Chapter 4
The people of the Thames Valley

INTRODUCTION (THE MAIN THEMES)

What were the first millennium inhabitants of the Thames Valley like? In this chapter archaeological evidence is used to say something about their numbers, physical characteristics and state of health, aspects of day to day life and appearance, the origins of newcomers, and how we may identify different social, economic and other groupings of people from the types of sites in which they lived and the objects that occurred within them. Some of these questions can be addressed directly through study of the physical skeletal remains of the people themselves, and others through interpretation of the associated archaeological material. How people in ancient societies saw themselves, individually and collectively, is much more difficult to assess, but the question is of crucial importance, particularly (but not solely) in addressing key issues of identity and ethnicity in the middle of the first millennium. There is no scholarly consensus on the extent of survival of the British population in the 5th and 6th centuries or, correspondingly, on the scale of Anglo-Saxon immigration.

There can be little doubt that for the first half of our period there was substantial continuity of the population base across the region, and that this population was essentially that of the pre-Roman Iron Age. Ideas about these issues change with time however, and this view would not always have been accepted. Less certain is the nature of changes in the population, both in terms of numbers and of origin, in the period after the conventional 'end' of Roman Britain in the early 5th century. Attempts to reconcile the archaeological and historical sources for this period, for example, underline the difficulties of using archaeological evidence to describe and define individuals and larger communities (see further below).

Individuals have many identities, which can be determined by such factors as ethnicity, clan and family grouping, gender, economic status and religious belief. In addition, the nature of identity changes with age as the individual (generally) increases and then decreases again in importance in relation to the family group. Identities are not just innate, they are constructed, subconsciously and sometimes consciously, both by the members of past societies and by the archaeologists who try to reconstruct those societies from their physical remains. Recent work has tended to emphasise the importance of artefacts in construction of individual identities in past societies, rather than as identifiers of specific 'cultures', labels which in the past have often had ethnic or racial connotations. The challenge is to tease out the meanings represented by changes in the archaeological record, attempting as far as possible not to impose 20th-century value judgements and preconceptions on the evidence (eg Jones 1997; Hill 2001), while accepting that this very process itself reflects a 21st-century perspective.

This period sees (at least) three major changes in material culture that have been interpreted in various ways at different times. Few people would now accept that the appearance of 'Belgic type' pottery in the 1st centuries BC and AD (see Chapter 3) represents the presence of large numbers of invaders (or even migrants) from northern Gaul as was once thought. At the same time few would deny that there was at least periodic movement of individuals and larger groups across the Channel (in both directions) in the late pre-Roman Iron Age, although none of these movements can be identified in the Thames Valley. Equally, while there was a significant intrusive element in the population of Roman Britain (most obviously the army in the 1st century), and the relative stability of the empire increased the potential for greater mobility of people generally, it is clear that the indigenous British formed the great majority of the (particularly rural) population. Moreover they were represented archaeologically by a wide range of 'Roman' material. At the end of the Roman period, however, the situation is less clear and there is a much wider range of views on how to explain the ultimately very marked changes in the archaeological record. In the Thames Valley all the familiar components of Romano-British civilisation disappeared. Romano-British material culture, even on an optimistic view, had largely vanished by the mid 5th century, settlement forms and some burial practices changed and, at some point, the Brittonic language was replaced by English. These are drastic changes, but how different was the general situation at this time from the other (earlier) identified times of convergence of political, social and economic stresses? When the commencement of the 'Roman' period, with all its evidence for changes in the archaeological record, was demonstrably marked by widespread continuity of population, need the situation at the end of that period have been greatly different?

LATE IRON AGE (Fig. 4.1)

The late Iron Age has been seen as a period of population growth, reflected in an increase in settlement density in the region, certainly in the Upper Thames, and a corresponding move towards increased definition of settlement components by

enclosure. These trends, along with the introduction of new styles of pottery and (in some places) burial, can be seen in the context of social and political developments that affected most of southern England and some points beyond. It may be that some of these changes took place as part of a process of forging political units on a larger scale (ie broadly at the level of the later Romano-British *civitates*) than had been seen before.

It is uncertain how far the development of any of these units led to the growth of a sense of group identity at more than very local level, except amongst the immediate following of the senior members of tribal societies. It is equally uncertain if any of the discernible regional variations in material culture, for example in pottery styles, reflected these concerns or were conditioned by quite different factors, although Cunliffe has suggested that 'broader regional [ceramic] groupings which it is possible to discern by the third century [BC] may indicate tribal confederacies: at the very least they represent a generalized picture of regional contact and contrast' (1991, 93). What type of group identity should we assume for people who used pottery of the same style with similar decorative characteristics, for example, or is the assumed correlation

(which would have been taken for granted by an earlier generation of archaeologists and is implicit, albeit perhaps with reservations, in the words of Cunliffe) simply invalid? Putting the question in reverse, is the likelihood that three different late Iron Age tribal groupings were represented in our area (based principally on numismatic and historical sources) reflected by any other significant variation in the archaeological record? If the answer is largely in the negative, does this mean that material culture was relatively homogeneous in the 'frontier zone' of the Middle Thames, or was the time-span of change in the late Iron Age too short for regional differentiation to become marked? Much of the Upper Thames is likely to have lain in what is retrospectively identified as Dobunnic territory (see Chapter 7, below). Is it possible that the relatively dense pattern of rural settlement here, compared to the apparently lower density of settlement in parts of the Middle Thames, could reflect a difference between 'heartland' and more liminal territories? The high density of settlement in the 'melting pot' area around Abingdon and Dorchester would probably argue against this. In terms of the development of material culture the widespread adoption of the 'Belgic' ceramic style (Fig. 4.1)
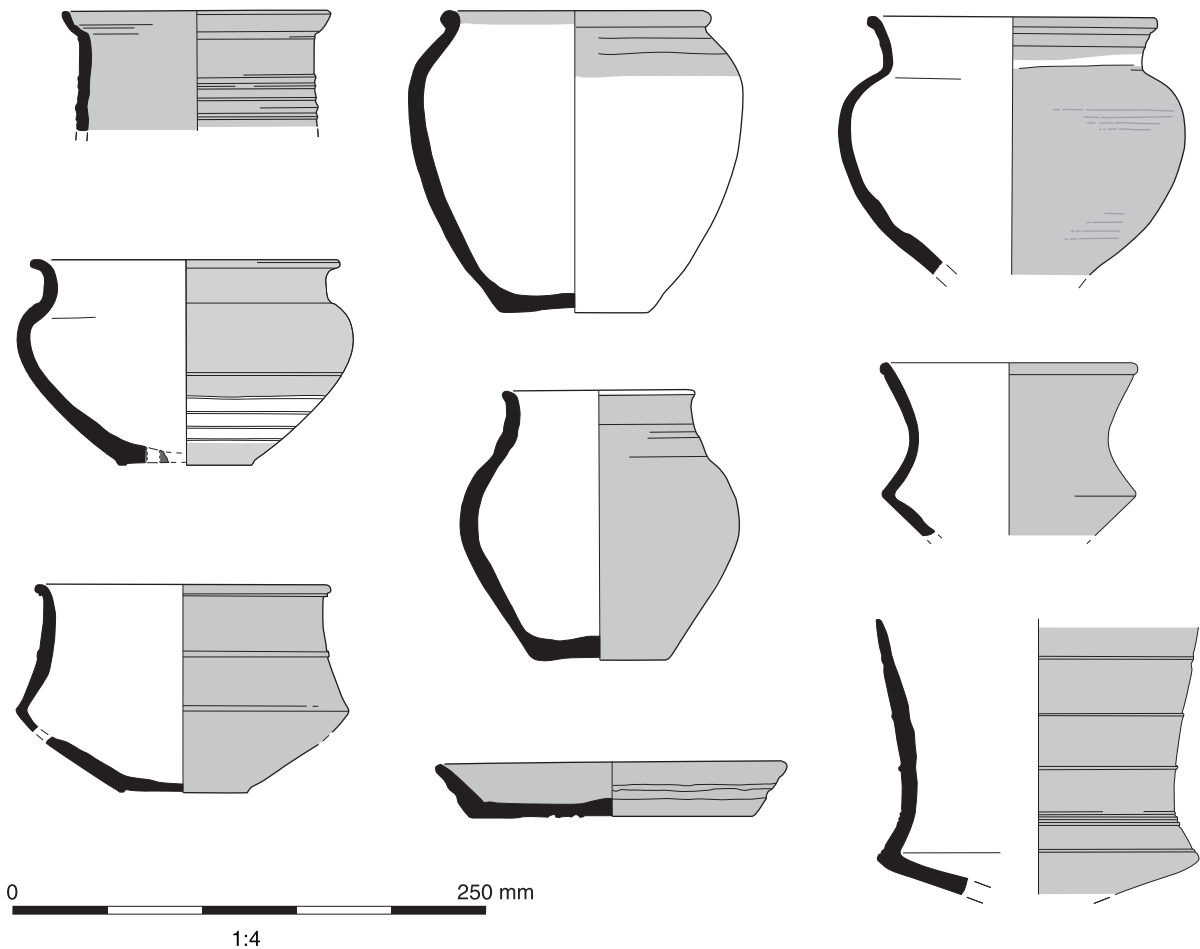

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Fig. 4.1 Late Iron Age-early Roman 'Belgic' pottery from Yarnton

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across the Thames Valley – accepting that there was some regional variation within it – could suggest rather that this period may have seen some moves towards a relatively homogeneous material culture that foreshadows developments in the Roman period. Nevertheless, it is unlikely that the late Iron Age 'tribal territories' of the Dobunni, Catuvellauni and Atrebates were closely defined and cohesive, with populations that aligned themselves distinctly with these units.

The simple question of the size of the late Iron Age population is difficult to answer. Evidence for the density of settlement is most clearly derived from the gravels but the extent to which this picture of relatively intensive activity was representative of the wider region outside the valley is less clear. Nucleated foci of settlement, with high population densities, if they existed at all in the valley, were to be found only at the 'enclosed oppidum' sites of Cassington, Abingdon and Dyke Hills, Dorchester, and since it is possible that the first of these might never have been completed the number of such foci was clearly very small. The population consisted essentially, as it had for an extended period, of rural communities based on individual farmsteads, though at some sites, such as Yarnton, Gravelly Guy, Claydon Pike and Thornhill Farm in the Upper Thames, groups of such units may have coalesced to form slightly larger communities. These groupings do not seem to occur outside the valley, which may have a bearing on the question of variations in population density just mentioned. Hingley's arguments about variation in settlement (and by implication population) density between the valley and other areas in the Upper Thames region in the middle Iron Age may still have held good in this period, despite recent increases in our knowledge of settlement in the areas beyond the valley itself (eg Featherstone and Bewley 2000).

THE ROMAN PERIOD

General accounts of Roman Britain are unanimous in identifying this as a period of population increase, although there is inevitably a wide range of opinion on the actual size of that population. Estimates have been based on an equally wide range of techniques (Millett 1990, 182) and it is arguable that there are still too few meaningful data for these estimates to be more than educated guesses at best (Millett 2001, 64; Burnham *et al* 2001, 71; cf discussion in Hines 1997, 87-8) or, at worst, 'produced with smoke and mirrors' (Esmonde Cleary 2004, 414). This has not, however, prevented discussion of such topics as 'urban' populations in Oxfordshire (Henig and Booth 2000, 76-7) and estimation of the total population in Surrey in the Roman period – in a range from 20,000-30,000 (Bird 2004a, 79). The latter range is comparable to that for estimates of the population of Roman London (Barber and Hall 2000, 112). Much of the debate has centred on measurement of urban population,

dependent principally upon understanding of the density and character of structures, which even now is problematic and cannot be attempted for any of the sites in our region except possibly early Roman London (based on selected samples) and late Roman Cirencester. The main point is that relative figures will be more meaningful than absolute ones, and most scholars would agree that the urban population of Roman Britain never exceeded 10% of the total at the very most, and may have been significantly less than that. On this basis any realistic estimate of population should be based on rural rather than urban data, but these are simply not available. Millett (1990, 183-5) attempted a calculation of this but the resulting range (1.8 ± 1.2 to 4.6 ± 2.9 million) was inevitably very wide; a subsequent figure of around 4 million (Millett 1995, 21) represents a fairly typical view. The main difficulty in any one area is to establish the number of sites in contemporary occupation. Because, as we have already seen, there was at least one major dislocation of settlement in the Upper Thames, we cannot take the likely total number of sites occupied there in the Roman period and use this as a basis for the estimation of population at any one time. Equally, in many areas, even on the gravels where the visibility of sites from the air means that we have a better than average idea of the overall number and density of settlements, our picture of the settlement pattern is incomplete.

For the Upper Thames, however, the gravels give a strong impression of being thoroughly exploited, with an integrated network of settlements and associated fields and open grazing land (see Chapters 2 and 3 above). In relative terms, therefore, this can be seen as a densely populated rural landscape. Parts of the Middle Thames may, for reasons discussed elsewhere, have been less densely settled.

Who were the people? The high level of evidence for continuity of occupation and settlement forms through the conquest period of the middle part of the 1st century AD strongly suggests that there was no significant disruption of the pre-conquest British population at this time. The subsequent appearance of greater diversity in settlement types and a more readily quantifiable variety of types and occurrences of artefacts could be interpreted in terms of the differences between 'Roman' and 'native', but no such distinctions are directly demonstrable in the archaeological record of the region. This general transformation of the range of material culture available to the indigenous people, from new brooches and pottery styles to villas and townhouses, was one of the most obvious consequences of the Roman invasion, in southern Britain at least. However, the concept and understanding of this process of 'Romanisation' have been subject to extensive critique, deconstruction and redefinition in recent years. Some scholars have even denied that the term now has any usefulness at all (Mattingly 2002; 2004, 9; amongst numerous other

references, Millet 1990; Freeman 1993; Hanson 1994; Webster and Cooper 1996; Barrett 1997; Mattingly 1997; Grahame 1998; Hingley 2000; Hill 2001; Keay and Terrenato 2001; Greene 2002). It is clear that many material transformations did take place. It is equally clear that they did not result from a coherent centralised policy of imposition of 'Roman' cultural values willy-nilly upon the native British, nor from a straightforward desire by the latter to emulate (in the interests of sustaining their social and/or political positions) their new masters, whose cultural 'superiority' was manifest and undisputed. Aspects of both these simplistic views may apply, however, but only as elements within a complex picture of interactions between the wide variety of identities subsumed under the labels 'Roman' and 'British', with their various interests, now conflicting, now convergent, now simply not linked at all. The political and some of the social aspects of these interactions are dealt with in Chapter 7, but it is most likely that the identifiable changes reflected different reactions of the native peoples, dependent upon inclination and opportunity amongst other factors, to an increased range of possibilities in expressing and defining their own identities.

People

Changes in population, in terms of the arrival of new people, whether from within Britain or beyond, would have been most evident in the towns when they occurred at all.

Military personnel – reading and writing
(Figs 4.2-4.6)

Military personnel are the most obvious category of new arrivals in the early Roman period, but as we have seen there is very little evidence to indicate their presence in numbers, except at the probable fort site at Dorchester and at the margins of the area in Cirencester and London. In the latter case a significant military presence is likely to have been maintained for much of the Roman period, both in the Cripplegate fort (occupied at least from the Hadrianic period up to *c* AD 250 (Bateman 1997, 68)) and elsewhere, for example in Southwark (eg Yule and Rankov 1998). With the passage of time an increasingly large proportion of these soldiers would have been British born, though whether this was yet the case for example with the men possibly on detachment in London from Cohors I Tungrorum, originally from Gallia Belgica and based at Vindolanda in the early 2nd century, is not clear (Hassall 2000, 54; Bowman and Thomas 1994, no 154). As the probable seat of most 'permanent' provincial administration, whatever else its status, London was exceptional in the civilian zone in maintaining both a high number and probably a high turnover of military personnel. As such it falls largely outside our frame of reference.

At Cirencester, well-known military tombstones attest the presence of two cavalrymen, Dannicus, from Augst in Germany, a trooper of the *ala Indiana* and Sextus Valerius Genialis, recorded as a Frisian (or Frisiavonian) but clearly a Roman citizen from his name, and also a trooper in an *ala* (cavalry unit) of Thracians. Genialis may have been a member of the first garrison of Cirencester (probably in the 50s) as his unit probably came to Britain in AD 43 from Germany with the 20th legion. Dannicus' tombstone perhaps suggests that his unit was present in the early 70s (RIB 108 and 109, see Hassall 1982). The only other named member of military personnel in the region is the *beneficiarius consularis*, Marcus Varius Severus, who dedicated an altar at Dorchester, probably in the early years of the 3rd century. His name gives no indication of his origin, but by this date he is quite likely to have been British born.

The impact of military personnel on much of the population is likely to have been quite restricted, however, although units stationed in a particular area over an extended period will have established some local roots, including unofficial families in some cases. The extent of these relationships would have been variable – for example one of Dannicus' two heirs (both male) named on his Cirencester tombstone had a Germanic name (?Flavius Bitucus) and was clearly not a 'local', but he was not necessarily resident in Cirencester. Once the main sphere of military operations had moved beyond the region the numbers of soldiers remaining in administrative or policing functions were presumably small, but they are suggested by metalwork finds from several sites as well as by the Dorchester inscription. Some military personnel may have retired within the region. The establishment of regional roots is demonstrated most clearly by the tombstone of Lucius Valerius Geminus, from Northern Italy, who after retirement from the 2nd legion Augusta returned to the site of its probable former base at Alchester (Sauer 2005a). In other cases, local people may have joined the army and then returned (unlike Geminus) to their native place
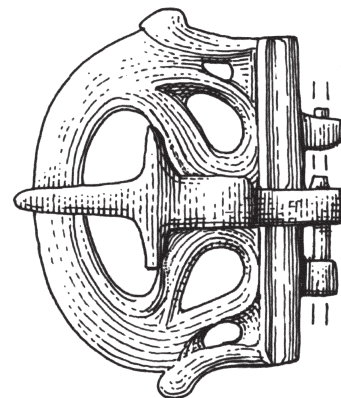

Fig. 4.2 Military identities: early Roman military buckle from Ashton Keynes, Wilts (scale 1:1)
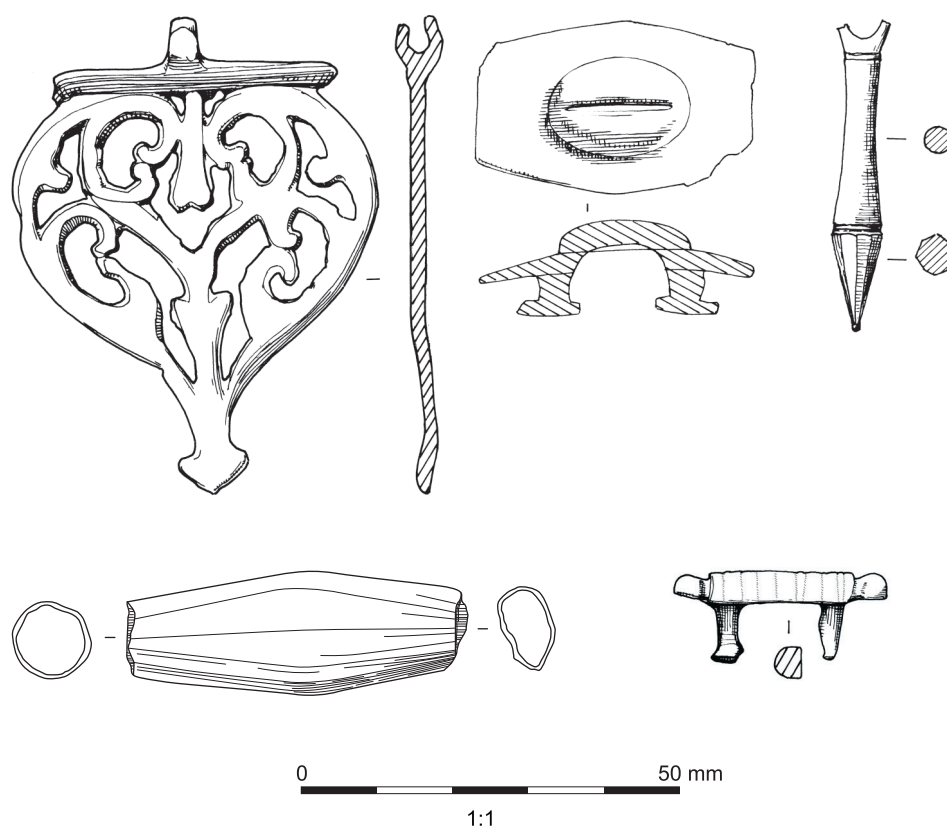
Fig. 4.3   Military identities: middle Roman military pieces from Claydon Pike, Fairford
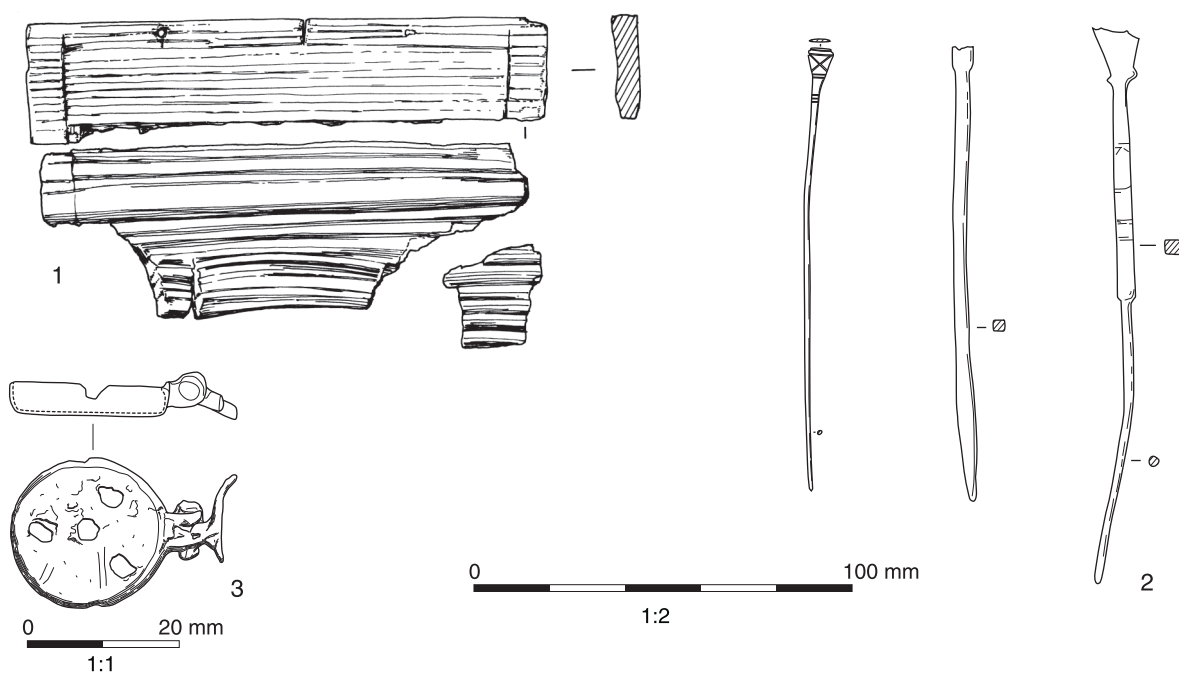

Fig. 4.4   Reading and writing: (1) wooden writing tablet (near Claydon Pike); (2) three styli from Claydon Pike, Fairford; (3) seal box from Appleford, Oxon.

on retirement. The importance of army service in furthering the ambitions of relatively senior members of British society in the early Roman period has been discussed by Black (1994). This sort of scenario may be seen at sites such as Ashton Keynes, where 1st-century military belt buckles were found (Fig. 4.2; Griffiths 2001, 58-9), and possibly at Claydon Pike (and is strongly suggested by the 'chieftain' burial at Folly Lane, Verulamium (Niblett 1999)). It is notable, however, that most of the objects with military associations from sites such as Claydon Pike (Fig. 4.3) and Somerford Keynes date to the middle part of the Roman period and (in some cases) later. These may reflect a continuation of early Roman traditions of military service.

A recent study of the Batavians has shown how an unusually high incidence of military service resulted in correspondingly high levels of evidence for literacy in rural settlements in their home region (the Lower Rhine) in the early Roman period (Derks and Roymans 2002), and it is possible that finds

such as the seal box from Appleford should be seen in this sort of light. Unfortunately there is no close dating for the very large numbers of styli from Hambleden. The only other evidence for early Roman literacy in a rural context comes from Claydon Pike, indicated by remains of a wooden writing tablet among the finds in a well, probably of 2nd-century date, located some 800 m from the main focus of early Roman settlement (Fig. 4.4). This kind of evidence is at least indicative of familiarity with Romanised styles of communication – and therefore with the Latin language itself. Its appearance at a relatively early period need not, however, indicate that the individuals involved were not native British, but the nature of the documents in question, whether private letters or of more formal character, is unknown.

Formal inscribed Latin is, however, effectively confined to urban contexts and essentially to the cities of London and Cirencester. Apart from the early military tombstones from the latter, already
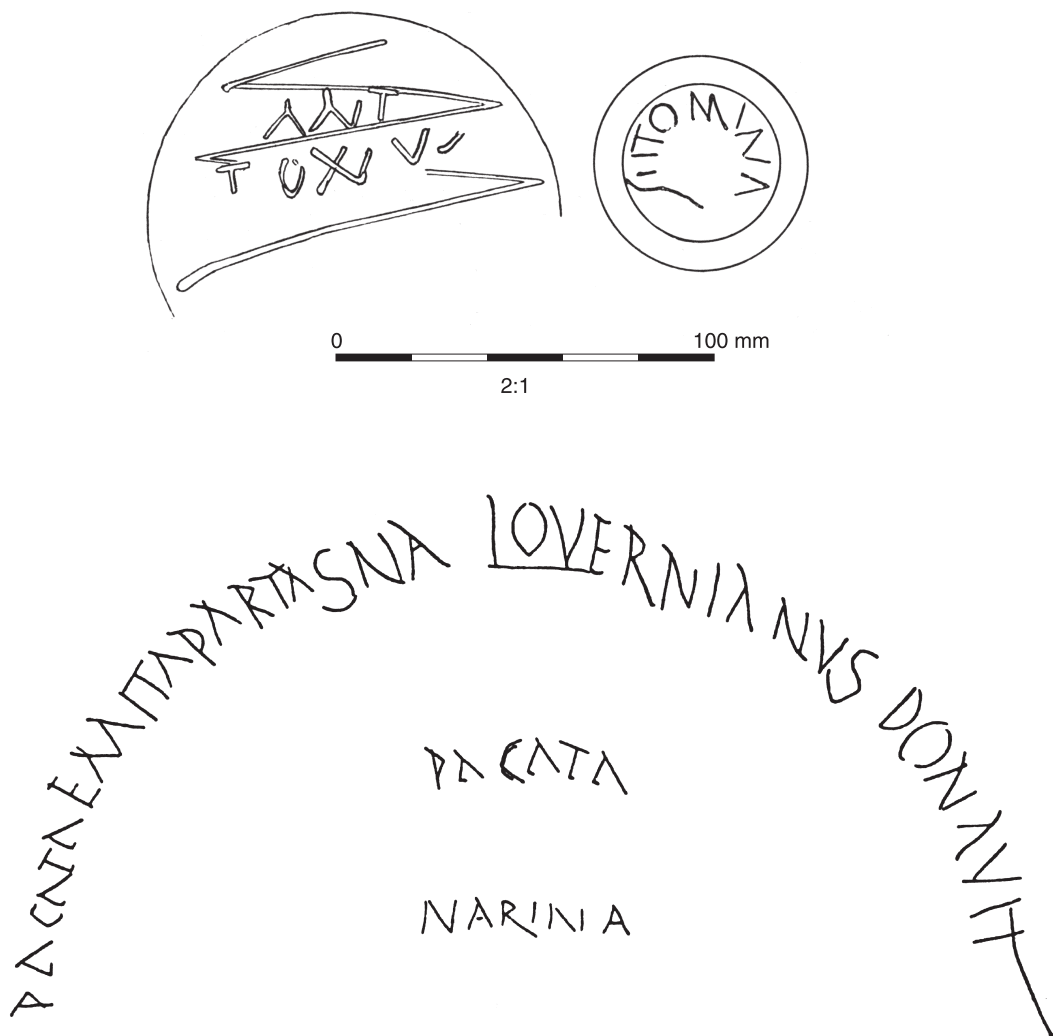

Fig. 4.5 Graffiti (Antonius and Setomina) on pottery bases from Hambleden (above) and on pewter vessels from Appleford (below).

mentioned, names are recorded on four further tombstones (RIB 110-113) and at least three altars (RIB 104, 105 and 106). The individuals named include one Philus son of Cassavus, a Sequanian (from the upper Saone valley, near Besancon) and Sulinus son of Brucetus, probably the same man who at Bath dedicated a statue base on which he is described as a sculptor. Three of the tombstones are of women, Publia Vicana, Casta Castrensis (whose name suggests a military family background) and Julia Casta. Publia Vicana and Julia Casta were commemorated by their husbands. The latter died at the age of 33 while Philus, the only other individual whose age is recorded, died at 45. At a time when precise records were rare, rounding of ages to the nearest five was quite common and 45 may have been an approximate figure (the 1st-century cavalryman Genialis was 40, for example).

Evidence of this kind is effectively unknown in the lesser nucleated settlements, though a fragmentary tombstone has been noted from Cricklade (RIB 100). In the Roman period, however, as today, graffiti very commonly take the form of names. An important group of these occurs on pewter vessels from the well deposit at Appleford (Oxon). Four plates in this group have names of women – Melluna and Narina (the readings of both these are slightly uncertain) and Pacata twice. On one plate the name Pacata is followed by a longer inscription recording that Lovernianus had given 'his own purchased acquisitions' – indicating the votive character of the deposit (Brown 1973a; Henig and Booth 2000, 117-8; RIB II, 2417.25-28). Graffiti, which appear most frequently on pottery vessels, can be shown to occur much more commonly at nucleated settlements and villas than in other rural settlement contexts (Evans 1987; 2001, 33-34). Examples from the villa at Hambleden (Cocks 1921, 184-5) are consistent with this pattern and include the names Setomina and (probably) Antonius (Fig. 4.5). The latter was scratched on the base of a vessel before firing and may therefore have been the potter's name. Such instances are quite unusual, though there is a parallel in the Oxford industry – the inscription *Tamesubugus fecit* – 'Tamesubugus made this' was incised twice on a mortarium of late 3rd-century date. This is considerably later than the normal practice of stamping mortaria with potters' names, which had generally died out by the later 2nd century. In any case, stamped mortaria are quite rare in the Oxford industry, and only a small proportion of the known stamps are literate. This situation prevailed again in the Oxford pottery industry when, in the late 3rd century, samian wares were imitated to the extent of providing a maker's stamp on some bowls; most of these are also illiterate. Tamesubugus, whose name presumably reflects the Roman name for the Thames – Tamesis – is clearly something of an exception.

Apart from the (principally early Roman) military influence, which is difficult to quantify, other 'external' elements in the population would have been concentrated in the towns, but outside London, probably distinctly cosmopolitan and in any case marginal to our area, their impact is difficult to assess. Such people are very rarely directly identifiable in the archaeological record. Individual objects or groups of finds do not usually allow confident attribution of their users to particular geographical areas and the best chance of making such attributions is usually through inscribed items – none of the few such items from the valley provides this kind of information, however. One piece of some interest, from Staines, is a collyrium stamp (Fig. 4.6) that would have been used for marking eye ointments in solid form, one containing nard (an aromatic resin) and the other a generic 'softening or soothing remedy', purveyed by an individual whose name (given as SENI) may have been Senior (Jackson 1996). Such an object would have been part of the equipment of a doctor, whose presence in Staines, at least periodically, can be inferred from this find. The distribution of similar stamps (some 30 are known from Roman Britain) is heavily biased towards sites, mostly major settlements, on the main road network of the

Fig. 4.6   Medical men: collyrium stamp from Staines and graffito naming a ?mule doctor from Amerden

province. This may reflect the means by which such individuals, who could have been peripatetic, moved around, but it may also indicate that access to relatively formalised services such as medicine was restricted mainly to occupants of certain types of site.

The provision of government accommodation and transport services, the *cursus publicus*, on the main road network may be the context for a remarkable graffito in Greek recovered from the Thames at Amerden near Maidenhead, although the location itself is at some distance from any such road (Wright 1977). The graffito, on a fragment of pottery, refers in a compound of Latin and Greek forms to a veterinary physician (the equivalent, well-known Latin term is *mulomedicus*, literally 'mule doctor'). Whether or not he was employed by the *cursus publicus*, the individual referred to reminds us of the diversity of people living (and dying, if the interpretation of the pot as a cremation urn is correct) in the Thames Valley, and of the specialist professions that they could represent.

Dressing (Figs 4.7-4.8)

New approaches to health care were but one aspect of the treatment of the body. The period from the late Iron Age onwards is currently seen as one of relatively rapid change in matters of dress and related topics. The most marked (and perhaps first) stage of this process was a sudden increase in the use of brooches (Fig. 4.7) for clothes fastening (the so-called 'fibula event horizon' (eg Hill 1997, 96)), starting at the end of the 1st century BC (Haselgrove 1997, 51, 53). It has been argued that these were amongst a range of object types used to redefine individual identities at this time (Jundi and Hill 1998, 130). Other object types with very limited pedigrees in Iron Age Britain, such as tweezers, nail-cleaners, 'ear scoops' and probable cosmetic grinders, also appeared at the end of the period (Hill 1997). Evidence for these types of objects (as opposed to brooches) before the conquest is both scanty and confined largely to south-east England, while thereafter they became both more common and more widely distributed. It has been argued that from having marked out a user as distinctive and 'different' these objects became part of a fairly standardised 'identity kit'. Either way, these objects suggest a marked development in perceptions of the importance of personal appearance. A number of other artefact types that might have been seen as conferring special status upon their owners/users/wearers in the pre-conquest period may have lost this special character in the later 1st century as they became widely available. From this point onwards, individuals who wished to distinguish themselves from the generality of the population presumably sought other means of doing so. Objects (and other characteristics) that were 'status symbols' in one period might be regarded quite differently in another. Conspicuous consumption (or expendi-

ture) would always be one means of demonstration of status, whether it involved wearing unusual jewellery, drinking imported wine, building houses of non-traditional form, financing construction of urban buildings and rural temples or supporting an array of clients. Not all of these actions are archaeologically detectable, however.

The material remains of the period, for the most part easily recognisable and widely distributed, allow us to quantify the extent and perhaps the nature of some of the transformations mentioned above. Not all of these changes were directly consequent upon the conquest; in some cases they represent pre-conquest trends (such as those in dress and personal appearance mentioned above) in accelerated or expanded form (Jundi and Hill 1998, 134-5). The greater numbers of some of these object types allow us to begin to identify regional variation in some of them – in brooch types, for example, such as the distinctive flat bow brooch with tooled decoration which Mackreth (1993, 31) suggests 'may have been the Atrebatic brooch type', and even in objects such as nail cleaners (Crummy and Eckardt 2003). It remains an open question whether localised distributions of these types of objects are determined by cultural preference related to local identity (of whatever kind) or whether they simply reflect the marketing range of particular workshops. Sometimes, however, objects appear in locations that seem to be well outside their normal distribution and may suggest the movement of individuals from the areas with which the particular style of object is associated. An example of this may occur at Somerford Keynes, in Dobunnic territory, where the collection of metalwork from a probable shrine includes brooch types that may potentially be assigned to the Atrebates and Durotriges and a dress fastener more typical of the north, as well as a couple of possible northern brooch types (Cool 2007). It cannot be certain that these 1st-century finds reflect the presence of non-locals, but this is at least possible. The reverse side of the coin may be seen in the occurrence of a Severn Valley ware tankard in a grave at Springhead in Kent, which might more likely indicate the presence of a person of Dobunnic origin than the end of a long chain of exchange mechanisms. Such equations of personal origin and artefact types can be oversimplistic, however, as will be seen in the context of the larger scale debates about the early Saxon period, and other explanations are also possible.

Personal items, for example jewellery, could therefore be used as expressions of identity but were typically of standardised types. Occasional exceptions are known, however, such as the 'Aesica' type brooch from Yarnton (Henig and Booth 2000, fig. 5.19). Objects such as intaglios from signet rings are amongst the most personal items found. These are not common in the valley away from the cities of Cirencester and London, but appear occasionally in rural settlement contexts, for example at the Cotswold Water Park sites of Claydon Pike (2) and
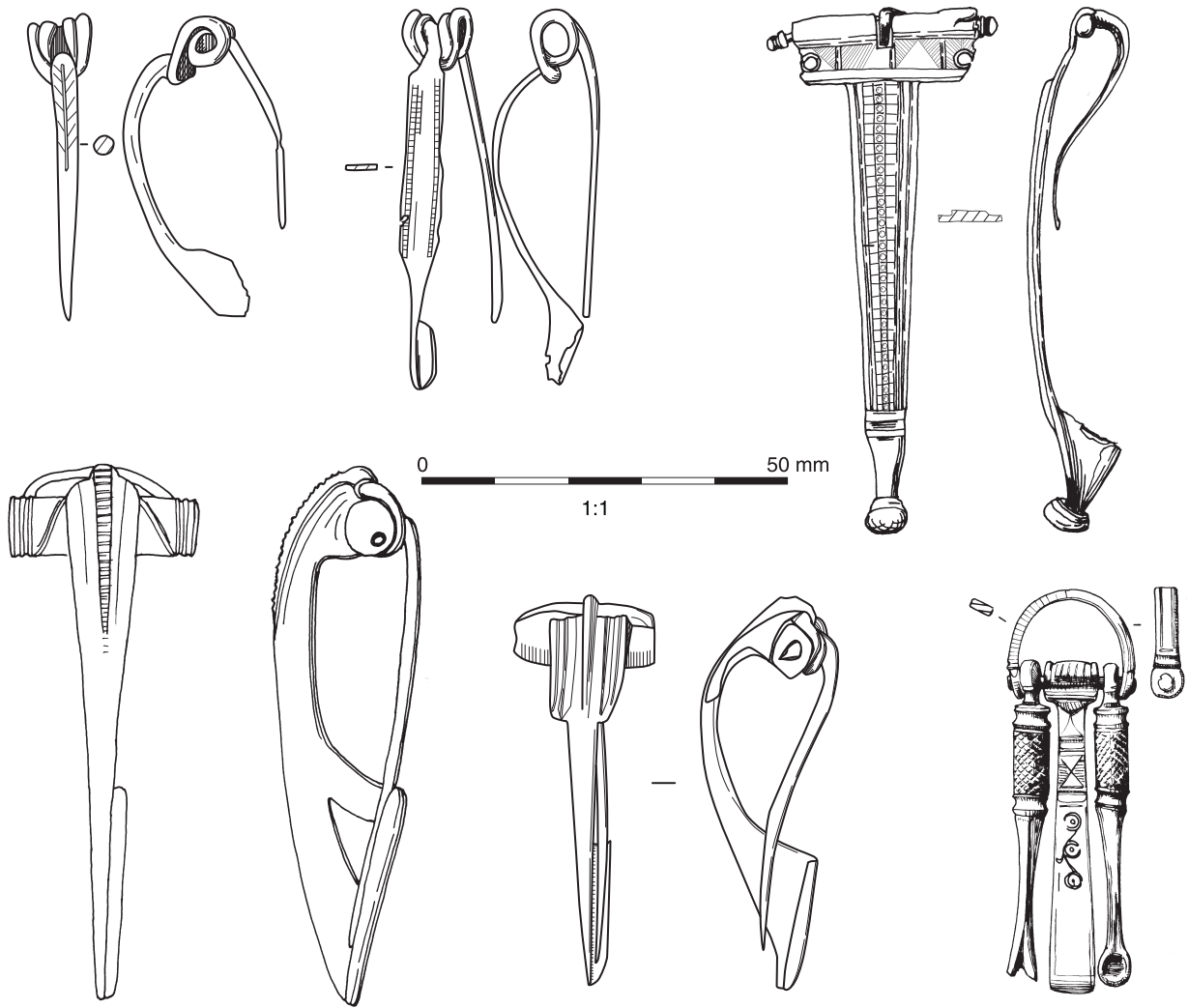
Fig. 4.7 Changing faces: brooches from Somerford Keynes (top two rows) and Thorpe Lea Nurseries (lower two rows, reproduced smaller than actual size) and toilet set from Claydon Pike (second row, righthand side)

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Fig. 4.8   Cornelian intaglio with Minerva carrying a spear and shield. From Cassington

Whelford Bowmore (all of glass), while a cornelian with a figure of Minerva (Fig. 4.8) is a recent find from Cassington. These pieces, with their classically derived decoration and implications of literacy, are likely to have been seen by their wearers (and others) as indicators of a particular status.

Eating and drinking- you are what you eat (off)
(Figs 4.9-4.12)

Evidence for changes in diet comes from animal and, in particular, plant remains, that are discussed in Chapter 6 below. The main trends are towards greater variety of diet, with quite widespread indications of the adoption of a range of vegetables and spices to supplement or enliven the staples of bread and (to a lesser extent) meat. These changes may also be reflected in part by the development of a much wider range of pottery types for the storage, preparation, cooking and consumption of food than had been in use in the late Iron Age. Some of these vessels could, of course, have been used with the traditional diet, but a connection between diversification in diet and in the repertoire of vessels of pottery and other materials seems quite likely in general terms, and can be specifically demonstrated in some cases.

Such a relationship could imply that the occurrence of particular pottery types was specifically linked to dietary preference. Usually, however, an economic (trade based) explanation is adopted in relation to the distribution of pottery for which, uniquely, the source of production can often be identified. Many pottery styles current at the time of the conquest survived in use for a generation, and sometimes more, thereafter. By the later part of the 1st century AD, however, technological developments (which in some cases were in train from the middle of the century) were widespread across the region. The most obvious new features were the use of kilns to fire the pottery, enabling potters to produce in particular reduced (grey) wares of a general character that is familiar throughout the Roman period. The trend towards a greater diversity of vessel shapes that had already been initiated in the 'Belgic' tradition (in part encouraged by the adoption of the potter's wheel) was continued. The repertoire of shapes in use was supplemented by specialist types, such as flagons and mortaria (Fig. 4.9), which had at best been very rare in pre-conquest contexts. Some of these were imported from workshops outside the region while fine table wares such as samian ware came from Gaul and Germany. Less commonly, commodities such as imported wine and olive oil are recognised by their characteristic containers (amphorae).

The post-conquest period probably also saw an increase in the use of metal vessels on the dinner table, supplemented for the first time by glass as well, but vessels in these materials are found much less commonly than pottery, perhaps in part because they could be recycled. Despite this characteristic, however, it is clear that the occurrence of glass and metal vessels was heavily biased towards villas and nucleated settlements – many smaller rural settlements produce none at all – and realistically, recycling of glass is very unlikely to have taken place in rural contexts where the necessary manufacturing skills simply did not exist, so the absence of glass there is unlikely to be explicable in this way. Glass assemblages of moderate size come from villas such as Claydon Pike, Roughground Farm, Barton Court Farm and Hambleden. Claydon Pike is one of the few sites to have produced mid 1st-century glass (a drinking cup and an unguent bottle) well before the appearance of buildings of Romanised type. Both there and at Somerford Keynes, however, glass vessels did not really start to be used with any regularity until later in the 1st century when the inhabitants adopted glass bowls and the contents of whatever was commonly shipped in the ubiquitous blue/green bottles. Hilary Cool notes that this type of bowl/bottle dominated assemblage is relatively often observed on rural sites of the later 1st century (2007). This is less often the case in the Thames Valley, simply because the majority of the material from the region is of middle and later Roman date, exemplified by the assemblage from Roughground Farm (Shepherd and Cropper 1993) and vessels from Dorchester (Fig. 4.10). Metal vessels are significantly less common even than glass, and more so since the re-identification of two 'Roman' bronze bowls from Sutton Courtenay (Miles 1976) as Frankish (Boyle *et al*. 1995, 204). The most striking groups of metal vessels are the pewter 'hoards' from Appleford

(Brown 1973a; see also below) and Shepperton (Fig. 5.11; Poulton forthcoming a), but it is questionable if such vessels were ever used routinely in a domestic context prior to their deposition (Poulton and Scott 1993, 127-130; see also Chapter 5). One significant component of the Appleford well deposit which, notwithstanding the likely religious context of its final resting place, was certainly a functional piece, was the elaborate cauldron chain (Brown 1973a, 193-6). Such an object implies communal cooking practices on a reasonable scale, but does not inform us about the context of this, or the presentation of the results. From the same collection came a small folding-handled pan of iron (ibid., 199-200), suggestive of food preparation at an individual level. Such vessels are not particularly common: a comparable example, but of copper alloy, is known from just outside the valley near Binfield, Berks (Keevill 1992b).

In contrast, the majority of the pottery types mentioned above were eventually widely available, so the question here is to what extent their appearance at different types of site was related to expressions of identity rather than a whole range of other factors. It is likely that some of the same significance was attached to pottery as to other finds. In the pre-conquest period imported pottery was extremely rare in the Upper Thames and occurred at a strictly limited number of sites. Its presence is arguably related to statements of identity and status at this time, particularly to aspects of presentation of food and drink in the context of status display. This was linked to more widespread changes in the preparation of food suggested by the general expansion of the ceramic repertoire in the late Iron Age (cf Meadows 1994; 1997; 1999). It is interesting that one of the earliest identifiable (but not precisely located) pottery industries in the region in the early post-conquest period was concerned with providing precisely these vessels – principally cups, beakers, dishes and platters – types that were of Gallo-Belgic origin and had been so rare previously (Timby *et al.* 1997). Even then the distribution of these products was relatively restricted and they were common only at Abingdon and Dorchester, the likely foci of high status activity in the area where this industry was probably located (Fig. 4.11). An analogous industry at Chichester in the immediate post-
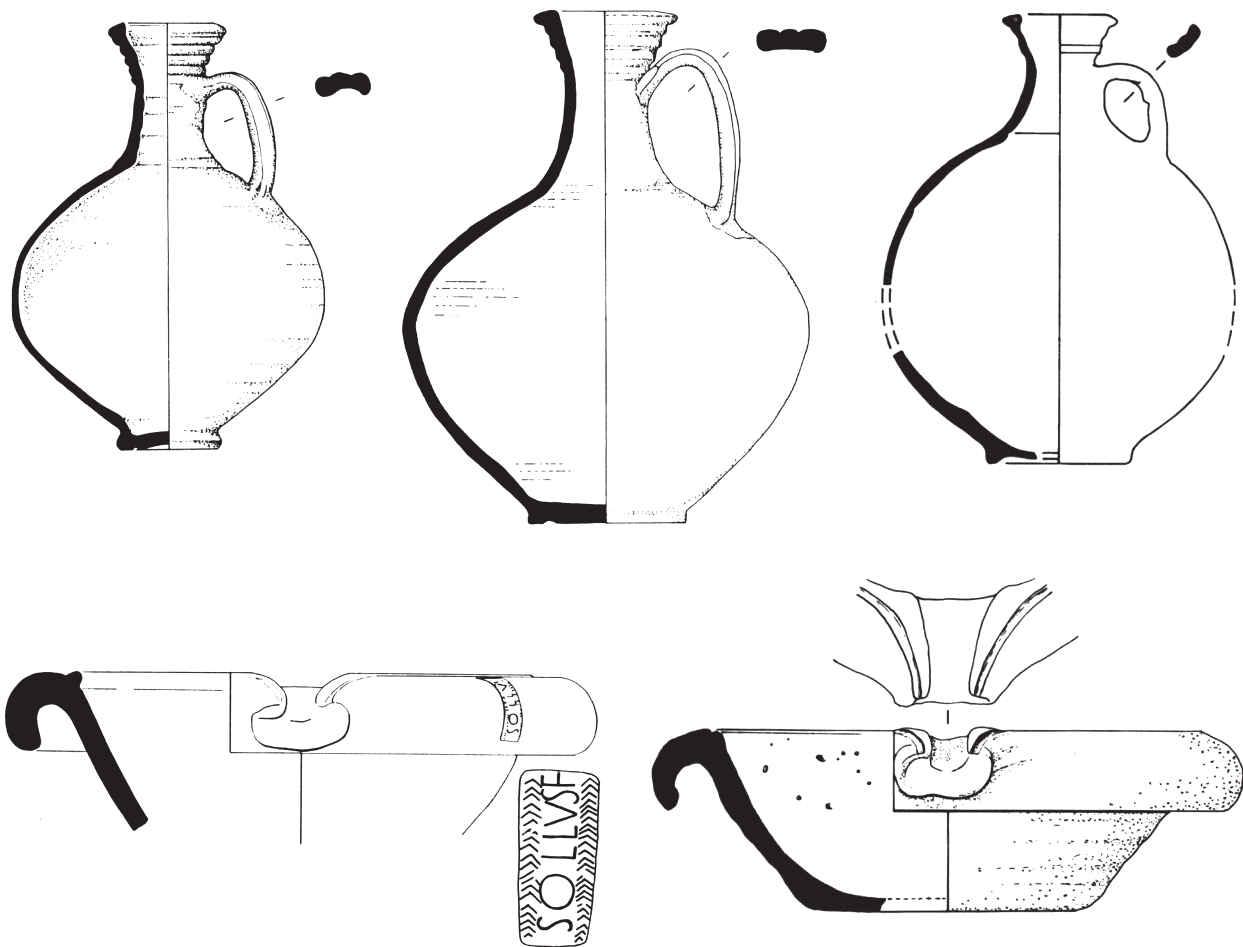

Fig. 4.9   New Roman pottery types: Verulamium white ware flagons and mortaria with an Oxford flagon (top right) for comparison

conquest period (Down 1978, 125-6, 145-6) may have been associated with military activity; the general context of the two could have been rather similar, without the Thames Valley industry having any specific military links. An important development indicated by these new pottery forms and underlining the contrast in cooking styles suggested by the (admittedly later) metal vessels from Appleford mentioned above, is the presentation and consumption of food in individual portions. This is seen also in later Roman ceramics and in glassware; food may have been prepared (for the most part) communally, but drinking vessels such as cups and beakers were for individual use. This seems unremarkable today, but it appears to mark a significant departure from pre-Roman practice. Another aspect of food preparation in the late Iron Age may be indicated by a much more mundane class of object, the clay discs or rectangular blocks which are found on a number of sites in the Upper Thames, such as Farmoor (Lambrick and Robinson 1979, 53-4, nos 124-127) and Hatford (Booth and

Simmonds 2004, 344-5, with refs) and probably disappear from the archaeological record by the end of the 1st century AD. These are not associated directly with cooking, as burnt examples are not found, but might have served as portable surfaces on which to make bread or carry out other food preparation tasks.

The early 2nd-century settlement hiatus in the Upper Thames helps us to see unusually clearly the characteristic patterns of early Roman pottery use in this area at sites with no later activity (Booth 2004; 2007; Henig and Booth 2000, 173-174). While the great majority of pottery at all sites (except the fort at Cirencester) was of local origin there were marked differences in the representation of 'fine and specialist' (non-utilitarian) wares. At this period this seems more likely to be related to distinctions of status than simply to ease of access to markets, though nucleated settlements on the main roads will always have been at an advantage in this respect and might be expected to produce 'higher-status' assemblages (see Chapter 6). In the early
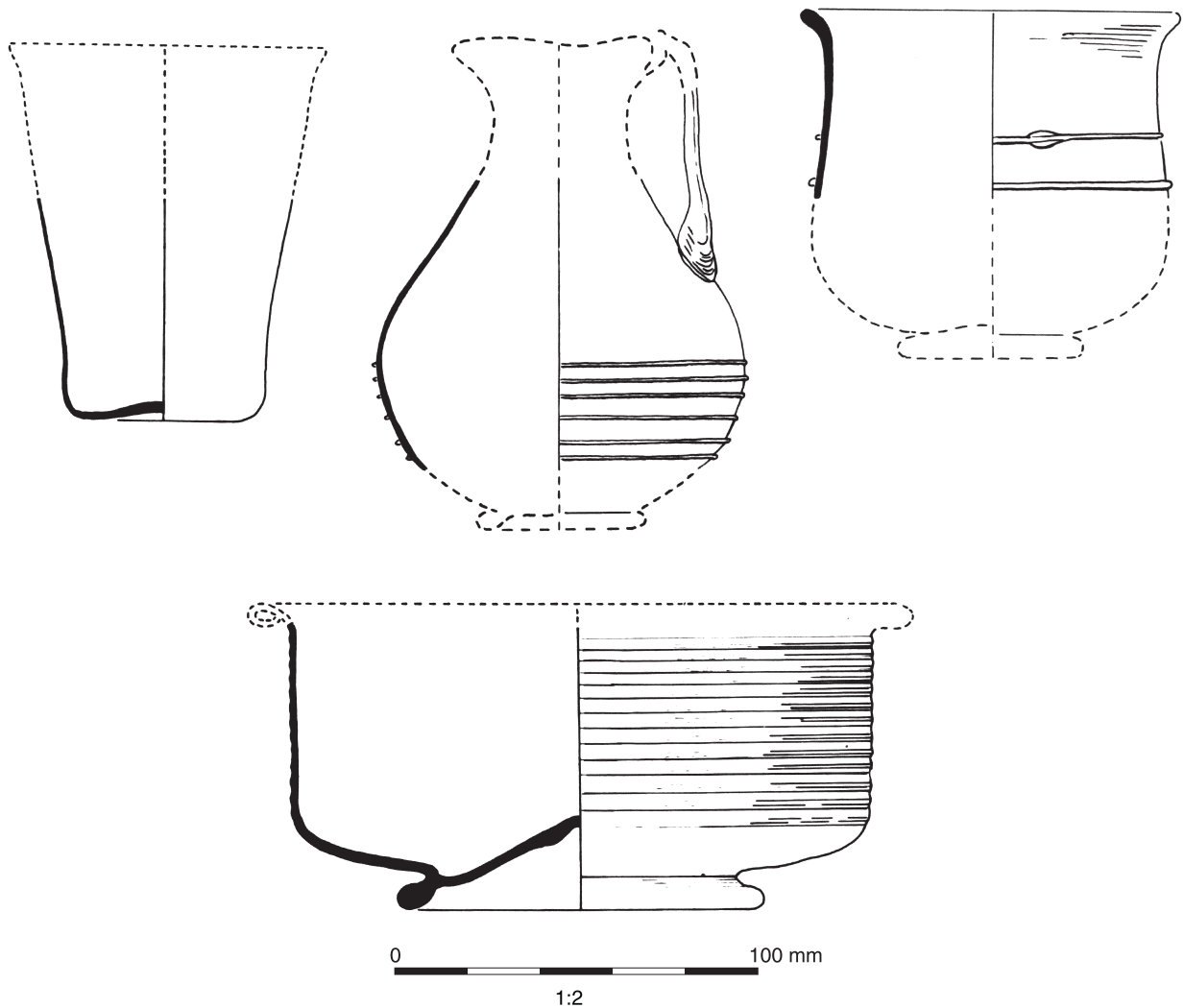

Fig. 4.10   Late Roman glass vessels from Dorchester

Roman period the inhabitants of some rural settlements, such as Thornhill Farm (Glos) and Old Shifford and Gravelly Guy (Oxon) made minimal use of fine and specialist wares (Fig. 4.12). Amounting to less than 1% of all sherds at these sites, they were represented only by occasional sherds of samian, amphorae and white wares and a single mortarium fragment at Thornhill Farm. The latter site is particularly instructive since at the exactly contemporary and very similar settlement at Claydon Pike, less than 1 km distant and later linked to Thornhill Farm by a trackway, fine and specialist wares were more than 15 times as common. This suggests a distinct difference in some aspects of status between contemporary communities in this area. In this specific case a potential explanation of the difference may be in terms of the relationship between the two communities.

The adoption of 'technologically Romanised' pottery was fairly universal by the end of the 1st century AD. Some industries produced particular types in, for example, grog-tempered fabrics which maintained pre-Roman traditions, but these were often used for specific vessel types such as large storage jars, which continued to be made in this way in the Oxford industry throughout the Roman period. It remains uncertain whether this should be interpreted in terms of functional suitability or culturally-determined preference. Grog-tempered fabrics were also characteristic of the early Roman Savernake (North Wiltshire) industry, products of which were widely distributed in the Upper Thames, and formed part of the repertoire of the Highgate (just north of London) potters in the mid to late 1st century. Another distinct tradition, that of flint-tempered 'Silchester ware' and the related fabrics found in Berkshire in the early Roman period, also appears to be of conservative character and hark back to late Iron Age antecedents. Many vessel shapes of the Roman period developed in the 1st and 2nd centuries out of the 'Belgic' repertoire so that, notwithstanding the technological changes, there was substantial continuity with established traditions.

Despite these local variations in background the broad trajectory of pottery use seems to have been quite consistent across the whole region. Overall there is no indication that the uptake of more technologically developed utilitarian pottery was contested in the long term. Use of the more exotic ceramics (and in some cases their contents) may have been a different matter, but this is not certain. Samian ware, for example, is sometimes seen as a distinct status marker. This was possibly the case in

Fig. 4.11 Locally made early Roman fine wares from Abingdon, with a comparable beaker from Dorchester on Thames top right.
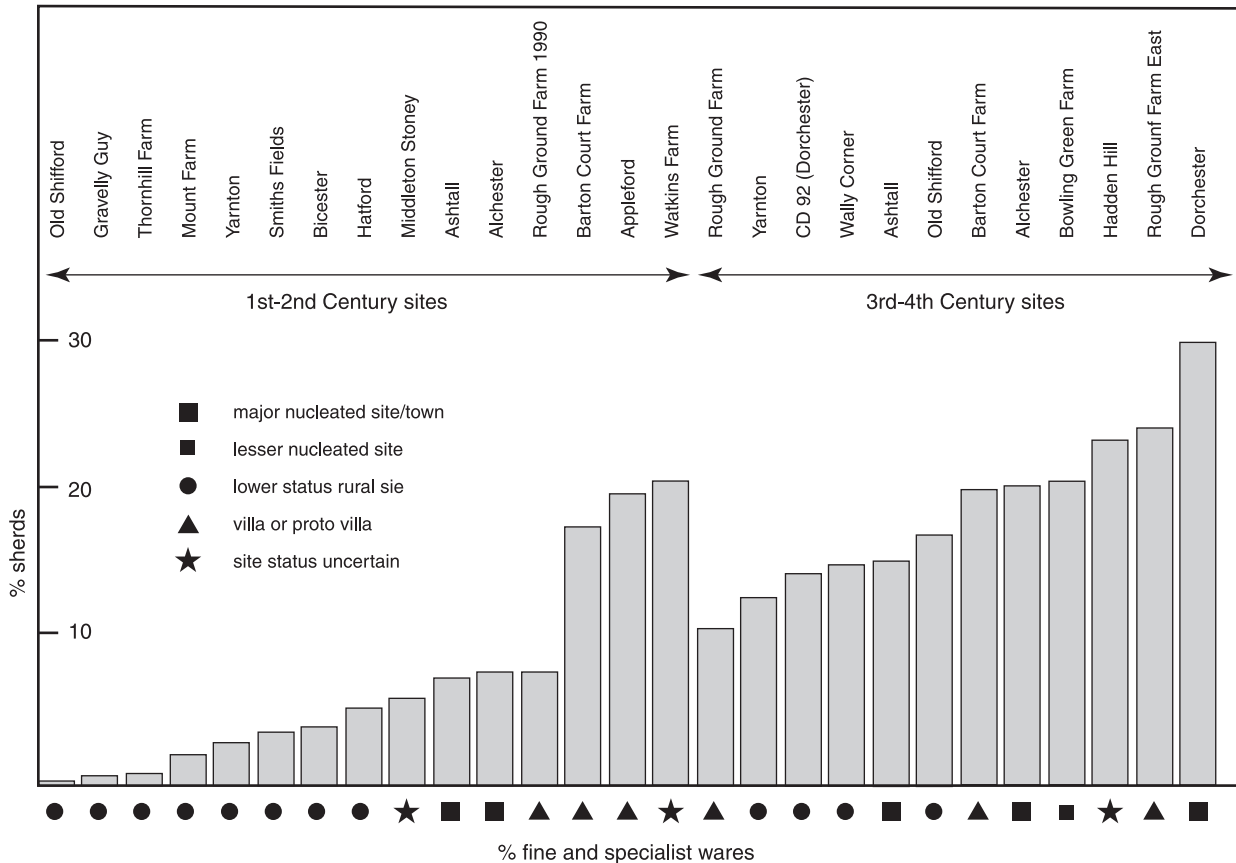
Fig. 4.12   Ceramic indicators of site status: the proportions of fine and specialist pottery fabrics in selected Oxford region assemblages.

the 1st century AD but by the 2nd century samian was to be found on every site and, to judge by its occurrence on late Roman sites, continued in use well past the end of the latest period of import in the mid 3rd century. There were quantitative variations in samian ware use that were status-related, but there is no doubt that the material was potentially available to, and apparently used by, almost all communities. The incidence of amphorae was more limited, however. There were certainly sites in the Upper Thames where amphorae were very rare and, in some cases, apparently completely absent. Thus the use of olive oil and wine, and even more so fish sauce and some of the other commodities carried in amphorae, was rare in many rural communities through the valley, even if some of these products were perhaps transferred to other types of container for local distribution in smaller quantities. These absences clearly suggest that changes in styles of eating and drinking, some of which were initiated before the Roman conquest, were implemented differently in different communities and were carried further in some than in others.

One innovation encountered universally from (at latest) the beginning of the 2nd century AD is the use of mortaria (gritted mixing bowls). These are traditionally understood to be for grinding and

mixing food in a style consistent with Romanised practice and they were produced in very large quantities in the Oxford industry, amongst others. It is not clear, however, that the use of these vessels was necessarily as has been usually understood. In some settlement contexts quite a number of mortaria are burnt in a manner that would hardly have been approved by Apicius. It cannot therefore be assumed automatically that the presence of a 'Roman' form means a 'Roman' function. Never-theless, the evidence from plant remains, in partic-ular (see above and Chapter 6), indicates that there were innovations in diet in the period which are likely to have had implications for techniques of food preparation, and it would not be surprising if some of these correlated with developments in the ceramic repertoire.

Settlement and housing (Figs 4.13-4.15)

For much of the length of the Thames Valley, early Roman settlements continued to be characterised by enclosures and by a general elusiveness of struc-tural evidence (presumably of clay and/or timber) in much the same way as in the late Iron Age. In the absence of compelling evidence to the contrary not only broad continuity of population but also of building traditions is therefore assumed. Indeed, for

many lower status rural settlements this situation did not change significantly in the late Roman period. There is thus little alternative but to assume that much late Roman rural housing was of relatively simple form, built using mass wall or above ground timber framing construction techniques, and possibly (in the former case) still largely of circular plan.

It is clear that property in Britain was bought and sold under Roman law (eg Tomlin 1996) and it is certainly possible that the 'settlement dislocation episode' of the early 2nd century, amongst others, resulted in estates changing hands. Any such transactions *might* have been only between members of the native population, but this is entirely speculative. The power of the state to confiscate lands should be remembered – some reallocation of land-holding in the new political situations of the post-conquest period seems very likely, for example – and the potential for non-Britons to acquire estates (as is known to have been the case in the late empire) not discounted altogether. There is no indication from the Thames Valley, however, that any of the farmers, large or small, were other than of British origin, though by its nature the kind of evidence that would be required for such an identification would be most unlikely to appear, so the argument from silence is not completely conclusive. What does appear is evidence of the diversity of settlement form referred to above. The earliest examples of this in the Upper Thames are the rectilinear enclosure sites at Barton Court Farm and Appleford Sidings, both of which may perhaps have been established around the time of the Roman conquest (whether shortly before or after is impossible to say) and were occupied into the early 2nd century. The presence at both of rectilinear timber buildings, unparalleled in regional rural settlement at this time, and pottery assemblages with above-average representations of 'fine and specialist' wares (see above) have led to their (somewhat speculative) designation as proto-villas (Henig and Booth 2000, 84). Other finds contributing to understanding of these sites in the 1st century AD were scarce, but the copper alloy seal-box from Appleford Sidings (above) is a rare indication of literacy in the countryside in this period.

Other evidence for marked variation of settlement character, one of the most obvious aspects of expression of status differentiation, is seen in the appearance of architecturally recognisable villas in the landscape from the 2nd century onwards in the Upper Thames, and perhaps earlier further down river, although within the valley itself such sites are not particularly common. The first villa building at Cox Green, Maidenhead may have dated to the mid 2nd century, while development of the best known Upper Thames villa, at Roughground Farm, Lechlade, can be traced from about the same period onwards. Isolated aisled buildings of 'Roman' character are seen in the same area at Claydon Pike

and further west at Somerford Keynes from a slightly earlier date, but whether they represent the same type of development as other villa sites is less certain. Elsewhere, the chronology of the known villas is less certain and some may be late Roman foundations, like Barton Court Farm which was only re-established in the later 3rd century after a gap in the occupation sequence of almost 150 years. At sites such as Hambleden, excavated before the First World War, the occupation sequence ran from the pre-Flavian period to the end of the 4th century, but the basis of the excavators' dating of the first phase of the main house (a simple block of four rooms) to the 1st century is unclear (Cocks 1921, 144). A late 1st-century dating is broadly in line with that of a number of comparable buildings in Catuvellaunian territory, however, and is accepted by Branigan (1985, 111) but cannot be regarded as certain.

The relative absence of evidence for the simpler rural buildings means that consideration of internal layout and decoration is confined entirely to villas. It may well be that with regard to decoration this marks a real distinction – timber framed buildings could have had painted walls, for example – but there is no surviving evidence to suggest that this was the case in the Thames Valley. Few of the Thames Valley villas, most of which are relatively modest in architectural terms, have produced well-preserved evidence for 'standard' decorative features such as mosaic pavements and painted plaster, though many if not most undoubtedly originally possessed such features. Heated rooms and or bath suites were not universal, however; they were certainly absent at Barton Court Farm, for example, although this site did have evidence for simply painted walls and tessellated floors. The latter were extremely poorly preserved, including one within a 'cellar' at one end of the building. This, and perhaps the other floors, was of simple plain limestone tesserae. Elsewhere, more elaborate floors are known, but again are usually in fragmentary condition, as for example at Roughground Farm, where Building III certainly contained a patterned pavement in its late 3rd-century phase, in one of a row of rooms with hypocausts (Allen *et al.* 1993, 73, 77, 166-7). Basildon, Berkshire, is one of few sites with comprehensible decorative schemes, revealed by excavations in 1839 (Fig. 4.13), while at Goring, some 500 m distant across the river the ?aisled building includes a tessellated floor and the presence of smaller tesserae suggests the former existence of a finer pavement. Plain tessellated pavements were found in both House 1 and House 2 at Hambleden, while the existence of pavements can be demonstrated at Dropshort and Little Wittenham, but their nature is unknown. In contrast, the villa at Cox Green, Maidenhead had a bath suite and floors of opus signinum and tile, but no indication of mosaics, and at Maidenhatch painted wall plaster was noted, but again no mosaic pavements.

Fig. 4.13   Mosaic pavement from Basildon

These features were not confined to the larger rural estates. At least three buildings in Staines had mosaic or tessellated floors (Bird 2004a, 56-8), and a similar situation prevailed at Dorchester, although most of these are known only from antiquarian references. Substantial fragments of a painted plaster wall came from a building near the east gate of the town (Fig. 4.14; Bradley 1978, 32). In both cases, however, well-appointed buildings are likely to have been a relatively small proportion of the urban landscape. The problem, in both urban and rural settings, is to understand the extent and the importance of these new approaches to house decoration and in particular the reaction of other people to them: whether such developments were the object of scorn, indifference, envy, or attempts at emulation, is unfortunately unknown.

Away from Cirencester and London the Thames Valley examples of house decoration are not only relatively scarce but also modest in terms of artistic achievement. This seems to apply to portable objects as well: the use of such material in expression and construction of identities is a familiar concept, but the evidence for this in the valley is meagre. Sculpture is known in the form of altars or reliefs from Bampton, Ducklington and Bablock Hythe, for example, but as substantial religious items these fall slightly outside the daily domestic sphere (see Chapter 5). The surviving evidence rarely extends beyond minor pieces such as decora-
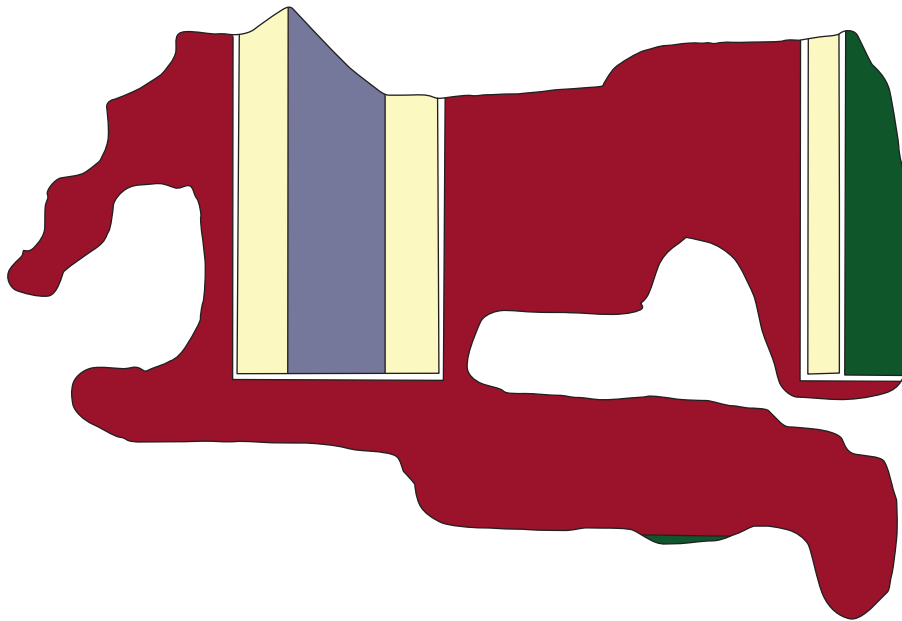
Fig. 4.14   Wall painting: reconstruction of a panel from Dorchester on Thames

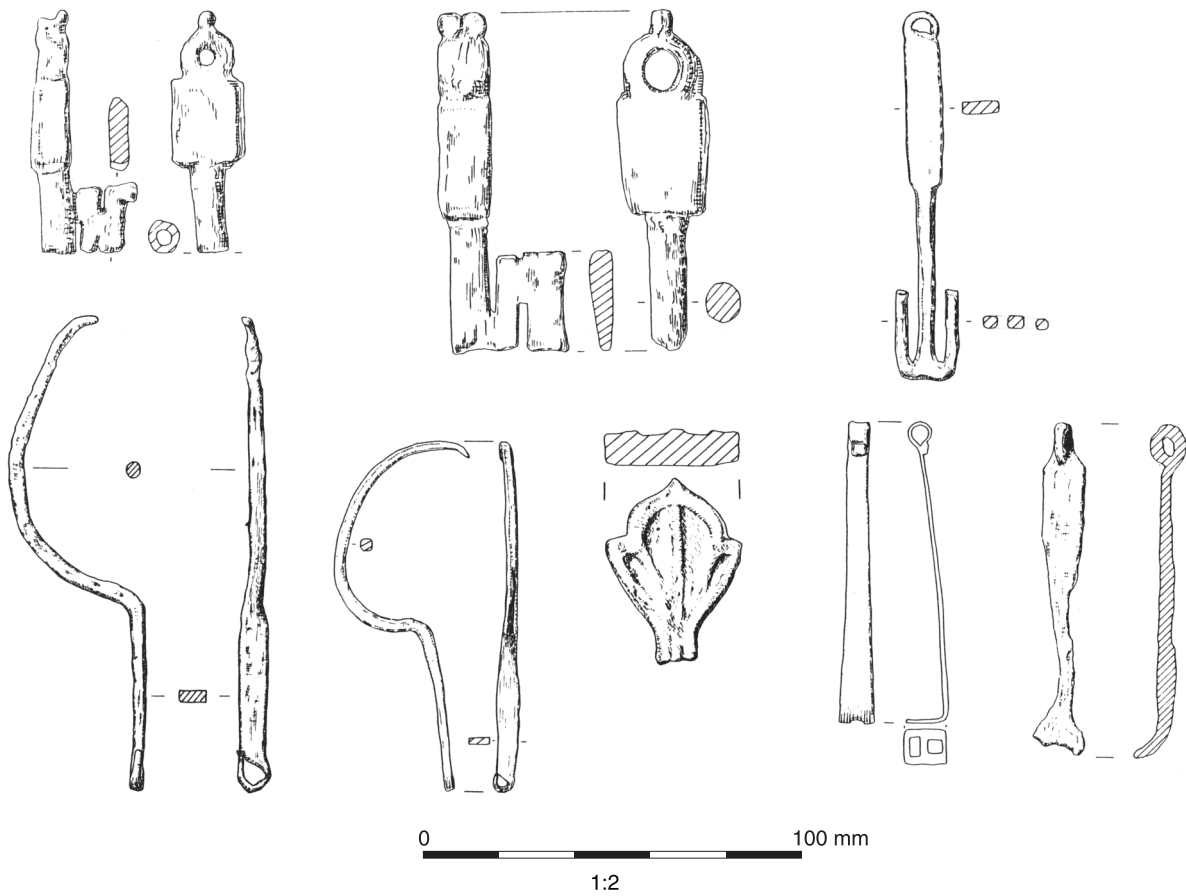0   100 mm

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Fig. 4.15   Keys and latchlifters from Barton Court Farm

tive mounts in copper alloy or bone, probably from boxes or other items of furniture. Decoration on vessels, such as one of the Appleford pewter dishes, could be of high quality, but was of secondary importance to the vessel itself, as was the case with the occasionally elaborate painted decoration on late Roman Oxford pottery, for example. While it is likely that such pieces might have been carefully selected by their purchasers, as was probably also the case with decorated samian ware earlier, their significance for their owners, and in particular the extent to which they were thought to represent 'main-stream' provincial cultural aspirations, remains unclear.

Despite their limitations, the appearance of some of these interior spaces would have contrasted markedly with that of their late Iron Age predecessors, and it is likely that they were also clearly different from contemporary lower status dwellings, particularly in the countryside. An important aspect of differences in the use of interior space between the Roman and earlier periods might have been in relation to lighting. Apart from the fact that some buildings now had glazed windows there was the potential to transform interiors by the use of light from sources other than fires. The extent to which this was done may, however, have been limited. There is very little direct evidence for the use of lamps and other lighting equipment in our area, which is in line with the nationally observed trend for such equipment to concentrate overwhelmingly on military sites and at the largest urban centres such as London and Colchester (Eckardt 2002, 153). Silchester and St Albans also fall into this pattern but Cirencester appears to have been relatively poor in lighting equipment (ibid., *passim*). Away from Cirencester and London a single ceramic lamp from Hambleden (Cocks 1921, 177 no 98), a fragment of copper alloy vine leaf, probably the reflector from the back of a decorated lamp, from Claydon Pike and an iron open lamp apparently from a burial near the Wittenham Clumps (Bailey 1996, 57) are perhaps the only examples from the valley. A fragment of a copper alloy ?candleholder is known from Dorchester (Henig 1981, 45-6 no 18). Interestingly, ceramic candlesticks did not form part of the repertoire of the Oxford pottery industry (unless this was the function of a so called 'triple-vase' from Headington; Young 1977, 89, 91, type P40), whereas they were produced in some quantity by, for example, the New Forest potters, with the result that these objects are quite common at places such as Silchester (Eckardt 2002, 334-6).

There is little direct evidence for furniture, but the existence of chests and boxes is indicated by handles, mounts and decorative fittings and inlays, and also by keys. The numbers of keys and simple latchlifters found at some sites (for example Barton Court Farm; Fig. 4.15) indicate a concern with security not seen previously. Keys could vary considerably in size, some being appropriate for furniture and others for exterior doors. A large iron padlock was amongst the finds from the 'pewter hoard' well deposit at Appleford (Brown 1973a, 197-8 no 28).

Living and dying (Figs 4.16-4.17)

The direct impact of architectural and artistic developments on most rural communities is likely to have been slight, however. Modifications of traditional ways of food preparation and consumption discussed above represent much more significant and widespread changes for rural communities – yet perhaps some traditional practices were less affected by the adoption of new ceramic repertoires than has been thought. Other changes seem to have been even slower in taking effect: burial practice as such will be discussed in Chapter 5, but it is relevant here that in the Upper Thames, at least, evidence for burial in rural contexts is rarely seen before the 4th century AD. It has been argued that this broadly reflects the survival of regional pre-Roman practice, in which the normative rite did not involve disposal of the body in a way that is routinely recoverable by archaeologists (Booth 2001). The point is that identifiable changes in burial practice in the early Roman period are mainly associated with towns and villas, although even for many of these sites within the region the evidence is extremely scarce. The majority of the rural population only 'caught up' with, or adopted, mainstream burial practice over two centuries after the conquest, by which time the common early Roman practice of cremation had been largely superseded by the rite of inhumation (Fig. 4.16). In this respect these communities seem to have been firmly resistant to change. There is no indication that the adoption of inhumation had any particular significance in terms of changes in identity, however (with the exception of those burials, probably few in number outside centres such as Dorchester, which may have been Christian). Once established, inhumation remained the normative rite throughout our period and region, being only partly replaced by cremation in the early Saxon period at particular sites such as Abingdon. The 'reappearance' of rural burial after an extended period of relative invisibility does allow direct comparison with urban practices. While the general pattern of both is the same, there are observable differences of detail between them. In particular there are a number of 'minority' burial practices, such as decapitation and burial with footwear (identified by the appearance of hobnails) that seem to have been more common in rural than in urban cemeteries (Philpott 1991, 81, 167). Only rare examples of these, or of the prone burials sometimes associated with decapitation (Fig. 4.17), occurred at small-town cemeteries in the region (principally Dorchester), while decapitation was particularly common at rural sites such as Cassington (Oxon). However all of these rites were encountered in the Bath Gate cemetery at
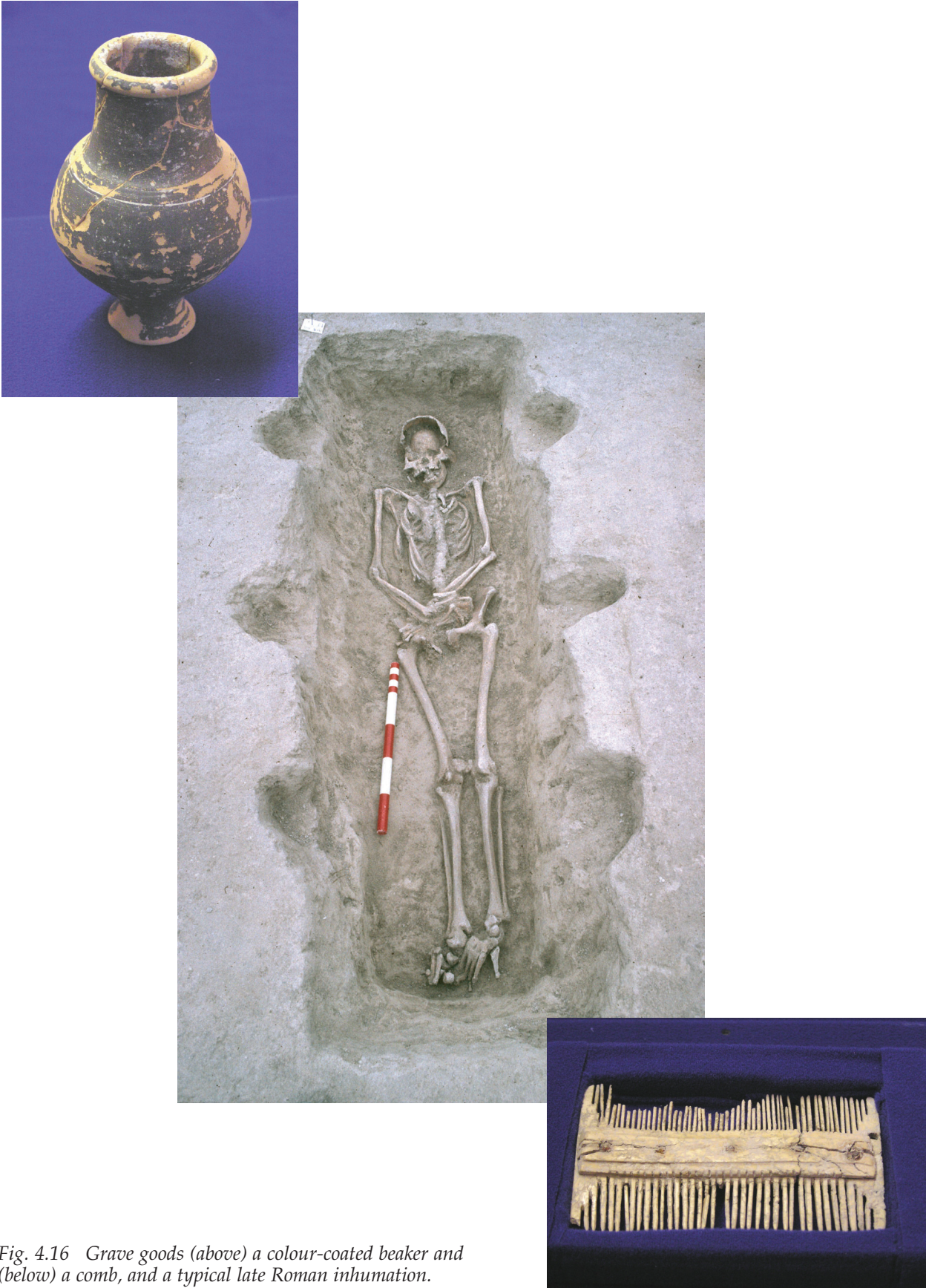
Fig. 4.16 Grave goods (above) a colour-coated beaker and (below) a comb, and a typical late Roman inhumation. From Coldharbour Farm, Crowmarsh. The sockets in the sides of the grave are, however, an unusual feature most common in Anglo-Saxon graves in Kent
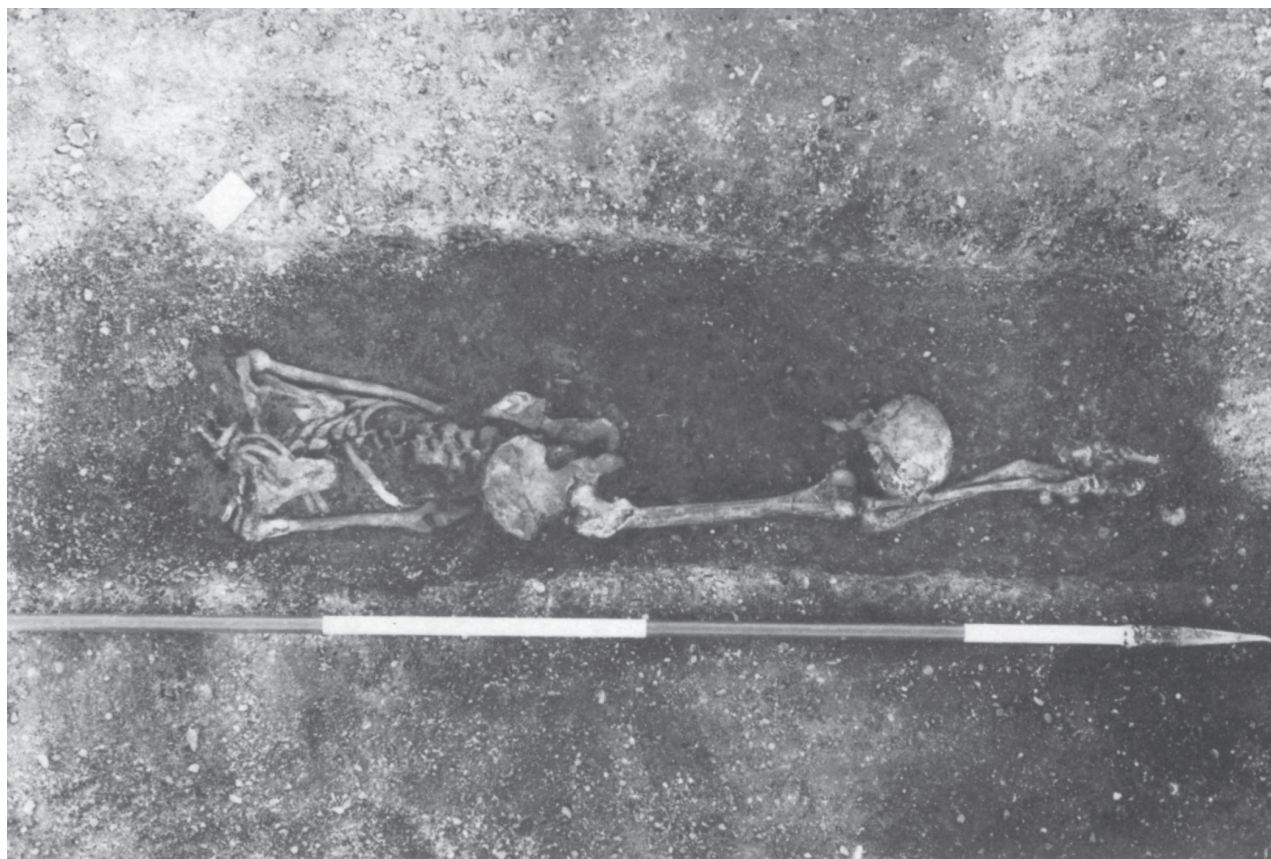
Fig. 4.17   Decapitated prone burial from Stanton Harcourt. The right leg is missing, but the left leg has healed fractures of the tibia and fibula

Cirencester (McWhirr *et al*. 1982, 78, 108, 128), and in the eastern cemetery of London, for example (Barber and Bowsher 2000), so the validity of the rural/urban distinction is uncertain. At Cirencester, however, it has been thought that the occupants of the Bath Gate cemetery might represent a rural community (rather than the retired legionaries envisaged by Wells (1982, 135)), a suggestion supported by the consistent pairing of the site with the rural cemetery of Lynch Farm (Peterborough) in a statistical analysis of late Roman burial practices in Britain (Quesnel-von-Kalben 2000, 225-6). The significance of these 'rural' rites is much debated (see Chapter 5), but whether they relate to aspects of identity in life or to characteristics assumed only at death is unknown.

Physical characteristics

Data from part of the Bath Gate cemetery population (Wells 1982) give some view of what may have been a fairly typical group of people. Of a sample of 202 male and 91 female adults, the males had a mean estimated age at death of 40.8 years and the females 37.8 years. The individual age estimates that produced these mean figures were, however, rather more precise than would generally be attempted today. This is just one characteristic of the rapidly developing discipline of palaeopathology.

Skeletal analyses are increasingly sophisticated (Roberts and Cox 2004) and material that was relatively well-recorded twenty years ago can seem inadequate to address current questions, but ageing methods have not progressed in the same way. Another important recent advance is the increasingly detailed examination of cremation burials. As yet, however, there are inadequate data for the early Roman period – which would be more difficult to derive from the remains of cremation burials even if these were known in sufficient numbers – to compare with those from the much more numerous late Roman inhumations of the valley. As it is, well-recorded, substantial early Roman cemeteries are entirely lacking for the region, being encountered only in London.

The mean heights recorded for the Cirencester people were *c* 1.69 m (5ft 6$\frac{1}{2}$ in) for men and 1.58 m (5ft 2in) for women, almost exactly the same as figures for a 'national' Romano-British mean derived from a rather larger sample (Roberts and Cox 2004, 254). Height is determined by a complex interplay of inherited and environmental factors. Whilst we all have a maximum genetic potential to reach a certain adult stature, physical and emotional stressors during childhood and adolescence may prevent us from achieving this potential. If such stressors (such as malnutrition, infection or chronic

illness) are too severe or prolonged to allow the body to 'catch-up' growth later, the individual will become permanently stunted. Thus, stature can serve as a rough yardstick to indicate the overall health of individuals and of populations. Sudden changes in mean adult stature have, however, been used to indicate the inclusion of large numbers of individuals of different stature into the existing gene pool of a society, although other explanations are also possible. Variations in the mean height of contemporary populations, or between populations over relatively short periods of time (as little as a few generations), or between sexes, could result from dietary differences between them.

A sample of cemeteries in the Upper Thames, mostly rural but including some burials (but not all those now known) from the Dorchester small town cemetery of Queenford Farm, provides useful comparisons for the Cirencester data (Harman *et al*. 1981). For example, the mean heights of men and women were very similar to the Cirencester people (10 mm more in each case), but the figure for females was felt to be biased by a group of 'very small' individuals from Queenford Farm, where eight of the 21 adult females whose height could be measured were from 1.47 to 1.52 m (4ft 10in to 5ft) (ibid., 149). A more limited sample from a recently excavated cemetery at Crowmarsh gives very similar figures, while in cemetery II at Barrow Hills, Radley, the average height of 21 men was 1.67 m (5ft 6 3/4in) and of 17 women was 1.57 m (5ft 2 1/4in) (Harman in Boyle and Chambers 2007).

Infant mortality would have been high, and a different attitude to neonatal and perinatal death from contemporary first world perspectives is seen in the different treatment of these fatalities, which were generally buried, often informally, in settlement rather than in identified cemetery contexts. Stable isotope ratio analysis of burials of slightly older children in the late Roman cemetery of Queenford Farm showed that solid foods were a part of the diet in at least some cases by the age of 18 months and that most children were fully weaned in a gradual process between the ages of 2 and 4 years (Fuller *et al*. 2006), rather later than, for example, in medieval England, on the basis of comparable isotopic data (eg Mays *et al*. 2002).

The basic components of diet are discussed in more detail in Chapter 6, but the Queenford Farm study did show that $\delta^{15}N$ (nitrogen isotope) values for females were significantly lower than for males. This could be a consequence of physiological processes, but a diet with lower animal/fish protein levels is also possible (Fuller *et al*. 2006). Such gender based distinctions were probably common, but are rarely demonstrable in archaeological populations. At Yarnton, however, isotope analysis showed no statistically significant difference between males and females in either the Iron Age or the Roman sample. Interestingly, this site showed some evidence of a change in diet between the two periods, with a probable decrease in diet to body

enrichment (of Nitrogen levels). This is not particularly what would be expected (comparable levels in the contemporary animal population increased) and suggests a conservative population (Anon 2003), which contrasts with some of the archaeological evidence for greater diversity in diet on other sites in the Upper Thames.

At a much broader level, Garnsey has suggested that 'accounts of the diet and health of ancient classical societies have generally been unrealistically favourable' (1999, 60). Whether his strictures are directly transferable from the Mediterranean to the north-west provinces is uncertain, but many of the key indicators that he discusses (ibid, 145-161) are found in the skeletal records of the region. On this basis it may be presumed that undernourishment, particularly in specific groups of society such as children, was relatively widespread and will be reflected in evidence for deficiency diseases.

One such may be the condition known as cribra orbitalia, a sieve-like pitting in the roof of the eye sockets, probably an indicator of childhood iron deficiency anaemia (although other causes are possible) and therefore of dietary inadequacies. This was not routinely noted in older reports (Cirencester (Wells 1982, 186-7) is a notable exception) but is now regularly recorded when bone is sufficiently well-preserved. For example there were two (relatively mild) cases in the group of 22 burials from Crowmarsh, but bone preservation here was generally poor and further examples might have gone undetected. At Cirencester the condition was recorded in 35 individuals at the Bath Gate cemetery (ibid.).

Dental health is also indicative of characteristics of diet as well as oral hygiene. For example a significant increase in caries and the related complication of abscesses, in comparison with data for the Iron Age, suggests the increased consumption of fermentable carbohydrates (sugars). These could have derived from several sources but cereal crops would probably have been the most significant (Roberts and Cox 2004, 251-2). The 1981 study by Harman *et al*. provides supporting data from the Upper Thames. Deterioration in dental health with increasing age was evident, with the incidence of caries, abscesses and tooth loss at 21%, 18% and 41% respectively in the population group aged 40 and above. (The percentages are based on the numbers of teeth/tooth positions recorded, not the numbers of people involved). Some individuals had lost all the teeth in at least one jaw (1981, 151-2); such evidence could be indicative of extreme old age. More specific evidence of dietary deficiency, particularly in childhood, comes from conditions such as enamel hypoplasia. The indicators in the teeth allow particular episodes to be dated quite closely, so, for example, a child in the Radley II cemetery who died at 7-8 years old had clear indications of a period of significant illness or malnutrition at about the age of 6 months. The data do not yet exist to allow quantification of such trends, but the potential is substantial.

Nutritional factors would obviously have had a bearing on patterns of mortality. Estimations of age of skeletons have to be treated with caution (Harman *et al*. 1981, 148), particularly where bone preservation is not very good. A significant portion of any cemetery population can often only be described as 'adult'. Another factor affecting understanding of population profiles is the extent to which infants and younger children are included within cemeteries – and therefore the extent to which cemetery populations are representative of overall mortality patterns. It is clear both from a Roman legal background and from the evidence of settlement sites that neonatal and very young infants were not subject to the same taboos as older individuals with regard to placement of burials. The large groups of infant burials from the villa sites at Barton Court Farm and Hambleden provide particularly graphic evidence of this. In the course of the 4th century there may have been changes in the perception of the appropriate location for the burial of children, perhaps influenced by Christian attitudes, although the evidence for the effect of these is ambiguous (Watts 1989). The clearest indication of this comes from Queenford Farm, where a relatively high proportion of the recorded burials (*c* 42%) were of subadults (ie up to *c* 18 years, Harman 1987), but it is clear that there was age-based (and perhaps also sex-based) zoning within this cemetery, which was only partly excavated, so it is uncertain how representative this high number of subadults might be. The mean figure for all the known late Roman cemeteries (ie groups of 10 or more burials) in Oxfordshire for which there are data (Booth 2001, 30-31, incorporating information from Harman *et al*. 1981) is *c* 31% subadults, relatively close to levels recorded in Anglo-Saxon cemeteries in the region (see below), but without the Queenford Farm sample the figure falls to 26%. All these figures effectively exclude burials of neonates and very young infants, the majority of which were located in settlement contexts.

The general breakdown of estimated age ranges for these cemeteries shows that some 37% of adults that could be aged were approximately 45 years or more at the time of death – beyond this range (if not earlier) accurate assessment of age becomes effectively impossible. Just over 60% of these older people were men – otherwise there are relatively few distinctive features in the overall pattern of mortality, but it is notable that two thirds of adults in the 20-25 age bracket are women, a figure that presumably reflects the difficulties of childbirth at this time. The majority of this sample are from sites that lie on the Thames Valley gravels – though the question of whether the sample size is large enough to be really representative remains. Although some of the larger groups within this sample derive from the 'small town' of Dorchester it is likely that most of the burials (including many of those from Dorchester) reflect a rural population. A sample of 550 burials from the East London cemetery (Conheeney 2000) provides an interesting comparison at a general level. Here, subadults comprised 25% of the sample (9.5% infants and 15.5% 'immature') and only 20% of the ageable adults were 'older', ie above *c* 45 years old. The latter figure might be indicative of a contrast between urban and rural conditions, and support the view of ancient urban centres as net consumers of people, although a summary of the general characteristics of the London population suggests that they enjoyed reasonable health (ibid.).

There are too few data to allow many general conclusions to be drawn about the health of the Romano-British population. Relatively few skeletal assemblages have been examined at a sufficiently detailed level for evidence of particular diseases or conditions to be detected (and many diseases will leave no identifiable traces even on well-preserved skeletons; eg Manchester 1992, 12). A number of individual sites have, however, produced useful evidence. Osteoarthrosis was much the most commonly identified disease at Cirencester, affecting (to different degrees) at least 45% of the adults in this group – preservation factors mean that its estimated incidence in this group might have been as high as 80% (ibid., 152). Degenerative disease of the spine was widespread in the skeletal assemblages examined by Harman *et al*.(1981) and, for example, was almost universal amongst adults over 30 years of age at Radley II, where osteoarthritis was also common. Two men and one woman were severely affected, in all cases in the hip (Harman in Boyle and Chambers 2007).

Other degenerative disease may be less apparent. Trauma resulting from accidents is often more readily identified, however, and was relatively common. For example, three males in the small cemetery at Crowmarsh had healed fractures, two of a rib and one of a clavicle. In the slightly larger group from Radley II healed fractures of ribs and clavicle were recorded in both men and women (combined in the cases of two men and one woman), although they were always less common in women. The similarity of these patterns of injury could suggest that, as might be expected but has commonly not been supposed in classical antiquity, women worked in the fields alongside men (Garnsey 1999, 110-111).

FROM ROMAN TO 'ANGLO-SAXON'
(Figs 4.18-4.20)

Late Roman society in the valley must have encompassed a number of different identities but their material manifestations seem mostly to have been relatively homogeneous, although we still know remarkably little about the housing of the lower status rural population. Villas were recognisable from one end of the valley to the other, although not particularly common within it and varying in size and degree of structural and decorative elaboration. Pottery styles were consistent, and while there was

obviously local variation dependent upon site location in relation to specific sources, there were constant elements, such as the ubiquitous presence of Oxford wares. Burial traditions were for the first time broadly comparable for both urban and rural populations, and although there were some specific customs that were more common in one or the other setting these were minority rites. Some regional variation may be observed in certain types of metalwork, however. A group of broadly related material, principally comprising belt fittings and related objects, is now known to have a marked concentration in western Britain, including the Upper Thames region. At least some production in, and a specific association with, the late province of Britannia Prima (with its capital probably, but not certainly, at Cirencester) has been suggested. This metalwork includes some of the very latest recognisable Romano-British material and is important for understanding some of the transitions of the early 5th century.

Overall, this period, for which the Thames Valley has produced particularly important evidence, has seen shifts in archaeological thinking as significant as the actual changes that they seek to interpret. Early to mid 20th-century views of the 'migration period' saw it as precisely that. Led by the historical evidence for the period, and particularly the account of Bede, they sought to construct a chronology for the Anglo-Saxon invasions of Britain and, by recognising links in the artefactual record between objects found in Britain and in north-west Europe, to identify the particular ethnic groups named in the sources. The basis of this tradition of analysis was the material recovered from cemeteries, since Anglo-Saxon settlements, with rare exceptions exemplified by the pioneering work of E T Leeds at Sutton Courtenay (Oxon) in the 1920s, were hardly known at that time.

Notions of large scale movements of peoples with closely-defined ethnic identities have died hard, harder than the idea of wholesale settlement population replacement achieved by mass slaughter of the residual Romano-Britons. In recent years a very different perspective has emerged, influenced by work on ethnicity and other topics, but it is by no means universally accepted (for a clear summary of the main issues see for example Lucy 2000, 155-181; see also Hamerow 1997; Ward-Perkins 2000). Recent reviews of the Oxfordshire evidence by Blair (1994, 1-29) and (more particularly) Hamerow (1999, 26-30) set this new approach firmly in the regional context. Most authorities would agree that at least some of the Romano-British population must have survived into the 5th century and beyond. Debate centres around the extent of such survival, how these people might be recognised in the archaeological record, and conversely on the numbers of immigrants involved and their role in transforming society at this time.

However these questions are answered, the fact remains that the contrasts between the archaeolog-ical record for the 4th century and that for the 6th are extremely marked; the physical characteristics of settlements, buildings and artefact types have all changed dramatically if not (in some cases) completely. Such changes demand careful consider-ation and interpretation, and questions of their meaning in human terms are central to our under-standing. It has been widely accepted for some time, however, that whatever the scale of migration, the early Anglo-Saxon period did not see the wholesale disappearance of the rural Romano-British popula-tion (eg Hills 1999, 181; E James 2001, 121). The latter, probably the majority component in the population of 5th-century Britain, even in the south-east, therefore have to be accommodated within interpretations of the period, despite the fact that the archaeological material that would have been used to identify them in the later 4th century has disappeared. Opinions vary on the extent to which the British population can be isolated within cultural assemblages of 'Anglo-Saxon' character.

For much of the Roman period in Britain consid-eration of questions of the ethnic (or at least geographical) origin of archaeologically identifiable individuals or groups of material has been confined largely to studies of the military north, where the historical and epigraphic framework provides some basis for interpretation, and to some aspects of pottery studies (often with a substantial overlap between the two, for a good example of an integrated approach see Cool 2004). In the late Roman period such questions become of wider relevance, but specific examples have been contro-versial, as in the identification of groups of 'intru-sive' burials of individuals of Saxon and Danubian origin in the late Roman cemetery at Lankhills, Winchester (Clarke 1979). These identifications have been widely questioned, but the archaeolog-ical approach is exactly that routinely employed in the following period until very recently. Whatever the origin of these individuals, there is little doubt that the wearing of crossbow brooches – one of the characteristics of the males of Clarke's 'Danubian' group – marked the wearers as officials, if not military personnel. While widely distributed, crossbow brooches were rarely numerous at any one site (the Lankhills group, which now totals 13, is exceptional in central southern England). They are sometimes associated with other elaborately decorated metalwork, such as the belt set in a male grave in the East London cemetery dated after AD 350 (Barber and Bowsher 2000, 206-8, 305). Here again an official/military identity seems almost certain, but nothing can be said about the ethnicity of the individual.

Distinctive belt fittings and related objects of the general type seen in the London burial are generally thought to have official associations – some probably were military equipment, but this need not have applied to all and it is possible that some types were simply high status dress accessories. Dress and its associated accessories were used

throughout the Roman period as indicators of status distinctions, but if anything this trend was enhanced in the late Roman period (eg Swift 2000, 9-10). Regardless of the exact nature of these objects, however, the origins of the belt sets lie firmly in late Roman metalworking traditions which were widespread in the north-western provinces, objects within these traditions deriving from a number of different production centres, including one or more in western Britain (see above). Nevertheless, the occurrence of some comparable objects on both sides of the Rhine led to a view that they had specific Germanic associations and that their wearers were Germanic military personnel.

This interpretation has been particularly important for our region because of an early identification of metalwork of this type, associated with objects of Anglo-Saxon character, in three graves found in the 19th century at Dorchester (Kirk and Leeds 1952-3). Two of these were from Dyke Hills south of the town and one from the Minchin Recreation Ground just to the north. These have subsequently been amongst the most widely discussed burials in early Saxon archaeology (Fig. 4.18). Combined with other evidence (including that of the stature of a male burial) the individuals from these graves were conclusively identified as Germans (Hawkes and Dunning 1961, 9-10). The ultimate development of this line of argument (Hawkes 1986) saw metalwork of this type as a specific identifier of federate troops (*foederati*), by definition Germanic, in the early 5th century after the severance of Britain from western Roman administrative structures at the beginning of that century.

These interpretations are not impossible, nor even inherently implausible, although the extent to which Britain was entirely divorced from developments in the western empire even after the usurpation of Constantine III is questionable (Wood 2004, 439-440). The character of the metalwork, however, does not itself permit identification of the individuals with which it is associated as Germanic, despite the fact that units of Germanic origin formed a significant proportion of the late Roman army. Military or military-related identities are amongst the most clearly defined in the Roman west, and what we see here is arguably a late Roman version of this, embracing females as well as males, but not necessarily revealing anything about the place of origin or the ethnicity of the individuals involved. The male with the belt set and crossbow brooch buried in the East London cemetery is relevant here. In contrast, a female burial some 12 m distant in the same cemetery, with a pottery jug, two *tutulus* brooches and a triangular comb of distinct Germanic type, dated *c* 350-410, was accepted by the excavators as indicating an individual of German origin (Barber and Bowsher 2000, 183-184, 305-6). The two might perfectly well have been related (and both German), but the archaeological evidence for the male does not permit this conclusion. If in general it is accepted in a post-Roman, barbarian, context that 'Ethnicity

was a factor of cohesion among its elites, but it seems to have mattered little to the majority of its inhabitants' (Pohl 1997a, 46; 1997b), this is likely to have been even more the case within a late Roman military framework.

What was the significance of a military identity in the early 5th century? Details of the workings of power relations in the period after AD 410 are elusive (see Chapter 7, below), but it is plausible that the Dorchester burials were representative of a community engaged in supporting a local or regional leadership of Romano-British origin. Whether such a leadership was itself based in Dorchester or further afield – for example relating to a polity centred on Britannia Prima and perhaps therefore Cirencester, is quite unknown. The Dorchester burials are not quite alone, however. Fragments of late Roman belt fittings and related material, albeit mostly reused or redeposited, occur in Saxon graves at Minster Lovell, Cassington, Long Wittenham (2), Dorchester and Berinsfield (Dickinson 1976, I 245), and Hawkes type IA buckles were found in early Saxon graves, for example at Blewburton Hill and Reading (Hawkes and Dunning 1961, 44). With regard to the type IA buckles Dickinson considered that 'their occurrence in probably functional positions in Anglo-Saxon graves suggests their continued manufacture during the fifth century' (1976, I 246). Another unusual belt from Blewburton Hill, with copper alloy fittings and iron buckles, was thought to be derived from late Roman military belts in form and came from a grave (20) assigned to the later 5th century (ibid, 247). Although not in the Thames Valley, Blewburton lies only 8 km from Dorchester, and is even closer to the Thames at Wallingford, where Saxon burials include other late 5th-century examples with belt fittings. These and other sites belong to a cluster of Saxon cemeteries and settlements in the Dorchester area, most but not all of which lie on the south bank of the Thames. Although both early Saxon settlement and (particularly) cemetery evidence is widespread in the immediate vicinity of Dorchester itself the scale of this activity, particularly in the 5th century, is less clear. Radiocarbon dates from the late Roman managed cemetery (ie with burials carefully laid out in rows and/or lines) at Queenford Farm, just north of Dorchester, suggest the continuation of Roman burial traditions perhaps as late as the 6th century AD. Together, this evidence may indicate the survival of a localised, principally British (and probably Christian) enclave based on Dorchester itself. In the early years of the 5th century this enclave might have been protected by people such as the male from Dyke Hills, and (more speculatively) later by individuals like the male in Blewburton grave 20. The nature of relationships between these contrasting communities is uncertain. It would almost certainly be mistaken, however, to assume that both were clearly defined on ethnic lines.
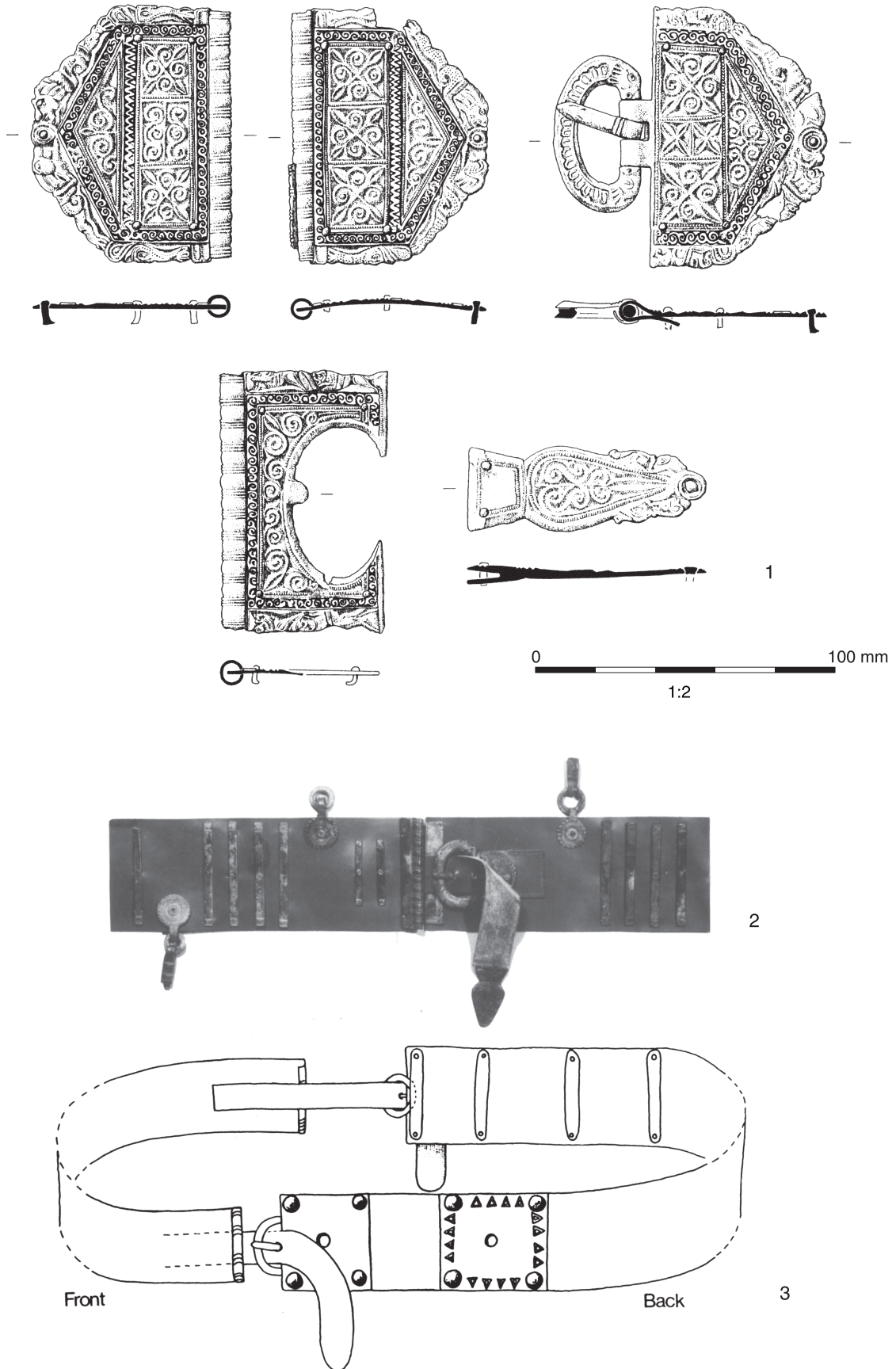
Fig. 4.18 Late Roman 'official' metalwork. Belt sets from (1) the East London cemetery, (2) Dorchester Dyke Hills and (3) Blewburton Grave 20

With the potential exception of burial practices, however, there is no direct evidence in the material record of the Thames Valley to indicate the survival of a residual Romano-British population through the 5th century, either at Dorchester or elsewhere. The objects recovered archaeologically in mid to late 5th-century contexts, usually from graves, are very largely of Anglo-Saxon character. When Roman finds do occur in such graves they are not generally explained in terms of direct links between the people with whom they are buried and earlier generations of Romano-British inhabitants of the same area. However, the numbers of 'Anglo-Saxon' burials, identified as such on the basis of associated grave goods, which can be assigned to the first half of the 5th century are very small, so small that Tania Dickinson (1976, I 423) considered them 'not representative' of the likely scale of immigration at this stage. However that may be, the earliest dated graves in most cemeteries belong to the second half of the century, and even these are few in number as a proportion of the total cemetery populations. In her survey of the Upper Thames region Dickinson (ibid., 379) identifies as many as 22 sites (not all strictly within the valley) with burials certainly dated to the 5th century. In most cases no more than five dated 5th-century burials are involved; there are 6 at Fairford and 10 at Long Wittenham I, while Abingdon is exceptional with more than 25 burials assigned to the 5th century. In all cases it is possible that some of the undated burials and those only assigned a broad late 5th- to 6th-century date range could also have belonged to the early phase. However, many of the burials assigned a mid 5th- to 6th-century date range are so dated on the basis of associated objects with equally broadly-defined chronological ranges and rarely on the basis of artefacts which can be confidently placed in the 5th century and not later. Even if all of the dated 5th-century burials (and some others) represent Germanic immigrants into the region at this time, it is hard to see how many of them can have sustained viable agricultural communities, unless they were accompanied by significant numbers of individuals who are not 'culturally defined' in the burial record. Despite the likelihood of population decline in the later 4th and particularly the 5th century it seems that the majority of the inhabitants of the region must have been from the residual Romano-British communities, and for Surrey Poulton (1987) has argued that the distribution of early Anglo-Saxon evidence suggests survival of a substantial Romano-British population. However, this leaves as a major problem the apparently total demise of late Roman material culture, which at the same time enhanced the daily life of the people and provides archaeologists with the means of dating the contexts from which it is derived.

With regard to the main categories of relevant material, the cessation of coin supply is explained by external factors discussed above (and see also Chapter 6). Personal items of metal and other materials are relatively scarce by the end of the 4th century and few such pieces make their way, for example, into graves where they could serve to help date cemetery sequences. Without the underpinning of the dating framework provided by coins we have no understanding of possible chronological developments in regional pottery assemblages after *c* AD 400. Some production in southern England has been assigned to the early 5th century (Lyne 1994) and a group of distinctive dishes with bosses is potentially of comparable character. Interestingly, the distribution of the latter group is tightly concentrated in the area between Frilford and Dorchester, precisely that part of the valley with the closest correlation between latest Roman and earliest Saxon settlement and cemeteries. Such material is relatively scarce, however, and it is unlikely to be representative of contemporary production on a much larger scale but of less distinctive character. A recent attempt to explain the lack of demonstrably 5th-century Roman pottery in Britain draws a parallel with the early to mid 3rd century 'stagnation in material culture' and links this to an absence of contemporary coin supply (Fulford 2004, 322), an argument closely reminiscent of the cycle of 'log' and 'lag' phases in ceramic output proposed and discussed some years ago by Going (1992). If it is accepted, this argument could allow the survival of a substantial Romano-British population, at least in the first half of the 5th century. As it happens, the evidence of cemeteries such as Queenford Farm appears to support just such a possibility.

The absolute scarcity of 5th-century burials with 'Anglo-Saxon' grave goods in the valley has already been mentioned, although it is notable that in comparison with many other parts of the country, except those eastern parts likely to have seen the very earliest settlement, they are still relatively well-represented. 'Anglo-Saxon' identity as defined by grave goods is more firmly established in the 6th century, and recognisably non-Roman structure types are now seen in settlements, but how far were the people different? We have already seen that burial practice was probably one of the most conservative areas of rural society in the early Roman period. At the end of the Roman period inhumation was the majority rite, but cremation was not unknown. Broadly this is the pattern that prevails in the early Saxon period. The high proportion of cremations at Saxton Road, Abingdon is exceptional (Fig. 4.19), and probably reflects a particular characteristic of part of the community using that cemetery, but late Roman and early Saxon inhumations are of very similar character, except that the latter contain more grave goods. The unaccompanied burials of sites such as Berinsfield are completely indistinguishable from comparable late Roman burials (not least in their location in relation to Romano-British field system ditches, seen so many times in the late Roman cemeteries of the region). This has resulted, unsurprisingly, in their
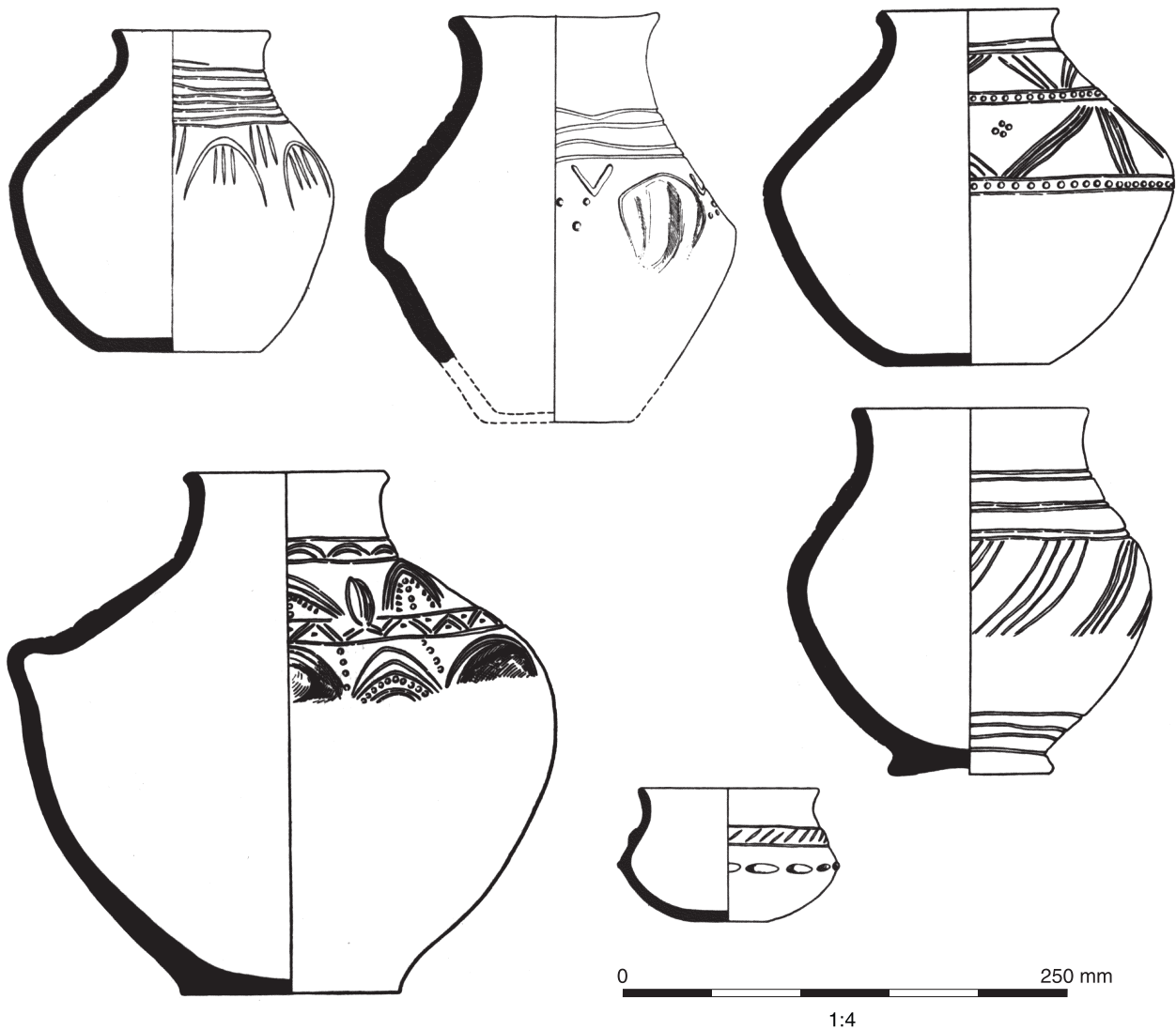
Fig. 4.19   Early Anglo-Saxon pottery from the cemetery at Saxton Road, Abingdon

interpretation as potentially representing a Romano-British component in the population.

Nevertheless, if there was considerable overlap in burial rites between 'late Roman' and 'early Saxon' communities, there is little indication of physical use of the same cemetery locations. The early burials at Dorchester are a probable example of this, but their contexts are very poorly understood. The only certain example is at Frilford, where late Roman and early Saxon burials were both adjacent and in some cases physically superimposed on different alignments, although the details are obscure (eg Bradford and Goodchild 1939, 65, see also Akerman 1867; Rolleston 1869; 1880; Evans 1897; Buxton 1921). What is clear is that some of the late Roman burials are very late indeed and must be of 5th-century date. Equally, one of the five 5th-century Saxon burials is dated to the first half of the century by Dickinson. It is therefore possible that continuity of use of this cemetery was chronological

as well as spatial. It is perhaps surprising that there is not more evidence for such a sequence of events. What are the factors that would have encouraged such continuity here rather than at other sites? The lack of other examples (Cassington and Pangbourne are other sites where this pattern might have been followed; Dickinson 1976, I 409) must be significant. The discontinuity of location of corresponding settlement sites is notable but less extreme (there are examples of continuity of settlement location, at least, at Yarnton and particularly at Barton Court Farm) – but its meaning is less certain.

The 5th-century finds from the valley include several notable pieces (Fig. 4.20). Amongst the earliest and most unusual are a tutulus brooch from Abingdon, a proto cruciform brooch from Dorchester and a supporting arm brooch from Berinsfield, all dated to the first half of the 5th century. Berinsfield also produced an equal-armed brooch of the later 5th century, but it is unclear if
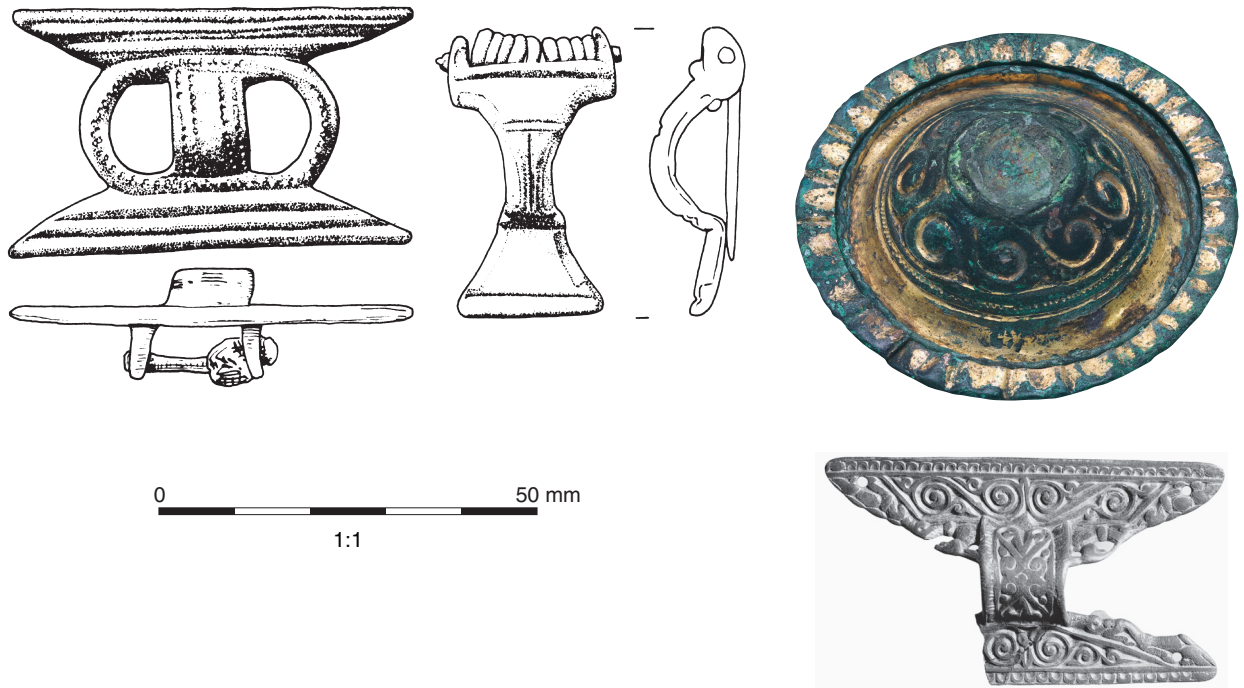
Fig. 4.20   *Mid 5th-century Anglo-Saxon brooches. Above left, equal armed brooch from Berinsfield; above centre, Stützarmfibel from Berinsfield; above right, tutulus brooch from Saxton Road, Abingdon; below, silver equal armed brooch from Sutton Courtenay*

Fig. 4.21 *The Anglo-Saxon cemetery at Wally Corner, Berinsfield under excavation in 1974*

this should be seen as an imported piece, like those just mentioned, or as an insular type (Boyle *et al*. 1995, 81-2). Equal-armed brooches are relatively rare (another one comes from Abingdon), but a particularly striking (and very well-worn) example was found in the settlement site at Sutton Courtenay (Leeds 1923, 171, fig. 11). This piece was most unusual in being made of silver rather than copper alloy, a characteristic that perhaps suggests some links to jewellery in the 'quoit brooch style', the significance of which has been much debated (see Inker 2000; Suzuki 2000 for recent approaches). Some types of cruciform brooch also appear to be specifically 5th-century rather than later. In general, however, the Upper Thames cemetery groups are dominated by circular brooch forms, the earliest of which are applied saucer brooches, some types of which can be assigned to the first half of the 5th century, like the example from Dorchester. The earliest cast saucer types are dated to the second half of the century, but most belong to the 6th century. Disc brooches, the most common individual type from the Upper Thames, appear by the mid 5th century, and possibly a little earlier. By the later 5th century, if not before, brooches of these types were almost certainly being produced in the Upper Thames and some examples of this production seem to have found their way to sites outside the valley. Such production and distribution suggests a well-established network, at least of social relations, between communities or powerful individuals in the valley and those outside.

The associations of the earliest Anglo-Saxon metalwork have been seen by many commentators as consistent with Saxon origins for the earliest settlers of the Upper Thames, although by the later part of the 5th century most objects from the cemeteries in the valley were probably produced in England, some in the region itself (Dickinson 1976, I 412-3, 429). The closest contacts, on the basis of style associations, were with Essex, West Kent, Surrey and Sussex (ibid., 416). This represents a reconfiguration of lines of contact seen in the late Roman period, and may imply a distinct change from earlier 5th-century arrangements in which, it has been suggested, Cirencester remained a focus, albeit remote, for activity located in the Dorchester area.

THE ANGLO-SAXON PERIOD

Population (Figs 4.21-4.22)

Estimates of population numbers remain little more than educated guesses for the Anglo-Saxon period. It is widely believed that the years following the end of the Roman administration in Britain saw a steep decline in population, though meaningful quantification is impossible and the causes remain a matter of speculation. Indications of a retrenchment of cultivation (see Chapter 2, above) may be amongst the best evidence of this trend. Our most informative source of evidence for this period is the

number of people who were buried at the excavated cemeteries (listed in the Appendix to this volume; Fig. 4.21). Any attempt to use such numbers as indicators of population size must take account of the fact that almost all cemeteries were incompletely preserved and excavated, and some categories of individuals (such as infants and young children) seem to be under-represented. However, if the excavators' estimates of original totals of burials are reliable, these figures at least provide minimum numbers for local populations. Inevitably the evidence is somewhat impressionistic, but there is simply no other source of data for forming even a very generalised view of the level of population in the region at this time. There is a surprising degree of consistency when the figures for the best-recorded sites are reviewed. The largest known cemeteries in the region are likely to have been used for some 150-250 burials between the mid 5th and the late 6th/early 7th century, with an apparent peak in the early 6th century. Using a rough working estimate of a 30-year generation span, and assuming a steady burial rate over this period (probably wrongly, but there is insufficient information to do otherwise), we might suggest that these cemeteries were serving local communities of around 30-40 people per generation (Boyle *et al*. 1995, 116). This might represent anything between 6 and 10 households, if the household size estimates of 4-5 people used for calculating Domesday population levels can be applied to early Saxon populations (for Domesday calculations, see Darby 1977, 86-7; see Härke 1997, 138-42 for earlier populations, for which larger household sizes, perhaps up to 9-12 persons, may be more appropriate).

How large were the catchment areas for each of these cemeteries? We might, for example, look at the case of Abingdon, since the town has seen a considerable amount of excavation over the last 30 years, providing both positive and negative evidence for Anglo-Saxon settlement (see Fig. 3.23 for locations of principal sites). Saxton Road, which was discovered in the 1930s, remains the only large Anglo-Saxon burial ground known in the area. Elsewhere some 11 burials have been identified within the Barton Court Farm/Barrow Hills complex, 2-3 km north-east of the cemetery (Chambers and McAdam 2007, table 7.3), and stray finds of beads and brooches suggest perhaps small numbers of other burials elsewhere. Outside Abingdon itself, the nearest known cemeteries are located at Frilford and Sutton Courtenay. It remains possible that a major Anglo-Saxon cemetery of this period could have been destroyed without record in gravel quarrying or building, or that one awaits discovery. Given the level of antiquarian and archaeological interest and expertise in the area during the 19th and earlier 20th centuries, however, it seems unlikely that a major cemetery would have been completely destroyed without record. On current evidence, there are at least grounds for thinking that a large number, if not the majority, of late 5th- and
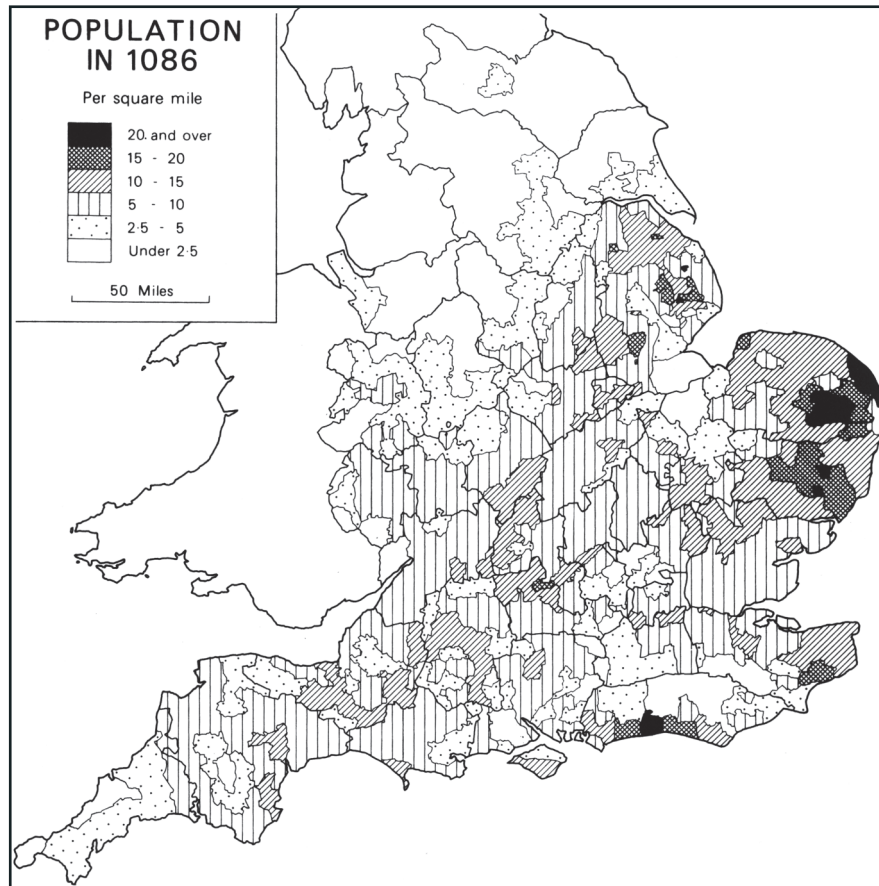
Fig. 4.22 *Domesday population distribution in the study area*

6th-century inhabitants of the Abingdon area were indeed buried at Saxton Road. Could this suggest that the Abingdon area was a focus of occupation in the 5th and 6th centuries, with a population perhaps of the order of 30-40 people, or 6-10 households, per generation? Similar results have been suggested by other researchers, and the general view appears to be that archaeological evidence suggests local communities of somewhere between 12 and 50 people, rarely as many as 100, comprising a small number of households made up of parents, children and unfree or semi-free dependants (Härke 1997, 140-41).

During the 7th century, the evidence suggests that cemeteries were, on the whole, distinctly smaller. Moreover, not only are 7th-century cemeteries smaller, but fewer of them are known. At a national level Sam Lucy notes 469 known sites of the 5th and 6th centuries, compared with 261 of the late 6th century and later (2000, 149). Within the Upper Thames Valley, Tania Dickinson notes a slight decrease in the numbers of known cemeteries for this period (1976, I 437, tables 14-15). This undoubtedly reflects the fact that smaller cemeteries with fewer accompanied burials are more likely to have been destroyed unrecorded, or not to have

been identified as Anglo-Saxon (Blair 2005, 244 and n 273). However, such evidence might also be indicating the likelihood that population growth was by no means consistent in the region over the 6th and 7th centuries. On present evidence, there was a peak in the rate of burial at the largest regional cemeteries in the first half of the 6th century (Dickinson 1976 I, 425), and population growth during the 7th century may have been temporarily checked by events such as the plague that affected the country for some decades after 664 (Blair 2005, 79).

At present, we can do little more than speculate that there was slow overall increase in population over the ensuing 300 years. Evidence for the subdivision of estates and intensification of agriculture (see Chapters 2 and 3, above) would be consistent with the pressures of a rising population, but there is at present relatively little direct archaeological or historical evidence for actual numbers of people. One indicator may be a site such as the cemetery at Chimney, Oxon (see Chapter 5, below), which was intensively used for burial at some point between the 10th and mid 12th centuries (radiocarbon date ranges from dated burials). Chimney was a satellite cemetery of Bampton minster, situated on land

acquired by the minster in the 950s (Blair 2005, 466-7). The intensive use of this rural burial site for hundreds, if not thousands, of burials provides a striking contrast with the numbers buried in the 5th- to 7th-century cemeteries reviewed above. Similar evidence for intensive use of burial grounds for large numbers of burials is typical, too, of the evolving minster and urban cemeteries of the late Saxon period (see Chapter 5, below; also Blair 2005, 242-3 n 267).

At the very end of the Anglo-Saxon period, Domesday Book provides a unique insight into the levels of population and agricultural exploitation that had been achieved by the late 11th century. Estimates of the population of England at this time vary between 1.5 million (Darby 1977, 91) and 2.2-2.5 million (Dyer 2003, 95). Figure 4.22 (from Darby 1977 fig. 34) shows the distribution of recorded population in the study area in 1086 and Figure 3.37 shows the distribution of Domesday manors in the Thames Valley region. Throughout much of the Thames Valley there were somewhere between 5 and 15 recorded people per square mile, representing perhaps between 20 and 75 individuals per square mile in total if the numbers of recorded people are multiplied by 4 or 5 to account for unrecorded household members (Darby 1977, 92). What is also interesting, however, is the degree of variability in population levels within the valley. Some areas, notably north Wiltshire, the Chilterns in south Buckinghamshire, much of east Berkshire, and south-west Surrey are sparsely or very sparsely populated. By contrast, the Ock Valley between the Thames and the Berkshire Downs, the Thame Valley, the area between Staines and Shepperton, and parts of the Gloucestershire Thames Valley had relatively high population levels. The area between Abingdon and Long Wittenham has one of the highest population densities in the country, with 15-20 recorded people (perhaps 60-100 in total) per square mile. Perhaps surprisingly, Domesday population densities often correlate strikingly well with Tania Dickinson's maps of early Saxon cemeteries, although this appears not to be the case in Surrey.

Domesday also offers us information at the 'micro' level of the individual estate. How many people, for example, might have been living on the manors of Yarnton, Cassington and Worton (see Chapter 3, above) by the end of the Anglo-Saxon period? In 1086 there were two separate holdings at Yarnton, one of 9.5 hides, and the other of 0.5 hide (Munby 2004, 216-17). In combination, a total of 22 villagers and 4 bordars are recorded, but there would have been others (children, wives, perhaps servants, perhaps specialists such as a herdsman or a priest) who were not recorded. Applying the standard multipliers of 4, 4.5 or 5 to allow for such people would suggest that there were perhaps some 100-130 peasants in all, perhaps belonging to some 25 households. At Worton, Domesday records 8 villagers and 5 bordars, perhaps some 50-60

peasants in a dozen households, and at Cassington, there were 4 villagers and a bordar, suggesting perhaps some 20-25 peasants in 4 or 5 households. At the Middle Thames Chiltern-edge estates of the Dorney/Eton area (see Chapter 3, above), Domesday Book records one villager for Boveney, 24 for Taplow, 11 each for Dorney and Hitcham, 37 for Burnham, 26 for Upton and 21 for Eton (Munby 2002, 19).

Osteological evidence

Whilst material remains offer a wealth of insights into the lives of the Anglo-Saxons of the Thames Valley, their skeletons remain the most direct and tangible source of evidence for the people themselves, providing information on questions such as longevity, age distributions within society, lifestyle, physical appearance, health and disease. Physical characteristics, such as head shape and stature, have also been used historically to address the vexed question of ethnicity of the early medieval people of England. Although these approaches have been heavily criticised in recent years, arguments based on stature are still used by some scholars in discussions of ethnicity.

The detailed study of human remains from Anglo-Saxon cemeteries is a relatively recent development and most reports on older excavations contain little useful information on this subject. Information on the physical characteristics of the people is therefore based on data from a fairly limited number of more recently excavated and published cemeteries. If human bone from inhumations is poorly recorded, however, analysis of cremated bone is non-existent, with the exception of the four cremation deposits found at Berinsfield (Boyle *et al*. 1995, 108-9). The (relatively small) total numbers of burials known from the recently recorded cemeteries (see above) make it difficult to draw wide-ranging inferences, however.

Anglo-Saxon skeletal assemblages are generally noted for a relative dearth of subadults (Crawford 1999; Buckberry 2000)and the Thames Valley appears to conform to this pattern. Subadults formed *c* 30-34% of the total burial population in the early and middle Saxon periods. Neonates and infants are conspicuous by their absence, given the high infant mortality rates predicted for pre-modern societies. As in the Roman period, either taphonomic processes or burial practices (or a combination of both) may account in part for this under-representation in the archaeological record. Subadult bones are very vulnerable to chemical and mechanical destruction in the buried environment, particularly if placed in very shallow graves. Being small and relatively amorphous, infant burials are also easily overlooked by excavators. Earlier archaeologists had a tendency to ignore such skeletons, often only noting those newborns that were buried with their mothers (either still *in utero* or placed beside their mother in the grave). Buckberry (2000)

noted that the proportion of subadults recorded in Anglo-Saxon assemblages has increased consistently in recent decades, arguing growing awareness of their importance in palaeopathology and the interpretation of funerary traditions. Despite all these factors, however, it is entirely possible that the typical late Roman practice of disposal of infant remains within the settlement was also followed in the early Saxon period and results in the relative scarcity of children aged less than 3 years in the known sites.

The relatively high proportion of the population in the 3-5 year old category at 'late Roman' Queenford Farm was not reflected in the nearby (and potentially contemporary) early Anglo-Saxon cemetery at Berinsfield. The anomalous nature of the Queenford Farm evidence (see above) may make it invalid for purposes of comparison, however, although it may nevertheless be the case that there were differences between perceptions of early childhood in the late Roman and early Saxon periods. The age-at-death data for the early, middle and late Anglo-Saxon periods show, however, that a surprisingly high proportion of the population died as older children (6-12 years) and as adolescents. In most societies, these age categories tend to be less well represented in cemetery groups, having survived the most vulnerable years of infancy, weaning and early exposure to infectious diseases. Crawford (1999) has observed that from approximately 5 years children were expected to assume considerable responsibilities in everyday life, both in terms of caring for themselves and contributing economically to the family group. It is possible that this lack of supervision resulted in a higher number of deaths than is commonly expected in older childhood. There is little evidence from grave goods, however, that this might have been a significant threshold – at Berinsfield, for example, children from the age of 1 upwards were regularly accompanied by grave goods. It is possible that the occurrence of knives (and the occasional spear, one each associated with children of 4, 9 and 12 years of age, all dated to the 6th century) with a majority of the children from the age of 4 upwards was considered important (Boyle *et al.*1995, 129-132).

The early Anglo-Saxon cemeteries overall show a slight, but not particularly significant preponderance of females. The principal exception to this is Abingdon Saxton Road, with 44 male, 32 female and 4 unsexed adult inhumations (Harman 1995, 108). It is unclear if the unusually early chronological emphasis of this cemetery (where burial started in about the mid 5th century) had any bearing on this, but the sample may be too small for the variation to be meaningful. Males were increasingly predominant in the middle and late Anglo-Saxon periods, but this is explained by the likely specific monastic nature of the burial groups from Christ Church, Oxford which heavily skew the relatively small sample. The same bias may have had an effect on the data for age, which suggest increased longevity

in relation to the early Saxon period, which itself shows a notable reduction in longevity of populations in comparison with the late Roman period. In the cemeteries of Abingdon, Butler's Field and Berinsfield the percentage of the population living to more than *c* 30 years of age (including un-aged 'adults' in this figure) was 34%, 41% and 45% respectively. This compares with a figure of *c* 58% for the sample of late Roman Oxfordshire sites mentioned above (Booth 2001, 30-31, excluding the neonates from the settlement context at Barton Court Farm). The reasons for this quite marked difference are not clear. The variation between the individual Saxon cemeteries is also notable, though again not easily explained. At Abingdon, for example, a high proportion of the males died between the ages of 20 and 30. Relatively high female mortality in this age range, also seen here, is usually associated with difficulties in childbirth and is reasonably typical, but the male pattern is notable, and contrasts with the evidence from Berinsfield and Butler's Field. Harman (1995, 108) notes that the difference between late Roman and early Anglo-Saxon female mortality patterns was not so marked, but that in the later period no more than one in eight adult men survived beyond the age of about 45. This assessment was based on the Berinsfield and Abingdon assemblages, however; at Butler's Field the representation of older males was more nearly comparable to that of females (Harman 1998, 52).

Stature

There is some evidence for temporal changes in mean adult stature of both males and females in the Thames Valley sample. From the late Roman to the early Anglo-Saxon periods there was an increase in mean male stature from *c* 1.69 m (5ft 6$\frac{1}{2}$in) to 1.72 m (5ft 8in), and in mean female stature from *c* 1.59 m (5ft 2$\frac{1}{2}$in) to *c* 1.61 m (5ft 3$\frac{1}{2}$in). In terms of individual communities, the mean heights of 24 adult men and 17 adult women from the 5th- to 7th-century cemetery at Berinsfield (Oxon) were 1.73 m and 1.62 m respectively (Harman 1995, 107), and for 29 men and 17 women at the contemporary cemetery at Abingdon the average figures were almost identical, 1.73 m and 1.61 m respectively (ibid, 108). In the rather larger cemetery population at Butler's Field, Lechlade (Glos) the comparable figures were 1.70 m and 1.61 m (Harman 1998, 44). Overall, therefore, while the figures for Berinsfield and Abingdon suggest that the 'Anglo-Saxon' populations were on average slightly taller than the Romano-British ones, the males in the latter and at Butler's Field were almost the same height, though the Butler's Field females were slightly taller than their Romano-British counterparts. There was clearly some (slight) variation of average height from community to community amongst the Romano-British population – the same may be expected for the Saxon period, for which there are fewer sites with recorded data.

Average stature in the middle Anglo-Saxon period was almost identical to that for the early period, with male stature at *c* 1.73 m and female stature *c* 1.62 m. However, there is a reversal of this trend in the late Anglo-Saxon period, with the mean stature of both sexes falling by more than 20 mm. This general pattern was also observed by Nelson (1985) in his synthesis of early medieval sites elsewhere in England. It is impossible to unpick the extent to which the increase in mean adult stature in the early Anglo-Saxon period reflects the invasion of large numbers of taller Germanic peoples, and the extent to which social changes of the period affected the health of an essentially indigenous population.

The difference between mean male and female stature changed only very slightly over time, from *c* 100 mm in the late Roman period, to 110 mm in the early Anglo-Saxon period and around 105 mm in the middle and late periods. These sexual differences in stature may indicate the relative status of males and females in society, suggesting differential access to higher quality food (such as meat) and/or health care. At Berinsfield, however, stable isotope analysis showed that there was no significant dietary distinction between men and women (Privat *et al*. 2002, 788). Alternatively and more controversially, the diamorphic difference between statures in the early Anglo-Saxon period may suggest to some the inbreeding of taller Germanic males with shorter Romano-British females, but the variation outlined above does not seem sufficiently marked to allow the ready identification of distinct ethnic components on the basis of height alone.

Health

The evidence for decreased longevity in the early Anglo-Saxon population (in comparison with the late Roman period) is to some extent counterbalanced by some evidence for apparently better health. It may be argued that the demise of urban centres and the diminution of long-distance contacts characteristic of the Roman era, and the relative isolation and self-sufficiency of extended family groups in rural settlements in the early Anglo-Saxon period, could have reduced exposure to infectious disease. The relatively simple political structure of the time may also have reduced the amount of tax or tribute required from each family group relative to earlier and later periods, with the consequence that a higher proportion of agricultural produce could have been devoted directly to the needs of the household. These diverse sociopolitical factors may underlie the indications that the early Anglo-Saxon population was relatively healthy, borne out by the fairly low level of osteological evidence for deficiency diseases.

Dental health was certainly better than in the late Roman period. While there is again some variability in the evidence from the three main cemeteries (for example dental health was consistently less good at Abingdon than at Berinsfield), in all cases the incidence of caries and abscesses and of tooth loss was significantly lower than in the late Roman sample (Harman 1995, 108; 1998, 45). A low incidence of *cribra orbitalia* (only four cases out of *c* 219 burials at Butler's Field, for example) may also reflect generally good levels of nutrition, although 2 instances out of only 17 7th-century burials at Didcot Power Station suggest that there was considerable variability between communities in this respect (Boyle *et al*. 1995, 232). Degenerative diseases such as osteoarthritis were widespread, and at Berinsfield a single woman was the only individual over the age of 35 to show no sign of spinal degeneration, although many of the other individuals were only slightly affected (Harman 1995, 107). A variety of vertebral anomalies was noted at Butler's Field, some of which could have been inherited. Both here and at Berinsfield the occasional clustering of such characteristics in the cemetery suggested that, in some cases at least, groups of related individuals were buried close together.

More extreme cases of disease occurred occasionally. A particularly striking instance of this was seen at Berinsfield, where an adult had her back permanently bent at a right-angle, perhaps indicating healed tuberculosis (Harman 1995, 108). This is paralleled in a late Roman example (also female) from nearby Queenford Farm, identified as spinal tuberculosis (Pott's disease) (Harman *et al*. 1981, 156-7).

Evidence for injury, as in the Roman period, is likely to relate mainly to accidents, but there are exceptions. The cause of fractures is not generally known, but accident is usually most likely, as in the case of the five possible fractures noted in males at Berinsfield (including three of the clavicle and one of the left tibia), while a single female had an ossified haematoma (blood clot) that may be a result of trauma. Fractures of limbs and of the clavicle were also recorded at Butler's Field, notably more commonly in men but not confined to them. In addition, six males at Butler's Field had head injuries. In three cases the injuries could have resulted from accidents, but the other three all involved cuts to the skull, one of which was certainly fatal (Harman 1998, 45). The size of the cuts suggests sword wounds. More ambiguous is the case of a young male (20-30 years) from the 5th- to 6th-century cemetery at Harwell, just on the edge of the valley, who was buried with a spearhead embedded in his chest in a position consistent with it having passed through the heart. The excavator commented that 'here is a man killed by an Anglo-Saxon spear and buried in an Anglo-Saxon cemetery' (Brown 1967, 74). While the evidence might support the view that inter-community conflict was not necessarily based on ethnic lines, an alternative possibility is that the spear was placed post mortem, either as a way of marking the grave or to prevent the 'return' of the individual concerned.

In terms of later developments the sample size is much more limited. The reduction in mean adult stature in the late Saxon period may suggest a worsening in the general health of the population. This could be related to broader patterns of social transformation as English society developed in complexity in the centuries preceding the Norman invasion. One consequence of this may have been the development of a peasant class increasingly burdened with taxes and obligations to its overlords, to the extent that its standard of subsistence was significantly reduced. This might be investigated in future, perhaps, by comparing burials from rural cemeteries such as Chimney (possibly reserved for the poor), or execution cemeteries such as Staines, with the charcoal or stone-lined burials from urban minster sites, which are likely to be those of more privileged individuals (see Chapter 5, below).

Culture and identity in the 6th and 7th centuries

Grave goods and ethnicity

The study of grave goods as indicators of cultural influence, chronology, ethnicity, social status and belief was one of the main preoccupations of the first Anglo-Saxon archaeologists, and remains an active, if highly specialised, field of research today. There is an extensive literature on the subject, and a comprehensive account of the many possible interpretations of evidence from the study area is beyond the scope of the present review. A review of local burial practices can be found in Chapter 5, below; the present section will concentrate on how the material culture associated with burials may reflect changing perceptions of ethnicity and personal identity in the early and mid Saxon period.

The Thames gravel terraces have revealed very large numbers of cemeteries of this period (see Chapter 3, above, and the Appendix, below). The area is noted for a concentration of objects traditionally associated with Saxon (rather than Anglian or Jutish) material culture, and has long been regarded as one of the main centres of early Saxon migration and settlement. Very large numbers of grave goods of this period have been collected from the burial sites of the region. Unfortunately, however, many of the cemeteries were discovered by chance during 19th- and early 20th-century quarrying and building, and only a few (mostly late 20th-century discoveries) have been recorded in sufficient detail to support analysis of grave good deposition in relation to other variables such as age and sex and the layout of the cemetery. The following account therefore draws mainly on the results from modern excavations, with additional comparative information from the more fully recorded of the older sites as available.
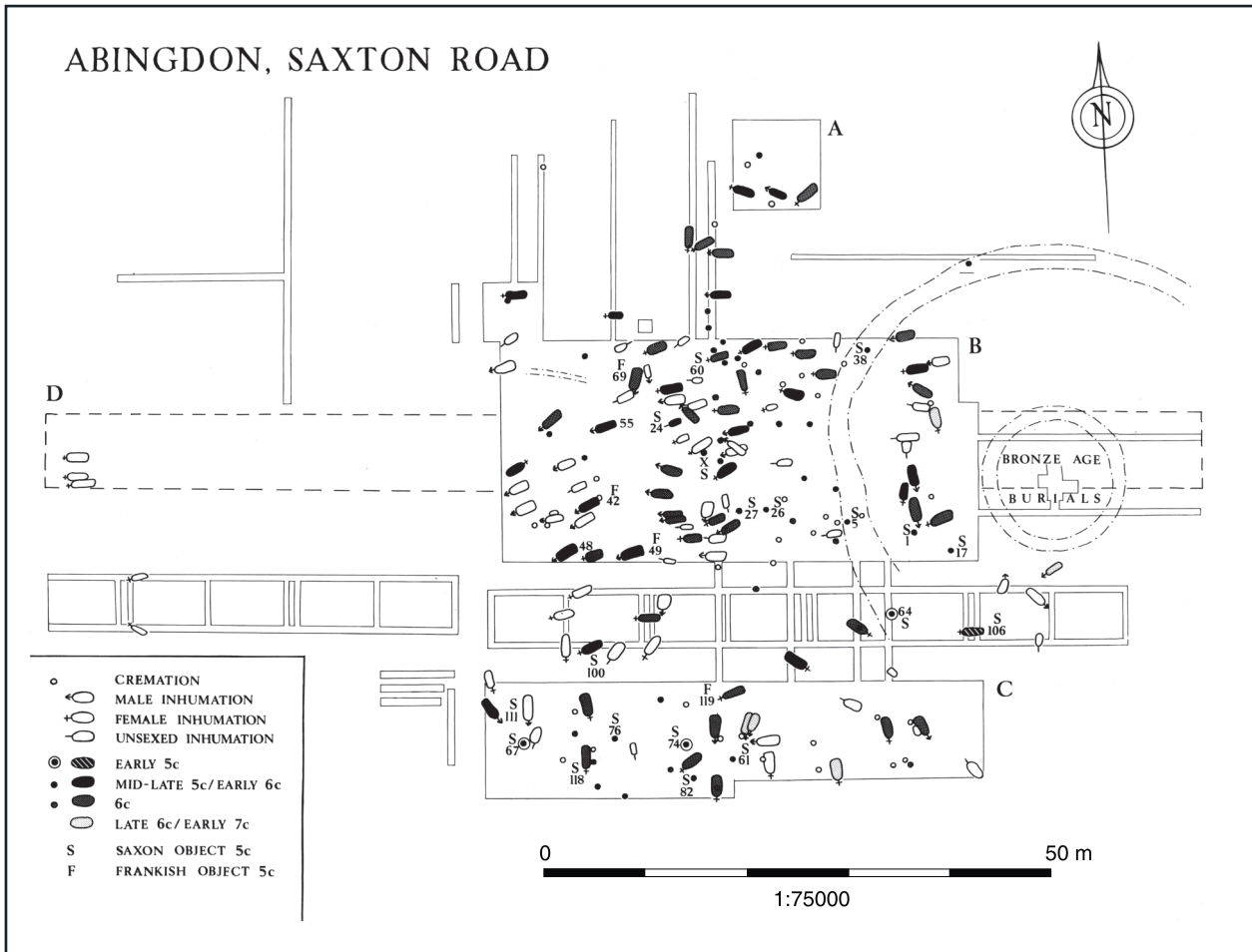
Cremation and inhumation; a cultural indicator? (Fig. 4.23)

The study area is notable for the continuation of both cremation and inhumation burial in mixed rite cemeteries throughout the 6th century. Inhumation burials greatly outnumber cremations in the region, however. A far higher proportion of cremation burials are likely to have been destroyed by medieval ploughing and more recent disturbances, and significant numbers seem to have been lost since excavation. Nevertheless, the evidence suggests that cremation was essentially a minority rite even if accurate quantification is impossible. The highest proportion was at Abingdon Saxton Road, where 128 inhumations and 99 cremations of the 5th and 6th centuries were found (Fig. 4.23; Leeds and Harden 1936; dated plan from Hawkes 1986, fig. 8). Elsewhere relatively high proportions of cremations seem to have been present at Long Wittenham, Brighthampton, Frilford, Reading and Wallingford. Although probably very much in decline, the cremation rite continued to be practised in some places during the 6th century, and is evident in the 7th century at sites such as Asthall Barrow, probably Yelford, and Long Hanborough City Farm, where three cremations were among five burials set out across Bronze Age barrows.

The evidence from Abingdon Saxton Road suggests the presence of people with markedly different attitudes about the appropriate treatment of the dead. This implies that the social mix at the time was more complex than a simple opposition of homogeneous populations of native sub-Roman British and incoming continental Saxons, since both the cremation and inhumation rites were practised within both communities. However, inhuming and cremating populations used the same cemeteries with no evidence for segregation into separate areas, which suggests that there was not a huge social gulf between them in life. Practical difficulties such as lack of the necessary skills or materials to carry out cremation within a community may have been as influential as cult differences in the predominance of inhumation. However, it is seems possible that the contrast in burial rite, particularly in the 5th century, may reflect households with different traditions living in the same neighbourhood. What is more intriguing is the evidence from Long Hanborough City Farm, for both cremations and inhumations in what would appear to be a single small 'family' burial ground of the 7th century.

Over time, cremation seems to have dwindled to a minority rite, before it was completely abandoned in the 7th century. The evidence from

Fig. 4.23 (opposite) Mixed rite cemeteries with cremations and inhumations. (Above) plan of Abingdon Saxton Road as amended by Sonia Hawkes (1986, fig. 8). (Below) a selection of grave goods from Wallingford: (clockwise from top left) an urn, an iron pin, an iron strike-a-light, an iron knife and a pair of copper alloy small-long brooches

ABINGDON, SAXTON ROAD

CREMATION
MALE INHUMATION
FEMALE INHUMATION
UNSEXED INHUMATION
EARLY 5c
MID-LATE 5c/EARLY 6c
6c
LATE 6c/EARLY 7c
S   SAXON OBJECT 5c
F   FRANKISH OBJECT 5c

0   50 m

1:75000

WALLINGFORD

Clockwise from top left: Lechlade Butler's Field: grave 92 with two spearheads, the central boss and silvered studs from a shield (above) and a copper alloy cauldron (Gotlandkessel) (below); Berinsfield: grave 24 with shield boss and spearhead; grave 53 spearhead, knife, and shield boss, grip and studs; grave 51 with spear and shield boss; grave 29 with copper-bound wooden 'bucket' vessel; grave 28 as excavated, with detail of his two spearheads, shield boss, grip and studs, two knives and a bead

Abingdon Saxton Road suggests that here cremation was the dominant rite in the 5th century, but that inhumation became dominant during the 6th and early 7th centuries. At Lechlade Butler's Field, a number of cremations appeared to have been disturbed when inhumation graves were later dug over them.

Grave goods in inhumation burials in the 6th century
Men (Fig. 4.24)
In general, men were buried with a restricted suite of grave goods, principally weapons, which are the only common grave good types that appear to be virtually exclusive to the burials of men and boys (see Härke 1997, 132-3 for a recent discussion of apparent anomalies). The deposition of weapons in large numbers of men's graves is remarkably consistent across the study area, and is widely believed to indicate important aspects of status including ethnicity and social rank. Most commentators have seen the presence, absence and type of weapons as marking personal identity and status in some form, and some have associated this with Anglo-Saxon law codes that link the right to carry weapons with legally free status (see Härke 1997, 142-6 for a recent summary of the arguments). Heinrich Härke has argued that weapon burial was used as an ethnic marker, rather than a marker of social status, by Germanic immigrants and their descendants during the 5th and 6th centuries (1997, 149-50). He suggests that men with weapons are Germanic, or of Germanic descent, while those without may be the native Romano-British people, whose burial rites did not include the deposition of weapons. Härke's analysis of evidence from 47 cemeteries at a national level (ibid., table 5-6) suggests that roughly half (52%) of men in cemeteries of the 6th century were buried without weapons; of the remainder, the great majority (42%) had shields and/or spears, and a small group (6%) had less common, and probably more prestigious, weapons such as axes, seaxes and swords. Interestingly, Härke's implication (1995, 69) that the evidence of weapon burials at Berinsfield suggested a status 'threshold' for males around the age of 30, with older men less likely to carry weapons and perhaps therefore of lower status, seems to be borne out by the stable isotope evidence from the site which shows differences in dietary patterns between younger and older adult males. The diet of the former group contained a higher proportion of sheep- and cattle-derived meat protein, while that of the older men was characterised by 'an increased consumption of lower status foods (freshwater animals or pork)' (Privat *et al.* 2002, 788).

Most weapon burials in the Thames Valley include spears and shields in varying combinations, and occasionally rarer types such as swords and seaxes. While swords and seaxes are generally

Fig. 4.24 Male 6th-century weapon burials

associated by most commentators with burials of the social elite, no clear meaning, except perhaps more minor variations in personal status, can be discerned in the deposition of spears and shields singly, multiply, or in combination. The significance of other objects found with men's burials is unclear. The very common knives may have been personal possessions, and belt fittings such as buckles and buckle plates, which range from very simple to very elaborate in form, were probably fastening clothes and belts. Elaborate buckles may reflect high personal status, as in the case of the buckles from the barrow burial at Taplow, and from grave 67 at Watchfield (see Figs 7.11 and 7.14). Men's graves also occasionally contain metal or metal-bound vessels such as cauldrons and 'buckets' (see Cook 2004 for a corpus of Anglo-Saxon 'buckets' including numerous examples from the study area). These are often, although not exclusively, found with burials accompanied by numerous other grave goods, and some types of vessels, particularly imported vessels of cast bronze, were probably rare and restricted to the social elite (see Princely burials, Chapter 7, below). Their function remains unclear, but their general associations suggest that they may have been symbolic of feasting.

At Abingdon Saxton Road, weapons were found with 19 out of 41 individuals identified as adult men or adolescents; one adult man and one adolescent had swords, while the others had spears and shields in varying combinations. Spears were also found with 3 out of 37 children. At Berinsfield, 21 out of 30 males over 15 years of age had spears and shields, and spears were again found with 3 children (aged approximately 4, 9 and 11-12 years old). All males from 20-30 years of age at this site had weapons (Härke 1995, 69). At Lechlade, weapons were found with 21 men and adolescents out of 37 late 5th- or 6th-century individuals, but only 1 child had a spear. At Brighthampton, 12 adult males had weapons, 3 of them swords, while the most striking figures of all come from Long Wittenham, where 43 out of 59 men and young men had weapons, two of them swords, and no fewer than 8 out of 40 children had spears. This cemetery lies only 200-300 m west of the potential royal site identified from cropmarks (see Chapter 3, above), and it has been noted as the most 'military', with more burials of armed males than anywhere else in the Oxford region (Hawkes 1986, 89).

Women (Figs 4.25-4.26)
The range of grave goods found with burials of women is considerably wider. However, the presence of very similar types of jewellery in a large number of women's burials across the region has long been taken as meaning that costume (*Tracht*) and associated dress accessories were a key marker of women's status and identity during the 6th century (see Härke 1997, 132-3 for brooches in 'male' graves). At this time, the most characteristic elements of female burials in the study area are

pairs of similar brooches worn at the shoulders, probably fastening a dress or tunic, with strings of beads hanging between them. The round 'saucer' brooches that are characteristically found with burials in the Thames Valley can be associated with similar brooches found in the area between the Elbe and the Weser in north Germany, believed to be the region from which 'Saxons' were migrating to England (see, for example Hawkes 1986, 77-8; Myres 1989, 59-61). Together with similar correspondences in the style and decoration of cremation urns, these brooches have been regarded as key archaeological indicators of the continental origins of the Saxons in England.

Three round brooch types are particularly common within the study area: cast saucer brooches, applied saucer brooches and disc brooches. In her survey of grave goods from Upper Thames Valley cemeteries, Tania Dickinson studied 223 grave groups containing brooches (1976, I, table 1). This showed that 68% of the sample of 631 brooches were of these three types (25% cast saucer, 15% applied saucer, and 28% disc). The statistics also emphasise the prevalence of the habit of wearing brooches in pairs, with 120 of 157 cast saucer brooches, 66 of 94 applied saucer brooches and 128 of 179 disc brooches occurring in pairs, usually of the same type, but very occasionally paired with a brooch of a different form. Although characteristic of the Thames Valley, the same brooch types are also found in significant concentrations in the east and west midlands and east Kent (Lucy 2000, 135, fig. 5.6; for cast saucer brooches, see Dickinson 1993, fig. 1).

Long necklaces of amber and glass beads seem to have hung between the brooches as part of the costume. At Berinsfield, all but two of the burials with brooches also had beads, and all but two of the burials with beads had brooches. Other types of dress accessories, including buckles and belt fittings, rings and pins occur less frequently, and probably had a purely practical or decorative function. Knives are common in the graves of men, women and children and may have been personal tools. Many women's graves (roughly 25% at Berinsfield, for example) contained small tools such as tweezers and brush holders, thought to be part of toilet sets, and miscellaneous large rings, occasional Roman coins, and metal fragments, that appear to have been carried at the waist, suspended from a belt in bags. Toilet sets deposited with inhumations may have been functional personal possessions, but miniature cosmetic items, including tweezers, shears and combs are characteristically found with cremations, and the same symbolism may be reflected in both types of graves. Some of the objects found hanging from belts have been interpreted as keys, and may be symbolic of the woman's role as keeper of the keys of the household, and some items

may have been amulets (these are discussed in detail in Meaney 1981). Other miscellaneous metal bits and pieces may have been scrap collected to be melted down for re-use, although if this is true it raises interesting questions about why it was considered right to include such material in a grave assemblage. It is generally assumed that these objects had been collected by the women with whom they were buried, although there is no proof of this.

The meaning of grave goods in the 6th century
(Fig. 4.27)
Weapons and brooches are the most distinctive components of the graves of 6th-century men and women in the region. As has been noted above, the continental affinities of these grave goods have led to a general belief that they are evidence for the actual presence of immigrants, and for a continuing tradition of continental burial rites amongst immigrant families and their descendants. Moreover, the distribution patterns of particular types of objects, particularly female dress accessories, have been seen as marking the territories of different ethnic groups amongst continental immigrants, following Bede's classification of them as Angles, Saxons and Jutes (see Lucy 2000, 11-15 for a summary of the development of these ideas). It cannot be denied that there are very distinctive patterns in the distribution of some of these artefacts (such as sleeve-clasps and button brooches) but there are huge areas of overlap in others. Small-long brooches, for example, are strongly represented in middle Anglia, but are to be found in smaller numbers in almost all areas of early Anglo-Saxon settlement (including in the Thames Valley, where they account for 11% of Tania Dickinson's sample of 631 brooches (1976 I, table 1)). It seems very likely that such distributions are telling us as much about patterns of manufacture, trade and exchange as they are about the real or supposed ethnic origins of the women who wore them (Lucy 2000, 139, and figs 5.5-5.7 for artefact distributions; Dickinson 1993 for a discussion of saucer brooches).

Much work has been done since the 1970s on the ways in which grave goods may be representing other aspects of identity, particularly in relation to age- and gender-related status within the household and community. There is, for example, the distinct male/female dichotomy in grave good types (see above), more marked in inhumation than cremation graves, but present in both (Härke 1997, 132). Similarly, burial practices seem to reflect the changing status of children and young people as they reached particular age 'thresholds'. Infants were often buried in multiple graves and without grave goods, and weapons appear more consistently with boys, and the dress accessories associated with

Fig. 4.25 (opposite) A reconstruction of a 6th-century female burial from Butler's Field, Lechlade

Fig. 4.26 Female 6th-century burials. Clockwise from top left: Berinsfield grave 102; brooches from Lechlade Butler's Field – great square-heraded brooch (grave 18), saucer brooch (grave 47), pair of saucer brooches with star motif and preserved textile remains (grave 10); brooches from Berinsfield – saucer brooches (grave 54 and grave 22); disc brooches from Lechlade Butler's Field (grave 41); brooches and beads from Berinsfield grave 102
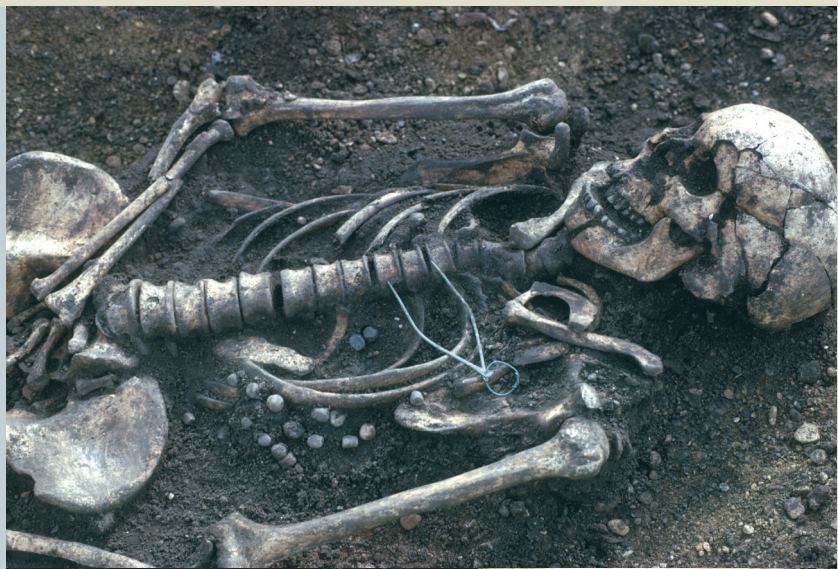
Fig. 4.26 cont. Clockwise from top left: Grave goods from Barton Court Farm grave 820; Barton Court Farm grave 820 as excavated; Lechlade Butler's Field – grave 184 with a collection of beads, pierced Roman coins, keys and three 'scrapers' at her right shoulder, grave 131 with pin beater and spindlewhorl visible at the edge of the grave; bone Thunor's club pendant with spangles (grave 133); copper alloy vessel (Perlrandbecker) (grave 11)
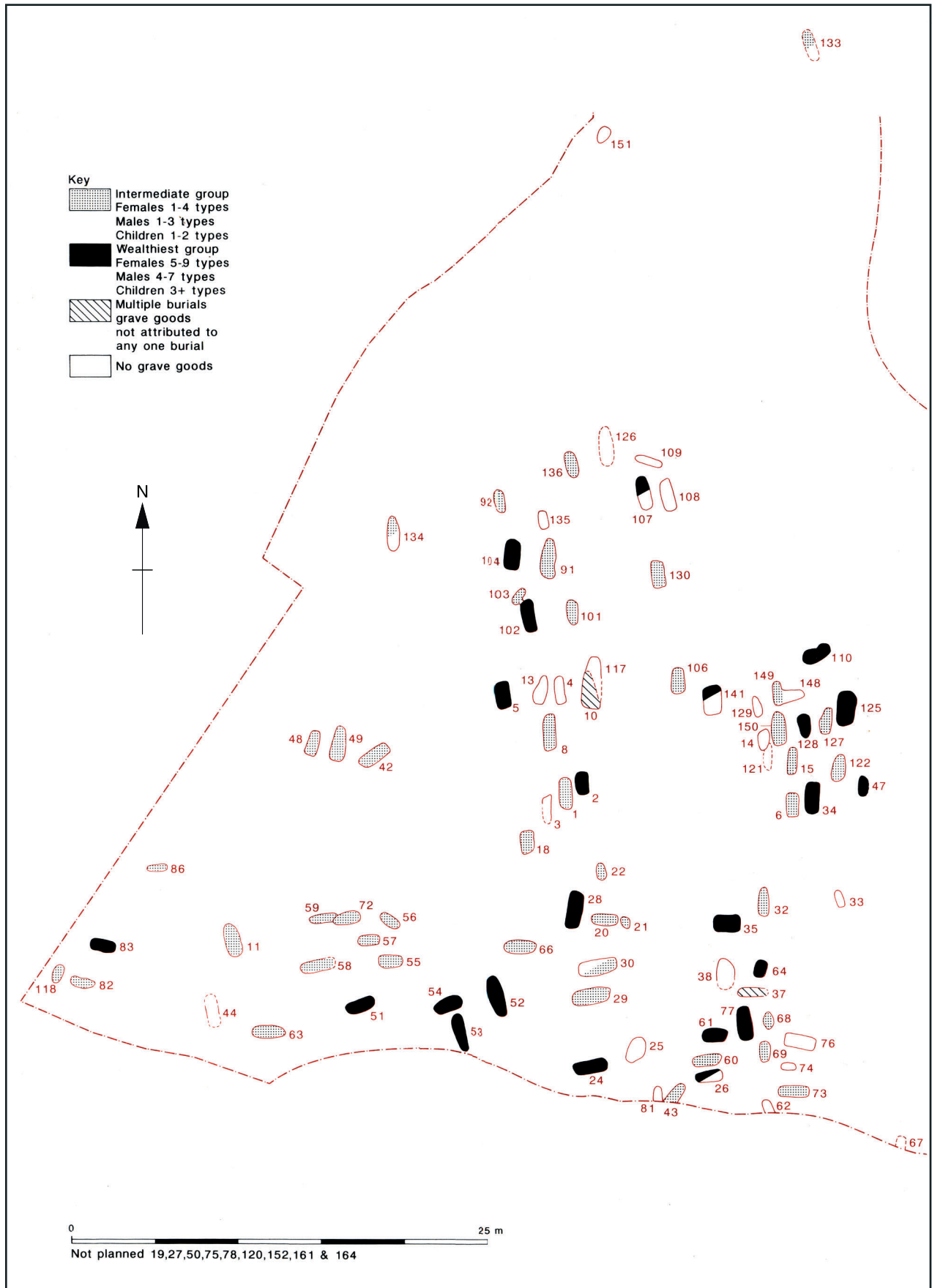
Fig. 4.27 Family burial plots at Berinsfield?

costume with girls, from the age of about 12 onwards. The widest range of grave goods is found with individuals above the age of 18-20 years, who had presumably attained adult status (see Härke 1997 for a discussion of these various aspects of burial practice). The way in which graves are distributed in a cemetery such as Berinsfield (Fig. 4.27) suggests a number of distinct groups, perhaps households, each containing a mix of male, female and subadult graves, with different numbers of grave goods. There has been much debate about whether the number and types of objects in graves can be read as an indicator of social status within the wider community. Graves with large numbers of objects, rare objects such as swords and metal and glass vessels, and other indicators of significant investment of effort such as grave linings and structures, have been interpreted as those of the leading members of the local community, with the greatest access to material wealth (see Chapter 7, below). Conversely, graves without grave goods have been seen as the burials of the poorest, including slaves.

The positive identification of Britons in Anglo-Saxon cemeteries remains controversial. Unaccompanied, west-east aligned inhumation was the predominant burial rite of the native British population, and this has led to the suggestion that some individuals buried in 'Anglo-Saxon' cemeteries in this way may have been from British families or communities, and may even have been servants or slaves (see Härke 1997, 148-51 and Petts 2004 for British burial rites). It is likely that only increased use of scientific techniques such as DNA and oxygen isotope analysis will enable us to make much further progress on this question.

The ambiguity of burial as a marker of 'ethnic' origins is underlined by the very different customs apparently associated with cremation. Here, the symbolism of grave goods appears to be rather different. Weapons are rarely found with cremation burials. Beads and toilet items such as combs, tweezers and razors are most commonly found, often in miniature rather than functional form (Williams 2004, 96-8 and fig. 10.5). Howard Williams has argued that this reflects a different perception of burial ritual, in which cremation was used to transform the dead person into a new 'ancestral' form, rather than representing their identity in life (ibid., 98). The process of cremation is likely to have been a complex ritual sequence, involving many stages no longer visible to us in the archaeological record. These are likely to have included procession to the cremation site, animal sacrifice and feasting, the cremation, and then the selection of burnt remains, grave goods from the pyre, and other grave goods, their transportation to the burial site, and finally their burial, usually in an urn, perhaps accompanied by the construction of a funerary monument (ibid., 93). The objects selected for burial are those associated with bodily appearance and adornment, particularly cutting, shaving and combing hair (ibid., 97), which were perhaps

perceived as part of the process of reconstituting a new body for the dead person in their transformed ancestral identity (ibid., 98). Although cremation was occasionally practised amongst rural communities in late Roman Britain, the appearance of cremation burial on a large scale from the 5th century, particularly in eastern England, is seen as an intrusive rite, and strongly associated with continental influence.

Few archaeologists today would argue that the cemeteries of the Thames Valley prove the presence of homogeneous groups of Saxon immigrants and their descendants preserving and reiterating old continental burial customs. Rather, the cemeteries show us how people were using a range of symbols to represent different aspects of identity. The variability we observe in practice may simply reflect how very unlikely it is that a late 6th-century community in Gloucestershire, for example, would have been using grave goods in exactly the same way as a late 5th-century community in Surrey. There must have been much variation in minor details. It would be perverse to argue, in the face of the evidence, that the burial rites we observe in these cemeteries did not include the deliberate selection of objects with continental, indeed even Saxon, affiliations, and it is surely likely that this reflects the spread of a new culture introduced by continental immigrants. What must be seriously questioned now is to what extent those who buried their dead in such cemeteries were all necessarily ethnic Saxon immigrants, or of Saxon descent, even if some of them were.

Changing culture and identity in the 7th century
(Figs 4.28-4.29)

Most of the large communal burial grounds of the 5th to 6th centuries seem to have been abandoned at some point in the later 6th or early 7th century, and new cemeteries appear, sometimes nearby but on different sites (see Chapter 3). Some commentators have suggested that this change in cemetery location can be linked with conversion to Christianity, and abandonment of the old sites because they were associated with pagan practices. Similar suggestions have been made about religious motives for the abandonment of furnished burial, which had all but ceased by *c* 720. However, there is no evidence that the mid Saxon church exerted pressure on the laity to abandon traditional burial sites or rituals. The identification of growing numbers of late Saxon cemeteries in the study area, as elsewhere, makes it increasingly clear that definitive, permanent changes in burial ritual are to be associated with the 8th century, and the gradual embedding of the Christian church in English lay society, rather than with the more fluid conditions of the 7th century (Blair 2005, 228-45; Lucy 2000, 181-4). The earliest evidence for what may have been an explicitly Christian minster burial ground in the study area comes from Oxford, where a burial
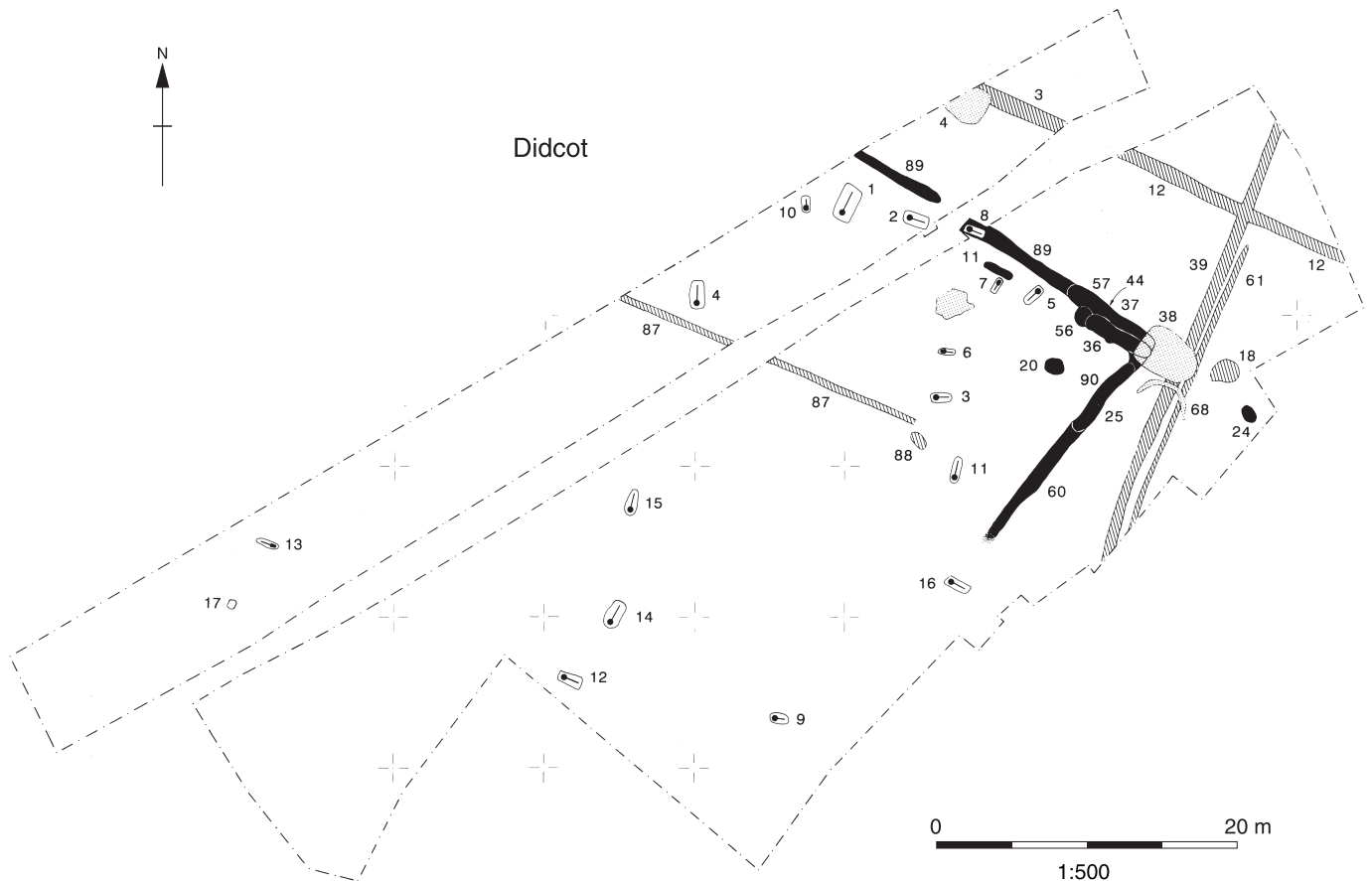
Fig. 4.28 The 7th-century cemetery at Didcot Power Station

in the graveyard of Oxford Cathedral has recently been radiocarbon dated to the period cal AD 620-690 (see Chapter 5, below). This is thought to have been the site of St Frideswide's minster, traditionally believed to have been founded around the turn of the 8th century.

The reasons for cemetery shift in the 7th century remain hard to discern. Within the study area, there was a great deal of variety in the kinds of places chosen for burials over the whole of this period, and quite marked differences between the cemeteries themselves, suggesting that no single explanation is likely to account for all the evidence. Lechlade Butler's Field demonstrates that the old 'ancestral' burial grounds of the 5th to 6th centuries were not universally abandoned, even if most of them were. Didcot Power Station (Fig. 4.28), New Wintles and Long Hanborough City Farm look like family burials on small 7th-century settlement sites, but Standlake and Field Farm must have served larger communities. The re-use of prehistoric burial sites is a marked feature of new cemeteries of this period (Field Farm, Stanton Harcourt, City Farm, Standlake Down, East Ilsley; Fig. 4.29). This is not an exclusively 7th-century phenomenon, and earlier cemeteries had been established in similar places (Burcot Amey's Pit, Hampnett and Abingdon

Saxton Road); a pond barrow was re-used for an Anglo-Saxon burial at Berinsfield, and burials on settlements such as Radley Barrow Hills were cut into prehistoric features. Sites such as Field Farm and Stanton Harcourt can leave little doubt, however, that these barrows were deliberately selected for the purpose by people in the 7th century; the graves are crowded into the mounds, or aligned along the curvature of the ring ditches (Fig. 4.29). A number of recent commentators have suggested that shifting cemetery location in the 7th century is probably to be seen as an element in the whole range of synchronous changes in the settlement pattern, linked with the emergence of a more stratified society, the creation of estates, and the evidence for a developing hierarchy of settlement. The evidence for this is considered further below (see also Chapter 3, above; Hamerow 2002, 123; Härke 1997, 146-8; Lucy 2000, 152).

Grave goods in the 7th century (Figs 4.30-4.32)

An increase in the numbers of unfurnished burials is seen by many commentators as a characteristic of 7th-century cemeteries, and it has been variously interpreted as reflecting the growing influence of Christian belief, the decline in status of individuals

Standlake

Circle 16

Circle 17

Circle 18

Circle 20
hereabouts

Catling 1954

Brown 1971

Circle 21

Circle 19

Stone 1857

Riley 1945

Stone 1857

Stone 1858

The Witney Road

Road to Underdown

+—| Burial

Early Iron Age pits

Cropmarks of
E.I.A. pits?

N

0   100 m

1:2000

Area of Bronze
Age Primary burial

Area of Bronze
Age Primary burial

() Burial

* Cremation

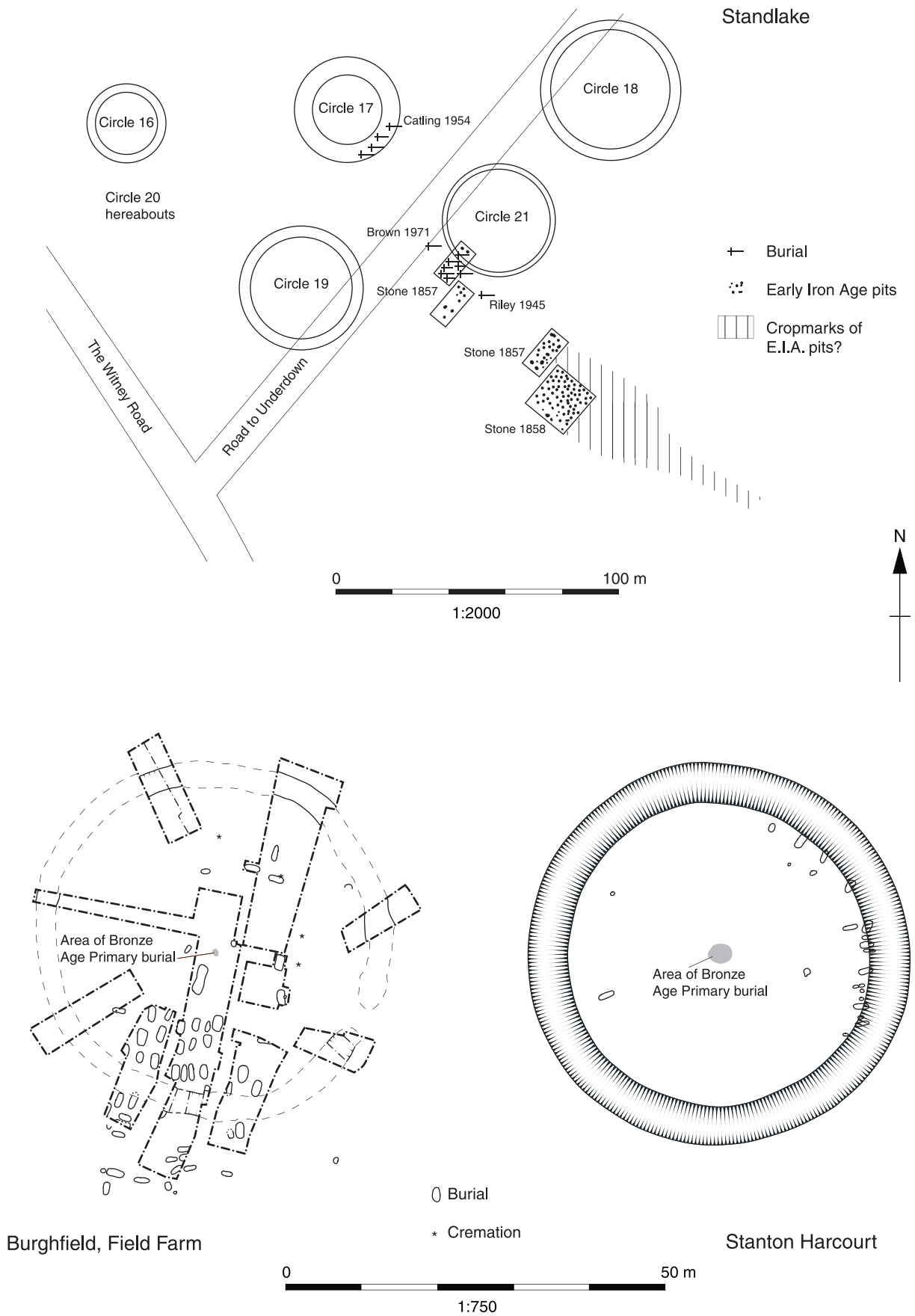Burghfield, Field Farm

Stanton Harcourt

0   50 m

1:750

Fig. 4.29 7th-century cemeteries re-using Bronze Age barrows: Standlake, Oxon., Burghfield, Field Farm, Berks, Stanton Harcourt, Oxon.

Grave 40

Whetstone and spokeshave

Seax

Shield boss

Weapons

Silver ring

Bone rod

Amethyst pendant

Bronze disc

Perforations

Bronze disc

Iron nail

Lead object

Bronze strap

N

100mm 0 500mm

10mm 0 50mm
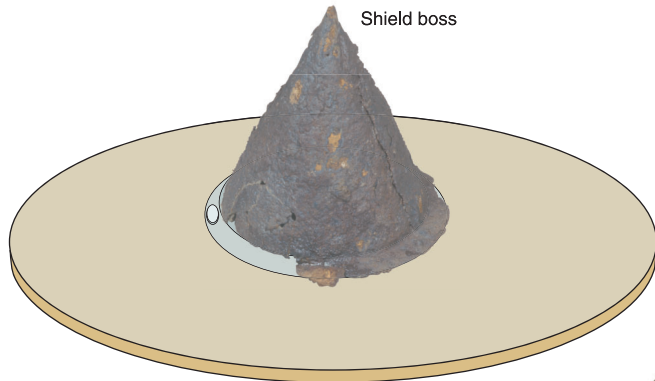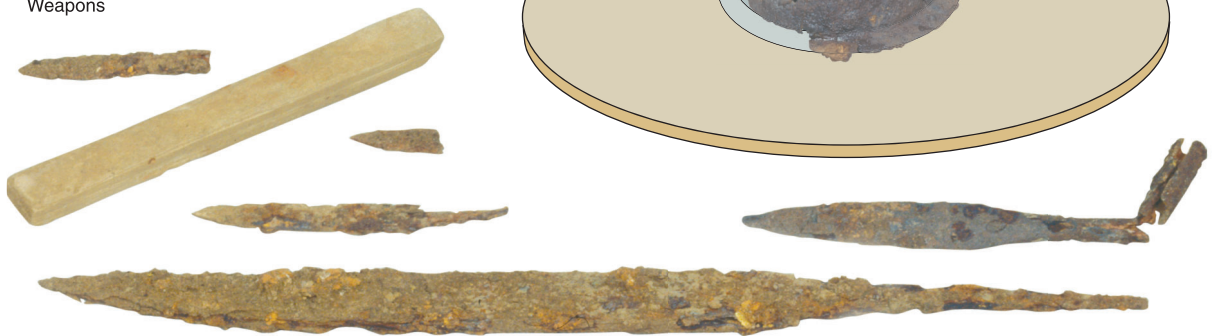
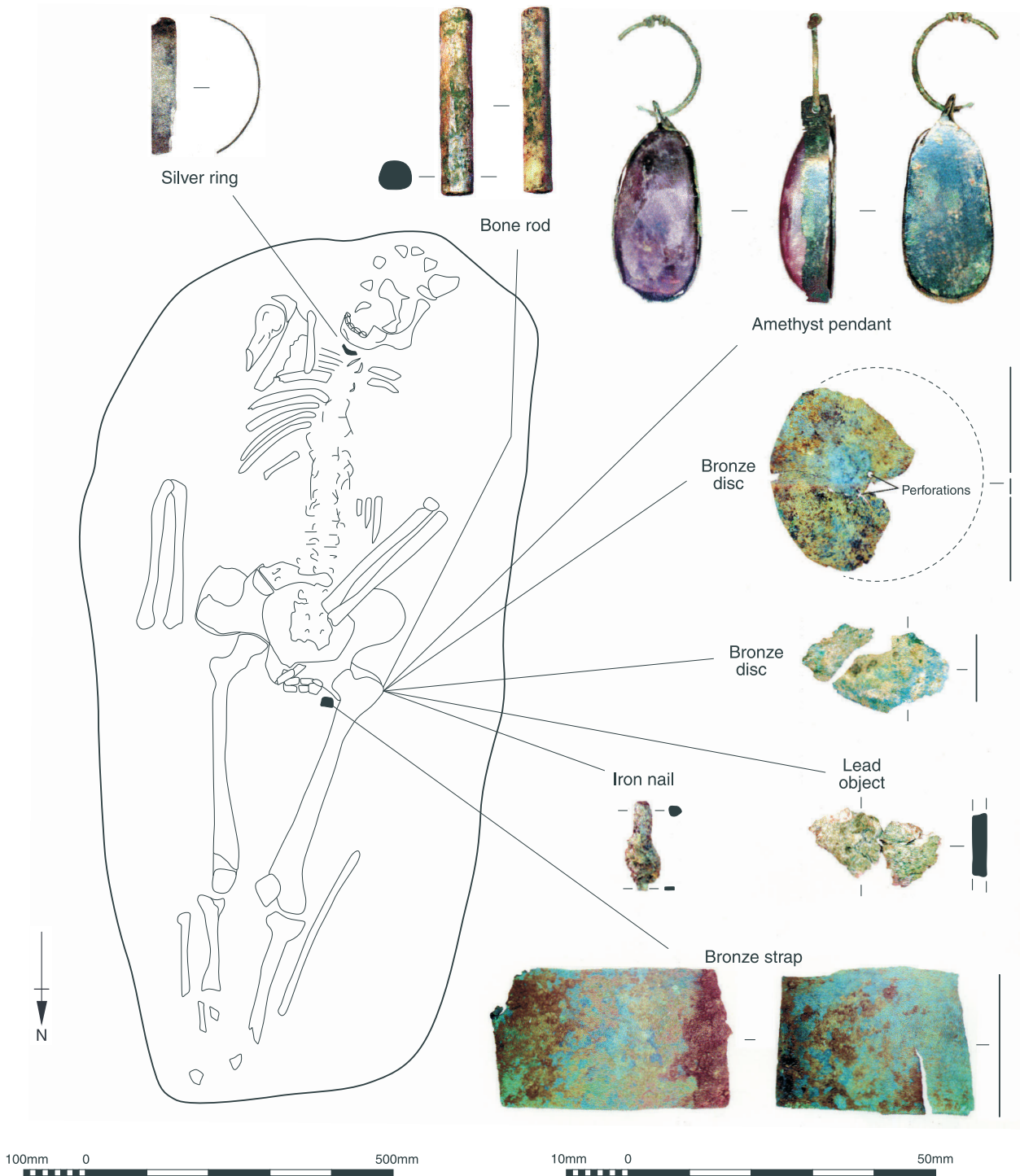*Fig. 4.31 An isolated 7th-century female burial from Eton Rowing Course, near Boveney, Bucks*

Fig. 4.32 (overleaf) Female 7th-century burials from Lechlade Butler's Field. Left hand page. Top row: grave 14 with beaver tooth pendant, bronze 'workbox' casket, cowrie shell, wool comb fragment and silver pins set with garnets and linked by a silver chain; middle row: grave 148 as excavated, with detail (right) of glass pendant and (far left) bell, with a second bell from grave 91; bottom row: (left) grave 179 with gold pendant (upper), and (right) grave 95 with gold pendant (lower). Right hand page. Top row: grave 187 with necklace of silver rings and a silver equal-armed cross; middle row: grave 144 with 'transitional' jewellery of c AD 600, (right) as excavated, with very large saucer brooches and a necklace of silver wire rings and (left) detail of the rings, most of which were strung with amber beads; bottom row: (left) grave 84, a young child with gold pendant (below), and (right) grave 172, young child to the left of the male burial, found with gold and garnet pendant (above)

Above: Grave 44

Above: Grave 148

Below and Pendant bottom: Grave 179

Below and Pendant top: Grave 95

Above: Grave 187

Above: Grave 144
Below and Pendant bottom: Grave 84

Above: Grave 1104

Below and Pendant top: Grave 95

in the middle and lower levels of society, and a growing tendency to pass worldly wealth on to the next generation rather than investing it in burial ritual. Recent work suggests that the abandonment of grave goods in the early 8th century may indeed reflect the adoption by the laity of an austere burial rite associated with the church (Blair 2005, 228-34), but whether this was widespread in the 7th century must be doubtful. Only a small number of sites have sufficient information to support an accurate assessment of this trend in the study area, and even in these cases excavated burials are probably at best only a large sample of the total original cemetery population. However, the evidence for proportions of unaccompanied burials suggests that there was considerable variation in practice. The highest proportion of unfurnished burials at any one cemetery was at Stanton Harcourt, where 19 out of 23 had no grave goods; but the cemetery included the burials of 12 infants and very young children under the age of 4, none of whom had grave goods, and it is questionable how typical this group may be. At Yelford, just under half the burials (12 out of 26) were unaccompanied, and of the 5 individuals found at City Farm Long Hanborough only 1 cremation contained grave goods, in the form of a belt and strap plate, and a pair of tweezers. However, elsewhere proportions of furnished burials are rather higher. At Field Farm, only 16 out of 50 excavated graves were unaccompanied, and at Lechlade Butler's Field and Didcot, 9 out of 56 and 4 out of 17 burials were unaccompanied, respectively. At Lechlade, however, a number of graves contained only fragments of pottery or animal bone, which may have been accidental inclusions in the grave fill, rather than deliberately deposited, and the real total of unaccompanied burials was probably higher.

There is a very clear change in the proportions of men buried with weapons, a feature which Härke has noted at a national level (1997, 146), where the proportion of 7th-century burials with high-status weapons remains consistent, at 6%, but the proportion of men with shields and spears drops to 17%, while the proportion of men with no weapons rises to 77%. At Lechlade Butler's Field, one of the few sites where a direct comparison can be made, 21 out of 37 6th-century men and adolescents had been buried with weapons. By contrast, only 4 out of 21 males were buried with weapons in the 7th to early 8th century, all of them with seaxes, weapons that are generally classed with swords and battle axes in the highest status category (Fig. 4.30). At Field Farm, 8 of the 50 graves excavated contained spears (2 of them with shields), although the absence of preserved bone means that this cannot be calculated as a proportion of all adult male burials. At Didcot, one of three certainly identified adult males was buried with a spear and at Stanton Harcourt a spear was found with one child. No weapons were found at Yelford, Long Hanborough or New Wintles Farm, and the identification of a spear burial at Standlake Down is doubtful.

Women's grave goods show an even more striking change, with the old custom of wearing long swags of amber and glass beads strung between paired brooches apparently completely abandoned in favour of very different fashions (Figs 4.31-32). The date of this change is not clear, but Dickinson suggests (1993, 34, 39) that exceptionally large saucer brooches represent the end of the cast saucer brooch tradition in the study area, and are found with grave assemblages of the end of the 6th century and the beginning of the 7th. The wearing of brooches seems to have continued for longer in Kent, and two elaborate composite brooches from Milton II (Fig. 7.11) were probably acquired from there, and were dated by Sonia Hawkes to the period *c* 625-650. Kentish composite brooches seem to have been worn singly, however, rather than in the tradition of pairs fastening a dress. Amber beads occur in much smaller numbers in 7th-century graves (Geake 1997, 47), although necklaces were still evidently an important component of female dress. In 7th-century graves they appear to be much shorter, and are composed of a different suite of elements, including small monochrome glass beads, beads with decorative overlays of glass trails, amethysts, knotted silver wire rings, cabochon pendants, metal beads, and disc pendants with filigree decoration, often of gold or silver, and sometimes with garnet or glass cabochon settings. Within the study area numerous examples occurred at Lechlade Butler's Field, and two gold pendants with settings of cabochon garnets and glass were found at Standlake Down (AM 1971.448 and 449). A silver equal-armed cross soldered for a suspension loop, so probably for wear as a pendant or necklace element, was found in grave 187 at Lechlade Butler's Field, and a silvered bronze foil cross was found at Standlake Down (grave 8). The occasional wearing of silver finger rings continues from the 6th century. Pin suites, often of silver pins with a linking chain, and set with garnets, are found with women's graves in the second half of the 7th century, and may have been used to fasten headdress (examples are known from Long Wittenham II and from Lechlade Butler's Field). Single pins of bronze, iron and silver are also found, often suspended from rings (as at Stanton Harcourt, Milton II). Chatelaines, collections of objects hung from the waist on long chains, are regarded as a characteristic 7th-century grave good type. However, in the study area in practice it is often difficult to say whether groups of corroded ironwork and miscellaneous rings and fragments of iron and copper alloy are the remains of true chatelaines, or represent continuing deposition of the girdle groups and bag collections typical of the 6th century.

The commonest grave good types in 7th-century graves are knives and simple buckles, often found at the waist and presumably fastening belts. Many graves in the study area have no other grave goods. Containers of various kinds occur quite commonly.

Metal and wooden vessels that might have been associated with feasting are generally, but not exclusively, found in graves with rich grave good assemblages. The largest iron-bound 'buckets' in Helen Geake's sample (1997, table 4.17) were from the Taplow barrow burial, and two of the buckets found at Lechlade Butler's Field were with men buried with seaxes and other weapons (see Fig. 4.30). However, examples at Lechlade Butler's Field were found with children (see Fig. 5.27). Wooden caskets with metal fittings occur occasionally in the graves of women; their function is unclear, but Geake notes that they were often apparently buried empty, as in the case of the maple wood casket with iron fittings found in grave 140 at Field Farm. Fittings from two wooden boxes were found in graves 14 and 107 at Lechlade Butler's Field; in the case of grave 107 (an adult woman), a spindlewhorl appeared to have been buried inside the box, and a thread picker on top of it, and the box in grave 14 had been buried with a bronze 'workbox', shears and a cowrie shell inside (Fig. 4.32). Bags of leather or cloth are usually inferred from the recovery of objects lying together in groups, and the presence of rings of metal that formed the frames; a purse mount in grave 145 at Field Farm had the mineralised remains of several loops of coarse twine, which probably fixed it to a leather bag (Brooks 1992, 59). Many objects may have had an amuletic function, including panther cowrie shells from the Red Sea area, found in five graves at Lechlade Butler's Field, mounted beaver teeth (Lechlade graves 14 and 18), a perforated boar's tusk (Lechlade grave 171) and a perforated unidentified canine tooth. Objects such as shears, spindlewhorls, weaving battens (sometimes reused or modified swords and spears) and thread pickers (or pin beaters) occur in the graves of some women and girls, and may be in some way symbolic of their role, or skill, in spinning and weaving. Grave 71 at Lechlade Butler's Field (a woman of 40-45) had been buried with a purse containing nearly 200 loose garnet stones, which may have reflected a personal involvement in trade in these items during her lifetime.

Grave goods and changing perceptions of ethnicity and identity

The change in grave good deposition in the 7th century is very marked, and it culminated, in the early decades of the 8th century, in the virtually complete abandonment of the practice of furnished burial (Geake 1997, 125). Over this period, there is a clear divergence in the treatment of male and female graves (see above). It has been suggested that over the course of the 7th century weapon burial lost its 'ethnic' associations, and became increasingly associated with elite burials, as a mark of status (Härke 1997, 146). The four men with seaxes at Lechlade Butler's Field may therefore have been significantly more powerful than other people buried in the cemetery. Conversely, the graves of women and girls continue to be marked by the deposition of jewellery, but the styles are completely transformed. The 'Saxon' brooches and beads have been replaced by jewellery that has strong affinities with contemporary Roman and Byzantine styles. Moreover, the change seems to have taken place at a national level; by the later 7th century the distinctive jewellery styles of eastern, midland and southern England had all given way to the new types.

There is much evidence to suggest that the Anglo-Saxons' views of their identity were changing significantly during this time. As the migration period communities coalesced under the kings who emerge in the written record in the late 6th century, it is suggested that new ideas about ethnicity were developing which emphasised Angles, Saxons and Jutes at the expense of other groups, and which would later narrow the field even further to the single name of 'English'(Wood 1997, 50-51). Indeed, Bede tells us that the people of the Upper Thames Valley had been called the Gewisse, but that from the later 7th century they became known as the West Saxons (Yorke 1989, 93-4). Barbara Yorke suggested that the adoption of this name might reflect the establishment of their power over people of disparate origins, including the Jutes of Hampshire and the Isle of Wight (ibid., 96). Ian Wood has suggested that it can also be seen as a move to identify themselves ostentatiously with one of the more prestigious 'ethnicities' emerging as the migration period drew to an end (1997, 50-51).

During the late 6th and 7th centuries it is clear that a number of individuals were laying claim to the right to rule as kings in England, and the establishment of kingdoms during the 7th century owed much to the support and authority of the church. It has been argued (see for example Geake 1997, 132-5) that it was the desire of the elite to identify themselves with the power and authority of the Roman Empire, and the influence of the church, that was instrumental in reorientating the material culture of the period away from Germanic Europe, and towards the Mediterranean. The presence at Lechlade Butler's Field of significant quantities of jewellery in the classical and Byzantine styles of the 7th century demonstrates, in a way that documentary sources cannot, how far changing cultural aspirations had spread through Anglo-Saxon society by this time, and must have been highly visible even to those who did not have the means to acquire such possessions themselves. The presence of crosses suggests that some individuals may even have had a personal adherence to the new Christian religion.

5th- to 6th-century settlements

The early Saxon settlement pattern is markedly different from that of late Roman Britain in that it was exclusively rural, with no evidence for a hierarchy of settlement or the formal division of

space in the landscape, only for more and less populous places (see Chapter 3). The use of stone, glass, brick and tile had ceased, and Saxon buildings were constructed using timber, thatch, turf and earth. Coinage and mass-produced pottery disappear, and most early Anglo-Saxon communities were probably largely self-sufficient in food and clothing, even if commodities such as salt, and iron, amber, copper and ivory (evident in grave good assemblages) must have been procured through regional or long-distance trade or exchange. Until recently, the complete absence of certain characteristic continental settlement and building types from Anglo-Saxon sites in England has been difficult to reconcile with theories of large-scale immigration from north-west Europe. The sunken hut, which first appears on English sites from the 5th century onwards, has long been the only unambiguously continental element of early Anglo-Saxon settlements (see Fig. 3.20). There is a stark contrast between the large and often planned settlements of the Anglo-Saxons' continental 'homelands', and the loosely structured, dispersed settlements the same people apparently constructed in England during the 5th and 6th centuries. Helena Hamerow's recent work (2002), however, suggests that these difficulties may very largely result from a failure to compare like with like. In many cases, the regular, planned layouts of continental settlements belong to the 4th century, rather than later. During the 5th and 6th centuries there is evidence that many settlements along the North Sea coast underwent radical changes, and more dispersed, irregularly arranged settlements were appearing that would not look out of place in an early Anglo-Saxon context (ibid, 88-9, 95). Similarly, while the characteristic continental longhouse does not appear on English sites, simpler post-built halls of the type known in England (Fig. 3.21) are increasingly being recognised on contemporary north-west European sites, and there are many similarities to suggest that they were relatively common in the 5th and 6th centuries (ibid., 48-50). Helena Hamerow has suggested that the absence of the longhouse in England might be a result of dual processes of migration and acculturation leading to change in the composition and economy of the household (ibid., 50-51). In the Thames Valley, as throughout much of north-west Europe, new building and settlement forms may reflect the altered circumstances of migrant families, the realities of what was available in terms of time, labour, technology and raw materials, the influence on both incoming and native populations of the other's traditions, and the likelihood that there was considerably less pressure on land than a century or two before.

The evolution of a more stratified society

From the late 6th century, both documentary and archaeological sources tell us that increasing divisions of rank were developing within Anglo-Saxon society, to be closely followed by the appearance of places with specialised functions. How long 'kings' had existed in the study area is unknown, but the first named individuals are identifiable from the later 6th century. Settlement sites and burials that may be associated with such people are reviewed in Chapter 3 and Chapter 7 respectively. From *c* 635, when the king of the Gewisse was baptised, the old Roman small town of Dorchester took on a new lease of life as a religious centre. Other high-status religious centres, minster churches, are likely to have been founded in the area in the late 7th and early 8th century, and are reviewed in Chapter 5, below.

Such spectacularly high-status sites and individuals are relatively visible in the documentary and archaeological record, but it is much harder to observe the effects of increasing polarisation and specialisation on people further down the social hierarchy. Here, we are left with far more questions than answers. The emergence of high-status people and sites might, for example, mean that the status of other settlements and their occupants declined, probably at first relatively, but ultimately in real terms if control of territory and agricultural surplus was focusing in the hands of the emerging elite. The high-status settlements at Long Wittenham and at Drayton/Sutton Courtenay, for example, might have evolved from the homes of large and locally influential kindreds who achieved a dominant status in the local area and beyond, perhaps ultimately enabling their leading members to assume the title of king. Were the communities buried in the barrows at Field Farm and Standlake Down trying to assert their kindred's 'ownership' of territory at a lower level, by identifying themselves with its ancestral monuments? Perhaps they believed that the dead had power to defend the land they had left to their heirs (see Blair 2005, 59-60). The change in cemetery location in the 7th century may indeed partly reflect the fragmentation of earlier communities as individuals and kin groups sought to establish a claim to their own territory. Increasing polarisation of status may also be reflected in the grave goods we see in 7th-century burials. The leading 7th-century men at Lechlade, Butler's Field, for example, may have been the only four buried with weapons (in each case a seax). Men who, a century earlier, would have been buried with a spear and a shield were now, perhaps, only buried with a knife. Settlements such as New Wintles Farm and Lechlade, Sherborne House may be those of the middle ranks of this polarising society – still farmers rather than kings, but prosperous enough to maintain their own farmsteads rather than serving on the farms of others. The appearance of increasingly formal organisation of space, particularly individual house enclosures, is a marked feature of Anglo-Saxon settlements from *c* 600 onwards (see Hamerow 2002, 97-9). The reasons for this are likely to be numerous, and it has been suggested that increasingly formal control of

space within settlements can be linked with greater pressure to produce agricultural surplus, a phenomenon that was probably already operating from the 7th century to maintain the new, specialised non-productive elements within society (see above). However, it may also reflect an increasing need to define one's own individual territory and status in what seems to have been an increasingly competitive environment.

Collective identities

There is some evidence that early to mid Anglo-Saxon territorial units in parts of England followed the political geography of Roman Britain (for example, the kingdom of Kent; see Hamerow 2002, 124; Blair 1989 and Hines 2004 for Surrey). In most of the study area, by contrast, there is very little known about how far the Iron Age tribal territories and Roman *civitates* of the Dobunni, Atrebates and Catuvellauni (see Chapters 3 and 7) retained any kind of cultural, political or social significance into the 6th century. It may be significant that the *civitas* capitals of Cirencester and Silchester were not chosen for the seats of 7th-century bishops. In so far as they are discernible at all, the names and groupings of 6th- and 7th-century communities of the study area appear to owe remarkably little to the past. Place names and documentary records such as the Tribal Hidage may provide clues to the names of numerous groups of what appear to have been 'peoples' by the mid Saxon period (see Chapter 7, below). How far the inhabitants of the Thames Valley thought of themselves in these terms is hard to say. It is not clear whether such names preserve information about early groups or kindreds, or whether they were convenient labels applied by royal officials to disparate groups of people for the purposes of calculating tribute assessments. Perhaps a regional sense of identity was strongest amongst a group like the Hwicce, who were ruled by their own kings, clients of their Mercian overlord.

It is also very difficult to say to what extent the dominance of the area from the mid 7th to the mid 9th century by Mercia altered people's perception of their identity. Had the Mercians taken over the Thames Valley a century earlier, some effects of the change might have been visible in grave good assemblages, but the adoption of new styles of jewellery and dress in the 7th century, and the abandonment of furnished burial in the 8th, means that this source of information is no longer available to us. It is worth recalling the fact that, by the late 9th century, the West Saxon compilers of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle were apparently able to believe that the origins of the kingdom lay in the conquest of Hampshire, and the close association with the Upper Thames Valley is presented as a secondary element. This was undoubtedly an account manipulated to show the 'ancestors' of King Alfred as conquering heroes, rather than losers in a 7th-century struggle with Mercia. However, it does also suggest that the West Saxons had either forgotten, or suppressed, the claim of the Thames Valley to be the primary focus of their early settlement in this country.

The 8th to 11th centuries

Individual identity

Rural communities (Fig. 4.33)

Throughout this period, documentary sources show us the increasing elaboration of a social hierarchy based on royal favour and land ownership. The vast majority of people lived and worked on agricultural settlements, although by the end of the period a small, but increasing, proportion of the population lived in towns (see below). One of the most pervasive components of personal identity at this time must have been perception of one's place in this hierarchy, and the status symbols, rights, restrictions and behaviour it implied. Our knowledge of how this hierarchy might be reflected in archaeological evidence remains poorly developed in the study area to date. Advances in our understanding of this fundamental aspect of mid and late Saxon society will depend on a number of factors. The first of these is the opportunity to accumulate more evidence about mid and late Saxon settlement, providing greater opportunities than we currently have to compare different types of building and settlement form and their associated material culture. The second will come from the closer integration of archaeological research with that of documentary and landscape historians. Work such as that of Rosamond Faith (1997; see below) has shed much light on different groups within rural society in this period, their relationship to the evolving estates, and how this was reflected in the location and nature of their own land holdings and homes. The third factor is the need for greater awareness of the potential significance of what often seem to be very limited and unremarkable archaeological results from small-scale excavation on sites of this type and period. When considered in the context of the village plan, or the historic landuse patterns of the township, even the characteristic partially revealed ditched enclosures, pits and indistinct structures may have much to tell us. Even if they can as yet provide few answers, they can at least prompt us to ask more relevant and appropriate questions.

The estates of the mid and late Saxon period were essentially divided into two zones, which Rosamond Faith defines as inland and warland (1997, 16, 90-91). Inland was the directly exploited core area of the estate, in which the land and all its resources belonged directly to the landowner and which was farmed on his or her behalf by a peasant labour force of notably dependent and low social status, who were tied to their holdings and were considered part

of the capital assets of the estate on which they lived and worked (ibid., 58, 84). Such people, including slaves, represent between 40% and 60% of the recorded Domesday population in most of the project area, the highest proportions being in Berkshire and Wiltshire (ibid., appendix 2). It has been estimated that, at a national level, some 12 % of the recorded Domesday population were slaves. Many are likely to have been people captured and traded in war or raiding, or their descendants, but it was not uncommon for the poorest people to sell themselves or their children into slavery in order to survive times of extreme hardship. Slaves provided full-time labour and were often employed in specialist occupations involving a degree of training, as ploughmen, stockmen, swineherds, beekeepers, dairymaids, seamstresses, weavers and even priests. Freed slaves often appear in records as cottars, holders of a cottage plot, but essentially still full-time workers. A third group of peasants, called bordars in Domesday Book, appear to have been slightly more prosperous (ibid., 70-74). Also tied inland workers, these people were granted housing and smallholdings, typically of five to eight acres, in return for heavy labour services. On large estates such people have been identified in domestic jobs such as cooking, baking, brewing and what might be described as 'housekeeping' – the preparation of the residence for the use of the king and his retinue. The final category of inland peasant discussed by Rosamond Faith are the *geburs* (ibid., 76-84). These people were yardlanders, who were essentially tenants on the inland, renting perhaps some 30 acres and paying with rent in kind and by working for perhaps half the week on the lord's land. Such people appear often to have been 'set up' by the landowner on entering into the tenancy, and provided with a house, oxen, a cow, sheep, tools for work and utensils for their homes. Rosamond Faith suggests that such

tenancies may have been the only resort of surplus free people whose own family holdings could not provide them with a living. The *gebur* was regarded as tied to the estate; he and his family could be transferred with the estate if it was sold, and the children of a *gebur* inherited their father's status and were regarded as belonging to the estate.

The warland was the estate land from which the landlord enjoyed customary dues and services, but the relationship of its inhabitants to the lord was different. Such people were essentially free (ibid., 126-8, 137-43). Economically and socially they were a much more disparate group, ranging from smallholders with only half a yardland (some 15 acres) to substantial farmers holding a hide, whose farms were essentially small manors in their own right, with their own labour force and in some cases their own tenants. Many smallholders seem to have held marginal land on woodland or waste, supplementing their produce by earnings from fishing, timber and charcoal production, iron working and stone quarrying. What such people, who are loosely defined as *ceorls*, had in common was a sense of owning their own land, which they would expect to pass on to their descendants. They paid the *geld* (or tax), which seems to have been a distinct marker of the difference between free and unfree status, since the inland peasants did not pay. Along with the status of being a payer of *geld*, such people contributed to public works such as army service, bridge and fortification work (whether on their own account or by paying for substitutes), and they attended the public courts and assemblies such as those of the hundred (see Chapter 7, below). Such people also owed services to the lord (ibid., 107-14). Characteristically these included services associated with riding and transport (escort, the carrying of messages, hunt services, the driving of herds, carting and carrying of loads) and building and

Fig. 4.33 Peasants cutting and loading wood. From an Anglo-Saxon calendar probably produced at Winchester in the second quarter of the 11th century (BL Cotton Tiberius B. V, Part 1 f.6)

service works such as the construction of fences at the estate centre and cutting and carrying fencing materials. Such services tend to reflect the fact that many people at this level may have been prosperous enough to own their own riding and pack horses, carts and draught oxen. Other services included occasional assistance with farm work such as hay making, harvesting and ploughing on the lord's inland at the busiest times of the year. Whether warland tenants carried out this work themselves or sent their own labourers, it seems not to have been regarded as a dishonourable obligation, but rather it reflected duties that derived from a much earlier organisation of society (ibid., 91) when such assistance may have been owed, along with *feorm*, to the early kings.

How can we identify these different groups of people in the archaeological record? We know that slaves and cottars were provided with a cottage and cottage plot, essentially a 'wage in land' that would provide for some of their needs but well below the level of self-sufficiency. This was supplemented by food rations and occasional perks. Much of their housing is likely to have been provided near to the estate centre itself (ibid., 67-70), in the form of cottages within small enclosures. Bordars were provided with cottages and smallholdings, typically five to eight acres. Bordar holdings appear often to have been grouped together on the inland, and a group of very small rectangular fields behind the village of Porlock has been identified as the plots of land used by serfs and bordars for growing subsistence crops (ibid., 71-4 and n 60). *Geburs* were closely tied in to the lord's inland economy, and their holdings may have been contiguous with, or even intermingled with, the lord's arable. In some places, however, the *geburs* may have been settled at some distance from the estate centre, in discrete pockets of tenanted inland within the warland zone. Some Burton or Bourton place names may derive from *gebur* land of this kind (ibid., 78-80). The settlements of warland families, dispersed around the estate rather than focused at the inland, may be harder to identify archaeologically, but there will be many clues in placenames and in the records of late Saxon estates (ibid., 129-152). Rosamond Faith draws attention to the impression of a landscape of small-scale private property given by many late Saxon charter bounds, with their references to 'Ofling's ploughed land, Ecgerde's hill, Cytel's well' and 'Leofstan's bridge', perhaps named from farmers with their own arable, pasture and woodland. Loosely structured polyfocal hamlets and villages may represent the aggregation of farms of this kind, perhaps as families grew and their lands were subdivided to create holdings for brothers and sons. Some of the many Charlton and Carlton placenames may preserve the memory of a nucleated settlement of warland *ceorls*.

Can this information help us to interpret the late Saxon archaeological evidence we currently have from the study area (see Chapter 3, above)? Roy

Canham noted that Shepperton Green was a subsidiary settlement within the parish of Shepperton and might have been an individual farm unit with its own buildings and fields, and a droveway connecting it to the village centre (1979, 111). Might this, perhaps, once have been the homestead of a free tenant, a *ceorl*? Or could the minor settlement of Shepperton Green have originated as a settlement of *geburs*, at a distance from the main estate centre (see Fig. 3.48)? Might we expect to see such people and their families buried at a small local burial ground rather than taken to the local minster at great expense? At Wraysbury, the evidence perhaps hints at a higher status settlement. Timber buildings with wattle and daub walls were found inside large rectangular enclosures, but evidence suggested that there may have been a more substantial building, with plaster walls, on the west edge of the excavated area. An exceptional range of animal, bird and fish bone may be waste from a well-stocked kitchen (see Chapters 2 and 6), and suggests a diverse settlement economy that included hunting, fishing and the trapping of wild birds. The site lay a short distance east of a mid Saxon settlement focus where no fewer than five coins were found, and the parish church of St Andrew is located in the immediate vicinity. Could this have been a late Saxon estate centre? By contrast, at Yarnton, a series of rectangular enclosures were laid out in the late Saxon period, across the area previously occupied by the 8th- and 9th-century settlement, and further rectangular enclosures containing possible sunken huts were detected by geophysical survey some 300-400 m to the north-east in the area of Mead Farm. Could these enclosures have been the smallholdings of inland workers at the late Saxon estate? Is it pure chance that one of these enclosures contained a smithy, or might this have been the holding of a late Saxon estate smith?

It may always remain very difficult to prove any such interpretations, but the information available from documentary sources for this period suggests that considering archaeological remains within the context of the social and economic landscapes evident in written sources might encourage us to be more ambitious in our research aims for sites of this type.

Specialised communities (Figs 4.34-4.35)

The late Saxon period saw a proliferation of more specialised places, associated with a relatively small number of individuals who did not farm the land for a living, and a number of these can be recognised in the study area. Excavated evidence for the form of a royal settlement of this period (unfortunately still unpublished) is known only from Old Windsor (see Chapter 3, above). We have more information about ecclesiastical centres. Following the Viking occupation of Leicester in the late 9th century, the seat of the middle Anglian bishopric

was transferred back to Dorchester, subsequently the base for a bishop and his household until the Norman reorganisation of the church in the 1070s. Both minster and reformed Benedictine monastic communities were present in numerous places in the study area (Chapter 5, below). An unreformed minster of the late Saxon period (such as 10th-century Eynsham, prior to its refoundation in 1005) may have been home not only to a number of priests, but also to their households, comprising wives, children and servants. The numerous male burials from Christ Church Cathedral graveyard in Oxford (see Chapter 5) seem likely to have been members of a late Saxon community of priests at St Frideswide's minster. Whether such priests were entirely occupied with their religious duties is unclear, but in poorer communities it appears to be the case that they needed to supplement their income from farming in their own right.

The reformed Benedictine monasteries of the study area in the late Saxon period were much higher status communities. From its refoundation *c* 954/5, Abingdon Abbey was intimately involved with national government (see Kelly 2000, ccxiv-ccxvii). The first abbot, Æthelwold, was himself a nobleman and a close associate of 10th-century kings (Fig. 4.34); both he and his successors attested royal charters, implying their regular attendance at court. Charters may have been drafted at the abbey, and a version of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle was maintained there (Kelly 2000, ccx and notes 64-5). What is known about the later Anglo-Saxon abbots suggests a continuing presence of men of high personal status, wide connections (both in England and abroad) with royalty, aristocracy and leaders of the church, and a continuing involvement in national affairs. Æthelwold's successor, Osgar, had studied at the great French monastery of Fleury; Abbot Rodulf (1051-2) was probably a Norman, who had been a missionary bishop in Norway; Abbot Spearhafoc (*c* 1047/8-1051) was a monk from Bury, a renowned gold- and silver-smith who worked for the king and queen, and who is reputed ultimately to have fled abroad with gold and gems entrusted to him for making a crown; Abbot Ealdred (1066-71) was deposed after taking part in a political conspiracy. Following its refoundation as a reformed Benedictine monastery in 1005, Eynsham was for a while home to its first abbot, Ælfric, one of the leading churchmen and religious writers of his day, and to his patron Æthelmær, Ealdorman of the western shires of Wessex, a man of royal kin descended from an elder brother of king Alfred, who had formerly been a close associate of King Æthelred, but had temporarily fallen from favour. We can only speculate about the effects the presence of such individuals had on the lives of the ordinary people of Abingdon and Eynsham, but we can perhaps imagine the impact, visual, psychological and economic, of the visit of a king and his retinue. Beyond the normal demands they made on their estates and tied peasants, the foundation of such establishments must have provided increased opportunities for specialist trades of all kinds, and employment for local people as abbey servants.

It is also clear that the late Saxon period saw the development of permanent urban populations at places like Oxford, Wallingford and Reading, and the growth of marketing centres at a number of the minster settlements (see Chapter 3, above). What was a late Saxon urban community like in the study area? By the 11th century, if not before, it is clear that a town like Oxford was developing a distinct urban character. Its population, both permanently and occasionally resident, was probably very diverse and may have numbered several thousands. Documentary references imply that the king may have had a house here, although its location remains unknown, and both lay and ecclesiastical lords maintained houses in the town. Ealdorman Æthelmær, for example, gave his 'court' and other rents in Oxford, together with St Ebbe's Church, to his new foundation of Eynsham Abbey, and Abingdon Abbey was granted an estate at Lyford which included an Oxford urban property around the church of St Martin (Dodd ed. 2003, 30; see Holt 2000, 81-2 for high-status residents in late Saxon towns). This can perhaps be associated with evidence for a luxury element among the animal, bird and fish bones, which included some prime meat cuts, venison, hare, numerous wild birds, marine fish, pike and oysters. The metatarsal of a peregrine falcon, probably a hunting bird, was also recovered.

There was a strong ecclesiastical presence in a town like Oxford. The old minster of St Frideswide's occupied much of the south-east quarter, and there was clearly an increasing number of urban churches, perhaps originating like St Ebbe's and St Martin's as private churches on the urban manors of leading landowners. Elsewhere, excavation results suggest that properties on the main street frontages were extensively developed by the early 11th century, implying the presence of a vigorous trading and mercantile community (see Chapter 3, above). Buildings further toward the street frontages may have been the workshops and stalls of traders. Traded goods found in the town suggest the presence of fishmongers and perhaps wine merchants. Oxford was a mint in the late Saxon period, and its community must have included moneyers, and probably the associated trades of gold- and silver-smithing; a stone mould for casting silver ingots was found at the bottom of a late Saxon well. Finds evidence suggests that the town supported leatherworkers, shoe-makers, butchers, hornworkers and metalworkers; textile and bone working were also undertaken within the town, but the relatively low level of associated finds suggests that this may have been essentially domestic production. The retting of flax, and possibly also hemp, was taking place in channels on the floodplain outside the town to the south. A

Fig. 4.34 King Edgar with St Dunstan and St Aethelwold (BL Cotton Tiberius A. III f.2v)
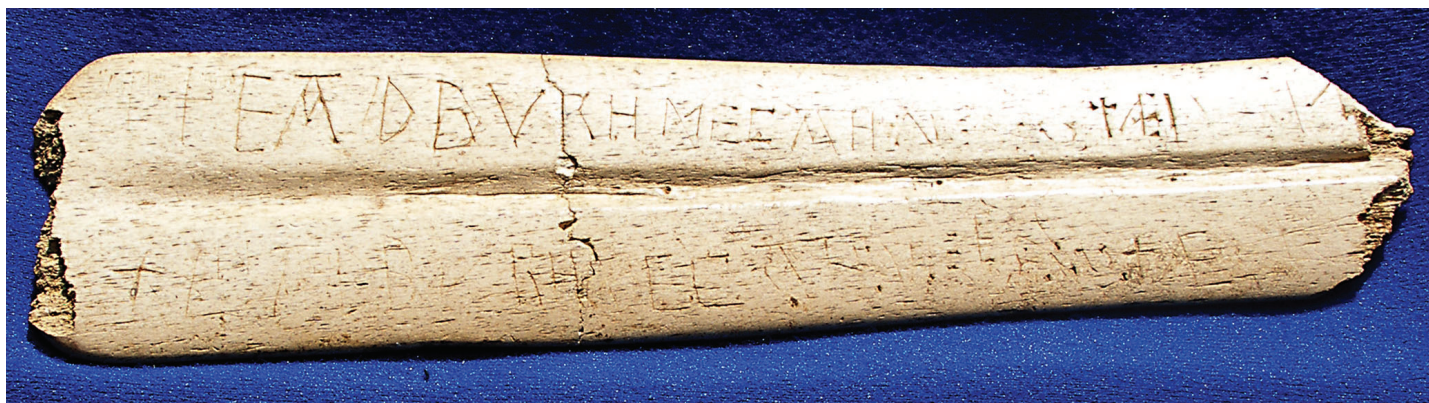
Fig. 4.35 A whalebone weaving sword fragment from Wallingford with the inscription EADBURH MEC AH, *'Eadburh owns me'*

whalebone weaving sword inscribed with its owner's name Eadburh (Fig. 4.35), which was found at Wallingford, gives an almost unique glimpse of an otherwise unknown late Saxon girl or woman living in a Thames Valley town (for the inscription, see Okasha 1971 no. 118; Reading Museum 170:66/3 currently on loan to Wallingford Museum).

The finds from late Saxon pits at Logic Lane, Oxford, include nails, iron clamps for joining pieces of wood, and fragments of what may have been a small trowel, perhaps debris from building or carpentry. Presumably carpenters produced the timber for the numerous channel revetment structures that have survived in the waterlogged conditions of the floodplain and the presence of millers can be inferred from Domesday records. While there is an impressive range of evidence for urban crafts and trades, it is also likely that many of the townspeople continued to farm, garden and raise livestock. Exceptional quantities of pig and pigeon bones have been noted on a couple of sites; this, together with the evidence for domestic fowl and eggs, suggests that some people were raising animals and birds within the town itself. Severe staining of a gravel yard surface at a site along the Thames Crossing suggested that animals were being kept here, too. The townspeople of Oxford had common rights in pasture at Port Meadow, where some of them, presumably, were grazing cattle and horses; domestic geese and ducks were also consumed in the town and may have been raised by the townspeople on the surrounding low-lying floodplain. Hay, presumably for bedding and fodder, may have come from local floodplain hay meadow as well as from estates further away. Domesday Book notes the presence of 23 'men with little gardens' in the suburb of Holywell, outside the town to the east. Perhaps local producers such as these were the source of some of the broad beans, peas, hazel nuts, cherries, sloes, blackberries, apples, possible pears, plums or damsons and summer savory found in the town?

Material culture

In the 8th century, evidence suggests that, for the upper levels of society at least, the church was close to the heart of English cultural life (Hines 1997, 391), and this should mean that Mercian cultural influence in the region was strong. The removal of the Dorchester bishopric to Lichfield, and subsequently to Leicester, and the likelihood that numerous of the Thames Valley minsters were founded under Mercian control, suggests that the strongest influences on the church in the study area would have been coming from Mercia rather than Wessex (see Blair 1994, 59-68). Books and manuscripts produced at the scriptoria of Mercian churches were probably in use here. Manuscripts such as the Barberini Gospels, attributed to Mercia or possibly to York (Brown 1991) testify to the continuing power of classical and Byzantine influences in England. The English church and evolving kingdoms were also very much influenced at this time by contact with the Carolingian world. The importance of Carolingian models in the development of church architecture is evident from the reconstruction of the 9th-century minster at Cirencester (see Fig. 5.29; Gem 1998, 36-9 and fig. 27). The slightest hints of what may have existed in the study area come from Graham Keevill's recent excavations at Dorchester, which found small fragments of glass and rare imported Mediterranean pottery, and a trace of a wall constructed with re-used Roman brick or tile (see Chapter 6). Although there is little direct evidence for it in the study area, it may be reasonable to infer the gradual spread of literacy and learning, albeit probably limited to aristocratic and ecclesiastical circles. Surviving manuscripts of the period include a number of prayerbooks intended for private devotional use (of which the Book of Cerne is the most celebrated example), and a mass text (Bodl Lib MS Hatton 93) of *c* 818-30, representing a class of manuscripts that must have been required in every church and chapel (Brown 1991, 210-11). Influences on secular material culture, from

the 9th century onwards, owe more to Viking and Celtic traditions. A number of objects from the study area reflect a national trend towards metalwork styles of ultimately Viking and Irish inspiration, including a decorated buckle plate and stirrup strap mounts found at Eynsham Abbey, an enamelled stud found at Yarnton, and a probable strap distributor found at Orchard Farm, Brighthampton (see Chapter 6, below). Mostly horse fittings, these items suggest that the fashion for Viking-inspired metalwork was spreading quite widely among at least the upper levels of local society. By the late 10th and early 11th century, it is clear that there were Danes living at Oxford. The superior wheel-thrown St Neot's ware that was widely used in the Thames Valley in the late Saxon period was probably imported from an East Midlands source in the Danelaw. While it is possible that this simply continues to reflect Oxford's position at the western edge of trade routes from the east and south-east of the country, Maureen Mellor has commented (2003, 341-2) that its distribution in Oxford may reflect the culinary preferences of Danes living first of all in the suburbs, and then as the 11th century progressed and their political position improved so markedly, within the town centre itself. A gold ring of elaborately plaited rods found near St Aldate's Church in Oxford may have been with the burial of a rich Dane, or an 11th-century Englishman who had adopted the Viking fashion for wearing these rings after the accession of a Danish king in 1016.

Collective identity

Evidence for evolution in people's sense of collective identity is very indirect. It is certain that, over the course of the mid to late Saxon period, Christian belief and ritual became embedded in the life of most people in the study area. This is discussed in more detail in Chapter 5, below. In political terms, much of the study area passed into the control of the kings of Wessex from the early 9th century. How far this changed anybody's sense of identity in the Thames Valley is debatable, although it has been noted that the West Saxons were considerably more conciliatory as rulers than their Mercian predecessors, and they may have been relatively welcome to the local population (Keynes 1991). Nevertheless, antagonisms persisted between Wessex and Mercia throughout the 9th century, and very probably well into the 10th (see below). The experience of common resistance to the concerted Viking campaigns of the late 9th century may have had an effect on people's sense of identity and the wider community to which they belonged. The West Saxon response to the Viking attacks involved the setting up of a number of fortified *burhs* in the Thames Valley (see Chapter 7, below). The inhabitants of the study area will undoubtedly have been involved in the building and provisioning of these, and may possibly even have taken refuge within

them. Cricklade, Wallingford and Sashes, all south of the Thames, were in West Saxon Wiltshire and Berkshire, while Oxford, north of the Thames, was in Mercia, although under the domination of the West Saxons from at least *c* 911-12, when Edward the Elder took control of Oxford and London and the lands belonging to them. Presumably local men also fought in the armies of King Alfred, his children, and Ealdorman Æthelred of the Mercians. Whether they did so with any enthusiasm for the cause remains unclear. Asser, in his Life of King Alfred, tells us that in places King Alfred's fortress-building initiatives met with an uncooperative and unenthusiastic response, and we can only speculate whether the men of the study area were among those who had only half finished when the Vikings struck again.

During the early 10th century, the reconquest of territory ceded to the Danes by Alfred turned the West Saxon rulers into kings of all England, but local divisions and differences persisted, and distinctions between Mercians, West Saxons and Danes were long recognised in English administration and law (see Chapter 7, below). Although there were undoubtedly considerable differences in custom and speech between people in the heartlands of these administrative territories, the Thames may have been a rather artificial boundary at a local level, at least in cultural terms. The growth in the political importance of the Thames Valley may well have been a much more significant factor. As a national system of government evolved over the course of the 10th and 11th centuries, people would have found themselves assigned to a number of units of local administration (see Chapter 7, below). By the end of our period, the people of the study area would have belonged to numerous local communities. Most were tied to an estate or manor, and their role within it and relationships with their neighbours would probably have been the most important factor in their day to day lives. Almost all would have been baptised and buried as Christians, perhaps increasingly at the local church of the lord of the estate. By the 12th century, the local churches and estates of the late Saxon period had become the familiar parishes of the medieval period. Administratively, people were assigned to units of increasing scale, the tithing, the hundred and the shire, and some of them would have been involved in attending court meetings. These units, particularly of parish and shire, which emerged during this period of fundamental change, have remained the basic units of English local government into our own time. Even today, they form the basis of a very powerful and enduring sense of local identity.

The material culture of everyday life

The lives of most inhabitants of the study area would have been taken up with the routine activities of the farming year, and this evidence, together

with the evidence for crafts and trade, is discussed in Chapter 6, below. We can derive a little information from finds and environmental remains for the routine activities of day to day life, although this is not often given explicit consideration in archaeological reports. Pottery is one of the most abundant sources of evidence, and ceramic vessels would have been used for the storage of solids and liquids, as well as for boiling and cooking. The predominant pottery fabric in the Oxford area in the 9th and 10th centuries was shelly limestone fabric B, and the most common vessel forms were two sizes of cooking or storage vessel, the larger being the more popular (Mellor 1994 fig. 6 nos. 1, 4 larger; 2 smaller); shallow dishes were also available (ibid. fig. 7 nos. 2-4). Bowls are less common (ibid. fig. 7 no. 1) and some bowls may have had spouts, although this is rare (Mellor 1994, 38). Lamp bases were made from the same pottery fabric (ibid. fig. 6 no. 7). During the later 10th century and the first half of the 11th century a second pottery tradition, St Neot's type ware, also a shelly fabric, brought new vessels into the area. Products of this tradition include wheel-thrown fine-walled cooking pots (Mellor 1994 fig. 15 no. 1) of various sizes, handmade deep sided dishes (ibid. fig. 15 nos. 2 and 3) and shallow dishes (ibid. fig. 15 no. 11). Storage jars and lamps (ibid. fig. 15 no. 5) were also produced, but are rarer in the study area.

Pots found at Lincoln College, Oxford had obviously been used for cooking as a number were scorched and heavily sooted, and had limescaling and charred internal residues (Blinkhorn 2002a, 237). The sooting patterns on pots found at the Thames Crossing sites in Oxford were analysed for evidence of how the pots had been used (Underwood Keevill 2003, 301 and fig. 6.15 nos. 57-61). Sooting on bowls in the common late Saxon shelly fabric B was confined to the upper half of the vessel and under edge of the rim, suggesting that the bowls had been used as lids, or had stood inside another vessel (ibid. fig. 6.15 no. 57). Jar forms in the same fabric (ibid. fig. 6.15 no. 59) were extensively sooted, but the bases appeared to be untouched, suggesting that the jars had been placed within another shallow vessel, or on top of stones. A later type of fabric B jar had a completely different sooting pattern, suggesting that they were used in double-boiler arrangements, smaller vessels being nested within larger vessels containing boiling water, or suspended on the rims of other vessels. Double-boiler arrangements would have been particularly appropriate, perhaps, for cooking milk- and egg-based preparations. Pots may even be showing us differences in culinary traditions. Maureen Mellor has noted that thick sooting deposits are evident at some sites in Oxford and Wallingford on pottery made in fabric B, but not on the regionally imported St Neot's ware pottery (2003, 341). At Northampton, by contrast, the same St Neot's ware pottery is heavily sooted (ibid.), suggesting that it was being used in a different way.

It is not clear how liquids were usually served, although the occasional presence of sherds from spouted pitchers (especially in regionally imported pottery such as Ipswich and Stamford wares) indicates their use perhaps for wine, ale and water, and spouted bowls may have been used for pouring sauces, gravies, oils or melted butter. Drinking horns and wooden cups were almost certainly in use in the project area, although their remains rarely survive. Cups are not generally found among pottery forms at this date. Glass was very rare, and undoubtedly the preserve of the upper ranks of society (see Chapters 6 and 7). Containers of organic materials such as leather and wood were probably as common as pottery, but rarely survive. Part of a rough wooden bowl from 9th-century silts at the Thames Crossing in Oxford is the only evidence of what must have been a very widely used type of object (Henig 1977, fig. 35 no. 1). The staple food for most people was bread, and there is abundant archaeological evidence for the grinding of grain into flour using quern stones. The commonest stone used for the purpose during the mid and late Saxon periods was Niedermendig lava, a relatively light stone imported from the Rhineland, which is found throughout the study area. A large fragment found at Dorney is an upper stone retaining the central hole through which the rotation mechanism operated (Roe 2002, fig. 4.7 no. 1), and another large fragment from Yarnton Cresswell Field showed the pitted grinding surface typical of Saxon querns (Roe 2004, 304).

No ovens have been securely identified within the study area. It is likely that ovens would have been used at least for the baking of bread, but that much other cooking would have taken place over open fires, both indoors and outdoors. The best evidence for domestic cooking comes from a house in Reading, probably datable to the later 11th century (Ford *et al*. forthcoming). Here, part of the internal floor surface was heavily scorched and overlain by a deposit of ash and charcoal that had resulted from *in situ* burning, and was probably a hearth. A large quantity of pottery was recovered from the occupation layer that surrounded the hearth and many pieces fitted together to form a large jar. A clear circular indentation was evident in the base of the hearth, and it seems highly likely this was the vessel that had stood there. Elsewhere, several very large outdoor hearths were recorded at Eynsham, datable to the period from the mid 7th to the mid 8th century (Hardy *et al*. 2003, 40-45, 470). The hearths had clearly been intensively used, and were cut by a large number of shallow slots and post- and stake-holes, some containing the charred remains of stakes and posts, and fragments of burnt clay. This suggests that at various stages different forms of shelter may have been constructed, including windbreaks and possibly a dome of clay supported on wooden stakes. Other stakeholes could have been caused by the legs of tripods, spits or other supports for roasting joints and cooking vessels.

Evidence for lighting is quite rare. Lamp forms are known in late Saxon pottery traditions (see above); elsewhere, stone lamp fragments are known from Eynsham, of Bladon stone (ibid., fig. 9.21.146), from Oxford (Dodd (ed.) 2003, fig. 6.3.30), of local limestone, and from Reading (Ford *et al*. forthcoming). Lighting was expensive, and lamps such as these tend to be associated with high status sites.

Evidence for leisure activities is also very limited, although the excavations at Eynsham recovered a die and a gaming counter both made of bone (Hardy *et al*. 2003, figs. 9.5.42-43). A possible bone flute was recovered from a late Saxon context at Reading (Ford *et al*. forthcoming).