

## Changing Landscapes?

### Land, People and Environment in England, AD 350–600

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#### **Introduction: Moving Beyond Traditional Compartmentalisations of the Past**

The traditional view is that Roman Britain ended relatively abruptly and decisively in the early fifth century: its market-based economy collapsed, its towns and military installations became deserted and its villa estates abandoned (e.g. Faulkner 2000). The archaeological record has been seen to suggest a clear break, with material culture and architectural styles that had been strongly influenced by the Roman world replaced, especially in the eastern half of the former province, by new forms of artefacts, settlements and burial practice introduced by Anglo-Saxon migrants from the mid-fifth century onwards. In part, this view of what happened in the fifth century reflects the meagre documentary sources that exist for this period, and the Anglo-Saxon supremacy that was eventually achieved, although we must remember that texts are written by particular people with particular agendas, and stressing chaos and defeat on the part of British communities suited many of those writing about this period (even the sixth-century Briton Gildas who bemoaned the state of native society). The impression of discontinuity is also, however, very much a product of the way that academic research has been conducted in the past, notably with different scholars, learned societies and journals focussing on the 'Roman', 'Anglo-Saxon' or 'medieval' periods.

As is increasingly recognised now, there are of course many problems with this crude, history-driven compartmentalisation of the past, and the emphasis that some scholars now place upon understanding landscapes and the transitions between traditional periods – of which this volume is an example – provides a very different perspective. This is an approach that is far more open to seeing *continuities* within society (or, for this period, potentially multiple societies) and in the countryside. The fourth to sixth centuries AD in Britain are of particular interest for a number of reasons. Firstly, these centuries undoubtedly marked a profound change for the higher echelons of society – the political, commercial and land-owning elites – although how far this was true for the vast majority of the rural population will be explored in more depth below. Secondly, this is a period in which we can explore one of the major questions that has faced, dogged and challenged archaeologists of all periods, namely the extent to which change within the archaeological record can be explained by *external* factors such as migration, as opposed to indigenous developments such as expanding trade and exchange. Thirdly, there is also scope to look beyond texts and material culture in order to explore wider issues such as climatic change whose profile within contemporary society is currently high. In this paper, therefore, I will consider Britain during the fourth to sixth centuries from an explicitly landscape perspective, exploring what became of the late Roman countryside in this transitional period that saw such profound socio-political, cultural and economic transformations.

The data used in this paper are drawn from two major projects. The first, *The Fields of Britannia* (Rippon *et al.* 2014 and 2015), explored patterns of land-use during and across the first millennium AD and the stratigraphic relationship between late Roman and early medieval field systems, while

the second, *Kingdom, Civitas, and County* (Rippon, in press) examined the development of regional and local-scale socio-economic and territorial structures within which communities managed their landscapes across eastern England. Through the data-sets presented here, an attempt will be made to explore landscape development at national, regional and local scales in order to present both a 'big picture' overview as well as examples of local landscape biographies.

## **A Roman Inheritance**

What happened in the fifth century can only be understood against a backdrop of the evolving landscape of the late Roman period. Although, traditionally, Romanists have described *Britannia* in terms of a binary division between military and civilian, upland and lowland, and native and villa (e.g. Haverfield 1912; Fox 1932; Dark and Dark 1997), recent work has increasingly shown that there was significant local and regional variation in settlement patterns and material culture (e.g. Cool 1990; Taylor 2007; Crummy and Eckardt 2008; Laycock 2008; Smith *et al.* 2016; Rippon, in press). **Figure 1.A**, for example, shows the road network, urban hierarchy and possible/probable/certain villas across eastern England, showing how communities in regions such as East Anglia (north of the Gipping-Lark valleys) were far less interested in displaying their Roman identity in these ways compared to areas such as the northern Thames Basin and south-east Midlands.

It was into this varied landscape that the Anglo-Saxon migrations occurred. There has been much debate within archaeology over the role of migration in shaping cultural change, and the Roman to medieval transition is crucial to this debate. Some scholars have argued for a mass folk migration of Anglo-Saxons that almost entirely displaced the native population, while others have suggested that a small warrior elite achieved political supremacy through military conquest (a process evident in the Roman and Norman Conquests). The truth is most likely to lie somewhere in between. Estimating absolute populations based upon the archaeological record is extremely difficult, and traditional approaches have focused upon using well-studied landscapes to estimate the densities of settlements, the average populations living in those places, and then interpolating this across Britain as a whole: Millett (1990, tab. 8.5), for example, suggests a population in late Roman Britain of 3.7 million. Such approaches are fraught with difficulties as the best studied landscapes will be those where archaeological sites are most easily visible and there has been the greatest amount of archaeological survey and excavation, but these will tend to be in either the most densely settled core agricultural areas (e.g. the major river valleys where the greatest gravel extraction and urban expansion is occurring) and in extremely marginal landscapes where preservation is good because the Romano-British landscapes were later abandoned (e.g. coastal wetlands and chalk downland: Phillips 1970; Hall and Coles 1994; Fulford *et al.* 2006). It is unlikely that settlement density and size in these landscapes are typical of Britain as a whole.

Another approach is, therefore, to try and reconstruct relative changes in population, for example by attempting to establish which periods saw the expansion and contraction of both individual settlements and the patterns of settlement as a whole. The Roman Rural Settlement Project, for example, has clearly shown that the numbers of excavated sites declined across Britain during the fourth century, and there is no evidence for an equivalent increase in settlement size (i.e. nucleation) to compensate (Smith *et al.* 2016). If anything, urban populations appear to have been declining in a similar way. Faulkner (2000, figs. 10-11, 26, 33-4 and 60), for example has tried to quantify the prosperity and decline in settlements through a series of calculations including the

number of high status houses in towns and the number of rooms occupied in town houses, and while there are many methodological problems with this approach – such as dating and identifying just which rooms were used at specific times, and for what purposes – this does at least provide a rough indication of broad trends, which are all downward.

It seems clear, therefore, that the population of late Roman Britain was declining, but that the landscape was far from having been deserted. So what was the relationship between this late Romano-British landscape and the Anglo-Saxon colonisation? The oft-reproduced maps showing the distribution of Anglo-Saxon burials give the impression of an immigrant presence that was spread right across most of eastern and central England, although closer examination of the evidence suggests that this was not the case: as long ago as the 1930s, for example, Mortimer Wheeler (1935) noted the scarcity of Anglo-Saxon burials in the area north of London, speculating that this area may have been a British enclave. In recent years, the increased archaeological survey and excavation brought about through PPG16 and its successors (i.e. rescue and developer-led archaeology) has transformed our understanding of the density and distribution of settlement in all periods and regions, particularly so for this northern Thames Basin. While this data is extremely informative in showing that Anglo-Saxon colonisation occurred in some areas but not others, we cannot use it to reconstruct absolute population trends because of a missing part of the picture: the native British population that appear to have continued to live in many areas that did not see Anglo-Saxon colonization but which are far less archaeologically visible than the immigrants (this is discussed further below). The scale of the Anglo-Saxon migration is also much disputed with Alcock (1971, 311), for example, suggesting a figure around 50,000-100,000, compared to M. E. Jones's (1996, 26) estimate of 10,000-20,000. Other scholars see a negligible Anglo-Saxon migration with Pryor (2004, 96, 214), for example, arguing that 'Anglo-Saxon mass migrations into Britain never happened'.

The actual scale of the Anglo-Saxon migrations will always be difficult to determine, but it is clear that the large size of some Anglo-Saxon settlements and cemeteries is deceptive. Where closely datable finds have been recovered it can be seen that archaeological sites with several hundred buildings actually comprised relatively small settlements that shifted around over time (e.g. West Stow in Suffolk: West 1985; Mucking in Essex: Hamerow 1993). It would be really helpful if specifically fifth century settlements could be identified but unfortunately this is often not possible as the pottery is simply dated as 'fifth to sixth century' or 'early Anglo Saxon', sometimes because very few finds are recovered (e.g. Cowie and Blackmore 2008; Powell *et al.* 2015, 110). Similarly, large richly-furnished cemeteries give the impression of large communities, but as their use almost invariably extended over a long period of time even quite large cemeteries may have served a small hamlet-sized settlement. At Barrington, in Cambridgeshire, for example, Malim and Hines (1998, xviii) suggest that the c.300 graves were laid out over c.150 years, giving an average of c.2 burials per annum, indicating that the cemetery served a community of around 50-65. On this basis the 257 burials at Springfield Lyons (Essex: Tyler and Major 2005), that was used from c.450-700 (one burial per annum), probably served a community of around 30, and the c.200 graves at Flixton (Suffolk: Boulter and Walton Rogers 2012) that were in use for c.170 years between the late fifth and mid seventh centuries suggest a community of perhaps 30-40 (just over one burial per annum).

[INSERT FIGURE 1]

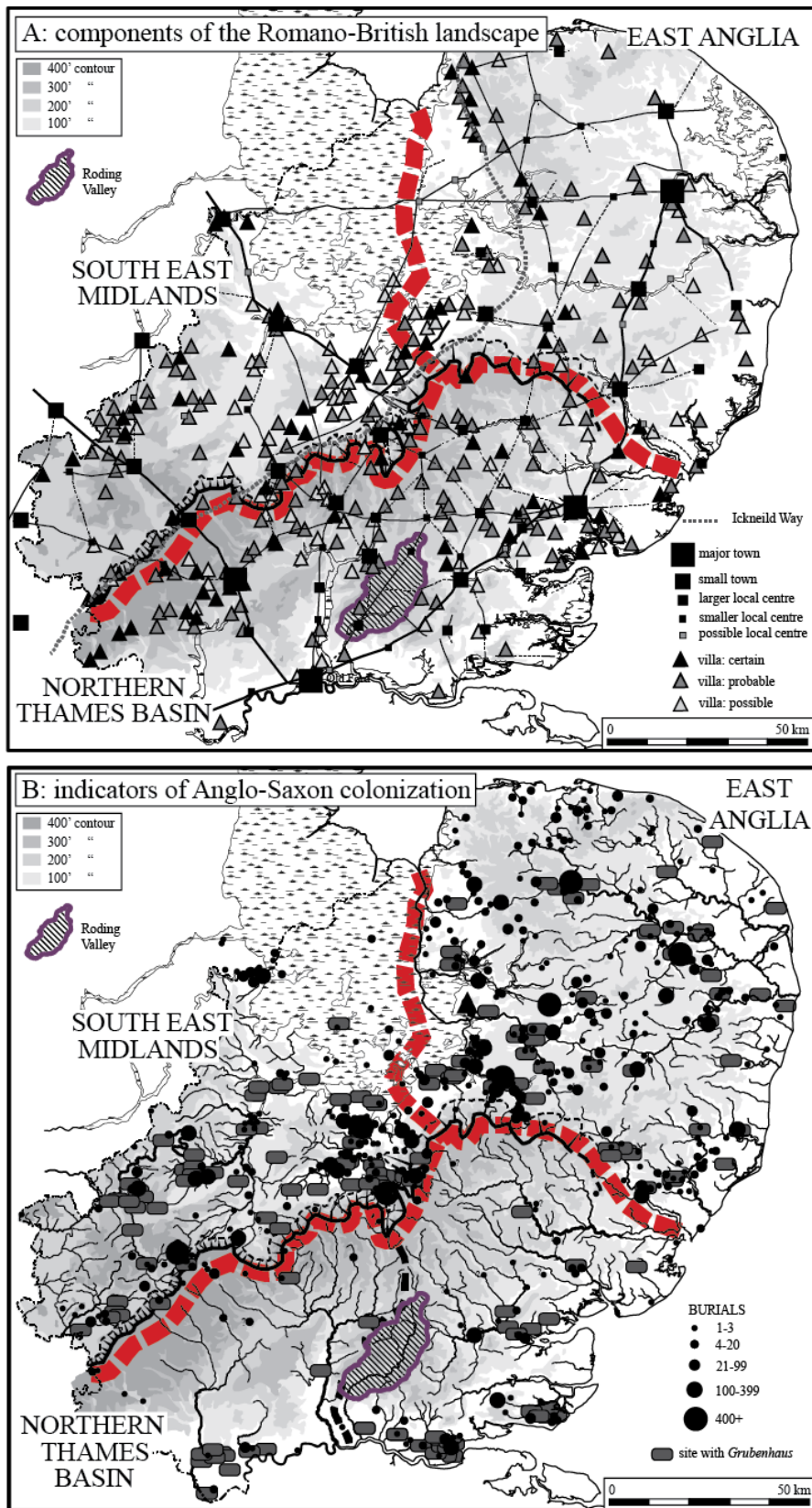


Figure 1: the boundaries between the Northern Thames Basin, East Anglia, and South East Midlands, and the location of the Roding Valley early folk territory, in relation to (A) selected components of the Romano-British landscape (the urban hierarchy, villas, and roads), and (B) indicators of Anglo-Saxon colonization (Grubenhäuser and furnished pagan burials).

Overall, the landscape archaeological evidence suggests that there was a small but significant Anglo-Saxon immigrant population living in eastern England, although it is the contention here that it was far from evenly spread across the landscape (see Rippon in press for a fuller discussion). A key indicator of Anglo-Saxon colonisation is the presence of *Grubenhäuser* as this distinctive form of architecture has no precedence in late Roman Britain. Although it has been proposed that ‘sunken-featured buildings’ found on some Roman sites were the predecessors of *Grubenhäuser*, Tipper (2004, 7–11) has convincingly shown that this was not the case and that they instead represent an entirely different building tradition of cellars with revetted sides, entrance stairways, and floors associated with hearths and sunken storage jars (e.g. examples at King Harry Lane in *Verulamium*: Stead and Rigby 1989). It is therefore frustrating that the term ‘sunken-featured building’ is still used for these *Roman* cellars as it is extremely misleading. At Tothill Street in Minster-in-Thanel, Kent, for example, a large, rectangular, 0.5 m deep, vertical-sided and flat-bottomed ‘sunken-featured building’ is clearly a cellar as it had a floor on which was a hearth, and into which a pit had been cut; it was back-filled in the first century AD (Birchenough 2010) and is wholly unrelated to fifth- and sixth-century Anglo-Saxon *Grubenhäuser*.

Despite their providing clear evidence for Anglo-Saxon immigration, the distribution of *Grubenhäuser* is, however, poorly understood, with distribution maps in Tipper (2004) and Hamerow (2012) being of selected places referred to in the text. Indeed, when the complete distribution of known sites is mapped across eastern England, we can observe that *Grubenhäuser* were not evenly spread across the landscape. Instead there are three subtly different patterns: firstly, in East Anglia, as far south as the Gipping and Lark Valleys in Suffolk, they are found across most *pays* including on the heavy claylands; secondly, in the south-east Midlands, as far south as the chalk escarpment, they are largely restricted to the river valleys and are conspicuously absent from the claylands, despite there having been a large number of recent large-scale excavations there; and, thirdly, across the northern Thames Basin these new house forms are restricted to coastal and estuarine districts, and again are conspicuously absent from the claylands (Figure 1.B). Such patterns are repeated in the distributions of burials in the ‘Anglo-Saxon’ tradition (that is ones with Germanic-style grave goods: seventh-century ‘final phase’ cemeteries are not included here as they date after the so-called migration period). These fifth- to sixth-century cemeteries are mapped for eastern England in Figure 1.B where the size of the circles is in proportion to the number of graves; this is significant because the scale of these cemeteries varies enormously across eastern England.

What is particularly striking about the northern Thames Basin and some clayland areas of the south-east Midlands are the large areas which lack evidence for Anglo-Saxon colonisation. These are areas that have, however, seen considerable archaeological survey, excavation, and the reporting of finds from metal detecting. Indeed, major infrastructure developments and the expansion of urban centres means that many of these claylands have seen extensive archaeological investigations which have revealed a high density of late prehistoric, Romano-British and later medieval sites, but none from the fifth to sixth centuries.<sup>1</sup> The scale of archaeological work here, however, allows us to be

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<sup>1</sup> For example, the claylands around Bedford (Timby *et al.* 2007b; Luke 2018; Simmonds and Welsh 2013; Luke 2016); the claylands west of Cambridge (Abrams and Ingham 2008; Ingham 2008; 2010; Wright *et al.* 2009); the claylands of north-western Essex (Havis and Brooks 2004; Barber 2006; Ennis 2006; Roberts 2007; Timby *et al.* 2007a; Cooke *et al.* 2009; Patten 2012; Wolfram-Murray and Chapman 2015); and the claylands on the Chiltern dip-slope in Hertfordshire (Stansbie *et al.* 2012).

fairly confident that these areas were not extensively settled by communities with an Anglo-Saxon identity, which raises two possibilities: firstly, that what had in the Roman period been an extensively settled landscape was now largely abandoned, or, secondly, that they continued to be occupied by communities who currently are not archaeologically visible. Three strands of evidence support the latter hypothesis: (1) palaeoenvironmental evidence – notably pollen – from number of sites shows no extensive woodland regeneration in the post-Roman period (e.g. Camborne New Settlement and A428: Abrams and Ingham 2008; Wright *et al.* 2009; Stansted palaeochannel: Havis and Books 2005); (2) at various places sherds of fifth- to seventh-century pottery have been recovered from the upper fills of late Romano-British ditches, suggesting a landscape still being managed and probably manured; and (3) occasional sites have revealed stratigraphic sequences, changes in faunal assemblages, and new forms of material culture that would appear to indicate that occupation continued into the early medieval period: at Childerley Gate, for example, occupation of a late Romano-British farmstead clearly extended beyond the end of the fourth century and an artefact-rich ‘dark earth’ formed across the site (Abrams and Ingham 2008, 99); there was also a distinctive change in the animal bone assemblage from cattle to sheep/goat, which reflects a trend seen more widely in this period (Sykes 2007, app. 1b; Rippon *et al.* 2014, Table 3; Rippon *et al.* 2015, Table 3.4). Alongside the latest Romano-British mass-produced wares was also a small amount of pottery with a grog-tempered fabric: although published as ‘proto-Saxon’ (Abrams and Ingham 2008, 100), there is nothing else Anglo-Saxon on the site, and instead this pottery probably represents sub-Roman production (Rippon, in press).

Overall, the evidence points to an Anglo-Saxon colonisation of eastern England that was patchy in its extent, and which occurred within the context of a substantial British population that continued to occupy (potentially) extensive parts of the landscape. Who was ‘in control’ at this time can only be a matter for speculation, although when we examine particular sites a strong sense emerges that Anglo-Saxon settlement in the coastal fringes of the northern Thames Basin occurred within parts of the Romano-British landscape that had been abandoned (e.g. Mucking: Hamerow 1993; Hirst and Clark 2009; Lucy and Evans 2016; North Shoebury: Wymer and Brown 1995; Orsett Cock: Carter 1998).

### **The Fields of Britannia**

While a large number of fifth- to sixth-century ‘Anglo-Saxon’ settlements have now been recognised through both excavation and fieldwalking, the nature of the field systems with which they were associated is less well understood. It is striking that the settlements themselves lack ditched property or roadside boundaries, and where excavations have extended beyond the settlements themselves there was similarly a marked absence of evidence for field systems (e.g. Mucking, North Shoebury, and Orsett Cock: see above; West Stow: West 1985). Some scholars have speculated that in part the reason for this was because Romano-British fields remained in use; for example, Taylor (1981, 20) suggests that:

‘whenever or however the Saxons developed open fields, these had to be based on a pre-existing system of agriculture and field shapes and did not evolve in an empty countryside devoid of any remains of earlier farming. Whether the existing system or the fields were still in use when the open fields as they are understood finally evolved is a question that

cannot be answered at the moment. But the main point is that the open-field system was at least partly based on what was already there’.

Across the country, anecdotal evidence had started to emerge for just such continuity (e.g. the Midlands: Green 1978, 115; Taylor and Fowler 1978; Upex 2003; Gloucestershire: Thomas *et al.* 2003; East Anglia: Percival and Williamson 2005), but how widespread was it? The possible survival of a substantial late Romano-British population implies that there may have been a considerable degree of continuity within the management of the rural landscape; this was a key theme explored through the *Fields of Britannia* project. This study comprised three components: firstly, the analysis of palaeoenvironmental sequences in order to establish broad patterns of continuity or change in land-use; secondly, the analysis of archaeological evidence for the relationship between excavated Romano-British settlements/field-systems and the historic landscape (both discussed in Rippon *et al.* 2015); and thirdly, evidence for continuity in settlement patterns (Fleming 2016).

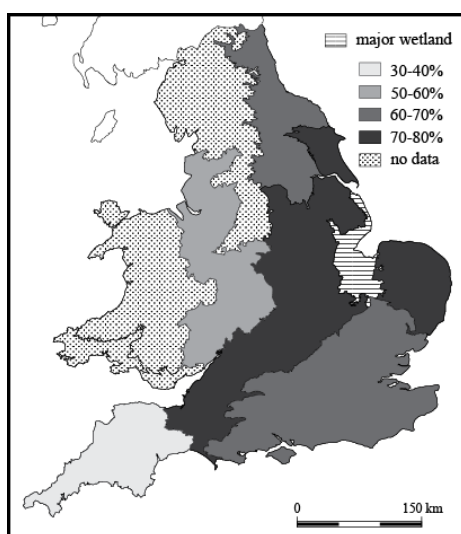
[INSERT FIGURE 2: Weedon Hill]



Figure 2: The excavations at Weedon Hill, near Aylesbury(Buckinghamshire) where extensive excavations revealed a Romano-British enclosure complex on the same orientation as the overlying ridge and furrow, and the post-enclosure historic landscape (after Wakeham 2007; OS 1<sup>st</sup> Edition Six Inch base map: © Crown Copyright and Landmark Information Group Limited (2013), all rights reserved, 1884; drawn by Chris Smart).

The analysis of archaeological evidence for the relationship between excavated Romano-British settlements and field-systems and the historic landscape quantified the occurrence of three possible relationships: (1) one where excavated Romano-British landscapes were on the same orientation as medieval field systems; (2) where they shared the same specific alignments; or (3) where there was no relationship. Note that Romano-British field systems that occur in areas of the landscape without medieval field systems were excluded from the analysis. One example to highlight is at Weedon Hill near Aylesbury in Buckinghamshire, shown in [Figure 2](#). This extensively excavated Romano-British field system is clearly on the same orientation as the ridge and furrow within the overlying medieval open field. Across lowland Britain as a whole – unfortunately, as yet, there are insufficient excavated sites from upland areas to make any analysis statistically valid – around 60–70% of Romano-British landscapes that were succeeded by medieval field systems shared the same orientation, although there were marked regional variations in the extent to which this occurs. The greatest incidence is in the ‘Central Province’ and East Anglia, and the lowest in the South West ([Figure 3](#)). It should be stressed that Romano-British sites in areas *without* field systems of medieval character (that will include extensive areas of woodland and unenclosed common pasture) were excluded from the analysis, as were coastal wetlands that were flooded in the post-Roman period, which means that we cannot say that 60–70% of the Romano-British landscape shows this degree of potential continuity. Furthermore, it should be pointed out that [Figure 3](#) is a regional-scale summary of data from various discrete districts whose character varied considerably, and it is likely that the degree of continuity and discontinuity will have been different within individual *pays*. Unfortunately, however, there are at present very few *pays* with sufficient appropriate excavations to make a statistical analysis valid, which is why the data have, at this stage, been summarised at a *regional* scale (which is at least an improvement on the old binary divisions between upland/lowland, military/civilian, and native/villa landscapes).

[INSERT FIGURE 3: FoB field boundary analysis]



*Figure 3: the extent to which excavated Romano-British field boundaries across different regions share the same orientation and/or alignment with excavated medieval field systems or historic landscapes characterized by former medieval open fields (that had been*



*enclosed by agreement and so fossilize their distinctive long, narrow fields and furlong boundaries) or closes held in severalty (see Rippon et al. 2015 for a full discussion of the methodology; drawn by Chris Smart).*

### **Broad Patterns of Land-use**

This close relationship between the physical fabric of the Roman and medieval fieldscapes suggests the potential for *broad continuity* in land-use: this does not mean that the fields were continuously ploughed, but rather that a prolonged period of total abandonment is highly unlikely. Long-term field observations at the Rothamsted Experimental Station at Harpenden, in Hertfordshire, for example, have revealed that woodland regeneration on former arable land happens within 10 to 30 years (Harmer *et al.* 2001). This is confirmed by the analysis of historic maps, such as sequential revised editions of the Ordnance Survey, that show how agricultural fields will be invaded by scrub and regenerated woodland within 20 to 30 years (e.g. the Benfleet Downs in Essex: Rippon 2012b, 7). While it is conceivable that the removal of woodland could reveal the earthworks of an earlier field system that was then rehabilitated, in practice the process of clearing trees and grubbing out stumps would surely destroy or at least render the remains of any relict field system so incoherent that they would simply have been flattened and replaced.

So, was there a woodland regeneration? Another strand of the Fields of Britannia Project was an analysis of pollen evidence, exploiting a now significant number of pollen sequences from lowland areas for the Roman and the early medieval periods. From these some striking differences in land-use emerge. **Figure 4** summarises the pollen evidence from each of the Fields of Britannia's regions, with each wedge in the pie charts representing the proportion of pollen from the four major land-use types: woodland, arable, improved pasture, and unimproved pasture. If we take woodland in the Central Province, for example, **Figure 4** indicates that that there was relatively little tree pollen in both the Roman and the early medieval periods, compared to the South East that was both more wooded than the Central Province in both periods and saw a greater increase in the amount of tree pollen in the early medieval period. It should be stressed that these pie charts show the proportions of the 'Total Land Pollen' coming from each of the four land-use groups, and since different plants produce different amounts of pollen so these proportions do *not* equate to the physical amounts of the landscape that were put down to particular land-uses (for example, an acre of trees produces far more pollen than an acre of arable crops). But what they do show are *relative differences* between regions, such as the South East being more wooded than the Central Province. It should also be noted that **Figure 4** is, like **Figure 3**, a regional summary of data from various discrete districts whose character varied considerably, and as more data become available so we should gain a more refined mapping of land-use in each period, and of land-use change over time. In the lower part of **Figure 4** these pollen data are presented in another way, with maps showing the proportions of pollen from the woodland land-use type in the Roman period, in the fifth century, and between the sixth to mid-ninth centuries. The evidence suggests that the Central Province and East Anglia were the most extensively cleared of woodland in the Roman and the early medieval periods; this is notable because these are the same regions that seem to have had seen the greatest potential continuity in field systems from the Roman through to the early medieval period (**Figure 3**). While most regions generally saw very little increase in tree pollen during the early medieval period, the lowland area

that saw the greatest rise was the South East, although the percentage increase is admittedly so small that even here there cannot have been a widespread woodland regeneration.

[INSERT FIGURE 4: FofB pollen]

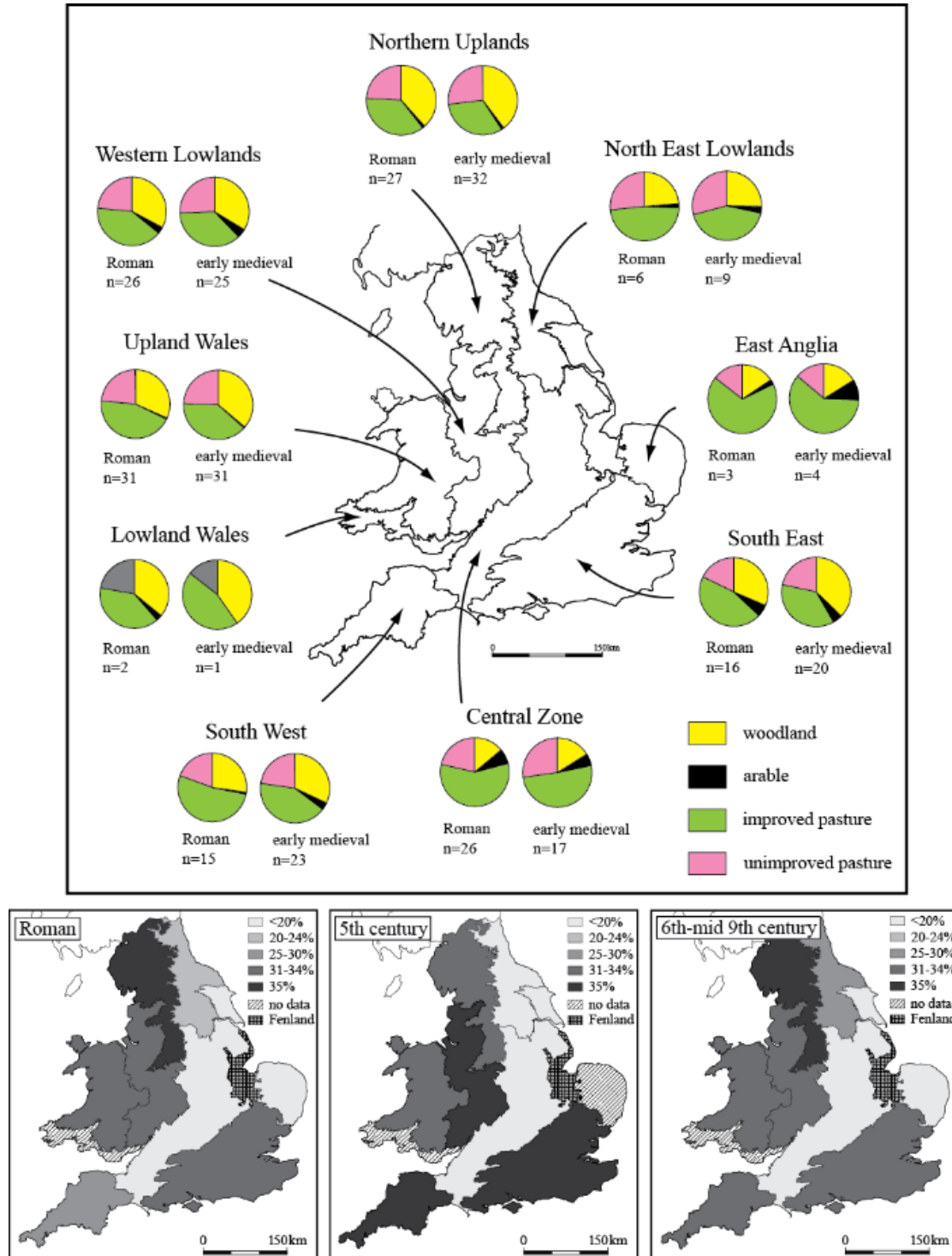


Figure 4: pollen evidence for temporal and spatial variation in land-use across Britain (south of Hadrian's Wall) in the Roman and early medieval periods.

## Anglo-Saxons and Britons in the Landscape: The Evidence of Names

The combined evidence from the relationship between late Romano-British and medieval field systems and the pollen evidence reveals that the countryside across large parts of lowland Britain was not abandoned at the end of the Roman period, but was instead maintained in some form of agricultural use which prevented widespread woodland regeneration. Whether there was also demographic continuity is, however, less easy to determine. Much discussion has been generated over who was buried within 'Anglo-Saxon' cemeteries, but that debate will hopefully be moved on through ongoing developments in the scientific analysis of skeletal material. Many scholars have drawn on place-name evidence to support the view that Anglo-Saxon colonisation was widespread. It was noticeable that at the major conference in 2004 examining *Britons in Anglo-Saxon England* – an event which began with the question of 'whether or not there were many Britons within Anglo-Saxon England' (Higham 2007b, 1) – a good number of contributors (particularly linguists) rejected the notion of any significant British survival in lowland Britain, showing that many scholars still stubbornly adhere to the traditional view. We can attempt to tackle this question further here by employing a case study centred on a common place-name element thought to be associated with the Anglo-Saxon immigrants: *-ingas*. The evidence deployed below can hopefully help disprove the notion that the language of landscape can be a guide to the ethnic origins of its occupants.

Names in *-ingas* and *-inga-* appear as a common feature of the landscapes of eastern England (Figure 5), although comparison with Figure 1B shows that they are far more widespread than the actual archaeological evidence for fifth- to sixth-century Anglo-Saxon colonisation – in the form of cemeteries and *Grubenhäuser* – occurring, for example, in large numbers on the claylands of the northern Thames Basin. This in itself is not a new observation, and indeed it led Dodgson (1966) to propose that instead of representing the *initial* phase of Anglo-Saxon settlement, they are evidence of a later phase. The interpretation of *-ingas* names may, however, be less straightforward than this and it is suggested here that rather than being associated with a new ethnic group – i.e. Anglo-Saxon colonisation in the traditional sense – they actually simply relate to the naming of early 'folk territories' by people using the Old English language, irrespective of who was living there. Note that in this study the term 'folk territory' is used for discrete areas of landscape occupied by a community that possessed a distinct identity, and which in Anglo-Saxon documents are sometimes referred to as *pagi* or *regiones*.

[INSERT FIGURE 5: place-names]

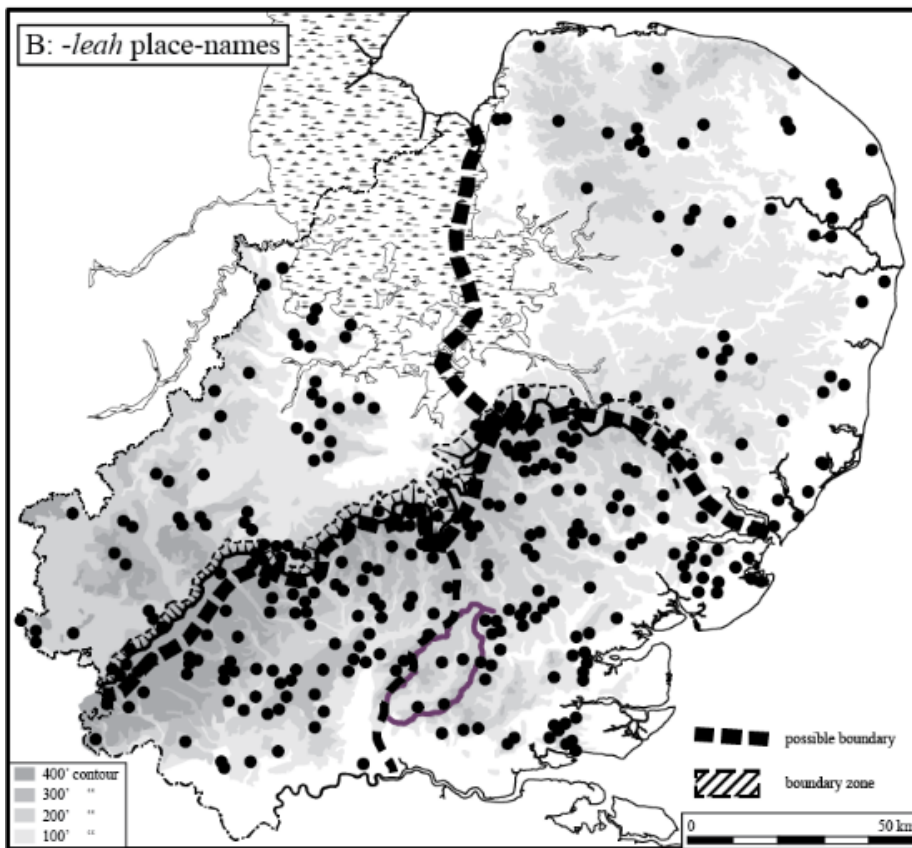
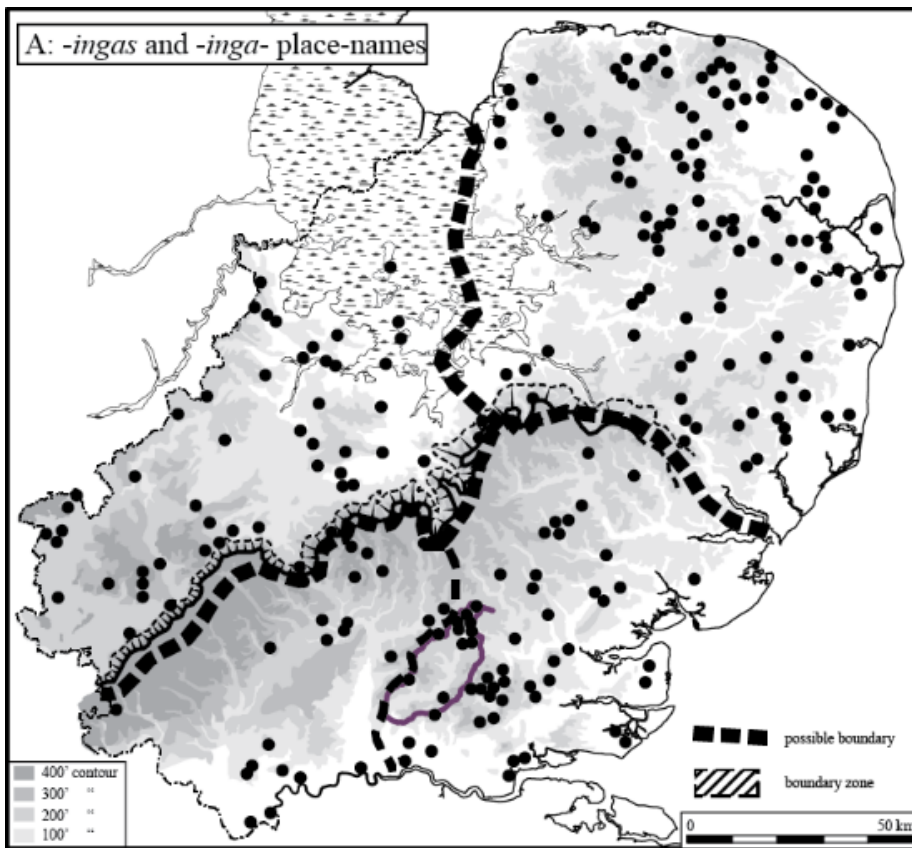


Figure 5: the distribution of *-ingas* and *-inga-* place-names (after Dodgson 1966, fig. 1), and wood-pasture and woodland indicative *lēah* place-names (after Williamson 2003, fig. 20).

## Reconstructing Early Folk Territories

Place-names such as *-ingas* are thought to indicate the territory belonging to a particular social or folk group: hence Barling in south-east Essex is recorded as *Bærlingum* in 998 (S.1522) and *Berlings* in 1042x66 (S.1056), meaning ‘the Bærlingas, the people called after Bærel or Bærla’, being derived from the Old English folk-name *\*Bærlingas* (that includes the personal name *\*Bærel* or *\*Bærla*) and *ingas* (Watts 2004, 36). In addition to place-name evidence, a wide range of other sources can be used to reconstruct early medieval folk territories (see Rippon 2012, chapter 8, for a fuller discussion). Other place-names can indicate that two territorial units were once one (e.g. Higher and Lower X), while what by the sixteenth century was a parish church may once have been a chapelry of a nearby mother church – a possible indication of the latter’s former minster status. The relationship between parish boundaries and the physical fabric of the historic landscape is particularly informative: more ancient units tend to have boundaries that follow equally ancient features in the landscape (such as the long, sinuous field-boundaries that run along many watersheds), whereas the boundaries of more recent entities tend to zig-zag through field systems creating complex patterns, including one parish having detached parcels in another (an arrangement that might also be created where former common grazing was divided between two newly separated communities).

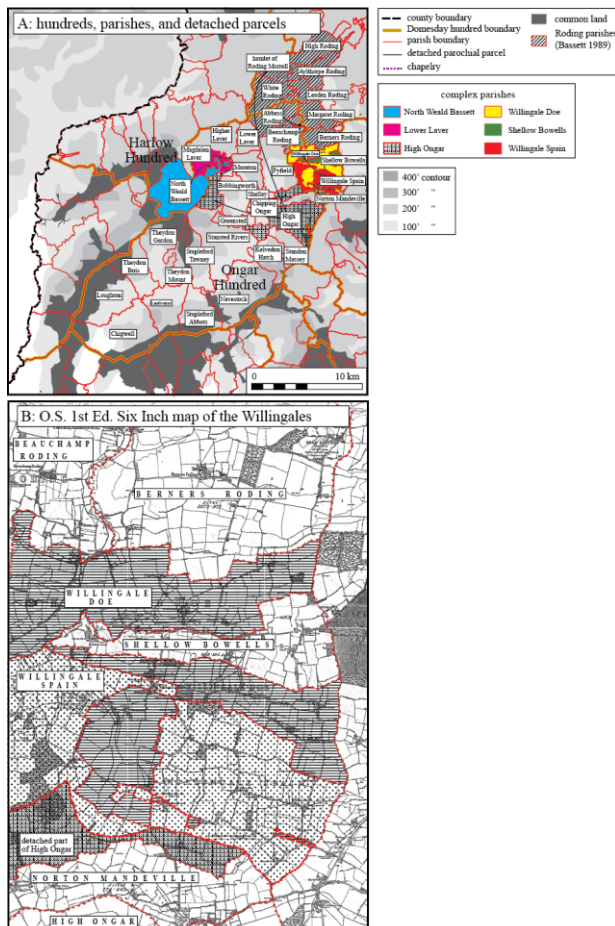


Figure 6: evidence for the Roding Valley early folk territory. (A) hundred and parish boundaries, and detached parcels. (B) Ordnance Survey First Edition Six Inch map of the Willingales, showing the relationships between the complex parish boundaries and the historic landscape.

[INSERT FIGURE 7: Rodings reconstructions

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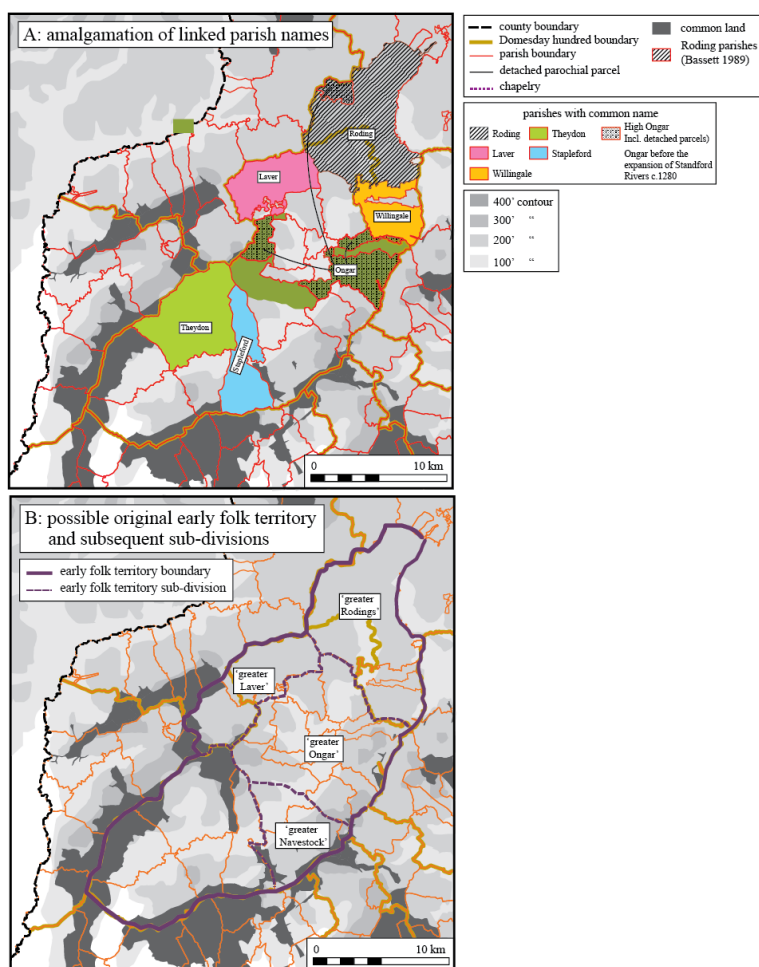


Figure 7: evidence for the Roding Valley early folk territory. (A) the amalgamation of parishes with shared names; (B) the possible early folk territory and its initial sub-divisions.

### 'The Greater Rodings'

A well-known example of an *-ingas* name is the group of eight parishes and 16 Domesday manors and other land-holdings called Roding, located in western Essex, derived from the Old English folk-name *\*Hrōthingas*, 'the people called after Hrotha' (Watts 2004, 505). These parishes lie either side of the River Roding (Figures 1 and 6-7), the name of which is a back-projection from the folk-name, since in the eleventh century it was the *Angricesburne* ('the stream of Angric, Ongar Stream': Watts 2004, 505). Bassett (1997, 25) has previously suggested that the Rodings represent a *regio* of 'an early Anglo-Saxon community whose name they all perpetuated', although there are two problems with this hypothesis: firstly, while the Rodings do form a coherent block of landscape, a case can be made for Bassett having under-estimated the extent of the early folk territory on its southern side, and secondly, while the place-name is Old English there is virtually no other evidence for Anglo-Saxon colonisation in this district, which raises the possibility that it was occupied by a community of native British descent.

That the Rodings may have been part of a far more extensive early folk territory is suggested by a wider examination of the landscape. To the west, north and east, the Roding parishes are contained within a long, sinuous field boundary that mostly follows high ground (e.g. the eastern boundary of Berners Roding on [Figure 6.A](#)). Within the Rodings, however, all the parish boundaries zig-zag through – and so must post-date – existing fields, likely denoting that they are relatively recent compared to the more ancient, sinuous watershed boundaries that enclose the Rodings on three sides. To the south, however, the boundary of Berners and Beauchamp Rodings with Willingale Doe similarly zig-zag through the historic landscape ([Figure 6.B](#)) and are clearly relatively recent. Willingale Doe is one of two small parishes (Willingale Doe and Willingale Spain), that are separated by Shellow Bowell ([Figure 6.A and B](#)); the inter-fingering of these three parishes and numerous detached parcels clearly suggests that they were once part of a single ‘Willingale’ territory ([Figure 7.A](#)). The southern edge of Willingale Spain, by contrast, follows a long sinuous field boundary which may have originally marked the southern edge of a territory comprising the Rodings and the Willingales (with Shellow Bowels; [Figure 7.B](#)). It is likely that White Roding was the central place of this territory: it was the largest parish, sometimes prefixed ‘Magna’ (Great) (Reaney 1935, 494), was the only Roding held by the King in Domesday (*DBEss* 1,8; probably Kingston Farm), and was by far the most highly valued church in the Taxation of Pope Nicholas in 1291 (Bassett 1997, 29–30). Two curiosities are that the Roding parishes were split between Dunmow Hundred to the north and Ongar Hundred to the south, and that Roding Morrell, a hamlet in the north of White Roding, was a detached part of Ongar Hundred (VCH *Ess* IV, 4; see below), although this probably reflects the late date at which the Hundreds of Essex were created (Boyden 1986).

### *Greater Ongar*

The ‘greater Rodings’ territory is, in fact, just one of a series of similar large valley-based units in the Roding valley, that together make up the rest of Ongar Hundred. One of these is ‘greater Ongar’. To the south of Willingale Spain lies a large detached parcel of High Ongar parish that was generated when Norton Mandeville, a chapelry of High Ongar of the 1180s, was elevated to parochial status (VCH *Ess* IV, 172); the place-name ‘Norton’ suggests that this was the ‘North Farm’ of Ongar. High Ongar parish had a second, substantial, detached parcel on the western side of the River Roding that included High Ongar Farm and the northern part of Ongar Great Park (see below), the rest of which lies in Stanford Rivers. The parish of Stanford Rivers as mapped in the nineteenth century is, however, larger than it was before c. 1280 when it was enlarged to take in the area north of the Wash Brook (that includes Toot Hill) which left High Ongar Farm as a detached parcel (VCH *Ess* IV, 182–183). When the extent of High Ongar is reconstructed on the eve of this change it curved around Bobbingworth, Greensted, Shelley and Chipping Ongar in a way which would imply that at some earlier date these four parishes were carved out of High Ongar ([Figure 7.A](#)). As the boundaries between Bobbingworth, Shelley, Fyfield, Moreton (which had a detached parcel in High Ongar), Stondon Massey<sup>2</sup> and Kelvedon Hatch all zig-zag through the historic landscape, they too were probably part of this ‘greater Ongar’ territory ([Figure 7.B](#)). The central place of this territory should have been High Ongar, described as a ‘mother church’ in 1210 (Secker 2013, 89). Chipping Ongar was clearly carved out of High Ongar, while the hundredal meeting place was at Toot Hill (VCH *Ess* IV, 155). The importance of Ongar is also reflected in the high value ascribed to its church (Secker

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<sup>2</sup> Stondon Massey is not in the Domesday Book: its name is derived from the Marci family who certainly held it in 1238, and it may have been part of Kelvedon Hatch which, at the time of Domesday, was held by Ralph de Marcy (VCH *Ess* IV, 242; Watts 2004, 580).

2013, 89) and in the nearby Ongar deer park which is documented in the will of Thurstan (dated 1043x1045; VCH Ess IV, 159; Whitelock 1930, 83; Hart 1971, No. 59; Rackham 1986, fig. 6.2).

#### *An Anglo-Saxon or British regio?*

Ongar Hundred, as documented in Domesday, seems to have been the rump of a once larger territory that included the 'greater Rodings', 'greater Ongar', 'greater Laver' (that included High Laver, Lower Laver, Magdalen Laver and North Weald Bassett), and the parishes to the south west that were enclosed by two long, sinuous boundaries that ran through the unenclosed commons that capped both watersheds of the Roding Valley. The various linked place-names (e.g. Stapleford Tawney and Stapleford Abbots; Theydon Mount, Theydon Gardon, and Theydon Bois), along with parish boundaries that zig-zag though the historic landscape (sometimes cutting diagonally across fields), all point to these south-western parishes having been a fourth sub-division of the Roding Valley *regio* (Figure 7.B).

The Anglo-Saxon place-names, including *ingas*, would lead many to assume that this area – at the heart of the East Saxon kingdom – was occupied by an immigrant Anglo-Saxon community but no evidence exists for this whatsoever. Essex is a county that features a large number of identified Anglo-Saxon settlements (many including *Grubenhäuser*) and cemeteries, although these are far from evenly spread across the landscape, in fact being restricted to southern and eastern coastal districts. Extensive surveys and excavations on the inland Boulder Clay areas have failed to produce any evidence for such Anglo-Saxon colonisation (see note 1 above); and nor have these inland areas produced many antiquarian finds of Anglo-Saxon metalwork, the single example from the Roding Valley being a spearhead of late sixth- or seventh-century date (Ess HER 16850), which obviously post-dates the migration period. The Portable Antiquities Scheme (PAS) has recorded 750 finds (of all periods) from the Roding Valley *regio*, showing that responsible metal detectorists who report their finds are working in the area, but there is not a single fifth- to sixth-century Anglo-Saxon artefact.<sup>3</sup> New, and surprising, discoveries are always being made, but such has been the scale of antiquarian observation across Essex, recent archaeological survey and excavation, and PAS reporting that this absence of evidence for early Anglo-Saxon occupation within the Roding Valley must surely be taken as reliable *negative* evidence for minimal Anglo-Saxon activity in this *regio*. Coupled with the fact that this had been a zone with dense Romano-British occupation (see Figure 1.A) but one with relatively few woodland-indicative *-leah* place-names (that are now thought to be indicative of wood-pasture: Hooke 2008; Figure 5), so it is highly likely that this area continued to be occupied and farmed by the native British population.

#### **Climate Change: A Factor in Shaping Landscape Character during the Fifth and Sixth Centuries?**

Just as archaeologists have questioned the traditional orthodoxy that change within society was brought about by migration, so they have become sceptical about early ideas suggesting that environmental factors determined human behaviour – a view once prevalent in both the prehistoric and historic periods (e.g. Postan 1972; Beresford 1975; Burgess 1985). While crude 'environmental determinism' was rejected by landscape archaeologists long ago (see Wright 1976 for an early

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<sup>3</sup> In Essex as a whole there are 17,338 artefacts in the PAS database of which 78 are fifth- to sixth-century AD date (<https://finds.org.uk/>).



rebuttal), in recent years there have been new, more subtle considerations of how geology and topography may have shaped the settlements and field systems of early medieval England (e.g. Williamson 2003; 2013; although see Lowerre 2015 for a critical assessment) and the character of Romano-British and medieval agriculture (Rippon 2012a; Rippon *et al.* 2014 and 2015). Notable also is the growing academic interest in past climate change, although alongside this is a worrying tendency within modern climate science to make simplistic correlations between observed trends in temperature and precipitation on the one hand, and changes within society on the other (see, for example, van Geel *et al.* 2004; Turney *et al.* 2006 and 2016). Thus, while Klimenko (2016, 365) plots fluctuations in temperature in north-eastern Europe based upon tree-ring, pollen, lake sediment and historical data, he draws overly crude correlations with documented historical events, arguing that 'it is virtually certain that the mode and speed of development and north eastward expansion of the Russian State from the Middle Ages to the Modern Time were in many ways dependent on natural and geographical factors'.

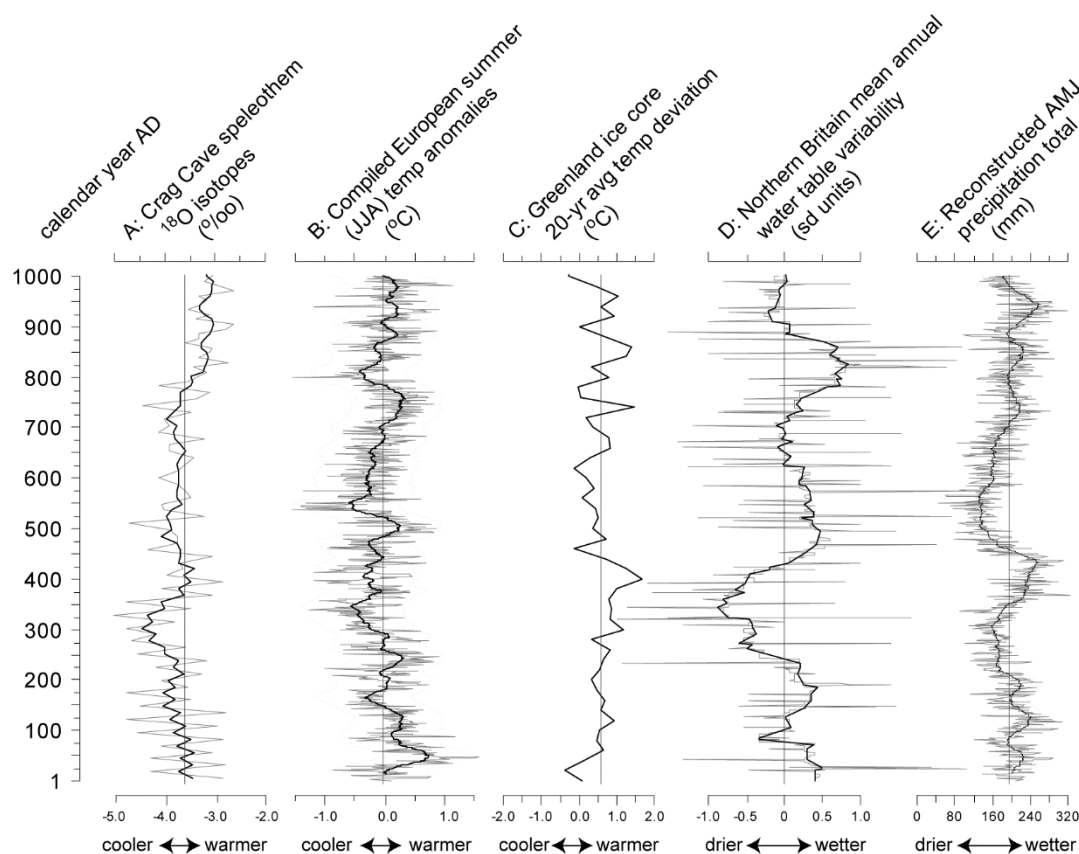
Such views have been challenged within the palaeoenvironmental community (e.g. Coombes and Barber 2005) and Middleton (2012, 268), for example, has argued that 'palaeoclimatic studies have already profoundly impacted the study of collapse and culture change, and a new determinism is in evidence'. Buntgen *et al.*'s reconstruction of summer temperatures, for example, does indeed appear to show a decline from the mid-sixth through to the mid-seventh centuries, but we should question whether this did really constitute a 'Late Antique Little Ice Age' that was a contributing factor 'to the establishment of the Justinian Plague, transformation of the Eastern Roman Empire, and collapse of the Sasanian empire' (2016, 231). There are various reasons why not, most notably that most climate change data come from very high upland areas (such as the European Alps and Russian Altai-Sayan Mountains) that will not reflect patterns in the lowlands where the impact of changes in climate will have been far less significant (for example in having a far longer growing season such that falls in temperature will not have curtailed agriculture to the same extent as in upland areas). Historians have also jumped on this climate change band-wagon, such as Ellenblum's *The Collapse of the Eastern Mediterranean* (2012) which argues for 'a series of well-documented climatic disasters that altered the face of the eastern Mediterranean in the mid eleventh century' and which led to 'the physical decline of some of the most important civilisations and cultural centres of the time'. Reviews of this work suggest grave concerns over the uncritical assessment of source material, as well as a general scepticism of the arguments put forward (e.g. Frankopa 2012; Burke 2013). Along similar lines, Cheyett (2008, 127) argues that 'since reversion from arable to pasture affected regions as far apart as Italy and Poland it cannot simply be ascribed to the political and fiscal dislocation of the ancient world, but should be understood as one effect of the climatic anomaly', yet the failure here to engage with the primary evidence for land-use – tellingly, just a single pollen diagram is discussed – or to account for the wide range of evidence for continuities in the landscape, means that this paper likewise fails to convince.

Another issue is that it should not be assumed that because data are 'scientific' they are always accurate; they may be but they must be understood in the context of their study, and their scale and quality must always be fully assessed. While reconstructions of past climate used to be based on scarce and very indirect evidence – mostly documentary references (e.g. Lamb 1982) – modern techniques use a range of proxies such as changes in the widths of tree-rings and plant/animal remains preserved within sequences of upland peat that indicate the degree of wetness. There are, however, many problems: these palaeoclimate reconstructions rely upon analysing deposits at intervals that can be many decades or even centuries apart, and the material

employed to reconstruct climate may not in itself be datable which means that radiocarbon dates have to be used which themselves are only accurate to a hundred years or so. Overall, many of the climatic trends that have been reconstructed are very poorly dated, which in a period with precise historical dates makes correlation extremely difficult. Another problem is that the analysis of one particular data-set will give one set of proxy climate indicators from one area, but that does not mean that those data can then be applied to a far wider region. Indeed, in practice, a comparison of data from different areas, and using different types of proxy, produces a confusing picture of variability.

**Figure 8** brings together a range of recent palaeoenvironmental data compilations that describe climatic fluctuations during the first millennium AD. While there are significant challenges in drawing together such a diagram, including dating, discrepancies between data sets, and the diverse – usually marginal – places from where data are obtained, it at least summarises the current position. Charman *et al.* (2006) brought together bog-surface wetness records derived from testate amoebae assemblages from ombrotrophic (i.e. rain-fed) peatlands across northern Britain that allow changes in precipitation to be determined, with key periods of increased wetness observed in the mid-fourth and eighth centuries AD. These compare to raised lake levels in the Alps between 150-250 cal. AD and 650-850 cal. AD (see Magny 2004), and oxygen isotopes from Sphagnum cellulose from Walton Moss in northern England (Daley *et al.* 2010), that show broadly the same trends. While there is some correspondence with inferred rainfall in central Europe, differences are also apparent, such as showing that the later fifth century was a period of continued increased wetness in Britain but one of decreased precipitation in mainland Europe (**Figure 8.E**).

[INSERT FIGURE 8: climate change]



*Figure 8: selected palaeoclimatic proxies for climate change during the first millennium AD. The Crag Cave speleothem indicates palaeo-temperature, while the Northern Britain watertable variability is a palaeo-precipitation record. Values for the compiled European summer temperature and Greenland ice core record are expressed as anomalies from the twentieth century average. Vertical lines indicate the first millennium AD average (Sources: A: McDermott et al. 2001; B: Luterbacher et al. 2016; C: Vinther et al., 2009; D: Charman et al., 2006; E: Büntgen et al. 2011) (drawn by Ralph Fyfe).*

These northern British wet/dry periods superficially appear to correspond to the periods of warmer and cooler summer temperatures identified through oxygen isotopes from a speleothem (stalagmite) in south-west Ireland (McDermott *et al.* 2001) (Figure 8.A), and in Luterbacher *et al.*'s (2016) synthesis of a wide range of proxy records from across mainland Europe (Figure 8.B). The picture that emerges in Britain is that the fourth century AD became cooler and wetter, and while it now appears that this was a period of declining population, it seems unlikely that there was a causal link. The decline in population – as evidenced by the recently published extensive survey of Romano-British rural settlement – was not synchronous across Britain (Smith *et al.* 2016), and the regions where the fall was most marked, such as the South East, were lowland areas where a small change in temperature will have had its most limited impact. Although Büntgen *et al.* (2011) have linked the movement of barbarian groups in the migration period in Europe to temperature and precipitation changes, it is clear that these climatic shifts and the pronounced deterioration that has been widely recognised that started with the major volcanic eruption of AD 536, had no discernible impact in Britain, as temperatures and precipitation were broadly stable from the start of the 6th century. It is noticeable, however, that the period of economic expansion during the 'long eighth century' did correspond to a period of warmer and wetter conditions, even if the relationship between the two is unclear. This period also saw the emergence of stable kingship, the Christian Church, a revival in international trade, and the replacement of folk territories (and their strongly communal patterns of agriculture) with new estate structures: it is difficult to see how all these will have been caused by gradual, and slight, changes in climate.

## **Conclusions**

The end of Roman Britain is traditionally seen as a significant phase in the history of our landscape and society, but traditional debates have been from a Roman or an Anglo-Saxon perspective which inevitably leads to the impression of discontinuity in the early fifth century. The extent and character of the Anglo-Saxon migrations have been much debated, but the neglected dimension is the extent of regional variation in the scale of the colonisation. When viewed at a national scale, Anglo-Saxon settlements and cemeteries appear to have been liberally scattered across most of southern and eastern England, but when individual regions are examined more closely the picture becomes complex: there are some areas which have seen considerable archaeological survey and excavation, and which have revealed prehistoric, Romano-British, and later medieval occupation, but where there is almost no actual evidence for Anglo-Saxons. If we discount the wholesale abandonment landscapes, this leaves open the potential for the survival of a substantial British population in some (if not all) regions. There are clear discontinuities at the end of the Roman period, although these will have had the greatest effect on the higher echelons of society: the land-owning and urban

classes whose prosperity was most tightly associated with the money-based market economy. In many areas of the countryside, in contrast, the disappearance of taxation and collapse of the market economy will have led to a decline in the intensity of agriculture – as there was no longer a need to produce a food surplus – yet life will otherwise have carried on. Indeed, the great advantage of studying the landscape as a whole is that one gets to see the bigger picture, and in particular what was going on within the wider countryside. Data collected in *The Fields of Britannia* project indicate that there was far more potential continuity within the landscape than previously thought, although this varied from region to region. This continuity is seen both in areas that appear to have witnessed a significant Anglo-Saxon migration (such as East Anglia and the Central Zone), and those that did not (such as inland areas of the northern Thames Basin).

Studying landscape at a broad scale is good for providing the ‘big picture’, but in order to fill in the details one needs to study specific places. The example explored here was of a landscape characterised by Old English place-names – and in particular *-ingas* – but one lacking archaeological evidence for Anglo-Saxon immigration. Instead, the integration of a wide range of source material suggests that an extensive valley-based territory was occupied by a community of British descent.

In addition to the issue of how native Britons and immigrant Anglo-Saxon communities interacted, another factor influencing landscape history will have been the role of environmental factors. This is, however, fraught with difficulties and an emerging challenge is to prevent a new paradigm of environmental determinism as climate scientists seek simplistic correlations between their often poorly dated evidence for climatic change, mostly taken from physically extremely marginal environments, and socio-economic trends seen in the archaeological and documentary record. Overall, the fourth to sixth centuries should be clearly recognised as a crucial period in the history of landscape and society in Britain as elsewhere, and one in which scholars from both humanities and science backgrounds need to work more closely together.

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DB Ess	Domesday Book, Essex (Rumble 1983)
Ess HER	Essex Historic Environment Record
S.0000	Sawyer 1968
VCH	Victoria County History of Essex

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