Late Roman Cemeteries in Oxfordshire: a Review

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SUMMARY

All the known Roman cemeteries in Oxfordshire are of late-Roman date. Nineteen sites, including one just in Berkshire, are summarised and discussed in terms of their settlement associations, layout and date and the characteristics of the graves and their contents. Patterns of evidence indicative of 'urban' and 'rural' associations are identified and possible indications of relative settlement and individual status are also discussed. The human remains are not examined in detail but age and gender patterns are considered briefly. The cemetery evidence is then reviewed in terms of the development of regional funerary practice from the Iron Age through to the Christian period.

INTRODUCTION

While there are records of a good many individual burials certainly or probably of Roman date in Oxfordshire, there are relatively few clearly identified cemetery sites of this period; that is, sites containing more than a small number of apparently randomly disposed burials. For present purposes two simple criteria, a minimum number of burials and relatively close spacing of these burials, have been used to define a 'cemetery'. Ten has been taken as the arbitrary minimum number of burials considered to constitute a cemetery. At a small number of sites, larger numbers of burials are known but fail to meet the second criterion, that of a close spatial relationship. For this reason the burials found in recent years at Gill Mill, Ducklington, for example, have not been considered here because they are distributed across a wide area at the margin of the associated settlement.[1] In our terms, therefore, they do not form part of a carefully constituted cemetery, though it is accepted that to describe them as randomly scattered, with the implication that no care was given to burial in such contexts, may be to misjudge the case completely.[2] In other cases, however, as for example at Roden Downs (located *c.* 500 m. across the county boundary in Berkshire, but included here for its particular interest),[3] it is clear that small numbers of burials could comprise either complete cemeteries or substantial parts of them. Despite the small suggested minimum size for our cemeteries the number of such sites in the county remains low, at 18 (19 with Roden Downs), all of which are essentially inhumation cemeteries of late

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[1] P. Booth, 'Ducklington: Gill Mill', *OAU Newslr.* 18 No. 3 (1990), 19-23.

[2] Cf. J. Pearce, 'The Dispersed Dead: preliminary observations on burial and settlement space in rural Roman Britain', in P. Baker, C. Forcey, S. Jundi and R. Witcher (eds.), *TRAC 98: Proceedings of the eighth annual theoretical Roman archaeology conference, Leicester 1998* (1999), 151-62; see further below.

[3] S. Hood and H. Walton, 'A Romano-British Cremating Place and Burial Ground on Roden Downs, Compton, Berkshire', *Trans. Newbury District Field Club*, 9 (1948), 10-62.
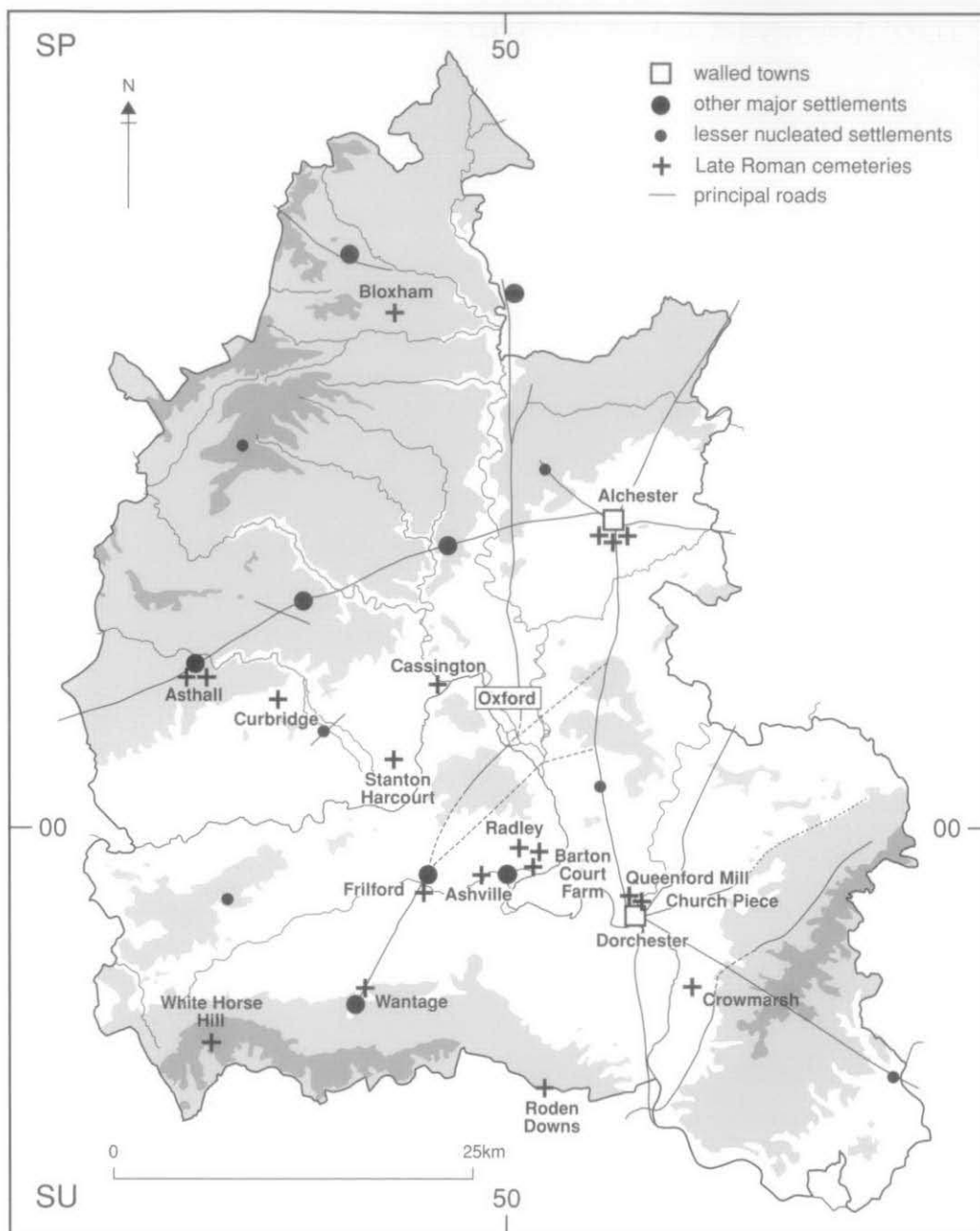
Fig. 1. Map of Roman Oxfordshire showing location of cemeteries discussed.

Roman date, though some include cremations which are broadly contemporary with the inhumations.[4] Only five sites have produced more than 50 burials of which four, Cassington, Frilford and the two 'Dorchester' cemeteries (Queenford Mill and Church Piece, Warborough), probably or certainly exceeded 100 burials, though the last of these is included on the basis of aerial photographic evidence, only six burials having been revealed by excavation.

Eight of the 19 sites (for locations see Fig. 1) are certainly or probably associated with major nucleated settlements in the county, sites lying broadly within the 'small town' category, the settlements concerned being Alchester (two sites, of which only one is a substantially complete group and neither is large), Asthall (two small sites), Dorchester (two sites), Frilford and perhaps Wantage. The status of this last site is the least certain,[5] as indeed is the status of the Witan Way cemetery. A Roman date is assumed for this site,[6] and is plausible, though no certain confirmatory evidence was recovered. Cemeteries associated with rural settlements range from ten burials (most of the burial groups with less than ten individuals, not considered here, will also have derived from such sites) up to over 110 at Cassington, though the exact number of burials there is uncertain[7] and it is unclear if the cemetery was associated with settlement in the nearby 'Big Enclosure' site,[8] or related to even less well-known settlement elsewhere in the area. In terms of settlement context, an important group of rural cemeteries is formed by Radley I and II (respectively 35 and 69 burials) and the infant cemetery at nearby Barton Court Farm (up to *c*. 48 burials), all of which may have been related. Other significant rural cemeteries where definition is fairly clear include Stanton Harcourt (35 burials) and White Horse Hill, Uffington (46 burials). All of these cemeteries were completely or almost completely recovered.

Some of the main characteristics of the 19 cemeteries have been tabulated (Table 1) in order to assess the extent to which they are shared, and whether similarities and differences between their occurrences permit the identification of different types of cemetery in the region in the late Roman period. Not all these characteristics could be recorded for all the sites, however, owing in some cases to the paucity of the original records and, in others, to the restricted nature of excavation possible. The principal references for each cemetery are given after Table 1 to avoid undue repetition elsewhere. The present summary is concerned principally with the physical characteristics of cemeteries and of their component graves

[4] Chronology is discussed in greater detail below, but all the sites in question are likely to date to the 3rd-4th centuries AD, though the evidence for a few is poor. Remarkably, there are no certain examples of 'cemeteries' of 1st- to 2nd-century date from the county. The present review arises partly from the fact that there was much more to be said about these sites than could be accommodated in the most recent general survey (M. Henig and P. Booth, *Roman Oxfordshire* (2000)). The study has benefited very considerably from the work of previous writers, especially Mary Harman and Richard Chambers, and I am particularly indebted to Angela Boyle for much unpublished information and for discussion of many of the points raised here. It should also be noted that this paper was substantially complete before the publication of J. Pearce, M. Millett and M. Struck (eds.), *Burial, Society and Context in the Roman World* (2000), the important contents of which have not been fully digested here.

[5] See N. Holbrook and A. Thomas, 'The Roman and Early Anglo-Saxon Settlement at Wantage, Oxfordshire, Excavations at Mill Street, 1993-4', *Oxoniensia*, lxi (1996), 171-5 for a recent discussion.

[6] R.A. Rutland and J. Thomas, 'Archaeological Notes from Reading Museum', *Berks. Archaeol. Jnl.* 63 (1968), 73.

[7] *Oxoniensia*, iii (1938), 165.

[8] H.J. Case, 'Cassington, 1950-2: Late Neolithic Pits and the Big Enclosure', in H.J. Case and A.W.R. Whittle (eds.), *Settlement Patterns in the Oxford Region: Excavations at the Abingdon causewayed enclosure and other sites* (CBA Res. Rep. 44), pp. 118-51.

TABLE 1. CEMETERIES IN LATE ROMAN OXFORDSHIRE: PRINCIPAL CHARACTERISTICS

Site	Parish	Oxon SMR PRN	Date of excavation /find	No. Crems	No. Inhums	Complete	Dominant Alignmt	Other Alignmt	Date	Comments
Alchester northern suburbs (A421 Site C)	Chesterton	14292	1991	?	30	AC	WNW-ESE	Minor variations only	?4C	Adjacent ?sub-Roman phase
Alchester south	Wendlebury	3061 ?=3064	c. 1848		28	IC?	W-E	?		Little information?
Ashville	Abingdon	12274	1974		11	IC	E-W	3 N-S	?4C	1 N-S decapitation, 1 N-S with 4C CC beaker. No proven relationships between alignments
Asthall west	Asthall	2255	1921		15	IC?	?	?	?late Roman	1921-22 excavated by Peake
Asthall 1992 Site B	Asthall	14291	1992	3	12	IC	c W-E (8)	3 N-S, 1 NW-SE	?4C	1 with Cu anklet; 1 with dog skin. N-S burials probably earlier than E-W, but 1 E-W cut by cremation
Barton Court Farm	Radley	8376	1972-6	–	26	C	irregular?	–	?3-4C	All infants. Further dispersed infant burials bring total to c. 48
Bloxham	Bloxham	1712	1929-35	–	30	IC?	NNE-SSW	1 E-W; 3 W-E; 2 SW-NE	?4C	At least 5 burials said to be associated with pots. Asociations with coins much less clear, but 1 (Constantine I, close to skeleton 21) is possible
Cassington near Big Rings	Cassington	1266	1930s	?	110+	IC?	?NE-SW	NW-SE, N-S & E-W all present	??4C	Orientations based on plan in Harding 1972. No real published details
Church Piece	Warborough	13281	1975	–	6	IC	c. W-E	Little variation	4C (?+)	Good AP evidence for extensive cemetery in rectangular ditched enclosure, containing hundreds of burials

Crowmarsh, Cold Harbour Farm	Crowmarsh Gifford	16009	1996-9	–	?22	AC	NNE-SSW	1 c E-W; 1 c WNW-ESE	?4C	Various grave goods, some uncertainty about what pottery is grave goods rather than residual
Curbridge	Curbridge	8880	1975	–	21	IC?	N-S	5 c E-W, 1 c W-E, 1 NW-SE	??4C	Condition generally poor. 1 decapitation was E-W. 5 burials with hobnails
Frilford	Frilford	7117	1860s-1938	–	? c. 135+	IC	c WSW-ENE	Variation?	?4C	Adjacent/superimposed AS burials – accurate breakdowns impossible. 1 lead coffin burial has bone composite comb
Queenford Mill	Dorchester	5416	1972 & 1981	–	164	IC	W-E	Some variation	4C-6C	C14 dates. Only certain grave good is a composite bone comb of late Roman type. AP evidence indicates size of cemetery enclosure. Density extrapolated to give estimated cemetery population of over 2000
Radley I	Radley	2903	1945	–	35	C	N-S	Minor variations	4C	All adults?
Radley II	Radley	13357	1980s	12	57	C	N-S	17 W-E	4C	1 with bracelets, beads & shoes; 1 with shoes & Fe obj; 1 other with hobnails, 1 with bone pin. 7 cremations have associated beakers
Stanton Harcourt Cricket Ground	Stanton Harcourt	5680	1978	–	35	AC	c N-S	Minor variation only	4C	3 graves each have 3 coins, all FTR fh types in two graves, UR and GE types in third. 1 grave with coins has hobnails and also ?packing stones
White Horse Hill	Uffington	7866	19C & 1993	9	49	AC	c W-E	?Minor variation	4C	5 or 6 graves with coins, other goods are a CC beaker (type C38) & composite bone combs
Wantage 33 Witan Way	Wantage	7540		–	14	IC	SSW-NNE	?	?4C	No grave goods recorded, but Roman date assumed
Roden Downs	Compton (Berks)	N/A	1944-7	–	10	C	c SW-NE	Some variation, 1 NW-SE	4C	2 coins, bone comb, CC beaker and 'remains of ?shoes' all from lead coffin burial

Codes for 'Complete' column: C = complete (cemetery fully revealed); AC = almost or probably complete; IC = incomplete (only partly examined)

REFERENCES FOR TABLE 1

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Alchester south: J. Marshall, 'Alchester', *Trans. Archaeol. Soc. N. Oxfordshire* (1857-8), 130; W.L. Brown, untitled ('additional notes and remarks'), *Trans. Archaeol. Soc. N. Oxfordshire* (1857-8), 137; *V.C.H. Oxon.* i, 284.

Ashville: M. Parrington, *The Excavation of an Iron Age Settlement, Bronze Age Ring-ditches and Roman Features at Ashville Trading Estate, Abingdon (Oxfordshire) 1974-76* (CBA Res. Rep. 28. 1978), 23-5.

Asthall west: M.V. Taylor and R.G. Collingwood, 'Roman Britain in 1921 and 1922', *Jnl. Roman Stud.* 11 (1921), 214-15.

Asthall 1992: P. Booth, Asthall, *Oxfordshire, Excavations in a Roman 'small town', 1992* (OAU Thames Valley Landscapes Monograph No. 9, 1997), 64-73.

Barton Court Farm: D. Miles (ed.), *Archaeology at Barton Court Farm, Abingdon, Oxon: an investigation of late Neolithic, Iron Age, Romano-British and Saxon settlements* (CBA Res. Rep. 50, 1986), fiche 4:C8-D1.

Bloxham: W.F.J. Knight, 'A Romano-British Site at Bloxham, Oxon.', *Oxoniensia*, iii (1938), 41-56.

Cassington: D.W. Harding, *The Iron Age in the Upper Thames Basin* (1972), pl. 27; *Oxoniensia*, i (1936), 201; *Oxoniensia*, ii (1937), 201; *Oxoniensia*, iii (1938), 165; *V.C.H. Oxon.* i, 334.

Church Piece: M. Harman, G. Lambrick, D. Miles and T. Rowley, 'Roman Burials around Dorchester-on-Thames', *Oxoniensia*, xliii (1979), 6-16.

Crowmarsh: C.M. Clarke, 'Excavations at Cold Harbour Farm, Crowmarsh', *S. Midl. Archaeol.* 26 (1996), 71-6; C.M. Clarke, *Excavations of a Roman-British cemetery – Cold Harbour Farm – Crowmarsh – Wallingford – Oxfordshire* (Wallingford Hist. and Archaeol. Soc. unpubl. report, 1997).

Curbridge: R.A. Chambers, 'A Roman Settlement at Curbridge', *Oxoniensia*, xli (1976), 38-55.

Frilford: J.Y. Akerman, 'Report of Excavations in an Ancient Cemetery at Frilford, near Abingdon, Berks', *Proc. Soc. Antiqs.* 2nd ser. 3 (1867), 136-9; G. Rolleston, 'Researches and Excavations carried on in an Ancient Cemetery at Frilford, Abingdon, Berks, in the years 1867-1868', *Archaeologia*, 42 (1869), 417-85; G. Rolleston, 'Further Researches in an Anglo-Saxon Cemetery at Frilford, with notes on the northern limit of Anglo-Saxon cremation in England', *Archaeologia*, 45 (1880), 405-10; A.J. Evans, 'A Roman Villa at Frilford', *Archaeol. Jnl.* 54 (1897), 340-54; L.H.D. Buxton, 'Excavations at Frilford', *Antiqs. Jnl.* i (1921), 87-97; J.S.P. Bradford and R.G. Goodchild, 'Excavations at Frilford, Berks., 1937-8', *Oxoniensia*, iv (1939), 54-66.

Queenford Mill: B. Durham and T. Rowley, 'A Cemetery Site at Queenford Mill, Dorchester', *Oxoniensia*, xxxvii (1972), 32-7; M. Harman, G. Lambrick, D. Miles and T. Rowley, 'Roman Burials around Dorchester-on-Thames', *Oxoniensia*, xliii (1979), 3-6; R.A. Chambers, 'The late- and sub-Roman cemetery at Queenford Farm, Dorchester-on-Thames, Oxon.', *Oxoniensia*, lii (1987), 35-69.

Radley I: R.J.C. Atkinson, 'Excavations in Barrow Hills Field, Radley, Berks, 1944-5', *Oxoniensia*, xvii-xviii (1952-3), 14-35.

Radley II: A. Boyle and R.A. Chambers, 'The Romano-British Cemetery', in R.A. Chambers and E. Macadam, *Excavations at Barrow Hills, Radley, Oxfordshire, vol. ii: The Romano-British Cemetery and Anglo-Saxon Settlement* (OAU Thames Valley Landscapes Monograph, in prep.).

Stanton Harcourt: N. McGavin, 'A Roman Cemetery and Trackway at Stanton Harcourt', *Oxoniensia*, xlv (1980), 112-23.

White Horse Hill: J.B. Davis and J. Thurnam, *Crania Britannica: Delineations and descriptions of the skulls of the aboriginal and early inhabitants of the British Isles: with notices of their other remains, vol. ii Plates and Descriptions* (1865); A.M. Cromarty, C. Gosden, G. Lock, D. Miles and S. Palmer, *Investigations at White Horse Hill, Uffington and Tower Hill, Ashbury: the development of ancestral landscapes* (OAU Thames Valley Landscapes Monograph, forthcoming).

Wantage: R.A. Rutland and J. Thomas, 'Archaeological Notes from Reading Museum', *Berks. Archaeol. Jnl.* 63 (1968), 73.

Roden Downs: S. Hood and H. Walton, 'A Romano-British Cremating Place and Burial Ground on Roden Downs, Compton, Berkshire', *Trans. Newbury District Field Club*, 9 (1948), 10-62.

rather than with detailed consideration of the individuals buried therein. Aspects of the latter have been discussed elsewhere[9] and while it would be absurd to examine cemeteries without any consideration of their occupants, these have been treated in fairly broad terms here.

CEMETERY SIZE, LAYOUT, DEFINITION AND STRUCTURES

Numbers of graves have already been referred to in some cases. Even where they are incomplete it is either clear or at least likely that the majority of cemeteries were fairly small. Only two rural cemeteries (Radley II and Cassington) contained over 50 and over 100 burials respectively. For the most part the communities served by such cemeteries would have been small and greater numbers need not be expected. Although it has been suggested that some of these cemeteries might have served more than one settlement[10] there is no reason to think that they normally represent more than an extended family or estate population.[11] A similar situation is noted in relation to Anglo-Saxon cemeteries in the region, with Berinsfield, containing some 118 graves thought to represent a maximum population of 30-40, suggested as being typical.[12] Some of the smaller late Roman cemeteries probably related to individual farmsteads with rather lower populations levels. Even some of the cemeteries associated with nucleated settlements are no larger – the clearest example being the 30 graves from the northern suburbs cemetery at Alchester, which if not complete was very nearly so. Much more substantial cemeteries must have existed at places like Alchester and at some of the other nucleated settlements in the county, but they are only seen clearly at Dorchester.

In the majority of cases where sufficient evidence survives the general layout of cemeteries and principal grave orientations relate to pre-existing features – usually ditched boundaries of one kind and another – though there are exceptions to this (see below). It is less clear how far these cemetery alignments were determined pragmatically, by those of the adjacent features, or whether aspects of belief or custom required the selection of particular alignments (for example north-south) for which appropriate landscape units or existing divisions were sought.

Only in three cases is there evidence from the relevant plans to suggest that cemeteries were deliberately located within enclosures which were originally intended to define them. All of these are 'urban' cemeteries, the two Dorchester sites (Queenford Mill and Church Piece, Warborough) and Asthall Site B. For the Dorchester sites, and for Church Piece in particular, the evidence comes essentially from aerial photographs, which indicate regular rectilinear enclosures in both cases. Both the Dorchester sites appear to belong to the category of late Roman 'managed' cemeteries (i.e. with clearly organised layout of graves in lines and/or rows)[13] and are the only fairly certain examples of this type in our sample. At Church Piece the enclosure can be seen to have been subdivided and it may also have contained a substantial structure, the interpretation of which is uncertain.[14] At Queenford

[9] Particularly by Harman et al. (M. Harman, T. Molleson and J.L. Price, 'Burials, Bodies and Beheadings in Romano-British and Anglo-Saxon Cemeteries', *Bull. Brit. Mus. Nat. Hist.* (*Geol.*) 35(3) (1981), 145-88) which is important as a source of primary data on the human remains from a number of sites.

[10] J. Pearce, op. cit. note 2, p. 159.

[11] R.A. Philpott and R. Reece, 'Sépultures rurales en Bretagne romaine', in A. Ferdière (ed.), *Monde des morts, monde des vivants en Gaule rurale* (1993), 421.

[12] H. Hamerow, 'Anglo-Saxon Oxfordshire, 400-700', *Oxoniensia*, lxiv (1999), 26.

[13] Cf. R. Philpott, *Burial Practices in Roman Britain* (BAR Brit. Ser. 219, 1991), 226-8.

[14] M. Harman, G. Lambrick, D. Miles and T. Rowley, 'Roman Burials around Dorchester-on-Thames', *Oxoniensia*, xliii (1979), 8, 15.

Mill burials were not confined to the ditched enclosure, being also found beyond it to the south, though it seems likely that the great majority of the graves in this cemetery did lie within the enclosure. At Asthall only one corner of the enclosure was located within the excavated area so its extent is unknown, as is the degree to which it was occupied by burials. In all three examples the principal orientation of burial is approximately west-east, but none is precisely aligned this way.

It may be significant that these three sites were associated with major nucleated settlements. There is no evidence regarding enclosure in relation to the burials at Asthall excavated in 1921, nor (unsurprisingly) is there any reference to enclosure associated with the burials lying south-east of Alchester, recorded in the 19th century. There is some confusion as to whether more than one site is involved here, but the earliest publications appear to refer to a single site, though this is nowhere stated and different numbers of burials are given.[15] The compilers of the *Victoria County History* assumed that a single site was involved and this view is followed here.[16] In the case of the cemetery in the northern extramural area of Alchester the orientation was determined by a pre-existing WNW.-ESE. aligned settlement boundary feature which formed the southern limit of the cemetery, but there is no indication of further enclosure, though a number of minor gullies within the cemetery area may have marked subdivisions of it.

Small ditched enclosures formed components of two cemeteries. At Radley II a square ditched feature was associated with a group of cremations, enclosing five of them, and at Queenford Mill a similar enclosure, *c.* 6 m. x 8 m. internally, overlay the southern edge of the main cemetery enclosure. This presumably marked a family plot of a type familiar in late and post Roman cemeteries such as Poundbury,[17] and contained the only interment with grave goods out of 164 excavated graves. The only other cemetery which definitely lay within a defined space was that at Roden Downs, but there the conjoined enclosures occupied by the graves had apparently been established some considerable time before, and interestingly were interpreted as being associated with cremation (though no cremations were located *in situ*). There was a relatively rare early-Roman regional tradition of placing cremations (usually single burials) within small, roughly square ditched enclosures, and it is therefore possible that the Radley II cremations indicate some continuation of this tradition, but at present there are insufficient examples to demonstrate its survival beyond the 2nd century.

Like the enclosed sites the Uffington cemetery was also restricted in area, but in this case it was because the burials were, curiously, inserted into a Neolithic long barrow, the plan of which determined their extent and orientation, though excavation in 1993 showed that burials were present in the associated ditch and were not just confined to the mound itself, as suggested by the 19th-century excavation plan. Elsewhere, cemetery orientation followed existing linear features at Stanton Harcourt and probably at Crowmarsh. While the presence of such features may be inferred at other sites there is no certain evidence, and at Radley, at least, there was apparently a positive absence of indications of linear features associated with

[15] J. Marshall, 'Alchester', *Trans. Archaeol. Soc. N. Oxfordshire* (1857-8), 130; W.L. Brown, untitled ('additional notes and remarks'), *Trans. Archaeol. Soc. N. Oxfordshire* (1857-8), 137 (28 and 16 burials respectively).

[16] *V.C.H. Oxon.* i, 284.

[17] D.E. Farwell and T.I. Molleson, *Poundbury, vol. 2: The Cemeteries* (Dorset Nat. Hist. and Arch. Soc. Monograph Ser. no. 11, 1993), 49-51.

either cemetery.[18] Nevertheless, the extremely ephemeral nature of a probable north-south feature at Crowmarsh does demonstrate that slight linear features could have been largely or completely lost to post-Roman activity, particularly ploughing, and in a fairly intensively exploited landscape it is inherently implausible that cemeteries would have been randomly placed in agricultural fields without demarcation. Indeed the plan of the Radley I cemetery shows a clear north-south break between the slightly differently-aligned eastern and western parts of the cemetery. This was suggested by the excavator as implying 'some difference of custom or family, or even of date'.[19] The plan hints strongly at the existence of a linear feature here which otherwise had left no trace in the gravel subsoil. Such a feature may have served to divide the cemetery along the lines suggested by Atkinson, or its presence alone may have resulted in the observed variations in alignment between the graves in the east and west halves of the cemetery.

GRAVES: ORIENTATION AND OTHER PHYSICAL CHARACTERISTICS

East-west or, more usually, west-east aligned burials (i.e. with the head to the west) are, like enclosures, particularly characteristic of cemeteries associated with the major nucleated settlements. This interpretation inevitably treats the definition 'west-east' rather loosely because, as already indicated, the alignment of the enclosures of the two Dorchester cemeteries is not precise and in the case of Church Piece is more nearly WNW.-ESE. On this basis the Alchester northern suburbs cemetery might be considered to be aligned approximately west-east, but here the alignment was clearly based on that of an earlier settlement boundary, itself determined by the alignment of Akeman Street, established at around the middle of the 1st century AD, and appears to have owed nothing (except perhaps coincidentally) to possible 'religious' considerations. At Frilford the principal alignment was approximately west-east or WSW.-ENE., but in the absence of detailed plans of most of the 19th-century excavations the degree of variation here is not certain. Minor variation of alignment within a prevailing pattern was of course normal and may be explained in a number of ways.[20] In the case of Queenford Mill, for example, it is noticeable that many of the burials lying outside the cemetery enclosure to the south were aligned more nearly west-east than those within it.

The only known exceptions to the generalisation that cemeteries associated with major settlements are aligned roughly west-east are the site at Wantage, where the prevailing orientation was SSW.-NNE., and the 1992 Asthall cemetery, where some graves were aligned north-south. The majority of the graves in this cemetery were west-east aligned, however, as were those in the 19th-century cemetery find at Alchester, though again in the absence of detailed records the degree of precision in the observation of their alignment is uncertain.

Approximate west-east alignment is less common in the rural cemeteries. It is encountered at Uffington, where the alignment of all the burials was determined by that of the Neolithic barrow into which the burials were inserted. Otherwise, while it occurs widely,

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[18] R.J.C. Atkinson, 'Excavations in Barrow Hills Field, Radley, Berks, 1944-5', *Oxoniensia*, xvii-xviii (1952-3), 32; A. Boyle and R.A. Chambers, 'The Romano-British Cemetery', in R.A. Chambers and E. Macadam, *Excavations at Barrow Hills, Radley, Oxfordshire, vol. ii: The Romano-British Cemetery and Anglo-Saxon Settlement* (OAU Thames Valley Landscapes Monograph, in prep.).

[19] Atkinson, ibid.

[20] E.g. P. Rahtz, 'Late Roman Cemeteries and Beyond', in R. Reece (ed.), *Burial in the Roman world* (CBA Res. Rep. 22, 1978), 58-9; cf. L. Watts and P. Leach, *Henley Wood, Temples and Cemetery, Excavations 1962-69 by the late Ernest Greenfield and others* (CBA Res. Rep. 99, 1996), 63-4.

at Ashville, Bloxham, Cassington, Crowmarsh, Curbridge and Radley II, only at Ashville was it the dominant orientation (in eight out of 11 recorded burials). Elsewhere west-east or east-west burials, where present, amounted to between *c*. 5% (at Crowmarsh) and *c*. 29% of total burials (at Curbridge), with most of the sites listed above falling in the middle of that range. Only at Stanton Harcourt, Radley I and Roden Downs were west-east (or east-west) burials entirely absent. In all three cases the extent of excavation makes this absence fairly certain. At Radley II most of the west-east inhumations lay in a discrete group. The same may have been true at Cassington, but the only published plan of the site[21] is at a very small scale and the detail is therefore uncertain.

The principal orientation of many of the rural cemeteries was therefore approximately north-south. This alignment accounted for all the graves at Radley I and Stanton Harcourt and was dominant at Curbridge and Radley II. An alignment between north-south and NNE.-SSW. was dominant at Bloxham and Crowmarsh. Only at Cassington and at Roden Downs was the principal alignment of burials significantly removed from the cardinal points of the compass.

There is very limited evidence for intercutting of graves. Where north-south and west-east graves did intercut, as at Asthall (1992 Site B) and Curbridge, the west-east ones were always later. Otherwise, however, there is no evidence for a sequence between graves of contrasting alignment, except at Frilford, where some of the Anglo-Saxon graves were noted as cutting late Roman ones at right angles, implying a roughly north-south alignment for these Saxon burials. The number of these graves which were demonstrably of Saxon date on the basis of grave goods is uncertain; though the first major published account of the cemetery implies that this may have been only a fairly small proportion (21 Saxon graves had 'relics', alongside six unaccompanied graves thought to be of Saxon date).[22] There is no clear evidence for intercutting graves of Roman date at Frilford, however, (though 'disturbance' of some of the graves was noted) and the only other site apart from Asthall and Curbridge where this has been certainly noticed is in the Alchester northern suburbs, where there were several phases of intercutting graves all on the same basic alignment. At Curbridge one example of intercutting graves on the same alignment (in this case north-south) was also noted and at Uffington the 19th-century plan suggests that there may have been up to four instances of intercutting graves. Here, however, grave cuts as such were not defined by the 19th-century excavators and in at least one case it is possible that a double burial in the same grave is involved and in another instance the skeletons, though very close (end to end) may have been in graves with only a marginal relationship between the cuts.

On present evidence, therefore, intercutting of graves is fairly unusual in the cemeteries of this region. At Ashville, where graves on west-east and north-south alignments were very closely juxtaposed, there was no evidence for intercutting, but the area examined was limited so the absence of evidence here is not conclusive. A similar situation is also seen in the more complete cemetery plan at Crowmarsh. Cumulatively the evidence suggests either the fairly consistent use of grave markers of one kind or another and/or that adjacent graves tended to be fairly close in date, with the implication that earlier graves were still visible as mounds. The instance of intercutting of graves of similar orientation at Curbridge was

[21] D.W. Harding, *The Iron Age in the Upper Thames Basin* (1972), pl. 27.
[22] G. Rolleston, 'Researches and Excavations carried on in an Ancient Cemetery at Frilford, Abingdon, Berks, in the years 1867-1868', *Archaeologia*, 42 (1869), 478-80.

relatively marginal, however, and could have occurred even if the graves were marked. Not all instances of the intercutting of graves in the Alchester northern suburbs can be interpreted in this way, however. The evidence there can be seen as indicating a lack of grave markers or, perhaps more likely, suggests extended use of the cemetery over several generations, with some loss of markers (and settlement of mounds) over an extended period of time before reuse of certain parts of the cemetery.

Variation in the depth of graves in our region is considerable and there is a broad correlation between the age and/or status of the deceased and the depth of individual graves. This is in line with widely observed trends and so the data are not presented in detail here, but sample figures from Alchester northern suburbs, Asthall (1992), Bloxham, Radley II and Roden Downs, almost all show progressively greater average depths (within each cemetery) for infants (up to *c*. 2 years old), children and adolescents between 2 and 17 years, adult females and adult males. The differences between the first and second of these groups, and between the third and fourth, can be quite slight, as the figures from Radley II show (average grave depths for infants (9) – 0.19 m., children (6) – 0.20 m., adult females (17) - 0.42 m. and adult males (24) – 0.47 m.). Unusually, in the Alchester northern suburbs cemetery (a small sample) the average depth of 7 subadult graves (0.19 m.) was slightly greater than that of 9 adult female graves (0.15 m.), which possibly suggests that most of the subadults were males. Exceptional burials could occur in any of these groups; for example one infant at Radley II was contained within a grave 0.5 m. deep, so the results from small samples could easily be distorted. This may explain why at Curbridge the average depth of 4 adult female graves was, uniquely in our region, greater than that of the 6 adult male graves – the figures here being skewed by an exceptionally deep female burial (grave 27) which was accompanied by two infants.

The small sample from Roden Downs stands out in having much deeper graves than the other sites considered here – the average depth of the six adult female graves was 1.47 m. and of the four adult male graves 1.60 m. (there were no infants or adolescents). The marked contrast between this and other sites in the region may reflect the position of Roden Downs on the chalk downland where it had suffered little from denudation by post-Roman ploughing, in contrast to sites on the Thames gravels or other locations vulnerable to plough damage (at Alchester northern suburbs for example, a site which was clearly quite badly affected by plough damage, the maximum depth of the 30 recorded graves was only 0.35 m.). This explanation seems unlikely to account for all the difference, however, and it may be suggested that the Roden Downs cemetery contains individuals of well above-average status, whether in social, economic or other terms, a point which is supported by the unusually high representation of grave goods, and particularly coins, within the cemetery (see further below).

Much more detailed examination of large cemetery groups would be necessary to take the argument much further, but for present purposes one of the most important points is to indicate the shallow depth and consequent vulnerability of most infant graves, in particular. This characteristic is of significance in considering the general nature of some of our cemeteries, discussed below.

There is minimal evidence for possible structures directly associated with individual graves. Such evidence is seen most clearly at Crowmarsh and at Roden Downs. At Crowmarsh one grave had three 'sockets' in each long side of the grave cut. It is not clear if these held posts belonging to a structure above the grave, or whether they related in some way to the process of lowering the body or coffin into the grave. A similar arrangement is seen in the Anglo-Saxon cemetery at St. Peter's, Broadstairs, Kent, where graves with one,

two, three and four pairs of opposed 'sockets' were recorded[23] and comparable features have been noted at other Anglo-Saxon cemeteries in Kent, where they are generally thought to have supported above-grave canopies or structures.[24] At Roden Downs, sockets, in this case two on each side of the grave, occurred in one case (Grave VII). Here they were not observed at ground level but were cut into a ledge left in the natural chalk some 1ft. 10 in. (0.56 m.) above the base of the grave, which at 7 ft. (2.1 m.) was the deepest in the cemetery. Such internal ledges, recorded in seven of the ten burials in this cemetery, ranged from a well-formed step around the entire circumference of the grave to a slight feature at one end. In Graves VII and VI traces of carbonised wood were noted on the ledges, in Grave VI 'with grain running across the grave as if boards placed with ends resting on the ledges'.[25] These timbers were additional to those indicating a wooden coffin. No parallels to these features have been noted in other Roman cemeteries in our region, however, though stepped graves are a feature of the cemetery at Lankhills, Winchester, where it is clear that in at least one case the step supported timbers which roofed a burial chamber within which the coffin was placed, thus providing a close parallel for the Roden Downs example.[26]

BURIAL RITE

Aspects of the almost infinite variety of body position in late Roman inhumations have not been considered fully here, though they have been discussed for example by Chambers with regard to Dorchester and Curbridge. The most obvious variants are those of prone and decapitated burial (see Table 2), the great majority of late Roman inhumations being extended and supine (though a variety of flexed and occasionally crouched positions are also known). These were discussed (along with other topics) in an important paper by Harman et al.,[27] but further examples have been identified since then. It is possible that prone burials have not been recorded consistently for all sites, particularly in early excavations, but they have been noted at Bloxham (?4), Queenford Mill (1), Radley I (1), Radley II (6), Stanton Harcourt (3) and Uffington (5). Decapitations, which aroused the curiosity of antiquarian as well as more recent excavators, have probably been recorded more consistently, and occur at Alchester northern suburbs (2), Ashville (1), Bloxham (1), Cassington (15), Crowmarsh (2), Curbridge (3), Radley I (2), Radley II (4), Stanton Harcourt (3) and Uffington (probably 3, though only one of these had the skull placed between the legs, as is common with decapitated burials). Several authorities[28] have observed that decapitation is most frequently recorded in rural cemeteries, a pattern which is followed here, with the rite only recorded in one site associated with a major settlement – and this (the Alchester northern suburbs) one in which urban and rural characteristics are blended in several different aspects of the site. Conversely decapitation is only absent in one rural cemetery, the small group from Roden Downs. The incidence of decapitation, where present, is generally quite low, ranging from *c*. 3% (at Bloxham) to 14% of burials (at Curbridge), but being most commonly in a range from 6% to 10%. It is notable that the rite was well-represented (*c*. 13%) in the largest rural cemetery of the group, at Cassington, where 15 examples were recorded.

[23] A.C. Hogarth, 'Structural Features in Anglo-Saxon Graves', *Archaeol. Jnl.* 130 (1973), 109-11.

[24] Ibid. 115-16.

[25] Hood and Walton, op. cit. note 3, p. 40.

[26] G. Clarke, *The Roman Cemetery at Lankhills* (Winchester Stud. 3: Pre Roman and Roman Winchester pt. ii, 1979), 134-5.

[27] Harman et al., op. cit. note 9.

[28] E.g. Philpott, op. cit. note 13, p. 81.

Evidence for the use of coffins is widespread, but only at Roden Downs was there evidence that every interment in the cemetery was contained within a coffin. Direct evidence for coffins, apart from those of lead (from Crowmarsh, Frilford (at least five), Church Piece and Roden Downs),[29] which would have been contained within a wooden outer coffin, consists of stains and iron nails and other fittings. Stains, occurring at Crowmarsh, Radley I and II, Stanton Harcourt and Roden Downs, are usually rare. At Roden Downs a number of coffins were identified on the basis of 'carbonised' wood, but it is difficult to see how coffins would have been burnt *in situ* without leaving some trace on the associated burials. It is more likely that, as at Crowmarsh, on broadly similar chalk geology, the blackened remains were of incompletely decomposed wood. It was presumably such anaerobic conditions which allowed the identification of leaves of boxwood in one of the coffins from Roden Downs.

Nails and other coffin fittings were not always noted in early excavations, but in systematically-recorded sites examined more recently it is notable that the occurrence of nails is variable, and that the use of other (iron) fittings is rare, being certainly noted only at Queenford Mill.[30] In the Alchester northern suburbs cemetery only nine out of 30 graves produced coffin nails, and in several cases it was clear (as also at Asthall 1992 and elsewhere) that these were insufficient to have been used in all the coffin joints.

There was thus a variety of practice in interment. Some bodies may not have been contained in coffins at all (alternative treatments are possible in some cases, see below), while others may have been placed in coffins which were entirely of jointed construction with no use of nails or other fittings. The existence of such coffins, likely on a priori grounds, can be demonstrated from a number of cases where coffin stains have been recorded without accompanying nails, as for example at Radley II. Some coffins clearly were nailed together, while in other cases nails may have been used only to secure a lid. It is not certain that all coffins had lids, though this seems likely. Further evidence for the existence of jointed coffins comes again from Radley II and also from Queenford Mill, where some recorded skull positions are consistent with the decay of the body in a void, i.e. presumably in a coffin.[31] In some cases this evidence for post-decomposition movement of the skull is associated with other indications of coffins, but in other instances there are no such indications and the skeletal remains themselves provide the only evidence that they had originally lain within (presumably) coffins of jointed construction.

Large stones are occasionally recorded associated with graves, occurring at Alchester northern suburbs, Bloxham, Frilford and possibly Stanton Harcourt. None of the graves under consideration was completely lined with such stones, though one of the Alchester graves had an almost complete lining (of both sides and base) formed of stones and large pieces of reused tile, and something similar may have occurred at Frilford, though there is insufficient detail in the earliest accounts to confirm this. Evans, however, accepted that the stones were set around the edges of graves which were deep cut and on the same alignment as the Roman burials but contained 'Anglo-Saxon insignia'. He therefore assigned these burials to the conversion period,[32] but without defining what the 'Anglo-Saxon insignia' consisted of. At Alchester, at least, the stones could have served as packing around wooden coffins, perhaps to hold them in place within the grave pit while this was being backfilled, or

[29] They also occur in smaller groups of burials not considered here, such as Abingdon (T. Allen, 'Abingdon Vineyard Redevelopment', *S. Midl. Archaeol.* 20 (1990), 73-8).

[30] R.A. Chambers, 'The late- and sub-Roman Cemetery at Queenford Farm, Dorchester-on-Thames, Oxon.', *Oxoniensia*, lii (1987), 54.

[31] Ibid. 56.

[32] A.J. Evans, 'A Roman Villa at Frilford', *Archaeol. Jnl.* 54 (1897), 341.

TABLE 2. BURIAL VARIANTS AND FURNISHINGS

Site	Coffins etc	Burial variants	% inhums with footwear	% inhums with coins	% inhums with other goods	Comments
Alchester northern suburbs	?9, stone packing in 6 (3 overlap)	2 decapitated	–	10	3.3	
Alchester						
Ashville	?	1 decapitated	–	–	9.1	1 N-S decapitation, 1 N-S with 4C CC beaker.
Asthall	?	?		?	?	
Asthall 1992 Site B	?7	–	–	–	16.7	1 with Cu anklet; 1 with dog skin.
Barton Court Farm	–		–			
Bloxham	'large stones...above a few'	?4 prone 1 decapitated	-?	?	16.7?	At least 5 burials said to be associated with pots. Associations with coins much less clear, but 1 (Constantine 1, close to skeleton 21) is possible
Cassington near Big Enclosure	?	15 decapitated		?	?	
Crowmarsh Cold Harbour Farm	1 lead coffin, ?12 other coffins (wood stains & nails)	2 decapitated	–	19	?	Various grave goods, some uncertainty about what pottery is grave goods rather than residual. CC beaker and 2 iron objects in one grave, double sided comb, coin and pot base in another, grey ware beaker in another
Curbridge	None	3 decapitated	23.8	–	–	1 decapitation was E-W
Queenford Mill	Nails & some fittings –	1 prone evidence from 47 graves	–	–	<1	Only certain grave good is a composite bone comb of late Roman type.
Frilford	5 lead coffins; coffin nails, tile or flat stone lining in some egs	?	?	?c 2	?c 1	1 lead coffin burial has bone composite comb
Radley I	Only 1 certain (nails & stain)	1 prone 2 decapitated	–	2.9 (9 coins)	2.9 (CC beaker)	

Radley II	16	6 prone 4 decapitated	1.8	1.8 (1 coin)	5.3?	1 with bracelets, beads & shoes; 1 with shoes & Fe obj; 1 other with hobnails, 1 with bone pin. 3 inhumations and 7 cremations have associated beakers
Stanton Harcourt Cricket Ground	Nails in 15 graves, stains in 4, ?packing stones in 1	3 prone 3 decapitated	2.9	8.6	–	3 graves each have 3 coins, all FTR fh types in two graves, UR and GE types in third. 1 grave with coins has hobnails and also ?packing stones
White Horse Hill	Nails in at least 1 grave	5 prone 3 decapitated	4.1	10.9+	6.5+	5 or 6 graves with coins, other goods are a CC beaker (type C38) and composite bone combs
Wantage 33 Witan Way	?	?	?	?	?	No grave goods recorded, but Roman date assumed
Warborough Church Piece	1 lead coffin, 1 other	–	–	–	–	
Roden Downs	1 lead coffin, all probably had wooden coffins	–	10	70	10	2 coins, bone comb, CC beaker and 'remains of ?shoes'all from lead coffin burial

they may have served in some cases as a coffin substitute, though if so it is clear that this was representational only. At Alchester there was certain evidence of wooden coffins associated with three of the six graves in which stone packing was present. At Bloxham large stones were noted 'above' a few of the burials, but no further evidence indicating their possible function was presented.

These graves can be seen as cist burials of Philpott's type 3, with partial stone lining.[33] Such burials were particularly common in the 'limestone belt', and while this and related traditions had Iron Age antecedents they appear to have been much more common in the 4th century than earlier, and of course also occur in the post-Roman period, particularly in the West Country. The associations of this particular type of cist burial are with both formal urban and rural cemeteries, though in our region the clearest occurrences are in 'small town' contexts. The overall associations are both with these and rural sites, a pattern observed by Philpott in relation to his type 2 cist graves, in which the lining is generally complete and careful. In either case a broad interpretation of such grave types as representing 'the poor man's stone coffin'[34] is possible.

While the use of coffins of various kinds was extensive, therefore, in almost all the cemeteries under consideration at least some burials did not occur within coffins. Such bodies could have been shrouded, but there is no indication of whether the shroud would have been additional to or an alternative to everyday clothes. Evidence for *in situ* clothes fastenings such as brooches and buckles is almost entirely absent. A 2nd-century brooch fragment recovered from one of the graves in the 1992 Asthall cemetery lay above the body and was probably accidentally incorporated in the grave fill. The same cemetery also produced evidence that one of the burials, of an adolescent, may have been wrapped in a dog-skin cape,[35] but otherwise positive evidence for clothing of the body for the journey to the underworld, or in anticipation of the day of judgement, is confined to the provision of shoes in a number of cases, here all represented by the occurrence of hobnails. This, like the incidence of decapitation, is another well-known late Roman characteristic, occurring regularly in a minority of burials, though in the Oxfordshire cemeteries it seems to have been less common than decapitation. Documented examples come from Curbridge (5), Radley II (2), Stanton Harcourt, Uffington (2) and Roden Downs. The Curbridge incidences are reasonably typical. Here only one of the five groups of hobnails was recovered from the area of the feet, the others being located adjacent to the shins in three cases and by the left hand in the last.[36] Shoes were therefore not usually worn at the time of burial, but were placed separately in the grave. In comparison at Lankhills, Winchester, for example, hobnails were recorded in some 151 burials (almost exactly one third of the site total). In 40% of cases these were between the toes and in a further 24% they were in the area of the feet, leaving just over a third of all cases in which the shoes were certainly not worn.[37] The overall incidence of burials with footwear, concentrated most noticeably in central Southern

[33] Philpott. op. cit. note 13, p. 63.

[34] Ibid. 66.

[35] P. Booth, K.M. Clark and A. Powell, 'A Dog Skin from Asthall', *Int. Jnl. Osteoarchaeology.* 6 (1996), 382-7.

[36] R.A. Chambers, 'A Roman Settlement at Curbridge', *Oxoniensia,* xli (1976), 45.

[37] Clarke, op. cit. note 26, pp. 153, 178-80.

England, has been discussed at length by Philpott,[38] who sees the rite as essentially rural (the Lankhills cemetery being one of a small number of significant urban exceptions) and therefore 'native' in origin.[39]

GENDER AND AGE STRUCTURE (Table 3)

'The 'missing' women from many cemeteries from late Roman Britain are notorious'[40] – which is to say that it is their absence, rather than the women themselves, which is remarkable! Some of the Oxfordshire evidence is relevant here, although in many cases there is usually no clear indication of significant imbalance in the occurrence of the sexes. Typical examples may be Radley II, where 24 males, 18 females and 15 (unsexed) subadults were recorded, while at Stanton Harcourt the numbers of males and females were equal.[41] At Cassington and Frilford, however, more significant disparities in gender representation are apparent. At Cassington 42 males and 22 females were recorded, though the sample examined here (71 skeletons) was not the complete collection (over 110 burials being known from this site) and one may speculate about selective retention of skeletal remains, which may have favoured more robust male skeletons against less well-preserved female ones. Figures quoted for Frilford suggest an even more imbalanced population, with a female:male ratio of 1:2.6. The basis for this value is uncertain, however, and while the ratio is certainly not 1:1 the disparity between males and females at this site seems to be considerably less extreme than has been claimed.[42]

Comparable gender imbalances in both rural and urban late Roman cemeteries have been discussed by Everton and Leech and by Woodward,[43] and more widely by Morris,[44] but while regularly observed such imbalances are less readily interpreted. Morris concludes, however, that the phenomenon is 'peculiarly British and peculiarly 4th-century'.[45]

[38] Ibid. 167-73.

[39] Ibid. 171. Cf. C. van Driel-Murray, 'And did those feet in ancient time... feet and shoes as a material projection of the self', in Baker et al., op. cit. note 2, p. 132, who points out that many late Roman shoe types were not nailed and would thus usually leave no archaeological trace. Shoes may therefore have been much more widely provided than the evidence suggests.

[40] J. Pearce, 'Burial, Society and Context in the Provincial Roman World', in Pearce et al., op. cit. note 4, p. 6.

[41] M. Harman, 'The Human Remains', in N. McGavin, 'A Roman Cemetery and Trackway at Stanton Harcourt', *Oxoniensia*, xlv (1980), 120.

[42] The figure of 1:2.6, from unspecified sources, is given by R.F. Everton and R. Leech, 'The Burials', in R. Leech, 'The Excavation of a Romano-British Farmstead and Cemetery on Bradley Hill, Somerton, Somerset', *Britannia*, 12 (1981), 197, and has been repeated by several subsequent writers. The published accounts of Frilford (see Table 1 refs. above) do not permit confident distinction of Romano-British from the Anglo-Saxon burials, but a total of *c.* 135-140 is possible. Of 123 burials discussed by Rolleston, op. cit. note 22, pp. 479-80, some 97 were thought to be Romano-British on the basis of archaeological associations and cranial characteristics. Regardless of the reliability of the latter characteristics, which were also of much interest to Buxton (L.H.D. Buxton, 'The Racial Affinities of the Romano-Britons', *Jnl. of Roman Stud.* 25 (1935), 35-50, with discussion of Frilford at pp. 43-7 passim), the breakdown of the 97 burials was: males 40, females 28, indeterminate adults 6, children 23. The breakdown of *c.* 175 Romano-British *and* Anglo-Saxon burials listed in the various publications (ignoring references to unrecorded burials, such as those in the quarry edge indicated by Buxton (L.H.D. Buxton, 'Excavations at Frilford', *Antiqs. Jnl.* i (1921), 90) is: males 70, females 53, indeterminate (?adults) ?16, children ?36.

[43] Everton and Leech, op. cit. note 42; A.B. Woodward, 'Discussion', in Farwell and Molleson, op. cit. note 17, pp. 222-3.

[44] I. Morris, *Death-ritual and Social Structure in Classical Antiquity* (1992), 82-8.

[45] Ibid. 88.

TABLE 3. CEMETERY AGE STRUCTURE: DATA FOR SELECTED SITES BASED ON HARMAN ET AL. (1981) WITH ADDITIONS

Site	Sex	Neonatal	0-5	5-10	10-15	15-20	20-25	25-30	30-35	35-40	40-45	45+	Adult (unspecified)	Total (inhumations)	Comment
Alchester northern suburbs	M	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	1	0.5	0.5	1	2	6	Wider than 5 year age range brackets assigned to many adults
	F	-	-	-	-	-	2	1.5	0.5	0.5	0.5	1	3	9	
	?	-	5	3	2	1	-	1	1	-	-	-	2	15	
Ashville	M	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	1	1.5	1	0.5	1	6	Bone only recovered from 10 burials
	F	-	-	-	-	1	-	0.5	0.5	-	-	1	-	3	
	?	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	
Asthall 1992 Site B	M	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1?	1?	-	-	2	Wider than 5 year age range brackets assigned to many adults. Parts of two bodies in one grave
	F	-	-	-	-	-	1?	1?	1?	-	-	-	-	3	
	?	1	6	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	8	
Barton Court Farm	?	26												26	Other neonatal burials scattered across villa site
Cassington near Big Enclosure	M	-	-	-	-	-	3	-	4	1	1	8	25	42	Surviving sample from over 110 burials
	F	-	-	-	-	1	1	2	-	2	2	5	9	22	
	?	-	3	1	-	1	-	1	1	-	-	-	-	7	
Crowmarsh Cold Harbour Farm	M	-	-	-	-	1	-	0.5	0.75	1.25	1.75	1.75	2	9	Wider than 5 year age range brackets assigned to many adults
	F	-	-	-	-	1	-	1.5	2	1.5	1.5	1.5	-	9	
	?	1	1	1	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	4	
Curbridge	M	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	2	-	2	1	6	No information for 3 burials
	F	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	2	2	5	
	?	2	-	-	-	1	1	-	-	-	-	3	-	7	
Queenford Mill	M	-	-	-	-	3	4	3	8	4	-	21	2	45	Data for 163 burials
	F	-	-	-	-	5	11	6	7	4	2	10	6	51	
	?	2	33	12	11	2	-	-	-	-	-	3	4	67	
Radley I	M	-	-	-	-	1	1	-	2	-	-	8	5	17	Harman only gives data for 32 burials
	F	-	-	-	-	1	3	-	-	1	-	7	2	14	
	?	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	1	
Radley II	M	-	-	-	-	2	2	1	1	4	3?	11?	-	24	Wider than 5 year age range brackets assigned to adults over 40
	F	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	4	5?	7?	-	18	
	?	-	11	3	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	15	

Stanton Harcourt Cricket Ground	M	–		–	–	–		1	6	1	1	–	5	1	15	Includes distubed and redeposited burials
	F	–		–	–	–	1	5	2	2	–	–	2	3	15	
	?	–	3	–	–	1		–	–	–	–	–	–	2	6	
Warborough Church Piece	M													2	2	Possibly all adult – burials examined in situ
	F													2	2	
	?													2	2	
Roden Downs	M	–		–	–	–		–	–	–	1	1	2		4	
	F	–		–	–	–	1	–	–	–	–	2	3		6	
	?	–		–	–	–		–	–	–	–	–	–		–	

Segregation of male and female burials, with uneven representation resulting from excavation of small samples of cemetery populations, may be a factor, but if this was a universal explanation there should be more examples in which females are better represented than males. Such cases are rare, however.

A little more can be said about the age range of burials in these cemeteries, the principal issue raised relating to the representation of children, whether infants (for present purposes ranging from peri- and neonates up to the age of *c*. 2 years) or older. The frequent occurrence of burials of the former category in settlement contexts is well known and is seen very clearly in the region at the villa of Barton Court Farm. Harman observes, surely rightly, that 'this 'lost' section of the population group rarely got as far as the cemetery'.[46] The relative absence of child burials at Curbridge, Radley I and II and Stanton Harcourt was noted by Harman.[47] The only infants recorded at Curbridge were two infants associated with an adult female and suggested to be twins dying, along with the mother, at birth.[48] The mother and twins were placed in the unusually deep grave mentioned above. This raises the question of whether this distinction was a consequence of the status of the woman in life – in which case her possible high status (inferred from the very deep grave) might have prompted the otherwise unusual occurrence of infants within the cemetery. Alternatively the depth of the grave might have been related to the circumstances of death, but in a society with fairly high mortality rates both for infants and for women at childbirth further examples of this sort of association might be expected in the region, whereas in fact they are rare (one possibly premature infant was buried with an adult female at Queenford Farm).[49]

The Queenford Farm cemetery contained a 'high proportion' of child burials, a situation contrasted by Harman with that at Curbridge, Radley I and II and Stanton Harcourt.[50] Infants and older children were quite well represented at Alchester northern suburbs and Asthall 1992 (though the total sample from the latter site is very small), so it is possible that this representation is a characteristic of cemeteries associated with 'urban' rather than rural sites. While the figures are suggestive there is as yet insufficient evidence for this to be demonstrable clearly, however.

The relatively small size of the sample from most sites, particularly once this is broken down into 5-year age range groupings, makes detailed discussion of variation in age patterns of little value. The one aspect that does emerge fairly clearly is that, even in some relatively small samples, there tends to be better representation of males in the over-45 age bracket. This is most noticeable at Queenford Mill, the largest sample, where almost half the identifiable male skeletons were aged 45 and over, while just under 20% of females were assigned to this range. Even if the skeletons assigned to the adult (unspecified) category are counted – these were a higher proportion of the female total than of the male total – older adults still account for less than one third of the female skeletons from the site. Harman plausibly identifies death associated with difficulties in childbirth as one factor which contributes to this disparity.[51]

[46] M. Harman, 'The Human Remains Excavated in 1981', in Chambers, op. cit. note 30, p. 60.

[47] Ibid. 61.

[48] M. Harman, 'The Human Remains', in Chambers, op. cit. note 36, p. 49.

[49] Harman, op. cit. note 46, p. 60.

[50] Ibid.

[51] Ibid.

GRAVE GOODS

Grave goods are not particularly common in the majority of the cemeteries under discussion. Shoes have already been considered as an aspect of the clothing of the dead. Other items encountered fall mainly under two headings; those related to the adornment of the body, whether specifically as part of the burial rite or as representing normal accoutrements (such as combs and other jewellery), and those which may be seen as accompaniments on the journey to the underworld, of which coins and pottery are the most common examples. Combs are one of the more regularly occurring object types, though numerically they are still very scarce. They are recorded at Crowmarsh, Frilford, Queenford Mill, White Horse Hill and Roden Downs. At Queenford Mill a single comb was the only certain object deliberately incorporated within an excavated grave, and here its position, at the back of the head, suggests that it was worn rather than being deposited as an accompanying grave good.

Other items of jewellery or personal adornment are encountered only occasionally. For example a single copper alloy bracelet was the only such object from the Alchester northern suburbs cemetery and a twisted copper alloy wire anklet occurred similarly in the 1992 excavations at Asthall. Shale and copper alloy bracelets and a bead necklace were found in a child burial at Radley II, and another inhumation from the same site produced a bone pin. At Bloxham a copper alloy bracelet, a penannular brooch, a ring and a coin of Valens were found together near grave 15, but the quality of excavation at this site means that the significance of the association is unclear and it is uncertain if these objects were thought to belong to the burial, to another otherwise unrecorded, or were simply stray finds. The bracelet, however, would be quite in keeping with the other evidence for objects of this type in late Roman graves in the region and probably derived from a grave. The significance of fragmentary iron objects in one grave each at Radley II and Crowmarsh is uncertain, though the object at Radley, a hoop, was possibly from a small wooden vessel or container.

Coins are amongst the more frequent grave good types, but their occurrence is quite variable and they are completely absent from several cemeteries, including Ashville, Asthall 1992, Curbridge, Queenford Mill and Church Piece, Warborough, though the excavated sample of the last of these is so small that the absence of coins here, while likely on the basis of the general character of the cemetery, cannot be regarded as conclusive. In those cemeteries where they are present and for which there are reasonably reliable data coins can occur in up to 20% of graves, although they are more commonly present in less than 10%. The exception is Roden Downs, where 7 of the 10 graves produced coins, with a total of 30 coins and a range of 2 to 9 coins per grave, where present. This cemetery is clearly exceptional, but the occurrence of multiple coins in graves is not unique to this site, the most obvious parallel being that of a grave at Radley I which also produced 9 coins, wrapped in linen cloth. The placing of coins in a container is also evidenced or suggested at Roden Downs, Frilford and White Horse Hill. In one burial at Roden Downs it was suggested that the five coins recovered, two of which were apparently found in the mouth, may originally have been contained in a leather purse laid on the face of the deceased, a practice also noted at Frilford.[52] At Roden Downs, where preservation conditions seem to have been exceptional, the placing of coins in a purse or bag, usually of leather, was quite common. At

[52] Hood and Walton op. cit. note 3, p. 40 (Roden Downs); Rolleston, op. cit. note 22, p. 427 (Frilford).

White Horse Hill one grave produced 4 coins 'placed between the cheek and the jaws.... wrapped in felt-like material',[53] an occurrence which echoes both the use of cloth at Radley I and the positioning of coins on the face at Roden Downs and Frilford. In all, five of the skeletons at White Horse Hill excavated in the 19th century were noted as having coins in the mouth, but there are no other clear instances of this practice in the region.

The only other significant grave good type was pottery. In almost all cases (with the obvious exception of cremation urns, as found at Asthall and Radley II) these were drinking vessels, most commonly beakers of Oxfordshire colour-coated ware, and occurred singly. At Crowmarsh, a vessel in one of two graves producing beakers was in a grey coarse ware fabric (the significance of a colour-coated ware base in a third grave here is less clear – this could have been a casual inclusion in the grave fill). As with coins the occurrence of pottery is inconsistent across the region, and only at Radley II, where 7 inhumations and 3 cremations had associated beakers, could they be described as moderately frequent. There were single examples of colour-coated ware beakers or comparable forms at Ashville, White Horse Hill and Roden Downs, the vessel at this last site occurring in the single lead-lined coffin there. One problematic site with regard to pottery is Bloxham, where vessels were said to have been associated perhaps with as many as eight burials. In two cases these are reported as having 'turned to dust' when moved.[54] Both these and two other vessels of which only one or two sherds survived appear to have been in reduced fabrics, and it may be that these were sherds incidentally incorporated in the grave fills rather than grave goods. A complete Oxford colour-coated bowl of Young type C81, dated to the 4th century,[55] was found close enough to grave 7 to be mentioned in the grave inventory and is assumed to have been associated with it. Elsewhere at this site items only listed in the pottery catalogue as being found 'near' other graves cannot be regarded as grave goods (see above).

Overall, therefore, the evidence for pottery vessels as grave goods is quite consistent. These were usually Oxford colour-coated ware vessels and the majority were of beaker or closely related forms. The use of drinking vessels as an accompaniment on the journey to the underworld seems clear. Other liquid containers, such as the flagons which occurred regularly for example in the cemetery at Lankhills, Winchester,[56] are notable by their absence. In the Oxford region the pottery component of the late Roman burial assemblage, if required at all, was reduced to the single essential drinking vessel. It may be noted that none of the cemeteries under discussion here has produced any evidence of glass vessels.

CHRONOLOGY

It has been implicit in the discussion so far that the inhumation cemeteries under consideration are later Roman, i.e. broadly of 3rd- to 4th-century date, in line with the general trend for inhumation to become the dominant burial rite in this period.[57] Unfortunately, however, the Oxfordshire evidence is also consistent with the broad pattern from the rest of Britain in its lack of well-dated 3rd-century burials.[58] While the 4th-century

[53] J.B. Davis and J. Thurnam, *Crania Britannica: Delineations and descriptions of the skulls of the aboriginal and early inhabitants of the British Isles: with notices of their other remains, vol. ii Plates and Descriptions* (1865), 4.

[54] W.F.J. Knight, 'A Romano-British Site at Bloxham, Oxon.', *Oxoniensia*, iii (1938), 46-7.

[55] C.J. Young, *The Roman Pottery of the Oxford Region* (BAR Brit. Ser. 43, 1977), 166.

[56] M. Fulford, 'Pottery Vessels', in Clarke, op. cit. note 26, p. 222.

[57] R.F.J. Jones, 'Cremation and Inhumation – change in the third century', in A. King and M. Henig (eds.), *The Roman West in the Third Century* (BAR S. 109, 1981), 15-19.

[58] Philpott, op. cit. note 13, p. 225.

position, here as elsewhere, is relatively clear, therefore, it is much less certain at what point in the 3rd century inhumation was widely adopted, or indeed if this was not almost entirely a 4th-century phenomenon. Where present, datable material, whether grave goods or other items accidentally incorporated in grave fills, appears to be consistently of the 4th century. This is clearly so in the case of coins. Coins were recovered from the cemeteries at Alchester northern suburbs, Crowmarsh, Frilford, Radley I and II, Stanton Harcourt Cricket Ground, White Horse Hill and Roden Downs and perhaps Bloxham. In every case where identification is secure the coins are of the 4th century and elsewhere, as at White Horse Hill, this seems almost certain. The absence of later 3rd-century coins is striking.

Dating based on pottery is less precise, and in the case of graves dated by the occurrence of Oxfordshire colour-coated ware a mid 3rd- to 4th-century date range rather than a strictly 4th-century one is theoretically possible. The most common colour-coated vessel type encountered in cemetery contexts, however, is the pentice-moulded beaker and related forms, either in full size or miniature versions.[59] None of the former group are thought to date before AD 270 and the latter group can probably all be assigned to the 4th century, even if the suggested date of AD 390-400 for one particular type (C102, found, for example, at Radley II) is probably over precise.[60] The one certainly identifiable vessel from the 19th-century excavations at White Horse Hill is of a type[61] dated after *c.* AD 340. Cumulatively, therefore, the available pottery evidence also suggests 4th-century rather than earlier dates for the graves which have associated vessels.

Dating the latest phases of these cemeteries is often difficult. As already discussed, there are few cases where sequences of intercutting graves can be used to define an extended chronology, and (at present) no instances where slight variations in grave alignment and other criteria have been used to try and establish successive phases of use within particular cemeteries. Establishing the terminal date is thus largely dependent upon the limited grave goods, and on coins in particular. Coins of the House of Valentinian (principally of the period AD 364-378) are relatively common, but later coins are rare, reflecting general patterns of loss across Roman Britain as a whole. There are a few instances of burials associated with very late Roman coins, however, of which the most striking is an inhumation from Frilford excavated in 1937, 'a foot above and behind the skull' of which lay a hoard of 34 coins,[62] mostly of the House of Theodosius and assignable (in terms of issue) to the last decade of the 4th century, though on the basis of the degree of wear on the coins it was suggested that the hoard 'cannot have been buried before about AD 440'.[63] While it is possible that the hoard was deposited subsequent to the burial and was not associated with it, a direct association was assumed in the original publication. The 'general' coin finds from the 1937 excavation in the cemetery area at Frilford also contained a high proportion of Theodosian issues.[64]

The Frilford evidence therefore suggests that burial was probably taking place in the cemetery into the early 5th century. This is no more than might be expected, but the situation can rarely be demonstrated so clearly. One certain example of a burial associated

[59] Young, op. cit. note 55, types C23-C33 and C101-106 respectively.

[60] Ibid. 174; cf. P. Booth, A. Boyle and G.D. Keevill, 'A Romano-British Kiln Site at Lower Farm, Nuneham Courtenay, and other sites on the Didcot to Oxford and Wootton to Abingdon water mains, Oxfordshire', *Oxoniensia*, lviii (1993), 163.

[61] Young, op. cit. note 55, type C38.

[62] J.S.P. Bradford and R.G. Goodchild, 'Excavations at Frilford, Berks., 1937-8', *Oxoniensia*, iv (1939), 56.

[63] C.H.V. Sutherland, 'Coins', in ibid., 65.

[64] Ibid. 61.

with late 4th- and even early 5th-century coins occurs at Rams Hill,[65] though this is not from a well-defined cemetery. At Queenford Mill, Dorchester, a different type of evidence is involved. Here a number of radiocarbon dates suggest that the use of the cemetery through the 5th century AD perhaps into the early 6th.[66] Not surprisingly these dates have been regarded with scepticism in some quarters, but there seems no particular reason to regard them as unreliable. If taken at face value, however, these dates do suggest a very unusual pattern compared to the conventional late-Roman dating of the other cemeteries under discussion. Yet it may be that the apparently distinctive character of Dorchester in the early 5th century was sustained throughout the rest of the century and allowed the maintenance of an orderly cemetery of late Roman (presumably Christian) character. It is unlikely that this cemetery can be regarded as typical of the region, though further evidence, both in confirmation (or otherwise) of the Dorchester dates and in examination of other apparently 4th-century cemeteries is certainly desirable.

Other aspects of 'continuity' of late Roman cemeteries have been discussed elsewhere and need not be rehearsed here in detail.[67] It suffices to note that the Alchester northern suburbs cemetery was succeeded by a nearby group of burials of similar character, though less regular alignment, which post-dated the infilling of the ditch which had formed the southern boundary of the cemetery in the 4th century. The ditch fill contained early Saxon pottery. This does not demonstrate that the main cemetery here was later in date than the 4th century, but the continuity of burial tradition into the 'early Saxon' period has been taken to suggest some continuity of a Romano-British community, presumably well into the 5th century, albeit with some relaxation of the formal separation of cemetery and settlement areas. The absence of detailed evidence for the relationship of late Roman and superimposed Anglo-Saxon graves at Frilford is particularly unfortunate, but overall there is sufficient evidence to hint that continuation of use of our cemeteries into the 5th century is at least possible in some cases, and very likely in one or two. Queenford Mill remains exceptional, however.

DISCUSSION

On present evidence no Roman cemeteries, as opposed to individual or very small groups of burials, are confidently identified in Oxfordshire before the 4th century AD. This remarkable fact is presumably an accident of discovery, since substantial early Roman (presumably cremation) cemeteries might be expected to have been associated at least with the major nucleated settlements such as Alchester and Dorchester, but the absence of such evidence means that the nature of burial in the region in the earlier Roman period is largely unknown except for individual instances. Local Iron Age burial traditions included the placing of the dead in features such as pits within settlements at sites like Gravelly Guy (Stanton Harcourt), but such 'special' or structured deposits were not necessarily a standard approach to disposal of the dead. Recently a group of unaccompanied crouched inhumations from Yarnton, situated just outside the contemporaneous settlement, has been dated to the Iron Age[68] and it has been suggested that such an occurrence may have been

[65] C.H.V. Sutherland, 'A Theodosian Silver Hoard from Rams Hill', *Antiqs. Jnl.* 20 (1940), 481-5.

[66]. Chambers, op. cit. note 30, pp. 58, 63.

[67] E.g. Henig and Booth, op. cit. note 4, pp. 194-5.

[68] G. Hey, A. Bayliss and A. Boyle, 'Iron Age Inhumation Burials at Yarnton, Oxfordshire', *Antiquity*, 73 (1999), 551-62.

more common than was previously believed. However, there is as yet no evidence that this rite was typical of the Iron Age of the region. Nevertheless such a tradition could have survived, alongside others, into the early Roman period, since we do not see in the Oxford region any significant evidence for the introduction of a south-eastern 'Belgic type' tradition of cremation burial in the late Iron Age. The well-known Watlington burial,[69] which is unlikely to have preceded the Roman conquest by more than a few decades at most (and may possibly have been post-conquest), is the exception that proves the rule.

It can be argued therefore that cremation was not a rite widely established in the region before the Roman period, and that this may help to explain the relative paucity of cremations in the region in the 1st and 2nd centuries – on the basis that cremation may still have represented an alien tradition for most people in the region, rather than being part of a 'cultural package' which had already been taken on board, as further south-east, before the Roman conquest. In rural settlements, in particular, the relative invisibility of burials through much of the Iron Age is arguably maintained until the later Roman period, suggesting that pre-conquest burial traditions, whether of 'Yarnton type' or (more likely) in some other fashion, probably remained in practice. It remains true of the early Roman period in our region, as elsewhere in Britain, that 'we simply do not know how most Romano-Britons were buried at that time'.[70] Cremation may have been seen as a distinctly 'Roman' rite, the adoption or rejection of which was a choice governed largely by social and deeply-embedded cultural factors.

It seems, therefore, that 'Romanisation' of burial practice beyond the major nucleated settlements only became widespread towards the end of the Roman period, at a time when inhumation was becoming firmly established as the principal (but not the only) burial rite in the region. This inference has also been drawn in studies of other parts of the north-western provinces of the empire.[71] The available evidence points to the 4th century, rather than earlier, as the period of origin and (for the most part) use of our cemeteries, but this should not be accepted uncritically. Is it possible, for example, that deposition of (dated) grave goods, particularly coins, was a chronologically restricted activity and that burials containing such items constituted only one or two phases in a longer continuum of late Roman burial practice?[72] Currently this does not seem likely, but such possibilities need to be considered.

Even in the 4th century, however, there was no single normative burial rite in the Oxford region. This is shown most clearly by the occurrence of some cremations and could also be indicated by the presence of prone and decapitated burials, which may mark quite significant departures from late-Roman inhumation 'orthodoxy'. Equally, the appearance in the region of relatively well-defined cemeteries, clearly limited in terms of chronological range, may also have been a phenomenon of limited significance in other respects. There is no certainty that the cemeteries discussed here, plus comparable undiscovered examples, accommodated the entire populations of the settlements with which they were associated. As already indicated, the normative burial rite (particularly for rural communities) in the early Roman period, as for the Iron Age, was probably one which leaves little or no archaeologically detectable trace. The late inhumation cemeteries may have come to represent the normative rite for the region in the 4th century, but even here other (low visibility) rites may have persisted. Clear-cut distinctions of character can be seen, for

[69] H. Case, 'A Late Belgic Burial at Watlington, Oxon', *Oxoniensia*, xxiii (1958), 139-42.

[70] R.F.J. Jones, 'Cultural Change in Roman Britain', in R.F.J. Jones (ed.), *Roman Britain: Recent Trends* (1991), 117.

[71] Pearce, op. cit. note 40, p. 3.

[72] Cf. Morris, op. cit. note 44, p. 25.

example, in contemporary burials at sites such as Ashford (Northants) and Ilchester (Somerset). At both sites small, 'managed' cemeteries and distinctly different 'backland' burials are probably exactly contemporary.[73] Such distinctions may have originated in religious belief or other aspects of social or economic status, but a simple inference that backyard burials (or burials in and beside other archaeological features in a rural context) are an *a priori* indicator of low status is not sustainable. Just as the presence of 'managed' cemeteries at these sites did not preclude a rather different approach to the disposition of burials elsewhere around these settlements, so other more conservative approaches to disposal of the dead might equally have remained in practice. Closer integration of cemetery and contemporary settlement studies, in particular consideration of the correlation between developments in burial practice in the context of changes in settlement character and patterns, may help to shed further light on this question.[74]

The main characteristics of the late-Roman cemeteries of the region are reasonably clear and the data allow categorisation of the known sites in several ways. One of the clearest distinctions is between rural and 'urban' cemeteries – or at least, those associated with the larger nucleated settlements. On present evidence it is only in (some of) the latter that formal provision of defined enclosures for burial is seen (with the possible exception of Roden Downs); approximately west-east alignment of burials is more consistently practised and the incidence of both decapitation and grave goods is on average significantly lower than in the rural cemeteries. Some associations, such as the occurrence of footwear (as defined by hobnails, but see qualification in note 39 above), are found exclusively in rural cemeteries in our region, though exceptions to this occur outside the region, most notably at Lankhills, as already mentioned.

An important problem is to determine the extent to which individual grave or overall cemetery alignment was determined by ritual considerations and to what extent by the logic of the pre-existing landscape layout. Again it may be possible to draw a distinction between rural and 'urban' cemeteries. A number of the former were clearly laid out in relation to existing boundary features, whether trackways, field boundaries or, in the case of Uffington, utilising a prehistoric monument. There was a broad tendency for these to be aligned roughly north-south, but it is impossible to be certain if this was a matter of choice or was simply fortuitous, though the former may be suspected. Outside the region, analysis of the major cemetery at Poundbury, Dorchester (Dorset) resulted in the conclusion that grave alignment was 'based on the disposition of adjacent major topographical features'.[75] In the Oxfordshire sample similar pragmatic considerations also influenced the siting of some 'urban' cemeteries, such as that in the Alchester northern suburbs, but in the case of the more formally defined cemetery enclosures it may be that their establishment involved some local reorganisation of the landscape to accommodate considerations of appropriate alignment, rather than simply fitting these features into existing patterns of boundaries wherever it was convenient to do this. Perhaps the clearest example that the alignment of cemetery enclosures was carefully considered comes from Asthall, where the enclosure excavated in 1992 was on a significantly different alignment from the earlier (2nd- and 3rd-century), underlying features. Arguably, this was a defined cemetery enclosure, rather than

[73] S. Esmonde Cleary, 'Putting the Dead in their Place: Burial location in Roman Britain', in Pearce et al. op. cit. note 4, pp. 127-42.

[74] Cf. Morris, op. cit. note 44, p. 26.

[75] Woodward, op. cit. note 43, p. 229.

simply a case of use of a convenient 'backland' area.[76] At Queenford Mill, Dorchester, earlier alignments were again ignored by the cemetery enclosure, but these were of prehistoric date, so the impact of the imposition of the enclosure upon the earlier Roman landscape remains unclear.

Evidence that grave orientation was considered to be of some importance is seen clearly in those cases where a change of alignment occurs. Although this is only noted in a few cases the change is usually from (roughly) north-south to west-east. In none of these cases is there any clear prosaic reason for the change and it may be assumed that questions of belief relating to the nature of the afterlife are involved. Again, this change is seen most clearly in relation to major nucleated settlements (here Asthall and Frilford), though it may also have occurred at Ashville and possibly at Radley II. Its chronology, however, is not very clear, though it may be noted that this development has been placed in the period AD 320-340 at Colchester.[77]

Aspects in which there is on present evidence no clear distinction between rural and 'urban' cemeteries are the gender structures of the buried populations. There are hints that disproportionate representation of males may be a more consistent feature of rural sites, but Frilford also appears to conform to this pattern. There is no indication of meaningful concentrations of male or female burials in particular cemeteries. The question of age structure is more problematic; perinatal or neonatal burials are rare or absent in some cemeteries but reasonably common in others. As has been widely observed, the status of such burials allowed them to be placed within settlements. Much the clearest instance of this in our region is the concentration of infant burials at Barton Court Farm. Some 26 of these were localised in one corner of the late Roman villa enclosure and a substantial number of others were more widely scattered across the site, though by no means all of these were of Roman date. These burials recall the very large numbers of infants found within the villa complex at Hambleden, Bucks.[78] It has been suggested that one or both of the nearby Radley cemeteries might represent the burial place of the non-infant members of the Barton Court Farm community. The Radley I burials included two individuals aged between 15 and 20, the remaining 30 all being adults.[79] At Radley II, however, some 26% of the cemetery population consisted of children up to about the age of 14, though none of these was necessarily neonatal. This distinction between the Radley I and II populations might suggest that they served different communities, though there might have been other factors distinguishing them which were not recoverable archaeologically.

Leaving aside the question of the burial of perinatal and neonatal infants, there are indications of considerable variation in the representation of children. In some cases the total cemetery populations are too small for such variations to be meaningful, but children of various ages are well represented at the 'urban' Alchester northern suburbs cemetery, at Asthall 1992 and Queenford Mill, and at the rural cemetery of Radley II. The contrast between Radley I and Radley II in this respect has already been mentioned, though the explanation remains unknown. With the exception of the latter site and Crowmarsh, however, children usually total 10% or (often significantly) less of rural cemetery

[76] Contra Esmonde Cleary op. cit. note 73, p. 129.

[77] P. Crummy, 'The Cemeteries of Roman Colchester', in N. Crummy, P. Crummy and C. Crossan, *Excavations of Roman and Later Cemeteries, Churches and Monastic Site in Colchester, 1971-88* (Colchester Archaeol. Rep. 9, 1993), 266.

[78] A.H. Cocks, 'A Romano-British Homestead in the Hambleden Valley, Bucks', *Archaeologia*, 71 (1921), 150.

[79] Harman et al., op. cit. note 9, p. 149.

populations. The extent to which poor preservation is a factor here is uncertain, but it may be noted that the representation of children at Alchester northern suburbs was high despite the very shallow surviving grave depths discussed above. In the case of Asthall 1992 it is possible that the high incidence of child burials was related to the layout of the site, since the excavated sample probably formed the extreme south-east corner of the cemetery enclosure. Similarly, Harman noted a substantial difference between the representation of children in the 1972 and 1981 samples at Queenford Farm, Dorchester, and it is possible that this also indicates some variation in the location of interments of varying status (in this case defined by age) across the cemetery.

Recent research has emphasised that the composition of grave assemblages in the late Iron Age and early Roman period are not only intended to ensure the comfort of the deceased in the afterlife but also involve structured processes of interpretations and representation of the status of the deceased which may not have reflected exactly the true situation in life.[80] Grave assemblages are not necessarily simple reflections or transferences of daily life into a different context. Something similar may be argued to be equally valid in the late Roman period. The widespread occurrence of burials with no associated objects of any kind no more reflects the reality of day to day life than do burials with finds assemblages which may have been carefully selected to define an idealised identity. The omission of grave goods is therefore a positive and conscious (though not necessarily thought-through) action. At the same time, the deliberate and artificial structuring of grave assemblages (or the lack of them) should not be taken to mean that there was not a very close integration of matters of belief into daily life, a point emphasised recently by several writers.[81]

In terms of matters of belief, the question of the identification of Christian burials or cemeteries in late Roman Britain remains a fundamental issue[82] which has been discussed at length in some recent work[83] and a number of Oxfordshire sites have been included in this discussion. The problems associated with the identification of 4th-century Christian cemeteries have been reviewed on several occasions[84] and criteria for such identifications were set out at length by Watts in 1991.[85] Such criteria, some of which carry more weight than others, may serve as a guide to the identification of Christian cemeteries but cannot be regarded as completely reliable indicators of Christian (by their presence) or non-Christian burials (by their absence), because they do not take account of individual departures from apparently established practice; 'A normative set of religious beliefs – orthodoxy – may not have a direct relationship with a normative set of practices – orthopraxy'.[86] Equally it is simplistic to view individual late Roman cemeteries as exclusively Christian or pagan, nor should either of these groupings be regarded as monolithic – late Roman Christianity was not necessarily any more internally uniform than late Roman paganism, as literary

[80] J. Pearce, 'From Death to Deposition: the sequence of ritual in cremation burials of the Roman period', in C. Forcey, J. Hawthorne and R. Witcher (eds.), *TRAC 97, Proceedings of the seventh annual theoretical Roman archaeology conference* (1998), 99-100. See also M. Parker Pearson, *The Archaeology of Death and Burial* (1999), 9.

[81] E.g. M. Millett, 'Re-thinking Religion in Romanization', in J. Metzler, M. Millett, N. Roymans and J. Slofstra (eds.), *Integration in the Early Roman West: the role of culture and ideology* (1995), 98.

[82] Though Philpott (op. cit. note 3, p. 240) takes an essentially pessimistic view 'the direct evidence of Christians [sc. from burials] is exiguous'.

[83] See particularly D. Watts, *Christians and Pagans in Roman Britain* (1991) and *Religion in Late Roman Britain* (1998).

[84] E.g. C. Thomas, *Christianity in Roman Britain to AD 500* (1981), 231-9; cf. Philpott, op. cit. note 13, p. 239.

[85] Watts, op. cit. note 83 (1991), pp. 38-89, summarised on p. 79.

references to numerous heresies attest. Some of the complex social, economic and religious interactions that can take place in cemetery contexts, many of which may leave no direct archaeologically detectable traces, have been discussed by Williams.[87] Indeed Watts' analyses identify potential Christian burials at an intra-cemetery level in a few cases, but on these criteria (or any others for that matter) it is hard to see how, in most cases, intermingled Christian and pagan burials, in a broadly similar late-Roman tradition, could be distinguished with confidence.

In late-Roman Britain the evolution of the dominant beliefs, as suggested by mortuary practice, from 'pagan' to 'Christian' can be postulated in some cases, perhaps most clearly at Butt Road, Colchester.[88] Such a development underlines the point that Christian practice was not necessarily exclusive in its requirements with regard to previous or contemporary use of cemetery sites by others, though Philpott has pointed out that many characteristic late Roman (particularly urban) cemeteries composed of east-west findless inhumations in rows, are often established *de novo*, regardless of whether or not they are clearly Christian in character.[89] The non-exclusive nature of some other probable Christian cemeteries, however, can be demonstrated spatially rather than chronologically at sites such as Poundbury, Dorchester, Dorset, where cemeteries on contrasting alignments were broadly contemporary, with Poundbury cemetery 3 generally accepted as Christian while the adjacent cemetery 2 was not.[90] At Lankhills, Winchester, a group of burials associated with a gully, perhaps the bedding trench for a hedge, have been interpreted as possibly Christian,[91] whereas the majority of the associated (and contemporary) burials were arguably not.

Returning to Oxfordshire, the identification of Christian cemeteries or cemetery components is generally hampered by the small size of the available samples. Watts has suggested that the group of west-east inhumations at Radley II might reflect Christian influence in this cemetery, the rest of which she characterises as 'a typical 4th-century pagan cemetery'.[92] Watts' 1991 analysis of late-Roman cemeteries also considered Radley I, Frilford and Queenford Farm. Using the criteria mentioned above,[93] of which the essential ones were considered to be west-east inhumations, undisturbed, supine and extended burials, presence of neonatal or very young infants, absence of decapitation, footwear and grave goods of vessels, animals and birds,[94] all were discounted as Christian cemeteries, Frilford on the basis of the presence of disturbed burials and Queenford Farm on the basis of the absence of neonates. The evidence is perhaps insufficient to allow the case of Frilford to be judged clearly, but there must be some doubt about Watts' assessment of Queenford Farm. While it is admitted that neonates are absent, other children are well-represented and the excavated burials, while numerous, form only about 10% of the estimated total cemetery population,[95]

[86] D. Petts, 'Burial and Gender in late- and sub-Roman Britain' in Forcey et al., op. cit. note 80, p. 112.

[87] H.M.R. Williams, 'Identities and Cemeteries in Roman and Early Medieval Britain', in Baker et al., op. cit. note 2, pp. 96-100.

[88] N. Crummy and C. Crossan, 'Excavations at Butt Road 1976-79, 1986 and 1988', in Crummy et al., op. cit. note 77, pp. 4-162; D. Watts, 'An Assessment of the Evidence for Christianity at the Butt Road Site', in ibid. 192-202.

[89] Philpott, op. cit. note 13, p. 239.

[90] Farwell and Molleson, op. cit. note 17. The terminology is that of Watts, op. cit. note 83 (1991), 47, cemetery 3 being the main west-east cemetery in the excavators' Site C, cemetery 2 being principally the north-south group in the peripheral eastern Site D.

[91] Clarke, op. cit. note 26, pp. 429-30; Watts, op. cit. note 83 (1991), 84-5.

[92] Watts, op. cit. note 83 (1998), 22. She sensibly falls short, however, of claiming that the west-east group definitely are Christian.

[93] Watts, op. cit. note 83 (1991), 79.

leaving the possibility that neonates could be among the unexcavated burials. Moreover, considerable variation in the occurrence of child burials was noted between the samples from the 1972 and 1981, again suggesting that there may have been some spatial segregation by age within the cemetery and allowing the possibility that neonates occurred elsewhere.

A number of writers have accepted the excavator's cautious conclusion and assumed that Queenford Farm is likely to have been a largely if not entirely Christian cemetery.[96] While it cannot necessarily be proved, on present evidence this site appears to be much the closest to a Christian cemetery that we have within the region, along with (most probably) the nearby cemetery of Church Piece, Warborough. These are the clearest (though not necessarily the only) examples of characteristic 'managed' late Roman cemeteries amongst our sites. Queenford Farm, remarkably, appears to show the survival of a managed cemetery significantly beyond the 'end' of the Roman period. In this respect it is highly unusual in the region, arguably reflecting the unique circumstances of Dorchester at the transition from late-Roman Britain to Anglo-Saxon England.

[94] Ibid. 88.

[95] Chambers, op. cit. note 30, p. 69.

[96] E.g. B.C. Burnham and J. Wacher, *The 'small towns' of Roman Britain* (1990), 121; cf. Petts, op. cit. note 86, p. 118, who even argues that the presence of the cemetery and 'possible continuity' on the later abbey site suggest that Dorchester had episcopal status in the late Roman period.