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Shaping Buildings and Identities in Fifth- to Ninth-Century England

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Nearly all buildings in fifth- to ninth-century England, from humble houses to ‘great halls’ to early churches, were wooden structures that have long since disappeared from the landscape, leaving only postholes and wall trenches behind for archaeologists to uncover. Nevertheless, the archaeological remains of buildings constitute a fundamental source of direct evidence for daily life and community structure in Anglo-Saxon England. The architectural form of a building, its location within a settlement, and the artefacts and materials found in and around it all provide evidence for its economic use. Within a single settlement, the number of buildings, the range of building types, and the spatial organization and density of structures together reflect the social and economic structure of the resident community. Comparing these characteristics among settlements across a given area contributes to an understanding of social structure on a local, regional, and national scale.

Some Anglo-Saxon buildings and groups of buildings also exhibited formal — or formalized — architectural elements, such as internal architectural symmetry and alignments of buildings. Evidence for ritual — or ritualized — activities associated with buildings has also been found, such as the deliberate placement of objects in and around their foundations. Formal architectural elements and so-called ‘placed’ deposits have been mined for clues to social ideals, ritual activities, and worldview.

This article suggests a new approach to interpreting the archaeological remains of Anglo-Saxon buildings. It explores whether some of the ways people in Anglo-Saxon England formalized the architecture of their buildings, and ritualized their use, may have mirrored the processes they used to construct social identities. Specifically, it discusses the formal use of space in some buildings, especially those with high-status associations, and asks whether the ways in which space was formally organized reveals something about the mechanisms by which communities formed internal and external relationships, and kings constructed royal authority. It presents evidence for ritualized activity associated with the construction or demolition of buildings, and suggests that this evidence not only reveals how ‘lifecycles’ of

¹ I would like to express my gratitude to the members of the Architectural Representation 650–1350 working group for many stimulating discussions and creative exchanges, which both overtly inspired and subtly infiltrated this article. I would especially like to thank Daniel Thomas, Hannah McKendrick Bailey, and Karl Kinsella for their insightful comments and suggestions in response to an earlier draft. Finally, I am grateful for the helpful feedback of the anonymous reviewer.

buildings were perceived, but also how human lifecycles were perceived and constructed. By considering how people shaped buildings, perhaps we can learn how people shaped society.

Symbolism, Structure, Practice

Why should the way people treated buildings in Anglo-Saxon England have anything to do with the way they shaped society? The connection lies in the idea that buildings may have been perceived as resonating with, or even embodying, aspects of Anglo-Saxon worldviews, by which I mean the (perhaps widely varying) range of ways people in Anglo-Saxon England perceived the world and their place in it. Setting aside archaeological evidence, it is possible to find hints that this was the case in the written record of the Anglo-Saxon period. For example, it is easy to find examples from Anglo-Saxon literature in which writers describe architectural elements of buildings in terms of human lifecycles or bodies. In a well known metaphor, also discussed in this issue by Karl Kinsella, Bede employs the architecture of an Anglo-Saxon royal hall to illustrate the ephemerality of human life, and the mystery of what lies beyond:

This is how the present life of man on earth, King, appears to me. [...] You are sitting feasting with your ealdormen and thegns in winter time; the fire is burning on the hearth in the middle of the hall and all inside is warm, while outside the wintry storms of rain and snow are raging; and a sparrow flies swiftly through the hall. It enters in at one door and quickly flies out through the other. [...] So this life of man appears but for a moment; what follows or indeed what went before, we know not at all.²

The specific architectural elements to which Bede refers are the parts of the hall that, for him, make it resemble a human life: the hearth providing the warmth of life; the protective walls that divide life from death; and the two doors, presumably opposed and so close together that a sparrow passes between them in a moment, that represent life's beginning and end. All of these architectural elements agree with archaeological evidence for late sixth- to early seventh-century 'great hall' architecture from excavated royal sites like Cowdery's Down and Yeavinger.³ They are also characteristic of some ordinary houses in southern and eastern England of the fifth to seventh centuries.⁴ So Bede's metaphorical depiction of worldly human existence resonates with domestic architecture of the broader period.

Buildings can serve as metaphors in literature, but can real buildings relate in some way to cosmology? The idea is not a new one in archaeology. The sociologist and anthropologist Pierre Bourdieu argued that among the Kabyle, in northern Africa, the recurring performance of particular, symbolically charged activities in particular parts of the house resulted over

² Bede, *Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, ed. and trans. by Bertram Colgrave and R. A. B. Mynors (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969), pp. 182–85 (ii.XIII): “‘Talis’ inquires ‘mihi uidetur, rex, uita hominum praesens in terris, ad comparationem eius quod nobis incertum est temporis, quale cum te residente ad caenam cum ducibus ac ministris tuis tempore brumali, accenso quidem foco in medio et calido effecto cenaculo, furentibus autem foris per omnia turbinihus hiemalium pluuiarum uel niuium, adueniens unus passerum domum citissime peruolauerit; qui cum per unum ostium ingrediens mox per aliud exierit. [...] Ita haec uita hominum ad modicum apparet; quid autem sequatur, quidue praecesserit, prorsus ignoramus.’” All references to the *Ecclesiastical History* are to this edition.

³ Martin Millett and Simon James, ‘Excavations at Cowdery’s Down, Basingstoke, Hampshire, 1978–81’, *Archaeological Journal*, 140 (1983), 151–279; Brian Hope-Taylor, *Yeavinger: An Anglo-British Centre of Early Northumbria*, Department of the Environment Archaeological Reports, 7 (London: Her Majesty’s Stationery Office, 1977).

⁴ Helena Hamerow, *Rural Settlements and Society in Anglo-Saxon England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), pp. 25–26.

time in those parts of the house developing cosmological associations that, in turn, influenced the symbolic significance of the activities practiced there. In this way, the Kabyle house came to embody, and recursively generate, the Kabyle worldview, with opposite parts of the house representing dichotomous values such as high:low, light:dark, day:night, male:female, fertilizing:fertile, and so forth, in a mirror-image microcosm of the Kabyle universe.⁵

Inspired in part by Bourdieu's work, some archaeologists have suggested cosmological interpretations of the architecture of past buildings. Notably, Fitzpatrick, Parker Pearson, and others have proposed cosmological interpretations of Iron Age roundhouses, based in part upon the types of archaeological remains recovered from different parts of the buildings, reflecting either the nature of the activities that took place there, or placed deposition.⁶ Such interpretations have received mixed reviews.⁷ Cosmological interpretations have also been offered for Iron Age longhouses in Denmark and northern Germany, relating their predominantly east–west orientation to the passage of the sun, and viewing the fact that these long buildings incorporated dwelling space as well as byres for stabling animals as symbolic of a close cosmological relationship between humans and livestock.⁸ Ways in which ecclesiastical architecture embodies Christian cosmology are well known, and there is evidence that this applied to churches in Anglo-Saxon England;⁹ but such ideas have received limited attention in relation to Anglo-Saxon secular buildings, especially in archaeology.¹⁰ Kopár has employed lexical evidence, particularly comparing the temporal senses of Old English nouns *fyrst* ('span or (bounded) period of time; delay, postponement') and *fæc* ('(specified) length of time; interval; while') with their architectural/spatial senses ('ceiling; roof; roof beam; entrance' and 'space; area; gap', respectively), in arguing that the house or hall helped to measure and structure concepts of time in Anglo-Saxon England.¹¹ Meanwhile, Ware suggests that the orientation, layout, and fabric of the halls at the royal centre Yeavinger would have been rich

⁵ Pierre Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice*, trans. by Richard Nice (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1990) pp. 271–83 (first publ. *Le sens pratique*, 1980).

⁶ Andrew P. Fitzpatrick, 'Outside In: The Structure of an Early Iron Age House at Dunston Park, Thatcham, Berkshire', in *The Iron Age in Wessex: Recent Work*, ed. by Andrew P. Fitzpatrick and Elaine L. Morris (Salisbury: Association Française d'Etude de l'Age du Fer, 1994), pp. 68–72; Mike Parker Pearson, 'Food, Sex and Death: Cosmologies in the British Iron Age with Particular Reference to East Yorkshire', *Cambridge Archaeological Journal*, 9 (1999), 43–69.

⁷ Rachel Pope, 'Ritual and the Roundhouse: A Critique of Recent Ideas on the Use of Domestic Space in Later British Prehistory', in *The Earlier Iron Age in Britain and the Near Continent*, ed. by Colin Haselgrove and Rachel Pope (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2007), pp. 204–28.

⁸ Richard Hingley, 'Comments', in Parker Pearson, 'Food, Sex and Death', p. 63; Leo Webley, *Iron Age Households: Structure and Practice in Western Denmark, 500 BC–AD 200* (Højbjerg: Jutland Archaeological Society, 2008), p. 9. Compare Lotte Hedeager, 'Asgard Reconstructed? Gudme—A "Central Place" in the North', in *Topographies of Power in the Early Middle Ages*, ed. by Mayke de Jong and Frans Theuvs with Carine van Rhijn, *The Transformation of the Roman World*, 6 (Leiden: Brill, 2001), pp. 467–507. Hedeager argues that the third- to sixth-century 'central place' of Gudme on the island of Funen was built to resemble Asgard, the mythical home of the gods described centuries later in Old Norse sources (pp. 501–05). It could alternatively be argued that depictions of Asgard in Old Norse literature preserve a cultural memory of central places like Gudme, or that the physical Gudme and the mythical Asgard were constructed in their respective landscapes according to a shared grammar of power.

⁹ See, for example, the articles by Conor O'Brien and Meg Boulton above.

¹⁰ Hamerow, *Rural Settlements and Society*, p. 37.

¹¹ Lilla Kopár, 'Spatial Understanding of Time in Early Germanic Cultures: The Evidence of Old English Time Words and Norse Mythology', in *Interfaces between Language and Culture in Medieval England: A Festschrift for Matti Kilpiö*, ed. by Alaric Hall, Olga Timofeeva, Ágnes Kiricsi and Bethany Fox, *The Northern World*, 48 (Leiden: Brill, 2010), pp. 203–30 (esp. pp. 211–14, 217–19, 226).

in symbolism for those using them, but she does not go so far as to suggest that they overtly embodied cosmology.¹²

Ethnographic work shows that some present-day societies overtly identify buildings with bodies, and events in the ‘lives’ of buildings with human life events. Among indigenous groups in south-east Asia, houses variously have architectural elements named after body parts, including the heart, sensory organs, and genitalia; are born, breathe, die, and have a soul; and are thought of as buffalo.¹³ The Batammaliba of Togo and Benin ceremonially nourish newly built houses as if they were newborn babies; incise their outer walls with designs resembling the cicatrization marks on the bodies of Batammaliba women; and dress them up for funerals as the deceased would have dressed as a youth.¹⁴ Imagery identifying buildings with bodies, and vice versa, can be found in the literature of Anglo-Saxon England. In the poem *Beowulf*, buildings are described in terms that equate them to human and non-human bodies, while bodies are described metaphorically as buildings.¹⁵ Not only does Hrothgar’s great hall have a name, and thus a degree of personhood, but that name, Heorot, plays on words for an animal (the hart) and a bodily organ (the heart). During the famous fight between the hero Beowulf and his adversary Grendel the hall is repeatedly described in bodily terms. When Grendel gains entry to Heorot it is through ‘the mouth of the hall’ (*recedes muþan*, l. 724a).¹⁶ The building resembles an armored warrior in the ensuing battle (ll. 771–75a), and Heorot’s resulting devastation parallels the mauling and dismemberment suffered by Grendel’s first victim in the fight (ll. 739–45) and the grievous injuries that Grendel himself suffers (ll. 809–18a).¹⁷ Later on in the poem, the kenning *banhus* (‘bone-house’) is used twice to describe the fragile human body: first, in Beowulf’s telling of how he crushed the life out of the warrior Dæghrefn (ll. 2506b–08a), then in the portrayal of the cremation of Beowulf’s own body (ll. 3144b–48a).

It is not my intention to propose that Anglo-Saxon buildings represented cosmological concepts in an overt, symbolic way; nor do I intend to argue that buildings were endowed with personhood, even anthropomorphized, in Anglo-Saxon England — although both of these things are possible. At the very least, however, the literary examples mentioned show that buildings resonated metaphorically or symbolically with Anglo-Saxon worldviews. Even without understanding specific details about that resonance, it is possible to use it recursively to learn something, not about Anglo-Saxon buildings, but about Anglo-Saxon society. This paper proposes holding up the formalized or ritualized ways in which buildings were treated

¹² Carolyn Ware, ‘The Social Use of Space at *Gefrin*’, in *Yeavinger: People, Power & Place*, ed. by Paul Frodsham and Colm O’Brien (Stroud: Tempus, 2005), pp. 153–60 (p. 156).

¹³ Roxana Waterson, *The Living House: An Anthropology of Architecture in South-East Asia* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1997), pp. 115–37.

¹⁴ Suzanne Preston Blier, *The Anatomy of Architecture: Ontology and Metaphor in Batammaliba Architectural Expression* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), pp. 27, 127–30. Brück has previously introduced these ethnographic analogies into an archaeological context in order to explore possible perceptions of houses and their lifespans in Bronze Age Britain: Joanna Brück, ‘Houses, Lifecycles and Deposition on Middle Bronze Age Settlements in Southern England’, *Proceedings of the Prehistoric Society*, 65 (1999), 145–66 (pp. 153, 159).

¹⁵ See further, M. D. Faber, ‘The Monster in the Bone-house: *Beowulf*’, *Psychoanalytic Review*, 76 (1989), 263–80 (pp. 266, 267); Lewis E. Nicholson, ‘The Art of Interlace in *Beowulf*’, *Studia Neophilologica*, 52 (1980), 237–49 (pp. 241–45). References to *Beowulf* are from *Klaeber’s Beowulf: Fourth Edition*, ed. by R. D. Fulk, Robert E. Bjork, and John D. Niles (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008). I am grateful to Daniel Thomas for contributing substantively to this discussion of hall–body imagery in *Beowulf*.

¹⁶ Glenn Davis, ‘The Exeter Book Riddles and the Place of Sexual Idiom in Old English Literature’, in *Medieval Obscenities*, ed. by Nicola McDonald (York: York Medieval Press, 2006), pp. 39–54 (p. 52).

¹⁷ Nicholson, ‘Art of Interlace’, p. 241.

as a kind of mirror, in which it is possible to see reflections of how individuals, families, and communities were defined and constructed. Formalized and ritualized activities are important mechanisms by which social identities are constructed and by which social groups are defined. If there were formal elements in the architecture of Anglo-Saxon buildings — as this paper will demonstrate — these may reflect mechanisms by which people constructed families, communities, and polities. If ritualized activities were practised at important times in the lives of buildings, then it is a reasonable question to ask whether they resembled practices associated with rites of passage in the human life course.

Building Houses and Families Using Symmetry (Late Fifth and Sixth Centuries)

At one level, the typical architecture of houses of the early Anglo-Saxon period offers primary evidence for the economy and social structure of England in the late fifth to sixth centuries. They were relatively small and simple rectangular structures, built of posts set into individual postholes, usually with doorways centred in the long walls and sometimes with internal partitions, especially at the eastern end (figure 1).¹⁸ In addition to these post-built structures, sunken-featured buildings, also called *Grubenhäuser*, were also common in this period. *Grubenhäuser* probably served as all-purpose ancillary structures for domestic craft working or storage.¹⁹ A lack of special-purpose buildings, such as barns, granaries, or workshops for specific crafts, indicates a non-specialized economy in which each household subsisted self-sufficiently. The artefactual evidence, faunal remains, and botanical remains recovered from settlements of this period agree, pointing to domestic textile work, ceramics, and metalworking, and small scale farming and rearing of livestock. Settlements ranged from a handful of structures (as at Puddlehill, Bedfordshire) to as many as dozens at any one time (as at Mucking, Essex, or West Stow, Suffolk).²⁰ None of the houses in a given settlement typically stand out as larger or more complex than the others; nor is it usually possible to identify one building or group of buildings that commanded larger areas of the settlement than others. This suggests a lack of hierarchy among households.

An element of formalization, however, is detectable in the architecture of early Anglo-Saxon post-built structures.²¹ The large majority were one-room rectangular structures with opposed doorways located in or near the centres of the longer walls. Ground plans were by no means standardized; indeed, many structures of this period featured irregular ground plans. Nevertheless, Hamerow notes that a small proportion of buildings of this period, especially the larger ones, featured remarkably regular and symmetrical ground plans (figure 1).²² In these structures the two doorways, symmetrically paired with each other across the long axis

¹⁸ Hamerow, *Rural Settlements and Society*, p. 22, 37–38.

¹⁹ Jess Tipper, *The Grubenhäuser in Anglo-Saxon England: An Analysis and Interpretation of the Evidence from a Most Distinctive Building Type*, Landscape Research Centre Archaeological Monograph Series, 2 (Yedingham: The Landscape Research Centre, 2004).

²⁰ C. L. Matthews and S. C. Hawkes, 'Early Saxon Settlements and Burials on Puddlehill, near Dunstable, Bedfordshire', *Anglo-Saxon Studies in Archaeology and History*, 4 (1985), 59–115; Helena Hamerow, *Excavations at Mucking, II: The Anglo-Saxon Settlement*, English Heritage Archaeological Reports, 21 (London: English Heritage, 1993); Stanley E. West, *West Stow, the Anglo-Saxon Village*, East Anglian Archaeology Reports, 24, 2 vols (Ipswich: Suffolk County Planning Department, 1985).

²¹ Hamerow, *Rural Settlements and Society*, pp. 38, 40.

²² Hamerow, *Rural Settlements and Society*, pp. 25–26.

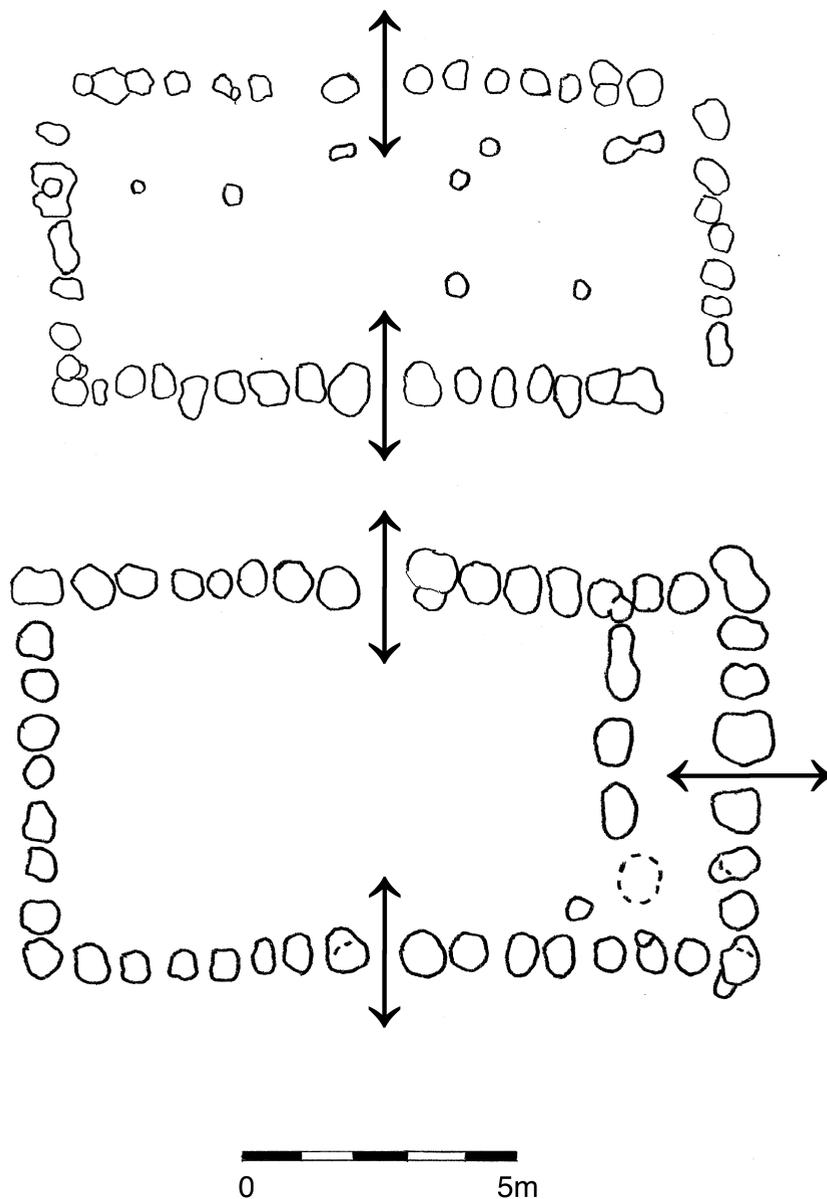


Figure 1. Early Anglo-Saxon post-built structures: (top) Building A11 at Chalton, Hampshire; (bottom) PHB 1 at Mucking, Essex. Arrows indicate doorways. After Addyman and Leigh, 'The Anglo-Saxon Village at Chalton', fig. 7, and Hamerow, *Excavations at Mucking*, fig. 54.

of the building, simultaneously form a second, short axis of symmetry. The wall posts of such buildings are placed symmetrically over both of these axes: each individual post in one long wall can be paired with one in the opposite long wall, as well as with another post in the first long wall, the same distance from the central door but on its far side. Although extreme regularity was exhibited by only a small proportion of buildings, the overall picture still manages to convey an impression of formality and symmetry.²³ Many buildings with irregular ground plans, perhaps necessitated by the use of irregular timbers,²⁴ could arguably be regarded as variations from this ideal form.

The two-fold symmetry described above probably served practical architectural purposes or resulted from constructional methods. Wall posts paired across the long axis of the building probably supported tie beams, and symmetry across the short axis (formed by the central doorways) could indicate that the central doorways were the starting points for setting out the building.²⁵ It is likely that structural integrity of the entire building depended, or was thought to depend, upon the two central doorways, as evidenced by massive doorposts, and the frequent repair or replacement of doorposts, in some fifth- and sixth-century buildings.²⁶ By contrast, the corner posts of Anglo-Saxon buildings were not usually substantive.²⁷

Practical activities that are formalized, however, often become ritualized.²⁸ Although the symmetry of Anglo-Saxon buildings may have served a practical purpose, it is plausible that it developed social or symbolic resonances, for example, with the ways households structured themselves. The practice of establishing symmetry may have been as fundamental to constructing a household as it was to constructing a house. If this was the case, then it is a valuable insight, since the archaeological record offers little evidence out of which to build a picture of the social structure of living households in the fifth and sixth centuries. At present, the best evidence comes from burial grounds of the period. It has already been mentioned that settlements provide little evidence for social hierarchy; in cemeteries, by contrast, there is ample evidence of social stratification. Grave goods, which frequently accompany

²³ Hamerow, *Rural Settlements and Society*, p. 40.

²⁴ Philip Dixon, 'The Reconstruction of Buildings', in *Catholme: An Anglo-Saxon Settlement on the Trent Gravels in Staffordshire*, ed. by Stuart Losco-Bradley and Gavin Kingsley, Nottingham Studies in Archaeology, 3 (Nottingham: Department of Archaeology, University of Nottingham, 2002), pp. 89–99 (p. 93); Hamerow, *Rural Settlements and Society*, p. 26.

²⁵ Compare the evidence for setting-out posts in the central doorways of some later structures: Hamerow, *Rural Settlements and Society*, p. 30.

²⁶ Hamerow, *Rural Settlements and Society*, p. 43. The excavated foundations of some seventh-century buildings show signs that they were assembled from prefabricated sections of walls, and in structure C8 at Cowdery's Down and building 0734 at Staunch Meadow, Brandon, there is further evidence that the lengths of wall either side of the central doorways were prefabricated separately: Hamerow, *Rural Settlements and Society*, pp. 28–29; Andrew Tester, Sue Anderson, Ian Riddler, and Robert Carr, *Staunch Meadow, Brandon, Suffolk: A High Status Middle Saxon Settlement on the Fen Edge*, East Anglian Archaeology Reports, 151 (Bury St Edmunds: Suffolk County Council Archaeology Service, 2014), p. 367. In these structures, each central doorway would have bound together the lengths of wall either side of it, with the lintels performing a role not unlike that of the keystone of an arch. Compare this to building 7098 at Staunch Meadow, where the doorways themselves appear to have been prefabricated and inserted into the walls of the partly raised building to complete its frame: Tester et al., *Staunch Meadow*, p. 48. Although these seventh-century examples cannot be taken as evidence for constructional techniques in the fifth and early sixth centuries, they may preserve an earlier understanding of the architectural importance of the opposing doorways.

²⁷ Tester et al., *Staunch Meadow*, p. 366.

²⁸ Catherine Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992); Richard Bradley, 'A Life Less Ordinary: The Ritualization of the Domestic Sphere in Later Prehistoric Europe', *Cambridge Archaeological Journal*, 13 (2003), 5–23.

inhumations and cremation burials of this period, are unevenly distributed: some burials are more lavishly equipped than others, while still others are completely unaccompanied. Considering the lack of evidence in settlements for higher or lower status households, it is reasonable to infer that the uneven distribution of grave goods in cemeteries reflects stratification within, rather than between, households.²⁹ In other words, individuals buried with greater wealth of grave goods held important status or authority within their own households. Apparently corroborating this interpretation is evidence from some cemeteries of well-defined burial clusters or groups, each thought to correspond to a household, and each showing a range of social statuses as measured by burial wealth.³⁰

Although the burial evidence indicates the presence of hierarchy within households, it gives little indication as to the shape of that social structure. It is here that the formalization and symmetry detectable in fifth- and sixth-century architecture may be able to provide some insight. If the ways buildings were structured developed social or symbolic resonances with the ways households were structured, as has been suggested, then a household's social structure might not have rested upon one individual (e.g. a 'master of the household' or 'clan chief'), as used to be assumed, nor even upon a unitary 'nuclear family' (with their dependent relations and the unfree forming the rest of the household).³¹ Instead, multiple individuals of comparably high status within the household might have anchored its social structure, just as symmetrically opposed doorways anchored the architecture of a house. We can only speculate on the precise shape of this hypothetical 'symmetry' in the social structure of households. It is tempting to imagine two individuals, a man and a woman, symmetrically mirroring each other like opposed doorways at the core of the social structure. Indeed, the individuals who enjoyed high social status within households, judging by burial wealth, included both men and women. Moreover, the clear distinction between masculine and feminine grave-good assemblages indicates a fundamental difference in the nature of the social influence men and women exercised, suggesting that as co-anchors of a household a man and a woman would have played complementary roles. As tempting as it is to indulge in such speculation, however, it is probable that the precise shape of the social structure varied from household to household, and that within any given household it fluctuated over time.

Constructing 'Royal' Architecture and Authority (Late Sixth to Early Seventh Century)

In the late sixth and early seventh centuries, architecture exhibiting even greater levels of formalization became a feature of higher-status settlements, specifically so-called 'royal vill's', of which we have excavated examples, such as Cowdery's Down, Hampshire, and Yeavinger, Northumberland, and others that are known through aerial photographs and geophysics, such

²⁹ Chris Scull, 'Archaeology, Early Anglo-Saxon Society and the Origins of Anglo-Saxon Kingdoms', *Anglo-Saxon Studies in Archaeology and History*, 6 (1993), 65–82 (pp. 72–73); Chris Scull, 'The Human Burials', in *The Anglo-Saxon Settlement and Cemetery at Bloodmoor Hill, Carlton Colville, Suffolk*, by Sam Lucy, Jess Tipper, and Alison Dickens, East Anglian Archaeology Reports, 131 (Cambridge: Cambridge Archaeological Unit, 2009), pp. 385–426 (pp. 424–25).

³⁰ Heinrich Härke, 'Early Anglo-Saxon Social Structure', in *The Anglo-Saxons from the Migration Period to the Eighth Century: An Ethnographic Perspective*, ed. by John Hines (Woodbridge: Boydell, 1997), pp. 125–60 (pp. 138–39).

³¹ Cf. Scull, 'Early Anglo-Saxon Society', p. 73; Härke, 'Early Anglo-Saxon Social Structure', p. 140; Scull, 'The Human Burials', p. 425.

as Sutton Courtenay, Oxfordshire (formerly Berkshire), and Foxley, Wiltshire.³² Chronologically, the appearance of these settlements coincides with the rise of the earliest Anglo-Saxon kingdoms. Yeavinger is identified with *Ad Gefrin*, Edwin of Northumbria's royal vill where (according to Bede) Paulinus spent thirty-six days catechizing and baptizing the Northumbrian people.³³ As they survive archaeologically, the royal vills typically feature one larger structure (a 'great hall'), associated smaller buildings, and a fenced enclosure, which together constitute a 'great hall complex'. The layouts of these great hall complexes, which often went through several different phases, were clearly formalized. Linear alignments of buildings were present, for example, at Yeavinger, Sutton Courtenay, and Cowdery's Down, with other buildings laid out at right angles (figure 2). At Yeavinger, an area between the great hall and an axially aligned building was fenced off. At Cowdery's Down, Foxley, and Chalton, Hampshire — which has not been interpreted as a royal vill — there were also cruciform arrangements of buildings, consisting of a great hall and three smaller buildings, with the smaller buildings contained inside a fenced area (figure 3).³⁴

Reynolds has observed that in these cruciform arrangements the doorways of the buildings were aligned in ways that would have facilitated formal or ritualized procession.³⁵ This observation applies to axially aligned groups of buildings as well. The idea that a level of formality was involved in moving through space in these buildings complexes is supported by a few discoveries of deliberately 'placed' burials located in doorways at high status sites.³⁶ A grave containing an adult (of unknown sex) buried with a bronze-tipped wooden staff and the head of what was probably a goat lay immediately outside one of the axially aligned doorways of the great hall at Yeavinger (figure 2).³⁷ A burial of a skinned, unbutchered cow was laid on a surface of cobbles in a pit just outside a door of one of the buildings at Cowdery's Down, likewise on the aligned axis of the building (figure 2).³⁸ A horse skull and associated horse bones were found in the foundation pit of the doorway leading from the 'nave' into the 'chancel' of a proposed church at Staunch Meadow, Brandon.³⁹ These burials emphasize the significance of crossing into and out of certain spaces at these sites.

The fenced enclosures associated with great hall complexes represent exclusive spaces, access to which appears to have been controlled by the great hall. Some phases of the complexes at Yeavinger and Chalton incorporated fenced yards that could only be accessed through the great hall. In the first two phases at Cowdery's Down, a fenced yard was attached

³² Millett and James, 'Excavations at Cowdery's Down'; Hope-Taylor, *Yeavinger*; Helena Hamerow, Chris Hayden, and Gill Hey, 'Anglo-Saxon and Earlier Settlement near Drayton Road, Sutton Courtenay, Berkshire', *Archaeological Journal*, 164 (2007), 109–96; John Hinchliffe, 'An Early Medieval Settlement at Cowage Farm, Foxley, near Malmesbury', *Archaeological Journal*, 143 (1986), 240–59.

³³ Bede, *Historia ecclesiastica*, pp. 188–89 (ii.XIV); Hope-Taylor, *Yeavinger*, p. 1.

³⁴ On the status of the site at Chalton, see P. V. Addyman and D. Leigh, 'The Anglo-Saxon Village at Chalton, Hampshire: Second Interim Report', *Medieval Archaeology*, 17 (1973), 1–25.

³⁵ Andrew Reynolds, 'Boundaries and Settlements in Later Sixth to Eleventh-century England', *Anglo-Saxon Studies in Archaeology and History*, 12 (2003), 98–136 (pp. 104–06).

³⁶ Helena Hamerow, "'Special deposits'" in Anglo-Saxon Settlements', *Medieval Archaeology*, 50 (2006), 1–30; C. M. Sofield, 'Thresholds in the Lives of Settlements: Anglo-Saxon Placed Deposits made at Entrances and "Liminal" Times', in *Life on the Edge: Social, Religious and Political Frontiers in Early Medieval Europe*, ed. by S. Semple, C. Orsini, and S. Mui, *Neue Studien zur Sachsenforschung*, 6 (Braunschweig: Braunschweiges Landesmuseum with the Internationales Sachsensymposium, 2017), pp. 195–208.

³⁷ Hope-Taylor, *Yeavinger*, pp. 67–69, fig. 25.

³⁸ Millett and James, 'Excavations at Cowdery's Down', p. 221, figs 49, 50; M. Maltby, 'The Animal Bone', in Millett and James, 'Excavations at Cowdery's Down', pp. 258–59.

³⁹ Tester et al., *Staunch Meadow*, p. 48.

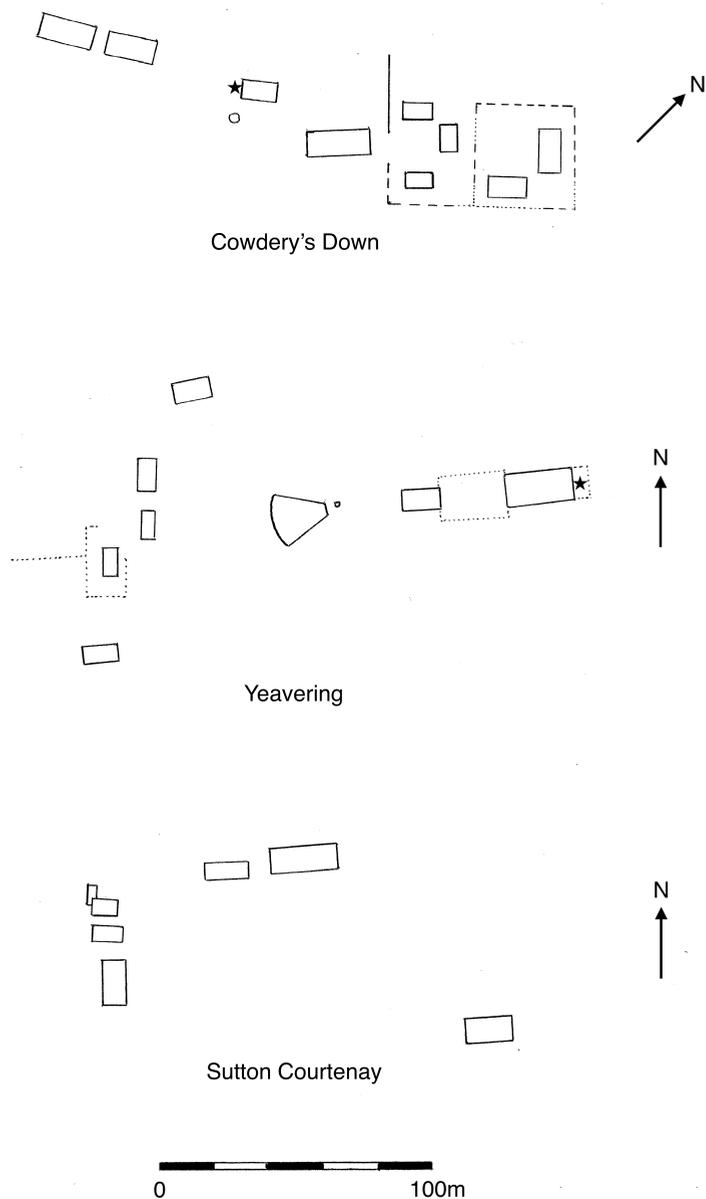


Figure 2. Alignments of buildings at Cowdery's Down, Yeavinging, and Sutton Courtenay. Stars mark the locations of the cow burial in pit 6 at Cowdery's Down and grave AX at Yeavinging. After Hamerow, *Rural Settlements and Society*, fig. 3.20.

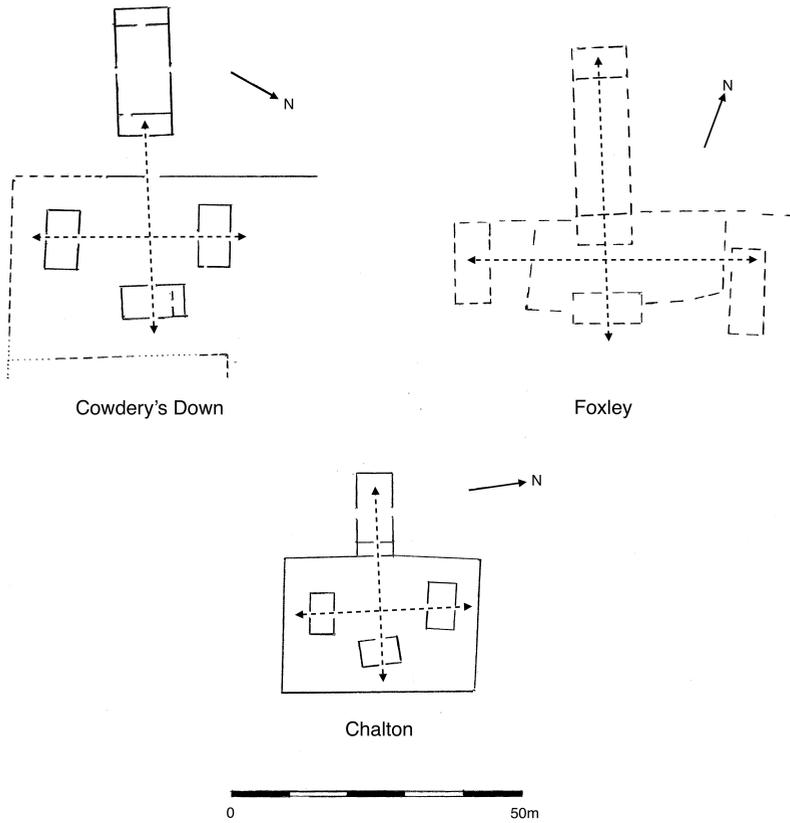


Figure 3. Cruciform arrangements of buildings at Cowdery's Down, Foxley, and Chalton. Arrows indicate alignments of doorways. After Reynolds, 'Boundaries and Settlements', fig. 2.

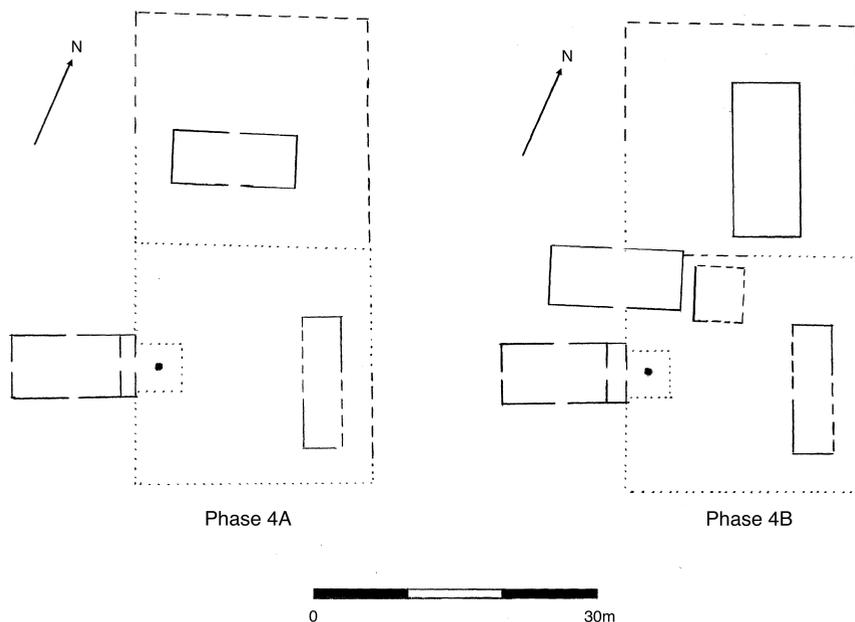


Figure 4. Great hall complexes of phases 4A and 4B at Cowdery's Down. After Reynolds, 'Boundaries and Settlements', fig. 1.

to the great hall that could not be accessed from that building, but within the yard was a smaller square enclosure, annexed to the great hall, that could *only* be entered from within the great hall (figure 4). Inside the smaller square enclosure was a single posthole. Blair has interpreted this and similar square enclosures as possible Anglo-Saxon shrines, centred around a *beam* or *stapol*.⁴⁰ The presence of one of these enclosures in an exclusive space within a great hall complex contributes to an impression of formal or ritualized use of space.

The formal arrangement of buildings and the presence of exclusive spaces were clearly important architectural features of great hall complexes and some other high status sites. The ability to exert this kind of control over space demonstrated the power of emerging kings and other elites. Early kings exercised this power frequently. At both Cowdery's Down and Yeavering, several successive phases of great hall complexes were built over a period of decades, and some show evidence of deliberate destruction, chiefly by fire.⁴¹ Although there

⁴⁰ John Blair, 'Anglo-Saxon Pagan Shrines and their Prototypes', *Anglo-Saxon Studies in Archaeology and History*, 8 (2005), 1–28, and 'Holy Beams: Anglo-Saxon Cult Sites and the Place-name Element *Bēam*', in *Trees and Timber in the Anglo-Saxon World*, ed. by M. D. J. Bintley and M. G. Shapland (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 186–210.

⁴¹ Millett and James, 'Excavations at Cowdery's Down'; Hope-Taylor, *Yeavering*; Christopher Scull, 'Post-Roman Phase I at Yeavering: A Re-consideration', *Medieval Archaeology*, 35 (1991), 51–63.

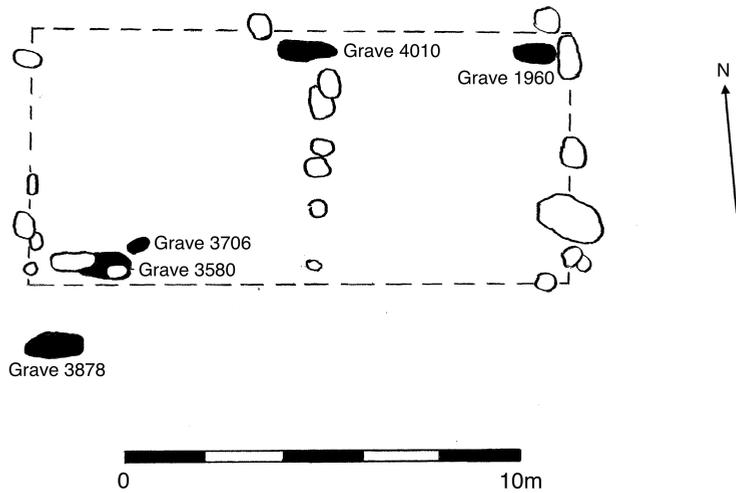


Figure 5. Building 1 at Flixborough, with associated graves shaded black. After Loveluck and Atkinson, *Early Medieval Settlement Remains*, fig. 4.2.

have been suggestions that attacking enemies could have wreaked this destruction,⁴² it seems at least as likely that the building complexes were razed by the occupants, before their useful life had ended, in order to make way for fresh rebuilding. It is possible that one way kings demonstrated their authority was by destroying the great hall complex of the previous ruler and constructing a new, greater one.

Besides being a demonstration of power or authority, I would argue that the formal architecture and exclusive enclosures at great hall complexes were physical manifestations of social processes that helped to establish royal authority. For an emerging king, the ability to distinguish himself and his associates from the rest of society, and to impose a layer of formality on interaction across that division, must have been critical to constructing royal identity. It has long been known that the emerging royal elite used mortuary rites to distinguish itself from the rest of society. In the so-called ‘princely’ burials of the decades surrounding AD 600 and the high-status female burials that flourished in the middle of the seventh century, emerging royal elites were frequently set apart from their contemporaries not just in terms of burial wealth, but physically as well. The boat burials and other elite graves at Sutton Hoo were located in a cemetery separate and distinct from the ancestral burial ground.⁴³ At the ‘royal’ cemetery at Street House Farm in Cleveland a female bed burial was set in the centre of a space surrounded by over a hundred graves laid out in the form of a large square enclosure.⁴⁴ The formal arrangement of buildings and the construction of exclusive enclosures at high-status sites in the late sixth and early seventh centuries show that emerging kings also distinguished themselves from the rest of society in life. The formalization and exclusivity embodied in these sites indicate that this distinction was established and maintained by controlling access to the ‘royal person’ both physically and through layers of formal ceremony and ritual.

Shaping Homesteads, Households, and New Communities (Seventh to Ninth Centuries)

The rise of kingship and an aristocratic elite in the late sixth and seventh centuries signaled an overall socioeconomic shift in England, characterized by more intensive agriculture and increased economic specialization as the ability to extract surplus from the land became the primary basis of wealth and power. Associated with this change, a more varied settlement ‘hierarchy’ emerged in which certain settlements began to engage in specific social and economic activities.⁴⁵ There were burgeoning religious communities or ‘minsters’ featuring churches and specialized craftwork; so-called *wics* or ‘emporia’ showing evidence of overseas trade, intensive craftwork, and a greater density of occupation; and rural settlements apparently focused on particular aspects of food or craft production. These rural settlements contained a greater range of building types than those of the fifth and sixth centuries, a few of which can be identified archaeologically with specific functions, such as kitchens,

⁴² Hope-Taylor, *Yeavinger*, pp. 163, 277.

⁴³ Martin Carver, *Sutton Hoo: A Seventh-Century Princely Burial Ground and its Context* (London: British Museum Press, 2005).

⁴⁴ Steven J. Sherlock, *A Royal Anglo-Saxon Cemetery at Street House, Loftus, North-East Yorkshire*, Tees Archaeology Monograph Series, 6 (Hartlepool: Tees Archaeology, 2012).

⁴⁵ K. Ulmschneider, ‘Settlement hierarchy’, in *The Oxford Handbook of Anglo-Saxon Archaeology*, ed. by Helena Hamerow, David A. Hinton, and Sally Crawford (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), pp. 156–71; Hamerow, *Rural Settlements and Society*, pp. 163–68.

barns, and granaries.⁴⁶ They also exhibited evidence of more complex and longer-lasting spatial organization, with individual farmsteads comprising multiple buildings defined by ditched boundaries maintained over generations, as well as droveways for the management of livestock, and ditches defining boundaries of whole settlements.⁴⁷

It is possible to see formalized or ritualized elements in the construction of living space in England in the seventh to ninth centuries, especially in rural settlements. As I have demonstrated elsewhere, there was a marked increase in the small number of human burials made not in burial grounds but in or alongside buildings, settlement ditches, and other domestic features.⁴⁸ About half of these were so-called ‘deviant’ burials: individuals buried prone, with their legs tied, or with other characteristics more typical of ‘execution’ cemeteries than normal burial grounds.⁴⁹ In contrast, a similar number of burials made in domestic contexts resembled ordinary burials from burial grounds. Most of these more ‘normative’ burials were found next to building walls and farmstead boundaries; none were found at the outer boundaries of settlements. A striking example comes from Flixborough, where three children, a woman in her twenties, and an infant were buried next to the walls of an eighth-century building, which was subsequently rebuilt on the same footprint (figure 5).⁵⁰ The excavators suggest this building was ‘renovated without any reference to the graves’.⁵¹ Considering these five graves together with other burials made next to buildings during this period, however, I have argued that the building at Flixborough was rebuilt on the same footprint in a conscious effort to maintain a direct connection to the burials.⁵²

At Flixborough and elsewhere, a small number of deceased individuals were selected for burial alongside buildings and farmstead boundaries. This practice can be understood in the context of a broader contemporary development of the seventh to ninth centuries whereby some burial grounds were becoming more closely integrated with living spaces.⁵³ The overall picture is one of households seeking to establish physically closer links with their ancestors, sometimes even incorporating burials into the ‘architecture’ of farmsteads. This practice may have helped families forge a shared sense of identity based on shared ancestry. If claims to settlement space and agricultural land had any ancestral basis, it may have been a way of staking or reasserting those claims.⁵⁴

⁴⁶ Hamerow, *Rural Settlements and Society*, pp. 45–53.

⁴⁷ Hamerow, *Rural Settlements and Society*, pp. 34–35, 72–83; Reynolds, ‘Boundaries and Settlements’.

⁴⁸ C. M. Sofield, ‘Living with the Dead: Human Burials in Anglo-Saxon Settlement Contexts’, *Archaeological Journal*, 172 (2015), 351–88. The rest of this section relies substantially on this work.

⁴⁹ Helen Geake, ‘Burial Practice in Seventh- and Eighth-Century England’, in *The Age of Sutton Hoo: The Seventh Century in North-western Europe*, ed. by Martin Carver (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 1992), pp. 83–94 (pp. 87–89); Andrew Reynolds, *Anglo-Saxon Deviant Burial Customs* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

⁵⁰ Christopher Loveluck and David Atkinson, *The Early Medieval Settlement Remains from Flixborough, Lincolnshire: The Occupation Sequence, c. AD 600–1000*, Excavations at Flixborough, 1 (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2007), pp. 49–50, 53.

⁵¹ Loveluck and Atkinson, *Early Medieval Settlement Remains*, p. 53.

⁵² Sofield, ‘Living with the Dead’, p. 380.

⁵³ Helena Hamerow, ‘Communities of the Living and the Dead: The Relationship between Anglo-Saxon Settlements and Cemeteries, c. 450–c. 850’, in *Intersections: The Archaeology and History of Christianity in England, 400–1200: Papers in Honour of Martin Biddle and Birthe Kjølbjæ-Biddle*, ed. by Martin Henig and Nigel Ramsay (Oxford: Archaeopress, 2010), pp. 71–76; see also Grenville Astill, ‘Anglo-Saxon Attitudes: How Should Post-AD 700 Burials be Interpreted?’ in *Mortuary Practices and Social Identities in the Middle Ages: Essays in Burial Archaeology in Honour of Heinrich Härke*, ed. by Duncan Sayer and Howard M. R. Williams (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2009), pp. 222–35.

⁵⁴ Hamerow, ‘Communities of the Living and the Dead’, p. 76; Sofield, ‘Living with the Dead’, pp. 376, 379–80.

There are indications that the ‘young dead’ were instrumental in this process (whether or not children were themselves regarded as ‘ancestors’).⁵⁵ Six of the eight ‘normative’ burials located next to buildings and farmstead boundaries belonged to children, adolescents, or young adults. Most of these young burials were discovered at Flixborough and Yarnton, where nearby burial grounds contained only adults.⁵⁶

The role played by the ‘young dead’ in farmstead architecture may resonate with a similar role played by living children in certain social interactions, especially ones relating to the construction of kinship, family identity, and lineage. If burials of children next to some houses in the seventh to ninth centuries are any indication of the role living children played in those households, then their importance in binding together families and cementing kinship may have been widespread. This is an important insight, considering that children and their role in Anglo-Saxon society are difficult to detect, both archaeologically and in documentary sources. Nevertheless, Sally Crawford has found glimpses of the crucial role played by children in constructing families and kinship in documentary evidence. In particular she has noted the importance placed on procreation in the law codes and medical texts, and on raising children in poetic sources and accounts of the lives of saints.⁵⁷ For example, the late sixth-century Law 81 of Æthelbert of Kent requires that in the case of a childless marriage, a wife’s property should revert to her kin after her death.⁵⁸ According to this law, at least, children were what made a marriage socially and economically binding. Crawford argues from later documentary sources that the nuclear family, consisting of father, mother, and children, was the core unit of Anglo-Saxon society. Within law codes, for example, a man’s *hired* or household refers to his wife and children, while a ‘kinless’ man lacks immediate family, not a wider kin group.⁵⁹

Demolishing Buildings and the Close of Life (Fifth to Seventh Centuries)

I would like to conclude this paper with a discussion of formalized or ritualized practices associated with the destruction of certain buildings, specifically *Grubenhäuser*, and whether they (like Bede’s sparrow analogy) can inform our understanding of how the human lifespan was conceived. As excavated, *Grubenhäuser* consisted of a subrectangular pit, on average c. 4m by 3m in plan and 0.30–0.50m deep, with two or more postholes.⁶⁰ They are typically reconstructed with a tent-like, steeply sloping thatched roof raised on posts, wattle-and-daub walls, and either a suspended wooden floor or a compacted floor on the base of the pit.⁶¹ Evidence has been found to support both interpretations of the floor, and it is possible that *Grubenhäuser* with both types of floors were constructed. *Grubenhäuser*, which primarily date to the fifth to seventh centuries, were once interpreted as dwellings, but following the

⁵⁵ James Whitley, ‘Too many ancestors’, *Antiquity*, 76 (2002), 119–26.

⁵⁶ Loveluck and Atkinson, *Early Medieval Settlement Remains*; Gill Hey, *Yarnton: Saxon and Medieval Settlement and Landscape. Results of Excavations 1990–96*, Thames Valley Landscapes Monographs, 20 (Oxford: Oxford Archaeology, 2004).

⁵⁷ Sally Crawford, *Childhood in Anglo-Saxon England* (Stroud: Sutton, 1999), p. 57 and *Daily Life in Anglo-Saxon England* (Oxford: Greenwood World Publishing, 2009), p. 67.

⁵⁸ Carole A. Hough, ‘The Early Kentish “Divorce Laws”’: A Reconsideration of Æthelberht, Chs. 79 and 80’, *Anglo-Saxon England*, 23 (1994), 19–34 (p. 20 n. 5).

⁵⁹ Crawford, *Daily Life in Anglo-Saxon England*, p. 66.

⁶⁰ Tipper, *The Grubenhäuser in Anglo-Saxon England*, p. 1.

⁶¹ Hamerow, *Rural Settlements and Society*, p. 55.

discovery of post-built structures, they are now chiefly interpreted as ancillary structures used for storage or domestic activities such as weaving.⁶²

Many deposits of deliberately 'placed' material have been found in *Grubenhäuser*. In my doctoral research on placed deposits in rural settlements of the fifth to ninth centuries, eighty-seven out of 151 placed deposits came from *Grubenhäuser*.⁶³ These typically comprised lines or clusters of loomweights, complete or largely complete pots smashed in situ, and skulls of animals, especially cattle and horse. Where detailed records of the deposits exist, most show that the deposits were found on or near the base of the pit. Tipper has shown that most *Grubenhäuser* pits remained empty during the use of the building, and were deliberately backfilled shortly after abandonment, perhaps in part with material from the superstructure.⁶⁴ Based on this model, I have argued elsewhere that placed deposits of loomweights, pottery vessels, animal skulls, and other materials lying on or near the base of the pit represent termination deposits associated with the abandonment and demolition of the building.⁶⁵ This appears to have been a component of a formalized or ritualized practice undertaken at the end of the useful life of some *Grubenhäuser*. One possible interpretation is that these deposits were analogous to grave goods in human burials.

A separate body of evidence points to another formalized or ritualized practice associated with the destruction of *Grubenhäuser*. About a dozen *Grubenhäuser* have been excavated which appear to have burned down, some of which contained lines or clusters of loomweights.⁶⁶ These loomweight deposits have been interpreted as the in situ remains of weighted looms, or of stores of weights, that were destroyed in the fire. While this interpretation is probably correct, it may not represent the whole story, as there is reason to believe that at least some *Grubenhäuser* destroyed by fire were deliberately burned down.⁶⁷ Experimental attempts to burn other types of timber-framed buildings with thatched roofs and walls covered in daub has shown that, although the roof goes up quickly, the walls do not burn easily.⁶⁸ A large amount of fuel is required for the structure to burn down completely, as well as a way to keep the heat from escaping after the roof is gone. An experimental *Grubenhäuser* at West Stow Anglo-Saxon Village, a reconstructed settlement and open-air museum in Suffolk, was destroyed by arson in 2005. This particular structure was a maximally heavily timbered reconstruction with a planked floor suspended over a fully timber-lined subterranean chamber. This substantial amount of fuel, plus the presence of an enclosed timber-lined subterranean chamber, provided the preconditions for an extremely hot and long-lasting blaze.⁶⁹ It is unlikely that anything approaching these conditions would have existed in the fires that destroyed actual *Grubenhäuser*.

⁶² Tipper, *The Grubenhäuser in Anglo-Saxon England*, pp. 160–77; Hamerow, *Rural Settlements and Society*, pp. 60–64.

⁶³ C. M. Sofield, 'Placed Deposits in Early and Middle Anglo-Saxon Rural Settlements' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Oxford, 2012), pp. 117–34, fig. 5.8.

⁶⁴ Tipper, *The Grubenhäuser in Anglo-Saxon England*, pp. 99–107.

⁶⁵ Sofield, 'Thresholds in the Lives of Settlements'.

⁶⁶ Jess Tipper, *Experimental Archaeology and Fire: The Investigation of a Burnt Reconstruction at West Stow Anglo-Saxon Village*, East Anglian Archaeology Reports, 146 (Bury St Edmunds: Suffolk County Council Archaeological Service, 2012), pp. 144–51.

⁶⁷ The remainder of this paragraph summarizes a more detailed analysis in preparation by the author.

⁶⁸ Hans-Ole Hansen, *I Built a Stone Age House*, trans. by Maurice Michael (London: Phoenix House, 1962); A. Bankoff and F. Winter, 'A House-Burning in Serbia', *Archaeology*, 32 (1979), 8–14.

⁶⁹ Tipper, *Experimental Archaeology and Fire*.

It seems probable that at least some of the *Grubenhäuser* destroyed by fire were, like the reconstruction at West Stow Village, deliberately burned down, perhaps with weighted looms or stores of weights left in them, or even especially placed in them, to be destroyed in the blaze. The likelihood that some phases of the great hall complexes at Cowdery's Down and Yeavinger were deliberately destroyed by fire has already been mentioned. These blazes would have been spectacular events to mark the end of a building's life, characterized by intense heat, light, and sound. In many ways, they would have resembled the spectacle, and the conspicuous consumption, of cremation.⁷⁰

The deliberate burning of *Grubenhäuser* and halls, and the placement of loomweights, smashing of pots, laying of animal heads, and other forms of deliberate deposition at the bases of others, represent formalized or ritualized activities relating to the abandonment and demolition of buildings. By contrast, relatively few deposits clearly relating to the construction of buildings have been identified.⁷¹ The deposit of a horse skull and associated bones in a door-pit at Staunch Meadow, Brandon, discussed above, represents one of the few placed deposits clearly associated with a building's construction. Other placed deposits associated with doors and walls were probably placed while the building was already standing. Destruction appears to have been a more significant event than construction in the life histories of buildings.

Likewise, human burials provide most of our archaeological evidence for ritual practices surrounding a person's lifecycle. Mortuary rites could be elaborate in the early Anglo-Saxon period: cremation was widely practised in parts of England during the fifth and early sixth centuries, and furnished inhumation was common throughout England until the end of the sixth century, and only disappeared in the latter part of the seventh century.⁷² Most elaborate of all, the princely burials of the late sixth and early seventh centuries and the flourish of richly furnished female burials in the middle of the seventh century have already been mentioned.

Admittedly, the fact that these mortuary rites concluded with burying human remains in the ground makes them particularly visible to archaeologists. Other important transitions in a person's lifecycle may have been attended by rites of passage that archaeologists have not been able to detect. For example, large-scale analyses of fifth- to seventh-century burials have shown that the types and quantities of grave goods afforded to children changed at around two years and eighteen years old, suggesting that transitions from infancy to childhood, and from childhood to adulthood, were both recognized thresholds in a person's lifecycle.⁷³ Nevertheless, we have no direct archaeological evidence for rites of passage associated with these transitions. Is this because the practices in question left no archaeological trace, or were

⁷⁰ Howard Williams, 'Death Warmed Up: The Agency of Bodies and Bones in Early Anglo-Saxon Cremation Rites', *Journal of Material Culture*, 9 (2004), 263–91 (p. 271). Literary evidence for a conceptual link between house burning and human cremation can be found in *Beowulf*. The poet's repeated allusions to the great hall's future destruction by fire (ll. 81b–85; 778–82a) foreshadow the final scene, in which Beowulf's dead body is itself consumed on the cremation pyre (ll. 3137–55). I am grateful to Hannah McKendrick Bailey for suggesting this parallel.

⁷¹ Sofield, 'Placed Deposits in Early and Middle Anglo-Saxon Rural Settlements', p. 148.

⁷² Catherine Hills and Sam Lucy, *Spong Hill, ix: Chronology and Synthesis* (Cambridge: McDonald Institute for Archaeological Research, 2013), pp. 320–28; *Anglo-Saxon Graves and Grave-goods of the 6th and 7th Centuries AD: A Chronological Framework*, ed. by John Hines and Alex Bayliss, Society for Medieval Archaeology Monographs, 33 (London: Society for Medieval Archaeology, 2013).

⁷³ H. Härke, 'Early Anglo-Saxon Social Structure', in *The Anglo-Saxons from the Migration Period to the Eighth Century: An Ethnographic Perspective*, ed. by John Hines (Woodbridge: Boydell, 1997), pp. 125–60; Nick Stoodley, 'From the Cradle to the Grave: Age Organization and the Early Anglo-Saxon Burial Rite', *World Archaeology*, 31 (2000), 456–72.

they actually less lavishly ritualized than funerals? If the life histories of buildings were in any way modelled on the human lifecycle, then perhaps the funeral was indeed the most important rite of passage in a person's life in fifth- to seventh-century in England.

Conclusion

The remains of buildings provide fundamental archaeological evidence for daily life and community structure — arguably the best evidence in periods where we have no or little access to written records, such as England in the early Anglo-Saxon period. Buildings were also the locus of formalized and ritualized practices relating to domestic life. This article has argued that by analysing formalized architecture of buildings and ritualized practices relating to their use, it is possible to better understand the 'architecture' of society itself.

Whether building architecture merely resonated metaphorically with Anglo-Saxon world-views or whether buildings were endowed with personhood, this paper has argued that formalized or ritualized treatment of buildings offers a reflection of how individuals, households, and communities were constructed. From the internal symmetry that formed a defining element of house architecture in the late fifth to seventh centuries, it has been suggested that the social structure of contemporary households was shaped more or less symmetrically around two or more individuals, rather than a single 'head of the household'. In the late sixth and early seventh centuries, the remarkably formalized layouts of royal villas, which emphasized procession and exclusivity, suggest that controlling and formalizing social access to the king was equally pivotal in constructing emerging royal identities. Human burials were used to define space in farmsteads of the seventh to ninth centuries, perhaps in order to establish or reaffirm claims to what was becoming ancestral land. The especial use of children's burials in this practice may indicate that living children played an instrumental role in shaping household and ancestral identity. Finally, ritualized practices relating primarily to the destruction of buildings in the fifth to seventh centuries, rather than to their construction, suggests that death was perceived as the most important threshold in the human lifecycle.

This article has proposed a new level of interpretation for the archaeological remains of buildings, so it is inevitable that many of its conclusions take the form of suggestions. This article is intended to be a starting point, and it has hopefully demonstrated that future research into the ways people shaped buildings has the potential to reveal a great deal about the ways they shaped themselves.