

Chapter 11 Discussion of Castle Hill and its immediate environs

INTRODUCTION

As only very small areas of Castle Hill were excavated during the current project, any conclusions about how the role and significance of the hilltop developed through time must be regarded as tentative and provisional. Nevertheless, the excavations have made it clear that Castle Hill was a favoured locale in the local landscape which was returned to repeatedly over the last 3000 years. The recurring choice of the site as a focus for activity was no doubt influenced by its dramatic topographical situation. The twin rises of Castle Hill and Round Hill are striking in their isolation, and offer excellent views northwards along the Thames Valley, southwards to the Berkshire Downs and eastwards to the Chilterns. The creation of the hillfort ramparts during the early Iron Age would have further marked out Castle Hill as a special place in the landscape, giving it a place in local tradition and myth long after the original role of the hillfort was forgotten. This may partly explain some of the subsequent activity on the hilltop, for example its use for burial in the Roman period, while Round Hill was seemingly ignored (Chapter 5). In recent history, mythic associations of Castle Hill included the belief that it was the site of a battle, and that it possessed a buried treasure guarded by a phantom raven (Page 1972, 381).

THE NATURE OF THE SURVIVING EVIDENCE WITHIN THE HILLFORT

Documentary evidence shows that the interior of the hillfort has been cultivated on and off since at least AD 1542, a period of more than 400 years, and the excavations confirmed that a considerable depth of ploughwash has built up behind the rampart at the edges of the interior. The depth of the soil buried beneath the Iron Age rampart indicates that at least 1 m of soil overlay the chalk within the interior and has now been mixed by ploughing. Ploughmarks were also evident in the chalk towards the top of the hill, and the shallow depth of the middle Iron Age pits, particularly towards the top of the hill, when compared to those from the adjacent settlement, suggests that there has been significant truncation of archaeological features over much of the interior of the hilltop enclosure, if not further downslope. The trenches dug within the wooded clump did not indicate significantly different preservation from those outside the clump, although the trenches deliberately avoided standing or fallen large trees, where localised damage may well have been much greater.

No postholes were found during the excavation except at depth within the fills of the large hilltop enclosure ditch, which may indicate that smaller features such as these do not survive in this area, although they may simply have been absent from the areas investigated. The possible removal of all small features, and of structural evidence with them, must however be borne in mind during the following discussion of the recovered evidence.

EARLY PREHISTORIC ACTIVITY

Evidence for Mesolithic activity was slight, but did include a small number of flints from Castle Hill, perhaps indicating occasional visits to the hilltop to take advantage of the view afforded by its elevated position.

Only one early prehistoric feature was found, an early Neolithic pit at Hill Farm. The radiocarbon date from this pit was upon hazel charcoal from twigs, which made up some 25% of the fill. The burning dates to before 3630 cal BC, which places this feature in the first phase of Neolithic activity in the Upper Thames valley, contemporary with the earliest monuments of the Dorchester complex across the river to the north (Whittle et al. 1992) and prior to the construction of the Drayton cursus some 6 km to the west (Barclay et al. 2003, Chapter 8). Published radiocarbon dates would suggest that it might overlap with the earliest use of the Abingdon Causewayed Enclosure some 10 km to the north-west (Case and Whittle 1982), but a new dating programme suggests that the enclosure is unlikely to have been constructed until after 3650 cal BC (Whittle et al. Forthcoming). Occupation sites of this early date are relatively uncommon in the Upper Thames Valley; only at Yarnton are there securely dated pits as early (Hey forthcoming).

A scatter of struck flint, some of it Neolithic, was recovered from the field west of this (R Eeles pers. comm.). A few flint artefacts datable to the Neolithic were also recovered from the topsoil or as residual material from later features in the trenches dug in 2004, and others (including a leaf-shaped arrowhead) from Castle Hill. Overall this suggests a low level of activity across the area during the early Neolithic.

A continued presence in the Middle Neolithic is shown by one probable sherd of Peterborough Ware. Some of the Neolithic flints may also have been of this date, though nothing diagnostic was found. Late Neolithic activity is not represented, but Beaker activity is shown by the sherds recovered by Rhodes in 1947 (Rhodes 1948, 22), and early Bronze Age activity by two pottery sherds (beaker or collared urn) from Trenches 3 and 5 on Castle Hill. Except perhaps for the early Neolithic, the overall paucity of evidence suggests that use of the hills prior to the late Bronze Age was relatively low-level or sporadic.

Middle Bronze Age pottery was recovered from Hill Farm in small quantities, but no contemporary features were identified. Bronze Age pottery was apparently found by Dr Watts, the amateur excavator of Castle Hill, near to Hill Farm on the surface, but the finds have not been located (Berks Arch. J. 1937, 37). Rhodes recorded a sherd of Middle Bronze Age cinerary urn from his excavation on the plateau (Rhodes 1948, 24), possibly indicating that the tradition of burial here began in the Bronze Age, but it has not yet been possible to examine the vessel held at the Ashmolean Museum.

THE LATE BRONZE AGE ENCLOSURE

One of the most significant results of the Wittenhams project has been the discovery of a late Bronze Age enclosure on Castle Hill, preceding the Iron Age hillfort. Geophysical survey and excavation have demonstrated that the enclosure was sub-circular in form, measuring *c* 100 m in diameter. The ditch was substantial and potentially of defensive proportions, reaching 2.5 m in depth in Trench 3, though narrower in both Trench 4 and Trench 6. The ditch fill sequence seen in Trench 3 hints that an inner upcast bank once existed, although no evidence of postholes or a palisade for revetment was found in any of the three trenches. It therefore seems plausible that this was a simple dumped rampart. No entrances were located during the excavation, although the geophysical plot appears to show three gaps in the south-eastern half of the enclosure circuit. The lower fills of the enclosure ditch can be securely ascribed to the late Bronze Age, on the grounds of finds of 'plain ware'

pottery and four radiocarbon determinations with date ranges falling between the late 11th and 9th centuries cal BC.

Surprisingly, mollusc evidence from the lower ditch fills is indicative of tree cover. Phytolith evidence from the ditch and from late Bronze Age buried soil layers beneath the hillfort ramparts is also consistent with wooded conditions. It is possible that many of the snails recovered date from the original clearance and construction of the enclosure, being incorporated into the upcast bank at this time, and later being introduced into the ditch when the bank slumped. Nevertheless, at face value the evidence suggests that woodland regeneration occurred fairly soon after construction of the enclosure, or conceivably even that the hilltop was only partially cleared in the first place.

Significant numbers of finds were recovered from the lower ditch fills, including much pottery and animal bone, and worked flint possibly from a contemporary knapping industry. Two possible 'deliberate' or 'special' deposits can be identified: a large semi-complete pot (Trench 6) and a human radius fragment (Trench 3). The faunal remains included a notably high proportion of pig, with cattle and sheep/goat also represented. Charred plant remains were sparse, although some wheat grain was present.

The upper fills of the enclosure ditch belong to the early Iron Age, although they contained significant amounts of residual late Bronze Age pottery. On the analogy of pieces from other late Bronze Age sites, a fragment of worked igneous rock from one of these fills probably represents part of a late Bronze Age mould, suggesting that bronze casting took place in the vicinity.

Despite the significant quantities of artefacts deposited within the ditch, evidence for late Bronze Age activity elsewhere on the hilltop was limited. No other contemporary features were found in the excavated trenches, with the possible exception of a pit broadly dated to the late Bronze Age/early Iron Age from Trench 7. Some residual late Bronze Age pottery occurred in later features both inside and outside the enclosure, but the quantities were relatively sparse. While the apparent emptiness of the enclosure could simply be the result of the limited scale of excavation, the geophysical survey showed few features inside that part of the enclosure outside the clump, and it is possible that it never saw permanent settlement. South of Castle Hill Rutland's excavations in the car park (Hingley 1978) recovered late Bronze Age pottery, and late Bronze Age finds were also recovered from a pit to the west in Time Team's Trench (Harding pers. Comm.). A buried land surface with late Bronze Age activity was found in Trench 14 some 200 m further west, and modest quantities of late Bronze Age pottery, together with a scabbard chape, were also recovered from around Hill Farm. This strongly suggests that a contemporary settlement lay to the south-west of Castle Hill, although associated structural features were not confirmed.

It is notable that, in contrast to some later Bronze Age enclosures elsewhere in southern England, there is as yet no evidence that Castle Hill was a focus for the deposition of metalwork. This role may have been taken by the adjacent stretch of the River Thames, where three pieces of middle or late Bronze Age metalwork have been found over the years (York 2002). A similar association of a late Bronze Age hilltop enclosure with a focus of metalwork deposition in the adjacent Thames is evident at Taplow, Bucks (Allen and Hayden forthcoming).

LATER BRONZE AGE ENCLOSURE IN SOUTHERN ENGLAND

Recent fieldwork has revealed several new examples of later Bronze Age hilltop enclosures in southern England. A survey of the evidence will be presented below in order to provide a context for the results from Castle Hill. Broadly speaking, three chronological groups of enclosures can be identified:

1. A small group of middle Bronze Age enclosures of around 100m in diameter, radiocarbon dated to *c* 1400-1000 cal BC;
2. A further group of similarly-sized enclosures, broadly contemporary with Castle Hill, radiocarbon dated to *c* 1050-800/700 cal BC and associated with post-Deverel Rimbury 'plain ware' pottery;
3. Hillforts 'proper', which appear across much of southern England after *c* 800 BC, being associated with 'decorated' post-Deverel Rimbury wares.

Middle Bronze Age enclosures

The best known of the early enclosures lies only 25 km to the south-west of Castle Hill at Rams Hill on the Berkshire Downs. As at Castle Hill, the enclosure lies within a later hillfort. The enclosure is oval, with a ditch and internal bank, measuring *c* 120 x 75 m. Earlier excavations at the site (Piggott and Piggott 1940; Bradley and Ellison 1975) have been reinterpreted by Needham and Ambers (1994). The radiocarbon evidence implies that the enclosure was established in the last quarter of the second millennium BC, with the rampart later remodelled with timber lacing. The interior of the enclosure was occupied by scattered roundhouses, four-post structures and small pits. However, it is unclear how much of this activity was actually contemporary with the enclosure; some, at least, appears to have been either earlier or later (Needham and Ambers 1994, 238-9).

A further possible example from the Upper Thames basin comes from the site at Camp Gardens, Stow-on-the-Wold. Here, a section of ditch more than 1.7 m deep has been excavated, the overall extent of which is uncertain, although it is suspected to form part of a hilltop enclosure preceding the Iron Age hillfort on the site. Two radiocarbon dates of 1400-990 cal BC and 1390-1005 cal BC have been obtained from the ditch (Parry 1999).

In other parts of southern England, a number of putative middle Bronze Age 'Rams Hill-type' enclosures were cited by Bradley and Ellison (1975), including South Lodge Camp, Wiltshire; Martin Down, Hampshire; Highdown Hill, Sussex; and Norton Fitzwarren, Somerset. However, as discussed by Needham and Ambers (1994), at each of these sites doubts can be raised over the dating evidence and interpretation of the structural remains. Subsequent work has identified some more convincing examples, however. This includes a site in the Chilterns at Fairfield Park, Bedfordshire, where a ditched sub-oval enclosure *c* 100 m in diameter has recently been found, stratigraphically preceding an early Iron Age settlement. The lower fills of the ditch contained few finds, but a radiocarbon determination of 1250-1239 cal BC/1211-1012 cal BC has been obtained. No evidence for internal occupation was found, although a small cluster of later Bronze Age pits and an unurned cremation burial lay just outside (Webley *et al.* forthcoming). A further possible parallel comes from Thundersbarrow Hill, Sussex, where again an inner enclosure (1.2 ha in size) has been found preceding a later hillfort. Antler from a basal fill of the enclosure ditch produced a very early radiocarbon date of 1670-1320 cal BC, although the possibility

of residuality is an issue. The middle ditch fills contained late Bronze Age 'plain ware' pottery (Hamilton and Manley 1997).

Late Bronze Age enclosures

At least two enclosures in the Upper and Middle Thames basin can be dated to the late Bronze Age. This includes the final phase of the Rams Hill enclosure, dating to the late 11th-10th centuries BC, when a double palisade was set into the now infilled ditch (Needham and Ambers 1994). A further enclosure has recently been discovered at Taplow Court, Buckinghamshire, once again within a later hillfort. Although the enclosure was only partially exposed, it probably measured around 160 m long and 80-100 m across, occupying a bluff overlooking the River Thames. The enclosure ditch was up to 2.2 m deep and approaching 5 m wide, and contained late Bronze Age 'plain ware' pottery; the lower silts have been dated to 1070-790 BC using optically stimulated luminescence (OSL). A palisade trench to the interior of the ditch also produced plain ware, and further palisade or fence lines lay to the exterior of the ditch, although the chronological relationship between these different elements of the enclosure is uncertain. Little of the interior of the enclosure was excavated, although one possible Bronze Age post-built structure was found (Allen and Hayden forthcoming).

Claims have also been made that the poorly-understood subcircular earthwork at Marshall's Hill near Reading may be a late Bronze Age enclosure, on the grounds of finds of pottery from the interior and metalwork from the surrounding area (Bradley 1986). However, there is no dating evidence from the enclosure circuit itself, and the diminutive size of the earthwork (reportedly only 20 x 13 m: Seaby 1932) suggests that it is unlikely to be related to the other sites discussed in this section.

Looking further afield, roughly circular enclosures of a similar size to that at Castle Hill are known from Carshalton, Surrey and Thrapston, Northamptonshire. The Carshalton enclosure is around 150 m in diameter, and has produced plain ware pottery from its ditch (Adkins and Needham 1985). Recent small-scale excavation has produced evidence for pits both inside and outside the enclosure (Groves and Lovell 2002). The Thrapston enclosure is around 110 m in diameter and has been ascribed to the 10th-mid 8th centuries BC through radiocarbon dating and associated artefacts. Again, occupation in the form of pits was found both within and outside the enclosed area (Hull 2001).

Also belonging to this period is the well-known group of late Bronze Age circular 'ringworks' of Essex and Kent, including Mucking North and South Rings, Springfield Lyons and Mill Hill, Deal. These may be of a slightly different character, however, as they are rather smaller at 40-75 m in diameter. Complete excavation of the sites at Mucking and Springfield Lyons has shown that they contained one or more roundhouses, and they have been interpreted as high-status residential units (Needham 1993).

Discussion

This survey has shown that Castle Hill can be placed in a tradition of similarly-sized hilltop enclosures in southern England that had emerged by the later Bronze Age (see

Fig. 11.1). Unfortunately, the extremely limited extent of excavation of most of these enclosures makes interpretation of their function difficult. Some evidence of occupation has been found in most cases, though this was not necessarily limited to the interior of the enclosure. Whether any of the enclosures saw intense or permanent settlement is a moot point. It can be tentatively suggested at this stage that the enclosures served a role as a place for periodic gatherings for communities in the local area. Such an emphasis on group performance might contrast with the situation in Essex and Kent, where smaller ringworks were constructed which arguably emphasised the prestige of particular individuals or family groups. The presence of the stone mould at Castle Hill is notable given that residues of non-ferrous metallurgy have also been found deposited at the Thrapston enclosure and at a number of the Essex ringworks. However, the significance of this is unclear given that metalworking also appears to have taken place at many unenclosed sites during this period.

THE EARLY TO MIDDLE IRON AGE HILLFORT

The hillfort defences

Dating evidence from the hillfort defences was sparse, but a few sherds of pottery from the lower fills of the ditch and from the core of the counterscarp bank suggest that construction took place in the early Iron Age, in line with most other hillforts in the local region. However, the defences may have been maintained into the middle Iron Age, to judge by the very limited accumulation of layers in the ditch prior to the late Iron Age/early Roman period. It seems that the ditch underwent a series of episodes of cleaning out, with upcast used to heighten the counterscarp bank, which showed a series of dumped layers separated by thin turf lines. Mollusc evidence from the lower ditch fills indicates that clearance had occurred since the late Bronze Age, the hillfort being established in a largely open landscape.

Excavation of the inner bank of the defences has shown that its present profile is somewhat misleading (see Chapter 2). The accumulation of Roman and post-Roman deposits to the rear of the original bank has created a 'false crest' on this side, while the front of the original bank may well have been removed by erosion into the ditch. The internal stratigraphy of the original Iron Age bank is difficult to interpret, due to severe disturbance from animal burrowing, and the fact that only a narrow slot was excavated through the feature. However, it seems that the soil and chalk rubble core of the bank was revetted to the rear by a timber palisade or kerb, which was replaced at least once. No evidence for the use of stone in the ramparts was seen.

Despite the build-up of colluvial soil behind the rampart, the buried ground surface did not survive except beneath the rampart itself. In the excavated trench the surface of the chalk dips behind the rampart (see schematic section [Fig. 2.3](#)), and the geophysical survey, which identified a 'lynchet' corresponding to the edge of the dip, suggests that this dip extended along much of the south and east sides of the hillfort. One plausible explanation for this dip would appear to be a quarry hollow excavated to add material to the rampart, but the limited excavation evidence does not support an Iron Age origin for this feature, as only one very thin deposit that could have predated the late Roman period was found within it.

There are now two entrances to the hillfort, on the south-west and north-east. No archaeological investigation of the north-east entrance has been carried out, but limited clearance of part of the south-west entrance suggests that the causeway leading through this entrance is undisturbed chalk, suggesting that this entrance may have been original. This entrance is sited where it might be expected, facing the large external settlement. Pairs of opposing entrances are a common feature of early Iron Age hillforts, occurring for instance at White Horse Hill (Cromarty et al. 2003) and at Wessex hillforts such as Quarley Hill and Danebury (Cunliffe 1991, 348 and Fig. 14.24).

Further excavation – including some intentional investigation of the entrances – would be required in order to elucidate the extent to which the hillfort was a seriously defensible structure, rather than being primarily for show. One possible flaw in the defensive capabilities of the hillfort may have been the presence of the slightly higher Round Hill within slingshot range to the west. What is clear is that the hillfort ramparts in their original state would have formed an imposing and impressive monument, visible for many miles around.

Comparison with other hillforts in the Upper Thames Valley

The nearest contemporary hillfort to Castle Hill was that at Blewburton, lying 7 km to the south and clearly visible across the intervening valley. Blewburton belongs to the group of hillforts on the chalklands of the Berkshire Downs, of which Castle Hill has sometimes been considered an outlier (Cotton 1962). Most of the Berkshire Downs hillforts are similar to Castle Hill in having a univallate form, often with a counterscarp bank, and where excavated all have been shown to originate in the early Iron Age. Beyond this, however, some variation can be seen in the construction and developmental sequence of their defences. At Blewburton (Collins 1947; 1953; Avery 1993) and Segsbury (Lock *et al.* 2005) a similar sequence can be seen whereby an early Iron Age palisade was followed by a timber-laced rampart, which was in turn replaced by a dump rampart revetted with drystone walling (Blewburton) or an inner retaining wall of sarsens (Segsbury). In the case of Blewburton, the third of these phases is dated to the middle Iron Age and may have followed a period of desertion. At Uffington (Miles *et al.* 2003) an early Iron Age timber-laced ‘box’ rampart was similarly replaced by a chalk rubble dump rampart with sarsen stone facing. At Alfred’s Castle (Lock and Gosden 2000; Gosden and Lock 2001), meanwhile, only the latter phase of chalk rubble with sarsen facing is apparent. At Rams Hill the severely plough-damaged ramparts appear to have been of dump type (Piggott and Piggott 1940); ploughing has brought many pieces of sarsen to the surface, suggesting they were used in the rampart structure in some way (Bradley and Ellison 1975, 67). The evidence from the Berkshire Downs hillforts is thus consistent with the wider trend within southern England for timber-laced hillfort ramparts to precede dump ramparts (Avery 1993). The implied relative chronological sequence is summarised by Table 11.1, although it cannot be assumed that any given constructional technique was directly contemporary at different sites. It should also be noted that the apparent absence of the third constructional form at Castle Hill may simply be accounted for by the lack of local availability of sarsen stone.

In contrast to the sites on the Berkshire Downs, much less is known about the group of hillforts lying to the east of Castle Hill in the western Chilterns, although surface traces indicate that all were large univallate enclosures. Dating evidence is scarce, although at Bozdown Camp, Whitchurch, limited excavation during the

1950s produced flint-tempered pottery sherds and a shale bracelet fragment from the lower fills of the hillfort ditch, suggesting a late Bronze Age or early Iron Age date. The inner bank was too plough damaged to reveal much about its structure (Wood 1954). At Danesfield Camp, Medmenham, small-scale excavation of the hillfort interior has produced evidence for middle Iron Age occupation, although the recovery of a late Bronze Age spearhead from the ramparts in early 20th century may suggest an earlier origin (Keevill and Campbell 1993).

Internal occupation

Evidence for internal occupation of the hillfort during the early Iron Age in terms of features was slight. As mentioned earlier, ploughing may have removed shallow features, and modification of the area immediately behind the rampart, possibly in the late Roman period, may also have removed Iron Age evidence. Two postholes were found sealed by early Iron Age layers within the upper fills of the late Bronze Age enclosure ditch in Trench 6, but these may have belonged to a feature marking the line of the enclosure itself, such as a fence, rather than evidence of unrelated structures on the top of the hill that have now been removed by the plough.

Otherwise, the only feature datable to this period was a single large pit (3006) near the summit of the hill in Trench 3. This pit was unusual in size, being 3.5 m in diameter and surviving 0.75 m deep, and was larger than any of the pits excavated on the settlement outside the hillfort. The largest of these were at Hill Farm, and were 2.6 m, 2.3 m and 2.1 m across. In comparison with pits on the gravel terraces of the Upper Thames it is also unusually large; the largest of 900 pits at Gravelly Guy, Stanton Harcourt, for instance, was 2.5 m in diameter (Lambrick and Allen 2004, 112-3), and pit N/3 at City Farm, Hanborough, which was 2 m across, was described as conspicuously large (Case et al. 1964, 43). Lambrick however notes that pits cut into chalk are generally considerably larger, and the pits excavated at Segsbury do include a number at around 2.8 m in diameter, and one (1316) just over 3 m across (Gosden and Lock 2005, 56). At Danebury (Whittle in Cunliffe 1984, 130-131), also on chalk, the cylindrical pits did not exceed 2.5 m in diameter, and only 8 of the 753 beehive pits were more than 3 m across at the base. The largest pits were almost all of the latest phase, that is, later middle Iron Age. This brief review suggests that the size of this pit at Castle Hill was exceptional, particularly for the early Iron Age.

The pit contained a series of dumped deposits which produced a remarkable assemblage of finds, including 12 kg of pottery, 12 kg of animal bone, four worked bone implements, a sling bullet and a few fragments of fired clay. The animal bone included an articulated raven skeleton, representing a type of 'special deposit' seen at several other Iron Age sites in southern England (Hill 1995a). Charred plant remains from the pit included wheat, barley and oat grains, and wheat processing waste (chaff). This pit is unusual within the region for the sheer wealth of material it contained, and while it might be argued that a large pit is likely to contain a larger assemblage of finds, the quantity of material is exceptional even taking this into account. Allowing for its greater volume, only two of the 900 pits at Gravelly Guy were proportionally as rich, and none of those at Segsbury was remotely comparable.

Its fills are likely to have resulted from unusual processes or events, although the exact nature of these events is debatable. The combination of 'placed' items (eg the raven skeleton) and apparent 'refuse' or midden material of more fragmented character is fairly typical of Iron Age pit deposits (Hill 1995a), and it could be argued

that only the scale of the assemblage is out of the ordinary. The large and unabraded sherds of a number of vessels refitting across the fills, however, shows that deposition occurred rapidly, and that most of the material had not been curated for any length of time. In this context the number of animals represented, many of whose bones were also in good condition, is significant, as it indicates the death and disposal of a large number of animals in a very short time, something that is unlikely to have occurred commonly. It is therefore tempting to see the large quantities of animal bone and pottery as the residue of a specific event such as a feast, especially as particular types of vessel, possibly those associated with cooking and drinking, are very strongly represented in the pit assemblage. Against this, the animal bones show no particular emphasis on 'choice' meat, some of the young animals are neonatal, and some of the other finds, for instance the worked bone implements, would be more difficult to explain in this way.

Much depends upon whether we need see all of the material in the pit as representative of the same activity, and what the pit contents may have been intended to commemorate or to bring about. The neonatal animals may have been those stillborn during the spring lambing, but may still have been offered up at a celebration of spring. While the quantity of other animal bones does suggest that there may have been a feast, this may only have been an accompaniment to other ceremonies enacted at that gathering, of which the other items were perhaps offered in memory. The raven skeleton and the slingshot may have been connected, the shot either the one used to bring the bird down, or to represent its killing. The elaborate lid may have belonged to a vessel brought in gift exchange, or whose contents had been consumed during the rituals performed on this visit to the hilltop. The more domestic tools may then have represented the creation of garments prepared for the rituals, the assumption of certain domestic duties, perhaps on marriage, or their renunciation in a rite of passage. In addition, not all of the finds need have been incorporated deliberately; some abraded sherds of pottery were found that are believed to have been residual, and it is possible that some of the other items were also incorporated accidentally.

Overall, it seems unlikely that this feature and its contents were simply the product of domestic activity, and an interpretation connected to some gathering, possibly in the springtime, is preferred.

Three of the four trenches excavated into the late Bronze Age enclosure ditch revealed a dark deposit in its top containing a considerable quantity of early Iron Age pottery and animal bone, and the fourth also contained some sherds. Unless the excavations have happened upon particular concentrations of such material, a significant quantity of early Iron Age finds is likely to have been deposited along the silted ditch on the hilltop. This evidence does not fit with the relative scarcity of early Iron Age features apparent from the geophysical survey and the excavated trenches. It strongly suggests either that a considerable number of features of this date within the hillfort have been destroyed entirely by later ploughing, or that the silted hollow was chosen preferentially for the deposition of material, possibly a deliberate reference to the past existence of the hilltop enclosure within the larger hillfort. The extensive evidence for early Iron Age settlement on the plateau below the hillfort, including numerous storage pits, makes the former suggestion perhaps less convincing. Evidence from the settlement outside the hillfort shows that middening was practised (see Chapter 5 Trench 14), and it is also possible that material was deliberately deposited in the hollow left by the earlier enclosure.

There is more tangible evidence for widespread occupation within the hillfort during the middle Iron Age, represented by thirteen pits in Trench 3 and one in

Trench 6. Most of these were fairly shallow bowl-shaped features, although one probable storage pit of cylindrical form was also found. No less than six of the pits contained articulated, partially articulated or fragmentary human remains. Other finds were modest in range, being limited to limited assemblages of pottery and animal bone and some copper alloy fragments. Notably, environmental samples produced a small amount of fish bone, apparently from secure contexts. While fish is not generally thought to have played a significant dietary role in Britain during this period, pike bone has been previously recorded from a middle Iron Age settlement elsewhere in the region at Watkins Farm, Northmoor (Allen 1990). The samples also contained limited amounts of wheat and barley grain and wheat chaff.

The human burials represent examples of the well-attested Iron Age tradition of depositing human remains in settlement and hillfort contexts. Neonates, adult females and males were all represented. Radiocarbon date ranges from the burials span the 4th to 1st centuries BC. The most remarkable of the burial deposits came from 'storage' pit 3152. At the base of the pit lay the crouched skeleton of an adult male, while the middle fill of the pit contained the partially articulated remains of an adult female, showing cut marks from the defleshing or dismemberment of the body. A neonate burial inserted into the top of the pit during the late Iron Age or early Roman period (see below) completed the sequence. Multiple burials of this kind are not common in Iron Age contexts, but some parallels do exist. At the Danebury hillfort in Hampshire, for example, one early Iron Age pit contained three successive inhumations, with a young adult male followed by an infant, in turn followed by another adult (Walker 1984, 447).

Within the local region, finds of Iron Age human bone deposits have come from Blewburton (Collins), from Segsbury (Lock *et al.* 2005) and Alfred's Castle (Lock and Gosden 2000), perhaps suggesting an association between hillforts and mortuary ritual. Human remains have also been found at a number of non-hillfort settlements in the region, including at Hill Farm just outside Castle Hill. Most notably, more than 60 individuals were found at the settlement of Gravelly Guy, Stanton Harcourt, Oxfordshire (Lambrick and Allen 2004, Chapter 6 and 458-46). Nevertheless, the proportion of excavated Middle Iron Age pits associated with human remains at Castle Hill (some 46%) is still extremely high, and human bones found in the Late Roman quarry cutting other Middle Iron Age pits may well have derived from further examples. Only further excavation will determine whether the sample of pits that were excavated is anomalous or representative of activity within the hillfort, but on present evidence a strong association between this hillfort and burial is plausible.

Castle Hill is very unusual within the region in that the hillfort appears to have been associated with a contemporary settlement just outside on the plateau below. It may thus be possible to gain some sense of the role of the hillfort by comparing its finds assemblages with those from the trenches across the settlement. Overall, the artefact assemblages seem broadly similar, for example in terms of the character of the pottery. Finds of querns and pottery sherds with charred residues suggest that food preparation and cooking took place in each case. Each of the sites also produced artefacts probably associated with textile manufacture. There was also at least some evidence for cereal processing at both Castle Hill and the adjacent settlement. However, evidence for iron working (iron slag and a tuyère) was limited to the settlement, and this was perhaps one activity not pursued at the hillfort.

It is notable that the faunal assemblage from Castle Hill shows a consistently higher proportion of pig bone in the early and middle Iron Age than in the settlement

below. The relative amounts of pig from the hillfort are in fact unusually high for this period in a regional context. This is potentially significant as it has been argued that pigs and pork carried status associations during the Iron Age (Parker Pearson 1999). Unusually fish bones were present in both early and middle Iron Age pits on Castle Hill, but an eel vertebra was also found in a middle Iron Age pit at Hill Farm. The occurrence of fish bones in both the hillfort and settlement probably indicates that fishing was practised by the local community; there were too few bones to suggest any distinction between the species found in either.

Recent work elsewhere in southern Britain has emphasised the diversity of differing roles probably served by the sites lumped together under the label 'hillfort' (Hill 1995b; Hamilton and Manley 2001). Within the local region, the wide variation in size shown by hillforts arguably makes it unlikely that all performed the same functions. The smallest, Alfred's Castle, is only 2 acres in size, while the largest, Segsbury, is no less than 26 acres in size (Castle Hill is middling at c 10 acres). Furthermore, where excavated the interiors of the hillforts show significant variation in the character and intensity of occupation. At Uffington, a series of early Iron Age pits and limited evidence for middle Iron Age activity was found in the interior, while at Segsbury there was internal occupation including pits and roundhouse gullies from both the early and the middle Iron Age. In both cases, however, the excavators argue that the evidence is more commensurate with temporary, repeated occupation than permanent settlement. The lack of evidence for crop processing at Segsbury was highlighted in particular (Miles *et al.* 2003; Lock *et al.* 2005). At Alfred's Castle, however, preliminary results suggest dense early to middle Iron Age occupation in the hillfort interior, including storage pits, a roundhouse, and evidence for crop processing (Gosden and Lock 2001; Lock and Gosden 1999; 2000).

Fully understanding the roles served by the hillfort at Castle Hill would require larger scale excavation of its interior, but a few observations can be made at this stage. The presence of the seemingly very substantial early to middle Iron Age settlement immediately to the south-west of Castle Hill suggests that warfare or raiding was not sufficiently frequent to make the hillfort itself the primary focus for permanent occupation in the immediate area. While it could be argued that the hillfort and surrounding settlement represent something akin to the medieval castle and surrounding town, there is as yet no evidence of structures within the hillfort, and apart from one pottery lid, the finds from the hillfort do not differ significantly from those in the settlement outside. Only the higher proportion of pig consumed within the hillfort suggests a significant difference between the hillfort and the adjacent settlement, and this need not imply a higher-status group within the hillfort, pig may have been consumed by the whole community, but in association with special events that only, or most often, took place within the hillfort. The hillfort can instead be viewed as serving certain more specific functions for this community and others in the wider local area. In addition to its potential role as a refuge in times of trouble, the hillfort may have served as a venue for special activities such as those represented by the unusual early Iron Age pit deposit and the atypical middle Iron Age burials.

THE LATE IRON AGE AND ROMAN PERIOD: ABANDONMENT AND REOCCUPATION OF THE HILLTOP

Activity at Castle Hill seems to have been much reduced in scale during the late Iron Age and early Roman period. The focus of occupation in this period may have been

on the lower ground to the south-west of Castle Hill, as pottery of the 1st to 2nd centuries AD has been recovered from Trenches 13-15 and Hill Farm, as well as from Rhodes' (1947) and Time Team's (2003) excavations.

Finds of late Iron Age to early Roman material from silting deposits in the hillfort ditch suggest that the defences were no longer actively maintained. The finds included modest amounts of pottery and animal bone, and some fired clay blocks of uncertain purpose. The only other evidence for activity in this period was the neonate burial inserted into the upper part of middle Iron Age pit 3152, which has been radiocarbon dated to 20 BC-AD 130 (Poz-12518: 1945 ± 30 BP). The placing of this burial squarely within a pit that contained two much earlier inhumations is unlikely to be coincidental, indicating persistence in the tradition of using the hilltop as a place of burial.

The reduction in activity may indicate that the role of the hillfort as a local centre was taken over in the late Iron Age by the 'oppidum' at Dyke Hills, on the low ground on the opposite bank of the river. Access to or control of the River Thames was perhaps now deemed more important than the defensive benefits and visibility provided by a hilltop location. During the early Roman period the centre of gravity shifted again a short distance to the town of Dorchester.

There was no evidence from the excavated evidence for significant activity on Castle Hill during the 2nd and 3rd centuries AD, but material held in Wallingford Museum from the 1920s amateur excavations in the Clump includes Samian ware and other coarsewares of a probable 2nd or 3rd century date, and Samian sherds were also given to the Reading Museum and the British Museum by . A penannular brooch found within a late Roman midden should date to the late Iron Age or early Roman period, and was presumably a long-curated item when deposited. Following this hiatus occupation returned in the late 4th century. Occupation below the hill in the area of Trenches 13-15 and Hill Farm seems to have dwindled by this time, although some late Roman pottery was recovered from the Rhodes (1948) and Time Team (Wessex Archaeology 2004) investigations of the building overlying the early Iron Age midden.

Features uncovered on Castle Hill included two very large pits in Trench 3. The function of these pits, which were only two of a line identified by the geophysical survey (Fig. 2.1), remains uncertain. The pits were vertical-sided and flat bottomed, though the upper sides of the larger of the excavated pits had weathered back to a 45° angle. The regularity of the sides and base of these features perhaps suggests that they were not simply quarries. No trace of any surrounding post or slot-built structure was found to indicate that these might have been cellars, though insufficient of either was dug to rule out the possibility of steps or of supports at the sides for a superstructure, and the weathering may have removed surrounding postholes or slots.

During the excavation it was noted that a seam of clay running through the chalk reached the side of the hill just above the line of pits indicated by the geophysical survey. This layer of clay would have prevented rainfall from draining through the chalk, so that a springline would have emerged on the hillside after heavy rain. It is just possible that these pits were temporary cisterns, as chalk will hold water for a short time before it drains away. Against this, a slightly smaller pit was found towards the top of the hill in Trench 4, again late Roman, and with the same rectangular shape, vertical sides and flat base as the larger pits.

A few much smaller pits were scattered across Trenches 3, 4 and 7, and midden layers were dumped behind the hillfort ramparts. There is no evidence that the hillfort defences were refurbished, however, with the build-up of silting and

erosion deposits in the hillfort ditch gathering pace in this period. A varied range of finds was recovered from late Roman deposits, including pottery, vessel glass, a rotary quern fragment, a spindle whorl, and several pieces of ironwork. Some tile was found, but not in sufficient quantities to suggest the presence of a Romanized building on the hilltop. Much animal bone were also recovered, along with small amounts of both freshwater and marine fish bone and some oyster shells. The overall character of these finds suggests domestic activity.

The hilltop was once again used for burial in this period, with a single inhumation grave occurring in Trench 3. Disarticulated human bone was found in the late Roman deposits in the hillfort ditch, although it is unclear whether this was a deliberate mortuary practice or simply the result of disturbance of earlier burials. Four unaccompanied inhumation burials found in the 1980s immediately outside the eastern entrance of the hillfort could well also belong to this period (Chambers 1986). The Roman burials found in the 19th century immediately outside the ramparts on the north and west are not closely dated, but apparently included both cremations and inhumations (Wade and McGavin 1978; Fig. 1.2 No. 9). The bracelet found nearby (Fig. 1.2 No. 10) might indicate that some at least were late Roman. Human bone from rabbit holes in the ditch on the south-east was also handed in during the course of the project, though whether this was Roman or prehistoric is unknown. All of this suggests either the reuse of the hillfort by a substantial population in the later 4th century AD, or possibly continuity of use of the hillfort as a place of burial throughout much of the Roman period.

Reoccupation during the late 4th century AD can be seen at several other hillforts in the region. At Rams Hill, a rectangular enclosure cutting the eastern side of the hillfort ditch contained three inhumation burials along with coins giving *terminus post quem* of AD 395 (Piggott and Piggott 1940; Sutherland 1940). It has been suggested that this enclosure could have been the *temenos* of a late Roman shrine (Bradley and Ellison 1975, 71). At Uffington, activity dating to the late 4th and early 5th centuries AD was found within the hillfort interior, mostly in the form of unstratified artefacts, suggesting to the excavators that the site was a focus for votive deposition. An oven or corn-drier was also found, however. Just outside the hillfort, 49 inhumations and 9 cremations were found cut into a Neolithic long barrow, with at least one of the burials dated by pottery to after AD 340 (Miles *et al.* 2003). Slightly further afield, at Madmarston Camp in north Oxfordshire, limited excavation has produced 4th century pottery, coins and other artefacts from layers butting up to the inner face of the hillfort rampart, as at Castle Hill (Fowler 1960).

Castle Hill is thus just one example of a more general trend within the region to return to long-abandoned hillforts during the closing decades of the Roman period. The character of the activity at these sites is not easy to characterise. A mortuary or other ritual element seems to be typical, although at Castle Hill this may well have been combined with domestic occupation. Whether the use of Castle Hill for burial during this period was informed by any continuing memory of its comparable use during the Iron Age is uncertain.

POST-ROMAN OCCUPATION AND AGRICULTURE

Evidence for activity in the early to middle Saxon period was limited to four small residual pottery sherds from Trench 3. As a few Saxon sherds have previously been recovered as surface finds from Castle Hill (Wade and McGavin 1978), and Saxon sherds are also recorded from just north of the defences (Fig. 1.2, OA 17), it would

seem that there was some use of the hilltop during this period, perhaps continuing on from the late Roman occupation.

There is more substantial evidence for occupation during the 11th to 13th centuries. Individual pits occurred in both Trenches 4 and 6, containing local Wallingford ware pottery and, in one case, a spoon bit augur. Significant amounts of charred wheat, barley and oat grain were recovered from the pits, but the absence of chaff may suggest that the processing of the grain took place elsewhere. Abundant beech charcoal and some hazelnut shell also occurred in the pits. The assemblages from the pits may suggest an emphasis more on the use of local woodland resources than on farming. Subsequently, however, the area was given over to agriculture, as indicated by a ploughsoil deposit overlying pit 6011 but predating the 18th century planting of the Clumps.

Ploughing of the hilltop during the medieval period is also suggested by a series of colluvial layers which built up behind the hillfort ramparts in Trenches 2 and 3. Among the finds from these layers were further sherds of Wallingford ware pottery and a number of iron objects, including a decorative door hinge fragment, a padlock bolt, a horseshoe and two possible arrowheads. The sherds of Wallingford Ware included an associated group of large sherds from a single vessel, suggesting that this had been deposited during the same phase of occupation represented by the pits, and prior to the onset of agriculture. By analogy with the sequence seen in Trench 6, it could be suggested that these colluvial layers resulted from agricultural use of the hilltop after the two pits had been infilled, incorporating material from the preceding medieval occupation, although this chronological relationship cannot be proven.

THE SETTLEMENT OUTSIDE THE HILLFORT

Introduction

Geophysical survey has demonstrated the presence of a very substantial prehistoric settlement south, west and south-west of Castle Hill, within which a number of different elements can be discerned. Despite several different campaigns of excavation, however, only a very small part of this extensive settlement has been examined, making interpretation of the overall duration and development of this settlement extremely tentative. Sufficient has been done to make an outline interpretation possible, but the limited scope of the investigations needs to be borne in mind during the following discussion.

Late Bronze Age activity

A late Bronze Age element to the occupation on the plateau south of Castle Hill and Round Hill was first noted by Hingley when he wrote up Rutland's 1970 excavations on the site of the Castle Hill carpark (Hingley 1978). In addition to the evidence from the car park, Hingley suggested that there was late Bronze Age material amongst that recovered by Rhodes (*ibid.*,). Time Team's excavations in summer 2003 included a pit containing a fragment from a pyramidal loomweight (not mentioned in Wessex Archaeology's assessment report), a characteristically late Bronze Age form, and the excavation of Trench 14 in 2004 confirmed the presence of a late Bronze Age activity

horizon beneath the early Iron Age midden. Two features in Trench 15 south of Hill Farm were tentatively dated to the late Bronze Age, and a scabbard chape was found by metal detecting in the vicinity of the trench. Small quantities of late Bronze Age pottery were also recovered from the excavations at Hill Farm. The discoveries thus spread some 700 m along the plateau, though activity is concentrated beneath the midden and to the east.

The midden

The buried land surface in Trench 14 lay at the base of an accumulation of dark soil containing numerous finds, which is interpreted as a midden. The chronology of the stratigraphic sequence is not particularly clear. In his excavation Rhodes (Rhodes 1948, 22) found a few Iron Age sherds and Beaker pottery at the base of his sequence (layer 4), while in Trench 14 the earliest features contained either late Bronze Age or early Iron Age pottery, and were sealed by soils corresponding to Rhodes' layer 4. It is therefore possible that the whole sequence is of early Iron Age date, the Beaker and late Bronze Age finds being residual in a reworked soil, or derived from activity further upslope.

Alternatively, some of the postholes only recognised where cut into the light soils at the base of the sequence may in fact have been cut from higher up, and similar unrecognised features could also explain the presence of a few early Iron Age sherds in layers otherwise containing mainly late Bronze Age or earlier finds. This interpretation, which is preferred here, would mean that there was a buried topsoil containing finds from activity of Beaker, Middle Bronze Age and late Bronze Age date sealed by middening.

The preservation of large and unabraded sherds of late Bronze Age pottery, and the presence of a swan's neck pin of Hallstatt D type, close to the base of the sequence in Trench 14, probably indicates that the midden began to accumulate either during the late Bronze Age or immediately afterwards. The wolf bone from the base of the midden may therefore provide an approximate start date to the accumulation. The quantity of late Bronze Age pottery within Trench 14 alone, an area of only 10 x 2 m, suggests a significant accumulation of occupation material across the midden as a whole, whose extent, although uncertain, was tested by augering and can be broadly estimated using the negative evidence from some of the Time Team trenches excavated in the vicinity (Fig. 5.1). The auger survey suggested that the deposit extended for at least 30 m east, west and north, and south to the hedge bordering the road. The sequence was truncated in Time Team (hereafter TT) trenches 7, 8 and 10, only a pebble horizon and a thin layer of soil above (probably corresponding to 1457 and 1456) surviving below the Roman levels. The midden deposits were probably present in a deep soil build up in TT trench 4 that contained much early Iron Age pottery, but were absent from TT trenches 6, 9 and 11, suggesting that the midden did not reach the west side of the Roman enclosure, nor the north-east, but did continue beyond it on the south-east. This suggests that the midden is more than 60 m and less than 100 m in diameter.

Just north-west of the Castle Hill carpark, some 120 m to the south-east, a dark occupation deposit overlying a light occupation deposit was found in test-pits by Rutland (Hingley 1978). The sequence is similar to that in Trench 14, and the excavator compared this to the midden deposit found by Rhodes, but the two deposits are certainly not linked, as no trace of such a deposit was found in Time Team trench

11 dug midway between them. Several explanations are possible. Perhaps Rutland's deposits were the result of digging into a large feature of some sort, perhaps this was a second smaller localised midden, or possibly there was originally a much more extensive midden or occupation deposit that was later truncated. This might have occurred in the Roman period, such that the deposits were removed outside the ditched enclosure, but were preserved inside it, or the truncation may have occurred in the medieval period, but did not penetrate the area of Roman building debris, and also did not occur at the headlands at the edge of the medieval fields, such as that running south-west from the hillfort entrance.

On balance a very extensive occupation deposit seems least likely, although middens in the Vale of Pewsey do reach even greater size than this (Lawson 2000). TT trench 11 contained only a modest quantity of early Iron Age pottery, the majority of which came from two pits, and later features did not contain the quantity of residual material that might have been expected had the midden deposit extended over this area.

The deposit uncovered by Rhodes, Time Team and in Trench 14 is interpreted as a midden, rather than simply as an occupation soil, due to its depth, the condition of some of the finds, including large pottery sherds and groups of sherds, and complete animal bones, within it, and due to the sheer quantity of finds. As such, it bears comparison with the very large middens of later Bronze Age and Iron Age date found in Wiltshire, predominantly in the Vale of Pewsey, at sites such as Potterne, All Cannings Cross and Chisenbury (Lawson 2000). These sites are characterised not only by the quantity of finds within them, but also by the associated structural evidence, in particular chalk platforms like the one found by Rhodes (Mc Cormick ??).

The site at Potterne began in the Middle Bronze Age and continued until the end of the early Iron Age; at Little Wittenham accumulation appears to have begun only towards the end of the Bronze Age, and to have finished by the end of the early Iron Age, although it is possible that the limited investigation has only tested a peripheral area of the midden, and that earlier deposits will be found at its core. A shorter period of use would in part explain the more limited scale of the Little Wittenham midden, but may also indicate that this southern custom was only adopted here after it had been customary for centuries in Wiltshire. Some of the Wiltshire middens, such as All Cannings Cross, also date mainly from the earliest Iron Age.

At Potterne the range of finds, and the areas from which they are drawn, led Lawson to argue that these accumulations are more than the rubbish dumps of local settlements, and that they represent the deposition of materials from a wide area, and by large numbers of people, perhaps at times of major gatherings. The scale of excavation at the Wittenham site has been small, but the finds do include rare items such as the swan's neck pin and the wolf bone, as well as a variety of bone and other artefacts. A similar function to that suggested for Potterne may be represented, albeit on a smaller scale, on this site.

Within the Upper Thames Valley, sites of this type have not previously been positively identified, although others may well exist. At Wallingford a late Bronze Age occupation deposit some 0.3 m deep was found on an eyot in the Thames (Cromarty et al. 2006). This is one of several such island sites where accumulations of this date are known, most notable being Runnymede (Needham and Sørensen 1988; Needham and Spence 1996).

Perhaps an even closer parallel is the site at Woodeaton, where a remarkable range of Iron Age metalwork has been recovered (Kirk 1949; Goodchild and Kirk

1954; Bagnall-Smith 1998). Excavations by Harding showed that the Roman temple was underlain by an Iron Age dark occupation deposit some 0.4 m deep that extended for at least 20 m in either direction, and which included small areas of cobbling within it (Harding 1987). This deposit had material of late Bronze Age and early Iron Age date at the base, and although the deposit was somewhat mixed, predominantly middle Iron Age pottery towards the top. This may well be another such midden site, which Harding suggested might have been involved in metalwork production (*ibid.*, 33). Further fieldwalking, geophysical survey and limited trenching by Oxford Archaeology in 1990 has found more evidence of this dark deposit, and has shown that the Woodeaton deposit lies within an extensive cropmark complex including what appear to be several roundhouse gullies and enclosures (OA 1991; information from G Lambrick). As at Little Wittenham, the midden may have formed part of a wider settlement, but the chronological and spatial relationships between them has not been tested by excavation.

Early Iron Age occupation

Date and extent of occupation

Early Iron Age activity has been found covering almost the full extent of the settlement identified by geophysical survey. Excavations by Rutland in 1970 (Hingley 1978) revealed pits and a possible roundhouse gully just east of the car park, and Rhodes, Time Team and the excavation of Trench 14 indicated the presence of a midden some 200 m to the west. Time Team's trenches 11, 9 and 6 investigated early Iron Age pits, showing that settlement activity extended across the area between them, and (in the case of the pit in Trench 6) beyond. Trench 19 to the south revealed a series of semicircular gullies of small diameter, at least one surrounding a four-post structure, and Trench 15 revealed another focus of activity including a probable roundhouse gully, a dense cluster of pits and other ditches. Further early Iron Age features, including another ring gully of small diameter, were exposed in the staff car park to the north just east of Hill Farm, and several early Iron Age features were encountered during the excavations within and to the west of Hill Farm. A wide scatter of residual pottery was recovered from later features here, testifying to an early Iron Age presence in areas where no contemporary features were identified.

Whether all of this activity was contemporary has not been clearly established. The illustrated material from Rutland's excavations included handled bucket-shaped jars and bowls that are early Iron Age, but are not closely dateable. Finds from Rhodes' excavation of the midden include a few examples of earliest Iron Age type, as do those from Trench 14. His bowls include a large proportion of carinated types, which may be earlier than the round-bodied angular bowls that are argued to date from the later part of the early Iron Age (see Chapter 3). Some sherds belonging to the round-bodied type were also present in Trench 14. Although the material from the Time Team excavation of the midden has not been analysed for publication, initial assessment and spot-dating showed a similar variety of material to that recovered by Rhodes (Wessex Archaeology 2004; Allen pers. Comm.). This suggests that activity was continuing on the midden throughout the early Iron Age.

Associated with the round-bodied angular bowls on Castle Hill were coarse shelly vessels with T-shaped rims, which were also argued to belong in the later part of the early Iron Age. Another substantially complete example of the latter was recovered from a pit in Trench 15 cut by other pits attributed to this period, showing

that some of the early Iron Age activity in this trench was of the 5th century. There were also no clearly identifiable forms of the earliest Iron Age at Hill Farm or in Trench 15, perhaps suggesting an expansion of early Iron Age settlement from further east. The material from Trench 19 did not include large assemblages, and so is not closely dateable.

Structural evidence

Structural evidence from this phase is limited but varied. One probable roundhouse gully 13 m across was found in Trench 15, two possible posthole rings in Trench 19, one 7 m across, the other only 5 m across, and one four-post structure, also in Trench 19. Another probable roundhouse drainage gully, this time only draining the uphill (northern) side of the structure, was found by Rutland adjacent to the Castle Hill Car Park (Hingley 1978, Fig.). The diameter of the gully in Trench 15 is similar to that commonly found at Ashville, Abingdon (Parrington 1978) and at Gravelly Guy, Stanton Harcourt (Lambrick and Allen 2004), but nothing unfortunately survives to indicate what, if any, type of building lay inside. At 7 m across the larger post-ring in Trench 19 is similar to one at Ashville (*ibid.*, Fig. 17), and well within the range of those found at Gravelly Guy (*ibid.*, Fig. 3.12), most of which had doorposts beyond the ring, suggesting aisled construction. The post-ring at Ashville, however, did not. The east and south-east of the ring in Trench 19 lay beyond the limits of excavation, so cannot usefully be categorised further. The post-ring of the roundhouse within gullies 174/5 at Hill Farm is only 5 m across, and single examples of post-rings as small were also found at both Ashville (*ibid.*, Fig. 12) and at Gravelly Guy (*ibid.*, Fig. 3.11), but at Hill Farm and at Gravelly Guy this was only the inner ring of a larger aisled structure, and the same was probably true at Ashville, where a series of probable door posts on the south-east were not recognised. It is possible that outer doorposts could lie outside the limits of Trench 19. Smaller buildings with irregular post-rings are known, for instance at Mingies Ditch, Hardwick-with-Yelford (Allen and Robinson 1993, Houses 1, 2 and especially 4). Alternatively this post-ring could simply represent a fence.

If genuine, the four-post structure within semicircular gully 19183 is towards the upper end of the size range for most sites in the region, comparable for instance to the largest of those at Gravelly Guy (*ibid.*, Fig. 3.16), and with correspondingly substantial postholes. Four-post structures at least 3 m square are however a feature of this site, two of those at Hill Farm (548 and 549) being as large, and one (structure 547) considerably larger. Additional postholes along the sides are occasionally recognised on other sites, but appear to be another feature of this settlement, as they also occur with structures 548 and 549.

A number of four-post structures with surrounding gullies are known in the region; at Ashville early Iron Age ditch 346 (Parrington 1978, 11 and Fig. 10) formed a crook-shaped enclosure around a possible four-post structure, but clear semicircular ditches like those in Trench 19 are uncommon. A semicircular gully 180 of similar diameter at Ashville (*ibid.* Figs 3 and 4) surrounded postholes that could have included a four-post structure, but this was not recognised as such by the excavators, and the gully was dated to the Middle Iron Age. The alignment of the ends of the gully with one side of the four-post structure is not matched within the region, and could even indicate an alternative structural arrangement such as a semi-circular building. The presence of several semicircular gullies in Trench 19 may indicate that

a group of such structures lay within this area, a possible hint of zoning within the early Iron Age settlement.

Pits

A number of pits of this period were excavated in Trench 14, and several others were excavated in Time Team trenches 6, 9 and 11. The pits came in two sizes, those around 0.5 m in diameter, and those 1 - 1.5 m in diameter; the larger pits survived up to 0.8 m deep. Three or four large pits at Hill Farm may also be of this date, but stand out from the rest in terms of size (2-2.5 m in diameter and up to 1.2 m deep) and fills, having very few finds.

The pits were filled in a variety of ways, some showing a pattern of slow natural silting, others rapid infilling, and yet others a combination of phases of both. As is now commonly recognised on Iron Age settlements, some of the pits contained placed deposits. The most obvious of these was a pile of sherds from a large jar with a T-shaped rim, and from a decorated black burnished bowl, found on the base of a shallow small pit (15018) underneath a pile of small burnt pebbles. The pebbles were mostly of similar size, about 50 mm in diameter, and could perhaps have been used as slingshots. Other examples of placed deposits include the adult and child skeletons buried in intercutting pits (15003 and 15155), a complete and usable saddle quern in pit 15069 and possibly a pair of horse mandibles in pit 15010.

Middle Iron Age

The extent and character of the settlement

Amongst the widespread settlement activity identified through geophysical survey, one of the most prominent features is the ditch or ditches running for some 800 m in an arc from west of Round Hill to south of Castle Hill, with various ditches and pit alignments at right angles either side suggesting a division into fields or enclosures (Figs 5.2 and 5.3). This ditch was sectioned in Trench 13, and at this point was shown to date to the middle Iron Age. The ditch, which formed the main spine of the settlement system, splayed east of Trench 15 to form a sub-rectangular enclosure in one phase, and was interrupted where crossed by Trench 19, a penannular enclosure (Fig. 5.10, 19188) lying along its projected line.

A second penannular enclosure, probably enclosing a roundhouse, was found within Trench 19 north of this, ie on the north side of the boundary line (Fig. 5.10, 19185). Other than this no significant evidence of Middle Iron Age activity has yet been recovered within the arc of this boundary. Nothing of this date was recognised in Rhodes' or Rutland's excavations (Rhodes 1948, Hingley 1978), nor in the Time Team trenching in 2003 (Wessex Archaeology 2004). The excavation of Trench 14 similarly contained only a handful of sherds diagnostic of the middle Iron Age, perhaps suggesting that there was a drift of settlement southwards in this period, and that the bulk of middle Iron Age activity may have lain south or outside the boundary. Given the presence of early Iron Age activity west of the boundary, however, and the Middle Iron Age penannular gullies to the north in Trench 19, this was clearly not a hard and fast division, and much more investigation would be needed to clarify its function.

Adjacent to the boundary at the east end of the settlement were ditches suggesting an enclosure about 1 ha. in area, with a penannular enclosure at the centre

(Fig. 5.2 M). Another kite-shaped enclosure is suggested halfway along the spine ditch (Fig. 5.2 B), and other divisions within the settlement are hinted at by lines of pits, most (but not all) at right angles to the spine ditch; boundaries marked by lines of pits are known from other Upper Thames Valley settlements such as Gravelly Guy (Lambrick and Allen 2004, Fig. 3.2). The geophysical survey suggests that penannular enclosures, whether of Early or Middle Iron Age date, may have been widely spaced, but the excavations have shown that the geophysical survey does not give the whole picture; the obvious penannular enclosure at G has another adjacent just to the north, so that there was probably a line of small enclosures here stretching from G to E. A pair of adjacent penannular enclosures is evident north of B, and another two close to one another at J, while the excavations at Hill Farm have shown a pattern of separated enclosures, but no more than 30 m from one another. A similar mix of single house enclosures and lines of linked or loosely associated enclosures is evident at Faringdon, where part of another large settlement has recently been excavated (Weaver et al. 2004; Cook et al. 2004), though no overall plan of the excavated area has been published.

The archaeological features from Hill Farm overwhelmingly date to the middle Iron Age. A complex of features, including a post-built structure surrounded by a double penannular gully enclosed in turn by a large ditch, was exposed in the northern part of the Visitors' Car Park; a second penannular gully was revealed in the southern area of the site. Datable features from the Offices and Boiler House site include pits and postholes (some of which formed four-post structures), another penannular gully with two phases of ditch, and the ditch of a possible small sub-rectangular enclosure.

Structures

The structures at Hill Farm displayed some degree of order in their positioning, but the evidence for recutting and truncation clearly shows that they did not represent a single phase of development. The penannular gullies that surrounded the roundhouse 532 were all recut on at least one occasion, while ring gullies 60/70 and 690/700 also show subsequent phases of modification. These developments indicate that the structures were constructed and used over an extended period. Enclosure 100, which cut two earlier pits, was itself recut on one occasion and is later cut by other pits.

The four-post structures in the Offices excavation are a group of four or five. Postholes in two of these, 548 and 549, contained diagnostically Middle Iron Age pottery, the remainder are dated by association. The larger three cluster in an area surrounded by three penannular enclosures whose entrances faced the structures. This purposeful arrangement implies a degree of central settlement organisation, perhaps involving the communal use of these structures. One smaller four-post structure, 546, lay across the line of penannular enclosure ditch 690/700, and another possible example to the east lay within this enclosure, but had one corner obliterated by a pit, suggesting that the more southerly of the group may have gone out of use when this enclosure was created. These were the smallest of this group of four-post structures, with the smallest postholes. A tentative shift towards larger and more substantial four-post structures might be suggested, but the dataset is too small, and the dating evidence insufficient, to substantiate this.

The association of a roundhouse enclosure with an adjacent annexe is fairly common on Middle Iron Age settlements within the region, for instance at Farmoor (Lambrick and Robinson 1979, Areas II and III), at Ashville, Abingdon (Parrington

1978, Fig. 12) and at Salmondsbury (Dunning 1976). At Salmondsbury two roundhouses were enclosed by one gully, at Ashville the annexe was believed to contain an ancillary structure, while at Farmoor there were hardly any internal features. The presence of a human skull fragment at the base of pit 149 in the centre of the annexe at Hill Farm, and the fact that the other pits all lay at the edges of the annexe, suggests that this annexe did not have a purely agricultural function.

The excavated penannular gullies are mostly of similar size, at least 11 m in internal diameter, while the early Iron Age example in Trench 15 is more than 12 m across. The additional examples evident from the geophysical survey appear to be of broadly similar size, but the partially excavated penannular enclosure on the north side of the Offices excavation, 12066, was considerably smaller, only c. 9 m across.

As is usual in this region, entrances are commonly on the east or south-east. Hillforts generally share the predominantly east or south-east entrance, although Castle Hill itself has entrances on the north-east and south-west. Oswald has argued that the orientation of house and enclosure entrances is symbolic, and is related to the sunrise, and Fitzpatrick has suggested oppositions between light and dark or even life/birth and death (Oswald 1997, 92-5; Fitzpatrick 1997, 76-9). There are however also west-facing entrances in two cases, 690/700 in the Offices excavation and 19188 in Trench 19, both of which were subsequently blocked. As neither enclosure was completely exposed, it is not clear whether these enclosures were reoriented from west to east, or originally had two entrances, the west entrance later being blocked. House enclosures with 'back doors' are not particularly common in the region, but are known, for instance at Mingies Ditch (Allen and Robinson 1993, House 3).

It is therefore possible that the blocking of the western entrance of the penannular enclosures is symbolic rather than purely functional. Whether this relates to an opposition between the rising and the setting sun, and thus between the realms of birth and death, or has some other cosmological significance, is unknown. An attractive theory would link the recutting of the enclosure ditch to a change of ownership after the death of the first occupant, leading to the need to close the opening to prevent the return of the dead, but this is purely supposition.

Evidence for the houses themselves is less clear. The surviving circle of posts in structure 532 is only 5m in diameter, and postholes to the east form a 3 m long line leading to a pair of pits or massive doorpostholes. Such a small building would be very unusual, and the post-ring is better interpreted as internal, the building being aisled and the line of the wall being indicated by the massive doorpostholes, and by a short length of stakeholes on the south-east. These would suggest that structure 532 at Hill Farm was 8-9 m across. What may be a wall slot within the more northerly enclosure in Trench 19 would suggest a diameter of around 10 m. Wall lines rarely survive in Iron Age houses in the Upper Thames Valley, exceptions being the stake wall at Mingies Ditch, Hardwick-with-Yelford (Allen and Robinson 1993), and the ring-groove at Warrens Field, Claydon Pike (Miles et al. 2007, Fig. 3.11).

The Middle Iron Age enclosures are more substantial than those of the Early Iron Age. This is certainly clear in Trenches 15 and 19, and also at Hill Farm, the only possible exception being the north-westernmost enclosure in the Visitors Car Park. A wide variation in the depth and width of roundhouse enclosure ditches is evident across the region, one example at Gravelly Guy reaching nearly 2 m in depth. There is no particular indication from the finds or internal structures that depth or width is associated with status at this or other Upper Thames Valley sites, nor is it likely that variations in geology or the depth of the water table below Castle Hill affect the depth of the ditches. Possibly the depth and width of the ditches is related to the

organisation (or lack of it) within the settlement, more substantial ditches being provided in areas where, or at periods when, animals were allowed to roam freely, posing a threat to the thatch of the buildings, as suggested at Watkins Farm, Northmoor (Allen 1990, 75).

Pits and placed deposits

Pits of this period were found at Hill Farm, in Trench 14 and in Trench 19. The pits were mostly circular, with a few oval examples, and were mostly from 1-1.6 m in diameter m, although there were single pits up to 2.7 m across in Trench 19 and the Offices excavation. Most of the pits were up to 0.8 m deep, the exceptions being the large pit 19055 in Trench 19 and pit 53 in the Visitors Car Park, which were respectively 1 m and 1.3 m deep. As in the Early Iron Age, the pits were filled in a variety of ways, some showing a pattern of slow natural silting, others rapid infilling, and yet others a combination of phases of both. The tradition of placed deposits within pits continued, most obviously in the placing of a human cranium on the base of pit 149 in the Visitors Car Park. Other possible deposits of this type include a collection of saddle quern fragments and a complete rubber in pit 769 (Fig. 9.3), and the collection of Lodsworth quern fragments in pit 41.

Placed deposits were also found in penannular enclosure gullies, for instance most of a pot in the terminal of 121 at Hill Farm in the Offices excavation. The use of enclosure ditch terminals for such deposits is relatively common in the Upper Thames Valley, but these are usually animal skulls as at Farmoor (Lambrick and Robinson 1979, Enclosures 2 Fig. 13) and Gravelly Guy, Stanton Harcourt (Lambrick and Allen 2004, 130 Enclosure B3). Concentrations of pottery and burnt stone are frequently remarked in enclosure terminals, but are normally viewed as refuse from domestic activity rather than deliberate deposits (eg Allen et al. 1984; Allen 1990, 75), substantially complete pots being rare.

Late Iron Age activity

Evidence for this period is currently limited to ditches in Trench 14, which appear to indicate at least two small rectilinear enclosures. A virtually complete pot was found at the junction of two of the ditches, demonstrating that the tradition of placed deposits continued here to the very end of the Iron Age. Whole or virtually complete vessels are known from Late Iron Age or Early Roman deposits at other Upper Thames Valley sites, for instance in a terminal of a small horseshoe-shaped enclosure at Smithsfield, Hardwick-with-Yelford (Allen 1981; Lambrick and Allen 2004, 175).

Roman and post-Roman period

The Roman settlement below Castle Hill consisted of several enclosures, one of which, a trapezoid c. 70 m by 70 m, contained a Romanised building boasting mortar and tessellated floors, painted plaster on the walls and a tiled roof (Rhodes 1948; Wessex Archaeology 2004). A second sub-rectangular enclosure just south of Hill Farm was larger, c. 125 m by 65-70 m, and surface indications of limestone and small quantities of Roman tile may indicate a second building, though this evidence could equally reflect a corn-drier. Only a corner of a third enclosure north of Hill Farm was seen, but this was at least 80m by 30 m. A fourth rectangular enclosure south-west of

Hill Farm is only known as a cropmark, but as its west side is formed by a linear boundary running north parallel to an excavated Roman ditch, it seems likely that this too is Roman. This enclosure is only 30 m by 25 m. A fifth slightly smaller enclosure, at 25 m square, lay south of the road just west of the Castle Hill Car Park, but this is undated.

Given its rural location, the main building can reasonably be described as a villa building, and was included in Miles' gazetteer of villas in Oxfordshire (Miles 1982). Situated on a plateau sheltered from the prevailing winds by Round Hill and Castle Hill, and facing southwards with an uninterrupted view as far as the Berkshire Downs, the location is very suitable, although it is not clear how close a source of water could be found. Details of the building are unclear, but the trenches dug around the area by Time Team perhaps support the view that this was a relatively simple, corridor building rather than anything more elaborate.

The surrounding enclosure is smaller than those known from excavation and from cropmarks at other Oxfordshire villas: the enclosure at Barton Court Farm, for instance, is c. 120 m square, that at Ditchley 100 m square and that at Islip 85 m by 130 m. The closest is probably that at Gatehampton Farm, Goring, at around 80 m by 90 m (Sharpe (ed.) 2006, 50-55 and Fig. 15). Other enclosures less than 1 ha. in area immediately around the villa buildings do exist, for instance at Little Milton (80 m by 100 m), at Woodstock (60 m by 90 m +), but these are elements of a larger system of integrated enclosures, as are the examples quoted at Ditchley, Islip (Miles 1982, 74-6, Figs 8-10) and Goring. Both the enclosures north of the modern road appear to have been in use contemporarily, and the group of enclosures as a whole may together have performed the functions found in larger enclosures elsewhere, but the layout is considerably less formal. The key to the Roman settlement layout appears to have been the ditched trackway approaching up the slope from the south-west, adjacent to which three of the four known enclosures were placed. The geophysical survey suggests that the Roman road disappeared under the modern road just south of the south-west entrance to the hillfort, and either ended or continued south-east beneath it.

Two small square enclosures are known as cropmarks east of the main villa enclosure, both with a central anomaly perhaps indicating a pit. A trench (Fig. 5.1, Trench 11) was dug by Time Team across the more westerly enclosure, showing that the ditch was V-profiled and shallow, but no dating evidence was recovered, nor was any central pit found. These enclosures, at c. 10 m and 8 m across, are reminiscent of Late Iron Age square barrows, though a small square enclosure of Early Iron Age date has recently been excavated at Frilford (Lock et al. 2002, 76-8 and Fig.18).