

SOME PERSPECTIVES ON THE PLACE-NAME EVIDENCE
FOR NOTTINGHAMSHIRE'S EARLY SETTLEMENT*

This paper has two main purposes: first to update some of the past work on the place-names of Nottinghamshire, and secondly to illustrate that place-name evidence is only one form of evidence for analysing settlement distributions and that, used alone, it can give an unrealistic picture of a past reality.

Documentary sources for Nottinghamshire before Domesday Book in 1086 are extremely limited, and for this reason the evidence of archaeology and place-names has been used extensively to recreate the early settlement pattern.

Considering the basic place-name elements for the county (Figure 1), it can be seen that these do have specific distributions. The -hām and -ingas/-inga-names are found predominantly in the Trent valley, whereas the -tūn names have a more widespread distribution covering most of the county, except areas in the west and also in the east near Newark. The Scandinavian element -by is localised, found predominantly in the north-west of the county, whereas the -thorp and -thwaite elements largely represent an infilling of the county in areas, such as that by Newark, which are devoid of other names.

This has traditionally been interpreted as representing a pattern of Anglo-Saxon settlement in the Trent valley, followed by two waves of Scandinavian immigration.¹ The first of these waves, represented by the -by endings, was on areas of poor soil away from the major river valleys initially colonised by the Anglo-Saxons. It is usually thought of as being the colonisation of virgin territory, and thus an expansion away from the older settled region. This was followed by a secondary, more widespread, immigration, illustrated by the -thorp names.

There are however several problems with accepting this traditional approach. Cox has argued, with reference to the East Midlands,² that the -hām names were earlier than the -ingas/-inga- names and that they were closely related to the Roman settlements in the area. If his map is studied in detail, and the distances between the various elements and the Roman sites and roads he mentions are analysed it can be seen that, for Nottinghamshire, there is an exact reversal of the pattern he suggests (Figure 2). In fact the -ingas/-inga- names are in general nearer Roman sites than are the -hām names. This shows the great necessity for precision in place-name studies, but it, itself, is nonetheless too simplistic. In essence the archaeological record is incomplete - we have no means of knowing the exact distribution of all the Roman sites in the county, and can therefore not use archaeological data for such point pattern analyses. However this does not mean that the -hām names were later than other Anglo-Saxon elements. If the distances between these elements and the rivers marked on Cox's map are studied it becomes apparent that the -hām names are nearer rivers than are the other elements (Figure 2). If it is accepted that the earliest Anglo-Saxon settlement sites were located by rivers this would then certainly suggest that settlements with -hām names preceded those with -ingas/-inga-elements. In other regions where -hām names are clearly located near Roman sites this might simply be due to a coincidence of situation interests, since both sets of occupiers preferred locations by rivers.

Remaining with the archaeological evidence a further flaw in the traditional argument is revealed. Riley has recently shown, from air photographs, that much of north-west Nottinghamshire, especially the area between Retford and Doncaster, is underlain by extensive field systems of Roman date.³ This therefore suggests that the Scandinavian immigration here, represented by the -by names, was not undertaken on previously uncolonised land, but was instead reclamation of areas once farmed by the Romano-British population. However,

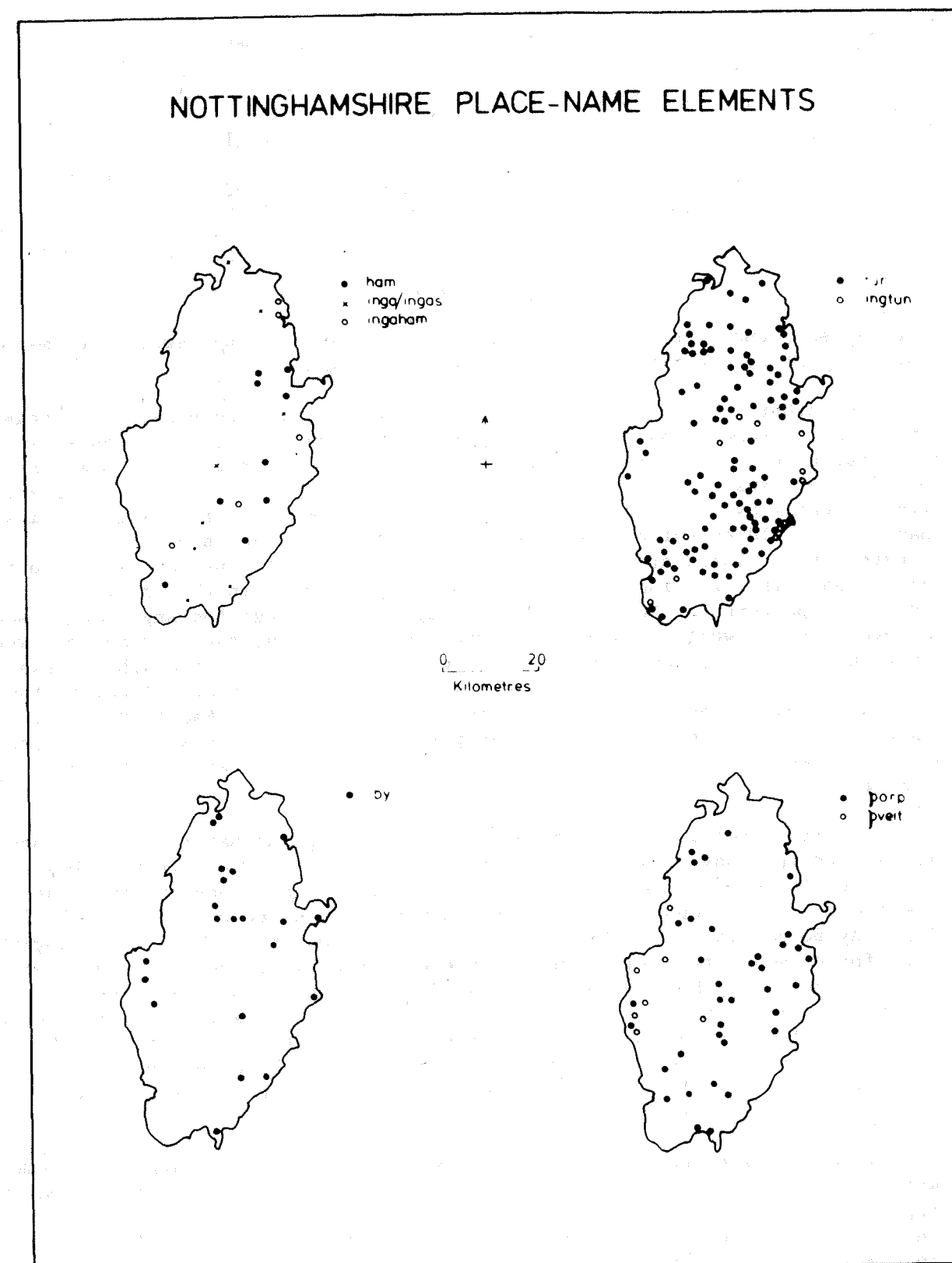


Figure 1

Mean distances in miles between various place-name elements
and Roman sites and rivers in Nottinghamshire

	-hām	-ingahām	-ingas/-inga-
Roman Site	3.44	3.00	2.39
Rivers	1.00	1.20	1.89

n.b. these figures are based on Roman sites and rivers as mentioned in B. H. Cox's article of 1972/3.

Figure 2

the parish boundaries bear little relation to the field systems, which might suggest that new territories were indeed carved out.

One other source, which might profitably be used elsewhere, also suggests the need for some reassessment of the place-name evidence. This concerns the personal names of the pre-Conquest holders of manors mentioned in Domesday Book. Their spatial distribution is, however, very difficult to interpret, since clearly by the 11th century there had been much intermarriage and mixed naming of children between the Scandinavian and Anglo-Saxon populations. Nonetheless if large areas of manors owned by people of one particular culture are found this might indicate a dominance of one group in that region. The resultant pattern for Nottinghamshire suggests an integrated Anglo-Saxon society. However, in the west, between Nottingham and Mansfield, there is an area where only Anglo-Saxon personal names occur, which might suggest that this was an area relatively uninfluenced by the Scandinavian immigration. Also, in the central Trent valley, around East Bridgford, Shelford and Radcliffe on Trent, there is a large area of Scandinavian personal names. This suggests a great Scandinavian influence in this area, which is not illustrated by the place name evidence.

One final point should also be made concerning the nature of the place-names used in studying Nottinghamshire. These generally derive from Domesday Book, there being few Anglo-Saxon charters or other documentary evidence surviving for the county before 1086. However the named units occurring in Domesday Book invariably contained more than one manor. A typical arrangement was, for example, two manors and one piece of sokeland, such as existed at Gedling and Barnby Moor. The equation of one manor to one named unit is the exception rather than the rule. Further to this it is possible, in many cases, to show that these manors were spatially distinct settlement units representing a pattern of dispersed farmsteads. If this was the case then the place-names refer to territories, with often more than one settlement unit within them, rather than distinct settlements.

In conclusion the use of the various types of evidence suggests a somewhat different picture to that traditionally accepted. The Roman occupation appears to have been extensive throughout the county. However, the primary Anglo-Saxon settlement seems to have been located along the Trent valley and in the south-east. This could represent a distinctly lower population in the 6th and 7th centuries than in the earlier, Roman period, enabling the Anglo-Saxons to concentrate only on the better lands of the county. With the Scandinavian immigration a higher density of population had to be sustained and this necessitated a recolonisation of lands in the north-west of the county. However, Scandinavian people nonetheless remained settled throughout

the county, so that by the 11th century there was a truly mixed Anglo-Scandinavian society in Nottinghamshire.

Notes

* A summary of a paper read to the tenth Conference of the Council for Name Studies in Great Britain and Ireland on 15th April, 1978.

1. This subject is best summarised in two papers: Cameron, K. "Scandinavian settlement in the territory of the Five Boroughs: the place-name evidence" 1965 inaugural lecture, University of Nottingham; and Fellows Jensen, G. "The Vikings in England: a review" pp.181-206 of *Anglo-Saxon England*, vol. 4 ed. P. Clemoes C.U.P. 1975.
2. Cox, B. H. "The significance of the distribution of English place-names in -hām in the Midlands and East Anglia", *Journal of the English Place-Name Society*, vol 5, 1972/3 pp.15-73.
3. Riley, D. N. "Air reconnaissance of West and South Yorkshire in 1975" *Yorkshire Archaeological Journal*, vol. 48, 1976, pp. 16-17; and also personal communication 13/3/1978.

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