

A Multi-Phase Anglo-Saxon Site in Ewelme

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SUMMARY

New evidence is presented for a middle Anglo-Saxon 'productive' site on hilly ground north-west of Ewelme in south Oxfordshire. Coins and other finds from metal-detecting activity suggest the existence of an eighth- to ninth-century meeting or trading point located close to the Icknield Way. This place takes on an added significance because of its proximity to an early Anglo-Saxon cemetery and probably a late Anglo-Saxon meeting place. The authors provide an initial assessment of the site, its likely chronological development and its relationship with wider Anglo-Saxon activity in the upper Thames region and beyond. Some suggestions are made about the implications of the existence of such a long-lasting or recurring centre of activity for early medieval inhabitants' perceptions of landscape.

Recent research for the Leverhulme Trust funded South Oxfordshire Project has highlighted the presence of a multi-phase Anglo-Saxon site in the Chiltern-edge parish of Ewelme, next to Benson (Fig. 1, below). This part of the Thames valley, close to the proto-urban centre at Dorchester, was a heartland of early Anglo-Saxon settlement but became a frontier zone between the kingdoms of Wessex and Mercia. The site has special interest for the light it may shed on the little-understood early medieval royal centre at Benson and because of its apparent membership of a small class of middle Anglo-Saxon 'productive' sites which coincide with earlier burial grounds and later hundredal meeting places. This article aims to bring together the fragmentary evidence to provide a preliminary description and characterisation of the site, and offers a brief discussion of it in its wider context. Future publications by the South Oxfordshire Project will explore the function of the site as a focal point in the wider landscape and its role in changing medieval perceptions of place.¹

GEOLOGY AND TOPOGRAPHY

The site is approximately 5 km north-east of Wallingford on the east side of the main valley of the Thames (NGR SU 639 924; Fig. 1) and forms part of an area of transitional landscape between the low-lying south Oxfordshire vale and the Chiltern Hills. Located between 70 and 105 metres OD, the site comprises around 50 hectares of undulating countryside, bounded to the south by the modern village of Ewelme and the narrow valley of the Ewelme brook. To the east the ground is part of a large ridge of West Melbury Marly Chalk Formation which rises steeply into the foothills of the Chilterns (Fig. 2). The higher ground provides wide views to the south, towards the Chilterns and over the Thames towards the Sinodun Hills and the Berkshire Downs. On the flatter ground the Chalk is partially overlain by Northmoor Sand and Gravel. Particularly to the south, close to Ewelme village, the land is boggy and there are small streams and ponds which may have covered a more extensive area before modern field

¹ The aims of the project are outlined in S. Mileson, 'The South Oxfordshire Project: Perceptions of Landscape, Settlement and Society, c.500–1650', *Landscape History*, 33:2 (2012), pp. 83–98.

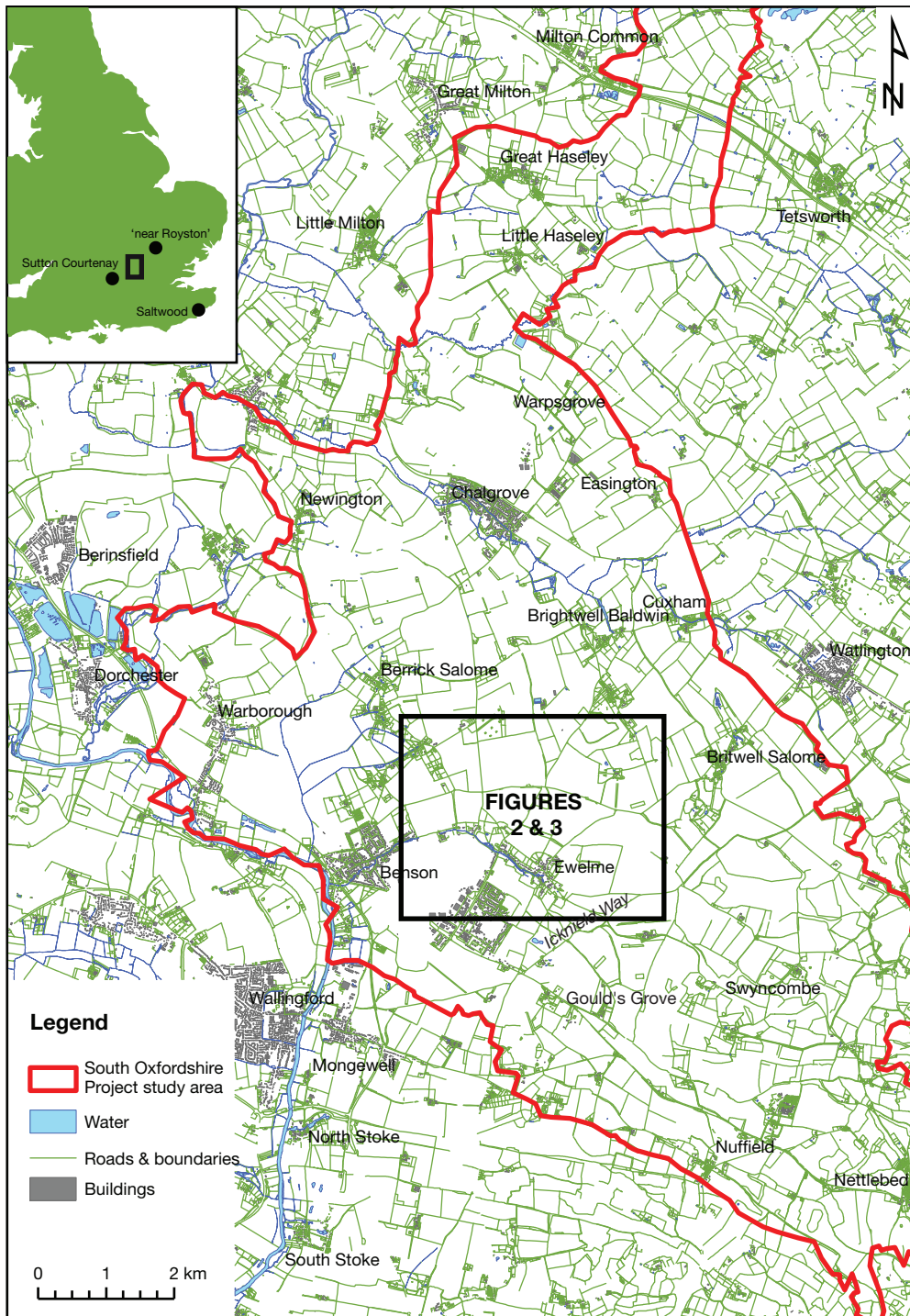


Fig. 1. General location plan. Basemap data: © Crown Copyright/database right 2014. An Ordnance Survey/EDINA supplied service.

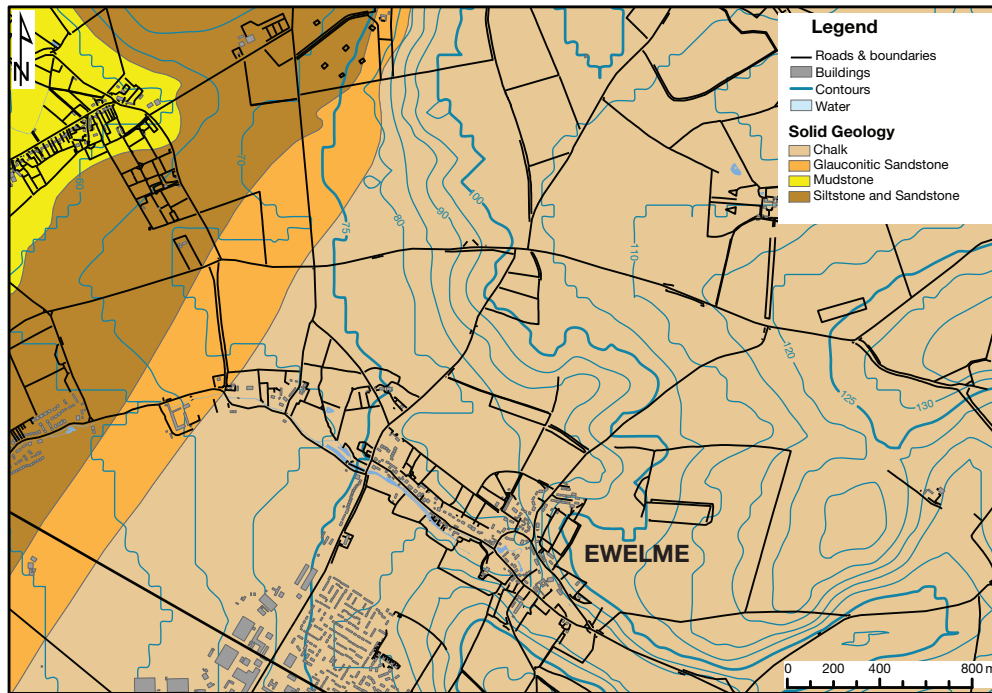


Fig. 2. Site geology and relief. Basemap data: © Crown Copyright/database right 2014. An Ordnance Survey/EDINA supplied service.

drainage. The field is currently under arable cultivation, but has not been deep ploughed for many years.

This location is well connected by routeways. The Icknield Way passes c.1.1km to the east of Ewelme, and an early road, known as Rumbold's Lane, running along the spine of the Chalk scarp up into the Chilterns, forms the eastern boundary of the site. This is the *fildena weg* ('open-country way') mentioned in the ninth-century bounds of the Brightwell Baldwin charter (S 217),² which is likely to have functioned as a droveway linking vale settlements and detached upland wood-pasture.³

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

In 1086 Ewelme was a sizeable settlement with four manors of, in total, 20¾ hides, 39 tenants and 7 slaves, land for 24 ploughs (though it was not fully stocked) and significant quantities of meadow and woodland. Then as later its territory probably stretched from the lowlands at the

² Anglo-Saxon charters are annotated with reference to the numbering outlined in P. Sawyer, *Anglo-Saxon Charters: An Annotated List and Bibliography* (1968): <http://www.trin.cam.ac.uk/chartwww/eSawyer.99/eSawyer2.html>.

³ G.B. Grundy, *Saxon Oxfordshire: Charters and Ancient Highways*, ORS, 10 (1933), p. 10 renders *fildena weg* 'open-country dwellers' way'. The same path is described further north in the Benson charter of 996 (S 887) as the *fildena wudu weg*, glossed by Grundy as 'open-country dwellers' wood way'. However, P. Kitson, 'Quantifying Qualifiers in Anglo-Saxon Charter Boundaries', *Folio Linguistica Historica*, 14 (1994), pp. 61–9 shows that *fildena* was always used adjectively in charter boundaries, rather than as a collective noun, and that the best translation is 'open-country way', a term apparently used to describe a wide, turf-covered droveway, that in S 887 explicitly linked to the 'wood' as its destination.

foot of the Chilterns up into the hills themselves. Together the Ewelme manors had the second highest hidation in Benson half hundred after the four manors of Great Haseley parish, which were assessed at 30¼ hides. This suggests a locally important centre, and the place-name itself, first recorded in Domesday (as *Auuilme*, ‘spring, source of a river’ or ‘powerful spring’) suggests it was the location of an important resource and potentially a feature of religious significance which became the focus for settlement fairly early in the Anglo-Saxon period.⁴ The limited historical evidence tells us relatively little about Ewelme’s early development, but something more can be deduced from what is known about neighbouring Benson, 2.5 km west, with which it was closely connected.

According to an unreliable late Anglo-Saxon tradition, Benson was one of four *tūnas* captured by Cuthwulf or Cutha in 571.⁵ Settlement certainly existed close to the medieval church by the mid sixth to mid seventh century, though limited excavation revealed no high-status components. Probably a Gewissan centre in the seventh century, by the eighth century Benson seems to have passed back and forth between the kings of Wessex and Mercia. Its dependent territory was evidently extensive, perhaps originally comprising the whole of the 4½ Oxfordshire Chiltern hundreds (over which it had jurisdiction, or ‘soke’, in 1086), and its area can be partly reconstructed from land grants of the late Anglo-Saxon period. Despite the considerable reductions which resulted from these grants, in 1086 Benson was the most valuable royal manor in Oxfordshire.⁶ Benson was assessed at a very modest 10 hides in 1086, but it continued to receive renders appropriate to an early tribute centre, including corn rent, profits of woods, pastures and fisheries, and church scot, a payment made to a mother church. The manor retained an association with a number of settlements as late as 1279, including Preston Crowmarsh, Warborough, Shillingford and part of Holcombe in the vale and Henley, Huntercombe, Nettlebed and Wyfold in the Chilterns.

Much of the early history of Benson is obscure – the place-name (*Bænesingtun* c.900, ASC A, meaning ‘Benesa’s estate/farm’)⁷ offers no clue to its early to middle Anglo-Saxon significance – but there are strong indications of its early links with Ewelme. In the Middle Ages and later Benson, Ewelme and Berrick (a *bere-wic*, or outlying dependent farm, north of Benson) shared a large and highly complex open field system.⁸ Almost certainly this field system was first laid out, if not fully developed, when the land remained under united royal lordship in the late Anglo-Saxon period. The fields were evidently established after the division of Berrick into two manors, since the northern manor, later called Berrick Prior, was excluded from the shared fields; the date of the division is uncertain, but it most likely occurred in the early eleventh century or shortly before.⁹ This agricultural linkage probably represented the continuing strength of an old relationship. As will be shown below, the archaeological evidence suggests that Ewelme’s particular role was as a gathering point, perhaps initially for rendering tribute and later for trading and as the hundred meeting place.

The site of the hundred meeting place is unknown, but it is potentially significant that the name of the half hundred changed from Benson to Ewelme in the mid thirteenth century.¹⁰ Typically, Domesday hundreds were named after the place that served as meeting-point for

⁴ M. Gelling, *The Place-Names of Oxfordshire*, vol. 1 (1953), p. 127; E. Ekwall, *The Oxford Dictionary of English Place-Names*, 4th edn (1960), p. 170; A.D. Mills, *Oxford Dictionary of British Place-Names* (2003), p. 182; V. Watts, *The Cambridge Dictionary of English Place-Names* (2004), p. 220.

⁵ *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* (ASC) A, Cuthwulf, E, Cutha.

⁶ *VCH Oxon.* 1, p. 374.

⁷ Gelling, *Place-Names of Oxfordshire*, vol. 1, p. 116; Ekwall, *Dictionary*, p. 37; Mills, *Dictionary*, p. 52; Watts, *Dictionary*, p. 50.

⁸ *VCH Oxon.* 18, forthcoming; Davis map of Benson, Berrick and Ewelme (1788), Bodl. (R) MS C17:49 (141). For the *bere-wic*: R. Coates, ‘New Light from Old Wicks: The Progeny of Latin *Vicus*’, *Nomina*, 22 (1999), p. 97.

⁹ *VCH Oxon.* 1, p. 377.

¹⁰ C. Holmes, ‘From Saxon Royal Vill to Medieval Manor’, in K. Tiller (ed.) *Benson: A Village through its History* (1999), p. 37.

the district; in a minority of cases they are named after their most important manor.¹¹ When hundreds bear two names, this may reflect appurtenance to a central vill on the one hand, and provide evidence for the location of the original meeting place on the other.¹² Certainly, Benson and Ewelme were closely connected both jurisdictionally and geographically, and conceivably once formed a larger administrative entity, with its meeting place at Ewelme. The name change may have occurred in the mid thirteenth century because of Richard of Cornwall's leasing of Benson manor (minus hundredal jurisdiction) to a group of local tenants, an act which set the seal on its reduced importance as a royal administrative centre long after it had been eclipsed as the governmental centre for the region (a role taken initially by Wallingford and later by Oxford).

Two sites within the Domesday lordship of Ewelme are plausible locations for the hundred meeting place. The first is on the Ewelme–Brightwell Baldwin parish boundary at the junction of the *feldena weg* and the present-day Benson–Watlington road (B 4009), immediately next to the Anglo-Saxon burial finds and the 'productive' field. This location is denoted in a charter of c.887 as 'Ceolwulf's tree', a landscape marker possibly associated with either the West Saxon or the Mercian king of the same name (Fig. 3).¹³ The name element 'tree' (*treōw*) was associated frequently with hundred meeting sites and it has been suggested that the use of the word as a synonym for the cross and its homonymity with words for truth and faithfulness made it particularly suitable for creating an 'inscribed place' with 'religious and judicial overtones'.¹⁴ By the thirteenth century the junction here was marked by the 'Derlestane' or 'Dernestane' ('hidden stone') and in 1604 by 'Dunstone Crosse'.¹⁵

The second site is further west on the same main road at a point on the boundary of Ewelme, Benson and Fifield which was the meeting point of six routes in 1788 and was called Roke Elm. The name Roke, recorded as 'le ok' in 1279 and 'Roak' in 1379 (OE *æt þære āce* 'at the oak'),¹⁶ like 'Ceolwulf's tree', suggests a highly visible landscape marker useful for those seeking the gathering place. This location lies amidst a notably complex arrangement of open-field strips on nineteenth-century tithe maps, shared between the three parishes of Benson, Berrick Salome and Ewelme.¹⁷ A thirteenth- to fifteenth-century silver mount was found just to the south-east of this site, close to one of its former radial routes, now a footpath leading to Cottesmore Lane and the 'productive' field.¹⁸ Both of these sites would conform to the location of some hundred meeting sites on later parish boundaries,¹⁹ and both were located in an area of bare open country that was part of the shared common field area in the Middle Ages, though the crossroads by the 'productive' field is on higher ground (105 metres OD) than that further west (c.72 metres OD).

¹¹ A. Pantos, 'Assembly-Places in the Anglo-Saxon Period: Aspects of Form and Location', University of Oxford D.Phil. thesis (2002), vol. 1, pp. 10–13; J. Baker and S. Brookes, 'Outside the Gate: Sub-Urban Legal Practices in Early Medieval England', *World Archaeology*, 46.1 (2014), pp. 1–2; J. Baker and S. Brookes, 'Developing a Field Archaeology of Outdoor Assembly', *Journal of Field Archaeology*, forthcoming 2014.

¹² O. Anderson, *The English Hundred-Names* (1934), pp. xxix–xxx; idem, *The English Hundred-Names: The South-Eastern Counties* (1939), pp. 79–80, 83–4, 86–8, 90–1, 92–9.

¹³ S 217.

¹⁴ B. Morris, 'Old English Place-Names – New Approaches', in R. Jones and S. Semple, *Sense of Place in Anglo-Saxon England* (2013), pp. 56–8; Anderson, *South-Eastern Counties*, pp. 184–5.

¹⁵ P.R. Coss (ed.), *The Langley Cartulary*, Dugdale Society, 32 (1980), pp. 5, 8; TNA: PRO, E326/8308; Exeter College Archive, unlisted deed.

¹⁶ *Rot. Hund.* vol. 2, p. 761 (Wace fee, Ewelme); Gelling, *Place-Names of Oxfordshire*, vol. 1, p. 117. Hundred names with 'oak' are relatively infrequent (Skyrack, Yorks. ('shire oak'), and Tipnoak, Sussex, being the only examples), but meeting places at oak trees are reasonably well attested: Anderson, *South-Eastern Counties*, pp. 185–6.

¹⁷ Grundy, *Oxfordshire Charters*, p. 6; OHC, tithe maps.

¹⁸ PAS, BERK-E70F34; information from David Janes.

¹⁹ A. Pantos, "'On the Edge of Things": Boundary Location of Anglo-Saxon Assembly Sites', *Anglo-Saxon Studies in Archaeology and History*, 12 (2003), pp. 38–49; J. Baker and S. Brookes, 'Gateways, Gates, and *Gatu*: Liminal Spaces at the Centre of Things', *Neue Studien zur Sachsenforschung*, forthcoming.

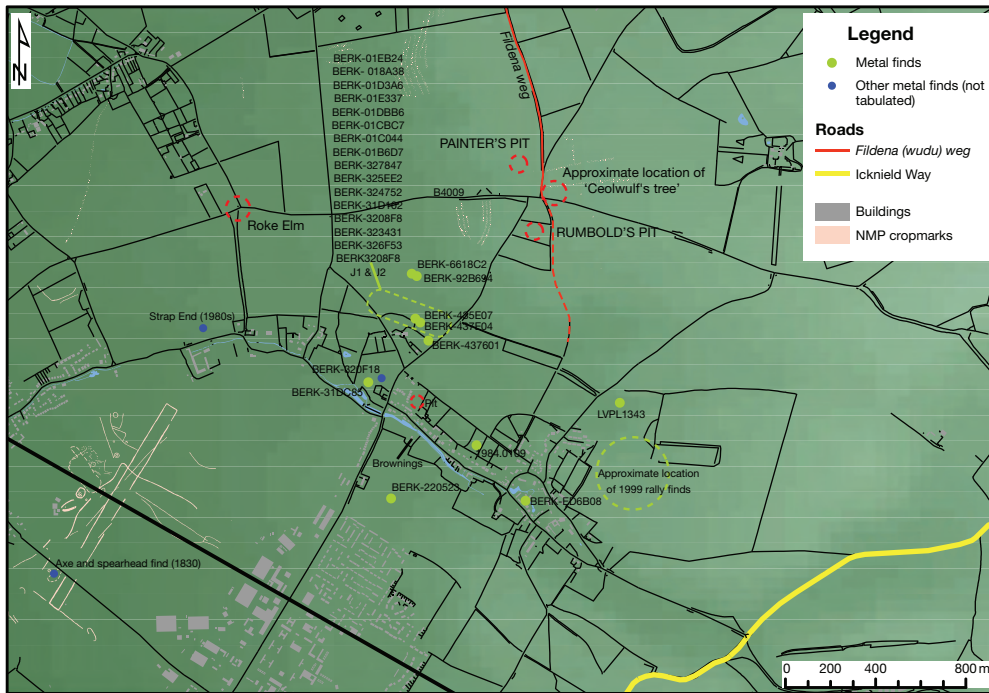


Fig. 3. Plan of the site showing the locations of metalwork finds. Basemap data: © Crown Copyright/ database right 2014. An Ordnance Survey/EDINA supplied service.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

South Oxfordshire is rich in prehistoric, Roman and early Anglo-Saxon finds. The higher gravel terraces around the Thames, Thame and Ock apparently provided the most attractive terrain for early settlers and were probably farmed continuously from the late Bronze Age.²⁰ Dorchester, 8.5 km west-north-west of Ewelme, became a significant Iron-Age centre and later a Roman small town at the intersection of several main roads.²¹ The area between Abingdon/Milton, Sutton Courtenay/Drayton (all formerly Berks.) and Dorchester/Berinsfield has yielded the greatest concentration of early and middle Anglo-Saxon finds in the whole of the Thames valley.²² Additional Anglo-Saxon cemetery and/or settlement sites within 10 km of Ewelme have been found at Benson, Wallingford (formerly Berks.), Mongewell, North Stoke and Lewknor.²³

²⁰ G. Lock, 'Prehistoric Oxfordshire', in K. Tiller and G. Darkes (eds.), *An Historical Atlas of Oxfordshire*, ORS, 67 (2010), pp. 10–13; A. Lang, 'Iron Age Oxfordshire', *ibid.* pp. 14–15.

²¹ P. Booth, 'Roman Oxfordshire', *ibid.* pp. 16–17.

²² J. Blair, *Anglo-Saxon Oxfordshire* (1994), pp. 1–17; P. Booth et al., *The Thames through Time: The Early Historical Period, AD 1–1000*, Thames Valley Landscapes Monograph, 27 (2007), pp. 91–100; H. Hamerow et al., 'Anglo-Saxon and Earlier Settlement near Drayton Road, Sutton Courtenay, Berkshire', *Archaeological Journal*, 164 (2007), pp. 109–96; H. Hamerow et al., 'The Origins of Wessex Pilot Project', *Oxoniensia*, 78 (2013), fig. 2 and p. 51.

²³ J. Pine and S. Ford, 'Excavation of Neolithic, Late Bronze Age, Early Iron Age and Early Saxon Features at St Helen's Avenue, Benson, Oxfordshire', *Oxoniensia*, 68 (2003), pp. 177–8; H. Hamerow with S. Westlake, 'Saxons before the *Burh*: The Early Anglo-Saxon Cemetery at Wallingford', and H. Hamerow, 'Saxon Settlement before the *Burh*', in N. Christie et al., *Transforming Townscapes. From Burh to Borough: The Archaeology of Wallingford, AD 800–1400* (2013), pp. 57–65; Booth et al., *The Thames through Time*, p. 96; S. Ford and A. Hazell, 'Trial Trenching

Within Ewelme parish itself, archaeological finds span the prehistoric to Anglo-Saxon periods. Little is known about prehistoric settlement, but isolated finds include an Iron-Age quarter stater and fragments of late Iron-Age or early Roman pottery found in test pits close to the church and in the grounds of Brownings, a house south of the brook towards the western end of the village.²⁴ Roman activity is reflected in the discovery of numerous coins, including two hoards in the southern uplands of the parish (one just over the Swyncombe boundary), both closing with issues of Allectus (AD 293–6).²⁵ Metal-detecting activity over a three-year period on the north-western edge of the village, close to the ‘productive’ site, produced some 14 Roman coins, the majority of them fourth century, along with other objects including fragments of bronze bowl, an ear-scoop, brooches, ingots and a miniature bronze axe head which may have been a votive charm.²⁶ A heavily clipped late Roman silver siliqua found just south of the ‘productive’ field suggests activity in the sub- or post-Roman period after 410.²⁷

The first recorded discoveries of Anglo-Saxon material were made near the ‘productive’ site at the beginning of the twentieth century during gravel quarrying. In 1903 some fifteen apparently unfurnished inhumation burials were found in Painter’s Pit, just north-west of where Rumbold’s Lane joins the Watlington road (Fig. 3).²⁸ One account states that five of the skeletons were found together in a single pit and that the rest occupied narrow graves about two feet deep in rows two to three yards apart, some of them with their heads to the west. Another description claims that the graves were irregularly laid out and that one skeleton was found in a sitting position. Amongst the finds were an enigmatic bronze hanging bowl, probably associated with human bones, a small wooden bucket (including thirteen wooden staves) furnished with a thin copper-alloy hoop and fittings, and iron hoop fragments.²⁹

A second gravel pit, called Rumbold’s Pit, some 200 metres to the south-east, produced pottery and other grave goods at around the same time (Fig. 3). It was called ‘the skeleton pit’ in 1911, when a variety of objects from it were deposited in the Ashmolean Museum. These include a hand-thrown wide-mouthed cup with bands and punched dot decoration (possibly a small cremation urn or accessory vessel; Fig. 4) found in the same grave (‘pot hole’) as a piece of red sandstone (perhaps used as a muller) and other pottery fragments;³⁰ a perforated ceramic disk assumed to be the lid of a pot it was found with (which was broken and abandoned on site);³¹ an iron spearhead;³² and two iron horse shoes.³³ In 1916 a small plain globular bowl (Fig. 4) and five fragments of grey ware were found in a smaller pit to the south-east, close to the far western end of the village (‘on rising ground behind the blacksmith’s forge’; Fig. 3).³⁴ A further ‘half a basketful’ of pottery found in this pit was not retained.³⁵

of a Saxon Pottery Scatter at North Stoke, South Oxfordshire, 1988’, *Oxoniensia*, 55 (1990), pp. 169–71; D.A. Hinton, ‘Anglo-Saxon Burials at Postcombe, Lewknor’, *Oxoniensia*, 38 (1973), pp. 120–3.

²⁴ PAS, CCI-940005; S. Mileson, ‘The South Oxfordshire Project’, *SMidLA*, 42 (2012), p. 74; ‘Ewelme Manor, Ewelme, Oxfordshire’, unpublished OA report (2007), pp. 5–8.

²⁵ A.S. Robertson, *An Inventory of Romano-British Coin Hoards* (2000), nos. 924, 943; C.M. Kraay, ‘A Third Century Hoard of Roman Coins from Ewelme’, *Oxoniensia*, 17/18 (1952–3), pp. 234–5.

²⁶ HER, PRNs 12286, 27437.

²⁷ PAS, BERK-320F18.

²⁸ R.A. Smith, ‘Ewelme, Oxon.’, *Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries*, 2nd series, 22 (1907–9), pp. 71–3; *VCH Oxon.* 1, pp. 348–9; A. Meaney, *A Gazetteer of Early Anglo-Saxon Burial Sites* (1964), p. 208.

²⁹ T.M. Dickinson, ‘The Anglo-Saxon Burial Sites of the Upper Thames Region, and their bearing on the History of Wessex, circa AD 400–700’, University of Oxford D.Phil. thesis (1976), vol. 2, pp. 102–3; Smith, ‘Ewelme, Oxon.’; *VCH Oxon.* 1, pp. 348–50; J.M. Cook, *Early Anglo-Saxon Buckets* (2004), p. 81. All of the finds are now in the British Museum: museum numbers 1908,0207.2–4.

³⁰ Ashmolean Museum, AN1911.504–6.

³¹ *Ibid.* 495.

³² *Ibid.* 510 ii.

³³ *Ibid.* 514.

³⁴ *Ibid.* AN1917.33–4.

³⁵ Ashmolean Museum, Ewelme topographical folder, letter from Thomas Powell, 1917.



Fig. 4. Anglo-Saxon pots from Ewelme in the Ashmolean Museum.

In July 1943 H.O. King of Mount Farm, Dorchester wrote to E.T. Leeds stating that mechanical diggers at work on his land next to Rumbold's Pit had come across 'what appears to be a Saxon cemetery'. Several burials had been found and when King was on site the digger cut through a burial about eighteen inches to two feet below the surface, the skull 'facing north-east, rather upright in position'.³⁶

As part of her analysis of early medieval burial sites in the upper Thames region, Tania Dickinson attempted to bring together the varied descriptions of these findings, concluding that they were likely to represent both Iron-Age and Anglo-Saxon remains.³⁷ This interpretation might seem to be supported by one of the accounts of the Painter's Pit graves which appears to describe a crouched burial, which could be prehistoric or early Anglo-Saxon. However, examination of the finds suggests that the great bulk of the material is Saxon. A few of the pottery fragments might potentially be prehistoric, but the two pots and the large majority of the pottery sherds, including the grey grass-tempered ware, clearly are Anglo-Saxon, as must be the fittings for the stove-built bucket.³⁸ The recovered ceramics do include some fragments of Roman pottery, including the 'perforated ceramic disk' which evidently has been modified for secondary use, presumably in the Anglo-Saxon period. Identification of the copper-alloy bowl is very difficult, since it appears to be a unique example.³⁹ The vessel is small, measuring only 135 mm in diameter, and takes the form of a mini-cauldron which originally had three plain circular hook-escutcheons for suspension.⁴⁰ Bruce-Mitford took it to be possibly of Anglo-Saxon manufacture and it does not closely resemble bowls known from Iron-Age Britain. The closest known parallel is a silver cup of similar shape and size found in a fifth-century grave at Godøy, Norway.⁴¹ On balance it seems most likely, therefore, to come from an early Anglo-Saxon grave, though the place of manufacture and cultural background of its maker remains unknown. The horse-shoes are evidently intrusive finds, most likely of post-Conquest date.

³⁶ Ibid. letter from King to Leeds. This find was reported in brief in *Oxoniensia*, 8–9 (1943–4), p. 196.

³⁷ Dickinson, 'Anglo-Saxon Burial Sites of the Upper Thames Region', vol. 1, p. 36.

³⁸ Ibid.; Cook, *Early Anglo-Saxon Buckets*, p. 81.

³⁹ R. Bruce-Mitford with S. Raven, *The Corpus of Late Celtic Hanging Bowls* (2005), pp. 232–4.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid. p. 234.

RECENT FINDS

More recent metal finds and fieldwork shed some further light on the Ewelme cemetery and its users, as well as on later activity in the area. Forty Anglo-Saxon objects from Ewelme, including 12 coins, have been reported to the Portable Antiquities Scheme (PAS) and/or are recorded in the Fitzwilliam Museum Early Medieval Corpus of Coins (EMC).⁴² Many of these objects were found by a single metal-detectorist, David Janes, over a period of around fifteen years beginning in the late 1990s.⁴³ Ten of the Ewelme finds are from a collection no longer available for study but seen and photographed by Professor Helena Hamerow of the Oxford University School of Archaeology (Fig. 5; these finds were given 'S.' codes).⁴⁴ Around eight Anglo-Saxon objects, only one of which was reported to the PAS, are known from a poorly recorded metal-detecting rally held in 1999. The metalwork collected by Janes, including two non-PAS pieces, has been examined by Jane Kershaw, and summaries of her descriptions of the items are given in Table 1, along with information on the other items from the EMC and PAS databases and from John Naylor.

All of the closely located early Anglo-Saxon finds and most of the middle Anglo-Saxon ones, apart from a few coins, come from the southern part of the large field on lower ground immediately to the south-west of Rumbold's Pit. This field is on a south-west facing slope, at around 75–80 metres OD. Most of the PAS object find spots are located to an accuracy of about 10 metres. The detailed find spots of the photographed items are not known, and these and a few other poorly located finds are not shown in Fig. 3.

The distribution of the firmly located objects appears to reflect a real concentration of activity rather than to be the result of the pattern of metal-detecting. Ewelme has been subject to extensive metal-detecting but local information suggests that almost all the Anglo-Saxon material has been found here and in a line stretching east to the Icknield Way, including mainly unreported Anglo-Saxon finds said to have been made to the south-east of the 'productive' field by the footpath north of and parallel to the village street, and metalwork found on farmland east of the church during the metal-detecting rally held in 1999. Two sceattas are also thought to have been found immediately west of the 'productive' field, close to the footpath leading from Cottesmore Lane towards Roke Elm. The only potential indicator of Anglo-Saxon activity found in eighteen test pits excavated in the village itself came in the form of two very worn, possibly Anglo-Saxon, pottery sherds from the grounds of Brownings.⁴⁵

Within the 'productive' field, the Anglo-Saxon objects were almost all found on the flatter ground in the south. This may partly be as a result of gradual downhill movement through soil weathering and plough action, but the distance from the burial sites and the character of the recovered finds suggest they are more likely to reflect separate occupation or activities mainly during the middle Anglo-Saxon period. Magnetometer and resistivity surveys in the south of the field revealed a small number of potential archaeological features, including a c.2.5 metre by 4 metre sub-rectangular pit-like anomaly aligned north-west to south-east, which could possibly be the remains of an Anglo-Saxon *Grubenhau*s (Fig. 7).⁴⁶ Fieldwalking of fifteen hectares of the field in stints (at 10 per cent coverage) produced two sherds each of Roman and medieval pottery, a few pieces of possible later-medieval roof tile, and, notably, in the same southern area, a piece of Anglo-Saxon pottery and seven pieces of lava quern (Figs. 8 and 9).

⁴² Eight of the coins are listed in the Fitzwilliam Museum Early Medieval Corpus of Coins (EMC). Where these can be correlated with PAS finds in Table 1, both reference numbers are given.

⁴³ The majority of these finds were given to the Ashmolean Museum in 2012.

⁴⁴ Skeleton records of these objects were added to the PAS database during the preparation of this article. We are especially grateful to Helena Hamerow for her detailed descriptions of them.

⁴⁵ Mileson, 'The South Oxfordshire Project', p. 74 (fig. 28, nos. 7 and 8).

⁴⁶ R. Ainslie, 'Ewelme, Oxfordshire', unpublished report, no. 017/2011.

Table 1. Known Anglo-Saxon finds from metal-detecting activity

Object type	Probable date	Description	PAS/EMC/other ref.
Saucer brooch	Mid 5th to mid 6th century	Copper-alloy; five spiral design; thick score line on reverse may indicate it was unfinished (not fitted with clasp)?	S.871-2; FAHG-1BBCF6 [not plotted on Fig. 3]
Saucer brooch	Mid 5th to mid 6th century	Copper-alloy; five spiral design; see Fig. 6	Janes collection (J1), no PAS number.
Saucer brooch, fragmented	Mid 5th to mid 6th century	Copper-alloy; running spiral design	S.873-4; FAHG-1BE680 [not plotted]
Button brooch	Later 5th to mid 6th century	Copper-alloy; Avent & Evison Class I	S.850-1; FAHG-1AD586 [not plotted]
Wrist clasp, half	Late 5th to late 6th century	Copper-alloy, gilded; Hines Type C, Style I animal ornament; Fig. 6	BERK-437601
Curved, rectangular strap-mount	Early 6th century	Copper-alloy; probably a horse harness mount; Style I	S.703-5; FAHG-1B0694 [not plotted]
Circular Mount	6th century	Copper-alloy; shield apex disc?; zoomorphic limb decoration in hexagonal pattern	S.706-7; FAHG-1B7273 [not plotted]
Circular Mount	7th century	Copper-alloy; probably a horse harness mount; Style II animal interlace	S.697-8; FAHG-1B2DA4 [not plotted]
Coin	c.695–715	Clipped sceat; Series E, Variety G	BERK-92B694
Coin	c.700–750	Continental sceat; Series E (Metcalf Var. A), plumed bird	HAMP2587 [not plotted]
Coin	c.710–20	Anglo-Saxon sceat; Series G, Type 3a	BERK-327847
Coin	c.710–25	Anglo-Saxon sceat; two facing heads with cross, prob. Series J, Type 37	LVPL1343; EMC, 2000.0030
Coin	c.710–35	Anglo-Saxon sceat; Type 30b/8 'mule' (Wodan head obverse with standard reverse)	EMC, 1998.0070 [not plotted]
Coin	c.710–40	Series X, Variety 3e, monster head, four circles on reverse	EMC, 1999.0161; BERK-220523
Coin	c.710–40	Related to Series X (obv. facing head; rev. annulets/saltire) (Type 81)	EMC, 2008.0067 [not plotted]
Coin	c.710–50	Anglo-Saxon sceat; 'Fledgling' Type; obv. walking bird; rev. worm-wolf	EMC, 2008.0057; BERK-01EB24

Object type	Probable date	Description	PAS/EMC/other ref.
Coin	c.715–35	Continental sceat; Series E, Type 4 (Metcalf and Op den Velde Variety d (corpus no. 1576)	EMC, 1984.0109
Coin	c.720–740	Anglo-Saxon sceat; Series E, secondary phase, Variety C-related	BERK-ED6B08
Coin	c.720–50	Anglo-Saxon sceat; Celtic cross with rosettes	EMC, 1998.0068 [not plotted]
Coin	c.765–92	Anglo-Saxon (Mercian); Cynethryth: non-portrait (Chick Type 148)	EMC, 2008.0332 [not plotted]
Mount	8th century	Copper-alloy; discoidal; central, equal-armed cross; animal design; prob. linked pin; Fig. 6	BERK-018A38
Pin	8th to early 9th century	Copper-alloy; biconical head; collar; Fig. 6	BERK-01D3A6
Pin	8th to early 9th century	Copper-alloy; biconical head	BERK-435E07
Pin	8th to early 9th century	Copper-alloy; biconical head; collar	BERK-325EE2
Pin	8th to 9th century	Copper-alloy; square-sectioned polyhedral head; stamped ring-dots	BERK-324752
Pin	8th to 9th century	Copper-alloy; polyhedral head; ring and dot motif; collar	BERK-6618C2
Hooked tag	8th to 9th century	Copper-alloy; scroll decoration	BERK-01E337
Pin	Uncertain, prob. 8th to 9th century	Copper-alloy; pin head; perhaps from a one-piece or composite pin	S.761; FAHG-1C5728 [not plotted]
Strap end	8th to 9th century	Copper-alloy; Thomas Class B, Type 1	BERK-01DBB6
Hooked tag	9th century	Copper-alloy, with possible niello; Trewiddle-style decoration; Fig. 6	S.714-15; FAHG-1C4203 [not plotted]
Strap end	9th century	Copper-alloy; Thomas Class A, Type 2; crescents	Janes collection (J2), no PAS number
Strap end	9th century	Copper-alloy; Thomas Class A, Type 2; chevrons	BERK-31D102
Strap end	9th century	Copper-alloy; Thomas Class A, Type 2 (probably); corroded	BERK-3208F8

Table 1 (Continued)

Object type	Probable date	Description	PAS/EMC/other ref.
Strap end	9th century	Copper-alloy; Thomas Class A, Type 1; Trehiddle-style decoration; Fig. 6	BERK-01CBC7
Strap end	9th century	Copper-alloy and niello; Thomas Class A, Type 2; chevrons; Fig. 6	BERK-01C044
Pin	9th century or later	Copper-alloy; head of a composite pin	S.758-9; awaiting PAS number [not plotted]
Strap end	Mid/late 10th to early 11th century	Copper-alloy; Winchester-style; openwork	S.766-7; awaiting PAS number [not plotted]
Stirrup strap mount	11th century	Copper-alloy; lozenge-shaped recesses; Williams' Class A, Type 12	BERK-31DC85
Tweezer, fragment	Uncertain: Roman to mid Anglo-Saxon, poss. 5th to 6th century	Copper-alloy; elongated triangular plate with a median row of punched ring-dots	BERK-01B6D7
Tweezer, fragment	Uncertain	Copper-alloy; similar to above, but punched dots contained within engraved border	BERK-437E04
Tweezer, fragment	Uncertain: Roman or, more likely, 8th or 9th century	Copper-alloy; triangular arm of tweezer; punched dots; flared end similar to above, but punched dots contained within engraved border	BERK-323431
Hooked tag or mount	Uncertain	Copper-alloy; triangular plate; two perforations; undecorated	BERK-326F53

'Three A-S strap ends', apparently 9C, one highly decorated; a silver 'Saxon strap end'; 'Anglo-Saxon metalwork'; 'Saxon strap end, 3 parts'; 'Saxon mount'; and Saxon sceat porcupine c.710–25 (LVPL1343, above) found in metal-detecting rally

The co-location of the lava quern and Anglo-Saxon finds, and the lack of evidence for intensive Roman activity in the immediate area, raises the possibility that the quern fragments date to the middle to later Anglo-Saxon period.⁴⁷

⁴⁷ In c.1840 the central and southern parts of the field were called Little and Great Black Piece, names which may perhaps reflect observation of dark-coloured organic residue from past human occupation dating to before the layout of the open fields: OHC, tithe award, nos. 412, 421; J. Field, *English Field-Names. A Dictionary* (1972), p. 22.

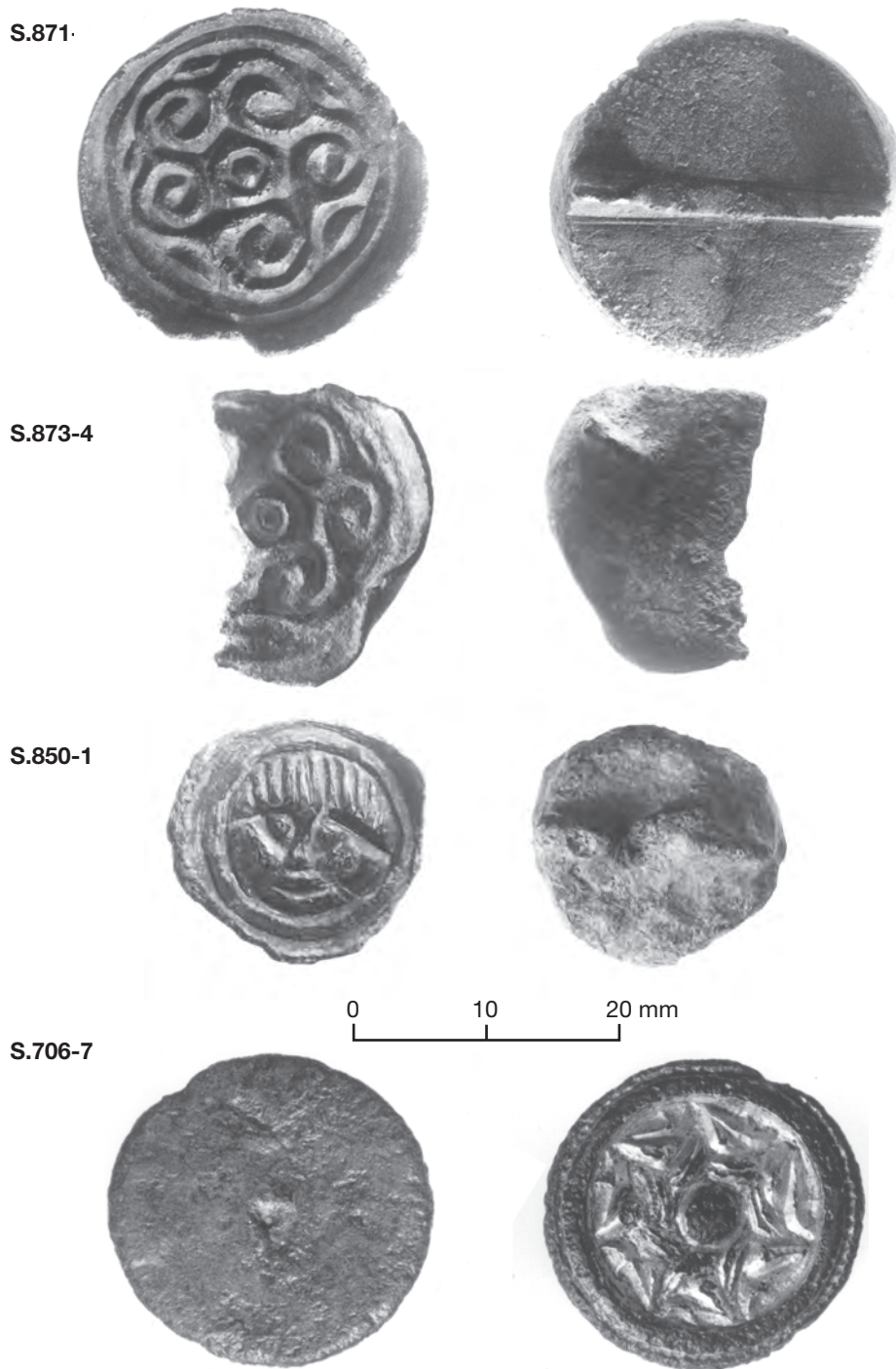
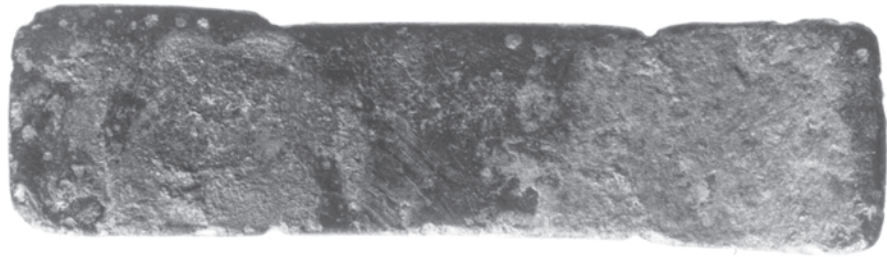
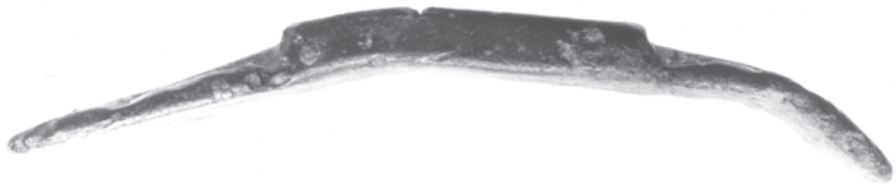


Fig. 5. Anglo-Saxon metalwork 'from Ewelme'. Scale 1:2. Photographs courtesy of Helena Hamerow.



S.704-5



0 10 20 mm

S.697-8

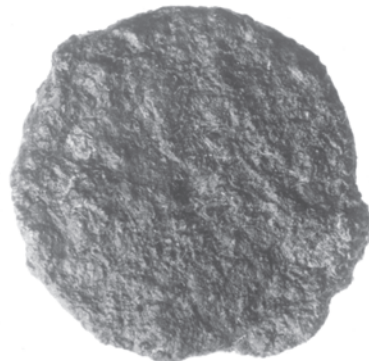
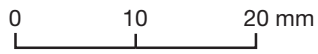


Fig. 5 (Continued)



S.761



S.766-7



Fig. 5 (Continued)

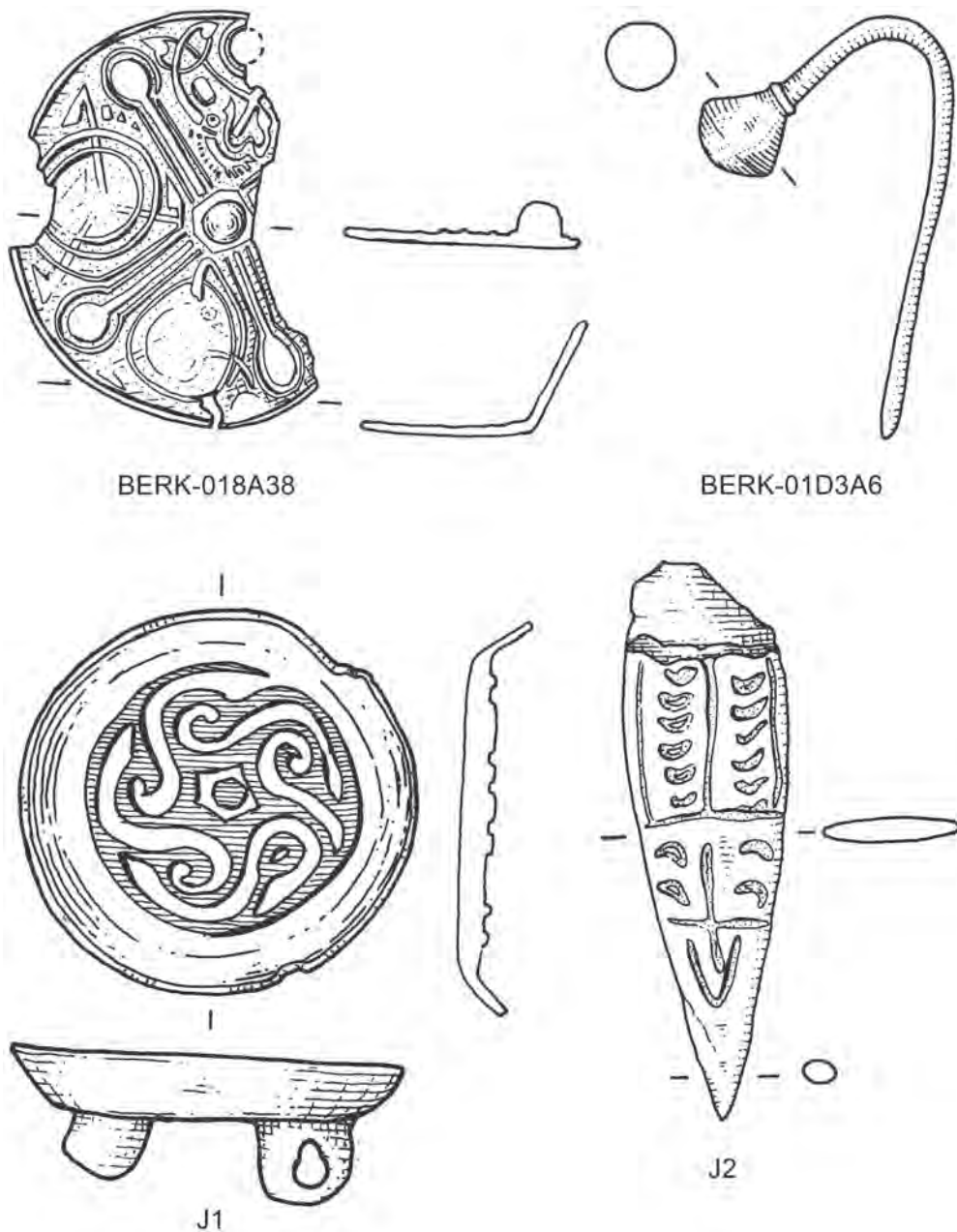


Fig. 6. Drawings of selected pieces of metalwork. Scale 1:2. Drawn by Alison Wilkins.

LIKELY SITE SEQUENCE AND INTERPRETATION

An assemblage of only 42 to 49 objects dating from over 500 years of activity is too small to allow extensive conclusions to be drawn about the nature of the Ewelme site. Nevertheless, the distribution and character of the finds prompt several observations regarding the likely site sequence and interpretation.



Fig. 6 (Continued)

Early Anglo-Saxon Cemetery

Much about the cemetery remains unknown due to very poor recording and, almost certainly, the presence of further unexcavated or unrecorded burials. Nonetheless, taken together, the early material suggests the presence of an extensive or polyfocal cemetery occupying the west-facing apex of the Chalk scarp. This location was, by the ninth century at the latest, bisected by the *fildena weg* – a significant local route linking vale and Chilterns.⁴⁸ The presence of two groups of burials nearly 200 metres apart raises the intriguing possibility that the finds made so far represent just a small fraction of a much larger burial ground

⁴⁸ This close association of early Anglo-Saxon cemeteries and routeways is commonly observed elsewhere: S. Brookes, 'Walking with Anglo-Saxons: Landscapes of the Living and Landscapes of the Dead in Early Anglo-Saxon Kent', *Anglo-Saxon Studies in Archaeology and History*, 14 (2007), pp. 143–53.

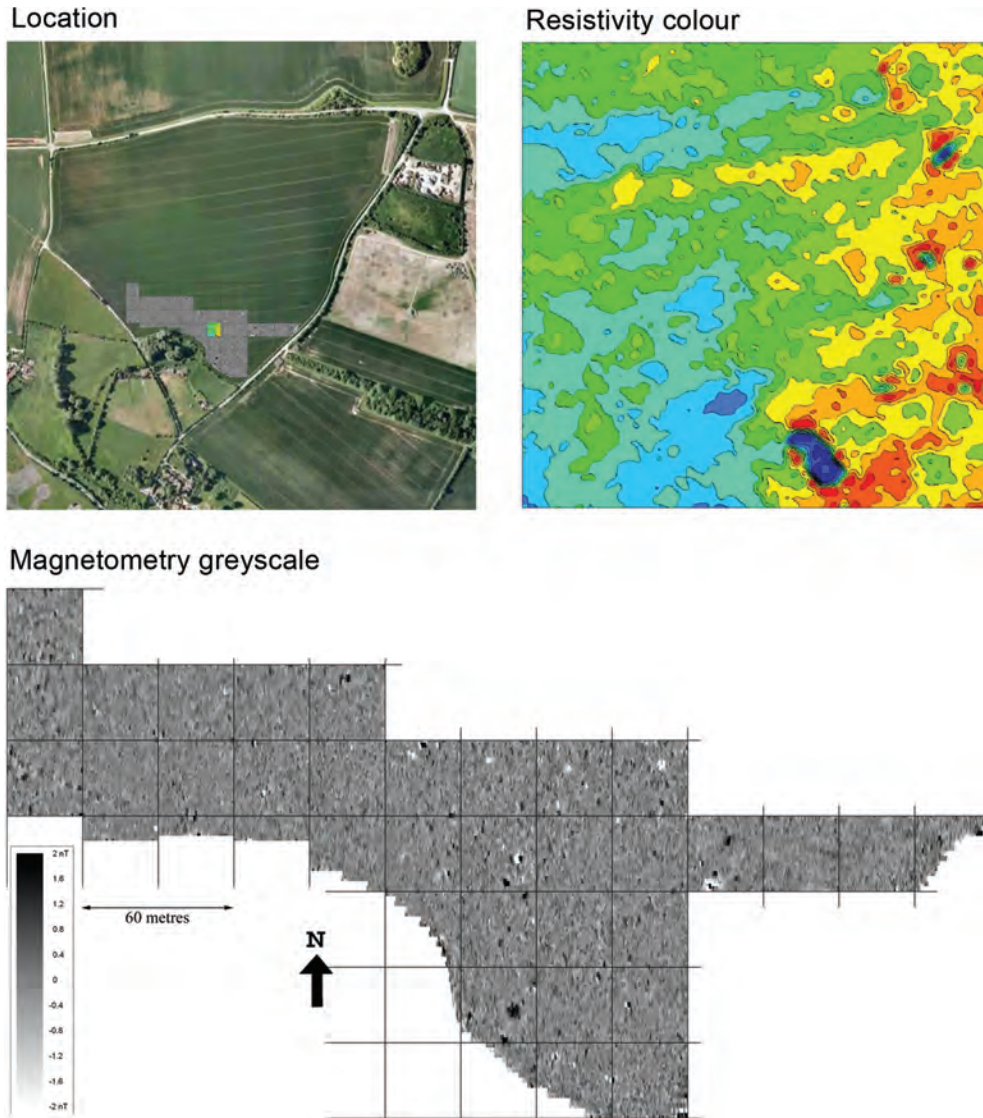


Fig. 7. Geophysical Surveys of the 'productive' field: location in Google Earth air photo (top left); magnetometry (below); resistivity (top right) – note the rectangular patch of low resistance, possibly indicating the location of a Grubenhaus. Images courtesy of Roger Ainslie.

strung along the edge of the ridge. However, if the burials from Rumbold's Pit and Painter's Pit were part of a much more extensive cemetery stretched across this ridge-top location, it might be expected that there would have been many more early Anglo-Saxon metal finds than have so far been discovered through long-term and systematic metal-detecting across the site. It is therefore much more likely that these were separate clusters of burials at the two locations. These clusters might reflect the existence of two self-consciously distinct groups utilising the site, or, alternatively, a chronological shift in the focus of burial from Rumbold's Pit to Painter's Pit, or vice versa. The analysis of more completely excavated cemeteries at, for example, Dover Buckland and Finglesham (both in Kent), has demonstrated that cemeteries



Fig. 8. Fieldwalking and metal-detecting underway on the 'productive' field, March 2011.

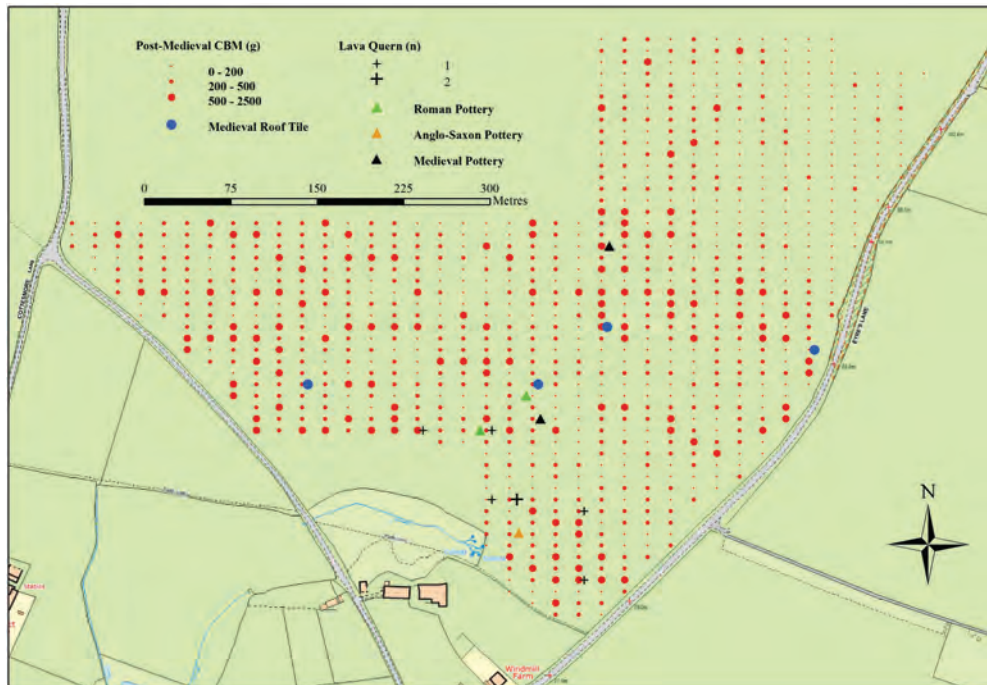


Fig. 9. Fieldwalking results. Drawn by Alexander Portch.

Published in Oxoniensia 2014, (c) Oxfordshire Architectural and Historical Society

could develop horizontally over time.⁴⁹ Whether the apparently smaller cemeteries of the upper Thames developed in this way is uncertain, but there are local parallels for the kind of polyfocal and quite dispersed arrangement found in Ewelme at Wally Corner, Berinsfield and Didcot Power Station.⁵⁰

The absence of information about the number and precise chronology of burials makes it hard to guess the size and character of the contributing population, but possibly the cemetery, or at least the burial area at Rumbold's Pit, was associated with a settlement to the south, on the north-western fringe of the modern village. Its location is possibly indicated by that of the wrist clasp fragment (see below), which appears to be somewhat disassociated from the main concentration of burial material, and which may have been a casual loss rather than a grave good, especially given its worn and broken condition.

Without any detailed information about the early twentieth-century finds or the location of most of the early Anglo-Saxon objects found by metal-detectorists, an approximate dating of the cemetery relies on the identification of the objects likely to have originated as grave goods. Ignoring the problematic hanging bowl, the best indication for the start of the cemetery is provided by the three saucer brooches and button brooch, which all have a broadly mid fifth- to mid sixth-century date. To these objects can be added the bucket and the two bowls, which most likely date from the fifth or sixth century.⁵¹

It is difficult to know how long the cemetery remained in use. Cemeteries of the fifth to sixth centuries typically include a wide variety of grave orientations, in contrast to those of the seventh and eighth centuries in which more standard orientations became the norm.⁵² Unfortunately, the conflicting accounts of the layout of the burials make it hard to be sure about orientations, and in any case two nearby cemeteries, Didcot Power Station and Long Wittenham II, both displayed an unordered arrangement of graves, despite dating to the seventh to early eighth centuries.⁵³ The probability that some cremations were present would seem to support the idea that the cemetery started to be used in the fifth or early sixth century. The unaccompanied burials encountered in early gravel digging, on the other hand, might indicate a later sixth- or seventh-century component. This interpretation is certainly supported by the one or two objects of seventh-century metalwork amongst the assemblage, along with the apparent dearth of weaponry. Even this statement must be taken as inconclusive, however. Although grave goods are known to have become scarcer over time, recent re-phasing of sixth- and seventh-century burials using calibrated radiocarbon dating combined with Bayesian modelling suggests that an absence of grave goods cannot be interpreted in purely chronological terms.⁵⁴ In any case, the possibility remains that some of the burials encountered were of Iron-Age date.

From the limited evidence available, the character of the cemetery appears in many ways typical of the region. Firstly, it was probably a mixed rite cemetery: indications of cremation include one of the urns and, perhaps, the fragmentary saucer brooch (S.784), the poor condition of which appears to be consistent with cremation damage. Secondly, nearly all of the metalwork fits with known regional types. Similar saucer brooches have been found at, for example, cemeteries at Queenford Farm (Dorchester), Wally Corner (Berinsfield) and

⁴⁹ V. Evison, *The Dover Buckland Anglo-Saxon Cemetery* (1987); S. Hawkes and G. Grainger, *The Anglo-Saxon Cemetery at Finglesham, Kent* (2006).

⁵⁰ A. Boyle, *Two Oxfordshire Anglo-Saxon Cemeteries: Berinsfield and Didcot* (1995), pp. 133, 245.

⁵¹ Cook, *Early Anglo-Saxon Buckets*, p. 81.

⁵² N. Stoodley, *The Spindle and the Spear: A Critical Enquiry into the Construction and the Meaning of Gender in the Early Anglo-Saxon Burial Rite*, BAR BS, 288 (1999), pp. 63–7.

⁵³ A. Meaney, *A Gazetteer of Early Anglo-Saxon Burial Sites* (1964), p. 54; Dickinson, 'Anglo-Saxon Burial Sites of the Upper Thames Region', site 99; Boyle, *Two Oxfordshire Anglo-Saxon Cemeteries*, pp. 240, 243.

⁵⁴ C. Scull and A. Bayliss, 'Radiocarbon Dating and Anglo-Saxon Graves', in U. von Freeden et al. (eds.), *Völker an Nord- und Ostsee und die Franken. Akten des 48. Sachsensymposiums in Mannheim vom 7 bis 11 September 1997*, 39–50 (1999), p. 86; A. Bayliss et al., *Anglo-Saxon Graves and Grave Goods of the 6th and 7th Centuries AD: A Chronological Framework* (2013).

Abingdon, and as unstratified PAS finds.⁵⁵ The two complete saucer brooches, and probably also the fragmentary brooch, are examples of the five running spiral design from Dickinson's Main Series, which are well-evidenced from the upper Thames valley.⁵⁶ The button brooch has a face mask with the characteristic high-set cheeks and round eyes of Avent and Evison's Class I, a type which likewise has a distribution strongly associated with the upper Thames.⁵⁷ Indeed, the hairpiece of vertical striations is very similar to one found at nearby Long Wittenham 20.2. The bucket also fits in well with regional styles, its repoussé dot decoration being more typical of 'Saxon' than 'Anglian' examples.⁵⁸ Only the wrist clasp stands out as an unusual find for the upper Thames valley, the distribution of these objects being generally confined to 'Anglian' areas of East Anglia and the East Midlands. Perhaps significantly the find was made amidst the main cluster of middle Anglo-Saxon coin and metalwork finds, c.800 metres from Painter's Pit, making its provenance from a grave highly unlikely. In light of its very poor condition the clasp may represent either a casual loss, or perhaps scrap metalwork retained for recycling.

What may mark out a more distinctive aspect of the cemetery, or of particular burials within it, is the presence of pieces of probable horse equipment. These include a curved rectilinear strap-mount with terminals (S.703–5) and a circular mount (S.697–8). In both cases the mounts are missing their rivets, complicating identification.⁵⁹ However, most finds of harness mounts come from cemetery contexts and appear to have been reused, often as brooches, and here as elsewhere this may well account for the absence of rivets.⁶⁰ The curved, rectangular strap-mount has chip-carved Style I decoration datable to the sixth century. It has good parallels with an unprovenanced metal-detector find from Kent and a rectangular mount from Eriswell 104 (Lakenheath), grave 4116.⁶¹ The form and curvature of the object point to it being a decorative mount on the brow or nose strap.⁶² The circular mount is similar to other disc mounts from Oxfordshire found at Spelsbury 4 and Standlake, as well as further afield at, for example, Sutton Hoo Mound 17.⁶³ It has chip-carved decoration in Style II interlace surrounding what appears to be a central raised circular boss. On stylistic grounds a date of manufacture in the late sixth or first half of the seventh century is likely.

A second circular mount (S.706–7) is possibly also derived from horse harness; certainly it has very close analogues with other PAS finds believed to derive from horse gear (for example BERK-18B795 and BUC-24D605). However, another possibility is that this item was a shield apex disc.⁶⁴ Both of the parallels in the PAS have three or more rivets on the reverse

⁵⁵ T.M. Dickinson, 'Material Culture as Social Expression: The Case of Saxon Saucer Brooches with Running Spiral Decoration', *Studien Zur Sachsenforschung* (1991), pp. 39–70; Dickinson, 'Early Saxon Saucer Brooches', *Anglo-Saxon Studies in Archaeology and History*, 6 (1993), pp. 11–44; Boyle, *Two Oxfordshire Anglo-Saxon Cemeteries*, pp. 77–8, 175, 184.

⁵⁶ Dickinson, 'Material Culture as Social Expression'; Dickinson, 'Early Saxon Saucer Brooches'.

⁵⁷ R. Avent and V. Evison, 'Anglo-Saxon Button Brooches', *Archaeologia*, 107 (1982), pp. 86–7.

⁵⁸ Cook, *Early Anglo-Saxon Buckets*, p. 81.

⁵⁹ Unfortunately, from the photographs it was unclear whether these fittings had evidence for rivets which had been removed, or whether there were any other indications of reuse.

⁶⁰ On the other hand, corrosion on the reverse of the circular mount (S.697) may argue against the idea that it was reused as a brooch: personal communication from Helena Hamerow.

⁶¹ C. Fern, 'The Archaeological Evidence for Equestrianism in Early Anglo-Saxon England, c.450–700', in A. Pluskowski (ed.), *Just Skin and Bones? New Perspectives on Human-Animal Relations in the Historical Past*, BAR IS, 1410 (2005), pp. 54, 58. The authors are grateful to Chris Fern for discussing these objects with them.

⁶² An alternative suggestion is that it is a scabbard mount: personal communication from Helena Hamerow.

⁶³ Fern, 'Archaeological Evidence for Equestrianism', pp. 58, 60; G. Speake, *Anglo-Saxon Animal Art and its Germanic Background* (1980), plate 16c; M. Carver *Sutton Hoo. A Seventh-Century Princely Burial Ground and its Context* (2005), p. 229, 25ii.

⁶⁴ Compare, for example, T. Dickinson, 'Symbols of Protection: The Significance of Animal-Ornamented Shields in Early Anglo-Saxon England', *MedArch*, 49 (2005), pp. 117–25.

for attachment, and these are lacking in the Ewelme example, which has an apparent scar of a single central rivet more typical of shield discs. The disc is decorated in chip-carved Style 1 with a single band of relief animal ornament, and a beaded rim, and is therefore datable to the sixth century.

Sets of horse harness are usually found in association with adult males of presumed high status, but all of the Ewelme finds appear to have been used in a secondary capacity, possibly in female graves. Although associations with women are generally rare, Wallingford 12 – which included decorated harness fittings reworked as a pair of brooches – provides a nearby example.⁶⁵ The tendency for recycling material may indicate that the interred community did not, by the later sixth and early seventh centuries, have regular access to metalwork, thereby necessitating the reworking of older pieces. Alternatively, Helen Geake has suggested this practice may have symbolised the equestrian, that is to say high, status of the interred.⁶⁶ Should these pieces only have been deposited some time after their manufacture (perhaps in the seventh century), it is possible that these finds represent evidence for a regional elite, since by this time horse gear was more clearly associated with high-status burials. Such individuals were often located away from community burial grounds, usually in elevated locations commanding impressive views, and can be associated with prehistoric earthworks.⁶⁷ In this regard a final observation about the cemetery is worthwhile, relating to the proximity of Rumbold's Pit and *ceolulfes treobe* 'Ceolwulf's tree' (Brightwell Baldwin, S 217). Although Ceolwulf was a common Anglo-Saxon personal name, it is possible that this place-name referred to either one of the ninth-century Mercian kings of that name, or, more likely, Ceolwulf of Wessex (supposedly 597–611). In support of the latter connection, all fifteen recorded occurrences of the name in the *Prosopography of Anglo-Saxon England* database date to before c.910,⁶⁸ suggesting Ceolwulf may have been an old 'heroic' name that became obsolete in the tenth century. By the ninth century it may have been natural to make an ancient royal association with a place long-known as a site of burial.⁶⁹ Indeed, as much has been suggested of several other landmarks in the vicinity of Ewelme bearing the prototheme Cuð-, which may have taken their name from Cutha, a member of the same kindred (at least in legend) as Ceolwulf of Wessex.⁷⁰

Middle Anglo-Saxon 'Productive Site' and Later Anglo-Saxon Finds

So far at least twelve eighth-century sceattas and a number of other middle (eighth- to ninth-century) Anglo-Saxon objects have been recovered from the fields below the cemetery ridge, mainly to the north-west of Ewelme village. Single coin finds are generally taken to represent money that was accidentally lost. Sites producing large numbers of such finds are therefore believed to have been the locations where money was changing hands, presumably to buy and sell, but perhaps also in the payment of taxes and tolls. Other metalwork finds from these sites may similarly have been the result of casual losses by users of these sites, and significantly the types of objects consistently recovered – pins, strap ends, hook tags – are small and relatively low value objects most likely to be dropped and not recovered at the time. Some debate surrounds what precise activities may have taken place at 'productive' sites, although periodic fairs or markets are frequently assumed, particularly where coin finds predominate amongst the overall assemblage.⁷¹

⁶⁵ Fern, 'Archaeological Evidence for Equestrianism', p. 46.

⁶⁶ H. Geake, *The Use of Grave-Goods in Conversion-Period England, c.600–c.850*, BAR BS, 261 (1997), p. 101.

⁶⁷ S. Semple, *Perceptions of the Prehistoric in Anglo-Saxon England* (2013), esp. pp. 233–6.

⁶⁸ <http://www.pase.ac.uk>, accessed April 2014.

⁶⁹ Mileson and Brookes, forthcoming.

⁷⁰ T. Dickinson, *Cuddesdon and Dorchester-on-Thames* (1974), pp. 32–3; Blair, *Anglo-Saxon Oxfordshire*, p. 39. Examples include Cuddesdon, Cutslow, *cudan hlaw* in Cuxham and *Cudendone* in Watlington (all Oxon.).

⁷¹ T. Pestell, 'Markets, *Emporia*, *Wics*, and 'Productive' Sites: Pre-Viking Trade Centres in Anglo-Saxon England', in H. Hamerow et al. (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Anglo-Saxon Archaeology* (2011), p. 563.

Given their probable method of deposition, single coin finds can provide a rough indicator of the chronology of activities at a particular site and the type of coin in local circulation.⁷² In this regard it is notable that only one of the identified coins from Ewelme belongs to the primary sceatta phase of the late seventh to early eighth century. Of the remainder, all but one – a penny of Cynethryth (757–96) – belong to the secondary phase of c.710–50, which accounts for the majority of early medieval coins found in the region and beyond.⁷³ This makes it likely, on the basis of the available evidence, that Ewelme became an important site with coin coming into it after the turn of the eighth century. In terms of coin types, half of the sample comprises continental coins deriving ultimately from the Rhine-mouth emporia and Friesland (Series E) and from Ribe on the Jutland peninsular (Series X). Both series are well attested nationally, including in Oxfordshire, but are particularly prevalent in eastern England. Perhaps significant to the interpretation of the Ewelme site, density plots, particularly of Series E, show a marked concentration of these coins at the ‘productive’ site ‘near Royston’, which is directly linked to Ewelme via the Icknield Way.⁷⁴ Though less plentiful, coins of Series X show a similar distribution, and it seems likely on this basis that this overland route had a greater bearing on long-distance coin circulation than the River Thames, along the route of which far fewer of these coins are known.⁷⁵ This vector of contacts north and eastwards is apparent also amongst the English coins. Sceattas of Series J probably came from the Humber region and the ‘Fledgling’-type coins may be from east Yorkshire.⁷⁶ By way of contrast, so far no coins of Kentish or West Saxon provenance have been identified at Ewelme.

Of some relevance to this discussion is the close proximity of the Aston Rowant hoard, found c.13 km further to the north-east along the Icknield Way, at its intersection with the London–Oxford road.⁷⁷ Deposited around 710–15, the hoard comprised some 324 sceattas, of mainly continental – specifically Rhine-mouth – types, but including also a small number of Kentish coins. Given the location and composition of the hoard, it in all likelihood belonged to a merchant travelling along the Icknield Way between East Anglia and the upper Thames valley, who may well have come to a violent end before reaching Ewelme.⁷⁸

Later eighth-century activity at Ewelme is indicated by the silver penny of Cynethryth (wife of Offa), datable to 765–92. The moneyer, ‘Eoba’, is mainly known to have produced coins in Canterbury. The distribution of this type is, however, fairly widespread across eastern England, making any further hypotheses regarding long-distance connections at this date highly speculative.⁷⁹

Ninth-century activity at Ewelme is attested by several finds of strap ends and hooked tags, of fairly ubiquitous types.⁸⁰ Three finds – a stirrup mount (BERK-31DC85), the head of a composite pin (S.758–9) and a Winchester-style strap end (S.766–7) – demonstrate continued activity at the site in the tenth and eleventh centuries. The pin and strap end unfortunately

⁷² D. Metcalf, *An Atlas of Anglo-Saxon and Norman Coin Finds, c.973–1086* (1998), pp. 14–17.

⁷³ J. Naylor, ‘Portable Antiquities and other Finds in the Upper Thames Valley’, in Hamerow et al., ‘Origins of Wessex’, p. 57.

⁷⁴ M.A.S. Blackburn and M.J. Bonser, ‘Single Finds of Anglo-Saxon and Norman Coins’, *British Numismatic Journal*, 56 (1986), pp. 64–101.

⁷⁵ Cf. Blair, *Anglo-Saxon Oxfordshire*, pp. 81–4; Naylor, ‘Portable Antiquities’, pp. 53, 57–8; J. Baker and S. Brookes, *Beyond the Burghal Hidage* (2013), pp. 140–52.

⁷⁶ T. Abramson, *Sceattas. An Illustrated Guide* (2006), pp. 15–18, 33; information from John Naylor.

⁷⁷ J.P.C. Kent, ‘The Aston Rowant Treasure Trove’, *Oxoniensia*, 37 (1972), pp. 243–4; D. Hill and M. Metcalf, *Sceattas in England and the Continent*, BAR, 128 (1984) p. 286.

⁷⁸ Blair, *Anglo-Saxon Oxfordshire*, p. 81.

⁷⁹ D. Chick, *The Coinage of Offa and his Contemporaries*, British Numismatic Society, Special Publication, 6 (2010) records 32 similar coins of Cynethryth.

⁸⁰ The hooked tag S.714–15 (Fig. 5) is very similar to one found by the Thames near Bampton, which John Blair regarded as a late ninth- or early tenth-century object: J. Blair ‘An Anglo-Saxon Silver Hooked Tag found near Bampton’, *Oxoniensia*, 57 (1992), p. 341. Given their close similarity it is likely that these objects come from the same maker or workshop.

cannot be securely located to the 'productive' field, and it is possible that they were found elsewhere in Ewelme.

DISCUSSION

Despite the fragmentary and poorly recorded nature of the evidence from Ewelme, the location, form and development of the site appear to be similar to that of better-understood places in the upper Thames valley, in particular Sutton Courtenay, 19 km west. Ewelme, with its association with Benson and one or more rich seventh-century burials, extends eastwards the cluster of high-status settlements recognised on the south bank of the River Thames at Long Wittenham and Sutton Courtenay, and forms apparently the eastern limits of the cluster of sites associated with the Gewissan rulers of the sixth and early seventh centuries who went on to found the West Saxon dynasty.⁸¹ Archaeological evidence from both Sutton Courtenay and Long Wittenham suggests that these places, though undocumented, once served as centres, possibly even royal vills,⁸² and the same might be supposed, from written sources, of Benson. Given its close proximity to Benson, it is unlikely that the settlement at Ewelme functioned in a similar capacity contemporaneously with a vill there, even if the quality of the sixth- and early seventh-century material suggests a settlement of some status. It remains possible, on this basis, that Ewelme and Benson were paired, perhaps as Long Wittenham was to the nearby vill at Drayton, with one site replacing the other over the course of the middle Anglo-Saxon period.⁸³ Until similar early high-status material is found at Benson, such a suggestion remains unresolved,⁸⁴ but the possibility remains that Ewelme was in the early Anglo-Saxon period the pre-eminent of the two places, or at least that some functions of the vill were focussed there.

At Ewelme, as at Sutton Courtenay and elsewhere, there seems to be an association of early Anglo-Saxon material and earlier Roman and possibly prehistoric finds. At Ewelme it is at least possible that this reuse had a religious significance, given the presence of springs in a narrow valley and Roman finds which are suggestive of the presence of a shrine or temple which might have had Iron-Age origins.⁸⁵ There could conceivably be a parallel here with Wood Eaton where the lost name *Harowdonehull* probably indicates an Anglo-Saxon pagan 'shrine' (*hearg*), most likely located on the site of a stone Romano-Celtic temple on the parish's most prominent hill, a place which was perhaps already a cult site in the Iron Age.⁸⁶ Monument reuse, if it did occur, may have been a means by which groups could legitimise claims to territory and resources by evoking a mythical past.⁸⁷ In this light, Dickinson's suggestion that five spiral saucer brooches may have been used to express some kind of Roman affiliation is particularly interesting.⁸⁸ Metal-detector finds of equestrian equipment, one bearing high-status Style II decoration, along with the excavation of an apparently unique copper-alloy vessel of undeterminable age, indicate that members of the community were of special status already by the sixth and seventh centuries.

⁸¹ Blair, *Anglo-Saxon Oxfordshire*, pp. 35–41; B. Yorke, *Wessex in the Early Middle Ages* (1995), pp. 34–6.

⁸² Hamerow et al., 'Anglo-Saxon and Earlier Settlement near Drayton Road', pp. 183–90; Hamerow, 'Saxon Settlement before the *Burh*', p. 63.

⁸³ This transition from one royal vill to another is best known from Bede's account of the royal sites of Yeavinger and Milfield (Northumberland), Bede *HE* II.14.

⁸⁴ Only a handful of Anglo-Saxon finds from Benson are recorded by the PAS or Fitzwilliam, none of them high status.

⁸⁵ 'Ewelme Manor, Ewelme, Oxfordshire', p. 8.

⁸⁶ Blair, *Anglo-Saxon Oxfordshire*, p. 18; M. Henig and P. Booth, *Roman Oxfordshire* (2000), pp. 121–5.

⁸⁷ H. Williams, 'Ancient Landscapes and the Dead', *MedArch*, 41 (1997), p. 26; S. Brookes, *Economics and Social Change in Anglo-Saxon Kent AD 400–900: Landscapes, Communities and Exchange*, BAR BS, 431 (2007), pp. 67–75; Semple, *Perceptions*.

⁸⁸ Dickinson, 'Material Culture as Social Expression', p. 68.

The topographical arrangement of the Ewelme site gives some indication of the ways in which it was experienced during the early medieval period. The deliberate location of the cemetery near the top of the west-facing ridge must have held some purposeful significance. This spot certainly affords stunning views across the vale and the Thames itself, as well as of the skyline along the nearby Sinodun Hills and more distant Downs on the opposite bank. Perhaps more importantly, this location meant the cemetery was visible from the main routeways around Benson and Ewelme. Analysis of other early Anglo-Saxon cemeteries has found that burial grounds were often situated in such prominent places, commonly using pre-existing funeral monuments, or natural ridges and mounds, to enhance their landscape monumentality.⁸⁹ Besides demarcating the position of a cemetery, such features would have helped to direct celebrants to the site for the purposes of interment and remembrance.⁹⁰

A recent survey of sites with possible continuity from early Anglo-Saxon cemetery to Domesday meeting place suggests a number of common features;⁹¹ two of these may be relevant to the discussion of Ewelme. Firstly, many of these sites appear to occupy key transitions in landscape, particularly between lowland settlement and upland pasture. Secondly, there is often evidence that these places functioned as focal mortuary landscapes for several communities. The type-site for such continuity of function is that of Saltwood in Kent, which displays both of these characteristics.⁹² Running through the Saltwood site were two Iron-Age and Roman tracks leading up from the coastal plain to the chalk scarp of the North Downs. In plan Saltwood should be considered as four discrete cemetery clusters of late fifth- to seventh-century date, arranged around a number of prehistoric and Anglo-Saxon funerary monuments. Evidence for continuity of this site as a place of hundredal assembly is provided on two counts: the name for this locale is preserved in the place-name Heane (OE *Hen* 1086, *Henhāh' dr'* 1168–9), which is that of the Domesday hundred; and scattered artefacts of middle and late Anglo-Saxon date were recovered from topsoil stripping.

The similarities between Saltwood and Ewelme are striking. By the late tenth century the *fildena weg* was described in a Benson charter (S 887) as the *fildena wudu weg*, a seemingly explicit reference to the function of the road in linking together the lowlands and the Chilterns, perhaps specifically for the extraction of woodland resources. The scarp crest near Rumbold's Pit with its extensive views over the vale would seem to be the most appropriate location to visually express this transition from one form of settlement and land use to another or, perhaps, to assert possession over both. A recent survey found that the co-location of early Anglo-Saxon cemetery and hundredal meeting place was generally quite infrequent, particularly outside of eastern Kent and Cambridgeshire.⁹³ It is very noteworthy that in many cases where it does occur, the cemetery arrangement suggests these sites were used by multiple groups who expressed physically, through nearby but discrete burial sites, distinctions likely to have separated them in life, such as place of settlement, familial association, or descent. Whilst these distinctions were retained in burial, the close proximity of burial clusters in turn emphasises the cultural foci for macro-community affiliations. In this regard, rather than merely convenient places close to settlements in which to dispose of the dead – an arrangement often assumed of early Anglo-Saxon inhumation cemeteries –⁹⁴ polyfocal cemeteries are perhaps more closely analogous to the large cremation cemeteries of eastern

⁸⁹ S. Lucy, *The Anglo-Saxon Way of Death* (2000), p. 128.

⁹⁰ Williams, 'Ancient Landscapes and the Dead', p. 25.

⁹¹ S. Brookes, "'Folk' Cemeteries, Assembly and Territorial Geography in Early Anglo-Saxon England', in J. Carroll et al. (eds.), *Power and Place in Later Roman and Early Medieval Europe: Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Governance and Civil Organization*, forthcoming.

⁹² P. Booth et al., *On Track: The Archaeology of High Speed 1 Section 1 in Kent*, Oxford Wessex Archaeology Monograph, 4 (2011), pp. 348–67.

⁹³ S. Brookes, "'Folk' Cemeteries'.

⁹⁴ M. Welch, 'Rural Settlement Patterns in the Early and Middle Anglo-Saxon Period', *Landscape History*, 7.1 (1985), pp. 13–25.

England which functioned as fixed central-places for a range of dispersed groups. It is this quality of polyfocal cemeteries that may have ensured their longevity as possible trading sites and meeting places: they were *loci* for collective activities that were simultaneously liminal and central. Should the *fildena wudu weg* be indicative of some of the collective activities negotiated between communities, one purpose of the site may have been the management of woodland and grazing rights.

It seems likely that earlier Anglo-Saxon settlement was established in the valley below the cemetery. A possible focus for this settlement was the water sources at the bottom of the 'productive' field. Any settlement here may well have developed into a more significant centre during the middle Anglo-Saxon period. In the Middle Ages a feature in or next to the 'productive' field was called the 'Buristede' ('*burh* place'), which may suggest substantial visible remains, possibly Anglo-Saxon.⁹⁵ Without fuller excavation it is difficult to gauge the economic activities of the inhabitants. The identification of quernstone fragments of possible Anglo-Saxon date is paralleled at Sutton Courtenay, Yarnton and elsewhere in the upper Thames valley,⁹⁶ and hints at a fairly advanced level of agricultural production and processing. One further intriguing possibility, suggested by the wrist clasp fragment, and the possibly unfinished saucer brooch, is that fine metalworking was practiced at the site already in the early Anglo-Saxon period. Whatever its economy, as at Sutton Courtenay and Yarnton, the settlement focus appears to have shifted by the high Middle Ages to a new location close by.

With twelve coin finds and a smattering of other metalwork, Ewelme does not rank amongst the first order of 'productive' sites nationally; by comparison the site 'near Royston', Hertfordshire has produced ninety-five coins, and Heckington (or 'South Lincolnshire'), 141.⁹⁷ This relatively small cluster of finds is, however, a significant assemblage for the region, at present second only to Sutton Courtenay, where one field produced at least thirteen sceattas over a fairly short period of metal-detecting in the 1990s.⁹⁸ Given the relatively large proportion of coins amongst the recovered mid Saxon metalwork, some form of trading or tax collection seems likely to have taken place at the site. Comparison of the Ewelme and Sutton Courtenay coin assemblages suggests that monetary exchange began earlier at Sutton Courtenay, where four primary phase sceattas were found, and that fewer foreign coins changed hands there. The Sutton Courtenay assemblage includes one Series H coin from Hamwic, a type which is not common in Oxfordshire. Other small finds from Sutton Courtenay include two gold items (a fragment of sheet gold and a gold finger ring); to date no gold objects have been reported from Ewelme.

Significantly, there is no evidence that the Ewelme 'productive' site was ever under the anything but secular control (contrary to the emphasis sometimes given to an association with religious communities). Whilst it remains possible that a minster existed at Benson, this was likely to have been a relatively late secondary type minster and there is nothing to suggest a strong connection between any such religious centre and Ewelme. If anything the association with 'Ceolwulf's tree' could potentially represent a significant and visible royal influence over the site. Given south Oxfordshire's location in what was at times a contested borderland between Mercian and West Saxon kings, any royal association may have been regarded as providing an important 'protected' space in the local social landscape. The Ewelme site may have developed as a kind of trading area attached to the royal centre in Benson and latterly as a stopping place for those travelling to the hundred meeting.

More speculatively, this meeting place may have had a further political dimension. Immediately preceding 'Ceolwulf's tree' in the Brightwell charter is the boundary mark

⁹⁵ TNA: PRO, E326/8308.

⁹⁶ Hamerow et al., 'Anglo-Saxon and Earlier Settlement near Drayton Road', p. 184.

⁹⁷ Pestell, 'Markets, *Emporia*', pp. 562–3.

⁹⁸ Hamerow et al., 'Anglo-Saxon and Earlier Settlement near Drayton Road', pp. 180–3. A fourteenth coin was found c.2002/3.

gisles bæce. Although its etymology is not without problems, the similarity with the OE *gisel* ('hostage') is strong.⁹⁹ Should this boundary mark indeed refer to 'hostage ridge' this would make it an almost unique occurrence in OE toponymy, with further potential significance for the ethnicity and political constitution of the region. In an article exploring the use of hostages in political relations in Anglo-Saxon England, Ryan Lavelle has postulated that hostages were used as a tool for inter-ethnic relations, particularly conveying status between political adversaries.¹⁰⁰ One good political context for such a *détente* might well be in the late sixth century after Benson's capture by the West Saxon Cutha; another may have been the 870s, during the reign of Ceolwulf II, when the Mercian kingdom was dismembered between the Danes and English.¹⁰¹

Whatever its connections, the site's location on a branch route leading off the Icknield Way at one of the main descents from the ridge-top route into the Oxfordshire vale made it well placed to serve as a gathering point, both for marketing functions and as an open-air assembly site.¹⁰² Neither the cemetery nor the two possible locations for the assembly site are very visible from the narrow valley occupied by the village of Ewelme itself, but they are readily seen from the routes which traverse the higher ground, including the Icknield Way and Rumbold's Lane to the north, and to some extent from the Thames valley to the west (Fig. 10). These visibility patterns are almost certainly significant for the long-term use or re-use of the site and may have helped for a time to make Ewelme a significant node in overland trade westwards from bigger 'productive' sites in eastern England, its connections, unlike Sutton Courtenay's, apparently more overland than riverine, albeit the Thames was nearby.

CONCLUSION

The evidence from Ewelme is fragmentary, but of some significance. Benson's shadowy existence as an Anglo-Saxon royal centre is brought into dappled half light through the existence of a burial and trading place just to the east, even if the precise relationship between Benson and Ewelme requires further elucidation. The apparent longevity or recurrent reuse of the Ewelme cemetery/trading/meeting place and its probable co-location with or close proximity to the hundred meeting site suggest that until late in the Anglo-Saxon period 'Benson' included neighbouring Ewelme. Certainly the Ewelme site would have been an important part of the social landscape for inhabitants, a place where different groups came together and where by the middle Anglo-Saxon period they would have encountered outsiders. It may also have had a special social meaning as a place associated with ancestors and a power centre of group leaders. Future work may shed further light on the way the site would have been encountered and experienced in different periods and the relationship between those who buried their dead at Ewelme and those who used nearby cemeteries, some of which are known only through as yet unpublished antiquarian descriptions, such as the probable Anglo-Saxon burial ground at Gould's Grove, Benson,¹⁰³ which is located at almost exactly the same height on the opposite (south) side of the Ewelme/Benson side valley, or through local pottery finds, such as Nettlebed.¹⁰⁴

⁹⁹ *Gisl-* elements may derive from the personal name *Gisla* or a short form of personal names such as *Gislhere*, and this was Gelling's favoured interpretation of *gisles*: Gelling, *Place-Names of Oxfordshire*, vol. 1, p. 122.

¹⁰⁰ R. Lavelle, 'The Use and Abuse of Hostages in Later Anglo-Saxon England,' *Early Medieval Europe*, 14:3 (2006), pp. 269–96.

¹⁰¹ F.M. Stenton, *Anglo-Saxon England*, 3rd edn (1971), pp. 253–4.

¹⁰² Baker and Brookes, 'Developing a Field Archaeology of Outdoor Assembly'.

¹⁰³ Ashmolean Museum, Ewelme topographical folder, letter from Thomas Powell, 1917.

¹⁰⁴ Surface find of part of a fifth- or sixth-century pot, possibly a funerary vessel, examined by Helena Hamerow and Paul Booth.



Fig. 10. View of the burial sites from the 'productive' field (top), and the view south-west over the Thames valley from Eyre's Lane, close to Rumbold's Pit (bottom).

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