Chapter 3
Settlement patterns on the Thames Gravels

THE LATE IRON AGE AND EARLY TO MID ROMAN PERIOD (Fig. 3.1)

In the Upper Thames Valley the beginning of the first millennium AD is roughly coincident with the beginning of the late Iron Age, as demonstrated by new ceramic traditions and settlement forms. The historical narrative of the events of the Roman conquest of AD 43, wherever they are to be placed geographically, has little meaning for the understanding of settlement development in the region. These events are only represented in the archaeological record at one or two very specific sites (see below). In archaeological terms many aspects of the late Iron Age and early Roman periods are indistinguishable. Similar settlement forms and pottery styles occur, and dating remains dependent largely upon the pottery, as it was for much of the later prehistoric period and continued to be for rural settlements on the gravels throughout much of the Roman period as well.

The end of the Iron Age

New traditions of pottery production, broadly the so-called 'Belgic' style (*sensu* Thompson 1982, 4-5), were probably first introduced into south-east Britain in the later 2nd century BC (eg Hill 2002, 146 with refs). The processes by which this 'style' was disseminated are likely to have been much more complex than the simple diffusion of new technological ideas, and were probably conditioned principally by social factors. The chronology of these changes could have varied quite widely even across the Thames Valley. Late Iron Age pottery at Cippenham, Slough, for example, is dated as early as 50 BC, if not a little earlier (Lyne 2003, 79). In the Upper Thames Valley, however, there is reason to believe that some if not the great majority of such pottery dates no earlier than a generation before the Roman conquest at most (eg Booth 2000, 40-41; 2007). (There is clearly room for differences of opinion on this matter, since the debate is based largely on ceramic evidence, with the danger of circular argument.) The main characteristics of the 'Belgic' style are the use of grog-tempering and wheel-throwing, the latter technique producing a wider range of distinctive vessel forms than had existed earlier. Neither of these characteristics completely dominates late Iron Age assemblages in the region, however, since both grog and other fabric tempering traditions were used for wheel-thrown and hand made vessels. Nor is it likely that the new traditions instantly and comprehensively replaced the existing ones, though it is very difficult to assess the extent to which 'middle Iron Age' pottery found alongside stylistically later material was in contemporary use or was residual.

The whole of the Upper Thames Valley seems to have been densely settled by the middle Iron Age (Hingley and Miles 1984; Allen 2000). It is less clear that this was the case for all of the Middle Thames, or indeed for all areas adjacent to the Upper Thames, such as the higher ground of north Oxfordshire, where settlement was more dispersed than in the valley itself (eg Hingley 1984, 79). There are substantial elements of continuity of settlement location in the region from middle to late Iron Age. However, this was not a universal pattern. Some middle Iron Age settlements were replaced by ones in different locations (with the assumption, which remains to be justified in detail, that these represented relocation of the same communities of people). There were also some developments in settlement form. In particular a trend towards the definition of settlements by enclosure within ditches, apparent from the middle Iron Age, seems to have become more marked. In the Upper Thames, at least, it is hard to identify late Iron Age settlement that does not employ ditched components in some way. The picture is more mixed further downstream; in Surrey, for example, enclosure ditches were absent from settlements at Hengrove and Ashford prison, but seemingly present at Thorpe Lea Nurseries, as they were at Heathrow in Middlesex (Framework Archaeology 2006). In most cases it is very unlikely that these features were defensive in purpose, since they are not generally sufficiently substantial. Rather, they suggest an increasing concern with definition of settlement areas or zones within these areas, perhaps in response to increasing pressure on the available agricultural land caused by steady population growth. This period has been particularly noted for the phenomenon of 'filling up of the landscape' on the gravels (Fulford 1992, 35); increased emphasis on settlement definition can be seen as a logical consequence of this process.

A few sites do, however, stand out by virtue of the size and scale of their enclosing earthworks, which were certainly of defensive proportions, even if their principal function was perhaps related to status display. In contrast to the hillforts of the early and middle Iron Age these sites occupy low-lying locations adjacent to the Thames. The three main examples in the upper part of the valley, at Cassington, Abingdon and Dorchester, all lie at confluences of the Thames with its tributaries, respectively the Evenlode, Ock and Thame. The

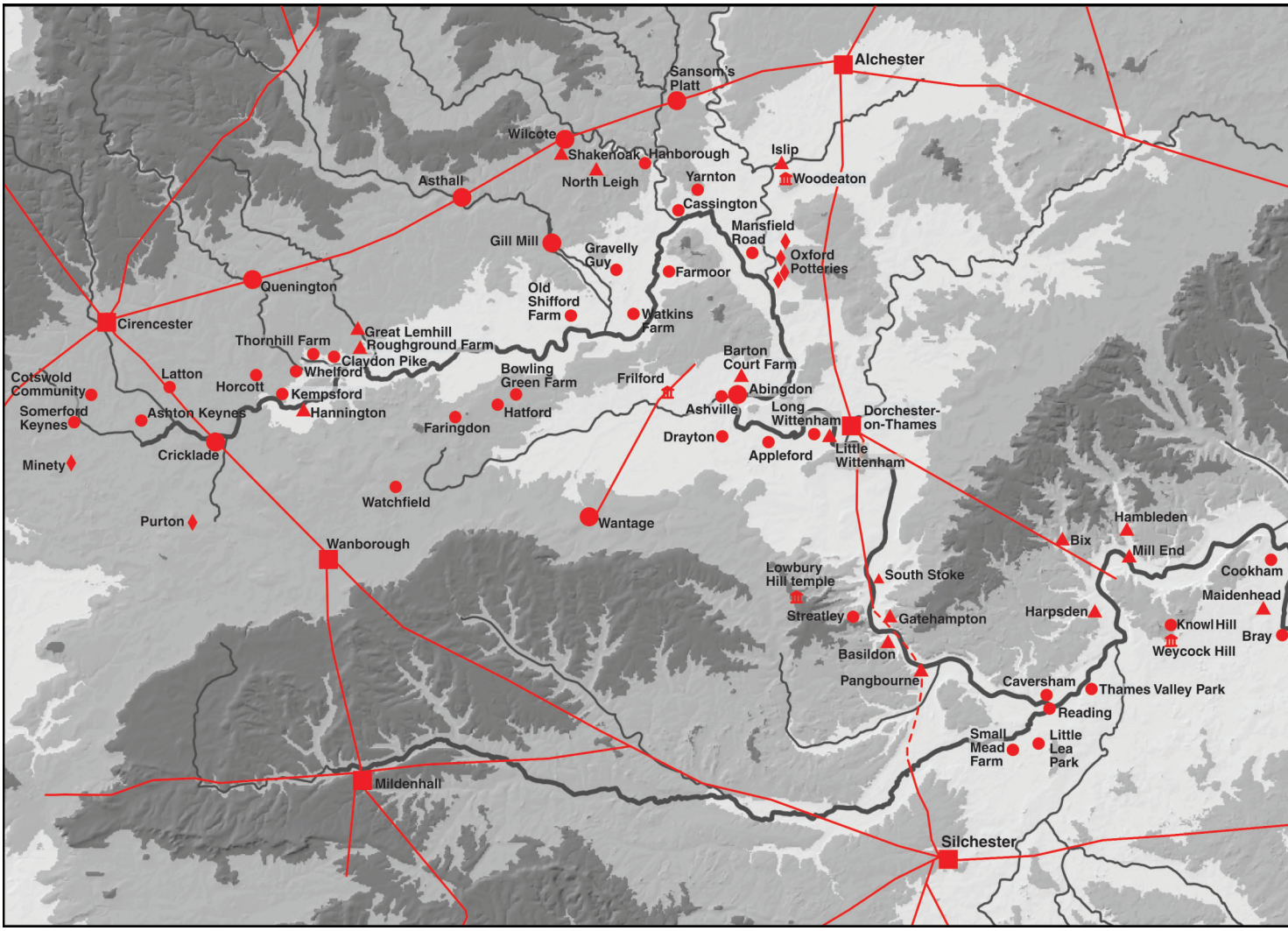
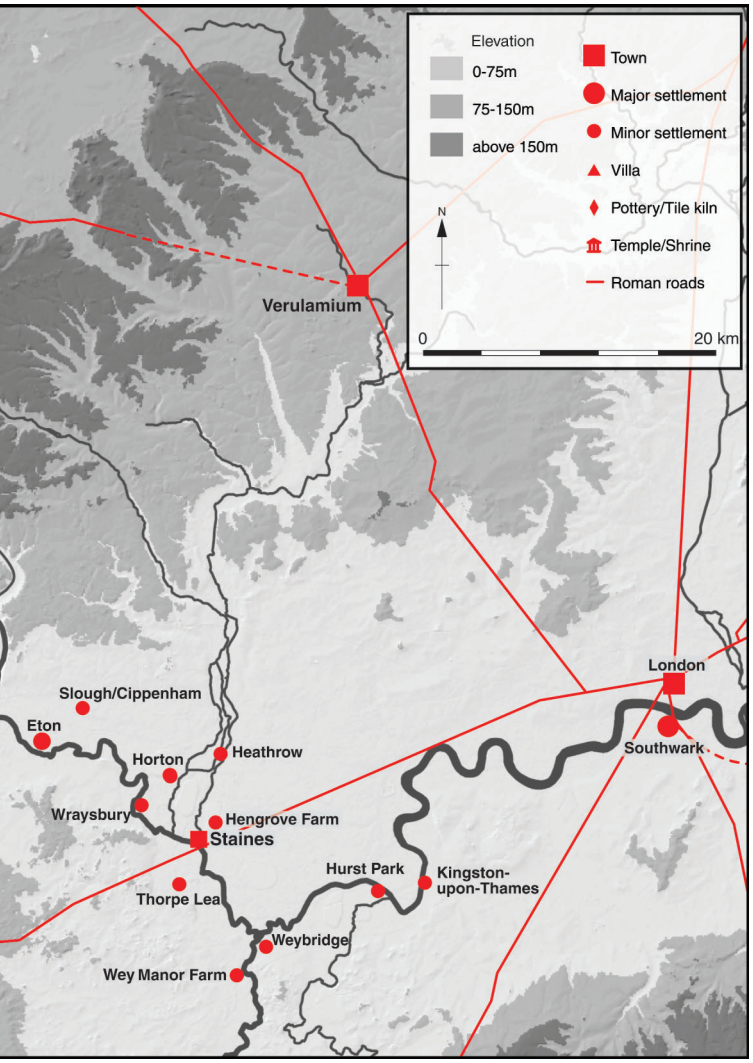


Fig. 3.1 Late Iron Age and Roman settlements and the Roman road network

form and extent of these sites vary, but essentially all have coherent single enclosures: with a single bank and ditch, possibly never completed, at Cassington (Case 1982); double banks (but only one ditch) at Dorchester; and two or three ditches with associated banks at Abingdon (Allen 1991; 1993; 1994). Only this last site has seen fairly extensive excavation, unfortunately still unpublished in detail. While it is clear that all can be assigned to the later Iron Age their exact dating remains to be established, particularly in the case of Dorchester, Dyke Hills. Here aerial photographs reveal a complex mass of internal features, but without excavation it cannot be certain that these are contemporary with the earthworks. At Abingdon, excavation showed that dense occupation was broadly of late Iron Age date but occupation of the site began in the later part of the middle Iron Age and it is possible that the defences also date to that period (Allen 2000, 25). The situation at Dorchester might be similar, particularly now that it is clear that there is little activity of the late Iron Age at nearby Wittenham Clumps, overlooking the river and Dyke Hills from the south (Lamdin-Whymark and Allen 2005).

The most recent discussion of these sites sees their development as stimulated by the growth of regional trade (Allen 2000, 22-26). Allen also includes in this discussion an analogous site at Salmonsbury, Gloucs, on the upper reaches of another Thames tributary, the Windrush. In scale and date range, at least, Salmonsbury seems comparable to the others. Their overall spatial concentration is notable and there are no other clearly analogous sites from the Middle Thames. It is possible to interpret this within the framework of the specific characteristics of the developing regional political situation. Whatever their initial impetus, the conclusion that these sites, 'enclosed oppida', as they have been called, represented local centres of power seems inescapable. These questions, along with evidence for other types of features and finds used in the articulation of power at this time, are discussed in Chapter 7. It is worth noting here, however, that larger late Iron Age



complexes defined by substantial linear earthworks and generally grouped under the heading of oppida, are not found immediately adjacent to the Thames. At the north end of the valley important examples are known at Bagendon (near Cirencester; Clifford 1961) and in north Oxfordshire (the so-called North Oxfordshire Grim's Ditch complex; Copeland 1988), both relating to tributaries of the Thames but not to the river itself. Further south and east such sites are completely absent from our area. There is, for example, no evidence for a postulated oppidum in the Thames Valley west of London (Bird 2004a, 29), although the site at Silchester (and perhaps to a lesser extent, those in the St Albans area; Bryant and Niblett 1997) were of importance to the development of settlement in the valley.

While there are hints that the 'enclosed oppida' may have been, amongst other things, substantial centres of population, this is not yet certain. Away from these sites rural settlement was very much based on smaller enclosures, occurring either singly, or in groups that could vary considerably in plan, size and complexity. Small subrectangular or sub-oval enclosures, often quite irregular in plan, were common. These could occur as isolated features, such as the classic example at Linch Hill Corner, Stanton Harcourt (Grimes 1943-4) and a more recent one from Hatford, on the Corallian Ridge just south of the Thames west of Oxford (Booth and Simmonds 2004). Elsewhere they occur as components, often closely linked, within larger settlements. Typical examples of the latter form are widespread in the Upper Thames at sites such as Thornhill Farm and Claydon Pike in Gloucestershire (see Fig. 3.4) and Yarnton in Oxfordshire.

At Old Shifford, Standlake (Hey 1995), an irregular enclosure of this type, with subsidiary features, was subsumed into a more rectilinear arrangement, and later into a more substantially ditched sub-rectangular enclosure (see Fig. 3.3, No. 3). Even here, however, the likely domestic focus of what had become a small enclosed farmyard was surrounded by a ditch of quite irregular layout. These developments are not precisely dated, but the first two phases, though perhaps not the last, occurred within the late Iron Age. A contemporary site at Barton Court Farm (see Fig. 6.10; Miles 1986, 4-8) was defined by a rather more rectilinear ditch enclosing a slightly larger area but still incorporating fairly irregular subdivisions. Comparable trapezoidal enclosures are also encountered in the Middle Thames, at sites such as Thames Valley Park, Reading (Barnes *et al.* 1997, 28-38) and Cippenham, Slough (Ford *et al.* 2003, 48-9) (Fig. 3.3, Nos 5-6). Present evidence might suggest that there was a wider variety of enclosure form in the Upper Thames than elsewhere, but that some enclosure types, at least, were represented quite consistently along the valley.

By the late Iron Age, if not a little earlier, there were a number of major developments that affected the internal character of settlements, certainly in the Upper Thames and perhaps elsewhere. The most obvious changes from the preceding period are the general disappearance of traces of roundhouses and of storage pits, both very characteristic features of the middle Iron Age of the region (eg Allen 2000, 21-22). Both these changes must have been of considerable cultural significance, but neither is easily explained. Roundhouses did continue to be present in the Surrey part of the Thames Valley, and there is limited evidence for the occurrence of circular buildings in the Roman period (eg Ashton Keynes, Wilts; see Fig. 3.12 below), so this building tradition did not entirely disappear. However, at the very least it is clear that the techniques of round building construction were transformed and they were arguably also partly supplanted by the introduction of other building forms. These changes are seen more clearly in the early Roman period, but some at least were probably of earlier origin. For whatever reason, the middle/late Iron Age saw a change in construction traditions, at least in the Upper Thames region, that resulted in the abandonment of structures that required vertical posts set in the ground, or the equally distinctive drainage gullies that often

accompanied such structures. In general it is most likely that a mass-wall construction technique, for example using cob, became prevalent (Allen *et al.* 1984; Henig and Booth 2000, 82). This assertion is still based more upon negative than positive evidence, although there is some support for it in certain aspects of later Roman buildings in the Upper Thames (Keevill and Booth 1997, 42-43). In addition, an early Roman circular building at Staines was identified by the surviving clay floors, and there was no evidence of the means by which the superstructure was supported. Alternatively, rectangular timber framed buildings of largely or entirely above ground construction would leave similarly little trace in the archaeological record. Possible evidence for such structures is discussed below.

The early to mid Roman period (*c* AD 43 – late 3rd Century)

Military activity, infrastructure and the pattern of major settlements

The immediate impact of the Roman conquest of AD 43 on the rural population was relatively slight. However, the wider region played a key part in events as it is now clear that a major military site was established as early as AD 44 (the dating is based on dendrochronology of gateposts and is therefore independent of traditional archaeological dating approaches) at Alchester, near Bicester (Sauer 2000; 2002). It is likely that this was the base of *legio* II Augusta (Sauer 2005a). Lying some 13 km north-east of the Thames at Oxford the site was not strictly in the Thames Valley, but activities based upon it must have exerted a strong influence across the region. The Alchester base was probably sited to provide protection at the northern margin of the territories soon to be (if not already) assigned to the client king Togidubnus. It would probably have served a similar function for the Dobunni to the west, some of whom are known to have surrendered to the Romans at an early stage of the conquest. To the east, it may have ensured that order was maintained amongst the Catuvellauni, who had been involved in the British resistance, though it is less clear that they were fundamentally anti-Roman (eg Haselgrove and Millett 1997, 293-4).

Within the valley itself and its more immediate environs Roman forts are known only at Cirencester and Dorchester and just possibly at Staines, although there have only been a few pieces of military equipment found at the latter site, which need not imply a permanent military presence. Indeed, if such a fort existed, it was certainly not located where the main Roman town developed and it is becoming increasingly difficult to see where in the immediate vicinity it may have lain and escaped discovery (Bird 2004a, 25). Even at the other two sites there is no suggestion of activity contemporary with the earliest phases at Alchester. At Cirencester, the best known of these sites, a garrison of auxiliary cavalry was established in the area of the later town centre probably about AD 50 and may have been maintained, with at least one change of unit, into the early 70s. The relationship to this fort of 'military style' ramparts located at two points further south in the town is uncertain (Wacher and McWhirr 1982). At Dorchester, the site of an important river crossing as well as the 'enclosed oppidum' of Dyke Hills, the existence of a fort has been questioned but the fragments of early timber buildings excavated by Frere (1984a, 95-98) seem as likely as not to be of military character. Here, however, the associated finds suggested a date range in the 60s to 80s for the excavated structures and a context in the aftermath of the rebellion of Boudica has therefore been suggested for the establishment of the fort (ibid., 105-106). A similar context is considered possible in the Staines area, where a poorly-dated ditch of military character was found at the former Petters Sports Field. The exact nature of early Roman military activity at London is also unclear and need not indicate the presence of a substantial garrison.

While the presence of an early conquest period fort at Dorchester still seems likely on the grounds of the already established importance of the site, the general disposition of military sites, their relative scarcity and the present evidence for their dating make it clear that the Thames Valley itself was not an important axis of advance for the army. The important sites were key crossing points, such as Dorchester and Staines, which were linked to the main framework of major roads (see Fig. 3.1). Even the latter did not mirror the line of the valley very closely. The earliest roads were intended to link places that were of particular significance at the time. One such south of the Thames Valley was Silchester, a major late Iron Age centre subsequently to become the tribal capital of the Atrebates whose territory probably included much of the middle part of the valley. Of the roads radiating from Silchester three are of importance to us. These headed north-west (Ermin Street) to Cirencester, crossing the Upper Thames at Cricklade; northwards to Alchester, crossing at Dorchester; and east and then slightly north towards London, with a crossing at Staines, the aptly-named *Pontibus*, 'at the bridges'. Bird (2004a, 39-40) has argued that the line of this road was later diverted slightly to head into London and that its original destination was the early provincial centre of Colchester. Such a suggestion would make sense in the context of the very earliest stages of the post-conquest period. Of these roads only the north-south one followed part of the line of the Thames Valley, roughly from Basildon (Berks) to Dorchester, but even this avoided the valley bottom.

North of the Thames Valley the principal east-west route (Akeman Street) linked Verulamium, north-east of London, first to Alchester and then, via the north Oxfordshire uplands, to Cirencester, en route passing right through the North Oxfordshire Grim's Ditch complex, a line which can

hardly have been coincidental. Alchester was thus a focal point in this arrangement of early roads, even though immediately south of Alchester the north-south road originally skirted Otmoor and did not assume its direct route across the marshes until the end of the 1st century (Cheetham 1995, 422-426; Chambers 1986a). Cirencester also developed as a major road junction with a complex history, most recently analysed by Hargreaves (1998; see also Reece 2003). The new evidence from Alchester makes it increasingly likely that aspects of the sequence of roads at Cirencester should be reconsidered, giving Akeman Street greater prominence at an early stage.

Detailed evidence for the physical character of the roads in the Thames Valley is generally lacking, but locally available materials would have been used wherever possible. The importance of gravel in road construction is demonstrated strikingly at Court Farm, Latton (Wilts), just north of the Thames near Cricklade. Here very extensive gravel quarries of 1st- to early 2nd-century date not only lay alongside Ermin Street but also respected the line of a contemporary trackway running at right-angles from the line of the Roman road to a settlement some 500 m distant (Mudd *et al.* 1999, 116-129). At Street Farm, Latton, at least six compact gravel layers were found at the south-west margin of Ermin Street itself, apparently representing a single phase of construction (ibid., 273). Elsewhere in the Cricklade area a bank of mixed clay, stone and gravel supported the surface (Wainwright 1958-60; Mudd *et al*. 1999, 271-272). At Dorchester the internal streets, where examined, were of gravel (eg Frere 1962, 121; 1984a, 113-4).

Most, if not all, of the major Roman settlements in the Thames Valley were located on the network formed by these main roads (Fig. 3.1). The valley was topped and tailed by the cities of Cirencester and London. The distribution of other cities around the valley reflects the development of tribal territories in the late Iron Age and subsequently, and their fossilisation under Roman administration in the later 1st century AD. The whole of our area ultimately fell within the territories of three tribal groupings or civitates: the Atrebates to the south, the Catuvellauni to the east and the Dobunni to the west, with their centres at Silchester, St Albans (Verulamium) and Cirencester respectively. The territories of all three of these tribes may have conjoined somewhere in the Abingdon/Dorchester area of the Upper Thames. Upstream from this point the Thames lay largely in Dobunnic territory, whereas downstream it may have served as a boundary between the Atrebates and the Catuvellauni. This is discussed further in Chapter 7 (below). Definition of such boundaries using archaeological evidence is always extremely risky, and ironically the use in this respect of a traditional tool, late Iron Age coinage, may produce a clearer picture at that time than any evidence we have for the Roman period, where the only fixed points of reference are usually the tribal names attached as suffixes to their capital towns.

Major towns

The origins of Cirencester are generally agreed to lie in the interaction of the Roman army with a focus of the Dobunnic elite at Bagendon, a little to the north of the later town. It is clear that this interaction was complex and did not result in the complete abandonment of all parts of the Bagendon complex, since the early development of the villa at The Ditches testifies to the survival of some high status occupation in the later 1st century AD. There is very little evidence for pre-Roman settlement at the site of Cirencester itself, so the presence of a pre-existing centre of population is not likely to have been a factor in the selection of the site. Its special significance may be hinted at by the Tar Barrows, possible late Iron Age/early Roman high status burial mounds located just to the north-east. These could have had an influence on the location of the fort which then in turn determined the site of the city.

The development of civilian Cirencester can be compared with that of London which, while strictly outside our area (and therefore not discussed in detail), inevitably exerted a strong influence on it, particularly in the most closely adjacent areas. There are differences in the trajectory of development, perhaps related to contrasts in status, but there are similarities too. As at Cirencester the site of London may have had no significant focus of pre-Roman settlement (Wait and Cotton 2000, 112-113; not contradicted by Holder and Jamison 2003), but activity commenced quite soon after AD 43, probably *c* AD 50 (eg Rowsome 1998, 35; cf Bird 2004b, 65), with the role of the military in its foundation (if any), unclear. Thereafter its development was very rapid so that it was already a substantial settlement by the time of the Boudican revolt of AD 60. In other words its development as a civil town was considerably in advance of that of Cirencester.

The timing of urban development across south-east Britain varied depending on a variety of military and political circumstances. Thus the extensive Boudican period settlements at London and Verulamium (and Silchester, though without a Boudican destruction horizon the precise chronology of its development is less easily determined) were contemporary with the fort at Cirencester. The formal establishment of the civitas Dobunnorum is generally assigned to a phase of widespread reversion to civilian administration dated to the Flavian period (AD 70-96). This followed a general movement of military units into Wales and northern England, and perhaps the dissolution of the client kingdom of Togidubnus, with a direct impact on the development of Silchester. As the fort at Cirencester was probably abandoned in the early AD 70s it is likely that this development followed shortly after. There is, however, no meaningful trace of civilian settlement contemporary with the fort which might, on the

basis of a popular model of urban development in Roman Britain, have formed a nucleus of population for the subsequent town. Formal constitution would have been followed by the construction of the appropriate public buildings, but the speed and scale at which this occurred would have depended largely on the availability of local resources of a variety of kinds. At Verulamium, for example, an inscription dates the dedication of a major building, probably the forum, to *c* AD 79 (Niblett 2001, 76 – the question of whether this is the 'Phase 1' forum or an earlier building remains unresolved), while at Silchester the first forum-basilica, of exactly the same period, was built entirely of timber, being replaced in stone in the Hadrianic period. The contemporary first forum at London was of stone. While Cirencester, Verulamium and Silchester were all tribal capitals, the legal status of London remains a hotly debated topic, to which the presence of the forum is a contributory factor (see papers in Bird *et al*. 1996; Hassall 2000). All these sites saw successive forum-basilica structures erected over a period of less than a century.

At Cirencester, while there were two major construction phases of the forum and basilica by the mid 2nd century, they seem to have been essentially on similar lines, rather than representing a major expansion of the facility. By contrast, at London, the huge second forum-basilica of the early 2nd century occupied nearly five times as much space as its predecessor and nearly half as much again as the Cirencester example. The date of the first phase at Cirencester rests on very slight evidence, but this suggests that construction might not have started before the last decade or so of the 1st century rather than *c* AD 75. In any case, the construction of such a major monument would have taken several years even on an optimistic timetable. The second construction phase, involving extensive if not total rebuilding, probably took place in the later part of the first half of the 2nd century and was probably largely complete by *c* AD 150, though a slightly later date is possible. By this time Cirencester was equipped with a range of public buildings typical of the major towns – though not all of these (such as the main public baths) are well-known. In addition to these and the better understood forum-basilica complex the public structures included a probable market hall, a possible temple enclosure complex just south of the basilica, a theatre in the northern part of the town and an amphitheatre outside it to the west. Monumental stone gates, of which the north-east (Verulamium gate) and south-west (Bath gate) are known, are poorly dated. The former, at least, might initially have been a freestanding structure to mark the formal entrances into the town, only later associated with earthwork ramparts (dated to about the middle of the 2nd century) and later still with the complete walled circuit. Alternatively, the stone gates may have been later replacements for timber structures originally associated with the earthwork circuit.

The complete defensive circuit of Cirencester enclosed 96 ha, making it the second largest urban enclosure in Roman Britain (London being the largest). It appears, however, that not all of this area was occupied. It is not clear whether this was a result of excessive urban ambition, deliberate planning to include areas for pasture and cultivation (Wacher 1995, 78-81) or the relative immutability of boundaries once these were defined by the appropriate religious rites (eg Guest 2002, 79-82). The date of the earthwork defences at Cirencester is notably about a generation earlier than that of most comparable urban defences in Britain, and might possibly relate to a change in the legal status of the town in the mid 2nd century (Frere 1984b, 68), though there is no direct evidence to support this suggestion.

'Small towns' (Fig. 3.2)

Lesser nucleated sites or 'small towns' formed the principal foci of the settlement pattern for most of the Thames Valley although, as already indicated, few such sites were located in the valley itself. The two principal exceptions were Dorchester and Staines, both situated at particularly important crossing points. Dorchester was the only one of the probable and possible 'small towns' to have been defended in the Roman period, but excavation has generally been on a small scale and thus relatively little is known of the town and, in particular, of its early development (see insert, Fig. 3.16). Apart from the potential military phase structures (see above) the first identified buildings are dated to the mid 2nd century AD (for summaries with references see VCH Oxon I, 288-296; Rowley 1975 and 1985; Burnham and Wacher 1990, 117-122; Henig and Booth 2000, 58-62. The most significant excavation reports for sites within the town are Hogg and Stevens 1937; Frere 1962 and 1984a; Bradley 1978; Rowley and Brown 1981). 'Public' aspects are hinted at by a possible market area and the well known altar referring to the erection of an 'altar with screens', presumably part of a shrine (RIB 235). There is evidence for a number of later Roman structures, and the town is best known for its cemetery evidence and late/post-Roman associations (see below).

Dorchester was sited at the confluence of the Thames and its tributary the Thame, both of which were crossed by the main north-south road before it resumed its northward route along the gravel spur upon which Dorchester is placed. At Staines the situation at the confluence of the Thames and the Colne was broadly similar, though the pattern of minor channels was probably more complex than at Dorchester and the Roman road used a series of gravel islands to cross the valley (though the exact site of the Thames crossing remains uncertain) (Fig. 3.2). The name *Pontibus* of course indicates multiple bridges. The nucleus of the settlement at Staines lay on one of these islands beneath the modern town centre, with the High Street following (at least

approximately) the line of the Roman road (for the most recent summary see Bird 2004a, 55-60; cf Burnham and Wacher 1990, 306-310; Jones and Poulton forthcoming). The relatively limited width of this island may explain why there is no evidence for significant side streets at Staines, in contrast to Dorchester. There is more evidence at Staines for the early development of the town, which seems to have got underway *c* AD 65-70. Several late 1st-century timber buildings are known, albeit partially. In the course of the 2nd century stone foundations were introduced in some buildings but there is some evidence of the presence of tessellated or opus signinum floors and hypocausts from the earlier part of that century onwards (Bird 2004a, 56). This is in contrast to the situation at Dorchester where evidence for tessellated pavements and painted wall plaster seems to relate mainly if not entirely to later Roman buildings. (These are known mostly from antiquarian references, but with one fragmentary example excavated by Frere (1962, 109-111).)

The 2nd century seems to mark the peak of identified activity at Staines. It is clear that in the 3rd century flooding was a major problem for the settlement and this may have been a major contributory factor in the apparent decline in the level of activity, and the change in its character, in the archaeological record. While there may have been less intensive activity, and perhaps relocation of part of the settlement, there was continued occupation to the end of the Roman period, though this is indicated more clearly in some cases by coin evidence than by site sequences. In broad terms the trajectory of development of Staines seems to reflect that of London (including Southwark) downstream, with evidence of intensive activity in the later 1st and 2nd centuries (the London sequence having started slightly earlier) but marked differences in the character (and perhaps density) of settlement in the late Roman period. In this respect the contrast between Staines and Dorchester (albeit that the excavated sample from the latter, in particular, is relatively small) is quite striking, the evidence from Dorchester having a heavy late Roman emphasis, both in terms of structures and the artefactual record. The concentration of very late Roman activity at Dorchester may be exceptional, but the general picture it suggests of thriving 3rd- and 4th-century nucleated settlement does seem to be fairly representative of the Upper Thames Valley and the wider region. It is also evident at places such as Alchester and Cirencester. This is not to say that there were not changes in the character of occupation in these towns in the later Roman period, but these seem to be less drastic than those that affected Staines and London. The reasons for the apparent regional contrast, perhaps part of a wider pattern characterised by Reece (1995) as an east-west divide in lowland Roman Britain, remain to be established, however.

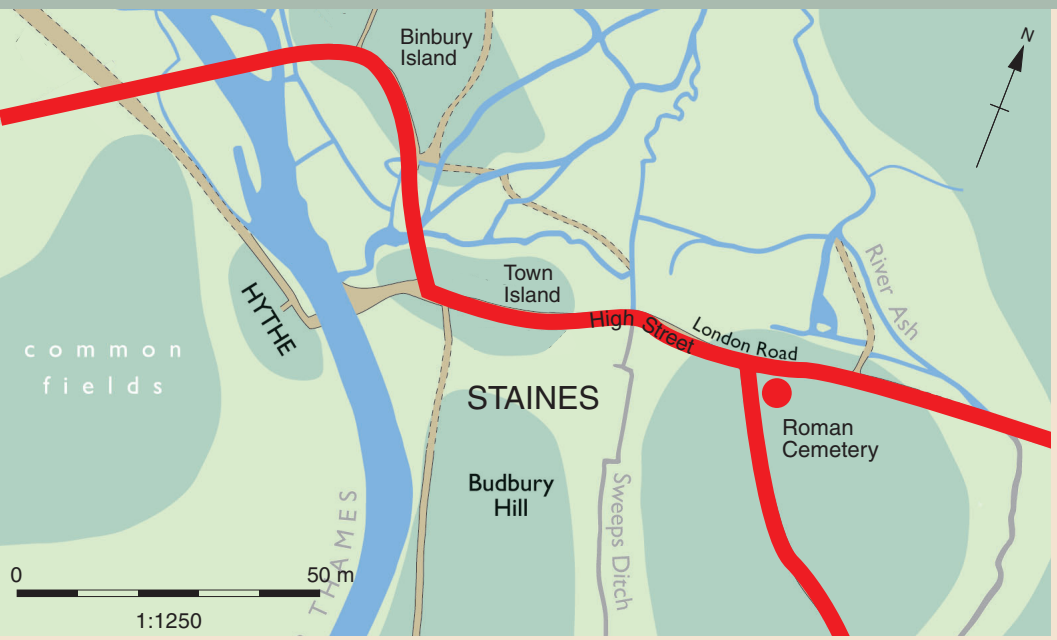
There is a little evidence for several other potential Roman 'small towns' in the Thames Valley, but none is as well known as Dorchester and Staines. At the top of the valley Cricklade, at the Ermin Street crossing of the Thames, is possibly one such site (Smith 1987, 246-248; Radford 1972; Haslam 2003). Not only was the river crossing location (also adjacent to the confluence with the Churn) suitable but it also lay half way between Cirencester and the more substantial small town of Wanborough to the south-east. Whether the Roman material scattered in the area of the Saxon burh and medieval town represents nucleated rather than dispersed rural settlement is still debatable, but the finds do include a fragment of a tombstone (RIB 100) which, albeit reused in a later structure, is not consistent with the typical rural settlements of the area (but could possibly have been associated with a villa). If Haslam's interpretation of some ten closely spaced rectilinear ?building platforms is correct this suggests a nucleated settlement, but the unusual character of these features and the absence of stratified Roman material associated with them are problematic, even though the great majority of finds from this part of the town are of Roman date.

Further down the Thames there is similar uncertainty about the status of Abingdon in the middle and later Roman period. While there is no doubt that this was a very important centre at the time of the conquest it is far from clear that it went on to develop the character of a nucleated Romano-British settlement. There seems to have been a major change in the nature and intensity of occupation, perhaps in the early 2nd century (see below). The known late Roman features, including a building and a small group of high status inhumation burials, would be equally consistent with the identification of the site as a villa-like estate centre as with a 'small town'. The temple complex and settlement at Frilford/Marcham lay only 6 km to the west up the valley of the Ock, another minor tributary of the Thames, at the point where this was crossed by the second principal north-south road across the Thames Valley (see Chapter 5, Fig. 5.5). The presence of this site, and the absence of any evidence to suggest that Abingdon lay on a road (or a river crossing) of any great significance (though there was almost certainly a minor road down the Ock valley from Frilford), supports the view that Abingdon did not develop into a 'small town'. Formerly the location of a late Iron Age 'enclosed oppidum' (see above), it may have retained some importance perhaps as an elite residence. Cassington, the third of the three Upper Thames 'enclosed oppida', seems to have been a minor nucleated settlement, with quite a large late Roman cemetery (Harding 1972, plate 27; Booth 2001, 16, 18).

The nature of Frilford itself is, however, also still debated. It was characterised by Burnham and Wacher (1990, 178-183) as a 'specialised religious site' within their categorisation of Romano-British

Fig. 3.2 (overleaf) Feature: The Roman town of Staines

THE ROMAN TOWN OF STAINES SURREY



Above: *Roman settlement on the Thames gravel 'islands' at Staines*

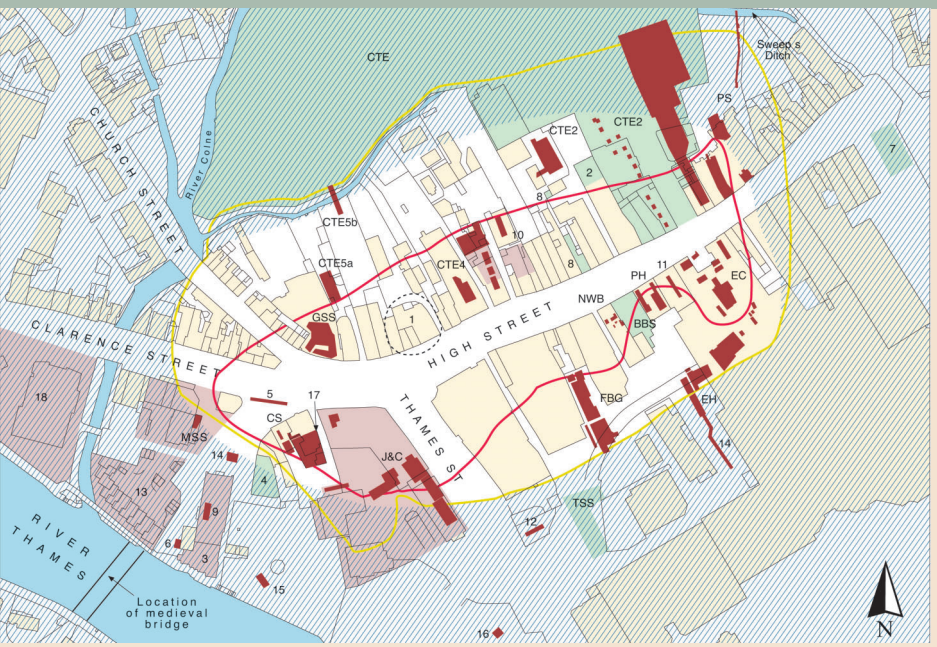
The likelihood that Staines was a Roman town has been known since at least the 18th century, but almost all our knowledge of it is derived from a series of excavations that have been carried out since the 1970s (Crouch 1976, Crouch & Shanks 1984, Jones & Poulton forthcoming, and McKinley 2004). These have shown that Roman settlement at Staines began soon after the Roman conquest and had assumed an urban character by the 70s AD. Staines is named in the Antonine itinerary as Pontibus 'at the bridges', reflecting its position adjacent to a major crossing point of the Thames for the London to Silchester road, and there can be no doubt that the settlement grew and flourished as a 'posting station'.

The settlement occupied a gravel island raised a little above the floodplain (Town Island), but occasionally itself subject to flooding. The road ran across the centre of the island, and settlement was arranged to either side of it, with frontage and backlands zones, but little other sign of formal planning. For a few generations during the 2nd century the town flourished as it was never to again during the Roman period, or until the peak of growth in the early 14th century. Buildings seem generally to have been of timber, with prepared clay floors. More sophisticated

Above right: *Surgical instruments. Left to right, spoon-probe, scoop-probe, double-ended spatula/probe and a scalpel handle*
Below: *Old Police Station, London Road, Staines: finds associated with the 2nd century cremation 136: a pair of enamelled disc brooches, two glass phials, a glass dish, and a central Gaulish Samian Dr35 dish.*

Facing page
Above right: *Staines may have been a centre for medical treatment. Finds include a collyrium stamp used to mark eye remedies. The photographs have been reversed to show the retrograde lettering (as it would have appeared in use), and it probably belonged to a circuit doctor. SENI, the first element at each end, is an abbreviated name, NARD is short for Nardum, which was an aromatic resin, LENE refers to a soothing or mild remedy*

THE ROMAN TOWN OF STAINES SURREY



features, including painted wall plaster, tessellated, mosaic, or opus signinum flooring, and window glass were only adopted after c AD 120/130, at several locations within the town.

The thriving life of the town faltered towards the end of the 2nd century and went into a period of decline that lasted for, perhaps, all of the 3rd. This event probably had more to do with a general recession across the south-east of the country than with local factors, but may have been exacerbated in Staines by renewed episodes of flooding.

On the Binbury Island there was at least one building and a scatter of other evidence, but only limited areas have been examined. East of the main town, where the present London Road follows the Roman highway, a clearer picture has emerged from a series of excavations in recent years. This indicates non-intensive use for inhumation and cremation, superseded in the later 3rd century when a series of plot boundaries were dug to form a suburb of the town at a period when the Town Island seems to be in decline. This may suggest its partial desertion in favour of the London Road area, perhaps in response to the problems caused by flooding.

Above: *Location of all archaeological discoveries and interventions on the Town Island*

Below: *Ritual deposits from a well in Clarence Street (552/1000). The pots are (left to right): an Oxfordshire mortarium; a narrow-necked Alice Holt/Farnham jar; a samian DR 31R bowl; and part of a Cologne type Hunt cup beaker. Also present are parts of a flue tile and jaws and skulls belonging to some of the 16 dogs found in the well*

The evidence for late Roman settlement in Staines is difficult to assess. Many sites show evidence of a 'dark earth', sealing earlier features and structures from the later 3rd century onwards. There is comparatively sparse evidence for buildings but a rather greater spread and variety of other features. Most sites have produced a few miscellaneous features, suggesting widespread but not intensive activity. Perhaps the most important feature of the Staines High Street area in the late Roman period and long after is the constant presence of the highway itself, since it seems unlikely that it was ever abandoned.

small towns. The most recent work (Lock *et al.* 2002; 2003) has tended to emphasise the significance of the ritual complex at the expense of the settlement component, casting doubt on whether the site should be seen in any sense as a 'town' at all, in contrast to the picture produced by Hingley (1985) based principally on fieldwalking evidence. The combination of river crossing, probable temple/shrine and nucleated settlement also occurs in the region at Gill Mill, Ducklington (Oxon), (Henig and Booth 2000, 72-73). Evidence for the focal area of this extensive site is still lacking, however, so here (as at Frilford) the question of whether or not the shrine can be regarded as the primary force conditioning the location and success of the settlement remains open (cf Booth 1998, 616). In contrast to Frilford, however, the settlement at Gill Mill had no Iron Age predecessor and activity probably did not commence until the early 2nd century. As a local centre Gill Mill occupies an intermediate position between the Thames Valley itself and the nucleated settlements along Akeman Street, which were too far distant to be of great significance for the rural communities of the valley.

Much further downstream, there was a crossing point of the Thames at Henley (Margary 1973, 166; Malpas 1987, 29), providing *a priori* a likely location for nucleated settlement. Present evidence for such settlement from the modern town centre is, however, confined to a single, poorly-dated structure (Moloney 1997, 113-5, 129-130). No further nucleated settlement sites have been suggested between Henley and Staines. This is consistent with the view that such sites in the valley only occurred at the location of important road crossings, leaving the possibility that the crossing of Margary's road 163 (from Verulamium perhaps to Silchester) at Cookham might therefore be a further possible settlement site. There is no other evidence for this suggestion, however and detailed understanding of the course of the road at this point is poor.

Administrative functions for the region were carried out in the tribal capitals, of which only Cirencester was broadly within the Thames Valley; as already indicated the status of London remains debatable. The lesser nucleated settlements are conventionally seen mainly as economic centres, an aspect emphasised by Hingley's analysis of their spacing (1989, 112-114); Gill Mill has been added to the Upper Thames region distribution map since his analysis was undertaken. While market functions and provision of craft based services would have been very important there were other facilities as well. Most, if not all, of these sites will have contained temples or shrines. This aspect was of major significance in the case of Frilford where the temple complex was associated with a theatre/amphitheatre (recent work has not offered any convincing alternative to this interpretation), but elsewhere direct evidence is relatively slight. At Dorchester, however, the well-known altar (RIB 235) refers to the construction of an 'altar with screens', presumably within a shrine complex (see Chapter 7, Fig. 7.8). The dedicator, M Varius Secundus, was a *beneficiarius consularis*, an official responsible to the provincial governor, probably with duties relating to control of military supplies and transport. The continued presence of small numbers of military personnel long after the end of the initial phase of occupation in the 1st century is an increasingly-recognised phenomenon in Romano-British towns, both large and small (cf Bishop 1991; Booth *et al.* 2001, 442-3; James 2001). The Dorchester altar is the best evidence of this from the region, together with finds of metalwork of 2nd- to 3rd-century date from Alchester. Small amounts of military material from the Staines area seem all to be of 1st-century date (Bird 2004a, 24-25).

Rural settlement (Figs 3.3-3.8)

The vast majority of the population along the Thames Valley and elsewhere in the Roman period would have lived within small rural settlements (Fig. 3.3), although these exhibit considerable variety in terms of spatial organisation and agricultural regimes. The numbers of rural Roman settlements to have been excavated in parts of the Thames Valley has increased substantially over the past 30 years, mainly through increased gravel extraction on the river terraces, although in many cases the nature, chronology and relationships of these sites are still very poorly understood.

Late Iron Age-early Roman continuity

Most of the settlements throughout all of the Thames Valley with sufficient chronological information appear to have continued from the later Iron Age into the early Roman period without any real disruption. There is no conclusive evidence for occupation at any site coming to an end as a direct consequence of the Roman conquest, though this scenario is just possible at a couple of sites in the immediate vicinity of the fortress at Alchester. Even where sites did cease to be occupied broadly in the mid 1st century the dating evidence is insufficiently precise to allow this to be correlated closely with the events of AD 43 and later.

Continuity of settlement is clearly seen in the Upper Thames at sites such as Claydon Pike (Miles *et al.* 2007) and Thornhill Farm (Jennings *et al.* 2004), located just 1 km from each other on the 1st gravel terrace (Fig. 3.4). Both sites were radically reorganised during the early 1st century AD and appear to have operated similar pastoral economies, in effect becoming cattle ranches. Activity continued largely uninterrupted until the early 2nd century AD, although the number and types of objects recovered from Claydon Pike (eg amphorae, mortaria, vessel glass etc) were at variance with those from Thornhill Farm, and may hint at the radical developments that were to follow (see below). Elsewhere in the Upper Thames, other sites such as Somerford Keynes Neigh Bridge (Miles *et al.* 2007), Horcott

(Pine and Preston 2004) and Gravelly Guy (Lambrick and Allen 2004), which were all either newly established or transformed in the later Iron Age, appear to continue substantially unaltered into the early Roman period (Fig. 3.3, Nos 1, 2 and 4). This suggests that any incoming Roman influence in terms of land ownership and organisation would have been comparatively minimal, at least initially.

Further down the Thames Valley the evidence is more patchy, although the indications are still that most late Iron Age settlements continued into the early Roman period with little or no disruption. A settlement at Small Mead Farm, just south of Reading, probably originated at the end of the late Iron Age. It comprised circular enclosures and curvilinear ditches and showed no indication of any major changes until the 2nd century AD (Moore and Jennings 1992, 123; see below). At Little Lea Park a little further to the east, another settlement originating in the middle/late Iron Age also continued in use until at least the early Roman period (Steve Lawrence pers com; Fig. 3.5). This site appears to have been remarkably well preserved, with a series of roundhouses and re-cut enclosures, within which were layers of animal trample indicating that they were used for stock control. There was also evidence for small-scale iron and bronze working on site, and a considerable quantity of pottery, including a pre-conquest amphora (Dressel 1) that hints at wider contacts and possibly a higher status for the inhabitants of the settlement. This area of the lower Kennet Valley near to the Thames confluence appears to have been quite densely settled in the late Iron Age and Roman period, with much evidence for continuity of settlement and land use (Lobb and Rose 1996, 86). A nearby site at Thames Valley Park, Reading, is important for evidence of a possible posthole structure of this date (Butterworth and Hawkes 1997, 85-88; see Fig. 3.12). Further Iron Age-Roman continuity has been demonstrated along the Thames Valley at Cippenham and Eton Rowing Lake in Buckinghamshire (Ford 1998; Allen and Welsh 1998) and at a number of sites near to the Roman town at Staines such as Hengrove and Ashford Prison (Bird 2004b, 68-9; see below). The settlement at Perryoaks, Heathrow, in Middlesex, which had been radically altered during the late Iron Age, continued without any further major developments until well into the 3rd century AD (Framework Archaeology 2006, 202).

Ultimately, however, the imposition of a framework of major roads and major settlements, must have had an effect on rural settlement patterns, with its earliest impact probably on settlements in the vicinity of Cirencester and most particularly London. In the Upper Thames Valley there is no indication that the density and distribution of villas, for example, was clearly influenced by the location of the lesser nucleated sites. The principal focus of villa settlement here was on the higher ground north of the valley, with a notable concentration in the North Oxfordshire Grims Ditch area. While villas do occur alongside other settlement types in the valley, particularly in the Lechlade area and downstream from Abingdon, they do not appear to have dominated the settlement pattern, and unless their estates were extremely large, which is not suggested by the size and scale of the known sites, landholding was clearly not only in the hands of a small number of villa owners.

An early 2nd-century hiatus?

Across a large region there would be many reasons for individual settlements to be abandoned and new ones established within the course of the Roman period, and relative proximity to (small) towns may have been one of these (cf Taylor 2001, 58-59). However, in the Upper Thames, at least, there is one major episode of disruption of rural settlement patterns, in the early 2nd century, that arguably stands outside this pattern.

The particular characteristics of this hiatus in settlement sequences, first noted as a pattern by Lambrick (1992, 83-84), are its relatively close dating (reliant almost entirely upon ceramic data) and its extent. The number of sites in the region occupied through the late Iron Age and early Roman periods which cease to have significant activity after the early 2nd century is very substantial (Henig and Booth 2000, 106-108; Miles *et al.* 2007). Some sites in the Alchester area seem to have been affected, but most of the evidence comes from rural settlements on the gravels, generally, but not always, of low status. Sites with evidence of major change at this time extend from Neigh Bridge, Somerford Keynes (Glos), south of Cirencester (Fig. 3.6), at least as far down-river as Dorchester. Examples further south and east are hard to find but may include a site at Streatley, dating from the late Iron Age to the later 1st century AD (Allen *et al.* 1991-93).

The nature of these changes is far from being constant, however. Sites such as Thornhill Farm (Jennings *et al.* 2004), Old Shifford Farm (Hey 1995, 170) and Gravelly Guy (Lambrick and Allen 2004) were abandoned. At Somerford Keynes and Claydon Pike, previous late Iron Age/early Roman settlements characterised by intensively recut circular enclosures were radically reorganised at this time with systems of rectangular field boundaries, trackways and substantial aisled buildings (Miles *et al*. 2007; see Fig. 3.12). The reorganisation at Claydon Pike was concurrent with the establishment of hay meadows along the surrounding terraces (Fig. 3.4). At Horcott south of Fairford there were also developments during this period, with transformations from stock enclosures to fields, paddocks and enclosures which were peripheral to the main settlement (Pine and Preston 2004, 92; Fig. 3.7).

In the Abingdon/Dorchester area the early Roman settlements at Barton Court Farm and Appleford Sidings, both characterised as 'proto-villas' on the basis that they contained rectilinear timber buildings within, in the case of Appleford, a markedly rectangular double ditched enclosure,

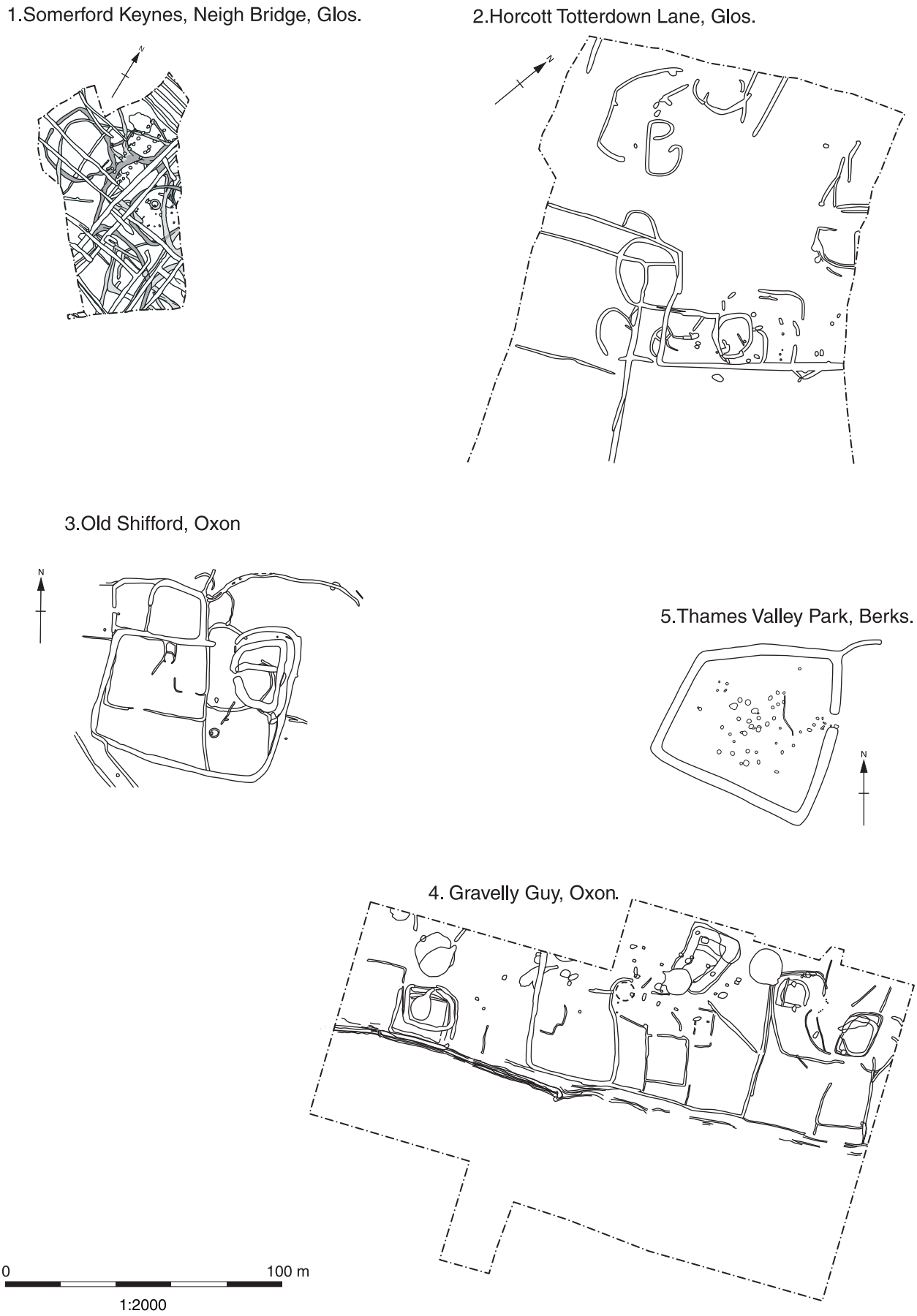
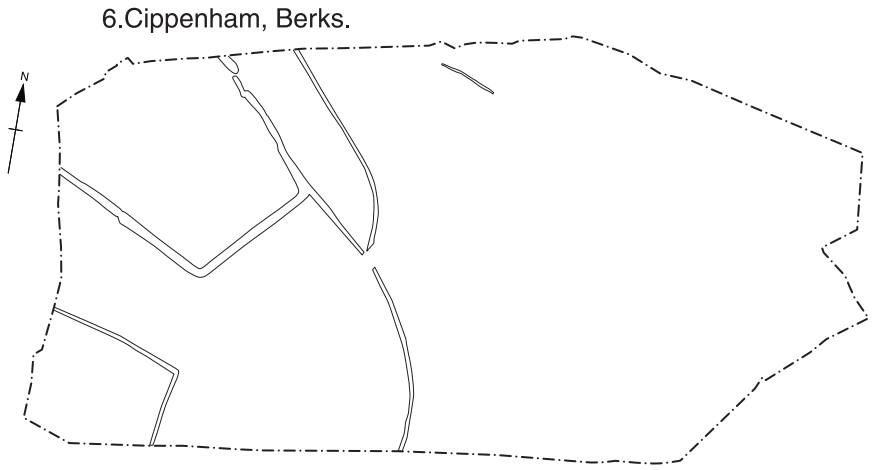
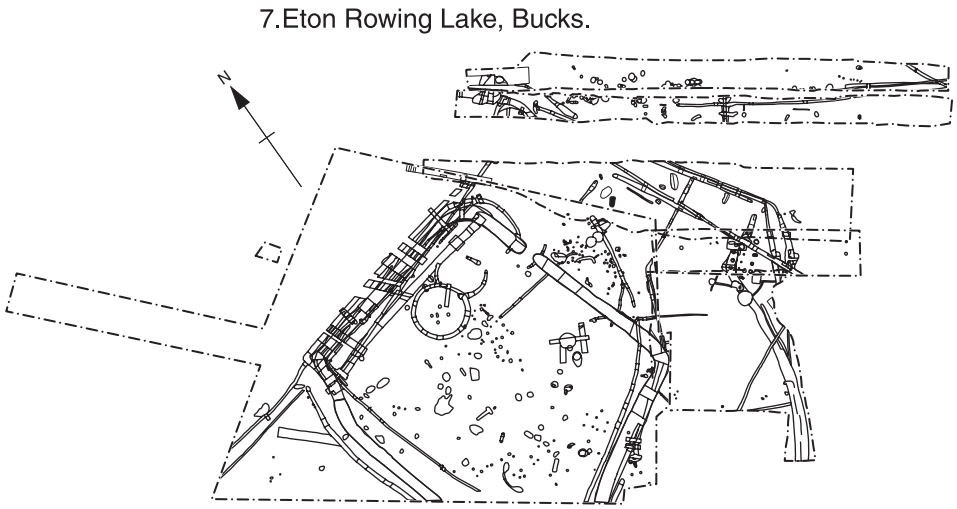


Fig. 3.3 Plans from a selection of excavated late Iron Age and early Roman sites in the study area





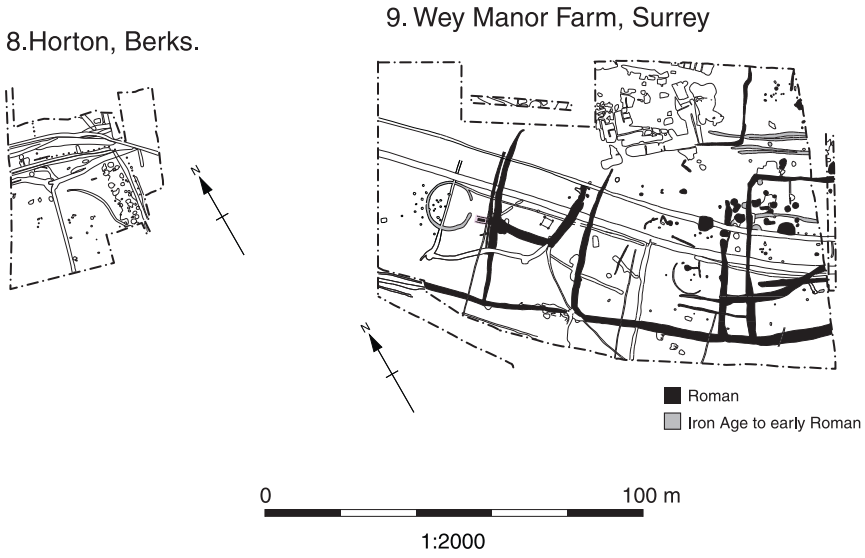
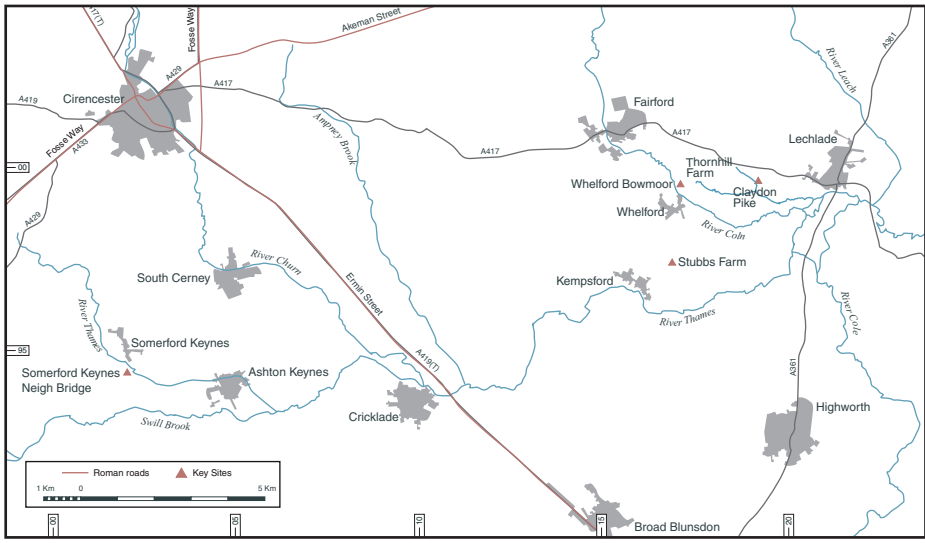


Fig. 3.4 (overleaf) Feature: Thornhill Farm and Claydon Pike

THORNHILL FARM AND CLAYDON PIKE

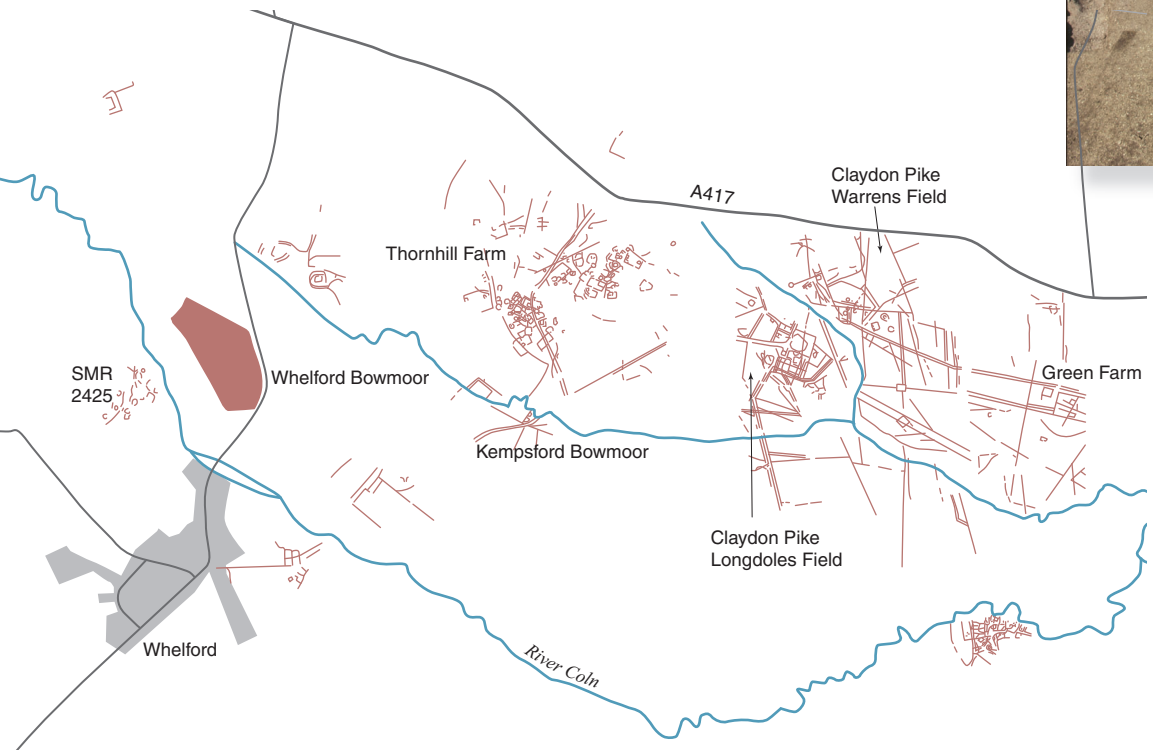
Excavations at Thornhill Farm and Claydon Pike took place in the late 1970s and 1980s as part of a landscape based research programme that was originally laid down in response to increased gravel extraction in the region. This area of the first gravel terrace within the Upper Thames Valley was chosen for archaeological investigation because of the presence of major complexes of cropmarks which revealed whole settlements, field systems and trackways, thought to be of Iron Age and Roman date.



Thornhill Farm

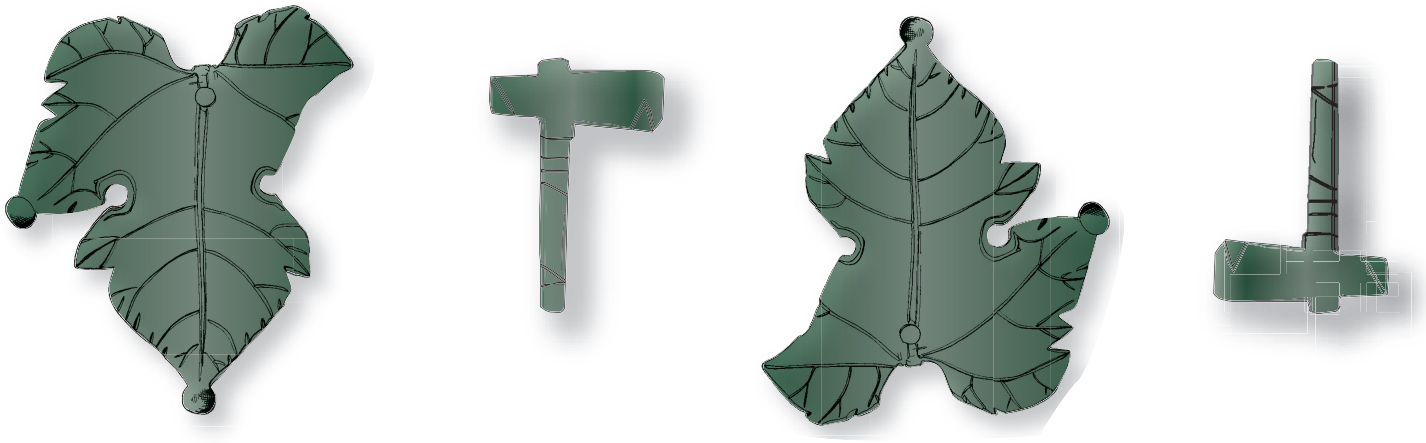
The earliest occupation at Thornhill Farm comprised a number of middle Iron Age roundhouses and associated enclosures. Activity seems to have been continuous through to the later Iron Age when there was a reorganisation resulting in a dense palimpsest of paddocks and larger enclosures, which continued to develop and be remodelled into the early Roman period. These appear to have been designed for the effective control and management of livestock, most probably cattle, and in this respect was very similar to the nearby site at Claydon Pike.

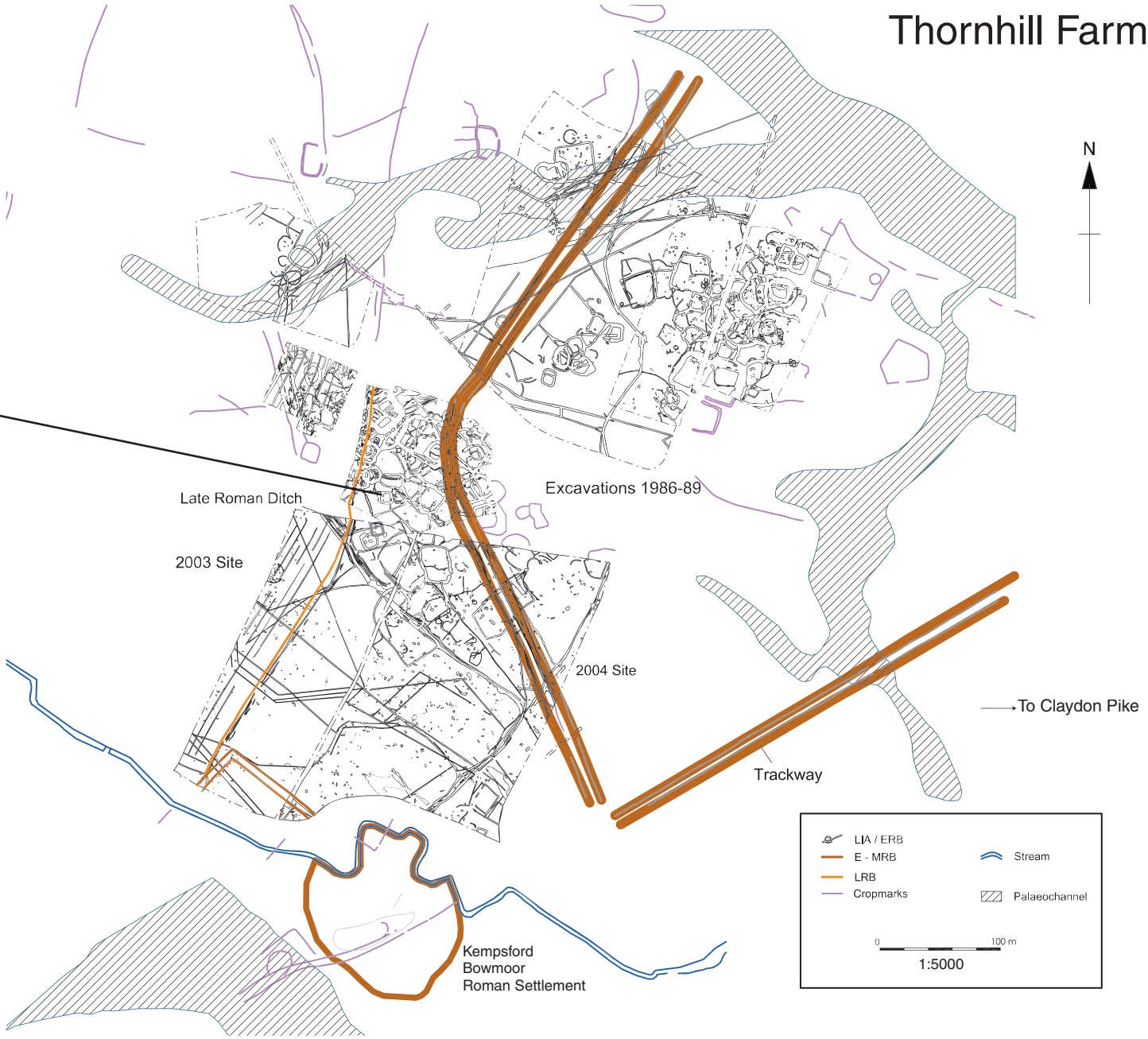
The site changed radically during the early 2nd century AD when the tightly knit group of paddocks and enclosures was replaced by a series of newly constructed trackways, and all occupation appears to cease. It is likely that at this time the land around Thornhill Farm became incorporated into a large estate probably run from the new aisled building complex at Claydon Pike.



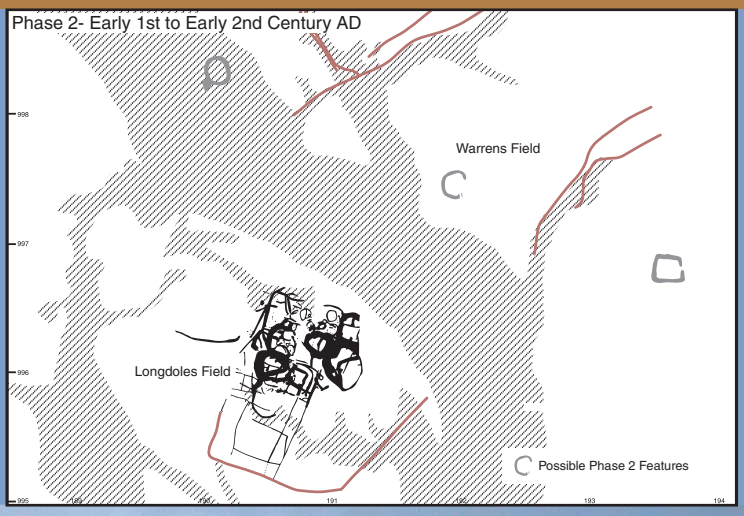
Top: *Location plan showing the location of the sites in relation to other Roman settlements and roads*
Left: *Location plan showing Claydon Pike and Thornhill Farm with archaeological cropmarks shown in brown (Whelford Bowmoor-a non cropmark site)*
Facing page
Right: *Plan of all excavations at Thornhill Farm with the Roman trackway shown in the photo* ***above***
Top : *Drawings of a copper alloy vineleaf (from an oil lamp) and a miniature axe, both from Claydon Pike*

THORNHILL FARM AND CLAYDON PIKE





CLAYDON PIKE



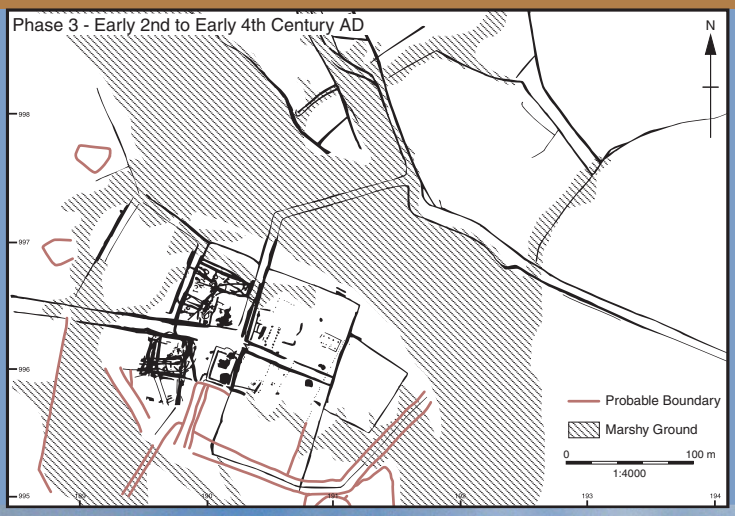
Claydon Pike

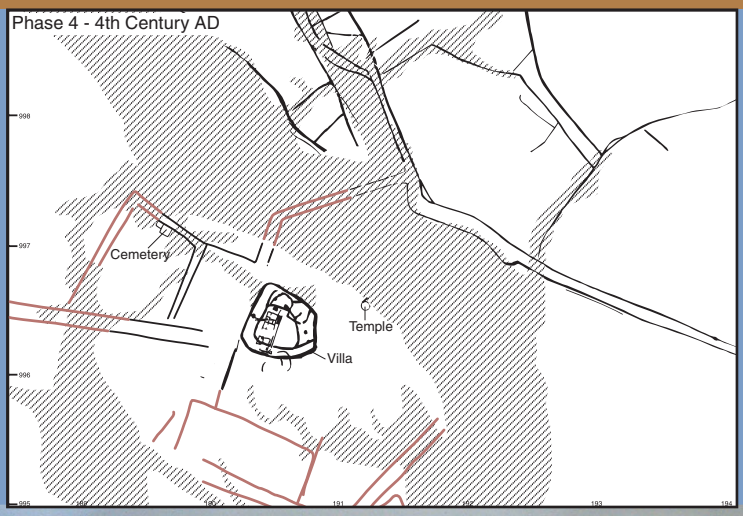
Two areas of settlement were revealed at Claydon Pike, with dates ranging from the middle Iron Age to the medieval period. To the north in Warrens Field, a middle Iron Age settlement appears to have shifted across three gravel islands over a period of time. During the early 1st century AD, a new farmstead was established in Longdoles Field, approximately 120 m to the south-west. It appears to have operated a largely subsistence economy associated with cattle ranching.

Artist's reconstruction of the latest phase of the Roman villa at Claydon Pike (by Peter Lorimer)
Above left : *Drawings of a copper alloy vineleaf (from an oil lamp) and a miniature axe, both from Claydon Pike*
Above and opposite page: *Plans of the late Iron Age and Roman phases at Claydon Pike*

The early 2nd century saw dramatic changes, including the imposition of large rectangular enclosures, a substantial aisled barn and an aisled house. The economic basis of the site incorporated the management of hay-meadows, probably on a commercial basis to sustain the needs of growing local population centres such as Cirencester.

CLAYDON PIKE





At some point during the early 4th century AD, there appears to have been deliberate and widespread clearing of the site, undoubtedly connected with the establishment of a modest masonry footed villa. A small inhumation cemetery lay 100 m to the west of the villa and a well built masonry footed shrine was constructed to the east. The surrounding gravel terrace and floodplain had largely reverted to grassland used for grazing animals. The final abandonment of the villa at Claydon Pike is unclear, but there is evidence to indicate activity of some kind until the start of the 5th century.

A small group of inhumation burials cut through the villa building, three of which were radiocarbon dated to the middle Saxon period.

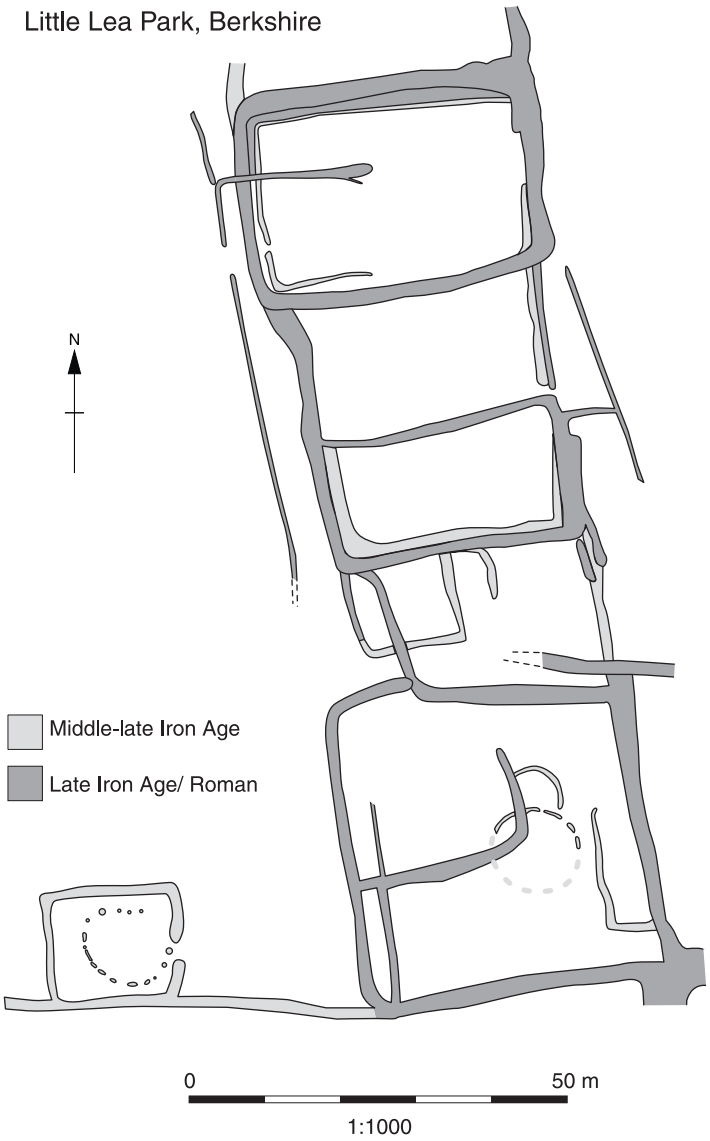


Fig. 3.5 Little Lea Park, Berks: the Iron Age and Roman settlement

also came to an end at this time (Fig. 3.8). The latter site was never reoccupied, while Barton Court Farm was abandoned until the later 3rd century. At Abingdon itself there seems to have been a major change of character in the occupation of the site, if not a break in the sequence, although the character and status of occupation in the 2nd century are still poorly understood (Henig and Booth 2000, 72).

Evidence for settlement dislocation is also encountered in certain sites on the Corallian Ridge and within the Vale of the White Horse just south of the Upper Thames Valley. Recent excavations at Watchfield (Birbeck 2001), Faringdon Coxwell Road (Weaver and Ford 2004) and Hatford (Bourn 2000) have all revealed settlements which appear to have ceased, or at least shifted location, by the first half of the 2nd century.

The exact chronology and interpretation of this settlement hiatus remain uncertain. Clearly not all sites were affected by this development. The existing larger nucleated settlements and the north Oxfordshire villas, for example, were not, nor were some rural settlements within the valley, such as Yarnton (see below), but where detailed stratigraphic and ceramic sequences have been examined the pattern is striking. While pottery dating evidence cannot allow very close definition, there is sufficient concordance of dates, with outside limits of definition of the hiatus mostly in the range *c* AD 120-150 but often falling within the middle part of that range, to suggest that what was happening, if not the result of a single 'event', was at least part of a short-term process and not simply a manifestation of one or more long-term trends. This would therefore appear to rule out gradual developments in environmental conditions, for example, as factors influencing settlement relocation. It should also rule out an alternative view that relates the early Roman

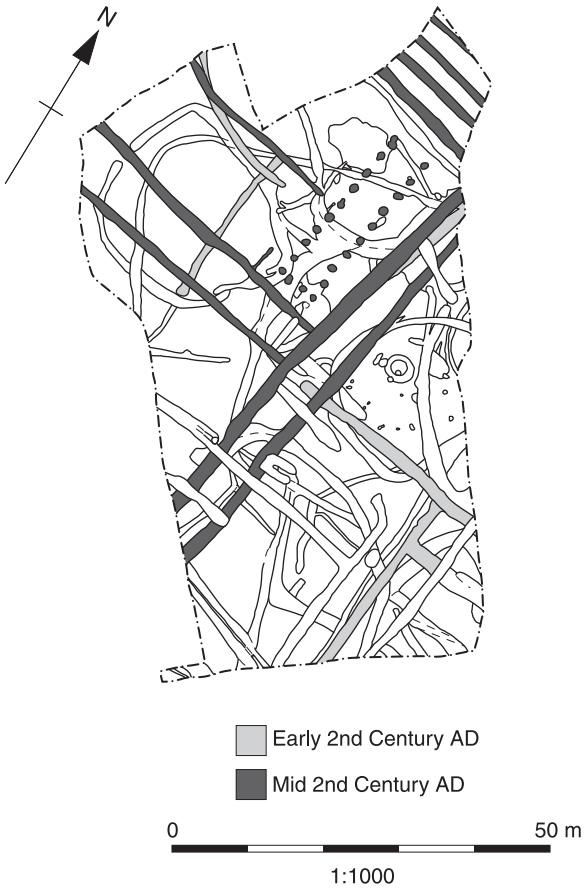


Fig. 3.6 Somerford Keynes, Neigh Bridge, Glos: the early to mid 2nd-century settlement

Fig. 3.7 Roman settlement at Horcott, Glos.

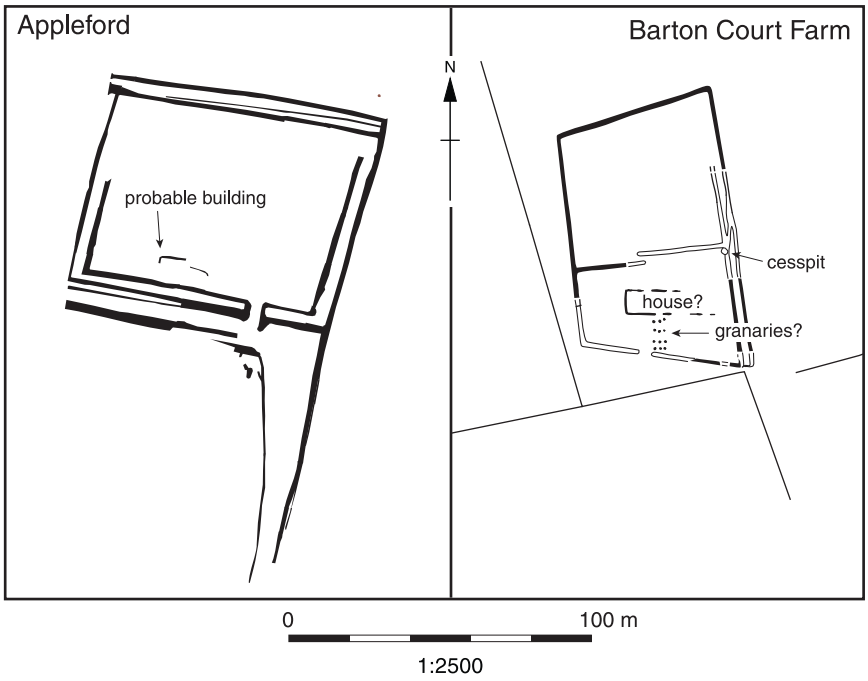


Fig. 3.8 Early Roman settlements: Appleford and Barton Court Farm, Oxon.

'failure' of sites to the limited scope of their agricultural production (Fulford 1992, 33-35), particularly since one of the key 'progressive' sites was Barton Court Farm, where settlement ended in the early 2nd century exactly in line with the widely-observed pattern. Some more immediate politically or socially driven factors involving quite widespread reallocation of landholdings may be the explanation. Interpretations of this type are not fashionable in contemporary archaeological thinking and, more problematically, are not usually demonstrable on the basis of archaeological evidence. Much more detailed analysis of site sequences and finds assemblages is required to test this and alternative interpretative models of what is a striking and interesting phenomenon.

Later reoccupation of the abandoned sites is seen in a number of cases, but relocation of settlement in the general area, although not immediately adjacent, may have been more common. Some of the sites with a general 2nd- to 4th-century date range were presumably the successors of sites abandoned in the early 2nd century. In some cases there was a considerable lapse of time before the re-establishment of nearby settlement, as for example at Old Shifford. Appleford may be another example of this, though there the known later Roman site nearest to the early 'proto-villa' lay some 700 m distant, so the relationship between the two cannot be determined. The fields and a trackway closer to the early site seem to have continued in use, however. The abandonment of some (or even, in local terms, many) settlements was not therefore accompanied by the widespread disuse of associated agricultural land.

The development of rural settlement, 2nd–3rd century AD

Overall the evidence from the Upper Thames region suggests major changes in the system of land ownership during the first half of the 2nd century AD (see above). It is likely that there was a reorganisation of the way in which land was controlled, possibly linked with the need for increasing economic productivity during this period as the Roman-British economy developed. The lower gravel terraces and floodplain, which would probably have been marginal land in terms of economic value, were increasingly exploited, with much greater evidence for field systems and trackways linking different settlements. Although pastoral activity would still have dominated the largely open landscape of the floodplain terrace and floodplain, other economic activities such as haymaking and horticulture also start to appear at this time (see Chapters 2 and 6).

Corresponding to the evidence for site abandonment in the early 2nd century are indications of the establishment of new settlements, at sites such as Whelford Bowmoor (Miles *et al.* 2007) and Farmoor (Lambrick and Robinson 1979). At around the same time, a substantial nucleated settlement was established at Bowling Green Farm at Stanford in the Vale (Mudd 1993).

The evidence for site abandonment in the region at this time is striking, but is not universal. A number of sites show evidence for continuity of use throughout this period. At Ashville Trading Estate, near Abingdon, the early Roman boundary system and related, though barely known, settlement developed directly out of the late Iron Age plan and evolved with no clear evidence of significant

disruption through into the 4th century AD (Parrington 1978, 36 gives 3rd century, but the pottery clearly runs later). Two further little known and poorly dated Romano-British sites lay to the east of this site at Goose Acre Farm, Thrupp Farm (Miles 1986, 39, fig. 25) and Ford's Field (Wallis 1981) just north of the Thames. The settlement at Yarnton near Oxford, which had been occupied throughout the Iron Age, is the best example of an extensively-excavated rural settlement in the Upper Thames to show continuity of settlement layout and character through the early Roman period. This site was in use at least until the later 2nd or early 3rd century AD, at which point there is some evidence to suggest a possible decline, or at least settlement shift (Hey (ed.) forthcoming). Similarly at nearby Cassington there is evidence for continuity, albeit on a much reduced scale, from the later Iron Age into the later 2nd and 3rd centuries AD and beyond (Case 1982). At both Yarnton and Cassington, 1st- to 2nd-century AD pottery kilns were discovered (see Chapter 6) and it is perhaps in part this small scale industrial function that accounted for their relative impunity to the widespread settlement dislocation within this region.

Villas in the Upper Thames Valley (Figs 3.9-3.11)

The evidence so far has been for essentially non-villa settlements in the Upper Thames, notwithstanding the 'proto-villas' at Barton Court Farm and Appleford. Villas within this part of the Thames Valley are comparatively rare, especially when compared with their proliferation within the Cotswolds further north and to a lesser extent the Vale of the White Horse and Berkshire Downs to the south. Nevertheless at Roughground Farm near Lechlade, a quite extensive villa complex was constructed on the 2nd gravel terrace in the early 2nd century AD (Fig. 3.9), with another possible example at Great Lemhill 2 km further north. Just south of the Thames at Hannington Wick, a villa building was excavated in the 19th century, which appears to have been occupied from the 2nd to 4th centuries AD (Goddard 1890). There are also a number of other masonry footed buildings in this part of the Upper Thames, for example at Churchberry Manor, Horcott (OAU 1989b), Cotswold Community (OA 2004a) and Kempsford (Multi-Agg Quarry; Booth and Stansbie forthcoming), where the evidence seems insufficient for them to be assigned 'villa status' (Fig. 3.10). There is, for example, no definite sign of hypocausts or tessellated pavements, although these sites are certainly suggestive of higher status farmsteads.

Further east there is a notable lack of villas until the area south of Oxford is reached. The appearance of a group of possible villa sites between Abingdon and the walled town at Dorchester may have been related to the emergence of the latter, and the social and economic influence that this would have exerted. Unfortunately, aside from Barton Court Farm, where a modest villa was constructed in the later 3rd century AD (see below and Fig. 6.10), there is very little information available on these sites, so that their chronology, and therefore their place in the overall landscape development, remains largely unknown. The most substantial of these sites was probably at Dropshort (*BAJ* 60, 118). To the south, there was a villa west of Didcot (RPS 2001), notable for the nearby discovery of a substantial hoard of 2nd-century gold coins (Bland and Orna-Ornstein 1997; see Fig. 6.1) and, closer to the river, the enigmatic site of Penn Copse which, like Dropshort, was in Sutton Courtenay parish (Benson and Miles 1974a, 63). A possible modest villa was discovered in 1947 at Little Wittenham, just south-west of Dorchester-upon-Thames, comprising a small masonry building within a substantial rectangular ditched enclosure (Rhodes 1948), although a religious interpretation for this structure cannot be entirely ruled out. Recent investigations into the wider landscape of this area have suggested that a late Iron Age/early Roman focus lay *c* 200 m further west (Lamdin-Whymark and Allen 2005), and it is possible that the masonry building and enclosure are part of the regional 2nd-century reorganisation in settlement pattern. Late Roman activity was largely confined to the nearby hillfort suggesting further dislocation at this time (see below). Just to the north of this area, in a meander of the river Thames, were extensive cropmarks indicating at least four areas of settlement linked by trackways (Baker 2002; Fig. 3.11). Excavations in one of these areas, at Northfield Farm, revealed a group of enclosures that were apparently abandoned during the 2nd century, although other enclosures on a slightly higher terrace to the south continued much later (ibid., 25). There was also clearly at least one building of some pretension in the area, as roof tiles and painted plaster were found at Northfield Farm.

The Middle Thames (Figs 3.12-3.15)

As with the later Iron Age and early Roman period, the evidence for mid Roman rural settlement further down the Thames Valley in Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and to a lesser extent Surrey, is comparatively slight. Many sites, especially the villas, were investigated in the 19th century and minimal information is available about them. Nevertheless, it is clear that in certain areas at least settlement appears to have been quite intense, while in other apparent 'blank' areas, it is often uncertain whether this is genuinely reflective of the situation, or just an indication of the relative lack of archaeological investigation (see Chapter 1).

In the region where the Thames cuts through the Berkshire Downs at the Goring Gap there is evidence for a number of Roman settlements. At Gatehampton Farm, Goring, parts of the Roman villa complex have been excavated on the north

Fig. 3.9 (overleaf) Feature: Roughground Farm, Glos: the villa estate

ROUGHGROUND FARM LECHLADE, GLOS.

The Roman villa at Roughground Farm

The villa was situated on the second gravel terrace just north of Lechlade, Gloucestershire, between the rivers Leach and Thames and 2km east of Claydon Pike. Excavations of the villa and parts of the surrounding landscape took place between 1957 and 1965 in advance of gravel extraction and again in 1981-2 and 1990 prior to a housing development (Allen *et al.* 1993).

Aside from some Neolithic and early Iron Age features, the main occupation sequence at the site began in the 1st century AD, with a number of native farming units covering an area of at least 80 by 140 m lying to the north-west of two droveways. A mixed farming regime seems to have been adopted which was typical of many rural Upper Thames settlements at this time. There was no indication of high status occupation at the site other than a dump of pottery which included fineware imports, dated to the early 2nd century AD. Of the same date as the pottery was a rare cremation burial within a square-ditched enclosure, lying c 300 m east of the main area of settlement.

ROUGHGROUND FARM LECHLADE, GLOS.

Phase plan of the late 2nd/early 3rd century villa

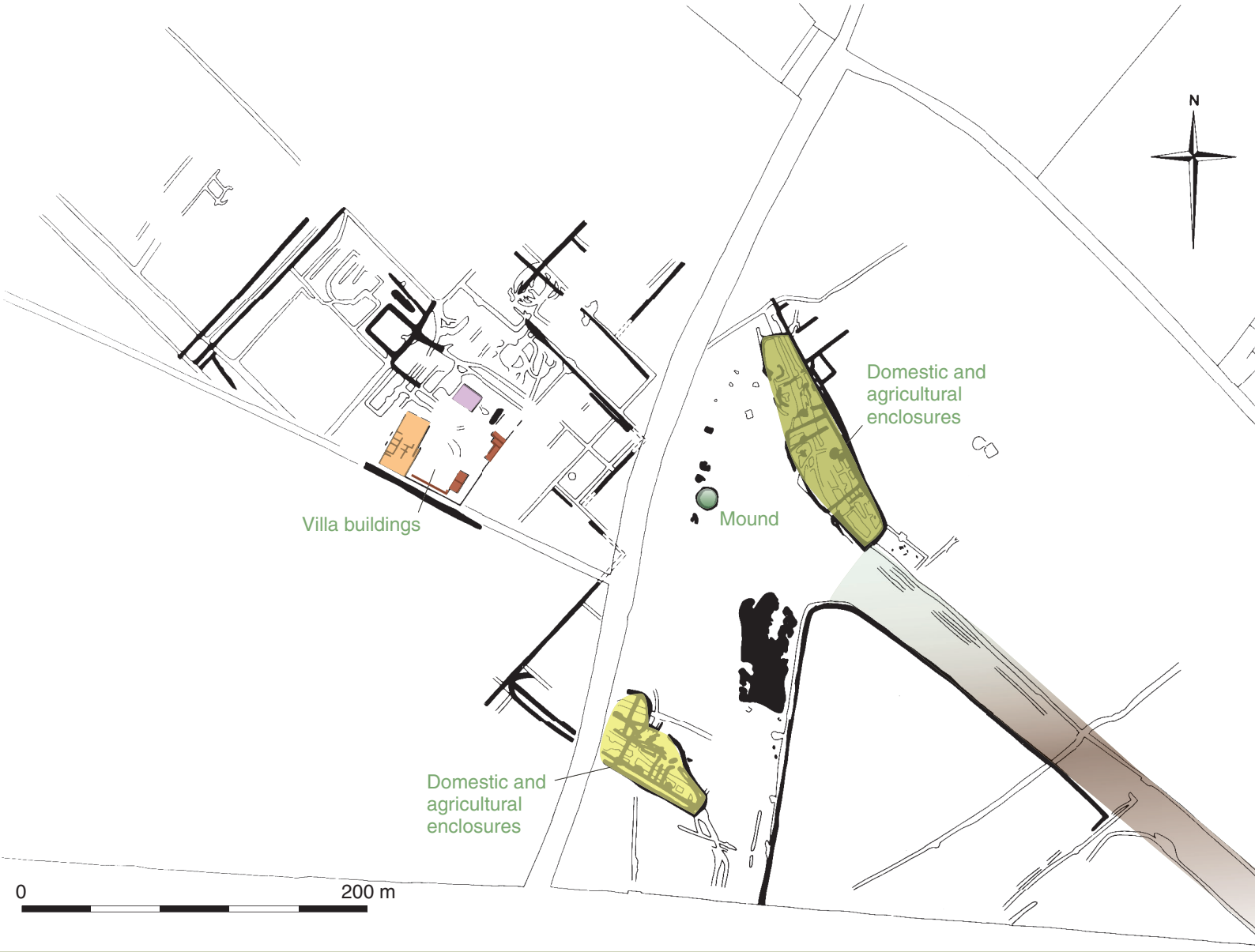
The site was transformed in the early to mid 2nd century AD, with the construction of at least two masonry buildings. One of these was an aisled structure with an apsidal end, while the other contained a probable under floor heating system (or hypocaust). The buildings were surrounded by a rectangular ditched enclosure and outside this was a regular system of paddocks and larger arable fields. The aisled building within the compound appears to have been initially of timber-framed construction but was soon rebuilt in masonry and had an ambulatory built around the apsidal room. This very unusual feature was suggested as being a dining room (or triclinium) with a 'viewing area' surrounding it. The eastern end was destroyed prior to excavation but there are slight indications that it may have contained a bathhouse.

The earlier droveways and trackways that approached the settlement from the lower terraces and floodplain to the south were now defined by ditches. A timber aisled building, possibly a cattle shed and hay barn, was located at the junction of these droveways. A series of enclosures opened out onto this cleared space, which was interpreted as a 'green' used for the corralling of animals. A circular raised mound in the centre of the 'green' was suggested as being an elevated platform from which to oversee stock collecting or even a market.

In the early 3rd century AD an additional substantial masonry building (c 15 x 30-40 m) was constructed 20 m to the west of the apsidal building. This was then rebuilt in the late 3rd century on a much grander scale with evidence for a range of heated rooms, tessellated floors and painted plaster walls. At this point there seem to have been three domestic ranges, along the south-east, south-west

ROUGHGROUND FARM LECHLADE GLOS

Phase plan of the late 3rd/4th century villa



and north of the villa courtyard, which was bounded by a wall on the southern side. In the 4th century the apsidal building was partially demolished and two further buildings were constructed to the north-east, one of which was possibly a bathhouse. A further possible bathhouse lay c 150 m to the south, suggested as being for the estate workers. A total of 26 inhumation burials, probably of the late Roman date, were found around the settlement, mostly in small plots possibly representing family groups.

The economic basis of the settlement does not appear to have altered radically from that of the early Roman period and was still a mixed farming regime. Among the new innovations though was the introduction of bread wheat and possible coppicing of hazel.

The later development and ultimate fate of the villa complex is quite difficult to establish, as the latest deposits had been largely ploughed away. The scarcity of later Roman (AD 370+) coinage may suggest a decline in activity at this time, which is also implied by the ceramic evidence. However, a clipped siliqua coin dating to at least AD 410 together with postholes cut into the floor of one building suggests that occupation of some nature continued into the 5th century. There is slight evidence for early Saxon activity on site, and it appears that stonework from the villa was incorporated into 6th century graves at Butler's Field less than 1 km to the south (Boyle *et al.* 1998).

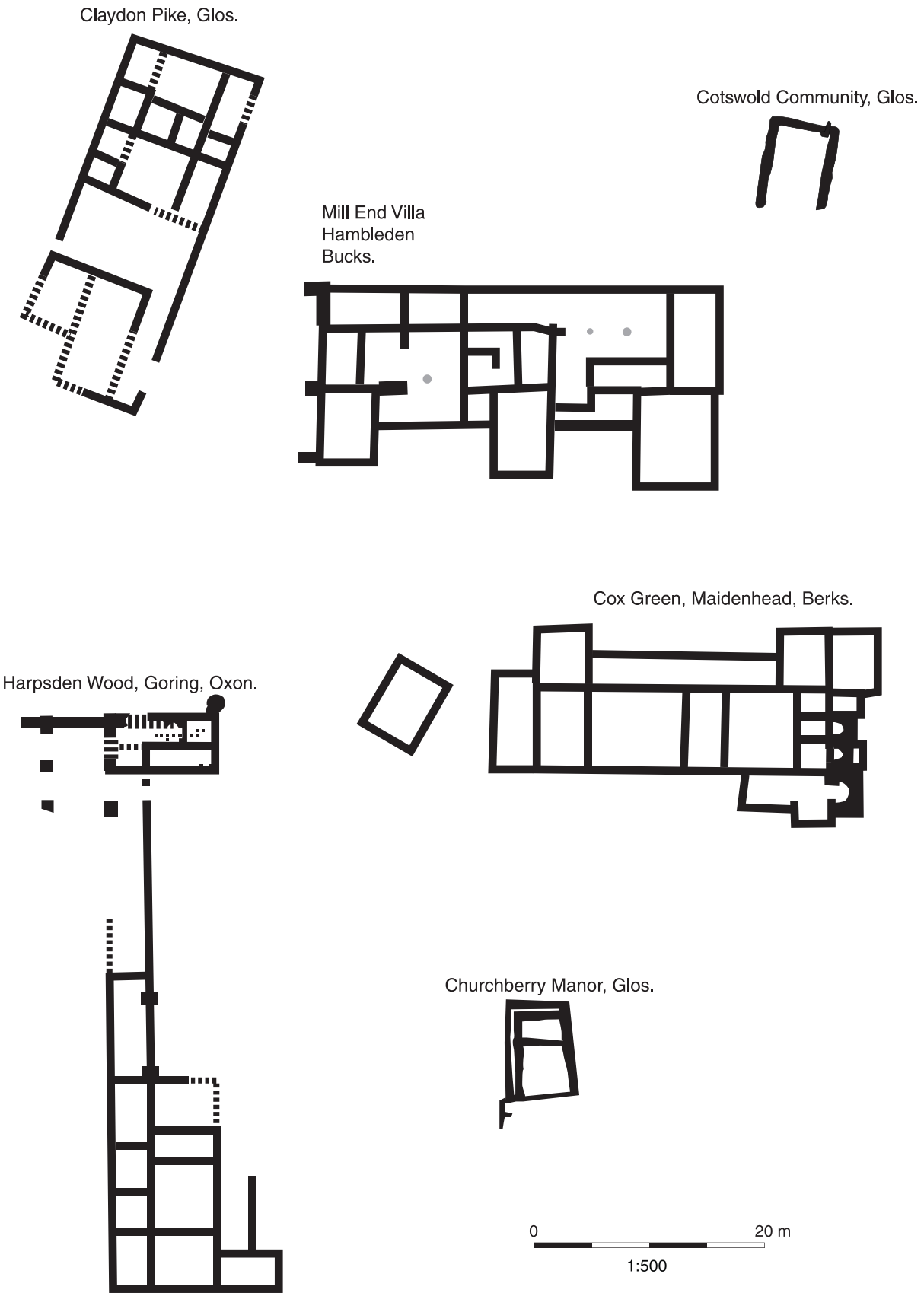


Fig. 3.10 Plans of selected villas and other masonry footed buildings in the study area

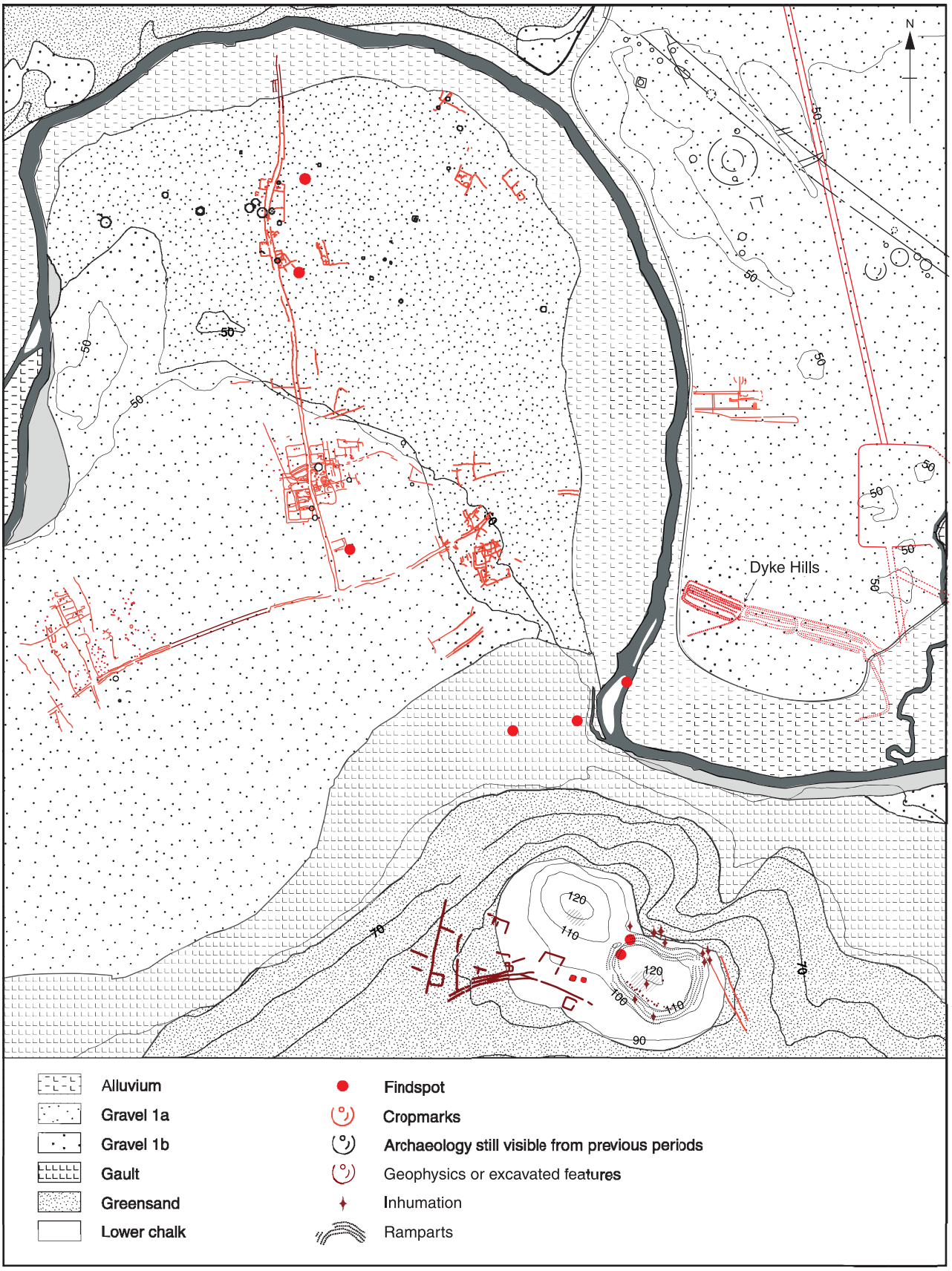


Fig. 3.11 The local landscape of Little and Long Wittenham, Oxon.

bank of the Thames (Allen 1995). This villa, which had painted plaster walls and evidence for a hypocaust, seems to have been established in the 2nd century AD and continued into the late and possibly post Roman period (see below). Associated field systems, ploughsoils and a corn dryer all indicate arable cultivation on the relatively narrow flint gravel terrace between the chalk escarpment and the floodplain (ibid. 125). On the opposite bank of the Thames, about 500 m distant at Lower Basildon, the remains of a Roman villa were found in 1839 during construction of the railway (Berks SMR 1052). This comprised two superb mosaic floors, one of which was damaged in antiquity and the other recorded by antiquarian, Charles Roach-Smith prior to its destruction by the railway (see Chapter 4, Fig. 4.13). This mosaic was of 4th-century origin. Recent excavations by Channel 4's Time Team in 2001 revealed outbuildings around the villa, along with field systems and a substantial (3 m deep) ditch, possibly bounding the villa complex. The ditch produced many finds including 1st- to 4th-century pottery, building material, animal bones, oyster shells, coins and a barrel padlock. At least two further Roman tiled buildings and a possible trackway were located within 0.5 km of this site, suggesting quite an intensive area of settlement, perhaps connected with the passage of the Thames through the Goring Gap, through which the Dorchester to Silchester road almost certainly ran.

Further down the Thames just south of Pangbourne, a large corridor villa along with an aisled building and a number of corn dryers were excavated at Maidenhatch Farm in 1970 (Wilson 1971, 284). A pottery kiln which stood inside a 1st-century field system was cut through in the late 2nd /early 3rd century by the corridor building, while the aisled house was not constructed until the later Roman period (see below). The villa complex lay on the edge of the Sulham Gap valley linking the Thames and Kennet Valleys, and it has been suggested that villas such as this may have been strategically sited to exploit the Kennet Valley to the south and large areas of agricultural land in the Berkshire Downs to the north and west (Lobb and Rose 1996, 90). The lower Kennet Valley appears to have been quite densely populated from the Iron Age onwards, and there is some evidence for increased expansion into the more marginal land of the lower gravel terraces and floodplain in the Roman period (ibid., 86). Like the Upper Thames region, most of this area seems to have been open grassland, with a heavy emphasis on pastoral farming. The settlement on the Kennet gravels at Wickhams Field just south of Reading for example, had very little evidence for arable farming, and instead had an economy closely linked with animal husbandry, especially cattle (Crockett 1996, 169). However, a mixed economy is suggested for the nearby settlement excavated at Small Mead Farm, also lying on the gravel terrace, which underwent substantial changes in the 2nd century AD (Moore and Jennings 1992, 123). The 1st-century focus of occupation appears to have gone out of use at this time and an extensive field system was laid out across the area, with the main settlement probably lying about 300 m to the west (ibid.).

Much of the Kennet was probably navigable by light craft, and could therefore have been an important communications route, perhaps accounting for the relative density of settlement (Lobb and Rose 1996, 86). River traffic may have come down along the Thames from the confluence at Reading, and it has been suggested that Reading could have been the site of a Roman river port for the town of Silchester, 10 km to the south (Rivet 1964, 140), although evidence for the use of the river as a transport route remains minimal (see Chapter 6). The nature of occupation in the Reading area during the Roman period is quite uncertain, but there have been a number of finds and structural remains suggesting the presence of at least a small number of settlements, including traces of a building with tesserae, pottery and a quern (Berks SMR 486). The finds from Reading indicate general occupation from the 1st to the 4th century AD, although there is little evidence for the specific nature and chronology of settlement development. Excavations at Thames Valley Park just to the north-east of Reading, revealed evidence for intermittent occupation on the gravel terrace and floodplain from the mid/late Iron Age through to the later Roman period, although activity appears much more slight in the 3rd-4th centuries (Barnes *et al.* 1997, 115-7). The site comprised an enclosure lying upon the edge of the gravel terrace, from which were found loomweights, smithing slag and a possible kiln (see Fig. 3.3, No. 5). It was suggested that this site was a centre for production and/or storage, with further 'heavier' industrial activity occurring on the floodplain, on a seasonal basis (ibid.).

To the north-east of Reading, on either side of Henley, are a number of well known though not so well understood villa complexes. A winged corridor villa lying on the crest of Harpsden Wood (Golf Course), *c* 1.5 km west of the Thames, appears on the scant evidence to have been primarily late Roman in date (Rivers-Moore 1951; Fig. 3.10), while a stone-founded building at Harpsden High Wood *c* 1 km to the south is even less well-understood and dated. It is not certainly another villa. Some 6 km NNW of Harpsden Wood but only 3 km from the river was a further poorly-known villa at Bix (Henig and Booth 2000, 105). Further along at Hambleden were at least two villas and a possible settlement. One of the villas at Hambleden (Yewden) had evidence for occupation from the 1st to the end of the 4th century AD, with some indications of pre- or very early post-conquest activity (Cocks 1921, 156; Fig. 3.13). This villa complex was unusual in both its finds assemblage (which included 70 styli), number of corn dryers (14) and in the exceptional number of infant burials (97) in an area north-east of the main enclosure, which has led some (eg Salway 1981, 601)

to suggest that the site was connected with a rural industry using large numbers of female slaves. Just to the east of this site lay an extensive cropmark complex in the valley identified from aerial photographs, which included substantial buildings, field systems and trackways (RCHME 1993). It is highly likely that these two sites were associated in some way, and possibly also with another villa complex lying less than 1 km to the south on the northern banks of the Thames at Mill End (Farley 1983; Fig. 3.10). This villa, known only from aerial photographs and fieldwalking, appears to be of winged type with a central porch, and was surrounded by number of enclosures and a road. It has been suggested that its position close to the Thames and orientation towards the river indicates close associations with the river, either for 'business or pleasure traffic, or perhaps simply for the view' (ibid., 258). Until the site is investigated, its exact function, development and relation to the northern settlement will remain unknown.

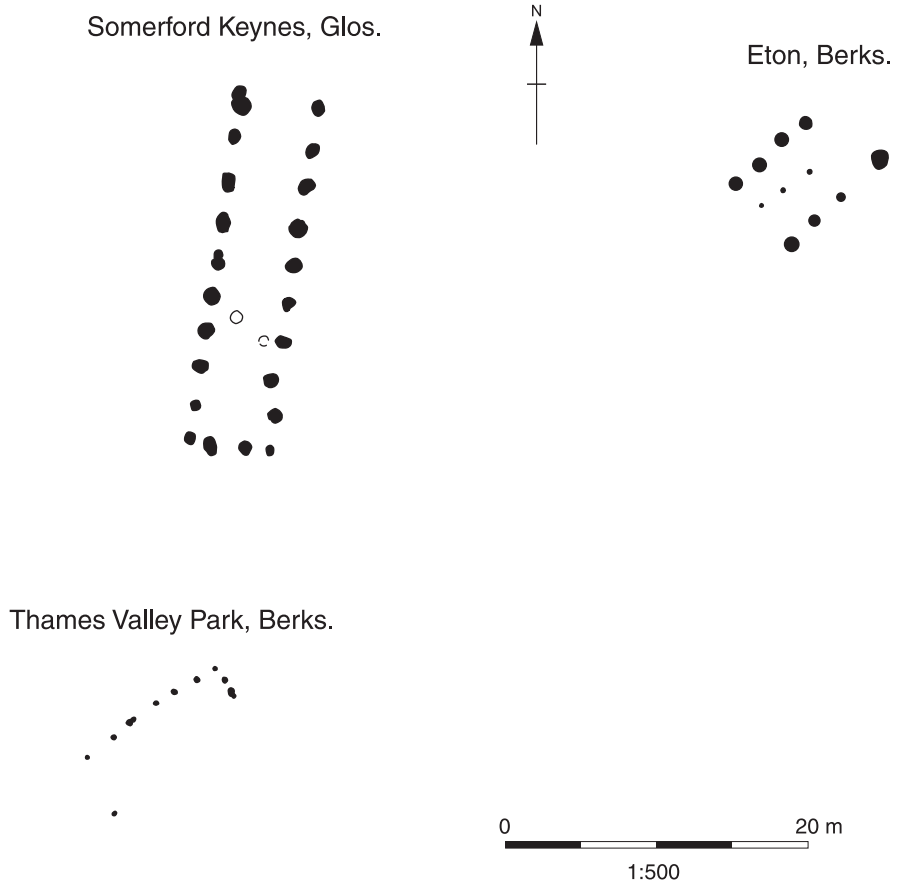
Further east towards the Maidenhead area there are relatively few known settlements along the Thames gravels, although surveys have shown that Roman occupation was probably still quite widespread in this area (Ford 1987, 93). One site at Cookham, *c* 1.5 km west of the Thames, was revealed through excavation and aerial photographs as a complex of postholes, enclosures, trackways and gullies with two possible structures and a corn dryer (ibid., 83). Pottery ranged from 1st- to 4th-century in date, but there is no indication of how the settlement developed. Within and around Maidenhead itself there is plenty of evidence for Roman occupation, including at least two villas. The villa at Cox Green on the south-western edge of the town was excavated in 1959 and 1969-72, with four phases of occupation recognised (Bennett 1962; Fig. 3.10). A mid 2nd-century timber framed building developed in the late 2nd century into a winged corridor villa with bathhouse, situated within an enclosure with a number of other buildings. Nearby have been recorded a 'Roman settlement' with wall and courtyard (*MAHS* newsletter 1984, 4), along with a 2nd-4th century corn dryer and building (RCHME PRN 3903), which may have been part of an outer estate complex. Another probable villa was noted further north at Castle Hill, with a hypocaust and at least one late 3rd century coin, although further details for this site are lacking (*BBOAJ* 1926, 76). A third postulated villa within the town (Scott 1991, 23, site 29) remains unsubstantiated.

To the west of Maidenhead, lying on the Upper Chalk/Reading beds above the Thames gravels, was an extensive area of activity around Weycock Hill, extending over 14 ha (Ford 1987, 83). The only site for which there is any real information (though still very slight) is the octagonal temple and precinct near the top of Weycock Hill (Cotton 1956-57; see Chapter 5). A substantial area of occupation *c* 200 m to the south (Berks SMR 144) may have been an associated settlement (see Chapter 5), and both temple and settlement appear to date from the 2nd to the late 4th century AD. Lying *c* 300 m further east were a number of wells and an inhumation cemetery, probably associated with the complex, while *c* 1.5 km to the north at Knowl Hill was a probable aisled building with 1st- and 2nd-century pottery, excavated in the 1930s (Seaby 1934).

In his archaeological survey of East Berkshire, Ford recognised a distinctive settlement pattern in this region, based upon the geology (1987, 83-96). Villas and possible villas were best represented on the Upper Chalk, scarcer on the lower-lying Reading Beds and gravel terraces, and particularly scarce on the London Clay further to the south (ibid., 95). Excavations since this survey have identified further sites on the London Clay, such as Park Farm, Binfield (Roberts 1995). Here a low status farmstead comprising a number of circular house gullies, enclosures and pits was dated from the middle Iron Age, with intensification during the late Iron Age, and abandonment in the later 2nd century AD. Other discoveries also suggest that that occupation on the London Clay was more widespread than had previously been thought (ibid., 123). Despite this, non-villa settlements appear generally more numerous on the river gravels, although the region as a whole is still suggested as being less densely populated than other areas such as the Upper Thames Valley (Ford 1987, 95).

In recent years, a growing number of Roman rural farmsteads have been excavated along the Thames gravel terraces to the south-east of Maidenhead, such as at Bath Road in Slough, a town which had previously produced very little evidence for Iron Age or Roman activity (Howell and Durden 2003). This site, which comprised ditches, pits and postholes, was part of a small early Roman farmstead that was abandoned or at least shifted location at the start of the 2nd century AD (ibid.). At the nearby site of Cippenham in Slough a middle Iron Age farm seems to have continued into the late Iron Age/early Roman period, probably operating a largely pastoral led economy (Ford *et al.* 2003, 160-3). In the 1st century AD extensive refurbishment took place of the settlement, which comprised enclosures, part of a field system, and rare evidence for rectangular structures (Fig. 3.12). The difficulties of identifying domestic buildings on rural sites have already been mentioned, and so the two slightly sunken-floored structures here, with metalled floors and faint traces of walling (the better-defined of the two buildings measured 15 m x 8 m), are of particular significance, even though their dating is not very secure (ibid., 53). There is far less evidence for activity from the 2nd century onwards, and this probably relates to the apparent abandonment/shifting of the Bath Road site, suggesting wider changes in the local area.

Other recently excavated settlements in the region include a group of enclosures at Agars Plough near



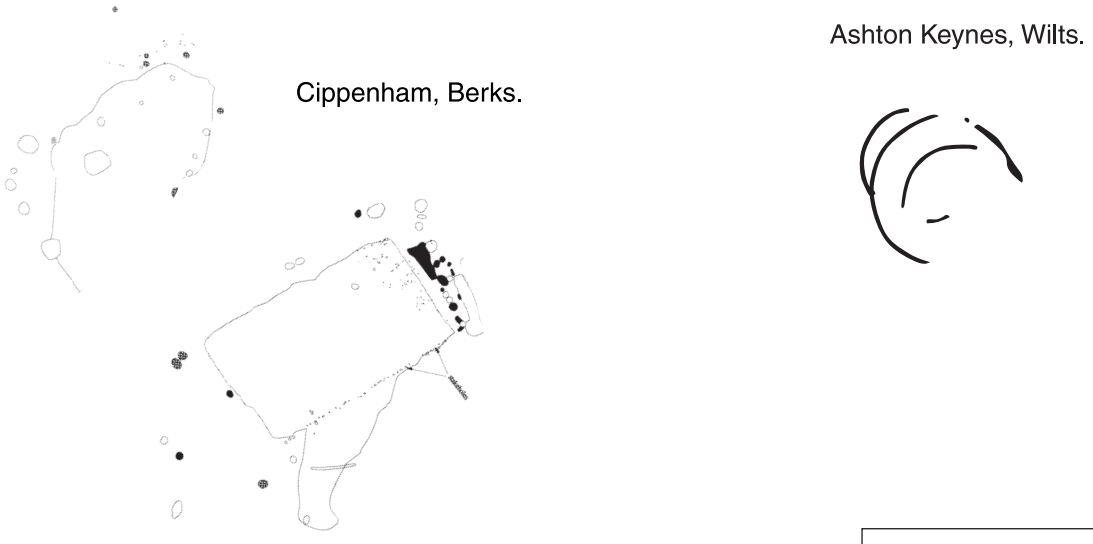


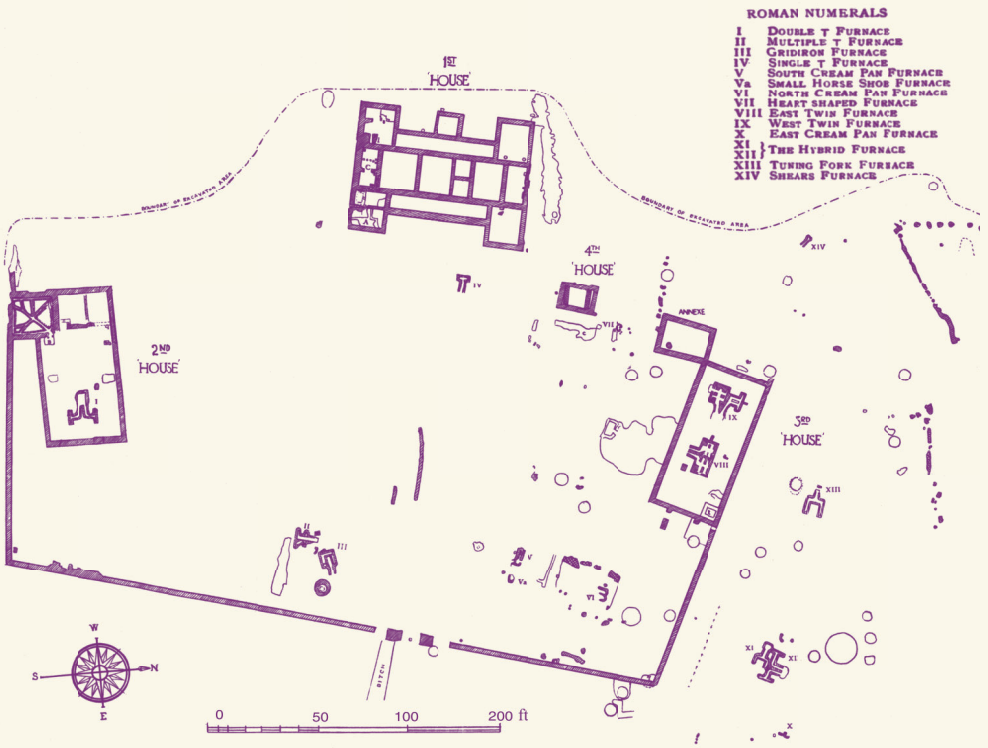
Fig. 3.12 Plans of selected non-villa buildings in the study area

Fig. 3.13 (overleaf)
Feature: Hambleden villa

HAMBLEDEN VILLAS

The villa at Yewden, Hambleden, Bucks lies c 400 m from the Thames on the left bank of the river and only c 700 north of another probable villa site at Mill End, known only from the air (Farley 1983). Yewden was excavated in 1912 and the resulting report (Cocks 1921) does not use stratigraphic principles consistently to describe the development of the site, though the excavators established structural sequences for the main buildings and did record the spatial positions of many finds in detail.

The site may have developed from a late Iron Age farmstead. A rectangular enclosure ditch with rounded corners, known largely from aerial evidence, may have contained such a site and the excavated finds certainly include material at least as early as the mid 1st century AD. The 'Roman' site was eventually (perhaps not until the 4th century, Cocks 1921, 142) partly contained within a walled enclosure, the east side of which, with a substantial gate slightly north of centre, was c 112 m long. The north and south walls were set at slightly more than a right angle to the east wall. They may never have formed a complete enclosure (the excavator thought that their alignments were continued by fences), though this seems unlikely. Within the likely enclosed area there were three major and several minor structures. Further features lay outside, mostly to the north, perhaps within an area defined by further walls. In addition 'two small outlying buildings' are known from the air (Farley 1983, 258).



***Top**: Some of the numerous ovens, mainly corn dryers, excavated in 1912*
***Above**: Simplified plan of Yewden villa (after Cocks 1921)*
***Opposite**: Aerial photograph of Yewden villa, looking south (NMR 4632/16)*

HAMBLEDEN VILLAS

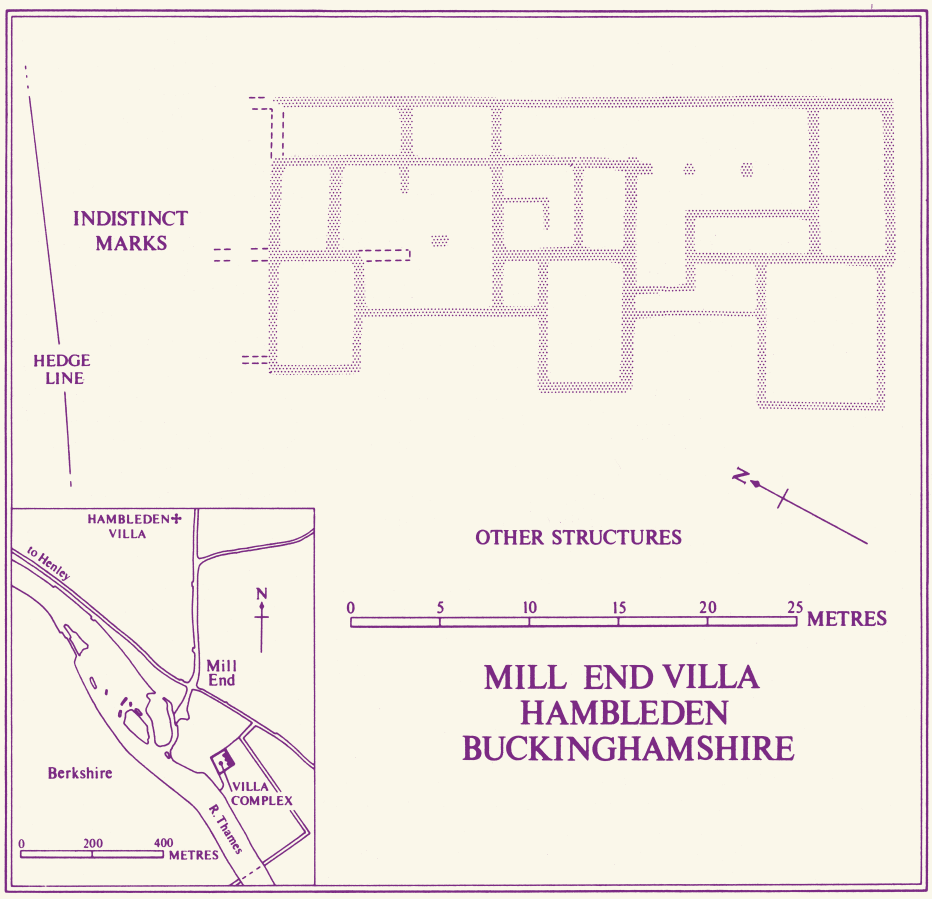
The main enclosure wall and the principal structures within it formed a roughly symmetrical slightly fan-shaped layout, with one stone founded building on or close to the north and south enclosure wall line and the main house approximately equally spaced between them on the west side. Other structures within the courtyard will have impacted on this symmetry, most particularly a fairly small building interpreted as a possible shrine lying a little north-east of the main house. The relative chronology of the buildings is not always clear but it is likely that at some time most if not all of them were in contemporary use.

A simple block of four rooms that formed the core of the later main house, was perhaps as early as the late 1st century in date. Rooms were then added to north and south of the core block. To east and west of this block were (externally) very similar arrangements of wings and joining corridor, that on the west side having a central projection which may have been a porch. It is not known if the two sets of wings and corridors were added at the same time. At one time the southern rooms formed a small bath suite, but this was out of use before the end of the life of the building. Other features were several tessellated floors, but there was no evidence for finer mosaic pavements.

HAMBLEDEN VILLAS

The other main buildings may have been primarily barns and/or workshops and their dimensions (c 27 m x 14 m and 26 m x 12. 5 m) suggest that both were probably aisled structures). In the 4th century the western end of the larger, southern building (the '2nd House') was partitioned off and a hypocausted room inserted partly into its south-west corner, indicating at least some domestic use. The small room adjacent had a tessellated floor. Both buildings contained one or more 'corn drying' ovens, and further comparable ovens and other related features lay within timber buildings situated one each side of the gateway in the east enclosure wall as well as in the probable northern compound and elsewhere. The number and variety of these ovens is one of the more remarkable features of the site and has been used to support the argument that its agricultural production was particularly linked to central government supply (Applebaum 1966, 102-3; Branigan 1967, 142; Farley 1983, 258-9). Other activities included metal working, both of copper alloy and iron, but the scale of this activity does not appear to be extensive.

The collection of metal objects includes a large number of brooches and 70 styli. The latter number, quite exceptional for a site in this region (Farley 1983, 258), has also been used in support of the '(bookkeeping associated with) official supply' model for the site already mentioned. More widely known, however, is the large number of infant burials, some 97, almost all located 'in the yard, north of the 3rd House' (Cocks 1921, 150). While the



Plan of Mill End villa from aerial photographs

numbers are particularly high here it is clear that disposal of infant bodies in settlement contexts was common (as at Barton Court Farm (Harman and Miles 1986, fiche 4, C9-D1). The remains of three adults and two children were also found in a deep pit or well in a deposit perhaps of early 3rd century date. This is suggestive of a ritual practice rather than of casual disposal. As for other ritual practice, the idea that the small '4th House' adjacent to the main house, with a tessellated floor, might have been a shrine is attractive but without direct support from other evidence.

The site can now be seen in the wider context of the nearby probable villa at Mill End, unusually close at hand, and further cropmark complexes located nearby. Whether these formed a single integrated landscape of agricultural exploitation and if so, what the specific basis of that exploitation was, remains to be established. There is nothing unusual in the physical appearance of the site. The emphasis on arable processing as well as on stock raising, seen by Branigan (1967, 142) as unusual in a Chiltern context, may simply be a consequence of the Thames-side location of the site. Models of direct official involvement in military and other procurement are currently unfashionable (Taylor 2000). They need not necessarily be invoked here, but the exceptional number of 'corn dryers' and styli still require explanation. There is no clear evidence of post-Roman activity on the site.

View south-east with Yewden villa in foreground. The site of the Mill End villa is visible top right, just to the left of the tree-lined Thames (NMR 4632/17)

Eton (OA forthcoming a), and a site at Eton Rowing Lake, Dorney (Allen and Welsh 1998). These settlements continued from the Iron Age into the Roman period, although they appear to have been largely abandoned by the end of the 3rd century AD (see below). The site at Dorney comprised a substantial ditched enclosure (*c* 70 x 70 m) lying on the 1st gravel terrace adjacent to the floodplain (Fig. 3.3, No. 7). It originated in the middle/late Iron Age and was extended to the north during the Roman period (ibid.). The only evidence for contemporary Roman structures was a rectangular timber building in the northern extension, which lay next to a group of ovens or possibly kilns (Allen and Mitchell 2001, 27; Figs 3.12 and 3.14). The quantities of tile, which included wasters, suggested that production may have occurred on site (ibid., 29-30). Further evidence for economic activity came in the form of a well preserved scythe blade found in the former river channel silts, the wooden handle of which was radiocarbon dated to the 1st century AD. This provides very early evidence for the probable existence of hay meadows in this area.

Further south-east at Horton, on the west bank of the Colne Brook, *c* 3 km north of its confluence with the Thames, were three distinct areas of activity, dating from the late Iron Age to the 2nd century AD (Ford and Pine 2003; Fig. 3.3, No.8). These sites appear to represent outlying parts of low status agricultural settlements, and only in one case was there any evidence for late Roman activity (see below). The 2nd-century abandonment and/or hiatus was suggested as being partially because of increased flooding (ibid., 84), although it could also relate to wider landscape reform (see below).

Until fairly recently, evidence for non-villa rural sites in Surrey was particularly sparse (Bird and Bird 1987, 172), but an updated archaeological account of the county has given details of a number of new sites, including a group around the Roman town of Staines (Bird 2004b, 69). At many of these sites, such as Wey Manor Farm, Hengrove Farm, and Thorpe Lea Nurseries there is evidence for field systems which appear to have continued from the Iron Age into the Roman period, and were subsequently replaced by more regular fields *c* AD 200 (ibid.; Fig. 3.15). The settlement at Thorpe Lea, which produced possible evidence for buildings, seemed to continue throughout the Roman period, albeit with later reorganisation (Hayman 1998). On the Thames gravels at Brooklands in Weybridge there were two low status settlements dating to the Iron Age, although only one continued throughout the Roman period (Poulton 2004, 54, 60). Further east a number of Romano-British settlements have been discovered in recent excavations, although evidence for occupation in this area still remains relatively scarce. At Hurst Park on the south bank of the Thames near Hampton Court, part of an early Roman settlement comprising a corn dryer and cremation burials was discovered in 1994 (Andrews 1996b, 102). Environmental evidence from the corn dryer suggested that both the gravel terrace and floodplain may have been cultivated, with the grain being ground and stored on site (ibid., 103). There was very little evidence for late Roman activity on this site. Further possible Romano-British farmsteads have been discovered on the gravel terraces at Hampton Wick, Twickenham and Richmond upon Thames (ibid., 109), suggesting that this part of the valley towards London may have been quite densely occupied.

Although in general there is more evidence for villas than for lower status rural settlements in Surrey, there is a notable lack of such sites on the main gravel terraces. This is perhaps surprising given the evidence for villas close to urban centres in parts of the Upper Thames region (for example near Dorchester). It may in part reflect the fact that Staines, like Southwark further east, seems to have fallen into decline after the end of the 2nd century (Bird 1987, 169) and so did not exert the same level of economic and social attraction for higher status sites. The reason for the lack of villa development in the 2nd century is less certain, but may relate more to the agricultural potential of the gravels in this area (see below).

Regional variation

The above summary account of rural Roman settlement development throughout the Middle and Upper Thames Valley has shown that distinct local and regional variations existed. In all parts of the valley there is a general tendency for continuity of occupation from the Iron Age to the early Roman period, but there is a noticeable trend in the Upper Thames for a widespread settlement dislocation in the first half of the 2nd century. Although such transformation during this period is also in evidence in the Middle Thames, at sites such as at Small Mead Farm, Horton and Hurst Park, the general picture here is of more varied chronological development. Certain smaller scale regional and local patterns are observed, with for example many settlements around Staines being reorganised around the end of the 2nd century, and many of those around Windsor and Slough being apparently abandoned by the end of the 3rd century at the latest. In general though, especially compared to the Upper Thames, there is a lack of detailed chronological information from lower status rural sites in the Middle Thames, and there appear to be fewer of them on the gravel terraces. How far this is a result of less intensive modern gravel extraction remains unclear.

The evidence suggests that there were genuine concentrations of settlement at various places along the Thames Valley. Some were perhaps influenced by the location of urban centres, some by communication routes such as rivers or roads (see Chapter 6), and others maybe by the pertinent socio-political situation of the time (see Chapter 7). London, Silchester and Cirencester, are likely to have exerted increasing economic, social and political influence over much of this region. At Silchester, Boon (1974,

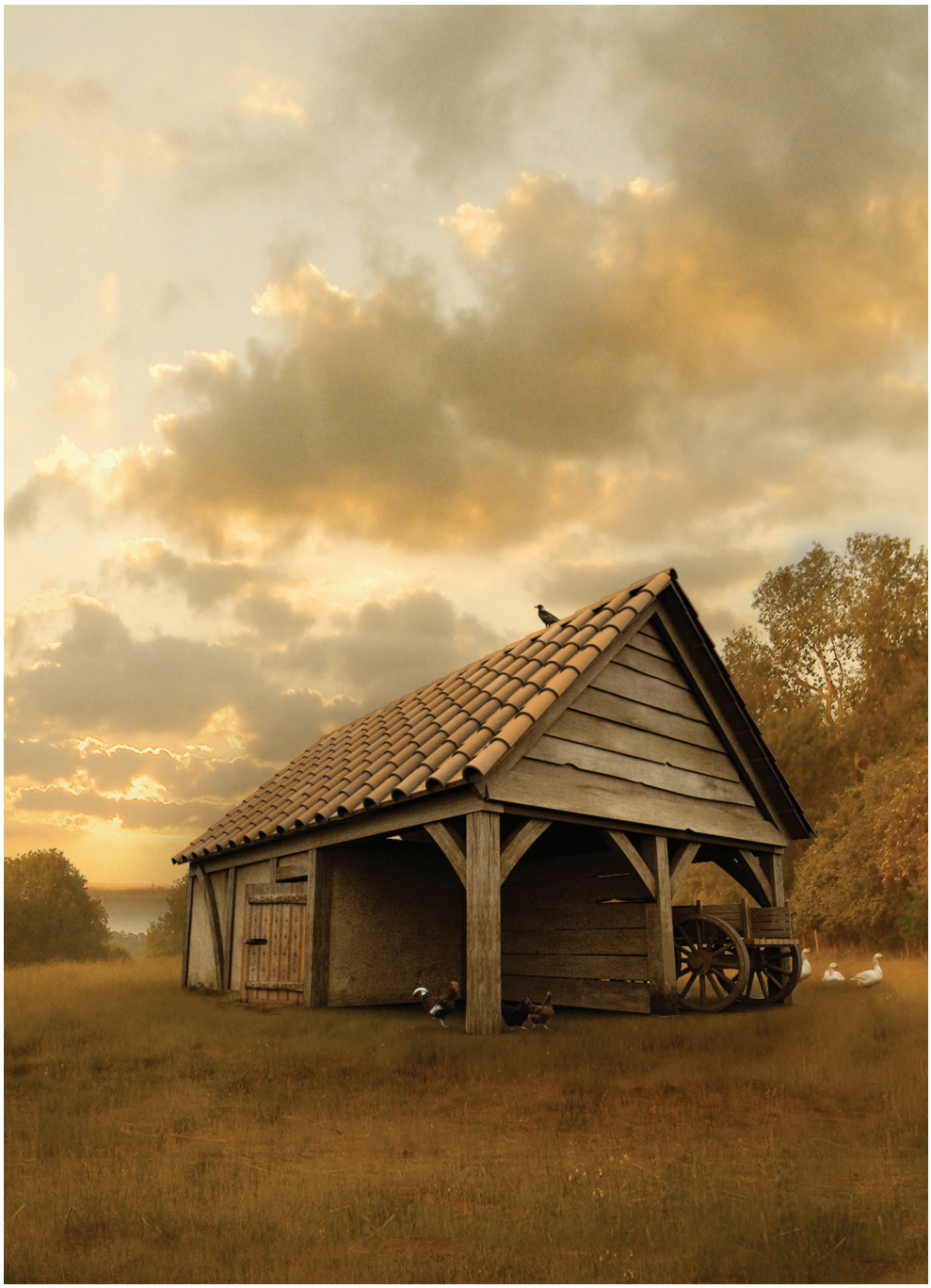


Fig. 3.14 Reconstruction of a post-pad building from Eton, Bucks

245) suggested that the area under the direct control of town might have been up to 15 km in radius, including much of the lower Kennet Valley and Thames Valley around Reading (see above for river port suggestion). This remains debatable, but the town would surely have provided a ready market for consumables and encouraged profitable production of surplus in its hinterland. The limit of Silchester's economic hinterland is uncertain, although the settlement at Streatley, 17 km to the north, is thought to have lain within it (Allen *et al.* 1991-93). Although the degree of influence need not always be directly correlated with settlement size, it is likely that London and Cirencester, being the two largest urban centres in Roman Britain, would have exerted even greater influence over the Lower and Upper Thames Valleys respectively, both economically and socially (see Chapters 4 and 6).

In a predominantly agriculturally-based society, the greatest influence on settlement location would have been the productivity of the land itself (see Chapters 2 and 6). Varying local geologies seem to be reflected in different densities and types of settlement, and the more acidic soils of the Middle

Fig. 3.15 Plans of Thorpe Lea Nurseries and Hengrove Farm Surrey

Thames gravels do appear more sparsely settled than the calcareous gravels of the Upper Thames terraces. The more agriculturally productive land is likely to have been more attractive for settlement in all periods, although as agrarian techniques improved and diversified and innovations were introduced, more marginal lands are likely to have been increasingly exploited.

THE LATE ROMAN PERIOD (LATE 3RD TO 4TH CENTURY AD)

The landscape of later Roman Britain is widely acknowledged to have been quite different from that of the earlier Roman period. Yet understanding the types of changes that occurred, and their significance in terms of economic and social development, remains contentious. Some commentators, such as Reece (1992) and more recently Faulkner (2000), have argued that Roman society was essentially set on a course of decline from a highpoint at the end of the 2nd/start of the 3rd century AD, and that by the 4th century certain Roman institutions were in deep decline, with major urban centres for example being left 'stagnant and decaying' (ibid., 121). The more conventional view, however, suggests that while there may have been some decline in the major towns during the later Roman period, this was generally a time of economic prosperity within most parts of Britain (Esmonde Cleary 1989). As ever the reality seems to have been more complex and varied, with the evidence from the Thames Valley indicating variable levels of apparent prosperity and/or decline. The Upper Thames region in particular contained a number of thriving settlements, both urban and rural, while further down the valley at urban centres like Staines and Southwark/London (see below), a late decline is much more in evidence.

Overall, where chronological indicators allow, it is clear that widespread changes did occur in the settlement pattern across much of the Middle and Upper Thames Valley in the later Roman period, undoubtedly linked to political, economic and environmental factors. In particular, the reforms of Diocletian in the later 3rd century AD, which created four (and later perhaps five) provinces within the Diocese of Britain, may have had significant effects, especially with the probable elevation of Cirencester to provincial capital of Britannia Prima (see below). Indeed the division of territory between this province to the west and Maxima Caesariensis based upon London to the east may have been of considerable significance with regard to the nature of settlement development in the Thames Valley (see Chapter 7).

Late Roman urban centres (Fig. 3.16)

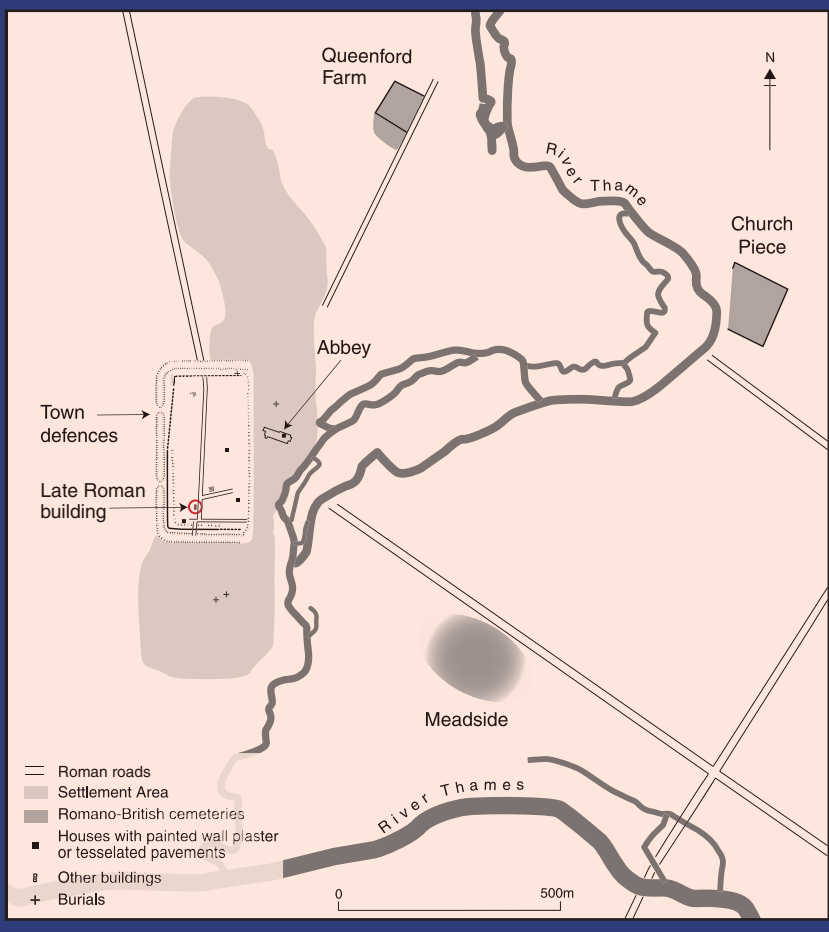
It is a commonplace that the towns of late Roman Britain were very different from their early Roman predecessors. London provides a particularly clear example of this, with evident changes not only in the major public buildings but particularly in relation to the density of the smaller domestic, shop and workshop structures which characterised the early Roman city. Whatever the status of earlier Roman London the late 3rd-century city contained, however briefly, a building perhaps to be interpreted as a palace of the usurper Allectus. From the early 4th century at the latest the city, probably now with the status of a colonia, is attested as the seat of the vicarius or governor of the diocese of the British provinces. What any of this meant for the physical appearance of the town is, however, another question. The riverside wall is dated a little earlier in the 3rd century than the construction of the Allectan building (the landward wall is currently dated around the end of the 2nd century or early in the 3rd), but both included in their foundations reused stone from earlier monumental structures (Hill *et al*. 1980; Williams 1993) some of which were presumably located in the south-west quarter of the city. By the early 4th century most, if not all, of the forum-basilica had been demolished and buildings such as the Huggin Hill baths had long been abandoned. These changes, while striking, are not dissimilar to those seen in some other major cities, although there are contrasts at Cirencester (see below; for discussion of the Silchester forum see Fulford and Timby 2000, 576-580). A 'short-term' view of the significance of the built environment has been identified by Fulford (1998, 110) as a particular feature of the archaeology of London, perhaps related to the relatively mobile character of at least part of the urban population. Continued investment in 'public' structures in late Roman London is shown by the Colchester House (Tower Hill) building, however it be interpreted, whether as cathedral or granary (Sankey 1998; Hassall 2000, 60; Haynes 2000, 94), and by the late reworking of the defences at the south-east corner (Parnell 1985, 21). While the historical sources imply some continued official presence in London up to the end of the 4th century the extent and character of 'normal' late Roman occupation is much more contentious, with widely varying recent views (eg Sankey 1998; Watson 1998a).

One characteristic of late Roman London (though not exclusively of this date) is the occurrence of deposits of 'dark earth'. These have been variously interpreted (eg Yule 1990; Watson 1998a), but the most recent work supports the view that they do represent abandonment of sites, at least for *in situ* occupation (eg Watson 1998a, 103; Macphail 2003) rather than, for example, conversion of disused areas into market garden plots. On this basis the relatively widespread distribution of dark earths, in some cases from the 2nd century onwards and often above or within abandoned buildings, indicates a significant reduction in the density of occupation.

Fig. 3.16 (overleaf) Feature: Dorchester

DORCHESTER ON THAMES

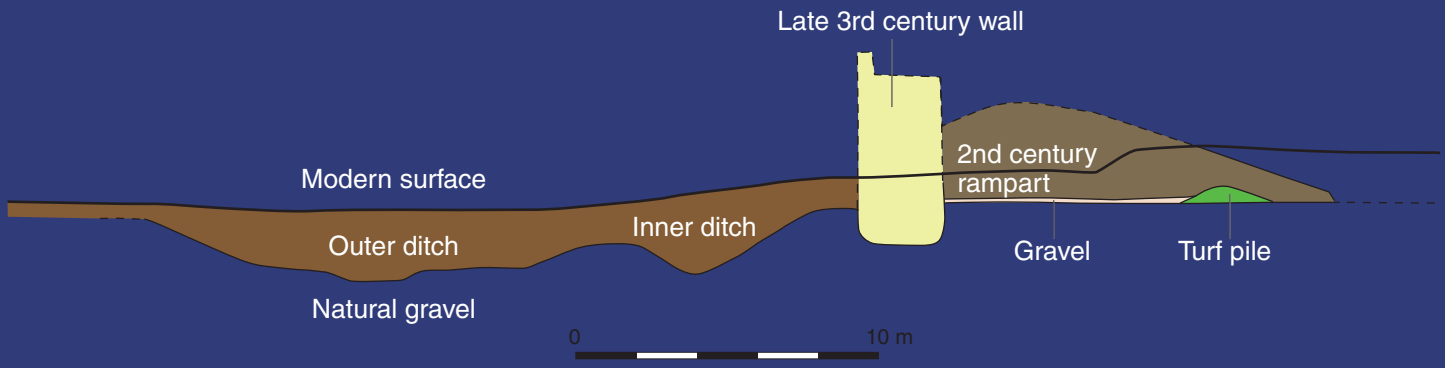
The Dorchester area was of great significance for early societies from at least as far back as the Neolithic period, when major ceremonial monuments were constructed on the gravel terraces north of the Thames. Much later, the monumental focus, now relating to settlement, shifted to the Wittenham Clumps, dominating Dorchester from the south side of the river. Here a hilltop enclosure of late Bronze Age date was succeeded in the early Iron Age by a hillfort, with associated features outside. How long settlement of this site continued into the middle Iron Age is uncertain. At some point, perhaps within the later part of the middle Iron Age, the focus of activity shifted once more to the north side of the river. Here, at Dyke Hills, within a loop of the Thames and with its tributary the Thame on the east side, was a large settlement defined on the north side by two substantial banks that still survive in part today. This site has never been examined systematically but is assumed to have been important not only as a settlement but also as a centre of trading activity and political power in the late Iron Age. As such it would have attracted attention in the early Roman period. The main Roman road running north from Silchester crossed the Thames just east of Dyke Hills. It is likely that a fort was established close to this road line on the gravel terrace just north of Dyke Hills and beneath the site of the modern village, although the probable military features so far encountered by excavation seem not to date before AD 60, suggesting establishment some time after the conquest period.



Dorchester subsequently became a 'small town' astride the line of the Roman road. Its early development, in the aftermath of the probable military occupation phase, is particularly poorly understood; none of the identified structures is certainly earlier than mid 2nd century in date. Either the (limited) excavated sample is unrepresentative (which is quite possible), or there must have been enough development in the second half of the 2nd century to justify the construction of earthwork

DORCHESTER ON THAMES

Composite interpretative section of town defences



defences enclosing an area of c 5.5 ha, probably in the later part of that century. Alternatively, the construction of defences was required because of a specific function of the site, but this seems less likely. The defended enclosure was rectangular in plan. There is some uncertainty about the line of its eastern side, but it is most likely that, the later Abbey lay east of the defended area, between it and the River Thame. The defences were later modified; a stone wall with a foundation about 2.75 m wide was set in the front of the earlier rampart, which may also have been raised behind it, and a much wider, shallow ditch, perhaps as much as 15 m across, was excavated. The dating of the late defences is unclear - the wall may be of the late 3rd century but a later date is possible.

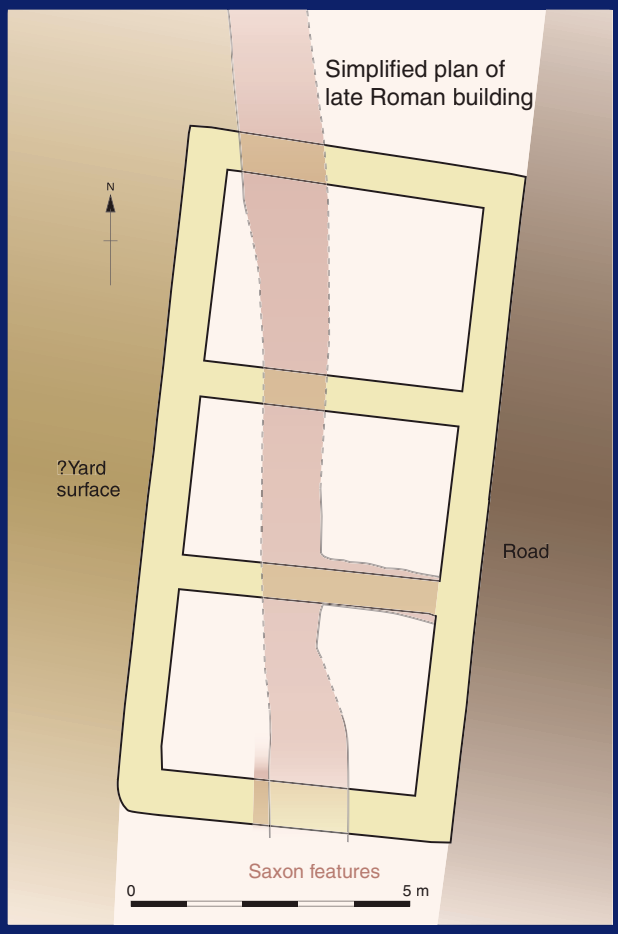
The principal road through the defended area ran roughly north-south and presumably had east-west side streets, though few of these are known. The locations of north, east and south gateways can be estimated but they have not been examined in detail. It is uncertain if there was a west gate. Antiquarian

Top: *view north to Dorchester from Castle Hill. The Abbey, just east of the Roman town defences, is clearly visible and the late Iron Age earthworks of Dyke Hills run left to right through the fields*
Left: *Plan of the Roman town*
Above: *composite interpretative section of town defences (after Hogg and Stevens 1937, fig 13)*
Right*: possible military rampart of turf on a base of horizontal timbers, excavated in 1962 beneath the south side of the later defences; scales in units of feet*

DORCHESTER ON THAMES

references record the presence of tessellated or mosaic floors and painted wall plaster at several locations, but there is little further evidence for the buildings from which these derived. Excavations in the 1960s and 70s revealed parts of a number of later Roman buildings with stone foundations. Three of these fronted onto the main north-south road. One, probably of 3rd century date and of aisled plan, had a tessellated floor and a (?later) hearth in one of the aisles, while on the other side of the road a building of roughly similar plan also had a tessellated floor in one aisle, but this building seems not to have been constructed before about AD 370. Just to the south a further building, of simple three-room plan, was constructed even later, quite possibly after AD 400 on coin evidence. In the north-west corner of the town another building of less certain plan, and perhaps with stone and timber elements in its construction, was constructed around the mid 3rd century on an alignment that bore no relationship to the known street layout. It is unclear how long the building remained in use (Rowley and Brown 1981, 8, cf 24), but activity on the site continued to the end of the Roman period.

Dorchester has very important late- and sub-Roman cemeteries north and east of the town (see Chapters 4 and 5). An earlier cemetery lies to the south-east alongside the main road from Silchester east of its crossing of the Thame.



Above: *A very late Roman building in the south-west quadrant of the walled town*
Opposite*: the Queenford Farm late Roman cemetery under excavation in 1981. The South-west corner of the rectilinear cemetery enclosure and related graves are clearly visible. Earlier ditches are also evident*

DORCHESTER ON THAMES

Evidence for Anglo-Saxon activity is encountered in most of the areas examined within and in the immediate vicinity of the walled town. Both burials and some pottery (eg Frere 1984, 163-4 no 86) indicate that some of this dates to the first half of the 5th century, although structural evidence appears to be later. Five potential sunken featured buildings have been identified, three within the walls (Frere 1962, 123-5; Rowley and Brown 1982, 10-12) and two less certain examples perhaps just outside the position of the Roman east gate (Bradley 1979, 21-3). None of these structures conforms clearly to the most common type of sunken featured building, with a single posthole at each end of the approximately rectangular pit, and most are not well-dated, although one, fronting onto the main north-south Roman road through the town, was probably 6th century (Frere 1962, 130). It was succeeded by a more substantial rectangular timber structure and comparable linear features occurred elsewhere in the south-west corner of the walled town. A further post-in-trench built structure of two phases was found west of the town at Bishops Court (May 1977, 57-9), while a series of smaller rectilinear structures of very different construction was identified in the north-west corner of the defences. The larger buildings within the town could belong to the period from the 9th century onwards, but those further north, and perhaps those at Bishop's Court, could have been earlier. An association of at least some of these buildings with the ecclesiastical development of Dorchester is possible (see Chapter 5).

This general view is supported by the relative scarcity of significant late Roman finds assemblages from the city (eg Symonds and Tomber 1991) compared to early Roman ones. Coin data indicate continued activity, but the figures from Southwark, for example, show lower levels of 4th-century coin loss than are typical of many sites, particularly further west (Hammerson 1996).

At the upper end of the Thames Valley Cirencester held, in administrative terms, a subordinate position to London in the 4th century. It is generally thought that Cirencester was the administrative centre of Britannia Prima, one of the four provinces of Britain under the Diocletianic reorganisation. The assumption is plausible, but direct evidence for it is slight and the well-known inscription recording the restoration of a statue and column by the governor (*Rector*) Lucius Septimius ? (RIB 103), does not prove that he was resident in Cirencester. The treatment of the forum basilica, however, seems to have been very different from what happened in London. At Cirencester there is evidence for continued refurbishment and use up to the end of the 4th century. The relatively limited scale of investigation means that the precise character of this use is difficult to determine. However, there were significant modifications to the inner portico of the forum on its north-west side, including the construction of mosaic pavements after the mid 4th century, and the forum courtyard was repaved after AD 364 at the earliest (Holbrook 1998, 115-121). Meanwhile the rooms at the south-west corner of the complex were in use, perhaps for metal-working amongst other activities, at the end of the 4th century and the road immediately adjacent to the south-east was blocked off at its western end at about the same time as the forum courtyard repaving (ibid, 109-110). It has been suggested that this was intended to create a market space to substitute for the loss of part of the forum itself to the requirements of the provincial governor (Wacher 1995, 314). While the latest developments are rather later than the establishment of Britannia Prima this interpretation is still considered possible (Holbrook 1998, 121). Another, though perhaps less likely possibility, is that only in the second half of the 4th century was the governor established in Cirencester – there is no need for provincial centres to have remained static at this time.

There is less evidence for the state of other public buildings in Cirencester in the late Roman period. As at London, plenty of attention was devoted to the defences with remodelling and the addition of some towers. Those on the east face of the landward wall at London are generally dated to the later 4th century, while the more limited evidence from Cirencester indicates a date around the middle of the 4th century (Holbrook 1998, 93-94). Again in parallel with the situation in London one structure that did remain in use into the late Roman period was the amphitheatre, though the London example was probably abandoned in the early 4th century and finally robbed in the later 4th. At Cirencester there were 4th-century modifications to the amphitheatre and it may have survived into the post-Roman period (ibid., 168-169), perhaps being used as an extra-mural market at this time (ibid., 174), while even later, sub-Roman use as a fortified position has been suggested (Wacher 1976, 16-17; Holbrook 1998, 174).

The change in the nature of domestic buildings in Cirencester from early to late Roman periods had some aspects in common with changes in London and elsewhere, but the process seems to have been less drastic. Late Roman houses are at least identifiable in Cirencester, although differences in deposit sequences and preservation conditions should be borne in mind. The best known example is the complex at The Beeches, consisting of three probably related buildings perhaps forming a single agricultural unit. The overall appearance of this group is quite rural and its initial discovery fuelled a debate about the nature of late Roman urbanism (Wacher 1974). The fact that it lies within the city walls rather than outside may, however, simply reflect the exploitation of available space rather than a particular concern for security. Overall the plan of late Roman Cirencester away from the monumental focus is characterised by a variable density of substantial buildings (McWhirr 1986) and, as in comparable towns such as Verulamium, there is scant evidence for a significant lower status urban population. This pattern is consistent with current thinking on the nature of the large towns in this period. However, the circumstances of discovery of many of these buildings are not ones in which evidence for less substantial structures would have been readily identified, so there remains a question about the real character of the Cirencester at this time.

There is contrasting evidence for late Roman activity from the two lesser towns between Cirencester and London. Staines seems to follow the London pattern. Late Roman activity is indicated by the finds record but is less clearly represented in structural terms. Dark earth deposits are present, as indeed they were at Cirencester, for example overlying the forum. At Cirencester, the extent of post-medieval reworking makes it uncertain that these deposits represent the same phenomenon as those in London, though this is likely. However, at Staines the overwhelming impression is one of a reduction in levels of occupation, though some relocation of settlement is a possible explanation for this.

Dorchester, by contrast, is particularly well known for aspects of its late Roman sequence, although the scale of excavation makes comparison between early and late Roman periods difficult (Fig. 3.16). The earthwork defences, presumably of late 2nd-century origin, were augmented with a wall probably in the second half of the 3rd century. A wide outer ditch replaced the earlier one, perhaps, but not demonstrably, at the same time. None of the

components of the defences are, however, very closely dated. There is at present no evidence for the presence of the towers that were sometimes associated with wide late-Roman ditches and are seen at London and Cirencester. Most excavated sites have produced evidence for 3rd- and/or 4th-century stone-founded Roman buildings or other features. These include a simple three-roomed building that cannot have been constructed before *c* AD 400 (Frere 1962, 123). Of particular importance is the relationship between the late Roman features and those of Anglo-Saxon date discussed further below, which represents a unique juxtaposition in a major Roman settlement in the region. Unfortunately, however, the earliest Anglo-Saxon structures are not very closely dated, which leaves open the question of the relationship, if any, between the latest Roman and earliest Saxon occupation – not one that was necessarily represented accurately by the limited excavated sample. Unusually the burial evidence from Dorchester, including some of the most discussed 'early Saxon' burials in Britain, can also shed light on this question. These burials, two from Dyke Hills to the south and one from the Minchin Recreation Ground just north of the town (Kirk and Leeds 1954) can probably all be assigned to the first half of the 5th century, though the vexed question of their ethnic origins is less easily resolved (see Chapter 4, below). It is notable, however, that there were also two major late Roman 'managed' cemeteries associated with the town. The character of these suggests that they may represent a Christian community. More striking are the radiocarbon dates from Queenford Farm, the nearer of the two cemeteries to Dorchester itself, which indicate that use of this cemetery extended well past the end of the 4th century and potentially into the 6th (Chambers 1987, 58; see Henig and Booth 2000, 190). If this dating is correct these burials would have been contemporary with those in a number of early Saxon cemeteries in the area.

Late Roman rural settlements (Figs 3.17-3.18)

The late Roman rural settlement pattern within the Thames Valley was markedly different from that of the earlier Roman period. Furthermore, it is in the Upper Thames region that we are able to note these developments most clearly, primarily because of the greater availability of chronological data. The Middle Thames suffers from a comparative lack of comprehensive excavation and even many of the better known villas were often very poorly recorded in the 19th and early 20th centuries.

Settlement transformation in the late 3rd and early 4th century AD

From the later 3rd to the early 4th century AD large numbers of settlements in the Upper Thames Valley were either established, abandoned or transformed, in many ways mirroring the situation within the Cotswolds further north (see below). The farmstead on the 1st terrace at Cotswold Community, 5 km south of Cirencester, underwent substantial structural changes at this time, with large ditched enclosures encircling much of the site and masonry footed buildings being constructed (OA 2004a; Fig. 3.17). Lying about 3.5 km further south-east the 2nd- to 3rd-century settlement at Ashton Keynes was also spatially transformed in the late 3rd/early 4th century, although the exact nature of activity at this site unfortunately remains unclear (Coe *et al.* 1991; WA 2001). In close proximity to both these settlements was the site at Somerford Keynes Neigh Bridge, where in contrast all activity relating to the structural features appears to have ceased by the early/mid 3rd century AD (Miles *et al.* 2007). However, quantities of late Roman artefacts were recovered by metal detecting on the site, including very late Roman military equipment and a crossbow brooch indicating some kind of official presence, perhaps even into the start of the 5th century.

Downstream at Claydon Pike there is also evidence for late Roman settlement transformation, with the aisled building complex being replaced by a modest villa estate (see Fig. 3.4). Environmental evidence from this site also shows important landscape changes at this time, with less evidence for hay meadows and more indication of a mixed agricultural economy. At nearby Roughground Farm on the 2nd terrace, the existing villa underwent embellishment, which suggested to the excavators an increase in the centralisation of the villa's estate management (Allen *et al.* 1993, 81; see Fig. 3.9). Evidence for the overall reorganisation of territory in this part of the valley is also indicated by the abandonment of certain low-lying settlements at Kempsford Stubbs Farm, Whelford Bowmoor and possibly Kempsford Bowmoor, all sites which had originated in the 2nd century (Miles *et al.* 2007). There is some reason to suppose that increased flooding may have been a factor in the abandonment of these sites, although more deliberate territorial landscape reform cannot be ruled out, especially as they lay on particularly marginal areas of land in terms of economic value.

This same trend of later Roman settlement transformation is also clearly in evidence further east, at Barton Court Farm, where a modest villa was probably built in the later 3rd century (Fig. 6.10), and at Old Shifford Farm where a small settlement was established on land that had been manured for *c* 160-70 years following the abandonment of the earlier site (Hey 1995, 170; see above). The settlements at Farmoor (Lambrick and Robinson 1979) and Yarnton (Hey (ed.) forthcoming) were also both reorganised in the later 3rd century, and both appear to have been part of a well ordered landscape with extensive drove and trackway systems, field boundaries, stock enclosures and horticultural plots. Most of the Thames floodplain and lower gravel terraces were still primarily open


0
50 m
1:1000
Late Iron Age - Early Roman
Early Roman - Mid Roman
Mid Roman - Late Roman
Unknown/other

pastureland, although some parts of the landscape appear to have become more defined and controlled, with increased evidence for ditched and hedged boundaries.

The settlement and landscape changes noted above all seem to have taken place within a period of 30-40 years and suggest that the Upper Thames Valley was subject to the same developmental stimulus as the Cotswolds further north and west. Here there is evidence for widespread construction and/or embellishment of villas – the site type for which there is most information in this region – including Great Witcombe (Leach 1998; Holbrook 2003), Woodchester (Clarke 1982) and North Leigh (Ellis 1999). These three sites were particularly lavish courtyard villas that reached the height of their opulence at this time, and must have been the residences of high ranking officials. It is tempting to see these changes, both in the Cotswolds and Upper Thames Valley, as at least partially related to the establishment of Britannia Prima, which may have created new impetus for wealth creation and display and land reform.

Further east in the Middle Thames there is less evidence for such widespread changes in the later Roman period, with many settlements either appearing to continue largely unaltered from earlier times, or else having little in the way of specific chronological/phasing information. However, at certain sites transformations did occur. At Maidenhatch Farm, Pangbourne, for example, an aisled house of at least two phases was constructed in the early 4th century AD (Wilson 1971, 284). It is uncertain if the earlier corridor villa remained standing at this time, or whether the aisled building had replaced it as the principal residence. The villa at Harpsden Wood near Henley appears from the minimal coin evidence to have been occupied from the late 3rd century (Rivers-Moore 1951, 26), although an earlier origin is likely. The villa further along the Thames Valley at Hambleden seems to have undergone significant alterations in the mid 3rd century and possibly at the start of the 4th century (Cocks 1921, 144, 148), although dating evidence is slight (see Fig. 3.13).

Overall, however, although late Roman activity is certainly attested at many sites across the Middle Thames (see below), there is as yet little evidence for any widespread settlement transformation comparable to that witnessed in the Upper Thames. Surveys of the Lower Kennet Valley do suggest a decline in activity during the 4th century (Lobb and Rose 1996, 90; see below) but the chronologies are generally not refined enough to note a specific period of disruption. At Thames Valley Park and at Wickhams Field, both near Reading, evidence suggests far less intensive activity during the 3rd and 4th centuries AD than earlier (Barnes *et al.* 1997, 115-7; Crockett 1996, 169), although occupation certainly continued and there is no sign of any particular structural or economic transformation. However, further east at Eton Rowing Lake, Dorney, the settlement seems to have been abandoned by the end of the 3rd or early 4th century AD, possibly because of the silting of the river channel (Allen and Welsh 1998, 83). Activity at other sites in this area (eg Agar's Plough) and in parts of the Surrey Thames Valley also seem to have terminated around this time, possibly reflecting a more locally defined episode of rural landscape change. Closer to London, the landscape at Perryoaks, Heathrow, underwent significant alterations during the 3rd century AD, with the appearance of a system of 'ladder' enclosures and a major droveway that seemed to overwrite the previous land divisions (Framework Archaeology 2006, 218).

Later development of rural settlement in the 4th century

After the widespread developments of the later 3rd to early 4th century AD, the Upper Thames landscape appears to have remained fairly stable in terms of settlement form and economy. However, while it is unlikely that the region as a whole would have changed a great deal from the early to the late 4th century, individual settlements continued to develop at various rates and in various forms. At Cotswold Community, continuous structural modifications were made to the settlement complex and initial indications are that activity extended at least to the end of the 4th century. Two other excavated sites nearby, Ashton Keynes and Somerford Keynes Neigh Bridge, both have evidence for activity continuing into the 5th century, although as mentioned above, there is no actual structural evidence from the latter site. Grass-tempered pottery recovered from Ashton Keynes suggests that activity here may even have continued into the 6th or 7th centuries, which has also been argued for a number of other settlements to the north and west (see below).

Further east near Lechlade, both Claydon Pike and Roughground Farm villas continued to be occupied until at least the later 4th century, although the relative prosperity of these two sites is more difficult to establish. The inhabitants of the small villa at Claydon Pike appear to have grown more concerned with security, as judged from the increased number of locking devices in late contexts and the construction of a substantial ditched and walled enclosure around the main building (Fig. 3.18). However, the erection of a well built masonry footed shrine at some point after AD 364-7 suggests that considerable economic resources were still available at this time. The Roughground Farm villa is thought to have declined rapidly after AD 370 (Allen *et al.* 1993, 199), although occupation of some nature probably continued into the 5th century (see Fig. 3.9).

Fig. 3.17 (opposite) Somerford Keynes, Cotswold Community, Glos: the development of the settlement during the late Iron Age and Roman period

Fig. 3.18 Claydon Pike, Glos: ditch and wall surrounding the late Roman villa, looking north

Many of the other Upper Thames Valley settlements in existence at the start of the late Roman period also appear to have continued until at least the end of the 4th century. At Barton Court Farm a large group of Theodosian coins indicates quite pronounced late 4th-century activity, and occupation of some sort clearly continued into the 5th and 6th centuries, albeit with major changes (Miles 1986, 47; see below and Chapter 6). Cemeteries just to the north at Radley Barrow Hills are mostly probably related to the late villa occupation, with pottery indicating burial continuing at least into the late 4th century (Atkinson 1952-3; Chambers and McAdam 2007). At Old Shifford Farm (Hey 1995, 174) and Farmoor (Lambrick and Robinson 1979) occupation also continued until at least the end of the 4th century, although there is no evidence from either site for significant post-Roman activity. At Farmoor the presence of a late Roman scythe suggests the cultivation of hay meadows at this time if not before. There is more evidence from Yarnton for continuous activity right through from the prehistoric to the post-Roman period (Hey 2004). Certainly late Roman occupation is well attested at this site, with the floodplain grassland being used for grazing and the well-drained soils of the 2nd terrace being extensively cultivated. Coin evidence continues right up until the end of the 4th century, and although the evidence suggests a dramatic decline in activity in the 5th century, the land appears to have continued to be worked (ibid., 35; see below).

Nucleated settlements in the region also flourished in the late Roman period (for the 'small town' of Dorchester, see above). Despite the late Roman levels being severely truncated, the quantity of pottery and coins from Abingdon, for example, suggest fairly intensive occupation until well into the 4th century (OA 2001), although its nature at this late date is unclear. In addition to the late Roman settlement and cemetery evidence at Barton Court Farm/Radley Barrow Hills, there was a further late Roman cemetery in the area at Ashville (Parrington 1978, 36). A probable nucleated settlement at Wantage, in the Vale of the White Horse, certainly continued until the end of the 4th century and there was an uncertain relationship between this phase and early Saxon activity at the same site (Holbrook and Thomas 1996, 175; Barber and Holbrook 2001, 299-303). A similar chronology is found further north along the Roman road at Frilford, the site of a large religious complex (see Chapter 5). At Appleford (Hinchliffe and Thomas 1980) there is clear evidence for substantial settlement associated with a distinctive configuration of trackways of a pattern seen elsewhere in the Upper Thames (cf Henig and Booth 2000, 99). This settlement, based around small trackside enclosures, produced very late Roman evidence. Associated with the settlement were two hoards, one of coins dated to the 340s, and one of pewter and other objects (see Chapter 5 for ritual associations). The latter, in particular, has been seen as incompatible with the 'low-status' character of the adjacent settlement (Brown 1973a, 204) and has led to speculation about the possible location of a villa from which it might have derived.

In the Middle Thames Valley the situation is generally less clear. Excavations at Gatehampton

Farm, Goring produced late 3rd- and 4th-century material in abundance suggesting a possible resurgence of activity at this time (Allen 1995, 125). A corn dryer contained late 5th- to 6th-century pottery in the primary destruction layer, and so the possibility must remain that it had continued to function well into the sub-Roman period. The other Roman sites in the vicinity (see above) had no explicitly recorded dating evidence. The later chronology of the aisled house at Pangbourne, for example, remains unknown and the same is true of many other sites in the region. Crucial dating evidence is lacking from many known or suspected Roman sites in the Lower Kennet Valley. Stray 4th-century coins and hoards indicate that activity certainly continued in this area, although probably at a reduced level (Lobb and Rose 1996, 92). A wooden structure found within an old river channel near Burghfield and interpreted as a fish trap was radiocarbon dated to the period cal AD 230-540 AD, so could possibly indicate late Roman exploitation of the river's resources (ibid., 88). Finds recovered from the floodplain and gravel terraces in the Reading area, including a number of 4th-century coin hoards, attest to late Roman occupation of some kind (ibid.), probably in the nature of farmsteads and possibly villas. A timber-lined well discovered during gravel extraction at Caversham contained 4th-century pottery, iron bound wooden buckets, an iron spear and scythe and part of a Christian lead tank containing a Chi-rho symbol (Frere 1989, 319; see Chapter 5). As at Farmoor in the Upper Thames, the scythe suggests that hay meadows may have been managed within the valley during the late Roman period.

The villas at Harpsden and Hambleden seem to have been occupied until at least the latter half of the 4th century. At Maidenhead Cox Green, there are indications that the villa reached its height in the early 4th century and possibly went into decline after *c* AD 350, although occupation is thought to have continued until at least the last quarter of the 4th century (Bennett 1962). Elsewhere, the lower status site at Cookham was apparently occupied into the 4th century, while judging from slight coin evidence, activity at the temple and associated settlement at Weycock Hill seems to have continued until the very end of the Roman period (Cotton 1956-57, 59). The abandonment of a number of sites to the south-east of Maidenhead (eg Eton) by the start of the late Roman period has already been commented on above, and in general evidence for late Roman activity remains scarce at many rural sites in this area. There does appear to have been some continuation (or reoccupation) in the late Roman period at Cippenham, with 3rd/4th-century field systems overlying those of earlier periods, but activity seems to have been quite minimal (Ford *et al.* 2003, 165). Immediately south of the Thames at Bray was a mixed cemetery and associated occupation debris probably dating to the 4th century (Wilson 1972, 349), indicating late Roman occupation of some kind in this area. Also at this site was a group of postholes interpreted as a timber jetty over a Thames tributary although this must remain quite speculative. Nearby in the grounds of Down Place, numerous Roman finds have been recovered, including late Roman coins up to Arcadius, while the remains of a supposedly Roman building were also reportedly found here (Berks SMR 350).

A number of the rural settlements located in the Thames Valley towards Staines, such as Thorpe Lea and Waylands Nursery, seem to have been occupied into the 4th century. At the latter site, which lay on river gravels 800 m east of the Thames and 3 km north-west of Staines, was a triple ditched enclosure and various pits, postholes and gullies (Pine 2003). Its function was probably agricultural and it is unusual in this area for only having 3rd- to 4th-century occupation evidence (ibid., 133). Possible reoccupation of one of the nearby sites at Horton can be seen at this time, as a new field system was created on a different alignment to that of earlier periods (Ford and Pine 2003, 84). Downstream at Hurst Park there was minimal later Roman pottery, and this was all thought to have been residual in Saxon features (Andrews 1996b, 103). The 'ladder' enclosures and associated settlement at Perryoaks, Heathrow, appear to have continued throughout the late Roman period, and indeed some residue of this late Roman landscape can be traced in the medieval ridge and furrow (Framework Archaeology 2006, 230).

Apart from settlements such as these, the general evidence for the late Roman period at many of the valley sites in this area remains quite poor (Bird 2004b, 73). Although the scarcity of evidence must dictate caution, it seems that rural settlement and landscape in this area was undergoing some kind of transformation (decline?) in the later Roman period, perhaps linked with the noticeable economic decline in the surrounding urban centres.

This summary account has revealed the patchiness of the overall evidence for late Roman rural settlement in the Middle Thames Valley. All of the villas with dating evidence certainly appear to have been occupied at this time and in a number of cases there are indications of expansion, at least during the early 4th century. However there are fewer indications of activity flourishing until the end of the Roman period, such as characterises much of the Upper Thames Valley. Although this may in part be because of a comparative lack of detailed archaeological information, the possibility must remain that there was a genuine regional disparity between the Upper and Middle Thames at this time. Certainly, in the two areas which have received more detailed archaeological research, around the Lower Kennet Valley and around Eton, there are real indications of a late Roman decline in activity, although many more data are needed from well-excavated settlements.

THE SUB-ROMAN PERIOD (EARLY 5TH CENTURY AD)

There is no doubt that the breakdown of centralised administrative and military authority and collapse of the monetary economy in the early 5th century would have had a devastating effect upon at least the upper levels of Romano-British society. How far Roman lifestyles and institutions may have persisted in this sub-Roman period is discussed in Chapters 4 and 7, but here we need to examine the extent of apparent settlement continuity from the end of the 4th century onwards. As mentioned above, late Roman settlement patterns exhibit much local and regional diversity, although the Upper Thames as a whole does have the clearest evidence for a thriving and prosperous 4th-century settlement pattern. The problems of dating once coin supply ceases and large scale pottery production ends are well known, with the corollary that many settlements may seem to have been totally abandoned at the start of the 5th century. Yet, although population decline is likely to have been considerable in the 5th and 6th centuries AD, much of the land in the Upper Thames at least appears to have continued to be farmed without any apparent break (see Chapter 2, above; Robinson 1992a, 59; Hamerow 1992, 43), suggesting not insignificant continuity of occupation.

The urban centre of Cirencester had particularly strong evidence for activity in the late Roman period (see above) and appears to have been occupied well into the 5th century and possibly beyond, although how far any urban civic functions remained is debatable. A probable extra-mural market place within the amphitheatre seems to have continued to function, while a substantial post-built structure within the arena could belong to the post-Roman period, although dating is uncertain (Holbrook 1998, 140, 174). Theodosian coins (AD 388-402) on the latest floor surfaces of the basilica suggest activity into the 5th century (Holbrook 1998, 121), and there is evidence for timber buildings very late in the structural sequences within parts of the town indicating that further buildings were erected at this time. Although the overall evidence is slight, it does suggest that not inconsiderable levels of occupation may have continued well into the post-Roman period. The town certainly seems to have been a base for the late Roman military and it is possible that elements of the army remained into the post-Roman period under rulers based here, although how they would have been supported in a non-monetary economy is uncertain. It does, however, seem quite possible that the elite classes continued to govern much of the surrounding Cotswolds and Upper Thames region from here for some time.

Further south and east, mainly on the gravel terraces of the Thames Valley, were a number of settlements which appeared to show evidence for continued activity into the 5th century including Somerford Keynes and possibly Roughground Farm (see above). However, it is unlikely that this occupation can be pushed too far into the post-Roman period, and there were other sites such as Claydon Pike where occupation had probably ceased by the early 5th century. One exception is the settlement at Ashton Keynes, which on preliminary evidence appears to have continued into the 5th and even 6th centuries AD (WA 2001). In addition, although the villa buildings at Barnsley Park, *c* 7 km east of Cirencester, were supposedly abandoned around the mid 5th century AD, the fields continued to be cultivated long afterwards, as indicated by scatters of grass-tempered pottery (Webster and Smith 1982, 93).

Further east along the Thames Valley in Oxfordshire evidence suggests continuity of occupation in one form or another, although it is obvious that great changes in settlement, society and economy were also occurring. The important evidence from the town of Dorchester has been discussed above. Elsewhere, activity at Yarnton certainly seems to last until the end of the 4th century, but how far Roman agricultural systems extended into 5th century is largely unknown (Hey 2004, 40). Important environmental evidence suggests a slow-down in the deposition of river sediments, thereby possibly indicating the abandonment of some arable fields at least in areas upriver at this time, although managed grazing still appears to have occurred (ibid.). All of this suggests that while the scale of economic operations may have been greatly reduced, possibly due to population decline, at least one small area of settlement probably still existed. Further evidence that the landscape was still utilised comes from a pollen sequence taken near Shotover, north-east of Oxford, which revealed that an open landscape was maintained until at least the late Saxon period (Day 1991; Hamerow 1992, 43).

South of the Thames at Frilford and Wantage, late and sub-Roman activity appears quite marked (Holbrook and Thomas 1996), although little is known about the nature of occupation at this time, or the relationships with the early Saxon settlements (see below). In some ways the same is true of the modest villa at Barton Court Farm to the east, although this site has produced some of the best evidence for a late Roman to early Saxon sequence in the Thames Valley (Miles 1986; see Fig. 6.10). The villa appears to have been in use until at least the early 5th century AD, leaving only a very small interval – if indeed there was one at all – before the construction of the earliest Saxon buildings. Environmental evidence has indicated that some arable production (including flax growing) continued on the gravel terraces over the whole of this period, thus demonstrating at least some level of continuity. Some decline in arable production in the area is suggested however, by an alluviation sequence noted at Thrupp near Abingdon, which was similar to that at Yarnton (Hey 2004, 40).

Gatehampton Farm near Goring is one of a very few Middle Thames sites with recorded evidence for a possible continuation of occupation in the 5th century, although whether there was any relationship with the late 5th- to 6th-century Saxon occupation remains unknown (Allen 1995, 126). A 'logboat' coffin containing the skeleton of an adult female found during gravel quarrying at Smallmead south of Reading gave radiocarbon dates of 1500±60 and 1750±50 BP which would suggest a 5th century date (*BAJ* 71 1981-2, 104), although it cannot be related explicitly to any sub-Roman native population.

It is quite possible that much of the Middle Thames region was still under the influence of the town at Silchester, at least during the first half of the 5th century AD. Occupation of the town in the 5th century is well attested, with a famous inscribed Ogham script stone naming a man called Tebicatus being of this date (Fulford *et al.* 2000). However, the influence of the town is likely to have waned quite rapidly as its population declined, and earthworks known as Grim's Bank, blocking the Roman road to Dorchester about two miles north of the town, could possibly represent the defence of an increasingly limited enclave. At Hoveringham Pit, Bray, occupation is supposed to have continued into the 5th and possibly 6th centuries, although no explicit evidence is provided for this (Stanley 1972). At Waylands Nursery, Wraysbury, a late Roman settlement has been reported as continuing without any break in occupation into the early Saxon period, when a typical Saxon sunken hut was constructed (Pine 2003, 137; see below). Although late Roman activity at Staines was clearly less intensive than in earlier periods, occupation certainly continued at this time, and it has been suggested that it persisted through to the Saxon period, although the evidence is admittedly very poor (Poulton 1987, 215). It has further been argued that while certain characteristics of Romano-British life must have disappeared, there is likely to have been much continuity in terms of agricultural practice in post-Roman Surrey (ibid.). However plausible this seems, further excavation of multi-period sites with good environmental sequences will be needed to corroborate this.

THE EARLY SAXON PERIOD (5TH TO 6TH CENTURIES AD)

The early Anglo-Saxon period: the 5th century

The 5th century saw a very marked change in the settlement pattern in the project area. In broad outline this is clear enough when we compare the archaeological record at the end of the 4th century (see above) with what is evident 100 years later, when the presence of new types of communities can be seen (see below). What happened in between remains one of the most controversial episodes of British archaeology. Here, as elsewhere, the evidence has been interpreted as meaning that the area was substantially abandoned by the Romano-British, and taken over by an incoming population of Anglo-Saxons. However, recent results suggest that the reality was far more complex than this.

Some of the clearest indicators of change come from the environmental record, and the results reviewed above from a number of sites suggest continuity of farming but at a much reduced level (see Chapter 2, above, and Chapter 6, below). The number of known Anglo-Saxon sites and burials in the project area that are certainly datable to the first half of the 5th century remains vanishingly small, and, at least on present evidence, it is simply not possible to attribute the maintenance of a farmed landscape to immigrant communities. To date, only seven sites with probable early 5th-century burials have been positively identified in the study area, at Abingdon Saxton Road (2 burials and possibly 1 cremation), Dorchester Dyke Hills and Minchin Recreation Ground (3 burials), Berinsfield (2 burials), Frilford (1 burial), Minster Lovell (1 burial) and more recently West Hendred (Dickinson 1976 Vol I, 401-4; Hamerow 1993b: this volume, Appendix).

The most visible early 5th-century evidence comes from the declining towns and villas, some of which eventually show evidence for 'Anglo-Saxon' occupation (see below). These were, however, relatively high-status sites. The towns and villa estates were an integral part of the late Roman administrative and economic system, and were unsustainable in its absence. They may, therefore, be showing a particularly acute form of decline, although fundamental changes in the character of expression of status in this period may also have been a factor (see Chapter 4 below). Dislocation of settlement may have been less marked at a humbler level in society, but while we have abundant evidence for the infrastructure and material culture of late Roman peasant farmsteads (field ditches, trackways, enclosures, pottery), the houses and agricultural buildings themselves leave only scarce traces. Such buildings are likely to be as invisible to us in the 5th century as they were in the 4th. There is no evidence for the replacement of late Roman field or trackway systems in the early Saxon period, which, in the context of continuing agricultural activity, suggests either that 5th-century farms were using the same fields and tracks, or that defining boundaries and trackways was simply not so important in a much emptier landscape.

Whether Romano-British farms and farmers survived into the late 5th century therefore remains difficult to assess. At a general level, agricultural exploitation of the Thames Valley in the late Roman period had been so extensive that almost any late 5th- or 6th-century settlement would have been located on what had previously been Roman farmland, regardless of whether there was any genuine continuity of occupation or cultivation. It may, however, be possible to move the debate forward in the future by looking for more evidence for local differences in the environmental and

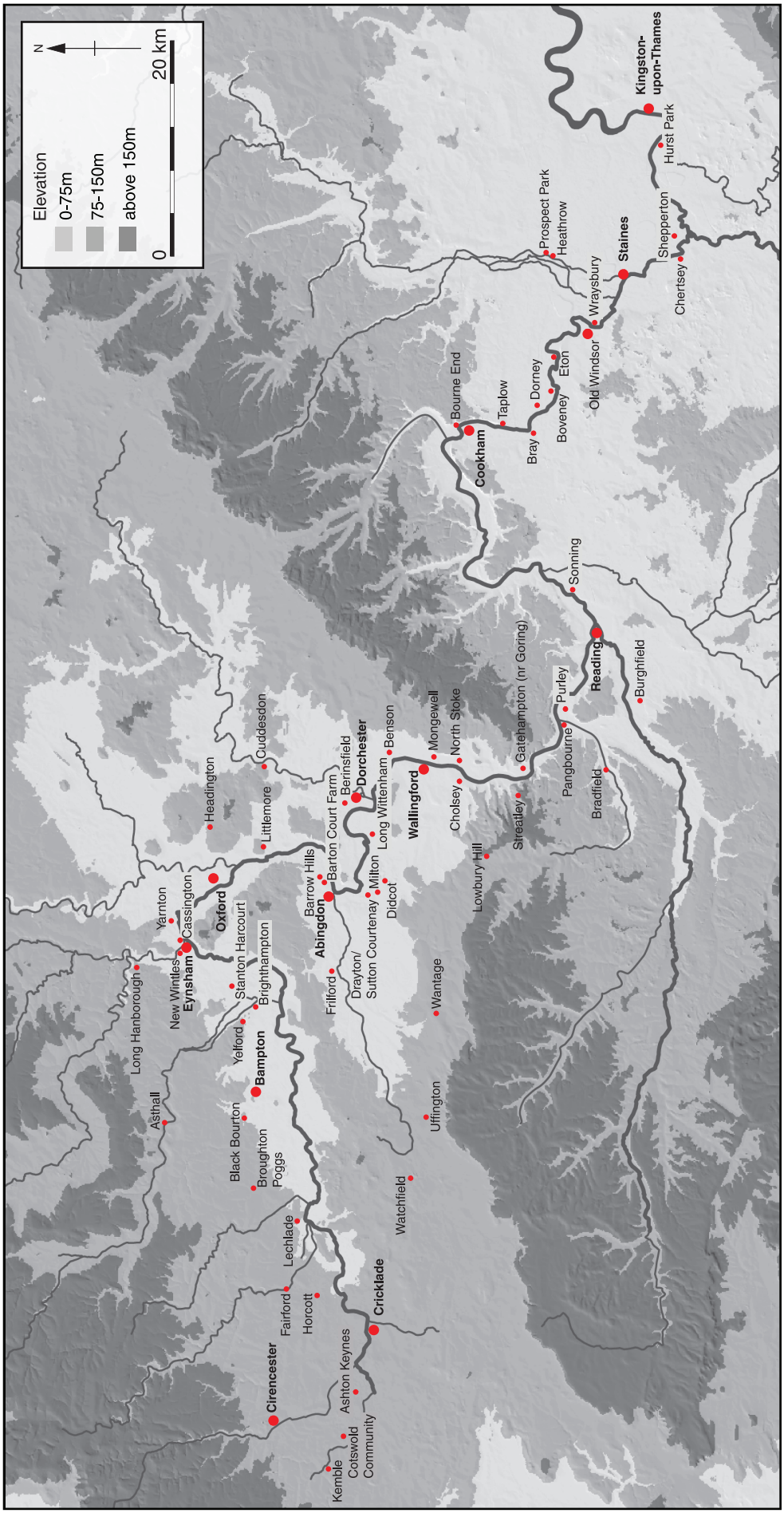


Fig. 3.19 Anglo-Saxon sites

settlement record. The environmental evidence suggests that there were contrasts between different parts of the valley consistent with a decline in intensive arable farming, and the re-establishment of patterns of smaller-scale mixed farming. Might the changed conditions of the 5th century have encouraged a reduced population to concentrate on farming at places offering a mix of resources capable of supporting both pastoral and limited arable agriculture within an essentially self-sufficient system?

The late 5th and 6th centuries (Fig. 3.19)

The pattern of settlement

Burials accompanied by distinctive Anglo-Saxon grave goods and cremation urns remain the best general indicator of the extent and spread of Anglo-Saxon influence in the valley in the 5th and 6th centuries, if not necessarily always of the actual presence of Germanic immigrants and their descendants (see Chapter 4). A major study of all cemeteries in the Upper Thames region was carried out by Tania Dickinson in the early 1970s (Dickinson 1976). She produced a series of distribution maps showing the extent and spread of Anglo-Saxon cemeteries during the 5th, 6th and 7th centuries. We are most grateful to Dr Dickinson for permission to reproduce this information, which can be found as an appendix to the current volume, accompanied by a table with the main details of each site. Figure 3.19 shows only the major cemeteries falling within our present study area of the Upper and Middle Thames Valley. All cemeteries discussed in the current volume can be identified from the list provided in the Appendix table.

Tania Dickinson identified a total of 27 cemeteries in the Upper Thames Valley and surrounding region that certainly or probably came into use during the 5th century, 15 that came into use during the later 5th or earlier 6th century, and 55 cemeteries in use during the 6th century (1976 Vol I, table 15). Cemeteries at West Hendred, Lechlade Butler's Field and Watchfield, discovered since her survey was carried out, also show evidence of coming into use during the 5th century. Downstream two, or possibly three, cemeteries of the 5th to 6th centuries existed in the Shepperton area (see below). On the basis of present evidence, the distribution of cemeteries suggests a strong early bias towards the river valleys, with concentrations at the river confluences, and it seems very likely that the valleys of the Thames and its tributaries were a significant highway for population and economic movements at this time. The settlements in which these people lived have indeed been discovered increasingly upon the Thames gravels in recent years, and it is now clear that settlements are to be found on the 1st (floodplain) terrace, as well as higher ground. However, the presence of a number of burial sites on the Berkshire Downs from at least the later 5th century suggests that the reality was rather more complex. Intensive quarrying means that sites are much more likely to be discovered on the Thames gravels than in adjacent areas such as the Cotswolds and the Downs, where the pressure of development is much less. There is therefore a bias of recovery in our data relating to this period, but how seriously this skews our picture of the past remains unquantifiable at present.

The most significant known settlement sites are discussed below, working downstream from the Cirencester area.

Characteristics of early Anglo-Saxon settlements (Figs 3.20-3.21)

Early Anglo-Saxon settlements have a number of characteristics that distinguish them very clearly from the farmsteads of the late Roman period. Their general form is illustrated by two of the larger-scale excavations to have been carried out in the area, at New Wintles Farm and Radley Barrow Hills, both of which are discussed and illustrated below. Two distinctive new building types are seen, both seemingly deriving from continental prototypes: the sunken hut (variously known as the Sunken Featured Building, or SFB, or in German the *Grubenhaus*) and the post-built hall (see Figs 3.20 and 3.21). Early Anglo-Saxon settlements in the study area are also characterised, for the most part, by a lack of evidence for formal organisation of space, with no sign of the division of settlements into individual house plots, and relatively little evidence for the definition of fields and paddocks. This contrasts markedly with the well-ordered landscapes seen at many late Roman sites (see above). In general, settlements are very similar to one another, with little sign of status differences in the division of space, or size and form of buildings, and no evidence for defensive enclosures. It is important to bear in mind, however, that most excavations in the study area have been undertaken on a relatively small scale. Where information is available, cropmark evidence, fieldwalking and earlier discoveries suggest that many of the known excavated sites are likely to have formed only part of a much larger settlement focus, often extending over distances of up to 750 m. This has been confirmed in the few cases where excavation has been undertaken on this scale, as on the gravel terrace site at Mucking in Essex (Hamerow 1993a, fig. 50). Here, it was clear that the focus of settlement had shifted several times over the course of the 5th to 7th centuries. Over 50 post-built halls and 200 sunken huts were identified in investigations of some 18 ha, but it is likely that only around 10 household units were standing at any one time (Hamerow 2002, 94). At West Heslerton

Fig. 3.20 (overleaf) Feature: Sunken huts followed by Fig. 3.21 Feature: Post-built halls

SUNKEN HUTS

Sunken huts (also known as sunken-featured buildings, or, in German, *Grubenhäuser*) are the commonest and the most characteristic buildings of the early Anglo-Saxon period. They occur widely on settlement sites of the 5th to 7th centuries, and examples dating to the 8th or 9th century were found at Yarnton and Shepperton Green. The base of a sunken hut was formed by a large, shallow, flat rectangular pit, which is usually the only element that survives in the archaeological record. Many sunken hut pits have a posthole centrally placed in both short sides. These are thought to have held posts supporting a tent-like roof of thatch, sloping down to the ground, or low turf or mud walls, on the long sides. Sunken huts with more complex arrangements of postholes and stakeholes are known in the study area and elsewhere, suggesting that other forms of construction were also used. There remains considerable debate about whether the pits were floored over at ground level, or whether the base of the pit functioned as the floor of the hut. Small-scale excavations outside the north wall of the present Dorchester Abbey have recently located the remains of a large hut thought to be of 6th or 7th century date, with evidence for beams supporting a suspended floor (Keevill 2003, 323-4 and fig 8).

Sunken huts were introduced into England in the 5th century, probably by incoming Germanic people. On the continent, the sunken hut seems to have its origins in the later Iron Age, and is then widespread on continental sites of the Roman and migration period (Tipper 2004, 4).

Above, top: *A reconstructed view of a sunken hut showing possible suspended floor*
Above: *The pit of a sunken hut at Eynsham, with postholes in the centre of the short sides*

Facing page:
Yarnton Cresswell Field SFB 7325 (8th century), plan and cross-section, with numerous stakeholes in the floor of the pit

Radley Barrow Hills SFB 20 (6th century) , plan and cross-section of pit, with finds comprising a knife, a whetstone, a comb and pottery

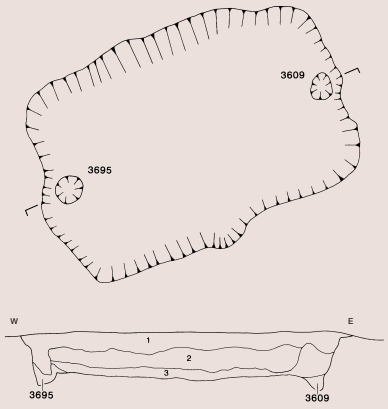
Hurst Park, East Molesey SFB 16 (late 6th or 7th century), plan and cross-section with a ramp at the east end

SUNKEN HUTS

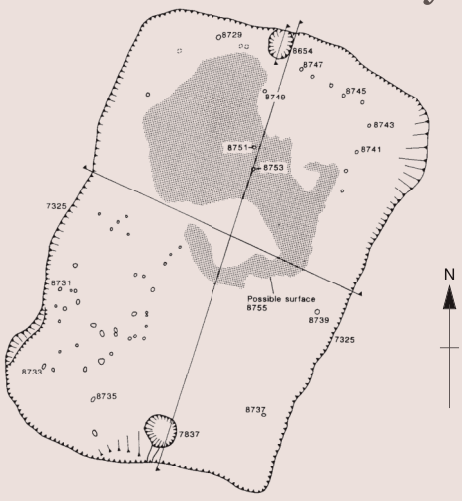
The greatest numbers are found in the North Sea zone, where they formed a common component of settlements from the late Roman Iron Age into the Carolingian and Viking periods (Hamerow 2002, 31-2). The vast majority were ancillary to ground-level houses, and it is likely that they were used for a variety of different purposes, including weaving and grain storage. The evident variations in size and structure suggest that they had a number of uses; the smallest huts are little more than 2 m square, while the largest in the study area are more than 6 m long and 4 m wide. There is some evidence to suggest that larger huts tend to be later in date.

The pit was usually backfilled with soil and general debris once a hut had gone out of use. As a result, sunken huts are one of the richest sources of finds on settlement sites. They frequently contain animal bone and broken pottery, and often bone combs and pins, weaving equipment such as loomweights and spindlewhorls, and sometimes fragments of querns, whetstones, knives and other metalwork.

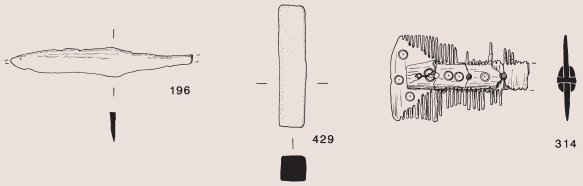
Sunken hut plans from the Thames Valley



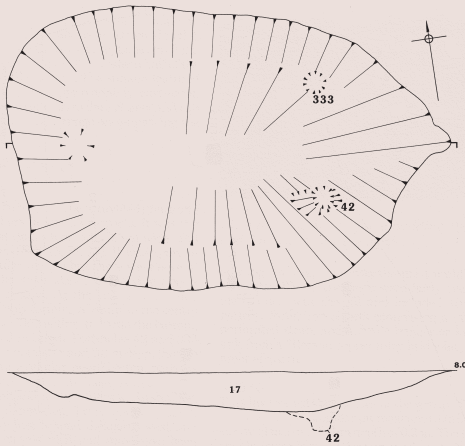
Radley Barrow Hills above SFB20; below finds from SFB20



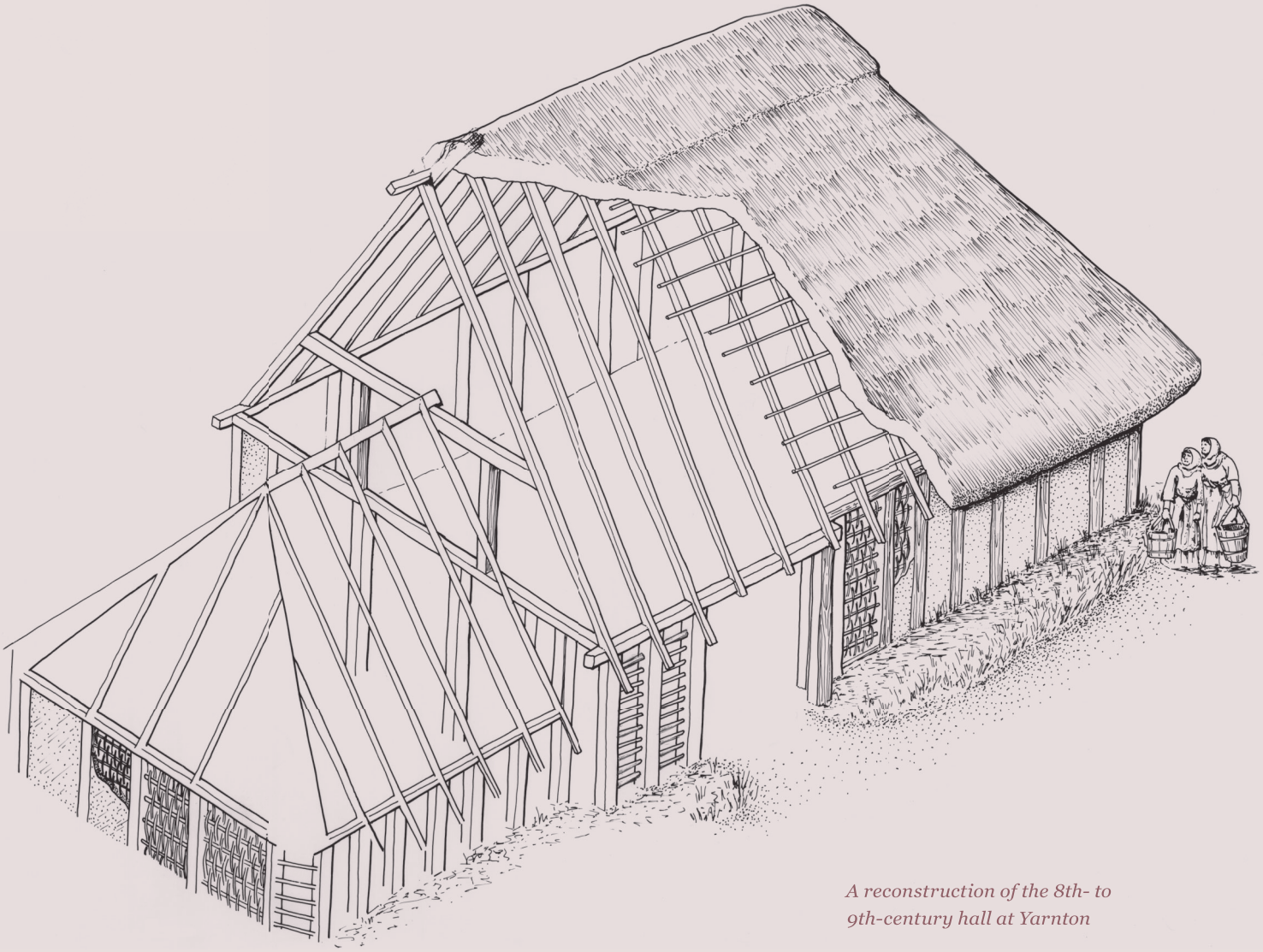
Yarnton Cresswell Field



Hurst Park



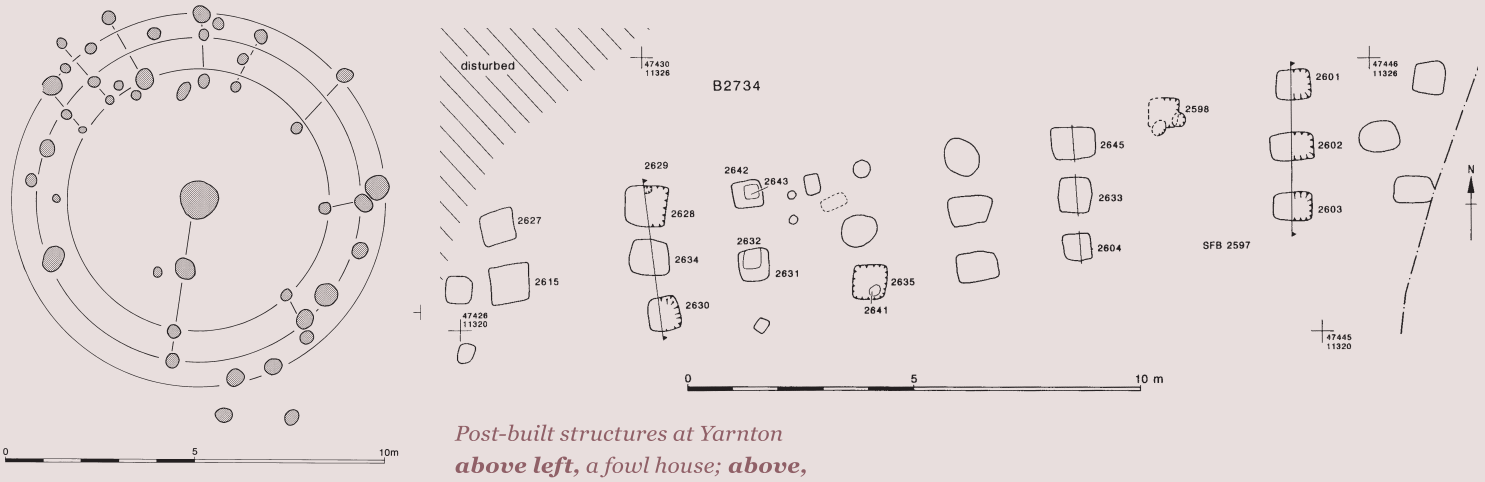
POST BUILT HALLS



A reconstruction of the 8th- to 9th-century hall at Yarnton

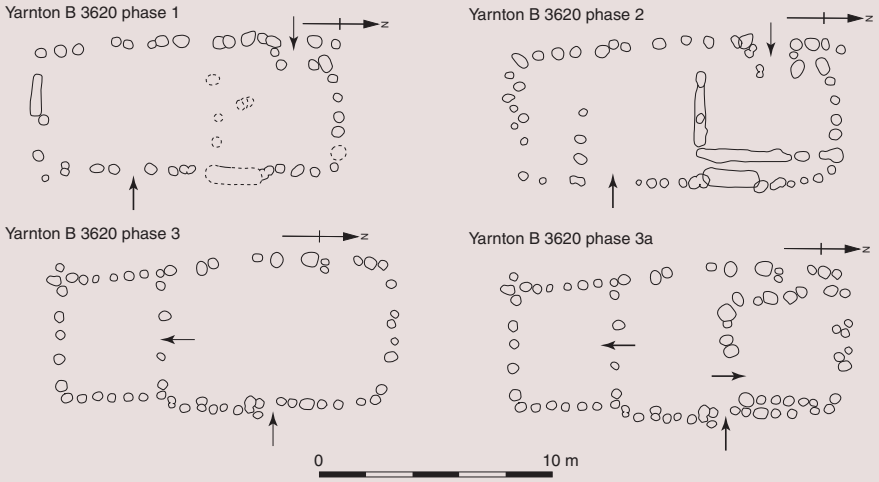
Post-built halls are present on most Anglo-Saxon settlement sites, although (unlike the more distinctive sunken huts) they were not generally recognised by archaeologists in this country until the 1950s. In their simplest, and earliest, form they were constructed using upright posts set into individual postholes. Postholes forming a characteristic rectangular shape are often the only evidence remaining of these buildings on archaeological sites today. The weight of the roof must have been carried on the walls, as there is usually no evidence for any internal supports, and roofs were probably made of thatch or wooden shingles. The space between the posts often seems to have been filled with daub on a wattle framework. Most early Saxon halls consist of a single room, although evidence for an internal partition, usually at the east end, survives in roughly 25% of examples (Hamerow 2002, 47). There were usually two entrance doorways, set opposite each other in the long walls. More sophisticated construction techniques using posts set into continuous foundation trenches and double plank construction came into use from the late 6th century. During the 7th century, roughly half of the known halls were constructed using foundation trenches, rising to 75% in the 8th and 9th centuries. However, halls built of posts in individual postholes continued to be constructed throughout this period. Annexes at the gable ends of buildings also occur from the late 6th or 7th century onwards (ibid., 50).

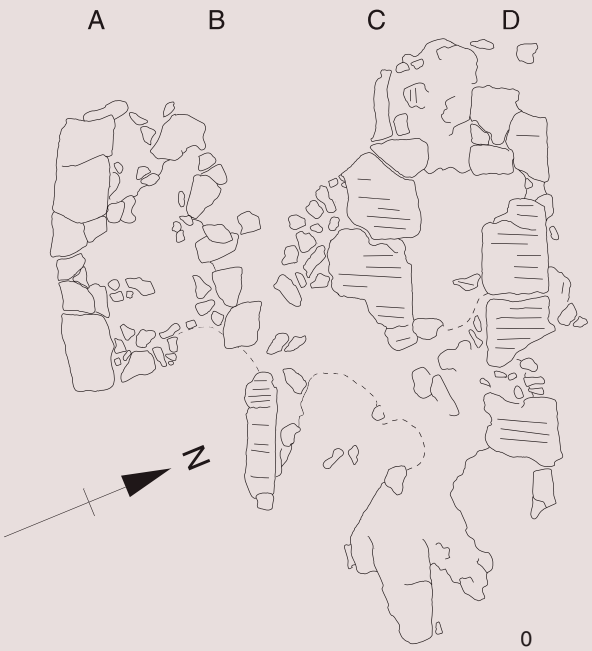
POST BUILT HALLS

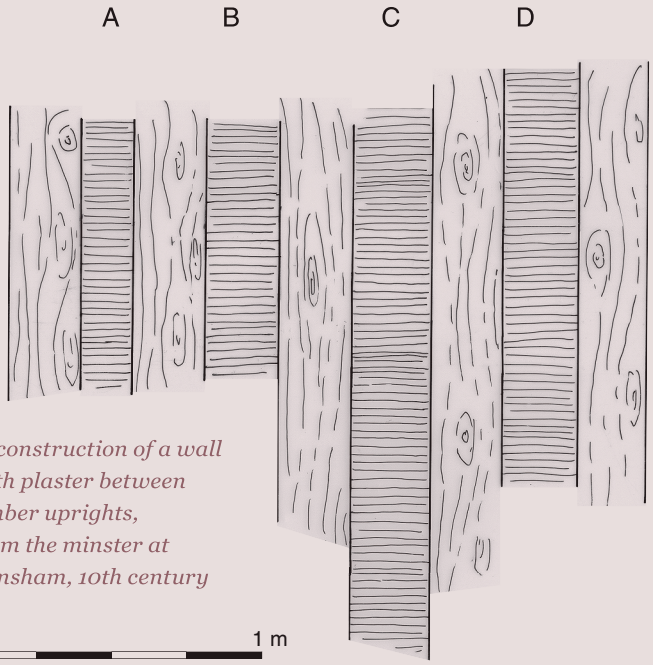


Post-built structures at Yarnton ***above left,*** *a fowl house;* ***above,*** *a granary;* ***below****, the developing ground plan of the main hall*

These halls are generally believed to have been the living accommodation of the Anglo-Saxon population, and the large halls of kings and lords could accommodate many members of a household, including family, the lord's warband, and servants. Very little evidence for the superstructure of these buildings survives anywhere, but it is clear that they could be of very elaborate design. As well as living accommodation, it is likely that many post-built structures will have been used as barns, as animal sheds and for a variety of other storage and working purposes. Firsthand evidence of this, however, rarely survives.







Reconstruction of a wall with plaster between timber uprights, from the minster at Eynsham, 10th century

in Yorkshire, some 20 ha of a settlement site have been investigated (Powlesland 1997, 110-13). Here, it is suggested that the settlement was divided into five zones, one for housing, one for craft working, one for crop and livestock processing, one with evidence of more mixed activity (including extensive industrial/craft working), and one regularly enclosed zone that seems to have been of higher status (ibid., 111-13).

The Upper Thames Valley (Figs 3.22-3.27)

Knowledge of Anglo-Saxon settlement in the upper reaches of the Thames has advanced rapidly in recent years. A small number of burials are known from Cirencester, and three small cemeteries have been identified at Kemble, although unfortunately two of these were discovered during the 19th century and very little information is available about them (a summary and discussion can be found in King *et al*. 1996). Two large cemeteries existed at Fairford and Butler's Field Lechlade, both dating from the mid/late 5th century, and the latter continuing until the late 7th/early 8th century AD (Boyle *et al.* 1998). Part of a settlement has now been excavated adjacent to the Butler's Field cemetery, and this is discussed further under the mid Saxon period, below. Recent excavations at Somerford Keynes Cotswold Community have found structures of early or mid Saxon date (see Fig. 3.31; discussed further below) and current excavations at Horcott, near Fairford, have found a number of sunken huts in the vicinity of a Roman cemetery (see Fig. 1.5). Settlement evidence is also known from south-west of Fairford at Lady Lamb Farm (Hey 2001) and ceramic material of this date has been found at the Loders (Darvill *et al.* 1986) and Great Lemhill Farm (Boyle *et al*., 1998, 5).

Settlement at the Thames/Windrush confluence is principally known from cemetery sites. On the east side of the confluence, a cemetery of some 23+ individuals set into a Bronze Age barrow is known from Stanton Harcourt and is probably datable to the 7th century (see below and Chapter 4); 15 unaccompanied west-east burials of uncertain date were reportedly found during gravel quarrying at Blackditch and an unknown number of skeletons were recovered during gravel quarrying at Dix's Pit (see Hardy *et al*. 2003, 576 for detailed references). Cropmark evidence suggests possible sunken huts in the vicinity, and two 'broad, shallow, contiguous depressions', one of which contained sherds of stamped decorated Anglo-Saxon pottery, were discovered during the working of a gravel pit south of the road to Beard Mill, near to the river Windrush (*Oxoniensia* **vii**, 104). A single sunken hut was found during excavations at the nearby Iron Age site of Gravelly Guy (Lambrick and Allen 2004, 217-19). Little is known about settlement to the west of the confluence. Here, however, the presence of late 5th- to 6th-century cemeteries at Brighthampton and Broughton Poggs, and cemeteries at Standlake Down and Yelford of the 7th and 8th centuries, suggests that there must have been significant levels of occupation in the area.

Much more information is available from the area of the Thames/Evenlode confluence. West of the confluence, prior to the foundation of the minster at Eynsham in the 8th century, a secular settlement had existed, dating possibly from the later 5th to mid/late 7th century (Hardy *et al.* 2003). The excavated evidence comprised five sunken huts and a small number of associated features including a fence, a possible posthole structure and pits. Despite the reference to Eynsham in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle as one of the *tunas* captured by the West Saxons in 571, the finds and environmental evidence suggested that during the 6th century this was no more than an ordinary farmstead engaged in mixed, subsistence agriculture. The excavated buildings appear to have been on the edge of a settlement that extended further to the north and east, with finds of further probable sunken huts, pottery and burials recorded as far as the edge of the village, some 750 m to the north (Hardy *et al*. 2003, 467-9 and fig. 14.1). The nearby settlement of New Wintles Farm is a rare and important example in the study area of a site with evidence for both 6th- and 7th-century occupation, and is considered further below.

On the east of the confluence, construction and gravel quarrying in and around the village of Cassington between the 1930s and 1950s led to the discovery of a number of what appear to have been very interesting sites. Unfortunately opportunities for recording were minimal, and the true significance of this area may now never be known (recent summaries of the evidence, with references, can be found in Hey 2004, 10-11, 30 and fig. 1.2; and Hardy *et al*. 2003, appendix 6). Cassington, like Dorchester and Abingdon, had been the site of a late Iron Age 'enclosed oppidum', and occupation within and around the enclosure continued throughout the Roman period (see above). An early Anglo-Saxon settlement and a large cemetery were identified roughly 1 km to the south-west. Here, a number of sunken huts were recorded, associated with characteristic early Anglo-Saxon settlement finds that included a disc brooch, plain and decorated pottery, weaving equipment and a parcel of ten loomweights in a row. Numerous Anglo-Saxon and Roman burials were found nearby, the grave goods including a Kempston-type cone beaker and a pair of radiate brooches, both unusual finds for the study area. Just under 2 km to the north, a second area of early Saxon settlement was identified at Purwell Farm. Here, some 21 skeletons were recovered, associated with cast saucer brooches, a disc brooch, shields and spears, knives, amber and glass beads and boars' tusks. Two groups of sunken huts were located some 700 m further to the north-east; a few burials, hearths and patterns of postholes that may have represented post-built structures were also identified. It was suggested by the excavators

that two discrete settlements were represented. The excavations found evidence for weaving, bone comb making, the casting of an elaborate bronze saucer brooch, and a little iron working. The two kilns or ovens found at the site are now believed to be early Roman rather than early Saxon.

In the Yarnton area just to the east was a series of settlements dating from the end of the 5th or start of the 6th century AD (Hey 2004). At Yarnton itself the excavations located four sunken huts along with a modest post-built structure and pits which were possibly contemporary. Most of the buildings were probably quite short-lived structures, and further parts of the widely dispersed settlement may lie in unexcavated areas to the north (ibid., 41). A cemetery roughly 100 m north of the settlement was destroyed during the construction of the railway in the 19th century; surviving grave goods are of late 6th- to 7th-century date. Just over 1 km to the west at Worton was another dispersed early Saxon settlement, of which just three sunken huts were excavated (ibid.), while cropmark and fieldwalking evidence reveal that the total area of occupation covered approximately 7 ha. Environmental samples from this 6th-to 7th-century landscape phase indicate a mixed agricultural regime, with arable cultivation (mainly hulled barley) occurring not only on the higher gravel terraces but also probably on the wetter gravel islands on the floodplain (ibid., 42-3). Such an open mixed agricultural landscape accords well with other early Saxon sites in the Upper Thames Valley (see Chapters 2 and 6).

Evidence from the Thames/Cherwell confluence, at Oxford, remains very patchy at present. The first settlement to have been excavated in the area was recently discovered at Oxford Science Park, Littlemore, where 10-12 sunken huts were found in a *c* 2.25 ha area on a valley side, between the Littlemore Brook to the north and a limestone ridge to the south (Fig. 3.22; J Moore 2001). The area had been plough-damaged and there may originally have been other buildings present. The settlement as found extended over a distance of 265 m and could have continued further. The presence of decorated pottery supports a 6th-century date for the main phase of occupation of the site. Two burials have been found in the Headington area, on the east of the modern city, although there is as yet no archaeological evidence for the later royal estate of Headington. Elsewhere in Oxford, chance finds of burials and objects suggest the presence of early Saxon settlement in and around an area of Roman farmsteads just north of the city centre. Small groups of early to mid Saxon pottery have also been recovered at a number of sites at the terrace edge close to the Thames, suggesting the possibility of some settlement of this date in the vicinity, and an early Saxon cremation urn was found to the west of the modern city at Osney (Dodd ed. 2003, 12; Norton 2006; Blinkhorn forthcoming b).

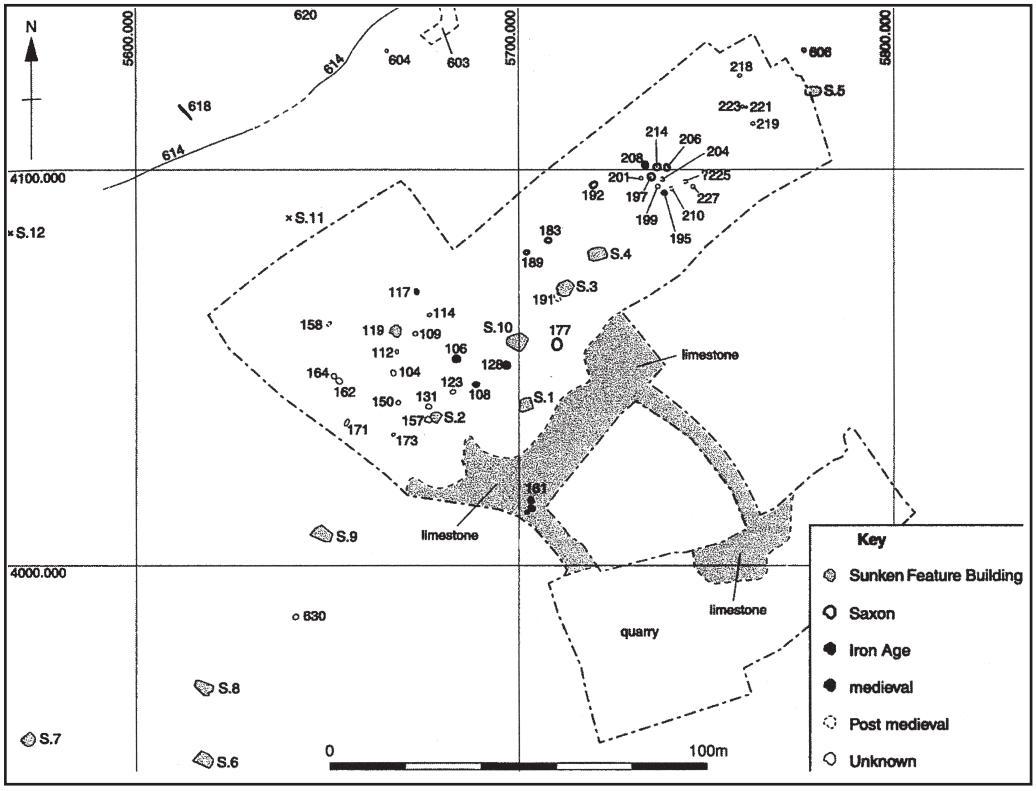


Fig. 3.22 Early Anglo-Saxon settlements: Oxford Science Park, Littlemore, Oxford

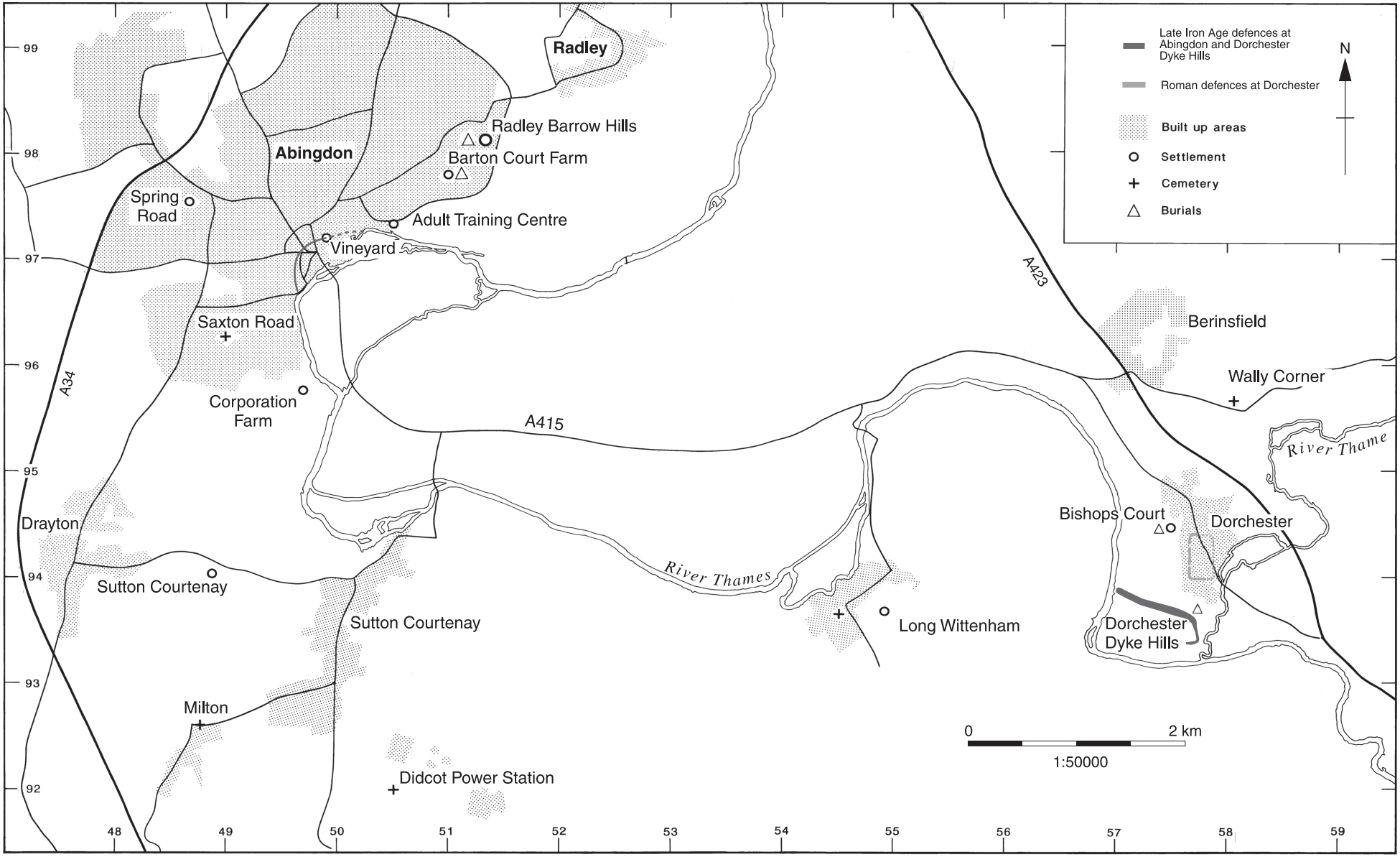


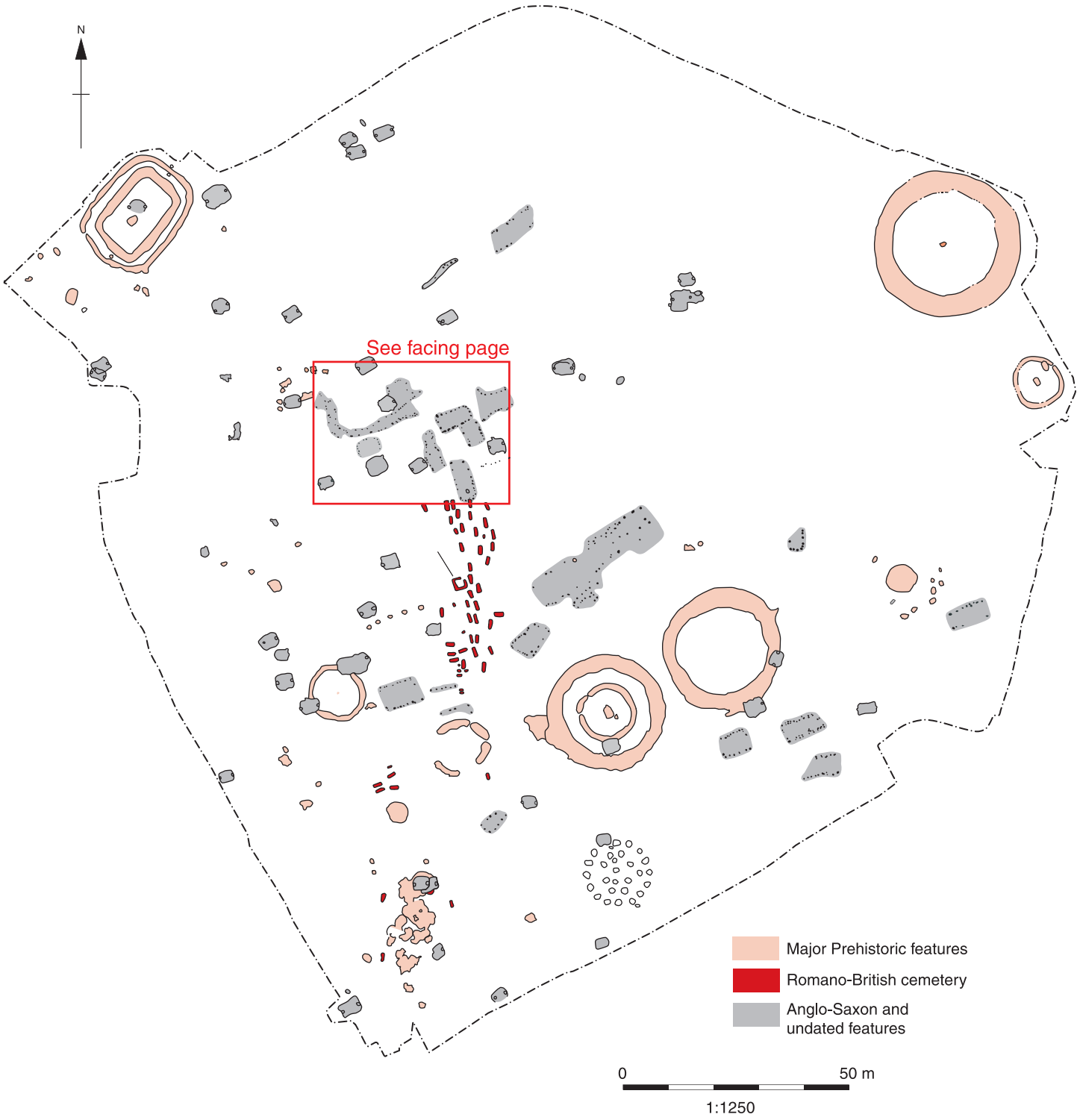
Fig. 3.23 Early Anglo-Saxon settlements and cemeteries in the Abingdon-Dorchester area

The area between the Thames/Ock confluence at Abingdon and the Thames/Thame confluence at Dorchester has the highest concentration of known early Saxon sites in the whole study area (Fig. 3.23). Small groups of sunken huts have been identified at numerous locations within Abingdon, including one associated with lines of postholes at Spring Rd (Allen and Kamash forthcoming), two at the Vineyard (Allen 1990), three at the Adult Training Centre in Audlett Drive (Keevill 1992a), and three at Corporation Farm, to the south of the town. Here the sunken huts were associated with pottery reportedly of 5th-century date but the results unfortunately remain unpublished in detail (ADAS 1973). Roughly 1 km to the north-east of the town centre, at Barton Court Farm, a group of seven sunken huts, several post-built structures, fence lines, a well and a pit were found on the site of a modest late Roman villa (see Fig. 6.10 for a plan of the Anglo-Saxon occupation; Miles 1986). Pottery dating from perhaps as early as the mid 5th century was recovered from the main Roman ditches suggesting little or no lapse between occupation periods (see above). Occupation at the site was thought to have ended in the 6th century, and burials of the mid to late 6th century cut through the villa building, which had been systematically dismantled some time before. It has been suggested that the Barton Court site was an outlying part of the much larger 5th- to early 7th-century settlement at Radley Barrow Hills, centred 300 m to the north-east (Fig. 3.24; Chambers and McAdam 2007). Here, excavations between 1983 and 1985 investigated an area of some 3.5 ha of gravel terrace on which an early Anglo-Saxon settlement had been established within and around an area of Bronze Age barrows and a late Roman cemetery. A total of 22 probable post-built structures (PBS on Fig. 3.24) have been identified but there were many more postholes, particularly to the west of the late Roman cemetery in the centre of the site, that could not be resolved into any coherent form. Some 45 sunken huts (SFBs on Fig. 3.24) were also identified. The settlement appeared to centre on a group of four post-built structures (1-4) arranged around an open area approximately 7 m square (Fig. 3.24 inset detail) and there was a high degree of refurbishment and replacement of buildings in the central part of the site. Ellen McAdam has suggested that the site was a single farmstead, represented by a stable central group of structures, with activities such as the butchery of animals, the processing of animal products, and weaving, carried out in other areas of the site. A small number of burials found in the ruined buildings at Barton Court Farm, and in the Bronze Age barrows, may have been some of the site's occupants. Barrow Hills is dated from the evidence of pottery and other finds to the 5th and 6th centuries. Charcoal from a tree-throw hole at this site was radiocarbon dated to the period cal AD 390-600, suggesting woodland clearance contemporary with the early Saxon settlement (Barclay and Halpin 1999, 167).

Between Drayton and Sutton Courtenay to the south of Abingdon is an important complex of sites located to the west and south of the river, within and around the Drayton Neolithic cursus, and numerous Bronze Age barrows (Figs 3.25, 3.26). Excavations carried out here by E T Leeds in the 1920s and 1930s during gravel quarrying revealed the first Anglo-Saxon settlement to be recognised in this country. He identified a total of 33 sunken huts and at least two post-built structures within an area of roughly 350 m x 250 m; it seems likely that many more buildings had been destroyed by earlier gravel quarrying (Leeds 1923; 1927; 1947). The fills of the sunken huts contained what has come to be recognised as the typical range of early Saxon material found in such contexts, and included pottery, animal bone, combs, loomweights, pin beaters, spindlewhorls, and ironwork including animal bells, hooks, nails, knives and an object interpreted as a flax heckle. The presence of cut bone and antler implies that bone and antler working were taking place. The finds suggest that the settlement dates from the 5th and 6th centuries, and it may be one of the earliest settlements yet known in the study area: a silver equal-armed brooch found in one of the sunken huts is datable to the mid 5th century, and may itself be an import from northern Germany (Leeds 1923, 174-6 and fig. 11; MacGregor and Bolick 1993, 150-51). A small number of burials and stray finds may derive from a cemetery or cemeteries in the area and recent metal detector finds include further objects that are likely to derive from graves, including four 6th-century saucer brooches (Hamerow 1999; Hamerow *et al*. forthcoming). In the fields to the south, cropmarks of a number of large, regularly-aligned hall buildings suggest the presence of a high status settlement, probably datable to the 7th and 8th centuries, which is discussed further below. Further evidence for early Saxon occupation has now been discovered some 500 m to the north of Leeds's settlement, to the west of the cursus (Barclay *et al.* 2003, fig. 5.1), where three sunken huts were identified, along with two fairly clear post-built halls (ibid., 117-121). A sample of cattle bone from this site gave a radiocarbon date of cal AD 550-890 (Barclay *et al.* 2003, 123).

Some 6 km to the east, at Long Wittenham, was a large and important early cemetery. In 1975, hall buildings were recognised from cropmarks a short distance to the east of the cemetery (Fig. 3.26; Hawkes 1986, 89). The National Mapping Programme describes these as a very large hall measuring 21 x 10 m and two others measuring 15 x 9 m, with numerous possible sunken huts also visible in the vicinity (Monument Nos SU59 SW133 and SU59 SE178). A fourth hall in the vicinity has been identified from aerial photography in 1986 (Fig. 3.26).

Elsewhere, large scale evaluation to the immediate west of Drayton located very little Anglo-Saxon evidence (Hearne 2000), suggesting


N
See facing page
Major Prehistoric features
Romano-British cemetery
Anglo-Saxon and undated features
0
50 m
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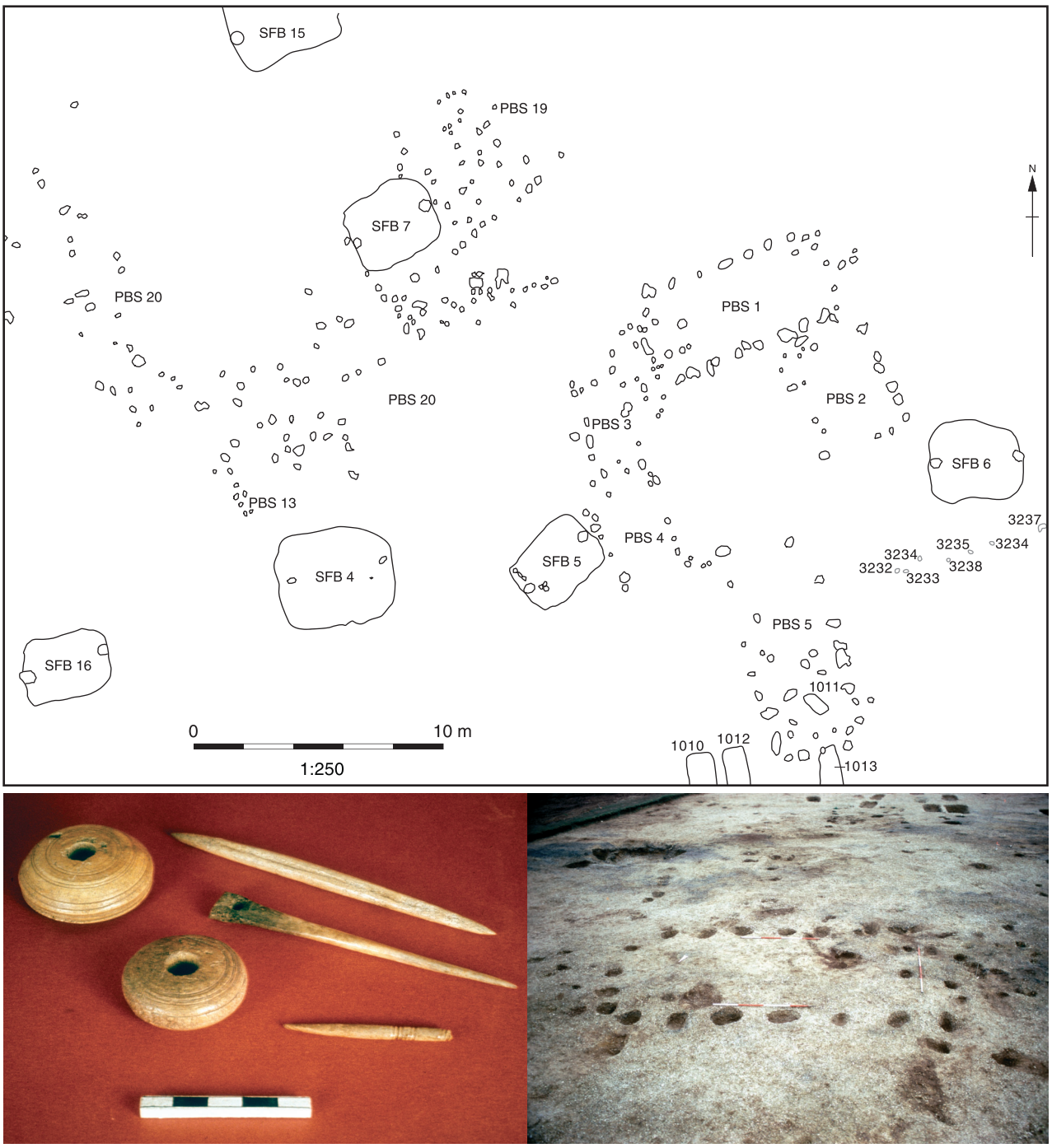


Fig. 3.24 Early Anglo-Saxon settlements: Radley Barrow Hills, Oxon. Left, the site plan; above, detail of central group of structures, textile tools and post-built structures


Cropmarks of the Neolithic cursus, Bronze Age barrows, and other features of unknown date, some of which are very likely to be Anglo-Saxon
Anglo-Saxon settlement features
Areas destroyed by modern quarrying
N
Road to Sutton Courtenay
Road to Milton
Drayton Highways Depot.
Leeds excavation
Drayton South Cursus
Drayton East Way
Drayton 'Palace' complex
0
100 m
1:2500

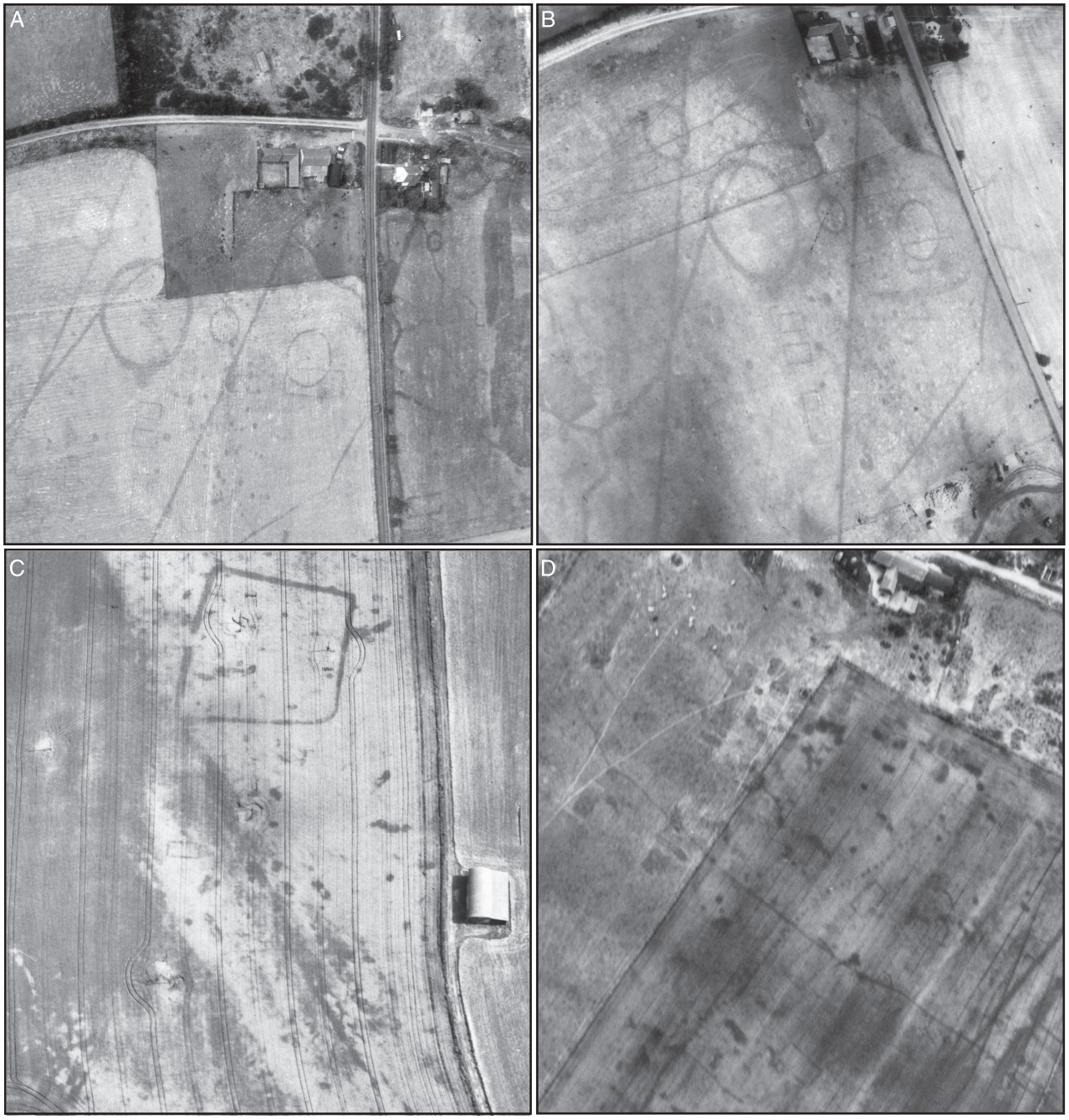


Fig. 3.26 Cropmarks of Anglo-Saxon settlements and halls. A: Drayton/Sutton Courtenay, with halls visible in lower half of photo, west and east of the modern road (looking north; CUCAP/BTT60, 3 July 1975). B: same area, showing additional detail plotted on Fig. 3.25 (CUCAP/AFT91, 25 June 1962). C: Long Wittenham, with hall located to the north of the rectangular enclosure (looking south; NMR 3117/2151, 23 July 1986); D: Long Wittenham, three halls visible to the lower right of the photo (looking north; CUCAP/BTT94, 3 July 1975)

Fig. 3.25 (opposite) Drayton/Sutton Courtenay, Oxon: the settlement excavated by E T Leeds, and the large halls evident from cropmarks

that Saxon settlement was largely focused close to the Thames itself. Further west and south we remain largely reliant on cemetery evidence for settlement along the Ock Valley and on the Berkshire Downs, although some settlement evidence has recently been recorded at Wantage (Holbrook and Thomas 1996).

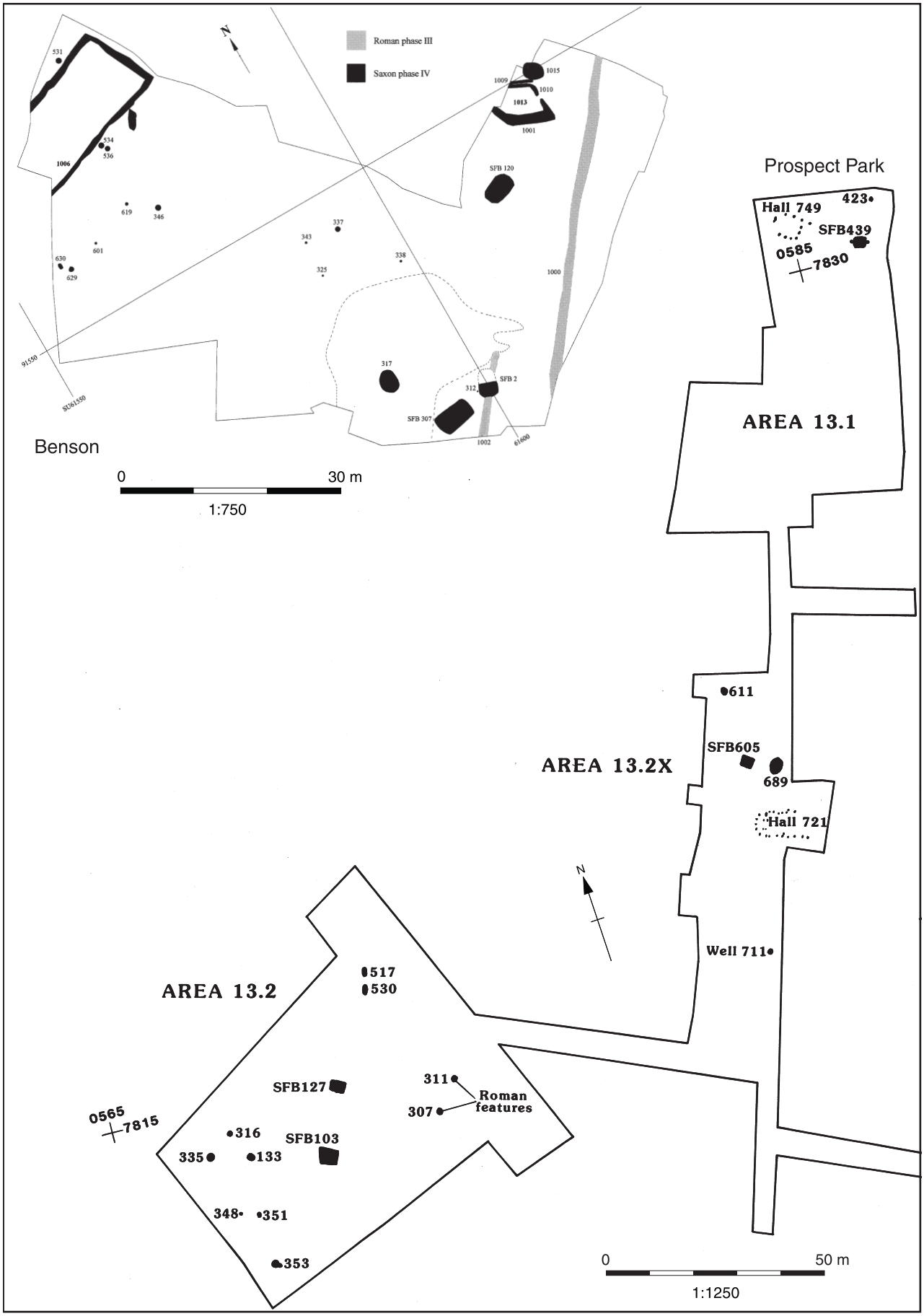
The earliest evidence for possible Germanic settlement in the region comes from the Roman small town of Dorchester-on-Thames, where the well-known early 5th-century burials at Dyke Hills and Minchin Recreation Ground were found in the late 19th century (see Chapters 4 and 7 below). A small number of probable sunken huts have been excavated within the town, although their dating and context is not very well understood (see Fig. 5.28 for site locations). Frere's excavations at the Allotments found a possible 6th-century sunken hut adjacent, and in relation to, the line of the north-south Roman road through the town. It cut through a timber building of uncertain (middle Roman?) date, and was in turn cut by a more substantial rectilinear building of post-in-trench construction, which is likely to be of mid Saxon date (see Chapter 5, below; Frere 1962, 131). Other sunken huts have been identified at the Beech House Hotel and less certainly at the Old Castle Inn (Bradley 1978; Rowley and Brown 1981, 10-16, 24). Most recently, small-scale excavations outside the north wall of the present Dorchester Abbey have located the remains of a large sunken hut with evidence for a suspended floor (Keevill 2003). To the north and west of Dorchester early Saxon cemeteries are known at Berinsfield and Burcot. Some of those buried at Berinsfield may have lived at the nearby settlement at Mount Farm, *c* 2 km north-east of Dorchester, where groups of pits, wells and a possible sunken hut have been excavated (Lambrick forthcoming). Environmental evidence from this site indicated open grassland probably used for pasture, in addition to a range of arable crops such as hulled wheat, barley and flax (ibid; Myres 1937).

Some 5 km downstream from Dorchester, at the point where the Thames turns again from an east-west to a north-south alignment on its approach to the Goring Gap, stands the village of Benson. A royal vill, and the most valuable royal manor in Oxfordshire at the time of the Domesday survey, Benson is mentioned in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle as one of four *tunas* captured by Cuthwulf of the Gewisse in 571 following a battle against the Britons at *Biedcanford* (the others were Limbury, Aylesbury and Eynsham). It has seen much less archaeological investigation than some of the other significant Anglo-Saxon sites in the region. Stray finds of pottery, axes, spears and a knife have been found within the village, and a seax and spearhead were recovered from the Thames nearby (Pine and Ford 2003, 133, fig. 1). An excavation took place at St Helen's Avenue in 1999, on a site towards the west edge of the modern village, some 150 m east of the Thames and 100 m south of the church (Fig. 3.27). This revealed three sunken huts and two ditched enclosures, probably a paddock and animal pens, along with a small number of pits and postholes. A radiocarbon date of cal AD 545-659 was obtained on bone from one of the sunken huts. Some pottery at the site had been tempered with igneous rock, for which a Charnwood Forest (Leicestershire) provenance is suggested (Vince 2003, 158). In general, the other finds comprise a small number of objects associated elsewhere with everyday occupation (spindlewhorls, a pin beater, a double-sided composite comb, two needles and two small decorated copper alloy fragments). There is nothing indicative of royal associations, nor indeed (as at Eynsham, see above) anything to suggest that Benson had become a particularly significant place by 571, the date to which the Chronicle ascribes its capture by the Saxons.

At Wallingford, the 5th- to 6th-century cemetery south of St John's Road, immediately outside the late Saxon south-west defences, remains the only certain evidence for early Saxon occupation (see Fig. 3.51 for location). Some 24 burials were excavated here during the early 20th century. Recent excavations at St John's Primary School found a further early Saxon urn containing cremated infant bone, and an infant inhumation in the top of a ditch. Radiocarbon dating has given a very early date of cal AD 426-540 for the cremation (we are grateful to Steve Preston and Thames Valley Archaeological Services for providing this information in advance of full publication). Early Saxon pottery has been found within the rampart of the late Saxon *burh*. On the opposite bank of the river at Wallingford Rowing Club, Mongewell, an evaluation carried out in 1998 found a sunken hut containing an assemblage of late Roman and early Saxon domestic objects including bone needles, pottery and a very well preserved decorated bone comb that is thought to be of 5th-century date (OAU April 1998). Some 20 skeletons have been excavated at various times on and around the nearby late Iron Age South Oxfordshire Grim's Ditch earthwork, although there is no secure evidence to confirm the conventional interpretation of these as Anglo-Saxon (Bradley 1968; *SMA* **1**, 1971, 7; Hinchliffe 1975, 128; see also Chapter 7, below).

Fieldwalking and trial trenching in the late 1980s to the south of the village of North Stoke (Ford and Hazell 1989; 1990) revealed evidence for quite extensive multi-period activity. A cluster of early to mid-Saxon type grass- or grass- and sand-tempered pottery was investigated by trial trenching. This revealed a number of shallow pits and a probable posthole, together with well-preserved animal bone and a fragment of daub. A small quantity of late

Fig. 3.27 (opposite) Early Anglo-Saxon settlements: Benson and Prospect Park


Roman phase III
Saxon phase IV
Benson
0
30 m
1:750
Prospect Park
Hall 749
423
SFB439
0585
7830
AREA 13.1
611
SFB605
689
AREA 13.2X
Hall 721
Well 711
AREA 13.2
517
530
SFB127
311
307
Roman features
0565
7815
316
SFB103
335
133
348
351
353
0
50 m
1:1250

Saxon St Neot's ware was also recovered. Cropmarks suggestive of sunken huts have also been identified at South Stoke nearby.

The Middle Thames Valley

Evidence for the Middle Thames is much more sparse. Although the region has generally seen much less excavation than the Upper Thames, the scarcity of settlement evidence may also be reflecting early medieval reality. The area was much less densely settled than the Upper Thames at the time of Domesday Book (see Fig. 3.37). Recent excavations in the region have identified a number of new sites of the Iron Age and Roman periods (see above), but despite some work on a very large scale there has been only limited new evidence for Anglo-Saxon occupation.

A single sunken hut was discovered at Gatehampton Farm, Goring, and sherds of early Saxon pottery were found over a wide area including in the destruction layer of the late Roman corn dryer and ditches alongside the river (Allen 1995, 126). A midden was found on top of an old silted river channel nearby and the likelihood is that a substantial settlement did exist in the vicinity, probably dating to the 6th-7th centuries. The relationship between late Roman and early Saxon occupation remains uncertain. On the opposite side of the river at Streatley the evidence currently amounts to one certain Anglo-Saxon burial and a number of possible Anglo-Saxon burials found in 1819 at Southbury Farm (*Archaeologia* **38**, 328). A cemetery that seems likely to have been at least in part Anglo-Saxon (although other finds are suggestive of a Roman site) was found during the 19th century at Pangbourne. Two burials, one of which may have been Roman, were found at Whitchurch. At Tilehurst Station, Purley, an Anglo-Saxon inhumation has been found with glass and amber beads, pottery and a brooch and an unassociated sword is reported from nearby. A late Saxon/Viking spearhead is reported from Mapledurham.

Further down the Thames towards Reading, the only archaeological evidence for early Saxon activity remains a small number of burials and finds. A 5th- to 6th-century cemetery containing 8 cremations and 5 inhumations was partially excavated during the 19th century at Earley, just east of the Kennet/Thames confluence at Reading. Most evidence, however, comes from the higher land to the west of the confluence, where pottery and metalwork of early to mid Saxon date were found in early levels during excavations at the site of Reading Abbey (Slade 1975-6, 44-5). Further sherds of early to mid Saxon pottery have been recovered in more recent investigations in the vicinity, at the Oracle development and at Broad Street (Blinkhorn forthcoming a and c). Elsewhere in Reading there have been chance finds of a cremation urn and a burial with a shield and spear. Archaeological investigation of an area of some 47 ha of the floodplain east of the cemetery at Earley, undertaken over the period from 1986-88, found no further evidence of Anglo-Saxon occupation (Barnes *et al*. 1997). It was probably not until a slightly later date, in the late 6th and 7th centuries, that Saxon settlement became better established along the Kennet Valley (see below). Recent excavations at Sonning Vicarage (see Chapter 5, below) recovered small quantities of early to mid Saxon pottery, and a cast saucer brooch has been dredged from the river at Sonning, suggesting that there was some occupation in the vicinity at this date. A small inhumation cemetery was found at Cookham in 1854 (*Antiq. J* **22**, 1907-9, 82), and a number of early Saxon objects have been recovered from the river itself in this area (see Chapter 5, below; Foreman *et al*., 2002, 13-5). Poorly documented early Saxon occupation is recorded overlying a late Roman cemetery at Bray, and it has been suggested that an early Saxon settlement preceded the later royal centre at the site of Old Windsor (see below). On the Buckinghamshire bank of the river, extensive excavations between Dorney and Eton in advance of gravel quarrying revealed only a single burial of the early 7th century, with no other evidence for early or mid Saxon settlement seen anywhere within the large area investigated. The burial, which was found in an isolated position near Boveney, is illustrated in Figure 4.31, below. The unusual mid Saxon evidence from Dorney is discussed further in Chapters 6 and 7 below.

Known settlement density increases again in the Colne Valley, and at the Colne/Thames confluence. At Waylands Nursery in Wraysbury, Berkshire, was a single sunken hut and two pits, dated on pottery evidence to the 5th century (see Fig. 3.47 below; Pine 2003). Three burials were found nearby at Wraysbury County Combined School in 1984, a female and adolescent unaccompanied, and a young man buried with a seax (Carter and Cram 1983-5). Evidence for mid and late Saxon occupation was found some 450 m to the south-west (see below). Further evidence that the apparent scarcity of Anglo-Saxon settlement sites in the Middle Thames may be a genuine reflection of very low population levels at the time, rather than an absence of excavation, comes from recent work at Heathrow Airport. Here, an area of some 146 ha has been subject to detailed archaeological investigation, but the only evidence for early Saxon occupation was recovered a little to the south of the village of Longford, in the form of a cluster of pits and waterholes and a possible sunken hut that all produced small quantities of early to mid Saxon pottery. A large post-built timber structure partially revealed within the same area may be of Anglo-Saxon or Roman date (Framework Archaeology 2005). A more extensive early Saxon settlement was excavated in 1994 at Prospect Park, Harmondsworth, less than 5 km north of the Thames along the Colne Valley in the London Borough of Hillingdon (Fig. 3.27; Andrews 1996a). Activity extended along

the edge of the river terrace and comprised two small groups of sunken huts, approximately 100 m apart, with further areas of settlement found during watching briefs in the area. Prospect Park is also the only site in the area to produce evidence for timber posthole buildings, although they may have gone unrecognised or have been truncated on other sites. In total, occupation seems to have been spread over at least 500 m, possibly representing a small settlement which shifted over time, rather than one large settlement. Limited finds were recovered and these included pottery, animal bone, loomweights, spindlewhorls and a small amount of smithing slag. Petrological analysis of the ceramic vessels revealed sherds of non-local pottery, possibly of 5th-century date, deriving either from the Midlands or perhaps even north Germany (ibid., 50).

At Shepperton Green, opposite the confluence of the Wey and the Thames, was a long-lived settlement that seems to have been occupied from the early Saxon period into the 13th century. Excavations took place here in 1967 and 1973 (see late Saxon period, below), and again in 1986, when the principal feature recognised from the early Saxon period was a midden formed by the dumping of refuse into a natural hollow (see Fig. 3.48 below; Poulton forthcoming b). This contained plentiful pottery (including stamped and decorated sherds), fragments of fired clay, worked bone combs, a pin beater and bone points. The animal bone indicated a mixed farming economy, with neonatal piglet bones suggesting that pigs were bred at the site. Other bone present in small quantities included domestic fowl and other bird bones, fish bones, and interestingly six bones from hare suggesting trapping or hunting. The Shepperton area is also notable for the presence of a number of early Saxon cemeteries in close proximity (see Fig. 3.48). Two cemeteries of 5th- to 6th-century date have been identified, at Upper West Field and possibly at Walton Bridge Green (Longley and Poulton 1982; Poulton 1987). A third cemetery in the vicinity, at War Close, is known only from an 18th-century record of the finding of great quantities of human bones with 'spears, swords etc' (Surrey County Council Sites and Monuments Record No. 550).

Recent excavations at Kingston-upon-Thames indicate the presence of an early to mid Saxon settlement on a gravel island south of the Hogsmill ('South Lane Island/Le More'; see Fig. 3.29 below for locations), and on higher ground to the north east (Andrews 2004, 171). During the mid Saxon period, settlement is thought to have shifted to the central island, probably the location of the royal estate centre later evident in documentary sources (see below). The status of the Kingston area during the early Saxon period remains unknown, but the finding of a possible hoard of at least ten early 6th-century Byzantine coins in the river nearby is suggestive of significant activity along the river in this period (Hines 2004, 94). Evidence for Anglo-Saxon settlement of the late 5th and 6th centuries continues beyond the study area, as for example at Ham and Hammersmith to the north of the river (Andrews 1996c, 111), and on the North Downs to the south (Hines 2004).

THE MID SAXON PERIOD (7TH TO 9TH CENTURIES AD)

During the 7th century, the combined evidence from cemeteries and settlements suggests that there were significant concentrations of occupation at the confluences of the Thames with its major tributaries. Settlement on the Berkshire Downs, which appears quite widespread in the 6th century from the evidence of cemeteries, is interestingly not so evident in the 7th. Settlement becomes more visible at this period in the Kennet Valley, and on the upper reaches of the Windrush and the Evenlode, although here also we are largely dependent on cemeteries rather than occupation sites themselves. Evidence for settlement in the Middle Thames remains relatively scarce. As before, the most intense occupation is concentrated in the area between Abingdon and Dorchester, which emerges as a high status and ecclesiastical focus of the Upper Thames Valley during the late 6th and earlier 7th centuries. The mid Saxon period saw significant changes in the settlement pattern, with the appearance of status differentiation and specialisation in settlement types. Evidence for groups of very large buildings associated with rich cemetery and stray finds suggests the first recognisable high status centres in the vicinity of Drayton, Sutton Courtenay and Long Wittenham. The first bishopric of the region was established at the nearby Roman town of Dorchester *c* 635. Here, and at numerous other places in the study area, Christian religious communities were established at minster churches from the mid 7th century onwards. Minster communities were stable, rather than peripatetic, and their role as centres for the collection and consumption of renders from their estates was to have an important influence on the development of the settlement pattern in the region. Large trading and manufacturing settlements are another indicator of the mid Saxon trend towards settlement specialisation, but classic sites of this type, such as *Hamwic*, *Lundenwic*, Ipswich and York, do not occur within the study area. However, there is increasing evidence that places within the Thames Valley were associated with trading networks of the time, and a small number of sites that may have been places of trade and exchange are becoming apparent. The farmsteads on which most people must have lived are less visible in the archaeological record, largely owing to a reduction in the amount of pottery being produced and used, although a combination of evidence suggests that the pattern of shifting, dispersed settlement continued throughout the 7th century. Important recent results from Yarnton show decisive change in the early 8th century, with the appearance of much clearer settlement definition.

Royal centres (Figs 3.28-3.29)

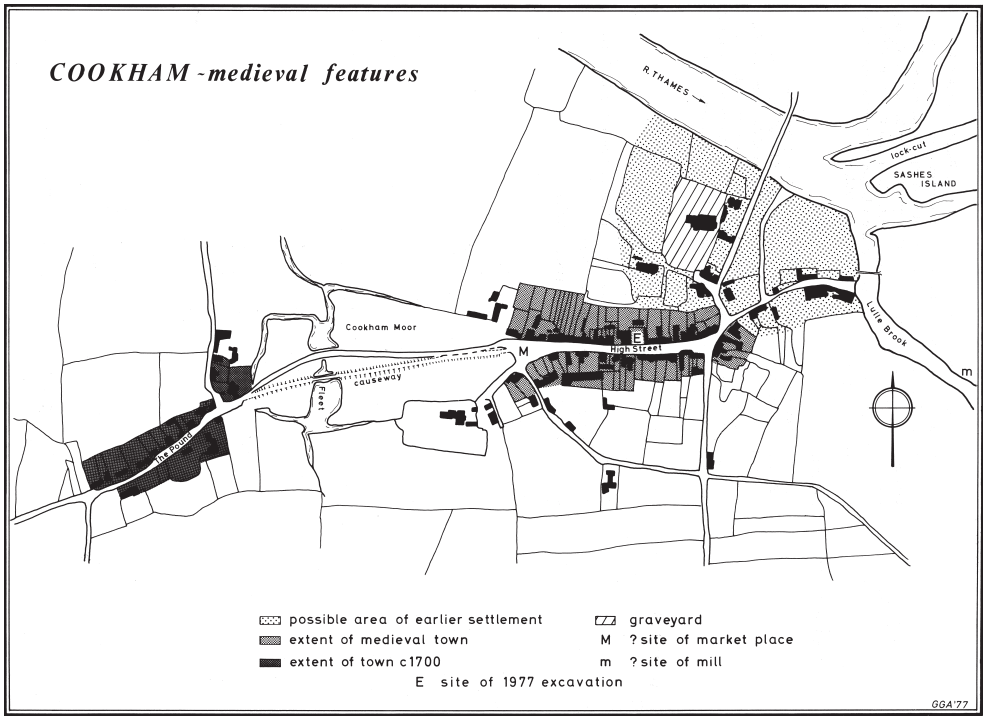
The best archaeological evidence for an early royal centre in the study area comes from the area between Drayton and Dorchester. The cropmarks of large halls at Long Wittenham have been noted above. Sonia Hawkes suggested that this complex could be associated with the nearby 5th- to early 7th-century cemetery, although a later cemetery, of late 7th- to early 8th-century date is also known from Long Wittenham, slightly further to the west (1986, 89). The cropmarks have not been investigated, and the date of this complex remains unclear.

The better known cropmark complex, which has now been subject to limited trial excavation, lies approximately halfway between the villages of Drayton and Sutton Courtenay. Here five trench-built halls in an L-shaped alignment are visible at the south end of the Drayton cursus, over and around a number of Bronze Age barrows (see Figs 3.25, 3.26). The halls lie to the south of the early Saxon settlement excavated by E T Leeds in the 1920s (see above). The largest of the Saxon buildings was described by Sonia Hawkes as a great hall some 25 x 8 m in size, as long as, but not as wide as, Edwin of Northumbria's great hall at Yeavering (1986, 88). Trial excavations have recently been carried out in the field to the east of the modern road. A feature identified from cropmarks and magnetometry as a possible sunken hut was excavated and discovered to be a waterhole containing early to mid Saxon pottery and fragments of quern, iron sheet and copper alloy that may have been waste from metalworking (Hamerow *et al*. forthcoming). Charred wheat and barley grains and mineralised seeds of *Brassica* or *Sinapis* sp. were also identified. A pit cut into the top of the waterhole contained a single sherd of early to mid Saxon pottery, a large assemblage of animal bone including cattle and sheep skull, leg and foot bones, and a fragment of blue glass that may be of 7th-century date. The east end of the single hall building in this area was subject to limited trial excavation. Results from magnetometry and excavation suggest that this building in its final form measured 19 x 9 m, and there was some evidence for an enclosure at its east end. The north wall was constructed of double rows of planks set into foundation trenches, and there was a gap just over 1 m wide in the east wall marking the entrance. The preponderance of organic-tempered wares and the absence of decorated wares amongst the pottery assemblage would favour a 7th-century date.

A number of objects suggestive of very high status occupation have been recovered by metal detectorists working in the area (Hamerow 1999), including a fragment of sheet gold set with a garnet or red glass, five copper alloy mounts, an oval buckle with gold wire and chip-carved animal interlace on the plate, and cut sheet and droplets of gold and gold/copper solder. It is possible that a gold finger ring of quadripartite design set with glass beads, purportedly found in a garden in Abingdon, may also be associated with this site. These objects are all datable to the late 6th and early 7th century and suggest that the status of the site may have changed significantly around this time. The richest 7th-century cemetery yet found in the Upper Thames Valley was located only 650 m to the south, at Milton, where two Kentish composite jewelled disc brooches, a hanging bowl, spears, seaxes and a sugar-loaf shield boss were found (Dickinson 1976 Vol II 182-3; Hawkes 1986, 89; Fig. 7.11). Unfortunately the cemetery was discovered during the 19th century and there is now little secure information about individual graves and assemblages. A total of 14 late 7th- to early 8th-century sceattas have also been reported from the area since 1991 (Metcalf forthcoming; see Chapter 6, below), suggesting that the site may have had a continuing role as a trading centre. Sutton Courtenay appears in the documentary record as a royal centre in 868, when a West Saxon charter was issued there (Blair 2000, 2; Blair 2005, 325).

What use was made by early Saxon kings of the old Roman town of Dorchester remains very unclear. There is limited evidence for early Saxon occupation in the town (see above), but most finds and excavated structures are likely to postdate the foundation of the bishopric *c* 635. The evidence from Dorchester is discussed in more detail in Chapter 5, below.

A number of potential early royal centres can be identified in the study area from documentary sources, although we are dependent on scarce references in genuine early documents, and otherwise to the identification of royal manors in later sources such as Domesday Book. It can only be presumed that later references are evidence of a long-lasting royal connection. Bampton, Headington (near Oxford) and Benson have been identified as the main royal centres along the Thames in Oxfordshire (Blair 1994, 79, 108 and fig. 62). Nothing is known archaeologically of the royal centres at any of these places, although early Saxon settlement was recently found in excavations at Benson (see above). A number of places that appear as late Saxon royal centres seem to have been minsters that were appropriated by late Saxon kings, including Alfred himself, and turned into royal residences (see Blair 2005, 324-8). Cookham (Fig. 3.28) is perhaps the best documented example in the region. King Æthelbald of Mercia gave the minster to Christ Church, Canterbury; it was subsequently seized by Cynewulf of Wessex, and then taken, along with other places, by King Offa. The Archbishop of Canterbury was given 110 hides in Kent in 798 to compensate for its loss (Blair 1996, 23). Presumably Offa and his Mercian and West Saxon successors granted away elements of the estate, because Ælfheah, Ealdorman of Hampshire, left land at Cookham to King Æthelred in his will of *c* 971, and Grenville Astill comments that this could well have been the whole settlement (1978, 23). Thereafter, Cookham remained a royal estate. A royal council was held



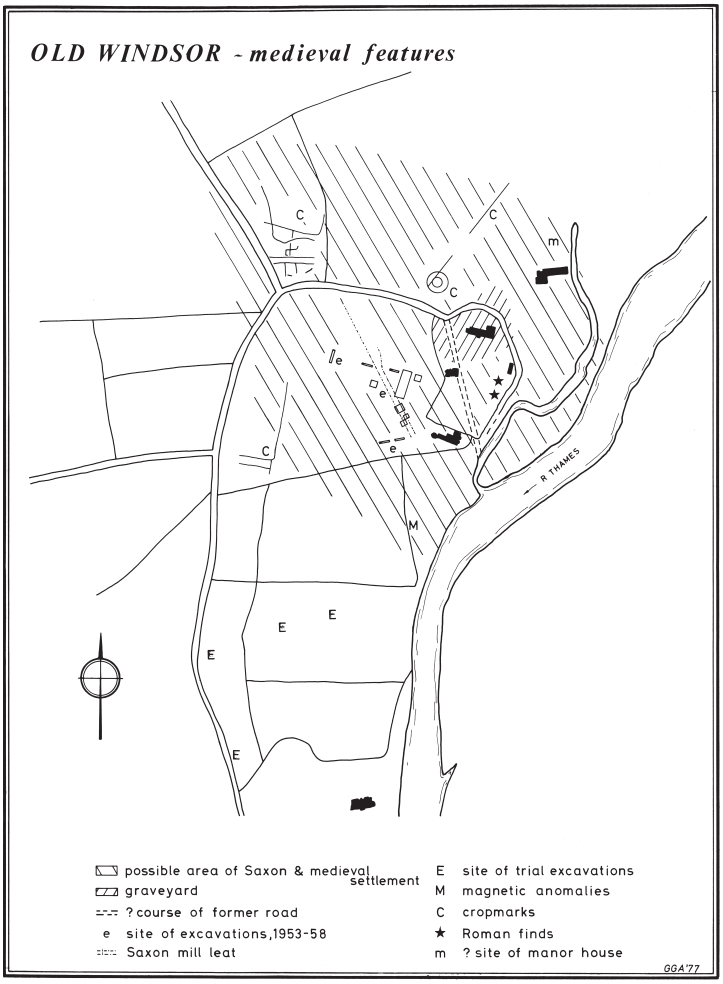


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Fig. 3.28 Cookham and Old Windsor

there in the period 995-999 (ibid.) and it appears in Domesday Book as a royal manor of 18 hides, with an attached church with two hides held by Regenbald the chancellor and two clerks (Blair 2005, 327).

There is similar evidence from Abingdon, which was a royal possession during the early 10th century, and later (if not also earlier) the site of a royal palace. Tradition at the medieval abbey maintained that Andersey, an island in the Thames at Abingdon, was acquired by King Offa from the minster in return for an estate at Goosey (Kelly 2000, cciii), and the later associations of Andersey with a royal residence suggest that this may preserve an element of truth. The monks believed that the site of the old minster had been appropriated by King Alfred, and a *regale ædificium* had been constructed there (see Chapter 5, below; Kelly 2005, ccviii-ccix). Clearly there was a royal residence at Abingdon in the early 10th century; Æthelstan met Count Hugh of the Franks there in 926, and it is mentioned in a Barking charter of 950 (ibid.). William the Conqueror and William Rufus both occasionally resided at Andersey, although it was finally given up to the monks in 1101.

A royal vill at Reading in the late 9th century is referred to in Asser's Life of King Alfred. Was this a similar case of royal encroachment on a minster site, or did Reading originate as a royal centre?

At Taplow, Bucks, the richest burial yet known in the study area was sited under a barrow on a prominent chalk spur overlooking the Thames (see Chapter 7, below). Recent excavations have shown that this was immediately adjacent to the site of a late Bronze Age to early Iron Age multivallate hillfort, which remained visible as an earthwork into the Saxon period (Kidd 2004; OA 2004b; OA 2005a; Allen *et al*. forthcoming). The hillfort had certainly been re-occupied in some form during the early to mid Saxon period. The burial of an adult male accompanied by an iron knife was found within the entrance of the hillfort, and bones from a second individual were identified within the ditch fill nearby. Just outside the entrance, but within the hornwork, part of a sub-rectangular trench-built post structure was found, some 3.5 m wide and at least 5 m long. The pottery assemblage comprised sherds of handmade undecorated early to mid Saxon sand- and organic-tempered wares, but exceptionally also a sherd from an amphora or flagon of probable east Mediterranean origin, a type of pottery that is elsewhere known from re-occupied hillforts in areas that remained under British control in the west of the country. Other finds included Niedermendig lava quern fragments, a spiral-headed pin of mid to late Saxon date and a number of knives. The animal bone included an unusually high proportion of red and roe deer bone, as well as cattle and pig, and smaller quantities of sheep/goat and domestic fowl. Charred plant remains included wheat, barley, oats, rye, bean and arable weed seeds, and oak and beech charcoal was also present. The site of St Nicholas' Church, which was demolished in the 19th century, has recently been rediscovered next to the Saxon barrow, at the southern end of the hillfort.

Old Windsor is mentioned as a royal residence in the 1060s, but excavation has identified remains of what seems to have been a royal palace site dating from the beginning of the 9th century (Fig. 3.28; Astill 1978, 69-70). The excavations remain unpublished, but such information as is available suggests that the earliest Saxon settlement may have been located on an area of higher ground near the present church (ibid., 70-71). A village or farmstead located south-west of the church may have succeeded this, and is thought to date to the period *c* 650-700/750 (ibid.; www.pastscape.org Old Windsor Palace NMR No. SU97 SE2). At the beginning of the 9th century the site underwent a drastic change which has been interpreted as signifying a systematic economic exploitation of the area, and perhaps reorganisation to cater for a large household (Astill 1978, 70). It seems likely that this represents the Anglo-Saxon royal complex known from documentary sources of Edward the Confessor's reign. A water mill with three vertical wheels, served by what seems to have been an artificially created leat, was built in the 9th century. A stone building with glazed windows and a tiled roof stood near the east bank of the mill leat. This seems to have been destroyed by fire in the late 9th or early 10th century, and the excavator suggested this could have been a Viking raid. Subsequently a new, horizontal-wheeled mill was constructed, and remained in use into the 11th century. Evidence of wooden buildings with sleeper beams dates from the 10th and 11th centuries. The site was abandoned in favour of Windsor Castle, 3 km upstream during the early 12th century.

Kingston, like Staines, occupies a site that seems formerly to have been made up of a series of gravel islands on the Thames floodplain, separated by river channels. The main or 'central' island was defined on the west by the Thames, and on the north, east and south by branches of two channels known as the Hogsmill and the Latchmere stream. To the north-east, the land rises to 50 m OD at Kingston Hill. Figure 3.29 shows the topography of the area and known Anglo-Saxon sites (after Andrews 2004 fig. 13.2, incorporating information from Hawkins 1998 fig. 1). Recent excavations indicate an early Saxon and possibly even high status presence in the vicinity (see above). During the 8th or 9th century, the focus of settlement shifted to the central island. Documentary evidence suggests that Kingston (*Cyninges Tun* or *Cingestune*) was a royal estate centre in the 9th and 10th centuries (Andrews 2004, 171-3). First mentioned in documentary sources in 838 as the location of a council between King Ecgbert of Wessex, Æthelwulf, ruling as his sub-king in Kent, and Coelnoth, Archbishop of Canterbury, its location on

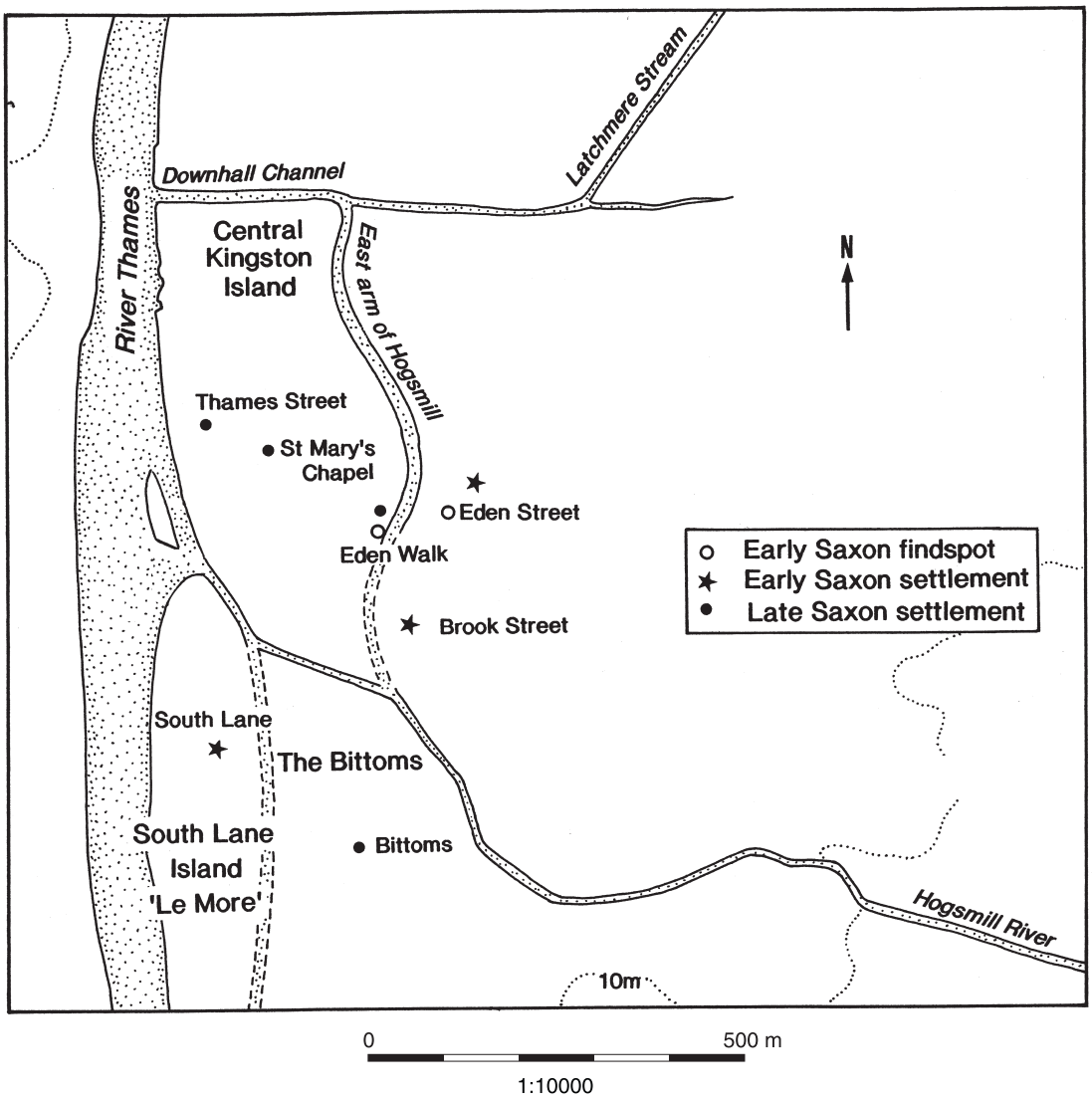


Fig. 3.29 Kingston-upon-Thames, general plan with location of Anglo-Saxon archaeology (after Andrews 2004, fig. 13.2)

the shore of the Thames was probably regarded as a frontier zone between the power centres of the kings and the archbishops (ibid., 171). At least two and possibly as many as seven late Saxon kings are known to have been crowned at Kingston between 901 and 979, suggesting the presence of a very important church, and a number of royal charters were witnessed there. The location of the royal estate centre, likely to comprise a timber hall, church and ancillary buildings, is unknown, although it probably lay in the vicinity of the parish church of All Saints. The late Saxon church may have been in the position later occupied by the former chapel of St Mary, and a 10th- or 11th-century re-used cross fragment has been recovered from the later medieval church fabric (Tweddle *et al.* 1995, 146). Ditches of 9th- to 10th-century date have been found at Thames St and Eden Walk on the central island, and may have served as plot boundaries and drainage. A small number of pits and some pottery have been found to the south around the Bittoms and to the east in the vicinity of Tiffin School (Andrews 2004,171-3).

The church

The minster churches of the Thames Valley were to play a formative role in the development of the settlement pattern. It is very likely that a considerable number of the Thames minsters were founded during the later 7th or early 8th century, although proof of this is only available in the case of Chertsey, and possibly Bradfield. The minsters of the Thames Valley appear to have been founded on sites of some strategic significance, and many of them probably had very generous landed endowments. In addition to their importance as local churches, they also became significant as estate centres, and over time these factors stimulated a number of important changes. Royal appropriation of minster

sites as residences in the late Saxon period has been noted above. More importantly, by the late Saxon period it is clear that a number of minsters were developing as urban centres, many of them remaining market towns even today. The minster churches are discussed in detail in Chapter 5, below; the links between these places and early towns and market centres are considered towards the end of the present chapter.

Rural farmsteads

The extent and nature of the evidence

Very few sites of the 7th century have been identified in the study area. It seems increasingly likely that this reflects the fact that they do not tend to produce readily datable artefacts, rather than a genuine absence in the region. Datable mid Saxon artefacts are much rarer on settlement sites in the Thames Valley than in eastern England. The pottery was largely handmade and domestically produced, using calcareous (limestone), sandy or organic grass/chaff tempered pastes. There are few reliably diagnostic forms after the 5th century. The presence of stamped decoration is taken as an indicator of 6th-century date, but decorated sherds usually form a very small proportion of site assemblages, and decoration seems to have ceased during the 7th century. How long plain undecorated handmade vessels in these fabrics continued in production and use remains very unclear. In the Upper Thames Valley, organic-tempered wares are considered to have a broad later 5th- to 8th-century chronology, increasing in importance during the 6th to 7th century (Timby 2003a, 60-61). Both Mellor (1994, 36-7) and Jones (1999) have drawn attention to the fact that sandy and grass/chaff tempered wares have been found at numerous sites in association with late Saxon pottery, and grass/chaff tempered pottery is considered to have continued in production until the 10th or even the early 11th century in the Middle Thames Valley.

Many Anglo-Saxon settlement sites in the study area have been dated to the 'early Saxon period', or to 'the 5th to early 7th centuries' on the basis that the only certainly datable material present, usually decorated pottery of 5th- to 6th-century type, is of this period. There has also been a general perception that the sunken huts and halls of earthfast-post construction found on these sites are more likely to be of this period than later. The effect of this has been to suggest an abrupt dislocation in the settlement pattern during the early 7th century, with the majority of known early Saxon sites apparently abandoned, for no obvious reason.

Recent work suggests, however, that the reliance on dating sites from decorated pottery, building types, and an absence of obviously later finds, may be misleading. Evidence from the Yarnton project (see below) demonstrates that 8th- or 9th-century sunken huts were constructed in the same area as sunken huts of the late 5th to 6th centuries, with no apparent change in their form, construction or associated finds. The halls of the 8th and 9th centuries at Yarnton continued to be built in the earthfast-post tradition. The true date of the Yarnton settlement only became apparent through the use of radiocarbon dating, suggesting that wider use of this technique may reveal similar results elsewhere. The results from Mucking (Hamerow 1993a, see above), and from a number of the sites reviewed above, suggest that this was a period when many settlements were loosely structured and were probably shifting location at intervals over distances of 750 m or so. Under such circumstances it is not hard to imagine an area of land being occupied by sunken huts in the late 5th or early 6th century, turned over to cultivation or grazing for a generation, and then subsequently being re-occupied by buildings. The evidence of cropmarks in particular suggests that settlements were larger and longer-lived than is evident from the limited areas usually available for excavation.

There is, however, some structural evidence that may assist in identifying sites of the mid Saxon period. An increase in evidence for the planning of settlements, and more formal division of space, has long been considered an indicator of mid Saxon date. In a recent review of early medieval settlement, Helena Hamerow has drawn attention to the potential importance of the appearance of enclosures as a chronological marker (2002, 95, 98-9, 154). She comments that evidence of enclosures around buildings (as distinct from enclosures that may have served as animal pens or paddocks) is scarce, perhaps even absent, before *c* 600. A number of sites, however, show evidence for the presence of trackways or droveways, and for fenced enclosures around buildings and paddocks, by the late 6th or early 7th century (ibid., 98-9). The widespread appearance of enclosures associated with individual settlements, not only around groups of buildings but also defining paddocks, kitchen gardens, and perhaps even infields, may reflect a more general reorganisation of farming practices later in the period (ibid., 154).

Evidence suggests that there was significant change in the location of cemeteries in the 7th century. This is clear as a broad trend, but there is a very wide range of practice at individual sites and the likelihood is that we are seeing a high degree of variability in the speed and manner in which changes took place. Almost all the large communal cemeteries of the 5th and 6th centuries appear to have been abandoned, and new burial grounds appear (see Appendix). Lechlade, Butler's Field is the only cemetery yet known to have continued in use throughout this period and into the early 8th century. Most of the new 7th-century cemeteries in the study area are distinctly smaller, perhaps reflecting growing emphasis on possession of a 'settlement' burial ground and a weakening of identification with the traditional burial ground of

the kindred. Elsewhere, however, it is clear that some new cemeteries (such as Field Farm and Standlake Down) were continuing to serve large populations, presumably far more than the inhabitants of a single farmstead. The meaning of changing cemetery location in the 7th century is discussed further in Chapter 4, below, where the contribution of cultural and religious factors is considered.

Excavated settlement sites (Figs 3.30-3.32)

Sites are reviewed working downstream from the upper reaches of the river in Gloucestershire and Wiltshire.

The settlement site at Sherborne House Lechlade (Fig. 3.30; Bateman *et al*. 2003) is broadly dated to the period from the late 5th to the early 8th century. Occupation here was set within a framework of ditched land divisions and trackways that are quite exceptional for a site of this period in the study area. The dating of the settlement to the 5th to 8th centuries is based on the broad date range of the pottery, particularly the organic-tempered wares, and it is considered likely that the settlement was contemporary with the nearby cemetery at Butler's Field, which is thought to have ended in the early 8th century. The excavators have suggested a general sequence of development in which structures can be tentatively linked to different phases of land division on the basis of similarity of alignment. Two of the potential hall buildings were clearly associated with fences, which seem likely to have formed enclosures around them (ibid., fig. 16). A large number of undatable postholes on the site (not illustrated) are likely to represent the remains of two- and three-post racks, a possible four-post structure, and fencelines (ibid., 47). The predominant north-south alignment of the sunken huts is noted as unusual (ibid., 88), but interestingly was also seen in the mid Saxon phases at Yarnton. Cropmarks and further finds of pottery indicate more occupation of a similar date to the north-east and south-west. The absence of late Saxon pottery suggests that settlement did not continue here much beyond the 8th century, and probably shifted south-eastwards in the direction of the medieval core of Lechlade. Evidence in support of this has been recovered during excavations 50 – 100 m to the south-east at Allcourt Farm, Little London. Here, the pottery suggests that the origins of a farmstead on the outskirts of the medieval town lie in the 11th century, although some earlier activity at the site was indicated by the presence of 42 sherds of early to mid Saxon date, and eight sherds of Ipswich Ware datable to the period 725/40-mid 9th century (OAU 2001).

The opportunity to compare the settlement and cemetery evidence from Sherborne House and Butler's Field is almost unique within the study area. Textile production is marked in both assemblages. Interestingly, loomweights were found on the settlement, but not in the cemetery, while wool combs, weaving battens, pin beaters, spindlewhorls and shears, which may have been more 'personal' possessions, were found in a number of graves. The cemetery finds might suggest that the making of woollen cloth was important for this community but sheep were not particularly prominent in the animal bone assemblage. Flax was being grown at the settlement, however, and was probably made into linen cloth there. Cattle bone predominated at the settlement; a leather worker's awl was found in grave 57, and leather had been used for shield boards and knife sheaths in a number of the graves. The production of leather from cattle hides was probably a more prominent element of the settlement's economy than is evident from the excavated remains, and much of the associated work is likely to have been carried out closer to water. One of the most interesting features of the settlement was the almost unprecedentedly high representation of calves among the cattle bone group. While this could be pure chance, it may be a reflection of the long-standing importance of cattle farming on the low-lying Thames meadows. Perhaps this explains the very marked evidence for land division and the creation of droveways and enclosures, which are so reminiscent of the cattle farming landscape of the Iron Age and Romano-British periods (see above). Cattle, beef, leather and perhaps even calf skin for vellum may have been the means by which the leading members of this community acquired the prestigious weapons, gold jewellery and traded goods such as pine, garnets, cowrie shells and amethysts that were buried with them in the cemetery.

Nearby, a site at Somerford Keynes Cotswold Community has produced evidence of a post-built hall inside a fenced enclosure (Fig. 3.31). Six post-built structures have been defined some 150 m to the north-east of this enclosure, and a further, apparently elaborate, post-built hall has been identified roughly 200 m to the south-east. A single sunken hut has so far been found, cut through an earlier ditch (OA 2004a). Detailed analysis of this site remains at an early stage, but a 7th-century or later date for some of these structures must be a strong possibility.

An evaluation at Black Bourton, Oxon, carried out in 2002 identified a possible mid Saxon site, dated by the presence of Ipswich Ware (Hart 2003). We are most grateful to John Moore Heritage Services for kindly providing information about further work carried out at the site during June 2006, in advance of full publication (JMHS 2006). This has revealed four probable sunken huts and five post-built structures, at least one of which was certainly a rectangular hall measuring some 7.5 x 3.5 m; a fenceline and a well were also present on the site(see Fig. 3.30). Two of the post-built structures were of an unusual circular form, with the postholes arranged around one or more internal pits. Analysis of this recently excavated site remains at an early stage, but it has been suggested that the circular

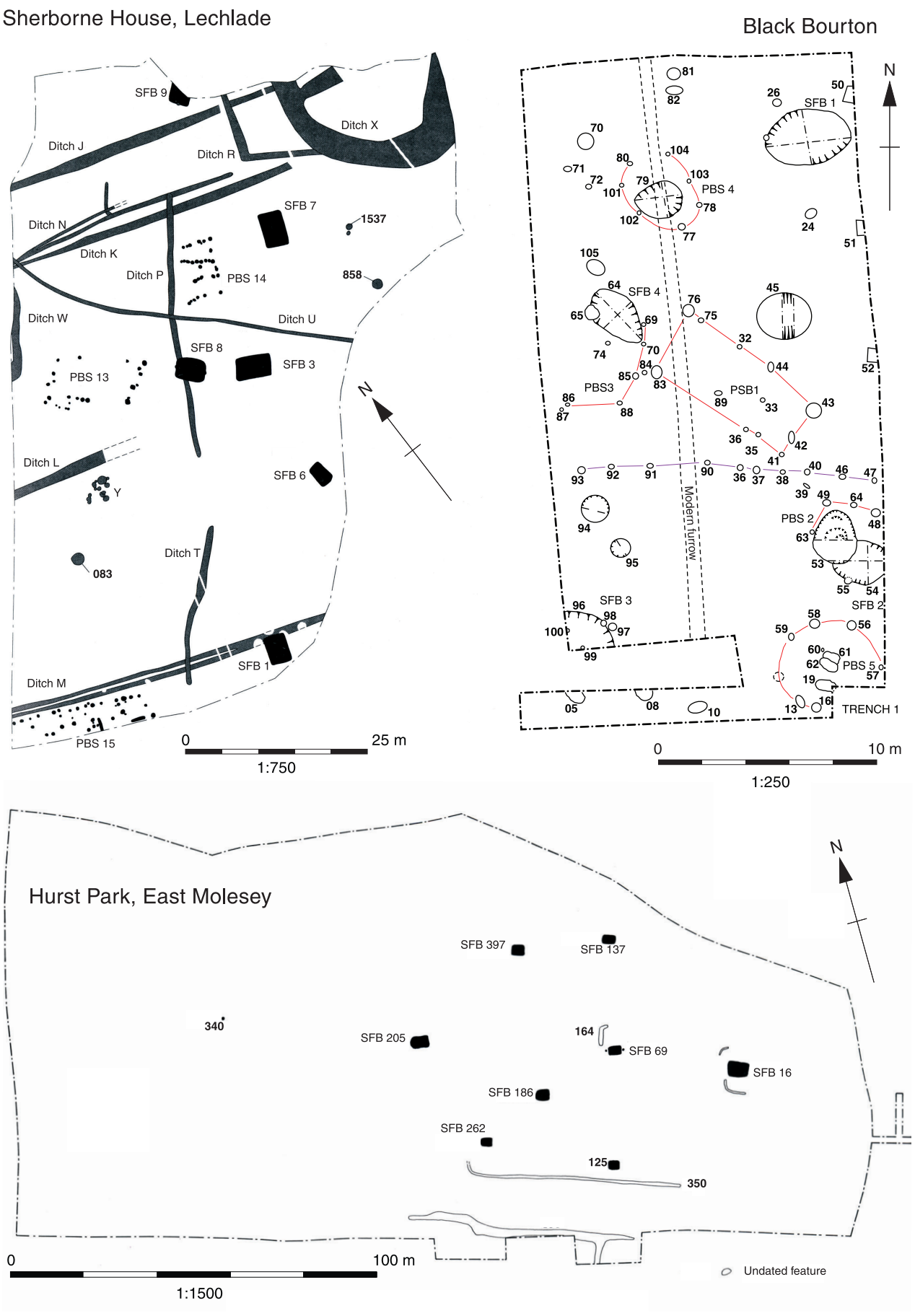


Fig. 3.30 Early to mid Saxon rural settlements: Sherborne House, Lechlade, Glos; Black Bourton, Oxon; Hurst Park, East Molesey, Surrey

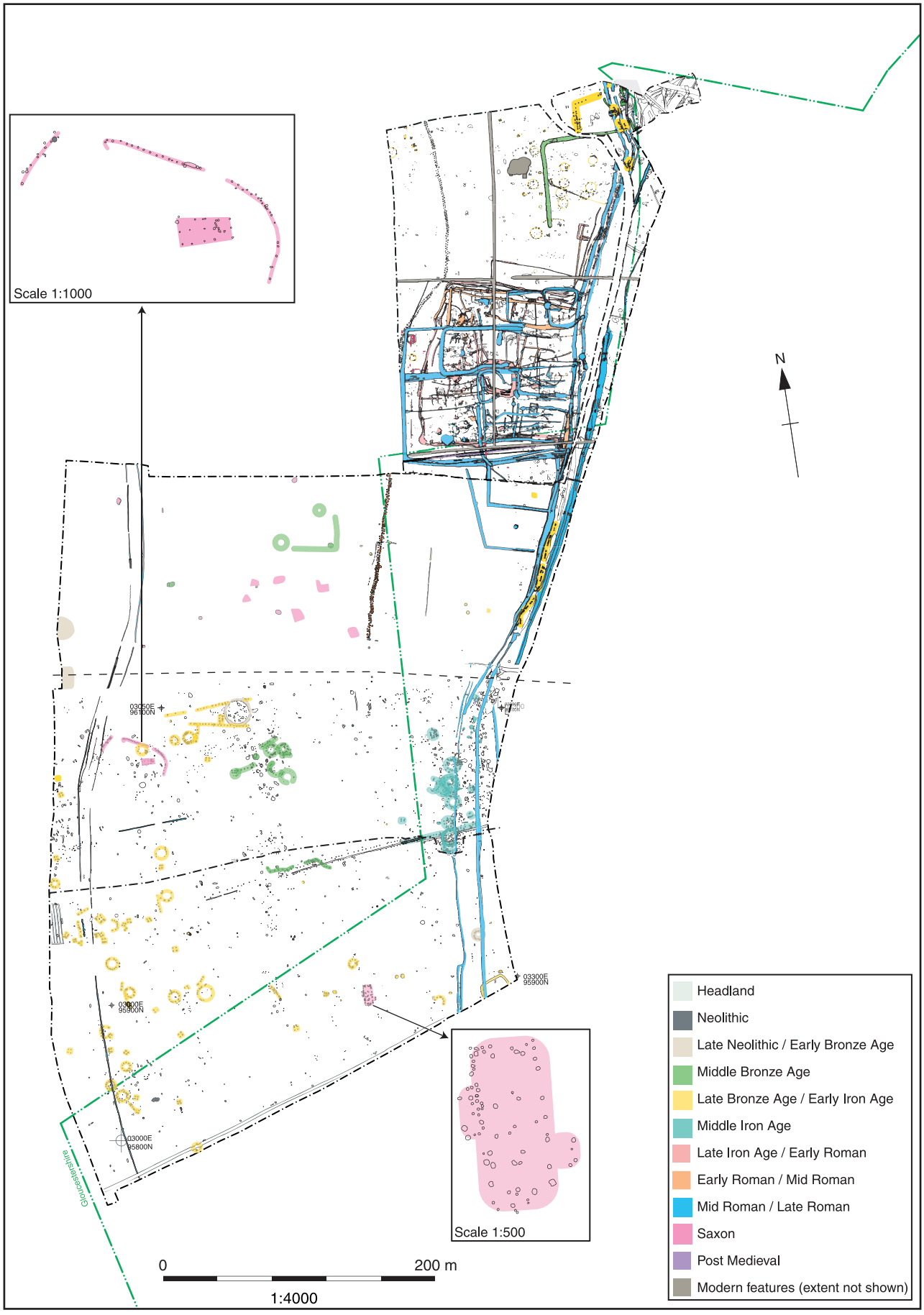


Fig. 3.31 Anglo-Saxon buildings at Somerford Keynes Cotswold Community, Glos.

post-built structures might represent pagan Anglo-Saxon shrines. Pottery evidence suggests that the site was in use from the early Saxon period until the 12th century. Whatever the site's status in the early Saxon period, there seems to have been a settlement present by the 8th century. The church of St Mary, of 12th-century date, stands only 70 m to the east, and may have replaced an earlier church on the site. Links between this site and the minster at Bampton are discussed further in Chapter 7, below.

The site at New Wintles Farm, Eynsham was excavated in advance of gravel quarrying in the 1960s, but has unfortunately never been published in detail. The following comments are based on the most recent interim statement (Hawkes 1986). The excavators have suggested that New Wintles

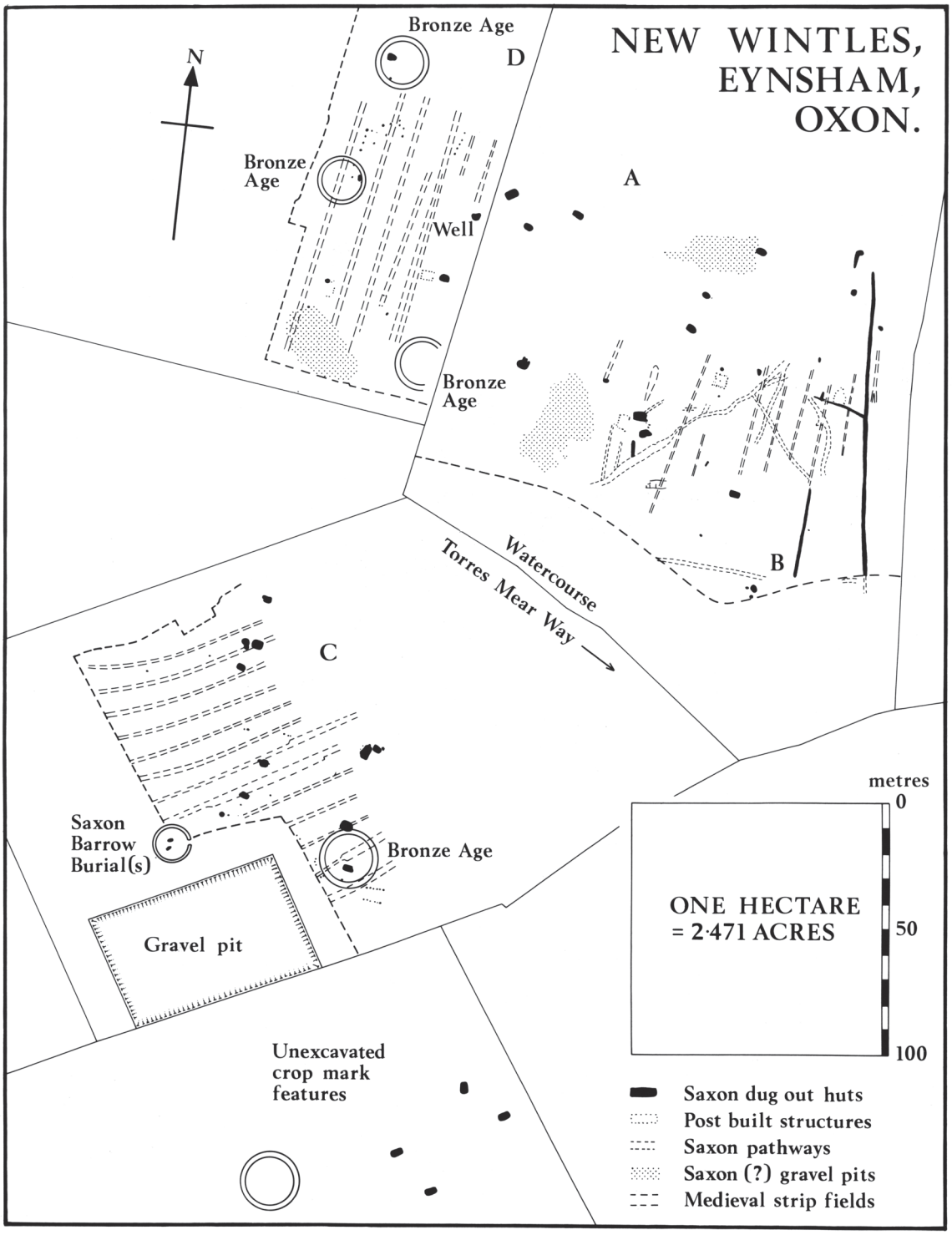
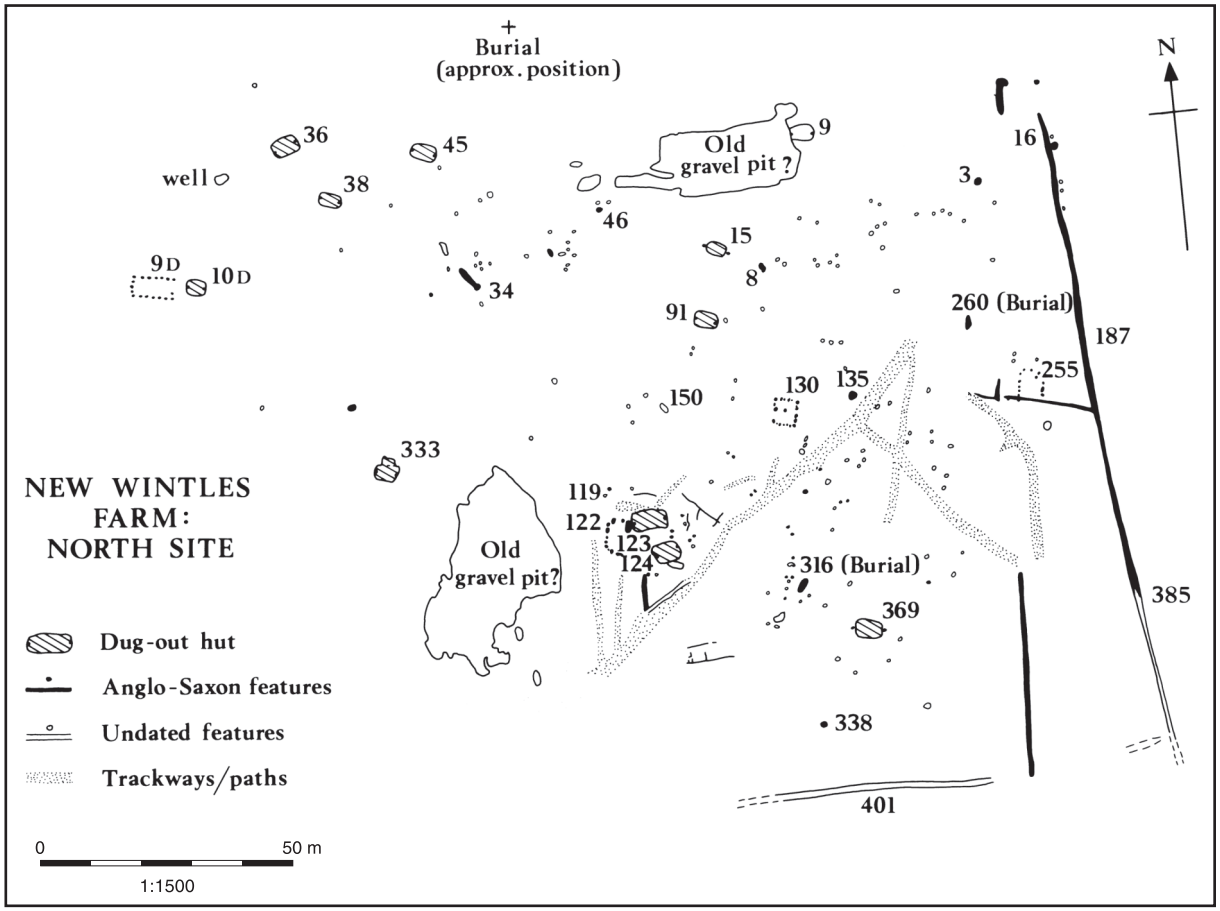


Fig. 3.32 New Wintles, Eynsham, Oxon: above, overall site plan; facing page, detail of the 7th-century settlement

probably represents several phases of a single farm, which shifted location from a 6th-century site south of the Torres Mear stream to a 7th- to early 8th-century site to the north. Figure 3.32 shows the interim overall plan of the site, and a detail of the later, northern half. Two substantial palisade trenches at the east edge of the site are thought to mark the boundary of the settlement. A number of paths were identified, two of which lead into the area between the palisades at the east of the site. The post-built structure 122 may have been a long-house 12 x 6 m in size, with an internal partition abutting the north wall (Hawkes and Gray 1969, 2 and fig. 1). This building must have gone out of use during the lifetime of the farmstead, as two sunken huts were subsequently constructed over its east end. The nearby square structure with a central posthole, 130, might have been a granary (Hawkes 1986, 84), although John Blair has suggested that it could equally have been a shrine (1995, 4, 19). Indeterminate structures represented by posthole groups in the vicinity were thought by the excavators to have been sheep folds. The principal farmhouse may have been the clearly-defined post-built hall with an identically-aligned sunken hut outside its east end, located within area D of the site (Hawkes 1986, 84). A well was found roughly 30 m north of this building, and the presence of other structures is suggested by a number of regular posthole alignments in the same area of the site. If these structures are all part of the same farmstead, it would have extended over a distance of some 220 m from east to west.

Recent excavations in the Burghfield area, roughly 8-10 km south-west of Reading, are providing increasing evidence for the Anglo-Saxon landscape of the lower Kennet Valley. Excavations at Wickhams Field revealed three Saxon pits and two timber-lined wells, one of which was radio-carbon-dated to the period cal AD 650-870 (Crockett 1996, 132-7). The pits and wells were spaced far apart and there was no evidence of any other Saxon features in the areas in between. The excavator suggests that the wells and pits formed part of a dispersed settlement whose focus has not yet been identified. However, he points out that it is almost certainly to be associated with the cemetery discovered within and adjacent to a Bronze Age barrow at Field Farm, some 600 m to the north-west (Butterworth and Lobb 1992, 5-72). The cemetery is considered further in Chapters 4 and 5 below, but it is worth noting here that its excavators believed that it was likely originally to have contained up to 100 inhumations. Nearby at Bourne End, Wooburn, Bucks, the presence of mid Saxon settlement can only be inferred from the reported finding of 7th- and 8th-century swords, knives and spearheads in a cemetery discovered in the 1850s.



At Taplow, Bucks, recent excavations have revealed evidence of early to mid Saxon settlement within and around a late Bronze Age to early Iron Age multivallate hillfort. The presence here of a very rich barrow burial of the late 6th century or the first half of the 7th century suggests the possibility that the hillfort was re-used as a high status, or even a royal, centre at this time. The settlement evidence has been considered with other potential royal sites, above, and the barrow burial is discussed in Chapter 7, below. At Wraysbury, the early Saxon site at Waylands Nursery, Welley Road, lay some 450 m north-east of St Andrew's Church, which is situated on a low sand and gravel knoll that represents the highest point in the area (see above). Here, material of mid to late Saxon date has been found in excavations some 100 m west of the church, including large quantities of pottery, two glass beads, iron objects and five coins (comprising two sceattas, two pennies of Offa and one of Coenwulf) (Astill and Lobb 1989, 68). Further excavation revealed evidence of 10th- and 11th-century occupation further to the east (see below).

A small, nucleated, single phase settlement of six or seven sunken huts (SFBs on Fig.3.30) was excavated at Hurst Park, East Molesey, Surrey (Andrews 1996b). The excavator has drawn attention to the striking regularity of layout, with the buildings set roughly 30 m apart, consistently aligned, and mostly of the same size. It is considered unlikely that any evidence for other structures was overlooked in the intervening gaps, and the regularity of the layout is suggestive of a single phase of activity. Two parallel ditches, some 15 m apart, at the south side of the site seem likely to represent a droveway leading to fields, and lengths of gullies around two of the sunken huts may be the remains of enclosures. SFB 16 was considerably larger than the others with a metre-wide ramp at its east end. Its position is striking, and it seems possible that it was sited to allow supervision of the other structures. There is some evidence to suggest that grain processing took place on this site. A scorched area was identified on the base of the hollow of SFB 205, towards its west end, and it is suggested that this may represent the remains of burning in a structure that was used for crop drying and processing (ibid., 74, 104); two fragments of rotary quern were also found in its backfill. A dark, charcoal-rich spread comparatively rich in charred cereal grains, chaff and weed seeds seems to have been dumped over the ramp at the east end of SFB 16, probably when it was abandoned (ibid., 70), and another quern fragment was present in the backfill. It is interesting to compare this site with Yarnton where groups of sunken huts were constructed in both the early and mid Saxon period in an area of the site that was also the location of the probable granary. Was the site at Hurst Park a crop processing and storage area of a larger estate?

Rural settlement in the 8th to 9th centuries: the Yarnton-Cassington project (Figs 3.33-3.36)

The Yarnton-Cassington project (Hey 2004) has revealed the first really good evidence for the form of later mid Saxon rural settlement in the Thames Valley. Here, excavations at Yarnton, and survey and evaluation work at the nearby sites of Cresswell Field and Worton, were undertaken in advance of large-scale gravel extraction (Fig. 3.33) At Yarnton the excavations have revealed a rural settlement of two phases, dated broadly to the 8th and the 9th centuries (Fig 3.34). The 8th-century phase seems likely to represent a prosperous farmstead, which may have formed part of the estates of the nearby minster at Eynsham. It continued in use through the 9th century, with evidence for some reorganisation, but was then apparently abandoned as occupation shifted northwards towards the site of the medieval village.

Evidence for similar 8th-century settlements was recovered in less extensive work at Cresswell Field and Worton. At Cresswell Field (Fig. 3.35), some 500 m west of the Yarnton farmstead, a timber hall was constructed of earthfast posts (Hey 2004, 177-188, figs 9.2, 9.3). It was divided into a larger compartment (10.5 x 6 m) and a smaller one to the east (5.2 x 5 m), divided from each other by a double row of postholes. Immediately to the south and west of the hall were postholes that seem to represent a contemporary arrangement of four or five paddocks and a possible ancillary building. Three sunken huts were aligned in an east-west row roughly 30 m south of the hall and more are apparent from geophysical survey to the north. At Worton (Fig. 3.36), a post-in-trench building measuring 16.5 x 7 m internally was constructed, cutting through the backfill of an earlier sunken hut (ibid., 197, fig. 10.6). A single radiocarbon date indicates that it was in use in the period cal AD 640-880 (ibid., 59 and table 13.1), and it is also thought likely to have been contemporary with the 8th-century phase at Yarnton. A second building was identified by magnetometer survey to the south of this hall, and at right-angles to it (ibid., 59 and fig. 12.14), while another rectangle of similar size just to the north, visible in air photographs, may also be associated. Given the likelihood that a number of the sunken huts visible from the air are also mid Saxon in date, it seems likely that the Worton settlement was considerably more extensive than is currently known (ibid.).

The Yarnton-Cassington project has been of great significance for understanding the evolution of settlement at this time. A major programme of radiocarbon dating was undertaken, suggesting that three farmsteads were established around the early 8th century, 1 km and 0.5 km apart from each other. The impression is definitely of three individual establishments, rather than households within larger settlements. Each contained between one and three post-built halls, and a number of sunken huts. The structures share a broadly similar alignment, and the settlements incorporated ditched track-

ways, enclosures, paddocks and probably the edges of larger fields. At Yarnton, the ditched enclosures become more prominent in the 9th century, and the settlement as a whole has a more organised appearance. The most striking change in the 9th century phase is the appearance of human burials at the settlement, in enclosure ditches and a small cemetery. The excavations have also revealed very important evidence for changing farming practices, including the resumption of hay cultivation, the manuring of fields and the spread of arable farming onto clay soils in the north of the settlement. This is considered in detail in Chapter 6, below.

THE LATE SAXON PERIOD (*c* 850-1066) (Fig. 3.37)

The late Saxon period is widely held to be the time at which the landscape began to assume the more familiar form recognisable in the later medieval period. In its essentials, this remains the framework of the settlement pattern we know in the Thames Valley today. By the time of Domesday Book (1086) occupation was widespread in the study area (Fig. 3.37), although population levels were very much lower than today, and poorer quality land remained very sparsely populated. Many of the towns and villages of the Thames Valley today will have existed in some form by this time, although this is by no means a universal pattern. Numerous towns and villages of Surrey and (less clearly) old Middlesex, for example, only emerge in the 12th and 13th centuries (Poulton 1998a), and there is clearly considerable scope for analysis of these kinds of differences and their significance.

The late Saxon period also sees an important change in our sources of information. Documentary

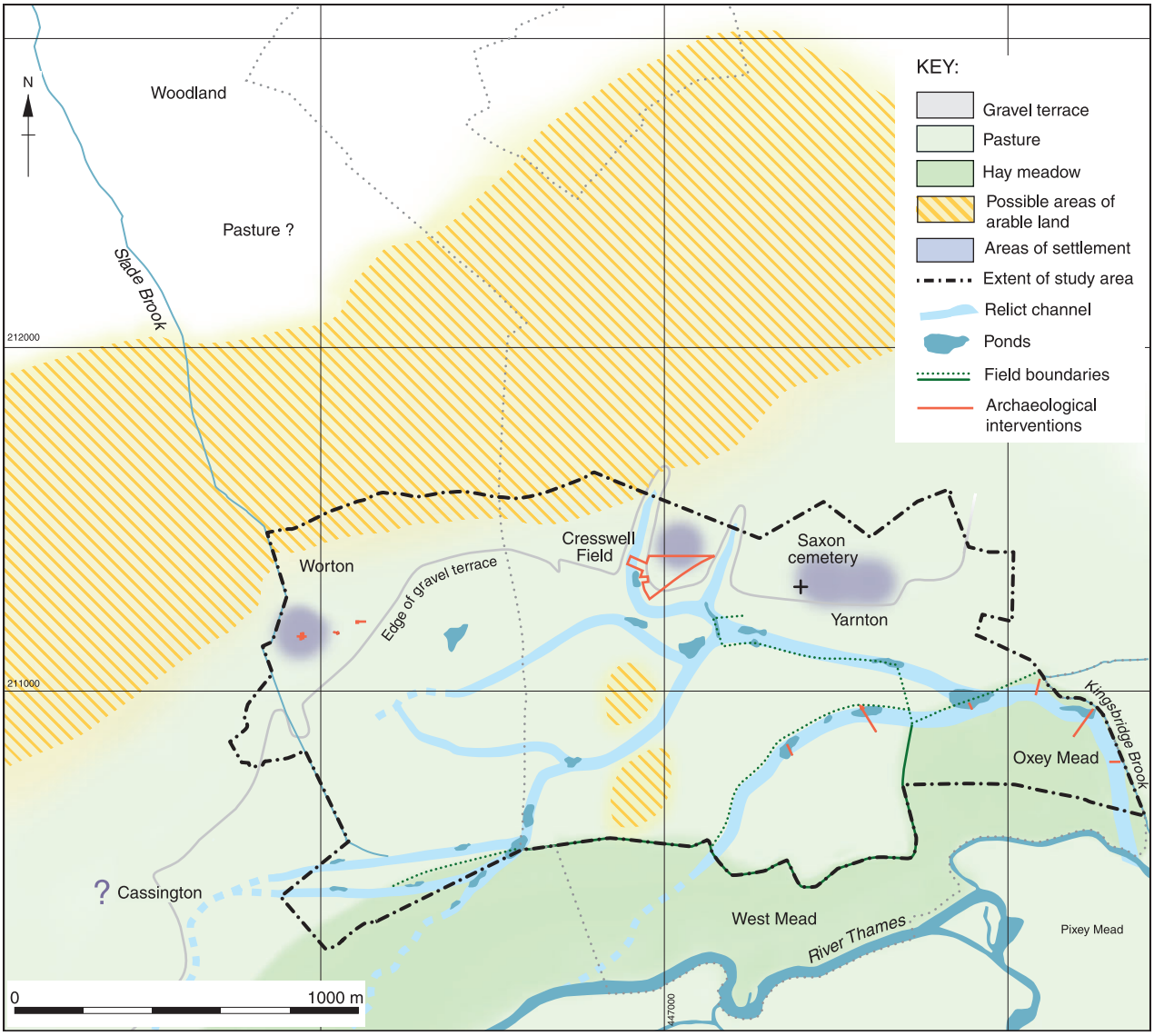


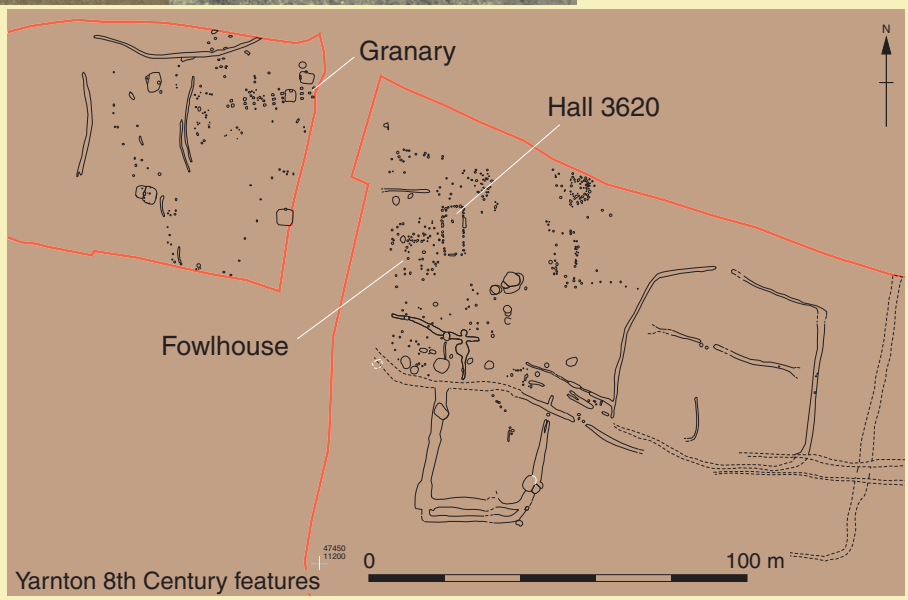
Fig. 3.33 The Yarnton project area, Oxon

Fig. 3.34 (overleaf) Feature: mid Saxon Yarnton

MID SAXON YARNTON

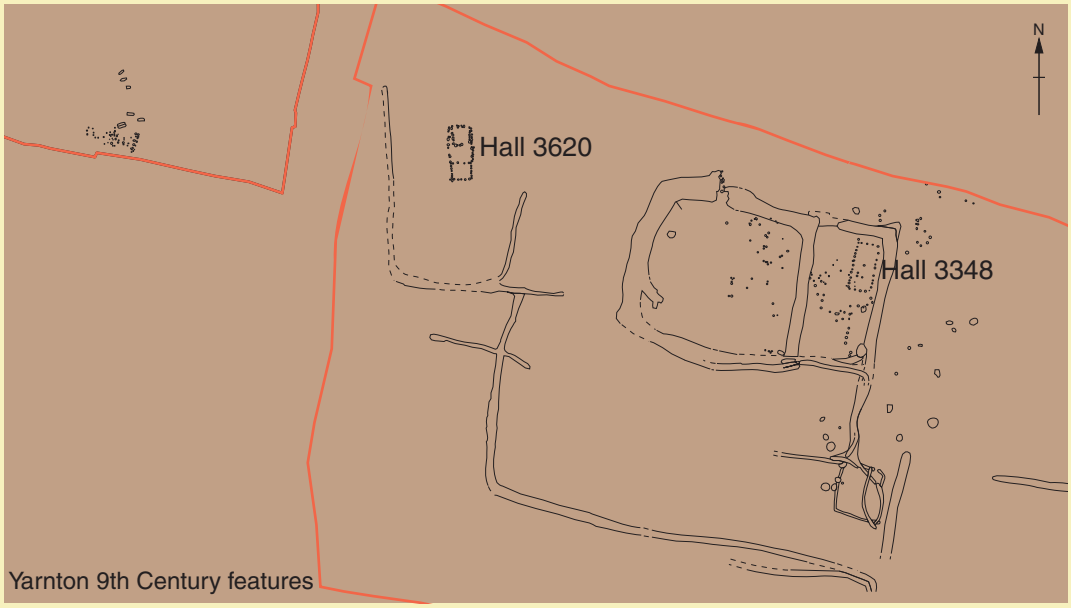
The 8th-century settlement at Yarnton was focused on a substantial post-built hall, 3620. It was surrounded by a mass of postholes that represent other structures whose nature is less clear. One of these was probably a fowlhouse, and others may have been subsidiary domestic buildings, barns and animal pens. To the south was a trackway leading to two enclosures, perhaps animal paddocks, formed by ditches. Two sunken huts were dug over the ditches of the southern enclosure. Approximately 50 m west of the main hall was a subsidiary area, also enclosed and divided by gullies, where five sunken huts and a granary were constructed. Some 50 pits were found, the majority of which were dug in the area between the hall and the trackway, some of them within the trackway ditches. During the 8th century, Yarnton may have belonged to the nearby minster at Eynsham. Evidence from plant remains indicates that there was an intensification of farming at this date. Hay was being grown for the first time since the Roman period, and some of the heavy clay land in the north of the settlement had been brought into cultivation. The construction of the granary and the fowlhouse could also be signs of more intensive farming, and the estate may have had to supply much of its produce to the minster as part of its food render.

During the 9th century the focus of settlement shifted to the east. Hall 3620 was rebuilt on two occasions in a more elaborate form, and a substantial boundary ditch was created around it.



Yarnton 8th Century features

MID SAXON YARNTON



Yarnton 9th Century features

To the east, the 8th-century enclosure 3139 was re-dug with an annexe to the east in which a new timber hall (3348) was constructed. A second, smaller timber structure may have stood nearby. The area containing the buildings appears to have been divided from the rest of the annexe by fence lines, and a hearth was found towards the centre of the fence lines, surrounded by some form of shelter. Another building may be represented by postholes in the north-east corner of the outer enclosure. Fields were marked out with ditches on the south side of the settlement, and there may still have been a trackway running from west to east, although this is less clear than in the previous phase. Wells were dug inside a small rectangular enclosure to the south-east of the annexe. Human burials were found within the large enclosure ditch, and the enclosure ditch around hall 3620. A small cemetery containing six or seven graves was found in the western area of the settlement, with two associated posthole structures of uncertain form and function (2730). Three skeletons were radiocarbon dated to the 8th and 9th centuries. During the 9th century many minster estates were taken back into royal control and granted out to new, often secular, owners. Does the new hall inside its ditched enclosure and annexe suggest the arrival of a new owner at Yarnton?

Clockwise from top left:

* *Two photographs of the halls*
* *Two 9th-century strap ends*
* *Equal-armed brooch (9th century; metal detector find)*
* *Stud (9th century; metal detector find)*
* *Plan of the 9th century features*
* *Aerial photo of the site*
* *Reconstruction of the 8th century settlement*
* *Plan of the 8th century features*

records become more abundant, particularly from the 10th century onwards, and some parish churches in the study area have architectural elements and sculpture that are datable to this time. However, just as documentary sources increase, information from archaeological excavation declines in this period. Archaeological study of the Upper and Middle Thames Valley has been strongly influenced by gravel extraction, but (for obvious reasons) quarrying does not occur in the built-up areas of modern towns and villages. If we are right in believing that the settlements of the late Saxon period are close to those we occupy today, then they will not generally be uncovered by this means. To date, the lack of evidence for late Saxon settlement from gravel quarries is consistent with such a view; vast areas of the Thames gravels have been quarried over the last 200 years, but late Saxon settlement evidence from them is very rare. As a result, the study of medieval rural settlement has received much less attention in this region than elsewhere in recent years, most notably in the East Midlands and East Anglia. The best opportunities to investigate late Saxon archaeology now arise from infill building and 'brownfield' development within modern settlements. Even these, however, will not necessarily take us close to the core areas of towns and villages, where the earliest evidence may lie, and the areas available for excavation are often very small indeed.

Rural settlement

Background

Over the period from *c* 850-1150 rural society in much of the country underwent a major transformation. This led ultimately to the emergence of a medieval manorial economy whose characteristic components across much of central England, including large parts of the study area, were nucleated villages and open field farming, and the close involvement of the lord of the manor or his agents in the working of the estate. The nature, timing and causes of the move to nucleated settlement and open field farming have been, and remain, hotly debated. It is beyond the scope of the present review to consider these arguments in detail, and recent extensive discussions have been published by Lewis *et al*. (2001) and Williamson (2003). By the time of Domesday Book manors with substantial populations of villagers owing labour services are widespread in the project area (Fig. 3.37), and it is likely that many of the fundamental changes had taken place here during the late Saxon period. Evidence from the recent excavations at Yarnton shows how change in the form of settlement and expansion of arable agriculture can be traced from the 8th century onwards (see above, and Chapter 6 below for a discussion of the changing farming practices). At Yarnton, gravel quarrying enabled

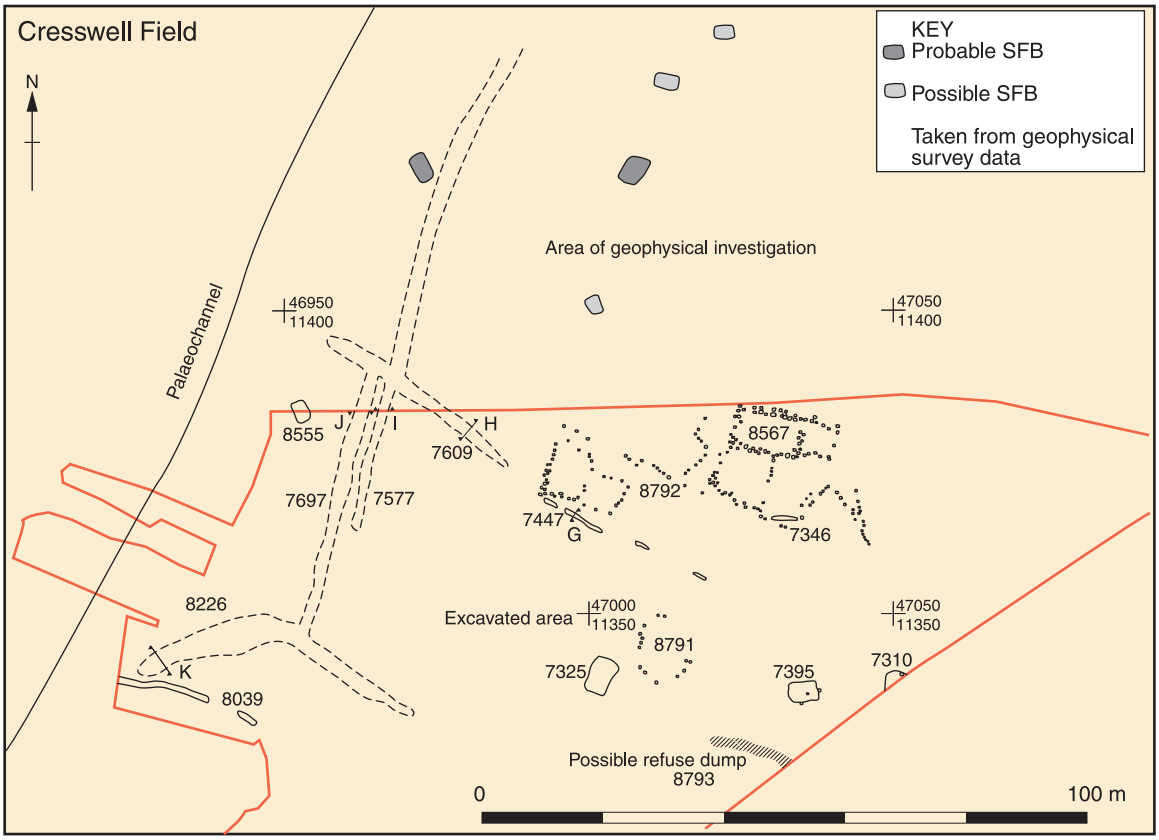


Fig. 3.35 8th-century settlement at Yarnton Cresswell Field

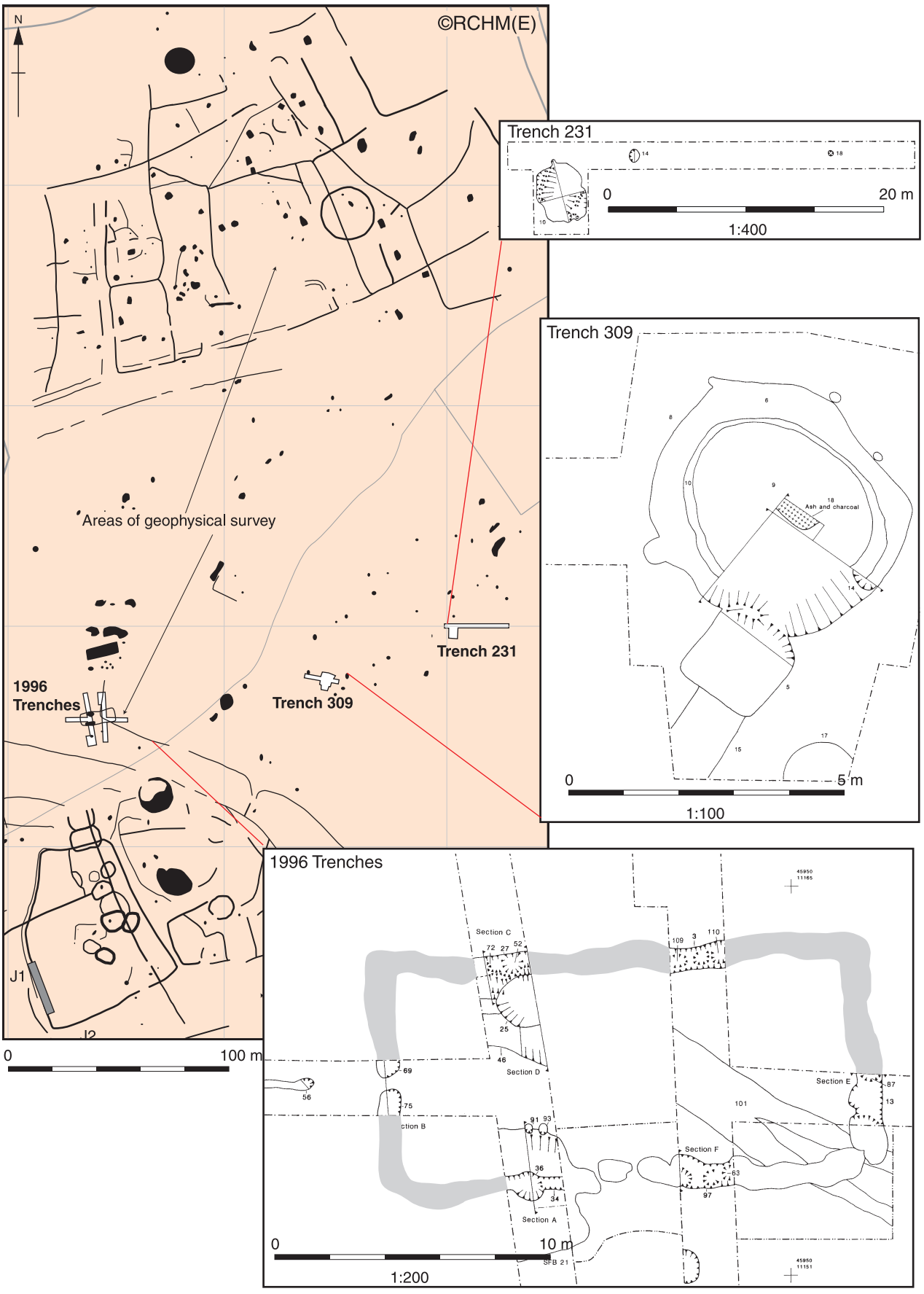


Fig. 3.36 8th-century settlement at Yarnton Worton

excavations to take place over a very wide area. Elsewhere, evidence is much more limited. Although it is likely that similar changes were occurring in many places in the study area, much more work is needed before this can be demonstrated.

Late Saxon estates (Figs 3.38-3.39)

The development of nucleated settlement and open field farming has been associated with the proliferation of small estates, formed in the late Saxon period by the increasing subdivision of the earlier, larger landholdings of the mid Saxon period. Our knowledge of estates in the late Saxon period depends on the survival of authentic charters (amongst numerous later forgeries) and these often include a detailed description of the boundaries. Many features of estate boundaries can still be identified in the modern landscape, and an increasing amount of research is taking place at a local level within the study area to attempt to trace

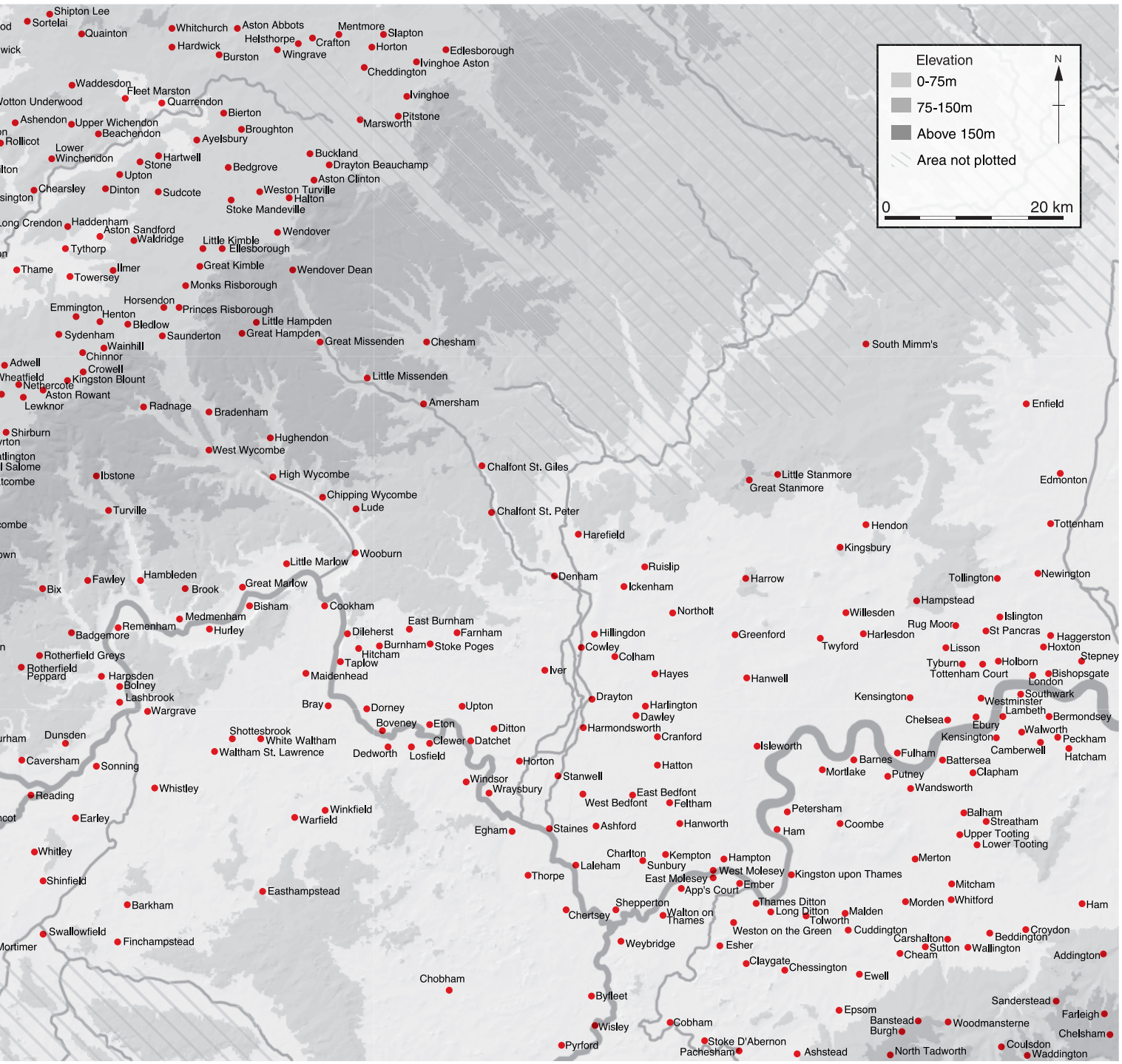


Fig. 3.37 The study area and surrounding region by 1086, showing Domesday manors

them (for example Holmes 1999, 41-3). It is clear that late Saxon estates were often designed to provide a mix of resources available on different types of ground, and many were to become parishes in the post-conquest period, and remain visible to us as such in the modern landscape. An important group of charters relating to estates of the Berkshire Downs and Vale of White Horse was studied in detail by Della Hooke (1987). She showed that the later ecclesiastical parishes of the area were closely based on a series of long, thin, rectangular estates created in the 9th and 10th centuries. Similar long, thin estates with a mix of woodland, pasture, arable and meadowland resources are recognisable in the parish boundary arrangement of the land north of the Thames between Taplow and Windsor (Fig. 3.38; Foreman *et al*. 2002 fig. 2.3), and occur commonly throughout the study area (Canham 1979; Blair 1991). The bounds of the estate granted to Eynsham Abbey at its refoundation in 1005 were translated

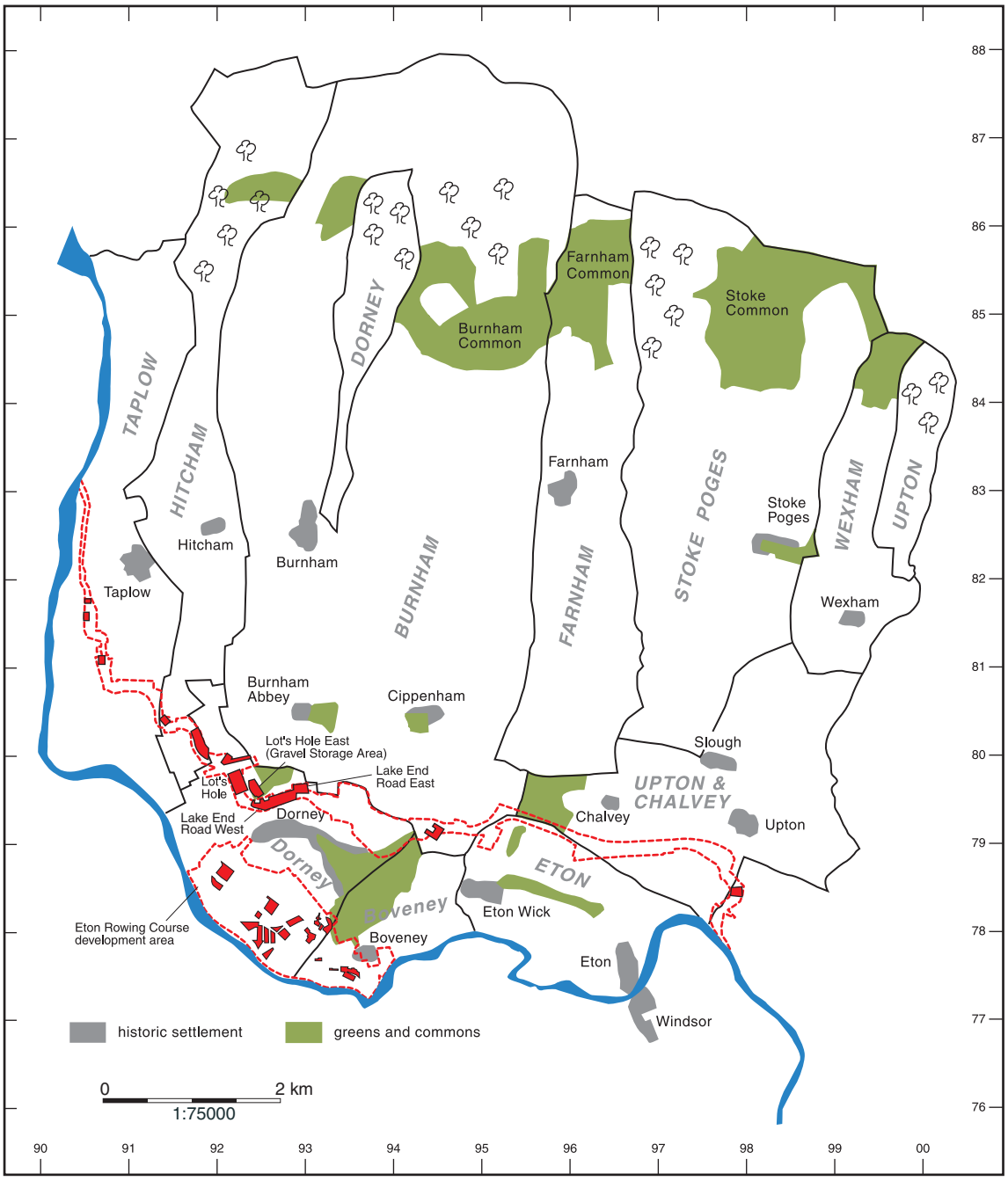


Fig. 3.38 Chiltern-edge parishes in the Middle Thames. (The areas of the archaeological investigations for the Jubilee River and Eton Rowing Course are shown outlined in red.)

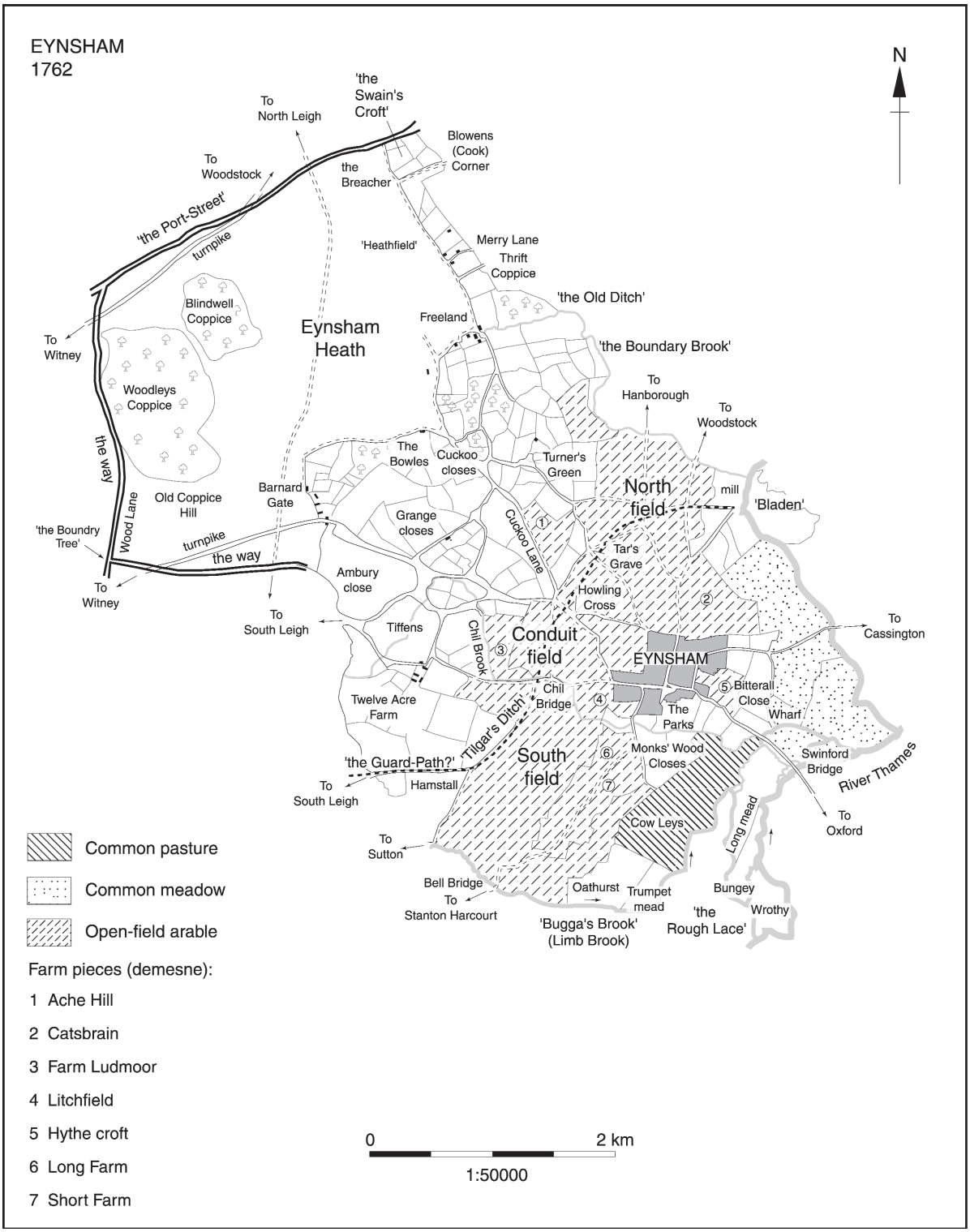


Fig. 3.39 The 1005 boundary of the Eynsham estate

and traced for the recent publication of the abbey excavations onto a map of the area drawn up in 1765. The location of known arable, meadow and pasture is also shown (Fig. 3.39, which corrects the version published in Hardy *et al*. 2003, fig. 1.3):

> These are the boundaries of the land at Egnesham. First from the 'rough lake' to Bugga's Brook; along the brook to Tilgar's ditch; from the ditch to ward sty (ie path); from the sty to Winburh's 'stock'; from the stock to three oaks; along the way to the boundary tree; thence along the way to the port street; from the street to the 'swains' croft; thence to heath-field to the old ditch; thence right to the boundary-brook; along the brook into (the) Bladen; along (the) Bladen into (the) Thames.

The archaeological evidence (Figs 3.40-3.48)

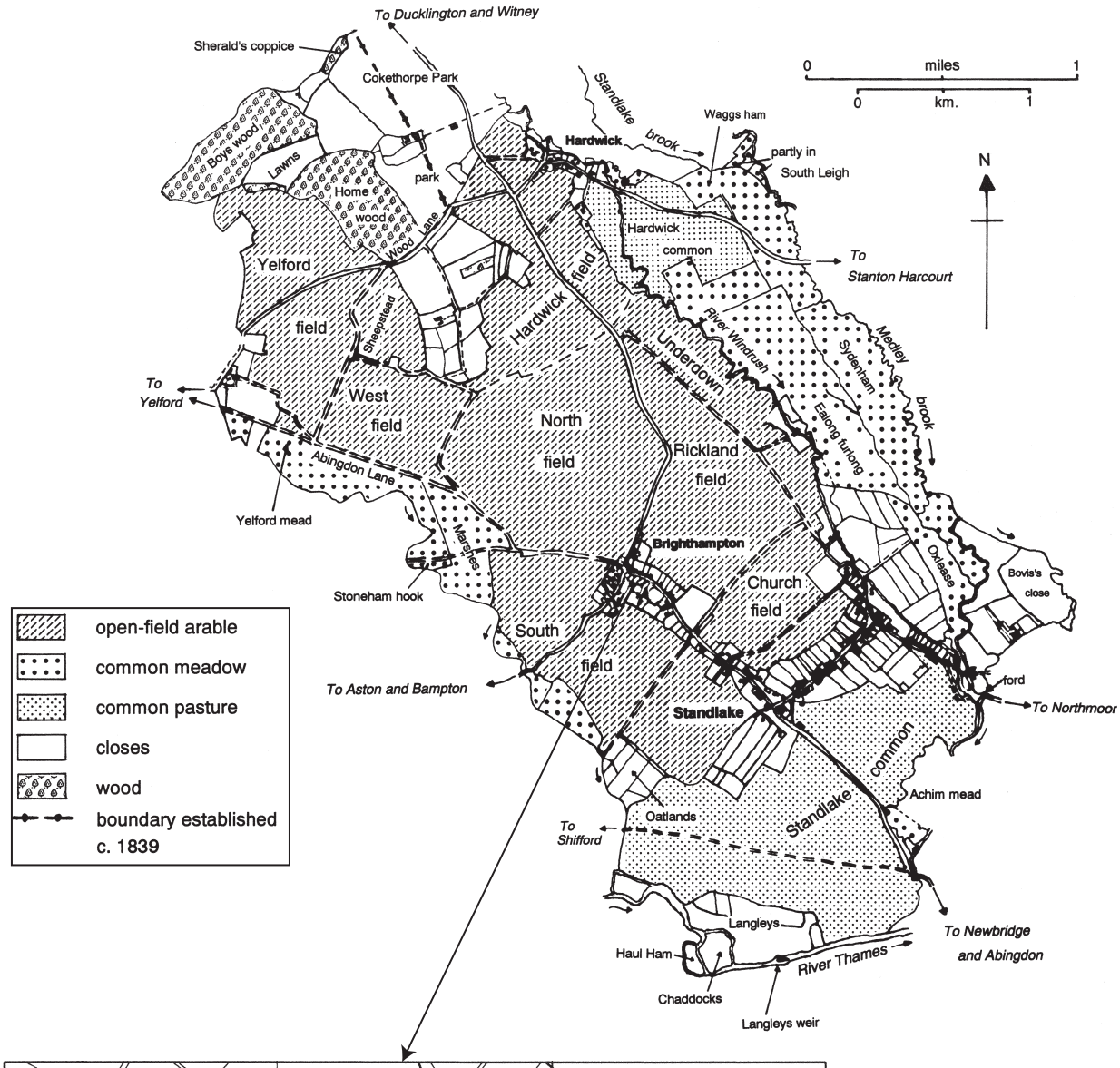
Rural settlement remains of this period are reported from only a small number of sites in the study area. Only five of these provide sufficient evidence to be considered here in any detail, but it is worth noting that even at less thoroughly investigated sites late Saxon occupation is invariably associated with the creation of ditched enclosures which seem to form elements of larger systems. A number of suggestions are made by the excavators regarding the function of these enclosures. Some, as at Yarnton, Lot's Hole Dorney, and Wraysbury appear to have defined fields (perhaps small 'home fields') and enclosed farmsteads. Closer to the village core, ditches can be seen as forming the boundaries of individual house and garden plots of the 'toft and croft' type, as has been suggested at Shepperton Green and at The Orchard, Brighthampton.

Excavations at The Orchard, Brighthampton, took place within the core area of an interesting small village located adjacent to the site of an early Saxon cemetery (Fig. 3.40). King Aethelred gave an estate of 3 *cassati* at Brighthampton from the royal estate of Bampton to his minister Aelfwine in 984 (Townley 1996, 180). A small estate may have continued to exist here for a century or so, as an estate of 1.5 hides was held at Brighthampton by Wadard in 1086, with 1 plough in demesne; a *servus*, a *villanus* and 5 *bordarii* were mentioned, but other lands and tenants may have existed, surveyed with Bampton (ibid., 187). The estate was later forfeited and reverted to the Crown. In 1131 it was included in a grant to Sées priory of land at Brighthampton and Hardwick, later Hardwick and Brighthampton manor. By the time of Domesday Book, a second estate of 6 hides, probably the later manor of Standlake, had been created in the area, and was held by Anketil de Grey; a manor house and church for this estate were built by the 12th century, and a second settlement, now the contiguous village of Standlake, grew up on the Grey estate. Anketil de Grey's estate had land for 7 ploughs in 1086, with 9 plough teams, 2 worked by 4 *servii* on the demesne, and 7 of them held by 15 *villani* and 16 *bordarii*. The manor of Brighthampton and Hardwick eventually came into the hands of the Grey family when it was granted by the priory to Walter de Grey, Archbishop of York, in or before 1245. Thereafter it was held jointly with Standlake until it was sold to St John's College in 1571 (Crossley 1996, 122). The field systems of Brighthampton and Standlake may have been separate originally. The estates had extensive meadowland estimated at 106 acres in 1086 (Townley 1996, 185). The excavations were located close to the core of Brighthampton, on the south side of the road running between Brighthampton and Standlake. A small amount of pottery suggested 10th-century activity in the area, although no features of this date could be identified and most of the evidence is thought to be of 11th- or 12th-century date, although some of it could be earlier. Evidence was recovered for a plot of land defined by ditches, which seems to have been large enough for a garden or paddock space. A rectangular post-built building was set towards the rear of the plot, roughly parallel to the road, and the intervening space was very busily used, with large numbers of pits, gullies and ditches (Ford and Preston 2002). Occupation at the site appears to have ceased by the mid to late 13th century.

At Manor Farm, Drayton (Oxon) an excavation towards the core of the village found a series of late Saxon ditched enclosures at the centre of which lay a large pond or hollow (Fig. 3.41). Clusters of postholes were evident within the enclosures, but could not be resolved into any clear structures. The pottery included late Saxon Oxford (shelly) ware, St Neot's type ware, Stamford ware and (unusually) Thetford-type ware, and it is suggested that the area was in use from the 9th/10th century until the late 11th or early 12th century. It was clear that there had been two or three phases of activity at the site. Other finds included a whetstone and fragments of Niedermendig lava quern, and most interestingly a zoomorphic strap end with fields of niello and silver wire inlay, datable to the second half of the 9th century. There was no evidence for any later medieval activity on the site after its abandonment (Challinor *et al*., 2003).

At Yarnton, the 8th- and 9th-century mid Saxon settlement was replaced by a a series of enclosures laid out to the north and south of a trackway along the terrace edge (Fig. 3.42; Hey 2004). The only building was a smithy located in the corner of one of the enclosures, apparently used only intermittently, and the fields appear to have been in agricultural use and at the periphery of the contemporary settlement. A magnetometer survey located two phases of ditched enclosures laid out to

Fig. 3.40 Nucleated settlement in the study area at Brighthampton, Oxon: facing page (above) the medieval field system, (below) the location of recent excavations; overleaf, the excavations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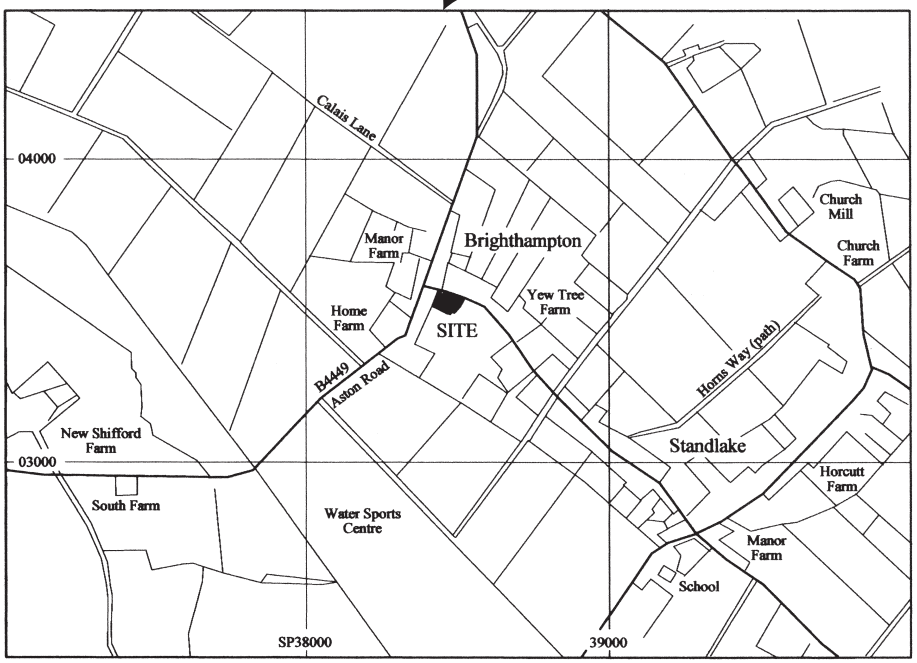
Wood Lane
Hardwick common
To Stanton Harcourt
Yelford field
Sheepstead
Hardwick field
River Windrush
Medley brook
Sydenham
Ealong furlong
Undercrown
To Yelford
West field
North field
Rickland field
Abingdon Lane
Yelford mead
Brighthampton
Stoneham hook
Marsh
Church field
Bovis's close
Oxlease
South field
To Aston and Bampton
ford
To Northmoor
Standlake
common
Achim mead
Oatlands
To Shifford
Standlake
Langleys
To Newbridge and Abingdon
Haul Ham
River Thames
Chaddocks
Langleys weir
open-field arable
common meadow
common pasture
closes
wood
boundary established c. 1839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Home Farm
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Standlake
Horcutt Farm
South Farm
Water Sports Centre
Manor Farm
School
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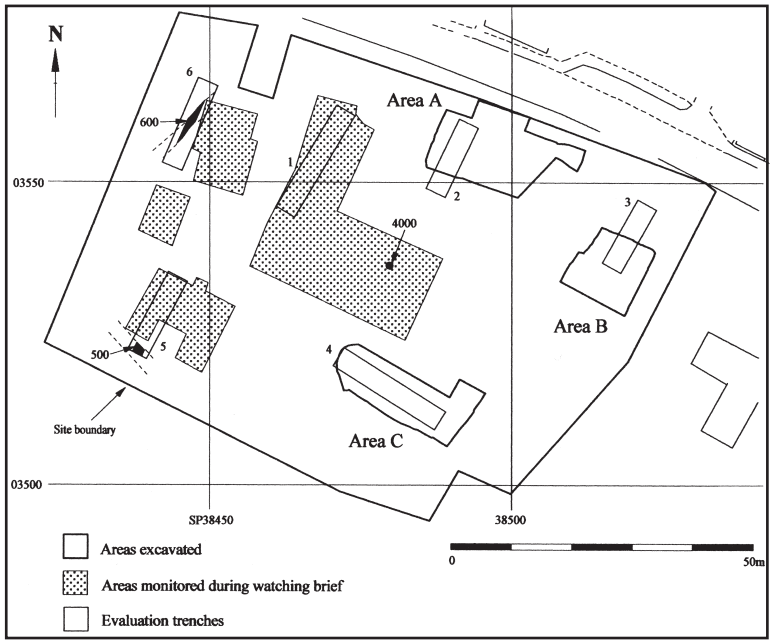
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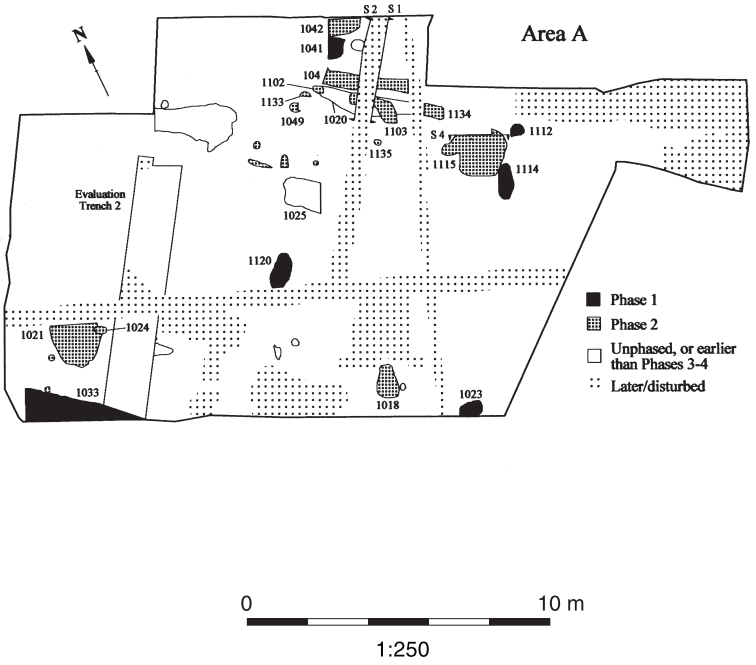
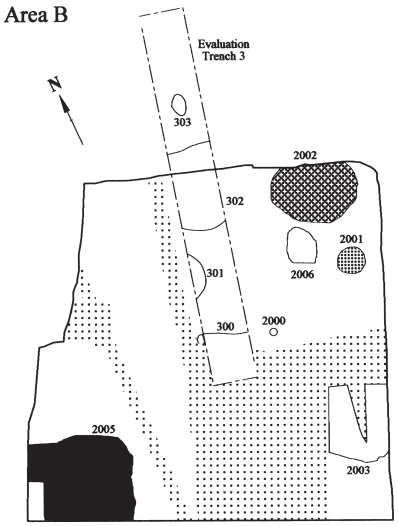
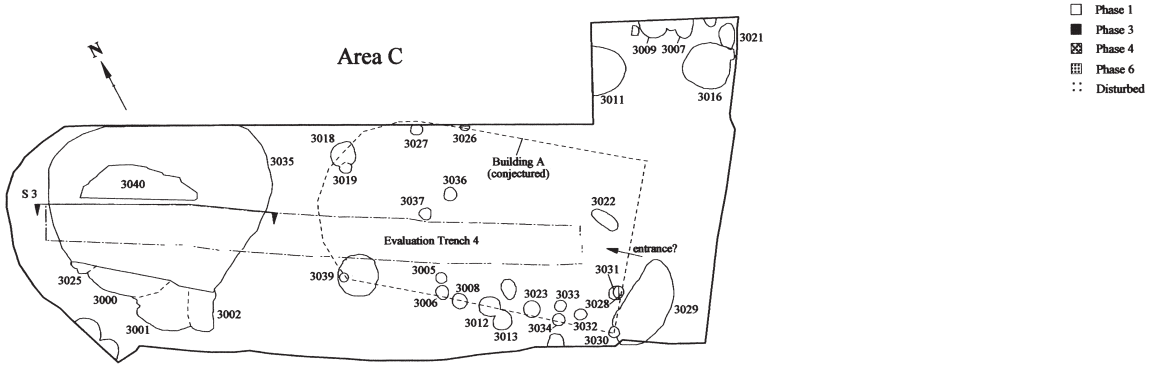
Areas monitored during watching brief
Evaluation trenches


Area A
N
S 2
S 1
1042
1041
104
1102
1133
1049
1020
1103
1134
S 4
1112
1135
1115
1114
Evaluation Trench 2
1025
1120
1021
1024
1033
1018
1023
Phase 1
Phase 2
Unphased, or earlier than Phases 3-4
Later/disturbed
0
10 m
1:250


Area B
N
Evaluation Trench 3
303
2002
302
2001
2006
301
300
2000
2005
2003


Area C
N
3021
3009
3007
3011
3016
3018
3027
3026
3035
3019
Building A (conjectured)
3036
3040
S 3
3037
3022
Evaluation Trench 4
entrance?
3005
3031
3039
3025
3008
3023
3033
3028
3029
3000
3006
3012
3034
3032
3002
3013
3030
3001
Phase 1
Phase 3
Phase 4
Phase 6
Disturbed

the north-east of the main excavated area, suggesting that the focus of the settlement shifted north-eastwards during the late Saxon period to the area around Mead Farm. A number of features detected by the survey resemble sunken huts; the way in which these features were dispersed through the enclosure system suggests that they should be seen as part of the late Saxon settlement, associated with a series of individual farmstead tofts (ibid., 234). The Norman church and the manor house are located a short distance to the north of Mead Farm, and it is suggested that the focus of the late Saxon settlement may have been here. The village subsequently shifted north-eastwards again, leaving the church relatively isolated.

The large-scale excavations at Lot's Hole and Lake End, Dorney (Bucks) took place in advance of gravel extraction and the creation of the new Jubilee River (Maidenhead to Windsor) flood relief channel (Foreman *et al*. 2002). The sites were located in an area of dispersed settlement formed on a series of islands within a system of palaeochannels of the Thames that are now largely silted up, although small streams survive. Figure 3.43 is an estate map of Boveney, drawn up in 1812, showing a scatter of small individual farmsteads dispersed throughout the parish, with a very marked row aligned along the north side of the common. Figure 3.44 shows historic land use in the vicinity; the areas of the new Jubilee River and the nearby excavations for Eton Rowing Lake are shown by broken red lines, and the sites at Lot's Hole and Lake End Road are marked in solid red. The origins of dispersed settlement have generally seen less investigation than nucleated villages, and the results are therefore of some interest. During the mid Saxon period, a very large number of pits were dug on the site, but there was no evidence of a contemporary settlement, and the nature of the site at that time is considered further in Chapters 6 and 7 below. During the late 10th to 11th century, a boundary ditch was laid out at Lot's Hole (Fig. 3.45), with an entrance roughly

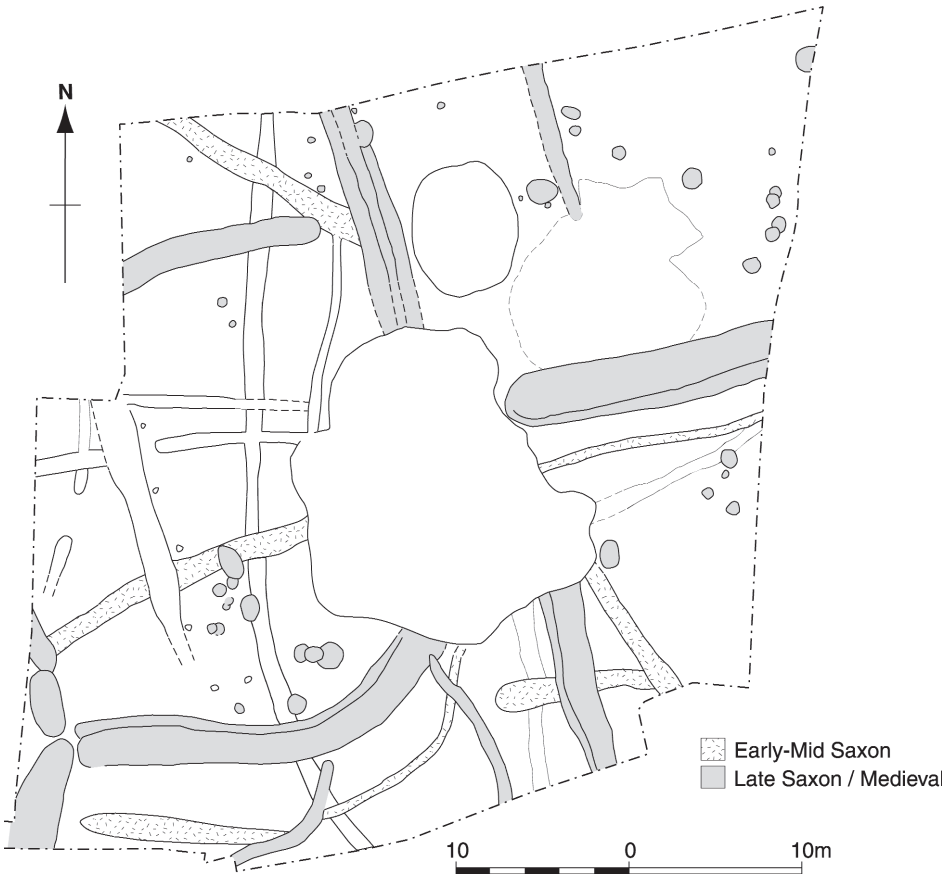


Fig. 3.41 Late Saxon settlement at Manor Farm, Drayton, Oxon

Fig. 3.42 Late Saxon settlement at Yarnton

Fig. 3.43 Dispersed settlement in the study area. An estate map of Dorney, Bucks, 1821

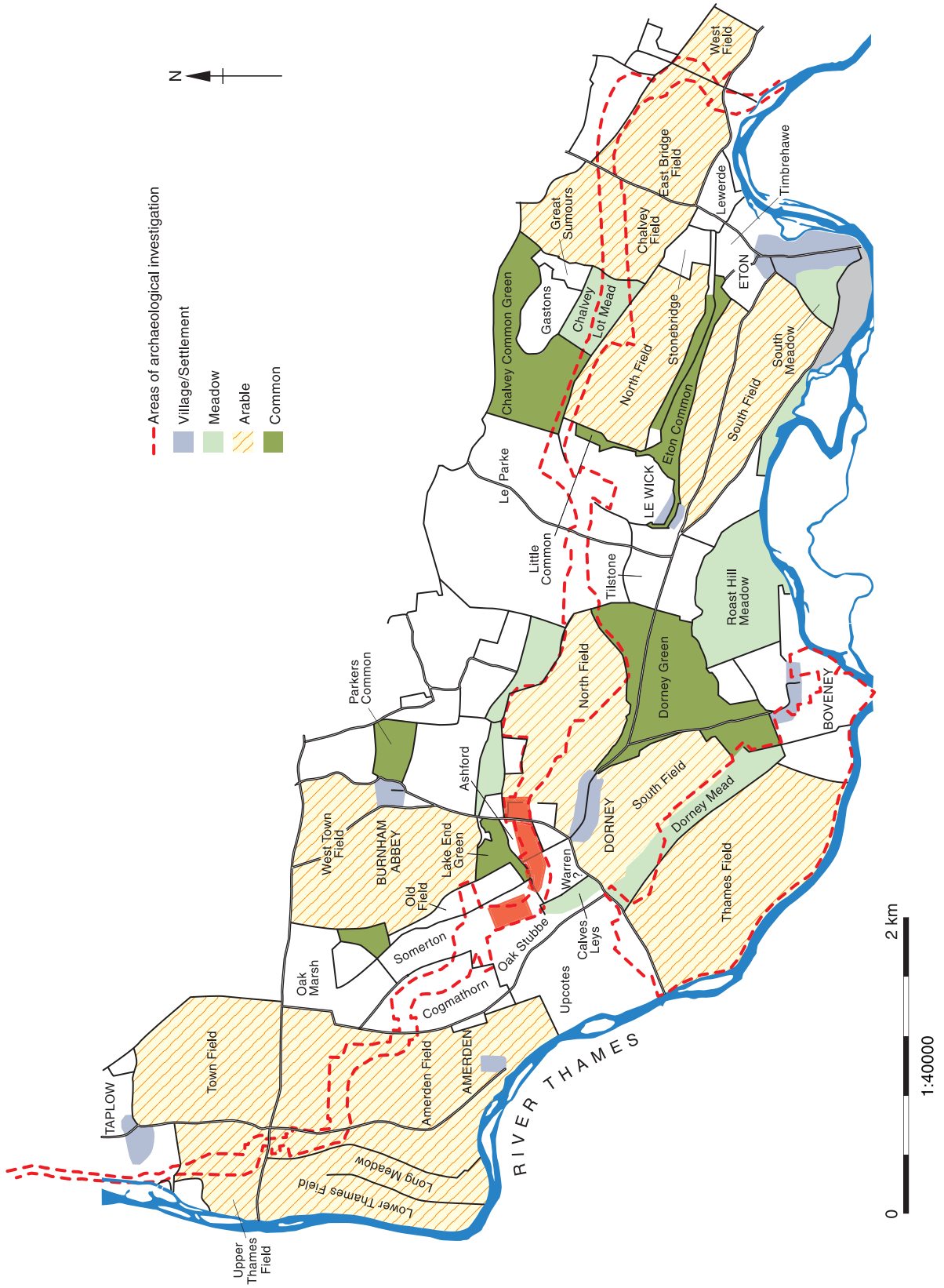


Fig. 3.44 Historic land use in the Middle Thames at Dorney, Boveney and Eton. (The areas of the archaeological investigations for the Jubilee River and Eton Rowing Course are shown outlined in red.)

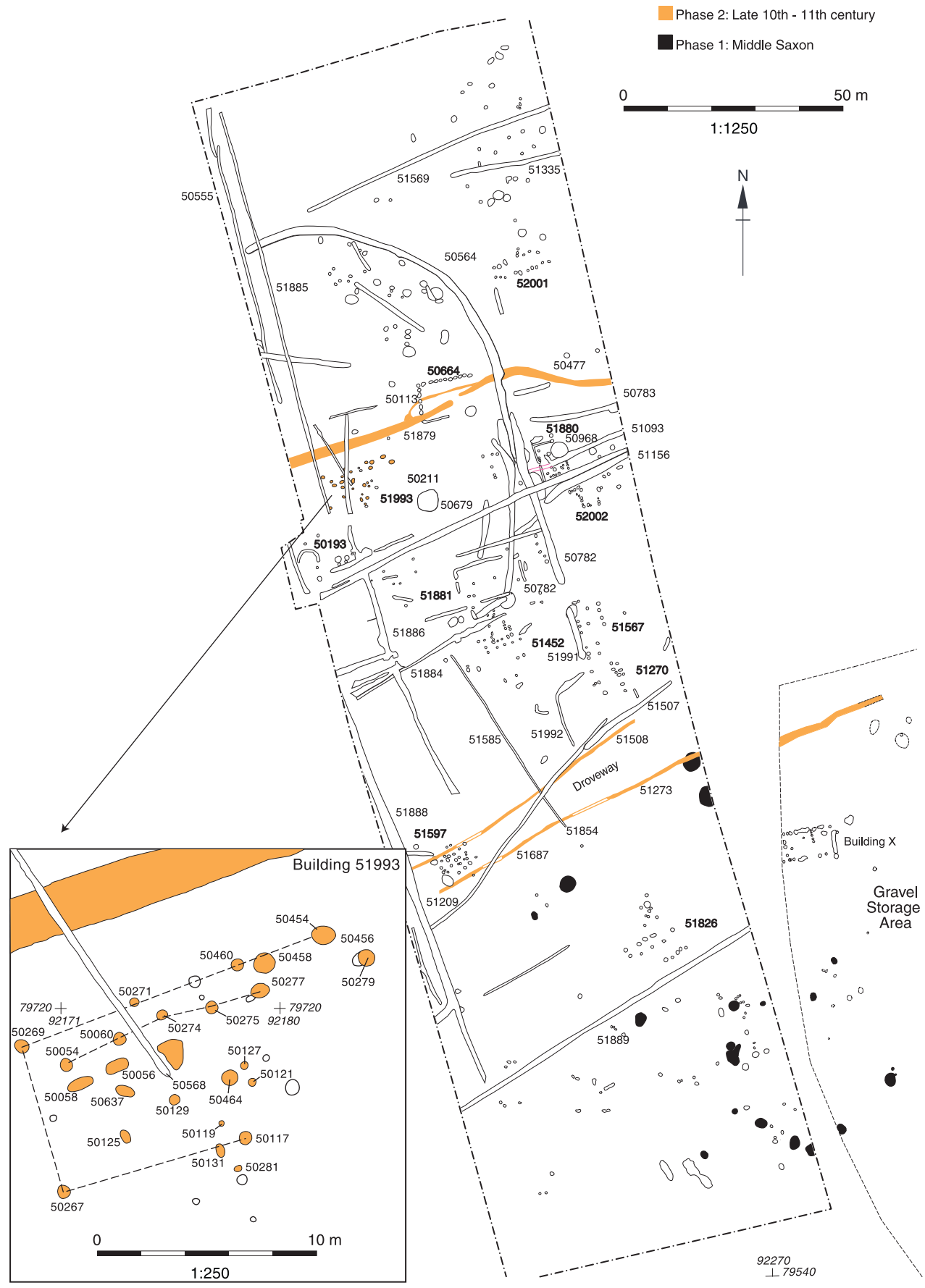


Fig. 3.45 Saxon and medieval settlement at Lot's Hole, Dorney

1 m wide, subsequently closed off. Immediately south of the boundary ditch was a concentrated spread of postholes representing one or two phases of building, although the exact form of the building cannot be reconstructed with any confidence (building 51993). Fragments of daub in the posthole fills suggest the likely wall fabric. The building lay roughly 3 m inside the enclosure boundary, and seems to have been aligned parallel to it, suggesting that the two were contemporary. Some 90 m to the south was a droveway, thought to lead from an earlier trackway to the east towards the palaeochannel and stream to the west (ibid., 73). The later reorganisation of the area can also be followed on Figure 3.45. At Lake End Road East (Fig. 3.46), pottery was recovered suggesting that occupation could have started in the 10th century, but the earliest datable feature was a rectangular enclosure of late 11th- to mid 12th-century date. The site was occupied throughout the medieval period by a sequence of rectangular enclosures laid out in slightly different positions, but only a single building of late 12th- to mid 13th-century date was seen.

At Wraysbury, sample excavations were undertaken covering an area up to 100 m north of St Andrew's Church, between the church and Manor Farm (Fig. 3.47). Significant evidence for mid Saxon settlement had been found to the west of the site (see above). The excavations located evidence for late Saxon and Norman occupation spanning the period from the late 9th to the 12th centuries (Astill and Lobb 1989). Evidence for two late Saxon ditched enclosures was found, which appeared to form basic units of the settlement extending to the edge of the stream in the south. Fence lines were

Fig. 3.46 Saxon and medieval settlement at Lake End Road, Dorney

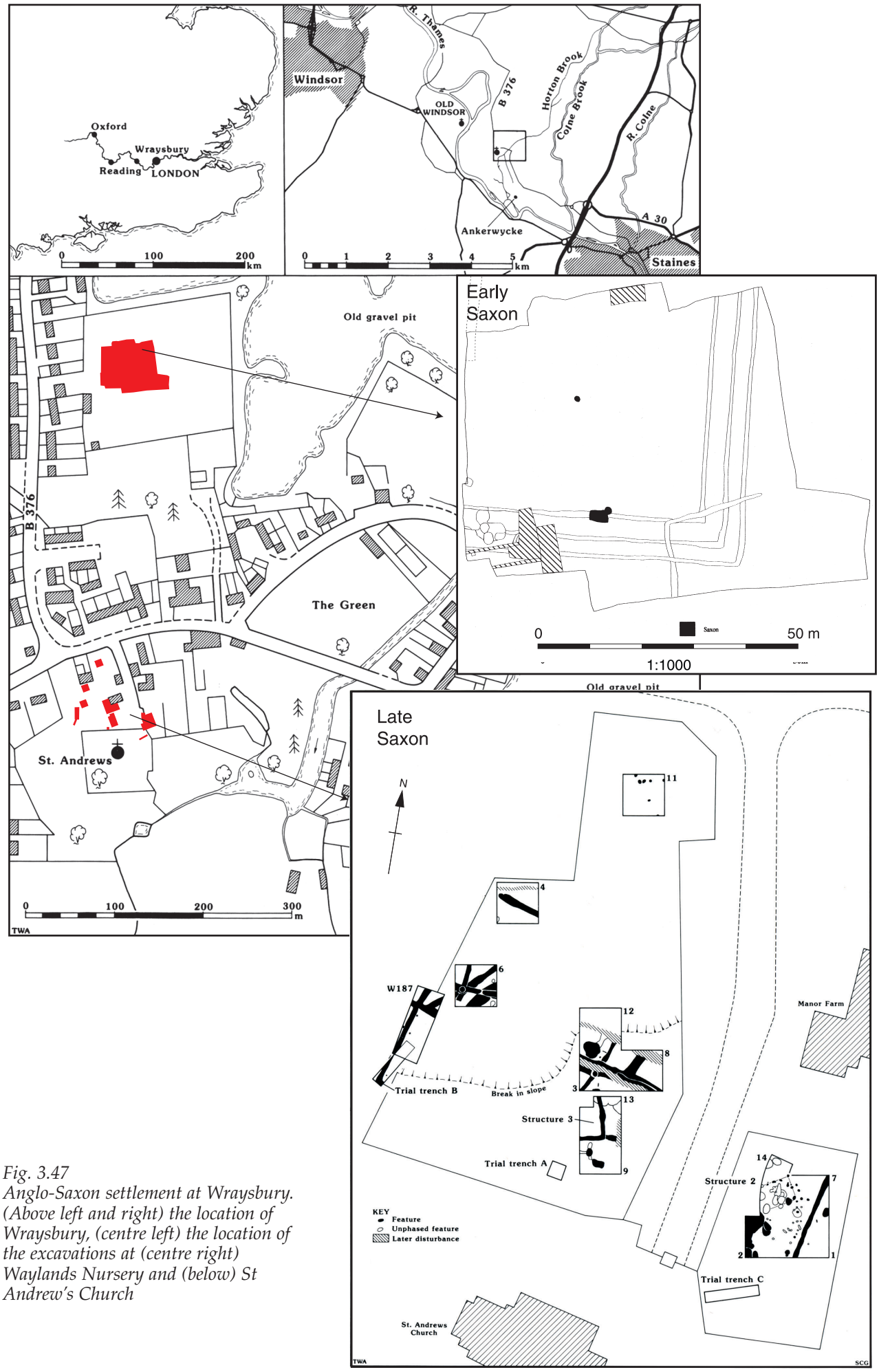


Fig. 3.47
Anglo-Saxon settlement at Wraysbury. (Above left and right) the location of Wraysbury, (centre left) the location of the excavations at (centre right) Waylands Nursery and (below) St Andrew's Church

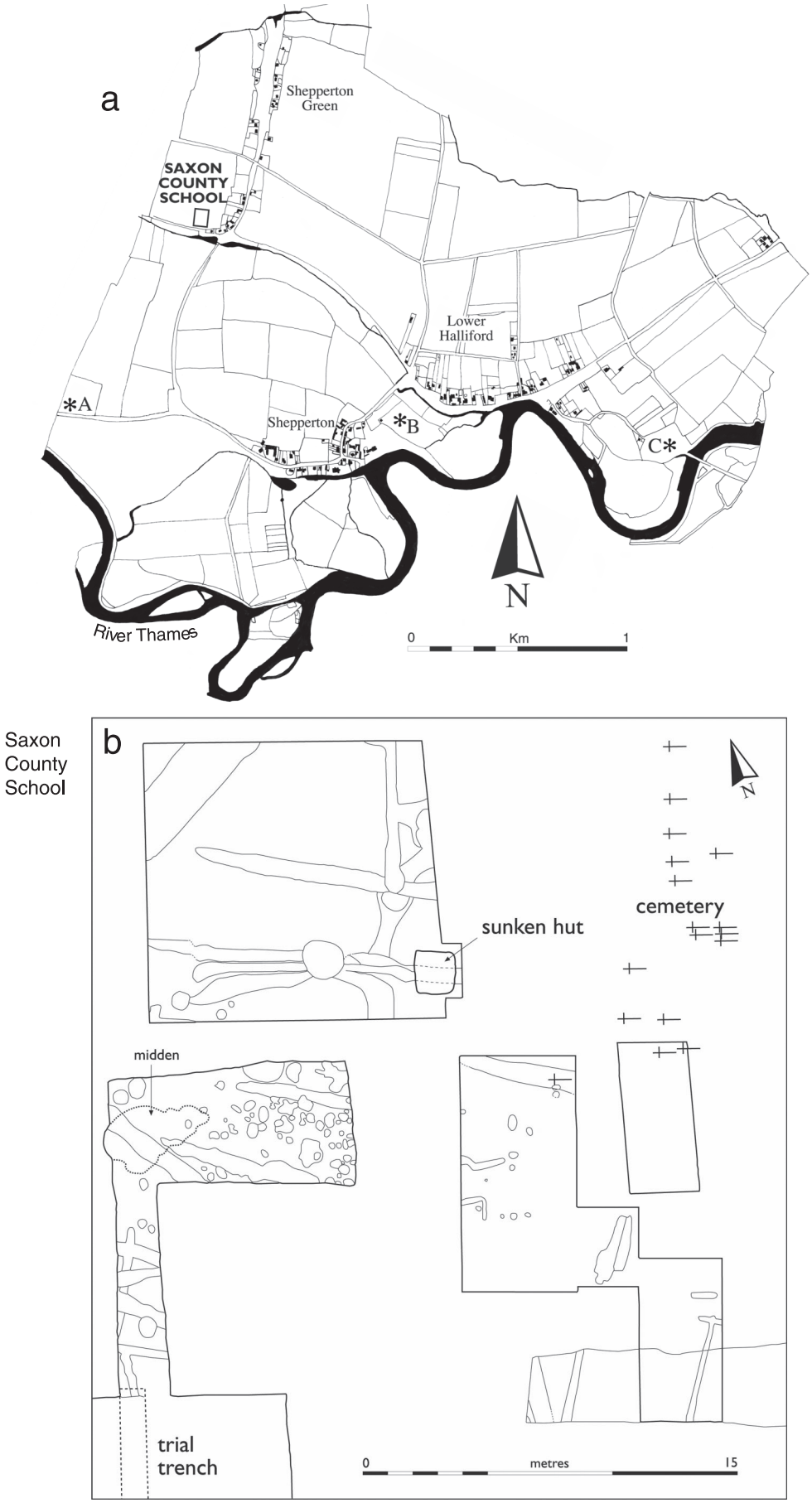


Fig. 3.48 Saxon settlement at Shepperton Green: (a) the Shepperton area (based on the Tithe map of 1843) showing the location of the excavations and Anglo-Saxon cemeteries. A, B and C are the (presumed or actual) early Saxon

c

d

cemeteries at Upper West Field, War Close and Walton Bridge Green; (b) plan of all the 6th- to 12th-century features at Saxon County School; (c) view of Saxon features, looking west, with the midden at the far end; (d) the sunken hut, with postholes at each corner

indicated adjacent to at least two of the ditches. Two probable buildings were partially excavated. One (Structure 2) was constructed of earthfast posts in postholes with wattle and daub infilling, judging by the presence of a large proportion of daub, some with wattle impressions, in the adjacent area. The other (Structure 3) was possibly of sill beam or post-in-trench construction. The presence of a third building on the west edge of the site was inferred from an exceptional density of well-preserved daub in a ditch in this area, some of which had plaster attached. It is suggested that this may imply the presence of a substantial building, and the faunal assemblage from the area was suggestive of kitchen waste. The buildings were not particularly closely aligned on the enclosures. Astill and Lobb (ibid., 83) note that the enclosures were similar in size to those at North Elmham, period 3, West Cotton and Wicken Bonhunt, and contrasted markedly with the smaller crofts located in the 11th-century phases at Barton Blount and Goltho, which become such a familiar feature in later medieval villages. The Wraysbury-type enclosures clearly performed a different function. It may be that, as at Wicken Bonhunt and North Elmham, structures were restricted to a small area of the large enclosures. Subsequently the occupied area was apparently turned over to agriculture, and the settlement seems to have moved northwards.

Several phases of excavation at Saxon County School, Shepperton Green (Canham 1979; Poulton forthcoming b) have found evidence for a multi-period site that was in used from the early Saxon period until the 13th century. This has confirmed the early Saxon origins of the settlement through the identification of an early Saxon midden. A ditched layout seems to have been established on the site in the mid to late Saxon period, and continued to develop until the early 12th century (Fig. 3.48). The only clear evidence for structures associated with the ditched enclosures is a single sunken hut with four posts, one in each corner. A pin of 8th- or 9th-century date was found in this building. Two possible buildings were identified from probable wall trenches in an area beyond the ditched system to the south, and it is suggested that these could represent an extension of the settlement in the 11th or 12th century (Canham 1979, 109-11). Postholes found in the vicinity of one of the buildings could imply an earlier (or a later) building in the same spot. The site appears to have reverted to arable during the 14th or 15th century. Two Saxon coins have been recovered from the site: one, a coin of Offa dated to the period c 792-6 was residual in a late Saxon ditch. The other coin, of the 10th century, was found in topsoil. Some 20 m to the east of the ditched enclosure was a cemetery containing at least 20 individuals; all had been buried on an east-west alignment, and none had any grave goods. This cemetery, which is thought to have gone out of use by *c* 1000, is now thought likely to be contemporary with the mid to late Saxon settlement at the site (Poulton forthcoming b). In a recent re-assessment of the character of the settlement Poulton suggests that the ditched enclosure system seems to represent a 'toft and croft' system typical of late Saxon and medieval village layouts. Shepperton is one of a number of riverside parishes within Spelthorne Hundred (Canham 1979, 111-13, fig. 9), which seem likely to have been created in the pre-conquest period with a substantial length of river-bank. Canham considers it likely that Shepperton village, near the Thames on the south edge of the parish, was the principal medieval (and late Saxon) settlement, but suggests that Shepperton Green may have originated as an individual farm unit with its own buildings and home fields, and a droveway connecting it to the village centre.

Late Saxon towns

If the evidence of Domesday Book can be taken at face value, there were only five places in the Upper and Middle Thames Valley that were defined by their contemporaries as towns at the end of the Anglo-Saxon period: Cricklade, Oxford, Wallingford, Reading and (Old) Windsor (Darby 1977 appendix 16). Society remained overwhelmingly rural, with no more than perhaps 1 in 10 living in towns by the time of Domesday Book – and many of these would have been in the most populous places such as London, York and Winchester (Dyer 2003, 62). The Saxon 'towns' of the study area were very varied places. What they had in common was royal authority: Cricklade, Oxford and Wallingford were founded as part of the burghal defensive network under Alfred and Edward the Elder in the late 9th and early 10th century (see below), and Reading was probably given borough status by Edward the Confessor in the first half of the 11th century. Windsor is referred to as a *villa* in a charter of 1065 (Astill 1978, 69) and in Domesday Book, and was a royal residence of some importance. Unreliable as Domesday Book's figures are, these five 'towns' seem to have been very different in size. Wallingford and Oxford were among the 18 largest towns in the country and are recorded as having 545 and 477 properties respectively (Dyer 2000, 752-3); the entries for waste properties at Oxford are hard to interpret, but could imply that there were something like twice as many properties prior to the Norman conquest (see Munby 'Oxford in Domesday Book' in Dodd (ed.) 2003, 50-51). Their populations are almost impossible to estimate reliably but will have numbered several thousands. Meanwhile, 95 properties (*hagae*) are recorded at Windsor, only 59 properties at Reading, and 35+ at Cricklade (Dyer 2000, 752-3), suggesting that their populations numbered perhaps no more than a few hundred at most. The archaeological evidence for their development and form is variable: Oxford has seen a good deal of excavation, but work at the others has been more limited.

What, in the opinion of contemporaries, set these places apart from other settlements of the time? Only these places within the study area are identified as towns in Domesday Book, but there are many other places that had some urban characteristics, and the distinction between them is considered in more detail below. Recent attempts to define what is meant by a town have emphasised their character as densely populated and permanently occupied sites, with a specialised non-agrarian economy and the functions of a central place (Scull 1997, 272; Palliser 2000, 4-5). John Blair has also argued that the important ritual and ceremonial central place roles of minsters would have made them 'cities' to the contemporary mind, even if modern archaeologists take a more rigidly economic view of the criteria of urbanism (2005, 262-8).

Wallingford and Oxford, on the evidence of the Domesday statistics, certainly qualify as densely populated by the standards of the day; Windsor, probably, and perhaps Cricklade and Reading were also considerably more populous than contemporary villages. However, many of the higher status urban landholders would have been itinerant, and numerous properties may have been occupied only on an occasional basis, at least in the earlier part of the period. It is also very difficult to know how far these towns had developed a specialised non-agrarian economy, and problems associated with identifying trade and crafts in late Saxon towns are considered in Chapter 6 below. There are few signs in the study area in the 10th century of the intensive craft working and trading characteristic of Danelaw towns such as York and Thetford, and many southern English towns must have retained a distinctly rural aspect at this time. From the later 10th century, however, there is clear evidence of an upturn in trade and parts of Oxford and Wallingford appear to have been densely built-up in the early 11th century.

A critical element of urban character is the possession of functions of a central place, although these are the hardest to identify archaeologically. In a recent review of the development of towns, Astill suggests that, broadly speaking, there were three major strands of 'central place' functions, political, religious and economic, that were exercised from a variety of different places during the mid Saxon period (2000, 28-34; see also above). The process by which these functions became associated with towns remains unclear, and there has been extensive debate on the matter, much of which is beyond the scope of the present review (see numerous contributions in Palliser (ed.) 2000 for an overview of the issues; also, Scull 1997; Blair 2005, 246-90).

It is reasonably clear, however, that the late Saxon kings thought of towns as places where a number of royal functions could be centralised, often through delegated authority, operating in a defined region, and from behind substantial defences. In the context of the Viking invasions of the 9th century, the most critical of these were the control of strategic points, the organisation of resistance and the protection of the population, and the towns and forts of the Burghal Hidage network (see below and Chapter 7) were primarily established to meet this need. However, some of these places were also given other functions, and the fact that a number of them (including the three in the study area) show evidence for a planned layout, with a grid of streets and properties, suggests that they were intended to function as towns as well as forts. All three were mints; Oxford itself probably from Alfred's time and Wallingford from the early 10th century at least, although Cricklade is only known as a mint from the late 10th century. Reading appears as a mint in the 11th century, but Windsor never appears to have had this function (Hill 1984, 131-2, charts 224-5). Administrative and judicial authority, and tax gathering, may also, in part, have been exercised through towns, although clear evidence for this is hard to see until the later 11th century (Campbell 2000), and it is clear that much of the process of government continued to take place at traditional open-air meetings (see Chapter 7). Reynolds has argued that some execution cemeteries, such as that recently found at Staines (see Chapter 7, below) indicate the presence of judicial authority in towns (Hayman and Reynolds 2005). Legislative attempts were made during the 10th century to confine marketing to the towns, at least for major transactions, although it is clear that the towns of the study area never had anything like a monopoly of marketing; probably it was too significant a source of revenue for the church and the lay aristocracy. Domesday Book mentions markets at some places in the study area, but of the named towns, only Wallingford's *mercatum* is listed; perhaps the others were assumed. The other named markets are all at minster centres: Abingdon is said to have *x mercatores ante portam ecclesiae manentes*; Cookham owed for a *novo mercato*; Cirencester paid for a *novo foro*; and Bampton owed for a *mercato* (Darby 1977, appendix 17). These minster markets testify to another significant trend in late Saxon society; it is clear that some minster and monastic centres both had, and were acquiring, urban characteristics. Many of them emerge by the 12th and 13th centuries as the market towns that remain such a characteristic feature of the Thames Valley landscape today. Archaeological understanding of the growth of these places is still very limited, and numerous recent writers have drawn attention to the need for more study of them (for example Astill 2000; Dyer 2002).

In the following review of the archaeological evidence for the late Saxon towns of the study area, the three associated with the Burghal Hidage will be considered first, followed by Reading and Windsor, the other named towns. This will be followed by an overview of the more limited evidence for the development of urban characteristics at other places where they are suggested by archaeological or documentary evidence.

The towns of the Burghal Hidage: Cricklade, Oxford and Wallingford

Cricklade (Fig. 3.49)

A detailed account of the defences of Cricklade has recently been published by Haslam (2003). Here, the rampart was a clay bank with turf revetments to the front and rear; although there is no direct evidence, it is suggested that a palisade was constructed on the crown of the bank, with a small pathway behind it, and a wooden tower at the inner angle of each corner. An intramural walkway some 1.4 m wide was constructed to run around the entire circuit of the inner edge of the bank; this was constructed of small flat stones, and its upper surface is described as worn smooth with use. Three ditches ran around the outside of the bank. The construction of these defences is considered to date from the period 878-9. Apparently not long afterwards, during the late 9th or early 10th century, the front turf revetment was replaced by a partly mortared stone wall. The bank was heightened, the two inner ditches were cleaned out, and a stone wall may have been built partway up the back (inner) face of the rampart, possibly to revet a walkway on top. Subsequently, the defences appear not to have been actively maintained during the 10th century; the ditches silted up, the rear wall partly collapsed, and soil and stones accumulated over the intramural walkway. During the early 11th century there seems to have been a partial refurbishment of the defences involving the re-excavation of the inner ditches.

Relatively little is known about the interior of Cricklade, or its development as a town during the late Saxon period. Its origins are uncertain. While it is possible that a pre-existing minster settlement was chosen for fortification, there is no evidence to prove it. Haslam suggests it is more likely that Cricklade was part of a crash programme of emergency fortress building, on a virtually new site, and

Fig. 3.49 Late Saxon towns: Cricklade (after Haslam 2003 fig. 6c)

designed to guard the strategically important point where Ermin Street crosses the Thames. Its main axial streets may have perpetuated the line of earlier routeways from Malmesbury to the south-west, and Purton to the south, heading towards the Thames crossing. The interior appears to have been divided into four main quadrants, and the position of what were probably original streets is shown in the north-east and south-east quadrants. The south-west quadrant was occupied by the church of St Sampson, which Haslam suggests may have been a new urban minster founded for the fortress. The north-west quadrant appears to have been empty throughout the late Saxon period, and may therefore always have been left as open space. Haslam suggests that the fact that the intramural street or walkway was allowed to fall into disuse during the 10th century suggests that there was never any great pressure for housing space within the *burh*, a conclusion that is perhaps borne out by the relatively low level of occupation implied in Domesday Book.

Oxford (Fig. 3.50)

Saxon Oxford has been the subject of a very extensive recent review (Dodd (ed.) 2003), and readers are referred to this for detail additional to the summary that follows here. Unlike Cricklade and Wallingford, there is good evidence that the *burh* at Oxford was established to fortify an earlier settlement that had grown up around the minster of St Frideswide's (see Chapter 5, below). More importantly, however, Oxford was probably also a key river crossing on routes between Mercia, London and the south coast. Oxford was established on 8 hides of land taken from the royal estate at Headington, and defended by men from 1500 hides within the surrounding countryside (see Chapter 7). The form of the original *burh* at Oxford remains uncertain. Its original extent may be represented by Catte St on the east and New Inn Hall St on the west between which a grid-plan of streets can be seen. The area east of Catte St has long been thought on topographical grounds to represent an early 11th-

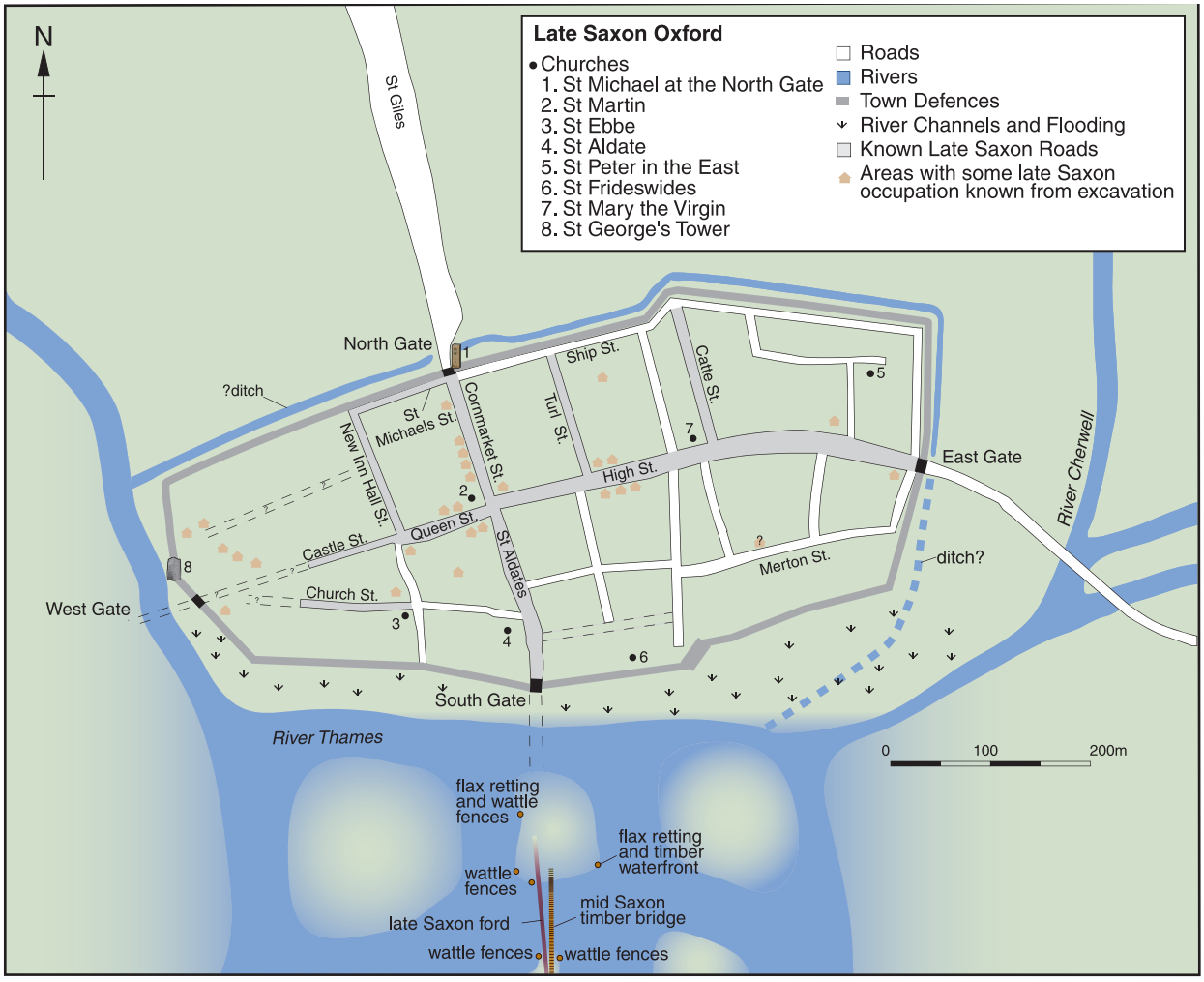


Fig. 3.50 Late Saxon towns: Oxford. The representation of the defences takes account of the recent discovery of the late Saxon rampart at Oxford Castle, on the basis of which we have assumed that the rampart did indeed (by the 11th century if not earlier) run along the south side of the town

century extension, although this remains unproven archaeologically. At the time of writing, current work at the site of Oxford Castle has identified a late Saxon rampart on the line of the later medieval town wall around the south-west side of the town as far as St George's Tower. The rampart enclosed an area containing evidence of substantial buildings and a metalled street surface. The exact sequence of events has yet to be determined, but a late Saxon date for the rampart and for the buildings and the street surface seems certain. Sections of the rampart revealed in earlier excavations on the north side of the town suggest that it was built over an old ploughsoil, of earth with a turf facing, and strengthened by horizontal lacing timbers, with a timber revetment, subsequently replaced by a stone facing. The recent excavations at Oxford Castle have recovered similar evidence for a stone facing, and substantial deposits of cleaned and processed cereal grains have been recovered from the rampart material (Norton 2006).

A number of primary streets have been confirmed by excavation throughout the town, whose similarity suggests they were surfaced simultaneously; a coin of Edward the Elder found pressed into one of the streets suggests this could be datable to the period *c* 920. The interior was laid out on principal north-south and east-west axes, the north-south axis leading to the Thames crossing in St Aldate's, and the east-west axis probably following an earlier routeway to a crossing of the Cherwell. Evidence for a primary intramural street was found in excavations of the northern defences and an external ditch was recorded in excavations at St Michael at the Northgate.

Evidence for the form of occupation of the interior of the burh in its early years remains very slight. There is some excavated evidence, and a number of 11th- and 12th-century documentary references, to suggest it was probably laid out with large, open plots of land assigned to local estates, as has been suggested at Winchester. Two sites where concentrations of clean, processed grain have been found in early levels may possibly suggest the location of granaries, although this is not certain. Evidence for intensive build-up of street frontages, suggesting a thriving economy, does not appear before the late 10th and early 11th centuries. By the early 11th century, however, there is good evidence that pressure for space, at least on the principal commercial frontages, was leading to the development of relatively narrow plots, with substantial cellared buildings usually set back towards the rear of the property, and smaller buildings, even possibly stalls, towards the street frontage. Apart from the minster of St Frideswide's, there is evidence for the existence of three other churches before the time of Domesday Book; two are known from documentary references, and the third (St Michael at the Northgate; see Fig. 5.36 below) from its surviving tower of the period 1010-1060. Recent excavations suggest that the tower of St George's in the Castle may also be of pre-Norman date (Norton 2006). Suburban occupation spread southwards along the line of the Thames crossing from as early as the 10th century, and Domesday Book records the presence of 23 'men with little gardens' outside the east gate of the town. By the mid 11th century Oxford was a major town, and appears to have been visited frequently by royalty; there may have been a royal palace in the town, but its location remains unknown. Although Oxford was a mint throughout the late Saxon period, no certain evidence of this has been found archaeologically; a mould for the casting of silver ingots was found in the bottom of a well excavated on the Clarendon Hotel site in Cornmarket, but could have been post-conquest in date. Evidence for trade and crafts in the town is considered in more detail in Chapters 4 and 6 below.

Wallingford (Fig. 3.51)

Wallingford, at least at the time of its establishment, may have been intended to be the most important of the Thames Valley *burhs*. It was established on 8 hides of land taken from the royal estate at Benson, and its assessment, at 2400 hides, was considerably larger than that of any other *burh* except Winchester (and Warwick, which was a later addition to the network). Limited excavations on the defences (Brooks 1965-66; Durham *et al*. 1972) have indicated that a primary earthen rampart was constructed of turves, over an old plough soil; Brooks' excavations also found evidence for a timber revetment. A second bank was constructed over the earlier one, and is probably to be interpreted as a later Saxon heightening of the rampart. This was fronted or capped by a stone wall. The Wallingford Burh to Borough Project (Christie *et al*. 2003; 2004) undertook a full earthwork survey and cross-sectioning of the north-western rampart, in the area known as the Bull Croft, during 2002. Here, the full surviving profile of the rampart and ditch was recorded, measuring 7 m in height from the visible base of the ditch to the surviving crest of the rampart. During 2003, a full earthwork survey and cross-sectioning of the rampart was carried out in the south-western quadrant of the defences.

The rectilinear street plan of the town seems to have been laid out at the same time as the defences (Airs *et al*. 1975, 155), although some streets have since been lost. The main north-south axis of the town is now some 30 m to the west of its original course: the original road, together with a 13th-century stone gateway and its timber predecessor, was found during excavations within the castle precinct, and appears to have been diverted as a result of a late 13th-century addition to the castle's defences (ibid., map 2). The original alignment of the north-south axis is represented by St Mary's St. At least one street formerly existed within the Bullcroft (ibid.), and recent resistivity survey here showed potential traces of north-south and east-west intramural lanes, and possible house plots

(Christie *et al*. 2003, 109). Geophysical survey in the Kinecroft revealed possible traces of a now lost continuation of Kinecroft Rd, and what may have been house plots facing onto it (Christie *et al*. 2004, 98 and fig. 27). Elsewhere within the Kinecroft there was little sign of early building, and it is suggested that both the Bullcroft and the Kinecroft might have been substantially open spaces, perhaps for animal grazing or cultivation (ibid., 101). The medieval priory of the Holy Trinity was established in the Bullcroft following the Norman conquest.

A church at Wallingford is mentioned in Domesday Book, and the church of St Leonard's has some surviving 11th-century work, despite extensive

Fig. 3.51 Late Saxon towns: Wallingford (after Airs et al. *1975, map 2)*

19th-century restoration. Recent excavations on the site of the former church of St Martin's at the central crossroads have uncovered evidence to date its construction and the first use of its graveyard to the 10th-11th century (see Chapter 5). Earlier excavations at the former church of St Rumbold's found 40-60 undisturbed burials in trenches at the junction of Mill Lane and Goldsmith's Lane, some of which may well be of late Saxon date (Halpin 1983, 148-9). Stonework revealed during the same excavations suggests that the church itself may have been located on the site of Wilder's iron foundry (ibid.).

The most substantial evidence for late Saxon buildings was recovered during excavations at 9-11 St Martin's Street in 1979, which remain unpublished in detail. Here, a timber-lined cellar was revealed of the type known from numerous other contemporary towns, with an adjacent contemporary well. In its initial phase, datable to the late 10th or early 11th century, the cellar appears to have been lined with horizontal planks set on edge, retained by posts, and a series of beaten earth floors were recorded. During the early 11th century the rear part of the cellar was backfilled, and the front was refloored, at first with planks laid on the ground, and later with what appears to have been a suspended wooden floor jointed into the wall posts (*South Midlands Archaeology* **10**, 1983, 44-6 and fig.

Fig. 3.52 Late Saxon towns: Reading (conjectured extents of late Saxon and medieval town after Astill 1978 fig. 23)

15; Durham, in archive). Late Saxon pottery, including numerous sherds of St Neot's type ware, was recovered from the well and deposits associated with the cellar (Durham, in archive). A number of textile tools were associated with the late Saxon levels, comprising heckle teeth, the blade and arm of a pair of shears, a perforated bone needle or pin and two bone pin beaters. Other finds from late Saxon levels included knife fragments, a prick spur, two buckles and part of a harness fitting, all with non-ferrous plating (ibid.). Elsewhere, archaeological work within the town has generally been small-scale and much of it remains unpublished in detail. Late Saxon or medieval pits and pottery are reported from the High Street and from Wood Street (*South Midlands Archaeology* **15**, 1985, 110; **21**, 1991, 93). A recent evaluation in Castle St found pits, postholes, a possible wall line and a buried soil. Some 89 sherds of pottery suggested a 10th- to 12th-century date range (*South Midlands Archaeology* **32**, 2002, 69: Wallingford, Lamb Garage, Castle St).

Sashes

The fourth Burghal Hidage fortress within the study area was at *Sceaftesege*, which has been identified as the island of Sashes in the loop of the Thames at Cookham (see Fig. 3.28, above; Brooks 1964, 79-81, 89; Astill 1978, 23-4 and fig. 9, for what follows). It is likely that it was constructed as a bulwark for the settlement at Cookham (see above), and it never seems to have been intended for permanent occupation. Astill suggests that on the basis of the 1000 hides assigned to it in the Burghal Hidage, the defences may have enclosed about 11 ha, or roughly half the area of the present island. However, the course of the river may have changed substantially in the intervening period. It is assumed that the defences would have consisted of a palisade on top of a bank; no earthworks are visible, and the cutting of a lock in 1830 led to the spreading of upcast across the island, probably masking any surviving features. Dredgings of the river in the 19th century recovered a number of iron weapons including spearheads and a winged axe of roughly the same date as the Viking attacks.

Other towns

Reading: a royal borough of the 11th century (Fig. 3.52)

Domesday Book mentions a royal borough next to a royal estate at Reading; there were 29 *mansurae* and 30 *hagae* (Darby 1977, appendix 16) and a pasture called 'portmanbrook'. The borough may have been created by Edward the Confessor (Astill 1978, 75-82), and the existence of coins minted at Reading between *c* 1044 and 1046 shows that a mint was operating there during his reign. Astill (ibid.) suggests that the late Saxon borough was probably focused on the Old Market and Old St (now Bridge St), where two major long-distance routes crossed (from Oxford to Winchester and from London to Bath). St Mary's Church is the only Reading church recorded in Domesday Book, and stood at this crossroads, facing onto the market. Recent large-scale investigations of the Kennet floodplain (Ford *et al*. forthcoming) suggest that occupation started to spread southwards during the 11th century. There is some evidence to suggest that at least two of the mills known from the later medieval period were in operation here by the end of the late Saxon period, or only slightly later (see Chapter 6, below). A row of three large and regularly-spaced latrine pits were found that were possibly associated with a nunnery mentioned at Reading in Domesday Book. These contained goat and horse bones with cut marks suggesting that the refuse derived from skin or hide working; a number of goat horncores were also found. To the south, the edge of the gravel terrace was quarried for gravel and chalk during the late 11th century. Two timber buildings were subsequently constructed, one succeeding the other, at some point between the mid 11th and early 12th century; these appeared to be of mixed beam slot and posthole construction, contained chalk floors and hearths, and associated finds suggest domestic occupation. A possible late Saxon ditch was the only evidence of this period found in recent excavations on the north side of St Mary's churchyard, at Broad St (Norton and Poore forthcoming). Despite this increasing evidence for the late Saxon borough, however, the medieval town seems to have been substantially developed only from the later 12th century, on the initiative of Reading Abbey (founded in the 1120s).

Windsor: a royal 'villa'

The evidence of Domesday Book suggests that a sizeable settlement had grown up around the royal palace at Old Windsor (see Fig. 3.28 above), providing services to the palace, and perhaps acting as a marketing centre for the large 20-hide royal estate centred there (Astill 1978, 69). Whether any of the *villa*, as opposed to the royal palace, was uncovered in the excavation campaigns of the 1950s remains unclear, and its location has yet to be established (ibid., 70).

Minster towns: Bampton

Bampton (see Fig. 5.30, below) was the centre of an extensive royal manor and a separate minster *parochia* in the late Saxon period, and almost certainly earlier. John Blair's researches are finding increasing evidence for the existence of a substantial minster on the site of the present church (Blair 1994, 1998), and the royal manor house is thought to have been located on the opposite bank of the Shill brook, which in the 10th century separated their respective core lands (Townley 1996, 11-12). A market at Bampton is recorded in Domesday Book (see above), and John Blair has suggested that the outline of an early market place may be preserved in the alignment of Church View, subsequently narrowed by encroachment on its east side (Town-

ley 1996, 12). Triangular market places were characteristic of monastic towns. In 1050 the minster was given to the new cathedral chapter of Exeter, who kept it thereafter (John Blair pers. comm.), and a large new triangular market place was laid out to the south-east during the 13th century. Excavations in the town have recovered some evidence for the growth of settlement outside the minster precinct in the late Saxon period. A sunken-floored building has been excavated on the projected east side of the early market place (Blair 1998a, 49, figs 1 and 7); the building was of two phases, and the later phase used rubble footings for sill beams, laid out on the same alignments as the first phase. A small amount of pottery suggests an 11th-century date. Subsequent excavations on land to the west of Church View found evidence for the laying out of ditched enclosures between the 10th/11th and 13th centuries (Mayes *et al*. 2000, 272, 288, figs 3 and 5); a large, flat-bottomed pit in the same area may have been a further example of a sunken building, although the interpretation is not certain. The laying-out of the new market place seems to have drawn the focus of the settlement away from this area from the 13th century, from which point it seems to have been used for quarrying gravel.

'Minster towns': Abingdon (Fig. 3.53)

The traditions relating to Abingdon in the mid Saxon period are very confused, but it seems likely that it was the site of both a minster (possibly a double minster) and a royal centre (see above for the royal centre, and Chapter 5, below, for the minster). Traditions preserved at the medieval abbey suggest that a mid Saxon minster may have stood on the site of the present St Helen's Church, and the radial arrangement of East and West St Helen Streets offers some support for this (Munby *et al*. 1975, 33). There is almost no archaeological evidence for this period, however. In 955 a site some 500 m north-east of St Helen's was granted by King Eadred to St Æthelwold for the foundation of Abingdon Abbey, a reformed house of Benedictine monks. This seems to have had the effect of shifting the focus of settlement north-eastwards. The market place, outside the abbey gate, had been created by the 11th century (ibid.), and Domesday Book mentions ten merchants dwelling there. Despite apparently being a place of some significance in the mid and late Saxon period, Abingdon's archaeological evidence remains very limited. Documentary evidence suggests that there was little more than a thin scatter of buildings between St Helen's Church

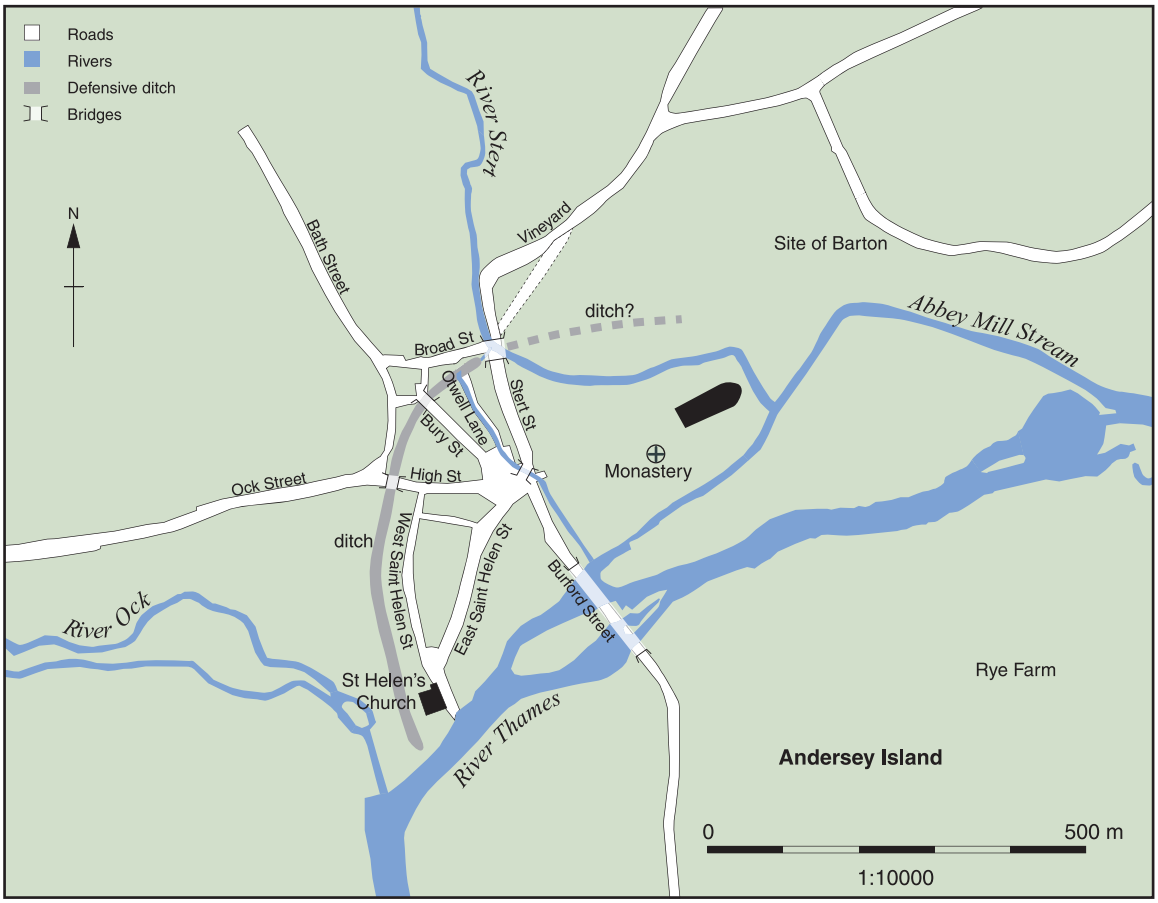


Fig. 3.53 Late Saxon towns: Abingdon

and the abbey, until the area started to be built up from the late 12th century (Miles 1975, 88). Late Saxon finds from the town include a coin of Eadred, part of a wheel-headed cross re-used in a wall, and the Abingdon sword, dredged from the river Ock in 1874 (ibid; Hinton 1974, 1-7 and plates I-III for the sword). One of the most interesting results from recent work in the town has been the identification of a late Saxon ditch that seems to follow the same alignment as the west side of the Iron Age and Roman defences a little way to the west of West St Helen Street, suggesting that this boundary was maintained as the west edge of the settlement at this time (OA 2005b; OA forthcoming c). Possible Saxon pits were seen closer to the modern street, although no evidence of Saxon date was found in earlier excavations in West St Helen Street (Miles 1975). Two recent excavations between the Vineyard and Radley Road have found evidence of late Saxon pits and pottery and extensive 11th-century quarrying probably associated with building works at the abbey. Ditches were seen that might have been field boundaries predating the monastic enclosure of the area (OA 2005c; OA forthcoming d). Elsewhere, late Saxon occupation is attested only by small numbers of finds of pottery and metalwork (Ainslie 1995, 73; Allen 1989; 1990; 1991). A coin of Cnut dated to the period *c* 1031-1035 was a residual find in medieval pits excavated at Broad St (Parrington and Balkwill 1975, 46), where a spiral-headed bronze pin similar to mid Saxon types was also found (ibid., 47, fig. 37 no. 11). It is suggested that a number of these pits were the result of gravel quarrying, and at least one may have been late 11th- to 12th-century in date, although others are later (ibid., 17). Excavations at Morlands Brewery in Ock St found only a single feature of possible Saxon date; the building up of the area seemed to be a feature of the 11th to 13th centuries (Taylor 2002).

Other sites

The other place with a market mentioned in Domesday Book is Cookham, where we are told the market was new. The fortification of the island of Sashes and Cookham's significance as a minster and a royal centre have been discussed above. Astill (1978, 23 and fig. 9) suggests that the new market may have been intended to exploit the resources of the royal estate of some 20 hides, and to act as a secondary marketing centre for the region (ibid.). However, there is no archaeological evidence to confirm either the location or the form of late Saxon settlement; the historic core of the town has been little affected by development (ibid., 25).

Dorchester was briefly the seat of a bishopric in the mid 7th century, and again, for a longer period, from the late 9th century, and it is likely that this stimulated growth in the town. Excavation in Dorchester has been rather sporadic, however, and the fact that the location of the Saxon cathedral(s) and associated minster settlement has not been confirmed by excavation makes it very difficult to differentiate between urban development and buildings that may have been associated with an episcopal or minster household. The excavated evidence is reviewed in more detail in Chapter 5, below.

There is an interesting, and growing, body of evidence for the status of Staines at this time. During the mid Saxon period a settlement, thought to be based around a minster, had developed on Binbury island (see Chapter 5 and Fig. 5.32, below). The presence of late Saxon and post-conquest pottery and two 9th-century strap ends here suggests that this settlement, whatever its nature, persisted throughout the late Saxon period. By the time of Domesday Book, and possibly from the mid 10th century, it was the centre of a large estate belonging to the Abbey of Westminster. Domesday Book records 94 villeins, cottars, bordars and serfs, as well as 46 burgesses, for the manor, and it is suggested that such a large number (although by no means all living at Staines itself) implies a relatively large central settlement (Jones and Poulton forthcoming). The 46 burgesses are particularly interesting. It has generally been thought that this reference is to occupants of London property belonging to Staines, probably identical with the medieval parish of St Mary Staining (Jones 1982, 192; Jones and Poulton forthcoming). However, the recent discovery of a late Saxon execution cemetery at Staines (see Fig. 7.23; Hayman and Reynolds 2005) has revived debate since it implies the existence of an important centre with judicial functions at this time. Reynolds (ibid., 251-2) has noted that execution sites are often associated with *burhs*. The site on Binbury island did not, ultimately, develop into a town. By the late 12th century occupation had shifted back to the island to the south, where the Roman town had been, and subsequent development is probably to be associated with the construction of a bridge across the Thames (Jones and Poulton forthcoming).

There is currently no evidence to confirm that other places within the study area were developing urban characteristics. The minsters at Chertsey and Eynsham were refounded as reformed Benedictine monasteries in the mid 10th and early 11th centuries respectively, but the towns themselves appear, like Reading, largely to have been the result of planned development in the 12th and early 13th century (Munby *et al*. 1975, 109; Rob Poulton pers. comm.). Kingston, although undoubtedly a very important royal centre in the 10th century, has also yet to reveal any substantial evidence for settlement of this period.