INTRODUCTION

The last quarter of the twentieth century saw the beginning of a revolution in our knowledge and understanding of the countryside of late Iron Age and Roman Britain, its regional diversity, settlements and settlement hierarchy, agricultural exploitation, field systems and communications, rural industry and the wider environment of the landscape. This intensified in the 1990s after the introduction in England in 1990 of a change in planning policy, PPG 16 (Planning Policy Guidance 16), and the beginning of a radically more regulated approach to the potential loss of archaeological heritage through development and mineral exploitation. Although this policy has been modified in the years since and its essence since 2012 now enshrined within the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), 25 years of implementation have seen huge investment in the excavation, recording and publication of sites and settlements in the countryside of late Iron Age and Roman Britain (fig. 1.1). Similar policies were introduced in Wales in 1991 and Scotland in 1994. While some of this work has been slow to come into the wider public domain, with reports residing as unpublished ‘grey literature’ in local authority Historic Environment Records (HERs, formerly Sites and Monuments Records (SMRs)), its contribution in general terms has been to shift our gaze from the elite of Roman Britain and their villa residences to the population of the countryside at large.

The context for the introduction of PPG 16 in 1990 was the growing pace of development of all kinds and the associated increase in the mineral exploitation, notably sand and gravel, from the 1960s onwards, whose archaeological impact could not be responsibly accommodated either through voluntary funding agreements with developers and quarry owners or with the increasing gap between the available public funds required to excavate, record and publish the threatened sites and the growing scale of the threat. In parallel with the increasing development pressure, local authorities were encouraged from the mid-1970s to establish systematic records of their archaeological heritage (Site and Monuments Records (SMRs), now the HERs), trawling the literature and aerial photography for indications of past human activity (Darvill and Fulton 1998, 63–5). With the publication of *A Matter of Time* (RCHME 1960), the Royal Commission on the Historical Monuments of England had taken the lead in the systematic mapping of the aerial photographic evidence (National Mapping Programme (NMP)). Also, the national organisation for heritage, the Ancient Monuments Directorate of the Dept for the Environment, which became English Heritage in 1984, now, since April 2015, Historic England, began to support projects to map systematically the evidence of aerial photography across regions such as the Thames Valley, which were seeing a rapid expansion of development and mineral exploitation, particularly of the gravels (Benson and Miles 1974; Gates 1975; Leech 1977). Meanwhile the national (English) approach (NMP) continued under the auspices of Historic England following the merger of RCHME with English Heritage in 1999. Similar initiatives to map the historic landscapes of Wales continue to be undertaken by the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Wales (RCAHMW), Cadw and the Welsh archaeological trusts.

Building on the pioneer work of Phillips in the Fenland (1970) new fieldwalking surveys, involving the systematic collection of pottery and building materials from the surface of ploughed fields and mapped against the evidence of crop and soilmarks plotted from aerial photography, were commissioned to improve our knowledge of wider landscapes, rather than the individual settlement. These approaches drew attention to a more diverse and populous settlement and exploitation of the countryside than had hitherto been perceived. In the years since 1990 techniques of geophysical survey have improved immeasurably so that they, too, have been incorporated into site and landscape survey as a more efficient and cost-effective way of covering greater areas.

In parallel with the increase in the measures to manage the destruction of Britain’s archaeological heritage through preservation by record, i.e. through archaeological investigation, there were also parallel and significant developments in what can be collectively termed as ‘environmental archaeology’ during the last 30 years of the twentieth century. In order to understand better
FIG. 1.1. Quantity and distribution of excavated Roman rural sites over time (by date of report)
...how the countryside of Roman Britain was exploited it was necessary to gain knowledge of the crops that were grown and the animals that were raised for consumption, and this was made possible by the development of the twin disciplines of archaeobotany and archaeozoology. These rapidly took shape to be effective as nationally available resources through the agency of English Heritage until the implementation of PPG 16. For the Roman period, the first synthetic fruits of these new directions began to appear from the late 1970s and early 1980s (e.g. King 1978; Jones and Dimbleby 1981; Luff 1982). The quantitative approaches that are integral to those disciplines also began to be applied to the study of material culture, particularly ceramics and coins (e.g. Reece 1973), which allowed for the possibility of characterising rural settlements from chronological, economic and social perspectives, as well as to the people themselves through developments in human osteology (cf. Roberts and Cox 2003, 107–63; 2004).

Thus the two decades or so before the implementation of PPG 16 saw a very significant increase in the range of approaches that could be applied to the archaeological heritage and their potential for the advancement of knowledge was very evident. However, in order for PPG 16 to have the support of developers, it was essential to offer them the possibility of choice in whom they commissioned to undertake the archaeological work required by the planning authorities, and so competitive tendering between archaeological organisations, which previously had relied heavily on state funding for their projects, became embedded in the process. Notwithstanding the very real risk that a drive on cost could lead to a decline in standards, it was recognised that development-led archaeological projects should embrace, with appropriate justification, the full and developing toolkit of methodologies that could be applied. Therefore, the outcome of the integration of archaeology within the planning process over the last 25 years has meant not only a rapid increase in the number of reported investigations, but also in their overall quality. For example, information on settlement plan, change over time and material culture, which was perhaps the best that could be expected of post-WWII archaeological investigations over the third quarter of the twentieth century, was complemented by reports which, in the rural context, would give a more systematic insight into the agricultural economy, the people and the diversity of rural society in Roman Britain. The application of quantitative approaches provided potential for comparative analysis across both regions and the province as a whole. Nevertheless, while we should stress that, overall, the quality of information has improved over the last 25 years, there is still much variability, and the research that has underpinned this volume, and its planned successors, has identified where improvements could and should be made in the recovery of archaeological evidence, its recording and its publication. These methodological considerations will be the subject of a separate study to be published in 2017.

At the same time, it is a tribute to what has been achieved since 1990 that research to capture and analyse the data that relate to the rural settlement of Roman Britain is necessary. While a good proportion (approximately 60 per cent) of developer-funded work has reached publication over this 25-year period a significant percentage has not and, particularly in the period before the wider dissemination of digital reporting, unpublished reports, the ‘grey literature’, languished within individual HERs without wider dissemination. Earlier pilot projects undertaken by Cotswold Archaeology, with funding from English Heritage, had identified both the volume and significance of the unpublished work (Cotswold Archaeology 2008; 2009; Fulford and Holbrook 2011) and this in turn stimulated the approach taken by this, Leverhulme Trust-funded, project to realise the potential of both the published and the unpublished work and to address a wide range of questions about the society, economy and people of the countryside of late Iron Age and Roman Britain. The sheer volume of information initially led to a focus entirely on England, but the additional resource has allowed the scope to include Wales and thus embrace a Roman Britain south of Hadrian’s Wall, but with comparative data from England to the north of that frontier. Therefore we have included those parts of Britain that were behind a frontier, defined around the turn of the first and second centuries a.d., initially as the Stanegate and then, after c. 120, as Hadrian’s Wall, which persisted through the remaining period of Roman administration into the early fifth century. Clearly there is scope to include Scotland, but in a context where territory within Scotland under Roman rule fluctuated between the campaigns of Agricola of the late first and those of Septimius Severus in the early third century, a contextualised approach exploring diversity and regionality, but which embraces Scotland as a whole in the late Iron Age/Roman period, might be more appropriate.

Where this project departs significantly from previous attempts to synthesise the growing body of evidence from the countryside of Roman Britain is in its focus on the excavated evidence and the exploration of its potential in some detail. In his survey of Roman England, Taylor (2007) drew...
In practice this means that there are fewer monuments (SAMs) – the non-villa settlements. Sites with no legal protection as Scheduled Ancient Monuments (see Ch. 2) drawing on over 5000 published and grey literature reports, and equivalent to about 10 per cent of the settlements included in Taylor’s survey (2007). Allowing for upward adjustment in respect of settlements yet to be discovered and for some downward adjustment to figures following evaluation of undated sites, this 10 per cent nevertheless probably represents a minimum figure for our sample of the late Iron Age and Roman rural settlements of England and Wales, though there is undoubtedly variability between regions.

Our prerequisites for inclusion are that the data can contribute to our understanding of settlement morphology, field systems, architecture, industry, people, ritual and systems of belief, and to the broader questions of social and economic status. In the case of the latter this requires the material or ecological data to be sufficiently robust in terms of characterisation and quantification to address such questions. It was found that small-scale evaluations and excavations, pre- or post-1990, generally did not provide data with suitable potential. However, even in a situation where a significant number of reports did not contribute enough morphological information to allow a settlement to be classified (see Ch. 2), the information that could be derived from other categories of evidence justified inclusion in the project.

An important caveat is that in the years since the introduction of the first Ancient Monuments Act in 1913, there has been a protection policy that has favoured, through the process of ‘scheduling’, the ‘Roman’ aspect of the rural landscape. Owing to the large amount of research on villas into the third quarter of the twentieth century, and the corresponding lack of interest in non-villa settlements, along with the associated difficulties of designation given their irregular morphology and often unclear relationship with the wider landscape, the greater proportion of investigation since 1990 has been directed towards sites with no legal protection as Scheduled Ancient Monuments (SAMs) – the non-villa settlements. In practice this means that there are fewer investigations of villas that have benefited from modern approaches towards their excavation and the treatment of their finds, particularly the ecofacts.

In the first instance the data analysed here were captured in terms of the modern political geography of regions and counties. As collection for each English region, and then for Wales, was completed, summary analyses were presented to regional seminars. This not only provided feedback to the team but it also began to provide an evidential basis for defining regions that reflected more closely the situation in the countryside of late Iron Age and Roman Britain. As the following section, which explores the development of research into the countryside of Roman Britain shows, previous approaches to synthesis had worked to the simple binaries of upland: lowland, military: civil, villa: non-villa, Roman: native, or a combination of arbitrary geographic regions, or modern counties, linked to the political geography of the tribes of Roman Britain insofar as it could be defined. Exceptions to this approach have been the detailed multi-period surveys of distinctive regions defined on the basis of geology and environmental considerations, drawing primarily on the evidence of aerial photography, earthwork survey and surface collection, such as the Fenland (Phillips 1970), Salisbury Plain (McComish et al. 2002), Thames Valley (Booth et al. 2007) and the Solway Plain (Bewley 1994). The approach to regionality adopted here, and in the planned monographs to follow, also represents a compromise which, on the one hand aims to respect the distinctive pays, such as the Weald or the Fenland, within the newly defined regions, but, on the other, also allows for the assembling of data sufficient for comparative analysis across those regions, and that takes the study of the countryside of Roman Britain beyond the binary approach that has dominated research and synthesis up to now. A notable innovation of the analysis presented here is that the characterisation of the ‘new’ regions takes account of the material and environmental evidence as well as the morphology and architecture of settlements and their distribution through time and space.

The underpinning data for this volume have been published online by the Archaeology Data Service of the University of York (M. Allen et al. 2015).

HISTORY OF RESEARCH INTO THE ROMANO-BRITISH COUNTRYSIDE

If one takes the beginning of the modern study of Roman Britain as Haverfield’s The Romanization of Roman Britain (first published in 1912, but based
on a lecture given to the British Academy and published in its Proceedings in 1905), the twentieth-century study of rural settlement, and the countryside of Roman Britain at large, was dominated by considerations of what was perceived to be the character and extent of ‘Roman’ influence. A clear distinction was made between the uplands of the north and west, occupied by troops, and the lowlands of the south and east occupied by civilians (Haverfield 1912, 24). Appreciation of the latter had been built up by successive generations of curiosity-driven research from the early nineteenth century onwards on villas, with the expectation of discovering mosaic pavements and bath suites. Such buildings, or complexes of buildings, were defined as farming establishments in the countryside, and differentiated from ‘native’ settlements or ‘villages’ on architectural grounds, because their ‘dominant element is the Roman provincial fashion which is borrowed from Italy’ (Haverfield 1915, 46; Collingwood and Myres 1936, 208–25; Rivet 1958, 103–5; cf. Reece 1988, 59–76). By the mid-1930s some 500 villas were known and mapped, the vast majority noted as lying in the ‘lowland zone’ to the south-east of a line joining the rivers Trent and Severn (Fox 1932; Collingwood and Myres 1936, 217). Thus the emphasis of research was very much on the establishments of the elite, rather than on the ‘unromanized peasantry of the villages, which in fact must have comprised the great majority of the inhabitants of Britain’ (ibid., 221). The study of the ‘villa’ in isolation absorbed the majority of amateur and academic attention until the late 1970s (e.g. Rivet 1969; Todd 1978), seeing the 'villa' as the 'expected of a “homestead” (as opposed to a “village”) in Richmond’s extensively revised edition of Collingwood’s The Archaeology of Roman Britain (Collingwood and Richmond 1969, 177) and in Applebaum’s agrarian history of Roman Britain (Applebaum 1972, 152). Besides the ‘homestead’, Richmond defined four other types of ‘native settlements’: ranches, villages, settlements in the military zone (or ‘upland areas’) and fortified community settlements, also seen to be characteristic of the fringes of the province in North Wales, the Pennines and the Lowlands of Scotland (Collingwood and Richmond 1969, 175–92). Other than the ‘homestead’ category, little could be said of the others, Richmond noting, for example, that ‘clearly defined Lowland villages have mostly been neglected’ (ibid., 180). Nevertheless, despite the lack of information about ‘native’ settlements or ‘villages’, Collingwood had previously teased out certain patterns of change, notably a perceived decline in rural settlement on the chalklands of southern England considered to be due to ‘a deliberate transplantation of village-dwellers to serve the capitalistic landlords’ (Collingwood and Myres 1936, 223–4). He also discussed the economic and legal status of the peasants and their plight in the later Roman period by saying that ‘As the years went by, there was no general increase in their prosperity... they became more and more liable to arbitrary exactions and oppression of every kind... they became increasingly servile in their position’ (ibid., 225).

Comparing the situation in Britain with that in Gaul, Collingwood concluded ‘A survey of the stae of the people in fourth-century Britain shows at least that, of the material conditions which might lead to such [peasant] revolts, none was lacking’ (idem).

Richmond’s premature death meant that he was unable to include the outcome of a landmark conference held in 1965 on ‘Rural Settlement in Roman Britain’ (Thomas 1966) in the revised edition of The Archaeology of Roman Britain (Collingwood and Richmond 1969). This conference broke away from the tradition of treating rural settlement according to its constituent parts, which in effect, would have meant focusing on the ‘villa’, with papers considering the regional diversity of settlement right across the Roman province. Profusely illustrated with distribution maps and settlement plans, very many deriving from the ongoing work of the Royal Commissions on the Historical Monuments of England and Wales, and published in advance of the completion of the relevant county inventories, it provided a rich agenda for future research which was sensitive to regionality. The first detailed study of a distinct landscape of Roman Britain followed in 1970 with the publication of Phillip’s The Fenland in Roman Times, subtitled as ‘Studies of a major area of peasant colonization’. This drew heavily on the analysis of aerial photography, combined with surface collection of material from potential sites sufficient to date them and to offer some assessment of their economic base. This research on Fenland
settlement was contextualised in relation to a rapidly developing knowledge of the Holocene sedimentary sequence and the incidence and extent of marine sedimentation as opposed to freshwater flooding.

Although synthetic studies of Roman Britain during the post-WWII period looked afresh at rural settlement and economy, the evidential basis had changed little over the third quarter of the century. So Richmond (1955), Rivet (1958), Frere (1967), Salway (1981) and Todd (1981) essentially drew on much the same information as Collingwood had done in the 1930s and treated it in much the same way. In a major departure, Martin Millett broke new ground by promoting the archaeological evidence, at the expense of a historically driven narrative, in his The Romanization of Britain (1990).

The first work dedicated specifically to an agrarian history of Roman Britain (Applebaum 1972) also had to work largely with material gathered before 1950. Almost a third of his study is based around analyses of the buildings found in the countryside with successive and complementary chapters on houses, byres and stables and farms and their uses, the latter section divided between the villa and the highland farm. The problems relating to this material were legion: dating was poor and the interpretation of the function of individual buildings as byre, barn, stable, granary, pigsty or slave quarters, was based solely on plan and conjecture, rather than on the combination of plan and supporting environmental evidence. It did not, however, prevent further conjecture about the workings of individual farms or villas, with estimations of the size of estates or herds, the acreage of arable or crop yields, as for example at Bignor villa, West Sussex (ibid., 212–14). Nevertheless, thanks to Helbaek’s research on cereals (1952) and Godwin’s The History of the British Flora (1956), Applebaum was able to say more about crops and plants than had been possible before (1972, 108–21). Chapters also surveyed the evidence of agricultural tools and ploughs, the latter distinguished from their Iron Age predecessors by the addition of the coulter. With a greater knowledge of, and insight into, field systems and agricultural technology, and with better excavated settlements and farms to draw on, Fowler (2002) took forward the agrarian theme in the broader context of the first millennium A.D. as a whole. Applebaum’s approach to the reconstruction of villa estates was also adopted in individual excavation publications, for example Shakenoak villa (Applebaum 1978), Barton Court Farm, Oxfordshire (Jones 1986) and Gatcombe, Somerset (Branigan 1977a), and was also reflected in Branigan and Miles (1989), a collection of essays that contained the first quantitatively informed considerations by Reece and King respectively of coins and faunal data in relation to villas.

As Collingwood had done in the 1930s, writers continued to interpret regionality and change over time against what could be derived from written sources, or linked to wider understandings of land and estate management across the Roman Empire. Though Frere appreciated the difficulties of disentangling rural organisation on the basis of archaeological evidence alone (1987, 259), the absence of written sources did not prevent continued speculation. For example, the lack of villas on Salisbury Plain and in the Fenland, where there was also evidence of drainage (the Car Dyke) and reclamation, was seen as an indication of the presence of imperial estates (ibid., 266–9; cf. Collingwood and Myres 1936, 223–4). The narrative continued to be framed around the written sources. For example, despite considerable source criticism on the part of archaeologists, Applebaum continued to be persuaded that wool production was a significant element of the agrarian economy, particularly across the chalklands of southern England (1972, 232–4; cf. Collingwood and Myres, 239; Frere 1987, 290–1). Without the listing of a gynaeicum (weaving works) in the Notitia Dignitatum and of two British wool products in Diocletian’s Price Edict, it is doubtful whether such conclusions would have been reached on the basis of the archaeological evidence then available. Likewise the incidence of corn-drying furnaces was linked to the written sources that implied the regular production of corn surpluses, including its export to the Rhineland, in the fourth century (Applebaum 1972, 229–31). It was also appreciated that cattle rearing played an increasingly important role, particularly in the later Roman period, though without perceiving its role, as a provider of manure, in cereal production (ibid., 208–14, 232–4).

The evidential base began to change significantly with the rise of rescue archaeology in the 1970s and the increasing application of systematic methods to recover both botanical and faunal remains, alongside improved excavation methodologies to provide sequencing and chronology. Studies by King (1978; 1984; 1988; 1991), Maltby (1984) and Grant (1989) synthesised the increasing availability of faunal assemblages, demonstrating the growing role that cattle played in the economy, at the expense of sheep, compared with the Iron Age. As well as a source of meat and leather, cattle provided traction for ploughing and transportation, and in addition there was recognition of the part that animals played in ritual and religion. Complementary research on macroscopic plant remains, seeds and pollen also
shed more light on the agrarian regime of Roman Britain, including evidence for the expansion of areas under cultivation and the introduction of hay meadows, as well as the consumption of plant-based foods (Jones 1981; 1989; 1991; Lambbrick and Robinson 1988; Lambbrick 1992, 97–105; Robinson 1992, 56–9). By the end of the twentieth century, there were sufficient pollen data to allow the assembly of a province-wide review of environmental change between the late Iron Age and the Anglo-Saxon period, which considered *inter alia* the relationship between cultivated or open land and woodland and the impact of the establishment of the northern frontier systems on the local environment (Dark 2000, 81–129).

The intensification in survey, from the 1980s onwards, both from the systematic plotting of available aerial photography, but also by ground level, ‘walk-over’ survey with systematic collection of artefacts revealed by cultivation, also led to enhanced understanding of the density and distribution of settlement. One project, the Maddle Farm survey on the Berkshire Downs, interpreted the significance of the pottery scatter in the ploughsoil as evidence for the rearing of cattle on the chalk downland, their manure helping to fertilise the intensive cultivation of cereals (Gaffney and Tingle 1989). Collectively, these surveys encouraged the further modelling of population numbers leading to the projection of some high numbers for the later Roman period (Millett 1990, 181–6; Salway 1981, 542–52). Further important regional surveys, necessarily multi-period in scope, followed, including the Solway Plain (Bewley 1994); Salisbury Plain (McOrnisch et al. 2002); the Thames Valley (Booth et al. 2007), the Lincolnshire Wolds (Jones 1998; Winton 1998), the Yorkshire Wolds (Stoertz 1997) and further survey of the Fenland (Hall and Coles 1994, 105–21).

Nevertheless, even by the end of the twentieth century the narrative of the Roman countryside continued to be dominated by the duality of villa and non-villa, for example in Dark and Dark (1997) and in Hingley, although the relationship of the built environment and rural social organisation is a major theme of his *Rural Settlement in Roman Britain* (1989). There were only sufficient data to offer reliable distribution maps of villas, as illustrated in successive editions of the Ordnance Survey’s *A Map of Roman Britain*, the fourth edition of which appeared in 1978, or in Jones and Mattingly’s *Atlas of Roman Britain* (1990), and formed the basis of quantitative studies such as Millett’s further reflections on the relationship of villas with towns (1990, 190–7). In contrast, non-villa settlements continued to be characterised and discussed on an individual basis.

Malcolm Todd, acknowledging the increase in knowledge since his *Research on Roman Britain 1960–89* (1989), produced a new overview only 15 years later, his *A Companion to Roman Britain* (2004). He saw that the treatment of rural settlement required separate chapters, dividing Britain into ‘north’ and ‘south’ (Hingley 2004; King 2004a) with a further chapter by A. Grant (2004) on ‘Domestic animals and their uses’, which embraced urban as well as rural developments.

Following Millett’s explicitly archaeological approach, David Mattingly set out his concern over a Roman-centric approach to the study of Roman Britain in the introduction to his *An Imperial Possession: Britain in the Roman Empire* (2006, 3–20). More specifically in relation to the ‘Rural communities’ and in a symbolically titled chapter ‘The villa and the roundhouse’, he drew attention to the bias in the information available for the study of rural settlement towards the villas and the elite society of Roman Britain (2006, 356–8). Nevertheless, whereas previous academic syntheses of Roman Britain had treated the countryside in a single chapter, Mattingly’s consideration extended over four chapters, representing about one-fifth of the whole book. There was an extensive treatment of both ‘provincial landscapes’, similar to the approach taken in Todd (2004), which reviewed the character and diversity of settlement according to broad geographical regions of England, Scotland and Wales (while also taking account of the political, tribal geography), and of ‘rural culture and identity’ whose scope was able to embrace both elites and non-elites. Together this represented a distinctive break with the synthetic treatments of the second half of the twentieth century whose structure and content could still be firmly linked to Collingwood’s Roman Britain of the 1930s.

The first attempt to assimilate the large datasets relating to all rural settlement in Roman Britain was published the following year (Taylor 2007). This study drew on the evidence of local authority SMRs across England supplemented by case studies on certain areas where the evidence from more intensive aerial and ground survey, as well as excavation, was more plentiful and provided a new classification of non-villa rural settlement based on their morphology: enclosed, unenclosed and linear system settlements. Regionality was a major area for consideration but it was addressed through the modern political English regions, rather than through any construct of the *civitates*. At a simpler level Taylor saw a Roman Britain of two (if not more) worlds: eastern and central Britain, characterised by villas and linear system settlements associated with ‘continuously bounded landscapes’
linked by long-distance trackways, as well as rural industries, and a northern and western Britain with continuity of a roundhouse tradition and ‘settlement-focused patterns of enclosure with significant areas of unbounded land in the wider landscape’ (ibid., 113–14). The first world was one that saw the development of agricultural production strategies designed to create a significant surplus, while the second world demonstrated no evidence for such a strategy (ibid., 115, and figs 7.2–4).

Taylor’s analysis of SMR data (up to 2003) logged a total of 27,902 settlements, the majority of which were identified either as earthwork, cropmark and soilmark sites, without independent evidence of date, or as finds scatters. The inclusion of types of settlement on morphological grounds, rather than in combination with excavated evidence, reduces the reliance that can be placed on the recorded numbers, though there is no reason to doubt the overall trends in space and time (2007, 11–22). Nevertheless, it is Taylor’s study that has provided the foundation for this book and the planned successor volumes, which draw on the excavated data. It was published, as we have seen, when the volume of excavation of non-villa settlement was gathering pace in the boom years at the very beginning of the twenty-first century.

In this introduction we make the case for dividing Roman Britain south of Hadrian’s Wall into eight regions, each with a distinctive range of settlements and their associated material and environmental characteristics. In areas where there has been a large amount of recent, development-led excavations we can begin to identify yet more locally defined and distinctive patterns of rural settlement; the two approaches draw us away from identifying any connection with the administrative arrangement of Roman Britain based on the tribal civitates, in so far as it can be reconstructed. Inevitably we look across the Channel to see to what extent similar patterns of complexity and regionality are emerging from the study of late Iron Age and Roman settlement in the neighbouring provinces of Gaul and Germany, but note the continued dominance of the villa in current discourse there (e.g. Roymans and Derks 2011a; Jeneson 2013).

THE NATURE OF THE DATASET

In order to synthesise the vast amount of excavated evidence available for a new study of the Romano-British countryside, one of the most important aspects was the development of a project database to facilitate management and analysis of the substantial body of data generated. At the outset it was the intention to make the database available as an online resource, which is available at http://dx.doi.org/10.5284/1030449 (see Appendix 1). This section introduces the key geographical, chronological and typological parameters of the dataset.

While the title of this volume is the Rural Settlement of Roman Britain, in modern geographical terms it would be more accurate to describe this work as the Rural Settlement of Roman England and Wales. Although the initial phase of the project focused on England only, a second phase, also funded by the Leverhulme Trust, has facilitated the inclusion of data from Wales, meaning that the geographical scope of this work includes the Roman province of Britannia, south of Hadrian’s Wall, as well as an area up to nearly 90 km north of the line of the Wall in North-East England (for rationale, see above, p. 3).

Although the Roman period forms the chronological focus of this work, a fundamental research question centres upon the impact the Roman Conquest had on late pre-Roman Iron Age societies in Britain, and for this reason the chronological parameters have been extended to include sites occupied prior to the conquest. The late pre-Roman Iron Age in Britain tends to be defined as the approximate century and a half prior to the Roman conquest of Britain, from around the start of the first century b.c. to the mid-first century A.D., a period characterised by profound changes such as the introduction of coinage and wheelmade pottery, and the establishment of nucleated settlements (e.g. Millett 1990, 10; Creighton 2000, 4–21; Cunliffe 2005, 402–6). These changes did not occur uniformly across Britain, however, being confined largely to the south and east, meaning that it is arguably inappropriate to regard the late Iron Age as having a single start date that is applicable to the whole island. Nevertheless, for reasons of pragmatism and consistency, all sites with evidence for occupation during the first century b.c. and early first century A.D. have been included in the project database as late Iron Age sites. Sites that were wholly occupied and abandoned prior to the first century b.c. (i.e. those generally described as middle Iron Age) have not been included in the dataset. However, late Iron Age sites with earlier origins have been included, and where possible these have been distinguished from those sites actually established during the late Iron Age (i.e. mid–late Iron Age sites and late Iron Age sites).

At the opposite end of the chronological spectrum, in order to explore potential evidence for post-Roman continuity at Romano-British sites, settlements with activity in the fifth century A.D. and beyond have been included where there was evidence for Roman-period occupation,
Although sites newly established after the early fifth century A.D. fall outside the study's scope. Coins of the House of Theodosius and radiocarbon dates are the principal sources for determining occupation after A.D. 400, the latter especially for settlements in the north and west of Britain.

As Fulford and Holbrook (2011) have previously described, the project is concerned with all sites occupied within the above chronological parameters in England and Wales, and not just those that produced evidence of Romano-British culture. The remit of the project therefore includes sites within areas such as the south-western peninsula and parts of Wales and Northern England that include evidence for occupation during the late Iron Age or Roman periods, even where they display relatively little evidence of integration with the Roman provincial administration and economy (ibid., 326).

This study originated as an assessment of the value of commercial archaeology to the study of the Romano-British countryside, with a focus on the range of excavated evidence available. Excavations conducted in the commercial environment are undertaken at a variety of scales, employing a range of methods. These include exploratory pre-planning-determination ‘trial excavations’ or ‘evaluations’, as well as post-determination watching briefs, strip-map-and-record sample excavations, and open-area excavations (Fulford and Holbrook 2011). The archaeological reports produced for all of these types of intervention represent the primary sources of data gathered by the project.

While one of the initial aims of the project was to consider the impact of commercial archaeology on our understanding of the Romano-British countryside, it was decided to extend the scope of the project to include data from all excavations concerning Romano-British rural settlement, whether they were conducted in response to development or not, and sites subject to excavation under other circumstances (e.g. research-driven or community-focused excavations) have been included on the project database as long as the reports contain sufficient data to contribute to the overarching aims of the study (see above, p. 4). The major increase in development-led archaeology since the introduction of PPG16 in England in 1990 means that the majority of records on the project database are represented by excavation reports produced during the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, but the database includes reports from a wide range of dates; several antiquarian reports dating to the nineteenth century are included, for example, with the earliest dating from 1808. Sources of data include traditional published excavation reports as well as archaeological ‘grey literature’ – unpublished reports generated during the planning process and deposited with Historic Environment Records, which have traditionally been little utilised by archaeological researchers. Sites represented by this body of unpublished material form a substantial component of the database; 46 per cent of database records include information retrieved from grey literature reports, and 35 per cent are represented by unpublished grey literature reports alone.

As the focus has been on evidence generated through excavation, Romano-British sites identified exclusively through other forms of archaeological prospection such as aerial photography, geophysics, fieldwalking or metal-detector survey have not been included in the project database. However, where these methods have been employed alongside excavation, the results and associated site plans have generally been incorporated together with the excavated material. It is important to stress here that the emphasis placed upon excavated data results in an inevitable geographical bias towards areas that have seen most excavation, and the initial phase of the project identified a clear emphasis on the south and east in terms of the distribution of development-led archaeological interventions (Fulford and Holbrook 2011, 330). As Taylor has shown, however, some parts of England and Wales are substantially better represented by evidence from (undated) cropmarks and earthworks than they are by evidence from excavations (Taylor 2007, 11–17), and consideration of the excavated evidence without regard to information from other archaeological sources is unlikely to allow meaningful discussion of issues such as regional variation in Romano-British settlement density. While excavated sites represent the study’s primary dataset, in order to mitigate the effects of geographically uneven levels of excavation, other sources of archaeological evidence (e.g. cropmark data, earthwork survey, fieldwalked data, Portable Antiquities Scheme records) have been consulted and incorporated, where, for instance, they can contribute to a better understanding of regional patterns of settlement density or the circulation of material culture in a given area. The potential impact geographical bias has on our understanding of rural settlement density is considered on a regional basis in Chapters 4 to 11, and in overview in Chapter 12.

DEVELOPING A METHODOLOGY

Archaeological excavation reports were collected in two ways. For unpublished material an English Heritage-funded team from Cotswold Archaeology was dedicated to sourcing developer-funded grey literature concerned with Roman rural sites by
requesting reports from individual Historic Environment Records (HERs) in England and Wales. The response was overwhelmingly positive. Of the 88 HERs in England and the four in Wales, all engaged with the project, and over 2575 grey literature reports were collected from the two countries. Where digital versions of reports existed these were sent electronically, and where reports existed in paper format only, members of the Cotswold Archaeology team negotiated with the HERs (and in some cases the originating archaeological contractors) to produce electronic versions using Optical Character Recognition technology, allowing the reports to be searched electronically. The scanned, electronic reports were then fed back to the HERs (and uploaded to the Archaeology Data Service’s grey literature library), meaning that in many cases HERs benefited directly from providing access to the data. The unpublished reports gathered by Cotswold Archaeology were then sent to the research team at the University of Reading who mined them for data. Excavation reports published in national and regional archaeological journals and monographs were located directly by the Reading research team. Data collection was divided between the three University of Reading researchers geographically, using the modern European Parliamentary Regions for England and areas covered by the four HERs in Wales. Reports were scrutinised on an individual basis and any site, whether published or unpublished, with potential evidence for Romano-British rural settlement was considered for inclusion in the project database. However, the research team was selective in their choice of sites to include, and only reports of investigations with sufficient evidence to contribute data to at least one of the research questions were included in the database. Reports associated with very small-scale interventions that produced only slight and poorly characterised evidence for Romano-British activity, or those entirely lacking information about finds and environmental evidence, were generally excluded.

Given the ambitious scope of the project it was necessary from the outset to establish strict criteria for what was to be included as a ‘rural site’ for the purposes of inclusion in the project database, as it was impractical to consider including all Roman sites within England and Wales. Sites with clear non-rural characteristics, such as Roman military sites and major walled urban centres, including civitas capitals and coloniae, were therefore omitted from the database. For pragmatic reasons related to what could be achieved within the project budget it was also deemed unfeasible to collect data from all ‘small towns’, and so only undefended nucleated sites (i.e. those without walls or major ditches) were selected for inclusion. Although canabae associated with the three long-lived legionary fortresses of Caerleon, Chester and York have been excluded, vicus attached to other military sites (with the exception of those on Hadrian’s Wall and the Stanegate, once again for reasons of pragmatism) have been included in order to provide evidence for nucleated settlements in the north comparable to that for the villages and ‘small towns’ (here termed ‘roadside settlements’; see Ch. 2), which occur much more widely in the south and east of the province. Aside from the above restrictions, all other Romano-British sites were considered for inclusion, and were entered into the database using a two-tier classification system, with ‘major’ and ‘minor’ site-type headings (Table 1.1).

Where appropriate, sites entered onto the database were assigned multiple site-types. For example, a site characterised as a farmstead, but which also produced evidence for pottery production, was classified under ‘Rural settlement and industry’ in the major site type category, and under ‘Farmstead’ and ‘Pottery production’ in the minor site type category. Similarly, a site that originated as a farmstead in the late Iron Age or early Roman period but which later developed into a villa would be classified as both ‘Farmstead’ and ‘Villa’, and the project database includes phase date fields within which the chronological details of major changes to settlements could be recorded. As explained above, Roman military sites were generally excluded from this study, and the major site-type category ‘Military’ includes ‘Fort’ and ‘Other military’ principally to allow recognition of sites that may have had military phases but which were ‘rural’ during other periods of their occupation within the Roman period. The

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Major site type</th>
<th>Minor site type</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rural settlement</td>
<td>farmstead, villa, agricultural building, isolated building, hillfort, cave</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural landscape</td>
<td>field system</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Industry</td>
<td>pottery production, tile production, quarry, iron production, other metal production, mill, other industry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nucleated settlement</td>
<td>roadside settlement, village, oppidum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious, ritual and funerary</td>
<td>Romano-Celtic temple, shrine, funerary site</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Military</td>
<td>fort, vicus, other military</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communications</td>
<td>road, jetty/bridge, mansio, port</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1.1: Classification of site types on rural Roman settlement project database
specific criteria for inclusion under the settlement categories presented in Table 1.1 are discussed in detail in Chapter 2.

From the outset, the project was designed to take an integrative approach towards the excavated material, and the database was developed with fields to record detailed information for a range of archaeological information for each site. The facility exists to record approximately 500 specific fields of data for each database entry. These include core data fields detailing bibliographical and geographical information, the form of archaeological intervention (i.e. evaluation, watching brief, area excavation) and the extent of the area excavated, as well as more detailed information for sites, including the form and character of the settlement, the chronology of activity and the presence, frequency and form of features such as domestic and non-domestic structures. Where reports contained site plans that allowed sites to be classified based upon their morphological characteristics (see Ch. 2), these were scanned by the Reading team and linked to the database. The detailed information collected on settlement form, chronology and building types was fundamental for the analyses presented in this volume, allowing the exploration of regional and intra-regional patterns of settlement character, temporality, and architecture. Specialist data fields also allowed collection of detailed information on burials, pottery, small finds and environmental evidence, including faunal and botanical remains. Summary details were recorded for finds and environmental assemblages, and, where possible, finds were also quantified in order to enable statistical comparison between sites. These categories of data represent the basis for the discussion of rural settlement economies and social hierarchies that form a component of each of the regional chapters in this volume, but will be dealt with more fully in volumes 2 and 3 of this series.

Amalgamating and attempting to record data in a standardised format from several thousand archaeological reports, which were produced by different organisations, using different methods, operating under different circumstances at different times, has not been straightforward, and there have been a number of resultant methodological issues to overcome. For various reasons it was not always easy to classify sites according to the system outlined above, and this particular methodological problem is considered in Chapter 2, where the project’s method for classifying sites is described in more detail. The ability of the team to assign confident date ranges to individual sites was also immensely variable, and this was influenced by a number of factors. One such is the level of detail included in the literature, with the presentation of the chronology of occupation for sites varying dramatically between different reports. Some reports present meticulously phased site chronologies, with start dates, end dates and periods of hiatus or transformation provided to within 50-year blocks or better (e.g. occupied between ‘50 B.C. and A.D. 300, with a hiatus during the second half of the second century’). Some sites, however, are presented in reports by very broad date ranges, with chronological descriptions limited to statements such as ‘occupied during the Iron Age and Roman periods’.

There are several reasons for the discrepancies between the levels of dating information provided in different reports, but as pottery represents the principal dating tool for most sites occupied during the Roman period, in most cases the precision and confidence of a site’s chronology is directly associated with the quantity and type of pottery recovered during excavation. There is a tendency, for example, for sites examined in evaluations and watching briefs to be less precisely dated than sites subject to open-area excavation; Fig. 1.2, for example, shows how evaluations are twice as likely to have only very broad dating information available compared with excavations. This partly reflects the situation that these types of interventions tend to yield far smaller pottery assemblages, presenting pottery specialists with more limited collections on which to draw chronological interpretations (Fig. 1.3), but also that ceramic assemblages recovered during evaluations and watching briefs, because they are often of relatively limited size, are perhaps less likely to progress to specialist analysis than larger assemblages from excavations.

There is also considerable regional variation in the extent to which pottery was used in Britain during the Iron Age and Roman periods, meaning...
that the availability of pottery as a dating tool is geographically very variable. Many rural Iron Age sites in northern England and elsewhere are essentially aceramic (Bewley 1994), meaning that even those producing pottery of Roman date may well have been occupied earlier, in phases that produced little dating evidence. In some areas even sites definitely occupied in the Roman period produce very little pottery evidence. Many Roman rural sites in the hinterland of Wroxeter, for example, appear to have used little pottery (Fulford and Holbrook 2011, 326; Gaffney et al. 2007), apparently representing a continuation of mid- and late Iron Age patterns of pottery use (Wigley pers. comm.). Even in regions where pottery occurs as a common site-find, differences in our understanding of the chronology of diverse types of Romano-British pottery in various parts of the province have a major influence on the precision pottery has as a dating tool. Pottery of Iron Age and early Roman date is particularly problematic. In the south, for example, there are clear and reasonably well-understood differences between pottery of mid- and late Iron Age date, and well-stratified sherds can be exceptionally good indicators of the date of origin and sequences of activity at sites. At Copse Farm, Oving, West Sussex, for example, it was possible to establish from the pottery assemblage that two adjacent enclosures, initially identified through aerial photography, were not contemporary, with the earlier enclosure established in the second century B.C. and abandoned by the beginning of the first century A.D., when the second enclosure became the focus for activity (Bedwin and Holgate 1985).

Such resolution is often unattainable in other parts of the country. In parts of the East Midlands, for example, ‘Middle Iron Age’ pottery traditions such as ‘Scored Ware’ continue in some areas until the mid-first century A.D., perhaps even into the early Roman period (Chadwick 2010, 334; Elsdon 1992, 86; Willis 2006, 112–13), meaning that some regional types of pottery are unable to provide anything other than a very broad suggestion as to the period of occupation for sites, such as ‘Iron Age or Roman’. At some sites in such areas, where well-dated and diagnostic Romano-British or imported Roman pottery such as samian is found, it may be possible to establish with confidence that a site was occupied during the Roman period, but the imprecise chronology of many regional coarse-ware pottery traditions means that it may be impossible to establish with any meaningful degree of precision when a site actually originated or, indeed, when activity ceased. Even in regions where ceramic traditions are well dated, the closest resolution provided in a report is normally to within 25–50 years at best, and it is common for reports to describe date-ranges for activity at sites as ‘from the later first or second century to the earlier fourth century’, as at, for example, Burton Wold Farm, Burton Latimer (Edgeworth 2008, 41). Chronological information has been recorded on the database numerically, and so such a statement would generally result in a site being provided with a start date of A.D. 100 and an end date of A.D. 325, and it is important to be aware that the start dates, end dates and phase dates for major changes at sites are only intended to be very approximate, as pottery rarely affords a greater degree of precision.

Coins form an additional and important strand of dating evidence at some late Iron Age and Roman period sites, and 52 per cent of the settlements recorded on the database produced Iron Age or Roman coins. However, coins are far less commonly recovered from low-status, rural settlements than from villas or nucleated sites (present at 42 per cent of farmsteads, for instance, compared with 86 per cent of villas, villages and roadside settlements), and they are therefore unavailable from many rural sites. What is more, whereas villas and nucleated settlements typically produce coins regardless of where they are located, coins are geographically distributed far less evenly across other classes of rural sites. Of 38 farmsteads in Northumberland, for instance, only three (8 per cent) produced coins, all single examples. In Gloucestershire, by contrast, coins have proven to be considerably more likely to be found, and here 55 of 91 farmsteads (60 per cent) produced coins, in some instances numbering in their hundreds. The starkly uneven distribution of coins at farmsteads therefore compounds the above dating issues associated with pottery, as the areas in which coins appear not to have circulated widely in the countryside typically correspond with those that saw low levels of pottery use or conservatism in pottery traditions.
The other major source of dating evidence, particularly in regions where ceramics and coins tend to be poorly represented, is radiocarbon dating, although radiocarbon dates were available for just 278 sites (7 per cent of sites) recorded on the project database. While the use of such a dating method is clearly geographically widespread, it is particularly well represented in areas such as the South-West and the North-East (FIG. 1.4), where little closely dated pottery is available at rural sites. Radiocarbon dating was, in the decades following its widespread introduction as a dating method in the 1950s, a very imprecise technique, meaning that sites dated by radiocarbon dating in its formative years were often provided with very broad date ranges, often spanning centuries (Barker 1991, 243), and there has been a perception that, for the Roman period, artefact-based dating provides far greater precision (Bayliss 2009, 140). However, subsequent developments in the technique, in particular the introduction of calibration, dating by accelerator mass spectrometry (which increased the range of material available for sampling) and the widespread adoption of Bayesian chronological modelling, means that considerably more precision can now be achieved (e.g. Bayliss 2009, 141). It would therefore be advantageous to see the approach adopted more widely for Romano-British rural sites.

A further methodological problem has been a lack of consistency in the way information is presented in excavation reports. This issue is common to all types of material recovered from archaeological sites, although it is particularly acute for ceramics, and this is especially problematical because pottery is the single most common type of artefact recovered from most sites of Roman date. While there has been undoubted improvement in recent years, pottery reports still suffer from a lack of standardisation in the recording of ceramics, both regarding terminology and quantification. Pottery (and other finds) reports from the earliest excavations are generally the least useful, where the presentation of information on the pottery is often limited to catalogues and descriptions of complete and unusual vessel forms, with little attempt at quantification, making
meaningful comparison with pottery assemblages from other sites impossible.

Modern excavation reports generally do quantify pottery, although different pottery specialists employ a range of methods. Total number of sherds and total weight are the two most commonly used quantitative measures for pottery, and so these units were selected for the purposes of recording pottery assemblages in the database. However, two other common methods include presentation by Minimum Number of Vessels, or by Estimated Vessel Equivalents (EVEs) (Orton et al. 1993, 172, 210). Presentation of pottery data using these methods is sometimes used alongside sherd count/weight, which does not represent a problem, but all too often they are used exclusively, meaning that the reports are incompatible with those produced using alternative methods. Although the creation of a National Roman Pottery Fabric Reference collection (Tomber and Dore 1998) provided terminology that has facilitated consistent descriptions of Roman imports and selected major British pottery products, the volume did not include all regional wares, meaning that these continue to be described using local terminology by pottery specialists operating in different geographical areas (Booth pers. comm.). This has made it problematic to attempt consistent recording of anything other than very basic information on the types of pottery recovered from Romano-British rural sites, and this was limited to noting the presence/absence and quantification of major types; samian, amphorae and mortaria. Currently, all artefacts and ecofacts suffer from similar issues to the pottery. In particular, a lack of consistency in the methods used by specialists for presentation of the data in reports means that it was not always possible to quantify and analyse material on the database, even where the report provided some information. In these instances summary fields provided in the database prove useful, as the data may still be interrogated at some level using text searches. There is insufficient space here to provide more detail on the methodological problems associated with the way site finds are excavated and recorded. These issues will be addressed further in a forthcoming study, which will present a critique of the ways our rural settlements in England and Wales are currently excavated and reported on, providing some recommendations for best practice in the future.

While pottery represents the principal dating evidence available for most sites, the study of site finds otherwise forms a fairly minor component of the work presented in this volume, and more detailed analysis of the artefactual and environmental data will form the focus of subsequent volumes. However, artefact and environmental assemblages have been incorporated in each of the regional chapters to explore broad spatial, social and economic patterns in major classes of settlement. Furthermore, in the regions where environmental evidence is scarce because of highly acidic soils (chiefly in the north and west), slightly greater emphasis has been placed on the artefactual evidence. For artefacts, the principal method for comparing the use of objects across site-types has been a simple evaluation in terms of presence/absence of a range of 20 broad classes of objects (see Appendix 3 for details of object classes), with the number of sites producing objects presented as percentages. Where faunal remains were available in sufficient quantities, different classes of site were compared using relative frequencies of the major species of domesticated livestock (cattle, sheep/goat and pig). In order to avoid bias caused by small sample sizes, the relative frequencies were calculated for each site-type using a mean value of all percentages for all sites that had a minimum of 100 identified animal bones (NISP – Number of Individual Specimens identified to species). The variability in the availability of quantified archaeobotanical assemblages prevented a similar approach to the consideration of plant remains, and for these data site-types were compared using presence/absence of different taxa.

The availability of environmental evidence varies considerably from region to region, chiefly owing to the effects that variations in soil acidity have on the preservation of organic remains, with human burials, animal bone and plant remains all affected. Sites with well-preserved bone (human and animal) assemblages, for example, are overwhelmingly biased towards the south and east of Britain, where soils are, in some areas, much less acidic than in the north and west. This has a profound effect on our ability to use burial evidence, faunal remains and botanical evidence to help characterise sites in some regions, and our understanding of various aspects of the rural agricultural economy is therefore almost entirely reliant on well-preserved evidence from the south and east.

A further issue that may impact upon the availability of various types of archaeological evidence is the considerable variation that exists between different archaeological contractors, both in terms of approach and levels of competency and commitment. There is also regional variation in curatorial practice, including differing policies concerning the way sites should be investigated by contractors, as well as differences regarding the enforcement of these policies (Holbrook and Morton 2011, 7).
This section has sought to present some of the principal methodological problems associated with the collection of such a vast body of disparate data. While these issues are often difficult to overcome at the level of the individual site, the large number of sites in the database and the broad geographical scope mean that analyses can often be undertaken once problematic sites with known biases (poorly quantified or incomplete assemblages, for instance) have been identified and removed, without having too detrimental an effect on the sample size available for study.

A REGIONAL ANALYSIS OF RURAL ROMAN BRITAIN

During the data-collection phase of the project, data were collected and entered into the database using modern political boundaries, principally at the level of the European Parliamentary regions for England, and of the areas covered by the four Welsh HERs, which represent Clywd-Powys, Glamorgan-Gwent, Gwynedd and Dyfed. This was to facilitate ease of systematic data collection and entry into the database. A regional approach towards the analysis of the data is necessary to explore geographical variation in the Romano-British settlement pattern, but it is clear that the modern regions used during data collection are meaningless entities in terms of the ancient countryside, and so using them as geographical units for comparative analysis (as has been done by some recent studies of the Romano-British countryside, e.g. Taylor 2007) would be problematic. As discussed earlier in this chapter, the regional variation in the Romano-British settlement pattern has previously been explored in various ways, and it became clear during the data collection phase that few previous studies of the Romano-British countryside had established satisfactory units for analysis, with most adopting overly simplistic models such as ‘civilian’ and ‘military’ (Haverfield 1912), ‘upland’ and ‘lowland’ (Fox 1932), or ‘military’ and ‘villa’ (Dark and Dark 1997) zones, which failed to take account of the regional diversity in the character of the landscape within these bipartite categorisations. An attempt to use ancient Roman administrative units, civitates, was discounted, as these were Roman political constructs and our understanding of the territorial extent of these units is very imprecise and debated (Jones and Mattingly 1990, 154; Millett 1990, 67); in any case the boundaries of these territories are likely to have shifted over time (Frere 1987, 194) (see Ch. 12 for discussion of ‘tribes and civitates’).

The approach recently adopted by the Fields of Britannia project (Rippon et al. 2015) (itself influenced by Roberts and Wrathmell’s 2000 and 2002 studies of medieval England), which investigated continuity and change in the agricultural landscape between the late Roman and early medieval periods, offered a good way forward. In that study, a new series of nine regions was defined, based on a combination of distinctive natural and anthropogenic characteristics. These included geology, soils and topography, as well as Roman and post-Roman cultural distinctions such as the extent of ‘Romanisation’, the scale of Anglo-Saxon immigration and the creation of villages and open fields in the early medieval period (ibid.). For our purposes eight distinct regions were established to provide a best-fit between the results of an analysis of the archaeological dataset, and the character of the physical landscape. These regions comprised the North, the North-East, the Central West, Upland Wales and the Marches, the Central Belt, the East, the South, and the South-West. Whereas the North-East and South-West project regions share their names with European Parliamentary regions, they do not coincide with these modern administrative areas (FIG. 1.5). As the regions were partially defined based upon physical characteristics of the landscape, there are some broad similarities between the project regions and those utilised by Rippon et al. (2015), and, indeed, the ‘English provinces’ recognised by Roberts and Wrathmell in their study of the medieval rural landscape (2000; 2002), although there are some subtle and important differences.

Each of the project regions was initially defined by the project team by mapping various distinctive aspects of the Romano-British settlement pattern, including the distribution of villas, nucleated settlements and different classes of farmstead (see Ch. 2). Broad patterns in the distribution of these different types of site were identified and the eight regions were coarsely drawn around them. In order to avoid entirely arbitrary regional boundaries, the precise extent of each region was then formed by amalgamating several of Natural England’s ‘Natural Areas’ in England (these have since been succeeded by ‘National Character Areas’, which differ slightly and are more refined than the original Natural Areas; Natural England 2014). Natural Areas were designed by Natural England to inform decision-making concerning the natural environment, and are intended to describe geographical, ecological and historical variations in landscape character. Their boundaries follow physical lines in the landscape rather than administrative boundaries, and these were used in order to marry the physical characteristics of the landscape with the archaeological evidence as closely as possible.

In the absence of an equivalent set of character areas for Wales, topography was used, though
more distinctive landscape zones were identified for the area of South Wales included in the Central Belt region (e.g. Gwent Levels, Vale of Glamorgan etc.; see Ch. 5). It is important to recognise that each of the Roman Rural Settlement Project regions incorporates considerable intra-regional diversity, as clearly demonstrated by the range of different Natural Areas, which often display quite markedly diverse settlement characteristics (Fig. 1.5). The eight regions defined for this project must not, therefore, be regarded as homogeneous entities, but rather as convenient units for purposes of inter-regional comparison. Each displays some common physical and cultural characteristics which make them preferable to using either entirely arbitrary modern administrative units, or adopting the numerous Natural Areas defined by Natural England as the sole units of analysis. However, individual Natural Areas, termed ‘landscape zones’ for our purposes, have formed the principal units for exploring sub-regional variation, allowing intra-regional comparison of rural settlement chronology, form and building styles. In regions with relatively small numbers of excavated sites, however, such micro-scale sub-division has not always been practical. In these cases other methods of sub-division have been employed on a case-by-case basis.

THE RESEARCH STRUCTURE

The establishment of our eight regions in this chapter, the definition of our settlement types in Chapter 2 and their constituent buildings in Chapter 3, provide a framework for the characterisation of the rural settlement of each region as set out in Chapters 4 to 11. The chronological data allow analysis of change over time: of the different classes of settlement, their buildings and their distributions across the landscape zones, and in relation to the road network, the major towns and military establishments of each region between the first century B.C. and the fifth century A.D. The characterisation of the rural settlement of each region is further enriched through the analysis of the material culture and ecofactual data associated with the settlement hierarchy. The concluding Chapter 12 draws all the regional approaches together to give a province-wide perspective.