CHAPTER 8

CONCLUSIONS

By Alexander Smith and Michael Fulford

INTRODUCTION

One of the overarching themes running through this and other volumes in the *New Visions* series is that the countryside of Roman Britain – its settlements, farming regimes, industries, social structures and ritual practices – is a great deal more varied and complex than previous syntheses have concluded. In many ways the increased awareness of its complexity is a natural consequence of the collection and synthesis of thousands of excavation reports of late Iron Age and Roman sites from across England and Wales. We now have many more pieces of the jigsaw, though it remains a very incomplete picture, and one with significant changes over the four hundred year timeframe under review. As with Volume 2 (Allen *et al.* 2017), this volume has utilised the framework set out in Volume 1 (Smith *et al.* 2016), with its eight regions and range of different settlement types, in order to facilitate more readily comparison and understanding of geographic and social variation across the Roman province. But whereas the previous volumes have focused on characterising the settlements and economic life of the countryside, here we have put the people firmly at the heart of the analysis – how they looked, lived, interacted with the material and spiritual worlds surrounding them, and also how they died, and what their physical remains can tell us.

A book concerned with life and death in the countryside of Roman Britain has a very wide potential remit, but analysis has largely focused upon certain aspects of identity, lifestyle and ritual practices that best correlate with the types and quantities of data collected for this project. As previously noted (Fulford and Allen 2016, 2–3), much of these data derive from development-led archaeological investigations of the past 30 years, which have been particularly successful in revealing large numbers of Roman-period farmsteads of differing forms across England and Wales. When it comes to understanding life and death in Roman Britain, this has had a fundamental impact, as most previous accounts relate to urban, military or high-status (i.e. villa) rural settlements. Life and death within lower status farmsteads – where the vast majority of the population would have resided – has been largely ignored (with notable exceptions such as Mattingly 2006, 353–490; Gerrard 2013, 236–43; McCarthy 2013), mostly for lack of evidence. This is a world that has rarely been explored before, and never in as much depth as has been possible here, resulting in a picture of the countryside of Roman Britain that is – for the most part – quite removed from the bucolic scenes of villa life, such as that depicted in the reconstruction of Great Witcombe villa in Gloucestershire, shown in FIG. 8.1.

IDENTITY AND DIVERSITY: THEMES FROM THE CURRENT VOLUME

Brindle's analysis in Chapter 2 used various categories of object associated with dress and personal display – particularly brooches – to highlight the great diversity of peoples in the Roman province. In general terms, it was pointed out that people living in much of southern and eastern Britain would seem to have had very different ways of dressing than most of those further north and west. In the South and Central Belt it is possible to go further. During the late Iron Age and early Roman period there was a difference in the clothing worn by the inhabitants of different types of settlement. The clothes of those living in farmsteads would typically have required brooches as fasteners, while those living in other settlements, notably villas, complex farmsteads and nucleated settlements, were more likely to have also worn other items of dress accessory, such as metal bracelets and finger rings. In addition, the presence of hairpins, particularly at villas, points to more elaborate hairstyles for elite woman. On this basis, it was suggested that the occupants of these settlements in the Central Belt or South regions, for instance, would have been able to distinguish themselves from the occupants of an enclosed farmstead, based upon their appearance.

In the north and west of the Roman province, there is very little evidence for anybody's personal appearance, except at forts and associated *vici*, suggesting that traditional styles of dress continued, with little influence from the substantial military population, although this may have been a product of tight military control and a lack of access to certain dress accessories. However, the Roman occupation did result in some changes to people's appearance, in the form of the relatively widespread

FIG. 8.1. Artist's reconstruction of Great Witcombe villa, Gloucestershire © Historic England (illustration by Ivan Lapper)

use of glass bangles (if they were indeed a form of dress accessory), which, together with the distribution of metal torcs, may reflect the conscious construction of new group identities to counter the more 'Roman'-inspired dress of the military communities.

Such cultural identities and social strategies could be defined and manipulated through many different media, including domestic environments and lifestyle choices. This has been explored in Chapter 3, which focused upon variations in domestic homes, including aspects such as security, lighting and the existence of gardens, alongside evidence for eating and drinking, recreation and literacy. The multiplicity of lifestyles in rural Roman Britain was made clear, though it is true to say that most country dwellers continued to live in fairly simple, and probably multi-functional, houses with minimal architectural elaboration or decoration, albeit with a progressively greater tendency for rectilinear building forms in most areas. Many aspects of lifestyle are likely to have remained largely unaltered from the pre-conquest period, though settlements with greater socio-economic connectivity – notably those that developed into villas, complex farmsteads and particularly nucleated settlements on the road network – were clearly associated with a greater range of opportunities and pace of lifestyle change. Increased use of locks and keys, for example, suggests both greater affluence and a greater need for security, while more evidence for lighting equipment may have impacted upon aspects such as the length of the working day and social activities like reading and dining.

Evidence for recreational activities is relatively sparse, presumably since the majority of the rural population would not have had much in the way of leisure time, certainly as suggested by skeletal pathologies, which, as highlighted below, indicated a harsh working life for most rural inhabitants. This is not to say that there would not have been any 'down-time', but rather that any entertainment was perhaps more based upon traditional activities, such as music and story-telling around the hearth fire, rather than 'Roman' games. Social bathing is often seen as a typically 'Roman' past-time, yet bathhouses were largely restricted to urban populations and the few wealthy rural elite; it is possible that some villa estate workers in the south may have had occasional access to bathing establishments, but it seems certain that the vast majority of country folk did not.

Analysis of the evidence for Latin and literacy has shown a strong correlation with the road

system and its associated settlements, including roadside settlements, larger urban centres and military sites, undoubtedly reflecting their key role in the bureaucracy and management of the province. The ability to read and write Latin at rural settlements away from the main communications routes was largely restricted to a few rural elite.

The cultural diversity and dynamism of rural Roman Britain can also be expressed through people's relations with the world around them, and Allen's analysis in Chapter 4 has ably demonstrated this through a study of the social connections of people with animals and the natural environment. As discussed at length in Volume 2 (Allen *et al.* 2017), farming was by far the most important economic activity in Roman Britain, and the major developments in farming practices would have had far-reaching social implications. Cattle, for example, are likely to have been utilised as a form of wealth and prestige during the Iron Age, only to be slaughtered for feasting during social exchanges. They became steadily more common, at least from the second century A.D. onwards, in response to a widespread expansion of arable agriculture across southern and central England, where they switched to being 'beasts of burden', used as traction for ploughing and haulage, thereby marking a complete social change in human–animal relationships. They may have become a shared resource between rural households in these areas in order to shoulder the increasing agricultural burden, which was in part dictated by demands of the state. In such circumstances it is thought likely that farmers would have built up strong social bonds with their cattle, which would have differentiated them from urban dwellers, where cattle were likely to have been viewed purely as a commodity for meat, leather etc.

It is thus the case that attitudes toward animals and nature in towns and forts may have been quite different to much of the countryside. The occupants of villas, however, also demonstrate a distinctive relationship with the natural world, as seen through evidence for keeping 'exotic' wildlife and hunting wild animals. The increased exploitation of wild resources is thought to be consistent with changes associated with an increased emphasis on the accumulation of landed wealth, and deer hunting may have thus become a means of expressing land rights. It all seems a very clear ideological shift from the Iron Age worldview, where wild animals are thought to have been regarded with reverence.

This is not to say that religious ideologies were any less significant in the countryside of Roman Britain than they were in the Iron Age, with all aspects of rural life being intimately connected with a belief in the supernatural. The assessment of religion in rural Roman Britain in Chapter 5 thus lies at the heart of this volume. It focuses upon analyses of sacred space, along with the material culture, plant and animal remains that either formed part of ritual practices, or else had some other religious associations.

The first point to highlight is that certain elements of religious expression changed significantly into and throughout the Roman period, and exhibited a great deal of variation, some on a regional scale, others reflecting local traditions and individual choices. People appear, for the most part, to have been able to exert considerable control over many aspects of their religious lives, from the use of religious objects, including figurines and amulets, to the performance of rituals involving sacrifice and the deposition of artefacts and ecofacts. Such 'structured deposition' was widespread and could clearly be performed in a variety of contexts, though there were regional and chronological patterns noted in the types of features generally used for the deposits.

Structured deposits were certainly not confined to religious sites, although these are, nevertheless, numerous in certain parts of the Roman province, their geographic variability reflecting the traditions and choices of individual families and communities. Those places defined here as shrines are relatively widely distributed, in the Roman period at least, and take on a variety of different forms, from buildings and enclosures to sites merely defined by concentrations of finds. Some small rural shrines appear relatively isolated in the landscape, and may have been visited fairly infrequently, but they presumably marked places of special significance. Most of the shrines directly associated with farmsteads lay within the Central Belt region, the majority of these farms being of complex type. Such shrines likely served just the families and other workers on these agricultural settlements, but there were also other sacred places in the landscape reserved for much larger scale ritual activities, probably designed to ensure the welfare of the wider community. In the East region these were largely confined to the towns and other nucleated settlements, while in parts of the South and Central Belt regions, religious complexes developed in the wider countryside, some of these developing to a scale where they can barely be differentiated from 'small towns'. The majority of these complexes have temples of Romano-Celtic form, and might have attracted worshippers from some distance; they were, perhaps, under some level of *civitas* control, or may even have been largely independent communities. Such Romano-Celtic temples have typically been regarded as the 'standard' form of religious architecture in Roman

Britain, though it is now clear that they only represent a relatively small fraction of sacred sites, usually associated with public sanctuaries and other forms of 'elite' architectural display.

The depth of pagan religious beliefs and practices in the countryside undoubtedly remained strong into the late and post-Roman periods. While most of the major sanctuaries went into physical decline before the end of the Roman period, this was often contemporaneous with surrounding settlements, and there is no discernible evidence for any friction with Christianity. Indeed there is only fairly limited evidence for Christian communities beyond villas and nucleated settlements, and it would be some time after the Roman period before this religion took a deep and lasting hold in the countryside.

While the majority of this volume is concerned with the lives of the peoples of rural Roman Britain, Chapters 6 and 7 assess evidence for the dead. In Chapter 6, the various rituals associated with death are considered, and burial rites examined. The late Iron Age and Roman periods were particularly dynamic in terms of changing attitudes to the disposal of dead, developing from many different local and regional funerary traditions, to a somewhat more widespread but heterogeneous burial tradition, which was particularly marked across the Central Belt and western part of the South region. Perhaps one of the biggest changes in many areas was that the dead were being increasingly interred within graves, whether as cremated remains or as a body, whereas previously they had left little trace, the remains presumably being disposed of in ways that are archaeologically invisible. Yet, even though – in some places at least – there was clearly an increase in burial during the late Iron Age and early Roman periods, it is unlikely in most cases that these burials represent the total deceased populations of their communities, with traditional 'invisible' funerary rites, such as excarnation and dispersal, continuing as before. Why certain communities chose to start to bury at least a proportion of their dead, and how these individuals were selected, remain difficult questions for future research.

The spike in burial numbers in large parts of central Britain, in particular, during the later Roman period is notable. At this time, formal interment of the dead may have been considered as a 'normative' (though far from exclusive) funerary rite within many communities, particularly those living within some of the larger complex farmsteads, villas and nucleated settlements, paralleling the substantial numbers of late Roman burials at larger towns. Much of this general increase in interments is due to the greater use of defined burial zones, or cemeteries, as opposed to more dispersed burial within and around the settlements and fields. The use of cemeteries is certainly linked to the scale of the site, and possibly to an increased population, but is also associated with higher levels of likely social and economic interactivity with other settlements, with burial grounds perhaps used as part of wider mechanisms employed to enhance social standing. Rural cemeteries may also, however, have been used to exert an element of control over sections of the agricultural workforce.

Osteological data for 2717 individuals, from 102 settlements of primarily mid- to late Roman date in the South, East and Central Belt regions, were analysed by Rohnbogner in Chapter 7, making it the most comprehensive osteological dataset for rural Roman Britain to date. Although analysis was obviously limited to those selected members of communities who had been formally interred as complete, un-cremated individuals, it has provided important new observations on the rural living environment of Roman Britain, including aspects of diet and the range of daily stressors that impacted on wellbeing in the countryside.

Elevated levels in mortality and morbidity were generally apparent in infants (1.1–2.5 year olds) and younger children (2.6–6.5 year olds), indicating the dangers of exposure to pathogens and inadequate nutrition that follows the cessation of breast milk and introduction of supplementary feeding in the childhood diet. Older children (6.6–10.5 years) were also seen to have experienced a range of health problems, though these may be more regionally specific, with, for example, greater occurrence of metabolic disease in western parts of the Central Belt, some perhaps linked with a lack of fresh fruit and vegetables in the diet. Crucially, in comparison with children from urban sites, the more simple diets of rural children may hint at a lower social status. In addition, it would seem that the adverse health effects evident in older children probably attest to the early start of their working lives.

It is clear from adult buried remains that older ages (46 years +) could be achieved across all of the areas studied, though, as with the children, there was regional variation in the prevalence of certain diseases, such as malaria and tuberculosis in parts of the South, and metabolic disease in western parts of the Central Belt. Of course there was also much individual variation, with, for example, the deceased from the roadside settlement at Higham Ferrers, Northants, seemingly being more disposed to upper respiratory tract infections, probably caused by increased pollutants (e.g. smoke). Overall, the palaeopathology of the rural adult population indicates a physically hard,

strenuous lifestyle, probably dictated by the heavy demands of agricultural labour. Furthermore, although both men and women suffered stress, differences suggest that divisions of activities were undertaken according to sex. Compared with both the preceding Iron Age and the contemporary adult urban populations, the rural peoples of later Roman Britain, although 'coping', were clearly more stressed, with significant short-comings in their health.

CULTURAL LANDSCAPES AND SOCIAL CONNECTIVITY

The analyses presented in this volume have demonstrated major heterogeneity in the social construct of rural Roman Britain, on a regional, local and individual basis. People in various parts of the countryside would have had differences in appearance, diet, forms of dwelling, methods of interaction with the spiritual world, and concepts of dealing with their dead, among many other aspects of their existence. Any corresponding shared cultural characteristics may have created levels of social cohesiveness among peoples in certain areas, although defining broader, cultural landscapes across the province is difficult. The distinctive, late Iron Age, so called 'Aylesford-Swarling Culture' of south-east England (notably Kent, Essex and Hertfordshire), defined primarily by the presence of cremation burial and distinctive wheel-turned pottery, certainly indicates a level of cultural cohesion, one that appears to have been partly stimulated by the transformation of existing links with northern Gaul, where there seems to have been a broadly similar social organisation (Champion 2016, 161). However, there was still considerable diversity within the burial and settlement evidence of the south-east at this time, and the distinctive developments in this region form part of wider cultural changes found across different parts of Britain – there is certainly little to suggest that they were initiated by any mass movement of population from Gaul to Britain (Caesar's 'Belgic migration', *BGall* 5.12; Hill 2007, 24; T. Moore 2016, 264).

As previously demonstrated (Smith and Fulford 2016, 402–3), it has not been possible to conclusively identify the extent of any named 'tribes' or *civitates* (Roman administrative districts) within the distribution of archaeological data, perhaps because these were not based upon any underlying, consistent, shared cultural values. Indeed, Moore (2011, following Roymans 2004 for the Batavians) has argued that such larger socio-political entities may have had fairly limited periods of relevance, developing towards the very end of the Iron Age, in response to expanding Roman power, and becoming less important by the third century A.D. (see below, p. 351). Although certain people, particularly those of higher social status, may have had some sense of identity associated with a particular *civitas*, especially during the earlier Roman period, it is likely that most rural peoples' 'worldview' remained on a fairly local scale.

Nevertheless, although the identification of particular *civitates* remains elusive within the archaeological record, there are some forms of evidence that suggest there were areas where people shared certain cultural values, as seen, for example, with burial practice. Analysis in Chapter 6 highlighted various late Iron Age and early Roman mortuary rites that had strong and well-known regional associations, including, as just noted, a concentration of cremation burial in the south-east, of 'Durotrigan' burial in parts of Dorset, and of cist burial further to the south-west. Yet, even within these areas, there is still considerable variety in funerary rites, and it is highly unlikely that all such burial traditions belonged to separate, culturally homogeneous zones. The reality was undoubtedly far more complex. Other evidence often used to suggest regional cultural coherency during the late Iron Age includes distinctive pottery types and different coin series, the distributions of which would broadly correlate with some of the burial traditions in, for example, parts of the south-east and in Dorset (Cunliffe 2005, 144–77; Creighton 2000; Papworth 2008). However, Lein's analysis of late Iron Age coins has indicated a far more complex and shifting network of social groupings (Leins 2008), and the ceramic evidence is seen more to represent networks of social exchange rather than defining specific cultural groups (Hill 2006; Moore 2007). Attempts to map these fluid social groupings through such material culture are certainly problematic (Moore 2011, 350), which can be further demonstrated through the lack of geographic correlation between late Iron Age/early Roman burial traditions and evidence relating to personal appearance and religious expression. All of this is hardly surprising, as we should not expect neat and discrete 'cultural packages' (Roberts and Vander Linden 2011, 3).

As expressed via a number of different, and sometime conflicting, forms of evidence, there was clearly a strong element of diversity across England and Wales, particularly during the late Iron Age and early Roman period. At its broadest level, this is demonstrated by the major differentiation in the types and quantities of material culture and settlement architecture between parts of the north and west, and regions to the south and east. There is also more specific variation broadly

corresponding with the regions utilised in this project (see Ch. 1), such as the concentration of Dragonesque brooch types in the North-East (see Ch. 2, p. 30) and the high proportion of religious enclosures in the East. Ultimately, however, a great many differences are revealed on a more localised, landscape scale, as seen, for example, with the many variances in burial ritual, such as the relative paucity of late Iron Age to early Roman cemeteries in landscapes like the Thames and Avon Vales, compared with others such as the North Kent Plain, where such burial groups are far more common. Overall, this would suggest that while there may have been broad and, perhaps, deep-rooted cultural divisions between the north and west on one hand, and the south and east on the other, there were also many divergent sub-regions and landscapes, each with certain culturally distinctive traits, albeit traits that in some areas were gradually eroded over time.

None of the regions remained culturally static over the course of the Roman period, though some areas would appear more dynamic than others. Incorporation into the empire brought great social change, and the diverse nature of this change in part reflects the variable character of the regions and landscapes during the Iron Age (cf. Mattingly 2004, 22; Sharples 2010, 310–17). Parts of the Central Belt and South and East regions would appear especially dynamic in terms of social development, particularly from the second century A.D., when rural settlement numbers, and, by proxy, population size, reached their height, as discussed in Volume 1 (Smith and Fulford 2016, 404–5). This also coincided with a period of significant development in agricultural practices, as indicated in Volume 2 (Allen and Lodwick 2017, 170). These are undoubtedly inter-related, and together herald the start of a gradual but significant cultural shift from the late Iron Age/early Roman period. The regional diversity that was such a strong feature of this earlier period, although certainly still evident, appears to begin to break down across much of south, central and eastern Britain, so that by the later Roman period, the main concentrations of settlement in these areas exhibited increased levels of broad cultural conformity, as expressed by the built environment, material culture, religious behaviour and burial practice, albeit still with considerable individuality. Aspects such as people's appearance, religious practices, and funerary rites appear to be less dictated by previous cultural traditions but more by social hierarchies and individual choice. Such changes were probably down to a multitude of factors, but were largely driven by the degree of social connectivity between settlements.

Throughout many of the analyses in this volume, settlement types could often be differentiated through variations in material culture, environmental remains, and articulations of religious expression and burial practices, even within the same regions and landscapes. Those settlements exhibiting greater dynamism were generally those that developed into complex farmsteads, villas and nucleated settlements, especially those along the main, arterial roads of the provincial network. The inhabitants of these sites would appear to have been far more connected, not only physically, through the existence of trackways and roads, but also economically and socially, as seen through the types and quantities of objects and ecofacts recovered. This all suggests that peoples living in these sites interacted with others on a far more regular basis than those at other settlements, with this interactivity acting as a catalyst for social change. Roadside settlements in particular are probably the key to more widespread social developments in the countryside of south, east and central Britain, just as they were key to certain economic developments, as discussed in Volume 2 (Allen *et al.* 2017). They would have had regular flows of people and provided opportunities for social interaction at markets, religious sites and perhaps hostelries. Some certainly had bathing establishments, though, as noted in Chapter 3, it is uncertain how accessible these would have been to much of the population. The unfortunate fact is that there are still relatively few of these sites to have been comprehensively excavated, and this must form a priority for future research. More multi-isotope analysis in particular is needed on the buried populations of such settlements, which may shed light on just how transient the occupants were (see below, p. 352).

The conditions for the 'success' of these roadside settlements, in terms of their acting as social catalysts, seem to have been largely limited to much of the South, Central Belt and East regions. In the North-East region, roadside settlements along the major north–south routes also had important social and economic functions, although their reach into the countryside appears somewhat limited, reflecting a general lack of integration (Allen 2016b, 280). The paucity of such settlements further north and west probably reflects differences in pre-existing social and cultural conditions. Military *vici*, as the major type of nucleated settlement in these areas, are a very different type of site, being largely inward looking towards the military community and certainly not acting as conduits for social change within the surrounding rural communities. This is not to say that the rural populations in these areas underwent

no social change as a result of the significant military presence, as indicated by the slight evidence for shifts in personal appearance, noted above and in Chapter 2. However, these changes would appear more concerned with countering the *Romanitas* of the military communities rather than emulating them. Furthermore, the potentially devastating social disruption that the Roman military could have had on rural communities in these areas is seen, for example, in the abandonment of certain settlements just to the north of Hadrian's Wall during the second century A.D. (Hodgson *et al.* 2013; Brindle 2016a, 315). Added to this social disruption may have been the movements of peoples from elsewhere in the province (or from outside) to these military-dominated zones, as suggested by the inscriptions relating to southern *civitates* on Hadrian's Wall and large numbers of roundhouses from Vindolanda (Bidwell 1985, 28–31; Fulford 2006; Smith and Fulford 2016, 417).

POPULATION MOBILITY IN THE COUNTRYSIDE

It has been suggested above that social connectivity between settlements may have been key to wider cultural change within certain parts of the Roman province. Such connectivity would of course rely upon the movements of people, a topic that has received considerable attention in recent years, in particular the Diaspora Project at the University of Reading, which explored the diversity of the Romano-British population using a combination of techniques (cf. papers in Eckardt 2010b; Eckardt and Müldner 2016). The principal methods of assessing population mobility and the extent of migration comprise the analysis of epigraphic data – for example, inscriptions on tombstones or altars identifying the origins of individuals – alongside aspects of material culture (e.g. objects associated with certain ways of dressing and eating), and, perhaps most importantly, the scientific application of stable isotope analysis (particularly strontium and oxygen) in order to distinguish between locals and foreigners (Eckardt 2010a). Although each set of data has its own problems and limitations (cf. Eckardt and Müldner 2016, 204–11), taken together it is clear that there was substantial mobility within the Roman Empire. Approximately half of the 155 skeletons analysed from five Romano-British sites for the Diaspora project, for example, were of non-local (more than 30 km) origin, mostly thought to have been from other parts of Britain, but also with some individuals from cooler and warmer climates (Eckardt 2010a, table 7.2). However, as the authors of this project readily admit, much of our evidence for population mobility derives from military and urban sites, and is thus not representative of the Romano-British population as a whole. It may be expected that persons associated with military sites and those living in major cities are more likely to have had non-local origins, including soldiers, traders, craftsmen, officials and their dependents, that may have come from all parts of the Roman world. But what of those living in rural areas? Unfortunately, here we are left with relatively little evidence, and although isotopic analysis is far from a perfect indicator of origin, its more widespread application on skeletons from rural contexts would be hugely beneficial in understanding mobility in the countryside.

Most of the few isotopic studies of rural Roman burials have concentrated on analysis of carbon and nitrogen values, used to evaluate differences in diet, though this can also be useful for assessing origins. At Horcott Quarry in Gloucestershire, for example, the variable levels of $\delta^{13}C$ isotopes were used to suggest that an unusual triple burial comprised individuals who had diets early in life possibly consistent with an external origin (Cheung *et al.* 2012; Hayden *et al.* 2017, 420). In addition, analysis of a small mid- to late Roman rural cemetery at Gravesend in Kent revealed one skeleton with a diet that included a substantial C_4 component, completely different from the remaining eleven individuals, suggesting a non-local origin (Pollard *et al.* 2011). Interestingly, subsequent $\delta^{18}O_c$ and $^{87}Sr/^{86}Sr$ measurements of the particular individual were consistent with a local origin, or from a region sharing similar isotopic values, highlighting the value of obtaining a suite of isotopic signatures.

These few studies, along with certain other indications, such as the occasional inscription and graffito (Noy 2010), and evidence for continental craftsmen (Birley 1979, 129–36; Fulford 2010), does suggest that there was some movement of people from outside the province into the countryside of Roman Britain. There was undoubtedly a huge influx of incomers into Britain from the earliest post-conquest period, with at least 40,000 military and over 100,000 camp followers, traders, craft-workers, slaves and the like (Fulford 2010, 68). Although the great majority of these would have settled in military sites and the rapidly developing urban centres, many may have ended up residing in the countryside. Retirements from the army, arguably amounting to several hundreds every year, presented opportunities for veterans to invest their *praemia militiae* in land and build appropriate accommodation (Black 1994; Fulford 1999). In addition, slaves from other parts of the empire

would have been brought in for various duties, although there was almost certainly not a lack of British slaves at this time (see below). All of this could have had a significant effect on rural society (cf. Mattingly 2006, 355).

It is, of course, not only incomers from other parts of the empire that could cause social disruption, but also movement of peoples from within the province. The Diaspora project demonstrated that there was certainly some movement of peoples from different parts of the province into the cities (Eckardt 2010a, 112–24), though there is nothing to suggest mass rural–urban migration. Discussion in Volume 1 (Smith and Fulford 2016, 417) highlighted some slight evidence for larger scale population movements within the province, much of which may have been involuntary and for specific purposes. As noted above, the epigraphic evidence from Hadrian's Wall referring to the Catuvellauni, Dumnonii and Dutrotriges from the south of the province suggests that people were moved up to help with the monumental building work, while over 200 roundhouses from Vindolanda on the Stanegate are thought to relate to levies brought in from elsewhere to help with rebuilding work during the Severan period. Of course, whether these were temporary relocations for specific purposes, or permanent forced migrations, remains uncertain; the social impact of the latter scenario on surrounding communities would surely have been much greater, though there is little archaeological evidence for this. One area where there may be signs of larger scale, permanent population movement is that to the south and east of the Fens. Here, the prevalence and persistence of circular buildings was noted in Volume 1 (Smith 2016d, 168), and, taken together with the incidences of flexed burials and cist graves, is indicative of certain cultural characteristics more typically found further north and west. Whether this is due to, presumably forced, population movement from these areas is unknown, but further programmes of stable isotope analysis on these 'unusual' burials would certainly be beneficial.

Population movement within the province is rarely likely to have been on any large scale. The extent of small-scale migrations – families and individuals – is impossible to ascertain, but it was certainly occurring, as attested by the Diaspora project. Some communities in rural upland areas may have followed a semi-nomadic existence, moving with their livestock between summer and winter pastures. Further south, there is limited evidence from strontium isotope analyses (notably from Owslebury, Hampshire) to suggest that livestock were transported some distances in the Roman period (Minniti *et al.* 2014; see Allen 2017, 86), perhaps, therefore, suggesting the existence of professional drovers, driving cattle across parts of the province. Many traders would certainly have moved around the province to different markets at various times, while there is also evidence for itinerant craftsmen, such as the specialist mortaria makers who migrated from Colchester to the Verulamium region or from the Verulamium region to Mancetter, Warwickshire (Tyers 1996, 61–2), or the tile maker Cabriabanus, whose stamped voussoir tiles have been found at various sites in Kent and London (Davies 2004). The occasional occurrence of an unusual finds assemblage from a settlement may attest to other examples of small-scale population movement, such as the atypically large group of 'non-local' brooches and pottery from the farmstead at St Mawgan-in-Pydar, Cornwall, noted in Chapter 2 (p. 47). Of course, in these cases, it remains uncertain if this represents movement of people or just objects, but in either case it points to a higher degree of connectivity with other parts of the province. It is still, nevertheless, likely that most of the rural population remained fairly static, especially those of lower social status, who may have found themselves increasingly tied to the land. Greater mobility may have been generally reserved for certain groups higher up the social and economic spectrum – particularly elements of the populations from villas, nucleated roadside centres and complex farmsteads.

THE SOCIAL CLASS SYSTEM

The position of certain individuals within society in Roman Britain can be gleaned from evidence such as inscriptions on tombstones or altars (e.g. the altar recording a *beneficiarius consularis* from Dorchester-on-Thames, Oxon.; *RIB* 235; Henig and Booth 2000, 40), or more generally from, for example, the context and material culture associated with burials (e.g. high-status barrow burials near to a villa at Bartlow Hills, Cambs.; Eckardt *et al.* 2009). Establishing a broader understanding of social and tenurial structures across the Roman province is, however, far harder to achieve, partly due to the paucity of written evidence. When viewed on an empire-wide scale, it is typically thought that 'Roman society evolved into one of the most hierarchic and status conscious social orders in human history', albeit one that allowed significant degrees of social mobility, both formally and illicitly (Reinhold 2002, 25). By the later Roman period, this social order appears at its most hierarchical, from the 'super-rich' at the uppermost end of the empire's elite (cf. Scott 2004), to the bonded-tenant farmers, or *coloni*,

and slaves at the lowest end of the social spectrum. It has recently been estimated that the imperial 'super-rich' of this period represented 1.5 per cent of the empire's population, and owned about half of all the slaves (Harper 2012, 59).

Despite the highly stratified nature of 'Roman' society, we cannot simply transpose social orders that are known primarily from literary evidence pertaining to the Mediterranean world directly onto far-flung provinces. As has been made clear, the Britain that Claudius invaded in A.D. 43 was a cultural patchwork, whose social systems would have reacted in many different ways to inclusion within the Roman Empire. If we can use settlement form and architecture as one set of indicators for social change, then the marked development of complex farmsteads and multi-room buildings in parts of the Central Belt during the second century A.D., for instance, suggests a particular growth of the 'middle classes', perhaps entrepreneurs (both native and incomers, including veterans) exploiting new social and economic opportunities within the Roman province. In parts of south-east Britain, there appears to have been a slightly greater socio-economic gap between those living in settlements that developed more sophisticated villa architecture and those in mostly simple, enclosed farmsteads. Meanwhile, to the north and west of the Central Belt this gap, between those living on farmsteads and those in towns, roadside settlements, military sites, and the occasional villa, was even more marked, reflecting the general lack of connectivity and integration in these areas, noted above.

Over time, in parts of central, southern and eastern Britain at least, the archaeological evidence does appear to conform to wider patterns across the Roman world, with much deeper inequalities between the social classes by the later third and fourth centuries A.D. (cf. Gerrard 2013, 243). There is a rise in the number of rural settlements that had significant capital investment in villa architecture, including – by British standards at least – a number of 'palatial' multi-courtyard villas (Smith 2016b, 71–4), with luxurious mosaics, painted walls and statuary, ably demonstrating the appropriate cultural and social knowledge (*paideia*) needed to compete within the upper echelons of Roman society (Scott 2004, 52). Although the economic basis of these villas is usually unclear, it is likely that many were centres of agricultural estates. These estates may have expanded at the expense of smaller farmsteads, whose numbers had declined from a second century A.D. high, in order to fulfil the growing state demand for agricultural produce (Allen and Lodwick 2017, 173). It may have been the case that, within the context of a steadily dwindling population, agricultural labour became more concentrated within such villa estates rather than on dispersed 'independent' farmsteads, a process that may, for example, account for the development of the villages on Salisbury Plain (McOmish *et al.* 2002, 87–108). The later Roman period was certainly a time of agricultural innovation in crop cultivation, enabling greater production per unit (Lodwick 2017c, 48). The growth of arable production may have occurred through improved processing and storage infrastructure, more technological innovation, and greater economic integration (*ibid.*, 83), but it was also undoubtedly only made possible through the increased exploitation of the rural workforce; analysis of human palaeopathology in Chapter 7 certainly suggests a harsh working life for the average rural resident; the evidence of spinal strain and high mortality rate among the middle adult age group at the Chignall St James villa, Essex, is a case in point (p. 353).

The Roman state's increasing demands for agricultural produce may have necessitated greater control over the rural workforce, possibly involving occasional deployment of military personnel. The *beneficiarius* inscription from Dorchester-on-Thames noted above attests to the presence of officials in local small towns, while the recovery of Roman military equipment from excavated rural sites has long attracted attention (Bishop 1991; Black 1994; Cool 2007, 348). Within the current dataset, possible Roman military equipment (fittings, armour, *armillae*, weapons, etc.) was recovered at *c.* 60 per cent of defended small towns, *c.* 40 per cent of roadside settlements, *c.* 23 per cent of villas and *c.* 10 per cent of farmsteads. Such equipment has been argued to indicate the presence of retired military personnel (Black 1994), though it could also represent army detachments sent to police important local activities such as agricultural supply networks (Bishop 1991, 26; Haynes 2003, 342). In this respect, the relative prevalence of military equipment at farmsteads in the Central Belt (*c.* 50 per cent of the 200 farmsteads with military objects), which was the agricultural heartland of the Roman province, may be of significance, although this may also be due to the high numbers of farmsteads that have been excavated in this region.

The actual status of the 'typical' agricultural worker in late Roman Britain remains uncertain. Tenant farmers, termed *coloni,* who leased their lands from larger landowners (mostly villa owners), are known to have existed in Britain (*Theo. Cod.* XI.7.2; Gerrard 2013, 237), though these do not represent a single homogeneous group, only being unified in an official sense for the sake of tax collection purposes (Sirks 1993; Rio 2017, 5).

Nevertheless, it is generally thought that, from the reign of Diocletian (A.D. 284–305), many *coloni* were increasingly tied to the land, with a gradual erosion of status and rights (Salway 1981, 606). Some have viewed such people as being in a position of de facto slavery in the fourth century (McCarthy 2013, 130–2), though of course there would also have been plenty of actual slaves engaged in a multitude of tasks within Romano-British society.

Roman society is generally thought of as a 'slave society', though in actuality this probably only applied to Italy and possibly some of the Mediterranean provinces, where slaves have been estimated to have made up over 20 per cent of the population (Joshel 2010, 7–8). The proportion of slaves within the population of Roman Britain is generally considered to have been less, with the province instead being described as a 'slave-using society' (Mattingly 2006, 294). Regardless of overall numbers, it is likely that the use of slaves was relatively widespread in parts of Roman Britain, with the occasional finding of slave chains suggesting that it was also far from unknown prior to the Claudian conquest.

Roman literary sources clearly indicate the wide-ranging use of slaves in Italy, with those working on agricultural estates and in mines being of fundamental importance in the creation of wealth for private individuals and the state. They would have formed an integral part of the agricultural labour force, particularly in the late Republic and early imperial period, working alongside tenant farmers (*coloni*) and seasonal labourers (Joshel 2010, 8). There are a number of literary references by the likes of Varro, Pliny and Columella in the first century A.D. to large agricultural estates (*latifundia*) in parts of Italy and the Mediterranean provinces that used extensive slave workforces, these mostly being deplored by these writers as symbols of moral degeneracy (Garnsey and Saller 1987, 67). Although relatively large agricultural estates undoubtedly existed in parts of Roman Gaul and Britain, there is no specific evidence for any slave-based *latifundia*, and in any case, it would seem that the overall use of slaves as a rural workforce declined over the course of the empire, with much greater reliance on *coloni* (Alfoldy 1985, 175). Other uses of slaves, however, would appear to have remained prevalent within the upper reaches of society right through to the late antique period, including those serving as domestic servants, administrators, financial agents, tutors and many additional roles. Such slaves may not have added to the intrinsic wealth of elite families – indeed they could have been a considerable drain on resources – but they served a very important role as expressions of wealth, status and power – 'slaves figure importantly as animate possessions that signal wealth and power, as symbols of excessive spending, as evidence of good or finicky taste, or as a means to best one's social peers or inferiors' (Joshel and Petersen 2014, 163).

The paucity of social commentary within the few classical literary references to Britain means that the only direct evidence for slavery (slaves and freedmen) in this province comes from a small amount of epigraphic and iconographic material, alongside the occasional finding of objects such as slave chains and shackles. In addition, Webster (2005) has suggested that the numerous examples of roundhouses on otherwise 'Roman-style' settlements such as villas (and the 200 roundhouses from Vindolanda *vicus* noted above, p. 352) may have been built and used by slaves, while certain other structures, including some aisled buildings, may have been dedicated slave-quarters (*ergastula*).

Much of the epigraphic and iconographic evidence for slavery has been found in military or urban contexts, and is earlier Roman in date, such as the tombstone of Martialis, a 14-year-old slave, depicted at the foot of a couch containing his master, Gaius Cilonius, found in a cemetery outside Gloucester (Henig and Tomlin 2008). A particularly well-preserved wooden writing tablet from No. 1 Poultry in London records the contract for the sale of a Gallic slave-girl called Fortunata to a man named Vegetus, who was a Roman official, though also himself the slave of a slave of the Emperor (most likely Domitian or Trajan; Tomlin 2003). The existence of slavery in the countryside of Roman Britain is, however, suggested by the occasional religious curse tablet, notably from the temple at Uley in Gloucestershire, where the phrase 'whether slave or free' is used a number of times (e.g. Hassall and Tomlin 1979, 343).

Iron objects described as shackles (a metal link used to secure a chain or rope to something) have been recovered from seventeen sites recorded in the project's database, though their original use is not always certain. Some, such as that from the nucleated 'village' at Butterfield Down, Amesbury, Wiltshire, were suggested as being used for animals (Rawlings and Fitzpatrick 1996), while others, like the two finds from a roadside settlement at Higham Ferrers, Northamptonshire, were interpreted as for slaves or prisoners (Lawrence and Smith 2009). Very occasionally, some still have chains attached, such as that at Park Street, Hertfordshire, found in a mid-first century A.D. pit, pre-dating the villa (O'Neil 1947). Such objects are more commonly found in nucleated settlements (7), though have also been recovered from farmsteads (4), villas (3), temples (2) and a single industrial site, occurring in a range of

phases, from first to fourth century A.D. Even supposing that most of these artefacts were associated with slavery, the evidence is still slight, and other indications occasionally put forward are even more tentative. An aisled building on a villa complex at Houghton Down, Longstock, Hants, for example, was suggested as possibly being used for slaves/servants during the fourth century A.D. (Cunliffe and Poole 2008c), while a mid-Roman cemetery of 24 individuals in a roadside settlement at Stainfield, Lincolnshire, was thought to possibly include slaves due to an excess number of young adult males (APS 1995). Given the vagaries of all this evidence, how common slaves would actually have been in the countryside of Roman Britain remains uncertain.

Even if we cannot attach particular labels to individuals, such as those in the Stainfield cemetery, the burial evidence, particularly when burial practice and palaeopathology correlate, does suggest the presence of distinctive social groups among the non-elite in late Roman Britain. Rohnbogner has observed that decapitated individuals in the Central Belt show higher rates of skeletal trauma, enamel hypoplasia and caries, characteristics that indicate biocultural stress in childhood (Ch. 7, p. 343). She interprets these traits as indicative of a lower social status for these individuals. By contrast, in the South region she sees evidence of higher social status among those buried with grave goods. Such individuals also lacked evidence of enamel hypoplasia, an indication of fewer episodes of stress in early childhood.

Ultimately, whatever their status, it seems clear that life for the majority of workers in rural Roman Britain was generally harsh and unrelenting, and a world away from the lifestyles of those higher up the social scale. This increased hierarchy within late Roman society may have been instrumental in the breakdown of certain elements of regional cultural expression, as noted above (p. 351). This is certainly not to say that regional differences disappeared, but just that in parts of central, southern and eastern Britain it probably became more important for many people to be identified by their position in society rather than by any shared, geographic-based, cultural bond, which may in any case have been gradually eroded by over 200 years of Roman rule.

With events on the Continent in the early fifth century leading to Britain ceding from the Roman Empire, there would have been a seismic shock to the social system, or at least to its upper echelons. The collapse of Roman authority would have quickly led to a breakdown of social and economic connectivity within the diocese, and with that a rapid fragmentation of power. There would have been significantly less demand for agricultural output, which was no longer dictated by the state, and this in turn would have had major effects on the rural workforce, especially in the primary agricultural lands of central Britain. There is little doubt that they continued with agricultural production, but on a far less intensive scale (cf. Rippon *et al.* 2015, 312) and probably with greater emphasis on self-sufficient, mixed farming regimes. The social bonds between land-owners and tenant farmers may have continued in some areas for some time, though many were undoubtedly renegotiated as power structures, economies and social networks adjusted to fit the new world order.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Since the outset of this project we have been very conscious of the disparities in the quantities of available data, particularly between the Central Belt and South regions and elsewhere, and the extent to which we can draw generalisations or address what might be considered as 'big' questions, one of which might be quality of life. In developing her conclusion that the countryside of Roman Britain saw a decline in health compared with the Iron Age, Rohnbogner was drawing on a population sample from three regions in the south of the province: the Central Belt, the South and the East. We question whether it is legitimate to extrapolate from this sample and conclude that similar conditions prevailed in the north, west and south-west, where we have already seen in Volumes 1 and 2 how little rural settlement patterns and evidence of agricultural activity had changed from the Iron Age. It might be reasonable to speculate that the health of the population in these regions had not changed for the worse since the Roman conquest; that there was an expectation of better health in the regions apparently least affected by the Roman occupation. Yet such an optimistic view is immediately tempered by the knowledge that the Romans did draw on the manpower from these regions and not all the people, who are the source of the data regarding elevated levels of pathology analysed in Chapter 7, will have lived all their lives in the farmsteads and settlements where they died in central and south-eastern Britain (above, p. 352; Smith and Fulford 2016, 417).

Our information regarding the health of the population is not only confined to three southern regions, but it is also largely limited to the later Roman period when the rite of inhumation was prevalent. As skeletal data cannot yet address change over time within the Roman period, we have to consider the usefulness of other sources in providing possible insights into the wellbeing of the rural population before the late third and

fourth centuries. Was the quality of life worse in the fourth century than it was in, say, the second century? One significant dataset that we have analysed in this project is brooches (Ch. 2), which are common finds both from excavations and as reported to the Portable Antiquities Scheme between the first and early third centuries, but become rare thereafter. A number of explanations, such as rejection of the fashion or a change to forms of clothing that did not require fastening in the same way, can be invoked to explain the change, but the period of transition also coincides with other changes such as the reduction in long distance trade, evidenced, for example, by the marked decline in the importation of pottery, whether as containers of wine, olive oil or other foodstuffs, or as tableware. Were brooches no longer as affordable as they were? Support for a relative impoverishment of material culture in the late Roman period comes from the finds assemblages of late Roman farmsteads, which are dominated by just two categories of finds not related to structures (such as iron nails): bronze coins and pottery. The burial record shows a similar pattern with a reduction in the use of grave goods, and with simple pottery vessels the most frequent find in those graves that were furnished. While a decrease in the availability of certain material goods, such as dress and toilet items, may not have had a major impact on day-to-day life, it would have had if clothing, the means of keeping warm in winter, was similarly affected. In this regard we may note the decline in the evidence for spinning and weaving in the countryside in the Roman period, suggested as coinciding with increased centralised production. The incidence of spindlewhorls in the Roman period declines generally, and their relative scarcity at farmsteads, in particular, across the province, except in Upland Wales and the Marches and the South-West, is striking (Brindle and Lodwick 2017, 226–8, figs 5.30–2). Whereas previously the rural population could look to the household to provide clothing, now it was vulnerable to the price fluctuations of the market place. That the loss of textiles and articles of clothing was a source of grief, in the second century as well as later, is evidenced by the incidence of the theft of these, the largest and most distinctive category of stolen items, on the curse tablets from Bath (Tomlin 1988, 79–81). Stricter control over woodland and the commodification of timber may also be part of the explanation for the adoption of inhumation burial from the second century onwards; securing wood for the purposes of cooking and heating may have taken priority over meeting the needs of funerary rituals. While life for the peasantry was undoubtedly hard even in the second century, the above examples of changing conditions suggest it was even more difficult in the fourth century.

This focus on the condition of the rural population of Roman Britain, which is a major theme of this volume, also necessarily points up similarities and differences with life in the towns of the provinces. We have seen, for example, that the varieties of burial practice – decapitated, prone, cremation burials – observed in the countryside are paralleled in the towns, where the informal practices collectively termed as 'structured deposition', one of the few behaviours, incidentally, that can be mapped in all the regions of Roman Britain, are also widely recorded (Fulford 2001). Although there are some differences reported between the health of the rural and urban populations, these do not appear very significant: while a higher rate of early childhood stress and upper respiratory infection is reported from the urban cohort, vitamin C deficiency is absent and there is no difference in vitamin D deficiency between town and country. However, the more varied urban diet, including of sweeteners, is reflected in a higher incidence of caries and tooth loss than in the countryside. Spinal joint disease affected a slightly higher proportion of the rural population who were more predisposed to spinal degeneration than their urban counterparts.

Although the benefits of Roman civilisation are widely and repeatedly trumpeted, it is clear that these did not impact favourably on the mass of the population of Roman Britain. Paradoxically, those who lived outside the areas of intensive agricultural production in the south and east of Britain and were apparently least affected by the Roman occupation may have enjoyed slightly better health and quality of life, comparable to that of their Iron Age ancestors.