

Review Article

Why should we write about Anglo-Saxon farms and farming?¹

Thomas Pickles

Susan Oosthuizen, *Tradition and Transformation in Anglo-Saxon England.*

Archaeology, Common Rights and Landscape (London: Bloomsbury, 2013).

Debby Banham and Rosamond Faith, *Anglo-Saxon Farms and Farming* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

Allen J. Frantzen, *Food, Eating and Identity in Early Medieval England* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2014).

Mark McKerracher, *Farming Transformed in Anglo-Saxon England. Agriculture in the Long Eighth Century* (Oxford: Windgather Press, 2018).

When William Hoskins wrote *The Making of the English Landscape* (London, 1955), there was a relatively straightforward answer to this question. Historians had argued that the ‘Germanic’ migrations of the fifth and sixth centuries shaped the familiar characteristics of the English landscape.² These migrations were thought to have occurred on a large scale in the context of an undeveloped landscape whose

¹ Marios Costambeys, Roy Flechner, Gabor Thomas, Charles West, and Katherine Wilson generously provided helpful feedback on an earlier draft of this article.

² F. W. Maitland, *Domesday Book and Beyond: Three Essays in the Early History of England* (Cambridge, 1897; reprinted London, 1960); H. L. Gray, *English Field Systems* (Cambridge MA, 1915), esp. pp. 409-18; C. S. Orwin and C. S. Orwin, *The Open Fields* (Oxford, 1938); F. M. Stenton, *Anglo-Saxon England* (Oxford, 1943; 2nd Edn 1947), pp. 274-84.

population was annihilated, displaced, or suppressed.³ They had resulted in the wholesale import, not just of a common ‘Germanic’ language (Anglo-Saxon or Old English), but also of pre-existing ‘Germanic’ social institutions; though the migrations were piecemeal and drawn-out, these shared characteristics predisposed the migrants to a common identity.⁴ The most obvious shared social institution was the *hid*, denoting a free peasant household, the land supporting it, and the basis of its assessment.⁵ This was the foundation for social status and political power amongst the Old English speaking peoples, with the sole (and explicable) exception of the Kentish people.⁶ These free peasant households were located within nucleated villages surrounded by open fields of arable held in severalty – that is, each field was divided into strips shared out between the households and worked cooperatively.⁷ Variations on this pattern were attributed to the chronology, density, and circumstances of settlement, and the suitability of the land.⁸ Ultimately, historians identified an English social landscape, established by a proto-English people, even if that landscape took no single or simple form: the Champion belt or Central Province, from the north east,

³ Maitland, *Domesday Book and Beyond*, pp. 265-7, 452; Stenton, *Anglo-Saxon England*, pp. 274-5, 310-11.

⁴ J. R. Green, *A Short History of the English People* (London and New York, 1874), pp. 1-16; W. Stubbs, *The Constitutional History of England in its Origin and Development* (Oxford, 1874-8; 5th Edn 1891), I, pp. 12-71; J. R. Green, *The Making of England* (London, 1881), pp. 131-58; J. R. Green, *The Conquest of England* (London, 1883), pp. 1-6; J. R. Green, *A Short History of the English People*, Vol. 1 (London and New York, 1892; reissued 1902), pp. 1-28; H. M. Chadwick, *The Origin of the English Nation* (Cambridge, 1907).

⁵ Maitland, *Domesday Book and Beyond*, pp. 416-563; Stenton, *Anglo-Saxon England*, p. 276.

⁶ Maitland, *Domesday Book and Beyond*, pp. 457-8; Stenton, *Anglo-Saxon England*, pp. 278-9.

⁷ Maitland, *Domesday Book and Beyond*, pp. 38-40, 178-88; Stenton, *Anglo-Saxon England*, pp. 276-8, 309.

⁸ Maitland, *Domesday Book and Beyond*, pp. 426-8; Stenton, *Anglo-Saxon England*, pp. 279-83.

through the Midlands, to the south west, was the typical English landscape, against which variations were observed and explained.⁹

Since Hoskins, almost every element of this consensus has been challenged. Three of the four books under review – those by Susan Oosthuizen, Debby Banham and Ros Faith, and Mark McKerracher – reflect these historiographical developments and make significant contributions. Collectively, they leave us wondering whether we should write about Anglo-Saxon farms and farming at all. This prompts questions about how we might integrate their arguments into wider surveys of the early medieval societies and polities of Britain. The fourth book – by Allen Frantzen – offers one way forward.

Subsequent studies have revised our understanding of the origins and chronology of those social institutions through which the landscape was organized. Though Bede described the *hid* as an English institution, the household was the basis for social status and political power across Britain and Ireland: it may have pre-Roman ‘Celtic’, rather than post-Roman ‘Germanic’, origins.¹⁰ A clause in the laws of Ine, king of the West Saxons (d. 726), reveals the existence of some irregular open fields held in severalty as early as the seventh century,¹¹ but nucleated settlements surrounded by regular open fields held in severalty and worked cooperatively began at the earliest in the ninth century and probably only became widespread from the eleventh century.¹²

⁹ Gray, *English Field Systems*, pp. 409-18.

¹⁰ T. M. Charles-Edwards, ‘Kinship, Status and the Origins of the Hide’, *Past & Present*, 56 (1972), pp. 3-33; P. Barnwell, “‘Hlafaeta, ceorl, hid and scir’: Celtic, Roman or Germanic?’, *Anglo-Saxon Studies in Archaeology and History*, 9 (1996), pp. 53-62, for further and broader discussion.

¹¹ Ine 42 (references here and after are to F. Liebermann (ed.), *Die Gesetze der Angelsachsen*, I-IV (Halle, 1903-16), I, pp. 20-7, 89-123).

¹² Nucleated settlements: G. Foard, ‘Systematic Fieldwalking and the Investigation of Saxon Settlement in Northamptonshire’, *World Archaeology*, 9 (1977), pp. 357-74; C.

Quite why this landscape evolved, most commonly in the Champion belt, remains a matter for debate. Gradual population pressure might explain the decision to establish nucleated settlements and turn over the majority of land within a vill to cooperative arable agriculture.¹³ Long-term developments in royal lordship and landholding may have contributed too. There was an early tributary mode in which kings itinerated around royal vills with surrounding territories of obligation from which free peasant households provided dues and services; such territories fragmented as kings permanently alienated their rights to dues and services from parts of them, creating a lower tier of local lords exploiting them more vigorously.¹⁴ Those lords could have reorganized settlement and production, or their demands could have prompted others to do so.¹⁵ The Norman Conquest produced constitutional, tenurial, and feudal revolutions concentrating more lordly power and land in the hands of a small nobility

Taylor, *Village and Farmstead: a history of rural settlement in England* (London, 1983); H. Hamerow, 'Settlement Mobility and the "Middle Saxon Shift": rural settlements and settlement patterns in Anglo-Saxon England', *Anglo-Saxon England*, 20 (1991), pp. 1-25; R. Jones and M. Page, *Medieval Villages in an English Landscape: beginnings and ends* (Macclesfield, 2006). Open Fields: J. Thirsk, 'The Common Fields', *Past & Present*, 29:1 (1964), pp. 3-25; A. R. H. Baker and R. A. Butlin (eds), *Studies of Field Systems in the British Isles* (Cambridge, 1973); T. Rowley (ed.), *The Origins of Open-Field Agriculture* (London, 1981); D. Hall, *Medieval Fields* (Aylesbury, 1982); D. Hall, *The Open Fields of Northamptonshire* (Northampton, 1995); C. Lewis, P. Mitchell-Fox and C. Dyer, *Village, Hamlet and Field: changing settlements in central England* (Manchester, 1997).

¹³ Thirsk, 'The Common Fields', *passim*.

¹⁴ R. Faith, *The English Peasantry and the Growth of Lordship* (London, 1997); R. Fleming, 'Land Use and People', in J. Crick and E. Van Houts (eds), *A Social History of England 900-1200* (Cambridge, 2011), pp. 15-37.

¹⁵ B. M. S. Campbell, 'Commonfield Origins – the regional dimension', in Rowley (ed.), *The Origins of Open-Field Agriculture*, pp. 112-29; T. Brown and G. Foard, 'The Saxon Landscape: a regional perspective', in P. Everson and T. Williamson (eds), *The Archaeology of Landscape* (Manchester, 1998), pp. 73-82; Hall, *Medieval Fields*; Hall, *The Open Fields of Northamptonshire*.

with a new capacity to exploit sub-tenants, and generated local institutions – honour and manor courts – sufficient to regulate open field systems.¹⁶

Despite the virtue in these explanations, they require a further factor to account for regional variation. Environmental realities perhaps shaped the impact of these trends. Mapping Old English and Old Norse place-names denoting woodland and clearance alongside Domesday entries for woodland suggests that the Champion belt was always the most heavily cleared region in lowland eastern Britain.¹⁷ Pollen analysis reinforces this idea.¹⁸ The heavier clay soils and short plough seasons of this region require collaborative agricultural regimes.¹⁹ Population pressure could result in different types of organic settlement nucleation reflecting topographical differences – the piecemeal addition to existing settlements of enclosed strips, irregular expansion into common pasture, or regular expansion across former arable land which fused separate settlement foci.²⁰ The impact of Norman Conquest may then have prompted the reorganization of the surrounding landscape into regular open field systems.

Having replaced the ‘barbarian’ migrations with long term environmental, social, and political developments, historians and archaeologists have reconsidered the evidence

¹⁶ G. Garnett, *Conquered England: Kingship, Succession and Tenure 1066-1166* (Oxford, 2007); S. Baxter, ‘Lordship and Labour’, in Crick and Van Houts (eds), *A Social History of England*, pp. 98-114; J. Hudson, *The Oxford History of the Laws of England, Volume II, 817-1216* (Oxford, 2012), pp. 284-9.

¹⁷ B. K. Roberts and S. Wrathmell, *Region and Place: A Study of English Rural Settlement* (Swindon, 2002), pp. 18-24, 28, 72-9.

¹⁸ S. Rippon, A. Wainwright and C. Smart, ‘Farming Regions in Medieval England: The Archaeobotanical and Zooarchaeological Evidence’, *Medieval Archaeology*, 58:1 (2014), pp. 195-255, at 201-7 and 242; S. Rippon, C. Smart and B. Pears, *The Fields of Britannia: continuity and change in the late Roman and early medieval landscape* (Oxford, 2015), pp. 309-15.

¹⁹ T. Williamson, *Shaping Medieval Landscapes* (Macclesfield, 2003); T. Williams, *Environment, Society and Landscape in Early Medieval England* (Woodbridge, 2013).

²⁰ T. Williamson, R. Liddiard and T. Partida, *Champion: The making and unmaking of the English Midland landscape* (Liverpool, 2013).

for earlier medieval farming landscapes. A number of more recent methodological, analytical, and interpretative trends are developed more fully by the works under review.

The first trend has been to move away from the Champion belt as the default region for study, through a focus on all the available evidence, whether in Britain as whole, in England as a whole, in regions that straddle the boundaries of the Champion belt, or in one county. Taking in Britain as a whole, Peter Fowler wrote about farming in the first millennium AD, including textual, visual, and material evidence.²¹

Focusing on England, Helena Hamerow studied all the published archaeological evidence for settlements from the fifth to the eleventh centuries, including buildings, small finds, boundaries, field systems, and environmental archaeology; John Blair extended this to the unpublished archaeological ‘grey literature’ and place-names, setting settlement patterns within wider social and political landscapes;²² and David Hall analyzed all the evidence for English field systems from the fifth to the eleventh centuries.²³ Comparing three case studies of regions straddling the boundary of the Champion belt – southwestern and eastern England and south Wales – Stephen Rippon investigated the relationship between lordship, settlement nucleation, and field systems.²⁴ Homing in on Northamptonshire – one paradigmatic county within the Champion belt – Tom Williamson, Robert Liddiard and Tracey Partida mapped

²¹ P. J. Fowler, *Farming in the First Millennium AD: British Agriculture between Julius Caesar and William the Conqueror* (Cambridge, 2002).

²² H. Hamerow, *Rural Settlements and Society in Anglo-Saxon England* (Oxford, 2012); J. Blair, *Building Anglo-Saxon England* (Princeton, 2018).

²³ D. Hall, *The Open Fields of England* (Oxford, 2014).

²⁴ S. Rippon, *Beyond the Medieval Village: the diversification of landscape character in southern Britain* (Oxford, 2008).

and interrogated the evidence for every township relating to topography and geology and medieval and post-medieval settlement evolution and field systems.²⁵

Three of the studies under review emulate these precedents in distinctive ways. Debby Banham and Ros Faith concentrate on England and combine a thematic structure in part one, which considers arable farming (crops, tools, and techniques) and animal husbandry (livestock and products), with, in part two, regional case studies based on different types of agricultural landscapes (coasts and riversides, woodland, downland, moorland, and wolds). Susan Oosthuizen takes a *longue durée* approach, considering the archaeological evidence for settlements and field systems in England from prehistory to the early middle ages. Mark McKerracher compares two regions – the south midlands and East Anglia – within and without the Champion belt, incorporating variable topography; he concentrates on bioarchaeological evidence – bone, plant, and cereal remains.

A second trend has been to pay more attention to the regional and chronological incidence of our Old English and Latin textual sources and their potentially distorting effects. More generally, John Blair has suggested that we should think in terms of a persistent ‘Anglian’ cultural zone comprising eastern England between the Thames and the Humber watersheds, which for earlier periods includes much of the classic settlement archaeology that we call ‘Anglo-Saxon’, whereas our textual evidence for settlement and social organization often derives from outside of this zone.²⁶ More particularly, a number of studies have questioned whether we should consider our surviving written sources as geographically or chronologically representative.

²⁵ Williamson, Liddiard and Partida, *Champion*.

²⁶ Blair, *Building Anglo-Saxon England*, pp. 24-35, 70-3, and *passim*.

Following Lisi Oliver and Tom Lambert, local and regional communities of freemen probably established most customary oral law, preserved and presented by local lawmen: this helps to explain why our earliest written royal laws pay little attention to features of economic and social organization that must have been central to everyday life.²⁷ When they do focus on such issues, the connection between a people and its law suggests that we should be careful about extrapolating general rules. The laws of Ine, king of the West Saxons (d. 726), provide some uniquely interesting information about farms and farming, but the studies here take great care to present close readings and avoid using them as the basis for representative models.²⁸

The twelfth-century manuscript Corpus Christi College, Cambridge, MS 383 includes two texts sometimes referred to as estate management literature – *Rectitudines singularum parsonarum* (Rights and ranks of people) and *Be gesceadwisan gerefan* (On the prudent reeve): *Rectitudines* focuses on the operation of a rural estate through its various social status groups, and *Gerefa* is a handbook for the reeve or steward on such an estate.²⁹ Paul Harvey and Patrick Wormald argued that *Rectitudines* was a manual of estate administration perhaps composed at Bath abbey and implemented on one of its properties in the early eleventh century, whereas *Gerefa* was a piece of ‘estates literature’, and that the two became linked because of

²⁷ L. Oliver, *The Beginnings of English Law* (Toronto and London, 2002), esp. pp. 34-51; T. Lambert, *Law and Order in Anglo-Saxon England* (Oxford, 2017), pp. 27-62.

²⁸ Oosthuizen, *Tradition and Transformation*, pp. 52-3, 69, 74, 163, 169, 189 for general references; Banham and Faith, *Anglo-Saxon Farms and Farming*, pp. 9, 27 (Ine 59.1, barley), 37 (Ine 60, 70.1, fodder), 52 and 73 (Ine 6, plough teams), 67 (Ine 40-42.1 on managing crops and livestock), 86 (Ine 58-9, the value of cattle), 91 ((Ine 55, sheep), 116 (Ine 49, pigs), 119 (Ine 69, fleeces), 124 (Ine 40-42.1, meadows and hay), 129-30 (Ine 44 and 49, wood pasture), 208 (Ine 49, pig pannage), and 235 (Ine 69.55 sheep and wool).

²⁹ C. P. Wormald, *The Making of English Law: King Alfred to the Twelfth Century, Volume I, Legislation and its Limits* (Oxford, 2001), pp. 228-36; ed. Liebermann, *Gesetze*, I, pp. 444-53 and 453-55.

their connection with land law and folk rights.³⁰ Neither text offers a geographically or chronologically representative guide. Hence Banham and Faith use them for passing information on aspects of farming in Anglo-Saxon England, without claiming representativeness, while Oosthuizen and McKerracher ignore them.³¹

A third trend is to emphasize the economic transformations of the long eighth century.³² Archaeologists have tended to observe continuities between Roman and post-Roman farms and farming – the retention of field boundaries, of an infield-outfield system (sometimes called convertible husbandry), and of pastoral transhumance regimes.³³ They have also highlighted changes coincident to the long eighth century – the emergence of settlements with semi-permanent boundaries, the establishment of cemeteries associated with settlements, the expansion of arable farming (particularly through evidence for wheat production, weeding and manuring, and crop processing), and the exploitation of wetlands.³⁴ Three of the studies under review endorse these ideas.

Though Banham and Faith are commendably careful and nuanced in acknowledging regional variations and problems of chronology, they observe ‘signs

³⁰ P. D. A. Harvey, ‘Rectitudines Singularum Personarum and Gerefa’, *English Historical Review*, CVIII (1993), pp. 1-22; Wormald, *Making of English Law*, pp. 387-9

³¹ Banham and Faith, *Anglo-Saxon Farms and Farming*, pp. 8, 31, 34, 43, 48-9, 57-8, 63, 66-7, 111-12, 119, 122, 123, 127-31, 136.

³² For context: L. Hansen and C. Wickham (eds), *The Long Eighth Century: Production, Distribution and Demand* (Leiden and Boston, 2000).

³³ P. Dark, *The Environment of Britain* (London, 2000); Hamerow, *Rural Settlements and Society*, pp. 10-16, 144-7; Rippon, Smart and Pears, *The Fields of Britannia*, *passim*.

³⁴ A. Reynolds, ‘Boundaries and Settlements in Later Sixth- to Eleventh-Century England’, *Anglo-Saxon Studies in Archaeology and History*, 12 (2003), pp. 98-136; S. Rippon, ‘Landscape Change during the ‘Long Eighth Century’ in Southern England’, in N. J. Higham (ed.), *Landscape Archaeology of Anglo-Saxon England* (Woodbridge, 2010), pp. 39-64; S. Rippon, ‘Water and Land’, in Crick and Van Houts, *A Social History of England*, pp. 38-45; Hamerow, *Rural Settlements and Society*, pp. 88-90, 123-9, 147-55; S. Oosthuizen, ‘Anglo-Saxon Fields’, in Hamerow, Hinton and Crawford, *Oxford Handbook of Anglo-Saxon Archaeology*, pp. 377-401.

of change [which] become visible around the middle of the Anglo-Saxon period': a shift from hulled cereals to free-threshing cereals, especially bread wheat, which could reflect changing tastes; an expansion of arable farming over animal husbandry; and the first evidence for the heavy mould-board plough (at Lyminge, Kent).³⁵ They suggest 'these changes, if often hard to pin down, added up to a revolution in farming, not perhaps as all-encompassing as the Neolithic one, but comparable to those of the eighteenth or twentieth centuries.'³⁶ All the crops, tools, and techniques necessary for later open-field farming became available, and the emergence of settlements with strip fields in a number of locations may represent a staging post on the journey towards that system, even if the destination was not inevitable. The historical forces behind this revolution are population growth, the expansion of arable agriculture focused on free-threshing cereals, perhaps because of a new taste for wheat bread, and the adoption of the heavy mould-board plough, requiring more traction from dairy animals kept closer to settlements, and resulting in more pig pannage in wood pasture.³⁷

Operating on a smaller canvass and focusing on bioarchaeological evidence, McKerracher fills out this picture. Coming last in his analysis, but taking priority, the plant remains suggest a growth in arable agriculture, particularly cereals, from the seventh century onwards, resulting in the survival of more evidence for mills,

³⁵ Banham and Faith, *Anglo-Saxon Farms and Farming*, 294. An analysis of the Lyminge plough has since been published: G. Thomas, G. McDonnell, J. Merkel and P. Marshall, 'Technology, Ritual and Anglo-Saxon Agriculture: the biography of a seventh-century century plough coulter from Lyminge, Kent', *Antiquity*, 90: 351 (2016), pp. 742-758.

³⁶ *Ibid.* p. 295.

³⁷ This develops D. Banham, "'In the Sweat of thy Brow Shalt thou eat Bread': Cereals and Cereal Production in the Anglo-Saxon Landscape', in Higham, *Landscape Archaeology of Anglo-Saxon England*, pp. 175-92.

granaries, and ovens, as well as the deposition of more charred plant remains.³⁸ These remains bear witness to diversification and specialization, and a revival of hulled wheats, flax, and grapevines.³⁹ To McKerracher, the arrival and spread of the heavy mould-board plough was a necessary factor, but social and cultural processes were the sufficient force – the emergence of a social hierarchy, the expansion of kingdoms, the conversion to Christianity, and the endowment of religious communities.⁴⁰ A net effect was the extension of arable at the expense of pasture, undermining pastoral transhumance regimes and drawing livestock closer to settlements. The symptoms may be seen in the construction of droveway and paddock complexes,⁴¹ and in the keeping of more animals to an older age, requiring overwintering and facilitating their increasing use for secondary products.⁴²

In a more abstractly conceptualized and forcefully stated study, Oosthuizen argues that the long eighth century was the period when settlement nucleation and the later medieval system of open fields held in severalty emerged.⁴³ Crucial to her case are the concepts of ‘common pool resources’ – exclusive groups of co-owners sharing equitable bundles of property rights – and ‘common property regimes’ (CPrRs) – the collective institutions governing them. She distinguishes between narrow CPrRs, in which co-owners share but manage their shares independently, and wide CPrRs, in

³⁸ McKerracher, *Farming Transformed*, pp. 94-109. See also his ‘Landscapes of Production in Mid Saxon England: the monumental grain ovens’, *Medieval Settlement Research*, 29 (2014), pp. 82-5, and ‘Bread and Surpluses: the Anglo-Saxon “bread wheat thesis” reconsidered’, *Environmental Archaeology*, 21:1 (2016), pp. 88-102.

³⁹ *Ibid.* pp. 110-16.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.* pp. 117-25.

⁴¹ *Ibid.* pp. 69-93.

⁴² *Ibid.* pp. 49-68. See also his ‘Saving the Bacon? Reflections on the Anglo-Saxon Pig’, *Association for Environmental Archaeology Newsletter*, 134 (2016), pp. 4-9.

⁴³ This builds on some of her recent work: S. Oosthuizen, ‘The Anglo-Saxon Kingdom of Mercia and the Origins and Distribution of Common Fields’, *Agricultural History Review*, 55:2 (2007), pp. 153-80; and S. Oosthuizen, ‘Medieval Field Systems and Settlement Nucleation: common or separate origins?’, in Higham, *Landscape Archaeology of Anglo-Saxon England*, pp. 107-31.

which co-owners manage their shares cooperatively.⁴⁴ This is the distinction between the common lands of the laws of Ine, where each freeman (*ceorl*) seems to enclose and cultivate his own share, and the open field system, in which the co-owners collectively cultivate all the strips in each common field. This distinction enables Oosthuizen to argue for the existence of narrow CPrRs from prehistory to the early middle ages, because of evidence for open fields, strips, and common pastures.⁴⁵ She suggests that the concept of CPrRs makes some long-term continuities likely, because they depend on orally preserved systems in which everyone knows the rules.⁴⁶ Nonetheless, she identifies innovations in lordship in the long eighth century, which developed across Carolingian Continental Europe, including under the kings of the Merccians, and resulted in settlement nucleation and a shift towards wide CPrRs, even if this tended to occur in regions with ‘Romanised traditions of landownership, a long history of grain production, and continuity of cultivation across the fifth, sixth and seventh centuries’.⁴⁷ These innovations include careful management of inland and leased demesne; the expansion of cultivation through use of the heavy mould-board plough, careful crop choices, and attention to soil fertility; investment in infrastructure such as watermills; and specialized industry focused on salt, wool, flax, and iron, to facilitate production and exchange.⁴⁸

All three books are impressive in marshaling approaches and evidence from different disciplines to make their cases, and will be essential reading. In combination, they

⁴⁴ Oosthuizen, *Tradition and Transformation*, pp. 1-5.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.* pp. 17-86, 153-76.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.* pp. 10-14.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.* pp. 89-151, 177-196, quotation at 186.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.* pp. 111-39.

highlight the challenges our evidence poses for attempts to demonstrate widespread chronological change.

An initial challenge is conceptual: we need to agree on workable definitions of the specie under analysis. What constitutes a ‘farm’, a ‘nucleated settlement’, or a ‘planned settlement’, and what are the different types of agricultural regime that may be attached to them? Banham and Faith observe many different types of ‘farms’ and ‘farming’ – from the more widespread and familiar *tuns*, *bys*, and *throps/thorps*, to the coastal and riverine *hamms*, *egs* and *wereads/werods/werds*, or woodland *leahs* and *felds*, and chalk downland and moorland *wordīgs*.⁴⁹ Whether or not the precise form of a settlement or its agricultural regime directly correlated with the names applied, this reveals substantial variations in contemporary perception and we may need to divest ourselves of the term ‘farm’ and seek more precise terms and definitions. Similarly, we may need to be clearer when a ‘farm’ or group of ‘farms’ becomes ‘nucleated’ or ‘planned’: McKerracher and Oosthuizen employ these adjectives without much comment,⁵⁰ whereas John Blair has since argued that, though some earlier excavated settlements were laid out by surveyors, no excavated settlements from England were ‘nucleated’ or ‘planned’ before the eleventh century.⁵¹ In thinking about the relationship between a ‘farm’ and its agricultural regime, Oosthuizen replaces the language of ‘open fields’, ‘common fields’, and ‘convertible husbandry’ with the distinction between narrow and wide CPrRs, but this abstraction may not do justice to the distinctiveness of individual regimes.

⁴⁹ Banham and Faith, *Anglo-Saxon Farms and Farming*, p. 170 (with 166-7, Fig. 7.2), 175-83 (with 176, Fig. 7.6), 206-17, 232-5, 246-57, 265-8.

⁵⁰ McKerracher, *Farming Transformed*, pp. 25-6, 33-42; Oosthuizen, *Tradition and Transformation*, pp. 89-92, 96-106.

⁵¹ Blair, *Building Anglo-Saxon England*, pp. 143-56, 294-302, 317-24, 408-15.

Irrespective of how we resolve this issue of definition, there remains a separate challenge: establishing the chronological relationships between phenomena and their universality. The classic archaeological approach is excavation and stratigraphy, but the excavations at the deserted Medieval village of Wharram Percy (Yorks.) illustrate the degrees of precision for which we can be hope. A mid-Saxon (c. 630-850) 'Butterwick-type' settlement comprised curvilinear enclosures with occasional post-built and sunken-featured buildings associated with metalwork, bone, and ceramic finds.⁵² This was replaced by a later 'planned' settlement of two rows of tofts and crofts, a mill, a burial ground, and a church. The 'planned' settlement may have its origins between 850 and 950, because the distribution of finds begins to concentrate on the area of the 'planned' settlement, and radio-carbon dates suggest the churchyard burials began 940-95 at 95% probability. Yet stratigraphically it can only be shown that the scarp of the West Row tofts and some associated broad ridge-and-furrow pre-date c. 1180, since they were ignored by a new manorial focus (*curia*).⁵³ Settlement shift, settlement planning, and common fields could have occurred at one moment in time or not, and the question of when common fields held in severalty but worked cooperatively predominated across the township remains open to debate, and Wharram may not be representative of wider trends, because it was part of a Chalk Wolds landscape used for pastoral transhumance probably from the Bronze Age

⁵² G. Milne and J.D. Richards (eds), *Two Anglo-Saxon Buildings and Associated Finds*, Wharram: A Study of Settlement on the Wolds, VII (York, 1992); P. A. Stamper and R. A. Croft (eds), *The South Manor Area*, Wharram: A Study of Settlement on the Yorkshire Wolds, VIII (York, 2000), pp. 27-37, 60-100, 101-64; P. Rahtz and L. Watts (eds), *The North Manor Area and North West Enclosure*, Wharram: A Study of Settlement on the Yorkshire Wolds, IX (York, 2004), pp. 35-103, esp. 66-73; S. Mays, C. Harding and C. Heighway (eds), *The Churchyard*, Wharram: A Study of Settlement on the Yorkshire Wolds, Vol. IX (York, 2007), pp. 20-39, 65-70; S. Wrathmell (ed.), *A History of Wharram Percy and its Neighbours*, Wharram: A Study of Settlement on the Wolds, XIII (York, 2012), pp. 23-54, 163-79, 196-220.

⁵³ Wrathmell, *A History of Wharram Percy*, pp. 39-41, 202-6.

onwards with its own particular history.⁵⁴ Taking a larger sample of excavated sites and their bioarchaeological assemblages, McKerracher puts together a strong case for the date and agricultural regimes on a number of roughly contemporaneous ‘farms’, but dating brackets remain relatively wide and the sample is small in comparison to the number of ‘farms’ once in existence.

In shifting perspective from the micro to the macro, alternative approaches lose precision. When Williamson, Liddiard, and Partida analyzed Northamptonshire as a whole, they replaced a single excavation and its stratigraphy with an impressively comprehensive study of all settlements in all townships, bringing greater certainty about statistical trends and the relationship of a landscape type to a particular settlement type and its agricultural regime. Nevertheless, work at this scale requires assumptions about the relationship between spreads of material from field walking and deductions about the evolution of villages from later morphology.⁵⁵ Oosthuizen takes as comprehensive an approach as possible to excavated sites from prehistory to the early middle ages. This leads her to infer the existence of more-or-less ‘nucleated’ settlements and cooperative agriculture across a long time frame, but leaves insufficient space to provide the detail from any particular site. Stephen Rippon, Chris Smart and Ben Pears have made this point in relation to the evidence cited for fields and common pastures.⁵⁶ To develop the point with reference to settlements, we can focus arbitrarily on three sites familiar to me: Whitby, Hartlepool, and Wharram Percy. To furnish examples for the origins of planned settlements in the mid Saxon

⁵⁴ C. Fenton-Thomas, *Late Prehistoric and Early Historic Landscapes on the Yorkshire Chalk*, British Archaeological Reports, British Series 350 (Oxford, 2003); M. Giles, *A Forged Glamour: Landscape, Identity and Material Culture in the Iron Age* (Bollington, 2012); Wrathmell, *A History of Wharram Percy*, pp. 63-112, 180-195.

⁵⁵ Williamson, Liddiard and Partida, *Champion*, pp. 74-126.

⁵⁶ Rippon, Smart, and Pears, *The Fields of Britannia*, pp. 320-8.

period, Oosthuizen states that ‘planned towns were set out alongside the newly founded royal abbeys at Whitby (Yorks.) and Hartlepool (Cleve.)’ and that ‘At Wharram Percy (Yorks.) an eighth- or ninth-century nucleated settlement that may have included an estate centre and other buildings was inserted into a pre-existing layout provided by Romano-British fields’.⁵⁷ An interim report on the Whitby excavations – published after Oosthuizen’s study – notes the existence of two rectangular hall-like buildings, some post-built rectangular structures, and some wells, pits, ditches and gullies: these features may all relate to the religious community and are insufficient to identify a planned town.⁵⁸ The final excavation report for Hartlepool is not cited, which interprets the remains as distinct parts of a religious community (church, abbess’ lodging, male and female communities and cemeteries, guesthouse, and craft area) with no mention of a planned settlement or town.⁵⁹ The discussion of Wharram Percy above illustrates the complexity underlying Oosthuizen’s brief summary. To criticize by picking out three minor cases in such a rich study of settlement archaeology would be, dare I say, *ceorlisc*: to the contrary, these instances are raised to exemplify the inherent difficulties in pursuing a much-needed analysis of this type at this scale.

A third problem is more intractable still and brings us around full circle to Hoskins and *The Making of the English Landscape*: what collective term should we use in writing about these early medieval ‘farms’ and their agricultural regimes?⁶⁰ If

⁵⁷ Oosthuizen, *Tradition and Transformation*, p. 102.

⁵⁸ T. Wilmott, ‘The Anglian Abbey of Streonaeshalch – Whitby: New Perspectives on Topography and Layout’, *Anglo-Saxon Studies in Archaeology and History*, 20 (2017), pp. 81-94.

⁵⁹ R. Daniels, *Anglo-Saxon Hartlepool and the Foundation of English Christianity: An archaeology of the Anglo-Saxon Monastery*, Tees Archaeology Monograph Series 3 (Hartlepool, 2007).

⁶⁰ Compare S. Reynolds, ‘What do we mean by “Anglo-Saxon” and “Anglo-Saxons”?’’, *Journal of British Studies*, 24:4 (1985), pp. 395-414.

we are sampling areas from Britain in a period that includes indigenous Britons and Old English or Old Norse speaking migrants, living in social and political communities of variable scales, depending on the time and locale, and we are unsure how typical the patterns are, or what relationships they have to social, cultural, or political change, should we write about Anglo-Saxon ‘farms’ or ‘farming’, or even ‘farms’ or ‘farming’ in Anglo-Saxon England? Like Peter Fowler or Stephen Rippon we might opt simply for ‘farms’ or ‘farming’ in early medieval Britain. A straightforward geographical locus makes no assumptions about the extent to which the evidence is typical, or about its relationship to a particular language group, its social structures, or its ethnic identity. Yet this might result in a division between those who study agricultural regimes and those who study social and political organization or cultural identities. Of course, we know that these collective terms are shorthand for study of the area that became England in the later tenth century with a focus on the time period from *c.* 400 to *c.* 1066. We know too that they serve in some disciplines to mark off the evidence from other periods and regions. We also employ them to make books recognizable to readers. But use of the terms ‘Anglo-Saxon’ and ‘England’ in these contexts seems, subconsciously, to reflect the baggage of our nineteenth-century historical frameworks. Despite the variety, or the acknowledgement that we have a small and unrepresentative sample, it encourages us to look for universal trends within a larger territory that only demonstrably shared a language of administration, political institutions, and perhaps an ethnic identity, at a relatively late date; and it encourages us to think that those patterns and that region were somehow historically connected. To make such connections, even unconsciously, risks participating in the search for English exceptionalism, or superiority, rooted in economic patterns, which has been going on since the twelfth

century.⁶¹ It also invites us to ignore the possibility that variety within what became England influenced long-term political developments. Such issues are independent of, but amplified by, concerns about the contemporary resonances of the phrase Anglo-Saxon.⁶²

One solution to this problem is to turn the question on its head. Instead of assuming the existence of Anglo-Saxon ‘farms’ or Anglo-Saxon ‘farming’, we can ask how farming in early medieval Britain contributed to the development of social, political, and cultural identities – not ‘what was Anglo-Saxon farming’, but ‘how did farming make the English (or the Cymru/ Welsh, or the Picts or Scots)’? This approach complements the direction of a lot of existing work. The three books already discussed include implicit contributions to this approach, and Allen Frantzen’s pursues it more explicitly. Farming had a role in determining the status of local kin groups, the emergence of local and regional communities, the formation of peoples and kingdoms, and the successful expansion of some kingdoms over others. In parallel to all of these processes, farming may also have influenced the development of a shared Old English language, culture, and identity.

Medievalists have long been sensitive to the importance of the mode of production in framing class, status, authority, and power: within those tributary modes where surplus is taken as rent, the quality and productivity of the land and the relative ability to control it may be the key to social and political organization.⁶³ Amongst the Old English speaking peoples, the basic unit of society was the free peasant (*ceorl*),

⁶¹ J. Gillingham, *The English in the Twelfth Century: Imperialism, National Identity, and Political Values* (Woodbridge, 2000); R. R. Davies, *The First English Empire Power and Identity in the British Isles 1093-1343* (Oxford, 2002).

⁶² M. Wood, ‘As a racism row rumbles on, is it time to retire the term “Anglo-Saxon”?’ , *BBC History Magazine* (December 2019), pp. 10-12.

⁶³ C. Wickham, *Framing the Early Middle Ages* (Oxford, 2005).

his household (*hid*, *hiwisc*, *hiwscipe*), and the land that supported that household: this was the basis for freedom, social status, and lordship. Putting Bede's statement that the *hid* was the English way of reckoning alongside the laws of Ine and our earliest diplomas, it is justifiable to reconstruct a neat, orderly, universal world across the earliest Old English speaking peoples in which a free peasant (*ceorl*) was equated with 1 household and a noble (*eorl*) with 5 households.⁶⁴ Nevertheless, since Maitland it has been acknowledged that the household was a notional unit of subsistence and that the quality of the land helped to determine its extent. Beneath this veneer, Banham and Faith reconstruct a more textured reality – an archipelago of different types of 'farms' operating different agricultural regimes on different scales in different landscapes, producing a more fine-grained differentiation between households. Such differences must have influenced the emergence of local and regional communities, and the definition of core territories. Whilst aspects of this influence have been noted in various ways, there is still a history to be written that fully integrates the diversity Banham and Faith describe into our narratives of social, political, and cultural development.

Free peasant households apparently formed local or regional communities of two types. First, a group of households subject to a lord, providing dues and services in return for leadership; these groups are sometimes later fossilized as a royal vill (Latin *villa regia*) with a surrounding tribute territory (Latin *regio*), associated with a folk name (Old English 'x + *ingas*, 'sons, people, followers of x').⁶⁵ Second, a group of households participating in regional legal assemblies, where lawmen presided over

⁶⁴ Charles-Edwards, 'Kinship, Status and the Origins of the Hide', pp. 3-15.

⁶⁵ S. Bassett, 'In Search of the Origins of Anglo-Saxon Kingdoms', in S. Bassett (ed.), *The Origins of Anglo-Saxon Kingdoms* (London, 1989), pp. 3-27, esp. 17-23; G. Molyneux, *The Formation of the English Kingdom in the Tenth Century* (Oxford, 2015), pp. 98-104.

customary and collective oral laws.⁶⁶ It has long been recognized that agricultural cooperation may lie behind the formation of local and regional communities – from Stephen Bassett’s reconstruction of the *regio* of the *Stoppingas*, the ‘people of the bucket-shaped hollow’, as the drainage basin of the River Alne,⁶⁷ to the classic studies of the lathes of Kent by Alan Everitt and Stuart Brookes,⁶⁸ the peoples of early medieval Surrey by John Blair,⁶⁹ or the transhumance territories of the Yorkshire Wolds by Stuart Wrathmell.⁷⁰ By the later tenth century, there was a network of administrative assemblies known as hundreds and wapentakes, whose origins may also lie in agricultural cooperation: Banham and Faith point out how much of the business of these assemblies was associated with managing and marketing livestock.⁷¹ George Molyneaux has recently argued that King Edgar (r. 957/9-959) introduced a new administrative system focused on these assemblies, which was responsible for the crystallization of a kingdom of the English, an *Engla-lond*, and a collective English identity.⁷²

Though there are notable exceptions, it is often argued that Britons and Old English speaking migrants lived alongside one another in the fifth and sixth centuries, but that the Old English language and ‘Germanic’ culture predominated. At a local level, we might consider ways of connecting this process with the diversity of ‘farms’

⁶⁶ Lambert, *Law and Order*, pp. 27-62.

⁶⁷ S. Bassett, ‘Boundaries of Knowledge: Mapping the Land Units of Late Anglo-Saxon and Norman England’, in W. Davies, G. Halsall and A. Reynolds (eds), *People and Space in the Middle Ages 300-1300* (Turnhout, 2006), pp. 115-42.

⁶⁸ A. Everitt, *Continuity and Colonization: The Evolution of Kentish Settlement* (Leicester, 1986); S. Brookes, ‘Population Ecology and Multiple Estate Formation: The Evidence from Eastern Kent’, in Higham, *Landscape Archaeology of Anglo-Saxon England*, pp. 65-82.

⁶⁹ J. Blair, *Early Medieval Surrey: Landholding, Church and Settlement Before 1300* (Stroud, 1991).

⁷⁰ Wrathmell, *A History of Wharham Percy*, pp. 82-96, 180-95.

⁷¹ Banham and Faith, *Anglo-Saxon Farms and Farming*, pp. 158-62.

⁷² Molyneaux, *Formation of the English Kingdom*.

and agricultural regimes which Banham and Faith observe: did groups prioritizing Old English operate ‘farms’ of high productivity or which were focal in wider agricultural landscapes, making it attractive for the population of a wider landscape to prioritize their language, identity, and culture? At a regional level, we might pursue more vigorously the suggestions from Wendy Davies and Hayo Vierck to Nick Higham and Brian Roberts that there were optimal agricultural regions with especially valuable resources that formed the core territories of emerging peoples and kingdoms:⁷³ did the further spread of the Old English language and ‘Germanic’ culture result from some wealthier households extending lordship over their neighbours? At a supra-regional level we might consider further Tom Williamson’s observation that the mid sixth-century regional culture zones with associated ethnic identities recorded by Bede – the Angles and Saxons – reflect the watersheds of the major eastward draining river systems:⁷⁴ did the construction of these supra-regional identities result from economic cooperation and exchange within these drainage systems? Undoubtedly we will all need to think about John Blair’s recent argument that shifting agricultural regimes might produce shifting centres of political power: were the agricultural transformations of the long eighth century the reason for the shift from Northumbrian to Mercian overlordship, as the Mercians found themselves in a prime position to dominate the exchange networks connecting eastern and

⁷³ W. Davies and H. Vierck, ‘The Contexts of the Tribal Hidage: Social Aggregates and Settlement Patterns’, *Frümittelalterliche Studien*, 8 (1974), pp. 223-93; N. Higham, ‘Landscape and Land-Use in Northern England: A Survey of Agricultural Potential c. 500 B. C. – A. D. 1000’, *Landscape History*, 9 (1987), pp. 35-44; B. K. Roberts, ‘Northumbrian Origins and Post-Roman Continuity: An Exploration’, in R. Collins and L. Allason-Jones (eds), *Finds from the Frontier: Material Culture in the 4th-5th Centuries* (York, 2010), pp. 120-32.

⁷⁴ T. Williamson, ‘The Environmental Contexts of Anglo-Saxon Settlement’, in Higham, *Landscape Archaeology of Anglo-Saxon England*, pp. 133-56, at 145-54.

western economic zones?⁷⁵ Ultimately, we should try to substantiate or refute George Molyneaux's suggestion that the eventual success of the Cerdicing kings of the West Saxons in constructing an English kingdom was partly a function of their superiority in land and moveable wealth:⁷⁶ do the tenth-century farms and their agricultural regimes in the Cerdicing kingdom support this idea?

Whatever answers we find to these questions, we will also need to consider how the diversity in production and consumption influenced the particularities of the Old English language and its associated culture. Here Allen Frantzen's book provides a valuable starting point. His is a study of 'the relationship of food to objects and words for these objects' in Old English. To frame his investigation he borrows ideas from network theory and sets out to consider food networks of all types, resulting in nodes of greater or lesser density. The assumption is that the exchange and consumption of things constructs social and cultural associations and thereby identities. After establishing the semantic field – the range of words associated with food – he considers the relationship between the materiality and meaning of food objects through attention to quernstones, pots, and iron and wood utensils. Then he turns to the relationship between economic, social, and cultural change, and developments in the social organization of exchange and consumption, through analysis of food officers, legal regimes, and fasting. By doing so he brings together material and textual culture in a way that suggests two broader conclusions. First, that production, exchange, and consumption resulted in a society with some shared cultural identities, best exemplified through a language with a particular lexis for food drawn from experience. Second, that production, exchange, and consumption also resulted in a society marked by cultural particularities, which were based on food

⁷⁵ Blair, *Building Anglo-Saxon England*, pp. 179-231.

⁷⁶ Molyneaux, *Formation of the English Kingdom*, pp. 48-85.

networks with more or less dense nodes that were exclusive to some parts of that society. Here is a stimulating reminder that the English and England did not make an English landscape, but the landscape of farming in early medieval Britain had a crucial role in making the English.