NEW VISIONS OF THE COUNTRYSIDE OF ROMAN BRITAIN

VOLUME 1:

THE RURAL SETTLEMENT OF ROMAN BRITAIN
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ROMAN BRITAIN

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THE RURAL SETTLEMENT OF
ROMAN BRITAIN

BY

Alexander Smith, Martyn Allen, Tom Brindle and Michael Fulford

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## CONTENTS

*List of Figures* vii  
*List of Tables* xvii  
*Preface* xviii  
*Acknowledgements* xxii  
*Summary* xxiii  

### CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION  
**by Michael Fulford and Tom Brindle**

- Introduction 1  
- History of research into the Romano-British countryside 4  
- The nature of the dataset 8  
- Developing a methodology 9  
- A regional analysis of rural Roman Britain 15  
- The research structure 16  

### CHAPTER 2: RURAL SETTLEMENT IN ROMAN BRITAIN: MORPHOLOGICAL CLASSIFICATION AND OVERVIEW  
**by Martyn Allen and Alexander Smith**

- Introduction 17  
- Classification of rural settlement 17  
- Farmsteads 20  
- Villas 33  
- Nucleated settlements: roadside settlements, military *vicī* and villages 37  
- Summary 43  

### CHAPTER 3: BUILDINGS IN THE COUNTRYSIDE  
**by Alexander Smith**

- Introduction 44  
- The architectural dataset 45  
- Building form and material 47  
- Building function 54  
- An architectural continuum: building types 64  
- From national overviews to regional syntheses 74  

### CHAPTER 4: THE SOUTH  
**by Martyn Allen**

- The nature of the landscape 75  
- The South dataset 76  
- Roman rural settlement patterns 78  
- Buildings 102  
- Landscape context and infrastructure 114  
- Settlement hierarchies: the social and economic basis of settlements 121  

### CHAPTER 5: THE CENTRAL BELT  
**by Alexander Smith**

- The nature of the landscape 141  
- The Central Belt dataset 142  
- Roman rural settlement patterns 145  
- Buildings 167  
- Landscape context and infrastructure 175  
- Settlement hierarchies: the social and economic basis of settlements 183  
- Case study: the Cambridgeshire Fen edge 192  
- Region summary 206  

### CHAPTER 6: THE EAST  
**by Alexander Smith**

- The nature of the landscape 208  
- The East dataset 209  
- Roman rural settlement patterns 212  
- Buildings 225  
- Landscape context and infrastructure 232  
- Settlement hierarchies: the social and economic basis of settlements 234  
- Region summary 240  

### CHAPTER 7: THE NORTH-EAST  
**by Martyn Allen**

- The nature of the landscape 242  
- The North-East dataset 243  
- Roman rural settlement patterns 245  
- Buildings 262  
- Landscape context and infrastructure 270  
- Settlement hierarchies: the social and economic basis of settlements 273  
- Region summary 280  

### CHAPTER 8: THE CENTRAL WEST  
**by Tom Brindle**

- The nature of the landscape 282  
- The Central West dataset 283  
- Roman rural settlement patterns 286  
- Buildings 294  
- Landscape context and infrastructure 298  
- Settlement hierarchies: the social and economic basis of settlements. A case study from the Chester and Wroxeter hinterlands 300  
- Region summary 306  

---

Case studies: Middle Thames Valley and the Hampshire Downs 129  
Region summary 139  

---
CHAPTER 9: THE NORTH
by Tom Brindle
The nature of the landscape 308
The North dataset 309
Roman rural settlement patterns 311
Buildings 320
Landscape context and infrastructure 322
Settlement hierarchies: the social and economic basis of settlements 324
Region summary 329

CHAPTER 10: THE SOUTH-WEST
by Tom Brindle
The nature of the landscape 331
The South-West dataset 332
Roman rural settlement patterns 334
Buildings 346
Landscape context and infrastructure 349
Settlement hierarchies: the social and economic basis of settlements 353
Region summary 357

CHAPTER 11: UPLAND WALES AND THE MARCHES
by Tom Brindle
The nature of the landscape 360
The Upland Wales and Marches dataset 360
Roman rural settlement patterns 363
Buildings 373
Landscape context and infrastructure 378
Settlement hierarchies: the social and economic basis of settlements 380
Region summary 383

CHAPTER 12: CONCLUSIONS: THE RURAL SETTLEMENT OF ROMAN BRITAIN
by Alexander Smith and Michael Fulford
Introduction 385
The regions 385
Chronological patterns 404
Rural population 416
Town and country 418
Roman rural settlement: reflections and future research 419

APPENDICES
1. Introduction and guide to the digital resource by Tim Evans 421
2. Kernel density 423
3. Finds categories 425

BIBLIOGRAPHY 426
INDEX (Peter Ellis) 455
### LIST OF FIGURES

**Chapter 1**

1.1 Quantity and distribution of excavated Roman rural sites over time 7

1.2 Proportion of each major type of intervention with only imprecise dating evidence available 11

1.3 Average number of pottery sherds recovered from excavations, evaluations and watching briefs 12

1.4 Distribution of sites with radiocarbon dates 13

1.5 Map showing Natural England’s ‘Natural Areas’ within the Roman Rural Settlement Project regions 16

**Chapter 2**

2.1 Frequency of farmsteads and/or villas with and without the attribution of morphological classifications by area of excavation 19

2.2 Frequency of classification of farmstead and/or villas by area of excavation 19

2.3 Site plan of Melton wastewater works near Brough, East Riding 20

2.4 Distribution of all excavated sites recorded as farmsteads 21

2.5 Distribution of excavated open farmsteads and plan of mid-Roman open farmstead at Strood Hall, Essex 22

2.6 Distribution of excavated enclosed farmsteads and plan of enclosed farmstead at Bishopstone, East Sussex 23

2.7 Relative frequencies of different enclosed farmstead types by region 24

2.8 Distribution of enclosed farmsteads by type 24

2.9 Plans of ‘Banjo’-type enclosures 25

2.10 Distribution of enclosed farmsteads with identified masonry- or earthen-walled enclosures 26

2.11 Development of masonry-walled enclosed farmstead at Cefn Graenog II 27

2.12 Plans of multi-ditched enclosed farmsteads 28

2.13 Distribution of excavated complex farmsteads and plan of complex farmstead at Cotswold Community, Wilts/Glos 29

2.14 Plan of early Roman complex farmstead at Wavendon Gate, Buckinghamshire 30

2.15 Plans of complex farmsteads at (a) Haddon, Cambridgeshire, and (b) southern site at NIAB Huntington Road, Cambridge 31

2.16 Chronology of different types of complex farmsteads in use 32

2.17 Distribution of complex farmsteads by type 32

2.18 The origins of complex farmsteads 33

2.19 Distribution of excavated villas in relation to NMR ‘villas’ 34

2.20 The origins of villas 35

2.21 Kernel density distribution of villas from late first to fourth century A.D. 36

2.22 Number of villas able to be classified 36

2.23 Plans of late Roman ‘complex’ villa at Barton Court Farm, Oxon (a) and mid-Roman ‘enclosed’ villa at Chilgrove 2, West Sussex (b) 36

2.24 Distribution of excavated nucleated settlements 37

2.25 Geophysical survey plan of the roadside settlement at Westhawk Farm, Kent 38

2.26 Geophysical survey plan of the fort and vicus at Caer Gai, Gwynedd 39

2.27 Excavation plan of the roadside settlement at Moor Lane, Stamford Bridge, Yorks 39

2.28 Interpretative plan of the roadside settlement at Scole 40

2.29 Earthwork survey plans of village settlements at Chisenbury Warren, Wiltshire, and Chalton, Hampshire 41

2.30 Plan of Roman village settlement at Mucking, Essex 42

**Chapter 3**

3.1 Distribution of all excavated late Iron Age and Roman rural buildings 45

3.2 The context of buildings 45

3.3 Average number of buildings per site by region and settlement type 46

3.4 Use of circular and rectangular buildings over time 47
3.5 Distribution of all excavated circular and rectangular buildings, c. late Iron Age–late Roman
4.1 The South region in relation to modern county boundaries
3.6 Distribution of sites with different architectural forms from the late Iron Age to the 4th century A.D.
4.2 Constituent landscape zones of the South region
3.7 Relative frequency of circular and rectangular buildings according to major settlement type
4.3 Kernel density of South region records and all excavation records from National Monument Records (NMR) Index
3.8 Distribution of all excavated timber/mass-walled and masonry buildings
4.4 Excavated late Iron Age/Roman rural settlement in the South region
3.9 Distribution of circular masonry buildings
4.5 Relative frequency of main settlement types by landscape zones in the South region
3.10 Internal functional areas within Structure 6 at Langdale Hale (a) and functional designation of buildings within the Romano-British port settlement at Camp Ground, Colne Fen (b)
4.6 Number of settlements in use over time in the South region
3.11 Distribution of excavated sites with corndryers and plan of Yewden villa, Bucks
4.7 Variations in settlement chronology by selected landscape zone within the South region
3.12 Distribution of excavated sites with four-post structures and buildings interpreted as granaries and plans of selected ‘granaries’
4.8 ‘New’ and ‘abandoned’ settlements over time in the South region
3.13 Distribution of excavated sites with buildings interpreted as workshops and plan of late Roman pottery workshop at Stibbington, Cambs
4.9 ‘New’ and ‘abandoned’ settlements over time in selected landscape zones of the South region
3.14 Distribution of excavated sites with structures interpreted as religious in nature and plan of shrine at Rutland Water, Rutland
4.10 Number of open, enclosed and complex farmsteads in selected landscape zones of the South region
3.15 Plan of religious enclosure at Higham Ferrers, Northants
4.11 Relative frequency of farmstead types in use over time in the South region
3.16 Plans of ‘single-roomed’ buildings
4.12 Distribution of farmstead types in use over time in the South region
3.17 Distribution of excavated sites with Roman cellared buildings
4.13 Distribution of farmstead types in relation to geology in the South region
3.18 Distribution of excavated sites with aisled buildings and selected aisled building plans
4.14 Plans of complex farmsteads at Pingewood, Burghfield, Berkshire (a), Beam Washlands, Dagenham, Greater London (b), and Chigborough Farm, Essex (c)
3.19 Number of aisled buildings in use over time
4.15 Site plans of complex farmsteads on the Hampshire Downs
3.20 Distribution and relationship of excavated aisled buildings associated with villas
4.16 Site plans of larger complex farmsteads in Hampshire
3.21 Distribution of excavated farmsteads with multi-room buildings and plans of buildings in Gloucestershire
4.17 Phased site plan for the open Roman-period farmstead at Foxholes Farm, Hertford
3.22 Types of villa within the dataset by total number and by final form
4.18 Chronology of occupation on villa sites in the South region
3.23 Plans of selected villa types
4.19 Distribution of villas over time in the South region
3.24 Chronology of villa types
4.20 Chronological variation in date of villa construction between eastern and western areas of the South region
3.25 Distribution of different types of excavated villas
4.21 Phased plans of the site at Beddington, Surrey
4.22 Villas as a percentage of the total number of settlements in different landscape zones of the South region
4.23 Geophysical survey results at Brading villa, Isle of Wight | 4.43 Plans of courtyard/’palatial’ villas at Eccles, Kent (a), Fishbourne, Sussex (b), and Darent, Kent (c) 
95 | 110
4.24 Plans of villas at Sparsholt, Hampshire (a) and Keston, Kent | 4.44 Plans showing the development of the villas at Bignor, West Sussex (a), and Rockbourne, Hampshire (b) 
95 | 111
4.25 Excavation and interpretative plans of late Roman villas in Hampshire | 4.45 Plan of the ‘villa’ complex at Chiddingfold, Surrey 
96 | 112
4.26 Plan of the roadside settlement at Shapwick, Dorset | 
98 | 
4.27 Variation in dating evidence from different excavations in Staines | 4.46 Distribution of excavated villas according to their final ‘type’ in the South region 
99 | 113
4.28 Site plans of settlements on the Salisbury Plain | 4.47 Spot height analysis for villas, complex farmsteads and enclosed farmsteads in the South region 
100 | 114
4.29 Aerial survey plan of the village settlements at Charlton Down, Upavon Down, and Compton Down, Wiltshire | 4.48 Distances of villas and farmstead types from the major road network in the South region 
101 | 115
4.30 Plan of first-century A.D. enclosures at Ower, Poole Harbour, Dorset | 4.49 Distances of villas, enclosed farmsteads and complex farmsteads from a major walled town in the South region 
101 | 115
4.31 Distribution and frequency of rural buildings on excavated sites in the South region | 4.50 Riverside distribution of villas in north Kent 
102 | 116
4.32 Frequency of settlements with evidence for buildings by different landscape zones in the South region | 4.51 Plan of North Bersted, West Sussex 
103 | 117
4.33 Number of sites with circular and/or rectangular buildings over time in the South region | 4.52 Plan of Lea Farm, Hurst, Berkshire, showing late Iron Age enclosed farmstead (a) and an early Roman complex farmstead with trackway (b) 
104 | 118
4.34 Distribution of excavated masonry buildings over time in the South region | 4.53 Distribution of sites with excavated late Iron Age/Roman field systems in the South region 
105 | 119
4.35 Relative frequency of masonry and timber buildings found at farmsteads within selected landscape zones in the South region | 4.54 Number of excavated field systems in the London Basin and the Wessex landscape zones over time 
105 | 120
4.36 Plans of internally partitioned posthole structures at Winnall Down, Hampshire (a), and late first-century A.D. timber-framed structure at Chichester Harbour, Sussex (b) | 4.55 Frequency of major artefact categories on all sites in the South region 
106 | 121
4.37 Site plan of the late Roman building complex at Woodhouse Hill, Dorset | 4.55 Frequency of major artefact categories recovered across selected landscape zones in the South region 
107 | 122
4.38 Plans of aisled buildings with later modifications | 4.56 Frequency of major artefact categories on different types of rural settlement in the South region 
107 | 123
4.39 Distribution of aisled buildings across the South region | 4.57 Frequency of selected categories of artefact on sites in selected landscape zones in the South region 
108 | 123
4.40 Plans of timber aisled buildings at Furfield Quarry, Boughton Monchelsea, Kent (a), and Bower Road near Smeth, Kent (b) | 4.58 Relative frequency of major livestock taxa from farmsteads in the London Basin, Hampshire Downs and South Wessex Downs landscape zones 
108 | 126
4.41 Plans of cottage/strip-house villas at Houghton Down, Hants (a) and Shillingstone, Dorset (b) | 4.60 Frequency of major artefact categories on villas and farmstead types in the South region 
109 | 124
4.42 Plans of winged-corridor villas at Barcombe, Sussex (a), Lullingstone, Kent (b), and Sedgebrook Field, Plaxtol, Kent (c) | 4.61 Inter-site type comparison of mean relative frequencies of major livestock taxa in the South region 
109 | 127
4.43 Plans of ‘villa’ complex at Chiddingfold, Surrey | 4.62 Percentage presence of cultivated plant taxa on sites in the South region 
110 | 127
4.44 Plans showing the development of the villas at Bignor, West Sussex (a), and Rockbourne, Hampshire (b) | 4.63 Percentage presence of cultivated plant taxa on sites in the South region 
111 | 127
4.45 Plan of the ‘villa’ complex at Chiddingfold, Surrey | 4.64 Percentage presence of cultivated plant taxa on sites in the South region 
112 | 127
4.46 Distribution of excavated villas according to their final ‘type’ in the South region | 4.65 Percentage presence of cultivated plant taxa on sites in the South region 
113 | 127
4.47 Spot height analysis for villas, complex farmsteads and enclosed farmsteads in the South region | 4.66 Percentage presence of cultivated plant taxa on sites in the South region 
114 | 127
4.48 Distances of villas and farmstead types from the major road network in the South region | 4.67 Percentage presence of cultivated plant taxa on sites in the South region 
115 | 127
4.49 Distances of villas, enclosed farmsteads and complex farmsteads from a major walled town in the South region | 4.68 Percentage presence of cultivated plant taxa on sites in the South region 
116 | 127
4.50 Riverside distribution of villas in north Kent | 4.69 Percentage presence of cultivated plant taxa on sites in the South region 
117 | 127
4.51 Plan of North Bersted, West Sussex | 4.70 Percentage presence of cultivated plant taxa on sites in the South region 
118 | 127
4.52 Plan of Lea Farm, Hurst, Berkshire, showing late Iron Age enclosed farmstead (a) and an early Roman complex farmstead with trackway (b) | 4.71 Percentage presence of cultivated plant taxa on sites in the South region 
119 | 127
4.53 Distribution of sites with excavated late Iron Age/Roman field systems in the South region | 4.72 Percentage presence of cultivated plant taxa on sites in the South region 
120 | 127
4.54 Number of excavated field systems in the London Basin and the Wessex landscape zones over time | 4.73 Percentage presence of cultivated plant taxa on sites in the South region 
121 | 127
4.55 Frequency of major artefact categories on all sites in the South region | 4.74 Percentage presence of cultivated plant taxa on sites in the South region 
122 | 127
4.56 Frequency of major artefact categories recovered across selected landscape zones in the South region | 4.75 Percentage presence of cultivated plant taxa on sites in the South region 
123 | 127
4.57 Frequency of major artefact categories on different types of rural settlement in the South region | 4.76 Percentage presence of cultivated plant taxa on sites in the South region 
124 | 127
4.58 Frequency of selected categories of artefact on sites in selected landscape zones in the South region | 4.77 Percentage presence of cultivated plant taxa on sites in the South region 
123 | 127
4.59 Frequency of major artefact categories on villas and farmstead types in the South region | 4.78 Percentage presence of cultivated plant taxa on sites in the South region 
124 | 127
4.60 Frequency of major artefact categories on different types of rural settlement in the South region | 4.79 Percentage presence of cultivated plant taxa on sites in the South region 
124 | 127
4.61 Relative frequency of major livestock taxa from farmsteads in the London Basin, Hampshire Downs and South Wessex Downs landscape zones | 4.80 Percentage presence of cultivated plant taxa on sites in the South region 
126 | 127
4.62 Inter-site type comparison of mean relative frequencies of major livestock taxa in the South region | 4.81 Percentage presence of cultivated plant taxa on sites in the South region 
127 | 127
4.63 Percentage presence of cultivated plant taxa on sites in the South region | 4.82 Percentage presence of cultivated plant taxa on sites in the South region 
127 | 127
4.64 Percentage presence of cultivated plant taxa on sites in selected landscape zones in the South region 128
4.65 Percentage presence of cultivated plant taxa on different site types in the South region 129
4.66 Distribution map of sites in the Middle Thames Valley case study area 130
4.67 Plans of three late Iron Age open farmsteads in the Middle Thames Valley 131
4.68 Plans of three Roman-period complex farmsteads in the Middle Thames Valley 131
4.69 Plan of Heathrow Terminal 5 showing middle Iron Age open settlement and LIA/ER complex settlement and field system 132
4.70 Plan of Ashford Prison, Spelthorne 132
4.71 Plans of later Roman droveway complexes in the Middle Thames Valley 133
4.72 Distribution of sites in the Hampshire Downs case study area 136
4.73 Plans of late Iron Age enclosed farmsteads in the Hampshire Downs region 136
4.74 Plans of Dunkirt Barn, Abbots Ann 137
4.75 Plan of East Anton, Hampshire 138
4.76 Plan of the villa and field systems at Fullerton, Hampshire 139

Chapter 5
5.1 The Central Belt region in relation to modern county boundaries 141
5.2 Constituent landscape zones of the Central Belt region 142
5.3 Kernel density of Central Belt region records and all excavation records from National Monument Records (NMR) Index 143
5.4 Excavated late Iron Age/Roman rural settlement in the Central Belt region 145
5.5 Relative frequency of main settlement types by landscape zones in the Central Belt region 147
5.6 Number of settlements in use over time in the Central Belt region 148
5.7 Variations in settlement chronology by selected landscape zone within the Central Belt region 148
5.8 ‘New’ and ‘abandoned’ settlements over time in the Central Belt region 149
5.9 ‘New’ and ‘abandoned’ settlements over time in selected landscape zones of the Central Belt region 149
5.10 All excavated farmsteads in the Central Belt region 150
5.11 Percentage of farmsteads classified by selected landscape zone in the Central Belt and breakdown of classification 151
5.12 Site plans of selected open, enclosed and complex farmsteads in the Central Belt region 152
5.13 Relative frequency of farmstead types in use over time in the Central Belt region 153
5.14 Chronological distribution of farmstead types in use in selected landscape zones in the Central Belt 153
5.15 Distribution of farmstead types in use over time in the Central Belt 154
5.16 Enclosed farmsteads at Claydon Pike, Glos and Old Shifford Farm, Oxon 155
5.17 Distribution of complex farmstead types in the Central Belt and site plans of farmsteads at Rudgeway Lane, Glos and NlAB Huntington Road, Cambridge 156
5.18 Site plan of Banbury Flood Alleviation Scheme, Banbury, Oxfordshire 157
5.19 Distribution of complex, enclosed and unclassified villas in the Central Belt 158
5.20 Number of villas in use over time in the Central Belt with indications of development 158
5.21 Plans of (a) ‘Complex villa’ at Roughground Farm, Glos. and (b) ‘Enclosed villa’ at Whitton Lodge, South Glamorgan 159
5.22 Distribution of all excavated Roman nucleated settlement in the Central Belt region, in relation to walled towns 161
5.23 Cropmarks of the ‘village’ settlement at Lockington, Leicestershire 162
5.24 Site plan of extensive excavations of the nucleated Roman ‘village’ settlement at Gill Mill, Ducklington, Oxfordshire 163
5.25 Magnetometer survey of regular ditched enclosures probably associated with the Roman roadside settlement at Fleet Marston, Aylesbury, Bucks 164
5.26 Excavation site plan of roadside settlement at Higham Ferrers, Northants and geophysics plot of the roadside settlement at Somerdale, Keynsham, Bath and North-East Somerset 165
5.27 Plan of mid-second to early third-century A.D. phase of the roadside settlement at Stanwick, Northants 167
5.28 Distribution and frequency of rural buildings on excavated sites in the Central Belt region 168
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Figure Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5.29</td>
<td>Number of sites with circular and/or rectangular buildings over time in the Central Belt region as a whole, and in the Cotswolds and West Anglian Plain landscape zones</td>
<td>169</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.30</td>
<td>Relative frequency of masonry and timber buildings found at Roman-period farmsteads within selected landscape zones in the Central Belt region</td>
<td>170</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.31</td>
<td>Plans of Roman multi-room buildings at (a) Newhouse Park, Chepstow, South Wales and (b) Horcott Quarry, Glos</td>
<td>171</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.32</td>
<td>Plans of Roman buildings at (a) Alfreds Castle, Oxon, (b) Chilton Fields, Oxon, and (c) Croughton, Northants</td>
<td>172</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.33</td>
<td>Distribution of excavated villa types within the Central Belt</td>
<td>174</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.34</td>
<td>Plan of parchmarks and geophysical survey results showing outline of multi-courtyard villa complex at Turkdean, Glos</td>
<td>174</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.35</td>
<td>Spot height analysis for villas, complex farmsteads and enclosed farmsteads in the Central Belt region</td>
<td>175</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.36</td>
<td>Distances of Roman farmsteads and villas from major roads in the Central Belt region</td>
<td>176</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.37</td>
<td>Plan of Roman settlement and trackway at NIAB, Huntingdon Road, Cambs</td>
<td>177</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.38</td>
<td>Cropmarks showing Romano-British settlements and linking trackways, south of Cirencester in the Upper Thames Valley</td>
<td>178</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.39</td>
<td>Distribution of sites with excavated and dated field systems in the Central Belt</td>
<td>180</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.40</td>
<td>Plan of second century A.D. farmstead and associated field system at Tubney Wood Quarry, Oxon</td>
<td>181</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.41</td>
<td>Plan of field system at Eye Quarry, Cambs</td>
<td>181</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.42</td>
<td>Distribution and chronology of sites with evidence for lazybeds in the Central Belt region</td>
<td>182</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.43</td>
<td>Frequency of major artefact categories on all sites in the Central Belt region</td>
<td>183</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.44</td>
<td>Frequency of major artefact categories recovered across selected landscape zones in the Central Belt region</td>
<td>184</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.45</td>
<td>Frequency of samian, amphora and mortaria recovery within settlement types in the Central Belt region</td>
<td>185</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.46</td>
<td>Frequency of major artefact categories on different types of rural settlement in the Central Belt region</td>
<td>186</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.47</td>
<td>Frequency of major artefact categories on villas and farmstead types in the Central Belt region</td>
<td>186</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.48</td>
<td>Occurrence of selected high status objects on ‘rich’ farmsteads and villas compared to other farmsteads in the Central Belt</td>
<td>186</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.49</td>
<td>Relative frequency of major livestock taxa across all Central Belt landscape zones</td>
<td>188</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.50</td>
<td>Relative frequency of major livestock taxa over time in the Central Belt, Cotswolds and Thames &amp; Avons Vales</td>
<td>189</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.51</td>
<td>Relative frequency of major livestock taxa across different settlement types in the Central Belt</td>
<td>190</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.52</td>
<td>Percentage presence of cultivated plant taxa on sites in the Central Belt region</td>
<td>191</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.53</td>
<td>Percentage presence of cultivated plant taxa on sites in selected landscape zones in the Central Belt region</td>
<td>191</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.54</td>
<td>Percentage presence of cultivated plant taxa in (a) major settlement types and (b) farmstead types within the Central Belt Region</td>
<td>192</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.55</td>
<td>The Cambridgeshire Fen edge case study area</td>
<td>193</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.56</td>
<td>Huge area excavation of Romano-British rural settlement in North-West Cambridge</td>
<td>194</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.57</td>
<td>Chronological patterns of case study settlements</td>
<td>195</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.58</td>
<td>Settlement development in the case study area in the late Iron Age</td>
<td>196</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.59</td>
<td>Late Iron Age farmsteads on the Cambridgeshire claylands</td>
<td>196</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.60</td>
<td>Settlement development in the case study area in the early Roman period</td>
<td>197</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.61</td>
<td>Comparison of selected finds assemblages from ‘rich’ complex farmsteads at Langdale Hale and Vicar’s Farm</td>
<td>198</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.62</td>
<td>Settlement development in the case study area in the late Roman period with selected sites named in the text</td>
<td>199</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.63</td>
<td>Roman complex farmsteads at (a) Vicar’s farm, Cambridge, (b) Knobbs farm, Earith, and (c) Langdale Hale, Earith</td>
<td>200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.64</td>
<td>Mid–late Roman farmstead at Fenstanton in relation to surrounding cropmarks in the lower Ouse Valley</td>
<td>201</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.65</td>
<td>‘Iron Age and Roman’ cropmark data in relation to excavated sites to the north and west of Cambridge</td>
<td>202</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5.66 Plans of excavated Roman agricultural landscapes at (a) Low Fen, Fen Drayton and (b) The Fields, along with (c) NMP cropmark of Iron Age/Roman field system in the Lower Ouse Valley 203

Chapter 6

6.1 The East region in relation to modern county boundaries 208
6.2 Constituent landscape zones of the East region 209
6.3 Kernel density of East region records and all excavation records from National Monument Records (NMR) Index 210
6.4 ‘Roman’ NMP cropmark data in the Norfolk Broads/coast 211
6.5 Excavated late Iron Age/Roman rural settlement in the East region 213
6.6 Number of settlements in use over time in the East region 214
6.7 Variations in settlement chronology by selected landscape zone within the East region 214
6.8 ‘New’ and ‘abandoned’ settlements over time in the East region 215
6.9 All excavated farmsteads in the East region 216
6.10 Number of excavated farmsteads in use over time in the East region 216
6.11 Relative frequency of farmstead types in use over time in the East region 217
6.12 Development of the farmstead at Kilverstone, Thetford, Norfolk 217
6.13 Plans of complex farmsteads in Essex 218
6.14 Plans of enclosed farmsteads from the East region 219
6.15 Distribution of excavated villas in the East region, compared with ‘villas’ recorded in the NMR index 220
6.16 Chronological patterns of excavated villas in the East region 221
6.17 Plan of excavations south of the villa at Chignall, Essex 222
6.18 Distribution of nucleated settlement in the East region 223
6.19 Plan of Roman roadside settlement at Baldock, Herts 224
6.20 Plan of nucleated settlement to the east of the coastal fort at Brancaster, Norfolk 225
6.21 Distribution and frequency of rural buildings on excavated sites in the East region 226
6.22 Distribution and frequency of (a) circular and (b) rectangular architecture in the East region 226
6.23 Number of sites with circular and/or rectangular buildings over time in the East region 227
6.24 Plans of late Roman (a) workshop and (b) granary/storehouse at Frogs Hall Borrow Pit, Takeley, Essex 227
6.25 Plans of farmstead buildings at (a) Strood Hall, Essex, (b) Melford Meadows, Norfolk and (c) Brandon Road, Norfolk 228
6.26 Plans of villa buildings from (a) Exning, Cambs and (b) Gayton Thorpe, Norfolk 230
6.27 Plan of villa complex south of Caistor, Norfolk 231
6.28 Plan of field system ditches radiating out from late Roman settlement at MTCP site, Stansted 233
6.29 ‘Roman’ field systems in the Norfolk Broads as revealed through NMP cropmarks 234
6.30 Frequency of major artefact categories on all sites in the East region 235
6.31 Frequency of major artefact categories on different types of rural settlement in the East region 236
6.32 Relative frequency of major livestock taxa across the East region and in selected landscape zones 238
6.33 Relative frequency of major livestock taxa over time in the East region 238
6.34 Relative frequency of major livestock taxa across different settlement types in the East region 239
6.35 Percentage presence of cultivated plant taxa in farmsteads and roadside settlements within the East region 240

Chapter 7

7.1 The North-East region in relation to modern county boundaries 242
7.2 Constituent landscape zones of the North-East region 243
7.3 Kernel density of North-East region records and all excavation records from National Monument Records (NMR) Index 244
7.4 Excavated late Iron Age/Roman rural settlement in the North-East region 246
7.5 Number of settlements in use over time in the North-East region 247
7.6 Variations in settlement chronology by selected landscape zone within the North-East region 247
7.7 ‘New’ and ‘abandoned’ settlements over time in the North-East region 248
7.8 Site plans of Roman Ridge, West Yorkshire, showing (a) the late Iron Age/
early first-century field system, trackway and enclosures, and (b) the line of the Castleford to Tadcaster Roman road

7.9 Plan of the twin enclosure complex at Allerton Park Quarry, North Yorkshire 249

7.10 Distribution of all farmsteads in the North-East 250

7.11 Numbers of farmsteads in use in the North-East over time 251

7.12 Relative frequency of farmstead types over time in the North-East 251

7.13 Phase plans of High Wold, Bempton Lane, Bridlington 251

7.14 Plans of two types of complex farmstead in the North-East 252

7.15 Plan of Holmfield Interchange, Site Q 252

7.16 Plans of two late Iron Age/early Roman enclosed farmsteads integrated with a rectilinear field system 253

7.17 Site plans of Wattle Syke, West Yorkshire, showing (a) the late Iron Age–middle Roman enclosure complex (village), and (b) the late Roman (fourth century A.D.) open settlement 254

7.18 Phase plans of the settlement at Parlington Hollings, West Yorkshire 254

7.19 Distribution of excavated villas in the North-East compared to 'villas' recorded in the NMR index 255

7.20 Chronological patterns of excavated villas in the North-East 256

7.21 Plans of the villas at (a) Welton Wold and (b) Ingleby Barwick 257

7.22 Distribution of nucleated settlement and military sites in the North-East 258

7.23 Interpretive plan of the geophysical survey results at Hayton 258

7.24 Chronological development of nucleated settlement in the North-East 259

7.25 Plan of cropmarks showing the fort and vicus at Newton Kyme, North Yorkshire 260

7.26 Plan of cropmarks showing the late Iron Age/Roman ladder complex at Burton Fleming 261

7.27 Distribution of all buildings in the North-East 262

7.28 Distribution of circular and rectangular buildings in the North-East 263

7.29 Use of circular and rectangular buildings in the North-East over time 264

7.30 Use of circular and rectilinear buildings on farmsteads of different type 264

7.31 Plans of drystone masonry structures on the North York Moors 265

7.32 Post-built 'structures at (a) Melton A63, (b) Cedar Ridge, Garforth, and (c) Stile Hill, Colton 266

7.33 Villa building forms in the North-East 266

7.34 Comparative plans of six villa houses 267

7.35 Plans of buildings at roadside settlements 269

7.36 Spot height analysis for major settlement types in the North-East 270

7.37 Plans of long distance trackways with associated field systems and settlements 271

7.38 Plan of Romano-British 'brickwork' fields at Dunston's Clump, Babworth 272

7.39 Recovery of samian and mortaria from different types of site in the North-East 274

7.40 Frequency of major artefact categories on different types of rural settlement in the North-East region 275

7.41 Relative frequency of cattle, sheep/goat and pig 277

7.42 Religious monuments at Ferry Fryston 278

7.43 Presence of arable crops and other plant taxa from roadside settlements/vici and farmsteads in the North-East 279

Chapter 8

8.1 The Central West region in relation to modern county boundaries 282

8.2 Constituent landscape zones of the Central West region 283

8.3 Distribution of excavated Roman rural sites and all excavation records from National Monument Records (NMR) Index (in the Central West region 284

8.4 Distribution of excavated Roman rural sites in relation to built-up areas 285

8.5 Distribution of sites in the Central West by six sub-regions 286

8.6 Number of farming settlements in use over time in the Central West region 288

8.7 Number of farming settlements in use over time in selected sub-regions of the Central West 289

8.8 Establishment dates for farming settlements in the Coal Measures and the Mosses and Meres/Shropshire Hills/Wrexham area 289

8.9 Plans of enclosed farmsteads of rectilinear, irregular, D-shaped and curvilinear form 291

8.10 Plan of farmstead at Sharpstones Hill Site E, Shropshire 292
8.11 Site plan of a mid-second to mid-third century A.D. complex farmstead, north of Langley Mill, West Midlands 293
8.12 Sequence of development at Bullerthorpe Lane, Swillington 294
8.13 Plan of buildings at Wilderspool, Warrington 295
8.14 Use of circular and rectangular buildings in the Central West over time 296
8.15 Use of circular and rectangular buildings on farmsteads in the Central West over time 296
8.16 Plan of building at Pentre Farm, Flint 297
8.17 Plan of a corridor villa at Hales, Staffordshire 297
8.18 Plan of a winged corridor villa at Eaton-by-Tarporley, Cheshire 297
8.19 Spot height analysis of farmsteads and villas in the Central West region 298
8.20 Plan of a trackway leading to a mid-to late Roman farmstead at Billingley Drive, Thurnscoe, South Yorkshire 299
8.21 The Chester and Wroxeter case study area 300
8.22 Chronology of farming settlements in the Chester and Wroxeter hinterlands 301
8.23 Frequency of major artefact categories on different types of settlement in the Chester and Wroxeter hinterlands 303
8.24 Frequency of major artefact categories on farmsteads in the Chester and Wroxeter hinterlands 303
8.25 Proportion of coins and brooches among all finds recorded by PAS in the Chester and Wroxeter hinterlands 304

Chapter 9

9.1 The North region in relation to modern county boundaries 308
9.2 Constituent landscape zones of the North region 309
9.3 Distribution of excavated Roman rural sites and all excavation records from National Monument Records (NMR) Index in the North region 310
9.4 Distribution of excavated late Iron Age/Roman rural settlements in the North region 312
9.5 Number of settlements in use over time in the North region 313
9.6 Number of vici in use over time in the North region 314
9.7 Number of farmsteads in use over time in the North region 314
9.8 Number of farmsteads in use over time in the North region, north and south of Hadrian’s Wall 315
9.9 Farmstead morphology in the North region 316
9.10 Distribution of all excavated farmsteads in the North region 316
9.11 Plan of complex farmstead at Blagdon Park 2, Northumberland 317
9.12 Plan of complex farmstead at Poulton-le-Fylde, Lancashire 317
9.13 Plan of a single-ditched curvilinear enclosed farmstead at Crosshill, Penrith, Cumbria 318
9.14 Plan of a double-ditched rectilinear enclosed farmstead at Burradon, Northumberland 318
9.15 Distribution of farmsteads with single and double-ditched enclosures in the North region 318
9.16 Plan of an irregularly shaped enclosed farmstead at Milking Gap, Northumberland 319
9.17 Distribution of farmsteads with rectilinear, curvilinear and irregular shaped enclosures in the North region 319
9.18 Use of circular and rectangular buildings on farmsteads and other rural sites in the North region over time 321
9.19 Spot height analysis on major settlement types within the North region 323
9.20 Distribution of excavated field systems in the North region 326
9.21 Distribution of sites with agricultural tools in the North region 327
9.22 Distribution of excavated sites with features interpreted as paddocks/stock enclosures 328

Chapter 10

10.1 The South-West region in relation to modern county boundaries 331
10.2 Constituent landscape zones of the South-West region 332
10.3 Distribution of excavated Roman rural sites and all excavation records from National Monument Records (NMR) Index in the South-West region 333
10.4 Distribution of excavated late Iron Age/Roman rural settlement in the South-West region 336
10.5 Number of farmsteads in use over time in the South-West region 337
10.6 ‘New’ and ‘abandoned’ farmsteads over time in the South-West region 338
10.7 Number of farmsteads in use over time in Cornwall and Devon 339
10.8 Continuity, abandonment and the establishment of new farmsteads over time in Cornwall and Devon 339
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10.9</td>
<td>Map showing the geographical shift in focus of settlement over time</td>
<td>340</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.10</td>
<td>Distribution of farmsteads over time in the eastern part of the South-West region</td>
<td>341</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.11</td>
<td>Plans of four Cornish ‘rounds’ showing the variation in their form</td>
<td>343</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.12</td>
<td>Plans of Courtyard House settlements from Cornwall</td>
<td>344</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.13</td>
<td>Plans of enclosed farmsteads from Devon</td>
<td>345</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.14</td>
<td>Plan of multi-roomed, timber, domestic building from the possible roadside settlement at Topsham</td>
<td>346</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.15</td>
<td>Plans of villas at (a) Magor Farm, Illogan, Cornwall and (b) Crediton, Devon</td>
<td>347</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.16</td>
<td>Plan of a timber-built circular building from East Worlington, Devon</td>
<td>348</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.17</td>
<td>Plan of circular and oval buildings within the round at Threemilestone, Kenwyn, Cornwall</td>
<td>348</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.18</td>
<td>Spot height analysis on farmsteads/villages in Devon and Cornwall</td>
<td>350</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.19</td>
<td>Distribution of farms and villages in the South-West region, identifying those situated at under 50 m elevation</td>
<td>351</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.20</td>
<td>Distribution of late Iron Age and Roman farmsteads/villages and excavated sites of other periods from the South-West region shown in relation to modern soil geochemistry</td>
<td>352</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.21</td>
<td>Plan of earthwork remains of a probable field system associated with an enclosed farmstead at Stoke Gabriel, Devon</td>
<td>353</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.22</td>
<td>Frequency of major artefact categories on farmsteads and villages in Devon and Cornwall</td>
<td>355</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.23</td>
<td>Average frequency of major classes of finds at hillforts and farmsteads/villages in Cornwall</td>
<td>356</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.24</td>
<td>Frequency of major artefact categories on hillforts and farmsteads/villages in Cornwall</td>
<td>357</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Chapter 11</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.1</td>
<td>Upland Wales and the Marches in relation to the England/Wales border, English counties and the preserved counties of Wales</td>
<td>359</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.2</td>
<td>Regional sub-divisions used for analysis in Upland Wales and the Marches</td>
<td>360</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.3</td>
<td>Distribution of excavated Roman rural sites in Upland Wales and the Marches</td>
<td>361</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Chapter 12</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.1</td>
<td>Density of records across the different regions of the project</td>
<td>387</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### 12.2 Kernel density of records from England and Wales and all excavation records from National Monument Records (NMR) Index

Table 12.2: Kernel density of records from England and Wales and all excavation records from National Monument Records (NMR) Index.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Value</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>England and Wales</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>records from National Monument Records (NMR) Index</td>
<td>388</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 12.3 Distribution map of 'Iron Age/Roman' settlements in England recorded as earthworks, and cropmarks and soilmarks

Table 12.3: Distribution map of 'Iron Age/Roman' settlements in England recorded as earthworks, and cropmarks and soilmarks.

<table>
<thead>
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<td>recorded as earthworks, and cropmarks and soilmarks</td>
<td>389</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 12.4 Kernel density of late Iron Age and Roman artefacts recorded by the Portable Antiquities Scheme (PAS) across England and Wales

Table 12.4: Kernel density of late Iron Age and Roman artefacts recorded by the Portable Antiquities Scheme (PAS) across England and Wales.

<table>
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<tr>
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<td>recorded by the Portable Antiquities Scheme (PAS) across England and Wales</td>
<td>390</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 12.5 Modern soil pH values for England and Wales

Table 12.5: Modern soil pH values for England and Wales.

<table>
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<tr>
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<tr>
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<td>391</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 12.6 Proportion of different settlement types within the project regions

Table 12.6: Proportion of different settlement types within the project regions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>England and Wales</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>recorded by the Portable Antiquities Scheme (PAS) across England and Wales</td>
<td>392</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 12.7 Relative frequencies of farmstead types by project region

Table 12.7: Relative frequencies of farmstead types by project region.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
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<tr>
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<tr>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 12.8 Distribution of farmstead types over time

Table 12.8: Distribution of farmstead types over time.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
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</tbody>
</table>

### 12.9 Percentages of excavated farmsteads with indication of pottery present by project region

Table 12.9: Percentages of excavated farmsteads with indication of pottery present by project region.

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<td>396</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 12.10 Density of quantified late Iron Age and Roman pottery on farmsteads across England and Wales

Table 12.10: Density of quantified late Iron Age and Roman pottery on farmsteads across England and Wales.

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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>recorded by the Portable Antiquities Scheme (PAS) across England and Wales</td>
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</table>

### 12.11 Frequency of selected artefact categories on farmsteads in different project regions

Table 12.11: Frequency of selected artefact categories on farmsteads in different project regions.

<table>
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<tr>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>recorded by the Portable Antiquities Scheme (PAS) across England and Wales</td>
<td>398</td>
</tr>
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</table>

### 12.12 Distribution of animal bone assemblages across England and Wales

Table 12.12: Distribution of animal bone assemblages across England and Wales.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>recorded by the Portable Antiquities Scheme (PAS) across England and Wales</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

### 12.13 Relative frequency of cattle, sheep/goat and pig by project region

Table 12.13: Relative frequency of cattle, sheep/goat and pig by project region.

<table>
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<tr>
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<td>399</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 12.14 Distribution of sites with corndryers, shown at their most expansive period in the later third century A.D.

Table 12.14: Distribution of sites with corndryers, shown at their most expansive period in the later third century A.D.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Value</th>
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</table>

### 12.15 Distribution of excavated late Iron Age and Roman field systems and trackways, across England and Wales

Table 12.15: Distribution of excavated late Iron Age and Roman field systems and trackways, across England and Wales.

<table>
<thead>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>401</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 12.16 Comparison of settlement chronology by southern and eastern regions

Table 12.16: Comparison of settlement chronology by southern and eastern regions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Value</th>
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</thead>
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<tr>
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</tr>
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<td>405</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

### 12.17 Comparison of settlement chronology by northern and western regions

Table 12.17: Comparison of settlement chronology by northern and western regions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>recorded by the Portable Antiquities Scheme (PAS) across England and Wales</td>
<td>405</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 12.18 Kernel density plot of excavated settlements dating to the late Iron Age and early Roman period

Table 12.18: Kernel density plot of excavated settlements dating to the late Iron Age and early Roman period.

<table>
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</thead>
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<tr>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>406</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 12.19 Kernel density plot of excavated settlements dating to the middle and late Roman period

Table 12.19: Kernel density plot of excavated settlements dating to the middle and late Roman period.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>England and Wales</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>recorded by the Portable Antiquities Scheme (PAS) across England and Wales</td>
<td>407</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 12.20 Settlement ‘establishment’ and ‘abandonment’ during the early post-Claudian conquest period

Table 12.20: Settlement ‘establishment’ and ‘abandonment’ during the early post-Claudian conquest period.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>England and Wales</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>recorded by the Portable Antiquities Scheme (PAS) across England and Wales</td>
<td>409</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 12.21 Settlement ‘establishment’ and ‘abandonment’ during the second century A.D.

Table 12.21: Settlement ‘establishment’ and ‘abandonment’ during the second century A.D.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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</tr>
</thead>
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<tr>
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</tr>
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<td>411</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 12.22 Settlement ‘establishment’ and ‘abandonment’ during the third century A.D.

Table 12.22: Settlement ‘establishment’ and ‘abandonment’ during the third century A.D.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<tr>
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</tr>
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<td>412</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 12.23 Settlement ‘establishment’ and ‘abandonment’ during the fourth century A.D.

Table 12.23: Settlement ‘establishment’ and ‘abandonment’ during the fourth century A.D.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>recorded by the Portable Antiquities Scheme (PAS) across England and Wales</td>
<td>413</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 12.24 Excavated late Roman settlements with indications of continued activity into at least the early fifth century

Table 12.24: Excavated late Roman settlements with indications of continued activity into at least the early fifth century.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
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<tr>
<td>recorded by the Portable Antiquities Scheme (PAS) across England and Wales</td>
<td>415</td>
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</tbody>
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### 12.25 Percentage of site types located within 20 km of a major Romano-British town

Table 12.25: Percentage of site types located within 20 km of a major Romano-British town.

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<th>Region</th>
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<td>recorded by the Portable Antiquities Scheme (PAS) across England and Wales</td>
<td>418</td>
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### 12.26 Principal types of settlement in use over time within 20 km of the Roman *colonia* at Gloucester

Table 12.26: Principal types of settlement in use over time within 20 km of the Roman *colonia* at Gloucester.

<table>
<thead>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Appendix 2

#### A2.1 Distribution of excavated late Iron Age and Roman rural sites, shown as points (a) and kernel density of excavated late Iron Age and Roman rural sites

Table A2.1: Distribution of excavated late Iron Age and Roman rural sites, shown as points (a) and kernel density of excavated late Iron Age and Roman rural sites.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
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</table>
LIST OF TABLES

Chapter 1
1.1 Classification of site types on Roman Rural Settlement Project database 10

Chapter 2
2.1 Quantification of excavated rural settlements by type 18
2.2 Numbers of single, double and triple-ditched enclosures by region 27

Chapter 3
3.1 Recorded characteristics of buildings 46
3.2 Buildings interpreted as workshops: associated site types and industries 61

Chapter 4
4.1 Number of settlement types by landscape zone in the South region 80
4.2 Proportion of farmsteads classified over time in the South region 87
4.3 Buildings in the South region 103
4.4 Proportions of the three main domesticates from sites in the Middle Thames Valley case study area 134

Chapter 5
5.1 Number of excavated sites and density (per km²) by landscape zone in the Central Belt region 144
5.2 Number of settlement types by landscape zone in the Central Belt region 146
5.3 Buildings in the Central Belt region 169
5.4 Villa architecture within the Central Belt region 173
5.5 Quantity of object types by settlement category 187

Chapter 6
6.1 Number of excavated sites and density (per km²) by landscape zone in the East region 209
6.2 Number of settlement types by landscape zone in the East region 212
6.3 Buildings in the East region 228
6.4 Distribution of selected object categories across landscape zones of the East region 235

Chapter 7
7.1 Number of excavated sites and density (per km²) by landscape zone in North-East region 245
7.2 Number of settlement types by landscape zone in the North-East region 246
7.3 Buildings in the North-East region 265

Chapter 8
8.1 Number and density of sites in the Central West arranged by sub-regions 286
8.2 Major site types in the Central West region displayed by sub-region 287
8.3 Buildings in the Central West region 295

Chapter 9
9.1 Number of excavated sites and density (per km²) by landscape zone in the North region 311
9.2 Number of settlement types in each landscape zone in the North region 312
9.3 Buildings in the North region 320
9.4 Building material at farmsteads in the North region 321
9.5 Presence of archaeobotanical evidence at rural sites in the North region 326

Chapter 10
10.1 Number of excavated sites and density (per km²) by landscape zone in the South-West region 334
10.2 Number of settlement types in each landscape zone in the South-West region 335
10.3 Numbers and proportions of objects of different functional types recorded by the Portable Antiquities Scheme from Devon and Cornwall 355

Chapter 11
11.1 Number of excavated sites and density (per km²) by sub-region in Upland Wales and the Marches 361
11.2 Number of settlement types by sub-region in Upland Wales and the Marches 362

Chapter 12
12.1 Selected sample of radiocarbon dates from sites with late Roman activity suggesting possible activity in the post-Roman period 415
PREFACE
By Michael Fulford and Neil Holbrook

This is the first of three volumes in a series entitled New Visions of the Countryside of Roman Britain. These books represent one of the main products of a collaboration that dates back to 2006. In that year we agreed to work together to create a project which sought to define and evaluate the contribution that investigations undertaken as part of the planning process made to academic knowledge of Roman Britain. Our hope was that the project would play a major part in addressing concerns that were being increasingly aired about the dislocation between archaeologists charged with the investigation of landscapes in advance of development and those involved in teaching and research (who are largely based in universities). The dramatic increase in the volume of archaeological fieldwork as a consequence of the introduction of new planning guidance in England in 1990, and Wales in 1991, has been well rehearsed (for instance Darvill and Russell 2002, 52, and below in Ch. 1). This guidance articulated a clear presumption in favour of the physical preservation of archaeological remains that would be affected by a proposed development, but, where it was decided that this was not an appropriate outcome, it put responsibility on developers, rather than the state, to fund prior archaeological recording and the subsequent analysis and dissemination of the results.

As the amount of archaeological work undertaken in the UK increased in the 1990s, so did concerns about the fragmentation of the archaeological discipline and, in particular, the realisation that the enormous quantity of new data being generated on an almost daily basis by archaeological contracting organisations was having very little impact on how British archaeology was being taught and researched in Universities (for instance, Olivier 1996; James and Millett 2001, 1; and for the fact that these concerns had not gone away, Southport Group 2011, 14–17). This lack of cohesion was due to a number of factors, not least the unfamiliarity of the products of commercial investigations, which can be divided into two categories: fieldwork investigations, which normally occur prior to the determination of a planning application (‘evaluations’), and those secured as a condition of consent (‘post-determination’ work, so-called because it occurs after the determination of planning applications). The former aim to characterise the archaeological deposits present and inform decisions on their management; they use techniques such as surface collection, geophysical survey and trial trenching. The latter are designed to make a record of deposits prior to destruction and involve methods such as open-area excavation, strip-and-record sample excavation and watching brief. The outcomes of evaluations and small-scale post-determination works such as watching briefs are unpublished reports produced in very small numbers that are normally deposited in the local Historic Environment Record (HER). It is generally envisaged that the results of more substantial pieces of post-determination work to mitigate the effects of development will be published in conventional ways, although sometimes little more than a note may appear in a county journal. For larger excavations it is commonplace to compile a post-excavation assessment report that seeks to summarise what has been found (features, finds and environmental evidence), assess the potential of these data to address specific research questions, and propose an appropriate level of further analysis to be contained in the final published report. The reports that document the results of the various investigations described above have been termed grey literature, which we can characterise as unpublished reports produced in small numbers and with very limited distribution. Until comparatively recently grey literature reports could only be consulted by visiting an individual county or district HER in person, although the development of the on-line library of unpublished fieldwork reports hosted by the Archaeology Data Service (ADS) and Archwilio in Wales has had a profound impact on increasing the accessibility of grey literature (over 34,000 reports were available for download from the ADS in December 2015). For the two decades following 1990, however, many researchers decided, not unsurprisingly, that they would get a better return on their limited research time by restricting themselves to conventionally published, and thus more generally available, works (Fulford 2011). A number of major national syntheses published in that period therefore made little use of the new evidence generated by commercial archaeology (for instance, Cunliffe 2005; Mattingly 2006). Some academics did, however, rise to the challenge presented by the myriad of new evidence, and research students began to engage with this source on a more regular basis (early examples of
published works that made extensive use of grey literature include Moore 2006 and Yates 2007). Richard Bradley was one of the leading early pioneers in this area (Phillips and Bradley 2004) and he published an influential paper in 2006 which concluded that syntheses concerned with prehistoric Britain and based purely on conventionally published data contain serious lacunae in a number of important areas (Bradley 2006).

It was against this backdrop that we developed a proposal to English Heritage (now Historic England) for a project entitled *Assessing the Research Potential of Grey Literature in the Study of Roman England*. The concept was to examine the research dividend that could be gained from a study of grey literature relating to investigations that have discovered Roman period remains in England, and investigate ways of bridging the gap between individual typescript reports held in the HERs and overarching regional or national syntheses. The project was conceived from the outset as a partnership between academia and the commercial sector, and was designed in three stages. Stage 1 was concerned with a rapid national overview of how much work had been done between 1990 and 2004, where it was located, and an assessment of what proportion of grey literature had reached conventional publication (Holbrook and Morton 2011). Stage 2 targeted four pilot areas (Essex, Somerset, South and West Yorkshire combined and Warwickshire) for a more detailed assessment of the research potential of the grey literature (Holbrook 2010; 2011; Hodgson 2011; 2012). This work suggested that about 9000 separate interventions had encountered Roman archaeology in England in the period 1990–2010 and that, while gains in knowledge had been uneven, the evidence pertaining to the Romano-British countryside had the highest research potential both in terms of its quantity and its potential for hitherto unattempted synthesis (Fulford and Holbrook 2011).

Stage 3 was always envisaged as a national survey of England (and hopefully Wales as well), but the results of Stages 1 and 2 had highlighted the considerable level of funding necessary to achieve this, even if analysis was restricted solely to the Roman countryside. The costs of the national survey were beyond those that could be met by the resources available to English Heritage alone, and so a grant proposal was developed jointly to both English Heritage and the Leverhulme Trust in 2011. The proposal was accepted and work commenced in March 2012 on a study entitled *The Evaluation of PPG16, ‘Grey’ Literature and the Rural Settlement of Roman Britain*. Initially the area of study was restricted to England, but, thanks to a second grant from the Leverhulme Trust in 2015, we were able to expand the area under consideration to include Wales. Even with this level of funding the scale of the project was daunting, and a number of pragmatic decisions were made. The major towns of Roman Britain always lay outside the remit of this study, although an evaluation of the contribution of commercial archaeology to knowledge of these important urban centres has been published elsewhere (Fulford and Holbrook 2015). The evidence from the so-called ‘small towns’ was a challenge to accommodate within the resources available, and a purely pragmatic decision was taken to exclude the defended small towns. The arbitrariness of this division was always apparent to us, and we were able to rectify the situation in 2015 thanks to a generous donation from Mr Paul Chadwick that allowed us to collect data from the walled small towns. This evidence was not available in time to inform the analyses presented in this volume, although it will be included in the studies contained in the subsequent ones.

The methods adopted by the project are set out in Chapter 1, but, from the outset, one of our major objectives was to actively engage with regional audiences who had an interest in the project and its outcomes (such as those responsible for specifying and undertaking commercially funded investigations, academics and local interest groups). We were always clear that we did not wish to collect data in a vacuum without an opportunity to feedback and discuss our emerging ideas. We therefore held seven regional meetings between March 2013 and December 2014 in Cambridge, Leicester, London, Birmingham, Exeter, York and Durham, each attended by between 50–100 people, with a national meeting in Reading in April 2015 to launch the project database and a meeting in Cardiff to discuss the findings in Wales in November 2015. These meetings were dynamic events that proved extremely valuable in raising awareness of the project, winning local support and generating engagement between the project team and those with local and regional expertise. They also provided a forum to critically examine aspects of contemporary professional practice in the investigation, analysis and publication of work on Romano-British rural settlements. The value of such events is a lesson from this project that future national surveys might usefully consider.

This series of volumes is a timely survey of the present state of knowledge of the Romano-British countryside. There is already a pressing need to demonstrate to the wider community the extent and quality of the knowledge gain stimulated by the implementation of the new planning policies and the public benefit that accrues from the
considerable sums invested by developers in the investigation of late Iron Age and Roman rural settlements impacted by development. Why should national and local government require developers to continue to fund this work if its public benefit cannot be appreciated? Indeed the true potential of work done since 1990 cannot be fully realised without a synthetic project of this kind. At just over £1 million, the cost of this project represents less than half of one per cent of the estimated £200 million or so spent by developers on investigations relating to the rural settlement of Roman Britain in the period 1990–2010. In those terms expenditure of this order to make sense of much of what has gone on surely represents value for money.

This project tests a number of hypotheses relating to the Romano-British countryside through an examination of the excavated evidence. Our approach has been an integrative one, which gives equal weight to investigations reported solely in grey literature compared to those disseminated in more conventional formats. Through a consideration of settlement archaeology, finds and environmental data our overarching objective is to produce a new characterisation of the Romano-British countryside, and in this respect this project can be considered as one of a clutch of so-called ‘Big Data’ projects started, and in some cases completed, over the last few years. These include the Fields of Britannia project at the University of Exeter (Rippon et al. 2015); English Landscapes and Identities (‘EngLaid’) at the University of Oxford and Hoarding in Iron Age and Roman Britain at the University of Leicester and the British Museum. In all these projects the hope has been that, through the examination of particularly large datasets, new patterning will be identified that might not be apparent with smaller samples. Such projects pose their own particular challenges, not least that the size of the datasets does not permit a critical evaluation of individual records. For example, in this project it has not been feasible to re-evaluate the reliability of the site chronologies presented in the original reports. Undoubtedly in some cases the dating suggested by the excavators might at best be questionable or at worst plain wrong. But to have done this for all of the c. 2500 sites would have been a truly Herculean task. The expectation is, however, that, through amalgamating numerous interventions and looking to the bigger picture, individual biases will fade into the background and broader trends will shine through.

Another major challenge with Big Data projects is to recognise factors that might bias the data recovered, and to evaluate the degree to which patterning is a true reflection of past activities rather than a product of modern ones. As this project is concerned with excavated evidence, a fundamental consideration is the degree to which spatial patterns apparent in the data are a product of the complex set of factors that dictate where archaeologists excavate. And these have not been constant over time. Whereas in the nineteenth and most of the twentieth centuries much attention was focused on villas, due both to their high visibility in the landscape and the prevailing research interests of the time, from the second half of the twentieth century, and especially from 1990 onwards, the predominant factor in determining the location of archaeological work has related to where development was to take place. The project team is acutely aware of this issue and in each regional chapter they have sought to critically evaluate the causes behind spatial patterning. While the number of sites investigated varies considerably between regions, in every case the authors have been able to break away from previous characterisations based upon a small number of ‘type-sites’ and are able to present a much more subtle and nuanced analysis that draws on the richness of the data now available.

As stated above, this is the first in a series of three books. This volume considers the settlement evidence, principally the morphology of rural settlements and the architecture of their constituent buildings. Conclusions are drawn on a variety of topics including the influence of existing patterns of late Iron Age settlement on later arrangements; regional diversity in settlement form and location; variation in the chronologies of rural settlements in different parts of the country; the interplay between landscape and cultural influences on settlement, and the effects that proximity to urban centres and roads had on settlement location. In many respects this volume sets the framework for the further studies that will be provided in volumes 2 and 3, and, for that reason, sizeable parts of this book are necessarily descriptive. What this volume does not do is to offer any firm conclusions on overall settlement densities in Roman Britain as the excavated evidence is but one source for this analysis (which is better accomplished through extrapolation from extensive regional surveys and estimations from all currently known late Iron Age or Romano-British settlements contained in sources such as Jeremy Taylor’s 2007 study or Historic England’s AMIE (Archives and Monuments Information England) database. There are a few areas, however, such as the environs of Cambridge and the Upper Thames Valley east of Cirencester, where development has been preceded by so many archaeological interventions that we reach the nearest approximation to a total excavated landscape.
The second volume in the series will be concerned with the rural economy of Roman Britain and examine themes associated with agriculture, industry, transport and markets, drawing heavily on the environmental and artefactual evidence. Volume 3 will examine the rural population of the countryside, and the evidence for their rituals and religion. It will look at the visibility in the record for the multifarious identities that made up the province, and the considerable evidence for religious expression, including regional and chronological variations in burial practice. All three books are underpinned by the project database hosted by the Archaeology Data Service, which is described in Chapter 1 and Appendix 1. Launched in April 2015 this has already proved to be a valuable and popular resource: the website received over 6000 visits and 7000 downloads of reports and site plans in the first seven months following its release. The great beauty of the database is that it permits individual researchers to undertake their own analyses and follow their own research directions. Given the time-limited funding of this project there is no mechanism to update the database with new discoveries made since 2012/13. However, given the linkages implicit in its design it should be possible for individual HERs to build upon our work and they will remain the primary source of information on the results of work undertaken within the planning system.

While we have spent much time in this project reviewing what has been learnt, it is equally important that we also look ahead as the archaeological and land-use planning communities need to learn from what has been achieved in the first 25 years of commercial archaeology, and how it has been achieved, in order to influence best practice in the future. This relates not only to the sampling strategies determined by curatorial archaeologists for the areas and volumes to be excavated, but also the way material culture and environmental data are recovered, quantified and reported. This is a key moment to evaluate past practice and set down benchmarks for the future. We will present our thoughts on the effectiveness of methodologies used to examine and report on rural settlements in a separate paper in 2017, which will draw heavily on the thought-provoking discussions that formed such a vital part of the regional meetings.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The research that underpins this report would not have been possible without the generous grant awarded by Historic England to Neil Holbrook at Cotswold Archaeology and by the Leverhulme Trust (RPG-417) to Professor Michael Fulford at the Dept of Archaeology, University of Reading and to Professor Julian Richards at the Archaeology Data Service, University of York.

Given the collaborative nature of this project there are many people and institutions who have made significant contributions to our work. Barney Sloane, Head of Strategic Planning and Management Division at Historic England, supported the project from the outset and was instrumental in obtaining the necessary resources. His colleagues Kath Buxton, Roger Thomas and Pete Wilson also assisted the project in various ways. At a time when local authority historic environment services were subject to severe funding restrictions we were acutely aware that the success of the project would rest in no small measure on the ability of HER staff to supply digital copies of grey literature reports. We therefore developed a close relationship with various leading members of the Association of Local Government Archaeological Officers (ALGAO), principally, Dave Barrett, Stewart Bryant, Fiona Gale and Fiona MacDonald. Their enthusiastic support from the outset, coupled with that of their colleagues in individual HERs, enabled us to interact successfully with all 92 HERs in England and Wales, a truly excellent outcome. Stewart also represented ALGAO on the project steering committee. We benefited greatly from the involvement of a series of regionally based experts who were influential participants at the open meetings and also reviewed an early draft of the chapters in this volume that covered their areas of knowledge: Paul Booth (London and the South East); Nick Cooper (East Midlands); Christopher Evans (Eastern); Peter Guest (Wales); Nick Hodgson (North East and North West); Ian Roberts (Yorkshire and Humber), and Andy Wigley (West Midlands). We thank them for putting their knowledge at our disposal. The project benefited greatly from the wise counsel afforded by the project steering committee under the skilful chairmanship of Stephen Rippon.

The expansion of the project into Wales was facilitated by the support of Kate Roberts of Cadw and Chris Martin, and the inclusion of the walled small towns was made possible by the generosity of Paul Chadwick. The project was managed for Cotswold Archaeology by Nathan Blick with exemplary efficiency, and Rob Skinner played a vital role in liaising with the many HER officers. He also dealt with numerous organisations responsible for producing the grey literature, and the willingness of these contractors to allow their reports to be disseminated through the project website was a major boost to us. The data collected was assimilated and entered into the project database by Martyn Allen, Tom Brindle and Alex Smith, and more latterly by Lisa Lodwick. The on-line project database was developed by the Archaeology Data Service at the University of York, and we are grateful to Julian Richards, Catherine Hardman and, especially, Tim Evans who was crucial to making the website such a powerful and valuable resource. Tim’s presentations on the database were an important part of the regional meetings.

Our main debt, however, is to the three principal authors of this volume who were employed at the University of Reading to undertake the Leverhulme project: Senior Research Fellow Alex Smith and Research Fellows Martyn Allen and Tom Brindle. Their expertise, enthusiasm and sheer hard work over the last three years has made the project what it is.

Earlier drafts of sections of this volume were commented upon by the regional experts named above, and we are also grateful to Paul Bidwell, editor of the Britannia Monograph series, for his assistance in bringing it to publication. The illustrations were produced by Sarah Lambert-Gates and Daniel Wheeler, with the large number of maps produced by Tom Brindle. Copy editing was undertaken by Val Kinsler, 100% Proof, and the volume was guided through the press for the Roman Society by Lynn Pitts with her normal exemplary efficiency.

Michael Fulford, University of Reading  
Neil Holbrook, Cotswold Archaeology  
December 2015
SUMMARY

It has often been stated that Roman Britain was fundamentally a rural society, with the vast majority of the population living and working in the countryside. Yet there was clearly a large degree of regional variation, and with the mass of new data produced since the onset of developer-funded archaeology in 1990, the diversity of Roman-period rural settlement across the landscape can now be demonstrated. Drawing on the evidence from c. 2500 excavated settlements, this volume presents a new framework of eight regions for the study of rural Roman Britain, in which has been developed a 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 that has for so long dominated discourse in the study of Roman Britain. 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 large enclosure complexes of the central English river valleys. Farmsteads have been classified through site morphology (using site plans), with further exploration of their associated buildings, surrounding landscape context and wealth of material culture and environmental evidence. The physical, social and economic relationships between farmstead types and other forms of settlement (villas, military vici, villages and roadside settlements) have been explored, allowing the demonstration of distinct variation across space and time. Many of the regional differences would appear to relate to the variable settlement patterns and social structures of pre-Roman Britain, but there is little evidence to corroborate existing understanding of the territories of Iron Age ‘tribes’ and subsequent Roman administrative regions, or civitates.

The increased emphasis on farmsteads, as the most numerous type of rural settlement, has had a major impact on our understanding of chronological patterning in the Roman countryside. In particular the second century emerges as the period when most settlements were in use, and is therefore arguably the point at which the population was at its height, drawing us away from previous assertions of a ‘golden age’ of rural expansion in the late Roman period. There is, nevertheless, a notable shift in the overall focus of settlement over time away from the south-east, with parts of central and western England maintaining relatively high numbers of settlements into the third and fourth centuries A.D. These included many large farmsteads and sites that developed architectural characteristics which would define them as villas – all part of the increasing wealth that appears concentrated in this region, which could readily be described as the ‘bread basket’ of Roman Britain.

The analysis presented in this volume has been primarily devoted to gaining a better understanding of the nature, form and development of Roman rural settlements, while a further two volumes will focus on the economy and the peoples and rituals of rural Roman Britain. All volumes take an integrated approach, utilising many different strands of evidence in order to breathe new life into our understanding of the Romano-British countryside.
Il a souvent été déclaré que la Bretagne romaine était une société fondamentalement rurale, dont la vaste majorité de la population vivait et travaillait à la campagne. Pourtant, il existait manifestement d’importantes variations régionales et, grâce à la masse de nouvelles données générées depuis le début de la privatisation de l’archéologie en 1990, il est à présent possible de démontrer la diversité de l’habitat rural de l’époque romaine à travers le paysage. En puisant parmi l’ensemble des témoignages issus de la fouille d’environ 2500 habitats, ce présent volume permet de présenter un nouveau cadre de 8 régions pour l’étude de la Bretagne rurale romaine, un cadre au sein duquel s’est développée une caractérisation de la mosaïque des communautés qui ont peuplé la province et la manière dont ces dernières ont changé au fil du temps. La ferme est au devant de la scène, plutôt que la villa qui, elle, a dominé le discours de l’étude de la Bretagne romaine depuis fort longtemps. Ces fermes présentent des variations régionales notables, allant des enclos circulaires évidents dans certaines parties de la Cornouaille jusqu’aux enclos rectangulaires en pierre sèche du nord-ouest du Pays de Galles et aux complexes de grands enclos des vallées fluviales centrales britanniques. Les fermes ont fait l’objet d’une classification selon la morphologie du site (utilisation de plans de site), à laquelle s’est ajoutée l’exploration plus exhaustive des bâtiments qui leur sont associés, du contexte du paysage environnant et de la richesse de la culture matérielle et des restes environnementaux. Il a ainsi été possible d’explorer les liens physiques, sociaux et économiques existant entre les types de fermes et autres formes d’habitats (villas, vici militaires, villages et habitats en bordure de route), ce qui a permis de démontrer les degrés de changement divers à travers l’espace et dans le temps. Nombre des différences régionales notées sembleraient à la fois relever de l’agencement des habitats et des structures sociales variables de la Bretagne préromaine, mais il existe peu de preuves permettant de corroborer ce que nous comprenons des territoires des « tribus » de l’âge du fer avec les régions administratives romaines qui ont suivi, ou civitates.

L’accent croissant mis sur les fermes, comme type d’habitat rural le plus représenté, a eu un impact majeur pour comprendre la structuration chronologique au sein de la campagne romaine. En particulier, le IIème siècle émerge comme le moment auquel la plupart des habitats étaient en usage, et donc sans doute une période durant laquelle la population était à son maximum, ce qui contredit les précédentes affirmations d’un « âge d’or » de l’expansion rurale à l’antiquité tardive. Il faut noter, néanmoins, un déplacement notable de l’objectif d’ensemble de l’habitat au fil du temps marqué par un éloignement du sud-est, avec des parties de l’Angleterre centrale et ouest maintenant un nombre d’habitats relativement élevés durant les IIIème et IVème siècles après J.-C. Il s’agissait de nombreuses grandes fermes et sites dont les traits architecturaux les auraient communément définies comme des villas – tout ceci faisant partie intégrante de la richesse qui semblait être concentrée dans cette région et que l’on pourrait décrire comme le « grenier à blé » de la Bretagne romaine.

L’analyse présentée dans ce volume a pour vocation première de mieux appréhender la nature, la forme et l’évolution des habitats ruraux romains, tandis que les deux suivants se focaliseront sur l’économie puis les peuples et rituels de la Bretagne rurale romaine. Les trois ouvrages ont une approche intégrée et utilisent de nombreux éléments distincts de témoignages afin d’améliorer notre compréhension de la campagne romano-britannique.

