ROMAN OXFORDSHIRE

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Research Background

Roman Oxfordshire has been relatively well served by works of synthesis. Leaving aside antiquarian accounts (for which see Henig and Booth 2000, 202-221), the county benefited from the relatively late appearance of Volume 1 of the *Victoria County History*, in 1939 (Taylor *et al*. 1939); the summary of Roman archaeology presented there was able to take account of pioneering work in aerial photography and of excavations such as Radford's work at Ditchley, as well as containing the typical gazetteer. The corresponding volume for Berkshire, covering much of what is now the Vale of the White Horse District of Oxfordshire, was of that earlier generation (1904) and is accordingly less useful, but a later survey, Peake's *The archaeology of Berkshire* (1931), took account of subsequent work. Post-war summaries of Roman Oxfordshire were quite concise (Taylor 1954; Young 1986) and the first modern full-length survey is that of Henig and Booth (2000), following on from Peter Salway's Tom Hassall Lecture of 1997 (Salway 1999). With the greatly increased volume of evidence available *Roman Oxfordshire* was inevitably a work of summary throughout, dispensing with the gazetteer approach of the VCH. Short summaries have also dealt with localised areas of the county (eg Booth 1998; 2001a; Copeland 2002). Although these generally add little in terms of new data they do provide a closer focus on the areas concerned. Most recently the Thames Valley area of the county has been subject to further review in an English Heritage (Aggregates Levy Sustainability Fund) backed project entitled The Thames Through Time, examining the whole of the Upper and Middle Thames Valley region (but taking a very geographically-restricted view of the valley) through the first millennium AD. The draft text of this synthesis was submitted in February 2006 (Booth *et al*. forthcoming). There have also been reviews of particular aspects of the archaeology of Roman Oxfordshire, of which the most significant have dealt with the pottery industry (Young 1977) and rural settlement (Miles 1982).

Oxfordshire is notable for early antiquarian involvement in villa sites such as Stonesfield and North Leigh, but systematic excavation of Roman sites in the county, with the exception of Atkinson's pre-First World War work at Lowbury Hill (Atkinson 1916), did not begin until the 1920s, with the work of Hawkes and others at Alchester (Hawkes 1927; Iliffe 1929; 1932). The scale of such excavation remained generally small, despite the extent of destruction caused for example by gravel quarrying, until the 1970s. Thereafter the emphasis of intrusive fieldwork shifted almost entirely to threat-led work, the excavations of Brodribb *et al*. at Shakenoak (see below) being the only significant exception in the 60s and 70s. The formation of the Oxford Archaeological Unit in 1973 (see Miles 1998) led to increasingly large-scale examination of sites, particularly in the context of gravel extraction, prompted by the publication of Benson and Miles' (1974) survey of the aerial photographic evidence for the area. While excavation was very largely concentrated in the Thames Valley, however, other work considered wider areas, examining the Upper Thames region as a whole (Hingley 1983) and the vale and downland areas to the south (eg Gaffney and Tingle 1989; Tingle 1991). Since the advent of PPG16 the concentration

of excavation in the Valley has been maintained as this continues to be the focal area for development within the county, although a notable exception has been the growing scale of work in the Bicester area, where expansion is also considerable. Apart from this, however, some of the most high profile (though not always high quality) excavation outside the valley has been carried out in the context of research programmes (eg the Hillforts of the Ridgeway project and Eberhard Sauer's work at Alchester) and of local archaeological initiatives, particularly at Swalcliffe Lea and Wigginton. Both of these traditions are well-established in the county; the former represented principally by the activities over many years of the University Archaeological Society; the latter by a number of local groups, some of considerable longevity and others more ephemeral, while a number of individuals have also instigated fieldwork programmes. The difficulty with all this work is to ensure that resources and expertise are adequate to achieve acceptable post-excavation analysis and reporting. In addition to these traditions, a large number of contracting organisations regularly carry out work within the county. These include Oxford based companies such as Oxford Archaeology and John Moore Heritage Services, 'regional' companies such as Cotswold Archaeology and Thames Valley Archaeological Services and contractors based outside the region, including Birmingham Archaeology, Museum of London Archaeological Services, Network Archaeology and Wessex Archaeology among others.

The nature of the record

The Oxfordshire SMR was a pioneering venture established in 1967, although computerisation came relatively late. This now has a fairly comprehensive record for the Roman period, although there is a modest backlog of data entry, mainly for PPG16 related 'grey literature', and the coverage of artefact data is such that systematic recovery of information on particular object types is rarely possible. This is largely a result of the development in recent years of the SMR specifically as a planning rather than a research tool. The SMR contains about 1000 records for Roman 'monuments' and 'buildings', some of which are components of individual sites. These 'monuments' include sites identified only from the air where morphological criteria make a Roman date certain or probable, but some aerial evidence is omitted where dating is less clear (the bias of aerial evidence towards the Thames Valley is well known, but this is exacerbated by the fact that detailed plotting by the NMR has mostly been confined to the valley, although the North Wessex Downs have been covered more recently). 'Find spots' of Roman material, having no particular settlement associations, occupy an estimated further 900 records. The distribution of the Roman 'monuments' is relatively even across the county (total area *c* 2605 sq km). Although there is a concentration in the Thames Valley, as would be expected, this is not as marked as might have been anticipated. Relatively thinly covered areas include parts of the Vale of the White Horse, west Oxfordshire away from the river valleys, parts of north-east Oxfordshire around (but excluding) Bicester and the Chiltern scarp.

Overall, the county is well-served by the journal *Oxoniensia*, published annually with a high production standard. *South Midlands Archaeology* serves as a useful source of short reports and in particular of accounts of work in progress. Many of the larger excavation reports are of such a size, however, that they are not readily covered by these journals. A number of the key excavations of the 1970s were published by the CBA (Parrington 1978; Lambrick and Robinson 1979; Miles 1986)

before the establishment of Oxford Archaeology's ongoing Thames Valley Landscapes and related monograph series and occasional papers, while reports on Wilcote and Aves Ditch have been published by BAR (Hands 1993; 1998; Hands and Cotswold Archaeology 2004; Sauer 2005b) and aspects of recent work at Alchester and elsewhere have been published in national journals (Sauer 2000; 2005a; Gosden and Lock 2003). With this range of publication options a lower proportion of important evidence is consigned wholly to the 'grey literature' than might be the case in some other counties. The majority of the numerous reports of this type deal with evaluations and watching briefs having results of minor significance, but a number of more important projects have stalled at this stage. Perhaps the most significant of these is the work carried out in the Oxford pottery industry in and around Minchery Farm (RPS Clouston 1996) - it is unclear if there is any prospect of formal publication of this work.

Two major republications should be noted. Young's 1977 publication of *The Roman pottery industry of the Oxford region* was reprinted in 2000 in its original form but with the additions of a short introductory essay and a review of post-1977 bibliography pertinent to the industry. In 2005 the various components of the Shakenoak report (Brodribb *et al*. 1968-1978) were republished in more accessible form as a single BAR volume (395). This involved complete repagination of the original reports, which are otherwise unchanged. All references to Shakenoak below are to the new format (Brodribb *et al*. 2005).

Inheritance

There are substantial aspects of continuity in the archaeological record of the late Iron Age and early Roman periods, for which reason no clear distinction is made between them in this survey and a few sites with sequences which perhaps end in the late Iron Age have been included. Both the patterns and character of rural settlement are almost entirely unaffected in the short term by the events of the conquest period. Two of the very few possible exceptions to this are the Bicester sites of Slade Farm (Ellis *et al*. 2000) and Bicester Fields Farm (Cromarty *et al*. 1999) where occupation may have ceased at about the time of the conquest. The reasons for the abandonment of these sites are unknown, but they are fairly close to the legionary base at Alchester, so it is possible that the arrival of the army had a direct impact on local settlement patterns, and it may also be no coincidence that this area lay in what was probably the territory of the Catuvellauni, perceived as aggressors against the Dobunni of western Oxfordshire, part of which tribe had entered into a treaty relationship with the Romans at the time of the conquest.

Linear earthworks such as Aves Ditch (Sauer 2005b) and the South Oxfordshire Grims Ditch (Cromarty *et al*. 2006; 169-200, 233-5) are fairly certainly of late Iron Age date and their construction may be seen in the context of power relations in this period. They presumably fell out of use in the conquest period, but a number of major late Iron Age defended local centres (or 'enclosed oppida', as they have been termed), such as Dorchester, Abingdon and Cassington, remained important – the vicinity of the first of these becoming the location for one of only two walled small towns in the county. A further area, defined by the extensive earthwork complex known as the North Oxfordshire Grim's Ditch (Copeland 1988; 2002, 55-69), may have been a particularly important focus of high status rural settlement at this time, but at present the assumption is based more on the very marked concentration of later villa sites in the area, a number of them with (for Oxfordshire)

unusually early commencement dates (ie in the later 1st century AD), rather than concrete evidence for significant late Iron Age settlements underlying these villas or situated elsewhere within the Grims Ditch complex. Such evidence is not totally lacking, but it has never been collated (a recent suggestion that settlement is absent here (Yeates 2006, 25) is absurd). There is little doubt about the date of the Grim's Ditch, however, although intrusive examination has been rare. A recent small section at Charlbury showed that the bank and ditch there may have been deliberately levelled, but this event was only broadly dated by pottery of '1st-2nd century' date (Wessex Archaeology 2006).

As with settlement, so much of the range of late Iron Age material culture was largely unaltered in the short term. Except in military contexts and the new nucleated sites along major roads, forms of buildings (probably) and ceramic styles (certainly, for the dating of the latter see Chronology below) survived for the best part of a generation at least. The impact of conquest on agricultural practice was probably also not felt immediately.

Chronology

With very few exceptions, chronologies are artefact based. The exceptions are, however, important. There is a key dendrochronological date from a gatepost timber at Alchester which demonstrates that this structure was probably built in AD 44 (Sauer 2001, 72) and thus provides not only the earliest secure independent dating for a military feature anywhere in Roman Britain but also a key starting point for understanding the Roman conquest of the region and the early development of the complex sequence at Alchester itself. At the other end of the Roman period radiocarbon dates from burials in the Queenford Farm cemetery at Dorchester suggest that the use of this cemetery perhaps continued as late as the 6th century AD (Chambers 1987, 58). These dates, obtained in the 1980s, are now of some antiquity and perhaps for that reason have not generally received the attention that they merit. At present, however, there is no reason to doubt their accuracy, and they are thus of the greatest importance for understanding developments in the Upper Thames, and in the Dorchester area in particular, in the crucial late Roman/early Saxon transition period.

Except at Alchester, early Roman chronology is based almost entirely on pottery. A key question for the region is the date of the appearance of the distinctive late Iron Age 'Belgic type' ceramic tradition which spans the conquest period and probably survived in widespread use at least into the early Flavian period. This issue has been discussed quite extensively. Without a whole range of radiocarbon dates from contexts of this period, however, the ceramic arguments risk becoming circular. One of the key ceramic sequences for Harding's (1972, 118-121) consideration of the period, Linch Hill Corner at Stanton Harcourt (Grimes 1944), can be shown to include Savernake ware from its earliest stages (cf Booth 2000, 41; the relevant sherds have been re-examined and the identification confirmed). This suggests a late date for the appearance of the Belgic tradition (for the latest view on the chronology of Savernake ware see Timby 2001), but it is not certain that this sequence is typical. Generally 'Belgic type' material is currently dated from the early 1st century AD onwards, but an earlier start date may be preferred by other workers and cannot be ruled out. The problem merits targeted research.

'Romanised' coarse wares probably first appeared in the Neronian period. The products of the major Oxford pottery industry are well understood in outline (Young

1977) but many individual types are not well-dated, while other pottery industries in the county are less well-understood. Nevertheless, the evidence is sufficient to allow a broad pattern of chronological development to be demonstrated (including a very significant disruption in settlement patterns in the first half of the 2nd century). Oxford products are a particularly good marker of late Roman (mid 3rd-4th century) activity, and are widely supplemented by coin evidence from this time. The latter demonstrates settlement right up to the end of the Roman period, particularly in the Dorchester area (coins of the House of Theodosius are generally quite well-represented in the county). In the context of renewed interest in 'post-Roman' coinage in Britain (eg Moorhead 2006) the occurrence of a Gloria Romanorum issue of *c* 406-408 at Didcot (Adby and Williams 2006, 30, no. 51) may be of real significance. Oxford pottery production also appears to continue at least up to this time, but the date of the final collapse of the industry, probably in the early 5th century, remains conjectural. Again the concerted use of radiocarbon dating is desirable for this period - targeting of otherwise 'undated' inhumation burials, for example, is one clear area of potential.

Landscape and land use

The extent to which the well-known distinct landscape units of the county give rise to different patterns of settlement and land use remains debateable. The gravels of the Thames valley remain much the best known of these units in terms of the density and character of settlement and the quantity and quality of detail of the excavated evidence and as such have been susceptible to relatively sophisticated analysis for some time (eg Lambrick 1992), although detailed analysis of the development of specific areas of the valley landscape beyond site level remains rare (Baker 2002 is a significant, diachronic exception). While broadly characterised by 'non-villa type' settlement, there is variation in the nature of settlement down the valley. Adjacent areas to north and south have been less intensively studied. On the open areas of the Berkshire downs, however, there is reasonable understanding of land use in terms of the division between arable and pastoral areas because of the tradition of study of field systems in this area (eg Rhodes 1950; Ford 1982a; 1982b; Ford *et al*. 1988; Gaffney and Tingle 1989), but the associated settlements themselves remain poorly known, recent excavation at Alfred's Castle being a rare exception to this situation (Gosden and Lock 2003). The area of the Vale of the White Horse and the corallian ridge, lying between the downs and the Thames valley, remains less well known, despite survey work (Tingle 1991) and recent excavation, for example at Watchfield (Birbeck 2001; Heawood 2004) and Hatford (Bourn 2000; Booth and Simmonds 2004). The immense archaeological potential of at least parts of this area is clear from evaluation work in advance of the projected Abingdon Reservoir (Hearne 2000). Like the adjacent part of the Thames valley to the east, the Vale seems to show a complex blend of non-villa and villa sites.

North of the Thames valley the 'Cotswold slopes' and ironstone area of north Oxfordshire are in some ways even more problematic. Parts of this area, particularly around the roadside settlements of Asthall and Wilcote, have notable concentrations of villas. A few of these sites have been excavated (eg North Leigh, Ditchley and Shakenoak) but most are only superficially known. Almost no work has been done on non-villa settlement, but the potential of aerial photography to identify such sites now that flying restrictions have been reduced has been clearly shown (Featherstone and Bewley 2000), although the chronology of enclosure sites revealed by this work has

yet to be tested and not all are necessarily Roman. The social and economic relationships between villa and non-villa sites in this area remain completely unexplored, however. Excavation of a trackway and a few burials at Steeple Aston is notable only for the rarity value of such work in this area (Cook and Hayden 2000).

Something similar is true of the mostly gentle landscapes of the north-east of the county, east of the Cherwell valley and of Oxford, the principal exception to this being the relatively extensive work occasioned by the ongoing expansion of Bicester. In this area a number of rural settlements have now been examined in the hinterland of Alchester (eg Mould 1996; Cromarty *et al* 1999; Northamptonshire Archaeology 2005), although two of the most important Bicester sites, at Kings End Farm and South Farm, both possible/probable villas, were lost with effectively no record (Chambers 1979; 1989). An important component of this landscape is a probable shrine site at Stratton Audley (see further below). South of Alchester the nature of Roman exploitation of the wetlands of Otmoor remains uncertain, but south of this area again the Oxford pottery industry would have had a significant impact on the landscape of the area from Noke almost as far south as Dorchester. It is arguable that the location of this industry took advantage of relatively heavily wooded ground of low agricultural value, particularly in the focal area of the industry beneath modern east Oxford.

With this last exception the other varied landscapes of the county all seem to have been used for mixed agriculture. There are good environmental/economic data particularly for sites in the Thames valley (see Booth *et al*. forthcoming for an up to date survey), but none, for example, from any of the villa sites north of the Thames, so serious imbalances are present in the evidence. There are indications of specialist exploitation of hay meadows in the valley and of fish farming at Shakenoak (Brodribb *et al*. 2005, 420-423; cf Branigan 1989, 46-7). Specialist emphasis on sheep rearing on the Berkshire downs is plausible but not yet demonstrated clearly with faunal evidence. Equally, there is no clear indication of a corresponding specialisation in the Cotswold uplands in north-west Oxfordshire, but this may reflect lack of evidence.

Social organisation

Assessment of Romano-British society in Oxfordshire is largely based on generalised models of hierarchical structures, but there is a certain amount of more regionally specific evidence. In his 1983 PhD thesis Richard Hingley proposed, on the basis of the evidence for variation in settlement pattern between the Thames Valley and the areas to the north, that these two areas had distinctly different social organisations in the Iron Age (see also Hingley 1984). Developing this theme, Lambrick suggested that settlements in the Stanton Harcourt area had communal access to pasture resources, an idea retained in the recent publication of excavations at Gravelly Guy (Lambrick 2004). In contrast, the large late Iron Age earthworks of the enclosed oppida or valley forts (Allen 2000, 22-27) imply organisation of considerable resources of manpower, but whether by egalitarian societies or (more likely) small groups of powerful individuals, is more difficult to say. As noted above, some of these remained important centres in the Roman period. The location of a notable concentration of villa sites, including several unusually early (ie probably Flavian) examples within the area of the North Oxfordshire Grim's Ditch is often taken to suggest that this area was a focus of (presumably Dobunnic) power in the late Iron Age (see above, the only significant examination of the relationship between Grim's Ditch and an adjacent villa site remains that by Thomas (1957) at Callow Hill).

Oxfordshire includes territory attributed to three major tribal groupings, Dobunni, Catuvellauni and Atrebates, with the Abingdon area likely to be a point at which all three 'territories' met (the concept of clearly defined tribal territories at this time is problematic). There are hints that the Thames and Cherwell may have formed a western boundary to Catuvellaunian territory, and Aves Ditch and the South Oxfordshire Grim's Ditch may have been related to Catuvellaunian expansion. The relevance of these developments for lower level social relations is uncertain, however.

Aspects of the observed variation in settlement pattern are retained into and perhaps right through the Roman period, but their significance for social organisation remains unclear. Understanding of the nature of land tenure is vital to these questions, but is not achievable with archaeological evidence alone. Villas imply the existence of estates, but even where attempts have been made to calculate the extent of estate holdings, as for Barton Court Farm and Shakenoak (Jones 1986; Brodribb *et al*. 2005, 548-9; Applebaum 2005) fundamental questions remain. These concern the coherence of estate territories (and how they could be identified if they were heavily fragmented), relationships between villa owners and the occupants of other settlements within hypothetical estate boundaries, and relationships between villa estates and other non-villa-based forms of land holding. Another approach to the definition of socio-economic status is through examination of the material culture associated with settlements. A preliminary attempt has been made at this using pottery data (Booth 2004).

A couple of changes in settlement pattern may shed limited light on these questions. There is evidence for widespread dislocation of settlement in the first half of the 2nd century. This is observed particularly in the Thames valley, but is not exclusively confined to it (Henig and Booth 2000, 106-8). Although the dating depends almost entirely on pottery, with its attendant uncertainties, there is enough evidence for dislocation consistently centred around the period *c* AD 120-130 that this seems likely to be related to a specific development, rather than reflecting long term environmental or economic trends. Many sites cease to be occupied at about this time. In some cases early settlements are succeeded by adjacent sites which may be regarded as their successors, in other cases a direct relationship is less clearly seen. Many rural settlement sites have a generalised 2nd-4th century date range and those that are occupied throughout the late Iron Age and Roman period appear to be in the minority, particularly in the Thames Valley (larger centres seem not to be affected by this trend, although at Abingdon there was a major change in the character of the site in the early 2nd century). The evidence for relocated settlement and new layouts of field boundaries, for example, strongly suggests that the changes might have involved considerable, if not fundamental, changes in land holding. For the most part, settlements established by the mid 2nd century then seem to have been maintained up to the end of the Roman period (there are exceptions to this further up the valley in Gloucestershire).

Another more localised change has been remarked upon in the context of the north Oxfordshire villa sites of Ditchley and Shakenoak. Both seem to have witnessed major changes in their domestic accommodation, respectively at about the end of the 2nd century and the mid 3rd century. The excavators of Shakenoak suggested that both sites might have been subsumed within larger estates, such as those centred at North Leigh or Stonesfield (Brodribb *et al*. 2005, 259-260). This interesting suggestion cannot be substantiated, but is consistent with more general evidence for transfer of estate title in the western empire.

Settlement

A wide variety of settlement types is present within the county, ranging from substantial 'small towns' to minor farmsteads. Two of the 'small towns', Alchester and Dorchester, were walled, and it may be no coincidence that both had military origins. In the case of Alchester it is increasingly clear that the unusually orthogonal layout of defences and internal streets reflects the underlying military plan. Recent work at Alchester has concentrated almost exclusively on military aspects (eg Sauer 2000; 2005a), while modern excavation of the civil town has taken place in the northern extramural area (Booth *et al*. 2001). Excavation at Dorchester has rarely been more than piecemeal, with the result that, without the extensive aerial coverage that also exists for Alchester, it is still poorly known in many ways (see eg Burnham and Wacher 1990, 117-122; Henig and Booth 2000, 58-62).

A string of roadside settlements/'small towns' lies along Akeman Street to the west of Alchester. Of these, Sansom's Platt has seen minimal excavation (Chambers 1978) but aerial photographs show a number of impressive structures (Henig and Booth 2000, 63-4; Winton 2001). Further west Wilcote has been subject to a series of excavations by Anthony Hands (1993; 1998; 2004), this last publication incorporating work by Cotswold Archaeology on a water pipeline, while work at Asthall in 1993 was also occasioned by pipeline development (Booth 1997). These two sites contrast markedly, both in topographical setting and character of archaeological evidence (for discussion of this see also Booth 1998).

A number of other nucleated settlements are known, some in roadside contexts, as probably at Frilford (but see Ceremony, ritual and religion below) and also Wantage (Holbrook and Thomas 1996; Barber and Holbrook 2001), on the road running south-west from Oxford, Swalcliffe Lea on the east-west road in north Oxfordshire (Eames 1998; Shawyer 2000, 50-56; 2001, 49-54; 2002; 2003; 2005, 54-59), Gill Mill, a substantial site on what may be a road of only local significance across the Windrush south of Witney (Henig and Booth 2000, 72-3, with refs; OA 2006), but with very recent new evidence for a further road running down the Windrush valley, and Middleton Stoney on another minor road running north-west from Alchester (Rahtz and Rowley 1984). Roadside settlements in the vicinity of the Oxford pottery industry, for example at Barton, are of uncertain scale and importance (OAU 1993; Pine 2003). Significant but in many ways poorly understood settlements situated away from obvious roads are found at Chipping Norton, Abingdon (despite important excavations by Allen (1991; 1993; 1994)) and Bowling Green Farm, Stanford in the Vale (Henig and Booth 2000, 72, 74, 104). The importance of the latter in the late Roman period, in particular, seems to be reemphasised by recent metal-detector finds including a number of siliquae. The existence of settlement at Henley on Thames, at a major road/river crossing, remains no more than speculative, although plausible on *a priori* locational grounds.

Clearly defined elements in the rural settlement pattern consist of villas, of which approximately 70, of greatly differing size, are known (Henig and Booth 2000, 82-86 for numbers and criteria; the number of villas continues to grow slowly, with a recently discovered example just west of Didcot (RPS 2004)) and a variety of farmsteads. The significance of possible nucleated rural settlements, such as Bowling Green Farm, is unclear. Small groupings of farmsteads, or aggregated settlements, as perhaps at Gravelly Guy in the late Iron Age-early Roman period, and at Yarnton (Hey and Timby forthcoming), may have been as common as single agricultural units, at least on the Thames gravels, but the difficulties of identification of structures (see

Built environment below) make this particularly difficult to judge. Enclosures, often rectangular or subrectangular, are typical component s of such sites, but it is not clear that all late Iron Age-early Roman settlements were necessarily enclosed, nor that this practice always continued into the late Roman period. One characteristic of some of the Thames valley cropmark complexes is the presence of so-called 'village green' features – large spaces formed by the junction of ditched trackways. These often seem to be a focus of enclosures which probably define settlement units, and therefore potentially form small 'villages', but only one of these sites, at Appleford, has been (partially) excavated (Hinchliffe and Thomas 1980).

Despite the relative wealth of understanding of the rural landscapes of the Thames valley and their associated agricultural regimes this evidence still rests on a relatively limited number of modern excavations. Amongst the most significant sites are (in down-river order): Old Shifford (Hey 1995), Watkins Farm (Allen 1990), Gravelly Guy (Lambrick and Allen 2004), Yarnton (Hey and Timby forthcoming), Farmoor (Lambrick and Robinson), Oxford – cumulatively (for adjacent sites see Hassall 1972; Booth and Hayden 2000; Bradley *et al*. 2005; Anthony 2005), Barton Court Farm (Miles 1986), Appleford (Hinchliffe and Thomas 1980; Booth and Simmonds forthcoming) and Mount Farm, Dorchester (Lambrick forthcoming). There has been little work downstream from Dorchester, and in this respect recent work on an Iron Age to Roman settlement near Chalgrove is important despite the limited nature of sampling (Network Archaeology 2004). Outside the valley, rural settlements examined on more than a very limited scale include Bicester Fields Farm (Cromarty *et al*. 1999) and Bicester Park (Northamptonshire Archaeology 2004) in the Bicester area (although at the latter site direct evidence of settlement features was lacking) and Watchfield (Birbeck 2001; Heawood 2004) and Hatford (Bourn 2000; Booth and Simmonds 2004). The areas outside the valley remain consistently under-examined.

Barton Court Farm, although excavated in the 1970s, is still the only comprehensively examined villa in the county to incorporate extensive environmental work in the reporting process. The only other major villa excavation, Shakenoak, had a more limited approach to these questions (Brodribb *et al*. 2005). Other relatively recent work on villas has been generally small scale, as at North Leigh (Ellis 1999; see also Wilson 2004), Fawler (Allen 1988), Brize's Lodge Leafield (John Moore Heritage Services 2005) and Alfred's Castle (Gosden and Lock 2003), including evaluation as at Didcot (RPS 2004), or falls well short of modern standards, as at Gatehampton Farm, Goring (Williams 2005) and Wigginton (Morris 2004; 2005), although geophysical survey (unpublished) and aerial photograph plotting (Winton 2005) have provided useful information for the latter site. The lack of good excavated data may explain the lack of evidence for possible late Iron Age origins at villa sites - this is clear at the 'proto-villas' of Barton Court Farm and Appleford, and likely at some of the sites in the North Oxfordshire Grim's Ditch area, but is not yet seen elsewhere.

Built environment

A major problem for the region is the paucity of structural evidence from low status rural settlements – ie, the majority of settlement sites. This represents a continuation of the situation prevailing in the late Iron Age; the well defined roundhouses of middle Iron Age settlements disappear. The most plausible interpretation of this phenomenon is that there was a fundamental change of building tradition to one that employed above ground mass wall construction techniques in materials such as cob

(Allen *et al*. 1984). Direct evidence to support this view is still largely lacking, however. A variety of timber and stone building types appears in the post conquest period. Military timber construction techniques represent an alien tradition but one that might have been taken up outside the military milieu in the so-called 'proto-villas' of Barton Court Farm and Appleford (Henig and Booth 2000, 84-5) where post-in-trench and beam-slot construction (respectively) were employed. The latter technique also appears in the small towns such as Asthall.

Stone built structures in the towns are typically of fairly simple 'strip' plan, but greater complexity in a number of examples is suggested by the aerial evidence for Alchester and Sansom's Platt, the surface traces of a building at Asthall (Booth 1997, 151) and excavated evidence from Dorchester (Frere 1984, 108-111; Rowley and Brown 1981, 6-8) and the probable roadside settlement at Swalcliffe Lea in the north of the county (eg Shawyer 2005, 58). The Asthall building has been speculatively interpreted as a possible *mansio* (Booth 1997, 158), but Alchester, perhaps a more likely location for such a structure, has produced no obvious contender from the excellent aerial photographic coverage (eg Foster 1989), although a large building near to the west gate is a possibility (Henig and Booth 2000, 63). West of the walls of Alchester lay a probable bath-house, well-known (but not well-understood) from antiquarian accounts. Geophysical survey has shown that this is paired with a temple on the opposite side of the east-west road (Sauer 2000, 6-8), suggesting an element of monumental planning unusual in settlements of this type but perhaps a reflection of the previous importance of this area as part of the probable legionary fortress annexe. Elsewhere, evidence for 'public' structures consists most clearly of temples and related features. In a small town or major settlement context these occur at Alchester, where the complex in the north-west angle of the central crossroads is particularly noteworthy, Sansom's Platt (also in a key junction location) and Frilford, where the complex includes an amphitheatre. The only other evident communal structures are the town walls of Dorchester and Alchester, neither as well known as might be wished. In these circuits the only monumental component to have been examined is the west gate at Alchester, a very simple structure (Sauer 2005c, 90).

Higher status rural structures are largely in stone, at least at foundation level – direct evidence for superstructures is generally lacking. The sample from the county represents a wide range of villa plan types, but aisled buildings appear to be poorly represented amongst them, with Shakenoak building A the most likely example of this type. The largest villas, such as North Leigh (and probably also Stonesfield and Wigginton, though on much less clear evidence) reached their fullest extent only as the result of a complex sequence of development; there is no evidence of large-scale, single phase coherent planning.

An interesting feature of a number of villa sites (Shakenoak, Ditchley and Islip) is the presence of stone-based circular buildings. These occur elsewhere as well and the evidence for this most versatile building type has been examined for Oxfordshire (Keevill and Booth 1997) – examples serve as domestic/agricultural buildings (Shakenoak), purely agricultural buildings (at Alchester), potters' workshops (Churchill Hospital) and temples (see below).

Ceremony, ritual and religion

The tectonisation of religion is a characteristic of the Roman period in this region. Two of the most important religious centres, at Woodeaton and Frilford, probably or

certainly have some continuity of function with pre-Roman activity, although at the latter site the nature of possible Iron Age religious features has been contentious (Bradford and Goodchild 1939; cf Harding 1987, 12-16). Both sites are major centres. Woodeaton has seen little recent work, but the revelation from aerial evidence that the enclosure contained three temples rather than one is very important (Henig and Booth 2000, 89) and a useful geophysical survey was carried out in 2000 (Johnson 2000). Frilford has been characterised as a small town with a specialist religious function (Burnham and Wacher 1990, 178-183). Recent work at Frilford (Marcham) has tended to play down the importance of the wider settlement evidence discussed by Hingley (1985) but has added considerably to knowledge of the religious focus of the site (eg Lock *et al*. 2003; Lock and Gosden 2004; Gosden *et al*. 2005), with evidence of numerous structures adjacent to the temenos wall and at least one other enigmatic building between this area and the amphitheatre. Other important work on sites of this type has included the re-examination of Lowbury Hill (Fulford and Rippon 1994) and a general consideration of the votive material (Bagnall-Smith 1995; 1998). A very recent analysis of religion in the Dobunnic region (Yeates 2006) has some useful perspectives but is also problematic in a number of respects.

Many of the most important temple or shrine sites were in the major nucleated settlements. Alchester had at least three such buildings evident on the basis of aerial and geophysical evidence, and the roadside settlement of Sansom's Platt had one of concentric circular plan (Henig and Booth 2000, 64, fig. 3.5). The Dorchester altar, with its reference to 'aram cum cancellis', clearly implies the existence of a shrine if not a major temple building. Other likely occurrences were at Wilcote (Barber *et al*. 2004, 335; Crummy 2004, 277-281) and possibly Asthall (Booth 1997, 151), while concentrations of finds including two carved stones suggest another possible shrine at Gill Mill, Ducklington (Henig 1993, nos 36, 124). A further important sculpture, a head probably of Jupiter (ibid., 46) comes from Chipping Norton and may derive from a shrine within the extensive Roman settlement there.

The exact character of some of these sites and the form of possible religious structures (for example at Wilcote, Gill Mill and Chipping Norton) appears ambiguous, although there is little doubt about the presence of a significant religious element within them. In a more certainly rural context it is now fairly clear that there was no temple building as such at Lowbury Hill, and the same appears to be true of the small multiple ditched enclosure at Lees Rest in the north of the county (Copeland 2002, 36-39, 119-121). Identification of shrines solely on the basis of the presence of a small rectilinear enclosure, as at Blenheim Park (Copeland 2002, 118-9) and two sites near Enstone (Yeates 2006, 711) is at best speculative. In contrast a simple circular shrine structure without any clear evidence of an associated enclosure has been partly examined recently at Faringdon (Weaver and Ford 2004). The ridge top setting of this site is approximately matched by that of an unexplored probable shrine at Stratton Audley, north of Bicester, where aerial photographs show a rather amorphous parchmark suggestive of one or more buildings, and unrecorded metal-detector finds, apparently made over many years, include hundreds of coins and other possible votive material.

Further loci of religious activity are suggested by the occurrence of unassociated altars at sites such as Bampton and Bablock Hythe (Henig 1993, nos 28 and 35). A further relief of three domestic deities from Stonesfield (ibid., no. 42) may derive from the nearby villa, and such establishments would have provided a context for a variety of religious activities and associated objects. Other types of activity are suggested by the occurrence of features containing special deposits. A large pit at

Alchester is certainly to be seen in this light (Booth *et al*. 2000, 101-4), and at Asthall an iron billet in the fill of a smithing hearth (Booth 1997, 50-95-7) may also have been deposited deliberately. The 'special' character of pit deposits at early Roman Barton Court Farm (Meadows 1999, 113-4) is less clear, however, although the case for ritual deposition in a late Roman well at this site is more convincing (Miles 1986, 15; Poulton and Scott 1993, 124), as it is at Appleford (Poulton and Scott 1993, 121-2; see also below).

Evidence of Christianity is extremely limited and generally uncertain, but an important recent (2005, unpublished) find is a lead tank, decorated with a chi-rho monogram, recovered in unsatisfactory circumstances very close to the villa at Wigginton, probably from a small pit.

Evidence for burial is varied. There are very few clearly identified early Roman burials, probably because prevailing Iron Age rites such as excarnation continued to be practised by a large part of the population, and no cemeteries of this date have been excavated although they must have existed, particularly at towns such as Alchester and Dorchester. The recent discovery of a tombstone of a veteran of the legio II Augusta at Alchester is of major importance (Sauer 2005a), while in a rural context a possible bustum cremation burial near the newly-discovered villa at Didcot is, if correctly identified, also of considerable significance (Cotswold Archaeology 2003). There is much more extensive evidence for late Roman burial, and a number of significant urban and rural cemeteries have been examined. A recent summary (Booth 2001b) identified nineteen cemeteries (defined as coherent groups of ten or more burials) including the small but important site of Roden Downs, located just across the county boundary in Berkshire close to Lowbury Hill. At least one new site, at Kingston Bagpuize (Moore 2001) can be added to this list. A wide range of characteristic late Roman rites is known, including cremation burials, particularly at Barrow Hills, Radley (Boyle and Chambers forthcoming). Decapitated burials are well-represented in these cemeteries. Large cemeteries at Dorchester fall into the category of late Roman 'managed' cemeteries and one, Queenford Farm, has radiocarbon dates which suggest use perhaps into the 6th century AD (Chambers 1987, 58). Isotope analysis has been used in a limited number of cases to address questions relating to the health of the human population (eg Anon 2003; Fuller *et al*. 2006). This is an area of research with enormous future potential.

Warfare, defences and military installations

Late Iron Age linear earthworks, which may conceivably have had a role to play in inter-tribal warfare in the LPRIA, have been mentioned above. Until recently the impact of conquest period activity was unknown. The knowledge that Alchester was a major base, probably of the legio II Augusta, at a very early date (probably at least as early as late AD 44) has transformed understanding of conquest period developments in central England as a whole (Sauer 2000; 2005a). The sequence at Alchester seems to have included a temporary camp, the probable legionary base and an annexe, and a parade ground, and several phases of activity may have occurred in the key focal area located beneath the later walled town. The duration of the military period at Alchester is unknown, but some form of garrison may have been maintained into the early Flavian period, although Sauer (2005a, 124-5) argues persuasively that legio II Augusta was transferred to Exeter in the late 50s or early 60s.

It is likely that an early fort was established at Dorchester. Present evidence suggests that the known features are post Boudiccan in date, but an earlier presence is

likely on a priori grounds. A small fort is known from aerial evidence at Asthall, where it lies alongside Akeman Street, and the Akeman Street settlement at Wilcote has very early origins and may perhaps have been associated with the construction of the road in the 40s, even though direct evidence of a military presence at the site is lacking. Akeman Street is undoubtedly an early strategic route, but a recent suggestions that it was actually a *limes* (Ainslie 2005) seems implausible. The concept of a bounded province within the first few years of the conquest period is surely anachronistic.

There is no good evidence for the maintenance of military installations in the county after the middle Flavian period at the latest. The presence of military personnel in the middle Roman period is suggested or demonstrated by small quantities of metalwork from Alchester and Asthall and of course by the well-known *beneficiarius consularis* altar from Dorchester (RIB 235). These objects suggest the existence of minor posts on the major roads through the region.

Late Roman 'official' metalwork is quite widely distributed in the county (eg Henig and Booth 2000, 181, fig 7.1), but the extent to which this reflects the presence of military rather than other personnel remains debateable. The Dorchester area is key to the understanding of possible military developments at the very end of the Roman period. There can be little doubt that at least one of the famous Dyke Hills burials was a soldier, but whether a regular member of the late Roman army (whatever his ethnic origin) or whether a member of a 'sub-Roman' force of unknown political association, is also uncertain.

Material culture

The material culture of Roman Oxfordshire is generally unremarkable and follows broadly recognisable patterns. Assemblages of the early Roman period are dominated by ceramic material. Comparative analysis of assemblages has been aided by the implementation of a standard recording system for all OA sites since the early 1990s; but unfortunately this has rarely been used by other organisations working in the region. Small finds are typically limited in quantity in the early period, but brooches are characteristic as would be expected. Some of these may show regional distributions – in particular a late La Tène type with a decorated bow, characterised by Mackreth as the 'Atrebatic type' (Mackreth 1993, 31), is reasonably common in the county. Striking individual pieces include two brooches of Aesica type, one from Hook Norton (VCH I, 339) and one from Yarnton (Henig and Booth 2000, 135) and an 'Adlocutio' brooch from recent work at Frilford.

Early ceramic assemblages tend to be dominated by local material, but notable characteristics include the occurrence of sherds of carrot amphora at a number of early villa and other sites in north Oxfordshire (Booth 1999, 48). Other early amphora types are rare and in this context recent finds of Dressel 1 at Watchfield (Laidlaw 2001, 253, 255) and South Stoke (Timby *et al*. 2005, 253-5, no. 17) are striking. Amongst the locally produced pottery a group of pre-Flavian fine wares has been isolated. Its source is unknown but on distributional grounds should lie in the Abingdon-Dorchester area (Timby *et al*. 1997). Ceramics have been used as the basis for identifying developing trends in culinary and hence social practice in the region in the late Iron Age-early Roman period (eg Meadows 1997; 1999). Another significant group of material in this respect and at this time comprises slabs of fired clay, of which both rectangular and circular forms occur. These are now widely recognised in the county (for recent examples, with references, Booth and Simmonds 2004, 344-5;

Biddulph 2005) and although their interpretation is not certain a function related to aspects of food preparation seems most likely. A much less common object with a related function is part of a ceramic grid-iron from East Hanney (Case and Sturdy 1960, 132). Other aspects of social transformation in the early Roman period are suggested by unexpected object type/context correlations; for example a seal box lid from the mid 1st-early 2nd century possible proto-villa site at Appleford. Other evidence of literacy is present – the Dorchester altar has already been referred to. A fragment of a high quality inscription on Purbeck marble from Alchester is perhaps of early 2nd century date (Booth *et al*. 2001, 249-253), while even more remarkable in its way is a wooden writing tablet from a well in a rural settlement context just near Alchester (Northamptonshire Archaeology 2005). Styli form the most widely-distributed type of evidence for literacy.

Later Roman sites are generally richer in finds than earlier ones, although the chronology of the remarkable collection of material from the temple site at Woodeaton, for example, is poorly understood because of the uncertain context of many of the objects. Villa assemblages such as that from Shakenoak are relatively rich and diverse, though without producing many intrinsically remarkable objects – the pottery syrinx from this site (Brodribb *et al*. 2005, 308-310), with the names of Satavacus and Bellicia, has proved particularly evocative (eg Copeland 2002; Henig 2002, 114-5). Villas are also the chief source of evidence for wall painting and mosaic pavements – only fragments of the latter are known from Dorchester, for example, and none from Alchester, although their presence at Swalcliffe Leigh is notable – with important examples from North Leigh, Stonesfield and Wigginton. The antiquarian and 1960s finds from the last site are now supplemented by further pavements from the most recent work.

Potential ritual contexts provide some of the most striking late Roman finds – in particular the well deposits from Appleford, with its ironwork and pewter 'hoard' (Brown 1973), while late contexts at Dorchester produced important collections of ironwork and glass (Manning 1984; Charlesworth 1984, 153-155) as well as several probable hoards of Theodosian coinage (Reece 1984). Amongst other coin hoards from the county of earlier date two are particularly significant, one (Chalgrove II) for the presence of only the second authenticated coin of the 3rd century emperor Domitianus II, and the other, from Didcot, at the time of discovery the second largest gold hoard of its date (*c* AD 160) ever found in Britain (Bland and Orna-Ornstein 1997).

The Didcot hoard represents considerable wealth, although apparently associated with the modest adjacent villa. The lower status rural settlements, both nearby and elsewhere in the county, present a very different picture, albeit that by the 4th century small numbers of coins appear at many of them. The finds assemblages from such sites continue to be dominated by pottery; other materials are generally scarce and undistinguished.

In broad terms finds reported through the Portable Antiquities Scheme amplify existing patterns rather than modifying them, although this could change. A major problem remains the lack of precision and/or confidence in some of the reported provenances. Recent PAS finds of some note include a late Roman buckle, reportedly from 'South Leigh'. A rather earlier find, recently surfaced in the saleroom, is a fine millefiori enamel disc of a rare type. Its provenance is currently only 'Oxfordshire' (R Jackson pers. comm.).

Crafts, trade and industries

With a heavy emphasis on examination of rural settlement the evidence for crafts is not extensive, though this may in part reflect a lack of detailed synthesis. Small scale metal working, particularly of iron but also of copper alloy, could have occurred on these sites, and there is good evidence for coin counterfeiting at North Leigh (Esmonde Cleary 1999), but is currently best known at the small towns - for example at Alchester, where a bracelet mould has been found and Asthall, where there is evidence for silver as well as bronze-working (Salter 1997, 91). Iron working is also well-attested at Asthall, while it was probably even better represented at Swalcliffe Lea, in an ironstone area where smelting as well as smithing may have been carried out, but there is no detailed evidence there beyond the presence of probable hearths. Other crafts such as bone, leather and wood-working and spinning and weaving would have been widespread but are mostly indicated only by the presence of occasional tools, although horn working has been suggested on the basis of the animal remains at Wilcote (Hambleton 2004, 326).

Larger scale production which can be characterised as industrial is more limited in scope and confined largely to ceramics, although minor pottery production sites (particularly of early Roman date as at Long Hanborough, Cassington and Yarnton and perhaps Sonning Common) may be better seen under the heading of craft rather than industry. The nationally important Oxford pottery industry has been extensively studied, although the key excavation of the Churchill Hospital has never been formally published. Post-1977 work was summarised in a prologue to the 2000 reprint of Young's (1977) BAR. The most significant production site excavations in this time (and since) are those at Lower Farm, Nuneham Courtenay (Booth *et al*. 1993) and at Blackbird Leys (Booth and Edgeley-Long 2003), although a highly regrettable aspect of the latter publication was the omission of illustrations of the kiln products owing to substantial under-funding of the post-excavation as well as the fieldwork phase of the project (see now Oxford Archaeology website). Very recent work has been more piecemeal but, significantly, includes the confirmation of the location of a production centre on the southern margins of Otmoor at Noke (Pine 2005). Aspects of the industry away from its production centres have been discussed in part by Booth (2004) and particularly by Evans (2001).

Another significant pottery industry was based in west Oxfordshire, probably fairly close to the Akeman Street settlements of Asthall and Wilcote on the basis of the distribution of its products, which dominate assemblages at both sites. The major problem is the similarity of this fabric tradition with that of the north Wiltshire industries. Some connection seems likely but its nature is uncertain. Tile production is now demonstrated in the same general area, with waste material at Wilcote and surface finds backed up by geophysical survey data at North Leigh (unpublished). One further aspect of pottery production of importance for Oxfordshire is the very poorly understood industry at Compton, Berks (Harris 1935; Harding 1937). Its products include reduced ware copies of Oxfordshire fine ware forms, but it may also be a source of the distinctive and apparently very late curving sided and bossed dishes identified by Lyne (1999, 285-6) as characteristic of a limited number of locations with potential 'sub-Roman' activity, although some of these vessels were certainly produced at Blackbird Leys (Booth and Edgeley-Long 2003). One group of these vessels clusters in the area between Frilford and Dorchester.

Incoming as well as outgoing trade is most readily assessed in terms of pottery evidence. In this respect Oxfordshire is fairly typical, with a modest array of early Roman imports, but nothing remarkable. Given the strength of the late Roman Oxford

industry it is unsurprising that extra-regionally traded wares are relatively scarce. They include generally small quantities of the 'usual suspects', Nene Valley and (very few) New Forest colour-coated wares, Harrold type shell-tempered wares, black-burnished ware and a little Alice Holt grey ware. The importance of non-Oxford coarse wares, particularly from south-west of the county, is difficult to judge. Pink grogged ware, from adjacent Buckinghamshire, is widely distributed, particularly in sites on the road network.

Beyond pottery Oxfordshire has no readily identified large scale exports. The scale of exploitation of the various well-known limestones (particularly Stonesfield slate) appears to be very limited outside local circles; agricultural products were presumably most significant. Identifiable imports include stone – particularly for querns and millstones. Lodsworth greensand was important for these in the early Roman period, particularly in the south of the county. Other sources included sandstones from Northamptonshire and Gloucestershire, Niedermendig lava and Millstone Grit. The dominant source, however, particularly in the later period, was Old Red Sandstone from the Forest of Dean (Shaffrey 2006). Roofing material from the same source is also found occasionally, as for example at Asthall.

Transport and communication

There is moderate evidence for a network of Roman roads in the county. The two most important of these are Akeman Street, which runs roughly east-west linking Verulamium and Cirencester, with Alchester at the mid point and a string of other nucleated settlements along its line, and the south-north road from Silchester which crossed the Thames at Dorchester, met Akeman Street at Alchester (although the direct south-north crossing of Otmoor appears to be a late 1st century modification of an earlier more circuitous route (Chambers 1986; Cheetham 1995; Sauer 1999, 63)) and ran up to Watling Street at Towcester.

Important lesser roads include a north-south route that follows the Cherwell valley from Kings Sutton (just in Northamptonshire) to Oxford. Crossing the Thames at an uncertain location (there may be more than one crossing point, see eg Lambrick 1969; Blair 1994, 87-88) it heads SSW to Frilford and Wantage and thence possibly over the Downs, but this is less certain. In the north of the county a major road, roughly east-west, probably ran from the Alchester-Towcester road in the vicinity of Finmere to the major settlement at Kings Sutton and thence via the roadside settlement at Swalcliffe Lea before turning north-westwards towards the Fosse Way in Warwickshire. In the south of the county a road ran south-eastwards from Dorchester to Henley on Thames. This and other roads in the Dorchester area have been considered in some detail by Malpas (1987). There has otherwise been relatively little work specifically on the road system, rather than involving the examination of roads in the context of settlement archaeology (as for example near Alchester, at Asthall and at Barton), although the course of the north-south (Kings Sutton to Oxford) road in the vicinity of Kidlington has been considered (Sauer 1998).

Three localised lesser roads are known in west Oxfordshire. One crosses the Windrush valley at Gill Mill, where it forms the axis of a major settlement, but its north-easterly and south-westerly destinations are known. A second road runs south-eastwards from Gill Mill down the Windrush valley, but although this and a related subsidiary road were both surfaced it is at present uncertain if they had more than local significance. A third road, on a noticeably straight, roughly WNW-ESE alignment, crosses Akeman Street just west of Wilcote, but again its further course in

either direction is unknown. Beyond these, a complex network of minor tracks would have linked settlements, and elements of these networks can be seen in the aerial photographs at a number of locations in the Thames Valley. When encountered in excavation they are almost invariably unsurfaced, but trackways on the floodplain at Yarnton were gravelled, and as already mentioned, recently discovered lengths of road/track at Gill Mill, identified 300-600 m east of the axial road through the settlement there (see above) were well paved with worn limestone. This treatment might indicate unusual measures taken to mitigate the effects of a valley bottom location, but it also suggests that comparable surfaces might survive in other locations where plough damage is less intense than on most of the gravel terraces.

The form of trackways is sometimes indicative of their use - widely spaced ditches suggesting drove roads, for example (eg Hinchliffe and Thomas 1980, 68). A typical width of 10-15 m between ditches has been noted (eg Riley 1944, 85), but much narrower examples are also known; 4-5 m wide at Stanton Harcourt, for example (McGavin 1980, 115). Direct evidence for use is moderate - objects such as hipposandals (eg Mould 2001, 240, 242) are rare in the county, although linch pins are more common and unsurprisingly concentrate in sites associated with the principal roads or at villa sites such as Shakenoak. A much more unusual find is a fragment of an oak cart wheel from a waterlogged pit at Gill Mill (unpublished, but see Booth *et al*. forthcoming).

A key question for the recent Thames Through Time project was to establish the nature and extent of use of the river in the Roman period and later. There is in fact no direct evidence for such use, and combining this with environmental evidence for the likely character of the watercourse in the Roman period it is likely that use for transport was extremely limited (a view endorsed independently for the Middle as well as the Upper Thames, *contra* Henig and Booth 2000, 51, 162, where a more optimistic view was taken, pehaps erroneously). While aspects of the distribution of Oxford pottery appear to support the suggestion that water transport was important for this industry (eg Fulford and Hodder 1974) this evidence still stands alone. The suggestion that there may have been a wharf at Burcot (Miles 1977) while not implausible, is entirely speculative. Wider trade links (see above) support the view that many of these connections were sustained by communication routes outside the most obvious framework. The relatively low importance of the Upper Thames Valley itself in terms of communication is shown by the fact that it is largely ignored by the principal road lines, and that (with the partial exception of Dorchester) major settlements did not develop at the points where roads and river intersected (Booth *et al*. forthcoming).

Legacy

There is no consensus on interpretation of the archaeological evidence for the 5th century in Oxfordshire. A reasonable number of sites are occupied as late as the conventional dating frameworks allow but what happened thereafter is currently a matter largely of opinion rather than fact. The Dorchester area has always been regarded as key for understanding this period, but it should not distract from the potential importance of other locations, such as a sequence at Alchester (Booth *et al*. 2001, 433-435). The latter almost certainly reflects what was by then a rural settlement. Given that most nucleated settlements are thought to have been in terminal decline at this time it is the survival of rural settlements that is most significant. In this sense the indications of the possible survival of a localised power centre (Dorchester),

while hugely important, do not necessarily help understanding of the situation in the wider countryside. The 5th century Dorchester burial evidence has been very widely debated (eg Kirk and Leeds 1952/3; Hawkes ad Dunning 1961, 1-10; Hawkes 1986, 69-75; Blair 1994, 1-6; Hamerow 1999, 24-25), and whatever its interpretation a focus of potentially high status activity was probably maintained for a considerable time. By the middle Saxon period the site of Alchester was ignored when it came to the foundation of a religious centre, whereas that of Dorchester survived, selected as the location for the See of St Birinus in 635. There is at present no meaningful evidence for 5th century activity at any of the other nucleated settlements in the county, but the evidence for very late Roman burials at Frilford, and for the reuse of the same cemetery in the Saxon period, is extremely important (Booth 2001, 18 for references) and merits modern consideration. In a very different, rural context the juxtaposition of late Roman and early Saxon metalwork at Shakenoak is particularly noteworthy (eg Hawkes 2005a; 2005b; Vierck 2005).

There is evidence of late Roman activity at or near a number of hillforts in the county, notably Madmarston Camp (Fowler 1960, 25-40) in the north and Castle Hill, Little Wittenham (Lamdin-Whymark and Allen 2005), Uffington Castle (Miles *et al.* 2003, 38-46, 55-59, 112-114, 124-125) and Rams Hill (Sutherland 1940) in the south. It is difficult to assess the scale and exact chronology of this in some cases (activity at Alfred's Castle, however, appears not to extend into the 4th century), but coin evidence at Uffington and Rams Hill is of the very end of the 4th century while at Little Wittenham and Madmaston the pottery appears to include material that could also be dated very late in the century and a glass vessel from the latter site is again a very late Roman type (Fowler 1960, 38, fig. 19, no. 15, cf Price and Cottam 1998, 165-6). All the more southerly examples also involve the use of the site for burials. Collectively this evidence would repay further attention.

Superficially the archaeological evidence indicates an empty landscape by the middle of the 5th century, since only a tiny handful of individual Anglo-Saxon burials could be as early as this date and there is as yet no clearly identified contemporary settlement. The relatively limited environmental evidence, however, supports the view that open landscapes were largely maintained. This was presumably achieved largely by a residual Romano-British population, but the major problems (here as elsewhere in the country) are to identify any of this population archaeologically and to estimate its size compared with that of the 4th century. These problems are in turn fundamental for interpretations of the cultural transformation that can be clearly documented by the early 6th century.

In the longer term none of the major Roman settlements was of great significance for the developing settlement pattern and until the question of the survival (or otherwise) of rural settlement through the 5th century can be addressed sensibly there is little that can be said with regard to the impact of the Romano-British pattern on later periods. While continuity at or reuse of favoured settlement locations can be demonstrated in a number of places in the late 5th and 6th centuries the broader view is that from the middle Saxon period the structure of the settlement pattern was substantially different from that of the Roman period.

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