ASSESSING THE CONTRIBUTION OF COMMERCIAL ARCHAEOLOGY TO THE STUDY OF ROMAN SOMERSET, 1990–2004

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Summary

Since 1990 the overwhelming majority of archaeological fieldwork in Somerset has been undertaken in response to proposals for development. This paper presents an analysis of those commercial investigations which have revealed remains of the Roman period, and seeks to highlight the advances in knowledge that have accrued. It is concluded that developer archaeology has made an uneven contribution to knowledge of Roman Somerset, although a particular achievement is the greatly expanded information base relating to rural farmsteads, which helps to redress the historical bias towards the investigation of high-status villa houses. The small town of Shepton Mallet is also almost entirely known as a consequence of developer work. A number of significant excavations deserve formal publication so that their results can be more widely appreciated.

INTRODUCTION

In November 1990 the mechanism for recording archaeological sites in advance of their destruction by development, a process commonly called rescue archaeology in the 1970s and 80s, underwent a fundamental change in England with the introduction of Planning Policy Guidance Note 16: Archaeology and Planning (PPG 16). This set out a clear presumption in favour of the physical preservation of archaeological remains, but where this was not possible it required developers, rather than the state, to pay for archaeological investigations associated with developments that required planning permission. In the decade following the introduction of PPG 16 investigations prompted by the planning process accounted for 89% of all archaeological interventions in England (Darvill and Russell 2002, 52). In terms of fieldwork a division can be drawn between those investigations which normally occur prior to determination of a planning application ('evaluations') and those secured as a condition of consent ('post-determination' work: so-called because it occurs after the 'determination' of a planning application). The former aim to characterise the archaeology present and inform decisions on its management by using techniques such as surface collection, geophysical survey and trial trenching. The latter are designed to make a record of the archaeology prior to destruction and involve methods such as open area excavation, strip and record sample excavation and watching brief. While there is a rigorous system for documenting pre-determination work, this is not the case for substantial post-determination interventions which are usually only reported in conventional publication. The products of evaluations and smaller post-determination investigations (such as watching briefs) are normally typescript reports produced in very small numbers which are deposited in the local Historic Environment Record (HER). These reports form the principal component of so-called grey literature which is in theory publicly accessible, but in reality local communities and academic researchers have found it difficult to access because of the problems of finding out what is available and its highly

restricted distribution. The need to make the results of developer-funded work more readily available has been recognised as a priority by English Heritage and others in the archaeological community for some years now, and the increasing number of electronic reports accessible via the OASIS website has been a positive development (http://www.oasis.ac.uk). Richard Bradley has recently demonstrated the research potential of these often poorly visible products of commercial archaeology in a study of prehistoric Britain and Ireland. He concluded that syntheses based purely upon conventionally published data contain serious lacunae in a number of important areas (Phillips and Bradley 2005; Bradley 2006; 2007).

In order to further address the hidden value of much commercial work, and complement Bradley's work on prehistoric Britain, in 2007 English Heritage commissioned Cotswold Archaeology and University of Reading to examine the research dividend that could be gained from a study of grey literature relating to investigations that have discovered Roman remains in England, and investigate ways of bridging the gap between individual typescript reports in the HER and overarching regional or national syntheses. The project was designed to have three stages. Stage 1 was concerned with a rapid national overview of how much work had been done between 1990 and 2004, where it was located, and an assessment of what proportion of grey literature had reached conventional publication (Cotswold Archaeology 2008; Fulford and Holbrook forthcoming). Stage 2 targeted four pilot areas (Somerset, Essex, Warwickshire and South and West Yorkshire combined) for a more detailed assessment of the research potential of the grey literature. Somerset was selected as a largely rural county which has experienced less development than areas in South-East England, yet the number of interventions was sufficient to make analysis worthwhile. The pilot programme was completed in 2009, and it is hoped that it will prove possible in Stage 3 to expand the project to cover the whole of England and Wales. The resource implications for this nationwide study are considerable, however, and it is already clear that it will not be possible to study the whole of the country in the detail devoted to the pilot areas. Publication of the case studies therefore highlights the achievements that have accrued from commercial archaeology and the further potential that still exists.

METHOD

In Stage 1 of the project a database was created of archaeological investigations undertaken between 1990 and 2004 which had encountered Roman remains in England. This was formed from data derived from the Archaeological Investigations Project (AIP) hosted by Bournemouth University and the Archives and Monuments Information England (AMIE) database held by English Heritage. For the Stage 2 pilot areas the listings were subjected to a programme of data cleaning and enhancement to ensure as complete a record of relevant activity in each county as possible. Entries in the annual 'Somerset Archaeology' section of *SANH*, and the 'Roman Britain in 199x' section of the journal *Britannia* which did not appear in the AIP or AMIE were added. The relevant issues of *SANH* were also reviewed, and monographs or articles in national journals added as their existence became known. The final version of the Stage 2 database for Somerset listed 163 investigations. At this stage the decision was taken to focus emphasis onto commercial projects, and thus largely exclude targeted interventions by local groups, universities, etc. This reduced the number of investigations to 141 made up of 74 evaluations, 30 watching briefs and 37 excavations. A system of scoring of the reports was instigated to measure their potential contribution against twelve broad research themes.

Once the Stage 2 database had been compiled the project officer Dr Ben Croxford visited the Somerset HER to review the grey literature reports. Those priority reports identified during the preparation stages were rapidly reviewed, rated against the research themes and selectively photocopied if deemed of significant value. Based upon this methodology 84 reports were searched for; 69 were found, and 57 copied. Reports not located were in almost all cases ones listed by the AIP but which for a variety of reasons had not so far been deposited with the HER. Finally a rapid non-exhaustive search of the remaining grey literature in the HER was undertaken. All interventions listed were added to a Microsoft Access Database, with the GIS elements being processed in MapInfo (Fig. 1). The Somerset database is available for consultation and interrogation through the Archaeology Data Service (Holbrook and Morton 2008).

Review of the database and photocopied extracts has been used as the basis for the following account

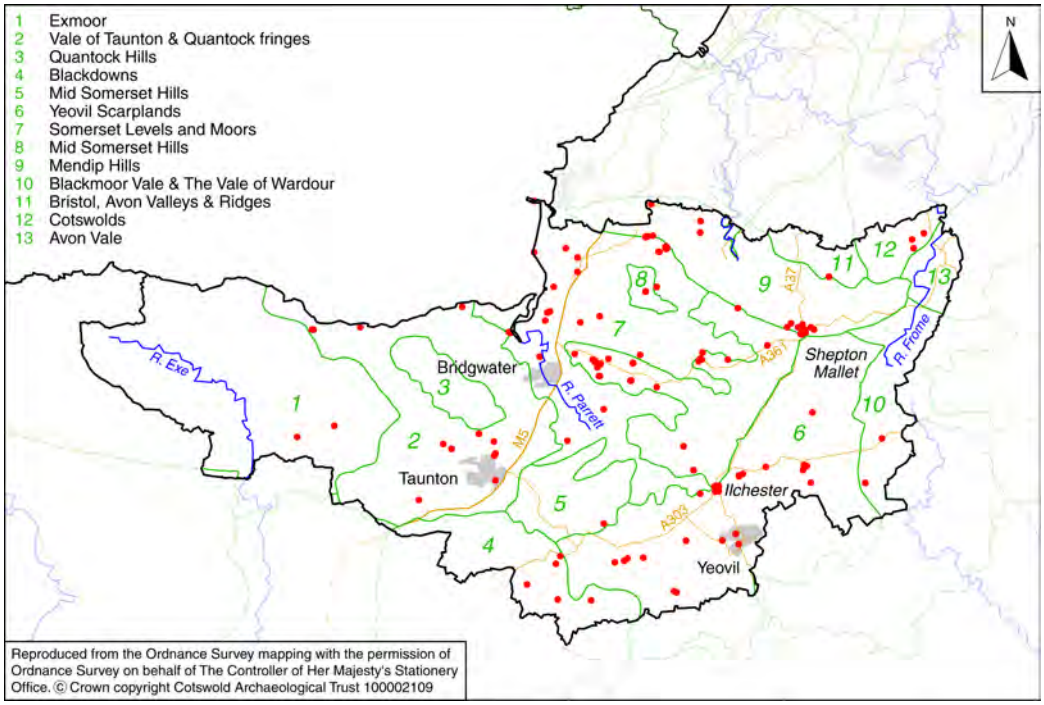

Fig. 1 The distribution of Roman sites investigated in Somerset mapped relative to the National Landscape Character Areas

which seeks to identify topics and themes where commercial archaeology has generated much new data, as well as those areas where less progress has been made. The unevenness of the information gained, both thematically and geographically, will be readily apparent, as is the need to consider the commercially derived evidence alongside that from other sources. I have attempted to give equal weight to discoveries only reported in grey literature to those which have been conventionally published. Each intervention in the project database was ascribed a unique reference number, and this has been used as the basis for referencing sites in the text and locating them on Fig. 2. Sites are referenced in the text by their database identifier, with the bibliographies at the end ordered by these numbers. The bibliographies are split into two parts so that the numbered site references are separated from the general references. For brevity grey literature reports which have subsequently been published have not been referenced, as the published account normally supersedes them. Only the most significant phase of work on a particular site is referenced, so for instance where an excavation has taken place, preceding evaluations are not referenced. To have done so would have expanded the size of the bibliographies considerably, with little added benefit. Site locations are marked on Fig. 2, unless they are in a named urban area. Those interventions not cited in the text are not numbered on Fig. 2 to aid clarity. The rural settlement evidence is considered with reference to the National Landscape Character Areas, rather than any modern political divisions (Natural England 2005). These Landscape Character Areas are mapped relative to major modern features such as settlements, rivers and roads in Fig. 1, and in Fig. 2 the locations of the interventions are shown alongside the principal Roman settlements and roads. The latter are drawn from the *Ordnance Survey Map of Roman Britain* (2001) and the National Monuments Record, with minor additions and deletions.

BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY OF ROMAN SOMERSET

The study of the Romano-British archaeology of Somerset has a long pedigree, the first systematic

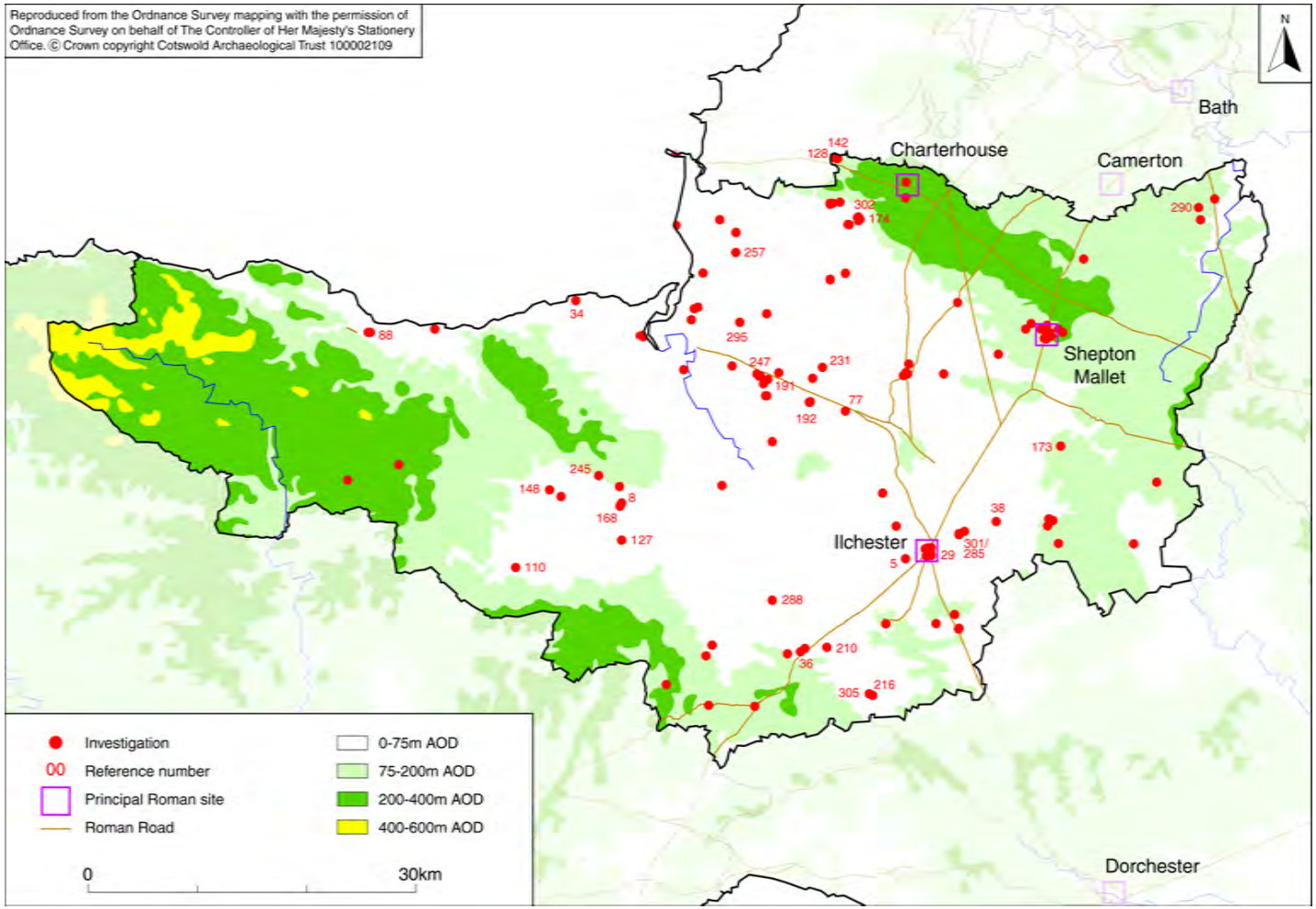

Fig. 2 The distribution of Roman sites investigated in Somerset mapped relative to the Roman road system and major sites

study being produced over 100 years ago (Haverfield 1906). Much of this interest was generated by the wealth of its late Roman villas, a number investigated in the 19th century producing seemingly complete and intelligible plans and a fine array of impressive mosaics (now systematically listed in Cosh and Neal 2005). Development-prompted work over the last 20 years has shifted the emphasis of study away from the villas as land use planning has sought largely to direct new construction away from their sites. Villas remain, however, attractive destinations for research investigation. The most recent overview of Roman Somerset, aimed at a non-specialist audience, was published in 2001 (Leach 2001a), while the South West England Regional Resource Assessment and Research Agenda appeared in 2008 (Webster 2008). The latter publication provides a firm basis to go forward, although the treatment of Roman Somerset is necessarily short and does not include any review of grey literature.

Somerset is topographically diverse, with uplands to north (Mendip) and south (Exmoor, Quantocks and Blackdown Hills). The eastern part of the county is dominated by the flat low-lying wet pastures of the Levels and Moors, surrounded and divided up by low hills, ridges and islands favoured for settlement. The Vale of Taunton Deane is a low clay vale on the southern edge of the Quantocks, while the western part of the county has a varied landscape of hills, wide valley bottoms, ridge-tops and combes.

The traditional map of the political geography of Roman Britain shows the modern county as encompassing parts of three different civitates. Branigan (1976, 109–14) speculated that the Dumnonii lay to the west of the Parrett; the Durotriges between this river and the southern edge of Mendip, with the Belgae to the north. Little evidential value is placed on these putative boundaries in the following account which deals solely with the modern county, and thus excludes consideration of Bath and those parts of the historic county lost to Avon in 1974.

The distribution of developer work has been uneven within the county, with relatively little work on the Quantocks, Exmoor fringe and Mendip (Fig. 1). Ilchester and Shepton Mallet are modern settlements with concomitant development pressures, and much work has occurred here. The M5 corridor has been another focus of activity, especially around Taunton in response to the suburban growth of the county town.

URBANISM

Ilchester was the principal Roman town in Somerset and the only place in the county equipped with urban defences (Leach 1982; 1994). It may have been elevated to the status of a civitas capital in the late Roman period (Fulford 2006). Ilchester aside, a variety of other nucleated settlements are known to varying degrees, although in a number of cases it is difficult to ascertain whether the partially known remains are of an extensive rural settlement rather than a more nucleated market centre (Cheddar is an example). In most cases knowledge of these sites derives from development-prompted investigations, which at Shepton Mallet have generated spectacular gains in knowledge. It is also encouraging that the probable river port site at Crandon Bridge examined prior to the construction of the M5 motorway in 1971 has now at last been published (Rippon 2008). The state of knowledge of Somerset's principal historic towns up to 2003 is presented in a series of extensive urban survey reports (which in a Roman context include Cheddar, Ilchester and Shepton Mallet; Somerset County Council 2003).

Ilchester

At Ilchester most advances have come through work in the suburban areas. To the north, on the opposite bank of the river Yeo from the walled town, limited excavation revealed late 1st-century AD activity suggestive of an early origin for the suburb. This was followed by two phases of 2nd-century timber structures, presumably located in the backlands of strip buildings fronting the Fosse Way (238). Adjacent to the river, a system of boundary ditches was encroached upon in the 4th century by the southern extension of the Northover inhumation cemetery (12). To the west of the town work due to the laying of a water pipeline recorded 1st to 2nd-century timber structures and plant remains suggestive of a close association with crop processing (70). In the late 2nd century a metalled road was laid out, running obliquely from the putative site of the west gate towards the river. Roadside activity starts in the late 2nd/early 3rd century but reaches its maximum extent in the late 3rd or early 4th century. Quarry pits, property boundaries and possible stone structures were revealed, along with three inhumation burials (burial to the rear of roadside structures is well attested in

the southern suburb). The recovery of sprouted grain from an oven might indicate the manufacture of beer, while bones from salt water fish testify to trade with the coast at least 37km distant. To the south of the defences late Roman suburban activity to the east of the Dorchester road stretched for *c.* 70m back from the frontage, with a seemingly isolated farmstead beyond (5). Further south along the road, and on the opposite side of the Bearley Brook, late Roman field boundaries aligned on the road were found in work associated with a pipeline, but there was no trace of any structures within the limited area examined (29). Work to the east of the Fosse Way to the south of Ilchester (56, 186) has demonstrated that suburban activity extended further east and south than had hitherto been thought, although little can be said of its character. Durotrigian pottery recovered from this area either relates to the earliest phase of urban activity or else is associated with the nearby sizeable Iron Age defended enclosure (sometimes referred to as an 'oppidum' although this is a premature classification given the lack of knowledge of the site; Leach 1994, 117–20).

Shepton Mallet

The settlement at Fosse Lane, Shepton Mallet, lies on the Fosse Way a little over half way between Bath and Ilchester. It is almost exclusively known through the medium of developer work (Fig. 3). Roman occupation was first recorded in the 19th century when a large building was found during the construction of a railway. More recently metal detecting and chance discoveries had pointed towards the potential of the area (cf. Smith 1987, 298, for a summary of the limited knowledge of the site in the mid 1980s). The zoning of this modern suburb of Shepton Mallet for commercial and residential expansion in the late 1980s therefore provoked archaeological interest, although a number of planning consents were granted prior to the introduction of PPG 16 in 1990. The first development to come forward was the Showerings site, which was subject to trial trenching in 1990 and full excavation later that year (Leach 2001b). In the following years adjacent sites on either side of the Fosse Way were archaeologically evaluated, geophysics being routinely employed as an evaluation technique with impressive results. Most of these sites proceeded to a further phase of mitigation works, the response varying according to the nature of the planning conditions and the prevailing national archaeological policy of the time (in essence the belief to which preservation in situ could be achieved within a development, and the balancing of this with the desire for mitigation works to produce archaeologically intelligible results). An extensive area immediately to the north of the Showerings site was examined in two parts following an initial trial trench evaluation in 1994. In the northern sector (Mendip Business Park) investigation was limited to a myriad of small trenches where foundation pads were to be placed. The results are hardly intelligible and contribute little to our knowledge of the Roman settlement (42). In contrast the southern part of the site (Tesco) was subjected to extensive excavation in 1996 with impressive results (80). More recently a further site to the north of the Mendip Business Park at Mendip Avenue has been subjected to investigation of its latest deposits through a programme of surface cleaning (299). Other significant excavations have occurred on the opposite side of the Fosse Way at the Wolff Construction site in 2004 (270) and near the southern periphery of the settlement at Cannard's Grave in 1995 (116). Full reports have to date only been published on the Showerings and Cannard's Grave sites. In seeking to contextualise his findings Leach (2001b) was able to draw on his knowledge of discoveries at other sites up to 1995, but the work at Tesco, Wolff Construction and Cannard's Grave considerably amplifies the evidence. A full publication level report on the Tesco excavation has been prepared and will be published in *SANH* 155, whilst only very brief summaries currently exist of the Wolff Construction and Mendip Avenue sites.

By combining the Showerings and Tesco data it is possible to reconstruct a series of eight compounds, defined variously (or sequentially) by banks or walls, stretching back eastwards from the Fosse Way frontage (which has not been examined on the east side of the road). Ellis and Leach consider that the compound walls were of some height, and compare them to 18th or 19th-century garden walls rather than low banks which served purely to control stock. A variety of structures was found within the compounds, of both timber-framed and dry-stone construction, some with mortared floors. Some of the former may have served both as residential accommodation and barns or stock-houses. Occupation appears to have begun in the AD 80s and continued until the early 5th century at least. In

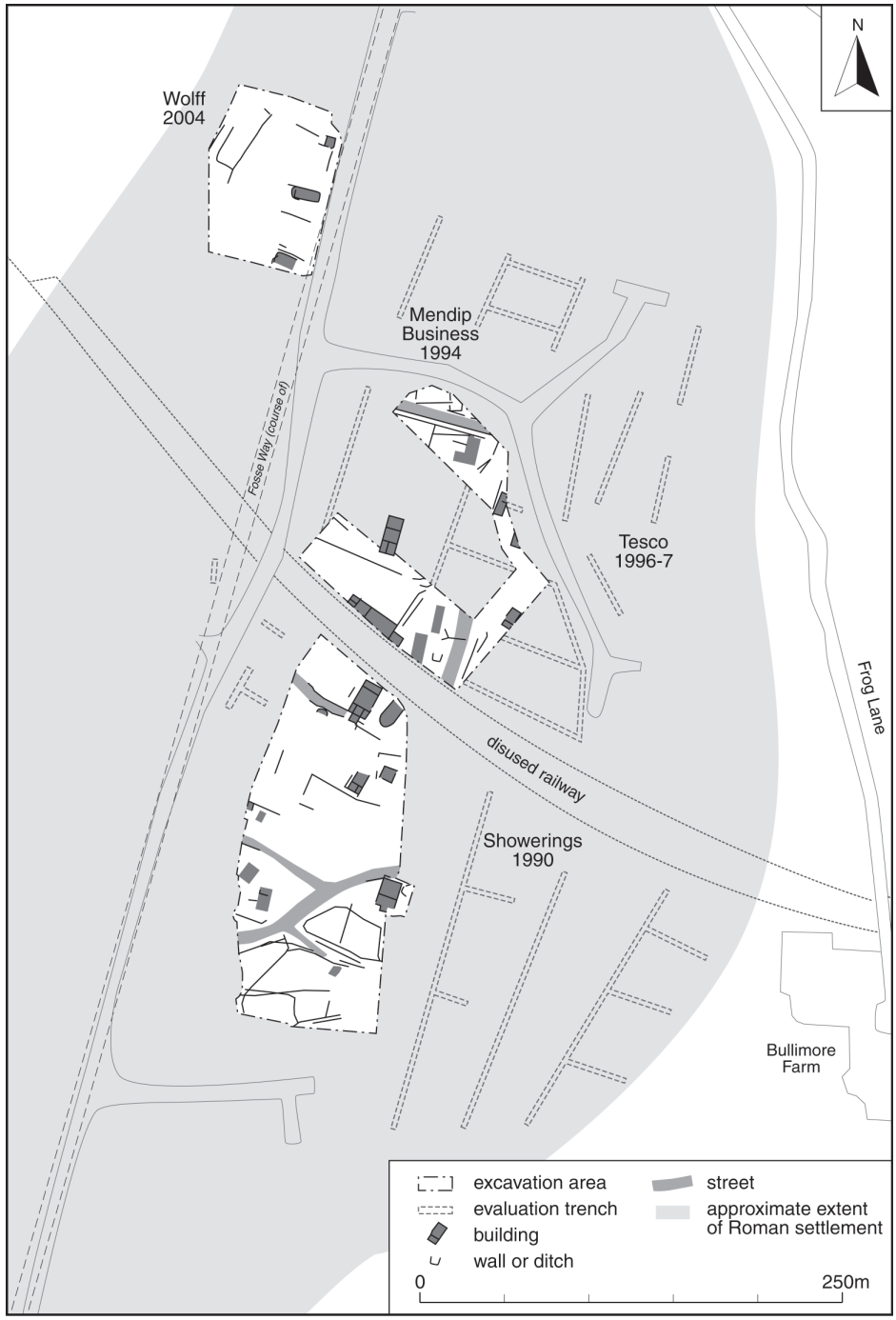

Fig. 3 Investigations within the small town of Fosse Lane, Shepton Mallet. Numerous investigations combine to suggest that the town may have been made up of around 40 ditched or walled compounds at its maximum extent. After P. Leach; Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit; C. and N. Hollinrake

some of the compounds there was evidence of flooding, a layer of silt seemingly marking abandonment during the 3rd century before reoccupation in the 4th. It is assumed that there were buildings on the street frontage, with those excavated perhaps representing secondary structures within the compounds or, in the case of the better constructed ones, the possibility that accumulated wealth allowed some families to construct higher quality residences in the backlands. Burials form the final event on these sites, although they need not necessarily indicate that occupation had ceased within the compounds.

To the north of the Tesco site the evidence is known only by evaluation and highly localised recording. A well-made road ran back from the Fosse Way at right angles and at least two further stone buildings, apparently set within compounds, spread over a distance of *c.* 200m. Further north again at the Mendip Avenue site occupation appears less intense with no evidence of stone structures within the frequently redefined plots. There was a scattering of late or post-Roman inhumation burials.

On the opposite (west) side of the Fosse Way work in 2004 at the Wolff Construction site examined only the latest deposits on an extensive basis, but here three compounds were detected, laid out after a period of street wash had accumulated alongside the Fosse Way. Rectangular stone buildings fronted onto the road, with small scale quarrying and field boundaries to the rear. Following the demolition of the buildings, their sites were occupied by pitched stone platforms, hearths and ovens suggesting the presence of timber-framed structures which no longer respected the late Roman arrangement of property boundaries.

Although Iron-Age activity is well represented in the vicinity of Shepton Mallet, as yet no evidence of Late Pre-Roman Iron Age activity has been found within the Fosse Lane settlement itself, and it would appear to be an essentially new foundation of the late 1st century AD. For instance, at Cannard's Grave on the southern periphery of the settlement four roundhouses dated to the 5th–3rd century BC, but the next phase of activity was 2nd-century AD land division followed by the construction of a masonry building in the early-mid 4th century. Ellis and Leach (in rep. 80, p. 106) believe that the Fosse Lane settlement grew organically to eventually contain around 40 compounds which were involved in the collection of agricultural products from the surrounding region, and their distribution via the road network. Doubtless there were also opportunities to service the needs of traffic passing along the Fosse Way as well. As far as is known, there was only one high-status building within the settlement, that destroyed by the railway in the 19th century.

Of particular interest at Fosse Lane has been the chronology of the very latest deposits. Occupation and activity in the 4th century was vigorous, although the very latest coins issued between AD 378–402 are not that well represented. Absolute dating methods, however, raise the possibility that occupation may have either continued well into the 5th century and beyond, or else that there was reoccupation at some date before the end of the 7th century. At the Showerings site a skeleton in a lead coffin yielded a radiocarbon date of 420–767 cal AD and another with hobnailed footware 430–680 cal AD (Leach 2001b, 28, 45). Further evidence derives from archaeomagnetic dates of 285±80, 400±90, 515±45 and 515±65 AD derived from hearths overlying the demolished buildings at the Wolff Construction site (the dates are not yet fully published, but are cited in Webster 2008, 173, although the confidence level is not stated). Doubtless had other burials and features been dated by absolute scientific techniques similar results would have been obtained. Obtaining greater refinement of the character and date of this late or post-Roman activity at Shepton Mallet should be a major research objective of future investigations.

Cheddar

Rahtz (1970) identified Roman remains at Cheddar Vicarage which he interpreted as a villa. More recent work has shown that occupation extends for a distance of at least 150m west from the Vicarage, including a substantial stone-built aisled building of probable late-Roman date (174). Attempts to describe Cheddar as a small town or river port are premature, work further north finding solely a field ditch (302), and the site could just as easily be a villa as a small town (Webster 2000, 80–1, fig. 13.2 maps the location of some of these investigations in relation to the late Saxon palace). Nevertheless the possibility that there was a substantial settlement here cannot be excluded on current evidence, and the riverside location and proximity to mineral resources are suggestive of a site akin to that at Crandon Bridge (Rippon 2008).

RURAL SETTLEMENT AND AGRICULTURE

The rural settlement pattern of Somerset has traditionally been viewed through the medium of villas, Mattingly (2006, 399) for instance believing that villa development was retarded due to the initial resistance of the Durotriges and that their poor representation on the Levels is evidence for a high degree of state exploitation there. Taylor (2007, fig. 4.6) takes more regard of the non-villa evidence and deduces a boundary in west Somerset between the settlement pattern characteristic of the south-west peninsular, where isolated enclosures dominate, and a transitional zone characterised by more complex and extensive sites. This reinforces the conclusions reached by Leech (1982, 225), who observed that villas are much rarer to the west of the Parrett than to the east of it (a concentration of villas close to the Fosse Way to the south-west of Ilchester form a slight exception to this pattern; see Taylor 2007, fig. 4.9).

As has been mentioned developer archaeology has added relatively little to our knowledge of Somerset villas, although there is one notable exception. The construction of a minor access road at Mill House, Lopen, in 2001 led to the discovery of a previously unknown villa and prompted a limited programme of recording and investigation of the uppermost Roman levels (210). The site lies less than 1km from the Fosse Way and 13km south-west of Ilchester. Undated ditches predated the construction of the villa which was itself of two phases. The first phase, which did not contain any mosaics, consisted of a range of rooms and a corridor. This was later extended to the west by the addition of a bipartite ?*triclinium*, furnished with geometric mosaics, and other rooms including a corridor with mosaic. By analogy, the mosaics are dated to the third quarter of the 4th century (Cosh and Neal 2005, nos 206.1–2). Coins and pottery recovered from the surface cleaning confirm only a broad late-Roman date. Lopen aside, investigations of the periphery of known villas at Stock Down Farm near Ilchester (29) and Star on the Mendip Hills (128 and 142) provide relatively little new knowledge. At Edington Holy Well on the Poldens monitoring of a water pipe trench revealed evidence for stone structures associated with hypocaust tile which are most plausibly interpreted as a previously unrecorded villa (77). Most new information on villas has derived from research projects, and the site at Blacklands, Hemington (290), on Mendip is particularly notable as a rare example of a villa in Somerset which appears to have been built no later than the early 2nd century.

Much more has been learnt of non-villa rural settlements. To the west of the Parrett there has been a particular focus of activity in the environs of Taunton within the Vale of Taunton Deane, which has to some extent mitigated the lack of publication of seemingly comparable sites such as Holway, Stoke St Mary, and Maylands Road, Wellington, investigated in advance of the construction of the M5 motorway (Dawson *et al.* 2003, sites 52 and 80). Two sites, less than 1km apart, have been excavated at Maidenbrook Farm (8) and Nerrol's Farm (168) which were conceivably part of a single dispersed agricultural settlement. Maidenbrook Farm was subject to open area excavation and has been published; Nerrol's Farm was examined on a more piecemeal basis and is only reported in grey literature. While the sequence seems broadly to be the same at both sites, it is accordingly much better understood at Maidenbrook Farm. Here a small circular enclosure, most probably surrounding a roundhouse, and an adjacent larger enclosure containing square or rectangular post-built structures, originated in the Late Iron Age and was abandoned in the late 1st or 2nd century AD. The next phase of activity dates to the 3rd and 4th centuries, but whether this marks a phase of land use replanning in a continuous sequence of occupation, or renewed activity after a period of abandonment, is unclear. In the later period it would appear that the focus of domestic activity had shifted elsewhere, and the area was occupied by a boundary wall with an adjoining rectilinear enclosure containing hearths. At Nerrol's Farm prehistoric activity stretched back to the Bronze Age, and an Iron Age roundhouse was found. The earliest Romano-British activity was a single ditch which was replaced by the fragmentary traces of a rectangular building with drystone foundations (perhaps a sill wall supporting a cob or timber superstructure). Maidenbrook Farm and Nerrol's Farm demonstrate the existence of an extensive agriculture landscape with continuity of Iron Age traditions stretching into the 2nd century. Whether there is an as yet unlocated domestic focus for the later Roman activity, or whether the settlement consisted purely of dispersed buildings set amongst the fields, remains to be determined. At Nerrol's Farm an isolated pit contained organic material which produced a radiocarbon date of 420–570 cal AD (Wk 8566; calibrated at 95% probability), which

(if this single date can be taken at face value) might indicate that activity stretched into the 5th century, or that the area was reoccupied at some point in the 5th or 6th century. At Hillyfields, another site in the environs of Taunton, rectangular fields which may have originated in the Iron Age continued in use into the early Roman period (127). Once again there was later 3rd or 4th-century landscape reorganisation when a series of ditched paddocks and gardens were established (a rectangular arrangement of ditches might define the site of a timber building of which no trace remained). The main focus of domestic occupation again presumably lay elsewhere.

The sites excavated in the vicinity of Taunton appear to be part of extensive, unenclosed rural settlements which can be ascribed to Taylor's (2007, 19) broad classification of Linear System Settlements, although isolated ditched enclosures do occur in western Somerset. At Dene Cross, Bishop's Lydeard, on the fringes of the Quantocks, evaluation sampled the ditch of a rectilinear enclosure known from cropmarks (148). The lowest fills contained late Iron Age pottery, whilst the upper fills which perhaps mark the abandonment of the enclosure produced late 1st or early 2nd-century AD pottery.

Few Romano-British sites have been examined on the Quantocks and their fringes in advance of development, but the research project conducted by the University of Winchester has included excavation at the villa at Yarford (245). As few other sites have been examined in this area, the work at Hinkley Point (34) on the west Somerset coast is noteworthy. Here investigation utilising geophysical survey and trial trench evaluation revealed two conjoined rectilinear enclosures, one of which may have contained roundhouses. Evidence of Iron Age activity was restricted to a few sherds of pottery, the bulk of the assemblage dating to the later Roman period. Further evidence of the nature of Romano-British settlement in western Somerset was found at Wiveliscombe on the eastern fringe of Exmoor in 2006 (and thus strictly outside the time frame of this project). Here two probable late Iron Age/early Roman roundhouses were succeeded during the Roman period by a probable rectangular building associated with iron smithing. A pottery vessel containing a hoard of in excess of 2000 late 3rd-century coins was found within the footprint of the building (Payne and Webster 2010, 206).

To the east of the Parrett, work on the Yeovil scarplands in the south-east part of the county is dominated by investigations at Yeovilton, 3km from Ilchester, which has yielded particularly good environmental data (301). Another excavation on the site of the Fleet Air Arm Museum found further evidence, but this is unreported save for a very brief summary (285). Considerable landscape continuity was revealed at Yeovilton, with the pattern and alignment of ditches and trackways established during the late Iron Age continuing into the later Roman period. While some 1st-century BC/AD pottery was recovered, clear evidence of occupation at this period was difficult to identify and the excavated remains dated predominately to the later Roman period. A small farmstead containing stone-founded buildings lay within a network of paddocks, fields, and trackways. The field system was made of up narrow strips, while some larger paddocks seem to have been associated with a trackway that ran between the Fosse Way and a minor road leading eastwards from Ilchester. Another settlement is known from cropmarks 500m to the north-west of the excavated area adjacent to the trackway. The late prehistoric and Romano-British field pattern seems to have had a long-lasting influence on landscape organisation as post-medieval ridge and furrow respected the Roman alignment. The field system at Yeovilton falls within the tradition of so-called 'Celtic' fields characteristic of Wessex (Taylor 2007, 70, cites other Somerset examples including Shapwick on the Polden Hills). An extensive suite of environmental studies shows that the late Roman farm was involved in large-scale cereal production and processing, including the cutting of hay. Insect remains included a grain weevil and a honey bee.

Very little developer work has occurred on rural settlement on the Levels and Moors, the sole exception being a soil horizon sealed between layers of sterile estuarine silt at Brent Knoll which may have been a product of the manuring of the land from a nearby settlement (257). More has been found on the Polden Hills, a rib of land rising steeply out of the Levels which was utilised by the road which led from Ilchester towards Crandon Bridge. Work during the laying of a water pipe between Woolavington and Shapwick over a distance of 10km provided an opportunity to examine a series of sites along the ridge (77). Whilst the work was limited in extent, it did provide an insight into the density of settlement along a transect 0.5km north of the road. The probable villa at Edington Holy Well has already been mentioned, and a second site was found 580m north-west of it which appears to have commenced

in the Iron Age and continued throughout the Roman period. Only field ditches were found in the pipe trench so the status of this settlement, if that is what it is, remains uncertain. At Chilton Polden pottery once again attests to Iron Age activity, but the main discovery was a stone building. Associated artefacts were predominately low status and it was considered that the building was more likely part of a farmstead rather than an outbuilding to a villa complex.

INDUSTRY

Discussions of industry in Somerset have tended to focus on the exploitation of metals, stone and salt. Developer archaeology has made relatively little contribution to our knowledge of these industries as they mostly took place in the largely undeveloped parts of the modern county. Whilst significant advances have been made in understanding the Mendip lead industry (Todd 2007) and the Blackdown and Exmoor iron industries (Griffith and Weddell 1996; Riley and Wilson North 2001, 78–81 and current unpublished work on the Exmoor iron industry by Exeter University) this has all been achieved through research-driven fieldwork. Likewise important work on a saltern at East Huntspill, where discoveries included two settling tanks and a hearth, has been prompted by work in response to erosion rather than development (295). Commercial archaeology has made some advances, however, and a notable example of its ability to turn up unexpected discoveries comes from Cade's Farm, Wellington, where evaluation revealed a series of ditches, one of which produced over 400 sherds of pottery (110). The pottery was clearly production waste (seconds, rejects and wasters) from a nearby clamp or kiln. The forms were mostly greyware jars, including storage jars, and are datable to the 3rd century. Wellington can now be considered the site of another greyware industry which produced pottery for local markets in Somerset and east Devon, comparable with Norton Fitzwarren 7km to the north-east (Holbrook and Bidwell 1991, 175). Further kilns producing mortaria and seemingly Severn Valley ware were discovered near Shepton Mallet in 1864. Evaluation near their site suggests that the kilns have been largely destroyed, although abundant residual pottery was recovered (239). While perhaps not strictly industry, the discovery of a Romano-British limekiln at Castle Cary is a relatively uncommon find (173). The kiln was of circular plan and had been dug deeply into a sloping hillside. This site is discussed further below.

COMMUNICATIONS

A watching brief on a pipeline just outside Ilchester investigated the structure of the road to Dorchester adjacent to the crossing of the Bearley Brook (29). Cobbled surfaces were replaced by limestone slabs and it is speculated that this might be associated with the replacement of a timber bridge in stone. A quantity of stone rubble was found infilling the original channel of the stream, including one block with a groove which may have held an upright parapet slab. Traces of a dry stone revetment, conceivably an abutment, had previously been found on one bank of the stream (Leach 1982, 109). The apparent recognition of a stone bridge is a rarity in southern Britain (Holbrook 1996, 122–3).

BELIEF, RELIGION AND BURIAL

The most newsworthy discovery at the Showerings site in Shepton Mallet was a silver pendant with punched chi-ro cross found as a grave good. From the outset there were concerns about the composition of the metal used for the amulet, which was unique for a Roman object (Johns 2001). Subsequent analysis has now confirmed that the silver can date no earlier than the 19th century and the artefact is therefore a modern forgery inserted into a Roman grave during the course of excavation (*Current Archaeology* 225 (December 2008), 8).

There is a growing recognition of the significance of structured deposition within Romano-British archaeology, and speculation on the beliefs that underpinned this behaviour (Fulford 2001). At Castle Cary a pit or trench was dug into the top of a limekiln after its final firing and a bronze figurine of a Lar placed at the base of the cut (173). The figurine is of probable 2nd-century date and is not dissimilar to the group from the nearby temple at Lamyatt Beacon (Leech 1986). It is conceivable that it was deposited as an act of thanks or protection for the building for which the lime was destined – perhaps an undiscovered temple or shrine overlooking the source of the river Cary. A similar motivation can be surmised for the deposition of an iron anvil and a small quantity of slag in the terminal of a field ditch at Hillyfields (127). Structured deposition was not

solely limited to artefacts, however. A well at the Yeovilton farmstead contained six dogs, a cat, a domestic fowl, an abundance of the heads and feet of sheep, and two complete pots (301). Comparison was made between the contents of the well and one in the southern suburbs of Ilchester (Leach 1982, 82) and another at Oakridge, Hampshire (Maltby 1993). The excavator considered that the contents of the well might have been deliberate placements, perhaps marking the change of use of this part of the site from agricultural production to burial, although the possibility that the dogs were disposed of to control population numbers is not discounted. Given the evidence elsewhere for the deposition of animals in wells, especially dogs, a ritual rather than functional interpretation is preferable.

Evidence for human burial is widespread in the county. At Ilchester and Shepton Mallet the practice of inhumation burial in the backlands of roadside plots is well recorded and now occasions little surprise. Just how widespread in Somerset this tradition of burial in and around settlements was, has been brought into clearer relief by commercial work. The practice of crouched inhumation in the late Iron Age in Dorset is well known (Whimster 1981), and further evidence for this so-called Durotrigian tradition has been found in south Somerset at North Perrott (305). Here a middle/late Iron Age roundhouse settlement was replaced by a small rectangular building set inside a ditched boundary (Fig. 4). Five burials were found in pits, tightly crouched in the foetal position. One burial had been partially disturbed whilst there was sufficient flesh to maintain articulation, the shallow grave also containing two additional articulated arms. Pottery associated with the settlement terminated in the 1st century AD, later activity seemingly shifting to an adjacent site. A further pit burial of similar date was found in a watching brief to the south of the main excavation area (216). In the report comparisons are made with the massacre deposits at the Somerset hillforts of Worlebury and South Cadbury, and it was speculated that the site may have been destroyed by fire and abandoned during the invasion of AD 43 or in the Boudican revolt. Given the re-interpretation of the massacre deposits (Moore 2006, 118–22), there is no necessity to invoke the agency of the Roman army to explain the discoveries at North Perrott and the burials can be seen as part of an indigenous tradition where interment marks the final act in the abandonment of a site.

Most of the other examples of rural burials have come from evaluations or watching briefs where it is difficult to determine their context. In addition to North Perrott, only at Yeovilton has investigation occurred on a large scale. Here twelve late-Roman inhumations (six in wooden coffins) were scattered on the periphery of the settlement, usually close to or in ditches (301). Cremation is much less widely represented than inhumation, a 3rd or 4th-century cremation adjacent to a farmstead at Camel Hill Farm being a rare example (38). The evidence is dominated by later Roman extended inhumations, although the crouched posture of an isolated inhumation at Greinton might suggest an early Roman date (192). The late Roman tradition of burial on the periphery of non-villa rural settlements is well established, and the evidence from Ilchester and Shepton Mallet can be regarded as an urban manifestation of this indigenous and widespread tradition. Interestingly less evidence for burial has been recorded in this survey from the extensively excavated sites in the Vale of Taunton Deane, although excavations on the East Taunton Park and Ride site at Cambria Farm, Ruishton in 2009 found 30 inhumations within a field system (Payne and Webster 2010, 205).

Radiocarbon dating at Shepton Mallet has shown that some of the seemingly late-Roman burials in fact date to the 5th century or later. Doubtless if radiocarbon dating was routinely applied to rural burials other similarly late dates might be recovered. For instance at Puckington a small cemetery of six inhumations was found which is 'probably Romano-British but no dating evidence was found' (288). The absence of artefacts may in itself be instructive, and scientific dating of the skeletons could quite conceivably show that they date to the post-Roman rather than Roman period.

CONTINUITY AND DISCONTINUITY OF SETTLEMENT

There is no evidence that any urban centre in Somerset had a late pre-Roman Iron Age origin, although the juxtaposition of the sizeable late Iron Age enclosure with the forts and later town at Ilchester does suggest some form of relationship here. Unsurprisingly there is much greater evidence of settlement continuity in the countryside, especially non-villa sites, although this can usually only be determined clearly where open area excavation has occurred. To the east of the Parrett continuity of

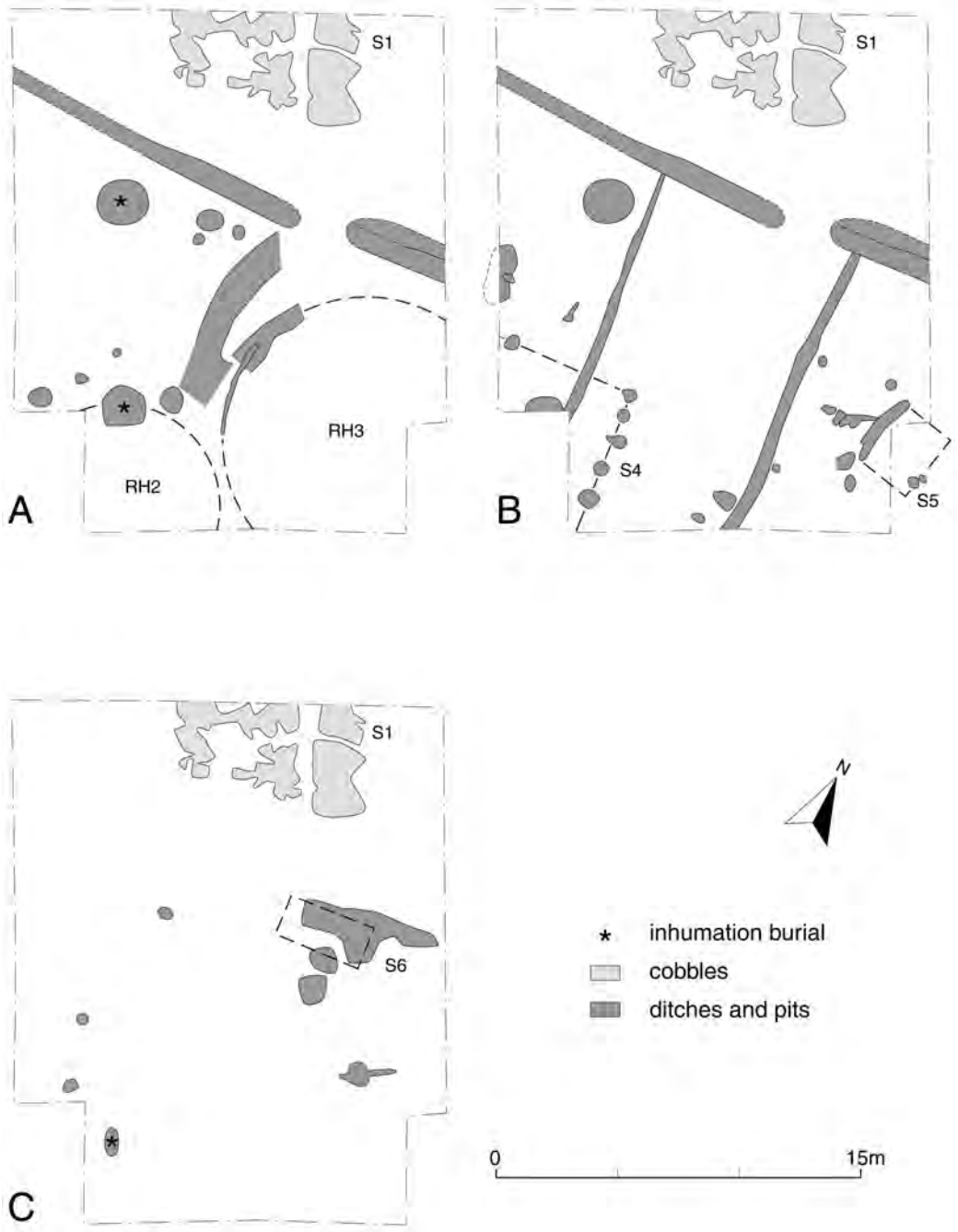

Fig. 4 Phasing suggested by the excavators at North Perrott School (305). A: middle/late Iron Age roundhouse settlement. B: late Iron Age rectangular structures. C: Ultimate pre-Roman Iron Age, boundary ditches fall out of use. Five inhumations buried in pits were a feature of this site which was abandoned in the 1st century AD. After C. and N. Hollinrake; scale 1:300

farming is indicated at Yeovilton (301) and to the west at the Maidenbrook Farm/Nerrol's Farm and Hillyfields sites in the Vale of Taunton Deane (8, 168, 127; Cade's Farm, Wellington may be another; 110). At these latter sites dislocation in agricultural practice, and presumably settlement as well, occurs in the late 1st or 2nd century AD with different layouts evident in the later 3rd and 4th centuries. While it is possible that parts of these settlements were abandoned and then reoccupied, it is simplest on general grounds to believe that there was continuity in farming. The apparent gap between the late 1st/2nd and late 3rd/4th-century phases may therefore not be real and could just be a product of the dates ascribed to ceramic assemblages dominated by conservative coarseware traditions in which the better dated finewares are poorly represented. Further north on the Polden Hills there are hints of Iron Age antecedents to the non-villa settlements at Chilton Polden and Edington Clover Close, but this is based on a general assessment of the pottery recovered in a watching brief and is not backed up by structural detail (77). Overall a mid-Roman reorganisation in rural settlement and land use appears to be sufficiently widespread that it should be viewed as the norm, and sites which vary from this pattern are consequently worthy of highlight. In south Somerset the Iron Age settlement and cemetery at North Perrott came to an end in the 1st century AD, although it is stretching the evidence too far to assert that this need be due to a violent act associated with either the Roman invasion or Boudican revolt (305). The enclosure at Dene Cross, one of the few such sites examined in western Somerset, appears to have come to an end in the late 1st or early 2nd century, but whether this marks the end of settlement in this locality or a shift in its form and focus is unclear (148).

Most villas in Somerset are traditionally dated to the 3rd and 4th centuries, with little evidence for early Roman or late Iron Age origins. While the essential truth of this statement is not disputed, and a late Roman date is indicated for the probable villa at Edington Holy Well (77), the pattern is not absolute as research excavations at Yarford on the Quantocks (245) and Blacklands, Hemington (290) on Mendip demonstrate that some villas at least developed out of sites occupied in the late Iron Age. At Shapwick a villa was constructed in the late 2nd century on a site where there had been late Iron Age occupation. It was seemingly short lived and was demolished in the early 3rd century (231).

Somerset has some of the best evidence for the archaeologically elusive interface between the late Roman and post-Roman periods (Webster 2008, 169–88). In an urban setting, the evidence for 5th-century or later activity at Shepton Mallet has already been discussed, and the single radiocarbon date at Nerrol's Farm might hint at something similar in a rural context (168). Later Roman activity has also been found on two sites which were of significance in the post-Roman and Saxon periods. At Cheddar Roman occupation on the site adopted for the late Saxon palace has been found (174), but a programme of scientific dating will be required to determine whether features containing Roman ceramics are in fact somewhat later in date than they at first seem. Evaluation on the site of a possible early medieval monastery at Carhampton on the northern fringe of Exmoor has recovered late Roman pottery (including South Devon ware), as well as post-Roman Mediterranean imports (Bi, Bii and the first instance of 7th-century Gaulish E ware from the county), which show that activity continued, or recommenced after a gap, in the 6th or 7th centuries (88).

MATERIAL CULTURE

Nearly all the reports reviewed contain sections dealing with the pottery of one sort or another, but their utility varies widely depending not only on the size, condition and stratification of the assemblages, but also the approach and detail adopted in the reporting. Specialist reports within major excavation reports, both published and unpublished, normally deal with the material in a good level of detail and provide meaningful quantification. This analysis, even of a poorly stratified rural assemblage, provides a good indication of the forms and proportions of different fabrics present. Such a level of detail allows patterns of trade to be detected and economic deductions made. For instance there are a number of new rural assemblages which add to Allen and Fulford's (1996) analysis of the distribution of South-East Dorset Black-Burnished ware, although the failure of some reports to differentiate between South-East Dorset Black-Burnished ware and the South-Western variety obscures the patterns in the earlier Roman period. On sites to the west of the Parrett in the Vale of Taunton Deane such as at Maidenbrook Farm and Hillyfields (8, 127) South-East Dorset Black-Burnished occurs in smaller quantities than at sites further east, locally produced greywares dominating the assemblages. It is now starting to be possible to refine the distribution of the inter-linked local greyware industries which

operated in South Somerset and East Devon in the 2nd and 3rd centuries. For instance we can begin to trace the distribution and importance of the greyware industry at Norton Fitzwarren thanks to work around Taunton, and the discovery of production waste from an industry producing jars, including some within the South-Western Grey Ware Storage Jar tradition, at Cade's Farm, Wellington (110) adds further refinement to our knowledge of these wares (Holbrook and Bidwell 1991, 175–7). In a number of reports there is reference to 'Congresbury type greywares' (as at Hinckley Point; 34). This is a misleading term which should be avoided unless attribution to the Congresbury kilns is reasonably assured. While material from the kiln is unpublished in detail (Usher and Lilley 1964) it has generally been thought that this fabric had a localised distribution in the north of the county (Rippon 2008, 134–40).

Aside from pottery, it is worth noting that few coins have been recovered from the extensive rural excavations in the Vale of Taunton Deane. This stands in contrast to late-Roman sites further east and north, and fits more with the pattern seen further west in Devon where coins are extremely rare on rural sites.

CONCLUSIONS

Developer archaeology has made an uneven contribution towards our knowledge of Roman Somerset. With the exception of the spectacular discovery at Lopen, little of note has been discovered about villas through this medium. That is not to say that no research has taken place on villas, as universities, local groups and the *Time Team* have investigated sites including Dinnington (36); Blacklands, Hemington (290); Shapwick (231); Stawell (191, 247), Peart villa, Springfield; Whitestaunton, and Yarford (245). There is comparatively little grey literature pertaining to these mostly as yet unpublished excavations. Any disappointment would be misplaced, however, for the advances in knowledge that developer work has brought on the broad array of different types of non-villa rural settlement has been extremely valuable. This has greatly amplified and refined our understanding of the settlement archaeology of the county, and provided an essential counterbalance to the traditional focus on villas and their associated art. Developer work also helps mitigate any underestimation of rural sites based upon cropmark evidence, which has made less of an impact in Somerset than some other parts of the country due to the nature of the soils. Our evidence base has been enhanced considerably since 1990, both in the quantity and quality of data recovered, and we are now in a good position to build upon and develop the pioneering research by Roger Leech (1982). One area which is still weak, however, is the palaeoenvironmental record (although Yeovilton is a notable exception). The routine sampling, analysis and reporting of good quality plant and faunal assemblages would greatly enhance our knowledge base. Rural settlements examined on any scale to the east of the Parrett also normally produce a scattering of dispersed inhumation burials, and we can now recognise these as a normal component of such sites. Settlements to the west of the Parrett appear to be of somewhat different character to those further east, and the field archaeology of the Vale of Taunton Deane and the Quantocks has more in common with that of eastern Devon. The work in advance of pipelines has also yielded valuable insights into the density of Romano-British settlement in different parts of the county, the Polden Villages project (77) for example forming a useful companion to the Shapwick parish research project (Gerrard with Aston 2007). It is not only in the countryside that advances have been made, however, and Shepton Mallet is now one of the most extensively investigated small towns in western Britain.

A fair proportion of the most significant investigations undertaken within the county has reached full publication, but a number of significant sites reside solely in grey literature (North Perrott School (305) for example). Much more work has occurred at Shepton Mallet beyond that reported by Leach in 2001 (Leach 2001b) and it is to be hoped that a second volume will be published which will pull these later investigations together. In this respect it is encouraging that this survey has encouraged the excavators to dust off the grey literature report on the Tesco excavation (80), which was nothing less than a publication draft awaiting a suitable vehicle, and it will shortly appear in *SANH*.

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