3

Engraved sequences and the perception of prehistoric country in south-east England

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Investigation of the Palaeolithic countryside provides one of the greatest of archaeological challenges and Surrey is ideally positioned to be at the forefront of investigation. However, this essay covers an enormous time-span and attends to aspects of later prehistoric periods as well. Recent work on prehistoric landscapes in central southern England has identified a series of significant chronological 'events' that allows a sequence of land use to be identified. How regional such sequences are remains to be seen, but fragments can be detected across the South and these might provide basic elements on which much of the prehistoric country could be reconstructed. In addition, new approaches in considering the past provide interesting and fresh interpretations of the ancient countryside and allow us to catch a glimpse of how topography may potentially have been perceived at certain times during prehistory. This places greater emphasis on the importance of places and landforms rather than on single sites, but also provides challenges to the traditional interpretations of some monuments.

Introduction

Developer-funded archaeology has added enormous numbers of sites and finds to the inventory during recent decades, providing a wealth of archaeological data for analysis. Unfortunately, synthesis of the material, a now not insignificant task, has not kept pace. This essay does not attempt to remedy the position; however, it approaches the distribution of archaeological features within the countryside in a rather unusual way. It does not aim to be comprehensive: other accounts of prehistory within Surrey and the adjacent counties do that more than adequately, eg essays in this volume, in Bird & Bird 1987, in Museum of London 2000, and in Russell 2002. Neither is its scope site specific. Instead, it considers the whole of the land, treating each part of it as of equal value. It incorporates many new ideas in order to attempt to come to terms with the way in which countryside might have been experienced: it covers an enormous time-scale and consequently there may be unexplained chronological leaps or deviations in the narrative. Inevitably, and of necessity, coverage will be relatively thin and sometimes patchy, an acknowledged problem when trying to cover half a million years of land-use in so few words. There are two main components: an attempt to consider how the prehistoric countryside might have developed, coupled with a consideration of how those present in it might have perceived their contemporary environment.

I have also made an attempt to escape the constraint imposed by the, perhaps overused, term 'landscape', by reverting to other objective terms such as 'land', 'topography', or the 'country' of the title. Use of the word 'landscape' has completely permeated archaeology and the term is used for anything beyond the limits of the site trench. We are not alone in this for it has been used in similar ways in other disciplines too, geography, photography and anthropology, for example, although in the latter case new interpretations are now in vogue. As others have pointed out (eg Hirsch 1995) the very word landscape, or 'landskyp', derives from a Dutch school of painting and art in general has played a considerable role in our romantic view of countryside. The widespread perception of landscape as romantic appears to derive from the Grand Tour. Richard Colt Hoare of Stourhead, Wiltshire, who was ultimately responsible for much of the database for prehistoric Wessex, was enormously influenced by the monuments of Italy and the way they were depicted in paintings by Canaletto and others. Hoare and his contemporaries rearranged huge swathes of land and adorned it with temples, ruins and other features designed to catch the eye and provide pleasing views from a multitude of viewpoints. Implicit in such compositions is the ability to move from one 'view' to another, but for every such constructed harmonious composition, there must be many views in 'natural' country without harmony. The designer/architect has travelled, moved and adjusted to select the aesthetic frame and the selection itself implies movement through various landforms and is something that arrives in a major way with tourism. Tourism allows the land to be appreciated as a 'scape', for beyond the garden, knowledge of wide areas is necessary – we need to know what is beyond the distant ridge, or valley. In the pre-modern agricultural world, however, such travel was the preserve of a few. Most were familiar with the land immediately around them and their knowledge of landforms might be supplemented by an occasional trip beyond the home range. Processes of nomadism or transhumance aside, perception of country during prehistory would be very different from our own.

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Surrey landform: looking south across the Weald from Newlands Corner. Photograph by Giles Pattison

In contrast, the land itself can be difficult. It has characteristics of form, texture and colour, of smell, feel and touch that in turn nurture different kinds of flora and fauna. It is not picturesque, but demands sheer hard work. A botanist once pointed out to me the different species that grow on the respective escarpments of the North and South Downs as a result of one receiving more sunlight than the other. Thus the elements are extremely important and even the wind, explained to the medieval peasant only in metaphysical terms, can result in exposure and death where the land provides no natural shelter.

After almost 200 years of 'landscape' archaeology, taking, that is, Richard Colt Hoare's *Ancient Wiltshire*, first published in 1812, as the catalyst, it is perhaps appropriate at the turn of a new millennium to consider new approaches and investigate the impact that factors such as belief, memory and tradition might have had upon the land (Bradley 1998; 2000; 2002; Edmonds 1999). This essay is seeking to stimulate debate, particularly on the manner in which the countryside might be perceived at different points in time during the past, or even about the nature of perception itself. Thus, it is about more than just seeing, or understanding, or experience, but also about repeated tasks, work, received learning through traditions, and the experiences of others (Ingold 2000). At what stage hominid brain capacity became large enough to absorb such concepts is unclear. As one reader wrote: 'Now my two cats are (naturally) very intelligent. They know their territory/landscape, but I don't think that they have any perceptions about it. They do experience and react to their landscape; they know where and when the sun will warm the roof of my neighbour's shed: when it's cold they come in and make a bee-line for the airing cupboard, where they experience its warmth with pleasure.'

Capabilities of vision aside, cats certainly appear to know their own territory, and will fight over it. Though certain features are acknowledged as being present, cat does not recognize the modern boundaries, hedges, or fences as territorial. Instead, it uses boundaries invisible to us. In my own case, the line seems to be half way down our garden and it appears to define a home patch. Cat is not excluded from the area beyond, as there is no rival cat, only foxes, badgers and stoats, but this appears to be a buffer zone or perhaps no-cats-land where dangers might await. Cat often lies alongside this boundary, at a point where stoats and other animals pass by the home range.

The past

In terms of perceptions of land-use, great shifts are required in the economic interpretations placed on the prehistoric countryside as a result of our received cultural preconceptions, for it is unlikely that we will ever understand the pre-Christian, pre-commercial approach to the land if we continue to interpret it by using a 21st century western European template. Recently there has been a widespread recognition of the symbolic, spiritual and metaphysical attributes of certain landforms by non-western societies (eg essays in Carmichael *et al* 1994; Hirsch & O'Hanlon 1995; Bradley 1996; Ashmore & Knapp 1999) and an increased interest in natural landscape features as of archaeological interest (Bradley 2000). New strategies are required to research and investigate these.

To start as close to the beginning as we can get. The chalk cliff at Boxgrove (Roberts & Parfitt 1999) must have provided some comfort to the hominids that preyed upon the animals attracted by the lagoon at its base. While open to the south-westerlies it provided considerable shelter from the biting north winds, the white chalk providing both reflected warmth and light, a natural beacon at once recognized by starlight. Wet or dry, it left a colouring on anyone who ventured close enough to come in contact, a white pigment that would disappear in the calm waters of the lagoon. The same cliff provided nodules of flint that could with care and practice be formed into

predetermined shapes for cutting and chopping, and perhaps throwing. At times the beach was a pleasant environment, as it can be now, but it could also be menacing as storms provided uncertainty and encouraged the cliffs to crumble.

Determining how the Palaeolithic topography was utilized some 250,000 or more years ago must be seen as one of the supreme challenges in archaeology. So much has changed. Rivers have moved course dramatically, whole hillsides have shifted so it is no wonder that consideration of the contemporary countryside is rarely attempted. Only occasionally, as at Boxgrove in Sussex, can we manage to catch a glimpse of what may have been going on beyond the immediate site.

Limpsfield on the Surrey and Kent border is one Palaeolithic site where a few clues regarding wider land-use remain. Here, between about 1889 and 1903, A M Bell, a local teacher, assembled a collection of handaxes from the local fields and gravel pits (Field *et al* 1999). His contemporary and fellow collector Benjamin Harrison lived just a little to the east and, at a critical and exciting point in the development of archaeology just 30 years after the publication of Darwin's *Origin of Species*, they engaged in debate over the great antiquity of the human race (Harrison 1928). Bell championed Harrison's finds of 'old olds', struck flakes found in high level deposits evidently earlier than those containing handaxes, though eventually others concluded that the flakes were likely to have been produced by natural forces, and the Eolith debate was over. However, over 500 palaeoliths were recovered from Limpsfield, a well-defined area framed by both the chalk escarpment of the North Downs and by the Lower Greensand escarpment that overlooks the Weald Clay, each separated by little more than 1km of various greensand deposits. The historic village is located on the watershed between two drainage systems, those of the river Mole to the west and the river Darent flowing east, both of which eventually turn north and cut through the chalk massif to disgorge into the Thames. A third drainage system lies in close proximity, that of the Medway which rises in the Weald to the south of the escarpment and flows east before it too turns north to join the Thames. But the finds of handaxes were made in the area to the south-west of the village, for several hundred metres around the present source of the river Darent.

Careful analysis of the artefacts revealed that they came from a number of distinct sites in the vicinity, about twelve in all, scattered around what is now Limpsfield Common. Some were recovered from the surface of fields after deep ploughing, others came from quarrying operations and were recovered *in situ* sometimes from shingle lenses or 'floors' at several metres depth. This indicates the presence of relatively slow-running water, though it is not clear whether the artefacts ultimately derived from the river or stream bed itself or were washed in from an adjacent bank their condition indicates that they have not moved far. The quarry sections indicate that there were a number of phases of depositional activity, some alluvial as the result of a high-level river flowing along the foot of the Downs, some the result of solifluction. The chalk escarpment here has receded and with it chalk and flint gravels have spread across the area, and these in turn have been caught up by and redeposited by the river. As the river cut down, some of the gravels were left high and dry. While some handaxes were found in these deposits, others were found beneath 'head', an all-encompassing term for unexplained soliflucted gravel; a number were evidently *in situ* just below the topsoil, being brought to the surface by a single episode of deep cultivation. Many frost cracks were present in the artefacts so they appear to have survived at least one glaciation. None of these sites has been archaeologically excavated and for the moment we can only work with the artefacts and reports by geologists of visits to quarries in the vicinity.

So why were so many tools used and discarded at each site? The question was raised but only partially addressed in the original site report (Field *et al* 1999, 26–7) where it was considered that the concentrations of such material represent places in the locale used in ways other than purely kill sites. Wherever a Palaeolithic site containing handaxes presents itself, it is rarely a case of the odd handaxe submerged in great quantities of waste flakes, but of hundreds of handaxes. Sometimes the count runs into thousands (perhaps 1000 at Farnham and about 3000 at Swanscombe – one collector is said to have accumulated some 80,000 from the latter site (Conway *et al* 1996, 7)). In later prehistory, such concentrations of axe types might be interpreted as ritual or ceremonial offerings. Here, at least initially, we might need to think in more practical terms, probably of everyday routine.

At Limpsfield, the greater proportion of the handaxes comprise twisted ovates. Some are so violently twisted that they have C-shaped rather than S-shaped edge profiles. Each piece is extremely neat and must have taken about an hour to make. Flaking technique at least on the twisted ovates is strikingly uniform. It is almost as though the objects were the work of one individual.

In terms of use, the general view is that such handaxes were perhaps all-purpose tools, but had a more precise role in the dismemberment and butchery of animals. If so, each of these areas represents repeatedly visited kill and dismemberment sites. Despite the similarities in manufacturing technique, the possibility that common elements in tool design continued in use for extremely long periods of time

cannot be ruled out. We do not know the size of the group involved, and at Limpsfield the tools can represent various scenarios from a group of two or three hundred hominids, each discarding a single tool on the same occasion, to a single discard in each of 100 years or more. To put it another way, if each handaxe represents the tool used to butcher a carcass, each handaxe group represents the killing of a considerable number of animals. Alternatively, there may have been other incentives for repeat visits, spiritual as well as practical. Isaac (1981), for example, describes how a fruit tree might become a favoured stopping place where, after a series of return journeys, evidence of intermittent activity accumulates. However, despite a widely held assumption that these early people were highly mobile and spent their lives endlessly following herds of large animals across open plains, there is an indication that these sites meant something. They provided a reference point or focus of some kind, and in a place of such botanical diversity, where animals were attracted by the foliage, cover, browse and water, it may have been possible to survive on the sheer variety of plant and animal foods available without moving significant distances. Groups here could increase to relativity large sizes and like chimpanzees might form socially complex societies (eg Kohn & Mithen 1999, 523). In such circumstances continued use of similar handaxes might derive from received ideas and traditions of social relevance (eg Gamble 1997, 108; White 1998, 32).

The raw material for tool construction is abundant, and can be found *in situ* in the chalk, now just a few kilometres away but then much closer. However, immediately to hand are the large nodules from the solifluction and river terrace gravels, so there was no need to hoard tools or curate them, at least in a modern sense. It was perfectly feasible to throw them away, and scavenge for flint again the next time a carcass was to be dismembered. To us such behaviour seems to make little sense. Why make new tools on return to the spot when many perfectly good old ones were lying around? Or if made elsewhere, why take another back to the site if it was merely going to be used once and dumped there? In a similar way, it might be considered unlikely that hunters would continue to leave useful tools behind, as they would never know when they might be needed again. To remake identical artefacts and bring them back to the same spot implies an awful forgetfulness – a memory loss not in keeping with the mental agility required to recall the precise method of knapping a handaxe, or of re-finding the same spot left some while, perhaps weeks, earlier. Such discard then might be indicative of regular activity at each spot and it is merely the nature of such activity that remains to be determined. These points have been considered recently by Kohn & Mithen (1999), who argue persuasively that the role of the manufacture of handaxes, at least symmetrical ones, is to produce an artefact of display in a courtship ritual, handaxes being symbols in a process of sexual selection. This might explain why so many appear in an undamaged condition, but by itself fails to account for the accumulations of great numbers, unless, that is, we are to interpret these accumulations as isolated mating sites or breeding grounds. Clearly such sites and the artefacts found at them played a special role in the lives of these early people.

Identical handaxes left lying around on the surface will have been familiar artefacts with some form of meaning, no matter how little developed memory was. At a complex level they may provide links and associations with the maker, contemporary or ancestral; at a simpler level the mere familiarity of shape would be enough to provide comfort, if not legitimacy. Additionally they would provide a signal to others that this world was occupied. In other words, the country around Limpsfield is likely to have provided all that was needed within quite a small range. The topography itself with its particular type of vegetation would have encouraged certain forms of repeated action. It could be comfortable. It could be home. Like the cat's requirement, there may have been a perceived boundary around the comfort zone.

So what do the artefacts tell us about the country? Kohn & Mithen (1999, 521) indicate that the implications inherent in handaxe manufacture include a good environmental knowledge of, for example, raw material sources and, by default, of other resources in the locality too. How did these early people think of their world? The landforms channel natural movement into the river valley, focusing attention there and encouraging repeated activity in certain localities (Gamble 1996). Thus everything required is contained within an area little more than 5km in width, bounded by the chalk escarpment in the north and the greensand escarpment to the south. In terms of extent, whatever the vegetation, it would be possible to see for a good distance across the Weald from the escarpment edge. Equally the towering chalk escarpment would form a continuous visual backdrop, and experience would provide knowledge that it could be climbed to provide a vantage point from which the valley as a whole could be viewed, or from which other animals, potential hunters or prey, could be observed. It would be implicit that another world lay beyond, perhaps dangerous and unexplored.

All things being equal, we might expect similar numbers of artefacts more or less equally distributed right across the South East. The field walking programmes of the last 40 years have reported few handaxe finds – though surface collection from known sites, eg Limpsfield and Banstead (P Harp,

pers comm) continues to produce them. It would appear from this that the apparent clustering of finds does have some validity.

Most handaxes at Limpsfield were left on the surface and sat there through extremes of temperature as the frost cracks on them testify. In the aftermath of the last glaciation, enormous forces influenced the topography and vegetation – solifluction, mudflows, river course changes, dust storms and rising sea levels. As alpine flora gave way, browsing animals will have had an immense impact on the rate and intensity of new growth and the abundance of human population can only have been relative to the abundance of fauna and flora. Many sites, such as springs and streams, provided the same attraction as they had always done, but here the detritus of past activity was visible for all to see.

Perception

Encountering such artefacts, perhaps half a million years later, humans would immediately recognize them as struck implements, though totally alien ones. The surface condition – patina, staining, frost cracks – set them apart. The knapping was of a style not recognized within living memory. Nobody knew why so many almost identical tools had been left lying around the springhead. The nature of the spring itself, which appears quite obvious given a modern knowledge of hydrology, would also be difficult to explain and the reason why the life-giving substance gushed out of the ground at this particular spot could only be explained in metaphysical terms. Were the artefacts that littered the surrounding area perhaps the tools of the gods?

Springs are potentially useful places to explore. For example, the sites at Farnham attracted repeated visits throughout the Mesolithic and Neolithic periods (Rankine 1939, 67–89). Elsewhere in the country such sequences continue intermittently into the Iron Age and Roman period, for example at Bath, Avon (Cunliffe & Davenport 1985, 8–9), Springhead, Kent (Oxford Archaeol Unit 2000, 458–9) or more locally perhaps at Ewell, Titsey and Chiddingfold (Bird 2002), and with the great number of named Holy Wells (Hope 1893) situated in such places, perhaps even into the Christian period. Standing pools of water, meres, may have similar attributes, some having received deposits of Bronze artefacts (eg Crawford & Wheeler 1921) or garrotted bodies (Green 1986, 128). The Silent Pool at Shere and other similar places in Surrey might be reconsidered in this context. We might think too of the influence of the Thames. Given the spiritual reverence placed on such rivers elsewhere in the world, such as the Ganges, this major artery would almost certainly have been perceived as an important spirit; the deposits of stone axes (Field & Woolley 1984) and bronze artefacts (Needham & Burgess 1980) which have been dredged up might be considered as having symbolic value (eg Bradley 1990), rather than as being lost from boats or during battles, as was often formerly thought (Adkins & Jackson 1978).

Such approaches provide interesting new interpretations of the land and allow us to catch a glimpse of how the topography might have been thought of at certain times during prehistory and as a result greater emphasis might be placed on the importance of locations and landforms rather than on single sites. This also provides a challenge to the traditional interpretations of some monuments. Perceptions of the countryside will of course change through time as well as according to the method of subsistence in operation. Forest dwellers, for example, will have a completely different perception of the world from those who live in open country: their high dark horizon, where few extensive views are possible, may result in additional importance being placed on locations where such views can be obtained (Bloch 1995; Gow 1995). Changes in the dense vegetation itself, the result of long-abandoned clearances, may however signal the former presence of people and signpost areas inhabited by supernatural elements.

Whereas the lithology of the northern part of the Weald mirrors its southern counterpart and the topography of the North and South Downs is almost identical, the distribution of some monuments in the South East, for example round barrows, is variable. Far greater numbers occur along the southern

Surrey wooded landform: early morning view of mature trees near Albury. Photograph by Giles Pattison

formation on both greensand and chalk. An economic interpretation provides an incomplete explanation of this (Field 1998), but in any case of all monuments, those assigned a burial or ritual function such as round barrows might be expected to be constructed to reflect non-economic influence. The accumulation of barrows in what, to us, are often aesthetically pleasing 'planned' cemeteries makes sense only if influenced by some form of spiritual divination of metaphysical forces or geomancy, while the position of many barrows on slopes may have more to do with drainage of such forces than intervisibility. Equally the metaphysical properties of landforms may help to explain the difference in distribution between those on the North and South Downs. The contrasts of north/south, high/low, dark/light etc being quite obvious fodder for harmonious cosmological schemes. Traditions, myths, legends and belief might easily become established about such places.

In a similar way, the almost consistent orientation of 'Celtic' fields on a north-east/south-west/north-west/south-east axis needs explanation. There appears to be no agricultural reason why this should be and it appears to imply a concern with this alignment, an orientation that first appears to become significant in some barrow cemeteries eg Snail Down, Wiltshire (McOmish *et al* 2002). The importance of the alignment must lie in its adherence to a framework that must reflect a widely understood system of social values and hint at a perceived cosmos. Original clearance of land for agriculture may itself have been a ritual event. During the Neolithic or Early Bronze Age, clearance involved a process of initiating change if not control over nature, including the removal of natural objects such as trees and boulders. Interference with the natural harmony of the land may have contained a metaphysical dimension (Ingold 2000) which allowed it to be carried out only with due permission and ceremony. Some barrows with a turf core, eg Deerleap Wood (Corcoran 1963), may have resulted from such a process. No formal burial was found in this, or in numbers of other similar mounds, and the purpose of the barrow may have been as much to do with breaking the land as funerary. The presence of turf here, as well as in barrows on the Sussex greensand at, for example, Iping Common, or in nine mounds at West Heath, only two of which contained traces of burial (Drewett *et al* 1988, 80–4), implies at least a degree of open grazed country around such cemeteries, and it may be that much of the Surrey countryside was more open during the Early Bronze Age than in the historic period. A good sized 'Celtic' field would result from such stacked turves and if not immediately 'managed' even in a pastoral area, natural colonization would rapidly follow, resulting in a natural 'monument' of impenetrable vegetation. Once established, 'Celtic' fields themselves would become intimately known and while it would be wrong automatically to associate fields with agriculture alone, they may be intrinsically involved with day-to-day existence and favoured or despised according to soils and function and even given field names (Field 2001). They were important places.

Moving through this, at least partly open, land, people may have encountered a four-dimensional topography, the fourth dimension being that of sacred proscription. While the whole land may have been considered sacred in one way or another, even trees and animals possessing spirits, some places may have been more sacred than others. As Jordan (2001), for example, has described for indigenous cultures in Siberia, we might imagine a land for the living, consisting of the usual domestic paraphernalia; a land of the dead that manifests itself in areas where remembered, or half-remembered, dead people have been placed, eg barrow cemeteries, where it may be dangerous or taboo to enter; and a land of the spirits, those places possessing potential interfaces with a supernatural world, such as springs, caves and hilltops.

Other uncertainties have developed concerning the traditional interpretations of many well-established monuments. Thus interpretations are often economic or military in nature and not necessarily applicable to sites built by prehistoric societies not versed in industrial European, commercial or Christian ideals. This need not stop at the Bronze Age but might extend right through the archaeological record. Just back from the Sudan, Col Lane-Fox described Cissbury, the Caburn and other hillforts in Sussex as prehistoric versions of the defences with which he was so familiar (Lane-Fox 1869). Following his example, the various earthwork camps at, for example, Anstiebury, Holmbury, and Hascombe, were assigned a defensive function even though they often occupy liminal locations. While Hawkes (1971, 6) observed that hillforts were sometimes constructed on former ritual sites and Bradley (1981) too observed the manner in which such sites often located on former sites, in Wessex at least, many forts overlie focal points of the earlier linear ditch system (Hawkes 1939; Bradley *et al* 1994; McOmish *et al* 2002). Directly defensive functions are beginning to be questioned and emphasis placed on matters of display (Bowden & McOmish 1987; 1989) or other social factors (Field 2000; Hamilton & Gregory 2000). Underlying linear ditch foci aside, most hillforts were constructed hundreds of years before classical writers could imply a military function and indeed they were already ancient sites when Caesar, Tacitus and others alluded to them. As such the concept of ditch as defensive, or for

quarry material, which we accept without question, originally may not have arisen. Elsewhere, digging into the earth is taken to be a disruptive activity that may disturb the balance of nature and may only be carried out with due ceremony. Thus nomads in Mongolia will carefully backfill pits so that the harmony of the land is not affected (Humphrey 1995), for restricting the movement of animals or insects will only invoke appropriate responses, while it is also thought that impeding the free movement of spirits will have similar repercussions. There is adequate evidence of carefully backfilled pits and ditches, with placed deposits during the Neolithic and Bronze Age (eg Thomas 1991, 57–77) at, for example, Carshalton (Proctor 2002). Thus while causewayed ditch systems might allow spirits freedom of access, ditches left open might equally be positioned to entrap supernatural elements and keep them out of certain places (Darling 1998). Thus it is conceivable that the ditches of monuments such as hillforts, as well as more obvious types such as henges and round barrows, may have been originally constructed with more metaphysical aims in mind.

Sequence

Even though there has been increasing acceptance of the need to place archaeological sites within their wider context, archaeology is still seen very much as a site-based discipline. Burial mounds, henges, hillforts and villas are viewed very much as the *raison d'être* of archaeology, and enormous amounts of energy are applied to recording new examples and adding them to the inventory. However, recent work on the archaeological topography of parts of central southern England has identified a series of critical 'events' that allow a broad chronological sequence of land-use changes to be identified (McOmish *et al* 2002). How regional such sequences are remains to be seen, but fragments of the commonly recognized elements of this chronology can be detected across wider areas of the South and, as the geology and available resources are quite similar in all these areas, these might provide basic elements, the building blocks or foundations on which much of the later countryside was constructed. They provide a model that might be tested in different regions.

The key sites here are located on the chalk downs of Wiltshire, on Salisbury Plain and the Marlborough Downs. Here, monuments have been preserved from episodes of historical cultivation by their location on the higher marginal land, at a distance from river lines and historical village centres. Throughout the historic period there was little economic incentive to cultivate these areas and they were therefore given over to stock and became huge sheepwalks, thereby preserving remnants of earlier phases of activity. Not until the 18th century were inroads made into these areas as agricultural improvers (eg Davis 1811; Young 1813) encouraged new ways of working the land, the change being recorded by travellers like Daniel Defoe (1724–6) and antiquaries like John Merewether (1850) and A C Smith (1884), who lamented the amount of newly cultivated downland.

In these areas a palimpsest of the prehistoric and Romano-British past can be detected as extant earthworks and, where field observation has reported that such remains lie in juxtaposition, they have been investigated, mapped, analysed and interpreted. Consistently a repeated chronological sequence of field monuments has occurred. Extensive co-axial 'Celtic' field systems of the Middle Bronze Age appear later than the construction of round barrows, either respecting or overlying them, but in turn are themselves cut by the equally extensive linear ditch systems of the Late Bronze Age (McOmish *et al* 2002). All three of these elements are sometimes re-used, but particularly the last two. The 'Celtic' fields are invariably re-utilized as fields long after their initial period of use. This applies particularly in the Romano-British period when fields are enlarged and cross-divisions ploughed through. Lynchets take on greater proportions and indeed in some places appear more akin to modern landscape engineering. They are used too as settlement units, as 'green field' sites when Roman villages expand and spill out on to the fields. The Middle Bronze Age 'Celtic' fields thus become the building blocks of the English countryside, the principle being that once something is created it is difficult to eradicate and, on the contrary, far easier to utilize in one way or another. Thus medieval strip lynchets on the chalk rarely represent newly planned strip fields, surveyed and cleared from the waste; for something that provided influence was already there, invariably earlier fields, which were simply adapted to cater for new methods of cultivation.

The linear ditches too became fossilized and re-used, not always as boundaries as originally intended, but as thoroughfares and trackways, and the junctions of these often appear to have influenced the location of subsequent Romano-British settlement. Many ditches subsequently become incorporated as later markers of tithing or parish boundaries, fossilized for history by the Anglo-Saxon charters, or like parts of Bokerley Dyke (RCHME 1990) or Wansdyke (field observation), reconstructed into boundaries with monumental proportions.

While the earliest of monuments, the Neolithic and Early Bronze Age long and round barrows, begin the sequence, the heavy utilization of land around London has ensured that traces of these are now quite rare. Were aerial photographs more numerous (aerial photography is restricted by the air corridors

of Heathrow and Gatwick) it may be that greater densities could be recorded. Recent air photography indicates that the density of ring-ditches on Thanet, for example, most of which are interpreted as barrows, approaches that of barrows around Stonehenge. Whether this has something to do with Thanet's liminal, former island, position is not clear. Within Surrey, cemeteries that can be identified tend to cluster in small groups on the dip slopes of the chalk, for example around Leatherhead, and in similar positions on the greensand, eg on Reigate Heath (Grinsell 1987). Distribution thins out to almost insignificant numbers as one travels east, until a slight increase in East Kent can be observed (Field 1998, 310). Distribution throughout the Weald is markedly riverine with clusters on valley slopes appearing at almost regular intervals along the greensand stretch of the rivers Mole, Tillingbourne and Rother (*ibid*). In contrast to the thin scatters on the North Downs and northern greensand, the South Downs and its respective greensand contain enormous numbers; one cemetery, Westmeston, boasts 36 barrows. The reason for this is not clear, but as noted above economic interpretations are not entirely satisfactory and a cosmological explanation might instead be considered.

Where barrows are few and far between, their influence on later land-use may have been negligible, perhaps merely as sight lines when laying out fields, and they may have become incorporated in and obscured by such constructions. Co-axially laid out over hectares, irrespective of the lie of the land, the 'Celtic' fields are the most visible and extensive field monument that can be expected to occur right across the South. These have been recognized on the South Downs since the 1930s, though elsewhere in the region they have been considered quite rare. However, while extant examples might be few, perhaps as a result of intensive pressure on land for cultivation in the London hinterland, developer-funded examination continuously identifies ditches and other features associated with Bronze Age pottery that are assigned an agricultural function. Some 39 examples of such contexts come from the west London gravel terraces alone (Yates 1999; 2001, 68–9), and there are 28 such localities along the Wandle flood plain (*ibid,* 70–1) and even six in Lambeth (*ibid,* 72). Similar evidence for such densities can be paralleled on the Sussex coastal plain and elsewhere (D Yates, pers comm) and might encourage the view that the presence of fields here could match, or surpass, the intensity of field systems present in Wessex. It may be that here too, such fields formed the template on which many later features in the countryside were constructed.

Unfortunately, away from the terraces evidence continues to be less certain. Few extant 'Celtic' field systems exist, although there is great potential for further discoveries in the wooded areas on the summits of the Downs, especially in those areas devoid of Clay-with-Flints. The evidence was assembled and reviewed by Rosamond Hanworth (1978; 1987, 145), who demonstrated the presence of two chalkland clusters grouped around the Mole gap and around the headwater areas of the river Wandle. The most extensive system appears to be that across Fetcham, Mickleham, Leatherhead and Box Hill Downs (Frere & Hogg 1946, 104–6: Hope-Taylor 1946–7, 60–1; J English, pers comm), situated either side of the river Mole, though whether these are all part of the same system remains to be seen. Occasional Early Iron Age and Romano-British potsherds have been reported from the surface across the area and are perhaps indications of manuring, but in places the system is considerably lyncheted and as a whole is likely to have been laid out much earlier. Another system on Walton Heath was initially thought to be associated with the Roman villa (NMR no TQ 25 SW 3) although excavation provided no support for this (Prest & Parrish 1949, 57–62). A further system was reported at Bletchingley (NMR no TQ 35 SW 22). Aside from locations on the riverside gravels, there is little further evidence of extant fields off the chalk, although cropmarks indicate a potential system at Tilford. One system has been recorded at Whitmoor Common, where fields are laid out on a north-east to south-west axis (English 2001). A nearby round barrow excavated by Pitt Rivers in 1877 produced a Deverel-Rimbury urn (Saunders 1980; Grinsell 1987, 26; illustration in the Pitt Rivers Collection, Salisbury Museum), providing the kind of potential association with the fields that would be comfortable in Wessex.

The North Downs are capped by considerable spreads of Clay-with-Flints. If the pattern of land-use identified in central southern England holds good here, we might expect 'Celtic' field development on the dip slope and along the lips and slopes of valleys, where the Upper Chalk is exposed, while on the interfluves of the higher downland we might instead predict the presence of banjo enclosures and associated features eg at Effingham Common (Gardiner 1921) and perhaps Tadworth (Clark 1977, 189).

Linear earthworks may be more widespread than is initially apparent. If the 'Old Dyke' on Whitmoor Common, which is now more of a hollow way (English 2001) but according to John Aubrey was 'a great old trench' (Fowles 1980, 272–3, 890–1), was originally a ditch as the name suggests (Grymesditch is mentioned in Worplesdon in 1605 – Gover *et al* 1934, 358), it could cut the field system in the same way as the linear ditches in Wessex. Other linear ditches were observed by early antiquaries or mentioned in documents, for example the great ditch

crossing the Guildford Road on Albury Down (Fowles 1980, 908), or that mentioned at Mickleham in 1248 (Gover *et al* 1934, 358). Similarly, if the straight parish boundary at Long Ditton is the long ditch referred to in the Saxon place-name (Gover *et al* 1934, 57; Ekwall 1974, 146), it might imply that part at least of the boundary system adopted at that time had its genesis at an earlier date. Others may too, for example the already ancient Fullingadic that extended from south of the Thames at Weybridge, part of which appears to have been observed by John Aubrey (Fowles 1980, 908), or the Rowdyke mentioned in 1445 at Battersea (Gover *et al* 1934, 372). If Bronze Age linear ditches are fossilized in some tithing- or parish-sized allotments based on the Thames, it will be worth searching 19th century tithe or enclosure maps for similar 'ditch' names or investigating the origin of certain significant hedgerows and sunken lanes. At face value, the multiple banks recorded at the foot of the Downs at the unlocated Smytham Bottom (Fowles 1980, 902) are rather different and may be more akin to the kind of multiple ditch systems usually associated with banjo complexes.

Conclusions

This metamorphosis of the archaeological countryside, with its changes of function from one thing to another, finds echoes in the processes taking place at certain individual sites – the stone circles, pit circles, ring-ditches, henges and hengiform monuments – and it has long been observed how monuments often focus around earlier ones (eg Bradley 1981; 1993; 1998; Bradley & Williams 1998). Sites such as Whitesheet Hill, Wiltshire, or Maiden Castle, Dorset, readily spring to mind. The very process of digging the earth is of crucial importance; for example, ditches at causewayed enclosures are repeatedly backfilled and then re-cut, long barrow ditches are extended, and similar processes take place at round barrows, eg Handley 27, Dorset, where the ditch was backfilled and re-cut three times; but we can also see here processes at work that utilize, adapt, complement, and at the same time change, the topography of the wider area.

Of course, it is not clear whether all this is a regional phenomenon, or whether there are implications that are more far-reaching. There may be something that proves to be peculiar to certain geological formations, in this case chalk downland and its surroundings, or that may prove to be a mere component in a wider pattern of land-use. Indeed differences can be observed in the standard sequence in some places. In particular, in some areas that are capped by Clay-with-Flints a countryside of curvilinear enclosure ditches and banjo enclosures, with a corresponding lack of co-axial fields, can instead be identified.

Examples include the extensive sites around Grovely Wood and Savernake Wood in Wiltshire (Corney 1989) and Micheldever Wood, Hampshire (RCHME archive), and considerable areas around Basingstoke, Hampshire, where, judging from the evidence of air photographs, banjos and similar enclosures predominate (NMR). In Wessex such banjo enclosures often occur in pairs and are invariably linked, by complexes of curvilinear banks and ditches, to square enclosures that resemble *viereckshanzen* (Corney 1989). The cambered funnel entrances to extant examples, eg Itchen Wood (RCHME archive), make it unlikely that they were used for stock, as central camber aside, the side ditches of the funnel would lead animals around the perimeter of the enclosure and back down the other side of the funnel instead of into the interior. It is worthy of note that phosphate found at the offset funnelled enclosure at Tadworth indicated that stock were kept outside the enclosure (Clark 1977). Instead, the interior is often raised and an impression is given of a high-status enclosure, an impression invariably enhanced by the later construction of Roman buildings nearby. These sites are often on areas of Clay-with-Flints *sensu-stricto* and, unlike the chalkland sheepwalks, in areas not cultivated in historic times for other reasons (Jones 1960). It is easy to see why forestry later formed a significant component of local economies. All three of the examples given above remain as wooded sites today. Such places may have been particularly unsuitable for Middle Bronze Age and later cultivation and were perhaps utilized as managed woodland or, like parts of Cranborne Chase during the Iron Age, as pasture for horses (Wainwright 1979, 189).

The problem of what lay beyond the Bronze Age field system – whether there were areas of 'common' or open land – has yet to be approached. For the moment, however, these 'events' provide a framework or benchmark against which the presence of other field monuments can be tested and it may be worthwhile teasing out some of the elements that may exist within the South East. The banjo enclosure on Effingham Common (Gardiner 1921) for example, appears to conform to this pattern and it would be interesting to know whether it conforms in other ways and whether a villa, or a *viereckshanze*-like enclosure, lies close by.

The greatest challenge must be in revealing the nature of the Palaeolithic countryside, how early people lived and moved through it. In some cases enough information should be available from quarry sections to start to construct and investigate ancient landforms. Surrey lies in a good position to do this, being geographically bracketed by the Thames, with extensive archaeological work carried out around Swanscombe, on the terraces around Acton and the Wey tributary at Farnham, and with

good groupings of palaeoliths in places such as Lower Kingswood (Walls & Cotton 1980) and Limpsfield. Similar clusters occur in Sussex to the south and the potential for linking these sites chronologically and spatially is enormous. The contribution of the Southern Rivers Project (Wymer 1999) in cataloguing the available information has been extremely helpful, but this should not be seen as an end in itself, rather as a catalyst for new work. Both Farnham and Limpsfield would repay investigation of the land-use variety.

In order to test some of these ideas it will be necessary to investigate places rather than sites – landforms, for example springs and prominent hilltops, with or without evidence of monument building – and to work across the artificial constraints of archaeological periods. To what extent are the field boundaries and land divisions that we see today the result of work by the Enclosure Commissioners and what was influenced by former patterns of land-use that had long been engraved on the topography? Rather than treat chronological events as separate episodes there is a need to investigate the whole sequence. It would be of great interest to know if zones of land used as woodland or common during prehistory can be identified today and whether types of use in such zones remains generally constant. Differences in land-use over time between land types might be investigated. It is an exciting time for 'landscape' archaeology.

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