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Life on the edge? Exchange, community, and identity in the Later Iron Age of the Severn-Cotswolds

Tom Moore

Introduction: Cores and peripheries

Recent discussions of the Later Iron Age¹ have signalled a need for the re-emergence of broad narratives of social change (e.g. Creighton 2001, 4; Haselgrove *et al.* 2001; Gerritsen 2003), but in Britain at least, no real alternative to the 1980s core-periphery model (Haselgrove 1982; 1987; Cunliffe 1988) has as yet emerged, although individual authors have offered important new perspectives on the changes in settlement and material culture seen in Late Iron Age southern Britain (e.g. Hill 1997; 1999; Willis 1997; Creighton 2000). Key to these re-interpretations is the role of individuals and communities as agents in the process of change. Alongside a greater awareness of the regional diversity of Iron Age Britain, this had led to reluctance to explain some of the broader patterns that exist in the archaeological record. This should not, however, prevent us from trying to explain these wider patterns. For example, why do some areas and sites contain imports, but not others? Why do regional pottery sources dominate at certain periods? How do we account for the appearance of new settlement forms? Whilst seeing individuals and communities as conscious agents, we need to explain why many communities apparently accepted or rejected broader cultural practices at much the same time.

In deconstructing the core-periphery model, Hill (1999; 2002; this volume) has expressed the view that the so-called 'core' area in Late Iron Age south-east England might actually be better understood as originally a 'periphery', since many *oppida* evidently developed at the margins of the existing social groupings. This inversion is in danger of misrepresenting some of the ideas underlying the

model, since Cunliffe (1976) and Haselgrove (1982) also saw the new elements of Late Iron Age society developing around the peripheries of well-established social systems, as witnessed by the shift from the hillfort-dominated landscape of central southern England to south-east England and its *oppida*. The critical feature of the core-periphery model was the causal influence it accorded to external forces – especially those relating to Roman expansion – in stimulating indigenous social developments, even if some of the consequences were unintended or later developed a dynamism of their own (Cunliffe 1976, 149; 1991, 546; Haselgrove 1976, 26; 1987, 105). In contrast, Hill sees change as more dependent on factors internal to the social system, whilst at the same time emphasising the formation of new communities – whether from within existing societies or as a result of movement from outside (Hill 2002; this volume). Long a central tenet of Iron Age studies (e.g. Hawkes 1959), migration has been downplayed in recent decades, but there is an increasing awareness once again that people *did* move in later prehistory. What is different is that the processes are now seen as far more complex and not merely as simple replacement of one population by another.

Like the original core-periphery model, Hill's alternative narrative mainly concerns south-east England and the wider implications have yet to be considered. The aim of my own paper is to explore whether a similar approach can enhance our understanding of Later Iron Age developments elsewhere, particularly in regions previously seen as peripheral to a south-eastern 'core'. The area chosen for detailed study is the lower Severn-Cotswolds

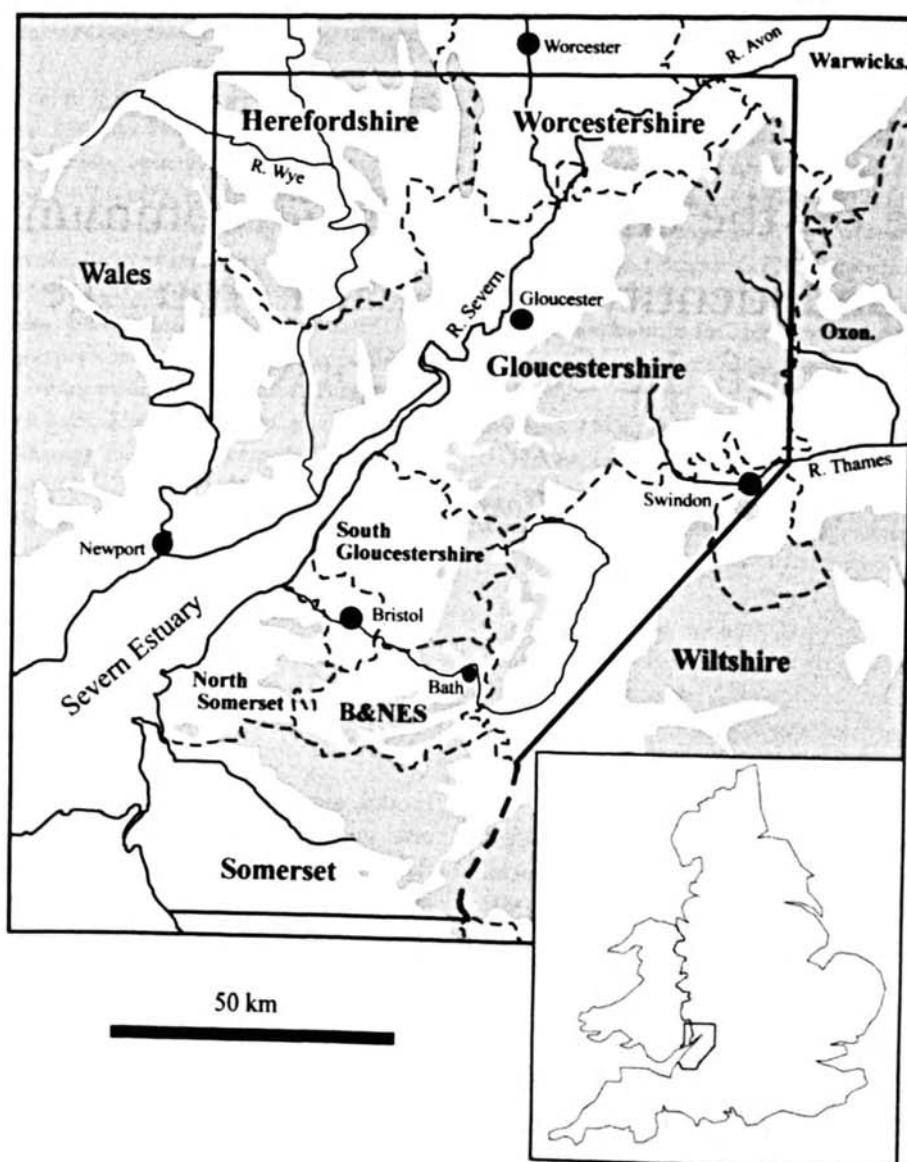


Fig. 1. The Severn-Cotswolds region.

(Fig. 1). This small region is not to be regarded as in any way representative of southern Britain as a whole, but rather as a specific case study of the relationship of Late Iron Age sites to social developments in the surrounding landscape. I will focus particularly on the problems raised by one site, the so-called '*oppidum*' at Bagendon (Clifford 1961), in the context of the wider changes evident in the Severn-Cotswolds. As I will show, although similar processes to those discussed by Hill can be identified, the precise factors behind the development of Bagendon are both complex, and regionally-specific; the nature of the existing settlement pattern and exchange systems, and how local and regional identities were constructed are all relevant. Simply reversing the core-periphery model runs the risk of establishing a new set of dichotomies that mask a far more complex and fractured picture.

The Severn-Cotswolds

The social and chronological models developed for the Iron Age in the Severn-Cotswolds have largely been adopted from elsewhere (Cunliffe 1984; Darvill 1987), emphasising features that are familiar from Wessex or south-east England, such as the many hillforts and enclosures, or the presence of Roman imports at sites like Bagendon. In effect, through sharing some of the 'classic' Iron Age features with these other areas, the Severn-Cotswolds has come to be regarded as an impoverished neighbour, where developments took place belatedly and to a lesser extent.

Whilst there are indeed similarities with other parts of southern Britain, many of them may be more apparent than real. As we will see, the Severn-Cotswolds has a distinctive settlement history, which has not been well-served by recent research. The general tendency to

project the Roman *civitas* of the Dobunni backwards in time and treat the Severn–Cotswolds as synonymous with their tribal territory (e.g. Hawkes 1961; Cunliffe 1991),² merely compounds this by ascribing a cohesiveness to Later Iron Age settlement and society, which is not only potentially at odds with the coin evidence that has long been used to justify this equation (Haselgrove *et al.* forthcoming), but also ends up masking more subtle patterns in the archaeology (Moore and Reece 2001).

Later Iron Age settlement patterns

Before discussing the role of Bagendon, we need to begin by re-assessing the Later Iron Age settlement pattern in the Severn–Cotswolds as a whole, drawing on the wealth of new evidence that has become available in the last decade (Marshall 1995; 2001; Parry 1998a; 1998b; Mudd *et al.* 1999; Price 2000). The settlement record is dominated by enclosures, mainly known from cropmarks and under 1 ha in size; whilst varying in form, they are most commonly sub-rectangular (Webster and Hobley 1964; RCHME 1976; Moore 2003). Excavated examples suggest they date from the fourth century BC to the first century AD (Darvill 1987; Moore 2007). The landscape also contains a number of larger ‘hillforts’, some of which like Uley Bury seem to be densely occupied. Generalising about these sites is problematical, however. Smaller examples such as Conderton Camp potentially comprised communities little larger than some enclosures. On analogy with Wessex, commentators have tended to see the larger Severn–Cotswolds hillforts as central places, occupied by an elite to whom the inhabitants of the smaller enclosures were subservient (e.g. Darvill 1987; Thomas 2005), but as elsewhere in southern Britain (Hill 1996), there is little evidence to suggest that hillforts actually served such a role.

Far more relevant to the Severn–Cotswolds is the detailed model of Later Iron Age society proposed by Hingley (1984) for Oxfordshire. Hingley contrasted the open settlement pattern of the upper Thames valley with the isolated enclosures found on the Oxfordshire Cotswolds, which he interpreted as reflecting differences in social organisation; the boundary ditches of the enclosures in the latter region marking the relative social – and to some extent economic – independence of their inhabitants, compared with the more socially integrated communities of the Thames valley (Fig. 2). This view of enclosed communities as isolated, both socially and economically, has since been applied to other parts of Britain (e.g. Ferrell 1995; Hill 1996), although Hingley (1999, 244) has since stressed that those dwelling in enclosures were also integrated into wider social networks.

There is growing evidence indicating that the Severn–Cotswolds do not conform to Hingley’s Oxfordshire model. Rather than being dispersed, Later Iron Age

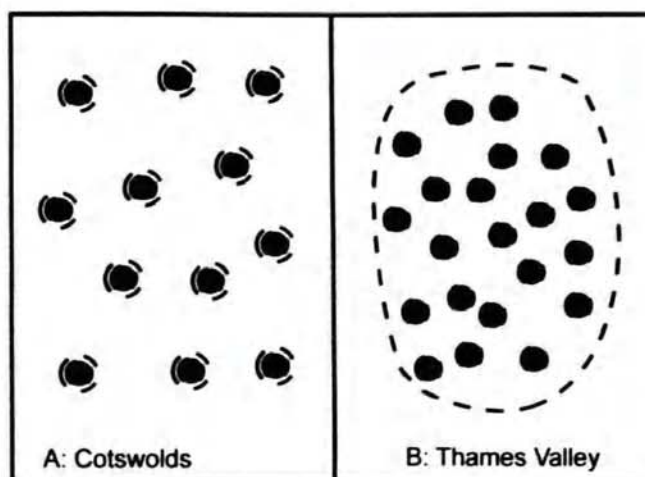


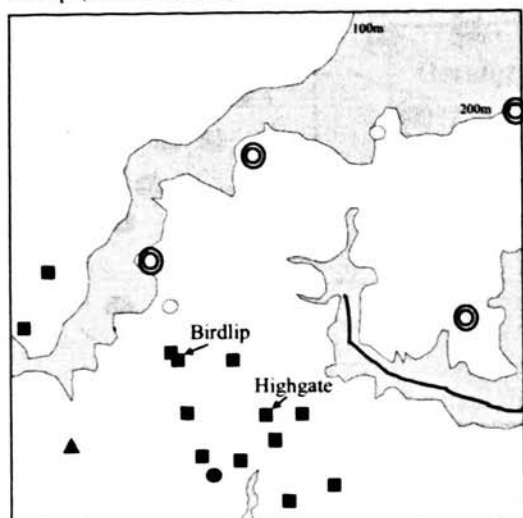
Fig. 2. Hingley's idealised settlement landscapes for the Oxfordshire Cotswolds and upper Thames valley. A. Enclosures on the Cotswolds as independent 'corporate social groups'. B. Unenclosed settlements in the Thames valley as part of larger corporate groups (after Hingley 1984, fig. 5.7).

enclosures in the Gloucestershire Cotswolds often seem to cluster, so that certain areas appear densely settled, with enclosures situated close to one another, as for example around Birdlip and Guiting (Fig. 3), whilst others seem much less densely occupied. Similar clusters exist in the lower Severn and (north) Avon valleys, often comprising a range of, sometimes multivallate, sub-rectangular enclosures, as for example at Broadway, Kempsey (Fig. 4), and elsewhere in southern Worcestershire (Webster and Hobley 1964; Dinn and Evans 1990; Moore 2003).

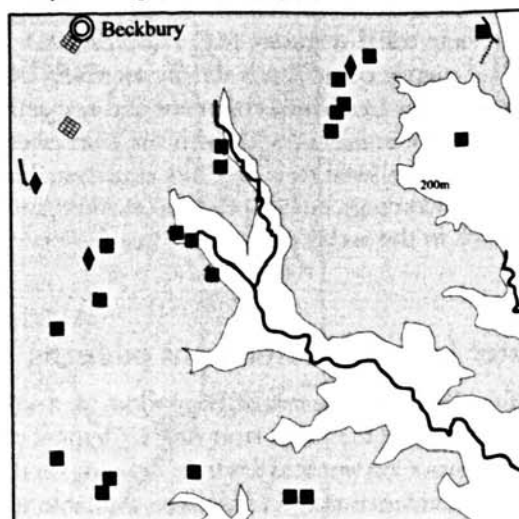
Overall, the cropmark evidence – reinforced by excavated sites such as Wyre Piddle (Napthan *et al.* 1997), Strensham (Parry 1998b), Throckmorton,³ and south and east of Bredon Hill (Coleman and Hancocks forthcoming) – suggests a densely settled landscape in the lower Severn valley by the Later Iron Age, within which discrete clusters of enclosures existed in certain areas. Similar clusters of enclosures are known further up the Avon valley in Warwickshire (Hingley 1996) and are emerging elsewhere in Britain, for example in the central Welsh Marches, north-east England and south-east Scotland. In none of these instances is there any reason to suppose that the apparent clustering and associated 'gaps' are due to variable cropmark formation or flying patterns, rather than a real pattern. Many enclosures do not seem to have been 'isolated' in the landscape, which has important implications for how we view social relations between groups and wider community organisation.

Some Later Iron Age enclosures in the lower Severn valley and elsewhere in the West Midlands are apparently

Birdlip (ST9011-SP0011)



Temple Guiting (SP0520-1520)



5 km

Fig. 3. Clusters of enclosures in the Birdlip and Guiting areas of the Gloucestershire Cotswolds.

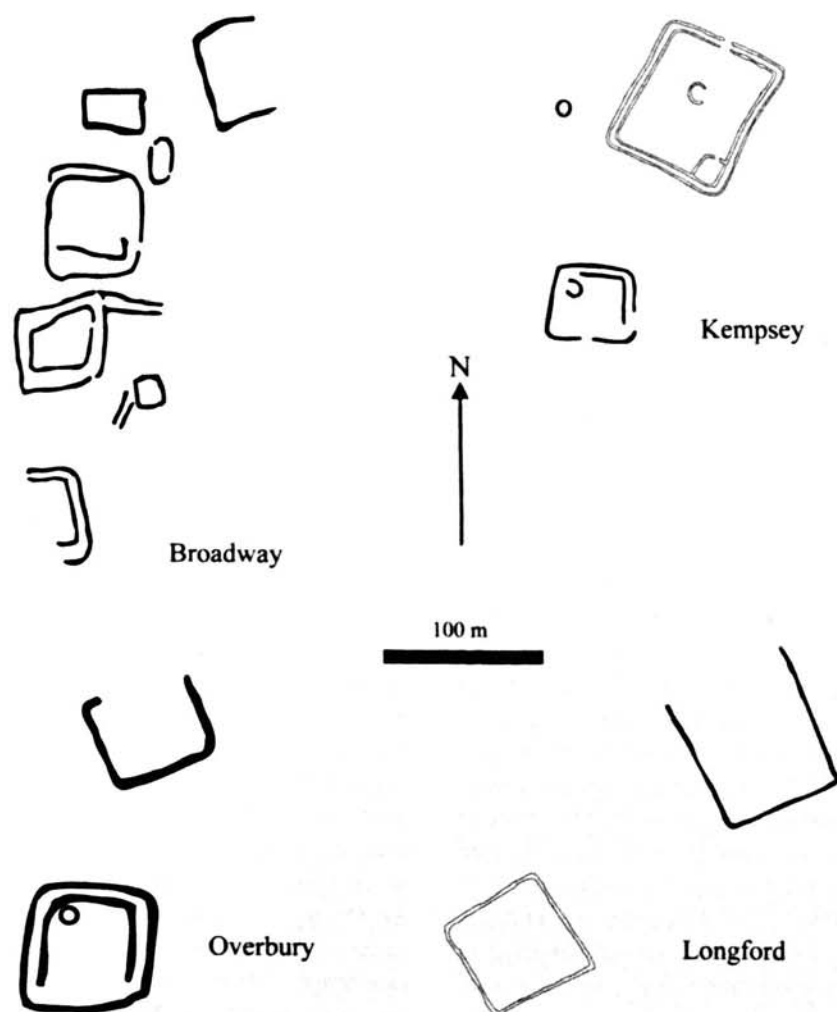


Fig. 4. Examples of clusters of enclosures from the lower Severn valley (after Moore 2003).

incorporated into larger field systems. At Aston Mill (Dinn and Evans 1990), Beckford (Oswald 1974) and elsewhere in the lower Avon valley, particularly around Bredon Hill, enclosures appear to be related to linears, trackways, and pit alignments; the pattern is repeated further up the Avon valley in Warwickshire (Hingley 1996). In the upper Thames valley, too, a densely occupied landscape existed by the Later Iron Age, here comprising a range of unenclosed and enclosed settlements (see e.g. Hey this volume), and in some areas, settlements were integrated into linears and other complex land divisions, as at Preston, where a polygonal enclosure is associated with contemporary segmented ditches (Mudd *et al.* 1999), and Ashton Keynes, where similar boundaries are associated with unenclosed settlement (Brossler *et al.* 2002).

There is an increasing sense of permanency of settlement in the Later Iron Age landscape compared to earlier periods (Moore 2007). The construction of small (household-sized?) enclosures from about the fourth century BC onwards indicates an increasing desire for communities to associate themselves visibly with particular locations (*ibid.*; Wigley this volume). A similar process may be argued for at least some upper Thames valley settlements, where houses acquired larger drainage gullies and an enclosure of their own within larger agglomerations (Moore 2007). By the later Iron Age, many parts of the region, particularly the northern Cotswolds and lower Severn valley (most visibly around Bredon Hill), possessed well-defined sets of landscape divisions and settlement clusters.

This evidence points to a highly organised and structured society, potentially very different from that envisaged either in the central place model or for Oxfordshire. At least in the northern Cotswolds and lower Severn valley, it seems likely that the occupants of enclosures, far from being isolated, participated in a variety of communal activities beyond the scope of the household to form wider communities. In addition, sites in the Avon and Severn valleys were integrated into wider systems of land divisions and in some areas there were dense clusters of enclosures. In such cases, groups were potentially bound into wider communities and a range of shared identities, as Hingley (1999, 244) has more recently suggested for the Stanton Harcourt area.

The nature of so-called 'Middle' and 'Late' Iron Age settlement patterns can also be reassessed on a wider scale (Fig. 5). For the purposes of this distribution map, Late Iron Age 'sites' are defined as having material such as Gallo-Belgic and early Severn Valley wares, Colchester brooches, or imports, and are conventionally dated to the early-mid first century AD, or slightly earlier. At 'Middle' Iron Age sites, such material is absent and only Middle Iron Age pottery forms and fabrics are represented. Essentially, then, this is a distribution of pottery types: sites with only hand-made pottery compared to those only or also producing wheel-thrown

wares. Clearly there are major problems with such definitions, which I will return to later, but depicting the evidence in this way serves to illustrate the conceptual problems with previous models of the Later Iron Age in the region.

The most obvious point is the marked disparity in the distribution of Middle and Late Iron Age sites, implying a relationship between site location and chronology. In a number of cases, Late Iron Age sites seem to appear preferentially in areas where Middle Iron Age settlement is less apparent. The most striking example is around Bagendon in the southern Cotswolds. Apart from Bagendon itself (Clifford 1961; Trow 1982), this pocket of settlement includes the so-called 'hillfort' at Ditches (Trow 1988) and the recently excavated enclosures at Middle Duntisbourne and Duntisbourne Grove (Mudd *et al.* 1999), to which we may add the (first century BC?) burial near Baunton (*ibid.*) and a possible Late Iron Age site at Stratton just north of Cirencester (Wymark 2003). However, despite the density of first century AD occupation in the area, evidence for activity of earlier date is limited.⁴ Equally, this area has produced very little evidence of cropmark enclosures compared to many parts of the Cotswolds or the upper Thames valley to the south (RCHME 1976; Moore 2003). This is in spite of the potential of Bagendon to act as a 'honey pot' for aerial survey, as has certainly happened with important Iron Age sites elsewhere.

In contrast, the other so-called *oppidum* at Salmons-bury, near Bourton-on-the-Water, is located in an area with plentiful Early and Middle Iron Age occupation, both in the immediate vicinity of the site (Dunning 1976; Marshall 1978; Barber and Leah 1998; Nichols 2001; 2004) and in the adjacent uplands around Guiting (Saville 1979; Marshall 1991; 1995), at Lower Slaughter (Timby 1998) and Naunton. Although there is some evidence of activity at Salmonsbury prior to the construction of the ramparts, the site probably emerged in the first century BC (Haselgrove 1997, 61), in close proximity to a densely settled and negotiated landscape.

Late Iron Age material is known elsewhere in the region,⁵ notably at Frocester (Price 2000), Wycomb (Timby 1998), Uley-West Hill (Woodward and Leach 1993), Beckford (Oswald 1974), Weston-under-Penyard (Jackson 2000), and possibly Kings Stanley (Heighway 1989). In other cases, the nature of the evidence is much less clear. At Abbeymead and Brockworth in Gloucester (Atkin 1987; 1991; Thomas *et al.* 2003), there seems to be both Middle and Late Iron Age activity, but it is unclear if this represents direct continuity as is apparent at Frocester. Attributing material to before or after the Roman conquest remains particularly difficult. Finds such as the *terra rubra* sherd from Dorn (Timby 1998), the Dressel 1 amphorae from Kenchester (Wilmott and Rahtz 1985) or the brooches from Kingscote (Timby 1998; Moore 2003) could have been deposited on either side of the conquest, whilst

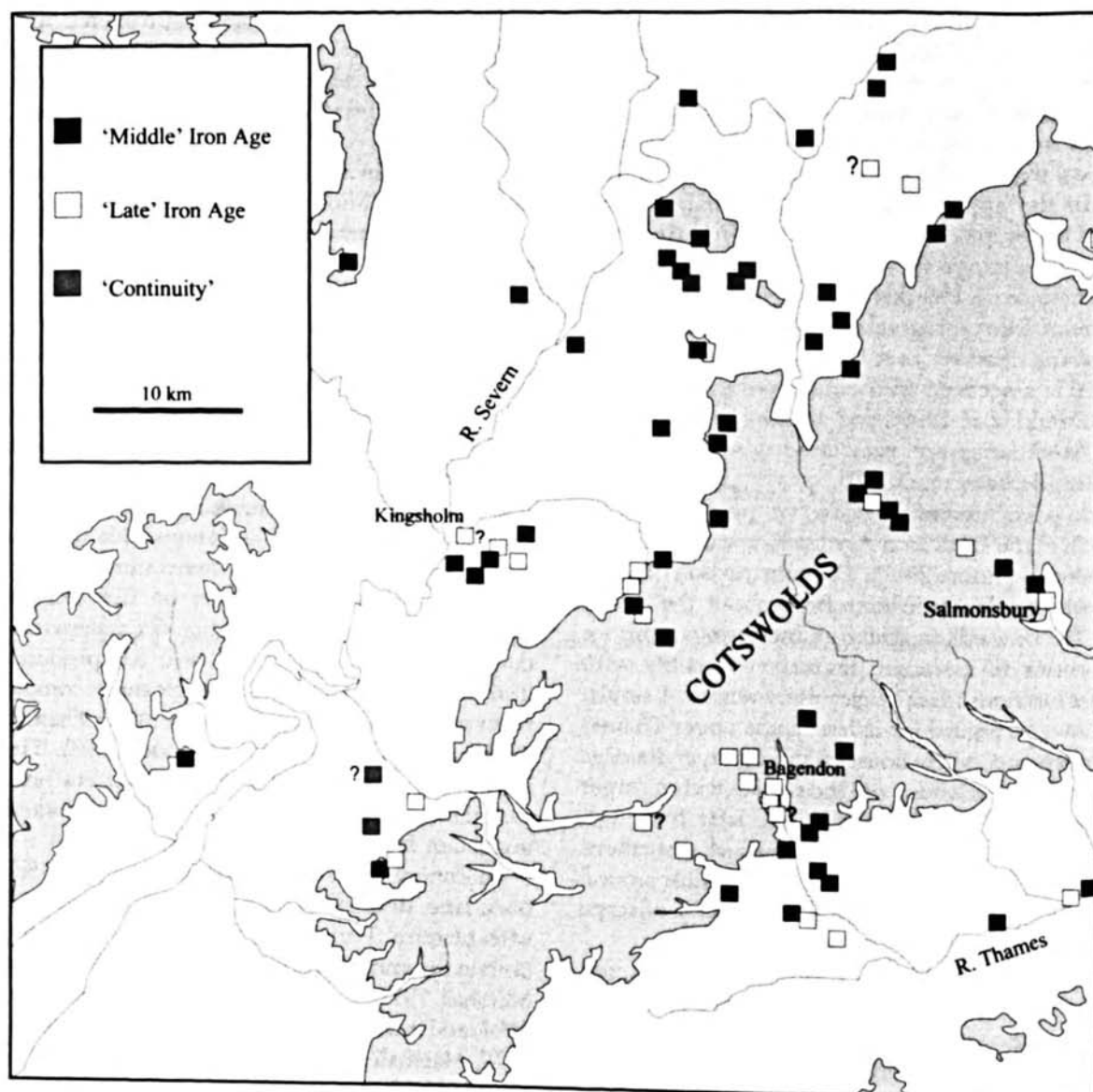


Fig. 5. The relationship between 'Middle' and 'Late' Iron Age sites in the north of the Severn-Cotswolds.

at Kingsholm, there is presently insufficient evidence to argue for continuity between the Mid-Late Iron Age settlements and the early Roman military site (Hurst 1999a; Timby 1999a).

A number of the sites yielding Late Iron Age material certainly represent settlements, including Beckford, Birdlip, and Frocester. Elsewhere, much of the evidence is ambiguous and could instead relate to ritual sites (Uley West Hill; Wycomb?) or exchange centres (Weston-under-Penyard?). In terms of both the landscape setting and the nature and quantity of finds, the Bagendon-Ditches complex may be regarded as regionally exceptional. Apart from Frocester (Price 2000) and Beckford – where the bulk of the excavations have yet to be published – remarkably few sites have good

evidence of continuity between the Middle and Late Iron Age. Most sites with Late Iron Age material, as in the Bagendon area⁶ and also elsewhere, such as Wycomb (Timby 1998), appear to possess little evidence of earlier activity. On the other hand, most 'Middle' Iron Age settlements, including the hillforts at Bredon (Hencken 1938), Conderton (Thomas 2005), and Uley Bury (Saville 1983); the enclosure at Guiting Power (Saville 1979); and the settlements at Aston Mill (Dinn and Evans 1990), Evesham (Edwards and Hurst 2000) and Gilder's Paddock (Parry 1999) are thought to have been abandoned by the second or first century BC, in other words, prior to the Late Iron Age. Is this picture real? Or is it a function of how 'Middle' and 'Late' Iron Age sites are identified?

New chronologies: a 'later' Iron Age?

A number of recent studies have suggested that as a distinct chronological entity the Late Iron Age has little meaning beyond certain areas of south-eastern England, and even in those 'core' areas cannot be regarded as a universal chronological horizon (Hill 1999; 2002; this volume). For a long time, finds of Middle Iron Age pottery, including Malvern wares, at sites like Bagendon and Cirencester, were seen as 'traditional hangovers', but there is a growing awareness that in the Severn-Cotswolds, as in other parts of southern Britain, such wares can persist into the first century AD, and that sites without wheel-thrown forms may post-date the first century BC. Regional hand-made wares (such as Peacock's B1 fabric) are now thought to continue as late as the 70s AD (Rigby 1982; S. Willis pers. comm.); conversely, certain 'early Roman' forms, particularly the early Severn Valley wares, may be pre-conquest in origin (Timby 1999a, 40; 2000, 363).

There are various reasons why this change in attitude was slow in coming. One is the continued reliance on a three phase Iron Age chronology which may not be relevant to the region (Darvill 1987; Saville 1984). Another is the assumption that by the first century AD communities had access to imported pottery, such as samian and Gallo-Belgic wares, or at least to wheel-thrown pottery. Sites like Uley Bury, where such material is absent, are therefore deemed to end by the first century BC (Saville 1983), whilst sites yielding wheel-thrown wares or imports in the same contexts as Middle Iron Age wares, are attributed to the Late Iron Age, the Middle Iron Age pottery usually being treated as a case of persistence into the later period, or in some cases as residual.

This method of dating has been adopted from south-east England, where both imports and wheel-thrown pottery are relatively common. In the Severn-Cotswolds region, however, the number of imports, in particular, is far lower (Fitzpatrick and Timby 2002, 168). At Frocester, for example, the identification of the Late Iron Age phase rests primarily on a handful of sherds of pre-Flavian finewares and the Iron Age coins (Price 2000, 63), and it may well be that at other sites, we are confusing an absence of evidence with evidence of absence. The Bowsings, for example, appears not to have produced wheel-thrown wares (Marshall 1991),⁷ yet a radiocarbon date implies that the enclosure was not abandoned until the first century AD. Similarly at Birdlip, the envisaged hiatus between a Middle Iron Age and an early Roman (first century AD) phase of the enclosures may not be as well defined as the excavator believed (Parry 1998a, 55). This may imply that more Middle Iron Age enclosures continued to occupy the same location into the succeeding period and that many Late Iron Age sites possessed little or no wheel-thrown pottery.

Using pottery as a chronological indicator in this

way ignores the role of the communities as active agents in the selection of pottery types and in the nature of the contacts and exchange between groups. As Steven Willis (1994; 1996) and others (Fitzpatrick and Timby 2002; Hill 2002, 144) have shown, the adoption of Roman and Gallo-Belgic imports and wheel-thrown pottery related as much to factors such as status, cultural identity and availability as to chronology. Consequently, the Middle and Late Iron Age are as much cultural constructs as chronological divisions (Willis 2005). The shift from one to the other should be seen not as a sharp break, but as a fluid process of cultural and technological change, reflecting individual communities' reaction to differing forms and sources of material, and ultimately dependent on the exchange networks, cultural traditions, status and choices by individuals and communities operating in a particular region. Rather than being purely a sign of Late Iron Age activity, the adoption of wheel-thrown technology and imports may in fact denote those groups that were willing – or able – to change both their consumption habits and their social practices.

Against this background, imposing a rigid chronological distinction between a Middle and a Late Iron Age in the Severn-Cotswolds is problematic and serves only to obscure the fluidity of changes in settlement and material culture over much of this period. For this reason, I employ the term Later Iron Age to cover the whole period from the mid fourth century cal. BC – which the associated radiocarbon dates suggest is when Middle Iron Age style pottery assemblages appeared in the region (Moore 2007) – until the first century AD, when these disappear from the record.

Freed of a purely chronological interpretation, the patterning in Figure 5 can be seen in a new light, as marking a cultural and/or socio-economic divide between sites with wheel-thrown wares/imports and those without. Three additional suggestions follow: First, we may in the first century AD be seeing the emergence of a group of new sites around Bagendon in an area of landscape devoid of earlier occupation. Second, some settlements classified as Middle Iron Age – and thus supposedly abandoned by the first century BC – might in fact be contemporary with later sites. Third, sites with wheel-thrown wares/imports may signify communities with different cultural links and connections from those that lack them.

Later Iron Age exchange networks

How does the Bagendon-Ditches complex relate to existing Later Iron Age social and economic networks? If we accept that material culture was embedded in exchange systems and employed in the construction of identities, we need to consider how such newly emergent sites fitted into the dominant exchange networks.

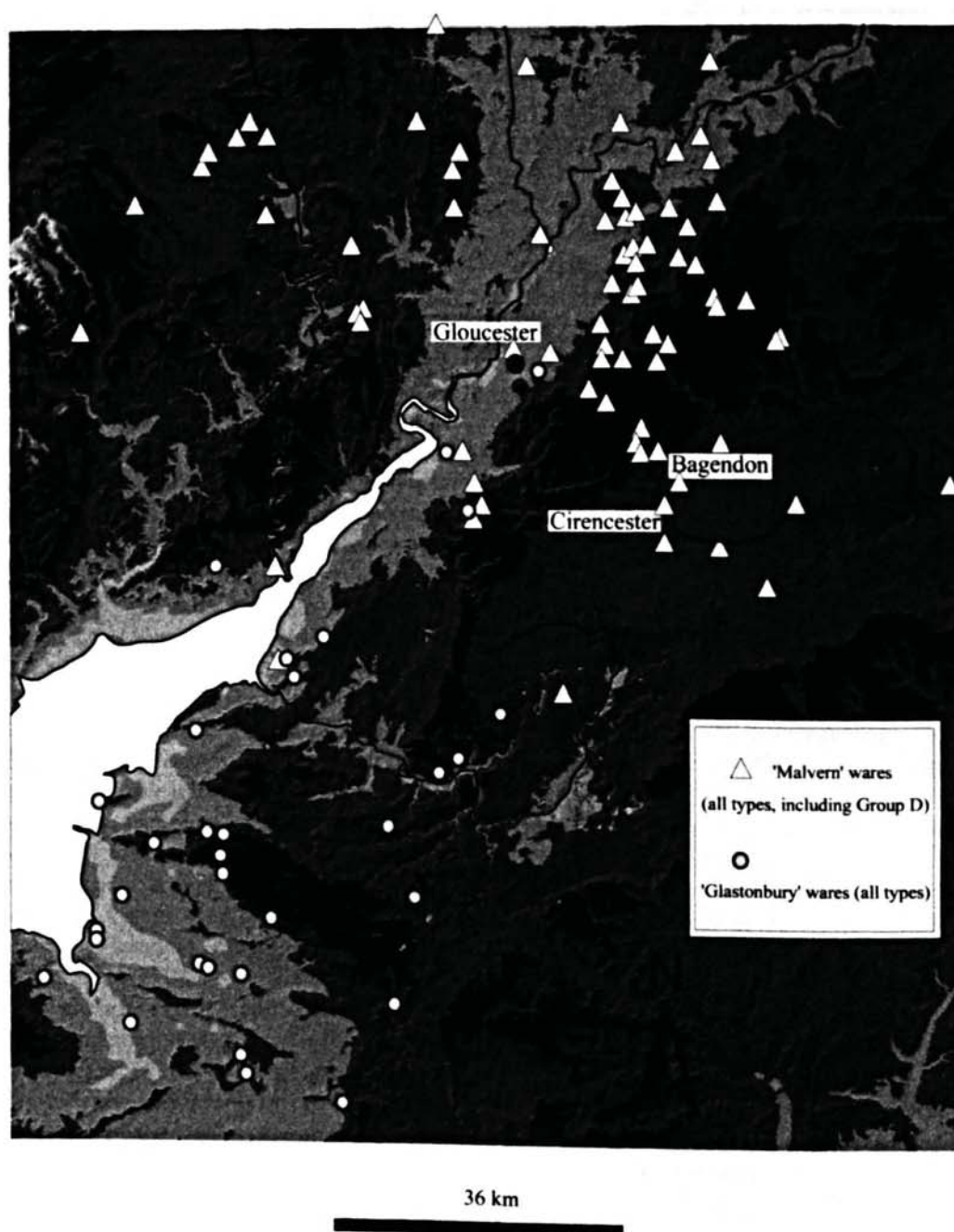


Fig. 6. Distribution of Malvern and Glastonbury wares in the Severn-Cotswolds. For full identification and discussion see Moore (2003). (Crown copyright/database right 2003. An Ordnance Survey/EDINA supplied service).

The existence of long-distance exchange systems in the region, involving Iron Age pottery and briquetage, has long been recognised (Peacock 1968; 1969; Morris 1983; 1994). More recently, specific locations for procuring stone for querns have also been identified, indicating that they too were involved in exchange systems. Many of these distribution networks appear to have been focused on distinct zones. The distribution of Malvern A and B1 wares,⁸ for example, centres on the Severn valley and the Cotswold ridge (Fig. 6). Work

by Fiona Roe on the lithology of querns has identified two distinct regional sources. In the northern Cotswolds, lower Severn valley and upper Thames many sites procured querns from May Hill, just to the south of the Malverns (Fig. 7), notably close to the various sources suggested for Later Iron Age Malvern wares (Peacock 1968; Morris 1983). Roe (1995) has also noted a distinct type of quern material, which probably derives from Beacon Hill, on the eastern end of the Mendips. Although fewer querns from this area

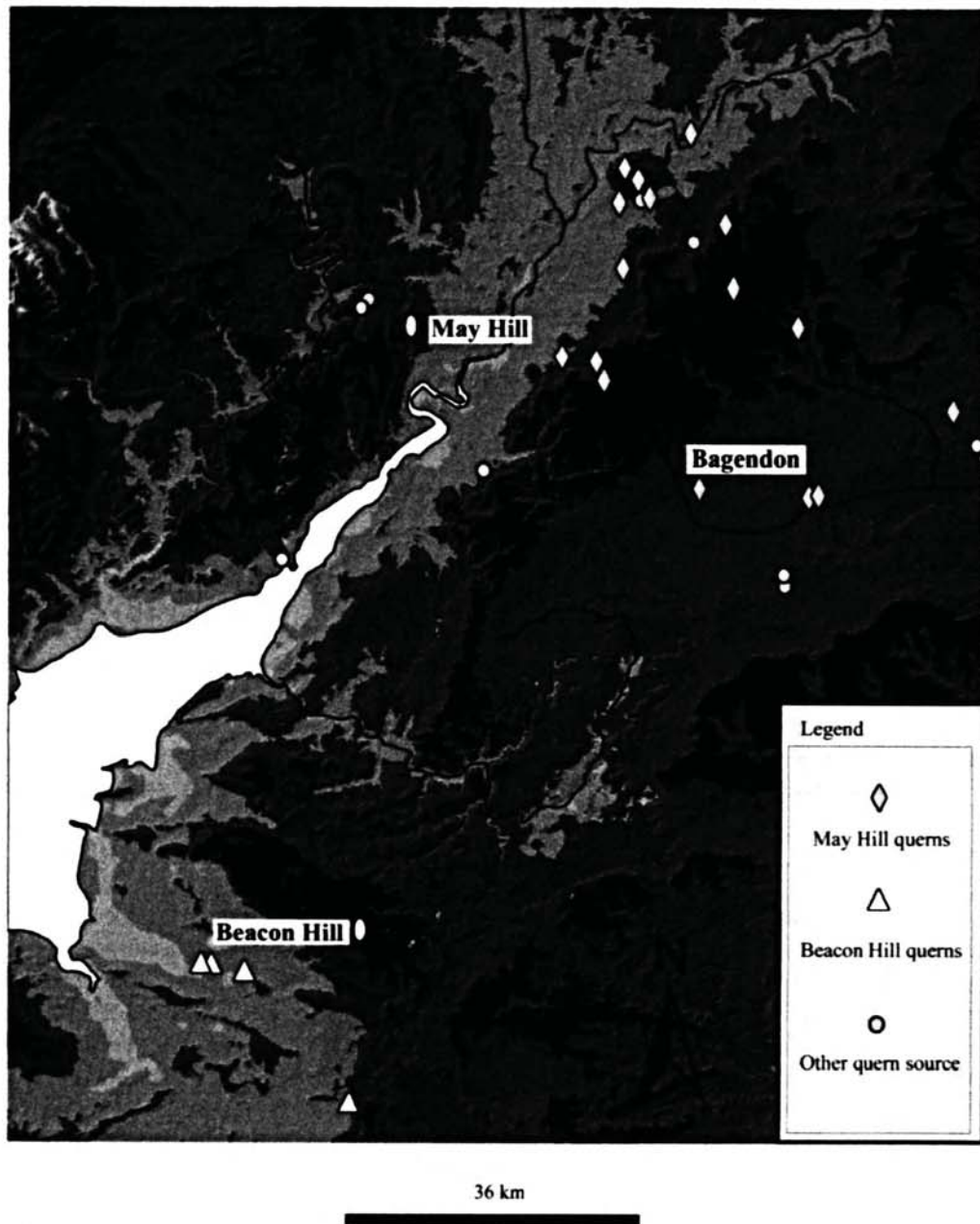


Fig. 7. Distribution of quern types in the Severn–Cotswolds. For full identification and discussion see Moore (2003). (Crown copyright/database right 2003. An Ordnance Survey/EDINA supplied service).

have been sourced, the major find sites – which include the Lake Villages (Roe 1995) and Cadbury Castle (Roe 2000) – imply that this represents another defined exchange zone. The Beacon Hill area also appears to be the source of Glastonbury 2 ware, which has a similar distribution (Peacock 1969).⁹

These regional exchange systems emerged gradually around the mid first millennium BC. Malvern A and B1 ware (Peacock 1968) and Worcestershire Group D pottery (Morris 1983) probably began around the fourth

century BC (Group D possibly slightly earlier), flourishing until the mid–late first century AD (Moore 2007). To the south, the Glastonbury wares deriving from the Mendips (Peacock 1969) appear roughly contemporary. May Hill querns on the other hand were already exploited in the Early Iron Age, as at Crickley Hill (P. Dixon pers. comm.) and may have started even earlier (Roe 1999), although the majority of sites with May Hill querns are of Later Iron Age date. Beacon Hill querns may start similarly early, but on current

evidence flourished in the Late Iron Age, dominating, for example, the Late Cadbury assemblage (Fig. 8; Roe 2000, 263).

In both these cases the pottery and querns derive from closely related sources and apparently form similar relatively well-defined exchange areas, although too few other sites have sufficiently detailed reports to allow their querns to be sourced and many sites lack querns altogether. In addition, Droitwich briquetage was exchanged from the Early Iron Age throughout the northern half of the study area, although the full distribution extends right across the Welsh Marches and the West Midlands (Morris 1994). Finds of briquetage well beyond the limits of the distribution of the May Hill querns and Malvern pottery imply that its distribution relates to specific factors of supply and demand. However, it seems likely that the same networks operated in exchanging these different materials, since many sites with May Hill querns also have Malvern pottery and Droitwich briquetage.

Previous analyses have suggested that the distribution of pottery and briquetage related to economic patterns of exchange. Morris (1994; 1996) in particular, saw the evidence as reflecting down-the-line exchange. Others have sought to explain the distributions in terms of socio-cultural groupings (Blackmore *et al.* 1979), or

quasi-political affiliations later reflected in the coinage (Cunliffe 1982; 1991, 172). In all these explanatory frameworks, the spheres of functional exchange and the relationship between material culture and cultural identity have largely been regarded as mutually exclusive.

None of these models fully explain either the distribution patterns or the choice of sources. Whilst the down-the-line-exchange model adequately accounts for the distribution of Malvern-sourced material (Morris 1994), it does not explain why communities would desire this material, or the popularity of these particular sources. Equally whilst reliance on regional exchanged material clearly increased in the Later Iron Age (Moore 2003), why this should come about is not considered. Nor is it explored why regional networks were such an important aspect of material culture in western and south-western Britain, or why in both the Malverns and the Mendips, the querns and pottery derive from closely related locations. In addition, the geographical fall-off in material may not be just about distance from source, but also about the extent to which different communities were integrated into the exchange networks.

Quasi-economic models rely on the assumption that the exchanged material was highly valued by other communities and was swapped for goods of equal value. In the absence of items appearing to travel in the

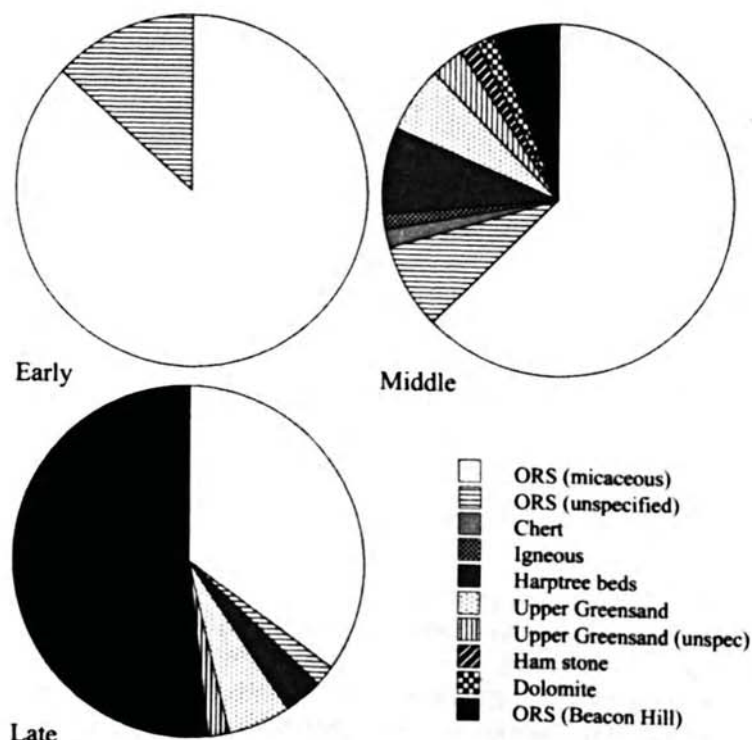


Fig. 8. Source of querns at Cadbury Castle by phase (numbers and quern identifications after Roe 2000).

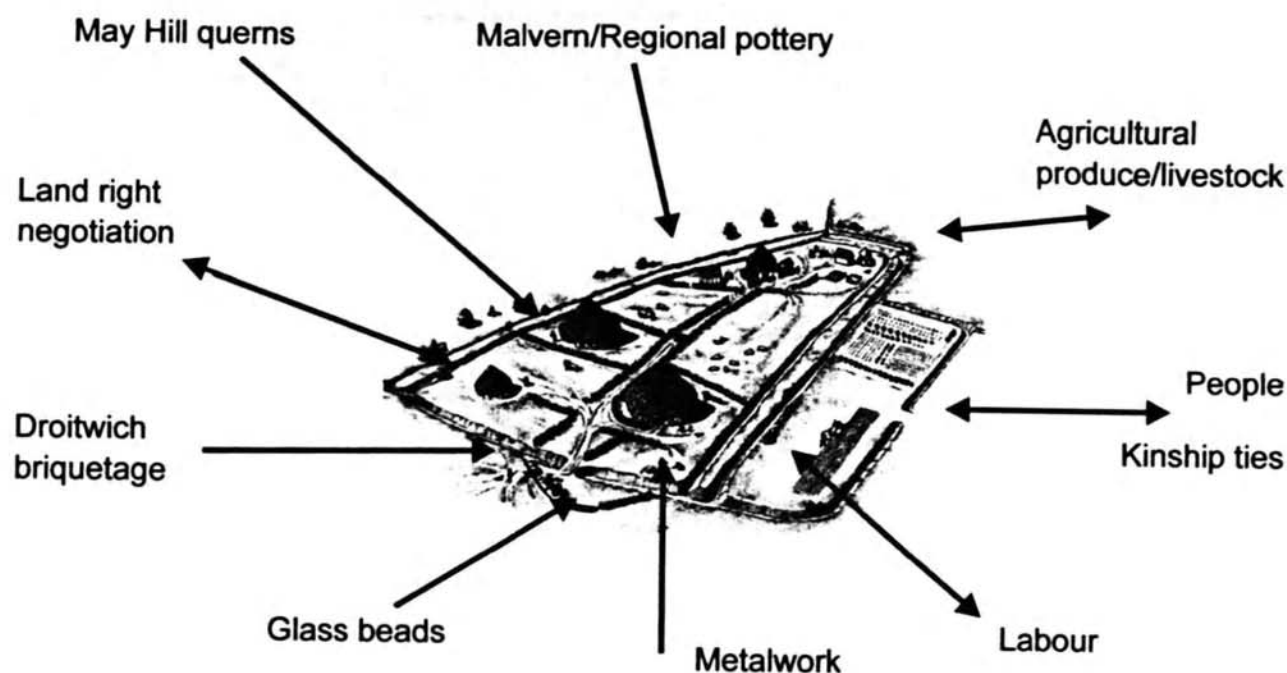


Fig. 9. Model of social relations engendered through exchange at an idealised enclosure community in the Severn–Cotswolds (Froester reconstruction after Price 2000).

opposite direction, these are generally assumed to be materials that do not survive in the archaeological record, such as animals, foodstuffs and skins. Such models rarely explore the social processes of exchange, instead regarding it as essentially a functional requirement.¹⁰ Other studies, however, have emphasised the role of exchange as a process of social interaction: for Cumberpatch, 'the exchange of utilitarian goods and food is an important, and in some senses primary, field of discourse, closely involved in the reproduction of social practices and the social formation' (Cumberpatch 1995, 82).

Anthropological studies suggest that exchanging material culture is often a form of social discourse, embodying the social relations and 'needs' of individual communities (Hodder 1982; Saitta 2000). As Le Blanc (2000, 55) suggests for the Yanomamo, 'the main goal of trade in some situations could have been to cement relationships between groups and the goods would thus have been a secondary benefit'. Can we, therefore, continue to regard the exchange of material like querns, pottery, briquetage and metalwork in Later Iron Age Britain as a purely functional or 'economic' process? To what extent might such finds reflect social relationships, such as forming alliances and marriages, as much as trade in the items themselves?

Exchanges might not have been restricted to material culture, but could also have involved the gift of labour.

As indicated above, landscape and settlement boundaries are an important feature of the Later Iron Age in the Severn–Cotswolds, and their construction and maintenance may well have played a part in negotiations and exchange (cf. Sharples 2007; Wigley this volume). Other items may also have been exchanged, including food, drink, and people, particularly if we consider feasting as part of the social reciprocity taking place (Hill 2002). In this way, enclosure communities were potentially engaged in a range of exchanges and relationships outside the immediate household group (Fig. 9).

For some elements of material culture, the source may have been extremely important. Querns in particular, as powerful tools for transforming foodstuffs, were fundamental to Iron Age life. Although information is limited, there is tantalising evidence from the region that querns were treated in special ways upon deposition, such as those placed in the entrances at Conderton Camp, Croft Ambrey and Salmonsbury (Moore 2003). Similar observations have been made elsewhere in Britain (e.g. Hill 1995, 108; Willis 1999, 99). If we accept this as confirming the importance of querns in Iron Age life, their provenance also seems likely to have been of particular significance.

Obtaining items from specific sources may relate to more than just any perceived functional superiority of the material. One factor may have been the physical nature and landscape prominence of these localities. May Hill

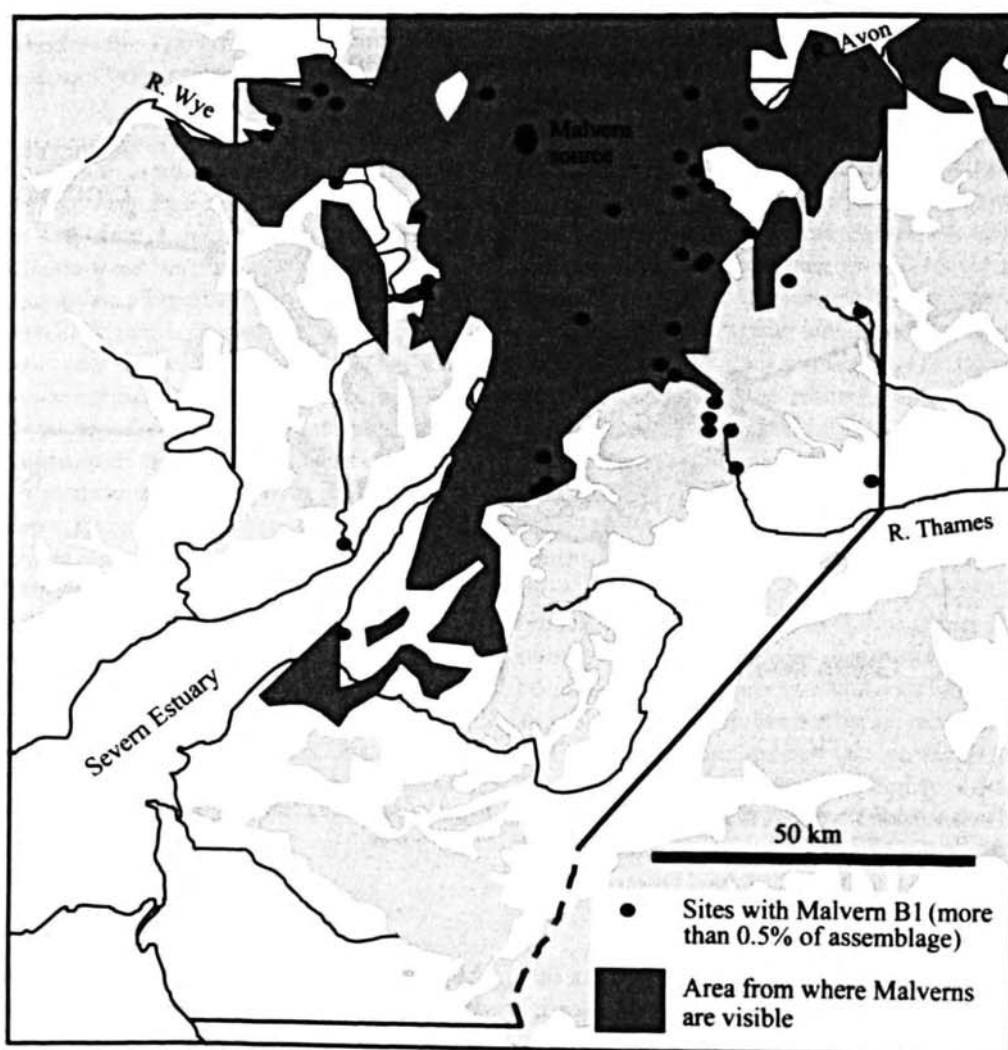


Fig. 10. The distribution of sites with Malvern B1 ware and visibility of the Malvern ridge (GIS viewsbed Crown copyright/database right 2003. An Ordnance Survey/EDINA supplied service).

and the Malverns, for example, both dominate the lower Severn valley and can be seen from afar from the north, south and east, as well as from the Cotswold ridge. It is surely significant that the Malvern ridge was visible to a high proportion of the sites obtaining Malvern A and B1 in any quantity (Fig. 10). The very dominance of these locations may have led to them being regarded as special places, their symbolic role leading them in turn to be a focus for obtaining these materials. Similarly, their role as the source of superior querns and pottery may have consolidated the link to a special place and/or have imbued the artefacts themselves with a symbolism associated with the locations. Two large currency bar hoards deposited in rock fissures on the Malverns offer further testimony to the apparent symbolic importance of such natural features (Hingley 2005).

Such symbolic landscapes potentially had long and complex histories. Roe (1999) has noted early use of May

Hill querns, potentially as far back as the Neolithic, and Bronze Age use of Malvern pottery temper has been suggested (Timby 2001), although not on the scale of the Later Iron Age. Whilst possibly marking a 'traditional' source (F. Roe pers. comm.), this does not sufficiently explain the increasing dominance of these sources. One possibility is that increased exploitation represented a conscious effort to perpetuate longer traditions of social exchange or to reference the cultural and landscape biographies of these localities. Another scenario is that pressure on land and resources and the growing complexity of social units generated a need to reinforce and negotiate the social bonds between communities through common relationships to the physical landscape. These shared visual references acted as part of the wider cultural biographies of the community.

It has been suggested that the Malvern clay sources were associated with particularly poor soil, leading local

communities to specialise in pottery production (Jackson 1999). This may be too simplistic an explanation, but does reinforce the concept of these areas as somehow distinct from the rest of the landscape. The idea that 'marginal' landscapes formed distinct areas appropriate for specialised industries and exchange has already been suggested for the Somerset Levels (Sharples 1990), although with the crucial difference that Sharples regarded the Levels as a liminal zone between different social groups, whereas the quern and pottery sources may have acted as central foci. Unlike in many down-the-line exchanges, the high visibility of May Hill and the Malverns will have meant that most (if not all) of the communities obtaining their products were acutely aware of the source of this material and its significance. In this way, these sources may have been actively involved in creating and reinforcing social bonds.

These sources became increasingly important in the Later Iron Age. Increasing reliance on regionally distributed pottery at the expense of locally made material has been noted at many sites, including Beckford, Birdlip, Conderton, Evesham, Gilder's Paddock, and Uley Bury (Hancocks 1999; Morris 1994; 2005). By the latest phases at the first four of these sites, more than 50% of pottery was obtained from the non-local sources. The quern data does not permit such a detailed analysis, but there is some evidence that by the later centuries BC sites in the lower Severn-Cotswolds relied primarily on May Hill querns. To the south, a similar pattern emerges at Cadbury Castle, where a variety of sources were used in the earlier phases, whereas in the later phases Beacon Hill querns predominate (Roe 2000). This may partly relate to the increasing use of rotary querns (which were predominantly of this material), but implies a more firmly established exchange network with a single defined source, which (like May Hill and the Malverns) happens to be a prominent landscape feature, one of the highest points on the Mendip Hills.

The process of exchanging material – and having a visual reference for that process – may have been important in fostering a sense of shared identity between Later Iron Age communities in these two distinct areas of the Severn-Cotswolds. This need not have translated into defined social ties or membership of a wider corporate group; a number of sites were clearly able to engage in a variety of different exchange networks. Hallen (South Gloucestershire), for example, has produced Malvern B1 ware, Morris Group D pottery (from Martley, Worcestershire) and Glastonbury ware from the Mendips (Gardiner *et al.* 2002). The role of material culture in expressing cultural identity and ethnicity is highly complex (Jones 1997) and it would be wrong to suggest that these distributions necessarily represented tribal communities, or that possessing certain items of material culture necessarily reflected political or cultural affiliations (contra Blackmore *et al.* 1979; Cunliffe 1991, 171).

This does not, however, prevent us from examining the role of material culture – through production, exchange and interaction – in creating and sustaining social relations between communities. As Cumberpatch (1995) noted, whether or not linked to a knowledge of the source of the material, the physical process of exchange is important in forming, maintaining and manipulating social relationships between groups, and can in turn forge a sense of shared community and/or identity, however loose. This may be a part of – but not solely related to – the economic links fostered by such exchange. Where such relationships were concerned with obtaining such essential tools as querns and pottery – themselves probably bound into fertility and social rituals – they would have generated extremely strong socio-economic ties between communities, which would be broken only in extreme circumstances. If the model of enclosure communities enmeshed in an array of social obligations and relationships forged through local and regional exchanges presented above in Figure 9 is indeed valid, it suggests a far more complex and integrated Later Iron Age society in the Severn-Cotswolds than in previous accounts.

Exchange networks and the Bagendon-Ditches complex

It is noteworthy that the Bagendon-Ditches complex, and to some extent Salmonsbury, appear to be located on the peripheries of the existing exchange networks; for instance, although all the Bagendon sites have produced pottery from the Malverns (Timby 1999b; Trow 1988; Trow *et al.* forthcoming; Moore and Reece forthcoming), they are at the margins of the distribution. This may suggest that Bagendon was not as integrated into these networks and the social links generated by them as might have been expected. Freed of such ties, communities on the periphery were perhaps more able, socially and economically, to engage with new sources and forms of culture. The Bagendon-Ditches complex was thus better placed – or was deliberately placed – to develop new relationships to the east on account of its looser ties with communities to the north, south, and west. Similarly, its establishment in an area devoid of dense settlement and land divisions meant that it was not fixed into a set of local social obligations and land rights.

At this period, local identities must have been well established and integrated into wider socio-economic groupings. Rather than being central to such networks, Bagendon – at least – was peripheral. It would be wrong, however, to suggest that it was isolated from them. As I have noted, the constituent sites all had Malvern wares and it was in the Malvern area that the early Severn Valley wares emerged, possibly alongside continued production of traditional hand-made forms (Evans *et al.* 2000; Timby 1999a). The relationships were undoubtedly complex.

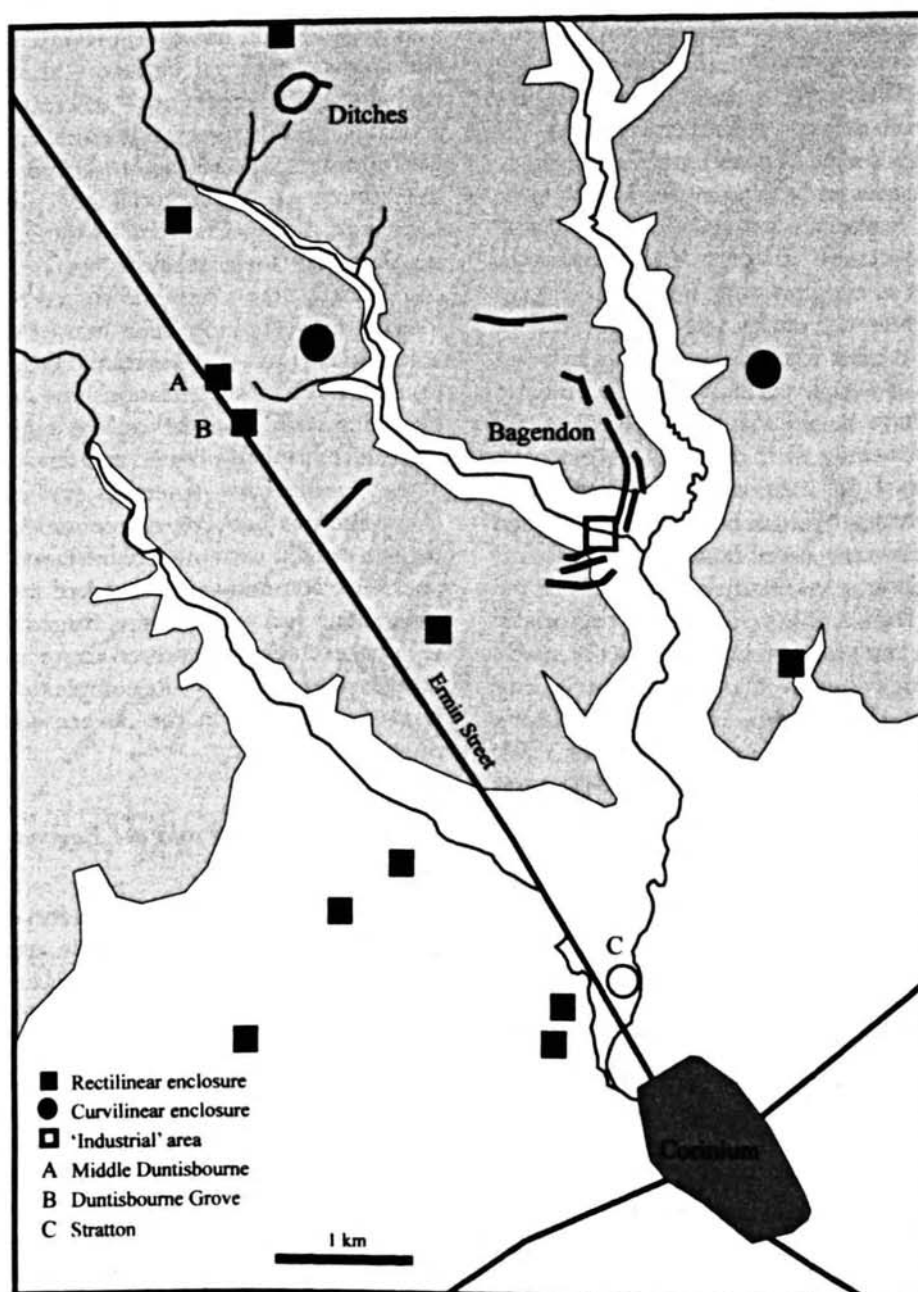


Fig. 11. The Late Iron Age complex at Bagendon-Ditches, Gloucestershire.

This is crucial for understanding the development of Bagendon: its inhabitants clearly were engaged with the communities to the north, even if the complex was deliberately sited to set it apart from existing ties.

Whether a discrete social group moved into the area (Hill this volume) or an existing elite seized a political and economic opportunity (Woolf 1993, 212), is uncertain; either way, placement between existing spheres of interaction and identity was highly significant. Whilst some have interpreted this location as the interface between a south-eastern 'core' and a western 'periphery' (Cunliffe 1991), what is in fact crucial is Bagendon's

position between the densely occupied Later Iron Age landscapes of the Severn-Cotswolds and the upper Thames valley. We also need to examine the existing land use of the area. If the landscape was relatively empty prior to the construction of the Bagendon-Ditches complex, what does this mean? There is tantalising evidence of a banjo enclosure within the dyke complex (Fig. 11), which may hint at some kind of pre-existing focus. In addition, areas that were underused may have acted as 'neutral' foci for neighbouring Later Iron Age communities (cf. Haselgrove and Millett 1997; Hingley 1999, 244), as Sharples (1990) has suggested for the Lake Villages.

Crucial in this debate is the appearance in the later first century BC of a new regionally distributed exchange item: the so-called Western or 'Dobunnic' coinage (Haselgrove 1993; Van Arsdell 1994). Previous studies have tended to regard this coin series primarily as an expression of identity and as evidence of political or cultural unity in the Late Iron Age (Cunliffe 1984), whereas more recent studies stress the new sets of social relationships and messages implicit in coinage and its iconography (e.g. Creighton 2000; Hill this volume). The use of coinage could well indicate a move from the kind of social ties and obligations discussed above to more personal relationships between individuals or small groups.

The generally assumed relationship between coinage and *oppida* creates a misleading explanation for the role of these sites. Despite the large numbers of coins found there, Bagendon is, if anything, peripheral to the Western coin distribution. This same is true of other sites in the region with significant numbers of coin finds, such as Bath and Western-under-Penyard, and applies equally to several major sites in south-east England (Hill this volume). A second point to stress is that relatively few Western coins come from 'ordinary' Iron Age settlements; most are from *oppida*, temples, and early Roman sites in general (Haselgrove *et al.* forthcoming). This might imply that coins represent a set of relationships and activities associated only with particular types of sites and communities, although this of course assumes that coins were deposited where they were most frequently used; given that acts of deposition and/or 'losses' are only one part of a complex picture, this may not be so.

If we regard coins as expressing one-off, personal relationships, obligations and contracts¹¹ – and not necessarily as having any market function (e.g. Creighton 2000; Woolf 1993, 213) – the complexity of the Western issues and their distributions (Van Arsdell 1994) become more explicable. Together with the lack of direct correlation with other regionally distributed items, this suggests that is simplistic to see the coins as evidence of a unified (or bi-partite) territory (e.g. Cunliffe 1991, 171). Why should coinage be any more important than pottery or querns in expressing social and cultural identities? If anything, coins mark a move away from social relations bound into regionally recognised identities and cultural biographies to power relationships based primarily on individuals which came to the fore in the first century AD (Creighton 2000).

The nature of late Iron Age sites

Rather than being at the centre of previous developments, the Bagendon–Ditches complex was apparently peripheral, occupying a gap in the existing settlement pattern. Such a scenario has been suggested

elsewhere, in particular for the emergence of Verulamium (St Albans) in an area largely devoid of previous occupation (Bryant this volume; Haselgrove and Millett 1997, 283). The existence of such gaps in the Later Iron Age settlement record remains somewhat controversial, contradicting the accepted view that by the mid first millennium BC, all areas of lowland southern Britain were densely settled (Cunliffe 1991, 533). Many gaps are argued to be the result of limited fieldwork, and where they seem genuine, expansion into them tends to be seen as part of a generalised process of population increase in the Later Iron Age. In contrast, Hill (1999; this volume) has sought to explain the emergence of Late Iron Age *oppida* in such areas in another way, linking it to the movement of new groups of peoples, or of communities marginalised in existing societies, into these areas. Hill sees these communities as more dynamic than those elsewhere and as the developers or bringers of new lifestyles, and more open to adopting exotic or foreign goods and habits.

The apparent lack of previous permanent settlement in these areas may be due to a number of factors, including possible special roles for these landscapes or their existence as liminal zones. As we have seen, some such areas, like the Malverns or Somerset Levels, supported specialised productive activities. Viewed in this light, Bagendon would be regarded not as peripheral, but playing a significant 'liminal' role between existing spheres of exchange and/or identity between the Thames valley to the south and the Severn–Cotswolds to the north and west. Here, the potential roles suggested for sites such as Bagendon – as production and exchange centres, meeting places, residences of new elites and potentially even as a ritual foci (Haselgrove 1995; 2001; Bryant this volume) – could exist outside the bonds of existing social networks and land rights. Such a model fits better with the evidence than an evolutionary model of social development that strives to see enclosures like Ditches and Salmonsbury as 'missing links' between the Middle Iron Age elites in their hillforts and Late Iron Age elites at *oppida*.

The morphology of sites such as Bagendon may well imply that they were involved in new activities, such as large-scale horse-rearing, as is suggested for Bury Hill, Hampshire (Creighton 2000). The possible banjo enclosure at Bagendon and the curving 'antenna' ditch at Ditches may well link the two in a specific function, perhaps stock corralling, as well as marking them out as distinct types of community. Potential parallels exist at Ashton Keynes, Barnsley Park, and Northleach, where complexes of banjo enclosures exist. Like Bagendon, these sites are peripheral to the exchange patterns noted above, being situated on the interface between the Cotswold dip-slope and the Thames valley (Fig. 12). Similar banjo complexes exist in Dorset and Hampshire and are dated to the Late Iron Age (Barrett *et al.* 1991;

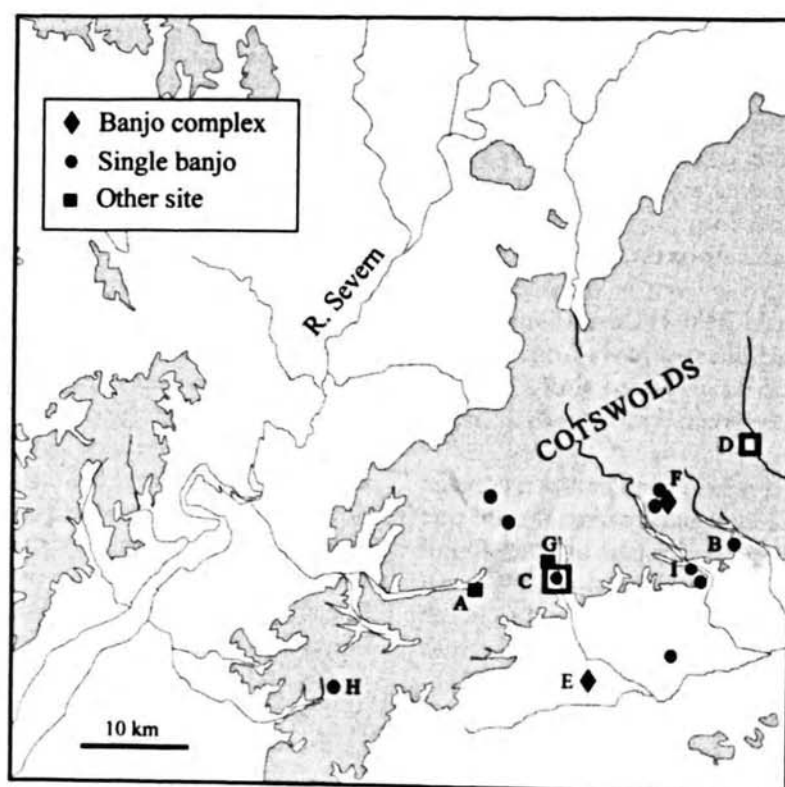


Fig. 12. The distribution of banjo enclosures in the northern Severn-Cotswolds. A. Frampton Mansell; B. Eastleach-Turville; C. Bagendon; D. Salmonsbury; E. Ashton Keynes; F. Northleach; G. Ditches; H. Lasborough; I. Barnsley Park.

Corney 1989); that at Gussage-Cow Down is particularly similar to Northleach. Several of these Wessex complexes have yielded imported pottery and Iron Age coinage, leading to the suggestion that they played a similar role to *oppida*; like their counterparts in the Gloucestershire Cotswolds, their distribution is discrete from the major hillforts (Barrett *et al.* 1991; Haselgrove 1994). Did these Wessex communities also operate on the margins of existing social networks and as a result were they able and/or more willing to engage in new relationships when the opportunity arose? Could the Bagendon *oppidum* have developed from such a complex and/or had similar roles?

How can the development of Bagendon be placed in the context of debates on 'Romanisation'? On the periphery and engaged in different activities from its neighbours, the inhabitants would have had more opportunity and indeed need or incentive to adopt the new lifestyles becoming available than communities economically and socially bound into existing exchange systems. Several Late Iron Age sites in the region have early villas, notably Ditches (Trow *et al.* forthcoming) and probably Waltham near Whittington (Hirst 2001), indicating rapid adoption of Roman 'lifeways' and building styles. The close relationship of many villas – including Barnsley Park,¹² Lasborough, and possibly

Rodmarton – to banjo enclosures implies that their associated communities were also among the quickest to adopt Roman habits (Moore 2003). This phenomenon occurs elsewhere, particularly in parts of Wessex (M. Corney pers. comm.).

The tendency has been to regard sites like Ditches as the home of a new elite, who consciously opted for a Roman lifestyle, in contrast to the inhabitants of areas like the upper Thames valley who maintained a more traditional 'Iron Age' way of life (cf. Hingley 1989; e.g. Robinson 1981, 274). This may mask a more complex picture. It may be better to regard these Cotswold communities as better able to move to new lifeways than others in the region. This may mark a tension and difference – as suggested at Cadbury Castle – between those communities (and individuals?) that were able – or chose – to move away from existing traditions and could recast themselves as 'Roman', in contrast to those who were unwilling, unable, or did not comprehend the change to 'Roman' ways of life (Barrett *et al.* 2000, 323). These 'Romanising' communities need not have been the existing (or even new) elites, but simply those who were less integrated into existing social and economic networks.¹³ We must be careful, however, that we do not simply replace one set of oppositions with another: 'Romanisers' versus 'native traditionalists'. The nature,

meanings and reasons for the adoption of Roman-style buildings could be very different, even at two sites as close as Ditches and Frocester. What we appear to see in the Late Iron Age is a fracturing of society, with different groups and communities breaking away from existing well-defined relationships and adopting various attributes of different lifeways.

The treatment of human remains in the Severn-Cotswolds is one reflection of the complexity of identities being expressed in the Late Iron Age and shows that what was happening at this period was more than simple acceptance or rejection of a 'Roman' or 'Gallo-Belgic' cultural package. On the one hand, the rich inhumation burials at Birdlip mark a form of social expression not previously seen in the region, but visible elsewhere in southern England (Staelens 1982) and some individuals (but only very few) may have begun to engage in the cremation rites seen in south-east England (Moore 2003). On the other hand, the presence of disarticulated remains of skulls and long bones in settlements shows that other members of the population continued to be treated in 'traditional' ways, even at sites like Ditches and Bagendon that were using imported pottery (Trow 1988; Trow *et al.* forthcoming; Moore and Reece forthcoming).

One cultural package was not simply replaced by another, not even by individual groups. Instead, a previously relatively unified set of lifeways seems to have fragmented into a variety of different attitudes to food, social obligations, and death, with some communities (possibly new elites), as at Bagendon, adopting new lifestyles and economies, whilst other groups continued on trajectories already established in earlier centuries (cf. Hill this volume). The destabilising effect of influence from the south-east (Haselgrove 1982; 1987; Cunliffe 1988) must not be overlooked in the emergence of certain groups as dominant whilst others continued to operate on traditional terms. Some communities probably strongly resisted change to their lifestyles, some potentially violently. There is no evidence of a linear model of evolution from a Later Iron Age tribal society.

We must not assume that other major Late Iron Age sites in the region performed the same roles or reflect the same social processes as Bagendon. Salmonsbury, for instance, has some morphological similarities with banjo enclosures – the antenna ditches and presumed emphasis on stock control – but there are also significant differences in form and probable chronology between it and Bagendon, and it is located in an area with plentiful Middle Iron Age settlement. The apparent dense occupation of the interior and its division into defined areas may therefore mark a process of social aggregation reminiscent of that taking place in parts of northern France (Haselgrove 1995; this volume). In all probability, Salmonsbury was engaged in a quite different set of relations between communities than Bagendon, even if it too was peripheral to the major exchange networks of the Severn-Cotswolds.

Even within the region, the patterns discussed in this paper are localised. Continuity of material culture appears far more apparent in Avon and northern Somerset than it is further north, despite the apparent similarities of the exchange systems operating in each zone. More sites show continuity from the 'Middle' Iron Age through to the Roman period, amongst them Butcombe (Fowler 1968) and Cadbury Castle (Barrett *et al.* 2000).¹⁴ Here too, the adoption of wheel-thrown wares and other Late Iron Age material was evidently variable and locally specific.

We should be careful, therefore, not to over-generalise about the development of Late Iron Age sites, when this evidently resulted from a complex combination of cultural choices, location and availability. It is important to question why developments to the south were different from those to the north and why no obvious parallel to Bagendon emerged,¹⁵ or why Dorset is different yet again (cf. Blackmore *et al.* 1979; Sharples 1990). What is becoming clear is that the character of existing social systems had a crucial role everywhere and that the emergence of Late Iron Age phenomena – *oppida*, cremation burial, pottery and so on – relates to the choices made by existing communities (cf. Hill this volume), who selected and modified particular traits according to their existing cultural traditions, rather than adopting the whole 'package'.

Conclusions

This paper has suggested that current chronological models mask more subtle changes during the Later Iron Age. Individual communities were engaged in different sets of exchanges and social relations, which aided the construction of their cultural identity. These identities were influential in determining which communities became involved in the changes that took place from the first century BC onward. Rather than there being a clear break with the past, individual communities reacted to change in different ways and at different points in time, with those on the peripheries of existing exchange networks more willing – and often more able – to adopt new lifestyles and exploit new spheres of influence. Even before this period, important production centres were situated in parts of the landscape peripheral to existing groups. It is against this background that the emergence of Bagendon is best viewed – situated deliberately apart from existing communities and thus better able to exploit new resources and possibilities.

To achieve a better understanding of Later Iron Age societies, we need to go beyond simply reversing the core-periphery model and instead visualise how individual communities were involved in processes of change or stasis. Similarly, whilst rejecting quasi-economic models of exchange, we must now pay more attention to the sources of material culture and the social

role of its exchange in creating wider regional identities and power structures.

Acknowledgments

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Notes

1. The term Later Iron Age is used throughout this paper for the period from the fourth century BC to first century AD. The problems raised by applying the separate terms Middle and Late Iron Age are discussed later in the paper.
2. For a recent discussion of these issues, see Wigley (2001) on Shropshire and the Cornovii.
3. Information from Worcestershire County Council Archaeological Services.
4. The 1980s excavations yielded some evidence of a pre-first century AD ditch at Bagendon (Moore and Reece forthcoming), and there is possible Middle–Late Iron Age settlement continuity at Pheasant Way, Cirencester (R. Reece pers. comm.).
5. See Moore (2003) for a fuller discussion of sites with possible Late Iron Age activity.
6. The start date for Ditches remains contentious, but there is little to suggest a construction date before the late first century BC or early first century AD. Trow's (1988, 37) second/first century BC date for the initial enclosure is based on the presence of the currency bars and 'Middle Iron Age form pottery', although both could be slightly later.
7. Some caution must be noted here, as a full report on the pottery was not available from the excavator.
8. See Peacock (1968; 1969) and Timby (1999a) for fabric definitions.
9. For a fuller discussion of quern provenance and depositional practices see Moore (2003).
10. Morris (1996, 46) hints at the possible social implications.
11. Or between individuals and the gods, as indicated by the frequent presence of coins on Late Iron Age/early Roman ritual sites.
12. The Barnsley Park villa does not seem to be earlier than the second century AD (Webster 1981; 1982); however, the presence of Iron Age pottery and a coin, as well as circular structures which are almost certainly roundhouses rather than animals pens, could well point to Iron Age activity on or near the site.
13. Richard Reece has even suggested to me that we could envisage these as dynasties 'inserted' from elsewhere – yet who would manipulate such an insertion (and why) seems difficult to explain.
14. Although with all sites the evidence is complex. At Cadbury Castle, for example, there is some suggestion of a hiatus in occupation around the first century BC, although this is open to debate.
15. Both Camerton and Ilchester have been proposed as candidates (Cunliffe 1982; 1991), but no convincing evidence exists, almost certainly because different social and settlement systems existed in those areas.

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