Chapter 7:
Synthesis: The Wider Regional and National Context

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THE EARLIER PREHISTORIC LANDSCAPE

The evidence for earlier prehistoric activity along the route of the bypass is in general ephemeral and in certain cases ambiguous. However, near the point where the bypass crosses the river a number of important Neolithic artefacts have been recovered, including Mortlake-style Peterborough Ware bowls and at least one stone axe (see Chapters 1 and 2). These finds are likely to represent intentional deposits that were placed in the river or at its edge (Holgate 1988a, 88). The line of the bypass also runs between two important monument complexes that are approximately 5 km apart, both of which are located on the east side of the river (see Fig. 1.2): to the north is the cursus monument complex at Benson and to the south is the North Stoke bank barrow/cursus with its associated barrow cemetery (Barclay *et al*. 2003). Other smaller groups or isolated monuments are also known to exist. The cropmark of a middle Neolithic oval barrow is located just to the north of Grim's Ditch (see Fig. 1.2) and a ring ditch of similar date was excavated at Newnham Murren (Moorey 1982).

From the old land surface beneath Grim's Ditch, pottery and flintwork indicate the ephemeral traces of early Neolithic occupation (see Barclay and Bradley, Chapter 5). This material might indicate the presence of more substantial settlement nearby or could simply represent the ephemeral traces of occupation that have been protected by the later earthwork. Similar more substantial scatters have been found elsewhere in the Upper Thames and the location of settlement near the river's edge is not unusual for this region (Holgate 1988a, fig. 6.9). It is possible that the Peterborough Ware, flintwork and animal bone found in one of the evaluation trenches at the west end of Grim's Ditch could represent only a small part of a more substantial spread. This area was sealed by early alluvium and appears to represent a sealed ground surface.

The field survey undertaken along the route of the bypass produced only a small number of flints (see Cromarty and Capel-Davies, Chapter 1) and therefore no evidence for substantial scatters, although the collected flintwork did appear to cluster in two areas, one near Brightwell and the other at Bradford's Brook. The flintwork was of mixed date but included some diagnostic forms such as a small number of scrapers, piercers and a leaf-shaped arrowhead.

Some late Neolithic/early Bronze Age activity is indicated by a Beaker sherd, some flintwork and the radiocarbon dates of 2340–2040 cal BC and 2130–1880 cal BC (95% confidence; OxA-7173–4) on charred cereal grain remains from a posthole beneath the Grim's Ditch bank. It is possible that the charred material, which included emmer, was residual within this feature. But nonetheless it still provides indirect evidence for cultivation at this time (see Chapter 5). It is possible that some of the ard marks found sealed below the earthwork are also of Bronze Age date. There is little contemporary activity from the immediate area other than stray finds. Just to the south, Beaker burials and pits have been found at North Stoke, while within the region there is a growing body of evidence for domestic sites. Most are represented by pit deposits and small-scale surface scatters (Barclay *et al*. 1996, 9).

THE PLACE OF WALLINGFORD WITHIN ITS WIDER CONTEXT

It is now almost 20 years since Barrett and Bradley reviewed the evidence for the later Bronze Age of the Upper Thames region (Barrett and Bradley 1980a) and since their review many new sites have been discovered and some old sites have been reassessed (Barclay and Cromarty in prep.; Miles 1997). This section will attempt to place the later Bronze Age settlements at Whitecross Farm and Bradford's Brook within their wider regional and national context.

It is now acknowledged that the middle Bronze Age (1600–1150 cal BC) represents a period of dramatic social change in which the landscape was transformed by the sudden appearance of field systems, farmstead enclosures and new types of settlement (Barclay *et al*. 1996, 13; Miles 1997). The economy appears to have been one of mixed farming, with a strong emphasis on pastoralism especially cattle rearing (Lambrick 1992, 88). Certainly the appearance of field systems, enclosures and waterholes all point towards intensification of this aspect. The introduction of spelt wheat at this time can be seen as an innovation. Although these developments may well represent intensification, in this region the scale of this change may be less pronounced than elsewhere (eg the Lower Kennet Valley, the Fen edge and Dartmoor).

It is during the middle Bronze Age in the Upper Thames region that coaxial field systems and farmstead enclosures appear for the first time (Lambrick 1992, 86–8 and fig. 29), a pattern that can be traced across much of lowland England. Many of

the ritual landscapes that were defined by groups of Neolithic and early Bronze Age monuments had been abandoned by this stage. In the Upper Thames there is some evidence for the reuse of barrows for secondary burial in both the mid and late Bronze Age. However, new monument building is rare, although a small number of cremation enclosures and post circles could belong to this phase. There are also traces of occupation at a number of Neolithic enclosures that range from scatters of material to actual settlement.

In 1972 in a book titled *The Iron Age in the Upper Thames Basin* Harding was only able to mention a handful of late Bronze Age sites, none of which was substantial. The site at Whitecross Farm, Wallingford – despite its finds of Bronze Age metalwork and pottery that was assumed at the time to be Iron Age – received little comment. The next review of the evidence came with Barrett's seminal paper on 'The pottery of the later Bronze Age in lowland England' (1980) and with Barrett and Bradley's paper discussing 'The later Bronze Age in the Thames Valley' (1980b). At the same time work by Hinchliffe and Thomas at Appleford (1980) and by Hingley at Wittenham Clumps (1979–80) was also identifying late Bronze Age sites. Aspects of the settlement at Whitecross Farm were reviewed in the 1980s (Barrett 1980; Thomas *et al*. 1986), while Thomas also published an article on Bronze Age metalwork from the Thames at Wallingford (1984).

Prior to the 1990s many of the accounts of prehistory such as Harding (1972) had been based on evidence (cropmark survey, field survey and excavation) that was recovered from the Second Gravel Terrace. Settlement patterns built around this evidence therefore had an inherent bias, as it is now realised that much of the earlier prehistoric settlement is concentrated on the lower lying First Gravel Terrace.

Since 1980 many new later Bronze Age sites have been discovered (Miles 1997) and this number is likely to increase as gravel extraction moves on to the lower lying areas of First Gravel Terrace. Ongoing large-scale excavations at Yarnton, Oxfordshire and Shorncote, Gloucestershire are revealing two, somewhat similar, landscapes characterised by open settlements, waterholes, pits and occasional fencelines (Gill Hey pers. comm.; Hearne and Heaton 1994). The sites at Yarnton are generally small-scale and dispersed over an area of First and Second Gravel Terrace that extends for almost 1 km adjacent to the modern course of the River Thames. Further to the west of Yarnton other contemporary sites have been found at Mead Lane, Eynsham and beneath the remains of the Saxon minster at Eynsham (Barclay *et al.* 2001; Miles 1997, 10). A series of excavations around Lechlade are revealing traces of a probable late Bronze Age field system and other ephemeral traces of settlement and burial (Jennings 1998; Allen *et al*. 1993).

In the Upper Thames region most evidence for middle Bronze Age settlement has been found on the gravel terraces, in particular the lower lying First Gravel Terrace. These settlements and their associated field systems and enclosures are generally small-scale in comparison to other areas of the Thames Valley such as the Lower Kennet Valley and the Middle Thames Valley (Yates 1997). Middle Bronze Age settlement is characterised by waterholes, open settlement, occasional enclosures and field systems. Other elements in the cultural landscape include burnt mounds and spreads. The settlement distribution for the Oxford region of the Upper Thames is illustrated in Figure 7.1. This reveals that many of the so-called field systems occur to the south of Abingdon, while finds of metalwork are more widespread, but that the two distributions, especially hoards, appear to be complementary.

For this area, Corporation Farm, just to the south of Abingdon, remains the only convincing and substantial example of an enclosed farmstead (Shand *et al*. 2003). The site developed next to a small barrow cemetery and this position could have been intentional. The site, with its complex of enclosures, associated Deverel-Rimbury pottery, evidence for textile production and with a series of ritual burials and deposits involving human and animal remains, has similarities with sites found elsewhere in lowland England (Brück 1995; Barrett and Bradley 1980a). So far the only other site in this region of a similar character is the settlement that was excavated at Eight Acre Field, Radley, 10 km to the north-west (Mudd 1995). Also of this date are a number of field systems most of which are located in an area extending from Abingdon down to Wallingford. Their distribution has been mapped by Yates (1999) and it seems likely that further examples will be discovered.

The most extensive field system is the one recorded at Dorchester-on-Thames, which consists of a network of coaxially arranged single, double and triple ditches (Bradley and Chambers 1988; Whittle *et al*. 1992). One of the ditches produced approximately half of a middle Bronze Age Bucket Urn (Whittle *et al*. 1992, 160). These ditches are arranged with their main axis NW–SE and with paired ditches running NE–SW. The ditches cut the earlier cursus in at least four places along its entire length. The system can be traced as cropmarks to the north of the cursus, while at Mount Farm 1.5 km away similar ditches have been found (Barclay *et al*. 1996, 13 and fig. 4). It is argued that the double ditches did not necessarily act as droveways but rather contained central banks, while the general shallowness of the ditches could indicate that fences or hedges were placed on the banks if they were to act as any form of stock control or barrier.

As at Corporation Farm the ditches at Mount Farm were aligned on an earlier barrow and they were possibly associated with a waterhole and burnt spread. At Dorchester-on-Thames the main axis of the field system appeared to share the same orientation as a massive henge monument (Bradley

and Chambers 1988, fig. 3). It is not possible to say whether the field systems recorded at Mount Farm and at the site of the Dorchester cursus were physically linked as much of the area in between has been extracted for gravel, although this seems very likely (Benson and Miles 1974, fig. 18). It is possible that the ditches recorded at Bradford's Brook belonged to a similar type of field system, although the evidence for their dating to this period is slight and tenuous (see Chapter 6). Another feature at Bradford's Brook was the waterhole 1/7, and this may have related to the same broad phase of later Bronze Age settlement. While the ditches cut the higher ground, this feature was found on low-lying ground not far from the present course of Bradford's Brook (see Figs 6.1–3). Deposits from the base of the waterhole are associated with two radiocarbon dates (GU-5713–14: see Chapter 6; Table A1.1) that indicate a middle or transitional mid–late Bronze Age date. Robinson's report on the insects (see Chapter 6) suggests that the waterhole was located within an open landscape perhaps made up of grassland and some disturbed ground and indicating that both arable and the grazing of animals was taking place. He also concluded that settlement could have been located nearby. Similar results were obtained from a waterhole of similar date at Eight Acre Field, Radley (Parker 1995, 52). However, the results from Bradford's Brook confirm the existence of an organised agricultural landscape by the end of the middle Bronze Age.

Much of the evidence recovered from the albeit limited and confined excavations at Bradford's Brook indicates that further and perhaps more substantial traces of later Bronze Age occupation are likely to exist in this area.

One other interesting feature of this waterhole was the recovery of intentional deposits, which have been discussed in Chapter 6; their wider context is discussed here. These deposits can range in date from late Bronze Age through to Roman and can involve a variety of materials. The Bradford's Brook waterhole contained two such deposits: a complete loomweight from the base and a cattle skull from the top. The radiocarbon dating indicates that the waterhole was dug in the mid–late Bronze Age and if the two dates are taken at face value then it was in existence before the settlement on the eyot at Whitecross Farm. There is little evidence to suggest when the waterhole went out of use and this may well have been gradual. The small size of the complete cylindrical loomweight makes it perhaps more likely to date to the early part of the late Bronze Age (see Barclay, Chapter 6). Items of weaving equipment are sometimes found at the bottoms of later Bronze Age waterholes, often only single items rather than a range of related objects. Other finds from waterholes in the Upper Thames Valley include quernstones, pots and human remains. Often occurring in isolation these items could have been deliberately deposited in a similar way to those single objects that were sometimes placed on the bases of Iron Age pits. This practice falls within the category of votive deposition in watery places that has been illustrated and described by authors such as Bradley (1990). Other more complex deposits sometimes occur and these can be associated with the blocking or decommissioning of these features. At Eight Acre Field, Radley, one of a pair of waterholes had a deposit of animal bone and pottery placed within it, while at Yarnton a waterhole was packed with worked timber and animal bone (Mudd 1995, 58; Gill Hey pers. comm.). Such deposits are more than just rubbish. The one at Eight Acre Field, Radley had clearly been structured. At Yarnton the worked timber included a broken wooden bowl and underneath this was the skull of a fox.

The blocking of these features could have signified more than just the deliberate closure of a waterhole. Some clearly went out of use during the late Bronze Age and early Iron Age, at a time of social change during a period of general settlement abandonment and shift on to the higher Second Gravel Terrace. The waterhole at Bradford's Brook appears to have been abandoned, but not blocked. That the position of this feature somehow remained in folk memory, or that the feature was recognised, possibly marked in some way and reappropriated, can be suggested by the placing of a cattle skull into what had become by the end of the Iron Age little more than a silted-up hollow. This practice of placed deposits belongs to a wider pattern of ritual or structured deposition that can be recognised at settlement sites and at natural places. One type of material that is seldom found in waterholes is metalwork, despite its abundant recovery from rivers and other wet places.

The suggestion that the enclosed landscape at Bradford's Brook is linked with the settlement on the eyot at Whitecross Farm is strengthened by the finding of late Bronze Age pottery from a pit (see Chapter 6). While the organised landscape at Bradford's Brook appears to have had its origins in the middle Bronze Age, the occupation on the eyot seems to have begun perhaps no earlier than the 10th century BC. There is little evidence for middle Bronze Age Deverel-Rimbury associated activity from around the site, other than metalwork recovered from the river (Northover, Chapter 3; Thomas 1984). The nearest settlement activity to here comes from Didcot (Ruben and Ford 1992) some 7 km to the west and from ongoing excavations at Appleford Sidings in approximately the same area (Paul Booth pers. comm.). At both sites Deverel-Rimbury pottery was associated with linear ditches that could indicate coaxial field systems and/or enclosure ditches. In general there would appear to be a concentration of domestic sites in the Abingdon/Dorchester area, although at present it is unclear whether this pattern is simply a reflection of where mineral extraction and development have taken place.

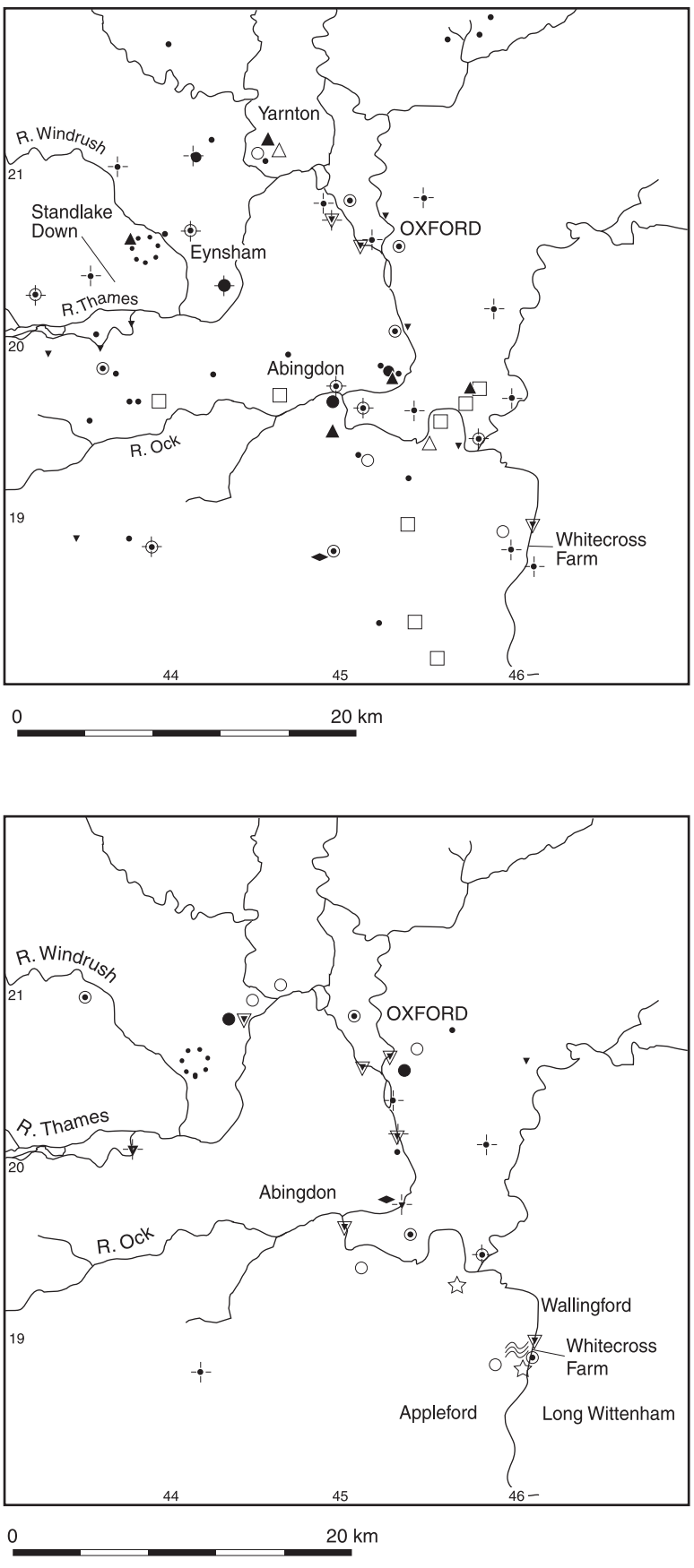


Figure 7.1 Metalwork, settlement and funerary distributions – a: middle Bronze Age, b: late Bronze Age

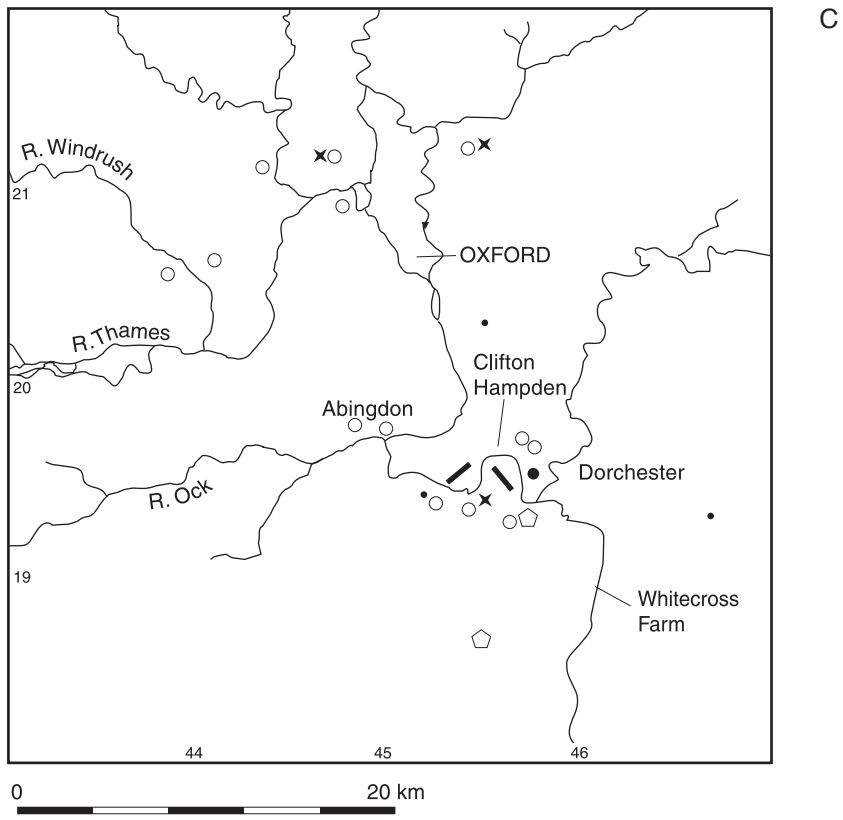


Figure 7.1 (continued) Metalwork, settlement and funerary distributions – c: late Bronze Age/early Iron Age?

As well as settlement activity within the region there is also a growing body of evidence for later Bronze Age funerary and ritual (see Fig. 7.1a–c). Within the barrow cemetery at Standlake Down it is possible to reinterpret one of the ring ditches as a possible later Bronze Age ceremonial monument (Catling 1982). Site 20 was a ring ditch or barrow that was surrounded by a probable post circle. It is possible that the post ring and ditch are not contemporary, but that the ring was added at a later date, perhaps during the middle Bronze Age. Pottery was recovered from the ditch that was originally reported as Iron Age but is in fact middle Bronze Age (ibid., fig. 58.24–6). The same barrow cemetery also contained a massive Deverel-Rimbury cremation cemetery (Akerman and Stone 1857; Riley 1946–7). At Gravelly Guy, Stanton Harcourt another post or pit circle of pre-Iron Age date was discov-

ered underneath an early Iron Age settlement (Barclay 1995, 88; Lambrick and Allen 2004). The post ring is of pre-Iron Age date and its entrance appears to align on what was perhaps the largest of the early Bronze Age barrow mounds (George Lambrick pers. comm.). Again it seems likely that the site is of later Bronze Age date. Secondary middle Bronze Age cremation deposits were found at a number of barrows, while part of a Bucket Urn was deposited in the silted ditch of the Devil's Quoits henge (Barclay 1995). A further possible site has also been identified near the cemetery at Barrow Hills, Radley (info. RCHME).

Apart from Standlake the evidence for middle Bronze Age cremation cemeteries tends to be small-scale and often secondary within pre-existing barrows. At Barrow Hills, Radley secondary cremation deposits were added to barrows near the periphery of the barrow cemetery (Barclay and Halpin 1999). Barrow Hills provides a good example of how the landscape was divided up during the middle Bronze Age. The barrow cemetery was constructed along the edge of the higher Second Gravel Terrace, while to the south on the lower lying First Gravel Terrace could be found the later Bronze Age settlement at Eight Acre Field (Mudd 1995). This settlement had its beginnings in the middle Bronze Age and appears to have gone out of use by the start of the Iron Age. The deposits found in the waterhole that included early Iron Age pottery perhaps signify deliberate decommissioning of the waterhole and settlement. In comparison, secondary cremation deposits, inhumations and at least one animal burial were added to the early Bronze Age barrows. Other finds of Deverel-Rimbury and post-Deverel-Rimbury pottery were found at some of the barrow ditches and from at least one pit (Barclay and Halpin 1999).

Around Eynsham and Yarnton middle Bronze Age settlement is represented mostly by small-scale open settlement (see Fig. 7.1a). At Yarnton settlement is characterised by pit deposits, roundhouses and related structures, burnt spreads and waterholes. The late Bronze Age settlement follows a similar pattern with slight evidence for settlement shift. However, large-scale nucleated and/or defended settlements, such as ring works, are notably absent. Excavation has indicated that most of the settlement at Yarnton was located on the First Gravel Terrace. There is the suggestion that a Neolithic long enclosure was reused for settlement during the late Bronze Age, although the activity is again small-scale (Gill Hey pers. comm.).

The evidence for the mid–late Bronze Age transition (*c* 1200–1100 BC) and for the start of the late Bronze Age is elusive within the Upper Thames region (Fig. 7.2), a situation that is perhaps common across many areas of lowland England (see Barrett 1980). So far only a few sites can be demonstrated as belonging to this phase. A number of sites have been identified in the Eynsham/Yarnton area. At Eynsham Abbey a probable ?Neolithic enclosure was reused for settlement during the start of the late Bronze Age, while at Mead Lane, Eynsham a possible open settlement of this date is known to exist (Barclay *et al.* 2001.; unpubl. info.). The traces of mid–late Bronze Age settlement at Mead Lane, Eynsham (Miles 1997) consisted of mostly unenclosed features and at least one burnt mound or spread.

At Yarnton elements of the later Bronze Age landscape that belong to this phase include at least one house structure and a number of pits (Gill Hey pers. comm.). Away from the gravels the only other site that developed during this phase is the enclosure at Rams Hill (see Fig. 1.1; Needham and Ambers 1994). On and around the gravel terraces most late Bronze Age settlement belongs to the early 1st millennium BC (see Fig. 7.2).

Settlement during this later phase of the late Bronze Age takes a variety of forms. The Whitecross Farm eyot settlement is characterised by a midden and a midden-like occupation spread. It was suggested in Chapter 2 that middens were placed near the edge of the eyot and that occupation debris was allowed to accumulate across the southern half of the island. The northern area could have been kept clean and this area could have been reserved for human habitation. The reconstruction of the site (see front cover) is just one interpretation of how such a settlement might have appeared. However, excavation on three separate occasions has failed to produce any convincing evidence for post-built structures apart from a few isolated postholes. Despite this, there is plenty of indirect evidence. While it is not improbable that rubbish was brought to the eyot either along the river or from the surrounding area, this does seem somewhat unlikely. The charred timbers and probable wattle, possible hearthstones and refired pottery from basal silts in the channel could have come from a demolished building. Robinson notes in Chapter 4 that some of the beetles found in samples taken from the edge of the eyot favour certain types of decaying organic matter and therefore could be taken as indicators for the former presence of manure, material from byres and crop-processing waste. Interestingly the insect remains provide evidence only for the type of refuse that accumulates around settlements rather than any actual evidence for buildings. Again the hypothesis can be made that the buildings were located in the northern part of the island where less excavation has taken place.

The character of the settlement on the eyot has been described in detail in Chapter 2, while parallels for this type of site can be found elsewhere along the River Thames at Runnymede and perhaps also at Bray.

The activities that took place on the eyot have been described in Chapter 2. There is by the nature of the site more evidence for consumption than production. What evidence there is for artefact production all derives from secondary contexts of deposition with no evidence for *in situ* working.

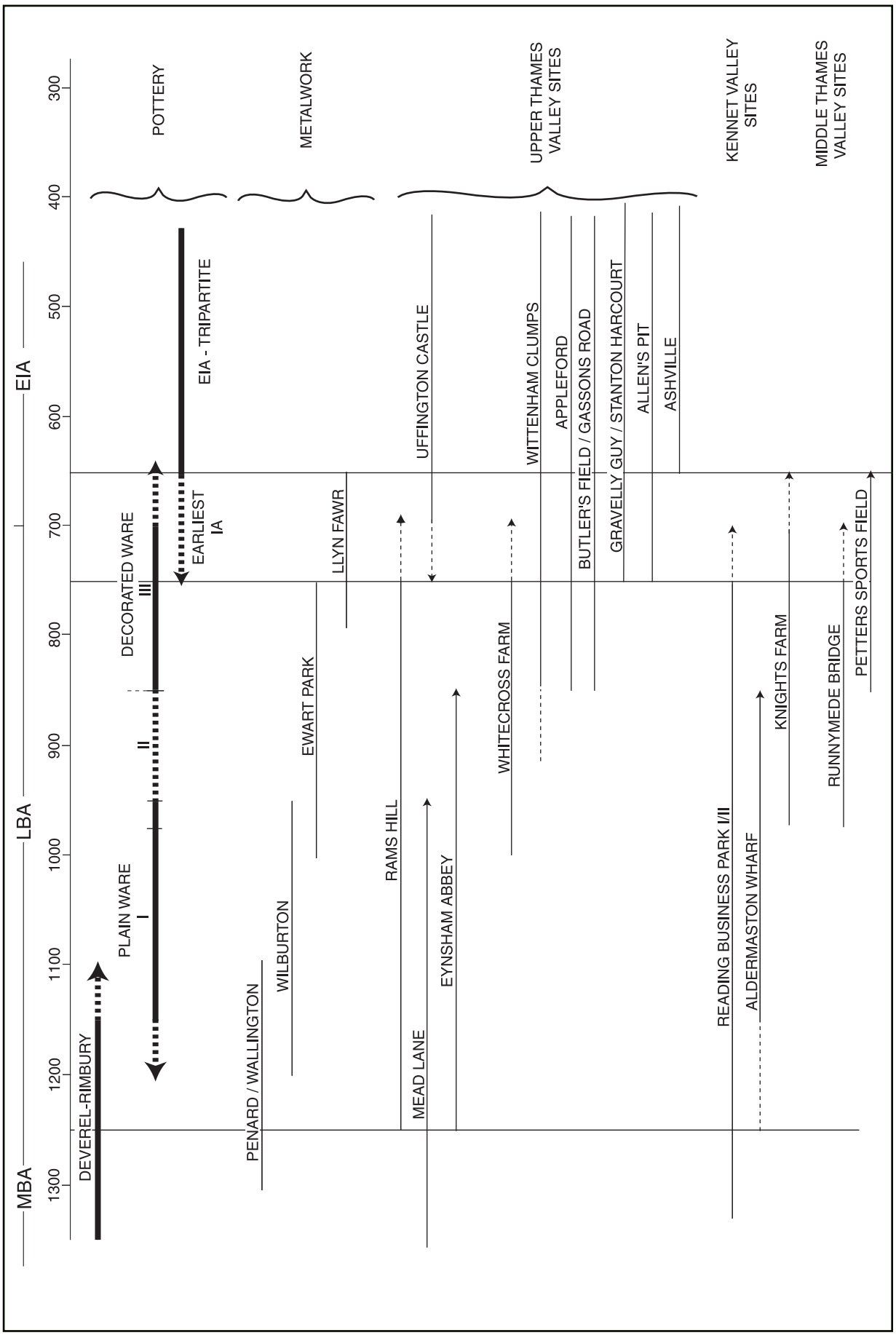


Figure 7.2 The development and sequence of pottery styles, metalwork and selected settlements in the Upper and Middle Thames Valley and the Lower Kennet Valley

Some of the metalworking debris included fragments of sheet and wire as well as an ingot fragment that might indicate at least the melting of bronze. The recovery of broken bronzes (eg sickles) also indicates the curation of scrap metal on the island. The presence of refired or overfired sherds, vein quartz and quartzite pebbles could all indicate pottery production, although the evidence is slight. No *in situ* flint knapping was recorded, although the waste from flintworking was present. Brown and Bradley (see Chapter 3) note that much of the waste material came from the southern part of the island. Apart from the production of the actual flint tools on the island, Brown and Bradley's use-wear data also provide an insight into other production activities in which flint tools were used. Although this type of analysis cannot be used to specifically identify what material was being worked, it is possible to make the suggestion as to what type of activity is represented and some of these tools could have been used for leatherworking and for woodworking.

Although waterlogged wood was preserved at the site, there was little evidence that extensive woodworking had taken place, although it must be remembered that proportionally very little of the channel deposits where such information could be recovered were excavated. Wood was certainly used on the site for making a variety of structures, and the evidence points to some degree of woodland management.

The recovery of a small number of spindlewhorl fragments from the earlier as well as the OAU excavations provides only slight evidence for textile production. The absence of loomweight fragments could be taken to indicate that the production of textiles was perhaps not a significant activity, a point that is also supported from the analysis of the animal bone (see Powell and Clark, Chapter 4). Powell and Clark note the similarities in the proportion of the three main domestic species (cattle, pig, sheep/goat) between Whitecross Farm, Runnymede and Potterne. They note that the high proportion of pig and juvenile sheep indicates meat consumption and that this could be a reflection of the site's suggested high status. For the region the proportion of pig and the age profile of sheep found at Whitecross Farm are significantly different to what is then found on Iron Age sites. The wider implications of the environmental analysis are discussed in detail by Robinson who notes the strong similarity between Wallingford and Runnymede (see Chapter 4).

The appearance of midden sites as a phenomenon of the late Bronze Age has been discussed by a number of people (Brück 1995; Needham and Sørensen 1988; McOrmish 1996). In north Wessex and the Thames Valley a number of midden sites have been identified and all appear to belong to the early 1st millennium BC. Apart from Whitecross Farm only one other site has been identified in the Upper Thames region, the Castle Hill hillfort at Wittenham Clumps (see Fig. 1.1; Hingley 1979–80). The contrast between these two localities is significant. The Whitecross Farm midden was placed on an island or eyot within the Thames, while the midden at Wittenham Clumps was placed on one side of a prominent hill that is a distinct landmark. At the latter site the origin of the midden could have predated the construction of an early Iron Age hillfort, although in a secondary phase it appears to have been contemporary. Wittenham Clumps has a number of parallels in Wessex, while Whitecross Farm has close affinities with the riverside sites at Runnymede and probably Bray (Needham 1991; Wymer 1960).

Hingley has compared the position of the midden at Wittenham Clumps in relation to the hillfort enclosure with other sites in southern Britain and noted the preference for a westerly or south-westerly slope (1979–80, 54 and fig. 17). The same point is made by McOrmish who also notes the occurrence of middens within enclosures (1996, 74). At Wittenham Clumps the midden is thought to have a linear spread of approximately 300 m. Other sites in north Wiltshire, such as East Chisenbury and Potterne, could have been on a similar scale. Many of the Wessex sites appear to belong to – or have their greater phase of development during – the late Bronze Age/Iron Age transition or earliest Iron Age, although some such as Potterne appear to have earlier beginnings (McOrmish 1996; Lawson 1994, 43). Within the Upper Thames region and just 3 km west of Castle Hill is the enigmatic site of Wigbalds Farm, Long Wittenham which is located on gravel terrace (Savory 1937). This site consisted of a large shallow rectangular pit some 6 m x 5 m that had been filled with occupation debris. Associated with this pit was an occupation layer that could be traced for *c* 8 m. Finds included pots that appeared to be broken *in situ* and animal bone, while small finds included an axe-pendant, a fragment of a bronze fitting, a crucible and a spindlewhorl. The pottery is similar to the earliest Iron Age assemblage from Castle Hill (ibid., fig. 2).

Both sites fitted into a pattern of generally small-scale open settlement. At present more is known about the variety of settlement than the overall organisation. Late Bronze Age landscapes or concentrations of sites have been found in a number of areas. For instance there are a number of sites along the gravel terraces between Wallingford and Abingdon, although most are small-scale (see Fig. 7.1b). Further upriver there is another concentration of sites in the Eynsham/Yarnton area. In the Oxford region finds of contemporary metalwork have a very similar distribution to that of settlement.

Between Abingdon and Wallingford many of the traces of late Bronze Age settlement are small-scale and some sites are represented by no more than isolated findspots or features or groups of features such as the pits at Appleford (Hinchliffe and Thomas 1980, 35). In this area the organised field

systems and enclosures could all belong to the middle Bronze Age with the possible exception of Eight Acre Field, Radley (Mudd 1995), although even here the date of the site is ambiguous because it contained very little artefactual evidence, and its layout, which has more than one phase, could have evolved over the later Bronze Age.

The eyot settlement at Whitecross Farm appears to have gone out of use before the start of the Iron Age. There is little evidence for settlement continuity at this time and so far most of the evidence that has been recovered points to settlement shift, with many of the early Iron Age settlements being located on the Second Gravel Terrace. This is clearly seen at Yarnton and could explain a simple reason why so little later Bronze Age settlement has been recorded at other sites on the Second Gravel Terrace. Many of the early Iron Age settlements – such as Ashville, Abingdon – appear to have their origins perhaps at a time after sites like the Whitecross Farm eyot had gone out of use (see Fig. 7.2). At other sites such as Yarnton it is possible to recognise the beginnings of settlement on the Second Gravel Terrace at a slightly earlier stage that might indicate some overlap with the final use of some late Bronze Age settlements, although it must be stated that this earliest Iron Age activity is perhaps on a much smaller scale. A similar early phase of activity may also be present in the Stanton Harcourt area (see Fig. 1.1) and again was represented only by a single pit group and redeposited finds of pottery (Lambrick and Allen 2004).

The distribution of Iron Age settlements with potentially early material is given in Figure 7.1c. At the same time new land divisions appeared. These took the form of massive linear earthworks that tend to cut off loops of the Thames. Two occur in the Oxford region at Clifton Hampden and Northfield Farm near Dorchester, while other examples have been found at Lechlade (see Fig. 1.1; Allen *et al*. 1993; Barclay *et al*. 2003; Jennings 1998, 33).

The early Iron Age is marked by a general, major shift in settlement location on to a higher gravel terrace that would perhaps be a better area for cultivation, and by the appearance of farming sites that are clearly organised around crop production and storage (Lambrick 1992, 88).

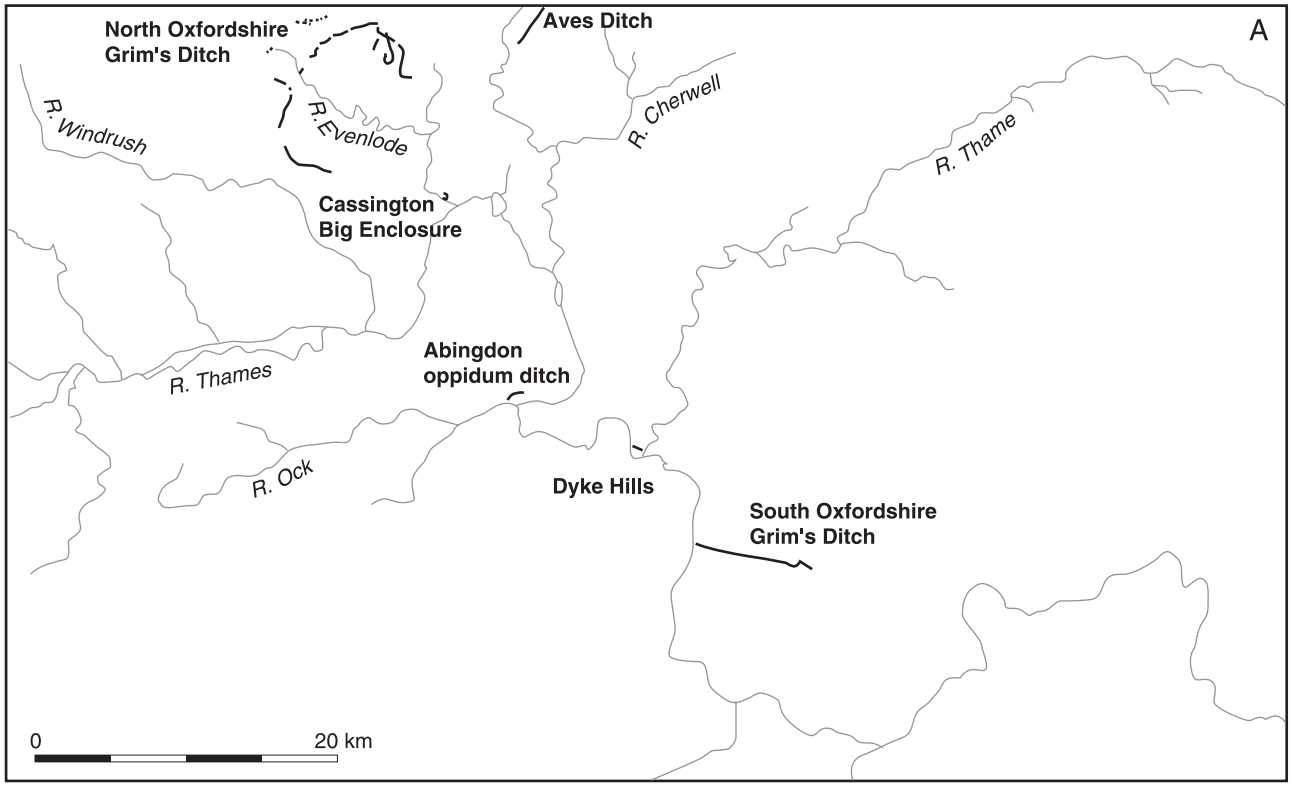
Along the route of the Wallingford Bypass there is little evidence for Iron Age activity before about the 1st century BC. Some of the pottery at Bradford's Brook could be of middle Iron Age date, but most of the associated features were found to be of a later date (see Chapter 6). To the north of Bradford's Brook are the excavated rectilinear enclosures at Newnham Murren that contained middle Iron Age pottery and animal bone (Moorey 1982, 59). Otherwise Iron Age settlement in the immediate area is on present evidence quite sparse with many of the known settlements occurring upriver.

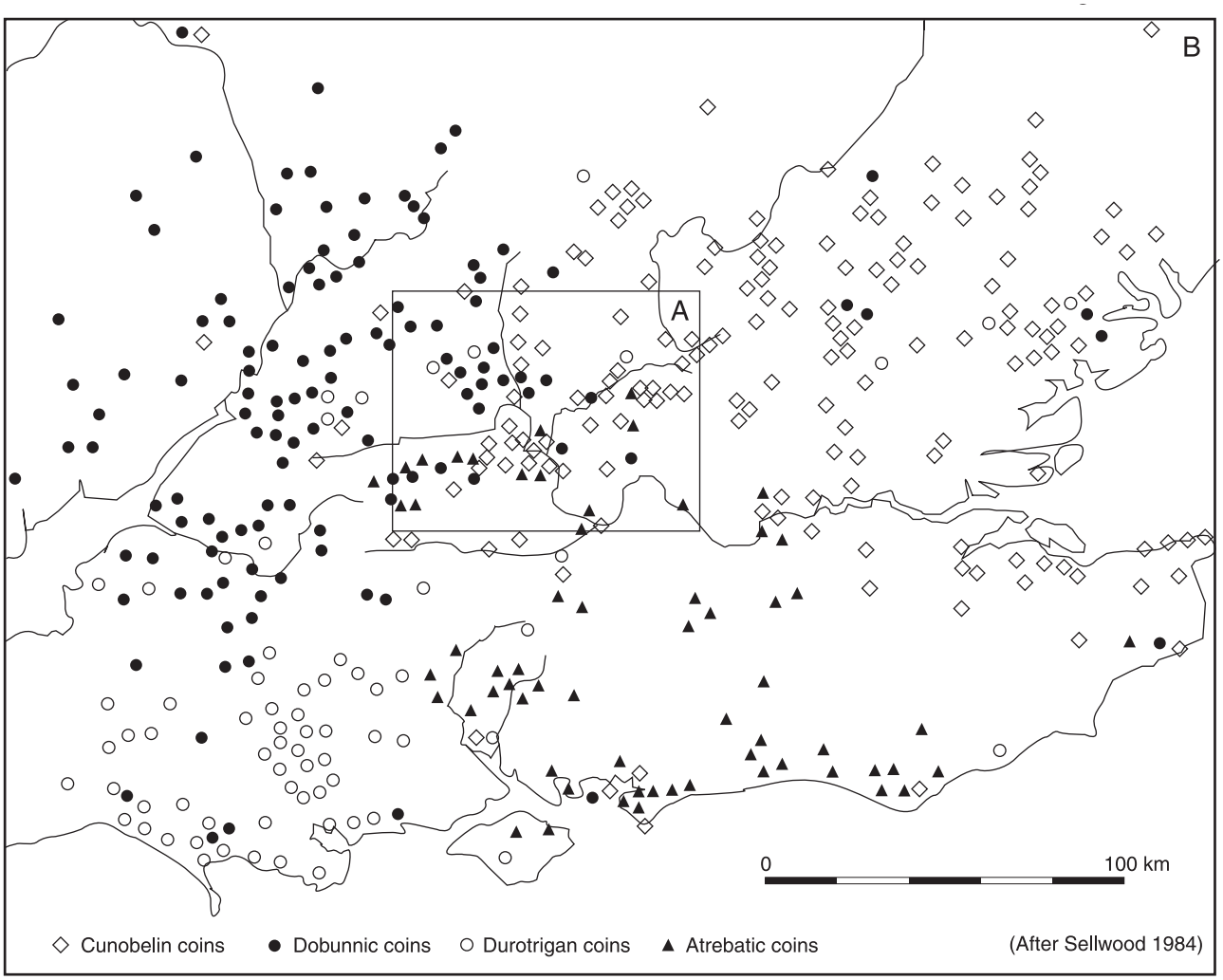
GRIM'S DITCH AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE HISTORIC LANDSCAPE

The late Iron Age landscape of the Upper Thames is one of change, and in the more eastern area around Abingdon and Dorchester it appears to have been more dramatic and rapid. From about 100 BC new settlements appear. There are major new settlements along the Thames, some of which – such as Abingdon and Dyke Hills – can be described as oppida, while other lesser sites are known, such as the Big Enclosure at Cassington (Fig. 7.3a; Case 1982b). The emergence of new settlement types and changes to the pre-existing settlement pattern reflect wider sociopolitical developments caused by the influence of the Roman Empire on much of south-east England. At this time the River Thames probably became both an important trade route to the south-east and a tribal boundary. The eastern part of the Upper Thames sat probably on the outer margin of this area. Sellwood has used the numismatic evidence to suggest boundaries between the tribal groups of the Dobunni, Atrebates and the Catuvellauni (1984). The interpretation of such data will always be problematic, but the complementary distribution of other lines of data do strengthen her hypothesis that these represent some form of ethnic groupings.

The coin distributions seem to respect the course of the River Thames, indicating that the river may well have functioned as a boundary (Fig. 7.3b). The symbolic and political importance of the Thames is well recognised (Bradley 1990), and this was certainly the case during the Iron Age (Fitzpatrick 1984). Fitzpatrick notes the recovery of ironwork and coins from the Thames; the explanation that at least some this is the product of votive deposition, perhaps linked to some form of public ceremony, seems plausible. The placing of new enclosed nucleated settlements of massive proportion – such as Dyke Hills and perhaps Abingdon – near the Thames support the river's role as an important economic link for the distribution of goods. Little is known of Dyke Hills, although a number of excavations have taken place at Abingdon. Dyke Hills is really only known as an earthwork and details of its interior have been revealed by aerial photography (Hingley and Miles 1984, fig. 4.9; Allen 1938, 170 and pl. XVIII).

It has been suggested that the settlement at Dyke Hills represents a tribal centre (Cunliffe 1991, 131 and fig. 7.2). Certainly the size and apparent complexity of the site indicate a massive nucleated settlement of 47 ha (Miles 1997, 16). The oppidum was placed so as to make use of a major bend in the River Thames and its confluence with the River Thame. Abingdon was similarly situated at a major bend in the river and at the confluence with the River Ock (ibid., fig. 3), while the much smaller Big Enclosure at Cassington was situated at the confluence with the River Evenlode (Case 1982b). Little is known of the site at Dyke Hills since only small-scale excavation has taken place, although the


A
North Oxfordshire
Grim's Ditch
Aves Ditch
R. Windrush
R. Evenlode
R. Cherwell
R. Thame
Cassington
Big Enclosure
Abingdon
oppidum ditch
R. Thames
R. Ock
Dyke Hills
South Oxfordshire
Grim's Ditch
0
20 km


B
A
0
100 km
Cunobelin coins
Dobunnic coins
Durotrigan coins
Atrebatic coins
(After Sellwood 1984)

cropmark evidence indicates that the interior contains quite dense settlement features. The smaller enclosure (only 8 ha) and possible oppidum at Abingdon have been revealed in a series of excavations undertaken by OAU (Allen 1997, 50 and figs 2–3). Like Dyke Hills it also seems to have contained dense areas of occupation. Study of the artefacts found at Abingdon indicates trade links with the south-east (Tim Allen pers. comm.).

The location of the south Oxfordshire Grim's Ditch earthwork also makes sense within this picture of political geography (see Fig. 7.3). The regional context and function of Grim's Ditch have been discussed in Chapter 5. As already mentioned, its purpose could have been to mark the edge of a territory or boundary between the Catuvellauni to the north and the Atrebates to the south. The suggestion that it was designed to cut off a significant loop of the River Thames between Wallingford and Henley-on-Thames (a distance of *c* 16 km; see Fig. 1.1) has yet to be established as its course can only be traced as far as Nettlebed, *c* 9 km east of Wallingford. Bradley was sceptical that it had continued as far as Henley-on-Thames (1968, 2–4), while the placing of the ditch to the south meant that it was designed to prevent movement from this direction. Its many similarities with Aves Ditch in north Oxfordshire have been discussed in Chapter 5; the two may have served the same basic function as tribal boundaries (see Sauer 1999, 268). Sauer has also suggested that the north Oxfordshire Grim's Ditch may have been created for this function and not, as previously thought, as a large oppidum (ibid., 269). He argues that in Oxfordshire the territory of the Catuvellauni was defined by Aves Ditch to the north and Grim's Ditch to the south. In between, the River Thames acted as a territorial marker as far as the Evenlode confluence. To the north of here the territory crossed the Cherwell and was defined by the north Oxfordshire Grim's Ditch. This particular interpretation would also fit with the general distribution of enclosed nucleated settlements. It would place both Cassington and Dyke Hills on the side of the Catuvellauni, while the 'oppidum' at Abingdon would occupy a similar position in an opposing territory perhaps controlled by the Dobunni.

Whatever the function of the south Oxfordshire Grim's Ditch, there is little evidence that it was ever slighted, but rather was abandoned and simply went out of use. The date of its construction is still ambiguous, although the results of the 1992 excavations indicate a date perhaps within the late Iron Age. Once created it is unclear on what scale the earthwork was maintained. There is evidence for recutting of at least sections of the ditch, and the recovery of early Roman pottery and the probable dog burial indicate subsequent activity into at least the late Roman period. If the accepted date for the earthwork construction is within the 1st century BC or sometime later, then initial use may have lasted no more than a few decades, although subsequent Roman activity indicates that some importance was still attached to the earthwork.

THE ROMAN LANDSCAPE

There is little evidence for Roman activity in the immediate area of Grim's Ditch or from the adjacent west side of the river. Roman pottery was found at all the excavated sites but only in relatively small quantities.

Of interest are the two animal bone deposits that hint at ritual activity and structured deposition. One is the probable dog burial of late Roman date from Grim's Ditch and the other is the late Iron Age/early Roman cattle skull from the silted-up Bronze Age waterhole at Bradford's Brook. Philpot has discussed the occurrence and relationship of animal burials with that of humans (1991). It is possible that the dog burial at Grim's Ditch was an isolated occurrence. Its position near the base of the ditch – which at this point was some 2.5 m in depth – rather than the bank could hint at some form of ritual offering and that the earthwork still held some significance as a boundary marker. The placing of the cattle skull in the much silted-up waterhole is intriguing. It seems unlikely that the feature retained any long-term meaning and the occurrence of place deposits in both the late Bronze Age and then the Roman period may be little more than coincidental. Votive deposition in wet places was a common practice in both periods but these acts are not necessarily linked by the same ritual traditions (see Webster 1997).

Most of the evidence from the area of the bypass relates to rural activity. The area to the immediate north of Grim's Ditch was being intensively cultivated during this period and it is possible that the area of the eyot was also ploughed at this time. There were also field ditches at Bradford's Brook associated with both early and late Roman pottery.

There is little evidence for substantial Roman settlement in the area around Wallingford. Numerous Roman finds have been found within the western part of the Saxon walled town and to the west of here (Airs *et al*. 1975, 155). The historian J K Hedges mentions some 1500 coins as coming either from Wallingford or from within a 6 mile (10 km) radius (Dewey and Dewey 1977). However, they note that the collection of coins was broken up upon the death of the owner, W R Davies. So far no structural evidence for Roman settlement has been found, and in general with the exception of the coins Roman evidence remains relatively slight. The

Figure 7.3 (opposite) a: Late Iron Age earthworks, b: Distribution of Cunobelin, Dobunnic, Durotrigan and Atrebatic coins (after Sellwood 1984)

fact that the Roman road that ran between Dorchester and Silchester passes to one side of Wallingford might be an indicator that any settlement was minor, while Wallingford itself could have been a river crossing.

Near Wallingford minor settlements are known from an area to the north, and near North Stoke is the site of a probable villa (Young 1986, map 9). In general, Roman settlement appears to be concentrated in the areas of Dorchester and Abingdon some 7–15 km further north (ibid., 60 and map 9).

THE POST-ROMAN EARTHWORK

The present excavations found little evidence for either Saxon or medieval activity. Finds of pottery and a bead from Bradford's Brook indicate some Saxon activity in this area with possible reuse of the Roman ditched enclosures (see Chapters 1 and 6). No Saxon material was recovered from Grim's Ditch during the 1992 excavations, although small quantities of medieval and post-medieval pottery were recovered along with the foundations of a possible bread oven or brewhouse. Little evidence for the village of Mongewell was revealed in the excavations other than scattered finds in layers mostly interpreted as ploughsoils. The extent of the village is unknown and its exact location is uncertain (see Chapter 5). However, the parish boundary lay between Mongewell to the south and Newnham Murren to the north and followed the line of Grim's Ditch.