

# Landscapes of Pre-Medieval Occupation

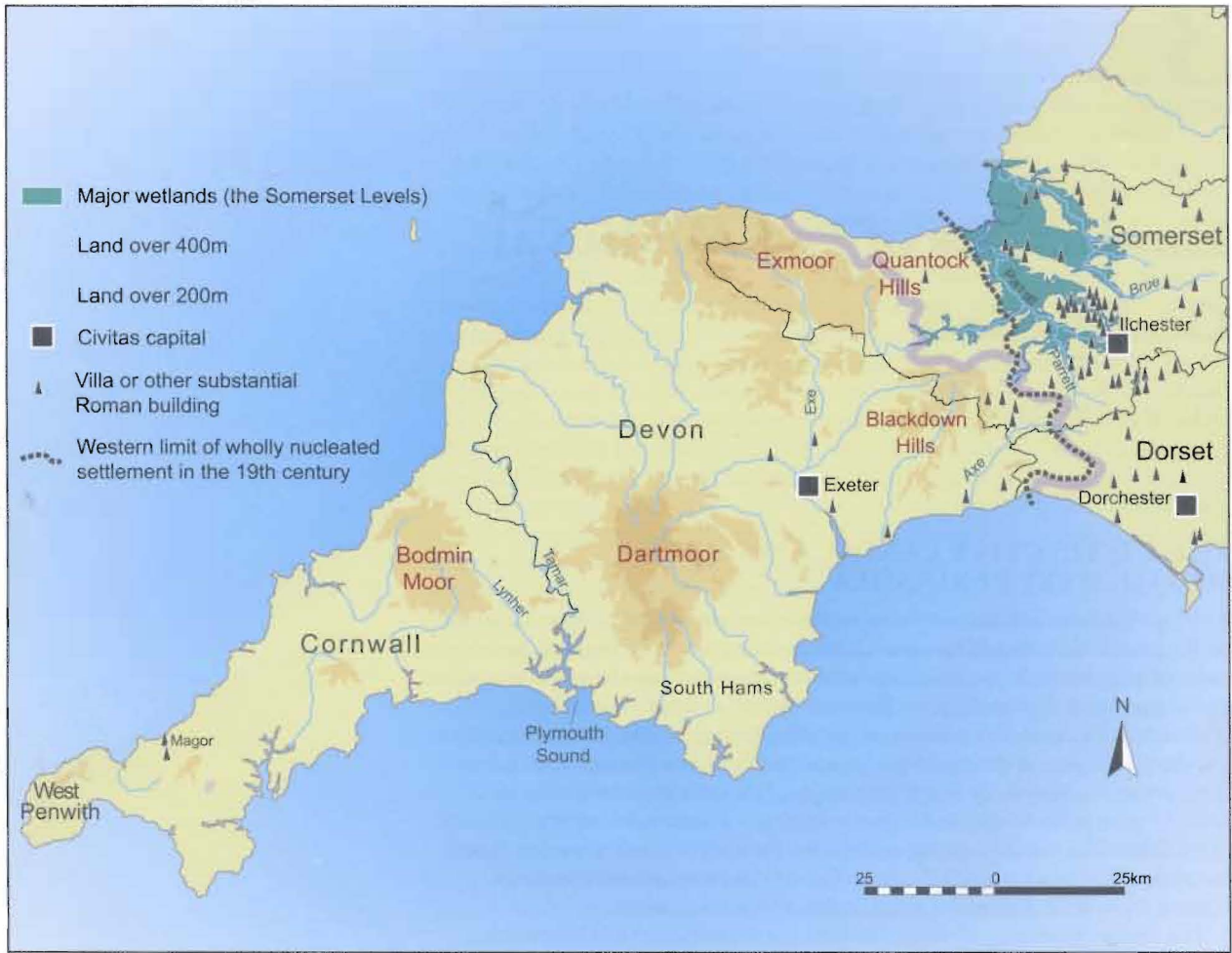
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## THE DISTINCTIVE LANDSCAPES OF THE SOUTH-WEST PENINSULA

The South West is well known for its wealth of archaeological sites, most notably on the granite uplands of Dartmoor, Bodmin Moor and West Penwith, but the focus of this chapter is not individual monuments but rather the whole landscape and in particular how prehistoric, Romano-British and early medieval communities shaped the character of the present countryside. Chronologically this chapter begins at the end of the ice age and finishes a century or so before the Norman Conquest, by which time many of the essential characteristics of today's 'historic landscape' had come into being – a settlement pattern typically of small hamlets and isolated farmsteads, the network of winding sunken lanes, the complex systems of small fields enclosed by high hedgebanks, and the legacies from the extraction of a wide range of mineral resources.

The eastern boundary of the South West is a fundamental and long-lasting division in the cultural and physical landscape, which runs approximately along the watersheds of the Quantock and Blackdown hills to the west of the rivers Parrett and Axe (Fig. 3.1). It encompasses the whole of the medieval counties of Devon and Cornwall along with the western part of Somerset, including Exmoor. This boundary divides the tribal areas of the Iron Age and Romano-British Dumnonii in the west and the Durotriges in the east, but also marks a fundamental division in the character of the cultural landscape of southern Britain as a whole in being the westerly limit of extensive Romanisation and a countryside characterised by nucleated villages and open fields in the medieval and post-medieval period. The special character of south-west England's landscape has an antiquity that goes back over two millennia.

A number of distinctive features of the region's archaeological research have greatly influenced the extent to which we understand its landscape history. Topographically, the landscape is dominated by a series of uplands of which those formed of granite have given rise to abundant, well-preserved relict landscapes due to the freely available loose stone boulders used for the construction of field walls and buildings. The other major upland, Exmoor, comprises mostly sandstones, slates and grits, and the lack of good quality stone results in a range of less visually impressive monuments, the extent of which has only recently been fully appreciated. Despite the excellent preservation of this upland archaeology, the long history of fieldwork on Dartmoor, and recent surveys on Bodmin Moor and Exmoor, the amount of recent excavation in south-west England's uplands is in fact surprisingly limited.



**Fig. 3.1 The south-west peninsula.** Distribution of villas and other substantial romanised buildings, and the western limit of wholly nucleated settlement patterns in the 19th century, following the work of Roberts and Wrathmell 2000.



**Fig. 3.2 Raddon, Stockleigh Pomeroy, central Devon (SS 885031).** The crop marks of this Early Neolithic causewayed enclosure and Iron Age hillfort, which was re-occupied in the early medieval period, have only been visible through aerial photography for a few weeks every few years. Following a geophysical survey, the site was excavated in advance of road construction. Without the use of radiocarbon dating the aceramic early medieval phase would probably not have been recognised.

In the lowlands past sites and landscapes are, in contrast, more difficult to locate as subsequent extensive ploughing has flattened most earthworks, while often heavy soils and a modern predominance of pastoral farming makes the extent of crop marks visible from the air relatively limited compared to regions such as Wessex. There has, however, been a long tradition of opportunistic surface collection, which has revealed large numbers of prehistoric flint scatters, though the region's often acidic soils, and a genuine scarcity of pottery used on many later prehistoric to early medieval rural settlements, means that sites of these periods are rarely located through fieldwalking. A transformation in our understanding of south-west England's lowland landscape started in the mid-1980s with the initiation of regular aerial photography that revealed a previously unsuspected density of crop-mark sites (Fig. 3.2 and *see also* Fig. 3.13), while large-scale geophysical survey is also starting to have an impact. Compared to some other parts of Britain there have been relatively few large-scale rescue excavations, though a number of linear developments such as road constructions and pipelines are now providing valuable cross-sections across the landscape and are once again revealing a hitherto unsuspected range and density of sites.

## THE CHRONOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

The chronological framework of the South West is based upon the traditional artefact-based terminology used by British prehistorians – for example the Middle Bronze Age – and these discrete cultural periods are summarised in Table 3.1. Distribution maps for sites from most of these periods can be found in the *Historical Atlas of South-West England* and *The Field Archaeology of Exmoor* (*see* Riley and Wilson-North 2001). All the dates referred to here are based on calibrated/calendar years (eg 3rd millennium BC; c. AD 55/60).

While discussion of the archaeological evidence from the South West is based upon the discrete cultural periods listed in Table 1, this chapter is structured around five broader phases defined by the way in which post-glacial human communities were exploiting, modifying and managing landscape:

- Landscapes of hunter-gatherers (Mesolithic: 10th to 5th millennium BC): development of post-glacial climax vegetation (mixed deciduous woodland) exploited by mobile hunter-gatherer groups who may have modified the landscape slightly through the use of fire to open up woodland clearings around the forest margins.
- Landscapes of the earliest agriculturalists and their ancestors (Neolithic/Early Bronze Age: 4th to mid-2nd millennium BC): initial significant clearance of woodland creating a moderately open landscape used for agriculture and hunting-gathering by semi-sedentary, socially stratified communities who laid claim to territories through the construction of ceremonial and burial monuments and the creation of ancestors.
- Landscapes of the first sedentary farmers (Middle/?Late Bronze Age: mid-2nd to ?early 1st millennium BC): emergence of sedentary communities living in stable settlements (both open and enclosed) often associated with small-scale field systems, with large-scale enclosure of the upland margins of Dartmoor. Continued use of some barrow cemeteries but relatively few archaeologically visible signs of social stratification. Possible decrease in the intensity of landscape exploitation in the Late Bronze Age.
- Landscapes of a stratified society (Iron Age, Romano-British and earliest early medieval periods: mid-1st millennium BC to mid/late 1st millennium AD):

**TABLE 3.1 THE CULTURAL PERIODS OF THE SOUTH WEST**

(AFTER GENT AND QUINNELL 1999 (EARLY NEOLITHIC); HOLBROOK 2001 (ROMANO-BRITISH); NEEDHAM AND PEARCE 1999 (BRONZE AGE METALWORK); QUINNELL 1986, 1994; ROBERTS 1999 (PALAEO-LITHIC/MESOLITHIC); AND WATTS AND QUINNELL 2001.

<b>PERIOD</b>	<b>DATES (CALENDARICALIBRATED)</b>	<b>DISTINGUISHING FEATURES</b>
<i>Early Mesolithic</i>	<i>10th to 9th millennium BC</i>	<i>Flint axe-heads and microlith points.</i>
<i>Late Mesolithic</i>	<i>8th to 5th millennium BC</i>	<i>Range of diagnostic microliths.</i>
<i>Early Neolithic</i>	<i>4th millennium BC</i>	<i>Early Neolithic south-western style pottery including gabbroic wares.</i>
<i>Late Neolithic</i>	<i>3rd millennium BC</i>	<i>Relatively little diagnostic material including a handful of sites associated with Grooved Ware and Peterborough Ware.</i>
<i>Early Bronze Age</i>	<i>late 3rd to mid 2nd millennium BC</i>	<i>Beakers, Collared-Urn and early Trevisker/Biconical Urn related pottery assemblages. Harlyn (2500–2000 BC, associated with beakers); Trenovissick (2000–1700 BC) and Plymstock phases of metalwork (1700–1600/1500 BC) corresponding to the Wessex I/II phases in Britain generally.</i>
<i>Middle Bronze Age</i>	<i>mid 2nd millennium BC</i>	<i>Trevisker-style pottery, regional variants of Deverel-Rimbury, and Biconical Urns. Chagford (1600/1500 to 1400 BC) and Taunton phases of metalwork (1400–1200 BC).</i>
<i>Late Bronze Age</i>	<i>late 2nd millennium to 7th century BC</i>	<i>Late use of Trevisker-style pottery? Post-Trevisker wares; ? Late Bronze Age Plain wares. Worth (1200–1100 BC), Dainton (1100–950 BC), Stogursey (950–750 BC) and Mount Batten (750–650 BC) phases of metalwork (corresponding to the Wilburton, Ewart Park and Llyn Fawr phases in Britain generally).</i>
<i>Early Iron Age</i>	<i>8th to 5th centuries BC</i>	<i>Early Iron Age shouldered jars (scarce)</i>
<i>Middle Iron Age</i>	<i>4th to 1st centuries BC</i>	<i>South-Western Decorated Wares, eg Devon/ Cornish versions of 'Glastonbury Ware'.</i>
<i>Late Iron Age</i>	<i>1st century BC to c. AD 50</i>	<i>Cordoned Ware in Cornwall, some Durotrigian Ware and continuation of SW Decorated Ware in Devon.</i>
<i>Romano-British</i>	<i>c. AD 50 to early 5th century</i>	<i>Mostly locally produced pottery (notably handmade South Devon ware and gabbroic wares in Cornwall), with some imported pottery from the more 'Romanised' parts of Britain and the continent.</i>
<i>Early Medieval</i>	<i>early 5th to 11th century</i>	<i>Mostly aceramic, with 5th to 7th century pottery imported from the Mediterranean on high status sites.</i>

renewed expansion and intensification in landscape exploitation, and the emergence of a new pattern of hierarchical and predominantly enclosed settlement, with a significant number of heavily defended sites, sometimes associated with small-scale field systems. The Roman 'interlude' saw relatively few significant changes in the countryside though the intensity of mineral extraction (including tin and iron) may have increased. Possible decrease in the intensity of landscape exploitation in the very highest uplands in the early medieval period.

- The 'historic landscape' (later early medieval period and later: mid/late 1st millennium AD to present): the late prehistoric, Romano-British and early medieval landscape characterised by enclosed settlements is replaced with the scatter of small hamlets and network of winding lanes associated with the near-continuous fieldscape of today's 'historic landscape'.

## LANDSCAPES OF HUNTER-GATHERERS AND THE EARLY IMPACT OF HUMAN COMMUNITIES ON THE ENVIRONMENT

Ice sheets appear never to have reached the South West, and with sea level perhaps 120m below that of today, what is now the south-west peninsula was part of continental Eurasia (see Chapter 2). During the glacial maximums this was a frozen land with shattered rock outcrops, gradually eroding hillsides and a coastline that stretched far out to the west, and it was probably only in the interglacial periods that human communities ventured into the region. A scatter of unstratified lithic artefacts testifies to a human presence during these warmer phases though only in the rock shelters at Kent's Cavern and Tornewton (both near Torquay, Devon) and the riverine terrace gravels at Broom in the Axe valley (in Devon), are these in anything close to a stratified context.

Britain was abandoned during the coldest parts of the last Ice Age (the Devensian), but as the climate warmed in about 9500 BC, the vegetation changed from tundra and cold steppe grassland with some herbaceous and shrub cover, through birch-pine woodland to a closed canopy of mixed deciduous forest dominated by oak, elm, lime and hazel that by about 7600 BC blanketed all but the very highest uplands and low-lying alder-dominated floodplains. Sea level was around minus 40 metres below modern Ordnance Datum, and although the basic form of the peninsula was evident, the actual coastline was between 2 and 10 km beyond that of today. This was the landscape that was reoccupied by hunter-gatherer communities of the Mesolithic. The numerous scatters of Mesolithic flints tend to concentrate in river valleys, the coastal zone and the upland fringes above 250m. The coastal zone would have been a prime location for hunting and gathering, providing a rich source of food, along with flint and chert, as reflected in the coastal camps at Westward Ho! in west Devon and at Porlock and the nearby hilltop site at Hawkcombe Head in west Somerset. The overall distribution of Mesolithic findspots, and the inclusion of beach flint and marine shells in assemblages at sites such as Three Holes Cave in the Dart valley, Devon, suggest that river valleys provided the main travel routes within the interior.

It was during the later Mesolithic that human communities first started to have an impact upon the landscape through their use of fire to open up the sedge-dominated peat bogs in the Exe valley floodplain (c. 6500 BC), and woodland clearings on and around Dartmoor (c. 6200 BC) and possibly Bodmin Moor (c. 4700 BC). This firing may represent an attempt to improve hunting by maintaining and improving grazing land, making the location of herds more predictable. On Dartmoor this localised opening up of the landscape may have initiated what became a marked deterioration of the soils in these areas, changing what were reasonably free-draining brown earths to acidic peats.

## LANDSCAPES OF THE EARLIEST AGRICULTURALISTS AND THEIR ANCESTORS

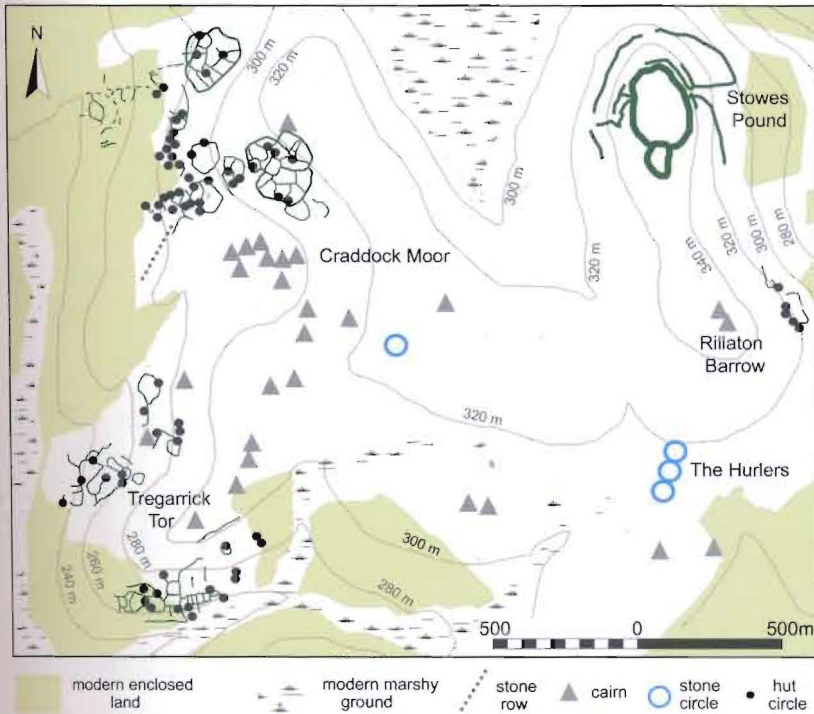
The 4th millennium BC saw a profound change in the way that human communities perceived and exploited the landscape, though it must be remembered that parts of the Neolithic/Bronze Age coastal zone are now below sea level and/or have been eroded away. It was during the Neolithic that woodland was cleared, followed by the grazing of domestic livestock and cultivation of cereals in the more open landscape. Monuments, many with links to the rituals associated with death, burial and the 'rites of passage' between the worlds of the living and the dead, were constructed while new types of artefact (notably pottery and ground stone axes) reflect the exploitation of a wider range of natural resources. The origins and significance of this 'Neolithic package' are much debated, and those complex arguments are beyond the scope of this chapter: the key theme here is the growing intensity with which the landscape was exploited both materially and in social interaction.

### Early Neolithic clearance of the landscape

The distribution of Late Mesolithic and Early Neolithic flints is broadly similar, suggesting that woodland clearance focused on those coastal, river valley and upland margins that had already started to be opened up through the use of fire in the Mesolithic or in places where the fringes of the surviving woodland cover were easiest to open up. This first phase of substantial woodland clearance, associated with a decline in elm, is dated to about 3500 BC in the Exe valley and around the fringes of Exmoor, and was followed by a pronounced increase in grassland and the first appearance of cereal pollen including rye and oat/wheat. On Dartmoor the palaeoenvironmental record for the Neolithic is poor, but the evidence suggests that some woodland was cleared, followed by grazing to maintain this open landscape. On Bodmin Moor the dating is similarly unclear and though the first appearance of pasture at Rough Tor dates to mid-4th millennium BC, on East Moor the earliest clearance dates to mid-3rd millennium BC; there is no evidence for arable cultivation. The higher parts of Exmoor appear to have remained substantially wooded and although the elm decline occurred in about 3500 BC it was quickly replaced by birch, willow, alder or heathland; there is little indication of grazing and similarly no evidence for the cultivation of cereals.

### Settlements and resource exploitation

During the Early Neolithic, notable concentrations of archaeologically detectable activity in eastern Devon – both domestic and potentially ritual – tend to occur on a handful of hilltop sites (eg Haldon Hill and Hazard Hill), some of which are associated with interrupted ditches, the so-called 'causewayed enclosures' known at Hembury, High Peak and Raddon Hill (Fig. 3.2). In Cornwall and west Devon so-called 'tor enclosures', such as Carn Brea and Helman Tor, may represent a regional variation that extends this pattern of Early Neolithic hilltop enclosures into the upland fringes (Fig. 3.3). The communities who used these hilltop sites were part of exchange networks that extended across the South West, and which reflect a growing intensity with which a range of landscape resources was being exploited. 'Gabbroic' pottery, made on the Lizard peninsula in south Cornwall, is found throughout the South West even comprising as much as 10 per cent of the ceramics at sites such as Haldon and Hazard Hill in eastern Devon. Vessels of this fabric have even been found as far east as Hambledon Hill, Maiden Castle and Windmill Hill in Wessex. A number of igneous rocks in Cornwall were also used to manufacture polished axes that reached Devon and beyond.



**Fig. 3.3** *The Craddock Moor complex, St Cleer parish, Bodmin Moor (SX 2571). The probable Early Neolithic 'tor enclosure' at Stowes Pound looks out over a complex of probable Early Bronze Age ritual monuments that are spread across the flatter interfluvial area of Craddock Moor (including the Hurlers triple stone circle, and the Rillaton Barrow: see Fig. 3.5). In contrast, the probably Middle Bronze Age settlements and 'accrative' field systems occupy the west/south-west facing valley sides.*

**Fig. 3.4** *Trethevy Quoit, St Cleer parish, on the south-east fringes of Bodmin Moor (SX259688). Early Neolithic 'Penwith-type' chambered tombs such as this probably sit alongside 'long cairns/mounds' and 'oblong ditches' as south-west England's variants of the long barrows and cairns found in Wessex. In a landscape of probably transient settlement and hunting camps, sites such as these would have provided a monumental permanence within the landscape and a link with the community's ancestors and their territory.*

Little is known about the ordinary settlement pattern of the Neolithic (or indeed the Early Bronze Age), and the few flint scatters that have been excavated produced little evidence of structural features. There has been much debate regarding the relative significance of cultivated cereals and the gathering of natural food plants during the Neolithic. In addition to the evidence for cereal pollen in lowland sequences in the South West (*see above*), charred cereals (predominantly wheat with a little barley) have also been recovered from a number of sites such as Hembury and Raddon, though there is also evidence for the continued gathering of natural foodstuffs such as hazelnuts, sloes, crab apple and bramble, thus indicating a very mixed economy.

### The creation of landscapes of ancestors

Within this landscape of semi-mobile communities, the burial of the dead and a respect for the ancestors encouraged the construction of a range of ritual monuments that could have provided 'monumental permanence' and simultaneously served as territorial markers (Fig. 3.4). Some of these



monuments form part of the suite seen further east in Wessex, such as south-west England's single 'cursus' at Nether Exe in Devon, but there are also more local types, notably 'long cairns/mounds' and 'oblong ditches', which might be the region's equivalent of ditched earthen long barrows of central southern Britain. The recent identification of many of these sites as crop marks in the lowlands of Devon helps to balance the distribution of megalithic monuments that concentrate around the peripheries of the granite uplands, though the impression remains that the extent of monument construction in the South West, both in terms of their scale and relative numbers, was less impressive than in Wessex.

There are several clusters of monuments that reflect the long-term significance awarded to certain locations, such as the hilltop causewayed enclosure at Raddon that overlooks a cursus and oblong ditch at Nether Exe, close to the confluence of the rivers Culm and Exe (Fig. 3.2). On the granite moors, monuments similarly appear to have been located with reference to significant features of the natural landscape. These were clearly special places of long-lasting significance in the landscape associated with the concept of 'ancestors'. They were not, however, exclusively 'ritual landscapes' and areas set aside purely for the dead: as in Wessex, fieldwalking in the lowlands has revealed scatters of lithic artefacts spread amongst the ceremonial monuments. Activity at the ritual complexes could also have been intermittent, with long-term folk memory periodically drawing communities back to these special areas and allowing monuments to be embellished from time to time.

### The Late Neolithic

The Late Neolithic is poorly evidenced in the South West, though it appears to have seen something of a change in how the landscape was exploited. On Bodmin Moor, and possibly Dartmoor, there are signs of a regeneration of hazel-dominated scrub and a decrease in the intensity of grazing in about the mid-3rd millennium BC, a phenomenon seen elsewhere in Britain at the end of the Early Neolithic. Archaeologically this discontinuity is also reflected in the abandonment of hilltop sites in the South West, though monuments of the cursus and long barrow type may have continued in use, as was the case elsewhere in southern England. Late Neolithic pottery of the Grooved Ware and Peterborough Ware traditions has only been found on a handful of sites, and although flint scatters are more numerous, the South West contains few examples of the distinctive monument types that characterise the Late Neolithic elsewhere in England: just four henges have been identified, of which one – the Stripple Stones on Bodmin Moor – contains a stone circle. Stone circles are common on all the uplands of the South West and while their clear association with barrows and cairns shows that they were used during the Early Bronze Age (Figs 3.3 and 3.5), this does not preclude their having Late Neolithic

**Fig. 3.5 The Hurlers, St Cleer parish, Bodmin Moor (SX 258714).** One of three, adjacent, probable Early Bronze Age stone circles, looking towards one of many abandoned 19th-century tin mines at Minions (see Fig 3.3 for a plan). The extent to which the wealth of this region – as reflected in the gold cup, Camerton-Snowhill-type bronze dagger, and possible faience glass beads from the nearby Rillaton barrow – was derived from the exploitation of tin is unclear.







*Fig. 3.6 Drizzlecombe complex, Sheepstor parish, south-east Dartmoor (SX 592671). A probable Early Bronze Age ceremonial complex comprising three stone rows, including a 4.3m-high standing stone, with a terminal cairn and 'Giant's Basin' cairn (behind the standing stone) in close association, looking across the Plym valley.*

origins. The same is possibly the case for some stone rows (lines of standing stones with presumably some ritual purpose) (Fig. 3.6). Overall, though, the Late Neolithic landscape is poorly visible in the South West of today.

### **The Early Bronze Age: a further opening up of the landscape**

Although the initial felling of woodland in some parts of the South West occurred at the start of the Neolithic, in many areas it was only during the Early Bronze Age that large-scale, permanent clearances were made and the landscape started to be permanently opened up. In the lowlands of the Exe valley the palaeoenvironmental record suggests that the final decline of elm, a further clearance of woodland and an expansion in open grassland and cereals occurred in about 2100 BC. The higher uplands of Exmoor were also probably cleared, and the open landscape maintained through grazing. Most valleys probably still retained substantial areas of woodland but some clearance is recorded both here and on the higher uplands around 1900 BC. Increased alluviation in the Exe valley from about this time may also have resulted from clearance around the upland fringe. Palaeoenvironmental evidence shows there was also an intensification of grazing and some arable cultivation on the uplands of Bodmin Moor, and although there is very little pollen evidence from Dartmoor for this period, the fact that its Middle Bronze Age reaves (field boundaries) were built in a landscape already cleared of woodland suggests that the flatter interfluvial areas were extensively cleared of woodland and that this open landscape was maintained through grazing.

### **Landscapes of ceremony**

In places this increasingly open landscape was characterised by a suite of ceremonial monuments that show a marked tendency to occur in clusters, often in places of long-lasting importance – for example the Class II henge and extensive spread of ring ditches (circular ditches that probably once surrounded earthen barrows) close to the Early Neolithic 'oblong ditches' at Bow near

Crediton. A number of megalithic tombs contain Bronze Age burials, such as a cremation at Tregiffian in Penwith, suggesting they similarly had a long-term significance as the houses of ancestors. On the granite uplands of Penwith, Bodmin Moor and Dartmoor, most stone circles, along with the stone rows and cairns with which they are often associated, probably date to the Early Bronze Age. They typically lie on the flatter interfluvial areas, away from what were probably still wooded valleys and steeper slopes (*see* Figs 3.3 and 3.5). Recent work on Exmoor has shown that a similar range of monuments exists there, though on a more diminutive scale due to the lack of good stone: if similar monuments had existed in the lowlands they will not have survived subsequent ploughing, though a notable exception is the Yelland stone row that now lies in the intertidal zone of the Torridge estuary and which was preserved by the encroachment of wetland conditions.

During the Bronze Age there was a significant shift from collective communal burial, which was typical of the Neolithic, to individual interment and such earthen round barrows and stone-built cairns occur right across the South West, including areas such as the Culm Measures of west and north Devon that currently show relatively little sign of earlier occupation. Though a number of unusually large barrows are known, none has yet produced evidence for a Neolithic date, and the majority of excavated barrows are Early Bronze Age. These landscapes of the dead appear to have been abandoned around the mid-2nd millennium BC, though at Leskernick on Bodmin Moor some Middle Bronze Age field banks appear to have been robbed in order to build funerary cairns. The construction and use of barrows also continued, at least to a limited extent, on Exmoor, where radiocarbon dates from a ring cairn at Shallowmead and a round barrow in the small Bratton Down cemetery date to the late 2nd millennium BC.

As with some earlier ceremonial complexes, the location of these mainly Early Bronze Age barrows sometimes shows important relationships to the physical landscape. In some areas they concentrate in areas of the greatest agricultural potential (for example, in the Exe valley) or with access to coastal resources (as in north Cornwall), suggesting that they were relatively central to the community's territory. Others occupy hilltop and watershed locations that may have represented the margins or boundaries of a territory – for instance along watersheds. The deliberate siting of cairns around natural tors on the granite uplands, and the close relationship between Early Bronze Age monument complexes and natural landmarks generally, is in stark contrast to the 'terrain-oblivious' Dartmoor reaves (*see* below) and suggests a very different set of social values and perceptions of the landscape.

### The exploitation of tin during the Bronze Age

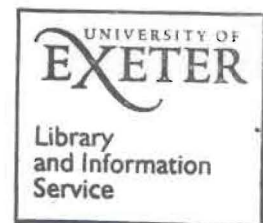
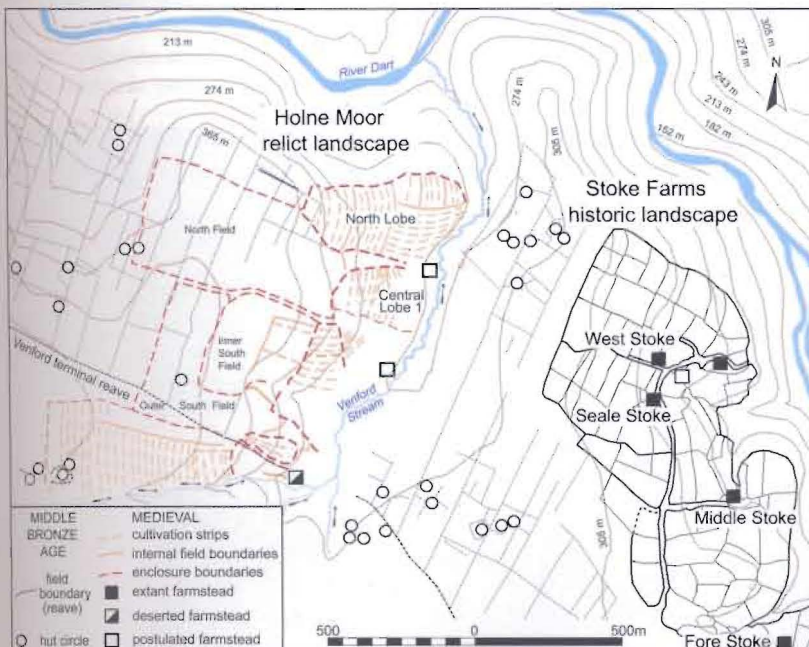
Tin has always been a scarce commodity in western Europe although the extent to which it was exploited in the South West during the earlier part of the Bronze Age, and indeed later, is unclear. While tin lodes occur on and around all the granite uplands of the South West and their hinterlands, tin ore is most likely to have been obtained in the prehistoric period from the extensive alluvial stream deposits. Any evidence for digging for tin will probably have been destroyed by later activity, though there have been a number of 18th and 19th-century finds of Bronze Age and later artefacts from stream deposits in Cornwall that suggest they were indeed being exploited. Considering the extent to which other local resources were being exploited – for example, china clay in the production of faience beads, and aplite for quern stones, at Shaugh Moor – the evidence for smelting is extremely scarce. This might suggest that an elite controlled production, though it must be remembered that the amount of excavation carried out to modern standards is fairly limited.

## LANDSCAPES OF THE FIRST SEDENTARY FARMERS

While there appears to have been an increase in the area and intensity of landscape exploitation during the Early Bronze Age, there remains little indication of permanent or long-lived settlements. By contrast, the Middle Bronze Age saw the appearance of permanent settlements across the lowlands, often associated with small field systems, while the upland fringes of Dartmoor were transformed through the creation of extensive, and sometimes carefully planned, systems of fields: the every-day practice of agricultural subsistence now comes to dominate the landscape. These Middle Bronze Age landscapes spread across the lowlands and the flatter interfluvial areas of the uplands that had already been cleared of woodland, while further forest clearance, particularly around the upland margins, points to a further expansion in settlement.

### The upland landscape

Probably the most famous example of a Middle Bronze Age landscape in the South West is that of the Dartmoor reaves (Fig. 3.7). These remarkably extensive blocks of carefully planned field boundaries were constructed around 1700/1600 BC in a landscape where woodland was probably restricted to the valley sides, and in which soils, although acidic, had no peat, no iron pan and lacked significant leaching. Ditches, which formed part of the Middle Bronze Age field systems, were filled with silt, not peat, and there is good evidence for active soil fauna, from earthworms to moles. The reave systems may represent the formalisation of existing arrangements within a social territory, or the appropriation by individual communities of once-open land. The central moorland of Dartmoor, above the terminal reaves, remained open and comprised acid grassland that Andrew Fleming has suggested may have been grazed through intercommuning (the communal grazing of open land), as it was during the medieval period and later. Palaeoenvironmental evidence along with the lack of lynchetting and large amounts of clutter (loose stone boulders) in many fields, suggests that the predominant land use within the reave systems was good quality grassland (not moorland as today) with very limited cereal cultivation.



**Fig. 3.7 Holne Moor, Dartmoor (SX 6771).** The carefully planned 'coaxial' Middle Bronze Age reave system, ending at the 'Venford terminal reave', overlain by an abandoned medieval landscape on the western slopes of the Venford Stream and the still-occupied landscape at Stoke. Stoke is recorded in *Domesday Book*, though the farmsteads to the west are undocumented: both medieval communities re-used parts of the reave system when laying out their field boundaries (based on the work of S Gerrard, A Fleming and the author).



**Fig. 3.8 Grimspound, Manaton parish, eastern Dartmoor (SX 701809),** looking south from Hookney Tor. This undated enclosure, containing a series of small 'shieling'-type huts, lies outside the Middle Bronze Age reave system, on the edge of the high open moor at the head of the West Weburn Valley. As there is no associated field system the community here was presumably engaged in pastoralism, possibly seasonally. This site, like many elements of the pre-reave ceremonial landscapes, has a dialogue with the natural landscape: its entrance faces south-east towards Hambledon Tor, and as one looks through the entrance one sees Hookney Tor above.

Some stone-built reaves are known to have had timber predecessors that leave no trace above ground, but it is not known whether these timber boundaries were in fact more extensive than the reaves and only partly rebuilt in stone. What is clear, however, is that large areas of occupied landscape were not structured around stone-built reave systems. Some areas were characterised by simple enclosures without any evidence for field systems (for example, Grimspound: Fig. 3.8), while elsewhere settlements consisted of scatters of round-houses, some associated with a single ovoid field enclosure, or linked by a stone wall or bank that enclosed areas which could serve as cultivation plots and paddocks for livestock at different times of year, with open pasture beyond (Fig. 3.9 and see Figs 3.3 and 3.10 for analogous landscapes on Bodmin Moor). In places these formed relatively extensive irregular field systems, which appear to have grown in a piecemeal fashion, comparable to the contemporary 'aggregate' celtic field systems on the Wessex downland.

On the granite moors of Cornwall the flatter interfluvial areas were also largely clear of woodland by the mid-2nd millennium BC, though further clearance is

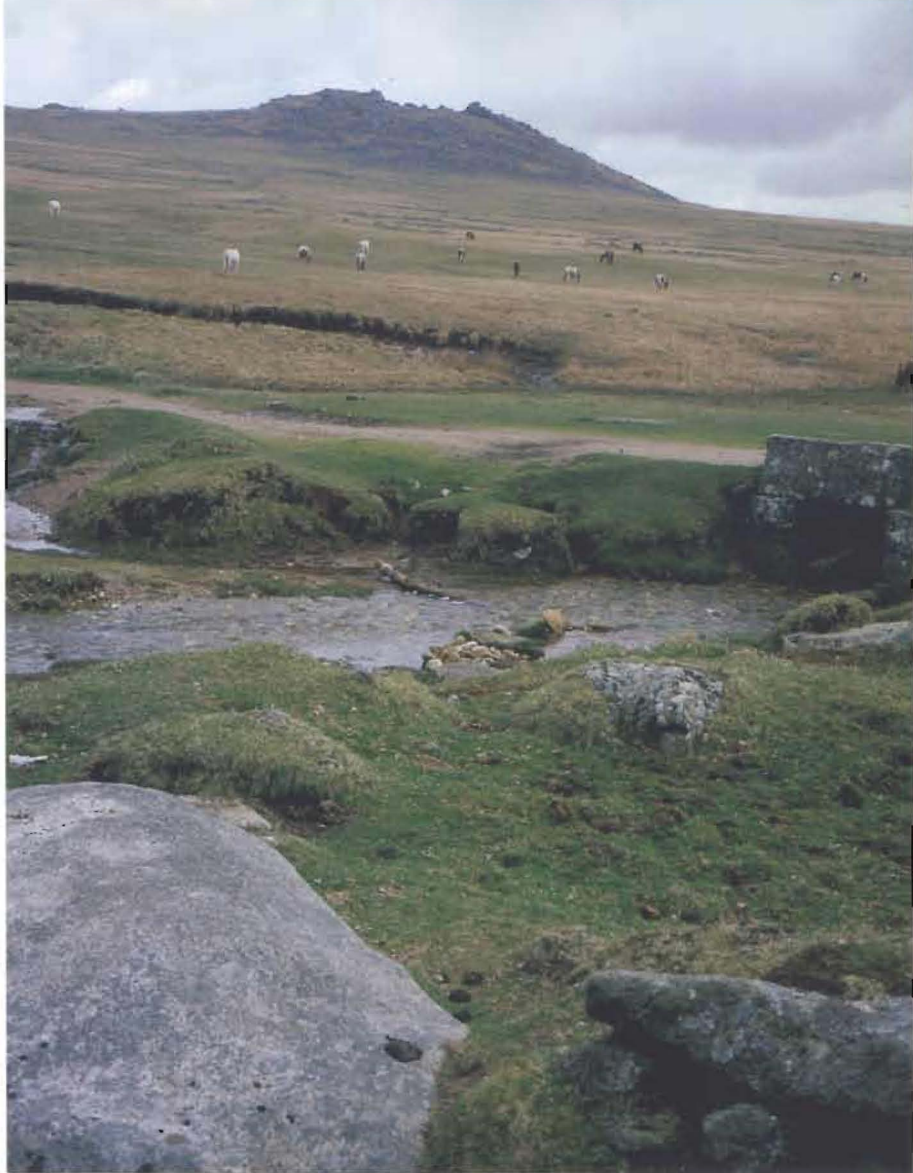
**Fig. 3.9 Merrivale, Dartmoor (SX 556749).** Typical Middle Bronze Age hut circle in an open settlement. Dartmoor is famous for its coaxial reave systems (see Fig. 3.7), but large areas were occupied by open settlements, often with small accretive field systems (for example Fig. 3.3). The extent of such unenclosed settlement in lowland areas (without such durable building stone) is unclear.



recorded at Rough Tor. It was in this context of a largely open landscape that, as on Dartmoor, the Cornish uplands came to be occupied by settlements and field systems. While certain examples of the latter do have a coaxial layout, there is nothing on the scale of the Dartmoor reaves; most of the settlements and field systems are similar to the irregular and aggregate field systems of Dartmoor (Figs 3.3 and 3.10). Exmoor has more limited remains of comparable landscapes that are undated. At Codsand Moor, however, the fields appear to pre-date the formation of peat in the late 1st millennium BC; the pollen sequence from Hoar Moor, immediately adjacent to another of the relict field systems, shows a marked period of clearance with an expansion in grazing and possibly some cereal cultivation in about 1700/1600 BC.

### The lowland landscape

In places the Dartmoor reaves may have extended some way into the surrounding lowlands (Fig. 3.11), though in most areas the Middle Bronze Age landscape typically comprised several round-houses, sometimes with ancillary buildings, associated with small regular rectangular fields. Palaeoenvironmental evidence, and the possible presence of raised four-post granary structures, suggest some cereal cultivation with a notable increase in the diversity of crops that now include emmer, spelt and bread wheat, barley, peas and flax, although wild foodstuffs such as hazelnuts and sloes were still being gathered. While broadly 'coaxial' (based on a series of long, parallel boundaries) in their layout,



**Fig. 3.10 Rough Tor, St Breward parish, north-east Bodmin Moor.** Middle Bronze Age settlement and 'accretive' field system looking south-east towards the probable Early Neolithic 'tor enclosure' on Rough Tor (from SX 137820).



**Fig. 3.11 Bittaford, on the southern fringes of Dartmoor,** looking south-east from Western Beacon (SX 657574) into the South Hams. Andrew Fleming has suggested that the regularity in the historic landscape here results from the re-use of Middle Bronze Age coaxial reave systems.

these lowland Middle Bronze Age field systems were on a relatively small scale, spreading over no more than a few hundred metres, and are in no way comparable in scale to the contemporary Dartmoor reaves.

### **The problem of the Late Bronze Age and the apparent abandonment of the uplands**

Just as the Late Neolithic is poorly represented in the South West, so is the Late Bronze Age. The palaeoenvironmental record is poor and relatively few archaeological sites have been recognised. Across the region most settlements occupied by communities using Trevisker-style pottery appear to have been abandoned, a process that at Trethellen Farm Jacqueline Nowakowski suggests represented a process of deliberate 'closing down'. Due to the relative scarcity of pottery in use at the time, only a few settlements have been identified, but these include both open and enclosed examples, which appear to be closer in character to the Middle Bronze Age tradition as opposed to the succeeding Iron Age landscape dominated by a hierarchy of more heavily defended settlements.

In common with other parts of Britain, south-west England's uplands appear at first sight to have been abandoned at this time. Traditionally, it has been argued that this was due to a climatic deterioration, which made farming in these areas increasingly difficult, though some scholars have more recently argued that in the north of Britain pollen sequences in fact show continued occupation and cultivation of the uplands during the 1st millennium BC, and that archaeological evidence for their abandonment is ambiguous and poorly dated. So what was happening in the South West? The limited excavations to date suggest that the Dartmoor reaves were abandoned between about 1400 and 1200 BC; only a few sites show evidence for Late Bronze Age or Early Iron Age occupation and there is just one known Middle to Late Iron Age settlement, at Gold Park on Shapley Common, alongside a handful of other findspots. On Bodmin Moor, peat started to form around abandoned Middle Bronze Age round-houses at Stannon Down before the walls had time to collapse, and the only site to have produced Iron Age pottery is at Garrow Tor, where a Bronze Age house was re-used, perhaps by transhumants (seasonal graziers). On Exmoor there has been no excavation of the relict field systems and their associated hut circles so no comment can be made on the date of their abandonment.

The key question is whether this *apparent* scarcity of evidence for Late Bronze Age and Iron Age settlement reflects the *actual* desertion of the uplands, or whether it is a product of differential *site visibility*: were the moors deserted altogether, or was there simply a change in the nature and location of land use? It is possible, for example, that there was a shift in the form of settlements, from stone-built houses and enclosures that remain highly visible in the archaeological landscape, to less easily recognised open settlements and timber buildings: this was the case at Gold Park and Shaugh Moor but is unlikely to have been a widespread phenomenon, as throughout the lowlands of the South West there is a marked trend *towards* enclosed settlement at this time (*see below*). Indeed, while the palaeoenvironmental record for this period is frustratingly poor it does suggest that south-west England's uplands saw a decrease in the intensity of human activity. Dartmoor appears to have seen the spread of ericaceous heath and some woodland regeneration, while on Bodmin Moor the Rough Tor sequences show a regeneration of hazel-alder woodland in the late 2nd millennium BC. On Exmoor, by contrast, there appears to have been continuity in land use.

Overall, therefore, the results from survey, excavation and radiocarbon dating suggest that south-west England's uplands saw a decrease in the density of settlement, including the abandonment of the Dartmoor reaves, but that some grazing must have continued, which prevented large-scale woodland regeneration. It is tempting to see some link between these vast areas of upland

pasture and the adjacent Iron Age hillforts that were subsequently well placed around all the upland–lowland interfaces, though this category of site has seen so little excavation that their period of construction and occupation, and the part they played in the wider landscape, remains uncertain. It is also unclear whether this apparent decrease in human activity in the uplands was due to climatic deterioration. It is certainly true that the upland moors of today have severe or very severe limitations for agriculture due to their climate: for example, 2,000mm of rainfall on Dartmoor is approximately double, and the average growing season of 175 days just half, of that in the surrounding lowlands (*see* Chapter 2). Any worsening of the climate would make these areas even more inhospitable, although there is little independent evidence for a climatic deterioration in the South West during the 1st millennium BC. On Bodmin Moor and Exmoor, acid grassland and cotton grass did develop in this period, though podsolisation, the spread of heather and the growth of peat bogs, both there and on Dartmoor, was a process that had started long before the Late Bronze Age. Overall, this decrease in the intensity of settlement on the uplands was probably a cultural phenomenon, and may simply represent the retreat of settlement from areas that inherently were less suited to agriculture: without high population pressure the ‘experiment’ of intensive upland settlement had not proved worthwhile.

## LANDSCAPES OF STRATIFIED SOCIETIES

Though the Late Bronze Age landscape is poorly understood, the late 2nd and early 1st millennia BC do appear to witness a discontinuity in the landscape, most obvious in the uplands but also reflected in the emergence of a new pattern of settlement in the lowlands. Middle to Late Bronze Age settlements across the South West show relatively little outward sign of social stratification, and while some were latterly enclosed with encircling banks, these were on a modest scale. By the Iron Age this changed with the emergence of a new pattern of predominantly enclosed settlement, ranging from well-defended hillforts through to small, enclosed farmsteads. Palaeoenvironmental evidence suggests an increasingly open landscape with further clearance where woodland remained, most notably around the uplands. There was some cereal cultivation, though in most areas the extent to which this involved more than very localised field systems is unclear. This landscape of enclosed settlements spread up to the upland fringes but not beyond, although the open landscape of the higher moors was presumably maintained through grazing. Although hillforts and the more strongly defended enclosed settlements were abandoned by the late 1st century AD, Romano-British society continued to show signs of stratification, with an elite living in the *civitas* capital at Exeter and a scatter of villas and other settlements in its hinterland also exhibiting some degree of Romanisation. In the early Roman period at least, the army also probably had a role in exploiting the region’s rich mineral resources. For most of the population, however, life probably carried on much as before with few signs of any significant change in the overall character of the landscape. This pattern of broad continuity is also seen after the Roman period ended, when the increasing numbers of palaeoenvironmental sequences register very little change in land use: in many respects the early to mid-1st millennium AD saw a continuation in the patterns of landscape exploitation that were established during the Iron Age a thousand years before.

### The landscape of enclosed settlement

Hillforts and coastal promontory forts (locally known as ‘cliff castles’) are found throughout the South West, though compared to their neighbours in Wessex they are relatively small, lightly defended, contain comparatively small round-houses,



**Fig. 3.12 Bats Castle, Dunster, Somerset (SS 987421).** An Iron Age hillfort with a typical hilltop location on the eastern fringes of Exmoor.

and demonstrate a complete absence of grain storage pits (Fig. 3.12). The function of these sites is likely to have varied in time and space, though where excavation has been undertaken, evidence for domestic occupation has usually been found. What dating evidence there is suggests a slow but poorly understood development that starts in the Early Iron Age, as in the case of the palisaded enclosure that pre-dates the hillfort at Raddon. Late 2nd millennium radiocarbon dates from a large hilltop enclosure at Liskeard in Cornwall may, however, parallel a Late Bronze Age trend towards defended hilltop settlement seen further east in Wessex. There is little evidence for the occupation of hillforts after the end of the Iron Age.



**Fig. 3.13 South Hams, southern Devon.** Crop mark of a rectangular enclosure of a type dated elsewhere to the Iron Age/Romano-British period. Note the lack of evidence for an associated field system.





Lower down the Iron Age settlement scale there is a range of enclosures that can be distinguished from hillforts by their relatively small size, hillslope (not hilltop) location, and the modest scale of their banks and ditches (Figs 3.13 and 3.14). The most substantial of these sites – termed ‘multiple enclosures’ – have several circuits of widely spaced banks and ditches, defining an internal area of some 0.2 to 1.6ha, which appear to have been constructed from around the 4th or 3rd centuries BC and were mostly abandoned by the 1st century AD. A majority of identified Middle Iron Age to Romano-British settlements, however, were enclosed by simple univallate, non-defensive ditches and banks that enclosed internal areas of between 0.1 and 1.0ha and show some regional variation in their morphology. In lowland eastern, central and south Devon there is a predominance of rectangular and square forms (Fig. 3.13), while in Cornwall and west Devon a greater proportion are oval or circular (hence the local term ‘rounds’), though with some rectilinear examples. In north and west Devon and around Exmoor there is greater variety but a predominance of ovoid forms which are termed ‘hillslope enclosures’ (Fig. 3.14). Excavated examples show that collectively these all form a distinctive class of enclosed settlements – what in medieval terminology would be called farmsteads and small hamlets – that characterised south-west England’s landscape from the Middle Iron Age through to the early medieval period (5th and maybe 6th centuries), although no individual sites appear to have been occupied for the whole of this period. Some, however, may be earlier or later: south-west England’s tradition of enclosed settlement, albeit with relatively insubstantial banks, goes back to the Middle

**Fig. 3.14 Sweetworthy, Luccombe, Somerset (SS 890424).** *A small cluster of particularly well-preserved hillslope enclosures on a spur between Aller Combe (background) and Aller Water. The larger enclosure, 70m in diameter (on the left), appears to overlie an earlier one that is 40m across; two other enclosures of a similar size lie to the south-west (right on the photograph) and each contains the platform of a single round-house. Note the lack of evidence for associated field systems even on the unenclosed moorland.*

Bronze Age – the hillslope enclosure at Higher Holworthy in Parracombe has now revealed Middle Bronze Age pottery – while another example, at Dunkeswell on the Blackdown Hills, turned out by contrast to belong to the 12th to 14th centuries AD.

In areas where preservation conditions and visibility are good (as both earthworks and crop marks), the density of enclosures can be as high as two or three per square kilometre, though excavated examples suggest that such sites were not all contemporary. It is also possible that we are aware of only part of the settlement pattern of this period as the extent of open settlements in the Iron Age and Romano-British periods is unclear. The Middle Iron Age open settlements at Long Range and Langland Lane in east Devon, for example, were discovered during road construction and were not identifiable on air photographs, and the relative scarcity of datable material culture on rural settlements of this period that have been excavated shows that such sites would be difficult to locate through fieldwalking.

### **Agricultural expansion during the Middle to Late Iron Age and Romano-British periods**

There are few palaeoenvironmental sequences for the Iron Age and early Roman periods in the lowlands, though at Bow in central Devon the landscape was already virtually cleared of woodland by around the 3rd century BC, apart from small patches of alder carr on the wetter areas, and some oak/hazel woodland presumably restricted to the steeper hillsides. Elsewhere the Middle Iron Age (5th to 3rd centuries BC) may have seen some expansion of agriculture: south of Exmoor, at Hares Down, alder woodland was cleared from the valley bottom and replaced with grassland, while in the southern fringes of Exmoor there is also evidence for woodland clearance. On Bodmin Moor, there was a major clearance phase at Rough Tor. What woodland remained in the South West by this time was probably managed with increasing intensity.

This expansion and intensification of land use appears to have continued into the Late Iron Age and Early Romano-British periods: at Hares Down there is a further decline in alder, followed by a general episode of woodland clearance; higher up the moorland fringe at Moles Chamber there was a dramatic woodland clearance around the start of the Roman period. On Dartmoor the palaeoenvironmental record for this period is poor, but cultivation terraces on Wotter Common date to the Middle to Late Iron Age, when there was also some increase in the intensity of land use at Tor Royal. At Sourton Down the main phase of woodland clearance also dates to this period, and interpolation between radiocarbon dates suggests that an intensification of land use at Merrivale may date to the Roman period. On Bodmin Moor there was further woodland clearance and an increase in herb-rich meadows during the Roman period at Rough Tor and Tresellern Marsh.

Though great care has to be taken when converting radiocarbon dates to calendar years, a number of episodes when the intensity with which the landscape was exploited increased could date to the later Romano-British period. On Exmoor, a marked episode of woodland clearance coupled with evidence for cultivation at Codsand and Hoar Moors is dated to around the 3rd to 4th centuries AD, while at Lobbs Bog to the south there was a marked decline in alder at about this time. In the lowlands of eastern Devon there was similarly a marked phase of woodland clearance from the valley at Aller Farm in Stockland and an increase in the indicators of pastoralism around the 3rd century AD. This possible later Roman intensification in Devon may be paralleled to the east in Somerset and Dorset where the 3rd to 4th centuries saw considerable agricultural wealth and innovation, as reflected in wetland reclamation, investment in villas (also seen at Holcombe in east Devon) and urban prosperity.

### The impact of conquest and the extent of Romanisation

During the mid-1st century AD the south-west peninsula was drawn into the Roman world. The Second Legion established its base at *Isca Dumnoniorum* (modern Exeter) around AD 55, and a number of small forts were located across the South West, but most notably in and around the lowlands of central and eastern Devon. This military occupation ceased in about AD 80 and the legionary fortress at Exeter went on to become the *civitas* capital of the Dumnonii, equipped with the normal range of civic amenities including a basilica and public baths. The extent of Romanisation elsewhere in the South West is, however, surprisingly limited. Features so characteristic of the landscape of Roman Britain further east, such as small towns and Romano-Celtic temples, are entirely absent from the peninsula, and although a few small villas are known in the far east of Devon, these all lie to the east of the Blackdown Hills and so may fall within the territory of the Durotriges (as the pottery from sites such as Seaton certainly suggests). A number of villas and other 'Romanised' settlements in the hinterland of Exeter possess simple stone or timber buildings that show Roman elements to their design – for example, the three-roomed timber building with veranda at Topsham – although even here the native tradition of round-houses continued into the 3rd century, as at Pomeroy Wood near Honiton.

Beyond this central lowland zone, however, the only example of a Romanised site is the villa at Magor near Camborne in the far west of Cornwall. This is a curious structure and Malcolm Todd has been tempted to see it as the residence of an official, perhaps from the procurator's office. Large amounts of 1st to 2nd-century Roman material culture have also been recovered from the multiple-enclosures at St Mawgan-in-Pydar and Carvossa, which presumably represent communities that had a greater engagement with the rest of Roman Britain. Other signs of Romanisation are scarce indeed, for example fragments of Roman tile from Barnstaple, Totnes and Plymouth, all of them on navigable rivers or estuaries, and while very small amounts of imported Roman pottery and coins have been recovered from a number of rural farmsteads across the South West, mass-produced pottery, notably south-east Dorset Black Burnished Ware, does not show up in significant amounts further west than Exeter.

### Patterns of land use

It is difficult to establish the relative importance of arable and pastoral farming through palaeoeconomic evidence, though cereals were clearly being grown and in east Devon this was on a sufficiently large scale to require raised granaries and corn driers. The region has very poor faunal assemblages, due to its acidic soils, though Edward Maltby has shown that as far as the material from Exeter reflects the composition of livestock in the surrounding landscape, then it appears that cattle predominated followed by sheep and pigs in roughly equal numbers. Livestock were driven to Exeter on the hoof, and a number of town houses had farmyards or stockyards suggesting they were either the urban residences of native rural landowners, or perhaps grazier-butchers.

It is notable that most Iron Age and Romano-British settlement enclosures in western Somerset, Devon and eastern Cornwall visible as both earthworks and crop marks do not *appear* to have been associated with field systems (Figs 3.13 and 3.14). Although Middle Bronze Age to Romano-British ditched field systems have been recorded in the east of Devon and parts of Cornwall, it may be that field systems have not survived elsewhere because they consisted simply of a bank, as was the case on the limestone hills south of Newton Abbot, which have produced Iron Age and Romano-British material. Like the lynchetted field

system at Beer Head, these would not survive prolonged ploughing. It is also possible that although substantial enclosure ditches show up as crop marks on aerial photographs, lesser field boundary ditches do not.

In the far west of Cornwall the situation is rather different, with extensive areas of lynched late prehistoric and Romano-British field systems forming the basis of the modern landscape, even in this relatively exposed coastal location. Considering the extent to which the archaeology and landscape of this area differs from the rest of the region from the Neolithic onwards, however, west Cornwall's near-continuous late prehistoric and Romano-British fieldscape cannot be taken as an analogy for the whole of the South West.

### Resource exploitation and external contact

Throughout the later prehistoric, Romano-British and early medieval periods, communities in the South West developed links with other parts of southern Britain, the near continent and even the Mediterranean. Several coastal islands and promontories appear to have been particularly significant as 'ports of trade', notably Mount Batten, in Plymouth Sound (Fig. 3.15), and probably St Michael's Mount off the south coast of Cornwall. Significant quantities of late Roman material have also been recovered from Tintagel, in addition to large

amounts of 5th and 6th-century pottery imported from the Mediterranean. The basis of this trade is unclear though the region's richest resource was potentially tin. The documentary evidence is unreliable before the 1st century BC, although thereafter we have clear documentary references to the trading of tin from the South West. A number of vessels made of tin discovered in stream deposits suggest exploitation was widespread, and although ingots have been found on several settlements, evidence for smelting is as yet limited. The large number of late Roman coin hoards from south-west England's stream deposits, the expansion of the pewter industry both here and around Bath, and elevated tin levels in the Erme valley south of Dartmoor, suggest an increase in production just



**Fig. 3.15 Plymouth Sound looking south-west from Hawks Tor (SX 554625), Shaugh Prior parish, in south-west Dartmoor. The south-west peninsula is some 200km long and at most just 120km wide: no point in Devon is more than 40km from the coast, while in Cornwall the figure is little more than 25km. Throughout the region's history (and prehistory) many of its natural resources have been traded further afield, and the numerous natural harbours, such as Plymouth Sound, have played host to 'ports of trade' such as the Iron Age and Romano-British site at Mount Batten.**

as the Roman Empire's major tin mines in Spain were becoming exhausted.

Archaeological evidence has also been forthcoming for the exploitation of other metals in the South West. At Duckpool, near Morwenstow, on the north coast of Cornwall a series of possibly industrial-scale hearths was used for working lead, pewter (a tin alloy) and possibly copper alloy (along with extracting dye from dog whelks). Metal-working debris from Exeter includes evidence for 'cupellation' (the separation of silver from base metals such as copper) from the late occupation of the legionary fortress (c. AD 69–75), and for 'parting' (the separation of silver and gold) from a 2nd-century roadside ditch. Tin is an essential component of pewter (an alloy with lead), and stone moulds for producing pewter bowls have been found in the far west of Cornwall. Lead does occur in the South West, at Newlyn in west Cornwall and most notably at Combe Martin in north Devon, and although evidence for its exploitation in the pre-medieval period is lacking, the possibility of Roman working cannot be ruled out.

The main focus of the Romano-British pewter industry in the later 3rd to 4th century was in the hinterland of Bath close to the major lead source on Mendip. The involvement of the army in extracting Mendip lead is well known, and the evidence from Exeter suggests that the military authorities may similarly have been involved in exploiting south-west England's rich mineral resources. The fort at Nanstallon, occupied between about AD 55 and AD 80, is in a region rich in minerals just to the west of Bodmin Moor, and the discovery of silver-rich slag on a crucible fragment, together with iron-working debris, hints at the army's involvement in exploiting these resources. Two fortlets on the north coast of Devon, at Martinhoe and Old Burrow (occupied between c. AD 50 and AD 75), would have maintained a view across the Bristol Channel, and together with forts at Axminster, Hembury, Cullompton, Tiverton,



Clayhanger, Rainsbury and Wiveliscombe they may testify to an interest in both Exmoor and the Blackdown Hills, where recent work has shown that iron was both mined and smelted. On Exmoor, the character of the early Roman pottery assemblages at Brayford and Sherracombe Ford (Fig. 3.16) is very similar to that of the legionary phase at Exeter, while trial excavations of a quarry pit adjacent to a furnace and dump of slag at Upottery on the Blackdown Hills produced a pottery assemblage of military character dating to the late 1st century.

One resource that does not appear to have been extensively exploited in this period was salt, obtainable by boiling sea water. Just two sites are known from south-west Cornwall: at Trebarveth (occupied around the 2nd to 4th centuries AD) and Carngoon Bank (3rd to possibly 5th or 6th centuries).

**Fig. 3.16 Sherracombe Ford, Brayford, western Exmoor, looking north up the valley towards the high moorland (SS 719366).** Excavations have recently shown that this well-preserved site was used for smelting and working iron during the Roman period. The pottery assemblage from here, and other sites, suggests military involvement in the exploitation of iron on both Exmoor and the Blackdown Hills.

## THE ROMANO-BRITISH TO MEDIEVAL TRANSITION: CONTINUITY IN THE RURAL LANDSCAPE AND RESOURCE EXPLOITATION

Just as the archaeologically visible, and highly distinctive, landscapes of the Early Neolithic, Middle Bronze Age and Iron Age/Romano-British periods are separated by less visible Late Neolithic and Late Bronze Age 'discontinuities', so the landscape of late 'prehistory' is separated from the 'historic landscape' of today by what remains a 'dark age'. The lack of material culture makes the early medieval landscape of the South West extremely difficult to locate let alone understand, although the increasing use of radiocarbon dating, palaeoenvironmental analysis and the distribution of Mediterranean imports suggests three indications of early post-Roman continuity. First, the tradition of enclosed settlement continued into at least the 6th century, though this included some reoccupation of hilltop sites; second, there was no significant change in the patterns of land use in the lowlands and upland fringe; and third, there was continuing external contact and exchange with traders from the Mediterranean at coastal sites, perhaps involving tin.

Very little is known about settlement patterns and field systems after the 4th century as a lack of distinctive coins and ceramics in Devon makes it difficult to know when the more Romanised sites were abandoned. Within Britain generally, the collapse of the market-based economy will have had the greatest impact in areas that 'bought into' the Roman economy, so the more localised economies of the South West would have been relatively unaffected. Though some decline in settlement is seen in the 4th century – a feature common to large areas of late Roman Britain – a number of rural settlements in the South West certainly continued to be occupied into the 5th and even the 6th centuries. A number of hilltop sites were also reoccupied (*see* Fig. 3.2), but these sites are a world apart from the massive defences of South Cadbury and Cadbury Congresbury in Somerset. Rather than representing an example of 'refortification', they are perhaps better seen as reflecting a continuation of the Romano-British tradition of enclosed settlement, as they are of a similar scale to the contemporary ovoid lowland enclosure at Hayes Farm near Exeter.

The reoccupation of hilltop sites suggests some changes in landscape and society during the 5th century, but a growing body of palaeoenvironmental evidence strongly suggests broad continuity in what remained an open lowland landscape. Only on the higher moors is there some evidence for a decrease in the intensity of human activity. On Exmoor there was a decline in arable and grassland, and an increase in heather and possibly woodland on the highest uplands around the 5th century, while on Dartmoor there are hints at Merrivale and Tor Royal of a slight decrease in the intensity of human activity. On Bodmin Moor, there was continuity in land use at Rough Tor North, but possibly slight regeneration at Tresellern Marsh and Rough Tor South. These uplands, however, lay beyond the main areas of settlement, and as early medieval place-names suggest, they were probably used for transhumant grazing; a decrease in the intensity of their exploitation need not therefore suggest a widespread dislocation in the landscape. In short, the overriding theme in the agrarian landscape between the late Roman period and at least the 6th to 7th centuries is one of continuity.

During the early medieval period we get the first evidence for ownership and control of land and resources through the medium of inscribed memorial stones, which occur across Cornwall and west Devon, with two outliers on Exmoor. Perhaps the clearest reflection of a stratified society is the distribution of late 5th- and 6th-century pottery imported from the Mediterranean. By far the greatest concentration has been found at the rocky coastal promontory at Tintagel in north Cornwall, which can best be interpreted as a 'royal citadel'. Other such sites may well exist: St Michael's Mount is certainly a contender. The importation of this pottery suggests that communities in the South West had something of value to exchange, and there are documentary references to English traders taking tin (presumably Cornish) to the continent from the 7th century. A number of finds in Cornwall prove that tin was being worked in the early medieval period. At Praa Sands four ingots were found eroding from a 7th to 9th-century intertidal peat, while a number of early medieval artefacts have been recovered from tin stream deposits, such as an oak shovel from Boscarne, near Bodmin. Actual evidence of tin smelting is, as ever, scarce though the Romano-British site at Duckpool (*see* above) was certainly occupied from around the 8th century, and the apparent hiatus between the mid-4th and 7th centuries may simply reflect the limited nature of the excavations. Radiocarbon dates from both Exmoor and the Blackdown Hills have shown that iron production continued well into the post-Roman period.

A number of coastal sites have been interpreted as trading sites or beach markets, such as Bantham, immediately south of Dartmoor, where ephemeral traces of occupation associated with late Roman and early medieval Mediterranean imported pottery have been recovered from a coastal dune

complex to the north of a rectilinear enclosure of late Roman date. A similar 'port of trade' potentially lies at Mothecombe (in south Devon) from which imported pottery has also been found, while a collection of 40 tin ingots has been recovered from the adjacent Erme estuary which, though undated, are of an Iron Age to early medieval type. It is noticeable that together with Tintagel and St Michael's Mount, those sites that appear to have seen contact with the external world are located on open coasts, rather than up sheltered estuaries, which perhaps reinforces the impression that these are 'ports of trade' on the relatively 'neutral territory' of the coastal fringes of Dumnonia.

Overall, therefore, it seems that while there were some socio-economic dislocations in the early medieval landscape, and a decrease in the intensity with which the highest uplands were exploited, the overall theme was – as might be expected in an area that was never that heavily Romanised – one of continuity.

## THE CREATION OF THE HISTORIC LANDSCAPE

In West Penwith, at the far western end of Cornwall, the present pattern of small, irregular, strongly lynched, stone-walled fields appears to perpetuate that of the late prehistoric and Romano-British periods, and at a number of locations this early origin for the historic landscape has been established through excavation and the stratigraphic relationship with late prehistoric/Romano-British settlements. It is tempting to argue that here the present hamlets and farmsteads, so closely integrated with the field boundary pattern, represent elements of the prehistoric settlement pattern that have continued to be occupied, making this one of the oldest areas of 'historic landscape' in the country. West Penwith, however, appears to be unique in this respect within the South West. In a number of places the Dartmoor reaves were incorporated into medieval field systems (see Fig. 3.11) but this does not imply their continued use, but simply the re-use of still visible, but long-derelected, features. These are in fact landscapes of discontinuity and this appears to have been the dominant theme in most, if not all, areas beyond West Penwith.

Though the early medieval landscape is poorly understood, rather like that of the late Bronze Age, the mid-1st millennium AD appears to represent a discontinuity, from which emerged the countryside of today. The origins of today's historic landscape are obscure, but by the time that we have good archaeological and documentary evidence for the character of medieval agriculture and landscape in the South West (around the mid-14th century) it already had certain key features including a dispersed settlement pattern characterised by unenclosed small hamlets and isolated farmsteads, which were connected by networks of tracks and sunken lanes. These settlements were surrounded by a mixture of enclosed fields held in severalty (individual ownership) and small-scale subdivided or 'open' field systems (managed in a communal fashion), that were separated by unenclosed common land on the higher ground (Fig. 3.17).

*Fig. 3.17 Countisbury, Exmoor (SS 747497), from the south. The 'historic landscape' – the present pattern of settlements, fields and roads – appears to have emerged towards the end of the 1st millennium AD, replacing the Iron-Age/Romano-British/early medieval landscape characterised by enclosed settlements, though the process through which this occurred remains ill-understood.*





**Fig. 3.18 Natsley in Brayford, north Devon (SS 699381), looking south-west from the hillfort at Shouldsbury Castle across west Devon.** This oval-shaped intake of land is typical of settlements on the fringes of Exmoor that palaeoenvironmental evidence suggests were colonised around the 10th century AD, while the field-boundary pattern is of a type suggestive of the regionally distinctive system of agriculture known as 'convertible husbandry'.

A crucial contrast with the enclosed farmsteads and small, localised field systems of the late prehistoric and Romano-British periods, is that by the high Middle Ages most of the lowlands of the South West were covered by a near-continuous fieldscape. This supported a regionally distinctive system of mixed agriculture – known as convertible or ley husbandry – first documented in the 14th century within which the majority of fields (closes or parcels of open fields) were subject to alternating grain and grass crops, often with a short period of cultivation (two to three years) followed by a long grass ley of six to eight years (see Chapter 7). The origins of this system of agriculture, and the landscape that supported it, are not documented but palaeoenvironmental research is increasingly pointing to a date in the late 1st millennium AD.

The creation of the near-continuous fieldscape and system of convertible husbandry that so characterised the historic landscape of the South West appears to have been associated with a transformation of the settlement pattern (Fig. 3.18). In and around Exmoor, for example, the deserted medieval hamlets immediately adjacent to hillslope enclosures at Bagley and Sweetworthy, first identified by Mick Aston and cited as possible examples of continuity, are in fact unique: the landscapes of Iron Age/Romano-British enclosed settlements, in places certainly occupied into the 6th and 7th centuries, are unrelated to the historic landscape of unenclosed medieval hamlets and farmsteads and their road and field-systems. Oliver Padel has shown that habitative place-names in Cornwall, notably *tre-* (farmstead, hamlet, estate) and *bod-* (dwelling), were being used by the 8th century, but none of these settlements is located within an earlier enclosure making it unlikely that these medieval hamlets represent prehistoric or Romano-British settlements that simply continued to be occupied. Aerial



photography and geophysical survey are similarly confirming that beyond West Penwith the field systems associated with Iron Age and Romano-British enclosed settlements are unrelated to the medieval pattern.

The earliest unequivocal evidence for the present 'historic landscape', and the tenurial structure within which it was created, comes in the form of 8th- to 11th-century charters, which record a pattern of substantial estates across the South West that around the 10th century were in the course of fragmenting. The ten 8th- to 9th-century charters record estates with an average hidage of 13.5 hides, in contrast to the 10th-century average of 4 hides (though in places larger estates may have survived in the form of the extensive composite manors recorded in Domesday, such as the 44 hides of Pawton). An earlier pattern of extensive territories in Cornwall may be mirrored by the six medieval hundreds forming estates of a similar structure to the Welsh *cantref*, each with its own administrative centre of *llys*.

So how far back can we trace this landscape of medieval hamlets and farmsteads? Landmarks in the boundary clauses of some charters (mostly 10th and 11th century) make frequent reference to roads and fords, suggesting a landscape with a well-established framework of communications that still survives to this day, while the Cornish habitative place-names were certainly being created by the 8th century (*see above*). Unfortunately archaeology has little to add to this. Most excavated medieval settlements are in secondary locations such as the uplands and heavy clays of the Culm Measures, which may account for their lack of pre-13th-century pottery. Even if sites can be excavated in the primary settlement regions, however, the lack of pre-11th-century pottery would make dating their origins difficult, and though radiocarbon dating the earliest stratigraphic horizons may have some potential, these deposits may not have survived the subsequent occupation of a site.

This early medieval period remains, therefore, a frustrating one. It clearly saw the genesis of the historic landscape across much of the South West (beyond those areas of western Cornwall where prehistoric landscapes appear to have remained in use), but there remains a gap between the latest dates (*c.* 5th to 6th centuries) for the use of the late prehistoric/Romano-British landscape characterised by enclosed settlements, and the date when pollen sequences suggest that the medieval pattern was emerging (*c.* 7th to 8th centuries). This was a turbulent period with some immigration from Wales/Ireland and emigration from the South West to Brittany. The eastern part of the kingdom of Dumnonia (modern Devon) was absorbed by the West Saxon kingdom of Wessex from the late 7th century – the minster church at Exeter was founded by 690 and probably in 670 – though the 'West Welsh' of Cornwall retained their independence until the 9th century. The relationship between these political upheavals and the emergence of the historic landscape is, however, unclear.

## THE DISTINCTIVENESS OF THE SOUTH WEST

The south-west peninsula forms one of the most distinctive and discrete parts of the English landscape, bounded to the east by the watersheds of the Blackdown and Quantock hills. Today, and more particularly in the medieval period, this was the boundary between landscapes of nucleated villages and open fields to the east, and areas characterised by more dispersed settlement patterns to the west. In earlier times the line of the Blackdown–Quantock hills also marked the eastern limit of evidence for early Anglo-Saxon settlement, acculturation and exchange networks as reflected in burials and artefacts; the same line marks the western limit of extensive Romanisation. So when did this regional identity emerge?

The initiation of systematic woodland clearance and the incorporation of agriculture into subsistence regimes (on whatever scale) occurred more or less

simultaneously across southern Britain during the Early Neolithic, as did the adoption of a suite of ceremonial monuments that has similarities in both the South West and in Wessex with the 'tor-enclosures' of Cornwall and west Devon, perhaps representing a topographically driven local variant of the causewayed enclosures that occur as far west as central Devon. 'Long cairns/mounds' and 'oblong ditches' may represent another local variation, in this case earthen long barrows. The exchange networks that led to gabbroic pottery and Cornish stone axes reaching as far as Wessex similarly reflect integration as opposed to isolation. In the Late Neolithic/Early Bronze Age, however, the local distinctiveness of the South West develops, with a scarcity of henges and an abundance of stone rows. Parallels can be drawn between the landscapes of Middle Bronze Age communities in the South West and Wessex, though by the Iron Age regional divergence was once again becoming marked, notably in the character of the settlement pattern. Even within the peninsula, there were significant local variations in landscape character. Although the Iron Age tradition of enclosed farmsteads extended into the far west of Cornwall, this area developed its own distinctive settlement pattern with a continuation of open settlement and the emergence of a tradition of stone-walled courtyard houses, which usually occurred in isolation or small clusters, occupied from the 2nd century AD through to the early medieval period. The far west of Cornwall appears to have missed a major landscape upheaval sometime between the 6th and 8th centuries, when the Iron Age and Romano-British landscape of enclosed settlements and small localised field systems was replaced with the medieval pattern of small hamlets set within a near-continuous fieldscape. This regionally distinctive landscape may from the start have been associated with the equally distinctive form of convertible-husbandry-based agriculture in which fields were ploughed for several years and laid down to grass for a period of around six years. This suggests that the Midlands and western Wessex were not the only part of England to see a major landscape transformation in the late 1st millennium AD: the creation of villages never occurred in the South West, not because this was a region that was remote from the centre of landscape innovation, but because it had already developed in its own distinctive way of organising agrarian production.

#### FURTHER READING

The most comprehensive overview of the archaeology of south-west England remains Todd 1987; in addition there are the special issues of *Cornish Archaeology* 25 (1986) and *Proceedings of the Devon Archaeological Society* 52 (1994). The most recent distribution maps of sites, with a brief period-by-period commentary, can be found in Kain and Ravenhill (eds) 1999.

For Bodmin Moor see Johnson and Rose 1994. For Dartmoor see Fleming 1988; Gerrard 1997; and Balaam *et al.* 1982. For Exmoor see Riley and Wilson-North 2001. For West Penwith there is no published overview but see Herring 1993, 1994.

On palaeoenvironmental evidence see Fyfe and Rippon 2004.

The exploitation of tin is discussed by Gerrard 2000. For iron working in the Blackdown Hills see Griffith and Weddell 1996.

The origin of south-west England's historic landscape is discussed further in Rose and Preston-Jones 1995 and Rippon 2004. The early medieval charters for the South West are discussed in Hooke 1994, while the early medieval inscribed stones are discussed in Thomas 1994. For place-names see Padel 1985.