Landscape and warfare in Anglo-Saxon England and the Viking campaign of 1006

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This paper outlines the state of research into early medieval conflict landscapes in England and sets out a theoretical and methodological basis for the sustained and systematic investigation of battlefield toponymy and topography. The hypothesis is advanced that certain types of place were considered particularly appropriate for the performance of violent conflict throughout the period and that the social ideas that determined the choice of locale are, to some degree, recoverable through in-depth, interdisciplinary analysis of landscapes, place names and texts. The events of 1006 and the landscape of the upper Kennet are introduced as a case study that reveals the complex interplay of royal ideology, superstition and place that were invoked in the practice of violence in late Anglo-Saxon England. In the course of the discussion, this paper seeks to demonstrate the value of applying a similar approach to the full range of evidence for conflict landscapes in early medieval England and beyond.

Searching for early medieval battlefields in England

The holistic understanding of early medieval battlefield landscapes in England remains limited and only a handful of key publications have

addressed the subject directly and in general terms.[1] It is true enough that individual early medieval battlefields have been a frequent subject of enquiry for historians. This, however, has generally been in the context of a desire to fix a location for an iconic event or to reconstruct the probable movement of troops on the battlefield. Studies of the former sort – often resting heavily on the evidence of place names – abound in local history and place-name publications. Indeed, the number and specificity of such studies militates against a systematic review;[2] some iconic battles have spawned minor publishing industries in their own right.[3] Nevertheless, attempts to establish the location of most early medieval battlefields with precision have generally been unsuccessful and, as John Carman has

[1]   K. Cathers, ' "Markings on the Land" and Early Medieval Warfare in the British Isles', in P. Doyle and M.R. Bennett (eds), *Fields of Battle: Terrain in Military History* (Dordrecht, Boston and London, 2002), pp. 9–18; G. Foard and R. Morris, *The Archaeology of English Battlefields: Conflict in the Pre-Industrial Landscape*, CBA Research Report 168 (York, 2012), pp. 45–51; G. Halsall, 'Anthropology and the Study of Pre-Conquest Warfare and Society', in S.C. Hawkes (ed.), *Weapons and Warfare in Anglo-Saxon England* (Oxford, 1989), pp. 155–78; G. Halsall, *Warfare and Society in the Barbarian West, 450–900* (London, 2003), esp. pp. 134–62 and 177–214; R. Lavelle, *Royal Estates in Anglo-Saxon Wessex: Land, Politics and Family Strategies*, BAR 439 (Oxford, 2007), esp. pp. 59–68; R. Lavelle, 'Geographies of Power in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle: The Royal Estates of Wessex', in A.D. Jorgensen (ed.), *Reading the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle: Language, Literature, History*, Studies in the Early Middle Ages 23 (Turnhout, 2010), pp. 187–219; R. Lavelle *Alfred's Wars: Sources and Interpretations of Anglo-Saxon Warfare in the Viking Age*, Warfare in History Series (Woodbridge, 2011), pp. 264–314; P. Morgan, 'The Naming of Medieval Battlefields', in D. Dunn (ed.), *War and Society in Medieval and Early Modern Britain* (Liverpool, 2000), pp. 34–52; P. Marren, *Battles of the Dark Ages* (Bamsley, 2006); T.J.T. Williams, 'The Place of Slaughter: The West Saxon Battlescape', in R. Lavelle and S. Roffey (eds), *The Danes in Wessex* (Oxford, 2015); T.J.T. Williams, ' "For the Sake of Bravado in the Wilderness": Confronting the Bestial in Anglo-Saxon Warfare', in M.D.J. Bintley and T.J.T. Williams (eds), *Representing Beasts in Early Medieval England and Scandinavia* (Woodbridge, 2015). In addition, recent publications addressing wider aspects of early medieval militarized landscapes touch heavily on this area: see especially J. Baker and S. Brookes, *Beyond the Burghal Hidage: Anglo-Saxon Civil Defence in the Viking Age* (Leiden, 2013), and papers in J. Baker, S. Brookes and A. Reynolds (eds), *Landscapes of Defence in Early Medieval Europe* (Turnhout, 2013).

[2]   For example: M.F. Gardiner, 'Ellingsdean, a Viking Battlefield Identified', *Sussex Archaeological Collections* 125 (1987), pp. 251–2; A. Breeze, 'The Battle of the *Uinued* and the River Went, Yorkshire', *Northern History* 41.2 (2004), pp. 377–83.

[3]   Most notably Hastings. For a recent interpretations and references regarding the battle see M.K. Lawson, *The Battle of Hastings, 1066* (Stroud, 2002); S. Morillo (ed.), *The Battle of Hastings: Sources and Interpretations* (Woodbridge, 1999). Other battles have generated sizeable literatures, often proportionate to their perceived importance in national historical narratives and the number of competing locations. The most contentious of these is *Brunanburh*, identified with unwarranted confidence as Bromborough in the Wirral on largely etymological grounds: see P. Cavill, 'The Place-Name Debate', in M. Livingstone (ed.), *The Battle of Brunanburh: A Casebook* (Exeter, 2011), pp. 327–50. For a highly persuasive alternative view see M. Wood, 'Searching for Brunanburh: The Yorkshire Context of the "Great War" of 937', *Yorkshire Archaeological Journal* 85 (2013), pp. 138–59. For the influence of national agendas in determining areas of focus in battlefield archaeology, see J. Carman, *Archaeologies of Conflict* (London, 2013), pp. 19–21. Nationalist or regionalist discourse can be found stridently expressed at the local level, where the claims of competing sites are sometimes aggressively championed in regional publications: see, for one example amongst many, C. Weatherhill, 'Where was Hengestesdun?', *Cornish World Magazine* (October 2007).

recently pointed out, the nature of enquiry has long been dictated by the preoccupations of military historians, arguably arresting the development of battlefield archaeology as an independent sub-discipline.[4]

The last twenty-five years have seen huge advances made in the way that battlefields can be recorded and understood through archaeological techniques, but these methods have only recently been accepted as a useful complement to traditional military history. Only since 2012 has English Heritage formally included archaeological approaches in the selection guidance for designating sites for the *English Heritage Register of Historic Battlefields*.[5] The seminal work combining historical and archaeological approaches to battlefields was undertaken in the late 1980s at the Little Bighorn,[6] but these techniques have not so far been applied successfully to any early medieval battlefield – a situation that arises in part from the difficulties in securely identifying battlefields of the period to the degree of precision that the techniques of the archaeological method demand.[7] Of the forty-three battlefields that English Heritage has included on its register, only three date from before 1100. Two of these – Hastings and Stamford Bridge – are from the same year (1066). The other is the battle of Maldon (991). The Battlefields Trust is slightly less pessimistic, and its register includes an additional two early medieval battlefields.[8] One of these is another from 1066 (the controversial site of the Battle of Fulford),[9] the other is the endlessly contested location of the Battle of Brunanburh.[10] Other battles of the period are represented as dots on a map, without names, dates or any other information (or even an indication of whether the map is a comprehensive representation of the number of early medieval battlefields).[11]

This picture has recently been clarified to a great extent by Glenn Foard and Richard Morris's review of English battlefields, which enu-

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[4]   Carman, *Archaeologies of Conflict*, pp. 15–16.

[5]   English Heritage, *Designation Selection Guide: Battlefields* (2012), available online at <https://content.historicengland.org.uk/images-books/publications/dsg-battlefields/battlefields-sg.pdf/> [accessed 4 April 2015]; for criticism of English Heritage for its slow uptake of archaeological investigation in relation to historic battlefields, see G. Foard, 'The Archaeology of Attack: Battles and Sieges of the English Civil War', in P. Freeman and A. Pollard (eds), *Fields of Conflict: Progress and Prospect in Battlefield Archaeology*, BAR 958 (2001), pp. 87–104.

[6]   D. Scott, R.A. Fox, M.A. Connor and D. Harmon (eds), *Archaeological Perspectives on the Battle of the Little Bighorn* (Oklahoma City, 1989). For on overview of how these techniques have been applied in English battlefields – particularly of the late medieval and early modern periods – see Foard and Morris, *The Archaeology of English Battlefields*.

[7]   Foard and Morris, *The Archaeology of English Battlefields*, pp. 45–51.

[8]   'The Battlefields Trust', <http://battlefieldstrust.com/> [accessed 4 April 2015].

[9]   'Battle of Fulford', <http://www.battleoffulford.org.uk/> [accessed 4 April 2015].

[10] See n. 3 above.

[11] G. Foard and T. Britnell, *Battlefields in England AD 41–1066* (The Battlefields Trust, 2004), <http://www.battlefieldstrust.com/resource-centre/mediapopup.asp?mediaid=312> [accessed 4 April 2015].

merates conflict at the supra-regional level and offers a fairly pessimistic assessment of the potential for future research in the field.[12] Moreover, degradation of the archaeology of such places through development, failures in the protection legislation and unscrupulous metal-detecting, means that the potential to fruitfully apply the approaches of battlefield archaeology is ever diminishing.[13] This means not only that the unrecorded evidence from the handful of locatable sites is under constant threat, but also that the likelihood of identifying battlefields described in documentary sources from their archaeological signature is also diminishing; a gloomy prognosis for future study. So far, only the late medieval battlefields at Towton and Bosworth have shown themselves amenable to the sort of detailed investigation pioneered in the USA and applied by Glenn Foard to the civil war battlefields at Naseby and elsewhere.[14]

Various archaeological remains can be used to suggest traces of past conflict: in particular, bones showing weapon trauma, defensive structures, and material remains of battlefield technology. Mags McCartney has also suggested that these categories can be added to with a subtle reading of site morphology – looking for what he calls 'traces of fear' in the social organization of past societies that might reveal the presence or threat of aggression.[15] The latter raises some interesting issues, especially for the changing layout of Anglo-Saxon *burhs*, settlements and manorial enclosures.[16] The other three categories of archaeology have all left their traces in early medieval Britain, but rarely in ways that help to locate landscapes of battle. As Andrew Reynolds succinctly puts it, 'Such remains, both monumental and artefactual, represent direct evidence for militarized society, yet they do not (necessarily) explicitly indicate actual conflict.'[17]

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[12] Foard and Morris, *The Archaeology of English Battlefields*, pp. 45–7.

[13] Several chapters address this theme in Freeman and Pollard (eds), *Fields of Conflict*. See esp. P. Freeman, 'Introduction: Issues Concerning the Archaeology of Battlefields', pp. 1–10; Foard, 'The Archaeology of Attack', pp. 87–104; J. Coulston, 'The Archaeology of Roman Conflict', pp. 23–50. New planning legislation introduced in the UK from 2012 will also have an impact. It is uncertain at this early stage what that impact might be, but see *Papers from the Institute of Archaeology* 22 (2012) for a variety of early responses from the wider archaeological community.

[14] Foard and Morris, *The Archaeology of English Battlefields*, pp. 81–96.

[15] M. McCartney, 'Finding Fear in the Iron Age of Southern France', in T. Pollard and I. Banks (eds), *War and Sacrifice: Studies in the Archaeology of Conflict* (Leiden and Boston, 2007), pp. 99–118.

[16] See for example M. Shapland, *Buildings of Secular and Religious Lordship: Anglo-Saxon Tower-nave Churches*, Ph.D. thesis, University College London (2013); and various papers in J. Baker, S. Brookes and A. Reynolds (eds), *Landscapes of Defence in Early Medieval Europe* (Turnhout, 2013). See also T.J.T. Williams, 'The Place of Slaughter', for the role of heroic ideology in determining the use of defensive structures.

[17] A. Reynolds, 'Archaeological Correlates for Anglo-Saxon Military Activity in Comparative Perspective', in Baker *et al.* (eds), *Landscapes of Defence*.

Whilst the archaeology that could be used to locate and identify conflict is largely absent, warfare looms large in the chronicles and histories that survive from the early medieval period. However, whilst written accounts of the period often provide information about the protagonists and associate the battle with a place name, information about the nature and conduct of warfare is rare and a relatively small amount of it before the ninth century seems to be contemporary with the events described.[18] Even when accounts are elaborated at greater length (take for example the poetic treatment of the battle of Maldon or Asser's description of the battle of Ashdown), they are made problematic by the use of literary devices, traditional motifs and archaic references – often drawing on a Roman military vocabulary that had long passed out of everyday use.[19] Equally sparse is the sort of topographical, strategic and logistical detail that might make early medieval battlefields more readily identifiable. Moreover, problems with the sources mean that even when a place might be identifiable through a place name, it is not always clear that the event described did in fact occur at the place recorded. A famous example is the battle of Maldon (991) which, were it not for the independently surviving poem describing the battle, might be assumed to have taken place at the *burh* mentioned in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* rather than on the shores of the Blackwater estuary where it is now generally agreed to have occurred – at some remove from the fortified town.[20]

A way forward?

Given these conditions, one might be forgiven for abandoning the study of early medieval conflict landscapes as a lost cause. However, by considering sites of conflict in relation to their wider landscape settings and the symbolic associations of topographical and man-made features, it may be possible to find a way forward. Typically, approaches that have considered the relationship of warfare to landscape have done so in the shadow of the military historical/geographical tradition that has its roots in post-Enlightenment efforts to establish a theory of warfare in line with the

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[18] *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicles*, ed. M. Swanton, 2nd edn (London, 2001) p. xviii.
[19] Halsall, *Warfare and Society*, pp. 177–8; Lavelle, *Alfred's Wars*, pp. 269–73; R. Abels and S. Morillo, 'A Lying Legacy? A Preliminary Discussion of Images of Antiquity and Altered Reality in Medieval Military History', *Journal of Medieval Military History* 5 (2005), pp. 1–13.
[20] Located convincingly at Northey Island, Essex. G. Petty and S. Petty, 'A Geological Reconstruction of the Site of the Battle of Maldon', in J. Cooper (ed.), *The Battle of Maldon: Fiction and Fact* (London, 1993), pp. 159–70; J. McN. Dodgson, 'The Site of the Battle of Maldon', in D. Scragg (ed.), *The Battle of Maldon AD 991* (Oxford, 1991); for avoidance of the *burh* see Lavelle, *Alfred's Wars*, pp. 250–1 and T.J.T. Williams, 'The Place of Slaughter'.

principles of scientific rationalism.[21] The concept of landscape as 'terrain' – a passive object to be used or overcome in response to pragmatic strategic, tactical and logistical concerns – is central to this way of thinking, and has been enormously influential.[22] The ahistorical bias implicit in this approach has been justified (and compounded) by frequent recourse to the concept of 'Inherent Military Probability' (IMP), a principle popularized by the military historian Alfred Burne,[23] which attempts to get around the problems of applying modern military precepts to the past by postulating that commanders behave according to universal laws of rational military behaviour. The questionable basis on which this theory rests can be summarized as follows:

1. IMP assumes that all commanders everywhere are equally competent, have received similar or equivalent training, and that effective command and control structures have been present or effective in all armies at all times.

2. It denies the influence of culturally specific rituals and taboos around the appropriate conduct of warfare and/or perceptions of the landscape.

3. It requires no corroborating archaeological or historical evidence.

In many cases, IMP has served as a means by which historians who have received military training (a sizeable constituency throughout the twentieth century) have sought to legitimize assumptions made on the basis of their own experience rather than on a foundation of primary evidence. Although rarely applied explicitly, its influence can be felt in a number of works dealing with early medieval conflict landscapes. Kerry Cathers, for example, makes a good number of salient points in a chapter that seeks to explain the monumental correlates for battlefields identified by Guy Halsall,[24] especially in recognizing that battles had to be fought by agreement and in places known to the combatants (the image of the frustrated warlord leading his tired men aimlessly around the landscape in search of a fight is quickly and rightly dismissed). However, when she asserts that 'it is unlikely that military commanders would prefer a site with religious or supernatural connections if it were not a suitable battle-

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[21] Most influential has been the early nineteenth-century view of Carl von Clausewitz, written in the aftermath of the Napoleonic wars and published posthumously in 1832. C. von Clausewitz, *On War* (1832), ed. and trans. M. Howard and P. Paret, rev. edn (Princeton, 1984), pp. 348–9: 'Geography and ground can influence military operations in three ways: as an obstacle to the approach, as an impediment to visibility, and as cover from fire.'

[22] Halsall, 'Anthropology and the Study of Pre-Conquest Warfare'; T.J.T. Williams, 'The Place of Slaughter'.

[23] A.H. Burne, *The Battlefields of England* (London, 1950), and *More Battlefields of England* (London, 1953).

[24] Cathers, 'Markings on the Land'; Halsall, 'Anthropology and the Study of Pre-Conquest Warfare'.

site, over another location which was more suited to battle', or that to suggest that roads, fords and monuments could be included as part of a battlefield is 'arguing contrary to common sense', a fatal epistemological bias is introduced.[25] The precise factors that may have made a battle site 'suitable' cannot be assumed from a modern rationalistic perspective – that they might include religious or supernatural considerations is, moreover, highly probable given what else is now believed about perceptions of the landscape in early medieval society.[26] Likewise, what may have constituted 'common sense' between the fifth and eleventh centuries was based on a radically different (and changing, contradictory and heterogeneous) stock of cultural assumptions: this was, after all, a society that believed in the efficacy of judicial ordeal as a means of establishing criminal guilt.[27]

It would be wrong to deny any element of shared humanity with the members of past societies: early medieval warriors got hungry, preferred to sleep indoors when they could and – all other things being equal – scorned the cross-country hike through moor, fen and fastness when dry and well-trodden paths were available. To suggest otherwise would be absurd, and it is for this reason that it remains imperative to consider the location of conflict sites in relation to wider military networks: muster sites, communication networks, signalling systems, fortified places. However, it is also important to recognize with John Carman that 'battlefields are carefully chosen and necessarily reflect attitudes to the appropriateness of the use of space for particular functions' – not merely a rehearsal of prosaic assumptions about military probability, but a complex relationship of social, political and cosmological ideas.[28] This is essentially to argue that the study of early medieval battlefields should sit

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[25] Cathers, 'Markings on the Land', pp. 14–15.

[26] See for example S. Brink, 'Mythologising Landscape: Place and Space of Cult and Myth', in M. Stausberg (ed.), *Kontinuitaten und Bruche in der Religiongeschichte. Festchrift fur Anders Hultgard zu seinem 65. Geburtstag am 23. 12.* (Berlin, 2001), pp. 76–112; S. Semple, *Perceptions of the Prehistoric in Anglo-Saxon England: Religion, Ritual, and Rulership in the Landscape* (Oxford, 2013); H. Williams, *Death and Memory in Early Medieval Britain* (Cambridge, 2006); A. Reynolds, *Anglo-Saxon Deviant Burial Customs* (Oxford, 2009); E. Thäte, *Monuments and Minds. Monument Re-use in Scandinavia in the Second Half of the First Millennium AD* (Lund, 2007).

[27] This is a point on which Halsall, unlike Cathers, is perfectly clear: 'the early medieval mind was profoundly different from the modern. This was a world which believed in miracles and that God was active in the world. When commanders had their troops fast, or carry out ordeals before campaigns and battles, this was not mere credulity or something done for show. Nor was it cynical manipulation of their troops gullibility; this was a serious matter' (Halsall, *Warfare and Society*, p. 7). For a succinct summary of the ordeal in Anglo-Saxon England see D. Rollason, 'Ordeal', in J. Blair, S. Keynes and D. Scragg (eds), *The Blackwell Encyclopaedia of Anglo-Saxon England*, 8th edn (Oxford, 2008), pp. 345–6.

[28] J. Carman, 'Bloody Meadows: The Place of Battle', in S. Tarlow and S. West (eds), *The Familiar Past? Archaeologies of Later Historical Britain* (London, 1999), p. 237.

alongside other modern approaches to medieval landscapes and monuments, not least the reframing of debates relating to the later medieval castle where theoretical approaches to the symbolic use of space are significantly advanced in comparison to contemporary battlefield studies.[29]

Such a method has the potential to draw on comparable approaches to warfare in other disciplines, most notably in anthropology, prehistoric archaeology and geography. Drawing on the writings of Hegel, the cultural geographer Michael J. Shapiro has framed an important distinction between what he describes as the two 'faces' of warfare. The first of these is the visible face, the face that is presented by politicians and historians to show warfare as 'an instrument of state policy': 'Instrumental and rationalistic talk links the features of war with enduring projects of the state: maintaining security, clearing spaces for effective and vital functioning, meeting obligations to friends, and so on.' [30] It is this face, with some notable exceptions, that has received most attention from those writing on the subject of early medieval warfare, in particular the ways in which it can be linked to the development of social and civic institutions and the implementation of organized systems of civil defence.[31]

The second face is ontological, concerned with the identity of the war-making group. It uses violence as a communicative strategy to build meaning within the self-group, to express and delimit values and ideas, and to share these ideas with others. In other words, warfare functions – on one level – as semiotic exchange, and a number of other writers have similarly emphasized the communicative, performative qualities of

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[29] See D. Stocker, 'The Shadow of the General's Armchair', *Archaeological Journal* 149 (1992), pp. 415–20, for an important salvo in the 'revisionist' approach to castles. This review paper helped to firmly establish the position, long advanced by historians such as Charles Coulson, that the castle should not be seen as exclusively, or even primarily, shaped by military functionalism, but rather that in form, location and landscape context these ostensibly militarized places were contingent on a variety of cross-cutting social, religious, economic and ideological realities. See, in particular, O. Creighton, *Castles and Landscapes: Power, Community and Fortification in Medieval England*, Studies in the Archaeology of Medieval Europe, 2nd edn (New York, 2005); C. Coulson, 'Structural Symbolism in Medieval Castle Architecture', *Journal of the British Archaeological Association* 132 (1979), pp. 73–90 and *Castles in Medieval Society* (Oxford, 2003); and for a recent recapitulation of the prevailing view and avenues for future research, see O. Creighton and R. Liddiard, 'Fighting Yesterday's Battle: Beyond War or Status in Castle Studies', *Medieval Archaeology* 52 (2008), pp. 161–9. The idea advanced here goes further, in that it suggests that even undeniably martial activity should not be seen exclusively in the light of military functionalism, and that the place of battle can – like the castle – similarly reflect a range of cultural ideas and circumscriptions.

[30] M.J. Shapiro, *Violent Cartographies: Mapping Cultures of War* (Minneapolis, 1997), p. 47.

[31] This has largely centred on military obligation and organization in the context of an increasingly centralized monarchical system: see, in particular, C. Warren Hollister, *Anglo-Saxon Military Institutions on the Eve of the Norman Conquest* (Oxford, 1962); and R.P. Abels, *Lordship and Military Obligation in Anglo-Saxon England* (Berkeley, 1988). For a recent and thorough survey of the relevant literature, see Lavelle, *Alfred's Wars*, pp. 47–140.

warfare and violence.[32] In order to apprehend this 'second face', Shapiro suggests that the semiotic function of violence can be sought in so-called 'structures of expression' – the ways in which a society conducts and presents itself in war.[33] The places that were considered appropriate to warfare – as glimpsed through the evidence of place names and the circumstantial details of battle – can be thought of precisely as a 'structure of expression' with the potential to reveal wider social attitudes to the practice of violence. Indeed, this has been the underlying theoretical basis for Carman's diachronic study of conflict landscapes.[34]

Seen from these perspectives, early medieval traditions that describe a disproportionate number of battles fought at places that – for example – imply the existence of ancient monuments or ancestral memorials, take on a profound significance for understanding how early medieval societies in Britain thought about the conceptual relationship between landscape and warfare. In the study alluded to above, Guy Halsall has pointed out that, of twenty-eight battlefields named in written sources and dated between 600 and 850 (excluding Viking raids and civil wars), almost all can be placed at ancient monuments and/or water crossings on the evidence of the documentary record.[35] More recently, Ryan Lavelle has demonstrated the relationship of battle sites with the political geography of later Anglo-Saxon Wessex.[36] Whilst these tendencies can be understood in the light of strategic and organizational considerations, the specific choice of places associated with antiquity, boundaries and royal identity points towards an engagement with other symbolic associations.[37] The success of these studies in associating conflict with clearly differentiated landscape settings and their semiotic content provide a partial model for a more comprehensive analysis of the available evidence.

[32] See, for example, D. Riches, 'The Phenomenon of Violence', in D. Riches (ed.), *The Anthropology of Violence* (Oxford and New York, 1986), pp. 1–27; J. Abbink, 'Preface: Violation and Violence as Cultural Phenomena', in G. Aijmer and J. Abbink (eds), *Meanings of Violence: A Cross Cultural Perspective* (Oxford and New York, 2000), pp. xi–xvii; A. Blok, 'The Enigma of Senseless Violence', in Aijmer and Abbink (eds), *Meanings of Violence*, pp. 23–38; I. Armit, C. Knüsel, J. Robb and R. Schulting, 'Warfare and Violence in Prehistoric Europe: An Introduction', in T. Pollard and I. Banks (eds), *War and Sacrifice: Studies in the Archaeology of Conflict* (Leiden and Boston, 2007), pp. 1–12.
[33] Shapiro, *Violent Cartographies*, p. 47.
[34] See, in particular, Carman, 'Bloody Meadows', and J. Carman and P. Carman, *Bloody Meadows: Investigating Landscapes of Battle* (Stroud, 2006).
[35] Halsall, 'Anthropology and the Study of Pre-Conquest Warfare', p. 166, Fig. 11.4. See also Halsall, *Warfare and Society*, ch. 7 ('Campaigning'), pp. 143–62.
[36] Lavelle, *Royal Estates in Anglo-Saxon Wessex*; Lavelle, 'Geographies of Power in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle'.
[37] T.J.T. Williams, 'The Place of Slaughter'.

However, as Aliki Pantos incisively demonstrates in relation to the investigation of assembly sites,[38] problems arise in relying exclusively on toponymic and documentary evidence. A place name may, in fact, conceal more than it illuminates concerning the characteristics of a location. The example of Bradford-upon-Avon in this regard is instructive. The site of a battle recorded in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* under the year 652, Bradford might be included in Halsall's list of conflicts at 'water-crossings'.[39] The *Chronicle* entry is exceptionally tight-lipped, even for this famously laconic document: 'Cenwalh fought' is all that the scribe saw fit to relate – even the object of Cenwalh's belligerence goes unidentified. The written evidence alone does not permit of any further analysis. However, investigation of the wider landscape reveals that Bradford-on-Avon was the site of a Roman settlement, an iron-age hill fort and an eighth-century monastic foundation.[40] Some of these may have coloured the choice of the location as an appropriate theatre of war – whether by Cenwalh and his foes in 652, or by an unknown West Saxon scribe in the ninth century – and the investigation of wider battlefield environments can therefore furnish a great deal of additional relevant data.

As Foard and Morris recognize, a substantial number of early medieval conflicts can be located on a broad, sub-regional basis (generally too broad, in fact, to be useful in the context of the current research agendas and methodologies of battlefield archaeology).[41] However, as John Baker and Stuart Brookes have recently demonstrated, an approach that combines the evidence of place names with the wider traces of militarism in the landscape can go a long way towards reconstructing historical systems of civil defence.[42] Battlefields naturally sit within or in relation to those systems,[43] and are amenable to investigation through similar data sets. It is proposed that through combining an understanding of the militarized landscape with a close reading of the wider historical context and the

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[38] A. Pantos, 'The Location and Form of Anglo-Saxon Assembly-places: Some "Moot Points"', in A. Pantos and S.J. Semple (eds), *Assembly Places and Practices in Medieval Europe* (Dublin, 2004), pp. 151–80, at p. 158: 'Failure to distinguish between the sites of assemblies and their names in attempts to classify and interpret assembly-places can thus have problematic consequences, keeping together examples which, though similar in name, are physically very different, while obscuring useful comparisons between sites which differ in "name-type".'

[39] Halsall, 'Anthropology and the Study of Pre-Conquest Warfare', pp. 165–7.

[40] The sequence of habitation is, however, less than clear. For the dating of the church of St Lawrence, which is thought to include part of the early monastic church, see the monument's entry on Historic England's PastScape website: <http://www.pastscape.org.uk/hob.aspx?hob_id=208138> [accessed 4 April 2015]; and J. Haslam, 'The Towns of Wiltshire', in J. Haslam (ed.), *Anglo-Saxon Towns in Southern England* (Chichester, 1984), pp. 87–148, at pp. 90–4. See also T.J.T. Williams, 'The Place of Slaughter', pp. 9, 11, 17 n. 80.

[41] Foard and Morris, *The Archaeology of English Battlefields*, pp. 49–52.

[42] Baker and Brookes, *Beyond the Burghal Hidage*.

[43] Baker and Brookes, *Beyond the Burghal Hidage*, pp. 199–209.

evidence of place names, a number of desirable research outcomes can be generated – not least the provision of a sophisticated toolkit for identifying battle sites where etymological analysis alone has failed to convince or has thrown up multiple competing sites.[44] In addition, research carried out along these lines across a large number of conflict sites has the potential to reveal why certain types of place figure more frequently than others in the documentary record and to identify the place of warfare in the organization of the early medieval landscape. On an individual level, as the following case study is intended to illustrate, the close study of individual conflict sites can reveal a great deal – not just about the landscape of civil defence or strategies of inter-polity aggression, but also about the ideas, attitudes and ideologies that underpinned the performance of violence in the early Middle Ages.

The battle at the Kennet in 1006

Historical context

The events of 1006 are recorded in the CDE manuscripts of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* and are given here in translation:

> Then when it came near to winter, the army travelled home, and after Martinmas the raiding-army came to its secure base in the Isle of Wight, and there provided themselves everywhere whatever they needed. And then towards midwinter they took themselves to their prepared depots, out through Hampshire, into Berkshire at Reading; and they did, in their custom, ignite their beacons as they travelled; and travelled then to Wallingford and scorched it all up; and then turned along Ashdown to Cwichelm's Barrow and there awaited the boasted threats, because it had often been said that if they sought out Cwichelm's Barrow they would never get to the sea. Then they turned homewards by another route. Then the army were assembled there at Kennet [*æt Cynete*], and there they joined battle; and the Danes soon brought that troop to flight, and afterwards carried their war-booty to the sea. There the people of Winchester could see the raiding-army,

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[44] E.g. Brunanburh, Ashdown, Assandun, etc. See Foard and Morris, *The Archaeology of English Battlefields*, p. 45 for a tabulation of the multiplicity of possible battlefield locations. In 'Searching for Brunanburh' (n. 3 above), Michael Wood presents an exemplary study that highlights the limitations of a mono-disciplinary approach to battlefield studies. Wood also makes a persuasive case for identifying the site of Brunanburh with a location on the river Went, at a site with long continuity of use as an assembly and muster point in a highly militarized landscape.

proud and not timid, when they went by their gates to the sea and fetched themselves provisions and treasures from over 50 miles from the sea.[45]

This campaign came in the context of major raids undertaken from the 990s onward that exploited the apparent inability of the late Anglo-Saxon state to adequately defend itself from a resurgent threat from Scandinavian aggression across the North Sea, and which would ultimately result in the conquest of England by Swein Forkbeard in 1013 and then again in 1016 by his son, Cnut. On this occasion, the ability of the Viking army to range (relatively) unopposed for scores of miles inland may have been intended to hasten the payment of tribute by demonstrating the inadequacy of English civil defence. In the following year, the Viking army would receive a payment of 36,000 pounds from the English crown. However, the *Chronicle* account of 1006 is remarkable for several reasons. Firstly, it explicitly describes resistance offered by an Anglo-Saxon army during the course of the Viking march, which implies the existence of an effective system of mobilization. Secondly, it offers a unique record of attitudes relating to a named landscape feature that suggest an association between ideas about conflict and places of communal memory. Finally, the Viking route through Wessex suggests a deliberate manipulation of the associations of place that would have had maximum psychological impact for the harassed English population. Close investigation of the landscape – particularly of the probable location of the battle at the Kennet – can shed further light on the significance of all of these points, and suggest ways in which the conflict landscape of late Anglo-Saxon England can be further interpreted.

Topography and archaeology

On the face of it, the battle at the Kennet is one of ten conflict sites in Wessex whose primary locational characteristic is the proximity to water – in this case the vicinity of the river Kennet, which has its origins in the Avebury region of Wiltshire. There is, however, sufficient documentary and circumstantial evidence to provide the battle with an unusually secure and investigable topography. Nick Baxter, in an unpublished article on the location, significance and historical context of the battle, has surveyed the evidence of tenth-century charters, and the associated chronicle account provided by John of Worcester, to locate the battle at

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[45] *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* [E], *s.a.* 1006; translation by Swanton, *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicles*, pp. 136–7, with minor modification by the author. Swanton translates *æt Cynete* as 'at the [river] Kennet'; in my view this is misleading and lacks textual authority, as outlined in the following paragraphs.

the crossing of the river Kennet near the village of East Kennet.[46] In summary, this rests on the description of the battle as 'at' or 'next to' Kennet ('æt Cynete';[47] 'juxta Kenetan'[48]), with the implication that the references imply a specific place, rather than the river in general. Kennet (*Cynetan*) occurs as a place name in a 972 charter of Athelstan granting land within Overton hundred,[49] indicating that an area within the hundred was known by that name as early as the tenth century. The modern village names of East and West Kennet preserve this local toponym. It seems highly probable on the basis of this charter that, to a West Saxon audience, the place name Kennet had quite specific associations, a suggestion made more plausible by the precision with which other places in the chronicle entry are identified (including a rare allusion to a named assembly site). [50]

The most likely place, on this reading of the evidence, at which the Anglo-Saxon fyrd would have intercepted the raiding army, is just north of the point at which the Ridgeway crosses the river Kennet just south of Overton Hill near the aforementioned village of East Kennet (Fig. 1). For the Viking army to reach the river from Cwichelm's barrow (*Cwichelmeshlæw*, the shire meeting place of Berkshire but now within the post-1972 boundaries of Oxfordshire), the most straightforward route would have been to follow the line of the Ridgeway.[51] Additional reasons to support this thesis arise in the course of the ensuing discussion.

The crossing of the Kennet lies in the river valley at the foot of Overton Hill, over which the Ridgeway climbs – eventually reaching a height of over 250 metres. Immediately to the north of the crossing, after a steep climb from the valley bottom, the gradient becomes markedly shallow as the Ridgeway continues to climb northwards and, at the change in gradient (approx 350 metres from the crossing), is the site of the 'Sanctuary' – a stone, and earlier wooden, circle that was still largely intact as late as 1725 (Fig. 2). Until the time of its destruction, the

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[46] N. Baxter, unpublished article (2010).

[47] *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* [E], *s.a.* 1006; translation by Swanton, *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicles*, pp. 136–7.

[48] *The Chronicle of Florence of Worcester*, ed. and trans. T. Forester (London, 1854).

[49] S 784; for the full text see The Electronic Sawyer, Online Catalogue of Anglo-Saxon Charters, <http://www.esawyer.org.uk/charter/784.html> [accessed 4 April 2014].

[50] There are, it must be acknowledged, other possibilities, particularly if the mention of 'Kennet' is taken as a generalized reference to the river. None, however, are particularly compelling, particularly given the civil defence context: see Baker and Brookes, *Beyond the Burghal Hideage*, p. 218 for the alternatives.

[51] A. Reynolds and S. Brookes, 'Anglo-Saxon Civil Defence in the Viking Age: A Case Study of the Avebury Region', in A. Reynolds and L. Webster (eds), *Early Medieval Art and Archaeology in the Northern World: Studies in Honour of James Graham-Campbell* (Leiden, 2013), p. 594; the 'Ridgeway' follows a line described as a *here-pæþ* in a number of ninth- and tenth-century charters (S 668, S 449 and S 668) – see Baker and Brookes, *Beyond the Burghal Hideage*, pp. 148–59.
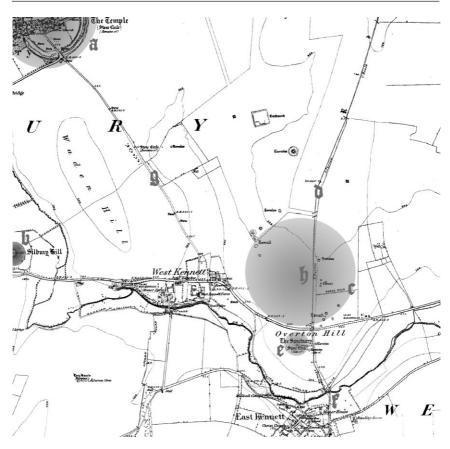
Fig. 1 Map of the area around Overton Hill showing the probable battlefield and related features, marked on the first edition Ordnance Survey map (1889, 1:10,560 scale): Avebury (a); Silbury Hill (b); Roman London–Bath road (c); the Ridgeway (d); the Sanctuary (e); the crossing of the river Kennet (f); stone avenue connecting Avebury with the Sanctuary (g); part of a bronze-age barrow cemetery and the probable battle site (h). © Crown Copyright and Landmark Information Group Limited (2014). All rights reserved

monument would have been an impressive and mysterious landmark, standing at the threshold of the steep descent to the water crossing below and to the south. Reconstructions of the monument in its final phase and drawings by John Aubrey and William Stukely dating to the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries give some indication of the likely form and state of preservation in the eleventh century. Stukely, in his *Abury, a Temple of the British Druids*, wrote of the affection with which the stone circle was held by local people, claiming that they 'still call it the
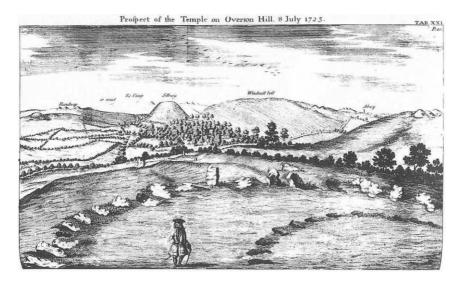
Fig. 2 William Stukeley's drawing of the Sanctuary and related topography in 1725, in *Abury, a Temple of the British Druids* (London, 1725)

sanctuary . . . and the veneration for it has been handed down thro' all succession of times and people'.[52] How much this assertion reflects reality is of course unknowable, but one suspects that Stukely was probably correct in his assessment: it is self-evident that a monument like the Sanctuary would have impressed itself forcibly on the imaginations of anyone who came in contact with it.

In 1685, the apothecary Robert Toope wrote to John Aubrey with description of a cemetery he had discovered by chance adjacent to the still-standing stone circle. He describes how the bodies lay 'So close one by another that skull toucheth skull . . . At the feet of the first order I saw lay the heads of the next, their feet intending the temple: I really believe the whole plaine, on that even ground is full of dead bodies.'[53] Sadly, Toope's habit of pulverizing human bones for use in medicinal remedies seems to have taken its toll,[54] and no trace of Toope's cemetery has been found in subsequent excavations. It is entirely likely that any such cemetery was associated with periods other than the early medieval. Nevertheless, the presence of a mass grave of late tenth-/early eleventh-century date in a similar landscape context on the Dorset Ridgeway at least

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[52] Stukeley, *Abury, a Temple of the British Druids*.
[53] Stukeley, quoted in W. Long, 'Abury', *The Wiltshire Archaeological and Natural History Maga-zine* 4 (1858), pp. 309–63.
[54] R. Sugg, 'Corpse Medicine: Mummies, Cannibals, and Vampires', *The Lancet* (2008).

provides a possible analogue for such a burial in the late Saxon period, although the deposition of remains at the Ridgeway cemetery does not correspond to the sardine-like scenario that Toope's description implies.[55]

Several modern excavations have taken place at the Sanctuary.[56] None has found evidence of Toope's cemetery. These excavations have understandably focussed on the substantial Neolithic and bronze age activity at the site and are not – for that reason – summarized here. Early medieval remains in the vicinity are not substantial and certainly cannot be used to prove or disprove the location of the battle.[57] Only a late Anglo-Saxon stirrup strap mount, found in the river Kennet near Silbury Hill, provides material evidence for a military presence of the right date in the immediate vicinity of the likely battle site.[58] This is not surprising, however, given the total absence of remains from any first-millennium English battlefield.[59]

Three hundred and sixty degree views from the Sanctuary demonstrate lines of sight with the top of Silbury Hill to the west north-west, the numerous bronze-age round barrows that dominate the level ground to the north-east, and the rising hillside north north-west (as well as single outlying barrows to the north and immediately south of the stone circle site on either side of the Ridgeway – Fig. 3). It is this funerary landscape that is presumably referred to as *seofan beorgas* (seven barrows) in the boundary clause of the 972 charter.[60]

West and East Kennet long barrows are also visible from the Sanctuary, forming part of the wider Neolithic ritual landscape. Directly to the north-west lies the line of the stone avenue that proceeds from the henge

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[55] L. Loe, A. Boyle, H. Webb and D. Score (eds), '*Given to the Ground.' A Viking Age Mass Grave on Ridgeway Hill, Weymouth,* Dorset Natural History and Archaeological Society Monograph Series 22 (2014).

[56] M. Pitts, 'Excavating the Sanctuary: New Investigations on Overton Hill, Avebury', *Wiltshire Archaeological and Natural History Magazine* 94 (2001), pp. 1–23; J. Pollard, 'The Sanctuary, Overton Hill, Wiltshire: A Re-examination', *Proceedings of the Prehistoric Society* 58 (1992), pp. 213–26.

[57] It worth noting that there is also evidence for an early Anglo-Saxon cemetery at this location, both as secondary interments in a now partially destroyed Roman barrow and in the agger of the Roman road at the point of its crossing with the Ridgeway: see National Monument Record (NMR) numbers SU 16 NW 55 (<http://www.pastscape.org.uk/hob.aspx?hob_id=220841> [accessed 4 April 2015]) and SU 16 NW 93 (<http://www.pastscape.org.uk/hob.aspx?hob _id=220945> [accessed 4 April 2015]), and also B. Eagles, 'Pagan Anglo-Saxon Burials at West Overton', *Wiltshire Archaeological and Natural History Magazine* 80 (1986), pp. 103–19. I am grateful to one of the anonymous reviewers of this paper for drawing my attention to these finds, which also bring in train some interesting points of correlation with other Anglo-Saxon battlefields, most notably the battle of Edington (see T.J.T. Williams, 'The Place of Slaughter').

[58] Reynolds and Brookes, 'Anglo-Saxon Civil Defence', p. 594.

[59] Foard and Morris, *The Archaeology of English Battlefields*, pp. 49–52, but note the possible exception of the battle of Fulford: <http://www.fulfordbattle.com/report_fulford.htm> [accessed 4 April 2015], and Foard and Morris, *The Archaeology of English Battlefields*, p. 57.

[60] S 784 (for full text see <http://www.esawyer.org.uk/charter/784.html>).

Fig. 3 Several of the tumuli to the north north-west of the Sanctuary are now crowned with imposing beech stands

monument at Avebury. Although none of the stones are now visible from the Sanctuary, part of the line of the modern A4 runs along or adjacent to the line of the avenue and it is possible (though not provable) that a portion of the old processional avenue between the two monuments was visible and usable in the eleventh century. North of the Sanctuary by 275 metres the Ridgeway crosses the line of the Roman road from London to Bath, which itself is situated 230 metres north of the A4. This was probably an artery connecting Silbury Hill and Marlborough in the eleventh century, and lies just to the south of the point at which a *herepæþ* (army road) crosses the Ridgeway[61] – a route connecting the late Saxon burh at Avebury with the northern approaches to Marlborough.[62] The crossing of the Ridgeway at this point would have been an important junction. This crossroads is the central point of an area of relatively shallow gradient (rising, to the north, by 20 metres over a distance of 680 metres) and, as a large area of relatively flat ground containing a site of strategic importance, is the most likely site of the battle.

In a recent paper on systems of civil defence in the Avebury region, Andrew Reynolds and Stuart Brookes have presented a detailed overview of the military networks that may have operated in this part of Wiltshire during the later Anglo-Saxon period.[63] In this, the practical reuse of prehistoric remains is described in the context of defensive networks, and

[61] For a nuanced definition of *herepæþ* with references to the relevant literature, see Baker and Brookes, *Beyond the Burghal Hideage*, pp. 143–4.
[62] Reynolds and Brookes, 'Anglo-Saxon Civil Defence', p. 582.
[63] Reynolds and Brookes, 'Anglo-Saxon Civil Defence', pp. 561–606.

it is important to place the battle site in this context. Most strikingly, the battle site is situated in close relationship to the postulated beacon relay linking Yatesbury and Avebury (via Silbury Hill), to Totterdown and thence to Marlborough.[64] It seems likely that a station at Totterdown would have seen any approaching army on the Ridgeway from a considerable distance and been able to relay that knowledge to the minor burhs at Avebury and (probably) Marlborough almost instantly, providing perhaps as much as a day's warning of an approaching enemy. Certainly the *Chronicle* entry for 1006 implies a preparedness on the part of the West Saxon levy that faced the Viking raiding army at the Kennet – even though they were ineffective in dealing with the threat. The presence of this system implies that this crossroads was recognized to be an important strategic junction and thus formed part of a militarized landscape.[65] Archaeological excavations at Silbury have revealed evidence of a structure, including a palisade, dating from *c.*1010.[66] It is possible that, in reaction to the failure of the local fyrd to counter the Viking threat in 1006, this area was considered to require investment to reinforce its defensive capability.

The fact that an army assembled near the Sanctuary would have been able to see signals from Silbury and Totterdown adds to the likelihood that the battle was fought at Overton Hill; sophisticated messages – utilizing different woods for variation in colour or intensity of flame, some perhaps carried by runners[67] – could potentially have been communicated right up until the enemy were in view of the assembled fyrd. Reynolds and Brookes also emphasize the role of minor burghal garrisons in contributing to local policing and defensive duties, and it seems probable that the forces assembled at the Kennet were drawn from these settlements.[68] Certainly the communication routes make this plausible – as mentioned above, the battle site is probably near the junction of the Ridgeway with the Roman road from Bath to London, which leads west to Silbury Hill and east to Marlborough. This route runs to the south of a circular network that incorporates a more northerly road system connecting Avebury and Marlborough, segments of which are described as *herepaþ* on the first edition Ordnance Survey map and in a boundary clause from a charter of 939 (S 449). A further possibility is that West

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[64] Reynolds and Brookes, 'Anglo-Saxon Civil Defence', pp. 586–8.
[65] A similar arrangement – of a crossroads overlooked by a possible signalling relay – has been identified by John Baker at the crossing of the Icknield Way by the Roman road from St Albans to Alchester: see J. Baker, 'Warrior and Watchmen: Place Names and Anglo-Saxon Civil Defence', *Medieval Archaeology* 55 (2011), pp. 258–9.
[66] A. Reynolds, *Later Anglo-Saxon England* (Stroud 1999); Reynolds and Brookes, 'Anglo-Saxon Civil Defence', pp. 584–6.
[67] Reynolds and Brookes, 'Anglo-Saxon Civil Defence', pp. 590–1.
[68] Reynolds and Brookes, 'Anglo-Saxon Civil Defence', p. 596.

Saxon forces could have approached the Ridgeway using the stone avenue that leads directly from the fortified enclosure at Avebury to the Sanctuary, which may well have been a more clearly delineated route in the eleventh century than it now appears. The fact that, in this case, a battle was fought near to – but not within – a robustly defensible site is unremarkable.[69] The object of initiating the conflict from a West Saxon perspective was to prevent the progress of the Viking raiding army towards the West Saxon heartlands and ultimately to the sea – the futility of remaining within a stronghold in these circumstances is neatly illustrated by the 'proud and not timid' progress of the Viking army past the walls of Winchester.[70] The events of 1006 at the Kennet thus seem to suggest an efficient system of civil defence put into action; even if the end result was disastrous, the network seems to have functioned remarkably well. The Danish passing of Cwichelm's Barrow can thus be interpreted as a trigger that ultimately mobilized an Anglo-Saxon force to block passage from the Ridgeway south into the Pewsey Vale. If so, this might provide a partial explanation for the prophetic passage contained in the *Chronicle* entry.

The symbolic and mythological landscape

The practical function of a defensive network such as that described by Reynolds and Brookes was to enable lethal force to be brought efficiently to bear on groups perceived to be the enemies of the established system of social and territorial organization.[71] Considered in these terms, it is entirely reasonable to view warfare against an invading army as a form of sanctioned, legitimate, quasi-judicial violence.[72] The laws of King Ine (688–94) – whence the oft-cited definition of a *here* (the normal way in which Viking armies are described in the *Chronicle*) as a group of more than thirty-five armed men is derived – makes explicit the association of the term with criminality. A *here* could thus very well be defined as simply

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[69] See also T.J.T. Williams, 'The Place of Slaughter' for other explanations of the curious reticence of Anglo-Saxon armies to make use of fortified places.

[70] *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* [E], *s.a.* 1006; translation by Swanton, *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicles*, p. 137.

[71] Baker and Brookes, *Beyond the Burghal Hidage*, pp. 10–12.

[72] That early medieval warfare in England was influenced by a developing idea of 'just war', aspects of which are thought to have influenced Old English poetry, was explored by J.E. Cross in 'The Ethic of War in Old English', in P. Clemoes and K. Hughes (eds), *England Before the Conquest: Studies in Primary Sources Presented to Dorothy Whitelock* (Cambridge, 1971), pp. 269–82. In addition, it can be argued that warfare in Anglo-Saxon England contained features of judicial combat reliant on the concept of *judicium dei* – submission to divine justice in battle. The formal introduction of trial by combat in the later eleventh century could be viewed as a late development of attitudes commonly held in the early medieval north. See M.W. Bloomfield, 'Beowulf, Byrhtnoth, and the Judgment Of God: Trial by Combat in Anglo-Saxon England', *Speculum* 44.4 (1969), pp. 545–59.

meaning a large group of thieves, as opposed to a small one (*hloð*) or fewer than seven (simply, *ðeofas* 'thieves').[73] Other semantic links – words for wolf (such as *wearg*), for example, are applied to monsters, Vikings and other social deviants (particular those implicated in illicit violence)[74] – make the 'outlaw' status of illegitimate armed groups very clear.[75] Seen from this perspective, a battle site can be expected to take on some of the characteristics of execution sites: these are places where lethal violence was meted out to transgressors of social and legal norms. Firm evidential links between warfare and judicial killing in the early medieval period are uncommon, but the recent Weymouth relief road (A354) excavation on the Dorset Ridgeway provides a possible exception. Around fifty headless skeletons were excavated, along with a slightly smaller number of skulls. Isotope analysis demonstrates that the individuals possessed diverse, but predominantly Scandinavian-centred origins and migration histories,[76] and carbon dating places the burial between 970 and 1025.[77] It is highly probable that this is an execution cemetery for Viking prisoners – perhaps a captured raiding party – and the site exhibits the traits that Andrew Reynolds has identified as characteristic of late Saxon execution sites: high elevation and proximity to major routeways (both ensuring high visibility) and association with prehistoric monuments.[78] The Dorset Ridgeway mass grave thus provides a West Saxon example of an association between execution and mass violence – possibly even contemporary with the events of 1006. Given all of this, it is striking that the battlefield at the Kennet exhibits many of the same topographical and geological characteristics.[79]

Halsall, in providing some interpretation of his locational findings, raised the intriguing possibility that 'certain kinds of [battle] site were set

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[73] *English Historical Documents, 500–1042*, ed. and trans. D. Whitelock, 2nd edn (Abingdon, 1979), p. 31, 13.1.

[74] R. Abels, 'The Micel Hæðen Here and the Viking Threat', in Timothy Reuters (ed.), *Alfred the Great: Papers from the Eleventh-Centenary Conferences* (Aldershot, 2003), pp. 269–71; A. Pluskowski, *Wolves and the Wilderness in the Middle Ages* (Woodbridge, 2006), pp. 185–90.

[75] Pluskowski, *Wolves and the Wilderness in the Middle Ages*, pp. 185–90. On the relationship between armed men and the wild beast more generally, see T.J.T. Williams, 'For the Sake of Bravado', and A. Pluskowski, 'Animal Magic', in M. Carver, A. Sanmark and S. Semple (eds), *Signals of Belief in Early England: Anglo-Saxon Paganism Revisited* (Oxford, 2010), pp. 118–20.

[76] Loe *et al.*, *Given to the Ground*, pp. 42–3.

[77] Loe *et al.*, *Given to the Ground*, pp. 128–9 and 259–84.

[78] Loe *et al.*, *Given to the Ground*, pp. 8–9 and 233–5; Reynolds, *Anglo-Saxon Deviant Burial Customs*.

[79] Geological conditions seem to have influenced the settings of warfare long into the later medieval and early modern period, a phenomenon possibly related to the correlation between routes of communication and underlying geological traits, notably chalk; see Halsall, 'Geology and Warfare in England and Wales 1450–1660' and 'Battles on Chalk: The Geology of Battle in Southern England during the First Civil War', in Doyle and Bennett, *Fields of Battle*, pp. 19–31 and 33–50.

aside as "places of fear" ', suggesting that the practice of Anglo-Saxon warfare engaged on some level with the supernatural danger associated with specific landscape types.[80] The apparent conceptual association between execution sites and battlefields, alongside aspects of the morphology of the Kennet battlefield, support this suggestion. Most dramatically, the upstanding stone circle may have been thought of as a particularly unwholesome place. There is certainly some suggestion that the similar monument at Stonehenge was regarded as peculiarly dreadful – not only does it appear to have been used as a place of execution and deviant burial in the early Saxon period, but its absence from any documentary sources of pre-eleventh century date is sufficiently remarkable to imply a deliberate silence. It may have represented something especially horrible to the Anglo-Saxon imagination.[81] The similarly surprising omission of the upstanding Sanctuary from all contemporary documents – including charter bounds, where it might be expected to figure as a prominent landmark given that the neighbouring barrows *do* feature in the charter of 972 (S 784; see above) – might be considered in the same light, and the possible presence of a mass burial draws parallels with both the Stonehenge execution burial and the Dorset Ridgeway mass grave. Moreover, the presence of a major crossroads in a landscape dominated by barrows brings into combination features with sinister associations; Ælfric was, as late as the 990s, warning of the recourse by witches to both barrows and crossroads for the purpose of summoning the dead.[82] The fact that the location is situated on a territorial boundary (in this case an estate boundary defined by the 972 charter, S 784) also links the battle site with other places associated with judicial violence.[83]

The *seofan beorgas* (seven barrows) that define the location in the charter bounds referred to above are – stone circle aside – the defining monumental characteristic of the Kennet battlefield landscape. There are, in fact, more than seven, and they dominate the field of view in almost

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[80] S.J. Semple, 'A Fear of the Past: The Place of the Prehistoric Burial Mound in the Ideology of Middle and Later Anglo-Saxon England', *World Archaeology* 30.1 (1998), pp. 109–26; Halsall, 'Anthropology and the Study of Pre-Conquest Warfare', p. 166.

[81] A. Reynolds, 'Stonehenge', in H. Beck, D. Geuenich and H. Steuer (eds), *Reallexicon der Germanischen Altertumskunde* 35, 2nd edn (Berlin, 2007).

[82] A.L. Meaney, 'Ælfric and Idolatry', *Journal of Religious History* 13 (1984), pp. 119–28.

[83] Reynolds, *Anglo-Saxon Deviant Burial Customs*. Alongside these observations might be considered the position of early high-status Anglo-Saxon warrior graves in similarly marginal locations; see Reynolds, 'Archaeological Correlates', but cf. J. Blair, *The Church in Anglo-Saxon Society* (Oxford, 2005), pp. 59–60. The presence of the river can also be considered in terms of physical and symbolic boundaries. As Halsall has shown (Halsall, 'Anthropology and the Study of Pre-Conquest Warfare', pp. 165–7), fords and riverine locations are disproportionately represented in the early battlefield record, and Bede in particular seems to attach a special significance to the role of water in conflicts with a religious dimension, perhaps recalling biblical narratives of flood and exodus. See *Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People* I.20 and III.24, trans. L. Sherley-Price and ed. D.H. Farmer, 3rd edn (London, 1990), pp. 69–70 and 184.

every direction. It is abundantly clear that mounds – funerary or otherwise – had sinister and otherworldly associations in the Anglo-Saxon world-view. The mound-dwelling dragon of *Beowulf* and the supporting maxim *Draca sceal on hlæwe* ('the dragon belongs in its mound') are the classic examples,[84] and elsewhere Sarah Semple has thoroughly surveyed evidence that identifies the barrow as 'the most fearful, horrible and haunted' of places. *Beowulf*, *The Wife's Lament* and the various treatments of the life of St Guthlac provide ample illustration of how the mound loomed grimly in the imaginary landscape.[85] It is notable that in both *Beowulf* and the Old English *Guthlac A*, the poetic language that described the mound dwellers is explicitly military. Once roused, the dragon is pleased by 'war's prospect . . . the thought of battle action'.[86] Guthlac's demons are similarly bellicose, boasting that 'the throng will come trampling in with troops of horses and with armies. Then they will be enraged; then they will knock you down and tread on you and harass you and wreak their anger upon you and scatter you in bloody remnants.'[87]

In both cases, however, neither dragon nor demon seems to have any long-term designs on the wider human realm – even the dragon, having wreaked vengeance for a theft from his hoarded treasure, returns to his dwelling to await the coming of Beowulf and 'trusted now to the barrow's walls'.[88] In every description of the dragon, his guardianship of the barrow is emphasized. Guthlac's demons, too, express themselves in sympathetic terms as the injured party, claiming that Guthlac 'had perpetrated the greatest affliction upon them when, for the sake of bravado in the wilderness, he violated the hills where they, wretched antagonists, had formerly been allowed at times a lodging-place'.[89] It is in defence of their possessions and barrow-homes that these supernatural forces are mobilized; the terrifying behaviour exhibited or threatened by dragons and demons tends to obscure the fundamentally defensive nature of the violence directed towards their respective human adversaries. In both cases the human intervention represents a usurpation of hoard and home, the very things that it was a king's responsibility to protect on behalf of his people (as the poetic entry for the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* in 937

[84] Christine Rauer has also surveyed the analogues for the Beowulf dragon in other secular and hagiographical literature, emphasizing its role as a measure of both heroic and religious struggle: C. Rauer, *Beowulf and the Dragon*: *Parallels and Analogues* (Woodbridge, 2000).
[85] Semple, 'A Fear of the Past', p. 113.
[86] *Beowulf*, lines 2297–8: *Beowulf: A Verse Translation*, ed. and trans. M. Alexander, 7th edn (London, 2003), p. 82.
[87] *Guthlac A*, lines 285–9: *Anglo-Saxon Poetry*, ed. and trans. S.A.J. Bradley (London, 1982), p. 257.
[88] *Beowulf*, line 2330, ed. and trans. Alexander, p. 83.
[89] *Guthlac A*, lines 206–212: ed. and trans. Bradley, p. 255.

iterates with great clarity).[90] There is thus an ambiguity about the motivations of these mound-dwellers in the literature that complicates their monstrosity and in fact aligns these supernatural forces with traditional aristocratic values. It is thus insufficient to regard the mounds occurring in battlefield contexts as exclusively defined by their negative associations; we need to recognize the ambiguity of violence and monstrosity implied by the battlefield topography.[91]

Richard Bradley has perceived in the reuse of ancient monuments an active process whereby social memories are created to legitimize claims to power and land: 'In such cases, links with a remote past, which could not be evaluated before the development of archaeology, may have been used to legitimize the social order',[92] and this idea has been taken up widely in regard to the reuse of pre-historic (and Roman) structures in Britain and Scandinavia during the early medieval period.[93] Both the reuse of ancient sites and the rehearsal of mythic narratives have been interpreted as behaviours that act to collapse temporality, merging contemporary events into what has variously been described as 'myth-time' or 'ritual-time',[94] whereby the protagonist becomes indissoluble from the mythic archetype. It can be argued that the wider locational evidence for conflict presented here points towards battles functioning as rituals that take place in highly charged symbolic loci and which position actors within this myth-ancestral time – thus emphasizing legitimacy, tradition, right to rulership and king-worthiness on a deeply rooted psychosocial level. None of the monuments at the Kennet have any obvious significance beyond their generic funerary nature and, possibly, their number, [95] although the presence of a likely early Anglo-Saxon cemetery at the site

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90 'Edward's offspring, as was natural to them / by ancestry, that in frequent conflict / they defend land, treasures [*hord*] and homes / against every foe': *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* [A], *s.a.* 937; translation by Swanton, *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*s, pp. 136–7.

91 For a more sustained consideration of these ideas see T.J.T. Williams, 'For the Sake of Bravado'.

92 R. Bradley, 'Time Regained: The Creation of Continuity', *Journal of the British Archaeological Association* 140.1 (1987), p. 3.

93 For example: S. Brink, 'Mythologising Landscape: Place and Space of Cult and Myth', in Stausberg (ed.), *Kontinuitaten und Bruche in der Religiongeschichte. Festschrift fur Anders Hultgard*, pp. 76–112; S. Semple, *Perceptions of the Prehistoric in Anglo-Saxon England: Religion, Ritual, and Rulership in the Landscape* (Oxford, 2013); H. Williams, *Death and Memory in Early Medieval Britain*; Reynolds, *Anglo-Saxon Deviant Burial Customs*; Thäte, *Monuments and Minds*.

94 Bradley, 'Time Regained'; J.M. Hill, 'Gods at the Borders: Northern Myth and Anglo-Saxon Heroic Story', in S.O. Glosecki (ed.), *Myth in Early Northwest Europe* (Turnhout, 2007), pp. 241–56.

95 The use of the number seven in this context can potentially be connected to the Byzantine legend of the *Seven Sleepers of Ephesus*. The folkloric parallels were discussed by the author in a paper presented at the first Popular Antiquities: Folklore and Archaeology conference at UCL in October 2010 and are currently being prepared for publication: <https://www.academia.edu/1722385/Sleeping_Kings_and_Wild_Riders_Supernatural_Warfare_in_the_Anglo-Saxon_Landscape> [accessed 4 April 2015].

raises the possibility of some sort of local communal memory or folklore now lost.[96] The battlefield does, however, sit in relation to two other remarkable myth-ancestral conflict sites, both centred on mounds, where mythological archetypes were arguably present and actively deployed: Cwichelm's Barrow and Woden's Barrow. Both are worth discussing briefly here as they relate closely related to the Kennet battle and the choice of battleground.

Invoking Cwichelm

As Guy Halsall has pointed out, there are perfectly sound strategic reasons why prominent monumental features might be chosen as battle-fields. In support of that view, he used the example of the 1006 *Chronicle* entry and reference to the 'boasted threats' made by the English in relation to Cwichelm's Barrow.[97] The function of the barrow as the shire meeting place for Berkshire means that the mound would have occupied a central and defining position within the local area, and was possibly conceived of as being at the heart of regional identity by the local community. It was, in other words, exactly the sort of place where a community might choose to arrange a punch-up; a highly visible and meaningful manifestation of 'home turf'.

And yet, whilst this goes some way to explaining this extraordinary *Chronicle* entry, detailed consideration of the site – now known as Skutchmer Knob (or Cuckhamsley Hill, or variants of both of these names) – supports a deeper reading. Although the site is now severely damaged by earlier and illicit excavations, Sarah Semple and Alexandra Sanmark's excavations at the site have demonstrated that the mound was originally constructed as a prehistoric barrow, probably in the bronze age.[98] The combination of a funerary monument with a name linking it to an early Anglo-Saxon figure – probably the seventh-century West Saxon leader Cwichelm[99] – makes it probable, as Howard Williams has discussed in some detail, that the mound functioned as a memorial to a royal ancestor (possibly even a belief that it contained his grave).[100] The reuse of Cwichelm's Barrow for administrative and legal functions recalls suggestions that funerary landscapes were used in the early Anglo-Saxon period as meeting places where the whole community – living and dead

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[96] See n. 49 above.
[97] Halsall, 'Anthropology and the Study of Pre-Conquest Warfare', p. 165.
[98] A. Sanmark and S.J. Semple, 'Places of Assembly: New Discoveries in Sweden and England', *Fornvännen* 103.4 (2008), pp. 245–59.
[99] See the Prosopography of Anglo-Saxon England (PASE) website for recorded references to this Cwichelm. He is listed there as *Cwichelm 1*: <http://www.pase.ac.uk/index.html> [accessed 4 April 2015].
[100] H. Williams, *Death and Memory in Early Medieval Britain*, pp. 207–11.

– could engage in identity-shaping ritual.[101] The supposed resting place of a legendary king may have played precisely such a role for the people of Berkshire; a powerful link to the past and a potent symbol of cultural identity and shared heritage that conferred ancient authority to a place associated with the exercise of power.[102] That ancestral traces could be considered manifest in times of assembly leads naturally to the suggestion that they could also be present when the same community was under threat – particularly when conflict centred on the myth-ancestral site itself, and there is growing evidence not only of conceptual and practical associations between battle sites and military assembly (mustering) but also between battle sites and funerary monuments.[103] The recorded traditions surrounding Cwichelm identify him as a notable warrior-king who fought against Penda of Mercia and against the British. Of particular interest is his reported slaying, with his brother King Cynegils, of 2,065 Britons 'on Bea's hill'.[104] A communal memory of this sort – as Williams suggests – is highly likely to have contributed to ideas about the place being particularly appropriate for aggression directed towards the enemies of Wessex;[105] one can perhaps see in the wording of the *Chronicle* entry a folkloric echo of the power of the mythic archetype as it was deployed in a military context. [106]

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[101] H. Williams, 'Assembling the Dead', and S.J. Semple, 'Locations of Assembly in Early Anglo-Saxon England', both in Pantos and Semple (eds), *Assembly Places and Practices in Medieval Europe*, pp. 109–34 and pp. 135–54 respectively.

[102] H. Williams, *Death and Memory in Early Medieval Britain*, p. 210.

[103] The interconnectedness of Anglo-Saxon administration is the subject of the ongoing Lerverhulme funded project 'Landscapes of Governance: Assembly Sites in England 5th–11th Centuries' led from University College London: <http://www.ucl.ac.uk/archaeology/research/projects/assembly/publications_papers> [accessed 4 April 2015]. See also J. Baker and S.J. Brookes, *Explaining Anglo-Saxon Military Efficiency: The Landscape of Mobilisation* (forthcoming).

[104] The identity of Bea is unknown, as is the location of this other plausibly myth-ancestral mound-type battle site (if it ever had a physical existence as a place outside the Cwichelm legend). It is open to reasonable conjecture that Bea – like Cwichelm, Cerdic, Egbert, Edwin, Woden, and others represented in the nomenclature of Anglo-Saxon battlefield landscapes – was at one stage also a name to conjure with in Anglo-Saxon ancestral mythology. *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* [A], *s.a.* 614; translation by Swanton, *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*s, p. 22.

[105] H. Williams, *Death and Memory in Early Medieval Britain*, p. 210.

[106] Simon Keynes has argued that the *Chronicle*'s account of the reign of Æthelred is a hostile, retrospective account and that the form of words used in the entry for 1006 is intended, through the use of irony, to highlight the failings of the English administration in coping with the Viking onslaught: S. Keynes, 'The Declining Reputation of King Æthelred the Unready', in D. Hill (ed.), *Ethelred the Unready: Papers from the Millenary Conference*, BAR, British ser. 59 (1978), pp. 227–53. There is no reason, however, to suppose that the entry is unreliable in its narrative outline or that the reference to Cwichelm's Barrow is a fiction – its significance may lie in the choice made by the chronicler to report otherwise unrecorded traditional material where it supported his dim view of King Æthelred's reign. In any case, the effect of its inclusion is to draw an indirect parallel between Æthelred and his more illustrious ancestor, suggesting that Æthelred could no longer rely on the support of his own ancestors and their legitimizing presence in the landscape: a subtle but damning indictment of his fitness to rule.

Neil Price has made a compelling case for a Viking-age Scandinavian belief in the active agency of supernatural forces on the battlefield.[107] Leaving aside the possibility of cross-cultural influence (in whichever direction) in the later Saxon period, there is some reason to believe that similar ideas may have held some force in the Anglo-Saxon world-view – even in a late and overwhelmingly Christian environment. The belief that ancestral forces could be accessed at prehistoric sites has been discussed above, and was apparently current as late as the 990s, when Ælfric warned against the recourse of witches to heathen burials for the purpose of summoning the dead.[108] The increasing prevalence of military visions and expectations of divine intervention in military affairs that characterize the later Middle Ages can be traced from notably early expressions in Anglo-Saxon texts. [109] It is also notable that royal military saints come into view in England at a very early date – unparalleled elsewhere in early Christian Europe.[110] It may be that these precocious developments should be understood in the light of pre-Christian frameworks of understanding that encompassed a belief in battlefield magic and the role of supernatural antagonists in war. Taken in this light, what Williams has called 'the curse of Cwichelm's mound'[111] takes on an even more direct significance: the complex relationship of fear, power, ancestral memory and warfare may have contributed to a belief that supernatural agents – variously associated with the winning of territory, the establishment of folk groups and royal genealogies, and the aggressive defence of *hord and hamas* – could be accessed and employed in certain prominent locations, possibly influencing the perceived appropriateness and choice of certain places for conflict.

The links between Cwichelm's Barrow and the Kennet battlefield are perhaps to be understood in this light. Although the threat of Cwichelm appears to have gone unfulfilled, it is surely no accident that the conflict – when it came – should have come in an environment that, through its funerary topography, invoked not only Cwichelm's mound, but Bea's Hill as well. In more than one sense, the Danish visit to Cwichelm's Barrow may have acted as a trigger: the challenge activated a network of conceptual, spatial and narrative associations that may have brought,

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[107] N. Price, *The Viking Way: Religion and War in Late Iron Age Scandinavia* (Uppsala, 2002).
[108] A.L. Meaney, 'Ælfric and idolatry', *Journal of Religious History* 13 (1984), pp. 119–28.
[109] K. Hare, 'Apparitions and War in Anglo-Saxon England', in D.J. Kagay and L.J.A. Villalon, *The Circle of War in the Middle Ages: Essays on Medieval Military and Naval History* (Woodbridge, 1999), pp. 75–86.
[110] C. Stancliffe, 'Oswald, 'Most Holy and Most Victorious King of the Northumbrians', in C. Stancliffe and E. Cambridge (eds), *Oswald: Northumbrian King to European Saint* (Stamford, 1995), pp. 33–83; K. Hare 'Heroes, Saints and Martys: Holy Kingship from Bede to Aelfric', *The Heroic Age* 9 (2006), <http://www.heroicage.org/issues/9/toc.html> [accessed 22 April 2015].
[111] H. Williams, *Death and Memory in Early Medieval Britain*, p. 207.

alongside the practical military deployment, an expectation of supernatural assistance that could be assumed to act with juridical authority and royal legitimacy. The doomed Saxon fyrd, nervously waiting amongst the ruins of prehistory for the approaching Viking army, were perhaps able to stand a little taller, grip their spear shafts more firmly, in the belief that the spirits of mighty ancestors were close at hand.

On Woden's ground

Following the path of the Ridgeway three miles south of the Kennet, the walker reaches the line of Wansdyke cutting east–west across the chalk downs (Fig. 4). Crossing it, one enters a landscape that contains one of the densest concentrations of theophoric place names in England. Here can be found Woden's Dyke (Wansdyke), Woden's Gate (*Woddes geat*), Woden's Valley (*Wodnesdene*) and Woden's Barrow (*Woddes beorg*, *Wodnesbeorg*).[112] It is a location where the memory of conflict and of royal mythology and genealogy intersect, and was almost certainly an important symbolic locale for West Saxon kings who claimed descent from Woden and derived their legitimacy from military conquest – both of which were expressed in the landscape through association with monumental prehistoric remains.[113] I have articulated the argument elsewhere that this location may have been of particular importance in the early to mid-Anglo-Saxon period as a ritual complex associated with a cult of martial kingship.[114] By the later Anglo-Saxon period, it is likely that many of these functions and associations had been transplanted to other places similarly associated with kingship and spiritual authority, much as the locations of royal burial were also to be translated.[115] Nevertheless, it is unlikely that these associations – particularly at a local level – would have been entirely forgotten, certainly while place names remained intelligible markers in common currency (the Woden names of this particular landscape are known from ninth- and tenth-century charters, as well as ninth-century *Chronicle* entries).[116] It seems likely that an intrusion into

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[112] For detailed discussion of this landscape see A. Reynolds, 'From *Pagus* to Parish: Territory and Settlement in the Avebury Region from the Late Roman Period to the Domesday Survey', in G. Brown, D. Field and D. McOmish (eds), *The Avebury Landscape: Aspects of the Field Archaeology of the Marlborough Downs* (Oxford, 2005), pp. 164–80; Reynolds. 'Archaeological Correlates'; J. Pollard and A. Reynolds, *Avebury: The Biography of a Landscape* (Stroud, 2002); Semple, *Perceptions of the Prehistoric*.

[113] T.J.T. Williams, 'Place of Slaughter'.

[114] T.J.T. Williams, in preparation; for an early outline of work in progress see: <https://www.academia.edu/1854404/Landscapes_of_Ritual_Warfare_in_Early_Medieval_Britain_poster_2010_> [accessed 4 April 2015].

[115] Blair, *The Church*, pp. 58–78.
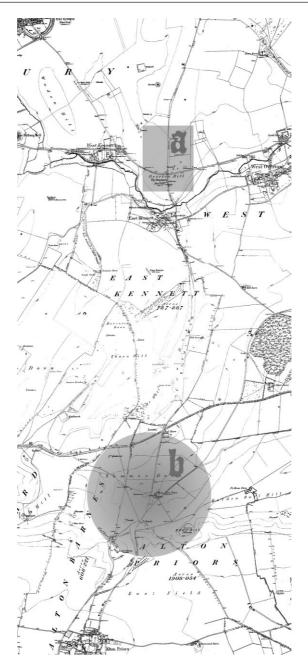
[116] S 449; S 272.

Fig. 4 Map of the route from the probable battle site at Overton Hill (a) to the area around Woden's Barrow (b), marked on the first edition Ordnance Survey map (1889, 1:10,560 scale). © Crown Copyright and Landmark Information Group Limited (2014). All rights reserved

Fig. 5 View from Red Shore (the crossing of Wansdyke by the Ridgeway) across Woden's Valley. Woden's Barrow and Walker's Hill are on the right, Knap Hill to the left

this symbolically rich landscape would have been profoundly disturbing to the local West Saxon population, and perhaps part of the deliberate psychological campaign that the Viking *here* seems to have been waging in 1006.

The topography of the site is also worth considering. Approaching from the Ridgeway, the crossing of Wansdyke into Woden's Valley is nothing short of breathtaking (Fig. 5). On either side of the path at the edge of the chalk ridge stand the peaks of Knap Hill and Walker's Hill, the former crowned with iron-age and Neolithic enclosures,[117] the latter with the Neolithic long barrow now known as Adam's Grave, but formerly – and in a charter of 825 (S 272) – as Woden's Barrow.[118] Between these peaks the path plunges to the edge of the ridge that separates the Wiltshire uplands from the Vale of Pewsey. Passing through that symbolic gateway meant unfettered access to the agricultural heartlands of Wessex

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[117] NMR SU16SW13 (<http://www.pastscape.org.uk/hob.aspx?hob_id=221112&sort=4&search =all&criteria=knap hill&rational=q&recordsperpage=10> [accessed 4 April 2015]) and SU16SW22 (<http://www.pastscape.org.uk/hob.aspx?hob_id=221139&sort=4&search=all &criteria=knap hill&rational=q&recordsperpage=10> [accessed 4 April 2015]).

[118] NMR SU16SW24 <http://www.pastscape.org.uk/hob.aspx?hob_id=221145&sort=4&search =all&criteria=adams grave&rational=q&recordsperpage=10> [accessed 4 April 2015]. Whilst charter S 272 <http://www.esawyer.org.uk/charter/272.html#> [accessed 4 April 2015] is not authentic, it seems to be based on older exemplars.

beyond. The fact that the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* records two battles fought at Woden's Barrow attests to the importance that control of this site represented for West Saxon royal territorial authority.[119] It is clear from the map that for an enemy army to reach the Vale of Pewsey from the north involved the crossing of a number of boundaries, both physical and symbolic: the line of the Roman road, the river Kennet, the defensive ditch of Wansdyke, and the geological transition from the chalk upland under the shadow of Woden's Barrow. From a West Saxon perspective, it would surely have been imperative to attempt to prevent an enemy from passing these various *limites* and may well have contributed to the choice of battlefield at the Kennet.

Conclusion

A landscape such as that at the Kennet can be seen to express a number of different social ideas that were open to manipulation by both the West Saxons and their Viking enemies. By the early eleventh century, and after two centuries of warfare and settlement, it can very plausibly be supposed that many Scandinavians had been exposed to the cultural norms and geographical vocabulary of English warfare. By their aggressive entrance into this landscape – first at Cwichelm's Barrow, then at the Kennet, and afterwards crossing Wansdyke and Woden's Field before ultimately passing the walls of the royal *burh* at Winchester – the Viking army was able to mount a profound challenge to the ideals and obligations of English royal authority. It was a challenge that operated on a number of levels: it challenged the military effectiveness of systems of civil defence, and made mockery of the king's role as law enforcer; it invited the defence of land, hoard and home; it defiled the burial places of ancestors and dared the wrath of heroes and euhemerized gods. Taken together, the campaign of 1006 can be seen as a blow struck against English, and particularly West Saxon, identity and claims to effective control over the landscape.

Through the exploration of these events, this paper has attempted to show how the close study of individual conflict landscapes can make a substantial contribution to how warfare in early medieval England should be understood, particularly in its relationship to matters of royal and ancestral mythology and the intangible attributes of landscape that have been increasingly recognized as an important key to matters of ideology

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[119] *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* [A], *s.a.* 592 and 715; translation by Swanton, *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicles*, pp. 20, 42.

and world-view. Further research will show how deeply and how widely these ideas were encoded elsewhere in Britain and how changing social and political circumstances may have been reflected in the wider conflict landscape. In doing so, it is hoped that the study of the place of battle in Anglo-Saxon England can be significantly advanced, and some of the problems outlined at the beginning of this paper overcome.

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