The Origins of King’s Lynn?
Control of Wealth on the Wash
Prior to the Norman Conquest

By A. R. J. HUTCHESON

THIS PAPER investigates the archaeology and history of ‘productive’ sites, estate centres and
towns between A.D. 600 and 1100 in north-western East Anglia. Whilst it concentrates on a
specific sub-region (NW. Norfolk), an argument is developed on the nature of the relationship
between archaeological assemblages and administrative structures that can be applied more
widely for this period. In particular, the nature of ‘productive’ sites is discussed, and it is
suggested that these places were centres of estate administration and tax collection. The later
history of ‘productive’ sites in western Norfolk is then examined, focusing on the effect that
the Viking wars and subsequent (short-lived) Danish rule may have had on them. How this
background may have affected the decision by Herbert de Losinga (first Bishop of Norwich) to
site a priory, port and new town at Lynn is then explored.

The historical date of birth of the town of King’s Lynn is usually set at
1090, when Herbert de Losinga, Bishop of Thetford, established the priory of
St Margaret at Lena (Bishop’s Lynn, later King’s Lynn) on the NW. coast of
Norfolk.1 Through creating the monastery and its attached market, Losinga was
setting out to control wealth at the opening of the Wash, a critical centre for
communications and trade,2 and it seems he may have utilised existing economic
arrangements to marshal resources for the sustenance of the priory. By 1300, the
development of King’s Lynn reflected exceptional success and growth. Many
commentators on the early history of Lynn take 1090 as the point of the town’s
inception as a de novo settlement of the early Norman Period.3 In itself such
a conceptualisation of the origin of the town is not unreasonable, but it is
potentially a limiting view over-dependent upon a document-led, and even legal-
listic conceptualisation of medieval urban places and their development. Such
views risk isolating towns from their local and regional historical and economic

1 The primary source for this is the First Register, a history of Norwich priory written in the early 14th century;
H. W. Saunders, The First Register of Norwich Cathedral (Norfolk Record Society XI, Cambridge, 1939), ff. 8 and
51.
2 He was pursuing similar schemes on the other side of Norfolk at Great Yarmouth, also strategically an
important port, and at Norwich.
3 For instance M. Beresford, New Towns of the Middle Ages (Gloucester, 1988), 467–8.
Given these problems, this paper seeks to re-assess the origins of King’s Lynn, and, drawing on a range of archaeological and historical evidence, to investigate why this area of western Norfolk was so ripe for the creation of a port and town. In addition this paper will explore whether there really were new conditions in the late 11th century?

In 1962 a meeting of the Society for Medieval Archaeology was held in King’s Lynn, which soon after resulted in the formation of the King’s Lynn Survey. The survey’s aims were to examine the origins of the town and to chart its development through the study of its archaeology, architecture and documentary history. After ten years of intensive research three detailed studies relating to the early town were published. It is the intention here to follow the essential theme of the survey and to look at the origins of King’s Lynn, using that, however, as a case-study to explore a broader theme: the historical nature and trajectory of ‘productive’ sites. To this end, a certain amount of scene-setting is required. The first section of this paper will explore some concepts of the political and social structures of the East Anglian kingdom from the 6th century through to the Norman Conquest, drawing on archaeological and historical studies. In particular, a history of 7th- to 9th-century estate administration and the impact that Danish rule had on this from the late 9th century will be discussed. This analysis is, in part, based on concepts of Early-medieval estate forms and structures that have been set out by Jones and developed locally for Norfolk by Williamson. Similar concepts have been recently discussed and expanded by Faith in her examination of the development of English land tenure. How the control over estate resources may have led to the growth of a town is explored. In western Norfolk there is now enough information, largely derived from the record of metal-detected finds, to begin to interpret the development of state control over a rich and at times strategically important part of the East Anglian kingdom. The discussion in this respect owes much to the work of Hodges. In particular, an important premiss of this paper is that the growth of coinage in the 8th century was related to experiments in economic strategy carried out during the 7th and 8th centuries by the state that were intimately linked to changes in land-management, the incoming policies of the church, the adaptation of old systems of justice, and primogeniture inheritance. These new — or in some cases resurrected Roman — forms of social and resource control were in many cases also being explored in Merovingian Francia, from where elements may have been adopted. Clearly, the 7th to 8th centuries witnessed

the growth of social hierarchies and new strategies and institutions for controlling alienated resources. The so-called Middle Anglo-Saxon shuffle in settlement is yet another reflection of the changes taking place.\(^\text{10}\) In few parts of the country can we see the archaeological manifestation of these transformations more clearly than in western Norfolk, where the post-Roman archaeological record collected from the plough zone is especially rich.

Early-medieval trading and taxation centres are inextricably bound together with the historiography of urbanisation and commerce.\(^\text{11}\) Hodges’ anthropologically inspired model of state-formation and the development of towns has been much debated over the last twenty-five years and remains very influential.\(^\text{12}\) Most of the archaeological work on 7th- to 11th-century economics is based on that framework. More generally, this period has widely been characterised as the seedbed of a number of important historical structures: not only the rebirth of towns but even the formation of the nation-state and ultimately the re-introduction of a market-based economy.\(^\text{13}\) These are big concepts and they can really only be addressed anew through the interpretation of archaeological information and the reassessment, sometimes consequentially, of historical sources and the conclusions of past scholars.

Recent work specifically on ‘productive’ sites and their nature has focused on the use of metal-detected finds to discuss the distribution and nature of central places in the 7th to 9th centuries.\(^\text{14}\) Ulmschneider has shown that in Lincolnshire and Hampshire many ‘productive’ sites are located at inland locations and on communication routes, either Roman roads or rivers, and noted a difference in artefact assemblages between excavated rural sites such as, for example, Flixborough (S. Humbs.) and ðēs. She suggests that wealth at these sites was a product of intensive exploitation of the locality. Visible at the rare excavated examples is evidence, for example, of secondary production and the presence of skilled labour. Further, since these places often exhibit an ecclesiastical character, defined through the presence or even abundance of finds and structures with ecclesiastical connotations, Ulmschneider has suggested that many of these central places were monastic.\(^\text{15}\) More locally to the concerns here, Pestell has illustrated that ecclesiastical landholdings in East Anglia from the 11th century and later can be related to the position of ‘productive’ sites, with the inference that at least some of these sites were early monastic

\(^{10}\) Ibid., 62–4.


\(^{12}\) Hodges (1982), op. cit. in note 8.

\(^{13}\) H. Pirenne, *Mohammed and Charlemagne* (London, 1939); also the opening chapters of idem, *Medieval Cities: Their Origins and the Revival of Trade* (Princeton, 1925); although Annales scholars such as G. Duby, *The Early Growth of the European Economy* (London, 1974) take a very different view.


\(^{15}\) Ibid., 105.
establishments. Naylor has recently countered this, suggesting that the identification of sites as monastic or as minsters is generally based on ‘flimsy’ documentary evidence, and that the characterisation of sites with a handful of coins as being significant is an overstatement: he argues that ‘productive’ sites were characteristic of a ‘generalised zone of monetised trade along the east coast’. This general assumption of some connection between rich site assemblages and ecclesiastical foundations has also been called into question by Loveluck, who suggests that a much more fluid and rapidly changing situation applied at the excavated site of Flixborough. It is perhaps significant that in archaeological terms rich secular and ecclesiastical sites from the 7th century to 9th century cannot easily be distinguished.

With these issues in mind it is argued in this paper that, prior to the planting of the St Margaret’s Priory, there were already institutions in the area of King’s Lynn for the control and exploitation of surplus. Whether these institutions were ecclesiastical, royal, or lordly is in some senses irrelevant to the discussion. Further, such a suggestion inevitably calls into question whether the establishment of the priory and its markets in the late 11th century was truly de novo. Instead, it will be suggested that this was a development that in effect centralised a pre-existing system of administration and exploitation. This unrecorded history has to be pieced together, using archaeological evidence, a few documents surviving from the 8th to 11th centuries that refer to the East Anglian situation, place-names, and the geographical patterns of land tenure in Domesday and later documents which reflect an older configuration. Losinga’s foundation was, it will be argued, more of a relocation and further centralisation of resources than an act of creation. Trade, and its control and utilisation for wealth creation, did not begin here in a vacuum. Those who controlled wealth in the region were replaced periodically, but, it will be argued, their taxation, judicial and rent-gathering infrastructure or network seems to have remained to some degree intact. Focusing on the period between the 7th and 11th centuries, I shall attempt to chart a history of the control of surplus and profits in Western Norfolk, prior to and eventually leading to the development of King’s Lynn.

THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL CONTEXT OF EARLY KING’S LYNN

Silvester’s work on the Norfolk Fenland landscape has suggested that the period between the 7th and 11th centuries saw considerable expansion of settlement into former wetland areas. During the earlier part of this period

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17 Naylor, op. cit. in note 15, 133.
19 Williamson, op. cit. in note 6, for the Norfolk context; more generally Faith, op. cit. in note 7, for an exposition of what may be termed a historical approach to Anglo-Saxon social structure utilising a variety of sources of information.
settlement appears to have been specialised. Fieldwalking at the site at Hay Green in the parish of Terrington St Clement identified a massive spread of Ipswich-ware pottery and an equally large assemblage of animal bone. These discoveries led to the suggestion that permanent settlement, represented by the large spread of pottery, had developed from the seasonal exploitation of marsh-land pasture and illustrated that the Fens were being intensively utilised during the 8th and early 9th centuries. It would appear, taking this evidence to a logical conclusion, that, in the 7th and 8th centuries, upland estates were controlling the exploitation of salt-production and seasonal grassland and that such patterns eventually developed into permanent settlements.

Excavation, undertaken as part of the Fenland Management Project, has refined this picture, providing valuable insights into the utilisation of the Fenland during the Early-medieval Period. This recent work has illustrated a pattern of permanent settlement in the 8th and 9th centuries to the south-west of King’s Lynn, based not only on salt-production and pasture but also the cultivation of salt-resistant barley, involving a more diverse economy here than had previously been imagined and suggesting that the intensive use of the Fenland began earlier than previously thought. Some of these settlement sites continued in use into the 10th–12th centuries. Continuity of settlement was by no means ubiquitous but appears, in the relatively small excavated sample, to have been common. In turn this suggests that the structures for controlling the landscape were already being developed in this earlier period, implying a more sophisticated form of administration at that time. These investigated sites clearly did not survive into the later Middle Ages. As yet not enough data have been gathered from modern villages and small towns to determine whether they too were established during this period, although the place-name evidence certainly suggests that they were, and Domesday Book shows that almost all of them were settlements of some kind by the middle of the 11th century.

There are many ‘productive’ sites situated on the fen edge (see Fig. 1). The definition of these is given in the next section. One such settlement at Bawsey lies just 4.3 km to the east of St Margaret’s Priory, the historic core of King’s Lynn, and was in many senses, it will be argued, a precursor to Lynn. Dr Andrew Rogerson originally made the connection between the two sites in the late 1980s when large quantities of metalwork from Bawsey began to appear. Pestell has also recently discussed the relationship. Administrative, trading, judicial and taxation roles that later came to be located within the town may in this earlier period have been spread between a number of locations, Bawsey being one of the more prominent of these. Western Norfolk seems to have been

22 Ibid., 225.
‘Productive’ centres with four or more finds of 7th- or 8th-century coins.
particularly decentralised compared with other parts of East Anglia where urban growth began earlier. Reasons for this lack of centralisation remain obscure but it may partly have been due, in earlier periods, to the distance of this part of the East Anglia from the royal centre of power in the Sandlings area of Suffolk. In addition to Bawsey, the nearby site at Gaywood, which later became the site of one of the bishop’s palaces, may also have been an important centre, although it cannot be termed a ‘productive’ site. It now lies within the modern parish of King’s Lynn (see Fig. 4).

It will be suggested that here in western Norfolk the difference between the early pre-urban administrative structures and later structures, which were more centrally focused on places that have come to be known as towns, can be summarised as the difference between a matrix of roles interspersed across a number of sites and a nexus drawing roles into a central settlement. Nationally we can see that roles such as trade, minting and craft production become increasingly centralised in towns throughout the period being examined here but predominantly towards its end. Many 7th- to 9th-century towns, if they can be termed as such, seem to have had quite specific reasons for their initial development for which historical sources, if they ever existed, have almost entirely disappeared. The origin and function of wīcs is therefore a subject of much conjecture and debate, most commentators viewing them as rather particular cases, with many suggesting that these locations were used by kings to control trade. Certainly, large urban centres were rare nationally before the 10th century or even the 11th, and wīcs were restricted to the eastern half of the country, with a focus on the North Sea and Channel, and to no more than one per major kingdom. By the 10th century, towns may have been intimately connected with military strategy and the establishment of burhs. In East Anglia these largely seem to reflect the so-called ‘re-conquest’ of the southern Danelaw by the King of Wessex, Edward the Elder. Western Norfolk does not appear to have experienced significant amounts of overseas trade in this period and was not a place where any known burh was established in the early 10th century. Until the end of the 11th century it was therefore apparently non-urbanised, in that it lacked what many would now refer to as a town.

Viewing the archaeological fragments of the multiple tiers of settlement structure that clearly existed during the period of the 7th to 11th centuries purely in relation to one theme, urbanisation, however, cannot do justice to the information available. In a recent review of the Mercian evidence, Vince laments that, ‘several decades of urban archaeology have failed to provide conclusive answers to even basic questions, such as were there towns in Mercia


25 For two distinctly different views, see Hodges (1982), op. cit. in note 8, and D. M. Hinton, ‘Metalwork and the emporia’, 24–31 in M. Anderton (ed.), Anglo-Saxon Trading Centres: Beyond the Emporia (Glasgow, 1999), Hodges arguing for emporia being used to control incoming trade in precious goods and Hinton suggesting they were surplus exporting facilities.
in the 7th to 9th centuries. Perhaps, then, the question is not being framed appropriately. Even the evidence from as late as _Domesday_ suggests that modern concepts of universal urban development do not accord well with how earlier medieval societies may have thought about and discussed urban places, commercial centres, trade, tax and tenure. It seems that localities and regions had their own peculiar trajectories when it comes to administrative control. One of the reasons why the interpretation of _Domesday_ evidence is so challenging may be precisely because it is imprecise on the topics that have concerned many historians and latterly archaeologists, such as the development of towns. This is not simply a defect, but might rather be viewed as an insight into the governmental mindset of the late 11th century. Clearly, power (by which, in this case, I mean the collection of wealth through dues) was being centralised at sites in this period in different ways, probably to fit the local and to some extent the contemporary political circumstances. In some instances this led to the development of a town earlier than in others. How ‘productive’ sites might, in East Anglia anyway, help to explore some of the detail of these developments is explored in the following sections.

We know that the power of kings was based on wealth derived from the exploitation of subjects, neighbours and enemies. The terminology of exploitation during the period is notoriously vague. Asser, for instance, describes Alfred’s wealth as coming from _census_, as well as using the terms tribute, taxes, tolls and rents. Historically, it is difficult to define the difference between the tribute demanded by a king from subject kingdoms and from subject populations. By the 8th century this distinction could possibly have been beginning to break down as over-kings subordinated collection to local kings or officials. In Wales, collection of taxation within a kingdom in the form of _render_ was by the 12th century, and perhaps from as early as the 8th, organised by _commote_ (half a _cantref_, or in English terms a Hundred). The detail of this system has been lost and what part coinage played in it is difficult to discern. However, in East Anglia, the large numbers of individual coin-finds from the landscape and the clear concentrations in their distribution may perhaps reflect for us, at least in part, a tax-collection system. Marrying the distribution of coin to a loose ‘multiple estate’ model could provide insight into the structure of the royal tax-collection system here. Perhaps the collection was organised at central places, based either within a single ‘multiple estate’ or some conglomeration of them. How could this relate to the origins of King’s Lynn? The hypothesis here is that these early centres for the collection of wealth were later centralised within the town, with

29 W. Davies, _Wales in the Early Middle Ages_ (Leicester, 1982), 129.
31 For an explanation of the term ‘multiple estate’, see Jones, op. cit. in note 6.
the old centres then becoming fiscally redundant. This may also explain, as we shall see later, why many of the western Norfolk ‘productive’ sites were recorded as being of little significance within *Domesday Book*.

**VIEWING EARLY-MEDIEVAL EXCHANGE IN THE LANDSCAPE THROUGH THE PORTABLE ANTIQUITIES SCHEME**

One of the most important archaeological datasets for the period within East Anglia is the relatively new one of metal-detected finds. But this is not a dataset that can be treated uncritically. Ulmschneider has demonstrated the value of metal-detected information for studying Early-medieval central places and has shown that there are problems in correlating it with excavated sites. In Norfolk and Suffolk the relationship between metal-detector users and archaeologists has been developing since the 1970s. The corpus of material from both counties is now considerable. A review of recent annual reports on the results of the Portable Antiquities Scheme shows that Norfolk accounts for a third of the artefacts nationally recorded through the scheme. Suffolk contributes around one-sixth of the national total.

**COINS**

Particularly useful for understanding the nature of Early-medieval settlement structure and governance, is the evidence of coin-loss across the landscape of East Anglia emerging from liaison between those practising metal detecting and archaeologists, for the reasons outlined in the previous section. The assemblage of coins for Norfolk and Suffolk is especially large for the period between the late 7th and late 8th centuries, when pennies known as *sceattas* were common. Blackburn has recently commented on the nature of coin-use and pointed out that more coin appears to have been in circulation at this time than at any other point in the post-Roman period prior to the 12th century. He goes on to suggest, following Metcalf, that the subsequent relative rarity of late 8th- and 9th-century coin-finds reflects a general European contraction in the silver supply. Therefore a penny in the 9th century may have had a higher value than one from the middle of the 8th century.

Some numismatists specialising in Early-medieval coinage see the patterns of coin-loss as a direct reflection of commercial activity. Metcalf, for instance, asserts that coinage in the countryside during the 8th century represents stray

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32 Ulmschneider, op. cit. in note 14, 107.
35 Blackburn, op. cit. in note 34, 35.
loss and indicates an integrated monetary economy. Archaeologists too, when explaining concentrations of coin-loss, often use the concept of the market, but do not define what they mean thereby. Coins in the landscape may represent other activities, apart from cash commerce, such as tax-collection, potentially reflecting a command rather than a demand economy, to stretch the economic analogies. If that were the case here, it could be that ‘productive’ sites rich in coin-finds in East Anglia are not all markets, although it is certainly true that a number may have been, but rather were estate or administrative centres for the collection of dues. Trade at this time, such that can be seen, is often similarly poorly defined and may have been confined in the main to direct transactions, as suggested, for instance, in Charlemagne’s letter to Offa referring to a trade in cloaks and black stones, which effectively was gift-giving. Where coin was used in a direct transaction it may have had not so much a monetary value as a specifically defined one. Money is a concept and coins are artefacts, a distinction that is not often discussed in the study of this period. What the biography of these artefacts was during this period is not as clear as it is often presented as being. Scattas, and other forms of coinage prior to c. 800, may, for instance, represent a form of ‘primitive’ or specialised money, as discussed below.

This distinction is important in the implications that it has for the type of society reflected in the distribution of the coinage. Clearly, given the distribution that we can see in East Anglia, coinage was not being used exclusively for long-distance trade. Hodges has suggested that sceattas were ‘primitive money’, following from Polyani’s definition of ‘special-purpose’ money, regarding them as primarily for long-distance trade. At that time their distribution was not as well understood as now and seemed to be concentrated predominantly within wics. This is still the case with certain issues, such as the H series, which is almost exclusively found at Hamwic. However, the lack of Series H from the rest of Wessex may be governed by sampling bias and the East Anglian distributions strongly suggest that coinage was used in many different locations and therefore not restricted to long-distance trade. The hypothesis here is that many of these sites were located at important or significant parts of the tenurial landscape: places, it is further postulated, where obligations were due. Trade, represented by the coinage, was therefore ‘socially embedded’, in that it was specifically driven through taxation and does not represent cash exchange in an open market. The coinage was not therefore money, in a modern sense.

37 See, for example, K. Ulnschneider and T. Pestell, ‘Introduction: early markets and “productive” sites’, 1–10 in idem (eds.), op. cit. in note 16.
Scholars studying prehistoric British coinage are also divided on the meaning of coin-production and use. The argument is largely between a formalist monetary view, as expounded by, amongst many others, van Arsdell, and the more substantivist view articulated by, for instance, Haselgrove, which sees coinage embedded in the social obligations between elites. Haselgrove makes the point that too few numismatists and archaeologists studying the Iron Age are interested in why coinage was produced, what it was used for, and what that might tell us about the social relations of that period, particularly given that within neither the Greek world nor the Roman Republic was the primary purpose of minting coinage to provide a medium of exchange. Van Arsdell counters that typology, metallurgy and metrology demonstrate that coins were money. He suggests that Iron-age coins were produced by specialised mints under centralised control and must have been used as a generalised medium for exchange because they were carefully manufactured to a specific standard and to a known intrinsic value. Further, they were marked so that the intrinsic value could be judged by sight, and were used by the population at large — illustrated by the fact that they were counterfeited. Taking a different view, Nash has suggested that inscribed Iron-age dynastic coinage may have been used to fulfil obligations of clientage, which she sees as an effective prototype for tax. Nash makes this suggestion for a specific sub-group of Iron-age coinage but it is probably reasonable to extend her view to suggest that all coinage in the Iron Age was utilised in the payment of specific types of obligations, for instance, judicial payments, dowry and tribute.

A debate between a substantivist and formalist view of coinage during this period has a long and distinguished history. I would argue that a substantivist conceptualisation of the archaeological evidence fits better with historical interpretations. For example, it is particularly difficult to reconcile, in the formalist, market centre model, the clear intensification during the 9th century of other economic activities with the lessening loss of coin and the increasing value of each individual coin. Following this line of thought through, and again considering the distribution, it is just as possible that sceattas were also primarily utilised in the payment of obligations. This would explain their distribution in wīces and at inland and smaller coastal sites just as well, as those are the locations where groups gather for a variety of reasons. This might also help to illuminate the development of putative simple markets as a method of converting agrarian surplus to coin. This conversion could have been undertaken at particular sites, at least some of which are now being rediscovered as ‘productive’ sites. Further, it is plausible that these locations for both the conversion and collection of wealth through obligations are correlated to the territorial divisions, which can be

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44 R. D. van Arsdell, ‘Money supply and credit in Iron Age Britain’, 139–50 in Mays (ed.), op. cit. in note 43.
46 This debate has recently been summarised by Naylor, op. cit. in note 15, 3–10.
thought of as multiple estates. So, we are not looking at the footprint of a monetised economy at ‘productive’ sites but rather at an element in the agrarian economy that is specifically turning goods into coin for the specific purpose of paying tax and fulfilling other types of obligation. Charles-Edwards has discussed the various mechanisms that Early-medieval kings used to collect wealth, and drawn a possible distinction between tribute and food renders. Prior to around 700 there is every likelihood that both tribute and food renders were collected in the traditional manner, with the royal household either travelling to consume them in the case of renders, or, in the case of tribute, the cattle or precious goods being brought to a point of collection. With a growth in the size of the kingdom the system of collection became more complex and it became necessary to convert, *inter alia*, the cattle and possibly some of the render into coin.

Pestell’s recent examination of East Anglian ‘productive’ sites looks at their possible tenurial continuity in the hands of monastic foundations of the post-Viking and Norman periods. He, Rogerson and Newman identify some fourteen sites which they term ‘productive’ within the East Anglian kingdom. These are mainly sites that have produced large metal assemblages of the 7th to 9th centuries discovered through metal-detecting. Brandon is an exception in that it has been systematically excavated. Bawsey has also been examined archaeologically, and the details of both are discussed below.

The list presented here (Tab. 1; Fig. 1) is based on slightly different criteria from Pestell’s, Rogerson’s and Newman’s lists: here the area of examination is the modern parish, looking at these places as ‘productive’ land-units; an explanation of this is given below. Within these modern parishes there are more *sceattas* than in other parts of the landscape. In many cases these can be linked directly to ‘productive’ sites but in some locations the coin-loss is more diffuse, although still significantly higher than in the great majority of parishes. Most parishes do not produce any coins of this period. Gurney has discussed the distribution of metal-detected find-spots within Norfolk and has pointed to some interesting patterns, illustrating that care must be exercised when interpreting distributions of metalwork within the county. He specifically cited the example of metal-detected coins from the 7th to late 8th centuries, demonstrating that by and large the distribution of these coins adheres to that of metal-detecting activity across Norfolk. That picture has subsequently changed greatly. The data Gurney used consisted at the end of 1997 of around 1,250 recorded events on the Norfolk Historic Environment Record relating to metal-detector use. Now there are more than 9,000 events or instances of the same activity.

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48 Pestell, op. cit. in note 16.
Table 1
PRE-A.D. 900 NUMBERS OF COINS BY PARISH
(NOT INCLUDING HOARDS)

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<tr>
<th>Norfolk</th>
<th>Parish</th>
<th>Number of coins</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bawsey</td>
<td>109</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Caistor St Edmund</td>
<td>24</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Thetford</td>
<td>23</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Norwich</td>
<td>20</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Burnham Market</td>
<td>13</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Burgh Castle</td>
<td>12</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Congham</td>
<td>9</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bradenham</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bircham</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Caister on Sea</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Middle Harling</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
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<td>Wormegay</td>
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<td>Rocklands</td>
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<th>Parish</th>
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<td></td>
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<td>Coddenham</td>
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If one takes concentration into account as well as distribution, then this bias can be accommodated, as shown in Figure 2. ‘Productive’ places, as defined here, are locations where four or more coins have been discovered. My argument is that even where the coin-loss is fairly diffuse across a parish, it still represents a significant concentration when compared with other locations. There are a number of theoretical and organisational problems in utilising the modern parish but this is a convenient approach and one that can be readily adapted to historical interpretations (see below). The number of these ‘productive’ areas amounts to 22 sites in Norfolk and 15 in Suffolk, including Ipswich, all of which are places that have produced four or more sceattas. Interestingly, there is a strong correlation between parishes producing sceattas in East Anglia and hām place-name suffixes. Williamson has discussed the place-name evidence for Norfolk and suggested that hām names may represent ‘multiple estate’ centres, with tūn names correlating to later tied settlements. These ‘multiple estates’ can also be seen in fossilised form in some locations in the relationship between adjacent parish boundaries.\(^{52}\)

**Pottery**

East Anglia is fortunate in having a recognisable pottery industry for the period and much work has been undertaken collecting evidence from tilled fields.

\(^{52}\) Williamson, op. cit. in note 6, 92–104.
Ipswich Ware was identified by Hurst and West and first dated to c. 625/50–850. Wade-Martins’s study of the development of settlement in the Launditch Hundred utilised this information to recognise sites of the period and demonstrated a strong connection between scatters of Ipswich Ware and some isolated village churches. Indeed, all of the eight villages with *ha¯m* endings within Launditch Hundred that were archaeologically investigated produced Ipswich Ware, although it is notable that the excavations at the 7th- to 11th-century putative diocesan centre at North Elmham produced only a fairly small assemblage of this ware. Subsequent landscape studies have benefited from this foundation work. Many parishes have now produced a small collection. Blinkhorn’s work on Ipswich Ware has provided much refinement to this picture, tightening the production chronology from Hurst and West’s longer period to c. 720–850. The production zone for the industry has petrologically

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56 Ibid., 85.
been narrowed to Ipswich alone, suggesting a very large and centralised ‘trading’ network.\footnote{58} It would seem that the ruling Wuffingas dynasty centred in the Sandlings area of Suffolk (at, amongst other places, Rendlesham, according to Bede, a site that has produced a significant assemblage of Ipswich Ware collected from the plough-zone) practised an archaeologically highly visible form of ‘extensive lordship’.\footnote{59} If we accept that the \textit{\textit{wic}} was under the control of the king, then so would the production of Ipswich Ware have been. The concentration of production in Ipswich is interesting given the known geographical spread of the material, with the bulk of findspots being in Norfolk. Blinkhorn has discussed the possible trade network implications of this distribution.\footnote{60} I would argue that this pattern represents an elaborate and widespread, render and tribute system or \textit{\textit{feorn}} supply chain.\footnote{61} The much-quoted section within Ine’s laws that spells out the expected render from a ten-hide estate in Wessex is useful corroboration of this general idea.\footnote{62}

In effect, within the former East Anglian kingdom, the distribution of Ipswich Ware could provide a ‘negative’ picture of the flow of wealth, with the pottery radiating out from the \textit{\textit{wic}} and unknown materials flowing into Ipswich. The \textit{\textit{wic}} may thus have been a royal clearing and counting house for tax, trade and tribute in a variety of forms, from food-rent to imported wine, the latter as evinced by the quantities of Badorf amphora found during excavations.\footnote{63} The exclusive production of this type of pottery within the \textit{\textit{wic}} suggests a monopoly, and although it may have been a product in itself, it is difficult to see that there would have been much scope, in the context of the likely nature of the Early-medieval economy, to make any significant profit from the sale of pottery vessels. It seems more likely that they served a different purpose, facilitating the transport of goods due through taxation, as well as possibly having affiliations with identity. Some incoming trade could also have been repackaged to express its origins at Ipswich. However, pottery is not a particularly easily transported material and this begs the questions of why it was used, and for transporting what type of foodstuff. Little work has yet taken place on the residues within these vessels but it can be postulated that both salt and honey are likely candidates. It is also possible that wine was transhipped in Ipswich Ware vessels, having been decanted from amphora at the \textit{\textit{wic}}.

\footnote{60} Blinkhorn, op. cit. in note 58.
Work on the animal-bone assemblages from *emporia* in England and on the Continent has suggested that the economic process represented was the provisioning of the settlement from the countryside through redistribution and not through commodity exchange.\textsuperscript{64} Ipswich would therefore have been the administrative hub for the royal house’s geld system; as will be discussed further below, the minting of ‘Type R *sceattas*’ in the earlier part of this period and their kingdom-wide distribution illustrate aspects of this extensive system, involving not only *feorm* but also coin-payments such as those referred to as *gafol* by the late 7th century in Kentish and West Saxon laws — a term that seems to be directly translatable as tribute.\textsuperscript{65} A further tier to this picture might also be discerned from the sub-regional distribution of some Type *Q* *sceattas*, for which a regression analysis seems to illustrate a north-western East Anglian and possibly Middle Anglian circulation.\textsuperscript{66}

Within Norfolk (to a lesser extent in Suffolk and Lincolnshire, and less still in Cambridgeshire) there is, as we have seen, a well, though problematically, sampled landscape in terms of reported metal-detected finds and ceramics. Many of the Norfolk detectorists spot Ipswich Ware in the plough zone while carrying out metal-detecting. In addition, there have been several systematic field-walking surveys, of various sizes, in Norfolk and Suffolk, which give more clarity in certain areas. The largest of these is Silvester’s work on the Norfolk fenland. There are also Rogerson’s surveys of Barton Bendish and Fransham parishes; Davison’s study of the parishes of Hales, Heckingham and Loddon; Wade-Martins’s investigation of the Launditch Hundred; Lawson and Wade’s study of Witton parish; and Newman’s work for the Sutton Hoo environs survey.\textsuperscript{67} These systematic surveys, in conjunction with more casually collected information, provide a comprehensive coverage of Norfolk with a lesser sample for the adjacent counties. The results of the Portable Antiquity Scheme illustrate that Norfolk contributes about one-third of the total finds for England. When examining metalwork patterns in the landscape the data are therefore weighted to Norfolk and comparisons between the situation there and those in other counties must be made with care. However, if comparisons are made on the basis solely of coins, and the Historic Environment Records excluded, the Early Medieval Coin Corpus held by the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge, contains entries for objects that may not have been reported to the local archaeological record.\textsuperscript{68} Searching this database for coins within the counties around the Wash dating to a.d. 500–900 produced the results given in Table 2.

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\textsuperscript{65} Faith, op. cit. in note 7, 105–6.


\textsuperscript{67} Silvester, op cit. in note 20; Rogerson, op. cit. in note 53; Davison, op. cit. in note 53; Wade-Martins, op. cit. in note 55; Lawson, op. cit. in note 53; Newman, op. cit. in note 59.

\textsuperscript{68} A searchable database of the Early Medieval Corpus is held at [www.fitzmuseum.cam.ac.uk/coins/emc/]
CONTINUITY OF ESTATE CENTRES ON THE WASH c. 650–1086

Many ‘productive’ sites encircle the area of the Wash. The previous section explored the distribution of 7th- to 9th-century coins and pottery and discussed what inferences might be drawn from the investigation of such information. This section seeks to examine a few individual locations and their subsequent history. It is suggested that the idea of a ‘productive’ area is perhaps more appropriate than a site-specific emphasis because there are clear patterns of continuity — if not in all cases at the site itself, then within the area of the later parish. What was later to become the parish may therefore have been a core entity within the territorial demarcation of the landscape prior to the church re-utilising it. It is notable, for instance, that evidence for Early Anglo-Saxon settlement in the Lark Valley (Suffolk) seems to reflect much the same distribution as the later parishes, except in the case of parishes with the late name-suffix tu¯n.69 A parish such as Wymondham in central Norfolk, for instance, forms the core of a much larger estate that can be visualised through a number of contiguous parishes surrounding it. There are no fewer than 56 parishes in Norfolk with what Williamson terms contact-scores of eight or more. Some, such as Docking (12 satellite contacts), Holt (10), Loddon (10), Diss (9), Tunstead (9) and South Erpingham (8), gave their names to hundreds.70 The process of manorialisation in Norfolk is not clear, but it seems reasonable to believe that some manors’ origins date back to the 8th century and their boundaries may well have been re-used as those of parishes at a later date. Although the development of the medieval parochial system was complex and multifaceted, it is true to say that both the early parochia and the parish conformed to a pre-existing territorial structure of royal estates and later manors and were conditioned by them.71 Many of these core parishes within Norfolk and Suffolk tend to have a place-name containing a h âm suffix. There may be a bias in our identification of ‘productive’ sites as a result of this.

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70 Williamson, op. cit. in note 6, 152–4.
Those estate centres which went on to become towns or large medieval settlements are not now under the plough and are therefore unlikely to produce significant numbers of coins, or pottery for that matter. This is exacerbated by the fact that most have not been investigated through other forms of archaeological fieldwork either, so that places like Wymondham or Aylsham, known to be large manorial centres at *Domesday*, have produced no coinage of the period being investigated here. As a result, there are, clearly, problems in using a distribution model based on the density of coins within the parish, but we can to some extent circumvent or at least qualify these by looking more closely at the situation at an individual site level and understanding why bias may arise in the picture.

Figure 1 shows all the ‘productive’ areas within East Anglia and its immediate environs. There is a clear concentration on the north and north-western coasts and extending to areas which are either on the Wash itself or in close proximity to waterways that drain into the Wash. There is another concentration in the Sandlings area of Suffolk centred mainly on the River Gipping. There is a concomitant absence of coinage in eastern Norfolk and north-eastern Suffolk, although this is not true of the distribution of Ipswich Ware. We can see from the distribution of metal-detector recorded events shown in Figure 2 that this lack of coin-finds is not due to a lack of attention from metal-detector users, although it is clearly possible that there is another bias at work that has not yet been identified.

Bawsey is the most ‘productive’ place in the region, apart from Ipswich, with 109 coins of Anglo-Saxon date, 92 dating from before A.D. 850. The main concentration of coins and the ‘productive’ site itself lie on a promontory jutting into the River Gaywood valley. In the 8th century, however, the site was much closer to the coast (see Fig. 6). This promontory is a short distance from the 11th-century episcopal manor and later palace at Gaywood; this relationship is discussed further below. Significant coin-loss began in the 7th century but the assemblage is dominated by 8th-century *sceattas* totalling 70. These range through the primary, intermediate and secondary series. Significantly, coin-loss continues at Bawsey into the later 8th and through the 9th, 10th and 11th centuries, although at significantly reduced volume. The work of the TV Time Team programme here revealed some of the context for the metal-detected information. Geophysics and trial trenching demonstrated an enclosure ditch that seemed to date from 720–850 through the presence of Ipswich Ware in its fill. This work also recorded an area of industrial activity, possibly associated with metal production. Ipswich Ware has been collected in significant quantity from the surface too.

The ‘productive’ site at Brandon is the only major site outside of Ipswich within the former kingdom to have been the subject of large-scale excavation. It, like Bawsey, has a dramatic setting upon a sand island within the River Little Ouse, linked by causeway to the southern bank. Settlement evidence here was extraordinarily well preserved. The structural evidence included a three-cell timber church with an adjoining inhumation cemetery; a second cemetery was
discovered on the edge of the excavated area but a second church was not identified. Other buildings numbered 35 in all. The artefact assemblage from the site is impressive, including items such as a ‘Coptic’ bowl, window glass, decorated glass jars, claw-beaker fragments, Tating-ware pottery and styli, as well as more commonly found objects such as strap-ends, pins and Ipswich Ware.\textsuperscript{72} A number of 6th-century brooches and a pair of 5th-century tweezers from elsewhere within the parish indicate some earlier activity.\textsuperscript{73} An important gold plaque depicting St John the Evangelist with the head of an eagle surrounded by a Latin inscription (\textit{SCS EVANGELISTA IOHANNIS}: ‘St John the Evangelist’),\textsuperscript{74} found by a fisherman in 1978, suggests a religious site. Holes at each corner of the square may indicate that this was a book cover, further implying a monastic establishment.\textsuperscript{75} A list of the coins from the excavated site was not available at the time of publication, but there are six other coins dating between the late 7th and early 9th centuries from other parts of the parish, giving the area, even without the ‘productive’ site, a significant concentration for the region. Here too the concentration of coin continues through the 9th and 10th and into the 11th century, but within the parish rather than at the excavated site itself.

Other ‘productive’ parishes around the Wash with similar patterns of coin-loss throughout the 7th to 11th centuries include Congham, Holme-next-the-Sea, Lakenheath, Middle Harling, Narborough/Narford, Oxborough, Thetford, West Walton and Wormegay. Beyond East Anglia proper, both the Cambridgeshire ‘Productive’ Site 1 (7 coins) and the South Lincolnshire ‘Productive’ Site (67 coins) (as named by the Fitzwilliam Museum) produce only evidence from the 8th century, apart from one Cnut short-cross penny from South Lincolnshire. Both these sites are only known through the liaison of metal-detector users with the Fitzwilliam Museum on the condition that their actual locations remain undisclosed. Ely has produced seven coins dating to before A.D. 850 and a further four from between 850 and 1065. Newman, following Metcalf, has postulated that Ely is a likely site for the minting of Series Q sceattas.\textsuperscript{76} This seems unlikely, given that only one of the coins from Ely is of Series Q. However, it is undeniable that this was the centre of a great Fenland monastic estate, comprising, at its core, what were later to become two Hundreds.\textsuperscript{77} Series Q also makes up only a small proportion of the 70 sceattas from Bawsey, with just three having been found there. Although, as Metcalf’s analysis shows, Series Q does make up a significant proportion of the assemblage at some ‘productive’ locations, it must be remembered that there are 48 Series Q coins nationally, with 29 in East Anglia, and at no place are there more than three of these coins: Bawsey, Freckenham (Suffolk) and York all have produced

\textsuperscript{72} Carr et al., op. cit. in note 50.
\textsuperscript{73} S. E. West, \textit{A Corpus of Anglo-Saxon Material from Suffolk} (East Anglian Archaeol, 84, Ipswich, 1998), 12.
\textsuperscript{75} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{77} See, for example, H. C. Darby, \textit{The Domesday Geography of Eastern England} (3rd ed., Cambridge, 1971), 265.
this number. On that basis, a percentage-based regression analysis must be treated with caution, but there is clearly a concentration in north-western Norfolk.

At Bawsey, the 7th- and 8th-century collection as a whole exhibits significant differences compared with other large assemblages of the period in eastern England, such as the ‘productive’ site at ‘South Lincolnshire’ on the other side of the Wash where the c. 70 coins are predominantly early and continental in origin. At Bawsey, there is a higher proportion of English coinage and just under a third of the total appears to have been produced within the East Anglian kingdom; in fact, if some of the Series E coins are double-sided copies, the indigenous proportion could be yet larger. At the ‘productive’ site near Royston (Herts.), one of the largest other assemblages in the country, the proportion of continental coins is in line with that of Bawsey, at 35 of a total of 105 coins, dating from the 7th and the first half of the 8th centuries. Royston, like Bawsey, also has continuity of coin-loss through the 9th, 10th and 11th centuries, although in much reduced numbers compared to the 7th- and 8th-century coin assemblage. At the Essex productive site at Tilbury only one of the 29 coins comprised in the a.d. 650–800 assemblage was continental and there were no coins post dating 800, with only two post-sceatt coins, both late 8th-century.

These patterns seem to reflect a complex circulation of sceattas, one that has yet to be fully explained. Naylor’s observation that much of the coin-loss was either near the coast or near a navigable waterway is valid, but not in itself surprising, as these were the communications routes of the period that any important place would need to be near. Figure 1 shows the distribution of ‘productive’ parishes against the major river systems, illustrating that these places tend to be located near major communication routes. A ‘coastal’ monetised zone within 15 km of the coast, as Naylor suggests, may be an explanation for coin-distributions in Yorkshire and Kent but not in Norfolk, where there are significant numbers of coins as far inland as it is possible to get, more than 30 km from the coast. In addition, there are few historical references that point to such a situation, apart possibly from those describing tolls.78 Taxation was a well-documented fact of Early-medieval life; it will have been levied and paid in different forms, and collected through a variety of institutions with foci spread throughout the landscape. Some of these central locations for the collecting of obligations will be archaeologically visible as ‘productive’ sites. Those places will undoubtedly have had specific roles: some will have been monastic, some residential, some were courts, some may have been moots or other forms of governmental meeting place, and some will have been linked to military assemblies. Many will have had multiple and changeable roles. All these types of place are reflected in the documentary records for the period. What is more difficult to see in the historical sources for England are cash-based commodity ‘markets’. A trend towards the centralisation of functions at a single location seems to be linked to the growth of government. By the 10th century this process was well on its way in

78 Naylor, op. cit. in note 14, 116–34.
some locations but north-western Norfolk seems to have retained a multi-focal set of central places, unlike southern and eastern Norfolk where government gravitated towards the larger central places at Norwich and Thetford. This situation is explored in the following section.

THE SOUTHERN DANELAW AND THE CONQUEST BY WESSEX

Social structure within the southern Danelaw is perhaps more difficult to discern than that of the historically better understood north. The place-name differences between the northern and southern Danelaw are striking, with far fewer Scandinavian terms in the south.\textsuperscript{79} A dividing line between the two areas can be drawn approximately at the River Welland in southern Lincolnshire. Even a cursory glance at a map of the Wash illustrates that Grimston-hybrid names and place-names ending in -by are much less frequent in the south of the area. The concentration of Scandinavian place-names seems to be fairly even across much of the northern Danelaw, albeit with some clustering to rivers. However, the East Anglian evidence is quite different. Here, Danish place-names are found predominantly in the eastern part of the former kingdom. In particular, there is a marked paucity of such place-names in the north-west of the region. The largest concentration is in and around the former island of Flegg and Lothingland in the extreme east of Norfolk and north-east Suffolk.\textsuperscript{80} Notably, there are very few Scandinavian derived place names in north-western Norfolk and the southern parts of the Wash. This place-name pattern seems to mirror the distribution of 'productive' locations. It may be significant that where there is apparently little direct effect on place-names during the course of Danish rule, such as here in Western Norfolk, there also seemed to be a relatively conservative approach to centralisation and the creation of urban places. This possible correlation has yet to be fully explored.

It is not necessary to document here the significant political and social changes between c. 850 and 950; suffice it to say that these led to a single nation-state of England, specifically through the expansion of what had been the kingdom of Wessex. With the takeover of eastern England by the Viking armies in the late 860s there was a change in the East Anglian kingdom’s direction of governance, although it had already been under the hegemony of the kingdom of Mercia from the late 8th century. The demise of Ipswich Ware, given its possible role discussed above, is perhaps a useful archaeological case in point. Historically, it makes sense that production of Ipswich Ware should have ceased sometime during the period of Danish raiding or conquest, given the fact that the \textit{wic} was, along with all the other \textit{emporia}, a target for raiding. \textit{The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle} records that East Anglia, along with Lindsey and Kent, suffered particularly in 841.\textsuperscript{81} Subsequently, Ívarr the Boneless and Halfdan led the great

\textsuperscript{79} For a recent discussion, see D. M. Hadley, \textit{The Northern Danelaw: Its Social Structure} (Leicester, 2000), 17–22.
\textsuperscript{80} Ibid., fig. 4; Williamson, op. cit. in note 6, fig. 5.1.
\textsuperscript{81} G. N. Garmonsway \textit{(trans.)} \textit{The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle} (London, 1984), 64; Stenton, op. cit. in note 62, 243. Ipswich itself is not mentioned in the chronicle until 991, and then next in 1010: Garmonsway, op. cit., 126–7 and 140.
The origins of King’s Lynn?

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army that landed in East Anglia in 865 and 868, and in 869 used Thetford as a base. The Danes defeated the East Anglian army in the same year, reputedly at Hoxne, in Suffolk, martyring King Edmund (later St Edmund). The choice of Thetford as a base for their campaign is interesting as it is a ‘productive’ location for 7th- and 8th-century coins. Why not Ipswich? It was the larger and, it must be assumed, the bigger prize but is not mentioned in the accounts of this time. It is possible that the \textit{wic} ceased to be used, perhaps because of its vulnerable position, around 841. Production of Ipswich Ware also seems to have ended around this time. It may be that parts of the East Anglian royal administration relocated and moved inland to Thetford in the 840s, with the effect of making Thetford a more strategic target in the late 860s. Indeed, the appearance of Thetford-type wares at around this time may be no coincidence. Thetford also possessed a readily defendable hillfort dating from the Iron Age, rare in East Anglia, and was a pre-existing central place, at least in terms of being a ‘productive’ location. Stretching the point further, Thetford-type Ware may be the administration’s redevelopment of a necessary industry, essentially relocating and redefining the hub of the \textit{færm} and foot-rent network away from Ipswich to what appeared to be safer ground. The re-design of the pottery may have pre-dated the end of Ipswich as a \textit{wic}, given that the Thetford-ware kilns were operating in Ipswich by at least the early 10th century. Hurst believed that the change to wheel-thrown Thetford Ware (as opposed to slow-wheel manufacture in the case of Ipswich Ware) might well have taken place before the Scandinavian arrival.

The network of obligations and tax collection that had been developed by the East Anglian kingdom may easily have been re-utilised in the Danish. The archaeological evidence for Ipswich may provide some substance for this interpretation. Little coinage is found here in the later 8th through to earlier 10th centuries, thought by Wade to indicate the \textit{wic’s} decline under Mercian control. This trend could as easily denote Danish raiding followed by movement of the administrative apparatus to other locations. Ipswich was fortified in the early 10th century, and coinage appears to return then. A lack of Danish place-names throughout much of East Anglia and in western Norfolk and around the Wash in particular may represent a degree of local continuity in administration of the rich region. This is further suggested by the continuity of coin-loss in some locations (discussed above). It can be assumed from the nature of the materials being found archaeologically in these situations that these \textit{foci} remained important, and represent taxation or centres for the collection of obligations that survive throughout the Early-medieval Period, indeed until the later 11th century.

82 Stenton, op. cit. in note 62, 248.
85 Ibid.
Having discussed the archaeology of ‘productive’ locations and their possible roles in terms of a historical model within the region, we can return to the central theme of the paper, the origins of King’s Lynn. What was a town in this period? Are modern or even later medieval concepts of the town relevant within the context of Anglo-Saxon England? This section will explore some of the problems relating to defining and discussing Early-medieval towns in East Anglia. What caused the growth of urban settlements in the two centuries leading up to the Norman conquest?

A map of East Anglian places with burgesses recorded by Domesday (see Fig. 4) illustrates that there was a significant area of northern and north-western Norfolk that did not possess an urban centre by 1086, at least in the terms of reference that the Little Domesday compilers were using. Often the inference from this has been that the plantation of Bishop’s Lynn was designed to fill a gap in the urban geography. Atkin has discussed the evidence for East Anglian urban places. His chronological hypothesis for urban genesis comprises three phases:

1. Ipswich — 7th and 8th century;
2. Norwich, Thetford, Sudbury and Bury St Edmunds — 10th century;

Within this scheme, Ipswich is the only urban place in the kingdom prior to the 10th century.86 Evidence for the location of mints in the 10th century is the basis for the identification of sites as towns.87 The Liber Eliensis (compiled \(1169 \times 1174\)) contains a passage from the late 10th century implying a law that allowed free trading in land within the region only at Norwich, Ipswich, Cambridge and Thetford.88 Domesday records only nine places with burgesses in Norfolk and Suffolk.89 Three of these were in Norfolk, at Norwich, Thetford and Great Yarmouth, and six in Suffolk: Ipswich, Dunwich, Eye, Beccles, Clare and Sudbury. Darby notes that the record for Norfolk is unsatisfactory in its discussion of urban life, suggesting that all three places must have had markets, yet none were recorded.

The markets of Domesday Norfolk were therefore held at places without burgesses, with records only for Dunham, Litcham and Holt (Fig. 5).90 Suffolk’s ‘urban’ Domesday record seems to match expectations better in that it contains

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87 Atkin, op. cit. in note 86.
89 Darby, op. cit. in note 77, 139–42 and 192–9.
90 Darby, op. cit. in note 77, 139.
FIG. 4
Places with burgesses according to the *Domesday* records.
Markets recorded in *Domesday Book* and *Little Domesday*.
more places with burgesses but also more references to markets than any of the other eastern counties, with four correlations between the two categories. There are nine entries for Suffolk markets: Beccles, Sudbury, Eye, Clare, Thorney, Blythburgh, Caramhalla, Haverhill and Hoxne.\textsuperscript{91} For Suffolk, Darby adds Bury St Edmunds to the list of towns, although the entry makes no mention of burgesses and it was recorded as a \textit{vill}. He goes on to state that the account for Bury is fraught with difficulties but testifies to the growth of a commercial centre.\textsuperscript{92} It is salutary to note that what does and does not appear in \textit{Domesday} is not always easily or simply correlated to some historical preconceptions, particularly with regards to the concept of a town. For instance London is absent from the record, and so is much of Winchester from the Hampshire \textit{Domesday} survey, although several manors do contain references for properties within Winchester.\textsuperscript{93} Such anomalies in many cases may represent \textit{geld} exemptions linked to royal and ecclesiastical holdings.

Commentators on the development of East Anglian urbanisation notably omit the Middle Anglian situation. Both Wade and Atkin restrict their discussions to Norfolk and Suffolk.\textsuperscript{94} However, there is good historical evidence for East Anglian influence over at least part of Middle Anglia as early as the 7th century, established through the marriage of King Anna’s (d. 653/4) daughter Æthelthryth to Tondbert, the \textit{princeps} of the South Gyrwe. Æthelthryth went on to found the monastery at Ely in 673.\textsuperscript{95} Whether such influence lasted is not known. The distribution of Ipswich Ware may be as good an indicator of East Anglian control as any other source, although its ubiquity in London cannot be explained in this way. This distribution extends into what are now Lincolnshire and Cambridgeshire and more dendritically into Northamptonshire.\textsuperscript{96} By the mid-10th century, Cambridgeshire, and more surprisingly Northamptonshire, were within the jurisdiction of Æthelwine, ealdorman of East Anglia.\textsuperscript{97} The fens have often been seen as providing a strategic buffer zone between East Anglia and Mercia, probably hindering East Anglian expansion but also protecting it to an extent against Mercian takeover.\textsuperscript{98} However, seeing the rivers and marshes of that countryside as a barrier is a modern perception; it seems more likely that the Fenland was a strategic route from the entrance of the Wash through to East Anglia, Middle Anglia and Mercia. It can be surmised that control of the area

\textsuperscript{91} Ibid., 202.
\textsuperscript{92} Ibid., 197–8.
\textsuperscript{94} Wade, op. cit. in note 86, 144–5.
\textsuperscript{96} Blinkhorn, op. cit. in note 58, 5–8.
\textsuperscript{97} D. Whitelock, ‘Foreword’, i–xiii in Blake (ed.), op. cit. in note 88, at p. xiii.
\textsuperscript{98} Yorke, op. cit. in note 95, 65.
FIG. 6
Sketch map of the topography of Early-medieval King’s Lynn, with later additions superimposed. Coastline based on the 5 m contour.
may have shifted between the control of different kingdoms throughout the pre-Viking period, leaving a complex and convoluted network of obligations. Control over the entrance to the Wash was clearly therefore an important asset for any polity. In national terms, as a strategic communication corridor linking the coast to the inland, its river system is second only to the Thames.

By 1086, the urban situation in the area of what had been Middle Anglia is perhaps even murkier than that in Norfolk. In southern Lincolnshire Domesday records Stamford and Grantham as containing burgesses.99 There is a mention of a market at Spalding (worth 40 shillings) but again no discussion of markets within any of the Lincolnshire boroughs.100 Spalding also paid taille of £30, a forced payment generally associated with towns, and more common in records relating to Normandy.101 For the whole of Cambridgeshire only the reference for Cambridge itself contains a mention of burgesses.102 This consists of a single sentence referring to Count Alan having ten burgesses there but no other geldable assets.103 There are no Domesday entries for markets within Cambridgeshire. Huntingdon is the only recorded borough in Huntingdonshire and it too has no record of any market.

An attempt has been, above, made to argue against an economically formalist conceptualisation of urbanisation for understanding the development of towns in Anglo-Saxon East Anglia. Historical sources are ambivalent and do not discuss towns in ways that seem appropriate to formalist views of urban and commercial development. It has also been argued that institutions throughout the period extended into the area of Middle Anglia and any study of the period needs to examine the boundaries of the kingdom, as an administrative unit. Rather, urbanisation seems to have consisted of trends towards the centralisation of governmental roles, which had previously been distributed throughout a number of foci. This can be seen archaeologically and historically in the context of north-western Norfolk, where the trend towards centralisation comes relatively late and was not fully realised until the eve of the 12th century.

CONCLUSIONS: THE ORIGINS OF KING’S LYNN?

It is known that Herbert de Losinga established the priory of St Margaret at Lynn in the late 1090s, along with a tied market — but why? This establishment did not begin in a vacuum (Fig. 6). Study of Domesday and later documents by Owen and latterly Pestell have illustrated a tenurial history for the Bishop’s interest in the area.104 Owen discerned possible evidence for tolls and trade associated with Lynn prior to the establishment of St Margaret’s Priory by

99 Darby, op. cit. in note 77, 78–82.
100 Ibid., 83.
101 Faith, op. cit. in note 7, 102.
102 Darby, op. cit. in note 77, 310.
Losinga. Notably, the priory had parochial responsibility for the land between the Purfleet, Millfleet and an area at South Lynn presumably centred around All Saints church. Soke on all the dwellings between the two fleets was also held, meaning that the tenants here owed financial, judicial and perhaps military obligations to the priory. This suggests that there was a good-sized population here before the establishment of the priory and that some administrative roles may already have been in place. It is interesting to note that both St Margaret’s and All Saints are situated on what appears, from a crude projection of the 5 m contours for the area, to be an island making up the spine of the old town (see Fig. 6). At the initial establishment there were rights awarded to the priory for profits relating to markets held on a Saturday and a fair held on the feast of St Margaret. It seems that these institutions were already in existence and not initiated by the grant of a charter. An existing market was extended by Losinga, with the creation of a Tuesday market. A 14th-century copy of a charter of Henry I to Willaim of Albini, grants:

... the manor of Snettisham with the two and a half Hundred of Freebridge and Smithdon. With all wreck and appurtenances, besides all the mysteria of Lynn, with a mediaty of the market, and toll and other customs, the port with its moorings for ships, loscop (possibly toll or lastage), the way of the water and the passage, with all pleas ... all to be held with all free customs and liberties infra burgham et extra as it was given to him by William the King’s brother in his lifetime.

If real, the basis for such a grant is intriguing. The tolls may have been inherited during William Rufus’s reign (1087–1100) from Odo, Bishop of Bayeux. Since Stigand held soke over so much of this area, including elements of what was to become King’s Lynn, prior to 1070, it seems reasonable that Odo should have been granted these rights by William I after Stigand’s forfeiture. Perhaps some of the rights and obligations not recorded in Domesday stayed with the crown and were then in turn passed on by Henry I to Albini. We cannot know. What we can surmise, though, is that not all forms of ownership and obligations were recorded in Domesday; that only reveals some of the picture.

The work of the King’s Lynn Survey revealed little evidence for settlement within the area of the present town before to the late 11th century. Some earlier pottery was recovered including Thetford-type wares, Pingsdorf, Ardenne wares and a single sherd of Badorf Ware. The latter may, however, be incorrectly identified, as relief-banded amphora which were still being produced in slightly altered forms into the 12th century. The sample of the town examined archaeologically was and remains small, however, with few trenches reaching

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104 Saunders, op. cit. in note 1, ff. 4d, 37, where a statement is made about Bishop Herbert conceding both the sand market and the fair held on the feast of St Margaret; Owen, op. cit. in note 5; Pestell, op. cit. in note 16; idem, Landscapes of Monastic Foundation: The Establishment of Religious Houses in East Anglia, c. 650–1200 (Woodbridge, 2004).
105 Owen, op. cit. in note 5, 9.
106 Ibid., 11.
107 Ibid., 10.
the base of the sequence and few within the areas likely to have fostered the oldest settlement locations. If Figure 6 is considered in these terms the most likely locations for early settlement *foci* become clear. The area’s true nature as a series of highly visible peninsulas is brought out. This opening into both the Gaywood and Nar Rivers thus, prior to the late 11th century, contained several *foci* of administration and communications. Bawsey appears within the archaeological record as the most ‘productive’ site on the Wash and indeed harbours the second largest collection of coins from the 7th and 8th centuries in the East Anglian kingdom. Arguably, the success of King’s Lynn represents the continuation of this focus. It was also a consolidation and expansion of the roles that appear to have begun at Bawsey. King’s Lynn, like Norwich and Ipswich and to some extent Great Yarmouth, took on a regional, as well as local, importance. With its strategic position here at the entrance to the Wash, King’s Lynn was in a prime position to become a focus for trade and communications. The Wash is one of the most important entrances to large tracts of inner England. It is interesting to note that the rise of Lynn seems also to coincide with the demise of Thetford. These two events were, after all, enacted by Bishop Herbert de Losinga.

If we think in terms of land-holdings instead of just specific sites then the background to the King’s Lynn foundation is clear. There are several large estate centres within the immediate area. The Bishop of Thetford, previously of North Elmham, held a manor at Gaywood both prior to and after the Norman Conquest.\(^{109}\) This was the Bishop’s only manor within the Hundred and a half of Freebridge but it was a valuable one, at £13 prior to the conquest and £18 10s after. There are further correlations, already discussed, which suggest that there may be the vestiges of an old ‘estate’ here. Gaywood now lies on the eastern fringe of the modern parish of King’s Lynn. A medieval Bishop’s palace is at its centre. All the pre-850 Saxon material recorded within the parish of Lynn on the Norfolk Historic Environment Record comes from the Gaywood area. This group includes a spearhead, an 8th- or 9th-century brooch associated with an undated cemetery, and a bronze Byzantine forty-numma coin (*follis*) of Heraclius (A.D. 612–16). All these artefacts are in private hands. The *follis* is from the same reign as the *solidus* incorporated into the Wilton cross.\(^{110}\)

Pestell has made the connection between the Bishop’s manor at Gaywood and the ‘productive’ site at Bawsey.\(^{111}\) He has suggested that Bawsey may have been an ‘estate’ centre for a unit with seven other adjacent parishes including Gaywood and Mintyle, both of which belonged to the Bishop of Thetford (later Norwich) at *Domesday*.\(^{112}\) This picture can be fleshed out by looking at other holdings and soke within the area belonging to Stigand prior to his losing office.

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\(^{109}\) P. Brown (ed.), *Domesday Book Norfolk* (Chichester, 1984), 10.2.
\(^{110}\) L. Webster and J. Backhouse, *The Making of England: Anglo-Saxon Art and Culture A.D. 600–900* (London, 1991), 27. Byzantine *folles* of this date in Britain are extremely rare: only five are known from the country, according to the Early Medieval Coin Corpus, loc. cit. in note 68.

\(^{111}\) Pestell, op. cit. in note 16; idem (2004), op. cit. in note 104, 187–8.

\(^{112}\) Pestell, op. cit. in note 16.
His combined land and soke holdings may provide additional ‘fossilised’ evidence for an earlier ‘estate’ here. Although Mintyle was not held by Stigand prior to the conquest he did have soke over it. In all Stigand had soke over 15 villas (parishes) in the Freebridge Hundred and a half, which accounts for around one-third of the total. Stigand also held a large and very valuable manor at Snettisham, worth £50, the outliers of which stretched beyond Freebridge and into the next Hundred of Docking, and another valuable manor at Well, valued at £9. Most of these landholdings ended up in Odo’s hands. Stigand’s holdings nationally were impressive, totalling £750, a huge sum for the time. In Norfolk his landownership was truly monumental at £240, larger here than that held by King Edward, and in Suffolk he held another £90 worth of property. Stigand was appointed a royal priest in 1020, was active at the court of Cnut in the 1030s, and became Bishop of North Elmham (later Thetford and Norwich) in 1043. He suffered a setback late in the same year when he was removed from office and his lands confiscated, but these were restored in 1044. By 1047 he had gained the bishopric of Winchester and he was elevated to the archbishopric of Canterbury in 1052. His initial favour at Cnut’s court may have been due to his Anglo-Scandinavian background, his family being East Anglian and possibly rooted in Norwich. Given his meteoric rise, it is unsurprising that Stigand gained great personal wealth and power. How he came to be in the possession of his lands in East Anglia, and perhaps more importantly, how the soke of so many villas were owed to him, must have been a complex process, the detail of which remains unclear. The salient point is that he held a great quantity of obligations, particularly in Norfolk, spanning whole Hundreds and including 50 burgesses in Norwich. This portfolio of obligations can be seen to pass to several different people and institutions after his dispossession, much being divided between William I, Odo, William Warenne and Erfast, the new Bishop of Elmham (consecrated 1070). These landscapes of obligations were obviously never static entities but rather had undergone several processes of fissioning between their origins in, or prior to, the period around the 7th–8th century and 1066. That said, it seems that in Stigand’s enormous holdings, recorded somewhat patchily in Domesday, we can see a fragmented reflection of these earlier ‘multiple estates’ that can to some extent be correlated with the evidence emerging from the archaeological record in the form of ‘productive’ sites.

In the grant of Henry I to William of Albini, discussed above, another level of insight into this situation is provided: a parcel of rights and obligations seems to have passed into Albini’s hands. This ‘estate’ may also be reflected in a report within the Ramsey chronicles, stating that William II ordered a joint session of the three and a half Hundreds, probably the Hundreds of Freebridge, Smethdon and Docking. Bawsey, it is suggested, represents the old administrative hub of

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114 Ibid., 199–202.
115 Ibid., 205.
116 Williamson, op. cit. in note 6, 130.
this ‘estate’, echoed in *Domesday* and the grant of Henry I. Later, many of these roles moved to King’s Lynn. It seems likely that silting of the Wash estuary and a gradual loss in the navigability of the Gaywood river may have contributed to the need for a move to Lynn. The as yet unpublished work by the Time Team illustrated an enclosure ditch surrounding a significant area at Bawsey. Ipswich Ware was discovered within the fill of this ditch and as a surface find. Thetford-type Ware has also been found fairly ubiquitously on the surface. Might this be a historically lost *burh*? It certainly seems reasonable that Edward the Elder, having conquered the Danelaw c. 917, would have required a stronghold at the entrance to the Wash. Control of this area would have been of primary strategic importance.

The evidence for 7th-century administrative centres surviving the Viking wars is compelling. In some cases these centres became far less important by the 11th century with the fissioning of the great ‘estates’. The importance of Gaywood, Bawsey and latterly King’s Lynn lies in their association with a particular landscape’s obligations and their position at the strategically important mouth of the Wash. As has been discussed here, there were a number of these centres in this sub-region, many of which survived into the 11th century according to the coin-loss, but few beyond that. By the late 11th century the need for major centres was considerable and this part of East Anglia still quite fragmented in its governmental structures. Why then did these administrative centres on the Wash survive through the changes wrought by the turmoil of the late 9th century? We might surmise that the political situation here was different from that of the East and South of East Anglia. Perhaps the putative splitting of the East Anglian Kingdom into three parts, each ruled respectively by Hun, Beonna and Alberht, which took place around 749, gives us a clue. One of these parts may have become a sub-kingdom encompassing the Fen edge and the north-west of the kingdom. Yorke suggests that the territories were Norfolk, Suffolk and an area around Ely:  

...perhaps that latter division, rather had Bawsey as its centre. Such an administrative division may have lived on under a re-united but much weakened East Anglian monarchy and the earldoms that succeeded it. We can thus envisage that by the time of the treaty between Alfred and Guthrum (886–890) a separate administrative situation still pertained.  

Here, in the north-west of East Anglia, it was useful for the Danelaw ruler to keep the existing system for extracting wealth from the landscape virtually intact. The continuity of coin-loss into the 9th, 10th and 11th centuries at Bawsey suggests that this was the case. Eventually, that role began to shift, possibly before the middle of the 11th century as Archbishop Stigand obtained significant holdings in the area. The stage was then set for Bishop Losinga to develop those holdings into the institution that eventually became known as King’s Lynn.

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117 Yorke, op. cit. in note 95, 69.  
118 Whitelock (ed.), op. cit. in note 38, 380–1 (No. 34).
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