

The Anglo-Saxon settlement of England

The state of research in Britain in the late 1980s

BY CATHERINE HILLS

When I gave my paper at Reichenau I tried to explain why it is difficult at present to produce a satisfactory synthesis of the evidence for the Anglo-Saxon migration to Britain. In particular, I focussed on two works, which seem to me to epitomize two very different approaches to the subject, and I tried to explore the reasons for those differences. I did this because I think that theoretical and ideological perspectives are important, and that they do affect the way we select and interpret evidence for the past, although I might not go so far as R. Reece, who has recently claimed »the way that you see Britannia turning into early England is going to say far more about you ... than about Britain from AD 200 to 800«¹). The point I was trying to make was that conflicting views of how to set about interpreting the evidence for the fifth century in Britain exist, and that the conflict sometimes seems to have inhibited research. It was not really fair to concentrate on two authors, or on the two kinds of thinking I think they represent. In fact a number of perspectives can be detected in current work, and scholars seldom fit quite so neatly into categories as I might have seemed to suggest. A second very important point which needed more emphasis is that there is a great deal of recent and current research, by scholars in various disciplines, which is relevant to our understanding of this period. The detail and volume of this work constitute another obstacle to synthesis, but offer considerable hopes for future resolution of some problems. In this paper I want to review some of the different approaches and to outline some recent work on different aspects of the problem, rather than myself attempting to offer any general account of the settlement of England by the Anglo-Saxons.

At Reichenau I discussed the paper published by H. W. Böhme²). I also discussed the book by C. Arnold »Roman Britain to Saxon England« (London 1984). These two works seem to me to represent very different approaches to the subject, indeed to archaeology. Böhme has collected and plotted the distribution of certain categories of metalwork of late fourth and fifth century date found in Britain. He has interpreted this in the light of historical evidence, although, as he says, he is attempting to use the archaeological material to go beyond existing

1) R. REECE, *My Roman Britain*. *Catswold Stud.* 3 (Cirencester 1988) p. 110.

2) H. W. BÖHME, *Das Ende der Römerherrschaft in Britannien und die angelsächsische Besiedlung Englands im 5. Jahrhundert*, in: *Jahrb. RGZM* 33, 1986, p. 469-574.

historical accounts. In particular, he traces a declining but surprisingly long-lived sphere of authority for the Roman army in southern Britain well into the fifth century, and the arrival of Germanic settlers in East Anglia during the same period. He has a specific topic, and sets out one kind of explanation for one kind of material in a very clear and persuasive manner. The relation of artefacts to written history in this way is very familiar, from generations of scholarship cast in the same mould, although not always with the same precision of detail.

Arnold's book is more ambitious in its aims, and refers to a much wider range of archaeological material: settlements, landscape history, burial ritual as a whole rather than confining himself to specific groups of artefacts. Inevitably he cannot bring to each aspect of the material the mastery of detail shown by Böhme's analysis of belt fittings and brooches, but he does try to bring a range of different kinds of evidence together and to see how coherent a picture can be derived from all of them. He sets his work within a theoretical framework derived from the »New« archaeology, which has had, as Arnold and a few other medievalists have complained, remarkably little effect on the thought and practice of Roman and post-Roman archaeologists in Britain. In principle it is clearly necessary to have a rationale behind the collection of information: questions to be asked, hypotheses to be tested. Reference to general models of the development and behaviour of human societies should help towards understanding of the specific case of fifth-century Britain, and computer-aided statistical analysis should be a valuable tool in coping with large data sets. In practice, in order to produce a clear picture, there must be selection from the vast mass of potentially relevant information. There is a temptation to emphasize those pieces of evidence which fit the predetermined theory and ignore or play down contradictory indicators. The evidence is still very fragmentary, so that some of the statistical techniques applied are too sophisticated, and produce misleadingly firm results from small samples.

British scholars are now confronted with a dilemma. There are still those who continue to work entirely within an artefact-based, historical framework close to that employed by Böhme. Most of the rest of us also occasionally produce work in this tradition: but we tend to keep to small articles or to deal with specific sites or regions, and keep away from grand synthesis. We are concerned that the historical framework may not be what it once seemed, while none of the various »isms« (eg. Marxism, processualism, structuralism, post-structuralism ...) which have flourished in British archaeology in the past twenty years seems a satisfactory substitute. A few scholars, like Arnold, have attempted new interpretations from a theoretical viewpoint, without, perhaps, taking enough account of all the detail for their conclusions to carry conviction³).

3) See for example R. HODGES, Peer polity interaction and sociopolitical change in Anglo-Saxon England, in: C. RENFREW and J. C. CHERRY (eds.), Peer polity interaction and socio-political change, Cambridge University Press (Cambridge 1986) p. 69–78; C. J. ARNOLD, Stress as a stimulus for socioeconomic change: Anglo-Saxon England in the 7th century, in: C. RENFREW and St. SHENNAN (eds.), Ranking, Resource and Exchange, Cambridge University Press (Cambridge 1982) p. 124–131; R. HODGES, The evolution of gateway communities: their socioeconomic implications, *ibid.* p. 117–123; K. RANDBORG,

Justifiable criticisms have been levelled at each side: traditionalists can be narrow, they do sometimes take historical information at its face-value, and they do sometimes lose the wood for the trees of detail about pots, brooches, house-types and so on. On the other hand, interesting ideas are sometimes not worked out with sufficient reference to what we really do already know, and statistics can be used to obscure rather than to enlighten. In the end, it is probably a futile argument: it is really the questions asked which differ, as much as the methods of answering them, and scholars will always differ as to which topics they see as most important. But there are clearly some contradictory conclusions, implicit and explicit, some of which do arise from underlying preconceptions. If you believe that most of the population of Roman Britain died, went to Wales, or became serfs, your account of the settlement of the Anglo-Saxons will be very different from the account written by someone who believes that a minority of immigrant Germanic people somehow achieved dominance over a substantial indigenous population. If you give the written word priority over material evidence or vice versa some of your conclusions will be predetermined. Writing the history of the fifth century in terms of kings and princes, again, will not give the same picture as one deriving from study of peasant life, or the use of the land. As well as a diversity of philosophies, English scholarship also faces the problem caused by the success of what has often turned out to be destructive criticism, which has undermined confidence in both archaeological and historical conclusions which once seemed securely founded. Vollrath's paper will have shown you how effective the source criticism of people such as D. Dumville⁴⁾ has been in removing the possibility of using our earliest documents as the straightforward account of events in the fifth and sixth centuries which previous generations of historians and archaeologists assumed they could be if one could only get the precise dates exactly right. Most English scholars would now use with great caution all of the sources Böhme quotes in his historical summary: few of these can now be taken as easily accessible accounts of events in fifth-century Britain. Also, given that we have such small fragments of written history it is not reasonable to suppose that they will be reflected clearly in the equally fragmentary archaeological record. Recorded events, such as battles or deaths of kings, are in any case notoriously badly reflected in the archaeological record which usually tells us most about the ways of life of ordinary people. So we can no longer take it that we have an outline to be filled in, even if we were not rather more ambitious for archaeology than that it should fill in a few spaces provided by historians.

Archaeological evidence has been as critically examined as the documents. It is now not possible to look at a distribution map and read it at once as a simple pattern of past activity. Agricultural, building and archaeological activity in recent centuries has been patterned for various reasons, such as the fertility of the soil, the location of universities or gravel quarries. One active fieldworker can alter the picture quite considerably: some parishes, like Witton in

Ranks, rights and resources: an archaeological perspective from Denmark. Part V, Discussion: contrasting paradigms. , *ibid.* p. 132-139.

4) D. DUMVILLE, Sub-Roman Britain; History and Legend, in: *History* 62, 1976, p. 173-192.

Norfolk⁵⁾ are so well-worked we can reconstruct their history in detail whereas the next parish is a blank. In some areas landowners are willing to let archaeologists onto their land, in others they are suspicious: some of the »empty« parts of north-eastern Norfolk may be caused in this way. Some metal-detectors work with archaeologists so their finds can be plotted, others do not: again, the resulting distribution maps will be biased. We see ancient patterns through this recent pattern. For moveable artefacts we must remember that we are looking at a pattern of loss, not of use or manufacture. Any one object could have a long and mobile life before it was lost or discarded. The south-eastern bias of most British distribution maps, especially those relating to Anglo-Saxon England, has to do with two things above all: the continuing greater prosperity and greater population of the south-east, and the burial practices of the Anglo-Saxons.

The Anglo-Saxons are very visible in the archaeological record, as, before them, the Romano-Britons were also very visible. We can find easily recognizable pots, brooches, burials and even houses in respectable quantity in most parts of eastern England. If, on the other hand, we go to western Britain, to Wales, the south-west, and parts of the west Midlands, we do not see any evidence for Anglo-Saxons in the fifth century, or even in the sixth. This is not surprising, if any credence can be attached to historical accounts of the slow westwards advance of the Anglo-Saxons. But what is disturbing is that we cannot really find much archaeological evidence for the existence of any inhabitants of those regions at all. Neither historical nor environmental evidence suggests total depopulation, and the later inhabitants of western Britain have always been assumed by themselves and everyone else to have been largely descended from the indigenous prehistoric population. The explanation must be that the British population did not have a very rich material culture, and seldom buried its dead in any way which would allow us now to distinguish them from later medieval Christian burials. The one large excavated cemetery from this area which can be dated to this period, Cannington in Somerset, only serves to underline this⁶⁾. Even the refortified hilltop sites such as South Cadbury which have been seen as homes for the chieftains who lie behind the Arthurian stories can be put in such a context only by the handfuls of imported Mediterranean pottery they produce⁷⁾. The question we must now ask is, is it true, as Böhme says, that north of the Thames »kaum noch mit nennenswerter romano-britischer Bevölkerung im 5. Jahrhundert zu rechnen ist«⁸⁾? Or is it more complicated than that? Should we be looking for Britons in the east, as invisible there as their cousins in the west, masked by the visible Anglo-Saxons?

5) A. J. LAWSON, *The Archaeology of Witton, near North Walsham*, in: *East Anglian Arch.* 18, 1983, p. 1–117.

6) Ph. RAHTZ, *Late Roman cemeteries and beyond*, in: R. REECE (ed.), *Burial in the Roman World*, CBA Res. Reports 22 (London 1977), p. 53–64.

7) I. BURROW, *Hillfort and hill-top settlements in Somerset in the first to eighth centuries A.D.* BAR, British Ser. 91 (Oxford 1981); Ch. THOMAS, *Celtic Britain* (London 1986).

8) BÖHME (see note 2) p. 525.

A fifth-century British peasant might have lived in the rundown remains of a house dated only by the fourth century pottery of its earlier phases. Coins and other easily dateable metal artefacts ceased to enter Britain in quantity after at latest the beginning of the fifth century, wheel-thrown pottery was no longer manufactured. The dead could have been inhumed without grave-goods according to late Roman practice. It might not be possible to distinguish between a British farm abandoned in 400AD and one still occupied two centuries later. Some support for this scenario has been provided by a few excavations of late Roman sites. Wroxeter is too far west to affect our understanding of the east, but it does provide one possible model for the last phases of a Roman town. The latest dated levels within the Baths basilica at Wroxeter underly a sequence of building and rebuilding, some of these constructional phases involving buildings of some elaboration. It is an elastic sequence which begins somewhere in the late Roman period, and extends into the fifth century or even beyond, without any diagnostically dateable finds of such a date so far published⁹). A similar constructional sequence beginning in the fourth century and extending for some unknown but significant time thereafter has been demonstrated by Sh. Frere at Verulamium. In *Insula XXVII* a house was built c380AD. Subsequently it was extended, new mosaics were inserted which remained in use long enough to need repair. Later a corndrier was inserted into part of the building, which was also used long enough to need repair. The house was subsequently demolished and replaced by a large rectangular building, constructed with Roman building techniques, but using broken tiles, as if no new tiles could be obtained. This building in turn was demolished, and across its remains the trench for a wooden water-pipe was laid. On Frere's conservative estimate this sequence could not end before 450–470AD. In the late fifth century, or later, therefore, there were still people in southeastern England who wanted, and were capable of constructing, a Roman-style water supply¹⁰). Elsewhere, W. J. and K. A. Rodwell have argued for continuity of occupation and use from Roman villa to Anglo-Saxon farm at Rivenhall in Essex, almost on the east coast¹¹). In the Upper Thames valley at Barton Court near Abingdon excavation has shown the development of an Iron Age farm to Roman villa to Anglo-Saxon farm¹²). There are even cemeteries which have produced burials of both Roman and Saxon type, for example in the Cambridge region¹³) or at Wasperton in the Midlands¹⁴). Quite a number of Roman sites have produced early Saxon pottery, and Roman objects occur on many Saxon sites. Without large-scale excavation, as at Barton Court, it is impossible to assess

9) Ph. BARKER, Wroxeter Roman City. Excavations 1966–1980, Dept. of the Environment (London 1980).

10) Sh. FRERE, Verulamium Excavations II. Report no. XLI of the Research Committee of the Society of Antiquaries of London (London 1983) p. 23–24; 212–228.

11) W. J. and K. A. RODWELL, Rivenhall. CBA Res. Reports 55 (London 1986).

12) D. MILES (ed.), Archaeology at Barton Court Farm, Abingdon, Oxon. Oxford Arch. Unit Report 3, CBA Res. Reports no. 50 (London 1984).

13) J. LIVERSIDGE, Roman Burials in the Cambridge Area. Proc. Cambridge Antiqu. Soc. 64, 1977, p. 11–38.

14) M. Carver, pers. comm.

the significance of these juxtapositions, but cumulatively they suggest more overlap between the two peoples than might have been suggested in the past. Place-name scholars have also noted a relationship between Roman and Anglo-Saxon sites¹⁵⁾ although it has to be said that the density of Roman sites is now known to be so great (see below, p. 311) that it might be difficult for any later site not to be near Roman remains. An argument can be constructed which starts with the poverty of demonstrably post-Roman British sites in the west, continues by way of sites which are occupied apparently without a significant break from the fourth to the sixth century and beyond, to suggest that much of the rural British population remained where it had always been.

Not only might we be able to detect the previously invisible Britons, still in situ, disguised as very run-down Romans. They might also be disguised as Saxons. This might seem to fly in the face of traditional wisdom, but there is no reason why a Briton should not have taken on Anglo-Saxon habits and equipment. An apparent Saxon might therefore in reality have been of British descent. All people of one ethnic grouping do not necessarily wear brooches which demonstrate that fact, and brooches of any one type are not necessarily exclusively the property of one specific group, although of course this can sometimes be approximately true. So, for example, the discovery at Spong Hill in Norfolk of one or two brooches of types which seem to come from central Germany¹⁶⁾ does not prove that Alemanni or Thuringians settled in East Anglia, because isolated brooches can travel without their original makers or owners, through trade, gift, theft, or inheritance. It is only where archaeological evidence exists for several aspects of society, such as burial ritual as a whole, or building techniques, or farming practice, that one can begin to make an argument for a relationship between the people of one area and that of another.

Comparison between the large cemeteries excavated in England, at Spong Hill¹⁷⁾, and at Süderbrarup in Schleswig-Holstein¹⁸⁾ does show similarity not just at the level of individual artefacts, but in the whole range of types and the proportions in which they occur. Where there are differences they can sometimes be explained in terms of chronology: Spong Hill begins and ends later than Süderbrarup so it may show development of trends visible in their earlier stages at Süderbrarup. For example, there is a decline in the deposition of brooches which is apparent in the later stages of Süderbrarup, and which seems to continue at Spong Hill. Both sites have complete bone reports¹⁹⁾, so that it is possible to say something about

15) B. COX, The significance of the distribution of English placenames in -ham in the Midlands and East Anglia, in: *English Placename Soc. Journal* 5, 1973, p. 15-73.

16) M. SCHULZE-DÖRLAMM, Romanisch oder Germanisch?, in: *Jahrb. RGZM* 33.2, 1986, p. 593-720.

17) C. HILLS, The Anglo-Saxon Cemetery at Spong Hill, North Elmham, Part I, in: *East Anglian Arch.* 6, 1977, p. 1-242; C. HILLS and K. PENN, Spong Hill II, *ibid.* 11, 1981, p. 1-287; C. HILLS, K. PENN and R. RICKETT, Spong Hill III, *ibid.* 21, 1984, p. 1-167; Spong Hill IV, *ibid.* 34, 1987, p. 1-212.

18) N. BANTELMANN, Süderbrarup I. *Archäologische Untersuchungen, Offa-Bücher* 63 (Neumünster 1988).

19) J. WAHL, Süderbrarup II. *Anthropologische Untersuchungen, Offa-Bücher* 64 (Neumünster 1988); J. MCKINLEY, Spong Hill VIII. The Bone Report, *East Anglian Arch.* Forthcoming.

associations of grave-goods and age or sex. Similar inconclusive patterns seem so far to be emerging although work on this is not yet complete for Spong Hill. The greater quantity of glass beads and ivory at Spong Hill may be another chronological difference: or it could be because there were few women buried at Süderbrarup, except in the later phases. Altogether, the general and specific points of similarity are so considerable that it does seem legitimate to suggest a contingent of settlers from Schleswig-Holstein in central Norfolk, Angles in fact in East Anglia just as Bede said. However, it is clear that there are elements of other cultural traditions at Spong: stamped pottery, saucer, applied and equal-armed brooches, all of which have a more »Saxon« flavour, as well as pots and metal objects which find parallels further afield. It is not so easy to quantify and assess the significance of these finds. There may very well have been, as I have argued before, a mixed group of Germanic settlers from various parts of northern Europe at Spong Hill. Or a group of predominantly Anglian origin could have acquired pots and brooches from other peoples, or they might have included a small number of wealthy or productive Saxons. The accident of a single skilled Saxon potter might have started a fashion for stamped pottery amongst people who had hitherto never used this kind of decoration.

Not only might Angles have used »Saxon« pots: so might Britons. In the absence of pottery or brooches of their own they might have used those of the immigrants. British wives or slaves have always been allowed a possible role in Anglo-Saxon populations, but perhaps we should look for their menfolk as well. If they were buried according to their own rites we might look first amongst unfurnished inhumations, although we do not know enough about Romano-British burial practice in Norfolk to rule out the survival of cremation. If they did cremate their dead, the most easily available funerary urns would have been the new Anglo-Saxon pots. Alternatively, they might have taken on all of the fashions and burial practices of the incomers. Identifying the geographical antecedents of each type of artefact is an important part of the investigation, but it does not give a simple answer as to the composition of the people using them. So many »Anglian« pots, so many »Saxon« brooches do not necessarily mean that there were the equivalent number of Anglian or Saxon settlers, or that all those who were buried with them were even of Germanic origin.

Human bones can be brought in here: some studies do support ideas of change in the population of some areas during the Migration period, while others do not. For example, at Frénouville in northern France, the bone report appears to substantiate the case for an indigenous population remaining fairly constant while fashions taken from a dominant elite – which did change, at least in part – filtered down to make it seem as if the people changed from Roman to Saxon to Frank²⁰. J. Blondiaux, however, has argued that at Vron, also in northern France, there was a new, more robust, »germanic« group, distinct from the earlier inhabi-

20) Ch. PILET, *La nécropole de Frénouville: étude d'une population de la fin du III^e à la fin du VII^e siècle*. BAR, Internat. Ser. 83 (Oxford 1980).

tants²¹). If there were comparable published English studies no doubt they would display a similar lack of unanimity. This kind of study is extremely difficult: variation in the size of skeletons has at least as much to do with health as ancestry, and although a study of some southern English skeletons suggested that there was an increase in stature from the Roman period to the Saxon period, the explanation put forward was in terms of nutrition rather than population change²²).

The attraction of continuity as a concept to English scholars may derive partly from insularity. Böhmes work is salutary here: his knowledge of the likely sources for material found on English sites is often greater than ours. None of us realized there might be a Goth buried in Gloucester or Huns at Caerleon. There is a tendency to explain everything in terms of Britain, with only sideways glances at Europe (of which many of us still do not feel part). We may be more inclined to think in terms of an unbroken sequence of occupation and exploitation of the land, rather than the disruption of invasion, simply because it is so long since England was invaded that invasion is not part of our subconscious, as it must be for many continental peoples. So recently there has been more interest in the structure of Anglo-Saxon society as a static phenomenon, rather than in the narrative of settlement. This is evident in work on ranking, as reflected through variation in grave-goods. There clearly is work to be done here, but the same anthropological thinking which inspired the approach has also shown how very problematic it can be. The dead are not always an exact mirror of the living, and the ways in which a dead body may be treated by those burying him or her do not necessarily reflect the status the person being buried had when living. People of very different status might have been given similar burials: for example, were those buried without grave-goods too poor to have any possessions, or were they Britons continuing late Roman burial practice, or Anglo-Saxons converted to Christianity? It is also probably a mistake to neglect chronology, since even if in prehistoric terms a period of two or three centuries is very short, there are enough historical sources for our period (just!) to remind us that that is a long time, during which many political, social and economic changes can take place.

A great deal of contradictory argument has been published on the subject of continuity, but some useful points do seem to have been established. It is very difficult to see the institutions and language of Roman Britain surviving in the southern and eastern parts of the country. Occasional finds of fifth-century material in towns or villas do not mean that urban life, or Roman administration, survived in any meaningful way. Nonetheless, there are pointers to a greater survival of the population than was once thought possible. In the first place, although it is not possible to give precise figures, it does seem that there were far more people in Roman Britain than used to be thought. This revision derives from the density of

21) J. BLONDIAUX, *La présence germanique en Gaule du Nord: La preuve anthropologique*. Paper given at 39. Sachsensymposium in Caen, Sept. 1988.

22) M. ROBINSON and B. WILSON, *A survey of environmental archaeology in the south Midlands*, in: H. C. M. KEELEY (ed.), *Environmental Archaeology: a regional review*. Vol. II. HBMCE Occasional Paper no. 1 (London 1987) p. 16–100.

settlements of first to fourth century date all over lowland England – a density not reached again for many centuries. For example, in Northamptonshire C. C. Taylor has plotted three or four settlements per square kilometre²³, T. Williamson has found similar densities in Essex²⁴ and comparable figures can be derived from most intensive surveys of lowland England. An unpublished map of Roman sites and finds in Norfolk compiled by T. Gregory (Norfolk Archaeological Unit) shows a dense mass of symbols over most of the accessible parts of the county. Even allowing for the fact that this represents a great variety of types of settlement, spread over several centuries, this must indicate a considerable population. In some areas the density of Roman settlement is comparable to that of medieval England, which might imply a similar comparability of population size. Even the size of the medieval population of Britain is not generally agreed, but a baseline of two million calculated from Domesday book (with many caveats) is often used. The Roman figures currently range from one to six million, with no obvious way of deciding which extreme is more reasonable. But at the lowest estimate, there seem rather too many for them all to have disappeared in the fifth century, however severe the political and economic disruption or virulent the plagues.

Secondly, the pattern of settlement in the early Saxon period, on a very local level, is in some cases very similar to the pattern of Roman rural settlement²⁵. The scattered hamlets and farmsteads which can be seen across the countryside in the later prehistoric and Roman periods continue into the early Saxon period and in some regions to the present day. In the areas where there was a break it was later, long after the arrival of the Anglo-Saxons, when at some still hotly debated time a more nucleated pattern of settlement emerged. In some places it has also been possible to trace back land boundaries, including parish limits, field boundaries and roads, from existing patterns, back through the earliest maps and then through analysis of field evidence to show that in outline in some areas land divisions predate the Roman period, let alone the Anglo-Saxons²⁶. There was not an uncultivated wilderness for settlers to exploit as if they were the first colonists. Lowland England has been intensively farmed for thousands of years and the traces of prehistoric farmers can still, just, be seen today, and seem in places to have conditioned later landuse to a surprising extent. Recent investigation of the earliest recorded divisions of land and peoples in post-Roman Britain suggest that many of the later Anglo-Saxon kingdoms were created by combining many smaller units. Some of these may have been divisions which had meaning in Roman and even prehistoric Britain²⁷.

23) C. C. TAYLOR, *The Nature of Romano-British Settlement studies. – What are the boundaries?*, in: D. MILES (ed.), *The Romano-British Countryside*. BAR, Internat. Ser. 103 (Oxford 1982) p. 1–16, see p. 11.

24) T. WILLIAMSON, *Settlement Chronology and Regional Landscapes: The Evidence from the Claylands of East Anglia and Essex*, in: D. HOOKE (ed.), *Anglo-Saxon Settlements* (Oxford 1988) p. 53–175.

25) WILLIAMSON (see note 24).

26) T. WILLIAMSON, *Early Co-axial Field Systems on the East Anglian Boulder Clays*, in: *Proc. Prehist. Soc.* 53, 1987, p. 419–431.

27) See especially the papers collected in St. BASSETT (ed.), *The Origins of Anglo-Saxon Kingdoms* (London–New York 1989).

Environmental evidence suggests a very generalized picture of continuity of landuse, in the sense that so far pollen cores do not appear to show any large scale regeneration of woodland after the major clearance of late prehistoric times. However, there are variations in the sequence sufficient to suggest »a patchwork subject to different trends in different places«²⁸). Some land may have reverted from arable to pasture. But there does not seem to be support for the idea that there was any long term abandonment of the country to allow for regrowth of forest for clearance by incoming pioneer Saxons. Some large collections of animal bones from the early Saxon village at West Stow in Suffolk and the middle Saxon town of Hamwic have now been studied²⁹). The results so far suggest that improved, larger breeds developed during the Roman period continued to be bred and exploited by the Saxons, and that there was neither a reversion to smaller Iron Age breeds nor importation of continental animals. From this J. Bourdillon argues that there must have been »a measure of real continuity in the stock and in the general standard of husbandry«³⁰).

Place-name scholars have also reassessed the basis of their thinking³¹) and moved away from simple interpretations designed to fit »accepted« history. Margaret Gelling has found a topographical theme in names given to early Saxon sites. B. Cox has listed those recorded in documentary sources written before circa 730AD³²). The British element amongst these names is much higher than collections of later recorded names: Gelling calculates it as 60 out of 224 names³³). This modifies one of the arguments against significant British survival, which has always been the apparently complete disappearance of the British language in the east. English did, of course, displace British: but it may have taken a long time to do so.

The demands of central and local government for easily accessible lists and maps of archaeological information to use as a basis for the formulation of policy have resulted in the accumulation of a vast amount of information. Some of this is unpublished, stored in local sites and monument records. Some of these have been used as the basis for a variety of published surveys of the archaeology of regions, counties, districts and towns. The Royal Commission on Historical Monuments has produced several archaeological surveys, including a set of beautiful maps of Northamptonshire, transparencies which can be overlaid in any combination required to set one class of evidence against another³⁴). It is not always easy to find or to use this information, as some of it is not published and, even when it is, a variety of

28) M. JONES, *England before Domesday* (London 1986) p. 56.

29) J. BOURDILLON, *Countryside and Town: The Animal Resources of Saxon Southampton*, in: HOOKE (see note 24) p. 176–195; P. CRABTREE, *The faunal remains*, in: *St. West, West Stow, the Anglo-Saxon Village. 1 Text*, in: *East Anglian Arch.* 24, 1985, p. 85–96.

30) BOURDILLON (see note 29) p. 187.

31) M. GELLING, *Towards a Chronology for English Place-names*, in: HOOKE (see note 24) p. 59–76.

32) B. COX, *The place-names of the earliest English records*, in: *English Place-names Soc. Journal* 8, 1976, p. 12–66.

33) GELLING (see note 31) p. 70.

34) Royal Commission on Historic Monuments. *Northamptonshire: An Archaeological Atlas* (London 1980).

criteria have been used in the compilation of the maps so that they are not always easily comparable from one region to another. There is also a difference between the results of very detailed investigation of a few square kilometres, and maps of whole regions or counties. The former include everything, down to single potsherds and flint flakes, whereas compilers of the latter have often selected »significant« finds or sites, because it would be very difficult to produce an easily comprehensible map if everything was included. Nonetheless, it is now easier to assess the evidence in spatial terms.

All of the surveys seem to give a very general picture of decline in the quantity and quality of material evidence from the late Roman to the early Saxon periods. In some cases the early Saxon period does not merit a separate map and is plotted with later Saxon or even medieval finds. The maps published for Oxfordshire³⁵, Northamptonshire³⁶, Essex³⁷, Suffolk³⁸ and unpublished maps of Norfolk (Norfolk Archaeological Unit) are all good examples of this, and the list could be multiplied without seriously altering the picture. For reasons which I have outlined above it is not possible to accept this as a straightforward measure of decline of population. It is not yet clear how we should balance the undoubted, and in some places dramatic, decline in archaeological remains against factors such as relative visibility to arrive at an estimate of any real decline in the size of the population. The simplified general maps do mask some detail. The maps of Suffolk show plentiful Roman sites, but hardly any early or Middle Saxon settlements. Nearly all those which are shown cluster in one area of south-east Suffolk, near Sutton Hoo. This is because J. Newman has surveyed that area very intensively. His detailed maps³⁹ do show a dramatic decline from Roman to Saxon, and he does argue that this means a considerable population decline. But he has more early Saxon, and many more Middle Saxon, sites than are shown on the county maps. Proportionately, the number of new Saxon sites he has found in the course of his survey is greater than the number of new Roman sites. He points out how difficult it is to identify sites of this period, a difficulty which other workers have encountered: Williamson, working in Essex, went back over the same ground he had walked before on his hands and knees before he found the small abraded sherds of hand-made pottery which are all such sites produce without excavation⁴⁰ (even when excavated, sites with major buildings can be surprisingly devoid of artefactual evidence). In eastern England, at least, when people look carefully enough, there are often sites there to find which can begin to fill the »empty« fifth-century landscape. This is not always true, and

35) G. BRIGGS, J. COOK and T. ROWLEY, *The Archaeology of the Oxford Region*. Oxford Univ. Dept. for External Stud. (London 1986).

36) RCHM (see note 34).

37) D. G. BUCKLEY (ed.), *Archaeology in Essex to AD 1500*. CBA Res. Reports. 34 (London 1980).

38) D. DYMOND and E. MARTIN (eds.), *An Historical Atlas of Suffolk*. Suffolk Country Council and Suffolk Institute of Archaeology and History (Ipswich 1988).

39) J. NEWMAN, *East Anglian Kingdom Survey – Final Interim Report*, in: *Bull. Sutton Hoo Research Committee* 6, April 1989, p. 17–20.

40) WILLIAMSON (see note 24).

surprising variation can be found even within eastern England. The Fenland Project has involved intensive survey of the fenland regions of several counties around the Wash. Some of the results are now published⁴¹). In Norfolk parish after parish produces Roman finds but nothing of early Saxon date, whereas in Lincolnshire numerous early Saxon sites have been found⁴²). The explanation in this case may have to do with the peculiar situation of the fens, with their fluctuating history of submergence and drainage, but elsewhere there are not always such obvious reasons for the presence or lack of post-Roman sites. In Hampshire, St. Shennan found 18 Roman villas and 30 Roman occupation sites in the area of his intensive survey, but no Saxon settlements at all, and only five cemeteries, not all securely dated⁴³). This might be thought surprising in the traditional home of the West Saxons. Even B. Yorke's new version of the early history of Hampshire leaves us with some Germanic settlers to account for, even if they were Jutes rather than Saxons⁴⁴).

Seeking for a simple account of the fifth century for the whole of England is clearly a mistake. The earliest reliable documentary accounts belong to the seventh or eighth centuries. Recent research into the origins of the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms⁴⁵) gives us a picture of a country which had been fragmented into many small territories, and was in the process of reassembling into fewer, larger conglomerations, the historical kingdoms, which did not all have the same history. The fragmentation must have happened during the fifth century. Some of the territories may have had roots in Roman administrative or economic organisation, and many could have remained under British rule for a long time after 410 or even 449 or any other magic historical date for the *Adventus Saxonum*. The accounts we have of the seventh and eighth century expansion of Mercia and Wessex involve piecemeal absorption of neighbours of varying size, through the exercise of more or less violence. This is surely the visible stage of a process which began as soon as Britannia ceased to be a province of the Roman empire. It may soon be possible to use the accumulation of archaeological, linguistic, historical and geographical information which is now at our disposal to reconstruct that process of fragmentation and conflict.

The various invasions of Britain: Roman, Saxon, Viking and Norman have produced contradictory evidence as to the way in which invasions or migrations may be reflected in the archaeological and linguistic record. The Vikings have left little archaeological trace: but there is plenty of historical and linguistic evidence to attest their presence. The Normans may have been a small elite, who did not, in the end, change the language, but they did affect the location

41) D. HALL, *The Fenland Project, Number 2: Cambridgeshire Survey, Peterborough to March*, in: *East Anglian Arch.* 35, 1987, p. 1-77; R. J. SYLVESTER, *The Fenland Project, Number 3: Norfolk Survey, Marshland and Nar valley*, *ibid.* 45, 1988, p. 1-186.

42) T. LANE, *Pre-Roman origins for settlement on the Fens of south Lincolnshire*, in: *Antiquity* 62, no. 235, 1988, p. 314-321; P. P. HAYES, *Roman to Saxon in the south Lincolnshire Fens*, *ibid.* p. 321-326.

43) S. J. SHENNAN and R. T. SCHADLA-HALL (eds.), *The Archaeology of Hampshire* (Winchester 1981).

44) B. YORKE, *The Jutes of Hampshire and Wight and the origin of Wessex*, in: BASSETT (see note 27).

45) BASSETT (see note 27).

and planning of villages and towns, and the architecture of churches and aristocratic dwellings, in a very drastic manner. The Anglo-Saxons themselves absorbed large parts of the west of Britain, introducing a new language, without vast changes of population. I think it is perhaps because we have all become so aware of the complexities of the evidence, and the various interpretations which might be put on it, that English scholars have not often produced confident works of synthesis of late. I hope that some of the groundwork has now been done, and that it is becoming apparent in what directions we should go, and how the evidence should be used to construct a more positive picture in the future.

SUMMARY

This paper outlines some of the theoretical difficulties which at present face any scholar attempting to present a coherent picture of the Migration of the Anglo-Saxons to England. Currently British scholars are confronted by different theoretical perspectives, justifiable but sometimes drastic source criticism, and a vast amount of new detailed archaeological information to assimilate. It is not really possible to present a coherent story which takes account of all the evidence and allows for all points of view. Britain was very fragmented in the period in question, and possibly only detailed local studies will show what may have been a very varied regional pattern of events.