'MIDDLE SAXON' SETTLEMENT AND SOCIETY

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Chapter I:
Introducing Middle Saxon Settlement

The early medieval period has long been central to the way in which the settlement history of England is understood. Less than a century ago, the prevailing scholarly view held that the village landscape of England was a product of the first Germanic migrants, who felled dense woodland and established a settlement form that endured into the present day (e.g. Seebohm 1883). Similarly, the majority of researchers believed that 'Anglo-Saxon' incomers also brought with them a new approach to agriculture, introducing the ploughing of intermingled strips within expansive open fields, which replaced the pre-existing 'Celtic' arrangements of small cultivated 'infields' (e.g. Gray 1915). By introducing such novel farming regimes, it was asserted, these peoples created the open fields which characterised much of the English countryside until the transformations of the enclosure movement that began in the sixteenth century. Such views of the landscape were but one facet of a more overarching attitude, which considered that the beginnings of English history was rooted in the arrival of the 'Anglo-Saxons', and not in the establishment of Roman Britain (Higham 2010, 2). Alongside the overhaul of settlements and field systems, the introduction of Old English language and place-names, and the adoption of Christianity were in effect viewed as part of the same process: the making of England (e.g. Green 1892).

Such perceptions of the rural landscape have since been dismissed by subsequent generations but, as the 'nucleated' villages that characterise much of midland England are now widely regarded as a product of the tenth century, the idea of the early medieval period as transformative has persisted. Modern researchers have access to a growing body of data that allows the settlement landscape of pre-Conquest England to be viewed with ever-increasing clarity, as local and regional studies contribute to a gradually more comprehensive understanding of the national picture. The development of a more nuanced chronological framework has proved particularly beneficial, allowing archaeologists to associate changes to the countryside with their social context more closely. Perhaps the most significant 'hangover' of the earliest research into the 'Anglo-Saxon' heritage of the English landscape, however, is the enduring influence of historic methods and texts. It is by no quirk of circumstance that many archaeological studies of 'Anglo-Saxon' England have focussed on the last two centuries before the Conquest, featuring as it does some of the most extensive archaeological evidence, but also access to written records unparalleled elsewhere in the early medieval period. The historical figures of the 'Late Saxon' period also continue to loom large, and although earlier leaders such as Offa and Rædwald are well-recognised, the influence of Alfred and the later kings of Wessex remain especially prevalent within published research and the popular consciousness. The archaeology of 'Early Saxon' England, taken to denote the two centuries following the withdrawal of Roman administration, has also proved a fertile area of scholarly interest, and it was research into the cemeteries and grave goods of this period that particularly laid the foundations of 'Anglo-Saxon' archaeology as a self-contained discipline (see below).

Current early medieval landscape archaeology is no exception to these more general trends, with the importance of 'Late Saxon' England as a period which imparted lasting change upon the character of the countryside especially emphasised. The majority of active scholars view the villages of England as a product of the ninth century at the very earliest, with new settlement forms introduced in what has been termed the 'village moment'—a contradictory term which in fact denotes a protracted process which is argued to have lasted several centuries (e.g. Taylor 1983; Lewis *et al*. 1997; Roberts and Wrathmell 2000; Page and Jones 2007). At the other extremity of the period, the landscape during the earliest centuries of early medieval England has also proved a fruitful area of academic interest. Researchers have attempted to delineate the character of this transitional period between the breakdown of administration in Roman Britain and the development of alternative social and economic systems that manifested themselves in new forms of material culture. In terms of settlement and landscape archaeology, the extent to which occupation centres and agricultural regimes underwent transformation in this 'Early Saxon' period continues to draw focus (e.g. Cool 2000; Christie 2004; Dark 2004), with the impact of migration receiving particularly detailed analysis (e.g. Faull 1977; Hodges 1989; Härke 1990; Higham 1992). Such discourse is usually accompanied by more fundamental debate regarding the appropriate interpretation of material culture, and the ways in which archaeology can provide an insight into the rapidly changing composition of society in the early post-Roman centuries (e.g. Hills 2011).

Sandwiched between these two more commonly-researched periods, the archaeology of 'Middle Saxon' England has traditionally been treated as something of a poor relation by comparison. Chronologically too distant to be integrated into debates on migration and early post-Roman upheaval, whilst also lacking the more lasting material culture and documented sources of the 'Late Saxon' period, the settlement archaeology of the mid-seventh to mid-ninth centuries has in the past been an area of scholarly neglect. Assisted by access to written sources

brought about by the development of the Church from the late sixth century, historians have typically engaged more readily than archaeologists with 'Middle Saxon'-period England (e.g. Stenton 1970; Brooks 1984; Hanson and Wickham 2000). Recently, however, and partly as a consequence of such historical enquiry, archaeologists have begun to appreciate the research potential of pre-Viking societies. Over the past two decades, a gradually increasing quantity of academic investigation has focussed specifically on 'Middle Saxon' settlement archaeology, so that there now exists a substantial body of research on the subject (e.g. Hamerow 19991; Brown and Foard 1998; Reynolds 2003; Rippon 2010).

Developments outside of academia have contributed significantly to this improved research environment, specifically the increased extent and detail of commercially-led archaeology projects. The introduction of statutory heritage protection in the early 1990s has resulted in a marked increase in excavation of 'Middle Saxon' settlements: material which had previously rarely drawn interest on the basis of its perceived research value alone (e.g. Mortimer 2000; Hardy *et al*. 2007). Despite the progress both in scholarly interest and the archaeological data now available for study, significant uncertainties continue to surround research into 'Middle Saxon' settlement and landscape. In many parts of the country a lack of chronological precision, chiefly the result of un-diagnostic ceramics, results in a limited understanding of the early medieval settlement sequence. These conditions frequently lead to the amalgamation of 'Middle Saxon' and 'Early Saxon' material, as the mid-ninth century onward is again underscored as the period in which occurred more meaningful changes to the countryside. Many researchers also persist in undermining the potential insight that 'Middle Saxon' archaeology provides to its immediate historical context. Seventh to ninth-century settlement material is instead more commonly deployed in order to explain later landscape character, as scholars regularly seek to discern the origins of medieval villages and fields (e.g. Jones and Page 2006, 222).

This book seeks to redress precisely these imbalances by focussing primarily on the archaeology of 'Middle Saxon' settlement, with the primary aim of demonstrating the ways in which such material can provide a picture of contemporary social, economic and political conditions. Within this overarching aim, this research encompasses a number of more specific objectives, first among which is a re-examination of the character and chronology of early medieval settlement change. In particular this volume will question what has become the prevailing view that it was the later ninth to eleventh centuries that saw the first fundamental transformation of rural settlements, and that before *c*.850, few significant developments occurred in the countryside. A further objective of this book is to assess whether there is regional variation in archaeological evidence relating to 'Middle Saxon' settlement, and analyse whether these inconsistencies represent actual differences in the character of the rural landscape between

the seventh and ninth centuries, or are more of a product of alternative research traditions.

The significance of data derived from development-led projects, many of which remain unpublished in Historic Environment Records (HERs), will be particularly prevalent, as excavations within currently occupied villages have revealed material especially informative for early medieval settlement studies. Research in this volume is concentrated on understanding the 'Middle Saxon' countryside of five counties in central and eastern England: Northamptonshire, Oxfordshire, Wiltshire, Cambridgeshire and Norfolk. These counties together represent a study area of extreme diversity and topographical complexity, providing ideal conditions to explore the way in which physical conditions may have influenced 'Middle Saxon' communities. Whilst it will be clear that the topographical backdrop shaped the relationship between people and their landscape, the most prominent theme of this book is one of comprehensive transformation to settlement that occurred across all types of countryside. The most important factor influencing such widespread change, it will be shown, was fundamental and deep-rooted stratification that was taking places across society.

Before investigation can begin in earnest, however, it is essential to place these objectives in their wider research context. The remainder of this chapter is therefore dedicated to a critical assessment of existing research, allowing the significance of the contributions made in this book to be appreciated more fully. Such an analysis of previous works facilitates the establishment of more specific aims, outlined in Chapter II, together with a description of the methodologies adopted. Following presentation of the county-based material in Chapters III to VII, this piece will then present a detailed discussion of its findings and their wider significance in Chapter VIII. The book will subsequently close with a brief concluding chapter, which will reemphasise the key points of the work.

DEFINING THE 'MIDDLE SAXON' PERIOD

It is exceptionally difficult to attribute a name to the period between the end of Roman administration in Britain and the Norman invasion that is not affiliated with a specific perspective (see Hills 2011). The traditional term 'The Dark Ages', describing the hiatus of 'classical culture' has been wholly rejected by academics, yet remains in popular use elsewhere. 'Medieval' and 'Middle Ages' are equally unhelpful idioms, both of which also allude to an interim period separating phases of greater social complexity (Gerrard 2003, xi; Hills 1999, 176-8). In England, the time between the withdrawal of Roman authority and 1066 is most commonly known as the 'Anglo-Saxon' period, based largely on the apparent influence of 'Germanic' peoples from the fifth century. Yet, whilst scholars are in near unanimous agreement that there was some influx of groups from the continent at this time, the extent and character of migration remains a source of significant contention (e.g. Scull 1992; Higham 1992). Compounding

such uncertainty, the term 'Anglo-Saxon' carries significant racial and ideological weight, whilst promoting the study of England in isolation, rather than in its wider geographical context (Reynolds 1985, 400-2).

For the most part, scholars have failed to consider the way in which 'Anglo-Saxon' has been used in the past and its changing significance through time, with the terminology often employed without apparent consideration of its possible connotations. As early as the eighth century, the inhabitants of what we now call England were using the simple word 'English' (OE *Angli* or *Anglici*) to refer to themselves (Reynolds 1985, 398). Particularly during the nineteenth century, 'Anglo-Saxon' was used to refer both to early medieval people and the nation, thus providing a common biological and cultural descent for the contemporary English. Indeed, the overall historiography of 'Anglo-Saxon' England is characterised by misuse in order to fulfil often hegemonic political and ideological agendas. Susan Reynolds (1985, 414) has suggested that such an inheritance results in a viable case for terminological change in the current literature, whilst conceding that this course of action is probably over-presumptuous and unrealistic. 'Early medieval' is, nevertheless, a preferable term, and one which possesses fewer political implications, and a less dubious background of usage.

'Early medieval' is now generally used for the fifth to eleventh centuries, but 'Anglo-Saxon' remains too imbedded in the existing literature, and indeed the popular mindset, to be completely overhauled. Whilst 'early medieval' is therefore preferred, this book will also occasionally utilise 'Anglo-Saxon' to refer to archaeological material that has been interpreted as 'Germanic' in character, but continue to place it within apostrophes to emphasise its subjective nature. Similarly, as this research is dedicated to the archaeology of the fifth to seventh centuries and not the entirety of the early medieval period, the term 'Middle Saxon' will also be employed, but as a period term only. 'Early Saxon' (*c.*400-650), 'Middle Saxon' (*c.*650-850) and 'Late Saxon' (*c.*850-1066) continue to be used in archaeological research, especially in eastern England (Reynolds 1999, 23; Rippon 2008, 8). These approximately equal periods at first appear convenient, but are essentially derived from historical contexts. The end of 'Middle Saxon' England for instance, is generally taken as the period in which the Scandinavian presence became more permanent, with the first overwintering of an army recorded at Thanet in 853 (ASC A for 850).

This tripartite system is therefore not ideally suited to archaeology, which traces social and cultural change gradually rather than by discrete historical events. Without due caution, archaeological researchers can be misled into neglecting the broader chronological significance of their results due to a tendency of adopting a 'period-specific' approach. Although this book retains the established tripartite approach common in the current literature, it does so with an awareness of its provisional character, whilst also actively seeking to deconstruct misleading

chronological boundaries both as lived experience and as subject for study. For this very purpose, 'Early Saxon', 'Middle Saxon' and 'Late Saxon' will again remain in apostrophes throughout the volume. With these chronological divisions, and their inherent difficulties and constraints in mind, this chapter now turns to a critical assessment of past approaches to 'Anglo-Saxon' studies, and more specifically previous research into early medieval settlement and landscape archaeology.

VIEWS OF 'MIDDLE SAXON' SETTLEMENT

Background

The perception of 'Anglo-Saxon' England, as with all studies of the past, has often been conditioned by contemporary social, religious and political ideology, as much as by available forms of evidence. Indeed, the historiography of 'Anglo-Saxon' studies represents a conspicuous example of the way in which the writing of history is marked by the contemporary society in which it was produced (Hills 2003, 21-2). Such influences cannot be completely avoided in modern research, yet critical assessment of previous traditions is essential in order to gauge the way in which they influence current thinking. Whilst the relatively recent development of 'Middle Saxon' settlement archaeology as a distinct area of study would form a rather brief analysis, the modern discipline actually owes much of its practice to the more established and broader studies of 'Anglo-Saxon' history and archaeology. Beginning with a review of the earliest investigators of early medieval societies, this chapter will subsequently assess the development of both disciplines, albeit with a greater emphasis on archaeological studies, culminating with an appraisal of the central perceptions and debates that currently characterise 'Middle Saxon' settlement and landscape archaeology.

'Anglo-Saxon' Archaeology: Development of a Discipline

Perhaps the most significant continuing influence that the earliest investigation of 'Anglo-Saxon' archaeology has had upon current research is the almost singular emphasis placed on evidence from burials and cemeteries. Indeed, the lasting bias toward funerary material has even led some scholars to suggest that current knowledge remains restricted merely to furnished graves of the fifth to seventh centuries (Reynolds 2003, 98-9). The first recovery of early medieval graves occurred as early as the thirteenth century, but it was not until the eighteenth century that the first 'Anglo-Saxon' burials and churches were positively identified. In addition to their conspicuous character in the landscape, early investigators benefited from an ability to associate furnished burials with the details outlined in early charters (Dickinson 1983, 33). The latter half of the eighteenth century denoted a phase of intense investigation which lasted well into the Victorian period, as antiquarians became increasingly aware of the potential insight that investigation of the landscape could produce. In Kent, for instance, the Reverend Bryan Faussett apparently

excavated over seven-hundred graves between 1757 and 1777, including twenty-eight in one day. Unfortunately, the attention to detailed documentation paid by Faussett was seldom replicated elsewhere, and the speed and cavalier attitude of most investigations led to the destruction of numerous sites without record (Arnold 1997, 3-4; Gerrard 2003, 5-15).

It was not until the second half of the nineteenth century that the discipline of 'Anglo-Saxon' archaeology, being the systematic investigation of early medieval remains, became more firmly established. At this time, historical research throughout Europe was largely dedicated towards defining the history of 'nations', and the creation of origin narratives for rapidly expanding states. Situated at the centre of a global empire, England required historical vindication for colonial attitudes and racial preconceptions. The value of English liberty was therefore seen as derived from 'Anglo-Saxon' democracy as an imperial myth of a superior Germanic race, ideally suited to rule other peoples, was developed. The idea of a Teutonic inheritance was one of two national myths central to English history, the other being origin stories surrounding the inhabitants of Troy and their supposed connections to Arthur and 'Celtic' Britain. It could even be argued that the perception of a singular 'Anglo-Saxon' nation and people was cultivated as early as the sixteenth century, in response to the rise of English imperial status (MacDougall 1982, 1-2). Racial applications to history during the nineteenth century were not therefore novel, but rather represented an intensification of a tradition that had persisted for several centuries. Irrespective of their exact origins, the approaches to 'Anglo-Saxon' studies that became so prominent in the Victorian period had a profound impact on subsequent generations, shaping attitudes that remained embedded in the collective subconscious of the English people (Gerrard 2003, 12-5; Hills 2003, 35; Stafford 2009b, 10-16).

Despite the significant interest in furnished burials during the nineteenth century, investigation of settlement sites in the same period was almost non-existent. Amongst the rare works on early medieval settlements, Stephen Stone recognised four 'Anglo-Saxon' 'dwelling places' in Oxfordshire during the 1850s (Stone 1859a; 1859b). Significantly, Stone initially noted the location of sites on the basis of crop-marks that he had detected on horseback, but also realised that density of artefacts in the ploughsoil were further indicators of previous settlement sites. The general principle of these prospection methods are now prominent in modern archaeology as aerial and fieldwalking survey, and using such approaches Stone was able to identify a series of 'pits', probably representing the remains of *Grubenhäuser* (Stone 1859a, 94; Tipper 2004, 15). Such research into settlement remained exceptionally slight in comparison to work on funerary sites, however, and by the end of the Victorian period typologies and chronological models were being developed from recovered grave goods. Typical of the colossal undertakings of data presentation that were produced around this time

are publications such as Gerard Baldwin-Brown's *The Arts in Early England* (Baldwin-Brown 1915).

Published at around the same time as Baldwin-Brown's work, was E.T. Leeds' *The Archaeology of Anglo-Saxon Settlements*, which represents the first notable attempt at amalgamating the archaeological evidence for 'Anglo-Saxon' society (Leeds 1913). In addition to data synthesis, Leeds' work was also amongst the first to specifically define the theories and methods of contemporary archaeology as the author perceived them (Arnold 1997, 8). Leeds, and other practitioners like him, were desperate to raise the profile and integrity of archaeology, and did so by attempting to corroborate the historical record with material culture. The result often undermined the original contribution of material studies, and more broadly the overarching value of archaeological approaches (Dickinson 1983, 34). One should not be over-critical of such pioneering works of the discipline, however, and it should be considered that approaches such as Leeds' merely reflect the document-driven agendas that characterised archaeological research throughout much of the twentieth century. Indeed, the syntheses of material and mapping of burial types and finds undertaken at this time formed the cornerstone of 'Anglo-Saxon' archaeology for much of the coming century, as demonstrated by David Wilson's *Anglo-Saxon England* which despite being published in the 1970s, retained a chronology that was still largely indebted to the research of individuals such as Leeds and Baldwin-Brown (Wilson 1976).

Acting as a guide for the budding discipline of archaeology, without doubt the early medieval text most utilised by any form of 'Anglo-Saxon' research has been Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum* (*HE*) ('Ecclesiastical History of the English People'). Completed in the first quarter of the eighth century, Bede's polemic remains the most influential source of any kind used by early medieval scholars (Jones and Page 2006, 6-7). In addition to details of the 'Anglo-Saxon' conversion and growth of the early Church, the *HE* also provides a descriptive account of the 'Early Saxon' migration, or the *Adventus Saxonum*. In an account based largely on the British cleric Gildas' *De Excidio Britonum* (*DEB*) ('The Ruin of Britain'), Bede depicted invading Germanic peoples driving west the 'wretched survivors' of the native Britons (*DEB*; Rippon 2000, 47; Yorke 1999, 26). In early archaeological studies, these accounts were ostensibly verified by material remains, such as the recovery of 'Germanic' artefacts from grave goods, but were also seemingly evidenced by the high proportion of Old English place-names and linguistic heritage (e.g. Myres 1969). It would be unfair to suggest that all early scholars agreed with this model, as researchers such as John Kemble attempted to 'retell' the accounts of early post-Roman Britain (Kemble 1849). Using archaeological material from the continent, Kemble was determined to demonstrate that written accounts of the *Adventus* were 'devoid of historical truth in every detail' (Kemble 1849, 16). Although extremely significant, such attempts to buck the prevailing paradigm were few and

generally poorly received, and the largely uncritical use of written documents to interpret material evidence persisted well into the twentieth century (Sims-Williams 1983, 1-5).

More significant to the development of landscape archaeology as an independent discipline, researchers from the late nineteenth century also began to amalgamate historical evidence with topography. John Green's *The Making of England* for example, contained headings such as 'Conquest of Our Berkshire', as researchers attempted to map early migration against features in the countryside, particularly villages and fields. Whilst studies such as Paul Vinogradoff's (1892) *Villeinage in England* took as read that open fields and nucleated villages were the product of the earliest 'Anglo-Saxon' migrants, the publication of Howard Gray's *English Field Systems* firmly correlated landscape types with particular ethnic groups (Gray 1915). Gray's seminal publication ensured that the racial and ethnic makeup of 'Early Saxon' communities was seen as the causal factor behind England's regional settlement and landscape variation for the next fifty years. It was not until the 1920s that the first systematic excavation of an 'Anglo-Saxon' settlement was undertaken on the outskirts of the village of Sutton Courtenay (Leeds 1923; Williamson 2003, 10).

Early medieval settlement remains were first identified at Sutton Courtenay—then in Berkshire but now in Oxfordshire—by Dr. C.W. Cunnington who informed E.T. Leeds, then Keeper of Antiquities at the Ashmolean Museum. Excavations were begun by Leeds who undertook work in sporadic fashion between 1921 and 1937 in advance of phases of gravel quarrying (Leeds 1923; 1927; 1947; Chapter IV). The 'rescue' character of the work recovered only limited evidence, yet the positive recognition of features represented the only evidence for non-ecclesiastical Anglo-Saxon structures at the time (Hamerow 1991, 1; 2002, 7; Tipper 2004). In a significant departure from the previously positive views of 'Anglo-Saxon' culture, interpretation of the settlement at Sutton Courtenay, and similar sites excavated around the same time, such as Waterbeach, Cambridgeshire, (Lethbridge 1927) and Bourton-on-the-Water, Gloucestershire (Dunning 1932), were partly influenced by contemporary attitudes. The collapse of Anglo-German relations brought about by the First World War probably led to the interpretation of the ephemeral and apparently rudimentary archaeological deposits in a particularly negative manner. Leeds therefore interpreted *Grubenhäuser* as of a 'rude nature' and, disregarding the possibility that the structures might have been used as material dumps, concluded that the occupants lived 'amid a filthy litter of broken bones, of food and shattered pottery' (Leeds 1936, 25-6). Similarly, the settlement at St Neots, Cambridge was described by the excavators as 'miserable huts in almost as primitive a condition as can be expected' (Lethbridge and Tebbutt 1933, 149). The perception of rudimentary 'Anglo-Saxon' daily life persisted for several decades, as part of a wider belief that cultural affinities could be linked to architectural style and excavated ground plans (Reynolds 2003, 98).

In spite of these early efforts, and partly as the result of Second World War, investigation of early medieval settlements continued to progress at an exceedingly slow rate during the 1940s. Further global conflict promoted further reconsideration of England's 'Anglo-Saxon' heritage, as scholars reacted against fascist concepts of nation and race. The *Adventus* again served as the focus for the definition of new attitudes, and from the 1970s migration began to be rejected as an explanatory model for material change (Hodges 1989; Chapman and Hamerow 1997, 3). This reaction against 'invasion neurosis' was initially and unintentionally sparked by David Clarke's (1966) paper on prehistoric migration, and although initially slow to react, early medievalists also began to voice doubt over how material culture change was understood (Hills 2003, 37; Stafford 2009b, 16). Several studies began to emerge arguing for hybridisation of 'Anglo-Saxon' and 'British' peoples, and for the existence of only small 'Anglo-Saxon' warrior elites, based particularly on evidence from burial grounds of the fifth and sixth-centuries. Contributions from settlement researchers arrived somewhat later, such as Phillip Dixon's (1982) study illustrating an apparent lack of continental precursors for the byre-less 'Anglo-Saxon' house (Hamerow 1997, 34-38).

Increasing Awareness: New Research of the Early Medieval Landscape

Although hostilities with Germany had again resulted in a more critical approach to understanding the English past, paradoxically, it was the period immediately after the Second World War that 'Anglo-Saxon' settlement archaeology began to develop as a more coherent discipline (Loyn 2007, 9). The excavation of the extraordinary ship burial in Mound 1 at Sutton Hoo, Suffolk, on the eve of war in 1939 brought 'Anglo-Saxon' archaeology into the popular imagination, acting as a stimulus for further research (Bruce-Mitford 1974; Lapidge 2002, 19). In spite of the continuing focus on burial material, the 1950s ushered in something of a qualitative transformation for 'Anglo-Saxon' settlement archaeology. Excavation of the palatial complex at Yeavering, Northumberland, by Brian Hope-Taylor from 1953 had a particularly positive impact for early medieval settlement studies, demonstrating that conspicuous displays of wealth and status were not solely restricted to the burial tableau (Hope-Taylor 1977). Yeavering's initial identification on aerial photographs was also significant, illustrating the new means available to archaeologists attempting to study early medieval settlements on a landscape-scale. Such methods were further supplemented by improved excavation techniques, many of which were developed on the continent, such as open area investigation and *pro forma* recording, all of which resulted in marked improvements in available archaeological data (Tipper 2004, 15).

Only two years after Hope-Taylor began excavating at Yeavering, W.G. Hoskins published *The Making of the English Landscape*, regarded by many as the founding text for historic landscape studies (Hoskins 1955). There can

be little doubt over the influence of this work, although modern landscape archaeologists have debated the merits of Hoskins' approach (e.g. Fleming 2007 vs. Johnson 2007). Perhaps Hoskins' most significant contribution to archaeological studies was the emphasis that he placed upon the landscape as 'the richest historical record that we possess', regarding the countryside itself as an artefact worthy of study in its own right (Hoskins 1955, 14; Rippon 2000b). In spite of such recognition, the view of the early medieval landscape amongst scholars at this time remained largely the same as researchers from the preceding generation. The document-led approach to archaeological material used by doyens such as Leeds was embraced by individuals such as J.N.L. Myres. Using the distribution of pottery largely derived from cremation burials, Myres' *Anglo-Saxon Pottery and the Settlement of England* attempted to illustrate the 'invasion routes' of the 'Early Saxon' period (Myres 1969). Whilst utilising the significantly increased corpus of archaeological data at their disposal, academics therefore continued to assert the traditional view of England's historic landscape as the product of the earliest Germanic migrants.

Challenging Traditions: New Ideas of Early Medieval Settlement

If the post-War period represented a quantitative transformation for medieval settlement archaeology, then the 1970s was marked by a revolution (Williamson 2003, 13), as a series of sites were excavated predominantly on a 'rescue' basis. As infrastructural developments placed the archaeological record under increasing threat, the organisation 'Rescue' was formed in 1972 with the aim of recording sites at risk. Large-scale excavations, particularly of urban sites such as London, Ipswich and York transformed understanding of early medieval trade and urbanism (Gerard and Rippon 2007, 535), but in rural areas too, there was a growing awareness of the potential for destruction to significant material posed by development and industry. Fewer more important sites were investigated at this time than Mucking in Essex, the scale of excavation at which remains unparalleled by any early medieval settlement in England (Jones and Jones 1974; Jones 1980; Hamerow 1991).

At Mucking, the extent of excavations revealed an unambiguous picture of a transient settlement type, identifying for the first time what is known on the continent as *Wandersiedlung* or 'wandering settlement' (Hamerow 1991, 13). The dating of occupation layers at Mucking, in addition to the apparent lack of high status buildings created initial speculation that it was a 'pioneer' site: a first landing place for storm-tossed peoples arriving from the continent (Hamerow 1991, 8). Preliminary interpretation almost exclusively concentrated on the earliest settlement phases, despite evidence for occupation until at least the beginning of the eighth century. The recovery of Ipswich Ware, then dated to *c*.650-850, and two 'Middle Saxon' sceatta finds suggested that although Mucking may have been occupied as early as the fifth century, habitation in

the area perhaps continued as late as the ninth century (Rippon 2007, 172). Probably the most important initial outcome of the excavations at Mucking and comparable sites such as West Stow in Suffolk, was that they clearly demonstrated that 'Early-Middle Saxon' settlements were of a different character to historic villages (West 1985).

The material from such excavations also began to be supplemented by new forms of archaeological evidence from the 1970s onwards— most significantly from fieldwalking surveys. The development of landscape archaeology around this time led to the recovery of artefactual material from ploughsoil through the systematic 'walking' of fields, particularly in east midland counties such as Northamptonshire. In the countryside around existing villages, this novel survey method began to detect concentrations of early medieval ceramics, consisting almost exclusively of organic-tempered ware, datable only to a very broad *c*.450-850 phase or 'Early-Middle Saxon' period (e.g. Foard 1978; Hall and Martin 1979; Chapter III). The existence of settlement centres underlying such pottery concentrations was often demonstrated by subsequent excavation which regularly identified occupation structures. Similar to the more extensively excavated settlement at Mucking, habitation at such sites appeared to be relatively short-lived. Indeed, the quantity of discrete pottery scatters located by fieldwalking also indicated that, akin to Mucking, these settlements possessed a dispersed pattern with a tendency to shift across the landscape over time (Ford 1995).

The evidence from fieldwalking and targeted excavation therefore demonstrated without doubt that the earliest medieval settlements were of vastly different character to later medieval villages. The traditional model of village origins was thus clearly no longer tenable, leading to the development of a new interpretive framework. In arriving at this conclusion, of equal importance to the fieldwalked finds of 'Early-Middle Saxon' organic-tempered ware, was an almost complete lack of later material from the same artefact scatters (e.g. Foard 1978; Hall 1981). This evidence implied the replacement of transient, scattered farmsteads at some point in which 'Early-Middle Saxon' ceramics were in use, but before the introduction of 'Late Saxon' wares, a point recognised by some early fieldwalking pioneers such as David Hall (Hall 1981, 37). It is somewhat baffling, however, the prevailing view that emerged from the late 1970s was that village formation dated to sometime *after* the mid-ninth century, with most arguing for a protracted 'village moment' process perhaps continuing as late as the thirteenth century (e.g. Lewis *et al.* 1997, 198). Until relatively recently, the earliest material derived from investigations into both currently occupied villages and deserted sites was also invariably 'Late Saxon' in origin, ostensibly supporting a late date for early medieval settlement change (e.g. Chapman 2010).

As Stephen Rippon (2010, 54) has observed, central to divergent interpretations are the different datasets that scholars utilise; with fieldwalking evidence pointing to a

terminus ante quem of *c*.850 for the creation of historic villages, but a body of material derived from villages apparently providing a *terminus post quem* of *c*.850 for the same process. Whilst this book is not primarily concerned with explaining the origins of later medieval landscape and settlement character, central to the village origin debate is the way in which the 'Middle Saxon' countryside, and indeed 'Middle Saxon' society itself, is perceived. The revisionist model of the late 1970s, which remains the prevailing one amongst scholarship today, suggests albeit implicitly that the landscape of England remained largely unchanged until at least the ninth century (e.g. Lewis *et al*. 1997, 79-81; Dyer 2003, 21). Over the last two decades, however, the archaeological dataset relating to 'Middle Saxon' settlement has increased dramatically and, whilst such material continues to be most commonly filtered into village origin debates, the breadth and quality of material also lends itself to alternative research aims.

OUT OF OBSCURITY: RECENT 'MIDDLE SAXON' SETTLEMENT RESEARCH

The last two decades undeniably represent the most significant period for the emergence of 'Middle Saxon' settlement studies with regard to sheer increase of available data. Earlier work had provided some important foundations, however, as a number of investigations throughout the 1970s and 1980s hinted at a more complex 'Middle Saxon' settlement hierarchy than that typically envisaged. At Cowdery's Down, Hampshire, for instance, excavation revealed a sixth and seventh-century complex consisting of a series of large halls and rectilinear enclosures, demonstrating a significant degree of permanence and spatial demarcation (Millett and James 1983). Sites apparently illustrating a similar degree of planning were also identified at Foxley, Wiltshire, and Catholme, Staffordshire (Hinchcliffe 1986; Losco-Bradley and Kinsley 2002). More recently, detailed excavation at West Heslerton, North Yorkshire, also showed exceptionally long-lived occupation apparently zoned into discrete areas (Powlesland 1990). The importance of the seventh and eighth centuries as a transformative period was also highlighted by what has become known as the 'Middle Saxon shuffle' model (Arnold and Wardle 1981). Based on excavated 'Early Saxon' settlements such as Mucking in Essex, West Stow in Suffolk and Chalton in Hampshire, archaeologists Christopher Arnold and Ken Wardle argued for a dislocation in occupation sites around the late seventh century, as 'Early Saxon' settlements located on lighter soils and higher ground were abandoned in favour of richer soils in river valleys (Arnold and Wardle 1981; see also Moreland 2000, 86-7).

The 'Middle Saxon shuffle' has since been subject to major critique, based largely on the data used to develop the model. Helena Hamerow (1991; 2002, 121-4) has demonstrated that many shifting settlements have probably only been partly investigated, and that other phases of occupation may lie beyond excavated the area in many cases. The apparent dislocation visible in some sites, she

argues, is therefore a product of research conditions rather than an actual marked change in the settlement sequence. In the case of Mucking, Rippon (2008, 171) has proposed that settlement may have shifted from the gravel terrace to the lower-lying site occupied by the parish church through a process of continued and gradual migration. Such re-assessments reflect heightened awareness amongst scholars of the range of archaeological evidence available to them, which has led to an increased concern for 'Middle Saxon' settlement studies more generally. Whilst the material upon which the 'Middle Saxon shuffle' is based thus renders it largely untenable as a concept, the idea of settlement transformation before the mid-ninth century has not been wholly disregarded.

Based on a multi-disciplinary project in the Nene Valley of Northamptonshire, Tony Brown and Glenn Foard argued again for a crucial modification of the settlement sequence in the 'Middle Saxon' period, but associated such change more convincingly with the development of historic villages (Brown and Foard 1998). The pair claimed that, based on evidence from the Raunds area in particular, some historic villages developed as part of a two-stage process, with the initial 'nucleation' phase occurring probably in the seventh or eighth centuries, followed by a later process of restructuring which created the historic village form (Brown and Foard 1998, 80; Parry 2006; Audouy 2009; Chapman 2010). The evidence on which Brown and Foard based their idea is explored more thoroughly in Chapter III, but of central importance to their hypothesis was the archaeological data derived from investigation in and immediately surrounding Raunds village itself. The research potential of such investigation within village environs has been recognised by archaeologists for some time, but was first demonstrated clearly by the investigators of the Shapwick Project, Somerset (Aston and Gerard 1999; Gerard 1999; 2007). The excavation of small test-pits in empty plots and gardens of still-occupied villages has since been adopted by a number of research projects, such as the Whittlewood Project, Northamptonshire (Jones and Page 2006), and the Higher Education Field Academy (HEFA) project, run by the University of Cambridge (Lewis 2007; 2010).

Based on test-pits in a number of villages, the researchers of the Whittlewood Project cautiously suggested that some historic centres possessed 'pre-village nuclei', with origins datable to the pre-ninth century (Jones and Page 2006, 222). Outside of Northamptonshire, the research of the HEFA project has been far more critical of the potential significance of 'Middle Saxon' settlement material from current villages. Based on test-pit excavations of fifty-one villages across nine counties in central and eastern England, Carenza Lewis concluded that, with the exception of Essex and South Suffolk, there seems to be little evidence for any co-location between sites of the 'Early-Middle Saxon' period, and later-occupied villages (Lewis 2010, 103). As Chapter II of this volume shall shortly demonstrate, however, there are a number of fundamental problems surrounding the methodology employed by the

HEFA project, and thus the conclusions reached by the investigators remain open to question. Central to such methodological issues are the way in which HEFA defines 'Currently Occupied Rural Settlements' or 'CORS', and the adequacy of limited test-pitting for the identification of often ephemeral 'Middle Saxon' settlement deposits (see Chapter II).

It is not only research-orientated projects that have investigated village environs though, as the last two decades have witnessed a major increase in commercial investigation of currently-occupied rural settlements. From 1991, the introduction of statutory heritage protection for the historic environment, first represented by Planning Policy Guidance (PPG) 16, and more recently by Planning Policy Statement (PPS) 5, has transformed archaeological practice across the United Kingdom. The legal obligation of contractors to mitigate for damage or loss to the historic environment, has led to an unprecedented increase of archaeological projects in advance of development. Many such projects which have recovered evidence for early medieval settlement have been subject to full publication, such as Yarnton, Oxfordshire and Higham Ferrers, Northamptonshire (Hey 2004; Hardy *et al*. 2007). The majority of development-led commercial archaeology projects remain unpublished, however, with reports instead archived in the National Monuments Record (NMR), and regional HERs, as well as in some online sources such as OASIS managed by the University of York. Academics have been slow to realise the significance of this body of so-called 'grey-literature', and although attitudes are slowly improving (e.g. Hamerow 2010), the quantity of data produced by commercial units continues to far outstrip related scholarly research.

'Middle Saxon' settlement research therefore currently stands at something of a cross-roads. Whilst research-orientated projects have laid a firm foundation, rehearsing the evidence from the same corpus of sites and landscapes will undoubtedly lead to stagnation in our growing understanding of the early medieval countryside. The current economic environment has resulted in decreased funding for academic field-projects, making the marked expansion in the dataset from development-led investigation all the more crucial to furthering research. It is therefore through a combination of the academic endeavour outlined above, and the unpublished 'grey-literature' that new insights of the early medieval landscape are most likely to be developed. The more detailed methods by which this research will approach the data are discussed in the following chapter.

CONCLUSION

The above analysis of previous and current 'Middle Saxon' settlement research illustrates a number of central themes that will be explored by this book. The most fundamental debates regarding early medieval landscape studies remain centred on village origins, particularly the emergence of 'nucleated' settlements that came to characterise much of central England. This research is not primarily concerned with explaining such divergence of settlement form, but of key relevance to such debates is the implicit way 'Middle Saxon' settlement and society is viewed in such models, and indeed by scholars generally. Following the development of fieldwalking in the late 1970s, the prevailing interpretation amongst scholars continues to assert that villages emerged during a protracted 'village moment' process which began around the mid-ninth century at the very earliest. The preoccupation with village origins in such interpretive frameworks has led to a neglect of earlier developments, however, as the pre-ninth century landscape is amalgamated into a broad 'Early-Middle Saxon' period.

By the 1980s, the traditional view of the early medieval landscape had been firmly rejected, and the 'Late Saxon' period heralded as the time at which significant changes to the English countryside first occurred. From as early as the 1970s, however, a number of excavation programmes already began to reveal 'Middle Saxon' settlements of appreciable variety and complexity, suggesting that the significance of the pre-ninth century period could not be wholly disregarded. The persisting emphasis placed by modern scholarship on the ninth century and later period, however, is part of a more deep-rooted interest in 'Late Saxon' England, inherited from the document-driven agendas that characterised early archaeological research. The vast increase of available written sources, coupled with the more durable material remains of 'Late Saxon' society certainly provide improved research conditions, but this has been to the detriment of the period immediately preceding it. Whilst the continuity and migration debates of the 'Early Saxon' period have also attracted academic investment, until relatively recently the 'Middle Saxon' period had somewhat fallen through the cracks.

The last two decades have led to a transformation of 'Middle Saxon' archaeology, however, both in terms of the available data, and the scholarly focus now afforded the discipline. The onset of statutory heritage protection has been fundamentally important in providing a rapidly growing body of material for study, the most prominent of which has been utilised by academic research. The 'grey-literature' relevant to early medieval settlement remains largely untapped by researchers though and as the corpus of commercially-led work continues to exceed research-led fieldwork, academic understanding of the archaeological material will become increasingly polarised without more active engagement. Concentrating on five counties within central and eastern England, this book will therefore counter the existing research trend by placing far greater emphasis on the 'grey literature' in order to provide a greater understanding of settlement and landscape in the 'Middle Saxon' period. In particular it will focus on contributing to the central debate of early medieval landscape studies, regarding the degree of transformation and complexity that can be viewed in the 'Middle Saxon' countryside. It will be demonstrated that the enduring scholarly focus on village origins undermines

the significant changes that 'Middle Saxon' communities underwent—changes that are indicative of deep-rooted developments in society.

Particularly prominent in this volume, is the contribution both of the 'grey literature' and of published sources of 'Middle Saxon' settlement evidence from still-occupied villages. Such data is naturally of essential relevance to debates regarding village origins, and indeed does hint at a relationship between 'Middle Saxon' and later settlements. This theme will be investigated further in the coming chapters, but the focus of discussion will remain upon the central aim of providing an insight of 'Middle Saxon' society through study of seventh to ninth-century settlement remains. This agenda will be addressed through a series of case studies that address these objectives, which will provide a greater understanding of the countryside throughout the period which in turn will fulfil the key aim of providing greater comprehension of the social, economic and political environment of 'Middle Saxon' England. The following chapter details the methods by which the archaeological data for this book was acquired and assessed. Of vital importance is the way in which 'currently occupied' settlements are defined and understood, in order to research the potential relationship between 'Middle Saxon' settlement and existing villages critically. Chapter II also presents a discussion of the way in which alternative forms of data to archaeology have been used by this research, with particular detail given to the deployment of written sources.