

Chapter 1: the Evolution of the Wittenhams Project

INTRODUCTION

The archaeological work described in this report was carried out on behalf of the Northmoor Trust, an environmental charity that owns and manages an estate largely situated in the parish of Little Wittenham, Oxfordshire (Fig. 1.1). The Northmoor Trust obtained Heritage Lottery support for a three-year project to examine landscape change using the local Oxfordshire landscape and to present the results to the public via Project Timescape, a new type of museum, at Hill Farm, Little Wittenham. This project aimed to examine the interaction of human activity and environmental change since the end of the last glaciation some 10,000 years ago, and to model future changes up until AD 2075 based upon the adoption of differing environmental strategies at the global, national, regional and local level.

Oxford Archaeology were responsible for putting together the programme of archaeological research for the past history of the area, for supervising the archaeological investigations and for bringing the results to publication. Central to the ethos of the HLF is the involvement of the local community, so as far as was practicable OA provided only a supervisory team, the bulk of the work being carried out by interested amateur archaeologists and other volunteers.

THE SCOPE OF THE PROJECT

Dominating the Northmoor Trust's own land in Little Wittenham are the Wittenham Clumps, landmark features of 18th century origin planted on twin hills at the end of a chalk ridge south of the Thames. On the lower of these two hills sits the Iron Age hillfort of Castle Hill, Oxfordshire Scheduled Ancient Monument (SAM) 208. Within sight of Hill Farm, this was inevitably a major focus for archaeological investigation, especially as no excavation by trained archaeologists had ever been carried out upon it (Fig. 1.2). The Trust wished to increase understanding of Castle Hill both as the proposed centrepiece of its landscape reconstructions and for improved management of the site for the future. Within Castle Hill (and on neighbouring Round Hill) the mature beech trees of the wooded clumps are also nearing the end of their lives. A Historical Restoration Management Plan was prepared by Scott Wilson on behalf of the Northmoor Trust (Scott Wilson 2002) to consider options for replanting, within which archaeological investigations within the wooded area were included.

On the plateau outside the hillfort earlier excavations by Rhodes (1948) had located the remains of a Roman building, an Iron Age occupation layer and Beaker pottery (Fig. 1.2). Excavations for the car park below Castle Hill (Hingley 1978) had found a Late Bronze Age and Early Iron Age settlement, while fieldwalking across the road had picked up more Iron Age and Roman pottery. These were clearly key areas to investigate, although cropmark evidence was limited.

The original area chosen for investigation (the Study Area, see Fig. 1.3) was however much larger, including all of Little Wittenham parish and much of Long Wittenham as well, though it stopped short of the modern village. This area, bounded by a large bow of the river Thames, contained an important multi-period cropmark complex at Northfield Farm (Oxfordshire SAM 180), including the ring ditches of ploughed-out barrows, a prehistoric field system cut across by a Roman trackway and

a long Iron Age pit alignment, none of which is followed by the modern field boundaries. This in itself was striking evidence of landscape change, and had also been studied and provisionally phased (Miles 1977; Baker 2002).

Archaeological Research Project Designs following the guidelines laid down by English Heritage (MAP2 1991) were prepared, setting out an ambitious list of aims and objectives (OA 2002a, b and c). Key to the wider aims of the project was the purchase of geophysical survey kit by the Northmoor Trust, which it was hoped would examine large areas and fill in the gaps in the cropmark evidence. Steve Head, then Director of the Trust, intended that the project should continue beyond the 3 years of the HLF grant, and that the teams of volunteers trained during this time would continue the research begun by the project. The Research Aims were therefore framed to give purpose to these longer-term aims, as well as for the shorter-term objectives of the 3 year project.

A geophysical survey of the interior of Castle Hill was carried out by English Heritage in summer 2002, providing the first evidence of buried features within the hillfort (Payne 2003; Fig. 2.1). These included a smaller enclosure enclosing the top of the hill within the hillfort, scattered pits and a line of large sub-rectangular pits of unknown purpose. In the light of this, and with the approval of the Northmoor Trust, the scale of planned archaeological investigation was increased. Fieldwalking began on Northmoor Trust land in the fields around Hill Farm in autumn 2002, and continued again in autumn and winter 2004. Summer excavations running six days a week were planned for 2003 and 2004 to allow students, schoolchildren and local societies working at weekends to take part.

The 2003 excavation was targeted on the interior and the defences of the hillfort, which as well as a Scheduled Ancient Monument is also part of a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). Both designations affected the scope of work and the methods used to carry it out. One of the seven trenches originally planned (OA 2002a) was abandoned due to the presence of a fallen tree that could not be moved on ecological grounds, and newt-protection measures were required for all excavations within and adjacent to the hillfort in 2003. Six trenches were dug in all (Fig. 2.1)

Time Team were invited to conduct a documentary following the project, but instead came for a 3-day dig. The opportune involvement of Time Team also allowed trenches to be dug on Round Hill and on the plateau below, where resistivity survey had revealed a square enclosure surrounding the Roman building found by Rhodes. The most important contributions made by Time Team was the high-resolution geophysical survey covering 8 hectares carried out by GSB prospecting, which revealed further small square enclosures, a multitude of pits, a curving ditch and another enclosure north of Hill Farm (Fig. 5.1). By great good fortune Stewart Ainsworth of Time Team was also airborne when the crops in the field to the south were turning, and his photographs (Plates xxx) gave the first indication of dense archaeological features continuing south as far west as Hill Farm.

By Christmas 2003 the Northmoor Trust had bought its own geophysical survey kit, and, under the overall supervision of Alister Bartlett, began to survey the field south of the road. The results were very clear, and ultimately another 15 hectares of dense buried features were added to the GSB survey north of the road (Fig. 5.2) Surveying west of the farm was less successful, suggesting that the settlement ended at Hill Farm, although long field boundaries and a square enclosure were revealed (Fig. 8.1).

The original strategy had called for geophysical surveys spread over a much wider area, followed by fieldwalking and augering of significant features that might

yield waterlogged environmental evidence, leading to selective targeted test-trenching (OA 2002c). This work was to have been concentrated on the gravel terraces and the floodplain north of Little Wittenham, to build upon the interpretations of the cropmarks carried out by David Miles (Miles in Gray 1977) and latterly by Steve Baker in a Dissertation for the Diploma in Applied Archaeology at Oxford University (Baker 1999), subsequently published in summary form (Baker 2002). Unfortunately, the necessary permissions from neighbouring landowners had not been confirmed, and in the event access for augering and trenching was not obtained from other landowners in Long Wittenham parish. Access was kindly given for fieldwalking and geophysical survey west of Northfield Farm, but the window of opportunity within the scheduled area itself was very limited, and only geophysical survey was carried out (Fig. 14.1). Trenching was thus only possible in land owned by the Trust at Clifton Meadow (Fig. 14.1), necessitating a change of strategy.

In the light of the new evidence for extensive settlement below Castle Hill and around Hill Farm, the budgets for augering and trenching in the wider landscape were reassigned to additional trenches within this settlement. These trenches, together with the work in Clifton Meadow, were excavated in summer 2004, again by an OA team supervising local society archaeologists, students and other volunteers (Fig. 5.3). In 2005 additional and larger excavations were carried out together with a watching brief by OA in advance of the renovation of Hill Farm (Fig. 8.2). The excavations at Hill Farm were undertaken solely by professional archaeologists due to the work being part of a demolition and rebuilding programme.

An unexpected further opportunity for investigations came with the planting of Neptune Wood near Long Wittenham as part of the Trafalgar celebrations in 2005, in advance of which a geophysical survey was carried out and a series of evaluation trenches was dug, together with a watching brief upon the excavation of a pond (see Chapter 12). A small number of volunteers were involved in this work. In late 2005 and May 2006 limited trenching was carried out upon Castle Hill in advance of improvement works (Fig. 2.1).

STRUCTURE OF THE REPORT

The background to the archaeological project is set out in Chapter 1. The excavations on Castle Hill are described next (Chapters 2-4), then those carried out upon the adjacent settlement (Chapters 5-10). Excavations upon the settlement in 2004 and those at Hill Farm in 2005 are presented separately (Chapters 5-7 and 8-10 respectively), partly due to the different timescales upon which they were assessed and analysed, and partly because the Hill Farm excavations formed a more coherent group of related features. The evidence from both Castle Hill and the adjacent settlement is then discussed in Chapter 11.

Work in the wider landscape consisted of the specific investigations in advance of planting at Neptune Wood (Chapter 12), limited geophysical survey and trenching behind the manor at Little Wittenham (Chapter 13) and a programme of fieldwalking and geophysical survey including targeted excavation at Clifton Meadow (Chapter 14). These chapters incorporate the finds and environmental evidence relating to them, as the scale of the artefacts and ecofacts recovered did not merit separate chapters like those for Castle Hill and the adjacent settlement. Chapter 14 also contains the results of pollen analysis undertaken by Brookes University upon cores from peat flushes within Little Wittenham Wood on the north side of Castle Hill, which have provided useful

environmental background for much of the 1st millennium cal. BC and for parts of the historic period. Chapter 15 concludes with a discussion of aspects of the development of the Study Area in post-glacial times, including a brief overview of the historic period.

THE PROJECT BACKGROUND

Location and topography of the site (Figure 1.4)

The Study Area (centred NGR SU 560 940) comprised a block of land some 9 sq. km in area south of the Thames, bounded on the west and north by the river itself, on the east and south by the parish boundary of Little Wittenham, and on the south-west running from White Lees via Woodside Farm to Long Wittenham. The village of Long Wittenham itself was not included. The area is just across the river from Dorchester-on-Thames, in and around which is a nationally important concentration of prehistoric, Roman and Saxon archaeological sites.

Most of the area is low-lying and relatively flat, and consists of first gravel terrace deposits. These are divided into 1b deposits on the SW and 1a deposits on the NE, Terrace 1b being slightly higher than 1a (and approximately delimited by the 50 m contour). Around the edge of the terrace deposits the river is fringed by alluvial floodplain deposits of varying width. To the south east the ground rises across Gault Clay and Upper Greensand strata to the Lower Chalk ridge of the Sinodun Hills, which separates the current river valley from an abandoned meander. The highest points are Round Hill (at around 120 m above O.D) and Castle Hill (107 m above O.D.). Small deposits of glacial plateau sands and gravels cap both hills. South of the Sinodun Hills the ground falls again onto the Gault Clay (British Geological Survey, 1: 50,000 Solid and Drift series, Sheet 254; Corser 1981).

Castle Hill (centred NGR SU 5695 9262) is situated on the south bank of the river Thames opposite Dorchester-on-Thames, Oxfordshire, and is part of a range known as the Sinodun Hills running south-eastwards. It is one of two adjacent hills, the most prominent of the range, that form a local landmark known as Wittenham Clumps because of the beech clumps on their crests. There is a small saddle between Castle Hill and Round Hill, whose crests are only 350 m apart. On the north side the ground drops steeply to the river Thames, but slopes more gently to the south. To the east the ground shelves away, the next hill in the range being some 900 m away at Brightwell Barrow.

The vast majority of the Study Area is agricultural land. Recent planting has created Paradise Wood between Long and Little Wittenham. Round Hill and Castle Hill were formerly ploughed for arable (1843 Tithe Map; Rhodes 1948), but have now been taken out of cultivation, and are maintained as grassland used for public recreation and seasonal grazing.

Archaeological background

Previous investigation of Castle Hill

No formal archaeological excavation has ever been undertaken upon the interior or the defences of the hillfort, although a number of trenches were dug by a local amateur

Harry Watts in the late 1920s (letter to Mr Hutchinson dated 8th May 1929, in Wallingford Museum archives). An extract from his letter is given below.

The ridges amongst the trees tempted me to dig in order to ascertain the truth, or otherwise, of the local tradition that they were the graves of soldiers.....

I worked in all directions among the trees, in fact, every place where the roots did not prevent me, some 15 trenches in all I expect. The same debris was found everywhere some 16 or 24 inches beneath the surface. Broken sherds from cinerary urns, charcoal, a few burnt human bones, many human teeth, and any amount of the bones of various animals. In as much, as where a large piece of pottery was found and nothing could be found nearby to fit it to, I concluded, it had all either been already looted by ? Roman soldiers (a considerable number of pieces of Samian ware were also found); or else everything became smashed and scattered when the trees were planted. Nothing like a perfect urn has been found.

Rhodes carried out fieldwalking of the interior after ploughing in 1947, and recovered sherds of Roman and Iron Age pottery (Rhodes 1948, 18). Subsequently potsherds were recovered from rabbit holes in the ramparts (Rhodes 1948, Jope 1949; Harding 1972, 1151 Plate 44E), and these were judged to be Iron Age A (now known as Early Iron Age). In 1950 a bronze bracelet was recovered from the centre of the clump (Fig. 1.2 No. 11; SMR3163). A brief summary of what little was known about the site was published in the *Archaeological Journal* (Wade and McGavin 1978), including a profile across the defences and the hilltop. This account mentioned occasional Iron Age pottery sherds and a Roman bracelet found as a result of ploughing.

Contour survey of the hillfort (Figure 1.5)

A detailed topographic survey of the hillfort was carried out by Adam Welfare in the early 1990s. This identified a bank running east-west across the wooded area in the interior, and a series of narrow parallel ridges at right angles to this on the north and south sides, covering much of the wooded area. In addition, a small quarry lay in the south-east corner of the wooded area. Subsequently it has been suggested that the ridges might be part of the preparation for the planting of the Clump in the mid-18th century (C Welch pers. comm; Scott Wilson 2002).

Aerial photography (Figure 1.2)

No cropmarks were observed within the interior of Castle Hill up until 1992 (RCHME National Mapping Project). Oblique aerial photographs flown since 1992 were scanned at the NMR for this project, and several potential circular features were tentatively noted, none however convincing.

A sub-rectangular enclosure has been observed north-west of this on the north-east side of Round Hill (Fig. 1.2 No. 20), but two sides of this correspond to boundaries visible on the 1843 Tithe Map, and it is likely that this feature is of post-medieval date. Two approximately parallel linear features have been plotted in the field immediately east of the hillfort, running NNW towards one of the entrances to the hillfort, (Fig. 1.2 No. 7; SMR 15364) and may indicate a former trackway. In addition, the cropmarks of

two probable Bronze Age ring ditches are known south-west of Brightwell Barrow, some 500 m south-east of Castle Hill (SMR 8576).

Another pair of linear ditches some 15 m apart have been recorded south-west of the hillfort running parallel for 115 m on a north-west alignment (Fig. 1.2 No. 103; SMR15361). Further cropmarks are known south of Hill Farm, comprising linear ditches at right angles (Fig. 1.2 No.14; SMR 15360) and a sub-rectangular enclosure (Fig. 1.2 No.93; NMR 1076707).

Investigations in the immediate vicinity (Figure 1.2)

Early discoveries

In the 19th century human remains were found immediately north and west of the defences (Fig. 1.2 No. 9), and are marked on the 1st edn O.S. map of 1877. Wade and McGavin's account mentions these, and also Roman coins, a bracelet (Fig. 1.2 No. 10), a bronze awl (Fig. 1.2 No. 19), Bronze Age and Saxon pottery (Fig. 1.2 No. 17) (Wade and McGavin 1978, 291). Peake gives more details, mentioning coins of Domitian, Gratian and Arcadius, and two urns in Wallingford Museum, but his information may cover a wider area (Peake 1931, 110). It is likely that most of the Roman finds described above derive from burials. In 1984 further burials were found and excavated on the north-east (Fig. 1.2 No. 8; Chambers 1986). These were judged to be of late Roman date, although there were no finds. Human bones were mentioned by the antiquarian Thomas Hearne in 1716 as having been found on the 'Welsh Harp' (PRN nos 3156-7), which the VCH says was another name for Round Hill (VCH Berks 1972, Vol. 4 381 note 14), though the shape suggests Castle Hill (Allen pers. comm.).

A Roman building

Some 200 m west of the SW entrance to the hillfort building debris including tegulae, tesserae and painted wall plaster covering an area around 30 m square was found and investigated (Fig. 1.2 No. 18; Rhodes 1948). The excavations found no *in situ* remains, but Rhodes interpreted this as the site of a small Roman building (Rhodes 1948, 29). Earlier reports indicated a Roman settlement in the field south of Hill Farm, and this has subsequently been confirmed by fieldwalking in advance of a British Gas pipeline, concentrated towards Hill Farm itself (Brooks 1992). Further Roman and Saxon findspots are marked on the O.S. map of 1912 west of Hill Farm (Fig. 1.2 Nos 15 & 16), indicating a sizeable settlement. The Roman finds appear to have been 'large worked stones, two small Roman cups and a lampstand' (Wade and McGavin 1978, 291).

Early Iron Age occupation

Beneath the Roman building debris Rhodes found a dark occupation layer between 0.3 m and 0.5 m thick, within which he uncovered part of a rectangular chalk platform (Rhodes 1948, 21 Figure 8). The layer was associated with large quantities of early Iron Age pottery and animal bones.

Rhodes also found a pit containing similar Early Iron Age pottery in what is now the Car Park just south of Castle Hill. Rutland subsequently excavated a number of test pits and a small area to investigate this, and found similar occupation deposits beneath a field boundary along the west edge of the Car Park, but no trace of this more than a few metres to the east (Fig. 1.2 No. 4; Hingley 1980). The character of the pottery suggested that the lowest grey clay was Late Bronze Age, the overlying black occupation deposits Early Iron Age but including some Late Bronze Age elements. Hingley interpreted the

black soil as a preserved occupation deposit, not a midden, but speculated that the occupation deposit might extend over the full 200 m from Rhodes' excavation to the Car Park.

East of the car park Rutland excavated a semicircular gully and a number of pits, all of Early Iron Age date (Hingley 1980), demonstrating that the occupation area was extensive.

Earlier prehistoric remains

Beneath the Iron Age occupation that underlay the Roman building debris was a possible buried turf line, and below it a grey clay containing occasional sherds including Beaker pottery and a struck flint (Fig. 1.2 No. 6). Rhodes also found part of a Middle Bronze Age cinerary urn (Rhodes 1948, 24). The small bronze awl found on Round Hill may also have been Bronze Age (Fig. 1.2. No. 19).

Geophysical survey south of the hillfort.

An area of just over 1 ha. lying just south and east of the site of Rhodes' 1947 excavation was surveyed by fluxgate gradiometer (Price 1995). The survey revealed the north-west corner of a rectilinear enclosure aligned north-south and east-west.

Fieldwalking, geophysical survey and excavation south of the Car Park.

Pottery of unspecified date was found east of Hill Farm in 1931 (Fig. 1.2 Nos 12 and 13).

In advance of the construction of a British Gas pipeline fieldwalking was carried out over the fields south of the road and east of Hill Farm (Brooks 1992; Lingard and Wilson 1995). This demonstrated the presence of considerable prehistoric and Roman activity, with a concentration of prehistoric finds extending for over 200 m south from the site of Rutland's excavations in the Car Park. This included worked flint dating from the Early Neolithic to the Late Bronze Age, most dating to the Early-Middle Bronze Age. Roman material was spread widely across the area, but was concentrated further west close to Hill Farm. Further limited fieldwalking at the north end of the field east of Hill Farm took place in 1999, recovering further Roman pottery.

A geophysical survey covering some 2 ha. east and south-east of Hill Farm was carried out using a fluxgate gradiometer (Price 1995), and located a roughly north-south linear boundary of several phases, probably cut across by the south-east corner of a triple ditched enclosure with internal pits and a possible small enclosure. This enclosure was oriented south-west to north-east.

A further geophysical scan was carried out along the proposed line of the gas pipeline further south in this field, but did not reveal any significant anomalies (Lingard and Wilson 1995, 52).

Some 200 m south of Castle Hill and just east of Wittenham Lane, the gas pipeline cut across a probable large ditch. This feature was 9.5 m wide and 2.1 m deep, and contained body sherds of prehistoric (possibly Iron Age) pottery, pig bones and a struck flint (Lingard and Wilson 1995, 50 and Figs 3.1 and 3.3). The orientation of this feature was not stated, but was possibly north-south. This feature was interpreted as a linear boundary of significant function, possibly associated with Castle Hill.

Further prehistoric pottery, including a Late Bronze Age/Early Iron Age decorated sherd, and also Roman and medieval pottery, was found to the east in field 0002 north of Brightwell Barrow by fieldwalking (Lingard and Wilson 1995, 47).

Finds from Little Wittenham village

Bronze Age finds have come from the village at the foot of Round Hill (Fig. 1.3 No. 28). Roman pottery and coins were found in the garden of the manor (Fig. 1.3 No 31), and Roman paving thought to belong to a stretch of Roman road leading down towards the Thames east of the church (Fig. 1.3 No. 27). The church itself has a 14th century tower, but is otherwise rebuilt, but both church and manor house presumably overlie earlier medieval remains. An Iron Age sword from a pond at the foot of Round Hill is described in section 2.2.7 below.

Metalwork and other finds from the Thames and other watery deposits

Significant numbers of Bronze Age and Iron Age metal objects have been dredged from the river Thames immediately below the site, including two Iron Age swords and a bronze scabbard from the construction of Day's Lock (Fig. 1.3 Nos 25 and 36; Peake 1931, 54; York 2002, 83-4), and a bronze shield (Fig. 1.3 No. 34; Cook 1985). Several skeletons were found on the island just below the lock (Fig. 3 No. 26). Pottery, two medieval iron swords, an iron dagger, a loom weight and skulls came from the river immediately north of Castle Hill (Fig. 1.3. Nos 22 & 23). Six iron spearheads were dredged from the river at the junction of the Thames and Thame (Fig. 1.3 No. 131; Peake 1931, 75). Two Iron Age swords from Little Wittenham, one from the village just north of Round Hill (Fig. 1.3 No. 21), are illustrated in Harding (Harding 1972, 173 and Plate 78, A and B), and also the decorated Late Iron Age chape (Harding 1972, Plate 79 D).

The wider Study Area

On the flat gravel terrace north-west of Wittenham Clumps lies the major cropmark complex of Northfield Farm, Long Wittenham (Oxfordshire Scheduled Ancient Monument No. 180). The cropmark evidence includes single and multiple ring ditches, enclosure/field systems on various axes, pit alignments, single enclosures, small penannular enclosures and pit groups and a ditched trackway with at least two settlements along it.

Archaeological discoveries have been made in this area over a long period of time. The tenant farmer of Northfield Farm in the 1890s, Mr Hewett, recognised cropmarks, and produced an extensive plan (VCH Berks 1, 219), as well as excavating some of the features (Haverfield 1901). His discoveries (Fig. 1.3 Nos 60-67) included:

- 1 a female skeleton with flint artefacts
- 2 a circular ditch containing a pit with organic material at the centre
- 3 wells and pits (some steyned with wood, wicker or stone) containing pottery (including Late Celtic urns from the bottom of a well), wattle and daub and leather
- 4 Late Celtic pottery, Samian and other local RB pottery
- 5 Painted wall-plaster and stone roof tiles in northern field west of the farm.

Haverfield also noted that 3rd and 4th century coins had been found south of the farm.

The site was flown and plotted (Allen 1938; Allen 1940), leading to the designation of the cropmarks around Northfield Farm as a Scheduled Ancient Monument. The area has subsequently been flown frequently both by the Cambridge

Committee for Aerial Photography and by the RCHME, and a comprehensive plot was produced by the RCHME in 1977 (Gray 1977 Figure 1). This has since been updated by work for the National Mapping Project in 1992 (RCHME 1995).

Part of Scabbs field (Fig. 1.3 Nos 68-70) was excavated in 1969, and reported upon by Gray (Gray 1970; Gray 1977). She interpreted a penannular ring ditch with an off-centre possible cremation as probably Bronze Age, and two pit-clusters and other isolated pits containing scraps of Bronze Age pottery as probably also of that date. The NNW-SSE aligned field or enclosure system was interpreted as pre-Roman on stratigraphic grounds, since it was cut by the N-S trackway and associated enclosures and waterholes, all of which were clearly 1st/2nd century Roman. A single Late Roman burial was also present, and scraps of Saxon pottery were found in the very top of a Roman pit or well. This feature was not bottomed as it continued below the water table.

The excavations by Margaret Gray in 1969 were supplemented by trenches dug further south adjacent to the north-south Roman trackway by R Chambers in 1976 to examine the effect of subsoiling on the archaeological features (Lambrick in Gray 1977, Appendix 1).

The area was included in Benson and Miles' 1974 survey of the Upper Thames gravels (Benson and Miles 1974, Maps 35 and 36), and in 1977 Miles provided a provisional phasing of the cropmarks (Miles in Gray 1977, Appendix 2).

In 1999 Steve Baker undertook a GIS study of the cropmark evidence, attempting to phase the various elements and produce overall plans of the cropmark landscape at different periods (unpublished dissertation for the Diploma in Applied Archaeology, Oxford University; Baker 2002). This has examined the cropmarks in relation to factors such as underlying geology and current landuse, has taken into account the findspots and the limited archaeological excavations in the area, and (following on from the work of Miles in 1977) has provided a provisional, but more refined, chronological development of the landscape (see Baker 2002).

The results can be summarised as follows:

Neolithic: One possible small late Neolithic henge, but overall there was little that could clearly be identified as of this date.

Early Bronze Age: Several clusters of probable barrows, plus other scattered examples.

Middle/late Bronze Age: An extensive field and enclosure system across the north part of the study area on a north-north-west alignment, and close to barrow clusters.

Iron Age: Several settlements, with new foci in SW (including large enclosure) and NE (including pit alignment) of study area.

Roman: Major N-S and E-W trackways across gravel terrace with settlements alongside. Largest focus in very middle of study area, with lesser foci at Northfield Farm, S of Long Wittenham and north of Little Wittenham. Possible small enclosure in NE. Probable river crossing at Clifton Hampden and possibly one north of Dyke Hills.

Neither Miles' nor Baker's study dealt with the post-Roman periods, but Lambrick commented that traces of ridge-and-furrow were visible either as earthworks or cropmarks over much of the gravel terrace (Lambrick in Gray 1977, 24), and provided most of the common fields for Long Wittenham. Miles commented upon the cropmarks

of the post-medieval settlement of Littletown (abandoned 1838), visible SE of Northfield Farm (Benson and Miles 1974, Map 36; compare SMR 238242, Fig. 1.3 Nos 118 and 123).

Two transept axes were found at Northfield Farm (Fig. 1.3 Nos 135 & 139), and lithic scatters have been found on the edge of the floodplain at the very north close to the river (Fig. 1.3 No. 57).

Just east of Long Wittenham is a cropmark complex (SMR 15311) with elements of several different periods. Parallel ditches running south-west (NMR 1089349) almost certainly represent the continuation of the Roman trackway meeting that from Northfield Farm at a junction, and continuing east-north-east towards the river Thames. North of this trackway is a rectangular enclosure with a circle inside (SMR 8519), thought to be Iron Age, while to the south are several sinuous ditches (some meeting at right angles) that probably represent a field system (NMR 1089371), and a group of large individual marks probably representing pits or wells. Seven Saxon sunken-featured buildings are recorded further north-west in this field (SMR 8522). A C-shaped enclosure is evident in the adjacent field at the north end of this complex. Fieldwalking carried out over this field, just east of Long Wittenham and just south of College Farm (Hinchcliffe 1998), revealed Roman pottery concentrated towards the south, and medieval and post-medieval pottery predominantly on the north closer to the village. A scatter of struck flints was also recovered. The Roman material was suggested to be associated with the cropmarks of an east-west trackway and a small enclosure in the same area.

Further west are ditches running at right angles to the trackway, some ending in partial enclosures, which probably represent Roman settlement, and beyond these is a second pit alignment, presumably Iron Age, and several large rectangular halls of Middle or Late Saxon type (ref to AP and Thames Through Time forthcoming).

South of Long Wittenham an Early Iron Age settlement, apparently enclosed, was excavated during gravel extraction near Wigbalds Farm (Savory 1937; Benson and Miles 1974 Map 35).

The surrounding landscape

Just across the river from Castle Hill, and overlooked by it, lies Dyke Hills, a valley fort of 45 hectares at the junction of the rivers Thames and Thame, and surrounded by them on three sides. A wide ditch flanked by two ramparts encloses the fourth side (on the north and north-east). This is not dated with certainty, but is believed to be Late Iron Age from the coins ploughed up in the interior, the cropmarks of penannular enclosures and pit groups, and the Late Roman burials dug into the northern rampart (Cook 1985; Benson and Miles 1974; Kirk and Leeds 1953).

Further north is the Roman small town of Dorchester on Thames, later Saxon abbey and episcopal see, with Roman roads radiating to the north and south-east, and surrounded by several large cemeteries, of which two (Wally Corner and Queensford Mill) have been excavated (Miles ; Chambers). North of this was a Neolithic ceremonial monument complex including a cursus, the 'Big Rings' (a major double henge monument) and many other burial and ceremonial monuments (Atkinson et al. 1951). A range of undated cropmarks east and south-east of Dorchester (at Overy and) includes further probable Neolithic, Iron Age and Saxon or Viking enclosures.

In a recent article Loveday has linked the existence of the Neolithic ceremonial complex just north of Dorchester-on-Thames (and that at Overy just south-east of

Dorchester) with the twin peaks of Round and Castle Hill, arguing that they were both visual markers for those visiting the complex, and possibly that the natural features were themselves associated with female anatomy and may have given rise to the emergence of the complex (Loveday 1999). Loveday does not speculate as to what use (if any) was made of the hilltops themselves at this time, but his hypotheses emphasise both the clear visual importance of these landmarks in the Neolithic, and of their potential significance as viewing points looking over the ceremonial complex.

About 3 km N of Castle Hill are the Early Iron Age sites of Allen's Pit and Mount Farm, Dorchester (Bradford 1942; Myres 1937), the former an enclosed settlement with a ditch of defensive proportions, and probably of high status.

Documentary references

The Abingdon Chronicle (written in the 12th century) states that Offa of Mercia established a frontier on the Berkshire Downs in the 8th century, and from this it has been suggested that Castle Hill was taken and refortified as part of this frontier (Parker 1885). A charter of 862 (BL. Cotton Claudius C.ix.108v; Kelly 2000, 15) lists the estate of Little Wittenham as 10 hides and gives the bounds, but does not mention the hillfort. By 1048 the manor of Little Wittenham was owned by Abingdon Abbey, and is listed in the Domesday survey of 1086. There is no mention of any settlement or occupation of the hilltop at this time. The manor of Little Wittenham, or Wittenham Abbots, continued to be held by Abingdon Abbey until the Dissolution, and there are occasional references in the abbey documents, including one grange return (Acts of the Obedientiars,).

The first reference to Sinodun Hills is in 1542 by Leland, cf. Vol. 120, who describes the castle and mentions barley and wheat growing within it, and Roman coins found by ploughing (Gelling 1974, 428). Camden also calls the place Sinodun in 1600. Following the Dissolution the village soon came to be owned by the Dunch family, who retained possession for more than 200 years. Documents relating to their occupation are scattered widely, and although a great deal of significant research has been carried out by Pete Annels, who kindly made this available to the project, this has not been drawn together or published. An important series of wills and inventories exists for the village from the late 16th century to the 18th century, which provide useful information on the occupants, their houses and belongings (ref).

Prior to the Ordnance Survey maps the only historic map of the area is Rocque's map of Berkshire 1761, but from the early 19th century there is good coverage of both Long and Little Wittenham. Rocque's map shows both Round Hill and Castle Hill hilltops as bare, and the Tithe Map of 1843 indicates that the interior of the hillfort was still ploughed for arable, except for the clump.

Archive

The archive, comprising the finds, paper archive and digital archive, will be deposited with the Oxfordshire County Museums Service. The archive includes a context database including sections, plans and digital photographs of the features and of key finds. Selected finds from the project are on display at Project Timescape, the museum at the Northmoor Trust, Hill Farm, Little Wittenham.

RESEARCH AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

A comprehensive list of Aims and Objectives was set out in the Project Designs (OA 2002a, b and c), and was revised in 2004 (OA 2004). For the immediate vicinity of Castle Hill, the aims can be summarised as follows:

Aim 1 To establish the history of enclosure on the hilltop

Aim 2 To investigate the environmental history of the hilltop and of its surroundings

Aim 3 To investigate how the use of the hillfort and the surrounding area has affected the preservation of its history

Aim 4 To investigate the role that Castle Hill played in the wider landscape, and to examine how this changed over time.

For the wider landscape, the primary aim was to build on Baker's work. His approach did not however exhaust the possibilities for information about the past landscape, for instance sites surviving only as surface scatters, surviving earthworks or hedge boundaries that may preserve buried soils. The project's principal concern was therefore:

To establish as full a range as possible of activities carried out by the people making use of the Study Area over the last 10,000 years, and examine and interpret their changing significance.

This overall aim was broken down into a number of more specific aims.

Wider Landscape Aim 1 How can we validate the archaeological dataset in order to have confidence in interpreting it?

Wider Landscape Aim 2 What changes in the environment of the Study Area have occurred since the last Ice Age, how have natural and human factors interacted to produce these changes, and how have they affected the patterns of human activity over time?

Wider Landscape Aim 3 What was the scale and social complexity of settlement within the Study Area, and how did this change and develop over time?

The overall project encompassed elements of all of English Heritage's primary goals, as set out in the Draft Research Agenda (English Heritage 1997) and Exploring our Past (English Heritage 1998). Themes of particular relevance were:

Single monument classes (Section 3), establishing the date and character of the inner hilltop enclosure ditch within Castle Hill hillfort.

The move from site-based dissemination to synthesis, in this case looking at the processes of change that provide the context for the development of the hillfort of Castle Hill and the surrounding settlements

Transitions: communal monuments into settlement and field landscapes, studying the relationship of the known barrows in the Study Area to the emergence of field systems and permanent settlements, and determining the relationship (if any) between the emergence of coaxial field systems at Northfield Farm and the first phase of enclosure at Castle Hill.

Territories and tenure in the 4th and 3rd millennium BC, investigating the apparent absence of Neolithic monuments within the Study Area in contrast to the 'sacred landscape' of the Dorchester-on-Thames cursus, henge and other monuments. This project aimed to clarify the character of Neolithic activity south of the river, including whether the earliest phase of hilltop enclosure at Castle Hill was Neolithic, and to place the monument complex around Dorchester-on-Thames in context.

Themes - Settlement hierarchies and inter-action, looking at the chronology of Castle Hill and its various phases of enclosing ditches, and its relationship to the adjacent external settlement and to other settlements within the vicinity in the Iron Age, particularly the valley fort at Dyke Hills across the river.

For the Roman period, using the cropmark evidence for trackways linking some known or possible settlements but not others, to explore the local hierarchy of settlement and its changes, the interaction between settlements and their relationship to the small town of Dorchester-on-Thames.

Chronological Priorities: Late Bronze Age and Iron Age landscapes (P7).

The chronology of the construction of a ditched enclosure and presumed later hillfort at Castle Hill, its relationship to the organised Middle to Late Bronze Age landscape on the terraces below and to the changing settlement pattern in the Late Bronze Age and Iron Ages (and indeed beyond that), are all issues already raised above. One aspect of detailed interest is the character of the transition from Bronze Age to Iron Age defended enclosure in relation to the surrounding settlement pattern. The history of the defended hilltop may be compared with that of the surrounding hinterland for evidence of the changing pattern of social organisation in later prehistory.

Another significant aspect of the Bronze Age and Iron Age landscape is the relationship between the hilltop settlement and the concentration of Middle/Late Bronze Age and Iron Age metalwork recovered from the river Thames adjacent (York 2002). Metalwork is only one aspect of finds of this period from the Thames and adjacent water features. The types and quantities of material deposited may be related to the character and status of the settlements and other features of the surrounding landscape.

Chronological priorities: Late Iron Age hillforts, enclosures and settlements, clarifying the character of activity at Castle Hill suggested by finds from the interior in relation to Dyke Hills valley fort.

Geo-prospecting techniques (MTD2), including characterising the unusual anomalies found by the English Heritage survey of the hillfort interior in 2002, and investigating the factors influencing cropmark visibility.

DETAILED EXCAVATION METHODOLOGY

Survey

Fieldwalking surveys were carried out using transects laid out relative to field boundaries, measured with 30 m tapes. For the fields below Hill Farm the survey lines were drawn in CAD on a north-south alignment onto scaled plans beforehand, and the ends of the transects measured along the field boundaries to locate them. These end points were marked with canes 1.5-1.8 m long with bunting attached. Below Hill Farm itself the distance across the field was too great to see clearly from end to end, so an intermediate line of pegs was set out at 10 m intervals across the transects to provide sighting points for the walkers. For the majority of the other survey areas the transects were established at right angles to a relatively straight field boundary by offsetting with tapes, and were then projected along the field using tapes. Both right angles and diagonals were checked at regular intervals, and adjustments made to the transect alignments as needed.

Geophysical surveys were carried out from basepoints established in field boundaries that were surveyed in using either a total station tied to the OS digital tiles, or using GPS. Trenches were laid out using a total station (or GPS if available) tied into the base points already established by the geophysical teams during their surveys. This was done in an effort to ensure that geophysical anomalies were correctly targeted.

No large contour surveys were undertaken. The interior of Castle Hill was surveyed by Glanvilles on a 5 m grid, and transects were taken across the ditch onto the counterscarp bank to obtain the profile of the ditch.

Fieldwalking

Fieldwalking was carried out by walkover surveys using parallel transects spaced 10 m apart. Over the 10-year period of the project originally envisaged by Steve Head it was expected that some fields would be walked repeatedly under different cropping regimes, and using different recovery strategies, but this has not happened.

Ground conditions were recorded for all fieldwalking exercises, including the cultivation regime, the length of time since last ploughing, the nature of the soil and any variations within it, the weather and the light conditions. The results of the fieldwalking were biased by the cultivation methods used; fields in Northmoor Trust ownership were usually minimally cultivated, whereas those farmed by the neighbouring landowners were generally ploughed traditionally. Walker(s) were initially paired to increase recovery and to train inexperienced volunteers, but this was later abandoned and each transect was walked by one person.

In general all materials within the fieldwalking areas or transects was recovered, except where large assemblages of clearly recent material (such as ceramic building materials or dumps of occupation rubbish) were found. In such cases a representative sample of the material will be retrieved.

Excavations

All archaeological excavations undertaken as part of this project were carried out using the Oxford Archaeology recording system and following the OA recording manual (ed. Wilkinson 1992). Topsoil and recent ploughsoils were generally removed by mechanical excavators fitted with toothless grading buckets under close archaeological supervision, and spoil was scanned for finds as work progressed. Excavation thereafter proceeded by hand. The proportions of features that were excavated is shown by the cuts across the features on the plans. Lines in less bold type within excavated slots shown on the published plans indicate the base of the feature or significant changes in the angle of slope of the sides; where a pit has such a line around the whole of the base, this indicates that it was completely excavated. In general the aim was to excavate at least half of all features within the excavated trenches, but sometimes shortage of time meant that less was examined, as for instance with the large sub-rectangular pit in Trench 3 at Castle Hill, or the rampart in Trench 2.

Metal detecting by local amateur detectorists was undertaken in parallel with the 2004 excavations around Castle Hill, and around the trenches at Neptune Wood in 2005. The position of any significant metal finds (i.e. those not clearly of recent date) was marked and shot in using a total station, or was measured using tapes to the adjacent excavation trench.

A digital record was created in post-excavation comprising a context database including scans of the plans and sections of individual features, digital photographs (either taken on site or copied from colour slides), linked to finds and environmental databases. The recovery of evidence of past environments was one of the key aims of the project, and extensive sampling was carried out for charred plant remains, small bones and molluscs, and samples were also taken for pollen, phytolith, waterlogged plant and insect remains, for phosphate analysis and for soil micromorphology.

Aerial photographs of the Study Area were examined at the NMR. As a detailed cropmark plot of much of the area had been published in 1977, effort was targeted upon vertical photographs of the 1940s and 1950s acquired from RAF and US overflights in recent years, and oblique photographs from flights undertaken since 1977. A scan of recent overflights by the NMR was carried out by the Aerial Reconnaissance Unit, but did not produce any new cropmarks. Very few new cropmarks were found, but the evidence for the pattern of ridge-and-furrow cultivation from early vertical photographs was very helpful in establishing the maximum extent of such cultivation.

A GIS of the Study Area has been created, incorporating OS tiles, the SMR data (kindly provided by the Oxfordshire SMR), additional cropmark data from the NMR, historic maps (scanned in and overlaid by best fit to the modern OS), and tied to the fieldwalking, geophysical survey and excavation data. Some of this data has also been draped onto Google Earth.

CONVENTIONS USED IN THIS REPORT

Pottery is described by period or, where closer dating is possible, by sub-period, e.g. Bronze Age, late Bronze Age or Iron Age, early Iron Age etc. Where described simply by period it may be assumed that potsherds could not be classified more closely. In the case of Iron Age pottery, this designation refers to material that may be either early or middle Iron Age in date; late Iron Age pottery mostly uses distinctively different fabrics and forms that are readily recognisable even from small sherds. Chronological date ranges are expressed in conventional years BC or AD.

Radiocarbon dating was carried out using accelerator mass spectrometry (AMS) dating at the Posnan Radiocarbon laboratory, Poland. Additional $\delta^{13}\text{C}$ measurements were obtained on some of the samples from the Oxford Radiocarbon Laboratory. The determinations have been calibrated using OxCal v3.10 and atmospheric data from Reimer *et al.* (2004). All radiocarbon dates are quoted in years cal. BC or cal. AD at two σ (95%) confidence range, and are followed in brackets by the measurement BP followed by the laboratory number.