Cemeteries as Central Places - Place and Identity in Migration Period Eastern England

Howard Williams

Abstract

This paper argues that the large cremation cemeteries of eastern England in the fifth and sixth century can be interpreted as central places where different households and communities congregated for mortuary rituals, ancestral ceremonies and other social activities. Through their size, early date and the predominant use of cremation, these sites were social and sacred foci where a distinctive mortuary ideology was developed that forged powerful relationships between place, identity, myths and memories.

The places selected for these large cremation cemeteries also encouraged this role. By examining four cremation cemeteries in Lincolnshire it is shown how, in different ways, each of them encouraged perceptions of both centrality and liminality. This was achieved through their location in relation to routes, ancient monuments, topography and contemporary settlement patterns. It is argued that while societies of the fifth and sixth century may be regarded as less 'complex' and more regionally varied than those coming before and after, social complexity is revealed in part through the role of mortuary practices and burial rites in strategies for reproducing political and sacred authority, social structures and perceptions of group identities and histories.

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Introduction

The early Anglo-Saxon period in eastern England is often regarded as a time of cultural change with the immigration of Germanic groups, but also as a time of social change. It is frequently seen as a period of social fragmentation following the collapse of the Roman socio-political system and prior to the formation of historically-attested kingdoms during the seventh century AD. Most commentators envisage a series of small polities taking over from the Roman system of administration, and competitively developing into kingdoms through the fifth and sixth centuries at the expense of rivals (Bassett 1989; Carver 1989; Scull 1992, 1993:68). In these conditions, social hierarchies are restricted and based upon face-to-face interaction, close-knit kin-groups, the loyalties of retainers, and tribute-giving to political leaders (Charles-Edwards 1989; Härke 1997). Some writers have taken this view of socio-political fragmentation even further by regarding each locality or settlement as expressing its own local identity (Hodges 1989; Lucy 1998).

Age, gender and kinship in the form of households or lineages are regarded by many scholars as the primary elements of social structure in the period (Scull 1993:73; Härke 1997) while attempts to identify a rigid social hierarchy, and fixed territories are often treated with scepticism (e.g Pader 1982; Lucy 1998; but see Carver 1989; Scull 1993:69, 75 p.). Indeed, while variations can be seen in the wealth and scale invested in burial rites, and differences can be seen in the size and character of domestic buildings, there is little evidence for discrete 'high status' residences and burial sites indicating a distinctive elite class before the late sixth century (Shepherd 1979; Arnold 1982; 1997: 177 pp.; Carver 1989; Scull 1992, 1993). This picture of England in the fifth and sixth centuries stands in contrast to interpretations of the late Roman and Germanic Iron Ages in southern Scandinavia where hoards, settlements and burials have been interpreted to indicate elements of emerging social and political complexity (Hedeager 1992:246 pp.; Fabech 1999a & b; Näsman 1999; Ringtved 1999). This contrasting situation might be explained by the effects socio-political fragmentation in the centuries following the breakdown of Roman political authority, the disturbances caused by the long-term processes of Germanic invasion and migration, and the complex interactions and acculturation between indigenous and immigrant groups could have contributed to the absence of clearly identifiable social stratification and differentiation.

However, there remains the risk that we over-simplify our view of societies in southern and eastern England in the fifth and sixth centuries and create a uni-linear view of their developing complexity from tribes to kingdoms (see Scull 1992:9 p.). This paper suggests that our inability to 'see' social complexity and central places in the early Anglo-Saxon period is partly because archaeologists are using criteria inappropriate for the shifting and diverse communities of these centuries and more appropriate in discussing other periods and places. If these societies are studied in their own right, rather than in comparison with what they were to become, we might begin to identify alternative criteria for recognising social complexity. It is argued that social differentiation can be identified through the way space and place were utilised rather than simply through variations in the character and wealth of the material culture found in the funerary and domestic spheres. In this paper it is argued that a small group of extremely large cemeteries in eastern England can be thought of as central places integral to the reproduction of group identities and political authority. This is not because these sites were particularly wealthy, but instead, because both the mortuary rites and their landscape setting allowed the cemeteries to take on a special importance for early Anglo-Saxon communities.

Invisible Central Places?

The presence and character of central places is usually treated as evidence for a degree of socio-political complexity and hierarchy. The emergence of places where authority and power is reproduced through repeated gatherings for a multiplicity of social, political, military, economic and religious interactions in the seventh century has frequently been seen in this light. In the late sixth and early seventh centuries we see the emergence of elite residences such as Yeavering in Northumberland (Hope Taylor 1977), and 'exclusive' and monumental burial grounds including Sutton Hoo (Carver 1998). Later in

the seventh century we can identify the development of 'wics' or emporia (Scull 1997), a range of artefact-rich sites on the coast and inland (Ulmschneider 2000) and Christian central places in the form of monasteries (Blair 1994). Comparable sites in the fifth and sixth centuries are conspicuous by their absence. However, we need to realise that there is not one single, universally applicable method for identifying high status sites in the first millennium AD. The term can be applied to a variety of sites, not simply because the definition and application by archaeologists of the term vary, but also because these sites change in size, character and physical location over time and space (see Fabech 1999b: 455 p.). Individual sites like Uppåkra may have fluctuated in their socially ascribed status and functions over time (Hårdh 2000:641, 647) and the criteria for identifying central places might vary between regions with different patterns of depositional practices and spatial organisation (e.g. Ringtved 1999:54).

Therefore while many 'central places' can be recognised through familiar criteria including their role in crafts and production, religious activities, long-distance trade and the like, at many times and places in the Middle Ages, the historical and archaeological evidence attests to the existence of 'central places' that yield no diagnostic archaeological signature or defy our expectations. Put simply, the absence of an "Uppåkra" from fifth and sixth century England illustrates that we are dealing with a different kind of social structure and spatial organisation in communities, but this need not necessarily indicate a different scale of social complexity or the absence of any form of central place. Even at Yeavering where historical and archaeological evidence combine to give an impression of a royal site of the powerful Northumbrian kingdom, there

was little evidence of its wealth and status from the artefacts recovered (Hope Taylor 1977; Reynolds 1999:52). Indeed, in any given society, there can be many different kinds of places of assembly and social interaction as the evidence from middle and later Anglo-Saxon England clearly demonstrates (Reynolds 1999). Such issues take us away from thinking about a universal check-list of attributes for central places and instead leads us to broaden our search by investigating the spatial and temporal variability of central places and the varied social, religious and economic functions they might hold. Consequently, it opens the possibility that not only were central places in the fifth and sixth century very different from the range of sites found elsewhere in northern Europe in the first millennium AD, but it also makes it possible to regard unconventional site-types, even cemeteries, as in certain contexts holding such functions.

In terms of moveable wealth or architecture, the cremation cemeteries of eastern England appear small. The destructive process of cremation, and the burial of ashes in ceramic urns beneath small grave structures hardly suggests that they acted as central places (see McKinley 1994; Williams 2000, 2002 for a review of early Anglo-Saxon cremation rites). Indeed, they were not necessarily places inhabited by the living nor geographically central within territories. Instead their central place role may derive from the combined effect of the nature of the mortuary practices and the character of the places selected for the burial of the 'cremains'. In order to develop this argument, we must first address the nature of the cremation cemeteries and then move on to investigate their landscape location.

Cremation Cemeteries

The archaeology of early Anglo-Saxon England is dominated by the cemetery evidence (see Lucy 2000; Scull 2001 for recent reviews of studies), but there are a small group of cemeteries that stand apart from the others. The large cemeteries of eastern England in which cremation rites predominate are distinctive in three ways (Fig. 1). The first of these is their size. It is difficult to tell the precise size of most early medieval cemeteries since few have been completely excavated and have escaped disturbance in more recent centuries. Yet, as far as archaeologists can esti-mate, most early Anglo-Saxon cemeteries rarely exceed four to five hundred burials, even in cases when cemeteries continue in use beyond the 'pagan period' and into the 'final-phase' of the seventh century. In contrast, some contemporary cremation cemeteries (sites where cremation burials are predomi-nant), when extensively investigated, appear much larger than other burial sites. Some may have been at least twice the size of sites where inhumation is the only rite or the pre-dominant rite, or where cremation and inhumation are used frequently in com-bination (mixed-rite cemeteries). The largest known sites, at Spong Hill and Loveden Hill
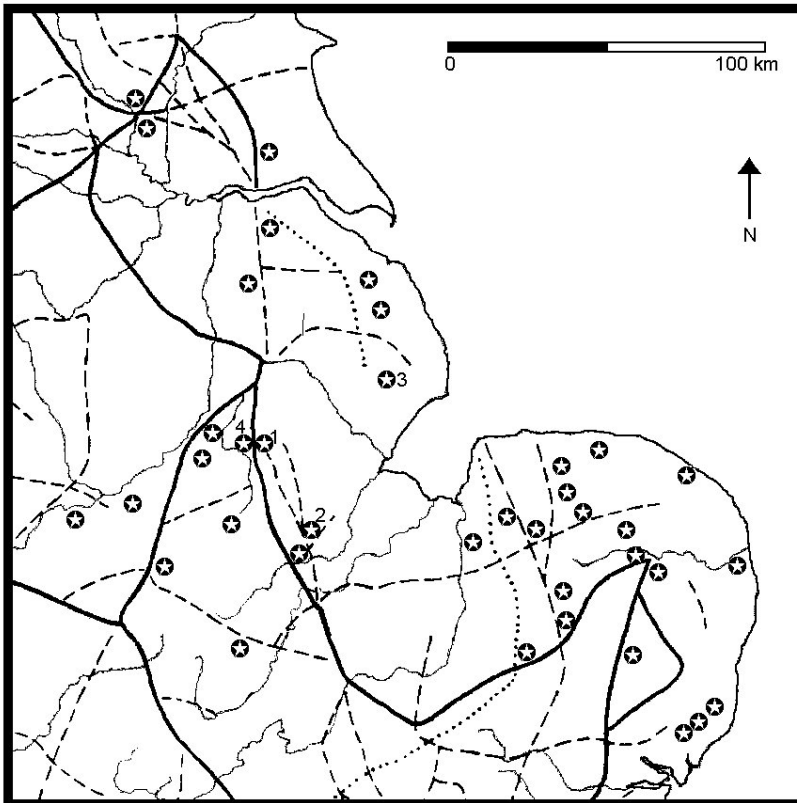

Fig. 1. Eastern England with a Distribution Map of Early Anglo-Saxon Cremation Cemeteries against the background of existing routeways and rivers. 1 = Ancaster; 2 = Baston; 3 = Hall Hill, West Keal; 4 = Loveden Hill, Hough-on-the-Hill.

may have each contained up to three thousand burials (McKinley 1994; Williams forthcoming: see also Scull 1993:72). The size of such sites is unprecedented when we recognise the relatively short time span in which they are used (no more than two centuries) and the dispersed rural communities they served. Adjacent contemporary settlements have been identified near these cemeteries, but these appear too small to have been alone in the use of the cremation cemetery. Consequently it is likely that the burials placed in these cemeteries came from more than one settlement; these sites acting as central burial grounds of many different communities and households (McKinley 1994). The congregation of groups at cemeteries or other nearby mortuary arena encourages us to consider the range of other socio-political and economic activities and exchanges which may have accompanied the funerary rites. In this sense, as places of congregation, the burial of the remains of the dead could only have been one of the functions of early medieval cremation cemeteries.

These cemeteries are also distinguished by their date. Many contain a high frequency of fifth-century metalwork including early forms of cruciform brooch suggesting that these are among the earliest Germanic cemeteries in eastern England (Hills 1977:24 p.). While they continued in use alongside smaller inhumation and mixed-rite cemeteries that appear in the later fifth century, some cremation cemeteries may have begun a generation or more earlier. Therefore they were established as part of a new socio-political and sacred geography established over large areas of eastern England following the invasion and immigration of Germanic groups (Higham 1992). However, their presence and continued use of these sites is not simply a reflection of Germanic settlement, but evidence of the enduring success of a conservative mortuary ideology maintained in parts of eastern England for up to two centuries (Williams 2002). In turn, the enduring nature of these sites seems to testify to their continued importance *as places* for early Anglo-Saxon communities.

The third factor that sets these sites apart is the predominant use of cremation. Inhumed bodies are found at these cemeteries, but they represent a minority burial rite. Usually regarded as an index of their early date and Continental affiliations, the use of cremation and the burial of the 'cremains' in central burial grounds also suggests a distinctive form of mortuary organisation. The cremation rite not only involved complex ritual procedures, the disposal of moveable wealth and the sacrifice of animals, but the post-cremation rite encouraged a different relationship between the living and the dead from that found in other contexts. Cremation served to breakdown the body but the post-cremation rites seem to have served to rebuild a physical and symbolic body for the deceased (Williams 2001a & 2002). In parallel with this transformation, social and political relationships between the living and the dead may have been also transformed and reconstructed. Moreover, through the repeated use of cremation as a means of disposal and the long-term use of the same burial site, the cemetery could have come to act as a material manifestation of relationships between community, ancestors and social memories (see also Williams 1999b, 2000, 2001b). Furthermore, given the complexity of the ritual procedures, it is possible that they were organised by ritual specialists ('priests' or 'shamans') or political leaders. This leads to the possibility that access to, and control of, the messages and meanings of the

rites and the burial ground were tightly controlled and orchestrated by elites. Cremation cemeteries were therefore places of ritual and ceremony, but also they forged links with the dead and hence forged identities and memories through techniques of bodily transformation and the choice of landscape situation (Williams 2000, 2001a, forthcoming).

These factors suggest that cremation cemeteries may have held a distinctive place in the minds and experiences of early medieval communities. Indeed, many scholars have already argued that they were the burial grounds of many communities and perhaps were associated with tribal centres (Arnold 1997; Leahy 1993, 1999; Scull 1993:73; McKinley 1994; Williamson 1993, Williams forthcoming). This argument has been supported by evidence for spatial relationships between large cremation cemeteries and both major Roman settlements and late Saxon centres (Everson 1993; Leahy 1993, 1999).

The Location of Cremation Cemeteries

In order to develop an understanding of the role of cemeteries in Migration Period England, we need to take a closer look at the hinterlands of these cemeteries to see what archaeological evidence can tell us about relationships with the local topography and neighbouring sites. In recent years, archaeologists have realised the potential for understanding cemeteries as places within landscape settings and as locales in relation to patterns of settlement and land-use, distinctive topographical features and existing monuments (e.g. Parker Pearson 1993; Tilley 1994; Richards 1996; Esmonde Cleary 2000). For early medieval societies, investigating the placing and settings of burials and cemeteries has the potential to help us understand their socio-political and cosmological significance for past societies (Williams 1997, 1998, 1999b; Lucy 1998; Thäte 1996; Theuws 1999), their role in power relations (Härke 2001), and the use of mortuary practices in the negotiation of disputes and tensions between groups (Williams 1999a). Perhaps most importantly, the significance of mortuary practices and landscape may inform us of strategies for the production and reproduction of social memories and myths of origin (Williams 1998, 2001b). Furthermore, the justification for examining cemeteries as central places is supported by the Scandinavian context where ritual as well as political and economic practices seem to characterise central places and sizeable cemeteries are an integral part of central place complexes (Brink 1999; Ringtved 1999; Hårdh 2000; Hedeager 2001).

In many cases, we know disappointingly little about the environs of cremation cemeteries, but by compiling all known archaeological data from a $25km^2$ area centring upon cremation cemeteries, we can sometimes identify new information which illuminates their social significance as places. In order to introduce this method, this paper will discuss four cremation cemeteries from southern Lincolnshire, at Ancaster, Baston, West Keal and Loveden Hill (Fig. 1).[1] While evidence is fragmentary for any single site, by discussing the evidence in turn we can identify the variations between the location of each site and some common features they all share using evidence derived from aerial photography, field-walking, chance finds, metal-detector finds and excavations.
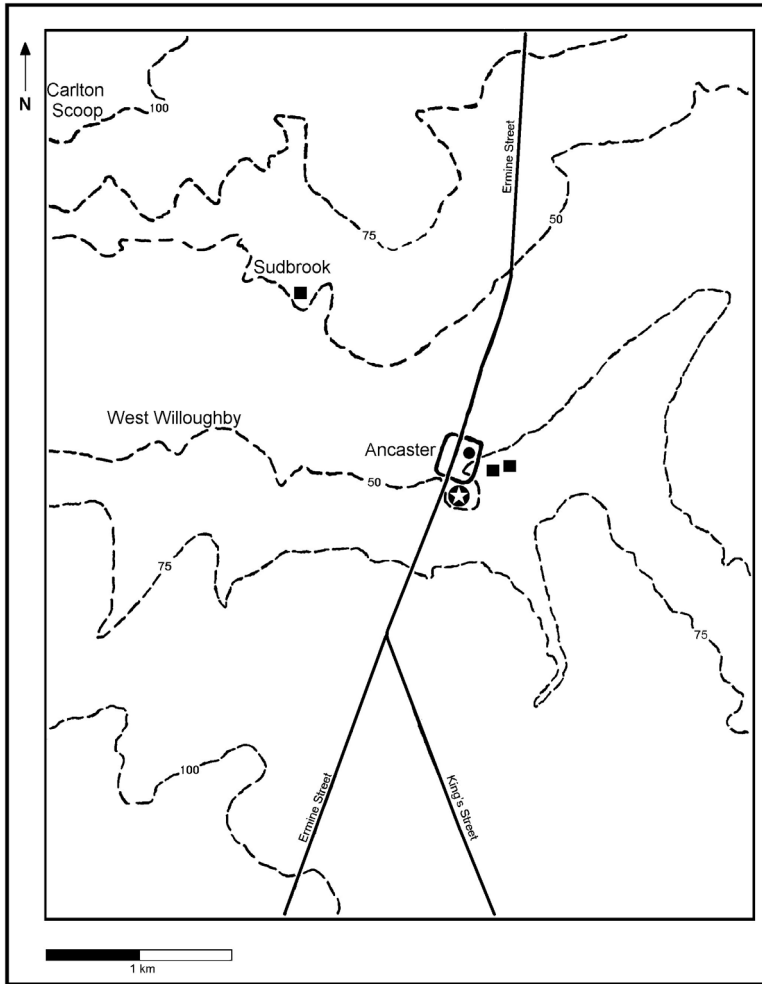
Fig. 2. Early Anglo-Saxon period activity in the environs of Ancaster, Lincolnshire. Star = cemetery; squares = metalwork finds; circles = pottery and other traces of settlement.

Ancaster

The first site to be considered lies near to modern Ancaster. Although the extent and character of the Ancaster cemetery is unclear, about 40 cremation urns were found during nineteenth century and early twentieth century excavations. Burials of Roman date were found but at least three urns have survived and can be dated to the fifth and sixth centuries AD (Meaney 1964:151; Myres 1977:255, 263, 340; Todd 1981:5; Leahy 1993:39; SMR 30334). By analogy with better excavated sites, the discoveries suggest a large cremation cemetery overlying a Romano-British burial ground (Fig. 2).

The location of the site appears significant in relation to Roman-period activity since the burial ground was situated about 100 metres south of the walls of the Romano-British settlement of Ancaster, classed by Burnham & Wacher as a minor defended settlement (Todd

1981; Burnham & Wacher 1990:235 pp.; SMR 30324). A brief review of what is known about the extent and nature of this settlement sheds light upon the relationship between the cemetery and the physical remains of the Roman period landscape. The settlement developed as the *vicus* of the first century Roman fort situated on Ermine Street (SMR 30323, see also SMR 30322). Excavations have revealed a series of buildings flanking Ermine Street and along at least one side street (Burnham & Wacher 1990:237). The town seems to have expanded rapidly in the second century and during the early third century it was provided with a set of defences laid out over earlier first and second century occupation. Corner towers were added during the fourth century (Burnham & Wacher 1990:237 pp.).

As well as replacing a Roman fort, the settlement benefited from its position on the meeting of various routes. Both fort and the subsequent civilian settlement were strategically located where the north-south Roman road of Ermine Street intersects with the west-east 'Ancaster gap' through the Lincolnshire limestone cliff. As well as serving as a node in the communication network, there are hints that the settlement was associated with local industries including limestone quarrying and pottery production (Burnham & Wacher 1990:239; SMR 30341). Discoveries of religious sculpture within the defended area suggest that the settlement also served as a religious centre sporting at least one temple to native deities.

Roman occupation was not restricted to the area enclosed by the walls. There is evidence of extra-mural occupation to the north, east and west (e.g. SMR 30332), a further concentration of sites further to the west along the 50m contour following the route west through the Ancaster gap (SMR 30331, 30343, 30345, 30348), and evidence for possible villas on higher ground to the south-west (SMR 30347, 30350), south-east (SMR 60456-7) and north-east (SMR 60362). Furthermore, excavations have revealed a series of at least seven extra-mural cemeteries around the settlement, including one late Roman 'Christian' cemetery to the west of the defended area (Wilson 1968; Watts 1991:48, 85; SMR 30327, 30333, 30353, 30329, 30330, 30341, 30343). The proximity of the fourth century Roman cemeteries to the defended area may indicate a contraction of occupation at this time. So it seems as if the physical remains of this settlement may have encouraged the location of the early Anglo-Saxon cemetery, and during its use the ruins of the Roman dwellings and fortifications would have been prominent features in the local landscape.

Relationships with centres of Roman administration and political authority by early medieval cemeteries have frequently been noted and received diverse interpretations by Roman and Anglo-Saxon archaeologists. The evidence from Ancaster and elsewhere could be seen as evidence of continuity in terms of either population or institutions. Equally, following Gildas and Bede, it might relate to strategies by which Germanic mercenaries were invited to settle near Roman towns to protect the sub-Roman population in the fifth century. In either case, it is unlikely that the Roman settlements retained their administrative roles, social functions or the majority of their populations (see Esmonde Cleary 1989; Scull 1992; Williamson 1993). Interpretations are restricted by the fact that excavations have not been extensive enough to reveal the full character of Roman occupation within and around the defences of Ancaster, or to identify

when the town was finally abandoned. Also, the presence of timber halls, Grubenhäuser and artefacts reflecting early Anglo-Saxon settlement are notoriously difficult to find without extensive excavation and the nature of the archaeological investigations at Ancaster are unlikely to have produced this evidence had it been present. However, across the area excavated within the Roman town evidence was found of fifth and sixth century activity including finds of domestic and stamped pottery sherds and at least two brooches, one a short-long brooch. What this represents in terms of settlement is uncertain but it certainly suggests that the area of the town was not completely abandoned in the early and middle Saxon period (Todd 1981:34 p.; SMR 30335). While this evidence cannot be used to suggest 'continuity', one possibility is that the defended enclosure retained a role as a focus of settlement and perhaps assembly during the fifth and sixth centuries, associated with the cemetery to the south. There are other indications of early Anglo-Saxon settlement to the north-west of the town at Sudbrook where industrial excavations in a sandpit produced beads, tweezers and a bracelet (SMR 30346). While this evidence is sparse, this is only to be expected given the degree of later medieval and post-medieval disturbance. At the very least these finds show that more than one settlement could have been present in the surroundings of the Roman defences and the cremation cemetery, and some of these may have brought the dead for burial south of the Roman settlement.

The cemetery itself appears to have overlain one of a series of the seven known extramural Roman cemeteries identified on all sides of the town (SMR 30330). The relationship with an earlier cemetery seems clear. It may be worth noting that of all the cemeteries around Ancaster, the burial ground selected for re-use may have been among the most geographically prominent for travellers using Ermine street and crossing on west to east routes through the Ancaster gap in the sub-Roman period. For those moving through the area, or dwelling in the vicinity, the cemetery was in a significant location where funerals and other ceremonies would take place at the confluence of routes. Also, the site would have allowed views into the area within the Roman defences and any early Anglo-Saxon gatherings or settlements enclosed therein.

The chronological relationship with the Roman burials, apparently including both inhumation and cremation, remains unclear. It may reflect the continuity of funerary activity following the Germanic take-over of the area (e.g. Myres 1969), or alternately it could represent the re-use of a recognisable ritual site following a short period of abandonment (Williams 1997). Similar relationships with substantial Roman settlements and towns have been noted across eastern England with close parallels coming from York, Great Casterton and Newark (Stead 1956; Kinsley 1989; Grainger & Mahany unpublished). Whether evidence of continued use or re-use, in either case the location of Germanic graves on an earlier burial ground can be interpreted as an act of appropriation which transformed the meanings and associations of earlier monumental sites into a new social and ideological order imposed by incoming groups. The earlier Roman graves may have also provided a monumental focus for the early Anglo-Saxon cemetery and a material link to the past that served in the construction of social memories (Williams 1997, 1999b, 2001b).

Although the data for the scale and character of the cemetery remain limited, by analogy with other sites we can suggest that
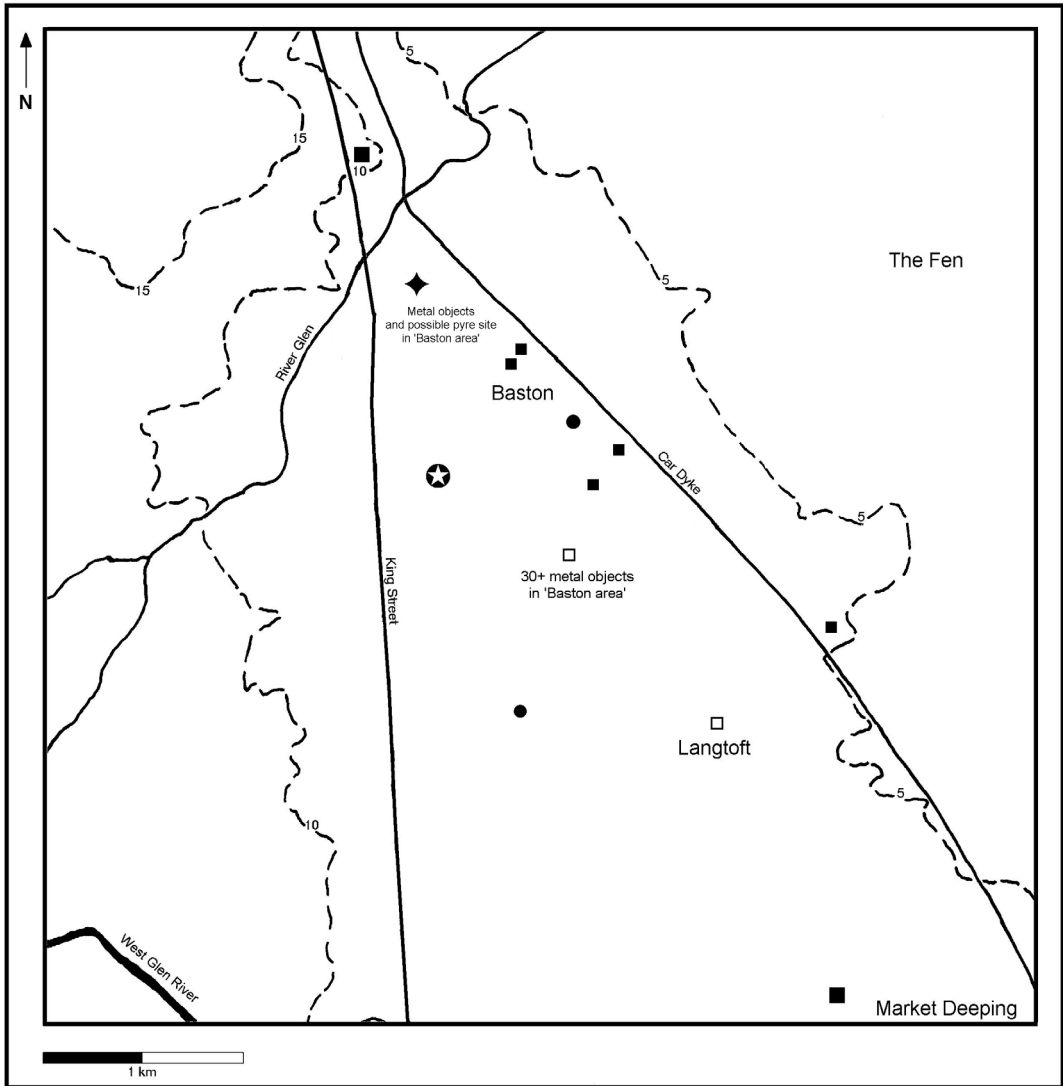
Fig. 3. Early Anglo-Saxon period activity in the environs of Baston, Lincolnshire. Star = cemetery; diamond = possible pyre site; filled square = metalwork find; open square = metalwork finds - approximate location only; circles = pottery, cropmarks and other traces of settlement.

we are dealing with a substantial cremation cemetery used for over a century. If this is the case, then the relationship with the Roman town, cemetery and roads may have allowed the site to be a central place for the living and the dead, perhaps related to the continued use of the area of the Roman settlement as a place of assembly.

Baston

The second cemetery to be discussed lies in the far south of Lincolnshire by the edge of the fenlands (Fig. 3). This area was extensively occupied in the Roman period and despite the abandonment of many sites in the fifth and sixth centuries at a time of worsening

climatic conditions and the abandonment of fenland drainage schemes established by the Romans, the Fenland Survey was able to identify a reduced but continued occupation through the early and middle Saxon periods (Hall & Coles 1994). The cremation cemetery at Baston was originally discovered in the 1860s (Trollope 1863; Meaney 1964:152 p.) and excavated again in 1966 producing 44 cremation burials (Mayes & Dean 1976; SMR 33387; Field 1989). Some archaeologists see this as a small cemetery because recent excavations did not reveal further burials (e.g. Field 1989; Leahy 1993). However, given the extent of medieval and post-medieval quarrying in the area, the site could have been much larger and mainly destroyed before antiquarians began to record the cemetery in the mid-nineteenth century (see Field 1989). Whatever its original size and despite limitations in our knowledge of the size and character of the cemetery, a great deal can be learned through the compilation of the available data from its environs.

The topographical location is uninspiring, but the cemetery is located on an extremely shallow but relatively well-drained rise 50cm above the surrounding landscape (Field 1989). There is evidence for substantial numbers of prehistoric barrows in the vicinity including some identified by aerial photography 1.5km to the west and three barrows surviving as low earthworks near an Anglo-Saxon settlement 2km to the north (see below; French 1994; SMR 33588; SMR 34194/5/6). Also, there is evidence from aerial photography of similar ring ditches in the field adjacent to the cemetery site (Field 1989), and it is possible that the cremation cemetery was focused on a prehistoric barrow as identified elsewhere (Williams 1997).

Field-walking and excavations have revealed the stone foundations of buildings (e.g.

SMR 33268) and scatters of pottery and metalwork indicating a densely occupied landscape in the Roman period (SMR 33582). Within a kilometre of the cemetery are numerous Romano-British farms, clustering along the fen edge and the Car Dyke, and others placed in relation to King Street Roman road and the River Glen (SMR 33584; 33417; 35066; 34621; 34629; 34638; 34640; 34642; 34643; 34644; 00160; 30054; 00327; 32978; 33184; 33194). There are also some sites out in the fens themselves (SMR 33413; 33420). Aerial photographs reveal that these settlements and villas were situated within complex system of land divisions and trackways comparable to those dated to the Roman period from other parts of lowland Britain (SMR 34966; 34971; 35010; 35111; 33421; 33422) and these have been identified in the area of the Anglo-Saxon cemetery (Field 1989; SMR 33530).

While these land divisions and settlements were probably abandoned during the early Middle Ages, they may still have influenced the pattern of early Anglo-Saxon landscape exploitation and settlement. Furthermore, a specific relationship can be identified in the placing of the cremation cemetery between two major Roman routes. These are the north-south route of the King Street Roman road to the west of the cemetery, and the Car Dyke to the east. The Car Dyke is a second century drainage dyke and waterway that was the focus of Roman exploitation of the fen-edge. These two routes come close to each other about a kilometre north of the cemetery, where both cross the River Glen.

It is against this background that we can appreciate the pattern of Anglo-Saxon settlement. As elsewhere, early Anglo-Saxon settlements are difficult to identify from surface remains but there are hints of settlement in a number of separate areas around the cemetery.

In addition to dense Roman period activity, Anglo-Saxon pottery has been reported from a number of sites, one to the south-east by one kilometre (SMR 33396), and another to the NE also by one kilometre where a sherd of Anglo-Saxon pottery from within Baston village raises the possibility of settlement even closer to the cemetery (SMR 34969). The Car Dyke at Baston has produced evidence of early Anglo-Saxon pottery in the same area suggesting an adjacent Anglo-Saxon settlement or perhaps the continued use of the dyke for water traffic or drainage in the early Anglo-Saxon period (SMR 33424). Less than 2km to the north of the cemetery field-walking by the Fenland Survey produced evidence of a large settlement on high ground overlooking the fen. It is strategically located where the River Glen cuts both the Car Dyke and King Street (SMR 34645) and placed in relation to a Bronze Age barrow cemetery. Also, aerial photographs and field-walking reveal possible Saxon settlements 2km to the south-east of the cemetery (SMR 33431; 35242).

Finds recorded by the Portable Antiquities scheme add greatly to our knowledge of the significance of the area. The areas immediately south-east and north of the cemetery have produced a density of early Anglo-Saxon metal objects including two girdle hangers (NLM 825, 833), three fragments of wrist clasps, one unfinished (828, 2153, 2154), a Continental 'snake' brooch (NLM 2157), two fragments of a square headed brooch (NLM 1080, 1136), fragments of seventeen cruciform brooches, two of which are early forms and may date to the fifth century AD (NLM 1082, 1083, 1100, 1102-5, 1109-1111, 1113, 1115-9, 1121, 1123). Other brooches have been found including eight fragments of small-long brooches (NLM 1112, 1122, 1124, 1132-33, 1141-3) and one fragment of an

equal arm brooch (NLM 1144). It is difficult to know whether these fifth and sixth century finds represent evidence of an extensive settlement, burials, or both. A further interesting find suggests ritual activity; the burnt remains of a square-headed brooch (NLM 1107) to the north-west of the site. This find may be interpreted as the remains of a disturbed cremation burial, or perhaps a pyre site serving the Baston cremation cemetery. A similar relationship has been identified between a possible pyre site and the cremation cemetery at Loveden Hill in Lincolnshire (see below & Williams forthcoming). In either case the evidence suggests that the Baston cemetery was placed within a complex and rich focus of early Anglo-Saxon activity. Only further research will enable the full extent and character of these remains to be uncovered.

By building up a picture of the environment of the cemetery, we can suggest that the cemetery served a series of settlements in the surroundings and that the cemetery may have formed only part of a focus of settlement and ritual activity in a triangular area bounded on two sides by the King Street and the Car Dyke. So while the Baston cemetery is situated in a different location from the Ancaster cemetery, the landscape context of both hint at their centrality in relation to earlier patterns of land-use, contemporary settlement and possibly also earlier monuments.

Hall Hill, West Keal

The next site to be discussed was discovered on Hall Hill in the parish of West Keal in 1954 during ploughing and through subsequent field-walking (Fig. 4). Yet again, this is another extensive cremation cemetery that is known through only limited investigation (Thompson 1956; Meaney 1964: 156; SMR
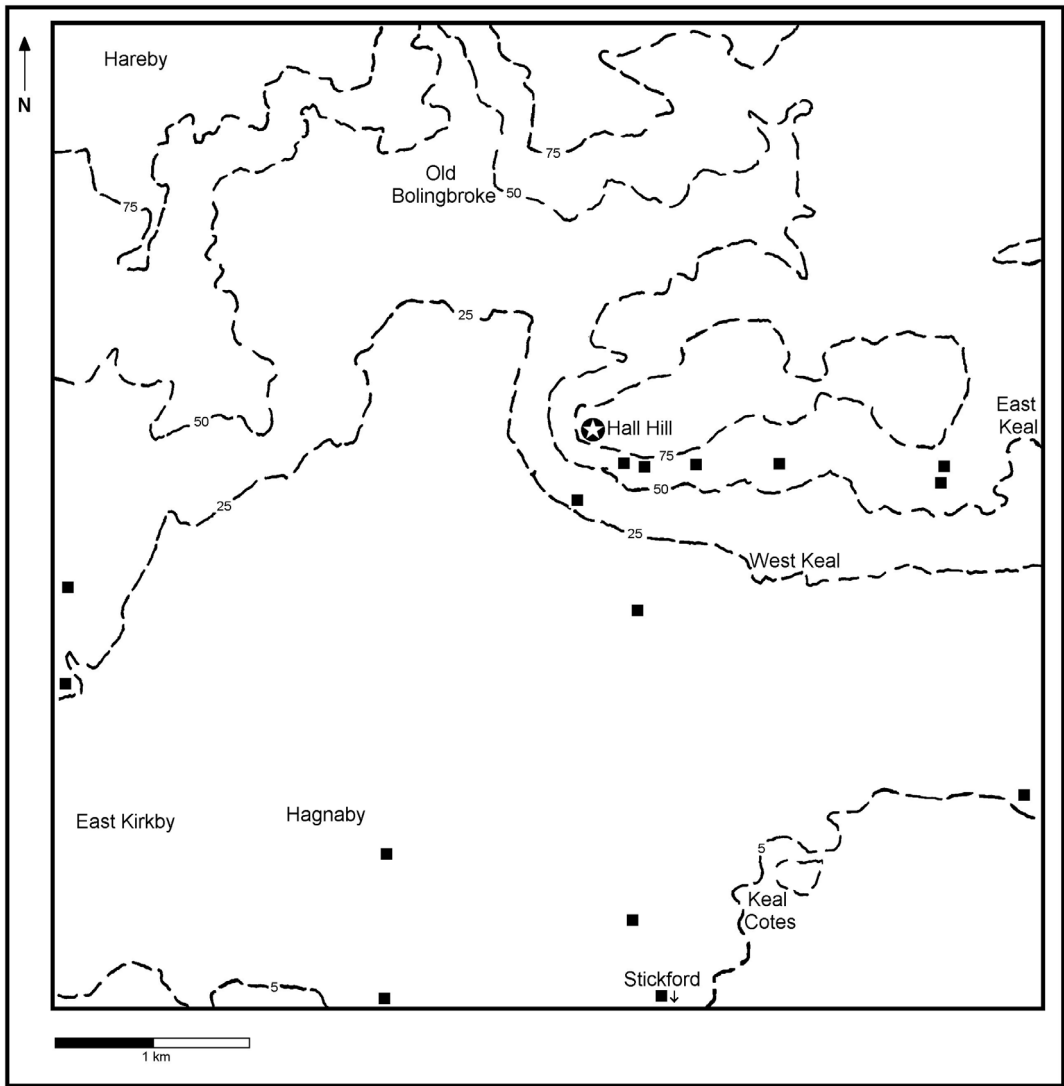
Fig. 4. Early Anglo-Saxon period activity in the environs of Hall Hill, West Keal, Lincolnshire. Star = cemetery; squares = possible settlement sites.

00308). Only a sketch plan survives of the 1950s excavations and since then no access has been gained to the site. However, from field-walking undertaken by Taylor, it is clearly a large cremation cemetery of a comparable size to other Lincolnshire sites. During the 1980s, the Fenland Survey Project walked many of the fields in West Keal and surrounding parishes. Although there are gaps in the distribution of sites, mainly to the north in areas not included in the field-walking by the Fenland survey, for much of the area surrounding Hall Hill we have good evidence for the distribution of settlement through prehistory, the Romano-British and early medieval periods.

Before discussing the archaeological evidence, the topography of the area is worth noting. In contrast to the Ancaster and Baston

cemeteries, the burial ground on Hall Hill makes use of a very distinctive landmark. The hill is a prominent spur on the southern edge of the Lincolnshire Wolds and visible over large areas of lower ground and the fen to the west, south and east. We have evidence for settlement on the uplands to the north-east of the cemetery and to the south along the fen edge from the Mesolithic through to the Iron Age. The south-facing side of the hill seems to have been a focus of attention in prehistory with flint artefacts from the Mesolithic through to the Early Bronze Age and Early Bronze Age pottery has been recovered in the parishes of West and East Keal (SMR 40950, 40958). There are prehistoric barrows in the surrounding landscape (SMR 40889, 42109, 40900, 40901, 40944) and the hill has also produced fragments of Beaker pottery which might be taken as a suggestion that Early Bronze Age barrows were situated on the hilltop. (SMR 40906;40959) This idea is supported by the discovery in 1915 of a Middle Bronze Age 'cinerary urn' (SMR 40899). Myres (1969) regarded the site as located in relation to the Roman small town of Horncastle some 11km to the north-west, but instead, the presence of a prominent hill adorned with ancient monuments might explain the attraction of the site as a burial ground.

The Fenland survey revealed evidence that fits into the broader picture of the extensive exploitation of the fen in the Romano-British period (Lane & Hayes 1993; Hall & Coles 1994:130 p.). To the south of the hill are a number of discrete settlements located between the 5 and 10 metre contours. There is also some evidence of Roman activity on the slopes of Hall Hill. Across the fen, the end of the Roman period seems to coincide with a reduction in the scale and number of settle-

ments, although, as with Baston, there remain debates about whether this reflects genuine changes in settlement patterns or a change in the archaeological visibility of settlement activity. What is clear is that a sizeable proportion of the Romano-British sites continue to be places of habitation in the fifth and sixth centuries AD. Lane & Hayes (1993) identify eight Saxon settlements around Hall Hill and further find-spots, half of which continue activity from existing Romano-British sites. These included the discoveries of early Saxon pottery on the southern slopes of Hall Hill (SMR 40956; 40962) and immediately below the hill to the south (SMR 40934; 40955; 40964). Further out into the fen more Saxon sherds were found associated with Romano-British sites south of Hall Hill near Hagnaby and Stickford (SMR 40764; 40894) to the west near East Kirkby (SMR 40890) and to the east around East Keal (SMR 41129; 41773; 41839; 42782). Further Romano-British sites may have continued as foci for settlement on a smaller scale that leave no clear archaeological traces. The largest identified Saxon settlement is at Stickford where over 200 sherds were collected from over 2.2 hectares. The site was located at a strategic point along the main route to and from the Fenland and is intervisible with Hall Hill (Hall & Coles 1994:127 p.).

By combining the distribution of Romano-British and early Anglo-Saxon settlements, we get the impression of a densely occupied landscape in the fifth and sixth centuries in which dispersed farmsteads and more focused settlements surrounded the Hall Hill cemetery on all sides. Many of these settlements could have used Hall Hill as one of their burial sites. Other archaeologically uninvestigated settlements may await discovery on the wolds to the north of the cemetery, but it is evident

that the hilltop cemetery was not only close to, but intervisible with, many separate early Anglo-Saxon settlement sites along the fen edge and below the hill to the south, west and east. Lane and Hayes (1993) noted that the relationship between these settlements and the large cremation cemetery may be significant. For the Stickford settlement, the Hall Hill cemetery would have been:

"in full and imposing view of the inhabitants... who may have relished being overlooked by their ancestors whilst going about their daily business". (Lane & Hayes 1993:59).

So to summarise, the Hall Hill cemetery seems to be located on a prominent hill with ancient earthworks upon it. The cremation cemetery was also intervisible with many separate contemporary settlements whose occupants may have used the hill as a focus for mortuary practices as well as for other ceremonies and assemblies.

Loveden Hill

The last site to be considered, Loveden Hill, was excavated extensively during the 1950s and 1970s producing over 1,800 burials and making it the second largest cremation cemetery investigated to date (Figs. 5 & 6). The results are almost completely unpublished (Wilson 1959; Fennell 1964, 1974, unpublished; Meaney 1964:158 p.; Webster 1973; Lincoln SMR 30289; see Williams forthcoming for a fuller discussion). Despite this, the site's location can reveal its role as a central place. The topographic situation is very similar to the Hall Hill, West Keal cemetery. As with Hall Hill cemetery, the burial site at Loveden Hill was situated on a prominent and distinctive hill and the evidence from excavations by K.R.Fennell and N.Kerr together with aerial photographs hint that

the cemetery could have focused upon prehistoric burial mounds and a natural knoll on the top of the hill. These features would have provided a ritual focus for the cemetery and a separate ritual space for gatherings and ceremonies (Williams 1997, forthcoming). Aerial photographs reveal undated ring ditches and enclosures in the area of the cemetery that may pertain to the early medieval activity on the site (Williams forthcoming). Furthermore, it may not be a coincidence that the hill gives its name to the late Anglo-Saxon wapentake while the nearby place-name of Spellar Wood may indicate the presence of another Anglo-Saxon assembly place in the vicinity (SMR 30284, 30288; Pantos 2002).

The cemetery would have been visible from a large tract of the Witham valley and from higher ground on the Lincolnshire Cliff to the east. What we may be seeing, as suggested with other sites, is the cremation cemetery being only one element of a much larger 'central place' acting as foci for a range of social, political and religious functions and gatherings. The prehistoric mounds may have been foci for ritual activities, or acted as mounds from which speeches to crowds were delivered, and the repeated use of the site for gatherings forged links between separate communities with the dead and the place.

As with Hall Hill, the area around Loveden cemetery provides evidence for a range of separate settlements served by the central burial place. Metal detector finds from the parish of Carlton Scoop to the east (NLM 2102), from the area west of the cemetery on either side of the river Witham in the parishes of Hougham (NLM 3480; 3481) and Foston (NLM 779; 782; 4814; Williams forthcoming), and south of the cemetery in the parish of Barkston (NLM 3873), indicate the presence of both settlements and cemeteries
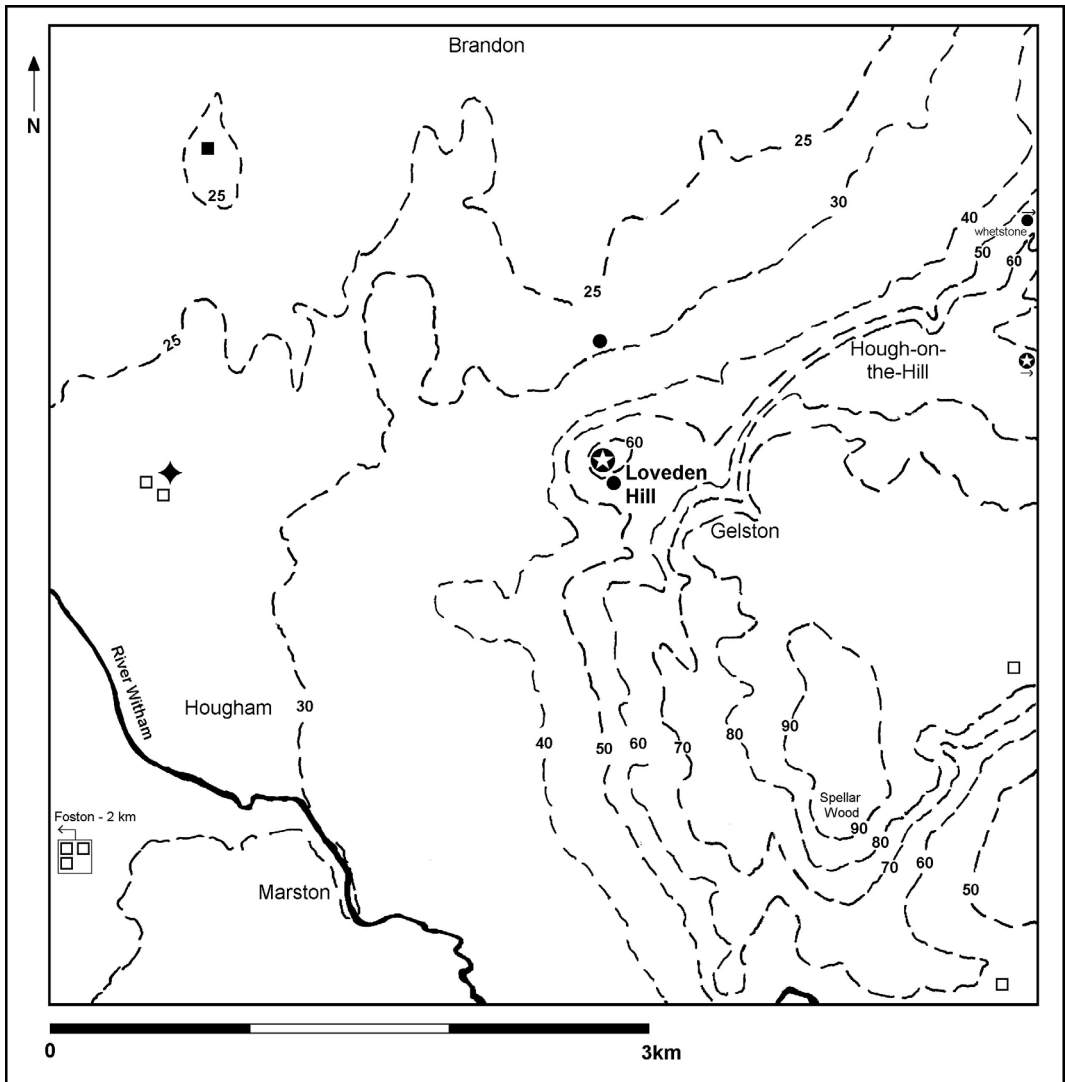
Fig. 5. Early Anglo-Saxon period activity in the environs of Loveden Hill, Hough-on-the-Hill, Lincolnshire. Stars = cemeteries; diamond = possible pyre site; filled squares = metalwork finds; open squares = metalwork finds - approximate location only; circles = pottery, cropmarks and other traces of settlement.

in the environs. Once again the nature of these sites remains unclear, but this evidence helps to support the view that the cemetery may have been a focus for burial by many different communities dwelling within these lowlands, as well as on the higher ground to the east around the modern villages of Hough-on-the-Hill and Gelston. As with Hall Hill, these settlements would be intervisible with the cremation cemetery located on this distinctive eminence. One of these finds is a small-long brooch showing signs of alteration by fire, perhaps having been through a cremation pyre (NLM 3455). If this is so, then we may have one of a series of pyre sites close to settlements and serving the burial site on the

Fig. 6. View of the prominent Loveden Hill from the low ground to the north-west where discoveries suggest the presence of early Anglo-Saxon settlements.

hill to the east as suggested above for Baston. An early Anglo-Saxon settlement was identified by field-walking immediately north of the hill by Nigel Kerr on the site of a Romano-British villa. The connection of this settlement and the cemetery is supported by the fact that at least one grave on the hilltop was covered by a slab of re-used Roman masonry, presumably originating from the nearby ruined Roman site (Fennell 1964; SMR 30285). Both the possible pyre site and this settlement contain explicit links to the cemetery and suggests a network of paths and routes linking these sites to the burial site on the hill. Further evidence that the area around Loveden Hill continued as an important focus into the seventh century is the discovery of whetstone or 'sceptre' from a field north-east of Hough-on-the-Hill village (Everson & Stocker 1999:182 pp.). A final point to be mentioned about Loveden Hill is that if these cremation cemeteries acted as central places, they were not the only burial sites available and used by local communities. Not far to the east of Loveden Hill in Normanton parish a

small inhumation cemetery of the sixth century has been excavated (SMR 35401).

Discussion

Having discussed the landscape context of four burial sites of the mid-fifth to early seventh century AD, it has been shown how we can begin to build up the local context of early Anglo-Saxon cremation cemeteries using a range of data from excavations, field walking surveys, aerial photography and metal-detector finds. Inevitably, the picture remains fragmentary but hopefully it will change as and when new research and discoveries take place. Despite the different topographic locations of the sites, this paper has attempted to show how they may have functioned as central places for ceremonies and rituals surrounding death.

While a discussion of four sites can hardly bring about final conclusions, let me at least summarise my argument based on the available data. The Migration Period in England was a time when central places of the kind found in Scandinavia are absent, and power

may have instead been invested in mobile elites rather than places (e.g. Charles-Edwards 1989; Scull 1992: 16). However, places clearly held a significance, and while these sites may be very different from 'central places' in Middle Saxon eastern England, we should not underestimate their importance for communities in eastern England during the Migration Period.

Cremation cemeteries required specific resources, technologies and modes of social interaction between communities during the funerary rites that differed with other, smaller, burial sites where inhumation was more common. The burial of cremated remains also defined a distinctive relationship to place where relationships between the living, the dead and social memories could become materialised (see Williams 2001b, forthcoming). Both the rite and the place in combination may have encouraged cemeteries to hold specific meanings and powerful associations for relations central to communities idealised views of themselves and their past and identities. Even if people only visited these sites on special occasions, rituals leading to the burial of cinerary remains from many different households and communities at the site could have encouraged the site to act as the physical and conceptual centre of the world for those living in the surrounding landscape. Elements of the topographical and archaeological evidence seem to support this argument, since cemeteries were frequently in prominent and 'strategic' locations where groups from many settlements could have come together for congregations and ceremonies. Relationships identified with routes, Roman and prehistoric remains and distinctive topographic features may have encouraged and enhanced the cemeteries' roles as places where communal memories and identities were realised and reproduced.

As argued above, central places in the first millennium AD were incredibly varied and we must open up the possibility that cemeteries could, in some instances, have had roles as central places, or as important parts of central place complexes (see also Reynolds 1999, this volume). Charlotte Fabech has recently noted that zones of transition can simultaneously act as places of both centrality and liminality in the first millennium of southern Scandinavia (Fabech 1999b:464). In a different way, this argument applies to the cemeteries in Migration Period England, because they were places where the living and the dead moved between states as well as being places situated in the environment to encourage their use by a range of communities and in relation to distinctive topographic or cultural features. In other words, while the farm has been regarded as a 'centre' in the pre-Christian cosmos and society, cemeteries may have had an equally prominent role (contra. Fabech 1999b:469; Hedeager 2001). Also by analogy with Scandinavian sites, we may not be looking at the cemetery as a site in isolation. We may consider the cemetery as only the most archaeologically visible element of a much more complex set of sites which collectively constitute a central place (see Brink 1999:424 pp., 433 pp.; Hedeager 2001). Also, through the nature of the cremation rites, they were linked to a range of settlements by routes of procession along which were other locations where rites took places during which the body was prepared and cremated prior to burial. Viewed with these factors in mind, cremation cemeteries can be interpreted as much more than simply points on a map, or collections of graves whose contents can be scrutinised by archaeologists. Instead, understanding the location of cremation cemeteries may be a key to appreciating the hidden

complexity of communities in eastern England in the centuries following the end of Roman rule, since cemeteries as places could have been central to the ways in which worldviews, identities and memories were built and maintained. Cemeteries can be seen as places where concepts of the person and community were performed, created and inscribed.

Acknowledgements

Note

[1] SMR references refer to those held by the SMR in Lincoln. The reference numbers of objects recorded by the Portable Antiquities Scheme refer to those held at the North Lincolnshire Museum (NLM) in Scunthorpe.

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