Postscript

by Tim Allen

There are some themes that appear to recur across several time periods, and the purpose of this final section of the report is to draw attention to these.

The results of the adjacent HS1 excavations had identified a wide range of sites of different periods, and the overall impression was of a landscape in which settlement was never static for long periods, nor were significant land boundaries identified that appeared to have persisted across several periods. The only exception to this was Downs Road, where a Roman metalled road was found alongside the modern one, and where medieval boundaries at right angles to Downs Road suggested that this routeway had also been used in the medieval period.

The A2 excavations did not completely overthrow this picture, but they did emphasise the significance of certain places during prehistory, and the role played by trackways in creating and sustaining this significance. In the early Neolithic, a rare type of monument, a single large post, was identified on Site G, and it was speculated that this might have marked the top of a dry valley used as a route from the coast up to the chalk plateau (see Fig. 1.2). Although no evidence of middle Neolithic use was found, the continuing use of this natural routeway might explain the occurrence of a recut pit of the late Neolithic adjacent to the vanished post. Late Neolithic/early Bronze Age flint scatters and tree-throw holes containing early Bronze Age pottery were also concentrated on either side of the top of this dry valley. A length of cobbled track was constructed leading out of it in the middle Bronze Age, alongside which a settlement enclosure was constructed. The ditches and banks of this enclosure created a much more visible and lasting reminder of the past than in previous periods, but this enclosure was largely avoided in the Iron Age. Continued use of the route no doubt led early Iron Age people to establish several small areas of pits and four-post structures close by, around the head of the dry valley. There was no evidence of middle Iron Age activity in this part of the scheme, but late Iron Age and early Roman pits were found adjacent to the earlier Iron Age ones, again possibly due to the use of the routeway.

At Site C, the importance of a trackway leading across the highest part of the undulating chalkland was even clearer. The use of this route might have begun as early as the Beaker period, when a double burial was made marking this high point, and overlooking the dry valley to the east. A wide feature adjacent to this was tentatively interpreted as a prehistoric holloway leading southwards (Askew 2006, fig. 5 and 11–12). There may well have been a mound over these burials, further emphasising this focal point. The use of barrows as markers for routes in prehistory is not uncommon; for example, the fact that lengths of the A30 in Cornwall run from barrow group to barrow group shows the great longevity of some such routes. From the middle Bronze Age onwards the Site C route was marked by a ditched trackway traced for 300m from Coldharbour Road and across the A2 Activity Park, to which a ditched enclosure was added in Site C. Both the route and the enclosure became a focus for burials for the communities using this route throughout the later Bronze Age, and developed in the early Iron Age into a holloway that was eventually surfaced with flint. Early and middle Iron Age pits and four-posters appear alongside the metalled trackway, and again close to, but not encroaching upon, the middle Bronze Age enclosure.

The Downs Road dry valley was probably another ancient routeway in prehistory, long before the provision of a metalled Roman road, but the scale of excavation in the valley bottom was limited. An early–middle Iron Age ditched trackway certainly led down to the dry valley from the east, however, and this may have overtaken the earlier Site C trackway as the importance of Springhead, and the use of river transport, grew later in the Iron Age.

Cycles of movement by prehistoric communities, and the following of established routeways, are one of the most plausible explanations for the 'remembering' of sites evident through episodes of deposition that span decades, centuries or even millennia (cf Roughground Farm, Lechlade Glos.; Allen *et al.* 1993, 46–7 and 195). It is, however, relatively rare to find physical evidence of these tracks before late prehistory, although short lengths of metalled surface, particularly crossing boggy ground, are known from the middle Iron Age, as at Mingies Ditch and Farmoor, Oxfordshire (Allen and Robinson 1993; Lambrick and Robinson 1979). In this respect, as in many others, Kent is unusual, as metalled roads, particularly of the Iron Age, are becoming more frequent on excavations, for example on the East Kent Access Road (K Welsh pers. comm.). In this, Iron Age Kent is similar to Northern France, where holloways evident over long distances form parts of organised landscapes from at least the 6th/5th century BC, and are believed to have originated much earlier (Le Goff

2009). In Brittany metalled roads are known from at least the 3rd century BC at Paule (Menez 2008).

Despite this pattern of trackways, there is little evidence of permanent division of the countryside, for instance in the form of land boundaries, until the middle Iron Age, and even then these are individual ditches, not field systems. Unless boundaries were entirely above ground, the pattern of land use, and of rights of access, does not appear to have become fixed in prehistory or in the Roman period. The situation was clearly still fluid in the Norman period when several new settlements appear, perhaps created by assarting in a still unenclosed landscape.

This view is supported by the fact that, taken together, the A2, the HS1 and the A2 Activity Park evidence still supports the overall shifting of settlement across more than two millennia. Middle Bronze Age enclosures are not reused in the late Bronze Age, and early Iron Age activity is dispersed across the landscape, although there are concentrations adjacent to both of the middle Bronze Age enclosures. Nucleation in the middle Iron Age does not occur around either of the previous trackways and associated early Iron Age foci, and there is a further shift of focus at the start of the Roman period, although occupation continues into the 2nd century on part of the later Iron Age settlement. The rectilinear Roman enclosure at Site D is abandoned in the later 3rd century, and the only late Roman activity is focussed alongside Downs Road. There is no focus of Saxon activity within the line of the two schemes, and medieval settlements occupy virgin sites, managing to avoid most earlier foci.

In terms of later Bronze Age settlement, there is no consistent pattern along the Thames Valley. There are similar discontinuities between the middle and late Bronze Age around the Wittenhams in Oxfordshire, and at Eton Rowing Course in Buckinghamshire (Allen *et al.* 2010; Allen *et al.* forthcoming(a)), but at Heathrow Terminal 5 in contrast the middle Bronze Age enclosure systems are extended in the late Bronze Age, although there is little continuity of actual occupation sites (Lewis *et al.* 2010). In Kent itself there are no middle Bronze Age predecessors to the late Bronze Age enclosures at Highstead (Bennett *et al.* 2007), nor any late Bronze Age.

The rarity of earliest Iron Age sites, the dispersed settlement pattern of the early Iron Age, and the absence of continuity from the early to the middle Iron Age seen at the A2, are also seen elsewhere, for example in the stretch of the Middle Thames including the Eton Rowing Course and Cippenham, Slough (Allen *et al.* forthcoming(b); Ford *et al.* 2003). At Heathrow waterholes of the early Iron Age respect the boundaries of the earlier fields, indicating that above ground there were still hedge boundaries, but the middle Iron Age pattern of settlement cuts across these enclosures, implying a major discontinuity in landscape terms (Lewis *et al.* 2010). Once established in the middle Iron Age,

however, several sites in the Eton area continue through the late Iron Age and into the early Roman period. At Heathrow, the middle Iron Age focus shifts slightly in the late Iron Age, but continues thereafter right through the Roman period (ibid., 213–5).

There is a significant contrast between this pattern and that seen in other areas such as Stanton Harcourt or Yarnton in Oxfordshire, where settlements established in the early Iron Age continue through the middle and late Iron Age, and persist into the 2nd century AD (and at Yarnton beyond the end of the Roman period). Lambrick (Lambrick and Allen 2004, 479–84) saw the settlements at Stanton Harcourt as reflecting the gradual fossilisation and clarification of earlier prehistoric landuse arrangements by communities whose ancestors were buried in the monuments of the sacred landscape around the Devil's Quoits henge, and who shared grazing rights there. Yarnton had a significant floodplain resource adjacent, and this may have ensured its continuity (Hey *et al.* 2011, Chapter 4). Despite the presence of the Tollgate Neolithic mortuary enclosure, and the double Beaker burial on the other side of the valley, there is no good evidence that these formed similar foci for further burial monuments that might have created social conditions leading to such a settled and established pattern of landuse. Such communities were probably the exception rather than the norm in later prehistoric southern Britain.

In Kent itself, continuity from the middle to late Iron Age, as seen at the A2, is in itself unusual; only 4 of 17 late Iron Age settlements along the line of the HS1, for example, had middle Iron Age origins (Booth *et al.* 2011). The settlement at Keston is an important exception, and the enclosure at Farningham Hill probably began late in the middle Iron Age (Philp 1991; Philp 1994). Late Iron Age to Roman continuity is however common, as locally at Hillsend (Philp and Chenerry 1998), so the establishment of a new farmstead on Site D very soon after the Roman conquest is particularly striking. Whether the result of the stimulus of the new Roman road and its traffic to an existing local magnate, or the granting of land to a pro-Roman native family, this new enclosure, situated in sight of Watling Street, is one of the clearest examples yet seen of the immediate effect of the Claudian conquest upon native rural settlement. The apparent abandonment of activity at Pond D North at much the same time may be another indication of this effect, although as only a part of the site was seen this picture may be incorrect. Several middle-late Iron Age sites along the HS1, however, also appear to have ended at around this time (Booth *et al.* 2011), so a causal link with the Roman conquest cannot be entirely discounted.

A second theme is the variety of burial rite, and the mobility of burial sites, evident throughout prehistory and the Roman period on the scheme (and more widely in Kent). Neolithic burial was

presumably focussed on the Tollgate mortuary enclosure, although no associated human remains have been identified as yet. The double Beaker inhumation burial west of Wrotham Road on the HS1 represents a further, and perhaps deliberately opposing, focus on the other side of the dry valley (Askew 2006, fig. 5). There are apparently no further burials in this location, but an early Bronze Age cremation was found within the dry valley west of Downs Road (ibid.). In both cases the burial rite conforms to the usual custom.

Middle–late Bronze Age cremation burials on the A2, the HS1 and the A2 Activity Park are found alongside boundaries and trackways and in loose clusters not far from settlement, a pattern also seen in the Middle Thames, as around Eton (Allen *et al.* forthcoming(a)). None were found associated with the earlier prehistoric burials, however, as is common elsewhere across Southern Britain. Middle Bronze Age ring ditches are rarer, but the example from the A2 Activity Park is small, as are most other examples of this date, and its proximity to the enclosure in Site C is matched at sites such as Itford Hill, Sussex (Bradley 2007, 197–9). The inhumation found within the ditch, however, appears to be a further example of a growing number of middle Bronze Age inhumation burials found along the Thames Valley (Lambrick with Robinson 2009, 283–327). Both rites appear to have been practised contemporarily.

In Southern Britain early and middle Iron Age burials are usually inhumations, even though these may comprise complete, partial or excarnated bodies. Both complete and partial inhumations are present on the A2 scheme, as is a cremation burial, the second found recently in North-West Kent. This may reflect continental influence, as mixed rite cemeteries are known there from the end of the 5th century onwards (Le Goff 2009, 99). The location of middle and late Iron Age inhumations within or alongside boundary ditches continues the focus of later Bronze Age burials alongside trackways. The late Iron Age sees a return to cremation on these two schemes, although inhumation 'warrior' burials are also found in East Kent, as at Mill Hill, Deal and Brisley Farm, Ashford (Champion 2007b, 125–6). Such burials are exceptional, but in the A2 Activity Park immediately adjacent, inhumations have been dated to the late Iron Age or very early Roman period (Dawkes pers. comm.), and both cremations and inhumations are present from the very start of the Roman period at the Pepperhill cemetery (Biddulph 2006a). This mixed rite is found on the A2 from the 2nd century onwards, and is present on Site L until the very end of the Roman period.

The implications of at least four cemeteries within the area between Springhead and Tollgate, and evidence for further burials alongside Watling Street, have already been discussed in Chapter 4. The key point to emphasise here is that, although a large and relatively long-lived urban cemetery existed at Pepperhill, foci of burial in the country-side were not as clearly fixed, mirroring the evidence for continuing fluidity of settlement.

In terms of burial rite, Kent demonstrates a greater flexibility than many other areas of prehistoric and Roman Britain. This may be due to its position close to the Continent, and thus in contact with a wider range of customs and ideas than most other areas. It is also possible that there were more incomers settling here, like the foreigner of North African, or at least Mediterranean extraction, identified within the late Roman cemetery on Site L. While this particular individual does not exhibit significant differences in burial from his neighbours, others may have brought with them their own burial customs and beliefs.

Another theme that appears several times in the chronological development of this scheme is feasting, and in particular assemblages of pottery whose deposition might have been associated with this activity. The basic premise behind the identification of such groups is that they do not represent an even representation of a standard range of vessel types and sizes for the given period, but include a large proportion of small cups, perhaps accompanying one or more larger vessels that may have contained food or drink for communal consumption.

A connection between Beakers and alcoholic beverages has been demonstrated from residues found on vessels in graves (Rojo-Guerra *et al.* 2006), and other vessels containing fats were also associated, suggesting that food was also involved. The large number of Beaker vessels found in a pit on Site D, most of which are of similar size, could well represent the discard of vessels from communal feasting events. It is even possible that the decoration, which was different on every vessel, was personalised, or at least was specific to a particular family group on each occasion. The fact that substantial parts of some vessels are present, and little of others, may simply be an artefact of preservation, as most archaeological features are truncated, and so no longer contain all of the material originally deposited within them. Alternatively, it may mean that the pit was filled from a midden that represented repeated events spanning a long period, but does not invalidate this interpretation of the events they represent. The few larger open bowls might perhaps represent communal vessels for particular foods. Such pit groups occur in small numbers across much of Southern Britain, as might be expected in societies where permanent settlements were rare or absent, and social groups small, so that communal gatherings were essential for social intercourse, and for reinforcing group identity (Rojo-Guerra 2006, 253–62).

It is less usual to find middle Bronze Age pit groups that contain groups of vessels that might be interpreted in this way. Nevertheless, pit 12510 on Site L contained much of an extremely large bucket urn, together with fragments of five much smaller

vessels, of which two at least were small tubs or cups. If an equivalent for decorated Beakers were to be sought in the middle Bronze Age, it would probably be the fine-walled Globular Urns, but there is no reason why simpler vessels might not have been used for such gatherings. They may have held individual servings of food rather than of drink. The scale of event or events represented here may well have been smaller than that represented by the Beaker pit, but the composition of this assemblage suggests that a particular meal was being commemorated by the deliberate burial of the pottery involved.

Another possible example of such an assemblage, also from Site L, was found in an early Iron Age pit. Here a preponderance of bowls was argued to represent vessels used in feasting, but it was not simply the pottery, but part of an animal skeleton, and the careful separation and placement of a variety of other objects, that suggested that the pit and its contents were commemorating an important event, or series of events, of which feasting was probably a part.

A very different assemblage was found in a pit on Site G, comprising only one example of each of a group of vessels of different size, form and finish. Similar sets of late Bronze Age date have been found adjacent to cremation burial pits, and have been labelled 'feasting sets', though how they were used is less clear. It is possible that each originally held foodstuffs or drink of different types that were consumed at the graveside. In the case of pit 9010, they were accompanied by pig skeletons, supporting the idea that feasting of some sort was involved, and by human bones. This was the only early Iron Age pit on the scheme to have a set of vessels of this type, and also the only one to contain human bones, reinforcing the view that sets like this were particularly associated with rites connected with death or its commemoration.

Although animal skeletons are found in a number of other pits and ditches, together with other deposits of special character including whole pots, no other Iron Age features contained pottery that so clearly demonstrates the likelihood of feasting. It is, however, noticeable that middle and late Iron Age ditches contain the same kinds of deliberate deposits that were found in early Iron Age pits, and it is in the early Roman ditches of the Site D enclosure that feasting assemblages are next clearly identified. Here again the pottery assemblages are remarkable both for their quantity and for the large numbers of certain types of vessel.

In looking at the context of such deposits, it is instructive to note that the ditch deposits in the Site D enclosure were 20m and 50m from the graves that were the foci of these events. While the placement of whole pots in small enclosure ditches immediately surrounding deep pits or shafts, as in Site B, provides an easy spatial association, other deposits found on this scheme could well relate to activities or features well outside the limits of excavation. More generally, it reminds us that the focus of such behaviour need not be immediately adjacent to its material remains, and that the scale of investigation needs to be sufficiently wide to have a fair chance of interpreting these remains.

This project has shown sporadic evidence for feasting over a period of more than two millennia. This is only remarkable in that the evidence, in comparison to that of most other sites, is relatively clear, although in only a very few examples. Given the importance of communal gatherings, and of celebrations to mark rites of passage, important agreements and other events in the lives of local people, the important question is why such evidence is not more commonly found, or perhaps, recognised.

Fitzpatrick's reminder of the ceremonies described as carried out at the graveside of Roman dead (1997), and on certain anniversaries thereafter, shows that where literary evidence is preserved, it suggests that such commemorative events were held more than once a year. Not all such events need, however, have been large-scale, or have involved feasting. It may be that the ways in which such events were commemorated did not, in most communities, involve rituals of destruction and deposition that leave such clear ceramic indicators, and that in this respect, the customs of the inhabitants of this area of north-west Kent were particularly distinct.

The literary evidence, however, reminds us that we need to be sensitive to the possibility of a wide variety of depositional events that were of considerable significance, although not necessarily represented archaeologically in as dramatic a manner as the collections of feasting debris. Just such a variety of deposits has been identified in this project, although as yet we lack the tools to interpret them.

The future

Finally, a note on opportunities for the future. Despite the controls of the planning system, narrow strips of land like that isolated between the High Speed 1 and the new A2 are often forgotten, or overlooked, especially when large-scale excavations have taken place on either side. This narrow strip, however, contains both the Tollgate mortuary enclosure and the central part of the Site D Roman enclosure, both key elements for the proper understanding of this landscape in the Neolithic and in the late Iron Age and Roman period. Significant questions remain regarding the character of the middle–late Iron Age settlement in Site B, the Saxon occupation in Site A, and the medieval settlement in Site C, which can only be addressed by the investigation of the area in between.