About The Twilight Age series

Not that many decades ago English history between the fifth the eleventh centuries was deemed the 'Dark Ages', largely because of the lack of evidence. Much has changed, and scholarship has shed considerable light on the later centuries. However by then many parts of Britain were evolving into Anglo-Scandinavian culture.

Evidence for the Anglo-Germanic fifth and sixth centuries is still scarce and difficult to interpret, so the epithet 'Dark Ages' is still apt. The years in between occupy a comparative 'twilight zone', fascinating because of numerous social changes, not least the various cultural transitions which ultimately led to Christianity being the dominant religion.

The period spanning the seventh and eighth centuries and, sometimes, the decades either side can be thought of as the 'Twilight Age'. This series of publications combines available evidence from archaeologists, historians and place-name scholars. This evidence is combined with a broader mix of paradigms than those usually adopted by early medievalists, including topography, cosmology, iconography and ethnography – especially current approaches to comparative religion.

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The Twilight Age series

Volume 1: Continuity of Worldviews in Anglo-Saxon England

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Volume 5: Rethinking Anglo-Saxon Shrines: A cosmological and topographical view of hohs and hlaws
Rethinking Anglo-Saxon Shrines

A cosmological and topographical view of *hohs* and *hlaws*

The Twilight Age Volume Five

Bob Trubshaw

*Cover illustration* The Long Man of Wilmington, Sussex.

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Second edition 2018

‘The past is never dead. It’s not even past.’

William Faulkner

*Requiem for a Nun* (1951) Act 1 Scene 3
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Preface to first edition

Back in 1981, when the first light of dawn was beginning to shine on the Dark Ages, Audrey Meaney’s study of Anglo-Saxon amulets and curing stones was not simply aimed at a better understanding of these objects. A better understanding of the amulets would also aid the understanding of wider Anglo-Saxon society. But, as Meaney herself recognised, to understand the amulets it was necessary to have a good comprehension of wider society.

This present study is also another instance of looking at a specific topic from the perspective of wider society and also trying to understand that wider society better by looking afresh at the specific topic. Dr Meaney also made the comment ‘It is in the nature of a pioneer investigation of this kind that conjectures are many, conclusions few.’ (1981: 239) In this study also conclusions are largely absent, although conjectures abound.

The specific topic around which this study pivots is the place-name element hoh, generally accepted as a word used to describe a specific shape of promontory. However the locations of these hohs suggests there was also a functional aspect to the name.

The opening sections of this study explore hohs in detail, and then discuss a number of associated words, including an extended section on hlaw (‘burial mound’). My approach puts geographical and topographical aspects of naming to the fore and also situates these names in the ‘worldviews’ or cosmologies of Anglo-Saxon culture. Here the parallels with Meaney are closest, as these place-names cannot be fully understood without considering such worldviews, while the names shed light on plausible cosmologies.

This study was written thirty-five years after Dr Meaney’s research was published. In the intervening years considerable light has been brought to bear on the ‘early medieval era’, to the extent that disparaging comparisons to a Dark Age no longer seem fitting. My skills do not match those of the highly-experienced historians, linguists, place-name scholars, archaeologists and art historians whose skills have illuminated the ever-evolving six hundred years leading up to the Norman Conquest. What I am aware of is the absence – at least from published papers and books – of perspectives based on cosmology and ontology, especially a perspective which recognises that the implicit assumptions or ‘world view’ of post-Reformation Christianity and its secularised successors are entirely inappropriate. In the last thirty-or-so years non-ethnocentric perspectives have become fundamental to comparative studies of religions. However, the scant evidence for pre-conversion Anglo-Saxon religion means, quite understandably, this has not been a research topic for religious studies specialists. The result has been that conversion-era England has largely been discussed from within distinctly ethnocentric perspectives (Dooley-Fairchild 2012).

Attempting to understand underlying cosmological assumptions of any society requires a wide viewpoint. By looking at words such as hoh, hlaw, weoh and stapal from a suitably wide perspective I hope to understand their meaning and significance better, and also greatly increase our understanding of wider Anglo-Saxon society and its ‘underlying assumptions’. This is a pioneering study. There is much that will be wonky. By all means let me know if I’ve got some of the finer details wrong. But if you look only at the dirt under my fingernails you will miss what that finger is pointing towards.

Avebury January 2016
Preface to second edition

No sooner had I published the first edition than further examples of *hohs* began to come to my attention. Some serious distractions during spring of 2016 – including moving back to the Leicestershire:Nottinghamshire border area which is discussed in detail – prevented me from making any further progress. However during that summer and autumn I visited as many of the ‘Hoe Hills’ and other *ho* places as possible. This revised edition incorporates all the new examples. In particular I have ‘trawled’ through all eight volumes of Barrie Cox’s studies of Leicestershire and Rutland place-names.

Despite all these additions, there was no need to revise the interpretations and speculations as the new information simply supported my initial thinking; in the case of the Leicestershire and Rutland examples this support included a high correlation of *hohs* with the boundaries of two hundreds and Rutland (a ‘hundred-sized county’). Nevertheless I am sure this edition is a long way from being a definitive study of *hohs*, simply because it is such a wide-distributed element in minor toponyms with vastly more examples than in the names associated with settlements.

In the first edition I refer several times to living in Avebury. Although that is no longer the case I have left these remarks as written. However I have avoided referring to my current place of residence in a similar manner, to avoid confusing the reader.

I have attempted to correct the rather large number of typos in the first edition, although I have no doubt missed some – and probably introduced further instances in the new text. My apologies.

Wymeswold 2018
Hoh and related place-names straddling the Leicestershire-Nottinghamshire border

Map based on contour shading generated by topographic-map.com
What is a **hoh**?

The Old English word *hoh* appears in a number of place-names. There are villages called Houghton, Hooton and Hutton in several counties and a Hoton in Leicestershire. Not far from Hoton there is a village called Hose, the plural of *hoh*. In between, although just across the boundary in Nottinghamshire, is Wysall which, despite the modern spelling, may originally have been the *weoh hoh* – the ‘shrine’ or ‘idol’ on the *hoh*. Nearby is Roehoe Wood, in all probability the *ruh hoh* or ‘boundary *hoh*’.

*Hoh* is however found in names of places that are not settlements, such as Plymouth Hoe (Devon), Sutton Hoo (Suffolk) and Lancing Hoe (Sussex). The villages of Upper, Middle and Lower Tysoe (Warwickshire) take their name from Tysoe Hill, which forms the skyline to the east. Numerous hills are now known as Hoe Hill, The Hoo, and variants thereof.

The one thing that such *hohs* have in common is that they are situated on a hill that looks like a human heel. Or at least the heel when seen when someone the size of a large giant is lying face down – the sketch should make this clearer.

This understanding of *hoh* originates with the work of Margaret Gelling (Gelling 1984; Gelling and Cole 2000). Recently Terhi Nurminen has demonstrated that the term *hoh* refers not only to heel-shaped hills but also to hill-spurs which occupy a triangular area of land, and even to low ridges which do not otherwise conform to these specific shapes (Nurminen 2011: 70–1).

Above right: **Plymough Hoe. The modern day ‘shrines’ include a statue of Sir Francis Drake and a war memorial. The lighthouse makes a third ‘stapol-shaped’ monument!**

Right: **The characteristic ‘heel-shape’ of a hoh.**
Not all heel-shaped hills now have *hoh*-derived names. Colborough Hill, to the east of Tilton on the Hill, Leicestershire, is almost a perfect *hoh* shape but the name of the hill suggests an origin in a personal name plus *beorg* (there are no early records so this is speculation). Whether it ever was known as or thought of as a *hoh* is simply unprovable but, equally, cannot be disproved. We simply have to accept that not all places once known as a *hoh* have left recognisable evidence in modern names, and similarly not all places that look like a *hoh* were necessarily known as such.

Where *hoh* has become part of a settlement name then, inevitably, modern buildings usually obscure the topography. Much can be revealed from the

*Hoton church sits on raised ground which drops away sharply to the north.*

*Wysall church – possibly the successor to the weoh *hoh*. The church is situated in a circular churchyard and the land falls away sharply to the west. The earliest known record of the village is in the Domesday Book, where it appears as *Wisoc*. This is at least four hundred years after a name like weoh *hoh* would have begun to lose its meaning, and steadily become corrupted.*
contour lines on OS maps and from a visit to the area most probably once the hoh. Such an approach confirms that the parish churches at Wysall and Hoton are probably situated on a hoh.

**Hohs on major boundaries**

But is hoh only a descriptive name? Was there something about such distinctive hills that made them more than merely landmarks? Well some hohs seem to have been sea marks: **Cliffe at Hoo** and **Hoo St Werburg** (both on the north Kent coast), **Hooton** and **Thornton Hough** (both on the Wirral), **Lancing Hoe** (Sussex), **Mortehoe** (Devon), **Plymouth Hoe** (Devon), **Samphire Hoe** (Dover, Kent), **Sutton Hoo** (Suffolk), together with a cluster of hohs in Essex just inland from Mersea Island: **Fingrinhoe, Langenhoe and Wivenhoe**. Curiously there is a Rowhedge just north of Fingrinhoe which, like Roehoe Wood, may incorporate the Scandinavian ruh, ‘boundary’. (The early forms of Mersea Island are *meres* ig ‘island of the pool’, not maere ei ‘boundary river’ as with the River Mersey which forms the boundary between Cheshire and Lancashire. However the mere was not so much a pool as a vast expanse of tidal salt marsh.)

Sea marks by definition fall on the boundary between land and sea. But it seems that hohs also demark county boundaries. While counties were created many centuries after the word hoh was first incorporated into place-names, these counties were made up of administrative hundreds. These too were more recent than the initial use of hoh but in many cases there is evidence that they followed ancient boundaries. Such evidence is often in the form of topographical features: more typically hill ridges and watersheds but sometimes watercourses.

Top right: **Roehoe Wood as shown on the 1899 one inch to one mile Ordnance Survey map.**

Right: **Roehoe Wood photographed from the south-west in November 2016. The distinctive hoh profile is not especially pronounced (perhaps because of modern trees) and only apparent when viewed from the west and south-west.**
Aynho overlooks the Oxfordshire-Northamptonshire boundary, Tysoe is on the Oxfordshire-Warwickshire boundary, and Luton Hoo overlooks the Bedfordshire-Hertfordshire boundary. Furthermore, Ivinghoe Beacon and Buckland Hoo are both near the Buckinghamshire-Hertfordshire boundary, as too is Hastoe, which is on the Ridgeway close to the Anglo-Saxon boundary earthworks known as Grim’s Ditch. Wixhoe is just on the Suffolk side of the boundary with Essex, demarked by the River Stour. Stirtloe is close to the former Cambridgeshire-Huntingdonshire border.

Staploe and Duloe are in Bedfordshire immediately adjacent to the modern Cambridgeshire border, although until 1974 this was to the south. Southoe is a few miles to the north and has always been in Cambridgeshire. A record of 1340 refers to a *landmarehowe* in Cambridgeshire, although the location is not now known. This name clearly derives from the Old English *landgemære hoh* or ‘land boundary hoh’ (Jepson 2011: 72). Possibly the prominent hoh was used as a convenient land mark for a newly-invented land division. Given the other examples of hohs on boundaries then more probably the boundary goes back to at least the early Anglo-Saxon era.

### Hohs and the Leicestershire-Nottinghamshire boundary

As shown on the map which forms the frontispiece of this study (and reproduced smaller overleaf) there are no less than four place-names with the element *hoh* sitting on the high ground associated with the Leicestershire-Nottinghamshire boundary: Hoton, Wysall (originally *weoh hoh* i.e. ‘shrine/idol hoh’), Roehoe (probably ‘boundary hoh’) Wood and Hose. These form an arc which, if extended to the south-west takes in Hoby and if extended to the south-east takes in Wyfordby, Stapleford (neither are hohs though another example of a *weoh* and a *stapol* and Hose Hill.

These hohs have something else in common apart from their names. The hoh-like aspect is only apparent when approaching from outside the arc, not from inside. Remarkably, too, all these places (including, more predictably, the two fords) have a modern road through them. These routes take the traveller towards Six Hills. Six Hills (a plateau-like area shown as Seggs Hill on eighteenth century maps) was the location of the Goscote Hundred moot site.

To the west is the medieval Arrow Field and River Arrow, plus a post-Enclosure Harrow Farm, and there is a minor hilltop (now surmounted by an Indian restaurant and a mobile phone transmission mast) which conforms with the topography of ‘harrowdownhills’ (*heargdon*). Furthermore a *ver nemeton* (‘great or especially sacred grove’) is commemorated in the name of the Roman small town of Vernemetum which is to the north of Six Hills, closer to Roehoe Wood (see Trubshaw 2012).

In the parishes of Wymeswold and Burton on the Wolds, two of the eight parishes which come together like slices of a pie at Six Hills, there are three unlocated field names: Ballow Woulds, Goscoreho and Segehishou (Cox 2004: 318), although as is typical for Leicestershire there is no way of distinguishing between hoh and haugr (Cox 2014: 233; 366). Segehishou is clearly the precursor to the name Seggs Hill, while Goscoreho provides confirmation that this *ballow* (ball-shaped hoh or haugr) was the meeting place of the hundred.
Vermenetum and Roehoe Wood are on the western side of the Fosse Way, the Roman road from Devon up through Cirencester to Leicester and on to Lincoln. At Six Hills a local Roman road connects Barrow on Soar to the Iron Age and Roman iron-working sites at Goadby Marwood, following the dramatic escarpment which overlooks the Leicestershire-Nottinghamshire border. There is every reason to suppose that this was an Iron Age tribal boundary.

Note that the county boundary does not follow the escarpment itself, and seemingly did not do so when created in the late ninth or tenth century. Instead the parishes occupying the steep north-facing slope and the associated part of the Vale of Belvoir (pronounced 'beever') are in Leicestershire, with the county boundary having no clear topographical marker.

The Fosse Way seemingly was within the Corieltauvian territory in Iron Age and Roman times but the Fosse Way in Leicestershire seems to have become an east-west boundary by the late ninth century as Scandinavian place-name elements are dominant to the east while being largely absent to the west. This made Roehoe Wood doubly liminal as it sits on both the tribal boundary which evolved into the county border and the east-west divide associated with Scandinavian settlement. Interestingly there is a Hoe Hill between Cropwell Bishop and Cropwell Butler which overlooks the Fosse Way from the eastern side.

Although Roehoe Wood might be a hill frequented by roe deer, the Domesday spelling of Rolow raises the possibility of this being ruh or ra (Jepson 2011: 167). Both these elements are Scandinavian and would have...
The sense of ‘boundary hill’. Boel Jepson discusses many other examples of English place-names with the element *ra*, and some of their Scandinavian counterparts (Jepson 2011: 159–76) and this Scandinavian word does seem to become widely used to refer to boundaries.

More enigmatic is the village of Hose. This takes its name from the plural of *hoh*. But the village itself is on flat ground in the Vale of Belvoir. Not even the church seems to be situated on a *hoh*-like mound. But as the name is not habitative – in other words not a Hoton or Hoby – then presumably it takes its name from a distinctive nearby landmark. The most obvious place to look for the eponymous *hohs* would be on the ironstone escarpment to the south. However extensive but discontinuous modern woodland makes it difficult to discern the underlying topography, compounded by the construction of a deep cutting for a now-abandoned railway which served the ironstone extraction quarries.

However the lane running north from the village of Hose up this escarpment runs between two promontories which show clearly on OS maps; one of these is now the location of the various buildings associated with Brockhill Hall Farm. At the summit of Brock Hill the lane forms a crossroads with the former Roman road running along the escarpment (although the road going due south to Melton Mowbray is now a bridleway). This road junction is also the meeting place of three parishes. I have been informed that it was once a local meeting place in the more literal sense.
While direct evidence is lacking, there seems to be no better candidate for the *hohs* which gave Hose its name. To the east is a natural valley known as Piper Hole which, at least by the later nineteenth century, was associated with a version of the widely-distributed legend of a musician who disappears underground, never to be seen again (the same legend was also recorded elsewhere in England, including Piper Wood near Shepshed, Leicestershire). Early forms of Piper Hole are not available but just possibly ‘hole’ is a corruption of an older word originating in *hoh*. However I do not think the sides of the valley known as Piper Hole are sufficiently *hoh*-like to have been the *hohs* of Hose.

**Hose Hill and the Holygate**

Two or more *hohs* also gave their name to a hill to the south-east of Melton Mowbray south-west of Stapleford. This Hose Hill is overlooked from the south-west by the ridge which includes the Iron Age hill fort at Burrough on the Hill.

Hose Hill is now part of extensive arable farming and there is little to suggest the location of the eponymous *hohs*. However the road along the ridge passes along an almost-level stretch which forms distinct promontories at each end.

More curiously the road running east-west parallel to the north of Hose Hill was once known as Holygate (with ‘gate’ here following its Scandinavian origins and typical Leicestershire usage to denote ‘way’). The best evidence is Holygate Farm to the north-east of Hose Hill.

Why this route was deemed a ‘holy way’ is unclear, still less when the name gained currency. Apart from parish churches, there are no obvious Christian or pilgrimage sites along the route, least of all at places to the west or east. But nevertheless it may once have been a customary route towards Walsingham. It was presumably used as a salt way as two similar nearby routes run parallel (Cox 2009: xii; 17).

To the east Holygate appears to become the route through Wymondham, crossing the Sewestern Drift just north of the Roman town and temple at Thistleton, then crossing Ermine Street at South Witham, thence to Castle Bytham, Little Bytham, Witham on the Hill, Manthorpe and Thurlby before petering out in the Fens. Plausibly the route went to Croyland, although no modern routes go direct to there from Thurlby (prior to early modern drainage Croyland would have been accessed by water not land).

Alternatively the route may have turned slightly to the north-east and ended at Bourne, just two miles north of Thurlby, then headed on to Spalding.
The western end of Holygate appears to be Hoby, although further west is Barrow on Soar (although no surviving routes connect Hoby and Barrow directly), Barrow taking its name from bearu ‘sacred grove’ as well as being an important trading and pottery production site by the Middle Saxon period. Slight deviations from the east-west route allow alternative western termini at Six Hills (with its putative hearp and to the south of the Roman town of Vernemetum) or Rothley, one of the most important early medieval estate centres in the region.

**Hohs and the Framland boundary**

Hoton, Wysall and Roehoe Wood form an arc around the west and north-west of Six Hills. Hoby, to the south-east of Six Hills, is also on the periphery of the Leicestershire Wolds. As I discuss later, these Wolds just might have once been known as the weoh mund walp, with mund being used in its earlier sense of ‘protection’ rather than of ‘(protective) mound’. These weohs may have been on one or more mounds at the centre. But more plausibly the weohs were protecting the periphery of the walp. If so they would presumably have been located at the hohs which partially encircle the Wolds. I will discuss this in more detail towards the end, in the section called ‘Munds and beorgs’.

All the other hohs to the east of the Fosse Way, along with Wyfordby and Stapleford, are linked with a different boundary – that of the original hundred of Framland (although the modern administrative unit of Melton Borough Council includes a ‘pan handle’ extending north-east to Bottesford and the eastern half of the Leicestershire Wolds, with the Fosse Way marking the boundary).

The original extent of Framland has almost the same number of square miles as Rutland, implying that these two areas of excellent farmland were both early Anglo-Saxon kingdoms, with the place-name element ‘land’ originally having a restricted meaning denoting such minor ‘kingdoms’. Rutland was named after Rota and Framland was plausibly named after Franni (‘nn’ to ‘m’ is a common scribal error).

In the geographical centre of Framland is Melton Mowbray whose name means ‘central settlement’, with the inference of an ‘important place’. Curiously the Latin words nemeton and nimidas are synonymous and Alby Stone has suggested that that nemeton/nimidas represent a compound of descendants of IE *nemos and *medhyos (‘middle’, ‘centre’) and refer to the ‘central sacred space’ of a particular community (Stone pers. comm. Nov 2016).

The hearp to the west of Six Hills and the nemeton associated with Vernemetum form the epicentre of the more westerly hohs, while Melton is the epicentre of the eastern arc of hoh, weoh and stapol place-names. As previously noted all these places have a road through them (or, in the case of Hose Hill, over it). These roads take the traveller either towards Six Hills or to Melton Mowbray. Furthermore, the distinctive hoh-like shape of these hills is only visible when approaching from outside.

**Counting hohs**

So far as I am aware no one has produced a complete list of place-names incorporating hoh (although Mills 1993: 180 and Cameron 1996: 184–5 provide two partially-overlapping lists).

Part of the problem is that the word hoh readily corrupts. Wysall, already discussed, is one example. Another is Sacriston in County Durham. In 1311 this was Le Segrestaynehue, the sacristant’s hoh. However subsequently the hoh was dropped and the -steyne ending corrupted to -tun (Whaley 2014: 17). (A sacristant was responsible for the sacristy, a room for keeping clerical vestments, sacred vessels used in liturgical rites, other church furnishings and parish records. Presumably this particular sacristant owned or otherwise
benefited from the *hoh*’s grazing rights. Note that this place-name cannot predate the Norman Conquest and the introduction of the word sacristant. But was there an established tradition for a ‘priest’ to have the benefit of the land?)

So far my list of *hoh* place-names includes:

- Aynho (Northamptonshire) – Ega’s *hoh*
- Belsay (Northumberland) – Bill’s *hoh*
- Bengeo (Hertfordshire) – the *hoh* of the dwellers of the River Beane
- Cliffe at Hoo [now just Cliffe] (Kent)
- Cogenhoe (Northamptonshire) – Cugga’s *hoh*
- Cranoe ‘crow *hoh’* (Leicestershire)
- Duloe (Bedfordshire, adjacent to Staploe) – possibly two *hohs* or two *hlaws*
- Farthinghoe (Northamptonshire)
- Fingrinhoe (Essex) – seemingly the dwellers on the finger-shaped *hoh*
- Flecknoe (Warwickshire) – probably Flecca’s *hoh*
- Hastoe (Hertfordshire) – probably Hæsta’s *hoh*
- Hoby (Leicestershire) – *hoh* and the Scandinavian suffix -by
- Hoo St Werburg (Kent) – a more obvious personal name + *hoh*!
- Hooton (one in Cheshire and three in South Yorkshire)
- Hose (Leicestershire) – two (or more?) *hohs*
- Hothorpe (Leicestershire) – *hoh thorpe* (‘subsidiary settlement by/on a *hoh’*)
- Hough (two in Cheshire)
- Houghton (twenty examples [Gelling 1984] including two in Bedfordshire and one a piece in Cambridgeshire, County Durham, Cumbria, Hampshire, Leicestershire, Norfolk, Northamptonshire, Tyne and Wear, and West Sussex)
- Icanho (Shropshire; once the ‘mother church’ for Wenlock [Sims-
Sharow (Yorkshire) – the boundary (scearu) hoh
Staploe and Upper Staploe (Bedfordshire) – staplo hoh
Stenigot (Lincolnshire) – corruption of ‘pool hoh’
Southoe (Cambridgeshire) – south hoh
Tysoe (Warwickshire) – the hoh of the god Tiw
Wadenhoe (Northamptonshire) – either Wadda’s hoh or from weoh don hoh ‘the hoh near the idol/shrine hill’ (cf. Waden Hill, Wiltshire)
Watnall (Nottinghamshire) – Wata’s hoh
Wellow (Lincolnshire) – the hoh with a spring
Wivenhoe (Essex) – Wifa’s hoh (the alternative, ‘wives’ hoh’, has no parallels so is unlikely)
Wixhoe (Suffolk) – Widuc’s hoh
Wysall (Nottinghamshire) (Wisoc in 1068) – the ‘shrine or idol’ (weoh) hoh

Stirtloe (Cambridgeshire) is somewhat obscure. The first element is presumable styre (‘clearing’) but the second could be either hoh or hlaw. Note that Houghton le Spring, Tyne and Wear, is not a hoh with a spring as ‘le Spring’ is the surname of a thirteenth century landowner, while Great and Little Houghton (South Yorkshire) are from halh (‘hall’) not hoh, and Hough on the Hill, Lincolnshire, is seemingly derived from haga (‘enclosure’).

Omitted from this list of settlement names are hohs that are not settlements:

Ivinghoe (Buckinghamshire) – the hoh of Ifa’s people
Luton Hoo (Bedfordshire)
Plymouth Hoe – the hoh on the Plym estuary
Samphire Hoe (Dover, Kent)
Sutton Hoo (Suffolk) – the hoh of the southern settlement (i.e. on the south side of the Deben estuary)
In addition to these comparatively well-known hohs there are numerous minor toponyms containing hoh. Hoe Hill, Hose Hill and The Hoo are comparatively commonplace. Just a small selection from Leicestershire reveals some of other forms: Hoe Close (Belton), Hofurlong (Quorn), Hoo Ash Farm (Ravenstone), Hooborough Brook (Donisthrope), Hough Hill (between Swannington and Donisthrope), House Hill Leys (Quorn), How Marsh (Hemington), Howe Lane (Rothley), Howhill (Castle Donington), Huberstoue (Coleorton), Pottershoue (Coleorton) and Tysoe Hill (Glenfield; discussed below).

And then there are the more ‘disguised’ modern spellings. Examples include Houback (possibly the earlier name from Robin-a-Tiptoe Hill, Leicestershire (Meadows 1995: 11)) and View Edge (Shropshire) – ‘view’ is a corruption of weohhoh.

Hoh also survives in places which are no longer shown on maps. Sparkenhoe Hundred in Leicestershire takes its name from a hoh. The hoh ending is not in doubt but the ‘sparken-’ part is less obvious. Barrie Cox has suggested it could be a corruption of either ‘brushwood’, ‘brown’ or ‘speech’; a hundred at the ‘speech hoh’ seems most probable (Cox 2014: 1–5). Interestingly there is a Cattow Farm in the hundred. Early forms are indistinguishable from the Scandinavian word *haugr*, in other words a hlaw or burial mound. So Cattow Farm is possibly on the site of Catta’s hlaw, although Cox prefers a hoh frequented by cats (presumably wild, or at least feral, rather than domestic).

Interestingly, also in Sparkenhoe Hundred is a Tysoe Hill, a hoh named after the god Tiw (as with the better-known Tysoe Hill on the Oxfordshire-Warwickshire border). In medieval times the distinctive promontory marked the boundary of the New Park on the west limit of the borough of Leicester (the parkland became a housing estate in the 1950s) and the parish of Glenfield. About 1960 Tysoe Hill also became part of a housing estate, although a modern street name still marks the summit of the hoh (see photograph and caption on page 9). Neither Cattlow nor Tysoe Hill were the places where Sparkenhoe Hundred met. Barrie Cox has identified this as Upton – even though modern names no longer refer to a hoh (Cox 2014, 261).

Leicestershire and Rutland’s ‘minor’ hohs

Thanks to Barrie Cox’s meticulous work a reliable survey of hoh names in Leicestershire and Rutland is possible. (The place-name studies for most other English counties were either published without systematic surveys of minor toponyms, such as field names, or have yet to be completely published.) There are at least 78 place-names referring to hohs in Leicestershire and Rutland. The exact count is difficult for two reasons. Firstly many of the references are to unlocated fieldnames so more than one name containing hoh in the same parish may or may not refer to the same hoh. Secondly nearly two-thirds of these hohs are in parishes adjacent to hundred boundaries. Plausibly field names in adjacent parishes might refer to the same hoh.

There are seven settlements with the element hoh:

- Cranoe ‘crow hoh’ (Gartree) (Cox 2009: 31)
- Hoby (East Goscote) (Cox 2004: 113)
- Hose (Framland) (Cox 2002: 99)
- Hothorpe (Gartree) (Cox 2009: 273)
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Hotton (East Goscote) (Cox 2004: 318)

Houghton on the Hill (Gartree) (Cox 2009: 109)

Lubbenham (Gartree) Lubenho in 1086 ‘Lub(b)a’s hoh’ (note that the dative plural of hoh is hom) (Cox 2009: 163).

Cox is cautious about whether Hothorpe contains hoh but the liminal location supports this interpretation. Hothorpe is part of Theddingworth parish, straddling the River Welland (here barely a stream), the watercourse which defines the historic Leicestershire-Northamptonshire border. The eponymous hoh was presumably on part of the Hothorpe Hills to the south of Hothorpe Hall and would have been conspicuous to anyone leaving Leicestershire and entering Northamptonshire on the Sibbertoft road.

Cranoe is not adjacent to the Leicestershire-Northamptonshire boundary but is on the ridge of high ground which overlooks the border. Furthermore it is where a north-south track from Great Bowden to Tilton on the Hill and Melton Mowbray (now the Midshires Way) crosses the Roman Gartree Road from Leicester to Medbourne and beyond to Wadenhoe (another hoh) beside the River Nene, which here forms the Cambridgeshire-Northamptonshire boundary.

Houghton on the Hill is close to the hundred boundary. A route (now partly a bridleway) from Great Glen to Melton Mowbray passes through Houghton. Passing to the side of the historic village core is the road from Leicester to Uppingham (the modern A47). To the south Houghton ‘overlooks’ the Gartree road.

In addition to these settlement names there are a substantial number of field and woodland names in Leicestershire and Rutland containing hoh.

Remarkably all but one of these seven hoh names in Rutland are in parishes adjacent the county boundary. Clearly Rutland is a small county so more of the parishes are adjacent to the borders, but its area is similar to that of the five hundreds of Leicestershire considered below, so is directly comparable.

Ayston (overlooks Rutland-Leicestershire border): martineshó (pers. name. + hoh) (Cox 1994: 174, 348); possible now Castle Hill (next to Wardley, presumably the ‘warden’s clearing’ i.e. a look out)

Bisbrooke: hotoft (Cox 1994: 242, 348); next to Seaton [qv.] but otherwise not near the county boundaries

Hooby Lodge on Stretton-Thistleton boundary to west of Ermine Street; also ‘Hooby Hedge’ recorded in 1652 (Cox 1994: 38–9, 348)

Seaton (on Rutland-Northamptonshire border): Bottingeshowes (prob. pers. n. plus hoh) and Sandhowes (‘sand hohs’) (Cox 1994: 297, 348)

Tickencote (on Rutland-Lincolnshire border): Hocroft (Cox 1994: 348)

Tixover (on Rutland-Northamptonshire border): Cafeleweho (‘bald or bare hoh’); (Cox 1994: 348)

In Framland Hundred there are thirteen possible hohs of which two are in parishes adjacent to the hundred boundary and seven are close to the county boundary (i.e. sixty-nine percent neighbouring boundaries). However three of these hoh names are more likely to be hearg or haugr, reducing the total to nine and increasing the percentage on boundaries to ninety-two percent. If Todhow is also a haugr (‘fox howe’) then all the hohs in this hundred are in liminal parishes.

Buckminster (on Leicestershire-Lincolnshire boundary): Hoe Hill (Cox 2002: 56)

Eaton: ?The Hows (Cox 2002: 120); an origin from hohs or haugrs is equally plausible

Great Dalby: Hubbuck Close (variant forms reveal this to be the hoh bekkr ‘stream’) (Cox 2002: 80)

Harston (on Leicestershire-Lincolnshire boundary): Dunesho [Dunn’s hoh] (Cox 2002: 12)

Hose (on Leicestershire-Nottinghamshire boundary): hohs (Cox 2002: 99)

Leesthorpe (on hundred boundary): (part of Somerby): litelho (Cox 2002: 240)

Normanton (on Leicestershire-Lincolnshire-Nottinghamshire boundary): ?Howong (more probably haugr than hoh) (Cox 2002: 43)
Rethinking Anglo-Saxon Shrines

Pickwell (part of Somerby): *Longhoe* (Cox 2002: 243); (on hundred boundary; Pickwell is the ‘peak well’ i.e. a distinctive-shaped hill)

Redmile (on Leicestershire-Nottinghamshire boundary): *michelho* ‘big hoh’ (Cox 2002: 198)

Scalford: ?*Harrowe* either *hearg* or *har hoh* ‘boundary hoh’ (Cox 2002: 214–5, 343) (This is most probably a reference to Great Framland Wood, the meeting place of the Framland Hundred and a plausible *hearg*.)

Somerby (on Leicestershire-Rutland boundary): Shutoe Close (poss. ‘south hoh’ (Cox 2002: 228, 343)

Stathern (on Leicestershire-Nottinghamshire boundary): ?*Cranor* variant forms suggest ‘crow hoh’ (cf. Cranoe) (Cox 2002: 263, 343)

Waltham on the Wolds: Todhow, possibly ‘fox hoh’ but maybe ‘fox haugr’ (Cox 2002: 343)

Goscote Hundred was not split into separate east and west hundreds until long after the coining of most place-names. In the combined hundred there are fourteen identifiable *hohs* (assuming the Burton on the Wolds and Wymeswold names refer to the same *hoh*) of which six are in parishes adjacent to the hundred boundary (ignoring the boundary between East and West hundreds) and six are close to the county boundary (i.e. eighty-five percent neighbouring boundaries). Presumably Charnwood Forest was not originally part of this hundred, so I have noted that a couple of parishes (Belton and Quorn) whose boundaries are close to the well-defined geological inlier on with the Forest is located.

Asfordby (on hundred boundary): Wakoe [possibly ‘watch or loo out hoh’; cf. Saxelby], Wiggo [Cox suggests pers. name or ‘less likely’ OE *wigga* ‘beetle’ but wig or *weoh hoh* should perhaps also be considered] (Cox 2004: 14, 318)

Barkby: Gosecoteho, ?*Howesgate* [presumably route to Mothowe], ?*Mothowes* [‘moot hohs’] (Cox 2004: 27, 318). These are associated with the meeting place of the East Goscote Hundred, now marked by the Moody Bush Stone (Trubshaw 2016b).

Beeby (on hundred boundary): *hoobarrow* (Cox 2004: 318)

Belton (on border of Charnwood Forest): Hoe Close (Cox 2016: 322)

Burton on the Wolds (part of parish on Leicestershire-Nottinghamshire boundary): ?*Crackhole* (Cox 2004: 57, 318), *Seghishou* [pers. name. + hoh?] (Cox 2004: 57, 318) Note that *Seghishou* is presumably the origin of Seggs Hill, the name for Six Hills before the later form appeared on Ordnance Survey maps.

Castle Donington (on Leicestershire-Nottinghamshire border): ?*Howhill* (Cox 2016: 322)

Colerorton: *Hubertsoue*, *Pottershoue* (Cox 2016: 322)

Gaddesby (small part of parish on hundred boundary): *Steynho* (Cox 2004: 104, 318)


Hoby (on hundred boundary): note the late formation of this name from the Scandinavian –by (Cox 2004: 113)

Hoton (on hundred boundary) (Cox 2004: 318)

Lockington (on Leicestershire-Nottinghamshire border): *Hoo Ash Farm*, Hooborough Brook, Hough Hill, Howe Lane, Snarrow’s Farm, *Gildoustry* (Cox 2016: 322)

Quorn (on boundary between East and West Goscote Hundreds; also on border of Charnwood Forest): *Hoουurlong*, House Hill Leys (Cox 2016: 322)

Saxelby: *Wakah Wong* (possibly ‘watch or look out hoh’; cf. Asfordby) (Cox 2004: 318)

Skeffington (on hundred boundary): *Caluero* [‘calf hoh’] (Cox 2004: 318)

Wymeswold (on Leicestershire-Nottinghamshire boundary): *Balllow Wolds* (from OE *ball* ‘a rounded hill’, ‘a mound of earth set up as a boundary marker’ (Cox 2004: 278, 286). This is plausibly the same as *Seghishou*, in Burton on the Wolds, as these two parishes (and six
others) come together like slices of a pie at Six Hills, formerly Seggs Hill.

Gartree Hundred has thirty identifiable hohs of which eight are in parishes adjacent to the hundred boundary and eleven are close to the county boundary (i.e. sixty-three percent neighbouring boundaries).

Billesdon (on hundred boundary): Starter, Struthou, Trumpeshou (Cox 2009: 335)
Burton Overy: Watho, Worthohyll
Cranoe: ‘crow hoh’ (Cox 2009: 31)
Drayton (on hundred boundary): Houwisgate, Howeslonde, Howes
(Cox 2009: 335)
East Langton: Redow (Cox 2009: 335)
Fleckeney (on hundred boundary): Hobrook Field, ?Stainer (Cox 2009: 335)
Foxton: Galhou (Cox 2009: 335) This seems to be the original name for ‘Gallow Hill’ i.e. the name is not a reference to judicial executions. Gallow Hill is now a cutting on the B6047 running north from Market Harborough.
Frisby: hose wey (Cox 2009: 335)
Glooston (close to hundred boundary): Hoo Baulk (Cox 2009: 335)
Great Easton (on hundred boundary): ?houdale, Howse, Onhou (Cox 2009: 335)
Great Bowden (on hundred boundary): Gallow Close (plausibly the same Galhou noted above under Foxton), Onowh (Cox 2009: 335)
Hallaton (on hundred boundary): le houe (Cox 2009: 335)
Horninghold (on hundred boundary): Hoeback Spinney (Cox 2009: 106)
Hothorpe (‘wrong side’ of county boundary) (Cox 2009: 273)
Houghton on the Hill (on hundred boundary): Pissowe (Cox 2009: 109, 335)
Kibworth Harcourt: Hobrinckes (Cox 2009: 335)
Little Bowden (on hundred boundary): High Howe (Cox 2009: 335)
Lubemham (on county boundary) Lobenho in 1086 ‘Lub(b)a’s hoh’ (dative plural hom) (Cox 2009: 163)
Medbourne (on hundred boundary): Houbriknes (Cox 2009: 335)
Mowsley (on hundred boundary): Lytulho, Rynksho (Cox 2009: 335)
Nevill Holt: Wignell Hill ‘Wiga’s (gen. sing. Wigan) hoh’ (Cox 2009: 204, 335)
Owston (on hundred boundary): Wakoe (Cox 2009: 335)
Saddington (on hundred boundary): ?Ringshill, Seueshouhille (Cox 2009: 335)
Shangton: Mathelou, Stapilhouhill (Cox 2009: 335)
Stonton Wyville: ?Howgate (Cox 2009: 335)
Guthlaxton Hundred has thirteen identifiable hohs of which seven are in parishes adjacent to the hundred boundary and one is close to the county boundary (i.e. sixty-one percent neighbouring boundaries).

Ashby Magna: ?Wartou (Cox 2011: 269)
Aylestone (on hundred boundary): Hodale (Cox 2011: 269)
Bitteswell (close to Leicestershire-Warwickshire boundary): Littleclarouhull (Cox 2011: 269)
Broughton Astley (on hundred boundary): ?Larow Hill (Cox 2011: 269)
Gilmorton: ?homedow (Cox 2011: 269)
Kimcote; Herningho (Cox 2011: 269)
Little thorpe (adjacent to Narborough and Whetstone, both on hundred boundary): Mowshow (Cox 2011: 269)
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Shearsby (on hundred boundary): Hyngnoe, Rinksoe (Cox 2011: 269)
Westrill and Starmore (on hundred boundary): Filleshou, Henhou (Cox 2011: 269)
Whetstone (on hundred boundary): howgates furlong, Long oho, under how (Cox 2011: 269)
Wigston Magna (on hundred boundary): ?Mokithow, Moseho (Cox 2011: 269)

Sparkenhoe Hundred has thirteen identifiable hohs of which seven are in parishes adjacent to the hundred boundary and one is close to the county boundary (i.e. sixty-two percent neighbouring boundaries).

Barlestone: Hoofield (Cox 2014: 366)
Glenfield: Tysoe Hill (on hundred boundary) (Cox 2014: 93)
Narborough (on hundred boundary): Long Caddoe (Cox 2014: 366)
Sapcote (on hundred boundary): Blodowe (Cox 2014: 366)
Shackerstone (on hundred boundary): The Hoofe End, the Howbydon’, Howes meyre (Cox 2014: 366); Cattow Farm (Early forms are indistinguishable from the Scandinavian word haugr, in other words a hlaw or burial mound. So Cattow Farm is possibly on the site of Catta’s hlaw, although Cox prefers a hoh frequented by cats (presumably wild, or at least feral, rather than domestic.) (Cox 2014: 233)
Snarestone (on hundred boundary): The Hoe (Cox 2014: 366)
Stanton under Bardon (on hundred boundary): Hornow (Cox 2014: 366)
Sutton Cheney: Little Hoof (Cox 2014: 366)
Thurlaston: Hoofield (Cox 2014: 366)

Upton (near to Fenny Drayton, close to the Leicestershire-Warwickshire boundary) Sparkenhoe Farm. This may takes its name from the hoh where the Sparkenhoe hundred met (Cox 2014: 261). Plausibly this is the same hoh as the Hoofield in Wellsborough.

Two Leicestershire hohs overlooking the Welland valley and Northamptonshire to the south, both photographed looking north-east.
Top: Mill Hill, to the north of Lubenham (which derives from ‘Lub(b)a’s hoh’).
Bottom: A dramatic hoh-like promontory immediately to the south-east of Cranoe.
Near Wellsborough (now part of Sheepy Parva) there is a Hoo Hills Farm with views over the Leicestershire-Warwickshire boundary and a ‘lost’ field name, Hoofield (Cox 2014: 366)

In contrast to the hundreds, there is just two hoh names recorded for the borough of Leicester: Howfurlong and le Redehoo (Cox 1998: 240) but neither can be located. But note that Tysoe Hill, discussed above as part of Glenfield, is on the western boundary of the borough.

In Rutland, Framland and Goscote the correlation with parishes neighbouring boundaries is exceptionally high. In the other three hundreds there is an almost identical proportion (61, 62 and 63 percent). Despite usually not knowing where within the parishes the hoh names refer to, this also seems to be a significant correlation.

This very ‘tight’ bimodal relationship of hoh place-names to boundaries (viz. circa 95 percent and circa 62 percent) bears no relationship the number of parishes in the hundreds which are on boundaries. The proportion of parishes in a hundred which are liminal has a wide distribution (55, 58, 67, 68 and 83 percent). Whatever the relationship of hohs to boundaries it seems not to be related to the actual number or proportion of parishes adjoining the borders.

The correlation with boundaries would increase if at least some of the infra-hundred hohs were located on other land units within these hundreds (such as estates based on Roman or older territories). More probably there may have been reasons for setting up ‘wayside shrines’ in locations which were not liminal; this would be paralleled by later Christian customs.

While Barrie Cox’s exhaustive survey of Leicestershire and Rutland place-name elements suggests some correlation of hoh in minor place-names with hundredal boundaries, at the same time this supposed correlation also suggests that in the early Anglo-Saxon era some areas of land (such as the Leicestershire Wolds and Charnwood Forest) were outside of the land units which subsequently evolved into hundreds. Without a greater understanding of pre-hundredal land units the location of this minority of hohs may or may not be liminal. Until complete surveys of minor place-names are available for a significant number of other English counties then this uncertainty must remain.

**Hoh as a functional as well as descriptive name**

I am not the first to suggest that hoh may be a ‘functional’ name. In his book *Surrey Place-names* Gavin Smith wrote:

> Personally I suspect hoh may relate not (as Gelling and Cole suggest) simply to ‘heel-shaped (hills)’, but perhaps to the lop-sided profile of the typical ancestral long barrow (though few survive in Surrey), or to a ramped moot mound (one possible candidate being ‘The Mount’ at Barrow Green in Tandridge Hundred). My reason? The stand-alone name Hoe (hoh) occurs in Surrey only in the *ingas* parishes of Godalming (where there is also a Munstead, which could be a related name ‘mount place’), Woking and Dorking and near Gomshall (for all of which see below) but elsewhere at Hoo in Kent and more famously at the Germanic burial site of Sutton Hoo in Raedwald territory. Was hoh, with *ingas*, the first Germanic term applied to hundred foci in west Surrey? (Smith 2005)

Unlike Smith I do not think that hohs have any intrinsic relationship to hundredal meeting places, although as both are often located at boundaries there may well be some such overlap. Smith’s association between hohs and hundreds may be specific to Surrey as the hundreds there are formed much later than in most other counties. Certainly the shape and arrangement of Surrey’s hundreds are far more neat and tidy than elsewhere, suggesting that traditional administrative land units were deliberately replaced after either eastwards expansion of Sussex or westwards expansion of Kent.

My own knowledge of Leicestershire and several other counties provides no obvious links between hohs and the foci of hundreds, and Barrie Cox’s
discussion of Sparkenhoe, summarised above, is confirmation that there is
no neat-and-tidy relationship between an eponymous hoh and its moot site.
Indeed, as suggested for the hohs on the Leicestershire-Nottinghamshire
borders, their location seems to be peripheral to hundreds rather than
central. More research should reveal whether hohs are typically associated
with the centre, the periphery, or neither.

I happily acknowledge that Gavin Smith’s remarks first alerted me to the
possibility of hoh being a functional name, but in almost all other respects
my approach and inferences differ from his. I also wish to stress that
exploring functional meanings for hoh does not require dismissing
descriptive uses of the name.

**Provisional ideas about hohs as boundary shrines**

The rest of the this work discusses a variety of reasons why we might
consider hoh to be both a descriptive term and also a functional one.
Because of the diversity of these ideas I am briefly going to summarise where
all this seems to be heading. Forgive me for putting the proverbial cart before
the horse and saving the reasons for the following suggestions till later.

First of all the blindingly obvious. Hoh has the fundamental sense of ‘high’. If
hohs are indeed shrines then they are ‘high shrines’ in distinction to ‘low
shrines’ (for example, those at fords). While this may seem an odd dualism
to modern sensibilities, it would make perfect sense to the millions of people in
China, where just such a distinction between shrines is axiomatic (Paper
1995: 169)

While we know little about what a pre-conversion shrine looked like, we
can say that they were not especially conspicuous. Indeed woodland groves
by definition must be surrounded by trees so were largely invisible from any
distance away. And yet if Anglo-Saxons had some sense of boundary shrines
then presumably travellers would have felt the need to pay their respects and
seek protection at such shrines. Such practices seem to be associated with
weoh fords and stapol fords. But how could they be located if such shrines
were neither architectural nor monumental?

Old English has a surprising number of non-synonymous words for different
shapes of hill, revealing that Anglo-Saxons were accustomed to using
topographical clues as landmarks. So if an especially distinctive shape of hill
– such as a hoh – was customarily used for boundary shrines then it would
make it easier for people to locate. We still do the same today. In most rural
villages the easiest way to locate the parish church is to look around for the
spire or tower.

The one thing which place-name experts all agree on is that most hohs are a
distinctive shape. Perhaps not quite as remarkable to modern minds as
church steeples, but seemingly distinctive enough to Anglo-Saxon
mentalities. Note that places called hoh usually only reveal the distinctive
shape when approached from one direction – and that direction seems to be
from ‘outside’ the territory.

What happens after Christian conversion? Well the need for ‘boundary
shrines’ as such evolves. Some will become wayside crosses or even
chapels, while others evolve into parish churches. By the very nature of
things some will simply be abandoned. I don’t think I’m stretching my neck
out too far to suggest that the ‘functional’ associations of hoh (i.e. as the
location of boundary shrines) become lost. What is left is the
descriptive term (i.e. a specific shape of hill). This neatly explains the many
Hoe Hills (and the Hose Hill) as by definition these are comparative modern
names (on the basis that hoh and hyll are oxymoronic in Old English).
This is also consistent with Scandinavian elements being used with hoh (e.g.
Hoby and Roehoe) as these names cannot predate the later ninth century – a
time when we can be fairly sure than pre-conversion shrines are lost to
memory.

But is there any other evidence to support this linguistic shift? Very much so
– and most of the rest of this study is devoted to examining such
corroborations. However we need to move away from linguistics, and even
historical and archaeologial approaches. To understand pre-conversion
ways of thinking we need to establish the cosmological and ontological
‘world views’ which the Anglo-Saxons inherited and adapted.
Roman shrines on boundaries

If *hohs* are predominately on boundaries then this raises the obvious question: ‘Why?’ Given the propensity for *hohs* to evolve into villages with churches, were they pre-conversion ‘cult sites’ of some kind? Wysall and the two Tysoes suggest so. Wysall is from *weoh hoh* which can be understood as the ‘shrine or idol *hoh*’, while Tysoe is from Tew’s *hoh* – Tew being the eponymous deity of Tuesdays and Tesco’s.

Roman temples on boundaries are common in Gaul, and there is plausible evidence of such shrines in other English place-names, such as Teffont (Wiltshire), the *funta* on a boundary. The Latin loan-word *funta* evolves into ‘fount’ and denotes some sort of spring or well (perhaps reusing a Roman lead cistern). Indeed, a fast-flowing stream rises to the north of Teffont Magna.
and runs for about a mile through the main street of Telfont Magna and Telfont Evia before flowing into the River Nadder. The first element is Old English teo, derived from the Old Frisian tiæ, meaning a boundary or boundary line’. Telfont is indeed on the boundary of two hundreds, but linguistically the name must predate the formation of hundreds by several centuries (Glover et al 1939: 193–4). Interestingly, Bruce Eagles has suggested that the wood on nearby high ground may have been a pre-Christian shrine site (Eagles 2015).

**Arduuina**

On the top of a hill overlooking Market Harborough, Leicestershire, and the River Welland – the historic boundary with Northamptonshire – stands the ruins of a small church known as St Mary in Arden (see photographs on previous page). The oldest surviving part is a twelfth century south doorway, complete with beaked heads. The origin of ‘Arden’ seems to be from Arduuina ‘the place of a deity known as the high or exalted one’. Antiquarians discovered Bronze Age cremation urns, many Roman coins, and fragments of Anglo-Saxon horse harness nearby. This church went into decline after the planting of Market Harborough in the early thirteenth century and the construction of a town centre chapel (only later the parish church) of St Dionysius. This has no churchyard so burials continued at St Mary in Arden. Dionysius is a corruption of St Denis, who is especially associated with fairs on county boundaries. We can reasonably assume that Harborough’s Lent horse fair, known from the fifteenth century and by the seventeenth century also famous for cattle and sheep, is the successor to an Iron Age seasonal gathering held, as these so often were, on a tribal boundary. Graham Jones has drawn attention to the holdings of the ‘mother parish’, the royal soke of Great Bowden, to the south of the Welland in Studfold Hundred, implying a stud of royal horses (Jones 2007 208–10). While falling short of being direct evidence for Iron Age horse breeding, this remains a clear possibility. The proximity to the presumed limits of navigation for the River Welland (see Trubshaw 2015) would enable Iron Age and later horse breeders to readily transport the animals to the rest of Britain and the Continent.

‘By Toutatis’

Arduuina is only one of a number of deities who seem to be associated with boundaries. Unlike Anglo-Saxon shrines, those of Classical Greece were often built of stone and so have survived for archaeological investigation. Susan Cole looked specifically at the temples to Artemis and their location in the landscape (Cole 2004). Cole notes that many of Artemis’s sanctuaries are on boundaries, including coastal borders. Susan Cole identified several overlapping ‘functions’ served by Artemisian shrines. Artemis is principally the protector of boundaries, and also the protector of people travelling past the boundaries of their own polis; fairly predictably her sanctuaries are close to routes over the watersheds between territories. Significantly, Artemis is not associated with mountain peaks, but with the passes in between. Her protection of ‘dangerous passages’ extends seawards – major shrines dedicated to her are found in harbours. The parallels with the location of hohs are striking.
Political boundaries, in Greece as in England and elsewhere, often follow watersheds (see also Trubshaw 2012: 59–64). By definition there will be springs fairly close to the summits of the watersheds, and these will be regarded as the sources of larger streams and rivers. For merely practical reasons alone sanctuaries need to be situated near to reliable springs. The water at the shrines to Artemis was thought to be especially efficacious for childbirth and children. This was in part because Artemis was the goddess of ‘transitions’ – whether travel or significant stages in the human life cycle.

Northern Europe and parts of Britain also had a ‘boundary deity’, known as Toutatis. The name means ‘tribal protector’, from the Latin tutelarius, ‘a guardian’. The root word in Latin is tutela, ‘protection’, which also gives the English word ‘tutelary’. Tutela is also the origin of ‘tutor’ which, until the late sixteenth century, had the sense of a guardian or protector rather than teacher.

In recent years metal detectorists have discovered over eighty metal rings inscribed with the letters ‘TOT’. These are seemingly votive offerings to Toutatis. These rings are mostly made from silver, although a couple are gold and about a dozen are bronze or a similar copper-alloy. They date to the second or third century AD, but the designs of the rings are closer to Iron Age precedents than Roman styles of the time. To put this is perspective, the eighty-or-so inscriptions to Toutatis outnumber the inscriptions on Romano-British jewellery to all other deities combined (Daubney 2010).

These rings were all found in or near the tribal territory of the Corieltauvi – in other words Lincolnshire, Leicestershire and parts of adjoining counties. Indeed the distribution of the finds suggests they were deliberately placed at shrines near the boundaries of the territory (Daubney 2010). While Toutatis seems to be a male deity – there is an inscription from a silver votive offering at a shrine in Barkway, near Royston in Hertfordshire, which is shared with Mars – both his function and the location of the shrines in the landscape seem closely related to the Artemis cult of Greece.

There is no evidence that the cult of Toutatis survived into the post-Roman period. For example, no English place-names clearly derive from his name. But the concept of ‘tribal protection’ and shrines on boundaries would have continued. There are overlaps between Toutatis and Artemis, and even greater overlaps between the location of hohs and sanctuaries dedicated to Artemis. Local tutelary deities – such as that commemorated as Arduuina – seem to have been at the heart of north European paganism so we should not be surprised to see place-names that reflect such cults. What is surprising is that hoh has not hitherto been included in such considerations. Which raises the possibility that further examples may be discovered if we look in the right sort of places.

**Toot hills**

Possibly there is more such evidence. Which does involve keeping a look out. Literally. Furthermore it involves a place-name element which is both descriptive and functional.

Although the place-name elements ‘toot’ and ‘tut’ have been looked at by a number of investigators, to my knowledge there is not a comprehensive list. The general consensus is that it denotes a ‘a hill of observation’, a look-out place. The word derives from the Old English totian, ‘to peep, look out, spy’. In Middle English ‘to tote’ is ‘to watch, to look out’, while ‘toten’ has the sense of projecting or sticking out. John Wycliffe’s translation of the Bible has ‘Up on the toothil of the Lord I am stonde… ’ which the King James version renders as ‘Go, set a watchman.’ (Isaiah 21:6) ‘Tote’ evolved into Modern English ‘tout’, which – until recently – meant a spy or lookout man. Presumably at least some of these toot hills were artificial mounds surmounted by watch towers. This links to a whole group of Germanic words which can be traced back to the Old High German word tutta or tuta, meaning ‘nipple’. In Old Norse tuta extends its meaning to ‘a teat-like prominence’. Medieval Dutch tote means ‘apex, point’ (giving the modern Dutch tut, ‘spout or nozzle’). Likewise, modern German tute means a ‘cone-shaped container’ (although, at least in Swiss-German, the sense has widened to include conventionally-shaped plastic carrier bags).
Examples of toot hills

Arguably the most auspicious toot hill was the one at Westminster, London. Westminster Abbey and the Houses of Parliament are the most-recent of a succession of churches and palaces on the site. The locality was known for many centuries as Thorney Island, being an area of relatively solid ground amid the marshes bordering the Thames. Additionally, there was an artificial mound, known as Tot Hill. This still stood in Queen Elizabeth I’s time, as Nordon, the topographer of Westminster, wrote ‘Tootehill Street, lying in the west part of the city, takes the name of a hill near it which is called Toote Hill, in the great field near the street.’ (Gordon 1925). Toot Hill is indeed shown on a 1746 map by Rocques by a bend in Horseferry Road roughly where Regency Palace now stands (TQ 298795). The name survived in Tothill Fields, the old tournament ground now part of the playing field for Westminster School in Vincent Square, and Tothill Street, which aligns with the northern transept of Westminster Abbey.

Not all ‘toot’-like place-names are necessarily from toot hills. The earliest record of Tetbury, Gloucestershire, (circa 900) is Tettanbryg, suggesting this was the fortified place of a woman called Tette. Tuttbury, Staffordshire, may therefore be the stronghold of a man called Tutte. In this case the earliest record is rather late, from the Domesday book, where it appears as Toteberie. Both these settlements have castles on prominent mounds, both are burhs – indicating a defensive function, presumably predating the establishment of burh tons by King Alfred in the ninth century, and both are close to modern county boundaries and important routeways (Tetbury is close to the Fosse Way and Tuttbury is adjacent to the River Dove). However burh place-names are most often associated with personal names so it seems unlikely that the original form was ‘toot’ (but see below regarding King Sil).

Only one ‘toot’ is directly linked to a hoh, Tottenhoe in Bedfordshire. Early forms reveal this was the toot aern hoh, ‘the look-out house hoh’. A Norman motte and bailey still survives. Not far away to the north-east is Houghton Regis, so the ‘toot’ prefix would have been necessary to distinguish the two nearby hohs. They are located either side of Watling Street, with Tottenhoe looking out to Buckinghamshire and Hertfordshire to the south and west, while Houghton Regis looks out north. Dunstable – the stapel on the ‘dune’ or heath – is immediately to the east of Tottenhoe at the crossing of Watling Street and the Icknield Way.

Many of the other examples of toot hills are also close to boundaries. Totley, six miles south of Sheffield, has commanding views of the frontier between Mercia and Northumbria. Tuters Hill on the outskirts of Pattingham is close to Totters Bank; both are in Staffordshire but close to the border with Shropshire.

Other ‘toot’ names include:

Toot Hill, Alton, Derbyshire. Overlooks the Churnet valley, not far from the confluence with the Dove.

Tettenhall, Wolverhampton. Early forms of the place-name suggest ‘toot hill in the meadow’. Indeed, the nineteenth century topography is of village in a meadow ascending a lofty sandstone ridge which has extensive views.

Tutnell or Totenhull in Tardebigge, Warwickshire.

Toot Hill just outside Bingham, Nottinghamshire – a promontory with excellent views over the Trent valley to the west and the Vale of Belvoir to the south. The modern A52 climbs up to Toot Hill just to the east of the junction with the Fosse Way (A46).

Totterdown occurs as an early field name in Bucklebury, Berkshire and an air photograph has revealed an enclosed earthwork.

Totterdown, near Chieveley, also in Berkshire.

Totters Bank, Chesterton, near Worfield, Shropshire.

Totterton Hall near Lydbury North, Shropshire.

Old and New Totterdown to the north-west of Malborough in Wiltshire lie at the end of a ridge which appears to have an ancient earthwork on the crest.
Tatteredge Hill (shown as Totteredge Hill on early OS maps) is south-east of Leintwardine in Herefordshire.

Tot Hill survives as the name of a lane off the A34 near Highclere, Buckinghamshire.

Tot Hill to the west of Newbury became one of the biggest tree camps during the protests prior to the construction of the A34 bypass in January 1996. It is now a service area with a hotel. This seems to make it the only minor toponym containing the element *tut* graced with a McDonald’s.

Wimble Toot is the name of a tumulus near Babcary in Somerset.

These examples are mostly from the second edition of *Signposts to the Past* Gelling 1988).

Barrie Cox’s detailed survey of minor names in Leicestershire (Cox 2002–2014) provides a good indication of how often ‘toot’ appears in field names and the like. Toot Field, Sapcote, is the site of a Norman castle. Toot Hill, Loughborough, survives as a street name near the church. The town’s name possibly derives from ‘Luhhede’s burh’ so is a strong possibility that ‘toothill’ is an alternative appellation for the same (or a closely related) earthwork. Toot Hill, Groby, is shown to the west of the modern village on old OS maps and, presumably, superseded by the Norman castle. Cox identified toot hill field names in the parishes of Arnesby, Aylestone, Groby, Mowsley, Quenby, Sapcote and Sproxton. He also recognises ‘toot’ as the possible origin of Tooley Park and Tooley Farm, Peckleton; Twitch Hill, Riddlington; Tirtle Meare, Morcott and Turtle Slade, Wardley.

If nothing else Cox’s detailed survey of field names and other minor toponyms in Leicestershire and Rutland reveals that toot hills once abounded, although sometimes corrupted into some unlikely variants. A broader survey would presumably reveal many more examples. A non-academic attempt to survey these names in the early 1980s listed the following places:

Tooter Baldon, Oxfordshire
Tooter Farm, Oxfordshire,
However these need treating with caution. As McGeogh gives no locations for the minor place-names it is not possible to quickly establish if there are possible look-out mounds or hills. More crucially he seems not to have checked the earliest recorded forms of these place-names to establish if the ‘toot’ derivation is reliable. The last five on his list are almost certainly not from ‘toot’, and the whole list is reproduced here more as an illustration of how uncritical enthusiasm quickly becomes a muddle.

Penny Drayton’s equally non-academic survey of 1994 is available online and has attracted a number of additional suggestions via email.

Toothill, North Baddesley, Hampshire.
Toot Hill, Pirton, Bedfordshire; now a motte and bailey.
Toot Hill, Swindon.
Toot Hill, Healing (near Grimsby), Lincolnshire.
Toot Hill, Great Coates, Lincolnshire.
Toothill Farm near Hathersage, Derbyshire
Oldbury Toot, Oldbury-Upon-Severn, a small island by the River Severn.
Toot Hill at Macclesfield Forest, Cheshire with earthworks on the top, supposedly a Roman camp or lookout post.
Cleeve Toot, an Iron age hillfort in Somerset.
Toot Rock, Pett Level, East Sussex TN35 4EW (OSGR TQ893138) is an outlier of the sandstone ridge which runs through Pett. It stands out on the marsh and was formerly an island. Its lookout status has persisted into recent times with the construction of Coastguard Cottages there in 1900 and watchtowers/gun emplacements in 1940.

None of these attempts to list ‘toot’ names seem to be comprehensive. Nevertheless there are two clear correlations. Firstly, the name is often associated with Norman motte and baileys. Clearly these are the successors to the less substantially-constructed Anglo-Saxon ‘watchtowers’. Secondly, there is an even greater correlation with Iron Age hill forts. Sometimes, as with Cleeve Toot in Somerset, the name has transferred to the hill fort itself. But more commonly the ‘toot hill’ is nearby. This suggests that the Anglo-Saxons simply gave a new name to an optimum look-out place.

Graham Gower has suggested that the toot hill names along the line of Stane Street, from Chichester to London, could have operated as a signalling system. (Gower 2002). This would be entirely consistent with more general ‘look out duties’ and also narrow down the options for places which could function in this manner.
However research into the distribution of toot hills needs to also consider place-names akin to ‘weard don’, which also has the sense of ‘watcher’s hill’, or the hill of the ‘wardens’ or ‘guardians’. Such *weard dons* can be found in a number of appropriate places. The most dramatic is Warden Point on the eastern end of the Isle of Sheppey. Other settlement names whose early forms indicate *waerd don* are Warden, Northumberland; Chipping Warden, Northamptonshire, and Old Warden, Bedfordshire. In Cumbria Scandinavian influences give Warcop instead, but with the same meaning. There are also *weard hylls* which become the two Wardles in the north-west, one in Cheshire and the other in Greater Manchester. Warborough, Oxfordshire, and Wardlow, Derbyshire, are other variants.

Wardley (the warden’s wood or clearing) to the west of Uppingham in Rutland looks out over the Eye Brook, the county boundary with Leicestershire, so seemingly offers an excellent example. As previously noted, in Wardley is the minor toponym Turtle Slade which Barrie Cox suggests might derive from ‘toot’. If so this may be an alternative name for the *waerd leah*.

I am not aware of any attempt to identify all *weard* names in England so the possible overlaps – or otherwise – with toot names remains an open question.

**Toot and Toutatis**

Etymologists can demonstrate convincingly that the name of Toutatis has a different origin from ‘toot’. However, if the Romano-British rings are anything to go by then he was commonly known as ‘Toot’. Even though these rings are inscribed ‘Tot’ there is no reason to suppose the ‘o’ was pronounced short, as in the Modern English word ‘tot’. Instead, had Romano-British metalworkers been aware of the diacritics favoured by later linguists they may have inscribed ‘Tot’ with a dash over the ‘o’.

We can say with complete confidence that Anglo-Saxon soldiers were neither skilled etymologists nor pedantic linguists. We do know, with a high degree of confidence, that they revelled in word play and homonyms. Soldiers on lookout duty would spend a great deal of time being bored and, if their modern successors are any indication, engaging in any number of humorous activities.

Such soldiers at lookout places would have been especially vulnerable to surprise attacks by unwelcome foes, who would presumably plan to greatly outnumber the inevitably modest number of watchers with predictably fatal consequences. Being assigned to duties at a toot hill would mean living with a sense that one’s life was in the hands of the gods. While I suspect that direct evidence will always be elusive, in the pre-conversion era those manning a toot hill would almost certainly have created some sort of shrine to a protective deity, such as Toutatis or one known by a local name.
While there is no evidence that veneration of Toutatis extends beyond the end of the Roman occupation, the very same look out hills that worked best then would work equally well in the early Anglo-Saxon era. Did ‘word play’ (evoking a distorted folk memory of a by-then largely forgotten deity) mean that ‘toot hill’ became the preferred term for these look out places, rather than names based on weard?

Possible personifications of toot

Somewhat relevant to how folklore both preserves and distorts is the Wiltshire legend of King Sil buried – in a full suit of golden armour – beneath Silbury Hill. At least, according to a legend first recorded in the nineteenth century. Silbury Hill is indeed a man-made monument, constructed in the late Neolithic, although without any evidence of sepulchral use. The Roman road from London to Bath bends around it, and a Roman town was constructed immediately to the south. In Anglo-Saxon times a look out ‘fort’ was erected on the top. The name Silbury presumably dates to this time. But plausibly it also known as the ‘king’s hill’. In the local pronunciation that could readily lead, several centuries later, to a legendary King Sil.

There is a slim chance that toot hylls in Gloucestershire and Staffordshire had also undergone a similar legendary ‘anthropomorphism’, leading to the invention of Tette and Tutte, who give their names to Tetbury and Tutbury. As burh place-names are predominately formed in conjunction with personal names there is little reason to think that there has been a direct corruption from toot burh. But an ‘intervening’ legendary person remains a possibility.

There are other parallels. The Neolithic chambered tomb known today as Adam’s Grave, which sits prominently above the Vale of Pewsey in Wiltshire, was known to Anglo-Saxons from at least as far back as the late sixth century as Woden’s beorg. It is at the end of Woden’s dene which cuts through part of ‘Woden’s ditch’, the Wansdyke. A large number of such legendary figures populate the English landscape, with the practice being...
alive and well into the eighteenth century, when the Devil leaves his mark in the toponyms of all parts of England (Harte 2010).

We often simply don’t know how real or otherwise the people are who are commemorated in the personal names which dominate English toponyms. Presumably they are founders – but were such names given when people still remembered the living person, or after they were essentially legendary? The place-names formed around the names people regarded as local saints clearly persist as names mostly because of subsequent retelling (and, exceptionally, later documentation) of the saints’ legends. In oral cultures there is no neat and tidy demarcation between memorates and legends, between what actually happened and legendary elaboration, including conflation with legends of other individuals. ‘Founding fathers’ who are seemingly the origins of the many –ingas- and –ingham place-names were likely to be remembered in ways which were as ‘legendary’ as founding saints. Indeed, as I will discuss later, we should not be in too much of a hurry to distinguish between the two customs.

Anglo-Saxon predilections for wordplay are in evidence throughout the surviving Old English literature. A legendary protective hero-deity known as ‘Toot’ being evoked at places known as ‘toot hills’ seems to be far more probable than not.

The deity on her mound

In keeping with the notion of double meanings, the fragmentary Old English poem known to scholars as *The Wife’s Lament* is also open to more than one interpretation. This work is conventionally thought to be the autobiographical perspective of an exiled noblewoman. However, as Sarah Semple has suggested (Semple 1998), the text reads more convincingly as the first-person viewpoint of a dead woman in a burial mound. But the identity and even the status of that ‘woman’ is seemingly ambiguous.

The general mood of *The Wife’s Lament* is gloomy, evoking a strong sense of emptiness and loneliness. There is a reference to a ruined defensive site –

Above: Part of the seventh century Franks Casket with Hos on her mound to the left. The runes start herh os sitæþ, ‘Here sits Os’. Most of the casket is in the British Museum but this panel is in the Museo Nazionale del Bargello, Florence.

Right: ‘Here sits Os’.
both physically decayed and evocative of a now-lost era. The woman described as living in an ‘earth
cave’ or an ‘earth structure’ – terms also used in *Beowulf* to describe the abode of the dragon – and,
elsewhere in Old English literature, dragons are specifically stated to be the guardians of burial
mounds. The passage in *Beowulf* reads:

> I was bidden to dwell among a thicket of trees under an oak tree in this earthen dug-out.
> Ancient is this earthen abode – I am quite consumed by longing – the dales are dark, the hills
> high, the bastioned town grievously overgrown with briars, their habitations void of pleasures.
> (translation Bradley 1995: 382–5)

She describes ‘my friends, loved while they lived, are in earth, possessed by the grave.’ (translation
Semple 1998: 111)

This first-person account is seemingly that of a dead woman. Semple goes on to argue that this poem
may be the Christian euhemerising of legends regarding the goddess Hos sitting on the ‘sorrow mound’.
Her main evidence is the curious depiction on the Franks Casket of a human-like figure with a horse’s
head and hooves sitting on a small mound – perhaps intended to be seen as a *hlaw*. The runes around
that panel of the casket start *herh os sitæþ*, ‘Here sits Os’ (Semple 1998: 110–11; 121–2).

If this interpretation is correct, then the apparently human posthumous viewpoint of The Wife’s Lament
is not what it seems. It is a metaphor – an euhemerisation if you like – for a pagan deity ‘exiled’ by the
christianisation of late Anglo-Saxon culture.

If so, the poet is expressing the first-person viewpoint of a deity. And, bearing in mind how little Old
English poetry has come down to us, we must assume that the so-called *Wife’s Lament* is the sole
survivor of a much more established literary tradition, one which has its roots deeply in the oral bardic
traditions which preceded the literacy of the Church. There is evidence for just such a ‘worldview’,
albeit in Old Irish not Old English, as the poem known as *An Cailleach Bhéara* (translated as ‘The Hag
of Beare’ or ‘The Old Woman of Beare’) is also written in the first person (see Weir 1994 for a
translation).

Semple’s interpretation of the Franks Casket panel is intriguing for a number of reasons. If, as she
suggests, Hos is sitting on a *hlaw* then this is the only image of a deity with a mound so far recognised.
As such it is the best – albeit not indubitable – evidence for there being an association between *hlaws*
and other-than-human beings. If we suspend disbelief in this association then there is something
remarkable about Hos. She is vastly bigger than the *hlaw*. She is giant-sized. But she is roughly in
proportion to how a *hlaw* – and maybe even a *hoh* – would appear alongside a turf-cut hill figure (see
my discussions below about Wilmington Long Man and the now-lost Tysoe Red Horse).
Left: Waden Hill from Google Earth, showing crop marks of ploughed-out Bronze Age barrows, probably created around 2,200 BCE – and almost certainly reused for burials by the Anglo-Saxons. Quite probably the each mound had a weoh on top in Anglo-Saxon times, giving the name ‘weoh don’ to the hill. The ‘dots’ to the left of the image are some of the megaliths of the West Kennett Avenue, erected about 2,500 BCE – maybe they too were thought by the Anglo-Saxons to be weohs.

Bottom left: Waden Hill as it looks when standing in the bottom left corner of the Google Earth image and looking towards the top right. The parallel lines at the top of the Google Earth image are the field boundary which forms the horizon of this photograph. The megaliths are two of the surviving stones from the Neolithic Avenue.

Below: How Waden Hill might look today if the burial mounds had not been ploughed out and the becuns were still standing.
When is a shrine not a shrine?

While my evidence is so far somewhat tenuous, hohs, toot hills and weard dons are seemingly mounds, often near boundaries, with shrines to deities. However Old English has two words which indicate pre-conversion ‘shrines’: weoh and hearg. Before I extend my speculations into yet another common place-name element which may overlap with hohs and toot hills, I will briefly review current thinking about weoh and hearg (the latter also spelt hearh and haerg).

Weoh is also spelt wig (pronounced like ‘why’) but for simplicity I will use just weoh. Weoh is found in settlement names such as Weeford, Wyfordby, Weoley and Willey. These tell us where a weoh once stood by a ford or in a woodland clearing (leah) In addition there is are several villages in Northamptonshire associated with a Weedon, the rounded hill with a weoh dons, and various non-habitative weoh dons, such as Waden Hill at Avebury.

Linguists tell us confidently that weoh denotes both a shrine and an idol. This is hardly confusing – think of any number of roadside shrines in Catholic countries with a small statue of the Virgin Mary or a locally-venerated saint. The words ‘shrine’ and ‘statue’ are almost synonymous in this context. And, as John Wycliffe and other late-medieval Lollards zealously preached, venerating such statues should be thought of as idolatry. Indeed, Catholic wayside shrines could be thought of as a direct continuation of weohs – although their appearance may well have changed greatly over the centuries.

And if you think this is taking an analogy too far, in Beowulf there is a mention of wigwearthung which means ‘worshipping of idols’. And when the pagan priest Coifi destroys his own temple, Bede specifically states that both the building and the wigbed – literally ‘idol-table’ but presumably a wooden altar – went up in the flames. We can only presume that the wigbed was carved and perhaps covered with elaborately decorated textiles. Bede omits to mention the wig which stood on the wigbed but this too was presumably wooden.

Lincoln in 1948. The cathedral is marked in red while, to the south, the parish church of St Mary Le Wigford is also marked in red. The location of the weoh ford, where the Fosse Way crosses the River Witham, is also indicated in red.
If we look to the cognate word in Greek, (w)eikon, this too describes an icon or ‘powerful devotional image’. However in Classical Greek eikon shifts meaning to denote statues of people, while the word agalma is introduced for statues of deities. There is also a third word, xonanon, which denotes a portable icon. Words of course shift meaning, and the later sense of eikon to denote a statue of a person does not diminish the shared origin with weoh. The ancient Greeks clearly felt the need to distinguish three different types of ‘devotional image’ depending on both what was depicted and how the image was used – whether portable or too big to be moved. So we should not be surprised that that Anglo-Saxons made a distinction between weohs and stapols – even though we cannot be sure what the distinction was! There are places called Stapleford just as there ones called Weeford. The general understanding is that stapols were carved from wood and, presumably, larger than weohs.

One of the more remarkable weoh fords – at least from the perspective of post-weoh developments – is the one which gave the name to the suburb of Lincoln south of the River Witham. The Wigford itself was where the Fosse Way crossed a small watercourse (now culverted and running under one of the

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Wadenhoe church is situated at the side of a large don-like hill. The River Nene runs parallel with the left of the path. Could the construction of the church have levelled a hoh-like promontory to the side of the don? If so then the name Wadenhoe would be derived from weoh don hoh.

The church at Wyville, Lincolnshire is situated on the summit of a hill with two spring-fed pools at the base. The pool in the lower part of this photograph is the smaller, more westerly, one.
streets in the centre of the city’s retail zone). A zebra crossing is the modern
day successor to the eponymous weoh ford. While this may have been a
wayside shrine at a tricky crossing, it was also on a major routeway.
Furthermore it is located at a clear topographical boundary at the base of the
dramatic hill which now has both the castle and the cathedral on its summit.
It is so dramatic that in all probability it would have been some sort of pre-
Christian sanctuary.

Not all weohs at fords became known as Wyford. Wye in Kent is on the
eastern bank of the Great Stour river, where the Pilgrims’ Way crosses a
Roman road. Presumably the eponymous weoh was at the crossroads rather
than the ford.

Although the name of Wadenhoe in Northamptonshire is usually deemed to
be a personal name plus hoh there remains the possibility of it being a
 corrupted form of weoh don hoh. This possibility is consistent with the
location of the distinctive mound at the side of the River Nene close to the
start of a Roman road running to Leicester, known as the Gartree Road (after
the hundred through which it passes – indeed the hundredal moot site
is known to have been at the side of this road).

At least some weohs also seem to have had some sort of relationship with
boundaries. The clearest example is Wyville, just to the east of the former
Roman road which still marks the Leicestershire-Lincolnshire boundary.
Although a document of 1185 shows this as Wiuewelle, which has the sense
of ‘wife’s well’, this is presumably a corruption of weoh wella ‘shrine well’.
Two springs still feed into pools at the bottom of the steep hill, on top of

which is a nineteenth century church. While there is no evidence for hoh
place-names, the relationship of spring and shrine may have once been
typical.

Archaeological evidence suggests that at least some Anglo-Saxon burial
mounds had a central post hole in the top. Given the poor state of
preservation of most such mounds there is no way of knowing if this was
exceptional or not. The Old English literature refers to such posts not as
weohs but as becuns. This is the origin of the modern word ‘beacon’ but then
had the sense of a ‘marker’.

From later in the Anglo-Saxon era a few stone gravemarkers have survived –
see the illustration of examples from Thornby, to the east of Leicester. These
have been inscribed with what I regard as somewhere between ‘proto-
heraldry’ and ‘proto-tartans’ – non-representational ‘logos’ which
presumably related to specific families or ‘clans’. It takes little imagination to
presume that earlier wooden becuns were inscribed in similar ways which
identified the lineage of those buried in the mound. Such marks may also have been geometric, although wood more readily allows the depiction of zoomorphic motifs (which have their parallels in the rampant lions and unicorns of later heraldry).

How similar the decoration on *becuns* and *weohs* might have been is an unanswerable question but in all probability the same group of craftsmen would have been commissioned to create both types, so we can reasonably expect some overlap. Equally unresolvable is whether *becuns* were regarded as a special type of *weoh* (i.e. all *becuns* are *weohs* but not all *weohs* are *becuns*) or whether *becun* and *weoh* were mutually exclusive concepts. If, as seems likely, there was physical similarity then I doubt if the terms remained totally exclusive.

From the place-name evidence it seems that some *weohs* were quite prominent landmarks. But these would have been only a small number of the *weohs*. So when we look at a *weoh don*, such as Waden Hill, we should imagine a large number of graves protected with either mounds or *weohs* or both.
Stapols

What were stapols? Linguists inform us that they were large wooden carvings – something akin to North American ‘totem poles’ perhaps. Presumably stapols were bigger than weohs. The assumption is that there was some mutually-exclusive distinction between the two terms. My guess is that the stapols were too heavy to be easily transported and were ‘planted’ into the ground, whereas weohs were light enough to be carried by a small number of people – perhaps even just one person – in a manner akin to medieval statues of saints. Whether they were often moved around is a moot point, as the distinction may have been based on ‘principle’ rather than practice.

Four settlements in England are known as Stapleford – in Cambridgeshire, Leicestershire, Nottinghamshire and Lincolnshire. Until recent decades locals in both the latter places still pronounced the village name as ‘stap-ul-fud’ rather than ‘stay-pull-ford’). There is also a Stapleton in Wiltshire. In Bedfordshire there is Dunstable – the stapol on the ‘dune’ or heath which predated the medieval priory and subsequent market town. There was once a hundred in Kent which met at a Thurstable, the stapol dedicated to the god Thor or Thunor. In Essex there is both Thurstable (Thunor’s stapol) and Barstaple (the bearded one’s stapol) (see Blair 1995 and Bintley 2015: 44–5).

Stapols were substantial wooden posts. They may have been as big as some of the permanent maypoles still surviving in England, such as Barwick in Elmet, Yorkshire; Belton, Leicestershire and Linby and Wellow, both in Nottinghamshire.

However unlike such maypoles, most or all stapols were carved – although how they might have been carved is open to debate. In the churchyard at Stapleford in Nottinghamshire there is a substantial fragment of a stone cross. Was this the successor to – or the final manifestation of – the eponymous stapol? The decoration is not explicitly Christian.
If you are thinking that seeing the stone cross at Stapleford as the successor to a pre-conversion stapol is a bit too radical then think of the Wiltshire village of Christian Malford. This derives its name from the ford with a Crist mael. Mael means ‘mark’ or ‘marker’ and is the origin of the modern word ‘mole’ to describe a large freckle-like mark on the skin. Michael Bintley suggests that at least some crist maeles were a cross cut in a tree (Bintley 2015: 46).

Indeed Christian Malford church is not in the centre of the village but instead right by the banks of the River Avon at a place which is ideally suited to fording (although no doubt the river channel has been deepened and widened in recent centuries to minimise flooding). Crist mael ford seems to be a direct Christian counterpart to the various stapol fords, offering similar supernatural protection at what might have been a tricky place to cross the watercourse.

Intriguingly the church at Stapleford in Lincolnshire is – like Christian Malford – also by the side of the River Witham, and remote from the village. The river now runs in a deep channel and a concrete bridge provides access for farm vehicles. But formerly the river would have been wider and shallower, with sloping banks associated with fords. Almost certainly this Lincolnshire church occupies the site of the eponymous stapol.

(See Volume Three of The Twilight Age for more extended discussions of weohs and stapols.)

The little-known ealhs

Most discussions of Anglo-Saxon shrines consider hear and weoh. Rarely ealh or alh gets a brief mention. The brevity is understandable – there seems to be nothing much known about them. One person who has shed more light than others is Stephen Pollington. He notes that:

The root of the word ealh lies in the cognate verb ealgian, ‘protect, ward off’ and the idea seems to have been a place which was kept inviolate and protected from inappropriate influences. The Gothic cognate alhs has a similar meaning.

(Pollington 2011: 111)

Ealh seemingly has the sense of ‘temple, precinct, holy site’, with the implication that these are the sanctuaries of tutelary deities. Pollington cites two examples in Kent: Alkham, ‘farm of the sanctuary’ and ealhfleot (‘sanctuary creek’) which connected Faversham to the sea. He also notes that the personal names Alcuin and Ealhwine also incorporate ealh, as does Alcis, the name of the Divine Twins (Pollington et al 2010: 459; Pollington 2011: 111)

This sense of protection clearly resonates well with the function of hohs and deities such as Toutatis. Given that Anglo-Saxon words are usually semantically distinct – for example about a dozen different words for different shapes of hills – then there is no reason to suppose that hoh and ealh are tautological. However as hohs seem to be associated with distinctive shaped hills it leaves open the possibility that an ealh had similar protective functions but was not located on a hoh-shaped promontory.
We simply do not have enough places named after *ealh* to understand the context of this name, even though to Pollington’s examples I can add two in Leicestershire. These are both in Wymeswold where an *Allletford* is recorded in 1292 and *Allfleethorn* at some time in the thirteenth century (Cox 2004). Note that, as with Kent, one of these is an *ealhfleot* or ‘sanctuary creek’. *Allletford* is comparable to Wyfordby, about twelve miles to the east.

There is only one watercourse in Wymeswold parish, rather grandly called the River Mantle (although it is more of a brook usually only flowing after heavy rain). Its origin is near Harrow Farm and the putative *hearg* at Six Hills. Until recent centuries the upper reaches of the Mantle were known as the Arrow, likely a corruption of *hearg* and also the name of one of the pre-enclosure great fields adjacent to the watercourse. Barrie Cox has recently suggested that Mantle is from the Old English *myned*, derived from the Old Welsh *minid* (Cox 2016: 214). There are similar examples of Mantle in Leicestershire from the adjoining parish of Burton on the Wolds and at Bardon, Swannington and Wilson.

Cox also discovered a reference to a *Cumberdale* in Wymeswold (in a document of 1543) which must refer to the dale-like valley associated with the Arrow/Mantle – this is especially interesting as this is from Brittonic *cymru*, implying ‘Celtic’-speaking people living here into the Anglo-Saxon era. This is confirmed by the nearby parish of Walton on the Wolds and several other Brittonic names in adjoining parishes (notably in Seagrave; see Trubshaw 2012: 31). There can be little doubt that the *ealhfleot* was in the Cumberdale and close to what seems likely to have been a *hearg*. As previously noted, Wysall, Hoton and Roehoe Wood are also nearby.

The complication with *ealh* names is that another word *halh* is fairly common in East Midlands place-names, notably Nottinghamshire (and Wymeswold and Wysall straddle the Nottinghamshire-Leicestershire boundary). *Halh* means a ‘jutting-out nook’ but, curiously, such nooks are often near a parish boundary (Paul Cullen, pers. comm.). Arnold, to the north of Nottingham, is from *earn halh*, the ‘eagle’s nook’.

Furthermore, in later Old English law codes the word *frithgeard* appears. The proclamations are usually along the lines of ‘if a *frithgeard* be on anyone’s land around a stone or tree or spring or any mockery of such kind.’ Clearly the sense of *frithgeard* is ‘sanctuary’. In Old Norse the word...
staľgarthr denotes a sacred ‘precinct’ around a post. Presumably there was such an enclosure around the Irmisul (Pollington 2011: 121). The concept of frith evolves into the later medieval concept on judicial sanctuary within churches, manifested as frith stools of which several still survive (see Volume Three of The Twilight Age).

Whether or not some of the attributes and functions of an ealh transferred to the sense of frithgeard is a wide open question. But, in my opinion, we need to be open-minded about this possibility given that ealh is seemingly rather elusive.

More than a shrine

Although ealh is often missing from academic discussions of pre-conversion Anglo-Saxon sanctuaries, linguists and historians have long recognised that the Old English words weoh and hearg denoted some sort of places where deities were venerated. Many books and web sites translate hearg as ‘temple’ and weoh as ‘shrine’ or ‘idol’. The implication is that heargs are bigger than weohs. This stands up to closer examination (e.g. Wilson 1985; 1992; see Pollington 2011: 112 for a recent overview) – although thinking of heargs as synonymous with temples does not. Wilson’s list of about twelve hearg sites shows a clear geographical correlation with the south midlands and proximity to Roman roads. Examples of hearg not known to Wilson (and discussed elsewhere in this study) share the same predilection for Roman roads, but extend the geographical area.

The Old English word hearg is closely linked to the Old Norse word horg(r) which initially denoted a cairn of stones but acquired the broader sense of an open-air sanctuary. However, as Stephen Pollington observed, the references to hearg in Beowulf suggest some sort of structure:

- Sometimes they offered at harrow-shelters [haergtrafum] with idol-worshipping [wigweorthinga]
- Beowulf lines 175–6; translated by Pollington.

Harrow Hill, Long Compton, Warwickshire.

A traf or traef is a temporary shelter such as a pavilion or tent. The Danish royal site at Lejre, known to be where sacrifices took place, is perhaps from the Gothic hleithra, ‘tent, tabernacle’ (Pollington 2011: 113). This puts in mind of the temporary shelters erected at hundred moot sites and, by implication, at places where the Anglo-Saxon kings held court. Seemingly, trafes were used as shelters at various places of assembly used for ‘communal rites’.

This is presumably why horg(r) also refers to wooden temples. However, temples are a comparatively late addition to Scandinavian paganism; indeed they may have been introduced to emulate Christian churches. We can see this complication more clearly in the way that hearg is used in Old English translations of Latin texts for words such as sacellum, lupercal, simulacrum, fanum and templum even though these words have the sense of ‘holy space’, ‘sacred cave’, ‘effigy’, ‘shrine’ and ‘temple’, respectively (Pollington 2011: 60). The underlying sense of horg is an open-air sanctuary, perhaps with tents or hustings. Which is how we should think of heargs, despite the confusion caused by later Christian clerics’ imprecise appropriations.
Until recently the assumption was that the size of such sanctuaries probably compared to Christian churchyards. After all, village churchyards predate parish churches by a few hundred years and are quite likely to emulate such pagan places of worship. However Semple argued that heargs are typically around forty hectares (approximately a hundred acres). We might reasonably assume that the Roman town of Vernemetum, which takes its name from a ‘great or especially sacred grove’, was associated with a nemeton and later hearg which was considerably larger. Sites small enough to become village churchyards are seemingly too small to have been regarded as heargs, although they are consistent with the size of hohs.

One of the distinctive features of what seem to be genuine heargs is that they are prominent hills. And these hills are often, though not always, of a distinctive ‘beached whale’ shape, as the photograph of Harrow Hill in Warwickshire shows. This Harrow Hill overlooks Long Compton and is to the west of the village of Whichford, ‘the ford into the territory of the Hwicce’. This hill adjoins three Anglo-Saxon estates – the boundary charters of each refer to ‘turf mounds’ as the markers here – which subsequently are each in a different hundred and then a different shire.

The extent of Hwiccian territory seemingly became ‘fossilised’ as the diocese of Worcester, which spans Worcestershire, much of Gloucestershire and south Warwickshire (Yeates 2008). At least two other Harrow Hills were on the boundaries of this territory, one at Cleve Prior, near Evesham, and the other at Langley, near Halesowen (although the latter survived only as a field name).

The Harrow Hill near Cleeve Prior is an Iron Age hill fort with evidence of ritual activity through to the seventh century AD. There is also a well, which became Christianised as St Anne’s Well (D. Cox 2015).

399. To the north-east of the Hwiccian kingdom is a cluster of names including a now-lost Arrowfield Top (Harewmede around 1300 and Harrowfield about 1830), near an also lost Tyesmere (presumably ‘Tiw’s moor’ as this modern name Uffmoor is nearby, but possibly ‘Tiw’s boundary’ or maybe ‘Tiw’s pool’) (Sims-Williams 1990: 74). A Twiland Wood appears on modern OS maps to the south of the ruins of Halesowen Abbey (founded in the thirteenth century) and is presumably related to the Tyesmere.

These places are a few miles west of Weoley (‘weoh in a clearing’), now part of suburban Birmingham and known only for the ruins of its castle. Tysoe Hill, already mentioned, is also on the boundary of the Hwicce (Sims-Williams 1990: 74). In addition to Sims-Williams’ list of harrows on the boundaries of the Hwiccian kingdom (and in direct contradiction of his statement that there are none in Gloucestershire) we need to add Harrow Farm near Elmstone Hardwicke, to the south of Tewkesbury. All the usual caveats about Harrow Farm merely being a modern name are dismissed by the location, on a former crossroads of a ridgeway (known locally, as in other places in the county, as ‘Rudgeway’) used in recent centuries as a droving road, and to this day still used by members of the travelling communities. It is a classic example of a ‘no man’s land’ between land units, the sort of location which frequently correlates with heargs.

Interestingly, although Sarah Semple stated that there is no occupation evidence associated with heargs, geophysical survey followed by trial trenching adjacent to Harrow Farm in 2015 revealed clear evidence of at least five Iron Age houses (Skinner 2015b). The family who have owned Harrow Farm for several generations are aware of similar parch marks a few
fields away, and evidence for what were presumably prehistoric burial mounds (pers. comm.).

There is a ‘lost’ Harrowdown in the parish of Birdbrook in Essex. However there is a large ‘beached whale’ shaped hill to the north-east of the village, with a road running along the ‘spine’. From the summit the surrounding horizon appears in a manner which is surprising, as the horizon is much less visible from any other roads in the vicinity; this is discussed later in the section ‘Ringed by the far horizons’. More relevant to the present discussion is that Birdbrook is to the south of the River Stour, the boundary between Essex and Suffolk. Just to the north of the river is Wixhoe. Could this be an intentional ‘pairing’ of hearg and hoh? Or, as seems more likely, were heargs typically in ‘inter-tribal territories’ so likely to be in proximity with boundary shrines? Wixhoe and the Harrowdown near Birdbrook parallel the ring of hohs around the hearg at Six Hills close to the Leicestershire-Nottinghamshire border.

**Triangles and gars**

To the north-west of this Harrow Farm is a promontory known as The Hoo, which has given its name to Hoo Farm and several other properties nearby. Only when seen from the north does the distinctive hoh profile become apparent. To the south of The Hoo and west of Harrow Farm is Deerhurst Walton, located on a ridge above the River Avon, indicating a settlement of British-speaking walhs. Stephen Pollington has suggested that hyrst denotes a sacred wood, rather than simply woodland on an eminence, although offers no examples (Pollington 2011: 116).

This relationship of hearg, hoh and walh tun in Gloucestershire is matched in north Leicestershire where the Harrow Farm to the west of Six Hills has Walton on the Wolds to its west, with Hoton to the north of Walton (and Wysall, Roehoe Wood and Hose somewhat further away to the north and north-east). I would be keen to hear from anyone who has local knowledge of similar hearg, hoh and walh tun relationships.

Hohs, weohs and triangles seem to go together almost as inevitably as the constituents of a full English breakfast. Roehoe Wood sits within a triangle
formed by the Fosse Way and another principal route from Melton Mowbray to Nottingham. Willey (weoh leah) in north Warwickshire sits in a similar triangle alongside Watling Street; the third and shortest side of this triangle is the Fosse Way about two miles to the west. The place-name Wigston Parva (early forms allow for the possibility this was the weoh stone, although other etymologies are considered more probable (Cox 2011: 231)) is just the other side of the crossing of the Fosse Way and Watling Street, known to the Romans as Venonis and for several centuries as High Cross.

Furthermore, the location of the Staffordshire Hoard at Hammerwich is in a similar triangle of roads alongside Watling Street. One of the more plausible suggestions for the hoard’s deposition is a ‘votive offering’ in thanks for a successful battle, inferring that the location was in some way sacred to a deity prior to the burying of the mangled goldwork.

After reading the first edition of this study Anthony Durham, who is researching the earliest place names of Roman Britain place names of Roman Britain, shared with me his thoughts about the earliest name of Worcester, Weogorna, recorded from 691. He considers that this is seemingly from weoh gar. The triangle of land is perhaps the tongue of land at the confluence of the Teme with the Severn. For information the ‘established’ explanations of Weogoma are a Celtic river name (Mills 1991) or an otherwise unattested Anglo-Saxon tribal name (Cameron 1996). Durham’s suggestion at least makes sense, which is more than can be said for either Mills’ or Cameron’s suggestions.

Barrie Cox records a reference in 1322 to a Gerehow in the Leicestershire parish of Hoby. Given that Cox elsewhere observes that haugr, hlaw and hoh are difficult to distinguish in Leicestershire then possibly the original name was geiri hoh. But even if this is not the case then it is significant that this
Top left: Roehoe Wood in 1889.
Top right: Willey in 1899.
Bottom left: Hammerwich in 1951. Note the abundance of triangular road arrangements with Watling Street (running east-west). As I am not sure the find spot for the Staffordshire Hoard is public knowledge I have not indicated the location.
Bottom right: The Gartree Hundred moot site in 1885 adjacent to the Roman Gartree Road running Leicester to Medbourne and beyond. A prehistoric ridgeway from Melton Mowbray to Melton Mowbray forms the north-south side of the triangular arrangement of roads. Note that the hamlet at the northern apex of this road arrangement has the unusual appellation of Three Gates.
‘gere’ is in a parish named after the distinctive hoh on which the church is sited.

Jeremy Harte noted that the thing which is commemorated in the name of Fingest (Buckinghamshire) was in a three-sided plot or gar (Harte 2015: 52). Another meeting site, this time in Leicestershire was once known as the ‘mæþel (‘meeting’) hoh’ (Wood 2010: 2) although is much better known as the moot site for the Gartree Hundred – sitting within a triangle of land demarked by the prehistoric ridgeway running from Melton Mowbray to Market Harborough (the modern B6047) and the Roman road running from Leicester down towards Huntingdon, known as the Gartree Road; the third side is a local lane leading to Kibworth Harcourt (on the London to Leicester road now known as the A6 and the location chosen for a Norman castle, the motte of which still survives).

Several hundredal moot sites are in similar triangles of land, although I have yet to form a comprehensive list. Keith Briggs has suggested that ‘harrow’ (hearg) may have denoted triangular areas of land (Briggs 2010: 59), although I am not aware of this suggestion having been picked up by other researchers. As there is no word in Old English corresponding to ‘triangle’ then gar – ‘spear shaped’ – would seem to be a metaphor for such three-sided sites. (The use of ‘delta’ to refer to ‘triangles’, based on the shape of the Greek letter, can be traced to Herodotus but the earliest usage in English is from the 1550s. Interestingly the name ‘delta’ is itself a reference to triangles, as the etymology is from the Phoenician daleh, meaning ‘tent door’.)

Some Classical deities, such as Hecate, were worshipped at three-lane ends, and British and north European folklore retains a sense of these being liminal places. Old English Christian(-ised) charms provide abundant evidence for three-fold evocations to pre-conversion deities, while the Trinitarian doctrine within Christianity is plausibly an accommodation of these prior practices.

The name ‘gartree’ can be interpreted variously as the ‘damaged or goitred tree’, ‘the spear-shaped tree’ or ‘the tree of the spears’. The association between spears and hundreds is entirely appropriate as only freemen could attend a hundred, and only freemen could carry a spear. Indeed the Anglo-

Scandinavian name for a hundred is wapentake, the ‘take (or count) of weapons’. We can still see the same notion persist in the canton of Appenzel in Switzerland where only men wearing a sword can vote at the annual town meeting (this custom of course long predates the rights of women to vote). My suspicion is that it was less a case of the person leading the moot requesting ‘All in favour raise their spears in the air… ’ than leaving spears propped up against the eponymous tree so that, should the discussions become unduly heated, any arguments led merely to fisticuffs and not fatal injuries. Quite possibly there was a count of spears to check everyone eligible was present before proceedings got underway.

Bear in mind also there are two Old English words written treow, one of which meant ‘tree’ and other which meant ‘truth’ or ‘oath’. This makes hundred moot sites named after compounds of treow, such as ‘Gartree’, doubly meaningful, as hundred moots would have been the occasions when oaths were made. Or are we not seeing the spears for the trees? Could it be
that ‘gartree’ indicates oaths sworn on an especially sacrosanct spear, presumably the one owned by the tribal leader? This would be distinctive because normal practice was more likely to involve oaths being made on swords. But that assumes the members of the hundred were wealthy enough to own at least one sword.

Having said all that, to use a tree as a landmark for a meeting place seems most probable, but does require that the tree is distinctive. A tree that had been struck by lightning or more intentionally damaged would serve well as such a landmark. So the ‘goitred tree’ cannot be ruled out. Modern thinking tends to seek a ‘primary’ sense for names such as gartree. But any familiarity with Old English literature – especially the riddles as well as the kennings – reveals that Anglo-Saxons would have revelled in multiple meanings. There is no reason why the sense of gar could not embrace a spear-shaped area of land with a distinctively shaped or damaged tree where the freemen’s spears were placed for the duration of moots and – just maybe – where oaths were sworn on an heirloomspearhead.

**Initial observations about boundaries**

Although more-or-less central to the hundred, many moot sites were at places which had previously been on boundaries. Or, more accurately, between boundaries – liminal zones or ‘no man’s lands’. Since the late nineteenth century every acre of England has been part of one
parish – and thus a county. County boundaries were also tidied up so that there were no detached parishes within adjoining counties. Prior to that there were still extra-parochial lands, and counties commonly included places detached from the rest. I mention this only to emphasise that any attempt to understand Anglo-Saxon boundaries will be wide of the mark if we try to impose neat and tidy modern concepts.

Many boundaries would have been ‘fuzzy’, as with inter-commoned woodland, heathland or moorland. Such places may also have been inter-tribal meeting places, for seasonal fairs and associated rites. The most defined of boundaries were double-ditched earthworks. These seem to have been constructed by the two sides each digging out one of the ditches, leaving a linear liminal zone, presumably available for any travellers who preferred not to enter either territory – or were simply unwelcome. Unlike today, all boundaries seemingly once had a tangible ‘buffer zone’. The ubiquity of the place-name element ‘shaw’ (Old English sceage or scage), the name for woodland along a boundary (and cognate with ‘shore’ as in ‘seashore’ and ‘shoreline’) provides direct confirmation for some of these betwix-and-between margins.

Boundaries have two sides. Perceptions of those inside are different from those outside. And such perceptions differ depending on what was on the other side – friend, foe, sanctuary, liminal zone, inhospitable wilderness, or whatever. To this day churchyards are carefully bounded with walls, hedges or buildings. Even the dead – for some people, especially the dead – need to be kept in their place. If such rich connotations are part of modern thinking then Anglo-Saxon concepts were almost certainly even more expansive.

I will return to boundaries again later. At this stage I simply want to summarise my initial reading of the relationship of hohs and heargs. As I have already suggested, hohs seem to function as boundary shrines. Given that heargs seem to be placed at tribal boundaries the correlation of hohs and heargs should be unsurprising. It just might be that the hearg was protected – and defined – by a more-or-less complete ring of hohs or comparable sites.

However my current thinking is that the opposite is more likely to be the case. That is, the hohs protect each tribe’s territory, leaving the hearg in a liminal zone. This means that the hearg may appear to be ringed by hohs but this is not the reason, simply that the hearg is ringed by tribal territories, each of which needs one or more hohs. The examples of a ‘ring of hohs’ which I have identified so far are actually ‘arcs of hohs’ – encompassing approximately one-third of the circumference. Assuming that further research does not reveal more hohs then the evidence is consistent with the hohs being recognised – at least to the extent of acquiring names with the element hoh – by just one of the tribal regions bordering a hearg. Further work on the evidence of hoh and hearg names may add more examples and thereby offer a clearer understanding, but for the moment I share this as a tentative interpretation.
Rethinking *heargs*

If there is indeed a relationship between *hoths* and *heargs* then does this add anything to our understanding of *heargs*? Compared to all other Anglo-Saxon words for pre-conversion sanctuaries, *hearg* has been the focus of considerable academic consideration. One of the more recent and thorough papers on this topic was published in 2007 by Sarah Semple. She concluded that:

> What is profoundly apparent is that the concept of the *hearg* needs to be rethought – *hearg* was never applied to a Germanic or Anglo-Saxon pagan temple structure. The *hearg* seems to have constituted a naturally significant location that formed a place of gathering and ritual for many generations over a long period of time.

(Semple 2007: 383)

Based on the available archaeological evidence, Semple specifically argues that *hearg* sites are not comparable to Christian churchyards – ‘God’s acre’ – but, rather, typically spread over an area about a hundred times greater.

Although the name *hearg* itself clearly does not predate the Anglo-Saxons, there is more evidence at *hearg* sites for Iron Age and Roman ritual activity than there is for Anglo-Saxon rites. This is probably because there were fewer Anglo-Saxons and also because the pagan depositions are associated with a material culture which is mostly or entirely organic so rarely survives for archaeologists to discover; while high-status items such as metal brooches may be found with burials but not as part of typical *hearg* depositions.

Most significantly, all this ritual activity is within areas which Semple states are devoid of evidence for occupation. That remark needs qualifying in light of the recent discoveries of Iron Age settlement at Harrow Farm near Elmstone Hardwicke but, nevertheless, seems to remain generally valid. (In my opinion odd exceptions do not invalidate general principles. Ironically, in recent decades some parish churches have been converted into houses – interestingly two examples are at villages relevant to the theme of this study, Hoton and Wyfordby, both in Leicestershire.)

Ken Dowden’s research on European paganism reveals that the Old High German word *harugari* had a counterpart in Old English, *higweard*. Both had the sense of ‘*hearg* warden or guardian’. Interestingly there are also references to a *weohward*. (Dowden 2000: 242–4). These wardens presumably lived ‘on the job’ so some evidence for occupation should be expected. Just possibly the houses revealed at Elmstone Hardwicke were the home of Iron Age custodians of the sanctuary, precursors to Anglo-Saxon...
This practice continued long after the conversion as priests commonly lived ‘on the job’ in a room above the chancel.

It is hard to imagine that the Anglo-Saxons were fully aware that these hallowed sites had been used for well over a thousand years, although they would of course recognise more substantially-built Roman shrines or such like. The Anglo-Saxons may have had little idea of how much ‘history’ they were continuing, but they would have fully recognised that these were the places where the deities were thought to dwell, or be more readily contacted. Along with the re-use of Bronze Age burial mounds for burials this was part of the ways in which the landscape of England was ‘read’ according to the implicit worldviews and more explicit myths established in while still dwelling in their Continental homelands.

Interestingly, none of the place-names associated with *hearg* sites reveal a connection to any specific deity. So a *hearg* was not dedicated to, say, Odin, or Thor, or whoever. This is in contrast to Scandinavia where place-names such as Odense (*Óðinn’s vi*) are common. This strongly implies that *heargs* were akin to Classical pantheons, places where individual families or clans paid their respects to their own preferred deity or deities, without any one deity taking pride of place overall. Based mostly on Continental evidence then local deities – or local names for more ‘universal’ deities – seem to have been the focus of family rites. Indeed, we should perhaps see them as ‘lineage deities’ as much as ‘local deities’. (I have attempted to provide a summary of Anglo-Saxon deities elsewhere – see Trubshaw 2013.)

The assumption that a *hearg* is an inter-tribal cult centre is fairly inescapable from their location on boundaries. This infers that local cult centres which were *not* inter-tribal – such as those associated with –*ing* and –*ingas* (‘the people of’) place-names – will not have had *hearg* names. However caution is needed. Harrow on the Hill, Middlesex, was once known as *Gumeninga hearh* ‘the sanctuary of the Gumeningas tribe’ (Pollington 2011: 112).

One probable example of such a tribal cult centre is visible from my home here in Avebury: Waden Hill at Avebury. Andrew Reynolds has suggested that after the Romans departed the Canningas established control of an area approximately twenty miles across. This putative territory had a western boundary near the former town of Verlucio (now Sandy Lane near Calne), and eastern boundary near Cenutio (now Mildenhall – pronounced ‘Mynull’ – to the east of Marlborough). To the north the boundary would have been marked by the dramatic ridge above the Thames valley associated with the villages of Chisedon and Wroughton. Near the southern boundary are the eponymous villages of All Cannings and Bishops Cannings, near Devizes (which takes its name from the ‘divide’) (Reynolds 2004).

Waden Hill is both central to this area and immediately adjacent to the small Roman town recently discovered near Silbury Hill, and there seems to be no better candidate for a ‘cult centre’ of the Canningas.
The early records show Waden Hill is from *weoh don* (not, as so often stated, ‘Woden’s hill’). However this *weoh don* is not completely distinct from a *hearg* as it shares the same ‘beached whale’ shape I previously noted for Harrow Hills. Presumably *heargs* would have one or more *weohs* associated with them, so a *hearg* and a *weoh don* may have looked somewhat similar, even if one was peripheral (and thus inter-tribal) and the other central (and presumably infra-tribal).

The implication is that the *Gumeninga hearh* was peripheral – if anyone reading this can make any sensible suggestions about the extent of the *Gumeninga’s* territory associated with Harrow on the Hill, I will be most interested.

**Open air meeting places**

Sarah Semple revisited her 2007 ideas about *hearg* sites in her chapter in *Signals of Belief* (Carver *et al* 2010) which looks more broadly at Anglo-Saxon open air meeting places. These encompass natural places, groves and woodland clearings and hilltops.

We know about these open air meeting places mostly because of their use in the later Anglo-Saxon period as moot sites for administrative hundreds (the early medieval counterpart to ‘borough councils’, although there were no counties or county councils at that time). Some are also the venues for the higher-level royal court which met as the king progressed endlessly around his kingdom.

What is much less clear from the available evidence is the extent to which these meeting places had been *hearg* sites since ‘time out of mind’. And, given that during these meetings various solemn oaths were sworn, to what extent did all such meeting places take on some of the sanctity once given to *hearg* sites?

**Turf rituals**

And, to what extent did these meetings involve the ritual use of turf? There is folkloric evidence of an early eighteenth century landowner at Queniborough, Leicestershire, requiring his tenant farmers to bring a turf from their land and place it on top of a standing stone at the start of each administrative ‘court’. Only when all the turves were in place could the ‘court’ commence. The stone is known as the Moody Bush Stone and seems to have acquired this name when the East Goscote Hundred met there (presumably from the eleventh century as prior to the East and West split in that hundred there was a different moot site).

While evidence for similar customs is absent, there are tantalising clues that taking turves to ‘moots’ and such like was indeed once the norm. The clearest evidence is from a metrical text in Old English called *Æcerbot* (‘field remedy’) and commonly referred to as the Land Ceremonies Charm and sometimes as the Unfruitful Land Charm. It is known from one surviving copy (British Library MS Cotton Caligula A VII), probably written between 1000 to 1025. It sets out a ritual which combines Christian liturgy and liturgical phrases with some actions and words which imply a pre-conversion origin.

How you can improve your fields if they will not flourish or if any harmful effect has been produced by magic or witchcraft. By night before it becomes dawn take four turves from the four sides of the land…

The rite then prescribes a poultice of yeast, honey, oil and milk mixed with parts of all the good herbs that grew, excluding buckwheat and woody plants which is applied to the roots.

... and then carry the turves to church and let the priest sing four masses over the turves; and one should turn the green side of the turves towards the altar and one should replace the turves where they came from before the setting of the sun…
Once back in the field, the officiant faced sunrise, turned three times clockwise and called upon the ‘holy guardian of the heavenly kingdom’ to ‘fill the earth’ so that the crops would grow. This ambiguous wording accommodates the *potentia* (‘potency’) of Christ or even the Sanctus Spiritus being ‘drawn down’ by a priest, but at the same time implies a pre-conversion origin for the custom, when an unspecified ‘spirit of life’ (probably known as *leac* or *wod*; see Trubshaw 2016b) was envisaged as filling the earth.

The rite continues with the anointing of a plough with a ‘hallowed’ mix of oil, paste, frankincense, salt and fennel. This was followed with the chant *Erce, erce, erce eorthan modor*. *Erce* is often regarded by linguists as a nonce word. But most probably it is a corruption of Latin *ecce*, ‘behold’ (Hutton 2013: 384). ‘Behold, behold, behold, mother of earth’ is of course a parallel to *Sanctus, Sanctus, Sanctus, Dominus Deus Sabaoth*, part of the Ordinary of the Latin Mass. Elsewhere the text also paraphrases the Benedicte and the Magnificat, and ends by specifying the saying of the *Crescite* (fertility blessing) and *Pater Noster* prayers. Yet much of the ‘action’ in the Land Ceremonies Charm has no liturgical parallels.

Although the surviving version was seemingly written in the early eleventh century, it seems to have been recorded as an anachronism or ‘curiosity’. We must assume that the text is a copy of older versions that have not survived. Much academic ink has flowed regarding the ‘paganism’ which apparently survives in this ostensibly Christian rite. This is not the place to develop those speculations; instead I am interested in the way in which turves act as a synecdoche for a whole unit of land.

Turves clearly acted as synecdoches for land units in seventeenth century Radnorshire:

> In 1664 Sir Henry Williams of Gwernyfed donated land for a new church at Glasbury… In conformity with ancient custom

he had to demonstrate that he relinquished the land by cutting a turf which he placed in a fold of the bishop’s gown and said: ‘I resigne upp all my interest in this circuit of ground, to be a buringe-place for ever for the dead of this parishe’.

(Palmer 2001: 143–4)

Roy Palmer continues by saying that

Such use of a turf may hark back to Saxon times, when a turf from land being granted to a monastery was sent along with the deeds to the archbishop for placing on the altar, as confirmation of the grant.

(Palmer 2001: 144)

Sadly he gives no source for this statement.

If you visit Scone in Scotland there is a good chance that you will be told that a flat-topped mound in the grounds, now with a chapel on top, was built from the mud on the boots of the Scottish barons who came to visit the king. This is why it is known as Boot Hill.
A great example of how folklore mangles history! The name is a corruption of Moot Hill and comprises the turves brought (seemingly in leather scrips or ‘satchels’) so they could swear allegiance to the king while kneeling on their own ground. This custom is known from the thirteenth century and is presumably older. The barons would not have had much mud on their boots as there were almost no roads and they needed to travel to Scone by boat. Another example of a ‘moot mound’ which still acts as the ceremonial focus of kingship in northern Britain is known by the Scandinavian word ‘Tynwald’. This is where Manx laws are still authorised every midsummer. It too seems to be a turf-built mound, although there is no record of where the turves came from. I assume each landowner eligible to attend the Manx parliament once brought one.

Palmer’s description of the Radnorshire land exchange and his background information suggestion that there was once a widespread custom for turves act as a synecdoche for a unit of land. Such ‘customary practices’ rarely leave much record as they are unremarkable at the time. Based on the evidence from Scone and Tynwald we should not be surprised that such symbolic use of turves was especially linked with hundredal moots and other administrative gatherings. We might imagine that there was some sort of turf-built mound at every hundred moot site up and down the land.

Why a hearth here?

After that digression into the ‘symbolic’ relationship with land which seems to have been so commonplace in the Anglo-Saxon era as to be unremarkable I want to return to the sorts of places which would have been deemed ‘numinous’ enough to be used for moots and, prior to that, as sanctuaries. We must reasonably assume that Anglo-Saxon settlers ‘respected’ the sanctity of at least some of the sites where the Romano-British had – and, in all probability, still did – venerate their deities. These were the hearg. They may have looked ‘auspicious’, if only from the evidence of former rites and sacrifices, and at the very least conformed to the immigrants’ expectations of what such ‘sanctuaries’ should be like. These ‘adopted’ sites may also have influenced these expectations, but such ‘reflexivity’ defies recognition. But what about sanctuaries which were not regarded as hearths? Did they share some of the expectations of hearth sites? Or were they, at least in some respects, mutually exclusive?

Place-name evidence suggests that the Anglo-Saxons thought of the landscape as containing any number of natural features which were regarded, if not necessarily as ‘sacred’ or ‘numinous’, then at least places where the supernatural was a little closer. Semple’s list includes:

- springs and wells
- hollows and fissures
- caves and openings
- hilltops, knolls and natural barrow-shaped features
- specific trees and shrubs
- standing stones and stones with natural holes

Groves and open spaces seem more likely to be associated with specific deities – there are various place-names where Woden, Thor and Tiw are all found in combination with leah (‘woodland clearing’) or feld (‘large open field’). There are also a significant number of place-names which derive from weoh leah ‘shrine clearing’ (see Bintley 2015: 118 for a recent overview).

We should imagine both woodland clearings and large open fields as places used for pasturing animals – indeed as communal pasturing for all the animals of a community. Using woodland for pasturing animals is now rare in western Europe but was necessary in the era before haymaking was invented to provide winter forage.

At the risk of distracting from the main discussion, note that over the centuries the sense of leah seems to change from ‘clearing’ (leah may be cognate with leoht ‘light’; see Bintley 2015: 114–5) to ‘woodland’. I have opted to gloss as ‘woodland clearing’ as this seems the only sensible interpretation of place-names formed from a god name followed by leah. Pedantically, leah should be glossed simply as ‘clearing’ because ‘woodland clearing’ is tautological for exactly the same reasons there cannot be a hole in a doughnut without a doughnut. I fully accept that other, presumably later, names containing leah may refer solely to woodland.
On higher ground

The accepted sense of *hoh* is a heel-shaped promontory. *Hlaws* and *beorgs* typically are situated on the apparent skyline when viewed from lower ground associated with settlements. The place-name elements *hearg* and *weoh* are most commonly found in such modern names as Harrow Hill, Weedon and other such descriptive terms which reveal that they occupied elevated location.

I fully accept that there are also Weefords which clearly were not associated with the tops of hills, so the concept of a *weoh* embraced a variety of topographical scenarios. As noted, Classical Greek and Roman sanctuaries dedicated to Artemis were similarly at conspicuously high as well as lower-lying locations; one of the unifying factors would seem to be ‘dangerous passages’. Biblical sources provide copious evidence for Semitic associations between God and high places – from Moses going to the top of Mount Sinia, any number of prophetic visions in high places, through to the Sermon on the Mount, Golgotha, and Christ’s Ascension from Mount Olivet. While none of these Classical or Biblical sources would have been known to pre-conversion Anglo-Saxons they have deeply influenced modern secular thinking. For example Stephen Pollington has written:

> The elevated situation of the *hearth* may have emphasized the site’s special position between the worlds of gods and men, while the strong vertical contour may have symbolizes the line extending between the plane of gods, men and the dead. In those societies which adopted the barrow-building rite, the grave-mounds themselves acted as cult centres, and it may be that the initial act of digging a circular ditch was part of the ritual preparation which made the site separate from the mundane, secular world, and therefore capable of being made holy. A barrow and a *hearth* may have been expressions of similar ideas concerning an elevated position with separation from the mundane.

(Pollington 2011: 112)

Top: Each of these clumps of beech trees ‘protects’ one or more Bronze Age burial mounds near the Ridgeway on Overton Hill. This photograph was taken from the side of Waden Hill; the late Neolithic double stone row known as West Kennett Avenue can just be discerned running parallel with the nearest hedge.

Above. Standing on the Ridgeway looking towards Waden Hill (in the middle distance). Although these burial mounds are on the skyline when seen from Avebury, they are in fact about three hundred metres away from the highest part of the ridge. They were clearly located to been seen from the lower ground around.
Overall this seems to be an entirely plausible suggestion. However did the Anglo-Saxons really think about the gods being on a different ‘plane’ to the living? After all the evidence we have for North European and Scandinavian deities is that they ‘walked this earth’ – they were immanent, unlike the transcendent deities of Semitic and Classical cultures (see Volume Two of The Twilight Age for a much more extended discussion). Based on circumpolar myths about the role of swans and geese as psychopomps, more probably it was the souls of the dead which needed easy access to the sky. In other words the elevated locations of ‘shrines’ placed them closer to the ‘plane of the dead’ rather than the plane of the deities.

Our understanding of where Anglo-Saxon cemeteries are located has been distorted by the high proportion discovered as a result of gravel extraction in valleys. However others are located in the same sort of locations as hilltop sanctuaries. In contrast, very few Anglo-Saxon burials have been found at hearth sites. Extensive cemeteries seem to be distinct from hearths, but may only be a mile or so away. Based on Semple’s statements about the size of hearths there is a possibility that such cemeteries are on the boundaries of what was recognised as the hearth.

If the hearths were inter-tribal areas or ‘no man’s lands’ then this would mean these cemeteries are also on the bounds of the recognised tribal territories. Such a ‘liminal’ location would be entirely consistent with where we might expect the dead to be buried and honoured, and for them to act as posthumous protectors just as they would have protected the tribe while alive.

So, contrary to Pollington’s assumptions about elevated locations being nearer to the gods, there seems to be a greater correlation with the ‘plane of the dead’ than with the ‘plane of the deities’. As indirect support note that the cult of the Archangel Michael is introduced to Britain around the ninth century. He is the first ‘saint’ who is not an apostle, martyr, missionary or confessor. By the eleventh century Michael is principally associated with dragon-killing, a ‘personification’ of evil. But that is not how he was first popularised. Instead he was regarded as a psychopomp, someone who can help the souls of the dead in the afterlife. For this reason pre-Conquest churches dedicated to Michael are on hilltops, giving the dead buried there a ‘head start’ to Heaven (Bartlett 2013: 165–6).

### Ringed by the far horizons

These ontological quibbles do not undermine Pollington’s observations about using ditches – included in the broader sense of the word beorg – to define ritual places. Which begs the question of just how big such a ditch should be – and what happens when the concept of such an encompassing
circle is far bigger than anything which could be constructed. And, just because the ditch survives to be discovered by archaeologists, was that necessarily more important than the bank made from the extracted soil? Clearly the mound made from the ditch surrounding a barrow was more important than the ditch, without suggesting that the ditch was merely a meaningless ‘by-product’. Could the same have been true of the boundaries of hearg? The topography of hearg sheds more than a little light.

Semple discusses in some detail the variety of hill shapes associated with hearg place-names and other ritual meeting places. Although detailed her discussion is not exhaustive. For example, her examples of ‘dramatic rises of land which at a distance, however, are hidden from view’ is not exclusive to hearg as Waden Hill at Avebury, most certainly fits that description too. Nevertheless her insight into visually dramatic sites which are to some extent hidden also provides clues to locate hearg sites which are known only from place-name evidence.

On-going personal research suggests that major prehistoric ‘sacred sites’ – from Neolithic henges to Anglo-Saxon hearg – are located at places where they appear high up but are ‘ringed’ by a higher horizon. Geographical constraints sometimes prevent a complete ring, but a minimum of three different ridges of high ground in different directions seem to ‘define’ henges and hearg.

Examples include several prehistoric henges as far apart as Avebury, Wiltshire, and Castlerigg, Cumbria. Other examples include the nemetons in Devon, and Vernemetum and Harrow Farm in north Leicestershire (all discussed in Trubshaw 2012). In this work have already mentioned the Harrowdown in Birdbrook parish, Essex, and the Harrow Farm near Elmstone Hardwicke. The latter is situated where the horizon comprises several different ridges of hills, including the Malverns (to the north-west), the Cotswolds (to the south) and Harrow Hill near Long Compton (to the east). I share this provisional research with readers in the hope that they will inform me of yet more examples of places which seemingly fit into this pattern.

There is a very pragmatic reason for wanting the horizon to be higher than where one is standing, and that is to observe sunrises and sunsets. On level ground or ground higher than the east or west horizon then almost inevitably a distant bank of cloud obscures the sun at the time it is rising or setting. However just a few minutes later the sun rises above the cloud bank.

Where I live at Avebury the sunrise is delayed by the Marlborough Downs to the north-east. Furthermore from within the henge the sun is only visible about five minutes later, by which time it is well above the typical cloud bank and ‘greets’ anyone watching with a spectacular brightness and casting long but sharp shadows of the megaliths and people within the henge. Sunrise seen from within a henge is far more theatrical than from places outside. The most obvious comparison is with the sun shining through the stained glass east window of a church at about nine o’clock in the morning. But as few people attend Morning Prayer (which is often earlier in the day) then this is an experience which even church-goers rarely experience.

Suffice to say that neither churches nor henges can be understood simply by turning up in the middle of the day – they need to be experienced at different seasons and all times of day and night. (Though I am especially privileged, living on the bank of the Avebury henge next door to the parish church…) None of this directly informs us about Anglo-Saxon practices, but the inherent conservatism of ritual practices means that continuity from prehistory into the post-conversion era is entirely plausible. Indeed the opposite scenario – that missionaries ‘invented’ the requirement for churches to face east – is not supported by any evidence and seems considerably more difficult to propose than a scenario based around continuity of praxis.

Watching the sunrise and set from a henge, nemeton or hearg where the distant horizon is higher minimises the opportunities for the sun to simply ‘fizzle’ into a cloud bank. It simply makes for good theatre to have the horizon ringed by higher ground.
Top left: The first midwinter sunrise at Avebury. Photograph taken at the western end of the West Kennett Avenue, a few hundred metres from the south entrance to the henge. Seen from here the sun rises in the beech tree clumps shown in the photographs on page 36 – in other words, from a major group of Bronze Age burial mounds and close to another group known to have been used for Anglo-Saxon burials.

Bottom left: The second midwinter sunrise at Avebury. Taken from just inside the south entrance to the henge, about ten minutes after the previous photograph. The sun appears over the henge bank much more dramatically as it has long since cleared the almost-inevitable cloud bank in the far distance.

Below: Looking west – the bright sun casts dramatic sharp shadows.
**Constantly evolving religious and administrative open-air meeting places**

Continuity of pre-conversion sanctuaries does not necessarily mean a church was planted there. The same sort of sites which place-name evidence suggests were used as pre-conversion sacred places also appear later in the Anglo-Saxon era as administrative meeting places – more commonly as hundredal ‘moots’ but also as places where the peripatetic royal court met for administrative purposes.

There is considerable detail in Semple’s study of Anglo-Saxon open air meeting places, not least her citations of relevant work by other researchers. However the evidence for open air meeting places is only one aspect of Anglo-Saxon ritual activity. So I will consider some of these other aspects before coming back to draw upon Semple’s detailed remarks.

For the moment there is one consideration which seems to link together all Semple’s various examples. That is, the same places – or, more pedantically in many instances, the same place-name elements – reflect both continuity and reuse of specific sites but at the same time shifting and ever-evolving meanings. So we cannot simply discuss ‘Anglo-Saxon open air meeting places’ – or whatever – as more-or-less fixed entities which span the centuries. Even such distinctions as pre- and post-conversion are too crude to be effective. What Semple demonstrates – although does not overtly discuss – is that while there is continuity of places there are also successive changes in their meaning and significance. There was, most probably, also a pluralism of meaning and significance at any one time which – to some extent – ‘enables’ steady evolution. We would be wrong to think of abrupt changes, even around the time of the Christian conversion (see Volume One of The Twilight Age for a more detailed discussion of continuity).

**Place-names and boundaries – methodological musings**

I have referred several times to place-names associated with boundaries, and also to deities which protect such boundaries, without giving much consideration to the concepts lurking beneath the seemingly neat and tidy term ‘boundary’. However boundaries are rarely neat and tidy, especially in the days before they came to be mostly thought of as lines on maps. Anglo-Saxons did not, so far as we are aware, use maps. In later centuries they listed landmarks as a ‘linear progression’ and recorded these on charters. There are also records of people riding around such boundaries.

We live in a society obsessed with boundaries, in urban and rural landscapes where fences and hedges define ownership and inhibit access. Administrative boundaries manifest as the roadside signs favoured by county councils as a way of offering a welcome to passing motorists. We have become accustomed to thinking of boundaries as sharp demarcations – if we knew exactly where the line was then we could stand with one foot in one county in the other foot in a different one, for example. Only rarely do national borders tend to have any width – think of the old Berlin Wall, for
example, with a ‘no go’ zone in-between formal checkpoints. A similar situation still exists in Nicosia, Cyprus, and between North and South Korea. Traditionally, a liminal zone was characteristic of major boundaries. These manifest as ridgeway routes which could be followed without entering the territories of the tribes either side. This seems to be the origin of at least parts of the routes which became the Roman Watling Street and Fosse Way, as these both follow watersheds but Iron Age hill forts are conspicuously absent from their course (although often sited a few miles away).

Boundaries have existed since ‘time out of mind’ – even when an astute historian can demonstrate they may only go back a few generations. It is in the nature of boundaries that they need to remain fixed. There are biblical prohibitions against moving boundary markers, reflected – with dire punishments – in Anglo-Saxon law codes.

Little wonder that the Old English adjective har refers unambiguously to boundaries (Jepson 2011: 181) in such compounds as har stan, ‘hoar stone’ yet is also cognate with ‘hoary’, meaning ‘venerable, ancient’ as well as ‘gray or white with age’ – the same sense as ‘hoar frost’. Hoar stones no doubt acquired lichen, making them appear ‘hoary’. However, Jepson considers that neither the sense of ‘venerable’ nor of ‘boundary’ is primary to the word har, but has developed out of usage and association (Jepson 2011: 221).

Har in place-names is inherently tricky because instead of har the name may instead be a corruption of hara (‘hare’), haer (‘heap of stones and/or burial cairn’), horu (‘dirt or mud’) or even here (army). As with toot, I am happy to accept that Anglo-Saxon’s revelled in the overlapping meanings of homonyms, without any care for the confusion this might cause to academics in the future. We need to understand har not as a phoneme with a singular semantic sensibility but instead as a word with both evolving meaning and usage and also as part of a ‘constellation’ of words.

Although there are plenty of har stans and almost as many har hlaws (Jepson 2011: 189–92), har also frequently compounds with hill, ridge, specific species of trees, wood and grove. In addition there are rare examples of har used with well, stream and ‘cottage’ or shelter.

One of the ‘hoary’ stones at Avebury. This one is one of the few still standing from the northern inner circle and faces – quite literally – the eastern entrance.

So far as I am aware har does not appear in compounds with hoh, toot, ward, woeh, stapo or other Old English words which I have considered elsewhere in this study. This is itself interesting – implying, for example, that a har stan might have been distinct from a woeh stan. Har stans and har hlaws were old, ‘hoary’ stones and burial mounds which may well have been used as boundary landmarks. However there seems to be nothing about the use of har in place-names which suggests that it denotes boundary shrines. My assumption is that har is only used later in the Anglo-Saxon era, after conversion, but I would be happy to be corrected by anyone who has given any consideration to why this commonly-used adjective for boundaries seems not to occur in compounds with pre- or post-conversion religious connotations.
**Blurring boundaries**

Boundaries were often not so much marked as shared. This was as true of woodland as it is of heathland. In both areas there would have been some sort of ‘inter-commoning’ agreements in place. Only when these resources became of increasing value – and, presumably, less abundant – was there a need to impose some sort of demarcation (see Pantos 2002; 2004). To this extent place-names associated with heathland and woodland should partially correlate with boundaries. Clearly the semantic relationship is not that of *maere, mearc* and other words which explicitly refer to a boundary. But, nevertheless, the spatial distribution will help to reveal former ‘liminal zones’, especially when located at watersheds or other topographical features which also correlate well with boundaries.

Prehistoric burial mounds have long been recognised as indicators of boundaries, and Anglo-Saxon naming practices correlate with this. For example, in north and south of Rutland are the settlements of Barrow and Barrowden. As Charles Phythian-Adams discerned, the modern boundaries of Rutland mostly reflect an Iron Age land unit (Phythian-Adams 1977; 1980) so the *beorgs* once overlooking these villages become their most distinctive attribute. By this time the causal relationship between *beorgs* and boundaries is that of chickens and eggs, but the correlation between ‘barrow’ place-names and boundaries is my point of interest.

If I seem to be somewhat labouring the manner in which some place-name elements correlate with boundaries then this seems necessary. A major study of English place-name elements relating to boundaries was prepared as a PhD thesis by Boel Jepson (Jepson 2011). However, for entirely understandable reasons, Jepson takes as his starting point place-names occurring on boundary charters, rather than starting out by asking ‘Which elements correlate with plausible boundaries?’

By looking at the texts of boundary charters rather than the actual spatial distribution of place-name elements risks missing place-names that only appear near (rather than actually on) the bounds. Furthermore, by starting from place-name elements appearing on boundary charters then the chronology of naming has been narrowed down to those names thought by Christian clerics to be appropriate for marking boundaries. This raises the possibility that older names, coined with a different ‘worldview’ or cosmological assumptions, are at risk of being overlooked.

These potential weaknesses in Jepson’s methodology become clear with *hoh*. As already noted, he identified a *landmarehowe* in Cambridgeshire, deriving from the Old English *land-gemære hoh* or ‘land boundary hoh’.* Land-gemære* occurs in many names associated with boundaries, including compounds with wood, well, hill and so forth. But this is only *land-gemære hoh* that Jeson discovered. However he also discusses a Hoham near Hutton Grange in Penwortham, near Preston, Lancashire. Hoham is associated with a Rokar, which might be from the Old Norse *ra*, meaning a boundary or boundary mark (Jepson 2011: 72; 168). Hutton is in the confluence of the Ribble and Asland (also known as the River Douglas), suggesting that this is another *hoh* associated with the boundary between land and water, with land demarcations only arising later. But these are very much incidental to Jepson’s study and he omits *hoh* from his list of place-name elements denoting boundaries. Further research is needed, not only to shed more light on the relationship of *hohs* to boundaries, but also to establish if there are other place-name elements not hitherto regarded as part of the ‘corpus’ of elements associated with boundaries.

Overall Jepson’s study is hugely helpful and based on immense research and solid linguistic skills. I am simply drawing attention to an underlying methodological weakness. This weakness is not specific to Jepson’s work but a seemingly an inevitable consequence of a discipline where linguists greatly outnumber geographers. I am not a geographer either, but nevertheless do not share these linguists’ categorical presumptions about what is – more strictly, perhaps, what is not – a boundary-denoting place-name element.

Two place-names derived from OE *bord* are on the historic county boundary between Warwickshire and Worcestershire: Bordesley and Balsall (early form *Bordeshealh*) and there are three other examples of *bord* having the sense ‘border’ in charters. In addition there is Bortheshowe in Suffolk, a name well recorded from about 1200 onwards as an important landmark in
the boundary of Ipswich’, surviving in the corruption ‘Boss Hall’ (Briggs 2017).

So-far unpublished research by Graham Aldred provisionally suggests that at least some worths were intentionally created on boundaries, although the reason for this is open to debate (Aldred pers.com. 2017).

In summary, place-name specialists seem to have largely overlooked the possibility that hoh, bord and worth have some correlation with boundaries. My suspicion is that other place-name elements may also reveal more about boundaries.

**Giants in the landscape**

So far my discussions about hohs has focused on the name as functional as well as descriptive. With that functional aspect in mind I now want to look anew at the descriptive aspect. When used to describe places the word hoh is a metaphor, as the principal sense is of ‘heel’. As I discussed right at the start, Margaret Gelling deduced that as a place-name it referred to a heel-shaped promontory, imaging a giant lying face down.

Before villages and churches changed things, the rounded profile of a hoh sitting on the skyline would have looked like a oversided hlaw or burial mound. It takes only a modicum of imagination – something the Anglo-Saxons certainly had more than a modicum of – to think that that hohs were the burial places of tutelary giants – the thrys and eoten of Old English literature.

Apart from modern place-name scholars who invented the description of hohs as being like the heel of a giant lying face down, there are other parallels. The Neolithic long barrow known today as Adam’s Grave which sits prominently above the Vale of Pewsey in Wiltshire was known to Anglo-Saxons from at least as far back as the late sixth century as Woden’s beorg. Woden was not strictly a giant but this somewhat hoh-like promontory has all the right ‘credentials’ to the burial place of an important deity or mythological being.

Jeremy Harte identified a small number of place-names formed from a pagan deity’s name with hlaw and used as hundredal meeting places. He concludes that by the tenth century (when the hundred were formed)

... the old gods were still embedded in heroic language, the wordhoard which held earth and sky tree and stone, fire and drink, and love and death; words which reminded them of the meaningful order of the world...

(Harte 2015: 65)

In a word, ‘cosmology’. And into that worldview hohs too once were part, though by the tenth century their cosmological ‘function’ had been long forgotten and so they survived only as a descriptive term.
The liminal locations of at least some of the *hohs* would have been exactly the sort of places where a tutelary deity – a guardian of the land – might be expected to be buried. There are two examples of Tysoe Hill, one in Leicestershire and the more famous one on the Oxfordshire-Warwickshire border, which are named after the god Tiw. There is also Inghoe in Northumberland, which perhaps is the *hoh* associated with the deity Ing. Which perhaps makes Shaftoe, also in Northumbria – the ‘shaft *hoh*’ – a candidate for a *hoh* with a *stapol*-like shaft.

*Thurs haugr* is the Old Norse counterpart to *thyrshlaw* and comes down to us in the corrupt form Thrushhowe, Cumbria. And there is an *entan hlew* – which uses *eoten* rather than *thysr* as the word for giant – on an *æntadic*, ‘giant’s ditch’ (sadly my source, Sproston 2011, does not state in which county this gigantic earthwork is or was situated).

Surviving place-names seemingly provide no examples of *thyrshoh* or even *thyrshlaw*, although such names may have later corrupted into names invoking Thor. Place-names incorporating Thor are in the parts of England...
Several authors have discussed the similarities between the Finglesham buckle (shown in a drawing by Lindsay Kerr) and the hill figure known as the Wilmington Long Man. Note especially the depictions of the feet.
where pre-tenth century records are generally absent, so by the time names were written down then Thor would be known – even if no longer venerated – while *thyrs* was no longer part of the lexicon. Someone with the necessary linguistic skills might want to look more closely at all Thor and *thyrs* names to discern whether an evolution from *thyrs* to Thor can be confidently discounted in most or all cases. Semantically there is little distinction as Thor would be conceived as a giant-like being, as with Woden and his exceptionally large grave near Pewsey.

Giants may well have once abounded in the landscape. **Optically Stimulated Luminescence** suggests that the Uffington White Horse was first cut in the late Bronze Age (Miles *et al* 2003). The Wilmington giant has, as numerous writers have recognised, a resemblance to the dancing warrior on the seventh-century Finglesham buckle. The buckle was found about eighty miles from the hill figure so one may have influenced the design of the other.

Tysoe Hill in Warwickshire was the location of a now-lost turf-cut horse (which revealed the red Triassic soils rather than the chalk at Uffington and Wilmington) but this may not go back much before the first documented reference in 1607. The very nature of turf-cut crosses, labyrinths and representational figures is that they are comparatively easy to create but without regular maintenance they are readily lost. If Uffington and
Wilmington were created – and, above all, maintained – in the Anglo-Saxon era then we must assume they were just two examples of a tradition which ones included tens or hundreds of other, now lost, examples. This would lead to an expectation that giants ‘occupied’ prominent hill slopes. Thyrs, Thor and Woden would indeed walk the earth. I have previously noted that if the goddess Hos is shown on the Franks Casket sitting on a mound then she is in the same proportion to the mound as a turf-cut hill figure might appear.

Were such giants thought of as weohs? On the face of things hill figures have little in common with carved wooden posts. But if the sense of weoh is as much functional as descriptive – viz. the word denoted an ‘icon’ of a deity – then they would have had much in common. We simply cannot rule out the possibility that weoh dons took their name from one or more turf-cut figures on the sloping sides. The nearest I can offer as evidence is the way that of trees on the skyline to the north-east of Waden Hill at Avebury cast crisp shadows on the east-facing slope at midsummer sunrise (and almost certainly during the weeks before and after although the necessary combination of clear weather and crop-growth on Waden Hill has precluded personal observation). In other words, that side of Waden Hill comes alive for a few minutes as the shadows are created and quite rapidly move, potentially interacting with putative turf-cut figures. The presence of the late Neolithic double stone row known as the West Kennett Avenue parallel to this side of Waden Hill adds extra ‘drama’ to the location. The soil is chalky so would enable dramatic giant figures to be cut; indeed within a few miles are several turf-cut horses, all seemingly cut since 1722 (Edwards 2014).
We simply do not know how many turf-cut figures there may have been in Anglo-Saxon times. All we know with some certainty is that surviving charters include numerous references to turf-cut crosses acting as boundary markers. As boundary markers such crosses are handy, being comparatively quick to make or renew and difficult to move, without leaving evidence of the previous one. However once the renewal process lapses then such crosses will quickly be overgrown.

References to turf mounds at boundaries also infer the possible presence of a turf-cut ‘figure’ or motif, as removing the turf for the mound must have left a scar, which may have been intentionally shaped – although not necessarily renewed, as the mound would form a sufficiently permanent landmark.

How prevalent such turf-cut landmarks may once have been cannot be established. Neither can we know if motifs other than crosses were once utilised. Turf-cut hill-figures overlook boundaries rather than demark them, so are unlikely to been included in charters. Furthermore, if they were of ‘pagan’ heroes and such like, then they may not have survived long enough to be visible by the time charters were being documented. And, even if they were, would they have been deemed suitable landmarks by the clerical scribes?

Sacrificial altars not burial mounds

‘To catch a thief, you must think like a thief’ supposed G. K. Chesterton through his priest-detective alter ego Father Brown. In the same way comprehending Anglo-Saxon thinking requires thinking like one. So, first off, are we right in thinking of *hlaws* as ‘burial mounds’? Not according to Anders Kaliff.

Anders Kaliff took a cosmological view of the later prehistory of Scandinavia (Kaliff 2007) and argued that we should think of burial mounds as ‘sacrificial altars’ where offerings to the ancestors were made. In this outstanding study of Scandinavian burial practices, Kaliff notes:

> Well into the nineteenth century it was the custom in certain parts of Scandinavia to make offerings of buttermilk, butter, beer, and porridge on the farm’s burial mound. Even animals could be sacrificed. Especially at Christmas, people would bury food offerings and pour beer on the grave, believing this would give good luck and bountiful harvests to the farm.

(Kaliff 2007: 83)

Kaliff considers that such residual folk customs reflect some of the ideas associated with pre-Christian cemeteries in which rites for the dead were inseparable from beliefs about fertility and new life. More especially, Kaliff

One of the beech tree clumps near the Ridgeway which have featured in previous photographs. But is this a Bronze Age ‘burial mound’ or ‘an ancestral shrine’?
considers that burial mounds were the places where animal sacrifices were most likely to have occurred (and Scandinavian archaeological evidence of animals bones supports this suggestion). So, although modern thinking distinguishes sacrificial altars from burial places, pre-conversion worldviews seem not to have made that separation. So, when we refer to hlaws as ‘burial mounds’ we should perhaps also think just as much of hlaws as sacrificial altars.

Why would there have been sacrifices at graves? We have enough background information to be fairly sure that in Scandinavia, Rome and China – among many other cultures – the deal was simple. If the living looked after the ancestors with the traditional rites and offerings, then the dead would intercede with the gods on behalf of the living to make sure everything went as well as possible. This seems a fairly sensible arrangement – and not that far removed from the local saints (i.e. deceased priests) of pre-Reformation Christianity interceding with Christ on behalf of anyone making an offering at their shrine.

Forgive me for stating what might be blindingly obvious to some readers, but late prehistory in Scandinavia is the same time period as Britain in the Roman and Anglo-Saxon periods. In other words, Scandinavia remained an ‘Iron Age’ culture for another thousand years or so after western Europe became part of the Roman empire. From this perspective Cnut (Canute) was prince of a ‘late prehistoric’ Scandinavian country – Denmark – before he became king of Anglo-Saxon England in 1016 (and, subsequently, king of Denmark and, later, Norway). If straddling two major cultures – one ‘post-Roman’ and the other ‘never Roman’ was not enough, he also acted to better integrate the Holy Roman Empire, which had ‘never not been Roman’ (even though it relocated to Byzantium), sustaining imperialist agendas by swapping missionaries for militia. It is the outcome of Cnut’s three-way mix of major cultures which is documented, albeit in a somewhat ‘snap shot’ manner and from the viewpoint of Norman French officialdom (themselves the scion of late prehistoric Scandinavians who had assimilated the culture of post-Roman Gaul), in the Domesday Book in 1086.

Right: A plan of Avebury’s burh. The internal plot boundaries are Late Saxon, and probably older than the sub-rectangular burh. (After Reynolds 2001.)

Bottom right: The south-eastern corner of the burh earthwork has become the footpath connecting the National Trust car park to the High Street. Photograph taken from the henge bank looking north-west.
Munds and beorgs

Returning to burial mounds which we should not think of as ‘burial mounds’ but as the places where customary sacrifices were made to honour the ancestors. According to Victoria Thompson, the literary evidence supports the notion that *hlaw* and *beorg* both retained strong ‘pagan’ connotations, as they are avoided by Christian writers – almost conspicuously so by Ælfric (circa 955 – circa 1010) (Thompson 2004: 106).

If we look at the etymology of the word ‘mound’ we see another level of meaning. Originally the Old English word *mund* meant ‘protection’, more specifically the ‘king’s protection’ – and that seems to be ‘protection of the king’ rather than ‘protection by the king’. The personal name Osmund has the literal sense of ‘god protected’, by inference a ‘god-protected king’. The personal name Wigmund (pronounced ‘Wymond’) has a parallel meaning – the ‘idol protected’ rather than the ‘idol mound’. By the twelfth century Wigmund is a common personal name that presumably has lost its meaning. But as the late as the ninth century the king of Mercia, Wiglaf, had a son called Wigmund who in turn was father of Wistan. This suggests that *wig* or *weoh* element was not simply an alliterative affectation, but still retained some semantic sense.

By the end of the Anglo-Saxon era the sense of *mund* has shifted from being adjectival (‘protection’) to a noun (‘mound’), the sense it has retained in Modern English. The transition is clear enough as the mound protects the graves. Clearly the Anglo-Saxon did think of ‘burial mounds’ as mounds because the word *hlaw* seems interchangeable with *beorg* (pronounced ‘bury’). *Beorg* refers generally to earthworks so is an apt description of Bronze Age ‘burial mounds’, especially those where the ditch has not fully silted up.

*Beorg* becomes *burh* and takes on a life of its own, becoming part of numerous settlement names, such as Avebury, Malmesbury and Tewkesbury, all of which seem to be seventh or eighth century settlements within sub-rectangular defensive earthworks (see previous page). These settlements often evolve into market towns so the sense of *burh* shifts from ‘earthwork’ to ‘market town’. Which means by the twelfth century, when market towns are being ‘planted’ by manorial lords, they are often named -borough, as in Marlborough, Narborough and at least two Harboroughs. In other words, a descriptive name (referring to the distinctive defensive earthworks) evolves into a functional one (referring to the role as a market town). The transition between the two senses matched other examples of place-names which straddle appearance and function, such as Grafton and Moreton (with variant spellings). Anne Cole has suggested that these are not simply settlements near ‘groves’ or ‘moors’ (but think of low-lying water meadows) but ones with a specific function for providing firewood for salt extraction and fodder for travellers’ livestock (Cole 2013).

Although Anglo-Saxon descriptive names usually make fine distinctions between near-synonyms (the classic examples are the variety of names for different shapes of hills and valleys, or names for woodland) I am not aware of anyone discerning any semantic distinction between *hlaw* and *beorg*. They seem to be regional variations, although with an overlapping distribution. In the absence of any obvious distinction I will treat *beorg* as a synonym for *hlaw* for convenience.

Categorical confusions

These examples of shifting semantics are confusing enough, but can be picked apart into the sort of progressive shifts which mark all living languages. However, in addition there may be out-and-out confusion. This arises when the original sense of a word has been lost, perhaps because the ‘what’ or ‘why’ has become obsolete.

The study of place-names revolves around the earliest documented forms of those names. In many cases the oldest written reference is in Domesday Book or another late document. Although the dates when place-names are first coined is often debatable, we can reasonably infer that *hoh* and *hlaw* names predate the conversion to Christianity. This means that in many cases these names have been used for at least three hundred years before the oldest surviving written form.
In his detailed research into Leicestershire place-names Barrie Cox notes that in the Danelaw the spellings ‘hoh, hlaw and haugr’ seem to be used almost interchangeably (Cox 2014: 233; 366). I have already mentioned both Cattow Farm and its hundred, Sparkenhoe, as examples; the same variant spellings arise with Roehow Wood near Widmerpool in Nottinghamshire, also discussed previously. However these are just three of a much larger number of relevant examples.

On the face of things this is simply because ‘hoh, hlaw and haugr’ sound similar and the original semantic distinctions became lost. This is just more evidence for the way in which languages evolve, especially when – as in the Danelaw – there is a merging of Old English words (such as ‘hoh’ and ‘hlaw’) with Old Scandinavian words (such as ‘haugr’ or ‘howe’). In speech the distinctions between these homophones would be lost. When hearing a certain sound we must assume that one Domesday scribe preferred the spelling ‘hoh’ and another the spelling ‘haugr’, and so forth. Much to the frustration of place-name scholars this confuses the original sense, although the archaeology or topography of the location may reveal evidence for a ‘hlaw’ or ‘hoh’.

**From protecting dead to intercessionary saints**

But what if, as I have argued, ‘hoh’ is not simply a descriptive name? What if it functioned in similar ways to a ‘hlaw’? In other words it was an ‘ancestral shrine’? No, I hear your knees jerk in unison. ‘Hohs’ were shrines to protective deities and ‘hlaws’ were where the human dead were buried. There would have been rites at both, but they would be distinct. To which I will simply ask: ‘Have you never heard of Christian saints?’

There is considerable debate about the personal names associated with both habitative elements – especially ‘ham’ and ‘tun’ – and also with ‘hlaw’ and ‘beorg’. On the face of things the place-name evidence suggests that a great many Anglo-Saxon settlements are named after a founder, and this name is then retained over many generations before becoming ‘fossilised’ without
any semantic sensibilities beyond being the name of a settlement. In a
corrupted form, these make up a large proportion of modern day names of
English villages and towns. What we seem to be seeing is how Anglo-Saxon
culture readily elevated first settlers to ‘cult status’ after their death.
Which begs the question as to the difference between, say, Whittington and
Whittingslow. One is clearly a ‘farm’ and the other a ‘burial mound’. But
someone with the name Hwita, or something similar, is seemingly the focus
of a ‘cult’ at both places. We might reasonable assume that the funeral
arrangements for the Hwita at Whittington did not involve the construction
of a hlaw, although not even this is certain.

Sarah Semple has recently revisited an observation first made by Martin
Welch back in 1992 which reveals that named barrows are not named after
an early founder but instead of a later estate owner, possibly of the seventh
century (Welch 1992: 322; Semple 2013: 161–2). I am not aware of any
place-name researchers either critiquing Welch’s suggestions or shedding
more light on the dates of the people commemorated by named barrows. My
own thinking is that because most if not all these names are monothematic
then they are most probably early. Later Germanic personal names are
more commonly dithematic, i.e. formed from two elements. For example,
King Æthelred derives from æthel (‘noble’) and ræd (‘counsel’).

Leaving open the possibility of the naming of hlaws spanning more than just
a few generations, the cultic important of founders has been dubbed ‘the
invention of ancestry’. Clearly it was more deeply rooted in Anglo-Saxon
society than just the naming of some hlaws after respected elders. Merely
commemorating the names of these people would be only one aspect—there
would be accounts of their more notable deeds, which would increasingly
become more legendary in nature as the transmission of any such legendary
and genealogical traditions relied entirely on oral history. Presumably some
lineages did maintain an accurate recollection, while others genuinely
thought they had it right but hadn’t (as is typical of oral transmission), while
those who needed to ‘keep up with the Joneses’ down the road might have
needed to be a little more creative (also well-attested in traditional lore!).

Whatever the truth might have been, we can only look at the overall
outcome — and that most certainly meant that, concurrently with the active
conversion by the Roman church, an ‘ancestor cult’ was revived and
enhanced, but this time honouring missionaries who quickly evolve into
local saints. Welsh and Cornish naming practices, where Ilan-St Someone
predominate, can be clearly discerned in place-names of the Marches and
the West Country, even when the place-name elements are all English (for
example St Harmon in Radnorshire, a former county with numerous
examples of place-names starting with Llan-). Ilan names are seemingly
semantic counterparts to the numerous –burh place-names starting with a
personal nams (such as Alderbury, Amesbury, Heytesbury, Malmesbury,
Ramsbury and Tisbury – to name only examples in Wiltshire) in that the use
of Ilan and burh in place-names denotes enclosures (although both words
have a much more complex history).

In Wales and Cornwall, the name of the place is more likely to be derived
from a local saint who founded the church. While there seems to be a
difference between apparently secular founders of English settlements and
the Christian founders of Welsh and Cornish settlements, this distinction
may not be that sound. I would suggest that ‘first settlers’ — whether seen as
secular or not from the perspective of modern worldviews — generally
became the ‘sacred deities’ of the settlement. Christian hagiographers
devoted their attention to the founders who could be comfortably
accommodated by the ideologies of the time as intercessionary saints, while
earlier generations of pre-conversion founders are now known only by their
names. Ideological distinctions were important to the clergy, but such
niceties would have been of less concern to the laity, who would have
regarded this simply as continuity of customary practice.

Even ignoring continuity of cosmological presumptions, from the narrow
perspective of ‘material culture’ then the burial of ‘first settlers’ and their
families in hlaws is little different from early medieval churches where the
altar — with relics of the founding saint — is surrounded by high-status human
burials. Clearly the ‘non-material culture’ — in this case Christian doctrines
is very different and, despite the indisputable sepulchral evidence, we do not
think of churches as merely ‘ancestral shrines’. Firstly, the sacrifice commemorated at the altar is a one-off, historic event, rather than an annual intercessionary ‘bribe’. Secondly, the sharing of bread and wine consecrated at the altar is not considered to be a sacrifice. But none of is this is self-evident from the material culture.

The overlap between burials in prehistoric mounds and early saints could sometimes be quite literal. For example, in 1199 the monks at Ludlow, Shropshire, removed a large barrow prior to enlarging the church. Not surprisingly they discovered three human burials. They were considered to the remains of Irish saints and re-interred in the church. Interestingly this mound may have been the one which gave the town its name (although the first part of the name is not a personal name but the word hlude, meaning a ‘rapid’). Similarly, around 1148 monks disturbed barrows near Redbourn, Hertfordshire, and the human remains were brought to St Albans Abbey where they were venerated as the relics of St Amphibalus (amphibalus is Latin for ‘cloak’). (Semple 2013: 127)

Trying to understand Christian churches from the archaeological evidence alone, without knowing the detailed – and ever-shifting – doctrines would be most likely to miss most aspects of the meaning and significance of Christian practices. We should similarly assume that archaeology fails to reveal the full meaning and significances of pre-conversion practices. I am not alone as Sarah Semple has reviewed all the relevant evidence and is happy to conclude that ancestors evolved into early saints (Semple 2013: 235). Semple also notes that Christian converts may have deliberately attempted to sanctify deceased ancestors to save them from damnation. There is no direct evidence of this from Anglo-Saxon times but this matches contemporary concerns of the Mormon Church.

Cults of the dead and deities before the conversion

If the distinction between secular founding fathers and slightly later founding saints is not as clear as place-name experts generally infer then what about
distinctions between secular founding fathers and pre-conversion deities? On the one hand we happily accept Tysoe as a god-name plus hoh. On the other hand place-names ending in hlaw are taken to be personal names rather than the names of local deities.

At least some of these founding fathers became the focus of ‘cults’, as this is the only reasonable interpretation of names including –ingas, meaning ‘the followers of’. The more recent parallel would be clan-names of Scotland and Ireland. But, before the arrival of missionaries, these founding fathers would have become reified as the posthumous protectors of the land belonging to the ‘clan’. After all, they would have been warriors in real life – and may have died fighting to protect the land. It would be inconceivable that they were not valorous warriors in the next life. By the time anyone who knew them had themselves died then the founders would have become entirely legendary figures; the same is equally true of local saints. Remembered only in legends, they would have become been little different from local tutelary deities – and there are ethnographical parallels the world over for the blurring of distinctions between ancestors and tutelary beings, perhaps because the rites for honouring the protective dead and for the protective deities inevitably converge.

So when we come across the names of these men as prefixes to hlaw then are we encountering the last vestiges of their ‘cult’? In Derbyshire alone hlaw appears in over seventy place-names, of which over thirty have evidence for burial mounds. At least eleven of the thirty are comprised of a personal name followed by hlaw, for example, Bassa at Baslow, Eatta at Atlow, Hucca at Hucklow and Tidi at Tidelow.

Outside Derbyshire there is Taplow, Buckinghamshire, where the church is situated by an Anglo-Saxon burial mound, presumably where Tæppa was laid to rest among many splendid grave goods. In Shropshire personal name plus hlaw is the origin of Beslow, Longslow, Munslow, Onslow, Peplow, Purslow and Whittingslow while in Herefordshire there is Wolferlow.

**Ethnographical parallels**

Territorial chiefs or ‘kings’ as manifestations of genii loci – protective spirits of place – is commonly encountered in the ethnographical literature. Brian Morris provides a detailed discussion of how Kongolese, Zambian and Southern African chiefs embody ‘ancestral power’ and thereby both aid the fertility of the land and also enhance their ability to protect the kin group (Morris 2006: 155–6, 167, 179).

In Papua New Guinea a person maintains links with three or four ancestral places, and the associated burials. These are far more than mere points of reference. ‘They symbolize the core meaning of kinship and of being. Coming from the same place is the essence of sharing an identity not only with other people, but also with all the non-human resources of the place as well.’ (Rose 2001 [2002: 333]) based on Jane Goodale 1995: 115)

I have briefly discussed how Indo-European languages reveal this deep sense of association with ‘places of origin’ (typically river valleys) in Volume Four of The Twilight Age. Anglo-Saxon society, with the tendency for tribal boundaries to follow watersheds, shares at least some aspects of the same worldview. While the richness of meanings associated with ancestral places in Anglo-Saxon minds are unlikely to be an exact match for the associations of a Papua New Guinean person, there is no reason to suppose that the ‘richness of meanings’ were not equally rich.

My suspicion is that ancestral places would have been especially rich for adult Anglo-Saxon women as the patrilocal marriage customs meant they would be spending most of their lives in ‘alien territory’ with, understandably, some nostalgia for their female kin group, and its (probably rarely-visited) territory, ancestral dead and tutelary beings.

While ethnographical parallels offer no direct evidence, the near-ubiquity of how tribal chiefs are, or were, perceived suggests that we can take this is the ‘normal’ worldview for kingship and, unless there is clear evidence to the contrary, assume that all such leaders had supernaturally-aided tutelary roles. Given the wide range of ‘attributes’ associated with the Old English words frea and dryhten (both having the sense of ‘war lord’) and the ‘hero-
deity’ culture of the sagas, this does not seem implausible. (See Pollington 2011: 242–3 for a detailed discussion of frea and dryhten in Old English.) Clearly, because the accounts are written by Christian scribes, we cannot expect to see direct reference to pre-conversion other-than-human tutelary beings. But on the basis that dryhten ‘takes over’ as the term for Christ while frea drops out of usage then seemingly frea was in some way ‘contaminated’ with unchristian associations.

The broader cosmological context

I have discussed overlaps between the ancestral dead and tutelary in Volume Two of The Twilight Age. Similarly Volume One of the series adds considerable depth to the brief mentions of such continuity in this study. My key point is that ‘worldviews’ are the ways of thinking which a society adopts without being consciously aware of doing so. In academic-speak this is the cosmology of a culture. Because members of a society are rarely, if ever, aware of the assumptions underpinning these worldviews they usually change only slowly, and often in contrary and syncretic ways rather than by smooth synthesis.

Continuity of worldviews is also the underlying theme of a collection of over forty articles which appear on a website called Anglo-Saxon Twilight (www.indigogroup.co.uk/twilight/index.htm). These are written in an accessible style and also seek feedback about more speculative interpretations. This study is a ‘tightened up’ version of some of those articles. Included in the Anglo-Saxon Twilight articles is one called ‘Rethinking conversion’ (Trubshaw 2013–14a) which attempts to summarise current academic thinking about such terms between ‘Christianisation’ and ‘conversion’, and the supposed dualism between ‘pagans’ and Christians. Suffice to say that all these terms make sense only from the perspective of post-Reformation and post-Enlightenment academic study and do little to help understand what might have actually been happening in Britain around the seventh century.

I have already quoted G.K. Chesterton’s advocacy of ‘thinking like a thief’. A generation or more later and the concept of ‘etic’ perspectives also began to become part of anthropological practices. But even within the humanities any research which smacks of the researcher ‘going native’ is dismissed in a knee-jerk manner (Bowie 2014). This is consistent with the praxis of early medieval studies operating within an etic worldview, with no evidence for emic approaches. Indeed, as Sira Dooley-Fairchild has described in considerable detail, early medieval archaeologists have yet to establish themselves within a reflexive historiographic context (Dooley-Fairchild 2012). The following quotation provides some indication of Dooley-Fairchild’s approach:

It is indicative of the religious backgrounds of the scholars of this subject that the focus has been, almost without exception, on the mechanics of conversion rather than the reasons for it. In other words, the fact that the Conversion was (at least prior to 1950) almost exclusively studied by people from Christian backgrounds or cultural contexts led to a general lack of interest in why the Conversion took place. Both Catholic and Protestant scholars instead saw the question as reversed and focused on why the Conversion was such a slow process and what could keep people from converting. I argue that as individuals who were convinced, to a greater or lesser degree, of the literal truth of the Bible, the reasons why to convert were obvious to them. They shared a set of revealed truths with their subjects, and as a consequence, these scholars were
Deaf to the most important and revealing questions that could be asked of the material.
(Dooley-Fairchild 2012: 238)

David Petts was the first to articulate the dualism between historical and archaeological approaches to the early medieval period (Petts 2011). Unsurprisingly, this dualism is also discussed by Dooley-Fairchild as she and David Petts are at Durham University. However, the similarity of approach of Petts and Dooley-Fairchild shares the same weakness – creating a simplistic dualism which recognises only the different academic approaches to texts and material culture. In doing so, they omit the different paradigms of linguists and place-name scholars. Among others, Alaric Hall has demonstrated that a careful study of language can shed considerable light on worldviews and cosmologies (Hall 2005; 2007a). Place-name studies also approach the early medieval era in a manner distinct from historians and archaeologists, while inevitably having considerable common ground with linguists.

The excluded paradigms

Furthermore, the ‘Durham school of early medieval historiography’ established by Petts and Dooley-Fairchild fails to look at what is excluded from the history-archaeology dualism. This is even more surprising because, since Howard Williams seminal paper on the reuse of prehistoric monuments as Anglo-Saxon burial sites (Williams 1997), there has been several attempts to look at early medieval era from geographical and topographical perspectives.

In particular, Michael Costen’s study of Anglo-Saxon Somerset (Costen 2011) offers considerable insights into both specific aspects of that county and the wider regional contexts. Costen’s approach owes much to the landscape archaeology approach pioneered by Mick Aston (which has been criticised for being under-theorised; see Fleming 2012: 64–6). A group of notable medievalists, including Andrew Fleming, ran a three-year project entitled ‘Landscapes of Governance’ to investigate fifth to eleventh century assembly sites. Although the two main publications are still forthcoming (Baker et al and Carroll et al) place-names and topography appear to be to the fore (a substantial list of papers already published is online at www.ucl.ac.uk/archaeology/research/projects/assembly/publications_papers). However, there are still major gaps. For example, the fundamental importance of waterborne transport rarely gets more than a brief remark, rather along the lines of a ‘given’ rather than a field of necessary study in its own right. (See Trubshaw 2015 and Volume Four of The Twilight Age for remarks which, if nothing else, establish the absence of an adequate understanding of the role of rivers and estuaries in the locations of early minsters and ‘trading places’.)

Although superficially this may seem to be a study of place-names, my core interest is topographical not onamastic. At the risk of over-simplifying, my approach is to places which, among other ‘attributes’, have names – in distinction to studying names which, as it were, ‘have’ places (or, more correctly, denote places). In other words, looking at toponyms from the other end of a metaphorical telescope conventionally associated with place-name studies. Furthermore, I am specifically interested in how places – both their topography and their names – reveal underlying cosmologies and ontologies.
Geographical and topographical approaches to Anglo-Saxon studies do not simply add different 'paradigms' to the methodological mix. Far more importantly they access evidence of the Anglo-Saxon era which has survived in a manner which historians and archaeologists can only dream about. For certain there have been changes to the landscape over the last 1,000 to 1,500 years. But, either in specifics or generalisations, these can usually be understood. Indeed, apart from changes to coastlines, most of the more significant changes have taken place since detailed maps were surveyed in the second half of the nineteenth century.

The landscape endures in a way that documents and artefacts rarely do. Of course places within the landscape evolve – and that is as true of the early medieval era as of recent centuries. In contrast to early medieval archaeology which, of necessity, informs us more about funerary practices, the landscape is where people lived. The way the landscape looks is the sum total of the efforts of generations of planning and toil.

Place-names are part of the collective memories of these communities. The names are 'mini memorates', 'narrative fragments' evoking a greater narrative of functions, topography and social history. But that is just the surface. How a society conceptualises both specific places and the wider landscape is a key part of the cosmology and ontology of that culture. Trying to understand specific historical or archaeological aspects without first making some attempt to understand the cosmology risks building castles on clouds. However to understand ontologies and cosmologies it is necessary to look at specifics – the same two-way process recognised by Audrey Meaney nearly forty years ago.

This is not the place to set out a methodology, even if I had the abilities to do so. My approach can only be a provisional and pragmatic one. Underpinning my approach is the assumption that Anglo-Saxon ‘cultural meanings’ and ontologies are unlikely to be the same as modern day assumptions about the meanings and significances of landscape. Note especially that I use these terms in the plural – there is no evidence to suggest that at any point in the past cosmologies were singularities or immutable.

Venturing into interdisciplinary oceans

All this this is not some sort of ‘topographical turn’ which merely adds another layer of icing to an already multi-layered cake. ‘Landscape theory’ is far from a homogenous or coherent epistemology which can be imposed on top of an essentially linguistic worldview.

In part this is because – as Christopher Tilley cogently observed back in 1994 – ‘landscape’ had come to mean something different for historians, archaeologists and geographers (Tilley 1994: 8). What these different epistemologies shared, however, was a sense of landscape as something which could be understood by mapping and measuring. Tilley was the first academic to insist that there was something irreducibly ‘experiential’ about the landscape which could not be reduced to Cartesian co-ordinates, although this insight was developed by others, including Professor Richard Bradley and various postgraduates of the school of archaeology at the University of Reading.

However even though ‘experiential’ or ‘phenomenological’ approaches to landscape have enriched archaeologists’ concepts of landscape there is no such thing as direct experience. We can only experience the landscape through underlying cosmologies, ontologies and more consciously-held ‘cultural meanings’. There has been little attempt to distinguish between modern assumptions and those which might have appertained at different times in the past – although the reductionist ‘economic models’ of human interaction with habitat are thankfully less often encountered in academic writings.

Until archaeologists situate themselves in a worldview which is not conceived of as simplistic dualism with historians then there is still a long way to go. An informed understanding of how cosmologies and ‘worldviews’ are distinct from ‘beliefs’ (a largely anachronistic concept before the Reformation) is absent from an otherwise interesting collection of papers (Carver et al. 2010). Similarly place-name research is only slowly expanding from linguistic approaches towards ones which put ‘places’ into
place-names as, despite the pioneering work of Margaret Gelling and Ann Cole, the emphasis still remains on onamastic paradigms rather than topographical ones.

Reflexively situating myself in this remark risks merely casting a large shadow, so I will instead observe that until now any topographical approaches to English place-name elements required vast amounts of time reading the many county-by-county volumes, then identifying and plotting the locations. However that is about to change with the ongoing digitisation of the corpus of place-names under the auspices of the Centre for English Name-Studies at the University of Nottingham. The potential for research which this database offers makes metaphors about floodgates opening seem exceptionally understated.

As for awareness of current thinking in comparative religion or cosmology, the complete absence of references to such works in the published works of early medieval researchers reveals that none can claim to be adopting even the most vestigial of interdisciplinary approaches. This has long been true of almost all British archaeologists, for whom since the 1990s ‘interdisciplinary’ means citing other archaeologists who have made an attempt to summarise other archaeologists who have written summaries of extra-disciplinary fields of study. The clearest example arose with woefully out of date misunderstandings of ‘shamanism’ with respect to prehistoric rock art, but lesser examples are endemic in British archaeology. ‘Never go back to the source when you can cite a colleague’ seems to be the rule in archaeological writing, while ‘interdisciplinary’ means inviting other disciplines to the party but retaining the archaeological paradigm as the one which ‘frames’ any discussions. Whoa!

This study of Anglo-Saxon ‘shrines’ attempts to show that even the approaches of cognitive archaeology are not sufficiently well-equipped. The dominant paradigms need to be those of cosmologists and topographers, as only from these viewpoints can archaeological evidence be more appropriately understood. Above all archaeologists, just as much as historians, need to be more fully aware of the historiography of their own discipline. Only then can early medieval studies venture effectively into interdisciplinary oceans.

Such voyages of discovery are, of course, fraught with dangers – but offer insights which have yet to be even dreamed. Those who think that we are close to knowing everything that can be known about early medieval Britain, apart from filling in a few more details, seem to living in a cosy illusion. From my perspective early medieval studies seem about to open out onto whole new landscapes – and the topographical metaphor may well be apt. A cosmological metaphor may have been even more appropriate.

As I stated at the beginning, almost everything in this short study requires much more research. I fully expect that further research will reveal that at least some of these remarks are unduly speculative. But please do not look at the specific weaknesses – look at the underlying approach and to where that is pointing. A clearer understanding of Anglo-Saxon shrines are just one aspect.

**Summary**

I am fully aware that this study attempts to offer some insights into Anglo-Saxon shrines by straddling an unusually wide range of sources. Allow me to summarise the key points.

A surprisingly high proportion of surviving *hoh* place-names are either on the land-sea boundary or on county boundaries. Especially remarkable is a group of *hoh*, *weoh* and *stapel* names forming an arc around the Leicestershire Wolds and the adjoining Framland hundred.

To fully understand the putative relationship between *hohs* and boundaries requires (a) a complete corpus of *hoh* in English place-names (b) a better understanding of the ‘hows’ and ‘whys’ of boundaries in the early and middle Anglo-Saxon periods. Both of these require considerable research and are beyond the scope of this study.

By looking at relevant Romano-British and Germanic shrines there is a distinct possibility that the concept of ‘boundary shrines’ was widespread. This in turn raises questions about other boundary-related place-names, such as *har*, ‘foot’, and compounds of *ward* which suggest ‘look out’ places.

I have proposed that *hohs* originated as topographically-distinct hills which would allow people to locate ‘boundary shrines’ with comparative ease, in
much the same way a parish church is visually distinctive. An understanding of of hohs as some sort of shrine requires comparison with the three Old English words known to denote shrines, idols and such like: weoh, hearg and (e)alh. There is some overlap between weoh and hoh (e.g. Wysall, Nottinghamshire, originally weoh hoh) and some hohs are in proximity to weohs and stapols (e.g. Hose Hills, Leicestershire is near Wyfordby and Stapleford). However, without a comprehensive corpus of these place-name elements it is not possible to establish whether such ‘overlaps’ are coincidental or not.

A number of weohs and hundredal moot sites are known to have occupied triangular areas of land. This might be the primary sense of gar, literally ‘spear-shaped’ but having the same semantic sense as Modern English ‘triangular’. Once again further work to identify all instances of gar is necessary before this suggestion can be fully appraised.

Modern spellings of place-names often confuse hoh, hlaw and haugr. But Anglo-Saxons would have been aware of these near-homonyms and intentional ‘puns’ could well have been made. Hohs look like giant-sized hlaws and could well have been thought of as the graves of legendary giants or even deities (as with Tysoe and perhaps Ingoe), plausibly ‘guardians of the land’ or such like. Such supernatural (or, more accurately, preternatural) giants would be entirely consistent with the idea of tutelary ‘spirits’. Just possibly turf-cut hill figures such as the Long Man of Wilmington and the now-lost Red Horse of Tysoe Hill are another aspect of such gigantic genii loci.

After the conversion to Christianity the original sense of hoh as a distinctive-shaped hill with a shrine becomes lost and the word becomes purely descriptive. This allows for compounds with Scandinavian elements to appear (almost certainly not earlier than the late ninth century) such as Hoby and Roehoe Wood. Probably later still comes the formation of the numerous Hoe Hill minor toponyms and the associated Hose Hill (on the basis that in Old English hoh and hyll would be oxymorons – i.e. describing different shaped hills – so ‘Hoe Hill’ as a name cannot predate the use of ‘hill’ as a generalised term rather than a specific).

There is something more to attempting to understand whether or not hohs can be considered as ‘boundary shrines’ than re-evaluating such place-name elements as weoh, stapol, hearg, hlaw and gar. Such re-evaluations need to place the linguistic evidence within paradigms which are primarily topographic and ontological. This requires methodologies which are distinct from established archaeological, historical and onamastic approaches.
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Several people have assisted with specific aspects. Boel Jepson’s PhD thesis on English place-name elements relating to boundaries was of itself hugely helpful, and also provided the stimulus to look from, as it were, the opposite end of the telescope.

Gavin Smith’s suggestion that *hoh* was functional as well as descriptive started this ball rolling. Adam Daubney kindly confirmed the distribution of TOT rings. Poppy Palindrew my attention to Hooton and Thornton Hough, both on the Wirral. Mark Valentine, unwittingly, did the same for Mortehoe. A conversation with Sophie Voyce and her family at Harrow Farm, Elmstone Hardwicke, Gloucestershire, towards the end of 2015 was both enjoyable and informative.

Mark Orridgespotted the unfortunate omission of Hoby from the first edition and drew my attention to the *Gerehow* mentioned by Barrie Cox. Alby Stone generously shared his insights into *nemetona*. Jeremy Harte’s posting to the English Place-Name Society email list on 9th August 2013 drew my attention to the 1185 form of Wyville, Lincolnshire. I am especially grateful to Anthony Durham for sharing this thoughts on the origins of the name of Worcester and also for informing me that the first element of Stenigot does not mean ‘stone’ but ‘pool’ (the name is shown as *Stangehou* in the Domesday book and the first element is related to modern French *étang*). Keith Briggs kindly drew my attention to his paper on ‘harrow’.

Graham Aldred generously took an interest in the first edition of this work and shared his tentative understand of *worth* names in Leicestershire and elsewhere; in addition he brought to my attention Hoo Hills farm near Bosworth.

Apologies to anyone who sees their ideas in print without credit, doubly so if I have mangled them. Please let me know if either is the case and I will amend accordingly. For anyone who wishes to comment on the contents of this study I am only as far away as an email (bobtrubs@indigogroup.co.uk).
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