

Chapter 6

Life on the Roman road

PREHISTORIC PERIOD

Mesolithic to Neolithic (Phase 1a)

Archaeological evidence of early prehistoric date within the Berryfields Major Development Area (MDA) was low-level and dispersed, but nevertheless indicated that the area attracted small groups of people intermittently over a prolonged period. Two pits (1501, 2774), a tree-throw hole (1982) and a pit or posthole (1637) are attributed to this period, based mainly on the finds recovered from them: small groups of flint tools (Donnelly, Chapter 3), or in the case of feature 1637 abundant oak charcoal and charred hazelnut shells radiocarbon dated to the early Neolithic period (3800-3650 cal BC; 95.4% confidence; SUERC-75472; 4963±30BP). Small sherds of pottery, including a piece with impressed (possibly cord) decoration (Brown, Chapter 3), were also collected. The flintwork collected from the cut features included flakes, blades and bladelets. More flint objects, among them scrapers, were recovered as incidental or residual occurrences across the site and span the Neolithic to early Bronze Age. The flint assemblage was dominated by tools. Cores were largely absent, suggesting that most of the raw material, save for the occasional piece of river gravel, had been procured and processed elsewhere. A primary source of the flint is likely to have been on the Chiltern escarpment, for instance in the vicinity of Whiteleaf Hill, where good quality flint nodules from the clay-with-flint capping on chalk are to be had (see Fig. 6.2; Hey *et al.* 2007, 7). The evidence from the MDA, though limited, suggests that the site saw repeated, short-term, visits, possibly on a seasonal basis, by mobile communities who exploited the oak-dominated woodland, the River Thame and other natural resources for food, fire and shelter and used tools that they had carried with them to process meat and plant materials.

The evidence reflects the pattern of sparse early prehistoric occupation in the area. For example, an isolated Neolithic pit containing charred hazelnut shells was recorded at Coldharbour Farm in south-west Aylesbury (Parkhouse and Bonner 1997, 80), and other isolated pits are known at Stone, Walton Lodge Lane, Ashenden, Long Crendon and Chilton (K Biddulph 2009, 28). The distribution of pits to some extent follows the course of the Thame valley, which may have guided communities through the landscape. The transitory nature of the occupation at

Berryfields stands in contrast to the more permanent occupation recorded on the outskirts of the town of Thame, where, on elevated ground overlooking the River Thame less than a kilometre to the north, Neolithic pit clusters and a triple-ditched causewayed enclosure were recorded (Ellis in prep). The site may have served as a central place for otherwise dispersed communities moving along the Thame valley to gather. A comparison between the radiocarbon determinations obtained from pit 1637 and the causewayed enclosure (C Hayden, pers. comm.) suggests that the pit only just overlaps with the monument chronologically and is more likely to be the earlier feature, although the monument's location could well have been significant to communities before the monument was built (cf. Pryor 2004, 164). Interestingly, the pit appears to pre-date the raising of the Neolithic barrow at Whiteleaf Hill, dated to c 3660-3520 cal BC (95% confidence; NZA-21036; 4803±35BP), but could be contemporary with the male skeleton that lay under the barrow and was buried up to 150 years earlier (3760-3640 cal BC, 95% confidence; OxA-13567; 4900±33BP) (Hey *et al.* 2007, 70, table 11). The pit may therefore be the remains of activity of a group or community who moved around the landscape at the same time as the Whiteleaf Hill man and represents one of the earliest Neolithic features in the region.

Bronze Age (Phase 1b)

The site saw occupation of a more permanent character during the Bronze Age. Two groups of features belonging to the middle Bronze Age were recorded: ditches SG8110 and SG8117 and an associated group of features (SG8150), possibly the remains of a structure, in the north-west part of the site, and ring ditches SG8028 and SG8035 and ditch SG8029 to the south-east. The features were dated largely by pottery, which was predominantly flint-tempered (L Brown, Chapter 3). The difference between the two groups of features is notable. The more northerly group served to divide or enclose the land – the ditches may relate to a thoroughly denuded field system – and the associated structure, defined by postholes and a beamslot, was sub-rectangular, whereas the ring ditches to the south-east may represent the remains of barrows. No human remains were found, but such evidence may well have been removed by later activity.

Further support for their interpretation as funerary monuments is provided by fragments of pottery of Deverel-Rimbury Bucket or Barrel 'Urn' tradition from ditch SG8029. The use of such pottery as burial urns is well known (eg Lambrick 2009a, 299), and potentially the pottery may be the remains of disturbed and redeposited urns from the nearby ring ditches.

Whatever the case, the features significantly add to what is otherwise limited evidence for middle Bronze Age settlement in the area. Much of this has been recorded at Walton in south-east Aylesbury. Excavations there uncovered five circular structures, including a roundhouse with a double circle of postholes, as well as pits, postholes, buried soils and, among the artefacts, pottery, copper alloy objects, fired clay and flint tools (Dalwood and Dillon 1989; Ford and Howell 2004, 61).

A pit alignment (G5) in the north-eastern part of the site, close to the middle Bronze Age features, represented the first phase of a major landscape boundary or division that was to endure into the early Roman period. The alignment, orientated E-W, was tentatively assigned to the late Bronze Age/early Iron Age, but middle Iron Age examples are known (Rippon 2018, 94), and it is possible that the alignment here belongs to this later date. Ditch SG8104, which was either contemporary with the alignment or was the second phase of the boundary (no direct relationship between the two elements was recorded), was attributed to the middle Iron Age. The alignment was disrupted and may have taken the form of intermittent groups of pits, each perhaps relating to separate family or community groups, although several pits could have been removed by later activity or left in isolation and not attributed to the alignment. The total recorded length of the alignment was *c* 80m; this is short compared with many – a pit alignment at Gayhurst Quarry, Newport Pagnell was traced for some 200m (Chapman 2007, fig. 181) and the longer of two pit alignments at Biddenham Loop ran to almost 1km (Luke and Edmondson 2008, 124-5) – but it may originally have been longer. It is interesting to observe that the Berryfields pit alignment is situated more or less perpendicular to the Fleet Marston Brook, which runs broadly north-south along the western edge of the excavation area and the alignment may have extended as far as the brook. This echoes the relationship that many pit alignments have with watercourses, the alignments combining with the natural boundary created by the watercourse to divide or delineate the landscape, for example at Northfield Farm at Long Wittenham in Oxfordshire (Lambrick 2009b, 64-6, fig. 3.8).

Apart from settlement and landscape features, artefacts found as residual occurrences also provide some insight into Bronze Age activities at the site. One such object was a fragment of a copper alloy socketed axe (SF 2578), recovered from a late Roman buried soil. The object recalls another fragment of a

Bronze Age socketed axe that was found by chance at Walton Court in south-east Aylesbury (Farley *et al.* 1981, 51). That example was suggested to represent metalworking scrap or a broken tool casually discarded, and a similar interpretation could be suggested for the Berryfields example. It is alternatively possible that the object, recovered with Roman-period coins and other metal finds, held some significance in the Roman period, perhaps having been curated and ritually deposited. This will be considered further below. A copper alloy awl (SF 2781), possibly used for piercing hides, is also worth noting.

Later Iron Age (Phase 2)

The pit alignment (G5), if of earlier date, was replaced by a major boundary ditch (SG8104) during the middle Iron Age. The earliest pottery from the ditch dated to the early-middle Iron Age and included sherds with All Cannings Cross- or 'Chinnor-Wandlebury'-type decoration (Brown, Chapter 3). This pottery was found with middle Iron Age material and was therefore residual, but it nevertheless points to activity of this earlier period in or around the site. The alignment of the ditch more-or-less matched that of the pit alignment and suggests that the digging of the ditch represented the redefinition of a significant land division, perhaps following a period of site abandonment. It is possible that the earlier pottery had been curated and deliberately deposited as part of an event or events commemorating the middle Iron Age community's ancestors, although the recovery of the pottery from secondary fills with later material argues against this. The ditch is likely to have remained visible as a landmark after filling, possibly as a bank, and served as the north side of a later enclosure (SG8105/SG8116). It is perhaps significant that early Neolithic pit 1637 and middle Iron Age pit 1583 were cut by the ditch; both features may have been positioned deliberately on what may have been recognised as an important boundary line long before the ditch was dug.

Three roundhouses (SG8094, SG8100 and SG8151) were attributed to this initial phase of middle Iron Age activity based on pottery finds and stratigraphic relationships and denote an area of settlement that was at least broadly contemporary with the ditch and enclosure. Roundhouse SG8094 was the largest of the three structures, with a ditch measuring *c* 14m in diameter. The ditches of the other two roundhouses had diameters of *c* 6-7m. The diameters are consistent with the those of Iron Age roundhouses uncovered on the Hardwick to Marsh Gibbon pipeline (Thatcher *et al.* 2014, 50), though lie at the ends of the range offered by the roundhouses from the middle Iron Age settlement at Bancroft (Williams and Zeepvat 1994, table 6). Roundhouse SG8094 is relatively large by comparison, but this is not necessarily unusual; the ditch of a late Iron Age roundhouse at Passingford Bridge in south Essex, for

example, also had diameter of 14m (Biddulph and Brady 2015, 11). An oval enclosure (SG8095) joined the western side of SG8094 and formed a pen or annexe, which presumably held livestock. A feature similar in size and shape and dating to the middle/late Iron Age was recorded at Passingford Bridge (Biddulph and Brady 2015, fig. 5).

At least two four-post structures, possibly set within a sub-rectangular ditched enclosure (G25) – the ditch is not well dated – are likely to belong to the middle Iron Age settlement. Such structures are commonly interpreted as raised granaries (cf. Bersu 1940, 97-8), though other interpretations have been put forward, among them excarnation platforms and fodder ricks, the last being especially relevant to Berryfields, linking as it does the feature type with pastoral farming (Hayden *et al.* 2017, 398). Two features (5607 and 5609) recorded in the far north-east part of the site were tentatively interpreted as ovens and assigned to the Bronze Age based on charcoal and fragments of pottery recovered from them. However, their form, a pair of shallow depressions connected by a slot, recalls two- or four-post structures recorded in some number at the Iron Age hillfort at Danebury (Cunliffe 1984, figs 4.69 and 4.70), and the features may therefore instead be the remains of granaries or drying-racks. Enclosure SG8105/SG8116 was replaced by enclosure SG8108/SG8109, which was larger and had a notably elaborate entrance through its south side. Roundhouse SG8094 was also replaced. Its successor, roundhouse SG8093, was almost identical to it, being 13m in diameter with an entrance facing east. Pottery from the later roundhouse included material of middle-late Iron Age transitional form, potentially dating the structure to the late 2nd to early/mid-1st century BC (Brown, Chapter 3). Another area of broadly late prehistoric evidence lay further to the east. This related to farming activity. No structures were identified, with the evidence consisting of a water-hole (9204) set on the junction of three field ditches (SG8144, SG8145 and 9220).

While four-post structures may have had a variety of functions, the two at Berryfields seem most likely to have been used for grain storage. Cereal grains and chaff were recovered from environmental samples collected from the postholes and recorded during the assessment stage (Meen and Stafford 2017). Though the plant remains were sparse and poorly preserved, they help to strengthen the association between arable farming and four-post structures. Similar evidence is known from four-post structures at, among other sites, Horcott in Gloucestershire (Hayden *et al.* 2017, 398-9, table 13.7) and Passingford Bridge (Biddulph and Brady 2015, 118). However, while crops were undoubtedly grown at Berryfields, this was possibly at a subsistence level, quantities being sufficient for the community's own requirements only, as well as for animal feed. The economy instead appeared to be one based principally on livestock, focused largely on sheep, goats, cattle and horses, with pigs being

kept to a lesser extent. That said, Leo Webley (2007, 61) notes that good environmental evidence is generally sparse on later prehistoric clayland sites in the wider region, cautioning against the assumption that this must identify the communities on such sites as being essentially pastoralists. As Webley (*ibid.*) suggests, deposition practices and site formation processes may account for at least some of the pattern. This observation notwithstanding, animal bone, including horse, was recovered from most of the middle Iron Age features, with relatively large groups coming from the boundary ditch, enclosure ditches and roundhouse gullies. While the dominance of sheep and cattle is consistent with the regional pattern (Kidd 2009, 41), the proportion of horse bones in the assemblage is abnormally high, accounting for just over 20% of the Phase 2 bone assemblage by number of identified specimens (Broderick, Chapter 5). Frequencies of this magnitude are rare in Buckinghamshire, though have been noted at a number of middle/late Iron Age sites in the Milton Keynes area, identifying the Ouzel valley as a region specialising in horse farming (Kidd 2009, 41); at the middle Iron Age settlement at Hartigans, 18% of identifiable fragments were of horse (Burnett 1993, table 41). We can now put the Vale of Aylesbury forward as another region with a strong focus on horse farming.

The nature of the horse-farming regime at Berryfields is nevertheless uncertain. Ranching is a possibility, but this implies that horses were being grazed over extensive undivided tracts of land, the evidence for which is somewhat nebulous, although the paucity of middle Iron Age field ditches or boundaries points to an open landscape away from settlement. Horse breeding may also have been practised, but again the data for the middle Iron Age, and indeed the Roman period, are equivocal. There is a total of 73 horse specimens with fusion data from the site, with just 23 from Phase 2. Of these 23, all are fused apart from a single distal femur, which fuses at between three and three and a half years (Broderick, Chapter 5). Slightly more evidence was recovered from late Roman (Phase 6) deposits in the Aylesbury Vale Parkway area, with an unfused distal radius from a horse less than 3.5 years old and a fragmentary horse skull with six unerupted permanent molars, indicating an age at death of 2-4 years (Strid, Chapter 5). An unfused distal femur, an unfused distal humerus, a fusing proximal femur and an unfused proximal humerus were collected from deposits broadly dated to the Roman period. There is therefore very little evidence for young animals on the site, but the data are based on quite a small sample and there is a similar paucity of juvenile animals among cattle specimens. Quite how we view the pattern is uncertain, and different interpretations can be suggested. It may be simply that preservation favoured more robust bones from older individuals. Other explanations are that younger animals were disposed of away from the site or were traded away and only a

breeding population of animals was maintained on the site, or the data suggest that no breeding took place on the site and older animals were imported. Given the species profile and that young animals are at least represented, the last option seems unlikely, leaving us with a combination of the other three (Broderick, pers. comm.).

Returning to the middle Iron Age, horses were clearly an element of the local economy, and we can imagine that horse farmers lived in the settlement represented by the roundhouses, and that, judging by the provision away from the settlement of a waterhole (if contemporary; pottery from the feature raises the possibility that it could be earlier), extensive grazing lay to the east. Broderick (Chapter 5) suggests that horse farming would be linked to a major routeway, which, along with favourable environmental conditions – historically, Quarrendon is known for good grazing – would have encouraged the farmers to develop here. The putative presence of a routeway here may relate to a conjectured pattern of droveways that, as part of a wider co-axial landscape with a prevailing NW-SE/NE-SW orientation, allowed communities to move livestock between the Chilterns and the Vale of Aylesbury (Alqassar and Kidd 2018).

Of equal interest is the discovery of a bone belonging to a domestic fowl. Its context is, however, problematic. The pit (SG8114) from which it was collected appears to form part of a late Iron Age/early Roman trackway (G1; Phase 3) and, what is more, contained Roman-period pottery, albeit three sherds from a different part of the feature. On the other hand, the dating evidence from the deposit that contained the bone is exclusively middle Iron Age, with 10 sherds of middle Iron Age pottery and a sheep bone radiocarbon dated to 410-210 cal BC (95.4% probability; SUERC-

76716) being recovered. Assuming that the material retained its integrity despite being redeposited, or that the feature in fact pre-dates the trackway and the later pottery is intrusive, the domestic fowl bone could be among the earliest evidence for chickens in Britain. White Horse Stone in Kent currently offers the earliest evidence, a chicken bone there being radiocarbon dated to 560-390 cal BC (Maltby *et al.* 2018, 1003). The specimen from Berryfields is potentially contemporaneous with that example or more likely is a little later, although that the Berryfields bone itself could not be dated inevitably adds uncertainty to the comparison, and it is safer to give the bone a Phase 3 date. The radiocarbon date obtained from the sheep bone is not itself without significance, however, dating as it does a period of occupation in the middle Iron Age settlement. Critically, this is broadly contemporary with the construction of the circuit ditches of Aylesbury's hillfort, which was built on the hill formed by the Portland limestone cap approximately where St Mary's Church now stands. Radiocarbon determinations from the ditch, which enclosed an area of c 7.9ha (Farley and Jones 2012, 80), suggest that the hillfort was built by 390-300 cal BC (95% confidence; Meadows *et al.* 2012, 67).

There are other, cultural, links between Berryfields and the hillfort. Pottery from both the hillfort's ditch and interior was stylistically similar to the pottery from Berryfields, all being consistent with the 'bowl-continuum' tradition characteristic of the middle Iron Age pottery of the South-east Midlands (Rippon 2018, 60, fig. 2.8). Pottery of so-called 'Chinnor-Wandlebury' style, dated to the later early Iron Age and characterised by geometric decoration and other ornamentation (Cunliffe 2005, 97-8), was also recovered both from Berryfields and the hillfort site – specifically, in the latter case, a

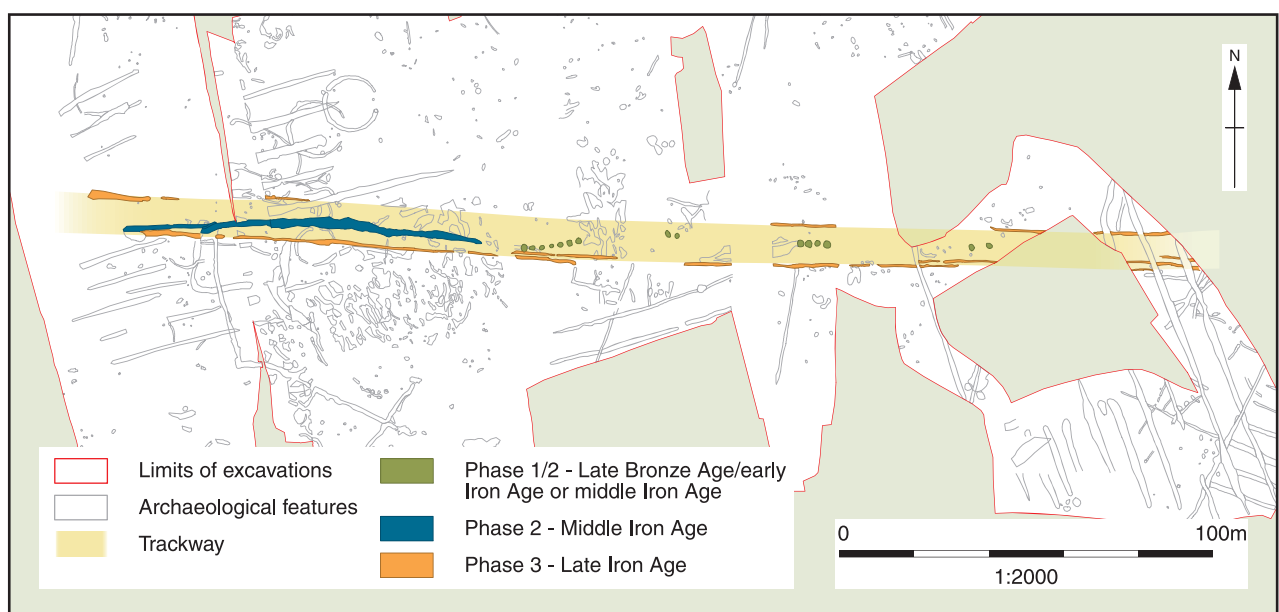


Fig. 6.1 Pit alignment, ditch, trackway: three successive prehistoric landscape features

ritual deposit that pre-dated the construction of the ditches and was radiocarbon dated to *c* 400-370/60 cal BC (Meadows *et al.* 2012, 65-7). Stephen Rippon (2018, fig. 2.7) has shown that such pottery has a distinctive distribution, being largely confined to sites along the corridor of the Chiltern escarpment. It is worth noting too that the dominant middle Iron Age fabric at Berryfields was tempered with glauconitic sand, which is likely to have been extracted from the band of Upper Greensand that extends NE-SW south of Aylesbury (Fig. 1.5; Brown, Chapter 3). The pottery therefore places the early-middle and middle Iron Age activity at Berryfields in a cultural zone focused to the south in the Chilterns and the southern part of Aylesbury Vale.

Not all the middle Iron Age pottery was of local origin, with two imports being tentatively or definitely identified: a round-bodied vessel with small perforated lugs and a South-West Decorated Ware bowl. The former is unusual and not paralleled locally, while the latter has a source in the Mendip Hills (Peacock 1969). It is possible that the vessels were brought to the site by traders who exchanged them for livestock or other commodities, but alternatively we could see a role for the hillfort, which may have seen periodic gatherings where trade, exchange and redistribution of food, animals and objects took place. Evidence from investigations within the hillfort interior suggests that the hillfort was intensively occupied, although large grain storage pits appear to be lacking (Farley and Jones 2012, 82).

Boundary ditch SG8104 was replaced by a trackway (G1; Phase 3). The dating evidence from the trackway, though meagre, suggests that the ditches filled during the pre-Flavian period (*c* AD 43-70). On stratigraphic grounds, however, the case could be made for an earlier, pre-Roman origin. That the trackway clearly respects the alignment of the pit alignment (G5) – tentatively dated to the late Bronze Age/early Iron Age – and the middle Iron Age boundary ditch, rather than Akeman Street and the early Roman field system (G6), is particularly telling. The trackway may represent the final phase of a long-lived landscape division, rather than the first phase of a new system related to the laying out of the Roman-period settlement (Fig. 6.1). If so, then these features may have marked a significant boundary, the precise form of which evolved over time. Considering the role of hillforts on the Chiltern escarpment and in the Vale of Aylesbury, Alqassar and Kidd (2018, 7) suggest that the hillforts were constructed in a liminal location, marking the boundary between the ‘community’s core territory and the less intensively occupied, and perhaps more contested, lands on either side’. It is tempting to see the successive, superimposed boundaries and the trackway at Berryfields as part of this territorial expression, although the relatively short length of the ditch and pit alignment suggests that the boundary was more of local importance and not

necessarily connected with the hillfort. A large NE-SW-orientated ditch recorded at Stoke Mandeville and dated to the middle Iron Age is interpreted as a boundary feature designed to make a ‘statement’ in the landscape, perhaps to mark a change in land use or ownership (Thorpe 2014, 10), and a similar function could be applied to Berryfields. There are, in addition, chronological objections to connecting the boundary features at Berryfields and the hillfort, although, while the pit alignment is suggested to have pre-dated the hillfort, we cannot rule out the possibility that it was contemporary with the ritual deposit of human and animal burials on the site of the hillfort that preceded the hillfort’s construction perhaps by a generation (Farley and Jones 2012, 20-49). After all, ‘late’ early Iron Age Chinnor-Wandlebury-style pottery was found both at Berryfields and the ritual deposit, linking the two sites, at least chronologically.

ROMAN PERIOD

The road network

Akeman Street

The fields and enclosures (G6, G14-G16) that characterised the early Roman activity at Berryfields were laid out with reference to Akeman Street, being aligned with the road and extending along its route. The road must represent one of the earliest elements, if not the primary element of the Roman-period landscape (Fig. 6.2). Akeman Street is a major Roman road that connected the Roman town of Verulamium in Hertfordshire to (via a short diversion; Simmonds and Lawrence 2018, fig. 2.1) the fortress and subsequent town at Alchester in Oxfordshire. Beyond Alchester, the road changed from a prevailing NW-SE alignment to a south-westerly alignment to connect Alchester with Cirencester in Gloucestershire (Margary 1967). Along the way, the road met farmsteads, villas and larger roadside settlements, among them several in the area of Aston Clinton (Masefield 2008; WA 2013; Simmonds 2016) and, of course, Berryfields where sections of the road have been exposed. While Akeman Street did not directly replace an earlier, prehistoric route, its course may have followed, albeit on a slightly different alignment, an earlier routeway whose presence is conjectured from the importance of horse in the middle Iron Age economy at Berryfields and the pattern of settlement and fields in the region (cf. Alqassar and Kidd 2018) as it extended through the Chilterns and into the Vale of Aylesbury.

The route of Akeman Street is reasonably well understood and need not be discussed in detail here; readers are directed instead to Margary (1967) and, more recently, Copeland (2009). However, it is worth addressing a curious aspect of the road’s course between the Aston Clinton Bypass and Berryfields. Along this stretch, the road is suggested to have

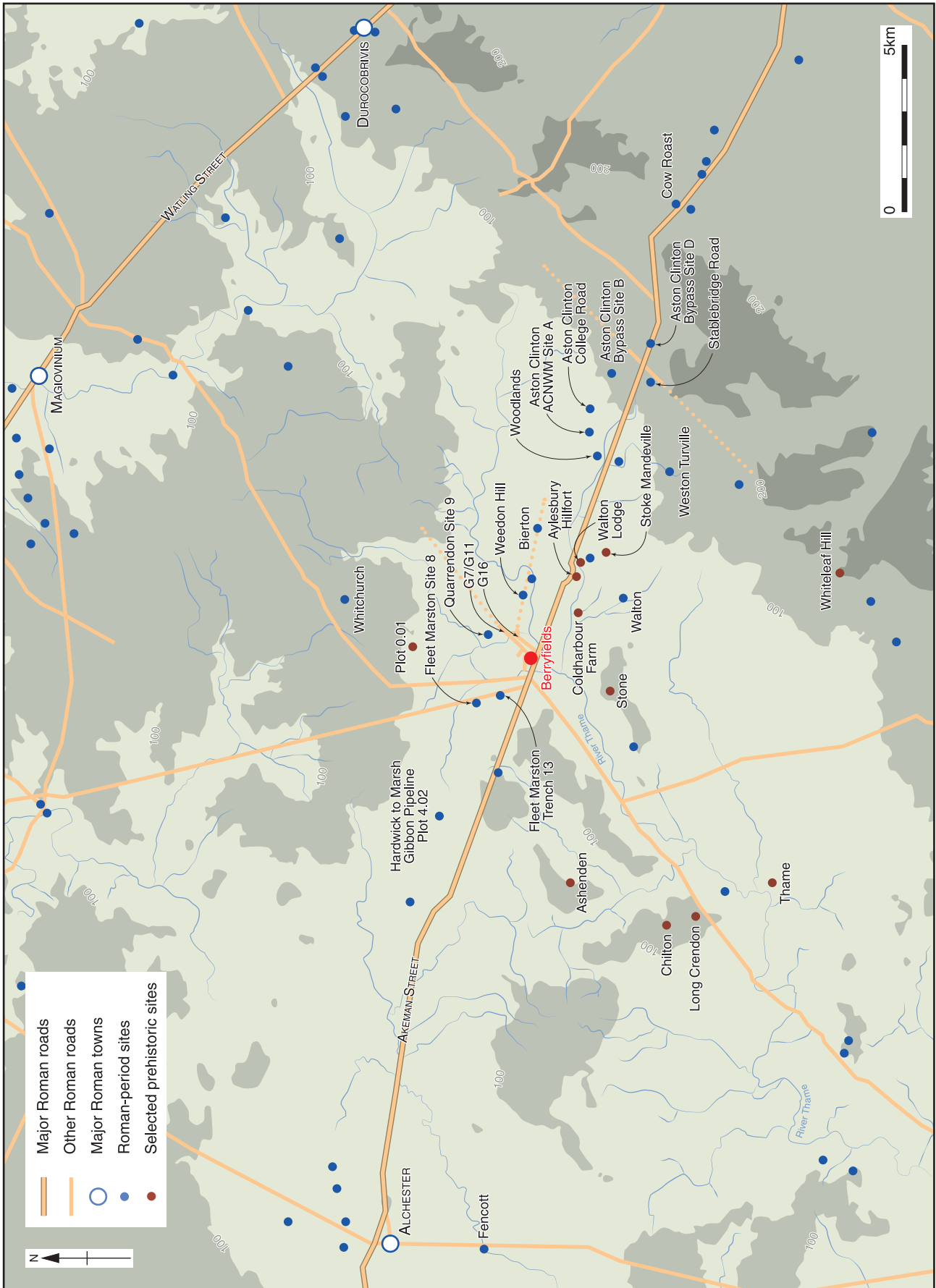


Fig. 6.2 Berryfields MDA in its archaeological context

diverted from its straight alignment to respect, or slight, the site of the Iron Age hillfort. As confirmed in the Aston Clinton Bypass excavations (Masefield 2008, 17), the modern A41 largely overlies the Roman road. As it enters the eastern end of Aylesbury town centre, the A41 changes course slightly (Tring Road) and, with another slight correction, continues as High Street towards the town's historic core and the north-eastern edge of the hillfort. The west end of High Street meets the east end of Buckingham Street, which curves towards the north-west to resume the prevailing course of Akeman Street (Bicester Road). As Allen (1982, 81) notes, Buckingham Street is likely to have been an element of the early medieval town, which hints at an earlier origin. What is more, evidence of Roman-period settlements that may have been situated on the line of the road have been recorded. Gullies, ditches and pits have been recorded on Buckingham Street and at the site of the Bull's Head inn (now the Hale Leys shopping centre) on the south side of High Street (Allen 1982, 84-5, 103). The site of the Iron Age hillfort may therefore have continued to exert a level of influence on the landscape and the Roman surveyors into the Roman period.

Ceramic evidence suggests that the part of Akeman Street uncovered at Berryfields was set out a short period after the Roman invasion, possibly just a few years. Pottery groups from the roadside ditches (G8), which included fragments of grog-tempered ware platters, a Drag. 29 decorated bowl in South Gaulish samian ware and a butt-beaker in North Gaulish white ware, are likely to have been deposited before *c.* AD 70. A fragment of a Drag. 29 bowl was also collected from the earliest phase of road surface (G9). The dating evidence is consistent with that from the portions of the road exposed during the evaluation in the south-eastern part of the site (formerly Billingsfield), in which 1st century pottery from the road's flanking ditches and surfaces was recorded (Cox 1997).

The chronology is imprecise, but significant, supporting as it does a military origin for the road. The military fortress which preceded the town and extramural settlement at Alchester (Booth *et al.* 2001; Simmonds and Lawrence 2018; Sauer 2005; 2006) was established in the Claudian period; gateposts belonging to an annexe associated with the legionary fortress were dated by dendrochronology to between October AD 44 and March AD 45 (Sauer 2006, 13). The fortress was occupied for 15 or so years, with withdrawal in the 50s or early 60s (E Sauer, pers. comm.; Sauer 2005, 124-5). Roads were of course an essential means of communication and supply, not least for the Roman army, which would have been required to secure supply lines, and so we may expect the construction of Akeman Street to have commenced very early – Henig and Booth (2000, 35) suggest AD 47 – in the life of the fortress.

Superficially, Akeman Street at the point where it passed through Berryfields follows the standard construction of a Roman road (Bagshawe 1979, 15).

The gravel road surface rises in the centre to form a low bank or *agger* and is flanked on both sides by inner and outer pairs of ditches. The evidence as recorded, however, did not wholly fit this model. The inner ditches, recorded on both the south and north sides of the road, appear to have been later additions, having been cut into the road surface or dug as recuts of the outer ditch after the earlier phases of ditch had silted up perhaps following flooding. Later Roman pottery (Phase 5) was also recovered from these ditches, contrasting with the early Roman pottery (Phase 4) recovered from the outer ditches. Both inner and outer pairs of ditches were exposed in the Billingsfield evaluation, and while none of the ditches were viewed as recuts, late Roman pottery was recovered from some of the sections through the features (Cox 1997, section 5.12). On the Aston Clinton Bypass, two ditches on the north side of the road and one on the south side were recorded, although in this case doubt was expressed about whether the ditches on the north side were related, being 19m apart, while any outer ditch on the south side may remain under the modern road (Masefield 2008, 17). Variation in road design may be expected, particularly in settlements and in areas of field systems where field ditches may themselves provide additional drainage. We may note that a single pair of flanking ditches were recorded on either side of Watling Street as it extended through the roadside settlement of Springhead in north Kent (Andrews 2011, 86-9, fig. 2.57).

As Akeman Street approached Berryfields from the south-east, it was naturally required to cross the River Thames. It is not certain that two timbers (G26) recovered from the bank of the river formed part of a bridge that carried the road over it, but the interpretation is plausible. Based on their form, the piles could have held a bridge trestle which in turn supported a metalled timber decking for the roadway (Goodburn, Chapter 3). The timbers were radiocarbon dated to the late 1st to mid-3rd/early 4th century (95.4% confidence) and so must post-date the construction of the road. They may instead represent the replacement of a temporary crossing or a repair of degraded piles from an earlier bridge. Similar timbers from a Roman bridge that carried the Alchester-Dorchester-on-Thames road over the River Ray at Fencott suggested a bridge width of 4.5m (Chambers 1986, 35).

Minor roads and trackways

Excavations at Berryfields uncovered the remains of two Roman trackways or minor roads that ran from the north side of Akeman Street towards the north-east (Fig. 6.3). Trackway G7/G11 extended through Phase 5 ladder settlement (G12) and its associated field system and may share its middle Roman date. As discussed below, however, it is possible that the ladder settlement has an earlier origin in the later 1st century AD, and the pottery recovered from the trackway's ditches, broadly

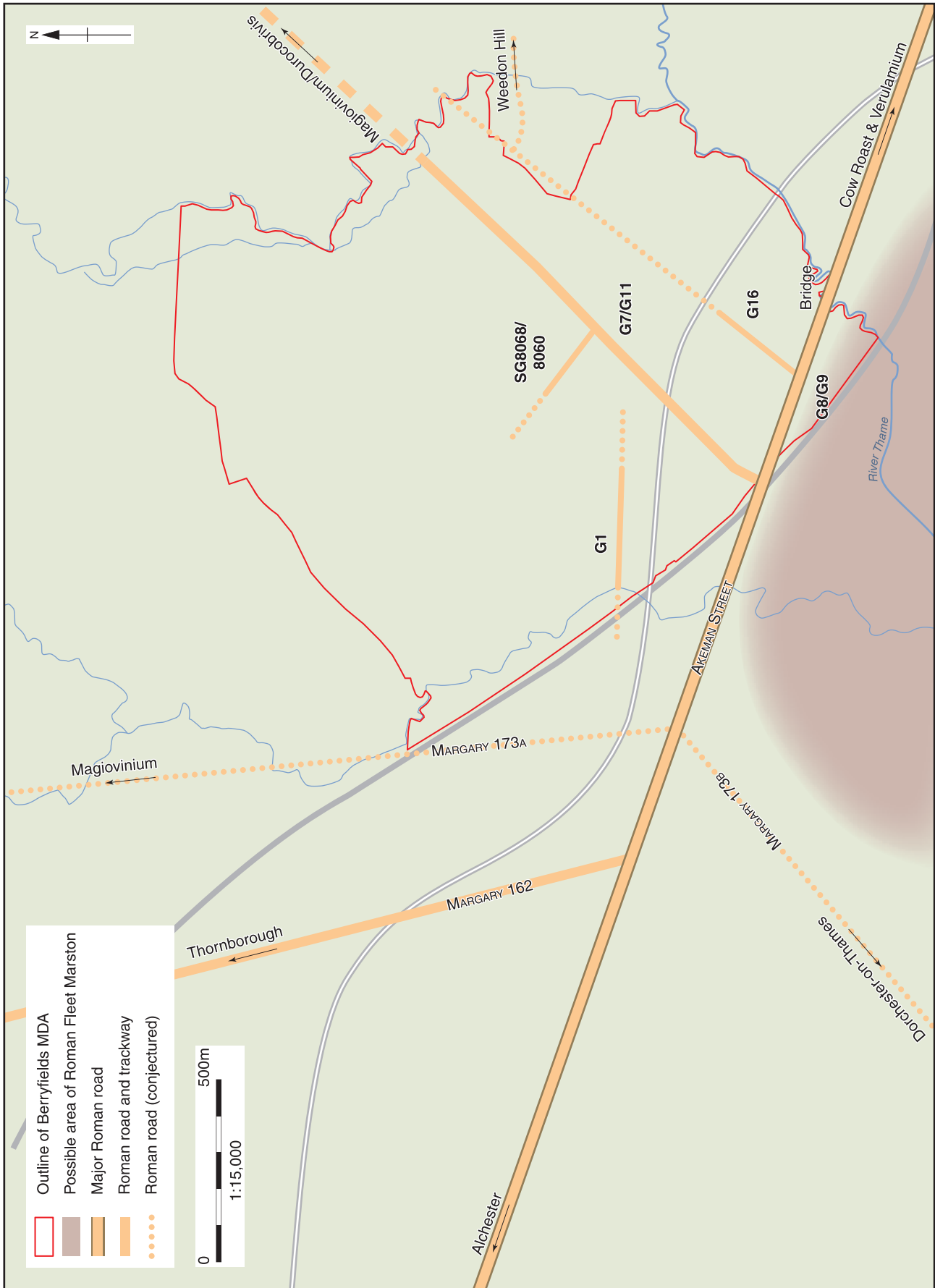


Fig. 6.3 The network of Roman roads and minor roads at Fleet Marston (data based on Allen et al. 2015)

dated to the mid-1st to mid-2nd century, is not inconsistent with this chronology. However, no trace of the trackway was seen on its projected alignment in the south-eastern end of the Aylesbury Vale Parkway site. It is probable, therefore, that the trackway changed direction slightly to avoid existing mid/late 1st-century roadside fields in the Parkway site before joining Akeman Street. On this basis, the trackway was laid out after Akeman Street and its roadside field system had been established. The trackway was defined by its flanking ditches. A patch of what appeared to be the remains of a road surface (4117) was recorded in the area of the ladder settlement, but this is more likely to be a causeway permitting inhabitants to cross the trackway, which may well have been muddy and heavily trampled with the movement of livestock along the route and between fields. The trackway was traced for a distance of *c* 1km and presumably continued northwards beyond the area of excavation, though it need not have continued far. For example, at Gill Mill in Oxfordshire road 2 which ran through a series of conjoined enclosures was traced for some 800m before fading out (Booth and Simmonds 2018, 91-3). It is possible that G7/G11, perhaps best described as a minor road, was maintained for some distance and made minor corrections to reach the major Roman town of *Durocobrivis* (Dunstable) or *Magiovinium* near Fenny Stratford. How the route might have related to the Dorchester-on-Thames/*Magiovinium* road (Margary's road 173; Viatores 1964), which is purported to cross Akeman Street west of Berryfields and run north for some 7km before turning north-east and heading towards *Magiovinium*, is uncertain. A narrower trackway (SG8058/8060) extended for some 200m towards the NW, having been set out perpendicular to G7/G11. The trackway is likely to have been laid out at the same time as the ladder settlement was established, or was later than it, and provided access to the surrounding fields.

Another routeway, which formed part of Phase 4c field system G16 and which replaced an earlier trackway (G14) during the second half of the 1st century AD, ran north-east from Akeman Street for some 250m before petering out. The earlier trackway was perpendicular to Akeman Street and perhaps laid out very soon after the trunk road had been constructed. No surfaces were recorded, but the trackway was relatively wide at *c* 20m (narrowing towards the north to *c* 16m) and it seems appropriate to identify the routeway, like G7/G11, as a minor road. There appears to be a paucity of settlements along the road's projected north-east course (Fig. 6.2), assuming that it continued with no deviation in its alignment, with the next stopping-place being *Magiovinium* (raising the possibility that G7/G11 replaced G16), but another possibility is that the road turned to the east and headed towards the settlement and malt house site at Weedon Hill (Wakeman and Bradley 2013) and beyond that the

putative villa at Bierton (Allen 1986). Some support for this proposal is offered by the results of geophysical survey in an area immediately north of the Weedon Hill site, which show the side ditches of a trackway orientated WSW-ENE, which would have continued west into the area of medieval settlement at Quarrendon (Wakeman and Bradley 2013, fig. 1). An early medieval road that extends through the Quarrendon settlement and is still traceable today in the fields and earthworks of the medieval site appears to have followed this trackway, and could preserve the line of the Roman route as it moves into Berryfields (Everson 2001, fig. 19).

Another Roman road (Margary's road 162; Viatores 1964) is judged to extend north from Akeman Street at a point *c* 1km west of the junction of Akeman Street and minor road G7/G11, on a north-north-west alignment towards the settlement and religious centre at Thornborough and beyond. In fact, recent fieldwork has corroborated the existence of this road, geophysical survey showing the junction with Akeman Street and the initial line northwards as well as a block of long fields on the west side (Lythe 2009, fig. 2). Continuation of the road on the same alignment is confirmed in an evaluation trench (Fleet Marston trench 13) dug by Pre-Construct Archaeology, in which a gravel surface containing late Roman pottery was recorded (*ibid.*, 27-8). The road was identified again in an excavation *c* 1.5km further north-west of the PCA site. Work at Site 8 at Fleet Marston on the Steppingley to Aylesbury Pipeline by Network Archaeology (2007, 23) revealed gravel road surfaces and a flanking ditch on either side on the line of the road, although dating evidence was limited to a sherd of medieval pottery.

The Roman road (Margary 1967, road 173a and b) that is suggested to have connected the Roman towns of Dorchester-on-Thames in Oxfordshire and *Magiovinium* is mapped as passing through Fleet Marston. Metalling and a parchmark observed at Putlowes have tentatively been identified as a road or trackway (UBP nd, record 0085310000), but it is not yet certain how it relates to this or other routes. Excavation at Stablebridge Road in Aston Clinton identified another routeway. Orientated NE-SW, it was established in the late 1st or early 2nd century AD as a droveway, before being narrowed and possibly metalled in the 2nd century. The road corresponds to the line of the Lower Icknield Way, a long-distance routeway that extended along the Chiltern escarpment and would have crossed Akeman Street (Morris 2017, 167-9).

Looking at the roads or their projections in the wider landscape, one notable aspect is that there is some correlation between their orientation and the pattern of conjectured prehistoric droveways or transhumance routes from the Chilterns into the Aylesbury Vale. This 'droveway pattern' has a prevailing NE-SW orientation, with other routes extending perpendicular to it, and is suggested to be preserved in Roman-period field systems and

routeways and the roads and trackways of the early medieval landscape (Alqassar and Kidd 2018). It could be seen, for example, the Roman-period fields and enclosures uncovered at the Woodlands site west of Aston Clinton generally matched the pattern (Simmonds 2016, 106). Road G7/G11 fits the pattern, too, as does the Dorchester-on-Thames to *Magiovinium* road (Margary 173b) and the section of the Lower Icknield Way at Stablebridge Road. However, while their alignments may have been influenced to some extent by traces or survivals of earlier routeways and settlement, we must be cautious before presuming the existence of pre-Roman routeways at those locations. Road G7/G11 was laid out after the roadside fields along Akeman Street were established and, similarly, excavations at Aston Clinton have identified no prehistoric precursor to the Lower Icknield Way (Morris 2017, 168).

The siting of Fleet Marston: the military connection

The location of Fleet Marston is of considerable interest. As suggested above, the settlement is situated at the nexus of several Roman-period roads, and this factor alone could be enough to explain the development of the settlement. But to adapt the age-old chicken-and-egg question, which came first, the crossroads or the town? The answer, in short, appears to be the town, probably in concert with the construction of Akeman Street. The network of minor roads at Berryfields and Fleet Marston could have been contemporary with the setting out of Akeman Street, but the evidence is not strong, with pottery, orientation and the stratigraphic sequence suggesting that the minor roads, with the exception of trackway G14, were laid out piecemeal after the roadside field system was established. Akeman Street was laid out, presumably in tandem with the construction of the legionary fortress at Alchester, within a few years of the Roman conquest, and dating evidence from Akeman Street at Berryfields is consistent with this chronology. What is more, the paucity of pre-conquest, late Iron Age features at Berryfields indicates that the hinterland of Fleet Marston, and possibly Fleet Marston itself, had no substantial pre-conquest antecedent. It was, essentially, a new town established after AD 43.

Graham Webster (1993, 118-9) speculated that Fleet Marston was the site of a conquest-period fort. Little physical evidence can be offered to support the suggestion, but the idea is not entirely unreasonable. After all, there is the matter of distance. For the Roman army, a day's march covered about 20 Roman miles, or 30km (Connolly 1997, 8). As it happens, the distance between Alchester and Fleet Marston is *c* 30km. Moving south-east on Akeman Street from Fleet Marston, the next nucleated settlement travellers would reach is Cow Roast in Hertfordshire, which is

another 30km or so away. The same distance again would bring travellers to Verulamium. If the distances between each major settlement are not simply serendipitous, then it is reasonable to suggest that the site of Fleet Marston reflected the needs of the Roman army, potentially on the site of a fort located at the end of a day's march.

Further evidence is necessary before a fort can be identified at Fleet Marston with certainty but, if nothing else, military or military-related finds from the town and its hinterland point to some form of military presence here. Finds of mid-1st century date included a cavalry harness pendant (Fig. 3.15, no. 21), an armlet of a type suggested to have been a military award or decoration (Fig. 3.15, no. 13; Crummy 2005, 93), and a buckle tongue from a military belt (Fig. 3.16, no. 20), although caution must be applied to the interpretation of such material on ostensibly non-military sites. Armlets such as the example here are concentrated in the territory of the Catuvellauni and Trinovantes and could have been part of a short-lived fashion among the general population within the region (*ibid.*). More generally, elements of military dress may have occasionally fallen into civilian hands through some means of trade or exchange, and we can well imagine that army veterans retired to the countryside still in possession of some of the paraphernalia of their service. Such possibilities are perfectly valid, but do not necessarily outweigh the pull that a roadside settlement is likely to have had on the Roman army. The routine movements of the legion based at Alchester would have made soldiers a familiar sight to the inhabitants of settlements along Akeman Street, and the necessities of the legion, particularly the supply of animals, meat, milk, wool, grain and fodder, provide the appropriate context for a small military presence at Fleet Marston. It is rather satisfying to imagine that three hobnails found embedded in the mid-1st century road surface of Akeman Street had broken off a soldier's shoe or *caliga* as a detachment passed through or stopped at the town.

Horse bones contributed a relatively large proportion of Berryfields' early Roman faunal assemblage, and it is likely that horses played a role within the economy. How significant a role, though, is open to question. In absolute terms, the number of horses represented in the early Roman period was small, but Fleet Marston's location on a major road and within an area of good, extensive pasture that traditionally may have been regarded as good 'horse country', would have made the settlement a prime location for horse farming or trading, with particular encouragement from the demands of the army during the period of military occupation at Alchester. Legionary fortresses, presumably including that at Alchester, which epigraphic and archaeological evidence suggests was home to the Second Augustan Legion (Sauer 2006, 14), accommodated a 120-strong unit of legionary cavalry (*equites legionis*), which provided

dispatch riders and escorts for officers and high-ranking individuals (Connolly 1997, 31). A horse harness and horse pendant, both dated to the 1st century, are among the military objects found at Alchester and attest to the presence of horses in military service (Booth *et al.* 2001, 426). The *equites* no doubt needed remounts from time to time in case of the death, injury or loss of a horse, and in addition, horses were required as pack-animals and to pull carts and other vehicles and may also have provided meat. Securing a supply of good-quality horses was therefore an important task for an army establishing itself in a territory. While stud farms are known in some parts of the late Roman empire, in the earlier period, horses are likely to have been purchased as required from civilian suppliers (Davies 1969, 453). Documents of the *cohors XX palmyrenorum*, stationed in Dura Europos in Syria, record that the commander was required to apply to the provincial governor for new cavalry horses, giving the name of the *equus* concerned and the reason for the replacement (*ibid.*, 435). Once the purchase was approved, there was then the crucial business of selection. Varro and Xenophon, among other ancient writers, place great importance on the inspection of horses to assess the animals' suitability for military service. Young animals were selected – no more than 5 years old (*ibid.*, 442) – which may explain in part the paucity of unfused specimens in the animal bone assemblage at Berryfields. After purchase, some 12 months' training would have followed before the horse formally entered service within the ranks of the legion (*ibid.*, 458). It is possible that Berryfields' horse farmers similarly received officials from the legionary fortress on a regular basis to inspect the herd and make their selection.

Beyond the military market, riders on provincial service, travellers on horseback and merchants with carts would have required to rest or change their horses as they arrived at Fleet Marston, and the existence of a *mansio*, where accommodation could be obtained and the horses could be looked after or changed, or perhaps simply a *mutatio* or changing-station, is not an unreasonable expectation. This may provide the context for other roadside activities: a smithing hearth bottom from southern roadside ditch SG8016, hammerscale from the Aylesbury Vale Parkway site, a smith's hammer from the central part of the MDA and lead manufacturing waste from soil on the south side of the road indicate that metalworking was carried out nearby, albeit to a fairly limited extent, plausibly for the purpose of creating or repairing objects (Keys, Chapter 3), including possibly transport-related equipment. Movement along the road network is epitomised by the discovery of a Roman-period horse carcass, as well as cattle carcasses, along the Lower Icknield Way at Aston Clinton; animals that died *en route*, it seems, were disposed of in the ditches that conveniently flanked the road (Morris 2017, 171).

Early Roman activity (Phase 4)

Fields were laid out on both sides of Akeman Street during the mid/late 1st century AD, probably within a few years of the road's construction. An area of fields was recorded in the south-eastern part of the site, on the low ground just above the floodplain of the River Thames. The fields were established as a single, coherent system based on the alignment of Akeman Street. Both the road and the fields had been imposed on the landscape, largely ignoring the orientation of the later Iron Age boundaries and ditches at the site. The fields (G14-G16) were perpendicular to the road, the ditches forming rectangular plots of approximately 45m by 40m. Curiously, the third phase of the system (Fig. 2.8, Phase 4c), represented by a replacement trackway and adjoining enclosure, was on a slightly different alignment to the system's earlier phases, instead matching the alignment of a Bronze Age ditch (G20). The alignment may simply be coincidence, but if the earlier ditch remained visible as an earthwork, then despite the monumentality of the road, the pre-Roman landscape occasionally re-emerged.

Ditches within the fields relate to subdivision and enclosure, but the fields were almost devoid of gullies, pits and postholes that point to domestic occupation – two rows of postholes (SG8031) seen in this area may define fencelines or a pen, rather than a domestic structure – and it is very likely that the enclosures were put to agricultural use. Another area of roadside fields (G6) was traced further to the north-west. The space between these two areas has not been investigated in detail, and therefore it is not certain whether the field system continued uninterrupted or there was a gap, although the Billingsfield evaluation did not appear to reveal any evidence of ditches (Cox 1997). The fields recorded as group G6 were only partially exposed and poorly preserved as a result of medieval ploughing, but appear to be have been larger than those to the south-east. One field, defined by ditches 329 and 355, measured some 50m wide and perhaps *c* 95m long, assuming the field extended to the road. This area had been heavily wooded. Radiocarbon dating suggests that the tree clearance that resulted in a multitude of tree-throw holes here occurred sometime between the late 1st and mid-3rd centuries, though this could have commenced earlier, with an obvious context for the clearance being road construction and the need to expand the land available for agriculture. Another area of fields or enclosures was seen to the north of these roadside fields, suggesting that the field system was extensive, stretching back some half a kilometre or more from the road. In addition, geophysical survey carried out for High Speed 2 shows anomalies that suggest that the roadside field system continued further west (Alqassar and Kidd 2018, 10; HS2 2017).

The regularity of the fields along Akeman Street has the hallmarks of a planned arrangement, laid out perhaps with the involvement of Roman

military surveyors or at least using Roman methods and for the purpose of managing livestock. The fields were adjacent to the road, allowing easy and rapid movement of animals, principally cattle, sheep and horses, and providing a 'shop window' for passing traffic. The vetch that dominated the assemblage of plant remains recovered from tree-throw hole 549 may have been removed as a weed from a cereal crop, but it is equally likely, if not more so given the evidence from the animal bone assemblage, that vetch was cultivated in its own right as a fodder crop, either to feed the animals being kept at the site or to sell to passing travellers, merchants, traders and officials.

A roundhouse set within a square enclosure in the northern part of the site (G24) provided the only evidence for domestic occupation at Berryfields in the early Roman period. With pottery dated to the second half of the 1st century AD recovered from features associated with the roundhouse, the use of this part of the site may well have been contemporary with the activity to the south. The enclosure is perpendicular to ditch SG8060, which formed the NW-SE axis of an array of fields (G6) to the west of the enclosure, although no direct relationship between these fields and the enclosure could be established. The roundhouse consisted of two gullies that form arcs and may have served as drainage features rather than a wall slot. The paucity of slots or postholes around the inside edge of the roundhouse precludes a clear understanding of how the roundhouse was constructed, but one possibility is that the structure had a mass wall of clay or earth. Such walling leaves little trace, but it is notable that a pair of postholes joined by a short gully that presumably marked a NE-facing entrance is set a little distance inside the roundhouse; a gap of c 1m separates gully SG8061 and posthole 3757. The entrance could mark the line of the wall or else the wall was built within the 1m gap; stake-holes on the north side of posthole 3757 may have held stakes that were incorporated into the wall for additional support. Excavation of a late Roman double-ditched roundhouse at Stanford Wharf Nature Reserve in Essex revealed groups of preserved stakes set within the shallow inner ditch. The stakes were suggested to have formed a wattle lining for a mass wall built between the two ditches (Goodburn 2012, 10).

Finds and environmental evidence shed some light on the daily lives of the early Roman inhabitants who lived or farmed at Berryfields or Fleet Marston or were just passing through. Items of dress or personal ornament include brooches, bracelets or armllets, a hair pin and a frit bead, while a spoon probe and fragments of a hand mirror (Figs 3.15-3.16, nos 18 and 19) show that some inhabitants expressed Continental values through hygiene and appearance, although the mirror was found within subsoil in the north-eastern part of the site in the AYLBER14 excavation area and may be evidence for a disturbed burial. Jars dominated the pottery

assemblage and point to the preparation of stews and other basic fare over the hearth, but the presence of ceramic cups, dishes, platters, flagons and olive oil containers, drawn presumably from the pottery supply to Fleet Marston, attest to the influence of Continental-style dining practices. The evidence for cereal production in the early Roman period at Berryfields is limited, but nevertheless indicates that wheat, mainly spelt, was grown for bread and possibly ale; rotary quern fragments are among the finds belonging to the period. As in the middle Iron Age, cattle, sheep and pigs – the last kept closer to home or allowed to root around in woodland – provided meat and dairy products. Bones were also useful for pins and other objects, though no direct evidence for bone-working was detected. Other animal-based products are likely to have included leather and wool. Fish, including eel and pike, was caught for the table from the River Thames. Horse bones were better represented in this phase compared with the middle Iron Age, suggesting that horses were of increasing importance in the local economy, whether for trading, traction or transportation.

Pottery production, as well as ironworking, may have been among the industrial activities carried out within or in the vicinity of Berryfields during the early Roman period. Four pottery vessels, jars in coarse reduced wares, had distorted rims and potentially can be identified as 'seconds' or wasters. Pottery with production faults is likely to be found closest to the workshops that produced it (Orton and Hughes 2013, 146), and it is worth noting that a firebar, plate fragments and a triangular brick of fired clay, which may relate to pottery production, were recovered from the site (Poole, Chapter 3). Excavation north of Fleet Marston at Site 9 on the Steppingley to Aylesbury Pipeline recorded a concentration of pits dug possibly for the extraction of clay for pottery production. Coins, pottery, and animal bone recovered suggest the presence of a nearby settlement, which was occupied in the late Roman period, if not earlier (Network Archaeology 2007, 25-6). It should be noted, however, that pottery seconds which were otherwise serviceable could be traded and therefore be found some distance from its source, as samian ware with distorted rims found in Britain testifies (Biddulph 2006a, 74). We cannot be certain, therefore, that these four vessels indicate pottery production in the vicinity of the site.

Middle Roman activity (Phase 5)

The ladder settlement

The later 2nd century (c AD 120-200; Phase 5) saw the development of an area of conjoined enclosures (G12) – a so-called ladder settlement – in the central part of the Berryfields MDA. The enclosures extended along the north-west side of a NE-SW-aligned trackway (G7/G11) that met Akeman Street. The ladder settlement remained largely unexca-

vated, being preserved *in situ*, but a corner of one plot at the north-east end extended into the QAVC12 excavation area and was investigated, providing crucial dating information. In addition, evaluation trenches exposed other parts of the ladder settlement, and geophysical survey allowed much of the plan of the settlement to be traced. The ladder settlement extended for at least 200m NE-SW and was *c* 50m wide. It is possible that the system extended further south, although no trace of a continuation was seen in excavation areas closer to Akeman Street. Circular anomalies within the plots of the settlement are likely to represent pits or wells, and indeed such features were recorded in the exposed corner. The number of individual plots within the settlement cannot be established with certainty, but if we assume that linear anomalies extending across the width of the settlement represent plot boundaries, then six or seven plots, each measuring some 50m by 30m, can be suggested, although these dimensions encompass a wide range with both narrow and broad plots. Ditches that do not extend across the whole width of the enclosures are likely to represent internal divisions. Though assigned to Phase 4 on the basis of stratigraphy and ceramic dating, enclosure G24, located at the northern end of the ladder settlement, may well have formed part of it, representing the northern extent of the block and hinting at an earlier, mid/late 1st-century origin for the system, with pottery from the exposed corner of G12 pointing to continued use of the settlement into the 2nd century. The pottery was recovered from NW-SE-aligned ditches that extend across the southern end of plot G24. These features, related to the establishment of a trackway (SG8058/8060) running perpendicular to trackway G7/G11 and cutting the G24 roundhouse, may therefore represent a later remodelling of the plots. The addition of G24 would extend the length of the block to *c* 250m, covering an area of 1.25ha.

Ladder settlements, also described as ladder systems (eg Abrams and Ingham 2008) and ditched rectangular enclosure systems (Smith *et al.* 2016, 164), are a well-known element of rural settlements in Roman Britain, being recognised, for example, at Gill Mill and Appleford in Oxfordshire (Booth and Simmonds 2018; Hinchliffe and Thomas 1980), on the Dengie Peninsula in Essex (Mustchin *et al.* 2016), near Cambridge (Abrams and Ingham 2008), and at Westhawk Farm near Ashford in Kent (Booth *et al.* 2008). An example recorded at Gill Mill in Oxfordshire offers a close parallel. There, two arrays of conjoined plots extended along either side of a road. The array on the north side of the road comprised 12 rectangular plots measuring some 50m by 45m. Internal features, among them pits, postholes and gullies (some representing roundhouses) and rectilinear sub-divisions were generally seen in the western half of the block, the enclosures in the eastern half largely devoid of features (Booth and Simmonds 2018, 103-113, fig. 4.12). The array south of the road is of a different character to those

on the north side, being larger and less regular in plan, though as on the north side, internal features, including structures, were concentrated in the plots located towards the west end of the array (*ibid.*, 117-124). The arrangement at Gill Mill is mirrored to some extent at Berryfields. The array on the north-west side of road G11 of relatively small, regular plots, characterised by pits or other circular features and internal sub-divisions, stands in contrast to enclosures on the south-east side of the trackway (G23). Here, geophysical survey traced the outline of larger, less regular enclosures, with far fewer internal features evident (Fig. 2.24). (The horseshoe-shaped geophysical anomaly that encroaches on the road and represents a roundhouse may well pre-date the road and ladder settlement.) The difference is likely to be one of function, with the plots on the north-west side of the road fulfilling a combination of roles, including domestic settlement, livestock management (for example related to breeding), smallholdings and animal stockades that held pigs, goats or cows for milking. The presence of a waterhole (3924) in the exposed corner of the roadside plots (G12) is relevant here. The area south-east of the trackway was more open and used predominantly as paddocks and fields for pasture or crops. Dating evidence from excavated sections through the ditches placed this field system in the late Roman period (Phase 6), and the waterhole could also belong here. The pottery is consistent with a difference in function between the two areas. The pottery from enclosure G24 and roadside plot G12 was comparatively well preserved, reflecting its close proximity to settlement, having been deposited into settlement-related features without prolonged weathering or multiple episodes of disturbance and redeposition after initial breakage in the home. In contrast, the pottery from the fields south-east of the road was more fragmented as a result of being discarded, redeposited and scattered onto the fields as manuring spreads or deposited into peripheral features to remove waste from the settlement (Fig. 3.5).

Along Akeman Street, the later 2nd century saw the recutting of the roadside ditches, the digging of field ditches to the south of the road, replacing at least in part, the early Roman system represented by group G15. However, comparison of phased ceramic groups (Biddulph, Chapter 3) indicates that the volume of pottery deposition fell during the middle Roman period, suggesting a general decline in the level of activity across the site. Nevertheless, the Phase 5 assemblage indicates that the range of pottery forms, fabrics and sources increased, showing that Berryfields continued to benefit from a wide trade network, as expected from its roadside location, with pottery arriving from Verulamium, Oxfordshire, the Nene Valley, Dorset, Gaul and Spain. Table wares, such as dishes, bowls and flagons, were better represented in this phase compared with the early Roman period, and amphorae attest to the supply of olive oil and wine,

with the inhabitants continuing to enjoy Continental-style food preparation and dining practices. A net weight assigned to this phase points to fishing taking place, and the diet of the inhabitants was occasionally supplemented by the meat of wild species probably hunted for sport, hare and red deer among them. Cattle and horse remained the most common species of large mammal, indicating that the rearing of these species continued to be important into this phase.

A wetland environment

In a final episode of deposition in Phase 5, pond 3062, on the south side of Akeman Street, received a small amount of pottery during the second or third quarter of the 2nd century AD. It is possible that the feature was originally open somewhat earlier, potentially during Phase 4, as a coin of 1st or 2nd century date was recovered from its earliest recorded deposit. While the feature has been labelled as a pond, it may not necessarily have corresponded with the common, though broad, dictionary definition of a pond, being 'a fairly small body of still water' (OED 2011). Superficially, from an archaeological perspective, the feature matches the definition of a pond as set out by Derek Hurst in his account of a Roman example at Wyre Piddle in Worcestershire (Hurst 2016, 170), being shallow and having a gentle profile, in contrast to conventionally identified waterholes, which tend to be deeper and have steeper sides. Hurst (2016, 185) draws attention to a Roman-period pond at Haverhill in Essex, which is described as an irregular oval with a length of 21.5m, a width of 18.4m and depth of 1.22. The pond is offered as a parallel to the feature at Wyre Piddle, but matches feature 3062 at Berryfields just as well, the Berryfields example being an irregular oval 19.1m long, 15.1m wide and 1m deep. Crucially, however, assessment of environmental samples taken from feature 3062 showed poor preservation of plant remains and pollen (Meen and Stafford 2017, table C.5.2), and clearly the feature lacked the rich artefactual and ecofactual assemblages that had been preserved in the waterlogged conditions of pit 3067, which was dug into the feature during the late Roman period. Whether or not it ever contained a body of water, the pond was certainly dry when the pit was dug. However, the nature of its fills, a sequence of blue-grey clay deposits, suggest the fills recorded in the pond accumulated naturally through the agency of water and decomposing pond vegetation. It remains open to question whether the pond ever contained a permanent body of water or experienced seasonal cycles of drying out and refilling or was susceptible to periodic flooding, but over time the water body became increasingly shallow until the pond dried up completely (or almost completely).

A further clue to the environment of the pond is provided by an auger hole (BH04) sunk through the edge of pit 3067. The auger hole penetrated a series of laminated clayey silt layers within the

Kimmeridge Clay that forms the natural geology in the area. Water began to fill the auger hole at a depth of *c* 1m below, which is likely to indicate the level of the water-table at the time of excavation (C Heistermann, Chapter 5). To what extent the water-level fluctuated over time is unknown, but, being lower than the base of the pond but higher than the base of pit 3067, it may not have been too different when pit 3067 was dug.

Whether a natural depression or sink-hole resulting from the subsurface conditions, feature 3062 would have been visible as a roughly oval area of wet ground that may have occasionally filled with water to form, for all intents and purposes, a pond. Pollen from the lowest fill of pit 3067 indicated a marshy environment around the pit of aquatic plants typical of reed swamps, lakes, ponds, slow rivers and ditches (Rutherford, Chapter 5; Stace 2010). This picture was supported by the plant remains – those recovered from the lowest fill of the pit were dominated by aquatic and wet-ground species (Meen, chapter 5) – and snails, which were similarly dominated by aquatic species (Stafford, Chapter 5). The pond would have been exploited by the people of Berryfields and Fleet Marston or passing travellers as a watering place for livestock driven along Akeman Street and in fields adjacent to the feature. A pair of ditches, SG8005/8053 and SG8006/8007, may have defined a short track that provided access to the feature from the road, although the ditches contained late Roman pottery and seem unlikely to be related to the use of the pond. The pond did not seem to provide a focus for sustained deposition, whether of waste or ritual material, although residual coins recovered from pit 3067 may originally have been deposited into the pond. However, the feature attracted the attention of maltsters who wanted a source of water for malting and brewing. Consequently, pit 3067 was dug into the pond to a sufficient depth to breach the water-table. The pit filled with water and became waterlogged, creating a reservoir or, indeed, a small pond.

Several ponds were recorded at the College Road site, Aston Clinton. There, ponds had been cut in marshy ground possibly as a flood prevention measure as much as to provide waterholes. One pond saw some ritual activity with the placement of a complete, though broken ceramic jar in pink grogged ware (Simmonds and Walker 2014, 14). It is tempting to see the complete, albeit repaired, butt-beaker in another pit (3059) that cut pond 3062 as a similar placed deposit but, given its association with other fragmented, 1st-century pottery, the vessel is more likely to have been redeposited.

Late Roman activity (Phase 6)

Field systems

The ladder settlement was abandoned by this time, but fields were laid out to the south-east of it (G23). These were aligned with the minor road G11,

though one of the field ditches encroached on the carriageway, narrowing the width of the road for a short distance. The fields were relatively large with a paucity of internal features and were put to pastoral or arable use. Pottery from the ditches indicated that these features filled after *c* AD 250. Fields along Akeman Street were also redefined. Ditches SG3083/8005 and SG8007/8006 south of Akeman Street marked new fields or formed a trackway that provided access from the road to pond 3062 or pit 3067 (see above). A ditch on the same orientation as Akeman Street was recorded in the Aylesbury Vale Parkway area. The ditch was noticeably wider and deeper than the earlier field ditches in this part of the site and had a distinct V-shaped profile, and it is possible that the ditch marked a new boundary as a flanking ditch between the road and the fields to the north. This could indicate that the road was widened here (though this is in contrast to the narrowing of the road to the east in the 2nd century) or defined an area of activity, possibly of an industrial nature; hammerscale recovered from the ditch suggests that iron smithing was carried out nearby, perhaps for odd roadside repair jobs to vehicles passing through. The ditch cut a quarry, which was dug to extract clay, possibly for road repair.

Malting and brewing

A group of features south of Akeman Street offers important evidence for roadside malting and brewing. Features related to the activity comprise a rectangular pit (3270) with a limestone-slab base, pit 3067, a gully (3281) that connected the two pits, and an oven (SG8166) immediately north of these features. Glumes or chaff, germinated grain and detached grain sprouts or coleoptiles, all of spelt wheat, were recovered in quantity from environmental samples collected from pit 3067, as well as from a nearby feature of uncertain function (2635) and Phase 5 grave 3003. Such evidence is characteristic of malting and brewing and is attested at other roadside and rural settlements, notably Springhead and an adjacent villa at Northfleet in north Kent on the line of Watling Street (W Smith 2011; Stevens 2011b). Closer to home, a malt-house has been identified at Weedon Hill some 2.5m east of Berryfields. There, germinated grain was recovered from a number of late Roman features, including a corn-drying oven, a stone-lined pit, and a drainage ditch (Wakeham and Bradley 2013). These features provide a very close parallel to the evidence from Berryfields. Pit 3270 is remarkably similar to the stone-lined pit found at Weedon Hill, the latter feature being 3.5m square and 0.6m deep with a limestone floor. As with 3270, the sides of the pit were not lined with stone, but the authors suggest that the feature had a timber revetment (Wakeham and Bradley 2013, 8; fig. 5). Interestingly, a pit almost identical to the stone-lined pits at Berryfields and Weedon Hill was uncovered by OA East at

Kettering in Northamptonshire. That feature was rectangular in plan with vertical sides and a flat base measuring 3.3m long, 2.3m wide and 1.15m deep. A floor of limestone slabs was laid on top of a clay foundation layer (N Gilmour, pers. comm.). The feature, which was similarly associated with evidence of germinated grain, corndriers, wells and other tanks, may identify the feature type as something of a regional tradition. Returning to Weedon Hill, a ditch emanated from the stone-lined pit and widened considerably further along its course. This may find an equivalent in the arrangement of gully 3281 and pit 3067 at Berryfields, although the Weedon Hill ditch was longer, measuring over 20m long compared with 15m with the Berryfields gully and pit combined. Oven SG8166 could have functioned as a corndrier, though it is different in shape to the oven at Weedon Hill.

The malting and brewing process began with the germination of the grain. Spelt wheat must be malted unthreshed, and thus the grain from Berryfields, like that at Weedon Hill and Northfleet villa, was germinated still encased in its spikelets. For germination or 'chitting' to occur, the grain is soaked or steeped in water. The water in this case may have been taken from pit 3067, which breached the water table and, as indicated by the evidence of snails (Stafford, Chapter 5) and other environmental proxies, held a permanent body of water that had seeped into the base from below. The River Thames is another possible source, though distance is likely to have precluded its use on any regular basis. Presumably at Berryfields, the grain was soaked in pit 3270, serving as a malting tank. The stone-lined pit at Weedon Hill was similarly interpreted (Wakeham and Bradley 2013, 9). It would have been necessary to change the water regularly, perhaps on a daily basis, to prevent spoilage (Dineley 2004, 2), and accordingly at Berryfields, water in the pit could have drained into pit 3067 via gully 3281. The sequence of steeping and draining would have taken up to three days, after which it was necessary to spread the grain thinly on the malting floor to be raked and turned and left for another seven or eight days to complete the germination (Dineley 2004, 2-3). No malting floor can be identified at Berryfields, but it is possible that a timber building with a rough clay floor similar in character to a 3rd-century malt-house at Stebbing Green in Essex (Bedwin and Bedwin 1999, 22), existed outside the area of excavation. The next stage involved heating the grain to arrest germination. For this, oven SG8166 is likely to have been utilised. The malt was then threshed to remove the spikelets and could be stored for up to a year or traded as a product. To make ale, the malt was milled, possibly by means of a water-driven mill built close to the site. With the River Thames *c* 200m or so east of the tank and oven, the putative mill is unlikely to have been far away, and in this respect the millstone fragment recovered from a middle fill of pit 3067 is of particular interest. The

milled grain, or grist, was mixed with water and heated to produce a mash and convert the starch into sugars. The developing ale could be flavoured with honey or plants such as meadowsweet (Dineley 2004, 9). Meadowsweet was identified from pollen recovered from pit 3067 and other flavourings may be among the other species represented. Judging by the list of insects from pit 3067 (Table 5.6), the malt does not appear to have been impaired or spoiled with infestation of weevil (*Sitophilus granarius*) and the saw-toothed granary beetle (*Oryzaephilus surinamensis*), which blighted the production of malt and ale at Northfleet (D Smith 2011, 90-1; W Smith 2011, 111-12).

In summary, plant and structural remains from Berryfields have indicated that the site had a specialist malting and brewing focus in the later 3rd century, if not earlier, with pit 3270 serving as a malting tank, the water that filled it draining by way of ditch 3281 into pit 3067, which acted as a sump and may in fact have been dug as the ditch terminus, only wider and deeper than the main part of the ditch. Oven SG8166 can be reasonably interpreted as a corndrier, or, rather, a malting oven. This arrangement of connected features – tank, drain and sump – is replicated at Weedon Hill and also at Northfleet, where, in the late 1st/early 2nd-century phase, a malting tank and a pit or sump were connected by a ditch or drain (Biddulph 2011, 142, fig. 3.4).

A sacred space?

When the complex of malting-related features fell out of use sometime during the late 3rd century AD, the final batch of malting waste was deposited into

pit 3067, together with a rich assemblage of objects. Notable finds in the bottom fill included four complete or near-complete ceramic vessels, 30 coins, many wooden objects including a basketry tray, tool handles and a bowl fragment, fragments of a chicken's egg and a leather shoe (Table 6.1). The second fill contained additional coins, three more chickens' eggs, another shoe and a fragment of disarticulated human bone (a mandible of a young adult, possibly female), but no complete pots. The millstone fragment was recovered from the next deposit in the sequence, and a few coins were retrieved from the upper fills. The organic objects had, of course, been preserved in waterlogged conditions, and environmental evidence from the pit confirms that the material had been deposited into a body of water, which had emanated from the water-table below. Pollen, waterlogged plant remains, insects and snails show that the pit held standing water, though over time the water became shallow and stagnant. The minor presence of riffle beetles within the insect assemblage suggests in addition the occasional input of clean, running water (Allison, Chapter 5), but there is no suggestion from the freshwater molluscs from the feature that the pit was connected to a channel or spring (Stafford, Chapter 5). Another source of water in the feature was the River Thames. Fish scales from the lowest fill point to the presence of live fish, which presumably had become trapped in the feature after the periodic flooding (Nicholson, Chapter 5). The area immediately surrounding the pit, across the former pond 3062, was marshy, as indicated by the pollen (Rutherford, Chapter 5) and insect remains, and the feature sat in a wider landscape of tracks, pasture and hay meadows (Meen, Chapter 5).

Table 6.1 List of finds from pit 3067

Fill no.	Pottery (complete or near-complete)	Coins	Wood	Leather	Other
3074	Indented beaker (fabric R30) Necked bowl (fabric R30) 'Cooking-pot' (fabric B11) Medium-mouthed necked jar (fabric R30)	AE2 x 2 AE3 x 5 Antoninianus x 1 As x 2 Dupondius/as x 1 Radiata x 15 Sestertius x 4	Ash mallet head Saw baulk Cleft oak and willow basketry tray Carved wooden vessel Ash tool handle Broken handle Stakes Misc. wood pieces and debris	Shoe	Chicken's egg x 1
3073		As x 2 Radiata x 3 Sestertius x 3	Wood fragment	Shoe	Chickens' eggs x 3 Human mandible
3075					Millstone fragment
3071		AE3 x 3 Dupondius x 1 Sestertius x 1			
3068		AE3 x 1			

Contexts in stratigraphic order, earliest (3074) to latest (3068)

By any standard, the discoveries from the pit are extraordinary, comprising material rarely seen, certainly not together, in Roman Britain. Individually, some of the finds are of extreme intrinsic interest, and are discussed in detail in their respective specialist sections. How may we explain their association in a single feature? To what extent do these objects represent structured, ritual deposition, rather than the chance survival of ordinary household or industrial waste?

It should be noted that the pit contained other material that, without the presence of the basket, eggs and so on, might be regarded as conventional domestic waste. A total of 105 sherds of pottery were recovered from the feature, including a large proportion of residual material. Only one vessel, a near-complete black-burnished ware cooking pot (SF 2686), need date after the mid-3rd century, with the remainder of the pottery from its deposit more comfortably fitting a late 2nd or early/mid-3rd century date range. That said, analysis of pottery composition and condition showed that, excluding the complete or near-complete vessels, pottery in the lower fills was generally less fragmented than the pottery higher in the sequence and had a greater emphasis on specialised or dining forms, pointing to a degree of selection or assembly from a different source or by a different means (Tables 3.8 and 3.9). The animal bone assemblage showed a standard profile, at least in the context of the site, with no special selection of body parts or deposition of complete animal burials (Broderick, Chapter 5). Both shoes from the feature were incomplete (Mould, Chapter 3), as were the wooden tools and the wooden bowl; one handle, probably from a knife, was worn and broken. The pit also contained woodworking debris and wooden stakes that formed part of a revetment or a superstructure around the feature (Goodburn, Chapter 3).

The feature can be usefully compared with a waterlogged pit from Stanford Wharf Nature Reserve, a Roman-period salt-production site on the Thames Estuary in Essex. That pit (1249), also of late Roman date, contained two complete or near-complete pottery vessels, an incomplete leather shoe, various elements of worked wood including chips and possibly part of a ladder, and rich assemblages of waterlogged plant remains and insects, the last including a large proportion of decomposer beetles suggestive of domestic and stable waste (Biddulph *et al.* 2012, 109-13). Nothing in the pit need be regarded as a structured deposit and on the whole the feature was interpreted as a waste or cess pit. Pit 3067 could be regarded in a similar light. The pit was certainly not a cess pit – there was limited evidence in the insect assemblage for litter associated with buildings and direct dumping of significant amounts of occupation waste, presumably a result of the feature being set within an open landscape away from the focus of settlement. However, the pit's contents are broadly of a similar character and likely in part to represent the

dumping of industrial waste and the worn-out possessions of passing travellers or roadside craftworkers in a convenient nearby feature.

Nevertheless, with some categories of finds, it is difficult to avoid a ritual interpretation for deposition. For instance, coins were absent in pit 1249 at Stanford Wharf, but present in quantity in 3067, where the casting of a coin into a watery place by the side of the road by passing travellers for, say, good luck or some other propitiatory act might be expected. Potentially, too, we can see the eggs, along with the basket that may have held other food items (Damian Goodburn makes a plausible case for bread), as offerings, possibly connected with funerary practice (cf. Scelza 2019, fig. 28). It is worth noting that at least one egg was deposited whole and clearly had not been discarded as food waste. The complete pots may also have held food or other contents deemed suitable for votive deposition. The disarticulated human bone may have derived from a disturbed grave and been deposited incidentally through some process of waste management, but it may alternatively represent a deliberate deposit. The bone recalls the extensive deposition of human remains into pits at the Iron Age hillfort at Danebury in Hampshire, where it was found that, among examples within the category of individual and fragmented bones, skull fragments and mandibles were over-represented (Cunliffe 1991, 424). More generally, the presence of the mandible in pit 3067 may be an expression of 'invisible' funerary rites of Iron Age origin, such as excarnation, that continued long into the Roman period (Smith *et al.* 2018, 276).

The assemblage of finds recovered from a soil layer (3082) to the north and south-east of pond 3062 may also be of relevance here. Some 123 objects were collected by hand and with the use of a metal detector from an area beside Akeman Street. The assemblage had the hallmarks of deliberate selection, and in some cases curation, although the means of recovery – the layer being stripped with a mechanical excavator and then passed over with a metal-detector – means that the assemblage is almost certainly a biased one. The assemblage comprised metal objects exclusively, with coins and objects of a personal, household and industrial character represented (Table 6.2). As with the contents of pit 3067, whether the assemblage represents sacred or profane deposition is debatable, and perhaps the answer is a combination of both. The fragments of lead waste and other miscellaneous metal fragments point to industrial and household waste. However, brooches and coins can be suggestive of ritual contexts, and such objects are certainly associated with religious locations, where they tend to be found in relative abundance, for example in the sanctuary complex at Springhead in Kent (Andrews and Smith 2011, 199) and the temple precinct at Heybridge in Essex (Atkinson and Preston 2015, tables 6.3-6.4). The Bronze Age socketed axe fragment, also from layer 3082, could also be seen as a votive object, its curious, ancient

Table 6.2 List of objects from soil layer 3082

Object type	Count
Coin AE3	36
Coin AE4	20
Coin radiate	16
Melted lead	10
Brooch	5
Coin fragment	5
Lead sheet and waste	5
Coin AE2	2
Lead rivet	2
Melted copper alloy	2
Metal fragments	2
Nail	2
Spike	2
Armlet	1
Buckle	1
Coin AE2	1
Coin sestertius	1
Horse pendant	1
Jeton or coin	1
Lion head stud	1
Metal object	1
Plate or sheet	1
Socketed axe	1
Spatulate object	1
Stud	1
T-shaped fragment	1
Wire	1
Total	123

appearance giving it perceived special, magic properties. The layer itself may have formed, with pond 3062, an extended area of wetland, whose fluctuations in water level gave the area an amorphous, ever-changing character that added to its special, liminal qualities, attracting deposition from the later 1st century onwards.

Funerary evidence

Four inhumation graves, two cremation burials, and several deposits of disarticulated bone were recorded at Berryfields. Cremation grave 3000 contained the remains of an adult of indeterminate sex within a ceramic vessel, accompanied by two ancillary vessels. The burial could not be closely dated, but a mid-Roman date (Phase 5) is likely. The adjacent inhumation grave 3003, dug between the mid-1st and mid-2nd century and possibly contemporary with 3000, contained an adult aged between 26 and 35 years. Skeleton 3340 was found within early Roman (Phase 4) roadside ditch SG8137 and is likely to represent the disturbed remains of a single adult individual, possibly a woman. The remains of cremation burial 453, found in a ditch in the Aylesbury Vale Parkway area, consisted of the burnt bones of an adult

individual and fragments of a shelly-ware jar that may have served as an urn. This burial was radiocarbon dated to the 2nd century cal AD or first half of the 3rd. Both inhumation graves from the Aylesbury Vale Parkway area (424 and 436) contained adult burials and are likely to date to the 4th century. Two further graves, both 1st-century cremation burials within ceramic urns, but with no other grave-goods, were recorded in the Billingsfield evaluation (Cox 1997, 11-12).

Though differentiated by burial rite and chronology, these graves are connected by their roadside location and the simplicity of their burial rite, although it possible that grave-goods and other mortuary- and funerary-related evidence has been lost through redeposition and later truncation. No formal cemetery, for example on the lines the inhumation cemetery to the north of Alchester (Booth *et al.* 2001, 152-58) or Pepper Hill cemetery in north Kent, which serviced the town of Springhead (Biddulph 2006b), has been traced in the Fleet Marston area and it is possible that burial here favoured informal locations along Akeman Street and within roadside fields and enclosures – although larger, more formal cemeteries may nonetheless exist, and indeed are suggested by the discovery of a lead coffin found in the Putlowes area (UBP nd, record 0085305002). Small groups of Roman-period inhumation and cremation burials were similarly located in proximity to boundaries and landscape features at the College Road and along the New Water and Sewage Pipeline sites, Aston Clinton (Simmonds and Walker 2014, 21; Clarke 2013, 9), both representing farmsteads. The burial rites were generally consistent with those at Berryfields, although decapitation was a notable aspect of the inhumation rite at the College Road site. The restricted grave-good assemblage at these sites stands in contrast to the rich assemblages recorded in a burial at Creslow Manor Farm, near Whitchurch (Booth and Champness 2015), and a burial at Weston Turville (Waugh 1962), in which ceramic tableware, glass and metal vessels were deposited. Both were situated close to the sites of suspected villas.

Returning to Berryfields, a group of eight small pits or postholes (SG8159) uncovered immediately north of a roadside ditch defined a structure *c.* 4.5m long and up to 2m wide. Charcoal and burnt bone were recovered from the features, but the bone could not be confirmed as either human or animal. Nevertheless, one attractive interpretation, given the nearby cremation burials, is that the postholes are the remains of a pyre site. Pyres tended to be constructed by laying base timbers flat on the ground and building the structure up from them, but postholes have been recorded with some pyre sites and are known from ethnographic parallels where they held posts that helped stabilise the structure (Polfer 2000, 30). Any burning and pyre debris within the area enclosed by the postholes are likely to have been removed by later ploughing and truncation.

A small town in Roman Buckinghamshire

The putative nucleated roadside settlement or (to use a more traditional, but problematic term) ‘small town’ at Fleet Marston remains to be investigated, but the evidence from its agricultural hinterland uncovered at Berryfields offers important indications of the settlement’s status and role. Ranking fluctuated through the Roman period, but generally, comparison of Berryfields’ pottery supply and composition with other assemblages from sites along Akeman Street allies the pottery with that of the nucleated settlement of Asthall, the extramural settlements of Alchester and the villa landscape of Kingshill South outside the walls of Cirencester. In contrast, the settlement at Weedon Hill appears to be of lower rank than Berryfields, as indicated by its lower proportion of decorated samian vessels (Biddulph, Chapter 3). It should be noted, however, that inconsistency of pottery quantification for a range of sites in the wider region has meant that the comparison is far from comprehensive. The picture from coins is highly nuanced, but in very broad terms, the assemblage from Berryfields shares aspects of coin loss with other nucleated settlements, among them the nearby site at Walton Court and the settlement at Cow Roast on Akeman Street (P Booth, Chapter 3). The metalwork other than coins is also consistent with a roadside settlement, as opposed to a farmstead. Objects related to recreation, religion and the household (for example furniture fittings) tend to be more strongly associated with roadside settlements than with farmsteads, suggesting a contrast in social values (Smith *et al.* 2016, 187, table 5.5), and in this connection, the two studs that would have adorned a box or furniture are of particular interest.

If the material culture at Berryfields strengthens Fleet Marston’s claim as a nucleated roadside settlement, then what sorts of functions did it serve? The possibility that the settlement was the site of a *mutatio*, or possibly even a *mansio*, and integrated into the *cursus publicus* has already been raised. It is not impossible that the settlement, by the later Roman period on the junction of a major road and several minor ones, fulfilled an administrative function, tax-collection and the like, as well as the role of a market. The considerable number of coins found in roadside fields within Berryfields – some 116 spread across the southern part of the Aylesbury Vale Parkway area and 220 coins in the Billingsfield area, in addition to the relatively large groups of coins found in layer 3082 and pit 3067 – speaks of monetary transactions on which such institutions would have depended. A market and commercial activities requiring the weighing of commodities are suggested by a steelyard weight from Fleet Marston recorded by the Portable Antiquities Scheme (PAS nd, BUC-679253). It is worth noting, too, a seal-box found by metal-detecting in the parish of Quarrendon in a ploughed field on the line of Akeman Street (UBP nd, record 0656). The object

may have sealed documents from important or official sources or fastened a pouch or some other container that held valuables (Andrews 2012). Besides a market or administration centre, Fleet Marston provided roadside services that catered for the needs of the traveller. Blacksmiths were available to create and repair tools, equipment and vehicle parts, lead-workers produced containers and sheeting and other objects and may have been called upon to effect repairs, woodworkers turned out a variety of objects, and, at least by the late Roman period, ale was produced and sold to the thirsty passer-by.

There are hints, too, of the presence of buildings of some pretension. Roof tile, flue tile and a voussoir recovered from Berryfields are likely to derive from masonry buildings situated somewhere nearby, some with heated and vaulted rooms that might be found in a bath-suites (Poole, Chapter 3). Other buildings boasted dwarf columns that would have sat on the low wall of a veranda or corridor, as well as tessellated or mosaic pavements (Shaffrey, Chapter 3). The material may have come from buildings on surrounding villa estates, but Fleet Marston cannot be discounted as the source.

The pottery assemblage places Berryfields, courtesy of the pull of Fleet Marston and the road pattern, on a trade network that extended across southern Britain. Pottery, and perhaps other commodities with it, arrived from Verulamium, central, eastern and south-west England, Gaul, the Rhineland, and southern Spain. Such connections provided inhabitants, at least occasionally, with unusual or exotic food items, hinting at a varied and cosmopolitan diet. Briquetage attests to the importation of salt, essential for food preservation and industrial activities in addition to its use as a cooking ingredient, from the Essex coast or the Thames Estuary. Oysters and mussels, occasional delicacies for the dining table, may have arrived from the same source or perhaps the south coast, having been imported live in seaweed or brine. The presence of amphorae indicates that inhabitants had access to wine and olive oil between the later 1st and 3rd centuries, at least some of the time. Evidence of coriander, opium poppy, plum, dill, apple, beet and turnip was recovered from late Roman pit 3067, with additional evidence of cabbage collected from ditch 2635, which together argue for knowledge of Continental-style cooking. Such items supplemented the more usual diet – largely unchanged throughout the Roman period – of locally-produced beef, mutton, pork, horse (possibly), freshwater fish – pike, eel, carp and perch – and bread and wheat-based stews or porridge-like meals. An association between Berryfields and chickens was long-lasting, stretching from the late Iron Age or early Roman period (or possibly earlier) to the late Roman period. We know that chickens were kept for their eggs – some used for religious activities – and the cut-marks on a chicken’s coracoid bone from pit SG8114 (whatever its date), being consistent with filleting,

shows that the chickens provided meat as well. Feathers, too, may have been utilised.

As for the general plan and size of Fleet Marston, the evidence from Berryfields and other investigations can offer little information, each area of field-work or geophysical survey seemingly missing the core of the settlement. Survey of areas to the south-east of Berryfields on the south side of Akeman Street, undertaken on the route of HS2, show tantalising traces of settlement and roadside enclosures, and we await their further investigation with enormous interest. So far, the surveys have not identified a dense, settlement core, but instead, in a similar pattern to Berryfields, roadside fields and enclosures and ditched plots alongside minor roads and tracks. It may be that the core of Fleet Marston lies more immediately to the south of the Berryfields MDA where the resistivity meter and magnetometer have not yet been, though perhaps we have been failing to see the wood for the trees – given the pattern of roadside plots and ladder systems served by a network of major and minor roads, we may be seeing a polyfocal settlement more akin to Roman settlements identified as villages, rather than a settlement with a core and an extensive agricultural hinterland, although such sites are typically not associated with major roads (Smith *et al.* 2016, 40-1). Further investigation of the Fleet Marston landscape is necessary here, but it is possible that rather than being peripheral to Fleet Marston, Berryfields was very much part of it.

In his examination of the evolution of settlement and landscape in the eastern counties of England, Stephen Rippon contrasts Roman-period small towns, which he defines as extensive settlements ‘with dense occupation fronting onto a network on streets that in most cases appear to have developed in a piecemeal fashion’ and with ‘evidence for manufacture and other commercial activity’, including *mansiones*, temples and bath-houses (Rippon 2018, 119-20), with local centres, defined as substantial roadside settlements ‘which all have evidence for a non-agricultural economic base that included manufacturing, marketing and other service provision’ (*ibid.*, 120). On current evidence, combining the discoveries at Berryfields, the results of geophysical surveys and metal-detecting surveys, and chance finds, the identification of Fleet Marston as a local centre is assured, but there is the potential for the settlement to scale the rankings a little higher.

AFTER THE ROMANS

Coins from Berryfields indicate that activity at or in the vicinity of the site continued into the late 4th century and possibly as far as the early 5th century. The pottery is less precise, but the latest pieces included necked bowls from Oxford (Young 1977, 164-6, type C75) dating after *c.* AD 340 and are consistent with occupation continuing into the second half of the 4th century. The excavations produced no evidence for activity during the Anglo-

Saxon period, and we may imagine that the landscape within the MDA saw at the most small-scale, sporadic agricultural activity, perhaps along the corridors of the former Roman roads. The river Thame may also have provided a focus for activity during this period; the name of Quarrendon, listed as Querendone in Domesday, may refer to a Saxon mill or millstream (Everson 2001, 3). Hagiographic tradition locates a *villa regalis* or royal palace at Quarrendon, identifying it as the birthplace of St Osyth, born in the mid-7th century. Aylesbury became a cult centre of St Osyth, which was suppressed in the 16th century following the dissolution of the monasteries (*ibid.*, 9-10). John Leland records a well dedicated to St Osyth between Quarrendon and Aylesbury (Chandler 1993, 43). It has been suggested that the relics of St Osyth only briefly rested at Aylesbury at the end of the 9th century or beginning of the 10th before being moved to the priory at Chich, subsequently St Osyth, in Essex and that the relics that were revered at Aylesbury were those of St Osyth’s aunt, St Edith. The two saints appear to have been conflated, however, and Aylesbury continued to attract pilgrims seeking the remains of St Osyth (Hagerty 1987). With this in mind, a fragment of a medieval ampulla recovered from Berryfields is of particular interest. The fragment is part of a small flask that would have contained holy water and been carried by pilgrims on the great pilgrimage routes, but it is not impossible that the find is associated with a pilgrimage to the cult centre of St Osyth.

Another notable find is an Anglo-Norman roof-tile, recovered from the Aylesbury Vale Parkway area. The tile is of a form associated with manor houses, ecclesiastical buildings, and high-status buildings in urban centres. We need only look to the manor of Quarrendon, established by the late 11th century (Everson 2001, 11), for the origin of the piece, but it is possible that it belonged to an ecclesiastical site that is suggested to have preceded the church of St Peter, which was built in Quarrendon in the 12th century (*ibid.*, 11, 16).

Extensive ridge-and-furrow earthworks indicate that much of the Berryfields MDA was put to arable use during the medieval period. The continued influence of the former Roman road system on the landscape is evident from the alignment of blocks of ridge-and-furrow with Akeman Street and minor road G7/G11. Both roads are likely to have been visible elements of the landscape, and indeed must have remained in use to some extent through the medieval period and beyond, as the recovery of horseshoes close to Akeman Street and the central part of the MDA suggests (and of course the modern A41 overlies parts of Akeman Street). Evidence of medieval smithing was collected from a ditch close to the northern end of road G7/G11 and may relate to a road- or track-side blacksmith’s or farrier’s workshop. Not all the areas of ridge-and-furrow were aligned with the roads. Traces seen in the Aylesbury Vale Parkway area and in the west-central

part of the MDA are orientated NW-SE/NE-SW and fit into the prevailing co-axial alignment of the early medieval road and field pattern seen around Aylesbury (Alqassar and Kidd 2018, 15-17, fig. 11).

Post-medieval activity at Berryfields is represented by a sub-rectangular enclosure (G13) towards the north-eastern part of the site. The feature is interpreted as an oxpen or paddock. Historical records of the post-medieval period paint a consistent picture of the economic base of the region. In his account of his visits to Aylesbury in the 1530s, John Leland approached Quarrendon from Thame 'through large pasture grounds and fertile bean-fields' and beyond, towards Aylesbury described the open land as again 'good for beans and pasture' (Chandler 1993, 40). Holinshed records that Sir Henry Lee, the owner of the estate of Quarrendon some years after Leland's visit, lost 3000 sheep and many cattle and horses in a severe storm – the so-called All Saint's Day Flood – of 1570 (BHO, nd; Chaplin 2007, 29). Even as late as the early 20th century, the agricultural land of the parish of Quarrendon was taken up overwhelmingly by grassland and grazing land (BHO, nd).

With its bean-fields and grazing livestock, the post-medieval landscape around Quarrendon

would have been familiar to the inhabitants of Roman, and to a lesser extent Iron Age, Berryfields (in the Roman period, the beans are represented by the cultivation of vetch, a legume). The findings of the archaeological investigation at Berryfields have thus demonstrated remarkable continuity of agricultural practice over some 2500 years.

At first glance, there is little obvious trace today of the Roman road or the roadside settlement and its rural hinterland in the housing developments, rail station, green spaces and new roads of Berryfields, but the signs are there. Approaching the development from Aylesbury, the modern A41 diverges from the line of Akeman Street just before the roundabout where a public house, the Cotton Wheel, stands and crosses the River Thame a short distance to the north of the site of the Roman bridge that carried the ancient equivalent of the A41 over the river. It is not difficult to reach the point of the Roman river crossing, though; a river-side path on the edge of Haydon Hill recreation park takes you to the bends in the river where the timbers were found (Fig. 6.4).

On the west side of the river, the site of the pit and pond complex and the roadside fields and enclosures is built over by houses, but a NW-SE-



Fig. 6.4 View of the River Thame looking north-west along the line of Akeman Street

Berryfields

aligned strip of grass, framed by Valor Drive, Avalon Street and Pershore Way, marks the line of Akeman Street (shown preserved *in situ* on Figure 1.4). Walk along the path that runs diagonally across the strip and you will be walking across the Roman road (as Avalon Street loops round to bisect the

development area it begins to follow the alignment of minor Roman road G16). As you look out towards the river or up to the hill to the west (Fig. 6.5), it is not hard to imagine the trundle of wagons, the clatter of hooves and hobnailed boots, and the hustle and bustle of a busy roadside town.



Fig. 6.5 The line of Akeman Street preserved as an open space within the Berryfields development, looking south-east towards the River Thames