Introduction

This is a study of the early medieval landscape, and of longstanding links between people and place in a pre-urban society. It examines how patterns of power and habitual activity defined spaces and structured lives, and considers the temporal relationships, both seasonal and longue durée, that shaped these practices. Its objectives are shaped by an examination of the limitations and lacunae of existing research: it seeks to identify key elements of the early medieval landscape; asks how landscape patterns and processes can be characterised; whether existing models provide an adequate description; and whether a better conceptualisation is possible.

It is a study at different levels. On one level it uses microscale studies to investigate the landscape signature of early medieval settlement and activity in a specific, poorly understood area. On another level it addresses the more general question of the spatial expression of power in the social and economic processes of a world without towns or large villages. Running through it is the theme of time, expressed in seasonally-syncopated patterns of practice in the landscape, as well as in longer term relationships with the past, both of which structured people's experience and definition of the landscape.

The area that it examines lies within Wales, a region defined in the early medieval period, its landforms imbued with references to early medieval mythology and marked by inscribed stones commemorating the secular and spiritual forces of the post-Roman centuries (Bollard 2009, 47–48; W. Davies 1982, 196–97; Edwards 2001, 22–23; 2007, 31–34, 55–62; Petts 2007, 164–65). It is therefore striking that, despite its iconic identification with this period, the region is notable for its substantial absence from early medieval scholarly discourse (W. Davies 2004, 203–4). Its settlement patterns and social and economic processes are poorly identified and understood, with research suffering from a material record restricted by aceramic traditions, little coin use, unfurnished burials, acid soils, and limited excavation activity: developer-funded excavations are scarce due to weak economic development (Edwards et al. 2011, 17–18). Historical documentation is also extremely limited, and both medieval and pre-Conquest records are absent in many areas. It is nonetheless an area of interest in a wider European context for its long-enduring patterns of dispersed settlement and power, which present a counterpoint to the dominant teleological European narrative of urbanisation and large-scale polities (Wickham 2010, 208). It is therefore unfortunate (to say the least) that there is little Welsh research to offer pan-regional reviews of early medieval settlement and landscapes, like that of Gabor Thomas (2012). Its focal places are poorly understood, and its assembly sites are substantially unidentified: before this research began, only one site in the whole of Wales had been definitively identified and published (Comeau 2014, 270–71; Edwards et al. 2005, 33–36; Edwards 2009b; Edwards et al. 2011, 2).

These problems extend to, and are linked with, the region's (early medieval) historical research, which has been criticised for its lack of integration of archaeological and environmental data and for its failure to engage with the major themes of European historiography, among them issues of social structure, change, popular involvement with processes of power in their various forms, and Annaliste interpretations (W. Davies 2004, 206, 210–11, 219–20). The region's best-known contribution to early medieval scholarship, the multiple estate model, a conceptual structure of economic and territorial relationships that has been highly influential in Anglo-Saxon and Scottish work, is commonly censured as static, prescriptive and anachronistic (W. Davies 1982, 44–47; 2004, 207; Gregson 1985; Hadley 1996, 8, 11–12; Seaman 2012). The development of alternative accounts is constrained by limited written sources and by the lack of conventional archaeological data, summed up in a recent review of early medieval Wales which notes that 'our understanding of the archaeology of pre-Norman settlement … is virtually non-existent: not a single site has conclusively been identified' (Edwards 2007, 8).

As well as being an issue for broader scholarship, these factors present problems locally in a region whose identity was formed by a nineteenth- and earlier twentieth-century tribal narrative of pastoralist Celtic aristocrats that dovetailed with the Welsh Annals' terse references to the exploits of Welsh princes (Fleming 2007, 5–6; Pryce 2011, 137–38). This research study is a response to the challenge posed by these shortcomings, which indicate a pressing need for a broadly-based (re)assessment of the evidence for pre-Conquest Welsh settlement patterns and landscape use that recognises current European research. It provides this through a detailed interdisciplinary, comparative investigation of an early medieval *cantref* (hundred/supra-local district), Cemais, in Pembrokeshire. Its subject is the multiple expressions of the relationship between land, people and power over the longue durée of the early medieval period, from sixth-century Irish settlement to the twelfth-century Norman conquest, with a particular focus on the eleventh-century pre-Conquest landscape. It identifies the structure and elements (economic, administrative and social) of this landscape, and considers the expression, at different spatial and temporal levels, of communal engagement with it. It does this using a thematic analysis that includes a consideration of the patterns of landscape use revealed in seasonal agricultural practices and in fairs and other assemblies; the materialisation of ideas
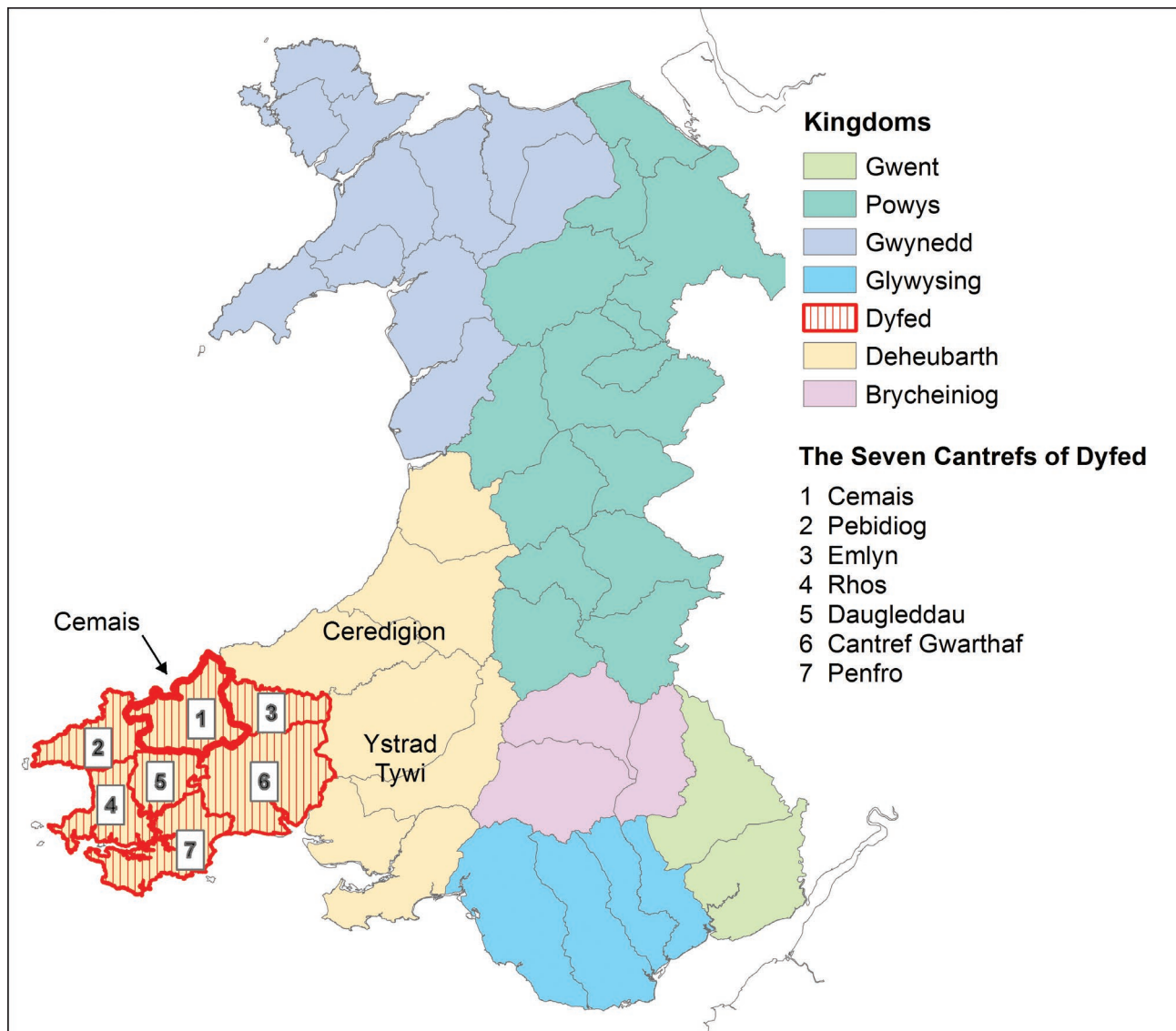
Figure 1.1. Cemais, Dyfed, and the early medieval Welsh kingdoms of Wales, with *cantref* boundaries, taken from Rees 1951, plates 22, 23, 28.

and events in place-names, monumental stones, barrows and intersite relationships; and the relevance and validity of existing models of early medieval settlement.

South-west Wales, the regional setting for Cemais (Figures 1.1, 1.2), exemplifies the limited scope of early medieval Welsh archaeology, with no investigation of its pre-Conquest central places or of their relationship to recorded Conquest-period territorial units: a clear gap in scholarship. The specific circumstances of Cemais' medieval development offer useful potential for interdisciplinary analysis. Its well-researched late prehistoric pattern of numerous small scattered habitative enclosures (Murphy and Mytum 2012; C. Thomas 1994, 76) is echoed by its dispersed medieval settlements; its only town, Newport, was founded by the Normans c.1200 (Miles 1995, 25). Oral tradition describes a brutal Norman takeover to the south of the Preselis, where there were subinfeudated Norman landholdings, and fruitful negotiations with the Welsh in the north, where substantial areas were held under Welsh law until the sixteenth

century (chapter four). Welsh is still the primary language of many of the area's inhabitants. These contrasting trajectories provide comparative substance for the detailed investigations that elucidate the study's principal themes.

Existing regional archaeological and historical research into settlement, economy, society and land use are reviewed in **chapter two**, with specific consideration of the multiple estate model and related discussions of lordship, power and territoriality; early medieval trade and exchange; assemblies; and the use of early medieval inscribed stones as territorial markers. This analysis shapes the objectives of the research project, defining directions that might allow research to identify the social and economic structure of the landscape and characterise and model its elements in a broader comparative European perspective. These directions include, firstly, looking at individual and communal engagement with the landscape, and its relationship with the expression of power; and secondly an evaluation of the utility of the multiple estate model against other and newer models of early medieval settlement and
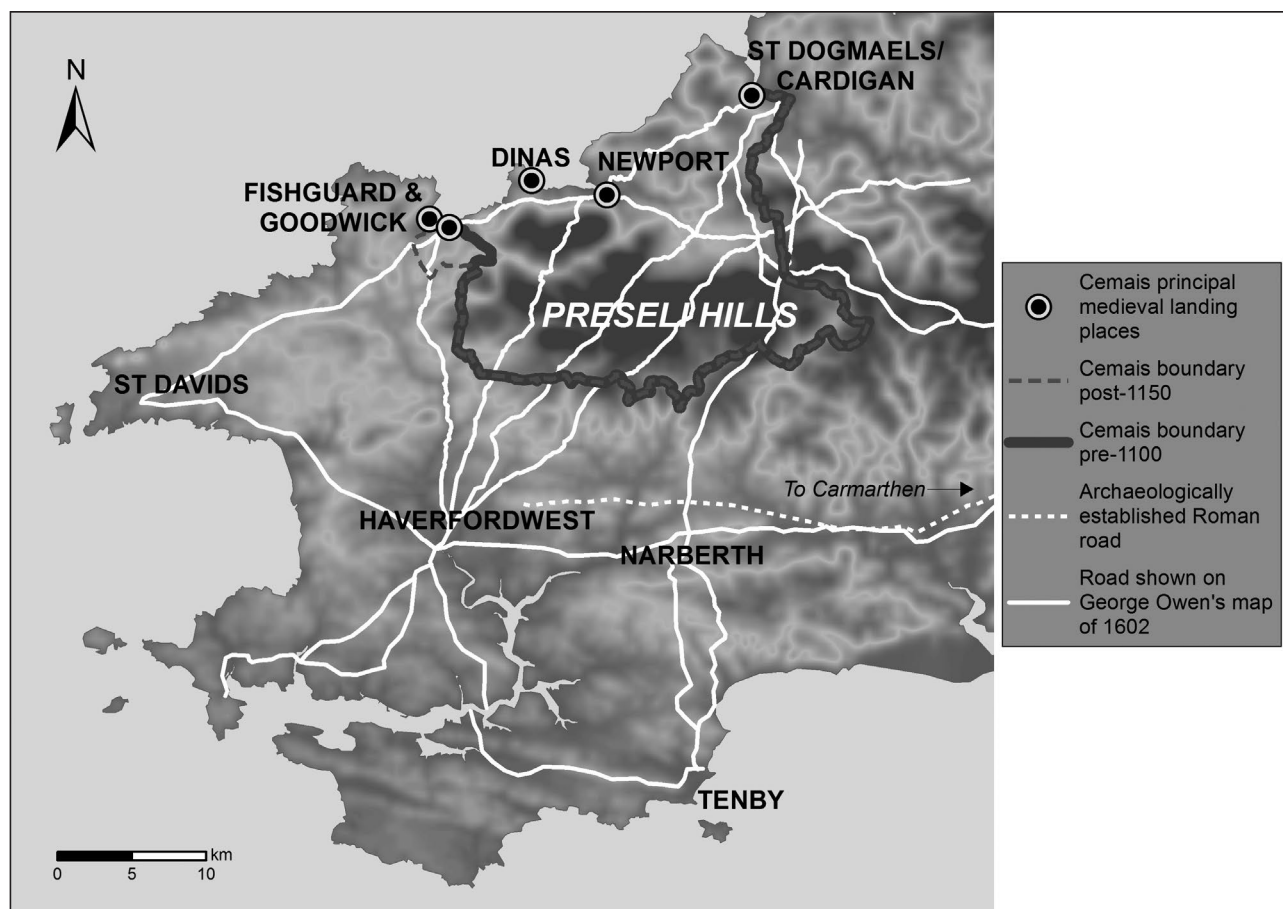
Figure 1.2. The *cantref* of Cemais, showing the pre-1100 and post-1150 boundaries and principal landing places, with principal Pembrokeshire roads c.1600 as shown on Owen map NLW 5359, and archaeologically-attested Roman road.

landscape. A checklist of focal zone elements generated from these discussions structures discussion of study area evidence in chapter six.

Chapter three, 'Approaches', continues this overview of existing research with a review of the research project's conceptual hinterland that shapes the study's theoretical framework and methodology. These are selected for their capacity to structure a broad and diverse range of data within a contextualised comparative analysis. Discussion focusses on the relevance of analytic models of social hierarchy and centrality, and considers the utility of a practice-based approach as a means of engaging with a broad range of attributes at different scales of analysis. The use of a practice-based approach in conjunction with an Annales time structure is proposed, emphasising processes of social and economic change over the longue durée of the early medieval period, and identifying the cyclical activities which structured society (conjonctures), and events at individual sites and settings (événements) as a counterbalance to the static reification inherent in mapping settlement and land use patterns. The issue of availability of evidence of past practice is looked at, and the point is made that conventional archaeological material culture is not the only source of information about past practice in the landscape. Other sources, like written records, place-names and oral traditions are considered.

These conceptual considerations lead into a discussion of the project's practical priorities and methods of data collection and analysis. Data sets are identified which relate to seasonal events as well as more conventional subject matter like archaeological sites and medieval landholding patterns. Criteria for examining focal areas are considered, and areas for detailed micro-level case studies are defined.

In **chapter four** attention turns to a collation and evaluation of patterns of evidence across the whole of the cantref study area. The very limited early medieval archaeological data for Cemais are summarised and examined before turning to the written record. Much of this derives from little-discussed material of the thirteenth to sixteenth centuries that is set out in supporting appendices, some of which are presented as downloads. These include medieval charters, sixteenth-century estate records and geolocated pre-1700 place names, as well as the evidence of the archaeological record, and provide the material for cantref-wide overall assessments in this chapter as well as detailed analyses in subsequent chapters.

The recorded historical development of the general area of Dyfed, and of the specific area of the *cantref* (or medieval Lordship) of Cemais, is outlined with the aim of providing a base for an assessment of the pre-Conquest *cantref*. This is a significant task since Cemais has hitherto received

little attention outside its Anglo-Norman enclaves, and it is specifically the non-Norman areas that are of particular interest to the current research. The medieval landholding and administrative structure of Cemais is assessed using medieval and sixteenth-century records, and set in the context of oral traditions relating to the Conquest of Cemais and such evidence as exists locally for pre-Conquest elements like the *cantref*, *commote (cwmwd)*, *llys*, *maenor*, *maerdref* and *tref*. Medieval and sixteenth-century landholding records are used to throw light on medieval Welsh social structure. Patterns of post- and pre-Conquest ecclesiastical landholding are considered. From this evidence a picture of Conquest-period Cemais emerges, and patterns of possible pre-Conquest areas of royal, ecclesiastical, freeholder and bondsmen's land are identified in broad outline.

A different approach to identifying patterns of life in the early medieval landscape occupies much of **chapters five** ('Living off the land') and **six** ('Power in the land'). The keynote to this is provided by chapter five's introductory overview of the broader documentary evidence for the seasonal patterning of early medieval life, using a new analysis of pre-Conquest Welsh law and of written sources elsewhere in north-west Europe. This identifies an annual cycle of activities focussing on particular key times (cross-quarter days and midsummer) that provides a key to the use of different sites and areas. Chapter five then proceeds to examine the longstanding spatial and temporal patterns of the medieval and pre-Conquest agrarian landscape. The detailed evidence of case studies illuminates and contextualises the picture communicated by broader-scale sources, allowing an understanding of the landscape's seasonal as well as spatial structure. Given the well-established problems of identifying early medieval use of Welsh sites, late prehistoric settlements and pre-1500 place-names are used as proxies for early medieval settlement, together with evidence for high medieval longhuts, platforms and deserted medieval hamlets. The use of an infield-outfield system with elements of local short-distance transhumance is identified and linked to pollen evidence and the patterning of medieval settlement indicated by archaeology, place-names, estate records and regressive analysis of field patterns. The implication of patterns of sixteenth-century Welsh settlement for the understanding of pre-Conquest settlement patterning and social structure is considered, together with local evidence for the pre-Conquest support of the Welsh prince's peripatetic court.

In **chapter six**, the focus turns to places and processes linked with the exercise of power, and to activities, notably hunting, that are strongly associated with the lives of the elite. Among the landscape elements considered are places of assembly, high status habitation, patterns of ecclesiastical provision and dedication and relationships to places of past power. The location of focal or central zones is analysed and set in comparative context, using the checklist of focal zone elements identified in chapter two. Sites of assembly are identified in locations that indicate spatially, temporally and socially differentiated processes of early medieval power; these are the first assembly sites to be identified in Wales through a systematic survey, and their landscape signatures provide productive comparisons with other areas of north-west Europe. The presence within the physical limits of the cantref of a recorded high status pre-Conquest estate, the *maenor* or 'bishop house' of Llandeilo Llwydarth, provides material for a consideration of the link between sites of post-Roman and later royal and ecclesiastical power.

These different elements are brought together in **chapter seven**, 'Synthesis and conclusion', which combines the different strands of evidence of earlier chapters to produce a richly-textured picture of the spatial and seasonal structure of the landscape. A coherent spatial patterning is identified and compared with evidence for the *maenor* which, it is suggested, may not have been as significant an early medieval landscape element as some commentators have believed. Seasonality – which runs through the various thematic discussions – emerges here as a unifying element that pulls together different aspects of life in the landscape. Its role in structuring the use of focal zones is considered, as is the role of assemblies at these focal zones in supporting processes of power. The interdependence of different elements of early medieval society – the king, powerful freeholders, the church and unfree agricultural workers – is noted. Trade mechanisms are considered and evidence set in comparative context. These structures and processes are compared with the schema of the multiple estate model and other conceptual structures of early medieval landholding, and some thoughts about redefining the early medieval Welsh landscape paradigm are offered. The study concludes with suggestions about directions of future research.