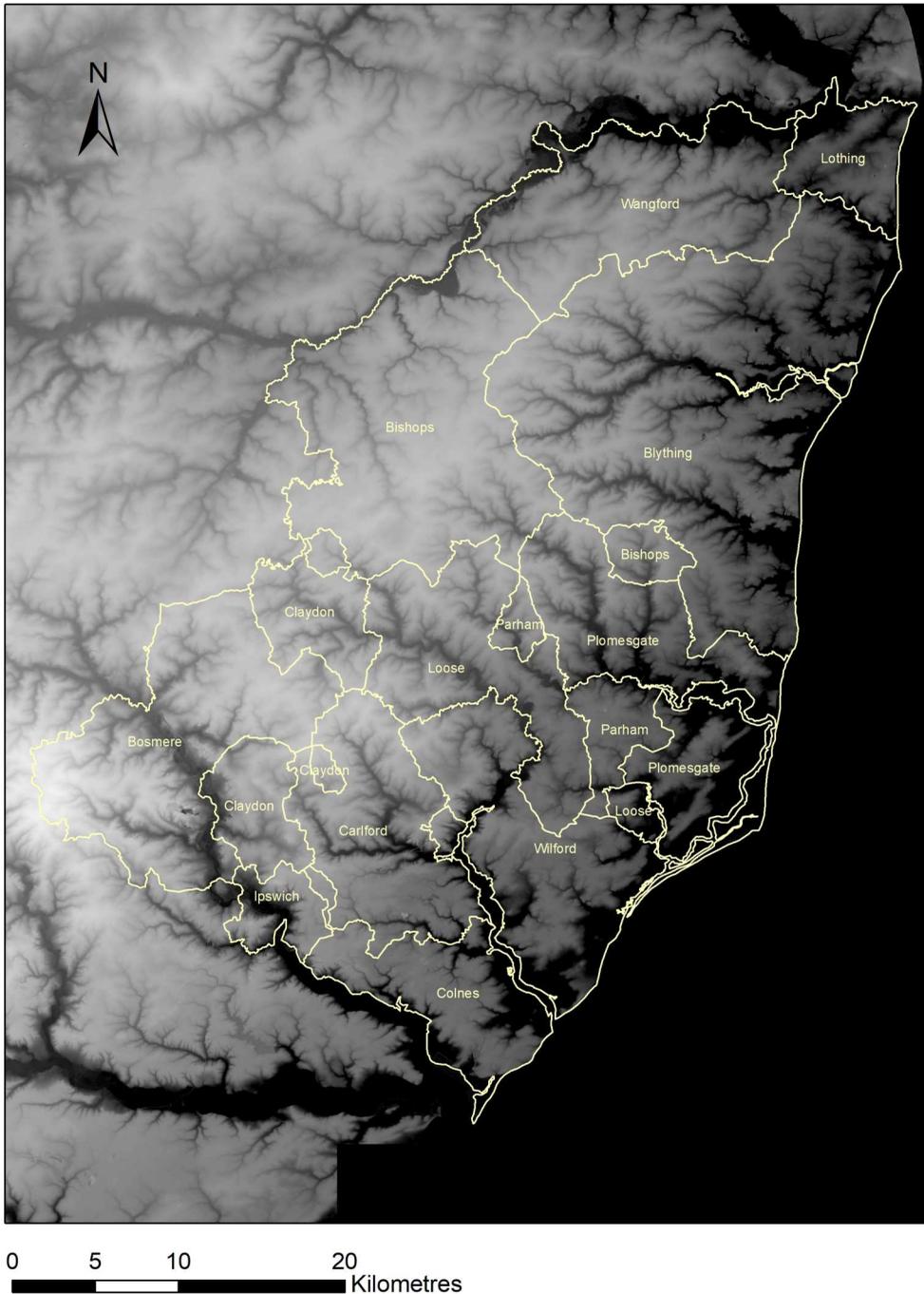


Figure 6. The hundredal pattern of East Suffolk and its relationship with topography. Few hundred boundaries do not extend into the fertile landscapes surrounding river valleys that were desirable for early settlement. © Crown copyright and database rights 2023 Ordnance Survey (100025252). Drawn by author using hundred boundary data from S. Brookes, *Atlas of Early Medieval England*, 2020. <https://doi.org/10.5284/1058999>.

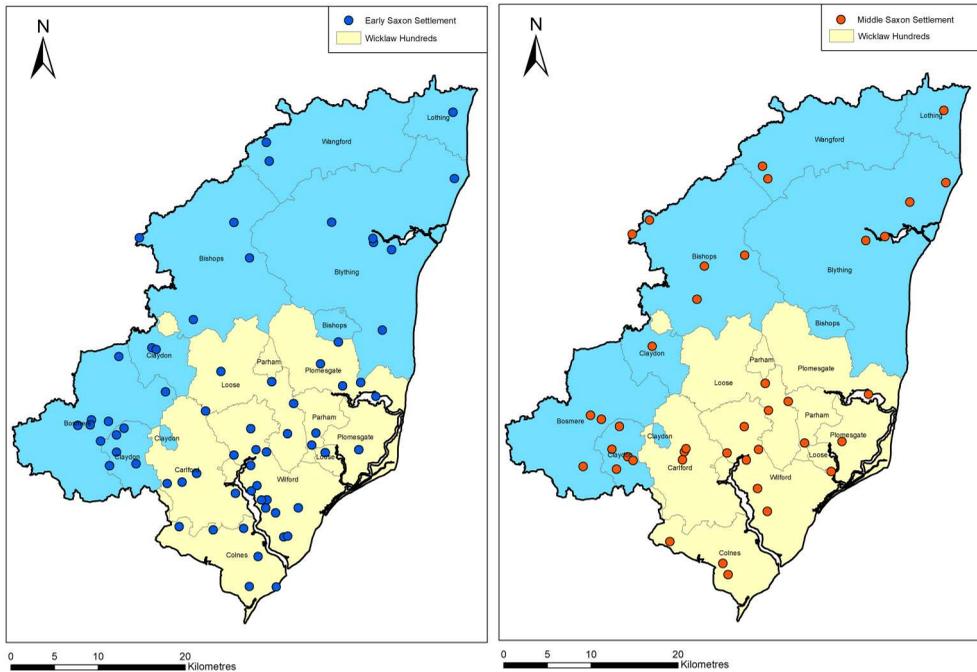


Figure 7. The distribution of settlements and their relationship with the boundary of the Wicklaw hundreds (a territorial unit comprising the hundreds of Carlford, Colneis, Loose, Plomesgate, Wilford and the half-hundred of Parham). Left, Early Saxon settlements, Right Middle Saxon. © Crown copyright and database rights 2023 Ordnance Survey (100025252). Drawn by author using hundred boundary data from S. Brookes, *Atlas of Early Medieval England*, 2020. <https://doi.org/10.5284/1058999>.

The outer boundary of the Wicklaw hundreds is, much like the hundred of Blything, noticeably devoid of Early and Middle Saxon settlement evidence, with the exception of two sites (Figure 7), both the product of later territorial adjustment. The first of these is the site in Friston mentioned above whose boundary location is probably due to later territorial readjustment. The second site is located on the boundary of the Wicklaw hundreds bordering Kelsale cum Carlton, a detached portion of Bishops hundred. As Warner has demonstrated, this portion of Bishops hundred was carved from the Wicklaw territory and Blything hundred when Kelsale cum Carlton was adopted as the administrative centre in East Suffolk for the pre-Conquest sheriff. The association between this site and the boundaries of the Wicklaw hundreds is, therefore, also the result of later territorial reorganisation.

The absence of other occupation sites in the boundary zone implies that the Wicklaw hundreds did indeed once form a single territorial unit, likely centred on the estate centre and royal residence at Rendlesham. The margins of the Wicklaw hundreds, for the most part run through the clay uplands, an area long acknowledged as unfavourable for early settlement; such a pattern may imply that the boundary zone was unsettled due to issues of agricultural rather than social marginality. Much like the boundary of Blything hundred, however, the boundary of the Wicklaw territory also picks its way through the valleys of rivers such as the Alde and Ore, areas that were viable locations for early settlement. The lack of activity in the Wicklaw hundreds boundary zone may result

from its perceived social marginality, as opposed to any inherent environmental or agricultural unsuitability.

As noted above, the relationship between territorial bounds and settlement sites is variable. While the boundaries of the Blything and the Wicklaw hundreds are devoid of settlement, others like Parham, Wilford and Loose are marked by many Early and Middle Saxon occupation sites. The boundary of Parham half hundred, for example, is marked by several sites, including ones in Parham itself, Wantisden and Blaxhall. The extent of occupation close to these hundred boundaries suggests that these landscapes were not regarded as socially peripheral in Early and Middle Saxon times. Following the argument presented above, it seems that the internal divisions of the Wicklaw hundreds may be the product of territorial revision in later centuries. Some hundred boundaries, or at least the sections of them where settlement evidence can be found, may not have been established before the ninth or tenth centuries at the earliest.

The occurrence of other occupation sites close to hundred boundaries in East Suffolk hints at a significant period of reorganisation in the last centuries of the Anglo-Saxon period, perhaps emerging from the 're-territorialisation' of former Danelaw areas identified by Brookes and Reynolds (Brookes and Reynolds 2019). Hundreds such as Loose, Wilford and Carlford appear to have emerged from the fracturing of the Wicklaw territory and its subsequent reorganisation in Late Saxon times. Although Warner has argued that the internal divisions of the Wicklaw territory have much earlier origins and are 'very much older than the time of Edgar' (Warner 1996, 164), the significant number of Early and Middle Saxon sites that are located near these boundaries points towards a different historical trajectory.

Conclusion

The origins of the system of hundreds into which England had been divided by the Late Saxon period has been the subject of much scholarly attention. It has previously been suggested that any relationship between Early and Middle Saxon cultural material and hundred boundaries is the result of funerary activity, with burials placed in the boundary zone to delineate and reaffirm developing territories. While it is indeed true that some people were buried close to boundaries, this paper has argued that the association between hundred boundaries and settlements can also be fruitfully addressed.

There is little documentary evidence for the development of hundreds and other basic administrative units, so understanding the origins of the English territorial landscape is inherently difficult. The approach described above has the potential to improve understanding of how the English system of hundreds developed over time. Although it has long been acknowledged that areas of Early and Middle Saxon settlement formed the core of early territorial entities, the association between settlements and large territorial units has been little explored. By systematically analysing the relationship between occupation sites and territorial boundaries, it may be possible to unpick patterns of organisation in the post-Roman centuries, enabling the association between Rippon's 'early folk territories' and later hundreds to be better understood (Rippon 2022, 50).

The origins of some hundreds, or their boundaries at least, lie in the Early and Middle Saxon periods. The hundred of Blything provides a good example: its boundary is

noticeably devoid of settlement activity, implying that its marginality was already established during the earliest centuries of the Anglo-Saxon period. As Nicholas Higham suggests, ‘the hundreds in their current form were formed probably early in the tenth century, but reflect in part, pre-existing divisions’ (Higham 1989, 24).

By contrast, the remains of Early and Middle Saxon settlements lie adjacent to other hundred boundaries, suggesting these spaces were not then recognised as socially and politically marginal. Hundred boundaries like Loose, Wilford and Parham may therefore have later origins, perhaps in a phase of territorial reorganisation as East Suffolk was taken from Viking rule into the unified English Kingdom.

The relationship between settlements and hundred boundaries potentially offers much of value for understanding the early medieval landscape of England. While the origin of the hundreds identifiable in the folios of Domesday Book has been the subject of much debate, little academic attention has been given to the association between Anglo-Saxon settlements and the boundaries of hundreds. The approach developed in this article, employing HER and PAS data, might be deployed in other parts of England to help understand such territorial units.

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