





# Rethinking the Archaeology of Elmet

By Ian Roberts\*

## ABSTRACT

*The British kingdom of Elmet has for many years been the subject of debate, fuelled largely by documentary and literary evidence; whilst speculation on its geography has relied almost entirely on place-name studies. The apparent invisibility of Elmet in the archaeological record is a long-standing problem. With the aid of radiocarbon dating recent archaeological projects in South and West Yorkshire have now provided evidence to suggest that the archaeology of Elmet has probably been subsumed within the archaeological record attributed to the late Roman period, in keeping with the recent thinking for Romano-British continuity in many other parts of Britain.*

## PLACE-NAME AND LITERARY EVIDENCE

By the time of its annexation in the early seventh century A.D. the British kingdom of Elmet had proven to be one of the most enduring of the north-eastern British kingdoms that emerged in the early post-Roman period. Archaeological study has been hampered by a paucity of archaeological evidence and, consequently, geographical and cultural perceptions of the kingdom have been based almost entirely upon the place-name and literary evidence, which it is pertinent to summarise briefly here.

The boundaries of Elmet have been postulated on the basis of a greater incidence of surviving British place-names: principally ‘*wāhl*’, ‘*brettas*’ and ‘*cumbra*’ names, those containing the element ‘*eccles*’, and, most obviously, those with ‘in-Elmet’ affixes (Faull 1974; 1977; 1980; 1981a; 1983; Jones 1975, 14–22). The distribution of these place-names suggests that, at its maximum, the territory of Elmet essentially lay between the rivers Wharfe and Don, the Pennines probably having formed a less certain western boundary (FIG. 1; see Jones 1975, map 2; Loveluck 2003, fig. 39). Corroboration of the southern boundary may be found in the sites of several seventh-century *burhs* along the Don and Dearne valleys, seen as reflecting the frontier between Northumbria and Mercia after the annexation of Elmet and, as such, the southern boundary of the former kingdom (Cox 1994, 53; Rollason 2003, 25–8; Hey 2003, 28). For many years the Roman Ridge earthworks, along the northern bank of the Don, were interpreted as southern Elmetian defence works (Preston 1950, 307; Hey 2003, 23), a similar but less purposeful interpretation having been adopted for Grim’s Ditch and the Aberford Dykes in West Yorkshire, which together offered Elmet a more tangible, if speculative, archaeological profile (Faull 1981a, 173–4; see below).

The ten place-names which have (or which formerly had) ‘in-Elmet’ affixes are all situated on or near the Magnesian Limestone belt between the Wharfe and the Don (FIG. 1). The presence of the affix is taken to indicate a British settlement that had been named by encroaching Anglo-Saxons. Early Anglo-Saxon incursions along the limestone belt, particularly to the south of the Wharfe, are represented by a number of ‘*ingas*’, ‘*ham*’ and ‘*ingaham*’ names. Such early Anglo-Saxon names are not common further to the west, and it has been argued that the Magnesian Limestone was the area of early integration between British and Anglo-Saxons communities (Faull 1980, 21; 1981a, 171–2).

Place-names have been the mainstay of the geographical debate, but the meaning of ‘Elmet’ itself remains uncertain. The more conventional translation sees the name as a reference to elm forest (Hind 1978–80, 541–52), but an alternative derivation would have the name as reference to killers of enemies, who ‘cut down many’ (see Breeze 2002, 166). Neither interpretation has

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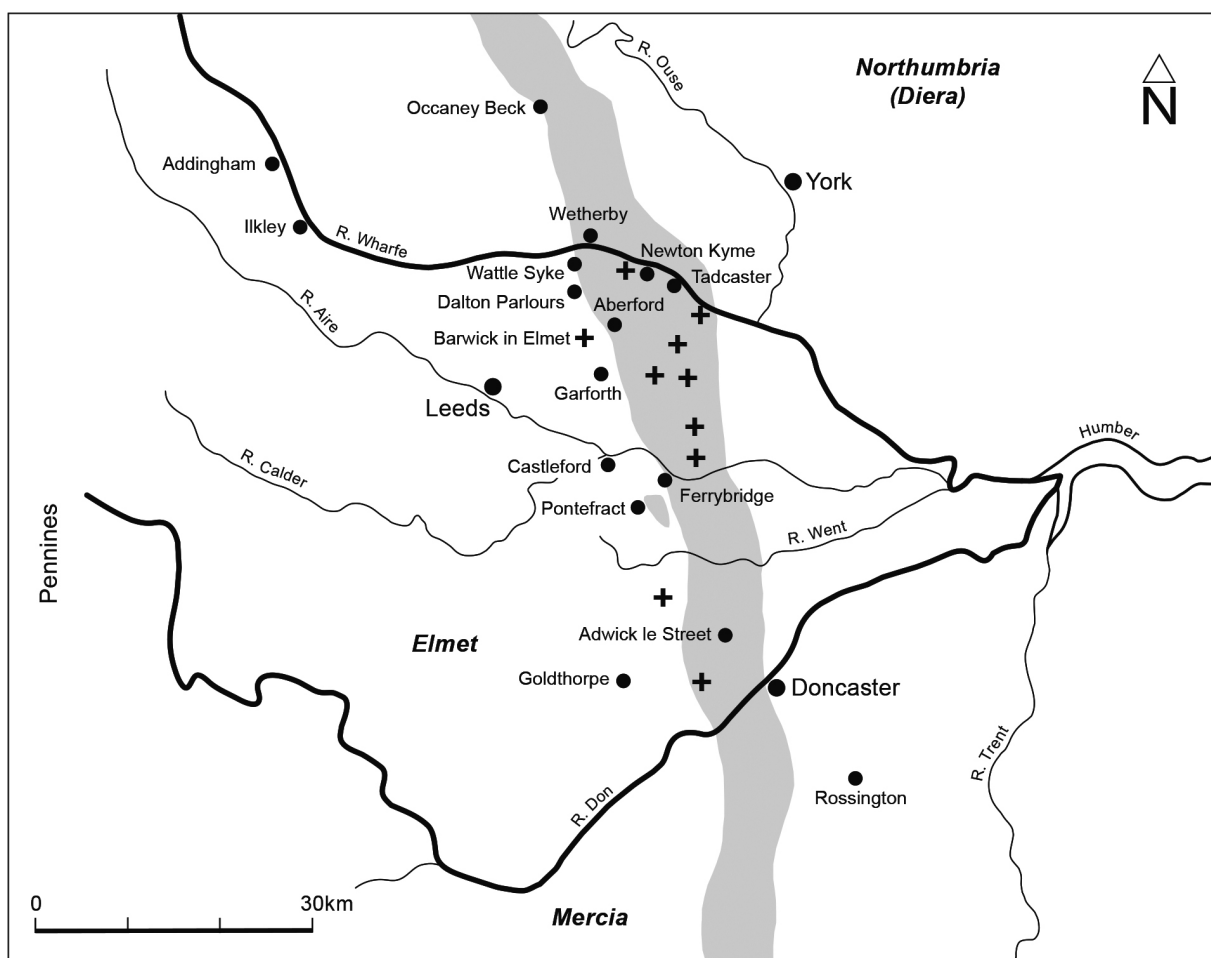


FIG. 1. Plan of the likely extent of Elmet (after Jones 1975, and Loveluck 2003), showing the places mentioned in the text and the locations of the 'in-Elmet' place-names (+) along the Magnesian Limestone belt (shown as a grey tone). (Drawn by J. Prudhoe)

universal acceptance (Gruffydd 1994, 64), but curiously they resonate with the divergence of opinion on the nature of the kingdom and the possible reasons for its longevity. Alcock (1971, 138) and Dark (1994, 110, 151–2) have regarded Elmet as a neutral buffer state, able to wield diplomatic influence disproportionate to its strength. Conversely, Stenton (1971, 33, 74) saw Elmet as being militarily strong and having formed a major obstacle to the expansion and co-operation of Northumbria and Mercia. It could in fact have operated in both ways at different times, but our perspectives on this matter hinge very much on the interpretation of the literary evidence, and particularly that in regard to Gwallog's association with Elmet.

Gwallog (or Guallauc) was a prominent northern British hero of the sixth century, recorded in the Book of Taliesin as 'the judge over Elmet' (Williams and Caerwyn Williams 1968, lv–lix, 14, 132), and possibly the father of Ceretic, recorded by both Bede and 'Nennius' as the last king of Elmet, expelled by Edwin of Northumbria in A.D. 617 after killing Edwin's grand-nephew, Hereric, a refugee living in Elmet (Colgrave and Mynors 1969, 410; Morris 1980, 79; Gruffydd 1994, 65; Breeze 2002, 161). There has been considerable debate as to whether Gwallog was the leader of Elmet or an overlord of a northern domain which included Elmet (see Gruffydd 1994, 69–74; Breeze 2002, 162–71). His campaigns included an attack on York (Faull 1974, 24; Jones 1975, 10; Gruffydd 1994, 71) and a battle at a site that is equated with Rossington, south of the Don (Jones 1975, 24). Gwallog is also mentioned in the eulogy to Cadwallon (c. A.D. 633–4), as having been a war leader who fought at *Catraeth*, although *Y Goddodin* only specifically records the presence of Madog of Elmet and, speculatively, Isag 'from the region of the south'

(Gruffydd 1994, 75). The association of Gwallog and his military reputation support the notion of a kingdom militarily able to defend itself, certainly in the sixth century. There is, however, by the early seventh century, some substance to the alternative view of a more passive kingdom with Anglo-Saxon affiliations, given the circumstances which saw Hereric's presence in Elmet prior to his death.

This review would not be complete without reference to the Christian memorial stone from Llanelhairn in Gwynedd, which is inscribed ALIORTVS ELMETIACO HI CIACET ('Aliortus the Elmetian lies here'). This supposedly provides further evidence for the existence of the Christian kingdom of Elmet by the mid-fifth century (Knight 1996, 111; Nash-Williams 1950, 88), despite an element of doubt as to whether it actually relates to Elmet in Yorkshire, rather than a similarly named place in Wales (Breeze 2002, 160). The invocations in the first lines of Taliesin's poems to Gwallog ('In the name of the ruler of heaven') are regarded as further evidence for the Christian status of Elmet, a case which is perhaps better made by the incidence of 'eccles' ('church') place-names in South and West Yorkshire (Faull 1984, 54), and the writings of Anglo-Saxon chroniclers who regarded Elmet as having contained many churches (Colgrave 1927, 164; Colgrave and Mynors 1969, 188).

Elmet's continued existence as a post-annexation territorial unit is attested by its inclusion in the Tribal Hidage, conventionally interpreted as listing the administrative units or dependent territories of Mercia from the seventh century, a view supported to some extent by dialect evidence pointing to Mercian penetration into southern Elmet (Dumville 1989; Gruffydd 1994, 68; Kolb 1974). An alternative view, however, would have it a Northumbrian document, detailing the tributes exacted from both Elmet and Mercia from the early seventh century soon after the annexation of Elmet (Higham 1992; 1995, 74–111).

### PREVIOUS ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVIDENCE

The evidence from documentary sources and place-names has been used to present a case for the existence of a post-Roman Christian kingdom that, at times, was actively engaged in warfare against the Anglo-Saxons. However, in the absence of any definite post-Roman British settlements or attributable material culture, the archaeological case for Elmet has essentially relied upon negative evidence, by virtue of the relative absence of more visible early Anglo-Saxon burial sites and findspots, to demonstrate its existence. Such patterns as there were in the data available in the 1970s were highlighted by Faull, albeit at a time when relatively little field archaeology had been carried out in South and West Yorkshire (e.g. Faull 1974, fig.1; 1977, figs 7a and 7b; 1983, fig. 5). Even so, by 2000, following a considerable increase in developer-funded archaeological work, understanding the archaeology of Elmet had not significantly progressed (see Loveluck 2003; Roskams and Whyman 2005, 73–4; Sanderson and Wrathmell 2005, 2). In fact the dataset for Elmet and the early Anglo-Saxon presence, presented in the West Yorkshire Archaeology Survey (Faull 1981a; 1981b), had actually diminished by this time. Part of this diminution is a consequence of discounting undated burials, speculatively ascribed to the post-Roman period on the basis of the unsubstantiated and secondary accounts of antiquarians, such as the 'Anglian' burials from Leeds and Ferrybridge (Faull 1981b, 180). The more significant losses to Faull's archaeology of Elmet, however, are the linear earthworks of Grim's Ditch and the Aberford Dykes which, following excavation and radiocarbon dating in 1996, are now seen to have originated in the later Iron Age (Wheelhouse and Burgess 2001, 129, 134, 144). Moreover, although no actual excavations have been carried out, a reappraisal of the Roman Ridge earthworks along the river Don has independently reached similar conclusions about their origins (Boldrini 1999).

### NEW INSIGHTS

Ironically, it was archaeological investigation on the M1–A1 Link Road scheme (the same project that had re-dated Grim's Ditch and the Aberford Dykes to the Iron Age), which produced the first clues to the possible archaeological character of British Elmet.

Excavations at Parlington Hollins, near Garforth, in 1996 investigated a multi-phased enclosure

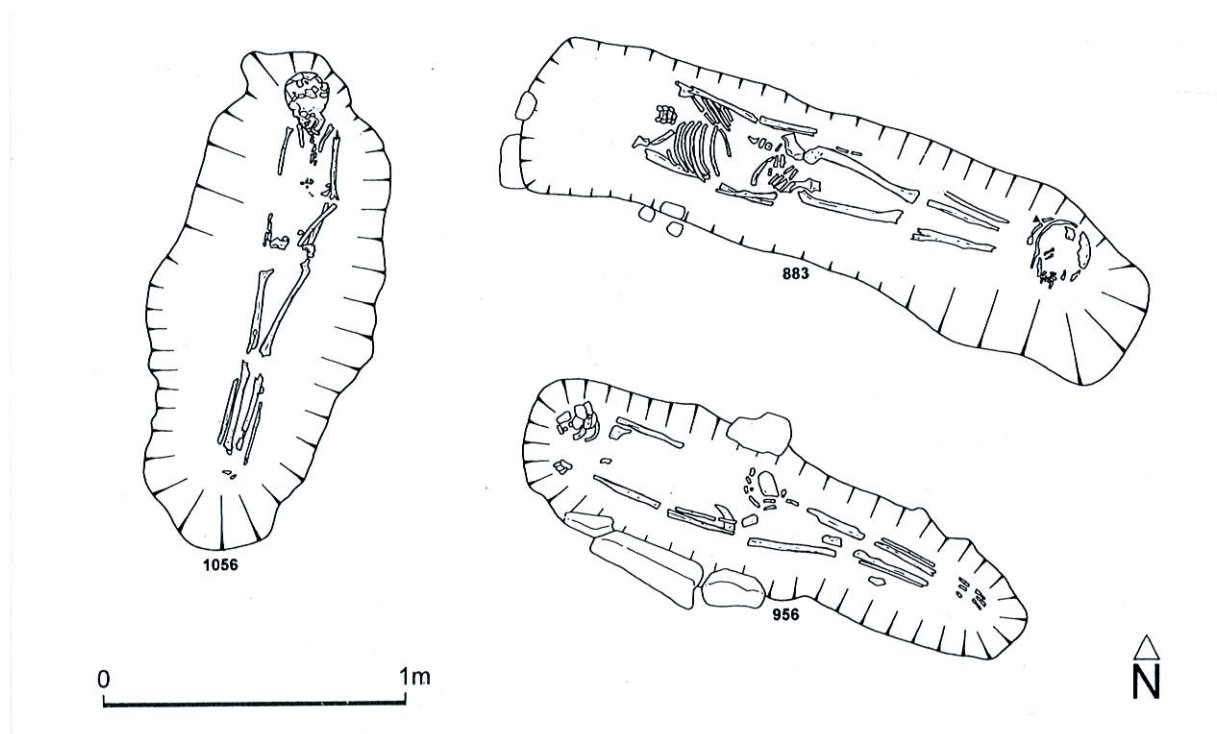


FIG. 2. The 'late Roman' inhumations from Parlington Hollins, Garforth. (After Roberts *et al.* 2001)

site with six associated human burials. Three crouched inhumations in pits were viewed as being typical of the native Iron Age tradition, whilst three extended inhumations, two in partially stone-lined graves, were regarded as being of late Roman date (FIG. 2). In the case of one extended burial (883), the body had been decapitated *post mortem* and the head placed between the feet, along with a pair of hobnailed boots. These particular rites, and the stone lining of the graves, are well-documented practices for the late Roman period in Britain (Philpott 1991, 61), and accord well with the fourth-century date suggested by the pottery and coins recovered from what were regarded as contemporary features (Holbrey and Burgess 2001, 101). However, the weakness of the traditional reliance upon associated artefacts and burial rite was to be exposed by a policy for radiocarbon dating all articulated skeletons.

As anticipated, the three crouched burials were earlier than the extended burials, but their date ranges were probably Roman (Table 1, 1–3). Remarkably, the radiocarbon date ranges for the three extended burials were all indicative of a date between the early fifth and the sixth (or seventh) centuries; the classic late Roman decapitated burial with hobnails (883) returned an unequivocal post-Roman date range at 95 per cent confidence (Holbrey and Burgess 2001, 102; Table 1, 4–6), demonstrating that a recognised late Roman burial rite had continued to be employed in the post-Roman period.

There is a degree of uncertainty about the date ranges of the Parlington Hollins crouched burials, which can only offer the possibility that the crouched tradition might have continued into and beyond the post-Roman period. That this could indeed have been the case was subsequently proven by radiocarbon date ranges between the fifth and seventh centuries achieved for two crouched burials excavated at Ferrybridge in 2002 (Martin 2005, 121; Richardson 2005, 87; Table 1, 8–9). One of these burials (1369) produced first- or second-century pottery, whilst the head of the body had been placed on or adjacent to a small dog, a rite also observed in a crouched burial at Wattle Syke, near Boston Spa, which is thought to be of Late Iron Age date (Richardson 2013). A further burial from Ferrybridge, which radiocarbon dating has also indicated could be potentially post-Roman (Table 1, 7), was found in a flexed position, similar to early post-Roman burials found at Wattle Syke and Dalton Parlours, and is also notable for having been buried with hobnails (Duncan *et al.* 2005, 157).

TABLE 1. Radiocarbon dates from Garforth, Wattle Syke and Ferrybridge

	Site and Context	Lab Code	Date BP	Cal Age 1 $\sigma$ @ c.68% prob	Cal Age 2 $\sigma$ @ 95% prob	Delta $^{13}\text{C}$ rel PDP (‰)
1	Parlington Hollins, Garforth (2034) Crouched inhumation <sup>1</sup>	AA-30657	1785 $\pm$ 45	AD 145–322	AD 119–346	-21.0
2	Parlington Hollins, Garforth (011) Crouched inhumation <sup>1</sup>	GU-7813	1730 $\pm$ 60	AD 223–392	AD 130–430	-21.6
3	Parlington Hollins, Garforth (073) Crouched inhumation <sup>1</sup>	GU-7814	1630 $\pm$ 60	AD 347–448	AD 252–560	-21.0
4	Parlington Hollins, Garforth (956) Extended inhumation <sup>1</sup>	AA-30655	1605 $\pm$ 40	AD 407–504	AD 348–548	-20.7
5	Parlington Hollins, Garforth (1056) Extended inhumation <sup>1</sup>	GU-7820	1520 $\pm$ 100	AD 420–640	AD 246–670	-25.8
6	Parlington Hollins, Garforth (883) Extended inhumation <sup>1</sup>	GU-7816	1500 $\pm$ 80	AD 440–637	AD 400–670	-22.5
7	Ferrybridge (2505) Flexed inhumation <sup>2</sup>	GU-11126 GU-11142	1630 $\pm$ 50 1610 $\pm$ 45	AD 350–540 AD 410–540	AD 260–550 AD 340–570	-23.7 -20.2
8	Ferrybridge (3428) Crouched inhumation <sup>2</sup>	AA-54290	1535 $\pm$ 55	AD 430–600	AD 420–640	-21.1
9	Ferrybridge (1369) Crouched inhumation <sup>3</sup>	AA-54284	1400 $\pm$ 45	AD 600–670	AD 540–720	-19.1
10	Wattle Syke (3698) Flexed inhumation <sup>4</sup>	GU-18009	1410 $\pm$ 30	AD 610–655	AD 590–670	-20.8
11	Parlington Hollins (7010) <i>Grubenhäus</i> ; carbonised cereal <sup>1</sup>	AA-31536	1715 $\pm$ 45	AD 234–399	AD 147–430	-21.7
12	Parlington Hollins (7011) <i>Grubenhäus</i> ; <i>corylus</i> charcoal <sup>1</sup>	AA-31522	1745 $\pm$ 50	AD 230–346	AD 174–410	-26.0
13	Parlington Hollins (7011) <i>Grubenhäus</i> ; Pig burial <sup>1</sup>	AA-30654	1485 $\pm$ 45	AD 543–624	AD 441–651	-21.0
14	Parlington Hollins (2023) Post-hole structure <sup>1</sup>	AA-30658	1595 $\pm$ 45	AD 410–535	AD 348–560	-21.2
15	Parlington Hollins (915) Horse burial <sup>1</sup>	GU-7817	1570 $\pm$ 70	AD 411–562	AD 268–630	-22.6
16	Brierlands, Garforth <i>Grubenhäus</i> ? <sup>5</sup>	unkn	unkn	unkn	AD 450–615	unkn

**Notes**

1. Holbrey and Burgess 2001, 97, 101–2;
2. Richardson 2005, 87;
3. Martin 2005, 121;
4. Martin *et al.* 2013, 107–8;
5. Owen 2000.

NB. The conventional radiocarbon ages are quoted in years BP (i.e. before 1950) and the errors are expressed at the one sigma (68%) and two sigma (95%) levels of confidence. Samples with a GU code were measured at the Scottish Universities Environmental Research Centre in Glasgow, and those with an AA code were measured at the University of Arizona AMS Facility.

The flexed post-Roman burial found at Wattle Syke had been inserted into the fill of one of the late Roman sunken-floored buildings found there (Martin 2013, 109). The skeleton has been radiocarbon dated to cal A.D. 590–670 (Table 1, 10), but the buildings themselves do not seemingly date beyond the early fifth century and the burial has been seen as reflecting small-scale post-Roman activity within the site of a former Roman settlement (Roberts 2013, 300). The Wattle Syke burial is reminiscent of the single flexed post-Roman burial found at the abandoned Dalton Parlours villa site, also dated to the fifth to seventh centuries on the basis of an associated penannular brooch (Dickinson 1990, 286). Both of these sites also produced small amounts of sub- or post-Roman pottery (Mainman 1990, 285; Cumberpatch with Young 2013, 117–18), but neither produced evidence for any sustained settlement activity.

Tangible evidence for post-Roman settlement is extremely scarce within the Elmet region and,

but for place-names, has until recently only been identified archaeologically through a handful of burials and findspots. The post-Roman determinations for the graves at Parlington Hollins could imply that the associated enclosure (previously considered to be late Roman) could also be of post-Roman date. Post-Roman activity at this site is, moreover, seemingly attested through the presence of what appear to be two classic *Grubenhäuser*. Such structures, conventionally regarded as Anglo-Saxon, had previously not featured in the archaeological record of the region, and the evidence from their fills has seemingly confirmed their post-Roman origin. Some of the finds from one of these sunken-floored buildings were typically Romano-British, whilst over 100 sherds of pottery were unequivocally Anglo-Saxon, one sherd displaying a Mercian stamp (Evans *et al.* 2001, 163). Radiocarbon determinations carried out on carbonised material from both buildings offer broad ranges between the second and early fifth centuries A.D., suggesting that residuality could have been a factor (Table 1, 11–12). However, a pig skeleton (from 7011) has provided a radiocarbon date between the fifth and seventh centuries A.D. (Table 1, 13), which accords well with the fifth- to sixth-century date ascribed to the Mercian pottery (Holbrey and Burgess 2001, 103; Evans *et al.* 2001, 161, 163, 167, fig. 117). Further potential evidence for post-Roman activity in the same landscape is provided by the radiocarbon date ranges for a post-hole structure and a horse burial (Table 1, 14–15), whilst a subsequent excavation just 500 m to the south, at Brierlands in 1998, revealed more elements of what was probably the same dispersed post-Roman settlement superimposed upon a late Roman farm. A third *Grubenhäuser* here is dated by a combination of early Anglo-Saxon pottery and a radiocarbon date in the range cal A.D. 450–615 (Owen 2000; Garner 2000, 14–16; Table 1, 16).

### LATE ROMAN RE-EVALUATION

The radiocarbon dating evidence from Garforth and Ferrybridge strongly suggested that the absence of Elmetian material culture in the archaeological record is due to it being undifferentiated from Romano-British material culture. The testing of this hypothesis will ideally require a comprehensive re-evaluation of previously investigated key late Roman sites in Elmet, the potential for which is briefly considered below.

Two sites offering very good potential for identifying hitherto unrealised sub- or post-Roman activity are the forts of Newton Kyme and Castleford, both within the eastern part of Elmet. Bidwell and Hodgson (2009, 138) have posed the possibility that Newton Kyme was the *Calcaria* recorded in the Antonine Itinerary and the Ravenna Cosmography, its late Roman evidence being more consistent with a town than a fort. That this site was occupied in the post-Roman period is indicated by the presence of fifth- to sixth-century Anglo-Saxon pottery, some similar to that found at Parlington Hollins in Garforth (Evans *et al.* 2001, 161; P. Wilson, pers. comm.).

Whilst a review of the Newton Kyme excavations is in progress (Wilson in prep.), an opportunity to explore the potential for post-Roman continuity at Castleford, using the archive from the excavations carried out in the 1970s and 1980s, has been facilitated and funded by Wakefield Museums. The Castleford excavation results indicated that occupation had ceased in the second half of the fourth century (Abramson *et al.* 1999, 307). Questions had already been raised regarding the validity of some of the late Roman phasing at Castleford as a consequence of Hilary Cool's reassessment of a set of seven yellow glass beads found associated with one of the human burials (FIG. 3). The original report (Cool and Price 1998, 189) had identified the beads as late Roman artefacts, but subsequent reappraisal saw them re-dated to the fifth to sixth century (Cool 2005). As no radiocarbon determinations had been carried out as part of the original post-excavation programme, samples of human bone from seventeen late Roman burials (Abramson *et al.* 1999, 280–4) were submitted for radiocarbon determination between 2008 and 2010. The vast majority of the obtained radiocarbon date ranges are consistent with later Roman dates. However, three skeletons, including the one accompanied by the glass beads, provided results more consistent with a post-Roman date (Table 2, 17–19; Roberts 2010). All three burials were from the *vicus* area and their new dates provide support to a notion that a post-hole building in the same area (Structure AY) may also have been of post-Roman date, the excavators having suspected (but not been able to prove) that its posts had cut through the



FIG. 3. The re-dated fifth- to sixth-century glass beads from Castleford. Diameters 6–8.5mm. (Photo: P. Gwilliam)

TABLE 2. Selected radiocarbon dates for human remains from Castleford (after Roberts 2010)

No.	Context	Lab Code	Date BP	Cal Age 1 $\sigma$ @ c.68% prob	Cal Age 2 $\sigma$ @ 95% prob	Delta $^{13}\text{C}$ rel PDP (‰)
17	Partial inhumation with beads (011) <sup>1</sup>	GU-14967	1650±35	AD 340–430	AD 320–540	-20.7
		GU-16535	1570±35	AD 430–540	AD 410–570	-23.9
18	Fragmented inhumation (043) <sup>1</sup>	GU-14968	1600±35	AD 340–530	AD 330–540	-20.3
		GU-16536	1600±35	AD 410–540	AD 390–550	-22.5
19	Fragmented inhumation (056/4) <sup>1</sup>	GU-14970	1560±35	AD 430–550	AD 410–580	-20.6
		GU-16537	1590±35	AD 420–540	AD 400–560	-20.1
20	Crouched/flexed ‘Anglian’ inhumation <sup>2</sup> Calibrated date	GU-1705) Calib 6	1880±35	AD 70–170	AD 50–230 AD 121–264	-19.2

#### Notes

1. Abramson *et al.* 1999, 151;
2. Crockett and Fitzpatrick 1998, 45, 58

dark earth that sealed the late Roman features in that area (Abramson *et al.* 1999, 151, fig. 95). Another notable radiocarbon date obtained from Castleford is that obtained for the ‘Anglian’ burial excavated in 1993 (Crockett and Fitzpatrick 1998, 47), which, despite its apparent crouched/flexed position, is now revealed to be a Roman burial of second- to third-century date (Table 2, 20).

Any site within Elmet with significant evidence for late Roman occupation could be a candidate for post-Roman continuity, though in past investigations such possibilities have rarely been considered. However, Doncaster and Wetherby are two sites on the borders of Elmet, both near the Magnesian Limestone and key river crossings, which seem to have demonstrable potential for elucidating the archaeology of the kingdom. Doncaster seems to have continued to be of significance in the immediate post-Roman period, occupation associated with the fort continuing at least to the fourth century (Parker 1987, 31–3; Bidwell and Hodgson, 2009, 131–2), after which later fourth- and fifth-century occupation became progressively less organised and unRoman, with irregular arrangements of huts of timber and turf on stone footings and the accumulation of dark silts (Buckland 1986, 17–18). Wetherby did not have a fort, but is particularly significant for the excavations in the later 1920s which investigated part of a cemetery containing large cists and stone-lined graves, not dissimilar to those found at Parlington Hollins and Wattle Syke, with finds which were considered to be potentially of fifth-century date (Kent and Kitson Clark 1933).



The regular employment of radiocarbon dating on new 'Roman' sites is expected to reveal more evidence of early post-Roman settlement. Such a result has already been obtained from a site at Goldthorpe, to the west of Doncaster. Here, a series of grain samples, recovered from what had been assumed to be Roman corn-driers, has produced radiocarbon date ranges between the fifth and seventh centuries (A. Lines, pers. comm.).

### ANGLO-SAXON INFLUENCES?

Radiocarbon date ranges accommodate the possibility that post-Roman burial practices were used alongside older Iron Age British traditions which, given the superficial level of Romanisation in the rural areas of Elmet, is quite conceivable. Without the aid of radiocarbon dating, however, it is impossible to differentiate these chronologically and there is still a reliance on the more visible Anglo-Saxon evidence, or the absence of it, in identifying post-Roman phases — although the re-dating of the Castleford 'Anglian' counsels caution in doing so on the basis of burial rite alone.

Only a very few burials regarded as being early Anglo-Saxon have been found in West Yorkshire (see Faull 1981a, 180). These burials are often flexed, rather than crouched or supine, and are accompanied by at least one votive offering. In this they are not so different from the late Roman burials in the region (cf. Wattle Syke), and some consideration might be given to whether they are all truly Anglo-Saxon burials or further manifestations of hybrid British-Anglian burial practices, as found at Occaney Beck (Waterman 1951, 440–1). It is perhaps noteworthy that to date there are no early 'Anglo-Saxon' burials, of the type recognised in Elmet, or indeed of any sort, known from the area to the south of the river Don in South Yorkshire, in what would have been Anglo-Saxon Mercia.

All the known and suspected post-Roman burials from Elmet are singular occurrences and there are no known Christian cemeteries (or churches) contemporary with the presumed Christian kingdom, or indeed the late Roman period (Ottaway 2003, 148), although an unconfirmed cropmark cemetery may exist at Newton Kyme (Bidwell and Hodgson 2009, 138). The earliest known formal Christian cemeteries within the territory of Elmet, at Pontefract, Adwick-le-Street and possibly Addingham (Wilmott 1987; Wilmott *et al.* 2009; Arcus 2008; Adams 1996), were all in use from the middle Anglo-Saxon period. Phase 1 burials from Pontefract, radiocarbon dated as early as A.D. 550–710 (Wilmott *et al.* 2009; see also Craig-Atkins 2012), do not preclude the cemetery's existence during the period of the British kingdom. One of the earliest burials at Pontefract was flexed and interestingly some of the Roman artefacts recovered from the graves had seemingly been deposited as grave goods (Wilmott *et al.* 2009), which could hint at an early British/Anglian origin after the Northumbrian annexation.

The number of early Anglo-Saxon artefacts known from western and central areas of Elmet are so few as to cast doubt on whether they truly represent Anglo-Saxon activity, as opposed to the occasional British acquisition of Anglo-Saxon material culture. Discounting the burials, in 1980 Faull could only point to three beads and two annular brooches in West Yorkshire as evidence of early Anglo-Saxon penetration of Elmet (Faull 1981b, 179–80). More recent archaeological excavations in the eastern margins of the kingdom have modestly increased this, with early Anglo-Saxon pottery coming from Dalton Parlours, Garforth, and possibly Wattle Syke (Mainman 1990, 285; Evans *et al.* 2001, 159–62; Garner 2000, 14–16; Cumberpatch with Young 2013). However, the greatest new source of early Anglo-Saxon evidence, in both West and South Yorkshire, has been the Portable Antiquities Scheme (PAS; [www.finds.org.uk](http://www.finds.org.uk)). It is only possible to interrogate PAS data in terms of what is identified as overtly early Anglo-Saxon, and only a very rudimentary search has been made. Nevertheless, even a rapid assessment of the data offers some potential insights. Few finds are recorded to the east and west of the limestone, but a large number have been recorded on, or immediately adjacent to, the Magnesian Limestone belt, as well as the area around Doncaster and along the Don valley. Supposing that this is not entirely a product of collection bias, and that a more comprehensive analysis would uphold this distribution, it seems to confirm that Anglo-Saxon incursions were taking place along the eastern border of Elmet, principally along the Magnesian Limestone, and probably utilising the Roman road, as suggested by the distribution of the 'in-Elmet' and early Anglo-Saxon place-names.

## DISCUSSION

It is apparent, particularly in the recent evidence from Garforth and Castleford, that a past tendency against using radiocarbon dating on Roman sites, especially those dated by diagnostic artefacts, has probably served to perpetuate Elmet's archaeological invisibility. On the premise that the kingdom was, at least at its inception, essentially late Roman in nature, any material culture from an early Elmetian site would be attributed a late fourth- or early fifth-century date. This phenomenon has been identified at several sites in Western Britain, particularly Chester (White 2007, 187–9), and along Hadrian's Wall where the longevity of fourth-century artefact circulation has created the illusion of an extended fourth century (e.g. Coulston 2010, 59). The problem is obviously compounded by the lack of new Roman coinage issues and Romano-British pottery production after the early fifth century which has much wider implications for identifying Romano-British survival generally (e.g. Brickstock 2000; Evans 2000). The transition from late Roman to sub/post-Roman is at present only detectable with the aid of absolute dating, and is not being readily exposed in the analysis of artefacts (see Dark 2000, 197–8; Gardner 2007, 253). A further factor could be Elmet's eastern location in fifth-century Britain, which meant it was unlikely to have benefited from the continued influx of continental imports that came into south-western Britain, its continental trade via the Humber presumably having ceased (see White 2007, 150–62). This may be a key factor in Elmet's archaeological invisibility and its 'late Roman' artefact profile may be subtly different to other parts of the country as a consequence. The development of more refined analyses that would expose subtle differences in the content and balance of artefact assemblages in the absence of new coin and pottery issues, as proposed by Cool (2000), is therefore critical to achieving a better understanding of the archaeology of Elmet.

Whilst the emergence of Elmet could have been aided through the survival of pre-Roman tribal affiliations or kinship groups (Loveluck 2003, 253–6), it seems logical in terms of the evident late Roman cultural continuity for it to have emerged from a former Roman military command or administrative framework (see O'Brien 2010, 113). It may be significant in this respect that Gwallog was termed the 'judge' of Elmet, a title that was often used for Roman provincial governors (White 2007, 204).

The problem of not being able to identify British settlements still remains. Some are undoubtedly included in the 'late Roman' rural settlements that have been interpreted as having been abandoned by the post-Roman period, due to them having been dated by late Roman finds, invariably pottery. This is not the case, however, for sites associated with the so-called 'villa economy', such as Dalton Parlours and Wattle Syke, which seem to have been linked to the military supply network and clearly did terminate in the late fourth or early fifth century (Roberts 2013, 300–2). The post-Roman continuity of a rural economy, perhaps diminished through no longer having to create a large surplus, is a possibility that has been envisaged by both Faull (1984, 55) and Loveluck (2003, 154), and one which must be entertained to explain the absence of any other archaeological rural sites associated with Elmet.

If Elmet is regarded as a significant military power, the sites of its Roman forts must be prime contenders for settlements which, if not urban, might have been natural locations for a higher order of strategic defended settlement. In the northern military zone of Roman Britain the sites with very late artefacts are nearly all forts and there is increasing evidence from the forts on Hadrian's Wall, and the North generally, for the existence of post-Roman British communities that had continued from the late Roman period without any hiatus (Dark 1992; 2000; Collins 2012; Collins and Allason-Jones 2010a, 134, 137; Ferris and Jones 2000; Wilmott 2000). It therefore seems only logical to consider the forts of Elmet as potential post-Roman settlements. On Hadrian's Wall, post-Roman settlements naturally seem to have focused upon crossing points (Collins 2004); thus it is likely that the defence of Elmet would be dependent upon maintaining control of movement at river crossings on major communication routes, such as the forts at Newton Kyme and Castleford. The archaeological evidence for such is only just beginning to emerge, with the radiocarbon dates from Castleford demonstrating at least some continuity of settlement — a fact that adds credence to the possibility that the final phases of Castleford's defences might actually be sub-Roman, as originally suggested by Buckland (2002, 401).

There are no known pagan Anglo-Saxon cemeteries in Elmet, yet there are indicators of an early Anglo-Saxon presence. The strong Mercian influences reflected in both dialect and place-names (Kolb 1974; Faull 1981b, 182), and the conventional interpretation of the Tribal Hidage, would seem to be corroborated by what is either a pre-annexation Mercian presence at Garforth or, at the very least, some evidence of trade, as represented by the Mercian pottery. The presence of *Grubenhäuser* at Garforth could indicate some more settled elements within the eastern Elmetian territory, supposing these structures are not the product of continuity of the recently identified late Roman tradition in sunken-floored buildings (see Roberts 2013, 291–5). An Anglo-Saxon presence would, however, be in keeping with the place-names, burial evidence and PAS finds, which together provide a more compelling case for a greater Anglo-Saxon presence along the Magnesian Limestone belt. It is conceivable that Anglo-Saxon activity in this zone was principally one of communication along an established route (the Roman road), rather than one purely of aggressive encroachment against Elmet. This idea accommodates Halsall's hypothesis for an axial north–south trend in early Anglo-Saxon political expansion (Halsall 2013, 250–2, fig. 10.4), which might naturally have resulted in it being a linear zone of potential conflict (see Pearson 1995, 49; Wood 2013, 157–8). It should not be forgotten that the Magnesian Limestone belt had been an important settlement and cultivation area in the later Iron Age and the Roman period (Roberts *et al.* 2010, 83), being one of the anciently cleared and long-tilled 'cultural cores' (Roberts 2010, fig. 13.3), making it likely that this geographical unit remained economically important for post-Roman Elmet, and one of prime interest for the Anglo-Saxons.

### CONCLUSION

Recent archaeological investigations, employing radiocarbon dating for the burials of the later Roman period, a practice generally considered to be non-standard, has begun to explain the long-standing archaeological invisibility of the British kingdom of Elmet. Rather than invisible, Elmet may be regarded more accurately as archaeologically undifferentiated. There is also some evidence to indicate that this archaeological 'gap' may not just be a consequence of late Roman cultural continuity; but possibly one also born of underlying older British traditions, as seen in certain burial rites, a notion which has long been accepted with regard to holy wells in Elmet (Faull 1981a, 176). It is also hypothesised that by the time of its annexation in the early seventh century the people of Elmet may already have begun to adopt subtle Anglo-Saxon cultural traits, possibly as a consequence of detachment from the British West, but also through increased Mercian influence.

From the small progress that has been made, it is apparent that unlocking the archaeology of Elmet, its post-Roman continuity and the subtle changes in its cultural identity during the late Roman to Anglo-Saxon transition, will be difficult. It is likely that the archaeology of Elmet will never be defined with the same degree of clarity claimed for other periods. However, a more refined and more lateral study of what appear to be late Roman finds assemblages, coupled wherever possible with appropriate radiocarbon dating, is going to be fundamental to a better future understanding.

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