

PART II

SYNTHESIS

Introduction

Much of the foregoing Part I has been descriptive and explanatory, with occasional forays into interpretation. We now change into a more discursive mode with an overtly interpretative objective. We also switch from a methodological base rooted in a spatial exploration of the physically-existing landscape and its so far detected archaeology to a thematic and, to an extent, a chronologically-led attempt to make some sense not just of the study area but what we ourselves have done with it. Chapter 13 marks the change for, although its bulk contains much primary data, it is also the first attempt, at least since Chapters 2 and 9, to synthesise a great deal of evidence. Those chapters were concerned with the areas in the north and south of the parishes. Here we are looking at the whole study area, regardless of how the evidence was obtained and whatever has been done with it. Our concern now is not with what the environment was like in one place or at one time, though we need to work quite hard at precisely that issue, nor is our synthesis concerned with just one site or a cluster of them through time. Around the theme of 'environment' as inferable from palaeo-environmental and archaeological evidence, ranging from soil samples from deeply buried contexts to domesticated animal bones, the chapter is actually working towards a story of environmental change. Some documentary evidence is also brought to bear. Interesting in itself, of course, the evidence is here used primarily in an attempt to try to assess such change as a factor in the development of the landscape.

At a very simple - but actually highly complex, - level the question can indeed be reduced to 'What does it all mean?' In similar vein, an obvious answer is, interestingly, that we do not know, either in terms of ourselves or of those who have lived here and created the phenomenon that we try to understand; but that in no way deters this attempt, however intellectually foolhardy, to 'make sense of', to 'give meaning to', even 'to write the history of' a small, pleasant but undistinguished area of countryside in England.

Interpretation involves subjectivity; though this essay has so far never been other than openly subjective. Part II is simply more so. One of the problems is clearly not knowing whether the interpretative difficulty lies in a deeply complex nature of former times, now impossible to sort out, or, whether complex or not, in our own personal distance from

them psychologically and experientially as well as chronologically. Going about his business, the writer often silently articulates the thought 'We haven't a clue'; which indicates in the vernacular his fairly deep scepticism about 'history' in the sense of its enabling us, or any generation, to 'know' what any period in the past was actually like for those living then. And if that is not its purpose, then the same would apply to its ability to discern significance except of a *post hoc facto* nature at least one stage removed from any sort of contemporary reality before the present. The portrayal now, for example, of the 1950s, and the interpretation of them as received by a 1990s' audience, bear little similarity to what it was actually like to be living then, at least as recalled now by this writer in his memories of his experience then. But who is 'right'?

Before being overwhelmed by doubt as well as data, the encouraging thing is to ask the question 'Does it matter?' For then we can truly answer with a very positive 'No'. That means, of course, that we are methodologically rigorous and intellectually honest to the best of our ability in attempting to bring some sort of pattern and understanding to the kaleidoscopic chaos that greets our enquiry when, just as we find in the present, we turn to any time before the present. The 'pattern', the 'meaning', as many have previously remarked (e.g....insert refs. to a few modern philosophers of history other than Collingwood), is, however, ours and not that of some independent, objective History, nor that of our subjects of study, whether they be people, events or, as here, landscape. So part of the 'honesty' required in our endeavours is to recognise that 'it does not matter' how accurate or percipient our constructions of pastness are in relation to what is actually a mythic historical 'truth', once we recognise that our creations in thoughts, words and graphics are really rather less about our predecessors and their times than about us and ours.

The following four chapters may, then, bear little or no relation to various pasts that actually occurred in the Fyfield and Overton area, though they are indeed meant to be relevant. Those pasts may concern people's, peoples' or institutional relationships, they may concern what happened as events or processes, they may concern what people saw or thought was happening at the time, or they may, perhaps more probably, involve what was actually happening but was either not perceived as significant or not perceived at all. The mid-C4 and early C14, for example, may well have been such times when event obscured perception of process and any perception of change was unlikely to be illumined by informed understanding of its motors. Similarly we may well have created a misinformed image of non-significant aspects of the study area in this synthesis. The very chapter heads impose a late-C20 framework which, if not actually 'wrong' - a pointless word in the world of post-modernist relativism, - may well be misdirected and even historically irrelevant; but that does not matter, at least theoretically, provided they express ideas which speak to us rather than be directed

solely as probes to find out what happened to others and their surroundings in former times.

Nevertheless, a happy positivism also informs this interpretation. It is one based on a countryside which, to all intents and purposes, exists, and an archaeology which the author and others can see, walk over and re-visit. Countryside and archaeology are also really there in another dimension in that both have provided much pleasure to many and continue to do so. People talk about the area and its local history as if they are real, as they clearly are in some sort of intellectual as well as popular perception. Old documents and maps also appear fairly convincingly to tell of these same things as if they have been there for some time. That it seems useful to state these truisms makes the point that present concerns shape the history we devise, for these self-evident truths reflect the uncertain cleverness of the 1990s. But we do not doubt that there is something there; even if this is only our view of it.

Chapter 13

Environmental History

'Man and the pig between them cleared the Downs, and the sheep carried on the process' (Anderson and Godwin 1975, 75)

This chapter presents the palaeo-environmental evidence from the study area and places it in its local context. Most of the evidence was obtained from the three main site excavations, OD X/XI, OD XII and WC (Chaps. 6, 7 and 5); it largely consists of animal bones, mollusca, and charred remains. Some other evidence is also available and is taken into account. Analysis of the material has been carried out by different people at various times since the early 1960s, with major, project-generated reports becoming available in the 1960s, 1970s and 1995-6.

The environmental programme and field methodology employed by the Fyfod project largely reflects the thinking and approach of the 1960s when the bulk of the evidence was obtained from archaeological excavations initiated primarily to address chronological and structural questions. In particular, assumptions then made about the relationship between excavation and environment are now glaringly anachronistic. No systematic or continuous programme of environmental sampling was pursued and there was no on-site sieving or flotation. Indeed, flotation was not a serious option. On the other hand, those involved were well aware of the palaeo-environmental dimension and many environmental materials were visually collected, almost all from carefully specified contexts. Animal bones in particular were collected by the thousand, and carefully bagged, washed, marked and roughly sorted. They were critically examined in the

1970s by Dr. Barbara Noddle, who then disposed of them; her report was revised in 1995.

Numerous individual 'soil samples' were also taken (mostly discarded as uninformative in 1995) and, critically, in several places sequences of stratified soil samples were taken 'blind' i.e. without specific questions in mind but hoping that the fact of a sequence could reveal evidence of floral and perhaps landscape change. The most informative sequence, from ODX/15, is discussed *below*.

Most importantly, however, building on the advice in two books basic to the project's approach (Cornwall 1956, 1958), Professor G.W.Dimbleby encouraged and advised on the environmental dimension of the investigation in its early days. Indeed, he himself undertook standard pollen analysis of a sequence of samples through FD 1 (*above* Chap 4, 000); the FD 1 series examined in 1995 was a duplicate set of samples (*below* p. 00). Dimbleby demonstrated that pollen did not survive in the chalk environment of Fyfield Down, so no further pollen analytical work was pursued. Instead, Dimbleby's post-graduate student, (now Professor) J.G.Evans, applied and developed his pioneering techniques in molluscan analysis, notably on Overton Down (OD XI). This was the way in which an environmental dynamic, so vital to project's objective of landscape change, was introduced into local considerations. It was also the technique which brought new environmental evidence to bear.

Some of this was given primary publication at the time e.g. Fowler and Evans 1967; Evans 1968, 1970, and 1972, 380-81; Dimbleby and Evans 1974. When Evans' subsequently incorporated his Fyfod work as illustrative material among much else in synthesising publications, its significance percolated far beyond the parish boundary (Evans 1972, 316-21; 1975, 152-53; 1978, 121-22). Contemporaneously and a little later, the environmental dimension was also subsumed in other syntheses, e.g. Fowler 1975a, 1981, 1983; Jones 1986, 00-00. One result of this environmental input from the start was that Fyfod interpretation was always open to new evidence and interpretations, and has been constantly modified by them. Evans himself has also continued his environmental investigations in the area, recently providing in particular an overall assessment of the upper Kennet valley (Evans *et al.* 1993). Other new evidence (Powell *et al.* 1996; Swanton *pers. comm.*), as the following account shows, was in fact being absorbed during the first half of 1996. Discoveries published then from along the line of the Kennet valley sewer pipeline in 1993 (Powell *et al.* 1996) included environmental evidence interesting in itself and additionally so when related to data already obtained from the study area. The new evidence complemented that from the Downs by including in particular information on valley in-filling and about second millennium flora **south** of the river at Pound Field, West Overton.

Four points should be made in relation to the project methodology and the subsequent environmental evidence:

1. The reliance overall on visual collection during 1960s-style excavation, and the absence of sieving or flotation, have resulted in differential recovery of animal bones and charred remains, and no means of checking whether the absence of other organic remains was misleading or otherwise.
2. Soil profiles sampled for mollusca occurred only on archaeological excavations; no off-site examination by coring, for example, was carried out. The main sequence, on OD X/15, was highly suggestive but can present only a partial picture of one portion of one site.
3. The methodology used for animal bone analysis has recovered less information than would be expected in a more recent study.
4. The charred remains and animal bones, although individually contextualised on site when recovered, have been reported on by species, not context, except for those associated with the pit deposits on ODXI. It is therefore difficult to make anything more than broad inferences about the nature of agrarian activity and impossible from this data to detect short-term change within main occupation phases.

These limitations affect the possible level of analysis, not the validity of the record as such or the inferences from it. These last are discussed in the final section with reference to other local sites and a number of conclusions are presented.

The Evidence

Animal bones

The three main excavations at ODXI, XII and WC (Chaps. 6, 7 and 5) provided all of the animal bones discussed below. The material is a mix of butchery waste and more structured deposits either found in pits around the settlements or distributed through the occupation layers. The large proportion of animals identified solely by their teeth and the fragmentary nature of much of the rest of the bones gives some indication of the differential preservation of the assemblage. Noddle's report, here revised by Allen, looked at five aspects of the bone evidence:

- proportion of fragments of bone per species;
- the minimum number of individuals represented;
- the proportion each species made up of the total represented;
- the proportion of certain anatomical fragments;
- where possible, the estimated age of individuals

The complete bone report and its recent reassessment are available in the archive, which also contains a small mammal report prepared separately (King and Fowler 19??), never published and here used summarily.

Overton Down X/XI: LBA/Early Iron Age settlement and enclosure

Excavation within the enclosure produced a large quantity of both wild and domestic animal bones. The main species found on the site were cattle, sheep/goat, pig, and horse; sheep and goat are difficult to recognise separately and have been counted together. Other less well-represented animals included red and roe deer, cat, dog, small mammals and amphibians. Sheep bones were the most common bones found (at least 30 individuals), cattle were next (22), followed by pig (14) and finally horse (8).

	cattle	sheep/ goat	pig	horse	deer	other	total
fragment s	37 7 (38%)	41 1 (42%)	75 (8%)	81 (8%)	no rec ord	4 2 (4%)	9 8 6
MNI	22 (25%)	30 (34%)	14 (16%)	8 (9%)	red 2 roe 3 (6%)	9 (10%)	- - - - - -
% of ma tur e ind iv.	40 %	29 %	33 %	70 %	----	-- -- -- -- -- -	- - - - - -

Table 9.1 - table showing numbers and percentages of: fragments, minimum number of individuals (MNI), and mature individuals (over 4 years), for the bones examined from Overton Down site X/XI.

Skeletal part analysis revealed specific differences between the species. Sheep were represented by a high proportion of waste parts while for cattle and pigs most of the skeleton was represented. Cattle and sheep were notable in that no phalanges (foot bones) were present. It is likely that these were removed with the skins. Another explanation may be that because of their small size they did not survive or were not recovered.

The percentage of mature individuals (over four years old) was similar for sheep, cattle and pigs at between 30 and 40%. Horses were unusual in that 70% of the individuals identified were over four years old at the age of death. This discrepancy is significant and it is possible horses were being kept for their working ability rather than as a meat supply. Sheep and pigs, on the other hand, constituted a much larger number of young individuals, so it is more likely they were exploited for their meat. Cattle, of which 40% were mature, may have been kept for their milk. Evidence for milk exploitation has been found at middle and late Bronze Age sites on the Marlborough Downs (Maltby *in* Gingell 1992: 141), and it should not be surprising that this continued into the Early Iron Age.

In addition to the major domesticated species, both dogs and cats were also represented, all large specimens. The minimum of two dogs were each the size of a modern Alsatian; the cats were large enough to be from a wild species.

The deer bones presumably represent the exploitation of wild animals. The extent of that exploitation is not clear since there is no skeletal part information available. Deer may have been hunted for their meat but there is also the possibility that animals were scavenged or that they were killed to protect valuable pasture. It is tempting to envisage hunting parties leaving the Downs and crossing the valley to the southern woodlands in order to find the deer in their natural habitat of late prehistoric Savernake Forest; but even in the intensively used and open modern landscape of the Downs north of the Kennet valley, deer are not unknown. Roe deer are recorded as present on the NNR.

Small mammals and amphibians were an important component of some pit fills, though their presence is likely in most cases to have been a result of accidental pit fall rather than as a source of food. Their presence and context is listed in Table ?? (Chap. 6 *below*). Their structural interest is, obviously, as indicators that some pits were left uncovered and unfilled, at least for a time, but analysis of the spatial patterning of the bone from the pits suggests that some form of deliberate deposition was taking place on site. This is not unusual for later prehistoric contexts (*cf.* Hill 1995), so allowance can be made that ceremonial as well as practical reasons may well underlie the appearance of small mammal bones in some OD XI pits.

The bones' environmental interest, whatever the reason for their presence, is that the range of animals present was typical of open downland pasture and fields. Weasel, short-tailed vole, water vole, harvest mouse, frog and toad were all represented. This cross-references satisfactorily with the sort of environment inferred from other evidence for the main phases of activity on and around site OD XI (Phase 3, *above* pp. 00, 00). Given that it is easy to imagine that today's downland environment is roughly similar to

that around OD XI c. 600 BC, it is perhaps curious that the voles, harvest mouse and frog are not on the official record of species present in the NNR, only the weasel (*M. nivalis*) and common toad (*bufo bufo*) being common to both lists. The (short-tailed?) vole, however, certainly inhabits the thick red fescue tussocks beside the experimental earthwork (Bell *et al.* 1996, 232).

Overton Down XII: Romano-British settlement

A total of 3,133 bones were examined. A similar range of species to the prehistoric site were present and similar calculations were made with the data. Comparisons between the sites are discussed *below*, p. 00.

Problems of preservation and recovery similar to those on OD XI existed on OD XII. Teeth were by far the most common surviving fragments, particularly from sheep where they represented 70-90% of the sample.

	ca t t l e	sh e e p / g o a t	pi g	ho r s e	de er	ot he r	tot al
fra gm ent s	78 0 (2 5 %)	17 00 (5 4 %)	27 2 (9 %)	26 9 (9 %)	no rec ord	11 2 (4 %)	31 33
MN I	35 (1 3 %)	14 1 (5 0 %)	36 (1 3 %)	21 (8 %)	red 6 roe 5 (4 %)	36 (1 3 %)	--- --- --- ---
% of ma tur e ind iv.	26 %	51 %	25 %	48 %	---- ---- ---- -	--- --- --- ---	--- --- --- ---

Table 9.2 - table showing numbers and percentages of: fragments, minimum number of individuals (MNI), and mature individuals (over 4 years), for the bones examined from Overton Down site XII.

The percentage of total individuals was dominated by sheep (50%, 141 individuals). Cattle and pig were roughly equal (13%), while horses made up a further 8%. Less common domestic animals included dogs and birds. Wild animals represented were red and roe deer, wild pig, hare, rabbit, small mammals and amphibians.

Skeletal part analysis was carried out on the cattle and sheep remains. The results showed a consistent dominance of waste parts. The absence of meatier parts is not unusual and may theoretically be due to the utilised bones being discarded in a separate, unexcavated, area; in practice, however, this is less likely, for excavation, and particularly post-excavation analysis, suggested several dumping areas, notably on the lynchet between Buildings 3 and 4 (*above* Chap. 6). Similarly, while the high survival of teeth may simply indicate that conditions for the preservation of bone were poor, in practice this seems most unlikely. Nothing observed suggested that the normal dry, alkaline conditions helpful for bone survival did not pertain on the site.

Of more significance may be a greater degree of carcass and bone fragmentation carried out on the cattle remains, presumably on-site. One possibility for this may be that cattle were intensively butchered, in contrast to the sheep which were kept for their secondary products. This interpretation is supported by the contrasting proportions of mature individuals from the cattle and sheep. Only 26% of the cattle were over four years old while sheep had a much higher figure of 51%, similar to that of horse. Pigs were represented by 25% of mature individuals, similar to that for cattle. The majority of cattle were killed in the second autumn. This may indicate killing to preserve a milk stock or a desire for younger meat on site, but it could also be indicating a stock-herding response to external market or tenurial demands. Of the sheep which did not reach maturity, some were in their first year while a similar number were in their second or third autumn.

Less common domestic species included the remains of seven dogs, one of which was a puppy. At least one of the dogs was Alsatian-sized, comparable with the bones found at Overton Down X/XI (*above* p. 00). Bird bones from domestic fowl represented at least two individuals.

A quantity of bones from wild species recovered included six red deer, five roe deer, wild pig, hare and rabbit (**RECHECK context of Mr Rabbit: he is not supposed to have been in England yet - NB this is really quite important and, until absolutely proven otherwise, must be assumed to be an intrusive record**). This list is a little closer to that of the current NNR record: though that does not contain wild pig, it lists hare and rabbit. Small mammals and amphibians were also an important component of pit fills. Their presence is likely, as on OD XI, to have been a result of accidental pit fall rather than as a source of food. The range of animals present was typical of open downland pasture and fields with short-tailed vole, water vole and frog; though none of those are listed on current NNR records.

'Marine shells' were also part of the faunal assemblage from OD XII. 54 oyster shells were found, representing the remains of at least 51 individuals. They were in a fragmented and worn condition. It seems unlikely that they formed any substantial dietary component or a meaningful part of the local environment.

Wroughton Copse: medieval and post-medieval farmstead

A total of 2536 bones were examined from the excavations at Wroughton Copse. The material comes from contexts which span prehistoric, medieval, and C16-?17 century occupation. The majority of the assemblage (2297 bones) came from the C13 occupation of the site. Cattle, sheep, pig and horse make up most of the domestic animals, while wild animals are represented by the bones of deer, hare, rabbit and bird. Three fish bones were found in a C16 deposit.

The summary of the results in four tables on p. 8 refers to the C13 century occupation unless otherwise stated.

The assemblage is dominated by sheep bones; a minimum of 255 individuals was represented. Cattle are the next most numerous (70 individuals) followed by pig (30) and horse (23). Though horses were the smallest number relatively, their number nevertheless seems quite high absolutely for an outlying, superficially marginal sheep farm, a point to be discussed further (*below* p. 0 in Chap. 12, in relation to doc. and finds evid. esp. horse shoes). Also suggestive of economic status, the cattle, sheep and pig are represented by a large percentage of 'first class joints' (trunk and upper limb). This is particularly clear in the cattle bones, 70% of which come from such joints. Assuming that the meat was locally-produced, this proportion strongly suggests that the bovine herd was kept for its meat. It equally strongly suggests that the inhabitants of Raddun, wherever they were obtaining their meat, were not dietarily-impooverished peasants eking out a poor living on the margins of a subsistence economy. This interpretation is supported by the low percentage of mature individuals represented among the cattle bones. Only 22-34% were over four years old at death, though it is such, presumably working animals, to which the documentary evidence refers (*above* p. 00 in Chap 14).

WROUGHTON COPSE

Analyses of animal bones by species, phase, age, MNI and meat quality

	Phase	cattle	sheep/goat	pig	horse	deer	other	Total
fragments								
	pre hist/ RB	18	51	4	4	-	-	77
	C13	323	1518+goat	74	-	-	-	1915+
	post - C13	19	134+goat	10	-	-	-	163+
	C17	48	88+goat	6	-	-	-	142+
MNI								
	pre hist/ RB	3	13	4	1	-	-	
	C13	70	255	30	23	1 roe 1 red 1 fal	1	1
	post - C13	8	36	6	-	2 red 1 roe	8	
	C17	10	24	5	5	-	7	

Table 9.3: Bone fragments and minimum numbers of individuals (MNI) of the main domestic species

Phase	cattle	sheep/goat	goat	pig	horse
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pre hist /RB	25	30	-	-	-
C13	22-34	30-56	50-70	-	-
post-C13	25	44	30	-	-
C17	20	33	30	20	-

Table 9.4: Percentage of mature (>4yrs) individuals. (Note: ranges are percentages of mature animals recorded from sub-phases)

	g o a t	r e d d e e r	r o e d e e r	f a l l d e e r	h a r e	d o g	c a t	r a b b i t	f i s h
pre hist /RB	(1)	-	-		-	-	-	-	
C13	(48)	(1)	(1)	(1)	(2)	(14)		(22)	
post-C13	(9)	(2)	(1)		(2)			(4)	
C17	(3)					(3)		(1)	3 (1)

Table 9.5: MNI of other non-common animals

	cattl e 1st 2nd	shee p/go at 1st 2nd	pig 1st 2nd
prehist/RB			
C13			
post-C13			
C17			

Table 9.6: Numbers of first and second class joints of the main domestic animals

In contrast, the sheep demography included a 30-56% proportion of mature individuals. The deviation between these results is large and probably economically significant (*below* p. 00, ref. to discussion of doc. evid.); but it does not of course preclude the use of cattle for milk or sheep for meat.

Other domestic animals represented were dog (14 individuals), goat (48) and domestic fowl (cock, duck, and goose). The small number of surviving bird bones may imply that few were kept and eaten or that the small bones were not preserved or recovered. The last seems likely. Among the obligations on the farmstead was one to provide ZZ (hen) eggs to the lord of the manor (*below*, p. 00 in chap. 13).

Wild animals made up a small proportion of the remains identified, probably because of defective recovery techniques on what was the first of the settlement excavations. Survival on a more acidic Clay-with-Flints subsoil was perhaps less good too. Species represented included roe deer (1 individual), red deer (1), fallow deer (1), hare (2) and rabbit (22). No small mammal or amphibian bones were identified. There is less indication there than on OD XI and XII of an open landscape with pasture and arable, and just a possible hint of local woodland. Fish bones identified from the C17 deposit were gadoid (*Gadidae*).

Discussion

The problems associated with the methodology and interpretation of the animal bone evidence outlined above make it permissible to suggest only broad conclusions. The opportunity to compare assemblages and make inferences cannot be spurned, however, given excavations of three settlements close together in similar geographical contexts but spaced out temporally at roughly eight hundred year intervals in different cultural contexts.

The environmental record of the prehistoric site, OD X/XI, is dominated by the remains of cattle and sheep around the C7 BC. It is likely that animals were exploited both for their secondary products and for meat. The nature of butchery practices and deposition on the site is particularly interesting. The proportion of cattle and pig skeletal remains, and their presence in 'ritual' pits, suggests that these animals may have had a special place in the cosmology associated with the site. This is highlighted by the contrasting fragmentation of the sheep remains.

The Romano-British assemblage, specifically C4, is, in contrast to the above, dominated by sheep bones. This would suggest that a different agricultural economy (or dietary regime?) could be taking place at the site. (can we relate this to other sites in region?- need to check this out. My impression is that change to cattle rather than

sheep is perceived??)). The wider range of species present, including wildfowl, wild pig, hare, rabbit (???) and sea shells, may indicate much more extensive social contacts than a millennium earlier; the oyster shells' significance is essentially economic rather than environmental. Certainly the presence of a main Roman road nearby, connections to urban markets in the region, and other local sites including villas and an apparently large settlement beside Silbury Hill (Powell *et al.* 1996, chap. 4) can be envisaged as affecting smaller settlements on the downland.

The contrasting bone assemblages from the Iron Age and Romano-British sites emphasise the differing occupation practices which occurred at each. At ODXI evidence suggests a strong symbolic relationship between farmers, domestic animals and the settlement enclosure. At ODXII this relationship is less clear and the assemblage can be understood in purely economic terms. That said, this interpretation would seem naive, even for farming work within the context of a villa estate - which is what the bones may be reflecting, - and it is likely that human/animal relationships were expressed in less tangible ways.

At Wroughton Copse, eight hundred years later, sheep are again the dominant domesticates represented, a statistic which correlates with the overwhelming thrust of the documentary evidence (Chap. 13). A model of a familiar sort of medieval landscape is the most likely framework for the bone assemblage in general; but perhaps with a reminder that such familiarity was unknown in a downland landscape before this evidence became available. With a touch of old woodland, now perhaps reflected by Wroughton Copse itself, the model here contains large patches of arable strip fields, now represented by ridge and furrow, surrounded by sheep-pasture grazed in a managed way on the less hospitable downland. The bone evidence also contains some resonances, particularly in relation to the meat represented by the cattle bones and the number of horses, which go beyond environmental matters alone and are discussed elsewhere (Chaps. 12, 13).

Interpreting the three sites together in linear sequence, it is tempting to suggest two parallel models through time, respectively environmental and agrarian. We could see environmentally through the second quarter of the first millennium BC the development of a widely opened landscape on the Downs, with little macro-flora and consequently stabilised with fixed enclosed fields within a pattern of land allotments associated with focal settlements like OD XI. The landscape then remained open, perhaps with patches of scrub and woodland coming and going, the main change through to medieval times being a trend towards more grassland and less arable. The agro-economic model would envisage a progressive change through time from mixed farming to one in which sheep became more dominant within a pastoral economy.

It cannot be stressed too strongly, however, that our sequence, although undeniably chronological, is not necessarily linear in any other respect. And even as a chronological sequence, it is not linear but episodic. So far, in any case, we have only looked at the animal bone evidence, and its import may well be economic and cultural rather than environmental. But it has produced indications of what may well have been happening environmentally in and around three adjacent settlements occupied between c 700 BC and AD 1300. Fortunately, some inferences can be matched against those from other evidence from the same sites.

Mollusca

Earlier molluscan work by Evans on lynchets from the area has been published elsewhere and will only be summarised here. The unpublished primary evidence comes from two sites: Overton Down X and Piggledean Bottom. The samples from Overton Down X were taken at the time of the excavation and were examined recently by Sarah Wyles. The Piggledean data are kindly made available from his own research by Mike Allen. The full reports of both are available from the archive.

Overton Down X: fill from Early Iron Age enclosure ditch

The soil samples from Overton Down X were taken from cutting 15 on the southern edge of the ditch circuit, down-slope of the main settlement (fig. 6.00; *above p. 00*). The ditch revealed a common stratigraphy through much of its length; at cutting 15, after very close inspection, ten layers were recognised, including deposits on top of its 'normal' sequence. Samples were taken from eight of these layers with a view to developing an environmental sequence and, after 30 years in sealed containers, they were successfully analysed.

The deposits were divided into three phases: primary, secondary, and tertiary. They showed a clear but apparently gradual sequence of deposition with at least one layer of soil stability when a turf line was able to form (our layer 4, *above p. 00*). Evans (1972, fig. 123) has illustrated almost exactly the processes envisaged as represented in the section of cutting 15 (fig. 5. 00), but with his layer 4, 'tertiary fill', containing at least two, probably three, major phases of cultivation - EIA, RB and medieval, - after the development of a turf line over the 'natural' primary and secondary fills.

The primary fill is dominated by open country species, characteristic of established grassland. Shade-loving species are present (10%) and this may indicate that there was wood or scrub close by either when the ditch was dug or during its use when it may well have been kept clean and open for a time. Layer 9, at the top of the primary deposits, shows a high mollusc count and a low diversity index indicating a period of stability before secondary erosion took place.

Ditch fill	Context number	Description
<i>Tertiary fill</i>		
0 - 0.15m	1	Brown humus with few flints in top of enclosure ditch fill. Plough soil (medieval)
0.15 - 0.31m	2	Brown humus with frequent flints in top of enclosure ditch fill. Plough soil (RB?)
0.31 - 0.55m	3	Brown Humus with few flints in top of enclosure ditch fill. Plough soil (RB or EIA?)
<i>Secondary fill</i>		
0.55 - 0.66m	4	soil, chalk lumps and flints.
0.66 - 0.82m	5	light brown soil with flint and chalk flakes
0.82 - 1.03m	6	soil with few chalk and flint inclusions. Stabilisation.
1.03 - 1.13m	7	Fine light brown chalky soil with common chalk and flint inclusions
1.13 - 1.32m	8	fine light brown chalk soil with large flint inclusions
<i>Primary fill</i>		
1.32 - 1.56m	9	soil with frequent flint and chalk inclusions. Stabilisation.
1.56 - 1.76m	10	Soil with very frequent chalk inclusions, common flint inclusions and decomposed natural.

Table 9.7 - A description of the layers identified from the enclosure ditch, cutting 15, Site Overton Down X.

The secondary fill sees a decline in the numbers of shade loving mollusca. More specifically, an area of short tufted grassland was present at the time the secondary fill developed. The presence of one species in particular (*Pubilla muscorum*) indicates there were areas of broken ground close by. This may indicate trampling by livestock or disturbance within the ditch itself; but overall seems best interpreted as representing adjacent arable, fairly unambiguously indicated archaeologically as contemporary with and surrounding the phase (3b) of enclosed settlement. This interpretation only identifies general trends in the mollusc sequence, however, the actuality likely to have been much more diverse. The presence of *Trichia hispida*, a species which favours humid closed vegetation, for example, indicates how the local area would almost certainly have included a varied range of micro-environments at any one time.

The sequence also suggests that, as with the primary fill, a period or periods of apparent stability characterised the later history of secondary deposition. A turf line

(layer 6), for example, occurred towards the top of the stratification. This may indicate a period of abandonment of the site, or simply that activity did not occur close to the feature. The later explanation is more likely since the mollusc sequence does not show any evidence for vegetative regeneration. It could well be this is an indication that the area was being grazed by livestock, an interpretation compatible with other evidence from these downs about their use in the last prehistoric centuries (*above* FD 1 in chap. 4 and *below* in chap. 10).

	Primary Fill	Secondary Fill				Tertiary Fill	
Context							
Depth (m)							
Weight (g)							
MOLLUSCA							
<i>Pomatias elegans</i> (Müller)							
<i>Carychium tridentatum</i> (Risso)							
<i>Cochlicopa</i> spp.							
<i>Vertigo pygmaea</i> (Draparnaud)							
<i>Vertigo</i> spp.							
<i>Pupilla muscorum</i> (Linnaeus)							
<i>Vallonia costata</i> (Müller)							
<i>Vallonia excentrica</i> (Sterki)							
<i>Vallonia</i> spp.							

<i>Punctum pygmaeum</i> (Draparnaud)									
<i>Discus rotundatus</i> (Müller)									
<i>Vitrina pellucida</i> (Müller)									
<i>Aegopinella pura</i> (Alder)									
<i>Aegopinella nitidula</i> (Draparnaud)	2	4							
<i>Oxychilus cellarius</i> (Müller)			4	2	4	2	2		
<i>Limacidae</i>		2		5					2
<i>Cecilioides acicula</i> (Müller)					4	8			
<i>Clausilia bidentata</i> (Ström)	2								
<i>Helicella itala</i> (Linnaeus)						4	2		
<i>Trichia hispida</i> (Linnaeus)	2		2	2	5		2		
<i>Cepaea/Arianta</i> spp.		2							
Taxa									
Shannon Index									
Total									

Table 9.8 - molluscs from Overton Down site X/XI.

In the tertiary fill of OD X, cutting 15, a virtual absence of shade-loving species combined with an increase in mollusca typical of an arable context. The new land use does not observe the line of the ditch, the profile of which was lost under the plough soil. Though none of layers 1-3 contained artefactual dating evidence, such arable activity would accord well with other, abundant and independent evidence across the landscape for intensive exploitation early in the Roman period. The increase in arable indicators at this point in the stratigraphy, whatever its absolute date, does not, of course, preclude arable activity from earlier in the sequence. The nature of the evidence is the result of post-depositional processes, for it is only during the accumulation of the tertiary fills that cultivation occurred over the top of the ditch, thereby ensuring the representation of that activity in the molluscan sequence.

Overton Down (XI/B) and Fyfield Down (FD1): lynchets

At approximately the same time as the ditch samples discussed above were taken, further samples were taken from sections through lynchets on both Fyfield and Overton Downs (this volume, pp. 00, 00). These were collected and analysed by John Evans (Fowler and Evans 1967; Evans 1972, Tables 9, 10).

The sequence at ODXI/B was heavily disturbed by later activity on the site, causing mixing of the layers. Molluscs throughout the profile were dominated by open country species. In contrast, FD 1 produced a clear stratigraphy with sufficient molluscs to construct an environmental sequence. The preserved land surface was dominated by shade-loving species, while within the lynchet open country varieties were prevalent. The modern turf line had a similar mollusca content to that found at Overton Down XI/B. Clearly the lynchet was formed in an open country environment which had been cleared just prior to its use. That landscape remained open throughout the lynchet's growth, hardly surprising given that by definition the process involved arable cultivation. Though, again by definition, cultivation ceased and has not been renewed since the lynchet stopped forming, the landscape has remained floristically open until the present day. Interpretation of the archaeological evidence suggests that the old ground surface on the Chalk was disturbed, probably by cultivation during prehistoric times, but was not buried until intensive agriculture within a stone-walled field produced the lyncheting effect in the first centuries AD (*above* Chap. 4, p. 00).

Piggledean Bottom: dry valley

A series of auger samples taken from colluvial deposits in the dry valley of Piggledean Bottom by Michael Allen (*pers comm.*) provided mollusc samples which can be related to 'offsite' activity in the area. The results have not been published elsewhere so they are here presented in full.

Depth	Layer	Description
0 - 370mm	<i>Brown rendzina</i>	dark brown (7.5YR 3/2) silty clay loam topsoil, few very small and small chalk pieces
370 - 580mm	<i>Upper colluvium</i>	yellowish brown (10YR 5/6) silty clay with many small chalk pieces, becoming darker with depth and less calcareous
580 - 800mm	<i>Lower colluvium</i>	dark yellowish brown (10YR 4/4) fewer chalk pieces, stiffer and becoming moister with depth
800 - 950mm	<i>Beaker horizon</i>	dark brown (10YR 3/3) silty clay loam, almost stone free, some charcoal flecks and occasional small pieces (<i>Pomoidea</i> and <i>Corylus</i> identified J Ede), pottery
950 - 1380m m	<i>Basal deposits</i>	dark brown (7.5YR 4/4) becoming reddish brown (5YR 4/4) with depth, silty clay
1380m m	<i>Stone</i>	sarsen

Table 9.9 - sequence of deposits from Piggleden Bottom (Allen pers comm.).

Cores were taken from four sites along the valley. Two of these reached stone at a depth of 0.4-0.6m, while a third revealed a brown rendzina over chalk, a typical chalkland sequence. The fourth core was of more interest in that it revealed a sequence of colluvial deposits overlying a possible buried land surface. A much larger core was then taken which produced sherds of pottery from the buried land horizon. The pottery was identified as Beaker ware, two of the larger sherds having rectangular toothed comb impressions and a possible chevron. Molluscs were recovered from the Beaker horizon and from the underlying basal deposits, thus giving a sequence of before and during anthropogenic influence. The basal deposit had a small and poorly preserved assemblage dominated by species which favoured a woodland habitat. In contrast the Beaker horizon had a larger and better preserved assemblage. The species present were characteristic of open country, with dry, short grazed or trampled grassland.

Magnetic susceptibility readings were also taken of the deposits. The Beaker horizon gave a much higher reading, characteristic of a buried soil, possibly supporting short grassland. The deposits which overlay these horizons were made up of colluvium which had sealed the Beaker occupation. The presence of localised colluvium is not unusual in the area and its importance is discussed more fully below. Both in general and in several particulars, these observations and the stratigraphy are similar to those recorded independently in the 1960s and 1995 at the Down Barn enclosure (above p. 00 and *below* p. 00).

	Basal Deposit	Beaker horizon
Depth (cm)	110-120	80-95
Weight (g)	273	428
MOLLUSCA		
<i>Pomatius elegans</i> (Müller)	4	-
<i>Carychium</i> spp.	3	-
<i>Vertigo Pygmaea</i> (Draparnaud)	-	1
<i>Pubilla muscorum</i> (Linnaeus)	-	4
<i>Vallonia costata</i> (Müller)	7	18
<i>Vallonia excentrica</i> (Sterki)	-	12
<i>Acanthinula aculeata</i> (Müller)	-	1
<i>Discus rotundatus</i> (Müller)	6	+
<i>Clausilia bidentata</i> (Ström)	1	-
<i>Helicella itala</i> (Linnaeus)	-	3
<i>Trichia hispida</i> (Linnaeus)	-	8

Molluscs per kilogram	49	172
Total	21	47
Magnetic susceptibility ($\times 10^{-8}$ SI/Kg)	13	53

Table 9.10 - molluscs from Piggledean Bottom (Allen *pers comm*).

Pound Field, West Overton

Molluscan evidence was also obtained from the site of a round barrow on the south side of the river. The site lay c 100 m NE of St. Michael's church near the top of the small but prominent knoll at the east end of the village (*above* Chap. 3, p.00). One sample came from a possible buried ancient soil which unfortunately could also be, or contain elements of, the ground surface buried in the 1960s (layer 16 in Powell *et al.* 1996, 18-21, 24, 26, from which publication all the Pound Field evidence used here is taken). It contained 'an open country assemblage with a significant (c. 15%) shade-loving element ...' though the fact that the generalisation is based on but 32 shells advises yet more interpretative caution. This is a great pity, for evidence unambiguously of 'short grazed grassland' in the Bronze Age on this south side of the valley but closely overlooking the river would be particularly welcome.

Discussion

The mollusc evidence offers only a partial picture of the environmental sequence of the downland. This is a result of the small amount of sampling which took place, a factor compounded by the local scale at which molluscs react to environmental differences (*cf.* Evans 1993, 159). Consequently, we have only three good micro-environmental sequences which can be supplemented with the data from three other local excavations.

The sequence from ODX/15 ditch fill begins with the ditch being dug in a partially shaded environment. Following this the landscape becomes cleared and was possibly maintained that way through grazing until the ditch is ploughed over and the site, or somewhere nearby, is used for arable. The lynchet at FD1 provided a sequence which began with a shaded environment at the time of the old ground surface which became cleared with the build up of the lynchet and remained so until the present. At Piggledean Bottom the basal deposit has mollusca identified with a woodland habitat, above which the Beaker horizon preserves mollusca of a grazed, open country environment.

Comparable local samples have come from a prehistoric pit next to the Ridgeway (Smith and Simpson 1964), a round barrow on Overton Hill (Smith and Simpson 1966) and a barrow at West Overton (Gill Swanton *pers comm.*). The pit was located while excavations were taking place at the site of three Roman tombs. The pit was 0.5m deep and just under 1m in diameter. The fill included animal bones from ox, sheep/goat and dog; struck flints; and 20 sherds of Peterborough ware. A mollusc sample from the pit fill showed the presence of *Helicella itala*, *Discus rotundatus*, and *Arianta arbustorum*, with the last being the most numerous. The assemblage reflects species found in a diverse range of habitats, including a shaded environment, open country, and wet thick vegetation (Evans 1972, 00). This may indicate disturbance of the upper layers of the pit or that the Late Neolithic environment was indeed locally diverse, ranging from dry pasture to woodland.

In contrast, a round barrow excavated on Overton Hill revealed a mollusc sample characteristic of an open dry grassland environment (Smith and Simpson 1966, 142). Barrow G19 at West Overton produced a similar sequence with an environment of cleared grassland existing from the first phase of construction through the subsequent use of the site (Gill Swanton *pers comm.*). Both barrow sites can be dated from the Early Bronze Age (check). If one can believe the evidence from Pound Field, much the same, especially the established grassland, might have been happening on the other side of the valley. If only it were reliable, this hint of pasture, perhaps permanent and even long-established pasture, might well both reflect in general the clearance sequence indicated across the valley on the northern Downs. It might also suggest a pastoral as distinct from an arable land-use on this particular knoll. If so, such use is likely to have been within a complex of environmental resource management which, while perhaps not conceived of in quite such words, would surely have been practised in fact, at the very least on a local territorial basis.

Charred remains

Charcoal and burnt hazelnuts make up a small proportion of the recorded finds from the main excavations. The samples were identified by Rowena Gale (charcoal) and Michael Allen (charred hazelnuts); the full reports are available from the archive.

Overton Down X/XI: Early Iron Age enclosure and settlement

The remains from Overton Down X/XI were from post holes and pit fills. The plants from which the charcoal originated included maple, hazel, ash, oak, *Pomoideae* (may be hawthorne, apple, pear, rowan, whitebeam, or wild service), and *Prunus* spp. (wild cherry, bird cherry, or blackthorn). The diversity of species indicates a number of woodland types were available. There are primary woodland species such as oak along with thornscrub, more characteristic of regenerating ground.

Overton Down XII: Romano-British settlement

Three samples of charcoal were recovered for identification, showing a slightly more restricted taxa list than Overton Down X/XI. The results indicated the presence of hazel, ash, oak, elm, and *Prunus* spp. (see above).

Wroughton Copse: medieval farmstead

Charred hazelnuts (identified by Michael Allen, see archive/appendix/microfiche) were present along with the charcoal. The charcoal consisted of hazel, ash, oak, elder, elm Pomoideae and *Prunus* spp. (see above). The hazelnut remains consisted of one burnt nut and a few charred fragments.

Pound Field barrow, West Overton

A sample from the possible ancient buried soil (above) led to sixteen identifications, 75% of them either *Corylus* sp. or 'a member of the Pomoideae' (Powell *et al.* 1996, 19). 'With such slender evidence it is only possible to speculate that the environment around the site contained lightly wooded areas'; these may have been recolonisation in the 2nd millennium of areas cleared in the 3rd. Hazel and hawthorn are common now in the hedges near the site.

Discussion

Charcoal is not unusual in excavated downland contexts. Apart from its dating potential, here checked but nugatory, it should indicate to a greater or lesser extent something of the local environment and - so easy to forget with so common a material as wood, - imports to the site. A comparison of the results from the sites shows very few significant differences. A stable woodland environment of oak, hazel, ash, and possibly apple or elm, was available. Its location in what appears to have been a well cleared landscape may lie to the south of the valley or on areas of marginal land, either on the Clay-with-Flints or the wetter valley bottoms. The possible presence of thorn scrub on all three sites again emphasises the likelihood that land was continually in a process of regeneration through clearance.

This is supported by the charcoal assemblage from a number of cremation pits at barrow G19, West Overton (Gill Swanton *pers comm*). Identifications of the charcoal show a mix of woodland species favouring acidic soils or clay overlying chalk (*Quercus*, *Fraxinus*, *Acer*, *Corylus* and *Crataegus laevigata*) and species which would have also thrived in a more open habitat on calcareous soils (*Rhamnus cathartica* and *Prunus spinosa*). This mix of woodland on Clay-with-Flints and scrub on regenerating chalkland is similar to the evidence from the Fyfod sites and, if one accepts the Pound

Field barrow evidence, from a similar topographical position on the south side of the valley across the river.

Environment and landscape in the tenth century AD

The Charter evidence

Introduction

In addition to the palaeo-environmental sources normal in archaeological considerations which this chapter has included so far, our study area is fortunate in that much documentary and cartographic evidence bears on its former environment. Here we take as exemplar one of the main sources, three pre-Conquest charters, not least because they relate to a time, the tenth century, for which we have no other environmental evidence (the medieval and later environment and landscape as illustrated by documentary and cartographic sources is specified or implicit in our use of them in chapters 9-12). Two tenth century charters exist for the modern parish of West Overton: one delineates the bounds of East Overton (S449), the other those of West Overton (S784). An additional description of the cattle farms and downland was appended to the East Overton charter, which covers the northern part of Fyfield (*above* p. 00). No charter exists for Fyfield, though one for Oare (S424) describes the south-east corner of the parish.

We use the charters here to try to acquire a better understanding of the environment and ecology of the study area, our approach being through the detail of references to tree species, water, woodland, boundary stones and land-use, followed by extrapolation. As such, it is the nomenclature which is being examined, not the precise twists and turns of the mere-men (see Chpts 10-12). So we question the charters here, not about boundaries or social matters, but for any light they can throw on the landscape: of religious and burial practices, the economy, the management of land and resources, and the communication and settlement patterns of the period. From such questioning, we have been able to reconstruct a version of the tenth century landscape (fig. 13.XX)

The River Kennet and water

In 939 AD, 15 hides of land at *Uferan tun* (East Overton) were granted to Wulfswyth, a nun, by King Æthelstan. That the settlement created in the Kennet valley was called 'Bank Farm' or 'Upper Town', clearly suggests it sat on raised ground. In addition, the 'offtakes' noted in the introduction to the charter may be indicating that the settlement was further protected by canalisation work or bank building which could counter flooding and drain marshy ground. They may, of course, have been exploitive rather than just defensive, perhaps to do with harnessing water power for a mill or with controlling water flow as in an early form of artificial water-meadow (*above* pp. 00, 00).

Two fords are mentioned in the charters, one near the Salt House (SU 131683), the other where today's Ridgeway crosses the Kennet by a bridge (SU 119676). The latter took a metalled road across it, as it is described as a *straetford* (S784). The street was a continuation of the *herpoth* (S449; Costen 1994, 98, 105), the Ridgeway, and a stone bed to the ford suggests the route was a busy one or at least one taking heavy, possibly wheeled traffic. The ford is not on the line of the Roman road (fig. 0.00). On the higher ground, water needed to be contained. The *mere*, or pool, recorded in both the charters of West and East Overton, may have been a fore-runner of one called Buckpitt in 1567 (Straton 1909, 147) and possibly the one still visible today at SU 143663.

Vegetation

The charters refer to three species of tree: elder (*Sambucus nigra*), willow (*Salix* sp.) and maple (*Acer campestre*). Elder grew near the modern village of Lockeridge, somewhere between the Kennet (SU 141684) and Lockeridge Dean. After crossing the ford at East Kennet, but before reaching the Seven Barrows, another was used as a marker (SU 119678). As elders were certainly not rare in the tenth century (Godwin 1975, 336; Rackham 1990, 187), these ones must have stood out in some way, perhaps because of their size or form, to have been chosen as fixed points. Across the valley, a hedge by 'withy pond', *withigmeres hege*, formed the south-eastern corner of the grant of land at East Overton. The pond lies just beyond the long barrow at the south-east corner of Barrow Copse (SU 15736553; Brentnall 1938a, 128) and willows continue to grow there. Indeed, it has been argued that the relatively rare species which grew at Withy Pond fifty years ago (*Salix Caprea* and *Salix atrocineria*) are lineal descendants of the Saxon ones (Gorse 1946, 576). Presumably willows would have served the basket and hurdle-maker just as osier beds did until recently, and the hedge would have been a useful source of wood, berries and plants as well as a boundary marker. East Overton's charter also refers to *mappeldre lea*, 'the clearing in the maple trees', which was probably situated in the Down Barn area, possibly a forerunner of Wroughton Copse. Maple was a widely used wood, from bridge uprights to musical instruments, and coppiced well. Other local vegetation included a *méos leage* (S424), 'the mossy clearing', situated near Levetts Farm (SU 173657) and *hacan penne*, (Hackpen Hill/Overton Hill), suggesting a fenced enclosure (Field 1972, 270), presumably from a local source of hazel.

Woodland and woodland clearances also feature prominently in the charters. There are references to *ers lege* (S784) and *hyrs leage* (S449; Hursley Bottom), *smalan leage* (S449 - small or narrow lea), *lorta lea* (S784; Lurkeley Hill, SU 123663) and *mappledre lea* (S449). As a *lea* or *ley* appears to indicate a permanent clearing in woodland, the number of leas in this study area suggests fairly substantial natural or manmade gaps in the woodland canopy. In addition, the inclusion of *lea* as a second element may imply

worship (Yorke 1995, 166-7), thus making Hursley 'the sacred clearing where horses are worshipped'. Would that that reference had been to Overton Down where, in a LBA/EIA context on OD XI, there is circumstantial evidence of such 'worship' (*above* p. 00). *Grafe*, on the other hand, means 'a small, defined, probably managed wood' (Rackham 1990, 46). Thus *mere grafe* (S784), 'Pond Grove', now part of Wools Grove (SU 145666), would suggest this wooded area was managed in the tenth century just as it was throughout the medieval and post-medieval periods (fig 00). Other descriptions of wooded areas are: *wuda* (S449), *scyt hangran* (S449), the fore-runner of Pickrudge and Pumphrey Wood (SU 145658), and *langan sceagan*, 'long wood', which was situated in the area of the deserted village of Shaw and the southern part of Pickrudge and Pumphrey Wood. Some settlement had already been established at the edges of this wooded area, such as at *Aethelferthes setle* (S449; ?SU 156651) and five crofts (*quinque cassatos*; S424) possibly lying along the road from Oare to Marlborough. The reference to *Safernoc* in the latter charter, coupled with the general, later name of West Woods for the woodland hereabouts, suggests Savernake Forest stretched right along the southern limits of the estates in the tenth century, possibly as far as Boreham Wood.

Stones, barrows and burials

Sarsen stones (which type??) predominate in this area, with the XXbrown ones?? far more limited in number. This being so, it seems the brown XXX stones were used as markers in an otherwise grey whether landscape. A *dunnan stan*, either a downland stone or a dun (brown) one, stood at the entrance to the *burg* of West Overton, with another north of Pickledean near ODXII earmarked as another boundary feature. *Twegen dunne stanas* (S784; 'two brown stones', ?SU 126692) divided the two Overtons and on the higher land to the north (?SU 126691), where divisions were less clear, *Aethelferthes stane* (S449) marked the boundary between East Overton, Avebury and Winterbourne Monkton, the western edge of the dairy farm was delineated by a *stan ræwe*, and, at the eastern edge of what later became Savernake Park, a *dræg stane* (S424) acted as a boundary marker.

Other 'archaeological' landmarks hint at the antiquity long-present in the tenth century landscape. Some were visually significant then, most obviously the *seofon beorgas* of the West Overton charter, today's Seven Barrows on Overton Hill (Fowler and Sharp 199X, pl. 00). Colta's barrow, *colta beorg* (*beorh* in East Overton), a named barrow common to both charters, lay on the Ridgeway at the NW corner of West Overton where its boundary with East Overton turns E to the two stones (*above*; fig. 8. 00); but we do not know whether it was a BA barrow, perhaps with an Anglo-Saxon secondary burial, or a new burial mound of post-Roman times placed on an estate edge or beside a trackway. The *ii beorgas* (*twegan beorgas* in East Overton) W of North Farm (fig. 8.

00) were fairly certainly two BA round barrows, now revealed by air photography, so important to a boundary which was also a through-way (*above p. 00*) that the line defined by the charter carefully goes through two right angles to respect them.

Such are presumably to be as carefully distinguished by us as they were by the boundary clerk from the *byrgelas*, burials, encountered high on the downs at the extreme eastern corner of the East Overton dairy farm. This suggests a flat inhumation cemetery. While such could be of pagan Anglo-Saxons, its location might raise the possibility, by analogy with Overton Down XI, of a Beaker burial place. The other such reference is much more specific, though interpretatively as ambivalent: between Shaw and Lurkeley Hill on the West Overton boundary lay *haethene byrgils*, again possibly secondary Pagan Saxon burials in White Barrow (*above Chp 10*).

Agriculture

The charters reflect the general division of the land into arable, pasture and woodland and the location of settlements; the only substantial point to note is that this familiar pattern was already established, long-established one suspects, in the tenth century.

It is evident, for example, that the area north of Down Barn, stretching from the Ridgeway in the west to the Valley of Stones in the east, was downland (S449, *dun landes*), used for grazing sheep (S449, *lamba paeth*) and cattle (S449, *feoh wicuna*, the dairy farm). Just north of the valley of Pickledean the land was under cultivation (S449, *yrldand on pyttel dene*), as was land to the south and west (S449, *furlanges west heafde*). It also appears that land east of Wroughton Mead (SU 142706) was also arable (S449, *suth heafod*). The two settlements (S449, *tune*; S784, *burg*) and the *chiricstede* (S784) stood up from, and south of, the Kennet flood plain. South of the settlements the area was described as downland too (S449, *dune*; S784, *scyfling dune*), a point to remember with our present day tendency to regard only those areas north of the A4 as truly downland. There was possibly some cultivation on those southern slopes as well (S449, *riht gemaere*, or 'straight balk') and west of Boreham Down, the land was probably being ploughed since the reference to the boundary as a *heafnod* (S449) suggests the headland of a field by definition under cultivation. It is also reasonable to assume cultivation, albeit on a small, pioneering scale, around the outlying settlements of *Aethelferthes settle* and the five crofts at *Safernoc*.

The landscape

From the charters we can, then, assemble a picture of detail and some generalities. The landscape was a mosaic, but with a river valley flanked by quite large areas of arable, downland and woodland lined by numerous tracks, some metalled or hedged, and punctuated by outlying buildings, erect stones, woods, copses and individual trees,

pits and ponds, and pre-existing landmarks such as barrows, lynchets and Wansdyke. In functional terms, it was a landscape of a mixed arable and pastoral economy, with local resources such as woodland, the river Kennet and the downland areas also playing a vital part. Sheep and cattle were kept to provide wool and leather, milk and meat, with the animals grazing the northern and southern downland slopes. The arable land was north and west of Pickledean, with some possibly further south on Boreham Down. Savernake Forest extended this far, but it had been cleared of trees in places and was being managed, at least partially. The river, with its salt house, provided fish, and several ponds, pits and quarries were situated along the boundaries so the inhabitants on either side could benefit from them.

Downland, fields and settlements were joined by a net-work of locally and regionally important trackways, many of which also acted as the estate boundary, indicating the bounds represented the limits of property and jurisdiction, but not of communities nor their movement. The principal zone of settlement was on the south side of the Kennet flood-plain, much like today we assume, though only an 'old' West Overton with a church by the *herpoth*, a new West Overton (a *burg*) and East Overton (a *tune* or farmstead) are actually attested; Lockeridge and Fyfield, West Kennet and Clatford, implicitly existed as part of that same settlement pattern. An outlying cattle farm lay to the north on Fyfield Down, possibly at Raddun (Chpt 5), and six dwellings are recorded at the southern limits of the study area along the edge of the woods.

9.4 - Summary and Conclusions

Although we have been to some considerable degree involved with written and cartographic sources, no systematic research on the voluminous post-Conquest documentary evidence for the study area has been undertaken from an environmental point of view within the Project: it would be a project in its own right. Similarly, the intensive research on the area's documentation by VCH, Kempson and Hare was not directed to elucidating environmental matters. Nevertheless, we are well aware that such materials contain a wealth of evidence bearing on the environment and changes in it and we have to some extent selectively illustrated that potential in chapters 9-12.

Overall, the project methodology was not directed towards producing a dramatic improvement in the environmental record since it was felt the archaeology could answer many of the questions that were being asked. With this in mind, it is satisfying that useful data were collected and can now offer a different perspective on the landscape to that presented earlier in the monograph. The following conclusions are based solely on the evidence presented in this chapter; the main points will be discussed in a wider context in chapters **12 and 13**.

The animal bones reflect the varying expression of human/animal relationships from the Early Iron Age to the medieval period. In all cases we can see a diverse and probably complex subsistence pattern with both wild and domestic resources being exploited. Sheep remain one of the key components of the downland environment and human diet. Cattle and pig appear more conspicuous in the EIA assemblage but the striking expression of their status through structured deposition makes it difficult to make any conclusions on statistics alone. The use of secondary products throughout the periods concerned is very likely, though the bone evidence does not rule out more specialised patterns.

The mollusc samples provide a series of short sequences for the south-west of the Marlborough Downs. The initial indications are that clearance was fragmentary across the downland up until at least the later Bronze Age. The samples from the basal deposit at Piggledean Bottom and the lynchet at FD1 have clearance episodes but at different times, the former apparently around c. 2000 BC and earlier, the latter in the later prehistoric centuries and more specifically during the early centuries AD. At the barrows on Overton Hill and West Overton and at the enclosed settlement OD X/XI, the indications are that a cleared environment existed before their construction, respectively early in the second and first millennia BC. All the sequences agree with the proposal that the downland landscape was a largely open one from the later Bronze Age, most likely as a combination of arable and pastoral activity, and none of the 'new' evidence countermands the argument that such clearance could well have been established a millennium earlier (Powell *et al.* 1996, 26).

The charred remains can be interpreted as a wider environmental indicator than molluscs but they are more susceptible to anthropogenic influences. All the samples suggest the availability to downland communities of mixed oak woodland and of the presence of regenerating scrub somewhere in their environs. Doubtless the local distribution of woodland and scrub changed through time but the areas of such trees and bushes are most likely to have been on the patches of Clay-with-Flints and in the wetter valley and combes prior to medieval drainage.

Overall, the environmental evidence suggests that clearance occurred prior to the Early Bronze Age over parts of the area, creating a patchwork of land in various stages of regeneration and use. The initially widespread woodland eventually became restricted to marginal land on the Clay-with-Flints and in the valleys. Land use was mixed, and it is difficult from the environmental evidence alone to make any assumptions about the extent to which certain subsistence practices were distributed. Perhaps, however, at any one moment our familiar open Bronze Age landscape may have been somewhat more of a mosaic of small shrub and woodland patches dotted around the vastnesses

of the arable and pasture than the prairie landscapes envisaged in some versions (ref. a good e.g. of a treeless landscape: one of those of Stonehenge?). Perhaps too, the eco-dynamics of such a landscape through time saw more small-scale, local change than has been allowed. Witness the many such changes in the study area's environment since the 1950s, few of them dramatic, only three of them significant beyond the parish boundaries, but nevertheless cumulatively making a lot of alterations and together symptomatic of a general state of change. Of course, to say so is to move on to dangerous ground, for has not the second half of the C20 been an exceptional time, quite inappropriate for such historical comparisons? Judging by the clear evidence once maps become available two and a half centuries ago, the later C18 was also a time of similar such change. One suspects that maps of C18 BC could have been interpreted likewise. An understandable interpretation could well be that a general state of local environmental change is, and characteristically has been, normal.

Animals were an integral part of the changing environment, with both domesticates and wild species playing roles in and around places of human settlement. Their status was not one of simple economic necessity, the explicit presence of symbolic deposition at the Early Iron Age settlement enclosure (OD XI) offering a glimpse of the complex web of relationships which would have existed between humans and their environment throughout the history of the area. The hints that a symbolic dimension may also have been present in that relationship in the less familiar animalistic *milieu* of the C4-5 AD, and even in the C13, may well support this. The tradition was unconsciously perpetuated in 1976 (Bell *et al.* 1996, 00).

Overview

Work on the Mesolithic environment has confirmed that by 8500 BP the region was most likely totally wooded (Evans *et al.* 1993, + others). People using flint blades at Down Barn in the period were, then, probably doing so in a relatively damp clearing in a relatively low-lying location of the local uplands (not yet 'downland' *sensu* opened environment). The extent of clearance episodes during this period is disputed with opinions varying between there being no evidence for clearance (*op. cit.*) and episodic clearance being widespread (Smith 198? PPS?). Elsewhere in Britain and Ireland Mesolithic clearance is an accepted reality (Simmons 19++), but without evidence for lithic sites on the uplands it is not possible to indicate in the study area any precedence for clearance episodes there until the early Neolithic. On the other hand, suggested by the Down Barn Enclosure evidence (*above* p. 00), there may well be widespread Mesolithic material buried under later prehistoric alluvium and colluvium if not along the Kennet valley itself then in the miles of combes which, as with Piggledean, intrude into the Chalk uplands. Mesolithic studies have recently looked more towards human exploitation and manipulation of land as a resource long before the adoption of farming

(Rowley-Conwy 1994, Gillman ????, Simmons ****). Our data, however, does not allow us to test such a model and it would presently appear that, if there was an environmental impact through Mesolithic land clearance, then its effect was minimal.

As with the Mesolithic, Early Neolithic evidence is sparse in the study area. Initial clearance in the area may be associated with the silt formation found along the Kennet Valley associated with the Avebury Soil which had a radiocarbon date for its earliest formation of 4040 ± 60 BP (Evans et al 1993, 186). Later mollusc sequences indicating clearance of woodland as a widespread phenomenon in Wessex include those from Windmill Hill, Marsden, Durrington Walls, the South Dorset Ridgeway, the Dorset Cursus, Maiden Castle and Easton Down, with Burderop Down, Horslip, Beckhampton Road and South Street providing local examples (Evans 1966, 1971, 1972; Ashbee, Smith, and Evans 1979; Woodward 1991; Allen 1992; Entwistle and Bowden 1991, Evans *et al* 1988, and Whittle *et al* 1993). By the centuries around 2000 BC it has become a moot point for the modern interpreter as to whether the downs bore a lot of clearings, some large, in what was still recognisably woodland or patches of woodland residual in an open landscape. The open Beaker cemetery on Overton Down might have been in one such clearing, the occupation debris on the higher northern part of the Down in another, the odd sherds from various places in yet others; but in any case the evidence demonstrates the use of the local upland at a time when such use was apparently common as suggested by the quantities of Beaker pottery found across much of the Marlborough Downs as surface scatters (Gingell 1992; *cf.* also Swanton 19££ on Meyrick's collecting). Such use may well have included arable, as indicated at South Street on lowland and at Red Shore on upland (Ashbee et al 1979, Evans !!!!, Fowler and Evans 1967; Green 1973), and would surely have included pasture too.

The extent of these clearance episodes appears to have been small since most evidence is from archaeological sites, and offsite analysis has not revealed evidence for major change until the Early Bronze Age (Allen 19??). The significance of this to Fyfield and Overton is possibly best represented by the alluvial deposits along the valley. Woodland soils, once cleared, have a crumb texture which would have eroded very easily (Evans et al 1993), so the effect of initial clearance could have been drastic. Large rills appearing in the side of the hillside after heavy rain - which still happens sometimes after ploughing, - swept away the loose top soil. At this early date it is unlikely that the quantity of alluvium reflects major clearance but it is possible to envisage minor clearance producing locally major erosion. The practical and environmental effects are impossible to gauge on present evidence. Regeneration of many non-mortuary sites is, however, known, and the distinction between this and the regeneration of apparently more utilitarian sites where regeneration took place can be explained through differing concepts of spatial importance (Whittle *et al.* 1993). The

Dorset Cursus, for example, was allowed to return to a shaded environment (Entwhistle and Bowden 1991, 21), the linear, non-natural, form of the monument being lost to encroaching vegetation. Had the monument also lost its significance? Had people directed their energies to conserving their land? Again Fyfield and Overton do not appear to have been heavily occupied at around this period (Early/mid Neolithic) but the occurrence of soil in the valleys which may have originated on the uplands could be indicating both activity and a major loss of *in situ* evidence for such activity.

The evidence here suggests that, within a general story of clearance, floral regeneration was always likely to be re-assertive dynamic within the local environment. That should apply whether landscape change was environmentally-led or not. In the second half of the 3rd millennium BC, for example, it is distinctly conceivable that religious or politically-driven demands were impacting more on the landscape and its resources than changes induced by the environment; though clearly such demands could themselves have environmental consequences, immediately and longer term. Were the Avebury stones dragged off Overton Down? Where did all that turf under Silbury come from? Where was the woodland that was so carefully managed and then so severely exploited to produce the materials to put up kilometres of palisading just off the SW corner of the study area? These are quite important, and practical, questions in a landscape perspective, particularly one of dynamic inter-relationships.

Important too is recognising another aspect of that dynamic: that pasture quite as much as arable became the established land-use within particular patches. There are hints here too that during the second millennium a long-term cultural divide was imposed on the landscape. The uplands to our eyes superficially became mainly arable, but what actually happened was that virtually the whole of the area's extent of field systems in the Bronze Age came to be spread out across the Downs (fig. 2.00) in what was agriculturally in fact a zone of mixed farming (fig. 0.00: Manton territ. unit). Nevertheless, in contrast, the downland fringes, initially respected for their sanctity but now with their increasingly scrub-infested barrow cemeteries, came to be characterised by rough grazing and permanent pasture as part of a more diverse land-use pattern oriented towards the more varied resources along and in the Kennet valley.

By the later prehistoric centuries, much of the downland seems to have been grass, the permanent arable having presumably already shifted from its upland to, not the valley 'bottomlands' but that valley-side location which it was to occupy henceforth. If correct, this environmental interpretation has so far provided two key components of the answer to the question of how the landscape came by its present appearance. It became an effectively opened chalkland landscape in the second half of the second millennium BC and by 500 BC the Downs were in place as treeless grassland. Their complement, functionally and visually as now, was the location of permanent arable on the south-

facing slopes of the valley and combes, that zone so clearly brought out on fig. 2.00 between the spread of earthworks and the communications corridor later marked by Roman road and A4.

It was early Roman imperialistic demands of the land which reverted to the earlier, Bronze Age style of upland arable, but unfortunately the Project produced no environmental evidence specific to this period. Such as there is for Roman times comes from the C-5, and is economic as much as environmental. Nor is the immediate post-Roman or Anglo-Saxon period represented by environmental evidence from within the study area. However, sections from excavations on the Wansdyke (Green 1971) have yielded both pollen and snail samples from close by to both east and west of the parishes' southern uplands. The Dyke is not closely dated but material beneath it can be taken as having been sealed in the C4. The samples which were studied come from two locations: Red Shore, and New Buildings, in both cases from the buried land surface. The results from Red Shore (west) produced pollen indicative of rough pasture with some local bracken. While at New Buildings (east) the sample showed evidence for a cleared area with dense woodland nearby; cereal pollen was also present in small numbers. The contrast in these two samples has been interpreted as evidence for the survival of Savernake Forest, now lying east of the New Buildings section. However, it must also be noted that ancient forest may also have lain to the west within the Fyfield/Overton area. The presence of forest is not in dispute, particularly locally with the presence of Roman pottery kilns in Savernake Forest. What is important is to what extent that forest covered the land during the later half of the 1st millennium AD. There is no evidence for regeneration of the landscape on the northerly slopes or in the valley so it is likely that the southern slopes were dominated by blocks of woodland which was potentially heavily managed as a valuable resource. That is certainly the impression from the C10 land charters, and may have some bearing on the implications of radio-carbon dates from the formation of a soil layer in the 'bottom-lands'. They bracket AD 886-1275, some four centuries during which the sediment cycle in the valley was apparently stable enough to allow the development of a soil in a dry open environment (Evans *et al* 1993, ???). A dry open environment was almost certainly also that in which, during the C13-14, sheep in their thousands, evidenced by bones and documents, grazed their way across by now long-established downland pasture in a pattern which persisted until recently. Theirs was visually a landscape similar to today's, emphasising the permanent nature of the late prehistoric clearances.

Whatever the land-use after agricultural clearance, the important point in trying to understand how the landscape came by its present appearance is that the land in general remained cleared from the second millennium BC onwards up to the present. One reason for that, not clearly brought out until the recent work of Evans *et al.* (1993) and Powell *et al.* (1996), is that so much of the downland soil, that most precious of

environmental resources, washed into the combe and valley. The downland could not support woodland; without trees, its soils could not be refreshed and could not therefore support arable except on a periodic basis, despite manuring from midden and flock, as in the C1-2 and C13 centuries AD. This remained basically the case between c 1000 BC and the day of the artificial fertiliser in the mid-C20. The ploughing up of the downs wholesale in our own lifetime falls, therefore, into an historico-environmental perspective.

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Throughout this environmentally based narrative it has been possible to observe a number of trends which have, at my own admission, given human agencies a solely adaptive role. Such an approach is under intense scrutiny since it assumes an ever optimising aim for those taking part in its processes (Shanks and Tilley ????). However, we must look realistically at the environment which has nurtured and helped direct the lifeways within it. The presence of exposed and rapidly eroding slopes forced individuals to move their settlements either from the valley when colluvium threatened or from the slopes when no soil remained to cultivate. The extent of soil cover in earlier prehistory is accepted as is the power with which it could come rushing down the hillside (Allen ????). It is naive to ignore this. The environment was a social issue to those who lived on the downlands and we may legitimately interpret it as such. Field systems can be seen as a direct result of this increasing realisation that the land is a resources which must be managed. Its profits can no longer be exploited on the building of ostentatious monuments. Land now becomes more important than metal, not just because metal is scarce but because land is more vital. By the Roman period on Overton Down and by the Iron Age elsewhere the form of economy can be seen to be conforming to this changed environment. Sheep now dominate the faunal assemblage as groups who survive on the hills exploited the ground to its full without destroying it. Possibly the valleys remained too unstable to settle, evidenced by the first stable soil since the Bronze Age Avebury formation being in the Medieval period.

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