An excavated Anglo-Saxon sunken-featured building and settlement site at Salmonby, Lincs. 1972

PAUL EVERSON

INTRODUCTION

In early February 1972 Mr. Geoffrey Taylor, for years an active fieldwalker and formerly a farmer in the parish, located a previously unknown early Anglo-Saxon settlement site in the western part of the parish of Salmonby, Lincs., near the now destroyed Pickitt's Cottages. Surface indications took the form of amorphous patches showing marginally darker than the surrounding soil after ploughing. At least six such patches could be identified, though experience in the subsequent excavation showed that this was not a full indication of the number of house-sites involved. Surface finds were minimal, some small fragments of pottery, one piece of daub, and a few scraps of animal bone from the whole field. It should be noted that the finds were made as a result of noticing the soil conditions rather than vice versa, and that without Mr. Taylor's intimate knowledge of the fields no discovery would have been made at this stage. No aerial photo so far available has recorded the site.¹

In order to check his discovery, Mr. Taylor dug into one of the patches, located one corner of the sunken area of the building, and obtained a considerable quantity of hand-made Anglo-Saxon pottery including most of no. 1 below. The following weekend the whole of the building was excavated by Mr. Taylor, his wife, and the author. The work was necessarily limited in scope, both by the need to meet the farmer's requirement of back-filling within the weekend, and by the clear understanding that, except for establishing the nature of the site, only an extensive area excavation could satisfactorily extract maximum information from it.

Both surface indications and the evidence of excavation show that, in contrast to most of the Lincs. sites mentioned below and in particular to Sandy Knobbs/New England,² ploughing has only just begun to make a substantial impact on the site.
SITE AT SALMONBY, LINCS. 1972

LOCATION

This site is situated at NGR TF/31757357, approximately 750 m west of the present village of Salmonby and approximately 1500 m west of the previously known extensive early Anglo-Saxon habitation site at Sandy Knobbs/New England, which was also located and investigated in a piece-meal way by Mr. Taylor. It stands on a slight elevation in relation to its immediate surroundings, since to the north and east are the dried-up beds of small streams and to the south a small beck forming the headwaters of one of the tributaries of the River Lynn. The house sites as identified appear to straggle along the south-facing ridge of the rise from this watercourse. In this detailed respect the choice of location resembles that of Sandy Knobbs/New England in relation to the River Lyynn (and West Stow, Suffolk3 to the River Lark). The site is 250 m from the parish boundary on the south-west; Sandy Knobbs/New England is 250-100 m from it on the east.

In a wider context, the site lies on Spilsby Sandstone, at 200 feet O.D., at the head of the secluded valley formed by the River Lyynn, which opens east onto the east-coast salt-marshes (the way the Roman road, Margary no. 27, goes) and south-east towards the mouth of the Wash as the Lyynn links with the River Ripping. For general discussion of the development of settlement in the valley see below.

DESCRIPTION

The structure

An area of about 5 x 4.5 m was opened to encompass the whole of the chosen sunken feature, plus an area around it varying from 0.5 to 1.5 m. The feature after removal of topsoil showed as a regular rectangle with rounded corners, 3.75 x 3 m: excavation showed it to be somewhat less regular, and with maximum dimensions of 4 x 3.25 m. The quarter previously dug into by Mr. Taylor was emptied to produce a section ABC. This showed clearly a bipartite fill: the upper fill was a dark loose soil with charcoal flecks, more or less identical with the topsoil, the lower a finer, more tightly packed soil, light grey-brown in colour. In the centre of the feature, in the upper fill, was a group of large stones showing no trace of wear or burning, but which covered an intrusion from the upper into the lower fill containing a group of animal bones. Both fills contained examples of each kind of find, animal bones, unbaked clay loomweights and pottery, and all distinctive fabric types of the latter were present in both.

The feature survived to a maximum depth of 40 cm below this year’s ploughsoil. The sides varied from quite vertical to shallowly sloping, and there seemed to be some shallow stepping of the bottom. There was no sign of wear, darkening, or burning on the bottom, though one of the loomweights lay on that level. In the centre of the NW side a post-hole, 36 cm diameter at the top, tapering to the bottom, was sunk to a depth of 60 cm below the base of ploughsoil. No matching hole was found in the SE short side, though the edge of the feature bulged in the appropriate place. It may be that the search was not diligent enough, or that the area was disturbed by Mr. Taylor’s earlier activities.

Within 0.50 m of the E edge of the excavated sunken feature another was found. It was not investigated.

Finis

Details of the finds and their associations are presented in the accompanying tabular form. In the pottery, a range of fabrics resulting from slightly differing tempering and firing was found, such as is usual with early Anglo-Saxon pot. There was nothing at all well made, and no. 2 was particularly coarse and friable.
## TABLE OF FINDS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Pottery</th>
<th>Ill.</th>
<th>Clay</th>
<th>Stone</th>
<th>Metal</th>
<th>Bone</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2 rim 6 undec.</td>
<td>1 piece of burnt daub</td>
<td>1 worked flint, 1 flint flake</td>
<td>bone &amp; teeth from ox, sheep &amp; horse</td>
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<tr>
<td>1. Fieldwalking</td>
<td>4 rim 10 dec. 87 undec.</td>
<td>Nos. 1, 2 &amp; 6</td>
<td>20 fgt. unbaked clay, mainly loom-weights</td>
<td>1 flint scraper, 1 flt. sandstone, 1 loom-weight</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Taylor’s hole</td>
<td>10 rim 4 dec. 29 undec.</td>
<td>Nos. 1, 5 14, 15, 16</td>
<td>14 fgt. 1 complete unbaked loomweight</td>
<td>bone &amp; teeth from ox, sheep &amp; horse</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>10 rim 5 dec. 59 undec.</td>
<td>Nos. 1, 2 9, &amp; 10, 11, 12, 13</td>
<td>18 fgt. &amp; 2 complete unbaked loomweights</td>
<td>1 iron nail</td>
<td>bone &amp; teeth of ox, bone of sheep</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Ploughsoil</td>
<td>5 rim 2 dec. 14 undec.</td>
<td>Nos. 2, 3 4, 7, &amp; 8</td>
<td>18 fgt. &amp; 2 complete unbaked loomweights</td>
<td>1 lump of iron slag</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>4. Upper fill of feature</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<td>5. Intrusion below group of stones</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>6. Lower fill of feature</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>7. Post-hole</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

## DISCUSSION

### The structure

In all respects except the failure to locate a second post-hole this Salmonby sunken-featured building is identical to those at Sutton Courtenay (Berk.), Mucking (Essex), and West Stow (Suffolk) of the two-post type. In particular its fill shows the same bi-partite...
pattern as the published examples from West Stow, and it must therefore be open to a similar interpretation - that the lower fill is an accumulation during the lifetime of the building beneath floorboards, which also probably formed the basis for the superstructure - to that being canvassed by Mr. West for those examples. At Salmonby, the total lack of signs of wear and the survival of shallow stepping on the bottom of the feature in the loose subsoil must add to the argument that people were never walking about or living at this level. Some similar shallow irregularity in the bases of sunken features can be seen at Thetford (Norfolk). In the northern corner was more substantial and regular stepping of the sort that elsewhere has been taken as steps down to floor level; but again practical trial during the excavation suggested that they would not have survived long in everyday use. No sign of wooden treads or their supports was found. There was, nevertheless, no evidence at all for floorboards here, nor anything to give substance to a superstructure raised from them.

Surprisingly this represents the first Anglo-Saxon sunken-featured building to be completely excavated and published from Lincolnshire. The other buildings from Salmonby parish, and one half of one excavated by Mrs. Rudkin at Willoughton are the previous examples from which most information was recovered. John Hurst lists evidence of Saxon buildings probably of this type at Bagmoor, Barton-on-Humber, Caistor, Caythorpe, Manton, Messingham, Normanby (in Burton-Stather), and Woolsthorpe, to which should be added Irby (TA/218040 four sunken features ploughed out producing a large quantity of undecorated domestic pot, Lincolnshire History & Archaeology 2 (1967) 42), probably Finnetby (approx. TF/094803 a group of annular loomweights was brought up in deep ploughing and reported to Lincoln Museum), Osbournby and Little Hale (area TF/065384 and area TF/146421 fieldwork by B. Simmons and H. Healey, short note in Medieval Archaeology forthcoming). Examples found in Yorkshire, and even one at Yeavering (Northumberland) show that the building type was in use in all northerly areas of early Anglo-Saxon activity.

The close proximity of a second sunken-featured building in this small excavation argues not only that the surface traces give only a partial indication of the size and complexity of the site, but also that the site was in use long enough for one building to replace another, since it seems unlikely that the two were contemporary so close together. The homogeneity of the pottery finds between the upper and lower fills does not disprove the possibility of boarded floors, but rather indicates either that the hollow left by the destruction of the building became filled very rapidly, or that this building was one of the latest on the site. If the latter is so, then it looks as though we have here yet another deserted early Anglo-Saxon village which went out of use at about the period of change-over from early to Middle Saxon ceramic styles, or, more pertinently, at the time of the impact of Christianity.

The presence or absence of more substantial post-hole built structures cannot be inferred from the surface indications.

**Finds**

It will be clear from the analysis by levels that there is no clearcut distinction in the ceramic assemblage between the upper and lower fills of the feature. Not only do the same fabric types and similar decorative schemes occur in both levels, but even pieces from the same pot, notably no. 2. Some 10% of the pottery on sherd-count was decorated, and this certainly represents a higher proportion of vessels decorated, since not only were some of the undecorated sherd from the same pot (as also were some of the decorated pieces) but also some were from decorated pots. The figure is double that published for West Stow.

Where any amount of decoration exists, it has some element of stamping about it, and that generally poorly executed and poorly arranged, with the minimum of linear restraint in the form of triangular or rectangular panelling. This style of decoration is judged typologically
by Myres in funerary contexts to belong to the very end of the 6th century and later.⁸ It still has a currency on domestic products in Middle Saxon contexts as at Maxey (Northants.) and on the Ipswich ware lugged pitchers.¹¹ The combed linear bands of no. 1, with lines of stamps in between are also at home in a 7th century setting. Only no. 1 is complete enough to give a whole profile, and this shows a bulbous-bodied, tall-necked jar similar to those thought by Myres to be “among the latest types to occur in the cemeteries”, and occurring significantly in the earliest ‘Christian’ cemeteries in this country.¹² The remaining decorated fragments suggest rather ill-defined forms, with no distinctive feature of neck or rim, suitable to the proposed dating.

Similar general observations, so far as they have any validity when early Anglo-Saxon domestic pottery has yet to be worked on in any detail, apply to the undecorated pieces. No. 2, crudely made and friable as it is, is moving in form and rim shape towards the barrel-shaped pots of Maxey-type ware. No. 16, and on a smaller scale no. 14, belong to a similar shape type. A flattened, usually thickened, rim occurs in a number of cases, but no example of a cleanly knife-trimmed flat rim is present. One fragment from the upper fill, in an unusually dense sandy fabric with smooth orange-fired exterior, has pinched rusticated decoration. It compares closely in fabric, firing and decoration with a large piece from a flat-topped, barrel-shaped vessel from fieldwalking at Osbournby. This type of decoration has been found in domestic, and rarely funerary, contexts across Southern England.¹³ But with the ubiquity and undatable forms of much of the group - as for instance the small cup, no. 5, and parallels in Myres Anglo-Saxon pottery & the settlement of England (1969) fig. 10 - the major virtue of this collection is that the larger decorated pieces give a dating for the rest.

In support of a general 7th century date, the loomweights tend to the intermediate rather than the annular type, though this may be a functional necessity when they are unbaked. Their survival in this green state is something now quite frequently recognised.¹⁴ The few flint fragments are probably residual from nearby prehistoric activity, which is evidenced also by a few scraps of Bronze Age pottery from fieldwalking. Bronze Age burials have been found in neighbouring fields by Mr. Taylor’s intensive fieldwalking.

For the identifications of animal bones incorporated in the table of finds I am indebted to Mr. M. Johnson F.Z.S. of Lincoln City and County Museum. The bone material was too small in quantity and fragmentary to allow any meaningful statistical analysis. Ox was overwhelmingly the predominant animal represented, including the deposit wholly of ox bones in the secondary small pit. Sheep formed a small but significant proportion, while only one tooth gave the evidence for horse. No evidence of non-domestic animals was found. To judge from the unworn condition of the teeth most of the livestock was killed young, but there were no clear cases of cut or split bones.

Taken in conjunction with the animal bones from the Sandy Knobbs/New England site (ox, horse, and pig were identified), and the evidence for substantial wool-production which the numerous loomweights on both sites represent, this analysis points to a thoroughly mixed husbandry at early Anglo-Saxon Salmonby. The picture of arable activity implied by oxen is marginally amplified by two pollen grain impressions in loomweights from Sandy Knobbs, namely barley (Hordeum sp.; unmeasurable) and wheat (Triticum sp.; length 6.5 mm, thickness 3.5 mm).¹⁶

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE SALMONBY DISCOVERIES

The discovery of a second early Anglo-Saxon settlement site at Salmonby has a more than local interest in the field of settlement studies. It should be of particular interest to place-name scholars, and especially to those who relate their linguistic findings to soil types and early land use.
SITE AT SALMONBY, LINCS. 1972

Map 1 is produced specifically on the pattern established by the place-name studies of Professor Kenneth Cameron to investigate the relationship between English and Scandinavian place-names in the East Midlands. By reference to the superficial geology of the area, Map 2 is a complementary one showing the relief and drainage of the same area, the valley of the River Lynn.

In general, a model of settlement development may be extracted from the place-names, geology, and relief mapped here very similar to that expounded in Cameron's work. Along the north-east (south-west facing) slope of the valley, on the terrace of Spilsby sandstone (which gives a well-drained easily-worked soil), usually well placed for water supply, and almost regularly spaced at approximately 2-3 km intervals, is a string of English villages - Partney, Langton, Harrington, Salmonby Sandy Knobs/New England, Salmonby Pickitt's Cottages, Tetford. On the north-east-facing, south slope of the valley there is just the one, Hagworthingham. The Scandinavian place-names then appear to infill between the south-facing English settlements (Asby-by-Partney, Sausthorpe, Aswardby, Bag Enderby, Somersby), take over derelict land (Salmonby), colonise the north-east-facing slope, again following closely the Spilsby sandstone (Asby Puororum, Stainsby, Winceby, Lusby, Mavis Enderby, Raithby, Hundleby), and expand onto higher or less desirable land (Dalby, Skendleby, Dexthorpe, Sutterby, Fulleetby, Asgarby). There is no instance of a so-called Grimston hybrid in the valley to mark the earliest impact of Scandinavian settlement, while Stainsby, Aswardby, and Sausthorpe are not recorded until the 12th century (though there is the possibility of their presence being masked in Domesday Book). Of the rest, it seems likely on a priori grounds that the valley slope settlements predate the last group, though this could be cut across by specialist activity like sheepfarming. Dexthorpe is in a classic position for a thorpe.

Complications exist within this simplified pattern of colonisation. The present village of Harrington is marked just on the Tealby Clay, a geological basis which every other place-name, English and Scandinavian, avoids. The name does not appear in Domesday Book and is first recorded in 12th century charters. Despite the Old English basis and early form of the name, this geological evidence may confirm its late foundation. On the other hand, the well-preserved earthworks of Harrington DMV lie in front of, i.e. down-slope of, the grand 17th century house and its 19th century church. It seems likely that the original settlement, 12th century or earlier, was on the Spilsby sandstone. Note that the other probable new post-Conquest foundations use -by and -thorpe habitative elements, and that one would expect an early English settlement at this place in the valley. Greetham, too, is strangely situated on boulder clay at over 350 feet O.D., considering its meaning (Ekwall "OE grēot-ham") and early type of habitative element. It may present a case of village migration with the retention of the name, either from the Spilsby sandstone to the east, or from a pocket of gravel with a Spilsby sandstone outcrop to the north-west around the spring source of one of the tributaries of the River Wizing.

Two of the lesser valleys on the map have apparently prime sites not occupied by English-named villages. At the head of the stream (Calceby Beck) which feeds the Great Eau, Brinkhill (Ekwall "OE pers.n. Brynca or OE* brinc(e) = steep slope + leah") has a position suitable for a secondary English settlement, but there is no early English name in the valley. The likely position, on grounds of geology and water supply is occupied by Calceby, which also gives its name to and is probably the meeting place of the wapentake. Then, in the valley of Skendleby beck the early name Fordington is well up the valley on the edge of the chalk, while the spread of glacial gravels among boulder clay where the valley widens out is empty, though overlooked by Skendleby. In either case one might have expected early English settlement; probably in the first case, and less certainly in the second, though one suspects the existence of a village taken over and renamed by Danish settlers.

Early Anglo-Saxon burial sites have yet to be recognised in any numbers in this area. Where evidence exists, however, in the parishes of Partney, Asgarby and Belchford, it is noteworthy that it has turned up on patches of lighter soils which seem to be favoured by early
settlement sites. Where this occurs in the proximity of a Scandinavian name, as at Asgarby, a similar problem about the supposed colonising nature of the Scandinavian settlement (as represented by place-names) is raised to that which the early settlements at Salmonby pose, - whether the desertion of the early settlements/cemeteries meant the abandonment of the surrounding cleared land until its recolonization by Scandinavian or Anglo-Danish settlers at some time between 876 and 1086, or rather marked the nucleation of Anglo-Saxon settlement into church-orientated communities to be taken over (or simply renamed) in the late Saxon period. The scale of the problem in the Lincolnshire Wolds area is not small, as a list of relevant burial sites demonstrates - Asgarby, Candlesby, Fonaby, Irby, West Keal, Laceby, Riby, Thimbleby, Worlaby - with an immediately adjacent settlement at Irby, and perhaps at Fonaby and Worlaby too. Nonetheless in the present state of our material evidence and without extensive excavation it is not even possible to say dogmatically that one Salmonby settlement was not a replacement for the other rather than their being contemporary, though I think the latter more likely. Tetford could be the result of the desertion of the Salmonby sites, although the burial evidence at TF/331762 \(^4\) and the fact that the ford is that of a Roman road argue its earlier existence. Until detailed fieldwork becomes possible and is done on the present village sites (in this instance) of Tetford, Salmonby and Somersby, the problem remains unanswered.\(^5\) Meanwhile, what the Salmonby settlements must at minimum demonstrate is that the Scandinavian/Anglo-Danish settlers were not the pioneers in land-taking in all the areas which a study of place-names alone might be taken to indicate.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My thanks are due to Geoffrey and Shirley Taylor for involving me on the site, and for sustained enthusiasm in the work. Prof. Cameron has not only provided model studies and persistent encouragement to discussion of all matters relating to place-names and settlement, but has also read and criticised the latter half of this paper to its greater benefit. Other assistance, willingly given, is recognised in the notes.
SITE AT SALMONBY, LINCS. 1972

Footnotes:

1. An air photograph taken by Mr. P. Wilson shows a rectangular enclosure at TF/322738 at 100 m distant to the east, across the dried-up bed of a stream. No surface material has yet been recovered.
9. The complement to this can be seen in Dr. P. Wade-Martins work in Central Norfolk, where most of the Medieval villages have their origins in the Middle Saxon period around a church centre. It does not surprise us that the church had a major impact on the cemeteries, but should it prove that the new faith also had a widespread affect on pre-existing settlement patterns it would be a major insight, and one of outstanding importance not least to place-name scholars.
15. Worked flints included: 2 end, 1 button, 1 thumbnail and 1 side scraper, all of Bronze Age date. Identifications by Mr. J. Marjoram of Lincoln City and County Museum.
16. Identified by Mr. R. Alvey of the Department of Classical and Archaeological Studies, the University of Nottingham.
19. Professor Cameron has been kind enough to point out to me the fallibility of the 1888 1" Geological Survey in mapping localised Drift. The village has two streams rising close to it, and traces of gravel pits in various parts of the small-sized parish appear to provide sufficient basis for the name on that site. In his recent important re-analysis of hâm names ('The significance of the distribution of English place-names in hâm in the Midlands and East Anglia' Journal of the English Place-name Society 5 (1972-3) 15-73) Dr. B. Cox finds confirmation of Greenthom's place within a general early dating of the hâm element in the occurrence of Romano-British pottery and a cremation burial at Ashby Puerorum, 2 km distant, (ibid. 25).
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20 The topographical name would itself on traditional reckoning be held to support a secondary foundation. But research currently in progress is beginning to suggest far greater complexity of interpretation of names in this category, including clear instances which predate at least the habitation element for: see the comments of Dr. Margaret Gelling in Notes & Queries NS vol. 20, no. 4 (April 1973) 144-6.

21 i.e. Calceworth. The ford-side meeting place (OS grid ref) is probably where the Bluestone Heath Road crosses Calceby Beck, within the Medieval village.

22 Cameron op. cit. (1965) in note 17 discusses Appleby and Scawby (p.14) and Ulceby (p.17) as examples of this phenomenon in Lindsey, and explicitly allows for this interpretation of certain *bys* in all his writing.

23 A. Meany Gazetteer of early Anglo-Saxon burial sites (1964) for brief references.

24 Meany Gazetteer of early Anglo-Saxon burial sites (1964) for references.

25 Meany Gazetteer of early Anglo-Saxon burial sites (1964) for references.

SITE AT SALMONBY, LINCS. 1972

Map 1

GEOLOGY AND SETTLEMENTS IN THE LYMN VALLEY, LINCS.

Map 2

RELIEF AND DRAINAGE IN THE LYMN VALLEY

Map 2
SITE AT SALMONBY, LINCS. 1972

[Diagram with labels and legend:
- Ploughsoil
- Dark grey occupation layer
- Dense light grey occupation layer
- Sandstone natural]

[Measurements in metres: 0 1 2 3 4 5]

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