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Life on the Edge:
Social, Political and Religious Frontiers in
Early Medieval Europe

Neue Studien zur Sachsenforschung Band 6

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By Babette Ludowici

Life on the Edge: Social, Political and Religious Frontiers in Early Medieval Europe

Edited by Sarah Semple, Celia Orsini and Sian Mui

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Preface

The sixth volume of the series 'Neue Studien zur Sachsenforschung' presents 36 papers presented originally at the 63rd Internationales Sachsensymposion, held in St John's College at Durham University, from the 1st to 6th of September 2012. These proceedings have been published with the Braunschweigisches Landesmuseum and the Internationales Sachsensymposion.

The theme of the conference 'Life on the Edge: Social Political and Religious Frontiers in Early Medieval Europe', was stimulated by the situation of Durham in the ancient kingdom of Northumbria. Formed from a series of smaller British polities in the 7th century, this political unit, at its greatest extent, reached from the Irish to the North Sea and from the River Humber north to the Firth of Forth, now in Scotland. It brought together British and Anglo-Saxon communities, but also at times encompassed Pictish populations. To the south, the kingdom spanned the old Roman frontier, and its legacy of fortifications, some of which continued in active use in the 5th and perhaps even 6th centuries. This frontier continued to exert an influence on the early medieval populations of the region, and Hadrian's Wall, the stone-built limit of Britannia, ultimately came to form a building medium for some of the remarkable early Christian churches and sculptures that survive in northern England today.

As a result of Roman and Romano-British legacies, cultural exchanges and contacts with Irish and North Sea communities, and conflicts and political alliances with British and Pictish territories, the region offers a unique landscape in which to consider issues of politics and identity in early medieval society. This gave rise to the conference theme, with the hope that members might contribute papers that touched on liminality, frontiers and boundaries, centres and peripheries and borderlands, as well as stylistic, artistic, linguistic and cultural divides. In total 42 members and invited speakers presented at Durham, with six poster presentations. Although not all participants chose to publish in the volume, this proceedings represents a rich and varied repertoire of papers that capture the temporal and geographic breadth of the event.

The articles included range widely, dealing with archaeology, art, and at times written sources, and cover the 1st to the 13th centuries AD. Geographically the papers touch on sites and finds from Britain and Scotland, Germany, the Netherlands, Denmark, Sweden, Norway and Poland. Articles

encompass many topics, including exchange at the North Sea edge, the building of linear divisions and defences, central places and production, religious transition, cultural borders, burial and identity, and the limits between real and imagined worlds. A number of invited participants and contributors also provide a specialist view of northern mainland Britain, focussed on key political and religious transitions and important discoveries of sites and objects.

The conference organising committee comprised Sarah Semple, Becky Gowland, Richard Gameson, John Henry Clay and David Petts (all Durham University), who were ably guided by the Internationales Sachsensymposion UK Co-ordinating Committee: Charlotte Behr, John Hines and Chris Scull. In addition the event was made possible by the hard work of a group of Durham doctoral student volunteers: Jocelyn Baker, Brian Buchanan, Lisa Brundle, Celia Orsini and Tudor Skinner.

An important feature of the Durham meeting was the attendance of a group of Polish members, whose papers appear here under Section III. Space, Place, Frontiers and Borders. It seems apt that our conference on frontiers witnessed the bringing together of scholars working on early medieval archaeology in northern and eastern Europe. Another distinctive provision was funding from the Internationales Sachsensymposion, Durham University and Durham's Institute for Medieval and Early Modern Studies, to support scholarships for PhD students and early career researchers, allowing them attend and present their work. As a consequence this volume includes articles by number of new researchers from different countries.

During the conference, an excursion was made to some of the key sites in Northumberland and County Durham: to Holy Island, Lindisfarne, to see the site of the early Christian monastic community, the surviving sculptures and the medieval priory; to Bamburgh Castle, a seat of power from late prehistory, through to the Viking and Norman periods; to Yeavering or Gefrin, a central place and site of royal power and conversion in the 6th to 7th centuries AD; and to the Anglo-Saxon church at Escomb, Co Durham. The organising committee would like to thank Historic England for facilitating access to the exhibition at Lindisfarne, and David Petts for site tours of the abbey. Thanks are due to Graeme Young for the tour of the Bamburgh excavations, Eric Cambridge for introducing conference participants to Escomb, and The Gefrin Trust for an on-site tour of Yeavering and the

exhibition, coffee and traditional Northumbrian tart served up at Kirknewton Village Hall.

This volume is edited by Sarah Semple, Celia Orsini and Sian Mui, and we are grateful for the goodwill and patience of authors, and their willingness to publish in English. Authors worked hard to meet the conference theme and the articles presented here are split into sections, to reinforce the connections and synergies between papers. An introduction to the volume comments on key common findings. The papers represent the state of study in 2013 when most contributions were submitted for publication, but many authors took the opportunity to update their articles in 2015–16. This is a double peer-reviewed volume, a process which takes time, but has significantly strengthened the cogency of the book, making it an original contribution to current thinking on the theme of social, religious and political frontiers in early medieval Europe.

The editors would like to thank Alejandra Gutiérrez for typesetting the volume, Babette Ludowici for assistance throughout the production process and Tina Jakob for assisting with translation. The conference was made possible through funding from the Internationales Sachsensymposium, the Department of Archaeology and the Institute of Medieval and

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Abstract

Life on the Edge: Social Political and Religious Frontiers in Early Medieval Europe brings together articles from specialists from across eight countries. Resulting from the 63rd meeting of the Sachsensymposium in Durham in 2012, this volume takes its inspiration from the position of this city close to the Roman frontier, and its instrumental role in the development of early Northumbria. The 7th-century kingdom of Northumbria at times united British, Anglo-Saxon and Pictish populations. To the south, it spanned the old Roman frontier and its legacy of fortifications; to the north, it stretched into modern Scotland. As a consequence Northumbria offers a unique landscape in which to consider issues of frontiers and boundaries, centres and peripheries, and the kinds of events, allegiances, political and religious changes, that helped shape the northern European early medieval identity. Articles deal with archaeology, art, and at times written sources, and cover the 1st to the 13th centuries AD. Geographically the papers touch on sites and finds from England and Scotland, Germany, the Netherlands, Denmark, Sweden, Norway and Poland. Articles encompass topics including: trade and exchange at the North Sea edge; the building of linear divisions and defences; central places and production; the delimitation of settlements; religious transition; cultural borders; burial and identity; and the limits between real and imagined worlds.

Zusammenfassung

Leben am Rande: Sozialpolitische und religiöse Grenzen im Europa des Frühmittelalters (Life on the Edge: Social Political and Religious Frontiers in Early Medieval Europe) vereint Beiträge von Fachleuten aus acht verschiedenen Ländern. Dieser Band, der aus dem 63. Treffen des Sachsensymposiums in Durham 2012 resultiert, erhält seine Inspiration aus der Lage der Stadt nahe der römischen Grenze und ihrer bedeutenden Rolle in der Entwicklung des frühen Northumbrias. Das Königreich des 7. Jahrhunderts vereinte zeitweise die britische, angelsächsische und piktische Bevölkerungen. Im Süden umfasste es die alte römische Grenze und seine hinterlassenen Befestigungen, im Norden erstreckte sich das Reich bis in das heutige Schottland. Infolgedessen hat Northumbria eine einzigartige Landschaft zu bieten, in der Fragen zu Grenzen und Begrenzungen, Zentren und Peripherien, sowie Ereignissen, Allianzen, politische und religiöse Veränderungen, die halfen die Identität des frühmittelalterlichen Europas zu prägen, gestellt werden können. Die Beiträge befassen sich mit Archäologie, Kunst, und gelegentlich Schriftquellen und umfassen zeitlich das 1.-13. nachchristliche Jahrhundert. Geographisch betrachtet gehen die Beiträge auf Fundstellen und Funde aus England und Schottland, Deutschland, den Niederlanden, Dänemark, Schweden, Norwegen und Polen ein. Thematisch befassen sich die Beiträge mit Handel und Gütertausch am Rande der Nordsee, dem Bau von linearen Begrenzungen und Befestigungen, Zentralorten und Produktion, der Abgrenzung von Siedlungen, religiösen Überritten, kulturellen Grenzen, Begräbnis und Identität, und den Grenzen zwischen der realen und imaginären Welten.

Résumé

Life on the Edge: Social Political and Religious Frontiers in Early Medieval Europe rassemble les contributions d'archéologues spécialistes du haut Moyen Âge de huit pays différents. Ce volume est né de leurs échanges lors de la 63^e rencontre du Sachsensymposium à Durham en 2012. La proximité de la ville de Durham avec le mur d'Hadrien et son rôle dans le développement du royaume de Northumbrie, a inspiré le thème de cet ouvrage. Ce royaume rassemble et unit, durant le 7^e siècle, des populations bretonnes, anglo-saxonne et pictes. Au Sud, il comprend l'ancienne frontière romaine et l'ensemble de ces monuments et forts ; au Nord, il s'étend jusqu'en Écosse. Sa diversité et sa topographie créent un paysage unique qui s'adapte particulièrement bien à l'étude des frontières et des marges, des centres et des périphéries, et en outre, à l'étude des transformations sociales, politiques et religieuses, qui participent à la création de l'identité des groupes sociaux du haut Moyen Âge dans le nord de l'Europe. Dans cet ouvrage, différentes disciplines se côtoient pour répondre à ces questions, à partir des données archéologiques, de l'histoire de l'art et des sources écrites du 1^{er} au 13^e siècle de notre ère. Au niveau géographique, les articles portent sur les sites et les objets d'Angleterre, d'Écosse, d'Allemagne, des Pays-Bas, du Danemark, de Suède, de Norvège et de Pologne. Les discussions portent : sur les échanges autour de la Mer du Nord, les divisions internes des bâtiments et des habitats, les systèmes de défenses, les lieux de pouvoir et de production, les transitions religieuses, les tombes et les questions d'identité, les limites des cadres culturels et les limites entre les mondes du réelle et de l'imaginaire.

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Gateways, Gates and *gatu*: Liminal Spaces at the Centre of Things

John Baker and Stuart Brookes

In Anglo-Saxon England, many of the processes of governance were carried out at open-air assembly sites. At least from the 10th century, meetings of districts known as hundreds or wapentakes took place every four weeks, commonly at outdoor locations, and involved all freemen of the district (LIEBERMANN 1903, 192–94; LOYN 1984; WHITELOCK 1979, 429–30). Other kinds of assembly also met periodically and outdoors, such as gatherings of the *witan*, and ecclesiastical councils (LOYN 1974; CUBITT 1995).

There are a number of indications that the locations for Anglo-Saxon assembly sites were very deliberately chosen based on a range of considerations, including grounds of accessibility and natural monumentality (BAKER and BROOKES 2015). One feature of their positioning is proximity to boundaries. Gelling (1978, 210) noted that a sort of ‘no-man’s land’ was the typical location for such assembly places and Pantos (2003) demonstrated that a statistically significant proportion of the hundred meeting-places in the English midlands were indeed situated within 200 m of modern parish boundaries. In her detailed study, Pantos (2003, 43–48) suggested several possible explanations: the natural neutrality of boundary locations; the ideological importance of sites on the edge of settlement areas and on features such as rivers, which often form divisions between political and administrative units; and the communality of locales through which boundaries now run, but which in earlier times may have been a kind of ‘every-man’s land’ rather than a ‘no-man’s land’. This paper aims to explore this paradox that might be termed liminal centrality, making use of the results from a three-year research project, *Landscapes of Governance*, which has examined the landscape setting of Anglo-Saxon assembly sites in detail. The project has used a wide range of sources and systematic site visits to identify and characterise sites of assembly, mapping their locations within the hundredal geography of 11th-century England (BAKER et al. 2011; BROOKES and REYNOLDS 2011; BAKER and BROOKES 2013; 2014).

Reconstruction of the administrative districts of Anglo-Saxon England is imperfect — relying, as it does, on a number of retrogressive assumptions; but the existence of territories at a variety of scales by the 10th century indicates that communities were by then separated into a number of definable supra-local political groupings: hundreds or wapentakes, burghal territories and ecclesiastical dioceses,

shires and kingdoms. The location of many assembly sites on the borders of these territorial divisions leads to two reasonable assumptions: first, that these places had a crucial role in bringing people from neighbouring territories together, enabling dialogue, mediation, exchange, communication and knowledge transfer; and second, that these neighbouring territories together constituted parts of larger political groupings for whom governance was enabled by such gatherings. Examination of assembly sites within their territories can therefore facilitate the exploration of the cadastre of political groups at a variety of spatial and temporal scales, and be used to propose some interpretation of their functions.

Assembly places and boundaries

The characteristic of being in some way geographically peripheral, but administratively central, is most clearly observed in the occurrence of assembly places on later parish boundaries. Whatever the date at which these parish boundaries became fossilised as linear features, they presumably dissected borderland zones existing between neighbouring communities; those locations furthest from the parish church (say) and/or topographically and economically marginal to places of settlement. Indeed often these zones are recorded later in the medieval period as areas of shared common land, perhaps preserving some form of older relationship. It is clear, however, that marginality was not perceived to be a defining characteristic of assembly sites that coincided with such zones; in no instance is a hundred clearly named from the boundary location of its meeting place. Rather it seems likely that these boundaries divided communities living within larger territories (perhaps constituting some form of political entity) which shared the use of the meeting-place.

The two cases that might be argued to provide onomastic evidence for the liminal location of meeting-places on closer inspection probably do not. The hundred-name *Mersete* in Shropshire might contain Old English (*ge*)*mære* ‘boundary’, but in a group-name compound with Old English *sæte*, hence ‘the border-dwellers’. So it is not a reference to the location of the meeting place on boundaries, but the position of the wider district and its people on the Anglo-Welsh frontier (other interpretations of the name are possible) (ANDERSON

1934, 155; BAKER 2015). The later medieval hundred-name Marden in Kent, might also derive from Old English (*ge*)*mære*, with *denn* 'woodland pasture'; but the first element could as easily be Old English *mere* 'mare', *mere* 'pool', or a personal name **Mære* (WALLENBERG 1934, 314; ANDERSON 1939b, 125; EKWALL 1960, 314; WATTS 2004, 397). In any case, it is clear that peripheral location was not a defining feature of hundred meeting-places in the minds of name-givers.

This observation strengthens Pantos' belief that there was a functional quality to these locations that made them both appropriate for assembly and for the sub-division of communities. The decisions taken at open-air assemblies needed to be consensual and transparent, and therefore a location on neutral ground where unbiased decisions might be reached may have been especially desirable (PANTOS 2003, 47). Such a requirement might have been met by land central to the hundred such as on an area of communal pasture, which was only later apportioned between parishes comprising the hundred. Equally it might have led to the positioning of meetings at sites that were off-centre or even peripheral to the district, but were equally accessible to most members due to favourable transportation links. On the other hand, some peripheral meeting-places might have been chosen by central government, for the convenience of officials rather than local people (BAKER and BROOKES 2015). Even in these cases, at least in the eyes of officials, neighbouring groups were often fiscally or legally united.

There are, however, elements of what might be considered boundary-related vocabulary that do make a significant impression on the nomenclature of the English hundreds. One of these is *geat* (plural *gatu*), which means 'a gap' or 'a gate'. This element occurs eight times in Domesday hundred-names, and a further four times in those first recorded after the 11th century. In other words, the meetings of about 1% of Domesday hundreds could be defined by their proximity to gaps or gates. This is a significant proportion, and it is certainly more than coincidence — something about the location of these gates was clearly appropriate for meeting-places too. At least one other instance of a hundred not named from gates but nevertheless meeting in close proximity to an attested *geat* can be cited. An Old English charter (charter number 794, SAWYER 1968), for instance, records the presence of 'high gates' (*æt ðan hean gatan fram þan gatan*) — presumably a gap in the Fleam Dyke — on or adjacent to Mutlow Hill in Cambridgeshire, which was probably the meeting place of Flendish Hundred and perhaps periodically of a larger territory of three or more hundreds (ANDERSON 1934, 100–1; REANEY 1943, 114, 129, 138–41; MEANEY 1993, 77, 83–5, 1997, 236–8). The *ealden fyrd gat* 'old army gate' of a charter for Micheldever (charter number 374, SAWYER 1968), caput of one of the Hampshire hundreds, is also worth noting (ANDERSON 1939a, 188; BAKER and BROOKES 2016, 243).

The locations of gate place-names

That *geat* occurs so frequently in hundred-names is particularly significant when compared with its relative infrequency as the generic in major place-names recorded by the 11th century, where it is found only 20 more times. Even in place-names first recorded in the late-medieval period, *geat* is not common, even though these include the kinds of minor name that are more likely to have been defined by features of local significance only (data based on a search through English Place Name Society county surveys). In general, gates or gaps that gave names to these places seem likely to have been important in some way. These are not, in all likelihood, run-of-the-mill gates; they are, perhaps, gates or gaps that define the transition between one important territory and another. A distribution plot of these names instantly shows their relationship to large territorial units (Fig 1). This discussion makes use primarily of major names (that is to say, names of settlements recorded in or before the Domesday survey), since they are more likely to incorporate references to significant landscape features. Anglo-Saxon charter bounds also preserve a number of instances of *geat*, but these are not treated here systematically since many such gates or gaps were presumably only of local importance — *geat* must also have been used in the Anglo-Saxon period to denote openings in many kinds of fence or small enclosure. Such features may be the points of reference in some minor place-names, even those recorded in late-medieval sources, and for that reason this class of place-name has not been analysed comprehensively here (the element occurs in this context at least 40 times, and it seems likely that further research would reveal many more examples).

At least seven of these major *geat* place-names are located on major political borders: Woodyates (East and West) is 600 m from the Dorset/Hampshire border, Skilgate is 1090 m from the border between Somerset and Devon, Kiftsgate is 1500 m from that of Worcestershire and Gloucestershire; while Biddlesgate (226 m) and Bozeat (1200 m) sit at the junction of three shires — Dorset, Hampshire and Wiltshire, and Northamptonshire, Buckinghamshire and Bedfordshire respectively. Madgett and Wyegate, both in Gloucestershire, stand almost directly on Offa's Dyke. Although first recorded only in the 12th and 13th centuries, Newdigate (Surrey), Rogate (Sussex), Markyate (Hertfordshire), Compton Wyniates (Warwickshire), Symonds Yat (Gloucestershire), and Windgate (Oxfordshire) fall into the same category of *geat* place-names located on or adjacent to shire boundaries. Markyate (Hertfordshire) is close enough to the border with Bedfordshire to suggest that its first element, Old English *mearc* 'boundary' may relate to the shire limits. Of the 55 known *geat* place-names, 12 (22%) lie within 1000 m of a shire boundary.

A number of *geat* place-names are situated at the transition between natural districts, landscapes of markedly differing character, and between land and sea. We should

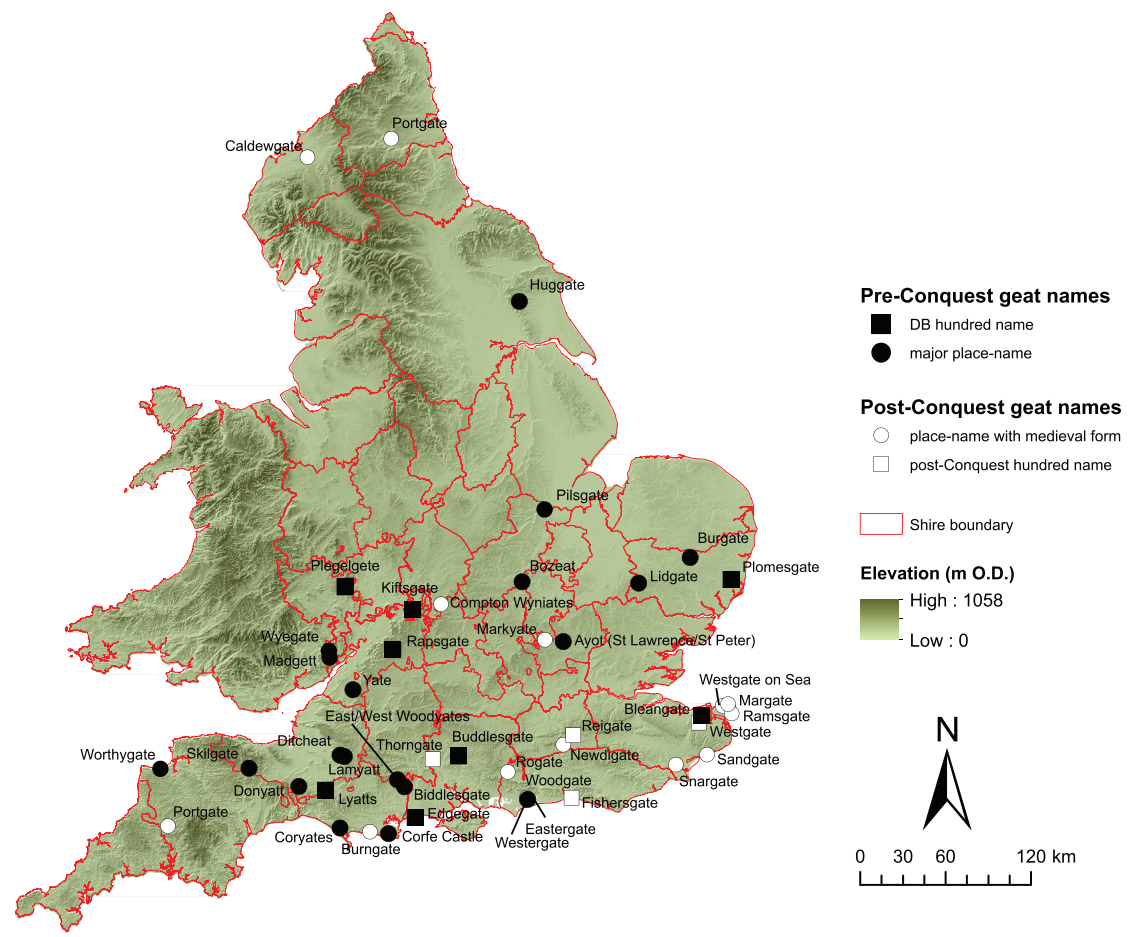


Figure 1. Distribution of *geat* names.

note, for instance, *Corfesgeate* (11 ASC (D); now Corfe Castle), which marks the boundary between Dorset and the Isle of Purbeck. This location is aptly named, marking a distinctive (and dramatic) gap in a long and steep Chalk escarpment, known as the Purbeck Ridge (Fig 2). Similarly Snargate in Kent is on the scarp edge above Romney Marsh and might have been thought of as a portal between marshland resources and the more suitable farmland beyond. Several *geat* names surround the Somerset Levels, including Donyatt, which is right on the margin of Levels and upland, and Lamyatt, whose first element Old English *lamb* 'lamb' suggests a role in the management of pasture (Fig 3). Leziat in Norfolk, the name of which means 'meadow gate', displays similar characteristics, while Warracott in Devon (Old English *weorf* 'cattle'; GOVER et al. 1931–32, 200) and Marriotts in Dorset (Old English *mōr* 'moor, marsh'; MILLS 2010, 194), have names suggesting that they might have been related to movement of livestock or delineation of different landscape types. Woodyates (Dorset) and Woodgate (Sussex), given the meaning of their names, seem likely to have been on the edges of areas of woodland; Bleangate in Kent was the gate

'leading into the old forest of *Blean*' (ANDERSON 1939b, 149). These too are gateways between different types of resource. The most striking transition is probably between land and sea, and Ramsgate, Margate, Sandgate (all Kent), Burngate (Dorset), and Worthygate (Devon) all have coastal locations, as does Fishersgate (Sussex). The latter means 'fisherman's gate', and hints that the significant factor here was not the character of the terrain, but the resources within it, and in the case of the sea that would presumably include traded goods. In this case, the *gatu* may have been control points. The Kentish examples correlate well with major maritime routeways: Thanet, location of Ramsgate and Margate, lying on an important pinchpoint of navigation at the junction of the North Sea and English Channel (BROOKES 2012).

This trend is not exhibited consistently in minor names, even when recorded in medieval sources. Westgate in Kent was one of the entrances to Canterbury, while two Portgates, one in Devon and the other in Northumberland, have names suggestive of a link with a market town (Old English *port*), although the latter is on Hadrian's Wall and therefore very clearly at a feature delimiting territories. Hanyards in



Figure 2. Corfe Castle. Photograph © Wikipedia Creative Commons.

Staffordshire, was at the entrance to Tixall Park and its name, from Old English *hægena-geat* 'gate of the enclosures' (SMITH 1956a, 198; HOROVITZ *s.n.*), dates back to the 13th century, perhaps reflecting its use as a hunting reserve before the earliest record of the Park itself. In light of Robert Liddiard's theory that some high medieval deer parks may have originated in the pre-Conquest period, use may even extend as far back as the Anglo-Saxon period (LIDDIARD 2003). Given the first elements of Rogate in Sussex, Old English *rā* (MAWER et al. 1929–30, 38–9), and Reigate in Surrey, Old English *ræge* (ANDERSON 1939b, 64–5; GOVER et al. 1934, 281–2, 304–5; MILLS 2003, 388), which both denote 'roe deer', and of Deritend in Warwickshire, Old English *dēor-geat* 'wild-animal gate' (GOVER et al. 1936, 29) a similar function as gateways to hunting areas might be supposed.

The link is, then, more clear with major place-names, although gateways to towns were certainly points of transition between different zones of jurisdiction (cf BAKER and BROOKES 2014), and gates to hunting grounds may have similarly defined legal territories. In general, however, early-attested place-names seem to contain *geat* not because of physically or visibly distinctive gates, but because the referent was of wider significance. In most cases, such gates must have been important portals of jurisdiction and control.

This general pattern of jurisdictional or topographical transition is matched by the location of *geat* place-names relative to major watershed boundaries, some of which in any case coincide with those of political units (Fig 4). The river catchment of the Great Ouse, for example, is closely respected by Leziat in Norfolk, Burgate and Lidgate in Suffolk, Bozeat in Northamptonshire and, in Hertfordshire, Markyate and arguably also Ayot (St Lawrence and St Peter), all of which lie within 2000 m of the watershed boundary. Skilgate in Somerset lies on the boundary between Somerset and Devon, which at that point follows high ground at the limits of several

watersheds; Pilsgate in Northamptonshire is 386 m from the watershed between the Nene and Welland, very close to the borders with Lincolnshire and Rutland. It is not in fact far from the River Welland itself, which is defined by Charles Phythian-Adams as one of the major and enduring cultural frontiers of lowland Britain (2000). In earlier times, watershed boundaries may have coincided with borderlands between polities, and may therefore have held a judicial liminality as well as a topographical one. In Phythian-Adams' assessment, watersheds and the broad patterns of drainage they define 'have always tended to provide the most influential matrices for the creation of human territories' (1993, 12). For example, it has been argued that the eastern limits of the Roman and Iron-Age territory of the *Dumnonii* lay between the Rivers Parrett and Axe and the higher ground of the Quantocks and Blackdown Hills (HIGHAM 2008, 17). Skilgate's location at the western edge of this upland zone, at the precise point where the Exe watershed and Devonshire boundary coincide, appears to fossilise something of this older territorial division. That in many cases the clustering of early Anglo-Saxon cemeteries seems to fall broadly within river-catchment areas serves to emphasise this same geographical tendency for cultural micro-regions largely to respect those defined by the environment (Fig 5). Significantly, many of the *geat* place-names sit between these agglomerations of archaeological evidence, once again reinforcing their importance as markers of territorial transition. Taken together, half (27) of all *geat* place-names lie within 1100 m of either a shire or watershed boundary; a further eight within 2000 m.

Geat is harder to localise when occurring in place-names as the specific (the first element in compounds), since the generic so-defined might not be directly on top of the *geat* defining it. It could also be argued that minor gates, ones with only a local significance, might nonetheless provide a qualifying referent for a settlement — a *tūn* (farm, settlement)

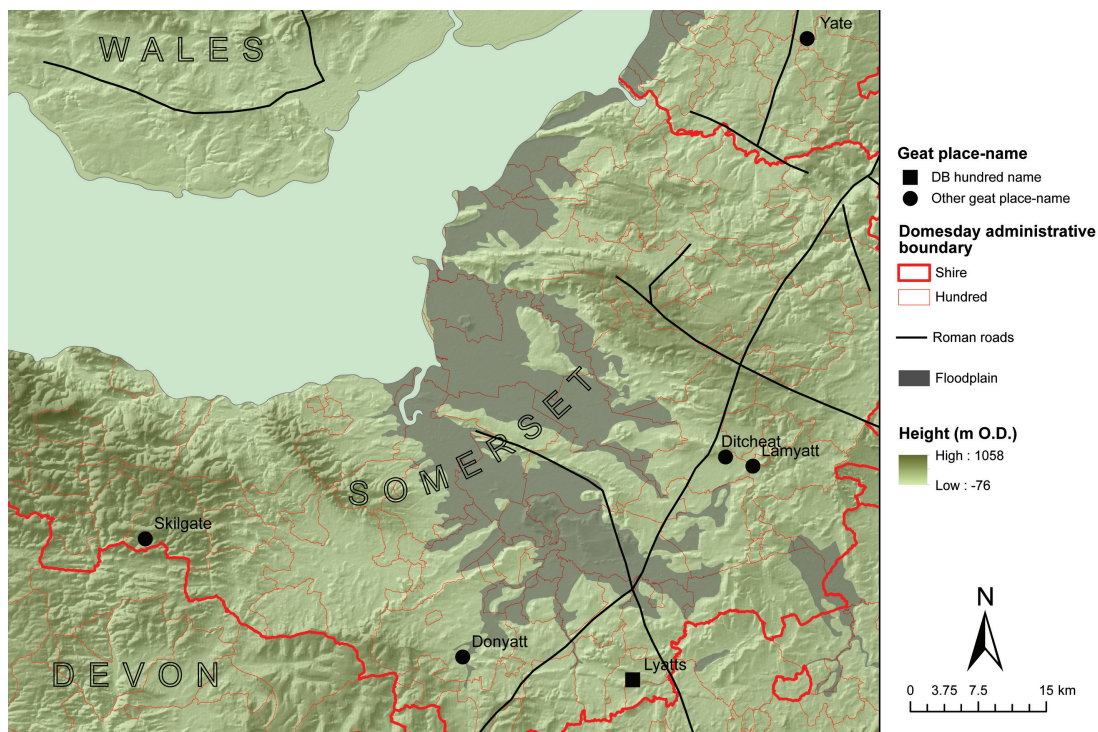


Figure 3. *Geat* names in Somerset.

where the gate into it was visually striking and therefore an especially defining feature. It is noteworthy, nonetheless, that Yatton (*geat-tūn*) in Herefordshire sits on a watershed of the Severn and adjacent to the boundary with Shropshire; that Yateley (*geat-lēah*) in Hampshire is very close to the Berkshire border and not far distant from Surrey; and that Yatesbury (perhaps *geates-burh*) is on a major watershed; but this category of *geat* place-names has been omitted from the figures.

Discussion

It would be easy to point out that gates tend to form parts of boundaries and are therefore bound to turn up in liminal positions. What is significant about the instances discussed here is their location at major points of transition — they are not simply the gates delimiting one settlement from another, but one political entity from another, one major resource from another and perhaps, in essence, one way of life from another. In that regard, the facts that relatively many became hundredal meeting-places, and that those represent a significant proportion of hundredal toponymy as a whole, emphasise the special, focal position they held in the landscape. There are interesting parallels to be made with another potentially boundary-related element of English hundredal nomenclature. References to river-crossings — bridges and fords — are very frequent in hundred-names and

riders or streams can form boundaries between socio-political units. However, waterways often form the foci for territorial groupings, and it is perhaps in this sense that they were appropriate sites of assembly. Meaney (1997, 203) considered features such as fords to be ‘natural or archetypal’ meeting-places; situated at nodal points of communications networks, ‘where traffic from one side of a river would meet traffic from the other’. Gates and gaps perform a similar role on many scales, funnelling bundles of overland routeways between one zone and another. When the gaps in question fulfilled that function on a regional or national level, they must have become very important points of transition and control.

The central role such gate meeting-places played in defining the geography of Anglo-Saxon England can be explored from a number of different directions. That focal position can be detected in their administrative geography, where several meeting-places named from gates may have served more than a single hundred. Kiftsgate in Gloucestershire became the meeting-place of six hundreds (ANDERSON 1939a, 2), Bleangate in Kent contained three single-manor Domesday hundreds (JOLLIFFE 1933, 158; ANDERSON 1939b, 149), Plomesgate became the meeting-place of one and a half hundreds (ANDERSON 1934, 90), and the post-Conquest hundred of Fishersgate was situated on the boundary of two Sussex Rapes (MAWER et al. 1929–30, 245). The meeting-place at Mutlow, where ‘high gates’ are recorded in the charter noted above, probably sometimes served the hundreds of Flendish, Staine and Radfield (REANEY

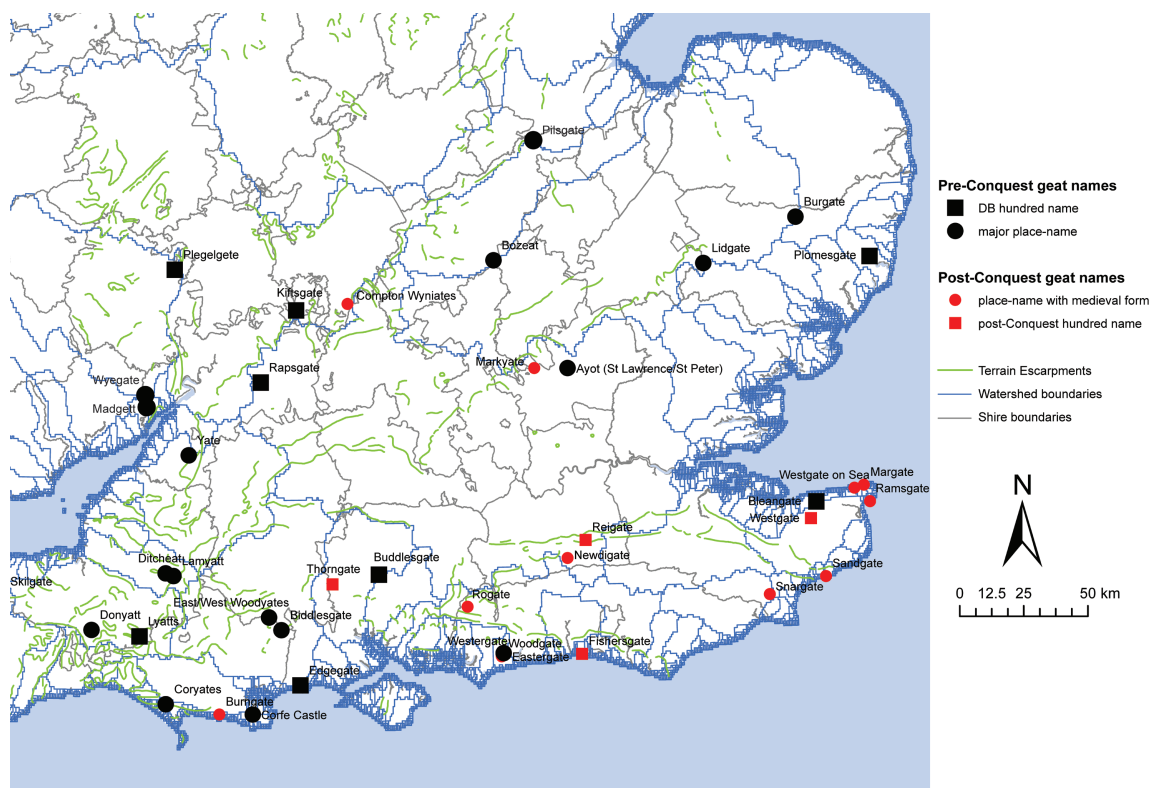


Figure 4. Plot of *geat* names to watershed boundaries and terrain escarpments. After Hydrosheds <<http://hydrosheds.cr.usgs.gov/datadownload.php?reqdata=30bass>>; ROBERTS and WRATHMELL 2000 <<http://www.english-heritage.org.uk/professional/research/archaeology/atlas-of-rural-settlement-gis/>>.

1943, 114, 129, 141; MEANEY 1993, 77). In each case, the implication is that the activities carried out at these meeting-places were of supra-local significance, above and beyond that of more typical hundredal assemblies.

The potential high-order function of gate meeting-places is further emphasised by their common association with shire boundaries, which they have in common with a special category of assembly places that share physical characteristics including the appearance of 'hanging promontories' (BAKER and BROOKES 2013). These places are likely to have been of particular significance in the wider regional administration of early kingdoms; *geat* places may similarly have served some wider territorial function. Kiftsgate (Gloucestershire) is both a *geat* place-name and a site of 'hanging promontory' type (BAKER and BROOKES 2013). Reynolds (2009) has discussed how execution cemeteries are also usually located on boundaries, perhaps motivated in part by the need to place social outcasts at the physical limits of communities, and a simultaneous requirement to signal transitions between legal jurisdictions. The linear earthwork of Bokerley Dyke forms part of the county boundary between Wiltshire and Dorset, and contains eight executed burials in the north-western terminal (REYNOLDS 2009, 145–7). Just 500 m to the south-west of this location along the Roman road to Dorchester is Woodyates.

Liminal locations used for the settlement of legal disputes, might also be closely related to venues of more violent forms of dispute settlement. Reynolds (2013) has made the case that Woden's Barrow, the substantial Neolithic long barrow now known as Adam's Grave in northern Wiltshire, was once part of a frontier between Wessex and Mercia, and the site of two battles mentioned in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* entries for 592 and 715. An important feature of this landscape was the position of Woden's Barrow on the course of the Great Ridgeway, at a point 1 km south of the linear earthwork of Wansdyke, where the Ridgeway descends dramatically into the Pewsey Vale. The gap in Wansdyke through which the Ridgeway passes is called *Woddes geat* in a charter of AD 825 (charter number 272, SAWYER 1968).

The context for these gates might also be economic. Law-code II Æthelstan 12, implies that at least some judicial assembly places functioned also as venues for trade and exchange, and the development of markets in close proximity to some hundred meeting-places is also suggested by place-name evidence (BAKER 2014). Given the distinctive location of some of these gates, it would seem natural that they demarcate transitions between particular landed resources and their related subsistence regimes; perhaps as seasonal gatherings frequented by a large pool of participants.

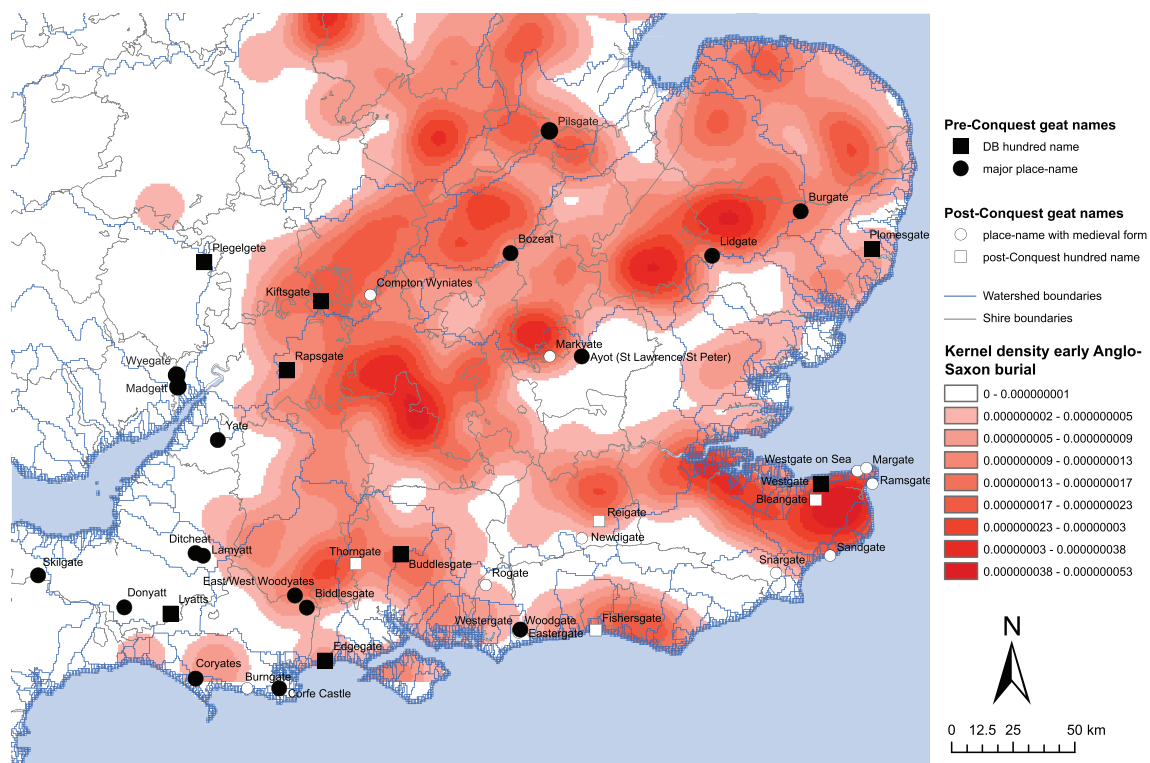


Figure 5. Plot of *geat* names to kernel density plot of early Anglo-Saxon burials.

The strong association of gate names with significant boundaries in the Anglo-Saxon landscape raises the question of whether these may also reflect wider cultural transitions. Several authors have sought to explain patterns in the territorial arrangement of early medieval settlement with respect to the natural topographies of elevation, hydrology and land quality (DAVIES and VIERCK 1974; BROOKES 2007; 2010; WILLIAMSON 2008; 2010; HARRINGTON and WELCH 2014). In one example of this type of historical ecology — Tom Williamson’s analysis of the East Anglian shires (2008) — it was argued that a significant cultural boundary existed in most historical periods, running diagonally along the Lark and Gipping valleys (2008, 123–6). This boundary forms the watershed between basins flowing into the North Sea and the English Channel. Williamson went on to suggest that the political dominance of the Wuffingas in the 7th century was partly the result of the location of Sutton Hoo and Rendlesham close to this boundary line — in that it underpinned the asymmetrical growth in the powerbase of the emerging kingdom. It might be suggested that ‘gates’ on the edges of topographical and archaeological distributions were key locations between spatially differentiated groups.

A similar ecosystemic approach has been advanced by John Blair (2013). In the most comprehensive national survey to date, he observes that the Wash watershed formed the limits of a cultural zone identifiable in a range of early medieval material remains; respected by the limits of early Anglo-

Saxon burial traditions, middle Anglo-Saxon settlements, and a range of other cultural distributions. Whatever the group behaviours underpinning these spatial patterns, the evidence clearly indicates the significant structuring influence played by changes in topography and environment. It is highly significant that it is on the very same boundaries between micro-environments that major *geat* names appear.

If regional groups were partly defined by their environment, it is noteworthy that a number of gate names can be associated with the edges of territories defined in both cultural and topographical terms. Of particular interest is a cluster of gate names located in Kent, Surrey and Sussex, surrounding the Weald and corresponding to the limits of early Anglo-Saxon burial in those counties. This region of intractable soils and woodland pasture appears to have been colonised comparatively late in the Anglo-Saxon period; much of it still lay outside administrative jurisdiction at the time of Domesday Book, and its tenurial structure was largely appurtenant to settlements lying outside the Weald (WITNEY 1976; EVERITT 1986; BROOKES 2007; BROOKES and HARRINGTON 2010). It is conceivable that in these cases gate meeting-places on the boundaries of the Weald acted as venues where the allocation, management, and use of common resources, existing beyond the limits of settlement, were agreed. The gates in question were physically and symbolically the transitions between *pays*, or particular areas of contrasting activity.

While cultural zones may often align with environmental transitions, this is not always obvious. The topography of two gates in south-west Sussex — Woodgate and the gate/gap or gates/gaps referred to in the Domesday place-name *Gate*, later Eastergate and perhaps also Westergate (MAWER et al. 1929–30, 64, 140) — cannot be easily explained either by the proximity of the shire boundary or obvious topographical qualities. But they lie noticeably between two clusters of early Anglo-Saxon burial focused on southern Hampshire and central coastal Sussex. These gates might therefore mark actual cultural transitions: from written sources these two clusters correspond with those of the South Saxons and the Jutes of Hampshire (WELCH 1983; YORKE 1995, 36–43; SEMPLE 2008). In the same area as Westergate, and indeed perhaps an earlier name for the same gate, was a place called *Geinste-disgate*, *Genstedegate* (charter numbers 45, 232 and 1291, SAWYER 1968; MAWER et al. 1929–30, 64, fn 1; TENGSTRAND 1940, 199–200; SANDRED 1963, 259–60; KELLY 1998, lxiv, fn 28). This is a difficult place-name, but one suggested interpretation, especially pertinent to the present discussion, is ‘meeting-place gate’; while an alternative, which takes the first element to mean ‘opposition, hostility’, is not entirely irrelevant either.

A final example of this type is provided by Bozeat (GOVER et al. 1933, 189; MILLS 2003, 69). Located on the corners of three shires Bozeat’s location might be regarded as exceptionally significant in administrative terms; an impression further reinforced by its position on the Wash boundary, and in an area of low density burial between two major clusters of early Anglo-Saxon burial.

If the foregoing observations go some way to explaining what functions *geat* meeting-places may have had, it is noteworthy that the distribution of such place-names is largely restricted to southern England. This aspect of the pattern is perhaps in part illusory. In northern England, *geat* can be impossible to separate from Old Norse *gata* ‘road’, and some place-names interpreted as containing the latter may in fact go back to the former. On the other hand, the absence of *geat* from the names of meeting places may also have a political explanation. If, as many believe, the system of administration of which the hundreds formed an integral part emerged first in the areas controlled by the West Saxon kings, spreading under their influence across southern England in the 10th century (STENTON 1971, 336–8; LOYN 1984, 140–2), there may be differences in the degree to which *geat* sites were used or preserved in different parts of the country; this complex issue is beyond the scope of the present discussion, but perhaps worth further consideration.

Conclusions

If assembly-places can be regarded as decision-making hubs, their recurrent location on the borders of territories reinforces

the suggestion that these geographical margins were not always conceived as impermeable limits, but as zones of collaboration and negotiation; perhaps even gateways between separate societies, polities, cultures and so on. This is underlined by the similarly close relationship between *geat* names — especially those clearly connected to administrative units — and borders, which may reflect a sense that such gateways held a special place in the regulation of society and justice. Apart from anything else, this emphasises the complexity of inter-territorial relations. Borders potentially defined and united territories both geographically and administratively, at all levels of Anglo-Saxon society, from local districts, through regional groupings, to kingdoms. It also hints at a complexity, perhaps even a natural flexibility, within the administrative structure. If these gateway locales acted as sites of political, judicial and economic assembly, then their role would be very hard to distinguish from that of territorially central meeting-places. In other words, points of transition between political or legal units or between different terrains could hold a very similar ideological status to spaces set aside for administrative gatherings elsewhere. The potential for assembly sites to change function or scale as territorial geography evolved is clear.

What these examples of gate meeting-places, and their correlates with a range of other archaeological and geographical phenomena, bring to attention, is the strong regional character of Anglo-Saxon England, formed through the conjunction of physical environment, administrative geography and cultural zones. That *geat* meeting-places existed on the boundaries of these distinctive regions suggests on the one hand that geographical difference was understood by contemporary society, and on the other, that mechanisms existed to bring different communities together. One purpose for the location of meeting-places at such places, and the marking of their importance through naming, may well have been to formalise boundaries and regulate conditions of access and use across them. Another may have been to facilitate interactions between discrete neighbouring groups.

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