5.   THE CHARACTER OF THE RESOURCE

There are 1102 English fields of conflict on the Fields of Conflict database. Thirty-nine of them have more than one record because multiple sites have been suggested, including eight for *Brunanburh*, six for *Ethandun* and four for Hexham, while six others each have three candidate sites, and 29 others have two. There is also an ancillary Features database which contains 354 records, linked to the relevant actions, including information that ranges from the modern excavation of burials and field survey of artefacts scatters through to dubious early finds, and written records of memorial chapels traditionally associated with sites.

The 1102 actions on the main database include 37 which appear to be spurious actions mainly deriving from dubious archaeological discoveries in the 19th century or before, and place-name evidence. Of the remaining 1065 there are 321 from before and 781 after 1066. Just 102 of these are classified as battles with a further 101 identified as possible battles (see Appendix I). However, of the possible battles 79 per cent date from before 1066, confirming the high level of uncertainty about all aspects of battlefields from this early period. Only one percent of the possible battles are from the 17th century, but here many actions are classified as skirmishes, a small number of which may need to be reclassified as battles. In the earlier periods it is more likely that some uncertain battles will be reclassified as skirmishes, although for the actions before 1066 the paucity of the documentary record makes secure classification impossible.

Sieges account for 383 actions of which 243 date to the 17th century, while 189 are classified as skirmishes of which 142 date from the 17th century. The dominance of the 17th century in these two classes is in part a result of database enhancement specifically undertaken for the period, but it also reflects the far greater detail for military action of the Civil War compared to earlier periods that is available in both primary and secondary sources. All skirmishes, even those of the 17th century, are likely to be grossly under-represented on the database.

In order to place the English resource in context, data from the previous database enhancement for Scotland have been used. The comparison is valid for battles as the database enhancement for the two countries was similar; however, the lack of enhancement of the Scottish element for sieges has led to a substantial bias in the total numbers of actions recorded for England. Where the battles are graphed to display the chronological distribution, figures have been supplemented by unvalidated data for the Republic of Ireland.

Ultimately the evidence needs to be viewed on a Europe-wide scale, for only then will the particular strengths and unique characteristics of the English resource be fully understood.

COUNTRY	ENGLAND			SCOTLAND		
	All actions	Battles	Multiple sites	All actions	Battles	Multiple sites
Total Records	1182	262		368	72	
Total Actions	1102	203	28	345	56	
Roman (43-410)	14	3	1	4	1	
Early Medieval (411-1065)	201	114	18	45	8	1
Later Medieval (1066-1535)[1]	285	33	5	109	23	2
[Wars of Roses 1455-1487]	32	15	4	-	-	-
Post Medieval (1535 – 1639)	38	7	2	55	7	1
Civil War (1640-1659)	436	29	2	26	10	1
Stuart Rebellions (1660-1900)	23	1	0	26	7	1

The scale of battles varies enormously. Looking first in terms of numbers engaged, Marston Moor was probably the largest with about 45,000, while numbers fall progressively until 5,000, below which problems of classification become acute. It has been decided not to quote figures for medieval battles because of the uncertainty that arises from unrealistic numbers and wide variation that frequently occurs in the primary sources.

Secondly, there is the size of the battlefield which is determined not only by the numbers engaged but was also mediated by the tactics of deployment employed, and then the degree to which the action moved through the landscape. Tactics of deployment varied dramatically between different periods leading to substantial differences in the frontage of armies when deployed in battle array, compounding the implications that arise from numbers. Thus, for example, very deep, sometimes square formations were in use in the 16th century, compared to the very shallow arrays used in the mid-17th century where deployments would be just eight, more often six and even occasionally three deep.[2] Thus a 17th century battlefield may be expected to be far broader in frontage than a 16th century one. In the later medieval period there is uncertainty about the nature of deployments, and hence the size of

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[1] Including Wars of Roses
[2] Prestwich, 1996, 315-323; Chandler, 1990

the battlefields on which they were drawn up. This is an issue upon which archaeology may ultimately provide some answers.
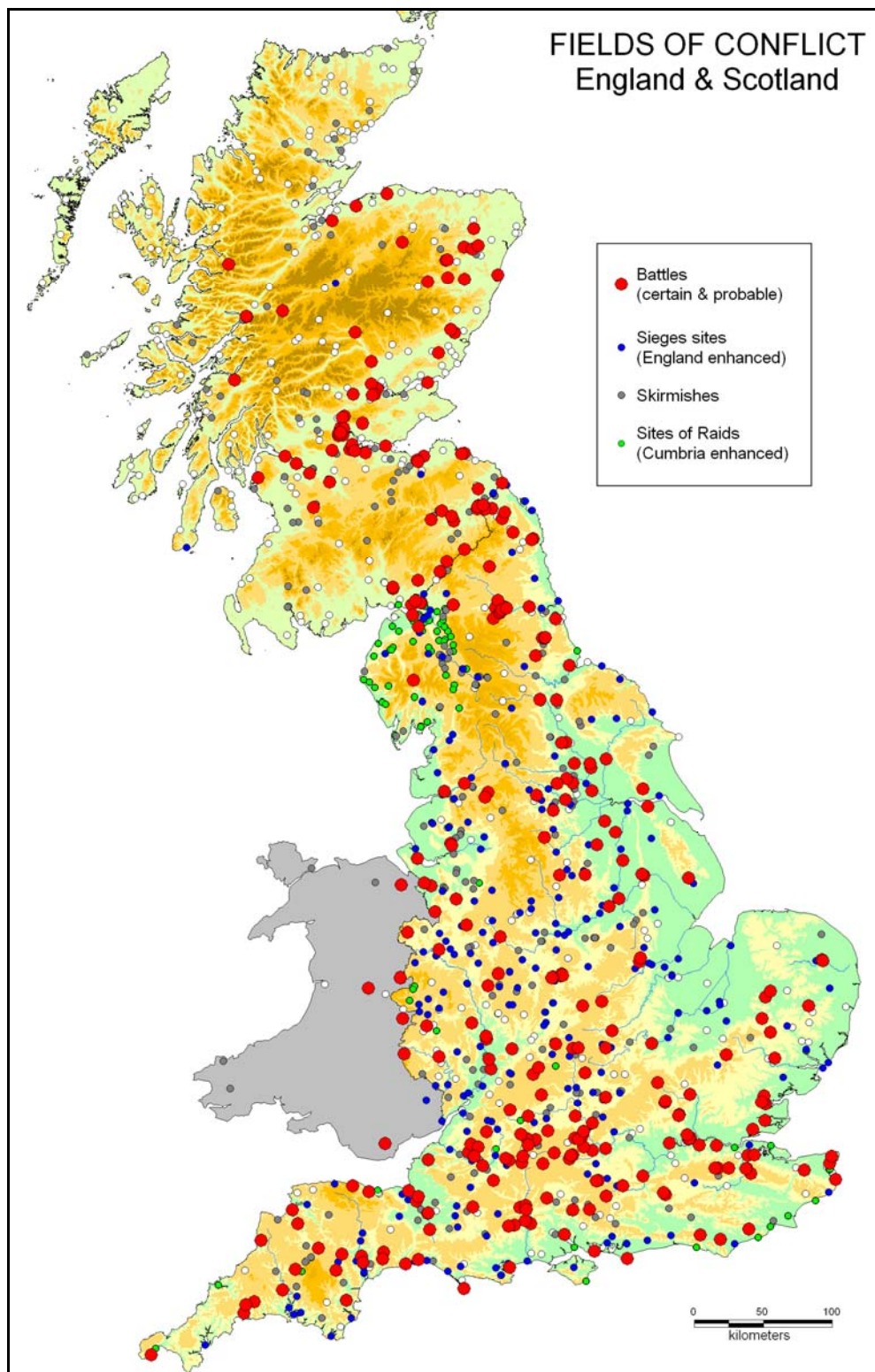

Figure 16: Map of Fields of Conflict in England and Scotland by type

When viewed on a national scale, patterning is visible. For example, a concentration of battles is noticeable along the Anglo-Scottish border but significantly

where the actions extend away from the border they congregate on the east rather than the west, a direct reflection of the ease of access along the eastern as opposed to the western route. Most of the patterning visible reflects topographical factors, which explain the absence of battles from the Pennines, Fens or Weald. More consequential distributions only become visible when the data are broken down chronologically.

During the last millennium there is a general decline in the number of actions as one moves back in time, particularly if the unverified sites are excluded. To a degree this may be influenced by a decrease in quantity and quality of primary documentation for earlier centuries, which by the early medieval period becomes a large problem. But, with regard to battles at least, it also reflects in some degree the generally accepted view that, compared to sieges and lesser actions, battle in the Middle Ages was very much a matter of last resort. The most distinctive peaks are the Wars of the Roses in the second half of the 15th century and the Civil Wars in the mid 17th century.
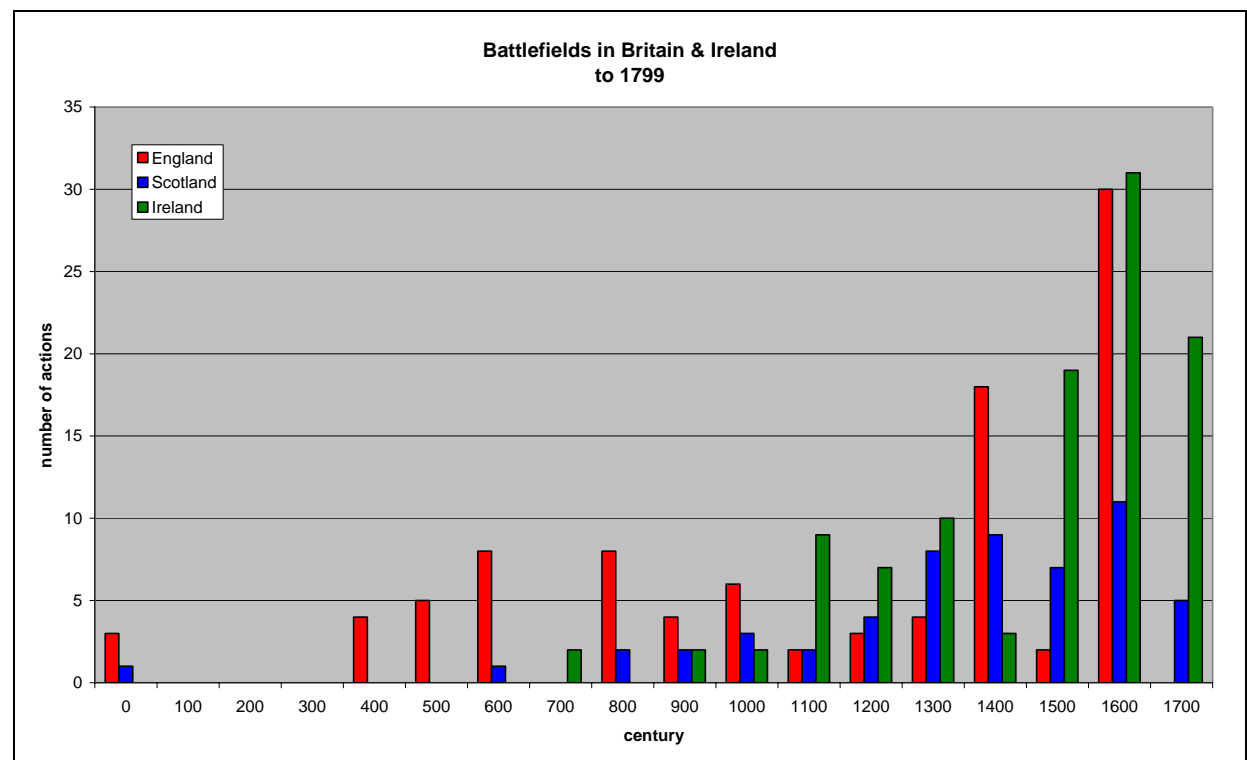

Figure 17: Battles in England, Scotland and the Republic of Ireland, by century. The Irish data are unvalidated

The fields of conflict fall into six main chronological phases of warfare based on the broad archaeological and documentary potential of the sites. Each of these is discussed individually below. For reasons explained, it is only with the later medieval

and early modern phases, and the transition between the two, that detailed study of the physical evidence for battlefields is currently possible.

Between the Neolithic and late Iron Age, sites are known only through the archaeological record. Thereafter increasing numbers of battles and other actions are recorded, but rarely in sufficient detail to enable their location. The only exceptions are actions against fortified sites, of which a handful are known. Hastings is the first battle with both detailed documentation and a reasonably secure location. Many battles thereafter, though more poorly documented, are nonetheless located, even if the action is not yet securely placed in the landscape. While potential exists through analysis of primary written records within the context of historic terrain reconstruction, ilt is only from the later 15th century that the full methodology for battlefield investigation can be implemented.

Prehistoric warfare

Warfare in the prehistoric period is such a specialised research area that no systematic data collection or analysis has been attempted here – it is an area largely separate from the study of later battlefields.[3] No systematiuc data collection has been attempted here. Only five sites revealed by HERs are recorded on the database, and of these several are spurious or speculative. Fields of conflict of the prehistoric period identified with some confidence include the Neolithic evidence from Crickley Hill, and the Bronze Age burials from Todmarton.[4]

Assessment

Prehistoric warfare has been subject to detailed investigation that has largely been kept separate from the study later battlefields.[5] It deserves further investigation, but the greatest potential appears to lie with the identification of action against fixed positions rather than open battles. Many defensive sites have left a substantial and distinctive archaeological signature.

The greatest potential appears to be the identification of action against fixed positions rather than open battles, because many defensive sites are there to be seen. The most obvious evidence will be in the form of groups of inhumation burials showing trauma. However, the location of such remains will usually be by chance.

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[3] Carman, 1997
[4] Keeley, 1996; Mercer, 1999, 143-56; Osgood & Monks, 2000
[5] Carman, 1997

Given the experience from later battlefields it is likely that secure evidence of military action itself will most often be recognised through the distribution of projectiles. While flint projectile points survive well, they will be difficult to recover other than via extensive excavation where the sites remain as earthworks, though it is possible that concentrations might be revealed by fieldwalking on arable land where defensive sites have been ploughed flat. Recovery of bronze artefacts after an action was presumably a high priority, although any left un-retrieved should survive, subject to the cultivation history of the land. If bronze or copper alloy items do survive, recovery through systematic metal detecting should be practicable unless they are deeply buried.

In contrast, the survival of projectile points and other artefacts of iron is likely to be low. In non aggressive soil conditions (low pH and low levels of mechanical damage) survival of stratified artefacts is likely to be good, but even in ideal conditions unstratified ferrous artefacts are unlikely to have survived for more than 2,000 years, especially if the topsoil has been subject to long periods of cultivation.

Flint arrowheads and stone slingshots have been found in significant quantities on fields of conflict of the Neolithic and Iron Age, respectively. However, these projectiles rarely if ever bear evidence as to whether or not they were actually fired. This is a problem for siege sites where it is possible, if not likely, that substantial numbers of these artefacts may have been deposited by mechanisms other than military combat. This is the reason given for the absence of an analysis of slingshot patterning across Iron Age Danebury hillfort, it being suggested that most of the slingshots retrieved may have been from the collapse and redeposition of stockpiles.[6] At Danebury there is also tentative differentiation between slingshots for hunting birds, and for battle.[7]

At Crickley Hill the discussion has normally dwelled just on the distribution of flint arrowheads, without presentation of the wider artefactual context. Yet to understand the projectile distribution it is necessary also to understand the background noise of flint artefact distributions and to see how the arrowhead distribution relates to them. It might yet be possible to tease combat evidence out of the Danebury assemblage but such analysis may need to be part of a wider analysis of the nature of projectile distribution patterns, seeking comparative patterning perhaps between prehistoric sites and those of the second millennium AD to determine if general principles can be identified.

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[6] Cunliffe 1984
[7] Poole, 371-2

Roman

With the coming of written records, information on open battles becomes available. Britain's first and only example from the prehistoric period is from accounts of Caesar's campaigns in Britain in 55 and 54 BC, which record military actions of various scales.[8] None of the actions described can be securely located, though suggestions have been made.[9] Though technically belonging to English prehistory, they are better considered alongside military action during the Roman period.

The written record for battle in Roman Britain is sparse and irregular; there is no necessary reason why even major military actions will have necessarily have attracted references in the sources that survive. We are, for example, dependent upon the survival of the eulogy written by Tacitus for his father-in-law Agricola for what detailed evidence we have of what we suppose to be two of the most important battles of the period in Britain: Boudicca's defeat and Mons Graupius.[10]

From the documentary record only three significant engagements in the period can be reasonably identified as battles: Medway (AD43), Thames (AD43) and Boudicca's defeat (AD61).[11] In addition there are two documented Roman battles elsewhere in Britain: Mons Graupius, Agricola's major victory in AD84 in Scotland, and Caratacus's defeat in AD51, for which a site at Cefn Carnedd in Wales is just one suggested site.[12] None of these actions is securely located, despite much effort on the part of many authors.

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[8] Caesar, *De Bello Gallico*, 4.20-37, 5.2-24; cf. Cassius Dio
[9] Wiseman and Wiseman, 1980; Johnson, 1917
[10] Life of Agricola, 16, 29-37
[11] Webster and Dudley, 1973; Webster, 1993
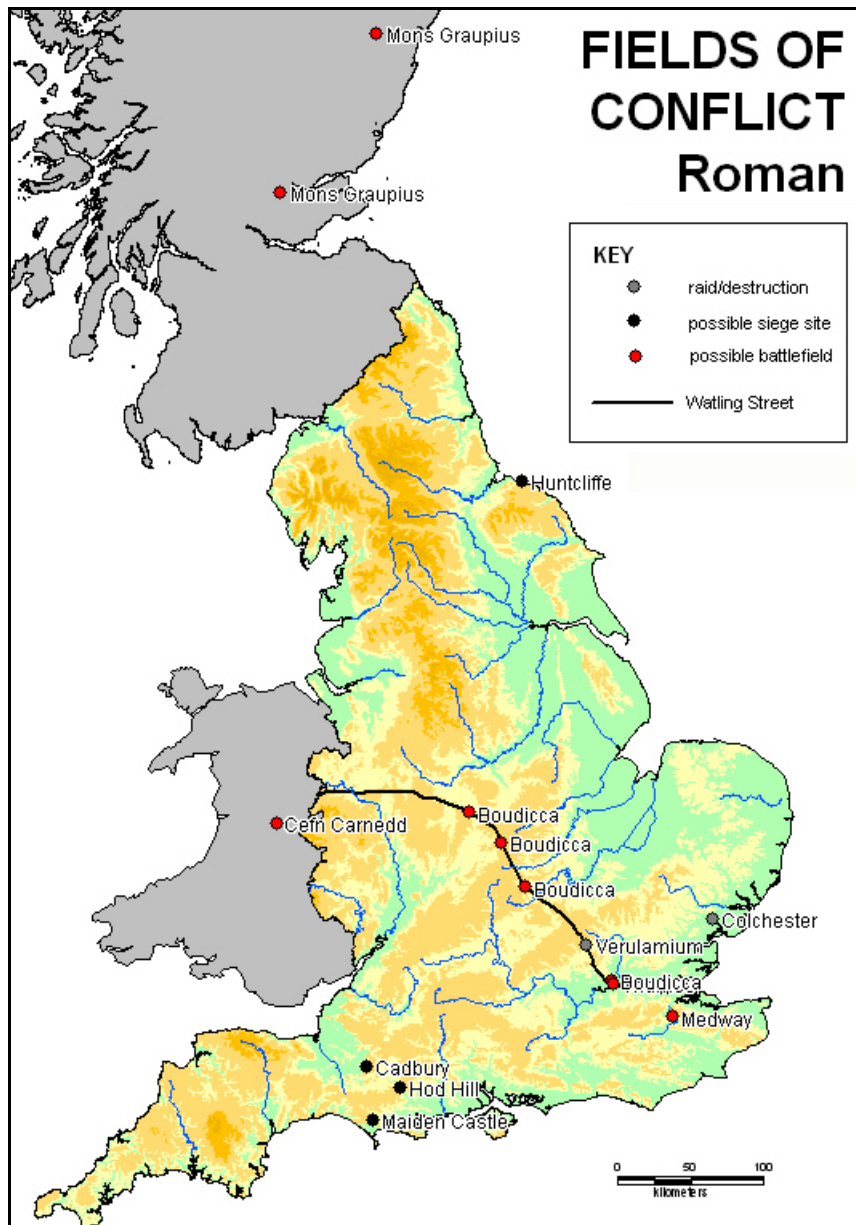[12] Webster, 1981; Fraser, 2005

Figure 18: Fields of Conflict: Roman

Even a brief examination of the battle in which Boudicca was defeated in AD61 demonstrates the difficulties that have to be overcome in identifying Roman battlefields in Britain.[13] Only four of the many suggested sites suggested for the Boudicca battle are recorded on the database and mapped here, but there is no secure evidence to prefer these or any of the others.

The primary source is Tacitus, writing some 50 years later and not an eye witness. However, he may have had report of the event from Agricola, his father-in-law, who was serving in the army in Britannia at the time of Boudicca's revolt.

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[13] Webster, 1993; Marix Evans, 2007

It would appear from Tacitus that Suetonius, the Roman commander, had to withdraw the majority of his troops from campaign in Wales to deal with the rebellion, while the rebel force was active in the south east, having sacked Camalodunum (Colchester) and Verulamium (St Albans). Because the majority of Suetonius's forces appear to have had to march back towards London it is believed by many that a site along Watling Street is most likely for the encounter. This is then further narrowed as probably lying somewhere between the West Midlands and St Albans, where Boudicca burnt Verulamium. There is, however, nothing in the original source to prove that either of these assumptions is correct.

Different authors have sought a location along Watling Street which would accord with what little Tacitus reports of the battlefield terrain:

> Suetonius had the 14th legion and a detachment from the 20th, and auxiliaries from the nearest (allies), some 10,000 troops in total. He decided to fight without further delay. He selected a place in a narrow defile enclosed at the rear by a forest. This guaranteed that the enemy could not attack except from the front; and the front was an open plain which removed any apprehension of ambush. He therefore drew up the legionaries on close ranks with the light armed auxiliaries on either side; the massed ranks of cavalry stood on the wings. On the other hand the British forces were moving this way and that in groups of various sizes, and in numbers never before seen. So confident were they, that they had brought their wives to witness their victory, and placed them on wagons positioned around the extreme edge of the battlefield.'[14]

Even if one sets aside the possibility that elements of terrain detail were topoi based on accounts of earlier battles, this is still vague. When land use change since the Roman period is added in, then together with our very limited knowledge of land-use at the time, the difficulties look insurmountable.

This can be illustrated by examining just one suggested site, to the south of Towcester near Cuttle Mill in Paulerspury (Northamptonshire), where Watling Street runs through Whittlewood Forest.[15] The site appears originally to have been suggested because of the presence of a large undated cemetery in close proximity to Watling Street.[16] The small valley here, opening out into the main valley of the Tove, might accord with the narrow defile opening onto a plain described by Tacitus, although even in the immediate environs there are several other small valleys in close proximity that also cross Watling Street.

The extent of woodland is problematic, even though this region has been subjective to fairly intensive archaeological investigation and detailed historic

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[14] Translation by N Hopkinson, from Marix Evans, 2007
[15] Marix Evans, 2001, 2007
[16] Information from Charmian Woodfield, Northamptonshire HER

landscape mapping.[17] Woodland extent when this was part of the medieval royal forest of Whittlewood is well understood, the woods lying on the boulder clay-capped plateau to the west of the valley of the river Tove. Although the medieval woodland did not extend close to Watling Street, there may have been extensive woodland across much of the boulder clay in the earlier medieval period. If so, this was largely a result of post-Roman woodland regeneration.[18] In the prehistoric period the permeable geologies of the river valleys were cleared very early, with the boulder clay apparently the latest area cleared of woodland in the Iron Age and Roman period. However, there is good evidence from settlements and pottery distributions that colonisation and clearance of these clays was already well advanced by the end of the Iron Age. Several Iron Age sites are known on the boulder clay in the Cuttle Mill area, despite the lack of systematic fieldwalking survey here. Thus it is quite likely that by AD61 woodland had been cleared well away from Watling Street in the area of Cuttle Mill.
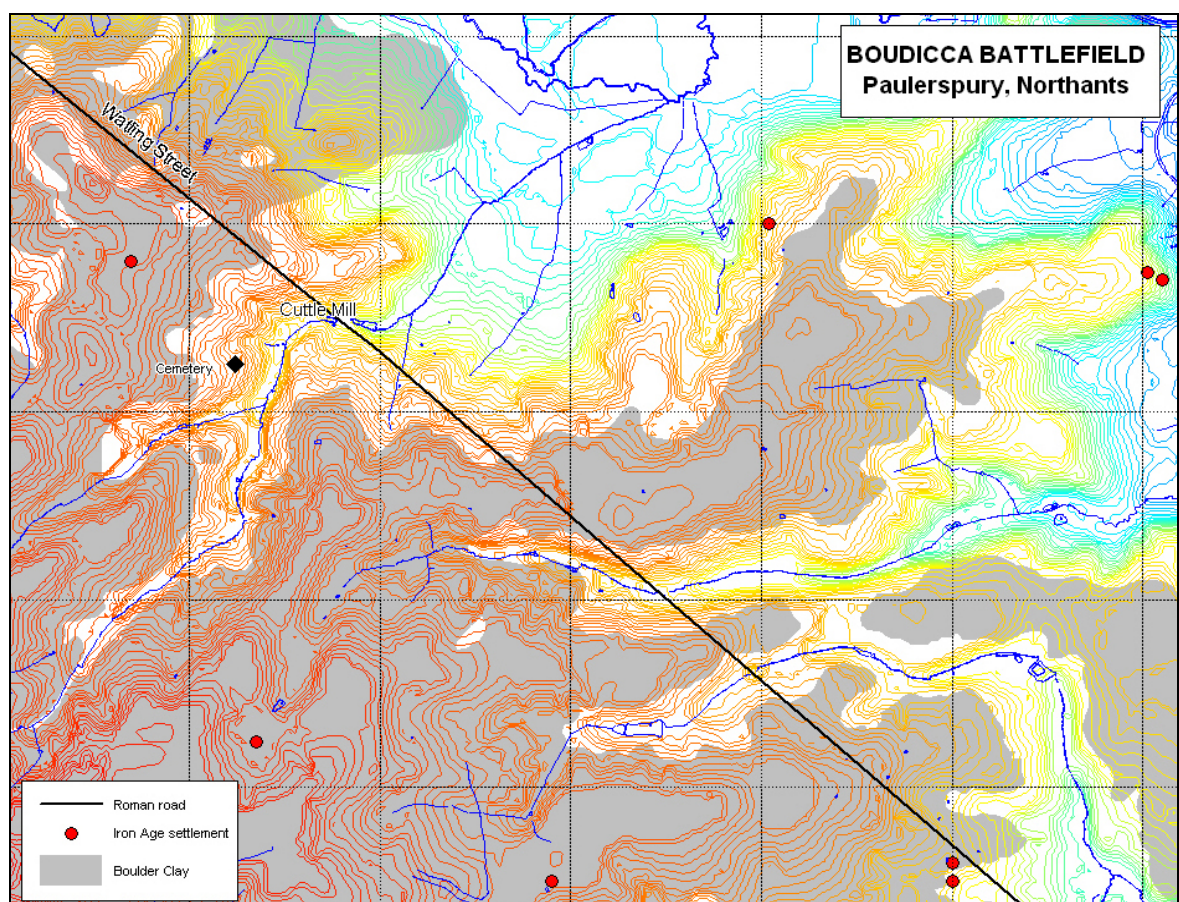

Figure 19: Boudicca battlefield (10m contour)

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[17] Jones and Page, 2006; Cooper, 2006; Deegan & Foard, 2008; Britnell, *et al*, 2004
[18] Jones and Page, 2006

Not only is there doubt about the extent of woodland in AD61, but the burials in the cemetery and associated finds have now been dated to the early Middle Ages.[19] A small metal detecting survey on fields surrounding Cuttle Mill to test this as the Boudicca battlefield failed to produce supporting evidence.[20]

Such failures are not as significant as might at first appear: we need to know more about the nature of the archaeology of Roman battles before we can determine what their signatures may look like.

Kalkriese

That there is a recognisable Roman battle archaeology is shown by several sites in continental Europe. One of them is the grave of 40 men and 30 horses reported from Krefeld-Gellep, Germany.[21]

The main site is at Kalkriese, near Osnabruck, which is probably where the Roman army under Varus was destroyed while on campaign in Germany in AD9.[22] From finds of coins and other material the site have been known here since the 19th century; modern investigation has followed significant metal detecting finds by Clunn.[23]

The action – reflected in a broad distribution of Roman coins and other distinctive artefacts, recovered as chance finds or through systematic and casual metal detecting – appears to have taken place over a number of days and across some 10 - 20 km.

The wide and impressive range of finds is displayed in a purpose-built visitor centre on the battlefield, a small part of which is accessible to and interpreted for the public. Interpretation is disputed.[24]

Kalkriese is important because it shows what the disintegration of a Roman legion in battle might look like archaeologically. The 'site' appears atypical in a number of ways. Firstly, because it is believed to represent the near-total destruction of a legion, a wide range of distinctively military artefacts (in addition to large numbers of undiagnostic artefacts) will have been deposited in large numbers.

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[19] A substantial stone building has been revealed by aerial survey, associated with Roman material: metal detecting by B Kings, information from Northamptonshire HER
[20] Information from John Kliene
[21] Coulston, 2001
[22] http://www.kalkriese-varusschlacht.de/ ; Coulston, 2001, 28-31; Harnecker, 2004; Wilbers-Rost, 2007
[23] Clunn, *et al*, 1999
[24] This account was prepared following a site visit and discussion with Susanne Wilbers-Rost, with reference to unpublished information made available by Achim Rost and Susanne Wilbers-Rost

Secondly, because the battle was fought outside the Roman Empire, most of the artefacts carried by legionaries – not just military items but also 'domestic' artefacts – were near-unique in the area, and so more easily distinguished from other contemporary material, in their quantities that exceed what might have reached the area through trade or plunder.

In contrast, the German forces are near-invisible. This is not simply because they were the victorious force and hence their losses were less, but most importantly because the vast majority of artefacts that they lost during the action will not be distinguishable from other artefacts deposited in a non-military context at an earlier or later date.[25]

The best preserved area of the site, at Kalkriese itself, has been examined through large-scale excavation over a number of years. These deposits are exceptionally well preserved. They represent a deeply buried battlefield surface, protected by more than a metre of medieval and later deposits of turf brought in over a long period to improve the fertility of the soil. The material appears to be associated with – and in places is possibly buried by the decay of – a Germanic fortification, which in some interpretations represents a fortification used against the Roman forces.

With all this said, it must be noted that almost no projectiles have been recovered from the core area. It could be argued that the assemblage is more typical of what might be expected from the destruction of a baggage train than of open battle of armies deployed in battle array.

It would be instructive to see analysis of the artefacts from systematic metal detecting survey across wider areas, as this may represent a more typical assemblage. To better understand the nature of the deposits it would also help to have knowledge of the preservation factors involved, with evidence on soil pH, land-use history and other factors likely to influence artefact survival and condition.

Kalkriese provides extraordinary information on the character of deposits that may have existed on parts of other battlefields. Yet this, and the exceptional nature of the character of the material, means that Kalkriese cannot be a model for the character of battle archaeology likely to survive on Roman battlefields in Britain. While northern Scotland in AD81 might be sufficiently beyond the frontier to meet one criterion, Mons Graupius did not see the destruction of the Roman army and there will not be corresponding artefact loss. Losses on the native side, even if substantial, will not stand out from the surrounding landscape, at least in type, although they

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[25] Coulston, 2001

might do so in terms of density. For battlefields in England, it would appear that none of the conditions at Kalkriese will apply.

Sieges and other actions

No attempt has been made here systematically to collect data for sieges, or for raids that led to the destruction of settlements – they lie beyond the terms of the project.

A few such sites have nonetheless been added to the database, where evidence incidental to battlefields has been collected. Of these, two are possible conquest period sieges of hillforts: Hod Hill and Maiden Castle. Another, Cadbury hillfort, is a possible siege or massacre deposit of cAD60. In addition there are the raids of AD61 on Colchester and Verulamium. To them can be added the late Roman signal station at Huntcliffe, which has yielded burials showing trauma which might have resulted from military action.[26]

Several sites included in SMR reports have been specifically excluded: for example, the report from Whittlesey (Cambridgeshire) of mutilated bodies of Roman date was not considered to be sufficiently securely associated with military action. Returns from two other SMRs provided records of artefact collections which had been interpreted as possibly indicating battle sites, but both appear spurious and have been excluded. Cambridgeshire SMR provided by far the most detailed response to our SMR enquiry, it seems likely that comparable sites would be revealed elsewhere through a more intensive search. Such research lies beyond the scope of the present study. Also excluded are various locations that have been suggested for the Roman invasion landing of AD43: none is convincing or has any substantial associated evidence of military action.

Sieges are promising because the identification of fixed positions is easier than battlefields in the open landscape. Even then, evidence is likely to be found more by chance than by strategy. Once identified, the potential for systematic metal detecting may yield informative horizontal spreads. What can be achieved on a wide scale through investigation of siege sites, admittedly with an exceptional artefact type, the lead slingshot, is graphically demonstrated from the investigation of the attack on Olynthos, Greece, in 348 BC.[27]

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[26] Hind, 2005
[27] Cf. Coulston, 2001; Lee, 2001

Conclusion

Potential may exist in

- o monuments to an action, or where people were killed

- o burials showing clear evidence of trauma

- o horizontal spreads of artefacts (e.g. ferrous arrowheads, small items of military equipment, slingshots, material lost in the pillaging of a baggage train)

We do not know what the assemblage of a 'normal' Roman battlefield would look like, or what 'normal' might mean. Work elsewhere on continental Europe and the wider Mediterranean, where arid conditions offer better preservation, may assist.