Continuity and Change in a Wessex Landscape

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THE WESSEX LANDSCAPE with which we are concerned is an area of some 450 sq km of chalkland situated in the centre of the chalk uplands of southern Britain (Fig. 1). Its central position gives it a special character. It is, above all, a route node where the east–west ridgeways from the North Downs, the South Downs, Cranborne Chase and the Marlborough Downs converge with the north–south river routes, the Avon and the Test, which provide access, through the forests and heathlands of the Hampshire Basin, to the waters of the Solent beyond. But there is an ambivalence about the region. While open to influences from all directions, this very openness endowed it with a strategic significance well understood by those who, in the past, wished to control the movements of peoples and commodities. As we will argue below, the region became a frontier zone for much of the latter part of the first millennium BC, dividing east from west.

This block of downland was chosen for detailed study partly because of its commanding position in the landscape of central southern Britain but also because previous archaeological activity has provided an extensive database invaluable in developing a detailed research strategy. Most notable among the earlier work were the pre-war excavations of the Cunningtons and J. F. S. Stone focusing on Bronze Age and Iron Age settlements in eastern Wiltshire and the campaign of hillfort excavations
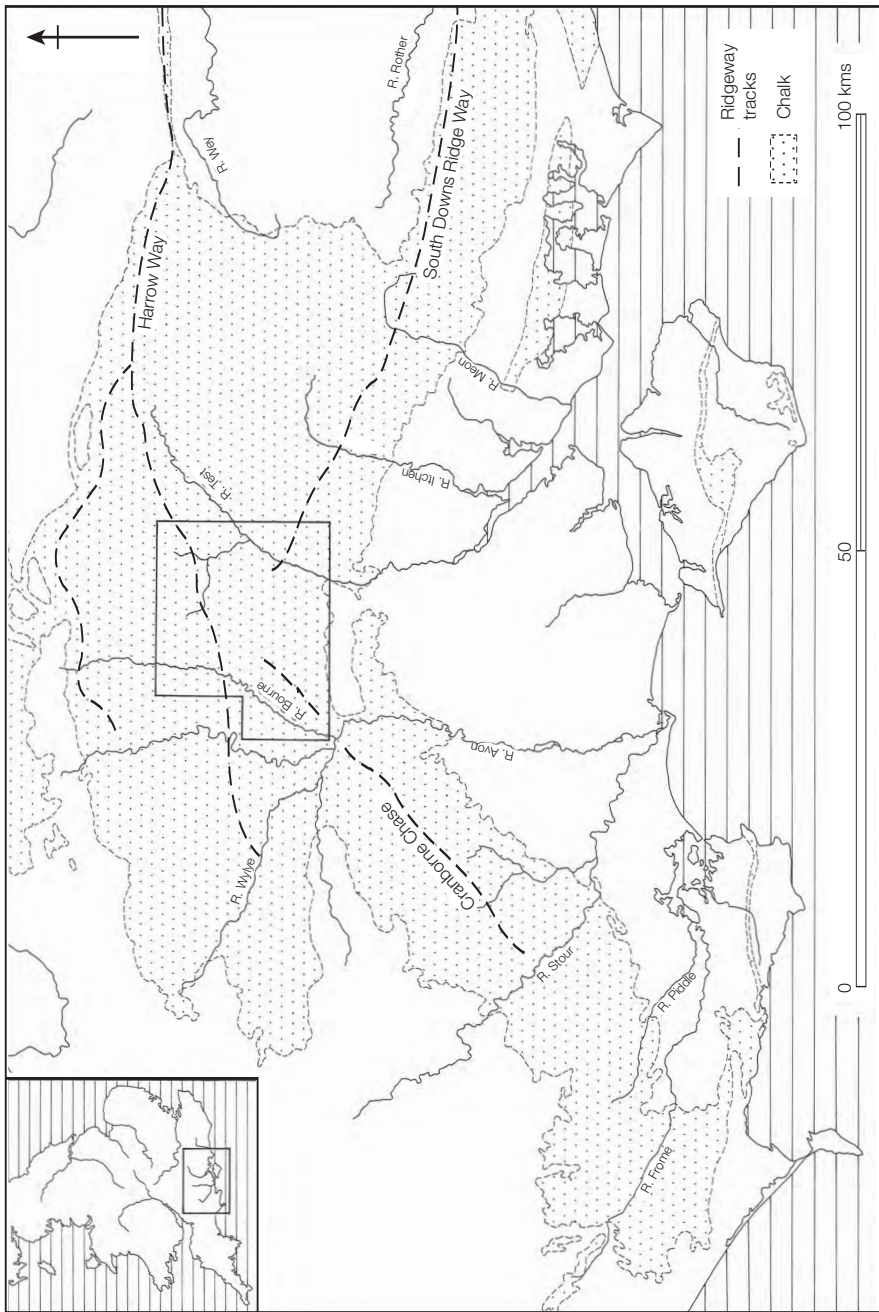
Figure 1. The Danebury study area in its geographical context.

carried out by Christopher Hawkes in the eastern part of Hampshire. All were thoroughly and speedily published in the County journals. Earlier, in the nineteenth century, the Roman villas of the Andover region had been dug over by an avid band of local antiquaries whose work was conveniently summarised by Francis Haverfield in the first volume of the *Victoria County History of Hampshire* (Haverfield 1900). In the latter half of the twentieth century rescue excavations, necessitated by the rapid development of Andover as a London overspill town and by road improvement schemes and pipe-lines, have added much new information to our understanding of later prehistoric and Roman settlement of the region.

Another factor of some relevance in our choice of study area was the early association of O. G. S. Crawford with the region. His undergraduate thesis, later published as *The Andover District* (Crawford 1922), provided a model for field studies and began his long involvement with central Wessex during the time he was perfecting his skills with aerial photography and the mapping of archaeological landscapes. Crawford's early air photographs provide a valuable resource showing, with some clarity, details of sites since damaged by decades of ploughing (Crawford 1924; Crawford and Keiller 1928). Our knowledge of the area was further enhanced by a new air photographic initiative undertaken, single-handed, by John Boyden in the 1960s and 1970s leading to the identification of many new sites and enhancing our knowledge of previous discoveries.

The fieldwork programme began in the summer of 1969 with a series of large-scale excavations at the hillfort of Danebury later to come under the auspices of the Danebury Trust. The work received the active encouragement of the Hampshire County Council which had recently acquired the site and wished to display it to the public. The intention from the outset was to study the hillfort in its landscape context (Bowen and Cunliffe 1973) and to this end the Danebury environs study region was defined covering an area of chalkland lying largely between the valleys of the Rivers Test and Bourne. The excavation of the hillfort took place over twenty seasons (1969–88) during which time the Royal Commission on Historical Monuments (England) made a major contribution by publishing a thorough survey of the entire study area based on the interpretation of the total aerial photographic cover then available (Palmer 1984). A map of the archaeological landscape at a scale of 1:25,000, included with the publication, established entirely new standards of archaeological mapping taking forward the pioneering work begun by Crawford some sixty years before.

Having completed the programme of excavations within the hillfort of Danebury attention turned to the landscape around, the intention being to select a number of neighbouring Iron Age settlements for sample excavation to provide a better understanding of the social and economic development of communities living within the region in the first millennium BC. Each site selected for excavation was subject to extensive geophysical survey undertaken by the Archaeological Survey team from English Heritage. These surveys, used in conjunction with the aerial photographic cover, provided the essential basis for planning the interventions. The Danebury Environs Programme, as it was called, lasted from 1989 to 1996. During this time eight sites were examined: the hillforts of Woolbury and Bury
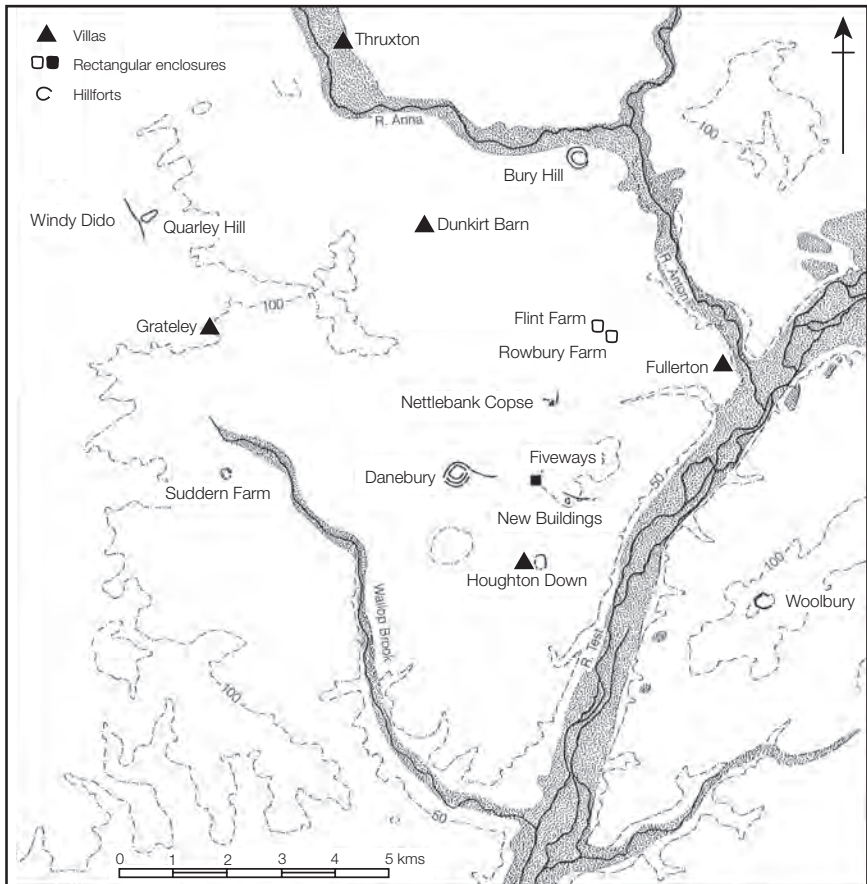

Figure 2. Sites excavated during the Danebury programmes.

Hill, the settlements of Houghton Down, Suddern Farm, Nettlebank Copse and New Buildings, and the field systems and linear earthworks of Windy Dido and Fiveways (Fig. 2).

It soon became clear that many of the settlements, occupied during the Iron Age, continued in use unhindered into, and often throughout, the Roman period, the Roman invasion of AD 43 thus having little effect on settlement dynamics. To complete the study, therefore, we introduced a third programme, the Danebury Environs Roman Programme, which began in 1997 and continued annually to 2006. This involved the excavation of five Roman villas all with pre-Roman origins—Houghton Down, Grateley South, Fullerton, Thruxton and Dunkirt Barn—and two non-villa settlements of Iron Age and Roman date, Flint Farm and Rowbury Farm (Fig. 2).

The three linked Danebury programmes, lasting from 1969–2006, were fully published by the summer of 2008 in a total of twenty-two volumes, the details of which are given in the Appendix (p. 208). (In the text to follow sites excavated as part of the Danebury programmes will not be referenced since each site has been published separately and the full bibliographical details are given in the Appendix.) Sufficient data now exist to allow a narrative to be written of the communities living in this favoured area of the Wessex downland in the two millennia from 1500 BC to AD 500. In what follows we offer an outline summary of that story always mindful of the fact that we are dealing with only a small area chosen from the large varied landscape of southern Britain. How typical our narrative is remains to be seen in the light of further studies.

The land

The study area sits wholly upon the chalk—a gently undulating upland varying from 50 to 150 m above sea-level dissected by the valleys of the Rivers Test and Bourne. Overall the land rises to the west creating a ridge of high land over 150 m OD fronted by a scarp overlooking the Bourne valley. This natural divide, as we will see, was enhanced by boundary dykes in the second millennium BC and became a significant cultural boundary throughout the Iron Age. It also marks an important difference in soil type: to the west the soils are thin with a limited clay content while to the east they are richer and more clayey (Soil Survey 1983). In practical terms this means that in the prehistoric period the land east of the Bourne is likely to have been more productive than that to the west—a

factor which will have influenced holding capacity and thus, potentially, the social systems which the land could support. Thus, the cultural divide, marked by the Bourne scarp, may, to some extent, have owed its origins to geographical determinants.

The greater part of the study area lies to the east of the Bourne valley. It divides into two broad landscapes: the chalk uplands and the valleys of the River Test and its tributaries, the Anna, the Anton, and Wallop Brook, each floored with gravel and alluvium, in some places creating water meadows up to 1 km wide. These two environments—the dry chalkland and the well-watered meadows—provided the ideal balance of resources needed to maintain the large flocks of sheep and herds of cattle so characteristic of the farming regime throughout the period under review. But the chalk uplands were by no means uniform. Large patches of clay-with-flints capped the hills and throughout much of the period would have supported stands of dense woodland—a resource invaluable for building materials, firewood, fruits and berries and for providing the pannage so essential for pigs and also for cattle who in their natural habitat are leaf eaters.

The many microenvironments created by these soil differences and by the structure of the land enable us to sketch out a cognitive map of the Danebury landscape as it may have appeared to those living here in the late prehistoric and Roman periods (Fig. 3). What stands out is the patchwork nature of the landscape with areas of woodland and forest interspersed with expanses of more open downland. This pattern of microenvironments had a direct impact on human activity as will become apparent.

Before the mid-second millennium BC the region experienced changes brought about by anthropogenic factors. A cursory examination of the archaeological evidence for this period allows the main trajectories to be traced (Cunliffe 2000: 143–9). The Mesolithic finds tend to cluster along the river valleys and the forest fringes as one might have expected of hunter-gatherer communities, but by the Neolithic period the centre of activity had moved to the zones of thinner soils—Figsbury Down, Quarley Down, Danebury Down and Woolbury Down—reflecting the opening up of these areas to agriculture and pastoralism. The long barrows erected within these zones are likely to represent territorial markers establishing claims to ancestral lands. The Early and Middle Bronze Age pattern of land use is closely similar to that of the Neolithic period but now the barrow cemeteries were beginning to encroach on the fringes of the heavier soils suggesting that the landscape was beginning to be opened up still further. Yet signs of spatial control, in the form of enclosures, field
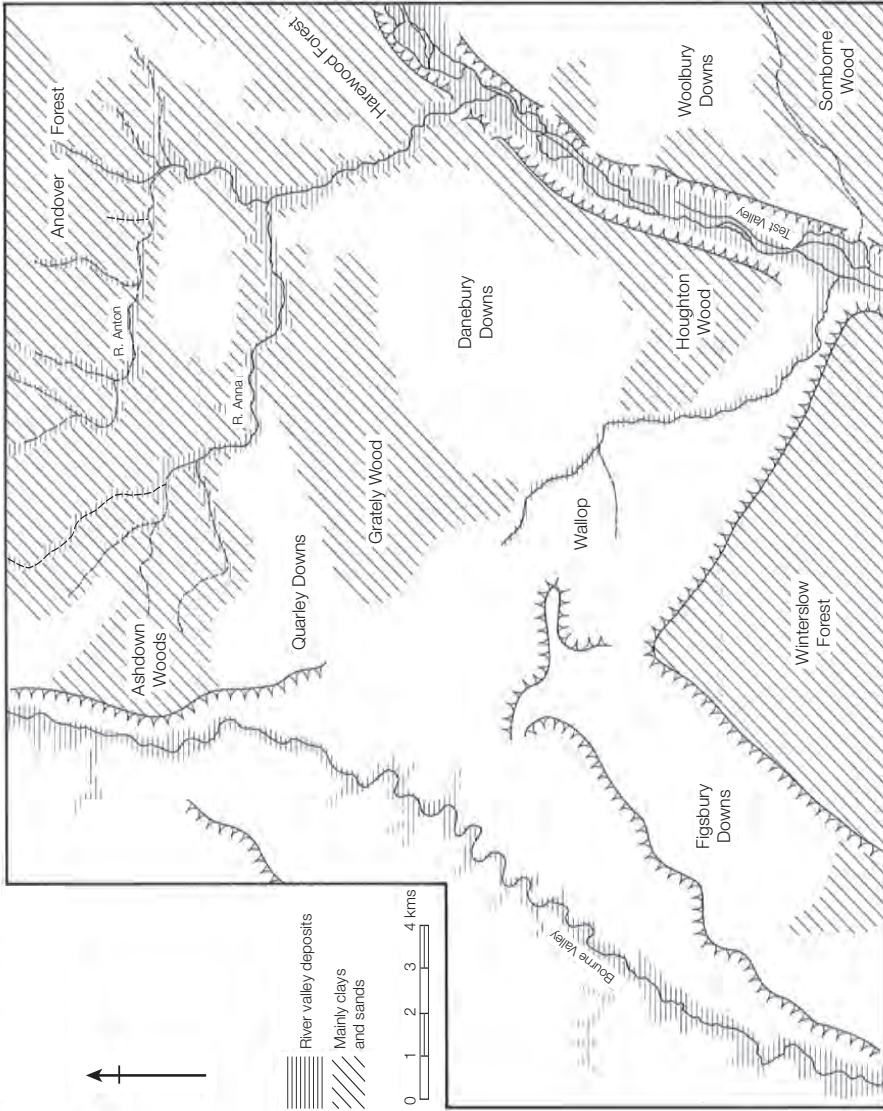
Figure 3. A simplified cognitive interpretation of the Danebury Environs landscape.

systems and linear boundaries, are lacking suggesting that the hold on the land was still light, based perhaps on shifting agriculture, a heavy dependence on pastoralism and a mobility of settlement. All this was to change in the second half of the second millennium.

A grip on the landscape (*c*.1500–800 BC)

Some time towards the middle of the second millennium there is evidence throughout Wessex of extensive areas of chalkland being apportioned into square or rectangular fields laid out at one time in compact co-axial systems. Within the Danebury region five distinct agricultural complexes of this kind can be recognised—Down Barn, Windy Dido, Rowbury, Fiveways and Stockbridge Down—all sited in areas of thin soils which had been in use for several thousand years (Fig. 4). Another extensive area of fields on Figsbury Down is broadly similar but cannot yet be shown to have originated in this early period.

The field system at Windy Dido provides a clear example of an early field system uncomplicated by later reuse (Fig. 5). The agricultural plots were laid out on a south-west-facing slope between a linear earthwork— the Quarley linear—which runs along the crest of the ridge, and a barrow cemetery in the valley below. The fields give the appearance of having been planned in a series of five conjoined blocks separated by continuous boundaries running downslope and parallel to each other. Clearly a high degree of planning was involved and it is tempting to suggest that each of the field blocks might have represented a social group, perhaps a lineage. At any event the size of the entire system, some 1.6 km by 0.8 km, represents the arable land of a substantial community working in collaboration.

Subsequent developments at Windy Dido, which can broadly be dated to the Late Bronze Age, saw at least part of the field system go out of use when the main Quarley linear boundary was renewed and two new linear ditches were dug, related to it, one cutting across the field system. The same sequence is apparent at Down Barn further west where an extensive block of co-axial fields was crossed unconformably by two linear ditches. This phenomenon, observed elsewhere in Wessex, has been interpreted as implying that large areas of arable land were put out of use when the landscape was divided anew into territories for stock herding. This is a not unreasonable suggestion but not all of the arable need have been abandoned when the later linear boundaries were laid out.
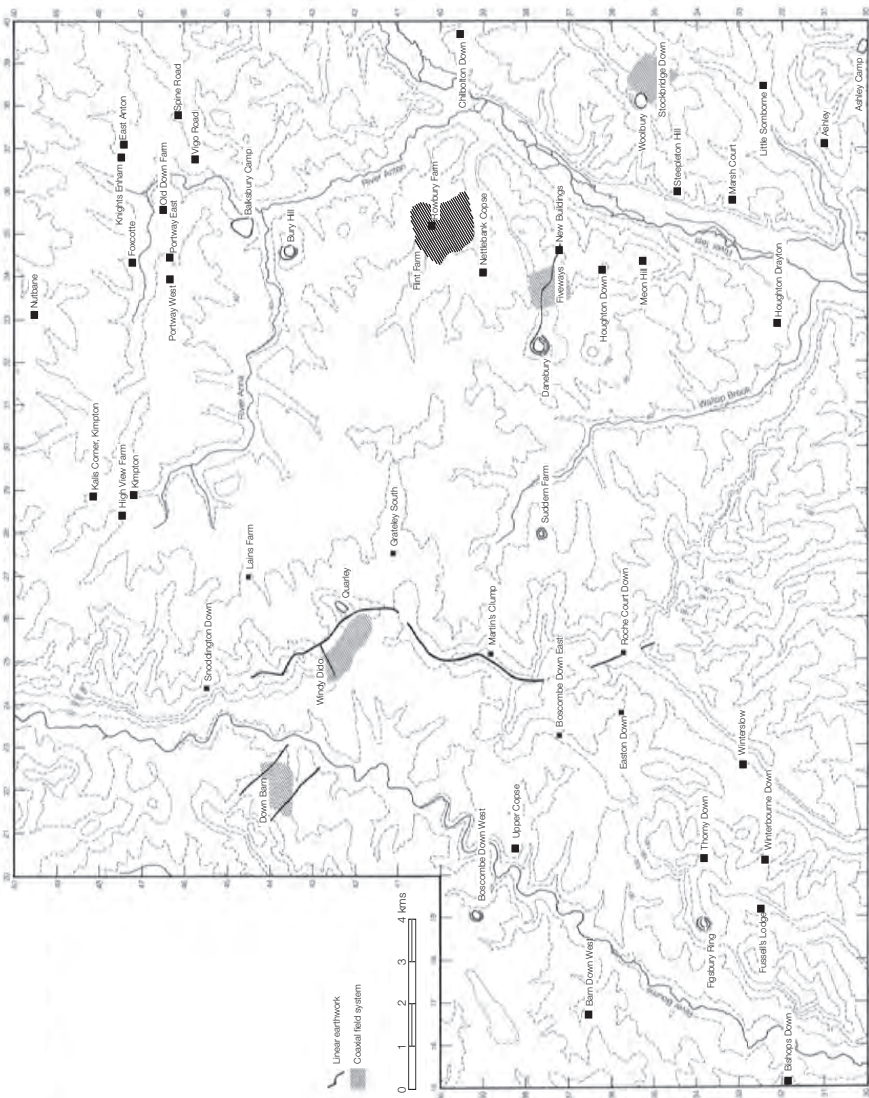
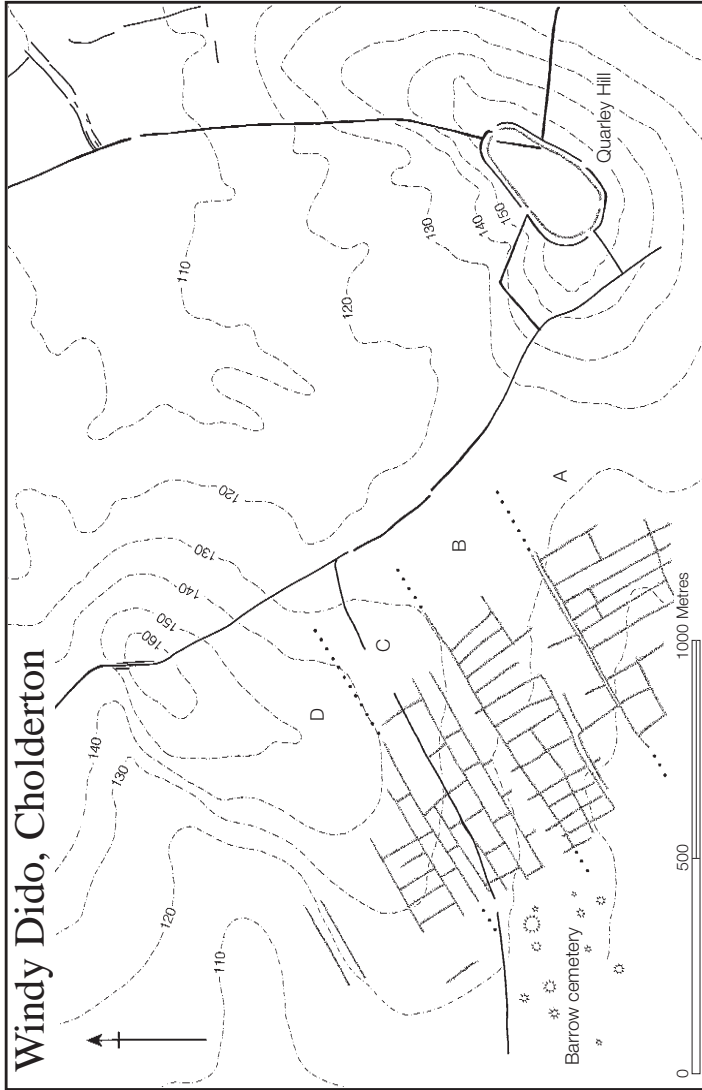**Figure 4.** Prehistoric settlement in the Danebury Environs region.

Figure 5. The region of Quarley Hill showing the late second millennium field systems and barrow cemetery in relation to linear earthworks and the later hillfort.

The earlier linear boundary, the Quarley linear, which runs along the ridge delineating the eastern limit of the field system, was evidently dug to enhance the boundary created by the Bourne scarp in a zone where the scarp is less evident as a landscape feature over a distance of some 12 km (Fig. 4). The persistence of this boundary line is demonstrated by the numerous rediggings of the linear ditch over many centuries. If, as seems probable, the ditch was flanked by a hedge, then the boundary line could have persisted well into the first millennium AD.

We have already mentioned that the boundary marked the western limit of the rich clayey soil type. Early fields put out of use by later ranch boundaries are a feature restricted to the territory of poorer soils lying to the west of the boundary. Could it be that the early agricultural regimes quickly exhausted the thin chalk soils of this region forcing a return to a more pastoral-based regime? On the richer soils to the east arable fields continued in use. Stockbridge Down and Rowbury provide clear evidence of this.

At Stockbridge Down careful field observation showed that an early co-axial field system preceded by some time the construction of the hill-fort of Woolbury, which probably dates to the fifth century BC, and that the fields continued to be cultivated after the digging of the hillfort ditch (Eagles 1989). At Rowbury the evidence of continuity is even more impressive. Here we could demonstrate that an extensive field system had been laid out, defined to the west and south by steep dry valleys (Fig. 6). The origin of the system is undated but probably lies in the late second millennium. Two small enclosures set within the fields may represent early settlements of Bronze Age date. Some time later, in the eighth or seventh century, two large rectangular ditched enclosures were created, Flint Farm and Rowbury Farm, their rectangularity determined by the fact that they were fitted into the existing field blocks. The contemporaneity of field use and enclosure occupation is nicely demonstrated by the way in which the roads serving the Rowbury Farm enclosure exactly followed the field boundaries. These same roads were still in use when a smaller enclosure was constructed at Rowbury Farm in the first century BC, and continued to function into the second or third century AD by which time a series of paddocks, probably for handling livestock, had been built within the old Early Iron Age enclosure.

Our ability to demonstrate the continuity of the boundary infrastructure does not, however, prove that the fields were continuously cultivated but some evidence to suggest that this was the case comes from the Flint Farm enclosure which was totally abandoned in the fourth century BC.

Barry Cunliffe

Figure 6. Field systems and settlements in the Rowbury region to the late second and first millennia BC.

One of the last acts before abandonment was the digging of a large quarry within the enclosure quite possibly to provide chalk for marling the clayey soil of the fields hereabouts. The subsequent filling of the quarry was composed of an aeolian sediment, almost a metre thick, which must have accumulated over a considerable time as the result of winds blowing dust from the surface of cultivated fields around.

Standing back from the detail, it is evident that field systems, resulting from large-scale land apportionment initiated in the middle of the second millennium, continued in active use throughout the first millennium over much of the Danebury region to the east of the Quarley/Bourne boundary. In some places the fields may have continued to give structure to the landscape well into the Roman period. Analysis of the animal bones and charred seed remains from the numerous excavations shows that, while some minor developments may be detected, the basic agri-pastoral regime changed little during the two millennia. This continuity over the *longue durée* implies a degree of agrarian stability.

The principal settlement type of the period is the small rectangular enclosure sufficient in size to house a single or extended family unit. Pre-war excavations at Thorney Down (Stone 1937; 1941) and Boscombe Down East (Stone 1936) characterise the type. Comparable enclosures have been identified at Ashley (Neal 1980), Meon Hill (Liddell 1933; Cunliffe 2000: 152–4) and Old Down Farm (Davies 1981; Cunliffe 2000: 154) and during the recent programme of excavations at New Buildings and Flint Farm. A number of sites of similar form can be recognised from air photographs. Those from which stratified material is available date to the Middle and Late Bronze Age. The restricted size of the enclosures and their distribution imply that the population was widely dispersed in small farmsteads but never far from the field systems upon which their livelihood depended. At first sight the scattered nature of the population would seem to be in contrast with the formal arrangement of the large tracts of carefully laid out fields but there is nothing inconsistent in supposing that the spatially dispersed community came under the authority of a coercive power of some kind, individual or communal, able to impose order on the use of landscape resources.

In such a society it is likely that special places were designated for periodic communal gatherings. Two possibilities have been identified within the region, Danebury and Balksbury. At Danebury the hilltop of 16 ha was enclosed by a ditch linked to a linear earthwork that can be traced for more than 2 km running across the countryside. Little is known of the internal arrangements within the enclosure but an arc of very large pits

supporting massive timbers, possibly of ritual significance, is likely to be broadly contemporary. Such an enclosure could have served a wide range of functions—religious, social and domestic—relating to the organisation of the larger community. At Balksbury 18 ha of the hilltop was enclosed with a bank and ditch refurbished on several occasions (Wainwright and Davies 1995). Contemporary internal features included a number of four-post structures often referred to as 'granaries' but more likely to be hay racks. There is evidence, from the stratigraphy just inside the ramparts, for the presence of animals. Of the many communal functions that could have been enacted here, the periodic corralling of flocks and herds may have been one. Such an activity was probably associated with autumn gatherings when the livestock of the community may have been brought together for culling, castration and redistribution.

There is a strong possibility that other 'communal places' existed in the Danebury landscape at this time. It is tempting to suggest that Quarley, Figsbury and Woolbury, which were later enclosed to become early hillforts in the sixth or fifth century, may already have served as 'communal places' in the preceding centuries. Each, as we have seen, is close to an extensive expanse of fields but positive evidence of early enclosure is so far lacking. The possibility of there having been continuity of communal use into the Iron Age is, however, intriguing. At Danebury direct continuity can be demonstrated while the Balksbury enclosure seems to have been succeeded by the early hillfort at Bury Hill just across the valley. In sum, it would seem that each of the areas of 'open downland', created in the Neolithic period, had, by the middle of the second millennium, become a discrete polity with its own 'communal place'. This pattern continued into the Early Iron Age with the construction of hillforts.

Consolidation (800–350 BC)

The middle centuries of the first millennium—traditionally the Earliest and Early Iron Age—was a period of consolidation in the Danebury region. Large settlements were set up within and adjacent to the earlier field systems and early hillforts were constructed on prominent hilltops within each of the 'open downland' territories.

The early settlements are best known from the four sites excavated as part of the Danebury programme: Flint Farm, Rowbury Farm, Houghton Down and Suddern Farm. All were enclosed by a ditch defining an area between 150 and 200 m across within which were a number of

circular houses together with storage pits, four-post 'granaries', windbreaks, quarries and other domestic features.

Flint Farm provides a particularly clear example of the complexity of such a settlement since it was abandoned in the fourth century and is therefore uncluttered with later features. Although excavation was limited the very high quality of the geophysical survey showed something of the complexity of the settlement (Fig. 7). It had been fitted into the existing field system and seems to have occupied at least two of the earlier arable plots. The boundary ditch which enclosed the settlement area probably followed field boundaries which by this time may well have been delineated by well-established hedges. Apart from large areas of quarrying, to provide chalk for marling or for hard core, and many hundreds of storage pits of different sizes, the most obvious of the internal features was a series of large circular houses of which about ten can be identified from the survey and there may have been many more. The excavation exposed one house in its entirety and part of another. The complete house was a massive structure *c*.15 m in diameter with a substantial porch protecting the single doorway (Fig. 8). The house is among the largest of the Iron Age houses found in Britain. Without total excavation of the whole enclosure it is difficult to say how typical this structure was of the other houses within Flint Farm and how many were in use at any one time. The question is further complicated by the fact that the excavated house had been completely rebuilt on exactly the same site. Given these constraints it would be unwise to attempt estimates of population but the likelihood is that the settlement served more than a single family.

The nearby settlement of Rowbury Farm was of comparable size and complexity and, in its early phase of occupation, was contemporary with Flint Farm. The proximity of the two sites, barely 500 m apart, raises interesting questions about the social relationships of the two communities. That they lived in harmony seems highly likely—perhaps we are seeing here the archaeological manifestation of a system of partable inheritance.

Both Flint Farm and Rowbury Farm owed their rectangularity to the fact that they had been inserted into existing field systems. Where no such constraints existed, as at Houghton Down and Suddern Farm, the enclosures assumed a more circular or oval form conditioned to some extent by the natural contours. The sample excavated within the southern part of the Houghton Down enclosure showed that the circular houses were tightly packed against the boundary ditch and represented rebuilding over an extended period of time. Less is known of Suddern Farm. Internal occupation, in the small area excavated, was represented largely
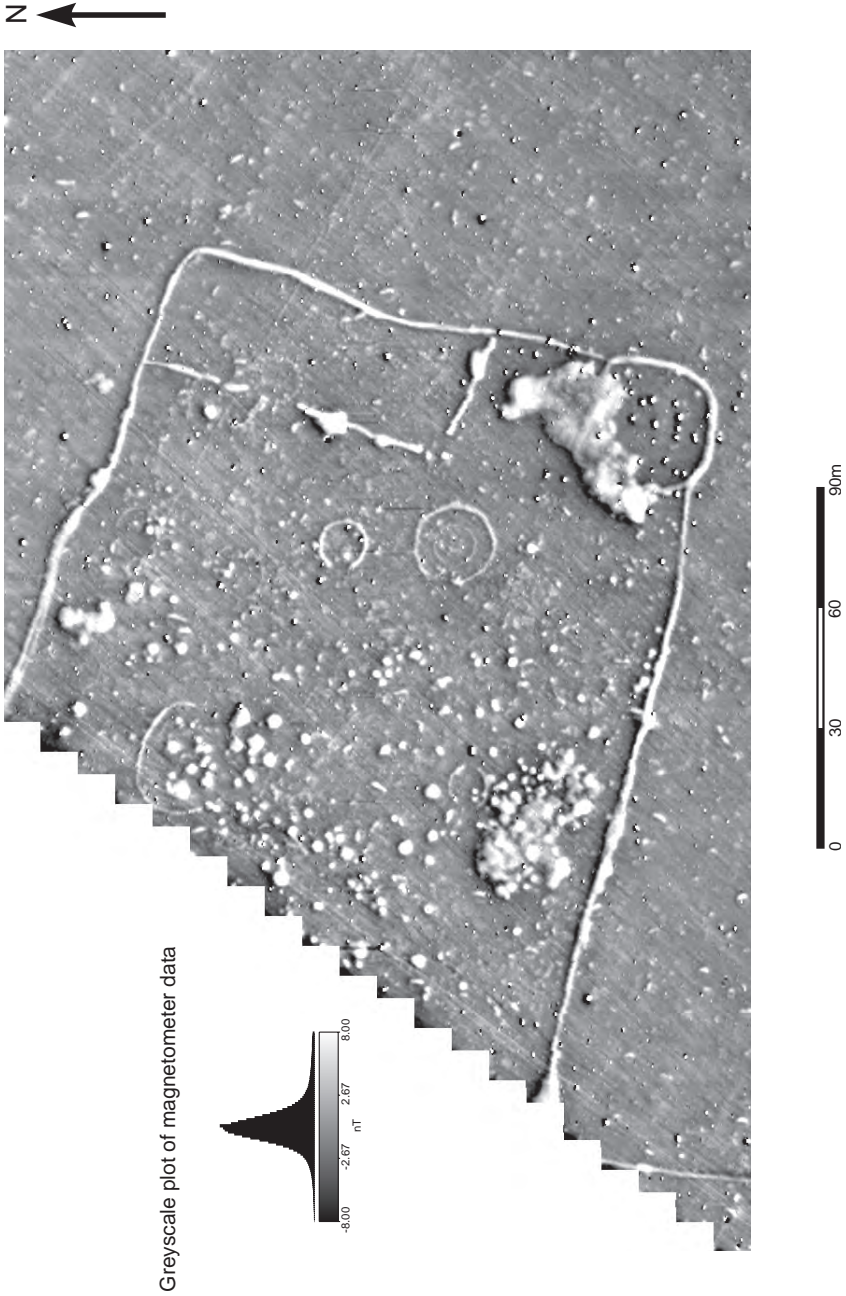
Greyscale plot of magnetometer data

Figure 7. Caesium magnetometer survey of the Flint Farm enclosure. (© English Heritage 2006.)

Figure 8.   The fifth-century BC house at Flint Farm after complete excavation.

by storage pits but the boundary ditch seems to have been replaced on at least one occasion indicating extended use. Other examples of ditch-enclosed settlements of the Early Iron Age found scattered across the region includes Meon Hill (Liddell 1933), Old Down Farm (Davies 1981), Little Somborne (Neal 1980) and Lains Farm (Bellamy 1992). All are of broadly comparable size. Together they indicate that the region must have been densely populated.

Not all of the settlements of this period conform to the large enclosure type. On Boscombe Down West an extensive area of occupation was found stretching across the landscape but without any sign of enclosure (Richardson 1951). There were also smaller settlements like the farmstead excavated at Nettlebank Copse which may have been enclosed with a fence and was only 50 m in diameter. Open settlements and small fenced enclosures are not widely known but this may well be because of their lack of visibility from the air. It is a reasonable assumption, therefore, that they are under-represented in the sample of sites known to us. The Early Iron Age landscape, then, is one showing some variety of settlement type—the variety reflecting the size and perhaps the status of the resident

social group. Some may have been little more than single family farm-
steads of barely a quarter of a hectare: others were large agglomerations
of people living together in hamlets extending to 3–4 ha.

The middle centuries of the first millennium see the development of
hilltop enclosures commonly referred to as *hillforts*, the assumption in the
name being that the defining earthworks were designed for physical defence
against aggressors. There has been some debate about this in recent years
(Bowden and McOmish 1987; 1989; Armit 2007), but all that can safely be
said is that earthworks, composed of banks set behind deep ditches, were
adequately designed to serve as defences if need arose and there is evidence
to suggest that in some cases attacks actually took place. That said, these
early hillforts could, and probably did, perform a range of functions. Above
all, they provided places of assembly, redolent of the power of the com-
munity, where people could congregate to engage in many kinds of social
interaction. Some may, over time, have taken on additional functions as
shelter for settlement, places for the storage of society's surplus and
perhaps as seats of the elite (Fig. 9).

Within the Danebury region five early hillforts were built: Danebury,
Bury Hill, Figsbury, Quarley and Woolbury. All were univallate with the
defences following the contours creating enclosures of circular or oval plan.
Each had two entrances on opposite sides of the enclosure. Although as
earthworks they were superficially similar in appearance there were signifi-
cant differences between them. In the first place the ramparts of Danebury
and Bury Hill were strengthened with timber, Danebury with a box-
structured rampart and Bury Hill with a palisade of close-spaced timbers
set in front, while Woolbury, Quarley and Figsbury were without timbering
and presumably had ramparts with sloping front faces of earth and rubble
in glacis style. These differences may be largely chronological, the timber-
structured ramparts dating to the sixth or fifth century and the glacis ram-
parts to the fifth–fourth century. A more significant difference lay in the use
to which they were put. Bury Hill, Woolbury, Figsbury and Quarley pro-
duced little evidence of internal activity suggesting either that they were
never used or, more likely, that such activity that did take place has left no
structural evidence and very little detritus. Danebury (Fig. 10) was alto-
gether different. A dendritic pattern of permanent roads was established
and the areas between them were tightly packed with circular houses, stor-
age pits and four-post 'granaries'. Large quantities of occupation debris
were found in the pits and in the stratified occupation layers. Clearly the
ramparts of Danebury had served to enclose a settlement of some size pro-
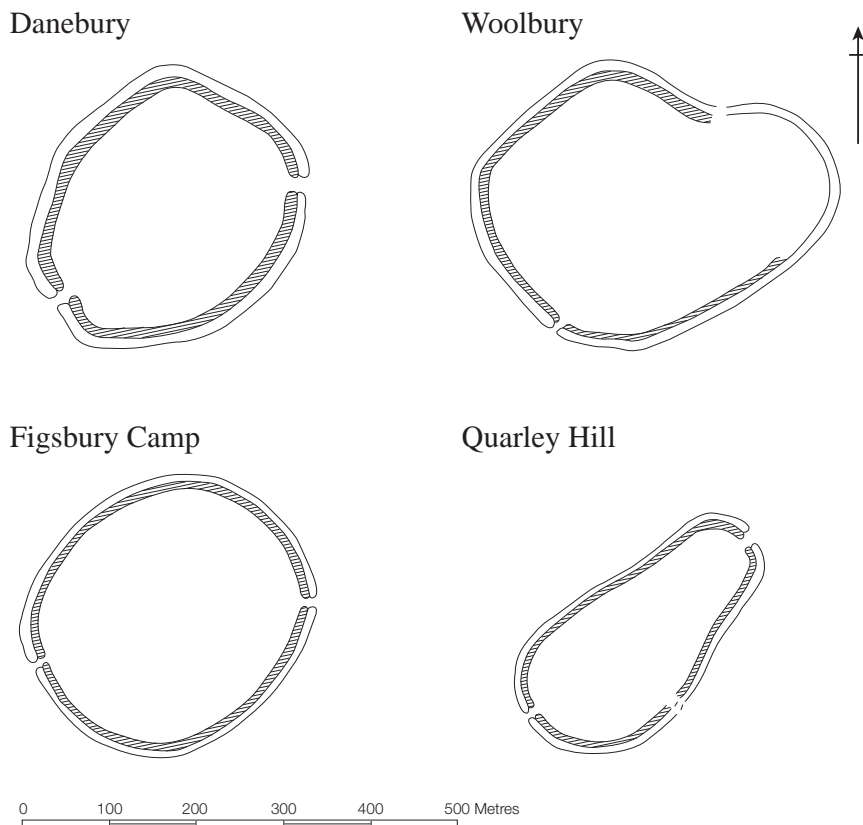vided with a considerable storage capacity for corn and other commodities.

Danebury   Woolbury

Figsbury Camp   Quarley Hill

0   100   200   300   400   500 Metres

Figure 9.   Comparative plans of early hillforts of the sixth and fifth centuries BC.

What all this means in social terms is not easy to determine. The simplest explanation would be to see Danebury emerging as a central place within an extended territory—serving as a location where people congregated, living within the enclosure for extended periods, if not permanently, and where society chose to store part of its surplus: the other hillforts provided places of assembly and were used only periodically. A further implication of this model would be that while Danebury represented the prime central place of the whole region the other forts may have served as the centres for smaller 'pagi' within the larger territory. It is even possible that Danebury was the residence of the presiding elite but this contention is difficult to test. Given the likely chronological differences between the enclosures it could be argued that Danebury was set up first, as the primary centre in the territory, and that the other forts were erected later, Bury Hill

Figure 10. The interior of the Danebury hillfort showing the areas excavated and the density of features, mainly pits and post-holes, within.

next followed by the other three at a later date, to provide a visible identity for the more distant communities. The alternative, that they were created to compete with Danebury, seems less likely.

Taken together then, the evidence available to us implies a development, rooted in the early centuries of the first millennium, which saw the hill of Danebury chosen to be the focus of the region. Gradually in the landscape around other focal points emerged as local identities began to crystallise out. What the driving dynamic was must remain guesswork but it is tempting to argue that increasing population may have been a significant factor.

Dislocation and reformation (350–100 BC)

If the first six centuries of the first millennium were a period of gradual development the fourth century was a time of rapid change. It was prob-

ably towards the beginning of the fourth century that the south-west gate of Danebury was modified with the addition of forward-projecting horn-works adding to its grandeur and defensive capabilities. Similar changes can be seen at other hillforts in central southern Britain, for example Beacon Hill, Fosbury, Oldbury and Maiden Castle. Then came a major event which saw the destruction of the east gate by fire accompanied by other signs of burning within the interior. This was followed, after some undefined period of time, by the reconstruction of the defences on a massive scale and reoccupation on a more intensive level than before.

Although various scenarios could be suggested to explain the facts the most compelling is that some kind of social stress, whether internal or from without, led the community to strengthen its defences. The threat continued and eventually overwhelmed the fort. After this it was rede-fended and reoccupied either by the surviving inhabitants or by the aggressors. Given that a similar story seems to have affected other forts of central southern Britain we may well be witnessing a period of widespread social upheaval.

The redefence of Danebury was on a large scale. The rampart was heightened and widened by the addition of a considerable thickness of chalk dug out of a quarry ditch behind the rampart while the defensive ditch in front was deepened and widened, the overall effect being to create a steep rubble slope continuous from the bottom of the ditch to the top of the rampart, a distance of some 17 m. At the same time the south-west gate was abandoned and blocked while the east gate was strengthened and provided with more massive foreworks designed to provide a central platform from which the inner and outer gates and the approaches could be defended by slingers. Sling stones were found in quantity in and around the entrance. The blocking of one gate and the strengthening of the ramparts are a phenomenon which can be recognised widely in central southern Britain around the middle of the fourth century. It was evidently an imperative which seems to have gripped a population responding to uncertain times.

Within the hillfort occupation continued on a more intensive scale than before (Fig. 11). The quarry ditches immediately behind the rampart provided a sheltered location which was particularly favoured. Its down-hill position, which encouraged the accumulation of soil, ensured that the individual occupation surfaces were particularly well preserved allowing six distinct phases of building to be identified. Given that these span a period of *c*.200–250 years, each phase is likely to represent only one or two generations. Houses were built elsewhere in the enclosure but were

Figure 11.   Excavations in progress within the Danebury hillfort, 1973.

less well preserved due to erosion. Another notable feature of the internal arrangement was the large number of large four- and six-post granaries, many of them arranged in rows along the streets and rebuilt many times on the same sites. The size of the structures and the broad contemporaneity of so many imply that the overall storage capacity must have been very considerable and was maintained over many generations. Storage pits continued to be dug and, while fewer than in the early period, they

were usually much larger. Finally within the central area, on what would have appeared to be the crest of the hill when viewed from the entrance, a series of small rectangular buildings was constructed which are likely to have been shrines. Thus, the overall appearance of the settlement at this time shows a high degree of planning, with different areas set aside for different functions. What is particularly impressive is the frequency of rebuilding on the same sites—a behaviour pattern which demonstrates a rigorous degree of control over the use of space exercised by a centralising authority be it elite- or communally-based.

One particularly noticeable feature of the later phase of settlement is the sheer volume of artefactual material deposited within the enclosure. While this may be, in some part, the result of domestic material being chosen for deliberate burial in 'special deposits' for ritual purposes, overall it must reflect a general and significant increase in the amount of material now in circulation which itself may be a reflection of a larger resident population.

Apart from the produce of the land around, and pottery which is also likely to be a relatively local product, a range of exotic materials was reaching the site. Iron, bronze, glass, amber, shale, salt, quernstones and whetstones are all attested, some of these materials coming from considerable distances away. The high concentration of these resources within the hillfort is in marked contrast to the range and quantities found in contemporary farmsteads, prompting the suggestion that the hillforts may have provided a location where resources were gathered from outside the territory for redistribution to neighbouring communities in the countryside around. If so then the very massive storage capacity within the fort might reflect the gathering of agrarian products—corn, wool and the like—from the countryside in exchange, perhaps through a clientage mechanism, for the non-local product range. Agrarian surpluses could then have been used for feasting and in extraterritorial exchanges. Support for the view that some form of organised redistribution took place within the hillfort comes from the discovery of a number of carefully finished stone weights fitted with iron rings for suspension. Weights signal careful measurement at agreed standards. In this model, then, the developed hillforts of the third and second centuries are understood to have taken on market functions articulating interregional exchanges in addition to the other functions inherited from the earlier period. This can be seen not as a revolutionary change but simply as a development of the socially embedded exchange systems which were already in operation at selected hillforts in the preceding stage.

The nature of the social system within which these exchanges were articulated is a matter for speculation. While it may have been elite-dominated—in which case one might talk of tribute being taken to the hillfort—it seems more likely that a communal form of market exchange had by now begun to operate. The reason for suggesting this lies in what was happening in the countryside around.

One of the more unexpected results of the Danebury Environs Programmes was the discovery that the settlements within 8–10 km of the hillfort were all abandoned, or largely so, in the course of the fourth century at about the time when the hillfort was being rebuilt on a grander scale. Further away, as for example at Balksbury where a farmstead had been built within the long-abandoned enclosure, the smaller settlements continued in occupation much as before. This observation, combined with the evidence for intensified settlement within the hillfort, strongly suggests that the population from the immediate countryside around may have migrated to the defended enclosure. The nucleation of settlement at this time does not mean that the land was abandoned but simply that it was probably worked, for the most part, from the protection of the fort. In all probability the old holdings were maintained to the extent that people still farmed their ancestral lands and may, indeed, have made some limited use of the old enclosures which were still a feature of the landscape. At Rowbury Farm, for example, there is evidence that some storage pits were dug in this period yet practically no occupation debris was left on the site. This could be explained by supposing that people had used the old enclosure as a convenient place to store some of their seed grain but did not actually live on the spot. A possible parallel is with the 'new barns' that were built on the open downs in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries to serve as storage buildings, often many miles from the nearest settlement.

The cause of such a radical change in the distribution of population in the region may lie in the political situation of the time. The destruction at Danebury and its subsequent refurbishment probably occurred, as we have argued, in an episode of social stress. This may have resulted from the frontier nature of the region close to the traditional boundary demarcated by the Bourne ridge and the Quarley linear. The fact that the ditch was refurbished on a number of occasions throughout the first millennium suggests that the boundary had taken on a new significance most likely as the result of increased stress in the fourth century. In such a situation the land around Danebury may have become vulnerable to

attack encouraging the dispersed population to seek the safety of the defences.

The question of the territorial boundary is nicely highlighted by the distribution of distinctive types of decorated pottery in use in the fourth century and later. Until about the middle of the fourth century the communities of the Danebury region had used a range of fine decorated bowls made from clays found in the Salisbury district, the distribution of which extended across central Wessex: but by the third century everything had changed. The pots now widely in use belonged to what has been called the saucepan pot tradition. They were fired grey-black and were frequently decorated with shallow-tooled lines and impressions delineated before firing when the fabric was still leather-hard. Several distinctive regional styles of design can be recognised. In Wiltshire, where the characteristic decoration is called the Yarnbury–Highfield style, the vessels were made in a glauconitic clay probably derived from outcrops west of Salisbury. In Hampshire and into West Sussex pottery of the St Catharine's Hill–Worthy Down style was made in a fabric tempered with finely crushed flint grit. The Yarnbury–Highfield style first extended as far east as Danebury but before long it was entirely replaced by the St Catharine's Hill–Worthy Down style, the divide between the two styles now corresponding closely with the Bourne scarp–Quarley linear boundary.

While there are, of course, many possible explanations for pottery distributions of this kind, it is tempting to relate stylistic preferences to geopolitics reflected in the redefence of Danebury and the abandonment of the countryside around by suggesting that the pottery styles were chosen by opposing polities to display their allegiances and to emphasise their differences from the neighbours. If so then the sharp divide between them, corresponding with the long-established linear boundary, reflects a politically significant divide with Danebury occupying a front line position in marcher-territory at a time when the two polities were in a state of conflict. It is conceivable that the developed hillfort of Sidbury, to the west of the Bourne, was the front line fortification of the opposing polity.

While there are evident dangers in proposing models of this kind—creating a kind of pseudo history—prehistorians have, for far too long, fought shy of considering their evidence in terms of territorial competition and conflict—conditions which are likely to have been endemic. In the present case, where several disparate strands of archaeological evidence converge, it seems not unreasonable to attempt to construct a local narrative.

The end of hillforts and the opening
of the countryside (100 BC–AD 100)

In the early decades of the first century BC a series of far-reaching
changes can be identified in the region. The most evident was the con-
struction of a new hillfort at Bury Hill (Bury Hill 2) within the confines
of the long defunct early hillfort (Bury Hill 1). The new hillfort occupied
a smaller area and was defined by a substantial rampart fronted by two
large V-profiled ditches. The exact date of construction is not easy to
define but on the basis of the ceramic evidence Bury Hill 2 seems to
overlap with the last stages of the Middle Iron Age—the saucepan pot
phase—of Danebury. The two forts are barely 6.3 km apart.

Apart from its unusual form, with concentric double ditches, Bury
Hill has other distinguishing characteristics most notably a very high per-
centage of horse bones among the faunal debris. It also produced a large
number of metal items belonging to sets of horse gear and vehicle fittings:
similar sets of equipment were characteristic of the last phase of occupa-
tion at Danebury. Again, the question of how to interpret these observa-
tions arises. The horse bones and horse gear would suggest that the
occupants of Bury Hill were involved in the rearing and training of char-
iot teams and the production of the chariots and horse tackle, while the
appearance of horse gear at Danebury indicates the involvement of the
ancestral location with charioteering in the final stages of its occupation.
The importance of the chariot ensemble in warfare in southern Britain is
vividly described by Julius Caesar who, in 54 BC, was confronted by an
army accompanied by 4,000 chariots (*De Bello Gallico*, IV. 33). He was
evidently impressed, describing them as combining 'the mobility of cavalry
with the staying power of infantry'.

In Iron Age society the chariot was essentially an engine of competition
involving display and aggression in equal measure. In the Danebury region
its very visible presence in the early decades of the first century BC implies
a society in a state of growing tension. The foundation of the new fort at
Bury Hill could well have resulted from a breakaway faction setting up in
opposition to the polity based on the ancestral site of Danebury. In this
way tension, already growing among the elite, became polarised.

The next episode in the story is the destruction of Danebury evident
in the massive fire which consumed the main gate. The hundreds of sling
stones scattered about the entrance and a large pit just inside the fort with
its floor covered with human body parts may relate to the destruction
event. After the fire the hillfort was abandoned. The situation at Bury Hill

is less clear, in part because the entrance area was not examined in the excavations, but there is some evidence to suggest that the site may have continued to be occupied with the main centre of activity shifting to outside the main enclosure.

There remains a real problem with the chronology of these events. All that can be said on the basis of the available evidence is that they were likely to belong to the first half of the first century BC but where within that period cannot be closely tied down. One distinct possibility is that the episode dates to the middle of the century and may have been the result of local social tensions exacerbated by the dislocating effects of the Caesarian expeditions of 55 and 54 BC in the south-east of the country. There are, however, other possible explanations.

In the early first century BC the communities of central southern Britain were beginning to experience the bow-wave effect of Romanisation with the development of maritime systems of exchange linking the Solent coast with the ports of Armorica (Cunliffe and de Jersey 1997) through the port-of-trade which developed at Hengistbury Head overlooking Christchurch Harbour (Cunliffe 1987). Among the imports which can be identified at Hengistbury are amphorae of north Italian wine, coloured glass, metal vessels and figs, all probably from the Mediterranean, as well as Armorican pottery (no doubt containing desirable commodities) and Armorican coinage. There is evidence to suggest that exports from Britain may have included copper, tin, silver, iron, grain and cattle. Other products mentioned in Strabo's list of British exports (*Geog.* 4.5.2) are slaves and hunting dogs more difficult to recognise in the archaeological record.

While it is impossible to estimate the volume of these exchanges such evidence as there is shows that wine amphorae of Dressel type 1A, dating largely to the first half of the first century BC, were widely distributed in central southern Britain and indeed are found in the latest levels at Danebury. It is a distinct possibility, therefore, that the broadening exchange network, introducing foreign exotics to Britain, may have had a destabilising effect on society. Access to a new set of consumer products would have encouraged competition among elites while the fact that a slave now suddenly had a greatly enhanced market value would have made their bulk acquisition desirable. It is easy to imagine how, given such a stimulus, an already competitive society may have been tipped out of its state of unstable equilibrium into one in which raids and military confrontation became the norm.

The demise of hillforts by the middle of the first century was accompanied by other changes in the organisation of the landscape. In the

Danebury region this saw the re-establishment of many of the ancestral farms and the emergence of new rural settlements. At Rowbury Farm the large rectangular enclosure, set up in the seventh or sixth century and perhaps used as an outpost during the period of Danebury dominance, was evidently still a prominent mark in the landscape. Its ditch had long since silted but the line of the enclosure was probably defined by a well-established hedge and the trackways leading to it were still in use. In the late first century BC a small ditched enclosure was established in the north-east corner of the old site facing on to the earlier road. Sufficient occupation debris was found to suggest that it was occupied, if not necessarily on a permanent basis. At Houghton Down a similar reoccupation is evident but here the new settlement was more extensive incorporating a number of conjoined enclosures.

A new type of settlement—the banjo enclosure—now proliferated. Banjo enclosures are so named because the small circular or oval enclosure with its long narrow entrance passage defined by ditches has a superficial resemblance in plan to the musical instrument. There is still some uncertainty as to their function. The one example totally excavated at Nettlebank Copse (Fig. 12) showed little sign of permanent occupation and is best interpreted as an enclosure used primarily for stock handling. However, the large quantities of broken pottery and animal bone found in its ditch may be interpreted as feasting debris resulting, perhaps, from periodic gatherings associated with livestock management. Another banjo enclosure, at Grateley South, formed the focus of a later Roman farmstead. Here limited excavation showed that subsidiary enclosures and pits occupied the area outside the main enclosure. A similar site, immediately adjacent to the Roman villa establishment at Dunkirt Barn, lay beyond the area explored by excavation but the geophysical survey showed that the inside of the enclosure was occupied by pits. Since, however, there is no dating evidence for the pits it remains a possibility that they belong to a preceding phase of settlement as we were able to show to have been the case at Nettlebank Copse.

Banjo enclosures, then, remain somewhat enigmatic. On present evidence it is best to assume that they may have originated as stock-handling enclosures, quite possibly endowed with ritual significance, and that some might have continued to develop as settlements grew up around them. In such a scenario Nettlebank Copse would be seen to be an undeveloped banjo which had ceased to be used by the mid-first century AD while Grateley South and Dunkirt Barn evolved to become the centres of Roman estates by the second or third century.
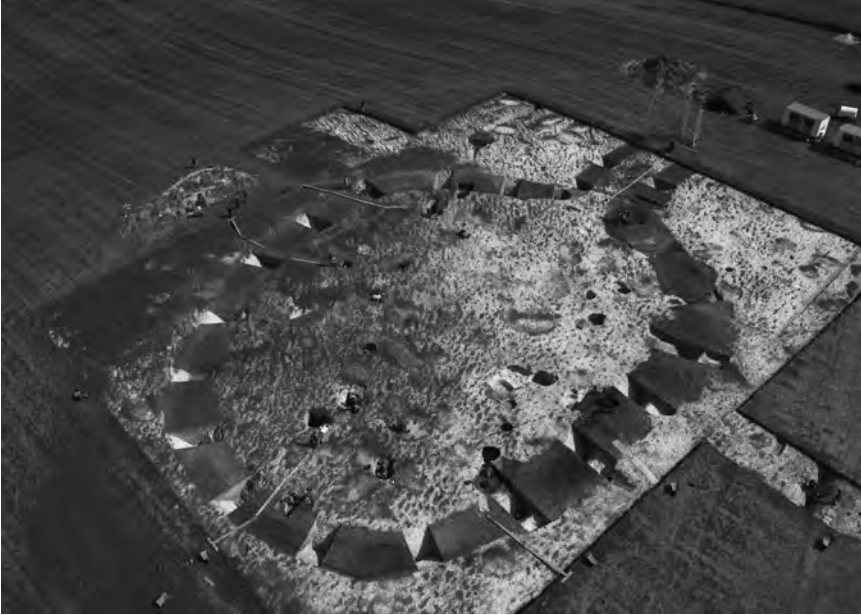
Figure 12.   The banjo enclosure of Nettlebank Copse under excavation, 1993.

One further site deserves mention—the multiple ditched enclosure at Suddern Farm. The settlement originated in the eighth or seventh century and continued in use until the fourth century when it was abandoned. Reoccupation began in the first century BC with the digging of a new enclosure ditch of considerable proportions inside the line of the earlier ditch which itself was later redug, thus creating a double ditch system of defences. Suddern Farm differs from other settlements of the Late Iron Age in that its enclosure ditches were far more substantial, the enclosure was larger (nearly 200 m across) and the material culture was richer, the pottery assemblage including amphorae and copies of fine ware Gallo-Belgic beakers. That 25 per cent of the pottery was brought in from production sites in the Poole Harbour region is indicative of the extensive exchange networks which the inhabitants were able to exploit. Taken together the evidence suggests that Suddern Farm may have been of higher status than other contemporary settlements in the Danebury region. The nearest comparable site is Boscombe Down West (Richardson 1951) which lies to the west of the River Bourne some 9 km from Suddern Farm. It is not unreasonable to suppose that it was sites like these that were the homesteads of the elites in the century or so following the demise of the hillforts.

Barry Cunliffe

Figure 13. The distribution of Roman period buildings in the Danebury Environs region.

The Roman invasion of AD 43 has left no recognisable impact on the Danebury region. There is no evidence of destruction of native sites and nothing to suggest that military detachments were left to police the landscape. If, as is usually argued, the territory was part of the kingdom of the Atrebates under the control of a pro-Roman dynasty, the military may have passed through quickly, or even bypassed the region altogether.

That the conquest caused no significant disruption is amply demonstrated by the fact that almost all of the settlements continued in use without recognisable change, though at Suddern Farm the ditches were allowed to silt up and the settlement extended across them. The nature of the continuity becomes even more striking when it is realised that all the Roman settlements examined in the region occupy locations that had been in use for generations before the Invasion. Clearly land-holding patterns were in no way disrupted by the occupation.

That said there were changes in the distribution of settlement in the landscape as the Roman period proceeded. Some of the settlements flourished to the extent that the occupants could afford eventually to replace their timber houses with masonry buildings, sometimes adorned with mosaic floors and baths, creating what are generally still referred to as Roman villas. The distribution of these villas is noticeably uneven across the landscape in that they show a distinct preference for the richer, more clayey soils (Fig. 13). This is best explained by supposing that settlements able to exploit productive soils had a competitive advantage in that their owners could produce a surplus exchangeable for cash which could be accumulated later to be reinvested in bricks and mortar. Those farming the thinner and less productive soils, now possibly nearing exhaustion, had no such facility. This may explain why sites such as Suddern Farm, though active into the fifth century, appear never to have acquired the trappings of Romanised luxury. The contrast between the close-packed villa estates on the heavy soils and the settlement on the open downland became more marked as the Roman period proceeded. The social implications of this will be explored below.

Becoming Roman (AD 100–400)

The annexation of Britain to the Roman Empire introduced a number of changes which impacted on the inhabitants of the Danebury region. The most apparent, physically, was the imposition of a system of roads slicing across the landscape unheeding of its historic texture. Three major roads

traversed the region: the great west road from London, through Silchester to Dorchester and the West Country; a south–north road from the Solent coast through Winchester to Cirencester on the Fosse Way; and an east–west cross-country road from the Weald through Winchester to the Mendips and the Severn estuary. The road building programme caused some dislocation but, once in place, rapid transport routes would have brought many advantages not least ease of access to the major markets which were developing at towns like Winchester and Silchester and the minor markets at cross-roads like those beneath modern Andover and close to Old Sarum. Here surplus agrarian products could have been sold and goods and services purchased with the cash realised.

The newly imposed system of taxation dramatically changed the dynamics of production. In the Iron Age, the patron–client relationship required a tithe of the client's output to be delivered to the patron who would then be expected to redistribute his 'income' by providing protection, offering hospitality and giving gifts. In this way the communal product was reinvested in society, albeit unevenly, and the social hierarchy was maintained. Under the Roman system in the Early Empire the state took the place of the patron but the tithe (i.e. the taxes) had to be paid in gold coin. This required the conversion of the surplus product into money thus stimulating the rapid growth of a money economy. In such a system surpluses could be saved, to be accumulated for subsequent reinvestment. This very facility would have encouraged the growth of maximiser strategies of production where, before, sufficer systems had been all that was required to maintain the equilibrium. The more entrepreneurial owners, and those with easy access to rich resources, could now acquire capital which could be reinvested through public works of self-aggrandisement to enhance status. In other words the introduction of the Roman capitalist system provided a stimulus which changed the trajectory of the socio-economic system.

The overall effect on the Danebury landscape was the introduction of new productive technologies and the emergence of increasing sophisticated country houses. These, as we have seen, tended to concentrate on the richer clay soils where the potential for productivity was at its greatest. Yet there is ample evidence of continued occupation on the thinner and less productive soils of the open downland. Of the two sites of this kind excavated—Rowbury Farm and Suddern Farm—Rowbury Farm seems at this stage to have been little more than a series of conjoined animal pens but Suddern Farm, with its timber buildings, corn-drying ovens, bread ovens and fenced enclosures, has the appearance of being a rural farming community. Several comparable sites, represented by con-

centrations of stray finds mainly gathered by metal detectorists, are known in similar locations. They appear to extend over considerable areas but at none is there any surface evidence indicative of masonry buildings. The strong possibility remains, therefore, that these scatters of finds represent extensive communities, perhaps of village size, similar to those found on the Salisbury Plain Training Area to the west (McOmish, Field and Brown 2002; Fulford *et al.* 2006) and on the South Downs, north of Portsmouth, to the east (Cunliffe 1973; 1977).

Allowing that two types of settlement coexisted—the villa estates and the upland 'villages'—the question of their relationship immediately arises. On present evidence there is little that can be said of this. It could be that the upland 'villages' arose from individual holdings that were economically restrained by the quality of the land but it is equally possible that they were true villages depending upon a productive regime focusing more on pastoral activities better suited to the depleted soils, than on crop growing. How these settlements related to the villa estates is an intriguing question. Were they free peasant communities or bondmen of the wealthy estate owners and did the relationship change over time? The questions are pertinent but it is difficult to see how they might be answered using only archaeological evidence. A necessary preliminary would be the total excavation of an upland settlement.

The masonry buildings of the villa estates are much better known and it is now possible to begin to consider the vernacular architecture characteristic of the different regions of southern Britain. In the central zone, where the Danebury study area is situated, four distinctive types of structure can be identified—aisled halls, strip houses, central-hall houses (essentially a hybrid of the two) and barns/crop processing buildings (Fig. 14).

The aisled hall is a recurring feature of most villa settlements. At their simplest the halls were large rectangular buildings, usually more than twice as long as they are wide, with the roof supported on pairs of timber verticals dividing the internal space into a 'nave' flanked by two side aisles. The intention was to provide a large, undivided roofed area. Grateley, building 1 provides an example. In some examples part of the hall was later partitioned off to provide smaller rooms, and bath suites were sometimes inserted into an aisle, as was the case at Houghton Down. Another variant, typified by the two aisled halls at Dunkirt Barn, entailed the construction of separate rooms at one end integral with the original structure. Another example of this variant has recently been identified at Brading on the Isle of Wight.
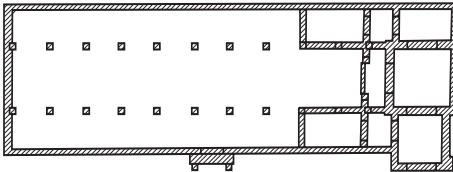
Aisled halls
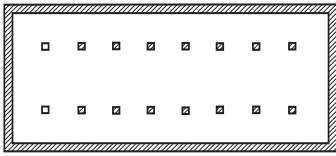
Grateley (building 1)   Houghton Down (building 1)
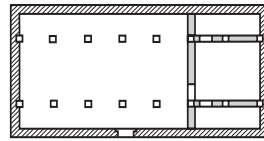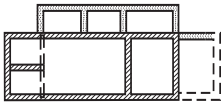
Dunkirt Barn (building 5)
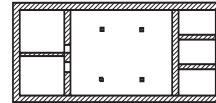
Central-hall houses
Houghton Down (building 2)   Fullerton (building 2)
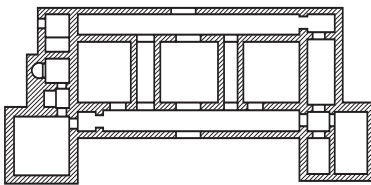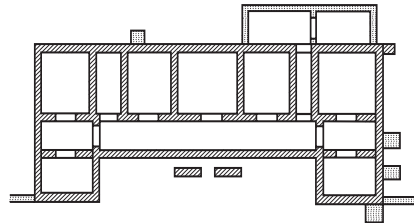
Winged-Corridor houses
Fullerton (building 1)   Dunkirt Barn (building 4)

0   10   20 Metres

Figure 14.   The three main types of Roman masonry buildings in central southern Britain.

Where dating evidence is available aisled halls come early in the con-
struction sequence, usually in the late second or third century, and in a
significant number of cases seem to be the only building, or the principal
building, on the site. Examples of this from the region include Houghton
Down, Thruxton, Clanville (Engleheart 1898), North Warnborough
(Liddell 1931) and Stroud (Williams 1909). The significance attached to
the halls is amply demonstrated at Dunkirt Barn where, in the extensive
mid-fourth-century rebuilding of the establishment, a new aisled hall was

constructed on an even more massive scale than its predecessor. The frequently stated view, that the aisled halls were merely barns sometimes later modified for domestic purposes, is at odds with the evidence. These buildings were grand structures which served an essential social function in the villa estates. The strip houses, which we will consider later, were an adjunct and one not universally adopted.

How, then, to explain the aisled halls? The clue may come from the late aisled hall at Dunkirt Barn built in the mid-fourth century (Fig. 14). It was a massive structure planned from the outset to contain two elements: the open hall proper and a series of rooms at one end, of tower-like proportions, arranged axially with the hall, the main central room opening through an atrium to the hall itself. The rooms were reached through an entrance hall while the hall was accessed through a side door. The building, therefore, provided for two interlinked functions. It should be remembered that at the time that the aisled hall was rebuilt the adjacent strip house, of winged corridor type, was also totally reconstructed, the implication being that the establishment required both structures to maintain its full range of activities.

Taking all the evidence together the simplest explanation would be to suppose that the prime function of the aisled hall was as a place of assembly where, on specified occasions, the different social sectors of the community could meet to enact the business of the estate, dispense justice, or simply to feast. Vitruvius reminds us that men of rank need the appropriate built spaces in their villas to enable them to discharge their duties. These should include 'basilicas, furnished in a style similar to that of great public buildings, since public councils as well as private law suites and hearings before arbitrators are very often held in the houses of such men' (Vitrivius 6.6.2). In other words it is likely that the aisled halls functioned in much the same way as the medieval hall which in size and structure they closely resemble. They reflect the social contract between master and client. And like medieval halls there was much variation. The formal grandeur of the Dunkirt Barn hall, where the lord of the manor could have presided in his separate chamber over the activities within the hall in front of him, contrasts dramatically with the much smaller hall at Thruxton where, in its initial phase, there was no differentiation between the high and the low end. Such variation must reflect the differences in social status of the villa owners.

Although the aisled hall (or basilica) probably derives from Roman architectural models the concept of communal space is likely to have been inherited from indigenous patterns of behaviour. The large circular house

of the fifth century BC at Flint Farm is, after all, a communal space where all the activities of the extended household would have been enacted. It is not unreasonable to argue that the primacy of the aisled hall in central southern Britain reflects a continuity of social tradition.

The central-hall houses (Fig. 14), like the early house at Fullerton, are probably best seen as a variant of the same idea, with the central hall serving as the communal space, and rooms at each end for private use. Such structures were far less grand than even the smaller aisled halls and may represent a lower social échelon.

The strip houses embody altogether different principles (Fig. 14). Characteristically they are composed of rows of discrete rooms which may be linked by one or more flanking corridors. Sometimes the front of the building was aggrandised with forward-projecting wings. The concept here was to provide a series of conjoined private spaces for domestic comfort which could be further enhanced with mosaic floors, painted walls and bath suites. The strip house is an alien concept imported from the Roman world and first introduced into south-eastern Britain in the first century. It was not widely adopted in central southern Britain until the third and fourth centuries and then usually as an adjunct to the aisled hall. The introduction of strip houses at Dunkirt Barn, Fullerton, Grateley South and Sparsholt is an indication of the acceptance of a more 'Romanised' style of behaviour and serves to distinguish these establishments from those like Clanville, Warnborough, Houghton Down and probably Thruxton where the aisled halls continued to be the prime building throughout. Such variations, reflecting relative wealth and taste, are hardly surprising but the enhanced database from the Danebury region at last provides a convincing way of demonstrating it.

The desire to increase productivity provided the imperative to introduce new technologies. There is little that can be said of animal husbandry. A study of the animal bones shows that there was little change in the relative percentages of the animals raised with sheep generally being the most numerous, but there are some indications of breed variations suggesting a willingness to experiment with stock to improve yields of milk, meat and wool. It is in the field of crop processing that new innovations can more readily be seen. The most ubiquitous is the corn-drying oven—a square working floor surrounded by a low retaining wall with a central flue beneath served from a stoking pit (Figs. 15 and 16). The flue ends at a chimney-slot, set along the back wall of the chamber. This allows the hot air to rise to the level of a stone baffle-shelf some 0.3 m above the level of the chamber floor, the function of which is to deflect

Figure 15.   The late corn-drying oven in the Roman crop-processsing building (Building 4) at Grateley after excavation.
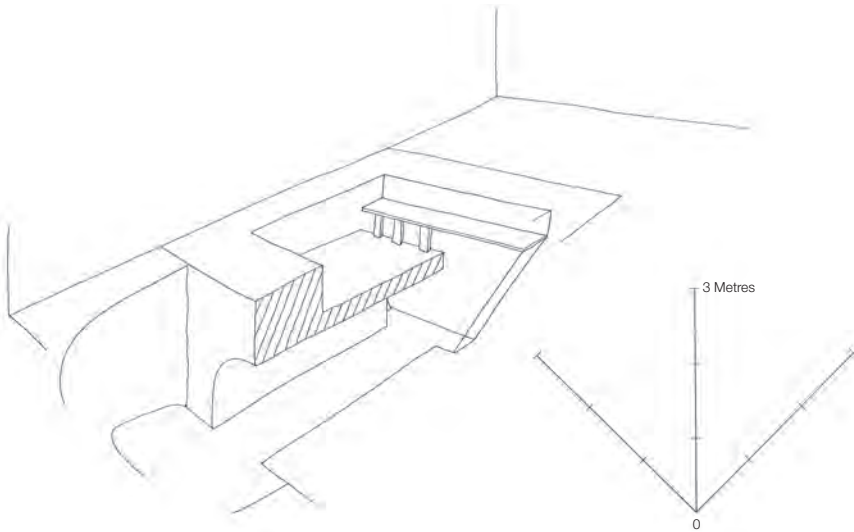

3 Metres

0

Figure 16.   Reconstruction of the corn-drying oven in Building 4 at Grateley.

the heat outwards across the floor. The intensity of the heat could be controlled by regulating the size of the fire in the flue and by cutting the flow of hot air by blocking, or reducing the size of, the vent with stone slabs or tiles propped against the shelf. The corn to be dried was spread on the floor and moved about with rakes to the hotter or cooler parts of the floor as desired.

Corn-drying ovens are found widely in the countryside on villa estates and non-villa settlements, some in the open, others within the protection of buildings. In the Danebury region the earliest date to the second century but most were in use in the late third and fourth centuries. Since there are no known Iron Age precursors, the corn-drying oven may be assumed to be an innovation of the Roman period.

Normally the ovens occur singly but at Grateley South three pairs of ovens were found, each pair served from one stokehole. The earliest appears to have been in the open. Later two corn processing buildings were constructed each with a pair of ovens set at one end (Fig. 17). In all three pairs of ovens the right-hand oven (viewed from within the stoking

Figure 17.   The crop-processing building, Building 3, at Grateley with a pair of corn-drying ovens in one end.

pit) showed evidence of having been more intensively burnt than the other. Analysis of the charred grain found within them confirmed their different functions. The more intensely heated ovens were used to dry spikelets of wheat before threshing while the ovens heated to more moderate temperatures served as malting ovens to treat germinating grain in the first stage of the beer-making process.

The buildings were large enough to accommodate other functions such as milling and baking, traces of both of which survived. There was also indisputable evidence, from one of the buildings that had burnt down, that threshed and cleaned grain had been stored in the loft. The Grateley corn processing buildings were, therefore, designed for efficiency—the input was grain, the output bread and beer, the two staples of the farming community.

The villa at Fullerton, in the valley of the River Anton, could boast another technological refinement—a water-mill—a type of structure hitherto rarely found in Britain. The mill (Fig. 18), which had been totally rebuilt on one occasion, was a comparatively simple timber structure comprising an undershot wheel some 2 m in diameter fitted with gears to transfer the power to work the millstones on the milling floor above. The mill was served by a leat running for several hundred metres along the side of the valley from a head of water probably created by damming the river upstream. This head-race flowed direct into the wheel pit, the spent water being channelled away in a tail-race to a deep holding pond which drained into the river beyond. The gradient and cross-section of the leat were so contrived that the velocity of the water was more than enough to drive heavy millstones. In the earlier of the mills the arrangement was such that two stones could have been driven simultaneously.

Although the mill itself was a comparatively modest structure, the labour and skills involved in engineering the water supply must have been considerable and must have involved a significant investment by the proprietor. Since a mill of this kind, working to capacity, would have been able to grind far more grain than is likely to have been produced on a single estate it is a fair assumption that the Fullerton mill would have provided services for several of the neighbouring estates with no access to water power of their own. It is a reminder that specialisation and a sharing of facilities may have been more widespread than is yet apparent in the available archaeological evidence.

Overall the Danebury region was a productive landscape. The surplus of its estates, sent to the market centre at Winchester, would have included corn, meat and hides (possibly on the hoof), cheeses, beer, wool, candles,
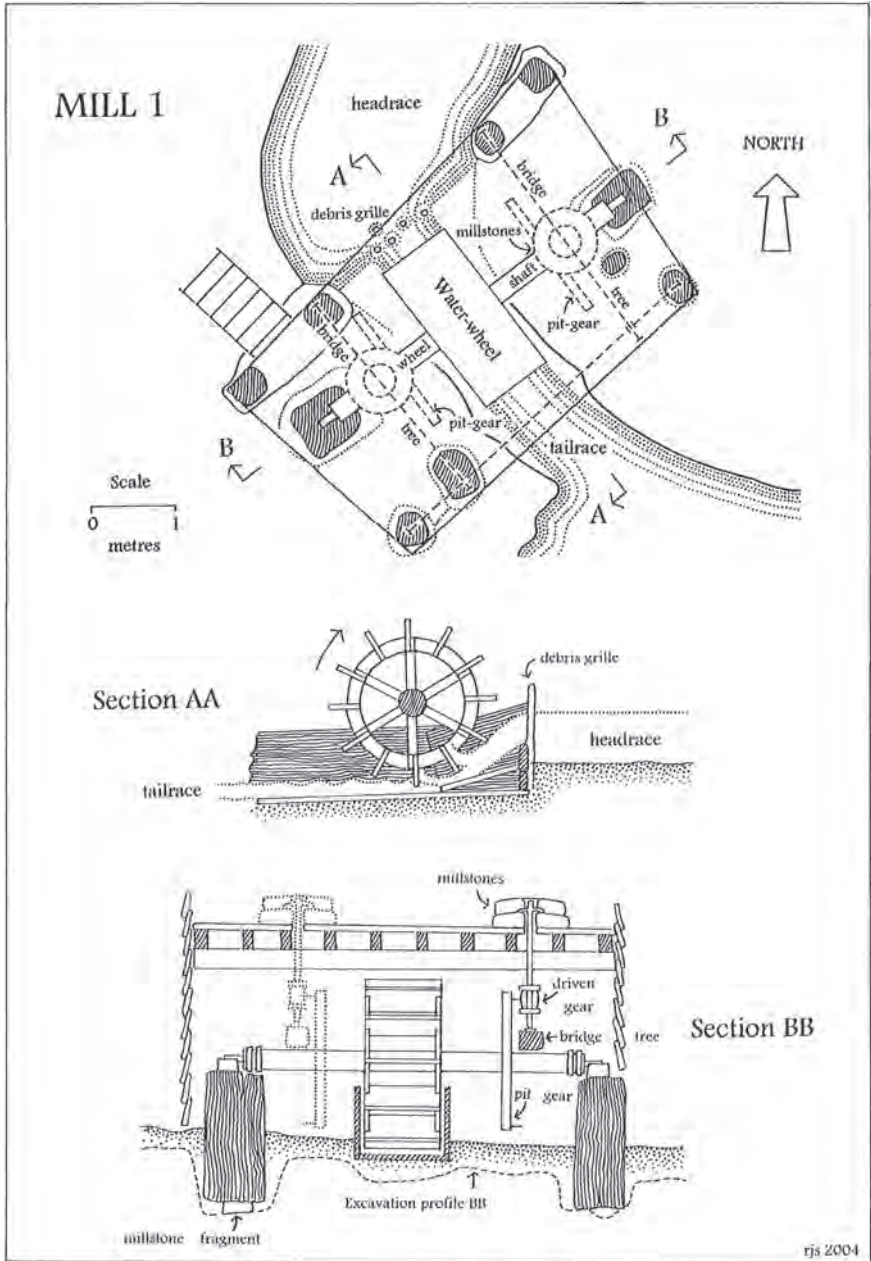
Figure 18. Reconstruction of the Roman water-mill at Fullerton by Bob Spain.

timber and rushes together with gathered foodstuff such as berries, nuts, herbs, game and fish. In return the rural community would have been able to buy consumer durables, exotic foods and wine, and the services of a range of specialists such as builders and interior decorators to improve their lifestyles.

Reinvestment in bricks and mortar came fairly late in the Danebury region. The earliest masonry structures date to the late second and early third centuries. Before that buildings were generally of timber with wattle and daub walls and roofs of reed or thatch though tiles were coming into use. The main luxury building boom, which saw the construction of strip houses, did not really get under way until the fourth century by which time the desire to embrace the finer points of Romanisation was becoming evident. A good example of this is the villa at Fullerton. Here the earliest building was a simple central-hall house set within a ditched enclosure and facing out across its yard to the water-mill beyond. It was a comfortable but modest establishment which was probably constructed in this form in the latter part of the third century. Some time later, probably towards the middle of the fourth century, a new strip house was built with a front and rear corridor and two projecting wings (Fig. 19). The new house turned its back on the yard and instead looked across the leat, which ran immediately in front of it, to encompass the view of the valley of the Anton and the hills beyond. It was a deliberate act, rejecting the old and embracing a viewshed which can only be said to have been picturesque. The new building, though of comparatively modest proportions, was fitted throughout with mosaic floors, the most impressive, in the central room, bearing a figured design including a central image of Mars. A bath suite occupied the south wing with the private residential rooms set in the north wing. The main central range comprised three large reception rooms separated by corridors. It was a carefully contrived plan redolent of the luxury and aspirations of the Romanised world. The owner had made a deliberate decision to present himself in a particular image.

At Dunkirt Barn the aisled hall and the strip house were rebuilt on a much grander scale at about the same time as Fullerton. The strip house was probably of more than one storey and contained at least two mosaics. The building of the strip house at Grateley South also dates to the fourth century and it too had a mosaic floor. It seems that we are witnessing something of a fourth-century building boom though it is not possible, on the available evidence, to argue that all the rebuildings were exactly contemporary.

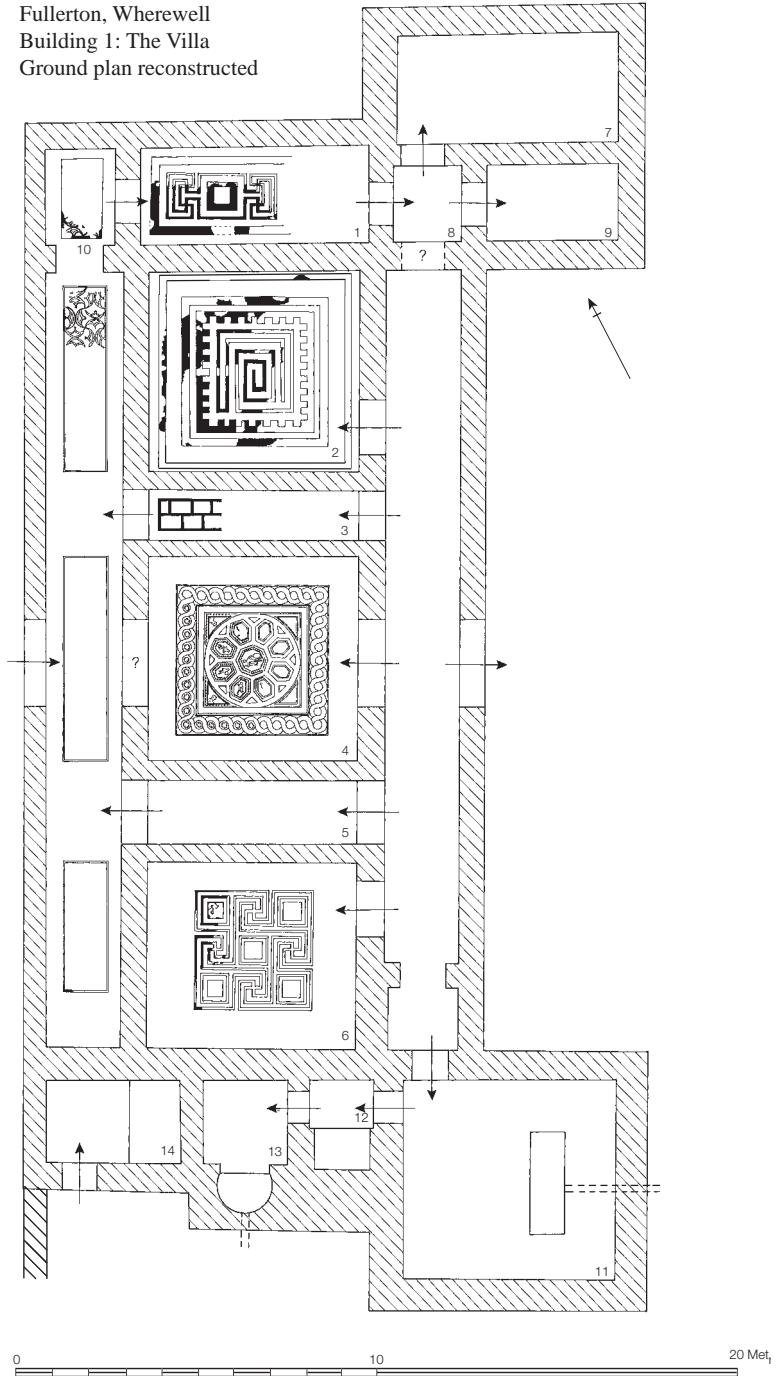Fullerton, Wherewell
Building 1: The Villa
Ground plan reconstructed

Figure 19. The fourth-century AD villa building at Fullerton.

What caused this phase of capital investment in the rural estates it is difficult to say. There is no doubt that this was a period of general prosperity in Britain but the underlying dynamics are likely to have been complex. The flow of new capital to the province, an exodus of the wealthy from the urban centres and a change in the fiscal system consequent upon the reforms of Diocletian, would all have contributed to a profound upheaval in the socio-economic systems which both constrained and facilitated lifestyle. In these circumstances a renewed interest in the productivity and wellbeing of the rural estates might not be unexpected.

The questions surrounding estate ownership are not easy to approach. Continuity of occupation from pre-Roman times does not necessarily imply that the holdings were passed down within a family-based inheritance system though this may well have been the case in many instances. The archaeological evidence is always likely to be ambiguous. At Fullerton, for example, the building of the sumptuous corridor house in the fourth century, replacing the old central-hall house, could be interpreted as a new owner buying the estate and investing his surplus wealth in modernisation but it could equally be that the owning household, by industriously working the land and by augmenting their income through hiring out their miller's services, were able to save money for subsequent investment in a lavish new-build. The archaeological record remains silent on the matter.

Yet on questions of ancestry and ownership, the villa at Thruxton has some tantalising evidence to offer. The villa is well known for the fine figured mosaic found in 1823 and removed seventy-six years later to the British Museum where it is now on display (Henig and Soffe 1993). The mosaic, depicting Bacchus seated on a rather undersized leopard, was once adorned by an inscription top and bottom. The top inscription is intact and reads *Quintus Natalius Natalinus et Bodeni* while of the lower inscription only the letters V and O, probably from the word *Voto*, survive. Who Natalinus was and who were the Bodeni and what was their relationship have been matters frequently discussed but without significant conclusions. The invented *tria nomina* of Natalinus implies that he was a man of pretension, quite probably a member of the local elite, while the Bodeni, two or more people using their Celtic name, seem to be in some way linked to him perhaps as relatives or clients. The word V*oto* in the lower line suggests that the named individuals were in some way making a votive offering.

In isolation the mosaic has a limited story to tell but the archaeological context, demonstrated in the recent excavation, is more revealing (Fig. 20). The Thruxton building was in origins a small aisled hall which, late in its

Aisled Hall, Period 3 and related features

F1082

F1070

F1063

F1069

F1159

Ritual pit
F1112

Early grave
F1111

Wall demolished

New doorway ?

Ph 1278

Hall abandoned + possibly partially dismantled

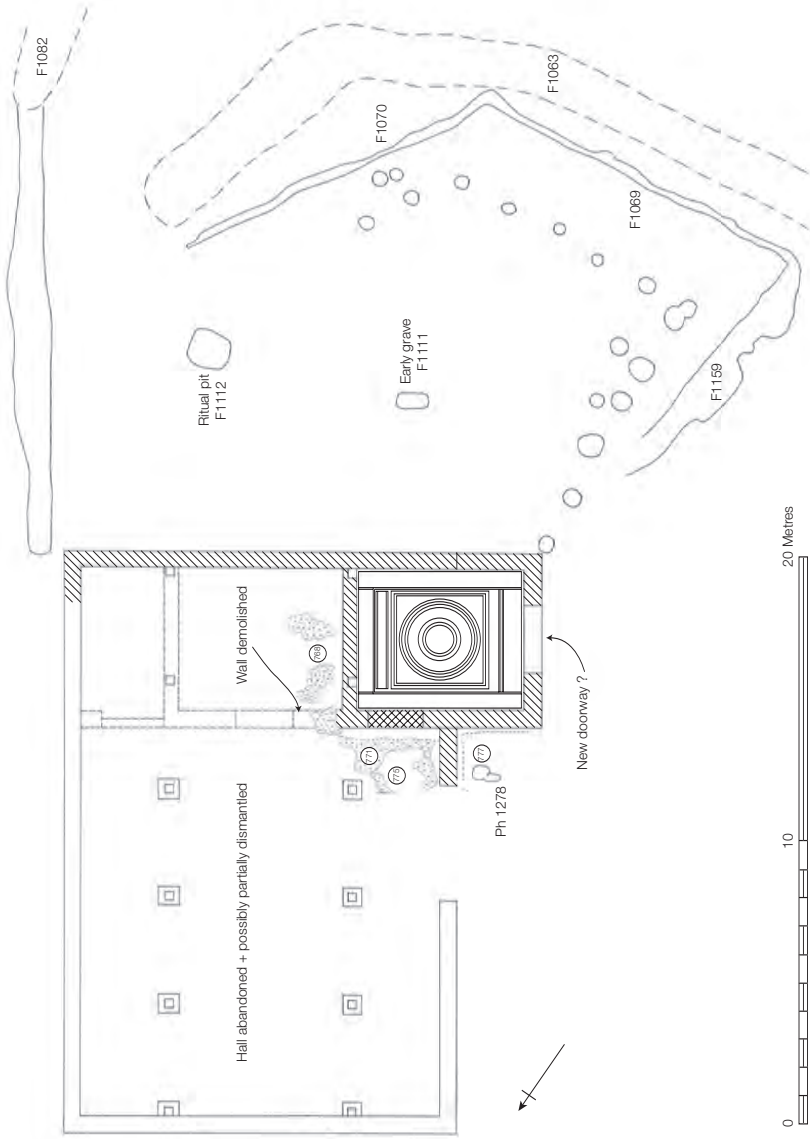0   10   20 Metres

Figure 20.   The Roman complex at Thruxton in the late fourth century showing the location of the Bacchus mosaic and adjacent 'ancestor burial'.

life, had been subdivided and slightly expanded at one end to provide three private rooms. After an extended period of use one of these rooms was modified and floored with the Bacchus mosaic while at the same time some at least of the adjacent walls were demolished. What the changes meant was that the room, though set within the shell of the old aisled hall, was now separate from it and opened directly to the outside world.

A few metres to the south of the room a human burial of the mid-first century AD was discovered adjacent to a deep pit, possibly for votive offerings. At various stages during the life of the establishment the open area containing the burial and shaft had been delimited by fences.

The evidence allows for a plausible scenario. It is likely that the burial was revered throughout the life of the building, perhaps as the founding ancestor, and was protected from incursion by an enclosing fence. When finally, in the late fourth century, the building was abandoned a family member, Natalinus, paid for the creation of an elaborate dining room set in the shell of the family home where, on special occasions, the ancestor could be revered and the lineage celebrated. It is not impossible that the lineage was the Bodeni and that Natalinus was a prosperous descendant. The later history of the site reflects its shrine-like nature for at some stage, later in the fourth or early in the fifth century, a small cemetery grew up around it.

The tentative reconstruction which we have outlined to explain Thruxton echoes a practice well known in the Roman world. It is not at all unlikely that ancestral shrines were established at other villas in Britain. This evidently happened at Lullingstone and probably at Littlecote and the practice may have been far more widespread than is at present realised.

The end and the beginning (AD 400–600)

The end of the long-established pattern of rural settlement in the Danebury region came fast. Most of the sites were in active use in the late fourth century but only one—Fullerton—can be shown to have still been in use into the fifth century. Here a scatter of grass-tempered pottery and a brooch, associated with hearths within the old central-hall house, are indicative of some kind of occupation continuing into the middle decades of the fifth century. A few similar sherds were also found unstratified at Thruxton possibly indicating continued visits to the shrine. Given that grass-tempered pottery of the fifth and sixth centuries is highly distinctive and that very large areas that have been excavated during the project, the

paucity of characteristic post-Roman finds is significant and suggests a rapid abandonment of the villas.

The nature and extent of the demographic changes gripping southern Britain in the fifth and sixth centuries are beyond the remit of the present study. Suffice it to say that where material of this date has been found within the region, as for example the extensive scatter of occupation beneath modern Andover, it is invariably on a site with little trace of previous use. The cycle of land use which had begun in the middle of the second millennium BC had come to an end in the middle of the first millennium AD.

The longue durée

The study of the Danebury landscape through time has enabled us to chart the social and economic changes experienced by a rural downland community over a period of two thousand years. It is an interesting observation on the nature of archaeological evidence that while we can identify local 'events' like the periods of dislocation in the middle of the fourth and middle of the first centuries BC, the Roman invasion would have passed unnoticed had it not been for the literary sources. That the evidence is partial in its focus must always be acknowledged when attempting to write a narrative.

What stands out from the study is the determining nature of the landscape and its microenvironments and the continuity of settlement and land use. The study area straddles a divided community marked by the Bourne valley. To the west the chalk soils are thin and delicate; to the east they are more robust with a higher clay content. This has determined an essentially different land use throughout the two millennia of this study but how much of this difference was conditioned by the soil and how much by perceptions of territory and boundary? It is an interesting observation that even in the Neolithic period this east–west divide seems to hold true. To the west the cursus monuments and henge monuments are a common feature while to the east they are unknown.

By the middle of the second millennium this divide was formalised by the Quarley linear enhancing the Bourne scarp where the geomorphology is less dominant. This boundary line seems to have marked a cultural divide throughout the Middle Iron Age. In the Roman period, though the political significance of the line may have declined, there remains a marked

difference in settlement pattern with the close-packed villa estates to the east contrasting with the upland villages of the plain to the west. The ditch was by this time silted up but its line may still have been apparent as a hedge. Is it entirely a coincidence that the county boundary between Wiltshire and Hampshire, which must have been in existence by the eighth century AD, approximates quite closely to the old line? Or are we seeing here a memory of a social difference buried deep in time, captured and perpetuated to become a local political divide which still has meaning today?

Then there are the microenvironments within the broader landscape. In the Mesolithic period the woodland cover would have been more or less continuous though the different qualities of soil may have been apparent in the density and vitality of the vegetation. Gradually, in the Neolithic period the lighter tree cover on the thinner soils was cleared, the clearings coalescing to form tracts of open countryside where human activities—settlement, food production and the burial of the dead—clustered. By the mid-second millennium the land was being divided by permanent boundaries to create tracts of arable. But as centuries of exploitation led gradually to soil exhaustion the old arable was put down to grass while new cornfields were cut out of the woodland to exploit the thicker undamaged soils. By the fourth century AD the process was complete and the large tracts of downland—once the focus of scattered communities—were now the preserve of sheep.

What followed is still something of a mystery. In c.AD 400 the rural population was still living in isolated farmsteads generally sited on the hills. Five hundred years later the population had nucleated into small villages strung out along the river valleys. There are some hints that the valleyward movement was already under way in the late Roman period but thereafter the relocation was rapid and lasting. The cycle of land management which began in the mid-second millennium was now at an end and a new cycle had begun.

The Danebury narrative set out in bold outline here is simply a sketch of the full story. The wealth of archaeological detail now available allows layers of texture to be added and divergent strands to be teased out. The thirty-eight seasons of fieldwork ensure that the Danebury region is probably the most thoroughly studied region of Britain. The challenge now is to develop other regional narratives so that we can see how typical—or otherwise—the Danebury story is of Britain as a whole.

Appendix

Danebury: an Iron Age hillfort in Hampshire

Vol. 1. *The excavations 1969–1978: the site*, by B. Cunliffe (London, Council for British Archaeology Research Report 52) (1984).

Vol. 2. *The excavations 1969–1978: the finds*, by B. Cunliffe (London, Council for British Archaeology Research Report 52) (1984).

Vol. 3. *An aerial photographic interpretation of its environs*, by R. Palmer (London, Royal Commission on the Historical Monuments of England) (1984).

Vol. 4. *The excavations 1979–1988: the site*, by B. Cunliffe and C. Poole (London, Council for British Archaeology Research Report 73) (1991).

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Vol. 2. *The Sites*, by B. Cunliffe and C. Poole (Oxford, English Heritage and Oxford University Committee for Archaeology Monograph 49) (2000).

    Part 1 *Woolbury and Stockbridge Down, Stockbridge, Hants, 1989.*
    Part 2 *Bury Hill, Upper Clatford, Hants, 1990.*
    Part 3 *Suddern Farm, Middle Wallop, Hants, 1991 and 1996.*
    Part 4 *New Buildings, Longstock, Hants, 1992 and Fiveways, Longstock, Hants, 1996.*
    Part 5 *Nettlebank Copse, Wherwell, Hants, 1993.*
    Part 6 *Houghton Down, Stockbridge, Hants, 1994.*
    Part 7 *Windy Dido, Cholderton, Hants, 1995.*

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Vol. 1. *Overview*, by B. Cunliffe (Oxford, English Heritage and Oxford University School of Archaeology Monograph 70) (2008).

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    Part 2 *Grateley South, Grateley, Hants, 1998 and 1999.*
    Part 3 *Fullerton, Hants, 2000 and 2001.*
    Part 4 *Thruxton, Hants, 2002.*
    Part 5 *Rowbury Farm, Wherwell, Hants, 2003.*
    Part 6 *Flint Farm, Goodworth Clatford, Hants, 2004.*
    Part 7 *Dunkirt Barn, Abbotts Ann, Hants, 2005 and 2006.*

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