Period Summaries
6. Period summary: the Palaeolithic

by Matthew Pope

6.1. THE PALAEOLITHIC OF THE WEST SUSSEX COASTAL PLAIN IN NATIONAL CONTEXT

It is important to note at the outset that the geographical area covered by the FRCF encompasses much the most critically important series of Quaternary deposits in southern Britain. The target area not only includes the globally important Palaeolithic site of Boxgrove (Roberts 1986) and the bulk of preserved sediments dating to Boxgrove interglacial period (MIS 13), but also incorporates wide areas of later Quaternary landscapes and associated artefacts (Bates et al. 1997; ApSimon et al. 1977). In this section the nature of this unique record will be outlined as well as the history of its study, and both current and future directions in its research.

Nationally there are currently two major new initiatives guiding the overall study of Palaeolithic archaeology: the Ancient Human Origins of Britain Project and the National Ice Age Network. The Leverhulme-funded Ancient Human Occupation of Britain project (AHOB) is currently undertaking a systematic reassessment of key Palaeolithic localities throughout Britain. While co-ordinated by the Natural History Museum, this project utilizes expertise from Universities, Museum Services and Field Units to undertake targeted fieldwork and post-exavication analysis. While yet to report, the project looks set to change our ideas about the

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Fig. 3. Modern coastline and water courses, peninsulas marked.
6.2. **OVERVIEW OF THE PALAEOLITHIC RECORD OF THE FRCF AREA**

Some 43 separate findspots are listed on the SMR for the FRCF study area (Fig. 7). For the most part these tend to comprise surface finds, recovered out of context and sometimes without clear provenance. However, included within these findspots are locales such as Boxgrove and Slindon where thousands of stone tools and associated debitage have been recovered from *in situ* deposits. Ongoing research by the Boxgrove Project, through both the Raised Beach Mapping Project (Fig. 9) and the Valdooe Assessment Survey, has sought to determine the wider limits of the preserved palaeolandsurfaces so well documented at the Boxgrove site. Similar work is being undertaken for the younger raised beaches of the Lower Coastal Plain through the

Timing of colonization and previous interpretations of key-locales.

In addition, the rolling out of the National Ice Age Network (NIAN) has commenced. This is an initiative funded through the Aggregates Levy Sustainability Fund (ALSF) which is aimed at providing a coherent but regionally based approach to the conservation and research of Palaeolithic archaeology. The ALSF also continues to fund targeted research projects such as the excavation of the nationally important Neanderthal butchery site of Lyndford (Norfolk) and, in 2006, the Valdooe Assessment Survey within the FRCF area.

The FRCF area has itself been the focus for intensive study and front-line Palaeolithic research during the past 20 years. Between the UCL-based Boxgrove Project team (Figs. 7 & 8) and the ALSF-funded Coastal Corridor Project run from Southampton and Lampeter Universities, the Pleistocene geology of the West Sussex Coastal Plain has been comprehensively mapped. However, this work has only sought to establish the enormous potential for further detailed archaeological investigations.

![Fig. 4. Bedrock geology, chalk downs and coastal plain marked.](image-url)
6. PERIOD SUMMARY: THE PALAEOLITHIC

ALSF funded Coastal-Corridor Mapping Project (Lampeter/Southampton). The results of these projects are starting to build up a coherent picture of the sedimentology of the West Sussex Coastal plain and offer the opportunity to understand the surface finds in context of the wider history of deposition.

In some cases it has even been possible to use the SMR database of surface finds to successfully track subcrops of intact Palaeolithic landsurface with *in situ* artefact scatters. Within the FRCF area we therefore know that there are substantial tracts of unexplored *in situ* landsurface, covering a variety of landscape types. Yet in addition to pushing ahead with direct archaeological excavation in these area there is still some uncertainty over the basic geological framework of the West Sussex Coastal Plain. These more obscure parts of the geological record will be addressed in detail later in this document but they include the fine mapping of the younger beaches of the Lower Coastal Plain, to the south of Chichester in addition to the detailed mapping of the interplay between the Lavant terrace gravels and beaches of the Upper Coastal Plain to the north of the city. In addition, there has yet to be a systematic reassessment of key surface finds in light of our improved understanding of the underlying geological record of the area. For this reason a more considered assessment of the SMR record is now timely.

6.3. THE PALAEOLITHIC RECORD OF THE FRCF AREA

Finds from the FRCF area can be divided into those from three major zones: The Lower Coastal Plain and foreshore, The Upper Coastal Plain and The Chalk Escarpment. While it is impossible to generalize about the artefactual material from any of these individual contexts it is possible to discuss the archaeology of each of the zones in broad terms.
This group include a range of finds from those found rolled on the modern foreshore to apparently in situ material from Pleistocene deposits overlying the Coastal Plain (West & Sparks 1960). Of note are the Middle Palaeolithic flakes from a Pleistocene channel exposed on the Selsey foreshore (Woodcock 1981) and a further 17 surface finds of Palaeolithic tools including a single biface from Fishbourne itself. This area includes the established beach lines of the MIS 5a Pagham Raised Beach and the MIS 7 Merston Raised Beach. It is probable that most bifaces in the area date from a post-MIS 7 period but this cannot be assumed.

THE UPPER COASTAL PLAIN
This critical Group includes not only tools associated with the MIS 7 and MIS 11 beaches of Brighton-Norton and Aldingbourne (Oving, Portfield, Pear Tree Knap) but also the important sites of the MIS13 Westbourne-Arundel Raised Beach which includes the Boxgrove (Roberts 1986; Roberts & Parfitt 1999), Slindon (Fig. 7) and Lavant sites. It includes the important Lavant Valley as it dissects the chalk plateau and therefore includes the area most likely to form the focus of Palaeolithic research in the next few years. The sites comprise material from a range of ages with varying degrees of preservation. However it is in this zone that the oldest and best-preserved archaeological signatures are likely to be encountered. It is worth noting that no Levalloisian material has been recovered from this zone.

THE CHALK ESCARPMENT
Six bifaces of a probable Palaeolithic age have been recovered from the chalk plateau of the South Downs. These finds do need to be critically addressed and re-examined in light of the potential that exists for confusing Palaeolithic bifaces with...
Neolithic polished axe pre-forms. This is a problem that is especially acute in the study area given the local presence of Neolithic flint mines. However, there can be little doubt that the Downs were intensively occupied during the Middle Pleistocene given the vast quantities of tools recovered from the Head Gravels which cover their flanking slopes and the Upper Coastal Plain. Indeed it must be remembered that Downland erosion has been so extensive during the Pleistocene that more evidence for their occupation now exists on the margins of the Plateau and in the dissecting valleys than within the impoverished subsoil of their summits. The possibility exists, however, for solution features on the plateau to have preserved in situ remnants of Pleistocene landsurface (Scott-Jackson 1996; Pope 2001). These should be actively prospected for and investigated.

This is, of course, only a brief summary of a wide and varied record of occupation covering over 500,000 years and a variety of climatic and ecological conditions. Therefore it should not be surprising that an equally varied range of preservational conditions should exist in the study area and this is reflected in the quality of the material. While the value of excavated assemblages from Boxgrove and Slindon requires no further elaboration, it is important to note that many finds classified as ‘surface’ are sometimes found in a remarkably excellent state of preservation suggesting only recent disturbance from high-quality preservational contexts. These finds undoubtedly are indications of local, important sites currently under threat from either the plough or on-going erosional processes. It is the context of these finds which should now be targeted in future research plans.
6.4. A HISTORY OF PALAEOLITHIC RESEARCH IN THE FRCF AREA

With the exception of the Boxgrove site (Fig. 8), we have only four main sources of published work on the Palaeolithic archaeology of the FRCF area. The earliest accounts of the geology in the region make no mention of the associated archaeology (Prestwich 1892; Reid 1892; 1903). Early to mid twentieth-century accounts by Grinsell (1934) and Curwen (1925) do little more than list findspots providing little or no consideration of either context or technology. Early investigations by Fowler (1929) and Calkin (1934) did something to hint at the potential quality of the archaeological record of the Upper Coastal Plain, but still focused on essentially disturbed contexts. Systematic treatment does not come until Roe’s (1968) gazetteer of all findspots within the area. This seminal work undoubtedly forms the basis of the modern SMR and sought to nationally document every Palaeolithic find in Britain and subject each to a standardized metrical and technological analysis. Roe’s work was built upon by Woodock (1981) who undertook both a more detailed assessment of the findspots listed earlier by Roe, and who also undertook excavations within the FRCF area at Manor Farm, Lavant. These excavations have not yet been fully published and a re-examination of both the archive and the original findspot should be considered as a key research priority for the area.

More recently Wymer (1999) expanded Roe’s gazetteer as part of the English Heritage-funded Southern Rivers Project. This provided much more detailed contextual information and provided a database and map series of critical importance in the subsequent curatorial management of the resource at regional and county level. The survey and its maps helped to change attitudes to Palaeolithic archaeology, modifying a conceptual framework that saw them in terms of isolated sites into a more realistic one which viewed the resources from a geological perspective.

Recent and on-going work in the area by the Boxgrove Project is now producing more detailed mapping and accounts of the archaeological record but there is still a need for yet more focused and targeted research programs. For example, current gravel extraction within the FRCF area at the Valdoe Quarry is directly threatening in situ archaeology embedded in a geological sequence identical to that found at the nearby Boxgrove site. Indeed these threatened landsurfaces form part of the wider Boxgrove landscape and as such constitute a palaeolandscape short-listed for UNESCO World Heritage status. Given that planning consents were given for this extraction prior to the implementation of PPG16, a non-developer-funded approach had to be implemented to assess the threat and put together a package of work for its mitigation. The Valdoe Assessment Survey (run by the Boxgrove Project, UCL) was conceived as a small-targeted project aimed to meet this threat head-on. Funded through English Heritage by the ALSF, it perhaps set the pattern for future Palaeolithic research in the county through similar nested projects.

In addition to government-funded research, developer-funded assessments of Pleistocene contexts are regularly undertaken in West Sussex and particularly in the FRCF area. West Sussex Planning authority has an excellent record of identifying
potential threats to the Pleistocene record within the county. As a result work has been carried out by Archaeology South East, Oxford Archaeology, Chris Pine and other specialist Units. The results of these developer-funded investigations have contributed immensely to our knowledge of the Raised Beach sequence and its associated evidence.

6.5. Future direction for Palaeolithic research in the FRCF area

The study area undoubtedly contains some of the most important Palaeolithic sites in northern Europe. In many respects it offers a near perfect sample of deposits from the past five interglacial/glacial cycles; but also a range of landforms including the Coastal Plain, Raised Beaches, River Valleys and foreshore. Consequently a wide range of diverse habitats, known to be exploited by early human groups are represented within the area.

The Upper Coastal Plain will continue to play a major role in British Palaeolithic archaeology and it is here that front-line research targeting threatened or exposed areas of the Westbourne-Arundel Raised Beach will be undertaken. Future themes for research in this area will focus on variation in habitat and human ecology, the relationship between the Lavant and Arun River Terraces with the Raised Beach and identifying the context of fresh surface finds from the Lavant Valley. As Palaeolithic archaeology is essentially geoarchaeological in its approach it might be economical to combine any research programmes aimed at very early prehistory with an overall geological survey of the FRCF area (Fig. 9). In this way a series of very detailed maps outlining not only local sedimentary conditions but also documenting the Holocene evolution of the local landscape could be produced. Within the scope of such a survey useful work could be achieved by targeting the following research themes.

Mapping foreshore channels

Building on work undertaken by David Bone and Martin Bates, the aim would be to produce a definitive map of Pleistocene and Holocene channels and inlets as exposed on the Coastal Plain foreshore. In combination with dating work, this will help to locate and identify new Pleistocene contexts as well as helping to inform any attempt to model the later development of Chichester Harbour. This work could be extended off-shore through further detailed examination of the Mixon Hole and associated deposits.

Surface finds environ survey

A thorough geoarchaeological examination of the environs of every clearly provenanced surface find should be undertaken. In addition attempts should be made to find associated notes for some finds which are now lost. This work will seek to identify, on the basis of condition and local geological conditions the likely origin and depositional history of these tools.

Lavant valley mapping project

A detailed geoarchaeological assessment of the evolution of the Lavant Valley. The study would seek to map not only earlier terrace deposits and explore the relationship between the Lavant and each of the five Raised Beaches, but also aim to examine its evolution during the Holocene when the valley undoubtedly formed an important Roman communication route.
7. Period summary: the Mesolithic

by Chris Butler

7.1. PERIOD OVERVIEW

Owing to the lack of material culture, apart from worked flint and stone and the occasional feature, on the vast majority of Mesolithic sites in southern Britain, there has been little to help us understand the settlement patterns, economic systems and social organization of these communities. It has been assumed until recently that all Mesolithic communities were engaged in exploiting local resources by hunting and gathering, without having any significant impact on their local environments. Certainly the evidence from sites such as Star Carr in Yorkshire and Mount Sandal in Ireland have provided models for temporary seasonal camps, on which most later studies have been based.

The Mesolithic period has recently been subject to some major re-evaluation (Young 2000). The nature of the evidence recovered from Mesolithic sites makes interpretation difficult. A good example of this is the numerous re-evaluations of Star Carr (e.g. Legge & Rowley-Conwy 1988), which have seen the interpretation change from a winter base camp to a summer hunting camp — all employing the same evidence (Bewley 2003). In addition, a number of discoveries have been made both in Britain and on the Continent, which have suggested that Mesolithic communities may have been more sedentary than we had thought. The recent discovery of a permanent huts at Howick in Northumberland (Waddington et al. 2003), and the numerous sites in Denmark (Gron 1995) suggest more permanent settlement during the later Mesolithic period, even if they were only seasonally occupied.

Some recent major studies of Mesolithic settlement in landscape settings from northern England have considered not only the material culture, but also environmental evidence, and have taken into account ethnographic data (Spikins 1999; Waddington 1999). From these studies models for the use of a landscape have been proposed, which with some adaptations may also be applicable to southern Britain.

The current state of Mesolithic studies in Sussex has been succinctly summarized by Holgate (2003). Drawing on the work of early archaeologists whose excavation of important sites, predominantly located on the Greensand to the north of the South Downs, including an initial summary by Jacobi (1978), and incorporating more recent discoveries, Holgate proposed different settlement patterns for the earlier and later Mesolithic periods. During the earlier Mesolithic period the settlement pattern was of a traditional nomadic way of life, with the seasonal exploitation of resources taking place over a large area from a sequence of temporary residence locations occupied on more than one occasion (Jacobi 1987). In the later Mesolithic period a new pattern of settlement and resource exploitation appeared with short-stay temporary hunting camps, and inland task-specific, seasonally occupied sites suggesting that a sedentary pattern of settlement could not be ruled out (Holgate 2003, 36). It is also likely that there was extensive exploitation of coastal resources, however the effect of coastal erosion and sea-level change means that this information has been largely lost (Woodcock 2003).

7.2. MESOLITHIC SITES IN THE FISHBOURNE FRAMEWORK AREA

An SMR search has produced a total of 145 records of Mesolithic date from the Fishbourne framework area. Of these, 38 are located on the Coastal Plain, 72 on Downland, 13 in the Weald, and 22 are unclassified (Fig. 12).

These records are derived from a wide variety of sources, with many of them being findspots for single flint artefacts of diagnostic Mesolithic date, such as tranchet adzes, picks, microliths and blades/bladelets (Fig. 10). Other records relate to chance finds of groups of Mesolithic flintwork, whilst a small number have come from excavations, or during the course of PPG16 fieldwork.

It is possible to determine broadly the type of activity going on in the Mesolithic period by
analysing the flintwork that has been found or recovered at some of the sites (Butler 2005). For example, a broader range and different types of implements would be found at more permanent base camps from those found at short-stay hunting camps, and where the same type of implement is found at both, the relative quantities of implements, area covered and other features present may also provide an indication of the type of site.

This determination will only be possible, however, where either a substantial quantity of flint artefacts have been recovered from a site, or the site has been subject to excavation. For the great majority of sites known about in the Fishbourne Framework area, this will not be possible as they comprise just a single or at best a handful of flint pieces. There are however, a number of sites where more substantial fieldwork or excavation has taken place, and therefore it is possible to make some broad interim statements about the types of site found within the Fishbourne Framework area.

**THE COASTAL PLAIN** (Fig. 11)

A summary of the Mesolithic flintwork found on the Coastal Plain (Pitts 1980) noted that the most frequent artefacts that had been found were tranchet adzes and other core implements such as picks, and that microliths were completely absent. Although no evidence for the production or use of tranchet adzes was found during the recent excavations at Fishbourne, examples have been found there in the past (Wymer 1977). However, the excavations did produce some 200 pieces of Mesolithic flintwork, which included five obliquely-blunted microliths, together with bladelets, bladelet fragments and bladelet cores, all of which are indicative of microlith production (Butler 2003). Excavations in 1985–6 on the new A27 road east of Fishbourne produced an assemblage of 340 pieces of flintwork of which the majority were Mesolithic (Goodburn 1996), including four microliths and a single microburin.

Other assemblages of Mesolithic flintwork have been recovered from excavations at Knapp Farm, Bosham and from the Westhampnett Bypass. At Knapp Farm, the small assemblage included blades, bladelets, cores, a microdenticulate and two truncated blades, together with a single small scalene triangle microlith suggesting a temporary camp of later Mesolithic date (Holgate 1997). Two clusters

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Fig. 10. Mesolithic flints from Fishbourne: 1–3) cores; 4–8) microliths; 9–10) notched implements.
of Mesolithic flintwork were encountered during excavations on the route of the Westhampnett Bypass in 1992 (Fitzpatrick et al. forthcoming): Area 1 was located on a small knoll overlooking a stream, whilst Area 4 was located on the lower slopes of a knoll, again overlooking a stream. Area 1 produced some 4500 flints, whilst Area 4 produced 6000 flints. These included a broad range of debitage and implements including microliths and microburins, together with tranchet adze-sharpening flakes and adze fragments. Radiocarbon dates from charred hazelnuts of 9120±90 BP for Area 1 and 8880±100 BP for Area 4, and a second date of 8300±90 BP on charcoal from Area 4 suggest this is early Mesolithic activity. The wide range and quantity of implement types at the Westhampnett sites, together with their location adjacent to a watercourse, suggests that they functioned as long-stay camps (Holgate 2003).

Recent work along the Coastal Plain, much of it PPG16 prompted, has resulted in the recovery of numerous assemblages of flintwork. When these assemblages have been analysed they are predominantly later prehistoric in date, but normally include a significant proportion of residual Mesolithic pieces.

**CHICHESTER HARBOUR**

A field survey of Chichester harbour was undertaken in August 1982 to assess the extent of coastal erosion (Cartwright 1984). Although the flintwork recovered was largely Neolithic in character, there were a small number of pieces that may have been Mesolithic. A few other findspots are known from around Chichester Harbour (e.g. Dell Quay – SMR ref: CH2162), but our knowledge of Mesolithic activity in this part of the Fishbourne Framework area is poor. The recent survey of Langstone Harbour to the west found little evidence for early Mesolithic activity, but there was some evidence for activity during the later Mesolithic (Allen & Gardiner 2000). The changing coastline means that both Langstone and Chichester Harbours would have been some way inland during the later Mesolithic period, and the landscape would have comprised a series of valleys with watercourses running through them to the coast. These would have made ideal locations for both hunting camps and longer-stay base camps, which are now perhaps buried in the alluviated valleys or have been eroded away (Allen & Gardiner 2000, 204).

The Mesolithic flintwork recovered in Langstone Harbour comprised mostly debitage and a restricted range of tools, including tranchet adzes and sharpening flakes, picks, scrapers and serrated and retouched flakes. Interestingly, there have been very few microliths found in Langstone Harbour, which draws some parallels with the situation in east Kent. At Finglesham on the east Kent coast a Mesolithic site excavated in 1981–2 produced a very similar assemblage; with large numbers of tranchet adzes and associated material, but no microliths, and no evidence for microlith production (Butler 2005, 118). It is not clear whether these sites are task-related, but their location in coastal regions, and the predominance of woodworking tools in their tool assemblages may suggest that they were perhaps involved in making and maintaining boats. By comparison, on the Pevensey Levels, in East Sussex, the known Mesolithic sites are clus-
tered around the 5 m contour, as subsequent sea level change has resulted in any lower sites being covered with peat (Woodcock 2003). Around the Pevensey Levels the known Mesolithic sites have produced both tranchet adzes and microliths, indicating that there may not be the same type of task specialization here (Butler 2002).

**THE DOWNLAND**

Almost half of the known Mesolithic sites recorded on the SMR from within the Fishbourne Framework area are located on Downland, although this category also appears to include sites on the Greensand, to the north of the South Downs. Many of the sites comprise just a few pieces of flintwork, whilst others were recorded during the excavation of sites dating to other periods. The Knowles collection of flintwork, amounting to some 300 pieces, derives from a number of locations around Midhurst.

The flintwork that has been found normally comprises diagnostic pieces such as cores, blades and bladelets, together with the occasional tranchet adze and microlith. In addition to the flintwork, three quartzite pebble maceheads, of probable Mesolithic date, have also been found.

None of the sites or findspots on the chalk South Downs appears to have come from any systematic work. Further west near Brighton, systematic fieldwalking and other fieldwork has associated Mesolithic sites with clay-with-flints outcrops (e.g. Butler 2001; Butler & Holgate 2002), and it does seem that this pattern may be repeated within the Framework area, although further work is required to confirm this.

A number of Mesolithic sites have been investigated on the Lower Greensand to the north of the Downs. At West Heath a pit sealed below a Bronze Age barrow produced a radiocarbon date of 8100±70 BP, whilst the excavations produced a quantity of Mesolithic flintwork including a small number of microliths (Drewett 1976). Pollen analysis at this site suggested that partial clearance of the forest was taking place in the Mesolithic period (Scaife 1988). Surface flint collection at Graffham Common produced an assemblage of almost 2000 pieces of Mesolithic flintwork from three dense scatters (Holgate et al. 1986), which included cores, blade and bladelet debitage, and a small number of implements including microliths. At Minsted, an assemblage of Mesolithic flintwork was found below a Bronze Age barrow (Drewett 1975). These sites on the Lower Greensand to the north of the South Downs belong to a group of early Mesolithic sites stretching from here through into East Sussex that appear to favour this location (Jacobi 1978).

**THE WEALD**

A small number of Mesolithic sites are classified on the SMR as coming from the Weald, and are probably too far north to be considered within the Fishbourne Framework area. Wealden Mesolithic sites tend to fall into two types of site. In the central and eastern part of the Sussex Weald there are numerous rock-shelter sites associated with microliths and microlith production, which can probably be interpreted as short-stay hunting camps. The second type of site is found in streamside locations across the Weald, and they appear to be associated with a broader range of implements, including both microliths (frequently Horsham Points) and tranchet adzes; these may be longer-stay camps.

**7.3. QUALITY OF THE ARCHIVE AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL RECORD**

As the majority of the sites listed on the SMR (Fig. 12) relate to single, or small groups of, artefacts, many of which may be in private hands or local museums, a full re-evaluation of these may not be possible, although many of the earlier finds will have been included in Wymer’s *Gazetteer of Mesolithic Sites* (1977).

Most of the major sites discovered during the course of excavation or other fieldwork have been published and the archive should be available from one of the local museums. An increasing number of sites have been discovered during the course of PPG16 work along the Coastal Plain, and in most cases the reports are available in the ‘grey literature’, and the archives should be accessible in local museums. However, in the majority of these cases the quantity of Mesolithic material is small, and is derived from residual contexts. It is possible that a small number of sites remain unpublished, although it has not been possible to identify these from the SMR information provided.

Some re-evaluation of the data is essential, and it cannot necessarily be taken at face value; for example in one published report some pieces are classified and described as microliths, but from the published drawings and descriptions appear to be simply retouched bladelets.
7.4. CONCLUSION

It is clear that the Fishbourne Framework area has evidence for extensive Mesolithic activity. However, the diverse and fragmentary nature of the records and archive means that some further work is required to draw this information together and to provide a meaningful picture of this activity.

On the Coastal Plain the evidence suggests that there are numerous short-stay hunting camps and longer-stay base camps, frequently located alongside or near watercourses. The evidence needs to be re-evaluated to establish the patterns that are emerging here, and to guide future strategies for fieldwork. The Chichester Harbour area, and areas subject to coastal erosion, may be prime locales for future study as the potential for preserved in situ archaeology, perhaps in anaerobic conditions, combined with the threat of its loss due to erosion may produce some informative results.

On the South Downs, research elsewhere in Sussex has shown that Mesolithic sites are clustered on the clay-with-flints outcrops. Further analysis of the existing findspots and sites, and any future work should perhaps be concentrated in these areas to establish whether this pattern is reflected here, and to establish the activities being undertaken on these sites.

Further environmental work is also essential so that in all of these areas we can better understand the Mesolithic environment in which these hunter-gatherer groups were living.
8. Period summary: the Neolithic

by Peter Drewett

8.1. PERIOD OVERVIEW

The Neolithic (c. 4500–2500/2500 BC) has always been a somewhat difficult period to define. Even in Stuart Piggott’s seminal work on the *Neolithic Cultures of the British Isles* (1954) he noted the ‘dubious validity’ of the term but accepted that it marked the arrival of agriculture into Britain. He suggested that the area of lowland Britain south of the Wash formed a homogeneous unit, his ‘Windmill Hill Culture’. Defining features of the Neolithic were seen as agriculture, permanent settlements, causewayed enclosures, long barrows, flint mines, polished stone tools and pottery. As these elements were thought to have been brought by immigrants from the continent then the model of settlement should match that of Continental Europe. The fact that permanent settlements remained elusive in lowland Britain and that evidence for crop cultivation is often missing in the early stages of the Neolithic was generally assumed to result from lack of evidence rather than suggesting something rather different in the English Neolithic. The last twenty years has seen a shift away from the idea of a single Neolithic in lowland Britain to a greater emphasis on regional variation (e.g. Thomas 1993). Instead of permanent settlements we should perhaps be looking for territories of use where ‘permanence’ comes in the siting of monuments rather than settlements. This may be more associated with herding of domesticated cattle than cultivation of crops. In many ways the Fishbourne Research and Conservation study area presents a ‘typical’ lowland British ‘Neolithic’ with its monuments (causewayed enclosures, long barrows and flint mines), polished stone tools, pottery, lithic spreads and isolated pits but lack of evidence for ‘permanent’ settlements and conclusive evidence for crop growth early in the period. It is therefore an ideal area for testing some of the alternative ‘neolithics’ being proposed (e.g. in Cotton & Field 2004).

8.2. THE STUDY AREA — ITS MONUMENTS AND FINDS

Surviving monuments of the Neolithic are generally within areas of lower agricultural potential in later periods. Hence causewayed enclosures survive as earthworks on the chalk Downs but only as cropmark sites in the Thames Valley. Within this study area all monuments survive on the Downs and none on the Coastal Plain. Is this a true distribution or an artefact of preservation? Given the considerable amount of developer-funded archaeological assessment on the Coastal Plain one suspects in this case the distribution may be real. Within this study area key Neolithic monuments, causewayed enclosures, long barrows and flint mines are all present. The Trundle causewayed enclosure (Figs 13 & 15) was clearly a focal point for the Neolithic peoples in this area, together with the possibly associated enclosures of Court Hill to its northeast and Halnaker Hill to its southeast. The field system apparently associated with the Halnaker Hill enclosure is more likely to be Later Bronze Age, or certainly later than the Neolithic date hitherto suggested. The Trundle was re-constructed over a period of perhaps 1000 years.

Fig. 13. Carved chalk block from the Trundle, north of Chichester.
with overlapping circuits of discontinuous ditches while Court Hill and Halnaker Hill perhaps had a much shorter life. The Trundle remains one of the best-preserved Neolithic causewayed enclosures surviving in Britain and has been subjected to only small-scale targeted excavations (Curwen 1929; 1931; Bedwin 1981). It has dates of 3290±140 BC (I-11615) and 3090±170 BC (I-11616).

To the west of the Trundle is the great long barrow of Bevis’s Thumb (Fig. 14) with, possibly associated, oval barrows to its northeast (North Marden) and southeast (Stoughton I and II). Bevis’s Thumb has a single date of 2596±95 BC (I-11,843) while North Marden has a date of 2760±110 BC (Har-5544). Although so few dates must be treated with caution it is possible that in this case (unlike other parts of England) the causewayed enclosures may pre-date the barrows. Bevis’s Thumb and Stoughton I and II survive as reasonably well-preserved field monuments (although with clear agricultural, and in the case of Bevis’s Thumb, road-edge damage). The North Marden barrow had been largely destroyed in antiquity and further damaged by post-WWII agriculture so was subjected to a salvage excavation (Drewett 1986).

The study area includes two flint mine shaft clusters (Long Down and West Stoke) and a single shaft at Nore Down (Fig. 15). Earlier suggestions of flint mines at Lavant Down and Bow Hill are now generally discounted as more recent flint-chalk working (Barber et al. 1999). The single shaft at Nore Down, West Marden (Aldsworth 1983), however, sounds a degree of caution when discounting any hollows on the Downs as possible flint-mine sites unless there is clear evidence of a later date. Two of the c. 24 shafts at Long Down (Salisbury 1961) and three of the c. 20 shafts at West Stoke (Wade, 1924) have been excavated. Although these shafts were used to extract flint for the production of axes and other tools, recent reconsideration of structured deposits within shafts and galleries emphasize their potential symbolic role within the cultural landscape. A general lack of other activity near the flint mines may suggest they were liminal areas to which particular people travelled at significant times (Topping 2004).

Pits containing the remains of apparently ‘domestic’ material culture (pot sherds, animal bones, flint tools and the like) were formerly thought of as possible indicators of settlement (Field et al. 1964). It now appears more likely that such pits and their contents represent a wider use of the landscape than specific settlement at the particular spot where the pit was dug. Pit deposits may have more of a symbolic than economic role, a way of fixing domesticity in a landscape being tamed (Thomas 1991, 76). Such pits in Sussex are found both within causewayed enclosure ditches and in the wider landscape (Drewett 2003, 43). A line of five pits were found to the east of the North Marden oval barrow in 1987 (Down & Welch, 1990, 221). These pits were roughly circular with diameters of under 1 m and less than 400 mm deep. The 408 sherds found represented a minimum of 30 Early Neolithic round-based pots together with flintwork and animal bone. Single pits have also been located on the Coastal Plain. One located by chance during the excavation of the Copse Farm Iron Age settlement at Oving contained ten rim sherds from a single round-based pot with a rim diameter of some 250 mm (Bedwin & Holgate 1985, 220). Two pits were also found during the Westhampnett Bypass excavations, one in Area 3 and another in Area...
8. A further seven pits containing Late Neolithic (but also Early Bronze Age) material were found at Chalkpit Lane and another pit (also containing Late Neolithic and Early Bronze Age material) at Graylingwell (Chichester). The mixture of Late Neolithic and Early Bronze Age material perhaps underlines the possibility that these pits contain structured depositions including curated items. If all these pits in the landscape have more to do with symbolism than direct economic activities on settlement sites then the problem of where people actually lived remains.

Although house-like structures akin to the European Neolithic long houses have been found on the chalklands of north Kent (White Horse Stone site in the Medway Valley) none have been found in Sussex and it remains uncertain as to whether these structures are the remains of domestic houses or are related to the (mortuary) structures found under long barrows elsewhere in England. Lithic spreads on the Downs and Coastal Plain of the study area together with polished flint and other stone axes and leaf-shaped arrowheads across the whole area indicate activity across all geologies. A simplistic attempt to divide these lithic scatters into Strand and Salt Marsh Resource Utilization Camps (on the Coastal Plain and particularly Chichester Harbour), Open Agricultural Settlements (on the chalk Downs) and Woodland Camps (in the Weald) was an attempt to create some (Processual) order out of this scantly evidence (Drewett et al. 1988, 44–7). What these lithic concentrations and broad landscape spreads do show, however, is the extensive use of all resource zones available in the Neolithic.

Lithic scatters in the wetter coastal areas probably do represent some specific range of activities. The site at Chidham in what is now Chichester Harbour, produced a high percentage of hollow scrapers and notched flakes together with three incomplete leaf-shaped arrowheads (Bedwin 1980). This assemblage may represent the preparation of osiers to be plaited into wicker fish traps and the manufacture of arrowshafts and spears for fishing and fowling. Lithic scatters on the chalk Downs create a greater problem of interpretation. Some probably represent surface flint-working sites while those with a greater range of tool types may represent some form of settlement, but perhaps shifting following herds of domesticated cattle rather than permanent settlements with agricultural plots.

The exact number of lithic scatters and findspots within the Fishbourne Research and Conservation study area can be certainly dated to the Neolithic remains uncertain although the Sites and Monuments Record includes some 162 locations from fairly large assemblages to just one or two artefacts. Early records often refer to flints as ‘Neolithic’ when in fact many are Bronze Age. This particularly applies to rather indeterminate clusters of flakes (including a number around Chichester Harbour where association with burnt flint spreads may suggest a Later Bronze Age date). Having said that, of the more certain Neolithic flint scatters and spot finds (both early and late) there appears to be a general spread across all geologies. Apparent clustering around Chichester Harbour and Selsey probably suggest discovery after erosion rather than real concentrations. Likewise apparent concentrations in the built-up areas of Chichester and Bognor may result more from development led discovery than real concentration.

The Fishbourne Research and Conservation study area contains a number of spot finds of complete polished flint and stone axes spread across all geologies. These are mainly unassociated findspots perhaps suggesting deliberate deposition in the landscape. At least two examples were however, found in well-dated medieval or post-medieval contexts (one for example was found incorporated into a timber-framed house at Walderton) emphasizing the significance of these ‘thunderbolts’ in the superstitions of later periods (and the fact that they may have been moved around the landscape much later than the Neolithic period).

8.3. CONCLUSIONS

The Fishbourne Research and Conservation area in many ways represents a ‘classic’ lowland English ‘neolithic’ with its distinct sites and many uncertainties. Monuments are represented by major and minor enclosed spaces with a clear ritual focus (the causewayed enclosures) and long and oval mounds with some burial evidence (the barrows) (Fig. 15). Industrial sites (the flint mines) also see processes of extraction, and perhaps preliminary knapping, embedded within forms of ritual behaviour. Pits may represent a wider use of the landscape than purely at the spot where they were dug. They may therefore not represent actual settlement sites but
wider ‘occupation’ of their landscape. The many lithic spreads and findspots perhaps represent a shift in land use, including herding, rather than discrete settlement sites. The use of the landscape in the Neolithic perhaps was more akin to the Mesolithic than the Later Bronze Age with its characteristic defined landscape. As the period progresses, however, collecting planted crops replaces collecting wild crops and humanly defined special spaces replace naturally defined special spaces.

Fig. 15. Neolithic site distributions/OS map.
9. Period summary: the Bronze Age

by David Dunkin & David Yates

9.1. BRIEF OVERVIEW

European communities three to four-and-a-half thousand years ago are said to have experienced the first golden or international age. The period of time between 2500–700 BC saw exceptionally rapid economic developments and social changes in comparison with anything that had gone on before. During the Bronze Age, widely-spaced parts of the continent were drawn together by an expanding communications network resulting in the rapid spread of new ideas, technological advances and material wealth. In England, a politically dominant English Channel–North Sea region developed with concentrated settlements along the Thames, the East Anglian Fenlands and the South Coast (Fig. 16). Access to the wider European exchange and alliance network was important and a farming surplus funded the accumulating scale of bronze metalwork found in the archaeological record. It was a time of profound changes in the way land was managed with rectilinear fields, pasture plots and straight droveways creating an imposing landscape. Within this working landscape burial practices changed. The dead increasingly became incorporated into the landscape of the living, buried within settlements or within the farmed grounds. Widespread social dislocation in southern England at the end of the Bronze Age reflected a significant shift in the patterns of long-distance exchange in Europe and the collapse of the bronze-based prestige goods economy.

9.2. WHAT’S NEW

Until the advent of developer-funded archaeology in 1990, Bronze Age studies were largely confined to investigation of upland earthworks especially the surviving downland barrows, earthen banks and ditches. Large-scale commercial archaeology has transformed that narrow focus and has revealed the hidden legacy of Bronze Age activity on lowland river terraces and coastal brick-earths — ground which provides no surface indicator of what lies beneath. It is now apparent that these rich farmlands, including the loess of Sussex, formed the core areas of Bronze Age settlement. It now seems that Early Bronze Age pits may have marked out the first land plots. These became formalized by digging permanent field boundaries, particularly in the Later Bronze Age (Knight 2002; Chapman et al. 2005, 19). Some Early Bronze Age barrows may have been constructed as clearance cairns at the edges of fields.

The field banks and ditches defined large areas of ground on which the farming communities lived out their daily lives, toiling to make a success of their existence. Researchers now recognize that certain dominant elements of farm life (those critical to the perpetual success of the community) were associated with acts of ritualization (Bradley 2003). There is increasing evidence to show that field systems and farmsteads were associated with particular depositional practices. Critical points in the fields and the settlement were marked by the deposition of artefact concentrations or the placing of special single finds including quernstones, bronze objects, curated curios and token human cremations (Brück 2001, 151; Dunkin 2001; Guttmann & Last 2000, 155). Offerings in watering holes, in particular, show concern for the continued welfare of the breeding herd (Bradley 2003; Barrett et al. 2001). Decommissioning rites marking the abrupt erasure of a settlement (Nowakowski 1991) or formal closure of a watering hole have also been recorded. All such actions provide clues to the complexity of a cultural landscape in which formal land tenure was not solely an impersonal expression of demographic and economic forces (Fokkens 1999, 41). The construction of field systems and roundhouses aligned on the rising sun appears to have created a spatial setting in which people, their livestock and cultivated land were closely linked in a complex cosmology.

Research suggests a drive to maximize output during the Bronze Age that is quite independent
of population pressure. Intensified production may have been adopted to meet social demands for feasting, exchange and alliance formation. Fierce competition between political economies puts pressure on the most valued land, i.e. that ground with the greatest fertility or strategic advantage. It was in those locations that innovations in livestock management and plant species were pursued. There is more evidence of manuring on the lowland sites to add to the existing evidence from the uplands. The discovery of massive Later Bronze Age middens at East Chisenbury and Potterne (McOmish et al. 2002, 73; Lawson 2000; Guttmann 2005) on the Wessex Chalklands has significant implications for future research in Sussex. There are signs of spiritual replenishment. Work in Cornwall and Cambridgeshire suggests that field shrines were incorporated into the farmlands (Nowakowski 1991; Bender et al. 1997, 173; Pollard 2002) and the discovery of human bones within manure matrices (Nowakowski pers. comm.) suggests a special emphasis on soil enrichment. It signals the continued participation of the dead in the life-giving land in an attempt to ensure the perpetuation of the farming cycle (Brück 2001).

Research into marine transgression has highlighted the scale of coastal erosion during the Holocene (Long & Shennan 1993; Long & Roberts 1997). Large stretches of Bronze Age coastline along the North Sea, in the Thames estuary and the English Channel are now submerged. Increasing data on relative sea levels provide a context for the surviving archaeological record.

9.3. THE EARLY BRONZE AGE DATA IN THE STUDY AREA

BARROWS ON THE DOWNS AND COASTAL PLAIN

The most visible form of evidence in the study area for the Early Bronze Age is the barrow. These have been, until recently, almost exclusively confined to the downland block. The majority of these are ‘Bowl’ barrows though there are a number of ‘Bell’ and ‘Pond/Saucer’ barrows which lie within the Kingley Vale/Bow Hill enclave. The Devil’s Jumps on Bow Hill (Fig. 17) contain a number of
the latter and these are very much in the Wessex tradition. This has been further emphasized by the
discovery of a ‘whetstone pendant’ from Barrow 3 on Bow Hill (Garwood 2003). The discovery of
two barrows (‘ring-ditches’) on the Westhampnett Bypass excavations (Allen & Gardiner 2000, 12) lie
within the study area and add to the only other
known barrow on the Coastal Plain, the ‘Hove Barrow,’ which was destroyed in the nineteenth
century. The Westhampnett discoveries suggest that further barrows, perhaps in ‘ring-ditch’ form,
await discovery on the Coastal Plain.

Other clusters of barrows within the study area
which lie on the Chalk to the north and northwest
of Chichester, are in the vicinity of Goodwood,
the Mardens and Chalton. The Bow Hill and the
Goodwood Group overlook the upper reaches of
the Lavant on the west and east sides respectively.
The Chalton Valley Group on the Chalk, in the
extreme northwest of the study area, now over-
looks what is essentially a dry valley. Research
may show that the Marden and Bow Hill Groups
demonstrate a continuity of funerary expression
and other activities from the later Neolithic. The
proximity of these two groups to Late Neolithic
oval barrows at North Marden (Drewett 1986) and
Stoughton respectively, may provide an important
sequence.

There is a great diversity of funereal and ritual
expression encompassed within the tradition of
barrow construction (Garwood 2003, 57). Each bar-
row and/or barrow group will have its own unique
history. A continuum of change must be expected
in a tradition which lasted for at least a thousand
years. Furthermore, the re-use of these monuments
over a much longer time-frame (Bradley 2002)
informs us that there are still many more strands
of evidence that research into barrows needs to
consider and unravel.

OTHER FORMS OF EVIDENCE
The other main body of evidence for the early
period is the artefact scatters, in particular the char-
acteristic flintwork and distinctive Beaker pottery.
The latter has been identified on both the Chalk
(e.g. Stoke Clump) and the Coastal Plain at Selsey
and North Bersted. Early Bronze Age metalwork
has been recorded at a number of locations on the
Chalk, the Coastal Plain and the Upper Coastal
Plain. Some of the finds include a flanged axe from

Fig. 17. Devil’s Jumps, Bow Hill, reconstruction.
Bracklesham Bay and flat axes from Selsey, Westhampnett and West Stoke (Trumley Copse).

The virtual absence of Early Bronze Age structures is in marked contrast to the developed farmscape of the later period (from c. 1500 BC). The study area contains much evidence of continuity from the earlier to the later period. In the Stoke Down/Bow Hill area Early Bronze Age barrows are juxtaposed with late prehistoric field systems, linear boundaries (cross ridge dykes) and Later Bronze Age settlement (below). The landscape around Bow Hill therefore provides possibilities for researching the transitional period where this apparent shift to a settled lifestyle took place.

9.4. MIDDLE AND LATE BRONZE AGE DATA

SELEY AND THE COASTAL REGION OF THE STUDY AREA

It has been conjectured that the Bronze Age coastline was 1–2 kilometres further south of the present-day foreshore and perhaps as far south as the Mixon Reef (Woodcock 2003, 4). Considerable erosion of the shoreline at Selsey has occurred and continues to do so. This is hastened by the fact that the tidal effects of long-shore drift, both to the east and the west of Selsey Bill (Woodcock 2003, 4), cause a greatly increased scouring effect. This has recently resulted in deposits of Later Bronze Age date being uncovered (Seager-Thomas 1998). There is a large and growing body of evidence of Late Bronze Age occupation and high-status metalwork known from the Selsey peninsula. This together with evidence of land division and cremation suggests an important farming and settlement focus within the region.

The coastal region of the study area has produced significant concentrations of Later Bronze Age activity. On Hayling Island in particular, there are a number of hoard sites; for example a Middle Bronze Age hoard of c. 20 palstaves from central Hayling and another MBA palstave hoard from Gable Head, have been identified. At North Hayling a putative burnt mound has been located (Bradley pers. comm.) and these may have a hoard association (Dunkin 2001). At the northern tip of Hayling Island a possible timber platform site has been recorded with a radiocarbon date centring on the Early Bronze Age/Middle Bronze Age transition and at South Hayling Late Bronze Age hearths suggest occupation.

At Bracklesham Bay two Later Bronze Age hoards and a gold ring are recorded from coastal deposits. To the immediate east of Selsey in the vicinity of Bognor Regis, another important enclave of Late Bronze Age activity is centred on the Aldingbourne Rife. At North Bersted a recent evaluation (Worrall 2005) identified a Later Bronze Age land surface containing burnt-flint concentrations, capped by an alluvial sequence provisionally dated to the Early Iron Age. Further work here should identify significant environmental data for the period. The proximity of further hoard sites (Flansham, Bilsham, Yapton, Bognor) and a settlement focus at Westergate (Stevens 2000) indicates that the western fringes of the Sussex Coastal Plain were central to the overall emerging picture of the region.

THE RIVER VALLEYS

Distribution of Later Bronze Age activity shows a marked coastal/riverine/valley orientation and the Lavant and the Bosham Stream are of particular significance.

The upper and middle parts of the Lavant, north and east of Chichester have evidence for occupation and significant metalwork. At Mid Lavant a Late Bronze Age spearhead was discovered close to the river and at East Dean at the river’s head a hoard containing two Sussex loops and three quoit-headed pins were discovered in 1936 (Anon. 1936).

The development of Chichester and subsequent gravel quarrying to the south and east of the city have seen many changes to the former courses of the lower reaches of the Lavant. In Chichester itself occupation evidence was identified at Graylingwell and burnt mound material was discovered in a palaeochannel during an evaluation just to the west of the cathedral (Priestley-Bell pers. comm.). In the north of the city close to the Lavant a fragment of Late Bronze Age cauldron was identified. Other metalwork finds are known in the vicinity. Some of the most important discoveries to date on the Coastal Plain, and investigated prior to gravel extraction, are centred on the Drayton/Oving area to the east of the city. Droveways, ditches, cremation cemeteries and settlement foci indicate that this area was intensively occupied during the Later Bronze Age. At Drayton South a number of elements of the Late Bronze Age landscape came together with two burnt mounds, cremation deposits, and metalwork immediately abutting the line of a braided stream which formerly fed into the Lavant south of the city.
The area immediately to the west and north of Fishbourne has yielded a number of metalwork finds close to or within the Bosham Stream/Fishbourne Creek. An important ‘ornament horizon’ Middle Bronze Age hoard was found by a metal detectorist in the West Ashling/Funtington area (Chichester District Museum) (Fig. 18). This area is characterized by the alluvium of the upper reaches of the Bosham Stream, a classic location. The hoard is comprised of arm-rings, metal-working tools, finger-rings and side-looped spearheads. Also from the area come two Late Bronze Age spearheads from the streambed together with the findspots of several Middle Bronze Age palstaves close by (e.g. Trumley Copse). One of the spearheads appears to have been broken deliberately and may represent an act of decommissioning (York 2002).

9.5. EXCAVATION STANDARDS AND HISTORY OF INVESTIGATION

Most of the earlier investigations on the Chalk amounted to antiquarian curiosity and therefore the visible barrows were targeted. Only two barrows have been fully excavated to modern standards (see Table 1).

Regarding sites of the Later Bronze Age period, which lie within the area of interest, very few have been excavated to modern standards prior to PPG16 in 1990. Principally these are: the Trundle, at which a campaign of excavation at the Middle Iron Age hillfort in the late 1920s (Curwen 1929; 1931) identified a pre-hillfort phase dated on pottery to the Late Bronze Age/Early Iron Age (Hamilton & Manley 1997). Also on the Chalk at Kingley Vale a sample excavation by Curwen in 1932 revealed a possible Middle Bronze Age house platform associated with a small assemblage of Deverel-Rimbury pottery (Curwen 1954). A small scale investigation at Selsey (Golf Links Lane) on the Coastal Plain by Mrs Graham Clark (White 1934) uncovered evidence for Late Bronze Age occupation. Fifty years later James Kenny’s excavations at the Pontins’ Broadreeds Holiday Camp (Kenny 1989) located later Bronze Age pottery, some of which may be related to Middle Bronze Age cremations (Hamilton 2003) together with other occupation evidence (e.g. Middle Bronze Age roundhouse).

Since 1990, and principally under the aegis of PPG16, the picture has changed dramatically, particularly on the Coastal Plain. A large body of this evidence is unpublished (client reports), but lies within the public domain. The published and unpublished reports are summarized in Table 2.

Indeed this evidence reflects the emerging picture across the entire West Sussex Coastal Plain. This new data helps to contextualize the great corpus of Bronze Age metalwork recorded over a much longer period in the region.

9.6. PARADIGMS OF THE PAST AND THE PRESENT

No longer therefore can the Coastal Plain be regarded as an uninhabited void for the Later Bronze Age. The high archaeological visibility of the Downland block in the past ensured that its earthworks were always going to be the subject of excavation and survey. The imbalance has been heightened by the fact that the identification of features on the ‘brick-earth’ soils in extreme wet or dry conditions is very difficult. Other reasons contributing to the earlier paucity of evidence would include the general absence of extant prehistoric earthworks
on the coastal plain (Bedwin 1978). Much of the region is characterized by deep deposits of topsoil/subsoil/alluvium which mask the identification of sites from the air. Also, for this reason, prehistoric pottery is not commonly found in the ploughsoil and this fact is further compounded by the acidic nature of the ‘brick-earth’ soils.

The view perpetuated by Curwen (1954) that metalwork deposition (single finds and hoards) could be accounted for by casual loss or the deliberate burial for later retrieval, by smiths (founder’s hoard) or merchants for example, is no longer tenable. The term ‘structured deposition’ has gained widespread acceptance and the work of Richard Bradley in particular (Bradley 1990; Barber 2003), has clearly shown the ritual significance of the burial or placement of bronze artefacts during the Later Bronze Age.

Environmental archaeology has begun to allow some fine tuning regarding the chronology of woodland clearance. Many studies indicate that the first major prolonged sequences in the opening up of parts of the landscape specifically occurred during the Later Bronze Age (e.g. Drewett 1989). This continuing work is going to be invaluable to placing the new archaeological data into an environmental context.

9.7. CONCLUSION

The Bronze Age communities were well placed to benefit from major changes affecting southern England. They had clear advantages in a new outward-looking world where social standing was increasingly defined in terms of long-distance alliances and the ability to compete for prestige goods. The shorelines gave direct access to coastal and cross-channel traffic. The loess deposits forming the plain were rich, inexhaustible soils — habitats which were capable of agricultural intensification — sustaining a burgeoning political economy. This would explain the siting of Wessex Tradition conspicuous barrows on Bow Hill with their outlooks over this rich territory and the abundance of Later Bronze Age finds which signal the political ascendancy of this region.