SECTION ELEVEN

Summary and discussion

David Rudling

The Brighton Bypass Archaeology Project was very successful in obtaining much new evidence concerning both downland land-use and settlement, the latter including the discovery and recording of the important Later Bronze Age sites at Downsview and Mile Oak.

The landscape and land-use

The programme of sampling large numbers of dry valley bottoms and field lynches from a restricted downland area generated a rare, if not unique, database which helps to document changes in the environment and the impact of humans upon the landscape. Although some of these changes in the environment were major, they did not necessarily occur at the same time throughout the Brighton region. Inter-site variation was at its greatest prior to the Late Bronze Age (LBA) and Early Iron Age (EIA), by which time all the sites sampled were apparently subject to the deposition of colluvium. At Toadeshole Bottom East the environmental sequence was traced back to the Devensian Late Glacial when the environment was open and cold. Representing the Early Holocene to c.3000 BC are fossils (of mollusc zone D) from two sites: Toadeshole Bottom East and the Devil’s Dyke, a site in the vicinity of the Bypass near Redhill. These mollusc shells indicate the presence of closed woodland. Although it would appear that earlier Holocene deposits at these sites have been lost to later erosion, pollen data from the Vale of Brooks to the east of Brighton indicate that deciduous woodland was the main vegetation type in the region prior to the Neolithic (Thorley 1981). Snail evidence which suggests an open landscape, indicating that forest clearance had occurred, was recovered from deposits dating to the Early Neolithic at Toadeshole Bottom East and at the Whitehawk Causewayed Enclosure (Fig. 1.1C). Various deposits dating to the Late Neolithic and Early Bronze Age (EBA) have produced differing molluscan evidence. At Sweetpatch a short period of colluviation suggestive of arable farming is dated to the first half of the second millennium BC. At Toadeshole Bottom East, in contrast, the molluscs comprise a diverse ‘shade-loving’ assemblage with species that prefer open country conditions. Although this mixed assemblage may indicate the contemporary presence of both woodland and open country, it could perhaps also be the result of periods of woodland clearance followed by short periods of agriculture (such as swiddening).

It is during the Middle Bronze Age (MBA), when the settlements at Downsview, Mile Oak, Varley Halls and Patcham Fawcett were established, that there is much greater evidence for open country conditions, both at the settlement sites and elsewhere. Subsequently, during the LBA and EIA, conditions generally continued to be open, with the deposition of colluvium in the dry valleys continuing, being renewed or started during this period. At Sweetpatch Valley Bottom the environmental evidence for this period indicates that after an episode of large-scale burning, the deposition of colluvium was probably a result of arable agriculture. Similarly, at Toadeshole Bottom West, Toadeshole Bottom East, Hangleton Bottom and Eastwick Barn the mollusc assemblages from colluvium deposits dated to, or thought to date to, the LBA and EIA periods, indicate that these deposits were the result of arable farming. In addition, the excavations at Eastwick Barn have demonstrated that most of the lynches which form parts of this extensive field system started forming in the EIA. Keith Wilkinson (see Section 8) suggests that the general increased thickness of colluvial deposits in the valley bottoms dating to the LBA/EIA and later may have been indirectly caused by an increasing population and thus greater pressure on the land, meaning that further areas had to be exploited for agriculture. Such population pressure may also have triggered, or necessitated, a more formal division of the landscape, involving permanent fields, ‘territorial’ linear ditches and ‘defended’ enclosures.

Unfortunately, owing to a lack of well-dated colluvial deposits from the valley bottoms, it is difficult to assess whether the widespread environmental conditions linked to agriculture in the LBA/EIA continued during the remainder of the Iron Age. At Sweetpatch Valley Bottom, however, there is a thick layer of colluvium which is thought to date to the later Iron Age, and it is likely that these deposits relate to arable cultivation, which may have included the growing of barley. The evidence from Eastwick Barn is again very significant, because here there is a lack of Middle and Late Iron Age pottery from the lynchet excavations. Various possible explanations have been put forward (see Section 6), of which the most likely are either that the field system was abandoned or was alternated between short periods of pasture and cultivation. This would have reduced/removed the need for manuring and lowered the potential for pot sherds to become incorporated into lynchet deposits. During the Romano-British period the environmental evidence from the valley bottom excavations is similar to that of the proceeding periods and indicates predominantly arable farming. Somewhat surprisingly, at Eastwick Barn the valley bottom excavations produced no Roman finds from the colluvium, despite the fact that such material was recovered from the adjacent lynched field system, which was modified and intensively used at this period. It is.
therefore suggested that at Eastwick Barn the downhill movement of soil during the Romano-British period was reduced (conserved) and prevented by the already large field lynchets from reaching the valley bottom deposits. Limited additional evidence for an expansion of arable cultivation during the Roman period includes the colluvial deposits containing Romano-British pot sherds and other artefacts at Downsview, and small abraded sherds of Roman pottery in ploughsoil contexts on Redhill.

Evidence from the Bypass Project for land-use during the Anglo-Saxon period was minimal and included small quantities of residual early Anglo-Saxon pottery in Saxo-Norman or Medieval layers from the valley bottom excavations at Hangleton Bottom and Toadeshole Bottom West. Such finds may suggest that much more limited and localised arable cultivation on the Downs continued after the end of the Roman period. At Eastwick Barn the Roman field system was abandoned and the land later used for pasture, as the valley bottom enclosure testifies.

For the Saxo-Norman and Medieval periods there is an increase in the environmental evidence for agricultural activity, particularly in the Medieval period when such activity significantly intensified in the vicinity of the (now deserted) Medieval village of Hangleton, and a lynchet developed at Benfield Hill. Later in the Medieval period, however, there may have been some changes in agricultural practice, since the molluscan evidence from both Toadeshole Bottoms East and West indicate a possible transition from an arable to a pastoral land-use. Such a transition agrees well with what is known of the downland economy of this period from historical sources, i.e. a concentration on sheep-farming (Pelham 1934). The importance of sheep-farming on the Downs continued until the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

To summarise then, the evidence from the Bypass Project indicates that inter-site variation in terms of the environment and land-use was considerably reduced by the LBA/EIA. During and after this period the countryside became more organised (examples: the field system at Eastwick Barn, and the linear feature and other dykes in the vicinity of Coldean Lane), and development of the landscape at various times was ‘probably influenced by economic factors relating to market needs’ (Wilkinson, Section 8). An example of such a development may have been the enlargement during the Roman period of the Eastwick Barn field system, perhaps as a response to an increase in demand for grain. Subsequently, in the late Roman or Saxon period, changes in economic factors may have led to the abandonment of arable cultivation at Eastwick Barn, probably in favour of animal husbandry.

Settlement

The Late Mesolithic and Early Neolithic

The total assemblage of Late Mesolithic flintwork from Redhill (i.e. comprising that discovered during the Field Archaeology Unit excavations and also the Toms Collection in Brighton Museum) is one of the largest Mesolithic flint assemblages to have been recovered from the South Downs. The site’s ridge-top location on an outcrop of Clay-with-Flints was one of the favoured places on the South Downs during the Mesolithic period, partly because of access to good quality flint nodules for making tools, perhaps also due to the water-retainative qualities of the surface geology (Jacobi 1978:15), and because such sites were in elevated positions overlooking adjacent dry valleys and land beyond the Downs. Redhill, which was probably occupied intermittently or seasonally during the Mesolithic, was a site at which flint was used to manufacture various types of tools. It may also have been used for other activities, such as hunting, food processing and craft activities. Unfortunately, no features were found at Redhill which can be definitely dated to this period.

No other investigated locations along the route of the Bypass yielded any concentrations of Mesolithic flintwork.

In the Late Neolithic the site at Redhill continued to be used for the procurement of flint (and possibly food) and the making of flint implements. Occupation was again probably seasonal. It is possible, however, that ditch 117 in Trench F may date to this period. If so, it may indicate that occupation was of a more permanent nature.

At Whitehawk, a prominent downland ridge overlooking the sea to the south of the Bypass, a major Early Neolithic communal earthwork, a large, multi-phase causewayed enclosure, was constructed in an open environment (Williamson 1930; Curwen 1931b, 1934b, 1936; Drewett et al. 1988: 34–44; Russell and Rudling 1996). This site, which offers extensive views of the Downs and the coastal plain from Selsey in the west to Seaford Head in the east, is so far unique in Sussex in having revealed evidence for a palisade, and also a possible gate structure. These discoveries, together with other finds from the small areas of Whitehawk that have been excavated, indicate that the site may have been a fortified settlement enclosure (Drewett et al. 1988: 42). The economy at Whitehawk probably involved the killing of animals, the preparation of food and skins, wood/bone working, agriculture (including the growing of naked barley (Hordeum sp.) as evidenced by impressions of seeds found in pottery), the domestication of cattle, pig and sheep/goat, weaving (?), hunting (including deer), and the utilisation of marine resources, especially molluscs. The relationship of the permanently (?) occupied settlement at Whitehawk to the contemporary, seasonally (?) occupied settlement at Redhill is uncertain. The locations and nature of fields belonging to either the occupiers of the Whitehawk enclosure, or the site at Redhill, are also unknown.

The Late Neolithic and Early Bronze Age

Although it appears that implements were still being made from locally obtained flints, other more distant sources were also being used. The range, quantity and wide distribution of flintwork, together with the discovery of pit/hearth 149 (Trench M) which dates to this period, indicate that at this time Redhill may have been the site of a permanent, primarily agricultural settlement. A similar South Downs site, also located on Clay-with-Flints, is Site 20 on Bullock Down (Drewett 1982a; Holgate 1988a).

Elsewhere in the Brighton area at this period, there is some evidence for resettlement at Whitehawk, where a
storage pit has been dated to the late third millennium BC (Drewett et al. 1988: 44). Also of interest from the vicinity of the Bypass are two large flat-bottomed pits which are dated broadly to the Late Neolithic and EBA. They were discovered recently during the construction of a new gas pipeline at a location just to the north of the Bypass at National Grid Reference TQ 277091. In both cases pieces of red deer antler had been placed on the bases of the pits. Other finds included pottery (provisionally identified as Grooved Ware) and flintwork, including endscrapers (Rudling 2000). These pits provide, for this area and period, a rare example of ‘ritual deposition’ in a location other than a barrow. The site at which the pits were discovered also revealed evidence for LBA and Late Iron Age/early Romano-British activity, and is possibly on the periphery of a more extensive area of human activity/occupation located on the adjacent hilltop.

Other sites on the ridge-tops during the EBA include many round barrows, such as some of those in the vicinity of Sites A and B (i.e. Downsview) adjacent to Coldean Lane (see Fig. 7.1). Although no barrows were excavated as part of the Bypass Project, the earlier excavations just to the west of the Bypass at Stonehill had revealed the badly truncated remains of two round barrows (Hartridge 1978). Two scoops cut into the chalk below one of the mounds contained bone fragments from cremation burials, including probably that of a child. The evidence obtained from such barrows remains central to general interpretations of social life in this period, and for a recent review of the round barrows of Sussex the reader is referred to a paper by Paul Garwood (2002). An earlier study by Peter Drewett had identified a Bronze Age rich grave concentration in the area between the rivers Arun and Ouse (Drewett et al. 1988: 84).

For the EBA, when clearance on the Downs appears to have been generally more extensive (Allen 1988: 84), most of the evidence at present from Sussex for settlements contemporary with the round barrows has been found in valley bottoms (Bell 1983; Allen 1984b). None of the seven valley bottoms investigated as part of the Brighton Bypass Project, however, yielded any evidence for nearby EBA settlements.

At both Mile Oak and Downsview the excavations recovered a few examples of residual flintwork and Beaker pottery which can be dated to the Late Neolithic and EBA periods.

At Mile Oak, the oval enclosure ditch in Trench 27 is thought by the excavator, Miles Russell, to be an EBA Class II henge monument (see Section 2). Others, i.e. the writer and several prehistorians, including Paul Garwood (2002), have queried this identification, and think instead that the enclosure ditch belongs either to the earliest phase of the MBA settlement, or is part of some other form of enclosure just predating it. The main dating for the enclosure ditch is based upon two radiocarbon determinations of bone from the primary silts of ditch segments 243 and 1557. The dates obtained: 1690–1410 cal BC (OxA-5106; 3250±60 BP) and 2040–1620 cal BC (OxA-3153; 3480±80 BP) respectively, are ‘statistically significantly different at 95% confidence’ and confirm ‘suspicions over the mixed taphonomy of the material within these silts’ (see Section 9). Bayliss et al. also state that ‘on the principle that a context dates to the latest material within it, the last dated event from this context provides a terminus post quem for construction of the monument’ of ‘1690–1460 cal BC (at 95% confidence)’, i.e. a very late date for a henge. This situation, however, is more complex because the excavator suggests that ditch segment 1557 ‘represents a survival from an earlier phase, the basic plan of which ‘remained unaltered in the course of the later remodification’ (see Section 2). If this theory is correct, however, the dating of the second phase of henge construction is still very late for a henge. Other complications concern the molluscan evidence from the ditch. This material was studied by Keith Wilkinson who concludes that ‘many subtle environmental changes occurred within a relatively short period of ditch segmentation’ and included the ‘total abandonment of the area’ prior to the construction of the Bronze Age settlement. A further argument put forward by Russell in favour of the henge interpretation is that Round-house I overlies the filled enclosure ditch. It is possible, however, that the construction of Round-house I was a late phase in the settlement’s history, and that it was built after Round-houses II and III (NB None of the three buildings in Trench 27 is securely dated.) To conclude, if Russell is right in his identification at Mile Oak of an EBA Class II henge, this would be, for Sussex, the first discovery of such a monument type, and would suggest that other such communal works may also have been constructed on the steep valley sides of the Downs. The probability, however, is that the enclosure ditch is an early phase of the MBA settlement.

The Middle Bronze Age

Totally unexpectedly, the excavations on steep valley sides at Mile Oak and Downsview both revealed important MBA settlement sites. At Mile Oak the settlement was either located within an abandoned ‘henge’ or had an enclosure constructed at the outset. Note the radiocarbon determinations indicate that ‘the construction of enclosure 243/245/1557 was the first dated event on the site (over 95% confidence), although this could be close in date to the start of the settlement activity (between 1 and 200 years at 95% confidence)’ (see Section 9). Other evidence for the settlement included the remains of three timber round-houses, a ‘pond’, areas of rubbish disposal and/or ‘ritual’ deposition in the enclosure ditch, a burial and perhaps a standing sarsen stone (unless this dates to a period of pre-settlement ‘henge’). Unfortunately, we do not know whether the round-houses formed a contemporary group, or a series of successive structures. The few radiocarbon dates, however, suggest a broad period of occupation lasting from 1550–1440 cal BC (95% confidence) to 1110–840 cal BC (95% confidence) (see Section 9). A possible ‘pairing’ of Round-houses II and III has parallels at Downsview (i.e. Structures 1 and 2, and 4 and 5).

At Downsview radiocarbon determinations indicate that settlement activity probably started between 1680 and 1570 cal BC and ended between 1020 and 800 cal BC, thus suggesting a period of occupation of between 580 and 860 years (all at 95% confidence) (see Section 9). Even at the lower end of this estimate for the length of occupation of the settlement, one is dealing with an incredibly long period of time. Within these six to eight and a half centuries have to be accommodated a probable minimum of twelve timber structures. As at Mile Oak, it is difficult to establish which, if any, of the Downsview structures were contemporary with each other. At least one, and possibly two, ‘pairings’ are suggested, i.e. Structures 1 and 2 (Area A) and perhaps Structures 4 and 5 (Area D). The radiocarbon determinations also suggest that over time there may have been a
downslope shift in the location of settlement. The MBA settlement was at some stage at least partially enclosed on its eastern side. It probably also had one or more ‘ponds’ or large pits.

At some 600m south-east of Downsview was the site of another MBA settlement, Varley Halls (see Section 13). This settlement, which consisted of four building platforms, a ‘pond’, an inhumation and various segments of ditch, dates to the second half of the second millennium cal BC, and is thus broadly contemporary with both the neighbouring site at Downsview, and also Mile Oak. As at Downsview and Mile Oak, it is again difficult to establish how many of the buildings were in use at any stage, although Houses 2 and 3 may represent another ‘pairing’.

At Patcham Fawcett, some 1.2km to the south-west of Downsview, was a further MBA settlement (see Section 14). Excavations at ‘Site A’ revealed the remains of three possible round-houses, several four-post structures, pits, a fenceline, a hearth and a ‘pond’ or scoop. ‘Site B’ comprised two round-houses (one of which was terraced), two large ‘ponds’, a hearth, various pits and post-holes and a ditch.

Recent archaeological rescue excavations have therefore revealed four broadly contemporary settlement sites along, or near, the route of the Brighton Bypass. All four sites are situated on steep slopes, and this and the density of such sites along our ‘transect’ may suggest pressure on land resources, perhaps the result of an increasing population. ‘Peopling’ such settlements is very difficult, especially given the problems of establishing the contemporaneity of the various revealed buildings. Even at the most minimal level of only one nuclear family per settlement, however, the discoveries at Brighton indicate a density and longevity of settlement and land-use not previously suspected for the South Downs. Unfortunately, in contrast to the well-known sites of Black Patch and Iford Hill, it was not possible to identify the remains of lynched field systems associated with the Brighton MBA settlement sites.

Comparisons of the various MBA settlements at Brighton with those from elsewhere in Sussex, such as Iford Hill (Burston and Holleyman 1957), New Barn Down (Curwen 1934a), Cock Hill (Ratcliffe-Densham 1961) and Black Patch (Drewett 1982b) do, however, highlight some collective differences, especially the lack of substantial fenced yards at Brighton, and the recovery at Brighton of evidence for stake walls, internal divisions and minor fences. Areas of similarity include the general form of the round-houses, the occurrence of ‘ponds’ (or scoops), the basic economy and pottery traditions.

At Thundersbarrow Hill, a downland ridge to the north of the Brighton Bypass, the primary fill of the ditch of an enclosure with two opposed entrances yielded a fragment of antler which has been radiocarbon-dated to 1680–1320 cal BC (HAR-8182; 3220±50 BP). This date therefore suggests a MBA date for the smaller of the two enclosures on this hill (Curwen 1933; Rudling, forthcoming). Owing to the small size of the excavations that have been undertaken within the enclosure it is difficult to identify its functions, but they may have included the coralling of animals, and perhaps settlement. Its construction may also have increased the status of its owners, and perhaps provided some degree of protection for people and livestock in times of conflict.

The status of some individuals in the Brighton area during the MBA may have been considerable judging from the size and contents of the famous Hove Barrow. The burial, which was probably an inhumation in a timber coffin, was accompanied by the richest grave goods to have been found in Sussex, i.e. an amber cup, a perforated Scandinavian stone battle axe, a bronze dagger and a perforated whetstone (Phillips 1857; Curwen 1924). The type of grave, the grave goods, and the radiocarbon date: 1500–1390 cal BC (BM-682; 3190±35 BP) are all consistent with a date in the late sixteenth or fifteenth centuries BC (Garwood, 2002). This barrow may have been an especially important funerary monument at the centre of an elite social grouping in central southern Sussex (Drewett et al. 1988: 84-6, Fig. 3.7).

The Late Bronze Age

At Downsview, Mile Oak, Varley Halls and Patcham Fawcett occupation continued into the first millennium cal BC, i.e. the LBA. At Downsview this later occupation included the probable reuse of MBA occupation areas, together with the construction of new structures and other features. LBA occupation at Varley Halls is thought to be represented by one, and possibly two building terraces, and a burial of a cow. At Patcham Fawcett, which currently lacks radiocarbon determinations, ceramic evidence indicates a possible break in occupation after the early thirteenth century BC and before a period of LBA occupation during the ninth to eighth centuries.

At Mile Oak a skeleton within Round-house III of the MBA settlement was buried between 1260 and 900 cal BC (GU-5675+GU-5691; see Table 9.1) and may thus have been interred at the start of the first millennium BC. By this time, however, the focus of activity had probably switched from the area investigated by Trench 27 to the area of Trench K. The LBA evidence revealed in Trench K consisted of at least one, and perhaps two, round-houses/structures, two mounds containing charcoal, baked clay and fire-cracked flint, and important metalworking debris, including crucible fragments and slag. This discovery represents a rare example of evidence for the re-smelting and casting of copper alloy. Nearby at Thundersbarrow Hill, occupation/activity continued during the ninth century BC at the MBA ditched and banked enclosure.

To conclude, the Later Bronze Age settlement pattern in the vicinity of modern Brighton is characterised by a shift from the barrow-dominated landscape of the EBA to a settlement-dominated farming landscape with a large number of small settlements, each perhaps consisting of several household clusters. This basic pattern may have undergone some changes, however, following the emergence of more elaborate hilltop sites, the ‘fortified’ enclosures, as at Thundersbarrow Hill. Such sites may have been responses to population pressure, or desires for new forms of prestige. This period is also characterised by the development of a more systematic organisation of the landscape, as evidenced by the creation of more permanent fields and pastoral boundaries.

The evidence for Later Bronze Age settlement and land-use in the Brighton area is very different to that obtained during the other major archaeological landscape study undertaken in Sussex, i.e. at Bullock Down, near Eastbourne. At Bullock Down no evidence was found for settlement sites of the period 1500–600 BC, and ‘it is probable that the area was not settled during the whole of the Later Bronze Age’; instead it was probably ‘used as a minor resource area for settlements further afield’ (Drewett 1982a:
The results of future large-scale archaeological landscape studies of other parts of the Downs, and other areas of Sussex (e.g. the coastal plain), will therefore be important in terms of evaluating the significance of the apparently high density of Later Bronze Age settlements in the Brighton area.

The Iron Age

The fate of the Later Bronze Age settlements at Downsview, Mile Oak, Varley Halls and Patcham Fawcett is unknown, but the absence of EIA occupation at these sites may indicate a period of settlement disruption. No Iron Age settlement or major activity sites were discovered during the Brighton Bypass Project, but earlier discoveries include settlement evidence on the downland ridge at Site A, Coldean Lane, and in the adjacent valley on the modern Coldean Estate (Fig. 7.1). Site A, Coldean Lane, could have been associated with the nearby field system at Eastwick Barn. At Slonk Hill a small unenclosed settlement dated to the sixth to first century BC was established adjacent to the EBA round barrows (Hartridge 1978). Discoveries associated with the Iron Age settlement at Slonk hill included: a number of post-hole structures, large numbers of pits, gullies and two inhumation burials (one female; one male) in pits. Other finds provide evidence for weaving, spinning, metalworking (both copper alloy and iron), ploughing, animal husbandry (sheep, cattle and pig) and the use of marine resources (especially mussel). Elsewhere, on the ridges of the Downs, EIA ‘hillforts’ were constructed at Hollingbury (Toms 1914; Curwen 1932; Holmes 1984), Ditchling Beacon (Crow 1930; Rudling 1985a), Thundersbarrow Hill (Curwen 1933; Rudling, forthcoming) and perhaps the Devil’s Dyke. (NB The dating of the Devil’s Dyke is uncertain: see Hamilton and Manley 1997: 104.) At least some of these sites, such as Ditchling Beacon, may simply have functioned as enclosures for livestock. At Thundersbarrow Hill the site is adjacent to a block of prehistoric/Romano-British fields (Gurd et al. 1924), and may have been used both for coralling animals and for settlement. One of the more elaborate sites, Hollingbury, had a settlement function, and is perhaps also an indication of a continuing concern for prestige and defence. For a recent review of later prehistoric ‘hillforts’/enclosures in Sussex the reader is referred to an article by Sue Hamilton and John Manley (1997).

The Roman Period

Fieldwork during the Brighton Bypass Archaeology Project did not reveal any new evidence of Romano-British settlement sites. At Site A, Coldean Lane, excavations failed to expose further traces of the Romano-British site which had been discovered during the widening of Ditchling Road in 1921. Although such sites are located on downland ridges, as at Rocky Clump (Gilkes 1997; Funnell 1994, 2000), to the north of Downsview, they are also likely to be located on the valley sides, as at Patcham Fawcett, and in the valleys, as at the Coldean Estate. At Thundersbarrow Hill a Romano-British settlement was located adjacent to the Iron Age enclosure and apparently continued to use the nearby field system. At Slonk Hill a settlement was established in the late first/early second century in the area of the earlier, and long abandoned, Iron Age settlement. This settlement, which may have continued to be occupied into the fifth century, was apparently involved in mixed farming. The EBA round barrows at this site were regarded as ‘monuments worthy of respect’ and were enclosed by a ditch (Hartridge 1978: 93–4). Later, in the fourth century, the ditches of both barrows were filled in and a square structure requiring wooden posts was constructed around one of the mounds. Evidence for the probable religious significance to the Romano-British people of this barrow include deposits of leg bones from lambs and piglets, and also of coins. Elsewhere in the Brighton area villas were constructed at Southwick (Winbolt 1932; Rudling 1985b), Preston (Toms and Herbert 1926; Dudley 1981) and West Blatchington (Norris and Burstow 1950). The relationship, if any, of these villas to the field system at Eastwick Barn is unknown. The discovery at the West Blatchington site, however, of eleven ‘corn-drying ovens’ may indicate this site’s involvement in the large-scale processing of agricultural produce.

The Saxon and Medieval periods

During the Saxon period settlement activity gradually shifted away from the centre of the Downs towards the peripheries. Initially, as the numbers of Early Saxon burials found all over the Downs, and settlements such as Bishopstone in Sussex (Bell 1977) demonstrate, at least some of the Romano-British fields continued in use until the sixth or seventh centuries. At the same time, however, the discovery of settlements such as Botolphs (Gardiner 1990) and the cemetery at Keymer (Welch 1983: 508) show that settlements were also being established on the edge of the Downs and in the river valleys. The sparsity of Middle or Late Saxon sites on the Downs indicates a major relocation of settlement away from the marginal land of the chalk uplands to the valleys where the Medieval villages were located. This action may have been necessitated by a decrease in the soil fertility on the Downs. It was not until the population began to expand in the later Medieval period that land on the upper downland was again brought back into cultivation (Mark Gardiner pers. comm.).

Thus we have seen that at various periods each of our three main downland zones have been used for a range of settlement and activity sites. The chalk ridges have been used for settlement, procurement of flints, communal monuments, burial, agriculture and defence. Valley sides, even very steep ones, have been used for arable agriculture and settlements. Finally, the valley bottoms have been used for farming, settlements and enclosures.

Rescue in a research framework

In recent years debate has centred on the research value of much rescue archaeology. It is hoped that this volume demonstrates that rescue work on large linear developments such as roads can be undertaken within a research framework. The A27 Brighton Bypass provided a very useful archaeological transect across a generally well-preserved part of the South Downs of Sussex. The value of the study of this particular transect increases, and will continue to increase, when its results are compared with those from existing and future studies undertaken elsewhere, especially
along different parts of the same east–west highway. In Sussex such investigations on the A27 have already included important work at Ranscombe Hill (Bedwin 1978); Slonk Hill (Hartridge 1978); Patching (Stevens 1997); West Hampnett (Fitzpatrick 1997), Fishbourne (Down 1996) and Knapp Farm (Gardiner and Hamilton 1997). Improvements to the A27 are thus gradually providing a major archaeological transect across various geological and topographical zones in the southern part of the counties of East and West Sussex. Unfortunately, a review and integration of the results of the various A27 excavations in Sussex was beyond the remit and funding of the Brighton Bypass Archaeology Project; its undertaking should be a priority for future research.