

Chapter 15

The Middle Iron Age Landscape

by Grace Perpetua Jones

INTRODUCTION

The Iron Age settlement at Claydon Pike is part of a growing corpus of such sites to have been excavated on the gravel terraces and floodplain of the Upper Thames Valley over the past 30 years (Fig. 15.1). Claydon Pike had been selected for investigation in the 1970s in part because the cropmark evidence indicated open Iron Age roundhouse clusters located on low-lying gravel islands. The project, therefore, had the potential to complement the data from other middle Iron Age settlements to the east, such as Mingies Ditch (Allen and Robinson 1993), Watkins Farm (Allen 1990) and Farmoor (Lambrick and Robinson 1979). In particular Claydon Pike offered the opportunity to examine the issue of seasonality, which had been investigated on the floodplain at Farmoor, and economy and structure: was Claydon Pike a predominantly pastoral site and if so were the round house clusters visible on aerial photographs contemporary? [Fig. 15.1]

Substantial settlements did not fit the models of pastoral farming communities which were put forward in the Upper Thames settlement hierarchy. In the event, excavation confirmed that Claydon Pike's middle Iron Age settlements were predominantly pastoralist, with houses probably occupied year-round by small family groups who over several generations shifted location. The site plan gave the impression of a larger community but horizontal stratigraphy clarified that only a limited number of buildings were occupied at any one time.

Most of the middle Iron Age sites for which full data is readily available lay to the east of Claydon Pike, further down the Thames Valley in Oxfordshire, as mentioned above. Perhaps the most relevant middle Iron Age site closer to Claydon Pike was Thornhill Farm (Jennings *et al.* 2004), which lay just 1 km away. This site provided the ideal opportunity for detailed comparisons of later prehistoric and Roman settlements with strikingly different layouts. Other nearby sites include Allcourt Farm in Lechlade (OAU 2001) and Totterdown Lane, Horcott west of Whelford (Pine and Preston 2004). Within the western Cotswold Water Park, middle Iron Age occupation has been found in a number of excavations, such as at Cotswold Community (OA 2003), Latton Lands (Stansbie and Laws 2004) Cleveland Farm near Ashton Keynes (Coe *et al.* 1991) and Spratsgate Lane east of Somerford

Keynes (Parry 1991). Together, these sites are helping to greatly increase our understanding of middle Iron Age settlement patterns and social practices within the Upper Thames Valley.

THE BRONZE AGE AND EARLY IRON AGE LANDSCAPE

During the Bronze Age the Middle and Upper Thames Valley underwent a period of clearance as the demand for land suitable for agriculture and pasture increased (see Chapter 14). The landscape became increasingly ordered with the layout of field systems and enclosures. The proximity of these landscapes to the River Thames is thought to be related to the role of the river in the importation of bronze from the Continent (Allen 2000, 6). Prestige metalwork was deposited in rivers within the Thames Valley from the early Bronze Age, although towards the end of the period the bronze trade and the burial of bronze goods in rivers appears to have ceased, signalling the late Bronze Age to early Iron Age transition (Bradley 1992, 21).

The late Bronze Age economy of the Upper Thames Valley was orientated towards pastoralism and cattle rearing (Lambrick 1992, 87). Throughout the early Iron Age there is an increase in both arable agriculture and the pastoral economy. Mixed farming economies focused on the higher terraces of the Thames Valley, at sites such as Gravelly Guy, Ashville, Abingdon and Mount Farm (Lambrick 1992, 90). The intensification in agriculture affected the hydrology of the gravels, causing a rise in the water table, followed by flooding during the middle Iron Age and eventually the onset of alluviation in the late Iron Age (Robinson 1992b, 54-5).

SETTLEMENT STRUCTURE AND DEVELOPMENT (Fig. 15.1)

Lambrick (1992, 93-97) has identified three broad settlement types in the Upper Thames Valley during the middle Iron Age period, one of which is the open settlement with paddocks, typified by Claydon Pike (see Chapter 3). Enclosures may occur within the open settlement, but 'there is no physical boundary around the area of domestic occupation' (Bowden and McOmish 1987, 81). The second form is the more enclosed farmstead, such as Mingies

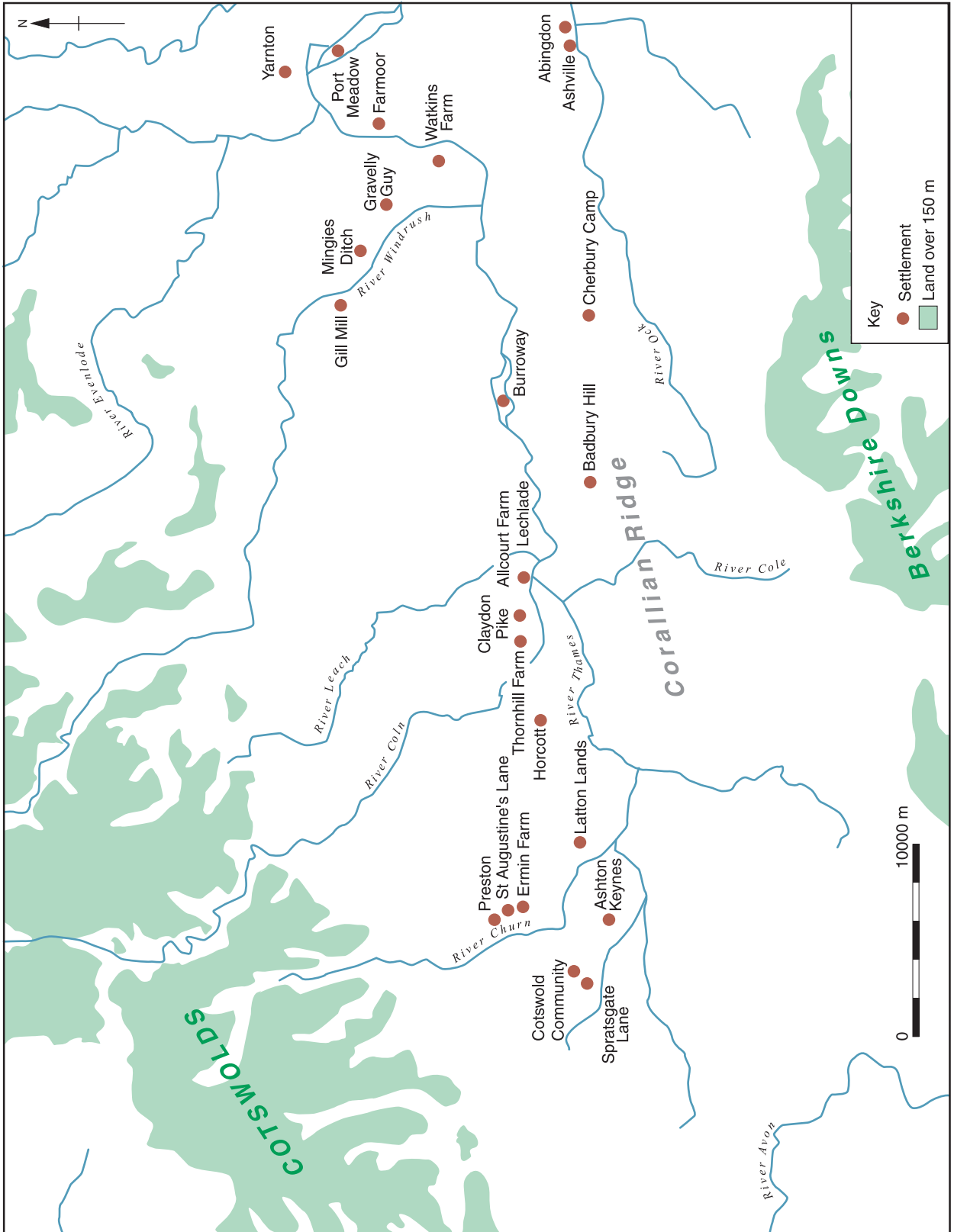


Fig. 15.1
Middle Iron
Age sites in
the Upper
Thames
Valley

Ditch and Watkins Farm, both displaying hedged-in ditches and funnelled entrances in much the same form as banjo enclosures. The third form consists of short lived seasonal farmsteads such as Farmoor, clearly evidenced in pits containing occupation deposits divided by episodes of flooding.

By the middle or later Iron Age there were many banjo enclosures on the Cotswold slopes and Downland dipslopes (Featherstone and Bewley, 2001; Lambrick 1992, 94; Winton 2004), although there have been no excavations of such sites on any scale and so details of their chronology, social and economic base are sadly lacking. This location (and comparison with similar sites, for example, in Wessex) suggests that they operated a mixed economy with access to both upland pastures and well-watered valleys (Fasham 1987). Hillforts physically dominate the area, sited on prominent positions on the Cotswold uplands to the north, the Corallian ridge between the Thames and Ock Valleys, and the chalk downland to the south (Miles *et al.* 2003, fig 14.5, 261). There are also rarer examples of substantial earthwork enclosures such as Cherbury and Burroway on lower lying sites. Relatively few hillforts have been systematically excavated, although recent excavations and geophysical surveys of Ridgeway hillforts at Segsbury, Uffington Castle and Alfred's Castle indicate the considerable variation in these sites, in particular in the density of internal occupation (Payne 2005). Where dating is available, it seems that their floruit was in the early to middle Iron Age.

Local hillforts not only show considerable variation in morphology; excavation evidence points to differences in function, Uffington Castle for example, adjacent to the White Horse figure, provided a communal focus for religious celebration. In contrast the much larger Segsbury Camp was more evidently integrated into the yearly farming cycle: a place for sheep (and to a lesser extent cattle) herders to exchange animals (promoting genetic variation), cull lambs and enjoy feasting. Both sites could, therefore, play complementary roles within a single community. Similarly, lowland Iron Age farmsteads, some (eg Claydon Pike) with the emphasis on pastoralism and others cultivating cereals (particularly spelt wheat and six row barley), formed part of integrated community networks occupying the valleys and upland slopes.

The enclosed farmsteads of Watkins Farm and Mingies Ditch appear quite late in the middle Iron Age period, although the enclosing of the settlements would not appear to be wholly defensive in nature. Authors such as Hingley (1990a) and Bowden and McOmish (1987) have suggested that enclosures may have acted as indicators of social status and that boundaries were not necessarily constructed for defence. However, the artefactual record from these sites does not suggest higher status than other settlements in the area (Miles 1997, 15). The double ditches at Mingies Ditch certainly

appear to have played a very practical role with the area between the ditches used to corral animals (Allen and Robinson 1993). At Watkins Farm only a single ditch surrounded the settlement and therefore animals may have been brought into the interior, this may be borne out in the deeper gullies and ditches surrounding features at this site (Allen 1990, 75).

The physical construction of the enclosure ditches would have been labour intensive, and may have required more people than the two or more households estimated to have inhabited Watkins Farm and the one or two households at Mingies Ditch (Allen 1990, 77). The importance of maintaining social relationships between neighbouring communities can therefore be inferred, and the suggestion of 'an integrated system of family farms' (Miles 1997, 14) implied.

Domestic structures

The domestic structures of the middle Iron Age period in the Upper Thames Valley tend to be circular and surrounded (and identified) by a concentric penannular drainage gully of approximately 10-13 m in diameter. A variety of construction techniques were used, although these are often not discernible in the archaeological record. Post-rings have been seen on a number of sites, including Structure 18 at Claydon Pike (see Chapter 3 and Fig. 3.10), and may indicate the wall of the structure, or an internal aisle. An area of Roman ploughsoil preserved a ring-groove of Structure 15, suggesting a stake wall (see Chapter 3 and Fig. 3.10).

The environmental evidence from sites such as Farmoor and Port Meadow suggest that much of the Thames floodplain consisted of 'vast treeless expanses of pastureland' (Robinson 1992b, 56-7). Much of the higher clay slopes would have been wooded and timber may have been obtained from these areas. However, given the large quantities of timber required to build an entire house it is likely that many of the structures in the region were constructed using other materials. Mass walls of turf or cob could be supplemented with a timber and thatch roof. Straw and reed thatch would have been available on the floodplain and higher terraces, and the local clays were suitable for cob walling and daub (Allen *et al.* 1984, 89). At Farmoor there is good evidence that turf was stripped in the area surrounding one of the enclosures and it is suggested that this may have been used to build the walls of a roundhouse (Lambrick and Robinson 1979, 70-71).

The gravels do not offer more durable building materials such as flint or freestone (Fulford 1992, 37). The Cotswold region is synonymous with building stone, where 'dry-stone building using the local limestone had been traditional since the Neolithic period' (Saville 1984, 144). However, the middle Iron Age internal structures at Salmonsbury were all timber constructed (Saville 1984, 147) and

there is no good evidence for the use of stone in Iron Age houses elsewhere in the region.

Iron Age houses tend to be orientated towards the east or south-east, and this is evident on the majority of structures at Claydon Pike and Thornhill Farm. Lambrick and Robinson (1979, 69) have suggested that this may be to offer maximum protection from the prevailing wind. Work by Parker Pearson and Richards (1994) and Oswald (1997) has further explored this subject and suggested that cosmological concerns may have influenced the orientation of the houses as the entrances 'face either sunrise at the equinoxes and midwinter, or points between them' (Fitzpatrick 1997, 77). Fitzpatrick concludes that the evidence suggests that 'east was the required orientation for the crossing of thresholds' (Fitzpatrick 1997, 78). The penannular gullies at Watkins Farm are unusual in not conforming to this pattern, although the main entrance to the enclosed area is orientated to a point immediately north of east.

Hill believed that several 'rules' structured the layout of many prehistoric settlements in Southern Britain, including a concern for the direction of the cardinal points and sunrise, and also an emphasis on the threshold area (Hill 1995, 79-93). The use of space within houses may have been structured according to a set of beliefs, although this is almost impossible to examine for so many of the structures in the Upper Thames Valley as so few *in situ* features, artefacts and ground surfaces survive within the areas defined by penannular gullies. Notwithstanding, Fitzpatrick (1997, 78) has suggested that distinctions between right and left, and light and dark are embodied in a number of early Iron Age houses in the Wessex region. Fitzpatrick (1997, 77) has further examined the shape of the houses, asking 'why are roundhouses round?' Roundhouses begin to be constructed after the construction of stone circles and henges, concerned with marking the passage of time, cease. The roundhouses may therefore have in part continued this role (Fitzpatrick 1997). The circular structures that characterise the middle Iron Age in the Upper Thames Valley are finally abandoned in favour of more sub-rectangular enclosures, such as those seen in Phase 2 at Claydon Pike (see Chapter 4).

Grain storage

Underground storage pits have been excavated on a number of Cotswold sites including Guiting Power (Saville 1979). The high water table of the floodplain and first terrace sites of the Upper Thames Valley would have rendered below-ground storage of grain in pits impossible. It is therefore suggested that some form of above ground storage was used, possibly in four-post structures. Two such structures were identified at Claydon Pike (S 22 and within S 20; see Chapter 3, Figs 3.2-3.3) and also at a number of other sites including Mingies Ditch and Groundwell Farm (Allen 1990, 78). The structures

tend to have substantial footings, and a complete absence of such structures at Watkins Farm (Allen 1990) suggests other methods of storage may also have been in use.

THE MIDDLE IRON AGE ECONOMY

The processes of agricultural intensification seen throughout the late Bronze Age and early Iron Age continued into the middle Iron Age period, with the higher terraces exploited for arable production and the more low-lying areas primarily utilised for pasture (Robinson 1992b, 56; see Chapter 14). By the middle Iron Age 'much of the valley bottom was an open, organised, agricultural landscape' (Allen and Robinson 1993, 149). It was densely settled, and these settlements were usually open. The population expansion caused pressure on the land and there is evidence from Ashville and Mount Farm that the arable land base was expanding onto much poorer soils. The weed flora from Ashville indicated that drier more stony ground to the north and west of the site was being exploited, and that damper ground to the south and south-west was also being used. A depletion of soil nitrogen during this period and a decrease in crop purity indicate the intensity of arable agriculture (Parrington 1978, 109). The pressure on land caused by the intensification of agricultural regimes appears to have led to the development of intensified pastoral regimes.

The economies of the settlements in the Upper Thames Valley during the middle Iron Age were predominantly determined by environmental factors and land use strategies, and the period is marked by 'increased diversification and specialisation of settlement types' (Allen 2000, 10). The lower gravel terraces and the floodplain were not always suited to arable agriculture and sites located in this area, such as Claydon Pike, Thornhill Farm, Mingies Ditch, Port Meadow and Farmoor appear to have operated largely pastoral economies. The risk of flooding during the middle Iron Age resulted in these sites either being occupied seasonally or else situated on gravel islands above the damper ground (Robinson 1992b, 57). Drainage ditches also provided suitable protection, as seen at Claydon Pike. Plant remains suggest that the landscape in the lower lying areas was predominantly grassland, and sites may have been positioned to maximise grazing potential. The Mingies Ditch inhabitants were able to exploit the lush grazing adjacent to the nearby stream and the River Windrush. The site at Farmoor was clearly subject to flooding and was occupied on a seasonal basis. It was therefore positioned solely for the maximum exploitation of resources, presumably with the predominant aim of grazing livestock. The high water table meant it was unlikely that areas of grassland would become dry and parched, and rich grassland would have been available from the late spring through to the early autumn (Lambrick and Robinson 1979).

The settlements on the higher gravel terraces tended to be less transient and operated mixed farming economies. Cereal debris was ubiquitous at Ashville, and the waste was often weed infested and chaff rich suggesting the initial stages of crop processing (Parrington 1978, 108). 'Such a ubiquity of debris would be expected to arise from a situation in which a large part of the human activity on the site was devoted to the processing and handling of cereal crops' (Parrington 1978). The low lying sites on the gravels produced evidence of cereal consumption which would have formed the dominant part of the diet of the inhabitants. However weed seeds present among the charred plant remains suggest that they were not grown on the floodplain. Instead the inhabitants may have either grown the grain on higher gravel terraces, or else imported it from such settlements as such as Ashville and Gravelly Guy, probably on an annual basis.

The dominant crops produced during the Iron Age in the Upper Thames Valley were spelt wheat and six-rowed hulled barley, with bread type wheat, emmer wheat, rye, celtic beans and oats forming minor components of the diet (see Robinson, Chapter 14). It is likely that wild leaves, roots and fruits would have supplemented the Iron Age diet. At Farmoor wild carrot and plants from the cabbage/turnip family were collected (Lambrick and Robinson 1979), and there is evidence for the collection of wild blackberries at Mingies Ditch. It has furthermore been suggested that a few herbs and vegetables may have been grown within the enclosure at Mingies Ditch (Allen and Robinson 1993, 145). No evidence of the collection of wild plants has been identified at Claydon Pike, although it is likely that it would have taken place (Robinson, Chapter 14).

During the middle Iron Age high proportions of both cattle and sheep/goat are recorded in the Upper Thames Valley, indicating that the environmental conditions were suited to sheep and cattle husbandry (see Ingrem, Chapter 14). Horse and pig are also represented in the archaeological record, but in smaller proportions. Within the region there appears to be a focus on cattle husbandry in the more low lying areas, and on sheep in the upland parts. Certain diseases which affect sheep, such as liver fluke and foot-rot, are more infectious on wetter ground, this may be part of the reason they were pastured on the higher drier terrace. Cattle and horses are less susceptible to these conditions and were therefore more suited to the lower damper areas (Wilson 1978, 136). Eighteenth-century historical records indicate that the Cotswolds pasture was known for its suitability for sheep rearing (Saville 1979, 149). Wilson (1978, 136) states that land drainage and the availability of pasture may be strong determinates in animal husbandry regimes.

The cull patterns exhibited at Claydon Pike indicate that cattle and sheep/goat were raised for meat products, but were also exploited for

secondary products (see Sykes, Chapter 3). A stronger emphasis on dairying has been suggested for Mingies Ditch and Farmoor and cull patterns from the former suggest that maximum beef production was not of primary importance (Allen and Robinson 1993, 144). Sheep were kept for both meat and secondary products, and would provide a more manageable source of meat for a smaller settlement (Allen and Robinson 1993). These sites may be viewed as specialist stock centres operating within a subsistence led economy.

Horse is the third best represented taxon at Claydon Pike, and is also present in high quantities at Thornhill Farm. One immature animal was identified in the Claydon Pike assemblage, and a number of sub-adults have also been recorded from other low-lying sites in the Upper Thames Valley. Both Watkins Farm and Mingies Ditch produced foal bones suggesting the possibility that horses may have actually been bred on the sites (Allen 1990, 78-9). The numbers of horses present appear to represent greater numbers than just wild animals rounded up for riding. Horse remains were less frequent on the second terrace site of Ashville (Wilson 1978, 136), however high numbers were again identified at Gravelly Guy. Horses would have been bred for trade, riding and status, and not for their meat products, although the large proportion of young horses and foals may suggest that animals considered to be of insufficient quality for trade were consumed (Lambrick and Allen 2004). Maltby (1996) has indicated that the breeding of horses would have necessitated high quality grazing and their value as work animals was sufficient to warrant this. The lower gravel terraces provided an ideal environment.

There is no evidence for hunting and fishing at Claydon Pike, with only one wild animal, a buzzard or kite, represented (see Sykes, Chapter 3). This is quite standard for animal bone assemblages in the region and indeed southern England as a whole during the Iron Age (Hill 1995, 63). Wild bird remains have been identified from the middle Iron Age phase at Ashville where a heron, mallard duck, domestic duck and jackdaw are all represented (Bramwell 1978, 133).

MATERIAL CULTURE

The artefactual assemblages from middle Iron Age sites in the Upper Thames Valley tend to consist predominantly of ceramics with relatively few objects of personal adornment or weapons. This is usually taken to be indicative of the low status of sites, however this may be too subjective an interpretation. Hill (1995) has warned that the material recovered from archaeological sites is a fraction of the material that would have originally been in use. Organic items made from wood or basketry have not survived and assumptions made about settlements based on artefactual assemblages do so without the full repertoire of objects. For the most

part there is little differentiation between the gravel sites assemblages, although a wide range of artefacts was recovered from the early to middle Iron Age phases at Gravelly Guy including brooches and also weaponry in funerary contexts (Wait and Boyle 2004). A rare discovery of a fused mass of Iron Age currency bars was made at Totterdown Lane, Horcott (4 km south-west of Claydon Pike) during excavations in 2001 (Pine and Preston 2004), although these may be late Iron Age in date.

Barrel- and globular-shaped vessels dominate the middle Iron Age pottery from the region. The fabrics predominantly contained coarse inclusions of shelly limestone or sand, and the proportion of calcareous fabrics to sandy wares within a single assemblage has been seen to be chronologically significant. The bulk of the material represents local procurement of resources and local production, however at a number of sites including Claydon Pike and Thornhill Farm non-local Malvernian pottery has been identified. Furthermore, at Claydon Pike sandy fabrics containing grains of glauconite suggests an origin from a Greensand source, located 14 km distant (see Chapter 3).

Fragments of salt container material have been recovered in varying quantities at a number of sites in the Upper Thames Valley including Claydon Pike, Mingies Ditch, Allcourt Farm (Little London, Lechlade) and Gravelly Guy. They have also been found to the south of the Thames at Groundwell Farm, Swindon, and to the north at a number of Cotswolds sites. The briquetage containers were used to dry and transport salt from the brine springs at Droitwich, Worcestershire and have been found at sites up to 80 km from the source (Morris 2004). The low quantity of salt container material recovered from Claydon Pike (351 g) was suggested to indicate the south-eastern edge of the distribution (see Morris, Chapter 3). A far greater quantity was recovered from Gravelly Guy (5 kg from early to middle Iron Age features), (Morris 2004).

Pottery distributed from a specialist potting industry centred in the Malvern Hills, Herefordshire (Peacock 1968) is often recorded from sites with Droitwich briquetage. Very small quantities of Malvernian pottery were recovered from Claydon Pike and Thornhill Farm. The Malvernian wares did not appear at Gravelly Guy in the middle Iron Age phase which is surprising given the quantities of briquetage recovered. 'It appears as though the need for salt as a commodity extended its distribution beyond that of the tribe using Malvernian pottery as a group identity marker' (Morris 2004). On the whole the quantities of briquetage and Malvernian pottery recovered from sites in the Upper Thames Valley during the middle Iron Age is small and suggests that this area was at the limit of the distribution network. Salt was a luxury item and probably used only as a condiment. Practices such as salting meat would require far greater quantities which are likely to have left more

visible remains on archaeological sites (Allen and Robinson 1993, 147).

Potting clay was widely available, although the gravels do not offer material suitable for querns and these were brought in from some distance. At Claydon Pike nearly all the quernstone material came from the same direction, either sandstone from the May Hill area, 51 km to the north west, or Upper Old Red Sandstone from the Forest of Dean, 64 km away, and one Greensand quern from the opposite direction, Culham in Oxfordshire, 37 km down stream (see Roe, Chapter 3). Saddle querns recorded from Gravelly Guy were also identified from these sources, the Greensand from the Culham area dominating the middle Iron Age assemblage, although the proximity of both the source and the site to the River Thames may explain the dominance of this material (Wait and Boyle 2004). The rotary quern identified on gravel Island 3 at Claydon Pike is unusual as querns recovered from the Upper Thames Valley tend to be saddle querns. The middle Iron Age use of rotary querns has been recorded in the Wessex region at Gussage All Saints, Dorset and Winnall Down, Hampshire (Wait and Boyle 2004).

Evidence of textile production is often recovered from sites in the region. At Claydon Pike a small number of triangular loomweights was identified and indicate weaving was practised there. At Gravelly Guy a wider range of tools associated with textiles was recovered, including a variety of worked bone objects such as bobbins, combs and needles. Bronze needles were also identified and iron awls which suggest leather working (Wait and Boyle 2004).

TRANSPORT

There was no evidence for roadways at Claydon Pike until the late Iron Age/early Roman period (Phase 2; Chapter 4), although various trackways and droveways were no doubt in use, and may be suggested in the north-eastern area of Island 3. It is possible that many of the later trackways were merely defining pre-existing routes through the landscape. The rivers of the Upper Thames Valley would undoubtedly have played an important role in the life of the settlement, particularly for bringing heavy items such as querns, limestone and timber to the site. The rivers may also have acted as boundaries.

RITUAL AND BELIEF SYSTEMS

Most of the buildings seen in the middle Iron Age are vernacular, and evidence for specialised constructed sacred space does not appear until the late Iron Age, where it is still very rare (Smith 2001, 67). The ritual and belief systems of the middle Iron Age appear to be more tied in with the fabric of everyday existence, 'a practical/domestic versus religious dichotomy is inappropriate for most

places and most times during the British Iron Age' (Gwilt and Haselgrove 1997, 2). Evidence of belief systems and associated behaviour must therefore be gathered from the evidence of everyday life.

Special deposits of human and animal bone have been recorded from a number of Iron Age sites in southern England (cf Hill 1995), and appear to have been treated differently from other waste. The burial of articulated cattle bones in a pit at Claydon Pike (Chapter 3) and an isolated sheep/goat cremation at Mingies Ditch do not represent the usual patterns of disposal of animal bone remains. Horse fragments from Totterdown Lane, Fairford, were relatively complete and implied a different use and disposal pattern (Reilly 2002, 17). Furthermore, there appeared to be deposits of human cremated bone, although not actual cremation burials, in roundhouse gullies at this site (Pine and Preston 2002, 24). At Farmoor part of a horse skull from an animal of around 12 years of age was discovered in the southern terminus of a roundhouse gully, while in the northern terminus was the jaw of a horse approximately 5 years old (Wilson 1979, 129). Special deposits of human infants, dogs, horses and other burials were seen across the early and middle Iron Age site at Gravelly Guy, where they are thought to 'represent an aspect of spiritual life that was associated with, or deliberately linked to, the fabric of ordinary living' (Lambrick and Allen 2004). The deposits were probably laid down relatively infrequently, at Gravelly Guy this is suggested as every 6-7 years in the early Iron Age and every 4-5 years in the mid to late Iron Age (Lambrick and Allen 2004).

Concentrations of debris in the terminals of penannular gullies are fairly typical of roundhouses in the region. An increase in finds towards the gully terminals was noted in two of the Ashville structures, and Parrington suggested that this 'would seem to indicate that domestic rubbish from the huts inside the ditch circles was thrown into the ditch by the entrance as the occupants emerged' (Parrington 1978, 35). More recent work by Hill on a number of sites in the Wessex region has indicated that the disposal of 'rubbish' may be more structured and that terminal deposits emphasised the entrance (Hill 1995, 79-80). These terminal concentrations were also seen at Claydon Pike and it appears significant that the largest and most complete vessels recovered from the site were also seemingly placed in gully and ditch terminals.

The large vessels from Claydon Pike had very high mean sherd weights and did not appear to have been discarded in the same way as pottery from other parts of the site (see Chapter 3). Two of these vessels appeared to have been used in cooking and may therefore have been used to prepare a communal meal, and possibly a feast. The giving of feasts may have been an important part of the social technology of the site and played a role in reinforcing and renegotiating relationships (Morris 2002, 55). Ceramic vessels may have been one of the

tools that facilitated such feasts and it is perhaps not surprising that their disposal was in some way structured.

There is very little evidence for the practices and beliefs associated with the disposal of human remains during the middle Iron Age in the Upper Thames Valley. Isolated fragments are often recovered from pits and ditches, however actual cemeteries are extremely rare. A middle Iron Age cemetery has been excavated at Yarnton, located 50 m north-west of the settlement containing the remains of 35 crouched inhumations 'with their heads to the north facing south' (Hey *et al.* 1999). They were of mixed age and sex and without grave goods (Hey *et al.* 1999). The exceptional nature of this site highlights the paucity of evidence for middle Iron Age burial elsewhere in the region.

EXCHANGE SYSTEMS AND SOCIAL RELATIONS

Within the Upper Thames Valley the middle Iron Age began a period of increasing economic specialisation, with settlements on the floodplain and First Gravel Terrace operating a largely pastoral economy, and those located on the second terrace operating a more mixed farming economy. The former could be quite seasonal settlements, such as Farmoor, while the latter tended to be permanent. This divide appears to be a response to environmental and topographic considerations, which had a great affect upon animal husbandry regimes. Thus, cattle dominated the animal bone assemblages of the lower lying sites, while sheep were more numerous in the upland areas. The pastoral sites appear to have been occupied by only one or two family groups, or perhaps one extended family group. They were self-sufficient in many ways, but did not appear to be producing grain, at least not in the immediate vicinity. Environmental evidence in the form of carbonised remains, together with the presence of quernstones, indicate that cereals were certainly processed on the lower lying sites, but these may well have been imported from settlements on the higher gravel terraces (Allen 1990, 78).

The low-lying pastoral sites would therefore appear to be part of an agricultural network that included the settlements on the second terrace (Allen 1990, 79), although the mechanisms behind such a network are completely unknown. The settlements were often quite close together, Watkins Farm and Mingies Ditch, both seemingly self-contained settlements, were separated from their nearest neighbours by 1 km (Allen and Robinson 1993, 149). Thornhill Farm and Claydon Pike were also only 1 km apart, with the settlement at Allcourt Farm, Lechlade, lying 2 km to the east, and ten possible middle Iron Age roundhouses located 4 km to the south-west at Totterdown Lane, Horcott. The question of how independent such settlements on the lower gravel terraces were, and the nature of their links to the other settlements is one of the most

difficult to define in the archaeological record. How they interacted with each other, if there was a system of grazing rights and how they obtained produce from the arable community are all key issues.

Allen and Robinson (1993, 144-5) have suggested two models that may have facilitated the import of grain at Mingies Ditch. The first is that the settlement was 'part of a complementary agricultural system' and provided summer grazing for those sites on the higher terraces. In this case over winter the inhabitants would have managed only enough animals to meet their subsistence requirements, but during the late spring to autumn would have provided grazing areas for the other settlements, particularly for cattle. Alternatively one or more species would have been raised as self-sustaining herds to produce a surplus of animals which could then be traded as livestock or for their products. These models are further complicated by the suggestion that Gravelly Guy was capable of producing a surplus of both pastoral and arable products, and that horse rearing may have formed part of the settlement's economy (Lambrick and Allen 2004).

In the case of seasonal sites such as Farmoor the inhabitants may have formed part of a settlement elsewhere, at any rate they would have needed to find winter accommodation. The specialisations exhibited in the economy of the region at this time suggest a complex social system to facilitate them. Lambrick and Robinson have also explored a number of possibilities for the Farmoor inhabitants, who may represent independent herdsmen who moved seasonally with their families and livestock to exploit the maximum potential from their environment, exchanging or selling their produce to obtain other goods such as grain. Equally they may have been less independent and formed part of a more complex society with a well organised division of labour designed to maximise production (Lambrick and Robinson 1979, 135).

The inferred relationships between settlements in the Upper Thames Valley serve as a reminder that Iron Age societies 'operated not simply at the level of the individual nuclear or extended family group, but also within wider communities, probably kinship groups that evolved out of the common use of Neolithic monuments and Bronze Age burial grounds' (Allen 2000, 13). The communities were exchanging grain and possibly grazing rights. Neighbouring settlements may have been called upon to supply labour during periods of construction work, such as the digging of ditches. Allen and Robinson (1993, 149) have examined ethnographic studies which suggest workers were rounded up for major construction work by a number of methods including providing parties and feasts.

Two large vessels recovered from Claydon Pike displayed areas of sooting and indicate the vessel

was used for cooking or heating, presumably for a communal meal and possibly for a feast (see Jones, Chapter 3). Hingley states that the 'feast should be envisaged as an act which reinforced the solidarity of the community formed out of the association of local social groups' (Hingley 1990a, 100). Hayden argues that feasts are a major component of 'the creation and maintenance of social relationships that are predicted on securing access to resources, labour, or security' (2001, 26). The apparent structured deposition of such large vessels in the terminals of gullies and ditches again indicates the importance of the feast, and thereby social relationships, that they represent. The presence of local and non-local sandy wares at Claydon Pike may be further evidence of the 'maintenance of exchange networks' which were 'vital for the survival of Iron Age communities' (Morris 1997, 38).

CONCLUSION

The middle Iron Age period saw a population expansion in the Upper Thames Valley and surrounding region, and the land clearance that began in the Bronze Age affected the hydrology of the region causing flooding at this time. Nonetheless the floodplain and first gravel terrace were widely exploited by small, probably single family, settlements operating largely specialised pastoral regimes with an emphasis on cattle husbandry. Settlements on the higher second terrace were better drained and operated mixed farming economies. Horse rearing may have been a particular speciality of the more low lying sites, and has also recently been proposed for the second terrace settlement at Gravelly Guy.

In terms of ceramic vessels and textiles, the sites within the region were largely self-sufficient, and would have been in a position to produce a range of other articles including organic items such as baskets. Salt and quern material were not locally available and had to be brought into the area, as part of wide networks of exchange. Furthermore, the low-lying sites did not appear to be producing grain but were consuming it, indicating they were part of a wider agricultural network.

The landscape of the Upper Thames Valley was densely settled and the relationships between these settlements were no doubt complex. The supply of grain to the lower lying sites, the communal labour force implied by the digging of the Mingies Ditch enclosure ditches, the presence of Malvernian pottery and Droitwich briquetage indicate the importance of these relationships. Feasting may have been one way in which these networks were maintained, however further work will need to investigate the complexities of the producer/consumer relationships.