CHAPTER 12
CONCLUSIONS: THE RURAL SETTLEMENT OF ROMAN BRITAIN
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INTRODUCTION
The impact of developer-funded archaeology since 1990 has had a profound effect upon our knowledge of all periods of British history and prehistory, with a huge upsurge in the volume of archaeological information (cf. Fulford and Holbrook 2011). Previous and on-going research projects such as Fields of Britannia (University of Exeter; Rippon et al. 2015), British and Irish Prehistory in their European Context (University of Reading; Bradley 2007) and The English Landscapes and Identities project (University of Oxford) have utilised these ‘mass data’ to great effect, analysing broad patterns in the character of human occupation over wide areas of Britain and Ireland, and assessing developments in landscapes over time. The Rural Settlement of Roman Britain Project has also drawn largely upon this mass of new data, with over 75 per cent of our records post-dating the introduction of PPG16 in 1990 (see Ch. 1). Furthermore, as the records comprise data gathered from excavated sites (as opposed to cropmark, earthwork or field survey data), the project database includes a wealth of contextual information along with specialist evidence, much of which has only recently begun to be fully exploited, most notably the plant and animal remains. The collation of these data, comprising almost one million fields of information (within 3654 records), has enabled many questions to be addressed, on topics such as settlement and building form, chronological development, regional characterisation, social and economic systems, and ritual and religious expression. This volume has been primarily devoted to gaining a better understanding of the nature, form and development of late Iron Age and Roman rural settlements, their marked regional and local variation across England and Wales and their change over time. Such regional characterisation of settlement has been explored through site morphology (using site plans) and buildings, along with the surrounding landscape context and communications infrastructure. Use has also been made of the wealth of material culture and environmental evidence, although these aspects will be analysed in greater depth within subsequent volumes, in relation to rural economy and identity.

The structure of this volume is centred upon eight chapters, each concerned with a different region of England and Wales, which together include the entirety of the Roman province of Britannia for most of its existence (see Ch. 1 for methodology). These regions are not intended to be ‘straightjackets’, limiting our ability to see wider trends, but rather as convenient units for assessing the differential character of late Iron Age and Romano-British settlement. They are preferred to using modern administrative regions that are likely to have no bearing at all on ancient patterns of land use or settlement character. This concluding chapter will compare and discuss the results of these regional analyses, assessing them against previous geographic divisions of late Iron Age and Roman Britain. Broader themes running across England and Wales on matters such as chronology, population and the relationship with urban centres will also be summarily explored, followed by some reflections on the project and thoughts for future research.

THE REGIONS
That the countryside and people of Roman Britain were far from uniform has been acknowledged since the antiquarian accounts of the nineteenth century (cf. Hoselitz 2007, 46–50), with Haverfield (1912, 24) later highlighting a clear distinction between the ‘military’ uplands of the north and west, and the ‘civilian’ lowlands of the south and east (see Ch. 1). Such binary division of the province has had great prominence in many works on Roman Britain ever since, though more recently there has been a growing awareness of the much greater degree of geographic complexity in the countryside, both within province-wide and national accounts (e.g. Mattingly 2006; Taylor 2007; Rippon et al. 2015), and in the increasing number of more detailed regional analyses (e.g. Bewley 1994; McOmish et al. 2002; Booth et al. 2007). Much of this awareness has stemmed from the increase in archaeological data noted above, particularly in the accounts of small rural farming settlements without villa architecture, which are by far the most numerous of all rural settlements across the Roman province. These farmsteads
exhibit substantial regional variation, from the enclosed ‘rounds’ evident in parts of Cornwall to the rectangular, dry-walled enclosures of north-west Wales and substantial complex farmsteads of the central English river valleys. In certain regions farmsteads were constructed using traditions that extended back to well before the Roman conquest, sometimes exhibiting little apparent change thereafter, whereas in other areas there is evidence for far greater dynamism, as rural settlements were adapted to changing economic and cultural circumstances.

Such variation in the character of farmsteads has been used alongside other aspects of the rural settlement pattern, including the presence of villas, roadside settlements and forts/vici, to help determine the eight regions as defined within this project. The specific areas of these regions were then defined through the grouping of topographic landscape zones (including Natural England’s National Character Areas; see Ch. 1) such as the Cotswolds and Yorkshire Wolds. In certain data-rich regions (e.g. Central Belt), these smaller zones were able to be analysed and compared with one another to provide a more nuanced understanding of late Iron Age and Roman rural communities.

A brief comparative analysis of the eight regions will now be presented, noting the broad characteristics that distinguish one from another, as well as intra-regional diversity where it can be defined. There are also elements of the rural settlement pattern, such as villa architecture, that transcend the boundaries of individual regions, and that might relate on some level to a shared understanding of ‘Roman’ cultural values within the province.

REGIONAL DENSITY OF RURAL SETTLEMENT

The distribution of database records pertaining to excavated late Iron Age and Roman settlement and other landscape features is far from uniform across England and Wales. The density of excavated sites is shown by region in fig. 12.1, with the two largest regions, the Central Belt and the South, containing the highest densities of records. Thereafter, however, the next three largest regions, Upland Wales and the Marches, the Central West and the North, all contain comparatively low densities of site records, with much of central Wales, in particular, being very sparsely populated. These are of course not necessarily reflective of past patterns of settlement density, as has been demonstrated in the regional chapters. They show only the distribution of excavated sites and are therefore likely to have been highly biased by a number of factors, including patterns of antiquarian/academic research interest (e.g. Cotswold villas and northern military forts), but especially by trends of modern development, particularly post the implementation of PPG16 when archaeology became part of the planning process.

If the National Monuments Record (NMR) index of excavations of all periods in England (1910–2010) can be taken as an approximate indication of where most development has occurred over the past century, then, as is to be expected, there are correlations with the highest density of excavated Roman rural settlements, particularly in the Central Belt region (fig. 12.2). Nevertheless, there are clusters of Roman rural sites in parts of the Ouse Valley and around Cambridge, for example, that stand out against the background of the NMR excavation index, and these areas may genuinely have been densely settled during the Roman period. Such conclusions are corroborated by cropmark evidence, fieldwalking evidence, and finds from the Portable Antiquities Scheme. Conversely, the general scarcity of excavated Roman rural sites in areas of the Midlands and the north-west cannot be purely attributed to a lack of excavation, and may suggest that these areas were relatively sparsely settled. This is amply illustrated by the 68 km long, gas-pipeline excavation running through parts of Cheshire, Shropshire and Staffordshire, which revealed just a single cremation burial and a small group of pits of Roman date (Moore and Hun 1999; see Ch. 8). Similarly, although the NMR excavation index does not cover Wales, it might be expected that, over the years, built-up areas like Swansea and the South Wales Valleys would have seen a reasonable level of development with associated recognition of archaeology, yet the few excavated Roman-period sites there are almost entirely military in nature. Of course, the latter are much more archaeologically visible than native farmsteads with little distinctive material culture.

The relative lack of excavated late Iron Age and Roman settlement in such areas does not of course mean that they remained unexploited. Upland areas, for example, may well have witnessed transhumance, the seasonal movement of people with their livestock between summer and winter pastures. The settlements left behind by such seasonal occupation may have been insubstantial, leaving scant remains of material culture, and therefore particularly hard to recognise in the archaeological record.

In some of the areas for which we have few excavated records there are alternative sources of evidence that might suggest greater levels of occupation. In the Cumbrian Fells, for example, there are large numbers of earthworks for which an Iron Age or Roman date is postulated (Taylor
2007, 14; FIG. 12.3a), but without the confirmation potentially provided by excavation. Similarly, it has been suggested that cropmark/soilmark and earthwork enclosures in certain areas of Upland Wales and the Marches and the Central West are of prehistoric and/or Roman date, but again without the support of excavated evidence (see Ch. 11; FIG. 12.3b).

The Portable Antiquities Scheme (PAS) has also been shown to provide valuable insight into the density and nature of settlement in Roman Britain (Brindle 2014), notwithstanding the many variables that have influenced the collection of these data (cf. Robbins 2014). A recent kernel density map of over 300,000 late Iron Age and Roman findspots from England and Wales shows a more or less blanket coverage over much of central, south and eastern England (albeit still with considerable variability in density), while much of the north and west remains patchy (FIG. 12.4). This is partly because these largely upland, predominantly pastoral areas have witnessed less

**FIG. 12.1.** Density of records across the different regions of the project
Fig. 12.2. Kernel density of records from England and Wales (n=3654) and all excavation records (1910–2010) from National Monument Records (NMR) Index (n=44,503) (excludes data from Greater London and Wales).
CONCLUSIONS

Fig. 12.3. Distribution map of Iron Age-Roman settlements in England recorded as (a) earthworks, and (b) cropmarks and soilmarks (after Taylor 2007, figs 3.2 and 3.3).
metal detecting than lowland regions, where the abundant arable land is favoured by metal-detector users (Brindle 2014, 3), and partly because, outside of military sites, the excavated evidence has shown that settlements in these areas typically produce very few artefacts, particularly of metal.

Overall, the combined evidence from excavated sites, earthworks, crop/soil marks and finds distributions indicates that there were very few really ‘blank’ landscapes with no Roman-period rural settlement, and these, unsurprisingly, are mostly in what may be described as agriculturally marginal, upland zones, such as parts of the Pennines, mid-Wales, and Dartmoor. The same also appears to be the case with areas of potential woodland or forest, such as the Weald of south-east England, where there is also very little evidence of any kind for Roman rural settlement.

If it is accepted that some parts of the countryside were more densely settled than others, then we need to consider the factors that may have led to such an uneven distribution. Given that we are dealing with an almost wholly farming-based society (pastoral and arable), then the productivity of agricultural land must surely be a major factor, as has been argued by Roberts and Wrathmell (2000; 2002) for the medieval period, and McCarthy for Roman Britain (2013, 27–30). He argued (idem) that soil types, along with other environmental and topographic factors, may have influenced past patterns of farming, although some of these (e.g. climate) are not quite as easy to assess during the Roman period as others.

Figure 12.5 shows the modern soil pH values for England and Wales (Emmett et al. 2010), and while it is fully appreciated that significant soil improvements have taken place over the past 150–200 years, the underlying values at this scale are unlikely to have changed significantly. Most arable crop plants (especially wheat and barley) prefer pH ranges of 6–7 (Vasey 1992), which is to be found in much of central, southern and eastern England, where the majority of our excavated settlements lie. The areas with most acidic soils are all conspicuous by their lack of settlement, although this may be partly because such areas are sparsely populated today and, as discussed above, have experienced fairly minimal development.

While within all of these areas there is variation in the soil types, settlement patterns and farming

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**Fig. 12.4.** Kernel density of late Iron Age and Roman artefacts recorded by the Portable Antiquities Scheme (PAS) across England and Wales by August 2015

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regimes, there is, nevertheless, a reasonable correlation between the agricultural potential of the soil and the density of settlement. However, there are exceptions where other topographic, environmental and cultural factors appear to be influential. For example, it is difficult to explain the apparent paucity of excavated Roman rural settlements in parts of the Central West, as noted above, on the basis of the slightly acidic soils that cover much of this area and would appear to be well suited to arable crops. In this region the settlement pattern is clearly different from that of the Central Belt to the south, with the Severn Vale (i.e. the Severn Valley up to the confluence with the Avon at Tewkesbury) and Avon Vale acting as the main boundary zone between areas of higher and lower settlement density. Roberts and Wrathmell’s (2002, 60, fig. 3.1) analysis of medieval settlement and farming regions also noted major differences along this line, with much of the Central West to the north (part of their ‘northern and western province’) being open-pasture landscapes, including concentrations of dairying, with fairly limited arable and large expanses of woodland. The Roman pollen sequences from the ‘Western Lowlands’ analysed as part of the Fields of Britannia project also indicated a higher than average amount of woodland and pasture, though more concentrated in landscapes to the north of the region, with greater amounts of arable land to the south (Rippon et al. 2015, 266). The limited environmental evidence from excavated Roman rural sites of the current project in the Central West precludes a detailed characterisation of farming practices, although, as discussed in Chapter 8, work in the Wroxeter area did suggest an emphasis on pastoralism (Gaffney et al. 2007, 254–7). Strong pastoral traditions in the region at large may have persisted from the Iron Age throughout the Roman period and beyond, and may at least partly account for the differences in settlement density between it and the Central Belt region.

The apparent relative under-exploitation of the neutral soils of parts of the Central West region for arable farming can be contrasted with the intensive exploitation of the highly alkaline, chalk soils, especially evident in the East, North-East and South regions. Although the Roman-period

![Modern soil pH values for England and Wales](image)

FIG. 12.5. Modern soil pH values for England and Wales
settlement pattern clearly develops out of that of the late Iron Age, it continues to concentrate on these relatively inhospitable soils that require continual manuring to sustain cereal cultivation. This is well exemplified by the growth of villages and their associated field systems on Salisbury Plain, which reach their maximum extent in the third and fourth centuries. Located in many instances over 100 m above sea level, their inhabited areas nevertheless range up to some 26 ha, with several exceeding the size of many small walled/unwalled towns (McOmish et al. 2002; Ch. 4). The expansion of settlement in the Fenland, on the other hand, albeit with necessary investment in drainage schemes, can be seen as a more rational response to the potential of the soils to support cereal cultivation (Ch. 5).

REGIONAL CHARACTER OF RURAL SETTLEMENT AND LANDSCAPE

Settlement
Despite the major differences in the density of settlement records across England and Wales, the volume and distribution of excavation data are such that we are able to note significant regional, and in some cases sub-regional, patterns in the general character of settlements and their environs. As shown in Fig. 12.6, all regions are dominated by farmsteads, though this still ranges down from over 82 per cent in the North-East to c. 65 per cent in Upland Wales and the Marches. Villas only really form a significant proportion of excavated settlement in the Central Belt (13 per cent) and South (18 per cent), although as discussed in Chapters 4 and 5, some landscape zones in these regions, such as the Cotswolds and the Wealden Greensand, have much higher levels of up to c. 40 per cent. Even though the general proportion of excavated farmsteads to villas has increased significantly over the past 25 years, villas are probably still over-represented, particularly in the Central Belt and South regions, with a previous estimate that they account for only one per cent of known rural sites arguably remaining valid for the Roman province as a whole (Millett 2014, 4). However, the fact that they clearly had much greater representation in certain landscape zones points to major differences in cultural and economic expression and possibly in the nature of land management, even within relatively closely defined areas. More detailed assessment of these ‘villa landscapes’ is still hampered by the lack of investigation beyond the main domestic buildings, though there are now increasing numbers of villas like Roughground Farm and Harnhill in Gloucestershire where wider landscape elements have been observed, including what could be argued as associated ‘estate villages’ (see Ch. 5).

Larger, nucleated settlements appear across all regions of the Roman province in varying numbers (see Ch. 2, FIG. 2.24). However, almost all of those to the north and west comprise military vici, forming 18 per cent of the settlements in central Wales, and 16 per cent in the north of England, a proportion that would be much greater if all of the forts/vici in the vicinity of Hadrian’s Wall were taken into account. Although military vici may share some of the characteristics of roadside settlements in terms of architecture and material culture, they are fundamentally distinct in that, for the most part, their continued existence seems entirely dependent on the fate of their associated fort. Both in social and economic terms therefore they can be seen to be focused inwards, towards the support of the soldiers and the associated military infrastructure, rather than outwards towards outlying ‘native’ farmsteads and villages,

![Fig. 12.6. Proportion of different settlement types within the project regions](image-url)
FIG. 12.7. Relative frequencies of farmstead types by project region.
although this is not to say there were no relationships in that direction (see Chs 9 and 11 and vol. 2).

Nucleated roadside settlements not attached to military forts are very uncommon in much of the north and west of the Roman province and only really form a significant component of the dataset in the East region (c. 15 per cent of all excavated settlement), where there is evidence for relatively high levels of engagement with surrounding farmsteads, as shown through the distribution of material culture (see below, p. 396 and Ch. 6). In the Central Belt and South the situation is more variable, with networks of roadside settlements seemingly spread throughout, but with higher concentrations in landscape zones to the east, notably the Lincolnshire and Rutland limestone, London Basin, North Kent Plain and the Low Weald. The remaining parts of the South have very low numbers of roadside settlements, though, as we have seen, nucleated, ‘village’ sites are relatively well represented elsewhere, particularly on the South Wessex Downs, where some appear to have developed to substantial sizes during the late Roman period. Hillforts form the only remaining settlement category considered in this study. They have been included where they have evidence of occupation in the later Iron Age, though a few also show occupation into the Roman period, particularly in upland Wales.

The proportions of major settlement types discussed here of course mask significant variables, as outlined in the regional chapters. Nevertheless, even at this broad scale of analysis, they do illustrate some of the fundamental differences in the make-up of rural settlement across England and Wales. These differences are further highlighted by examining in more detail the most prolific settlement type, the farmstead, which has been classified into open, enclosed and complex forms (see Ch. 2 for details). With this settlement type we can observe a clear divide between southern and eastern areas (the South, East, Central Belt and North-East regions), which include higher proportions of complex farmsteads, compared with the north and western regions (South-West, Upland Wales and the Marches, Central West, and the North), where enclosed farmsteads are totally dominant, and complex farmsteads are very poorly represented (fig. 12.7). There is of course variation within this twofold division, with, for example, Upland Wales and the South-West having more evidence for open farmsteads than complex farmsteads, and the Central Belt having complex farmsteads occurring almost as frequently as enclosed farmsteads, though with the former largely restricted to the major river valleys. The South contains a relatively low proportion of complex farmsteads (26 per cent) compared to other ‘lowland’ regions, and the distribution of these is concentrated to the north and west, part of the main band of such farmsteads sweeping up from the south-west to north-east.

Levels of complexity in farmstead morphology not only differ across the country, but also through time, at least in certain regions (fig. 12.8). During the late Iron Age enclosed farmsteads dominated the settlement pattern across England and Wales, though there was somewhat more diversity in southern and eastern regions of England, with a spread of open and complex farmsteads. These regions also experienced the greatest degree of change during the early to mid-Roman period, when there was a steep rise in the number of complex farmsteads at the expense of other forms, especially within the Central Belt. The apparent dynamism in settlement form witnessed in these central England landscapes appears to be associated with other changes, for example in building types, organisation of the landscape and farming practices, all of which point to this region being among the most integrated, agriculturally productive and socially complex of all areas of the Roman province.

Aside from providing clear evidence for differences in the regional character of rural settlement, what do such patterns in site type and morphology really reflect? Notwithstanding the inherent problems with dating (discussed in Ch. 1 and below), it is clear that the regional trends observed within settlements of the Roman period, at least in part, reflect the variable settlement patterns and social structures of pre-Roman Britain. For example, it has just been remarked that in the late Iron Age, complex farmsteads, defined by systems of (usually irregular) conjoined enclosures, were already a feature of parts of the North-East and Central Belt regions, especially in the valleys of the West Anglian Plain and, to a lesser extent, the Upper Thames Valley. There appears to have been a significant increase in the number of such farmsteads during the Roman period, in parallel with developments in their physical form such as the emergence of more regular, rectilinear enclosure complexes, but their basic distribution remained fairly constant. Elsewhere, there is continuity in the basic form of settlements in the South-West, Wales and the Marches, and the North, where all regions are dominated by variants of more simple, enclosed farmsteads in the late Iron Age and Roman periods. In parts of southern and central Britain, the well-known concentration of elite Roman rural settlements, defined by villa architecture, is largely coterminous with areas of late Iron Age coin distribution and the ostensibly elite centres...
of power termed oppida (cf. Howgego 2013, 23–5, fig. 3).

The distribution of roadside settlements and walled towns also shows a concentration in parts of central and southern Britain, possibly reflecting increased population levels from the late Iron Age and the existence of developed hierarchical social systems (see below, p. 416 and vol. 3). However, their development along the major Roman road networks to the north, particularly to the northwest, would appear to represent more of an ‘implantation’ upon existing settlement patterns, rather than an organic, internally driven development. Even in the Central West very few roadside settlements appear to have had late Iron Age origins (notwithstanding the problems of dating Iron Age sites in this region), with many developing from military establishments (forts or supply depots; see Ch. 8). The sense of social and economic disjuncture of these sites (and the *vicus* settlements of the regions of Upland Wales and the Marches and the North) from the surrounding rural population is perhaps reflected in the relative lack of ‘Roman’ material culture within surrounding farmsteads compared with areas further south and east.
For the most part then the rural settlement patterns of the Roman period would seem to have owed a great deal to pre-existing variations in regional settlement and social structures. Ultimately, however, there is only so much that settlement type and form alone can tell us of such differences, and it is clear that the regional character of rural settlement is also expressed through variations in architecture, material culture, farming practices and the wider landscape context.

**Buildings**

Analysis of buildings across England and Wales in Chapter 3 showed very striking regional and more localised patterns in building form and construction material, much of which serve to highlight the increased level of diversity within the Central Belt region in particular (see Ch. 5). Simple, single-roomed buildings (circular and rectangular, masonry and non-masonry) still predominate, but there is a wider array of multi-roomed buildings, of varying sizes and levels of architectural pretension. At the upper end of architectural scale and elaboration, the westernmost landscape zones of the Cotswolds and Avon Vale contain the greatest concentration of wealth in the province, with some of the courtyard villas reaching a palatial scale within a Romano-British context.

Villa buildings are also to be found in numbers across much of the South, and to a lesser extent the North-East, though in these regions there appears to be more of an architectural (and social?) divide between villa houses and the dwellings of the majority of the rural population. Among all the regions, the East stands out as having a very low proportion of sites with building remains, probably because of the relative lack of masonry-built structures, especially on farmsteads (Ch. 6). The few excavated villa buildings from the region are relatively modest in scale and elaboration, and, overall, it seems that socio-economic status is reflected more in portable wealth than architecture, as discussed below.

Building traditions in the far west and north tend to be less diverse, though the structures themselves could still be quite complex. Furthermore these buildings often reflect very distinct regional styles, such as the oval structures and courtyard houses in west Cornwall (Ch. 10) and the drystone, masonry roundhouses of North-West Wales (Ch. 11). This distinctiveness appears allied to an inherent conservatism, as there is little evidence for any major developments in architectural form from the later first century A.D., although an increase in drystone construction is evident in some areas.

**Material culture**

If the architectural elements complement the general settlement evidence in helping to define regionality in the countryside, then the picture derived from associated material culture is a little more complicated. Roadside settlements, military *vici* and villas across the province have been shown with few exceptions to produce a wider range of object types than farmsteads, and, almost always, in much greater numbers. All are dominated by coinage, along with an array of different items of personal adornment, with hairpins and finger rings being particularly prevalent in many villas. Certain artefact classes such as writing and lighting equipment, religious items and objects associated with recreation, while always rare, are very infrequently found in other types of settlement. Such objects may represent a wider, ‘pan-Roman’ influence that transcends regional differences, reflecting a greater level of connectivity between people at these types of site across the province (see vol. 3).

![Fig. 12.9. Percentages of excavated farmsteads with indication of pottery present by project region](image-url)
There are, however, more regional differences in the material culture assemblages of farmsteads, almost certainly reflecting different attitudes, identities and levels of engagement within provincial society and economy, topics that will be more fully explored in volumes 2 and 3. For the present, we highlight such regional variability through the presence/absence of some, more commonly encountered, object types. Pottery is by far the most ubiquitous object type on farmsteads across England and Wales, although of course there is major variability in the types of wares and forms (e.g. see Booth 2004 for the Upper Thames Valley). In the Central Belt, South and East regions the presence of pottery on farmsteads is virtually guaranteed, but in the Central West, Upland Wales and Marches and, particularly, the North, up to 10 per cent of farmsteads appear to be completely aceramic (Fig. 12.9). There is also a great difference in the size of quantified assemblages along these regional divisions, as shown in Fig. 12.10. Where farmsteads in the western and northern regions do receive pottery, it is generally in much reduced quantities, with, for example, only two farmstead assemblages from the North region totalling more than 500 sherds.

These sites, Wooperton Quarry and Murton High Crags, both in Northumberland, also contained imported continental pottery (samian and amphorae), with Wooperton Quarry thought to be associated with military activity along the Devil’s Causeway Roman road (Ansell 2004; see Ch. 9).

Aside from pottery, there is a wide range of object types on farmsteads, though there are distinct regional variations in representation of even the most commonly encountered items, as shown in Fig. 12.11. The farmsteads from the East region stand out as being particularly conspicuous with many artefact types (see Ch. 6), and particularly with coins, which have been found on c. 60 per cent of excavated sites. The comparable figures for the South and Central Belt are somewhat less (41–44 per cent), and there is then a distinct drop in the North-East (27 per cent) and in the regions further north and west, with only 18 per cent in Upland Wales and the Marches and 10 per cent in the North. Such differences may reflect differing levels of engagement with the Roman economy, though it must be emphasised that even in the East region, where there is a long tradition of metal detecting, the actual numbers of coins recovered from farmsteads is generally very low.

**Fig. 12.10.** Density of quantified late Iron Age and Roman pottery on farmsteads across England and Wales
There is also a higher representation of brooches on farmsteads in the Central Belt, East and South regions than elsewhere (30–38 per cent), with only a slightly lower percentage from farmsteads in Upland Wales and the Marches (27 per cent). The North region has the lowest occurrence of this object type, being recovered from just 6 per cent of farmsteads, although other personal items were more commonly found, notably glass bangles. Detailed consideration of the reasons behind the very different distributions of some types of dress accessories and other objects associated with personal display is reserved for volume 3, although these differences must reflect distinctive regional expressions of cultural identity through clothing, jewellery and hairstyles.

The more commonly found utilitarian objects associated with textile- and food-processing are more evenly spread across farmsteads in all regions, with objects in the former category most prevalent in Upland Wales and the Marches, and those in the latter in the North. This undoubtedly reflects the general ubiquity of these activities within farmsteads all across the Roman province, though the slightly lower incidence on farmsteads in the Central Belt may reflect a greater emphasis on the centralised production of textiles and processing of cereals, presumably for the most part at the numerous roadside settlements. This interpretation is supported by the relatively high concentration of millstones, which tend to occur more often at nucleated sites in this region (Ch. 5; cf. Shaffrey 2015).

Animal and plant remains

The assessment of the regional character of rural settlement and landscape through environmental material (plant and animal remains) is problematic owing to the differential levels of preservation, with a marked bias towards the south and east (e.g. FIG. 12.12). In addition, the differences between individual site assemblages even in close proximity to one another can be very marked, although a simple analysis of the relative frequencies of the main domesticates, for example, has shown that certain landscape zones and regions as a whole do have distinctive characteristics (FIG. 12.13). Cattle form the most dominant domesticate within excavated settlements of most regions, and generally have an increased presence over time, at least as indicated in the data-rich regions of the south and east. Sheep/goat form almost as high a proportion as cattle in the admittedly small number of assemblages from Wales and Marches, presumably due to the greater suitability of sheep-farming in this upland zone. The similarly small group of assemblages from the North region is very much cattle-dominated, perhaps associated with military supply networks, as recently suggested by Stallibrass (2009; see Ch. 9), though the lack of material culture on farmsteads and evidence of relationships with the military vici may suggest otherwise.

Within the data-rich regions it is the East that appears most cattle-dominant, though there is still much inter-site variation, with the greatest emphasis on cattle herds being on sites to the south, corresponding with a similar high representation in the adjacent London Basin zone of the South region (see Chs 4 and 6). This may well be connected with the supply of cattle to the major urban centres of London and Colchester. In the Central Belt, there appears to be a clear difference in the proportions of main domesticates within different farmstead types that is not so evident elsewhere. Notable is the greater dominance of cattle within complex farmsteads, which probably reflects their location in the major river valleys, giving access to large areas of lush pastureland (see Ch. 5).
The evidence from plant remains is similarly affected by levels of preservation and recovery, with great variability between sites. Of the cereal assemblages, spelt wheat dominates across all regions, although barley seems to have been just as widespread in its presence, if not in its relative abundance (nearly always remaining as a minor crop component), especially in the North and North-East (see Chs 7 and 9). Other cultivated crops found in most regions, to a greater or lesser extent, include emmer wheat, free-threshing (bread) wheat, rye, flax and oats, along with a range of horticultural plants. No clear regional patterns can be detected in the cultivation of main cereal crops at the level of analysis conducted here (but see vol. 2 for more detailed analysis), though there are certain landscapes that show more distinctive patterns within the minor crops.

**FIG. 12.12.** Distribution of animal bone assemblages across England and Wales (sites with >100 NISP)

**FIG. 12.13.** Relative frequency of cattle, sheep/goat and pig by project region (mean percentages from sites with >100 NISP)
Rye, for example, has been found to be relatively prolific (c. 20–30 per cent of sites) within the London Basin, the East Anglian Fens and adjacent Breckland, and to some extent in the vicinity of Wroxeter and East Wales. Flax, on the other hand, is rarely found in most areas, but has been recovered from quite a number of sites in the Sussex Coastal Plain, The Fens and Upper Thames Valley. Horticultural crops such as cabbages, carrots, beets, appear more commonly in eastern parts of the Central Belt around the Fens, which coincides with the only major concentration of lazybed cultivation trenches in any region, itself implying a particular specialisation in this region (see Chs 5 and 6). Such landscape-scale variations reflect the complexity of land use throughout the Roman province, governed not only by environmental factors, but also by local traditions and the demands of the market.

The botanical data collected as part of this project make it difficult to assess the level of intensity of arable cultivation within the different regions, although the Central Belt and South regions did have the highest percentages (30–37 per cent) of sites where spelt was recorded as being relatively abundant. In contrast, of the 23 assemblages with spelt from the North region, just two (8.6 per cent) were recorded as having this cereal in abundance, although this low figure may be affected by poor preservation. Even if this was not a significant factor, such patterns do not necessarily point to a greater intensity of spelt production in central and southern regions, although there are other elements, such as the distribution of corndryers, which do suggest this. The distribution of corndryers across England and Wales in the later third century A.D. is shown in FIG. 12.14, when they were at their most extensive (in terms of territory covered if not actual numbers). The Central Belt region has by far the greatest concentration, which extends into the western parts of the South region, most notably the Central Downs of Hampshire and Wiltshire (see Ch. 4 Case Study). The evidence overall does suggest a greater level of arable cultivation in at least parts of the central and southern regions, which more or less corresponds with the patterns of land use in the medieval period (Roberts and Wrathmell 2002, 60, fig. 3.1).
FIG. 12.15. Distribution of excavated late Iron Age and Roman field systems and trackways, across England and Wales.
Landscape organisation

Much of the evidence outlined above has related to the regional character of rural settlement itself, including associated buildings, material culture and environmental remains. Yet a fundamentally important element of local and regional identity is the character of the rural landscape surrounding these settlements, which can comprise complex patchworks of woodland, meadow, wetland, open pasture and fields, in some cases linked by sequences of trackways. The construction and maintenance of field systems and trackways, in particular, have been argued as important constructs in the social identity of rural populations, representing deep-rooted social, tenurial and political arrangements (Chadwick 2013; forthcoming).

The regional chapters in this volume have included discussions of the evidence for excavated field systems and trackways, while also noting where tracts of such organised landscape appear through cropmark evidence and/or earthwork survey. Figure 12.15 shows the distribution of the excavated evidence across England and Wales. In terms of their function, fields can, for the most part, be directly related to food production, either for livestock husbandry or crop cultivation, and, in this regard, their relative paucity in, for example, much of Upland Wales, the Northumbrian Uplands and the Kentish Weald may reflect a lack of intensity in farming in these landscapes. Conversely, the mass of evidence from many parts of central, eastern and southern England mirrors the evidence noted above from environmental remains and agricultural structures for more intensive farming, particularly arable cultivation and animal husbandry.

Unfortunately, in most areas, the dating of trackways and field systems is poor, and most may well have developed piecemeal over centuries. Where more refined dating of fields and trackways is possible, in parts of the south and east, it appears that, while many originated in the late Iron Age or earlier, there was a major expansion during the early to mid-Roman period, concurrent with the expansion in the numbers of complex farmsteads, particularly in the Central Belt. This period of growth for some farmsteads also coincides with a period of significant abandonment for others, such that the two are likely to be intimately connected. This reorganisation of landscapes, including the settlements, field systems and trackways, as in the Upper Thames Valley in the early second century, will have had a profound impact on the people affected. It is almost certainly no coincidence that these changes, with their greater emphasis on boundaries (cf. Hingley 1990; Knight 2007), occur when we have the first evidence for the commodification of land, as exemplified by the early second century A.D. writing tablet found in London, detailing the sale of a five-acre wood in Kent (Tomlin 1996). Further possible evidence for such commodification comes from an early Roman will found at Tomen-y-Mur in north Wales, which provides details of an estate (Tomlin 2001), although the nature of any property remains unknown, and we should not assume that the buying and selling of land was common practice throughout the province.

Although there are indications that many field systems underwent some kind of transformation in the later Roman period, either going out of use, or at least becoming less archaeologically visible (e.g. silted-up ditches), it is clear from the Fields of Britannia project that many were likely to have continued as landscape features well into the post-Roman period, with around two-thirds of excavated late Roman fields sharing a common orientation or alignment with the historic landscape of today (Rippon et al. 2015, 323). Furthermore, it was not just the fields and pathways that showed continuity into the post-Roman period, as pollen analysis suggests continued arable cultivation, at least in parts of the ‘lowland’ regions in the south and east (ibid.).

THE POLITICAL REGIONS OF ROMAN BRITAIN

Tribes and civitates

The various geographic divisions through which previous authors have studied Roman Britain have been noted above and discussed in Chapter 1. Aside from syntheses based purely on modern administrative regions (e.g. Taylor 2007 and various county-based studies), the usual basis is a broad north-west to south-east topographic and ‘cultural’ divide, the latter based primarily upon archaeological evidence (e.g. presence/absence of villas). For the late Iron Age, further sub-divisions, primarily of south-eastern parts of Britain, have sometimes been attempted based upon aspects of the material culture, including different ceramic styles (e.g. Cunliffe 2005, 144–77, figs 7.1–2, but cf. Moore 2011), and Iron Age coins (Creighton 2000). Distinctive pre-conquest pottery styles have characterised an ‘Aylesford-Swarling Culture’ in parts of Kent, Essex, Surrey, Berkshire, Bedfordshire and Cambridgeshire, though there is little in the settlement patterns that directly correlate with such boundaries. However, the concentration of late Iron Age and early Roman cremation burials in this zone is another defining characteristic of this ‘culture’, which does suggest certain shared cultural values (see vol. 3).
Spatial analysis of late Iron Age coins has been instrumental in attempts to reconstruct late Iron Age polities or ‘tribes’, which are generally believed to have later evolved into the primary administrative units (civitates) within the Roman province (Allen 1960; Millett 1990, 65). The concept of these nineteen ‘tribes’, or peoples, to which later Roman epigraphic evidence has added further civitates, has remained more or less unchanged since Rivet’s influential Town and Country in Roman Britain (1958), with each believed to have been centred upon a civitas capital, where met the local council (curia), drawn from elite landowners, who exercised power within their territory. In reality, very little is known of the specific details of this administrative set-up in Britain, and even the very concept of the civitas capital as a legal category of settlement in Roman Britain has been called – unconvincingly – into question (Laurence 2001, 90; cf. Creighton 2006, 76–7). In addition, there are likely to have been large areas that lay outside of direct ‘civitas’ control, perhaps for exploitation of mineral resources, including the large tracts of northern and western Britain with more or less permanent military establishments (Mattingly 2006, 261–3, fig. 10).

The central places of many civitates are identified from either written (e.g. Ptolemy’s Geography, Antonine Itinerary, Ravenna Cosmography) or epigraphic sources (e.g. the Cornovii at Wroxeter (RIB 288) or the Silures at Caerwent (RIB 311)), while the distribution of certain Iron Age coin types have been invoked to help define their spatial extent (e.g. the Durotriges, Iceni), but for the most part we have no clue to help us define boundaries or even to be certain of the existence of a particular civitas. For example, although regularly marked on maps of Roman Britain as one of its tribes, there is no evidence for a civitas Trinovantum. It has also long been argued that certain civitates were artificial Roman creations, for example the Belgae and the Cantii of southern Britain (Rivet and Smith 1979, 267, 299). Given these unknowns, there is a danger of circularity in arguing for the correlation of particular types of evidence with particular tribes.

It is therefore very much a moot point whether there might be any expectation of a correlation with settlement data, which, as we have seen, have allowed us to define, on the one hand, our eight regions and, on the other, within them, certain distinctive landscape zones, such as the Fenland or the Weald. Setting these zones aside it is not otherwise possible to see archaeologically the multiplicity of civitates through which the Central Belt and South regions were administered. More peripheral zones, such as the South-West, may be slightly more distinctive, though even this example, generally regarded as coinciding with the civitas of the Dumnoni, would be seen to encompass two very different landscapes, as expressed through all aspects of the settlement pattern (see Ch. 10). The territories attributed to the Demetiae in south-west Wales and to the Deceangli in north Wales could relate approximately to the quite distinct differences in the settlement patterns observed here (Ch. 11), while further east, the territory of the Iceni may correspond with the distinctive character of settlement in the north of our East region (Ch. 6). In the north of England there is no sign of a ‘Brigantian territory’, with distinctive patterns of rural settlement instead lying to the east and west of the Pennines, and, from the early second century A.D., to the north and south of Hadrian’s Wall (Chs 7 and 9). The civitas Carvetiorum, centred on Carlisle and only known from Roman epigraphic sources (RIB 933, 3525, 3526) appears to be an entirely Roman construct of the early third century, its boundaries impossible to discern from the settlement evidence.

It is in central and southern regions where most of our excavated data lies, and the geographic patterns observed here largely cut through all the traditional divisions of tribe/civitas. The main concentration of complex farmsteads, for example, cuts through at least eight civitates, while the major grouping of courtyard villas in the West Country covers parts of the territories assumed to belong to, respectively, the Dobunni, Belgae and Durotriges. There are some patterns in the data that may correlate with a distinct social identity, such as the concentration and longevity of circular building forms to the south and east of the Fens, though even here the distinction is gradually eroded over time (see Chs 3 and 5).

What then did the civitates mean to the inhabitants of Roman Britain? The epigraphic record, such as it is, for the ordo and the respublica, would tend to confirm a sense of civitas-related identity among the upper levels of society, at least in the second and third centuries, the period to which most of this evidence relates. Among these, some were proud to display their origins on their tombstones and other inscriptions, for example, the civitas Dobunna (RIB 621), the c(ivis) Cornovia (RIB 639) or the natione Catuallauna (RIB 1065). Archaeological evidence, on the other hand, for shared cultural values across the social spectrum of a civitas remains elusive and, for the reasons given, perhaps not to be expected. It may well be that much of the rural population continued to exist for the most part as a mosaic of smaller, local communities. This question of identity will be explored in more depth within volume 3 of this series.
Provinces of Britannia
The Roman province of Britannia underwent a number of major political and administrative changes over the course of its existence: the division into Britannia Superior and Britannia Inferior during the early third century and then further divisions into four provinces almost a century later, as part of widespread changes in the late empire (cf. Mattingly 2006, 227–30). Individually, these later Roman institutional structures have rarely been the focus of academic synthesis in Roman Britain, not least because there is little evidence for and, consequently, little agreement on their boundaries. However, White (2007) recently produced an account of Britannia Prima, a province he has defined in western Britain with its capital argued to be at Cirencester.

For the division of the early third century, the rationale is seen to be the reduction in power from a single governor in command of all three legions, to two, one in control of the two legions based at Caerleon and Chester and in Superior, the other with one legion at York in Inferior. Apart from an inscription from Bordeaux assigning Lincoln to Inferior, further definition of the respective provinces remains conjecture (for the complexities of the evidence for the reorganisation, see Frere 1999, 166–9). Addressing military and political needs seems to have provided the rationale for this reorganisation, rather than financial and administrative concerns, which could have separated the tax regime of the agriculturally productive regions of the South, Central Belt and East regions from that of the rest of Britannia.

Until further epigraphic evidence emerges, major uncertainties also remain in defining the boundaries of the four or five late Roman provinces, as acknowledged by White (2007, 36–42, fig. 11). Most interpretations agree that the major divisions lay along an east–west axis in southern Britain (Maxima Caesariensis to the east and Britannia Prima to the west), with Britannia Secunda and Flavia Caesariensis to the north. On the face of it, there is little in the broad patterns of late Roman data from the current project that conforms to these proposed provincial divisions, with the highest density of excavated settlement dating to this period lying right across the Central Belt, possibly within two or three provinces (see Chronological Patterns below). However, there are some patterns of this period that do exhibit more of an east–west split, including a slightly greater emphasis on third-century settlement ‘abandonment’ in the east and ‘establishment’ in the west, and, more clearly, a major increase in late Roman villa construction in parts of the west. Furthermore, many of these western villas developed into more elaborate courtyard forms at this date, including a number of ‘super-villas’ (see Ch. 3), indicating a great concentration of wealth in this region. There is also a slight shift in the main concentration of corndryers to parts of the south-west during the fourth century, possibly part of an expansion of arable agriculture associated with the economic base of the late villas. It remains uncertain if these late Roman patterns do relate in any way to the changes in provincial administration, but if so, as with the civitates, they only really relate to the upper levels of society.

CHRONOLOGICAL PATTERNS
A key part of this project has been to assess the complexities of chronological change in the rural landscape, from the late Iron Age to the early post-Roman period. The shifting patterns of rural settlements coming in and out of use, expanding, declining and changing form are at the heart of most of the analyses undertaken in this study. The inherent problems in dating and phasing the excavated sites in our dataset have been duly acknowledged and discussed, both in the introduction to this volume and within the regional chapters. A particular problem has been the variable chronological resolution within ceramic assemblages of different regions, and the fact that certain areas may have been largely aceramic both before and after the main periods of Roman occupation. Ultimately, however, we have been at the mercy of excavators themselves, relying upon their conclusions that have been drawn from specialist analysis of pottery and other datable objects, sometimes complemented by scientific dating. Wherever the reported dating has been vague, such sites have been omitted from any chronological analysis. Nevertheless, we would hope, given the volume of data collected, that this analysis should be able to provide a reasonable picture of long-term chronological trends across England and Wales.

REGIONAL CHRONOLOGIES
Regional and sub-regional chronological patterns have been extensively explored in Chapters 4–11, and have demonstrated the complexity and variation between different landscape zones, different settlement types and landscape features. Notwithstanding these more intricate patterns, a broader comparison of the numbers of settlements in use across the regions may be instructive in telling us something of how the focus and intensity of rural landscape exploitation shifted over time. Figure 12.16 displays the trends of settlements in use over time among the four regions with most
data (from southern and eastern areas), divided between those that have more of an early Roman emphasis (later first to early second century A.D.) and those with settlement numbers peaking somewhat later, in the later second to early third centuries. For the most part the differences are not so marked, with all regions here having the highest number of settlements in use at some point in the second century A.D. The South and East regions are quite similar in almost reaching their peak in the later first century, then remaining fairly constant until the end of the second century, when there is a gradual decline in numbers. The Central Belt and North-East reach their height in settlement numbers during the later second century A.D. with only a slight drop thereafter, although this becomes more pronounced in the North-East, especially during the fourth century (with the exception of the Vale of York and Mowbray; see Ch. 7).

By comparison, the northern and western regions are a little more varied (FIG. 12.17), though this may be partly due to the smaller number of excavated settlements, and the increased problems with dating sites in these regions. However, nearly all still appear to peak in numbers during the second century, with quite a sharp fall-off in the third century, this being particularly pronounced for the North region. The only exception to this pattern is in the South-West, where there is a spike in numbers during the late Iron Age, a subsequent fall and then an increase during the second and third centuries. This unusual pattern is due to the very different chronological trajectories shown by

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FIG. 12.16. Comparison of settlement chronology by southern and eastern regions expressed as percentages of sites from each region in use

FIG. 12.17. Comparison of settlement chronology by northern and western regions expressed as percentages of sites from each region in use
Fig. 12.18. Kernel density plot of excavated settlements dating to the late Iron Age and early Roman period.
FIG. 12.19. Kernel density plot of excavated settlements dating to the middle and late Roman period.
the settlements in Devon and Cornwall, part of
more fundamental differences between these areas
as discussed in Chapter 10.

The different chronological emphases of the
data-rich south, central and eastern regions in
particular can perhaps be better visualised through
the settlement density maps in FIGs 12.18 and
12.19. Still bearing in mind that these only
represent the excavated data, there can be seen a
gradual change from a focus upon parts of the
south and east during the late Iron Age and early
Roman period to one that lies largely across the
Central Belt by the late Roman period. Parts of
the West Anglian Plain (including the Ouse and
Nene Valleys) appear to remain densely settled
throughout, but the main difference in the third
and fourth centuries A.D. is a much greater
settlement emphasis (though not always an
increase in settlement numbers) in the west of
the Central Belt region, rather than in the east of the
South region, where the decline in settlement
numbers in some areas is quite marked.

The overall chronological emphasis on the
second century A.D. is clear, and contradicts the
long-held view that the later Roman period
represented the ‘flowering of the countryside and
the culmination of Roman Britain’s achievement’
(Millett 1990, 181). This idea was based largely on
the evidence from villas, particularly those from
the west of England, some of which demonstrated
dramatic architectural wealth during the later
third and early fourth centuries A.D. (see Chs 4
and 5). However, when the much greater number
of farmsteads are taken into account, the picture
changes quite considerably, and parts of western
and central England then appear more as later
Roman ‘bubbles’ of wealth and prosperity, with
rural settlement numbers elsewhere declining
significantly. Although the development of large
village settlements on places like the Salisbury
Plain during the late Roman period may hint at
some population shift to nucleated centres, the
evidence is very mixed, with many of the roadside
settlements in the south-east and east of England,
for instance, exhibiting a decline in fortunes at this
time (see below, pp. 416–17 and Chs 4 and 6).
The prosperity of major towns is also very mixed
during the later third and fourth centuries, with
many of those in the Midlands and north of
England (e.g. Leicester, Lincoln, Brough-on-
Humber and Carlisle) seemingly in some decline
after the second century A.D. (Bidwell 2015, 121).

While a fall in population is an obvious
explanation for the general decline in settlement
numbers during the late Roman period (see below,
p. 416), accounting for such a change is more
difficult. We might invoke a range of reasons, such
as changes in the late Roman administrative
system, as just discussed, or else a combination of
factors, including, for the south-east of England at
least, the decline in the Wealden iron industry or
the militarisation of the coast, any or all of which
may have had an influence (see Ch. 4). What is
more apparent is that the gradual shift in focus of
settlement to the Central Belt and western part of
the South region is part of an agricultural
intensification in this area, as noted above through
the greater prominence of complex farmsteads
and concentration of corn-dryers. These lands are
likely to have made up the ‘bread basket’ of late
Roman Britain, from which grain and other
produce was exported to sites elsewhere in Britain,
and, if ancient authors such as Zosimus (III, 5, 2;
in Ireland 1996, 149) are to be credited, in
considerable quantity to the Roman armies on the
Rhineland (see vol. 2).

CHRONOLOGICAL ‘EVENTS’
The graphs and maps discussed above provide
some measure of the broad, shifting patterns of
settlement over the course of the first to fourth
centuries A.D., but they do not really give much
insight into shorter term changes, or chronological
‘events’, as far as these can be detected at all. One
of the key questions to address in this regard must
be that of the Roman conquest itself, and what
affect this had upon existing settlement patterns.
Most regions seem to have experienced a significant
growth in ‘new’ settlement during the late Iron
Age, with as many as 85 per cent of sites of this
date in the East region, for example, apparently
being established de novo (compared to c. 60 per
cent in other southern and eastern regions where
such chronological resolution was at all possible).
Therefore the apparent proliferation of settlements
being newly established in parts of the south and
east during the early post-conquest period (FIG.
12.20, top) can probably be seen as a continuation
of this longer term trend rather than as a response
to the invasion itself, though the latter did initiate
considerable inward migration through the army,
its dependants, its suppliers and veteran settlement.

Possibly more telling are the indications of
settlement ‘abandonment’, or at least shift, at this
time, as shown in FIG. 12.20, below. For the most
part, continuity of settlement from the late Iron
Age seems to have been the norm, at least until the
second century A.D., though there was a
concentration of sites (albeit still not in high
numbers) showing abandonment/shift in the early
post-conquest period to the south and west of the
Fens. It is of course not always the best course to
attempt to relate such archaeological patterns to
historical events, but at least the possibility must be
borne in mind that this settlement disruption came
about owing to conditions associated with the
CONCLUSIONS

Fig. 12.20. Settlement establishment and 'abandonment' during the early post-Claudian conquest period.
Claudian conquest. As we do not have the ability yet to distinguish archaeologically between an abandonment precipitated by the conquest of the 40s and one attributable to the Boudican rebellion of A.D. 60/1, one or more military contexts is of course also possible.

The main concentration of abandoned sites of this date is in an area that also saw a significant number of new establishments, and therefore we might be seeing the start of a reordering of the landscape, with the expansion of some farmsteads at the expense of others. This is arguably the beginning of the formation of villa estates, a process that accelerated in this area into the second century when new establishments continued to outnumber abandonments (fig. 12.21). This period of readjustment may in effect mark the start of ‘Roman Britain’ in this area, in terms of the differentiation from late Iron Age patterns of settlement and landscape. This has been recently argued by Thompson (2015, 130) for the Hertfordshire region, where a date in the A.D. 60s was suggested.

By the end of the first century A.D., the limits of the province had more or less settled at the line of the Stanegate, between Corbridge and Carlisle, and the client kingdoms to the south of this had all been incorporated into the provincial administrative structure. It was over the next century that, as we have seen, settlement numbers across almost all the province reached their height in numbers, in what could, in terms of the extent of the farmed landscape and inferred population numbers, be regarded as the period of greatest opportunity for Roman Britain. One measure of this is the scale of investment in towns and public building through the second century; another, the investment in the frontier systems of Hadrian’s Wall and the short-lived Antonine Wall. The expansion of settlement numbers during the second century was far from uniform across the province, however, as seen in fig. 12.21. ‘New’ settlements were relatively scarce within many parts of the South region, with the exception of around London, and their number, particularly in the eastern half of the region, is comparable with the level of settlement ‘abandonments’ (Ch. 4). This contrasts markedly with the evident dynamism of the central-river valley and Fen-edge landscapes and the concentration of ‘new’ establishments in the west of the Central Belt region.

The rapid expansion and transformation in settlement and landscape during the early to mid-second century in central parts of Britain have been previously noted (e.g. Booth et al. 2007, 43; Fincham 2002, 73–7), though the cause is not entirely understood. Increased population numbers associated with the growth in numbers of new settlements must lie at the root of the expansion and the annual cohort of retiring legionaries and auxiliaries choosing to remain in the province where they had served, together numbering between about 800 and 1600 each year, was surely an important source, rather than any increased fertility of the indigenous population (Mann 1983; Fulford 1999). At the same time, if we are to believe the evidence of traded pottery as a proxy for the movement of cereals and livestock, the provincial administration looked increasingly to the agriculturally productive lands of Britannia for supplies to support the establishment and manning of frontiers and the other military garrisons of the north and west. From the Hadrionic period, beginning with the movement of coarse wares, BB1 from south-east Dorset and BB2 from the Thames Estuary, then, through the second century, a stream of provincial-made wares (mortaria, coarse and colour-coated wares) reached the northern frontier from the South, Central Belt and, latterly, the North-East regions (Fulford 2004, 314–6; Tyers 1996, 122–4, 127–9, 132–4, 182–8, 190–1). While supply of the military might be guaranteed year-on-year, there were also the towns to feed, several only founded in the second century, the combination providing a clear context for the rapid expansion of farmsteads, particularly in the Central Belt. That there might have been concerns about the province’s capacity to sustain its military establishment is evidenced by developments in the Fenland in the Central Belt region (Ch. 5). Here the creation of extensive drainage systems, such as the Car Dyke, and the intensification of settlement in the second century around the Fen edge, suggest intervention by the procurator. The same may also be true of the landscape changes evident in the Upper Thames Valley.

Increases in the numbers of settlements were not confined to the Central Belt and the South regions. It has been argued in Chapters 8, 9 and 11 that, notwithstanding the problems of dating, the apparent growth in settlement numbers during the early second century in parts of the Central West, North, and Upland Wales and Marches regions, was probably connected with an expansion of farming, associated at least in part with meeting the needs of the military in the west and north. However, it is still likely that most of the agricultural produce required by the military in Britain was not sourced locally, but part of longer distance supply networks from further east and south, as noted above.

The changes seen in the second century A.D. across almost the entire province also need to be seen against developments elsewhere in the empire, especially those just across the English Channel. Studies of Roman rural settlement in
FIG. 12.21. Settlement establishment and ‘abandonment’ during the second century A.D.
FIG. 12.22. Settlement 'establishment' and 'abandonment' during the third century A.D.
**Fig. 12.23.** Settlement 'establishment' and 'abandonment' during the fourth century A.D.
north-west (Courbot-Dewerdt 2003) and north-east (Rippon 1996; Habermehl 2011) Gaul have indicated significant transformations in settlement form, landscape and agricultural practices during the later first and particularly the early second century, including a decline in ‘native’ farmsteads and a rise in villas. These developments are largely attributed to broader changes within the context of evolving Roman provinces, particularly the creation of an institutionalised, political/administrative system resulting in increased socio-economic complexities, alongside the development of urban centres (Habermehl 2011, 78–9). However, it is also suggested that some of the changes may have been due to more direct, coherent and planned schemes of the Roman state (Courbot-Dewerdt 2003, 77).

The remainder of the Romano-British period saw many changes across the province, as outlined above. During the third century, there is increased evidence for settlement abandonment across the whole of the province, but this is particularly pronounced in parts of the east and north (fig. 12.22). In some areas this may represent more of a shift in the focus of settlement rather than actual decline, as for example around the Fens, where there is evidence for major levels of both settlement abandonment and new establishment (the latter particularly high around the town of Durobrivae; Ch. 5). In other areas, however, such as in Kent, the Sussex coast and much of north and north-west England, the third century does appears to be one of genuine settlement decline, probably for a variety of different reasons, as discussed in Chapters 4 and 9. Some connection with the wider third-century instability within the empire must remain a possibility, with the notable decline in rural settlement in parts of north-east Gaul at this time argued to have been due to frequent Germanic raids across the frontier (Hiddink 1999, 186–8). However, if this was the case then the effects in Britain appear to be quite restricted, perhaps limited to regions with greater risk of external threat and where there is more direct emphasis on state/military supply networks (including perhaps the Wealden iron industry; cf. Booth 2011b, 337).

Perhaps the most contentious and problematic chronological ‘event’ remains the ‘end of Roman Britain’. Here, our dataset of rural sites suffers from the usual problems of poor dating, with some regions having little or no identifiable late Roman pottery traditions, and all regions falling into the chronological abyss at the start of the fifth century A.D. Such problems with dating have led to much debate concerning the nature of late Roman Britain and the degree of decline versus levels of continuity into the fifth century and beyond. Some (e.g. Faulkner 2000) have argued for a virtual collapse of Roman institutions during the fourth century, while others have suggested that many elements of the Roman system remained in place well into the fifth century and even longer in certain areas (e.g. Esmonde-Cleary 1989; 2012; White 2007; Cool 2014). Both Gerrard (2013) and Rippon et al. (2015) have recently advocated much greater levels of continuity into the post-Roman period, at least in terms of farming regimes in our Central Belt and South regions, though with the former suggesting an ‘agricultural re-alignment’ away from the previous emphasis on arable production, which was geared towards the demands of the Roman state (Gerrard 2013, 96–117).

The levels of late Roman rural settlement decline observed in our dataset have already been touched on above, with the more intricate variation in different landscape zones discussed in the regional chapters. For all regions except the Central West, the number of settlements thought to have been in use during the later fourth century A.D. was below or at a similar level to that of the late Iron Age. The overall decline in settlement numbers is vividly shown by the comparison of settlement ‘establishment’ and ‘abandonment’ during the fourth century in fig. 12.23. The only area with any slight clustering of ‘new’ settlement was in western parts of the Central Belt, between Gloucester and Ilchester, where, as stated above, there appears to have been the greatest concentration of late Roman-built wealth. However, even in this zone, many of these ‘new’ settlements comprised villas, and it is likely that most of these did in fact develop from earlier farmsteads (see Ch. 5).

In some areas, such as south-east Wales, it has been postulated that the apparent marked decline in settlement numbers during the later fourth century may actually represent a disengagement from the monetary economy and the start of an accretive phase, rather than a genuine fall in population (Evans 2001, 30). It is, however, difficult to explain why the populations of some settlements continued to ‘engage’ with the Roman economy at this time while others (including those in villas) in relatively close proximity did not. Overall, it is hard not to see this fourth-century decline in most areas as genuine, although the ‘collapse’ in settlement numbers at the end of the Roman period is almost certainly not as stark as it would seem (see Population below).

In most regions, c. 80 per cent or more of rural settlements in use in the fourth century are thought to have ceased by the end of the Roman period, or at least there is no explicit evidence for any continuity much into the fifth century. The remaining 20 per cent of sites (c. 175) were argued by the excavators to have some continued
occupation until at least the early post-Roman period, though less than 25 per cent of these proposals were backed up with any scientific dating (mostly radiocarbon with some archaeomagnetic dating), and many of these could still possibly be late Roman in date, as indicated by the sample of radiocarbon dates in Table 12.1. It is clear, however, that further scientific dating (and Bayesian modelling; cf. Bayliss 2009) within sites that appear to stop at the end of the Roman period could have significant impact upon our understanding of this crucial but ill-defined period.

### Table 12.1: Selected Sample of Radiocarbon Dates from Sites with Late Roman Activity Suggesting Possible Activity in the Post-Roman Period

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Site</th>
<th>Reference</th>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Age BP years</th>
<th>Cal. Age A.D. (95%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Frocester, Glos</td>
<td>CAR-1475</td>
<td>Animal bone</td>
<td>1490±60</td>
<td>534–632</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marcham/Frilford, Oxon</td>
<td>OxA-17654</td>
<td>Human bone</td>
<td>1652±24</td>
<td>332–435</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trehurgy, Cornwall</td>
<td>UB-3251</td>
<td>Charcoal</td>
<td>1641±60</td>
<td>250–560</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tubney Wood, Oxon</td>
<td>NZA-34887</td>
<td>Human bone</td>
<td>1588±20</td>
<td>420–540</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Horcott Quarry, Glos</td>
<td>SUERC-28531</td>
<td>Waterlogged stone</td>
<td>1635±30</td>
<td>340–550</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High Post, Wilts</td>
<td>SUERC-32322</td>
<td>Charred grain</td>
<td>1645±25</td>
<td>335–535</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Queen St, Hitchin, Herts</td>
<td>Beta-165924</td>
<td>Human bone</td>
<td>1630±70</td>
<td>250–580</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thames Water Sewage Treatment Works, nr Kintbury, Berks</td>
<td>UBA-8269</td>
<td>Charcoal</td>
<td>1625±35</td>
<td>377–538</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shepton Mallett, Somerset</td>
<td>GU-5293</td>
<td>Human bone</td>
<td>1450±70</td>
<td>430–680</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cwm Gloyne, Dyfed</td>
<td>CAR-1382</td>
<td>Charcoal</td>
<td>1610±60</td>
<td>320–600</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

![Fig. 12.24. Excavated late Roman settlements with indications of continued activity into at least the early fifth century](image)
Sites without scientific dating have generally been suggested as continuing into the post-Roman period either through detailed stratigraphic sequences following on directly from dated late Roman levels (e.g. Baldock, Herts: Fitzpatrick-Matthews 2014, 46–9) or by a very strong late fourth-century signatures in coins, pottery and other finds (e.g. burial from Burton Latimer, Northants, containing a coin of Honorius, A.D. 395–402: Preece and Luke 2012). Occasionally there are also sites where well-dated fifth-century finds are recovered, such as the imported amphora from Piercebridge, Durham (Cool and Mason 2008, 309) and glass beads from Croughton, Northants (Dawson 2008, 68), though these are relatively few in number (cf. Cool 2014).

The distribution of all suggested late/post-Roman sites is shown in FIG. 12.24 and while it is fully recognised that the pattern is biased towards those sites having scientific dating and/or late Roman material culture, the clustering of sites in the Central Belt is notable. This was the area with the strongest late Roman settlement signature, particularly in the west, where White (2007, 204) has argued that elements of the province of Britannia Prima remained into the sixth century a.D. The Central Zone of the Fields of Britannia project (approximately coterminous with our Central Belt region) also exhibited the greatest degree of continuity in landscape exploitation between the late Roman and medieval periods, seen through both the palaeoenvironmental record and in the pattern of fieldscape (Rippon et al. 2015, 219). Clearly this part of central Britain remained a dynamic, well-populated and agriculturally productive region for a long period of time.

RURAL POPULATION

A key question addressed in most studies of Roman Britain has been the size of the population. Since the earliest archaeology-based accounts of the province in the early twentieth century, various methods have been used to suggest anything from half a million to six million, with most recent accounts suggesting something in the order of 2–4 million (Mattingly 2006, 356; Millett 1990, 182–5, table 8.1). One of the main issues with previous population estimates is that, even in the best case scenarios where the figures have been extrapolated from field surveys, little account is taken of regional variation, which, as has been seen, was considerable. Thus, settlement densities drawn mainly from parts of central and eastern England have been used to determine province-wide population statistics, thus probably over-estimating the total figure. Taking into account the relative densities of settlement discussed above, it would therefore seem likely that the population lay towards the lower end of recent estimates, in the vicinity of two million, with the peak reached before the end of the second century.

While the total figure may remain somewhat disputed, there is more agreement that 80–90 per cent of the population lived in the countryside. As a fuller discussion of this rural population will follow in volume 3 of this series, observations here will be limited to a few general comments, based upon the settlement data outlined in this volume.

The first observation to make is that population levels are unlikely to have remained constant over the course of the Roman period. If it is accepted that settlement numbers had some correlation with population size, then it would seem that many areas experienced a significant population expansion during the late Iron Age, as has recently been argued for parts of eastern England (Thompson 2015, 126). Population levels then reached their maximum during the second century a.D., and not, as previously suggested (Millett 1990, 182), during the early fourth century. By the end of the second century the more agriculturally productive areas were probably fairly densely populated, although even here there were still plenty of ‘blank’ spaces, areas of land that were not heavily exploited, as the pattern of new establishments in the west of the Central Belt region into the fourth century bears out. As McCarthy (2013, 26) has argued, ‘it is unlikely that the population of Roman Britain was ever at its “carrying capacity”, which means that there was always land to expand to, if it was necessary’.

The decline in settlement numbers during the later Roman period has been commented on above, though there has been something of a reluctance in the past to accept that this might equate with population decline, instead pointing to increased settlement nucleation at this time, with inhabitants of farmsteads uprooting to move to larger villages and towns (Millett 1990, 205; Taylor 2001, 58–9). Taylor’s study of Roman rural settlement indicated a rise in nucleated settlements paralleled by a decline in smaller farmsteads during the mid- to late Roman period (2007, 112), although, as noted above, the excavated evidence discussed here is more mixed. In the South and East regions nucleated roadside settlements developed fairly early in the post-conquest period, many having evidence for previous Iron Age activity, whereas in the Central Belt and North-East, such settlement nucleation was largely a second-century phenomenon, often developing from Roman military sites. Most nucleated roadside settlements appear to continue into the later Roman period, and therefore end up forming a higher proportion of the rural settlement
pattern because of the decline in farmstead numbers. However, when more detailed account is taken of individual settlements, then, in the East and South regions at least, there is evidence for a distinct decline in fortunes at some sites (e.g. Westhawk Farm and Springhead in Kent (Ch. 4) and Long Melford in Suffolk (Ch. 5)), suggesting that there was not wholesale movement of population to such places. Nor has evidence emerged for widespread expansion within nucleated settlements, including the larger towns, in the third and fourth centuries, with the exception of the growth of ‘villages’ in parts of the Wessex Downs (Ch. 4). Given these considerations, it is likely that there was a genuine fall in the rural population of many areas of Roman Britain during the later third and especially fourth century A.D., a situation comparable to that found across the Channel in Gallia Belgica (van Ossel 1992; Wightman 1985, 243–66).

While the development of towns in Britain from the later first century A.D. onward attracted incomers, a proportion of whom would have come from the country, it is clear then that there is no evidence for large-scale, country-to-town population movement. However, that urban populations could not maintain themselves and continued to depend on inward migration, both from within Britain and from further afield, is borne out by stable isotope analysis of late Roman burials from several towns across Britain. In the case of country dwellers, the proportion of individuals with signatures compatible with an origin in Britain that was not local to the town in question ranged from 14 per cent (Winchester) to 50 per cent (Catterick) (Eckardt et al. 2010, 112–24; 2014).

Whether there were other movements affecting the rural population remains less certain. However, it is a reasonable assumption that the process of conquering Britain resulted in considerable numbers being taken into slavery, some of whom would have remained in Britain, rather than being sold abroad. This would have included captives from campaigns north of Hadrian’s Wall, where we have noted a decline in settlement (Ch. 9). Such activity is not readily identifiable in the archaeo logical record, though some abandonments of settlement elsewhere across Britain could be explained in this way. While it has been suggested above that veteran settlement might account for some of the growth in settlement numbers across the provinces in the later first and second centuries, other explanations might be sought to account for a rapid increase (or decrease) in such numbers in a defined landscape. One example of increase is the spike in settlement numbers within the East Anglian Fens during the mid- to late second century A.D. Whether or not the area was part of an imperial estate (see Ch. 5), it is possible that some of these new settlements were populated by incomers from further afield within Britain, whether as captives of war or the price of treaty settlements with barbarian chiefs in the north. Elsewhere, the establishment of military sites may have acted as a stimulus for migration, which might account for the apparent rise in the number of settlements in the late first/early second century A.D. in the area around Chester (see Ch. 8). As an example of decline, we might note the fall in later Roman settlement numbers in south-west Wales, the territory of the Dematae. While there may be several plausible explanations, we should not exclude the possibility of the forcible removal of a proportion of the population.

Epigraphic evidence for the long-distance movement of groups of people within Britain is found in the inscriptions, probably second century in date, which record building work on Hadrian’s Wall. Groups from three tribes from the south of Britain are recorded, the Catuvelauni, the Dumnonii, and the Durotriges (Fulford 2006). The large number (over 200) of roundhouses recorded at Vindolanda on the Stanegate have been suggested as accommodation for levies from the south working on Wall rebuilding or its infrastructure in the Severan period (Bidwell 1985, 28–31; Birley 2009, 138). One obvious inference to be derived from this evidence is that there were insufficient numbers of workers to be found close to the northern frontier, which, in turn, raises a larger question about Rome’s relationships with tribes in Wales and north Britain. While it has always been assumed that the farmsteads in these areas supplied cereals and livestock to the garrisons, it has also been observed that (with suitable caveats on the size of sample) settlement density is low, and unlike, for example, in the Central Belt and South regions, there is very little material expression of economic transactions. One explanation for this is that these foodstuffs were taken as taxation, despite the proxy evidence for the wide-scale movement of supplies from the south. We should also entertain the possibility that, initially through conquest and subsequently through treaty arrangements, manpower (to service the fortresses, forts and vicus) was the principal product of the northern and western regions. This might partly account for the requirement for additional manpower from the south at times of particular need, such as the construction of a major frontier work. It is unlikely that material expression of such movements will be found, though note the prevalence and persistence of circular buildings to the south and east of the Fens, but further programmes of stable isotope analysis of human remains might well be helpful.
Elements of the social and economic relationships between farmsteads, villas, military vici and roadside settlements have been touched upon in the regional chapters in this volume (Chs 4–11). These will be explored in more depth in subsequent volumes, alongside their associations with the larger towns of Roman Britain, although it is worth highlighting here some of the broad spatial and chronological patterns associated with urban and rural settlements.

Relationships between town and country have long been at the forefront of Romano-British studies, where the pendulum has swung between major urban centres being viewed as parasitic implantations (e.g. Collingwood and Myres 1936, 198; Fulford 1982) and institutions with a more benign influence on the surrounding countryside (e.g. Wacher 1995, 70). More recently, with the benefit of much greater quantities of detailed excavation data, opinion has once again leaned heavily towards a negative view of the major towns, most notably in Perring and Pitts’ study of the East Anglian hinterlands of Roman London and Colchester in the early to mid-Roman period (Perring and Pitts 2013). Analysis of pottery and other types of material culture suggested great social and economic inequalities between town and country, with rural populations being subjected to repressive demands of taxation and the provisioning of urban and military populations (ibid.; Pitts 2014). Social inequalities have also been glimpsed through cemetery populations, with patterns showing relatively healthy urban populations in contrast to those in the countryside (Pitts and Griffin 2012).

Whether negative or positive, there can be no doubt that the main towns of Roman Britain must have had an impact upon the surrounding rural population, though its character is likely to have varied quite markedly from region to region, and from town to town, as discussed in the Central West case studies, where the hinterlands of Wroxeter and Chester were compared (see Ch. 8). Around 22 per cent of the current rural settlement data lie within 20 km (approximately a maximum day’s journey) of one of the twenty major towns in Roman Britain (defined as civitas capitals, municipia and coloniae). Despite significant evidence for settlement fluctuation in some areas, this proportion barely changes over time, suggesting some measure of stability in the demands of the town on its hinterland. This is well illustrated by the settlement pattern in the hinterland of Roman York, which displays markedly little variation over time after the mid-second century A.D., both in terms of overall numbers (though numbers are small) and in the proportions of different types of settlement. This is in marked contrast to most of the surrounding landscape zones, where settlement numbers appear to decline quite rapidly during the later Roman period (see Ch. 7).

There are some patterns observed in the types of rural settlement more drawn to major urban centres, the most notable being the greater prevalence of villas, a phenomenon that has long been observed for certain regions, the sites being traditionally interpreted as the country residences of a primarily urban-based elite (e.g. Branigan 1973, 42; fig. 12.25). Yet, as Millett (1990, 190–5) has pointed out, the relationship between villas and the larger, administrative towns in Britain is not a straightforward one, with the evidence suggesting it was determined more by social than economic factors. Alongside villas, complex farmsteads also appear to be proportionally better represented in the hinterlands of major towns, certainly compared with other farmstead ‘types’. Such complex farmsteads, at least in central, southern and eastern areas, are considered to have been associated with more intensive farming practices (see Chs 2 and 5), and therefore their representation close to towns is not, perhaps, surprising.

**FIG. 12.25.** Percentage of site types located within 20 km of a major Romano-British town.
CONCLUSIONS

The association of complex farmsteads with urban centres is illustrated by settlement patterns in the hinterland of the *colonia* at Gloucester (FIG. 12.26). Here, the overall number of farmsteads starts to decline from the early third century A.D., concurrent with the continued expansion of villas, which may relate to more widespread changes in the nature of land management at this time (see Ch. 5 and above). However, the number of complex farmsteads around Gloucester stays fairly static through this period, only dropping substantially during the latter half of the fourth century. The persistence of complex farmsteads around the town during much of the late Roman period is somewhat at odds with the Severn Vale as a whole, where there is a sharper decline in numbers at the start of the fourth century. Whether this represents the continued draw of the town as an economic opportunity for the rural inhabitants, which is at odds with what is regarded as the state of the town in the third and fourth centuries (cf. Hurst 1988, 64–70), or else the maintenance of a controlled, indentured rural population tasked with provisioning the town remains uncertain.

The settlement patterns around Gloucester and York demonstrate the impact major towns could have upon their hinterlands, yet also highlight differences in the way such effects could be manifested. The relationships between urban and rural communities are undoubtedly a dynamic construct, changing over place and time according to a variety of different variables. It is important, however, to put these relationships in perspective. Overall, the economic pull of the major towns was not great, with more than two-thirds of villas and over three-quarters of complex farms located more than 20 km distance from them. This suggests that the prosperity of these rural settlements relied on other markets, meeting the needs of the state, particularly the army, and demands, private or imperial, from across the Channel. Within the Central Belt, the South and, to a lesser extent, the North-East regions, location in terms of distance from a major town does not seem to have been a particular constraint on where villas and complex farms might develop. Of far greater importance was their relationship with other points on the road network where goods could be sold – the nucleated roadside settlements – which were far more numerous and provided a way to avoid the costs of long-distance transport.

Such relationships and the economic role of rural settlement across Britain will be further explored in volume 2 through the wealth of excavated material culture and environmental evidence.

**ROMAN RURAL SETTLEMENT: REFLECTIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH**

It is clear that the mass of new archaeological data has enormous potential to reinvigorate our understanding of the Romano-British countryside. They have allowed us to propose a regional framework for the study of rural Roman Britain in which we have developed a rich characterisation of the mosaic of communities that inhabited the province and the way that they changed over time. Centre stage is the farmstead, rather than the villa, which has for so long dominated discourse in the study of Roman Britain. We have found that, in the Central Belt and South regions, the farmstead accounts for 74 per cent of excavated villas and farmsteads combined. We have classified settlement and building types and assessed them in the regional context. Against this background, we have reviewed their associations with field systems, trackways and the network of major roads, and we have to some extent explored their relationships with towns and forts. This synthesis of the excavated settlement evidence thus provides the basis for the study of the associated material culture and environmental evidence, which will
allow us to develop a number of thematic approaches in volumes 2 and 3 within our regional framework. First, in volume 2, we will review the evidence for the agricultural economy, including the role of craft activities and industry, and trade and exchange with urban and military communities. Second, in volume 3, we will assess how identities were shaped in the countryside over time, evaluating the evidence provided by material culture, burials, ritual practice and religion, and we will evaluate the diet and health of the rural population.

The analysis conducted as part of this volume raises many questions, including, fundamentally, what more is there to be gained from continuing to excavate Romano-British rural settlements? With over 2500 individual excavated settlements within the current dataset (up to the end of 2014), it could be argued that we have sufficient data to address a wide range of research objectives. However, the quality and consistency of much of these data are quite variable, and it is only fairly recently that we have approached an acceptable level of professional standards for excavation and their reporting, including detailed and integrative accounts of faunal assemblages, botanical assemblages and material culture. It is, for the most part, those sites excavated and analysed during the past twenty years or so that are revolutionising our understanding of the past, but even in their reporting there are still major inconsistencies in the way some data are presented, which make it very hard to conduct any comparative analysis, vital for such ‘big data’ projects such as this (cf. Perring and Pitts 2013, 21). Besides inconsistency, we should note that too little could be learned from as many as about two-thirds of excavated farmsteads to be able to classify them and, in the case of excavated villas, less than a quarter of the sample, equating to less than 50 sites, contributes to an understanding that goes beyond the villa buildings themselves. In the case of villages away from the road network, the distribution looks patchy and the sample is probably unrepresentative. In the future, planners and excavators must be aware of both the larger and the local picture as well as of new scientific and methodological techniques that may greatly enhance our understanding of matters such as chronology, population and livestock mobility, and site formation processes (e.g. Minniti et al. 2014; Evans 2012, 297–300).

Against the historical background of research on major monuments such as fortresses, forts, frontier systems, towns and villas, commercial archaeology has had the advantage of providing random perspectives of the countryside, especially with major road/rail and pipeline schemes (e.g. HS1 through Kent), and so, as we have seen, we have far more information on insubstantial rural sites including field systems and farmsteads. However, such excavation data are still obviously biased in their geographical scope by modern programmes of development and so we need to continue to assess whether the patterns proposed in this volume are real. We have argued that the NMR record of all excavations provides a helpful proxy for evaluating our settlement data, but the samples of sites in areas of apparent low density are still very small. Thus further excavations of Roman rural sites across much of the Central West, Upland Wales and the Marches, the North and the South-West regions are all highly desirable. In these regions where assemblages of material culture are often very limited and where preservation of environmental data are very poor, a better grasp of chronology, drawing on more extensive and rigorous radiocarbon dating, is essential. We have noted the apparent contradiction between the evidence from crop- and soilmarks, suggested to represent a relatively dense Iron Age/Roman settlement, in the Central West and the North regions and the excavated data, which points to the opposite. This can only be resolved by extensive programmes of scientific dating.

In the Central Belt, East and South regions, with much higher densities of excavated sites, in addition to looking for higher standards of excavation and reporting, there are still major gaps in our knowledge. The recovery of evidence of structures in materials such as wood, cob or turf, is still poor, such that it remains difficult to reconstruct the built environment of farmsteads and the people who lived and worked in them. This puts a premium on sites not damaged by ploughing, where structural evidence may be better preserved. There are also considerable areas of ‘blank space’ that would benefit from investigation and help us reconstruct the larger landscapes beyond the settlements themselves: some, such as the Upper Thames Valley and the Cambridgeshire Fen edge, have now seen fairly intensive levels of excavation, with large numbers of Roman rural sites reported, but both still have considerable areas of ‘blank’ space, perhaps representing pasture, woodland or waste land, as suggested by the pollen evidence (cf. Rippon et al. 2015, 309–14). The potential for more integrated analyses of such landscapes combining a number of different data sources (cropmark, geophysical, evaluation and excavation evidence) has recently been demonstrated for the Upper Thames Valley (Morrison et al. 2014), and such approaches, on a larger scale, will be important for taking our understanding of rural settlements and landscapes to a new level.