The Early Medieval Period
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Of the periods considered in this volume after the Mesolithic, the early middle ages remains the most difficult to identify in the archaeological record. Archaeology has revealed a few new but significant sites since the 1980s and the practice of metal detecting continues to augment the material record. While the data remain limited, scholarly thinking in early medieval archaeology has changed significantly since the mid to late 1980s and what is offered here is a narrative that reviews the significance of certain previously known sites, but which explores additional themes such as the chronology and nature of territorial organisation. This paper, therefore, is not intended as a comprehensive guide to the early medieval archaeology of the county, but rather as an attempt to place aspects of the known evidence in relation to new discoveries and in the light of current thinking at a national level. The archaeology of towns and recent work on ecclesiastical sites is only cursorily mentioned. The abbreviation ASC in the text refers to the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle (Swanton 2000).

INTRODUCTION

Gloucestershire was border country during the early middle ages. During the 6th and early 7th centuries, the county lay at the western limit of cemeteries containing burials with Germanic associations, a feature shared with Wiltshire to the south and the Marcher counties, Hereford and Worcester, to the north. Quite what this distribution represents is considered further below. When documents allow a clearer picture of the emergence of the 11th-century shire, it is as the southern part of the province of the Hwicce, a people first mentioned in the second quarter of the 7th century and politically defunct one hundred years later having lost any aspects of semi-independence that they may have possessed to the Mercians (Stenton 1971, 45). By the Norman Conquest, Gloucestershire had emerged as a county and had been divided into the small parcels of land that substantially equate to the modern parishes of the shire, bearing in mind the many minor, and sometimes major, boundary alterations of the 19th and 20th centuries. Similarly, the names and locations of Gloucestershire's villages and towns were largely established during the early medieval period. In summary, close scrutiny of the archaeology and history of the post-Roman centuries provides a case study in the development of a 'complex society' following 'systems collapse' during the late Roman period. Those with an interest in the modern settlement geography of the county will find its 'foundations', and, in many respects, much of its 'superstructure', in the late Anglo-Saxon period if not earlier and this aspect, among others, underscores the fundamental importance of Anglo-Saxon archaeology to our understanding of the modern environment.

The topography of the county is key to understanding both its role in territorial terms and the nature of settlement and its attendant agricultural regimes. Three contrasting bands of terrain define the Gloucestershire landscape; the eastern side of a wooded plain dissected by the river Wye in the west; a central band of marl and sandstone in the Severn Vale and the Cotswolds formed of limestone to the east. This geology provides an excellent range of building materials reflected today in the field boundaries and vernacular buildings of the region.

THE POST-ROMAN VACUUM

With two major centres in the form of Gloucester and Cirencester, and with excellent communications by road and water, the region was heavily Romanized by the late 1st century AD. Dense
concentrations of villas surrounded the urban centres with many others in fully rural areas acting as central places for agricultural estates. What happened to the Roman way of life? Were late Roman power structures immediately succeeded by independent local autocracies? What impact did the transition have on levels of population and the exploitation of the countryside? These are key questions about which much has been written.

From Villa Estate to Parish: Questions of Continuity

A model for the end of villa life within the post-Roman period is provided by the Frocester excavations, recently published in two impressive volumes (Price 2000). I have highlighted ‘within’ because the post-Roman sequence is apparently of short duration, yet such evidence is often used to argue for ‘continuity’ into the middle ages, usually without any attempt to define what is actually meant by the term and to what social phenomena it applies.

Before examining the Frocester evidence and the conclusions drawn by its excavators, a few comments on the ‘continuity’ issue might usefully be made. Low-level occupation of a villa, perhaps for a generation is intrinsically interesting, yet demonstrates nothing with regard to the emergence of either the medieval parish or medieval village. Many considerations have been made of the villa to village process, yet the notion that the former is somehow the direct ancestor of the latter is surely a tired one, lacking in conclusive evidence and confounded by the fact that we do not know the extent of a single villa estate and that next to nothing is known of the interrelationships between villas and lower-status farms in tenurial terms. While there are treatises relating to the management of Roman estates, these relate to the core of the empire in the earlier part of our period and may bear little or no relation to north-western Europe, especially in the late Roman period. Indeed, one of the principal failures of much scholarship relating to the continuity question has been to view the Roman period as somehow monolithic, unchanging and predictable.

Neil Faulkner (2000, 139) has highlighted the late Roman period as one of ‘manorialisation’ of the countryside, perhaps comparable to the later 9th, 10th and 11th centuries in England. The lesson to be learned is that substantial changes occurred to the way that the countryside was exploited throughout the Roman and succeeding periods. The likelihood that individual land units survived such apparently comprehensive agricultural and settlement reorganisations is extremely slim, especially when we do not know what we are trying to show continuity of in terms of the extent of a given villa’s lands. A line of enquiry worth pursuing is to map Roman settlements in relation to parish boundaries. A cursory view of Hampshire and Wiltshire, for example, reveals a series of sites on parish or county boundaries, and in many cases the boundary in question actually runs through a Roman complex rather than around it (Reynolds 2005a, 175), illustrating beyond doubt a tenurial reconfiguration between the late Roman period and the early middle ages.

Indeed, a glance at a map of Gloucestershire parishes at once betrays a complex sequence of development with estates of widely varying morphology and extent. Perhaps a few units are fortuitous Roman survivals where issues of severe topography might naturally delineate a local territory, but the majority are likely to be much later, probably of the middle to late Anglo-Saxon period. A recent study of the Avebury area in north Wiltshire displays a closely comparable view of long-term fission and fragmentation of local land units within the Anglo-Saxon period highlighting the co-existence of small independent farms alongside fully developed village communities (ibid. 178–80). The finding of a few sherds of chaff-tempered pottery in a villa
excavation does not represent evidence for continuity as is so-often claimed; here Frocester is different in the range and quality of the evidence for post-Roman occupation which includes buildings as well as material culture.

Excavations at Frocester since 1961 have revealed clear evidence for post-Roman activity in close proximity to the villa there, although the villa building itself seems to have been only partially occupied (Fig. 1). On the basis of coin losses, the latest Roman period occupation appears to have taken place in Rooms 5 and 12, which lay at opposing ends of the villa, about the end of the 4th century (Boon 2000, 17). Fires had been lit directly on the concrete floors of Rooms 2 and 4, whilst the tessellated pavement in Room 6, the main corridor of the villa fronting the courtyard, had been poorly repaired. Post-Roman occupation of the villa itself is limited to Room 6, which was entered via a doorway midway along the corridor leading off the courtyard (Fig. 2). Domestic occupation evidenced by a hearth and sherds of chaff-tempered pottery characterised the north-eastern half of the corridor, and was apparently partitioned off by posts from the rest of the corridor. Access to this space was perhaps through a doorway on the north-western side of the room. The south-western end of the corridor arguably functioned as a byre, its floor make-up badly holed and worn, suggestive of animal activity. A series of evenly spaced postholes along the inside of the north-western wall is interpreted as supports for a wooden manger, although the absence of

![Diagram](image_url)

**Fig. 1**: Frocester Court: plan of the early medieval settlement (after Price 2000).
a drain is notable given the proximity to apparently domestic occupation. Price (2000, vol. 1, 116) suggests that the tri-partite division of Room 6 is comparable to a medieval longhouse, yet the early dating of the occupation finds few parallels in this respect.

Structural evidence beyond the confines of the villa is represented by three timber buildings (Fig. 1). The earliest is judged to be Building E, some 100 m south-west of the villa. The structure itself is poorly defined, although surviving postholes indicate a building of three bays set on a platform of stone, clay and gravel, probably derived from the ruins of the villa (ibid. 113-14, fig. 6.4). The ephemeral and potentially aisled nature of this building invites comparison with the timber halls at Poundbury, Dorset, which are of a similar date (Sparey Green 1991, 72, fig. 52). The short lengths of stone footings recorded along the line of both the long walls suggest piecemeal underpinning of rotted uprights, a technique otherwise uncommon in the early middle ages before the 8th century. An ox skull placed on the earlier of two floors is potentially a ritual deposit, perhaps associated with the refurbishment of the structure (see also Building 21 below). The two phases of flooring and potential underpinning indicate a relatively long period of occupation, although dating rests on a radiocarbon determination from the ox skull that centres on about AD 590 (CAR 1475), recalibrated by Neil Holbrook (this volume) giving a date at 95% probability of 430-660 cal AD.

Building 20 lay within the courtyard 20 m to the south of the villa but parallel with the corridor (Room 6). As with Building E, structure 20 lay on a platform of re-used building material from the villa and was formed of a timber superstructure. The building had been erected over a large double pit and its floor had been replaced three times due to compaction of the pits' fills and the need to level up the floor. Much chaff-tempered pottery was found in the vicinity of the building and it appears to have remained in use for an extended period (Price 2000, vol. 1, 117).

Building 21 lay c.40 m to the south-east of the north-eastern corner of the villa. Very little chaff-tempered pottery was found in association and it is perhaps the latest in the sequence as it
utilises a combination of continuous wall trenches, a feature of 7th-century and later buildings elsewhere, and postholes. The paucity of ceramics, however, may have more to say about the non-domestic, but undetermined, function of the building rather than having a chronological implication. As with Building 20, floor deposits survived slumped into an underlying feature, in this case a timber-lined tank. The presence of ox skulls in the north-west wall trench provides another indication of post-Roman ritual activity, perhaps a foundation deposit.

Dating is a key problem given the nature of the evidence (chaff-tempered pottery), while it is not clear whether the post-Roman occupation represents genuine continuity (ibid. 121) in terms of either the familial or kin group living there either side of the end of Roman rule, or whether the site was re-occupied following a period of abandonment. It does appear, however, that the activity in Room 6 represent a re-occupation of the villa, following a substantial fire. It can be seen therefore, that even when evidence is of a relatively high quality, determining issues of functional or tenurial continuity remain insurmountable in the absence of more accurate dating. Even though chaff-tempered pottery is now accepted as having a much longer date range (5th-early 10th centuries) than previously thought (5th-8th centuries), the recent finding of an annular bead in an occupation deposit immediately outside the north-eastern entrance to Building A and a possible fragment of a glass claw beaker in Room 6 indicate 6th-century activity (ibid. 118; Stamper 2003, 370), as does the radiocarbon determination from Building E. Otherwise, dating either the start or end of the post-Roman phase is fraught with problems, but there is no reason to see the post-Roman activity as anything other than broadly contemporary and representative of a single farmstead of later 6th-century date. The social position of the site is of interest and the presence of glassware in Building A and the finding of a pendant of copper alloy and iron, probably cut from a hanging bowl, in Building E indicate access to high-status objects. One of a group of four post-Roman inhumations from Frocester Court, as yet unpublished, has been radiocarbon dated to at least a century later than the 6th-century occupation (E. Price pers. comm. 2005). Whether these burials relate to the villa occupation or to a widely attested phenomenon of burial at ruined villas in the 7th and 8th centuries remains to be determined.

The nature of the Frocester evidence prompts consideration of a frequently stated misconception about post-Roman/early medieval activity in England; that the use of ground-level sill-beamed buildings and a highly perishable material culture has rendered much of the remains of the period invisible to the archaeologist. While chaff-tempered pottery is rather more fragile than Roman ceramic, this aspect is frequently over-emphasised and used to exaggerate the importance of a small handful of sherds from Roman occupation sites or from fieldwalking surveys. Frocester shows that despite extensive ploughing from the 11th century or earlier, both ceramics in quantity and buildings of immediate post-Roman date survived to be recorded. Beyond Gloucestershire, especially in central and eastern England, where settlement evidence for the early middle ages is better attested, both buildings and objects survive in a non-ephemeral way. It is now time to stop using single sherds of chaff-tempered pottery as markers of continuity and to recognise that early medieval settlement activity has simply not yet been recovered to an extent which is desirable to the archaeologist in western Britain. Indeed, even thirty years ago the known settlement archaeology of the period nationally was scarce to the extent that what might be termed the 'perishable/sill beam argument' was applied on a national scale. We now know rather better and sites like Frocester and Lechlade (see below) demonstrate that early medieval settlements in the region leave unambiguous remains comparable to the better known sites of the period elsewhere in the country.
Sub-Roman Central Places

The re-fortification of hillforts in the sub-Roman period in south-western Britain, Wales and Scotland has long been known. This can be observed in our region at Crickley Hill, but the range of defensible sites apparently re-used by British élites in the region is rather broader with the apparent re-fortification, or at least re-occupation, of selected Roman towns. Here, the significance of the ASC *s.a.* 577 ought not to be understated. The relevant entry records:

Here Cuthwine and Ceawlin fought against the Britons and they killed three kings, Coinmagil and Candidan and Farinmagil, in the place which is called Dyrham; and took three cities: Gloucester and Cirencester and Bath.

While caution must be exercised with the reliability of Chronicle entries prior to about AD 850, the AD 577 entry records the (entirely plausible) names of the vanquished British rulers and their arguably most significant power centres. The nature of military conduct in the early part of our period has been much debated (Hawkes 1989). The laws of the West Saxon King Ine were produced AD 688 x 693 and denote an army as a force upwards of thirty men (Attenborough 1925). These early battles no doubt involved small bands of higher-ranking warriors rather than wholesale military conquest by massed forces. Certainly, the Gloucestershire cemetery evidence supports the former view (see below, Germanic Influence). Former Roman centres apparently served as central places well into the 6th century, within a settlement framework of re-used hillforts. The nature of 5th- and 6th-century occupation within the amphitheatre at Cirencester suggests a withdrawal from the town itself, but a continued recognition of the nodal perception of the place in the wider region. Parallels can be drawn, for example with Chester, where sub-Roman activity has been identified within the amphitheatre there (S. Semple pers. comm. 2005). Settlement within the defensible amphitheatre at Cirencester is akin to the re-use of hillforts with timber buildings present, as at Crickley Hill, where occupation of early 5th-century date is attested, although the evidence is problematic with regard to dating. Following re-metalling on two subsequent occasions (dated by coins of 383-7 and 388-402 respectively) the arena entrance was narrowed by a roughly built masonry blocking, further enhanced by a fence or palisade to the north (Holbrook 1998, 174). Following abandonment of the entrance a turf-line developed which contained sherds of chaff-tempered pottery. Part of a substantial timber building at least 7m wide lay within the amphitheatre, although it is poorly dated; a single sherd of 12th century or later pottery from one of the postholes could easily be intrusive given that the features were shallow and just below the modern turfline.

Excavations at Kingsholm about 1 km north of Gloucester city centre revealed important evidence for both sub-Roman and late Anglo-Saxon activity. We will return to the later evidence for a palace, but the late 4th-century cemetery there was also the burial place of a high-ranking individual in the first half of the 5th century (Hurst 1975) (Fig. 3). Excavations on the site of the extramural cemetery revealed a masonry structure originally furnished with a floor of flagstones (thoroughly robbed) set into *opus signinum*. Although only the northern part of the building was exposed, a burial (B1) of an unusual character was found cut through the concrete floor close to the north wall of what is interpreted as a mausoleum re-used for the burial of a high-ranking person (ibid. 274). A male aged 25-35 was buried supine in a well-cut grave within the 'mausoleum'. He was furnished with a fine, and apparently brand-new, silver belt buckle found at the waist, an iron knife with silver fittings by the thigh and one miniature buckle and two
Fig. 3: The early 5th-century burial from Kingsholm, near Gloucester (after Brown 1975).
strap-ends, all of silver, at the feet. A number of iron nails around the edge of the grave indicate a coffin burial. David Brown's assessment of the finds noted parallels in bronze for the belt buckle of later 4th- and 5th-century date, and Frankish and Anglo-Saxon comparisons for the strap-ends of early 5th-century date (Brown 1975, 290-4). The geographical context of the burial, its earlier dating and hybrid nature led Brown to conclude a date of burial between AD 400 and 440 (ibid. 294). This individual is the best candidate so far for the burial of a sub-Roman, or 'British' person of high rank in the region. The objects from the grave, however, find closer parallels with material of 4th- and 5th-century date from south-eastern Europe and south Russia and an eastern Germanic, perhaps Gothic origin has also been proposed for burial B1 from Kingsholm (Hills and Hurst 1989).

While re-used hillforts and other 'market' sites in south-western Britain and south Wales can be identified by the presence of imported Mediterranean amphorae and other wares, there is not a single sherd of so-called Bii amphora, of 5th- to 6th-century date, known from the county. Heighway (1987, 12) has noted that this paucity is surprising if Gloucester was engaged with the trading networks of the late Celtic west; perhaps it was not. Gloucestershire lies on the eastern fringe of the distribution of Mediterranean imported pottery, while the nature of 'British' re-occupation of earlier defensible sites is closely comparable with the style of settlement within the core late Celtic regions. Given that the majority of imported material is derived from coastal sites, the prime importance of sea lanes is clear. Perhaps it was simply not possible for a ship to take a cargo up the Severn as far as Gloucester, owing to militarised control of the route much further down the estuary, perhaps at the point where the fortified aristocratic centres of Dinas Powys and Cadbury Congresbury lay on either side of the river Severn 70 km down river (see Thomas 1990, 13, fig. 4). Overall, little imported material travelled beyond Cornwall and Devon. The presence of a series of 7th- and 8th-century coins in the region reflects trade and exchange with polities to the east by that time (see below).

Before moving on to consider the nature of contact with peoples expressing a Germanic cultural affinity, we must briefly consider West Wansdyke and its role in determining the southern limit of what became the kingdom of the Hwicce and the later county of Gloucestershire. While the earthwork itself lies within the historic county of Somerset, just to the south of Bath and the natural barrier of the Bristol Avon, it requires brief consideration as many have argued for a sub-Roman date in the absence of secure dating evidence (Gardner 1998). There can be little doubt that the earthwork relates to an attempt to define a west-east frontier zone in the early middle ages. A major objection to a sub-Roman date, however, is the nature and scale of military organisation necessary to institute what can only be described as a monumental public work. It is surely contemporary with East Wansdyke, the two sections connected spatially by the Aqae Sulis-Cunetio Roman road, an aspect given even more credence by the fact that nationally the two sections of dyke are the only earthworks so named; a detailed consideration of the argument for a 7th- or 8th-century date is not possible here but is provided elsewhere (Reynolds and Langlands in press). While it could be argued that the dyke pre-dates the foundation of the monastery at Bath by Osric, sub-king of the Hwicce, in c.675 and that it reflects (from a southern perspective) Hwiccian, ultimately Mercian, control of Bath, viewed on the macro-scale the Wansdyke frontier is much better placed logistically and politically in the period of territorial contest and consolidation between the middle Anglo-Saxon kingdoms of Wessex and Mercia during the 7th, 8th and earlier 9th centuries. It is possible, indeed likely, that sections of both East and West Wansdyke incorporate earlier earthworks, but the named earthworks belong to a later period as a unified frontier.
GERMANIC INFLUENCE

What does the western limit of ‘Anglo-Saxon’ burials represent? More recently, scholars have considered a much wider range of explanations for the nature and patterning of cemeteries containing burials interred with material culture of a Germanic character. As recently as the 1980s it was common to view such cemeteries as a tide line mapping the influx of Germanic migrants from southern and eastern England westwards. Bearing in mind recent thinking playing down the scale of population movement during the 5th and 6th centuries (see, for example, Lucy 2000), there seems little doubt that eastern England in particular, experienced substantial social augmentation via folk movement from both southern Scandinavia and northern Germany from the second quarter of the 5th century, but particularly during the 6th century.

The fact that mainly 6th- and 7th-century burials are found at the western limit of cemetery distribution has led previous commentators to suggest that ‘Anglo-Saxons’ penetrated the western regions significantly later than their initial settlements in eastern England, although there are burials of likely late 5th-century date at Fairford and Hampnett (Meaney 1964, 90–1), both of which lay just on the Gloucestershire side of the boundary with Oxfordshire, and at Lechlade close to the meeting point of the county boundaries of Gloucestershire, Oxfordshire and Wiltshire. The distribution of cemeteries is shown in Figure 4. Settlement of early 5th-century date is well known in the Upper Thames Valley (Hawkes 1986), while a recent metal-detector find of a spearhead of Swanton’s Type L, dated AD 450–550, at Quedgeley (if the findspot is to be believed at all) indicates the potential for early Germanic settlement immediately south of Gloucester (Portable Antiquities Scheme (PAS) website 9 May 2005). Overall, it remains that a persistent Germanic presence in the region dates from the mid 6th century, by which time Cirencester, in contrast to Gloucester, was ringed by cemeteries (Heighway 1996, 32) in a manner identified at many other former Roman towns in Britain, including Dorchester-on-Thames, Oxfordshire, and Salisbury, Wiltshire, to give examples in adjacent counties.

It has been noted that the Cirencester cemeteries pre-date the documented ‘Anglo-Saxon’ takeover of AD 577 (ibid.) and this provides a clear case study in the ability of archaeology to question the written record. While scholars have long doubted the authenticity of the earlier entries, particularly those relating to the 5th and 6th centuries (Yorke 1993), there is a clear contrast between the two sources and it remains to determine which is the more accurate. A certain degree of leeway, however, should be allowed with regard to dating of both forms of evidence. The 9th-century compilers of the Chronicle may have been drawing on an inaccurate source, or have re-shuffled events according their own designs, which, coupled with the latest possible margins of the burial evidence, still allows for the basic outline chronology to be accepted; but only just.

Given the comparative paucity of early medieval Germanic-style material from Gloucestershire, as in the counties to the north and south, it is perhaps more helpful to explore a wider range of social interpretations for the presence of these ‘others’ in a ‘British’ province that survived until the later 7th century. Clearly, material culture of a Germanic nature was travelling well beyond the periphery of the ‘Anglo-Saxon’ provinces of eastern England. Metalwork from Hod Hill in Dorset represents the south-western limit of such material, while diagnostic finds are known from the re-fortified Iron-Age hillfort at Dinas Powys in south Wales and, indeed, from Scotland (Eagles and Mortimer 1993; Alcock 1963; Proudfoot and Aliaga-Kelly 1996).

Through an examination of place-name and burial evidence, Bruce Eagles has presented a plausible case for the survival of a British territory based on Bath until c.675 (Eagles 2003), although how this relates to the AD 577 take over recorded in the ASC is unclear unless the British
regained control of Bath shortly after the West Saxons' Cuthwine and Ceawlin's campaign in the west. What is clear is that, well before the end of the 7th century, much of the territory initially conquered by the (then Thames Valley based) West Saxons was in Mercian hands by AD 628 when the ASC records a settlement between the West Saxon King Cynegils and his son Cwichelm and the pagan Mercian King Penda at Cirencester in favour of the latter (Stenton 1971, 29, 45). Eagles

Fig. 4: Map of early Anglo-Saxon burials in Gloucestershire (after Heighway 1987).
Fig. 5: Map showing the extent of continuing 'British' political control in the Bath area in the 7th century and the distribution of Germanic influenced material culture (after Eagles 2003).

'British' zone extends westwards into north Somerset and eastwards into north-west Wiltshire as far as Keevil (Fig. 5). When viewed on the regional scale it appears as though the Forest of Braydon in north-west Wiltshire described a boundary zone, as opposed to a fixed line, separating western Britain from the 'Anglo-Saxon' regions to the east. Selwood Forest to the south played exactly such a role from an early period. The ASC, for example, refers to Aldhelm, as the bishop 'west of the woods' s.a. 709, and the forest was still significant in the 9th century when in AD 893 King Alfred, in countering the Danes, summoned men 'both west of Selwood and east': Asser, King Alfred's biographer, referred to Selwood as Coit Maur, 'great wood' (Stevenson 1904).

Another extensive territory, perhaps that of the Canningas, has been proposed adjoining the Bath unit to the east that arguably predates the East Wansdyke, and seeks to emphasise the rapidly
changing nature of social definition in the region during the 5th, 6th and 7th centuries (Reynolds 2005a). The liminal nature of the southern boundary of the Hwicce is demonstrated no more clearly than by the meeting of the bishops of the nearest British kingdom (to Kent) and the evangelising St Augustine in AD 603, near Malmesbury, at Augustinaes Ac...in confinio Huicciorum et Occidentalium Saxorum (Augustine’s Oak, which lies on the border between the Hwiccas and the West Saxons), perhaps at Kemble, in the early 7th century (Eagles 2003). It should be remembered that the frontier is so described in Bede’s Ecclesiastical History and thus strictly relates to the border in his day, the early 8th century, rather than in Augustine’s.

The most significant burial sites to be published in recent years with regard to the earliest part of our period are the cemeteries at Bishop’s Cleeve and at Butler’s Field, Lechlade. While other cemeteries and individual burials, sometime in re-used barrows, are known, there is not the space to review them all in detail; in any case this has already been done by Carolyn Heighway (1984, 230, fig. 1; 1987, 22). A few further comments can be made on the nature of the burial evidence in the county before we examine Bishop’s Cleeve and Lechlade as case studies, which had not been published at the time of Heighway’s review.

As Heighway has noted, early Anglo-Saxon burials in Gloucestershire fall into two major types; groups of inhumations and occasionally cremations as at Burn Ground, Hampnett, and at Lechlade, and secondary burials in barrows. Clearly, this basic division describes contrasting social and political circumstances of each type. The overall distribution of early Anglo-Saxon burials is of interest. There is a series of burial sites roughly following the county boundary with Wiltshire, on an east to west axis, and then turning north following the boundary with Oxfordshire (Fig. 4). While these burials do not all have an explicit relationship with the precise line of the boundary, their distribution does suggest that there was recognition at least of some kind of political frontier reflecting the line of the southern and eastern boundary of the later shire.

The three, or perhaps four, separate cemeteries at Kemble, of 6th- to 7th-century date, for example, lay close to what became the county boundary between Gloucestershire and Wiltshire, in a region that appears to have been contested from the early post-Roman period to the late 19th century when the parish was finally lost to Gloucestershire (Heighway 1996, 34). Indeed, the name Kemble itself might be derived from the Welsh cyfel meaning border or boundary (Smith 1964, 75–6). The secondary burials in barrows are part of a broader regional phenomenon of often isolated, frequently high-status burials at prominent points in the landscape, often in frontier territory. Such burials are best read as highly visible markers of a new social and political dominance in the regions where they occur. In Wiltshire, the high-status later 7th-century barrow burials at Roundway Down and Swallowcliffe Down occupy prominent sites on the western limit of Germanic-style burials, while in Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire a case has been made that certain isolated burials of this kind, albeit far wealthier than the Gloucestershire examples, represent overlordship from afar, from the kingdom of Kent in the case of the outstanding Taplow (Buckinghamshire) burial (Dickinson 1974).

In Gloucestershire, small numbers of inhumations rather than single burials characterise the barrow burials, although it is possible to view them in a similar light as so-called ‘sentinel’ interments, marking political domination as opposed to wholesale conquest and population influx. Indeed, the finds from Chavenage, and perhaps Oddington, are potentially indicative of such politically motivated burials (Meaney 1964, 60, 62).

At Bishop’s Cleeve to the north of Cheltenham, 26 graves, 19 unfurnished, were excavated by Kenneth Brown in 1969, although only recently published (Holbrook 2000). The cemetery provides a complete contrast to the barrow burials and is the only one of Germanic character.
located in the (Gloucestershire) Severn Vale (Heighway 1996, 32). The cemetery lay c.1200 m WSW from the medieval parish church. Graves with datable finds indicate a period of use of about 50 years, probably the second half of the 6th century (Fig. 6). Holbrook, however, notes the presence of worn and re-used objects among the grave finds (see for example Grave 13), while the presence of such a high proportion of unaccompanied burials suggests either that the burial sequence runs into the 7th century, when grave finds become less common nationally, or that a sector of the community was treated somewhat differently at death. Although the grave finds are relatively poor, the fact that the entire burial ground appears to have been excavated is highly significant for, in the absence of contemporary settlement evidence, it provides the only means of assessing the structure of early medieval rural communities in the region. Holbrook quite rightly suggests that a single family used the cemetery, noting the possibility of a community of about 13 burying over a 50-year period or of 9 over a 75-year period. It is essential that cemetery evidence is used to reconstruct living communities in the early Anglo-Saxon period, particularly in western England, and the Bishop's Cleeve community appears to reflect a small settlement, perhaps part of a dispersed settlement pattern, which contrasts with the more sizeable contemporary communities of eastern and northern England.

Fig. 6: A pair of 6th-century disc brooches from Burial 5 at the Bishop's Cleeve cemetery (after Holbrook 2000).
Significantly, the Bishop's Cleeve burials indicate a settled community living on the western margin of people who expressed their identity in a Germanic style: they must have been a distinctive group, although the relatively poor grave finds and the absence of swords and, particularly, shields is hardly suggestive of pioneer settlement in a context of Germanic territorial advance. A single prone burial, an unaccompanied female aged 45+ in Grave 6, is an example of the typical superstitious Germanic response to the dead widespread throughout early Anglo-Saxon England. The rite was relatively commonly enacted in the context of otherwise 'normal' community cemeteries. The unsexed individual in Grave 25 was buried only with a large perforated canine tooth found at the neck; a common form of protective amulet during the period. Ultimately, it is difficult to establish whether the Bishop's Cleeve community represents distinctive incomers, a mixture of indigenous people and immigrants, or whether a few members of a family of local origin had adopted a few aspects of eastern English fashion. The lack of beads and weapons other than spears is notable in a 6th-century context, and one wonders whether the latter scenario outlined above might apply in this particular case.

The Butler's Field early Anglo-Saxon cemetery in Lechlade is one of the most important such sites to have been excavated in southern England in recent years. An unexpected discovery, the cemetery yielded a total of 219 inhumation burials and 26 cremation burials with a chronological range from the mid or late 5th to the 7th century. Although not all the cemetery was uncovered, sufficient was exposed to gain a good impression of its full extent and to place it very much within the milieu of cemetery organisation of the Upper Thames Valley. While there is not the space nor desire to review the cemetery in full, a few observations on its social implications are required to emphasise both the differences and similarities with the other Gloucestershire cemeteries.

As the plan of the cemetery shows, the southern extent and parts of the eastern and western limits of the cemetery were established (Fig. 7). A ditch of Roman date perhaps delimited the cemetery area to the south-east, although the mass of burials stops before this feature with only one inhumation, Grave (175), a possible female aged 34-40 buried without finds, located 10 m south-east of the main group and less than 1 m from the boundary. The cemetery also contains several other graves whose contents invite interpretations of a superstitious nature. The most remarkable interment is surely that of the young woman in Grave 18, who had been interred with a wide and unusual range of objects before the grave was packed tightly with stones. She was furnished with a startling array of grave goods including 'normal' objects such as brooches and finger-rings, but also with hundreds of beads, a beaver tooth pendant, probably an amulet, iron, bronze and ivory rings and a fragment of a Roman limestone altar (Boyle et al. 1998, 61–3, 196–200).

The grave itself lies on the southern periphery of the cemetery, as do two other unusual burials, Graves 15 and 74, a 40-year old female buried prone with a knife and a few potsherds and a juvenile, also buried prone, with a potsherd and an animal bone. Another juvenile, furnished only with an animal bone, was buried prone in Grave 126 at the western edge of the cemetery. These burials reflect the wider development of liminal burial among early Anglo-Saxon communities nationally from the 6th century (Reynolds forthcoming). While the prone burials perhaps represent those who had transgressed acceptable patterns of social behaviour, the woman in Grave 18 arguably reflects the special role played by certain women in early Anglo-Saxon society. The stone packing of her grave might reflect a desire to prevent her corpse from rising out of the grave and is perhaps a further indication of her perceived supernatural role in life. Presumably, the death of a clever or 'cunning' woman within a given community required a successor who might operate without fear of her predecessor's return.
Fig. 7: Plan of the Butler’s Field cemetery, Lechlade, showing the location of the ‘cunning’ woman’s grave (18) and other unusual burials (after Boyle et al. 1998).
THE EMERGENCE OF THE HWICCE AND SUPRA-LOCAL TERRITORIAL ORGANISATION

During the 7th century, the consolidation of the middle Saxon kingdoms involved the fusion of a large number of territories or districts, many of which were likely consigned to memory well before others were recorded in the earliest reliable documentary sources. More recently, historians and archaeologists have considered the physical reconstruction of the limits of these early units, although there is little consensus with regard to their role in wider politics and social relations. The so-called 'Tribal Hidage', a tribute list of probable late 7th-century date, records groupings of lands of widely varying extent using an archaic terminology suggestive of the pre-state nature of post-Roman territorial organisation during the 5th to 7th centuries. The extraordinary variation in territorial extent expressed in the list can be read as an assessment of lands made during a period of considerable flux and where the expansionist nature of the larger kingdoms is self evident and where the smallest territories are fortuitously recorded close to the end of their autonomy as 'micro-kingdoms', to use Stephen Bassett's (1989) terminology (although see below).

The rulers of the Hwicce were arguably imposed upon the region by the Mercians, while Gelling has argued for a strong Anglian influence in the place-names of the sub-kingdom (Stenton 1971, 45, n. 1; Gelling 1953, xix). British place-names are also prominent and thus the Hwicce are probably best seen as a people of largely British stock with Anglian elements ruled by a Mercian (ultimately Anglian) dynasty (Hooke 1985, 8–9). By the late 7th century, the emerging kingdom of Wessex lay to the south, while the kingdom of the Hwicce became entirely subsumed within the Mercian kingdom by the late 770s.

Wales lay to the west, but separated from the Hwicce by a territory of comparable size occupied by a group known as the Magonætan, although, as with the kingdom of the Hwicce, its origins are obscure and contentious (Pretty 1989). Views of early medieval social relationships (effectively concerning conflict and its resolution) across the Mercian/Welsh border can be had as early as the mid 7th century from Welsh poetic sources, and from the 10th-century document known as the Ordinance of the Dunæte; a short legal code seeking to regulate interaction between the English and the Welsh either side of a river, probably the Wye (Kirby 1977; Noble 1983). On the basis of the distribution of 'sæte' (meaning 'dwellers') place-names, Margaret Gelling has highlighted the existence of a series of early administrative units of varying size running south from Oswestry to Hereford (Gelling 1989, 199–201), arguing that they represent administrative reorganisation of the Offa’s Dyke frontier in the late 8th century. The kingdom of the Hwicce breaks this naming pattern, although it picks up again south of the Bristol Channel in the names of Somerset and Dorset. Sæte-type names show a strong western distribution marking the cultural ecotone between western and eastern England.

That the kingdom of the Hwicce does not follow the same naming pattern as other major territories in the west is a matter of interest and may reflect an as yet unidentified difference in its origins compared to its neighbours. The Domesday Survey for Gloucestershire betrays a complex web of landholding with several hundreds comprising widely scattered estates of wealthy landowners (Darby and Terrett 1971, 4–5). Accordingly, the hundredal pattern at Domesday is difficult to reconstruct accurately and the origins of individual units require close attention to local circumstances rather than a search for an overarching model. The Gloucestershire Domesday also partly reveals differences between Welsh and English rural economies and social organisation, further emphasising the distinctiveness of the county.

Relationships between western Mercia and Wessex were as often strained as they were along the frontier further to the east. Warfare, apparently between Briton and Saxon, in the 6th century is
followed in the 8th and 9th centuries by a series of battles fought between Mercian and West Saxon armies attempting to dominate the frontier between their two kingdoms. The Gloucestershire region, therefore, occupied a unique geographical role within Mercia bordering both Wessex and Wales.

It is equally possible, of course, that the smaller units of ‘Bassett’ type originated as sub-divisions of larger territories. Such a model should also incorporate the possibility that the origins of hundredal geography, considered by many to be 10th-century, is of the same period as that of the ‘micro-kingsdoms’. Such a view accords with what is known of the longevity of the Hwicce in the consciousness of early medieval populations. Their identity survived in a vestigial form until after the Norman Conquest. As late as the early 11th century, for example, a charter of Æthelred II records Leofwine Wicciannum Provinciarum duæ (Leofwine, ealdorman or regional official of the province of the Hwicce) (Hooke 1985, 20; Sawyer 1968, no. 891).

Indeed, the hundredal pattern in Gloucestershire compares rather better with the ragged and apparently archaic patterns of the Wessex counties than with the Mercian heartlands whose shires and hundreds bear the morphological character of a widespread act of administrative re-organisation; in this case either following the recovery of the Danelaw by Edward the Elder, Æthelflaed and, later, Athelstan or, more likely, later still during the late 10th or early 11th centuries. The county of Gloucestershire itself came into being in the later 10th or 11th centuries, although the first mention of the shire in a contemporary account is in the ASC entry for 1016, which records the movement of King Cnut and his army there after a major battle at Ashingdon, Essex. In the same Chronicle entry the Magonsætan are referred to as fleeing the battlefield with the infamous Ealdorman (and traitor) Eadric Streona, whose political allegiance wavered between the invading Norwegian King Cnut and the English King Edmund. While the broader politics are beyond the remit of this paper, reference to the Magonsætan provides a further illustration of the potential for territorial entities of a much earlier political age to survive in a meaningful way late into the period.

Viking activity in the region is relatively well attested in the ASC where it had rather less success than in other parts of the country and accordingly much less direct impact upon local administrative arrangements compared to regions to the north and east. In AD 845 a Danish raiding fleet was heavily defeated at the mouth of the River Parrett near Bridgwater by the ealdormen of Dorset and Somerset and the men of their respective shires. In 877 King Alfred forced a truce upon them at Exeter, including taking ‘prime’ hostages, despite the fact that they had holed up in the walled town before he could catch them on their way from Swanage where a storm had destroyed 120 of their ships. Later in the same year, however, the Vikings ‘built booths in the streets’ of Gloucester according to a translation into Latin of a version of the ASC by Æthelweard, ealdorman of Wessex to the west of Selwood in the late 10th century (Stenton 1971, 461). Heighway (1984, 236) sees this visit to Gloucester as relatively peaceful, a situation perhaps reflected in the ASC entry for 880 when the Vikings ‘settled’ at Cirencester over the winter of AD 879–80. Although archaeological remains of these visits remain elusive, Heighway’s view is supported by the lack of reference to ravaging and burning that characterise so many of the other Chronicle references to the Vikings visiting English towns. Archaeological evidence for Anglo-Scandinavian interaction is, as elsewhere, extremely limited. A finger-ring formed of six platted strands of flattened copper-alloy wire is known from Longford parish (PAS website), north of Gloucester, and is of a type considered to be of Anglo-Scandinavian origin dated to between the 9th and 11th centuries at York and the 11th century at Waterford in southern Ireland (Mainman and Rogers 2000, 2584–6; Tait 1976, 264).
Della Hooke has considered the evidence for Gloucestershire's origins as four groupings of hundreds, based on Bath/Bristol, Cirencester, Gloucester and Winchcombe (Hooke 1985, 76). Although the hundredal groupings in question, such as the seven hundreds of Cirencester, or that of Grumbald's Ash in the south-west of the county, are not mentioned explicitly until after the Norman Conquest, Hooke notes that three of the central places for these territories, Bath, Cirencester and Gloucester, are those mentioned in the ASC entry for 577 as regional power centres of 'tyrant' kings (ibid. 77). The Domesday county, then, is perhaps the product of the amalgamation of a series of districts with seemingly 6th-century, or perhaps earlier, origins based on Roman central places, although the nature of Roman activity at Winchcombe, while evidenced, remains unclear (Saville 1985, 136). The importance of Winchcombe, which was occupied from at least the 8th century and possessed a minster or mother church and a royal manor by AD 821, is self evident in the role that it played as the central place of the short-lived Winchcombeshite which became defunct as an autonomous administrative territory in 1016 or 1017 (Heighway 1987, 152; Whybra 1990, 124).

SETTLEMENT AND LANDSCAPE AT THE LOCAL LEVEL: THE MIDDLE AND LATE ANGLO-SAXON PERIODS

What of the mass of small estates that formed the basis for the parish system crystallised during the 12th century? Debate surrounding the origins of parish units has, oddly, a rather separate historiography from that of the larger units. Whether Domesday manors equate to Roman villa estates remains at the heart of the issue. While many have accepted continuity from the Roman period, I have argued above that continuity of agricultural estates from the Roman period is likely to be absolutely minimal and, indeed, is exemplified by the more extensively excavated sites, notably Frocester (Price 2000).

Reconstructing the territorial units of early medieval communities before the later Anglo-Saxon period is extremely problematic and much rests upon how we understand the nature of territorial organisation before the emergence of the small units that became medieval parishes. The most plausible model is that during the period of kingdom formation in the 6th and 7th centuries, large estates, probably equating broadly to Domesday hundreds (at least in Gloucestershire and the Wessex regions) and with royal manors and minster churches at their centres, administered a multiplicity of farming communities within their bounds. Such units are known variously as 'federative', 'multiple' or 'complex' estates, although their constitution and even their existence is much debated. Parishes (parochiae) of minster churches are often observed to be coterminous with the extent of Domesday hundreds (Pitt 1999) and this factor, in combination with place-name evidence suggestive of specialised farms dependant on a central place, supports the general idea. Presumably, when smaller estates were carved out of these large units, as is documented by the granting of small parcels of land by the later Anglo-Saxon kings to private individuals increasingly from the later 9th century, the limits of many of these parcels must surely have followed existing divisions between the components of multiple estates. Support for this view is possibly forthcoming in the location of the 8th-century Lypiatt Cross upon the later medieval boundary between the parishes of Stroud and Bisley, the latter probably a minster church of early origin. Richard Bryant's careful consideration of the location of the cross leaves open the possibility that it stands at its original location, perhaps demarcating Bisley minster's religious jurisdiction (although this is likely to have included the whole of the Domesday hundred of Bisley (Hare 1990, 47)) or sanctuary (Bryant 1990, 46). Ultimately, we cannot trace the origin of the medieval parish back beyond this point.
Archaeological evidence for the 7th to 9th centuries is scarce, as it is elsewhere in western Britain. Early medieval coin finds from the 7th century up to the Norman Conquest are scarce when compared to those from surrounding counties to the east. A search of the Early Medieval Corpus of Coin Finds/Sylloge of Coins in the British Isles website (in May 2005) reveals seven coins of 7th- to mid 8th-century date, including an early shilling, dated AD 620-40, mint and moneyer unknown, from Eastleach Turville just west of Cirencester. The remainder of the early coins fall between AD 710 and 760 and reflect the national pattern of intense coin issue and use during the first half of the 8th century compared to earlier and immediately later (Gannon 2002). Mercian coinage is represented by three issues falling between AD 792 and 821, while a single coin of Edward the Elder (AD 899-924), precedes three coins of Æthelred II, two of Cnut (1016-35) and Harold Harefoot (1035-40) respectively, and three coins of Edward the Confessor (1042-66).

Settlement Sites

The development of rural settlement is particularly hard to characterise during the middle Anglo-Saxon period. It is becoming increasingly clear that the 7th to 9th centuries were characterised by a great complexity of settlement types, although extensively excavated sites are found mainly in central and eastern England. Archaeological evidence for the nature of occupation sites in Gloucestershire is more widespread and of a better quality than that available for study 25 years ago, although much more is required to assess just how representative of the wider scene the known sites are. In our consideration of early medieval settlement, we shall primarily consider Lechlade as an example of persistent occupation throughout our period, and Lower Slaughter, Kingsholm and Tewkesbury as examples of middle and late Anglo-Saxon higher-status settlement.

At Lechlade, excavations at Kent Place and Sherborne House have revealed the first evidence of early Anglo-Saxon settlement since the excavation of a single Sunken Featured Building (SFB) near Bourton-on-the-Water (Dunning 1932). Most importantly, the Lechlade site is probably that whose dead were buried at the Butler's Field cemetery 300 m to the north. The Sherborne House excavation revealed 0.5 ha of a settlement that evidently extended further in all directions and at least 100 m to the south-east as demonstrated by the contemporary evidence from the much smaller intervention at Kent Place (Bateman et al. 2003; Kenyon and Collard 2004). The larger excavation established a settlement plan that comprised a series of parallel linear ditches (J, K, L and M) of ephemeral character and an unusual sub-circular enclosure measuring some 25 m across with a rectilinear 'annex' on its north-eastern side (Fig. 8). Six SFBs and parts of three timber 'halls' were recorded along with a limited but nevertheless significant range of objects and other materials. Ditches J and K were only 10 m apart and surely represent a trackway, while ditches K, L and M were 30 m apart and seemingly constitute regular plots within the settlement space; both aspects are common features of middle and late Anglo-Saxon rural settlement elsewhere (Reynolds 2003). Ditch K was cut by several smaller ditches, also of Anglo-Saxon date, while one of these latter ditches was cut by SFB 8 showing that the settlement space was subject to periodic comprehensive re-organisation: similarly, SFB 1 cut ditch M. The three post-built structures are reminiscent of certain of the Frocester buildings, considered above, in terms of their apparently irregular post settings and the possibility that these structures were aisled bears serious consideration. This latter aspect is significant as aisled buildings are common in the Roman period, but not in the early middle ages until the late 9th century when they appear as one of the defining characteristics of late Anglo-Saxon manorial accommodation (ibid.). Similarities with
The Poundbury early medieval halls are again apparent and perhaps there are hints here of a western 'style'. A substantial patch of clay and limestone make-up within post-built Building 13 is again reminiscent of those within the Frocester buildings.

The dating of the Sherborne House settlement is problematic. Ceramics were of three fabric types (chaff-tempered, calcareous and sandy) and compare well with those from the Butler’s Field cemetery (Timby 2003, 60). While the presence of stamps of 6th-century or perhaps later date on certain of the vessels demonstrates occupation at this time, the overall longevity of the sequence remains difficult to determine. Given the provisos outlined above with regard to the potential date range of organic-tempered wares, we might perhaps allow for a later date of abandonment than the 8th century as suggested by the excavators, especially in view of the degree to which the morphology of the site was altered during our period. An angle-backed knife from Ditch T is dated to between the 5th and mid 8th centuries on the basis of Evison’s (1987) Dover Buckland cemetery typology, but her scheme does not take account of the fact that several of her types, including angle-backed knives, continue into the late Anglo-Saxon period (Ottaway 1992). The excavations at Kent Place revealed further occupation, including two ditches (D and F) of 6th- to 9th-century date, that appear to be followed by later alignments of property boundaries up to the present day (Kenyon and Collard 2004, 124). The Lechlade settlement is important in that it illustrates the development of structured and bounded settlement space potentially earlier than elsewhere in England. Although boundary features appear from the late 6th century at sites like Poundbury, they are in the main 7th- and 8th-century features on sites elsewhere (Reynolds 2003).

Minor features from excavations at other sites include a semi-circular arc of postholes c.4 m in diameter, dated to between the 7th and 9th centuries on the basis of a single sherd of pottery, from the Stoke Road site at Bishop’s Cleeve (Enright and Watts 2002, 11). A further individual posthole from that site is similarly dated, and a copper-alloy strap-end, of typical 9th-century type, recovered from a later medieval context supports the presence of a middle Anglo-Saxon phase. Overall, little more can be said apart from the fact that the posthole structure may not have been a windbreak but perhaps part of a truncated circular building of early medieval date of a newly emerging type recorded elsewhere at Quarrington, Lincolnshire, where two structures of a similar size to that from Bishop’s Cleeve were recorded, and Yarnton, Oxfordshire, where a larger circular structure is interpreted as a possible dovecote (Taylor 2003, 239, fig. 7; Hey 2004, 113, fig. 6.9).

Moving into the middle and late Anglo-Saxon periods, recent excavations at Lower Slaughter have revealed a substantial part of a multiple-ditched enclosure dated by three radiocarbon determinations to between the mid 7th century and the end of the 9th century (Kenyon and Watts forthcoming). The ditches probably represent continual redefinition of an ovoid enclosure, perhaps every 17 years on average, measuring c.100 × 60 m wide and partly fossilised in the present plan of the settlement. The ditches themselves were generally 'U'-shaped and shallow; clearly defence was not a motivating factor. The size of the enclosure compares well with those recorded elsewhere surrounding manorial-type accommodation of the late Anglo-Saxon period (Reynolds 2003). Lower Slaughter was clearly a settlement of some standing in the late 10th century when an assembly held there to settle a dispute was presided over by Ealdorman Ælfhere (Blake 1962, 79–80).

In common with many late Anglo-Saxon manorial sites, a church, St Mary’s, appears to represent a secondary addition to the complex on its eastern side. Parallels with other early medieval sites with 6th- or 7th-century origins and which became manorial complexes, such as Raunds in Northamptonshire, are apparent. The only possible trace for Anglo-Saxon activity within the enclosure were two shallow oval pits, although neither contained conclusive dating evidence.
Fig. 8: Plan of the early-middle Anglo-Saxon settlement at Sherborne House, Lechlade (after Bateman et al. 2003).

Outside the enclosure, activity of late Anglo-Saxon date is indicated by the finding of a hooked tag in a shallow ditch to the north of the main enclosure, although the object could feasibly be much earlier; two residual sherds of St Neots-type ware indicate 10th-century activity. One of the more significant aspects of the Lower Slaughter evidence is its persistence as a place of settlement from
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the 7th century to the present. This aspect compares well with that from Lechlade and suggests stability in the landscape rather than shift during the middle Anglo-Saxon period. Martin Watts's discussion rightly emphasises the significance of the early dating at Lower Slaughter and its implications for settlements studies in the region.

The late Anglo-Saxon archaeology from Kingsholm has been rather neglected in discussions of settlements of the period despite its potential significance. If correctly identified, the Kingsholm evidence provides the only contemporary comparison to the palace at Cheddar, Somerset (Rahtz 1979). A strong case has been made that the parts of timber halls excavated there in the 1970s formed part of the palace recorded in the ASC s.a. 1051. The probable late Roman mausoleum containing the high-status early 5th-century burial described above is suggested by the excavators to have remained standing, or at least have been visible, in the late Anglo-Saxon period (Hurst 1985, 20). Certainly, the late Anglo-Saxon timber hall (or part of) there, follows the same alignment (Fig. 9). The construction techniques and dimensions of the most clearly distinguished structure (F69/F72) are consistent with what one might expect at a high-status site of the period with steep-sided continuous foundation trenches describing a building in excess of 10 m long and 6 m wide. The structure may in fact have been 'L'-shaped if the various features, including wall-trench-like slots and postholes to the west of the two parallel wall-trenches, are all part of the same structure. Such buildings are known elsewhere at Catholme, Staffordshire, and North Elmham, Norfolk (Reynolds 2005b).

There is little from the Kingsholm finds assemblage to support a high-status interpretation, although many Anglo-Saxon settlements (including Cheddar) fail to produce substantial numbers of finds either in terms of quantity or range of materials. No 'small-finds' belonged to the late Anglo-Saxon phase, although a shield boss fragment is suggested to be residual and of 6th- or 7th-century date (Hurst 1985, 36–7, fig. 14, 8); perhaps it is late Anglo-Saxon. Although many objects of Roman date were found in early medieval levels, many of the iron objects found, including simple tools, could just as easily relate to the 'palace' phase. Alan Vince's (1985, 94) discussion of the albeit small quantity of ceramics suggests that the 'palace' was supplied in a different way to the city of Gloucester at the time, while he dates the construction of the principal building to the late 10th or early 11th century and its occupation into the later 11th century.

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Fig. 9: Plan of the Anglo-Saxon palace at Kingsholm (after Hurst 1985).
Another probable high-status site of the late Anglo-Saxon period was excavated by the late Alan Hannan at Tewkesbury in the mid 1970s, although, again, the evidence there for a substantial hall of late Anglo-Saxon date has been neglected in comparative discussions. The site of Holm Hill lies SSW of the medieval town and abbey of Tewkesbury, where the Domesday Survey records a manorial centre whose regional significance can be identified from at least the early 11th century; it was held by the powerful thegn Brictric Meaw during the reign of Edward the Confessor (Hannan 1997, 84). Holm Hill itself was the location of the residence of the post-Conquest earls of Gloucester and was recorded in Hannan’s excavations, while an earlier phase of substantial timber structures very likely represents the accommodation of the earls’ Anglo-Saxon predecessors (Fig. 10).

Large post-pits described a complex measuring nearly 40 m in length and between 8 and 12 m in width. As the plan of the site shows, two principal interpretations are possible, both equally plausible. Both suggested layouts centre on two axially aligned timber halls, with a rectangular structure, perhaps a tower, immediately to the south of the easternmost hall. Such alignments are common on middle and late Anglo-Saxon high-status sites, while the possible tower is another feature to be expected at the residence of a thegn.

Beyond the structural evidence, only a loomweight fragment and single sherd of late Anglo-Saxon pottery attest to activity during this period, although the explicit relationship to the succeeding phase and the character and alignment of the timber buildings is entirely consistent with high-status occupation and the site as excavated is best seen as such. As with Kingsholm, the lack of artefacts is not an unusual characteristic of such a site, although Hannan recorded the archaeology under appalling conditions as a rescue exercise during construction work. A further point worthy of note is the geographical separation of high-status residence and population centre exhibited by both Kingsholm/Gloucester and Holm Hill/Tewkesbury.

RURAL ECONOMIES

With regard to the nature of early medieval agriculture and rural economies, there is little evidence from archaeology. The Lechlade settlement excavations, however, have provided indications of the kind of rural economies one might expect in this region. Cattle comprised 56% of the Sherborne Place assemblage, followed by sheep/goat (34%): pig and horse were poorly represented (5% and 4%), while dog and red deer formed less than 1% each overall (Maltby 2003, 73). Domestic fowl, goose and crane were found in small amounts, while fish bones were absent even from sieved soil samples. Four soil samples from SFB 1 were examined for the survival of plant remains. Barley and wheat, flax and Celtic bean were recovered along with high numbers of rush seeds (Stevens 2003, 79). SFB fills, however, are rather problematic and those from Lechlade appear to conform to those elsewhere in that they represent redeposited midden material. The potential for samples taken from SFBs to incorporate non-contemporary elements should thus be borne in mind.

The Frocester excavations also provide important evidence, the earliest of which potentially belongs to the later part of our period and to the era of village formation from the later 9th century, not only in Gloucestershire, but across much of lowland England. The estate of Frocester was a possession of St Peter’s Abbey, Gloucester, from the 9th century until the Dissolution. The field in which the villa remains lay was known to Anglo-Saxon farmers as Stanborough, or ‘stone-barrow’ (Price 2000, vol. 121); surely a reference to the rubble remains of the complex, which was avoided by the first phase of ridge-and-furrow running up to the villa courtyard, but not over it. Unfortunately, this phase of cultivation is undated, although it precedes a pre-13th-century phase of narrower strips that encroached upon the parts of the complex, but not the villa, while the
Figure 10: Plan of the probable late Anglo-Saxon hall at Holm Hill, Tewkesbury (after Hannan 1997).
whole site was ploughed between the 13th and 16th centuries. The naming of the field recalls the *tiggel beorgae* or 'tile-barrow' recorded in the charter bounds of Exton, Hampshire, of AD 940 that refer to the site of the Meonstoke villa (Sawyer 1968, no. 463; Reynolds 2005, 175).

**LATE SAXON GLOUCESTERSHIRE**

In 1086 the Domesday Survey records a total of 367 places in the county, including the four towns of Bristol, Gloucester, Tewkesbury and Winchcombe (Darby and Terrett 1971, 6). Territory to the south of the Bristol Avon, the southern fringe of the ancient Hwiccian kingdom, was subsumed within Wessex during the 10th century and the county boundary moved northwards to follow the river rather than the line of West Wansdyke to the south (Reynolds and Langlands in press). Gloucestershire is one of those counties whose ecclesiastical provision is poorly reflected in the Domesday Survey with only ten churches listed against the 14 known through structural survival (Taylor and Taylor 1965; and including St Oswald’s in Gloucester). John Blair (1985) has listed secular minster churches in the county, while Peter Sawyer (1983) has considered the county’s royal vills within the context of a national overview. Judicial organisation in the county can be reconstructed by reference to charter bounds which record several potential execution sites located on hundred boundaries (Reynolds forthcoming). Hundred meeting places, where judicial courts were held, are little studied in the county and should prove a fruitful topic for future research.

**CONCLUSION**

In conclusion, I hope to have brought to the fore the more significant discoveries made by archaeologists in the last 25 years and to have set their findings in a broader context. Inevitably, there will be material that I have overlooked, but the one hope is that the next reviewer of the county’s early medieval archaeology will be in a position to revise this summary substantially, hopefully armed with a wealth of new data.

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East is East and West is Gloucestershire

Richard Reece

Two conferences on the archaeology of a region did exactly what they set out to do – concentrate on Gloucestershire. Yet in doing that they selected mainly the positive and so missed out some elements of the story which can only be seen through the negative. In other words they concentrated on the sites found and the objects recovered at the expense of the sites not found and the objects not recovered.

But this approach creates a problem in that there is a difference in the visibility of archaeological evidence between the eastern and western parts of Britain. In the period between about 100 BC and AD 1000 this seems to have two causes – the connections between the east of Britain and the highly visible material from the other side of the North Sea, and the eastern habit of burying things, whether singly or as groups of objects. Iron-Age torcs, Roman silver plate, and jewellery and ornaments in the Anglo-Saxon style are more immediately obvious and visible than similar objects such as small Iron-Age brooches often made of iron, Roman coarse pottery and the very occasional bronze Dark-Age pin. The former are found in East Anglia, the latter are staple fare in Gloucestershire. Perhaps even more importantly, objects such as torcs and silver plate are particularly well known because they were buried in groups or hoards particularly in East Anglia, more rarely elsewhere, and not at all in Gloucestershire (Hobbs 2006).

There are periods of time when East and West agree on the presence of material, but differ totally in the nature of the material. In the 4th century AD the Cotswolds are a focus for substantial villas with expensive furnishings such as mosaic pavements but they lack any finds of Roman silver plate. East Anglia has a high concentration of hoards of Roman silver plate but very few late villas and almost no expensive mosaics. If we concentrate on one particular type of material such as 4th-century bronze coins then the Cotswolds form a major concentration of both hoards and site finds while East Anglia shows a general small scatter and only a few sites with a concentration of the latest coins (Davies and Gregory 1991).

Moving forward in time to the years around AD 1000 there is a similar disparity in evidence between the two areas. East Anglia has a strong tradition of practical coarse pottery, but only a scatter of surviving pre-Conquest churches. The Cotswolds, and particularly the region around Cirencester, has a scatter of pottery so light that it is invisible, yet it boasts one of the densest concentrations of pre-Conquest churches in Britain. One group is in Daglingworth, Duntisbourne Rouse, Duntisbourne Abbots, Winstone, Miserden, Edgeworth and possibly Syde. Another is in the Ampneys (St Peter, Crucis and St Mary), Bibury and Coln St Dennis (Taylor and Taylor 1965 and personal observation).

If we move to the gap between these two periods, the 5th to 8th century, the differences in visibility become even more important. In the East there are the well known burials, either urned cremations or inhumations furnished with material of the Anglo-Saxon style. These objects are found much less commonly in Gloucestershire and always give the impression of being the westward limits of penetration of the style. Dating a little later in East Anglia there are now many sites on which large amounts of metalwork and early coinage have been found by metal detecting. These sites are now known as Productive Sites but they are unknown, so far, in the West (Pestell and Ulmschneider 2003).

The far west of Britain (Wales, Cornwall, Devon) between AD 400 and 800 has none of the material in Anglo-Saxon style, but some of the sites that have been excavated are usually dated by
finds of pottery imported from the Mediterranean – red slip wares and amphorae – and from south-west France – D and E ware. These imports have never been found in Gloucestershire. This leaves us with two mutually exclusive areas as far as visible archaeology and datable finds are concerned, with Gloucestershire sandwiched in between. This is particularly true after the earliest material in Anglo-Saxon style has died out without leaving any visible developments in pottery or metalwork. We need to consider the possible meanings of both presences and absences in the archaeological and material record.

Where material of roughly the same date survives in East and West then it is not enough to comment only on presence; difference must also be considered. This applies to the presence of late Saxon pottery in East Anglia and its rarity in Gloucestershire compared with the groups of pre-Conquest churches in Gloucestershire which cannot easily be paralleled in East Anglia. There are many complications which crowd in upon such generalising, some would say irresponsible, statements. To pick one at random, there may have been just as many churches of the 10th-11th century in East Anglia but they were of wood; the only point which is valid is that the Cotswold churches from an area of good building stone were of stone and so survive. But I think the point I am making is immune to such valid objections. I am not suggesting that the Cotswolds with their surviving pre-Conquest churches were Christian while East Anglia without surviving churches was pagan. I am pointing out that the rarity of 10th- to 11th-century pottery on the Cotswolds, which could be taken to suggest a minimal number of impoverished people has to be set against the counter-indication of an unusual number of churches of the same date.

I have spelled this out in laborious detail because in the period from about AD 400 to 1100 very little pottery indeed has been discovered outside Gloucester itself and the conclusion that some people wish to draw is that where there is no pottery there are no people. A refinement of this would be that a few sites, with a little pottery, are known, so we must accept that evidence, stringently limit the population to those sites and the few that remain undiscovered, and assume a heavy population loss on the Cotswolds in the years after AD 400.

It is possible that such a scenario is true but I doubt it for several reasons. In the first place, if it could be demonstrated such a population loss extending over many centuries would be unique in the history of population studies and would generate great excitement in the demographic world. So far as I know populations simply do not do that. Events of major mortality such as the Black Death, the Napoleonic wars, or even the First and Second World Wars cause an immediate drop in population, but, for various reasons, this leads to an increased birth rate and a reasonably quick (150 years or less?) restocking of the population (Scheidel 2002, especially the extensive references in n. 22 at p. 100). It could be that there is a disaster around AD 400, or the dust clouds of AD 540 might be to blame, but the mortality caused ought to have been repaired before AD 700.

The suggestion that there are a few sites which show continuity, and also have a small amount of pottery, has to be taken seriously. Unfortunately a type-site such as Frocester Court Roman villa provides difficulties (Timby 2000, 137–8). Continuity is hoped for because of the grass-tempered pottery found in the last phases of the villa – perhaps associated with its use to shelter animals. Such pottery is not yet well dated. I think the best we can say is that it rarely if ever appears in Roman assemblages of the late 4th century and is certainly not universal in groups of Saxo-Norman (11th-century) date. My impression, which has not been substantiated by detailed search, is that it belongs to the end of the Roman phase rather than the beginning of the Conquest-period phase. It cannot be taken to show continuity over as much as (perhaps) a century, though at sites such as Frocester it can warn us that there is a phase of material occupation, very difficult to study, post-dating the prolific late 4th-century deposits. The other problem with such pottery is its rarity,
even on sites on which it is found. As evidence of a discrete phase of unknown duration, perhaps a generation or two, five or ten sherds are acceptable. As evidence spread over five centuries to suggest continuity of occupation and use, I find five or ten sherds unacceptable. Similar problems apply to other types of pottery of roughly similar date, somewhere between AD 400 and 1100.

In summary we therefore have a period of several centuries during which there is good evidence for contact between the far west of Britain and the Atlantic coast of France and the Mediterranean. In the east of Britain there is substantial evidence for contacts across the North Sea with Scandinavia and the Dutch and German coastline. Gloucestershire and the surrounding area has no material evidence of outside contacts at all. It seems likely that contact between the West and points south depended partly on trade – for unless the remaining materials were all gifts, they had to be paid for. The same may well be true in the East. Gloucestershire seems to be an empty wedge between two different trading systems. This Empty Quarter runs from the middle of the modern city of Cardiff to somewhere east of Oxford and I have called it the Cotswold Severn Invisible Culture (Reece 1997, 8–10). It could be that the Cotswolds were producers and if so they could have passed their produce either to the East or the West, but this production and distribution apparently did not lead to the import of any materials into the region in exchange for whatever was produced and ‘exported’. We therefore have to consider the possibility that Gloucestershire, and surroundings, did not trade. That is because either there was no one there or the people who were there did not produce a surplus.

Not only can we be quite certain that there were people there, but they must have been quite productive. Gloucestershire is quite well supplied with early charters granting land to people of reasonably high status. To take one example, which has had a lot of attention, an estate at Withington was granted around AD 700 for the foundation of a monastery/nunnery in which daughters of the Establishment could be educated and, if not married, deposited. As Finberg pointed out long ago there is no point in endowing a company of noble women with a wilderness around a swamp. If they are going to settle successfully – and the establishment became successful enough for disputes about its ownership to emerge fairly quickly – the nuns need shelter, food, clothing, servants, and presumably a source of income. Just as you do not endow noble women with a swamp, so you presumably do not bicker over its ownership (Finberg 1959, 34–6). If, on the other hand, the land is ploughed and cropped and the surrounding hills, with gradients too steep for ploughing, are used to grow timber or to feed flocks of wool-producing sheep, then the nuns have sources of income and the ownership of the land becomes worth contesting. Yet, so far as I know, there is virtually no material evidence for that establishment, though there is an earlier pagan burial from Foxcote.

One area in which our ignorance is total is whether the ‘estate’ had an income and, if it had, how it was generated. If we take a fully ‘sustainable’ view of the whole land-holding then an income derived from production of a surplus is not strictly necessary. Tied agricultural labourers would not expect monetary wages – they would presumably be pleased if they were given enough time to minister to the shelter, food, and general well-being of their families. Their working time could produce the necessities of life for the ladies of the convent – wood and thatch for buildings and for heating, wool for spinning and weaving, substantial food and drink. But the nuns were perhaps used to more comforts than that, and if they took their educational and religious duties at all seriously they needed manuscripts and materials. Yet they could produce their own writing materials (ink, vellum) and they could engage in exchange with other monastic institutions by copying manuscripts.
The owner of land would be in roughly the same position as the inhabitants of the monastery, but without their religious and educational needs, so he or she could also be more or less self-sufficient. While an income would no doubt be useful for outlandish herbs, spices and medicines, the components of a fairly substantial life-style would all be available from the land. It could be that the rarity in Gloucestershire of foreign objects, whether from East Anglia, Byzantium, or Ireland, supports the idea of a self-sufficient wedge of people between the traders of the East and West. But this may be no more than my longing to demonstrate the re-emergence of a contented pre-lapsarian society in the Cotswolds. This argument has been based on Withington, but Withington is not unique.

The other charters belong to very contrasting areas of the Gloucestershire region. Some are on the high ground of the Wold (e.g. Calmsden, in North Cerney, and Stow-on-the-Wold); others are in the lush, not to say water-logged, lowland (e.g. Somerford Keynes and Ewen). An early date for the charters is supported by a very early church at Somerford Keynes, but again I know of no other material evidence. Following on the reasoning from Withington, there is little point in making the legal fuss of granting these disparate lands, and appearing to bestow great boons, if they were empty wildernesses. Wilderness might be thought an over-statement, but I have always carried with me the sight (about 1966) at Rothamstead Experimental station of an 100-acre field, part of which was left to its own devices in the mid 19th century and part around 1900. The part left alone for 100 years was a substantial wood with some tall trees and thick undergrowth. Unless this actual evidence is for some reason inadmissible for Gloucestershire it means that a landscape left empty by a disaster around AD 450 would have been complete wood and thicket by AD 550, and would so have remained until an intense Saxo-Norman reclamation in time for Domesday. Roads would have disappeared – they did not. Fields would have been totally forgotten and eliminated. The noble women at Withington would have had to make a clearing in the Wild Wood in order to build a wooden shack of branches to meditate out of the rain when they were not gathering nuts, berries and mushrooms in due season. This did not happen.

So what is the pattern of early medieval development in Gloucestershire to compare with the substantial landscape studies elsewhere, and particularly in the East? The answer is that we do not know because, apart from Finberg at Withington, the landscape writers have worked almost completely east of Oxford and have left us out of their pictures. The most recent example is the detailed and provocative study by Tom Williamson (2003) which has received mixed reviews. To me it is particularly provocative in that the study area on which so much attention has been lavished with some excellent results peters out as it reaches the area just east of Oxford.

I am left with my own very vague impressions from a study of the woody species of plant in all the roadside hedgerows in an area within a roughly eight-mile radius of Cirencester. As a result of this work, which needs considerably more attention to detail, I think I can recognise hedges of late 18th-19th-century enclosures and hedges of the 16th century. This leaves a substantial and fairly homogeneous group which ought to be older than the 16th century by three or four hundred years – a post-Norman re-organisation. And beyond that there are a few even richer hedges which seem to belong to an even earlier period. This all seems to come from a long period of use of the countryside which evolved from at least before AD 1000. This agrees with the Domesday record of manors and (thiving?) populations which is remarkably close to our first maps.

And if the hedges were being tended, the fields ploughed, the cows milked and the sheep shorn then the countryside was fully operational and not a desert. That the operators failed to leave us substantial signs of their existence and activities in material derived from excavation is simply a problem to be overcome by the study of other aspects of their life and work.
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The Medieval Countryside

Mark Bowden

INTRODUCTION

This paper considers the medieval topics that were covered in *Archaeology in Gloucestershire* (Saville 1984) arising out of the 1979 conference – pottery, deserted villages, towns, medieval houses – and some others. I trawled the literature to follow these topics and to see which others had arisen, identifying some of the trends, as I see them, of research in the medieval countryside over the last 20 or so years. One or two very significant themes emerge. Industrial archaeology was also covered in Saville's volume, and as there is no paper in the current volume specifically concerning that subject – in the rural milieu anyway – I have referred to that (briefly at least) and other matters that spill over into the post-medieval period. The locations of the principal places mentioned in the following text are indicated on Figure 1.

During my search of the literature I found two unexpected patterns.

First: there is a healthy tradition in Gloucestershire of professional, amateur and independent earthwork survey. This, I suggest, is contrary to the trend; not many other counties, if any, show such a pattern. Why this should be so is not clear. Gloucestershire has not been covered, for this period, by the national body of archaeological survey, the former Royal Commission on the Historical Monuments of England (RCHME), with the exception of the work at Chipping Campden (Fig. 2) reported by Paul Everson (1989), which relates mainly to the early post-medieval landscape. One should also perhaps note at this point Nicky Smith's (1998) work at Manless Town, Brimpsfield, but this was done as a personal research project in her own time, not as part of her official duties for the RCHME. There have also been two relevant surveys since the RCHME became part of English Heritage, at Minchinhampton Common (Smith 2002a) and at Dyrham Park (Smith 2002b), both for the National Trust. English HeritageInvestigators are currently working at Lodge Park, Sherborne, also for the National Trust.

Second: there is a notable concentration on low-status sites at the expense of high-status sites; the county's palaces, castles and abbeys have received comparatively little attention over the past twenty years. This again, I believe, is contrary to the national picture, but it is, arguably, a healthy state of affairs.

TOPICS

Pottery

There is, regrettably, little new to say on this subject. Alan Vince, when asked what advances he thought that there had been, and to what extent the research directions that he had pointed out (1984, 260) had been achieved, mentioned recent excavations at Dursley that have revealed sources of 12th–13th-century pottery that are different from those he knew of, even though it is only a few miles from the major production centre at Haresfield. The excavations at Acton Court (Rodwell and Bell 2004) and other excavations have also provided new assemblages. However, Vince's overall impression is that 'fieldwork in the past 20 years seems to have been mainly going over the same ground as far as pottery is concerned, whilst there are still large parts of the county with no recent fieldwork' (pers. comm.).
Fig. 1: Map showing principal places mentioned in the text. 1 Acton Court; 2 Berkeley; 3 Bradley; 4 Brimpsfield; 5 Chipping Campden; 6 Cirencester; 7 Compton Abdale; 8 Daneway; 9 Dumbleton; 10 Dursley; 11 Dyrham Park; 12 Frampton on Severn; 13 Hailes; 14 Haresfield; 15 Hawling; 16 Hay Wood; 17 Hillesley; 18 Hullasey; 19 Lancaut; 20 Leckhampton; 21 Little Aston; 22 Little Coleshourne; 23 Lodge Park; 24 Lower Almondsbury; 25 Lower Slaughter; 26 Lydney Level; 27 Manless Town; 28 Minchinhampton Common; 29 Nibley Green; 30 Oldbury-on-Severn; 31 Painswick; 32 Redmarley D'Abiot; 33 Roel; 34 Saintbury; 35 Saul; 36 Slimbridge; 37 St Briavels; 38 Stroud; 39 Sudeley; 40 Taynton Parva; 41 Temple Guiting; 42 Tewkesbury; 43 Tidenham; 44 Upton; 45 Winchcombe; 46 Bishop's Cleeve; 47 Ebley; 48 Kemble; 49 Moreton-in-Marsh; 50 Stonehouse; 51 Todenham; 52 Weston Subedge.
Fig. 2: Chipping Campden: site of 17th-century house and surviving earthwork gardens (photograph by Roger Featherstone, November 1986: © Crown copyright. National Monuments Record 3152/17).

Martin Ecclestone's (2000) important work at Haresfield itself has to be excepted from this. Ecclestone used documentary and place-name evidence, supported by aerial photos and experimental work, to locate the probable area of pottery manufacture but found little, if any, field evidence. This research should surely be followed up.
Deserted Villages and Other Rural Settlements

The term ‘deserted medieval village’ has been applied over-liberally to many sites which are
nothing of the kind, a problem noted by Aston and Viner (1984, 281–3). Sites so designated are
often no more than farmsteads or hamlets, and are sometimes not even of medieval date.

There have been very few excavations on medieval rural settlements in Gloucestershire
since the 1960s; exceptions are Kemble (King 1996), Lower Slaughter (Enright and Kenyon
2000), Ebley, Moreton-in-Marsh and Stonehouse (Oakley 2000) and Bishop’s Cleeve
(Enright and Watts 2002). Major advances on the topic of medieval settlement and agriculture
in Gloucestershire are the work not primarily of archaeologists but of a landscape historian
who takes archaeological evidence seriously, Professor Christopher Dyer. He has published
a series of papers studying settlement and land use on the Cotswolds; these are extremely
valuable in at least providing a substantial body of material to work on. These papers cover
villages and smaller, dispersed, settlements – at large and in particular – and the previously
unexplored subject of sheepcotes and seasonal settlement on the Cotswolds. Dyer (e.g. 1982;
1987) has thrown much needed new light on village formation, village planning, the causes
and process of shrinkage and desertion, and the reasons why some settlements were not
deserted. Dyer (1995, 160; 2002, 16) stresses just how extensive arable farming was on the
Cotswolds from an early date, something that is being reinforced by the aerial photographic
transcription being undertaken in the Cotswolds for the English Heritage National
Mapping Programme – ridge-and-furrow is almost ubiquitous on the fringes of the hills.
Two Gloucestershire townships, Todenham and Weston Subedge, are included in Hall’s
gazetteer of areas of Midland ridge-and-furrow of national importance (2001, 70, 71). Caution
has to be exercised, first over the dating and secondly over the function of this ridge-and­
furrow: is it in fact of medieval date and does it all represent arable agriculture, or is it in some
cases an effort to improve the pasture? The answer to the first question is that much of it is
probably medieval. The answer to the second may be more doubtful but a high level of
agricultural activity, at some times and in some places at least, seems to be indicated. Sheep
were entirely necessary in fairly large numbers to manure the relatively poor Cotswold soil – as
Dyer puts it, the balance between sheep and corn was the key to successful agriculture; each
ploughland in Temple Guiting, for example, was accompanied by 300–400 sheep (Dyer 1987,
177). The sheep got their feed from stubbles and fallows and imported hay, rather than from
permanent pasture, of which there seems to have been very little (idem 1995, 158, 160). Dyer
and his colleagues also find something which is being recognised more and more by landscape
archaeologists – boundaries are stable but settlements shift (Aldred and Dyer 1991, 142).

Patterns of medieval settlement are more complex than could have been imagined 25 years ago.
Not only are there primary and secondary settlements, or dual-focus settlements, but sometimes a
secondary settlement pertaining to one manor can be found physically linked to the primary
settlement of an adjacent manor. In their study of Roel and Hawling, Aldred and Dyer (1991, 149–
53) suggest that the location of the manor house at Roel, when most of the tenants lived in the more
desirable location of Roelside in Hawling, may be due in part at least to the existence of an earlier
stock farming centre on the site. However, they do not note (though it is shown on their plan) the
existence of an oval enclosure at Roel, apparently pre-dating other features, surrounding the
manorial complex. The unusual topographic location suggests that this is not a prehistoric enclosure
but it might well be of early medieval date and represent a high-status pre-Conquest focus. This might
be analogous to the oval enclosure that underlies Lower Slaughter (Enright and Kenyon 2000), but in
that case apparently including a church. Aldred and Dyer (1991, 146-8) count the number of earthwork buildings and crofts at Roel and Roelside and find they coincide approximately with the number of tenants recorded in documents; this is very neat but one should be cautious of such apparently close correlates between archaeological and documentary evidence. Archaeological evidence should not be used just to corroborate the documents but to challenge them.

As with permanent settlements, Dyer studied the documentary and archaeological evidence for shepcotes. He identified a considerable number of sites in the field (mainly in isolated upland locations), though many more are documented (and of these many were within or adjacent to manorial curia – where they are less likely to survive physically). These were long narrow buildings, capable of holding up to 500 sheep, often associated with enclosures and other buildings, as at Compton Abdale (Dyer 2002, 22-6) (Fig. 3). Shepcotes were used for

Fig. 3: Compton Abdale: plan of shepcote (after Dyer 2002, fig. 8). The long, narrow sheephose itself (A) lies at the north-eastern edge of a series of yards with subsidiary buildings. This is a very substantial complex, though not all the elements are necessarily contemporary. The leat cutting through the site from north-west to south-east is clearly a relatively late feature but its precise relationship to some of the platforms is uncertain.
shelter, for fodder storage, for lambing, for administration and flock management, and as a source of manure (idem 1995, 151-5; 1996, 32). They date from the 12th century and were in use until the 17th century. Dyer (1995, 155-6) stresses a change in historians’ views of medieval agriculture (which had previously been very negative) – medieval sheep farming was highly successful because of good management and care for the animals. This is true of peasant farmers as well as the owners of great estates (ibid. 159).

Despite the fact that even ‘isolated’ sheepcotes were no more than about 2.5 km from the nearest settlement, there is evidence that people dwelt at them temporarily (Dyer 1995, 161; 1996). This would involve shepherds bringing flocks of ewes and lambs to the upland pastures in summer but also dairymaids milking the ewes (idem 1996, 28-9). However, whether these upland sheepcotes represent a fully transhumant pattern of pastoral practice, with all the social implications of that identified by Herring (1996, 35, 39), is perhaps doubtful. Given the small distances involved, the sheepcotes might be seen as outstations of the permanent settlements, rather than shielings in the full sense, even if small numbers of individuals were dwelling in them at certain times. The seasonal movement of flocks declined with the increase in leasing of pastures from the late 14th century onwards, but flocks of wethers could be kept on upland pastures all year round, a practice perhaps reflected by the establishment of sheepcotes on deserted settlement sites from approximately this period, exploiting new pasture on former arable (Dyer 1996, 31).

In his presidential address to the Bristol and Gloucestershire Archaeological Society, Professor Dyer (2002) painted a picture of a well cultivated countryside with a mix of nucleated and dispersed settlement, seasonal variation, a mix too of planning by landlords and assertion of peasant rights and collective organisation. It was a dynamic countryside as well, with villages and other settlements growing between 1100 and 1300 and declining after the troubles of the 14th century. The decline was due to agrarian crises, a general fall in population and to various particular socio-economic problems but not to grasping landlords. However, even this decline brought in its wake economic diversification and new sources of wealth, such as the economic boom in the Stroud valleys, driven by cloth making, that began in the mid 13th century.

Other good work on settlement remains has been done. Earthwork surveys of a possible farmstead at Little Colesbourne (Parry 1989), shrunken settlement remains at Tidenham (Ellis 1984a) and an extensive deserted settlement at Hullasey, Coates (Ellis 1984b; Aston and Viner 1984, fig. 4), illustrate the potential of this type of work. However, much more is required, both in terms of breadth of coverage and depth of interpretation if the full potential of such earthwork remains is to be realised.

The current picture of a well-ordered, prosperous agricultural landscape, however, should not blind us to the fact that the medieval countryside of Gloucestershire was also (sometimes at least) an unhealthy place (Franklin 1983) and a place of crime, conflict and violence. Even Dyer’s (1995, 148; 1996, 31) evidence for sheepcotes indicates that security was a factor in the requirement for shepherds or others to be resident and for their doors to have locks and keys – sheep, equipment and sheepskins all being vulnerable to theft. Recorded episodes of violence and lawlessness in the county include aggravated burglary and multiple murders in Painswick in the early 13th century (Baddeley 1907, 71-2); poaching in the Forest of Dean (Birrell 2001) and elsewhere (e.g. Franklin 1989, 157); the battle of Nibley Green in 1470; and, most notoriously, the murder of King Edward II at Berkeley in 1327. The intransigence of individuals could also be an identifiable contributory factor in settlement desertion, as in the case of Richard Miller of Little Aston (Dyer 1987, 174, 177). More widely, archaeological evidence for concerns of rural security also exists in the earthworks surrounding individual tofts (Astill and Grant 1988, 51-4) and in the generous
provision of locks and bolts on village sites (e.g. Hurst 1984, 98). Keys, barrel padlock keys, hasps and locks were notable finds at Upton (Hilton and Rahtz 1966, 120-1, fig. 13; Rahtz 1969, 105, 108, fig. 12). Moats, although there is now probably almost universal agreement that they are principally a statement about social standing or pretension, are also about security at some level.

Moats
The term 'moat' is another classification, like 'deserted medieval village', that has turned into a straight-jacket. Supposed moats often turn out to be something unexpected, such as 17th-century water gardens. In extreme cases, such as the curious circular 'moat' at Redmarley D'Abitot (Wootton and Bowden 2002), there may be complete uncertainty as to whether the site is a moat or not.

A few moated sites across the county have been surveyed (e.g. Ellis 1984c). The moat at Bradley, Wotton-under-Edge (Iles and Popplewell 1985), with its associated ponds is an interesting example but like so many moats it raises several questions - is it in fact the documented manorial site, as the authors assume? Its position on a parish boundary should at least cause this question to be asked. Moats could be created by people in quite humble circumstances in relatively peripheral locations, as seems to be the case for many of the moats around the Malvern Hills (Bowden 2005, 40-1). What are the earthworks to the south-west of the Bradley complex that the authors describe as 'amorphous' and 'possibly quite recent'? Apparently amorphous earthworks should always be surveyed - it is the unravelling of such unpromising remains that often gives a vital key to interpretation. The tendency always to classify medieval ponds as 'fishponds' must also be questioned. Iles and Popplewell use this term, while noting that the lower pond at Bradley is exceptionally large - no doubt these ponds were used for raising fish, but they may have had other purposes besides, including ornamental ones (Everson 1998; Taylor 2000).

Towns
Towns were covered by Roger Leech in 1984. He complained that almost no attention had been paid to the smaller towns. (Bristol and Gloucester are covered by separate essays in this volume.) The situation remains much the same today, it seems; very little work has been done recently, outside of the Extensive Urban Survey (EUS) conducted by Gloucestershire County Council Archaeology Service, and some rescue excavations at, for instance, Cirencester, Tewkesbury and Winchcombe (e.g. Leech and McWhirr 1982; Wilkinson and McWhirr 1998; Hannan 1993, 1997; Hoyle 1992; Saville 1985; Ellis 1986; Guy 1986), though much of this work was undertaken before 1979. Cirencester has also been subject to an urban archaeological assessment (Darvill and Gerrard 1994).

Town plan analysis has been undertaken at Tewkesbury (Lilley 1997). St Briavels was covered by the EUS and a development sequence proposed (Douthwaite and Devine 1998a). Recent aerial photographic transcription in the Forest of Dean, part of the English Heritage National Mapping Programme, has, however, shown a more complex picture (Fig. 4), which seems to indicate that there have been episodes of shrinkage as well as growth (Cathy Stoertz and Fiona Small pers. comm.). Painswick (along with Dursley and Tetbury) was identified by Leech (1984, 297) as a town whose plan indicates more than usually complex development, associated with early settlement. Town plan analysis is wanted for such settlements (Fig. 5).

The Archaeology of Standing Buildings
Houses were covered by Lionel Walrond in 1984. There have been a few advances here but most have concentrated on individual buildings or complexes. Kirsty Rodwell's (1991) work at Court
Fig. 4: St Briavels: an extract from the English Heritage National Mapping Programme aerial photographic transcription, showing earthwork remains beyond the current extents of the village: based on an Ordnance Survey map. © Crown copyright. All rights reserved. English Heritage Licence No. 100019088. 2005.

Farm, Lower Almondsbury, for instance, is a good example, with an excellent analysis of the standing buildings. She notes that the manorial complex may have been moated but does not mention that the whole settlement – manor, church and village – appears to sit within an oval – again, as at Roel, possibly early medieval – enclosure (Fig. 6). Warwick Rodwell's (2000) work on Daneway – a diminutive hall dated by dendrochronology to c.1315 – raises the question of other diminutive halls of similar date still awaiting detailed study, such as Skinner's Mill Farm in the Painswick valley. This tiny but well-fenestrated hall indicates social pretension at a fairly low social level in the 14th century – perhaps on the part of the miller himself.
Fig. 5: Painswick: suggested scheme of urban development (based on Leech 1981, map 34, with additions). North is to the top of the page. If we assume that the present church occupies the site of the church inferred by Domesday Book (A), and that the manorial curia occupied the area immediately to the south (B) — though there is as yet no concrete evidence to support either assumption — then it is possible that the 10th–11th-century settlement straggled down the slope to the east and that the properties on either side of Vicarage Street (C) represent the tail of this original settlement. This might explain the awkward dog-leg in the main medieval through-route between Bisley Street, part of the new planned town, and Vicarage Street. However, there were alternative routes to the southeast via Hale Lane and Tibbiwell, or possibly by an extension of Bisley Street to St Tabitha's Well, now blocked. The planned market place, possibly of 12th- or 13th-century date, is usually taken to have occupied the area bounded by Friday Street (D) and now infilled by shops and houses. This area is small, however. It is also detached from the churchyard, whereas the church authorities were generally adept at ensuring themselves a profitable frontage on to any market area. Answering this objection, the authors of the Extended Urban Survey (Douthwaite and Devine 1998b, 151–66) proposed that the market place extended along the whole length of St Mary's Street (D and E). It could be proposed, alternatively, that the entire block south-east of New Street (D, E and F) was the market place. This is a very large area, but no larger than that identified as the original market place at Ludgershall, Wilshire (Everson et al. 2000), for instance. Of course, the market place might have occupied all these areas at different times, through the effects of infilling and encroachment. However, if the church’s property was at any time isolated from the market place, this would give a context for the creation of New Street, at some time before 1421, with the church authorities being main drivers in this development. They would have derived profitable church rents from their frontage on this new commercial street (G). Ironically these strips of land, almost certainly originally church property, were given to the church by generous donors in the 20th century. Burgage plots surrounding the market place (H) and extending along Gloucester Street (I), and later ones on the north-west side of New Street (K), can be identified.
Fig. 6: Almondsbury: plan (after K. Rodwell 1991, fig. 2, with additions). The road pattern suggests the existence of an oval enclosure around manor, church and village core.

More synthetic work on houses is represented only by Linda Hall (1983) on the rural houses of the southern end of the county, Walrond and Powell (1985) on smoke vents and other features of small medieval houses in the Severn Valley and, in the post-medieval period, Kingsley (2001) and, on weavers' houses, Palmer and Neaverson (2003). Issues of building conservation and restoration have been discussed by, for instance, Hill and Birch (1994). Industrial buildings will be mentioned below.

Parish churches are another class of building which has had some attention recently. Excellent papers have covered timbers (Morley 1985; Morley and Miles 2000), wall paintings (e.g. Edwards 1986; 1994), rooms over porches (MacAleer 2002) and general fabric (e.g. Parry 1990). However, there has been little consideration of churches in their landscape context (even Parry makes scant reference to the archaeological surroundings of Lancaut church), though Heighway (1989) has made some interesting reflections on medieval churches and manorial complexes in relation to high-status Romano-British sites.

NEW TOPICS – LANDSCAPE FEATURES

Fields and Woods

Terry Moore-Scott's paper on Leckhampton's fields (2000), using field-name evidence and surviving ridge-and-furrow, attempts a reconstruction of the open fields. More work of this kind is
Fig. 7: Field system in the Painswick valley (photograph January 2003, © Dr R.H. Bewley). Greenhouse Lane, a route of some antiquity, can be seen cutting diagonally through the fields. The relationship is complex because it suggests that the fields were regarded as being of secondary importance, or were perhaps even abandoned, at the time the road was established and yet their boundaries are, in most cases, still in use today. The fields are small, rectangular and lyncheted, and could well be of prehistoric origin. Plots of ridge-and-furrow are largely confined within these existing fields. The lower slopes were almost entirely under pasture in 1820 (Baker and Fosbrook). The ridge-and-furrow could be later than this but two features suggest an earlier, probably medieval, date. In a square field at the lower extreme right of the picture the ridge-and-furrow is very faint; this is the only field in the area that was under arable in 1820, so earlier cultivation remains might have been ploughed out at this time. In the elongated field immediately to the north (below and left), the ridge-and-furrow lies in two parcels, respecting a previous boundary, which had been removed before 1820; if the field had been ploughed in ridges after that date presumably it would have been ploughed in one parcel.

needed. The English Heritage Aerial Survey National Mapping Programme mapping of ridge-and-furrow has been mentioned above, but Gloucestershire does not have only extensive, classic, open-field systems. In the Painswick valley medieval or early post-medieval ploughlands were fitted into a pre-existing, indeed probably prehistoric, field system, which still survives today (Fig. 7).

Similarly, there has been some pioneering work on woodlands by Tom Heyes (1995; 1996) and others. Bick (1996) on earthworks in or near Hay Wood at Oxenhall in the Forest of Dean describes what may well be the ‘haga’ that gave its name to the wood – it certainly looks like a deer park on the map. It must not be forgotten that the doyen of historic woodland studies, Oliver Rackham, has had things to say about Gloucestershire. His passing remark (1980, 153)
that the Forest of Dean was 'probably the last place approximating to virgin wildwood in England' may be open to question. However, Rackham's statistics on the differing yields of the various forests are instructive and raise questions which, so far as I know, have not been addressed – why was the Forest of Dean such a major supplier of swine compared to other forests, until the mid 13th century at least (ibid. 185)?

One of the most exciting developments, however, has been a series of papers by John Allen and colleagues, opening up an entirely new area of landscape studies in the Severn Valley. The first, in 1986, concerned salt-marsh reclamation around Slimbridge, Frampton on Severn and Saul, as evidenced by documents and, on air photographs and in the field, by seabanks and ridge-and-furrow. These date from at least the 14th century and continued until the 19th century. The story is a localised one of gains and losses to a 'fickle, tidal river' (Allen 1986, 153). On the left bank almost the whole area gained seems to have been ploughed, for a time at least, and farmsteads may even have been established; later, by the 17th century, the fields were enclosed as pasture and settlement shifted eastwards, off the alluvium onto bedrock (idem 1992). This dating, it has to be said, relies heavily on the assumption that 'classic' reverse-S ridge-and-furrow is of high medieval date. On Lydney Level, by contrast, only a little more than half the area enclosed was ever ploughed and settlement was never established (idem 2001, 54). Other uses of the estuary are attested by quays (Fulford et al. 1992) and by fish weirs and traps, as at Oldbury-on-Severn (e.g. Riley 1998).

Castles and Abbeys

These more traditional monument classes have been strangely under-studied in Gloucestershire; there may as well have been almost no rural abbeys in the county as far as the archaeological literature of the past 20 years is concerned (though much of the work in small towns, mentioned above, concerns religious houses). This is not entirely a true reflection of the state of affairs – and more work is now under way at Hailes, for instance – but it is indicative of a relatively slight incidence of activity. The more historical literature, however, has had interesting things to say about persons of high status in the county (e.g. Birrell 2001; Vincent 1998; Warmington 1986).

The Bristol and Gloucestershire Archaeological Society presidential address by David Walker in 1991 was on the subject of castles but its approach looks old-fashioned from the standpoint of 2004 – castle studies have advanced by leaps and bounds during the past 15 years through the work of scholars such as Coulson (e.g. 1979; 2003), Creighton (2002), Johnson (2002) and the staff of the former RCHME (e.g. Everson 1996; 1998; Taylor 2000). More positively, in Gloucestershire there have been at least two surveys and some excavation of earthwork castles – Hillesley (Ellis 1984c; B. Williams 1987) and Taynton Parva. At the latter Sarah Williams (1997) notes that the motte fits awkwardly into its ditch and suggests that it started as a ringwork – a useful addition to the literature of such sites (see e.g. Welfare et al. 1999); the identification, supported by place-name evidence, of a large pool on the northern edge of the site as a swannery raises interesting questions about the status of this site. Williams refers to the settlement here as a 'village', but the evidence seems to point to a manorial complex in an area of dispersed settlement (as it still is today). Even the more recent discovery of further building platforms (Jasper Blake pers. comm.) does not necessarily suggest that this was ever more than a hamlet.

Dodd and Moss (1991) published a paper about Brimpsfield Castle and the Giffard family, accompanied by a very appealing reconstruction drawing. However, it is not clear from the text what the status of this drawing is – on what evidence is it based? The authors state that their findings are 'mainly conjectural'. A survey is mentioned but the results of the survey are not
presented, nor is the method or level of survey stated. Therefore it is impossible to know how much credence we can give to this drawing. There is, however, a 1972 Ordnance Survey Antiquity Model, reproduced here (Fig. 8). Several major questions about Brimpsfield remain: Dodd and Moss refer to the castle as a ‘ringwork’ but that is surely erroneous – it is much too big and far from circular. If we use the term ‘ringwork’ for castles such as this it will lose whatever meaning it has. The castle’s plateau-edge location is notable and its surrounding ditch is massive: is it a re-used hillfort? Why is this impressive castle located in this large but not particularly wealthy manor, in an area otherwise devoid of large castles? It is not even central to the Giffards’ estates, which were mostly in other parts of the country. What are the (unsurveyed) earthworks in the field to the north of the castle – evidence of shifted village settlement or part of the site of Brimpsfield’s medieval priory, or are they more closely related to the castle? What is the date and purpose of the motte in the valley below? What was Brimpsfield’s status as a settlement in the medieval period?

Sudeley Castle (Fig. 9) has apparently received no substantial attention recently but it is a site with huge research potential. The house itself may be now, partly at least, a Victorian reconstruction but the surrounding landscape clearly contains remains of the greatest interest. Sudeley was a major palatial house of the mid to late 15th century, of the type now known to be typically surrounded by extensive pleasure gardens and ornamental landscapes (Everson 1998; Taylor 2000), and with symbolic links to other features in the area. Much of what is now visible at Sudeley must relate to later phases, not least the 16th-century visits of Elizabeth I, but we should ask what the present...
landscape reveals about the 15th-century setting of this great house, and what are the links with Winchcombe town, its church and, perhaps most importantly in this respect, its abbey.

Early Post-Medieval and Industrial Archaeology

The incisive survey of weavers' houses by Palmer and Neaverson (2003) has been mentioned above. Work on Gloucestershire industry, especially but not exclusively the iron industry in the Forest of Dean, continues and is now a mainstream part of archaeological activity, as attested by a number of articles in the journal *Post-Medieval Archaeology* in the later 1980s (e.g. Kemp 1987; Stratton and Trinder 1988; Mullin 1989) and by the attention paid by 'mainstream' archaeologists, such as English Heritage's personnel undertaking the National Mapping Programme in the Forest of Dean. The RCHME's work on textile mills of the Stroud valleys was published by Keith Falconer in 1993, though more work has been done since in the south-west of the county. Quarrying has been somewhat neglected, though mention should be made of Hill and Birch (1994, 21–44), Arthur Price's work (e.g. 1995), King (1996) and Cedric Nielsen's (1999) fieldwork demonstration of a medieval or earlier date for some of the Painswick quarries.

Transport continues to be a major source of interest in all its forms, from the most local to the regional level. The Painswick Local History Society's milestones survey and restoration project (Minall 1999) is an instance. In 1984 David Viner described the Stroudwater Canal as 'a good opportunity for restoration in the future' (Viner 1984, 330) – that restoration is now, though
controversial, going ahead (Eaton 2004); Gloucester Docks – ‘arguably the county’s most pressing problem’ for Viner in 1984 (Viner 1984, 333) – are now triumphantly restored. Stroud station, also mentioned by Viner for its Brunel-inspired buildings (ibid. 335), has also been in the news recently – the goods shed received a substantial grant towards its restoration in 2004.

Aside from industry, parks and gardens are the most fashionable topics today for research in medieval and post-medieval archaeology. I have referred already to the RCHME’s seminal work at Chipping Campden and more recent work at Dyrham and Lodge Park. An earthwork and resistivity survey of 18th-century gardens at Dumbleton was reported briefly by Maxwell and Mayes in 2003. This was primarily an exercise in testing out new geophysical equipment, but it was also successful in demonstrating that the gardens depicted by Kip had in fact been created. Much more remains to be done in this field.

CURRENT INITIATIVES

There is a healthy amount of fieldwork going on in the county – Gloucester and District Archaeological Research Group’s recent purchase of geophysical equipment, and the considerable efforts of the Dean Archaeological Group and the Gloucestershire Society for Industrial Archaeology are worthy of note. Three closely inter-related professionally-led projects should also be mentioned.

Forest of Dean Survey

This initiative, led by the Gloucestershire Archaeology Service, possibly will not make as much impact for the medieval countryside as for earlier periods, as it is specifically targeted at the pre-afforestation landscape. It is an essential next step nevertheless.

English Heritage Aerial Survey National Mapping Programme Projects in the Forest of Dean and the Cotswolds

Work on St Briavels in the Forest of Dean and on ridge-and-furrow in the Cotswolds has been mentioned above. There is certainly much more to come out of these projects. One example is Saintbury (Fig. 10) on the northern edge of the Cotswolds, an area assessed in the pilot phase of the Cotswolds project (Ed Carpenter pers. comm.). This remarkable parish sits within an area of outstanding earthwork survival, where further landscape studies would prove invaluable. The parish church, which contains some interesting architectural puzzles in its own right, sits within an oval enclosure that also contains, immediately to the west of the church, a rectangular sub-enclosure, probably the manorial curia. On the scarp above is the remains of a rabbit warren, with the site of the warrener’s lodge possibly identifiable, and a large area of ‘humps and bumps’, mostly of geological rather than archaeological interest but probably including some of the latter. The present village straggles downslope to the north of the church, to the crossroads at Lower Farm marked by a late medieval cross (Fig. 11). Just without the current boundary of the parish are other significant sites, including the hillfort on Willersey Hill and a motte-and-bailey castle near the edge of Weston Park.

FUTURE RESEARCH

The development of a framework for archaeological research in South-West England is now under way (web address: somerset.gov.uk/somerset/cultureheritage/heritage/swarf). It is important that
discussion on future research frameworks does not descend immediately into a series of 'wish lists'. The examples mentioned in this paper are just examples, not firm suggestions. There are many issues to be considered but three points will be aired here, in no particular order.

The first is a question: is it more important to fill the gaps or to build on the strengths where good work has already been done? There are some yawning gaps in our understanding of the medieval countryside - environmental archaeology, for instance, is an almost complete blank (though the Forest of Dean Survey will be addressing this issue for that part of the county). Should effort be expended first there or, for instance, on taking another close look at the earthworks cited by Professor Dyer? An independent check on his results would be extremely valuable - does the archaeological evidence really confirm what the documents are saying, or does it challenge it?

The second point is that, whatever the emphasis of future research, it is vital that it is genuinely inter-disciplinary. Study of the medieval countryside (as of any other landscape) must involve geologists and geomorphologists, soils specialists, natural historians, place-name specialists, landscape and architectural historians, and so on, as well as all manner of archaeologists.

The third point is directed primarily at those undertaking earthwork survey, but it is more widely applicable. We must be more robust about earthworks and build on the good work that is already being done. The cup is half full, not half empty; it is not right to say of a well preserved earthwork site, 'there is virtually nothing left ... except for some earthworks' (Dodd and
Fig. 11: Saintbury: medieval cross (© English Heritage, National Monuments Record). The cross dates from the 14th century and has a mid 19th-century head. Such crosses are often described as ‘wayside’ or ‘preaching’ crosses but these terms disguise their focal position in medieval processional liturgical practice (Duffy 1992, 136–9 et passim), which gave them a key place in the structuring of the medieval countryside. The crosses that survive are a tiny proportion of those originally existing.

Moss 1991, 34). The approach should be, rather, that the survival of any earthworks is a matter for rejoicing; earthworks are full of archaeological evidence and are an important part of the beauty and fascination of the landscape. Similarly, there is no reason to apologise for the practice of earthwork survey or landscape analysis. These are not ‘second-best’ to excavation – they are valid research strategies with their own unique strengths (Bowden 1999, 80–96). It follows that one should not survey the earthworks and then write an interpretation that simply reinforces the received wisdom about the site; it is vital to interrogate the earthworks themselves, to be inquisitive about origins, classifications and functions, about modifications and later re-use. The comments above about inter-disciplinary research notwithstanding, there should be no automatic deference either to excavated evidence or to documentary evidence – the visible physical remains are the primary evidence for what actually happened.

Unfortunately, the earthworks of the county are not secure. This can be illustrated by the gross vandalism at Hillesley, where a very interesting and important (and barely understood) earthwork complex was levelled, as recently as 1979 as it happens, to create a playing field (Ellis 1984c, 206–7; B. Williams 1987, 147). This is not a counsel of despair either; the situation at Hillesley could be mitigated by further research – analysis of the village plan followed by geophysical survey and targeted excavation. But only by making people aware of the value of earthwork remains in their locality can we ensure that the Hillesley disaster does not befall other places in the county.

Finally, it is not enough to call for more field research in the hope that we will somehow one day have ‘enough’ evidence. Archaeological evidence is, by its nature, fragmentary and incomplete.
Interpretation, developing an understanding of the past from partial, inadequate evidence, is the business of the archaeologist, and we must press on with it.

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