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# WESTWARD ON THE HIGH-HILLED PLAINS

# THE MAKING OF THE WEST MIDLANDS

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WESTWARD ON THE HIGH-HILLED  
PLAINS

THE LATER PREHISTORY OF THE WEST MIDLANDS

*Edited by*

DEREK HURST

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*Back cover:* Copper alloy bucket mount in the form of a bovine head; broken loop at top (Henley-in-Arden, Warwickshire; WAW-F4DF95). Copyright C. Stevens

Westward on the high-hilled plains  
Where for me the world began,  
Still, I think, in newer veins  
Frets the changeless blood of man.

First stanza of poem LV from *A Shropshire Lad* by A. E. Housman



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# Preface

The move towards the production of this volume was first mooted at a meeting on West Midlands later prehistory held in the council chamber of Worcestershire County Council in September 2002 (doi:10.5284/1038433), as part of the national initiative by English Heritage (now Historic England) to promote research frameworks as central to the practice of archaeology. This event was followed up by a seminar which was focussed on establishing a research framework agenda for the later prehistoric period, and that was held at Birmingham University in July 2003. The later prehistoric research agenda and strategy was finally published (Hurst 2011), alongside that for the other periods, in *The archaeology of the West Midlands: a framework for research* (Watt 2011). That left the West Midlands regional research assessments, the period-based background surveys to the agenda and strategy, as still to be published to complete the West Midlands Research Framework. This is the second volume in this intended series of six volumes.

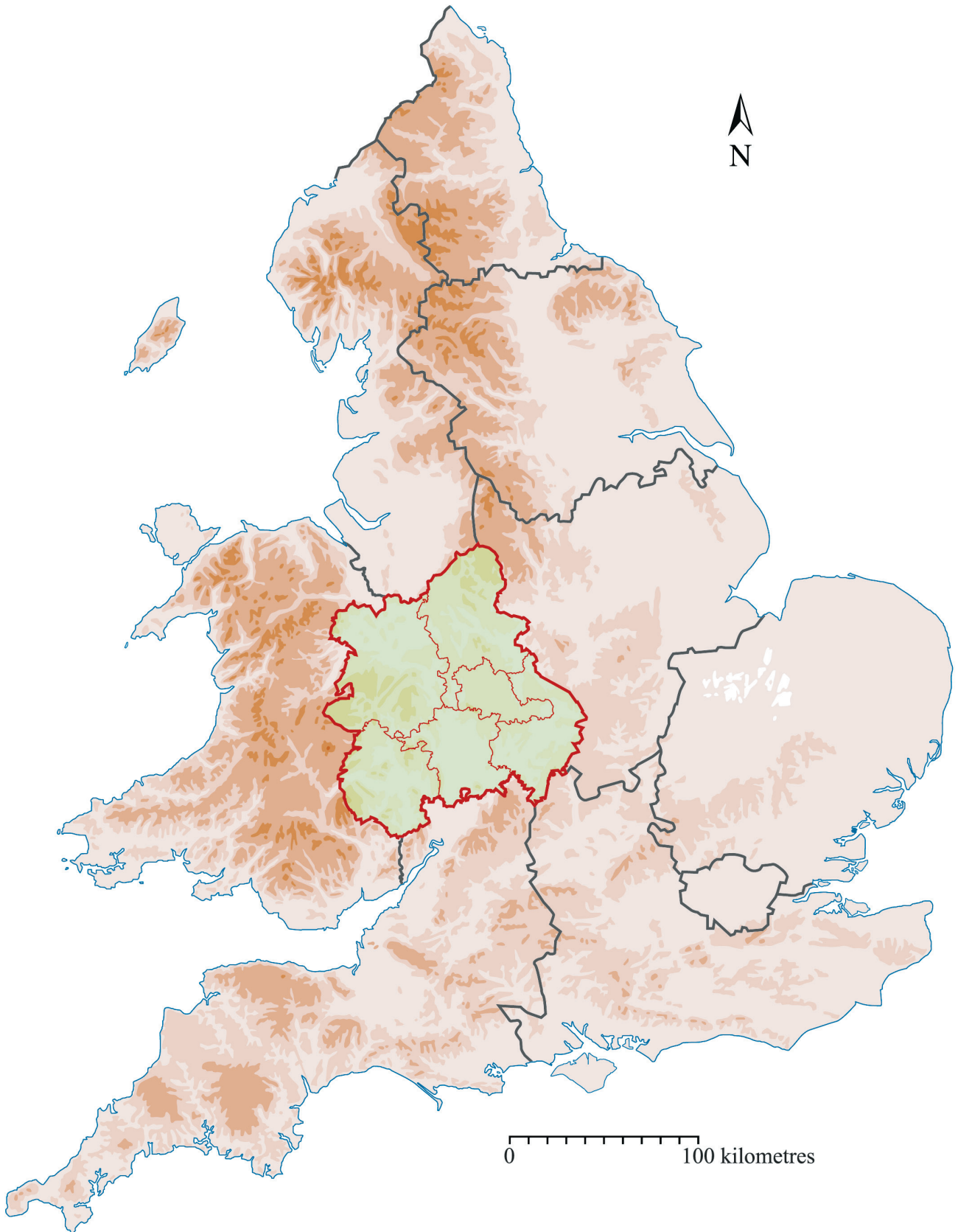
The majority of the research assessment papers in this volume were, therefore, first drafted in 2002. Thereafter, during 2004, a process of revision was instigated in consultation with authors with the intention to publish. At that time, however, several papers were still missing, and, in particular, one on a major topic, and it was not clear whether these would be forthcoming. Also illustrations, especially based on a map template, were lacking. With limited support from the Worcestershire Historic Environment and Archaeology Service (now Archive & Archaeology Service) the updating of existing papers was finally achieved in 2009, and this process then continued, selectively, into 2011. While this had significantly advanced the volume, the unavailability of funding to deal with the major topic omission and for drawing up the template maps, still remained major obstacles to publication. Fortunately, these difficulties were eventually overcome in 2014, when English Heritage undertook to support progressing the volume to final publication.

The West Midlands presently struggles archaeologically to project a distinct regional identity. The region is

geographically defined by reference to other areas, such as Wessex and the South-West, and the North, which have developed a stronger identity, both with regard to landscape and their associated historical culture. Whether this has always been the case going back into the more distant past, apart from a temporary eminence during the middle Saxon period (*viz.* kingdom of Mercia), is presently unclear, and this surely forms one of the lines of enquiry that might be pursued archaeologically. In more recent times part of the region attained international fame as the birthplace of the industrial revolution, though this occurred, incongruously, at Coalbrookdale in rural south Shropshire. This ignited the blaze of industrial expansion that later spread eastwards, as the Black Country, but, sadly, industrial heritage is not celebrated in the same way as other national achievements, and this has not adhered to the regional sense of identity. The resulting lack of a well formed self-identity is possibly exacerbated by the land-locked centrality of the West Midlands, and by its proximity to other much better (*i.e.* culturally) defined regions (*e.g.* Wales). This weak sense of identity has also probably led to a failure to recognise and then build a sense of character and place, even when circumstances allowed. This has even encouraged the view, perhaps most readily seen politically, that the West Midlands is peripheral, and so outside the range of normality. Hopefully this volume will serve to provide grounds for building a stronger sense of West Midlands identity based on the past, which could then be a source of greater inspiration towards developing a stronger sense of identity for the inhabitants of the region today.

## Introducing this volume

This volume presents the papers that formed the basis of the research agenda and strategy for later prehistory (Hurst 2011) published in *The archaeology of the West Midlands: a framework for research* (Watt 2011). In common with the earlier prehistoric Regional Research Assessment volume in



*The West Midlands region in geographical context.*

this series (Garwood 2007), the papers of the later prehistoric volume adopt a variety of approaches, variously being either regional, county-wide or thematic (*e.g.* by site type, or artefactual typology). Inevitably, because of the nature of the assessment papers, they often conclude by looking forward and so also include agenda and strategy points, though in this case usually very specific. These seem quite validly expressed here as part of the assessment rather than the formal Agenda and Strategy volume, as it is clear that the broad agenda formulated in Watt (2011) is more concerned with the related general points and issues. The latter include the need to recognise key sites and deal with them appropriately, the need also for greater scientific focus, the case for select work on major monument types sympathetic both to their protected status and their significance for the period, and how to use the broad appeal of archaeology to pursue this agenda. Accordingly, both Watt (2011) and this volume are intended to both be of relevance, when looking to develop projects where later prehistoric archaeology is involved.

The later prehistoric papers have been arranged so that a survey of environmental evidence for changing landscape in the region (by Pearson) is followed by papers in chronological order, with most of these being reviews of the evidence within a county (*e.g.* by Palmer), followed in turn by some thematic papers largely focussed around artefacts of the period (*e.g.* by Hancocks), and, finally, there is an overview of the later prehistoric activity viewed against its West Midlands landscape and as compared with other parts of the country (by Wigley).

Whereas the West Midlands is largely an area of rural counties (Figure 1.1), the former West Midlands County Council area is administratively complicated, being composed of several, mainly densely populated, boroughs and the coverage in this volume reflects this. It has resulted in a variable coverage: that is, Birmingham and the Black Country with its own paper (Hodder), and Solihull being covered in the Warwickshire paper (Palmer), but no specific coverage for the other metropolitan parts of the region.

### Acknowledgements

Many people have, over the long period of this project, given up their time and/or committed resources under their control to keeping this volume in view, with the knowledge that the

research assessments represent key statements on the state of later prehistoric studies in this region. These statements are important, not least because they are too rare examples of synthesis, but also because they provide an opportunity to disseminate more widely some striking highlights from the recent era of developer-funded archaeology. As such, this second volume in the West Midlands Regional Research Assessment series is a further stepping stone to greater understanding in an archaeological world currently largely drowning in data.

I am particularly indebted to Simon Woodiwiss and Victoria Bryant for their support in 2009 when the project was in danger of sinking, and, again, to the former for his more recently helping by reading and commenting on a draft text. Latterly I am indebted to Dan Miles and Ian George of English Heritage (now Historic England) for their crucial support in 2014. In the meantime, I have been generally encouraged and warmed by the unselfish response of fellow archaeologists who responded positively to the spirit of this project by providing the results of their work, and then, on occasion, were also ready to accept my calls for even more information.

Suzy Blake (Staffordshire HER) kindly pitched in with the production of template mapping for that county, while Alex Bayliss (Historic England) fielded my enquiries about radiocarbon dating, but I reserve my special thanks for Louise Buglass, who so patiently brought into being all the template maps (except for Staffordshire), regardless of how often I presented her with rather abysmal roughs and then went on to suggest more changes on top.

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- Garwood, P. (ed.) (2007) *The undiscovered country: the earlier prehistory of the West Midlands*. Oxford: Oxbow Books.
- Hurst, D. (2011) Middle Bronze Age to Iron Age: a research assessment overview and agenda, in S. Watt (ed.), *The archaeology of the West Midlands: a framework for research*, 101–126. Oxford: Oxbow Books.
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## Résumé

Les West Midlands ont peiné sur le plan archéologique pour projeter une identité régionale distincte, ayant été largement définis par comparaison avec d'autres zones bénéficiant d'une identité culturelle et d'une histoire plus solides, telles que le Wessex, le sud-ouest et le nord. Ce n'est qu'occasionnellement que les West Midlands ont été sur le devant de la scène, par exemple au milieu de la période saxonne (c-à-d le royaume de Mercie) ou, beaucoup plus tard, quand le sud rural du Shropshire est devenu le berceau de la révolution industrielle. Pourtant c'est une région riche en ressources minérales naturelles, située parmi des terres agricoles facilement productives et avec d'importantes rivières, comme la Severn, pour faciliter le transport. L'échelle de ses monuments de la deuxième moitié de la préhistoire, en particulier les forteresses de sommet de colline, proclame la centralisation de certaines fonctions, que ce soit pour la sécurité, les échanges ou l'émulation tandis que la population maintenait une production et une distribution étendue d'objets artisanaux spécialisés.

Finalement, vers la clôture de la préhistoire, on peut voir émerger des royaumes locaux. Au cours de la revue des témoignages de la deuxième partie de la préhistoire de l'âge du bronze moyen à l'âge du fer final, les articles présentés ici adoptent des approches multiples, elles sont soit régionales, soit au niveau du comté, ou thématiques (*par ex.* par type de site ou typologie des artefacts) et elles comprennent aussi le paysage plus étendu tel qu'il a été reconstruit à partir des témoignages environnementaux. Ceci est le second volume dans une série – *La création des West Midlands*, – qui explore l'archéologie de la région anglaise des West Midlands à partir du paléolithique inférieur. Ces volumes, reposant sur une série de séminaires du Cadre de Recherches des West Midlands, ont pour but de transformer la perception de la nature et de la signification des témoignages archéologiques à travers une grande partie du centre de la Grande-Bretagne.

Annie Pritchard

# Zusammenfassung

Archäologisch gesehen haben sich die West Midlands schwer getan, eine eigene regionale Identität hervorzubringen; sie wurden weitgehend in Bezug zu anderen Regionen mit stärkerer kultureller Identität und Geschichte, wie z. B. Wessex, dem Südwesten und dem Norden definiert. Nur gelegentlich haben sich die West Midlands hervorgetan, so z. B. in der mittelangelsächsischen Periode (d. h. zur Zeit des Königreichs Mercia), oder, wesentlich später, als der ländlich geprägte Süden der Grafschaft Shropshire die Wiege der industriellen Revolution war. Dennoch ist es eine an natürlichen Bodenschätzen reiche, in fruchtbarem Ackerland gelegene Region deren große Flüsse, wie der Severn, gute Transportanbindungen bieten. Die Größenordnung der in der Region vorhandenen bronze-/eisenzeitlichen Bodendenkmäler, vor allem der Ringwälle, zeugt von der Zentralisierung bestimmter Funktionen, sei es Sicherheit, Austausch oder Wettstreit, während die Gesellschaft die Produktion und weitreichende Verbreitung spezialisierter Handwerkserzeugnisse unterstützte. Am Ende der vorrömischen Eisenzeit ist letztlich die Bildung

regionaler Königreiche zu beobachten. Hinsichtlich der Bearbeitung des Quellenmaterials zur jüngeren Urgeschichte, von der mittleren Bronze- bis zur späten vorrömischen Eisenzeit, wurden für die hier vorgelegten Beiträge unterschiedliche Ansätze gewählt, so z. B. regionale, die gesamte Grafschaft umfassende oder thematische (z. B. nach Fundstellentyp oder Kleinfundtypologie), und sie schließen auch die anhand des paläoökologischen Quellenmaterials rekonstruierte weitere Landschaft ein. Dies ist der zweite Band einer Serie – *The Making of the West Midlands* (Die Herausbildung der West Midlands) – in der die Archäologie der englischen Region West Midlands seit der älteren Altsteinzeit untersucht wird. Mit diesen Bänden, die auf eine Reihe von Seminaren zu den Forschungsrichtlinien für die West Midlands zurückgehen, soll zum Wandel in der Wahrnehmung des Charakters und der Bedeutung des archäologischen Quellenmaterials eines großen Teils von Mittel-England beigetragen werden.

Jörn Schuster

## Introduction: Westward on the high-hilled plains

*Niall Sharples\**

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The West Midlands is an unusual region in many respects. Its existence is related purely to modern political and economic developments and owes little to either the underlying geology and topography or to the historical settlement patterns (Figure 1.1). This might be regarded as a disadvantage and there is certainly diversity to the region that defies easy synthesis. However, it could be regarded as an advantage, as it is clear the region encompasses a series of social, economic and natural boundaries that are of considerable interest to any archaeologist attempting to understand the development of regional cultures and identities in later prehistory. A considerable number of archaeologists find the definition and maintenance of regional identities a key area for contemporary research (Bevan 1999; Giles 2012; Sharples 2010).

In my job as a university lecturer I teach the ‘British Later Bronze Age’ and ‘Iron Age’. These courses are very broad and synthetic, and do not allow the detailed analysis of many of the ‘Different Iron Ages’ (Bevan 1999) that characterise the last millennium BC. The courses are split into thematic issues and case studies. My regional case studies have tended to focus on the usual suspects: Wessex, Yorkshire, the Atlantic Seaboard and, for local reasons, Wales. I have no specific incentive to examine the West Midlands as opposed to any other region. It is, therefore, interesting to note aspects of the West Midlands archaeology that are of such interest that they feature in the thematic lectures in my course; these demonstrate, to my mind, the national importance of the archaeological record of this region.

- On a broad scale the hillforts of the Welsh Marches are of considerable significance (Forde-Johnston 1976).

These, though frequently linked geographically with the Wessex hillfort region, provide an interesting contrast to the evidence from that dominant region. They include some of the largest and most densely occupied hillforts known from Britain (Stanford 1974; 1981), and potentially they are very early, though the best dated examples The Breidden (Musson 1991) and Beeston Castle (Ellis 1993) lie just outside the West Midlands. They, therefore, provide important evidence for the development and significance of this very distinctive settlement form. The extensive excavation of large hillforts, such as Credenhill Hill Camp, Croft Ambrey and Midsummer Hill (Stanford 1970; 1974; 1981), has revealed regimented ranks of ‘4-posters’ that contrast with Wessex, and which require explanation, even if they cannot be interpreted as houses.

- The quality of the excavated record for these hillforts is very good. Stanford was a good field archaeologist and his recording of the hillforts at Croft Ambrey, and Midsummer Hill (Stanford 1974; 1981) is as good as, if not better than, other more celebrated practitioners of the era. Earlier excavations by Kathleen Kenyon at The Wrekin and Sutton Walls, and Thalassa Hencken on Bredon Hill (Kenyon 1942; 1953; Hencken 1938) were also good. Many of these sites produced substantial collections of artefacts, which include important assemblages of iron and bone tools that are still not common in many areas of Britain. The published excavations are sufficiently detailed to justify thorough reanalysis. All this could contribute a considerable amount to contemporary debate, and it is rather surprising that work on these artefact assemblages has so far been largely restricted to analysis of the ceramic record (Morris 1982).

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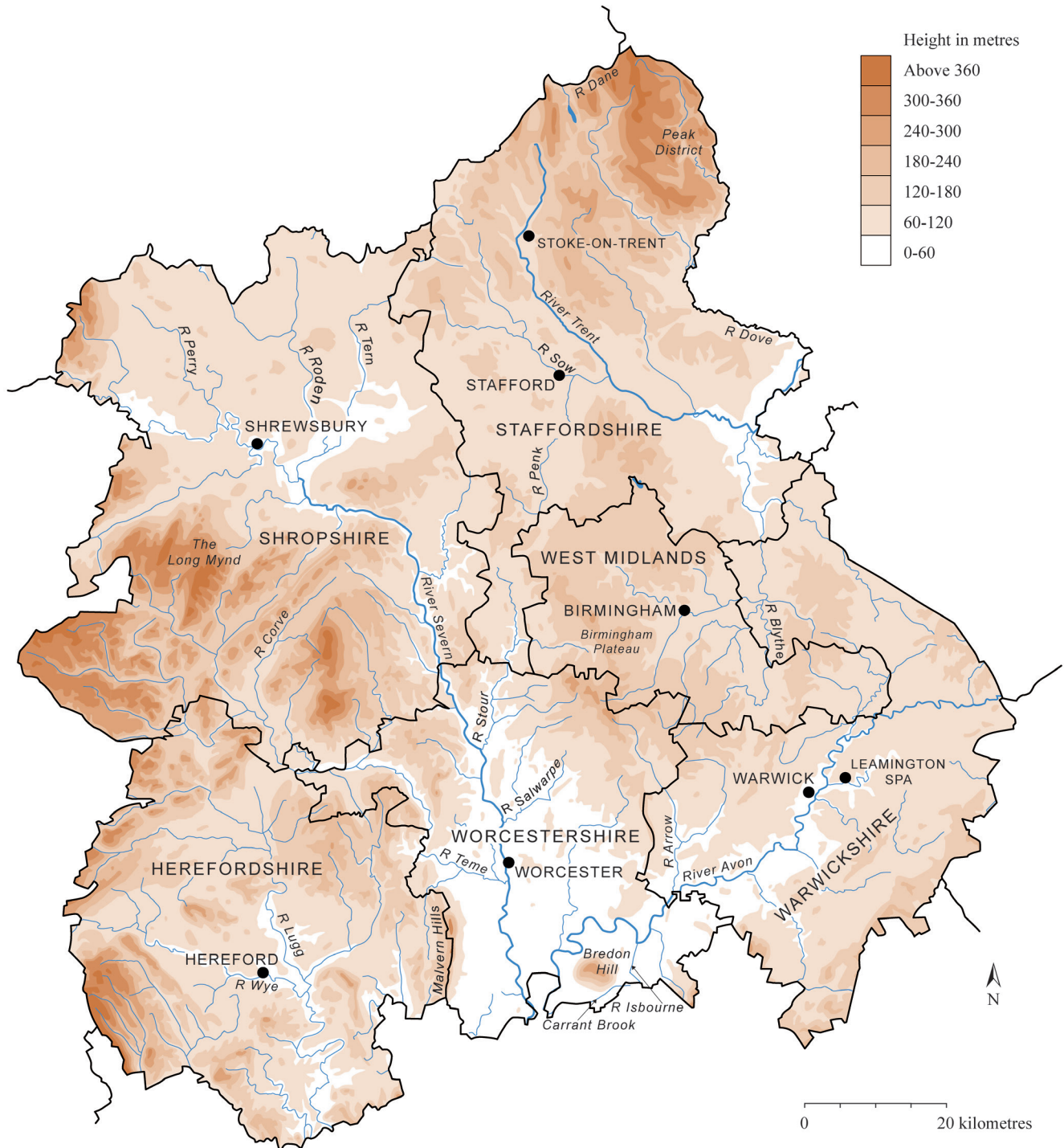


Fig. 1.1 West Midlands topography with main places and rivers indicated as mentioned in the text of this volume.

- The regional evidence for the understanding of exchange networks is unparalleled for the British Isles. The geology of much of the region is sufficiently distinctive to allow for sourcing pottery and important stone quarries (Moore 2006). The pottery evidence is perhaps the most well-known aspect, and this region was instrumental in demonstrating that specialised pottery production existed in Iron Age Britain (Peacock 1968), and in providing a quantified approach to analysing the distribution networks that connected producers to individuals at a considerable distance from the source (Morris 1982; 1994). The evidence for the exploitation

of salt at Droitwich and in Cheshire is even more important, as these are very unusual sources in Britain and the associated briquetage provides good evidence for the distribution of salt across a very wide area of western Britain (Morris 1985). The detailed analysis of these production and exchange networks is impossible to undertake in most of Britain where the geology is less conducive to investigation, or where the material culture simply does not exist.

- A particularly interesting discovery in the West Midlands is the burial evidence from Bredon Hill and Sutton Walls (Hencken 1938; Kenyon 1953). Both deposits have been interpreted as the result of warfare and certainly the remains at Bredon Hill had been systematically dismembered (Western and Hurst 2013). The only comparable deposit is the massacre level at South Cadbury which has recently been subjected to a detailed reinterpretation that has indicated the complexity of the depositional process (Barrett *et al.* 2000). The absence of a normal burial record for most of Iron Age Britain makes these deposits exceptionally important and provides some of the best evidence for the practice of warfare in Britain. These deposits have only recently been the subject of renewed study (Western and Hurst 2013), which has drawn attention to the international importance of the archaeological record of the region.

These are only some of the region's greatest hits and I am sure others would have a different list. Nevertheless, they give an impression of the important contribution West Midlands archaeology has made to the understanding of Later Prehistoric studies in Britain. I would now like to look at the potential the region has for addressing issues, which seem to me to be of considerable importance in current archaeological practice.

### Landscape and territory

Within the region the ability to compare and contrast different landscapes is very important, and understanding the very different nature of these landscapes should be one of the principal research objectives of the region.

It is immediately obvious that there is an important east-west division between the hillfort-rich landscapes of the Welsh Border counties, and the small enclosures that are so common in the low lying river valleys of Warwickshire and Staffordshire. This pattern was a feature of Cyril Fox's Highland Lowland division of Britain (Fox 1952), and, though we can now dismiss the cultural assumptions that dominate Fox's interpretation, we must still address the significant differences between the settlement patterns in each area (see Wigley, this volume).

There is also a major north/south division that ignores the landscape and which is best represented by material

culture. This is reflected in a marked decline in the quantity and quality of the ceramics found in the northern counties of Shropshire and Staffordshire, compared to the southern counties of Herefordshire, Worcestershire and Warwickshire, and this may also be the case for other aspects of material culture, such as metal and stone tools, though these patterns are more difficult to determine. These divisions can be linked to the development of distinctive exchange networks in the Middle Iron Age, which in turn are normally explained as reflecting ethnic identities, such as between the Dubonni and the Cornovii. However, we need to explore the significance of these differences at the level of daily practice before we start to discuss ethnic and tribal affinities.

For example, it is worth asking why certain stone types are being used to temper specific types of pottery. Can we just assume that this is because of the thermal properties provided to the pot which make it a more efficient cooking utensil? I doubt it. If the decoration and form of pots is about building identities and defining communities, then it may be that a desire to be associated with particular localities is the most significant feature of the distribution networks. A Neolithic analogy is appropriate: it is now fairly acceptable to claim that stone axes were being quarried from specific sources because of the symbolic significance of the sources, which were located on very dramatic topographic locations (Edmonds and Bradley 1993). Is it possible that some of the sources of rock temper used in the Iron Age also had a symbolic significance to the producers and users of this pottery? The distribution of pottery has to be seen as a social process; it creates relationships between people, which are lubricated by stories that explain these relationships and place them in a broader cosmology. Ultimately these stories create an explanation for people's existence as human beings, and place them in a world of rocks, soils, plants and animals.

The possibility of a symbolic significance for these ceramic sources may also be linked to some of the most important hillforts. The Malvern ridge is a dramatic landscape feature, which is highly visible, as anyone who has ever driven up the M5 will know. It acts as a boundary separating the very different landscapes of Herefordshire and Worcestershire. In most traditional societies this natural feature would be written into the mythological ancestry of the surrounding peoples. It would have a central role in the narrative of existence and provide an explanation for their being. It may be this mythological role that led to the construction of the two massive hillforts of Midsummer Hill and Herefordshire Beacon on the ridge. Do they control the mythology of place?

Directly opposite the Malverns is another prominent landscape feature, Bredon Hill. This isolated hill is the end of the Cotswold Ridge and looks down on the meeting of the rivers Avon and Severn. The hill is again controlled by the construction of a hillfort, but it is a very strange construction and difficult to interpret because of a massive landslip on



the northern slopes. Nevertheless, it seems to have been densely occupied despite a very exposed location, and the importance may be reflected in the extreme violence that was used to kill and dismember the occupants.

Separating these two eminences is the River Severn, and, again, this natural feature must have had a prominent role in the cosmological, social and economic life of these communities. It is surprising, therefore, to find that this river does not appear to be marked by the activities of any prehistoric community. If this river was in Eastern England we would expect to recover Bronze Age, and probably Iron Age, metalwork from dredging, but this does not appear to be the case for the Severn, though the Ironbridge Gorge might be the exception (see Wigley, this volume). Is this a result of particular dredging practices which do not allow for the recovery of archaeological remains, or is it an accurate reflection of an archaeological reality? Did the people of the West Midlands have a religious practice that avoided rivers? As Dorling *et al.* observe (this volume) we know next to nothing about Iron Age religious practice in this region.

### Site level

It is also necessary to consider the significance of the patterns recognised at the site level as part of this research process, and it is perhaps unfortunate that the analysis of sites was not a subject for detailed consideration in this volume. Certain aspects of settlements were a repeated feature of discussion during the original conference, and the nature of boundaries was one of these. This is a topic of considerable interest in later prehistoric research, and provides a thematic problem that cuts across different scales of the archaeological landscape:

- Large landscape boundaries are a conspicuous feature of some landscapes. Several of these have been identified in Warwickshire, and the redating of the cross-dykes of Shropshire to the prehistoric period is important. Pit alignments have a very interesting distribution, appearing in very limited areas on the river valleys of Warwickshire, Shropshire and Staffordshire.
- Field systems are also clearly a feature of some landscapes (notably at Kemerton, Worcestershire), though they are perhaps not as common as we would expect; recent work in Shropshire and Staffordshire suggests they are there, waiting to be explored (Wigley and Wardle, this volume).
- Enclosure boundaries are an important feature. The hillforts of the region are spectacularly well defined and can be used to distinguish the communities of the western uplands from the farmsteads occupying the less substantial enclosures of the eastern river valleys.
- Houses defined by shallow ditches are characteristic of the region. These should not be dismissed as drip

gullies, as they are a deliberate feature that would be a conspicuous part of the domestic arena.

All of these boundaries need to be interpreted, and cannot simply be assumed to have an obvious function. The enclosure of the landscape is not necessarily an efficient way of organising agricultural landscapes, particularly those where large-scale seasonal movements of animals are routine practice. The purpose of cross-ridge dykes and the precise physical characteristics of pit alignments are still a matter of some conjecture, but neither seem particularly efficient ways of creating an exclusive boundary. Field systems may be a feature of the Later Bronze Age, but as work on Dartmoor (Fleming 1988) and on Salisbury Plain (McOmish *et al.* 2002) clearly demonstrates, these divisions can be a relatively short-term phenomenon, which seems to be of little significance in the Iron Age. They do not simply reflect agricultural intensification to meet the demands of an increasing population in later prehistory.

The defensive nature of hillfort boundaries has been largely rejected in other areas within the hillfort zones of southern Britain (Bowden and McOmish 1987), and this re-interpretation has much to commend it, so long as people do not confuse the argument with a view that the Iron Age was a peaceful place, or that hillforts were never subject to attack (Sharples 1991). The effort involved in the construction of hillfort defences, and to a lesser extent settlement enclosures can be related to other issues of importance in these societies, and one of these must have been the social construction of identity. All of these boundaries have to be understood in terms of relationships between people who have chosen to define and delimit a specific place in the landscape. They are choosing to separate this place from other spaces, control access to the place and movement in the surrounding space. Hillforts separate communities from the landscape and other communities, and drip gullies separate a household from functionally distinct settlement space and from other households.

In recent years a considerable amount of emphasis has been placed on the understanding of depositional processes, in particular in houses. It is clear that the location and manner in which material is deposited within houses and in the settlement areas surrounding them, can tell us a considerable amount about society. This process of deposition is not simply occurring in a self-explanatory fashion, but uses a cultural logic, which can illuminate the different roles of individuals within these societies. The recovery of intact floor levels and *in situ* surfaces must be a very high priority in any research. These are always going to be rare in an intensively cultivated agricultural landscape, but recent work in Warwickshire suggests they do occur (Palmer 2012). Valley floors, uplands and localised accumulation zones, such as behind hillfort ramparts, become very important in this respect.

Finally, it is important to think of stratigraphic sequence as not just a useful means of demonstrating chronology but as a significant human decision. Why do people choose either to build on the same spot for several generations or, in contrast, choose to avoid past settlement locations for the construction of their own new settlements (Brück 1999; Gerritson 1999; Sharples 2010). In many areas of eastern England, the presence of settlement scatters which spread across the landscape in an unfocused manner, links these areas with the continent, and contrasts them with the location of specific settlements of areas such as Wessex. The creation of a settlement boundary clearly restricts a settlement's ability to expand or drift, and suggests a commitment to long-term occupation of a locale, which is otherwise unusual in prehistory. Does this indicate a change in inheritance and ownership?

### Potential

The understanding of settlements is a crucial research goal for Later Prehistory, as in many ways the millennium and a half from the beginning of the Middle Bronze Age is defined by the ubiquitous presence of settlements in many areas of Britain. In the West Midlands, however, identifying Late Bronze Age settlement has proved to be very difficult and settlements belonging to this period are largely absent from many areas (Dalwood, this volume).

The potential of limited and restricted research excavations to transform radically the current understanding

of the archaeological record is ably demonstrated by the discovery of a Late Bronze/Early Iron Age settlement at Whitchurch (Waddington and Sharples 2011; Figure 1.2). This settlement lies in the valley of the River Stour, a tributary of the Avon. Research excavations by Cardiff University revealed a complex site which consisted of a Late Bronze Age/Early Iron Age midden; a thick accumulation of organic rich soil. This later became the focus for Iron Age settlement which included rectangular, trapezoidal and oval enclosures. Pits, postholes and gullies were recognised both cutting through the midden and stratified below the midden (Figure 1.3), indicating the presence of a complex sequence of settlement structures.

Despite the small-scale nature of the research, the excavations produced an enormous assemblage of finds: 251 copper alloy artefacts, 7,512 sherds of pottery, 519 fragments of fired clay (including briquetage and spear mould fragments), 47 pieces of worked bone, 16 stone tools and a blue glass bead. The pottery assemblage from the midden and contemporary settlement features belongs to the post-Deverel-Rimbury decorated tradition that dates to the period around 850/800–550/500 cal BC (Brudenell in Waddington and Sharples 2011), and is almost unique for the whole region. 17,890 animal bones were recovered dominated by sheep, but with relatively high numbers of pig, a feature of many other midden sites (cf. Madgwick in Waddington and Sharples 2011). The presence of isolated bones of beaver and wild boar are important.



Fig. 1.2 Whitchurch, Warwickshire. General view of site locality with Trench 4 in foreground.





*Fig. 1.3 Whitchurch, Warwickshire. Trench 6 excavated.*

The copper alloy assemblage largely comprises metalworking residues including casting waste and an ingot, which together with the mould fragments suggest metalworking was an important part of the settlement activity. There was also an important assemblage of objects which included a socketed axe and a late palstave; tools including a chisel, punch, awl and razor; fragments from weapons, and a wide range of ornaments including pins, rings and discs. The most interesting discovery was 20 miniature axes (Waddington 2007; Figure 1.4). This assemblage was a very unexpected discovery as, until recent reporting through the Portable Antiquities Scheme, only a small quantity of miniature axes had been discovered, mostly from Wiltshire (Robinson 1995). These were thought to date to the Iron Age or Roman period, and a Late Bronze Age date was unexpected.

This is a truly exceptional site and is currently without parallel in the region. Sites producing Post Deverel-Rimbury Decorated Wares are very unusual, bone assemblages seldom survive, glass beads are unknown, and copper

alloy objects are rare and seldom found on settlement sites. Most West Midlands finds assemblages fit a single box (see Dalwood, this volume). The site is best interpreted as an important meeting place, where people gathered together to exchange material culture, animals and perhaps people, and to undertake significant ritual acts, the most noticeable of which was the conspicuous and wasteful deposition of large quantities of material culture. The location is relatively inconspicuous and, though the Stour valley might be an important route connecting the West Midlands to the Thames Valley, there seems little intrinsic reason why this location was chosen.

The exploration of the settlement at Whitchurch demonstrates that new discoveries will transform our understanding of the region. The recent discovery of an Iron Age road at Sharpstone Hill (Shropshire; Malim and Hayes 2010), as well as the discovery of a sword scabbard in the nearby Late Iron Age enclosure at Meole Brace (Bain and Evans 2011), and of large coin hoards at Pershore (Worcestershire; Hurst and Leins 2013),





Fig. 1.4 Whitchurch, Warwickshire. Copper alloy axes, including rare miniature examples.

would not have been predicted on the basis of previous work in the region and indicate the complexity of the archaeological record. The Portable Antiquities Scheme has also produced a surprising number of finds that challenge the accepted view that the West Midlands is impoverished (Bolton, this volume). It should also be remembered that Staffordshire is one of the few areas of Britain outside East Anglia which has produced gold torcs, such as at Glascote (Painter 1971).

### Conclusion

The West Midlands is one of the least understood regions of Later Prehistoric Britain. It does not generally have the long tradition of intensive antiquarian research that illuminates areas such as Wessex and Yorkshire, but nor does it have the intensive developer-funded excavations that have transformed our understanding of the East Midlands and South-East England in recent years. Nevertheless, it is clear that there is rich and interesting archaeology waiting to be discovered and that the region has the potential to make a major contribution to our understanding of many

of the key problems in Later Prehistory. A considerable amount of work is required and whilst some of it may be undertaken as developer-funded archaeology, this is unlikely to provide all the answers. Targeted research excavations are an urgent necessity, and it is unclear where the resources for these projects will be located. They are likely to require partnerships between universities, local communities and professional organisations to be successful.

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