INTRODUCTION

It has long been accepted that the rural settlements of Roman Britain were profoundly diverse in their size, function and form, and that there is a great deal of regional variation (Thomas 1966; Hanley 1987; Hingley 1989; Millett 1990, 181–211; Mattingly 2006, 379–427; Taylor 2007). Although a range of terms used to describe rural settlements persists in the archaeological literature, there exists no standard consensus for classifying them in a systematic manner. Rather than detailing objective criteria for distinguishing between different forms of rural settlement, many surveys have tended to present the evidence from exemplary examples of excavated sites (‘type-sites’), in order to highlight regional diversity (Miles 1989; Hingley 2004; King 2004a; Mattingly 2006). Taylor (2007, 8) has recently commented that ‘there has been little agreement on common terms to describe or analyse the nature and form of distinctive rural settlements, apart from the recognition of certain architectural traditions, such as villas’. An added problem is encountered in the array of vernacular terminology used to describe regionally based settlements, such as ‘ladder settlements’, ‘scooped settlements’, ‘hut groups’, and ‘rounds’ (Hogg 1966; Jobey 1966; Quinnell 1986; Stoertz 1997). These have the effect of creating caricatures of regionality, and although they may be useful in local contexts, they are less helpful for inter-regional, comparative analysis of known Roman rural settlement evidence across England and Wales.

This chapter examines the full range of settlement sites recorded in the database. It is intended to provide an overview of the main types of settlement encountered, summarising their principal characteristics, distribution, and the level of variation inherent within each group. By classifying rural settlements on the basis of their scale, context and morphological complexity, this framework provides a model by which settlements can be cross-examined independent of their location. While much of the regional detail of the Romano-British rural settlement pattern will be presented in Chapters 4–11, broad trends across England and Wales outlined here will provide a wider context. As we shall see, however, the process of classifying sites is less than straightforward. Although some excavations are of sufficient scale to reveal ‘whole’ settlement plans, many investigations only reveal parts of the occupation site, providing little evidence for overall layout and form. These ‘fragmentary’ sites are further explored here to show why they present an important contribution to the study, and how they might become classified within the proposed model. Once established, this framework provides a more systematic basis for examining regional diversity, continuity and change in Roman rural settlement patterns over a considerable proportion of England and Wales.

A further point to make here is that many rural settlements were, of course, immersed in a landscape of field systems, which represent the proportion of land directly or indirectly exploited for food production, either through the cultivation of cereals and other crops or the husbanding of domestic livestock animals (Fowler 2002, 127–60; Chadwick 2007; 2008). Field systems are not directly dealt with in this chapter, but are instead considered in more detail in their regional contexts in Chapters 4 to 11.

CLASSIFICATION OF RURAL SETTLEMENT

As discussed in Chapter 1, traditionally, studies of Roman rural settlement have focused almost exclusively on villas, in effect isolating them from the rest of the rural settlement landscape (Percival 1976; Scott 1993; Smith 1998). Even in more detailed regional surveys the emphasis upon villa settlement is clear, though most archaeologists now accept that this is a product of the greater visibility of their surviving remains (Henig and Booth 2000; Bird 2004; King 2004a; Russell 2006). While the significance of villas is less in question, it is the precise definition of what constitutes a villa that is problematic, since this can vary quite dramatically between different studies. It is for the most part a definition based upon certain architectural elements (masonry building, tiled roof, painted plaster walls, hypocaust, bathhouse, etc.), though even here the interpretations are wide-ranging, with Smith (1998, 10), for example, including any building that provided evidence of a ‘Roman form of
planning’ (see Ch. 3 for discussion of how villas have been classified in this project).

Hingley (1989, 3, 75–8) was one of the first Roman archaeologists to move away from simply looking at architecture to define rural site types, and to begin to explore the character and development of wider settlement morphology, placing an emphasis upon whether farmsteads (or ‘compounds’) were open or enclosed. The morphology of Roman rural settlement was developed by Taylor (2007, 19–21), who distinguished between ‘enclosed settlement’, ‘open settlement’ and ‘linear system settlement’. Further distinctions were made within these settlement categories using size and period data, against which additional evidence for architecture, craft activity, burial/ceremonial practice and the presence of military activity, could be explored (ibid.). Taylor’s (ibid., 12) decision to classify sites by settlement form, rather than traditional site classes such as ‘farmstead’, ‘villa’, ‘small town’, etc., was prompted by his inclusion of large quantities of site data gathered from cropmark and earthwork surveys, which populated many of the Historic Environment Record (HER) archives.

The approach to rural settlement classification taken here essentially follows on from the work of Hingley and Taylor, taking into account settlement size, morphological complexity, architectural distinctions, local context and aspects of the material culture. Rather than simply accepting the interpretations found in excavation reports, each site entered into the database has been re-evaluated, based upon these factors. While most of our classifications have followed the original interpretations of the excavators, re-assessments have been necessary on occasion to standardise the classification of all sites recorded across the country. Romano-British rural settlements were clearly diverse, and are perhaps best understood as a morphological continuum, though it still remains essential to attempt to classify sites in order to better understand their variety.

As outlined in Chapter 1 (see Table 1.1), the main site types used in this study are domestic settlements, specialist industrial sites, specialised religious/funerary sites, and sites that contain elements of rural landscape but for which the associated domestic settlement is not known, such as field systems, trackways, and livestock enclosures. Domestic settlements have been divided into larger nucleated sites and smaller rural settlements, the majority of which are simply defined as ‘farmsteads’, lacking any of the architectural characteristics that would suggest that they should be assigned as villas (see Ch. 3) (Table 2.1). Both farmsteads and villas have been further classified on morphological grounds (their physical layout), following the tripartite divisions defined by Taylor (2007) outlined above, with ‘open’, ‘enclosed’ and ‘complex’ (a development of Taylor’s ‘linear-system’) forms (see details below, pp. 21–33).

It must be acknowledged here that, although many farmsteads have been classified based upon their settlement morphology, a significant number have not. This does not mean that these ‘unclassified farmsteads’ are no longer of use within the study. On the contrary, many provide significant and clearly identifiable settlement features and finds assemblages. They were simply not useful for the analysis, which focused upon their morphological characteristics. Unfortunately, those settlements

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Settlement type</th>
<th>South Belt</th>
<th>Central West</th>
<th>North East</th>
<th>South-West</th>
<th>Upland Wales and the Marches</th>
<th>Central West</th>
<th>North Wales</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Open farmstead</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enclosed farmstead</td>
<td>111</td>
<td>138</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>501</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Complex farmstead</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>135</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>245</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unclassified farmstead</td>
<td>255</td>
<td>583</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>126</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>1175</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Villa</td>
<td>113</td>
<td>157</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>326</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total farmsteads/villas</td>
<td>522</td>
<td>1012</td>
<td>154</td>
<td>231</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>113</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>2333</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roadside settlement</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>182</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Village</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vicus</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total nucleated settlements</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>109</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>294</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>579</td>
<td>1121</td>
<td>191</td>
<td>257</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>133</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>2627</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

[Table 2.1: Quantification of excavated settlements by type]
defined architecturally as villas are rarely able to be classified morphologically, whether as ‘complex villas’, ‘enclosed villas’ or ‘open villas’. This is primarily a consequence of the large proportion of villa excavations having been undertaken prior to 1990 and the widespread adoption of developer-funded archaeology. In this context, the emphasis of the excavations typically focused upon the villa buildings rather than the wider form of the settlement. For this reason, the ‘villa’ category in Table 2.1 has not been further sub-divided on morphological grounds in the same way as farmsteads, although such divisions are discussed further below, and in the regional chapters for the South (Ch. 4), the Central Belt (Ch. 5) and the East (Ch. 6).

PROBLEMS AND LIMITATIONS OF SITE CLASSIFICATION

While our classification criteria are firmly set out and adhered to, as with any taxonomic system, problems and limitations exist. Most commonly these pertain to excavations that only minimally expose settlements, but they also arise from the diverse excavation strategies utilised on different sites, and the variation in recording and reporting.

Obviously, the larger the area of excavation, the more we can understand about the form and layout of a settlement. The frequency of farmstead/villa settlements that can be assigned to a morphological type – either open, enclosed or complex – clearly reflects the total area of excavation (Fig. 2.1). Sites with relatively small areas of excavation (below 0.5 ha) remained most frequently unclassified, whereas above 0.5 ha they are more likely to be placed within a morphological class. Furthermore, the area of excavation can have an effect upon the classification of specific settlement types, with smaller investigations less likely to identify open and complex forms (Fig. 2.2). This may contribute to a bias towards enclosed settlements, which must be taken into account in any analysis of settlement distribution.

In some cases the use of non-intrusive techniques, such as geophysics or aerial survey, alongside small-scale excavation, allows sites to be classified. At Melton wastewater works near Brough, East Riding, for example, a complex

**Fig. 2.1.** Frequency of farmsteads and/or villas with and without the attribution of morphological classifications (open, enclosed or complex) by area of excavation

**Fig. 2.2.** Frequency of classification of farmstead and/or villa settlements by area of excavation

farmstead could be identified from a combination of evaluation trenches and geophysical survey (Fig. 2.3). Non-intrusive techniques are of course inhibited by the fact that, in isolation, they cannot disentangle different phases of development of a site, with a palimpsest of features likely to obscure the identification of specific phases of a settlement’s development. In the case of the Melton wastewater works site, most of the features were identified as being broadly contemporary, indicating the presence of an enclosure complex with areas of domestic activity and internal trackways (Neal 2002). It is notable that the results of this evaluation were significant enough to persuade the developers to move the construction of the wastewater facility 200 m to the east, preserving the settlement in situ. This entailed the excavation of a second area of land, revealing further features that most likely related to peripheral areas of the now preserved farmstead, expanding our understanding of its size and function (Bishop and Westwood 2004).

Another issue associated with fragmentary evidence is how to differentiate a farmstead (a single-unit, domestic settlement) from a nucleated settlement, such as a village or a roadside settlement. For some ‘fragmented’ sites, we have been able to identify a number of different excavated elements that are likely to have been part of a larger nucleated settlement (for example, a number of excavations around Bishop’s Cleeve, Gloucestershire, appear to reveal parts of a possible village; e.g. Joyce 2010a; Lovell et al. 2007). In other cases, we must rely more on contextual and artefactual evidence, such as Lincoln Road, Enfield, in Greater London (Gentry et al. 1977). Here, a very small excavation provided little indication of the nature of the site, but an assessment of its position next to Ermine Street just north of London, coupled with the fact that it produced a large number of Roman coins, suggested that the site was actually part of a larger roadside settlement. Sites in Greater London perhaps provide the greatest difficulties in this regard. The scale of twentieth-century urban expansion around the capital has provided many opportunities for investigating settlement evidence in its hinterland, but the relatively small-scale excavations that have been undertaken mean that there are real difficulties in identifying and understanding the form and character of the settlements (Bird 2004, 60–67).

Other constraints on the classification of settlements include the truncation of the upper levels of settlement remains, a lack of understanding or definition of settlement phasing, and excavation strategies that are too focused upon targeting structural evidence rather than wider settlement features (particularly relevant for many villa excavations). Pre-excavation decisions could place greater emphasis upon the classification of settlements and, although large-scale excavations are not always possible, investigation techniques that seek to characterise/classify the settlement as a whole, rather than focus on one small part of it, are desirable if we are to continue to develop our understanding of Romano-British rural settlements.

**FARMSTEADS**

One of the most important developments of the past 25 years, in terms of the study of Roman rural settlement, has been the greatly increased number of farmsteads (i.e. small rural settlements without ‘villa’ architecture) that have been excavated and reported (Fig. 2.4). Of the 1866 farmsteads recorded on the database, over 80 per cent have been reported on since 1990, enabling a complete transformation of our understanding of economy and society in the Romano-British countryside, unshackled from the previous dominance by villas.

As discussed above, for various reasons not all farmsteads are able to be classified morphologically, and even where this is possible, there exists a considerable degree of regional, local and individual variation across England and Wales. A discussion now follows of the three broad types of farmstead defined in this project, along with some account of the extent of this variation. More detailed regional patterns will be examined in Chapters 4–11, where attempts are made to move
beyond morphological classification, to explore associations with landscape context, chronology, economy and social status.

OPEN FARMSTEADS

Unenclosed or ‘open’ farmsteads are defined as settlements where there does not appear to be any traceable boundary enclosing the main domestic core, as illustrated by the mid- to late Roman phase of settlement at Strood Hall, Essex (Fig. 2.5). Here, a series of roundhouses were set alongside a number of pits, an enclosure, and a track/droveway that led directly to the settlement, which otherwise appears to be unbounded at this time (Timby et al. 2007a).

Open farmsteads have a wide distribution across England and Wales, though they are relatively few in number, possibly because, as discussed above, they are difficult to identify from smaller excavations. It is also likely that the lack of ditches on open farms reduces their visibility as cropmark sites, which would have an impact on excavation strategies. They are most densely concentrated in and around the Central Belt region, with a particular cluster in the Middle Thames Valley. Further north, they appear almost completely absent from large areas of the Midlands, reappearing again in Yorkshire and County Durham. Although comparatively sparse, the distribution of excavated open farmsteads generally follows that identified from cropmarks and other survey techniques by Taylor (2007, 27), but there remains a lack of them in the northern half of the Pennines. In this region, Taylor was able to locate from survey evidence numerous open settlements (ibid.), but the dating and function of many of these has yet to be corroborated by excavation.

Within the current dataset, open farmsteads are almost exclusively a later Iron Age phenomenon, their existence perhaps reflecting a declining mid- to late Iron Age settlement pattern (cf. Knight 2007). Analysis of the subsequent histories of open farmsteads demonstrates considerable variability, with 28 being abandoned, 16 becoming enclosed farmsteads, 17 developing into complex farmsteads and 8 being replaced by field systems. Where open farmsteads developed into new forms of settlement, there is evidence for both continuity in domestic activity from an unenclosed phase, and for complete reorganisation of their land use. In the Middle Thames Valley there is good evidence...
of late Iron Age open farmsteads becoming overlain by new settlement types and their associated field systems, indicating a complete change in local land management during the first century A.D. (see case study, Ch. 4). This evidence forms part of a wider pattern of development at this time, when the vast majority of changes to open settlement occur. There is no evidence for open farmsteads developing into other forms of settlement after the second century A.D., and the remainder were gradually abandoned between then and the end of the fourth century.
ENCLOSED FARMSTEADS

Enclosed farmsteads are defined as settlements where all, or the majority, of domestic and associated activity was contained within one or two enclosures and where internal space was not further sub-divided to a significant degree (e.g. the ‘round’ at Trethurgy, Cornwall: see Ch. 11). They are the most widespread and frequently identified farmstead type, found in most areas of England and Wales, but particularly common across northern parts of England, around the
Welsh coast, in Cornwall, and on the southern chalk downland (e.g. Bell 1977; fig. 2.6). In a number of regions their distributions form small clusters, such as on the Yorkshire Coal Measures and on the Hampshire Downs. In contrast, they appear quite rare in areas of Lincolnshire and Nottinghamshire, and Gloucestershire and Somerset, despite the fact that relatively high numbers of settlements are recorded in these areas. A number of unexcavated examples are seen as cropmarks in the Cotswolds, which highlights the problem of relying on excavated evidence alone (RCHME 1976).

Despite being considered here as a homogeneous group, enclosed farmsteads vary considerably in form and construction technique, and have been further divided into four morphological types (rectilinear, curvilinear, irregular, and D-shaped).

![Graph showing relative frequencies of different enclosed farmstead types by region](image1)

**FIG. 2.7.** Relative frequencies of different enclosed farmstead types by region

![Map showing distribution of enclosed farmsteads by type](image2)

**FIG. 2.8.** Distribution of enclosed farmsteads by type
Rectilinear enclosures are those with only straight-sided circuits. They are usually rectangular in shape (e.g. **FIG. 2.6**), though a few are square or trapezoidal. Curvilinear enclosures have a boundary that curves along its full length, and are either circular or oval in shape (e.g. **FIG. 2.9**). Importantly, they do not have corners. D-shaped enclosures have, as their name implies, one straight side with the remainder of the circuit curving around the settlement. Irregular enclosures do not necessarily conform to any particular shape, though the vast majority are of a form that fall half-way between a rectilinear enclosure and curvilinear enclosure (e.g. Ch. 8, **FIG. 8.9**, Whitwood Common). They may be approximately square or rectangular in outline (i.e. with corners), but they do not have any straight sides.

These enclosure types show distinct geographic patterning (**FIGS 2.7 and 2.8**). Enclosed farmsteads in the South, Central Belt and East regions are predominantly of rectilinear types, with curvilinear and D-shaped types in the minority. In the North-East and Central West rectilinear types continue to dominate, but higher frequencies of irregular types occur (c. 30–35 per cent). In Upland Wales and the Marches and in the North, rectilinear, enclosed farmsteads no longer dominate the settlement pattern but feature among a more mixed group, including higher proportions of both irregular and curvilinear enclosed types. In the South-West region, the pattern is completely reversed by a dominance of curvilinear enclosed farmsteads, exemplified by the type commonly known as ‘rounds’ (e.g. Quinnell 1986).

Even in regions dominated by a particular type of enclosed farmstead, small clusters of other types can be identified, such as the group of curvilinear, enclosed farmsteads present on the Hampshire Downs in the South region (see Ch. 4). These are predominantly of the well-known, ‘banjo’ form, characterised by their broadly circular enclosure and funnelled entrance (**FIG. 2.9**). Banjo enclosures are generally Iron Age in date, though some are known to have been respected or even maintained into the Roman period (Cunliffe and Poole 2008c). They are thought to be mainly a chalkland phenomenon of southern England, although the form has been revealed elsewhere, as for example a coastal enclosure at Ewanrigg on the Solway Plain, Cumbria (Bewley 1992). Further work in this region is required to indicate whether or not this is an isolated example. In Pembrokeshire and Carmarthen, banjo-type enclosures have been excavated at Drim, Dan-y-Coed, Woodside Camp and Penycoed, Dyfed, each broadly dating between the first century B.C. and second century A.D., with the latter possibly continuing into the fourth century (Murphy 1985; Williams and Mytum 1998). A group of about 20 enclosures, not

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**FIG. 2.9.** Plans of ‘Banjo’-type enclosures at (a) Ewanrigg, Cumbria (Bewley 1992), (b) Dan-y-Coed, Dyfed (Williams and Mytum 1998) and (c) Grateley South, Hants (Cunliffe and Poole 2008c)
dissimilar to banjos, were identified in West and South Yorkshire, with a strong focus around South Kirby, occurring on both the Magnesian Limestone and Coal Measures (Roberts 2010, 30, 33). Recently, it was argued that banjo enclosures in Gloucestershire were high-status sites that were inextricably linked to the late Iron Age oppidum at Bagendon (Moore 2012). Further analysis of the finds and environmental assemblages from these types of settlement may provide useful cross-regional comparisons to see how far they reflected similar lifestyle and farming practices.

In some regions, enclosed settlement boundaries were defined with earthen embankments or masonry walling, though earthen embankments are likely to be under-represented, owing to destruction by later ploughing, especially in central and southern England. Most examples with surviving evidence for an embankment or walling occur in Cornwall, west Wales, and in northern England, particularly in the Hadrian’s Wall area (fig. 2.10). In Cornwall and Dyfed, earthen-walled, enclosed farmsteads are common, associated with a predominance of curvilinear enclosed types in these areas. The settlements in Gwynedd in the north-west of Wales differ by having numerous farmsteads surrounded by drystone-walled enclosures. The drystone-enclosed settlements of this region are under-represented in our dataset, since many are known through aerial and field surveys, but very few have been systematically excavated (Waddington 2013). There is evidence for the use of stone in revetments on sites on the Magnesian Limestone, west of the Vale of York, which tend to date to the early Roman period (e.g. O’Neill 1999; Brown et al. 2007, 66; Waddington 2012, 46–7; Martin et al. 2013). However, the small numbers of sites that have been investigated in Wales suggest that the settlements there had long histories, commonly extending from well before the first century B.C. up to the fourth century A.D. and beyond (Waddington 2013). A notable aspect of these types of enclosed farmstead is that many of the internal structures are contiguous with the outer walls, and, although many produce evidence for different construction phases, they appear to be largely homogeneous entities (Fasham et al. 1998; fig. 2.11). These distinctive forms of settlement will be further examined in Chapter 10.

fig. 2.10. Distribution of enclosed farmsteads with identified masonry- or earthen-walled enclosures
Evidence for both double- and, more rarely, triple-ditched enclosures is present in variable numbers across the country (Table 2.2). Multi-ditched enclosures are most frequently encountered in the South-West region, associated with the curvilinear earthwork enclosures found in Cornwall. The higher proportion of such multiple ditch and embankment boundaries here may be due to greater perceived defensive needs, or as an expression of social status. They are quite different from the earthwork farmsteads found in Dyfed which, as has been shown, tend to be of the ‘banjo’-type.

Triple-ditched enclosures are generally rare across England and Wales, but are mostly found within the South region. However, even here there is rarely much conformity in the form and size of

**TABLE 2.2: NUMBERS OF SINGLE, DOUBLE AND TRIPLE-DITCHED ENCLOSURES BY REGION**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Single ditch</th>
<th>Double ditch</th>
<th>Triple ditch</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>no.</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>no.</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>89.4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central Belt</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>84.9</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>13.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>83.3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>16.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South-West</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>71.0</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>29.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North-East</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>95.7</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central West</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>77.8</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>22.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Upland Wales and the Marches</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>90.5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>9.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>81.6</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>18.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>386</td>
<td></td>
<td>56</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**FIG. 2.11.** Development of drystone masonry-walled enclosed settlement at Cefn Graenog II (Fasham et al. 1998)
these enclosure types. Some may be seen as symbolically defensive, such as the late Roman settlement at Waylands Nursery, Berkshire, where three concentric rectilinear ditches enclose a number of four-post structures located towards the corner of the enclosure (Preston 2003; FIG. 2.12(a)). At other sites, an elaboration of the enclosure boundary may have been designed to control movements of livestock into and out of the bounded areas, such as the two discontinuous, corner ditches within the enclosure at Dairy Lane, Nursling, Hampshire (Adam et al. 1997; FIG. 2.12(b)). The use of annexes is also a feature of some enclosed farmsteads and may relate to the penning of livestock away from the main habitation areas (e.g. Carter 1998; FIG. 2.12(c)).

While enclosed farmsteads have been categorised as a distinctive group of settlements, differentiated from open and complex farmsteads, there is clearly great variation within the group. The shape of enclosed farmsteads, the manner of their enclosure, and the arrangement of entrances reflect a substantial range of sub-types. In many areas there are numerous enclosed farmsteads that are irregular in form, and in certain cases it is difficult to see why such shapes were chosen rather than more regular rectilinear and curvilinear layouts. It is possible that some reflect topographic elements that are not visible in the archaeological record, such as tree or hedge lines, although much of the variance may simply reflect local preference.

COMPLEX FARMSTEADS

Complex farmsteads are defined as settlements where there appears to be significant differentiation of space, either as a system of conjoined enclosures or as a principal outer enclosure with many internal sub-divisions (e.g. Cotswold Community, Wilts/Glos.; Powell et al. 2010; FIG. 2.13). The differentiation of space tends to reflect different activity areas (e.g. domestic, storage, agricultural processing, industrial, livestock enclosures etc.), though excavation is not always extensive enough to enable such zones to be defined. In certain instances, the enclosure of these areas might be seen as discrete and progressive developmental stages.
FIG. 2.13. Distribution of excavated complex farmsteads and plan of complex farmstead at Cotswold Community, Wilts/Glos. (Powell et al. 2010)
The growth in numbers of complex farmsteads appears to be a phenomenon of the early Roman period, although their distribution is regionally varied. They occur most frequently in the Central Belt region and in lesser numbers in the North-East, East and South regions, but are largely absent from the South-West, Upland Wales and the Marches, and appear infrequently in the North. This pattern is illustrated in Fig. 2.13, which shows their concentration around the Fens, with clusters of sites located along the river valleys of the Ouse, the Nene, and, to a lesser extent, the Middle and Upper Thames (see Ch. 5). They also occur widely, if not as densely, across the low-lying areas of Yorkshire, north of the Humber and on the Magnesian Limestone. Compared with enclosed farmsteads, complex farmsteads are very rare on the chalk downland, and appear to be predominantly situated in the river valleys. In general, the distribution pattern of complex farmsteads follows the distribution of ‘linear system settlements’ identified by Taylor (2007, 26).

Owing to the fact that complex farmsteads consist of multiple-bounded areas, there is a wide range of forms, varying far more than that of open and enclosed farmsteads. However, despite this variation, two main systems of development in complex farmsteads have been identified, sub-divided enclosures and linear complexes. Sub-divided enclosures are best described as large enclosed farmsteads, with internal areas large enough for the space to be significantly sub-divided (e.g. Wavendon Gate, Bucks; Williams et al. 1996; Fig. 2.14). They often appear to involve a degree of planning, with large external boundary ditches constructed initially, followed by divisions formed by shallower ditches or gullies. In contrast, linear complexes often involve a series of connected enclosures, usually extending out from a domestic focus (e.g. Haddon, Cambs (Hinman 2003); NIAB Huntington Road, Cambridge (Luke 2014); Fig. 2.15). They often incorporate significant land boundaries, usually either trackways or field systems, and appear to have developed more
FIG. 2.15. Plans of complex farmsteads (linear complex type) at (a) Haddon, Cambridgeshire (Hinman 2003), and (b) southern site at NIAB Huntington Road, Cambridge (Luke 2014)
organically compared with sub-divided enclosures. The distinguishing factor between these two forms of settlement is in the orientation of their development: sub-divided enclosures develop internally, and linear complexes develop externally.

Linear complexes are the most common type of complex farmstead, with a total of 134 being recorded on the database, outnumbering the 61 sub-divided enclosures by more than 2:1. A further 50 complex farmsteads could not be placed into either category as their plans were insufficiently complete. All variants of complex farmsteads peak in numbers during the second and third centuries A.D. (Fig. 2.16). Geographically, both sub-divided enclosures and linear complexes may be found in relatively close proximity, for example around the Fen edge and in the Ouse Valley, though there are concentrations of linear complexes in the Thames Valley and around the estuaries of the Severn and the Humber (Fig. 2.17). The form of these types of settlement suggests that they may have been primarily
involved in livestock husbandry, although the presence of corndryers in many of them also suggests an arable component to the economy. In many of the linear complexes the enclosures are contiguous, and on some sites funnelled entrances can be observed. The systems appear highly suited to managing herds of cattle or flocks of sheep where the animals could be herded, counted and separated. Trackways running alongside the settlement would have aided the control of their movement beyond its confines. This evidence may, in part, explain the regular siting of many linear complexes in river valley and estuarine locations, places where natural pastures and water sources could have been exploited. The increasing number of linear complexes through the later first and second centuries A.D. may be interpreted as evidence for an expansion of pastoral farming, or an intensification of animal management in areas where there was increasing pressure on land availability owing to heightened arable production.

A relatively large number of complex farmsteads can be shown to have developed from pre-existing domestic settlements or field systems (FIG. 2.18). Eleven sub-divided enclosures developed from simple enclosed settlements which, to some extent, indicate that these were simply more developed forms of enclosed farmsteads. However, it is also notable that more than half of the known complex farmsteads developed in areas with no evidence of immediately preceding activity. Although much of this land may have previously been used as grazing, the establishment of such farmsteads suggest that these landscapes were becoming increasingly organised and managed by the second century A.D.

It has become increasingly clear that complex farmsteads, either in the form of large and more developed enclosed farmsteads, or the more extensive linear complexes, were a particular characteristic of the Roman period, with a distinct distribution largely restricted to the Central Belt and parts of the North-East. Their appearance perhaps suggests changes to the way that local landscapes were being managed and how livestock was being husbanded. It is likely that they were related to an increasing focus upon the production of surplus for market.

VILLAS

Villas have been understood first as high-status ‘Romanised’ dwellings, then as economic entities, settlements that were better able to manage and exploit their surrounding landscape to generate surplus wealth (see papers in Branigan and Miles 1989). More recently, greater emphasis has been placed on the role of the villa as a medium for transmitting a set of cultural ideals and as a social arena for receiving and entertaining guests (Scott 2004; Taylor 2011; Millett 2014). Much work still needs to be undertaken on their roles as ‘producers’ and ‘consumers’, and their place in the settlement hierarchy.

In total, 326 settlements classed as villas are recorded in the database. Other sites of possible ‘villa status’ exist, but these lack detailed excavation on the building(s) (see Chs 3–7 for specific cases). Millett (2014) has suggested that villas in Roman Britain may number around 2000, although these still only represent perhaps as little as one per cent of all settlement. Villas clearly constitute more than one per cent of the settlements in our dataset, and are almost certainly over-represented compared with other farmsteads, because of their archaeological visibility and their long history of excavation.

The overall distribution of villa settlements is relatively well known (e.g. Mattingly 2006, 379–99), being particularly well represented through the Central Belt region, from the Cotswolds, across the Chilterns and up into the river valleys that drain into the Fens, a distribution similar to that of the majority of complex farmsteads. The distribution of excavated villas correlates well with the distribution of all known or suspected villas recorded on the NMR, though some disparity is evident, particularly south of the Humber where excavated examples are
comparatively rare (Fig. 2.19). Villas also cluster along the chalk downland in the South region, particularly along the North and South Downs and into Hampshire, although these are areas where complex farmsteads are comparatively rare. Beyond these core areas, villa settlement is more sparsely spread across East Anglia, Lincolnshire and Yorkshire, and across the West Midlands into Wales. Other areas are almost completely devoid of villas, including northern England and along the west coast in Cheshire, Devon and Cornwall. Absences in the south and east of the country, such as in the Weald and along the lower and middle Thames valley, are more localised.

The isolation of villas as a separate ‘settlement category’ is probably more apparent than real, since many developed from other types of farmstead. The number of villas constructed during the Roman period is shown in Fig. 2.20, and illustrates the considerable increase in new builds during the second century A.D. Around half of all villa establishments in each century have been recorded as developments from earlier settlements. This is almost certainly an under-representation since many excavations, particularly those undertaken pre-1990, placed much emphasis upon discovering the plan and date of the villa structures, rather than exploring the possibility of pre-villa activity. While some villas may be de novo establishments, it is very difficult to establish these conclusively on the basis of negative evidence. Even the so-called ‘proto-palace’ phase at Fishbourne, West Sussex, is now known to have been preceded by an earlier Roman and late Iron Age phase of occupation (Manley and Rudkin 2005). Many other excavation reports mention the recovery of late Iron Age or early Roman pottery that pre-dates the first phase of villa construction, but information regarding the context of such material has often been lacking. In fact, of the villa sites with proven pre-villa settlement activity, the great majority (80) have their origins in the late Iron Age or earlier, demonstrating that most sites which became villas had long periods of prior activity and development. Villas, then, represent significant investments of wealth designed to monumentalise the pre-existing settlement (Millett 2014).

The changing density and distribution of villas across the country between the later first and fourth century A.D. is shown in Fig. 2.21. It is widely known that much of the earliest villa construction in Britain occurred on the south
**FIG. 2.20.** The origins of villas (from date of earliest villa establishment)

**FIG. 2.21.** Kernel density distribution of excavated villas from the late first to fourth century A.D.
coast of Sussex and in north Kent (cf. Rudling 1998; Millett 2007a). The early Sussex villas included some particularly grand examples, such as Fishbourne, Southwick, and Pulborough, each placing an emphasis upon the design of central courtyards and reception areas, architectural aspects more readily paralleled in Gaul and the Mediterranean (Taylor 2011, 181). These sites were certainly the exception, interpreted as representing investments of wealth by local elite groups with each, potentially, the centre of a large estate (Cunliffe 1973, 79). The early Kent villas, however, are fairly evenly spaced along the major river valleys of the Medway, Cray and Darenth, which flow north into the Thames estuary (see also Taylor 2011, fig. 1). Some have interpreted these as the residences of those exploiting and exporting local resources such as Kentish ragstone, quarried along the border of the North Downs and the Weald (Boyce 2007; Elliot 2014). By the mid-second century A.D., the number of villas found in the Central Belt region is approximately the same as that in the South, while some investment was also starting to be made further north and west. The number of villas found in the Central Belt region continues to increase into the fourth century A.D., while those in the South and in other regions reach a peak in the third century.

As discussed above, relatively few villas have information regarding their immediate settlement and landscape context. However, of those that do, it is notable that those from the Central Belt tend
to be of complex form (complex villas) and those from the South tend to be of enclosed form (enclosed villas) (Fig. 2.22), in general following the dominant patterns already demonstrated by the farmsteads in those regions (for complex and enclosed nomenclature see under respective farmstead types above). It is important to note that the categorisation of a villa as either complex or enclosed does not reflect its relative size or status. For example, the small corridor villa-house at Barton Court Farm, Oxfordshire, was constructed in the late third century A.D. within a reorganised sub-divided enclosure, with several areas divided up into spaces for different farmstead activities (Miles 1986; Fig. 2.23a). This site shows no more evidence for architectural refinement than the enclosed villas at Chilgrove 2 (Down 1979; Fig. 2.23b), Batten Hanger (Magilton 1991; Gardner 2009), and Beddingham (Rudling 1998), all located on the chalk downland in Sussex, each set within a simple rectilinear enclosure, following the layout of many other farmsteads in that region.

If excavation were to place a greater focus on the landscape context of villas, it would greatly enhance our understanding of them. It is commonly assumed that villas were highly productive economic entities, but, for the most part, we do not know how the inhabitants of villa settlements generated their wealth (Millett 2007a; Taylor 2011). Perhaps it was through arable production and processing, as is indicated at sites like Yewden, Buckinghamshire (Eyers 2011), or Northfleet, Kent (Andrews et al. 2011), or the production of building materials as at Ashtead, Surrey (Bird 2014). It is also uncertain whether the wealth used to construct villas in the first instance was produced through the workings of the settlement or through money gained from elsewhere; only with a better understanding of their settlement context can we make more informed interpretations about how villas may have functioned.

NUCLEATED SETTLEMENTS: ROADSIDE SETTLEMENTS, MILITARY VICI AND VILLAGES

Nucleated settlements are clearly of importance for any understanding of the wider Romano-British rural economy, yet remain relatively unknown through a lack of recent academic...
attention and synthesis. The parameters regarding what is included in this project as a 'nucleated settlement' have been set out in Chapter 1, with the term encompassing all larger settlements (generally 3 ha and above), except for the major urban centres (including civitas capitals and coloniae) and defended ‘small towns’. The classification includes a wide range of sites, generally referred to in excavation reports either as ‘small towns’ or ‘villages’, often with little in the way of differentiation between the two (Hanley 1987; R.F. Smith 1987; Burnham and Wacher 1990).

This project has sub-classified smaller nucleated settlement primarily into villages and roadside settlements, based exclusively on whether or not the site had direct association with the Roman road network. Civilian settlements that originated next to forts – the so-called military vici – are also included in this group of settlements (except for those in the Hadrian’s Wall/Stanegate area; see Ch. 1). These were similar to roadside settlements in that they developed along major roads. However, because of their association with military sites, these settlements may have functioned quite differently to other roadside settlements and deserve to be examined as a distinct group. In this chapter, they are included and summarised with roadside settlements, but they are given more detailed, individual attention in the regional chapters, particularly those for the North-East (Ch. 7), the North (Ch. 9), and Upland Wales and the Marches (Ch. 11). For further discussion of the layout and typology of vici, the reader is referred to Sommer (2006) and, for a gazetteer and summary discussions of settlements in Northern England, to Bidwell and Hodgson (2009).

As a group, nucleated settlements are broadly distributed across England and Wales, though the density of sites is far from even, with particular concentrations of roadside settlements in parts of the East Midlands and East Anglia, and those sites defined as villages being more prevalent in parts of Gloucestershire, Wiltshire and Somerset. Military vici represent the primary form of nucleated settlement in the north and west (FIG. 2.24).

ROADSIDE SETTLEMENTS AND MILITARY VICI

The vast majority of the nucleated sites recorded in the project database are those that developed alongside the major metalled roads, where their form is generally described as being ‘ribbon-like’, signifying the influence of the road. This can, however, be an oversimplification of the matter. A combination of excavation and geophysics at Westhawk Farm, Kent, for example, has shown that the roadside settlement there included small bounded plots of land, perhaps equating with individual properties, on the west side of the road, but an uneven and irregular distribution of features to the east, where the road from Lymne joins the junction at the settlement (Booth et al. 2008; FIG. 2.25). There are many examples of roadside settlements and some military vici, which, rather

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**FIG. 2.25. Geophysical survey plan of the roadside settlement at Westhawk Farm, Kent (Booth et al. 2008)**
than developing along one stretch of road, spread along two or more roads that intersected in the vicinity. For example, geophysical survey at the Welsh forts at Cefn Caer and Caer Gai, both in Gwynedd, has shown evidence for settlement ‘ribbons’ along several roads radiating from the forts (Hopewell and Burman 2007; FIG. 2.26), while at Stamford Bridge in East Riding, Yorkshire, at least three roads converged, with excavations there demonstrating how densely the settlement features can build up in the area of the crossroads (Roe 2009; FIG. 2.27).

However, without large-scale excavation, geophysical survey or cropmark evidence, the plans of these settlements are very difficult to determine. Sites located around London, such as at Staines and Brentford, are particularly disadvantaged in this regard, and our understanding of them is only developed through a synthesis of usually small-scale, targeted excavations (Canham 1978; Jones 2010). Unfortunately, many of these excavations were undertaken at intervals many years, sometimes decades, apart employing different excavation and publication strategies.

**FIG. 2.26.** Geophysical survey plan of the fort and *vicus* at Caer Gai, Gwynedd (Hopewell and Burman 2007)

**FIG. 2.27.** Excavation plan of the roadside settlement at Moor Lane, Stamford Bridge, Yorks (Roe 2009)
making synthesis difficult if not impossible. Elsewhere, extensive geophysical survey in the Vale of Pickering has revealed linear Roman settlements extending over several kilometres along a trackway (Powlesland et al. 2006). The scale of these settlements, and the presence of a track rather than a metalled road, suggests that they are perhaps best considered as villages (see below, p. 41 and Ch. 7).

The size of nucleated settlements is also difficult to define, though surface survey techniques have been successfully undertaken at some sites to demonstrate the spread of Roman material culture along roadsides, reflecting the approximate extents of the settlements (e.g. Alfoldean, West Sussex: Luke and Wells 2000; Shiptonthorpe, Yorkshire: Millett 2006). At Great Walsingham in Norfolk, various metal-detecting and fieldwalking surveys (and very limited excavation) have suggested a settlement perhaps spread over 50 ha, immediately south of where the Roman road crosses the River Stiffkey (Norfolk HER 42850). However, estimations of the extent of settlements based purely upon such surveys could be potentially misleading, with some of the material culture perhaps representing manure scatters or outlying farmsteads (e.g. Garton 2008).

A considerable number of roadside settlements and military vici are located at the crossing of rivers, as for example at Scole on the Norfolk/Suffolk border, which lies on either side of the River Waveney (Ashwin and Tester 2014; FIG. 2.28). At Alfoldean, West Sussex, a large ditched enclosure with internal masonry structures, thought to have been the site of a mansio (Winbolt 1924), was built on the south side of the River Arun. As noted above, the further extent of this settlement was revealed with evidence from fieldwalking, geophysics and small-scale excavation, indicating occupation expanding south from the enclosure along the road for some distance (Luke and Wells 2000; Thompson 2006a). One inference that might be drawn from this example is that the road system and the waterways were used in conjunction for moving people and goods, and perhaps even livestock, although direct evidence for the use of rivers for transport is still fairly minimal (see Chs 5, 6 and 7 in particular). Another possibility is that tolls were paid to cross the river, which may have provided at least some level of economic stimulus to the settlement.

As just discussed, some roadside settlements may well have grown to a considerable size (e.g. Old Sarum (Sorviodunum), which possibly covered 36–45 ha (Moffat 2010)), and were likely to have been just as important as those nucleated settlements which at some point received masonry or earthwork enclosures. However, there are also a number of such settlements that were located within relatively close proximity to major walled/defended towns, and must have had a strong relationship with them. Across the Roman province, there were 37 roadside settlements located within 10 km of a defended town, 14 of these lying within just 3 km, possibly in some cases part of a continuous ribbon development. Lying 2 km south of the major walled town at Catterick (Cataractonium), and dating between the

![FIG. 2.28. Interpretative plan of the roadside settlement at Scole, either side of the River Waveney on the Norfolk/Suffolk border (Ashwin and Tester 2014)](image-url)
later first century A.D. and the middle of the fourth century, the roadside settlement at Bainesse, North Yorkshire, has provided evidence for domestic activity running alongside Dere Street. Previous excavations have revealed property plots, including timber and masonry structures, along with the remains of a pottery kiln (Busby et al. 1996; Wilson 2002), while current excavations in advance of new motorway construction is showing almost continuous activity along Dere Street which stretches for a number of miles (Wilson pers. comm.). Field systems were also found to back on to the enclosure plots, with geophysical survey showing that they ran for at least 500 m and perhaps further towards Cataractonium (Speed 2006). At Dringhouses, c. 3 km south-west of the *colonia* at York, evidence for successive timber structures, hearths, and cremation burials, has been excavated, perhaps also from within enclosed plots similar to those seen at Bainesse (Ottaway 2011). Another probable roadside settlement lies c. 2 km south of Silchester Roman town at Latchmere Green, where the Roman road splits south-east and south-west to Chichester and Winchester respectively. Settlement remains have been identified here from an array of surface finds, including quantities of pottery, ceramic building materials, quernstones, slag, glass, animal and human bone, covering an area of around 6 ha (Corney 1984; Fulford and Creighton 1998). Small-scale excavation indicated that the settlement, which had late Iron Age origins, was principally inhabited between the late first/second century A.D. and the late fourth century, while a subsequent pipeline excavation revealed the flint foundations from three walls, along with the presence of pottery and tile wasters, and smithing slag (Brading 2011). As with many of the other examples, it remains uncertain if we are looking at ‘separate’ settlements or else elements of extensive, though not necessarily intensive, ribbon developments stretching from the larger urban core. It is only with greater exploration of the hinterlands of the main Roman towns that we will be able to address such questions.

**VILLAGES**

The sites defined in this project as villages include all nucleated settlements that do not appear to have developed along, or in relation to, the major Roman road system. As such it is a very broad category, and it must be emphasised that the meaning of the term ‘village’ in this context is quite different from the village in later medieval or

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**FIG. 2.29.** Earthwork survey plans with locations of excavation trenches within village settlements at Chisenbury Warren, Wiltshire (McOmish et al. 2002; Fulford et al. 2006) and Chalton, Hampshire (Cunliffe 1977)
modern times, which developed under entirely separate historical and social circumstances (Millett 2014). Villages are in one sense an agglomeration of farmsteads, and it is the evidence for multiple centres of domestic activity that separates villages from complex farms, which had a single domestic focal point. Villages could spread over considerable areas, with some of those visible as earthworks on Salisbury Plain extending well over 20 ha (McOmish et al. 2002; Fulford et al. 2006).

As discussed above, the distribution of villages appears to be quite restricted (see fig. 2.24), but this is likely to reflect the fact that these types of settlement are very difficult to identify without large-scale excavation or survey. Their apparent concentration in parts of central southern England is in part the result of the levels of earthwork preservation on the Chalk downland, with good examples revealed at places like Chisenbury Warren on Salisbury Plain and Chalton on the Hampshire Downs (McOmish et al. 2002; Cunliffe 1977; fig. 2.29). Most of these downland earthwork sites have received very little or no intrusive archaeological investigation, though some villages elsewhere have been more extensively excavated. Archaeological investigations over 18 ha at Mucking on the South Essex Thames Estuary revealed a major Iron Age settlement that was extensively redeveloped after the Roman conquest into a series of enclosures and droveways with two main areas of domestic settlement (Lucy and Evans 2012; fig. 2.30). Excavations on this scale remain very much a rarity, though recent geophysical survey, fieldwalking, evaluation and excavations over 60 ha at Love’s Farm St Neots, Cambridgeshire, revealed a landscape of trackways, fields and 2–3 zones of domestic occupation, with nucleation appearing to develop during the early Roman period (Oxford Archaeology East 2012).

As can be seen from these examples, villages can cover very large areas and, where the evidence is available, appear to have developed quite organically, often from Iron Age origins. However, just how these settlements functioned in relation to the surrounding landscape and other settlements has yet to be determined, the majority having received little investigation.
SUMMARY

This chapter has presented an overview of the major types of Roman rural settlement found across England and Wales. It is recognised that such settlement is inherently varied, often poorly understood and represents a continuum of forms and scales that on many occasions defy any further categorisation. Nevertheless, the mass of mainly developer-funded excavations of the past 25 years has produced a significantly increased dataset of Roman rural sites to work with, and within this certain broad classes of settlement have been identified, defined here on the basis of morphology, size, and context, as well as architecture and finds assemblages, which will be drawn upon in the following chapters. Those settlements classified as farmsteads (i.e. without villa architecture) have seen the most notable increase in the volume of excavation and publication during this time. These have been further categorised, primarily on the basis of form, in order to provide a framework for additional analyses to be presented in subsequent chapters, based upon shared characteristics of chronology, economy, and social status.

The distribution of all excavated rural settlement across England and Wales has been shown to be far from even, but the number and spread of sites is sufficient to reveal very distinct regional patterns, which will be explored in Chapters 4 to 11. Prior to this, the following chapter will explore further the settlements themselves, to take account of the great variability in building forms and functions that exist between the different types of site and across the different landscapes of the Roman province.