

SHORTER NOTICES

'SMITHDON HILL', SNETTISHAM: THE POSSIBLE MEETING-PLACE OF SMETHDON HUNDRED*by Nicola Whyte*

A recent survey of early estate maps has located the possible meeting-place of Smethdon Hundred, referred to now as Smithdon Hundred. 'Smithdon Hill', located in 'Smithdon Hill Furlong', was recorded on a map of *c.* 1625 depicting the parish of Snettisham (NRO LEST OB/4). The name strongly implies that this must have been the hundred meeting-place, as 'Smithdon' is not otherwise mentioned in local place-names. Moreover, the site of 'Smithdon Hill' occupies an important location in the landscape; situated adjacent to the Peddars Way and, most significantly, close to the point where the hundreds of Smithdon, Docking and Freebridge converge. Smithdon and Docking were amalgamated soon after Domesday, perhaps due to their relatively small size compared to other hundreds in west Norfolk. It is most likely that it was during this later phase of reorganisation that Snettisham — which Domesday places within Freebridge hundred — was incorporated within Smithdon. Snettisham became the administrative focal point of Smithdon hundred; the hundred court was annexed to the manor of Snettisham, and it is also recorded that the court-leets of a number widely scattered manors (those of Titchwell, Stanhoe, Barwick, Bircham, and Shernbourn) were held here (Armstrong 1781).

The geographically peripheral location of the Smithdon meeting-place is not entirely unprecedented. Another example is that of 'Tunstead Hundred Hill' in Tunstead hundred; this occupies a position on the boundary of North Erpingham hundred and only 4km away from South Erpingham hundred, suggesting that the three hundreds may once have formed a single territory (Williamson 1993, 130). But in addition to such ancient connections, neighbouring hundreds might be linked together for certain purposes in much later times: in some cases at least, such medieval administrative groupings may have represented a resurgence of considerably older associations (Cam 1944, 91). Research has shown, for instance, that joint meetings were sometimes carried out to secure sufficient witness to land settlements (Cam 1930, 17). Indeed, in the late 11th century William II called for a meeting of three and a half Norfolk hundreds, apparently those of Smithdon, Docking, and the hundred and a half of Freebridge (Williamson 1993, 130). The long-term affiliation of Smithdon and Freebridge is revealed again in the 13th century when the hundreds shared a bailiff (Cam 1930, 94). The curious, peripheral location of 'Smithdon Hill' at the junction of the three hundreds strongly implies that it originally served as a meeting place for a much larger territory that embraced all of them.

A consideration of the wider context of meeting-places suggests that hundred courts met at highly specific locations. Finding a suitable meeting-place could be a subject for intense debate between members of the local elite. In the 13th century, for example, a dispute arose between the Abbots of Dereham and Ramsey as to where the meeting of Clackclose hundred should be held: in total thirteen different locations were mooted during their mediation (Cam 1930, 170). It is possible that the choice of location was defined by a more general comprehension among contemporaries of what was already deemed to be suitable. Many hundreds appear to have been named after their meeting-places (Anderson 1934) revealing that sites were often chosen due to their antiquity, and their location at strategic points in the landscape, such as bridges, fords or at the junction of important roads (Gelling 1978, 210). A number of hundreds assembled at ancient barrows — the court of Forehoe Hundred convened

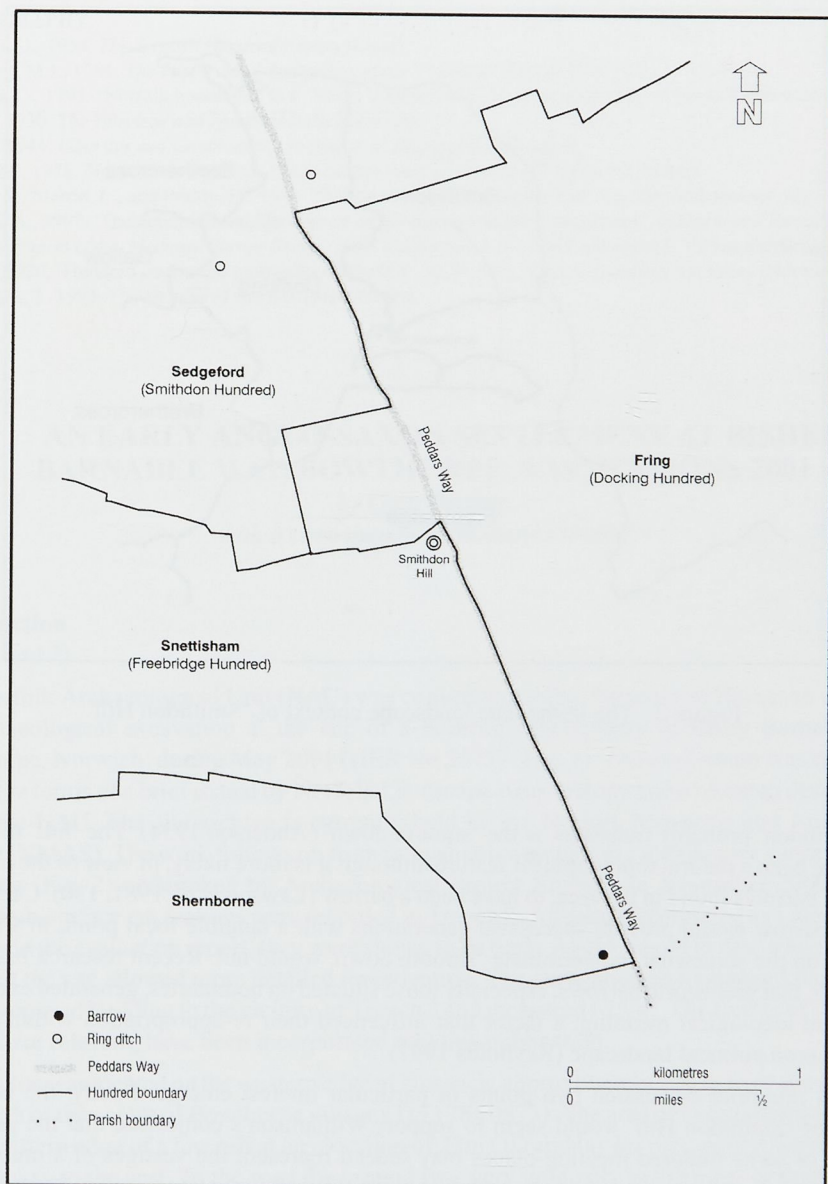


Figure 1. 'Smithdon Hill' shown in relation to the hundred boundaries of north-west Norfolk at Domesday

at the 'Four Hows' in Carleton Forehoe, while the names of Grimshoe, North Greenhoe and South Greenhoe also indicate meetings at barrows (Anderson 1934). In view of this, we might suggest that the sites chosen were viewed in terms of their antiquity and permanence in the landscape, and may have been construed as neutral places suitable for the assembly of the hundred court.

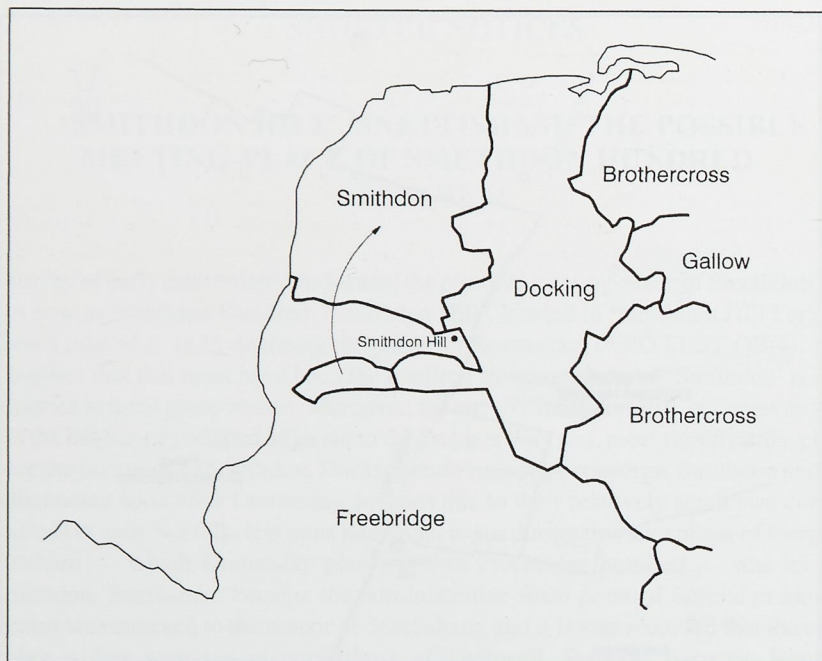


Figure 2. The immediate landscape context of 'Smithdon Hill'

'Smithdon' probably translates as the 'smooth down' (Anderson 1934). The 'hill' referred to may have been a natural topographical feature although it is more likely, in view of the high incidence of barrows found in the area, to have been a barrow (Lawson *et al.* 1981, 130). Certainly an ancient barrow would provide successive generations with a tangible focal point, in a way that meeting on the somewhat indeterminate 'smooth down' would not. Recent research has shown, moreover, that prehistoric barrows, especially those situated on boundaries, generated exceptional social and ideological meaning: a factor that influenced their re-appropriation within the Late Anglo-Saxon political landscape (Reynolds 1997).

From this brief discussion two points of particular interest emerge. Firstly, the landscape context of 'Smithdon Hill' would seem to support Williamson's conjecture that the peripheral location of some hundred meeting-places may indeed represent the vestiges of a much earlier system of territorial organisation, but one that continued to influence later administrative developments (Williamson 1993, 129–30). Secondly, the inclusion of 'Smithdon Hill' on a map dating to the mid-17th century confirms the remarkable longevity of many meeting-places as key focal points in the landscape — preserved for generations in the memories of local inhabitants due to their fundamental assimilation within the named landscape.

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AN EARLY ANGLO-SAXON SETTLEMENT AT BISHEE BARNABEE WAY, BOWTHORPE: EXCAVATIONS 2001

by Gary Trimble

with a contribution by Richenda Goffin

Introduction

(Figs 1 and 2)

The Norfolk Archaeological Unit (NAU) was commissioned by Persimmon Homes to undertake an archaeological excavation at the site of a housing development at Bishy Barnabee Way, Bowthorpe, Norwich, during May 2001 (HER No 35757; Fig. 1). The excavation was carried out within the terms of a brief issued by Norfolk Landscape Archaeology and a research design drawn up by the NAU. The site archive is currently held by the Norfolk Museums and Archaeology Service (NMAS). The work follows on from an evaluation employing a walk-over survey and trial trenching (Fig. 2) undertaken by Archaeological Project Services in November 2000 (Albone 2001). Sub-surface cut features were recorded in Trench 2. Although interpreted as Late Neolithic features in the evaluation report, they were shown to be Early Anglo-Saxon in date when full excavation of the site allowed more detailed investigation. The excavation encompassed the footprint of the proposed building in the vicinity of Trench 2 and measured 625m². The results of the evaluation, where relevant, have been incorporated into this publication.

The site was located on the western edge of Norwich, approximately 5.5km from the city centre and south of the centre of Bowthorpe village (TG 1784 0873). The area of excavation was situated on the eastern edge of a low hill at an elevation of 22m OD and lay on very gently sloping ground falling away to the east. To the west the ground rose very gradually to the brow of the hill before falling away steeply into the floodplain of the River Yare. Soils were coarse and fine loamy soils of the Burlingham I Association developed on boulder clay, gravel and sand. Boulder clay predominated in the south-eastern part of the area of excavation, whilst sands and gravels covered the remainder of the site. The underlying geology is chalk with some flint (Hodge *et al.* 1984).

Archaeological and historical background

(Fig. 1)

Prehistoric

Bronze Age barrows and ring ditches have been recorded at various places on the high ground and slopes along the Yare valley. Approximately 2km south of the excavation area, possible crop-mark ring-ditches are located near Watton Road,