

Prehistory in the Cirencester area

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The Churn Valley and adjacent limestone uplands in the parishes considered in this volume were extensively if sparsely occupied during prehistoric times, with the scale and extent of settlement increasing considerably after about 700 BC. Archaeologically the area is extremely rich, but understanding these early communities draws on many different strands of evidence. Investigations by antiquarians working here from the eighteenth century onwards are important, and one of the earliest recorded excavations in Gloucestershire was by Anthony Freston at the Hoar Stone long barrow, Duntisbourne Abbots, in 1806.¹ More recently, systematic surveys of upstanding monuments,² fieldwalking,³ aerial photography,⁴ geophysical survey, excavation, and the scientific study of finds and materials each provide a wealth of complementary information. Ongoing research projects around Bagendon,⁵ and on Abbey Home Farm in Baunton and Preston parishes,⁶ contribute many insights. But the single most important contribution in recent years has come from commercial archaeology projects such as those connected with upgrading the A417/419,⁷ the expansion of Cirencester,⁸ and gravel extraction in the Cotswold Water Park.⁹ Overviews of archaeology in the area provide a wider context for the material discussed below.¹⁰

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- ¹ A. Freston, 'An account of a tumulus opened in an estate of Matthew Baillie MD, in the parish of Duntisbourne Abbots in Gloucestershire', *Archaeologia* 16 (1812), 361–2.
- ² H. O'Neil & L. V. Grinsell, 'Gloucestershire barrows', *Trans. BGAS* 79 (1960), 3–149; RCHM *Glos.* I.
- ³ R. Holgate, *Neolithic settlement of the Thames basin*. (Oxford, 1988).
- ⁴ R. Leech, *The upper Thames Valley in Gloucestershire and Wiltshire: an archaeological survey of the river gravels* (Bristol, 1977).
- ⁵ T. Moore, 'Excavations at two Iron Age enclosures within Bagendon 'Oppidum'', *Glevensis* 47 (2014), 12–21.
- ⁶ T. Darvill & M. Smith, 'Baunton, Sisters Long Barrow, Abbey Home Farm', *Trans. BGAS* 136 (2018), 317.
- ⁷ A. Mudd, R.J. Williams & A. Lupton, *Excavations alongside Roman Ermine Street, Gloucestershire and Wiltshire* (Oxford, 1999).
- ⁸ E. Biddulph & K. Welsh, *Cirencester before Corinium* (Oxford, 2011); A. Simmonds, E. Biddulph & K. Welsh, *In the shadow of Corinium* (Oxford, 2018); D. Young & J. Erskine, 'Two prehistoric enclosures at The Beeches Playing Field, London Road, Cirencester, Gloucestershire', *Trans. BGAS* 130 (2012), 31–62.
- ⁹ A. Morgi, D. Schreve & M. White, *The Thames through time* (Oxford, 2011); G. Lambrick & M. Robinson, *The Thames through time* (Oxford, 2009).
- ¹⁰ T. Darvill, *Prehistoric Gloucestershire*, 2nd edn. (Stroud, 2011); T. Darvill & N. Holbrook, 'The Cirencester area in the prehistoric and early Roman periods' in T. Darvill & C. Gerrard (eds), *Cirencester: Town and landscape* (Cirencester, 1994), 47–56.

Before 10,000 BC

Outwash sands and gravels deposited on the east side of the Cotswolds during the Pleistocene Ice Age survive as a series of terraces in the Churn Valley south of Cirencester.¹¹ The gravels themselves comprise sandy oolitic limestone pebbles with varying proportions of other rocks including quartz, flint, and ironstone that originated in the Midlands Plain and beyond to the north. Occasional fossilized animal bones, struck flint, and flint implements are jumbled up within the rather mixed matrix, and these too derive from the southward movement during the Pleistocene of material eroded from earlier occupation sites away to the north. Two such implements come from separate findspots in fourth terrace Northmoor Sand and Gravel Member deposits near South Cerney.¹² These gravels were laid down late in the Devensian glacial stage, between 50,000 and 20,000 years ago,¹³ but typologically the flint tools belong to the Acheulian tradition broadly dated to the period around half a million years ago (Hoxnian interglacial); they were probably produced by *Homo heidelbergensis* communities. Similar items can be expected in Northmoor and earlier (Hanborough Gravel Member) deposits extending into the southern part of Siddington parish.

10,000 – 4000 BC

The earliest in-situ occupation of the Cirencester area occurred during the early post-glacial period after about 10,000 BC when mobile groups of hunter-gatherers visited the area to exploit herds of deer, horses, and other wild animals living within what by 7000 BC was a fairly wooded environment punctuated by naturally formed open grassland areas. Scatters of flint-working debris and associated finished implements betray the existence of small, probably fairly short-lived, campsites. Finds made during the construction of the A417/419 at Cherry Tree Lane east of Cirencester are amongst the earliest, dating to about 7000 BC,¹⁴ but other material spanning the period from about 6000 BC to 4000 BC is known from excavations at Bagendon in the 1950s,¹⁵ excavations at Kingshill North¹⁶ and Kingshill South,¹⁷ Beeches Playing Field, Cirencester,¹⁸ and fieldwalking in Baunton and Preston parishes.¹⁹ It is possible that contemporary preserved land surfaces exist under later alluvium deposits that have accumulated over several millennia in the floodplains of the River Churn and along its west-bank tributaries the Bagendon Brook and Daglingworth Brook.

¹¹ P. Robson, *The sand and gravel resources of the Thames Valley* (HMSO, 1975).

¹² Darvill, *Prehistoric Glos.*, fig. 10.B and E.

¹³ British Geological Survey on-line mapping; Morigi et al (2011), 1–131.

¹⁴ Mudd et al, *Excavations alongside Roman Ermine Street*, 15, 311–13.

¹⁵ E.M. Clifford, *Bagendon. A Belgic oppidum* (Cambridge, 1961), 197–8.

¹⁶ Biddulph & Welsh, *Cirencester before Corinium*, 33.

¹⁷ Simmonds et al, *In the shadow of Corinium*, 11.

¹⁸ Young & Erskine, 'Two prehistoric enclosures', 31.

¹⁹ N. Snashall, 'The idea of residence in the Neolithic Cotswolds.' (unpub. Sheffield Univ. PhD thesis, 2002).

4000 – 3300 BC

Rich soils and favourable environments seem to have attracted early farming communities to the upper Thames and Cotswold region from around 4000 BC, some of them probably migrants from western France. Livestock introduced with them comprised cattle, pigs, and sheep, and they grew small amounts of wheat and barley.

Occupation sites, probably small farmsteads comprising one or two houses in a woodland clearing with associated gardens and paddocks, are hard to find because of later erosion. However, one is represented by the pits, postholes, and a gulley associated with settlement debris at Duntisbourne Grove, Duntisbourne Abbots. Pottery in the plain bowl style together with sherds of Peterborough Ware and worked flints that included a leaf-shaped arrowhead suggest a middle fourth millennium BC date, as confirmed by two radiocarbon dates of 3654–3370 BC (NZA-8671: 4761±57 BP)²⁰ from Pit 94 and 3641–3354 (NZA-8672: 4717±60) from Pit 142.²¹ Flint scatters such as those found at Middle Duntisbourne (Duntisbourne Abbots), Norcote Farm and St Augustine's Farm South, Preston, during the construction of the A417/419 may be vestiges of other settlements of this period.²² A tree-throw pit and associated worked flint found at Hare Bushes North, Cirencester, might suggest another settlement nearby.²³

Seasonal gathering places for this dispersed population are represented by causewayed enclosures at intervals across the landscape. Two are known through aerial photography beside small tributaries of the Churn at Southmore Grove, Rendcomb,²⁴ and Bean Hay Copse, Down Ampney,²⁵ but neither has been confirmed through excavation. A third possible example lies about half-way between these two at Wiggold, but it too requires confirmation through further investigation.²⁶ Amongst the activities undertaken at causewayed enclosures was trade and exchange. Flint was brought into the Cotswolds from sources to the south and east, and stray finds of flint axes, mostly broken fragments, and other kinds of tools and weapons too are fairly common throughout the area. Stone axes from distant sources include a Group VI adze from Great Langdale in the Lake District found at Beeches Road, Cirencester.²⁷ These pieces show the extent of the exchange networks connecting these Cotswold communities with other parts of Britain.

²⁰ Radiocarbon dates are given as a calibrated date-range at the 95 per cent confidence limit in years BC followed in parenthesis by their laboratory number and the age determination and standard deviation in years before present)

²¹ Mudd et al, *Excavations alongside Roman Ermine Street*, 18–23.

²² Mudd et al, *Excavations alongside Roman Ermine Street*, 17.

²³ Mudd et al, *Excavations alongside Roman Ermine Street*, 18.

²⁴ S. Trow, S., 'An interrupted-ditch enclosure at Southmore Grove, Rendcomb, Gloucestershire', *Trans. BGAS* 103 (1985), 17–22.

²⁵ RCHM *Glos.* 1, 44 ; Leech, *The upper Thames Valley*, 12 (1095/1096) and map 3.

²⁶ T. Darvill, T., 'Ampney Crucis, Happy Lands, Wiggold', *Trans. BGAS* 130 (2012), 307–08.

²⁷ A. McWhirr, *Houses in Roman Cirencester* (Cirencester, 1986). fig. 93.

The first monumental architecture on the Cotswolds was built in the early fourth millennium BC and is represented by particular kinds of round barrow referred to as ‘rotunda graves’ and, better known, the distinctive Cotswold-Severn long barrows.²⁸ These long barrows, of which there are more than a hundred on the Cotswolds, are large well-built trapezoidal or rectangular mounds of stone and soil contained within a delimiting wall. The largest are nearly 100m long. In the mound are one or more chambers either opening from the side of the mound (lateral chambered tombs) or from one of the ends (terminal chambered tombs). Human corpses were placed in the chambers as part of complex long-term rituals and ceremonies involving the movement of body parts and the removal of selected bones for deposition elsewhere.

Six long barrows are currently known within the parishes covered by this volume: The Hoar Stone, and Jack Barrow in Duntisbourne Abbots, a pair of possible long barrows in College Plantation, Duntisbourne Rouse, The Querns long barrow in Cirencester, and Sisters Long Barrow in Baunton. Antiquarian excavations at the Hoare Stone,²⁹ Jack barrow,³⁰ College Plantation I,³¹ and the Querns barrow³² provide little reliable information about their form, structure, or contents. Some of the burials found during excavations at Jack Barrow in 1875 were reburied in Duntisbourne Abbots churchyard where they are covered by a cross made of slabs from the barrow.³³ The Sisters long barrow was first recognized in 2005 and is currently undergoing excavation, and seems to be a multi-period structure that was already in use by the 38th century BC and became a lateral chambered tomb soon afterwards.

3300 – 2300 BC

Construction of causewayed enclosures and long barrows ceased around 3300 BC, although some may have continued to be visited and remained significant places in the landscape. The following millennium seems to have been one of relative quietude on the Cotswolds, characterized by the use of Grooved Ware style pottery. Scattered communities came together for worship and celebration at regional ceremonial centres, the largest of which include Stonehenge and Avebury in Wiltshire. On the north Cotswolds the area around Rollright and Condicote were local versions,³⁴ and in the upper Thames Valley the Lechlade area seems to have played a similar role with a cluster of henges and

²⁸ T. Darvill, *Long barrows of the Cotswolds and surrounding areas* (Stroud, 2004).

²⁹ Freston, 'An account of a tumulus opened in an estate of Matthew Baillie MD'.

³⁰ E.M. Clifford, 'Jackbarrow, Duntisbourne Abbots', *Trans. BGAS* 59 (1937), 334–47.

³¹ O.G.S. Crawford, *Long barrows of the Cotswolds* (Gloucester, 1925), 88–9.

³² Crawford, *Long barrows of the Cotswolds*, 129.

³³ O'Neil & Grinsell, 'Gloucestershire barrows', 77.

³⁴ Darvill, *Prehistoric Gloucestershire*, 107–109.

cursus monuments.³⁵ A small henge about 9m in diameter with an entrance slightly west of north was found at Shorncote³⁶ and may be seen as a local shrine serving the lower Churn Valley.

A scatter of 11 pits at Kingshill North, Cirencester, contained a varied assemblage of Grooved Ware pottery, flint scrapers, bone pins, stone axeheads, antler fragments, and cattle and pig bones. They date to the early third millennium BC and probably represent a small settlement of the period.³⁷ The stone axeheads comprised one complete axe and three broken fragments made from Cornish greenstone, and one flake of Group VI rock from Great Langdale in the Lake District.³⁸

Burials of this period are rare and tend to be represented by flat graves of various kinds. One such near Ranbury Ring, Ampney St Peter, contained the partial remains of a child's skeleton dated to 3362–3107 BC.³⁹

2300 – 1600 BC

Profound social changes across much of northwest Europe in the late third millennium BC, in part at least associated with finding and using metal ores to make novel items through which to support emerging elites, led to migrations and the spread of distinctive ideologies and material culture. In Britain these changes are represented by the appearance of Beaker pottery and a variety of new traditions that went with it, including inhumation burial under round barrows. The origins of Beaker pottery lay in Iberia, although its appearance in Britain, and the genetic ancestry of those introducing it, can be traced back to the lower Rhine Valley and adjacent continent. The Thames Valley was undoubtedly an arterial route for the dispersion of these new ideas, and the Cotswolds an early recipient.

The A417/419 improvements around Cirencester revealed Beaker pottery at three sites. Most important was Trinity Farm, Daglingworth, where three pits with a large collection of early style low carinated Beaker pottery as well as flint scrapers, cores, and flakes suggest a settlement. Hazelnut shells dated to 2476–2142 BC (NZA-8673: 3876±57 BP) Pit 7 and 2462–2130 BC (NZA-8674: 3836±58 BP) from Pit 9 were associated with a few grains of wheat and barley thereby putting this site in the first wave of Beaker presence in Britain.⁴⁰ Beaker pottery was also found at Preston Enclosure, Preston, and St Augustine's Lane, Preston, although the context of these finds is not clear.⁴¹ Field evaluations at Cirencester Park Polo Club revealed a pit containing fine Beaker pottery as well

³⁵ Darvill, *Prehistoric Gloucestershire*, 106.

³⁶ A. Barclay, H. Glass, & C. Parry, 'Excavation of Neolithic and Bronze Age ring-ditches, Shorncote Quarry, Somerford Keynes, Gloucestershire' *Trans. BGAS* 113 (1995), 21–60.

³⁷ Biddulph & Welsh, *Cirencester before Corinium*, 7–10.

³⁸ Biddulph & Welsh, *Cirencester before Corinium*, 36–39.

³⁹ A. Mudd, 'A Neolithic burial and pit burial near Ranbury Ring, Ampney St Peter', *Trans. BGAS* 130 (2012), 129–43. 133.

⁴⁰ Mudd et al., *Excavations alongside Roman Ermine Street*, 25–27.

⁴¹ Mudd et al, *Excavations alongside Roman Ermine Street*, tab. 7.5.

domestic coarseware,⁴² and at Cirencester Rugby Ground beside The Whiteway in Cirencester a stone-lined pit contained fineware Beaker.⁴³ Other stray finds from the wider area include sherds from Beeches Playing Field, Cirencester,⁴⁴ and Sisters Long Barrow, Baunton. Excavations at Leaholme in the centre of Cirencester in 1961 identified a 2.4m diameter ring of 17 stakeholes cut into the natural clay and associated with friable red pottery that may belong to this period.⁴⁵ At Kingshill South, Cirencester, a deep pit or shaft some 1.1m deep also probably belongs to the Beaker period.⁴⁶

Beaker burials are well represented around Cirencester. At Kingshill North a flat grave in the northeastern part of the site was that of an elderly female buried with a Beaker pot and dated to 2201–2031 BC (OxA-20186: 3718±29). Isotope analysis of tooth fragments suggests that this individual spent her childhood in southwestern Britain rather than on the Cotswolds.⁴⁷ About 130m to the southwest was a 12m diameter ring-ditch surrounding the inhumation of a female aged 30–40 years old on her left side, head to the south. An early style low-carinated Beaker vessel stood between her arms and legs. A radiocarbon date of 2458–2154 BC (OxA-20184: 3830±29 BP) was obtained from the skeleton.⁴⁸ Part of a cattle skull and bones from the lower legs were present in the grave suggesting a 'head and hoofs' grave in which the body was covered with the hide of a cow.

Just outside the area at Shorncote Quarry two Beaker burials represented the start of a cemetery that continued through into later centuries.⁴⁹ A ring-ditch 9.5 m in diameter surrounded a central rectangular grave containing the poorly preserved remains of an adult male aged upwards of 30 years. He had been placed on his left side with the head to the northwest and facing northeast. A rather crude long-necked Beaker had been placed on its side next to the skull and nearby was a flint knife. A fine flint dagger was found near the position of the feet and a retouched flake and flint knife were found near the legs.⁵⁰ A second grave 80m to the north was probably a flat grave with no surrounding ditch or cover-mound. The body, that of an adolescent aged between 14 and 16 years, lay with head to the south, facing east. A long-necked Beaker had been placed on its side next to the skull, a decorated bronze bracelet adorned the right wrist, and a flint flake lay near the feet.⁵¹ A sample of bone from the skeleton was radiocarbon dated to 1950–1620 BC (BM-2862: 3480±60 BP).

⁴² P. Nichols & J. Timby, 'Daglingworth, Cirencester Park Polo Club', *Trans. BGAS* 123 (2005), 160–61.

⁴³ D. Hicks, 'Cirencester, The Whiteway', *Trans. BGAS* 118 (1999), 222.

⁴⁴ Young & Erskine, 'Two prehistoric enclosures', 33.

⁴⁵ J. Wache & A. McWhirr, *Early Roman occupation at Cirencester* (Cirencester, 1982), 28.

⁴⁶ Simmonds et al, *In the shadow of Corinium*, 11.

⁴⁷ Biddulph & Welsh, *Cirencester before Corinium*, 10.

⁴⁸ Biddulph & Welsh, *Cirencester before Corinium*, 10–11.

⁴⁹ Barclay et al, 'Excavation of Neolithic and Bronze Age ring-ditches'.

⁵⁰ Barclay et al Excavation of Neolithic and Bronze Age ring-ditches 25–9; fig. 8D.

⁵¹ Barclay et al Excavation of Neolithic and Bronze Age ring-ditches, fig. 8C.

The ribbed bronze bracelet is the first of its kind to have been found in the Cotswolds, although a handful of comparable pieces are known from Beaker graves elsewhere in Britain, mainly in Scotland.

The changes started in the late third millennium BC continued through the first few centuries of the second millennium BC with the emergence of a series of powerful chieftainships. Their leaders were buried under large round barrows with rich and exotic grave goods that emphasized their power and role in long-distance exchange networks that in some cases ran deep into continental Europe. One such burial was found at Snowhill in the north Cotswolds in 1877, accompanied by a dagger, spearhead and continental-style crutch-head pin in bronze, and a fine polished stone battleaxe made of stone from Cwm Mawr on the Powys/Shropshire border. Where exactly the centre of activity around Cirencester was at this time is not yet known, but round barrows and their ploughed-out counterparts known as ring-ditches are widely known across the area. Within the ten parishes discussed here, O'Neil and Grinsell listed 15 examples in 1960,⁵² rising to 40 recorded examples by 1988,⁵³ and more have been found since.

Some of these barrows are very large and where they stand near springs have been described as 'spring-head super-mounds'.⁵⁴ Two deserve mention here, the massive mound known as Grismond's Tower in Cirencester Park, 30m across and 4m high, whose origins probably lie in the second millennium BC, and the largest of the Tar Barrows, Cirencester, which is of similar size and equally uncertain origin. The two stand sentinel-like either side the Churn, a little way back from the river itself. Modern Cirencester now lies between them, but in prehistory anyone travelling north up the river would have seen these mounds to left and right. Both stand adjacent to springs that feed the main river. Grismond's Mound probably provided a focus around which a cemetery developed in Roman times, while the Tar Barrows seem to have been a focus for a temple complex in later prehistoric and Roman times.

Two ring-ditches of the early second millennia BC were examined on the line of the A417/419 at St Augustine's Farm, Preston.⁵⁵ The southern ring-ditch was about 18m across and contained a central cremation burial with fragments of a Collared Urn found in the topsoil nearby. The northern ring-ditch, about 15m across, seems to have been added to the southern circle. A single sherd from an urn of some kind was found, and a radiocarbon date of 1940–1644 BC (NZA-8614: 3482±60 BP) was obtained from charcoal in the ditch fill. A Collared Urn from Cirencester Park suggests the presence of another early second millennium BC burial there,⁵⁶ and at The Sisters a young adult female was buried in the top of the partly decayed mound of the long barrow in the fifteenth century BC.⁵⁷

⁵² O'Neil & Grinsell, 'Gloucestershire barrows'.

⁵³ T. Darvill, T., & L.V. Grinsell, 'Gloucestershire barrows: Supplement 1961–1988', *Trans. BGAS* 107 (1989), 39–105.

⁵⁴ T. Darvill, 'Grismond's Tower, Cirencester', *Trans. BGAS* 132 (2014), 11–27.

⁵⁵ Mudd et al, *Excavations alongside Roman Ermine Street*, 27–33.

⁵⁶ Darvill, *Prehistoric Gloucestershire*, fig. 74.

⁵⁷ T. Darvill & M. Smith, 'Baunton, Sisters long barrow, Abbey Home Farm', *Trans. BGAS* 138 (2020).

1600 – 900 BC

Consolidation of the numerous territories occupied by small chiefdoms across southern Britain in the early second millennium led to the emergence of larger cultural areas characterized by distinctive pottery styles. The upper Thames Valley and eastern Cotswolds is on the edge of the Deverel-Rimbury territory whose heartlands lay southwards on the chalklands of Wessex. The construction of round barrows more or less ceased. Instead cremations either in distinct ceramic urns, or contained in leather or cloth bags, were dug into the top of existing barrows or were deposited in small family-sized cemeteries near to but respectful of earlier monuments. At The Sisters, Baunton, for example, two cremations dating to the fourteenth or fifteenth century BC were found in small pits about 10m northeast of the long barrow.⁵⁸ Not all burials conformed to the traditional form, and at Kingshill North, Cirencester, a grave, rectangular in form, contained what appeared to be the body of an adult male accompanied by the hindquarters of a sheep or goat, and was dated to 1502–1415 BC (OxA-20188: 3187±26).⁵⁹

Settlements of the period are usually characterized by ditched enclosures, some with boundaries only on two or three sides. Excavations at the Beeches Playing Field, Cirencester, revealed an L-shaped ditch forming a kind of enclosure of unknown overall size constructed around 1350 BC on the basis of available radiocarbon dates and associated Deverel-Rimbury pottery. A pit containing two articulated cow skeletons lay inside the enclosure beside the entrance, and postholes and pits in the interior suggest occupation of some kind within.⁶⁰ A human skull fragment from the ditch was radiocarbon dated to 1404–1121 BC (NZA-19499: 3023±45 BP). Three similar enclosures have been identified by geophysical survey on Abbey Home Farm, and one example at Little Ampney, Ampney Crucis, has been sampled through excavation and shown to date from the late second millennium BC.⁶¹ Just outside the area at the Cotswold Community, Somerford Keynes, a Deverel-Rimbury settlement bounded by an L-shaped fence containing two round houses associated with pits and a waterhole was investigated, all dated to the period from about 1500 through to 1200 BC.⁶²

Metalworking developed rapidly during this period, often with strong continental influences. A bronze Picardy Pin discovered in 1997 during metal-detecting near Siddington is either an export from a northern French workshop or was made in Britain in imitation of continental styles.⁶³ At 20cm long it belongs to the so-called Ornament Horizon of the thirteenth and twelfth centuries BC, a time when significant people in southern Britain wore plenty of bling. It is one of only a handful of such

⁵⁸ T. Darvill & M. Smith, 'Baunton, Sisters long barrow, Abbey Home Farm', *Trans. BGAS* 136 (2018), 317.

⁵⁹ Biddulph & Welsh, *Cirencester before Corinium*, 10-13.

⁶⁰ Young & Erskine, 'Two prehistoric enclosures', 33-38.

⁶¹ T. Darvill, 'Ampney Crucis, Wiggold', *Trans. BGAS* 127 (2009), 303–04; Darvill, *Prehistoric Gloucestershire*, 161, fig. 84 and pl. 16.

⁶² K. Powell, A. Smith & G. Laws, *Evolution of a farming community in the upper Thames Valley* (Oxford, 2010), 42–44.

⁶³ D. Enright, 'A Bronze Age pin from Siddington, Gloucestershire', *Trans. BGAS* 117 (1999), 151–52.

pins known in Britain,⁶⁴ and serves to emphasize the long-distance contacts that communities living in the Cotswolds enjoyed during the late second millennium BC. The strength of such links, and the wealth of the Cotswold area, is further illustrated by what must surely be the most remarkable chance discovery of prehistoric remains found in Gloucestershire. In September 2004 a collection of 34 pieces of gold was unearthed in a field near Poulton, Ampney Crucis. This hoard included bar-twisted rings and bracelets, bullae, and pieces of scrap metal suggesting the stock-in-trade of an itinerant goldsmith.⁶⁵

900 – 100 BC

After about 900 BC the established Deverel-Rimbury culture breaks down into smaller regional groupings, most clearly visible archaeologically in their pottery styles. Plain, and later decorated, Post-Deverel-Rimbury Ware dates to the period from 900–700 BC,⁶⁶ followed by Long Wittenham-Allen's Pit style, Stanton Harcourt-Cassington style, Saucepan pot style, and Aylesford-Swarling style pottery.⁶⁷ Social and economic factors, including changing alliances and exchange patterns with the continent might partly account for a shift in the centre of gravity from the south coast to the Thames Estuary. Climate change involving the onset of wetter and cooler conditions at the start of what is referred to as the Subatlantic bioclimatic period might have a role in this too.⁶⁸ Certainly, the eastern Cotswolds and upper Thames Valley became increasingly connected to areas lower down the Thames Valley. Woodland which had dominated the landscape for millennia began to be cleared on a considerable scale, and land was divided up into identifiable blocks variously involving fieldsystems in areas devoted to arable farming and open grassland on the higher ground where animal husbandry was more common.

Based on the number of sites now known, and their distribution at fairly regular intervals across the landscape, the size of the population and the density of occupation rose fairly steadily during the first millennium BC. The separation of activities and the definition of land-holdings and jurisdictions led to the development of land boundaries, often pit alignments or banks and ditches. The importance and longevity of these boundaries cannot be overestimated as they structured the landscape into parcels still recognizable in places today. Some early land boundaries in the form of ditches and segmented ditches were identified at St Augustine's Farm South and St Augustine's Lane during the construction of the A417/419.⁶⁹ One segment was dated to 409–193 BC (NZA-8766:

⁶⁴ A. Lawson, 'A late middle Bronze Age hoard from Hunstanton, Norfolk' In C. Burgess & D. Coombs (eds), *Bronze Age hoards* (Oxford, 1979). 43–92.

⁶⁵ *Glos. Echo*, 28 Feb. 2005; Darvill, *Prehistoric Gloucestershire*, 160, pl. 15.

⁶⁶ J. Barrett, 'The pottery of the later Bronze Age in lowland England', *Proc. of the Prehistoric Society* 46 (1980) 297–319.

⁶⁷ B. Cunliffe, *Iron Age Communities in Britain*, 4th edn (Abingdon, 2005), 90–124.

⁶⁸ M. Magny, 'Atlantic and sub-boreal: dampness and dryness' in A Harding (ed.), *Climate change in later prehistory* (Edinburgh, 1982), 33–43.

⁶⁹ Mudd et al, *Excavations alongside Roman Ermine Street*, 35–42.

2294±59 BP). Tracks and sometimes even more substantial routes connected these communities together, and, like the boundaries, some probably influenced later road networks.

Settlements tended to reflect local economic conditions with open settlements connected to their fieldsystems in areas of predominantly arable farming in contrast to enclosures and bounded settlements where animal husbandry and livestock management provided the economic mainstay. On the lower ground along the Churn Valley at Kingshill South, Cirencester, evidence of two post-build round houses, fences, ditches and pits attest the presence of a small settlement dating to around 700 BC.⁷⁰ Nearby, pits and postholes perhaps indicating an open settlement were excavated during the construction of the A417/419 at St Augustine's Farm South, slightly later in time according to radiocarbon dates of 403–96 BC (NZA-8615: 2237±68 BP) and 396–125 BC (NZA-8619: 2234±56 BP).⁷¹ A handful of scattered pits was also found at Cherry Tree Lane and Burford Road, Preston.⁷² At Kingshill North, Cirencester, a scatter of 19 pits dating to the period 400 to 200 BC were found, the largest group towards the south end of the site.⁷³ As well as assemblages of broken pottery and domestic debris, one contained the bones of a crow or rook. On the other side of the Churn at Dryleaze Farm, Siddington, a small settlement comprising penannular-gulley round houses was found in advance of quarrying.⁷⁴

On the higher ground overlooking the gravel terraces and river valleys enclosures are common, many first identified through aerial photography. A rather unusual hexagonal enclosure some 65m across and covering 0.38ha was part-excavated during the construction of the A417/419 at Preston.⁷⁵ The entrance opened to the northwest. Three radiocarbon dates suggest it was built and used in the fourth and third centuries BC; internal pits and postholes suggest it was a small farmstead whose occupants cultivated wheat and barley and kept mainly cattle and sheep. Further south at Ermine Farm, Preston, a pair of roughly square enclosures set side-by-side was investigated.⁷⁶ Again built and used in the fourth and third centuries BC, these contained no clear evidence of structures, nor much in the way of material culture, and were probably stock pens. At Beeches Playing Field, Cirencester, a ditch excavated in Area B appears to form the northern side of a more extensive enclosure, although its precise extent remains uncertain.⁷⁷

Burials of this date are generally rather rare but one example came to light on the east scarp of the Churn Valley during the construction of the A417/419.⁷⁸ It was the crouched inhumation of a young adult male dated to the second or early first century BC.

⁷⁰ Simmonds et al, *In the shadow of Corinium*, 12–14.

⁷¹ Mudd et al, *Excavations alongside Roman Ermine Street*, 35–37.

⁷² Mudd et al, *Excavations alongside Roman Ermine Street*, 70–1.

⁷³ Biddulph & Welsh, *Cirencester before Corinium*, 13–15.

⁷⁴ TVAS, 'Siddington, Dryleaze Farm', *Trans. BGAS* 135 (2017), 335.

⁷⁵ Mudd et al, *Excavations alongside Roman Ermine Street*, 42–55.

⁷⁶ Mudd et al, *Excavations alongside Roman Ermine Street*, 56–59.

⁷⁷ Young & Erskine, 'Two prehistoric enclosures', 43.

100 BC to the Roman conquest

During the first centuries BC and AD the eastern Cotswolds and upper Thames Valley were fairly densely occupied, continuing many of the traditions established in earlier centuries but adding to them a veneer of new-found social status prompted by ever-closer trade and exchange links with the classical world and the expansion of the Roman Empire. The nature and extent of ‘Romanization’ in the 40s and 50s AD has been much debated,⁷⁹ and is discussed from different perspectives elsewhere in this volume by Tom Moore and Neil Holbrook in the context of Bagendon and Cirencester respectively.

Settlements dominate the archaeological evidence relating to this turbulent period, many of them self-contained holdings with compounds, gardens, paddocks, and their own associated cemeteries in close proximity. Many span the period from first century BC well into the Roman period, changing little either in their economic base or visible form, although some inhabitants enjoyed greater affinity with Roman lifestyles than others.⁸⁰ By the mid first century AD the landscape was full, the social use of space locally structured, and patterns of land-holding repeated themselves across the countryside even though there were differences in scale and perhaps also status and cultural identity.

At Middle Duntisbourne, Duntisbourne Abbots, excavations during the construction of the A417/419 revealed the remains of a settlement bounded by a rectangular partial enclosure, the later phases of which dated to the first century AD.⁸¹ A similar partial enclosure, also dated to the first century AD, was investigated nearby at Duntisbourne Grove, Duntisbourne Abbots.⁸² Both may have been part of a single extended agricultural settlement, although the presence of quality imported pottery suggests wider links and a higher status than many contemporary sites perhaps somehow associated with activities not far away at Bagendon. Set within a heavily wooded landscape these sites are also unusual in having a higher than usual proportion of pig bones in their animal bone assemblages.

At Kingshill North, Cirencester, a succession of ditches and gulleys in the central part of the site partially defined an area of occupation that started around 100 BC and continued through into the early Roman period.⁸³ One of the inhabitants, a 40–45 year old male dated to 181–41 BC (OxA-20185: 2083±26 BP), was buried in a rectangular grave and an infant was buried in one of the ditches. At Kingshill South, Cirencester, field boundaries and associated pits spanning the first century BC and early first century AD suggest that this area of the Churn Valley was in fairly intensive agricultural usage.⁸⁴ Activity continued down into the floodplain, as shown by discoveries at Stratton

⁷⁸ Mudd et al, *Excavations alongside Roman Ermine Street*, 76–77.

⁷⁹ M. Millett, *The Romanization of Britain* (Cambridge, 1990); S. Trow, S. James & T. Moore, T., 2009, *Becoming Roman, being Gallic, staying British* (Oxford, 2009).

⁸⁰ Trow et al, *Becoming Roman, being Gallic, staying British*.

⁸¹ Mudd et al, *Excavations alongside Roman Ermine Street*, 77–86.

⁸² Mudd et al, *Excavations alongside Roman Ermine Street*, 86–97.

⁸³ Biddulph & Welsh, *Cirencester before Corinium*, 15–25.

Watermeadows northwest of Cirencester where test-pitting in 2003 revealed a pair of pits containing pottery and domestic refuse of the early first century AD.⁸⁵

More than a dozen enclosures lie widely scattered in the higher ground along both sides of the Churn, generally at intervals of about 3 kilometres although sometimes more tightly packed. In Duntisbourne Abbots an enclosure complex south of Field's Farm has a trackway leading southwestwards,⁸⁶ while in Duntisbourne Rouse cropmarks indicate further trackways and at least two rectangular enclosures.⁸⁷ In Bagendon a series of boundary dykes sometimes considered to be a regional *oppidum* and capital of the *Dobunni* tribe⁸⁸ contain a range of enclosures of different forms, including a so-called banjo enclosure because of its pair of ditches defining a long narrow entrance track leading to a round enclosure.⁸⁹ The extent of the area bounded by the dyke-system is so great that its occupation has been described as 'low-density urbanism'⁹⁰ although the greatest concentration of occupation appears to lie in the valley of the Bagendon Brook immediately inside the main entrance.⁹¹ The Bagendon Dykes extend westwards into Daglingworth,⁹² where there are also several enclosures. One is visible as a cropmark northeast of Cirencester Park, rectangular with an entrance to the southeast,⁹³ cropmarks to the north looking like connecting trackways and to the southeast there are parts of two rectangular enclosures.⁹⁴ In Baunton a rectangular enclosure has been detected on aerial photographs west of Cirencester Golf Course.⁹⁵ In Cirencester a crop-mark enclosure visible west of Stratton is square with an entrance to the northeast,⁹⁶ while a series of more irregular enclosures are visible as cropmarks at the Beeches,⁹⁷ and east of the White Way.⁹⁸ In

⁸⁴ Simmonds et al, *In the shadow of Corinium*, 14–17. See also discovery of a coaxial fieldsystem in this area: R. Morgan, 'Preston, Land west of Kingshill Lane', *Trans. BGAS* 135 (2017), 334.

⁸⁵ N. Holbrook (ed.), *Excavations and observations in Roman Cirencester 1998-2007*(Kemble, 2008), 134–5.

⁸⁶ RCHM *Glos.* I, 48 (2).

⁸⁷ RCHM *Glos.* I, 49 (3 and 3).

⁸⁸ Clifford, *Bagendon*.

⁸⁹ Moore, 'Excavations at two Iron Age enclosures within Bagendon 'Oppidum''.

⁹⁰ T. Moore, 'Beyond Iron Age 'towns': examining oppida as examples of low-density urbanism' *Oxford Journal of Archaeology* 36(3) (2017), 287–306

⁹¹ Clifford, *Bagendon*.

⁹² RCHM *Glos.* I, 41.

⁹³ RCHM *Glos.* I, 41–2, site3.

⁹⁴ RCHM *Glos.* I, 49, site 3.

⁹⁵ RCHM *Glos.* I, 13.

⁹⁶ RCHM *Glos.* I, 30, site 4.

⁹⁷ RCHM *Glos.* I, 30, site 5.

Coates there is an enclosure north of Bledisloe Lodge,⁹⁹ while in Siddington enclosures are visible as cropmarks on level ground southwest of Ewen Bridge.¹⁰⁰ Finally, in Preston enclosures and linear ditches have been recognized at King's Hill above the Churn¹⁰¹ later investigated in advance of a housing development,¹⁰² and around St Augustine Farm¹⁰³ where the southern group was investigated in advance of the construction of the A417/419.¹⁰⁴

Hillforts and defended enclosures of the kind fairly common on the high Cotswolds from the middle of the first millennium BC are rare on the lower eastern slopes, but Trewsbury, Coates, is a bivallate enclosure of 4.6ha overlooking the headwaters of the Thames,¹⁰⁵ while Pinbury, Duntisbourne Rouse is a much larger univallate enclosure of 10.1ha overlooking the upper reaches of the River Frome.¹⁰⁶

Substantial tracks were already established at this time, some becoming important thoroughfares. Early use of the Lynches Trackway along the east side of the Churn Valley pre-dates the metallurgy introduced in Roman times,¹⁰⁷ and although the origins of the Whiteway are not known with any certainty, a case has been made that that it was in use well before the Roman conquest.¹⁰⁸ Indeed, trade and exchange were at the heart of social relations through later prehistory, providing materials that enhanced social standing and creating economic dependencies and specializations. Coins were produced in the area from about 40 BC,¹⁰⁹ one of the mints being at Bagendon.¹¹⁰ In the eastern Cotswolds horse-breeding and cereal production were key concerns that generated wealth and prestige amongst a self-identifying set of communities Roman writers refer to as the Dobunni.

Ritual sites were an important dimension of life in later prehistoric times, and again show how these communities provided the foundations of belief systems that continued through into later times. The Roman temple and ancillary buildings at Hailey Wood on the parish boundary between Coates

⁹⁸ RCHM *Glos. I*, 31, site 6.

⁹⁹ RCHM *Glos. I*, 32, site 6.

¹⁰⁰ RCHM *Glos. I*, 101, site 2.

¹⁰¹ RCHM *Glos. I*, 95, site 1.

¹⁰² Biddulph & Welsh, *Cirencester before Corinium*, 15–23.

¹⁰³ RCHM *Glos. I*, 95, sites 2 and 3.

¹⁰⁴ Mudd et al, *Excavations alongside Roman Ermine Street*, : 42.

¹⁰⁵ RCHM *Glos. I*, 32.

¹⁰⁶ RCHM *Glos. I*, 48.

¹⁰⁷ Mudd et al, *Excavations alongside Roman Ermine Street*, 276 and 281.

¹⁰⁸ R. Reece & C. Catling, *Cirencester* (Oxford, 1975), 3–5.

¹⁰⁹ R.D. Van Arndell, *The coinage of the Dobunni* (Oxford, 1994).

¹¹⁰ Clifford, *Bagendon*.

and Sapperton has yielded Dobunnic coins and small amounts of later prehistoric pottery.¹¹¹ Its proximity to one of the key sources of the River Thames may have been important. Likewise the Roman ceremonial complex at Tar Barrows, Cirencester, seemingly incorporated earlier structures,¹¹² and shows again how prehistoric people live on through their landscape legacy.

DRAFT

¹¹¹ T. Moore, 'An archaeological assessment of Hailey Wood Camp, Sapperton, Gloucestershire', *Trans. BGAS* 119 (2001), 83–93.

¹¹² H. Winton, H., *Tar Barrow, Cirencester* (English Heritage Research Department report, 2009) [<https://doi.org/10.5284/1033776>].