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### **The evolution and role of burial practice in Roman Wales**

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**THE EVOLUTION AND ROLE OF BURIAL PRACTICE IN ROMAN WALES**

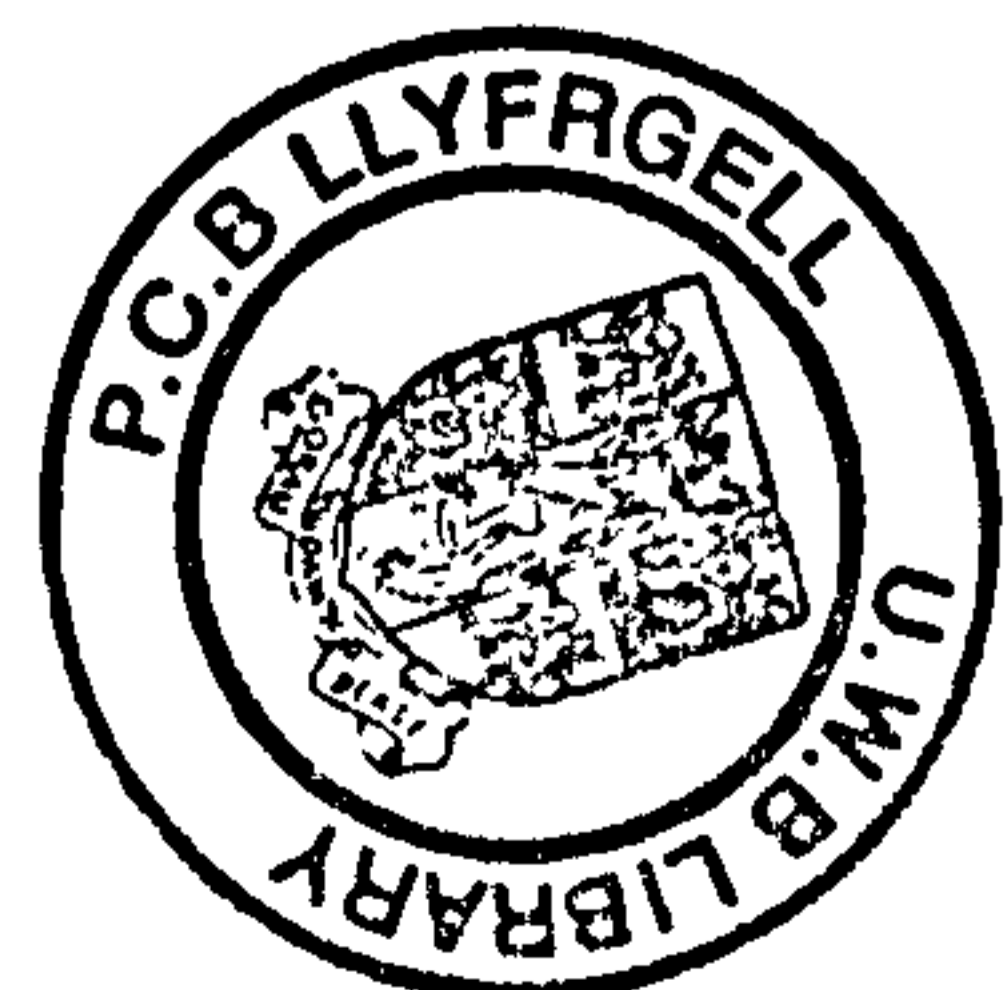
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**KAREN POLLOCK**



## SUMMARY OF THESIS

### THE EVOLUTION AND ROLE OF BURIAL PRACTICE IN ROMAN WALES

This thesis is concerned with what the archaeological record can tell us about the modes of burial and attendant rituals that were carried out in Wales during the Roman period. The initial rationale for undertaking this research was to draw attention to this largely untapped area of study. Thus the principal aim was to draw together the burial evidence into a comprehensive and coherent whole, in order to show the extent and type of Romano-British burials in Wales. This objective has been met by the production of a database, a corpus of burial evidence derived from over 100 sites, which has made it possible to examine the various grave treatments, chronology and geographical distribution of different burial rites. By evaluating the evidence from pre-conquest Wales and comparing it with the Romano-British data, it has also been possible to detect rites that appear to have had their roots in indigenous practice. Collectively, the evidence from both Iron Age and post-conquest Wales has shed new light on the evolution and role of burial practice in Roman Wales.

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## **CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION**

### **Main aims and directions of research**

The graves of a past society can provide the archaeologist with a valuable insight into the material remains of a culture. More importantly, the grave can provide tangible proof of rituals and customs, which help to shed light on past beliefs and attitudes surrounding death and burial. This thesis is concerned with what the archaeological record can tell us about the modes of burial and attendant rituals that were carried out in Wales during the Roman period. The initial rationale for undertaking this research was to draw attention to this largely untapped area of study. Thus the principal aim was to draw together the burial evidence into a comprehensive and coherent whole, in order to show the extent and type of Romano-British burials in Wales. This objective has been met by the production of a database, a corpus of burial evidence derived from over 100 sites, which has made it possible to examine the various grave treatments, chronology and geographical distribution of different burial rites.

From the preliminary research that was carried out, it was expected that the evidence would show predominately Roman rites and the sporadic, gradual adoption and assimilation of such practices across the frontier zone. Such findings would have concurred with the general consensus that, with a few exceptions, for example, the richly furnished cremation from Welshpool (Boon 1961), 'visible' Roman burials in Wales showed clear Roman antecedents and owed little to native influence (Philpott 1991, 225-6; Esmonde Cleary 1992, 31-2; Arnold & Davies 2000, 133-40). However, as research got underway, the comparative analysis of both pre- and post-conquest practices made it apparent that intrusive Roman rites in Wales did not eclipse indigenous practices. Moreover, the evidence showed that, even within some of the more 'Romanized' areas of Wales, there were mortuary rites that displayed native characteristics.

These findings have important implications for the study of Romano-British society in the Welsh frontier zone, particularly so, at a time when post-imperial perceptions of Roman Britain seek to redefine the part that the native population played in the development of a Romano-British culture (Barrett 1997, 1-7; Forcey 1997, 15-21; Fincham 1999, 46-51; Fincham 2000, 30-5; Esmonde Cleary 1999, 159-60). Roman

Wales contained a mix of peoples and settlement types and covered a wide geographical area. Such 'Romanization' that took place was largely confined to the south of Wales where the Roman presence was the most concentrated and longstanding. How people buried their dead in Wales during this period provides an indication of the degree of fusion between Roman and native society and sheds new light on the social dynamics of frontier life. The role that both intrusive and indigenous practices played in the evolution and development of Romano-British burial practices in Wales is, therefore, a theme pursued throughout this study.

Recent critiques of the study of Romano-British burial practice have emphasized the importance of analysing burial practices within the context of their immediate social and physical environments (Bridger 1993, 349; Pearce, J. 1999a, *passim*; Pearce, J. 2000, 10-11; Esmonde Cleary 2000, 127-42). A concerted effort has been made throughout this study to address this concern. Where possible, the various mortuary rites are considered within the context of their respective urban, rural or military milieux. An attempt has also been made to measure what affect the change in the status of a settlement had on burial practices, as, for example, at Usk, Monmouthshire, where a Roman fortress was superseded by a civilian settlement (Manning 1989, 181; Marvell 1996, 89-91). The spatial relationship between the different settlement types and their respective burials is also assessed, and prominent landscape features — natural or manmade — that may have acted as foci for burial are discussed. This approach aims to show how the diversity of burial practices in Roman Wales reflected the multifarious nature of settlement, community and topography. An analysis of the different types of contexts used for burial at the various site types has also made it possible to give some consideration to the different roles the dead may have played in the 'conceptual landscape' of Wales (Esmonde Cleary 2000, 127).

In order to set this research within the broader context of the study of Roman burial rites, this first chapter evaluates significant previous work on Roman mortuary practices in England and Wales. To provide a clearer chronological appraisal of previous work in Wales, Wales is assessed separately, following a general overview of the history of the study of Roman burial practice in Britain. However, the developments noted in methodology and archaeological theory relate to Britain as a whole. The scope of this thesis is then discussed and the limitations considered. This

is followed by an explanation of the methodology employed, coupled with an outline of the nature of the sources used. Finally, the structure of the thesis is outlined.

### **The history of the study of Romano-British burial practices**

Interest in the Roman occupation of Britain has a long history, but a growing curiosity with the past gathered pace in the nineteenth century and saw the burgeoning of many antiquarian societies that were devoted to the study of the ancient world. Early interest in Roman burial concentrated mainly on the artefacts that accompanied the body, with the result that the majority of records from this period are lacking in observation and detail (e.g. Watkin, W.T. 1886, 208-20 on Chester's evidence). Nevertheless, it is fortunate that in an age of unprecedented urban expansion, a growing interest in archaeology led to the recording of many Romano-British graves, however rudimentary or vague some of these records may have been.

By the beginning of the twentieth century the creation of Roman pottery typologies, which enabled more accurate dating, coupled with more disciplined and scientific excavation techniques, began to yield dividends, and a more coherent picture of Roman Britain started to emerge. However, Roman burials were still primarily a source of artefacts. Little attention, if any, was paid to the skeletal remains. The mode of burial was not seen as terribly significant and the form of enclosure made little of, unless it happened to be a decorated coffin or an unusual vessel. Wheeler's comment (1922b, 32) in the Ely villa (Glam.) excavation report that, 'incidentally, however, this area was used on at least one occasion as a cemetery', illustrates how little importance was placed on burials at this time. For the most part, Roman studies were focussed on the structural remains of Roman Britain, and it was the villas and forts, bathhouses and temples that received the lion's share of attention.

The few cemetery excavations of this period lacked adequate plans and carried a heavy artefactual bias. However, the implementation of technical drawing skills, and the growing use of photography, meant that artefacts were more accurately recorded than in the past (e.g. Ospringle, Kent, Whiting *et al.* 1931). But there were some exceptions to the general standard of the time. The excavation of Infirmary Field, Chester, was, for its time, exemplary. Newstead's excavation reports, which contained illustrations that showed the position of the skeleton in relation to the grave

goods, and the grave within the context of the cemetery as a whole, were clearly ahead of their time (Newstead 1914, 121-67; 1921, 49-60). Although only a rudimentary analysis was made of the skeletal material, Newstead's work went some way to answer a call, made some 60 years later, for cemetery reports not to divorce the grave from its contents (Reece 1982).

By the 1930s a large volume of data existed on Romano-British burials, but the majority of finds were still only published as part and parcel of the larger excavation reports on Roman towns, villas and military installations. Chance finds were regularly coming to light and some individual studies had been made, and these were mentioned in the archaeological journals of the day, but no attempt had been made to draw the growing body of evidence together. However, 1930 saw the publication of *The Archaeology of Roman Britain* by R.G. Collingwood, which, for the first time, gave an overview of what was known of the archaeology of Roman Britain and contained chapters on tombs, temples and inscriptions.

Although the extent of archaeological knowledge now made it possible for some interesting observations and studies to be made on certain aspects of Roman burial, for example, barrow burials (Dunning & Jessup 1936) or libation burials (Wheeler 1929), it was not until the 1960s and 1970s that the study of Romano-British burial began to be seen as a valuable area of study in its own right. The Lankhills (Winchester) excavations, which started in 1961 (Clarke, G. 1979), stand out as a landmark in Romano-British burial studies. The existence, in closed grave contexts, of many fourth-century artefacts made it possible to establish that the cemetery was in use over a relatively short period of time, about 100 years. Careful analysis of stratigraphic relationships showed a sequence to the burials, and, as a consequence, it was possible to determine certain trends in the mode of burial and the type of grave goods deposited over the period of time the cemetery was in use. Adding considerable interest to the site was a group of graves which were considered intrusive — their treatment and furnishing were seen as having origins that could be traced to the Hungarian Basin (Clarke, G. 1975; 1979, 377-404). The methodology and type of analysis employed at Lankhills set a benchmark for cemetery studies. As further cemeteries came to be excavated, a more comprehensive recording of individual graves took place, which, in addition to the artefactual evidence, took account of body

posture and different grave treatments. Where the evidence allowed, detailed cemetery plans were also produced which plotted the distribution of graves and other contemporary features.

Since the 1970s the expansion and redevelopment of many urban areas, together with the opportunity to carry out rescue archaeology in more rural areas too, has resulted in the excavation of a number of major sites. The growing body of burial data has allowed comparative studies to be made which have shown that, although there were similarities between sites, regional differences in mode of burial, grave treatment and grave goods can also be observed (Liversidge 1977; Jones, R.F.J.1982; Philpott 1991; Esmonde Cleary 1992; Pearce R.J.H. 1999a). There has also been some attempt to synthesize the antiquarian and modern evidence at individual Roman towns, in order to glean a better picture of the chronology, type and extent of burials at various urban centres (McWhirr *et al.* 1982; Jones, R.F.J. 1984; Crummy, Crummy & Crossan 1993; Mason 1987).

Though interim reports allowed dissemination of the evidence, lengthy periods of excavation have meant that, in many cases, full reports were delayed until relatively recently. This last fifteen years has seen the publication of substantial reports on the cemeteries of Colchester and London, both highly Romanised centres with cosmopolitan populations (Crummy, Crummy & Crossan 1993; Barber & Bowsher 2000; Watson 2003). Both places produced a fairly wide spectrum of 'Roman' burial practices, together with rites which appear to have been derived from indigenous traditions. The reports from the extensive extra-mural cemeteries outside the *civitas* capitals at Verulamium (Stead & Rigby 1989) and Dorchester (Farwell & Molleson 1993) are also now in the public domain. These last two sites add to the evidence from earlier excavations at other native townships such as Chichester (Down & Rule 1971), Cirencester (McWhirr *et al.* 1982) and Winchester (Clarke, G. 1979). The burial evidence from these native urban areas has also provided a valuable insight into the hybrid nature of Romano-British society. This is particularly well demonstrated by the recent examination of grave treatments at the early Roman cemeteries of Verulamium, where a complex mix of intrusive and indigenous rites was identified (Niblett 2000, 97-104).

Compared with urban sites the evidence from rural areas is still limited. John Collis (1977b) brought to attention the value of the study of the rural Roman dead as a means of understanding both their mortuary rituals, and, through the analysis of skeletal material, the demographic make-up of rural society. Since his study, there has been a gradual accumulation of burial evidence from villas/farmsteads, rural and semi-rural settlements (see for example: Jones, R. 1982, 81-9; Leech 1981; Woodfield & Johnson 1989; Burleigh 1993). However, there is still a strong urban bias.

1982 saw the publication of Richard Reece's seminal article 'Bones, Bodies & Disease' which stressed the need to compile comprehensive cemetery reports that included full bone reports. Like Collis (1977b), Reece saw the potential of skeletal analysis. He argued that you could not separate the person from the grave, and saw skeletal analysis as a vital tool that could throw light on the health, status and origin of a cemetery's occupants. Recent cemetery studies have borne out the validity of this argument. The value of osteology and pathology to Roman cemetery studies is now widely acknowledged, and, increasingly, the osteological evidence forms an integral part of a cemetery report (Barber & Bowsher 2000; Farwell & Molleson 1993; Rahtz, Hirst & Wright 2000; Watson, S. 2003). The analysis of cremated skeletal material has proved particularly useful as a means of identifying specific mortuary rituals (e.g. post-pyre manipulation of bone) and pyre-related activities (McKinley 2000a; McKinley 2000b; Polfer 2000; Coard in Crane 2001, 29-32).

The increased volume of data from Britain has been matched by a steady accumulation of evidence from Europe. Jocelyn Toynbee, in her seminal work *Death and Burial in the Roman World* (Toynbee 1971), was the first to attempt a synthesis of burial practices within the Roman Empire. This work remains an invaluable study aid, although it relies heavily on the Italian evidence at the expense of the provincial material (Jones, R.F.J. 1982, 15-16; Jones, R.F.J. 1993, 249). Following closely on Toynbee's heels was another landmark publication of the 1970s. *Burial in the Roman World* (Reece *et al.* 1977) brought together papers on various aspects of burial practices from Italy and from the Empire's north-western provinces. This collection of papers examined a range of topics, from Iron Age and Roman burial customs in Europe (Collis 1977a, 1-13; Todd 1977, 39-43; Davies, G. 1977, 13-19), to afterlife beliefs (Macdonald 1977, 35-8), and the need for computer-aided quantitative studies

(Jones, R. 1977, 20-5). But collectively, their principal achievement was to bring to attention the value of burial evidence to Roman studies in general, and the crucial need for further research.

### **Thematic approaches and theoretical frameworks**

The last twenty-five years has seen a gradual but increasing body of research into Roman burial practices in Britain and in Europe. Thematically, research into Romano-British burial practices has been concerned with three main areas: belief, the cultural antecedents of burial rites and the recognition of social status in the grave. The idea that religious belief can be reflected in the grave is one that can be traced back to the early years of archaeological exploration. However, the prominence of tombstones and classical funerary sculpture in the burial record, coupled with references to funerary practice in classical literature, heavily influenced discussions on Romano-British afterlife beliefs until the 1970s. Any evidence in Romano-British graves that suggested funerary ritual and, by inference, belief or ideology came to be linked directly to classical belief. This was a perception perpetuated by scholars from the early antiquarians onwards, with little to distinguish late nineteenth-century views from those of a hundred years later (Wright 1872, 339-46; Toynbee 1971, *passim*). The range of rites identified at Lankhills suggested intrusive and native antecedents and made the flaws in this approach apparent. Subsequently, attempts were made to marry Celtic and classical beliefs in the grave (Macdonald 1977, 35-7; 1979, 404-23). Nevertheless, there was still a tendency to rely heavily on literary sources as a means of interpreting the archaeological evidence. The 1980s saw two landmark studies which aimed to define specific aspects of burial practices: those which were influenced by classical religious belief (Alcock, J.P. 1980) and those that could be traced back to indigenous belief systems (Black 1986).

The identification of Christian graves in Roman Britain has also attracted considerable interest. One of the most influential papers of the 1970s which had a bearing on this topic was Rahtz's article on 'Late Roman Cemeteries and Beyond' (Rahtz 1977, 53-64). Rahtz classified a type of cemetery increasingly coming to light, which appeared to fall into the late Roman or sub-Roman period. The common characteristics of this type of cemetery were west-east grave orientation and a paucity of grave goods. Both attributes had previously widely been accepted as belonging to Christian graves of the



post-Roman period. By drawing on the growing body of burial data Rahtz firmly established that 'west-east findless graves' were not exclusively Christian or of post-Roman date.

Furthermore Green's article 'The Significance of Plaster Burials' helped clarify the position regarding burials packed in plaster, which had also previously been thought of as Christian graves. He argued that, though this practice was not confined to Christian use, it was indicative of such when found alongside other rites that suggested Christianity (Green, C.J.S. 1977, 46-53).<sup>1</sup> Both Rahtz and Green helped to resolve points regarding Roman and Christian burial, and it was becoming clear that the interpretation of a cemetery as either pagan or Christian was far from easy and full of pitfalls. Nevertheless, since the 1970s the question of whether or not a cemetery was a Christian burial ground has tended to dominate any discussions on Roman and early medieval cemeteries (Thomas, A.C. 1981; Farwell & Molleson 1993, 226-7; Watts 1989; Watts 1993; Petts 2003, 24-46). A scoring system was devised which can be applied to cemetery data. This calculates the probable Christian attributes of a cemetery in order to determine the ratio of such probability (Watts 1991; Farwell & Molleson 1993, 226-7). However, the recent report on Cannington (Somerset), whilst taking these scoring criteria into account, warns against rigid interpretations. Preferring not to pin a religious label on the community who lived and died at Cannington, a much more holistic approach is advocated which accepts that the answer is not necessarily that clear cut. It is suggested that any Christian influence within the cemetery may have been limited to part of the burying community, or only present during certain phases (Rahtz, Hirst & Wright 2000, 418-20).

There has also been a certain amount of backlash against the idea that burial practice was commonly linked to religious belief. Most notably, as early as 1932, Nock convincingly argued on eschatological and chronological grounds that the shift to inhumation from cremation — a phenomenon which spread from Rome across the provinces during the second century AD — was more a question of fashion than a change in religious doctrine. This argument was not favourably received by all; some sought other explanations, or attributed such change to a growing desire, held by pagan and Christian alike, to preserve the earthly body for an afterlife (Toynbee 1971, 40; Macdonald 1977, 37; Green, C.J.S. 1977, 48). However, it is now widely

acknowledged that the widespread adoption of inhumation in Britain took place before Christianity had sufficient influence to effect such change (Philpott 1991, 238; Esmonde Cleary 1992, 38-9).

The influence of the 'New Archaeology', which sought to identify social structure in funerary archaeology (Binford 1972; Binford 1983; Chapman, Kinnes & Randsborg *et al.* 1981), also led to the downplaying of a religious aspect to burial. It was confidently asserted that, 'any direct relationship between religion and the normal grave of a member of the mass of the provincial population is extremely rare' (Jones, R.F.J. 1982, 17). The weakness of this argument is that it presupposes that any such relationship would leave tangible proof in the archaeological record. As Philpott and others have pointed out, whilst the mass of Romano-British graves show little overt signs of religious belief, a belief in an afterlife is tacitly implied by the presence of specific types of grave goods and grave treatments (Philpott 1991, 235-40; 1993; Alcock, J.P. 1980; Black 1986; Grinsell 1961). More recent research into the social dimension of burial practice has tempered the trenchant views of the processual approach and emphasized that, 'religion must be seen as being as much a part of social structure as status or kinship' (Morris, I. 1992, 16).

The 'New Archaeology' had attempted to decode the past by inferential means, using ethnographic examples as a basis for inference. It did not draw direct comparisons between specific sites in the past and the present, but aimed to identify universal patterns of mortuary behaviour (Binford 1983; Parker Pearson 1999, 27-31). Its weakness was that it saw a direct relationship between the material remains of the grave and the status and role of the dead (Parker Pearson 1999, 21-44; <sup>2</sup> Pearce J. 2000, 4-5). This approach left little room for the possible loss of evidence from the archaeological record (McKinley 2000; Polfer 2000); for different cultural attitudes to burial display and grave treatment (Ucko 1969; Barley 1995) or, for the manipulation of the dead by the living for social or political reasons (Bradley 1987; Williams, H. 1997; Scott 1991; Hope 1997).

The principal value of the 'New Archaeology' was that it provided a theoretical framework for the study of mortuary practice at a time when one was sadly lacking. Rick Jones was able to draw on this framework in his unpublished PhD thesis

*Cemeteries and Burial Practice in the Western Provinces of the Roman Empire to A.D. 300*, a study borne out of the need to make some sense of the growing and unwieldy body of Roman burial data. Jones took a quantitative approach with the aim of identifying the variations in burial practice that reflected the social status of those in provincial society (Jones R.F.J.1982). This study was heavily reliant on the artefactual evidence and the flaws in this approach are now apparent (Pearce, J. 1999a, 9; Pearce, J. 2000, 4). We are now increasingly aware of mortuary activities and pre-burial rituals that leave little archaeological trace but may equally denote the status of the deceased (Niblett 2000; Williams, H. 2003; Polfer 2000). Nevertheless, Jones should be credited for a synthesis which identified specific burial trends and practices across the western provinces and, by doing so, set the groundwork for future research. From the point of view of this present study his work was also significant for another reason: he concluded that, ‘ the strength of local traditions of burial practice is probably the single most striking feature to emerge’ (Jones, R.F.J. 1982, 198). Paradoxically, therefore, one of the key points to come out of this broad approach to search for universal burial norms was to highlight local diversity.

Post-processual studies that seek evidence for social structure in the Roman mortuary record are aware that the grave may not be a true reflection of the social status of the living. Valerie Hope (1997) provides a good illustration of this. Hope’s study shows how figurative tombstones were used to misrepresent the social status of the dead. For example, the tombstone of the common law wife of a soldier attempted to legitimise her status by means of a highly decorated stone, which portrayed an elite lifestyle (Hope 1997, 256). Millett’s (1993) analysis of grave treatments at the King Harry Lane site, Verulamium, also demonstrates how theoretical approaches to burial display have become more sophisticated. Millett draws a distinction between pyre goods and grave goods, suggesting that unburnt grave goods reflected the social status of the mourners rather than the deceased. According to Millett, a decrease in grave goods through time is, therefore, not linked to a reduction in the wealth of the individual buried, but to a decline in the scale of their social network (Millett 1993, 276). However, this argument is not totally convincing, as little consideration was given to the possibility that, for example, organic grave offerings may have become more popular, or that more emphasis may have been placed on pre-burial rituals in the later period.

The question of whether gender or age led to differentiation in grave treatment has also been an intrinsic part of the study into the social aspect of Roman burial practice. Over the last fifteen years the growing burial data, coupled with advances in skeletal analysis, have engendered some significant research into the various grave treatments accorded to men, women and children (Foster 1993, 207-12; Davidson 2000, 231-7; Pearce, J. 2001, 125-42; Quensel-von-Kalben 2000, 217-30). However, it is the treatment of the infant dead that has generated the greatest amount of interest during the last decade or so. But only relatively recently (within the last five years) have in-depth studies been made which have started to question longstanding and widespread opinion.

The current interest in infant burial has grown out of the broader attempt to understand the status and role of the child, both within the Roman family and within Roman society as a whole (Bradley 1991; Dixon 1992; Golden 1988, 152-63; Shaw 1987, 3-51). To a large degree archaeological theory has closely followed historical thought on the subject of the child in antiquity. Early perceptions of Roman childcare were heavily influenced by demographic statistics and theory, which placed the child of the pre-industrial age very much on the margins of society. Social historians, of whom Stone (1977) was probably the most influential, argued that in an age of high infant mortality, little emotional capital was invested in children because they might not survive into adulthood.

In a burial context, classical texts (conveniently summarised by Pearce, J. 2001, 126-7), which suggested that children under a certain age were not afforded adult burial rites, coupled with the common discovery of infant burials on settlement sites, perpetuated the idea that the disposal of the very young was a random and casual affair and that infants were considered of little or no importance (Nock 1932, 322; Ucko 1969, 270; Philpott 1991, 67, 101; Watts 1989, 372-4; Taylor, A. 2003). That infanticide was carried out in antiquity further encouraged the view that infants were generally undervalued as human beings and treated with indifference. Such widely accepted notions fostered contradictory hypotheses about infant burial, for example: on the one hand large numbers of neonates (in settlement and cemetery contexts) were seen to represent the end product of infanticide (Mays 1993, 883-8). On the other, the

inclusion of infants in formal cemeteries was seen as indicative of late Roman Christianity and synonymous with more care for the very young (Watts 1989, 372-83).

Eleanor Scott's (1999) thorough treatment of the subject of the infant dead in past and present societies has done much to moderate the view that Roman infants were invariably carelessly disposed of or the end product of infanticide. In addition, several recent studies have (a) analysed infant burials in domestic and cemetery contexts; (b) compared natural infant mortality rates from different historical periods; and (c) considered the negative economic implications of infanticide. These have convincingly deconstructed former theories, namely: that Roman infants from pagan communities were always excluded from formal cemeteries and by implication burial rites; that the burial of infants in the domestic domain represented casual deposition; and that infanticide or sacrifice accounted for large numbers of the infant dead (Pearce, J. 2001; Gowland 2001; Engels 1980; Scott 1999, 110-20).

Along with the assumption that infants were casually disposed of, has been the idea that adult burials placed within ditches, wells or other disused features represented casual or random deposition and constituted the burials of criminals or those of low social status (Philpott 1991, 232). A growing interest in the contextual archaeology of Roman burial practice has challenged these views, suggesting that the physical world was also a 'conceptual landscape' in which the dead played a part (Pearce, J. 1999a; Pearce, J. 1999b; Esmonde Cleary 2000, 127). It is now increasingly recognized that, along with a closer spatial relationship between the living and the dead in rural and small town contexts, the dead appear to have been used to perform specific symbolic and ritual functions within their former communities (Pearce, J. 1999b; Fulford 2001; Clarke 2000; Esmonde Cleary 2000). That those buried in 'relict' landscape features could be as well furnished as those in urban cemeteries, has also largely debunked the idea that such locations represented the last resting place of those on the lowest rung of the social hierarchy ladder (Pearce, J. 1999b, 156).

Unlike the study of the prehistoric and early medieval periods, where burial practice has made a major contribution to mainstream studies, Roman burial practice has always been on the peripheries of the study of Roman Britain. There are three main

reasons for this. Firstly, the wealth of material evidence from the Roman period, in comparison to preceding and subsequent periods, has reduced the necessity of burial evidence as a means of material and cultural evidence. Secondly, epigraphic, iconographic and contemporary literary sources have thrown light on classical funerary rites and practices and, consequently, the presumption was that there was no need to look for evidence of belief systems in the grave. Thirdly, it was known that Roman society was a structured and hierarchical one; ergo (very simplistically) big marble tombs belonged to the rich, and burial within ditches was reserved for the poor or criminals (*pace* Savory 1954, 98; Jones, R.F.J. 1982, 22; Philpott 1991, 232).

The last twenty-five years has seen a gradual shift in the way in which Roman burial practice is studied and interpreted and such perceptions have been challenged. There has also been a concerted effort by those in the field to emphasize the value of the study of Roman burial practice to Roman studies in general, as a viable means of understanding the complex nature of Romano-British society (Pearce, Millett and Struck *et al.* 2000; Pearce, J. 1999a).

Though contemporary thought and knowledge are influencing interpretation and opening up new areas of research, the need for a synthesis of the British burial evidence is acute. The sheer body of data on Romano-British burials is vast and growing all the time. The introduction of computer-based data storage systems led, in the 1970s, to attempts to set up a national computer data base of burials (Jones, R. 1977, 20-5; Chambers 1980, 165-74). Unfortunately, due to restraints of finance and time, this project never reached fruition (Chambers, R.A. pers. comm.). A move towards synthesis came in 1991 with the publication of Philpott's *Burial Practices in Roman Britain*, an informative and valuable work on Romano-British grave treatment and furnishing, which attempted to provide 'a geographical and chronological framework for burial practices in Britain' as a basis for future research (Philpott 1991, 1). However, though Philpott catalogues an impressive number of graves throughout England, with the exception of a brief overview of the practices from Caerleon, very few graves from Wales are included. The methodology employed by Philpott, which concentrated on the artefactual evidence, also meant that unfurnished burials were given scant attention and omitted from his gazetteer, which skewed the burial evidence in favour of both the early period and southern Britain. Alternative

methodologies have been proposed which make use of the National Archaeological Record (NAR) and draw more extensively on the annual summaries of the *Journal of Roman Studies* (JRS) and *Britannia* (Leech, R.H. 1993; Pearce, J. 1999a, 19-24). This is seen as a way of providing a more balanced and comprehensive corpus of burial evidence which takes into account unfurnished burials and, as a result, covers a wider geographical area and broader chronological span. In addition to other sources (outlined below), this present thesis has drawn on both Sites and Monuments Records (SMR) and relevant entries in *JRS/Britannia* in the compilation of the accompanying gazetteer of burials in Wales. It is hoped that the recent move by individual Archaeological Trusts and County Councils, to provide on-line access to SMRs, will facilitate and encourage the production of a data-base for the whole of Roman Britain in the near future.

### **Significant previous work on Roman burial practices in Wales**

Previous research into Romano-British burial practices in the Welsh frontier zone is very limited and of a piecemeal nature. As in England, many discoveries related to mortuary activity came to light as the result of antiquarian interest, with finds recorded as early as the seventeenth century (Lhuyd 1695, 606; *RIB* 360; Collingwood & Wright 1995; *RIB* 404). However, the bulk of burial evidence derived from antiquarian sources comes from the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This was a period that saw a proliferation of antiquarian societies in Wales, many of which published their finds in journals. The most notable of these, in terms of providing Wales-wide coverage of antiquarian discoveries, was the Cambrian Archaeological Society; their journal *Archaeologia Cambrensis* has been published annually from 1846. This period also saw the publication of several local and county histories or surveys that noted Romano-British burials (Meyrick 1808; Jones, T. 1809; Poole 1886; Curtis 1880; Laws & Owen 1908; Lewis 1833; Lewis 1842). In addition, the growing popularity of Wales as a tourist location for gentleman travellers, resulted in the production of a number of journals and diaries that drew attention to Roman sites and burial grounds (Colt Hoare 1802, MS; Nicholson 1840; Pennant 1883; Fenton 1903; Fenton 1917). However, whilst the various antiquarian sources have proved invaluable to this thesis, by demonstrating the extent and variation of Romano-British burial practices in Wales, with a few worthy exceptions (e.g. Morgan, O. 1855, 76-9; Hall 1848, 172-3; Williams, W.W. 1878, 136-40), at the time of their discovery these

burials received little attention beyond an interest in any accompanying artefacts or monumental sculpture. Lees' *Delineations of Roman Antiquities found at Caerleon* (1845) and *Isca Silurum*, an illustrated catalogue of the Museum of Antiquities at Caerleon (1862), represent the only attempts in the nineteenth century to collate all the burial evidence derived from a single Roman site.

By the early twentieth century an increase in controlled excavations, coupled with ongoing industrial development in Wales, continued to bring Roman funerary evidence to light. Though the emphasis remained very much on the material remains and funerary sculpture, there was, by this time, a keener understanding of Roman burial practices, which is clearly evident in the introduction to the section on tombstones in the *Catalogue of Roman Inscribed and Sculptured Stones found at Caerleon* (V.E. & A.H. Nash-Williams 1935). However, as the major publications of the time attest, interest in Roman Wales was primarily focussed on the military aspect of the Roman occupation. Though burial evidence was noted, it was considered only as a by-product of troop deployment and, in itself, was of little interest (Haverfield 1910; Wheeler 1923).

This was still the case in the middle of the twentieth century when the first edition of Nash Williams' seminal work *The Roman Frontier in Wales* (1954) was published. The revised edition (Jarrett & Nash-Williams 1969) made some attempt to note the presence of cemeteries outside some forts, but was not consistent in this approach, and gave no detailed consideration to the burial evidence. Burials were considered under the heading 'other features' and dealt with briefly with the comment that, 'individual burials are attested outside most forts' (Jarrett & Nash Williams 1969, 174). The topic of burial practice was, however, dealt with more thoroughly in Boon's *Isca* (1972), an overview of the archaeology from Caerleon, which contained a short summary chapter on the cemeteries surrounding the legionary fortress. Although Boon concentrated in the main on the more unusual grave goods and grave treatments, an effort was made to place the evidence within the wider context of classical funerary practice.

The issue of indigenous burial practices remained outside mainstream discussion. Although from the early days of antiquarian interest there had been an awareness and



steady build-up of funerary evidence from rural contexts, the individual or small clusters of burials found on rural sites were considered only within the confines of their individual reports (e.g. Rogiet, Mons., Hudd 1908 and Coygan Camp, Carms., Wainwright 1967). Yet, increasingly, the authors of such reports had started to draw on other rural Welsh evidence and the growing body of English evidence for comparable and interpretative purposes (Boon 1961, 19-20; Alcock, L. 1963, 30, n.1; Hogg 1976, 20).

The last twenty-five years of research into Roman Wales has seen attention turn outwards from the military forts towards the civilian and rural settlements of the frontier zone (e.g. Williams G, 1978; Williams G, 1979; Williams G, 1988a; Kelly 1990; Robinson *et. al* 1988; Jarrett & Wrathmell 1981). This is an approach that has gone some way to balance the heavy military bias. However, though burial evidence from military, urban and rural Roman Wales has gradually accumulated, there has been little attempt at synthesis. Philpott's (1991) survey of *Burial Practices in Roman Britain* casts only a cursory eye on Wales. Indeed, he points out that, in the case of Wales, time constraints limited a more thorough literature search (Philpott 1991, 2). Most recently, *Roman and Early Medieval Wales*, an up-to-date review of archaeological evidence, contains an informative chapter on 'death and burial' (Arnold & Davies 2000, 133-140). But, due to the wide scope of this survey, the content was of necessity limited to a short overview that drew attention to the main features and trends in burial practice.

At the time of writing, work is underway by Julie Reynolds of the National Museum of Wales to synthesize all previous burials from Caerleon (Julie Reynolds, pers. comm.). Limited samples of Welsh evidence have also received some attention in recent studies concerned with high status burials and the contextual archaeology of Romano-British burial practice (Struck 2000; Pearce, J. 1999a). However, to date, there has been no in-depth study of burial practices in Roman Wales.

In 1991, Philpott argued that:

'Despite the potential for the survival of organic materials (though ironically not for bone) in acid upland soils, and the consequent scope for reconstructing aspects of the

burial rite that are usually archaeologically invisible, it will be some time before the invisible (or perhaps unburied?) dead of the North and West can take their proper place alongside their more privileged and lowland counterparts in a study of burial practice in Roman Britain' (Philpott 1991, 5).

Since Philpott's survey, thirteen years ago, at least a dozen new burial grounds have come to light in Wales. The thorough literature search and fieldwork undertaken for the present thesis have also shown that a large corpus of burial evidence was already in existence. This study aims to redress the southern bias and to show that, although there is a lacuna of burials in some areas of Wales, which suggests an archaeologically undetectable rite, there is also ample evidence from military, urban and rural contexts to show that Romano-British burials were far from 'invisible'.

It is pertinent here that, *JRS* and *Britannia*, which from 1921 have provided an annual review of archaeological finds, when matched against the other sources consulted in this thesis, can be seen to have omitted burial evidence on a number of occasions.<sup>3</sup> The need to keep the journal within manageable publishing and editorial limits is understandable (Taylor & Collingwood 1925, 223), but it would seem that non-monumental funerary evidence has been a victim of such constraints. This has important implications for the study of Roman burial practice, and has probably gone some way in perpetuating the idea that burials are sparse or 'invisible' in Wales (Philpott 1991, 40-1; Evans & Maynard 1997, 190; O'Brien, 1999, vii).

### **The scope and limitations of this study**

Initially, it was intended to restrict the geographical area under detailed study to within the modern Welsh boundary. However, it soon became obvious that this approach would create an anachronistic border for Wales that divorced the hinterlands of Roman Wales from major military and urban centres, most significantly Chester and Wroxeter. Consequently, the decision was taken to draw a more or less straight line from Chester to Caerleon, and to collate and analyse data from sites along this line and westwards into Wales. This recreates the Roman frontier system and allows for comparative analysis to be made between the legionary fortresses themselves and between the fortresses, auxiliary outposts and rural areas within Wales. The importance of viewing Wales within its Roman context was recognized early on in

Welsh frontier studies by both Wheeler (1923, 18) and Nash-Williams (1969, 1). It is also an approach adopted by more recent research (Arnold & Davies 2000; Mason, D.J.P. 2001; White & Barker 1998; White, R.H. & van Leusen 1997). However, while this study concentrates on the evidence from the geographical area outlined, this material will be compared with that elsewhere in Roman Britain as appropriate.

This thesis concentrates on two main areas: grave treatment and furnishing and the social and physical context of burials. The aim is to show the range of practices evident in both the 'Romanized' and the more rural and indigenous areas. However, the sources used to compile the burial data vary enormously in quality. Many of the antiquarian records, whilst valuable because they record the location and mode of burial, provide little detail on the spatial relationship between grave goods and burial, and no reliable information on the skeletal remains themselves. The poor preservation of skeletal material in the acid soils of Wales also limits discussion on bone assemblages. Nevertheless, surviving bone from recent cemetery excavations in Wales has been subjected to modern skeletal analysis, and this has made it possible to make some comment on the gender and social status of a percentage of those buried (e.g. Evans & Maynard 1997; Price, C. 1989; Coard in Crane 2001, 29-32; Bell, C. 2000).

A further objective has been to try and measure the speed at which intrusive rites were adopted or assimilated within the different geographical areas and the persistence of Iron Age practices. Securely dated burial deposits are needed in order to do this with any degree of accuracy. The majority of graves from military contexts can be securely dated by the stratigraphy, mode of enclosure or, though caution has to be exercised, closely associated artefacts. This is more of a problem in rural areas, where there is a heavy reliance on antiquarian evidence and where unfurnished burials were common. All that can be said in some instances is that, due to the mode of burial and/or the close proximity of Romano-British settlements, the burial deposit is most likely to be of Roman date (e.g. Rhostryfan, Llanwnda, Williams, H, 1923, 297-302 and Castle Ditches, Llancarfan, Hogg 1976, 38). Moreover, although some of the more recent finds have been radiocarbon dated, radiocarbon assay, though useful in determining a definite Roman date, is of limited use on its own when trying to recreate close chronological sequences, especially when the dates are calibrated using

the recommended two standard deviations (Renfrew & Bahn 1991, 123).<sup>4</sup> However, whilst there are problems with securely dating a proportion of the burial evidence, there is a sufficient amount of good quality burial data to enable chronological patterns and trends in burial practices to be determined.

The decision to give detailed consideration to the burial practices from Chester and Wroxeter has meant that constraints of time and space have prevented an in-depth examination of the Roman to early medieval interface, as was originally envisaged. However, some consideration has been given to this issue, in order to highlight the persistence of Romano-British burial practices in Wales into the post-Roman period. This is a topic of discussion that has increasingly come to the fore in recent studies of early medieval burial practices (O'Brien 1999; Petts 2001; James H, 1992a).

One of the most significant aspects of burial practice that this study has highlighted is the range of topographical features chosen to align burials with, or position burials on. The spatial relationship between burials and military sites has been particularly insightful, as changes in burial location can be matched to the reductions or abandonment of garrisons. Where possible, plans of the various forts with the position of their respective burials have been included, in order to illustrate this point more effectively.

The grave goods and furnishings discussed in this study have not been drawn. Although sketches of various artefacts were made during fieldwork, photography was found to be by far the best way of quickly recording objects for later analysis. Photographs are used in this thesis particularly to provide records of artefacts hitherto unpublished.

### **Methodology and sources used**

The evidence drawn together to compile the working data has been derived from both modern and antiquarian sources. These include the SMR records from the four archaeological trusts in Wales and from Cheshire and Shropshire county councils, together with all records published by the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historic Monuments of Wales. For evidence appertaining to Wales, manual records held at the Royal Commission in Aberystwyth were also perused. A thorough

literature search was made and evidence gathered from *JRS*, *Britannia*, and *Arch. Camb.*, as well as from various other Wales-wide and regional publications, most notably the *Bulletin of the Board of Celtic Studies* (BBCS), *Archaeology Wales* (Arch. Wales) and the *Chester Architectural, Archaeological and Historic Society* (JCAS). This corpus of burial evidence has been augmented by documentary and artefactual evidence from museums throughout Wales and on the borders.

In the case of some of the antiquarian records, where context is unsure, or artefacts no longer exist to verify their date or funerary nature, a degree of caution is necessary. But their inclusion in the wider body of evidence is seen as crucial: firstly, in providing a comprehensive overview of the available source material, and, secondly, as a means of showing the possible extent of certain practices when backed-up and viewed alongside definite evidence. However, every effort has been made to quantify the quality of the data used and to make it clear where evidence might be unreliable or of a doubtful nature.

### **The Gazetteer**

To manage effectively the volume of data collected, an *Access* database was created at a fairly early stage of research. This has allowed for statistical comparison and made patterns or trends in burial practice easier to identify. However, as Romano-British burial practice in Wales was of a diverse nature, and many sites have individual features that are worthy of attention, the data have been presented in the form of a gazetteer. This has made it possible to provide a catalogue of sites that sets out common attributes, but also highlights important variant details within the respective site descriptions.

Excluding the entries from Chester, Wroxeter and the border counties, the gazetteer catalogues 99 places in Wales that have produced evidence of definite, probable or possible Romano-British burials. At some places, burials have been located in more than one area, so that an approximate figure of 132 cemetery or individual burial sites can be given for Wales as a whole. In total the gazetteer contains 183 entries derived from the Welsh frontier zone and includes data from Chester, Wroxeter and a handful of sites along the border of modern day Wales. Each place has its own identification number, for example, *CI* for Caernarfon. If, as at Caernarfon, there is more than one

cemetery then a further number is allocated, e.g. Pool Street, Caernarfon is ***C1.1***; Llanbeblig Road cemetery is ***C1.2***. In a few cases, in order to give detailed consideration to a particular site or burial, burials within a cemetery are listed separately. When this is the case, as at Llanbeblig Road, a letter is added to the gazetteer number e.g. ***C1.2 (a)***. Where reference is made to a gazetteer entry within the main body of the thesis, the gazetteer identification number is emboldened within brackets and follows the site name, e.g. Llanbeblig Road Caernarfon (***C1.2***).

The database has proved an invaluable aid in the manipulation of the data. However, due to the varied nature of burial practice in Wales, the database had to be tailored to meet the specific requirements of this research. For example, in the main body of this thesis, the Romano-British burial evidence has been classified and examined under four main chapter headings: legionary forts; auxiliary and other military installations; towns; and rural areas. However, these are very broad categories, which cover a range of different contexts and site types. Moreover, the status of a site was not necessarily static throughout the Roman occupation. Towns such as Carmarthen had military origins (Arnold & Davies 2000, 48). Other sites, such as Prestatyn, Denbighshire (***P15***), developed from domestic sites to small-scale industrial centres (Blockley *et al.* 1989). In addition, in some instances more than one research-set criterion was met, as at Pen y Bonc, Holyhead (***P3***), where a small cemetery was within close proximity to a Romano-British hut group and a prehistoric monument (Stanley 1869, 307-8).

Without creating an unmanageable number of database fields, such information had to be easily retrievable from the database to aid comparative analysis and, also, in order to be able to show such variables at a glance, in the finished hard copy. This problem was solved by entering such variables under the field 'on or within close proximity'. Although, to some extent, this has compromised the querying facility of this particular field, it has provided an effective means of showing the contextual complexity of Romano-British burial in Wales and has also made it possible to note the development of specific sites. For example, at a site in Carmarthen (***C4.2***) it has been possible to show that a probable Roman cemetery was located in an area where there was a sequence of development: auxiliary fort (MI), Roman town (RT) and early medieval church (EMC).

## **The structure of the thesis**

In addition to the introduction (Chapter 1), this thesis contains six chapters and the gazetteer. In order to be able to quantify the effect of intrusive burial practices in the frontier zone, Chapter 2 reviews the current evidence for pre-conquest burial practices in England and Wales. Though the Welsh evidence is of a sparse nature, it mirrors practices found in other areas of Iron Age Britain. It has, therefore, been possible to provide a yardstick from which to evaluate change.

Chapter 3 provides an overview of the burial practices associated with the four legionary fortresses of the frontier zone (Usk, Wroxeter, Chester and Caerleon). The purpose of this is to identify Roman rites in what, in frontier terms, was likely to be their most 'Romanised' form. A broad range of practices is apparent at these sites and a strong classical element can be identified.

The fourth chapter concentrates on burials associated with military installations and *vici* across the Welsh frontier zone. As in the other chapters, attention is paid to mode of burial, grave furnishings and the contexts chosen for burial. The different types of burial display are noted and such evidence compared with that from the legionary bases and rural areas. Especial attention is paid to burials within *vici*. This is in order to identify any civilian cemeteries and any burials that show native characteristics.

The *civitas* capitals and small towns of Wales are considered in the fifth chapter. A sizeable proportion of this chapter concentrates on the burial practices carried out at Caerwent, as significant new evidence was uncovered during the course of this research. Attention is drawn to the presence of formal burials as well as fragmented skeletal material within the defences of the settlement. It is argued that, although some aspects of burial practice in this town were clearly of Roman origin, others mirror rural and native practice. The evidence from Carmathen and Cowbridge is also considered within this chapter.

The penultimate chapter considers the burial evidence from the rural areas of Wales. This covers burials from a range of different contexts and includes villas/farmsteads,

defended native settlements, cave sites and prehistoric monuments. This chapter attempts to gauge the influence of Roman burial practice in the different geographical areas of rural Roman Wales and also to measure the persistence of native traditions. Consideration is given to the spatial relationship between burials and settlement at the different site types, and to the possible symbolic significance of various burial contexts.

The final chapter summarises the main conclusions to be drawn from this research. Overall patterns and trends in burial practice are discussed here, and attention is drawn to chronological, regional or site specific variations in practice. Such variables had a direct bearing on the main theme pursued throughout this thesis, namely: the extent of Roman influence on burial practice in Roman Wales. Possible social, economic or religious reasons that may have engendered certain practices in the various milieux are also considered. Finally, grave treatments, post-mortem practices and burial loci are also analysed in greater depth and particular attention is paid to the question of whether some rites can be said to constitute 'ritual continuity'.

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<sup>1</sup> Recent research has shown that lime and gypsum react very differently on human soft tissue. Green (1993, 429) has concluded from this that lime-packed burials may have been used to dissolve the body in the grave, whereas gypsum may have been seen as a preservative. As Green points out, this distinction has important implications in terms of belief.

<sup>2</sup> A detailed history of the theoretical approaches taken in mortuary archaeology can be found in Parker Pearson's *The Archaeology of Death and Burial* (1999).

<sup>3</sup> *JRS/Britannia* is, of course, reliant on the reports submitted. However, examples of reports that omit burial evidence include the reports on finds from the cave at Maeschafn, Denbighshire (*JRS* 1951, XLI, 121) which gives no mention of skeletal material, and the description on the rich deposit from Welshpool (considered to be of a funerary nature) which provides no contextual information (*JRS* 1960, L, 212). See Gazetteer nos. (*M3*) and (*W1*) for burial evidence.

<sup>4</sup> In order to be consistent throughout, all radiocarbon dates quoted in this thesis have been calibrated. Where only raw dates have been supplied these have been converted using the online Oxcal programme <http://www.rlaha.ox.ac.uk/orau/index.html>.



## CHAPTER 2: BURIAL PRACTICE IN IRON AGE WALES

One of the main aims of this study is to evaluate to what extent indigenous burial practices in Wales were affected by the introduction of new intrusive rites brought into the area as a result of the Roman occupation. In order to be able to gauge how quickly and how extensively new practices were adopted or assimilated, post-conquest rites need to be measured against the type of burial practices carried out in Iron Age Wales. Just over a decade ago any discussion of pre-conquest burial rites would have been extremely limited. Whimster's seminal work in 1981 identified several specific Iron Age burial practices in Britain and, for the first time, provided a geographical framework, together with a body of data, on which to base future research. However, the evidence cited from Wales amounted to just six sites, too small a sample from which to draw any firm conclusions (Whimster 1981, 174). The last decade or so has seen some improvement in the situation. New discoveries, along with a more localised, in-depth literature search, led in the early 1990s to the production of a gazetteer which catalogued 21 sites in Wales, representing 45-50 individuals (Murphy 1992). This discussion draws on both the aforementioned studies, together with evidence from seven additional sites, three of which have been discovered since Murphy's survey and four brought to light as a result of this current research (Table 1; Map 1). Although the evidence remains fairly sparse and, of course, represents only a tiny proportion of the population, it is possible to recognise practices that mirror those carried out in other areas of Iron Age Britain. It is also possible to detect long-term trends, in terms of practice and/or choice of location, which originated in the Iron Age, or possibly, in some cases, in the Late Bronze Age, which appear to be carried into the Romano-British period.

The principal aim of this chapter is to examine the type of location chosen for burial and, where the evidence allows, the treatment of and/or provision made for the dead in Iron Age Wales. But in order to show how the evidence from Wales fits into the wider picture, some comparisons will be made with evidence derived from other areas of Britain.

Attention will also be paid to the problem of negative evidence. The limited number of Iron Age burials discovered in Britain has led to the widely held view that the majority of the dead in the Iron Age were disposed of in a manner which left no archaeological trace — hence the commonly coined phrase 'invisible rite'. Various arguments have been put forward as to what this rite may have been and some evidence produced to back up

specific theories (Whimster 1981, 194-6; Cunliffe 1991, 499; Cunliffe 2000, 72-9; Carr & Knüsel 1997, 167-73). As this debate has become central to any discussion of Iron Age burial practice, consideration will be given to how these various theories fit in with the Welsh evidence.

### **Problems of identification**

The acid content of the soil over much of Wales means that skeletal material does not survive well. There are some areas where the local geology aids preservation,<sup>1</sup> but, in general, the soil conditions adversely affect bone. The problems of skeletal preservation coupled with badly recorded earlier finds have resulted in a fair amount of uncertainty regarding the funerary nature and/or the date of some of the discoveries. In the absence of bone, a number of 'burials' are only assumed to be so from the presence of certain artefacts commonly found in association with graves (Murphy 1992, 28). Hence, for example, the context of the Cerrig-y-drudion bowl (or lid) remains uncertain (Whimster 1981, 174; Savory 1976, 26-7).<sup>2</sup> This is also the case for the 'spoons' from Castell Nadolig and Llanarmon (Barnwell 1862, 208-19). However, in the case of the last two finds the nature of their deposition, in a cist and a cairn respectively, and their location close to or within settlements strengthens the argument in favour of a funerary context (Lynch *et al.* 2000, 165, 193; Brassil 1992, 58 & 1993, 50; Barnwell 1862, 215; Davies & Kirkby 1994, 233). Difficulties also surround the secure dating of several burials. The mode of burial and the possible association with an Iron Age site is, in some cases, the only indication we have for a date of deposition (Murphy 1992, 28). Establishing a firm date within the Iron Age can also pose a problem. In some instances, although an Iron Age date can be fairly confidently assigned, in the absence of grave goods, or in association with material that was used throughout later prehistory, the possible date of deposition could span several centuries. This is the case for two inhumations from Moel Hiraddug hillfort (Davies, J.L. 1970, 9-10). Some of the more recent discoveries have been radiocarbon dated, but, while this has placed them firmly in the Iron Age, they cannot be dated with any precision, since the probable date range is far too broad (see Fig. 2.1).

It can be seen from this brief discussion that the study of burial practice in pre-conquest Wales is problematic and, in many cases, the evidence has to be treated with caution (Murphy 1992, 28; Lynch *et al.* 2000, 212-13). However, when the more tenuous

## FIGURE 2.1

### RADIOCARBON DATES (IRON AGE)

With the exception of Numbers 1, 10 and 25 (previously calibrated), the following dates have been calibrated using the online Oxcal (3.5) programme from the Oxford Accelerator Unit (<http://www.rlaha.ox.ac.uk/orau/index.html>). All dates calibrated using this method are calibrated at one and two sigma. The Oxcal programme shows (in percentages) the probability distribution range within a standard deviation. These figures are reproduced here (see column D).

A. Site.	B. Rite	C. Radiocarbon Age Uncal.	D. Calibrated 68.2% probability	E. Calibrated 95.4% probability
8. Capel Eithin Anglesey	crem	CAR-455: 2530 ± 70 BP	800BC (14.2%) 750BC 720BC (54.0%) 520BC	810BC (95.4%) 410BC
2. Ystrad-Hynod Llanidloes Pembrokeshire	crem	NPL-241: 2480 ± 145 BP	770BC (58.2%) 480BC 470BC (10.0%) 410BC	sigma too large at 2 standard deviations
12. Castell Bucket Letterston Pembrokeshire	crem	CAR-588: 2340 ± 60 BP	540BC (0.8%) 530BC 520BC (59.4%) 350BC 290BC (7.9%) 230BC	800BC (95.4%) 200BC
1. Llanymynech Carreghafa Powys	inhum	OXA-6824: 2375 ± 55 BP		770BC (95.%) 370BC (Owen 1997, 62)
25. Trostre Castle Usk, Mons	crem	OXA-6205: 2275 ± 60 BP		510BC-170BC (Mein 1996, 65)
10. Plas Gogerddan Ceredigion	crem	CAR-1072: 2150 ± 60 BP		2 sigma 390 cal. BC— cal. AD 05 (Murphy 1992, 15)
15. Devil's Quoit Stackpole Pembrokeshire	inhum	CAR-104: 2110 ± 60 BP	340BC (1.1%) 320BC 210BC (67.1%) 40BC	360BC (12.7%) 280BC 260BC (82.7%) AD30
5. Prestatyn Denbighshire	inhum.	CAR-827: 1980 ± 60 BP	50BC (68.2%) 90AD	170BC (95.4%) AD140

evidence is viewed alongside comparable and definite examples of burials in Wales and Britain as a whole, the picture becomes more positive, and we are able to glean some idea of a number of burial practices in existence before the Roman period.

### **Iron Age practices in Britain.**

The Late Bronze Age saw widespread social and economic disruption. This shake-up of the existing order appears to have affected religious and burial practices. The paucity of evidence for burial from the Late Bronze Age through to the Early Iron Age led Whimster (1981, 190) to argue that Middle Bronze Age practices had been replaced by the adoption of a burial rite that left no visible archaeological trace. Although there is no doubt that the limited evidence we have for burial practice during this period does suggest a break with earlier traditions, it is now becoming clear that there was not a total abandonment of previous rites and practices (Cunliffe 1991, 498; Lynch *et al.* 2000, 211-12). However, during the Late Bronze Age we do see a shift away from monumentality and formal cemeteries towards the deposition of the dead on settlement sites, in wet places and in association with metalwork and, occasionally, hoards (Brück 1995, 245-77; Burgess 1976, 81-104). This change in focus is coupled with the appearance of a range of activities of a seemingly 'ritual' nature that incorporated the use of fragmentary human remains. This practice has been seen as a reaction to socio-political changes taking place, caused, it is argued, by the transition of a society based on trade and exchange to one more heavily linked to agriculture (Brück 1995, 245-77).<sup>3</sup>

From the Middle Iron Age onwards (*c.* 400BC) burial is more archaeologically visible and it is possible to identify a range of different practices. Whimster (1981) has defined six groups of distinctive burial traditions in Britain: the Aylesford cremation rite of south-eastern England, four regional inhumation traditions and a fifth inhumation rite (sword-burial), which was geographically widespread. The four regional inhumation rites shared common characteristics (crouched body position and a tendency to place the head to the north) but showed variations in grave treatment. The various burial practices are discussed in more depth below, but, in broad terms, the four regional inhumation traditions consisted of pit burial in central southern and south-eastern England, defined cemetery areas of earth-dug graves in southern Dorset, cist burial around the Cornish coast and the distinctive square-ditched barrows of the Arras Culture in Yorkshire (Whimster 1981, 190-3). Whilst concurring with Whimster's findings, Cunliffe (1991,

510) has suggested that the centre south of England was also a zone where excarnation was widely practised (1991, 498-510).

However, as more evidence comes to light, these divisions have become less clear cut and it has become apparent that there were areas where different rites were carried out contemporaneously. For example, a formal Middle Iron Age cemetery has been discovered at Suddern Farm in Wessex (Cunliffe & Poole 2000), an area where it was previously presumed, from the partial and fragmented skeletal evidence, that excarnation was the normal rite (Cunliffe 1991, 510; 2000, 76). In addition, even quite distinct rites such as cart burial are not necessarily exclusive to any one given zone, and isolated, but comparable practices, are occasionally discovered a considerable distance away from the main groups (Cunliffe 1991, 504-5; Carter & Hunter 2001, 1-2). The difficulty of dating unaccompanied burials may also be masking the strength and geographical range of some Iron Age practices. For example, as Whimster (1981, 172) has pointed out, this may be the case in Scotland where few of the inhumations in cists can be confidently dated (Whimster 1981, 172).

One of the most prominent features of Iron Age burial practice was the tendency to dispose of the dead on or close to settlement sites. In terms of complete bodies, Whimster (1981, 191) cited 200 simple inhumations, each showing similar characteristics, from a number of sites across central southern and south-eastern England (Whimster's Group 1). Since his survey, however, more examples can be added which extend the geographical range (Wait 1985, 85-6, figs. 4.1 & 4.2) and which also include comparable practices in Wales as, for example, at Dinorben, Denbighshire (Gardner & Savory 1964, 45, 221) and Stackpole, Pembrokeshire (Benson *et al.* 1990, 228). Archaeologically visible grave goods were rare amongst this group of burials and it is the context in which they were deposited that has received the most attention. Burials were placed in disused storage pits and within enclosure ditches — locations which imply a desire to incorporate and/or utilise the dead in some way within the everyday life of a settlement. It has been argued that the characteristics of these burials — lack of visible status and their 'casual' disposal — shows a scant regard for the dead or, alternatively, ritual activities perhaps of a sacrificial nature. These forms of mortuary practice have therefore been judged atypical in some way and are not thought to represent the normal form of burial for any given area (Whimster 1981, 191-2; Wait 1985, 118-21; Cunliffe 1991, 507; Cunliffe 2000, 72).

However, whilst a proportion of these burials may reflect specific and deviant mortuary practices, it is not necessarily true of the whole, and it may be unwise to view them as a homogeneous group. It was noted above (Chapter 1) that the low status of comparable low-key burials of the Romano-British period has been challenged. Rather than being regarded as the burials of outcasts, criminals or the undervalued, they are seen instead as important components in a belief system which linked the welfare of the living and the dead with the protection and preservation of space, identity and fertility (Pearce, J. 1999b, 150-62).

Evidence derived from archaeology and parallels drawn from ethnographic evidence suggest that ritual and everyday life were firmly intertwined in prehistory (Hill 1995; Gwilt & Hazelgrove *et al.* 1997; Hugh-Jones 1996).<sup>4</sup> In the area of mortuary practice this integration can be especially hard to disentangle. In addition to complete articulated bodies, many settlements have also produced evidence of partial skeletons or isolated human bones. This was a practice that is most evident in central southern Britain but was not exclusive to this area and also has continental parallels (Whimster 1981, 182-5; Gardner & Savory 1964, 221; Collis 1977a, 8-9). Fragmented skeletal material has been discovered in occupation layers, rubbish pits, rampart ditches, points of entrance and, in a number of cases, purpose dug pits. These types of deposits have been variously interpreted as the end product of excarnation processes, ritual and/or rubbish deposits and trophies of war (Wait 1985, 120-1; Cunliffe 2000, 73-88; Hill 1995). Hill, however, has questioned the validity of placing too much emphasis on the deposition of human remains — whole or fragmented — as being seen purely in terms of ‘mortuary’ practice. Instead, he argues, skeletal material should be seen as just one element in a range of deposits similarly valued which, periodically, were combined and utilized in complex rituals (Hill 1995, 105-6, 117-18). Whatever interpretation we put on these activities, partial deposition appears to have been more intensive in the Early and Middle Iron Age. By the Late Iron Age there was a marked shift away from such practices towards the individual and complete burial of the dead (Wait 1985, 116-118; Whimster 1981, 191; Hill 1995, 121-3).

The predominant ‘visible’ burial practice in most areas of pre-conquest Britain appears to have been crouched inhumation. However, the treatment of the dead varied considerably. Along the south-west coast of England, with examples also known in Wales and

Scotland, stone cists were commonly used to enclose the dead (Whimster 1981, 60-74, Cunliffe 1991, 505; Murphy *et al.* 1992, 1-38). The shape and size of stone cists varied. Where rectangular, as opposed to circular or oval cist construction was employed, the majority were of short construction (under 1.52m in length), which reflects the principal rite of crouched inhumation (Whimster 1981, 273-85; 411-16; RCHAMW 1917, 188, no. 558). Sometimes cist burials were grouped together in formal cemeteries as at Harlyn Bay on the Cornish peninsula (Whimster 1981, 60-74). In proportion to the number of cist graves attested, grave goods do not appear to have been numerous and consisted mainly of personal ornaments, or small domestic items such as spindle whorls, but, occasionally, more elaborate items such as mirrors were provided. The evidence from the cemeteries in Cornwall and Devon suggests that their main periods of use spanned the two centuries either side of the Roman conquest, although they had possibly started to develop by the fourth century BC (Whimster 1981, 72). However, the 'richer' burials tend to be of Late Iron Age date (c.100BC-AD 43). This is also the case for comparable burials in Wales (see below). This acquisition of a larger variety of material goods was no doubt linked to increasing contact with the continent which opened up a growing number of trade networks.

The western coastal area of southern Dorset also saw the development in the first century BC of a distinctive burial rite, which is thought to have been associated with the Durotrigian tribe. This consisted of principally crouched inhumations in simple earth-cut graves (or occasionally in cists) within defined cemetery areas. The graves were furnished with pottery vessels usually of local manufacture, a limited range of personal ornaments and joints of meat (Whimster 1981, 37-59). But although there are distinctions to be drawn between the cist burials along the western coast and the Durotrigian rites in southern Dorset (Whimster's groups 2 and 3), similarities can also be observed. The Durotriges went to their graves far better equipped than their west country neighbours, but both groups buried their dead in a crouched position in formal cemetery areas with, in the majority of cases, their heads directed to the north (Whimster 1981, 190-6).

The Late Iron Age saw Britain being drawn closer into the broader Celtic and Mediterranean orbit with parts of the country forging social, economic and political links with western and central southern Europe. This creates difficulties in trying to isolate purely indigenous pre-conquest rites. Two of the most distinctive inhumation burial

traditions show affinities with practices that were developed on the continent during the early and middle La Tène periods. Widely distributed across the British Isles are a number of isolated burials containing weaponry, the principal weapon being a sword (Whimster 1981, 129-46). Continental parallels can be drawn but native rites are clearly evident in some cases, such as the inclusion of indigenous weapons and a crouched body position.

The burials of the Arras Culture of East Yorkshire also display elements of both continental and native practice. These well-known burials are defined by their square-ditched barrows and rare but distinctive grave goods that include joints of pork and mortuary carts (Whimster 1981, 193; Stead 1991, 183-4). Contemporary square-ditched barrows and cart burials are well attested in north-eastern France but very definite differences are apparent in the Arras burials and the presence of strong local traditions has been emphasized (Stead 1991, 183-4). The Arras burials are thought to have begun in the fourth or fifth century BC, but the most concentrated period of burial appears to have been during the last two centuries BC; by the first century AD the tradition seems to have largely petered out (Stead 1991, 183-4).

The last burial traditions in pre-conquest Britain to be considered are the La Tène III cremation practices of southern England. Named after sites in Kent, where these particular rites were first defined, they are most commonly referred to as rites associated with the Aylesford or Aylesford-Swarling Culture. Distributed quite widely across south-eastern Britain cremation burials of this type are found as single examples or in well-defined cemetery areas such as the King Harry Lane site, St. Albans and Baldock, Herts (Stead & Rigby 1989; Burleigh 1993, 41-9). Although the majority of cremation burials were quite modest in terms of grave furniture, a number of richly furnished cremations are attested. Evidence amassed over the years shows that burials range from simple urned or unurned cremations, often accompanied by pottery ancillary vessels and personal objects, notably brooches (e.g. Royston Road, Baldock, Burleigh 1993), to well-furnished cremation burials accompanied by a wider range of grave goods including vessels and personal objects in bronze and silver. Several high status cremations from north of the Thames, notably at Welwyn, contained imported glass vessels and wine amphorae, bronze and silver serving vessels and sets of iron hearth furniture (Whimster 1981, 147-66; Collis 1977a). Cremation is traditionally believed to have been reintroduced to the



south east of England from the continent during the middle of the first century BC as a result of the colonization of the Belgae and/or Belgic influence in the area.

In summary, both inhumation and cremation rites are attested in pre-conquest Britain. Inhumation appears to have been the dominant rite. The widespread practice of crouched inhumation with a preference to place the head to north, a practice not readily attested abroad, has led to the conclusion that this was rooted in indigenous tradition (Whimster 1981, 194). The deposition of partial and fragmented skeletal material was also a significant feature of pre-conquest mortuary practice. The evidence also shows that contact with the continent, whether through settlement or trade, introduced a new material culture, intrusive cremation rites and had some influence on indigenous burial customs.

In addition to the British evidence, the burial evidence from Ireland is pertinent to this study. Throughout prehistory relatively easy passage over the narrow stretch of Irish Sea between the western coast of Britain and Ireland had encouraged economic and cultural links, although it appears that these connections were stronger in the Neolithic than in the Iron Age (Lynch 1989, 1-19; 1991, 25). In terms of mortuary practice, cremation seems to have been the dominant rite in Ireland until the first century AD when crouched and flexed inhumations began to appear (Raftery 1996, 158; O'Brien 1992, 131). This phenomenon has been attributed to intrusive British influences (Whimster 1981, 175-6; O'Brien 1992, 131). Thereafter both cremation and inhumation rites were carried out contemporaneously, with cremation lingering on until the fifth or six century AD (O'Brien 1992, 133). A number of similarities can be recognised between the Irish and Welsh evidence. The most significant of these are the deposition of unurned cremations and the tendency to place burials close to or within earlier prehistoric monuments.

### **The Evidence from Wales**

The majority of Iron Age burials from Wales have been located within or close to settlements, most of which were defended and generically fall into the hillfort category. However, this may be more to do with the topography than any real bias in prehistory, as the nature of these upland defended sites makes it much less likely that their archaeology will have been destroyed as a result of agricultural or building development.

Interestingly, as we gain more knowledge of the diversity of settlement in prehistoric Wales, it has been possible to place certain burials, previously thought to have been in

isolation, back into a settlement context (Lynch *et al.* 2000, 165). For example, excavations at Tan-y-foel, Cerrig-y-drudion, Denbighshire, site of the possible 4th/3rd-century BC cist grave, have revealed a number of roundhouses; although a contemporary date with the 'burial' has not been determined (Brassil 1992, 58; 1993, 50).<sup>5</sup> Other settlement types to yield burials of probable Iron Age date include the low-lying open settlement at Merthyr Mawr, Bridgend, and Drim camp, Pembrokeshire, a small defended Late Iron Age/Romano-British site (Rankov 1982, 331; Mytum 1981, 32-3; Murphy 1992, 31-3). Burials of possible Late Iron Age date may also have been associated with contemporary phases at nearby farmsteads at both Llandough (Cardiff) and Biglis in the Vale of Glamorgan (Owen-John 1988, 129; Thomas & Holbrook, 1994, 8; Parkhouse 1988, 16, no.177).<sup>6</sup> Similarly, in north Wales, peat deposits at a Late Iron Age farmstead in Prestatyn, Denbighshire, yielded at least one burial of a contemporary date (Blockley 1989, 22; Stead *et al.* 1986, 187).

#### **'Formal' burial rites: the ratio of cremations to inhumation burials**

There is evidence for both inhumation and cremation rites in Iron Age Wales with inhumations forming the bulk of the recorded burials. How accurately this reflects any bias in the Iron Age is difficult to gauge, as the small sample of burials available for study prevents any meaningful statistical analysis. The existence of the two different burial rites is of great interest, especially as evidence for Iron Age cremation in Britain generally is sparse. The gazetteer of burials produced by Murphy lists 35 inhumations and 6-7 cremations; other burials are of an indeterminate nature (Murphy 1992, 30-35). Since Murphy's study, three further cremations have been identified, two at Capel Eithin, Anglesey (Lynch 1991, 351-3; White & Smith 1999, 58) and one at Trostrey Castle, Monmouthshire (Mein 1996, 65), but other, additional burials included in this study are inhumations, which increases their overall majority (Table 1, nos.1, 5, 6, 22 and 23). However, it is important to consider certain factors which may have affected this apparent disparity. As noted above, the acid soils of Wales destroy bone. The heating process undergone during cremation makes cremated bone more resilient to decay even in acid soils (Stallibrass 2000, 75), but its detection is always difficult if it is not made more obvious by unburnt grave goods or enclosure. It is this aspect that creates more of a problem in Wales than elsewhere in Britain, for although it is now recognised that Iron Age Wales was not aceramic, pottery, whether imported or locally made, was scarce (Lynch *et al.* 2000, 199-202). This paucity of pottery vessels suggests that cremations

were unenclosed or placed in organic containers which do not survive. It is also significant that all the recorded cremations from Wales were excavated within the last thirty years with the benefit of modern archaeological skills and knowledge. It is highly probable, therefore, that many cremations have been overlooked in the past. Unenclosed examples come from Castell Bucket, Plas Gogerddan and Trostrey Castle, whilst those at Drim Camp and Ystrad-Hynod were housed in a cist and a cairn respectively (Murphy 1992, 31-35, Mein 1996, 65).

Cremation is attested in Wales in the late Bronze Age, as it is in other areas of Britain (Lynch *et al.* 2000, 211-12; Cunliffe 1991, 498). Such a limited number of Iron Age cremations in Wales makes it impossible to know whether cremation was an isolated practice or, as in Ireland (O'Brien 1992, 130-3), an ongoing Bronze Age tradition. It may be significant here, that, the five radiocarbon dates we have for Welsh Iron Age cremations show a range of dates from the early to late Iron Age (Fig. 2.1). However, when these dates are calibrated at the recommended two sigma, only a very broad chronology is possible. 'Wiggles' in the calibration curve during the first millennium BC may also distort the overall picture (Cunliffe 1991, 591-2; Lynch 1991, 16).

On the issue of continuity, there are strong hints that Bronze Age rites were maintained into the Iron Age at Plas Gogerddan, Ceredigion. Here, three ring-ditches, the two largest of which possibly defined barrows, contained evidence of crouched or contracted inhumations and at least one cremation of Iron Age date. The cremation burial when calibrated at a two-sigma range gave a date of 390 cal. BC — cal. AD 05. The excavators have argued that this date is 'broadly compatible' with at least one of the inhumation burials, dated by two brooches to the first century BC or first century AD (Murphy 1992, 15). What is significant here is that radiocarbon dates placed the construction of the ring-ditches in the Late Bronze Age or Iron Age, a period when it is considered there was a major shift away from monumentality. Murphy (1992, 18) has drawn attention to the fact that without the confirmation of radiocarbon dating, the ring ditches and cremation burial would have been assigned to the early Bronze Age. This suggests that the practice of late barrow building was more widespread in Wales and has, as others have mooted, gone unrecognised (Davies & Kirkby 1994, 233). Here again, parallels can be drawn with the Irish evidence. The majority of cremations in Ireland were deposited within, or in association with ring-ditched enclosures, some encircling mounds or cairns. Some of the

Irish monuments also date to the Iron Age and the cremated remains were placed within the enclosure or in the ditch itself, as at Plas Gogerddan (Murphy 1992, 12; O'Brien 1992, 130).

## **Mode of burial and treatment of the body**

### **1. Hillforts**

The evidence derived from the hillforts in Wales shows a range of 'mortuary' practices. Unfortunately, as has already been outlined, there are difficulties in providing secure dates for a good proportion of this material. All that can be said in some cases is that the evidence presents material which is characteristic of Iron Age practice and is, therefore, assumed to be contemporary with the fort's occupation. However, by way of compensation, we have some good information about the spatial relationship of burials to other features within the settlement, and about the nature of the skeletal material. We can, therefore, see similar practices to those defined by Whimster in central southern and south-eastern England (1981, 4 -31, 191-2).

As Murphy has pointed out, it was the defensive ditches of hillforts which, in many cases, acted as a focus for burial. However, there are differences to be observed in the treatment of the dead between different sites and within individual sites themselves (Murphy 1992, 29). Coygan Camp, Carmarthenshire, provides a good illustration of the different contexts in which skeletal material were deposited and examples of different grave treatments. Burial evidence from this promontory fort started to come to light in the nineteenth century. Situated approximately eleven miles south-west of Carmarthen, Coygan Camp saw several phases of occupation spanning from the Neolithic to the Early Medieval period. The following phases are pertinent to this study: pre-rampart occupation, roughly thought to have run from the Late Bronze Age to the Middle Iron Age, c.800-200 BC; a period during which the fort was constructed c.200BC; and a further period of occupation in the 3rd century AD. It is unclear whether the first two phases overlapped (Wainwright 1967, 28).

In the first half of the nineteenth century a cist grave containing a skeleton in a crouched position, at the time assumed to be that of a large male, was discovered on the 'northern top' of the hillfort (A.J.K. 1842, 472-4). The grave was dug into the rock and topped by a

large capstone which, in turn, was enclosed by stone walling. It was noted that the capstone was not limestone and was thought to have been brought from a nearby site — a feat which would have demanded considerable effort. The head of the skeleton was placed towards the north and faced eastwards. Two further skeletons were reported in 1871 ‘buried in the hillside in two distinct places’, these were also considered to be of ‘large dimensions’ (Curtis 1880, 138). Although these earlier reports no doubt exaggerated the size of the skeletons, we can at least conclude these were adult remains, which appear to have been buried within well-defined areas.

Discoveries of cist graves at the bottom of Coygan Camp in Plashyatt Field were reported in 1875. A local farmer uncovered adult and juvenile skeletons buried in cists with capstones. Mary Curtis (1880, 138-9) reported that the graves were found under ‘several large stones and many small stones’, so cairns covering some graves may also be a possibility. The cists numbered seven or eight, and, like the first skeleton found at Coygan Camp itself, these were in crouched or flexed positions (RCHAMW 1917, no.558). In this case, the stones used to construct the graves are reported to have been unlike others in Plashyatt Field, but instead, like those on Coygan Camp. This is interesting and suggests that the stones used for the grave in the hillfort and for those in Plashyatt Field were selected for purposes other than convenience. There is, however, no positive evidence to link the burials in Plashyatt Field with the occupation of the hillfort, but their form and location suggest a probable association.

Wainwright’s excavations in the 1960s provided further evidence of burials from Coygan Camp. A pair of La Tène bronze bracelets and a serpentine ring were found in Romano-British deposits and above a possible Iron Age hut. These items were therefore considered to be evidence from a dispersed burial or rubbish from the postulated hut (Wainwright 1967, 37).<sup>7</sup> The bracelets date from the early-middle La Tène period (Savory 1976, 39; Wainwright, 1967, 83) and are therefore contemporary with the fortified Iron Age phase of the site. They were uncovered in a spot thought to be fairly close to the earlier cist grave discovery. A possible association has therefore been suggested (Wainwright 1967, 83, 40). However, their small size (2.2 inch diam.) implies they were intended for a child or female (Wainwright 1967, 83), in which case, as the skeleton in the cist was considered to be a large male, it is more likely that there were further burials

in the close vicinity. It may also be significant that these bracelets are of a type found in contemporary central European cemeteries. A similar pair also came from an Arras grave in Yorkshire (Savory 1976, 26; Whimster 1981, 174).

Two further burials, a female adult and female child, tentatively assigned to the late third century AD, came from just inside the southern entrance of the fort, which by this time had become blocked (*C8.1 a & b*). Both burials were in a slightly flexed position and lay with their heads towards the east; no prepared graves were discernible but the adult had a covering of 'largish' stones. Nothing was found that could be definitely associated with the burials, although the covering occupation earth contained coins and pottery of the late third century. A rim of a mortarium was also found between the ribs of the child (Wainwright 1967, 54-6). A skeleton found in association with several coins of Carausius is also reported to have come from the vicinity of Coygan Camp in 1802 (Colt Hoare, NLW Aberystwyth, MS. 3.127). In terms of fragmented human remains several fragments of skull came from under the outer bank and are attributed to the pre-rampart occupation, and five metacarpals came from the later Iron Age deposits. Overall twenty-one fragments of human bone were recorded from the site, a figure which covers all periods of activity (Wainwright 1967, 44, 54, n.133).

Apart from the fragmented material from Coygan Camp, which is indicative of some of the less well-understood Iron Age 'mortuary' practices, it could be argued that none of the burials described above, with the possible exception of the adult female reported to have been in a 'curiously twisted position' (Wainwright 1967, 56), represents casual deposition. Leaving aside the possible funerary association of the bracelets and ring, archaeologically visible grave goods are absent, although the nature of their early discovery may have resulted in them not being recognised. However, if the cist graves are genuinely of a Late Bronze Age/Iron Age date, we can see that considerable care was taken of the dead. Similarities between the cist burials on the Cornish peninsula and those at Plashyatt Field have been drawn (Benson 1990, 242) and it may be that we are looking at a western coastal tradition.<sup>8</sup>

What is also significant is that we may be able to recognise a pattern of spatial organisation, visible in Britain and possibly in other areas of Wales. For example, the Early/Middle Iron Age cemetery at Suddern Farm in Wessex, a strongly defended site,

was situated outside the settlement's enclosure ditches. Wessex had not until this discovery produced any evidence for large formal cemeteries and is an area where pit and ditch burials dominate the burial record. The dead at Suddern Farm were placed in flexed positions in individually cut pit graves and generally orientated north-south. It is estimated that the cemetery may have held as many as 300 adults, 80 children and 180 infants or neonates (Cunliffe & Poole 2000a, 143-174, 201). It is particularly interesting that isolated human bones from the same period were also found within the settlement enclosure, providing evidence of two contemporary but distinct treatments of the dead (Cunliffe & Poole 2000a, 152, 201). Little in the way of grave goods accompanied the burials from the cemetery. It may be significant that at Danebury, situated 5km away, a far greater number of 'special deposits' containing human bone are attested (Cunliffe 2000, 72-89). This suggests that, within a small local area, several different traditions were in existence. At Suddern Farm, as at Coygan Camp, later Romano-British burials were found close to the filled-in, outer ditch (Cunliffe & Poole 2000, 171).

Evidence from Dinorben hillfort in Denbighshire also hints at similar practices. The famous Late Bronze Age/Early Iron Age hoard of bronze horse trappings was found below, and outside, the north-western natural defences. The report of its discovery in 1875 records the presence of numerous bones, believed to have been human, in the vicinity of the find (RCHAMW 1914, no. 640; Gardner & Savory 1964, 1; Savory 1976, 52). This raises the possibility, that, like the two examples above, this find constituted grave goods from a cemetery located outside the settlement. Other burials discovered at Dinorben consist of three male skeletons, two disarticulated and one in a fragmentary condition, from the bottom of the northern enclosure ditch, and the skeletons of a female and child found on the northern rampart. These remains cannot be precisely dated but are thought to date from the earlier periods of occupation at a time between the Late Bronze Age and Middle Iron Age (Lynch *et al.* 2000, 150; Gardner & Savory 1964, 45; 221; Brück 1995, 270). Isolated human bones come from within the Early Iron Age entrance and from within the settlement itself.

In contrast to Coygan Camp, Late Iron Age/Romano-British skeletal evidence is more fragmentary but is found in similar locations to that at Coygan: deposited in the rampart ditches close to the entrance and under the upper road surface of the fort's entrance (Gardner & Savory, 1964, 221-2). The concentration of skeletal material close to the

entrances of settlements is well-attested in prehistoric and Romano-British contexts and has been seen as the symbolic use of space linked to concepts of liminality (Brück 1995, 257; Pearce, J. 1999b, 154). However, in the case of Coygan Camp and Mynydd Bychan, Glamorgan, burials were deposited close to entrances that had already become blocked in previous phases. If, therefore, their placement was symbolic in some way, the importance of this position was not altered by the removal of a physical and visible threshold. The three inhumations from Mynydd Bychan, dating to the first century AD, came from the lip of a silted-up ditch, close to the south-western entrance (Savory 1950, 247-50). At Moel Hiraddug, Flintshire, two inhumations of probable Iron Age date came from a position immediately inside the entrance and were sealed underneath the entrance trackway (Davies 1970, 9-10).

Although the evidence from Wales has to be treated with caution, it is pertinent to speculate on the possibility that formal cemeteries were often placed outside the main settlement areas of hillforts and other domestic sites. This is a hypothesis also recently put forward by the excavators of a small Middle Iron Age cemetery outside a contemporary settlement at Yarnton, Oxfordshire (Hey *et al.* 1999). The lack of excavation outside enclosures and on the periphery of sites may be responsible for the paucity of identified Iron Age cemeteries. This certainly appears to have been proved in the case of rural Roman Britain (Pearce, J. 1999b, 154). Other burials in Wales which might hint at this practice are the cist grave housing a cremation from Drim Camp, Pembrokeshire (Mytum 1981, 32-3) and the cairn burial with accompanying mirror at Llanwnda, Pembrokeshire (Idrison 1855, 273-7). Both these burials were placed outside the defences of settlements — their mode of enclosure implying careful deposition. Much has also been made of the fact that Plas Gogerddan, Ceredigion, a Bronze Age ritual site, was a focus for burial during the Iron Age and sub-Roman period. But it should also be remembered that its location was in the lower valley 1km from the Iron Age hillfort at Hen Gaer (Davies & Kirkby 1994, 233, DAT SMR no. 2015). Other evidence of a more nebulous nature comes from Castle Ditches, Glamorgan, where, in 1876, human bones were reported to have come from just outside the earthworks (Hogg 1976, 16). This site also produced a contracted inhumation from the rampart ditch of possible Romano-British date (*C13*) (Hogg 1976, 38). Murphy has suggested that Merthyr Mawr, Glamorgan, an open undefended coastal site, may have had an associated formal cemetery. Crouched burials of a possible Iron Age date were found close to the domestic areas, though widely



scattered across the site, which suggests more than one cemetery zone (Murphy 1992, 29, 34; Savory 1950/52, 170-1; 1954-6, 53-4; Wheeler 1925, 160-3). It is also possible that the small cemeteries at Llandough and Biglis had Iron Age beginnings (see note 6).

In contrast to the evidence collated by Whimster (1981, 28), who cites just one example of objects associated with ditch burials in Britain, the limited evidence for Wales provides several examples of personal ornaments in association with burials deposited in or close to hillfort ditches. However, only at Mynydd Bychan is the association secure. At Crocksydham Camp, Pembrokeshire, Fenton reported the early nineteenth-century discovery of the upper portion of a skeleton in a vallum ditch with a 'brazen ring on his breast, perhaps a rude brooch' (Fenton 1903, 226). At least three iron brooches were associated with the burials from Mynydd Bychan (*M6*) (Savory 1955-6, 16). There is also the possibility that two small, early La Tène bronze bracelets from the fill of an inner ditch at Llanmelin hillfort, Glamorgan, derived from a burial (Nash-Williams 1933, 308).<sup>9</sup> The presence of personal ornaments in these contexts suggests that some ditch burials were of a more formal nature. They need not, therefore, be regarded as 'casual' depositions but as one of a number of different mortuary practices discernible in Wales.

## **2. Secondary deposition at earlier prehistoric sites**

Over the last twenty years there has been an increasing awareness that prehistoric features in the landscape acted as a focus for later burials (Petts 2001; Williams, H. 1997; Bradley 1987; Lynch 1991, 353). In Wales, as in other areas of Britain, this is a practice that is attested not only in the Iron Age but also in the following Romano-British and Early Medieval periods (Murphy 1992; O'Brien 1999; Petts 2001; Brassil *et al.* 1991; Edwards, N. 2001; James, H. 1992a). Due to the limited number of recorded Iron Age burials in Britain generally, more attention has been paid to burials of the Romano-British and Early Medieval periods. This phenomenon in early historic Britain has been the subject of much discussion, and central to the debate has been the question of how much understanding or knowledge there was in the minds of later users of the original significance or purpose of a site. Although most would agree that their use was borne out of a desire to be linked with the past in some way, the deposition of the dead at sites of this nature has been interpreted in various ways. As well as being seen as places of ritual activity, which may or may not be rooted in unbroken tradition, it is argued that these features were associated with concepts of liminality, regardless of the passage of time

(Pearce, J. 1999b, 156). It has also been suggested that political motives or concerns might have played a part in the choice of site and that the use of prehistoric features for burial helped legitimise ownership of land in attempts to strengthen, preserve or gain local power (Bradley 1987, *passim*; Williams, H. 1997, 26; Edwards, N. 2001, 38).

No doubt a complex mixture of purpose and reason dictated the choice of each individual site, but it is likely that territorial concerns motivated use of pre-existing monuments in Iron Age Wales. Recent settlement studies in Wales have demonstrated that the earliest phases of occupation on many sites thought to have been established in the Late Iron Age can now be pushed back to the Late Bronze Age/Early Iron Age transition (Williams 1978, 3; Lynch *et al.* 2000, 154). However, continuity of settlement throughout the Iron Age is difficult to establish and it has been shown that in some areas there were considerable breaks and shifts in settlement patterns (Lynch *et al.* 2000, 144-72). It may be that during these periods of political, social and economic instability the use of earlier ritual sites for burial reinforced physical and spiritual ties with a specific area.

The evidence from the Devil's Quoit, Stackpole Warren, Pembrokeshire, shows that, as at Plas Gogerddan, Ceredigion, later Iron Age burials were placed in association with an earlier ritual complex which included a standing stone (Benson *et al.* 1990). The Bronze Age standing stone, along with a stone platform, was erected on the site of an Early Bronze Age domestic site, although it is argued one of the structures may have assumed a ritual role in its final stages (Benson *et al.* 1990, 238). Wind-blown sand incursions indicate that activity at the site was not continuous (Benson *et al.* 1990, 194; Lynch *et al.* 2000, 213; Williams, G. 1988b, 97-100). In the Late Iron Age, the Devil's Quoit was an integrated part of a large undefended agricultural settlement. During this period domestic activity and burial are attested around the site of the standing stone and associated features (Benson 1990, 196-8, 240). Thus, although we can see that burial was centred on the earlier ritual complex, we are still seeing settlement and burial very much intertwined as we do on the hillfort sites. This site demonstrates how crucial it is to see burials in the context of the landscape as a whole. Although it is clear this monument acted as a focus for burial, and may well have been perceived as religiously or ritually significant, it was not a prehistoric feature used in isolation, nor for ritual activity alone. There may have been considerable differences in intent and conception between the use of a monument that was sought out for burial at some distance away from areas of occupation, and one

that conveniently formed part of the close neighbourhood. Murphy has argued that 'two distinct locations' were used for burial in Iron Age Wales, 'in or around hillforts' and 'Bronze age ritual/funerary monuments' (Murphy, 1992, 28). The evidence from the Devil's Quoit suggests that the some sites do not easily fall into any one category — settlement or prehistoric feature — and it may be unwise to draw such clear distinctions.

The burials at Devil's Quoit consisted of an adult female and three infant burials. The adult was buried in a large oval pit (6m diam. and 0.7m deep) in a 'tightly crouched' position with the head to the north (Benson 1990, 196, 241). However, unlike the English pit burials, which were deposited in disused storage pits, this grave was purpose dug (Whimster 1981, 10; Benson 1990, 242). The burial was covered with five large stones which Benson suggests may be indicative of a 'votive of sacrificial function' (Benson 1990, 242). However, their presence may mean no more than a measure against disturbance.<sup>10</sup> The burial was sited within an arc of stakeholes placed at the edge of the stone platform. The skeleton was articulated and no visible grave goods were found in association. A radiocarbon date of 360 cal. BC — cal. AD 30 was obtained for the burial. Three infant burials were made outside, but close to the end of the arc of stake holes, and at the opposite end to the pit burial (Benson *et al.* 1990, 184, fig3).

Although deposited perhaps within fifty years of each other the group of infant graves were not necessarily contemporary with the adult burial. In addition, the stake holes were of an irregular profile which, it has been suggested, may indicate that they were withdrawn after a limited period of time (Benson *et al.* 1990, 196). If the stakes had been removed from the site, there need not have been any association between the group of children's graves and the stake arc and/or the pit burial. As Benson pointed out it is difficult to judge the nature of mortuary activity at this site as the juxtaposition of settlement and monument blur the issue. But due to the positioning of the burials near the monument, and the grave treatment, which he compares with burials from Frilford, Berks, where a stake-built circle interpreted as a shrine enclosed two inhumations, a specific ritual element is favoured (Benson *et al.* 1990, 242, Whimster 1981, 238-9). Such an interpretation, however, remains a matter of conjecture. It is of note that Collis (1977a, 3) attaches no ritual significance to the Frilford burials, which he sees as merely representative of integrated mortuary and domestic activity.

The Devil's Quoit burials also invite comparisons with a burial from a Late Iron Age farmstead at Prestatyn in north Wales. Here a semi-circle of stakes which, it has been suggested, originally formed part of an oval surround, enclosed the burial of a young infant. This burial was deposited close to the domestic area of the farmstead within natural peat deposits and produced a radiocarbon date of  $1980 \pm 60$  BP CAR 827 (cal. 170BC — AD 140: 2 sigma). Further stake structures were noted nearby (Blockley 1989, 20-3, 171). Although this burial has been categorised as a 'bog body' (Stead *et al.* 1986, 187), the deposition in peat may not be particularly significant, as peat formed a major part of the local soil makeup.<sup>11</sup> The two examples above demonstrate that stake enclosure was not exclusive to a particular site type. The purpose of the stake surrounds may well have been linked to specific mortuary rituals but, alternatively, may have served the more practical purpose of demarcation within a settlement context.

At Plas Gogerddan, Ceredigion, radiocarbon dates showed that burials were associated with earthworks that were newly constructed in the Late Bronze Age or Iron Age. However, as attested at the Devil's Quoit, Pembrokeshire, renewed interest in earlier monuments is also a feature of this period. In addition to small groups of burials clustered around earlier prehistoric features, or placed in 'urnfields' as appears to have been the case at Capel Eithin, Anglesey (Lynch 1991, 351-3),<sup>12</sup> seemingly isolated burials were also deposited in pre-existing barrows and cairns as at Ystrad-Hynod, Powys (Murphy 1992, 29, 35). The 'burials' at Llanwnda, Pembrokeshire and Castell Nadolig, Ceredigion, are also presumed to be secondary depositions (Murphy 1992, 29). However, the relatively high status of the 'grave goods' from the last two sites may suggest, in the light of the late date of the Plas Gogerddan barrows, that new monuments were constructed. On the other hand, the salient point of secondary deposition may have been that status was effectively achieved by association with a venerated former monument.

### **3. Cave burials and Bog Bodies**

The evidence from several caves in Wales suggests that they were used for mortuary purposes during the Iron Age and Romano-British period. However, there can be considerable problems in the identification and interpretation of skeletal material from cave sites. Firstly, it is often difficult to date deposits securely as water action and human or animal disturbance has, in many cases, destroyed contextual information. Secondly,

the fragmented condition of the material and, occasionally, the nature of its deposition make it difficult to distinguish burial practice from 'ritual' activity. However, this is not a problem exclusive to cave sites.

The caves examined in this thesis are assumed to present evidence of a more 'formal' burial rite as associated items mirror grave assemblages from Iron Age/Romano-British cemeteries. The issue of cave burial is discussed in more depth in Chapter 6, as much of the material evidence is of Romano-British date. However, in some cases, as at Orchard Cave, Denbighshire, the broad chronology of the material spans the Iron Age and Romano-British period and makes it impossible to assign the evidence to either (Guilbert 1982, 15).<sup>13</sup> Orchard Cave is one of a network of caves at Maeshafn, Denbighshire, two of which (*M3*) and (*L19*) have yielded burial evidence which can be dated to the Late Iron Age/Romano-British interface. The early date of these burials, however, suggests that cave burial is likely to have been a local tradition with Iron Age antecedents.

Several references to bog burials come from Wales (Stead *et al.* 1986, 187), but with the exception of the stake-encircled infant from Prestatyn, which does not readily fall into the same category, there is no indication of the date of these depositions. It has been pointed out that where radiocarbon dating has been carried out the majority of finds from Britain are of late prehistoric or Roman date (Turner & Penney 1996). In view of this it should be kept in mind that bog deposition may have represented yet another form of mortuary practice in a diverse system of rites in Iron Age Wales. The evidence we have for votive offerings in watery places during this period, for example, at Llyn Cerrig Bach, Anglesey, demonstrates the ritual significance of water at this time which, as others have suggested, may well have been extended to mortuary practice (Cunliffe 1991, 499).

### **Late Iron Age Burials of 'Status'**

The shift in the late Iron Age towards more individual and complete burial of the dead was widespread across Britain. Coupled with this development was an increase in the variety and quantity of grave goods deposited, due in part to the greater accessibility of material goods. In Wales late Iron Age burials are recognised in a number of contexts and small personal items were found in association with several of these burials.

Although it is unwise to link status exclusively to visible material wealth, as status may equally have been achieved through monument type, specific mortuary practices or

spatial association, a number of finds do hint at several 'rich' graves. Unfortunately, in most cases, any skeletal material originally in association with these discoveries was not preserved or went unrecorded (Murphy 1992, 28).

Apart from the Cerrig-y-drudion find, which is dated to the 4th or 3rd century BC, other 'burials' are of late pre-Roman Iron Age or immediate post-conquest date (Murphy 1992, 31-35, Lynch *et al.* 213). Two mirrors, one from Llechwedd Du Bach near Harlech (*P13*), Gwynedd, and the other from Llanwnda near Fishguard, Pembrokeshire (*L17*), the latter found in a cairn, are dated to the first century AD (Idrison 1855, 273-4; Boon 1980, 743-4; Fox 1925, 254-7). A tinned bronze platter accompanied the mirror at Harlech (Fox, C. 1925, 254). The association of mirrors with burials is well attested in Iron Age and Roman Britain and they are usually, but not exclusively, associated with female graves (Fox & Pollard 1973, 16-41; Lloyd-Morgan 1977, 231-52; Millett 1993, 266). Certainly a high status item in the Iron Age, mirrors are considered to have lost something of their 'status' value during the Romano-British period (Struck 2000, 87). Further finds include two separate discoveries of what are usually described as pairs of 'spoons', one from Llanarmon in Denbighshire, the other from Castell Nadolig, Ceredigion (Barnwell 1862, 208-19). The pair from Castell Nadolig came from what appears to have been a small cairn in the interior of the hillfort (Barnwell 1862, 214-15; Murphy 1992, 32; Savory 1976, 41, 61). The purpose of these items is unknown, they are normally found in pairs and have been discovered in funerary contexts in Britain and in Marne, France (Whimster 1981, 23; Cunliffe 1991, 509, n. 4).

Two warrior graves are also recorded from Wales. A vague report of a find from Ogmores Down, Glamorgan, describes two inhumations reputedly wearing highly decorated bronze helmets and in association with daggers and other weaponry. Other than the suggestion that the helmets appear to have displayed 'Italo-Celtic' attributes, little can be said about this find (Whimster 1981, 174). The burial of a male warrior from Gelliniog Wen, Anglesey, is also somewhat of an enigma. The body was enclosed in a stone cist and accompanied by a Late Iron Age sword and is one of 25 known British and Irish inhumations associated with La Tène swords and weaponry (Whimster 1981, 131). The extended form of warrior burial can be traced back to north-eastern France, and it has been postulated that this grave contained an exile or refugee fleeing from a troubled homeland under Roman subjugation (Whimster 1981, 143; Lynch 1991, 284). However,

extended inhumation is known in Iron Age Wales (Murphy 1992, 34, No.15, ii; Owen 1997, 62; see Table 1, nos. 1 and 20) and as Lynch (1991, 248) has noted, cist burial was not intrusive.

One further possible example of a high status Iron Age burial comes from Llanarmon, Denbighshire. A barrow in the neighbourhood is reported to have enclosed the skeleton of a horse along with its rider (Lewis 1842) — a description which is reminiscent of the ‘King’s Barrow’ at Arras, Yorkshire, and several other Iron Age cart burials across Britain (Whimster 1981, 293; Cunliffe 1991, 504-5). The vague nature of the antiquarian evidence makes it unwise to speculate too far, but it is possible that the Llanarmon find represented a variant form of cart burial. It may be also be significant that the ‘Abergele Hoard’ mentioned above (page 37), which also came from Denbighshire, could point to a regional tradition of placing horses or their trappings in the grave.

### **The ‘invisible’ dead and fragmented skeletal material**

The above discussion has centred on the very limited number of Iron Age burials known from Wales. Even though the evidence amassed from Britain as a whole is more encouraging, we can still only account for a small percentage of what settlement studies have shown was a sizeable population. This lack of evidence led Whimster (1981, 194-6) to put forward his ‘surface burial hypothesis’ to account for the missing dead. He theorised that the normative pre-conquest burial rite was inhumation with deposition in shallow graves. This practice would hinder preservation and, in many cases, the evidence would be destroyed entirely. Added weight can be given to this premise as such practice has been identified on a number of Late Iron Age and Romano-British rural sites (see Chapter 7). Deposition in water or the scattering of cremated remains are also suggestions that have been made to explain away the dearth of burials (Cunliffe 1991, 499; Cunliffe 2000, 72-3; Hazelgrove 1999, 123). On the other hand, others have pointed out that when the additional evidence of scattered and partial skeletal material from Iron Age sites is taken into consideration ‘Iron Age burials resemble an embarrassment of riches’ (Wait 1985, 83). The difficulties are in the interpretation of this material. We have seen that during the later Iron Age, burial becomes much more archaeologically visible and, to our twenty-first century eyes more understandable, as a pattern of more ‘formal’ burial emerges. The idea that fragmented skeletal material may in many cases

represent the end product of excarnation has been fairly widely mooted. It has also been pointed out that excarnation has wide ethnographical parallels and is a process which often includes secondary funerary rites where selected remains are incorporated into later rituals within settlement contexts (Carr & Knüsel 1997, 167-173; Hill 1995; Cunliffe 2000, 72-81; Wait 1985, 116-20).<sup>14</sup>

In Wales, Iron Age mortuary practices appear to mirror the practices attested in other areas of Britain, but how closely can we draw comparisons? In terms of the missing dead of the Welsh Iron Age the adverse soil conditions and a comparative lack of ceramics may account for a considerable loss of evidence. Similarly, as in Britain generally, the limited excavation outside the perimeters of settlements may also have reduced the evidence. Certainly in Wales, the votive offerings made in rivers and lakes suggest that watery places may also have been a focus for mortuary activity, especially, as mortuary and other forms of ritual activity may have been interconnected. However, with the exception of bog bodies and a few isolated undated skulls (Stead *et al.* 1986, 187), human remains have been rarely found in these contexts, although, if deposition took place after excarnation, de-fleshed bone would be unlikely to survive the generally acidic water conditions. Unurned cremation is also attested throughout the Iron Age which is harder to detect archaeologically.

The Welsh evidence shows that the dead were deposited on a range of site types and in various contexts. The deposition of complete bodies and the evidence of grave goods in a number of cases suggest burials of a formal nature. However, some of the other skeletal material is fragmented and difficult to interpret. How much of this material should be considered evidence of burial rather than of ritual use or secondary mortuary practice? The context and fragmented nature of the skeletal material from sites such as Coygan Camp and Dinorben suggest that partial deposition did take place. Moreover, the presence of fragments of human cranium on three hut-floors at the latter site suggest that human bone was deliberately incorporated into the core of the domestic sphere (Gardner and Savory 1964, 64, 221). Grave treatments also hint at secondary mortuary practices, for example, the skull was missing from a female inhumation at Llanmelin, Monmouthshire (Nash-Williams 1933, 310), which infers its removal for use elsewhere. Similarly, skull fragments were scarce in the cremations at Castell Buckett, Pembrokeshire (Murphy 1992, 32). However, the mixture of human and bovine bones in



the Castell Buckett deposits, need not imply a 'less formal approach to the disposal of the dead' (*pace* Murphy 1992, 29). The inclusion of animal bone is more likely to represent pyre offerings or part of the funerary feast, a practice that was common elsewhere in Iron Age Britain and other areas of north-west Europe (Fitzpatrick 2000, 15-29). It is also of some significance that partial deposition does not appear to have been rite specific in Wales and partial deposits of both burnt and unburnt skeletal material are attested in settlement contexts (for token deposits of cremated bone see Trostrey Castle, Mein 1996, 65).

It is difficult, however, to determine whether the presence of skeletal material in certain contexts was always a product of selective deposition, rather than the result of taphonomic processes. It has been shown that the factors that govern preservation can differ from site to site and from burial to burial (Waldron 2001; Dave Pepper, pers. comm.). But, as Brück has pointed out, specific studies have shown that it is the skull, mandible and long bones that are most likely to survive (Brück 1995, 256-7; Maylan 1993, 38; Mays 1992, 57). These are the bones most commonly found in isolation in a range of different contexts. Consequently, in the acid soils of Wales a proportion of this seemingly dispersed material may have derived from complete inhumations.<sup>15</sup>

## **Conclusion**

The evidence from Wales is of a limited nature but does show that a complex system of mortuary practices was in place during the Iron Age. As in other areas of Britain during the late Iron Age burial becomes more visible and of a more formal and individual nature. Grave goods in the main consist of small personal items, although the discovery of several high status objects suggests some burials are representative of the local elite. Settlements remain an important focus for burials throughout the period and spatial organisation of skeletal material within settlement contexts can be recognised, for example, along the peripheral boundaries, within ramparts and close to the entrances of settlements. Both inhumation and cremation are attested but inhumations form the bulk of known burials. With the exception of the burials from Gelliniog Wen, Anglesey (Lynch 1991, 282), Nash Point, Glamorgan (Murphy 1992, 34) and Llanymynech, Powys (Owen 1997, 62), inhumations were placed in a crouched or flexed position. Stone cists and barrows/cairns were used for enclosure and earlier prehistoric features attracted mortuary activity. Although the practice diminishes, the deposition of partial or

fragmented skeletal material, perhaps derived from excarnations, is still found in a number of contexts in the late Iron Age, as at Dinorben in Denbighshire (Gardner and Savory 1964, 221-2).

The practice of inhumation and cremation rites, deposition of fragmented skeletal material, reuse of prehistoric features for burial and the probable construction of new monuments imply a certain amount of conservatism in mortuary practice in Iron Age Wales. It will be argued that many of these deeply rooted traditions were carried forward into the Romano-British period.

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<sup>1</sup> Murphy has noted that, in fact, most of the inhumations have been discovered in limestone or sandy contexts - elements which aid preservation (Murphy 1992, 28). The calcareous nature of caves also helps to preserve bone.

<sup>2</sup> Originally identified as a 'hanging bowl' a more recent interpretation suggests that this object may be part of a decorated lid. Of continental or British workmanship it is dated between the 4th and early 3rd century BC (Cunliffe 1991, 431-3; Savory 1976, 26-7; Lynch *et al.* 2000, 189, 213).

<sup>3</sup> Brück (1995, 245, 245-77) has argued that the disturbance in the social and political structure of society caused anxieties which manifested themselves in ritual. Conceptual concerns regarding 'liminality, identity, continuity and renewal' were addressed and assuaged by the deposition of human bone in specific contexts.

<sup>4</sup> Although Ucko (1969, 262-4) warns against drawing direct comparisons between ethnographical and archaeological evidence, as in prehistory, ritual is an integral part of life in many modern day societies (Richards 1996; Hugh-Jones 1996). For two particularly pertinent studies which examine domestic/industrial and ritual integration on Iron Age settlement sites see Hingley (1997, 9-18) and Downes (1997, 149-51) in Gwilt & Hazelgrove (1997).

<sup>5</sup> Pottery (VCP) found in association with the structures does, however, provide a broad chronology for the settlement which agrees with the date of the 'grave' deposit (Lynch 1991, 376; Lynch *et al.* 2000, 189; Brassil 1992, 58).

<sup>6</sup> A Late Roman/Early Medieval cemetery 150m away from the farmstead at Llandough (Cardiff), produced evidence of several graves, which may have been associated with the Iron Age phase of the farmstead. Five flexed graves were recovered and one crouched burial — all postures characteristic of Iron Age practice. However, the only dating evidence came from a pit burial, which produced a potsherd of Late Iron Age date (Thomas & Holbrook 1994, 8). At Biglis, Glamorgan, several graves were associated with a Late Iron Age/Romano-British farmstead thought to have been established in the early first century AD. One of these graves (no. 177) contained a crouched inhumation, lying north-south with the head pointing north and facing east (Parkhouse 1988, 16). No dating evidence came from this grave but the crouched position and

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orientation suggest an early date. All other burials associated with the settlement were extended, two of which are dated to the 3rd and 4th centuries AD.

<sup>7</sup> It is suggested below that this 'hut' was an excarnation platform (Chapter 6, 181).

<sup>8</sup> This does not appear to include Ireland where, with one possible exception at Aghalahard, Co. Mayo (Herity & Eogan 1977, 244), cist burial does not appear to be a major feature of burial practice until after the introduction of inhumation in the first century AD (O'Brien 1992, 130-2, Whimster 1981, 175-6). Cist graves are well attested in Scotland (Thomas, C. 1971, 53-4; Whimster 1981, 172-4) but the majority of those that can be confidently dated to the Iron Age are concentrated along the eastern coast (Whimster 1981, 168-74, fig. 53).

<sup>9</sup> Llanmelin also produced evidence of skeletal material. The annexe of this hillfort yielded a portion of a male skeleton found in the bottom fill of the defensive ditch and several bones of an adult female laying close to the outer edge of the annexe ditch (Nash-Williams 1933, 264-5, 274, 308; Murphy 1992, 34).

<sup>10</sup> See Philpott (1991, 63) for partial stone coverings.

<sup>11</sup> A further skeleton of an adult female was drawn from a peat bed in Prestatyn in 1924 but, unfortunately, cannot be securely dated (Davies 1949, 298-300; Stead *et al.* 1986, 187).

<sup>12</sup> Heavy ploughing at this site may have destroyed a covering cairn or barrow (Lynch 1991, 351).

<sup>13</sup> A decorated bone toggle, bone peg and flint scraper came from this site together with skeletal material. Worked bone items of this type are often found in funerary contexts in Iron Age and Romano-British contexts and have variously been interpreted as bridle parts, belt segments and hinges for *ossuaria* (Stead & Rigby 1989, 107-8; Guilbert 1982, 15). However, there is a possibility that the SMR record has been duplicated and that these items were, in fact, found in close spatial association to skeletal material radiocarbon dated to the Neolithic (CPAT SMR Records 34750 & 103035; Chamberlain & Williams 2000, 22-3).

<sup>14</sup> The various types of skeletal material have received quite different interpretations. For example, Wait (1985, 120) sees partial body deposition as indicative of human sacrifice. Cunliffe (2000, 76), on the other hand, suggests that whole bodies in pits were of a possible sacrificial nature or atypical in some way, whereas he argues partial bodies represented ancestors brought back from the excarnation fields to be used in propitiatory rites.

<sup>15</sup> It is interesting that comparisons drawn between Iron Age and Early Medieval burials in Wales back up Mays' findings (Mays 1992, 54-8). Caer Bayvil, Dyfed, a small, defended enclosure of probable Iron Age date, became the focus for an early Medieval cemetery. Cist, lintel and simple 'dug graves' were attested, some of the last being 'little more than scoops in the gravel'. Skeletal material was minimal; a portion of skull and two phalanges were retrieved from a stone-lined grave in 1920 and a small amount from the 1979 excavations (RCHAMW Pemb. 1925, No. 32; James, H. 1987, 51-76). The point is that the presence of cist graves, not skeletal material, led to the interpretation of this site as a cemetery (James H. 1987, 57). Had small scoops and isolated bone been found on an Iron Age hillfort, the interpretation would, no doubt, have been one of ritual activity.

## **CHAPTER 3: BURIAL PRACTICES AT THE LEGIONARY FORTS**

In order to be able to recognize and quantify any changes in burial rites that took place during the Roman occupation of Wales, it is necessary to consider any intrusive practices in their most undiluted form. The legionary fortresses of Wales and the border provide considerable evidence for the introduction of Roman burial practices into the frontier zone, providing a yardstick from which to measure the practice and adoption of various rites at military outposts, urban and more rural areas in Wales. The following discussion examines the evidence from Chester, Caerleon, Wroxeter and Usk. The shift from military to civilian status at the last two sites has been taken into account and consideration is given to what effect this had on their respective burial practices.

This chapter aims to provide an overview for comparative purposes, to highlight intrusive rites and to consider what contribution indigenous rites made to the development of burial practices carried out within close proximity to the legionary fortresses. Due to the large quantity of data, it has not been possible, within the confines of this study, to provide a detailed breakdown of every burial identified at the legionary bases. The known cemetery areas have, however, been synthesized, and a summary of the various grave treatments carried out at each cemetery, or within each *canabae* (civilian settlement surrounding a fortress) zone, is included in the gazetteer.

The following sections concentrate on three main aspects of burial practice: the location of burials, the chronological development of cemeteries and grave treatment. In addition, the longer periods of military occupation attested at both Caerleon and Chester, as opposed to the majority of auxiliary forts in Wales, have provided the opportunity to examine the long-term development of burial practices at military sites. Times of markedly reduced military presence have also been considered and attention is drawn to the changes this brought about in mortuary behaviour.

### **Significant previous work on the *canabae* cemeteries**

Evidence of the cemeteries associated with the four legionary fortresses started to come to light in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, as a result of urban development and antiquarian interest. At Chester the founding of the *Chester*

*Architectural, Archaeological and Historic Society (JCAS)*, in 1849, ensured the recording of many early finds. However, early interest was focussed on the funerary sculptures and tombstones, the majority of which were uncovered within the city walls.<sup>1</sup> In terms of synthesis, the publication of *Roman Cheshire* (Watkin, W.T. 1886) recorded many of the previous finds relating to burials in and around the city. This was followed in the 1920s by Lawson's 'Schedule of the Roman Remains of Chester' (1928), which made a further attempt to draw the funerary evidence together.

To date, the Infirmary Field remains the only cemetery to have been systematically investigated (Newstead 1914; 1921). Funerary evidence is still coming to light but the majority of more recent discoveries consist of small clusters of burials or isolated finds (e.g. Mason, D.J.P. 2001, 157; Bell, C. 2000; Robinson, D.J. 1984, 91). Recent attempts at synthesis have brought some order to the large quantity of burial data accumulated over the past two centuries (Thompson, F.H. 1965, 48-50; Petch, D.F. 1987, 178-85; Mason, D.J.P. 1987, 163-6). Of these, Mason's work on the *canabae* has produced the most detailed review so far on the location and contents of the cemetery sites (Mason, D.J.P. 1987, 163-6; 2001). In addition, Philpott (1991) has provided some analysis of grave treatment and furnishing. However, to date, it is still the case that the tombstones and sculptures of Chester have received the most attention (Wright & Richmond 1955; Collingwood & Wright 1995, 159-90; Hope 1997; Henig 2002).

Caerleon, like Chester, produced much of the evidence for its cemeteries in the nineteenth century. Thanks to antiquarians such as Lee (1845; 1862), many of the discoveries were subsequently recorded and preserved. Moreover, during the first half of the twentieth century, the interest of archaeologists such as the Wheelers and Nash-Williams meant that Caerleon received professional attention during crucial years of urban growth — leading to such discoveries as the famous pipe burial (Wheeler 1929). However, finds from Caerleon's cemeteries remained sporadic until the latter part of the twentieth century, when the opportunity arose to carry out controlled excavations using modern techniques. Over the last twenty-five years excavations have been carried out at Lodge Hill, the Coed (also known as Ultra Pontem), Bulmore Road and Usk Road (Evans & Maynard 1997; Burnham 1994, 250-1; Vyner 1978, 25-34; Zienkiewicz 1985, 2-30; Yates 1999; Yates 2001). These

excavations have helped to answer questions on the extent of the cemetery areas, their periods of use and the location of earlier finds. Recent work on the *canabae* has also thrown light on the relationship between domestic and burial space (Evans, E. 2000). In common with Chester, Caerleon has produced some tombstones and funerary sculpture (Lee 1862; Nash-Williams 1935; Yates 1999, 6; Collingwood & Wright 1995), which have not only put a name to some of Caerleon's Roman occupants, but have also helped to paint a picture of the monumental nature of its cemeteries.<sup>2</sup>

Although the cemeteries of Roman Wroxeter have produced some of most interesting finds, the lack of contextual information hinders research. Casual finds started to come to light as early as 1752, along the roads leading out from the Roman fortress and later *civitas* capital (*VCH* 1908, 239). Excavations along Watling Street to the north east, and at Norton outside the north gate, were carried out by Thomas Wright in the second half of the nineteenth century (Wright 1872). A large quantity of funerary material was uncovered but, unfortunately, the work was carried out in a haphazard fashion with little attempt to employ accurate recording methods. Further investigations were made in the north-eastern cemetery areas in 1923 (Atkinson 1942), which helped throw some light on Wright's discoveries. More recently, excavations to investigate the line of Watling Street have uncovered further evidence for burials in the vicinity (Goodburn 1975, 328; Wright *et al.* 1976, 390). Much remains to be discovered about the extent and nature of Wroxeter's cemeteries, but Wright's work and the limited modern investigations have made it possible to say something about the location and type of burial practices carried out (Philpott 1991, 39; White & Dalwood 1996, 9, 13; White & Barker 1998).

Evidence for burials associated with the Roman fortress and later fort or works depot at Usk is of a much sparser nature. As with the other three legionary sites, investigation at Usk began in the nineteenth century, but although a tombstone was uncovered during building work (Thompson Watkin 1878a, 23, *RIB* 396), little else of a funerary nature was uncovered until the 1930s (Bowen & Nash-Williams 1933a, 119-20). Since this time, modern excavations and rescue work have provided evidence of several areas utilized for burials, although it would appear all probably date to the post-fortress period (Marvell *et al.* 1998, 66-7). However, the nature of the limited evidence, in particular the presence of two tombstones, echoes that found at

the other legionary bases. The inclusion of Usk in this section was, therefore, considered appropriate, especially as the change in the character of the site affected the location of burials and allows comparisons to be made regarding location changes at Caerleon and Chester.

## **KNOWN CEMETERIES, LOCATION OF BURIALS AND PERIODS OF CEMETERY USE**

The location chosen for burial is an aspect of Roman burial practice which is seen as increasingly important. It was noted above, that recent studies have been based on the premise that the location chosen for burial can be just as telling as the rituals and practices carried out during deposition (Chapter 1). Although lagging slightly behind the interest in rural burial loci, urban cemetery placement is now being considered in more depth. It has long been recognized that the Roman law of the Twelve Tables, which stipulated that graves were located outside the city walls,<sup>3</sup> influenced burial location in Roman Britain (Toynbee 1971, 48; Boon 1972, 106). However, with notable exceptions (Esmonde Cleary 1985, 74-7; Jones, R. F. J. 1982, 67-8), little attempt has been made to investigate further and to consider additional factors that might have influenced the location of extramural burials. This question is now being more readily addressed and emphasis placed on the importance of urban planning, burial display and topographical foci (Jones, R.F.J. 1984, 36-7; Hatton, 1999; Pearce, J. 1999a, 124-47). Attention has also turned to the spatial relationship between burials and domestic activity, and it is now increasingly realized that, especially in the smaller towns or suburban areas, buildings and burials were often in close proximity (Esmonde Cleary 2000, 129; Jones, R.F.J. 1982, 67-8; Cooper & Buckley 2003, 38-9).

Two of the questions to be addressed in this chapter are concerned with burial loci, namely: what influenced burial location at the legionary fortresses, and what relationships, physical or conceptual, can be discerned between settlement and burial? In order to try and understand some of the contexts chosen for burial at the legionary bases, two important points have to be borne in mind. First, the number of soldiers garrisoned at any one time could fluctuate considerably — the legions did not remain static and at certain times during the Roman occupation the fortresses were only lightly manned. Second, both Wroxeter and Usk were supplanted by the new

fortresses of Chester and Caerleon, Usk around AD 75 and Wroxeter by the end of the 80s, which changed the nature and status of both the former settlements (Marvell 1996, 91; White & Dalwood 1996, 2). Both the above factors appear to have had a bearing on the choice of burial location and will be considered in this section.

Attention is also given to the chronological development of the *canabae* cemeteries. Although the scarcity of burials from the later Roman period prevents detailed discussion on shifts in location, the presence of both cremation and inhumation rites in some cemeteries suggests that a number of cemeteries remained in use during the life of a fortress.

### **Chester**

The traditional view of Roman cemetery development presumes that cemeteries expanded outwards from a town or fort. It now appears that this may not always have been the case, and other factors played a part in the location of cemetery sites, as Jones has argued in the case of York and Chichester where the earliest burials are furthest away from the occupation areas (Jones, R.F.J. 1982, 60). At Chester (Map 3), Mason (2001, D.J.P.102) has suggested that, as the expanding *canabae* encroached upon the cemeteries closest to the fortress, new cemeteries were established at a further distance away from the areas of occupation. Handbridge (*CHE.7*) to the south of the fortress is seen as the principal alternative and later choice. However, the picture may be more complex. There is no doubt that changes are apparent from the third century, but the location and choice of site during the late first and second centuries seems to have been closely tied in with the fluctuating occupation of the garrison. It would also appear that the cemetery areas closest to the fortress were utilized by some of the wealthier members of the *canabae* community, who had embraced the rite of inhumation by the beginning of the second century.

Chester was established as a legionary base *c.* AD 74 and remained under military control until the latter part of the fourth century (Mason, D.J.P. 2001, 41-6, 211). As was common practice outside the military forts and towns of Roman Britain, Chester's main cemetery areas were sited along the main roads leading out from the fortress (Map 3). The evidence for burials (*CHE.8*) on the north side of the fortress is limited, and the existence of a sizeable cemetery in this area has been disputed (Petch,



D.F. 1987, 180). However, others have argued that tombstones and funerary sculpture found in the north wall probably came from a cemetery on this side of the fortress (Thompson, F.H. 1965, 49; Mason, D.J.P. 1987, 166). Burials that have been discovered in the vicinity are distributed over a fairly large area (*CHE.8*). A seemingly isolated inhumation, contained in a lead coffin, came to light in 1984, 220m from the north gate and to the east of the Roman road (Petch, D.F. 1987; Mason, D.J.P. 1987, 167). Cremations found approximately 500m north of the fortress were also probably deposited to the side of the main north road. Here, a coin of Domitian (AD 81-96), in association with a cremation burial, points to burials of late first- or early second-century date. This is significant, as the location of the lead coffin, which is unlikely to be earlier than the mid-second century,<sup>4</sup> may suggest that later burials were placed closer to the fortress. Alternatively, the possibility that the tombstones and funerary sculpture in the north wall originally came from close to the northern defences may indicate that the finer tombs were placed nearer to the fort from the outset.<sup>5</sup>

Isolated and small groups of first-century cremations flanked the roads to the south (*CHE.4*) and east of the fortress (*CHE.5*). Further late first- to early second-century cremations were also deposited at Boughton (*CHE.6*), 1.5km east of the fortress. In terms of context, this last site is of particular interest, as it seems likely that the location was chosen for its perceived liminal or supernatural qualities. Boughton was the source of the water supply which fed the fort's viaduct, and the spring is seen as a probable focus for some of the burials (Mason, D.J.P. 2001, 86; 1987, 166). This site also produced evidence of a shrine containing an altar dedicated by the Twentieth Legion to 'the nymphs and fountains', which, significantly, appears to have been in close proximity to a group of cremation burials (Watkin, W.T. 1886, 176, 220; *RIB* 460; Mason in Strickland & Davey 1978, 40). The dedication and the presence of flagons (Philpott 1991, 30) point to this site being a military graveyard, although it may not have been used exclusively for soldiers; only one cremation from the vicinity has so far been definitely identified as male (Robinson, D.J. 1984, 91).<sup>6</sup> To date, no structural remains have been found at Boughton, and it has been postulated that this site may have principally performed a religious function (Mason, D.J.P. 1987, 166; Petch, D.F. 1987, 185). If this was the case, as water sources were an important component in Iron Age religion, it seems unlikely that Boughton spring only became

a focus for religious activity in the Roman period. It may be that, as attested in other parts of Roman Britain (Woodward 1992, *passim*), a former Iron Age religious site attracted Roman religious observance. A similar association between an Iron Age cult centre and a Romano-British cemetery is inferred at Carmarthen (see Chapter 6).

What appears to have been the most extensive cemetery associated with the fortress lies at Handbridge (*CHE.7*), the other side of the River Dee and south of the fortress. Dubbed 'Chester's Appian Way' (Newstead 1946, 120), burials flanked the road leading out to the civilian settlement at Heronbridge. The River Dee, along the northern extent of the cemetery, also appears to have acted as a focus for burials (Newstead 1946, 121-2). The majority of recorded burials are cremations, although a lead-lined stone coffin (Watkin 1886, 219), a vessel from a possible inhumation (Newstead 1946, 124) and a small amount of skeletal material (Watkin, W.T. 1886, 19; Gros. Mus. acc. no. 221/1905), attest to some inhumations in the area.<sup>7</sup> Early accounts suggest that coins accompanying burials dated from the first century to Constantine I (AD 306-37) (Ormerod 1882, 379 n. (a); Watkin, W.T. 1886, 217). Although his report is vague, Watkin implies that these coins were associated with cremations. If this was genuinely the case, it suggests a number of late cremations. Certainly, a third- or possibly early fourth-century cremation is attested on the periphery of the cemetery, alongside the River Dee (Petch, D.F.1987, 182, n.65; Newstead 1946, 121-2). Such a late date concurs with evidence from the northern frontier zone, where late third-century or fourth-century cremations are attested (Charlton & Mitcheson 1984, 6; Philpott 1991, 50-2). Significantly, outside Chester, eight sites in Wales have produced late cremations, although the majority were from non-military contexts (Table 2).

Watkin's (1886, 212-13) account of discoveries from the Infirmary Field cemetery (*CHE.1*), located west and within a 100m of the fortress defences, suggests that both cremations and inhumations were present. However, no cremations were found in Newstead's excavations in the early 1920s. The main period of use at Infirmary Field is thought to be Antonine (AD 138-92) and is dated by the presence of coins found in association with burials. Earlier reports that a coin of Domitian (AD 81-96) was found in association with one of the inhumation graves (Watkin, W.T. 1886, 213), suggests that burial in this area may have begun by the beginning of the second

century. However, the earlier burials appear to have been further away from the defences and to the west of Newstead's excavated area (Newstead 1914, 121-2).

The principal period of use at Infirmary Field, a cemetery which contained men, women and children, coincides with a very marked reduction in the occupation of the fortress itself — so much so, that areas were derelict within the interior of the fortress (Mason 2001, 155-9). However, it was only the fortress itself and the extramural official buildings that fell into disrepair during this period — the civilian settlement continued to expand (Mason, D.J.P. 2001, 159). This is of some significance, for while the concentration of burials in Infirmary Field at this time may simply reflect a very practical use of vacant land, there may have been other, less tangible reasons for this juxtaposition. It may be argued that there was a conceptual need to be associated with the fortress during a time when its fortunes seemed unsure. If this was a symbolic use of space, then such a context made a statement about the relationship between the dead (or those who buried them) and the fortress — the power base of the *canabae*.

The absence of the majority of the garrison for long periods in the second century (Mason, D.J.P. 2001, 155), also appears to have encouraged burial within the defences (*CHE.9*). A number of cremation burials have been found in the north-eastern quarter of the fortress, some within derelict barracks, although doubt now exists as to the date of deposition of the earliest dated vessels (Watkin, W.T. 1886, 214; Philpott 1991, 38, Mason, D.J.P. 2001, 32). This period of dereliction also saw the burial of an infant, inserted through the deposit that had built up in a block of buildings behind the *principia* (Mason, D.J.P. 2001, 158). Clearly then, at this stage in its history, economic and social change effected a change in burial location.

Further inhumation burials (*CHE.2*) and (*CHE.3*) have been discovered on the lower south-western side of the fortress, south of Watergate Street, and in several areas leading down to the Dee Stands, where it is assumed the position of the river bank stood during the Roman period (Mason, D.J.P. 1987, 156 fig.3.). Coins found in association range from the early Flavian period, represented by a coin of Vespasian (AD 69-79), to the end of the first century, attested by a coin of Nerva (c. AD 98) (Watkin, W.T. 1886, 214; Lawson 1928, LVI, 179; Mason, D.J.P. 1987, 164, Petch, D.F. 1987, 182). How extensive burial was in this area is unclear. At least eleven

inhumations are recorded in the area south of Grey Friars (*CHE.3*), and a tombstone (now lost), coins and pottery, indicate further burials in the area (Watkin, W.T. 1886, 216; Petch, D.F. 1987, 182).

The spatial relationship between the cemetery areas on the western side of the fortress and the areas used for other activities deserves comment. As we have seen, the running down of the fortress during the second century may have led to the more intensive use of the Infirmary Field cemetery, and possible explanations for this have been put forward above. However, topographical features in this area of the *canabae* may also have attracted the deposition of burials. A large extra-mural bathhouse, approximately 100m to the south of Infirmary Field, but within 75m to burials at Grey Friars, is believed to have been constructed towards the end of the first century and to have continued in use up to the fourth (Mason, D.J.P. 1987 149; 2001, 111). It was, therefore, in operation throughout the time that burials were deposited to the western side of the fortress. Other instances of burials within close proximity to bathhouses are noted at York (Jones, R.F.J. 1982, 67; RCHM York 1962, 54-7), and there seems to have been the same association at Caerleon (*CAER.7*), and at three military sites in the hinterlands of Wales: Caersws (*C10.2*), Dolaucothi (*D2*) & (*P6*) and possibly Pennal (*P11*). Such an association may have been coincidental; however, bathhouses were well-frequented buildings and such a burial location would have provided an excellent platform for burial display.

It is also of note that the riverbank to the south west of the fortress appears to have been used for burial display. Monuments erected on the Roman riverbank, from where tombstones are attested (*RIB* 558, Petch, D.F. 1987, 182), would have been clearly visible, especially to those using the river itself. The collective evidence from Wales has made it very apparent that burials from military, urban and rural contexts were often placed alongside waterways, which, in addition to the purposes of burial display, may also signify a liminal and symbolic location. This association between water and burials in Roman Wales is discussed in more depth below (Chapter 4).

In summary, the evidence from Chester indicates that Handbridge cemetery (*CHE.7*) was in use from the first century onwards and was contemporary with the cemetery areas south of Watergate Street (*CHE.2 & 3*), which appear to have been used, if not exclusively, then principally, for early inhumations. The cemetery at Handbridge has

provided evidence of both cremation and inhumation rites, but the majority of finds have been cremations, and the limited evidence for inhumation dates from the 3rd or 4th century. Although there is some evidence for mixed rites at the Infirmary Field (*CHE.1*), the main period of use appears to have been the mid-second to early third century with the majority of burials, if not all, being inhumations at this time (Newstead 1914; Newstead 1921; Philpott 1991, 58). The lead coffin from the northern cemetery (*CHE.8*) (Petch, D.F. 1987; 180) attests to further inhumations close to the fortress. Although there is evidence for some fine tombs in Handbridge (*CHE.7*), the quality of some of the grave goods and grave furniture suggests that it was some of the wealthier members of society that could afford a prime location near the fortress. The evidence may also indicate that during the transitional phase from cremation to inhumation, choice of rite determined choice of cemetery at Chester.

## Caerleon

Established c. AD 75, on the banks on the River Usk, Caerleon remained under military control at least until the late third century (Knight 1994, 14). Its main burial grounds were located to the north west and south east of its defences, and were spread along the lower slopes of the hills which rise to either side of the Usk valley (see Map 4). Lodge Hill, to the north west of the fortress (*CAER.1-3*), was used for funerary purposes from the late first century (Evans & Maynard 1997, 202). The hillside appears to have been devoid of settlement at this time. A hillfort on the crest of Lodge Hill, occupied in the Iron Age, is thought to have been abandoned until the late Roman or post-Roman period, when there is evidence for limited reoccupation (Howell & Pollard 2001, 96). It has been speculated that a road ran across the bottom of the hillside, but the evidence is not conclusive (Evans & Maynard 1997, 172). Indeed, the choice of this location may have been more to do with the prominence of the site than the close proximity of a road. The present evidence suggests that burials were concentrated in clusters, which formed distinct burial areas along the hillside for a distance of 1km or more (Evans & Maynard 1997; Boon 1972, 106). There are indications that there were zones where inhumation and cremation rites were carried out, although not necessarily contemporaneously, and other zones which were used exclusively for cremations as at the Abbeyfield site (*CAER.2*) (Evans & Maynard

1997). Evidence for cremations outweighs that of inhumations. However, as bone is rarely preserved in the acid soils of Wales, it is quite possible that simple earth-cut graves have gone unnoticed and, consequently, burials from the later period are under represented.<sup>8</sup>

A tombstone (*RIB* 369) found at Pilbach Farm (*CAER 1*), dated to the early third century, shows that Lodge Hill was used for funerary purposes at least until this time (Evans & Maynard 1997, 185; Arnold & Davies 2000, 139). Only cremation burials were attested at the Abbeyfield site (*CAER 2*), dated by pottery to the late first and early second century. This cemetery zone contained approximately 101 cremations. The ratio of male to female and children's burials led the excavators to suggest that it had been established mainly for the use of the garrison's soldiers (Evans & Maynard 1997, 189). The layout of this cemetery, combined with the limited amount of inter-cutting of graves, give the impression that this was a well-planned and respected burial area. There is no evidence of grand monumentality, but stone footings may represent one modest mausoleum. This site is believed to have gone out of use by c. AD 140, perhaps in favour of one of the cemetery zones nearby (i.e. *CAER 1* or *CAER. 3*).

Approximately 150m east of the Abbeyfield site, chance discoveries brought to light fragments of a lead coffin, two tombstones and cremations contained in glass and pottery vessels (*CAER 3, no.1*). The extant pottery is of Trajanic or Hadrianic date and the glassware of a type common in the late first and second century. This burial zone was therefore contemporary with the Abbeyfield site. However, the presence of a lead coffin<sup>9</sup> suggests it remained in use for longer. The tombstone of a veteran (*RIB* 358) provides evidence that this cemetery area was utilized by the military sector of the *canabae*. Further inhumations, and possibly cremations (Nash-Williams 1937, 325), are attested to the west of the above site at a distance of 200m and 400m (*CAER 3, nos. 2 & 3*). A male skeleton contained in a bathstone coffin provided a radiocarbon date of cal. AD 140 — AD 230 (Burnham 1997, 403).

Approximately 1km east of the previous sites and north east of the fortress, a further cemetery zone is attested (*CAER 4*). This burial zone was between the Afon Llwyd, a small tributary of the River Usk, and the Roman road to Usk. In this instance, therefore, both road and river may have acted as foci. Nineteenth-century finds

included nine or ten stone coffins, along with evidence for cremation burials (Fox, F. 1848, 187-90; Lee 1862, 23-4). One of the coffins contained a third-century glass sprinkler bottle (Boon 1972, 110-11). Recent excavations have also uncovered two unurned cremation burials, believed to be on the periphery of this cemetery (Yates 2001, 7-9).

Apart from the Abbeyfield site (*CAER.2*), where no inhumations were detected (Evans & Maynard 1997), at least two, and possibly three, of the burial zones to the north west and north east of the fortress contained both cremations and inhumations (see *CAER.3 nos. 1 & 3; CAER.4*). It is interesting that the Abbeyfield site (*CAER.2*), which appears to have been principally for soldiers, was the most short-lived. This may imply that there was a move towards more socially inclusive *canabae* cemeteries as the Roman period progressed.

To the south and south east of the fortress were other extensive burial grounds. Finds from Ultra Pontem, (*CAER.5*), 600m south of the fortress, include the pipe burial discovered in 1927 (Wheeler 1929). Recent excavations have been able to throw some light on the original context of this libation burial and suggest that it had been originally surrounded by a circular structure, possibly a masonry tomb. In addition, a further 23 unurned cremations have been found in close proximity. The initial analysis of 13 of these, together with specific types of grave goods (decorated work-boxes and hair pins) indicated that all but one of the burials were female, which hints at gender separation within this cemetery area (Burnham 1994, 251; Arnold & Davies 2000, 139). However, a recent reassessment of the skeletal material from the pipe burial, originally believed to be male, and from the more recently excavated cremations, has proved indeterminate (Julie Reynolds, pers. comm.). The cremation burials from this site are of mid-second- to early third-century date.

East of Ultra Pontem, numerous cremation burials, some in tile cists, together with tombstones and other funerary sculpture are recorded from the slopes of Chepstow Hill and from along the stretch of road leading to the civil settlement at Bulmore 1.5km south east of the fortress (*CAER 6. nos. 1-3*). Although they have not been found *in situ*, many of the tombstones from Caerleon have come from the vicinity of Bulmore Road and attest to military and civilian use of the cemeteries. However, in

light of the evidence from Lodge Hill, it is possible that there were discrete military zones.

Recent excavations have also led to a better understanding of the civil settlement and adjacent burial sites at Bulmore (i.e. *CAER. 6. nos. 1 & 2*) (Vyner 1978; Zienkiewicz 1985; Yates 1999; 2001). Although early interpretations of mausolea have had to be revised in the light of more recent research (Frere 1977, 360, Vyner 1978), evidence for some fairly substantial funerary monuments and mortuary enclosures has recently come to light at Little Bulmore (Yates 1999, 6; 2000, 98-9). These monumental remains, together with cremation burials (*CAER.6. no. 2*), were separated by a stream from Bulmore's civil settlement and are thought more likely to have been associated with the legionary fortress (Yates 2000, 98). Within the settlement itself, cremation burials and buildings coexisted within 20m of each other. Such close proximity led the excavators to suggest that the buildings in question were of a ritual nature (Yates 1999, 11). However, as this study aims to show, domestic and funerary activities were often closely associated in Roman Wales. It is also pertinent here that at Great Bulmore, towards the middle of this linear settlement (*CAER.6. no .3*), a small inhumation cemetery was located within 30m of the domestic buildings that lined the road (Zienkiewicz 1985, 17-20).

The two distinct attitudes to burial disposal at Bulmore illustrate the social, if not, cultural, dynamics of frontier life. On the one hand, we have clearly defined cemetery areas; on the other, a less rigid separation of the living and the dead, characteristic of small town and rural burial practice (Esmonde Clearly 2000, 129). The settlement at Bulmore undoubtedly had some connection with the military and a veteran settlement is postulated (Arnold & Davies 2000, 59; Zienkiewicz 1985, 2). However, its inhabitants are also likely to have been drawn from the native elements of society. So whilst we can recognize intrusive burial practices (e.g. amphora burials and extended inhumation), it is not surprising that a rural, if not indigenous, attitude to the disposal of the dead is also discernible.

It is also of significance that a possible Romano-Celtic temple stood 50m south west of Bulmore settlement in an area where cremation burials were found (Burnham 2002, 317; Yates 2000, 98; Young 1999, 103). The association between burials and



possible temple sites in Wales is discussed in more depth below but appears to have occurred where there was a strong indigenous influence (see Chapter 5).

Caerleon's extramural bathhouse was situated just outside the southern defences. Finds of a funerary nature have been discovered close to the site (Lee 1862, 25, 34) and it has been argued that a cemetery probably existed in this vicinity (Boon 1973, 351; Evans 2000, 490) (*CAER. 7*). If this is the case, then, as at Chester, burials may have been deliberately placed close to the bathhouse. Further parallels can be drawn with Chester, as there is also some evidence for burials within the fortress itself (*CAER.8*). Two first- or second-century amphora burials were found just inside the southern defences and a further urned cremation, possibly of a child, came from 46m inside the south-western quarter of the fortress (Lee 1862, 34, 60). Boon was emphatic that such locations, within the fortress defences, meant that the burials had been displaced or ill recorded (Boon 1974, 351, n.2; 1972, 123, n.40, 138, n. 358). However, recent excavations discovered the scattered skeletal remains of an infant, in second-century deposits, within one of the internal turrets of the southern defences (Howard Mason, pers. comm.). It seems likely, therefore, that, as at Chester, burials were deposited within the defences at a time when the fortress was under-garrisoned. Certainly, occupation was markedly reduced for periods of the second century, while detachments of soldiers were deployed on the northern frontier (Knight 1994, 11; Arnold & Davies 2000, 24-5).<sup>10</sup>

This brief outline of Caerleon's cemeteries shows that, like Chester, a number of different contexts were chosen for burials. In addition to the placement of burials alongside the main exit roads, the natural topography (the hillsides and rivers) acted as foci. On the present evidence, cemeteries appear to have been established in small, discrete burial zones. The scarcity of inhumations in the Bulmore Road cemeteries, coupled with the presence of both inhumation and cremation rites in the majority of burial zones on Lodge Hill, suggests that the cemeteries to the north east and north west of the fortress were utilized for longer. It is also noted that the reduced presence of the military may have influenced the choice of location and led to the deposition of burials inside the defences.

## Wroxeter

Wroxeter's known cemeteries (Map 5) have recently been plotted as part of the Central Marches Historic Towns Survey (White and Dalwood 1996). A cemetery lining Watling Street (*WROX.1*), to the north east and approximately 250m outside the north gate, has provided evidence of the settlement's early military association, in the form of three legionnaires' tombstones (*RIB* 292-4). A further tombstone, that of a woman (*RIB* 295), also came from this site. The absence of much of the contextual information prevents any detailed correlation of specific graves and grave goods, but the nature of some of the artefacts, particularly mirrors, also hints that the cemetery was utilized for both genders.<sup>11</sup> However, as this cemetery was also in use during the early years of the *civitas* capital,<sup>12</sup> it is perhaps more likely that these objects derived from the graves of the early urban community. All the recorded burials appear to have been cremations, and the majority of associated pottery is dated from the late first to mid-second century (Atkinson 1942, 324-32; Goodburn 1976, 328). Wright (1872, 38) observed that cremations 'appear to have been placed in rows, nearly parallel to the road', which infers some cemetery organization was in place and that markers distinguished the graves. However, although the road was the primary focus, burials and tombstones were recovered from a bank set back from the road, which was presumably used to make burial monuments more prominent (Wright 1872, 340; Pearce, J. 1999a, 127).

Further groups of cremation burials have been located to the north (*WROX. 4*), south east (*WROX. 3*) and west of Wroxeter (*WROX.2*), although it is not known how extensive burial was in these areas, and those burials that can be closely dated post-date the fortress (see Map 5). This is clearly illustrated at Norton (*WROX.4*) where a coin of Trajan (AD 98-117), sealed under a cremation urn, attests to an early second-century burial. However, 'considerable traces of Roman sepulchral interments' were found at this last site (Wright 1872, 347), so it is possible that it spanned the transitional period between legionary fortress and *civitas* capital. Like the Watling Street cemetery, the burials at Norton appear to have flanked a main exit road (White and Dalwood 1996, 13).

In terms of intramural burials, a lead ossuary and several urned cremations are believed to have come from the southern sector of Wroxeter, within or immediately

outside the town walls, although if they were associated with the fortress their position places them outside its defences (*WROX. 6*). However, once Wroxeter's military phase was over (*c.* AD 90) there are definite hints that the line between domestic and burial space became blurred. A cremation burial (*WROX.5*), was discovered beneath the floor of a building in *Insula 8*, and infant burials were associated with the *civitas* baths (Philpott 1991, 97; Kenyon 1938, 188, 227, Pl. LXV; Frere 1984, 291). One infant, resting on the original floor and sealed beneath the wall of the second building phase, may have been a foundation burial (Kenyon 1938, 188, 227, Pl. LXV).

In summary, in common with Chester and Caerleon, Wroxeter's early cemeteries were placed close to the main roads leading from the fortress and later *civitas* capital. Similarly, there is also evidence at Tern Bridge (*WROX.2*) that, as at the two previous fortresses, the river was a focus for burials. No late Roman cemetery has yet come to light, but it is postulated that a cropmark, outside the north-west corner of the *civitas*, may indicate an inhumation cemetery (White & Dalwood 1996, 13; White & Barker 1998, 108). The absence of late Roman burials (post second century) inhibits discussion on what long-term influence classical practices had at Wroxeter. However, a decapitated burial, a late Roman practice with rural origins (Philpott 1991, 81; Esmonde Cleary 1992, 35), came from sub-Roman deposits within the town, which infers that the late Roman urban community were influenced by rural rites (Atkinson 1942, 112-3; Webster, G. 1975, 137; Todd 1977, 324).

## Usk

The locations chosen for burial at Usk provide an opportunity to consider what effect the change in status, from military base to civilian settlement, had on burial location. In some respects the change in location followed a logical sequence. Following the dismantling of the fortress *c.* AD 75, the subsequent fort/works depot took up a considerably smaller area, which freed up land outside the new defences for burial. The works depot itself was also defunct by AD 125, although some continuing military authority is assumed (Marvell 1996, 91; Arnold & Davies 2000, 63). Like Chester, vacant land and reduced military control could be seen as sufficient explanation for a shift in burial location. However, the context of some of the burials suggests other factors also played a part.

All the burials which have come to light so far from Usk post-date the closure of the fortress (Marvell *et al.* 1998, 66-7). The earliest evidence comes from a small burial group (*U2.3*) found to the north of the fortress and dated to the Flavian period (Map 6). These burials were presumably deposited close to the military base's northern exit road. Further cremations (*U2.2*) have been discovered on the roadside south of the former fortress and these are also believed to be contemporary with the fort/works depot. Here the presence of both adult and juvenile skeletal material shows that this burial area was not exclusively for military use. It is also significant that, although these burials took place after the fortress had been dismantled, their position still respected the lines of the earlier defences. Post-fortress features at this last site included structural remains and industrial activity, although their contemporaneity with the burials is not proven (Maynard & Marvell 1995, 57). It is of interest, however, that a recent geophysical survey detected a large double-ditched enclosure in this vicinity (*c.* 50m sq.). Although its function is unknown it is possible that, as attested at both legionary and auxiliary forts in Wales, there was a substantial extramural public building in this area which attracted funerary activity (Pearson 2003, 79).<sup>13</sup>

Post-military occupation was scattered within the area of the former fortress, with concentrations of activity noted along the main roads (Manning 1989, 131, 180-1; Marvell & Maynard 1998, 259; Marvell 1996, 89). Excavations carried out at the Cattle Market site (*U2.4*) have provided evidence of at least seven burials (cremation and inhumation), which are considered to be contemporary with the civilian settlement (Manning 1973, 42). These burials were placed on both sides of the former *via principalis*, but were also clustered approximately 8-10m from the ditch of the Flavian fort/works depot. The two tombstones discovered at Usk also came from close to the *via principalis*, (*U2.5*) and (*U2.7*). The most recently discovered had been reused (Boon & Hassall 1982, 51); the other (*RIB* 396) was a nineteenth-century casual find, and little can be deduced about its original context (Thompson Watkin 1878, 23). However, in view of the location of the other burials, it is perhaps unlikely that they had travelled far from their original positions. Further burials have come from the south-eastern sector of the former fortress where a group of third-century cremations lined the road (*U2.6*), and from just inside the former southern defences (*U2.1a/b*) (Wilson 1969, 202; Marvell *et al.* 1998).

How closely bound up with the military Usk remained after the closure of the fort/works depot is a matter of conjecture. It has been suggested that *RIB* 396, dedicated to the child of a soldier, may imply that Usk became a veteran settlement (Arnold & Davies 2000, 63). The contexts of the post-fortress burials are particularly interesting as they hint that, in the developing civilian settlement, burials may have been an important means of affirming cultural or social affinities. We can see that the Roman habit of placing burials alongside roadways continued in the post-military settlement. Moreover, the former *via principalis* would likely have retained its importance and thus provided a prominent arena for burial display. However, the deposition of burials close to the former defences of the works depot, hints at a more symbolic placement. It may be argued that the shift from military to civilian settlement intensified the need of the most 'Romanized' sector of the population to be associated with Rome, and that this desire also manifested itself in burial practice. As a consequence, burials were deposited in an area that held the most recent memory of military occupation — in other words, a conscious attempt was made to focus burials on the location imbued with the strongest sense of *Romanitas*. It may also be significant here that *RIB* 396 was found close to the former *principia* (Watkin 1878, 23). Conversely, we may be seeing a practice more characteristic of native tradition, where boundaries and defences attracted burials. It is tempting to see a possible inhumation, which was deposited between the rampart and the eastern ditch of the intervallum, as characteristic of indigenous rampart burial (pit EBX; Manning 1981, 110).

Although the evidence is limited, the burial practices at Usk reflect the changing nature of frontier life and suggest that the choice of burial location was an important component of burial practice, which may have been used to show both status and cultural identity.

## **GRAVE TREATMENT AND FURNISHINGS**

We are now more aware of the rich cultural mix of the troops stationed in Britain and it is no longer tenable to regard the conquest as bringing in its wake unadulterated classical beliefs (Dobson & Mann 1973; Haynes 1994). This same principle has to be applied to the introduction of burial rites, although Graeco-Roman classical rites are

clearly apparent (Alcock, J.P. 1980; Toynbee 1971, *passim*), we must allow for the assimilation of rites derived from other cultures across the Roman Empire (Philpott 1991, 234). Indeed, Esmonde Cleary (2000, 139) has questioned the validity of defining a purely ‘Roman’ rite and suggests it may be more pertinent to think in terms ‘of a range of possibilities both in metropolitan Italy and more widely in Gaul’. Nevertheless, while there are difficulties in disentangling the fusion of ‘Roman’ practices introduced into Britain, when set against the background of Iron Age practices, we can, at least, identify a range of intrusive rites that were brought into the Province.

### **Monumentality**

One of the most visible aspects of ‘Roman’ funerary practice in Britain was the erection of inscribed tombstones and monumental sculpture — a form of burial display with clear Roman antecedents, which was commonly decorated with themes drawn from the classical world (Henig 2002, 75-7; Hope 1997, 250-4). All four legionary fortresses have provided evidence of tombstones, and Caerleon and Chester a considerable amount of funerary sculpture. The earliest tombstones commemorate soldiers, but as Romano-British society developed, tombstone use was adopted at all four sites by sections of the civilian population (e.g. *RIB* 562, 371, 295 and 396). In Wales very few tombstones are attested away from the legionary bases: three come from the auxiliary fort at Brecon (*RIB* 403-5) and a possible tombstone fragment was discovered at Caerwent (*RIB* 312). Such limited use outside the *canabae* supports the argument that they were largely confined to military and urban areas (Esmonde Cleary 1992, 34; Hope 1997, 247).

### **Cremation**

The predominant first-century rite in Italy and the Western provinces was cremation (Davies, G. 1977, 18; Todd 1977a, 39; Toynbee 1971, 39-40). This is the earliest rite to be identified at the legionary bases, although at Chester there is also evidence for late first- or early second-century inhumations. It was noted above (Chapter 2), that there is some evidence for cremation in pre-conquest Wales. However, the Roman army introduced distinctive grave treatments into the frontier zone, namely: urned<sup>14</sup> cremation, and a characteristically ‘Roman’ range of ancillary items (e.g. coins, lamps, and phials).

Coarseware vessels form the bulk of cinerary containers, with a limited number of glass vessels, and occasionally wooden boxes and lead *ossuaria*. Unurned cremations are also attested at all four sites; these are likely to be under represented in the archaeological record, as they were more difficult to detect before the introduction of modern excavation techniques. This is borne out by the recent excavations at Caerleon where, at the Abbeyfield site (*CAER 2*), more than half the cremation burials were unurned. A percentage of these (roughly 12%) had concentrated areas of bone within the grave fill, suggesting some kind of organic container had originally housed the burial (Evans & Maynard 1997, 194, Table 1). It is significant that the linen which enclosed the pipe-burial cremation at Ultra Pontem (*CAER.5*), Caerleon (Boon 1972, 108), was probably only preserved because it was encased in lead. This suggests that cloth may have commonly wrapped cremations. It is also of note that at Abbeyfield, a higher percentage of cremations with no durable container included grave goods, indicating that 'unenclosed' cremations were not necessarily low status burials (Evans & Maynard 1997, 195). This phenomenon is also noted at the King Harry Lane cemetery, Verulamium, where wooden caskets may have been associated with the richer burials (Millett 1993, 264). No definite casket burials<sup>15</sup> have been found in association with cremations at the legionary fortresses, but ivory fittings found at the Castle Baths, Caerleon, (*CAER.7*), may be indicative of such (Lee 1862, pl.29; Boon 1972, 107).

The majority of pottery cinerary urns were coarseware jars, but a small number of amphora and flagons were also used as primary containers, and these are noted at Chester (*CHE.9*), Caerleon (*CAER.6*) (*CAER.8*) and Usk (*U2.2*). Most ancillary vessels were ceramic, and these were generally coarseware. However, samian ware is attested in association with cremations at Chester (*CHE.5, 7 & 8*), Caerleon (*CAER.2, 4 & 5*) and Wroxeter (*WROX.1* & possibly *WROX.2*). With reference to Chester, it is apparent that the number of ancillary vessels associated with cremations has been underestimated in the past (*pace* Philpott 1991, 38). This is demonstrated by the presence of samian at the sites listed above, ancillary vessels in the northern cemetery (*CHE.8*) and also within the probable *columbarium*<sup>16</sup> (a subterranean burial chamber containing niches for individual cremations) at Handbridge.<sup>17</sup>

The use of glass cinerary containers is noted at Caerleon (*CAER.3*) (*CAER.6*) and at Wroxeter (*WROX.2*) (Lee 1862, 49; *VCH* 1908, 239-241), but there is no evidence for their use at Chester or Usk. This may be due to lack of evidence, and their absence is understandable at Usk which, after its change in status, may not have remained so attuned to new trends.<sup>18</sup> The lack of glass cinerary containers in Chester is puzzling, as glass appears to have been readily available and is found in association with Antonine graves at Infirmary Field (*CHE.1*) (e.g. Newstead 1914, 151-2). It is possible, however, that the higher value placed on glass vessels in the early Roman period, made it less likely to be consigned to the grave in the early military phase (Philpott 1991, 26). However, a sheet of glass was used to cover a late first- or early second-century urned cremation at Boughton (*CHE.6*); this urn also contained a glass phial (Newstead 1899, 154-8).

The purpose of a glass or pottery cinerary container is a very practical one — to enclose and provide protection for the cremated remains. It is, therefore, a practice likely to have been readily adopted in aceramic areas with a pre-existing cremation rite. However, coins, phials (lachrymatories) and lamps also form part of the *canabae* grave assemblages and their presence demonstrates the clear Roman origins of the cremation rite at the legionary bases as well as the introduction of practices linked to classical beliefs. The deposition of coins in the grave is derived from classical Greece and represents Charon's fee for passage over the River Styx (Toynbee 1971, 44; Alcock, J.P. 1980, 57). Lamps also had symbolic meaning and were thought to light the way into the underworld. Their inclusion in the grave is noted in the Hellenistic world and they are also recorded in later Etruscan/Roman graves (Toynbee 1971, 24; Alcock, J.P. 1980, 60). Phials are generally thought to have contained oils and perfumes, which accompanied the dead, or were used to anoint the body (or cremated remains) as part of the funerary ritual (Toynbee 1971, 44, 50; Alcock 1980, 62). Such practices are alluded to in the Twelve Tables<sup>19</sup> and described in contemporary Roman literature (e.g. *Aeneid* VI, 212-36).

Phials are associated with cremation burials at all four legionary forts (e.g. *CAER.2*; *WROX. 2*; *CHE.6*; *U2.3*) and lamps are noted at Chester, Caerleon and Wroxeter (e.g. *CHE.7*; *CAER.2*; *WROX.1*). The distribution of coins at the legionary fortresses shows a more unequal distribution (Map 7). With the exception of Usk, coins have



been associated with cremations at all sites with Chester (where coins are also attested with inhumations) and Wroxeter producing the majority of evidence. However, at Caerleon there is only one definite example of a coin with a burial (a cremation) (*CAER.8*) (Lee 1862, 34); a further example cited by Boon (1972, 106, n.369) may be residual (Vyner 1978). This disparity between the northernmost legionary fortresses of the Welsh frontier zone and those in the south is also borne out by more recent excavations at Caerleon, where coins appear to be absent (Evans & Maynard 1997; Burnham 1994, 250-1; Yates 1999). Nevertheless, coins are attested with cremations and inhumations in the immediate hinterlands around Caerleon (see Chapter 6), and the nature of some of the sites suggests that it was a practice adopted by the indigenous population (*pace* Alcock, J.P. 1980, 57). The majority of coins found associated with burials at Chester, Wroxeter and Caerleon are of the first and second century, although this is obviously more to do with the fact that most of the evidence for burials comes from this earlier period. However, at Chester, where the highest level of coin use is recorded, coins were apparently associated with burials up until the fourth century (Ormerod 1882, 379 n. (a); Watkin, W.T. 1886, 217).

### ***Ustrina* (pyre sites) and pyre-related activity**

Philpott has noted that at early military sites the majority of offerings were placed on the pyre (Philpott 1991, 220). This may go some way to explaining any perceived differences in the level of furnishing between the legionary bases. There is certainly evidence that offerings were burnt on the pyre at Usk, Caerleon and Wroxeter e.g. (*U2.3*), (*WROX.1*) and (*CAER.2*). This is likely to have been the case at Chester too, although it is of interest that modern analysis did not detect any trace of pyre offerings in the bone assemblage or the grave fill of the most recently discovered cremation at Handbridge (Bell, C. 2000, 9). At Abbeyfield, Caerleon (*CAER.2*) and Ultra Pontem (*CAER.5*) the majority of objects found in the grave had been burnt on the pyre (Evans & Maynard 1997, 195; Burnham 1994, 251). In the main, burnt items from these two sites consisted of coarseware pottery vessels, a limited number of personal possessions and ornaments, together with cereal and animal remains (Evans & Maynard 1997; Julie Reynolds, pers. comm.). Nails were also identified in the cremations at both sites and these have been identified as nails from coffins and hobnail boots. The large quantity of hobnails at Ultra Pontem infers that, at this site, the dead had been cremated wearing their footwear (Evans & Maynard 1997, 239).

Although pyre and grave offerings are apparent, the presence of so many relatively poorly furnished cremations at the legionary bases is of interest. However, it is possible that such evidence may be no more than a reflection of little understood selection processes. Mike Polfer's work on an *ustrinum* (pyre site) at Septfontaines, Luxembourg has shown that whereas samian constituted 2.5% of grave goods, it comprised 37.6% of the pottery from the pyre site. Moreover, he was able to show, by comparing the function of the vessels from pyre and grave, that those vessels found at the pyre site were linked to the 'service of solid food', whereas those placed in the graves (whether burnt or unburnt) were associated with the 'serving of liquids' (Polfer 2000, 35). This example demonstrates that the lack of fine ceramics in a grave is not necessarily indicative of low status. It is tempting to speculate that something of this sort took place at Abbeyfield, Caerleon, where samian is only represented in three graves (Evans & Maynard, 1997, 198). No definite *ustrina* were detected at this last site (see below), but a ditch at the cemetery contained an assemblage of pottery rarely found in the graves, the composition of which the excavators suggest may well indicate funerary feasts or ritual offerings (Evans & Maynard 1997, 190).

Recent research concerned with reconstructing funerary rituals has shown there to be variations in the forms of pyre used and in the disposal of pyre material (McKinley 2000a, 38-44; McKinley 2000b, 60-81; Polfer 2000, 30-7). Most significantly, it is now recognized that small cemeteries, where burials were infrequent, had no need for a permanent *ustrina*. Instead non-permanent pyre structures of an ephemeral nature were used, which are difficult to recognize in the archaeological record. Based on this understanding, and on the growing evidence of pyre activity, it is now argued that, contrary to previous interpretations (Philpott 1991, 8; Black 1986, 210), burials commonly took place close to pyre sites in Roman Britain (McKinley 2000a, 39).

This new research has helped to identify possible *ustrina* and pyre-related activities in Wales. The two pyre sites at Wroxeter (*WROX.1*; *WROX. 4*) have long been recognized as such, as the archaeology showed well-defined burnt features within the cemetery areas (Wright 1872, 346-7; Philpott 1991, 48; Struck 1993, 92).

McKinley's<sup>20</sup> findings, however, caution against interpreting both of these as *bustum* burials — where a body is burnt and buried on the same spot. Only at Norton

(*WROX.4*), where the *ustrinum* contained an urned cremation, can such an interpretation be confidently made. Thus the definition of such features as invariably high status burials (Struck 2000, 85-96) may have to be revised. We may be looking at *ustrina*, which were used on more than one occasion — a product of cemetery organization only to be expected at sites associated with the military.

In addition to the pyre sites at Wroxeter, evidence of possible burning *in situ* comes from Handbridge, Chester (*CHE.7*). Here, a late first- or early second-century vessel containing skeletal material was embedded in a ‘mass of calcined bones’ 8.85cm thick, which ‘extended well beyond the vessel’. The boulder clay on which the cremation rested, c. 1m below ground surface, showed ‘faint traces of fire’ (Newstead 1946, 125). Similarly, within the cemetery at Little Bulmore, Caerleon (*CAER.6.no.2*), a large pit (c. 2m x 1m) lined with burnt clay and charcoal ‘indicating burning *in situ*’ suggests an *ustrinum* (Yates 1999, 6). The size of this pit is certainly comparable with the pyre sites at High Rochester, in the northern frontier zone (Charlton & Mitcheson 1984). Antiquarian reports of a large quantity of burnt bones and charcoal, in close proximity to a cremation in a glass vessel, indicate further pyre activity at Bulmore (Lee 1862, 49). At the Abbeyfield site (*CAER.2*), whereas the excavators commented on the lack of *in situ* cremation (Evans & Maynard 1997, 190), ‘small patches of reddening’ were apparent within cremation pits, which McKinley (2000b, 61) has argued is sufficient to suggest such practice.

The above evidence suggests that pyre sites were commonly located within the cemetery areas at the legionary bases. Such practice adds significance to the locations used for burial — the roadsides and prominent topographical features — as the cremation process itself would have been clearly visible. Such a public arena is likely to have facilitated the assimilation and adoption of specific rites between the different cultural elements of *canabae* society, especially the rite of cremation itself.

### **Grave construction: cremations**

In terms of grave construction the majority of cremation burials appear to have been placed in earth-cut pits, although there are examples of both stone and tile cists, which gave added protection to the burial. Examples of stone cists are attested at Caerleon (e.g. *CAER.2*) (Evans & Maynard 1997, 192-3) and Tern Bridge, Wroxeter

*(WROX.2)* (VCH 1908, 241). But in a legionary context the only recorded examples of cremation cists constructed of *tegulae* (tiles) are from Caerleon, again from the Abbeyfield site (*CAER.2*) and from Chepstow Hill along Bulmore Road (*CAER 6 .no.1*) (Lee 1845, 7). It is highly likely that stone cists were also used to house cremations in Iron Age Wales (Table 1). However, cists constructed of *tegulae* were a Roman introduction (Philpott, 1991, 67).

The Caerleon pipe-burial had a more unusual grave construction. This cremation burial at Ultra Pontem (*CAER. 5*) was contained in a lead canister and housed in a stone cist. A length of lead piping led from the burial to the ground surface, enabling libations to be poured into the grave. Examples of this type of grave treatment are known across the classical world but are also found occasionally in Britain, for example at Colchester, Essex, another site closely linked to the military (Wheeler 1929, 4). Although it was clearly an intrusive means of sustaining the dead (Toynbee 1971, 51-2; Alcock, J.P. 1980, 63; Wheeler 1929, 1-7), it was also a practice that appears to have been adopted and modified by the Romano-British as, for example, at Chichester (Down & Rule 1971, 72).

Although most cremation burials from the four sites under review were simply furnished, the presence of funerary sculpture and the remains of substantial masonry structures in cremation cemeteries indicates that some cremations were entombed in fine monuments as, for example, at Chester (*CHE. 7*), Caerleon (*CAER. 6*) and Wroxeter (*WROX. 1*). It is also notable that in some cases tombstones have been found in association with simple urned cremations (e.g. *RIB 294, WROX. 1*) — a clear warning that status was not necessarily reflected in the grave itself.<sup>21</sup>

### **Inhumations**

The rite of inhumation is attested at least by the beginning of the second century at Chester, and at Caerleon between the mid-second and early third centuries. Where skeletal material has survived all recorded inhumations were extended, which correlates with the inhumation rite adopted in Rome by the mid-second century (Nock 1932, 279; Toynbee 1971, 40). Philpott (1991, 57) has proposed that the earliest inhumation graves at Chester may be of Greek immigrants, as inhumation was the predominant rite in Greece in the early second century. This supposition is backed up

by the inhumation burials and *in situ* tombstone inscribed with the Greek names Flavius Callimorphus and Serapion (Philpott 1991, 57, Watkin 1886, 215, *RIB* 558).

Although the majority of burials from the legionary bases are cremations, sufficient inhumations have been recovered to be able to comment on grave construction and furnishings. Graves constructed of *tegulae*, and seen as a direct descendent of the tile cist (Philpot 1991, 67), are found at Chester (*CHE.1*) & (*CHE.3*). Although there is evidence for simple earth-cut or stone-lined graves at Usk (*U2.4*) and Caerleon (*CAER.6. no.2*) (Manning 1989, 44-5; Zienkiewicz 1985, 17-20), there is also evidence for more elaborate containers. Lead was used to entomb cremations and inhumations, and coffin linings and/or *ossuari* are recorded from Chester (*CHE. 1; 7; 8*), Wroxeter (*WROX.6*) and Caerleon (*CAER.3; CAER.5* and possibly *CAER.6 no.2*), with decoration of the lead seemingly a stronger feature in the south east (Table 3; Map 8). Apart from the possible stone coffin from Queen's Park,<sup>22</sup> all the evidence suggests that stone coffins were used predominately in the south east, with a number of examples from Caerleon and the surrounding area (Map 9). Bath stone would not have been so easily attained in the north, but suitable stone was available in nearby quarries that were worked in Roman times. If this disparity is a genuine reflection of practice, and not down to lack of evidence, then it appears that there was not a market for this type of funerary furniture in Chester. Conversely, the use of tiles to enclose inhumations, well attested at Chester and found at other sites with close military connections (RCHM York 1962, pl. 28; Hull 1958, 256), is limited to one possible example in south Wales.<sup>23</sup> It seems, therefore, that there were regional preferences for particular types of grave furniture.

The use of wooden coffins to enclose inhumations is attested at Caerleon (*CAER.6 no.2*) (Zienkiewicz 1985, 18), Chester (*CHE.1*) (Newstead 1914; 1921) and Usk (*U2.4*) (Wilson 1974, 401), and there is also evidence to suggest the use of shrouds at Chester (*CHE.1*) (Newstead 1914, 154) and Caerleon (*CAER. 3*).<sup>24</sup>

The limited number of inhumations from the third and fourth centuries, coupled with the poor recording of many of these later burials, makes it difficult to measure changes in the type and number of grave goods deposited over time. That the majority of items were consigned to the pyre during the early years of the Roman occupation

may also skew the evidence. Inhumations from Caerleon's northern cemeteries (*CAER.3; CAER.4*), like the early cremations from this area, continued to be provided with a limited number of pottery and glass ancillary vessels (Burnham 1997, 403; Fox, F. 1848, 188, Boon 1972, 110-11). Conversely, the small, third-century cemetery at the civilian settlement at Bulmore (*CAER.6. no.2*), although containing a Bathstone coffin, only produced one coarseware vessel (Zienkiewicz 1985, 20). As the inhumations from both sites are broadly contemporary, it is likely that we are looking at socio-economic differences between the two sites, rather than any marked chronological changes in grave furnishings at Bulmore. This is backed up by the apparent lack of grave goods in the second- or early third-century inhumation cemetery at Abernant, Kemeys Inferior (*A2*), 1.5km to the north east of Bulmore, and possibly associated with the Bulmore settlement (Tuck *et al.* 2003, 122).

The majority of inhumation graves at Chester are dated to the latter half of the second century and contain the same type of grave assemblages as noted in cremations — lamps, phials, coins, footwear and ancillary vessels in pottery and glass. Philpott (1991, 224) has argued that, at Chester, a sizeable increase in the level of grave goods can be recognized during the transitional phase between cremation to inhumation. This may not, however, be a fair reflection of practice. It was noted above, that the number of furnished cremations at Chester has been underrated. Moreover, from the first century there is evidence of richly furnished inhumation burials close to the fortress (*CHE.3*) (Watkin, W.T. 1886, 214-16; Williams, F.H. 1882, 389-90, 393-4; Henig 1976, 35-6, n.2; Mason 1987, 164). This evidence suggests that, rather than an increase in grave goods as a result of the second-century shift to inhumation, Chester had contemporary, 'rich' and 'poor' cemeteries from the outset, regardless of the burial rite.

### **The evidence for indigenous rites at the *canabae***

There is no doubt that intrusive burial practices were brought into the frontier zone by the Roman army. However, the apparent speed at which the civilian population appears to have adopted Roman rites in the more 'Romanized' areas, and Wroxeter provides a good example here, cautions against attributing the use of any specific practice to any one ethnic element within society. Skeletal and epigraphic evidence show that, by the second century, the *canabae* cemeteries included soldiers and

civilians, although as R.F.J. Jones (1984, 219-25) has argued, there are pitfalls in trying to separate out the two. A percentage of the *canabae* civilians were presumably drawn from the native hinterlands of the fortresses and epigraphs hint at such inward migration (e.g. *RIB* 371, *RIB* 358, *RIB* 295; Nash-Williams 1935, 24-8; *VCH* 1908, 247). It is also pertinent that the army's policy of local recruitment infers that native Britons were being enlisted by the second century. These men were most likely to have been drawn from the most 'Romanized' sections of native society: the *canabae* and *vici* (Dobson & Mann 1973; Hassall 1984, 274).

This integration of indigenous and immigrant communities suggests that we should see the influence of native rites at the *canabae* — unless we are to presume that such practices were totally eclipsed. As we have seen, the majority of grave treatments identified in the *canabae* cemeteries show clear Roman antecedents. However, while there is no firm evidence of native rites, there are some practices redolent of rural as well as indigenous practice. The inhumation cemetery at Infirmary Field, Chester (*CHE.1*), provides an interesting case study. A period of at least sixty-five years had elapsed between the foundation of the fortress and the deposition of the majority of the burials at this cemetery — ample time for the *canabae* to develop, and for a rich cultural mix to be present. Men, women and children were represented, including one neonate. The grouping of graves and double burials also implies some familial relationships (Newstead 1914, 135 and Plate XXIX). As Philpott (1991, 183) rightly points out, intrusive rites are clearly apparent: the burials were extended inhumations, half the graves had tiles in their construction and coins, phials and lamps were common. However, there is a danger in presuming that this cemetery represented a homogenous group of people in terms of race, belief or custom. Other grave treatments attested at this site have universal and wide chronological parallels, for example the placing of animal remains in the grave, or the deliberate breaking of pottery in and around the grave (Barley 1995, 85-6; Parker Pearson 1999, 10-11; Jessup 1955, 101-2). One grave, however, contained three vessels with holes pierced in the base, a form of 'ritual killing' with Greek antecedents (Newstead 1914, 143-5; Grinsell 1961, 482).

Other practices at Infirmary Field reflect developing Romano-British customs, the graves were furnished with pottery and glass vessels — their deposition at this stage

(mid-second century) perhaps more to do with the acquisition of material goods than adherence to Roman tradition. Mirrors also featured as grave goods, and these are items which are found in pre-conquest and Romano-British burials (Fox & Pollard 1973; Lloyd Morgan 1977b). Certainly, by the mid-to-late first century they are found in rural burials in Wales at Llanwnda, Pembrokeshire (*L17*) and Llechwedd du bach, Gwynedd (*P13*). A cosmetic set, found at Bedwar Row (at the southern end of the Infirmary Field cemetery), is also more indicative of native practice (Jackson 1985, 190, cat. no. 98). These items have indigenous origins, are mainly found on less 'Romanized' sites and are most often associated with graves (Jackson 1985, 172; Carr 2001, 120-1). A stone muller, found in the grave of a male, is also of interest. This had been used for 'mixing pigments', and, it may be argued, may also have been used to apply paint or woad, primarily an indigenous form of body decoration (Carr 2001, 120-1; Newstead 1914, 137).

There is nothing overtly military about the Infirmary Field cemetery, although an inscription of a probable legionary on a portion of tombstone (*RIB 531*), found c.27m west of the cemetery, suggests some of the graves may have been those of soldiers. Three 'empty' graves may also be significant, as it is possible that they represented 'cenotaphs', in memory of soldiers lost on campaign (Newstead 1914, 138; 1921, 53, 55; McKinley 2000b, 43). Empty 'grave' 17 contained part of a 'melon bead' (Newstead 1914; 139). Believed to have been used as amulets, melon beads were thought to possess protective properties and appear to have been particularly favoured by soldiers (Barber & Bowsher 2000, 254).

This brief overview of the rites at Infirmary field suggests that by the Antonine period this cemetery was fairly representative of a developing, multicultural society, although it is apparent that the majority of rites were intrusive. However, we also have to bear in mind that it is unlikely that archaeology can unravel subtle differences that may have existed in both the performance and perception of 'Roman' rites when carried out by the more native elements of society (Jones, R.F.J. 1993, 249). The evidence from the *civitas* capital at Wroxeter may be significant here, as there is the suggestion that, although the *Cornovii* adopted Roman rites, there were also rural elements at play. A limited number of unurned cremations were identified in pre-conquest Wales (Chapter 2; Table 1) but, as we have seen, the tendency to place the



majority of offerings on the pyre, coupled with distinctive grave assemblages, attest to an intrusive cremation rite (Philpott 1991, 220-1). Thus, it may be significant that, at Wroxeter, although there is ample evidence to show that objects were burnt on the pyre,<sup>25</sup> a larger proportion of unburnt goods were retrieved from the Watling Street cemetery (*WROX.1*) than from the cemeteries of the other three legionary fortresses (Wright 1872, 348, 352-3; *VCH* 1908, 240). This may suggest that the civilian population of the *civitas*, who continued to use the legionary cemetery post-fortress, were more inclined to place offerings in the grave than on the pyre — a tendency noted in rural and native contexts in Roman Wales (see Chapter 6).

In one instance only, is there a suggestion that the deposition of fragmented skeletal material, a practice attested in Iron Age and native contexts in Wales, took place at the legionary bases (*CAER.8, no. 2*). It is tempting, however, to speculate that the four skulls found on the Roman riverbed at Chester, close to the postulated landing stage (Mason, D.J.P. 2002, 67-8; 1987, 153), may be an example of less ‘formal’ mortuary behaviour. Similarly, the skeleton of a young man in the bottom of a well, to the south of Chester’s fortress, is reminiscent of the possible votive depositions noted at the *civitas* capital of Caerwent (see Chapter 5; Frere 1977, 387).

Finally, the tendency to place the dead within the interior of the defences (at times of reduced garrison) mirrors indigenous practice, where burials were placed within the curtilage of a settlement, or close to its defences (Chapter 2). A closer relationship between the living and the dead has also been noted at the civilian settlement at Bulmore (*CAER.6. no.2*), where graves were in close proximity to domestic buildings.

## Conclusion

The discussion above indicates that the burial rites and customs observed at the legionary bases of Wales and the border were derived from, and highly influenced by, Roman practices. This is apparent in the monuments which reflect classical beliefs, in the treatment of the body and the furnishing of the grave. However, as Romano-British society developed there is some evidence to suggest that indigenous rites may have also played a part in the development of burial practices carried out within the fortress environs.

Cemeteries which contained both inhumation and cremation rites are attested. There were also cemetery zones that were exclusive to one rite or the other. In the main, single-rite cemeteries were most likely the result of chronological shifts in cemetery location, rather than exclusive practice, although the early inhumation zones at Chester (*CHE.3*) suggest status may also have been a factor.

The treatment and furnishings of the graves at the four legionary fortresses can be readily compared with each other and with practices carried out at other military and urban sites in Britain. However, some geographical variations in grave treatment were observed between the fortresses of the Welsh frontier zone. For example, as we have seen, stone coffins are limited to one at the northern fortresses (*CHE.7*) but Caerleon boasts at least eleven (*CAER.4; CAER.3; CAER.6 no. 2*).

The deposition of symbolic objects, such as coins and lamps, reflects the concerns and beliefs of the community who buried their dead. However, although funerary sculpture may have depicted particular Roman gods (Henig 2002, 76), with the possible exception of the two following examples, none of the grave goods suggest an affiliation with any specific deity or religion. At Chester, a small figurine of unknown identity is associated with a third-century cremation group at Handbridge (*CHE.7*) (Newstead 1946, 122-3), and an intaglio depicting the Muse Thalia — associated with fecundity and salvation — was found in possible association with an inhumation south of Watergate Street (*CHE.3*) (Henig 1976, 35-6).

It has also been noted that, although roadsides were common foci, other topographical features also attracted burials. The close spatial association between water (rivers and springs) and burials is a recurring association and may have been for eschatological reasons, as well as for the purposes of burial display. The bathhouses at both Chester and Caerleon also appear to have been a focus for burials. The close proximity of burials to domestic or industrial activities at Bulmore, Caerleon (*CAER.6 no. 2*) has been drawn to attention. This is seen not only as a product of the developing Romano-British society, but also a practice that reflects native traditions, where the space between the living and the dead was not so rigidly defined.

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<sup>1</sup> The date of Chester's walls has been the subject of much debate (see *JCAS* vols. 1-4, 1887-90; Wright & Richmond 1955, 5), but one rebuilding phase is now thought to date from the first half of the fourth century (Mason 2001, 202).

<sup>2</sup> At the time of writing, Julie Reynolds, of the National Museums and Galleries of Wales, is preparing a synthesis of all previous burials from the cemeteries of Caerleon. Her PhD thesis aims to clarify the contents of the cemeteries and also to interpret the relationship between the various cemeteries.

<sup>3</sup> *Hominem mortuum ... in urbe ne sepelito neve urito* ('A dead person shall not be buried or burned in the city'), Table X of the Twelve Tables ([www.Yale.edu/lawweb/avalon/medieval/Twelve Tables.htm](http://www.Yale.edu/lawweb/avalon/medieval/Twelve%20Tables.htm)).

<sup>4</sup> See note 5, Chapter 5.

<sup>5</sup> In addition to the tombstones and funerary sculpture found in the north wall, a portion of tombstone, *RIB 531*, was found 91m west of the north-west angle of the Roman fortress.

<sup>6</sup> Skeletal material: Grosvenor Museum Acc. No. 44-45. R. 1986.

<sup>7</sup> The dating evidence for inhumations from the Handbridge area is limited. However, two vessels were found beside the stone coffin (Watkin 1886, 219), one was later identified, from documentary sources, as a Castor Ware beaker of third- or fourth-century date (Newstead 1946, 127-8). This pottery is now commonly referred to as Nene Valley colour-coated ware (Tyler 1996, 173-5).

<sup>8</sup> This is particularly well illustrated at Great Bulmore, where, out of five inhumation graves excavated, only the bath stone coffin, which offered better protection, contained a well-preserved skeleton. In the other four slab-lined graves little remained to indicate the presence of a body (Zienkiewicz 1985, 17-20).

<sup>9</sup> For comparative dates of lead coffins in England and Wales, see Table 3 and Chapter 5, note 5.

<sup>10</sup> It may also be significant that occupation appears to have been less intense during the late first century in the south-east corner of the fortress — the area where the amphora burials were found (Boon 1972, 33). Although, as Boon (1987, 25-7) points out, earlier timber buildings may have eluded detection in many areas of the fortress.

<sup>11</sup> Determining sex by grave goods is problematic. Foster (1993) has shown that some grave goods traditionally attributed to females have been found in the graves of men. A mirror is associated with a male burial at the King Harry Lane cemetery, Verulamium (Foster 1993, 207-12; Millett 1993, 255-82). In Wales, a probable hairpin was found in association with a male cremation at Usk (Marvell *et al.* 1998, 66), (*U2.1.a*).

<sup>12</sup> The exact date *civitas Cornoviorum* was founded is still a matter of debate. However, the civilian settlement started to develop once the army had abandoned the site *c.* AD90. An inscription from the forum attests that by AD130 the town was a *civitas* capital (White & Dalwood 1996, 3, Wachter 1995, 362-77).

<sup>13</sup> See also: GGAT 75 — Roman vici and roads project, 2003

<http://www.ggat.org.uk/Cadw/Cadwupdates>).

<sup>14</sup> See Chapter 6, note 2.

<sup>15</sup> The distinction between boxes and caskets is usually made on the grounds that boxes were larger and less elaborately decorated than caskets, which were often decorated with bronze fittings (Philpott 1991, 12). Both forms of container could be used to contain the cremation.

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<sup>16</sup> In sinking a cellar in a house alongside the Roman road in Netherleigh, Handbridge, in 1813, a possible *columbarium* was discovered. A 'demi' figure in a sacerdotal costume' may have come from a tomb relief. From the description given, some of the vessels were probably Samian, 'the vases were of red clay and arranged in cells, a little below the surface, each cell containing 4 or 6 vases. Some of them contained ashes, and in other the lamps (which were of white hard clay) were deposited'... (Omermod 1882, 379; Watkin 1886, 217).

<sup>17</sup> In addition to pottery vessels and coins, accessory items with cremations at Chester include: an unidentified bronze object at Foregate Street (Lawson 1928, LXVIII), a pottery figurine at Handbridge (Newstead 1946, 122-3), a glass phial at Boughton (Newstead 1899, 154-8) and bronze objects in the northern cemetery (Lawson 1928, 185, LXXXIII).

<sup>18</sup> A glass phial in association with a cremation is attested at Usk (*U2.3*), but it is possible that there were some more elaborately furnished graves that also contained glass grave goods. A portion of a pillar-moulded glass bowl was retrieved from Usk during construction of the gaol, where the tombstone *RIB 396* was uncovered (Watkin 1878, 21-3). This was identified by Lee (1862, 51) as of the 'same colour and make' as the blue/green bowl found in the cemetery at Afon Llwyd, Caerleon (Lee 1849, 82, plate VIII) (*CAER 4*). Another example came from the cemetery at Wroxeter (Wright 1872, 258). Dated to the first century, these serving bowls are often found in burial contexts (Isings form 3b, 1957, 17-20; Allen 1998, 22-3). If the bowl at Usk was associated with a grave, its location and early date suggest it was contemporary with the fort/works depot *c.* AD 75-125.

<sup>19</sup> Table X refers to such practice prohibitively: 'He is not to put perfumed liquid on a dead man. He is to sprinkle the funeral pyre with not more than ... wine.' cited in Cherry (2001, 9).

<sup>20</sup> McKinley (2000a, 40) has argued that evidence of *in situ* burning need not indicate a *bustum* burial, as the small quantity of cremated material present in many cases, suggests bones were removed to be buried elsewhere.

<sup>21</sup> This point was raised by Boon (1972, 109), although his premise was based on the 'mausoleum' at Bulmore, now known to be a building constructed with reused tombstones (Vyner 1978, 25-34).

<sup>22</sup> A lead coffin enclosed in a 'stone coffin or cist' was reported at Handbridge by Watkin (1886, 219).

<sup>23</sup> An antiquarian reference to an 'ancient sarcophagus' comprised of legionary tiles near Castle Baths, Caerleon (*CAER.7*) does not record the burial rite (Boon 1972, 351).

<sup>24</sup> Traces of fibres, which appear to be linen, remain attached to a fragmented lead coffin from Lodge Hill, Caerleon (Kate Hunter pers. comm), Newport Museum Acc. No. NPTMG:23.21.6. Fibres of the ?linen have been sent for analysis.

<sup>25</sup> Early reports note melted glass from an *ustrinum* and from cremation pits (Watkin 1872, 346-7, 353), and melted glass, a melted glass phial and a mirror fragment accompanied a group of cremations excavated in 1973 (SMR No. 06428-SA1). The most recently excavated finds are held at Rowley House Museum, Shrewsbury.

## **CHAPTER 4: BURIAL PRACTICES AT THE AUXILIARY FORTS AND OTHER MILITARY INSTALLATIONS IN WALES**

This chapter is concerned with the type of burial practices carried out within close proximity to the auxiliary forts and other military installations of Roman Wales. In line with the legionary fortresses under consideration in this thesis, the majority of burial evidence from the military outposts in Wales shows clear Roman antecedents. Likewise, many of the practices are closely comparable, in terms of grave treatment and furnishings, to those found at the legionary bases. However, some distinct differences and variations in practice can also be discerned, principally in terms of burial display. For example, although tombstones are scarce, other forms of burial display are evident, including barrows and wooden mortuary enclosures to house the dead. Significantly, both forms of monumentality are also redolent of indigenous practice. The principal aims of this chapter are, therefore, to analyse the type of practices carried out at auxiliary forts and other military installations in Wales, to compare such practices with those identified at the legionary fortresses and to consider what role native traditions may have played in the development of burial practices within military environs. The structure of this chapter follows that of the legionary bases and examines, in turn, location and burial foci, monumentality and mode of burial (cremation and inhumation), together with respective grave treatments and furnishings.

### **Problems of site classification**

This study aims to determine any similarities or differences in burial practices between military, urban and rural contexts in Roman Wales. However, the classification of a site is not always straightforward. Firstly, in some cases limited archaeological evidence makes it impossible to draw any conclusion as to the nature of a site. Secondly, the status of some sites changed over time and sites founded as military establishments could give way to settlements of a predominately civilian nature. This change in status could bring about changes in burial practices, for example, as we have seen at Usk, Monmouthshire, where there was a shift in burial location once military occupation gave way to a small civilian settlement (see Chapter 3). That many towns and settlements had military origins is well attested across Roman Britain (Burnham and Wachter 1990; Wachter 1995), but what part the military

played in the life of a settlement after the army was withdrawn is not easy to measure. Military involvement may have differed considerably from one site to another, especially in the frontier zones. In some instances, the military may have maintained authority over the industrial output of a site, as is postulated may have been the case at Usk (Marvell 1996, 91) and Pentre Farm, Flint (O'Leary *et al.* 1989). Furthermore, on a social level, there is evidence to suggest that retired soldiers and their dependants made up a percentage of the remaining civilian populations (Arnold & Davies 2000, 63).

In light of the above, the classification of some sites as either military or civilian is problematic and there is bound to be some overlap between the two. However, in order to examine the extent to which the immediate presence of the military influenced burial practices, in terms of both location and rite, this chapter concentrates on those sites with burials that were concurrent with military occupation. Burials which appear to have been contemporary with civilian settlements which had, or may have had, military origins, such as Cowbridge, Glamorgan, and Carmarthen are considered under Roman towns (Chapter 5), allowing for both chronological and contextual changes to be measured.

The majority of burial evidence examined in the following sections comes from auxiliary forts and their associated *vici* (civilian settlements that grew up around the forts). In addition, burial evidence is also considered from sites that are presumed to have had an official status, for example, industrial complexes such as Frith and Pentre Farm in Flintshire (Arnold & Davies 2000, 103-5; O'Leary *et al.* 1989). Burials from sites where auxiliary forts are not confirmed, but evidence suggests military installations were highly probable, such as Ruthin, Denbighshire and Monmouth (Waddelove & Jones, G.D.B. 1990, 299-300; Clarke & Jackson 1992, 1), are also included in the following discussion. Finally, burials found within close proximity to practice-camps and temporary camps (or marching camps) are also taken into account. However, any direct link between such burials and the military cannot be proven, and it is equally possible that these may have represented unrelated rural burials (e.g. (N3), Cefn Ffordd, Llantwit-iuxta-Neath, Glamorgan).

## **Previous work on burials from auxiliary forts and other military installations in Wales**

Although burial evidence from military contexts has been steadily accumulating since the nineteenth century, no detailed attention has been given to the burial practices carried out at the Welsh military outposts. While the lack of work on this aspect of Roman Wales is due in part to the low priority attached to the study of Roman burial practices in the past, it is also the case that most of the better quality data has only come to light within the last twenty-five years. In terms of synthesis, Jarrett and Nash-Williams (1969) drew attention to the cemeteries at four auxiliary forts: Caernarfon (Segontium), Caergai, Gelligaer and Llandovery. More recently, Philpott (1991) added to this number by cataloguing burial data from Abergavenny, Dolaucothi, Loughor and Pentre Farm. To date, Arnold & Davies (2000, 135-9) have provided the most detailed overview of the burial evidence and have noted fourteen military sites (or sites with probable military associations) with associated burials. Five of these sites came to light as a result of recent excavations carried out at Ruthin (Jones, N. 1992), Chepstow (Shoesmith 1991), Monmouth (Clarke *et al.* 1991), Cowbridge (Parkhouse & Evans 1996) and Caersws (Jones, N. 1993), which have provided evidence of both isolated burials and small cemeteries. There have also been some recent attempts to place the burial evidence from individual forts back into the context of the military landscape as, for example, at Caersws (Jones, N. 1993, fig. 2) and Llandovery (James, H. 2000, 29, fig.4).

This study evaluates the burial evidence from 33 sites with military or possible military associations (Fig. 4.1). Only at 22 of these sites is there evidence of a definite Roman date or of a definite funerary nature, but collectively the extent and quality of the present evidence allows for a much more detailed appraisal of burial practices from military contexts than was possible a decade ago. In addition to the new excavation evidence noted above, the working data on which the following discussion is based has been derived from a handful of small-scale, twentieth-century excavations (e.g. Loughor *L1.1* and Neath *NI*), chance finds (e.g. Abergavenny *A3.1b*) and antiquarian sources. Recent geophysical surveys have also highlighted possible burials as, for example, at Pennal, Gwynedd (*P11*) (Hopewell 2001).

Gazetteer	Place Name	On or within close Proximity	Crem	Inhum	Grave	Grave Gds Type	Coins
A3.1 (b)	11 Park Crescent, Abergavenny	MI	Yes	No	Yes	PV: CW (2J) FW (F,B) PO	No
A3.1(a)	Hereford Road, Abergavenny	MI	Yes	Yes	Yes	PV: J, D, F, ?B; S (D 2+), C	Yes
A3.1c	Dan y Bryn, Hereford Road, Abergavenny	MI	Yes	No	No		No
B2.1	Brecon Gaer, Fenni-Fach	MI	No	No	No		No
B2.2	Brecon Gaer, Fenni-Fach,	MI	No	No	No		No
B2.3	Brecon Gaer, Fenni-Fach	MI	No	No	No		No
C.17	Caer Llugwy, Capel Curig	MI	No	No	No		No
C1.1	Nr. Pool Street, Caernarfon	MI	No	Yes	Yes	PV; UMO	No
C1.3	Llanbeblig Road, Caernarfon	MI	No	No	Yes	PP	No
C1.4	Caernarfon,	MI	Yes	No	No		No
C1.5	Ysgubor-goch, Caernarfon	MI	Yes	No	Yes	S, PV	No
C10.1	Caersws	MI	Yes	No	No		No
C10.2 (a)	Bathhouse, Caersws,	MI	No	Yes	No		No
C10.2(b)	Bathhouse, Caersws	MI	Yes	No	Yes	PO (?); S (?)	No
C10.3	Caersws	MI	Yes	Yes	Yes	PV; PO	No
C10.4	Ty-brith, Manthrig Lane, Caersws,	MI	No	Yes	No		No
C12.1	Arthur John Car Park, Cowbridge	?MI,RT	No	Yes	No		No
C12.2	Hopyard Meadow, Cowbridge	?MI,RT	No	No	No		No
C2	Caerhun	MI	Yes	No	No		No
C3	Caergai	MI	Yes	No	Yes	GV; F; UMO	No
C4.1	Park Hall, Carmarthen	MI,RT	Yes	No	Yes	PV, G, FF, UMO; ?HN	No
C5.1	The Cattle Market Site, Chepstow	?MI	Yes	No	Yes	PV, F, UIO; C;	Yes
C9	Churchstoke,	MI	Yes	No	Yes	C	Yes
D1	Dolddinas, Trawsfynydd	MI	Yes	No	No		No
D2	Cwrt-y-Cilion, Cynwyl Gaeo Parish,	MI	Yes	No	Yes	UMO	No
F1	Frith, Nr. Hope	?MI	Yes	No	Yes	L; PO; C;	Yes
F2	Forden,	MI	Yes	No	No		No
G1	Gelligaer,	MI	Yes	No	No		No
L1.1	Loughor	MI	No	No	No	PV	No
L1.2	Loughor	MI	Yes	No	Yes	Nail; UIO;	No

MILITARY INSTALLATIONS AND SITES WITH POSSIBLE MILITARY ASSOCIATIONS.

FIGURE 4.1



L1.3	Dock Street, Loughor	MI		Yes	No	No	No	No	
L1.4	Loughor	MI		Yes	No	Yes	PV; S; LO;	No	No
L13	Near Cefn Mine, Llannor	?MI		Yes	Yes	No		No	No
L16	Llanfor	MI		Yes	No	No		No	No
L18	Llanio,	MI		No	No	No		No	No
L3	Caefelin Cie, Llanfair-ar-y-bryn, Llandoverry,	MI		Yes	No	No		No	No
L7.1	Cefnlllys Urban, Llandridod Wells	MI		Yes	No	No		No	No
M2	22-24, Monnow Street, Monmouth,	?MI		Yes	No	Yes	PO; PV; UMO; GV	No	No
N1	Dwr-y-Felin Road, Neath	MI		Yes	No	No		No	No
N3	Cefn Ffordd, Llantwit-iuxta-Neath,	MI		Yes	No	No		No	No
P10	Penydarren fort, Merthyr Tydfil,	MI		Yes	No	No	PV; S	No	No
P11	Pennal (Cefn Caer),	MI		Yes	No	No	?PV (pos pyre goods).	No	No
P6	Dolaucothi, Pumsaint,	MI		Yes	No	No		No	No
P7.1(a)	Pentre Farm,	?MI		No	Yes	No		No	No
P7.1(b)	Pentre Farm	?MI		No	Yes	No		No	No
P8	Pen-y-Gaer, Cwm-du,	MI		Yes	Yes	Yes	PV; S	No	No
R2.1	Brynhafryd Park, Ruthin,	?MI		Yes	No	Yes	PV; F; HN.	No	No
R2.2	The Hospital Site, Ruthin,	?MI		Yes	No	No		No	No
T1	Tomen y Mur	MI		Yes	No	No	PV ?F	No	No
W3	Waiford	MI		Yes	No	No		No	No
W4.1	Whitland Abbey, Whitland	?MI		Yes	No	No		No	No

As no cemetery from a military outpost has been comprehensively excavated, the full extent of any cemetery is unknown. Nevertheless, a sufficient number of burials have been uncovered from some cemeteries (e.g. 16+ from Caernarfon, Gwynedd *CI.2b-j*) to suggest such evidence is fairly representative of an auxiliary fort's cemetery as a whole, particularly so when it mirrors evidence from extensively excavated military cemeteries like Abbeyfield, Caerleon (*CAER.2*) (Evans & Maynard 1997). Likewise, the total number of burials discovered at military outposts cannot be given precisely. Antiquarian records are consistently vague in this respect, and even under modern excavation conditions, there can be uncertainties as, for example, at Loughor (*LI.4*), where between two and four burials were present (Ling & Ling 1973, 113-15). Most military installations, however, have provided evidence of between two and six definite burials.

The 33 sites can be broken down into the following categories: 19 were auxiliary forts and a further two were within close proximity to probable auxiliary forts, i.e. Ruthin (*R2*) and Monmouth (*M2*). In addition, three sites (Cowbridge (*CI2.2*), Frith (*FI*) and Pentre Farm (*P7.1*), are presumed to have had official links with the military (Parkhouse 1996, 234-6; Arnold & Davies 2000, 102-3). The remaining nine sites are made up of temporary camps, practice camps and burials deposited in locations where military outposts are suspected as, for example, at Whitland (*W4.1*) (James, H. 2000, 31) and Chepstow (*C5.1*) (Arnold & Davies 2000, 10-11).

## **KNOWN CEMETERIES, LOCATIONS OF BURIALS AND PERIODS OF CEMETERY USE**

Although occupation could fluctuate during a fort's lifetime, the majority of auxiliary forts in Wales were abandoned for good by the middle of the second century AD, along with any associated *vici*. A small number of forts positioned at strategic points across Wales continued to be occupied into the third or fourth centuries (Caernarfon, Brecon Gaer, Caersws, Forden Gaer), with others seeing reoccupation in the late third to fourth century — that is, Cardiff, probably Caerhun and possibly Loughor and Neath (Simpson 1962; Arnold & Davies 2000, 27-34).<sup>1</sup> It can be seen from this chronology that the heaviest military occupation of Wales correlates with a time when the principal Roman rite was cremation and, as would be expected, the majority of recorded burials from military outposts are cremation burials. This evidence

corresponds with the findings from the four legionary forts already considered, where cremation is the earliest rite, with the exception of the early inhumations from Chester (*CHE.2*) and (*CHE.3*). This reduction in the number of Welsh auxiliary forts during the later Roman period limits the discussion on long-term cemetery development and the shift to inhumation burial at sites that remained of an overtly military nature.

### **Location and burial foci**

With the exception of Loughor (see below), the burials associated with the auxiliary forts of Wales were placed outside their defences, in accordance with Roman burial regulations. In many cases burial areas would have been highly visible, either because they flanked a road or river, or because the lie of the land highlighted their presence. The deposition of burials in prominent locations within the landscape suggests they were intended to be seen and that some form of marker indicated the graves. In line with the evidence from the four legionary bases, roadsides appear to have been the most common focus for burials. There is evidence that burials were placed alongside roads at Abergavenny (Map 12), Caernarfon (Map 13), Gelligaer (Map 14), Neath (Map 15), Tomen y Mur (Map 16), Llandovery (Map 17) Pennal (Map 18) and Caer Gai (Map 19). At all these auxiliary forts, excavations or, in the case of the last two sites, geophysical surveys, have identified the presence of a Roman road in close proximity to burials. In two further instances, the location of burials in relation to military installations suggests graves were placed close to the main exit roads: to the north of the fort at Pen y Gaer (Map 20) and at Caersws to the south and west of the fort (Map 21).

There are also hints that, as at Caerleon (page 59) and Wroxeter (page 64), in addition to the road itself, the natural topography through which the road traversed was used to its full advantage and that hillsides, or the highest or most visible points in the landscape, were utilised for burial display. At Caernarfon (Map 13), burials were placed on the slope of the hill to the north and north east of the fort (*CI.4 & CI.5*) — the alignment of these sites suggests that they were both probably close to a road. They also flanked the conjectural line of the Roman road in the wide valley below at (*CI.2*) and (*CI.3*), to the fort's south east. These were all points in the landscape which were likely to have been highly conspicuous and possibly visible from the fort itself. A further example comes from Tomen y Mur (Map 16) where a cemetery

*(T1: no.1)*, lining the road to the north east of the fort, was positioned on a high ridge made even more prominent by the construction of barrows.

In line with the evidence from the legionary fortresses, a close correlation between burials and waterways is apparent at five, possibly six, of the military outposts in Wales. It is probable that in an age where rivers, like roads, were routes of communication, a riverside location served the same purpose in terms of providing a prominent location for burial display. It is significant that in some instances, and as we have seen at Caerleon (*CAER.4*, Map 4), river and road are closely associated and may have acted as dual foci. This may have been the case at Pen-y-Gaer, Powys (*P8*), where a cremation burial was buried close to Ewyn Brook and, presumably, also close to a western exit road from the fort (Map 20). Similarly, near Castell Collen, Powys (*L7.1*), cremation burials were discovered on the bank of the River Ithon, near to the postulated river crossing south of the fort and c. 500m east of the Roman road and practice camps (Carrington 1911, 120). There is also some slight evidence to suggest that a cemetery stood on the southern bank of the River Towy, close to a Roman crossing point and opposite the Roman fort and later town of Carmarthen (Map 22) (James 1992b 32; Crane 2001, 2, 33).

However, at Caerhun, Gwynedd (*C2*, Map 23) and Dolaucothi, Carmarthenshire (*D2*, Map 24), although the rivers and roads ran parallel to each other, the location of burials suggests that the rivers were the primary focus. Similarly, at the auxiliary fort at Caersws, Powys (Caersws II), established near the confluence of the rivers Severn and Carno (see Map 21), several riverside locations were utilized for burial (*C10.2a & b; C10.1; C10.3*). Both rivers have shifted their course since Roman times and the River Carno originally ran much closer to the fort and respective burials (Jones, N. 1993, 87, figure 2). On a cautionary note, however, we must also be aware that at some sites the river course may have been at a further distance in the Roman period.

The deposition of burials close to waterways may have been down to the fact that they were important thoroughfares. However, the aesthetic properties and possible perceived liminality of a waterside location may have played equal part. A belief in the healing qualities and religious significance of water is well attested at places like Bath (Cunliffe 1971) and, in terms of eschatological belief, a journey across the River Styx figures strongly in classical thought (Alcock, J.P. 1980, 57; Toynbee 1971, 44).

Equally, there is also a possible correlation between water sources and pre-conquest burials in Wales (see Chapter 2), and in Iron Age Britain generally (Cunliffe 1991, 449; Bradley 1998, 107-9). It is tempting to speculate, therefore, that water and burial were strongly linked in the Romano-British psyche and that water sources, and this would include bathhouses (see below), attracted funerary activity. Work on the contextual archaeology of Roman burials in England is still in its infancy and, with the exception of the research carried out on bog bodies (Stead *et al.* 1986), little work has been carried out on the spatial association between water sources and Romano-British burials *per se*. However, examples of a close association between watercourses and cemeteries can be readily identified in both urban and military contexts in England as, for example, at York, where clusters of burials appear to align the River Foss (Jones R.F.J. 1984, 34, figure 1), and at Gosbecks, Colchester where a cemetery lay close (*c.* 50m) to a stream (Wacher 1995, 113, fig.45). Significantly, at Poundbury, Dorset, a much closer spatial association is apparent between the cemetery and the River Frome (*c.* 60m) than between the cemetery and the main Roman road, which is *c.* 250m distant (Farwell & Molleson 3, figure 1). Nevertheless, a more in-depth study of this aspect of burial practice is needed in order to test if there was a particularly strong association between water and burials in Wales, and also to see whether the English evidence shows an urban or rural bias. In Wales such an association does not appear to have been site specific and rural examples of such practice are evident at Rhuddgaer, Anglesey (*RI*) and the Atlantic Trading Estate, Barry (*A4.1*). A possible urban example is suggested at Carmarthen (*C4.2*).

It is also significant that, as at the legionary fortresses of Caerleon (*CAER.7*) and Chester (*CHE.2; CHE.3*), burials were positioned within close proximity to the bathhouse at two, possibly three, of the auxiliary forts in Wales: Pumpsaint, Carmarthenshire (*P6*), Caersws, Powys (*C10.2 a& b*) and possibly Pennal, Gwynedd (*P11*). At Pumpsaint (*P6*), at least one probable cremation burial came from within or close to the bathhouse (Anon 1878, 320).<sup>2</sup> Anomalies picked up by a recent geophysical survey may represent further graves in the area, although these may have been aligned to the nearby road (Burnham 2003, 16). Similarly, at Caersws, urned cremations (*C10.2b*) and two inhumations (*C10.2a*), were discovered between the bathhouse and the river (Davies 1857, 164-5). Lastly, at Pennal (*P11*) a probable

bathhouse was located 85m north of a possible circular tomb or barrow (Hopewell 2001, 11) and 20m north of a possible pyre site (see below).

An association between bathhouses and burials has also been noticed in other areas of Roman Britain as, for example, at York (Jones, R.F.J. 1982, 62; RCHAM York 1962, 54-7), Wood Lane End, Hemel Hempstead, Herts and Angmering, Sussex (Black 1986, 208). The reasons behind this juxtaposition are not clear, but several explanations are worth considering. Firstly, (in the case of cremation) on a practical level, a constant store of wood kept for the bathhouse furnaces could be utilized for cremation purposes. Secondly, and perhaps more likely, the bathhouse was well frequented and any memorial set up close by would be clearly visible and receive ongoing commemoration. Alternatively, the water source that fed the bathhouse might have been the primary attraction and may, therefore, have been attributed with the same liminal or sacred qualities as rivers and other water sources. It may also be significant that, on occasion, strigils feature as grave goods (Black 1986, 208). While toiletry items were common inclusions in the grave, an association between bathing and, by inference, the cleansing properties of water may also have been intended.

### **Burials within fort defences**

As at Chester (*CHE.9*) and Caerleon (*CAER.8*), burials were deposited within the defences of the auxiliary fort at Loughor (Map 25). A group of urned cremation burials (*LI.4*) were cut into the rear of the north-eastern rampart (Ling & Ling 1973, 115-17) and a single unurned cremation (*LI.3*) was deposited in a pit in the south-western quarter of the fort (Marvell & John 1997, 148). The cinerary vessels were of late first- and early second-century date. Excavation and pottery evidence has shown that Loughor was under-garrisoned during the late first century (c. AD 85-100) and abandoned c. AD 120, probably until the late third century (Marvell & John 1997, 227). Because it is generally assumed that burials were never placed within a fort's defences during military occupation, the presence of these cremations has been seen as conclusive evidence that the fort was abandoned at the time of their deposition, even though in the case of (*LI.3*) this sits uncomfortably with the archaeological evidence (Marvell & John 1997, 148, 209; Ling & Ling 1973, 115, 117). In light of the evidence from Chester and Caerleon (see Chapter 3), which shows that burial took place within the defences during times of under-garrison, it is argued here that such an

assumption may be distorting our understanding of both burial practice and military movements at Loughor. In other words, Loughor may have been under-garrisoned, as opposed to abandoned, at the time of the burials' deposition.

In addition to the cremations (*L1.4*) cut through the rampart, a possible cremation of third-century date (*L1.1*) was placed in a stone cist against the outer north-east angle of the defences. By the time the latter took place it is apparent that the defences were in ruin (Ling & Ling 1973, 119). The context of these burials at Loughor is of particular note, as the defences of Caerleon (Map 4) and Usk (Map 6) also appear to have been a focus for burials, a practice which, it is argued above, may have fulfilled more of a psychological need than a practical one (page 67). It may also be argued that the defences of a fort were seen as significant in some way, perhaps representing liminal points in the military landscape.

### **Military and civilian cemeteries**

It was noted above (Chapter 3), that early cremation cemeteries at Caerleon (*CAER.2*) (Evans & Maynard 1997, 189) and Chester (*CHE.6*) appear to have been principally for military use. This suggests there may have been separate cemeteries for civilians and soldiers in the early years of occupation. This does not, however, appear to have been the case at Watling Street, Wroxeter (*WROX.1*), where grave goods usually associated with female graves, coupled with a civilian tombstone (*RIB 295*), hint that the cemetery served members of both fortress and *vicus* community from the outset.

With the exception of the probable inhumation from Pen y Gaer, Powys (*P8*), all early finds from auxiliary forts were cremations, and little work was done on the skeletal material, even in very rudimentary terms, to determine gender and age of the individuals buried. However, some opportunity still exists for future analysis, since a number of cremated skeletal assemblages, most notably from Caernarfon (NMGW. Acc. no. 48.63), are still extant. Some skeletal analysis has been carried out on bones (cremations and inhumations) from more recent excavations and this has identified the presence of women and children at five of the military sites under review. There is skeletal evidence for the burial of civilians (women and children) within the *vici* at Caernarfon, Gwynedd (*C1.1*), Caerhun, Conwy (*C2*) and possibly Caersws, Powys (*C10.2*). Female or juvenile burials have also been discovered within close proximity

to the probable official site at Pentre Farm, Flintshire (P7.1a & b), and at Ruthin, Denbighshire (R2.1) where a fort is presumed (Waddelove & Jones, G.D.B. 1990, 299-300). Unfortunately, the acid nature of the Welsh soil has destroyed inhumed skeletal material in some instances (e.g. Caersws C10.4). This is significant as such graves have only been detected by modern excavation, which suggests that inhumations have been overlooked in the past and may, therefore, be under-represented in military contexts.

Burial within or close to known *vici*, as at Caernarfon (C1.1), Caerhun (C2) and Caersws (C10.2; C10.4), may, in itself, suggest that there was an official divide between military and civilian cemeteries at some sites and that civilians were excluded from garrisons' cemeteries. It may be significant here that, with the exception of Caersws (C10.4), where no bone was preserved, of the burials deposited within *vici*, or probable *vici* as at Pentre Farm (P7.1a & b) and Ruthin (R2.1), 70% were female (or most likely female) and juveniles. Admittedly, the overall number of sexed burials is small (10), but this high percentage of female burials may indicate that there was a gender or social bias. Added weight is given to this supposition as, with the exception of Caersws (C10.2) and Ruthin (R2.2) where burials cannot be closely dated, the evidence derived from female burials points to deposition before the end of the second century. This is significant because before c. AD 197 soldiers under the rank of centurion were not permitted to marry, which may suggest these graves represent the unofficial wives and children of soldiers.<sup>3</sup>

The majority of the auxiliary forts in Wales had associated *vici* (Davies, J.L. 1990, 68, fig.8) and their size varied considerably (Hopewell 2001; Wilson 1990 13-15; Frere & St Joseph 1983, 101-9). It may be assumed that the size of a fort and its environs had some bearing on the number of burials that took place during, what was, in most cases, a relatively short period of occupation. On practical grounds it would seem more likely that the cemeteries of the smaller military installations served all the members of fort and *vicus* — although this does not discount the possibility of demarcation within the cemetery itself. Moreover, as noted above, there may have been differentiation between civilian and soldier at some sites in the early years of occupation. At three of the sites with extensive environs — Tomen y Mur, Gwynedd, Caerhun, Conwy, and Brecon Gaer, Brecknockshire — there is evidence for more



than one cemetery. This has prompted the suggestion that separate cemeteries for civilians and soldiers might have existed at these sites (Arnold & Davies 2000, 139). This premise is based on the context and discrete nature of the cemeteries at Tomen y Mur (T1) and Caerhun (C2), a possible female cremation at Caerhun, and the distribution of three tombstones at Brecon Gaer (B2.1-3), which suggest civilian and military demarcation. However, in the last instance, there is considerable doubt over the original placement of the tombstones (RIB 403, 404, 405).

The fact that more than one cemetery may have coexisted at both Caerhun and Tomen y Mur does not, of course, necessarily imply a military and civilian divide. But contextually, the evidence is persuasive, and this can be demonstrated by a more detailed look at the evidence from Tomen y Mur. This auxiliary fort had two barrow cemeteries (T1); both were located approximately 500m from the defences (Map 16), alongside the roads to the south east and north east of the fort, the former on the outskirts of the *vicus*, the latter on raised ground overlooking the amphitheatre (Gresham 1938, 199-200). In morphological terms the barrows have been compared to those from Petty Knowles, Northumberland, 500m south east of the Roman fort at High Rochester (Crew, Davies & Musson 1989, 53; Charlton & Mitcheson 1984). The square-ditched enclosures which surround some of the barrows are also reminiscent of indigenous practice, both in a pre-conquest British context (Whimster 1981, 193; Stead 1991, 183-4) and, perhaps more significantly, in an early medieval and possibly late rural Roman context in Wales (Murphy 1992; Brassil *et al.* 1991).

In addition to the distance which separates them, and their different contexts, the two cemeteries at Tomen y Mur are differentiated by the presence of a large barrow (10.5m x 11.4m with a central mound of 2.4m) in the south eastern cemetery. As this barrow was located in the cemetery tentatively associated with the *vicani* (Arnold & Davies 2000, 139) the presence of a barrow of such proportions — well over the 7m diameter argued to be indicative of an elite burial in native tradition (Struck 2000, 88) — may be significant. That native Britons were being enlisted into the *auxilia* by the late first century is pertinent here (Dobson & Mann 1973, 204-5) since this infers a native presence within the *vici* and the incorporation of indigenous traditions into *vici* burial practices (see below).

In the northern cemetery, indications of an intrusive burial rite come from the results of a recent geophysical survey, which picked up high levels of activity within several of the barrows (Peter Crew, pers. comm.). These strong anomalies probably represent the presence of *bustum* burials, which are generally considered to be of an intrusive nature (Struck 1993, 91; Philpott 1991, 48-9). Apart from the obvious military context of the northern cemetery, the location within the environs, high on a ridge and overlooking the amphitheatre, also infers a strong military connection.

On a cautionary note, there is a lack of comparable dating evidence from the respective cemeteries at Caerhun (*C2*) and Tomen y Mur (*T1*), and it is possible that a chronological shift in burial location may account for two distinct cemetery areas at these sites. It is also of note that the barrow cemeteries at High Rochester appear to have served members of both the fort and *vicus* community (Charlton & Mitcheson 1984, 18).

Unlike the two above sites, pottery evidence from both cemeteries at Ruthin, Denbighshire (*R1.1* and *R1.2*) indicates that they were broadly contemporaneous — that is, of late first- to second-century date (Jones, N. 1992, 23; Waddelove *et al.* 1990, 302; Waddelove 1982, 153-61). Skeletal evidence attests to the presence of a woman and child within the small cemetery at Brynhyfryd Park, Ruthin (*R2.1*) and, as at Tomen y Mur, elements of grave treatment, in this case a wooden mortuary enclosure, hint at native practice (see below). In contrast, cemetery (*R2.2*), located c. 200m to the west of (*R2.1*), is perhaps more representative of the presumed fort's military graveyard. Here, the cemetery appears to have been of a more uniform nature and to have contained simple urned or unurned cremations. However, while the character and contexts of the finds are generally considered to be of a funerary nature, no bone was recovered, since the pottery was washed prior to archaeological investigation (Jones, N. 1992, 19; Waddelove *et al.* 1989, 253). Pottery representing a minimum of 12 vessels was recovered, but no non-ceramic items were present and no mortuary structures were apparent. The pottery was retrieved from an undisturbed sand layer, in contrast to the mixed soil and sand matrix in surrounding excavation trenches. This was interpreted as a demarcation area between the cemetery and surrounding cultivated areas (Waddelove 1982, 158). We might, therefore, envisage

military and civilian cemetery zones at Ruthin comparable to those at Lodge Hill, Caerleon (see Chapter 3).

The problems inherent in 'sexing' grave goods also hinder our understanding of cemetery status at the military outposts. This is illustrated by the analysis of grave goods associated with 'sexed' skeletal material from the early first-century cemetery at Verulamium (Foster 1993, 207-12). Here, it was shown that brooches — also found at three of the military outposts in Wales — Abergavenny (*A3.1b*), Frith (*F1*) and Monmouth (*M2*) — were placed equally in male and female graves. Hairpins and beads, however, came exclusively from female cremations at Verulamium (Foster 1993, 211). It is perhaps significant, therefore, that pins and beads were recovered from burial grounds at Caersws (*10.2b*), (*C10.3*) and Frith (*F1*). Conversely, the presence of a probable bone hairpin in association with a male cremation at Usk (*U2.1a*) warns against drawing firm conclusions about gender from these finds. Equally inconclusive is the presence of a tette at Segontium (*C1.2h*, Plate I) in the principal cemetery of the fort. These small 'feeding cups' were commonly associated with children's burials, yet their function remains uncertain and other interpretations suggest they made appropriate grave goods for adults.<sup>4</sup> Other aspects of this last cemetery suggest a strong military component: it was positioned alongside the main exit road south east of the fort and the majority of burials were single-urn cremations with little in the way of grave goods.

There is, therefore, at present, little evidence in terms of gender, age, rite, or the use of gender specific grave goods to suggest extensive and separate civilian cemeteries, or to identify those cemeteries which served soldier and civilian alike. The small clusters of burials which display a mixture of indigenous and Roman characteristics and consisted of men, women and children as, for example, at Brynhyfryd Park, Ruthin (*R2.1*) may be more representative of the normative type of 'military' cemetery in Wales, and indicative of the integrated nature of post-conquest society within a military environment.

## MONUMENTALITY

### Tombstones

The prominent location of many burials at military outposts suggests that they were intended to be seen and would, therefore, have had some form of surface marker. In terms of monumentality, apart from the Cowbridge lion (*C12.2*), which may have graced a tomb (Parkhouse 1982, 23-4), there is little evidence to suggest the elaborate type of sculptured funerary monuments that existed at Chester (Wright & Richmond 1955), or to a lesser degree at Caerleon (Nash-Williams 1935). Outside the legionary fortresses evidence of tombstones is also sparse. Three come from the auxiliary fort at Brecon Gaer (*RIB* 403, 404, 405) and a possible tombstone fragment was discovered at the *civitas* capital of Caerwent (*RIB* 312). A vague reference to a possible tombstone also comes from Pen y Gaer, Powys, where an inscribed stone was recorded in 1803.<sup>5</sup> However, if funerary at all, this stone could equally have been of later date and add to the corpus of early medieval inscribed stones known from Roman contexts in Wales (Fox, A. 1939; Edwards 2001, 18-23; Handley & Lockyear *et al.* 2000). On this issue, it is germane that the post-Roman date of the first series of early Christian inscribed stones has recently been challenged (Handley 2001).<sup>6</sup> In terms of inscribed stone grave markers, we might also consider the sculptured stone from Caer Gai, Gwynedd (*C3*) which, although bearing a non-funerary inscription, may have been reused to mark a cremation burial of Antonine date (see below).

The dearth of tombstones at the military outposts of Wales at first seems surprising, as the majority of tombstones in Britain were associated with military sites.<sup>7</sup> Moreover, all four legionary fortresses under consideration have produced tombstones, with Chester yielding one sixth of the funerary inscriptions from Roman Britain (Handley 2001, 180). The northern frontier zone has provided 74 funerary inscriptions from the line of Hadrian's Wall alone (Handley 2001, 180, n.12), so the lack of this type of commemoration from the auxiliary forts of Wales requires some explanation.

Hope (1997) has convincingly argued that tombstones played a role as legitimising agents for immigrants seeking to claim or affirm 'Roman' status. If this was an important function of tombstone erection, then their scarcity in the hinterlands of Wales, on the remote edge of the Roman world, is puzzling. There is the possibility

that grave markers were made in wood and have not survived archaeologically.

Wood was certainly used in the initial phases of fort construction (Arnold & Davies 2000, 19) and was used for the construction of *mausolea* or funerary enclosures at Chepstow (*C5.1*), Monmouthshire and Ruthin, Denbighshire (*R2.1*). Thus inscribed wooden grave markers may have proved viable alternatives. Lack of suitable stone, a possible reason for the small number of tombstones known from the south east of England (Mann 1985, 204), does not appear to have been a problem in Wales. This is backed up by the presence of non-funerary inscriptions on stone at military outposts: thirteen building stones,<sup>8</sup> ten commemorative or dedicatory slabs and three, possibly four, altars.<sup>9</sup> Insufficient stone supplies, therefore, or, indeed, epigraphic skills, cannot explain the dearth of tombstones.

The most prolific epigraphic phase in Rome and its provinces was the latter part of the second century, though production periods at individual sites may have varied (Hope 1997, 249; Handley 2001, 182). However, outside Britain, the production of military tombstones had begun to decline by the second century (Hope 1997, 249; 2003, 132). At Chester tombstones increased<sup>10</sup> in the second century, and the most recent evaluation of its funerary monuments suggests that most date to the third (Carrington 1994, 41; Henig 2002, 75). At Caerleon, while an early third-century tombstone is attested (*RIB* 396, Arnold & Davies 2000, 139), the majority are most likely to be of second century date (Hope 2003, 127-8). At Wroxeter tombstones are of an early date but limited to five. Four of these commemorate soldiers (*RIB* 291-294) and are most certainly contemporaneous with Wroxeter's first-century military phase. Little can be determined about the date of the two tombstones from Usk (*RIB* 396; Boon & Hassall 1982, 51), although their probable original location suggests they were of post-fortress date i.e. late first century or later (see Chapter 3).

Based on the above chronology it may be argued that in mid and north Wales the majority of auxiliary forts were abandoned before tombstones and funerary sculpture reached their height in popularity, thereby curtailing any spread of the practice beyond the legionary fortresses. Their absence, however, at longstanding posts like Segontium is less easy to understand. In south Wales, three tombstones of late first- or early second-century date from Brecon Gaer, Powys (*B2.1-3*) demonstrate the early adoption of the tombstone habit at an auxiliary fort (Brewer 1986, 21-1). However,

as Arnold & Davies have argued (2000, 140), it may be significant that *RIB* 403 and *RIB* 405 commemorated members of the *ala* (cavalry), considered to be ‘the cream of the *auxilia*’ (infantry). This begs the question: did status or, indeed, cost dictate tombstone use at the auxiliary forts of Wales? Though many tombstones are undoubtedly lost from the archaeological record, the evidence from Britain as a whole may help us here. Of the tombstone inscriptions that can be attributed to members of the *auxilia* and their families, the balance is spread evenly between *ala* (12) and *cohors* (units which comprised mainly of infantry) (12).<sup>11</sup> However, five of the inscriptions referring to *cohors*, commemorated unit commanders or their families, and cohorts who were cavalrymen (*RIB* 1482, 2172, 2213, 121, 291), which suggests that both affordability and status played a part.

We must also consider whether the lack of tombstones represents a preference by auxiliaries for other forms of burial display, which were derived from their own provincial burial customs or, indeed, from indigenous traditions (Mann 1985, 206). Other types of monumentality are attested in the form of barrows and wooden funerary enclosures or mausolea, the antecedents, or possible antecedents, of which are discussed in the following sections.

### **Barrows**

The evidence for barrows varies in quality, but, nonetheless, suggests that their distribution — in both rural and military contexts — was predominately in the northern and upland areas of Wales (Map 26). The only hint of barrow construction from a military context in the south comes from Lodge Hill, Caerleon (*CAER.1*). Here, a tombstone inscription from Pilbach (*RIB* 369) states that it was set up beside the *tumulum* of a family member. This has been interpreted as a reference to a barrow nearby (Boon 1972, 109; Arnold & Davies 2000, 139). However, the term *tumulum* was also used to describe tombs generally, which casts some doubt on this interpretation.<sup>12</sup> The only other possible suggestion of military barrow use in south Wales is a tenuous one. At Cefn Ffordd, Glamorgan (*N3*), 0.5km from a marching camp, a cairn appears to have been reused for a Roman cremation.

The picture is different in mid and north Wales, where, in addition to the barrow cemeteries at Tomen y Mur, Gwynedd (*TI*), there is the possibility that barrows

housed Roman burials at five other auxiliary forts. At Caerhun, Conwy (**C2**), a group of mounds which lie alongside the northern exit road of the fort may be sepulchral (David Hopewell, pers. comm.). These are of particular interest as they have square-ditched enclosures and can be likened in form to the barrows at Tomen y Mur (**T1**). At Llanio, Ceridigion (**L18**), c. 100m north of the fort, a 'sepulchral mound full of bones', in a field called *Cae Gwyrfil* ('Soldier's Field'), was destroyed in the late nineteenth century (Anon 1878, 353). The close proximity of the mound to the fort, together with the place name, suggests a barrow of the Roman period.<sup>13</sup> Place-name evidence also hints at barrows at Cae Gai (**C3**), where the cemetery of the fort was located in a field formerly called *Wern Dwyndir* ('Field of Hillocks') (Thomas, D.T. 1885, 201). The possible barrow or tomb picked up by geophysical survey at Pennal, Gwynedd (**P11**), (Map 18) has been mentioned above (Hopewell 2001, 11). A similar feature of comparable size (c. 11m diam.), surrounded by a series of low magnetic anomalies, was also identified by geophysics at Llanfor, Merioneth (**L16**). This has been interpreted as a Bronze Age barrow and associated cemetery, largely because it appears to be aligned to, and sit between, two probable Bronze Age barrows, which are located 100m to its north east and south east (Crew & Crew 1997, 17-18, fig. 8). That this feature, however, is different in size and form to the prehistoric barrows, and the fact that it is in close proximity to the Roman fort, c. 20m outside the eastern defences, suggests it may be contemporary with military occupation. Fragments of burnt bone were recovered from the subsoil in the immediate vicinity of this presumed barrow (Crew & Crew 1997, 17).

In addition to the barrows within the environs of the above auxiliary forts, Roman barrows, or secondary Roman cremations in prehistoric barrows, are also suspected at three sites within close proximity (c. 0.5-1km) to marching camps or auxiliary forts: Churchstoke, Powys (**C9**), Doldinnas, Gwynedd (**D1**) and Walford, Hereford (**W3**). The example from Churchstoke (**C9**) is of particular note because there are hints that the cremation cist was constructed of *tegulae* (see below). This was an intrusive rite with strong military associations (Philpott 1991, 67). An early account also suggests that one or more barrows flanked the Roman road on Llandrindod Common, Powys, which ran south of the fort at Castell Collen (Price 1814). There is no evidence for these on the ground, but heavy ploughing on the common is likely to have destroyed any prominent surface features (Daniels and Jones 1969, 130).<sup>14</sup>

While Roman barrows are well known in England, it is widely assumed that barrow use was not a feature of Roman burial practice in Wales (Dunning & Jessup 1936; Struck 2000, fig. 9.3). The problem with the Welsh evidence is that much of it is derived from antiquarian records and no barrows have been excavated in modern times. Nevertheless, although the barrows at Tomen y Mur are the only examples from a military context that we can confidently ascribe to the Roman period, the collective evidence suggests that barrows were relatively common within fort environs. Moreover, when the eight examples of definite or probable Roman barrow burials in rural contexts are taken into account (Map 26), the indication is that barrow use was a significant aspect of burial practice in Roman Wales.

The traditional view that the main stimulus for barrows across the Roman provinces came from Rome (Dunning & Jessup 1936; Toynbee 1971, 180) has been challenged, and native traditions are now seen as equally responsible (Wigg 1993, 379; Struck 2000, 87-8). It is significant that in post-conquest north Wales, from where the bulk of the evidence comes, the distribution of barrows is split fairly evenly between rural and military sites. It may be argued, therefore, that there were two coexisting barrow traditions — that is, one indigenous and one intrusive. Added weight is given to this argument, as this was an area where primary Iron Age barrows are suspected (Murphy 1992, 18) and also one with garrisons of soldiers from provinces where barrow burial was a strong tradition.<sup>15</sup>

Where barrows were located within fort cemeteries then it seems fair to assume that these were primary barrows. However, we should also bear in mind that secondary deposition in prehistoric barrows was also common practice throughout the northern Roman provinces (Wigg 1993, 378, for Welsh evidence see Chapter 6). On the issue of newly constructed monuments within fort environs, as there has been no modern excavation of any of the Welsh barrows, little can be surmised about their probable antecedents. If, as argued below, Welsh garrisons as well as *vici* were made up of both ‘foreigners’ and native Britons, then the presence of barrows at a military site does not necessarily imply that they were intrusive. The difficulties of attributing the construction of a barrow to native or Roman are manifold and, as we have seen at Tomen y Mur (*TI*), although there are hints of intrusive and indigenous practice, those that were buried within the barrows may have been soldiers or civilians.



Raising a barrow required a substantial amount of effort. Struck (2000, 85-96) has argued that barrows represented a form of high status burial in Roman Britain and that they fulfilled this role in both military and rural contexts. It may be argued that the barrows of the Welsh hinterlands were not just expressions of high status, but took on the role that Hope (1997) postulated for tombstones — that is, a means of legitimising of affirming status. If this was the case, we are still no closer to identifying which elements of frontier society were more inclined towards this form of permanent burial display. Soldiers may have felt the need to honour their dead with a substantial and lasting monument — a metaphorical flag as it were, in what was, initially, a strange and foreign land. On the other hand, it has been argued that indigenous cultures used barrows as a form of ‘symbolic resistance to Rome’ (Morris, I. 1992, 51). However, although this may have been so in the native enclaves of Wales, it seems unlikely that it would have been the case in a military context where the military base provided the *raison d’être* for the associated *vicus*. Others have argued, rather than being a form of protest or resistance to Rome, barrow use successfully evolved and developed simply because it was a familiar form of burial rite to Romans and provincials alike (Wigg 1993, 379; Toynbee 1971, 180-2; Struck 2000, 94). This seems the most likely explanation in Roman Wales. It may be significant, however, that the distribution of barrows in Roman Wales is concentrated outside the most Romanised areas. While this may be down to the fact that barrows are more likely to survive archaeologically in areas that have not seen extensive modern development, we may also be seeing a reflection of a stronger indigenous influence outside the Romanised south.

Of the 21 sites where barrow burial is known or suspected in Roman Wales, with one possible exception (Brownslade, Castlemartin, Pembrokeshire *B4*), where mode of burial has been apparent, the burial rite was cremation. This is not to say that inhumations were not sometimes housed in barrows, and the predominance of cremations may be more to do with the survival of readily identifiable urned Roman cremations. However, the chronology of the auxiliary forts suggests that any associated barrows are more likely to have contained cremations. This would be in line with the majority of burials from the military outposts and with the dominant Roman burial rite during the first and second centuries.

## Funerary Enclosures

Two examples of wooden mortuary enclosures are known from probable military contexts in Wales; both of these housed cremations. The first example is from Chepstow (*C5.1*) where there is the possibility that a Neronian fort existed (Arnold & Davies 2000, 10). Here, a small burial ground contained three cremations, one of which was enclosed within a square enclosure delineated by a gully. The total area enclosed measured 4.5m across. The position and layout of iron and nails surrounding the cremation were interpreted as the remains of a wooden box or casket (Shoesmith 1991, 42), a form of enclosure rare in Wales (see page 69) and usually indicative of a high status burial (Philpott 1991, 12-21). Burnt daub and large pieces of charcoal within the gully trench were presumed to be the remains of a timber structure, interpreted as a shrine, which was later burnt down. This destruction took place before the gully had silted up (Shoesmith 1991, 42).

The presence of a coin dated to AD 41-54 close to the outside corner of the enclosure, and a possible flagon burial at this site, suggest an early post-conquest cemetery with strong Roman antecedents (Philpott 1991, 30; Toynbee 1971, 44; Alcock, J.P. 1980, 57). However, there are elements that may also reflect indigenous practice. The form of enclosure and its subsequent destruction are of particular interest. Close parallels can be drawn with the first- and early second-century mortuary structures at the *civitas* capital of Verulamium, especially at St. Stephen's (Niblett 2000, 97-104). At Folly Lane, Verulamium the destruction of a mortuary enclosure formed part of the funerary process. Moreover, it appears likely that there was a significant time lapse between the initial laying out, or exposure of the corpse, and the secondary rite of cremation and burial (Niblett 2000, 99-100; Williams 2003). We might envisage that this was also the case at Chepstow. It is of note that, although there are definite examples of exposure preceding cremation on the Continent (Niblett 2000, 99), the evidence from pre-conquest Britain also strongly suggests that excarnation was followed by secondary funerary rites in Iron Age England and Wales (see Chapter 2).

At Brynhyfryd Park, Ruthin (*R2.1*) a similar rectangular enclosure (c.3.5 x 3.0m externally) surrounded the cremation of a child in a probable *vicus* context (Arnold & Davies 2000, 136; Jones, N. 1992, 24). This feature was interpreted as a timber 'mausoleum', perhaps supported on sleeper beams, and comparisons were drawn with

the stone mausoleum at the Abbeyfield site, Caerleon (Jones, N. 1992, 22, Evans & Maynard 1997, 177-180). Two cremations — a male and a female — were deposited 2.5m and 5m outside the enclosure. Poor stratigraphy at this site, coupled with insufficient dating evidence, prevented any close chronological association being made between any the burials, or, indeed, between the burials and the structure (Jones, N. 1992, 23). The child cremation, however, and the presence of a male and female adult in close spatial association, raise the possibility of familial ties.

Rectangular or square mortuary enclosures are known from both Iron Age and Roman Britain and also have continental parallels (Black 1986, 201-210; Niblett 2000, 97-104). No direct parallels can be found in Iron Age Wales, although prehistoric sites were the focus for rectangular enclosures surrounding inhumations of early medieval, and in the case of Plas Gogerddan, Ceredigion (*P2*), possibly late Roman date (Murphy 1992, 17; James, H. 1992a). There is also some evidence to suggest that in north Wales these rectangular enclosures were the foundations for timber buildings or palisades as at Plas Gogerddan (Murphy 1992, 17-22), Arfryn (White 1972,41), Capel Eithin (White & Smith 1999,136) and possibly Llandegai (Houlder 1968, 221). If the late Roman/early medieval funerary activity at the above sites can be seen as a product of native continuity, then it can be argued that we are seeing, if not the origination, then certainly the long term adoption, of rectangular timber mortuary enclosures by the indigenous population. However, the interpretation of these various later 'superstructures' is problematic and any comparisons between them, or ancestral links back to the early Roman period, may be more superficial than real (Brassil *et al.* 1991, 90-1). Nevertheless, there was certainly a move towards individual demarcation or enclosure by the late Iron Age in Wales with partial timber surrounds attested at Prestatyn (Blockley 1989, 20-3) and Stackpole (Benson 1990), which suggests that new forms of funerary enclosure would be readily adopted by native communities. Struck (2000, 88, fig.9.7) suggests that wooden 'shrines' were restricted to southern England and south Wales and were rarely associated with military sites, their context and timber construction perhaps representing a cheaper and native alternative to the Roman mausoleum. Both the above examples may have been associated in some way with the military, but it is tempting to see them as reflecting indigenous practice, especially so at Ruthin (*R2.2*), where it is apparent that the 'mausoleum' was located in a civilian cemetery. Certainly timber was a familiar and

commonly used material for house construction in Iron Age Wales, which implies, as the examples from Prestatyn and Stackpole suggest, that it would be the medium initially chosen for native mortuary constructions during the early Roman period.

## GRAVE TREATMENT AND FURNISHINGS

### Cremation

The majority of cremations known from military outposts in Wales were contained in pottery vessels. However, unurned cremations are also attested and have been identified at five sites: Loughor, Swansea (*L1.2: no. 2*), Neath, Port Talbot, (*NI*), Ruthin, Denbighshire (*R2.1: no. 2*), and both Monmouth (*M2*) and Chepstow in Monmouthshire (*C5.1, no. 3*). As modern excavation has shown was the case at the legionary fortresses, particularly Caerleon (Evans & Maynard 1997; Burnham 1994, 250-1), it is probable that unurned cremations were also a common feature of burial practice at the auxiliary forts. That so few have been identified suggests that they have gone unrecognised in the past, due in large part to the antiquarian nature of many of the discoveries. Outside the legionary bases the use of alternative containers of organic materials is borne out by the possible casket burial from Chepstow (*C5.1*) (Shoesmith 1991, 42).

Where pottery was the chosen method of enclosure, cremations were deposited in common coarseware vessels. These vessels varied considerably in both size and form, and were both locally produced and of the more commonly traded types (predominantly black burnished and greywares). The bulk of vessels were cooking pots and domestic jars, although a beaker was used as a cinerary container at Segontium (*C1.2b*). In two instances, more unusual varieties of pottery were used: rusticated, coarseware jars contained cremations at Caer Gai, Gwynedd (*C3*) (Nash-Williams 1950a, 243-5)<sup>16</sup> and a small, pedestalled urn of Late Iron Age form may have held a cremation at Pumpsaint, Carmarthenshire, (*P.6*) (Plate I). There is also an example of a personalised jar from Llandrindod Wells, Powys (*L7.1*). Inscribed with the word *Atilli*, this locally produced, coarseware jar presumably bore the name of the cremated individual (Cunnington & Cunnington 1911, 150).

We have seen that there is ample evidence to suggest that offerings were commonly placed on the pyre rather than in the grave at the legionary fortresses (see Chapter 3). This was a tendency found generally in Roman Britain in early military and urban contexts (Philpott 1991, 220). It is likely that this was also the case at the military outposts in Wales. However, the poor quality of much of the evidence makes it difficult to determine to what extent this practice took place. Two recently excavated sites — Carmarthen (*C4.1*) and Ruthin (*R2.1*) — provide definite evidence of burnt offerings in the grave, but it is unlikely that early accounts would have distinguished between burnt and unburnt grave goods, particularly when dealing with small pottery sherds that are often heavily discoloured. Nonetheless we can see from the evidence of Carmarthen (*C4.1*), from a *vicus* or early town context, that glass, pottery, metal and funerary feasts — in the form of fruits and cereals — were placed on the pyre (Crane 2001, 30-1).

Although grave goods were not numerous at the Welsh military outposts, they were certainly not as sparse as Philpott (1991, 40-41) suggests. His premise that military sites in Wales produced ‘predominantly single-urn cremations’ and that ‘non ceramic furniture is almost entirely absent’ is no longer supported by the evidence. The most common ancillary items were ceramics, usually coarsewares. Flagons are attested at five and possibly six places: Abergavenny (*A3.1a and A3.1b*), Caernarfon (*C1.2j & C1.2e*), Caer Gai (*C3*), Chepstow (*C5.1*), Ruthin (*R2.1, no. 1*) and possibly Tomen y Mur (*T1, no. 1*). With the exception of the example from Ruthin (*R2.1, no. 1*), none of the flagons appear to have been placed on the pyre. In only one instance, Abergavenny (*A3.1a*), is there any suggestion that the flagon itself contained skeletal remains (Hall 1848, 172-3). This accords with the evidence from the legionary fortresses, where only a handful of definite flagon or amphora burials are attested. As no complete cemetery at an auxiliary fort has been excavated, the frequency at which flagons were present in the grave cannot be gauged. But of those auxiliary forts that have produced definite cremation burials, approximately 33% contained flagons as grave goods. Of particular interest is the flagon of Central Gaulish glazed ware from a cremation assemblage at Caer Gai (*C3*) (Nash-Williams 1950a, 243-5). This imported pottery was widespread but not abundant in Roman Britain (Tyler 1996, 141). It is, therefore, of some significance that two further flagons of this ware were

discovered at Pennal, Gwynedd (*P11*) and may, as discussed below, represent pyre goods (*pace* Boone & Brewer 1981).

While it is not always possible to determine whether the pottery from a cemetery context represents cinerary containers or ancillary vessels (e.g. Caernarfon *C1.2 (j)*; Loughor *L1.4 no. 2*), two examples of double enclosure (one coarseware vessel inside another) are known: Caernarfon (*C1.2a*) and Abergavenny (*A3.1(a) no. 3*). At Abergavenny the interior vessel contained the cremated bone, making the presence of liquid or food within either vessel unlikely. It seems more likely that these were double burials or indicative of a desire to provide extra protection for the remains. Other ceramic grave goods include a lamp, in association with a group of cremations at Frith, Flintshire (*F1*), and a coarseware tettine from Caernarfon, Gwynedd (*C1.2h*), which represents a hitherto unknown type of ancillary vessel from a Welsh auxiliary fort. A small hollow ball of 'clay ironstone concretion' from a cremation cist at Loughor (*L1.4 no. 1*) also appears to have been a deliberate deposition (Ling & Ling 1973, 114).

Fine wares also feature as ancillary vessels. Samian ware is attested at three auxiliary forts — Abergavenny (*A3.1a, no. 1*), Caernarfon (*C1.2a; C1.5*) and Loughor (*L1.4*) and is probable at a further three: Caersws (*C10.2b*), Pennydarren (*P10*) and Pen-y-Gaer (*P8, no. 3*). The samian ranges from small fragments as at Segontium (*C1.2a*), which probably represent pyre goods, to complete vessels as, for example, at Abergavenny, Loughor and probably Pen-y-Gaer.<sup>17</sup>

The largest quantity of ancillary pottery vessels in association with a cremation comes from Abergavenny (*A3.1a, no. 1*). Here, a 'rude cist' contained ten vessels of which at least two pieces were samian ware (Hall 1848, 172, 191, Saunders 1876, 348; Tyers 1996, 109, Drag. 35).<sup>18</sup> This assemblage is of particular interest as four vessels, each resting in a dish or bowl, were placed to the four corners of the cist, while a flagon rested on a dish positioned centrally (Saunders 1876, 348). The deliberate layout suggests it symbolised a funerary banquet. Philpott (1991, 35) has suggested that the combination of flagon, beaker and platter represented a standard Romano-British table setting and sees their presence in the grave as evidence of a Romanised lifestyle. A further well furnished cremation burial from the same cemetery (*A3.1b*; Plate II) contained two coarseware urns (both containing skeletal material), a fine white ware

flagon and beaker, two small bronze brooches and an iron ring (Abergavenny Mus. Acc. No. ABGMS: A.1992.293. 1-6). This grave group is of particular note as small pieces of *tesserae* were associated with the skeletal material which, if they did not constitute grave or pyre offerings, might have been derived from a tomb mosaic.<sup>19</sup> However, this assemblage has been dated to c. AD 60 and mosaics of this period, although not unknown, are rare in Britain (Laing 1997, 108-9).

In terms of non-ceramic grave goods, glass phials were associated with cremations at Caer Gai (*C3*) (Nash-Williams 1950a, 244) and at Carmarthen (*C4. 1*); in this last example the phial had been placed on the pyre (Crane 2001, 31). Glass was also found amongst scattered, cremated, human remains at Monmouth (*M2*), together with brooches and pottery. In addition to Abergavenny (*A3.1b*) and Monmouth (*M2*), personal ornaments also feature as grave goods at Frith (*F1*), where an unknown number of brooches, rings, pins and beads were found in apparent association with a group of cremations. The possibility that beads and pins represented grave goods at Caersws (*C10.2b & C10.3*) has been noted above.

Evidence for the presence of coins in association with burials at military outposts is sparse (see Map 7). At Abergavenny (*A3.1a*) a 'deposit of silver coins' is attested in the cemetery area, but their date is unrecorded and it is unclear whether these accompanied cremations or inhumation burials (Hall 1848, 348). An *as* of Claudius (AD 41-54) came from close to the mortuary enclosure at Chepstow (*C5.1*) and twenty-two coins were found in apparent association with cremation burials at Frith (*F1*), some of which were later dated to the late first and second centuries (Davies, E. 1949, 233). In addition, a coin of unknown date was found in association with a probable cremation at Churchstoke, Powys (*C9*), within close proximity (c. 2km) to Brompton fort (Thompson Watkin 1878b, 78). The limited deposition of coins with burials at the auxiliary forts in south Wales follows the pattern noted at the southern legionary fortresses of Caerleon and Usk, where present evidence also suggests coins in funerary contexts were rare (see Chapter 3). Such a large number of coins at Frith, Flintshire (*F1*) is understandable: its proximity to Chester, where coins with burials were common from the first to fourth century (e.g. *CHE.1 - CHE. 8*), suggests that such a practice would have been adopted in military contexts in Chester's immediate

hinterlands. It is surprising, however, that it does not appear to have been a practice adopted at any of the auxiliary forts in north Wales.

While metal objects have been found in association with cremations at the auxiliary forts, their poor preservation means that their original function has rarely been identified. The possible arrowheads fused to skeletal material at Caer Gai (*C3*), (Nash-Williams 1950a, 244-5) were later interpreted as nails from the bier (Boon & Brewer 1981, 365). Coffin or bier nails may also account for the 'arrow head' from Caernarfon (*C1.2a*) (Anon 1851, 82). Equally enigmatic are the unidentified metal objects from Dolaucothi (*D2*), Loughor (*L1.2*) and Monmouth (*M2*). The definite presence of nails is attested at Ruthin (*R2.1*), but it is unclear whether these constituted hobnails, bier or coffin nails (Jones, N. 1992, 22-3).

Lastly, a 'votive altar' was found at Frith (*F1*) in apparent association with the cremation burials, lamp and personal ornaments noted above (Davies, E. 1949, 233). Unfortunately, the record of this discovery is vague and the items lost. Funerary altars, especially those containing ashes, although common in Rome and Italy, do not appear to have been a strong feature of Romano-British burial practice (Toynbee 1971, 253-68; Dexheimer 2000; Philpott 1991, 28). However, the presence of an altar with cremations, and other objects commonly found in grave assemblages, suggests that this item is likely to have been of a funerary nature. It may also be significant that two tombstones of altar shape (*RIB* 489; 550) are attested at Chester (Wright & Richmond 1955, 35-6, pl. XXII, 75).

### **Grave construction: cremations**

Apart from the timber mortuary enclosures discussed above, there is little evidence of elaborate grave structures to enclose cremation burials. Simply constructed stone-lined cists are attested at Abergavenny (*A3.1a*) and Loughor (*L1.4*) (Hall 1878, 172; Ling & Ling 1973, 112-13 and Pl. XV). However, while the furnishings of both show Roman antecedents, there is little to differentiate the construction of these cists from their rural counterparts (see Chapter 6). There are no definite examples of cists constructed of *tegulae*, which were evident at Caerleon (e.g. *CAER.2*, Evans & Maynard 1997, 192-3) and which are undoubtedly a Roman introduction (Philpott 1991, 67). The only suggestion of a tile cist comes from Churchstoke, Powys (*C9*).



Here, a cremation cist inside a barrow was reported to have been constructed of flagstones, one of which bore an inscription (Thompson-Watkin 1878b, 78). The close proximity (c.2km) of this barrow to the fort at Brompton hints at the use of stamped military tiles.

### ***Ustrina* and pyre-related activity**

It was noted above that it is now increasingly evident that pyre and grave were commonly close together in Roman cemeteries, and that this was a practice that took place at the legionary fortresses under consideration. The possibility that the barrows in the northern cemetery at Tomen y Mur, Gwynedd (*T1*) covered *bustum* burials has already been mentioned and this may also have been the case at other military sites in Wales where there is evidence for barrow use. However, there are also hints that *ustrina* were present in formal cemeteries, or located close to small clusters of burials, at several auxiliary forts. The evidence from Loughor, Swansea (*L1.4*) infers that pyre and burial were adjacent. Around the cremation cist were 'extensive signs of burning' (Ling & Ling 1973, 113-14) and the cremation urn itself was blackened by fire. A close parallel can be drawn from High Rochester, in the northern frontier zone, where a grave pit contained a heat damaged cremation urn and a charred posthole. It was suggested this was the result of pyre material thrown directly into the grave from a pyre nearby (Charlton & Mitcheson 1984, 14-15). While the evidence has to be treated with caution, hints of pyre related activities are also gleaned from antiquarian reports. An urned cremation from the fort's principal cemetery at Caernarfon (*C1.2I*) was discovered with 'much burnt material all round' (Hughes, H. 1935, 297-8), and at Caersws (*C10.3*) 'several strata of charcoal' were identified by Richard Fenton in one of the riverside cemeteries (Fisher 1917, 35).

The evidence from Caer Gai, Gwynedd (*C3*) is also pertinent and suggests extensive pyre related activity. A large pit (1m diameter) in the fort's cremation cemetery contained samian and coarseware (Thomas, D.T. 1885, 201-2). Watkin's account suggests burnt bones were also present (Watkin, A.J. 1886, 285). The pottery was later dated to the mid-second century (Simpson 1962, 146; White, R.B. 1985, 141). This probable cremation burial was in apparent association with the base of an inscribed monument (*RIB* 418). The small amount of remaining sculpture on the stone suggests the monument originally depicted Hercules. Adjoining the presumed

cremation pit was a charcoal-filled trench within the remains of a timber surround. The presence of the cremation burial and the non-funerary dedication led to the suggestion that the monument was not *in situ* but had been reused for funerary purposes (Collingwood & Wright 1995, 140, *RIB* 418).<sup>20</sup> Others prefer to see the evidence as indicative of a shrine to Hercules and unassociated with funerary activity (Haverfield 1910, 95-8; White R.B. 1985, 141; Simpson 1962, 145-6; Jarrett & Nash-Williams 1969, 56). It may be argued, however, that in view of what is now known of Roman mortuary practice, coupled with the presence of this feature in a cemetery, the charcoal-filled trench is best interpreted as an *ustrinum*. The structure of the timber surround, which was described as forming an 'Oxford frame', is indicative of the outer edges of a pyre construction (Thomas, D.T. 1885, 202).<sup>21</sup> Furthermore, the dimensions of the burnt enclosure (2.7m x 0.60m externally and 0.75m deep) are more than adequate for a pyre (for variations in pyre size see Wigg 1993, 113, fig. b; Black 1986, 210; Charlton & Mitcheson 1984). The depth of the burnt trench suggests that this was probably an *in situ* cremation with the skeletal material collected and deposited in the adjoining pit. It may also be significant that the pottery from this pit comprised samian ware bowls and a mortarium rim. This composition of pottery is linked to the serving or storage of solid food and mirrors the type of assemblage noted in Polfer's (2000) functional analysis of pottery from an *ustrinum* at Septfontaines, Luxembourg (see above, page 72). Unfortunately, although some of the pottery from Caer Gai was recorded as 'damaged', there is no mention of heat damage (Simpson 1962, 146), which would suggest it had been placed directly on the pyre.<sup>22</sup> That *ustrina* were present at Caer Gai is also suggested by a recent geophysical survey which produced high readings believed to be 'almost certainly a result of burning' over a wide area of the cemetery (Hopewell 2000, 13). A square structure (14m x 14m) within this area of high responses is also significant since it is reminiscent in form to the mortuary enclosures noted above in southern England and, on a smaller scale, at Ruthin (*R2.1*) and Chepstow (*C5.1*).

There are also hints of pyre activity at Pennal, Gwynedd (*P11*). In 1977, two burnt vases of Central Gaulish ware (Déchelette forms 60 & 62) and a sherd of mortarium were discovered approximately 50m south west of the fort's defences, and alongside the Roman road. At the time it was argued that, as no cremated bone was found, and because the bottles were burnt, they could not have been associated with a burial. It

was noted, however, that an unburnt bottle of the same type (Déchelette 60) had accompanied a cremation burial at Caer Gai, 40km north of Pennal (Boon & Brewer 198, 363-367; Nash Williams 1950a, 243-245). While the bottles may not be related to funerary activity in any way, the context in which they were found (burnt layers of clay and charcoal) is suggestive of a single pyre debris pit, where little or no bone was common (Polfer 2000, 32). Moreover, a geophysical survey suggests that this road was a focus for funerary activity. A circular feature interpreted as a possible tomb was detected 120m from the defences and immediately west of the road (Map 18). Furthermore, a probable bathhouse (Hopewell 2001, 11), which as we have seen, often attracted funerary activity, was located 20m north west of the possible pyre site. The function of the large stone enclosure that surrounded the 'pyre' is unknown and may be of later date. It is tempting to speculate, however, that, if it was contemporary with the postulated pyre, it represented a walled cemetery-enclosure as, for example, at Shorden Brae, Corbridge in the northern frontier zone (Toynbee 1971, 91-4).

If cremation and burial were carried out within close proximity, then the choice of location has added significance. As we have seen, burials were placed in prominent locations, which implies that in the case of cremation burials, the cremation process itself would also have been on display. But there is another important aspect which deserves consideration. If we accept the premise that pre-burial activities were more important than the subsequent burial (Niblett 2000; Williams, H. 2003), then the choice of some locations, for example, within the defences at Loughor (*L1.3; L1.4*), is particularly interesting. It has been argued above that specific locations were chosen as a means of affirming status or cultural affiliations. This being the case, such sentiments were perhaps most strongly evoked during the ritual activity which centred on the pyre itself. In other words, it was the act of cremating the corpse within the defences at Loughor which was the most important aspect of the funerary process. This act provided a powerful and public means of showing cultural affiliation with Rome or, conversely, was perhaps a means of reclaiming native territory once the army had abandoned the site. The idea that the souls of the dead remained within close proximity to the grave (Toynbee 1971, 50-3) may also be significant and underlines the importance of pyre and burial location.

## Inhumations

Only two auxiliary forts have provided definite evidence of inhumation burials: Caernarfon (*CI.1*) and Caersws (*CI0.2a;CI0.4*). Inhumations are also probable at Abergavenny (*A3.1a*) and Pen-y-gaer (*P8*) and two inhumations are known from Pentre Farm (*P7.a & b*), a site with early military connections. The majority of auxiliary forts were abandoned before inhumation became a widely adopted practice. However, even though the evidence is sparse, it does show some of the grave treatments attested at the legionary bases were also carried out at military outposts in Wales.

Pen y Gaer, Powys (*P8*) provides the only example of a masonry-built tomb from an auxiliary fort in Wales. Here, a burial vault was uncovered 20m outside the fort's eastern defences (Randall 1950, 21; RCHMW 1997, 147). This was a substantial, subterranean structure built of rubble and brick and capped by two blocks of freestone. The vault contained fragmented skeletal material and the readily identifiable bone fragments (vertebrae, patellae etc.) coupled with the size of the chamber (1m high by 2m long and 1m wide) suggest it contained an inhumation. No dating evidence was found, but the construction and dimensions of the vault are comparable with the dressed stone and rubble-built tomb which housed an inhumation at the Infirmary Field, Chester (*CHE. 1*), where the main period of cemetery use is believed to have been Antonine (Newstead 1914, 125-7).<sup>23</sup> The vault at Pen y Gaer was 1.5m below ground surface and comparisons can also be made with the subterranean tombs from the Roman cemeteries in York (RCHAM York 1962, 95, 97). Nearer to Wales, there are hints that a burial vault may have existed at Kenchester (*KI*) (Lhuyd 1701, 607), a small town which may originally have had a military installation close by (Arnold & Davies 2000, 10). Pottery evidence suggests that military abandonment at Pen y Gaer was no later than AD140 (Crossley 1968, 99), although two fourth-century coins indicate later activity at the site (RCHAMW 1986, 147). If the vault was contemporary with military occupation, the likelihood that it contained an inhumation points to construction towards the end of the fort's life. An inhumation c. AD140 at Pen y Gaer, although fairly early, would not be out of step with evidence from Caernarfon (*CI.1*) and Pentre Farm (*P7.1 a & b*), where Antonine burials are attested. It would also be in line with the evidence from the

legionary fortress at Chester, where inhumations are known from the late first or early second century (*CHE.2; CHE.3*).

Wooden coffins housed inhumations in the *vicus* at Caersws (*C10.4*) and possibly also at Pentre Farm (*P7.1b*). Two different types of grave construction are known from the latter site. The earliest grave was constructed of *tegulae* and is comparable in form and date (c. AD 150) to tile constructed graves at Infirmary Field, Chester (*CHE.1*) (e.g. graves 14 and 22, Newstead 1914). The later grave (*P7.1a*), which was also of Antonine date, was a more complex construction of dressed stone blocks, one layer of which formed a pitched covering, possibly forming a superstructure above ground surface (Granger in O'Leary *et al.* 1989, 47). A decorated sheet of lead covered the inhumation. Again, parallels can be drawn with construction techniques at Infirmary Field, where pitched tiles were placed over graves and lead used for protection (Newstead 1914, 143, Plate XXXII, figs. 1 & 2).

Grave goods in association with inhumations are few. At Caernarfon (*C1.1*) a black-burnished ware jar accompanied an inhumation (White, R.B. 1985, 55-6) and at Caersws (*C10.4*) hobnail boots had been placed in the grave. No bone remained in this last example but the presence of boots at the southern end of a north-south aligned grave suggests they were placed near the feet and may, therefore, have been worn by the corpse. It has also been suggested that the gold 'phalater' found at Caernarfon (*C1.3*), 65m from the fort's defences and 145m west of the fort's principal cemetery (Map 13), came from a burial, although no details of its discovery were recorded (Wheeler 1923, 129). This Gnostic charm, inscribed in Greek, is of third- or fourth-century date, which suggests that, if it had been placed in a grave, it was associated with an inhumation. Amulets in burial contexts are well known in the Roman world, although inscribed examples are rare in Britain (Nuzzo 2000, 249-55; Philpott 1991, 164). If this charm was associated with a burial, then it represented a costly deposit in the grave. This is significant and may suggest that the burial plots closest to the fort went at a premium. It is also pertinent that the construction of the vault at Pen y Gaer (*P8*) suggests a relatively high status burial, at least in military terms, in a prime location close to the fort's defences. However, deposition at Pen y Gaer is likely to have taken place close to the end of the fort's life and, in the case of Caernarfon, during a period when there was a reduction in the garrison (Davies, J.L. 1995). We

may, therefore, be seeing burials placed closer to the defences as a consequence of settlement contraction.

### **The role of native burial practices**

There are inherent problems in trying to attribute the origins of certain burial customs to any one element of society, since there are clearly aspects of practice that were common to both cultures. The difficulty of assigning a particular rite to one culture or another is particularly problematic within a military context, as further difficulties arise from the uncertainty which surrounds the cultural origins of the *vicani*. Sommer (1984, 50) suggested that, because many of the *vici* in lowland Britain developed into civilian settlements after military abandonment, a substantial proportion of the original population were natives who remained within the settlements to take advantage of the burgeoning economy. This development is seen in contrast to the situation in Wales, where, it is argued, foreign camp-followers moved in tandem with the Roman army (Sommer 1984, 50; Arnold & Davies 2000, 60). However, urban centres developed from military origins in south Wales too (e.g. Carmarthen and Cowbridge), which suggests it was the economic viability of a settlement and not the cultural makeup of its occupants which determined its success. It has also been mooted that because architectural forms within the *vici* in Wales show little sign of native influence, this supports the argument that they were inhabited by foreign *vicani* (Arnold & Davies, J.L. 2000, 60). Yet the extent to which rural communities adopted Roman building forms in Wales — by the early second century in south Wales and by the later second in the north west — suggests that this cannot necessarily be seen as a sign of non-native involvement (Davies, J.L. 1984, 107). Conversely, others prefer to see specific features of *vicus* layout, for example, the widening of the fort's exit road at Caerhun, Gwynedd, as a deliberate attempt by the military to actively encourage markets and, by inference, Roman and native integration (Jones, G.D.B. 1984, 78-9).

The length of time *vici* were occupied must also have had a bearing on their social makeup. Although Davies has described the presence of the army as 'transitory', at the very least the *vici* of Wales were occupied for a quarter of a century (Davies, J.L. 1984, 119; 2000, 15-17, 60-2), which certainly suggests some immigration from the surrounding districts would have taken place. As Maxfield (2002) has shown in her study of military families in the Roman provinces, social relationships soon began to

develop between the civil population and the army once military units became static for any length of time. Moreover, judging by the spread of Roman material culture into the countryside, which, though patchy, was apparent in both south and north Wales from the late first century, it is probable that elements of the native population had developed economic ties with *vici* markets from early on.<sup>24</sup> This in itself would surely have fostered closer social relationships between the *vicani* and the native population. The strong probability that native Britons were being recruited into the *auxilia* by the late first century also suggests cultural integration within military *vici* (Dobson & Mann 1973). However, we should not assume that in Wales these were necessarily local men, but perhaps were initially drawn from the settled civil zones of southern Britain.

If the indigenous population made up a percentage of the *vicani*, then we should expect to see this reflected in the grave. None of the burial practices outlined above can be attributed exclusively to native practice. Yet many of the grave treatments clearly mirror native rites and it is significant that the level of possible indigenous influence is greater than that perceived at the legionary bases. We have seen that barrows were common to both cultures and that little can be determined about their cultural origins. However, it has also been noted that wooden mortuary enclosures as, for example, at Ruthin (*R2.1*), are likely to owe more to native traditions (see above). The presence of brooches in association with burials at three military sites — Abergavenny (*A3.1b*), Monmouth (*M2*) and Frith (*F1*) — is also of significance. These are not items found in association with burials at the legionary fortresses, but, conversely, are found in ten rural contexts (see Chapter 6 & Map 11). The deposition of brooches in the grave is a practice that has strong native antecedents (Philpott 1993, 167-70; Carr 2001, 112-24), so we may be seeing a greater level of native influence. Conversely, it may be that the destructive nature of the pyre has created a bias towards the auxiliary rather than the legionary forts. However, the inclusion of unburnt grave goods with cremation burials is, in itself, of interest, since this is a tendency noted in rural and native contexts in Roman Wales (see Chapters 5 & 6).

Perhaps the most persuasive sign of native burial traditions comes from their context. We have seen that both inhumation and cremation were evident in pre-conquest Wales but that inhumation was the dominant rite. It may be significant, therefore,

that, apart from the possible inhumation at Pen y Gaer (*P8*), all the definite inhumation burials identified within fort environs come from *vicus* areas. This may suggest the continuation of a native inhumation rite, although it is apparent that in some instances as, for example at Pentre Farm (*P7.a&b*) and Caersws (*C10.4*), Roman grave treatments were adopted.

The cremations in the fort rampart at Loughor (*L1.4; L1.1*) are also pertinent. Such a context echoes the distribution pattern seen on rural and pre-conquest sites in Wales, where the ramparts of settlements were utilized for burial. A female inhumation from Caernarfon (*C1.1*) also demonstrates how closely the contexts chosen for *vici* burials could reflect indigenous practice. This inhumation was placed in the bottom of a re-cut ditch that bounded an abandoned area of the *vicus* (White, R.B. 1985, 55-6).

Burials in or close to enclosure ditches or boundary features were a common feature of rural burial practice in Roman Britain (Collis 1977b, 26-34; Esmonde Cleary 2000, 132-3; Pearce 1999b, 154), and were also an aspect of late Iron Age and post-conquest practice in Wales.<sup>25</sup> The body had been covered with large rounded stones, a form of covering which has been shown to have had a wide geographical distribution with 'little homogeneity of form, date or associated settlement' (Philpott 1991, 63); nevertheless, it is a practice that can be identified in Iron Age Wales (Benson 1990, 196-242). An iron bar, together with a black-burnished-ware jar repaired with lead staples, were placed at the feet of the body.<sup>26</sup> The form of burial and the accompanying grave goods might infer nothing more than a poor but formal interment, but the location — in the *vicus* area and within an enclosure ditch — suggest deliberate placement in an indigenous form. The fact that this area of the *vicus* was no longer in use (Casey, Davies & Evans 1993, 7) does not negate the possible cultural antecedents of the burial or the symbolic importance of the location. The use of abandoned defences or enclosures for burial is attested in both late Iron Age and Romano-British contexts in Wales and may have been a means of reinforcing cultural affiliations or territorial claims. It may also be significant that there is some tentative evidence to suggest that *Segontium* was placed on a former native settlement site (Davies 2000, 15; Casey, Davies & Evans 1993, 27, 30).



## Conclusion

The evidence from the auxiliary forts and other military outposts of Wales shows that, whilst parallels can be drawn with the burial practices carried out at the legionary fortresses under consideration, there were also some variations in practice and alternative forms of memorial. The choice of location was an important part of the burial process, both in terms of cemetery placement and funerary ritual. Although roads were clearly a focus for burial, other factors also appear to have determined burial location. The natural topography of the landscape played a role, as did specific buildings and zones within the environs — connected either to the military or civilian inhabitants of the fort or *vicus*. These various locations may have been used to show and confer status, because they held strong religious or symbolic meaning, or as a means of demonstrating and affirming military or civilian identity or affiliation.

Many of the burial practices carried out, for example, urned cremation, the presence of flagons in the grave and a roadside location, show clear Roman antecedents (Philpott 1991, 30; Toynbee 1971, 73-4). It may be argued, however, that, although the extent cannot be quantified, native tradition also contributed to the development of burial practice within military milieux, most notably in the contexts chosen for burial, which include fort ramparts and boundaries. Native influence may also have contributed to what appears to have been the rejection of tombstones for other forms of monumentality such as barrows and wooden mortuary enclosures. This is contrary to the current view that visible forms of burial practice within the frontier zones were predominantly intrusive (Philpott 1991, 225-6; Arnold & Davies 2000). A reassessment of the burial evidence, in light of what is now known of mortuary rituals, has also shown that pyres and pyre-related activity were carried out in close spatial association to the burials themselves. This is in line with what is now known from other areas of Roman Britain and with the evidence from the legionary fortresses examined in this study (McKinley 2000a, 38-9). Grave goods were not numerous but were certainly more varied and extensive than previously believed (Philpott 199, 40-1). It has also been noted that, while there is evidence for the burial of civilians within *vici*, on present evidence it is not possible to determine whether there were separate cemetery areas which were exclusive to soldier or civilian.

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<sup>1</sup> A small number of other forts (Bryn y Gefeiliau, Llandovery and Gelligaer) have also produced evidence of activity in the late third and early fourth centuries, but this was limited and may not have been of a military nature (Arnold & Davies 2000, 29).

<sup>2</sup> An extant vessel, a pedestalled urn, is in Carmarthen Museum (Acc. No. A754694). Unfortunately the skeletal material is lost, and it is unclear whether human bones were ever part of the skeletal assemblage. Bones that remained in 1917 were identified as those of a 'small animal' (RCHAMW Carmarthen 1917, 31). However, original photographs (CASFC illustrated catalogue - Carmarthen museum) of the skeletal material show that some of the remains were that of a sheep or goat (pers. comm., James Latham). This possible burial is of particular interest as it is reported to have been found within a niche of a wall in the bathhouse (Evans, G.E. 1908, 58-9). This description is suggestive of a *columbarium* and it is possible that the 'burial' was not within the bathhouse itself but within a mortuary structure close by.

<sup>3</sup> The law that soldiers under the rank of centurion were not permitted to marry is believed to have been revoked by Septimus Severus *c.* AD 197. There is some doubt, however, as to whether this concession did allow soldiers to officially marry, or just to cohabit with their partners (Maxfield 2002, 152). For a

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full discussion on the complex nature of the laws governing soldiers and their dependants see Dixon 1992, 55.

<sup>4</sup> Because these vessels have often been found in association with children's burials (or with miniature vessels which suggest a child's grave assemblage) they are generally assumed to be a feeding cups for small children (Crummy, Crummy & Crossan 1993, 273; Philpott 1991, 36). Other credible alternatives include their use as invalid cups or lamp fillers (Eckardt 1999, 70; Webster 1981, 249-255). The last interpretation has a great deal of merit, as lamps were common inclusions in Roman graves.

<sup>5</sup> A survey of 1803 recorded 'a monumental stone, bearing an inscription in bad Latin, probably over some Romanised Briton, lies here under a hedge' (reproduced in Randall 1950, 22).

<sup>6</sup> Based on comparative formulae and epigraphic practice evident in Rome and its provinces in late antiquity, Handley (2001) has recently argued that the earliest series of Britain's early medieval inscribed stones can be pushed back to the late fourth century. If so, this has important implications for Wales. In a military context an inscribed stone from Tomen y Mur, Gwyendd, which bears the common Roman funerary formula *Dis Manibus* is of particular interest here (Westwood 1876-9, 156-7). However, some aspects of this stone's lettering are more characteristic of a post-Roman date (Handley 2001, 183, note 44; Nash-Williams 1950b, 171, No. 285).

<sup>7</sup> The distribution of funerary inscriptions apropos settlement types in Roman Britain is discussed in detail by Mann 1985 and, more recently, by Handley 2001.

<sup>8</sup> These figures are based on those from *RIB* alone. Building stones are known from Gelligaer *RIB* 400, Tretower *RIB* 401-2, Dolauchothi *RIB* 406, Llanio *RIB* 407, 409-411, Castell Collen *RIB* 415-17. Tomen y Mur *RIB* 420-28 and Holt *RIB* 439-41. The function of two further inscribed stone fragments from Caernarfon *RIB* 433 & 434 is unknown.

<sup>9</sup> Commemorative or dedicatory inscriptions on stone come from Gelligaer *RIB* 397-399; Llanio *RIB* 408; Carmarthen *RIB* 412, Castell Collen *RIB* 412, Caer Gai *RIB* 418, Tomen y Mur *RIB* 419 and Caernarfon *RIB* 430 and *RIB*, 432. Inscribed stone altars are known from Caernarfon *RIB* 435 and 429, Holt *RIB* 442 and possibly Carmarthen *RIB* 413.

<sup>10</sup> Although tombstones became more common in Chester from the second century, at least four stones attest to first century use by the *II Adiutrix Pia Fidelis* who held the legionary base *c. AD 75 - c. AD 86* — *RIB* 476, 479, 481 (de la Bédoyère 1999).

<sup>11</sup> The following data is taken from *RIB* and de la Bédoyère (1999).

Tombstone inscriptions relating to the *ala* (cavalry): *RIB* 1172, 1064, 266, 108, 1433, 594, 595, 109, 201, 159, 403, 405. *Cohors* (infantry or mixed infantry and cavalry): *RIB* 205, 1482 (daughter of a tribune), 619, 620 (veteran), 1249, 2172 (prefect), 2213 (centurion), 2142, 804, 121 (cavalry), 291 (cavalry), *JRS* Ivii (1967) No. 4 204-5.

<sup>12</sup> The ambiguity surrounding this term was brought to the writer's attention by Julie Reynolds (NMGW). (cf. *RIB* 204, 369, 864).

<sup>13</sup> This is the same field which yielded the small, wooden head, postulated to be a knife handle (Boon 1978, 619-24). If this area was a cemetery, then there is the possibility that the head was originally placed in a grave. However, the present evidence suggests that the date of the head (*c. AD 200*) post-dates the fort's occupation by around 40 years (Jarrett & Nash-Williams 1969, 98).

<sup>14</sup> Field walking and the examination of aerial photographs by the author failed to identify any definite evidence for Roman barrows. However, the principal reason that Thomas Price (1814) surveyed the archaeological remains on Llandrindod Common was to record archaeology under threat from peat cutting. It is probable, therefore, that any barrows in the vicinity of the practice camps have been destroyed. While Price's map (reproduced in *Archaeologia* 1814, 172) has proved fairly accurate with regard to the location and size of the practice camps on the common itself (Daniel & Jones 1969, Birley 1936), it loses its scale outside this area. Five additional barrows marked to the east of the camps, and shown to be within close proximity, are, in fact, positioned high on a hillside over a mile distant (SO075590). Their summit position and large proportions suggest they are more likely to be of prehistoric date. A further record (SMR: CPAT 5636), which suggests a line of four barrows flanked the Roman road traversing the common, could not be substantiated.

<sup>15</sup> An inscription at Caer Gai (*RIB* 418) attests to the presence of the unit *cohors I Nerviorum*, recruited from *Gallia Belgica* (Jarrett & Nash-Williams 1969, 18; Birley 1936, 15). This is significant as there was a strong barrow building tradition in Gaul (Wigg 1993). No definite Roman barrows are attested at Caer Gai, although it is one of the forts where place-name evidence hints at their presence.

<sup>16</sup> For illustration of type see Evans & Maynard 1997, 235, fig. 155.

<sup>17</sup> Complete unburnt Samian vessels are presumed at Pen-y-Gaer since Colt Hoare tells us they were recycled (*c.1803*) by the poor to hold their milk in (Thompson, M.W. 1983, 238).

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<sup>18</sup> The base of the largest dish was stamped IVLLIN but, unfortunately, cannot be closely dated. The possible date of manufacture ranges from the late first to the latter part of the second century (Philpott 1991, 11, n. 2).

<sup>19</sup> Boon (1972, 108) suggested that the tessellated pavement reported to have been found in the cemetery at Pilbach, Lodge Hill, Caerleon (*CAER.1*) is also likely to have belonged to a tomb. For Italian examples see Toynbee (1971, 132-43), although these are of second- and third-century date.

<sup>20</sup> The reuse of sculptured or inscribed stones is well attested during the Roman period, both for funerary and construction purposes. The most notable example of the reuse of tombstones for construction purposes comes from Chester (Mason 2001, 202) but examples of secondary use for funerary purposes come from Caerleon (*RIB* 379) and Chester (*RIB* 509, Philpott 1991, 11, n.3). It is also likely that the subject matter of the monument influenced its reuse for funerary purposes. A figurine of Hercules was placed in the 'Child's Grave' at Colchester. In this instance it was suggested that his perceived immortal attributes made him a particularly apt companion (Eckardt 1999, 65).

<sup>21</sup> See Gaizsch and Werner's (1993) reconstructions, especially figures 9 & 6.

<sup>22</sup> But see Chapter 5, note 18.

<sup>23</sup> The tomb at Infirmary Field was constructed of rubble and dressed sandstone blocks and measured (1.9m long x 0.60m wide and 0.91m high). At both Pen y Gaer and Infirmary Field mortar was used in the construction (Newstead 1914, 125-7 and Plate XXX, Fig. 1).

<sup>24</sup> For a detailed discussion on the economy of Wales during the Roman period and the stimulus provided by the Roman army see Davies, J.L. 1984. But two examples, from north and south Wales respectively, suffice to demonstrate the early distribution of Roman products into rural areas from probable *vici* markets. Samian ware of late first- to early-second century date at Cefn Graeanog, Gwynedd, a small unenclosed farmstead, is likely to have been supplied from Segontium, 10 miles to the south (Fasham *et al.* 1998). Similarly, the increase in the range of pottery immediately post conquest at Whitton, Glamorgan, a late Iron Age and Romano-British farmstead, was probably derived from a newly founded military market - possibly just outside the auxiliary fort at Cardiff (Jarrett & Wrathmell 1981, 250).

<sup>25</sup> See Table 1 for Iron Age examples. Roman examples include Nash, Newport (*N2*), Biglis, Vale of Glamorgan (*B1.1a*) and Caldicot, Monmouthshire (*C7*).

<sup>26</sup> The iron bar (110mm long, 15mm thick and 25mm wide) was perforated with five equally spaced holes. Similar objects have been found at Caersws and are interpreted as reinforcement strips for wooden objects (Britnell, J. 1989, fig.36, no. 29). See Stead & Rigby (1989, 352, fig. 147, n.3) for further comparisons.

## CHAPTER 5: BURIALS ASSOCIATED WITH THE *CIVITAS* CAPITALS AND 'SMALL TOWNS' OF WALES

The small degree of urbanisation that took place within Roman Wales was limited to the fertile lands of south Wales and the eastern peripheries of the Welsh frontier zone. These were lowland areas with rich agricultural resources, capable of supporting a higher population and able to take advantage of the Roman road network and potential military market, which was at its most concentrated and long-standing in these areas. In south Wales, in addition to the *canabae* that grew up around Caerleon, the *civitas* capital of the Silures was established at Caerwent (*Venta Silurum*) and what is presumed to have been that of the Demetae at Carmarthen (*Moridunum*) (Arnold & Davies 2000, 45; James, H. 2003). The urban centres which served mid and north Wales were to be found along its borders: at Wroxeter, the *civitas* capital of the Cornovii, at the 'small town' of Kenchester (Burnham & Wachter 1990, 70-6) and at the *canabae* associated with the legionary fortress at Chester.

A handful of smaller sites are also attested in Wales, mainly in the south east, which, for the most part, evolved from military beginnings but appear to have continued to develop as predominately civilian settlements after military withdrawal. These settlements, classified as 'roadside settlements' or 'small towns', lacked the formal civic planning and amenities found at the *civitas* capitals and *coloniae* of Roman Britain. Nevertheless, their respective archaeology shows a range and extent of industrial activity, and architectural forms and development, beyond that expected from sites of a purely agricultural nature (Arnold & Davies 2000, 62-4; Burnham & Wachter 1990 15-32; Marvell & Maynard 1998, 246-67; Manning 1989, 180-1; Parkhouse & Evans 1996, 233-40).

This chapter is concerned with the type of burial practices carried out in association with the towns and 'small towns' of Wales. However, outside the *canabae* and *vici* the burial evidence from urban areas is of a limited nature. This is in marked contrast to the extensive extra-mural cemeteries associated with, for example, the *civitas* capitals of *Verulamium* (Stead & Rigby 1989; Niblett 2000), Dorchester (Farwell & Molleson 1993), Chichester (Down & Rule 1971), Cirencester (McWhirr et al.1982) or Winchester (Clarke 1979). As discussed below, there are hints that the extra-mural cemetery outside the east gate at Caerwent may have had late Roman origins but, to date, there is no conclusive evidence, and there is certainly no evidence of extensive cemeteries in the early Roman period. This apparent disparity may

simply be because cemeteries remain undiscovered. Wales has not seen the modern urban development that has led to the discovery of Roman burial grounds in other areas of Britain. In the absence of inorganic grave goods or enclosure, burials may also go undetected, especially as the acid soils of Wales destroy bone. The size of the town's population also has to be borne in mind: Caerwent and Carmarthen, at least during the early stages of development, were both considerably smaller than the majority of aforementioned towns outside Wales (Wacher 1995, 392, 397; Arnold & Davies 2000, 46-51). It should also be noted that, as the majority of recorded cremation burials lay under later domestic structures, there is no way of gauging the original extent of Caerwent's early cemetery.

But in our search for sizeable cemeteries there is also another important factor which deserves consideration. At Caerwent a considerable amount of fragmented human skeletal material came from Roman contexts within the intramural area — a phenomenon strongly reminiscent of Iron Age mortuary practice.<sup>1</sup> There is growing recognition that Iron Age ritual behaviour, including that incorporating human bone, continued into the post-conquest period (Wait 1985; Fulford 2001, 199-218; Clarke, S. 2000, 22-9; Clarke, S. 1997, 73-81), as did elements of the more readily identifiable or 'normative' pre-conquest mortuary practices (Black 1986, 201-39; Philpott 1991, 222). Using Caerwent as a case study, this chapter aims to show that, as in rural areas of Wales, Iron Age mortuary practices appear to have continued into the Roman period at native townships, in tandem with intrusive Roman rites. If the practices discerned at Caerwent were typical of native 'urban' practice in Wales, then it shows a diverse range of mortuary rituals were being carried out. This being the case, it could be argued that, if only a proportion of a town's population embraced Roman burial practices, this would have reduced the size of any formal and characteristically Roman cemetery in the early Roman period.

The aims of this chapter are to analyse the extent and forms of burial practice at Caerwent and Carmarthen and at those 'small towns' that have produced burial evidence after their shift or surmised transition from military to civilian status. This distinction is made in order to measure the possible extent of 'native' influence at these sites. The difficulties of site classification have been outlined above (Chapter 4), but of those settlements which have been classified as probably falling into the 'small town' category (Arnold & Davies 2000, 45-64), only Cowbridge, Usk and possibly Abergavenny and Ruthin, have burial evidence from post- or probable post-military contexts. Although comparisons will be drawn with the three last sites, as they have already received detailed attention (see Chapters 3 & 4), this chapter will

concentrate on the evidence from Cowbridge. The remaining sites where later non-military settlement is suspected — Chepstow, Frith, Monmouth and Cardiff — are not discussed here. Only the first three sites have produced burial evidence and since this is likely to have been associated with early military phases they have been considered in the previous chapter.

## CAERWENT

The *civitas* capital of the Silures at Caerwent (Newport) developed from a small roadside settlement on the main route to Caerleon, 10km to the west. It appears to have been established fairly quickly after the Roman conquest in the Flavian period and to have been granted *civitas* status by Hadrianic times (Brewer 1993, 10-11; Wachter 1995, 378-91). It was until fairly recently mooted that an early fort lay within close proximity (Wacher 1995, 379), but a recent review of the evidence suggests that the town grew from a small civilian settlement, perhaps initially with commercial links to the military (Webster 2003, 214-20).

The first excavations took place in the mid-nineteenth century (Morgan, O. 1856, 418-37). These were of a piecemeal nature and it was not until the turn of the century that a series of large scale excavations started to take place which, by their fruition in 1913, had uncovered three quarters of the Roman town.<sup>2</sup> The early wall-chasing techniques of the Edwardian antiquarians left much to be desired in modern archaeological terms, but attempts were made to record some stratigraphic relationships. It is largely from these early reports, supplemented by information gleaned from museum collections and archives, that the burial evidence from the early Roman period is derived. Excavations since the early twentieth century have been on a smaller scale and concentrated on several structures within the defences and on the town walls (Nash-Williams 1930, 229-88; Brewer 1993; Wachter 1995, 378-391). Part of an early medieval extra-mural cemetery outside the east gate was excavated in 1973 (Campbell & Macdonald 1993, 74-98).

Although it is recognised that Romano-British burials have been found at Caerwent (Brewer 1993, 24; Arnold & Davies 2000, 136; Todd 1977, 323, n.18; Toller 1977, 43), no attempt has hitherto been made to examine the burial evidence in detail. Similarly, in terms of fragmented skeletal material, although attention has been paid to the votive wells of Caerwent (Ross 1968; Wait 1985), some of which contain human remains, important comparable evidence from the later Edwardian excavations has been overlooked.

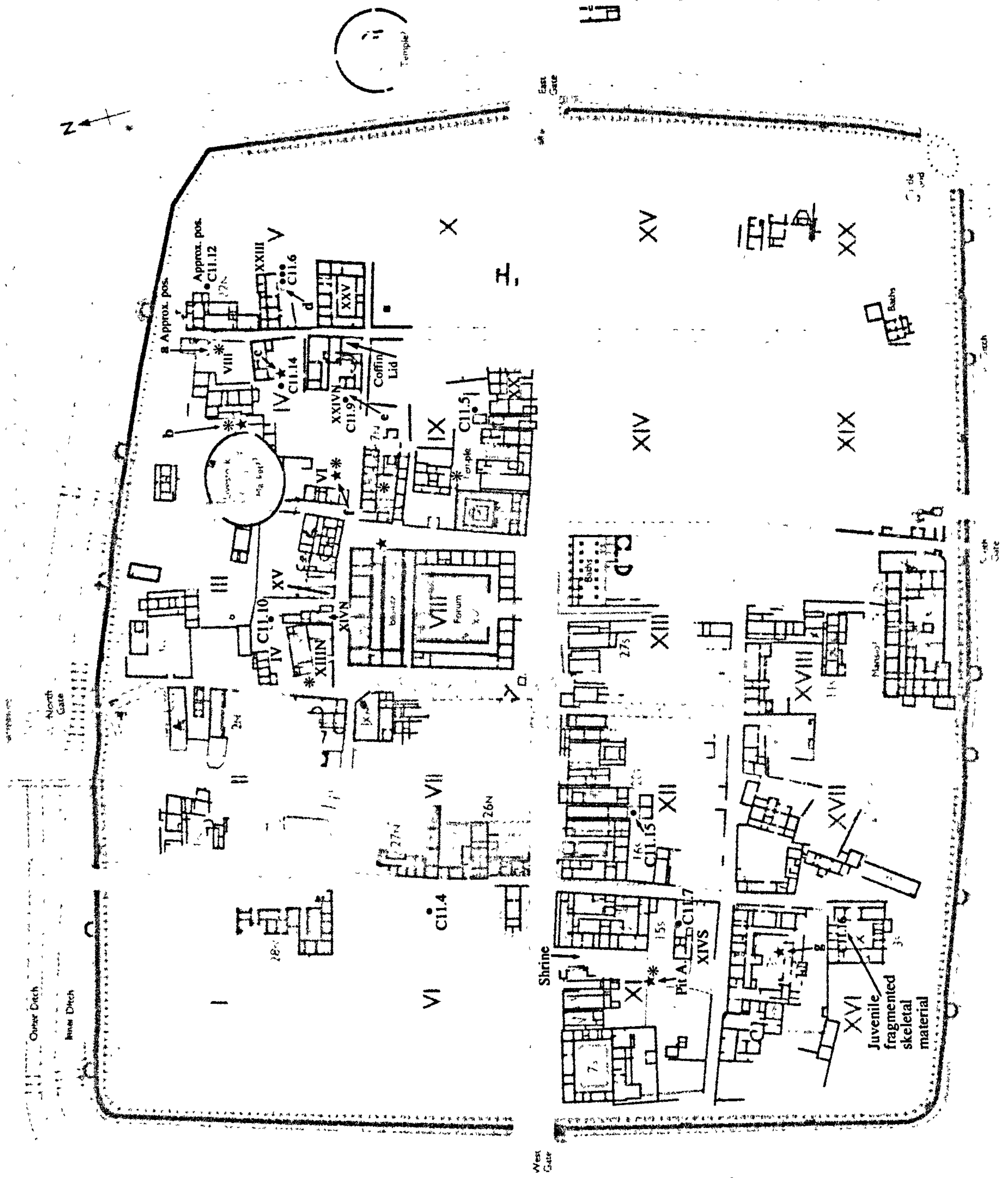
### The early 'intramural' cemetery in the north-east quadrant of the town

At least a dozen urned cremation burials (*C11.1, C11.4-7; C11.9; C11.10, C11.12-15*) were discovered during the early excavations of the town. From the extant vessels, associated finds and documentary evidence, it is evident that the majority of these burials date from the late first and second centuries AD.<sup>3</sup> They date to a time when the settlement was in the early stages of development and, most likely, before it was enclosed by its first defences of ditch and earthen rampart in the mid to late second century (Manning 2003, 182). Most of the burials come from the northern half of the town and predominantly from the north-eastern *insulae* (Fig. 5.1), preceding the prestigious houses in these areas which coin and other evidence suggest were built in the third and fourth centuries (Ashby *et al.* 1911, 404-48; Brewer 1993, 37-9).

The positions of the burials in the north-east quadrant of the town suggest the focus of a cemetery in this area may have been the street running north - south which divided *insulae* IV, V, IX and X (Ashby *et al.* 1911, 405). There is no means of knowing how extensive any early cemetery was in this area. However, the contemporary date of some of the objects discovered in close proximity to burials, and their known use in funerary contexts elsewhere, coupled with the discovery of a coffin lid, suggests that the cemetery contained more than the handful of recorded urned cremations. For example, the slab floor of Room 14, House VIIIN, sealed a coin of Constantius II (AD 337-61), providing an apparent *terminus post quem* for the southern block of the courtyard house. At just over 1m below the coin, which was immediately under the flooring, samian pottery was found, and at just under 2m a worn coin of Vespasian (AD 69-79), three bow shaped *fibulae* and a bronze ring all dated to the second century (Ashby *et al.* 1911, 410). Fragments of a samian bowl (Drag. 37) were discovered at a depth of 4.41m. If the stratigraphy was not disturbed in antiquity, or ill-recorded by the Edwardian excavators, we have a relative, chronological sequence for this part of the site and it is probable that the lower items referred to above (i.e. brooches, coin and samian), well-known in funerary contexts, represent grave goods. A cremation burial in a coarseware jar (*C11.14*) was found outside the southern wall of the house, within 15m of the above discoveries.

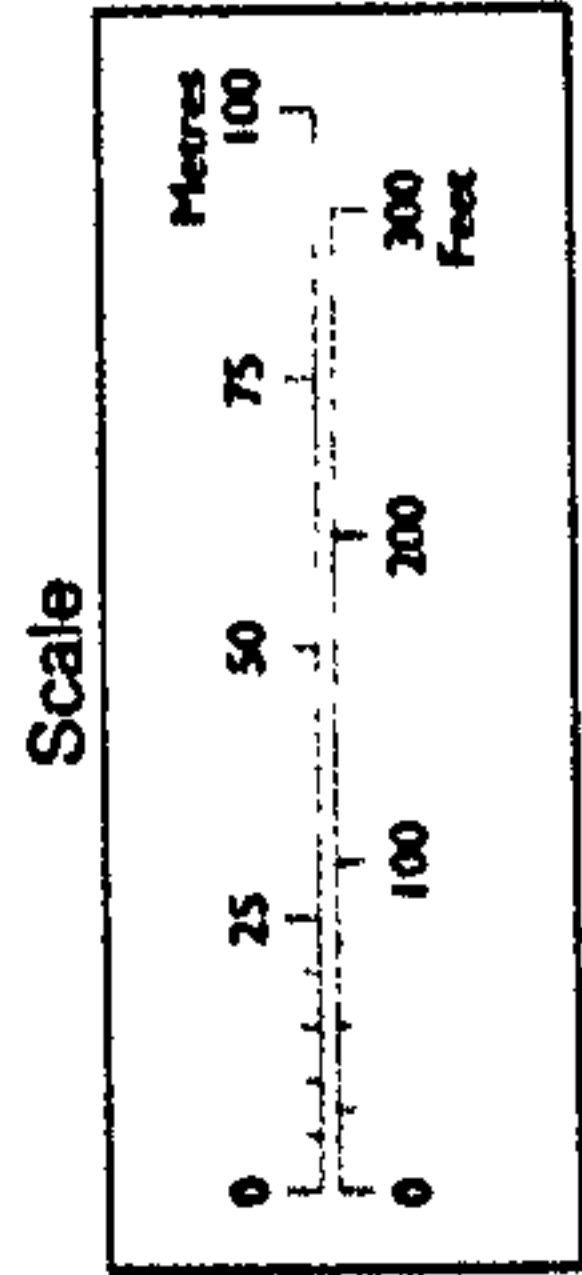
Evidence from House XXIIN also suggests that some of the features and finds uncovered were of an earlier funerary nature. Three coarseware jars (*C11.6*) were found 0.76m outside





Key:

- Burial
- ★ Fragmented Skeletal Material in votive contexts
- \* Votive Wells / Pits identified by Ross 1968



CAERWENT ROMAN TOWN GROUND PLAN (After Brewer 1993)  
Burial & skeletal material distribution: annotation by K. J. Pollock 2003

Fig. 5.1

the south wall of Room 10. Two jars contained cremated human bone, including the central and largest vessel. The pots were approximately 62cm apart and were covered with rough pieces of sandstone. A coin of Domitian was found in apparent association (Ashby *et al.* 1911, 414). Within Room 10 itself, a pit below the flooring contained coarseware pottery and a plain bow fibula. This pit was within 3m of the above cremations and its context and contents suggest that it may have been associated with the earlier cemetery. The floor within the room sealed coins of late third and early fourth century date. The structural phases in this particular area of the house perplexed the excavators: a wall, running from the south-west angle of Room 10 into the courtyard appeared to be 'earlier in date than the house' and had no apparent function (Ashby *et al.* 1911, 414-15, Pl. LVII). However, the alignment of this wall, which encloses the probable cremation pit under Room 10 and is also 2.48m south of cremation group (*CII.6*), suggests it is best viewed as part of an earlier cemetery boundary.

Taken together, the evidence from the north-east corner of the town indicates that, not only was the cemetery more extensive than the six urned cremation burials imply, but grave goods also accompanied the dead.<sup>4</sup> It also has to be remembered that there is little likelihood that cremations not enclosed in pottery vessels, or that were deposited in organic containers which leave little archaeological trace, would have been identified by the early excavators.

'Unenclosed' cremations were common at the military sites in Wales (e.g. Abbeyfield, Caerleon, *CAER.2*) and are also known in rural (e.g. Welshpool, *W2.1a*; Pentwyn Triley, *P17*) and pre-conquest contexts (Table 1), which makes it likely that urban burial practice would follow suit.

### **Intramural inhumation in the north-east quadrant of the town**

One of the most significant pieces of funerary evidence from Caerwent comes in the form of a decorated lead coffin lid found in the north-east corner of the town and therefore within the above 'main cemetery' area. This coffin lid is important for two reasons. First, if this find genuinely signifies a burial in the area, it raises interesting questions regarding the length of time the burial ground remained in use. The date of the coffin lid is listed as second or third century AD (Newport Mus. Acc. No. NPTMG: 86.2). Presumably, as there was no firm contextual dating evidence, this is based both on the bead-and-reel design, which was a relatively early form of decoration (Toynbee 1964, 344-57; Toller 1977), and the comparable date of other local examples. It can fairly confidently be argued that, judging by evidence from Wales and the border, the use of lead coffins at Caerwent is unlikely before the Antonine

period (see Table 3). If the coffin was of second-century date we may be looking at a period of deposition that is broadly contemporary with a proportion of the later cremation burials and before the town had defences. On the other hand, if the coffin lid is of third-century date, and statistically (Taylor A. 1993, 209) this would appear more likely, although Wales may have seen particularly early usage,<sup>5</sup> then the burial would have taken place after the town was enclosed. If this was the case, then it would be atypical for, although infants were often deposited within town defences, the coffin lid size implies an adult burial. However, it is possible that no immediate cessation of the cemetery took place just because the settlement gained a ditched defensive system. The town is thought to have been little more than a linear settlement until the late second or early third century when the street grid was laid out in its final form. Thus space may not have been rigidly defined in terms of inside or outside the town until the town fully developed, or until the construction of stone defences, believed to have taken place in the late third century (Brewer 1993, 14; Manning 2003, 182). If, therefore, as we have seen, even in military contexts, burials could take place within defences in certain circumstances, we also have to acknowledge this possibility in an urban and principally native milieu.

The second significant aspect of the coffin lid is its provenance and its possible Christian symbols in a town where there is a strong likelihood that there was an early Christian community (Boon 1962, 338-44; Boon 1992, 11-24; Thomas 1981, 123). It was reported to have been discovered to the east side of House XXIVN. No mention was made of any skeletal material found in association. This may be down to non-preservation of bone, but the possibility that the coffin was brought into the town as loot, as postulated for the coffin found at Cefn Onn (*C15*) (Threipland 1953, 72-5), has to be borne in mind. It is also possible that the coffin was reused for secondary burial in the post-Roman period, when Caerwent became a focus for early medieval burials, although none are known from this area of the town. Despite the site notebook being difficult to decipher, some observations can be made which point to the coffin lid being found in its original context:

'From the east side of House XXIV, 2ft down, 2 pieces of lead - one a large block, [word here might read 'smelted'], the other bit of rolled lead, crushed also about 3ft down some black pottery - here is a large pot in situ [might read 'against'] wall, [here, the find of a bone needle is recorded in the margin] bottom 3' 4" below grass, about 3ft from angle of cross wall. In angle lying lengthwise N-S smooth side up about 1' 6" down another large sheet of lead 2' 3" x 1' 3", one side has marks in relief: 3ft down a bit fig. Samian'.<sup>6</sup>

The last piece of lead represents the coffin lid. It is not clear how closely the first two pieces were associated with the lid but it is possible that they originally formed part of the coffin and that the burial was disturbed. It is also pertinent that pottery and a bone needle were found in close proximity to the lid, suggesting these objects represented grave goods. Moreover, it may also be significant that the coffin lid was orientated north-south, a common alignment for a Roman grave. The find spot itself, close to the Roman road, a favoured burial location, and within a known cemetery area, also strongly suggests that the coffin lid had been discovered in its original context. Unfortunately, there is no clear dating evidence for the time of deposition. None of the pottery found close to the coffin lid can be traced and the fragment of samian ware, which, if associated, would suggest burial no later than the early third century (Tyers 1996, 105-13), may have been residual.

The coffin is decorated with two square panels of lines and circles. In each panel a circle is positioned on the centre of a diagonal cross of small bead-and-reel design (Plate III) commonly referred to as a 'saltire' or 'St. Andrew's cross' (Toynbee 1964, 345-57; Toller 1977, 19; Watts 1991, 159; Watts 1993, 192). Although the saltire was a common decorative motif (Toynbee 1971, 276)<sup>7</sup> it is thought by Watts to have been a recognised Christian symbol by at least the fourth and fifth century. She argues that, although it is found in pagan contexts, when combined with other known Christian motifs 'it is very difficult to believe that it was not intended to be a representation of the cross' (Watts, 1991, 159). At Caerwent the saltire in each panel is overlaid by a circle, a symbol Watts also believes may have been considered an appropriate Christian motif. Contrary to Toller (1977, 19), who argues that the circle was not used as a Christian symbol until the 7th century, Watts (1991, 165) suggests that the circle had strong Christian connotations and was used in conjunction with other Christian symbols from the late Roman period. According to Watts the circle may have symbolised a wreath of triumph, representing Christ's resurrection, and should, therefore, be considered a possible Christian symbol in its own right. If, however, the coffin lid from Caerwent is of second or third century date, the use of the saltire and circle as Christian symbols would represent an extremely early example of such usage; perhaps not inconceivable, though, in an area of south Wales where Christianity is suspected from the third century (Boon 1992, 12; 1987, 67; Arnold & Davies 2000, 132).

The Roman penchant for ornamenting funerary furniture, or, indeed, artworks in general, with an eclectic mix of religious and mythical symbols, makes the assignation of an object to any one religion manifoldly difficult. Even when the symbolism is not ambiguous it is far from certain whether fashion or religious belief dictated manufacture or use (de la Bédoyère, 1993, 59). However, the collective evidence from a site can increase the possible weighting in favour of a Christian presence. Hence, two coffins from Colchester, ornamented with saltires and circles (amongst other motifs), from a cemetery displaying characteristics that are known in Christian contexts and from where a late Roman church is suspected, provide strong indicators of a Christian element in late Roman Colchester society (Watts 1993, 192-8).<sup>8</sup>

If the coffin from Caerwent was in its original position, it appears to have been orientated north-south and may have had associated grave goods. Both of these attributes are associated with pagan graves, yet do not necessarily preclude Christian practice. The development of Roman burial practices in Britain and other provinces is now recognised to have been fairly uniform, and it is generally acknowledged that there was little to distinguish Christian graves from pagan. Thus, although the collective evidence from a cemetery may hint at Christianity (Watts 1993; 192-8; Farwell & Molleson 1993), a grave cannot be interpreted as Christian or pagan on orientation and lack of grave goods alone (Morris, R. 1983, 17; Watts 1993, 193; Rahtz 1977, 54; Thomas, A.C. 1981, 231-4; Philpott 1991, 239-40). However, while there is nothing inherently Christian about the decoration on the coffin lid from Caerwent (Toller 1977; Toynbee 1964, 345-357), the close proximity of this find to Caerwent's possible house churches increases the possibility of a Christian association and makes this discovery of some importance. It was therefore felt pertinent to explore this spatial relationship in more depth in the following section.

#### **An early church or temple-mausoleum in proximity to the 'intramural' cemetery?**

The discovery of a pewter bowl with a Christian monogram from a fourth century context within House VIIN, *insula* IX, and the inferential evidence proposed by Boon (1976, 163-75) strongly suggests that Christianity was practised in late Roman Caerwent and increases the likelihood that a church existed somewhere in the town. Several attempts have been made to identify a house church and it is interesting that two of these postulated churches come from the north-eastern quarter of the town — the area of the earlier cemetery. Boon dismissed earlier suggestions (Nash-Williams 1930, 235-6) that the re-structured bathhouse south of the forum represented a late Roman church, due to its apparent later date (Boon 1976, 175, n.28;

Thomas 1981, 167-8). Instead he suggested that House XXIIN within the former cemetery area, and approximately 44m north east of where the coffin lid was discovered, was a more likely candidate (Boon 1992, 18-21).

The Edwardian excavators suggested that House XXIVN, the site where the coffin lid was found, also exhibited features that could be interpreted as a church (Fig.5.2). This building 'consisted of a series of buildings of different dates and peculiar plans, not corresponding to those of any ordinary Roman domestic building' (Ashby *et al.* 1911, 415). The earliest building consisted of a simple plan of three Rooms (6, 7 & 9). Room 9 contained an apse on the east side. The apse was originally complete but later incorporated a doorway. The second building constructed on this site was of 'entirely different plan' and consisted of rooms 4, 5, 10, 11 and an open yard (12). Room 4 had an apse at its western end with small pilasters on each side and a wide opening into a further room (Room 5). It was tentatively suggested that these two rooms constituted a small church (Ashby *et al.* 1911, 416).

Three further rooms (1, 2 & 3) were added at a later stage, and although some of the rooms from building two were probably preserved, the room with the apse (Room 4) was destroyed. The earliest phases of House XXIVN were little understood and it was remarked 'this early building, of which unfortunately very little is left, was certainly not an ordinary Roman house, and must have been a public building of some sort' (Ashby *et al.* 1911, 416 n. 2). It was postulated that the earliest building might have been an early basilica, which was destroyed once the later basilica was built to the west.

These three different building phases attest to a complex site history, with no firm dating evidence apparent for the two earliest phases. A coin hoard found in the third and final building phase dates from the late fourth to early fifth century. This is in keeping with three out of the four other houses in these two north-eastern *insulae* (*insulae* IV & V) dated by coin evidence to the fourth century. No firm dating evidence exists for House XXVN, the remaining house in *insulae* V, which appears to have been disturbed in antiquity (Ashby *et al.* 1911, 405-19). If the latest phase of House XXIVN dates to the fourth century it is possible, but unlikely, that both preceding phases were also of fourth-century date. If, on the other hand, as seems more probable, we assume that buildings one and two belonged to earlier centuries, it would be unwise to push either back too far. This is because it is unclear to which of these two building phases a colourful mosaic in room 10, over the apse of building

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one, belonged (Ashby *et al.* 1911, 416). Mosaics are known from the first century, but in an urban context the majority date from the second half of the second century (Laing, 1997, 130-2). The majority of the dated mosaics from Caerwent are of the fourth century; however, this date correlates with the building of prestigious houses in the *civitas* (Brewer 1993, 22).

If the first phase of building on the site of House XXIVN could be proved to be contemporary with the cemetery, then the most logical explanation would be that it was a mausoleum: the coffin lid was found to the east of the building and a cremation burial was discovered within 2m of its western side (*CII.9*) (Ashby *et al.* 1911, 417). However, most Romano-British examples of mausolea or temple-mausolea appear to have been of rectangular shape and generally of smaller dimensions (Black 1986, 205-10; Farwell & Molleson 1993, 17). The building at Caerwent measured 15m x 7.5m externally and was orientated east-west (the apse to the east). The simple apsidal shape could be interpreted in several different ways. A comparison can be found with a second-century temple at Corbridge (Collingwood 1930, 137-41; Johnston 1989, 95). It is also reminiscent of the fourth-century 'church' at Butt Road, Colchester, which Millett (1995b, 453) prefers to see as a funerary banqueting hall. Other early 'churches' also provide ready comparisons (e.g. Silchester, see Petts 2003, 57-9), but it is generally accepted that the function of a building cannot be determined from form, size or orientation alone (Thomas, A.C. 1981, 190; Watts 1991, 101, Watts 1993, 199-200).

If the first building on the site of House XXIVN was a temple it might explain the choice of the site, or indeed this quarter of the town, for the postulated later Christian church(es), as pagan religious sites were often utilised for subsequent Christian use (Watts 1991, 99-132). It may be significant here that a well (e) to the western side of the house, close to the cremation burial, contained a small bathstone column, a large quantity of animal bones including the fragments of antlers, some pieces of sandals and numerous fragments of hazel twigs (Ashby *et al.* 1911, 417). Such a combination of objects has been argued to be of religious and/or ritual significance and has been commonly found in votive contexts.<sup>9</sup> Unfortunately, evidence of any distinct pattern of deposition within the well, the most convincing indication of votive behaviour (Wait 1985, 54) was, in this instance, lacking. The use of wells and shafts for votive offerings is widely attested in Iron Age and Roman Britain and a number of examples of structured deposits from shafts, pits and wells in Caerwent have been convincingly interpreted as ritual depositions (Ross 1968, 262-3; Wait, 1985, 324-5). There is, therefore, a possibility that this well too would have been the focus for ritual activity, especially in a



cemetery context where chthonian and liminal concerns would be to the fore. Unfortunately, in this instance, it is not possible to determine whether the burials and well were contemporary. There is, however, a close correlation between burials (or fragmented human skeletal material) and wells/shafts in at least six other instances in Caerwent (see below), which suggests the two were ritually intertwined.

Perhaps the most intriguing piece of evidence from House XXIVN comes from a pit in the south-west corner of room 3. This pit (6.45m deep) was filled with debris and contained coins of the late first and fourth century (two worn coins of Domitian and a coin of Licinius AD 308-324). The stratigraphy of the upper layers of the pit appears to have been disturbed, as the later coin was found beneath the two earlier ones. But within the bottom metre of the fill were several perfect pottery vessels and a small sandstone altar, 'which had been much burnt' (Ashby *et al.* 1911, 417). These last items may have been discarded objects which were disposed of as rubbish in a convenient pit. However, they are also redolent of a ritual deposit; the complete vessels certainly indicate a careful and deliberate deposition. It has been suggested that in a votive context 'vessels or containers carry implications of plenty' (Clarke 1997, 75), which might suggest they were placed in the pit as foundation burials to effect prosperity. If this was the case, they are likely to have been deposited during an early construction phase. However, in view of the probable Christian presence in Caerwent, and the suggestion of an early church, either on this site or in close proximity, there is an alternative interpretation. It is hard to dismiss the possibility that at some stage in the site's history this assemblage consisting of a burnt altar and pottery represented the 'purging or destruction of pagan' evidence — a phenomenon well attested at sites converted for Christian use (Watts 1991, 105-7).

So how does the presence of the coffin fit in with the above scenarios? If the coffin is of mid second-century date, it is almost certainly too early to have been associated with Christian use and can readily be seen as a late deposition in the cemetery, probably deposited before the construction of any of the buildings outlined above. Similarly, if the coffin is of late second-century date, it may well have been contemporary with the first building on the site, which, if both burial and building were pagan, presents no problem — whether the building functioned as funerary banqueting hall, mausoleum or temple.<sup>10</sup> However, if the coffin lid represents a third-century Christian burial, and is contemporary with the first structure, it is unlikely to have been deposited close to a pagan temple, and the first building is best seen as a

mausoleum or early church. In this last scenario we must accept that the burial took place after the construction of earth ramparts around the town, although, as noted above, the distinction between intramural and extramural may have been blurred during the early stages of town development. Alternatively, the coffin lid might be seen as representing an early Christian burial deposited during the last stages of cemetery use and before the construction of any of the buildings, but, nevertheless, instrumental in the choice of the site for the later postulated church or churches in the immediate vicinity.

Regardless of whether, at any stage, House XXIVN performed a religious function, it may be significant that the pewter bowl with Christian monogram, the coffin with possible Christian symbols and Boon's postulated house church (Boon, 1992, 18-21) all come from the north-eastern quarter of Caerwent. This being the case, it is tempting to speculate that there was a small concentration of Christian believers in this area of the town.

#### **Burials in close proximity to contemporary buildings in Caerwent.**

Although the majority of 'formal' intramural burials at Caerwent appear to predate the construction of later houses, in three cases there is evidence that burials were deposited in close proximity to contemporary buildings. Firstly, the cremation of a child in a coarseware jar (*C11.5*) was found just outside the east wall of Block Ln, to the east of House XIXN, *Insula IX* (Ashby *et al.* 1910, 14) (Fig. 5.3). Secondly, fragments of skull, judged to be juvenile, came from just outside the base of the wall of House 3S, *Insula XVI* (Martin *et al.* 1901, 17); and lastly, a large pit (*C11.10*) to the rear of House XIV, *Insula III*, contained one or more urned cremation (Ashby 1906, 16). In the first two instances, as the skeletal material represents juveniles, it is likely that these were young children and, as such, there is nothing unusual about their burial within a settlement area. It is possible that the cremation burial (*C11.5*) represented an older child, as infants were typically inhumed.<sup>11</sup> The skull fragments from House 3S were probably derived from a dispersed infant inhumation. The deposition of infants within settlements is a practice which has both Roman and indigenous antecedents (Watts, 1989, 372; Collis 1977b, 26-34; Wait 1985, 85-100). In Roman Britain it was a practice that was not exclusive to any one site type and evidence comes from military, urban and rural contexts (Philpott 1991, 98-102; Scott 1991, 115-21, see Table 4 for Welsh examples).

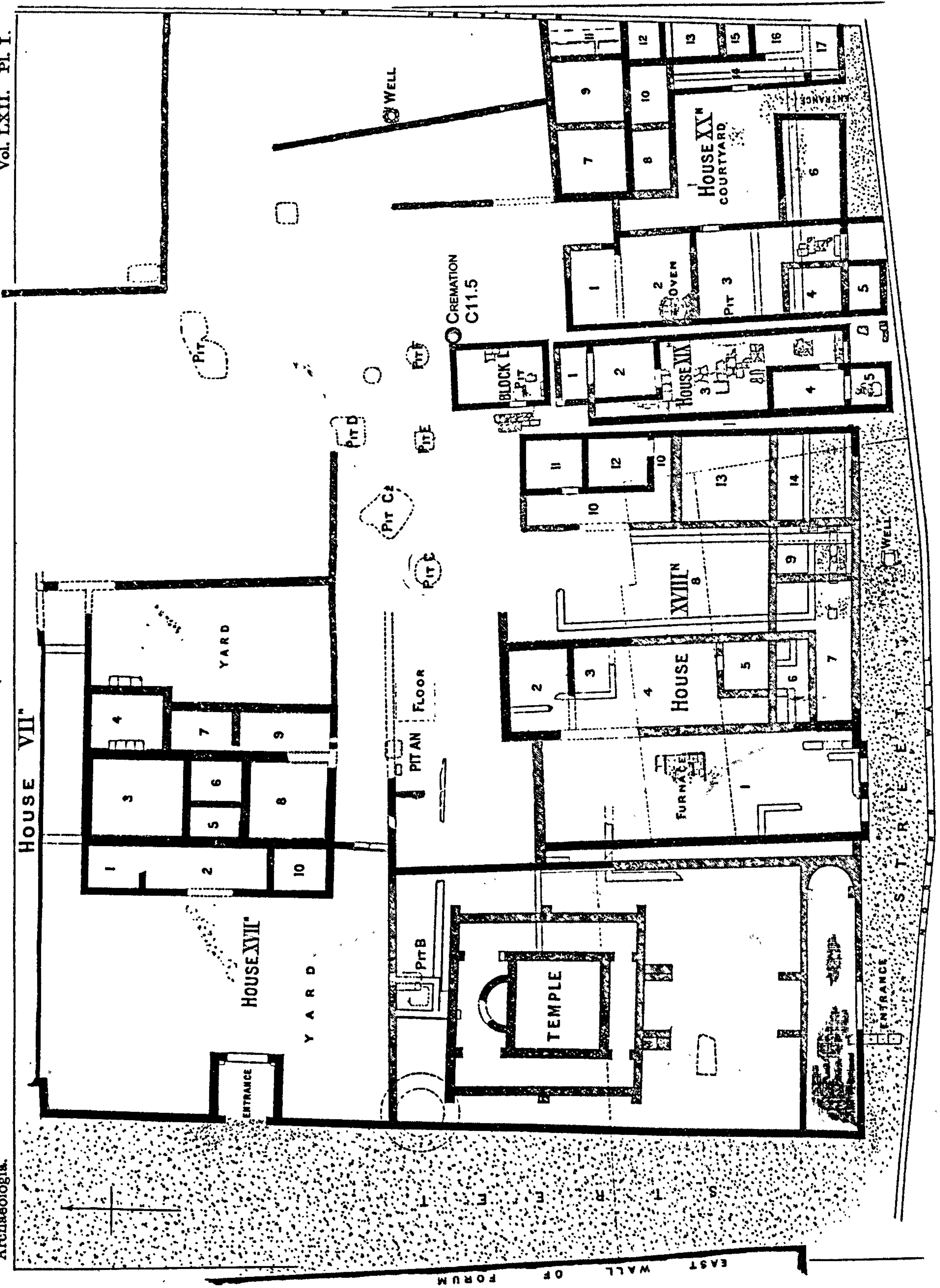


Fig. 5.3

Although a close correlation between buildings and infant burials has been noted in the Roman period (Philpott 1991, 97-8; Watts 1989, 374; Scott 1991, 115-21), other areas of settlements were also chosen for deposition. It has been suggested that there was a move towards the burial of infants within or close to buildings as a direct result of Romanization (Watts 1989, 374).<sup>12</sup> But, as the burial of infants on Iron Age settlement sites is also well attested, in some cases, close to domestic structures (Wait 1985, 100), the apparent intrusive nature of this rite may be more to do with the easier recognition of substantial Roman buildings, as opposed to the more ephemeral pre-conquest structures. In other words, as Roman buildings are more numerous in the archaeological record, we are much more aware of any associated infant burials.

The age of the individual, or individuals, represented by the cremated skeletal material (*C11.10*) in *Insula* III was not determined. This deposition is of particular interest as it is probable that it was of late Roman date and that the associated animal remains represented funerary feasts, or perhaps, votive behaviour (see below). The pit containing the cremated remains measured 3.04m x 4.87m at its uppermost level. It contained 'many fragments of pottery' and a grey ware jar containing cremated human remains covered with a fragment of amphora. A similar, but smaller pot came from the same level and also contained cremated skeletal material suspected to be human (Ashby 1906, 16). It is not known whether the bones represented two separate cremations or one individual deposited in two pots. Two coins of fourth-century date — a coin of Constantine AD 306-37 and one of Valens AD 364-78 — came from the same level. Underneath the cinerary urns was a 'large stratum' of broken ox bones.

The pit was located within 5m to the rear of House XIVN, the foundation date of which cannot be firmly established. However its narrow strip form can be compared with the some of the earliest buildings in Caerwent, which functioned as shops/workshops (Brewer 1993, 16-19). It may also be pertinent that the neighbouring house (House XIIN) underwent several phases of development suggesting occupation over a lengthy period (Ashby 1906, 14), and that the late Roman elliptical enclosure, 50m east of the burial pit, overlay several earlier buildings (Brewer 1993, 19). Therefore activity of some kind appears to have been fairly constant in this area of Caerwent throughout the Roman period. Thus, at any stage in the site's history, the cremated remains are likely to have been deposited within an area that was

utilized for other activities, possibly, if Building XIVN was a workshop, of an industrial nature.

If the fourth-century coins were genuinely associated with the burial(s) and not secondary depositions, then we have a very late example of cremation in an urban context and of burial within the intramural area. A handful of late cremations are attested in Wales, the majority in non-military contexts (see Table 2), but the closest 'urban' comparison comes from the 'small town' of Cowbridge where a late third-/mid-fourth century urned cremation was deposited within an industrial area (Parkhouse & Evans 1996, 149). That the Caerwent burial(s) were placed within a pit containing large quantities of pottery and animal bones perplexed the early excavators who could give no ready explanation (Ashby 1906, 16, note a). No mention was made of any charcoal or other burnt material within the pit, which, if not overlooked, probably discounts the possibility that the pit represented a pyre site. The pottery and animal remains may represent funerary activity and constitute grave goods and/or the remnants of funerary feasts; though the large dimensions of the pit by far exceed the average size of a cremation pit. Of course the burial(s) may well have been placed in a convenient pit containing debris derived from other activities. However, the layering of the pit's contents is reminiscent of structured deposition in the votive pits and shafts examined below. There is, therefore, the possibility that this pit falls into a broader range of ritual behaviour, which incorporated human remains.

### **Burials and fragmented skeletal material within and in close proximity to 'ritual' wells and pits at Caerwent**

Before looking in depth at the evidence from Caerwent, it is important to set it in the wider context of Roman-British burial practices. We are becoming increasingly aware of complex ritual activity within cemetery contexts. Some of this appears to mirror practices that were carried out at overtly religious sites (Esmonde Cleary 2000, 134-40; Forcey 1998, 87-98). The most obvious comparison is the deposition in pits of animal remains, complete or partial, thought to represent votive deposits or the end products of ritual meals or sacrifices (Wait 1985, 176, 186; Woodward 1992, 78-9).<sup>13</sup> For example, at the Eastern cemetery, London, a pit contained the carefully arranged articulated skeletons of dog, horse and red deer. This assemblage cannot be securely dated, but may have predated the burial sequences, and it was suggested that the contents of the pit represented ritual behaviour, perhaps in preparation for

cemetery use (Barber & Bowsher 2000, 20-1). A similar sequence may be envisaged at Chelmsford, Essex, where a dog burial preceded cemetery use (Wacher 1995, 214).

At Lankhills, Winchester we can clearly see a link between mortuary practices and other forms of ritual behaviour. In grave 400, interpreted as a cenotaph (Clarke, G. 1979, 421), two dog skeletons, one articulated, the other having been dismembered — its backbone tied together to form a circle — were placed in the deepest ‘grave’ in the cemetery. The grave pit contained an empty coffin which contained five coins, placed, it was suggested, where the hand of a corpse would have lain. Similarly at the Infirmary Field, Chester, ritual deposition appears to have been a substitute for a corpse. Here a small stone cist, which, the excavator believed, showed no visible signs of ever having housed a burial, contained two beads, a fragment of glass and the tooth of an ox and a pig (Newstead 1914, 139). Lack of any body may, as Clarke (1979, 421-3) opined at Lankhills, have induced a ritual response in the above cases; nevertheless, both examples illustrate the complexity of funerary ritual and that there could be little to distinguish it from other forms of ritual behaviour. The numerous ox bones associated with the cremation(s) from Caerwent (*C11.10*) have already been noted and, along with the examples described below, serve to demonstrate the difficulty of categorising ritual activity as funerary or votive. In light of the type of evidence outlined above, Esmonde Cleary (2000, 139) has argued:

‘We must be wary of decontextualising the deposition of human bone by separating it from other classes of ritual deposition. Even in large cemetery sites, apparently dedicated to the ordered disposal of human bodies, there are overlaps with other contexts of ritual deposition’.

The child cremation (*C11.5*) is of interest here, as the contents of two pits within 5m and 10m of the burial suggest deliberate deposition of a votive or funerary nature. Like the example from Caerwent noted above (*C11.10*), cremation (*C11.5*) not only serves to illustrate the integrated nature of domestic life and ritual activity, but also suggests an ‘overlap’ between mortuary and other ritual practices. Five pits were found to the rear of properties XVIIIN and XIXN in close proximity to the burial (*C11.5*), which was of probable late first- to second-century date (Fig. 5.3). These buildings fronted the main east-west road of Caerwent, an area where occupation is attested from the late first/early second century to the fourth century AD (Ashby *et al.* 1910, 12; Brewer 1993, 47; Boon 1976, 174, n.11). This makes the pits and burial contemporary with occupation, though not necessarily contemporaneous with each other.

Two of the above five pits are of particular interest. Pit F, the closest to (C11.5), contained a probable flagon and fragments of a glass bowl, both of which are well attested in funerary assemblages (Philpott 1991, 35; Allen 1998). Pit D was approximately 3m deep and contained layered depositions of various types of pottery, beneath which were the skulls of a horse and an ox. Although pottery and animal remains commonly feature in mortuary rituals, the structured nature of this pit is indicative of ritual activity (Wait 1985, 53; Clarke, S. 2000, 25). The presence of the skulls of an ox and a horse closely associated in the bottom layers is particularly significant. In the postulated votive contexts at Newstead, 'skulls appear to have been more significant than other bones' and 'the most significant material concentrated at the bottom of the pit' (Clarke, S. 2000, 25). A further pit (Pit AN), approximately 30m to the west of Pits D and F, has long been interpreted as votive since a small seated statuette of a mother goddess was included in the fill (Ashby *et al.* 1910, 14-15; Ross 1968, 262).<sup>14</sup> A temple stood c. 8m to the west of Pit AN, raising the possibility that the contents of the pits contained votive offerings associated with the temple, which has provided evidence of comparable votive offerings.<sup>15</sup> However, the temple dates from c. AD330 (Brewer 1997, 46) and the pit containing the statuette (Pit AN) contained material of second- to third-century date, which suggests it pre-dated the temple. It has been mooted that the statuette may have originally resided in a domestic shrine (Brewer 1986, 14; Arnold & Davies 2000, 129). All the pits were also clearly outside the temple *temenos* (enclosure).

The above cluster of features, consisting of cremation burial (C11.5) and probable votive deposits, and the pit (C11.10) containing one or more cremations, are just two examples from Caerwent of ritual activity, probably of a private nature, taking place within the confines of the town. Religion and ritual had public and private expression in the Roman world, as the temples and household shrines attest, but it has recently been argued that we are only just beginning to recognise the extent to which individual households participated in 'informal' ritual activity (Fulford 2001, 200-1). Boon (1976, 169-70) has drawn attention to the private nature of the well-known 'shrine of the head' at Caerwent (*Insula XI*, fig. 00), which implies, as do the further examples of ritual/mortuary practice discussed below, that domestic space was perceived on more than a domestic level. This backs up Clarke's premise (2000, 27) which argues that the *loci* of ritual depositions show that ritual activities were fully incorporated into the domestic, economic, social and religious spheres of everyday life.

According to Clarke, we are failing to recognise such behaviour due to our twenty-first century mindset, which finds it difficult *not* to separate secular and religious/ritual activity.

The significance of this kind of individual household, religious/ritual observance to this study is how it relates to the private or public nature of mortuary practice. Ross (1968, 262-3) and Wait (1985, 324-5) have drawn attention to the presence of votive shafts and wells in Caerwent. This is now recognised as a widespread practice with ‘special’ or structured deposits in wells and pits identified on a number of different site types in Roman Britain (Fulford 2001; Clarke, S. 1996; 2000; Wait 1985). A common inclusion within these ‘ritual’ deposits which, amongst other objects (see Wait 1985, 51-82; Fulford 2001, 199-218), frequently contained metal and pottery vessels (broken and whole), animal remains, coins, personal ornaments and tools, was fragmented or partial human skeletal material. At Caerwent, not only is there evidence of special or structured deposits incorporating human bone, but also a close spatial association between formal burials and wells and pits of an apparent ritual nature. The following discussion examines these relationships and also considers the public and private character of ‘mortuary’ practices in Caerwent.

In addition to the close spatial association between the well and cremation burial (*C11.9*) at House XXIV, cremation burials were discovered within close proximity to wells at House VIII and House XXIII, all three sites within the postulated cemetery area in the north-eastern quarter of the town. However, only in one case is there any evidence to suggest that the burials and well may have been contemporary.

A cremation burial (*C11.14*) was discovered south west of the southern wall of House VIIIN, pre-dating the fourth-century house. A well (c) to the south of the house, and therefore within the same curtilage area as the burial, contained deposits of disarticulated human remains. With the exception of a bronze fibula discovered at a depth of 0.30m, the top layers of the well, to a depth of 5.48m, contained building debris. At a depth of 7m a column drum and base were found. Water level was reached at a depth of 7.62m, below which, at a depth of 0.45m, ‘fragments of a human skull, part of a lower jaw, arm-bones, and ribs’ were found. Some 15cm below was a hazel twig and ‘more human bones, fragments of black pottery, and pieces of oak’ (Ashby *et al.* 1911, 411). Associated with the skeletal material at 8.53m down was a spindle whorl, a bone from a dog’s foot and seeds. The lowest levels of the well contained the skeletal material from several small animals and birds.



The concentration of human bone within the bottom layers of this well coupled with a bone from a dog and organic material is highly indicative of ritual deposition. The well contained no close dating evidence and may have been contemporary with the 'cemetery' or the later occupation. However, whilst it is possible that the skeletal material derived from an early cemetery context, it does not seem likely. The well was constructed in stone to its lower levels and discarded 'spoil' would no doubt have been redeposited elsewhere upon construction. The probability that this well was the focus of ritual activity is strengthened by the character and contents of two further wells in close proximity (marked (a) and (b) on Fig 5.1), which Ross and Wait considered to be of a votive nature (Ross 1968, 262; Wait 1985, 324-5). The well (a) to the north east of burial (C11.14), contained five dogs' skulls (Ashby 1906, 13). The dog is a common component of votive deposits and the skulls of humans or animals are considered especially significant (Wait 1985, 53; Clarke 2000, 25). The well to the north west (b) contained charred oak and twigs, cow bones, pottery, fragments of the staves and bands of buckets, hazelnuts and twigs, and coins of the fourth century (Ashby *et al.* 1904, 24). Fragments of human skeletal material also came from the top layers of Well b; however, as early medieval burials have been found in Caerwent, this may have derived from post-Roman contexts.

The well (d) in close proximity to the urned cremations (C11.6), to the south of House XXIII, contained coins which suggest it was in use by the mid-second century (Ashby *et al.* 1911, 415). But although the well contained a complete pot indicative of careful deposition, using Wait's criteria (1985, 51-82), this alone is not enough to classify the well as of a votive nature. However, in this instance, the well and cremations are broadly contemporaneous, suggesting a possible deliberate association akin to the deposition of burials close to other water sources — rivers and springs — and we might also add bathhouses (see Chapter 4), which had liminal and chthonic associations.

Four further examples of the deposition of human bone within pits or wells are attested at Caerwent:

1. A well (g) inside House IIS (*Insula XVI*) within the corridor area, but apparently earlier than the house, contained the 'the scanty remains of two or more skeletons of adult males' at a depth of 5.18m (Ashby *et al.* 1902, 15). The skeletons were 'covered by a number of large

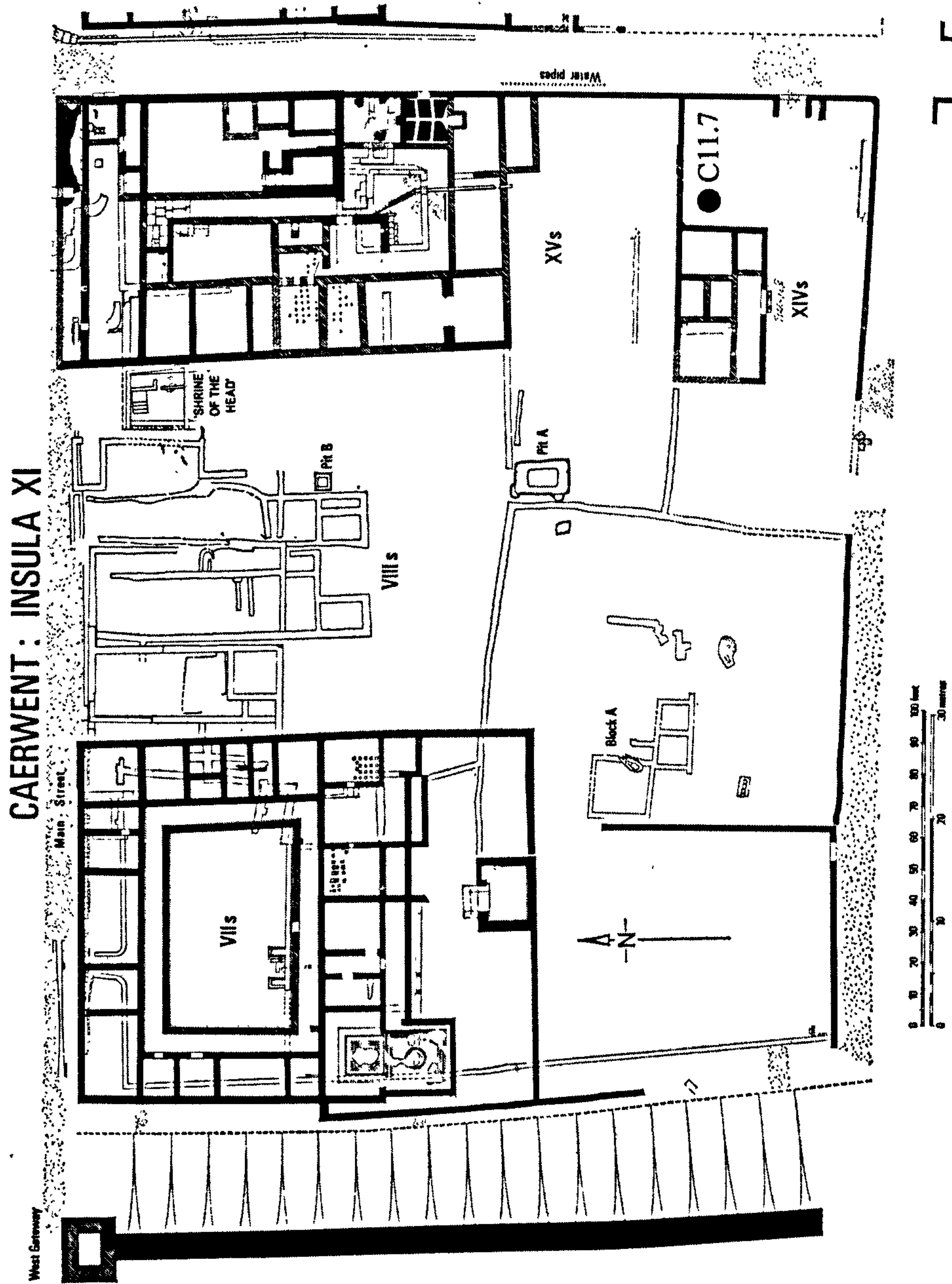
stones' (Martin *et al.* 1901, 17). Ox bones, bird bones and pottery also came from the lower deposits. The separation of the skeletal material from the upper deposits suggests deliberate layering, considered by Wait to be the most convincing evidence of votive behaviour (Wait 1985, 52-4).

2. A well (f) (Ross's well 2) to the east of House VIN (*Insula* IV), contained 'two or three fragments of a human skull, several ox skulls, other animal bones, fragments of a wooden bucket, pieces of pottery and several shoes with hobnails (Ashby 1906, 19-20, Ross 1968, 262; Wait 1985, 324-5).

3. East of the basilica (*Insula* VIII) a human skull was found within fourth-century 'rubbish' deposits in a waterpipe-channel which ran beside the forum wall (Frere 1990, 310). It is not clear whether the channel was still functioning by this date, but it is possible that, as in the examples outlined above, the association between human remains and a water source was deliberate.

4. In *Insula* XI, a pit to the south of House VIIS and 30m south of the 'shrine of the head' has also been argued to be of a votive nature (Ross 1968, 263; Boon 1976, 173). This pit (Pit A Fig 5.4) measured 2.74m x 1.52m and was cut through the rock and clay strata to a depth exceeding 4.57m. Antonine pottery was sealed within the pit under a sandstone trough and paving slabs. Two human skulls were found at a depth of 3.65m and 4.57m respectively, and on the bottom of the pit lay some pieces of oak timber (Ashby *et al.* 1902, 33-4; Boon 1976, 173 - 4, n.22). The contents and layered deposition again suggest votive behaviour and the close proximity of the shrine led Boon to suggest that the pit represented an earlier sacred spot. A skeleton lying E-W was found *under* a wall to the north-west angle of the pit, with a recess apparently left in the wall for the skull. However, as Boon points out, a large number of early medieval burials have also been found in Caerwent and the date of the wall is not certain (Boon 1976, 174, n. 22).

Although Pit A may represent votive behaviour, it may be significant that two urned cremations of second-century date (*C11.7*; *C11.15*), within close spatial association to fourth-century properties, came from within 20m and 60m of the pit and skeleton. This suggests that the south-western quarter of Caerwent, like the north-eastern quarter, was used for burial before the town fully developed. This raises the possibility that the pit was a timber-lined



(After Ashby *et al.* 1902 & after Boon 1976)

Fig. 5.4

burial vault with a double burial. However, although taphonomic considerations might explain the preservation of two skulls from amongst other bones (Mays 1992, 57), the depth of the pit is considerably greater than examples of burial vaults or substantial burial chambers known from Britain (Crummy, Crummy & Crossan 1993, 110-14; Clarke 1979, 132-3; Philpott 1991, 70). Nevertheless, this does not necessarily negate the possibility, as in many cases the depths of vaults/chambers have not been recorded.

One of the main aims of this thesis is to measure the extent to which indigenous mortuary practices continued into the post-conquest period. Central to the discussions surrounding the practice of the deposition of human remains within wells/shafts and pits in the Roman period has been the possible link with Iron Age structured deposits found in pits at settlement sites such as Danebury in southern Britain. These pits contained a range of 'special deposits' which commonly included human and animal remains placed in a 'structured and recurring manner' (Cunliffe 2000, 83). Although, as Wait (1985, 51-82) has shown, the range of objects found in 'votive' contexts increased during the Roman period, the character and contents of structured deposition closely resembled Iron Age practice. There was, however, a marked reduction in the inclusion of both human bone and ash deposits in the post-conquest period.

The argument that Iron Age structured deposition was a direct precursor to Romano-British practice needs both geographical and temporal association to give it weight. It has been argued that much of the skeletal material found within wells is from the late Roman period, which may point to a Romano-British development rather than 'linear continuity' from the Iron Age (Esmonde Cleary 2000, 135). However, there are positive arguments for continuity. The pits and wells from the fort and environs at Newstead, in the northern frontier zone, are important here. Two periods of occupation are attested at the fort, one from the late first century to the early second century, and the other from the mid-second century to late second century AD (Clarke, S. 1997). Human skeletal material was present in five pits at Newstead, and even though the votive nature of many of the pits has been questioned, there appears to be agreement that some kind of ritual surrounded those depositions which contained human bone (Clarke, S. 1997, 77). The presence of human bone in itself requires explanation and 'cannot be thought of in terms of simple rubbish' (Clarke, S. 2000, 24). Clarke sees the deposits at Newstead as 'the continued development of a widespread prehistoric ritual activity' suggesting that the occupants of the fort were 'ethnically Germanic and Celtic, only lightly

Romanised' (Clarke, S. 2000, 24; 1997, 80). He argues that the practices at Newstead provide close parallels with Iron Age 'special deposits in disused storage pits' (Clarke, S. 1997, 80).

Likewise Fulford's (2001) survey of six major settlements in southern Britain has shown that structured deposition had a chronological range from the late first century BC to the fifth century AD. Both Baldock and Silchester have provided evidence of the incorporation of human remains in the fills of wells and pits. Fulford suggests that as 'structured deposits appear to be associated with the earliest phases of occupation' at these last two sites — that is, from mid-first century BC — there is the possibility of local Iron Age continuity (Fulford 2001, 213). It is certainly significant that, on present evidence, it seems that the majority of the structured deposits from Baldock and Silchester were a product of the first and second century AD, rather than a late Roman phenomenon (Fulford 2001, 214). Of the five examples of pits/wells from Caerwent which contained skeletal material, only Pit A (*Insula XI*), which contained sealed second-century material and the skull in the water-channel to the side of the basilica (*Insula VIII*) can be securely dated. The well (b) to the west of House VIIIN (*Insula IV*) contained fourth-century coins, but, although this well is considered to have been used for votive purposes (Ross 1968; Wait 1985), it is excluded from this discussion as it is probable that the skeletal material was residual. Wait, who included only one example from Caerwent containing skeletal deposits (f) places deposits from this well between the second and third century (Wait 1985, 324, RS 24). Yet none of the objects in this well can be closely dated and it may be suggested that Wait gave a blanket date to all the wells included in his study based on the dateable evidence from three of his six examples.

While there are instances of complete bodies in pits (Benson *et al.* 1990), no examples of special or structured deposits incorporating disarticulated human bone have been identified from Iron Age contexts in Wales, though there are hints of such practices. A nineteenth-century account refers to 'a portion of a skeleton with a broken skull' in a kitchen midden found within the hillfort at Greenala Camp, Stackpole, Pembrokeshire (Laws & Owen 1908, 104). Similarly, the nature of the evidence from other sites, such as Dinorben in north Wales and Coygan Camp and Llanmelin in south Wales, suggests that the deposition of fragmented and partial human remains took place (Gardner & Savory 1964, 221-2; Wainwright 1967, 44, 54; Nash-Williams 1933, 264-5, 274). The example from Llanmelin hillfort, 1.6km to the south east of Caerwent, demonstrates how closely the character of some depositions resembles those found in votive shafts and wells. Part of a human skull and other bones were

found in close spatial association with animal bones (ox and pig) and pottery sherds in the bottom layers of the hillfort ditch. The bones were disturbed during excavation and 'it was uncertain whether the human remains represented a burial' (Nash-Williams 1933, 265). So, although the associated items might have been grave goods, the combined nature of the associated components is highly reminiscent of those found in votive contexts.

Many of the isolated human bones from Romano-British settlement sites in Wales have come from disturbed contexts and are not securely dated. However, there is some evidence to suggest that the deposition of fragmented human skeletal material continued post-conquest at native sites (see Chapter 6). Moreover, while there are no definite examples of structured or 'special' deposits incorporating human bone, there is persuasive evidence that animals featured in such contexts, in some cases close to human burials (Meddens & Beasley, 2001; Kinnes in Jarrett & Wrathmell 1981, 239).

It is widely believed that the presence of partial human remains and fragmented skeletal material on settlements in the Iron Age represents the end product of excarnation. It is argued that selected parts of the skeleton were brought back onto settlement sites for secondary mortuary rites or as components for use in ritual activities (see Chapter 2). We are clearly seeing some kind of secondary manipulation of skeletal material in Caerwent and on the rural, Romano-British sites in Wales where fragmented skeletal material is attested (see Chapter 6). We can also see the archaeology in Wales from both Iron Age and Romano-British periods supporting the notion that the skull/head was considered more significant than other body parts (Boon 1976, 171-3; Ross 1999, 79-94; Green 1983, 65-66), although this perhaps fell short of a cult of the head *per se* (Wait 1985, 199-200). But it is certainly the case that in the Iron Age skulls, or skull fragments, appear to have been removed from skeletal material, presumably for use elsewhere, and that skulls, or pieces of skulls, are also found in apparent isolation on settlement sites. In a Romano-British context, as we have seen at Caerwent, they featured more consistently in ritual contexts than other body parts. The close spatial association between the 'shrine of the head' and Pit A, containing the two skulls, may also be significant here. Boon postulated that, if the stone head and pit were ever connected, 'the association had faded from memory by the fourth century' (Boon 1976, 173). Nevertheless, he does link the two, and suggests that both the stone head and skulls represented products of the same belief system.

So, are we seeing some continuity of pre-conquest secondary mortuary rites in Wales? Or just evidence of practices that some see as having wide British and continental parallels (Fitzpatrick 2000). Fulford (2001, 215) has suggested that, although special and structured deposition has been identified on all site types, the practice was essentially rooted in rural traditions, albeit against a wider European background of similar practices. He argues that even by the late Roman period the practice of structured deposition may imply that urban society still had a 'rural mentality'.

So how does Caerwent fit into the local native or wider European picture? The topography of the town may give us some clue. Even though the third and fourth centuries in Caerwent saw the development of large and prestigious houses, it has been argued that the town was still very much tied to the land. There is evidence to suggest houses of considerable grandeur may have functioned as 'urban farms' (Arnold & Davies 2000, 53-4; Brewer 1993, 38-9). This suggests that rural concerns about the natural world and fertility would still be very much to the fore, along with any attendant propitiatory rituals. It also implies that indigenous mortuary rites — linked in their various forms to settlement space, and perhaps also synonymous with agricultural success and wellbeing — would not easily be discarded, even though it was known that Rome prohibited certain practices. After all, once a fragment of skeletal material is subsumed within the contents of a well or buried in a pot in a private garden — who would know? If ritual activity was of a private nature then it was hidden from official eyes. It may also be significant that some of the closest parallels that can be drawn with the type of structured depositions from Caerwent come from Silchester, also a native urban centre with postulated 'urban farms' (Wacher 1995, 271-91).<sup>16</sup>

### **The evidence for extra-mural burials at Caerwent**

Early medieval burials have been found within the town of Caerwent concentrated around the later church of St. Stephen and St. Tathan and outside the east gate of the town (Morgan 1865, 425; Ashby *et al.* 1911, 444-5; Hudd 1913, 437-8; Campbell & Macdonald 1993, 75-98).

The latest excavations immediately outside the east gate uncovered an inhumation cemetery containing a minimum of 136 burials, the majority aligned east-west. No grave goods were apparent and the burials were contained within stone-lined or earth-cut grave pits. These features are characteristic of both late Roman and of early medieval burials (Philpott 1991, 226; Farwell & Molleson 1993, 228; Rahtz 1977, 54; Cooper & Buckley 2003, 38-9). Eleven radiocarbon dates, derived from the skeletal material and taken from separate burials, gave a

two sigma calibrated date range between cal. AD 380-660 and cal. AD 785-1040 (Campbell & Macdonald 1993, 87-8). Whilst some have interpreted these findings as evidence that the cemetery had possible late Roman beginnings (James 1992, 96; O'Brien 1999; Brewer, 1993, 24), others discount the possibility, at least within the excavated area (Campbell & Macdonald 1993, 88). However, it may be significant that the earliest radiocarbon determination came from a grave separated by 15m from the other burials from which radiocarbon dates were taken (Campbell & Macdonald 1993, 79, fig. 3). It could be argued, therefore, that further earlier burials lay within the portion of the cemetery which provided the early date.

It is also noteworthy that at least three stone coffins were uncovered c.1975 during building work approximately 300m to the south east of the above site (C11.8).<sup>17</sup> Stone coffins are known from both the Roman and medieval periods (Wilmore 1940, 135-77) and a number of stone coffins come from Roman contexts in Wales. Local examples come from outside the western defences of Caerwent (Morgan 1855, 76-9) and from Caerleon, 10km from Caerwent (Burnham 1997, 403; Lee 1862, 23-4; Zienkiewicz 1985, 2-20). The location of the stone coffins at Caerwent, 300m outside the east gate, may also be significant and another example of the pattern recognised at York and Chichester (Jones 1983, 60-1) and noted at some of the early military forts in Wales (see Chapter 7). At these forts and towns the evidence suggests that the earliest burials were placed at a further distance from the defences than later interments. If this was the pattern at Caerwent, and the cemetery continued in use into the early medieval period, then we would expect to see the later burials close to the eastern gate.

Excavations outside the north gate of Caerwent have not revealed any evidence of a roadside extra-mural cemetery (Grimes 1931, 210-15). The north and south roads leading from the town appear to have been subordinate to the main east-west thoroughfare and it was surmised that this might account for the lack of burials in a northern or southern direction (Grimes 1931, 210, n.1). That the main road to Caerleon on the west side of Caerwent was a focus for burials is suggested by the discovery of one (C11.2) 6-7m from the side of this road at a distance of 0.33km from the defences. Although no dating evidence was found the location and mode of enclosure, a slab-built cist housing a stone coffin with lead lining, suggest a Roman date (Morgan, O. 1855, 76-9; Toller 1977, 43).

The space between the coffin and cist wall was tightly packed with small pieces of unburnt coal. The inclusion of charcoal/coal within inhumation graves has been likened to the late



Roman use of gypsum plaster or lime, interpreted as a means of preserving or, in the case of lime, perhaps aiding dissolution of the body (Green 1977; 1993; Philpott 1991, 93).

However, the incorporation of token deposits of charcoal/coal within graves need not have been linked to the preservation of the physical body (Alcock, J.P. 1980, 60; Newstead 1921, 54; Rahtz 2000, 411). Alcock considers both coal and charcoal to have had symbolic significance, perhaps representing 'change and durability', and were possibly of particular significance to the Christian faith (Alcock, J.P. 1980, 60). It is also possible that in the early Roman period its deliberate deposition in inhumation graves may have served as a link between cremation and inhumation practices, perhaps assuaging any concerns related to the shift from one rite to another.

At Caerwent the coal was not associated with the body but formed a barrier between coffin and cist, which suggests that protection (of a physical or spiritual nature), rather than preservation, was the principal concern. The use of a stone coffin with lead lining, coupled with the careful deposition within an outer chamber, imply a high status burial which, presumably, would have been visible from the road. There was no evidence of any grave marker, but a considerable quantity of stones came from above and around the grave, which may indicate that a monument marked the spot. Alternatively, this debris may have been associated with industrial activity (Morgan, O. 1855, 78).

There is no evidence of funerary sculpture from Caerwent that might have graced the tombs of the elite. But in terms of monumentality, it has been suggested that a circular structure to the north of the east gate may have been a mausoleum (Hudd 1913, 451-2; Brewer 1993, 44). It is also possible that a reused fragment of an inscribed stone found within a house in the town was part of a tombstone (Martin *et al.* 1901, 16; *RIB* 312). This is significant, as tombstones have not been found outside a military context in Wales; their presence at Caerwent would suggest that elements of the population were associated with the military. It was tentatively suggested that the numeral II inscribed on the stone might have referred to the second legion (Martin *et al.* 1901, 16). If this was the case, it is possible that, as is postulated for Usk (Arnold & Davies 2000, 63), Caerwent attracted veteran settlers.

## Carmarthen

The auxiliary fort at Carmarthen was established c. AD 75 and is thought to have been abandoned sometime in the early second century, possibly between AD 110 and AD 120. Although the foundation date of the *civitas* capital is uncertain, a formal street grid was laid out to the east of the fort between AD 120 and AD 150 (James 1992b, 10; Crane 2001, 30; Arnold & Davies 2000, 48). Early second-century occupation appears to have centred on the temple site c. 800m east of the fort.

Burial evidence from Carmarthen is limited in quantity but, as it is derived from recent excavations, it is of considerable value and includes detailed analysis of the skeletal material and associated artefacts. One definite (C4.1) and one possible cemetery site (C4.2) have been identified, both located outside the eastern defences of the town (Map 22).

Excavations in 2001 at Park Hall (C4.1), to the northern side of the main eastern approach road, uncovered what is believed to have been a small cemetery (Crane 2001). This included one cremation burial and hints of other burials in the vicinity, including a possible inhumation. The location of the Park Hall cemetery is of interest, as, although it was placed along the roadside following common Roman practice, a temple and later the town's amphitheatre were situated within 50m (Crane 2001, 33-4, fig.1 & 2; James, H. 1992b, 12-13). The jar containing the cremation is dated no later than the early second century (Crane 2001, 27), which implies that it was deposited during the time the temple was in use and before the construction of the amphitheatre in the mid-second century (James 1992b, 12-13). If the cemetery and temple are contemporary, it suggests that the latter may have acted as a focus for burial. This is an interesting juxtaposition as there is some controversy over the use of temple sites as foci for mortuary practices. Esmonde Cleary (2000, 133) has argued that temples were 'rarely, if ever' a focus for burial, as the dead were considered a pollutant. In contrast, Forcey (1998, 88-9) has suggested that funerary activity around temples was 'surprisingly widespread' but often goes unrecognised because of failure to identify funerary activity and to distinguish between votive and mortuary behaviour.

At Carmarthen there is no ambiguity regarding the presence of a cemetery. However, if, as it appears, temple and cemetery were contemporary, the *raison d'être* for this spatial association may lie in the pre-conquest period. It has been suggested that the temple and later

amphitheatre were sited close to an earlier cult centre (James, H. 1992b, 13). This is significant, for if this was the case, as attested elsewhere in Britain (Woodward 1992, 17-30), it is feasible that it was this former ritual importance that influenced the placement of the cemetery. We may be seeing an attempt by the native population of the early civilian settlement to maintain their links with the past.

The form and treatment of the cremation burial does, however, show intrusive 'Roman' influences. In line with the evidence from the majority of military sites in Wales, the evidence from Carmarthen shows that offerings were placed on the pyre rather than in the grave. This is a practice recognised at early military centres in Britain generally and in the 'most heavily romanised' urban centres of the north (Philpott 1991, 220-22). The cinerary urn and surrounding grave fill contained charcoal, fragments of glass, pottery sherds, metal objects (the majority probably nails), grape pips and other charred plant remains (Crane 2001, 30-1). These items are assumed to have accompanied the corpse on the pyre and to represent the remnants of a funerary feast and/or provision for the afterlife. This is of interest, for if we accept that certain objects found in close proximity to cremation burials in Caerwent were grave goods, their unburnt status suggests that there may have been a variation in grave treatment between the two *civitas* capitals.<sup>18</sup> The most likely explanation for such a difference is that Carmarthen had military beginnings and was, therefore, exposed to stronger Roman influences. However, no firm conclusions can be drawn here, as we have only one example from Carmarthen, which may not be genuinely representative, and the cremated skeletal material from Caerwent has not undergone modern scientific analysis which might detect the inclusion of pyre goods. But it is of note that the most richly furnished cremation in Wales is associated with grave goods rather than pyre goods and comes from a rural context (*WI*), which may suggest that native influences were more to the fore at Caerwent.

Skeletal analysis suggests that the Carmarthen cremation was of a young female (Crane 2001, 29-30) which attests to civilian use of the cemetery and implies that she was a member of the *vicani* or later civilian settlement. This burial is important as it provides a unique glimpse of the very Romanised lifestyle led by some in the early stages of urban development at Carmarthen: not only can we see evidence of intrusive 'Roman' burial practices — the grape pips from the pyre also infer that a Roman diet was enjoyed.

As at Abbeyfield, Caerleon (**CAER.2**) (Evans & Maynard 1997, 194), pyre debris was included in the grave fill; there was, however, no evidence of burning *in situ*. That the burial represented one of a series was suggested by two unexcavated features within 5m of the cremation pit which were highly suggestive of further burial pits. It is possible that this small cluster of burials was enclosed within a demarcated area represented by two linear features (probable ditches) to the east and south (Crane 2001, 5 & fig. 4). As other recent excavations have shown, burials were frequently grouped together within a cemetery context in Wales (Evans & Maynard 1997, 185; Burnham 1994, 250-1; Jones, N. 1992, 19-30). The presence of discrete clusters of graves within cemeteries is also a widely attested practice in Roman Britain generally (Barber & Bowsher 2000, 22-5; Crummy, Crummy & Crossan 1993, 51-9, 114-118; Watson 2003, 31-2; Millett 1993, 259-60; Farwell & Molleson 1993). The reasons behind such groupings may have been complex and site specific but familial ties, social status or religious affiliations are widely assumed to have been important determining factors. The factors which governed such practices in Wales are unknown, but in small urban or *vici* contexts, for example at Ruthin (**R2.1**) (Jones, N. 1992), Chepstow (**C5.1**) (Shoesmith 1991) and Carmarthen, where female and juvenile burials are components of the burial groups, it is likely that such clustering represented family plots.

Although no skeletal material was apparent, the shape and fill of a pit 15m west of the cremation burial and outside its postulated plot boundary, was 'particularly reminiscent of an inhumation burial' (Crane 2001, 6). Of course, no firm conclusions can be drawn from such a supposition, but it raises the possibility that the cemetery continued in use after the amphitheatre was built, since the majority of inhumations from military sites in Wales are of mid-second century date or later. As Crane (2001, 8) pointed out, this is a juxtaposition noted at Cirencester (McWhirr 1976, 6, fig. 1.1). It may be that the Park Lane site represents another example in Wales of what appears to have been the deliberate placement of cemeteries, not just along roadsides but also close to extramural public buildings, possibly as a means of ensuring any monuments received maximum attention.

There is some slight evidence to suggest that a Roman cemetery (**C4.2**) may also have existed on the southern side of the Roman road c. 220m to the south west of the Park Lane site (Map 22). Antiquarian reports record the uncovering of lead coffins in the grounds of the former Augustinian priory, an establishment founded on the site of a pre-Norman church (Evans 1876, 99; James, T. 1985, 120, 142). Although these burials may have been of medieval date,

the siting of a Roman cemetery in such a location, betwixt road and river, can be readily paralleled in Wales (see Chapters 3 & 4). It may also be significant that there are a number of examples in England and Wales of early medieval churches located within close proximity to Roman cemeteries (Morris & Roxan 1980; Morris 1989, 6-45; Edwards & Lane 1992, 1-11; (L14) Thomas & Holbrook 1994; (CI.2 a-i) RCAHMW Caerns. 1960, 163).

No tombstones or funerary sculptures are known from Carmarthen which concurs with the evidence from the majority of auxiliary forts. That tombstones were lacking in the urban phase of the settlement, at a time when they were most prolific at the legionary bases, supports the argument that the majority of the native population did not seek to emulate this overtly Roman form of burial display (Hope 1997, 247-50; Esmonde Cleary 1992, 34-5).

The location of Carmarthen on the western periphery of the Welsh frontier is also less likely to have attracted veteran settlers who might have imported the practice.<sup>19</sup>

### **Cowbridge**

Roman Cowbridge, in the Vale of Glamorgan, was a roadside ribbon development, which has produced evidence of occupation from the first to fourth centuries AD. The morphology of the settlement has led to its classification as one of the 'small towns' of Roman Britain (Burnham & Wachter 1990, 296-300). Whether the settlement developed from military beginnings is still open to question. Since the sixteenth century it has been mooted that the site may be the missing *Bovium* of the Antonine Itinerary, yet no concrete evidence of a fort has come to light (Robinson 1980, 23-4; Burnham & Wachter 1990, 296-300; Parkhouse 1990, 99). However, military equipment is attested at Cowbridge, as is the use of legionary tiles on an official looking bathhouse, so some connection with the military is to be assumed.

Parkhouse (1996, 234-6) suggested that its location on the road, half way between Caerwent and Carmarthen, and the presence of the bathhouse might point to an associated *mansio* with military connections. The settlement continued to develop after the bathhouse had gone out of use (c. AD 120), with an economy that appears to have been both agriculturally and industrially based. It postulated that in its later phases it may have served as a small market centre for the surrounding villas and farmsteads (Parkhouse 1990, 100; Parkhouse & Evans 1996, 237).

That Cowbridge may have had military connections is reflected in the funerary evidence. Only a handful of Romano-British burials have been found in Cowbridge; these mirror practices carried out in rural and other 'small town' contexts. However, the discovery of a

sandstone lion of probable funerary nature (*C12.2*) also points to the existence of a monumental tomb or mausoleum. In Wales such a Romanized form of burial display is highly indicative of a military association. This supposition is reinforced by evidence showing that the majority of British stone lions come from military contexts and are usually associated with funerary monuments (Parkhouse & Evans 1996, 215-16; Brewer 1986, 23).

The sculpture was found in the bottom of an enclosure ditch at Hopyard Meadow on the western periphery of Roman Cowbridge (Parkhouse & Evans 1996, 110-14). No human skeletal material was found, nor any other evidence of a funerary nature — although one piece of unidentified bone was retrieved from the ditch. It is therefore assumed that the lion was a secondary deposition resulting from fourth-century activity on the site. However, if the lion came from a cemetery close by, in line with Roman practice, it would have flanked the main road on the outskirts of the settlement (Parkhouse & Evans 1996, 216).

Of the stone lions that can be dated, all appear to be second century. Therefore, if the Cowbridge lion adorned a tomb, this would most likely have been during the earlier stages of the settlement's development (Brewer 1986, 23). The majority of definite burial evidence is of second-century date or later and can be readily compared with the evidence from the surrounding villa sites. Thus, although the collective burial evidence from Cowbridge is of a limited nature, it could be argued that, along with the abandonment of the bathhouse, it is synonymous with the settlement's shift from military to civilian status.

Four inhumation burials were found within and close to the bathhouse (*C12.1*) (Parkhouse & Evans 1996, 65-71). These cannot be securely dated but the stratigraphic relationships hint that they were deposited after abandonment or during the last phase of bathhouse development. Within the bathhouse itself, an extended inhumation below one of the later flue walls, probably constructed during the early second century, may have been deposited between building phases (Parkhouse 1981b, 47; Parkhouse & Evans 1996, 65-71).

Disarticulated human remains were also discovered in one of the rooms. This skeletal material could have been deposited at any time during or after the robbing of the building. It may, however, be significant that the fills from the robber trenches suggest demolition took place during the Romano-British period (Parkhouse & Evans 1996, 67, 71).

Post-bathhouse activity is attested by a series of gullies, a foundation trench and two T-shaped kilns outside the northern end of the bathhouse (Parkhouse & Evans 1996, 69-71). Two further inhumations were discovered within this area at a distance of 10m and 20m from the bathhouse. Closest to the bathhouse a child burial had been deposited in the fill of a gully. The fill itself was of probable mid to late second-century date but the date of the burial is uncertain. Two small copper-alloy bangles on the wrist of the child have been compared to similar Romano-British examples, with a close parallel from a fourth-century context (Parkhouse & Evans 1996, 186). To the north of the child burial an adult crouched inhumation had been placed in a pit which underlay a short linear feature containing pottery of early/mid second-century date.

The close spatial association between bathhouse and burials at Cowbridge is interesting and raises several questions about the choice of this location for burial. It seems likely that, with the probable exception of the burial associated with the flue wall, all the burials post-date abandonment of the bathhouse and were contemporary with the later activity at the site of a light industrial or agricultural nature. The close proximity between burials and industrial or domestic activity is characteristic of 'small town' burial practices in England and Wales (Esmonde Cleary 2000, 129; Pearce 1999b; Leach 2003, 143-4). Welsh examples are attested at the civilian settlement at Bulmore (*CAER.6. no. 2*) (Zienkiewicz 1985, 17-20) and possibly in post-military contexts at Usk (*U2.2*) (Maynard & Marvell 1998; 1994, 57) and Pentre Ffwrndan, Flints. (*P7.1a/b*), and were also a feature of burial practice at Caerwent (see above). As a much closer relationship between settlement and burial space can be observed in rural and native contexts, the implication is that this behaviour is a result of native influence.

The crouched inhumation is particularly pertinent here as this form of interment has clear native antecedents in Wales and is a mode of burial that continues into the post-conquest period on native sites (e.g. Mynydd Bychan (*M6*), Coygan Camp (*C8.1a*) and possibly Rhuddgaer (*R1*, see Chapter 6). It should also be noted that a 'corn drying oven' lay 1.5m east of this burial. If this burial and the oven are contemporary, this spatial association is significant, as a close association between 'corn-driers'<sup>20</sup> and burials has been identified at a number of rural sites (Scott 1991, 117-18; Pearce 1999, 155; Parkhouse 1988, 16). It is also significant that a Welsh example of this practice comes from Biglis (*B1.1b*) (Parkhouse 1988, 16) a rural site also in the Vale of Glamorgan, so clear local parallels can also be drawn.

In light of the above it seems likely that the burials associated with the bathhouse were influenced by both rural and local burial traditions. But should their deposition in this location be viewed merely as an example of 'small town' burial practice? It is tempting to speculate that if the bathhouse did have military origins, this might also have influenced the choice of burial location. The presence of burials close to the bathhouse could be seen as a further example of the practice observed in military contexts where the interior of abandoned forts were utilised for burial. This raises interesting questions about whether this type of behaviour denoted a desire to remain affiliated with Roman culture in some way, as may have been the case at Usk (see Chapter 3). Alternatively, it may be more representative of native practices where a long standing practice of using 'relict' landscape features for burial has been recognised — a practice which spanned the Iron Age to early medieval period (Pearce, J. 1999b, 156; Murphy 1992; Williams, H. 1997; Petts 2001; Brassil *et al.* 1991; Edwards, N. 2001). The burial within the bathhouse itself is of particular note, since, if it was genuinely of contemporary date, it represents a further example of what appears to have been a deliberate association between bathhouses and burials in Wales (see pages 89-90).

A further series of gullies and pits at Bear Field and Bear Barn (100m east of the bathhouse) may represent part of the same industrial complex. Pottery suggests the main period of activity was between the mid-second and fourth century (Parkhouse & Evans 1996, 5-43). Here, a double cremation burial of an adult and child (*C12.3*) had been inserted through a layer overlying a shallow pit or short gully. The jar containing the cremations was dated between the late third and mid-fourth century (Evans 1985, 64; Parkhouse & Evans 1996, 36, 149) and is one of a number of late cremations in Wales (Table 2). This burial also demonstrates the 'small town' tendency to incorporate burials within the confines of the settlement.

## **Conclusion**

The general trends in burial practices noted at the Welsh forts and their environs can also be observed in the 'urban' centres of Caerwent, Carmarthen and Cowbridge during the early Roman period. This suggests close military connections during the embryonic stages of urban development, regardless of the town's military or civilian origins. In line with the evidence from military installations, cremation appears to have been the dominant early urban rite, and although cremation is attested in pre-conquest Wales, the grave treatment and associated grave goods suggest intrusive Roman influences. For example, at Carmarthen skeletal and



artefactual analysis has demonstrated that offerings were placed on the pyre rather than in the grave, which concurs with the findings from military sites in Wales and in Roman Britain generally. However this might not have been the case at Caerwent and it has been tentatively suggested that the unburnt status of probable grave goods at this *civitas* capital may be more indicative of native tradition. However, the association of coins with cremation burials at Caerwent (e.g. *C11.6*; *C11.10*; *C11.15*) demonstrates that classical rites were assimilated here too. In common with military sites, all cinerary vessels in urban contexts were of coarseware, and associated grave/pyre goods consisted of ancillary vessels, food offerings and occasionally coins. The close proximity of personal ornaments to cremation burials at Caerwent also suggests that these formed part of the urban grave assemblage.

The use of lead coffins during the second half of the Roman period at Caerwent and possibly also at Carmarthen implies that the *civitas* capitals continued to follow the trends in burial practice identified at the legionary bases of Chester and Caerleon and within the civic areas of Roman Britain. The use of coffins *per se* also attests to a shift to extended inhumation in areas where the predominant indigenous rite was crouched inhumation. The evidence from Cowbridge tells a different story. While the later burial evidence from this 'small town' may be more indicative of 'poor' social status than cultural influence, the practices observed in a probable post-military context fit more readily into a rural milieu. The limited evidence for tombstones and funerary sculpture from all three 'urban' sites supports the view that the indigenous population felt no desire to emulate this particular form of Roman burial display.

Although the above evidence shows that Roman burial practices can be readily discerned at the *civitas* capitals and 'small towns' of Wales, there are also hints that native burial traditions continued within the 'urban' environment. The evidence from Caerwent is particularly significant and suggests that, alongside the formal and easily identified Roman rites, a complex range of mortuary rituals were carried out, which, it is argued, were rooted in rural tradition and reflect a continuing concern with the countryside and, by extension, former belief systems.

Contrary to the law of the Twelve Tables (Cherry 2001, 9), there does not seem to have been any civic prohibition or unwillingness in Caerwent about using a former burial ground for later domestic development. However, as Watson (1992, 56) has pointed out, if the legality of burial on public land was in doubt, graves were not considered *religiosus* by the state and

could be dug up. Certainly, the widespread reuse of tombstones in Roman Britain shows that cemeteries were not inviolable.<sup>21</sup> But it is significant that, if the existence of an earlier cemetery in the area was known, no fears or superstitious reservations such as those postulated by Toynbee and others appear to have prevented reuse (Toynbee 1971, 33-64; Macdonald 1977, 36; Nuzzo 2000, 249). Although a close spatial association between burial and domestic/industrial activity is not confined to the British province (Tranoy 2000, 12-8), this apparent readiness to reclaim the land for occupation might also be seen as a product of native tradition, a further reflection of contemporary rural practice where the demarcation between the living and the dead was not so rigidly defined.

The collective evidence from the 'small towns' and *civitas* capitals of Wales has proved of pivotal importance to this study. These 'urban' centres housed the most 'Romanised' elements of native society who emulated the Roman lifestyle. Yet a surprisingly diverse range of mortuary practices has been identified which appear to have both Roman and indigenous antecedents. The burial practices discerned in these 'urban' areas bridge the rural and military divide and reflect a developing and integrated Romano-British society.

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<sup>1</sup> Iron Age mortuary practices are discussed in detail in Chapter 2. But, see in particular, Wait (1985, 120-121), Cunliffe (2000, 73-88) and Hill (1995, 117-18) for the various and most widely mooted views regarding partial and fragmented human skeletal material on settlement sites.

<sup>2</sup> Excavations, principally under the supervision of Thomas Ashby, were carried out between 1899 and 1912 and reported in *Archaeologia*, Vols. 57-64.

<sup>3</sup> Newport Museum Acc. Nos. 16.11.17; 16.11.96; 16.11.94. (Ashby *et al.* 1911, 421, Plate LVIII).

<sup>4</sup> Grave goods are also suggested in the southern quarter of the town (C11.15). A pit underneath the wall of House XVIIIIS and preceding its construction contained an urned cremation burial. Underneath the cinerary urn were fragments of samian. Three coins were also found in close spatial association (Ashby *et al.* 1911, 436).

<sup>5</sup> It is estimated that, of the lead coffins that can be dated, just over 10% are of second-century date and just over 20% are of third-century date, the remaining 70% are dated to the fourth century (Taylor, A. 1993, 209; Toller 1977, 16-19). However, the evidence from Wales (Table 3) suggests comparatively early usage, possibly as lead was relatively easy to obtain (Philpott 1991, 53, n. 4).

<sup>6</sup> Newport Museum, Caerwent Archive: Notebook 17, 1909. Item 171. Coffin lid on display Newport Mus. Acc. No. NPTMG: 86.2

<sup>7</sup> As in Britain generally, the saltire was also a common decorative motif in Wales. Saltires decorate the child's coffin from Caerleon, the lead sheet covering an inhumation at Pentre Farm and the coffin lid from Cefn Onn (NPTMG: 89.381; Threipland 1953; O'Leary *et al.* 1989). All three examples are from fairly early contexts (see table 00).

<sup>8</sup> Although it is widely acknowledged that E-W orientated graves with little or no grave goods can no longer be seen as exclusively Christian, it was the combination of probable Christian elements at Colchester which led to its interpretation as a Christian cemetery and associated church (Watts 1993, 192-8). However, Millett (1995, 451-4) is not convinced by this argument, and suggests that there is significant room for debate. He is highly critical of the criteria used to determine the Christian status of both the church and cemetery at Butt Road, arguing that many of the features identified as Christian (e.g. lack of grave disturbance and the presence of infant burials) are also found in pagan contexts. He prefers to see the building as a funerary banqueting hall.

<sup>9</sup> Drawing on Ross's work (1968, 255-68) Wait (1985, 51-82) has defined a series of 27 artefact categories which, although alone need not represent votive offerings, when occurring in certain combinations and especially in layered contexts strongly suggest ritual deposition. Since Wait's categories it has been suggested that building stone may also have constituted a deliberate deposition in some instances (Scott 1989, 119). The contents of the well under discussion, particularly the footwear and animal remains, commonly occur in both funerary and votive contexts. When deposited with the dead they represented the funerary feast or provision for the afterlife. In votive contexts they were offered to chthonic forces. Antlers and horns had cult associations in both Celtic and Roman belief systems (Green, M.J. 1983, 64-6) and are also believed to have been associated with fertility (Clarke, S. 2000, 24). The hazel twigs may also have symbolised renewal or fertility. For a full discussion on the

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ritual significance and 'symbolic potential' of the various categories see Wait (1985); Clarke (2000, 24), Ross (1968 255-85).

<sup>10</sup> Forcey (1998, 87-98) has recently shown that temples and mortuary practice were not necessarily mutually exclusive. In some instances temples appear to have been the focus for mortuary practice of both 'normative' and the less readily understood rituals which incorporated partial or fragmented human bone. Toller (1977, 6) has also provided 6 examples of lead coffins placed close to temples in Roman Britain.

<sup>11</sup> On this issue, it has recently been argued that the cremated remains of infants may be going undetected. The difficulties of accurately identifying the age of cremated child remains, coupled with our preconceptions of expected inhumation for infants, may have distorted the archaeological record in favour of older children (Pearce, J. 2001, 130-1).

<sup>12</sup> It is widely assumed that the Roman origins for this practice can be substantiated by a text attributed to Pliny, thought to refer to the burial of infants under the eaves of houses - *suggrundaria* (Watts 1989, 374; Philpott 1991, 101). However, Pearce (2001, 127), whilst not disputing that infant burials took place within or close to buildings across the Roman world, argues that classical texts have become conflated and that, in fact, Pliny did not make reference to this practice.

<sup>13</sup> At Caerwent a dog's skull and a carved bone bird's head were buried in front of the apse of the temple (Ashby *et al.* 1909, 5).

<sup>14</sup> *Contra* Ross (1968, 262) this well did not contain a 'collection of iron tools' but Samian ware and a coin of Tetricus (AD 272-3) in the upper layers (Ashby *et al.* 1910, 14-15).

<sup>15</sup> See note 13.

<sup>16</sup> As well as the incorporation of human bone in structured deposits at Silchester and urned cremation burials within the town's interior (Fulford 2001, 203), other parallels can be drawn. A black pot *in situ* mortared against a house wall in Caerwent was compared with similar practices at Silchester (Ashby *et al.* 1902, 14, n. b; see also Fulford 2001, 204 for pots with 'mouths flush to the floor').

<sup>17</sup> Oral record, coffins no longer extant. Recorded by G. Mein in 1990 (GGAT PRN No. 43623).

<sup>18</sup> A caveat is necessary here, as not all objects that were placed on pyres showed signs of heat damage. An object placed in a peripheral location on a pyre might be little affected by the heat (Fitzpatrick 2000, 17).

<sup>19</sup> A sculptured head found in Priory Street, Carmarthen, and held at Carmarthen Museum is listed as Roman and of a probable funerary nature. However, it is argued that the style of the head precludes it from the Roman period (Brewer 1986, 62).

<sup>20</sup> It has been argued that the term 'corn drier' is misleading as botanical evidence suggests these structures were utilized for a range of different functions associated with cereal processing (Van der Veen 1989, 302-19).

<sup>21</sup> See Chapter 4, note 20.

## **CHAPTER 6: BURIAL PRACTICES IN THE RURAL AREAS OF ROMAN WALES**

Away from those areas where there was a substantial Roman presence, Romano-British burials in Wales showed considerable diversity. There was little immediate impact on indigenous burial practices post conquest, and, though there was a gradual assimilation of Roman burial rites into the countryside during the first two centuries AD, this was mainly evident in the use of material goods in the grave. It was not until the third and fourth centuries that a more uniform mode of burial — discrete clusters of extended inhumations — became apparent. This is a late Roman trend also identified in the more 'Romanised' areas of Wales. However, though burial rites with clear Roman antecedents became more evident in rural areas by the late Roman period, certain indigenous practices also continued. The native practices that were the most resistant to change were those related to burial location. For example, the close correlation between domestic and burial space, and the use of prehistoric monuments as foci for burials, were both indigenous burial traditions that continued throughout the Roman period.

The aim of this chapter is to evaluate the degree of Roman influence on burial practices in the Welsh countryside. The degree of contact between Romans and natives obviously had a bearing on the speed of acculturation and the amount of exposure between the two cultures varied considerably in different areas of Wales, especially during the later Roman period. This was due to the withdrawal of troops from across much of Wales by the middle of the second century AD, and the unequal distribution of urban centres.<sup>1</sup> This study takes full account of this disparity and particular attention is paid to the extent and speed to which Roman burial rites were adopted in the different geographical areas of Wales.

The following sections will consider the chronology, loci and spatial patterning of rural burials in Roman Wales. Grave treatment, furnishings and burial display will also be analysed and compared with that from military and urban areas. Comparisons will also be drawn from rural sites outside Wales in order to highlight any widespread rural traditions and any practices seemingly peculiar to Wales.

It should be noted that, in addition to the problem of the non-preservation of skeletal material in the acid soils of Wales (a problem encountered on all site types), much of the burial evidence from rural areas is derived from antiquarian sources. This means that many of the discoveries are ill recorded and some of the artefacts are no longer extant and cannot be assessed. The difficulty of securely dating skeletal material from cave and hillfort contexts also hinders analysis.

## **THE CHRONOLOGY OF CREMATION AND INHUMATION PRACTICES IN RURAL AREAS**

### **Cremation**

It is important to be aware that cremation was not an intrusive Roman rite in Wales (*pace* Philpott 1991, 220). Evidence from pre-conquest Wales shows that both inhumation and cremation were carried out, although inhumation appears to have been the dominant rite (Table 1; Map 1). However, there are factors which may have skewed the evidence in favour of inhumation (see pages 32-3). The most obvious of these is the paucity of pottery in Iron Age Wales which suggests that cremations, if enclosed, were likely to have been housed in organic containers;<sup>2</sup> this makes their detection far more difficult.

The increased availability of Roman pottery and other inorganic objects that were consigned to the grave made cremation much more visible during the Roman period. Cremation was the predominant Roman rite during the first two centuries AD and it is from the military forts that the majority of evidence comes (see chapters 3 and 4). However, there were also a significant number of outliers in the countryside (Map 2). Some of these burials were probably connected to the military and the result of troop movements across the frontier zone. But the close proximity of native settlement sites to other cremations, and the mode of deposition (within the curtilage or sited close to prehistoric monuments), suggests that we may be seeing a native cremation rite made visible by material goods. It is probable that this was the case at Welshpool, Powys (*WI*), Llanarmon-yn-Ial, Denbighshire (*L9*) and Pen y Bonc, Anglesey (*P3*).<sup>3</sup> All three sites were located at some distance from known Roman encampments and

displayed native burial characteristics through the use of specific types of grave goods (primarily metalwork) or in the choice of burial location.

If we are looking for evidence of the continuance of an indigenous cremation rite rather than a Roman introduction, it is interesting to note that five of the six Iron Age sites which have produced cremations are distributed to the west of Wales (Map 1). It may also be significant that the three antiquarian discoveries which lacked skeletal material, but were identified as 'burials' due to the funerary associations of the artefacts found (denoted by stars on Map 1), came from west and north Wales. This raises the possibility that these 'burials' were also cremations, as it seems more likely that the haphazard excavation methods of the nineteenth century missed unurned cremations that would quickly have become scattered under 'spade and pick'.<sup>4</sup> Based on such limited and tenuous evidence, it would be unwise to speculate too far. But it may be significant that, outside military and urban contexts, the distribution of what appear in the main to be first- and second-century cremations, broadly follows the Iron Age pattern and may point to a stronger indigenous cremation rite in these areas.

Of the eight late cremations (i.e. third century and later) that come from Wales, seven of these are from rural or native urban contexts (see Table 2). This is a significant number and it is tempting to speculate that we may be seeing the persistence of a native cremation rite through to the fourth and possibly fifth century. It certainly suggests that cremation took longer to die out amongst the native population. The evidence from Pentre Farm, Pontardulais, Swansea (*PI4*), is particularly pertinent here. Charcoal from a probable pyre site (see below) located on the edge of a Bronze Age ring cairn gave a calibrated radiocarbon date of cal. AD 420 — 660 (2 sigma).<sup>5</sup> If the radiocarbon date is correct, the late date of this deposit points to post-Roman cremation in Wales, which, in such a rural backwater, is likely to represent the continuation of a Romano-British rite. Comparable radiocarbon dates have also been attained for cremation burials in Ireland (O'Brien 1992, 133), which suggests a similar reluctance to put aside indigenous traditions. However, we cannot rule out a rogue example of intrusive 'Germanic' practice at Pentre Farm, since Germanic trading links are suspected along the south-west coast of Wales in the early medieval period (Alcock 1963, 56).

The late cremations from rural and native urban contexts are concentrated in south Wales (Table 2), but such limited evidence makes any suggestion of geographical bias untenable. It is also significant that, with the exception of Pentre Farm (*P14*), all these cremations are dated by their associated pottery. 'Unenclosed' Roman cremations, which cannot be closely dated, may also be of late Roman date. Here, we might consider the cremation burial from Bryn Beddau, Rhostryfan (*R4*) as a likely candidate. At this hut group in north Wales, a simple unurned cremation was inserted through the floor of a Romano-British building, apparently preceding the building's final destruction (Williams 1923, 297-302). No dating evidence exists for this building, but it is likely to be of a similar date to the other huts on the hillside where occupation from the second to fourth century is attested.

### **Inhumation**

Crouched or flexed inhumation which, along with cremation, is attested in pre-conquest Wales, is found in a hillfort context possibly as late as the late third century AD at Coygan Camp, Carmarthenshire (*C8.1a/b*) (Wainwright 1967, 54-6, 195-203). The social and possible political implications of hillfort burial at such a late stage are discussed below. A late third- or fourth-century AD date is also postulated for a possible crouched inhumation at Rhuddgaer, Anglesey (*R1*) (see below).

With the exception of the late-first/early-second-century inhumations from Chester, extended inhumation is apparent at the forts and *vici* of Wales by the middle of the second century. The introduction of the extended inhumation rite into rural areas is more difficult to assess, as many of the burials cannot be closely dated. Moreover, there is also some evidence for extended inhumation in pre-conquest Wales, which clouds the issue of Roman introduction.<sup>6</sup> In a rural context the earliest dateable post-conquest evidence of extended inhumation from south Wales comes from Nash (*N2*), where two earth-cut graves, c. AD 100-200 were aligned alongside a drainage ditch on pastoral land (Meddens & Beasley 2001, 143-83). Similarly, at Abernant (*A2*), 1.5km from the civil settlement at Bulmore, a single radiocarbon determination of cal. AD 20 — 240 (2 sigma), suggests extended inhumation by at least the mid third century (Tuck *et al.* 2003, 121-3). In north Wales, the official complex at Pentre Farm (*P7.1a/b*) produced evidence of two female extended inhumations dated to the Antonine period. That all three sites may have had military associations suggests that



in these instances extended inhumation — though not necessarily inhumation *per se* — was an adopted Roman rite. The use of *tegulae* and lead in the grave construction at Pentre Farm, and wooden coffins at Abernant, and possibly also at Nash, certainly show that Roman fashions in grave furnishings were being followed.

By the late third century (based on both contextual evidence and a radiocarbon date of cal. AD 50 - 350, 2 sigma) extended inhumation is evident at Biglis, Glamorgan (*B1.1a*), a modest Romano-British farmstead overlying an earlier Iron Age settlement, which implies that by this time, at least in south Wales, it was a rite employed by native farming communities (Robinson *et al.* 1988). Here again, the probability of a coffin attests to the adoption of Roman burial practices. However, the location of the burial, placed within the defensive bank of the settlement, underlines the fact that indigenous traditions were still an intrinsic part of rural burial practice.

### **Late Roman inhumation in south Wales**

By the fourth century extended inhumation was fairly widespread across south Wales and is the most visible form of burial during the late Roman period. Late Roman rural Wales also saw the first stages in the development of a cemetery type first defined by Rahtz (1977, 53-63), and now commonly referred to as the 'managed' cemetery (Thomas, C. 1981, 232). This class of cemetery has been identified on a range of site types and is classified by the presence of certain characteristics: namely, west-east orientated inhumations deposited in orderly rows or discrete groups with few or no grave goods. As Rahtz has pointed out, cemeteries of this type may have had earlier beginnings but emerge as a broadly definable class by the late Roman/early medieval period (Rahtz 1977, 53; Rahtz *et al.* 2000, 422-3). In south Wales both the Atlantic Trading Estate (*A4.1*) and Llandough (*L14*) fall into this category. At the former site, radiocarbon dates (the earliest: cal. AD 241 — 409, 1 sigma; the latest: cal. AD 686 — 877, 1 sigma) suggest a long period of use. A two-sigma calibration gives a date range between the second and tenth centuries. At Llandough (*L14*) the evidence suggests the sub-Roman cemetery had roots in the Iron Age and was utilized for burial in both the early and late Roman period (Thomas, A. & Holbrook 1994).<sup>7</sup> The relatively early radiocarbon date (see above) recently obtained from Abernant, Mons. (*A2*) is also significant here, since it implies that the moves towards this type of 'managed' cemetery had begun to take place as early as

the second or third century in Wales. Here, a series of nine extended inhumations with no apparent grave goods, formed a discrete cemetery, bounded on at least one side by a ditch. However, while the graves were carefully placed in rows, they were not all oriented true west-east and appear initially to have been aligned to the boundary ditch running north-east — south-west; there is also the possibility of a cremation at this site (Anne Leaver, pers. comm.; Tuck *et al.* 2003, 121-3).

Increasingly, west-east orientation coupled with a scarcity of grave goods is being recognised as a product of late Roman development in Britain rather than an early medieval phenomenon (Crummy *et al.* 1993; Farwell & Molleson 1993; Leach 2003, 144; Philpott 1991, 226-8; Rahtz 1977, 54; Leech 1981, 199-205). It is a late Roman trend that can be identified in a rural context in south Wales and is seen in both isolated burials (e.g. Biglis *B1.1a*; Rogiet *R3.1*) and in cemeteries (e.g. Atlantic Trading Estate *A4.1*). In terms of the introduction of this practice into Wales, it is probable that it was first adopted in the urban areas, because, although the evidence for inhumation from late military and urban contexts is limited, there is some slight evidence to suggest that the inclusion of grave goods and north-south orientation lingered on longer in rural areas as, for example, at Bendricks (*A4.2*), Llandough (*L14*) and Rogiet (*R3.2*).

### **Late Roman inhumation in mid and north Wales**

In mid and north Wales there is no conclusive evidence of late Roman extended inhumations, though it is possible that, as in south Wales, certain cemeteries generally ascribed to the early medieval period had late Roman origins. For example, a radiocarbon date (cal. AD 265-640, 2 sigma) from a coffin stain at Plas Gogerddan, Ceredigion (*P2*), an inhumation cemetery of east-west aligned graves, suggests late Roman beginnings (Murphy 1992, 27). No bone was preserved at this site but the length, width and construction of the graves implies extended inhumations. It is also of interest that the rectangular enclosures surrounding a number of the graves are reminiscent of the late Roman ditched funerary enclosures at sites such as Poundbury and Lankhills (Farwell & Molleson 49-51; Clarke 1979, 84-5). However, comparable enclosures can also be found in early Roman and early medieval contexts in Wales (see Chapter 4).<sup>8</sup>

Another example of a cemetery with a possible late Roman phase is Arrfryn, Anglesey. Here, a series of simple earth-cut, north-south aligned graves were stratigraphically earlier than the succeeding east-west aligned graves assigned to the late fifth/early sixth century on epigraphic evidence. These later, east-west graves also slighted a V-shaped enclosure ditch, which may have been associated with the north-south aligned burials (White, R.B. 1972, 35; Petts 2002, 35). The excavator argued that the earliest phases of the cemetery 'might easily be of the fifth century or even earlier' (White, R.B. 1972, 35).

Likewise a primary late Roman phase might also be postulated for Capel Eithin, also on Anglesey. Here again no bone survived, but epigraphic evidence attests to the cemetery being in use during the sixth/early seventh century. Two main foci are indicated within the cemetery, one a Bronze Age cairn, the other an early medieval mortuary enclosure. A first phase of sub-Roman date is favoured by the excavators as burial close to prehistoric features can be readily paralleled in late fifth — early eighth-century contexts in England and Wales (White & Smith 1999, 155). However, though such practice was widespread across post-Roman England and Wales, it was not a new phenomenon (Williams, H. 1997, 22; Petts 2001; Pearce, J. 1999b; Esmonde-Cleary 2000, 134). In Wales the reuse of prehistoric features for burial, particularly barrows or cairns, was a significant feature of Romano-British practice with clear prehistoric precedents. The possibility that Capel Eithin (*C.16*) may have been the focus for funerary and ritual activity in the early Roman period is also a factor which may have motivated mortuary use at a later Roman date (see below).

As the evidence from Plas Gogerddan and Capel Eithin shows, the difficulties of dating west-east findless burials are compounded in Wales by the lack of bone available for radiocarbon dating. The above sites are three of a number of broadly contemporary inhumation cemeteries in Wales, which display late Roman/early medieval burial characteristics and are located on prehistoric ritual sites (James, H. 1992a; Edwards, N. 1986; Petts 2002). However, positive proof of Roman period funerary activity at these sites is lacking.

In a search for late Roman inhumations in north Wales the evidence from Brynhyfryd Park, Ruthin should also be considered. Here, a small cemetery of east-west graves

was located 15m north of a late first- to second-century cremation cemetery (*R2.1*) (Jones, N. 1992). The excavator argued for a post-Roman date as six of the graves cut through Romano-British contexts containing pottery of second- and third-century date. Pottery of the mid-fourth century in one of the graves was interpreted as residual. However, the fact that there was no firm dating evidence and nothing exclusively post-Roman about the mode of burial, cautions against ruling out a late Roman date.<sup>9</sup> The close proximity of the earlier burial ground may also have influenced the placement of the later graves.

Similarly, at Pentre Ffwrddan, Flint (*P7.2*), close (.05km) to the official complex at Pentre Farm, three separate clusters of inhumation burials may date to the late Roman period. The nature of late Roman activity in the Pentre Ffrwndan area is uncertain, but pottery and coin evidence suggest some domestic occupation into the fourth century (O'Leary *et al.* 1989, 39, 122; Petch & Taylor 1925). Again, there was nothing diagnostically Roman about any of the burials; those discovered in 1856 were reported to be east-west orientated and in rough stone cists, features which in Wales might be attributed either to the late Roman or early medieval periods (Ffoulkes 1856, 307). However, since Antonine burials are attested at the Pentre Farm complex (*P7.1 a & b*), it is quite likely that those at Pentre Ffwrddan were also Romano-British. Certainly, the burials at Pentre Farm demonstrate that, in line with what is known of rural and 'small town' practice in Wales, integrated domestic and burial activity was accepted practice at this site (Blockley 1989, 5). It may also be significant that the distribution of the graves at Pentre Ffwrddan implies a linear alignment, which suggests that they may have been placed alongside a Roman road (see Atkinson & Taylor 1924, fig. 2).

Yet, even if we accept that a proportion of findless, 'early medieval' inhumations in north Wales may be of late Roman date, there still appears to be a lacuna of burials in mid and north Wales during the third and fourth century. We do not see the furnished or coffined inhumations that are apparent in south Wales. There are several possible explanations for the paucity of inhumation burials during this period. Firstly, mid and north Wales have not undergone the same level of archaeological exploration as the south and, consequently, burials may be undiscovered. Secondly, the soils in the more mountainous regions of Wales are particularly acidic, which may skew the

burial evidence in favour of the south. Thirdly, the presence of the military was greatly reduced from the middle of the second century onwards,<sup>10</sup> which would have reduced the influence of intrusive rites and customs. Finally, there is the strong possibility that indigenous burial practices such as excarnation or unurned cremation, which leave little archaeological trace, were more widespread and persistent in the less Romanised areas. There is certainly the suggestion that such practices continued into the late Roman period in a hillfort context at Dinorben, Denbighshire (*D3. no.2*) (Gardner & Savory 1964, 222).

It is telling that it is only at Rhuddgaer, Anglesey (*RI*), a site within close proximity (1.5m across the Menai Strait) to the auxiliary fort at Caernarfon (Segontium), that there is any suggestion that the late Roman burial trends clearly evident in south Wales had filtered out into the rural north. The category of the site at Rhuddgaer remains unclear, as the interior of the defended settlement nearby was destroyed in the nineteenth century. But the substantial defences of this encampment, coupled with the nature of the finds, suggest a relatively high status, agricultural settlement (RCHAM Anglesey, 1936, 92; Williams, W.W. 1861, 37-41 & 1878, 136-40; Arnold & Davies 2000, 67-8).

In 1878, three sides of an inscribed lead coffin were recovered from a disturbed stone cist c. 457m south-west of the settlement's defences (Williams, W.W. 1878). The coffin contained traces of quicklime filling and, to date, is the only example of a plaster burial in Wales. Although Nash-Williams (1950b, 59-61) dated the coffin to the fifth century, Toller (1977, 76, n.23) suggests a late Roman date, a supposition based on coins of Carausius (AD 287-93) found at the site. Additional weight is given to Toller's argument as pieces of tile, Roman pottery, ashes and calcined bones were also found in the immediate vicinity of the cist. These finds are indicative of cremation burials and suggest that the coffin had been deposited in an established Roman cemetery (W.W. Williams 1878, 140; Hughes 1919, 462-4).

The size of the Rhuddgaer coffin is of particular interest here, as it is possible that it housed a crouched or flexed inhumation (Williams, W.W. 1878, 138). Coffins built to contain crouched inhumations are rare, but not unknown, in the Roman period (Philpott 1991, 55). The preserved portions of the Rhuddgaer coffin measure

approximately 91.5cm x 70cm, measurements which, if truly representative of its original dimensions, would provide just enough space for the crouched body of a male of average height and build (see Fig. 6.1). However, as the coffin was truncated in antiquity, its original length cannot be ascertained with certainty. Nevertheless, there is considerable merit in the argument put forward by Williams (1878, 137) that, as the inscriptions placed on either side of the coffin appear to be the same, but are missing different portions, the original length can be calculated. This is possible as the juxtaposition of the lettering to the two extant ends of the coffin, suggests both extended the full coffin length.

If, as the evidence appears to suggest, the Rhuddgaer coffin contained a crouched inhumation, this burial is of great significance. Lead coffins and plaster burials were clearly intrusive burial rites (Green, C.J.S. 1977; Philpott 1991, 223) and their use also implies a burial of relatively high status. Yet, the implication is that, although the close proximity of Segontium exposed the native population to Roman mortuary fashions, the crouched posture was still an important aspect of indigenous burial practice as late as the fourth century. That the coffin represented the burial of one of the native elite is also implied by the inscription *CAMVLORIS HOI* 'here lie the bones of Camuloris' — a name of Celtic origin (Hughes 1926, 378; Nash-Williams 1950b).

In summary, it is clear that some sections of rural society followed the trends in burial practice seen at the military and urban centres. However, there appears to have been regional variations in the speed and extent to which Roman burial practices were adopted in the countryside. In direct contrast to the south, outside the few extended inhumations in *vici* contexts, and those of possible Roman date at the civil settlement at Heronbridge 2.5km from Chester (CHE.10), evidence for the extended inhumation rite in mid and north Wales is meagre. In rural contexts it is restricted to those sites outlined above, where late Roman burials are suspected but unproven.

In line with developments in England, the evidence from Wales shows that the indigenous rite of crouched or flexed inhumation persisted into the third century in rural areas (Wainwright 1967, 56; Philpott 1991, 57). However, if the Rhuddgaer burial was genuinely a crouched inhumation, and of fourth-century date, then it could be argued it was a practice that took longer to die out in north Wales.

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## **BURIAL LOCATION**

Burials in rural Roman Wales followed distinct patterns of distribution, largely reflecting those identified in the Iron Age (see Chapter 2). Burials were incorporated within the curtilage or placed on the periphery of settlement sites. They were placed in association with prehistoric monuments and landscape features, and within caves and close to water sources. The development of a Roman road network across Wales also led to the deposition of small clusters of burials close to roadways in rural areas. However, although roadside burial was principally a Roman burial tradition, this practice is also redolent of the prehistoric use of ridgeways and boundaries for burial.<sup>11</sup> It is also important to note that, whilst certain burials appear to have been found in isolation, they may originally have been associated with settlement sites which are hitherto undiscovered.

### **Burials associated with settlements**

Collis (1977b, 26-34) first highlighted the problems of the study of rural burials over that of urban cemeteries in the Roman period. Foremost of these difficulties is that there is not the large body of data available for comparative analysis that there is in an urban environment. Secondly, the tendency to place burials on the peripheries of settlements means that they may be missed by excavation. Thirdly, as the majority of farmsteads were located in areas of good arable land, centuries of ploughing may destroy vital evidence, especially in the case of burials deposited close to the surface, a practice recognised at some rural sites (Collis 1977, 26; Parkhouse 1988, 15; Leech 1981, 199; Burleigh 1993, 42-3). Finally, the difficulties of dating 'findless' burials are compounded in the countryside, as many sites saw multi-period activity and the contexts chosen for burial — which are often boundaries or field enclosures — cannot themselves be closely dated.

### **Formal cemeteries associated with farmsteads and villas**

In Wales, with a few exceptions, the modest size of the villas and farmsteads cuts down the likelihood of any large cemeteries being found in association, even allowing for the lengthy occupation of some sites. But the pattern identified in Wales of burials scattered across settlement sites, and of small, formal cemeteries on settlement perimeters, can be closely paralleled with evidence from other areas of rural Roman



Britain (Esmonde Cleary 2000, 131-3; Pearce, J. 1999b; Jones, R.F.J. 1982, 81-9). Taking the evidence for what appear to have been more formal cemeteries first, it has been noted that on some rural sites in England, burials were located beyond the settlement boundaries (Pearce 1999b, 154). Often it was the larger groups of burials, sometimes within enclosures, that were placed just outside or closest to the boundaries of a site; see, for example: Stanton Low, Bucks. (Woodfield & Johnson 1989); Owslebury, Hants. (Collis 1977, 28 phase 2); Lynch Farm, Cambs. (Jones, R.F.J. 1982, 85); Barton Court Farm Villa, Oxon. (Branigan & Miles 1989, 69); and Claydon Pike, Glos. (Branigan & Miles 1989, 70). Thus, at some sites, the dead were placed in delineated areas set apart for burial. However, it was not necessarily the case that all contemporary burials at a site were placed within the confines of any respective farmstead or villa cemetery.

Small groups of burials in Wales that probably represent the cemeteries of nearby villa/farmsteads have been discovered at Abernant Farm, Mons. (*A2*), Llandough, Cardiff (*L14*), Atlantic Trading Estate, Glamorgan (*A4.1*), Rhuddgaer, Anglesey (*R1*) and possibly Whitton, Glamorgan (*W2.1 (a\*)*). At all these sites groups of burials were distanced from domestic activity and formed discrete burial areas. At Abernant Farm, Mons. (*A2*), a small inhumation cemetery flanked the road below a postulated Romano-British farmstead located on the spur of the rise above (Mein 1998, 120; Yates 2001, 5). Similarly, the evidence from Llandough (*L14*) suggests that some of the burials within the early medieval cemetery were contemporary with the occupation of a villa site 150m to the south. In common with the evidence from a growing number of Romano-British villas in Roman Britain, Llandough villa was preceded by an Iron Age farmstead (Owen-John 1988, 129). A pit burial, which produced a potsherd of late Iron Age date, and a crouched inhumation burial from the cemetery may, therefore, be contemporary with the initial settlement phase at this site. Further inhumations within the cemetery contained grave goods consisting of a Colchester-derivative brooch, beads and coins. The brooch was of first-century date, which suggests deposition fairly early on in the Roman period. Two further inhumations containing beads (located in the same area of the cemetery as the grave containing the brooch) may be broadly contemporary (Thomas, A. & Holbrook 1994, 15). This correlates with the earliest phase of Romano-British occupation at the villa, which has been attributed to the Hadrianic or, at the latest, the early Antonine period

(Owen-John 1988, 144). It is tempting to see these furnished graves as belonging to this stage in the villa's development.

The possibility that a group of furnished inhumations within the cemetery were of late Roman date has already been noted. Four of these burials contained coins of mid fourth-century date, and five burials, including one of those with a coin, contained hob-nails. However, ceramic and numismatic evidence suggest that the villa was abandoned by *c.* AD 330. If the graves are genuinely of late Roman date,<sup>12</sup> this makes them slightly later. It has been suggested that the establishment of an early monastic site in the neighbourhood implies some activity may have continued at the villa site into the post-Roman period (Owen-John 1988, 152). Certainly, the graves must have been associated with habitation somewhere in the near vicinity.

The lengthy occupation at the villa may not have been continuous, but it is significant that what is likely to have been the villa's cemetery was used during the various stages of occupation. It is also of interest that the cemetery continued in use into the early medieval period, possibly in association with the early monastic site, which may have been established as early as the fifth century — a sequence of development that has raised questions about the continuity and type of settlement that existed between the demise of the villa and the rise of the early Christian centre (Thomas, A. & Holbrook 1994, Owen-John 1988, 144-7; Rahtz *et al.* 2000, 422; James 1992a).

The destruction of much of the cemetery at Llandough prior to excavation makes it impossible to calculate whether the cemetery catered for all the population of the villa. However, it is significant that the cemetery saw prolonged use and incorporated more than one burial rite. The graves were also located in a discrete burial ground set at some distance from the domestic areas, yet, judging by the lay of the land, still visible from the villa complex (Thomas, A. & Holbrook 1994, 2 fig.2). This is a pattern also recognised at Rhuddgaer (*RI*) where more than one burial rite is probable (Williams, W.W. 1878, 140). The burials at Rhuddgaer were also some distance from the defended settlement (*c.* 457m) and their location on raised ground would have made any burial marker visible from both the settlement and the nearby Menai Strait.

At the Atlantic Trading Estate, Barry, at least two cemeteries appear to have served the local Romano-British community (*A4.1*) (Price 1987) and (*A4.2*) (Sell 1996). It is not clear what type of settlement(s) existed in this area, but the discovery of lead coffins, the Sully coin hoard and verbal accounts of substantial Roman masonry, point to a Roman villa of some prestige within the neighbourhood (Sell 1996, 8-10; GGAT PRN 02921s; Toft 1989, 19).

Wartime activity uncovered a significant number of burials at Barry. An unrecorded number of cremations in glass vessels and inhumations in decorated lead coffins came from a site (*A4.2*) estimated to have been approximately 300m to the north of the late Roman/early medieval cemetery (*A4.1*) noted above. The chronological relationship between cemetery (*A4.1*) and (*A4.2*) is unclear, but invites speculation. Some of the coins (now unlocated) found at (*A4.2*) were of possible late third-century date, which, coupled with the presence of lead coffins, suggests the cemetery was used into the fourth century (Sell, 1996, 8; Taylor 1993, 209). Cemetery (*A4.1*) has produced radiocarbon dates that suggest an initial phase as early as the second or third century, so it is possible that both cemeteries were in use contemporaneously. The contrast of the findless east-west graves of (*A4.1*) against the cremations and apparent furnished graves of (*A4.2*) has led to the suggestion that these sites may have represented separate pagan and Christian cemeteries (Sell 1996, 10). However, if the cemeteries were genuinely of contemporary date, we might also consider that status dictated cemetery use. The use of lead coffins at (*A4.2*) implies relatively high status burials, whilst those buried at (*A4.1*) appear to have been of mixed social status. The pathological evidence from the latter suggests that over half of those buried were 'used to hard manual labour and thus perhaps of a low social status' (Price 1989, 19).

As at the other sites considered above, cemetery (*A4.1*) formed a discrete but prominent burial area delineated by boundaries on at least two sides and positioned on the shore of the Bristol Channel (Sell 1996, 21; Price 1987, 60-1). The extent of cemetery (*A4.2*) is unknown.

### **The co-existence of formal cemeteries and dispersed burials**

What all the rural sites cited above have in common is the establishment of formal cemetery areas away from domestic activity. At Llandough, Rhuddgaer and the

Atlantic Trading Estate the evidence also suggests that these cemeteries spanned several centuries and incorporated more than one burial rite. But what is more difficult to determine is whether these formal cemeteries were used for all of the local or villa community. At Owslebury, Hants, contemporary burials were deposited both within the cemeteries and across the settlement site (Collis 1977). This is a pattern that has been recognised on other rural sites in England, though in some cases lack of grave goods or complex stratigraphy make it difficult to determine whether these two distinct practices were contemporary (Burleigh 1993, 43; Leech 1981; Jones, R.F.J. 1982, 82-9).

It is possible that both forms of deposition also co-existed at sites in Wales, but lack of dating evidence prevents positive identification of such contemporaneity. At Rhuddgaer (*R1*) a possible formal cemetery was located on the outskirts of the settlement, whilst a probable cist burial was discovered c.1821 within the ramparts of the defended site (Williams, W.W. 1861, 37-8). At Whitton, Glamorgan (*W2.1a/b*) adult cremations and infant inhumations were located within the boundaries of the settlement. Yet skeletal material found in association with silver coins recorded at ST0837195, 500m north-east of the villa, may represent the farmstead's formal cemetery area (Jarrett & Wrathmell 1981; Thomas, H. 1958, 294). Similarly, two separate burial areas at Rogiet, Monmouthshire, suggest both may have been associated with a Roman farmstead in the area. Here a single east-west inhumation of probable late Roman date (*R3.1*) was located above a suspected domestic site of third/fourth-century date, whilst a quarry site 500m to the north, revealed a small late Roman cemetery (*R3.2*) (Bateman & Enright 1998, 75; Hudd 1908, 41-5).

It is significant that both forms of deposition — that is, within settlement interiors and in discrete burial grounds outside domestic areas — may have been contemporary at some of the Iron Age sites in Wales (see Chapter 2). This being the case, we are not necessarily looking at the later development of the more formal cemetery, but a longstanding tradition of these two modes of deposition.

## **The contexts of dispersed burials associated with rural settlements, with special consideration given to age selective distribution**

By analysing the different grave treatments of the rural dead in Hampshire, Pearce has challenged the view, largely conceived from models proposed for Iron Age skeletal distribution (see Chapter 2), that those enclosed within formal cemeteries were necessarily of higher status or worth than those apparently buried on a more random basis. Instead a 'concentric ordering' of gender and age is proposed, with infants buried closer to the hub of domesticity and older children and adults further away, possibly in gender selective groupings (Pearce 1999b, 156-7). The limited evidence from Wales makes such explanatory models of gender patterning difficult to substantiate, but the evidence suggests that, in line with Pearce's findings, infants were generally deposited closer to domestic buildings and that the choice of location for adult burials was more often on the periphery or outskirts of the settlement. Direct parallels with other areas of rural Roman Britain can also be drawn in the locations chosen for burial in Wales, which included boundary ditches, corn driers and the entrance to settlements (Pearce 1999b; Scott 1991; Esmonde Cleary 2000).

### **Infant burials**

It was noted above that the burial of infants within or close to buildings was not site specific, restricted to Britain, or a post-conquest phenomenon (see Chapter 5). Six rural sites in Wales have produced infant burials, five of which were farmsteads (*B1.1a*), (*C5.2*), (*C7*), (*E1.1a*), (*W2.1*) and one of which was a domestic and small scale industrial site (*P15*) (see Table 4). The nature of the site of a further possible example at Portskewett Hill, near Chepstow (*P12*), is unclear. Formerly considered a villa, it has been suggested that its hilltop position is more indicative of a temple site (Taylor & Collingwood 1922, 243; Arnold & Davies 2000, 130).

The background to the study of infant burial in antiquity is outlined in the introductory chapter. It was noted that Eleanor Scott's (1999) thorough treatment of the subject of the infant dead in past and present societies has done much to moderate the view that Roman infants were invariably carelessly disposed of or the end product of infanticide. In a domestic context, rather than being marginalized from society, the inclusion of infant burials within the confines of the settlement is increasingly being seen as a conscious attempt to integrate and subsume the dead into the heart of the

community. Such practice is seen as a means of securing the dead child's spiritual protection or actively addressing economic and social concerns related to fertility and cultural or female identity (Scott 1991, 115-121; 1999, 113; Gowland 2001, 157).

So how closely does the Welsh evidence match the developments in infant burial practice noted elsewhere in the province? From a chronological point of view, it has been suggested that, although the burial of infants on settlement sites was an indigenous practice, it increased during the late Roman period, possibly as a result of socio-economic pressure, which showed itself in 'revitalization' or 'nativism' movements (Struck 1993; Scott 1991).<sup>13</sup> This is not necessarily the picture that is gleaned from the Welsh evidence, though the sample is too small to draw any firm conclusions. The infant burials from Prestatyn, Denbighshire (*P15*) and Thornwell Farm, Monmouthshire (*C5.2*) date to the late first or second century, whilst those from Whitton (*W2.1b*), Caldicot (*C7*) and Ely (*E1.1a*), all in south Wales, are of late third- and fourth-century date. There were no firm indications of date for the infant burials at Biglis (*B1.1a*), but a third- or fourth-century date for the majority of burials was favoured by the excavators (Parkhouse 1988, 15-16). The possible infant burial from Portskewett Hill (*P12*) was deposited between the mid-third and late fourth century.

However, if those infant burials associated with structures at military sites are also taken into the equation, it can be seen that it was a practice carried out fairly equally across the Roman period, as both these examples date from the second century (*CAER.8*; *CHE.9*, Table 4). This is significant for if, as the evidence appears to suggest, the majority of these infant burials were associated with the native element of Romano-British society, there is little to suggest a late Roman resurgence of this practice. It is tentatively argued here that any late Roman socio-economic pressures in Wales were not specifically reflected in the mortuary practices of the very young. Given that there appears to be an increase in the use of prehistoric sites for burial during the late Roman period (see below), it is more likely that any 'revivalism' or 'nativism' movements reflected in burial practice affected the burial rites of all the community. The late Iron Age infant burials at Prestatyn, Denbighshire and Stackpole Warren, Pembrokeshire, bear out Struck's (1993, 317-18) argument that

infant burial on rural settlement sites was a native tradition (Benson 1990, 184; Blockley 1989, 20-3).

The deposition of infant burials within or close to buildings and/or associated with agricultural features at farmsteads and villas in Wales is in line with the evidence found at villa sites across much of England (Scott 1991; 1999; Struck 1993; Pearce, J. 1999b; Leech 1981, 189-92). If we include Portskewett Hill (*P12*), infant burials are associated with buildings at five rural sites (*W2.1b*), (*E1.1a*), (*P.15*) and (*C5.2*). In England, it has been shown that infant burials often 'inaugurated construction or terminated the use of buildings and installations' (Pearce, J. 2001, 127; Scott 1991); infant burials in Wales also appear to have been deposited at the start and cessation of occupation or agricultural activity. A good illustration of this phenomenon comes from Whitton in the Vale of Glamorgan (*W2.1b*). Here, two infants, probably neonates, were recovered from the highest levels of a foundation trench in a stone built building constructed c. AD 300 (Jarrett & Wrathmell 1981, 50-51, 98). As neither of the burial pits extended beyond the line of the trench, it was considered likely that they had been deposited whilst the trench was still open, rather than dug into it at a later date. Upon abandonment of the building a third neonate was deposited inside the building in the fill of a disused stone-lined tank, which adjoined a T-shaped drying kiln. Thus, the infant burials at this site were associated with agricultural/domestic processes, and appear to have marked the commencement and end of occupation.

The possibility of foundation burials has also been suggested at Thornwell Farm, Mons. (*C5.2*), where the post-hole of a structure cut through a burial pit containing three early-neonates (Hughes 1992, 96). However, although the burials may have determined the location of the building, as they appear to have been disturbed rather than carefully incorporated into the structure, it is perhaps unlikely that the burials effected immediate construction.

There are hints that infant burials also marked phases of occupation or closure at Prestatyn, Denbighshire (*P15*) and Ely, Cardiff (*E1.1a*). At Prestatyn, two fragmentary neonatal skeletons were 'located from layers' in a building which underwent two distinct phases of activity (Nicholls 1989, 171). This site is also of

interest as the skeleton of a large dog was located just outside the north-west corner of the building that contained the infants. The close spatial association between infant skeletal material and animal remains (particularly dogs) has been recognised at a number of villa sites in England — a juxtaposition that, in some instances, appears to have been deliberate and is indicative of ritual deposition (Scott 1991, 117). However, lack of close dating evidence at Prestatyn prevents any such interpretation here. Finally, fragments of a baby's skull were also found on the floor of a room at Ely villa, Cardiff (*E1.1a*), during the last phase of villa occupation (Wheeler 1922b, 24-5).

In light of the above evidence it is argued that infant burials in Wales, as in other areas of the province, were sometimes deposited within the fabric and interior of buildings at specific stages in a structure's development. However, there is also some evidence from three native towns (Caerwent, Cowbridge and possibly Wroxeter) to suggest that adult burials may also have been foundation burials or, at least, were knowingly incorporated into subsequent structures (see pages 65, 139, 150) (Ashby *et al.* 1902, 33-4; Boon 1976, 174, n. 22; Parkhouse & Evans 1996, 71; Shrop. CC SMR. No. 06455-SA13115). Adult burials in such contexts are not restricted to Wales (Leech 1981, 189), which implies that, though infants were more commonly foundation burials, there was not necessarily any distinction made between the adult or infant dead in this particular mortuary rite. It is also worth bearing in mind that there are also instances of adult burials found within abandoned buildings in late Roman and post-Roman contexts.<sup>14</sup> So it could be argued that adult burials were also used to mark the end of occupation.

It is also significant that, as Pearce (1999b, 155) has noted, though a close association has been identified between infant burials and agricultural features such as corn-driers (see Scott 1991, 117),<sup>15</sup> adult burials were also placed in such locations. In Wales two of the three burials associated with 'corn-driers' were adults (see *C12.1*; *B1.1b*; *W2.1b*). So, if we accept the premise (Pearce, J. 1999b; Scott 1991) that deposition in such contexts incorporated the dead into the ritual life of agricultural communities, then it can be argued that in Wales adult and infant burials were seen to perform some of the same ritual functions. The part that the dead played in community ritual is discussed in more depth in the concluding chapter. However, it is significant that the evidence from both rural sites and from the *civitas* capital of Caerwent suggests that



the remains of all age groups could be used in special deposits or afforded burial in 'symbolically charged' contexts. There is a picture emerging that in native contexts in Wales, whatever attributes singled out an individual for burial in symbolically important locations, or for incorporation into votive deposits, it was not necessarily their age. This is a pattern also recognised in Iron Age Wales and is particularly well illustrated by the adult and three infant burials at the Devil's Quoit ritual complex at Stackpole (Benson *et al.* 1990, 228). However, this is not to say that there was always parity in the treatment of the infant and adult dead, or that they were invariably perceived of in the same way.

### **Adult burials on settlement boundaries and in settlement interiors**

The boundaries of settlements figure highly in the places chosen for the burial of the dead in rural areas. These were burial locations, which, it has been argued, held liminal associations; were linked to the control or production of agricultural fertility; acted as a means of constraining the spirits of the dead by placing a physical barrier between the dead and the living; or provided a means of reinforcing territorial claims (Esmonde Cleary 2000, 137-8; Pearce, J. 1999b, 157-9). We should also consider that, since the dead were placed in defensive boundaries and ramparts, they were perceived as defensive tools — spiritual guardians of settlement interiors. Added weight is given to this supposition, as it was a practice that increased in intensity during the late Iron Age, in a period of social upheaval (Whimster 1981, 191). Again, this was a mode of deposition in Wales that was used for all age groups and, whilst this was not a phenomenon exclusive to Wales, it does reinforce the notion that both the adult and infant dead could be attributed with the same supernatural importance or hold the same ritual value.

Adult inhumation burials were found cut into enclosure ditches or boundary banks at the farmsteads of Biglis, Glamorgan (*B1.1a*), possibly Church Farm, Mons. (*C14*) and alongside boundary ditches on the Gwent Levels (*N2*). At Ely, Cardiff (*E1.1b*) an east-west orientated adult inhumation was located immediately outside the fourth-century banked defences. Infant burials were deposited within boundary banks at Caldicot, Mons. (*C7*), Thornwell Farm, Mons. (*C5.2*) and Biglis (*B1.1a\**). The evidence from Biglis is particularly interesting, as both adult and infant burials were placed within or close to the western and southern defensive boundaries of the

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settlement (Parkhouse 1988, 7-32) (Fig. 6.2). This infers that a specific part of the settlement was seen as appropriate for burial and utilized for a cross-section of the community. That this location was not seen merely as a convenient area for casual disposal is demonstrated by the coffined burial of an adult male (*B1.1a*). However, the uncoffined nature of the infant burials may suggest that more status was attributed to the adult.

The continued use of hillforts for burial post-conquest is discussed in more detail below. However, it is relevant here to note that burials deposited within the ramparts of hillforts as, for example, at Coygan Camp (*C8.1a & b*) and Castle Ditches (*C13*), reflect the same desire to place the dead within the settlement boundaries and can be seen as part of the same indigenous tradition.

Whilst infant burials make up the majority of burials within settlement interiors, there are also examples of adult burials in such contexts at Whitton (*W2.1a*), Rhostryfan (*R4*) and possibly Llantwit Major (*L15.1*). The evidence from the farmstead at Whitton is particularly pertinent here. There is definite evidence for continuous occupation at this site from c. AD 30 to the middle of the fourth century (Jarrett & Wrathmell 1981). Such continuity of settlement provides us with an excellent case study of how native burial practices evolved in Wales during the Roman occupation. Both adults and infants were deposited within the curtilage. In addition to the infant inhumation burials within the masonry building noted above (*W2.1b*), two adult cremations (*W2.1a*) were located within the north-west corner of the farmstead enclosure. One cremation was dated to the third century by the associated pottery. Burial during this period means that this cremation would have been deposited in a fairly open area of the settlement (Jarrett & Wrathmell 1981, 118, 96). The other cremation was unurned and cannot be closely dated, but its juxtaposition to the urned cremation suggests it was contemporary (Jarrett & Wrathmell 1981, figs. 41-7). Both adult and infant burials appear to have been of broadly contemporary date. However, the infants were interred within a building, while the adults were cremated and distanced from domestic structures — so a clear distinction between the two age groups is apparent at this site. The possibility that this settlement also had an associated formal cemetery was noted above, which implies that a range of burial practices were employed by the indigenous community at Whitton.

The comparison between the spatial distribution of burials at Whitton and those at Biglis (*B1.1a/b*) highlight the fact that, although patterns can be discerned in rural burial practice, different rural communities had their own individual approach to the disposal of their dead. It is also significant that, although both of these sites were located in the Vale of Glamorgan, cremation was still being carried out in the third century at Whitton, but at Biglis (5km to the south) extended inhumation was the preferred rite.

### **Burial display at rural settlement sites.**

Whilst there is ample evidence to show that Roman grave treatments, such as coffined or urned burial, influenced burial in rural areas, there is little to suggest the presence of any substantial masonry mausolea, along the lines of those found on the rich country estates of the Italian provinces or, to a lesser degree, in the more 'Romanised' areas of south-east England (Toynbee 1971; de la Bédoyère 1993, 83, 119-20). This is understandable in a frontier zone where such classical funerary display seems to have been largely restricted to the legionary fortresses. However, there is one possible example of a rural, stone-built mausoleum at Maesderwen in Powys (*M4*). A sizeable bathhouse with elaborate mosaics was uncovered at this site in the late eighteenth century — a discovery which is taken to indicate the existence of a fairly prestigious villa in close proximity (Nash-Williams 1948-50a, 105-8; RCHAM Breck. 1986, 179-82; Jones & Owen 1999, 10-16; Arnold & Davies 2000, 86). A second building c.24m from the bathhouse contained two skulls, which led to its interpretation as a mausoleum (RCHAMW 1986, 180-1). Whilst the vague nature of the antiquarian report makes it impossible to know whether building and skeletal material were contemporary, the suggestion of a mausoleum does have some merit. Firstly, the juxtaposition of bathhouse and burial is a phenomenon well-attested in Roman Wales (see Chapter 4). Secondly, the building was constructed on raised ground, and such a prominent position is comparable with the cemetery locations found at the rural sites discussed above. It is also worth noting that the mausoleum at Lullingstone, Kent, was located on the slope above the villa (de la Bédoyère 1993, 119).

## POST-CONQUEST BURIAL AND 'SPECIAL DEPOSITS' AT HILLFORTS

In the Iron Age most of the funerary evidence came from hillfort contexts (see chapter 2), whereas in the Roman period the majority of rural burials are found in association with low lying agricultural settlements. This turnaround is probably largely due to a shift in settlement patterns. From the limited evidence available, there is little to distinguish the type of mortuary rites carried out at hillforts in the Roman period from those in the Iron Age. However, the problems of accurately dating unaccompanied skeletal material, especially that of a dispersed fragmented nature, make it difficult confidently to ascribe such deposits to an Iron Age or post-conquest date.

Nevertheless, there are five sites where contextual evidence or contemporary occupation led the excavators to favour a Roman date for the deposition of inhumations and fragmented skeletal material: namely, Mynydd Bychan (*M6*), Dinorben (*D3*), Parc-yr-Eglwys (*P1*),<sup>16</sup> Coygan Camp (*C8.1a & b*) and Castle Ditches (*C13*). The probable date of the skeletal material from these sites provides a chronological span at least across the first three centuries of Roman occupation. The fifth-century burial of a child at Dinas Powys hillfort, Glamorgan (Alcock, L. 1963, 30, 200-8) is also significant here and adds weight to the argument that hillfort burial was an Iron Age burial practice that persisted into the early medieval period in Wales (James, H. 1992a, 95-6; Petts 2001).

Whether occupation was contemporary with the deposition of human remains within a hillfort's interior is crucial to any possible interpretation that we put on such deposits. If people were living or working at these sites on a frequent basis, then the deposition of human remains, in whatever form, was an integrated part of everyday life. Such contemporaneous activity can be seen as comparable to those burials or 'special deposits' found at Caerwent, in 'small town' contexts in Wales and on the rural farmsteads considered above. But if, on the other hand, these sites only saw sporadic use for ritual and/or mortuary purposes, then their post-conquest use takes on an additional significance.

The importance of hilltops and raised landscape features for ritual activity is well attested in Iron Age and rural Roman Britain and such places were favoured locations for temples and shrines (Downes 1997; Rahtz 1991; de la Bédoyère 1993, 102-13; Woodward & Leach 1993; Watts & Leach 1996; Rodwell 1980). Some of these sites

were also the focus for Roman and/or post-Roman burial.<sup>17</sup> Unfortunately, the nature of post-conquest activity at many of the Welsh hillforts is unclear and, even when occupation can be attested, it is often difficult to determine what form this took (Arnold & Davies 2000, 87-9; Williams, G. 1979, 15-37). The possibility that the masonry structure at Portskewett Hill was a temple was noted above, and the skeleton of a child in association with this building begs the question as to whether those Welsh hillforts that were utilised for mortuary practices were primarily religious foci.<sup>18</sup> However, the evidence from all five sites suggests that post-conquest activity was essentially domestic/industrial in nature and that this activity is likely to have been contemporary with the various mortuary practices carried out.

We should also consider whether the use of hillforts for mortuary practices and ritual activity during the Roman period was borne out of a resistance to the Romans and their attempt to impose new cultural norms. But again, regardless of the political or social status of Welsh hillforts in the Roman period (Arnold & Davies 2000, 87-9), as mortuary practice was not divorced from contemporary occupation, the use of hillforts for burial does not in itself appear to have been reactionary. In other words, even though occupation *per se* may have been motivated by the social or political climate, any associated 'mortuary' activity can only be viewed as part and parcel of such occupation. Nevertheless, such ritual activity post-conquest may well have been felt symbolically to reinforce the legitimacy of hillfort occupation.

However, whilst it can be argued that hillforts were not primarily religious or ritual sites in Wales, it is possible that certain hillforts provided the necessary cover for irregular mortuary practices such as excarnation. It may be significant here that four-post structures were present at Dinorben (*D3*) and Coygan camp (*C8.1*), both sites where fragmented skeletal material is attested (Wainwright 1967, 54; Gardner & Savory 1964, 222; Guilbert 1979). Although these features are traditionally interpreted as granaries or storage containers, an alternative use as Iron Age excarnation platforms has been postulated (Carr & Knüsel 1997, 168; Cunliffe 2000, 79). It is interesting that this model of usage does not restrict four-post structures to any one function, and suggests that they may have been used for several purposes, including that of granaries (Carr & Knüsel 1997, 168). Additional weight can perhaps be given to this hypothesis as human remains and grain were often combined

in 'special deposits' in both Iron Age and Romano-British contexts (Hill 1995; Wait 1985; Cunliffe 2000, 83). In terms of the Welsh evidence, it may be significant that at Dinorben both fragmented material and four-post structures were found in the same area of the fort — that is, near the south-east entrance (Guilbert 1979; Gardner & Savory 1964, 221-2, fig. 3). This is a pattern also noted at Danebury where skeletal material was more concentrated in the immediate vicinity of four-post structures (Carr & Knüsel 1997, 168; Wait 1985, 102).

It is also of interest that at Coygan Camp the probable burial assemblage noted above (a pair of La Tène type bronze bracelets and carved serpentine ring) came from Romano-British deposits covering the floor of an enigmatic four-post structure (see Chapter 2, page 35). The excavator suggested that these objects were derived from a disturbed Iron Age burial (Wainwright 1967, 37). This may be the case, but what is particularly pertinent is that the four-post structure and probable funerary deposits were in close spatial association. This juxtaposition may suggest that this area of the camp was utilized for mortuary purposes in both the Iron Age and Romano-British period. If this was the case, it could be further extrapolated that the personal ornaments derived from an earlier excarnation. It may also be significant that at both Dinorben and Coygan Camp four-post structures were located close to the ramparts — the most common locations for the deposition of human remains. In addition, metalworking, an activity that is often closely associated with burial and ritual activity (see below), is also attested at both sites in the location of the four-post structures (Guilbert 1979, 182-8; Wainwright 1967, 58).

If we accept the premise that the presence of fragmented skeletal material represents the end product of excarnation, then it is possible that certain hillforts provided the arena for such activity. Roman law prohibited secondary mortuary rituals<sup>19</sup> and, although such practices may have been tacitly accepted in the Roman period, excarnation would have needed to be carried out away from highly populated and 'Romanised' areas. A hillfort context would provide just such a location. It has been suggested that in the Iron Age, the deposition of partial body parts at hillforts may have represented ancestors brought back from excarnation fields to be used in propitiatory rites (Cunliffe 2000, 76). It is argued here, that in order for excarnation to continue under Roman rule, the location for the primary exposure of the corpse was

restricted to isolated native strongholds. Excarnation took place within hillforts and other defended enclosures, but secondary burial could be carried out surreptitiously in any number of contexts — for example, within the wells of Caerwent (see Chapter 5). So, in this sense, hillforts may have performed a specific native ritual/religious function in the post-conquest period.

The contexts chosen for the deposition of human remains at hillforts in the Roman period mirror those of Iron Age date. Burials and disarticulated body parts were placed within rampart ditches and in close spatial association to entrances. However, it was noted above (page 38) that at Mynydd Bychan (*M6*) (Savory 1950, 247-50) and Coygan Camp (*C8.1 a& b*) (Wainwright 1965, 45) inhumations were placed close to entrances that had fallen into disuse. This is also true of the inhumation from Castle Ditches (*C13*) (Hogg 1976, 20, fig. 3), which was deposited within a silted-up rampart ditch 40m from the main entrance and, perhaps significantly, in close association to a banked outwork that provided extra protection for the entrance.<sup>20</sup> That burials took place at all three sites during what appears to have been the last phases of occupation is of interest. In addition to their liminal placement — close to the boundaries and entrances of these hillforts — it is possible that like infant burials, which are thought to have marked the termination of buildings (Pearce 2001, 127), these inhumations (adult and child alike) marked the closure of hillfort occupation. On the other hand, if, as argued above, the burial of the dead within boundaries was a means of harnessing supernatural defence, for the protection of those living within a settlement's interior, then such protection may have been deemed more important once physical defences had fallen into disrepair.

It was shown above that, contrary to the evidence from outside Wales (Whimster 1981, 28), the Welsh evidence suggests that several Iron Age inhumations within hillfort ditches were associated with personal ornaments, which implies that they were not 'casual' depositions (see Chapter 2). With such limited evidence from the Roman period no serious comparison between the Iron Age and post-conquest data can be drawn. However, it is of interest that, whereas the first-century burials from Mynydd Bychan were associated with brooches, those of later date from Coygan Camp and Castle Ditches were poorly furnished and unfurnished respectively. Therefore, it could be tentatively argued that, whilst these depositions were not necessarily



‘casual’, the status of those buried in hillfort defences during the Roman period was lower than that of their Iron Age predecessors. It may also be significant that the inhumations from Coygan Camp, Castle Ditches and that of sub-Roman date from Dinas Powys were all females and, as such, were perhaps more likely to be marginalized in Romano-British society (Foster 1993, 212). On the other hand, if deposition in such contexts was symbolically linked to the promotion or control of agricultural cycles and fertility (Pearce 2000, 158), burials of female gender may have been thought more appropriate. Alternatively, the apparent ‘low status’ of these burials may just reflect the poorer status of the respective hillfort sites in the Roman period.

### **THE REUSE OF PREHISTORIC MONUMENTS FOR BURIAL IN THE ROMAN PERIOD**

Prehistoric monuments were reused for burial in the Iron Age, Roman and early medieval periods. It was also a phenomenon that was geographically widespread with evidence of such practice from Ireland, England and Wales (Petts 2001; James, H. 1992a; Williams, H. 1997; Edwards, N. 1986; 2001; Pearce, J. 1999b; Bradley 1987; O’Brien 1992; Murphy 1992). However, in contrast to both the Iron Age and early medieval periods, Roman funerary reuse in Wales has received little attention. Petts (2001) has shown that prehistoric monuments in Wales were a focus for ritual activity during the Roman period and he catalogues 19 cases of reuse. Whilst only two of the sites Petts drew attention to were identified as being used for burial (Penbryn, Ceredigion *P5*; Cefn Ffordd, Glamorgan *N3*), he argues that the deposition of coins, pottery and personal ornaments, together with other evidence such as metal-working, is indicative of ritual activity. This present study provides additional evidence of reuse for burial purposes, but Petts’s findings are of considerable interest as they demonstrate that prehistoric monuments were seen as important loci for a range of different ritual activities in the Roman period.

The most common prehistoric monuments reused for burial in Roman Wales appear to have been the Bronze Age barrow or cairn. This correlates with the evidence for reuse in England and Wales in the early medieval period (Petts 2001; Edwards, N. 2001; Williams, H. 1997). Unfortunately, the fact that there was almost certainly primary barrow construction in Roman Wales, coupled with the poor quality of much

Gazetteer No.	Place Name	Grave Form	Coins	On or within close Proximity
B4	Brownslade Barrow, Castlemartin	BW	No	?LMED chapel
C2	Caerhun	?BW	No	MI
C3	Caergai	?BW	No	MI
C9	Churchstoke,	BW	Yes	MI
CAER.1	Pilbach Farm, Lodge Hill, Caerleon	?BW	No	LF
D1	Dolddinas, Trawsfynydd	?BW	No	MI
H1	Hendre ddu, Llangernyw,	BW	No	
L10	Dinas Bran, Llangollen	BW	No	HF
L16	Llanfor	?BW	No	MI
L17	Llanwnda, Fishguard	cairn	No	HF ?RBS
L18	Llanio,	?BW	No	MI
L4	Melai, Llanfair Talhaiarn	BW	No	
L9	Llanarmon-yn-Ial,	BW	Yes	PLF
N3	Cefn Ffordd, Llantwit-iuxta-Neath,	cairn	No	MI
P11	Pennal (Cefn Caer),	?BW	No	MI
P14	Pentre Farm, Pontardulais,	cairn	No	BA ring cairn
P16	Banc Troedrhwiseiri, Tirymynach,	BW	No	ridgeway
P5	Parc Carreg y Luniaw, Penbryn,	BW	Yes	MC; Inscb.S
P9	Pontruffyd, Bodfari,	?BW	No	
T1	Tomen y Mur	BW	No	MI
W1	Welshpool,	BW	No	
W3	Walford	BW	No	MI

DEFINITE AND POSSIBLE ROMANO-BRITISH BARROW AND  
CAIRN USE

FIGURE 6.3

of the excavation evidence, makes it difficult to determine whether burial constituted primary or secondary deposition. There are 21 sites where Roman barrow use is known or probable in Wales (see Fig. 6.3 & Map 26). Of these sites, just over 40% are military installations, which suggests that any associated barrows are likely to have been newly constructed in the Roman period, as the forts provided the *raison d'être* for barrow existence. However, Bronze Age barrows within the immediate environs of a fort would probably have been utilized, as may have been the case at Llanfor, Gwynedd (*L16*). New barrows of native build are also suggested, the probable barrow from Welshpool, Powys (*W1*), fits into this category. Here, the assemblage was exclusively of Roman date and was deposited just under or on the ground surface, indicating a primary position in the suspected barrow (Boon 1961, 16).

Outside the fort environs the evidence from the majority of rural sites is of a more ambiguous nature. Whilst it seems likely that a high percentage of burials were secondary depositions, we should not assume this was always the case. For example, Petts (2001) argues that the urned cremation from Penbryn, Ceredigion (*P5*), is a clear example of reuse.<sup>21</sup> This may be so, especially as two urned cremations seem to have been removed from the barrow, only one of which is extant and of definite Roman date. However, large quantities of ash were found during the excavation of the barrow (Davies 1905, 165) and a recent re-examination of the existing urn shows it to have been 'heavily burnt' (Evan Chapman, pers. comm.). This suggests that pyre and burial were carried out in close proximity. Such evidence can be closely compared with that from Loughor (*L1.4 no.1*), where the cremation urn was blackened by fire and appears to have been placed close to the pyre (see page 109). So either a pyre site was constructed on a pre-existing monument at Penbryn, as was the case at Pentre Farm, Pontardulais (*P14*), or we are looking at primary burial *in situ*.

Sometimes the position of the burial in the barrow hints at secondary or primary use. For example, the apparent, central position of the cremation assemblage at Llanarmon-yn-Ial, Denbigh (*L9*) hints at primary burial in the immediate post-conquest period (Lewis 1842). This may also be the case at Brownslade Barrow, Castlemartin (*B4*), where the central interment appears to have been the earliest

burial and possibly of Romano-British date (Laws 1882; Ludlow 2003). On the other hand, secondary deposition is probable at Dinas Bran, Llangollen (*L10*). Here, an urned cremation accompanied by a lamp and phial, was discovered by a workman erecting a fence across the summit of a high barrow, (c.1.8m) (Clarke 1904; Davies 1929, 257-8; RCHAMW Denbigh 1914, 115, no. 407). This suggests that the finds came from fairly near the surface and were deposited after barrow construction. The barrow was also found to house a stone cist, which apparently contained pottery, cremated human bones and the unburnt bones of an ox and sheep. All that remained of the pottery from this cist were 'a few fragments of an urn of unburnt clay' (Davies, E. 1929, 257). The poor fabric of the pottery, coupled with elements of the barrow's construction<sup>22</sup> and its ridge top position, suggest that the barrow was of Bronze Age date and contained both Bronze Age and Roman interments.

It is important to note that whilst, as at Dinas Bran, pottery descriptions can be useful, Roman pottery varied considerably in quality, and vague antiquarian descriptions are of little use alone as dating tools. Without expert material assessment Roman coarse ware might too easily be interpreted as prehistoric pottery, especially when it is derived from a barrow context where a Bronze Age date is assumed more likely.<sup>23</sup> We should be aware that such misidentification might have skewed the barrow evidence in favour of the prehistoric in Wales.

Of the remaining eight rural barrows or cairns, possible examples of funerary reuse come from a Bronze Age barrow at Tirymynach, Ceredigion (*P16*) (Michael Freeman, pers. comm.) and a cairn field at Llantwit-iuxta-Neath, Glamorgan (*N3*) (Fox 1936, 274). However, in both cases no skeletal material was associated with the pottery, so a funerary context is unsure. Multi-period use is also indicated at Hendre ddu, Conwy (*H1*) where clearance of a barrow 'disclosed several tombs, cists, sepulchral urns, and fragments of Roman pottery' (RCHAM Denbigh 1914, 115). Positive evidence of reuse comes from Pontardulais, Swansea (*P14*). However, the mortuary activity at this site is most likely to be of sub-Roman date (see below). There is little evidence from the remaining five rural sites (Pontruffyd *P9*; Llanwnda *L17*; Llanfair Talaiarn *L4*; Churchstoke *C9*; Walford *W3*) to indicate whether Roman use or possible Roman use was primary or secondary.

Cremation appears to have been the dominant mode of burial associated with barrows in Wales and, as such, may suggest that barrow use, whether of a primary or secondary nature, was more common in the early Roman period when cremation was the principal mode of burial. However, as barrow reuse was a significant feature of early medieval burial in Wales (Petts 2001; Edwards, N. 2001, 18), it seems unlikely that there was a total absence of such practice in the late Roman period. The apparent lacuna may be down to the lack of grave goods in the later Roman period and the disintegration of inhumed skeletal material. It is also possible that some barrow burials attributed to the early medieval period are late Roman interments, since very few have been radiocarbon dated. At least two sites (Llangattock and Eliseg's Pillar) have produced inhumations from mounds that also contained coins, and it is tempting to speculate that they may fall into this category (Anon 1854, 148; Anon 1894, 223).

The possibility that the extended inhumation cemeteries on prehistoric sites in north Wales at Plas Gogerddan, Capel Eithin and Arfryn had late Roman beginnings has already been noted. At Plas Gogerddan, Ceredigion (*P2*) the cemetery was placed close to a standing stone and three ring ditches, two of which are likely to have originally contained mounds (Murphy 1992, 15). The primary phase of the inhumation cemetery at Capel Eithin, Anglesey, was also focussed on a Bronze Age cairn (White & Smith 1999, 155). At Arfryn, Anglesey, north-south aligned graves were focussed on a natural hilltop which was surrounded by an enclosure ditch, though the chronological relationship between ditch and burials is unclear. Antiquarian records suggest that Bronze Age cremations also came from this site (White, R.B. 1972, 30-1).

The cairn at Capel Eithin may also have been a focus for early Roman burial (*C.16*). Preceding the cemetery, a masonry building (6.5m square externally) was built within a circular banked enclosure which also encompassed the cairn. The function of the building is not known, but it is thought to be contemporary with small-scale bronze casting in the immediate vicinity, which is dated to the early second century (White & Smith 1999, 116). The form and size of the building were compared by the excavators with both religious structures and military installations of the same period, but a secular rather than ritual purpose was favoured (White & Smith 1999, 124-5, 154). The phosphate analysis of the fill of a large pit (2.90m x 1m internally)

approximately 5m to the north of the building indicates this pit was probably a grave. The size and shape of this probable grave implies it held an extended inhumation burial, possibly within a coffin, as a stone lining delineated a coffin-shaped area. Although there is no positive dating evidence, a contemporary date with the building was thought to be likely. Added weight was given to this supposition as the extended form of the 'grave' argued against a Bronze Age date, while the form and construction of the 'grave pit' was unlike those in the later inhumation cemetery (White & Smith 1999, 122).

This probable grave is of interest as it was associated both with metallurgy and a prehistoric monument. The close proximity of metalworking to burials has been identified elsewhere in Wales (*e.g.* Pentre Ffwrndan *P7.2*; Prestatyn *P15*; Rhostryfan *R4*) and is an increasingly recognised association in Roman Britain generally (Hatton 1999, 112; Rahtz *et al.* 2000 398-400; Crummy *et al.* 1993). Petts (2001) has noted that there also appears to have been a relationship between metalworking and prehistoric monuments in Roman Wales and Scotland, and suggests that there may have been a supernatural association, perhaps related to the Celtic god of smithing, Gofannon.

The link between metalworking and burials is intriguing. Hingley (1997, 9) has argued that that in the Iron Age, iron and metallurgy were 'powerfully associated with the idea of regeneration'. As we have seen, industrial activities and burials were often found in close spatial association, and there may have been no specific connection between burial and any one industrial activity. However, if Hingley's premise is correct, that metalwork was symbolically linked to the human life cycle, we have a possible reason for the burial association. It may have been felt that the mystical forces that controlled the changes observed in the metalworking process would facilitate the transition from corpse to spirit world.

A further example of probable Roman burials close to a prehistoric monument comes from Pen y bonc, Holyhead (*P3*). Here, what appears to have been a small cremation cemetery was discovered adjacent to a Romano-British hut group. Several standing stones *c.* 18m to the south east of the site were removed in the nineteenth century (Stanley 1869, 306, n. 6.). These stones were probably part of a series of Bronze Age

monuments in the immediate neighbourhood, of which only two stones remain at Plas Meilw (SH227809). Bronze Age burials have also been found at Pen y Bonc 164m E.N.E. from the hut group (Stanley 1867, 257; Stanley 1869, 307), which suggests, that, as at Capel Eithin and Plas Gorgerddan, this site also saw multi-period funerary use.

It was argued above with reference to Iron Age reuse that a distinction should be made between those prehistoric monuments that were closely associated with settlement sites and those that stood in isolation (see Chapter 2). Whilst 'relict' features in the landscape — boundary ditches, hillfort ramparts, agricultural features, Bronze Age standing stones — were used for burial in Roman Wales, in most cases, contemporary occupation was attested nearby. This was not necessarily the case with barrow burial. Bronze Age barrows were often placed high above sea level in areas less suitable for occupation. Petts's argument, that prehistoric monuments (primarily Bronze Age barrows) were commonly used for later ritual activity, suggests that barrows may have been perceived differently or, at least, may have held additional symbolic significance.

If we accept that secondary barrow use was more prevalent in the early Roman period, when cremation was the dominant rite, then this may have been because barrows were seen as particularly appropriate places for pyre sites. It is now recognised that cremation burials were often placed close to the pyre in Roman Britain (McKinley 2000, 39).<sup>24</sup> It has also become apparent that some sections of Romano-British society perceived the cremation itself as more important than the subsequent burial (Philpott 1991, 220-2; Niblett 2000, 100; Williams, H. 2003). This being the case, the location of the pyre rather than the burial would have been paramount. This suggests that the prehistoric barrow was seen as an active, immediate and important component of the act of cremation itself, rather than just in terms of a lasting memorial.

The possibility that the pyre was placed near the barrow at Penbryn has already been discussed. That monuments were used for pyre sites in Wales is strongly inferred by the sub-Roman mortuary activity at Pontardulais, Swansea (*P14*). The deposit of human bone on this site has been seen in the past as representative of votive deposition rather than formal burial (Williams, G. 1979, 28). However, the evidence

suggests it is more indicative of pyre activity. Fragments of cremated adult bone came from the upper layer of a large pit (2.50m x 1.50m and 0.60m deep) which was 'stained red by burning' (Ward 1975, 10). The pit was located on the edge of a Bronze Age ring cairn. The evidence clearly points to burning *in situ* with the dimensions of the pit comparable to pyre sites found on a range of site types (Polfer 2000, 32; Charlton & Mitcheson 1984). The small amount of cremated bone present (11 g.), and its location in the upper charcoal layer of the pit, is more consistent with a single pyre debris site than a *bustum* burial (McKinley 2000, 40; Polfer 2000, 31).

The late date of this material, cal. AD 420 — 660 (2 sigma), hints at the continuation of native cremation practices in the sub-Roman period. The ephemeral remains at this site also highlight the difficulty of identifying pyre-related activities, and suggest that pyre sites in such contexts have gone unrecognised in the past. It is tempting to speculate that some of the barrows to which Petts (2001) attributes Roman ritual use were in fact burial or pyre sites, especially those where 'hearths' are clearly apparent (e.g. Bishopston Burch, Penard, Williams, A. 1944, 52-63).

How barrow and cairn burial reuse was perceived in the Roman period is particularly interesting in the broader context of how prehistoric monuments were used in the early medieval period in Wales. Bradley's seminal study of 'ritual continuity' argues that throughout history the reuse of prehistoric sites was a means of manipulating the past 'to promote or protect the interests of the social elite' (Bradley 1987, 15). In early medieval England and Wales the use of prehistoric monuments for burial has been seen as an attempt to legitimise territorial claims in a dislocated post-Roman society (Edwards, N. 2001; Williams, H. 1997). It is argued that such intent was reinforced in Wales by changing the physical appearance of prehistoric monuments. This was done by the addition of inscribed stones and distinct mortuary enclosures, which stamped a new identity on the monuments (Edwards, N. 2001; Petts 2001).

So how should we view barrow reuse in the Roman period? It is possible that secondary deposition was purely opportunistic, in terms of saving the time and effort required for a new build. But in light of what is now known of the importance of pre-burial activity, the probability that such monuments were the loci of pyres suggests that they held strong symbolic significance and that deeper concerns motivated reuse.



However, if territorial or other concerns were assuaged by those who reused barrows in the Roman period, then, it may be argued that, as the physical appearance of the monuments probably remained unchanged, such concerns were seen to be met by supernatural forces. These forces may have consisted of 'ancestors' who were perceived to dwell in or close to prehistoric barrows. If so, it may have been felt that by reusing the barrow the ancestors' power, and by inference that of the locus, would be augmented by the recent dead, transformed into the spirit world by the physical act of cremation — a soul belief that has wide geographical and temporal parallels (Van Gennep 1960; Parker Pearson 1999, 2; Gräslund 1994; Barley 1995, 84). This made the place of cremation all-important. Although the funeral ritual itself was transitory, it created a strong social memory, linking the past and the present (Williams, H. 2003; Niblett 2000); moreover, in doing so, it laid claim to both physical and supernatural territory. Such a hypothesis would not be out of step with indigenous belief systems, which imbued ancestors and landscape features with power. These beliefs would naturally have diminished in the early Christian period to be replaced with more tangible signs of ownership.

Though the evidence is of a limited nature, the distribution of probable barrow and cairn reuse is concentrated in the northern half of the frontier zone. This part of Wales saw less long-term Roman influence, which may suggest that such practice was a result of indigenous tradition. It is also significant that the distribution pattern of prehistoric monument reuse for burial in the late Roman/early medieval period is also more apparent outside the Romanised south, with a noticeable concentration in north Wales (Petts 2001).

## **THE USE OF CAVES FOR BURIAL IN THE ROMANO-BRITISH PERIOD**

Cave burial in Wales has a long history that can be traced back to the Upper Palaeolithic (Green, S. 1989). The difficulties of securely dating skeletal deposits from cave contexts are outlined in Chapter one; such a long period of usage in Wales compounds these problems. However, skeletal and artefact assemblages from seven sites in Wales (Fig.6.4) suggest that mortuary activity is likely to have been of Romano-British date. Two sites previously thought to be of possible Roman date have been discounted from this study in the light of recent radiocarbon dating (Branigan & Dearne 1992, 110-12; Chamberlain & Williams 2000).<sup>25</sup> Radiocarbon

Gaz	Place Name	Grave Form	Coins	Grave Goods	Grave Gds Type	Inhum
L11	The Ogof, Llanymynech,	Cave	Yes	Yes	PO; PP?; ?C	Yes
L19	Lynx Cave, Maeshafn, Llanferres,	Cave	No	Yes	PO	Yes
M3	Big Covert Cave, Maeshafn, Llanferres,	Cave	Yes	Yes	PO; ?C	Yes
M8	Merlin's Cave,	Cave	Yes	Yes	PO; PV; Coins	Yes
N4	Nant y Graig, Llannefydd,	Cave	No	Yes	PV, iron tool (?R)	Yes
O1	Osgof-yr-esgym, Glyntawe	Cave	Yes	Yes	PV; PO.	Yes
P4	Potter's Cave, Caldey Island	Cave	No	Yes	?PV; UMO - pos. hinges; pos Iron nail.	Yes

CAVE BURIALS  
FIGURE 6.4

dating has also confirmed Roman-British burial use in Wales at Potter's Cave, Caldey Island (*P4*) (Chamberlain & Williams 2000, 25). Significantly, both Mesolithic and Romano-British burials were identified at this site, which suggests that other caves also saw multi-period funerary use. The distribution of cave burials from all periods correlates with the geographical location of carboniferous limestone outcrops in Wales, the two main concentrations of which are found along the south-west and north-east peripheries of modern day Wales.

Caves provided natural sepulchres for the dead and may also have held chthonic associations (Johnston 2003). Yet, with notable exceptions (Branigan & Dearne 1991; 1992), cave burial has been more or less excluded from discussions on burial practices in Roman Wales. This is largely because this form of deposition has been viewed as ritual activity rather than formal burial (Arnold & Davies 2000, 138).

However, of 97 cave sites with evidence for Romano-British usage in England and Wales only one was considered to have been used for ritual activity (Branigan & Dearne 1992, 64). It may be significant that this was in Wales (Culver Hole, Glamorgan), but, as Branigan & Dearne (1992, 36) argue, beyond the ritual of burial itself, the scarcity of visible ritual usage in caves suggests such practice was atypical. Moreover, the type of assemblages found in association with skeletal material in caves — predominately personal ornaments, coins and a limited amount of pottery — matches that found in 'formal' cemetery contexts. In addition, the pathology shows that both genders and all age groups were afforded this form of disposal, which suggests that such burials are representative of the population as a whole.

Whilst bearing in mind the limitations surrounding the secure dating of cave deposits, it is noted that all skeletal material thought to be chronologically associated with Roman artefacts was from inhumed bodies. There is no evidence of Romano-British cremation burials in caves in Wales. This correlates with the evidence from England (Branigan & Dearne 1992, 35). The reasons for this are not clear, though it may be due to the difficulties of identifying cremated deposits in such contexts. The choice of location points to native burial tradition (see Chapter 2) and the indigenous rite of unurned cremation would make detection especially hard. It could also be argued that the lack of cremation burials in caves might have been related to the suitability of a cave for the cremation rite. If, as suggested above, the pyre site was an important

component of the cremation itself — and usually located close to the subsequent burial — then caves may not have been seen as symbolically or practically appropriate.

The cave with the largest number of burials in Wales is Ogof-y-Esgyrn, Powys (*O1*), where up to 40 individuals were represented (D'Elboux 1924; Mason 1968). This site saw both Bronze Age and two distinct phases of Roman-British activity, the latter in the second and fourth centuries AD. The first Romano-British phase is considered to have been of a funerary nature and the second domestic. The floor of the cave had been much disturbed by both natural and human means, and very few of the bones remained articulated (Mason, E.J. 1968, 22). However, though much of the stratigraphy was destroyed, a concentration of human bones and exclusively Roman artefacts in the 'grave' (a large pocket of sand towards the northern wall of the cave), suggests that, at least in this part of the cave, bones and artefacts were contemporaneous (Mason, E.J. 1968, 23-4). Objects retrieved from this area were characteristic of grave goods and consisted of a bronze dolphin brooch, two iron rings, a bone pin, a bone ring, an iron pin or nail, and a worn coin of Trajan (AD 98-117). Additional objects attributable to the early phase of activity and likely to have been originally associated with burials include five further brooches, five coins (late first to early second century), an end-looped pestle from a cosmetic set and a small amount of pottery including samian ware (Mason, E.J. 1968; Jackson 1985).

Assuming the above artefacts are derived from burials, the make-up of this assemblage is significant. Firstly, all six brooches were of a high quality (Boon 1968, 42), which implies that cave burial was not reserved for those of low status. Secondly, we can see in this assemblage a blend of classical and native influences. The deposition of brooches in the grave can be traced back to the late Iron Age in both England and Wales (Philpott 1993a, 167-79; Murphy 1992, 15; Savory 1950, 247-50). Cosmetic sets, which were exclusive to Britain, are also thought to have originated in the late Iron Age and are most commonly found on less Romanised settlements and in association with graves (Jackson 1985, for Welsh evidence see also Liswerry *L5*). The inclusion of coins represents the only unequivocally classical burial rite in this assemblage; yet in such an apparent native burial context it is far from certain they

would have represented Charon's fee (*pace* Alcock 1980, 57). We cannot assume that the adoption of Roman rites meant an adoption of Roman belief (Jones, R.F.J. 1993, 249; Ucko 1969), and it is perhaps more likely, that, along with personal ornaments, these coins were seen in terms of wealth during a time when coinage was highly valued (Davies, J.L. 1983, 82-5). It is of interest that assemblages from the other cave sites in Wales, where Romano-British burial use is suspected, are dominated by personal ornaments, of which the brooch is the most common. Brooches are present at five of the seven cave sites analysed in this study (71.5%). When viewed alongside the data for Wales as a whole these figures are significant, and suggest a native and rural bias (see below).

As far as the evidence allows us to judge, with the exception of Ogof-yr-Esgyrn, cave sites in Wales produced small groups of burials, ranging from two or three burials at (*P4*) and (*L11*), to between six and ten burials at (*N4*), (*M3*), (*M8*) and (*L19*). The model proposed by Branigan & Dearne, based on demographic analysis, suggests that the smallest number of depositions represented relatively short-term usage by a single family. Those caves holding between six to ten burials are argued to have been used by a single family over a generation or two. The larger skeletal assemblages, as at Ogof-y-Esgyrn, are seen as more indicative of use by small communities, but again over one or more generations (Branigan & Dearne 1992, 34-5).

Whilst this model is attractive, it nonetheless presupposes familial usage. We also have to consider that some burials may have been associated with industrial communities, rather than related to kin-based groups, though the two are not necessarily mutually exclusive. It has been suggested that skeletons found within the Roman copper mines at Llanymynech (*L11*) might fall into this category (Davies, O. 1935, 14 n. 4). The earliest record of these burials suggests that several skeletons and disarticulated human bones were found in the back recesses of a large cavern (Nicholson 1840, 397). Two bracelets were found attached to the forearms of two separate individuals. Coins dated to the Antonine period were found at the same time, though there is no mention of how closely they were associated with the skeletal material. Whilst these deposits are not securely dated, recent analysis of the material culture of caves and mines in north Wales suggests that they were *not* used for burial in the Bronze Age (Johnston 2003). The burials at Llanymynech are therefore more

likely to be of Roman date, though they may not necessarily have been contemporaneous with mining activity.

Due to the disturbance of human remains in cave contexts in Wales no analysis can be made of body position or alignment. Moreover, any special treatment of the corpse (other than cut marks, burning etc., which are not evident) would be hard to determine in such contexts. But in view of what is known of the deposition of fragmented skeletal material on settlement sites, we cannot necessarily assume that cave burial always represented primary deposition. Mason drew attention to the predominance of both juvenile and skull bones concentrated in a section of Ogof yr Esgyrn (*O1*) (Mason 1986, 28). Such a pattern of distribution might easily be down to both disturbance and taphonomic processes, but secondary mortuary rituals are also a possibility.

## **GRAVE TREATMENT AND FURNISHING**

### **Grave form and construction: cremations**

The poor quality of much of the evidence related to rural cremations means that little can be deduced about grave construction. However, those cremations not enclosed within barrows or cairns appear in the main to have been placed directly in the ground. In these instances, protection for the cremation burial was afforded only by any primary container, which, in most cases, appears to have been a pottery vessel. Cremation cists of a probable Romano-British date are recorded at five rural sites. At three sites cists were constructed within barrows or cairns: Churchstoke, Powys (*C9*), Llantwit-iuxta-Ffordd, Glamorgan (*N3*) and possibly Hendre ddu, Conwy (*H1*). The small cremation cemetery at Pen y bonc, Anglesey (*P3*), and the third-century cist at Llanishen, Cardiff (*L8*) provide the only rural examples of cremation cists unassociated with larger burial monuments (Stanley 1869, 307, 314; Nash-Williams 1927, 1937-9). In addition, an urned ?Roman cremation found between two supposed Roman millstones at Forden, Powys (*F2*), may suggest that the stones formed a partial cist for the urn (Harrison 1856, 366-7).

### **Inhumations in cists and stone-lined graves**

There were a variety of grave forms utilized for inhumations in rural areas. In addition to plain interments, rock-cut cists, stone-lined graves, partial stone linings or coverings and complete cists (with capstone) are attested. The simplest cists were formed by cutting directly through bedrock, in order to form a hollow for the corpse, as in a probable Roman context at Llantwit Major, Glamorgan (*L15.2*) (Nicholl Carne 1872). At Rogiet, Mons. (*R3.2*), a small cemetery of approximately twelve graves was formed by the removal of loose stones from natural pockets in the rock. Stones were then incorporated along the sides and ends of the cavities to form rough cists (Hudd 1980, 42). Such simple graves took advantage of the natural geology and are found in other limestone areas in the west of Roman Britain (Rahtz *et al.* 2000, 409).

Stone-lined graves and graves with partial stone linings and coverings are found in both individual and cemetery contexts. The construction methods varied and local traditions may have played a part. Construction would also have been determined by the geology of the different areas and the availability of stone. Stone-lined graves are attested at Llanwern (*L6*) (Nash-Williams 1925, 423-5); Pentre Ffwrndan, Flint (*P7.2*) (Ffoulkes 1856, 307); Pentre Farm, Flint (*P7.1b*) (Granger 1989, 47) and Biglis, Glamorgan (*B1.1a/b*) (Parkhouse 1988, 16). Slab-lined graves are also found in semi-rural or 'small town' contexts at Bulmore (*CAER.6 no. 2*) and Abernant (*A2*) on the outskirts of Caerleon (Zienkiewicz 1985, 17-21, Tuck *et al.* 2003). The apparent lack of this type of grave construction in Caerleon itself backs up Philpott's supposition that cist burial first developed in rural areas (Philpott 1991, 223).

The graves at Abernant Farm and Bulmore were fully enclosed cists (of lid, side and bottom slabs); some of the graves incorporated dressed sandstone slabs. Side slabs and capstone are also attested at Llangan (*L12*), where rough limestone blocks were used in the construction of a cist of probable Roman date (Grimes 1931/3, 291). A substantial limestone cist is also thought to have housed the Rhuddgaer coffin (*R1*). At the other end of the scale, an inhumation at Ilston, Swansea (*II*), found in association with a late third-century hoard, contained only a top covering of limestone blocks (Grimes 1934, 210). This last grave type is identified in both a *vicus* (Caernarfon *CI.1*) and a hillfort context in Roman Wales (Coygan Camp *C8.1a*) which extends the distribution identified by Philpott (1991, 61-2). It is also a grave

type attested in pre-conquest Wales at Stackpole (Benson 1990, 196-242) and Plas Gogerddan (Murphy 1992, 15), but in association with crouched inhumations.

In some of those larger cemeteries which may have had late Roman beginnings a variety of different grave types are apparent, ranging from simple, earth-cut graves to complete cists as, for example, at Atlantic Trading Estate (*A4.1*) (Price 1987, 60-1) and Llandough (*L14*) (Thomas & Holbrook 1994, 9). A mixture of different grave types in a cemetery may represent differences in social status (Price 1989, 19), or, alternatively, be due to chronological trends. On the issue of chronology it is significant that, although long-cist graves are attested in considerable numbers during the early medieval period in Wales (e.g. Britnell 1990, 70-5; Edwards, N. 1986, 12), the second- to third-century examples from Abernant Farm (*A2*) and Biglis (*B1.1a*) show it was a long-standing rural practice. It is also germane that, while the form of graves changed with the widespread adoption of extended inhumation, the use of cists and the incorporation of stones in grave construction can be traced back to the Iron Age in Wales (see Chapter 2).

Although stone cists in rural Wales might show more affinities with the indigenous past, the use of tiles in grave construction is seen as a purely intrusive rite (Philpott 1991, 67). This is reflected in the distribution of tile constructed graves, which are concentrated at those sites where there was a strong military presence. The *tegulae* and dressed stone constructed graves from the official complex at Pentre Farm (*P7.1a & b*) (O'Leary et al. 1989, 46-7) also reflect this bias as does the possible cremation cist of *tegulae* at Churchstoke (*C9*) noted above (page 108-9). Tiles were also used to construct graves and cists at three of the villa/farmsteads in south Wales. At Caldicot (*C7*) an infant burial was housed in a 'neatly constructed' cist of roofing tiles (Vyner & Allen 1988, 78); and in late Roman or sub-Roman contexts at Ely (*E1.1b*) and Llantwit Major (*L15.1*) (Nash-Williams 1953, 103), roof tiles were incorporated into the grave construction of adult inhumations. However, the use of tiles for grave construction in these last three examples probably had more to do with the ready availability of suitable construction material from semi-derelict buildings, than attention to Roman custom.



### **Coffin use in rural areas**

Philpott (1991, 53) has drawn attention to the fact that coffin use, though limited, was not unknown in the Iron Age. There is no evidence for coffin use in pre-conquest Wales, though this may be down to the sparse nature of the Iron Age evidence. However, coffin use in rural Roman Wales appears to have been synonymous with the widespread adoption of extended inhumation, which was assimilated into the hinterlands from the military forts and urban areas. As can be seen from the distribution maps (Maps 8 -10), all coffin types (wood, stone and lead) are mainly concentrated in the south east of Wales, for the most part, in the immediate hinterlands around Caerleon and Caerwent.

Wood coffins would have been the cheapest form of coffin to produce and these are the most widespread of the different coffin types. The use of wood coffins is suspected in the rural areas of south Wales by the second century at Nash, Newport (*N2*) (Meddens & Beasley 2001, 150). In the rural areas of north Wales there is the possibility that a coffin was present in the 'grave' at Capel Eithin, Anglesey (*C.16*), which is thought to date to the early second century (White & Smith 1999, 122).

The distribution of lead coffins shows a clear urban and military bias. Only two rural sites in south Wales have produced evidence of lead coffins. The lead coffins at Bendricks, Glamorgan (*A4.2*), have already been mentioned (Sell 1996, 9, see above, page 00). A lead coffin lid was also discovered at Cefn Onn, Cardiff (*C15*), but as no evidence for a grave existed, it was argued it may be carried as loot from one of the military or urban centres (Threipland 1953, 72-4; Boon 1972, 138, n. 361). One rural and one semi-rural site in north Wales have also produced examples: Rhuddgaer, Anglesey (*RI*) (see above, page 170) and Pentre Farm, Flint (*P7.1b*), a site with official connections (see Chapter 4).

With the possible exception of a child's stone coffin from Chester (Watkin, W.T. 1886, 219), all the stone coffins recorded have come from south-east Wales. As noted above, this disparity may be largely due to easy access to Bath stone in south Wales. The majority of examples come from Caerwent, Caerleon and just outside Caerleon at Bulmore, so again there is an urban/military bias. However, three probable Roman examples (noted below) come from the hinterlands around Caerleon and Caerwent, which suggests there was limited adoption of stone coffin use in rural areas.

Unfortunately, as some Roman stone coffin types are hard to distinguish from medieval ones (Willmore 1939-40), dating can be difficult in the absence of grave goods. However, due to the recent discovery of definite Roman burials in the near vicinity (*N2*), the stone coffin discovered at Nash (*N5*) (7km south of Caerleon) is now considered to be of probable Roman date (Barnett 1962, 37-9; Meddens & Beasley, 2001, 143). A north-south aligned Bath stone coffin from Undy (*U1.1*) (5km south-west of Caerwent) is also likely to be Roman (Plate V). No grave goods were retrieved, although there is a possibility that items were removed before professional investigation (Evan Chapman, pers. comm.). The third example comes from Liswerry (*L21*) (4km south of Caerleon). This coffin is of particular interest as, unlike the other two examples, which were found in isolation, it was discovered within close proximity (c. 300m) to a known Roman inhumation cemetery (*L5*). The coffin contained an adult female; further skeletal material (disarticulated) was also found in the immediate vicinity. It is possible that the both the coffin (*L21*) and the burials at (*L5*) represent the remnants of a sizeable cemetery at Liswerry.

### Shrouds

The 'hunching' of skeletons' shoulders at the Atlantic Trading Estate (*A4.1*) and Llandough (*L14*) suggests shrouds enclosed some burials in late Roman rural contexts (Price 1987, 60; Thomas & Holbrook, 1994, 10). However, unlike Caerleon and Chester, no material evidence of shrouds has been found.

### Footwear

Based on the evidence available at the time, Philpott (1991, 165-75, figs. 11, 28) argued that footwear in burials was not adopted in Wales and, only marginally, in northern Britain. Since his survey, footwear has been found in association with both cremations and inhumations in Wales. Examples of cremations with hobnails in Wales come from urban & military sites: Caerleon (*CAER.2; CAER.5*), Usk (*U2.2*) and most probably Carmarthen (*C4.1*). The nature of the site at Brynhyfryd Park, Ruthin (*R2.1*) is uncertain. Inhumations with footwear come from a *canabae* (Chester, *CHE.1*), *vicus* (Caersws, *C10.4*) and rural context (Llandough, *L14*). Philpott argued for a strong rural and small town bias in the practice of this rite in England and suggested it was largely adopted by natives, 'a Celtic concept acquiring a Roman material expression' (Philpott 1991, 171). As this practice was carried out on

a broad range of sites in Wales, little can be deduced about which sections of society embraced the rite more readily. It appears it was a practice favoured in late Roman rural Wales as it was in late Roman England (Thomas, A. & Holbrook 1994, 11; Philpott 1991, 167). Yet, it may be significant that, in the early cremation cemeteries at Caerleon, hobnails were sparse at the Abbeyfied site (*CAER.2*), a cemetery thought to be predominately for soldiers' use, but plentiful at Ultra Pontem (*CAER.5*) (Evans & Maynard 1997, 237-9), where skeletal analysis and unurned cremations may suggest a female and civilian bias.

### **Grave Goods**

Though some of the objects deposited with burials in rural areas, such as coins and ceramic lamps, can be readily compared with grave goods from military and urban sites, there appears to have been more of an emphasis on personal ornaments (particularly brooches) and metalwork (e.g. bronze vessels) in rural grave assemblages. It is also important to note that there was less of a tendency to place items on the pyre in rural areas, which may have skewed the evidence in favour of rural cremation assemblages. However, it does appear that this preference for metalwork was a rural trend that continued once inhumation was widely adopted across Wales.

What is presumed to be the most richly furnished cremation burial in Wales comes from Welshpool, Powys (*WI*) (Boon 1961, 13-31). Although no skeletal material was found, this discovery is widely interpreted as of a funerary nature due to the collective nature of the artefacts and the presence of wood ash and charcoal on the ground surface, which are thought likely to represent pyre activity (Boon 1961, 16). As the assemblage appears to have been placed on or very close to the ground surface, it is also considered probable that a barrow originally housed the burial. This assemblage is of particular interest as it contained items of both Roman and Romano-Celtic manufacture, with decorative features reflecting both Celtic and classical beliefs.

In addition to pottery and glass vessels this assemblage consisted of a bronze spun cauldron containing three bronze skillets, one of which had a figure of Hercules on the handle, and a bronze ewer with a Bacchic design. These items were wrapped in linen and carefully packed together with leaves and grasses. The bronze items are

characteristic of the rich grave assemblages which started to appear in the late Iron Age and are found primarily in the south east of England, where they are typically found in association with barrows (Philpott 1991, 123; Boon 1961, 17; Dunning & Jessup 1936; Struck 2000, fig. 9.5). A large firedog of Celtic type was also present, which was believed to be from the same school as the Capel Garmon (Denbs.) firedog (Romilly Allen 1901; Boon 1961, 18; Savory 1976, 62). However, the use of such furniture in a funerary context is judged to have clear Belgic antecedents (Romilly Allen 1901; Boon 1961, 18; Collis 1977, 1-13). The associated 'lamp standards' display certain features which show affinities, not only with the metalwork of the Capel Garmon fire-dog, but also to a form of decoration noted on a Mithraic candle-holder from Segontium (Boon 1961, 18, 28). Lastly, a bronze bucket escutcheon in Romano-Celtic style depicted a bull's head — a popular symbol in Celtic mythology (Green, M.J. 1983, 8-10).

The date of the pottery, glass and bronze vessels suggests this assemblage had been deposited sometime in the second half of the second century. Boon (1961, 19) argued this find represented the burial of a member of the local native elite. This suggestion is backed up by recent surveys which show a clear native and rural bias in the deposition of bronze skillets and ewers in graves in pre- and post-conquest Britain (Philpott 1991, 124; Struck 2000, 85-96). Though atypical in Wales in terms of its wealth, the Welshpool find epitomises the eclectic nature of Romano-British material culture. It is more difficult to determine whether it also represents a fusion of classical and Celtic beliefs.

Grave goods comprising metalwork, particularly items related to banquets and feasting, were a strong feature of high-status late Iron Age and early Romano-British rural burials and characteristic of the burials of the native elite (Philpott 1991, 123-4; Struck 2000, 85-96). Whilst the Welshpool find is well known, three other, albeit less grand, examples from Wales may also be part of this tradition. Pant Fadog, Gwynedd (*P13*), produced a bronze mirror and platter dated to c. AD 100 from a probable burial context (Fox 1925, 254-7), and at Pentwyn Triley, Mons. (*P17*), a high quality copper-alloy cup with a silver handle was found in association with unurned cremated bone (Lawler & Howell 2003). The metal object from a probable inhumation grave at Llantwit Major, Glamorgan (*L15.2*), is open to several different

interpretations but can favourably be compared with part of a cauldron chain or lamp hanger (Nicholl Carne 1872, 99-102; Manning 1985, 99-102, plates 44-6, 52).

Whilst the destructive nature of the pyre may have skewed the evidence in favour of brooches deposited with inhumations, it is of interest that no brooches with cremations or inhumations are known from the legionary fortresses, and only three are found in association with cremations at the auxiliary outposts. In contrast, brooches occur with rural burials at ten sites (all but one of which are inhumations) but also in possible association with cremations at the *civitas* capital of Caerwent (see Chapter 5). This pattern of distribution appears to show a clear rural and native bias (see Map 11).

As at the military and urban sites, ceramic vessels feature as grave goods in rural areas. For the most part the pottery appears to have been coarseware, but small amounts of samian are recorded in association with cremations at Pen y bonc, Holyhead (*P3*), and in probable association with inhumations at Ogof-yr-Esgyrn, Powys (*O1*). The Welshpool assemblage contained sherds from a costrel (Boon 1961, 31), and a fine-ware, primary container is likely at Cwmbryn villa, Carmarthenshire (*C6*) (Jones, J.F. 1961, 126). The influence of classical burial practice is apparent in the deposition of ceramic lamps with cremations at Johnstown, Carmarthen (*J1*) and Dinas Bran, Llangollen (*L10*). At Johnstown a particularly fine pair of lamps (one large and one small) accompanied an adult and child cremation (Richard Jones, pers. comm., Plate IV). The use of small lamps and vessels to accompany children's burials is an aspect of Roman burial practice also noted at Colchester, Essex (Crummy *et al.* 1993, 270-3).

The deposition of glass vessels in the grave is less apparent and only at Welshpool (*W1*), Johnstown (*J1*) and Bendricks, Glamorgan (*A4.2*), is there any concrete evidence that this practice had spread into the rural areas of Wales (Boon 1961, 13; Burnham 2001, 278; Sell 1996, 9).

### **Animal remains**

The poor quality of much of the excavation evidence from rural areas prevents any detailed discussion on animal remains as grave offerings. Where faunal assemblages are noted, for example, at cave sites or within hillfort ditches, they are often not

securely dated or clearly associated with the human remains. The evidence for the deposition of animal remains as grave goods is therefore limited.

### **Coins in association with burials**

The distribution of burials with coins in rural areas shows some interesting patterns (Map 7). As we have seen, the deposition of coins in graves is noted at the legionary forts of Chester, Wroxeter and Caerleon, with Chester producing the highest level of coin use and Caerleon the least. At only one auxiliary fort, Abergavenny (*A3.1a*), is there evidence of coins with burials, though both Chepstow (*C5.1*) and Frith (*F1*) may have had military associations. Thus the early deposition of coins with cremations at Penbryn, Carmarthenshire (*P5*), and Llanarmon-yn-Îal, Denbighshire (*L9*), in what appear to have been isolated rural areas is significant. The native milieu of the barrow at Llanarmon-yr-Îal, which allegedly contained a coin of Nero (AD54-68) together with a brooch and ring, is exceptional in such a backwater if, as Philpott argues, this rite was not generally adopted by the native population of Britain until the second century (Philpott 1991, 215).

Whilst the practice of placing coins in graves did not feature strongly in Caerleon itself, there is ample evidence to suggest that this custom filtered out from the legionary base into the hinterlands. The distribution of rural inhumation burials with coins is again concentrated in the south east of Wales which correlates with the distribution of inhumation burials *per se* and reflects the stronger Roman influence in this area. However, as Philpott has demonstrated, the idea that the placing of coins with the dead was synonymous with classical belief and not a practice adopted by the Celts is no longer tenable (*pace* Alcock 1980, 57; Philpott 1991, 208-16).

Philpott cites only two instances of inhumations with coins in Wales, but as can be seen from the distribution map, it was a fairly widely adopted practice in south Wales. Moreover, in line with the evidence from England, there appears to have been an upsurge in the practice from the late third century (Alcock, 1980, 58; Philpott 1991, 211).

The number of coins deposited in individual graves appears to have been limited to between one and three in Wales; this is comparable with the English evidence (Philpott 1991, 213). However, an exception to this rule is attested at Ilston, Swansea

(II), where an inhumation burial was found in association with a late third-century hoard of 91 coins (Grimes 1934, 209-19). This inhumation is significant, as it appears to have been a formal interment, which infers the coins were a deliberate deposition. The grave is recorded as being roughly semi-circular in shape and aligned north-south. No cist or coffin appear to have been present (although two nails were found in association). The coins were placed beside the body and when found there were traces of a fabric container, which had originally held the coins.

Such a large number of coins in a grave is atypical but not necessarily unique (Boon 1976, 174, n. 22). It may also be significant that sizeable money bags or purses are depicted on two tombstones in Roman Britain (*RIB* 543 and *RIB* 1294), which hints that such a large deposition of coins was an occasional practice. The condition of the coins led Grimes (1934, 219) to postulate that the burial had taken place *c.* AD 280. The large number of coins may therefore be related to the reduction in the face value of coins in circulation, which resulted in an increased volume of coins in Wales during this period (Philpott 1991, 213; Davies 1983, 85-7). If these coins genuinely represented grave goods, it suggests that the grave contained a person of some status. However, it is interesting that no other objects were found in the grave. The suggestion that during the late Roman period grave goods were commuted to cash provides a possible explanation (Alcock 1980, 59). The location of the grave — in a prominent position close to a ridgeway — may also indicate status.

A skeleton was also found within close proximity to the hoard at Sully, Vale of Glamorgan (*SI*), though the association is tenuous (Storrie 1900, 60-5).

### **Votive deposition and burial practice in rural areas**

The presence of human remains within, or in close proximity to, votive deposits, especially those incorporating animal remains, was noted at the *civitas* capital of Caerwent (Chapter 5). It was argued that such behaviour was rooted in rural tradition, either regionally or on a wider British or European scale. If such ritual activities were part of local indigenous tradition we would expect to see examples of such practices in the countryside.

The juxtaposition between infant burials and that of a dog at Prestatyn, Denbighshire (*P15*) has been noted above. On the Gwent Levels (*N2*) the liminal placement of

human and animal burials (cattle and horse) suggests the deliberate construction of a 'ritual landscape' (Meddens & Beasley 2001, 143). Here, two adult inhumations were placed parallel to the field ditches, while a number of cattle were placed in purpose-cut pits within the ditches themselves. The excavators argued that the human burials, coupled with the unusual treatment of the animals, apparently healthy animals buried with the meat still on the carcasses, was indicative of ritual behaviour (Meddens & Beasley 2001, 157). We might also consider the pony deposited on the entrance causeway at Church Farm, Caldicot (*C14*) during the last stages of the farmstead's life (Insole 2000). Here again the animal was not butchered for its meat or hide and was placed in a symbolically important location, perhaps marking cessation of occupation. The partially articulated remains of a badger, in the fill of the grave of an adult female at Biglis, Glamorgan (*B1.1b*) (Parkhouse 1988, 387), is also of note. While it is possible that these remains were intrusive, it is significant that this grave was constructed in a disused corn drier, a context which appears to have held strong symbolic significance, possibly linked to concerns about the agrarian cycle of production and regeneration (Pearce, J. 1999b, 158). It is tempting to speculate, therefore, that the nocturnal nature of the badger influenced its deposition. In other words, this animal of the night was perceived, not only as appropriate in a funerary context, but was also seen to strengthen the symbolic potency of this burial locus, since it is a creature whose life cycle is inextricably linked to the natural world and its changing seasons.

Unlike Caerwent, no wells with structured deposits incorporating both human and animal remains have been noted in rural areas. However, deposits of intermixed, fragmented, human and animal skeletal material as, for example, at Llantwit Major, (Nash-Williams 1953, 161-2) and possibly Parc-yr-Eglwys, Carmarthenshire (*P1*) (Treherne 1925/6, 18) may be indicative of such practice, particularly in instances where only human skull fragments are present (Nash-Williams 1953, 161). Selective deposition of a ritual nature is also suggested in a late Roman context at Dinorben, Denbighshire (*D3*), where the proximal phalanx of a horse and part of a human femur — both bones that are derived from the leg or foot — came from the southern rampart ditch (Gardner & Savory 1964, 222). In addition, there is certainly persuasive evidence for the use of animals as 'special deposits' in a well at Whitton, Glamorgan. This assemblage from the farmstead's well was seen as disproportionate to the overall



site distribution of animal remains. 'Major parts of carcasses seem to have been dumped into it. The remarkable amounts of dog, red deer and roe deer cannot be readily explained on an economic basis' (Kinnes in Jarrett & Wrathmell 1981, 239).

Although there are no definite examples of human remains in structured deposits on rural sites, the deposition of partial human remains *per se* appears to have carried on post-conquest at hillforts (e.g. Coygan Camp, *C8.1b\**; Dinorben, *D3 nos. 1 & 2*). However, it is unclear whether partial deposition was a practice carried out at other rural settlement types in Roman Wales. This is largely because we have little contextual or stratigraphic information about isolated bones that have come to light, since many of the finds were antiquarian discoveries and ill-recorded (e.g. Storrie 1894, 128). Even when bones are found using modern excavation techniques and come from undisturbed contexts, taphonomic considerations have to be borne in mind. However, the human maxilla found in third- or fourth-century deposits within the enclosure ditch surrounding a farmstead at Church Farm, Caldicot (*C14*) (Insole 2000, 29) may be indicative of such practice, as may the small amount of human bone (less than 5% of a skeleton) found on the periphery of Thornwell Farm (Hughes, G. 1996, 80). In addition, although the fragility of infant bones make them more susceptible to decay and disturbance (Pearce, J. 2001, 130-1), the small amount of bone present as, for example, at Ely (*E1.1a*), may point to secondary mortuary rituals. Again, the fact that it was the skull that was present may be significant, especially as direct parallels can be drawn with Iron Age practices in Wales, where skull fragments were found within domestic structures (see chapter 2, page 46). As outlined above, secondary deposition is also a possibility in cave contexts.

## CONCLUSION

That the more isolated mid and northern areas of Wales lagged behind their southern counterparts and clung on longer to indigenous mortuary practices is implied both by the fusion of Roman and native rites seen in the Rhuddgaer burial and also by the negative evidence. For whilst the scarcity of late Roman burials outside south Wales may be down to lack of preservation or identification, the continued deposition of fragmented material at Dinorben hints at the persistence of practices such as

excarnation. The difficulties of identifying unurned cremations may also point to the continuance of a native cremation rite in the northern areas of the frontier zone. It is also noted that the tendency for Roman and early medieval burials to be placed on prehistoric sites appears to have been stronger in mid and north Wales, which also hints at stronger indigenous traditions in these areas. Limited Roman influence post c. AD160 is seen as the largest contributory factor in the slower uptake of Roman mortuary practices outside the Romanized south.

It is apparent that, whether burials were deposited within formal cemetery areas or distributed across settlement sites, none of the locations chosen was arbitrary. Cemeteries appear to have been carefully placed to ensure prominence within the landscape. Infants were most commonly placed within settlement interiors, and, as was most typical across the Empire, were inhumed (see Chapter 5, page 132, note 11). Adults were both cremated and inhumed and were more likely to be deposited on the periphery of settlements. However, both adult and infant burials were strategically placed in important liminal and symbolic locations. The burial of the dead within and close to settlements can clearly be seen to continue Iron Age practice, and the contexts chosen mirror those used in pre-conquest Wales. However, the possible mausoleum at Maesderwen suggests that some sections of the rural population may have constructed tombs that emulated the grander types of rural mausolea found in the classical world.

Though the evidence has to be treated with caution, there is a strong indication that hillfort and cave burial were features of post-conquest burial practice. In the case of caves the type of 'grave goods' show a native bias. Nevertheless, the presence of coins at two, possibly three, sites (28.5% or 43% of cave sites) shows that the communities that utilised the caves were integrated into the monetary economy of Roman Wales and, therefore, not on the peripheries of Romano-British society.

Grave goods are not numerous in the countryside, but where they are present they are decorative and of a good quality. As at the military sites, burials appear to have taken place close to pyre sites. However, there was less of a tendency to place offerings on the pyre in rural areas.

Barrows and cairns constituted the most dominant form of monumentality in the countryside, and both primary and secondary deposition in barrows appear to have been significant features of rural burial practice. The use of barrows for the construction of pyre sites suggests that they were of considerable symbolic importance. It is probable that as such importance seems to have been attached to barrows, burial status was achieved both through the erection of new barrows and the reuse of prehistoric barrows and cairns.

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<sup>1</sup> Both these aspects affected cultural fusion. Troops were withdrawn from the majority of auxiliary forts by AD 160 (Arnold & Davies 2000, 17), which lessened the contact between locals and Romans in much of mid and north Wales. Conversely, the continued development of *canabae* and urban areas along the borders and in the south of Wales fostered the integration of the two cultures throughout the Roman period.

<sup>2</sup> With the possible exception of the early Iron Age cremations from Capel Eithin (Lynch 1991, 353; White & Smith 1999, 58), all Iron Age cremations that have come to light in Wales have been unurned.

<sup>3</sup> The presence of samian ware at Pen y bonc, Holyhead, suggests a date of deposition no later than the early third century (Stanley 1869, 307, 313; Tyers 1996, 105-6), earlier than any known Roman military installations in the area. Numismatic and architectural evidence suggest a Roman watch tower on Holyhead mountain and a small fort at Caer Gybi, Holyhead, were part of the late third/fourth-century coastal defensive system (Arnold & Davies 2000, 32-3; Lynch 1995, 66, 100-101; RCHAM Anglesey, 1936, 28).

<sup>4</sup> 'With spade and pick we do the trick', motto of the 'Inn and out club', an Edwardian antiquarian society based in south-west Wales (Treherne 1925/6, 17).

<sup>5</sup> Har.-959: 1500 + 70BP (450 + 70 a.d.) calibrated by Stuiver *et al.* (1998) Oxcal = cal AD 530-650 (1 sigma) and cal. AD 420 - 660 (2 sigma).

<sup>6</sup> Three examples of extended inhumation are known from Iron Age Wales. The sword burial from Gelliniog Wen, Anglesey is considered an intrusive pre-conquest burial (Whimpster 1981, 143; Lynch 1991, 282). However, two extended inhumations from hillforts — Nash Point, Vale of Glamorgan and Llanymynech, Powys — point to the occasional native employment of this rite (Murphy 1992, 34 no. 15, ii; Owen 1997, 62).

<sup>7</sup> A group of east-west graves at this site contained late Roman coins; others within the same group contained hob-nails. Caution has been urged over ascribing a late Roman date to all the hob-nail burials, as eighth-century radiocarbon dates were obtained from under one these graves (Neil Holbrook, pers. comm.). However, this site had been much disturbed, probably in the early modern period, which may account for this anomaly (Thomas, A. & Holbrook 1994, 6-7). It should also be noted that Roman objects (particularly coins) could be placed in sub-Roman graves (Rahtz *et al.* 2000, 396; White 1988). Examples of this practice in Wales come from Caerleon (Evans & Metcalf 1992, 54) and possibly Llantwit Major (Nash-Williams 1953, 103, 106).

<sup>8</sup> For detailed comparative analysis of early medieval rectangular mortuary enclosures see James (1992) Brassil *et al.* (1991, 90-1) & Murphy (1992, 29-30).

<sup>9</sup> A single sherd of late medieval pottery was retrieved from one of the graves, its presence was attributed to probable animal disturbance (Jones 1992, 24).

<sup>10</sup> See Chapter 4, 86 n.1.

<sup>11</sup> A good example of this practice in Wales can be found at Bwlch y Ddeufaen, above Rowen, Gwynedd, where Bronze Age cairns are positioned close to the ancient mountain pass (Lynch 1995, no. 37). A further example comes from Tirymynach, Ceredigion, where a Bronze Age barrow is located to the side of a ridgeway (Houlder 1956, 11-23).

<sup>12</sup> See end note 7.

<sup>13</sup> Scott (1991, 120; 1999, 113) sees the increase in infant burials on rural settlement sites as a 'revitalization movement', borne out of a postulated shift in male and female relations as a result of internal and external socio-economic pressures. It is argued that these strains on society constrained movement within more heavily defended closed communities; circumstances which led women to seek greater control over the domestic domain through a 'strong fertility ritual', which manifested itself in the 'manipulation' of the infant dead. The contexts chosen for burial were settlement interiors, particularly in association with buildings and agricultural features.

<sup>14</sup> Welsh examples include burials from Llantwit Major (Nash-Williams 1953) and Tremadoc (Breese and Anwyl 1909). English examples are attested at Fishbourne (de la Bédoyère 1993, 129). See also Percival (1976, 183-99, 217, note 1) for further British and continental examples of this practice.

<sup>15</sup> See Chapter 4, note 20.

<sup>16</sup> Parc y Eglwys, Carmarthenshire is included here as, although its status remains unclear, its position high above sea level, defences, and material culture suggest it is generically of hillfort type (Treherne 1907-8; 1925-6; Williams 1978, 14).

<sup>17</sup> The possibility that temples and mortuary practice were more closely associated in the Roman period than commonly assumed is an argument put forward by Forcey (1998, 87-98) and is discussed in Chapter 5, pages 131, 146 and n.10. But it is pertinent here that a closer link is found between pre-Roman and Romano-Celtic temples and burials than those found in the classical world (Clarke 1979, 425; Rodwell 1980, 213; Forcey 1998). In a Welsh context, a close juxtaposition between cemetery and temple is likely at Carmarthen (see page 146) and possibly Bulmore, Caerleon (see page 62). Outside modern day Wales, but arguably part of the same western coastal culture in the prehistoric and early historic periods (Rahtz 1982, 5), burial activity at both Henley Wood and Cannington appear to have been focussed on a hilltop temples or shrines (Rahtz *et al.* 2000, 409; Watts & Leach 1996). At Cannington, a hilltop temple, shrine or mausoleum with a central grave, is seen as a possible primary feature within the subsequent late Roman/early medieval cemetery. At Henley Wood, although the majority of graves post-date the temple, it is possible that some of the burials may be contemporary with the latest stages of temple use during the late Roman period (Watts & Leach 1996, 145).

<sup>18</sup> A close correlation between infant burials and temples or shrines has been noted in Roman Britain (Watts 1989, 373). However, the presence of an infant burial at a temple site need not imply votive deposition (cf. Taylor, A. 2003; Forcey 1998, 89).

<sup>19</sup> The reason behind this prohibition is unclear; it may have been for economic reasons in order to clamp down on elaborate and expensive funerals or, alternatively, to curtail mortuary rites such as exposure, which would probably have been seen as unhygienic and offensive to public sensibilities.

Table X of the Twelve Tables Fragment 5:

*Citatio 1. Homini mortua ne ossa legito quo post funus faciat.* 'he is not to gather a dead man's bones, for the purpose of holding a funeral afterwards' but ...

*Citatio 2 ... excipit bellicam peregrinamque mortem . . .* 'An exception is for death in battle and on foreign soil (Cherry 2000, 9; [www.Yale.edu/lawweb/avalon/medieval/Twelve-Tables.htm](http://www.Yale.edu/lawweb/avalon/medieval/Twelve-Tables.htm)).

<sup>20</sup> The inhumation from Castle Ditches is the least securely dated of the 'Roman' period inhumations from a hillfort. However, it was thought most likely to be contemporary with the latest occupation of the site (2<sup>nd</sup>-4<sup>th</sup> century) as, although it was deposited after the defences had fallen into disuse, the context (hillfort ditch) and contracted form of the burial suggest an indigenous Romano-British rite.

<sup>21</sup> David Petts kindly allowed the writer access to his unpublished PhD thesis. However, this was in draft form and before pagination, no page numbers have, therefore, been included here.

<sup>22</sup> It was noted that 'the stones of a circle are to be seen protruding here and there' this is indicative of Bronze Age revetment or a ring cairn, as for example, at Pontardulais, (Swansea) (Ward 1975).

<sup>23</sup> It has been suggested that at Petty Knowles in Northumberland, previous to the site's identification as a Roman cemetery, Roman coarseware retrieved from the site was mistaken for that of a 'native type' (Charlton & Mitcheson 1984, 17). Records can also be misleading, for example, there is little in the description 'an urn of very mean pottery' to suggest a Roman date. Yet the pot referred to contained Roman coins (RCHAM Pembrokeshire 1925, 96). Most significantly, a black-burnished jar of definite late 3rd-4th century date from Meline, Pembrokeshire (*MI*), thought to have contained a cremation, is identified as a late Bronze Age cordoned urn (RCHAMW Pemb. 1925, 690).

<sup>24</sup> For evidence of pyre activity at military sites see Chapters 3 & 4. In rural areas, in addition to the evidence from Penbryn (*P5*) and Pontardulais (*P14*), pyre and burial appear to have been closely associated at Welshpool (*WI*) and Pant-y-Kendy, Abernant (*AI*).

<sup>25</sup> Human skeletal material from Ogof yr Ychen, and Nannas Cave on Caldey Island was radiocarbon dated to the Mesolithic and Neolithic respectively (Chamberlain & Williams 2000, 15 & 22).

## CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSION

This study has shown that the burial evidence from Roman Wales is far more extensive and varied than previously recognized (*pace* Philpott 1991, 40-1). The corpus of burial evidence brought together as a result of this research has made it possible to identify geographical, chronological and site specific variations in practice. In addition, by evaluating the evidence from pre-conquest Wales and comparing it with the Romano-British data, it has been possible to detect rites that appear to have had their roots in indigenous practice. Collectively, the evidence from both Iron Age and post-conquest Wales has shed new light on the role and evolution of burial practice in Roman Wales.

It remains the case that the majority of known burials are concentrated in, and within close proximity to, military and urban settlements (Map 2). There are a number of explanations for this uneven distribution. Firstly, and most obviously, 'built-up' areas had larger populations. Secondly, until the 1970s, it was the forts and urban areas of the Welsh frontier zone that received the bulk of archaeological attention. Moreover, the limited excavation that took place on rural sites was focussed on the structural remains, with little attention paid to the curtilage or peripheral areas of the settlements — areas in which, as more comprehensive modern exploration has shown, burials were commonly placed (e.g. Whitton (*W2.1*), Jarrett & Wrathmell 1981, 21; Biglis (*B1.1*), Parkhouse 1988, 15-16). Thirdly, while the acid nature of the soil may be responsible for a considerable loss of evidence on all site types, in rural areas, where burials were often unurned or inhumed in simple earth-cut graves, this factor may have skewed the evidence, since 'unenclosed' burials are less readily identified. That rural burials were often placed in shallow graves, which makes them more susceptible to disturbance, also suggests, as Whimster (1981, 194-6) intimated was the case in the Iron Age, that a large proportion of the rural dead have been erased from the archaeological record (e.g. Biglis (*B1.1*), Parkhouse 1988, 15; Plas Gogerddan (*P2*), Murphy 1992, 15; Coygan Camp (*C8.1*), Wainwright 1967, 54-6). Fourthly, there is a strong possibility that as less than 10% of known rural inhumation burials have been radiocarbon dated, some of those attributed to the early medieval period were, in fact, of Roman date. On this issue, it is of some significance that long-cist graves, which are generally attributed to the sub-Roman period in Wales, had begun to appear by the

third century in both south and north Wales (e.g. Biglis *B1.1(a)*; Abernant Farm (*A2*); Pentre Farm (*P7.1b*). Finally, the presence of fragmented and disarticulated skeletal material in native contexts, for example, at Caerwent (see Chapter 5) and on rural settlement sites (see Chapter 6) infers that ‘invisible’ rites such as excarnation persisted into the Roman period.

### **The influence of Roman burial practices: geographical and chronological patterns**

As would be expected, Roman burial rites were more apparent where there was a strong Roman presence. It is at the legionary fortresses that we see the widest spectrum of classical practices in terms of both monumentality (the use of mausolea and tombstones) and grave furnishings — that is, lamps, coins, glass phials etc. The burial practices at the auxiliary forts and other military installations in Wales also display strong Roman characteristics. Cremations, the principal Roman rite during the first two centuries AD, dominate the burial record, and grave goods, although less numerous, were, in the main, comparable to those at the legionary bases. There was, however, less emphasis placed on classical burial display; wooden mausolea were favoured over masonry, barrows were used to house the dead and less than a handful of tombstones are attested. This disparity may be down to the difference in status between legionary and auxiliary forces. However, there is also a strong likelihood that the *auxilia* and members of the *vicani* exercised a preference for alternative forms of monumentality derived from provincial and/or indigenous burial traditions.

The reduction in the number of garrisons from *c.* AD 160 lessened Roman influence in much of north, mid and west Wales and curtailed the spread of intrusive rites in these areas (see below). In contrast, in those areas of south Wales where there continued to be a military presence, and where urban centres were established, Roman rites were more extensively carried out and followed the developing trends in Romano-British burial practice noted in the other civic areas of Roman Britain. For example, alongside the widespread adoption of extended inhumation, we see fashions in grave furnishings (e.g. lead and stone coffins) spread out into outlying districts (see Maps 8 & 9). Similarly, although the deposition of coins in the grave does not appear to have been common practice in Caerleon, it was a Roman habit that was adopted at

an early stage in south Wales and one which persisted into the fourth century (e.g. Caerwent *C11.16*; Llandough *L14*).

By the late Roman period (3rd — 4th centuries) burial practices in south-east Wales, the most heavily populated and ‘urbanised’ area of south Wales, had reached a degree of uniformity. Extended inhumations (often coffined) are apparent in both ‘urban’ and rural contexts, and grave goods, where present, comprised one or more of a limited and specific range of objects, namely: pottery vessels, coins and personal ornaments. These burial practices follow the pattern observed across much of third-century Britain and are characteristic of what has loosely been termed a ‘national’ Romano-British rite (Philpott 1991, 224, 225-6). Similarly, in line with the evidence from a growing number of English sites, notably in the west of England, late Roman south-east Wales also saw the first stages in the development of ‘managed’ inhumation cemeteries, consisting of west-east extended graves with few or no grave goods (Rahtz 1977; Thomas, C. 1981, 232; Rahtz *et al.* 2000), as, for example, at the Atlantic Trading Estate (*A4.1*). That burial practices in south-east Wales should reflect the broad trends identified in England is not surprising, since relatively easy land and sea passage between the south coast of Wales and the West Country would have ensured the dissemination of both fashions and materials. In the case of the latter, this is clearly demonstrated by the concentration of Bath-stone coffins in and around Caerleon (see Map 9).

However, while a certain ‘uniformity’ can be recognised in south-east Wales, older practices were not totally abandoned. For example, cremations are apparent, in what appear to be principally native contexts, into the late Roman period (e.g. Bear Field, Cowbridge *C12.3*; Caerwent *C11.10*). Since Iron Age cremation is attested in Wales this is particularly significant: we are either seeing the continuation of an indigenous cremation rite, or, alternatively, native elements of the population who were reluctant to put aside earlier Romano-British traditions. It is also of note that, while extended inhumation and coffined burial were adopted in rural areas (e.g. Biglis *B1.1a*; Nash *N2*), the contexts chosen for burial (e.g. boundary ditches and settlement defences) are indicative of indigenous practice. Similarly, in south-west Wales, although the adoption of Roman rites is apparent in the *civitas* capital of Carmarthen and its immediate hinterlands, further to the west in the more isolated areas, hillfort burial



(e.g. Coygan Camp *C8.1*) and cave burial (e.g. Potter's Cave, Caldey Island *P4*) imply that indigenous rites continued. Moreover, the possible late third-century context of the Coygan Camp burials, and the radiocarbon date from skeletal material at Potter's Cave (cal. AD 240 — 400; 2 sigma), suggest that such practices lingered on into the late Roman period.

Although the extent of their occupation fluctuated, two military installations in the north and north-east region of the Welsh frontier zone (Chester and Caernarfon) maintained a military presence until the fourth century. It is of interest therefore, that they do not appear to have had a substantial or long-term influence on burial practices in their hinterlands. Outside their military environs and those of other military installations in north and north-east Wales, the small number of known burials display strong indigenous characteristics (e.g. barrow and cave burials), although the use of objects such as coins or lamps as grave goods suggests a measure of Roman influence (eg. Llanarmon-yn-Ial *L9*; Dinas Bran *L10*; Big Covert Cave, *M3*). Similarly, a military presence until the third century at both Caersws and Forden Gaer in mid Wales appears to have had little impact on practices in outlying districts. We can surmise therefore, that a reduction in military strength was not the only factor to arrest the development of intrusive practices in these parts of Wales. Nevertheless, the loss of the majority of military *vici* no doubt exacerbated the problems of an underdeveloped market economy in much of mid and north Wales. This poor economic climate restricted the movement of people and ideas and, as a consequence, beyond those at the few military settlements, prevented the establishment of 'urban' and permanent market centres — the melting pots needed to facilitate cultural integration (Davies, J.L. 1984). Thus, while it is apparent that burial practices in the remaining occupied forts and associated *canabae* and *vici* continued to evolve in tandem with those in the more 'Romanized' south, new rites and innovations do not appear to have filtered out to any great extent into surrounding rural areas. We may, of course, not be recognising rural burials for the reasons noted above.

While the limited adoption of Roman rites in mid and north Wales was principally due to the less integrated nature of many of the indigenous communities in these areas, there are also hints that burial practices may have been particularly deep-rooted and resistant to change. The Rhuddgaer lead coffin (*R1*) is pertinent here, since, if we

are correct to assume that this burial was of fourth-century date, then, in this instance, there was clearly both knowledge of, and a desire for, contemporary funerary furnishings. However, that the coffin may have been fashioned to house a crouched inhumation implies that there was also a determined effort not to abandon former rites. Such conservatism is still evident during the late Roman/early medieval interface. Although by this time a more uniform mode of burial can be recognised across Wales — that is, ‘managed’ cemeteries of oriented E-W graves — there was a greater tendency in northern and western regions to refer back to the indigenous past by placing such cemeteries close to prehistoric monuments. For example, as at Plas Gogerddan, Ceredigion (Murphy 1992), Llandegai, Gwynedd (Houlder 1968), Capel Eithin, Anglesey (White & Smith 1999), Tan Dderwen, Clwyd (Brassil et al. 1991) and possibly Arfryn, Anglesey (White 1972).<sup>1</sup> It is tempting to suggest that the descendants of those native tribes that had put up most resistance to Rome,<sup>2</sup> or, at least, had managed to hold out the longest against annexation, would be inherently more reluctant to embrace Roman mortuary practices beyond a very superficial level.

### **The continuation of Iron Age practices**

The impact of Roman burial practices in the Welsh frontier zone varied in intensity in the different geographical regions of Wales and in different milieux. By the same token, indigenous practices persisted to a lesser or greater degree in different social environments. In terms of grave treatment the fairly consistent use of stone cists for both cremations and inhumations in rural areas implies an ongoing Iron Age tradition, as does the preference for unurned cremations and for high quality metalwork as grave goods, particularly brooches. Other practices in the countryside had both Iron Age and Roman antecedents and include the use of barrows to house the dead. The difficulties of attributing barrow use to immigrant or native communities have been outlined above (Chapters 4 & 6), but it seems fair to assume that those barrows situated in isolated rural areas, or within close proximity to native settlements, represent the continuation of an indigenous barrow rite. The same is likely to be true of cave burials. Although there are no definite Iron Age examples, the probable date of the majority of deposits (1st - 2nd century), the high percentage of brooches (a practice with strong native antecedents) and the presence of both adults and juveniles suggests that caves were familial sepulchres for certain members of local native communities (see Chapter 6). Similarly, the limited but continued use of hillforts for

the deposition of both 'formal' burials and disarticulated skeletal material implies native burial traditions were carried forward into the Romano-British period.

Yet while it is possible to argue for continuity in rural areas, there are problems in trying to isolate native practices in military and urban contexts. There are certainly indications (see Chapters 3, 4) that indigenous rites were carried out within the *vici* and *canabae* of Wales (e.g. barrow burial or the presence of specific objects in the grave), yet there are no practices that we can say were exclusively of native origin. One of the better indicators of native influence within fort environs may be the contexts chosen to bury the dead such as rampart or boundary-ditch burial (e.g. Caernarfon *CI.1*; Loughor *LI.4*), loci which have both Iron Age precursors and rural parallels in Wales. The close spatial relationship between burials and domestic areas in urban and small town contexts (e.g. at Bulmore *CAER.6 no. 3* and Caerwent *CII.10*) is also redolent of native practice. Equally, however, we might see the gradual contraction of space between cemeteries and occupied areas as a product of a developing Romano-British society. Certainly, there seems to have been more of an attempt in the early years of occupation to create a wide physical divide between the living and the dead. For example, there appears to have been a greater distance between the pre-Flavian or Neronian forts and their respective cemeteries than the majority of those of the later Flavian period (e.g. Abergavenny, c. 700m, *A3.1*, Map 12; Wroxeter c.400m, *WROX.1*, Map 5 and Usk, 0.5km, *U2.3*). If these relatively long distances are accurate, and not down to patchy archaeological evidence, then it may be argued that we are seeing evidence of an early military policy which enforced a stricter code of burial practice — a policy which begins to break down during the later years of occupation.

### **Burial location**

The analysis of burial loci in Roman Wales has proved one of the most rewarding aspects of this study. This approach has made it possible to identify a number of widespread burial trends and also to detect site specific patterns and peculiarities. For example, at military installations it is apparent that, although roads were common burial foci, rivers and water sources (including bathhouses) also attracted burials. This has important implications for the study of urban and military burial practice in Britain, and underlines the fact that the various topographical foci in extramural

landscapes should be seen as equally important as those in the rural landscape. Potentially, the study of such burial contexts offers a valuable means of understanding the 'conceptual landscape' of Roman towns and military sites. The examination of the spatial patterning of burials on rural sites has also been of value (see Chapter 6), since we can now see that there was a degree of uniformity across the rural areas of Roman Britain. For example, as in England (see page 168), burials were often placed on the peripheries of settlements, commonly close to the defences, but were also scattered across settlement sites. There was also a common tendency to bury infants closer to the domestic core of the site (e.g. Thornwell Farm *C5.2*; Prestatyn *P15*). However, there were also variations in practice between England and Wales (see below). It is also evident that quite distinct differences in rite and practice could exist contemporaneously at similar sites within the same region in Wales, as, for example, at Whitton (*W2.1*) and Biglis (*B1.1*) in the south (see page 178).

But perhaps the most interesting burial contexts are those detected at military sites that were abandoned or under-garrisoned. It has been noted that at Chester formal burials were placed closer to the fortress at a time when the bulk of the Twentieth Legion was absent (see page 57). During this period of reduced military strength a handful of burials were also placed within the fortress itself (*CHE.9*). We have also seen that, contrary to Boon's (1972, 123, n. 40, 138, n. 358; 1974, 351, n. 2) emphatic denial of such practice, this was not a phenomenon that was restricted to Chester: the same thing occurred at Caerleon (*CAER.8*) at times of reduced garrison (see page 63). Similarly, at Loughor (*L1.4*; *L13*) burials were placed within the defences during the last stages of the fort's life. At Usk, a possible inhumation cut through the defences in a probable post-fortress context (Manning 1981, 110, *U2.4. no. 4*). Lastly, at Cowbridge (*C12.1*), shortly after the military bathhouse was abandoned (c. AD 120), the bathhouse complex was used for inhumation burials. Significantly, one of these was a crouched inhumation, which is indicative of native burial.

It is evident that we have a recurring pattern. As soon as the Roman army reduced its strength, or disappeared from an area, there is a marked shift in the location of burials — they move closer to the settlement and in some cases are placed inside. We might, of course, put these burials down to the mundane — that is, the utilization of vacant land — although it is difficult to believe that burial could be that arbitrary. It seems

more likely that those burials placed within abandoned areas of forts were part and parcel of a common phenomenon — that is, the use of ‘relict’ features for burial (Pearce, J. 1999b, 156). This was a practice apparent in native contexts from the late Iron Age/early Roman interface in Wales (*M6*). It was also one that continued into post Roman times (e.g. Llandough, Owen John 1988, 144), although it is also true to say it was not a practice that was exclusive to Britain in the early medieval period (Meneghini & Santangeli Valenzani 2000; Percival 1976). Interpreted in various ways, such behaviour is widely seen as a means of legitimising rights to territory, or of affiliating the dead with past cultures to affirm status or descent (Bradley 1987; Petts 2001; Williams, H. 1997; Edwards, N. 2001). It may be argued, however, that the speed at which forts were used for burial purposes, once abandoned or under-garrisoned, is paramount to our understanding of this practice. Clearly, unlike prehistoric features that were used for burial, there would be full knowledge of the character of the site and of its inhabitants. Either those who buried their dead within the defences of the forts wished them to be affiliated with the Roman culture in some way. Or, if these were natives reverting to type and burying their dead within the confines of the settlement, this may have been a means of reinstating their rights to the territory. It is germane here that at Loughor, Caerleon and Usk it was the ramparts and defences which acted as foci for burials — contexts mirrored on native sites. It is also significant that at Loughor the evidence points not just to burial, but to the cremation itself taking place within the defences. It would be hard to argue, therefore, that, in this instance, this was a ‘casual’ disposal or a surreptitious action — a statement was being made in which location played a large part.

### **Ritual and Belief**

In terms of mortuary behaviour a number of practices have been identified and comprise pre-burial rituals, post-funerary practices and secondary rites. On the issue of pre-burial ritual, one of the most significant aspects of the cremation rite to be identified in Wales has been the close proximity of pyre and burial, a practice now recognised as commonplace in other areas of Roman Britain (McKinley 2000a, 39). In Wales this practice has been noted in both military and rural contexts. It has been suggested above (Chapter 3) that when pyre sites were placed in prominent locations (for example, roadside cemeteries) this would have had a definite social impact. The cremation itself would have been clearly visible and may have facilitated the adoption

of cremation by elements of the native population. Similarly, such a public arena would have provided the opportunity to observe attendant rites, particularly the deposition of specific objects on the pyre or in the grave. We can see, therefore, how fashions in grave furnishing might be adopted. Indeed, we do not have to look far in the modern world to see how quickly trends in funerary practice are imitated, even where contact between different cultures is relatively transitory (Morgan, C. 2002; Parker Pearson 1999, 41-2; Ucko 1969, 273). The adoption of attendant eschatological beliefs is more difficult to measure. In those parts of Wales where a multicultural society developed, we have evidence to suggest the fusion of religious beliefs — the altar to Mars-Ocelus at Caerwent, provides a good example here.<sup>3</sup> We might expect, therefore, that, in heavily Romanized areas, ideas on the afterlife were also of a hybrid nature. However, there is much less likelihood that this would have been the case in the countryside where Roman influence was slight. Certainly, in the Welshpool (*WI*) cremation assemblage, there are decorative elements on the various grave goods that have both Celtic and Roman religious significance. Yet, while these were considered appropriate ancillary items, in such a rural backwater they are just as likely to represent the eclectic nature of Romano-British material culture than adherence to particular cults or ideologies.

Beyond the fact that inherent in both cultures was a desire to provide funerary offerings — a practice indicative of an afterlife belief — we cannot assume the adoption of classical rites was synonymous with classical belief, especially in isolated rural areas (Philpott 1991, 208-16; Jones, R.F.J. 1993, 249). It is here that differences in the cremation rite may be significant. It has been noted that there was less of a tendency to burn offerings on the pyre in rural and native contexts (e.g. Welshpool *WI*; Pentwyn Triley *P17*; Johnstown *J1*). It is tempting to equate this variation in cremation rite to differences between Celtic and Roman ideas of an afterlife. Roman afterlife beliefs had been heavily influenced by the Hellenistic world, which perceived the afterlife as a place of destination, although earlier Etruscan ideas that the dead remained at the place of burial had not been abandoned (Toynbee 1971; Macdonald 1977, 36). But it may be argued that, if the majority of Romans embraced the notion of Elysium, burning items on the pyre may have been a way to ensure that they accompanied the dead on their journey (Gräslund 1994). Conversely, from what we can discern about pre-conquest beliefs in Wales, they were part of a wider prehistoric

tradition, which held that the dead remained in or close to their graves (Pallottino 1992, 39). This is a concept which may explain the provision of unburnt objects in the grave, since these would need to be *seen* to stay intact at their place of deposition (*pace* Gräslund 1994, 19).

Post-funerary rituals in Wales include the manipulation of bone as at Park Lane, Carmarthen (C4.1), where the cremated bone showed cut marks (Coard in Crane 2001, 30). They also include the deposition of fragmented material in secondary contexts (evident at rural sites and in the wells and pits of Caerwent). In the case of Caerwent it has been argued that, since secondary mortuary rites were an intrinsic element of Iron Age practice in Wales, and that the deposition of fragmented skeletal material features almost exclusively in Romano-British native contexts in Wales,<sup>4</sup> we may be seeing the continuation of Iron Age practices. The incorporation of skeletal material within wells and pits at Caerwent raises interesting questions concerning how this practice was perceived in antiquity. The difficulties of separating different forms of ritual activity have been outlined above (Chapter 5). However, there is a danger that, although we are now more aware that ritual practices could incorporate disarticulated human skeletal material, we too readily depersonalise the bones of those individuals used in votive contexts. This is unfortunate, for if the disposal of human remains in this way becomes lumped together under the general category of 'special or structured deposit', we risk underestimating the importance of this practice as a mortuary rite in its own right. It has been argued, with reference to Iron Age ritual activity, that too much emphasis is placed on the skeletal material included in ritual deposits, rather than seeing it as one element in a range of equally valued deposits (Hill 1995, 105-6, 117-18). Yet, equally, it could be argued that, when skeletal material is either a component of structured deposition or housed in a cinerary urn<sup>5</sup> within votive contexts, this separation suggests that care was taken to retain some form of individual status for those deposited in this manner. It may also be pertinent that, as others have pointed out, many of the same categories of objects were chosen for votive offerings and grave goods and that some items, such as personal ornaments and most significantly footwear, carried an individual signature (van-Driel Murray 1999; Esmonde Cleary 2000, 138; Scott 1991, 119). This implies that they related directly to a specific individual(s), whether disposed of in a cemetery or votive context. Moreover, if we are correct to view the skeletal material within wells and pits as the end product of excarnation practices, and comparable in form and, by inference, to Iron Age rites,<sup>6</sup> there is little reason to assume that the dead in such contexts would be devoid of personality. We only have to look at the

concept of saints' relics to recognize that isolated bones were associated with different personalities.

While the burial practices identified in the more 'Romanized' regions of late Roman Wales were broadly in step with contemporary practices in England, there were also some significant variations. It is of particular note that decapitation, a widespread late Roman burial rite, which has been identified in predominantly rural contexts in England, but also in association with small towns and *civitas* capitals (Philpott 1991, 77-89), does not appear to have made headway in Wales.<sup>7</sup> The only two instances of this rite come from Wroxeter (Webster 1975, 137) and Kenchester (Philpott 1991, 308), both towns on the periphery of Roman Wales, which suggests it was a rite imported from the west midlands, where the practice is well attested (Philpott 1991, 441, fig. 23). The lack of this type of burial in Wales is particularly pertinent in view of the emphasis placed on the skull in both Iron Age and native Roman contexts in Wales. Isolated skulls and skull fragments were incorporated into votive wells and pits at Caerwent and must, therefore, have been removed from the rest of the corpse before deposition. Yet there is no evidence of 'formal' burials with the head missing in Wales, or of burials with a severed head placed within the grave. Again, such a lacuna may simply be down to lack of evidence. But, it is significant that, as a practice that is often argued to have been linked to Celtic belief systems, or thought likely to have stemmed from indigenous practice, it does not appear to occur in Wales (Macdonald 1979, 414-21; Barber & Bowsher 2000, 317; Philpott 1991, 84-8). Why there should be this disparity is not readily apparent. However, it may be argued that, if excarnation continued in Wales into the Romano-British period, there was no need to decapitate the body before deposition in the grave, since decomposition could be readily observed at the excarnation site. This not only allowed people to witness the physical destruction of the corpse but also allowed access to specific bones for use in transition rites<sup>8</sup> and other ritual activities. In other words, if, as some have argued, decapitation was carried out to ease the transformation from corpse to spirit world, or to prevent the dead from walking,<sup>9</sup> such concerns could be addressed outside the grave in Wales.

None of the burial practices or grave treatments identified in Wales can be confidently ascribed to any particular religion. This is true throughout the Roman period. On the



issue of Christianity, there are inherent problems in attempting to identify Christian graves or cemeteries, since many of the grave treatments favoured by the early church (e.g. west-east orientation, plaster burial and lack of grave goods) were not exclusive to Christian use, but part of broader developments in Romano-British practice (see Chapters 1 and 5). In terms of Roman period, Christian inscriptions or iconography, there are no overtly Christian tombstones or funerary furnishings in Wales, though the possibility that the lead coffin from Caerwent displayed Christian symbols has been mentioned above (*C11.9*). In addition, a piece of limestone, inscribed with a cross within a circle, was found in apparent association with a crouched burial at Brownslade, Castlemartin (*B4*). However, the record is vague and it would be unwise to confidently ascribe this burial to the Roman period (Laws 1882, 51-8). It has also been suggested that a zoomorphic brooch depicting a fish (Plate IV), found in probable association with burials at Big Covert Cave, Denbighshire (*M3*), might have had 'Christian significance' (Green, M.J. 1979, 30). But the date of this object (first to second century) and its isolated provenance make this highly unlikely.

Although it can be concluded that no definite Christian burials have been identified in Wales, it is probable that a percentage of those burials that display late Roman/Christian characteristics were Christian graves. Again, location may be the key. That there are several instances of early medieval church sites on Roman burial grounds in Wales is significant, and may be indicative of Christian continuity. From the fourth and fifth centuries the conscious development of churches on former Christian burial grounds or places of worship is well attested on the continent (Morris 1989, 6-17). But although the possibility of this type of development in Britain has fuelled considerable debate (e.g. Roxan & Morris 1980; Morris 1989; Bell 1998; Edwards 1996; Pearce, S. 1982; Petts 2001), the absence of any physical proof of continuity makes any intentional development purely speculative. In Wales, the sequence of events at the villas of Llandough (Owen-John 1988; Thomas & Holbrook 1994) and Llantwit Major (Hogg 1974; Nash-Williams 1953; Morris 1989, 100) have provoked this type of speculation, as have developments at Caerwent and Caernarfon (Edwards 1996; James, H. 1992a; Blair 1996; White 1972). Three sites (Loughor, *L14*; Caernarfon, *C1.2*; Carmarthen *C4.2*) are of particular note, since definite or probable Roman burials (rather than possible Christian communities *per se*) may have been the initial foci for later ecclesiastical settlements. However, unlike the other two

sites, all the Roman burials to come from the New Cemetery of Llanbeblig church, Caernarfon (*Cl.2a-j*), are of early date (first- to mid second-century) and cremations, which makes the argument for linear continuity between burial ground and early medieval Christian site harder to support. Possible Roman burials have also been discovered underneath and close to St. Martin's church, Laugharne, Carmarthenshire (*L2*).

### **Future Work**

It is hoped that this study, although only touching the surface of this vast topic, has shown that burial practice in Roman Wales can provide a wealth of information about Romano-British society. However, a lot remains to be done. It has been argued that the contexts used for burial, and attendant rituals, should be seen as the most important aspect of burial practice during this period. The analysis of the immediate and physical environment in which a burial took place can shed light on the status, beliefs and concerns, and perhaps, more controversially, the cultural identity or affiliations of some sections of Romano-Celtic society in Wales. It has been shown that many of the practices identified in Roman Wales have long traditions that reach back to the Iron Age and stretch forward into the early medieval period. We now need to isolate some of these practices and look at them in greater depth. For example, a considerable amount of work is now being done on early medieval burials in England and Wales, and it is becoming clear that both Roman sites and prehistoric monuments were a focus for burials in the post-Roman period (e.g. Lucy & Reynolds *et al.* 2002; James, H. 1992a; Edwards 1986; 2001). However, in terms of ritual or cultural continuity, it would pay to look more keenly at the spatial patterning of burials in specific cemetery types or contexts. To give an example: although it is widely recognised that burials were placed within derelict or semi-derelict Roman buildings, with notable exceptions (Petts 2001), little consideration has been given to the significance of building type or specific burial contexts at such sites, an approach that has been employed with considerable success elsewhere (Percival 1976, 183-99; Meneghini & Santangeli Valenzani 2000). A cursory glance at the Welsh evidence shows that bathhouses remained a focus for burials into the early medieval period (e.g. Tremadoc, Breese & Anwyl 1909; Llanio, Bund 1888, 303-5; Wroxeter, White & Barker 1998, 125). Moreover, it is also of note that it was the finest rooms of derelict villas that were used for post-Roman burials (e.g. Llantwit Major, Storrie

1888; Nash-Williams 1953; Hogg 1974). It is also of some significance that it was those early medieval burials at Roman sites (rather than prehistoric monuments) that continued specific classical practices (e.g. the incorporation of coins with the dead).<sup>10</sup> This adds weight to the argument that Roman structures may have attracted the burials of those who had, or wished to claim, a cultural link with the Roman past (Williams, H. 1997, 14).

Further attention also needs to be given to the spatial distribution of fragmented skeletal material at sites such as Caerwent and Wroxeter. This would involve a thorough re-evaluation of antiquarian reports, but is likely to further our understanding of intramural ritual activity at *civitas* capitals. It would also allow comparative analysis between the two sites.

Similarly, we need to be more aware of the potential burial evidence at rural sites and incorporate this into excavation projects by directing more attention to boundary ditches and defences. In terms of bone assemblages, there is also a great need to re-examine some of the earlier nineteenth-century collections held in Wales. While these collections are not extensive — the bone often being discarded from pots or coffins upon discovery — analysis, for example, of the remaining skeletal material from Segontium (NMGW. Acc. No. 48.63), would help to address questions of gender, health and age and throw light on the make-up of military cemeteries. Pathological examination has certainly paid off on some of the more recently excavated sites, as, for example, at the Atlantic Trading Estate (*A4.1*), where it has been possible to determine the demographic makeup of the cemetery and the health and possible familial relationships of those buried (Price, C. 1989). Finally, although financial constraints have to be met, there is also a need for more comprehensive radiocarbon dating on sites where bone is preserved. This would hopefully provide a better understanding of the chronology of grave types and cemeteries in general. It is also hoped that modern scientific techniques such as DNA analysis and oxygen isotope analysis of dental enamel will soon be applied to Welsh bone assemblages. This might help to answer some of the questions this thesis has raised about the degree of fusion between Roman and native society in Wales.

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<sup>1</sup> The geographical distribution of early medieval burials on prehistoric sites in Wales is discussed by Petts (2001).

<sup>2</sup> If we are to take Tacitus at his word then resistance to Rome was particularly vehement and long-standing in the northern regions of Wales, culminating in the defeat of Anglesey *c.* AD 77 (Tacitus *Annals* XIV, xxx) and *Agricola* 18) cited in Lynch (1991, 320) and Casey, Davies & Evans (1993, 10). See Arnold & Davies (2000, 13-24) for military strategies and the final conquest of Wales.

<sup>3</sup> Discovered in House 16S (*Insulae* XII), Caerwent (Ashby *et al.* 1911, 431; Brewer 1997, 23).

<sup>4</sup> The possibility that fragmented skeletal material was deposited at Chester is discussed above (see Chapter 3, page 79). No evidence of this practice was identified at the auxiliary forts. However, the contents of a well within the courtyard of the Praetorium at Segontium hint that animals could feature as 'special deposits' in military contexts. This echoes the type of practice seen on rural sites (Chapter 6, page 203-5). A large number of cattle bones were deposited in the well at a depth of 9-12 feet; these included the 'skulls or horn-cores of at least eight animals'. It was noted that 'unlike most others from the fort, none of them had been cut for food', which prompted Wheeler (1923, 27) to suggest that they might have been a product of ritual activity.

<sup>5</sup> Wait (1985, 327, 333) cites two examples of urned cremations found within votive shafts/pits at Hardham, Sussex and Stone, Bucks. It is suggested that the pit at Caerwent (*C11.10*) may also fall into this category.

<sup>6</sup> Cunliffe's (2000, 76) model is particularly pertinent here. See chapter 2, footnote 14.

<sup>7</sup> A possible post-Roman example is suggested at Llandough villa, Glamorgan (Owen-John 1988, 144).

<sup>8</sup> Complex post-mortem rites (often sequential and carried out over extended periods of time) which are perceived to facilitate incorporation into an afterlife have wide geographical and temporal parallels (Van Gennep 1960, 146-65; Niblett 2000, 97; Williams, H. 2003; Parker Pearson 1999, 22-6; Barley 1995, 143-50).

<sup>9</sup> Philpott (1991, 77-89) provides a detailed discussion on the possible reasons behind decapitation. But a common theme is that such a practice was a decisive way of laying ghosts to rest (Henig 1943, 203; Macdonald 1979, 414-21).

<sup>10</sup> A female burial with a radiocarbon date of  $ad\ 705 \pm 60$  (cal. AD 660 - AD 900, 93.2% probability) provides a good example. This burial was placed in a carefully constructed cist of roofing-slabs, which respected the lines of the existing walls in the ruined barracks at Caerleon (Evans & Metcalf 1992, 54). A coin of Victorinus (AD 269-71) accompanied the burial.

## Abbreviations

<i>Arch. Camb.</i>	<i>Archaeologia Cambrensis</i>
<i>Archaeol. J</i>	<i>Archaeological Journal</i>
<i>Arch. Wales</i>	<i>Archaeology in Wales</i>
<i>BBCS</i>	<i>Bulletin Board of Celtic Studies</i>
<i>CAST</i>	<i>Cardiganshire Antiquarian Society Transactions</i>
<i>CNST</i>	<i>Cardiff Naturalists' Society Transactions</i>
<i>Gent. Mag.</i>	<i>The Gentleman's Magazine</i>
<i>GGAT</i>	<i>Glamorgan-Gwent Archaeological Trust</i>
<i>JCAS</i>	<i>Journal of the Chester Archaeological Society</i>
<i>PPS</i>	<i>Proceedings of the Prehistoric Society</i>
<i>TAAS</i>	<i>Transactions of the Anglesey Antiquarian Society</i>
<i>TCASFC</i>	<i>Transactions of the Carmarthenshire Antiquarian Society and Field Club</i>
<i>TSAHS</i>	<i>Transactions of the Shropshire Archaeological Historical Society</i>
<i>TRAC</i>	<i>Theoretical Roman Archaeology Conference</i>
<i>JRS</i>	<i>Journal of Roman Studies</i>
<i>RCAHMW</i>	<i>Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Wales</i>
<i>VCH</i>	<i>Victoria County History</i>

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