THE FIELDS OF
BRITANNIA

STEPHEN RIPPON
CHRIS SMART
BEN PEARS

THE FIELDS OF BRITANNIA

The Fields of Britannia

*Continuity and Change in the Late Roman
and Early Medieval Landscape*

STEPHEN RIPPON, CHRIS SMART,
AND BEN PEARS

OXFORD
UNIVERSITY PRESS

This book is dedicated to Mick Aston,
a truly inspirational scholar and colleague

Preface and Acknowledgements

In 1996, a young Stephen Rippon was interviewed for a lectureship at the Department of History and Archaeology at the University of Exeter. One future research project he talked about was the need to take a broad landscape-scale view of the transition from Roman to medieval Britain, and having got the job at Exeter, he set about exploring different aspects of that subject. An early paper discussed some initial ideas (Rippon 2000a), one of which—the need for more work on palaeoenvironmental sequences—was explored in South West England through a project titled 'Landscapes in Transition', generously funded by the Leverhulme Trust (award F/00144/D: Fyfe et al. 2003; 2004; Rippon et al. 2006). Several PhD students explored the Roman to medieval evidence from specific parts of the country, including Chris Smart (2008), who was awarded an AHRC studentship for his thesis 'Continuity over crisis: the landscape of Southern Gloucestershire and South-East Somerset in the late Roman and early medieval periods'. There remained, however, the need for a larger-scale study with two particular characteristics: firstly, that covered the whole of Roman Britain but avoided simply repeating broad-brush narratives that obscured the possibilities of local/regional differences in the experience of native and immigrant communities in the fifth century; and secondly, a project that complimented the traditional approach towards this period—of writing a narrative—by using quantified data. And so was born the 'Fields of Britannia Project', generously supported by the Leverhulme Trust (award F/00 144/BI). In addition to the Principal Investigator, Stephen Rippon, it employed a team comprising Chris Smart and Ben Pears as the two Associate Research Fellows who worked on the archaeological and palaeo-environmental material respectively, and Fiona Fleming as the Ph.D. student. Additional funding from the University of Exeter enabled research assistant Adam Wainwright to collect the palaeoeconomic data (animal bones and charred cereals). The fieldwork at Membury Court, in Devon, which contributed to Figure 7.5, was funded by Devon County Council and Natural England.

Most of the illustrations in this book were produced by members of the project team, and in particular we thank Mike Rouillard, for whom working on this book was his last project in the Archaeology Department at the University of Exeter. In addition, we wish to thank the following for permission to reproduce their illustrations: Oliver Creighton (Figure 1.1, Caerwent), Northamptonshire County Council (Figure 1.2, Faxton), English Heritage (Figure 3.6, Knook Down East), Stewart Bryant (Figure 3.8, Cheshunt), Chris

Contents

List of Figures

Cover image: Aerial photograph of the heavily lynchetted field system at Bosigran, overlooking Porthmeor Cove in Zennor, Cornwall, looking east (© Historic Environment, Cornwall Council; F78-070 7 August 2007).

Chapter 3

Chapter 4

Chapter 5

Chapter 6

Chapter 7

Chapter 8

List of Tables

List of Appendices

The following are available online through Open Research Exeter, at: <http://hdl.handle.net/10871/15215>. They are also available on the Oxford University Press website at <http://www.oup.co.uk/companion/fieldsofbritannia>.

List of Abbreviations

ADS	Archaeology Data Service
AIP	Archaeological Investigations Project
AOD	Above Ordnance Datum (i.e. above mean sea level)
BAR	British Archaeological Reports
BUFAU	Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit
CBA	Council for British Archaeology
COMV	currently occupied medieval village
ECCFAG	Essex County County Field Archaeology Group
ECCFAU	Essex County County Field Archaeology Unit
EngLAID	English Landscape and Identities Project
HER	Historic Environment Record
HLC	Historic Landscape Characterization
MAFF	Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food
MNI	minimum number of individuals
NMP	National Mapping Project
NISP	number of identified specimens
OS 1st Edn maps	Ordnance Survey First Edn Six Inch to the Mile maps drafted in the mid- to late nineteenth century
SCCAS	Suffolk County Council Archaeological Service
S/G	sheep/goat
TLP	Total Land Pollen
TVAS	Thames Valley Archaeological Services
ULAS	University of Leicester Archaeological Services

Note on Period and Other Terminology

The term 'Saxon' is not used in this study as a period term because the ethnic tag is inappropriate for those areas that did not see significant Anglo-Saxon immigration: where others have used terms such as 'early Saxon period' it is placed in inverted comas. The term Anglo-Saxon is used in this study to refer to the Germanic migrations into Britain and the resulting distinctive building tradition (*Grubenhäuser*), furnish burials, and other material culture.

The term early medieval is used for the period between Britain ceasing to be part of the Roman Empire and the Norman Conquest, while later medieval is used for the period between the Norman Conquest and the end of the fifteenth century.

The historic landscape is the term used for the pattern of fields, roads, settlements, and land-uses recorded on the nineteenth-century OS 1st Edn maps.

Presentational Conventions

Site names in **bold** are illustrated.

1

Fields of Britannia

A Roman Legacy in the British Countryside

BRITAIN'S GREEN AND PLEASANT LAND

In asking about 'Our debt to Rome', O. G. S. Crawford (1928, 173) asked:

> What do we inherit from our Roman Conquerors? To this question some reply, 'little or nothing', and some 'the seeds of culture and religion' . . . it is difficult to reach a decision because the decisive period, between 400 and 600 A.D. is one of the darkest in our history.

The traditional view of Britain in the fifth century—when it ceased to be part of the Roman Empire—is one of catastrophe and discontinuity: although it is well known that some of our major roads are Roman in origin, and that many of our cities lie on top of Roman predecessors, most archaeologists and historians have come to the conclusion that our countryside is essentially medieval in origin. Despite the majority of the British population now living in towns and cities there is still a great affection for this countryside and, in the summer of 2012, millions of people across the World were absorbed by Danny Boyle's opening ceremony for the London Olympics that began with a portrayal of our rural landscape and culture, before showing the transformation of William Blake's 'green and pleasant Land' by the 'dark satanic Mills' of the Industrial Revolution.

One of the most distinctive features of the British countryside—as depicted in the Olympics—is its intricate pattern of small fields variously enclosed by hedges, banks, ditches, and walls, and it is often assumed that these fields were created when rapacious eighteenth-century landowners obtained an Act of Parliament to enclose open fields. For a broad swathe of countryside in central England this is generally true, but in the South East, the South West, and the West of England open fields never dominated the landscape, and the origins of this regional variation in the character of our 'green and pleasant Land' has received much scholarly attention. In the first half of the twentieth century, it

was assumed that villages and open fields—the so-called 'champion country-side' of England's Central Zone—were introduced during the fifth and sixth centuries by the Anglo-Saxon immigrants that early medieval writers, such as Bede, tell us came to Britain from mainland Europe. In recent decades, however, both archaeologists and historians have agreed that champion coun-tryside was the product of a transformation of the landscape around the eighth to twelfth centuries (that clearly post-dates the period of the Anglo-Saxon migrations by several centuries), which leads us to the central question to be addressed in this book: what happened to the landscape of Britannia between the period when it ceased to be part of the Roman Empire and the emergence of villages and open fields in some areas several centuries later?

The evocative ruins of Roman towns such as Caerwent (Figure 1.1), Silchester, and Wroxeter, and a countryside that appears to be littered with long-abandoned villas—such as Chedworth in Gloucestershire, whose sense of remoteness is increased by it being surrounded by woodland—reinforce the impression that the landscape of Britannia is largely unrelated to the coun-tryside of today. The apparently contradictory evidence of some modern towns lying on top of Roman predecessors has generally been resolved through excavations showing that their urban character failed to survive much into the fifth century, with any occupation being of an essentially

Fig. 1.1. The southern defences of the *civitas* capital of *Venta Silurum* (Caerwent) in Monmouthshire. Evocative ruins such as these reflect a popular perception that Roman Britain 'ended' and has little functional relationship to the countryside of today (© Oliver Creighton).

rural character: there may have been some continuity in these sites as locations for settlements of a largely rural character, but not in their function as administrative and market centres. A common view, therefore, is that Roman Britain ended quite suddenly and completely, and what came after was something very different. Costen (1992, 54), for example, suggests that the fifth century was one of:

> complete dislocation of the economy at all levels of society. No one was unaffected. Aristocrats in villas and their tenants and servants on their estates, merchants and the artisans who made goods for sale in the towns were all hit by the disappearance of the settled economy of the fourth century and the withdrawal of Roman administration.

Blair (1994, 3) paints an equally stark picture:

> The most obvious fact of the early fifth century is that towns and villas became irrelevancies, so that to look for 'continuity' in the modes of life which they served is to chase a will-o'-the-wisp. Complex government, bureaucracy, coinage and long distance trade simply could not survive the secession of Britain from the Empire.

Few would doubt that the fifth century saw a sharp discontinuity in the political history, the market-based economy, and the prosperity and power of the urban and villa-owning elite, but what about the majority of the population who farmed the countryside?

PERSPECTIVES ON AN AGE OF TRANSITION

The End of Roman Britain

The perception of the fifth century as one of profound change is now deeply engrained in scholarship, with Romanists seeing a relatively sudden and complete end to the culture that they study:

> While parts of the east were rich, indeed wealthy, in the later Roman period, much of the region, materially at least, seems not to have been and at the end of the Roman era vanished almost with ease from the archaeological record (Going 1996, 104).

This view that Roman Britain ended is also reflected in Casey's (1979) *The End of Roman Britain*, Esmonde Cleary's (1989) *The Ending of Roman Britain*, and Faulkner's (2000) *The Decline and Fall of Roman Britain*. That the fifth to seventh centuries were something different to what went before is also reflected in the scope of our learned societies (the Society for the Promotion of

Roman Studies and the Society for Medieval Archaeology) and their journals (e.g. *Britannia*; *The Journal of Roman Studies*, and *Medieval Archaeology*): the archaeology of Roman Britain is seen as quite separate from that of medieval Britain. Indeed, the distinctive archaeology of the fifth to seventh centuries—most notably the artefact-rich cemeteries and settlements characterized by *Grubenhäuser*—has led to a division between early medievalists who have focused on this 'early Saxon period',[1] and those who have concentrated on the 'middle and late Saxon' periods (the late seventh to mid-ninth, and mid-ninth to mid-eleventh centuries, respectively) during which villages, open fields, the Church, urbanism, and many other aspects of the later medieval (i.e. post Norman Conquest) landscape appear to have originated. There has also been a division between scholars who have tended to focus on the south and east of Britain, where there were clearly profound cultural changes brought about by the Anglo-Saxon migrations (e.g Welch 1992; Lucy 2000; Tipper 2004), and the north and west, where this Anglo-Saxon influence came far later and was the result of conquest and political assimilation as opposed to folk migration (e.g. Rahtz 1983; Alcock 2003).

The traditional view—based largely upon the extremely problematic documentary sources for this period—was that the remnants of what was only ever a relatively small Romano-British population were forced west by Germanic hoards, who therefore settled a largely depopulated and well-wooded landscape, with the result that the majority population of seventh-century England were of Anglo-Saxon descent, any of the remaining native Britons having been expelled or enslaved (e.g. Hoskins 1955, 38–60; Morris 1977). Early archaeological studies simply fitted the material remains of this period into that historical framework (Alcock 1971; Myres 1986). In the 1970s, however, this culture-historical approach, whereby changes in the archaeological record were seen as having been brought about by migrations, started to give way to post-processual ideas that cultural change results from human adaptation to a variety of environmental, social, economic, and technological factors (Chapman and Hamerow 1997; Hamerow 1997). Archaeological survey and excavation was also suggesting a far larger late Romano-British population, of perhaps 4 to 6 million (e.g. Salway 1981, 542–5) compared to estimates of *c*.0.5 million proposed in the early twentieth century (Collingwood 1929, 261), although most current estimates are around 3.7 to 4 million (Fowler 1983, 8; Millett 1990, tab. 8.5; Higham 1992, 20). In contrast, Williamson (2013, 12–13) has argued that 'it is unlikely that there were many districts in which Romano-British population exceeded that at

---

[1] The term 'Saxon period' is not used in this study, as the ethnic tag is inappropriate for those areas that did not see substantial Anglo-Saxon immigration: where others have used terms such as 'early Saxon period' it is placed in inverted commas. The term Anglo-Saxon is used in this study to refer to the Germanic migrations into Britain and the distinctive building tradition (*Grubenhäuser*), furnished burials, and other material culture that resulted.

the time of Domesday Book', because the density of Romano-British settlements revealed in fieldwalking surveys (assuming a population of 20 people per site) suggests a population that was less than Domesday records for those areas (allowing for a multiplier of 5.5). This argument can be challenged, however, as Romano-British settlements may well have contained a far higher population, and there are many examples of Romano-British settlements and field systems in areas that were unenclosed pasture in the medieval period (e.g. Chalton in Hampshire: Cunliffe 1973, cf. figs 5 and 7; Fenland: Phillips 1970; Palmer 1996; Rippon 2000b; Salisbury Plain: McOmish et al. 2002; Fulford et al. 2006b; Bradley and Fulford 2008). Another blow to the traditional view of a relatively low Romano-British population that fell even further in the post-Roman period was that palaeoenvironmental analysis had failed to find evidence for extensive woodland in the late Roman period or woodland regeneration in the early medieval period (Bell 1989; K. Dark 2000), and three seminal studies of the archaeology of this period—Arnold (1988), Hodges (1989), and Higham (1992)—all came to similar conclusions: that a substantial native Romano-British population survived into the early medieval period, and that there was only small-scale Anglo-Saxon immigration, which achieved social and political supremacy through elite dominance, not weight of numbers.

A central argument of these revisionist studies was that Britain remained Roman into the fifth century: while the last quarter of the fourth century saw a marked recession in Roman Britain, 'she was still a diocese of the empire with the administration, the economy and the society fashioned by three hundred years of Roman rule still firmly in place' (Esmonde Cleary 1989, 121). White (2007, 195–214) has even argued that, despite the political upheavals, the province of *Britannia Prima* and its social elite, at least, remained essentially Romanized until perhaps as late as the seventh century. Others, however, have disagreed, suggesting that Roman Britain collapsed in the fourth century, such as Faulkner (2000, 143), who argued that 'in the mid-late fourth century, agriculture was depressed and landlord surpluses were being squeezed hard. Moreover, this was no short-term crisis due to crop blight, transport failure or disrupted markets. It was a long-term structural collapse from which no escape was possible: full-blown systems failure.' More recently, in contrast, Fulford et al. 2006a, 280) have observed that 'we can see throughout the recent literature on late Roman Britain an urgency to end urban life early in the fifth century as a correlate of the demise of the most conspicuous and abundant forms of Roman material culture', but they counter this with an argument that 'it is hard to accept a rapid end to the use of surviving Roman material in the early fifth century'. At Silchester, for example, long seen as a classic example of an abandoned Roman town, there may have been occupation long into the fifth, and even sixth or seventh centuries (Fulford et al. 2006a; Fulford 2012): the debate about what happened at the end of Roman Britain clearly continues.

All of these studies focus upon cultural explanations for the decline of Roman Britain, although M. E. Jones (1996, 223, 237) provides an alternative model that explores environmental issues, echoing Postan's (1972) approach to later medieval England. Jones argued that falling temperatures and increased rainfall, past over-exploitation of soils, a declining demand for food as the market economy collapsed, and an outbreak of disease led to a 'severe crisis' in the late Roman period, during which fields were abandoned. It is unusual today to see environmental constraints on human behaviour being expressed so clearly, not least because M. E. Jones's (1996, figs 8 and 9) own maps show that lowland Britain cannot be classed as marginal in terms of its climate, although a number of other landscape studies have started to argue that the role of the natural environment in shaping human behaviour has been erroneously downplayed in recent years. Prominent amongst these studies is Williamson's (2003; 2013; Williamson et al. 2013) exploration of the potential role of soil character in explaining why only some areas saw the development of open fields, although suggesting that the inherent properties of geologies, soils, and topographies made them particularly suited to certain types of agricultural practice is very different to arguing that slight changes in rainfall and temperature will have had a material effect on farming in temperate lowland Britain. Overall, while poor weather may have combined with changing socio-economic circumstances in the fifth century to make farming more difficult, Jones's argument that environmental deterioration caused the decline of Roman Britain is not convincing.

A 'Late Antique' Landscape? Native Britons and Anglo-Saxons in Lowland Britain

As Dark (2004, 279) has observed, 'The development of the British landscape during the period c.AD 300–700 has often been depicted in terms of sharp discontinuities between the "Romano-British landscape" of partly stone-built villas, temples and "native settlements", and the "Anglo-Saxon landscape" of timber-built small hamlets and farms.' This is what a simple reading of the archaeological record tells us: Roman Britain ended, and from the chaos that ensued there emerged an 'Anglo-Saxon' landscape. The established view of the end of Roman Britain is that there is very little evidence for contact between the native British and immigrant Anglo-Saxon populations (e.g. Esmonde Cleary 1989, 131, 140, 153, 161, 197). There is, however, a paradox in that these same scholars who argue for a relatively abrupt collapse of Roman Britain also note that there appears to have been less change in the countryside and that 'there is little evidence that the fifth century saw a significant decline in the global amount of land under cultivation in Britain' (Esmonde Cleary

1989, 158). If the amount of land under cultivation did indeed not decline significantly then at the level of rural peasant society there should have been a strong degree of continuity, yet the compartmentalization of research into the 'Roman', 'Saxon', and 'medieval' periods perpetuates the impression of discontinuities: Romanists see the cessation of an archaeologically very visible culture and so end their story, while Anglo-Saxonists see a new and distinctive suite of material culture that had no precedents in Roman Britain and so start their story in the fifth century. The extensive remodelling of the landscape several centuries later, that saw the creation of villages and open fields, is another context for discontinuity (Figures 1.2 and 1.3). In contrast to this fragmentary approach that traditional periodization brings about, this book will focus very explicitly on the transition from the Roman to the medieval periods.

This takes us on to the debate about what happened to the native Romano-British population in the fifth century. Archaeologists (e.g. Arnold 1988; Hodges 1989; Henig 2002) and historians (e.g. Higham 1992; Blair 2013b, 2) have mostly rejected the traditional ideas that Anglo-Saxon immigrants wholly replaced the British population in lowland Britain, although few would go as far as the hyper-continuity hypotheses of K. Dark (2000) and particularly Pryor (2004, 96, 214), who argues that fourth- to sixth-century eastern England had 'an essentially stable rural population existing in a political context that was changing quite rapidly', with 'no convincing archaeological evidence for "Dark Age" chaos, disruption or turmoil'. Pryor (2004, 214) even goes as far as to suggest that 'Anglo-Saxon mass migrations into Britain never happened'. In sharp contrast, some linguists continue to argue that the native British population was largely displaced by Anglo-Saxon immigrants (e.g. Gelling 1993; Coates 2007), although the documents that survive from this period—written from the perspective of the ascendant Anglo-Saxon population, it must be remembered—simply show that the surviving British population was subservient to their Anglo-Saxon masters (e.g. the Law Code of King Ine of Wessex dated *c.*688–93: Grimmer 2007). That the starting point of a major conference in 2004 which examined *Britons in Anglo-Saxon England* started with the question of 'whether or not there were many Britons within Anglo-Saxon England' (Higham 2007b, 1), and that many of the papers—particularly by linguists—reject the notion of any significant British survival in lowland Britain, shows that many still stubbornly adhere to the traditional view. It is against this background of very divergent views that Nick Higham (2007b, 15) perceptively concluded 'A significant British presence does, therefore, seem discernible right across the Anglo-Saxon period alongside evidence for large-scale discontinuity between Anglo-Saxon England and sub-Roman Britain, to the confusion of us all.' The intention of this study, therefore, is to try and shed new light on this confusing period through an explicit focus on what happened to the rural landscape of Roman Britain.

Fig. 1.2. The unrelated cropmarks of an Iron Age/Romano-British landscape and medieval ridge and furrow within a former open field at Faxton in Northamptonshire. There is a clear discontinuity in this landscape's history, but rather than at the end of the Roman period it may have been in the late first millennium AD when the open fields were laid out (NCC photograph SP7874/018 1 August 1986; © Northamptonshire County Council Historic Environment Record).

While views still differ as to whether there was a mass-folk migration from the Continent involving hundreds of thousands of people, or simply a political take-over by a small, male military elite, what is clear is that the late Romano-British population was so large that it cannot have been ethnically cleansed. Millett (1990, tab. 8.5) estimates that the population of late Roman Britain was around 3.7 million, of which the rural population amounted to *c*.3.3 million, the urban population *c*.240,000, and the army and its dependents *c*.125,000 (and see Higham 1992, 20; M. E. Jones 1996, 208). In contrast to the artefact-rich

Anglo-Saxon communities, however, the native population in the fifth to sixth centuries appears virtually invisible: Roman pottery, coinage, and building techniques all appear to have gone out of use, and we are left with the impression that sub-Roman Britain was a period when a few dazed native Britons staggered around the ruins of once magnificent buildings in a virtually deserted landscape, while Anglo-Saxon immigrants took over their lands at will. A more positive view of this period, however, is presented by those who advocate a period of 'Late Antiquity' within which there was a strong degree of continuity from the preceding Roman period, and interaction between the native (often Christian) and immigrant (pagan) populations (e.g. K. Dark 2000; 2004; Collins and Gerrard 2004). There is, however, an almost total lack of rural settlements in eastern Britain that have been attributed to this native population, with all of Snyder's (1996) 'sub-Roman' occupation in this area being within Roman towns or coastal fortresses. One possibility is that some Romano-British settlements have been continuously occupied ever since, and so lie buried under modern villages, reflected, for example, by proximity of some parish churches to Roman villas (Rodwell and Rodwell 1977; Leech 1982; Bell 1998; 2005). One example is Rivenhall, in Essex, where Rodwell and Rodwell (1986) found evidence for a phase of timber buildings associated with fifth-century pottery adjacent to a Roman villa and the overlying parish church, suggesting near-continuous, if not continuous occupation on the site.[2] Rivenhall has become a much-cited 'classic' example of continuity, although it also illustrates the problem in studying the archaeology of this period that, due to the use of timber buildings, and the scarcity of material culture, is both ephemeral and poorly dated. Indeed, Millett's (1987) review of the original report, and Clarke's (2004) subsequent excavations on the site, have called into question some key elements of the Rodwells' sequence.

The evidence for such timber buildings being constructed during the latest phases of occupation within Roman settlements was traditionally seen as 'squatter occupation' (Brean Down in Somerset: ApSimon 1965; Silchester in Hampshire: Frend 1992, 126), although it is now thought to represent not the re-use of abandoned sites but the final phase of occupation by communities for whom the Roman aesthetic was becoming unsustainable or 'socially irrelevant' (Hamerow 2012, 13; and see K. Dark 1992; 2004; Rogers 2011, 158). The potential sophistication of timber buildings in this period have been postulated through Barker's meticulous excavations at Wroxeter (Barker et al. 1997; but see Fulford 2002 and Lane 2014), and the sequence at the

---

[2] Other late Roman sites with a stratigraphically late phase of timber buildings include Barnsley Park in Gloucestershire (Webster 1982), Brixworth in Northamptonshire (Brown and Foard 1998, 73), Frocester in Gloucestershire (Price 2000a, b), Gadebridge Park in Hertfordshire (Neal 1974), Latimer in Buckinghamshire (Branigan 1971), Orton Hall Farm in Cambridgeshire (Mackreth 1996), and Shakenoak in Oxfordshire (Brodribb et al. 2005).

nearby Whitely Grange villa shows very similar construction techniques in a rural context (a rubble platform beneath a mortar and clay floor); a remnant magnetic date for the last firing of the bath house is c.AD420–520 (White and Barker 1998, 126-8; Gaffney et al. 2007, 127). The latest timber phases on villa sites aside, however, there remain very few settlements that can be clearly associated with the native British population in the immediate post-Roman period: there are a small number of probably high-status sites in western Britain associated with pottery imported from the Mediterranean during the fifth to sixth centuries (e.g. Cadbury Congresbury and South Cadbury in Somerset: Rahtz et al. 1992; Alcock 1995; Tabor 2008), and a handful of lower-status rural sites (e.g. Poundbury in Dorset: Sparey Green 1987; Tatton in Cheshire: Higham and Cane 1996–7; Trethurgy in Cornwall: Quinnell 2004), but nothing equivalent in the South East of Britain. A number of linear earthworks in the West may also date to this period, and as they face north and or east they may have been built by native British communities under the leadership of social elites living in sites such as Cadbury Congresbury (e.g. Bokerley Dike in Dorset: Eagles 2004, 234; Wansdyke in Somerset and Wiltshire: Eagles and Allen 2011).

There is more evidence for the native British population in the burial record. In addition to the recognition that a number of those buried in 'Anglo-Saxon' cemeteries in the east may have been of British descent (e.g. Lucy 2000), there is also a growing number of 'sub-Roman' cemeteries in the west of Britain (e.g. Cannington, in Somerset: Rahtz et al. 2000; Kenn, in Devon: Weddell 2000). Poundbury, just outside Dorchester in Dorset (Farwell and Molleston 1993) is another well-known example, and a review of the evidence for early medieval burial in Dorset has revealed a large number of other sites that are probably native British (Mees 2014, from which the following is taken). A small group of eleven or twelve graves on Hambledon Hill, for example, were associated with just two iron knives and a pin (Mercer and Healy 2008, 317), while a crouched inhumation within a stone cist at Shapwick was associated with just an early medieval bone comb (Woolls 1839, 105). One of the two undated burials near the Romano-Celtic temple in Maiden Castle is radiocarbon dated to 1315 ± 80 BP (c. cal. AD 635: Brothwell 1971, 237). On Eggardon Hill, excavations uncovered three W–E unfurnished extended burials which have produced a radiocarbon date of cal. AD 640–980 (Putnam 1982; 1983; Cherryson 2005). Excavations at Tinney's Lane in Sherborne have revealed four unaccompanied inhumations, one of which was a crouched inhumation radiocarbon dated to cal. AD 430–660 (McKinley 1999a). At Manor Farm in Portesham, eight W–E inhumations were excavated, two of which were radiocarbon dated to AD 650–780 and 660–890 (Valentin 2000). At Shepherd's Farm, Ulwell, in Swanage, three unfurnished cist graves were found in 1949 (Farrar 1949), and in 1982 at least fifty-seven extended inhumations in N–S rows of W–E graves were

discovered nearby, with radiocarbon dates suggesting that the cemetery was in use throughout the seventh century (Cox 1988). At Tolpuddle Ball a small cemetery of fifty W–E graves arranged in well-organized rows was established in the fourth or fifth century[3] and continued in use until the seventh century[4] (Hearne and Birbeck 1999, 55–63).

These sites in Dorset are clearly part of the well-known sub-Roman cemetery tradition of Somerset and Devon in a region that lay beyond the Anglo-Saxon settlement, but a cursory examination of excavation reports to the north and east suggests that similar native British cemeteries are found in regions that did see fifth- to sixth-century Anglo-Saxon occupation, such as Bancroft in Buckinghamshire (Williams and Zeepvat 1994, 115–21) and Saffron Walden in Essex (Bassett 1982b). Recent radiocarbon dating in the Upper Thames valley is showing that a growing number of inhumation cemeteries with unfurnished graves date to the fifth and sixth centuries and are probably therefore probably sub-Roman (e.g. Queensford Farm outside Dorchester-on-Thames: Chambers 1987; Tubney Wood Quarry in Oxfordshire: Simmonds et al. 2011). Shakenoak Farm is a particularly good example, where a small inhumation cemetery was interpreted as 'Saxon' in the original published report despite there not being any accompanying grave goods (Brodribb et al. 2005): recent radiocarbon dates have confirmed that they are indeed fifth to sixth century,[5] and in the absence of Anglo-Saxon grave goods it is surely most likely that they represent a native British population. Wasperton, in Warwickshire, is an unusual example of a Romano-British cemetery that continued in use into the post-Roman period, finally becoming the burial ground of a community with an Anglo-Saxon identity (Carver et al. 2009).

It has traditionally been thought that there is very little material culture in the archaeological record that was produced and used by the native British population in the fifth and sixth centuries, which might be accounted for in three ways: firstly, that 'absence of evidence is evidence for absence' (i.e. there was no significant native British population in lowland Britain at this time); secondly, that the evidence has not survived (i.e. artefacts were made of organic materials); and thirdly, that the evidence survives but has just not been recognized (Härke 2007, 58). Certain aspects of the third proposition are well rehearsed, such as the possibility that early 'Anglo-Saxon' cemeteries may include the burials of native Britons, and that the post-built halls on early 'Anglo-Saxon' settlements incorporate elements of British design and so may

---

[3] 1660 +/− 35 BP (OxA-8299) cal. AD 250–450.

[4] 1470 +/− 35 (Ox-8320) cal. AD 530–660; 1450 +/− 30 (Ox-8300) cal. AD 550–650; 1440 +/− 35 (Ox-8298) cal. AD 550–660; 1380 +/− 35 (Ox-8297 cal. AD 600–690.

[5] Six burials have yielded dates of 1531 +/− 24 BP (cal. AD 442–575); 1577 +/− 28 BP (cal. AD 390–527); 1580 +/− 25 BP (cal. AD 409–532); 1612 +/− 26 BP (cal. AD 433–533); 1616 +/− 26 BP (cal. AD 390–527); 1630 +/− 25 BP (cal. AD 434–535): John Blair pers. comm. Reynolds (2009, 41) discusses the weapon injuries.

have been built by British workers (but see Hamerow 2002 for a rebuttal of this view). While it appears that some categories of Romano-British material culture disappeared altogether, such as the shale industry (Cool 2000, 48), other craft production and consumption appears to have continued. There is, for example, growing evidence for the survival of British manufacture of metalwork such as ironworking (e.g. Silchester: Fulford et al. 2006a, 155), the 'Quoit Brooch' style, penannular brooches, and hanging bowls, and the technique of enamelling (Dickinson 1982; Geake 1999; Suzuki 2000, 109–10; Henig 2002, 10; Laing 2007; Youngs 2007; Green 2012, 69–74). Evidence of metalworking is relatively common on high-status fifth- to sixth-century sites in the west of Britain (e.g. Cadbury Congresbury: Rahtz et al. 1992). Briscoe (2011) has suggested that some fifth-century stamped pottery traditionally ascribed to Anglo-Saxon immigrants may, in fact, reflect a continuation of British designs, as appears to be the case with some woollen textiles found at early medieval settlements (e.g. Flixton in Suffolk: Boulter and Walton Rogers 2012, 117–21, and fig. 10.2). Owen-Crocker (2011) has suggested that a particular type of woollen twill found in some 'Anglo-Saxon' contexts has no precedent in the Germanic homeland, or the Frisian and Rhineland districts with which they traded, and so may also be of British manufacture. The chemistry of 'Anglo-Saxon' vessel glass is the same as in the Roman period, and the change from soda-lime-silica to potash glass only came in the late first millennium AD (Stiff 2003).

   Although it is widely thought that the late Romano-British pottery industries all collapsed by the early fifth century, a variant of South East Dorset BB1—Orange Wiped Ware—may have continued in production for several decades (Gerrard 2010). While it would appear logical that the void created by the collapse of the market-focused large-scale pottery industries of late Roman Britain was filled with local production, evidence for this remains limited. At Childerley Edge in Cambridgeshire, for example, the occupation of a late Romano-British farmstead clearly continued beyond the end of the fifth century and an artefact-rich 'dark earth' formed across the site (Abrams and Ingham 2008). There was a distinctive change in the animal bone assemblage from cattle to sheep/goat, and alongside the latest Romano-British mass-produced colour-coated fine wares and shelly wares a small quantity of sherds with a grog-tempered fabric may represent sub-Roman production. Indeed, need the 'hand-made coarse ware' comprising 'wide mouthed jars, very plain and undecorated', recovered from a late Roman settlement at Boxworth in Cambridgeshire necessarily be 'Saxon', as is assumed (cf. Connor 2008, 115)? It is also very likely that late Romano-British material culture remained in use for at least the early part of the fifth century (Cool 2000), but without independent dating evidence it is impossible to say for how long. Although it is often suggested that wear on coins indicate that they remained in use for several decades on both urban (e.g. Cirencester, Gloucestershire: Simmonds and Smith

2008; Holbrook 2013, 33) and rural sites (e.g. Barton Court Farm, in Berkshire: Miles 1986; Shakenoak villa, in Oxfordshire: Brodribb et al. 2005), Besly (2006, 83-4) has noted that in part this may reflect that they were poorly made objects in the first place. Overall, however, it is true that the native British population remains hard to identify in eastern Britain in the fifth and sixth centuries, but in part this is because the evidence has not been recognized.

One reason why it remains difficult to identify the landscape of the native British population in the early medieval period is the tendency for any occupation in this period to be labelled 'Anglo-Saxon'. At Latimer, in Buckinghamshire (Branigan 1971, 173, 187), for example, some simple post-built structures are interpreted as 'Anglo-Saxon' seemingly because it was assumed that occupation in this period had to be Anglo-Saxon (in the sense of immigrants from mainland Europe), while at Shakenoak a small inhumation cemetery was interpreted as 'Saxon' despite there not being any accompanying grave goods (see above). As a more detailed example of how post-Roman occupation potentially by a native population has been regarded as 'Anglo-Saxon', we can re-examine the sequence at Orton Hall Farm in Cambridgeshire (Figure 1.3). The General Introduction of the published report sets the agenda from the very start: 'In Period 5 [*c.*375 to early sixth century], the Roman site became degraded with some buildings being reduced in size, although brewing on a large scale still continued. Anglo-Saxons occupied the east and west ends of the Roman main yard and gradually took over the whole plan, possibly retaining one of the barns in use all the time' (Mackreth 1996, xv). The report clearly argues that Anglo-Saxons took over a working farm, but a closer examination of this site's biography—as written in the archaeological record—reveals an alternative hypothesis. The structures that date to this phase were clearly built with reference to the late Romano-British farmstead: they are on the same orientation, and are positioned within the paddocks and in association with the buildings around the periphery of the existing farmyard, so respecting that open space. There is, however, not a single indisputable Anglo-Saxon building. At 22 m², the single alleged 'Sunken Featured Building' (F.204) was considerably larger than the average sizes at other sites (see Table 1.1), had very shallow and irregular sides, and lacked roof posts (Mackreth 1996, figs 33 and 55). This is extremely rare—at West Stow, for example, just seven of the sixty-nine *Grubenhäuser* had no evidence for roof posts—and along with its shallow sides and irregular shape, raises the possibility that this was simply a working hollow. It is also unusual to find just a single *Grubenhäuser* on what was an extensively excavated site. Of the three other 'Anglo-Saxon' buildings, one is simply a rectangular post-built structure of which there is nothing distinctively Germanic; the second is a group of post holes, some of which do form short lines, but which are not a convincing rectangular building; and the third is a square setting of nine posts, interpreted as a granary. Granaries are, however, extremely rare on genuinely early
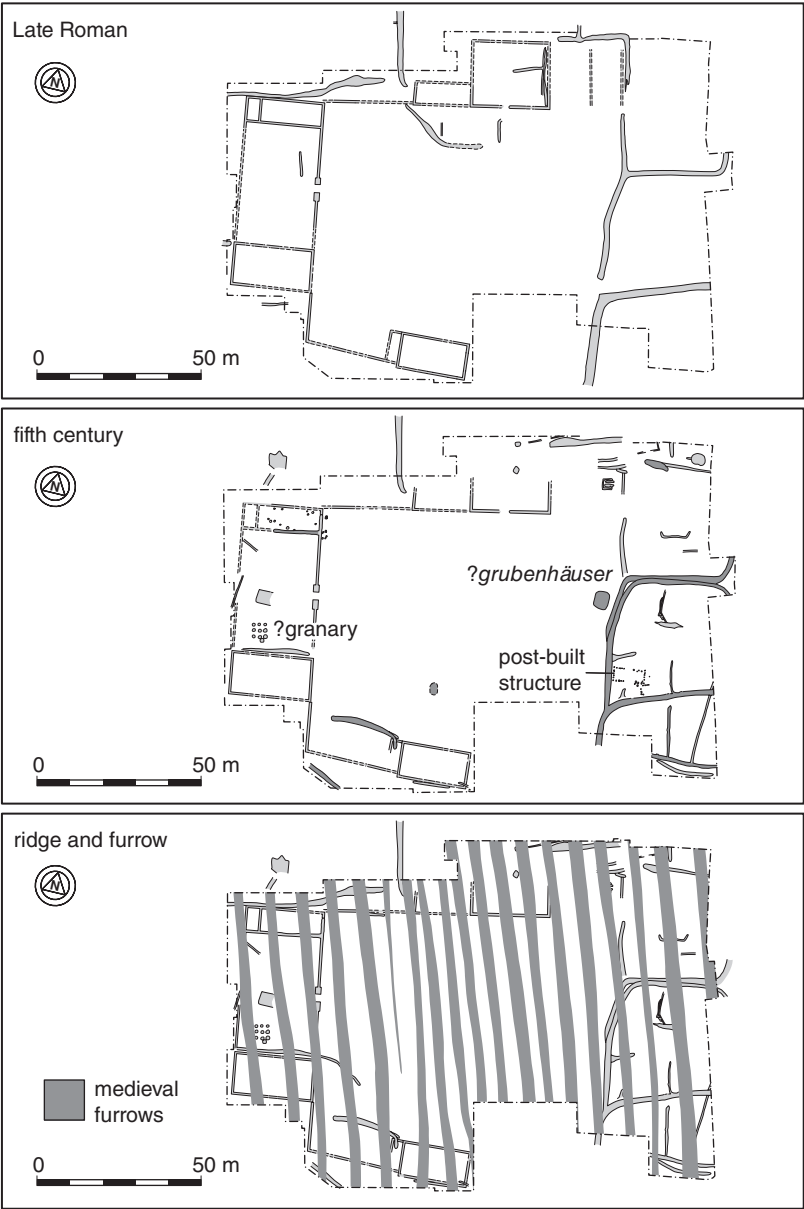
Fig. 1.3. The late Roman and fifth-century occupation at Orton Hall Farm in Cambridgeshire, overlain unconformably by later medieval ridge and furrow (after Mackreth 1996, plates VI and VII; drawn by Mike Rouillard).

Table 1.1. Average sizes of *Grubenhäuser* on selected early Anglo-Saxon settlements

Kilverstone, Norfolk	8.96 m^2	sample of 10	Garrow et al. 2006
Gamlingay, Cambridgeshire	10.75 m^2	sample of 12	Murray and McDonald 2005
Barrow Hills, Radley, Oxfordshire	10.96 m^2	sample of 41	Chambers and McAdam 2007
West Heslerton, Yorkshire	11.7 m^2	sample of 140	Tipper 2004, 64
Mucking, Essex	12.9 m^2	sample of 212	Hamerow 1993
Yarnton, Oxfordshire	13.1 m^2	sample of 7	Hey 2004
West Stow, Suffolk	13.5 m^2	sample of 69	West 1985
Carlton Colville, Suffolk	16.0 m^2	sample of 35	Lucy et al. 2009

Anglo-Saxon settlements (i.e. those that have *Grubenhäuser*: Hamerow 2012, 61) and at Orton Hall Farm the only dating evidence came from a tenth post hole, to the south, which is not obviously part of the structure.

Of the artefactual evidence at Orton Hall Farm, the 'Anglo-Saxon' pottery is dominated by handmade, undecorated, globular vessels whose simple, easy-to-produce form suggests that they could equally have been made by the native Romano-British population. One sherd in this fabric is clearly of a mortarium (a distinctively Roman form), and while the excavator interprets this as 'the only tangible evidence for a direct interaction between Roman and Anglo-Saxon' (Mackreth 1996, 27), this view reflects the traditional ethnic interpretation of the archaeological record in this period as being one of two clashing cultures, of which the latter was dominant: this same sherd can equally be interpreted as the local sub-Roman population maintaining some of the trappings of their former life through locally producing handmade pottery in the established designs. Indeed, while several of the 'Anglo-Saxon' bowls have a bi-conical form, these are in a Romano-British fabric (Mackreth 1996, 205–6), and it is very noticeable that there are no sherds with Anglo-Saxon-style bosses, chevrons, or *stehende bogen* decoration, something that—although rare—is seen on domestic settlements elsewhere (e.g. Cambridge Backs: Dodwell et al. 2004, 117). There is one final aspect of Orton Hall Farm that is curious: the number of enclosure ditches that were re-dug during this fifth-century phase (being associated with this handmade pottery). The fifth-century settlements that have been extensively excavated across South East Britain and which are clearly Anglo-Saxon (i.e. with large numbers of genuine *Grubenhäuser*) all noticeably lack boundary ditches (Hamerow 2012, 71),[6] whereas it is common to find late Romano-British farmsteads dividing up their space in this way. The conclusion, surely, is that the continued practice of defining space within Orton Hall Farm through ditches reflects the site's

---

[6] Examples include Bishopstone in Sussex (Bell 1977); Foxholes Farm in Hertfordshire (Partridge 1989), Mucking in Essex (Hamerow 1993), West Stow in Suffolk (West 1985), and Yarnton in Oxfordshire (Hey 2004).

occupancy by a native British population. It could be argued, indeed, that there are just two securely 'Anglo-Saxon' aspects to Orton Hall Farm: a small number of vessels with stamped decorations and a bone comb of Frisian origin that can only be dated to the late fourth or fifth century (being a form that is common in the late Empire): these could all have reached the site during the late Roman period, or through exchange with a nearby immigrant Anglo-Saxon community in the fifth century.

Orton Hall Farm provides an example of the complexities associated with individual site biographies which, when they reach this period, become fragmented, badly preserved, and poorly dated. It also shows, however, that the question of ethnicity has affected how this site was viewed by the excavator. The interpretation of F.204 as a *Grubenhäuser* is far from clear. The building(s) of posthole construction have nothing 'Germanic' about their character. Yes, some of the material culture from this phase shows Anglo-Saxon traits, but these items could have been brought to the site through exchange, while other elements of the ceramic assemblage are suggestive of a native community trying to carry on with life as they knew it. And finally, the continued definition of space within this settlement using ditches is a Romano-British tradition, not an Anglo-Saxon one. While this re-assessment of Orton Hall Farm suggests that it may have been the native British population who continued to manage this estate during the fifth century, we really need new ways of studying this period that do not rely solely upon the ephemeral, badly preserved, and poorly dated excavations of individual settlements. In this study, therefore, we explore two particular strands of evidence that provide a broader, landscape, perspective: firstly the palaeoenvironmental sequences that allow us to examine what happened to patterns of land-use from the late Roman through to the early medieval periods, and secondly, the related topic of what happened to the field systems of late Roman Britain and in particular their relationship to the medieval and modern landscape. Overall, the aim is to explore the legacy of Roman Britain in the fieldscape of today.

THE FIELDS OF BRITANNIA

The fifth to seventh centuries are clearly a contested period, with very different views over whether it was one of continuity or change. Although most would agree that 'the basis of the early Anglo-Saxon economy was the land' (Arnold 1988, 17), one of the problems is that most fieldwork and discussion has focused on just two types of site—cemeteries and settlements—as opposed to the landscape as a whole. This study is an attempt to redress that imbalance, and represents the major outcome of the Leverhulme Trust-funded Fields of Britannia Project, carried out from 2010 to 2012. Its focus was the legacy of the

Roman period in the rural landscape of today, and while informing the debate about the origins and development of regional variation in landscape character—such as why some areas saw the development of villages and open fields in the eighth to tenth centuries—the emphasis is on landscape evolution during the late Roman and earliest medieval periods (the fifth to seventh centuries). This is a study that tries to establish the big picture: while individual site biographies are explored, the primary aim was to assess what happened to the landscape as a whole at the end of Roman Britain. This is a study, therefore, that has quantified data as its starting point, based upon both archaeological and palaeoenvironmental evidence, and is free from the traditional historical framework (some might say straightjacket) that is based upon Gildas, Bede, and the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle. The Fields of Britannia Project therefore explores three specific topics:

1. Land-use: an analysis of palaeoenvironmental sequences in order to determine patterns of continuity or discontinuity in land management practices from the late Roman through to the early medieval periods.

2. Field systems: studying the extent of possible continuity or discontinuity in the physical fabric of the countryside by examining the relationship between late Romano-British field systems and their medieval successors.

3. Settlement patterns: an examination of the extent to which there was continuity or discontinuity in settlement patterns from the late Roman through to the early medieval period using three case studies that between them embrace areas with a continuous ceramic sequence (Norfolk), limited early medieval ceramics (Kent), and an aceramic early medieval period (Somerset).

This book focuses on the first two topics (land-use and field systems), as the third (settlement patterns) was the subject of separate thesis by Fiona Fleming (2013). It is the final publication from the Fields of Britannia Project, and as such supersedes the interim reports that have previously been published (Rippon et al. 2010/11; 2011; 2012a, b; 2013). In **Chapter 2** an approach to studying landscape evolution at a regional scale will be introduced as, in contrast to the traditional simplistic division of Roman Britain into 'upland and lowland', 'military and civilian', and 'native and villa' landscapes, this study has identified nine discrete regions (the South East, East Anglia, Central Zone, South West, Lowland Wales, Western Lowlands, North East Lowlands, Upland Wales, and Northern Uplands), each of which saw a different pattern of development throughout the late Roman and early medieval periods. **Chapter 3** explores in greater depth the two particular facets of the late Roman and early medieval landscape that form the focus of this study: patterns of land-use and the evolution of fieldscapes. The methodologies

used to synthesize the data from palaeoenvironmental sequences and excavations of field systems are outlined, and this is followed by a general discussion of the problems of trying to determine whether there was continuity or discontinuity within the landscape. **Chapters 4–11** then discuss the patterns of land-use and the evolution of fieldscapes in each of the major regions of first-millennium AD Britain (south of Hadrian's Wall) with detailed discussion of selected sites and sequences placed within the broader context of how landscape development in that particular region compares to the other lowland or upland regions as a whole. In **Chapter 12**, the general themes that have emerged are discussed.

2

A Regional Approach to Studying Landscape

LANDSCAPE CHARACTER IN ROMAN BRITAIN

The character of the British landscape has been shaped by a combination of its natural topography, geology, and soils, its climate and changing sea levels, and a wide range of cultural factors, such as the response of communities to the emergence and decline of market economies and the influence of external societies. These processes were not, however, experienced uniformly across Britain. The South East, for example, saw the emergence of complex societies during the late Iron Age, in contrast to areas further west and north, where the pace of change was slower. The impact of Britain's assimilation into the Roman world also varied from region to region, and between different social groups, and the combination of how these different native societies responded to Britain's new social, economic, and political relationship with mainland Europe led to the development of landscapes of very different character, with highly urbanized and market-driven countryside in some areas, compared to others where engagement with the Empire was less.

A feature of past scholarship on the landscape of Roman Britain has been a tendency to treat the lowlands as a single landscape. This simplistic view can be traced back to Haverfield's (1912) division of Roman Britain into 'civil' and 'military' districts, and Fox's (1932) identification of 'lowland' and 'upland' zones (Figure 2.1A), since when many scholars have continued to use such simplistic binary characterizations, the dividing line between them running roughly between the Blackdown Hills on the Devon/Dorset border and the Tees estuary in the North East (e.g. Salway 1981, 4–5). There is also a strong tradition of discussing the archaeology of Roman Britain in broadly thematic terms—the military establishment, towns, trade and industry, the countryside—which adds to the impression of homogeneity across large parts of the province (Figure 2.1B; e.g. Collingwood 1930; Frere 1967; Millett 1990). Dark and Dark's (1997) substitution of the term 'villa land-scape' for 'civil zone', and 'native landscape' for 'military zone' (Figure 2.1C),
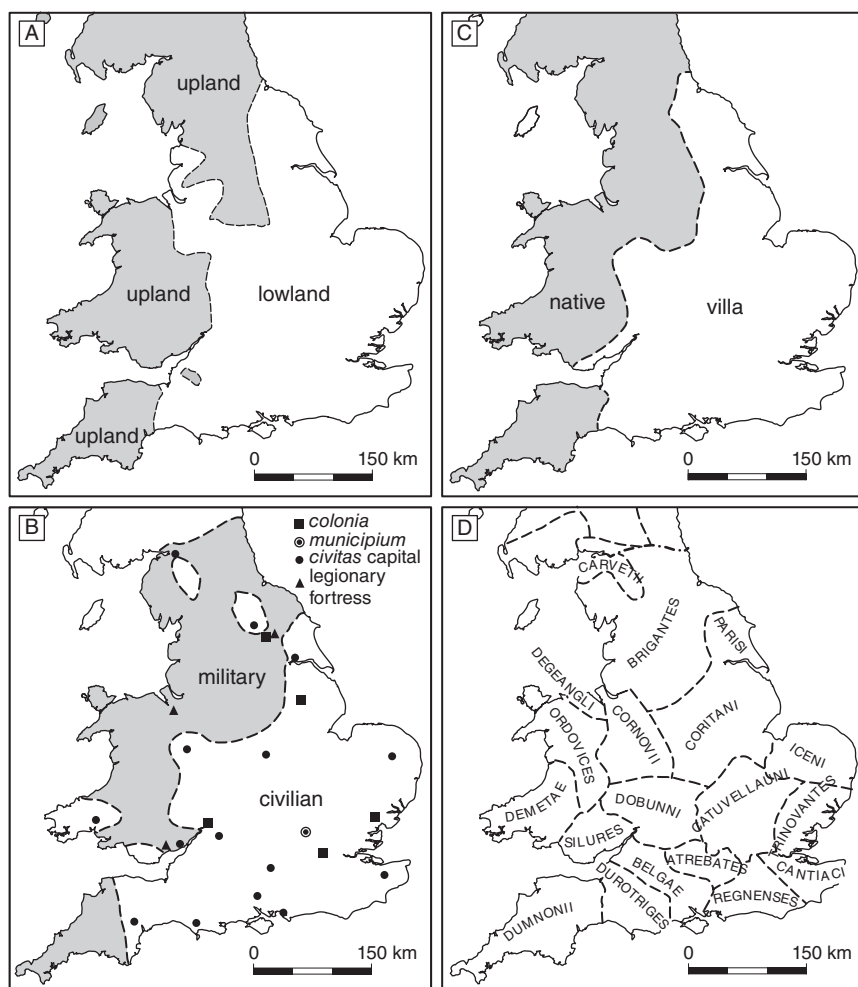
Fig. 2.1. Traditional binary divisions within Roman Britain, and its *civitates*: (A) the upland-lowland divide; (B) 'military and civilian' areas; (C) 'villa and native'; (D) the *civitates* (after Fox 1932, map facing p. 28; Mattingly 2006, fig. 10; Dark and Dark 1997, p. 68; Frere 1967, fig. 1; drawn by Mike Rouillard).

not only reiterates this existing over-simplification but adds a new and misleading dimension in implying that all lowland areas were characterized by villas, when even a cursory examination of a distribution map shows that this is obviously not the case (e.g. Figure 2.2: East Anglia, for example, and in particular the east of that region, has few known villas, and those that have been found mostly lack mosaic pavements).

   In recent years, however, there has been a more sophisticated understanding of some local variations in the Romano-British landscape, with simplistic
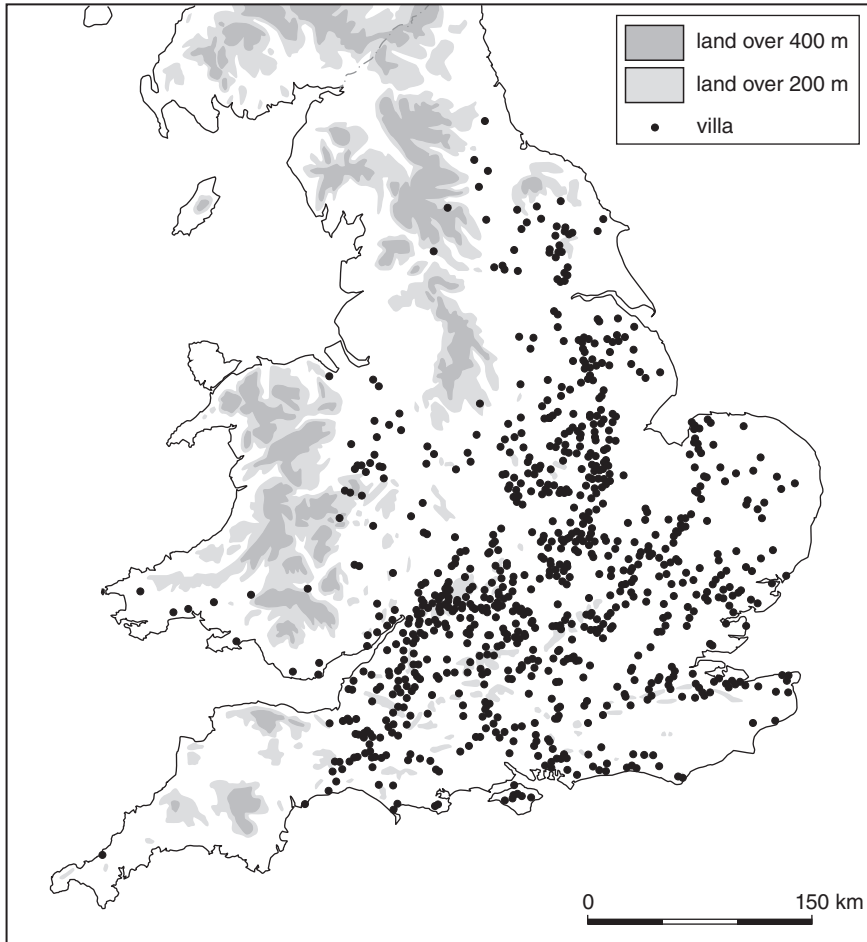
Fig. 2.2. Romano-British villas, showing how they are far from evenly distributed across lowland areas (after Jones and Mattingly 1990, map 7.6, and Taylor 2007, fig. 4.9; drawn by Chris Smart).

ideas that areas lacking villas were imperial estates having been challenged (e.g. Rodwell 1978; cf. Hingley 1989; Millett 1990, 120). In the most developed appreciation that the landscape of Roman Britain was far from uniform in its character, Mattingly (2006) rejects the traditional thematic approach to discussing Roman Britain (the conquest and garrisoning of Britain, its towns, the countryside, industry, etc.) in favour of exploring how three 'communities'—military, civil (urban), and rural—interacted with each other in different areas. In his discussion of the development of regionally distinctive societies Mattingly prefers the term 'discrepant experience' to 'Romanization', which he defines as 'the co-existence of very different perceptions of history, culture,