

Chapter 6: The Ceremonial Complex in its Local and National Context

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LOCAL CONTEXT

Any discussion of the Devil's Quoits area has to take into consideration the bias introduced by the methods of discovery and excavation. The majority of sites were affected to some extent by commercial extraction with excavation often taking place under unfavourable conditions. The quality of data from excavations in Gravelly Guy field (Lambrick *et al.* in prep.) serves to demonstrate what evidence may have been lost.

The Devil's Quoits was built in a long-inhabited and much modified landscape. The wider Upper Thames core area (Bradley 1984, 41) can be demonstrated to have had its own distinct development from the earlier Neolithic through to the later Bronze Age. The settlement and use of the surrounding area provide the framework in which the monument was built, used and abandoned. That framework is outlined here.

Later Mesolithic (c. 7500–4500 cal BC)

The local impact of human activity in the Mesolithic, summarised by Case (1989, 19), is thought to have been minimal. The extensive environmental change recorded during this period, particularly in the context of the Upper Thames, was almost entirely a product of natural agencies (Robinson and Wilson 1987, 29). Some forest clearance, perhaps to create browse and encourage the fruiting of hazelnuts, probably occurred, as at Mingies Ditch (Allen and Robinson 1993, 142).

The area of second gravel terrace at Stanton Harcourt appears to have been only sparsely used during this period. Some activity has been noted from the collection of surface flint scatters at Gravelly Guy (Holgate forthcoming) though no concentrations were noted. The scale of this activity across the terrace is not known but redeposited lithic material in later features in the Vicarage Field and at the Devil's Quoits henge may indicate the probable extent. The range of material analysed by Holgate suggests the possible existence of a base or short stay camp in the vicinity of the later Neolithic pits at Gravelly Guy.

Later Mesolithic activity in the Upper Thames Region as a whole is summarized by Case (1986, 18–19), and Holgate (1988, 208–27) provides a corpus of known sites. Much of the activity was

associated with the river Thames and its tributaries. Holgate records three sites in the Windrush valley in addition to Gravelly Guy and Mingies Ditch, in the form of surface scatters at Asthall, Sherborne Brook and Cow Common.

Early Neolithic (c. 4500–3500 cal BC)

Woodland exploitation seems to have remained a part of the economy, with fruits and nuts outnumbering other charred plant remains, and some monuments built in woodland clearances (Lambrick 1988, 130). Evidence for earlier Neolithic settlement in the Upper Thames Region comes from the study of lithic scatters as few sites of this period have been excavated.

The pre-cairn activity at both Hazleton North and Ascott-under-Wychwood is associated with Herne's class of carinated bowl and perhaps denotes an early Neolithic horizon (1988, 26). In chronological terms both sites would appear to belong to the start of the fourth millennium cal BC. On the whole evidence for the early Neolithic in this region is sparse and most of those sites that have been excavated fall rather late in the period, after the beginning of the fourth millennium cal BC. The evidence from soils buried beneath long cairns of this date in the wider Upper Thames region is disparate. At Hazleton North, on the Cotswolds, pedological study indicated possible tillage of the buried soil c. 3700 cal BC (Macphail 1990, 223) and the analysis of pollen and carbonized plant remains suggested cultivation or crop processing in the vicinity (Scaife 1990, 219; Straker 1990, 215). In contrast the broadly coeval buried soil beneath the Ascott-under-Wychwood long barrow showed no evidence for agricultural modification, furthermore, the associated molluscan fauna was predominantly of woodland species. To the S, on the edge of the chalk downs, the buried soil beneath the Wayland's Smithy II chambered tomb provided evidence for ploughing, again at a similar date.

This period also saw the construction of causewayed enclosures, perhaps around the middle of the fourth millennium cal BC. At least nine have been identified in the Upper Thames Region although the majority are known only from cropmarks. While monumental in scale, they are diminutive in contrast to those of Wessex (Bradley and Holgate 1984, 130). They are all situated so as to overlook the floodplain

of the Thames or its tributaries. A number are clustered, with Eastleach, Langford, Broadwell and Aston Bampton occurring close together some 10 km to the W of the Devil's Quoits area (Lambrick 1988, fig. 66). Further N along the Windrush Valley are the sites of Signet and Icomb.

15 km to the S is Abingdon, the only causewayed enclosure to be excavated in the region (Avery 1982, 10–50). It is generally agreed that the site was developed from a small enclosure defined by a segmented ditch and bank into a substantial enclosure with a continuous ditch and earth rampart (Thomas 1991, 153; Bradley 1992, 139–40; Barclay and Halpin forthcoming). The inner ditch was defined by a series of deep pits recut by a shallow segmented ditch. The earlier deep pits contain relatively little cultural material in contrast to both the shallow recuts and the lower fill of the outer ditch which contain significant quantities of cultural material. There are no satisfactory radiocarbon determinations for the enclosure's initial construction, the more reliable determinations on animal bone date at least the later use of the enclosure to c. 3500–3000 cal BC (4710 ± 135 BP, BM-352; 4460 ± 140 BP, BM-355; 4450 ± 145 BP, BM-354), within the currency of the decorated bowl pottery recovered from the ditches.

Middle Neolithic (c. 3500–3000 cal BC)

All of the monuments identified as belonging to this phase in the immediate area have a restricted distribution and are located towards the NE of the Devil's Quoits henge (Fig. 39).

Mortuary enclosures or long barrows

Sites XXII, 7 and 8 (Fig. 55), respectively c. 10 m and 20 m long, may have been mortuary enclosures or small, possibly late, long barrows. Their common alignment and juxtaposition suggest similarity of date and function. Their proximity to hengiform ring ditch XXII, 6 may also be significant. These two sites may represent the earliest monuments to be constructed on the terrace and would overlap in date with the Abingdon enclosure. The alignment of sites XXII, 7–8 is analogous to that of sites II, VIII and XI at Dorchester on Thames (Bradley and Chambers 1988, fig. 4).

The subrectangular enclosure, XXII, 7, may be comparable in plan to phase 1 of the oval barrow at Radley (Bradley 1992, 128–9). The oval plan of site XXII, 8 recalls the later phases of the same monument. The probably middle Neolithic dates of the North Stoke and Dorchester on Thames (sites I and VIII) mortuary enclosures (Case 1982b, 68; Whittle *et al.* 1992, 152) are relevant here. The occurrence of mortuary enclosures on the Thames gravels in this region has been discussed by Bradley and Holgate (1984, 107–135). The wide variety of long enclosures and the general lack of long barrows may be a regional characteristic.

Middle Neolithic burial

The most substantial and best-known evidence for contemporary activity is the female burial within a double ring ditch at Linch Hill Corner (site XXI, 1; Fig. 53; Grimes 1960, 154–64). The grave goods, a jet belt slider and an edge-polished knife, are closely matched by those from the oval barrows at Radley and Mount Farm, Dorchester on Thames (Bradley 1992, 136; Lambrick in prep). In the Mount Farm barrow were two pit graves, one of them containing a burial dated to 3380–2900 cal BC (4450 ± 100 BP; HAR-4673; Case 1986, 32) and accompanied by sherds in Peterborough Ware fabric and a flint knife, unpolished but otherwise comparable with that from Linch Hill. The burial has affinities with other middle Neolithic single graves in the region (Case 1986, 26), not least with that found within a double ring ditch at Newnham Murren, Wallingford (Moorey 1982). Figure 57 illustrates the similarity in design between the Linch Hill and Wallingford ring ditches, as well as of a further example at Aldwinckle, Northamptonshire, with a *terminus post quem* of 3510–3040 cal BC (4560 ± 70 BP; HAR-1411; Jackson 1976).

Taken as a group these burials, grave associations and barrow forms may all belong to a period centred on 3000 cal BC. Support for this date comes from the recently excavated oval barrow at Lower Horton, Berkshire (Ford forthcoming) and a burial with a belt slider from Whitegrounds, Yorkshire, dated to 3500–2920 cal BC (4520 ± 90 BP; HAR-5587; Brewster 1984).

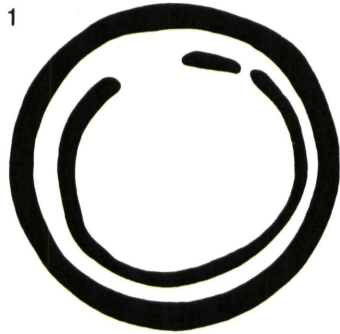
Late Neolithic and Beaker (c. 3000–1800 cal BC)

Hengiform enclosures

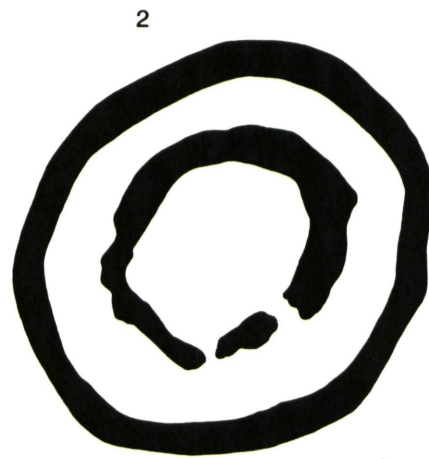
Site XXII, 6 (Fig. 29) may have been broadly coeval with sites XXII, 7–8 and may have formed part of an alignment of barrows. Its irregular penannular plan, dug in a series of interconnected pits, recalls those of sites IV, V and VI at Dorchester on Thames (Atkinson *et al.* 1951, figs 16, 19, 22), all middle or late Neolithic in date (Bradley and Holgate 1984, 123), of site 83A at Barford, Warwickshire, dated to 3320–2880 cal BC (4368 ± 64 BP; Birm-7; Oswald 1969, 1–65), and of Handley 27, Dorset, although, unlike the rest, this last site was covered by a mound (Fig. 57; Barrett *et al.* 1991, 85–92). The posthole setting which succeeded it again recalls some of the Dorchester sites and the two stones which may have stood outside it indicate a non-functional use.

Site IX, 1 (Fig. 45), another hengiform enclosure, was out of use by the early second millennium cal BC on the evidence of a *terminus ante quem* provided by a radiocarbon determination of 1870–1520 cal BC 3370 ± 40 BP (UB-3126) for a charcoal spread in its upper fill. Its origins may lie in this earlier period, a possibility heightened by worn sherds of Mortlake Ware recovered from the recut ditch. The enclosure was of similar size to ring ditch II, 10 in the

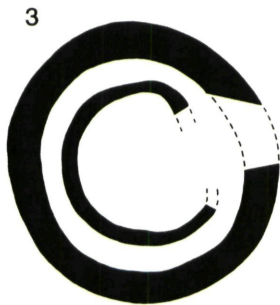
Devil's Quoits, Stanton Harcourt



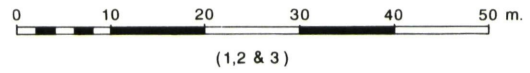
Linch Hill, Stanton Harcourt XXI,1



Aldwinckle, Northants



Wallingford



(1,2 & 3)



Gravelly Guy, Stanton Harcourt IX,1, phase 1



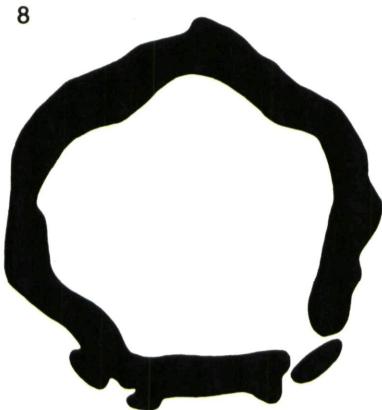
City Farm, Hanborough Site 4, phase 2



Gravelly Guy, Stanton Harcourt IX,1, phase 2



Vicarage Field, Stanton Harcourt II,10



Hadley 27, Dorset



Stanton Harcourt XXII,6, phase 1



(4,5,6,7,8 & 9)

Vicarage Field and can be compared with site 4, City Farm, Hanborough, 5 km from Stanton Harcourt (Fig. 57). Here, at the centre of a disc barrow, was a penannular oval ditch, 9–10 m in diameter and aligned NE-SE. Excavation revealed evidence for revetment very similar to that of X, 1. Charcoal from a burnt post gave a radiocarbon determination of 1960–1620 cal BC 3460 ± 65 BP (GrN-1685); and finds from the lower ditch silt included finger-nail decorated Beaker sherds and a 'thumbnail' scraper.

Pits

Pits containing later Neolithic and Beaker pottery occurred in four areas on the second gravel terrace, the ceramic styles from these pits tending to be mutually exclusive, Grooved Ware occurring only to the N of the Devil's Quoits. At Linch Hill, a pit containing Mortlake Ware seems to have been quarried away (Leeds 1940, 6). In field II (the Vicarage Field) two of the three pits excavated contained Grooved Ware and the third was without pottery (Thomas 1955, 22–3). In field XV two pits contained Peterborough Ware and the third was without pottery (Hamlin 1963, 2–4). In field IX (Gravelly Guy), Grooved Ware was found in a linear scatter of pits spread from Beaker 'flat' grave F1054 to hengiform ring-ditch site IX, 1; pit 1002, isolated from the rest, contained Mortlake Ware and a small quantity of Clacton substyle Grooved Ware; and Beaker was found in two tight pit clusters (Fig. 44). The remaining pit contents included a range of flintwork, flint debitage, carbonized plant remains, and animal bone (Tables 19–20).

Pit F1002, with its large quantity of Mortlake Ware pottery and absence of other artefacts, represents a typical Peterborough Ware deposit. This apparent deliberate selection of pottery for burial recalls a pit deposit at Barton Court Farm (Miles 1986, fiche 3:B2) which contained one or more apparently inverted Mortlake Ware vessels containing carbonized plant remains.

Further special deposits may be represented by two pits in the linear scatter: pit F1047, which contained only antlers, and pit F1039 which contained the remains of a single Durrington Walls substyle Grooved Ware vessel. The upper part of another Durrington Walls vessel was found in pit A in field II (the Vicarage Field).

This selection of the Durrington Walls substyle for deposition in a complete or near-complete state recurs elsewhere in the Upper Thames, as at Abingdon Common, where at least four vessels had been

placed in a pit (Balkwill 1979, 31). This is in contrast to the use of the Woodlands substyle, which tends to occur with a much wider range and greater quantity of cultural material, for example pit B in the Vicarage Field, pits F784, F785 and F962 at Roughground Farm (Darvill 1993, 9), pits at Barrow Hills (Barclay and Halpin forthcoming) and pits 2 and 5 at Cassington (Case 1982d, 121–7).

The pits at Stanton Harcourt exhibit a number of forms, most are oval or round, some are bowl shaped while others have flatter bottoms and steep or vertical sides (Tables 19–20). There are a number of obstacles to a detailed study of pits in the Upper Thames Region. The sample of pits is often, for example, quite small, with pits occurring in small clusters or in isolation. The pits may have been dug specifically to receive special or selected deposits associated with ritual rather than everyday domestic activity.

The Stanton Harcourt pits are thus likely to have had a number of functions associated with the deliberate burial of selected domestic rubbish. The pit scatters could be the result of occupation associated with ritual and funerary activities at the ring ditches and Devil's Quoits henge. Their original excavation, like that of the ring ditches, could have had its place in an agricultural cycle and the periodic settlement of the terrace.

By the time the Devil's Quoits henge was built, probably c. 2500 cal BC (Ch. 2), the surrounding area was already one of funerary, ceremonial and domestic activity, which became more intense through the life of the monument.

Environment and economy

The henge ditches and the Gravelly Guy pits have provided the bulk of the information about the contemporary landscape. Mollusca from the former indicate that the terrace was largely open grassland during the construction and use of the monument (Evans, Ch. 3). Molluscan evidence from the Gravelly Guy pits similarly points to open country, with part of the gravel terrace being used for permanent pasture (Robinson forthcoming).

The plant remains from the same pits (Moffett forthcoming) indicate small-scale arable agriculture combined with the collection of wild plant foods from both open and woodland habitats. A similar combination of wild and cultivated plant foods was present in pits containing Grooved Ware and Peterborough Ware at Barton Court Farm (Miles 1986, fiche 3:A10–12).

Figure 57 (opposite) Ring ditches: Linch Hill Corner, Stanton Harcourt (site XXI, 1); Aldwinckle, Northamptonshire; Newnham Murren, Wallingford; Gravelly Guy, Stanton Harcourt (site IX, 1), phases 1 and 2; City Farm, Hanborough, site 4, phase 1; Vicarage Field, Stanton Harcourt (site II, 10); Handley barrow 27, Dorset, and Stanton Harcourt site XXII, 6, phase 1

Virtually no wild animals are represented in the cattle-dominated faunas of both the pits (Levitan forthcoming) and the henge ditch (Levitan, Ch. 3).

Thomas has suggested that cereals and the bones of domesticated animals may be over-represented in pit and henge contexts, their deposition reflecting their symbolic value, which may have been far greater than their importance in the contemporary diet (1993, 388).

Burials with Beakers (c. 2600–1800 cal BC; Table 21)

Domestic and funerary activity involving the use of Beaker pottery was concentrated to the NW of the Devil's Quoits henge. There is a wide range of Beaker vessel forms, though most may be assigned to Case's Middle style or style 2 (1977, 77; 1993, 243).

Five burials with Early or Middle style Beakers were in 'flat' graves (graves 1 and 2 in field II, grave F1054 in field IX and graves 1/1 and 1/2 in field XV). Two were in ring ditches considerably smaller than those of the Neolithic or the early Bronze Age: ring ditch XV, 5 was only 14 m in diameter; and Beaker ring ditch XXI, 1a, superimposed on the circuit of Neolithic double ring ditch XXI, 1, was only 7.6–8.2 m in diameter compared with the outer ditch of the earlier monument, which was 26.3 m. The only two Late style Beakers were associated with the reuse of an earlier ring ditch at site X, 6, where they accompanied two successive secondary burials which replaced an initial undated burial and were themselves succeeded by cremations. Radiocarbon determinations of respectively 2280–1990 cal BC (3709 ± 35 BP; UB-3122), 2180–1950 cal BC (3666 ± 35 BP; UB-3123) and 2280–1910 cal BC (3677 ± 53 BP; UB-3125) for the two Beaker-associated burials and the cremations suggest that the sequence was a short one, as does subsidence of the third burial, apparently caused by the collapse of the underlying wooden chamber containing the second.

The Beaker graves display the range of associations by sex listed by Clarke (1970, appendix 3.3) with the male burials accompanied by the widest range of items and occurring in arguably richer or higher status burials (Table 21). This would suggest that greater expenditure of labour and more elaborate rites may have been involved in male burials.

Even the ring ditch sites were not monumental and would have required little of the labour budget. Small ring ditches of comparable date have been noted at Radley, ring ditch 4 (Williams 1948, 5), and Chilbolton, Hampshire (Russel 1990, fig. 2), both, as here, in association with wooden coffins or mortuary structures. Bradley and Chambers (1988, 272) have defined monumentality in terms of labour demands. Here, the small size of the ring ditches and any mounds that may have covered them suggests that consumption took the form of grave wealth and possible elaboration of the grave and grave ritual,

rather than of earthmoving. Wooden coffins and mortuary structures were constructed for the dead. The emphasis was on maintaining the existing social structure through ritual display rather than through monument construction. Of the inhumations, the male Beaker burial in reused ring ditch X, 6, with its plank-built mortuary structure and timber-revetted mound, may have required the greatest output of labour.

Disarticulated remains were recorded in two instances, displaying differing characteristics. Grave 1/1 in field XV contained a partially disarticulated skeleton possibly interred in an advanced stage of decay, though it is conceivable that the grave was robbed or disturbed. Disarticulated or disturbed Beaker burials are known elsewhere in the region, notably at Barrow Hills, Radley (Barclay and Halpin forthcoming). Evidence from Barrow Hills indicates that disturbance could have been deliberate and an integral act of a subsequent funeral (cf Mizoguchi 1993, 230–1). The other find of disarticulated bone was from ring ditch X, 6, where adult vertebral and carpal fragments were found in cremation pit F4014 above the cremated remains of a child.

Little is known of the date and character of penannular post setting IX, 2 (Fig. 44) beyond the fact that it was pre-Iron Age in date and lay in an area of later Neolithic and early Bronze Age activity.

Other early Bronze Age traditions (c. 2000–1200 cal BC)

Most of the ring ditches around the Devil's Quoits henge could have been built during the full early Bronze Age. It can be noted that a number of the barrow groups contained one or more Beaker burials. Although the evidence is limited these burials could represent founder burials or barrows within a number of barrow groups. If this is accepted then the linear group X, 2–8 may have developed from Beaker barrow X, 6, the linear scatter of barrows near Linch Hill may be aligned on the reused middle Neolithic Barrow XXI, 1, and the linear barrows XV, 2–4 may be aligned on Beaker 'flat' grave I, 1. It is perhaps significant that all three burials are of adult males with 'rich' grave assemblages. This recalls the arrangement of barrows with primary Beaker burials found at Barrow Hills, Radley and at Lambourn on the Berkshire Downs. The triple barrow X, 3 may have been similar to the twin barrow Radley 4/4a which contained two mounds, one covering a cremation deposit with a small bronze knife-dagger and the other an inhumation accompanied by a fine 'collared' Beaker, a pair of gold basket earrings and three flint arrowheads. The subsequent burial in ring ditch X, 6 at Gravelly Guy was of a female accompanied by a handled Beaker.

The two rows of ring ditches in the Vicarage Field (II, 1–4 and II, 5–8) may all belong to this phase: II, 4 contained a centrally-placed cremation accompa-

Table 21. Beaker burials at Stanton Harcourt.

FG = flat grave, RD = ring ditch, C = coffin, MC = mortuary chamber, * = disturbed

F = flake, S = scraper, AH = arrowhead(s), Wg = wristguard, W = whetstone, A = bronze awl, D = bronze dagger, Sp = spatula, Ar = antler rod

Grave number	Burial type	Orientation	Sex	Age	Beaker step	Grave goods
XV, 1/1	FG*	?N	M	15-25	2	F, Sp
XV, 1/2	FG	*	I	2	3/4	*
XV, 5	RD	?	M	Adult	3	Wg
XV, 1/4	FG	?	?	?	*	*
XV, 1/5	FG	?	M	Adult	*	*
II, grave 1	FG	SW	F	18-20	2	F
II, grave 2	FG	SE	F	Adult	2/3	BS
IX, F1054	FG	SE	?	Adult	3	?F
X, 6 (2)	RD/MC	NE	M	45+	6	D, Wg, WA, S, F, Ar
X, 6 (3)	RD/?MC	N	F	20-25	7	A, S
XXI, 1a	RD/C	NW	M	Adult	3	AH, BF

nied by a Food Vessel and pits D and E nearby contained cremations with, respectively, Collared and Biconical Urn. In the small cluster of ring ditches to the SW of the Devil's Quoits henge, XXIII, 2 contained a central cremation with a Biconical Urn and XXIX, 2 had an inhumation burial at the base of its ditch.

The largest barrow to be constructed was the possible bell barrow XVI, 1, which contained a classic Wessex II burial. In addition the mound covered the remains of a funerary pyre and the ditch produced a further 'later' Bronze Age inhumation (Case 1963, 42). The barrow was built close to the Devil's Quoits henge and near to the centre of the entire monument complex.

In situ cremation pyres are a common feature of early Bronze Age barrows and examples are known from the excavation of 18 barrows near Shrewton, Wilts (Green and Rollo-Smith 1984, 255-318) and from Amesbury G71, reconsidered by Barrett (1988, 38). Site XVI, 1 was unusual in that cremation and incorporation took place around the same focal point, a central timber post which became the structural centre for the mound and ring ditch.

The construction of the Wessex II barrow marks the end of the early Bronze Age. The barrow may well have been the last undertaking in the ceremonial complex at Devil's Quoits. The final Wessex burials overlapped with the appearance of the Deverel-Rimbury complex (Barrett 1980, 83), at a time when the large communal monuments went out of general use. This horizon is marked by the six cremations associated with Deverel-Rimbury type ceramics inserted into ring ditch XV, 4 and by sherds

of a middle Bronze Age urn (Fig. 31, 1) from layer G of the henge ditch. These seem to represent the last acts directly relating to the monuments before their eventual destruction.

MONUMENT MORPHOLOGY AND FUNCTION

At Stanton Harcourt and in the Upper Thames Valley as a whole many of the barrow groups survive as ring ditches so that taxonomic systems devised for upstanding monuments (eg Grinsell 1953) are not applicable. Instead classification has to rely on the interpretation of the ditch stratigraphy. Case (1963, 39-40) identifies two broad categories of ring ditch in the Oxford region: those with and without substantial mounds, the latter being subdivided according to the probable location of former internal or external earthworks.

Only two ring ditches from Stanton Harcourt have recorded evidence for mounds: XVI, 1, which was deliberately slighted in the 18th-19th centuries, and X, 6. XVI, 1 was the largest barrow to be constructed at Stanton Harcourt and survived as a prominent earthwork until its deliberate destruction in the last two centuries. The original form was a classic bell barrow. It belongs with the small number of Wessex Culture burials known from this area (Bradley 1986a, 39). X, 6, with its rich male Beaker burial housed in a timber mortuary chamber within a small revetted mound, has similarities with a broadly contemporary barrow at Chilbolton, Hampshire (Russel 1990, 153-72). Evidence for revetted mounds and for of post and stake structures beneath

barrows has been summarised by Ashbee (1960, 60–5). Such features have a wider north European distribution (Glasbergen 1954; Lanting and van der Waals 1976, 42).

With considerable caution, given their degraded state and incomplete investigation, many of the remaining Stanton Harcourt ring ditches may be attributed to Case's categories as follows. Bank near outer edge of ditch (form 2a): II, 10; VI, 2; VI, 4; IX, 1; XXI, 4; XXII, 2; XXIX, 3; XXIX, 4. Bank near inner edge of ditch (form 2b): II, 4; XV, 3; XV, 4; X, 7; and X, 8. Banks near outer and inner edge of ditch (form 2c): XV, 5. Without earthworks near ditch edges (form 2d): XV, 1; XV, 2; XXI, 1; XXI, 3; XXIX, 1; and XXIX, 2. Any or all may have had small, central mounds.

Three sites, X, 6; XXI, 1 and XXII, 3 (unexcavated), had two concentric ditches. X, 6 had a number of structural phases associated with a possible sequence of five central burials and it is probable that the inner ditch was later than the outer. XXI, 1 had an inner interrupted ditch and an outer continuous ditch associated with a middle or late Neolithic inhumation burial. In the Upper Thames Region middle and late Neolithic ring ditches are often double (Fig. 57).

A further four ring ditches can be interpreted as twin or triple barrows or enclosures. X, 3 appears to have been a triple barrow with three central pits. XV, 4; XI, 4 and XXII, 1 were varieties of twin barrow. Unfortunately the triple barrow and two of the twin barrows were destroyed without archaeological investigation. Twin barrows have been recorded in this region at Radley Barrow Hills (Riley 1982, fig. 40), North Stoke (Case 1982, fig. 33) and further S on the Berkshire Downs at Lambourn (Grinsell 1953, pl. IV).

The Gravelly Guy linear barrow group, X, 1–8, may have grown from W to E. It is possible to see an initial small group of contiguous ring ditches (X, 8–6), developing with the reuse of X, 6 and the possible addition of further, larger barrows towards the E in a sequence similar to that suggested for the Lambourn cemetery on the Berkshire Downs (Wymer 1965–6, 1–16).

AROUND THE MONUMENTS

Reassessment of the excavations at Stanton Harcourt (Ch. 5) suggests that settlement in the late Neolithic and earlier Bronze Age was integrated with ceremonial and funerary monuments. Pryor has argued (1988, 71) that livestock played a far greater role in the British Neolithic than has so far been realised and that grazing, like other aspects of farming, needs proper land management, which may be reflected in the organisation of monuments within the landscape. Such considerations could well be extended into the second millennium, at least up to the widespread establishment of enduring field systems and farmsteads in the later Bronze Age. The preponder-

ance of cattle in the animal bone from the Devil's Quoits henge and the Gravelly Guy pits, the associated grassland molluscan faunas, and, in the pits, the relative unimportance of cereals suggest that the local subsistence base may have conformed to this model.

The possibility prompts a review of Case's suggestion that the linear patterning of the groups of ring ditches surrounding the Devil's Quoits may indicate land divisions or boundaries within an area attractive for spring and summer grazing (1982c, 113; 1986, 33). He defines five clusters among the ring ditches, each spanning an extended period and representing a different descent group (1982c, 111–3, fig. 63). Similar interpretations have been argued for some Wessex barrows (Fleming 1971) and the ring ditches of the Great Ouse Valley (Green 1974). The apparent balance of the subsistence base supports all three authors' emphasis on the importance of pasture and of control over access to it. The seasonal transhumance assumed by all of them seems, however, of debatable validity (Lambrick 1992).

AFTER THE MONUMENTS (c. 1200–700 cal BC)

The abandonment of Neolithic and early Bronze Age monuments is often seen as an expression of socio-political change. The previous system of ritual authority and ranked societies, represented by the large-scale communal monuments and rich barrow burials, is replaced by more egalitarian funerary monuments; simple cremation cemeteries in which the same ceramic vessels serve both funerary and domestic purposes. Organised landscapes are also a feature of this period with the construction of linear field ditches and field systems.

This episode is locally elusive. A small number of cremation cemeteries have been excavated (Barrett and Bradley 1980, 251), at Standlake and Long Wittenham and further upstream at Shorcote (Barclay and Glass in prep.). No large Deverel-Rimbury settlements are known from this region, although some pottery has been found on more extensive late Bronze Age/early Iron Age settlements, among them Butlers Field, Lechlade (Barclay forthcoming), and Roughground Farm, Lechlade (Hingley 1993), as well as in small clusters of features on the floodplain at Yarnton (Hey 1994). Part of a middle Bronze Age settlement has been excavated at Corporation Farm, Abingdon (Barrett and Bradley 1980, fig. 4). Later Bronze Age field systems impinge on the monuments of the Dorchester on Thames area (Lambrick 1992, fig. 29; Whittle *et al.* 1992, 159–62).

Later Bronze Age activity on the second gravel terrace at Stanton Harcourt is sparse. The slow accumulation of layer F in the ditch of the Devil's Quoits (Limbrey, this volume), suggests little activity in the immediate area after the abandonment of the monument, as does the very small quantity of pottery from the same layer, which ranges from late Bronze/early Iron Age to Roman in date (Table 10).

A small amount of late Bronze Age pottery was also found in the upper silts of ring ditch XXI, 4.

Late Bronze Age settlement in the Upper Thames in general seems scant in contrast to the extensive sites of the Kennet Valley exemplified by the sites of Aldermaston Wharf, Knight's Farm and the Reading Business Park (Bradley *et al.* 1980, 217–95; Moore and Jennings 1992). The present contrast may, however, be an exaggerated one. The evidence available up to the mid-1980s is summarised by Bradley (1986a), and evaluation in Yarnton and Cassington has located late Bronze Age settlements on both second gravel terrace and floodplain (Hey 1994).

The early Iron Age saw the beginning of what became a highly ordered pattern of agricultural exploitation, with arable forming a band along the outer margin of the gravel terrace, the central area of which seems to have remained pasture (Lambrick 1992, 88–93). Contemporary settlement at Stanton Harcourt appears to skirt the known distribution of ring ditches. This is exemplified by the almost complementary location of ring ditches and later features in the Vicarage Field (Case 1982c, fig. 59). While some ring ditches may have begun to be ploughed at this stage, the cultivation horizons in many are associated with late Iron Age and Roman finds (Linington 1982, 81–7; Case 1982c, 107), suggesting that it was then that they came into cultivation. The henge too came into cultivation at this time. The filling of the almost silted ditch with a ploughsoil (layer E) containing early Roman pottery indicates that the interior, bank, or both, were under the plough.

REGIONAL AND NATIONAL RELATIONS

The Devil's Quoits and the regional sequence

The core areas defined by Bradley (1984, fig. 3.2 and 38–68) share a number of common features; above average land fertility, complex monuments and concentrations of exotic artefacts. Differences in monumental style and development are apparent between these areas. Differential adoption of particular styles of artefact between these areas is also notable, in particular at the time of the appearance of Beaker pottery towards the end of the later Neolithic.

The Avebury monument complex shares architectural features with the Devil's Quoits circle-henge. The Devil's Quoits circle belongs to a wider group of symmetrical circles exemplified by the two inner enclosed circles at the Avebury henge and the circles recorded at Coate and Winterbourne Bassett (Lambrick 1988, fig. 69), and including the complex of circles at Stanton Drew, where the central circle is of a similar type to the Devil's Quoits (Figs 37–8).

The development of the Avebury complex has been summarised by Thomas (1984) who has noted that there is far less spatial segregation between henges and barrow cemeteries or living areas than in

other areas of Wessex; less rigid spatial and contextual distinctions in the use of Peterborough Ware and Grooved Ware; and more prompt uptake of Beaker pottery.

Thomas (1984, 172) suggests that the characteristics of the Avebury region may reflect its location on an important exchange route which was controlled and manipulated by a growing elite. This route could have extended across the Thames Valley, linking the areas of Uffington/Rams Hill and the Berkshire Downs with the Devil's Quoits and the Rollright complex (Case *et al.* 1964–5, 50–3, fig. 20; Bradley and Ellison 1975, 193; Lambrick 1988, 123). The Avebury plateau is ringed by five causewayed enclosures and it would appear that political control of resources and exchange may have had its origins around the start of the fourth millennium cal. BC.

The period has been seen as one in which one section of society, an elite, controlled and restricted the use and supply of exotic items, thus preventing their emulation and downgrading (Bradley 1984, 46–7). It would have been important to control a major resource such as flint, which was transported in quantity. Saville (1982, 28) has observed the preponderance of chalk (non-local) flint in scatters from the Cotswolds which has led him to suggest the Avebury region as the nearest and likeliest source. Similarly good quality flint found in the Upper Thames region may have come from this area and at least one flint mine is known on the Berkshire Downs (Holgate 1988, 336). Further connections with the Cotswolds are expressed in the adoption of tombs of late Cotswold Severn form.

The Avebury henge has a noticeable lack of feasting debris and Grooved Ware, a situation paralleled at Devil's Quoits. At Condicote the only recorded pottery was Beaker and the Big Rings henge at Dorchester on Thames seems to have had Middle and Late style Beaker sherds in its lower ditch silts (Whittle *et al.* 1992, 187, 190). Grooved Ware does occur at the recently excavated palisaded enclosure at West Kennet (Whittle and Smith 1990, 364), which may explain its virtual absence from the Avebury henge-circle.

The scarcity of Grooved Ware on ceremonial sites in the Kennet Valley and the Upper Thames Region and its occurrence with other ceramic types suggests that some of its symbolic meaning was lost. The elite of the Avebury region appears to have displayed and maintained power by adopting exotic monument types and goods from every quarter. In this context, rapid adoption of Beaker-associated items would be no more than consistent with established practice (Thomas 1984, 173).

The Neolithic and earlier Bronze Age sequence in the Upper Thames has been synthesised by Bradley and Holgate (1984) and Thomas (1991). The region is characterised by multiple foci of often relatively small monuments and by the early appearance of individual burials. A group of large henges developed at the end of the Neolithic. The large symmet-

rical stone circle built within the Devil's Quoits henge has similarities to a number of sites built to the S around the Berkshire Downs and the Kennet Valley.

To the NW of the Devil's Quoits complex, at the head of the Windrush and Evenlode Rivers, lies the Rollright complex of monuments. The Rollright stone circle was built in an area which already contained Neolithic funerary monuments and at the NE edge of the distribution of Cotswold-Severn chambered tombs and long cairns (Lambrick 1988, 112). The circle was built close to an earlier Neolithic monument, the Whispering Knights, and flint scatters suggest nearby domestic activity (Holgate 1988, 68). The stone circle is probably late Neolithic in date and may predate the large Condicote henge 15 km to the W and possibly the construction of the Devil's Quoits henge-circle. The circle is associated with a small cluster of 5–6 burial mounds one of which contained an urned cremation with a radiocarbon determination of 1880–1420 cal BC (3320 ± 90 BP; BM-2429) and would be contemporary with the Wessex II barrow built close to the Devil's Quoits henge. The Rollright stone circle is of a different form to the Devil's Quoits, although the henge at Condicote is broadly similar in form and size.

A feature of the Rollright monument is the persistent association with monument traditions associated with western and northern Britain whereas the associations of the Devil's Quoits and its surrounding complex are more with the south and east, particularly Wessex and Yorkshire.

The appearance of early individual burial in at least one ring ditch at Stanton Harcourt may reflect a developing prestige goods economy with exotic items being deposited in graves and at other ceremonial centres. The emerging pattern parallels that of Yorkshire (Thorpe and Richards 1984, 73–5), where the role of Grooved Ware seems to have been limited and the division between secular and ritual less conspicuous than in most of Wessex.

In Wessex beyond the Avebury region individual Neolithic burials were rare and the few burials with Early style Beakers tended to avoid the areas with large henges (Bradley 1984, 46; Braithwaite 1984, fig. 3). Grooved Ware was distinguished from Peterborough Ware by its association with exotic items and ritual centres. The new, Beaker, network of prestige goods avoided the areas with Grooved Ware concentrations and its widespread adoption only occurred with the decline of traditional ritual authority (Thorpe and Richards 1984, 67–87).

Predating the construction of henges in the Upper Thames Region are the cursus monuments which have their origins in the middle Neolithic. A recent unpublished survey of these monuments in the Upper Thames by Simon Brereton demonstrates the relationship between these sites and Neolithic mortuary enclosures and ring ditches. Cursus monuments tend to occur away from causewayed enclosures (Lambrick 1988, figs 66, 69). Only at Dor-

chester on Thames is a large henge found in direct association (Bradley and Chambers 1988, fig. 1).

The monument complex at Dorchester on Thames has seen the most comprehensive studies of a cursus and its development in the Upper Thames Region (Atkinson *et al.* 1951; Bradley and Holgate 1984; Bradley and Chambers 1988; Thomas 1991; Whittle *et al.* 1992). The sequences outlined by Bradley and Chambers, Thomas and Whittle *et al.* vary in detail, but in essence propose comparable developments, starting in the early fourth millennium cal BC. An initial alignment of a subrectangular enclosure (site VIII) and a D-shaped enclosure spaced 1.40 km apart, and perhaps other monuments including sites II and XI, was succeeded in the later fourth millennium cal BC by the construction of the cursus. Pit and post circles and other small hengiform monuments (including sites IV, V, VI, 3 and 2) were built within and beside the cursus during the early third millennium cal BC, and some of the earlier monuments were modified. Some of the monuments of this phase were used secondarily as cremation cemeteries. The Big Rings henge (site XIII) to the S of the cursus may have been built as late as the mid-third millennium, on a similar monumental scale to the Condicote, Cutsdean, Westwell and the Devil's Quoits henges (Fig. 35). An exceptionally rich Beaker burial (site IX) outside its N entrance may have been broadly contemporary with, or more probably later than, the construction of the henge.

At Stanton Harcourt the alignment of enclosures XXII, 7–8 and ring ditch XXII, 6 recalls the arrangement of Dorchester-on-Thames sites II, VIII and XI. However no cursus was constructed at Devil's Quoits, instead the first communal monument was the henge. Links with Wessex to the S are expressed by the construction of a large symmetrical circle of similar character to those of Avebury, Coate and Winterbourne Bassett. The occurrence of non-local stone objects at Gravelly Guy and of non-local flint there and in the henge, together with the nature of some of the grave goods from the surrounding ring ditches and 'flat' graves (Case 1982c, 113), suggests that the area formed part of an exchange network which linked the ceremonial centres of the Cotswolds with Avebury and Wessex. The characteristic Wessex II barrow (site XVI, 1) reinforces this point.

MORTUARY PRACTICE AND RITUAL

At Stanton Harcourt burial practice exhibits the range of variation generally found in the middle to late Neolithic and early Bronze Age in southern England, with a progressive preference for cremation over inhumation (cf Barrett 1988, 30–42). However, the two rites were practised concurrently from at least the middle Neolithic in the Upper Thames: the interrupted pit enclosures at Dorchester on Thames contained later Neolithic cremation deposits (Harding 1987, 242–8; Atkinson *et al.* 1951);

and a middle Neolithic cremation enclosure was found at New Wintles Farm, Eynsham (Kenward 1982). The absence of Neolithic cremations from Stanton Harcourt may be the result of recovery conditions rather than a genuine feature. Middle and late Neolithic inhumations are known from Radley, Mount Farm, Wallingford and Stanton Harcourt.

The rite of inhumation has been interpreted as the preservation of individual identity in contrast to cremation where the body is destroyed (Braithwaite 1984, 104). This sense is reinforced by the placing of grave goods with inhumation burials, expressing continuity between life and death, and often reflecting the status of the deceased individual. With cremation the concept of physical continuity between life and death is ritually broken by burning and a lack of impressive grave goods suggests a limited or non-expression of social divisions in death.

In total eight 'flat' graves were recorded from Stanton Harcourt, though it is probable that others existed. They may originally have been covered and marked by small, scraped-up or turf-built mounds, such as Case suggests (1982c, 105) for graves 1 and 2 in the Vicarage Field (field II). Two groups were identified: a small cemetery N of ring ditches XV,

1-5 and three graves associated with the NE group of ring ditches in fields II and IX. Beaker 'flat' graves and 'flat' grave cemeteries are well known from the Upper Thames Valley, occurring at Cassington and Eynsham (Case 1977, 98); Barrow Hills, Radley (Barclay and Halpin forthcoming) and possibly at Shorncote (Barclay and Glass in prep.) and the Hamel (Palmer 1980).

The cluster of ring ditches around the Devil's Quoits is one of several in the region. Concentrations are found at Standlake (Catling 1982, 88); North Stoke (Case 1982b, 61); Barrow Hills, Radley (Barclay and Halpin forthcoming), Cassington (Case 1982d, 118), Condicote and Dorchester on Thames (Riley 1942, 67), often close to Neolithic communal monuments. The histories of the barrow cemeteries are as diverse as those of the preceding monument complexes, and as capable of being distorted by differing patterns of investigation. The contrast drawn by Thomas (1991, 158) and Whittle *et al.* (1992, 184) between the numerous Beaker burials of Stanton Harcourt, ranging from the very simple to the very rich, and the single rich Beaker grave at Dorchester may in part reflect the fact that there was no excavation beyond obvious crop- and soilmarks at Dorchester.