Developing a field archaeology of outdoor assembly in early Medieval England

John Baker

The University of Nottingham

Nottingham

Nottinghamshire

United Kingdom

and

Stuart Brookes

University College London

London

United Kingdom

Corresponding author:

Dr Stuart Brookes

Email: s.brookes@ucl.ac.uk

Mail: UCL Institute of Archaeology, 31–4 Gordon Square, London, WC1H 0PY, United Kingdom

ABSTRACT

The venues of outdoor assembly are an important class of archaeological site. Using the specific example of early Medieval (Anglo-Saxon) meeting-places in England we set out a new multidisciplinary methodology for identifying and characterizing such sites, and explore field approaches relevant to their study, focusing in particular on place-name studies, field survey, and phenomenological approaches such as viewshed, sound-mark and landscape character recording. We then outline how these sources of data can effectively be brought together, and some general conclusions are drawn about the characteristics of outdoor assembly places. The relevance of the observations made of Anglo-Saxon meeting-places to other ephemeral sites is also stated.

KEYWORDS

early Medieval England; assembly places; place-names; temporary sites; judicial governance; phenomenology

INTRODUCTION

Temporary popular gatherings in outdoor settings are common in societies past and present. Fairs, political rallies, festivals, sporting events, camps, theater, even battles, are frequent—and sometimes very significant—events, but may leave few physical traces for archaeologists to recover. In some cases, outdoor events have taken on such importance that the sites where they took place are now invested with special significance, and the need for heritage protection. The battlefields of Waterloo or Culloden, sites of mass protest such Greenham Common Women's Peace Camp or the Gdeim Izik protest camp, even the venues of music festivals such as Glastonbury or Woodstock are imbued with great cultural as well as historical import, and have been duly commemorated and memorialized (Fiorato 2007; Schofield 2000: 144–8). In other cases, even though similar cultural resonances persist, the site of the event has been lost or is only vaguely recorded; or indeed several alternative locations for the same place exist in popular memory.

In many instances—memorialized or lost—archaeological examination of what survives has never taken place. Myriad difficulties exist in finding and defining the material remains associated with the event. Identifying the venue may rely on folk memories or fragmentary descriptions; less frequently by deduction based on archaeological field survey. Whilst outdoor assembly encompasses a range of activities, its essential characteristic—the temporary gathering of people—may leave only ephemeral traces in the archaeological record. In many cases these are archaeological sites where recoverable materials, if they exist, are to be found in topsoil rather than in securely stratified contexts beneath. Even when sub-surface deposits exist they are typically very low-density horizons, and it is usually difficult to demonstrate stratigraphical equivalence between widely-spaced features.

It follows that field techniques analyzing horizontal relationships such as artifact spreads, landscape associations, or the topographical context of places may be the only way of assessing the essential character and

extent of these sites. Yet the intangible nature of these sites—transitory and rooted in communal experience—mitigates against straightforward assessment and recording of their physical qualities, and it might be doubted that such sites can even be systematically analyzed in a comparative way. In this paper we examine the specific example of early Medieval meeting-places in England to develop a new approach to the study of transient and ephemeral archaeological sites. We will outline the methods used in recording over 250 such sites in the field, and summarize some of the common features of these places. We will argue that this innovative multidisciplinary methodology has important implications for future work on open-air assembly places of all kinds in Britain and across early Medieval Europe and often previously known only from written sources, including judicial sites, fairs and temporary markets, battlefields and places of religious gatherings (e.g. Baker and Brookes 2013b; Williams forthcoming). It is our contention that key character-defining qualities of accessibility, distinctiveness, functionality, and location should be assessed as a means of analyzing all sites of this kind.

Open-air assembly sites in early Medieval England

In early Medieval northern Europe several forms of public assembly are known, including royal and regional courts which sometimes met outdoors (the Frankish *mallus* or English *witan*), and those of local administration which were held at regular intervals at open-air meeting-places, often referred to as "things" or "moots" in English historiography. The latter were a fundamental element of government and society amongst the various petty kingdoms comprising early Medieval (Anglo-Saxon) England. As they are recorded in contemporary sources, these groups were legally constituted of communities rather than territories (for example, the lawcode not of Kent but of the people of Kent), and their laws aimed primarily at mediating in-group conflict. The earliest legal code produced in England in the court of the Kentish King Æthelberht (*c.* AD 600) outlines an elaborate series of payments connected with the notion of *leodgeld* or *wergild*, a man's blood-price, through which kindred could be compensated by the initial

wrongdoer (and presumably his kindred) for injuries sustained as a result of robberies, brawls, or fights. Many disputes appear to have been settled without the intervention of officials; the role of kings was simply to administer justice when necessary and to uphold and clarify points of custom (Hudson 1996: 24–40). Significantly, the very first clause of Æthelberht's code also records that "the peace of a meeting [is to be paid for] with a two-fold compensation", emphasizing the centrality of public assembly. Implicit in this clause is a sense of spatially- and temporally-defined parameters within which a meeting could be formally declared to be in process, and it seems likely that such limits were from the outset tied to specific and preordained venues.

Many of these assembly sites can be identified by triangulating written, archaeological, and toponymic evidence. A crucial source in this regard is Domesday Book, the great survey of holdings and liabilities over much of England and parts of Wales completed in 1086 (Williams and Martin 1992). Amongst the categories of information recorded by the Domesday survey are geographical data on the estates, manors, and vills, and the administrative territories (hundreds and wapentakes) to which they belonged (**FIG. 1**). Within each hundred there was a meeting-place where during the Anglo-Saxon period the men of the hundred discussed local issues, and judicial trials were enacted, as described in the Laws of King Edgar (943–75; Loyn 1984: 131–47). Although the locations of hundredal gatherings are not explicitly stated in the Domesday survey, it is clear that many of the hundreds were named directly from the places at which they assembled.

Open-air assemblies were clearly of major importance to the functioning of early Medieval societies. They could fulfill either judiciary or legislative functions, were venues of local, regional, and national decision-making, and on occasion might be either quasi-democratic or autocratic in form. As significant elements in the administrative, legal, and military institutions of the Anglo-Saxon state, it seems certain that these open-air assemblies, and by extension the venues at which they took place, also served as important places in the

organization of the landscape. Yet significant questions remain about how they were chosen, how they were used, by whom, and for what purposes.

The project *Landscapes of Governance*, funded by The Leverhulme Trust, has begun to address these questions through the compilation of a gazetteer of over 800 places of documented public assembly in Anglo-Saxon England combining desk-based research with ground-truthing, as a way of beginning to address fundamental questions about the nature and development of legal and political frameworks in an early state. Over a three-year period from 2009–2012, fieldwork was carried out at over 250 sites of open-air assembly. Here we use a series of case studies from this fieldwork as a way of exploring, firstly, how early Medieval assembly places can be found; secondly, what field observations at these sites contribute to our understanding, and how this relates to evidence drawn from desk-based research; and thirdly, ways in which to characterize more generally places of open-air assembly. The relevance of this case-study to other cultural settings is offered in conclusion.

FINDING AND CHARACTERIZING EARLY MEDIEVAL ASSEMBLY PLACES

From the outset, it is worth emphasizing that places of early Medieval assembly cannot be identified by archaeology alone, and to understand such sites requires analysis of non-archaeological evidence as well. Indeed, whilst in many cases archaeology may refine our understanding of the location at which assemblies took place and furnish important evidence about the character and qualities of a site, it is often not the starting point for assembly place research at all. For legal or jurisdictional gatherings identification may be wholly dependent upon textual evidence. Such meetings appear regularly in written sources (legal and manorial documents, narrative texts, folklore) and in place-names, but the ephemeral nature of the human activity that took place means that there is little or no material evidence that intrinsically associates them with judicial practices. Their study, therefore, requires a carefully coordinated multidisciplinary approach.

Place-Names

Since the 1970s, English place-names have occupied an increasingly central position in multidisciplinary landscape studies. Margaret Gelling's hugely influential *Signposts to the Past* (1978) was instrumental in bringing the potential importance of place-name evidence to the attention of a wider community of archaeologists and landscape historians. Fundamentally, place-names are descriptive labels, used to define parts of a landscape in a way that is meaningful for others. The scale and frame of reference may vary, from the very local to the national, and between the social, political, and economic, but the need for accuracy within a given context remains unchanged. It is in the change from one-off (and variable) characterization to a more stable label for a specific location, that this descriptive information becomes fossilized, preserving for place-name scholars a precise nugget of data about an aspect of that site—its physical appearance, location, function, and so on. Detailed work on charter bounds, which list minor descriptive labels, some of which became place-names (e.g., Hooke 1981; Kitson 2008), and further ground-breaking publications on place-names (e.g., Gelling 1984; Gelling and Cole 2000), have emphasized the precision with which early Medieval people understood and described their surroundings. This insight allows us to use place-names as a means of understanding not just the physical characteristics of Medieval settlements, but contemporary perceptions of the landscape and functional relationships within it.

The naming of the hundreds and wapentakes in Domesday Book provides, in most cases, the earliest onomastic record we have for this category of place and therefore an important opportunity for linguistic analysis. It also has significant implications for our ability to identify their meeting-places on the ground. The naming of hundreds after their meeting-places was evidently not a formal requirement, since some hundreds were named from a defining characteristic of the district as a whole. Many others were called after a chief settlement; and there are almost certainly settlements named from the feature at which meetings took place, and from which their hundreds were also independently named. It can be difficult to distinguish instances of the latter from

instances of the former, and in all of these cases, separating the names of meeting-places from those of districts or settlements can be challenging. Moreover, the names of the hundreds do not themselves seem to have been entirely fossilized by the eleventh century. This much is clear from alternative names employed in Domesday and later Medieval surveys, and it is sometimes the latter rather than the former that provide the name of the meeting-place. This serves to highlight the complexity of the toponymic analysis required, but it is a very rewarding analysis, often leading to the identification—sometimes very precisely—of the locations where assemblies were held.

This is especially true when the name of the hundred contains specific locational information: description of a lake, barrow, standing stone, ford, or crossroads, for example. Such hundred-names are common and the features they describe sometimes positively identifiable. The barrow at which the freemen of *Brictwoldesberg* met is still visible at the place it has stood since the early Medieval period or before, while the distinctive landscape form anticipated in the hundred-name *Holeford* "hollow ford" or "ford in a hollow" has been convincingly associated with the hamlet of Ford (Gloucestershire; Anderson 1939a: 18; Pantos 2002: 299–300). Nevertheless, close scrutiny must be paid to late Medieval or modern records and antiquarian accounts. The stones that are believed to have marked the meeting-places of Tibblestone (Gloucestershire; **FIG. 2**) and Hurstingstone (Huntingdonshire) hundreds have probably been relocated, slightly in one case, substantially in the other (Pantos 2002: 310–11; Anderson 1934: 109; Meaney 1993: 80–1); and some debate surrounds the correct identification of *Langebrige* "the long bridge" which gives its name to a Domesday hundred in Gloucestershire (Rudder 1779: 551; Anderson 1939a: 12; Smith 1964c: 155, 162; Pantos 2002: 300; Draper 2011).

The correlation of Medieval hundred-names with modern place-names and, eventually, with specific positions in the landscape demands above all a rigorous historical linguistic approach. As Gelling (1978) pointed out in

her introduction to *Signposts to the Past*, the establishing of etymologies must be left to those with some philological training, but their work may be built on very effectively by those from other fields. Olof Anderson (1934–1939) set out the first, and until now the only, systematic national catalogue and etymological discussion of hundred- and wapentake-names, setting the subject on a sound linguistic footing, and helping to identify the meeting-places of many districts. Great strides have also been taken by the English Place-Name Society (EPNS), whose survey now covers all but seven of the traditional shires of England, in part or in whole. This vast archive of place-name data and interpretations provides an authoritative basis for the investigation of hundred-names.

Beyond the major names of hundreds and wapentakes, the value of detailed analysis of minor place-names has been demonstrated by a series of local and regional studies (Cox 1971–72; Meaney 1993; 1997; Pantos 2002). Modern EPNS county surveys provide detailed information on minor names and field-names, and these, alongside local maps and charters, can significantly aid the task of identifying hundred meeting-places. As well as surviving microtoponymic instances of the name of a hundred's meeting-place, which can allow fairly accurate identification, there exists a wide range of toponyms that seem to identify the hundredal centre or to denote in a more general way the assembling of people. These might include modern minor-names such as *Hundred House*, *Shire Hill*, or *Court Oak*, or place-names containing elements such as *(ge)mōt*, *þing*, *spell*, *mæþel* and so on, terms that refer to assembly, discussion, or speech-making (Smith 1956a: 110, 268–69; 1956b: 34, 44, 109–11, 136, 204). These elements may lie behind some modern names in Mot-, Mod-, or Mut- (e.g., Motborow, Modbury, both Dorset, Mutlow, various counties), Thing-, Ding-, or Ting- (e.g., Thingoe in Suffolk, Dinghill in Leicestershire, and Tingrith in Bedfordshire), although the modern forms alone are not conclusive evidence of such an etymology and should not be treated as such.

Moreover, although sites whose names contain elements such as *(ge)mōt* and *þing* are likely to have been the foci of gatherings, it is not a logical step to assume that they were the sites of hundredal moots (cf. Pantos 2002: 176–461; 2004a). As the corpus of place-names gathered by the EPNS grows, it becomes increasingly clear that the pre-modern landscape was venue to a wide range of meeting-places of different kinds, and belonging to different periods. While spiritual, commercial, military, judicial, leisure, and political get-togethers may sometimes have shared a common locus, it would be wrong to assume that all types of assembly coincided at all times.

Guthlaxton wapentake in Leicestershire provides a useful case study (Pantos 2002: 326–30). It is recorded as *Gutlacistan, Gutlagistan* in Domesday Book, and the name is preserved in Guthlaxton Bridge, Gap, and Meadows, recorded within *c.* 500m of each other in the First Edition Ordnance Survey map of Cosby parish of 1840–3. Minor place-names in Guthlaxton wapentake, however, document further early Medieval meeting-places. *Shericles Farm* in Peckleton parish is first recorded in 1553, and may derive from OE *scīr* ("an administrative division") and *āc* ("oak"). Given the frequent occurrence of tree-words in hundred-names (Anderson 1939b: 184–8), one possible assumption is that the oak in question was the focus of an administrative district. Meanwhile, the field-name *Spelthorn* in Oadby parish, recorded in a thirteenth-century charter, appears to derive from OE *spell* ("speech") and *þorn* ("thorn"). Again, this seems to commemorate an early meeting-place.

A place called *þing* or *(ge)mōt* within the district of a hundred need not, therefore, have served at all times, if ever, as administrative or judicial meeting-place of that hundred. In the absence of any other suitable site of assembly, the connection is natural; but it can only really be substantiated with corroborative evidence that meetings of the hundred took place there. It has sometimes been assumed, for example, that Mutlow (*(ge)mōt-hlāw* "meeting mound") on Fleam Dyke in Fulbourn (Cambridgeshire) served as the meeting-place of three

separate hundreds: Flendish, Staine, and Radfield. The suggestion has merit, given the meaning of the place-name and its location at the point where the boundaries of the three hundreds come together. Flendish hundred takes its name from the dyke on which Mutlow stands; Staine might be a reference to masonry remains associated with the Romano-Celtic temple that existed next to the mound; and Radfield "red open land" could be a district name rather than a reference to the meeting-place. However, detailed analysis of the microtoponymy of the area reveals a now lost *Radefeld* in the parish of Burrough Green, within Radfield hundred but at some distance from Mutlow (Meaney 1993, 83). *Radefeld* may, therefore, have been the location of the meeting-place, rather than the name of the district. The appropriateness of a sense "red open land" (OE *read-feld*) in this part of the hundred has been questioned, and an alternative "open land of the council" (OE *rǣd-feld*) has been proposed (Martin and Satchell 2008: 186). In that case, an alternative suggestion for the meeting-place of Staine hundred might be given greater weight (Meaney 1993: 83), and the need for Mutlow to have been the meeting-place of all three hundreds diminishes. It is quite likely that the people of all three hundreds did meet at Mutlow on occasion, but it does not follow that it was always, or ever, the hundred meeting-place of all three. The importance of making this distinction is clear, and has significant implications for our understanding of the complexity of Medieval administrative arrangements and the chronological evolution of the tradition of public assembly and the territories within which it took place.

With due care, the value of place-names is easy to demonstrate. The Domesday hundred-name of *Botlau* in Gloucestershire, for example, survives in Newent parish close to the border with Herefordshire, in the names *Botloe's Green, Botloe's Farm* and the fields of *Little* and *Great Botloe's Piece* (**FIG. 3**). Lying directly between these place-names is *Hundred Field*; a striking location giving good views particularly to the north. There is a network of footpaths, tracks, and roads converging on Botloe's Green, a triangular green at the head of Hundred Field, many of which are holloways including a well-worn route down the eastern side of the field. The second element in Botloe seems to be OE *hlāw* "mound", apparently in reference to a lost tumulus, or

perhaps to the distinctive mound-like form of Hundred Field. In cases such as this, the place-name evidence can be quite precise in pointing to a particular location as the early site of assembly.

Place-name evidence is important for much more than the simple identification of sites, providing also detailed and accurate descriptions of the landscape as it stood at the time of naming, which in most of the cases discussed here is the early Medieval period. They provide a means of characterizing assembly-sites by their environment and physical appearance, and by the types of activity that took place in their vicinity. Toponymy can be an important guide to local infrastructure and communications, sometimes evidencing use of a particular route during the Anglo-Saxon period, and giving an impression of the strategic appreciation of the landscape (Baker and Brookes 2013a; forthcoming a). They can also reflect the layout and function of a site, in broad terms, hinting at a focus for religious, commercial, or leisure activities, and in detail, by indicating, for example, the earlier presence of benches or platforms, pits or mounds, and so on, or the types of leisure activity that took place (e.g., Pantos 2004b; Baker forthcoming b). They also provide an important way into early Medieval perceptions of assembly and the ideological context of spaces set aside for public gatherings, including spiritual associations and perceived links with mythical or historical figures (e.g., Brink 2004: 213–5; Williams 2006: 207; Baker forthcoming a and b). An important caveat must be included here. Place-name evidence is seldom capable of providing precise and detailed chronological depth. The coining of a name can only be dated on linguistic grounds within a number of wide parameters. Thus a name coined in a given language can only have arisen during the period when that language was spoken in its locality; at a non-specific point earlier in time than its first attestation; at a period within a relative chronology based on comparatively datable linguistic (especially phonological and morphological) changes that are or are not evident in the place-name concerned. Beyond this, chronological depth can be asserted only on contextual grounds, using other forms of evidence; but this does not diminish the importance of place-names in identifying and characterizing assembly-sites or other periodically-occupied spaces in the landscape.

Historical and Folkloric Traditions

For this toponymic approach to succeed, legal, tenurial, or fiscal texts are often required. Domesday Book is the prime example of a survey that identifies the names of the hundreds (and often by implication their meeting-places), allowing identification through place-name research. Later Medieval documents may serve a similar role. Folklore and antiquarian surveys can also help to identify meeting-places. Eighteenth-century county surveys by the likes of Hutchins (1773–1774), Hasted (1788–1799), and Nichols (1795–1815), contain a range of evidence that helps identify meeting-places, often recording the location of courts, ancient trees, and other relevant details as they were in the early modern period, perhaps preserving older traditions.

A good example of the importance of folklore is provided by Combs Ditch hundred in Dorset (**FIG. 4**), which takes its name from the large earthwork of the same name. A crier continued to summon the hundred court at Combs Ditch near Goschen and at the nearby Bloxworth crossroads as late as 1905, even though district meetings were by that time held at Anderson manor (Hutchins 1773, I: 51; Guest 1851: 149; Dacombe 1935: 32). A footpath leading north from Anderson manor intersects with Combs Ditch close to the junction of the Goschen, Bloxworth, and Anderson parish boundaries, and where the earthwork is at its highest elevation. This may well have been the original site of the hundred moot, before it moved from open-air site to manor house. Similarly, the meeting-mound of Thynghowe (ON *þing-haugr* "assembly mound") in Birklands (Nottinghamshire)—not as far as we are aware a hundred or wapentake meeting-place, but an assembly site nonetheless—remained the focus of local communal traditions even after the earlier judicial importance of the site had been largely forgotten (Gover *et al* 1940: 92; Mallet *et al.* 2012). A perambulation of the manor of Warsop, made in July 1816 (MWP), describes how, at Thynghowe, "according to ancient custom Bread and Cheese and Ale brought from Warsop were given away to a number of Persons from Warsop who had Assembled there and also to a number of Boys who ran Races for it".

Hundred meeting-sites that are now public places of recreation—gallops or sports-fields for instance—may distantly echo this remembrance of communal process. Onomastic evidence places the meetings of Wetherley Hundred (Cambridgeshire) on the high ground of Orwell Hill, a site adjacent to May Pole Farm. This was the location of the Orwell maypole and therefore a focus of communal activity until the nineteenth century (Hughes and Hughes 1909: 244; Reaney 1943: 69, 77). The artificial mound where Pathlow hundred (Warwickshire) met is now lost, but a Gospel Oak, apparently used as a preaching post by early modern non-conformist ministers, stands very close to its probable location—a maintenance of the traditions of assembly at the site.

The archaeological signature of assembly

The transient nature of outdoor assemblies means that the places at which they occurred rarely feature in archaeological literature. Nevertheless, the characteristics of partially analogous sites have been profitably explored and two types of open-air gatherings have generated a substantial literature: temporary prehistoric camps and battlefields. Although in both cases scholarly discourse has focused on much narrower classes of site, it has resulted in hypotheses and methods relevant for the study of early Medieval assembly places.

One concern of Palaeolithic archaeology has particular relevance to the study of open-air assembly. Archaeological finds at Palaeolithic camps are generally fragmentary and spaced widely across a landscape. Demonstrating the contemporaneity of activities is therefore problematic, and some features may result from repeated activities, others a single isolated event (cf. Stern 1993: 215; McNabb 1998: 15–6). In order to address this problem, archaeologists have emphasized the need to adopt a landscape (or "off-site") approach, aiming to contextualize the nature of deposits from various sites across a locale (Stern 1993: 219; Potts *et al.* 1999, 786; Pope *et al.* 2009: 261). Following this method, research at Olduvai Gorge (Tanzania) has determined that

different types of activity took place across the basin, with the analysis of finds showing strong evidence for the frequent reuse of some locations (McNabb 1998). Similarly at the Olorgesailie basin in Kenya, such an approach has helped to define persistent patterns of activity associated with certain geographical settings (Potts *et al.* 1999). Further explanation of why these locations attracted persistent activity has focused on their microtopographical and vegetational characteristics, as elucidated through detailed environmental reconstruction (e.g., Kroll and Isaac I984: 27–8; Pope *et al.* 2009: 261).

This two-pronged approach (detailed analysis of the artifact assemblage and topographical reconstruction) has also been advocated by battlefield archaeologists. Following the pioneering lead of Scott and Fox *et al.* (1989; Fox and Scott 1991; Fox 1993) in their work since 1983 at the Little Bighorn, emphasis has been given to understanding the spatial clustering of features and finds across the locale, human agency being read (as with the Palaeolithic examples) from differences in the frequencies, variations, and proportions of artifacts within individual scatters (Fox and Scott 1991: 94). Thus, for example, a precise plot of specific cartridge-cases can be used to trace the positions and movements of individual weapons across the field of battle. Finds are also placed in their landscape context. Analysis by Glenn Foard of the English War of the Roses battlefield of Bosworth employed detailed environmental reconstruction to locate the site of the battle (Foard 2009). Ground and aerial survey as well as environmental sampling have enabled the reconstruction of the fourteenth-century pattern of land-use, providing for an interpretation of the site matching archaeological and contemporary accounts of the battle. Further work on plough-soil finds of projectiles and dress fittings has modified our understanding of the conduct of the battle, demonstrating the value of unstratified surface finds (Foard 2009).

Such finds can also be an important guide to identifying open-air assembly sites. The hundred court was a place where legal and administrative functions were carried out, but Anglo-Saxon law codes also emphasize its role in regulating trade, with large transactions expressly forbidden in II Æthelstan 12 unless done “in the witness of

the reeves at the "folk-moot"". As a consequence, hundred meeting-places frequently became sites of fairs and trading. Archaeologically, the signature for these activities might be reflected in patterns of casual coin loss, and in this regard there is potential overlap with a much-discussed class of site from the period 650–900 known as "productive sites" of concentrated coin and metal finds identified by metal detectorists (Pestell and Ulmschneider 2003; cf. also Arthur 2000: 427). The Portable Antiquities Scheme (http://finds.org.uk/) and Early Medieval Corpus of Coin Finds (http://www-cm.fitzmuseum.cam.ac.uk/emc/) are important resources for plotting the pattern of single coin finds, and in some cases concentrations of metalwork can be positively correlated with assembly sites. At Tan Hill in Wiltshire, for example, Medieval fairs were held at least by 1499. Andrew Reynolds (Pollock and Reynolds 2002: 254; cf. Chandler 1991: 98) argues that the alternative name *Charlborough* (1499; OE *ceorlabeorg* "hill or mound of the peasants") implies an even earlier association with groups of peasants, and may mark it as the early meeting-place for the Domesday hundred of Studfold (cf. Swanborough hundred, Wiltshire, from OE *swānabeorg* "hill or mound of the herdsmen/peasants"; Gover, Mawer, and Stenton 1939:320). The Portable Antiquities Scheme records a number of finds near Tan Hill, including a fragment of a penny of Edward I or Edward II, two Jetton, and other items of metalwork. Another example has recently been suggested by Thomas Green (2012: 140–7) at Lissingleys in Lincolnshire. Extensive metal detecting of the site has recovered a range of finds from the late Roman and early Medieval periods, which, combined with historical, toponymic, and cartographical analysis, argues for it having once been an important administrative centre. Likewise, the "productive site" of Hollingbourne in Kent, can be correlated with the meeting-place both of the hundred of Eyhorne and a putative early district known as the lathe of Hollingbourne (Brookes 2007a: 164–171).

Certain excavated sites existing in the corpus provide tantalizing clues for places that may have functioned as similar temporary (or seasonal) markets. Excavations at a site 2 km west of Eton Wick, at Dorney

(Buckinghamshire), have revealed evidence for significant middle Anglo-Saxon activity (Foreman, Hiller, and Petts 2002). Across the three sites 123 features of eighth-century date were recorded, a large number of which were pits of varying sizes backfilled with cess, animal, and plant remains, in addition to a range of small finds including exotic imports, alongside more limited evidence for craft and agricultural production. The formal arrangement of the features, the character of the material culture, and the scarcity of occupation structures, suggested to the excavators that this was the site of a temporary open-air trading place, operating for a brief period in the mid-eighth century. Although there is no hundredal meeting-place known to be associated with this site, the evidence hints at the kind of open-air gathering place that might occasionally have served as one.

Certainly, the Dorney site finds a number of close (but chronologically diverse) analogues, such as Iron Age "specialized" cooking pit fields in Norway (Gustafson, Heibreen, and Martens 2005; Skre 2007: 385–406), and grain-rich pits found in various Late Bronze Age and Iron Age hillforts across Europe. Archaeobotanical analyses of the latter (e.g., Jones 1984; van der Veen and Jones 2006; Kreuz and Schäfer 2008; McClatchie 2009), suggest the large cereal volumes in these assemblages as well as the weed diversity or grain/weed/chaff ratio represent the labors of different communities harvesting in a variety of environments. These sites appear to have acted as centralized locations for the bringing together of crops, some consumed in feasting when communities were assembled, others perhaps stored for later use and redistribution. Palaeoenvironmental analyses of these kinds may provide archaeological signatures for the temporary coming together of people for marketing, consumption, and hoarding.

Although archaeological evidence of open-air gatherings exists, other forms of evidence are generally required to distinguish it from different archaeological phenomena. An example of such retrogressive analysis is demonstrated by Reynolds' discussion of the early Anglo-Saxon cemetery of Saltwood, near Folkestone in Kent (Booth *et al.* 2011). Excavation in advance of the Channel Tunnel Rail Link revealed 219 burials of late fifth- to

seventh-century date buried across four plots, three of them focused on a Bronze Age barrow, either side of an Iron Age trackway (**FIG. 5**). Some four centuries later the site emerges as the meeting-place of the local Domesday hundred, Heane (Heane Wood Barn still stands less than 250 m to the south-west), consisting of the Medieval parishes of Saltwood and Postling. Crucially, a number of pits to the western and eastern ends of the excavated area, and stray-finds from the topsoil attest to sporadic non-funerary occupation of the site through the middle and late Anglo-Saxon periods after burial at the cemeteries had ceased. Very probably, therefore, these findings track the transition from early cemetery space (used by at least four communities) to judicial site, a role it held until at least 1279.

DEVELOPING A FIELD ARCHAEOLOGY OF ASSEMBLY SITES

Recent work on the landscape qualities of battlefields demonstrates the potential value of a rigorous phenomenological approach to open-air assembly sites. John and Patricia Carman's work on the battlefields of Europe, which identifies their shared characteristics such as "boundedness" in the landscape, location on low or high ground, and intervisibility with settlement, has made possible a comparative analysis of the topography of battle, and an assessment of the extent to which battlefield topographies are a reflection of changing methods of war (2001; 2005a; 2005b). Certainly, all of the foregoing studies have emphasized that the archaeological signature of temporary activities must be contextualized according to space and place. Full area survey and remote sensing, palaeoenvironmental reconstruction and off-site sampling are important techniques in establishing the ecological character of the locale, but these need to be coupled with an appreciation of more subjective qualities. Considering how people "read" and understood these places is an essential component of any account of the material remains. Thus in their discussion of the sites of FxJj5o at Koobi Fora and FLK *Zinjanthropus* at Olduvai Gorge, Kroll and Isaac (1984: 27–8) conclude that the material remains "would all fit perfectly well into the shade areas afforded by trees growing in comparable situations in modern East Africa. In addition to providing shade, the trees may also have provided the hominids with a refuge from on-the-ground

difficulties". Similarly, in Carman and Carman's (2005b) comparative analysis of the battlefields of Ancient Greece, they assert that "the high visibility from urban centers suggests too that battle was also seen as a form of "display" and that to be seen to fight was as important as the fighting itself". Implicitly, archaeologists working in both these areas have tried to explain why these places rather than others were significant and became the focus of temporary activities.

In the study of temporary gatherings archaeologists explicitly consider past human agency. Especially when places can be linked to recorded events, scholars must rethink the goals and choices which guided people to these outcomes. To engage fully in such a project, consideration needs to be given to the cultural and historical structures which constrained past action (cf. Giddens 1986; Brumfiel 2000), and this "process of observation require[s]… time and a feeling for the place" (Tilley 1994: 75). Glimpses of the former can occasionally be gained from written sources, or explored through the use of ethnographic analogy, but all interpretation relies on the concept of the "fusion of horizons"; a dialectic between past and present (Gadamer 1997: 302; Shanks and Tilley 1987: 103–15). Understanding the latter—the material world of social encounter—moreover requires not only an appreciation of the artificial spaces of archaeological monuments, but also the locales in which they are sited (Tilley 1994; Bradley 2000).

Patterns in the practical experience of open-air assembly may be partially identified through the epiphenomenon of our own encounter with these places. The *Landscapes of Governance* project team visited over 250 sites of early Medieval assembly, and recorded their experiential qualities. These include the lines-of-sight with other monuments and features; viewsheds from and to meeting-places; patterns of access and movement; the form of architectural spaces; acoustic conditions. Combined with more traditional methods such as detailed survey and GIS-aided analyses, this corpus of observations can be compared with phenomenological studies of, for example, prehistoric monuments (e.g., Tilley 1996; Bradley 2002; Hamilton *et al.* 2006), early Medieval burial

sites (Williams 2006), or high-Medieval churches (Graves 2000). Such approaches can aid the positive identification of sites, their extents, and features.

Many of these observations are subjective, dependent as they are on individual experience. It is not surprising, therefore, that previous attempts aimed at uncovering past perceptions have not escaped criticism (e.g., Jones 1998; Fleming 1999). Whilst acknowledging the problems, we take from these debates two important requirements: critical examination of historical contingency (cf. Barrett and Ko 2009); and adherence to a rigorous and explicit methodology (cf. Hamilton *et al.* 2006). We are fortunate in our study of the Middle Ages to be able to draw on a range of additional sources that allow us to reflect on Medieval perceptions of the world (e.g., also Altenberg 2003; Franklin 2006; Pluskowski 2006; see above). Regarding the second requirement, our recording can be given a measure of objectivity by the framework of a proforma, which provides a regulated overarching structure to the assessment of a site, whilst incorporating opportunities for comments on aspects that are unexpected or do not conform to established patterns.

The Landscapes of Governance *proforma*

It will be clear that detailed study of early Medieval assembly sites demands a fully interdisciplinary approach, and it is necessary, therefore, to establish a framework within which different disciplines can operate effectively, and by which their various outputs can be harnessed collectively. It is not a question of using one discipline to assess, let alone prove or disprove the findings of another, for each discipline is independent in approach, scholarly apparatus, scope, and stated aims, and each deals with different aspects of the same historical fields. In the present context, for example, place-names provide one of the best methods of identifying the location of meetings; but archaeology and fieldwork are more likely to link identifiable activities with specific points in the landscape. Place-names can provide a picture of a site's functions, while archaeology can more closely define the physical expression of these functions. It is unhelpful, then, to subject their results to a

comparative judgment. The *Landscapes of Governance* approach emphasizes the strengths of each discipline within its own parameters, and seeks to use its findings in a complementary rather than a contrastive fashion. Key to this approach is the establishment of a coherent means of recording and storing data from disparate sources: in the field by means of a proforma, and within a database that facilitates advanced analysis.

The proforma developed by the *Landscapes of Governance* team is divided into four sheets (accessible at http://www.ucl.ac.uk/archaeology/research/projects/assembly/downloads/Proforma.pdf). The first allows a desk-based compilation of relevant data of the types outlined above, as well as background information on the location. This information allows for rigorous source criticism of written and place-name evidence on a site-by-site basis. The second sheet lists a number of field-based observations. An impression of the scale of the landscape panorama and the presence of topographic features visible from a locale is recorded by drawing "circular views", a method adapted from the Tavoliere-Garagano Prehistory Project (Hamilton *et al*. 2006). This is supplemented by circular photo montages taken from the site, on which key features are later annotated. Given that an underlying function of public assembly sites is communication, we aim to record some of the audio qualities of sites, for example soundmarks of audibility measured by the distances at which the sound of a bell, individual words, or whole sentences can be distinguished by observers spaced around a central location (**FIG. 6**). The site's range of physical attributes—proximity to route-ways and water sources, presence/absence of distinguishing topographical features and ancient monuments, types of resources in a site catchment—are listed. Some of these observations are encoded on a third sheet, which consists of a series of multiple choice descriptive terms, providing a structured visual and experiential assessment of the site today. Modified from the Landscape Character Assessment forms used by the UK Countryside Agency (2002), these descriptive terms list factors likely to influence the character of the landscape from topography to texture. The final page is a continuation sheet, to include information for which there is insufficient space in the first two sheets, or that is not covered by any of the earlier sections. It is an attempt to make the proforma as non-proscriptive as

possible—while the third sheet helps to introduce a level of uniformity of description that will permit comparative analysis, the final sheet ensures that observers are not limited in their perceptual evaluations.

The data collected as a result of desk-based research and field observation is entered into a searchable electronic database, allowing comparative analysis of sites as GIS-enabled, spatially referenced data. Incorporating additional geographically cross-referencing datasets from historical, archaeological, and cartographic sources, including geology and soils, English Heritage National Mapping Project, and LiDAR data (**FIG. 7**), users can explore, query, and analyze these data and, crucially, investigate the relationships between them. Parametric and non-parametric statistical analyses of these relationships has illuminated the patterning of sites relative to ancient route-ways (Brookes 2007b), viewsheds and lines-of-sight (Brookes 2012), administrative boundaries and other monuments (Baker *et al*. forthcoming). These complementary methodologies—rigorous toponymic and textual source criticism; phenomenological recording; and GIS analysis—although useful in their own right, when taken together provide a suite of approaches which help us to identify significant patterning in the evidence, and this is especially important for evaluating the characteristics of assembly sites, in terms of location, function, and form.

Characterizing Early Medieval Assembly Places

Analysis of the corpus of open-air assembly places has emphasized some generalizable qualities. These can be summarized in turn under the following headings: accessibility, distinctiveness, functionality/practicality, and territorial centrality/liminality.

Accessibility

Perhaps the single most important feature of an assembly site is its accessibility. In most cases, the function of such sites would demand proximity to major through-roads and local routes between central places and smaller

estates, and it is no surprise that access from the main routes of communication appears to have been one of the principal criteria underlying the location of meeting-places. In some cases, the central position of a meeting-place within the surrounding infrastructure can be demonstrated. The meeting-place of the hundred of Swanborough in Wiltshire—thought to be the *Swanabeorh* of a charter of A.D. 987 (Sawyer 1968: no. 865)—is a low earthwork close to the junction of several route-ways mentioned in a number of separate tenth-century documents (Semple and Langlands 2001: 240–1). Similarly, the stone marking the meeting-place of Kinwardstone hundred in eastern Wiltshire, stood at the crossroads of the major north-south and east-west route-ways through the hundred (Langlands forthcoming). Audrey Meaney's (1997) study of meeting-places in the Cambridgeshire region suggested that the assemblies of Odsey, Thriplow, Whittlesford, and Lackford hundreds were all located beside the "prehistoric" trackway known as the Icknield Way; whilst similar work by Aliki Pantos (2002) on the Anglo-Saxon meeting-places of central England found many associations with Roman roads, port-ways, and "prehistoric" tracks. If assembly sites are to be categorized in any way, then their relationship with the landscape of communications is perhaps the easiest framework within which to do so.

A first group consists of hundred meeting-places located directly on major route-ways and, more specifically, at significant points on them. Most obviously, this means at the meeting of two or more tracks or a track and a stream (fords routinely feature in the names of hundreds and their probable meeting-places), but a marked change in the direction or incline of a path seems also sometimes to have served this purpose. The suggested meeting-place of Northstow Hundred (Cambridgeshire) is at a local apex on the Roman Road from Cambridge to Godmanchester (Margary 1973: Route 24), while Normancross hundred (Huntingdonshire) seems to have met in the vicinity of a major bend of Ermine Street, at the top of a relatively steep ascent (Margary 1973: 205–6).

Other assembly sites seem to overlook or dominate route-ways, situated on ridges close to, but not directly on long-distance tracks. At Pathlow in Warwickshire, the now lost mound overlooked an important early route between Henley-in-Arden and Stratford-upon-Avon (both Warwickshire), although its name (from OE *pæð-hlāw* "path mound") suggests that a spur-road already linked it with the main route-way in the eleventh century. The probable meeting-place of *Fernecumbe* Hundred is located on higher ground approximately 500m to the south of the Roman road from Alcester to Stratford-upon-Avon (Pantos 2002: 445).

A third sub-category is formed by upland sites such as Wittantree (OE "tree of the wise men, councillors") in Gloucestershire, possibly the meeting-place of *Biseleie* hundred. Such sites were certainly not inaccessible, but are located at some distance from the principal lines of long-distance communication. Wittantree lies 300m north of the Calfway, part of an early route referred to as the "great road" in the thirteenth century, and 600 m north-east of a Medieval holloway between Painwick and Cirencester (Pantos 2002: 280). Their upland location probably places them within expanses of communal grazing land which must have bordered on, or been accessible from those arterial route-ways, perhaps by means of minor but long-established tracks. Such sites may not be superficially obvious elements of a transport system, but in pastoralist terms they are vectorial spaces.

For some assembly sites *inaccessibility* might have been a criterion, providing the level of secrecy appropriate to sacred or ceremonial activities, or emphasizing the importance of the site by imposing an awkward and time-consuming approach on those seeking access to it; a naturally enforced staged procession. One class of meeting-places that appears to demonstrate such topographical syntax, illustrating concepts of spatial "depth" (cf. Hillier and Hanson 1988), are "hanging promontory" sites such as Moot Hill Piece (Dorset) and Botloe (Gloucestershire; Baker and Brookes 2013b). These meeting-places utilize highly distinctive topography to create spaces of ever-reduced accessibility (**FIG. 8**). Taking the form of domed hillocks of up to 100 m

diameter they are located on spurs of land protruding below a crest of higher ground. The high ground is often the location of a junction of several parish boundaries, and the site is always marked by at least one well-worn holloway descending further downslope beside the promontory. Access to the domed platform is gained by ascending the holloway and then negotiating the spur linking hillside and promontory. Parallels may be drawn between these and Scottish assembly sites, such as Law Ting Holm, the Tingwall lawthing in Shetland, where the most important business of the assembly took place on a small lake-island linked by a narrow isthmus to the shoreline, accessible only to the most important of the assembled (Coolen and Mehler 2011: 9–11).

Distinctiveness

A second approach to conceptualizing assembly sites is by the natural or monumental dominance of their situation or physical characteristics. Early Medieval meeting-places were often distant from the main areas of settlement, but at recognizable points in the landscape. Place-names emphasize their connection with naturally distinctive topography, trees, or vegetation; or in other cases human-made monuments like mounds or crosses. Some of these features may have had a functional utility for the proceedings carried out (see below), but in most cases they appear to be signposts to specific locations in the landscape.

A number of hundreds met in upland locations affording commanding views over their surrounding districts. The possible meeting-places of *Biseleie* and *Langetreu* hundreds in Gloucestershire (Pantos 2002: 279–81: 302–3) and Street in Kent (Anderson 1939b: 137) display such a characteristic. A small number of sites, however, possess such dominating views over the surrounding landscape, that this must have been a consideration in the choice of location. Spelsbury, next to Kiftsgate Court, one of the most impressive examples of a “hanging promontory”, possesses commanding views over large tracts of the Gloucestershire landscape. Mutlow, in Fulbourn, also holds a very prominent topographical position. In each case they may have been hundred meeting-places (Meaney 1993; Pantos 2002: 287–88, 315), but closer scrutiny suggests that they were

alternatively (or simultaneously) meeting-places for wider districts, their administrative importance perhaps reinforced by the impressive landscape location.

In some instances, the location of a hundred moot was not directly on an impressive landscape feature, but in very close proximity to one, the feature in question providing a marker for people traveling to the site and a backdrop to the meetings. For example, the meeting-place of Heane hundred in Kent is located close to the foot of a distinctive local eminence known as Summerhouse Hill (**FIG. 9**). Strikingly similar in profile is the Picked Hill beside the meeting-place of Swanborough hundred. In both cases these dominating landmarks are associated with a large number of ancient route-ways, datable at least to the Iron Age, which link chalk upland with areas of richer agricultural soils. The distinctive combinations of route-ways, meeting-places, and dominating landmarks identify these as liminal places, lying at the precise point between two contrasting areas of economic activity (agricultural and pastoral), and the communities which inhabited these landscapes. For the seasonal flow of pastoral transhumance, these places were fixed points of transition from one landscape—defined by economy, settlement, and culture—to another.

Natural monumentality may be mirrored or enhanced by the creation or re-use of imposing man-made markers. Hundredal gatherings seem to have taken place in Iron Age hill-forts at Badbury Rings and Eggardon in Dorset, while artificial mounds were a focal feature at Brightwells Barrow (Gloucestershire) and Pimperne Longbarrow (Dorset). Less imposing today are the remains of stones, crosses, and wooden posts used as markers for meeting-places, but their occasionally-surviving material may represent only a small segment of a once much more substantial and impressive feature. The presence of carved stone sculpture may provide indications of an early Medieval high cross, market cross, or boundary stone. For example, a cross-arm fragment of ninth- or tenth- century date, recovered during demolition of an old residence known as Styles' House, close to the crossing of the River Piddle, in Puddletown Dorset, may be associated with the meeting-place of *Pydelan*,

mentioned in a tenth century source (Sawyer 1968: no. 830). Many charter boundaries mention "crosses" and "stones", and fieldwork can occasionally identify these as markers around which open-air gatherings might have congregated. Several hundred-names contain the OE element *stapol*—e.g., Staploe (Cambridgeshire), Staple (Wiltshire); Thurstaple (Essex, Kent); Barnstaple (Devon)—which may refer to posts which functioned as cultic foci (Blair forthcoming). In this context, Sarah Semple (2011: 755) has drawn attention to a seventh-century letter by bishop Aldhelm which mentions the worship of crude pillars of the "foul snake and stag", presumably carved zoomorphic or anthropomorphic totem-poles. Archaeological evidence for such posts has been much discussed (Semple 2010; 2011; Blair 1995: 19–20; Meaney 1985: 15–17) and includes three standing posts from the seventh-century high-status site of Yeavering; perhaps significantly also the location of a famous assembly in A.D. 627 (Bede *HE*, II: 14; Hope-Taylor 1977: 78–85). Swineshead and Manshead place-names, two of which are also hundred-names, may be relevant here, although their interpretation as "pagan" place-names is disputed (Bradley 1910; Meaney 1995: 29–31; Ekwall 1960: 229; Gelling 1962: 16–8).

Distinctiveness is sometimes only partially tangible. Early Medieval meeting-places sometimes attract a range of other folkloric associations which may relate to their original functions. Ancient trees are often regarded as central places in local tradition, and indeed many Domesday hundreds are named after trees (Anderson 1934: xxxvi). The reasons for this association may be pragmatic—trees might be easily recognizable topographical markers particularly in relatively featureless landscapes; or symbolic—"world trees" feature in many Scandinavian and Germanic societies as the places in which the spirits of the dead reside (Ellis Davidson 1964: 87–8), whilst "holy trees" are common also in early Christian folk-cults (Blair 2005: 380–2, 477). An example of the long durée of folkloric memory is provided by Braunton hundred in Devon. The hundred is named from a royal manor of Braunton, first recorded in a doubtful charter of 854 (Sawyer 1968: no. 303), but the name gives no further clues as to the location of the meeting-place. Until 1935, an ancient oak known as the "Cross Tree" stood at the crossroads in the centre of the village. This tree is recorded as the site of open-air gatherings and

public pronouncements through the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, perhaps a reflection of much older traditions.

Folkloric memory might also be reflected in (and perhaps sometimes created by) the naming-patterns of hundreds, including direct or indirect reference to supernatural beings and deities (e.g., *Þunor* in Thunderlow (Essex), *Wōden* in Wenslow (Bedfordshire)). Individuals commemorated in the names of meeting-places sometimes perhaps had heroic or mythical resonance, just as the Cwichelm of Scutchamer Knob (earlier *Cwicelmeshlæwe* A.D. 990–2) may have been a reference to the early West Saxon king of the same name (Gelling 1973–1976: 481–2; Williams 2006: 207; Baker forthcoming a)—a significant marker within the local psychological landscape.

Functionality/Practicality

A third analytical framework is provided by the practical functionality of assembly sites—the degree to which they were user-friendly. As arenas of discussion and decisions, assembly sites would have required a range of natural or artificial zones and structures in which separate groups could confer, or from which important announcements could be made. Moreover, strong demands would have been placed on the catering capacities of places of this kind. An eleventh-century account of the proceedings of a shire court assembly held in 1075 or 1076 on Penenden Heath near Maidstone provides an insight into the length of time such gatherings could last; in this case, several days (Douglas and Greenway 1953: 481–3). Given that all freemen were expected to attend hundredal moots, and accepting that they must sometimes have required an extensive entourage of support staff and helpers, the practicalities of accommodating, feeding, and watering large numbers of people and beasts are clear.

Topography

Only a dozen or so English assembly sites have been investigated through detailed archaeological survey and excavation, but these have demonstrated the importance of mounds of prehistoric and Medieval date. Excavations in 1977–1978 at a site now behind the public library in Milton Keynes city centre have provided good evidence for a "moot mound" (Adkins and Petchey 1984). In Domesday Book the area of Milton Keynes belonged to the Buckinghamshire hundred of Secklow—the meeting-place of which was known to 18th-century antiquaries as the tumulus of Selly Hill. Excavation revealed a flattened mound of around 25 m diameter, encircled by a ditch about 1 m across. The mound probably once stood at least 2 m high, but there was no evidence of it ever having been used to mark a grave. The Secklow evidence suggests that some meeting mounds were artificially created, perhaps in the tenth or eleventh centuries, when West Saxon kings probably implemented a range of administrative reforms; and the creation of such a platform perhaps facilitated the delivery of pronouncements.

Practical concerns are also detectable in the topography of assembly sites. The many upland meeting-places are likely to have existed within wide expanses of open pasture, capable of accommodating large crowds of people. Woodland locations might be included here too—hundred-names in *lēah*, *denn*, or *grāf*, for instance. Meetings that took place within zones of pastoral activity may have been preferred, in order to avoid damage to crops. The location of some meeting-places at the gates of major settlements or of ecclesiastical and other high-status compounds (e.g., Westgate, Canterbury, Kent), must have had important symbolism, but may also have involved a practical decision to keep potentially unruly crowds without, rather than within (Baker and Brookes forthcoming b).

Defining space as suitable for large gatherings is not simply a matter of assessing its size relative to the population it must periodically contain. It is a complex balance of multiple considerations, of which areal sufficiency is only one element. In choosing a site at which speech-making is anticipated, acoustics are likely to

be a factor, and it is plausible that natural amphitheaters were occasionally selected for this specific reason. Aristotle claims that "an urban space of assembly should be only as large as a shouting human voice can make itself heard in" (Sennett 1990: 135). Places that are naturally enclosed and form a bowl-shaped arena, or wider areas in which shallow depressions provide smaller, sheltered venues for closed discussion (Pantos 2004b: 161), may have appealed to those seeking to create assembly sites, and can be recognized by site visits. Hutchins (1773–1774 II: 714, 763; cf. Anderson 1939a: 111–12) reports that the meetings of Uggescombe hundred in Dorset took place at some pits. At the probable site of these gatherings, a well-defined depression, perhaps the remains of an early quarry, is still identifiable within the south-west corner of Benecke Wood, and actual discussion may well have taken place there. Similarly, until the 18th century, meetings of Bingham hundred in Nottinghamshire took place in a bowl-shaped depression beside the Foss Way, known as Moothouse Pit (Anderson 1934: 42; Pantos 2004b: 161, 163).

A water supply would also have been of utmost importance, especially if travelling delegates required beasts of burden for their own transport and to carry any necessary paraphernalia. The many references to features associated with water—fords, bridges, water-meadows—may bear witness to this requirement; five hundred-names in OE *mere* "lake, pool", and 21 referring to running water—OE *burna*, *brōc*, *ēa*, and *welle*—are also relevant. If considerable numbers of beasts were present (for transport or to be slaughtered for feasting), stock enclosures might have been required, and a remarkable number of hundred-names make reference to such features (Baker forthcoming b).

Cemeteries, Shrines, and Temples

Apart from judicial and governmental activities it is likely that these places also served as symbolic and ritual assemblies. This is demonstrated by the coincidence of many documented meeting-places with "pagan" burial sites of the fifth to eighth centuries (e.g., Saltwood above; Brookes forthcoming). A similar continuity of

symbolic functions might also explain the close association of some hundred meeting-places and sites suggested on archaeological and toponymic grounds to be Roman temples or former pagan shrines. Place-names including the elements *wēoh*, *wīg* "idol, shrine"—including Wye hundred, Kent—and *hearg* "heathen temple" may indicate such continuities. The relationship with ancestral beings (supernatural or real) is also invoked by some hundred names and local tradition (e.g., Thunderlow and Wenslow above), whilst Easwrithe meeting-place in Sussex may mean "thicket of the gods". Topographical features thought to resemble giant heads of men (Manshead, meeting-place of Selkley hundred in Wiltshire) may similarly reflect mythological associations with giants under the earth; an association which may also find expression in local traditions linking meeting-places with giant lithic furniture (Crockern Tor, Devonshire).

The nature of these symbolic associations remains conjectural. Indeed, sites of local folk-belief are likely to have taken on new associations across long periods of use. The re-use of ancient monuments for assembly places might be interpreted as a dialogue with the past, conferring legitimacy and authority to proceedings or oath-taking rituals. The erection of new visible monuments on ancient sacred sites, by contrast, might chart the re-incorporation or re-alignment of the landscape within civil society. Certainly, regular meetings for judicial and administrative purposes could give rise to other types of communal activity such as marketing and sports. Fairs are documented on the site of early Medieval meeting-places, such as Hinckford (Essex); while the hundred-name Gainfield (Berkshire) is probably from OE *gamena-feld* "open land of games" (Anderson 1939a: 211–2; Gelling 1973–1976:, 385, 386). Military mustering—whether for campaigning or to review the completeness and order of troops under arms—appears also to have taken place at hundred and shire moots, and there is a good correlation also between places of assembly and recorded battlefields (Baker and Brookes 2013a).

Territorial centrality/liminality

Domesday Book tells us that much of England was already subdivided into administrative districts by 1086. These administrative territories can be reconstructed from evidence in Domesday Book, supplemented with estate records and parish boundaries, to create a map of the administrative subdivisions of England at the time of William I (Thorn 1992). Locational analyses of assembly sites demonstrate that meeting-places may lie centrally, and/or close to the boundary of the hundred, shire, parish, or estate. Gelling (1978: 210) argued that a hundred meeting-place was typically located in "a sort of “no-man’s-land”, as far away as possible from the settlements of the community it served and on the boundary between two or more estates", and indeed certain types of meeting-place closely correlate with district boundaries. For instance, in the example of Guthlaxton wapentake presented above both *Spelthorn* and a possible moot mound at Shackerstone, are located on the boundaries between neighboring wapentakes. One reason may have been to ensure the neutrality of places whose core function was one of mediation; these locations were perhaps considered common to all parties but particular to none (cf. Pantos 2002: 129–34).

In the context of this recurrent spatial arrangement, it is worth noting that very few hundred-names make reference to boundary location. Marden in Kent, which might derive from OE *(ge)mǣre* “boundary” and *denn* “woodland pasture”, has alternative possible explanations for the first element (OE *miere, mere* “mare”, *mere* “pool”, personal name **Mǣre*) and is in any case a post-Domesday hundred (Wallenberg 1934: 314; Anderson 1939: 125; Ekwall 1960; 314; Watts 2004: 397). *Mersete* Hundred in Shropshire, on the other hand, is a group-name (OE *(ge)mǣre-sǣte*) meaning “the border-dwellers”, presumably in reference to its location on the Anglo-Welsh frontier rather than location of assembly on a boundary (Anderson 1934: 155). This has two important implications. First, it probably indicates that the parish boundaries, so often spatially proximate to meeting-places, are in most cases administrative rationalizations post-dating the establishment of the assembly sites themselves. Anglo-Saxon charter boundary clauses demonstrate that some fixed, linear estate boundaries

did exist by the eleventh century, but much land must still have been divided in terms of limits of exploitation rather than territory. Secondly, and perhaps more significantly, the locations themselves, though neutral, were not perceived primarily as peripheral—they were places on the edge, but nevertheless focal, and were not described as borderlands.

Different scales of such liminal neutrality are recognizable in the data. The boundaries of kingdoms and shires were sometimes the locations of large political assemblies, such as military musters, major church councils, and meetings of royalty and nobles. The site of a meeting between King Cnut, King Edmund, and the *witan* in 1016 appears to have taken place on an island called *Olanige* in the middle of the River Severn on the boundary of Worcestershire and Gloucestershire, which was only accessible by fishing boat (1016 *ASC* DEF; Harris 1992). Meeting-places at the boundaries of lesser units within the limits of hundreds lay neither in one local estate nor the next, but in a place deemed to be neutral. For example, the likely location of Wetherley hundred meeting-place (Cambridgeshire) is close to the odd junction of Orwell, Little Eversden, Harlton, and Barrington parishes. The importance of communal land may be reflected in the post-Domesday hundred-name of Manhood in Sussex, earlier *Manwuða* (1170), *Mannewude* (1230), "common wood" (OE *(ge)mǣne* and *wudu*; Anderson 1939b: 74–5).

This liminal quality of some meeting places, existing at the interfaces between territories, has similarly been suggested to underpin the location on medieval fairs (Arthur 2000: 420) and this is hinted at also by a class of hundred names which appear to refer to commercial activities (Baker forthcoming b). Significantly, hundred-names that make direct or presumptive reference to animals, perhaps suggesting a role in facilitating the exchange of selected commodities such as livestock (e.g. *stōd* (OE) "a stud, a herd of horses"; *stōd-fald* (OE) "horse-enclosure": Stodden (Bedfordshire); Stotfold (Buckinghamshire); Stotfold (Northamptonshire); Studfold

(Wiltshire)), or those mentioning commercial activities directly (e.g. port (OE) "(market) town": Langport (Kent); Stotfold in Lamport (Buckinghamshire)), are all located on shire boundaries.

Retrogressive analyses of the form and size of administrative territories in conjunction with the study of meeting-places themselves hint at further patterns. The form and regularity of hundredal geography in Northamptonshire and Surrey, for example, suggests a deliberate policy to rationalize the layout of hundreds, perhaps during the tenth and eleventh centuries, whilst in the Weald some hundreds were yet to be defined at the time of Domesday Book. Huntingdonshire displays strikingly systematic subdivision into four equal parts with meeting-places of similar type (**FIG. 10**). Whether this arrangement is the product of Mercian, Viking, or West Saxon authority remains to be determined; it seems to reflect episodes of top-down imposition of state-level administration. (Baker and Brookes forthcoming c).

In parts of England, on the other hand, the hundredal geography can be closely related with older administrative units, suggestive of a more long-term evolution. In these areas the administrative organization of the eleventh century may have been superimposed onto earlier groupings. Oliver Padel's detailed analysis of Cornwall (2010), for example, suggests that the Domesday hundred of Stratton was a district known in the ninth century as *Trico[r]shire*—the "shire of the threefold tribe"—comprising the three divisions of Trigg, Lesnewth, and Stratton, an arrangement perhaps dating back to pre-Roman times. In Kent, by contrast, Brookes (2011) argues that groupings of hundreds, known in the tenth century as "lathes" may have originated as three internal subdivisions of the kingdom of east Kent, by comparing their administrative boundaries with the pattern of Anglo-Saxon burial of the period *ca.* A.D. 450–700.

Territorial formations of this kind were accompanied by developments in legal and administrative institutions (Fukuyama 2011; Brookes and Reynolds 2011). Open-air assemblies are one manifestation of this development; sites of judicial practice another, for which archaeological evidence from early Medieval England (including

execution burials and gallows) has recently been collated (Reynolds 2009a). Reynolds argues that the earliest manifestations of such practices can be correlated with the spatial limits of major political entities of the later seventh and early eighth centuries (2009b). Locations of capital punishment are closely associated with those of legal assembly: often separate from meeting-places, but at highly visible locations within their viewsheds, at the edges of hundred territories. The message of these arrangements is not difficult to untangle: lawmaking, legal procedure, and execution were fundamental components of the lived experiences of early Medieval people.

CONCLUSIONS

Despite the difficulties the study of outdoor assembly presents to archaeology, its venues are of major importance to understanding past societies. The common occurrence of significant events at places of open-air assembly is not incidental. Sociologists, political philosophers, historians, and anthropologists have emphasized the importance that public gatherings have played in the shaping of civil society and political order. Outdoor gatherings of political intent are the archetype for the "public realm" and broader notions of political discourse (e.g. Habermas 1989). Public assemblies are free, open, and accessible to all members of society (at least in principle) and provide places in which notions of civility and cultural community can be fostered. For Arendt (1958: 198–9) the formal development of the public realm and government emerged from the gathering together of people. "The political realm," she suggests, "rises directly out of acting together." The corollary of such a development is a notion of public space: the Greek *polis*, the Medieval City, Enlightenment urban planning all encompassed places where human action could be realized (Sennett 1990: 135). Public space enabled participatory democracy and in the story of western political development the creation and use of these places was of pivotal importance (Neal 2010: 4–10).

Open-air assembly is just one important manifestation of the "public realm". To Thomas Jefferson, breathing freely was a metaphor for public freedom (1955: 26–72), and this link between outdoor public space and an open society is a recurrent theme of socio-political theories since the Enlightenment (Sennett 1992). Ethnographical and historical sources are replete with examples of outdoor gatherings lying at the heart of the political community. Many tribal societies had elaborate systems of dispute settlement (van der Dennen 1998; Fukuyama 2011, 255), sometimes even formalized places of assembly where feuds could be settled and the business of the tribe enacted, such as the *kgolta* of the Tswana (Schapera 1994: 80–3) or the *bora* grounds which "anchored" ceremonies of the Australian aborigine Dreaming (Mulvaney 1979: 211–5; Flood 1983: 274). Studies of contemporary public spaces have emphasized how these sites also become facilitators of civil order as locales of power and resistance, theater and performance (e.g., Orum and Neal 2010; Low 2000). Thus, ceremonial gatherings of the Australian aborigines enable participants to interact with the Dreamtime through dance, music, and costume, whilst open spaces such as the National Mall in Washington or Trafalgar Square in London have become sites of major political resistance and activism.

The occasional and temporary nature of judicial assembly in Anglo-Saxon England dictates that its physical presence was ephemeral and its material signature faint and hard to identify. We have sought to demonstrate that its impression on the landscape, on the contrary, is deep and long-lived, and can be detected using a multidisciplinary approach. Memory of the location of meeting-places and of the types of communal activity they hosted can survive in macro- and microtoponymy, and in historical and folkloric tradition for centuries after the original purpose of the site has been forgotten. The landscape signature of sites of this kind is not simply physical, but vocal too. Communal memory, preserved in the spoken and written landscape, can be used alongside traditional topographical and archaeological observations in a successful methodological approach, creating an effective archaeology for places of periodic occupation.

Careful calibration of the different landscape disciplines can provide a detailed picture of this category of public space. The combination of evidence from a range of disciplines is vital to a detailed and nuanced appreciation of this type of site. Each discipline has the capacity to reveal important information about an element of the historic landscape, and to enhance, and be enhanced, by the evidence from other disciplines, strengthening interpretations. What this approach emphasizes is the importance of maintaining a careful balance. On the one hand, a multidisciplinary method must preserve the independence of each approach it encompasses, whilst on the other hand synthesizing the resulting analyses in a sympathetic and rigorous fashion. We believe that the methodology set out here is capable of harnessing the strengths of several disciplines, with a shared historical interest but contrasting source material, without reducing the status of any of them.

Assembly sites were selected with a specific function in mind, and within established pseudo-historical and ideological parameters; this may have led to a considerable degree of uniformity in the criteria by which a locality was judged appropriate for assembly. Practical and ceremonial needs—visibility and communality; ease of access and identification; acoustic and topographical compatibility—may all have dictated choice of location, and have helped to create a distinct typology of assembly sites. Some of the characteristics of meeting-places, for example their accessibility or recognizability, may not have served any function in the operation of the public meeting itself, yet may still have given their name to the administrative territory. In other cases, the landscape setting strongly suggests that different activities associated with the meeting took place in discrete places around a named locale.

This approach has a number of wider implications. It forms the basis of a methodology by which relatively intangible aspects of the human past, such as political, spiritual, and socio-cultural processes, may be studied, not just by their historical record, which is sometimes silent, but through their impact on the landscape and on the perception of landscape in local linguistic and folkloric tradition. It is worth noting, to take one example, the

potential to build on existing approaches to the study of pilgrimage, adding to our understanding not just of sites of veneration, but the wider ritual and logistical landscape in which the processes associated with them took place, materially distinctive, interdependent on networks of communication, and so closely tied to socio-cultural dynamics as they are (Coleman and Elsner 1994:77–8; Silverman 1994:13; Stopford 1994:59–61, 63–68; Webb 2000:215–32; 2002:121–4, 154–81; Petersen *et al.* 2012:213). Pilgrimage is apt to give rise to the kinds of folkloric and toponymic commemorations that have been highlighted in the present discussion, especially in view of the importance of local pilgrimage and the local impact of international pilgrimage (Hammond and Bobo 1994:19; Whale 2000:215; 2002:130–1). The methods described here have also transferred to a new Leverhulme Trust South Oxfordshire project which aims to investigate medieval perceptions of the lived environment (Mileson 2013)

These methods have a wide range of applications within the confines of Anglo-Saxon studies, and much more broadly in the study of poorly documented, proto- or prehistoric cultures. As a function of the character of English toponymy, the present study has focused on Anglo-Saxon and Anglo-Scandinavian examples; but even in England, some place-names contain pre-English references to assembly. Liss in Hampshire, for example, which is a pre-English place-name containing British **lisso-* "main place in a district, a court" (Smith 1956b: 25; Coates 1989: 109), may show that traces of early administrative organization can survive significant political and cultural change. Folk memory, place-names, adaptation to landscape, and material products may be elements of any human culture at any period, and the methodology set out here, therefore, has a very wide range of potential applications: it is transferable across cultures, across time, and across fields of study.

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AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

John Baker received his PhD from the University of Birmingham in 2002. He is Senior Research Fellow at the Institute for Name-Studies, University of Nottingham, with interests in landscape history, and in particular the role of place-names within multidisciplinary research approaches.

Stuart Brookes received his PhD from the UCL Institute of Archaeology in 2003. He is Honorary Senior Lecturer at the UCL Institute of Archaeology and Research Associate in the Oxford University Faculty of History, and specialises in comparative landscape studies and the archaeologies of state formation.

ABBREVIATIONS

Bede *HE* The Venerable Bede, *Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum*

MWP *Manor of Warsop Perambulation Verdict Dated 26th July 1816*. Stuart Reddish and Lynda Mallett Private Collection.

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FIGURE CAPTIONS

Figure 1. Map of England showing the arrangement of Domesday hundreds and wapentakes, and the location of their meeting-places as recorded in 1086.

Figure 2. Photo of the Tibblestone, Gloucestershire.

Figure 3. The probable location of the open-air assembly site of the hundred of Botloe in Gloucestershire is a field called “Hundred Field”. The field is noticeably domed as can be seen from the photograph. First Edition OS map

Figure 4. The probable assembly place of the hundred of Combs Ditch, Dorset, as reconstructed from folklore and cartographic sources.

Figure 5. Saltwood: A model of landscape continuity. Excavations as part of the High Speed 1, Channel Tunnel Rail Link have demonstrated the existence of a fossilized landscape: trackways – still used when this First Edition Ordnance Survey map was drawn in 1840–3 – have been revealed through archaeology to date to the Iron Age; while four groups of Anglo-Saxon burials cluster on Bronze Age and early medieval barrows. These in turn became the site of a medieval open-air assembly place, remembered as ‘Heane Wood’, a fragment of which remains to the south-west of the excavation.

Figure 6. An example of soundmark recording carried out at Cuxham, South Oxfordshire, showing the levels of audibility of the tolling church bell of Holy Rood, Cuxham. Interestingly, there is a good correlation between

the audible soundshed and the parish boundary. Basemap data: © Crown Copyright/database right 2013. An Ordnance Survey/EDINA supplied service.

Figure 7. Analysis of cartographic and remote sensing data can also help to identify the location of assembly sites. For example, LiDAR survey of Savernake Forest in Wiltshire has revealed the existence of several relict route-ways (Lennon 2012). One of these is named in a ninth-century charter as "Cuðheard's path" (Sawyer 1968, Cat No. 756), and in eighteenth-century documents as Hare Path (probably from OE *here-pæð* "army path"; Lennon 2012: 109–10) . The junction of this track and a Roman road, also visible in the remote sensing data, is marked by an ancient oak, perhaps the location of the Kinweardstone which gives the hundred its name. Image courtesy of the Forestry Commission (FC), based on FC and Unit for Landscape Modelling data.

Figure 8. The "Hanging promontory" assembly place of Moot Hill Piece adjacent to the shire boundary of Dorset and Somerset, and (below) photograph of the extensive views south from the meeting-place over northern Dorset. The site is named in a tithe map of 1837. Of great significance is the location of this putative supra-regional meeting-place just 1km southeast of Penselwood in Somerset, named as the location of a battlefield in 1016, and Coombe Street (Somerset), which lies 1km to the northeast. Coombe Street is one of the possible locations of *Ecgbryhtesstan* – "Egbert's Stone" – the place mentioned in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* at which King Alfred mustered the armies of Somerset, Wiltshire, and Hampshire west of Southampton Water, prior to the Battle of Edington in 878.

Figure 9. Recognizing meeting-places: several meeting-places are located in close proximity to distinctive natural hills, such as the Anglo-Saxon cemetery of Saltwood, meeting-place of Heane hundred, beside Summerhouse Hill, Kent (above), and Picked Hill, Wiltshire (bottom) beside the meeting-place of Swanborough hundred.

Figure 10. The Domesday geography of Huntingdonshire shows a remarkably uniform pattern of hundreds arranged around the burh of Huntingdon. Each hundred in turn met at a distinctive stone or cross, in three cases commemorated in the name of the hundred: Toseland met at the Moot Stone, now incorporated in the wall of Toseland church; Leightonstone is “the stone of Leighton” (still located outside the church of Leighton Bromswold); Hurstingstone is “stone of the people of the wooded slope” or rather “stone of the people of (Old) Hurst” (now on display in St Ives); and Normancross is “cross of the Norseman”.