Romano-British Trackways in the Upper Thames Valley

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SUMMARY

Trackways were a widespread and prominent component of Roman landscapes in the upper Thames valley, but their occurrence is often taken for granted. This article considers their establishment in the context of long-term trajectories of settlement development as well as more specific chronologies. Aspects of their role in facilitating transport through an increasingly regulated landscape are discussed, and the inception of extensive networks of trackways is linked to wide-ranging reorganisation of much of the rural settlement pattern in the early second century AD.

There is a long tradition of studying Roman roads in Britain, both collectively and at the level of individual routes.[1] Much of the work in this tradition has taken as its starting point the documentary evidence for Roman roads, preserved in sources such as itineraries,[2] and has applied field techniques to their identification and elucidation. These roads formed the skeleton of a strategic infrastructure, but they would have been rarely used by a majority of the inhabitants of Roman Britain. For the latter, preoccupied mainly with the day-to-day workings of the countryside, communication at a more local level was the primary concern. This would have been effected through minor roads and tracks, and very likely often by simply walking across fields with no closely defined path to follow. Trackways were a highly visible and significant component of the Roman rural settlement pattern of the upper Thames valley, as they were of many other areas of Roman Britain,[3] but is there anything more to be said about them than this? In particular, does their appearance provide insights into changes in rural society in the upper Thames valley (and elsewhere) in the Roman period?

Some relatively recent work on Roman roads – that is to say the basic framework of that transport network – has moved away from traditional emphases on details of alignments and construction and the nature of associated travel towards consideration of the social significance of roads and their symbolic importance, variously as means of integration or domination and repression, and in terms of the experience of movement through the landscapes traversed by the major roads.[4] In a regional context some aspects of these approaches have been take up by Tim Copeland in his recent work on Akeman Street,[5] but his study did not extend to consideration of the minor routes that might have connected with and related to that major road. The focus here is on these minor elements of the Roman land transport network of the region, though the discussion makes reference to other linear features such as settlement and field boundaries as potentially related phenomena. For individual places mentioned in the text see Fig. 1.

1 W. Long, *Observations on Roman Roads in the South of Britain* (London, 1836); T. Codrington, *Roman Roads in Britain* (London, 1903); I.D. Margary, *Roman Roads in Britain* (London, 1955); H. Davies, *Roads in Roman Britain* (Stroud, 2008).

2 A.L.F. Rivet and C. Smith, *The Place–Names of Roman Britain* (London, 1979).

3 K. and P. Dark, *The Landscape of Roman Britain* (Stroud, 1997), pp. 50–8; J. Taylor, *An Atlas of Roman Rural Settlement in England*, CBA Research Report, 151 (York, 2007), pp. 57–65.

4 For example, P. Rush, 'Roman Roads: Phenomenological Perspectives on Roads in the Landscape', in C. Forcey et al. (eds.), *TRAC 97, Proceedings of the Seventh Annual Theoretical Roman Archaeology Conference, Nottingham* (Oxford, 1998), pp. 60–70; R. Laurence, *The Roads of Roman Italy: Mobility and Cultural Change* (London, 1999); C. Adams and R. Laurence (eds.), *Travel and Geography in the Roman Empire* (London, 2001).

5 T. Copeland, *Akeman Street: Moving through Iron Age and Roman Landscapes* (Stroud, 2009).

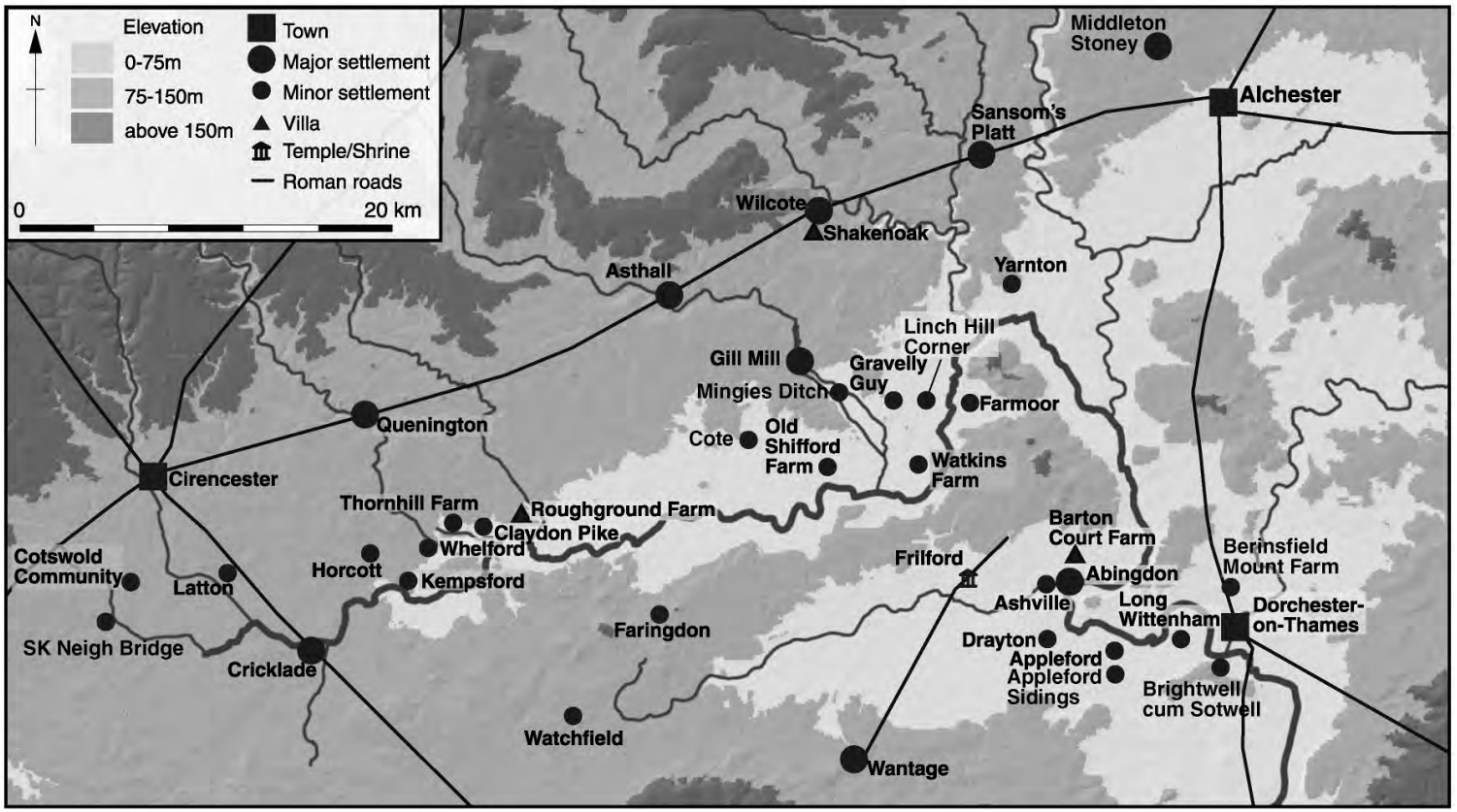

Fig. 1. Map showing location of sites mentioned in the text.

FIELD BOUNDARIES AND SETTLEMENT ENCLOSURE DITCHES

The construction, or at least physical definition, of roads is an obvious means of imposing order on a landscape, but there are other ways of doing this. In periods before roads are readily identified in the archaeological record field systems could potentially have performed some of the same functions. The introduction of field systems defined by ditches (and therefore probably with associated elements such as banks and hedges) in the middle Bronze Age marked a new way of organising parts of the landscape of the region.[6] Even though such field systems were quite limited in extent compared to later patterns, they seem to indicate an intensity of landscape (re)configuration not really seen again in this region until the late Iron Age. The evidence of commonality of alignments between middle Bronze-Age and Romano-British field systems, for example at sites such as Appleford,[7] suggests that in some places at least elements of the middle Bronze-Age pattern survived over a very extended period. At the very least, the Appleford area continued in agricultural use with no significant indication of the woodland regeneration that would inevitably have occurred had this not been the case. There is, however, little or no evidence that the field boundaries were actively maintained during the Iron Age,[8] although it is possible that such maintenance did occur at the level of surviving hedges, but was not manifested in ditch digging. Alternatively, approaches to the use of landscape in the Iron Age may have been so different from what preceded them that formal division was not considered necessary, but this is hard to imagine at a time when, in this region at least, it is likely that population and corresponding pressure on land was gradually expanding.

Definition of settlement sites (other than hillforts) by ditches forming enclosures was hardly seen (if at all) in the early Iron Age in this region, but it became more apparent in the middle Iron Age, with good examples at sites such as Mingies Ditch, Hardwick with Yelford,[9] and Watkins Farm, Northmoor.[10] Even at this time, however, evidence for definition of fields by means of ditch digging is very rare, and it may be no coincidence that the two sites just mentioned may have been principally pastoral in focus, a form of husbandry that required at least periodic use of enclosures to contain stock. At Yarnton, where much attention has been paid to the wider agricultural landscape away from settlement foci, there is no convincing evidence for the presence of fields defined by ditches before the early Roman period.[11] By contrast, the presence of gullies surrounding individual circular buildings is well-established, both at Yarnton and at other sites, such as Gravelly Guy and Ashville,[12] where multiple examples of such gullies occur. It is clear that this was a development of the middle Iron Age, early Iron-Age houses on these sites having no associated linear features.

6 G. Lambrick with M. Robinson, *The Thames through Time. The Archaeology of the Gravel Terraces of the Upper and Middle Thames. Volume 2: The Thames Valley in Late Prehistory: 1500 BC–AD 50*, Thames Valley Landscapes Monograph, 29 (2009), pp. 79–80; D.T. Yates, 'Bronze Age Field Systems in the Thames Valley', *Oxford Journal of Archaeology*, 18, no. 2 (1999), pp. 157–70.

7 P. Booth and A. Simmonds, *Appleford's Earliest Farmers: Archaeological Work at Appleford Sidings, Oxfordshire, 1993–2000*, Oxford Archaeology Occasional Paper, 17 (2009), pp. 132–3.

8 Lambrick, *Thames through Time*, pp. 80–3.

9 T.G. Allen and M.A. Robinson, *The Prehistoric Landscape and Iron Age Enclosed Settlement at Mingies Ditch, Hardwick-with-Yelford, Oxon*, Thames Valley Landscapes Monograph, 2 (1993).

10 T.G. Allen, *An Iron Age and Romano-British Enclosed Settlement at Watkins Farm, Northmoor, Oxon*, Thames Valley Landscapes Monograph, 1 (1990).

11 G. Hey et al., *Yarnton: Iron Age and Romano-British Settlement and Landscape: Results of Excavations 1990–8*, Thames Valley Landscapes Monograph, forthcoming.

12 G. Lambrick and T. Allen, *Gravelly Guy, Stanton Harcourt: The Development of a Prehistoric and Romano-British Community*, Thames Valley Landscapes Monograph, 21 (2004); 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 Research Report, 28 (London, 1978).

By the late Iron Age, settlement enclosure was de rigueur in this region, although the ditches themselves were often not particularly substantial and they often enclosed individual elements within larger agglomerations of such units. In this respect they may contrast with the approach to enclosure seen north and south of the Thames valley, for example in association with banjo enclosures, where the ditches often appear to be particularly prominent (this has, however, rarely been demonstrated by excavation). There is also a marked contrast with, for example, some of the Iron-Age enclosures of this period in Northamptonshire,[13] where defence or significant status display seems to have been especially important.

A particular characteristic of the enclosure ditches of the late Iron Age in the upper Thames valley – often defining a small area and in some cases perhaps surrounding a single structure, as for example at Linch Hill Corner, Stanton Harcourt –[14] is the frequency with which some were redug. This characteristic can give rise to extremely complex plans, with the multiple recutting producing the appearance of very wide features, often rather irregular in form. Good examples are seen at Thornhill Farm and Claydon Pike in the Fairford area of Gloucestershire,[15] in Enclosure 1 at Gravelly Guy (rather more rectilinear than usual),[16] and at Yarnton and probably at Faringdon.[17] An example on a slightly larger scale and spanning the late Iron Age and early Roman period is seen further down the valley at Brightwell-cum-Sotwell.[18]

The degree of recutting of these ditches is particularly noticeable given the relatively short period of time spanned by the late Iron Age period in the upper Thames region – perhaps as little as fifty years – even though the precise chronology of this period remains a subject for debate, and the process certainly seems to continue into the early years of the Roman period. At Brightwell-cum-Sotwell, for example, the fact that the curvilinear enclosure just mentioned was 'very actively maintained' was specifically commented upon.[19] The frequency of enclosure definition at this time, combined with the relative slightness of at least some of these ditches at sites such as Yarnton, may suggest that the act of redefinition had acquired a social and perhaps even a symbolic significance, but it is less clear if this came about as a result of increasing pressure on land and a corresponding interest in the clear demarcation of domestic and other units, or reflected other concerns.

LATE IRON-AGE TRACKWAYS

Trackways defined by ditches also appear as a component of settlement patterns in this period, having apparently been absent in this form earlier in the Iron Age, although this is not to suggest that the landscape in that period necessarily lacked means of defining routes enabling movement through it. In this context the definition of trackways in the late Iron Age need not be seen specifically as indicating an increase in the extent of communication between settlements above the levels already practised, but rather the appearance of trackway ditches was perhaps part of a process of formalisation of boundaries both at settlement level and beyond. It was simply an

13 For example, B. Dix and D. Jackson, 'Some Late Iron Age Defended Enclosures in Northamptonshire', in A. Gibson (ed.), *Midlands Prehistory*, BAR BS, 204 (1989), pp. 158–79.

14 W.F. Grimes, 'Excavations at Stanton Harcourt, Oxon., 1940', *Oxoniensia*, 8–9 (1943–4), pp. 19–63.

15 D. Jennings et al., *Thornhill Farm, Fairford, Gloucestershire. An Iron Age and Roman Pastoral Site in the Upper Thames Valley*, Thames Valley Landscapes Monograph, 23 (2004), pp. 31–4; D. Miles et al., *Iron Age and Roman Settlement in the Upper Thames Valley: Excavations at Claydon Pike and other Sites within the Cotswold Water Park*, Thames Valley Landscapes Monograph, 26 (2007), pp. 69–75.

16 Lambrick and Allen, *Gravelly Guy,* pp. 164–9.

17 J. Cook et al. 'Excavations of an Iron Age Site at Coxwell Road, Faringdon', *Oxoniensia*, 69 (2004), pp. 215–16 (ditch group 3).

18 T. Wilson, *A Narrow View across the Upper Thames Valley in Later Prehistoric and Roman Times: Archaeological Excavations along the Chalgrove to East Ilsley Gas Pipeline*, BAR BS, 467 (2008), pp. 230, 237–8.

19 Ibid. p. 127.

extension beyond the settlement enclosure itself of the processes of repeated definition applied in the context of the enclosure. It is questionable how necessary it was for the inhabitants of rural settlements in the region at this time to undertake long-distance movement on a regular basis – something that is likely to have changed in the Roman period (see further below).

However this may be, it is also highly questionable whether the definition of trackways in the late Iron Age regularly took the distinctive forms seen later in the Roman period. This seems to be assumed by Taylor, who claims that within the Thames valley 'there appears to have been a characteristic late Iron-Age and early Roman landscape of dispersed, enclosed and linear system settlements linked by an extensive network of trackways. The latter were often established upon an earlier first-millennium BC framework of settlement and land use'.[20] By their nature, the chronology of trackways, based on the material derived from the fills of their defining ditches, is not easily established, but it is arguable that the detailed evidence does not sustain Taylor's characterisation of the late Iron-Age (or earlier) landscape in respect of trackways. That trackways existed at this time in some form is not in doubt, but recognisable evidence for the 'extensive network of trackways' in this period is in fact very limited.

Two examples from the western part of our region help to underline this point. At Cotswold Community School, Somerford Keynes the first elements of settlement-related enclosure date to the middle-late Iron Age (although the domestic unit probably lay outside the enclosure at this time) and were augmented in the late Iron Age to early Roman period, by which time the principal enclosure was associated with a trackway running north from its north-eastern corner. A more extensive north–south fence line was associated with this trackway, but it is uncertain if this feature bounded a trackway south of the enclosure, or simply defined the edge of a stream course.[21] Clear-cut definition of the trackway over a distance of almost 700 m was achieved for the first time probably in the second quarter of the second century AD, by defining it with ditches which were then periodically recut throughout the rest of the Roman period. A second trackway, roughly parallel to the first and *c.*260–300 m west of it, was established at about the same time, although it was clearly of lesser importance.[22] At Totterdown Lane, Horcott, the 'East Site' had a complex sequence of development in which, once again, fragmentary hints of trackway definition are present for the first time in a phase dated about the middle of the first century AD,[23] but the establishment of well-defined ditched trackways with associated field systems was assigned to a broad second- to third-century phase,[24] although there may have been a degree of continuity of alignment through the early Roman period.[25] In the adjacent 'West Site' trackway and associated field boundary ditches seem to have been exclusively of second-century and later date.[26]

These sites appear to be typical of the region, and their extent, with examined areas of several hectares each, increases confidence that the picture that they present is representative. In archaeological terms, therefore, trackways become particularly visible in the upper Thames valley landscape from the early second century onwards. In many cases their appearance can be linked with wide-ranging changes in spatial organisation of the landscape that are apparent at this time. In other cases, where it is less clear that they involved significant remodelling of earlier spatial patterns of settlement, characteristic configurations of trackways and settlement layout, readily identifiable from aerial photographs, can also be shown, on the basis of excavation at sites such as

20 Taylor, *Atlas of Roman Rural Settlement*, p. 66.

21 K. Powell et al., *Evolution of a Farming Community in the Upper Thames Valley. Excavation of a Prehistoric, Roman and Post-Roman Landscape at Cotswold Community, Gloucestershire and Wiltshire. Volume 1: Site Narrative and Overviews*, Thames Valley Landscapes Monograph, 31 (2010), p. 113.

22 Ibid. pp. 119–22.

23 J. Pine and S. Preston, *Iron Age and Roman Settlement and Landscape at Totterdown Lane, Horcott near Fairford, Gloucestershire*, TVAS Monograph, 6 (2004), p. 18.

24 Ibid. pp. 24–5.

25 Ibid. p. 22.

26 Ibid. p. 46–7.

Roughground Farm and Appleford,[27] to date from the same period or later. While in some cases the identified trackway ditches may have represented a formalisation of pre-existing routes, or simply the latest phases of reworked but well-established boundary features, the evidence for the latter is in fact exiguous and the overall impression in the upper Thames valley, at least, is that there were simply more, more extensive, and better-defined trackways in the Roman period than at any previous time, and that these were particularly evident from the second century onwards.

REASONS FOR THE GROWTH OF TRACKWAYS

This increased visibility of trackways in the Roman landscape can be interpreted in many ways, but possible factors of particular importance include: changes in concepts of property ownership and the need to define land-holdings, whatever the basis on which they are held; maximisation of exploitation of the rural landscape; increased travel through the countryside, which encouraged the development of means of definition of that travel, and perhaps its control; and changes in the technology of travel which required different provision from that which had sufficed up to this time. Each of these possibilities deserves detailed consideration.

Changes in Property Ownership

We are still substantially ignorant of the ways in which land was held during the Roman period in Britain. There is general agreement that at least some land was privately owned from a relatively early date, but it is much less clear if this practice was widespread. It is equally unclear whether changes in the legal basis of landholding were gradual or were adopted wholesale as a result of Roman intervention, or whether significant regional variation in tenurial patterns was evident within the Roman period. The trend to private ownership may have increased with the passage of time. Even this is not certain, but it is possible that such changes were one factor contributing to the increased visibility of field and trackway boundaries in the course of the period (in addition to settlement boundaries, which had been a more constant feature from an earlier time). This is based in part on the assumption that definition of the limits of privately held land would have been a priority for owners (and perhaps tenants as well). Another critical factor in this regard, however, will have been the requirement for landholdings to be defined for taxation purposes. Tax assessments would have been facilitated by, and indeed probably necessitated, clear identification of property. This did not have to be achieved with the used of ditched boundary features, but these would have been useful elements in such a definition process.

Agrarian Development

The extent to which all the potential agricultural land in the upper Thames valley was fully utilised before the Roman period is uncertain. We tend to assume that there was relatively little 'spare' land even by the middle Iron Age. Such an assumption may well be justified, but it is likely that land use was less intensive at this time than later. Botanical evidence for the Roman period indicates the exploitation of relatively marginal land (including damp environments) for arable agriculture in a way that was not seen earlier. Similarly, in the well-studied landscape of Stanton Harcourt, patterns of exploitation of the gravel terraces can be shown to be significantly different in the Iron Age and Roman periods.[28] While the relatively non-intensive use of the 'core area' of the terrace adjacent to Gravelly Guy for pasture in the Iron Age may have had its basis in the established custom and social structure of the groups utilising it, rather than in a lack of desire

[27] T.G. Allen et al., *Excavations at Roughground Farm, Lechlade, Gloucestershire. A Prehistoric and Roman Landscape*, Oxford University Committee for Archaeology (Oxford, 1993); J. Hinchliffe and R. Thomas, 'Archaeological Investigations at Appleford', *Oxoniensia*, 45 (1980), pp. 9–111. See further below.

[28] Lambrick and Allen, *Gravelly Guy*.

to use this area for arable, there is no particular indication that there was any need for such use in this period. The approach in the Roman period was quite different and again supports a view that maximisation of potential arable output had become more important. This trend, which may have resulted in part in a reduction in the degree of flexibility in land utlisation, may also have resulted in a perceived need for closer definition of space, particularly of arable fields and of the means of access to and between them.

Increased Mobility

Travel and therefore traffic grew considerably in the Roman period. In the developed society of Roman Britain there was more movement through the landscape than there had ever been before. This was not just because there were more people, but also because their needs were different and their horizons were wider than their predecessors. We can distinguish between 'outside' and 'inside' travellers. The former include official travellers – these would in any case have been principally confined to the major roads – and itinerant traders and craftsmen, some of whom may have come from considerable distances. It is impossible to quantify how much more numerous the latter would have been in the Roman period than earlier, but the much wider range of material culture available to and (in some cases) utilised in rural settlements during the period suggests that at least some increase in the volume of such traffic is likely. It is probable, however, that the 'inside' travellers – members of the local population – were also considerably more numerous and mobile than hitherto. 'Inside' movements could have included visits to market, to shrines for religious festivals, and to larger centres for official purposes such as census registration and payment of taxes.

A key contrast between 'inside' and 'outside' travellers relates to the issue of familiarity. To a large extent 'inside' travellers moved through landscapes that were familiar, though decreasingly so with distance. By contrast, most 'outside' travellers are likely to have been moving through unfamiliar landscapes, whether on local trackways or on major roads. For them, the process of negotiating the latter was informed by itineraries and related sources of information.[29] No such assistance was available for the minor routes, negotiation of which would have been dependent upon local knowledge. (That this was a widespread consideration is illustrated by the specific information given by Pliny about reaching his villa at Laurentum, even though this was only seventeen miles from Rome itself.)[30]

The increased mobility of population seen across the Roman empire is likely to have had knock-on effects in terms of movement to visit more distant relatives and connections. Even if such changes made only a very small difference at a local level (as is probable) they would still have contributed to the other factors that resulted in a significant cumulative increase in movement through the local landscape. This increase would, in turn, have contributed to the need to define such movement. A specific example might be the movement of animals to the market in the local small town. Such movements are likely to have occurred on a scale and with a degree of regularity not seen in the Iron Age. In a landscape where intensification of cereal production was also important, segregation of the animals from these crops would have become increasingly necessary.

New Modes of Transport

Finally, it should be noted that an increase in the use of wheeled transport would have had implications for the nature of routes through the countryside. Again the increase cannot be

[29] K. Brodersen, 'The Presentation of Geographical Knowledge for Travel and Transport in the Roman World', in Adams and Laurence, *Travel and Geography in the Roman Empire*, pp. 7–21; B. Salway, 'Travel, *Itineraria* and *Tabellaria*', in ibid., pp. 22–66.

[30] Pliny the Younger, *Letters* II, 17.

quantified, and while it is likely that much use of wheeled vehicles was confined to the major roads it is clear that this was not exclusively the case, as is demonstrated by the occurrence of finds such as linch pins (albeit relatively scarce in the region) and, most spectacularly, a cart wheel fragment at Gill Mill.[31] A preliminary inventory of transport-related objects from sites of Roman date in the upper Thames valley, based largely (but not entirely) on published sources, is appended and discussed further below. Wheeled vehicles would ideally have been served by paved roads, but it is very unlikely that these would have been widely provided at a local level. In some cases it is possible that road or trackway surfaces in the valley have simply been eroded by post-Roman ploughing, but this can hardly be a valid explanation for the almost total absence of such surfaces. The evidence from Gill Mill is again useful. Here the roadways within the core of the settlement were surfaced with stone, but as soon as the limits of settlement are reached the surfaces tend to be absent. Post-Roman agricultural attrition may be the explanation in part but it seems likely, for example, that the occurrence of the surface on a road running east-south-eastwards down the Windrush valley confined exclusively to that part of the road within the settlement area and not occurring on the continuation of the road outside this area is a reflection of reality. It presumably relates to the need for surfaces in areas of most intensive use, but not beyond them. If surfaces were not provided, however, and the underlying gravel of the Thames valley terraces sufficed in normal conditions, the need for adequate drainage to keep these roads viable for as much of the year as possible would have been emphasised. The importance in this regard of roadside ditches, much more easily provided and maintained than proper metalled surfaces, is obvious.

No one of the explanations offered above can necessarily be favoured over the others, and it is quite likely that the phenomenon of ditched trackways in this region, as in so many other parts of Roman Britain, can be explained by a combination of factors. Moreover, their relative importance may have varied between time and place.

THE CHRONOLOGY OF CHANGE

These requirements may not have been clearly expressed as landscape modifications immediately after the Roman conquest. What is most noticeable in the upper Thames valley is the prominence of trackways in what may be termed the period of 'developed agricultural landscape' which emerged after the marked reorganisation or settlement dislocation widely (but not universally) observed in the early second century, perhaps centred around the period AD 120–30.[32] Trackways defined by ditches at this time were not only ubiquitous, but also often laid out in a fairly regular fashion, with straight alignments that show complete disregard for any vestiges of earlier settlement or boundary systems, as for example at Thornhill Farm or Kempsford.[33] Such trackways form the basic structure of sites such as the reconfigured early second-century probable estate centre at Claydon Pike.[34] These alignments are typically not orthogonal, but they are often strikingly straight when compared to what, if anything, had preceded them. Other examples can be seen at Old Shifford, where an isolated late Iron-Age to early Roman enclosure of subrectangular plan seems to have gone out of use by the later first century AD. Subsequent features a little to the north included probable rectilinear enclosures associated with a fairly straight east–west-aligned trackway, the whole layout apparently having no clear point of reference to the earlier settlement.[35] At Yarnton, the relationship between trackways and the organic development of the settlement

31 P. Booth et al., *The Thames through Time. The Archaeology of the Gravel Terraces of the Upper and Middle Thames. The Early Historical Period: AD 1–1000*, Thames Valley Landscapes Monograph, 27 (2007), pp. 313–14.

32 Ibid. pp. 43, 50–3.

33 Jennings et al., *Thornhill Farm*, pp. 58–61; P. Booth and D. Stansbie, *A Roman Rural Landscape at Kempsford Quarry, Gloucestershire*, Oxford Archaeology Occasional Paper, 15 (Oxford, 2007), pp. 10–13.

34 Miles et al., *Iron Age and Roman Settlement in the Upper Thames Valley*, pp. 93–7.

35 G. Hey, 'Iron Age and Roman Settlement at Old Shifford Farm, Standlake', *Oxoniensia*, 60 (1995), pp. 93–175.

through the late Iron-Age and early Roman phases was more direct, but the definition of access routes with trackside ditches does not seem to have occurred before the second century at the earliest,[36] even though some sort of definition of movement through the landscape had already been achieved here at least as early as the middle Iron Age, when causeways were in place to permit movement across periodically inundated palaeochannels in the adjacent floodplain.

Further down the valley, extensive trackway systems are well known around Appleford and Long Wittenham.[37] Again the layout was far from rigidly rectilinear, but significant lengths of roughly north–south- and east–west-aligned trackways are nevertheless identifiable, some of them with clusters of associated rectilinear enclosures. It is likely that the Appleford and Long Wittenham trackway complexes were created in the later first or second century. Use and infilling of ditches from the second century onwards is seen at Long Wittenham, where there seems to be no reason to date any of the associated material as early as the late first century.[38] Baker's review of the long-term development of this landscape refers to 'the possible survival of Iron-Age trackways into the Roman period',[39] although his mapping does not appear to reflect this, instead showing the late Iron-Age and Roman landscapes together. This approach misses the point that key developments in this landscape took place within the early Roman period and, as far as clear definition of trackways is concerned, not before then. At Appleford Sidings, trackways were located at the eastern and western extremities of the site. The eastern trackway was established in the third of at least four phases of activity in this area which rapidly succeeded each other. The dating is not as precise as would be wished, and here could be as early as the later first century; unusually, the evidence from subsequent enclosures suggests that the sequence does not extend beyond the mid second century at the latest.[40] The trackway at the western side of the site, meanwhile, certainly continued in use into the late Roman period, but unfortunately there were very few associated finds so the date of its establishment, not before (and presumably within) the early Roman period, cannot be defined with any confidence.[41] However, the principal south-north arm of this trackway is likely to have connected with the features excavated further north in Appleford Field, where the proximity of settlement means that the associated ditches were better dated. The trackway here was thought to have been established in the early second century and the ditches maintained well into the fourth century.[42] Such a chronology would be entirely plausible for the western Appleford Sidings trackway.

As already indicated, the trackways of this period varied in the regularity of their layout. Those at Yarnton, for example, were less rigidly aligned than most of the others mentioned above. A feature of what have sometimes been termed 'village green' or trackway junction settlements is that the eponymous trackways were characteristically more sinuous than those already mentioned,[43] with good examples at Appleford Field and Cote.[44] The significance of this difference is uncertain, but it would repay closer investigation. Either way, the ubiquity of well-defined trackways is a distinct feature of the period from the early to mid second century onwards. It is unclear, however, if the developed system then remained stable through the rest of the period or whether it evolved further, for example in the early fourth century. There may be other examples of trackways which, like the eastern one at Appleford Sidings, superseded by a later enclosure, were short-lived. Superficially,

36 Hey et al., *Yarnton*.

37 M. Gray, 'Northfield Farm, Long Wittenham', *Oxoniensia*, 42 (1977), pp. 1–29; D. Miles, 'Cropmarks around Northfield Farm', in ibid., pp. 25–9; Hinchliffe and Thomas, 'Appleford'; S. Baker, 'Prehistoric and Romano-British Landscapes at Little Wittenham and Long Wittenham, Oxfordshire', *Oxoniensia*, 67 (2002), pp. 1–28; Booth and Simmonds, *Appleford Sidings*.

38 C.J. Young, 'Romano-British [pottery]', in M. Gray 'Northfield Farm', pp. 19–21, 23, *contra* ibid., p. 15.

39 Baker, 'Prehistoric and Romano-British Landscapes', p. 25.

40 Booth and Simmonds, *Appleford Sidings*, pp. 39–41.

41 Ibid. pp. 32, 43.

42 Hinchliffe and Thomas, 'Appleford', p. 62.

43 D. Miles, 'The Cropmarks at Appleford', in ibid., p. 15.

44 Hinchliffe and Thomas, 'Appleford'; M. Henig and P. Booth, *Roman Oxfordshire* (Stroud, 2000), p. 109, fig. 4.17.

however, such instances of trackway abandonment seem to be rare and sustained use, even if not necessarily sustained maintenance, of the associated ditches, appears to have been characteristic of most trackways established in the second century. Nevertheless, what is fairly certain is that regular maintenance of trackway ditches, like that of field systems and even settlement enclosures, generally ceased in this region after the end of the late Roman period. The early Anglo-Saxon landscape, in this respect at least, was very different.

BEYOND THE THAMES VALLEY

Brief mention should be made of possible contrasts with landscape zones north and south of the Thames gravels, though examination of this question requires much further work. The principal problem for meaningful comparison between the valley and adjacent areas is the lack of a significant evidence base for the latter; this results from an absence of large-scale excavation because development pressures are lower here and, in part, from a relative lack of cropmark evidence, particularly for the Cotswold dip slope. Aerial evidence for the Berkshire Downs has been well studied,[45] but chronological detail is sparse. While it is likely that the majority of the recorded field systems are Roman in date,[46] the nature of their development remains obscure. Long-distance trackways are not easily discerned running through these field systems. That such trackways existed, both here and in the 'villa zone' of the Cotswold dip slope north of the valley, seems highly likely, but it is not yet possible to establish their spatial character and chronological relationships with the associated settlement pattern. It therefore remains unclear if the sequence and nature of trackway development observed in the valley were unique to that area, or if this is simply the location where more widespread developments are seen most clearly.

CONCLUSION

What seems most remarkable about the trackways of the upper Thames valley is their sheer ubiquity from the later first century and, particularly, from the early second century onwards. There are places where adumbrations of these systems can be detected in the later Iron Age, but the scale of their manifestation in the early Roman period amounts to a transformation of the appearance of the landscape, even if many of the routes followed were perhaps ones that had been in existence for some time. Possible factors influencing this development have been discussed above, but the fact that it is concentrated in the early Roman period must be significant, even if this reading of the evidence is at variance with the picture seen in some other parts of Britain, such as the east midlands, where well-defined trackways were apparently already established components of the landscape at an earlier date.[47]

This aspect of regional variation within Roman Britain may have implications for the character of social organisation at a local or wider level. Differences in the nature of settlement patterns between the Thames gravels and the upland areas to the north in the Iron Age were used by Hingley as a basis for suggesting contrasting social structures.[48] Despite the accumulation of much

45 F. Small, *The Lambourn Downs: A Report for the National Mapping Programme*, English Heritage (2002).

46 S. Ford et al., 'The Date of the 'Celtic' Field-Systems on the Berkshire Downs', *Britannia*, 19 (1988), pp. 401–4; V. Gaffney and M. Tingle, *The Maddle Farm Project: An Integrated Survey of Prehistoric and Roman Landscapes on the Berkshire Downs*, BAR BS, 200 (1989).

47 Taylor, *Atlas of Roman Rural Settlement*, p. 62.

48 R. Hingley, 'Towards Social Analysis in Archaeology: Celtic Society in the Iron Age of the Upper Thames Valley (400–0 BC)', in B. Cunliffe and D. Miles (eds.), *Aspects of the Iron Age in Central Southern Britain*, University of Oxford Committee for Archaeology Monograph, 2 (1984), pp. 72–88.

new evidence since then, and the inevitable realisation that this interpretation was too simplistic,[49] the continuation of the contrast between these areas into the Roman period – between settlement patterns largely dominated by lower status settlements in the valley and by villas to the north – can still be argued to prevail in broad terms. The relative lack of good quality excavation evidence from the latter area continues to make the significance of this distinction difficult to judge, and the validity and extent of the apparent contrast in settlement type between the two areas require further consideration.

Within this framework, however, a possible interpretation is that the settlements of the Thames gravels, although densely populated well before the Roman conquest, avoided significant pressure for economic intensification until the early second century by virtue of their social character or status. At this point changes were not only manifest and widespread, but many of them may have occurred within a relatively short period of time. Some of the changes were so marked that it is likely that they involved reallocation of landholding on a substantial scale. It was these changes, which included the archaeologically highly visible evidence for organisation of access through the landscape by means of trackways, which established key aspects of its physical character for the remainder of the Roman period.

One final question that might be considered is that of the temporal correlation of local changes in society and landscape organisation alongside the development of the major road system as an instrument of creation of a 'geography of Roman Britain' from the point of view of a centralised authority.[50] The latter is seen very much in terms of the network of major roads and of towns along them.[51] The two schemes of development may have little immediate connection, and in our region it is clear that the primary strategic route, Akeman Street, was in place well before the transformation of the upper Thames valley landscape discussed above.[52] In terms of the wider development of the civitas of the Dobunni, however, there may have been some connection between rural transformation and significant changes observable within Cirencester itself, where the principal civic centre development also seems to be of the early second century rather than earlier.[53] Further examination of these aspects lies beyond the scope of this paper, but would probably repay detailed consideration in future work.

APPENDIX: CHECKLIST OF TRANSPORT-RELATED FINDS FROM ROMAN SITES IN THE UPPER THAMES VALLEY

The sites tabulated below are grouped by broad settlement type and within each group are listed in approximate geographical order, following the valley downstream. The list only includes the more significant excavations in the region, principally because negative evidence based on work of limited scale is of little significance. Negative evidence from larger sites may be meaningful, however. No attempt has been made to assess in detail the significance of numbers of objects in different categories in relation to overall site assemblage sizes or character of excavation; generally the numbers of objects are too small to sustain such analysis. The exact meaning of inter-site variation is therefore uncertain, but a clear general picture emerges. This is, unsurprisingly, that transport-related equipment was concentrated in the larger settlements and in those of broad 'villa' type. Evidence for wheeled vehicles, in the form of linch pins and other items, occurs

49 See, for example, T. Moore, *Iron Age Societies in the Severn–Cotswolds: Developing Narratives of Social and Landscape Change*, BAR BS, 421 (2006), p. 91.

50 R. Laurence, 'The Creation of Geography: An Interpretation of Roman Britain', in Adams and Laurence, *Travel and Geography in the Roman Empire*, pp. 67–94.

51 Ibid.

52 Henig and Booth, *Roman Oxfordshire*, pp. 49–50.

53 N. Holbrook, 'Cirencester and the Cotswolds: The Early Roman Evolution of a Town and Rural Landscape', *Journal of Roman Archaeology*, 21 (2008), pp. 313, 320.

exclusively at these sites, with a notable concentration at Gill Mill which may reflect more than simply the large scale of examination there, since the overall metalwork assemblage from this site was relatively modest in relation to the total excavated area and to the assemblages from some of the other sites listed in the table.

Harness fittings were more widespread, but may in any case have been used on animals which were ridden, rather than used for drawing vehicles. It is nevertheless notable that all the sites in the 'other rural settlements' category which produced such items, apart from Old Shifford, have characteristics which suggest that they were not just simple farmsteads. There is no reason why harness fittings should not occur on such sites, but it is striking that on present evidence they do not. The absence of evidence for wheeled vehicles at the lower status farmstead sites is almost certainly significant, but it is matched by comparable absences at the extensively excavated villa sites of Roughground Farm (with the exception of bits) and Barton Court Farm, so a simple conclusion that absence of vehicles equates to low status is clearly not appropriate, nor can such an absence be correlated closely with particular types of agricultural regime.

Table 1. Summary list of artefactual evidence for wheeled vehicles in the upper Thames valley region

Site	Linch pin	Hippo-sandal	Harness fitting (bits etc.)	Comment	Reference
Major nucleated settlements					
Asthall	1	-	2		Booth, *Asthall*, pp. 84, 88, nos. 22–3
Wilcote	-	-	3		BAR BS, 265, pp. 70–1, nos. 93, ?100, 101
Alchester	-	2	1		Booth, *Alchester*, pp. 240, 242, nos. 24–6
Dorchester	-	-	?3	from post-Roman contexts	*Oxoniensia* 46, pp. 45, 47
Minor nucleated settlements					
Ducklington Gill Mill	9	2	2	nave band; oak cart-wheel fragment	Unpublished
Middleton Stoney	1?	-	-	from post-Roman context	Rahtz and Rowley, *Middleton Stoney*, p. 101, fiche appendix E, 28
Villas/?estate centres					
Fairford Claydon Pike	4	-	3		Miles et al., *Claydon Pike*, digital section 3.4.1
Lechlade Roughground Farm	-	-	6		Allen et al., *Roughground Farm*
Shakenoak	4?	-	?		Brodribb et al., *Excavations at Shakenoak Farm*, vol. 1, pp. 104–5, fig. 35, no. 40; vol. 4, pp. 118–19, fig. 56, nos. 364–6
Barton Court Farm	-	-	-		Miles, *Barton Court Farm*, microfiche

Other rural settlements				
SK Cotswold Community	-	2	1	Powell et al., *Cotswold Community*
SK Neigh Bridge	-	-	3	Miles et al., *Claydon Pike*, p. 249, table 9.4
Whelford Bowmore	-	-	1	Ibid., pp. 290–1, no. 8
Latton Lands	-	-	-	*WAM*, 102 (2009), pp. 22–113
Horcott Totterdown Lane	-	-	-	Pine and Preston, *Totterdown Lane, Horcott*
Horcott Quarry	-	-	-	Unpublished
Kempsford MultiAgg	-	-	-	Booth and Stansbie, *Kempsford Quarry*
Fairford Thornhill Farm	-	-	-	Jennings et al., *Thornhill Farm*
Old Shifford	-	-	1	*Oxoniensia*, 60 (1995), pp. 142–4
Stanton Harcourt Gravelly Guy	-	-	-	Lambrick and Allen, *Gravelly Guy*
Northmoor Watkins Farm	-	-	-	*Watkins Farm*
Yarnton	-	-	-	Hey et al., *Yarnton*
Farmoor	-	-	-	Lambrick and Robinson, *Farmoor*
Appleford	-	-	-	Hinchliffe and Thomas, 'Appleford'
Appleford Sidings	-	-	-	Booth and Simmonds, *Appleford Sidings*
Berinsfield Mount Farm	-	-	-	Oxford Archaeology Occasional Paper, 19 (2010)

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