

The Bronze Age and Iron Age in Leicestershire and Rutland

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INTRODUCTION

In many ways the Bronze Age and Iron Age covering the second-first millennia BC have seen the most dramatic changes in our perceptions of settlement and land use in Leicestershire and Rutland. The first site examined by Peter Liddle, within days of his appointment as archaeological survey officer with Leicestershire Museums in 1976, was an Iron Age settlement at Whitwell in Rutland, later investigated by a team from Nottingham University (Todd 1981). This was a portent of things to come since in the years following the first work by community archaeology groups in the two counties, 25 years ago, there have been great advances in our understanding of the archaeology of these periods.

Prior to this time our knowledge of the Bronze Age and Iron Age for the two counties was limited to small scale excavations of ring ditches at Cossington (O'Brien 1976), a round barrow at Lockington (Posnansky 1955); hillforts at Breedon on the Hill (Wacher 1977) and Burrough Hill (Liddle 1982, 22), some tantalising evidence of Iron Age occupation from Leicester (Kenyon 1948; Clarke 1952, 22) and stray finds, including several from the ironstone extraction areas, for example Harston (Cottrill and Dunning 1950). Bronze Age pottery and metalwork finds were known, including from collared urns from Syston and Earl Shilton (Powell 1950), hoards from Beacon Hill (Herrick 1866), Husbands Bosworth (Nichols 1804, 1127), the remarkable group from Welby (Fig. 4; Powell 1948) and examples from Rutland at Cottesmore, Ketton and Essendine (Clough 1979). Imported Late Bronze Age – Earlier Iron Age brooches were known from Barrow on Soar and Hinckley (Liddle 1982, 17-18). Although the present land use and underlying substrata in Leicestershire and Rutland are not always conducive for cropmark formation aerial reconnaissance had located some prehistoric ring ditches and enclosures. Of note were the extensive cropmarks of an Iron Age settlement at Lockington photographed by Dr J. K. St Joseph in the late 1950's (Frere and St Joseph 1979; Clay 1985a). Jim Pickering had undertaken further aerial photography but in 1976 much of this information had not reached the Sites and Monuments Record.

However in the years following the appointment of the survey officer, fieldwalking by community archaeology groups together with the results of Jim Pickering's aerial reconnaissance was beginning to change the picture of Bronze Age and Iron Age settlement patterns in Leicestershire and Rutland. By the time of the publication of volume 1 of *Leicestershire Archaeology The*

Present State of Knowledge (Liddle 1982) work by the Museum's survey team had begun to locate, in addition to Neolithic and Bronze Age flint scatters (see Beamish this volume), Late Bronze Age post-Deverel Rimbury pottery from fieldwalking comparable with earlier collections including material from excavations at Buddon Wood and Glen Parva (Liddle 1982, 18). While the earthwork surveys conducted by Fred Hartley (1983, 1984, 1987, 1989a) had mainly concentrated on medieval remains, some round barrows (e.g Sproxtton), hillforts (e.g Beacon Hill, Breedon on the Hill and Burrough Hill) and smaller Late Bronze Age and Iron Age enclosures (Belton, Ridlington and Thurlaston; those at Bardon and Thorpe Arnold are now thought not to be Iron Age (Liddle, *pers. comm.*; Liddle 1982, 22 Figs. 13-16) had been surveyed. Further excavation had also taken place including two Bronze Age barrow sites in northeast Leicestershire (Clay 1981) and important Late Iron Age evidence from Leicester (Clay 1985b). Further fieldwork and excavation was to continue and it has been the Iron Age, more than any other period, which has appeared to benefit from the increase in fieldwork resulting from the change in archaeology and planning policies following the Department of the Environment's Planning Policy Guideline No 16 (PPG16; 1990). For these two counties surveys and evaluations have located over 25 previously unknown Iron Age sites since 1990, mainly on boulder clay substrata, and far larger-scale fieldwork has been undertaken than had previously been possible (e.g. Humberstone; Charles *et al.* 2000, Normanton le Heath; Thorpe *et al.* 1994 and Wanlip; Beamish 1998).

Nationally there have been several major developments in the study of these periods largely as a result of aerial archaeology (Riley 1980; Pickering 1989), large scale field surveys (e.g. Raunds, Parry 1994 and forthcoming), environmental archaeology (e.g Van der Veen 1992) and large scale excavations (e.g. Crick in Northamptonshire (G. Hughes *pers. comm.*). There has also been a re-interpretation of the evidence including the role of hillforts (Hill 1989) and the identification of the deliberate special deposition of artefacts, animal bone and grain (Hill 1995, Thomas 1997). Research has begun to redress the balance of information from the south of England to the Midlands and the north (Clay 1999; Haselgrove 1999).

THE EARLY BRONZE AGE 2000-1500BC

The Early Bronze Age is better considered as a continuum of the late Neolithic covering c 2800-1500BC (see Beamish above). In common with evidence

from other areas of Britain, the most abundant form of Early Bronze Age monument from the two counties is the round barrow, 27 of which show evidence of surviving mounds. While most of the 250 ring-ditches recorded from cropmarks on the SMR are likely to denote ploughed-out round barrows others may be small ceremonial enclosures (e.g. Melton Mowbray; Finn 1998). Examples of round barrows and ring ditches have been excavated at Cossington (O'Brien 1976; Sturgess and Ripper 2000), Eaton (Clay 1981), Lockington (Posnansky 1955; Hughes 2000 – see Beamish this volume), Melton Mowbray (Finn 1998), Oakham (Clay 1998), Sproxton (Clay 1981) and Tixover (Beamish 1992). At Sproxton a multi-phase round barrow, with two phases of timber circles and concentric stone kerbs, was excavated (Clay 1981). Pre-burial excarnation prior to cremation has been suggested (Stirland 1981) while differential burning suggests that the body remained partially articulated and was laid face down with a pyre build over it. Three satellites and one secondary burial were located with radiocarbon dates suggesting use of the mound over a 200-year period from c.1950 -1750 cal BC (Fig. 1). At Eaton a sequence of four centrally placed burials saw a succession of a cremation in a plank built oak coffin, an inhumation in a monoxylous (tree trunk) coffin, followed by a cremation in an organic container and a further inhumation. A sequence of four concentric ring ditches denotes successive enlargement of the monument while radiocarbon dates suggest use of the mound around 1900-1800 Cal BC (Clay 1981).

Early Bronze Age pottery is known from several locations in Leicestershire and Rutland including examples of Beaker, Collared urn and food vessel. Metalwork has been recorded as stray finds or occasionally in association with other material, often in Beaker contexts.



Fig. 1. Aerial view of the excavation of a multi-phase Bronze Age round barrow at Sproxton (north to the bottom). A sequence of concentric timber stake circles was later covered by a mound surrounded by two concentric stone kerbs. Finally material from an encircling ring ditch provided a stone capping. The trench seen running from the north towards the centre of the mound was excavated in 1860 by Thomas Bateman, and missed the central burial by 100mm (from Clay 1981).



Fig. 2. Middle Bronze Age cremation urn during excavation of the large-scale cemetery at Eye Kettleby, Melton Mowbray.

MIDDLE BRONZE AGE 100BC – 1000BC

Middle Bronze Age evidence is mainly found in the form of metalwork, pottery and lithics. There are no known settlement sites from this period although some possible settlement areas, identified from Late Neolithic-Early Bronze Age flint scatters (Clay 1999; Beamish this volume), may continue into the Middle Bronze Age. Similarly some barrows and ring-ditches may date from this period and re-use of Early Bronze Age ceremonial sites in the Middle Bronze Age is known from various sites including examples from Castle Donington (J. Coward *pers. comm.*), Cossington (O'Brien 1976), Melton Mowbray (Finn 1998) and Tixover (Beamish 1992). Flat cemeteries are known from Cossington (O'Brien 1976) and Melton Mowbray (Fig. 2; Finn 1998) with other possible examples from Barwell and Stathern (Liddle 1982, 13). The cemetery at Eye Kettleby is one of the largest recorded from Britain comprising over eighty cremations, thirty in urns, located close to Early Bronze Age ring ditches. Middle Bronze Age metalwork, mainly from stray finds, includes side-looped spearheads, palstaves and long-bladed rapiers.

Pollen, insect and plant macrofossil analyses from a Middle Bronze Age palaeochannel at Croft (Rosseff *et al.* forthcoming) indicates a change from the mixed woodland of the Neolithic with an increase in Alder while grass pollen, cereal pollen and plant remains



Fig. 3. A Late Bronze Age rectangular building at Eye Kettleby, Melton Mowbray (plan by N.Finn courtesy of University of Leicester Archaeological Services).

suggest some nearby cultivated or disturbed land. At Castle Donington similar environmental information from a Middle Bronze Age palaeochannel shows limited woodland and an increase in meadowland and pastureland species (A. Monckton *pers. comm.*). The earliest evidence of spelt wheat is from charred remains from a Middle Bronze Age pit group at Lockington (c.1425-1260 Cal BC; Monckton 1995).

LATE BRONZE AGE – Earlier Iron Age 1000-500BC

Late Bronze Age - Earlier Iron Age evidence is rare in the two counties and often relies on diagnostic ceramic material that has poor survival qualities within surface scatters (Jackson and Denham forthcoming), while some undated cropmarks may be of sites with origins in this period. The majority of known sites are from areas with clay substrata with an average altitude of 105.75m O.D and an average distance from water sources of 0.7km (Clay 2002).

Late Bronze Age settlements are known at Glen Parva (Liddle 1982, 19), Kirby Muxloe (Cooper 1994), Melton Mowbray, Eye Kettleby (Finn 1998) and Ridlington in Rutland (Beamish 1997). The Eye Kettleby settlement included a rectangular building of post hole and beam slot construction with post Deverel Rimbury pottery from surrounding rubbish pits suggesting use from about the 11th-9th centuries BC (Fig. 3). Circular buildings are more common on Late Bronze Age settlements and these have been found at Willow Farm,

Castle Donington, Kirby Muxloe, Glen Parva and Ridlington.

Hilltop sites are known from Buddon Wood; Mountsorrel (Liddle 1982, 20) and possibly Beacon Hill, Woodhouse Eaves (Liddle 1982, 19) while the two developed hillforts at Breedon on the Hill and Burrough Hill (Kenyon 1950, 26; Wachter 1964; 1977) may have Late Bronze Age origins. A smaller defended earthwork site of possible late Bronze Age date is known from Ridlington, Rutland, although recent research suggests this may be part of a larger complex (M. Beamish *pers. comm.*).

The beginning of the first millennium BC has been interpreted as a period of climatic deterioration although its impact on this part of central England is uncertain. This area has provided few pollen diagrams and consequently information on the environment and any climatic change is scarce. Pollen diagrams are known from Croft (Rosseff *et al.* forthcoming), Hemington, Kirby Muxloe (Brown forthcoming) and Oakham (J. Greig *pers. comm.*) which, together with land snail faunal evidence from Tixover (Monckton 1995), suggest an increase in clearance and grassland from the Late Bronze Age that continues throughout the first millennium BC. Cereal cultivation is less common but is known from Late Bronze Age contexts at Kirby Muxloe (Cooper 1994) where charred cereal grain and chaff were present in small quantities including barley, bread wheat type, spelt and emmer (Monckton 1995).

This period also saw the beginnings of an increase in land management with the introduction of extensive field

and long distance boundary systems. These may have originated as pit clusters such as those located at Lockington (Meek 1995, 2000) and Castle Donington (Coward and Ripper 1998) in the Trent valley, serving as markers in areas where land was maintained for common use as pasture by different groups (Taylor 1996). These markers may have been replaced in some cases by interrupted banks and lines of pits showing division of land while enabling access for different groups. Pit alignments such as these are known from many different areas including Eye Kettleby where they may have been parts of field systems connected to the settlement. Towards the middle of the first millennium BC some of these pit alignments are replaced by single and multiple ditched systems perhaps reflecting a change towards making the areas less accessible in response to a change away from using these areas in common. Double ditched systems have been examined at Tixover, Ridlington and Preston in Rutland (Beamish 1992; 1997) while a triple ditch system sampled at Ketton showed evidence of primary filling during the Earlier Iron Age but with continued use into the Later Iron Age (Mackie 1993).

Ceremonial and burial sites are rare for the early part of the period and some Middle - Late Bronze Age flat burial cemeteries may have continued to be used into the first millennium BC.

The deliberate deposition of metalwork hoards is a phenomenon noted in many parts of Britain during the Late Bronze Age although interpretations for the reasons

for their deposition vary. Seven Late Bronze Age hoards are known from Leicestershire and Rutland with of particular note, those from Beacon Hill, (near Woodhouse Eaves) and Welby. The Beacon Hill hoard consists of a socketed axe, two leaf-shaped spearheads and a socketed gouge, which was located in a pit within the bounds of a hill-top enclosure (Herrick 1866; Liddle 1982, 17). A half-mould for a socketed axe was found nearby which suggests that metal-working was being undertaken nearby. At Welby a remarkable collection of metalwork was found comprising a 'founders hoard'. The assemblage, which included three socketed axes, a leaf-shaped spearhead, a sword, a carinated cup, cauldron handles and slided discs, has parallels from Hungary and the surrounding area (Powell 1948).

A burnt mound consisting of heated pebble debris and an associated timber lined trough has been recorded at Watermead Park, Wanlip, adjacent to a timber bridge (Ripper 1997). Butchered cattle bones from adjacent palaeochannels at both this site and another from Castle Donington might suggest that cooking/feasting may have been taking place, although other alternative interpretations including saunas are suggested from similar sites in the West Midlands (Hodder and Barfield 1990). Two skulls were located within a palaeochannel deposit close to the burnt mound and timber bridge at Wanlip (Ripper 1997). One of the skulls has been radio-carbon dated to 990-830 CAL BC while cut marks on its atlas vertebra may indicate

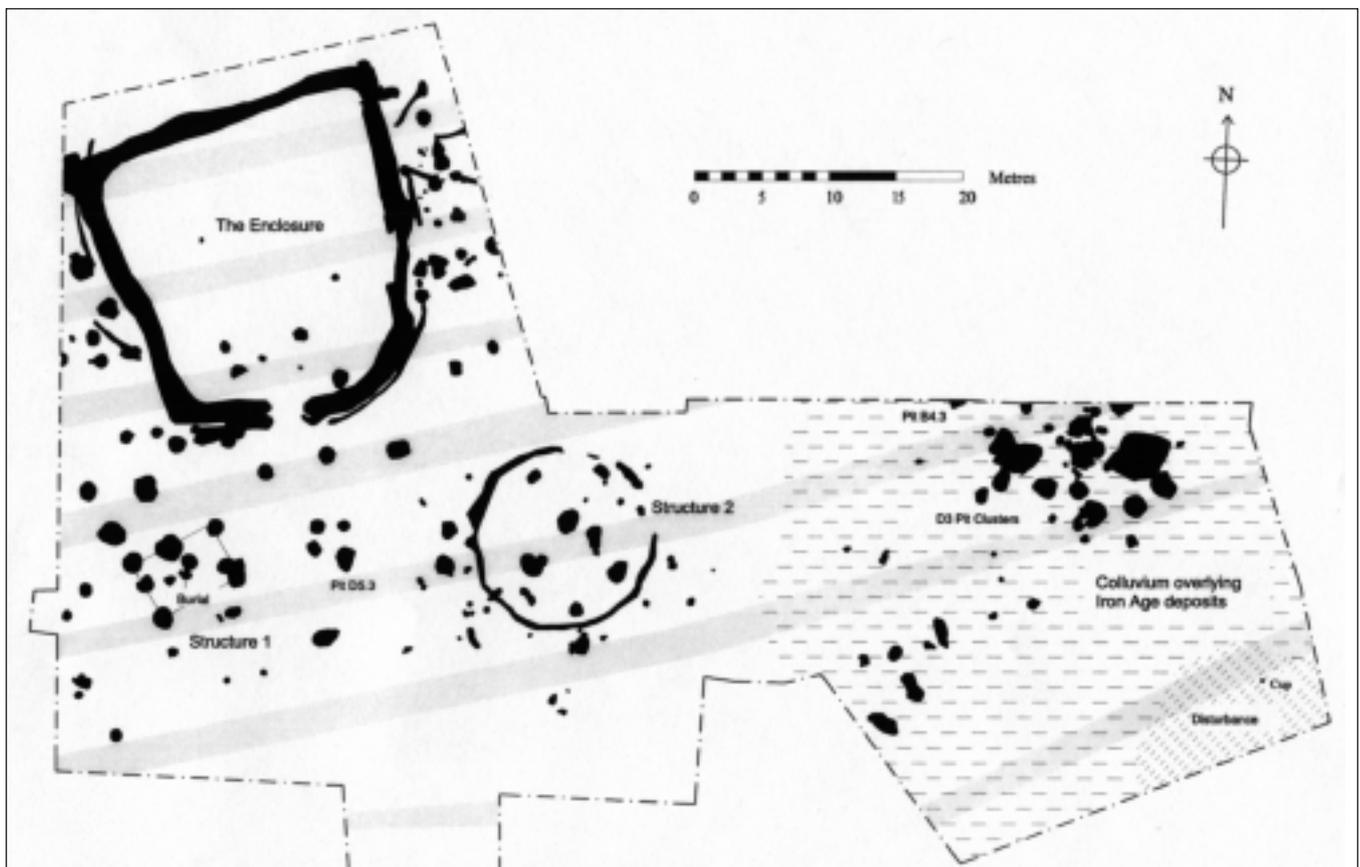


Fig. 4. Plan of the middle Iron Age site at Wanlip (from Beamish 1998).

decapitation before ritual deposition either in the river or surrounding marsh.

Small settlements appear to be the most common type during the mid-first millennium BC. Typical of these was one at Wanlip, in the Soar valley, excavated in advance of the construction of the A46 Leicester Western by-pass (Fig. 4; Beamish 1998). This comprised a small farmstead which radiocarbon and thermoluminescence dating suggests was in use between c. 450 and 350 BC. The settlement appears to have been well organised with its inhabitants having an awareness of their position in the world, building their structures with reference to cosmological events. These included circular buildings using ring groove foundations, some of which showed evidence of polygonal construction (Beamish 1998, 30-1). Tending livestock would have been of importance and a small rectangular ditched enclosure would have been used for managing herds entering from a droveway to the south or from pasturing on the floodplain to the east. Some grain and legumes were grown and consumed while some wild foods were still hunted and gathered. Special deposition of placed artefacts in pits was taking place including groups of pottery, querns and charred grain (Beamish 1998, 40-1). A cremation burial was also located, placed centrally within a four-post rectangular building (Beamish 1998, 28-9) close to evidence of domestic activity perhaps indicating a trend towards ritual being incorporated into the context of everyday life.

Most of the resources used at the settlement, including pottery and quernstones, were made from materials found in or near the valley. The pottery used on the site includes jars and bowls decorated with regular and irregular scoring and combing (East Midlands Scored ware; Elsdon 1992). This style of pottery has a long life, perhaps originating in the 5th century BC (Marsden 1998). Sooting on the outside of larger vessels suggests that they were used as cooking pots while the absence of sooting supports their use as storage jars. Some smaller cups and bowls would have been used as drinking containers. The different rock fragments in the pottery fabrics suggests movement of raw materials or finished items from Charnwood Forest and the eastern Jurassic ridge to the Leicester area. Examination of the worked flint from Wanlip suggests that it continued to be manufactured and used into the mid-first millennium BC (Cooper and Humphrey 1998; Young and Humphrey 1999).

THE LATER IRON AGE 500BC-AD43

The Later Iron Age sees an expansion of settlement and agricultural land-use. For the first time previously unsettled areas including the boulder clay plateaux were settled and farmed with environmental evidence again suggesting an emphasis on pastoralism. The settlement evidence interpreted from cropmarks (Pickering and Hartley 1985; Hartley 1989b), earthworks, artefact scatters (querns and pottery) and excavated data suggest

a growing population operating within a tribal system, with increased trading contacts. The Leicestershire and Rutland Sites and Monuments Record include over 220 Later Iron Age sites. These show an average height above sea level of 103m O.D, a preference for a south-facing aspect and an average distance to water of 0.4 km. The extensive fieldwalking survey areas at Medbourne (Clay 1996, 2002; Liddle 1994) and the Langtons (P. Bowman *pers. comm.*) located Later Iron Age sites every 1.8 -2 sq km.

The settlements of this period can be divided into different types, ranging in size from small farmsteads to hillforts or extensive lowland settlements. Farmsteads were both unenclosed and enclosed, the latter usually showing evidence of having unenclosed origins when excavated. The enclosures come in circular, oval, 'D' shaped and sub-rectangular forms and some have survived as earthworks (Liddle 1982, 22). Excavation and watching briefs at Enderby have located two *foci* of Iron Age occupation consisting of several circular buildings some of which were within enclosures (Clay 1992; Meek 1997; Ripper and Beamish 1997). Different phases of enclosure in the northern area comprised the replacement of a small rectangular version by a larger 'D' shaped example (Clay 1992, 24). At Huncote, 3.5km southwest of the Enderby sites, an oval enclosure of Later Iron Age date has been excavated which showed evidence of two circular buildings (Shore 2001). At both enclosures examined at Enderby a pattern of paired circular buildings possibly showing a division between living and kitchen areas can be interpreted (Clay 1992; Meek 1997; Ripper and Beamish 1997). Both areas were being farmed in the first century BC and had mixed economies but perhaps with an emphasis on stockherding. Cattle and sheep were the most common domestic animals on the sites while emmer and bread wheat were being grown. Other farmsteads have been examined at Cossington (Sturgess and Ripper 2000), Crown Hills (Chapman 2000), Empingham (Cooper 2000, 46-49), Ketton (Meadows 1999), Mountsorrel (Walker 1994), Oakham (G. Hughes *pers. comm.*),



Fig. 6. The hillfort at Burrough Hill, near Twyford, Melton Mowbray. Photo: Leicestershire Museums Arts and Records Service.

Preston (Beamish 1997), Ridlington (Beamish 1997), Tixover (Beamish 1992) and Whitwell (Todd 1981).

Hillforts are known from Beacon Hill, Breedon on the Hill, Burrough Hill (Fig. 5) with other possibilities at Bringhurst, Life Hill and Robin a Tiptoe (Liddle 1982, 19-22). At Breedon the first phase of the defences appears to have been a freestanding palisade that was in turn replaced by a substantial rampart and ditch (Kenyon 1950, 26; Wachter 1964; 1977). Limited excavation around the entrance to Burrough Hill in the 1960's showed evidence of occupation continuing from the Iron Age into the Roman period (Liddle 1982, 22). A smaller sub-rectangular earthwork with a substantial bank and ditch system, covering c. 3 ha, previously thought to be a Roman camp at Ratby Bury has also produced Later Iron Age material (Liddle 1982, 26) and may be the equivalent of a lowland defended 'hillfort'.

In addition to the hillforts, characterised by their location and surrounding ditches and ramparts other larger 'agglomerated' settlements are increasingly being identified in the region. While the size of these settlements at any one time is uncertain, even when allowing for focus shift they would appear to have supported several family groups. Two sites have been excavated on higher glacial drift plateaux. Partial excavation of a series of rectangular cropmark enclosures at Normanton le Heath have revealed Late Iron-Age and Roman occupation over c. 9 ha. (Thorpe *et al.* 1994). This multi-phase settlement included evidence of changing land division and settlement including both circular and rectangular structures based around a northwest/southeast-aligned trackway. The rectangular buildings are of particular interests as they represent a type of construction not previously known in the midlands comprising both postholes and beam pads. Despite a lack of surviving environmental and economic information the settlement and field system do appear to have been primarily concerned with stock control. A rare find from this site is of a sword scabbard mouth (Fig. 6).

At Humberstone a large settlement, different phases of which extend over c. 8 ha., has been partially excavated on a boulder clay ridge. Here a sequence of different phases was discernible showing changing *foci* within the Later Iron Age (Charles *et al.* 2000; J. Thomas *pers. comm.*). Evidence of over thirty circular buildings within different phases of settlement has been located, delineated by penannular drainage gullies and some showing evidence of foundation trenches. Most of these had entrances facing east. The excavation of the northern part of this settlement included some clear evidence of cereal processing with spelt the principal crop although hulled barley was also present (Pelling 2000). Four-post structures may have been for the storage of cereals while both saddle and rotary querns have been found on the site. Cattle bones indicated that the animals were being used for traction and for meat. Their wide variety of ages at death may suggest that they were kept for meat but not for dairying (Charles 2000).

An example of a larger agglomerated lowland



Fig. 7. A Late Iron Age copper alloy scabbard mouth from Normanton le Heath. Photo: Leicestershire Museums Arts and Records Service.

settlement may be interpreted from Lockington where settlement and field systems, possibly linked by a trackway, have been identified. Originally located from aerial reconnaissance by Dr. J. K. St Joseph in 1960, along with a juxtaposed Roman villa, geophysical survey and trial trenching has shown this complex to extend over a 7 ha. area (Frere and St. Joseph 1979, 198-9; Clay 1985a; Ripper and Butler 1999).

At Leicester the development of the Roman and medieval town has meant that evidence of the Iron Age settlement has been severely truncated. A possible circular house was found at St Nicholas circle and pits and a burial was present at Blackfriars Street (Clay and Pollard 1994; Clay and Mellor 1985). Evidence of the extent of the settlement has depended on the distribution of Later Iron Age artefacts. These include pre-Roman imported pottery from Gaul, Italy and Spain represented by Arretine ware, Gallo-Belgic butt beakers and Terra Rubra/Terra Nigra ware (Clamp 1985; Pollard 1994). At Blackfriars Street fragments of flan trays may be evidence of coin manufacture. The distribution of Iron Age finds from Leicester, however, does suggest a large lowland settlement covering c. 8 ha. and the type of material would suggest a high status settlement with extensive trading links by the Roman conquest (Fig. 7; Clay 1985b). It was this settlement that was to become the *Civitas Capital* during the Roman occupation.

Evidence for the economy during the Later Iron Age depends on information from assemblages of animal bone and charred plant remains. Sheep/goat, cattle and pig were the most common domestic animals from bone assemblages at Breedon on the Hill, (Wachter 1964), Burrough Hill (Liddle 1982, 20), Humberstone (Charles 2000), Enderby (Gouldwell 1992) and Tixover (Baxter 1991). Cereals are consistently present from excavated sites, with spelt, barley and bread wheat type being the most common, although concentrations, despite extensive sampling, are usually low. Whether this reflects survival, past usage or a lower emphasis on cereal farming is unclear (Monckton 1995, 35). Grain rich deposits of processed cereals are known, however, from

Rushey Mead (Pollard 2001) and Humberstone (Pelling 2000). Excavations of the hillfort at Breedon on the Hill recovered over forty querns suggesting that cereal processing was taking place at this site (Liddle 1982, 19). Concentrations of querns were also located during the limited excavations at the hillfort at Burrough Hill (Liddle 1982, 20) while they were also present in smaller numbers at the settlements at Castle Donington (Gimbro Farm; Derrick 2000) Kirby Muxloe (Cooper 1994), Enderby (Clay 1992), Humberstone (Roe 2000) and Wanlip (Marsden 1998).

Later Iron Age cremation burials are known from Enderby (Meek 1997) and Market Harborough while crouched burials are present at Leicester (Blackfriars) and Rushey Mead (Clay 1985b, Pollard 2001). Disarticulated human bones in Later Iron Age deposits are also known from Humberstone (Boyle 2000), Leicester (Clay 1985b), Mountsorrel (Walker 1994) and Tixover (Beamish 1992). The presence of disarticulated human bones is known from other Iron Age sites and may have resulted from dispersal following excarnation (Carr and Knusel 1997).

CONCLUSION

By the Early Bronze Age, although settlement areas are difficult to detect, the results from surveys and the location of burials does suggest some expansion onto previously unexploited land together with the continued use of preferred locations many of which had also been occupied in the Mesolithic and Earlier Neolithic (see Beamish this volume). During the second millennium BC more permanent settlement with larger social groups may also be inferred, with some mobile stock herding to preferred seasonal pasturing areas. Longer maintenance of cleared land and more intensive 'short fallow' agriculture may also have taken place (Barrett 1994) with allocation of land for ritual and burial rites, sometimes respecting or re-using areas where communal monuments had been established in the Early Neolithic. The maintenance of cleared land suitable for cultivation would have increased the importance of certain areas to these groups. This might have been re-enforced by reverence of the groups' ancestors, who would have been seen as important in the establishment of their territories (Bradley 1984). Floodplain areas close to river and stream confluences are increasingly being recognised as possible ritual centres (Brown 2000). The importance of the Trent, and in particular the area between its confluences with the Derwent and Soar, as a focus of settlement, ritual and communication is evident.

By 1000 BC the economy of people living in the area now covered by Leicestershire and Rutland appears to have mainly involved stockherding cattle and sheep. Just as the unwooded early post-medieval landscape was dominated by grassland this would be how much of the landscape would have looked in the Late Bronze Age and such areas have been identified from pollen profiles

at Croft, Kirby Muxloe and Hemington. The increased use of metal tools would have seen more efficient and rapid forest clearance. However the more open landscape that was being created would also have seen an increase in soil erosion during this time that would have had a gradual yet significant impact on the landscape. The loose soil would have created hill wash, which would have entered streams and rivers and slowly changed the speed of river flow and the shape of valley slopes. The people living in this area of central England may also have had to adapt to a gradual deterioration in the climate although the effect would not have been as great as in areas at a higher altitude. This may have led to changes in where settlements were located but not necessarily a significant contraction of occupation. This period may have been characterised by more intensive farming of fewer locations with an emphasis on pastoralism, supporting a similar sized population as before but within a less dispersed settlement pattern. The landscape may have included shared 'outfield' pastureland with small-scale subsistence cereal production nearer to the living areas. Managed woodland may have formed part of the infield areas close to the settlements enabling ready access to this important resource. The communities may also have used seasonal upland or floodplain areas further afield.

More permanent settlements are constructed at this time, although the farming communities may still have moved their flocks between summer and wintering grounds. Some hilltop and ridge top settlements surrounded by defensive ditches and ramparts were constructed at this time including examples at Beacon Hill, Burrough Hill, Breedon Hill and Buddon Wood. The need for these defensive structures may reflect increasing land pressures leading to the establishment of territories and consequent conflicts between groups.

By the Later Iron Age settlement evidence for the region shows different tiers of Iron Age society. While the majority of settlement appears to have been farmsteads consisting of family or extended family groups the emergence of larger settlements, with larger populations and serving as centres for trade perhaps similar in size and function to medieval villages, is being recognised. In many ways these settlements were similar in size to the more visible hillforts without the hills or the defensive ditches and ramparts. Although hillforts may have had a specialised role, which need not always have meant that they were occupied at all times, the relationship between these and the larger lowland settlements is still unclear.

The Later Iron Age for Leicestershire and Rutland, therefore, saw significant changes with an increasing population and the beginnings of larger scale settlements. It also saw the emergence of Leicester as an important settlement, a status that it is still maintaining 2000 years later. By the time of the Roman conquest the settlement at Leicester was trading with the continent and manufacturing coins – in many ways showing affinities with 'towns'. Leicestershire and Rutland would

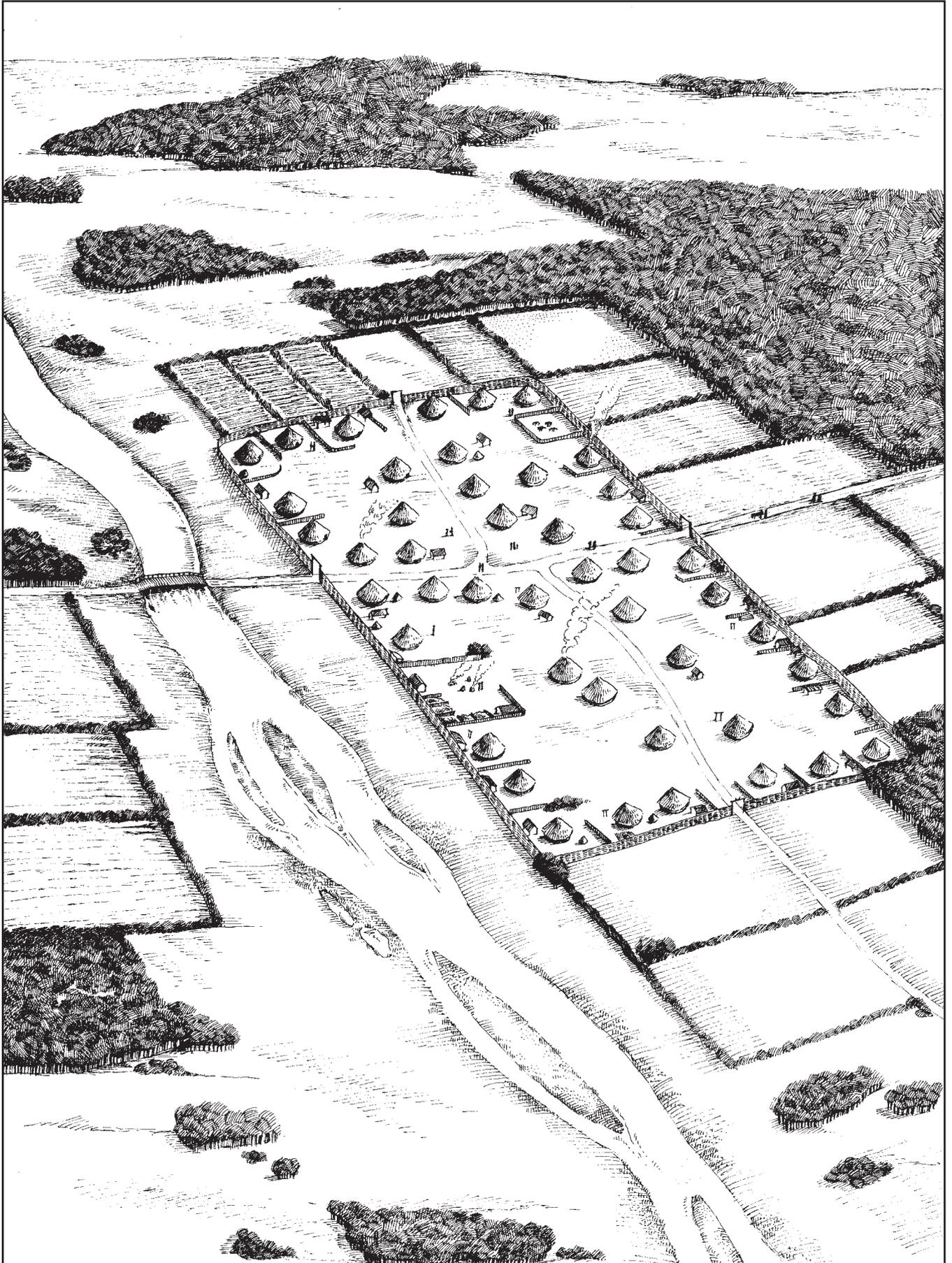


Fig. 8. Reconstruction of Iron Age Leicester circa AD 30. Drawing by Sarah Geeves, courtesy of Leicestershire Museums Arts and Records Service.

have formed part of the southern extent of the tribe called the *Corieltavi* (Tomlin 1983) and Leicester may have served as a tribal capital (although there are other contenders including Lincoln and Old Sleaford). To many Iron Age farmers in the smaller settlements, however, the *Corieltavi* may have been a distant concept of occasional trading contact at the larger settlements having little impact on their own subsistence economies except in times of conflict.

In conclusion, community archaeology in Leicestershire and Rutland has helped to re-write the pre-history of the two counties - areas which have previously been thought to have seen little prehistoric settlement (e.g. Hoskins 1957). Research and fieldwork over the past 25 years has overturned this concept and shown that the area was occupied extensively and in some areas intensively during the second - first millennia BC. At the time of writing two more potentially very important Leicestershire Iron Age sites are being excavated by teams from University of Leicester Archaeological Services, one of which was found by a community archaeology group. The story of these fascinating periods of time continues.

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In many ways the Bronze Age and Iron Age covering the second-first millennia BC have seen the most dramatic changes in our perceptions of settlement and land use in Leicestershire and Rutland. The first site examined by Peter Liddle, within days of his appointment as archaeological survey officer with Leicestershire Museums in 1976, was an Iron Age settlement at Whitwell in Rutland, later investigated by a team from Nottingham University (Todd 1981). This was a portent of things to come since in the years following the first work by community archaeology groups in the two counties, 25 years ago the Bronze Age people of England, as represented by this Beaker series, were clearly heterogeneous. The three ancestral elements which met in the Rhinelands may be distinguished easily. All three were tall, and the mean stature of the whole group was about 174 cm.⁶⁵ The Corded element, however, was the tallest, and the Borreby element, about 170 cm., the shortest. On the whole, the heavy-boned, rugged quality of the Borreby type seems to have influenced the bodily build of the total group. The Beaker skulls as a whole are large, long, and high vaulted, whatever their shape. They form one of the

The Iron Age in Britain refers to the pre-Roman era when iron was used significantly in the making of tools and weapons. The Iron Age followed the Bronze Age, which was generally considered to be the period in history from the 8th century BC and earlier. Places to Visit. Jarlshof Ruins. It is surprising that we have anything which has survived from the Iron Age, but there are several interesting places to visit in Britain which date back to this period including Glastonbury Lake Village. There is an interesting Museum of the Iron Age at Andover and the South Downs Way has many Iron Age features to see at Heyshott Down and Beacon Hill. There is even a recreated Iron Age Farm at the National Showcaves Centre for W