Englands fieldnames in Odcombe Parish, Somerset

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In 2009 a small project was begun to clarify the extent and nature of an important late Roman villa at Lufton in Somerset. The villa is only one component of a much larger historic landscape that also includes the largest Iron Age hillfort in Britain (Ham Hill), Roman and medieval towns (Ilchester and Yeovil), and an important Norman power centre and later religious establishment (Montacute) (Fig. 1).[1]

Work to date has been relatively modest. A large geophysical survey has examined the immediate hinterland of the villa and identified an extensive settlement of late prehistoric and Roman date. A Newcastle University training excavation in 2012 examined parts of this settlement and excavated an Early to Middle Bronze Age ringditch. The fieldwork has also been accompanied by an in-progress study of fieldnames in the parishes of Lufton, Thorne, Odcombe, Montacute and Stoke sub Hamdon. This short note is intended to draw attention to the first fruits of this work on fieldnames in the study area.

The 1839 Tithe Map and Tithe Apportionment for Odcombe is held in the Somerset Record Office (SRO D\D/Rt/M/139 and D\D/Rt/A/139) and shows a series of fields defined by a curving boundary just to the north of the modern village (centred on ST 50902 16278). A number of these fields are named in the Tithe Apportionment 'Englands' (Fig. 2). It is generally accepted that this fieldname is derived from *inland* (Field 1989, 73). Faith's (1997) discussion of the term argues that this land formed a privileged core under lordly control within early medieval estates.

Recent archaeological work in Somerset near Charleton Horethorne (Davey 2004; 2010, 88–92) and Sparkford (Durkin 2010) has investigated sites with Englands fieldnames. At the former site geophysics and excavation identified a late Roman settlement and an argument has been made for continuity of settlement activity into the early middle ages. At the latter site geophysical survey identified a series of penannular anomalies. On excavation some of these features were found to contain pottery of 10th- to 11th-century date (Durkin 2010, 74).

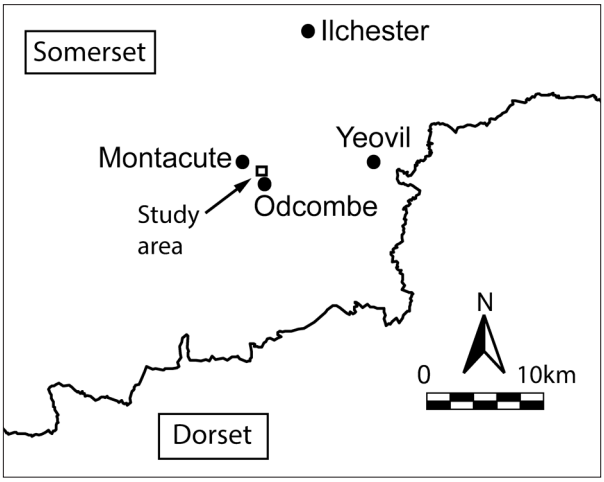

Figure 1 Study area: location map.

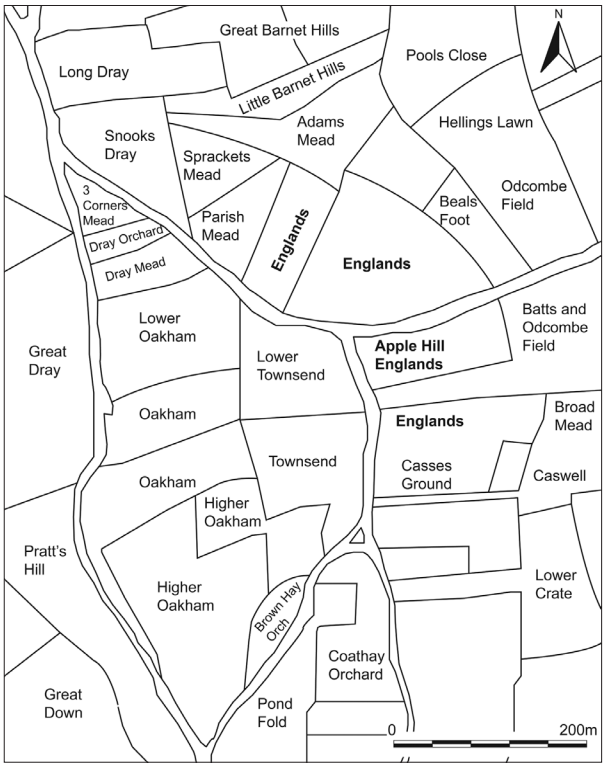

Figure 2 Englands fieldnames from the 1839 Tithe Map of Odcombe.

Together these recent excavations have demonstrated that Englands fieldnames are a strong indicator of Roman and early medieval activity. The identification of similar names in Odcombe Parish is an important discovery and it is hoped that the current project may find the opportunity to investigate these fields archaeologically in the future.

References

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