

## Introduction

### 1.1. Relevance and Objectives

This study advances scholarship of Anglo-Saxon non-elite rural settlements through a focus on material culture. Anglo-Saxon studies have predominantly focused on cemetery evidence, high-order secular and ecclesiastical settlements, trading sites such as *emporia*, and towns and this research contributes to redressing the balance. It furthers Anglo-Saxon settlement research through the comparative study of rural sites and the examination of material culture as evidence for the consumption, economic and social activities which shaped these communities, building upon the relatively few notable works serving the subject (i.e. Reynolds 2003; Loveluck 2001, 2013; Hamerow 2012; Wright 2015; Blair 2018).

The focus of Early Anglo-Saxon research in England has traditionally been dominated by the study of cemeteries and grave goods (Geake 1997, 2–3; Williams 2007, 1–3; Bayliss *et al* 2013; Hines 2013, 13–6). This imbalanced research approach has been at the expense of other fields including rural settlements and their associated material culture and has proved particularly detrimental to investigations of any long-term Anglo-Saxon material or social processes, such as settlement evolution (Lucy & Reynolds 2002; Wright 2015, 25–6).

The political, economic and social complexities of the Middle Anglo-Saxon period have also commonly been the focus of research, overshadowing some other areas of enquiry such as rural settlements (Wright 2015, 1–2). As a result, little is available in the way of comprehensive surveys and comparative discussions of Anglo-Saxon rural settlements, with the reviews of Andrew Reynolds, Christopher Loveluck and Helena Hamerow amongst the most significant works on the subject (Reynolds 1999, 2003; Loveluck 2001, 2013; Hamerow 2012).

The development of some low-status settlements, notably nucleated villages, as well as contemporary phenomena such as common fields, has been more commonly addressed in Middle and, particularly, Late Anglo-Saxon research (i.e. Williamson 2003; Rippon 2008). However, the comparative investigation of a range of non-elite rural settlements and associated material culture remains an area requiring further investigation which is addressed by this study. Late Anglo-Saxon studies have also traditionally concentrated on topics including the Viking incursions and the foundation of the Danelaw (i.e. Hadley & Richards 2000; Hadley 2006); the growth of *burhs* and burghal settlements (i.e. Haslam 2009; Hall 2011; Baker *et al* 2013); and the re-introduction of urbanism in England, with the rebirth of towns such as London, York

and Lincoln (i.e. Vince 1990, 1991; Hall *et al* 2004; ten Harkel 2013).

This work is a comparative study which examines material culture assemblages and site data from 45 rural settlements, geographically broadly representative of Anglo-Saxon settlement in England and with varied occupation dates spanning the Anglo-Saxon period (c. 5<sup>th</sup>–11<sup>th</sup> centuries) (Fig. 1.1; Appendix 1). Anglo-Saxon rural settlement and material culture data is increasingly available for study, primarily due to a marked rise in the number of excavations taking place across England, particularly in the last 30 years or so with the growth of commercial archaeology and the publication or online dissemination of such investigations.

The study analyses material culture forms, types, uses, provenance and distribution in order to: assess site artefact distributional patterns and depositional practices; produce a catalogue of material culture from rural settlements; determine the range of consumption activities taking place at rural settlements; and assess the economic reach of rural settlements as evidenced by material culture (Section 1.2).

The findings from these principal objectives are further examined in four case studies which focus on: material culture and chronology; the material culture signatures of the settlements; material culture as evidence for social status and settlement hierarchy; and a microscale settlement analysis contextualising the main aspects of the research.

Overall, the study produces a comprehensive resource which furthers knowledge of Anglo-Saxon non-elite rural settlements and associated material culture on a national scale, through the cross-comparative analyses of the settlement data and artefactual evidence from 45 Anglo-Saxon rural sites.

### 1.2. Research Questions

The study focuses on four principal research questions, raised from the literature review discussion (Chapter 2.3) and examined using the methodological approaches placed upon the study (Chapter 3), which were devised as objectives to achieve the work's aim of furthering knowledge of non-elite rural settlements and their material culture:

1. What distributional patterns of material culture are evident at Anglo-Saxon rural settlements?
2. What is the range and character of material culture at Anglo-Saxon rural settlements?

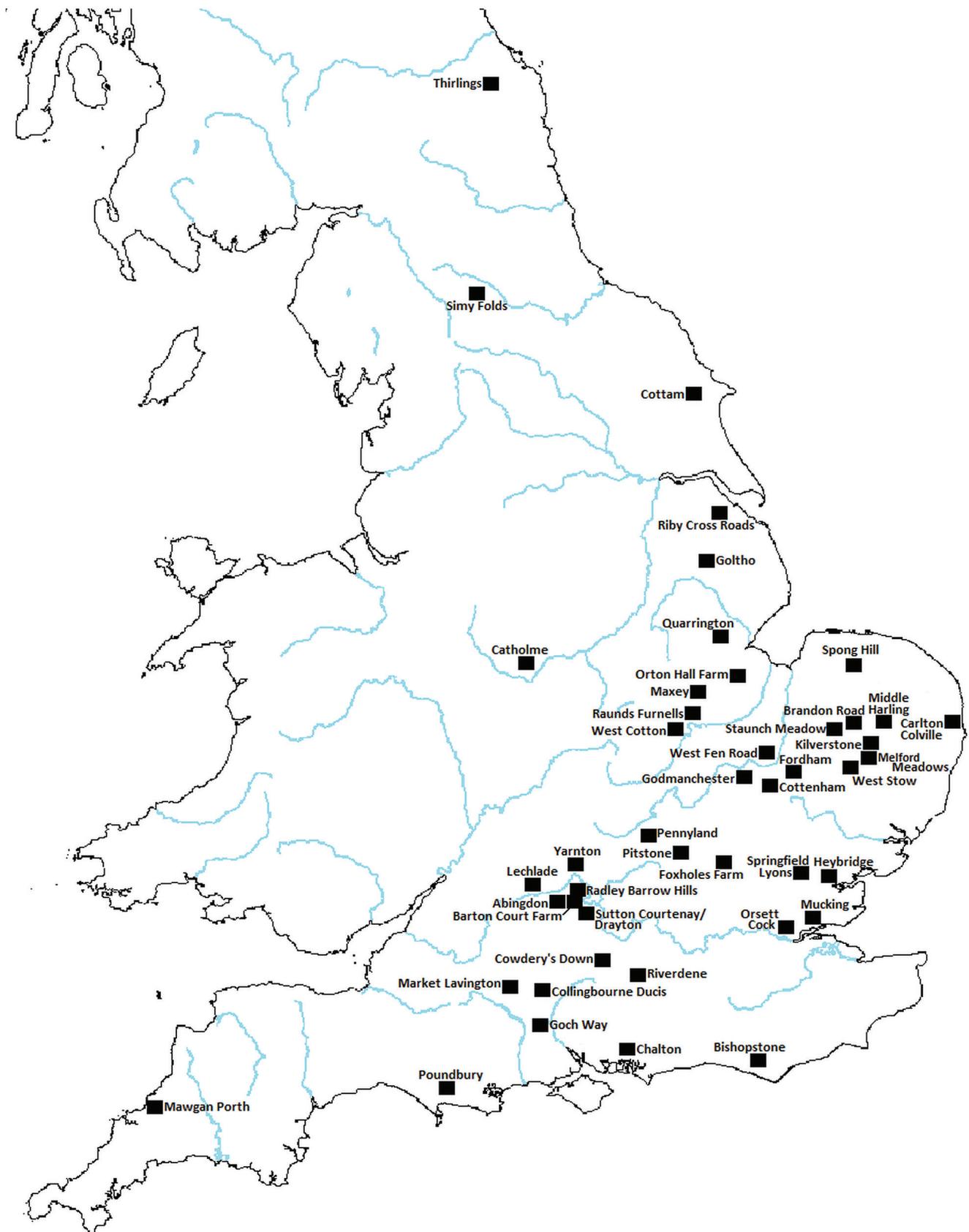


Figure 1.1. Distribution map: the settlements of study.

3. How was material culture utilised at Anglo-Saxon rural settlements?
4. What can material culture reveal about the economic reach of Anglo-Saxon rural settlements?

*1. What distributional patterns of material culture are evident at Anglo-Saxon rural settlements?*

Presented in Section 4.2, the research question was addressed through documenting the archaeological retrieval contexts of material culture from the settlements—stratified, unstratified, residual and metal detected—in order to assess the distributional patterns and artefact deposition trends of artefacts at the sites (Sections 3.2.4, 3.3.2, 4.2). The presence and/or absence of material culture in stratified and non-stratified contexts was compiled from the archaeological context information provided in the pro formas (Appendices 1, 2.1). Stratified features, buildings and structures producing material culture, for example ‘ditch’ or ‘PBS’, were categorised in tables by type in order to analyse depositional patterns and activities taking place at the settlements (Section 4.2; Appendices 2.2–2.10).

*2. What is the range and character of material culture at Anglo-Saxon rural settlements?*

Presented in Section 4.3, the research question was addressed through the classification of material culture in terms of form and character, determined from the artefactual information documented in the site pro formas (Sections 3.2.5, 4.3; Appendix 1). The material culture evidence was collated in tables by artefact form and grouped by artefact use (Appendix 3). From this data, a catalogue of material culture from the rural settlements was compiled, producing an informed research tool (Section 4.3). The catalogue comprises stratified, unstratified (including residual) and metal detected material culture of Anglo-Saxon date. Wherever possible or pertinent, artefacts were examined in terms of:

- total or approximate quantities
- site chronology
- site distribution
- types and forms.

*3. How was material culture utilised at Anglo-Saxon rural settlements?*

Presented in Chapter 5, the research question was addressed through identifying consumption activities undertaken at the settlements as evidenced by material culture (Sections 3.2.6–3.2.7; Chapter 5). Artefactual data recorded in the site pro formas (Appendix 1) and the catalogue of material culture (Section 4.2; Appendix 3) was interpreted from behavioural and cultural perspectives to identify and classify the use/s of material culture. Stratified, unstratified (including residual) and metal detected objects of Anglo-Saxon date were assessed as well as several exceptional prehistoric and Roman items. The artefactual information was compiled in tables categorised by consumption activity

for analysis (Appendix 5). Material culture evidence for consumption was considered in terms of:

- artefact use/s and function/s
- site chronology
- site distribution
- commonness of occurrence.

*4. What can material culture reveal about the economic reach of Anglo-Saxon rural settlements?*

Presented in Chapter 6, the research question was addressed through examining the origin and distribution of material culture as evidence for the potential economic reach (local, regional, supraregional, imported) of the rural settlements (Section 3.2.8; Chapter 6). Coins of Anglo-Saxon date (*sceattas*, *stycas* and pennies) and scale weights were further considered as indicators of various exchange, commodity and/or commercial transactions. Distance parameters were determined to define material culture of local and supra-/regional provenance at the settlements (Sections 3.2.9, 6.2). Stratified, unstratified (including residual) and metal detected objects of Anglo-Saxon date were considered. The artefactual information documented in the site pro formas (Appendix 1), the catalogue of material culture (Section 4.2; Appendix 3) and the collated tables of artefact types/distinguishing features (Appendix 4) were analysed to determine the provenance of material culture using the established distance parameters.

Material culture evidence for provenance and potential economic activities and contacts was considered in a wider historical framework comprising the following factors:

- chronology of the settlements
- geographical location of the settlements
- exchange/trade networks exploited by the settlements
- political environment (Anglo-Saxon, Scandinavian)
- social/cultural influences (Anglo-Saxon, Scandinavian and Continental).

The key findings and issues highlighted by examination of the four research questions were further explored within the four case studies presented in Chapter 7. The case studies examine, in turn: chronological trends in material culture use, consumption and economic activities (Section 7.2); the establishment of site profiles, highlighting settlement functions and specialisations (Section 7.3); evidence for social and settlement hierarchies (Section 7.4); and the contextualisation of the key findings of the study through microscale settlement analysis (Section 7.5).

### 1.3. Book Structure

The relevance and objectives of the present work as well as the research questions placed upon the study are introduced above (Sections 1.1–1.2). A literature review is presented in **Chapter 2**, comprising a consideration of theoretical approaches to Anglo-Saxon material culture studies and archaeology, and discussions of Anglo-Saxon

scholarship and rural settlement research pertinent to the study. The methodological approaches employed in the study are discussed in **Chapter 3**, including site selection criteria, data collection, analytical processes and the limitations of the data. The following three chapters examine the principal research objectives of the study. **Chapter 4** assesses material culture from the settlements in archaeological context in order to establish distributional patterns (Section 4.2) and produces a catalogue of the range and character of material culture (Section 4.3). **Chapter 5** determines the consumption activities taking place at the settlements through the examination of material culture as a resource. **Chapter 6** analyses material culture within an economic framework, assessing the potential economic reach, patterns and trends exhibited at the settlements. Four case studies are presented in **Chapter 7** which further explore key aspects

of the study, comprising: an examination of material culture from a chronological perspective, focusing on six multi-period settlements (Section 7.2); a discussion of the settlement profiles and signatures established for each site, as evidenced by material culture and the occurrence of consumption activities (Section 7.3); an assessment of material culture and site distributional patterns as evidence for social status and hierarchy at the settlements (Section 7.4); and a microscale analysis of the settlement of Yarnton [PF17], Oxfordshire which contextualises evidence of the principal aspects of the study (Section 7.5). **Chapter 8** concludes the work with a discussion of the findings and wider implications of the study and considers avenues of further research. The **Bibliography** is presented at the end of this volume. The **Appendices** (1–10) are available as an accompanying download.