

## Making of the Anglo-Saxon fenland

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**Start date** 19<sup>th</sup> January 2018**End date** 21st January 2018**Venue** Madingley Hall  
Madingley  
Cambridge**Tutor** Dr Susan Oosthuizen**Course code** 1718NRX038**Director of Programmes**

Emma Jennings

**For further information on this course, please contact** Clare Kerr, Public Programmes Co-ordinator  
01223 746237, [clare.kerr@ice.cam.ac.uk](mailto:clare.kerr@ice.cam.ac.uk)**To book** See: [www.ice.cam.ac.uk](http://www.ice.cam.ac.uk) or telephone 01223 746262

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### Tutor biography

Dr Susan Oosthuizen is Reader in Medieval Archaeology at the University of Cambridge Institute of Continuing Education and is a member of the University of Cambridge Department of Archaeology. She has been involved in university lifelong learning since 1985. Her undergraduate degree in Archaeology and History was taken at the University of Southampton; she holds an MA from SOAS (University of London), and a PGCE and a PhD from the University of Cambridge, where her research on Anglo-Saxon landscapes bridged archaeology, history and historical geography. She is a Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries of London, the Royal Historical Society, and of Wolfson College, Cambridge. She is a former President of the Cambridge Antiquarian Society.

Dr Oosthuizen has a strong interest in community engagement in higher education. She was Vice-Chair of the Universities Association for Lifelong Learning (UALL) from 2007-2012, and is a Fellow of the Higher Education Academy. Her work has included numerous externally funded outreach projects, and the direction of a programme of community education and outreach courses for the Institute. She received a National Award for excellence in History Teaching in Higher Education in 2003 from the Historical Association, the History at the Universities Defence Group, the Royal Historical Society, and the LTSN for History, Archaeology and Classics'. She delivered the 2012 Hoskins Lecture on 'Medieval Open Fields and Their Origins'.

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## Course programme

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### Friday

Please plan to arrive between 16:30 and 18:30. You can meet other course members in the bar which opens at 18:15. Tea and coffee making facilities are available in the study bedrooms.

19:00	Dinner
20:30 – 22:00	Session 1: <i>Introduction</i>
22:00	Terrace bar open for informal discussion

### Saturday

07:30	Breakfast
09:00 – 10:30	Session 2: <i>An abandoned wasteland or an occupied landscape?</i>
10:30	Coffee
11:00 – 12:30	Session 3: <i>Cultural identity in the early medieval fenland</i>
13:00	Lunch
14:00 – 16:00	Session 4: <i>Brigands and bandits? Political organisation in fenland c.400-970</i>
16:00	Tea
16:30 – 18:00	Free
18:00 – 18:30	Free
18:30	Dinner
20:00 – 21:30	Session 5: <i>Political organisation in the Ely region</i>
21:30	Terrace bar open for informal discussion

### Sunday

07:30	Breakfast
09:00 – 10:30	Session 6: <i>Landscape management for agricultural productivity, 400-970</i>
10:30	Coffee
11:00 – 12:30	Session 7: <i>Managing risk in the Anglo-Saxon fenland, 400-970</i>
12:45	Lunch

**The course will disperse after lunch**

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## Course syllabus

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### Aims:

- Outline the physical and historical development of the Anglo-Saxon fenland
- Discuss conventional interpretations for the history of the fens between about 400 and 970 AD
- Reconstruct the history of the Anglo-Saxon fenland using the evidence of the landscape in conjunction with a range of primary sources

### Content:

The Anglo-Saxon fenland was colourfully described by the great Clifford Darby as 'a frontier region ... the resort of brigands and bandits' in whose empty wilderness saints like Æthelthryth of Ely and Guthlac of Crowland established their new monasteries. The course critically examines these assumptions in the light of recent research which suggests fenland history was more complicated and more interesting in this period.

The first lecture introduces the geography and ecology of the fen basin, and discusses the ideas that have framed the work presented over the weekend. The Anglo-Saxon fenland is usually described as abandoned – the second session investigates that characterisation, by reconstructing the extent of its occupation working backwards from the first documentary evidence in 1086, to about 300. The third session explores the cultural identity (or identities) of people living in the fenland between about 400 and 900: were they late Romano-British communities, groups of migrants from north-west Europe, or communities that included both? Sessions 4 and 5 focus on the political organisation of the region since an individual's ability to make an agricultural living depends on sufficient governmental stability to provide protection for his rights of property. Although the emerging great kingdoms of Mercia and East Anglia increasingly provided that reassurance from the eighth century onwards, little is known of the kingdoms and sub-kingdoms that occupied the region before about 700. Sessions 6 and 7 discuss how individuals and households supported themselves in the wet conditions of the fen basin, and the surprising degree of ecological and water management that that exploitation entailed.

### Presentation of the course:

The course will be taught through tutor-led presentations and full class discussions.

### Outcomes:

As a result of the course, within the constraints of the time available, students should be able to:

- Demonstrate an outline knowledge of the physical and historical development of the Anglo-Saxon fenland
- Critically evaluate conventional interpretations for the history of the fens between about 400 and 970 AD
- Begin to be able to reconstruct the economy of the Anglo-Saxon fenland using the evidence of the landscape in conjunction with a range of primary sources

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## Reading and resources list

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Listed below are a number of texts that might be of interest for future reference, but do not need to be bought (or consulted) for the course. \* marks essential reading.

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**NOTE: Second-hand copies of out-of-print volumes are often available at reasonable prices through [www.abebooks.co.uk](http://www.abebooks.co.uk)**

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Author	Title	Publisher and date
Biddick, K.	<i>The Other Economy: Pastoral Husbandry on a Medieval Estate</i>	University of California Press, 1992
Darby, H. C.	<i>The Draining of the Fens</i>	Cambridge UP, 1940
*Darby, H. C.	<i>The Medieval Fenland</i>	David and Charles, 1974
Green, T.	<i>Britons and Anglo-Saxons: Lincolnshire AD400-650</i>	History of Lincolnshire Committee, 2012
Hall, D.	'The Fenland Project', <i>East Anglian Archaeology</i> , Vols. 35, 56, 79	1987, 1992, 1996.
Hallam, H.	<i>The New Lands of Elloe</i>	Leicester UP, 1954
Miller, E.	<i>The Abbey and Bishopric of Ely</i>	Cambridge UP, 1951
Lucy, S., Mortimer, R. and Regan, R	<i>The Saxon and Medieval Settlement at West Fen Road, Ely: The Ashwell Site</i>	East Anglian Archaeology, 2005
*Oosthuizen, S.	<i>The Anglo-Saxon Fenland</i>	Windgather, 2017
Ravensdale, J. R.	<i>Liable to Floods</i>	Cambridge UP, 1974
Royal Commission on Historic Monuments	<i>North-East Cambridgeshire</i>	HMSO, 1972
Silvester, R. J.	'The Fenland Project', <i>East Anglian Archaeology</i> , Vol. 45	1988
Taylor, C. C.	<i>The Cambridgeshire Landscape</i>	Hodder, 1973
Thirsk, J.	<i>Fenland Farming in the Sixteenth Century</i>	Leicester UP, 1973

### Materials available online

- Lucy, S. et al. 2009. 'The burial of a princess? The later seventh-century cemetery at Westfield Farm, Ely'. *Antiquaries Journal* 89: 81-141.  
<http://journals.cambridge.org/action/displayAbstract?fromPage=online&aid=6135608&fileId=S0003581509990102> (NB This article is available free to institutional subscribers, but a charge is made for others.)
- Oosthuizen, S. 2014. 'Re-evaluating maps of Domesday population densities: a case study from the Cambridgeshire fenland', *Medieval Settlement Research* 29: 1-10.  
[https://www.academia.edu/7924246/Re-evaluating\\_maps\\_of\\_Domesday\\_population\\_densities\\_a\\_case\\_study\\_from\\_the\\_Ca](https://www.academia.edu/7924246/Re-evaluating_maps_of_Domesday_population_densities_a_case_study_from_the_Ca)

[mbridgeshire fenland](#)

Oosthuizen, S. 2012. Rural settlement and commerce in the medieval peat fen, c.900-1300'. In P. Stamper and N. Christie, eds., *Rural Medieval Britain and Ireland, AD 800-1600: Settlements, Landscapes and Regions*. Windgather: 206-224.

[https://www.academia.edu/2764615/Cambridgeshire and the peat fen. Medieval rural settlement and commerce c. AD 900 1300](https://www.academia.edu/2764615/Cambridgeshire_and_the_peat_fen_Medieval_rural_settlement_and_commerce_c._AD_900_1300)

Great Fen Project [www.greatfen.org](http://www.greatfen.org).

Wicken Fen Nature Reserve [www.wicken.org.uk](http://www.wicken.org.uk)

Natural England (overview) [www.naturalengland.org.uk/Images/jca46\\_tcm6-5419.pdf](http://www.naturalengland.org.uk/Images/jca46_tcm6-5419.pdf)

**Note** Students of the Institute of Continuing Education are entitled to 20% discount on books published by Cambridge University Press (CUP) which are purchased at the Press bookshop, 1 Trinity Street, Cambridge (Mon-Sat 9am – 5:30pm, Sun 11am – 5pm). A letter or email confirming acceptance on to a current Institute course should be taken as evidence of enrolment.

*Information correct as of:* 14 June 2017