

Late Bronze Age to Middle Iron Age, c. 1150 – 100 BC

National and regional overviews

Nearly two decades on, *Understanding the British Iron Age: An Agenda for Action* (Champion et al 2001) remains a key source for research topics on the first millennium BC, with its overarching themes of chronological framework, settlement patterns, material culture, rationality and social-economic change being as relevant today as they were in 2001.

For Late Bronze Age studies, the British Museum's first volume of *Bronze Age Review* (2008) attempted to lay the foundations for a British Bronze Age research agenda, with topics of landscape, burial, settlement, interaction and society looming large in the contributions. Yet with no subsequent volumes in the series, this goal was never fully achieved. We also have to go back over ten years to locate other agenda-setting publication and overviews covering the period in question (Haselgrove and Pope 2007; Haselgrove and Moore 2007; Yates 2007), all of which have included aspects directly or indirectly relevant to the archaeology of the eastern region, and have shaped the direction and tone of subsequent research.

Whilst it is a little disconcerting that we cannot point to similar texts in recent years, the significance of some works may only be recognised with hindsight. At an intra-regional level, however, a number of important county-based overviews have reached publication. These include a collection of papers on the Iron Age in northern East Anglia (Davies 2011), and overviews of later Bronze Age and Iron Age in Essex (Sealey 2012; Yates 2012) and Hertfordshire (Bryant 2015). The importance of these works should not be underestimated, and will be a key reference point and entry for researchers and practitioners attempting to grapple with the extraordinary wealth of regional data there now is for this period.

Assessment of key projects

It is beyond the scope of this agenda to provide a comprehensive overview of all the major archaeological projects that have revealed evidence of this period in the region since 2011. The number of sites now excavated is truly vast. Moreover, with the scale and pace of commercial archaeology looking set to continue, if not accelerate, maintaining a handle and sense of regional perspective on this data is going to be a major challenge.

For Late Bronze Age studies, the excavations of the palisade-enclosed Must Farm pile-dwelling, Cambridgeshire, are of national and international significance. The remains of this remarkably preserved short-lived settlement, which burnt down in the ninth century BC, is providing stunning new insights into all aspects of Late Bronze Age settlement activity and household practice (Knight *et al.* 2017). Most striking is the richness of the material record, with 121 glass beads recovered, around 190 pieces of metal (socketed axes, sickles, gouges and fragments of spears and swords), 180 wooden artefacts (buckets, platters, textile beaters and bobbins), at least 117 individual items of fabric and fibre, and an extraordinarily well preserved assemblage of pottery. The research potential of the site is unprecedented, and the results of the post-excavation work are likely to transform understandings of the period and have far reaching implications of the study of other sites in the region.

PROJECT	LOCATION	AUTHORITY	TYPE	COMMENTS
Balls Park	Hertford	Herts	Excavation/ publication	MIA enclosure with internal features
Manor Estate	Apsley	Herts	Excavation/ publication	MIA occupation and boundary features
Hare Street Road	Buntingford	Herts	Excavation	MIA enclosure with 4-post structures and external roundhouse
Bishop's Stortford North	Bishop's Stortford	Herts	Excavation	LBA-MIA occupation. LBA cremations. MIA enclosure, roundhouses and 4-post structures
Hazel End	Bishop's Stortford	Herts	Excavation	LBA settlement with pits, posthole structures, and a three-sided ditched enclosure. Large assemblage of LBA pottery
Stevenage Road Solar Farm	St Ippolyts	Herts	Geophysical survey	Large D-shaped enclosure with roundhouses and associated features
Hitchin Grade Separation	Hitchin	Herts	Excavation	E-MIA occupation including 4-post structures and intercutting pits
Park Farm Industrial Estate	Buntingford	Herts	Excavation	LBA-MIA occupation and trackways. EIA cremations and inhumations
Howe Dell School Playing Field	Hatfield	Herts	Excavation	Possible LBA fled system ditches
Stocks Golf Course	Aldbury	Herts	Excavation/ Publictation	LBA occupation features with a well dated group of LBA pottery
Gadebridge	Hemel Hempstead	Herts	Excavation	LBA settlement with multiple structures and a cremation cemetery
Broom Quarry	Broom	Beds	Excavation	Substantial multi-phase Middle Iron Age settlement with 24 roundhouses, 20 settlement enclosures and 870 pits were associated with the Middle Iron Age. Large number Associated Bone Groups and large pottery assemblage.
Broom South Quarry	Broom	Beds	Excavation	MIA open settlement with two roundhouses, each associated with a small cluster of pits
Broadmead Road	Stewartby	Beds	Excavation	MIA enclosure and occupation features
Queen Street, Stotfold	Stotfold	Beds	Excavation/ publication	LBA creations and MIA enclosure with roundhouse.
A421 Improvement Scheme	M1 Juncion 13 to Bedford	Beds	Excavation/ publication	EIA cremation. MIA occupation at Sites 2, 4, 5 and 6, with concentric curvilinear enclosure at Site 4
Bedford Western Bypass Northern Section	Bedford	Beds	Excavation	LBA/EIA enclose, MIA occupation features and field system ditches.
Biddenham Loop	Bedford	Beds	Excavation/ Publication	Series of major excavations revealing eight zones of unenclosed LBA to MIA settlement with pits, posthole, and roundhouses. Excavation also revealed five LBA-MIA pits alignments.
Newhall Development Phase II	Harlow	Essex	Excavation	Scattered EIA settlement features
Mill House Farm	Chadwell St Mary	Essex	Excavation	Extensive LBA settlement with a possible ringwork, enclosures, structures and field system ditches. Large assemblage of LBA pottery and a series of possible LBA cremations.
Clements Park	Southend-On-Sea	Essex	Excavation/ publication	LBA occupation, rectilinear fields system ditches/enclosures and trackways
Springfield Lyons	Chelmsford	Essex	Excavation/ publication	LBA ringwork with four internal post-built roadhouses and associated pits, posthole and four-post structures. Regionally significant assemblage of fired clay metalworking moulds, and a stratified assemblage of LBA pottery associated with radiocarbon dates
Beaulieu	Chelmsford	Essex	Excavation	A series of excavations revealing open and enclosed MIA settlements with roundhouses, 4-post structures and other occupation features.
National Mapping Programme		Essex	Aerial Photography	Synthesis of result of The National Mapping Project in Essex with numerous new later prehistoric sits identified
Mucking	Mucking	Essex	Publication	Publication of the results of large-scale excavation at the site between 1965-1978. Includes LBA ringwork, areas of LBA-EIA settlement, 110 later prehistoric roundhouses and multiple later Iron Age enclosures. Substantial, regionally significant artefact assemblages.

PROJECT	LOCATION	AUTHORITY	TYPE	COMMENTS
Stanford Wharf Nature Reserve	Thames Estuary	Essex	Excavation/ Publication	MIA slat production site with associated pottery and radiocarbon dates
Must Farm	Peterborough	Cambs.	Excavation	LBA palisade-enclosed pile dwelling burnt down in the 9 th century BC. Stunning preservation of structure and household artefact assemblages. Project of national/international significance.
Barleycraft Farm/Over	Over	Cambs.	Excavation/ Publication	LBA arefact-rich buried soil on mid-channel sand ridge of the lower Ouse. Relatively few associated cut features.
Turners Yard	Fordham	Cambs.	Excavation	LBA cremations and barrow ditch with dumps of LBA material in the upper fills.
Striplands Farm	Longstanton	Cambs.	Excavation/ publication	LBA open settlement with pits, postholes post-building structures and series of waterholes with worked wood and artefact-rich capping fills.
Milton Landfill and Park & Ride Sites	Milton	Cambs.	Excavation/ Publication	EIA and MIA settlement. Unenclosed EIA settlement with pits, posthole scatters, post-built structures and a series of waterholes with work work, radiocarbon dates and large pottery assemblages. Component of an enclosed MIA settlement with roundhouses, and waterhole.
Colne Fen	Earith	Cambs.	Excavation/ Publication	Large scale excavations revealing multiple enclosure MIA settlement sites. Important overview of the local IA landscape and economy.
War Ditches	Cherry Hinton	Cambs.	Excavation/ Publication	Targeted excavation of EIA ringfort, associated with radiocarbon dates.
Newmarket Road	Cambridge	Cambs.	Excavation	EIA and MIA settlement. EIA open settlement c. 18 four-post structure. MIA settlement with multiple enclosures and c. 500 pits. Large pottery and animal bone assemblages
Northstowe	Longstanton	Cambs.	Excavation	EIA and MIA. Large scale excavation with multiple MIA enclosures and structures
Clay Farm	Cambridge	Cambs.	Excavation	Large scale excavation with activity spanning the EIA and MIA, with open EIA settlement, 4-post structures, other post-built buildings, and a series of MIA enclosures, roundhouses and pits. Regionally important group of well dated Earliest Iron Age pottery.
Bell Language School	Cambridge	Cambs.	Excavation	EIA cobbled trackway running parallel with an extensive BA post alignment.
Summersfield	Papworth Everards	Cambs.	Excavation/ Publication	Three separate area of MIA settlement with enclosures and a total of five roughhouses.
Hinxton Road	Duxford	Cambs.	Excavation/ Publication	E-MIA settlement with pit clusters and parts of several small enclosures
Cromwell Community College	Chatteris	Cambs.	Excavation/ Publication	EIA open settlement with pits, posthole, waterholes and tow four-post structures.
Trumpington Meadows	Cambridge	Cambs.	Excavation	Large, unenclosed pit-dominated EIA settlement with 16 four-post structures, and c. 560 pits; most belonging to four large pit clusters. Site also contains a pit alignment and MIA enclosures. Large number of human remains, and large artefact and faunal assemblages.
Harston Mill	Harston	Cambs.	Excavation/ Publication	Large, unenclosed pit-dominated E-MIA settlement with five post-building roundhouses, three four-post structures, and c.200 pits. Large number of human remains, and large artefact and faunal assemblages.
Low Park Corner	Chippenham	Cambs.	Excavation	MIA pits scatters and pits clusters, with 98 phased pits.
AstrZeneca New Cambridge Site.	Cambridge	Cambs.	Excavation	MIA pit alignment, roundhouse and other pits. EIA waterhole.
Bearscroft Farm	Godmanchester	Cambs.	Excavation	MIA settlement with pit alignment, small enclosures constructed along a long boundary ditch. Site also has a series of inter-connected organic-type curvilinear enclosures, including 'banjo-like' examples, and multiple roundhouses.
Peterborough Gas Compressor Station Site	Glington	Cambs.	Excavation	EIA and MIA settlement. EIA open settlement with pits, postholes, waterholes and post-built structures. MIA settlement with a small curvilinear connected to a long boundary ditch.
Beaulieu	Chelmsford	Essex	Excavation	Series of excavation revealing several later IA enclosures, roundhouses and associated features

PROJECT	LOCATION	AUTHORITY	TYPE	COMMENTS
Bloodmoor Hill	Carlton Colville	Suffolk	Excavation	LBA settlement with post-built roundhouses, 4-post structures and other pits, posthole and other settlement features.
Flixton Park Quarry	Flixton	Suffolk	Excavation	Extensive LBA to EIA settlement with multiple post-built roundhouses, 4- and 6-post structures and other settlement features.
Hartismere High School	Eye	Suffolk	Excavation	LBA-EIA settlement with post-built roundhouses, pits and postholes.
Westley Hall Farm	Westley	Suffolk	Excavation	MIA pit alignment.
Liberty Village, RAF Lakenheath	Eriswell	Suffolk	Excavation	MIA settlement with ditches and large a pit cluster continuing over 70 pits
Land East of Warren Hill	Saxmundham	Suffolk	Excavation	MIA open settlement with two roundhouses and scattered pits.
Morland Road	Ipswich	Suffolk	Excavation/ Publication	Small MIA open settlement with artefact rich pits and radiocarbon dates,
Days Road	Caple St Mary	Suffolk	Excavation/ Publication	LBA and MIA settlement. Scattered LBA pits on the clay and MIA curvilinear enclosure with internal roundhouse and associated settlement features.
Recreation Way	Mildenhall	Suffolk	Excavation	Part of a large MIA rectangular double-ditched enclosure defined by two massive ditches with associated pits and other occupation features. Large LBA pit also recovered.
Chalkstone Way	Haverhill	Suffolk	Excavation	MIA open settlement on the clay with roundhouses.
Ingham Quarry	Fornham St Genevieve	Suffolk	Excavation/ Publication	Extensive MIA settlement with scatted clusters of pits and postholes
National Mapping Programme		Norfolk	Aerial Photography	Synthesis of results of The National Mapping Project for the Norwich, Thetford and A11 Corridor, and Results of the Thetford Growth Point
Bacton to King's Lynn Gas Pipeline		Norfolk	Excavation/ Publication	Scattered traces of LBA to MIA settlement, notably at Weasenham Clumps; Cromer Road, Antingham; Spa Lane, Oulton and Foxley Road, Foulsham

Table 1. Key projects

Elsewhere in Cambridgeshire, excavations have revealed differing surviving signatures of Late Bronze Age settlement in varied landscape settings. Away from the river valleys and fen-edge, the publication of excavations at Striplands Farm, Longstanton (Evans and Patten 2011) has documented settlement features and a series of large Late Bronze Age waterholes with log ladders and refuse-rich capping fills. By contrast, a large pottery-rich Late Bronze Age midden, situated on a former mid-channel sand ridge of the lower Ouse has been extensively excavated, and was associated with a very light cut feature imprint (Evans 2016). Further east, midden-like dumps of settlement related material were excavated from a Bronze Age barrow ditch at Fordham on the chalk (Gilmore 2015), also associated with Late Bronze Age cremations.

In Suffolk, the last decade has seen more substantive evidence for Late Bronze Age settlement finally coming to the fore, with swathes of pits, postholes and several roundhouses excavated on the gravels at Flixton Park Quarry, Flixton (Boulter 2015). Similar unclosed remains of Late Bronze Age settlement have also been excavated on the light sandy soils in Suffolk at Hartismere High School, Eye (Caruth 2012), Bloodmoor Hill, Carlton Colville (Heard 2013), whilst at Day's Road, Caple St Mary (Tabor 2014a) features were found on the heavier glacial tills.

Comparable scatters of Late Bronze Age pits and postholes have continued to be uncovered in Essex, Hertfordshire and Bedfordshire. Three Late Bronze Age-Early Iron Age settlement scatters have been published from the landscape-scale investigations in and around the Biddenham Loop (2016), Bedfordshire, whilst an extensive Late Bronze Age settlement with multiple structures and a cremation cemetery has been found at Gadebridge (Last and McDonald 2013), Hertfordshire, on clay-with-flint geology. Elsewhere in Hertfordshire, Late

Bronze Age settlement features and a large well-dated group of Late Bronze Age pottery has been recovered from Stocks Golf Course, Aldbury (Hunn 2016), and widespread scatters of pits and postholes have recently been revealed at Hazel End, Bishop's Stortford (Bush 2017). Excavation here also uncovered parts of a rectilinear Late Bronze Age enclosure, possibly associated with contemporary field boundaries.

In Essex, Late Bronze Age field systems ditches, trackways and enclosures have been published from Clements Park, Southern-On-Sea (Chaffery *et al.* 2013), with further examples recorded at Mill House Farm, Chadwell St Mary (Newton 2015). The later was associated with an extensive swathe of Late Bronze Age settlement features, and yielded a large assemblage of pottery. A Late Bronze Age/Early Iron Age ditched enclosure has been excavated at the northern section of the Bedford Western Bypass (Barker and Meckseper 2015), Bedfordshire, whilst other Late Bronze Age field system ditches have been tentatively identified at Howe Dell Playing Field, Hatfield (Keir 2013), and Gadebridge (Last and McDonald 2013), Hertfordshire. To date, no unambiguous Late Bronze Age enclosures or field system ditches have been identified in Suffolk, Norfolk or Cambridgeshire.

The ringwork sites of Springfield Lyons (Brown and Medlycott 2013) and Mucking South Rings (Evans *et al.* 2016), Essex, have now reached full publication, greatly enhancing the understanding of this category of site. A further possible ringwork has also been revealed in excavations at Mill House Farm, Chadwell St Mary (Newton 2015), whilst other potential ringworks have been identified in Essex and Norfolk from the assessment of aerial photographs (Ingle and Saunders 2011; Bales *et al.* 2011; Cattermole *et al.* 2013).

The last decade has seen the excavation of numerous Early Iron Age settlement sites in the region. For the most part, the morphology of these is similar to that of open settlements in the Late Bronze Age. However, greater distinction between the two has emerged from a combination of developments in the understandings of ceramic sequence, and the more regular use of radiocarbon dating. In some instances this has resulted in the reinterpretation of site sequences, as at Mucking, Essex, where the Early Iron Age was previously absent from phasing (Evans *et al.* 2016).

Plans of small Early Iron Age farmstead-type settlements comprising scatters of pits, postholes, waterholes and four post-structures have been revealed at the Hitchin Grade Separate Scheme (Barlow and Newton 2013) and Park Farm Industrial Estate, Buntingford (Jones 2016), Hertfordshire. In Cambridgeshire, sites of this type are now plentiful, with good examples of small settlements and occupation scatters at the Peterborough Gas Compressor Station Site, Glinton (Rees 2016), Cromwell Community College, Chatteris (Atkins and Percival 2014), the Milton landfill and Park & Rides Sites, Cambridge (Philips 2015), Newmarket Road, Cambridge (Tabor 2016a) and Clay Farm, Cambridge (Phillips and Mortimer 2012); the latter revealing rare settlement remains and substantial pottery assemblages dating to the Earliest Iron Age. A number of small farmsteads have also been published from the Biddenham Loop excavations (Luke 2016), Bedfordshire. Furthermore, areas of Early Iron Age settlement have been published in Essex from Mucking (Evans *et al.* 2016) and West Thurrock (Andrews 2012), whilst others have been identified at Newhall, Harlow (Dyson 2015) with several occupation scatters recorded along the Bacton to King's Lynn Gas Pipeline, Norfolk (Wilson *et al.* 2012).

By contrast to these small farmstead-type occupation sites, excavation at Harston Mill (O'Brien 2016) and Trumpington Meadows (Patten 2012a), Cambridgeshire have revealed large, distinctive pit-dominated settlements dating to the end of the Early Iron Age. Both have zones of dense pitting containing hundreds of pits yielding vast artefact and faunal assemblages. The sites are also characterised by the recovery of significant numbers of animal and human 'pit-burials' and fragments of disarticulated human bone, some with cuts marks and signs of trauma. The practices relating to the treatment of human remains at these sites is extremely variable (and at others in the region), with some of the loose human bone being worked/modified. These distinct types of site appear restricted to southern Cambridgeshire and parts of Bedfordshire, and suggest regional variation in the form of Early Iron Age settlement. Interestingly, these aggregated pit-dominated sites in southern Cambridgeshire appear to be contemporary with the construction of local hillforts/ring-forts; the War Ditches, Cherry Hinton fort being secured by recent excavation (Pickstone and Mortimer 2012).

There is growing evidence of extensive routeways and different forms of landscape boundary features in the Early Iron Age. Metalled trackways and hollow-ways of the period have been excavated at Park Farm Industrial Estate (Jones 2016), Hertfordshire and the Bell Language School (Bush and Mortimer 2015), Cambridgeshire. A series of ditched precursors to the Bran Ditch, Cambridgeshire have also be radiocarbon dated to the Early Iron Age, suggesting the system of Cambridgeshire Dykes and the East Chiltern Ditches in Hertfordshire and Bedfordshire may have earlier Iron Age origins (Ladd and Mortimer forthcoming). Pit alignments dating to both the Early and Middle Iron Age have been more widely recorded, with notable examples from the Biddenham Loop excavations (Luke 2016), Bedfordshire, Trumpington Meadows (Patten 2012a), the AstraZeneca New Cambridge Site (Tabor 2015), and Bearcroft Farm (Patten 2016), Cambridgeshire. A single example has now also been excavated at Westley, Suffolk (Beverton 2011).

A large number of Middle Iron Age settlement sites have now been excavated in the region, with many more being investigated as part of major infrastructure projects in Cambridgeshire and Suffolk. Work over the past ten years has shown that Iron Age settlement was particularly dense in some areas of the region, both on the river terrace gravels and interior claylands. Large scale excavations at sites including Colne Fen (Evans 2013), Summersfield (Patten 2012), Northstowe (Colins 2017a; b), Bearcroft Farm (Patten 2016) and Clay Farm (Philips and Mortimer 2012), Cambridgeshire; Biddenham Loop (Luke 2016) and Broom Quarry, Bedfordshire (Tabor 2014; 2016) and Beaulieu (Stocks-Morgan 2016a; b), Essex, have revealed Middle Iron Age farmsteads spaced c. 300–500m apart, indicative of developed and densely occupied settlement landscapes.

Across much of Cambridgeshire and Essex enclosed farmsteads appear to be the norm, with both rectilinear and organic-type forms being widely recorded. The examples are now too numerous to list individually, but a representative selection are evidenced in the sites mentioned above, with others recorded in Table 1. Details of the size, form and number of enclosures in each farmstead varies subtly, some display multiple adjoined compounds, or separate components linked by linear ditches. In general, individual enclosures rarely exceed 0.5ha in area, with most being associated with one to five eaves-gully defined roundhouses.

In Bedfordshire, small enclosures often form a component of discreet and largely unenclosed farmstead-type settlements on the gravels. These are commonly defined by concentrated clusters of pits and one to two eaves-gully defined roundhouses. Six such sites have been excavated in the Biddenham Loop investigations (Luke 2016), with further examples at Broom South Quarry (Tabor 2016); all having the appearance of being relatively short lived. This contrasts to the picture emerging from the large scale excavations at Broom Quarry (Tabor 2014b), where a substantial multi-phase Middle Iron Age settlement has been revealed with 24 roundhouses, 20 settlement enclosures and over 800 pits: the site yielded a substantial pottery assemblage, a significant number of associated bone groups and other 'special deposits'. Here phasing indicates a gradual shift from open settlement, with roundhouses situated within a field system, to enclosed settlement comprising multiple small enclosures.

Other Middle Iron Age sites with multiple enclosures and medium to large-sized pit clusters have been found at Newmarket Road, Cambridge (Tabor 2016) and Low Park Corner, Chippenham (Adkins 2013), Cambridgeshire; the former having over 500 pits. Sites with similar characteristics have also been revealed at Hinxton Road, Duxford (Lyons 2011), Cambridgeshire, and RAF Lakenheath, Eriswell (Craven 2012), Suffolk, suggesting these may be typical of the Middle Iron Age landscape in southern Cambridgeshire and parts of West Suffolk. Interestingly, this distribution also overlaps with the distinctive Early Iron Age aggregated pit-dominated sites mentioned above, hinting at elements of continuity in the signature of Early and Middle Iron Age occupation in this part of the region.

Elsewhere, Middle Iron Age sites have also been increasingly found across the Bedfordshire clays, with small settlements revealed along the A421 corridor (Simmonds and Walsh 2013), and rectilinear enclosures and associated occupation features at Broadmead Road, Stewartby (Newman and Jeffery 2015) and Queen Street, Stotfold (Gibson and Powell 2017).

In Suffolk and Norfolk, excavated Middle Iron Age settlement enclosures are still relatively rare, though new sites in Suffolk include a curvilinear enclosure at Days Road, Caple St Mary (Tabor 2014) on the clays, and part of a large rectilinear double-ditched enclosure with ditches up to 8m wide and over 3m deep at Recreation Way, Mildenhall (Havard and Holt 2012). A host of other potential sites have also been identified from aerial photography and geophysical survey across the counties. On the whole, however, open settlement appears to be the norm, perhaps even on the clays, as suggested by excavation at Chalkstone Way, Haverhill (Heard 2016), Suffolk. Yet even within this category there is evident variation in the morphology of the sites and the visibility of roundhouses on them. Most seem to comprise relatively light scatters of pits and dispersed structural remains, as highlighted by excavations at Ingham Quarry, Fornham St Genevieve (Newton and Mustchin 2015), Warren Hill, Saxmundham (Clarke 2017), and Moreland Road, Ipswich (Brudenell and Hogan 2013), Suffolk.

Until recently, relatively few Middle Iron Age sites had been excavated in Hertfordshire. This picture is now changing, and is slowly building towards a better understanding of the character and patterning of settlement in the county. Complete or partial plans of varying Middle Iron Age enclosures have been revealed in excavations at Bishop's Stortford North (Keir 2014), Park Farm Industrial Estate and Hare Street Road, Buntingford (Clarke 2015;

Jones 2016), and Balls Park, Hertford (Stone 2016). A large D-shaped enclosure containing several possible roundhouses has also been revealed by geophysical survey at Stevenage Road, St Ippolyts (Stephens 2015).

Elsewhere in Hertfordshire, at sites such as Manor Estate, Apsley (Grassam 2016), excavations have revealed more scattered remains, comprising groups of pits, postholes, and ditches, which may be elements of larger unclosed settlement scatters, or evidence for off-site tasking. Such distinctions can be difficult to make. Some specialist activities, however, were clearly undertaken away from core of settlement, with excavations at Stanford Wharf Nature Reserve, Essex, for example uncovering important evidence for Middle Iron Age salt production along the Thames Estuary (Biddulph 2012).

Assessment of progress on research topics proposed in 2011

Dating and chronology

Dating is a theme of almost all past and present prehistoric research agendas, whether pitched at the county, regional or national scale. Whilst the establishment of reliable chronologies is rightly recognised as a foundation to interpretation, the process of establishment, refinement, and the means by which these can be achieved for the period, continues to evolve with the growth of our evidence base.

Progress since 2011 has been tangible. Radiocarbon dating has continued to become more common place, and as a consequence, well over one hundred dates for the period have reached print in the last decade, with many times more reported in grey literature and awaiting publication. Yet the full implications of this gradual accumulation of dates has yet to be fully realised, mainly because dating objectives have invariably aimed to address site specific questions and sequences. Various biases in context selection (e.g. burials) have therefore persisted, despite the overall growth in practice of dating, whilst projects with wider scope and direction have not materialised, or have not found funding support.

Dating has also tended to focus on the Late Bronze Age or Early Iron Age, leaving many questions about the date of Middle Iron Age sequences and material chronologies still outstanding. Furthermore, the 2011 call for the greater application of Bayesian modelling for dating has scarcely been heeded for this period. Rare published exceptions include the dating programmes at Springfield Lyons, (Brown and Medelycott), Essex; War Ditches (Pickstone and Mortimer 2012) and Duxford (Lyons 2011), Cambridgeshire; Site 4 on the A421 Improvement Scheme (Simmonds and Welsh 2013), and the Biddenham Loop (Luke 2016), Bedfordshire. More such programmes, however, are needed to grapple with issues of sequence and the duration of occupation more effectively.

Transitions

The scale of the changes that occurred across the Bronze Age-Iron Age transition have come into sharper focus in the region since 2011. Whilst the shift or collapse in the circulation, use and deposition of bronze remains the fundamental hallmark of this transition, more subtle transformations in settlement forms, ceramics and other

aspects of the material record have been gradually recognised. Consequently the once dominant narrative of continuity in these areas has begun to be eroded over the last decade.

Further work, however, is required to understand changes that occurred across the Early-Middle Iron Age transition, at a point conventionally placed during fourth century BC. It is a transition that involves the breakdown of regional styles of Early Iron Age pottery, a brief florescence in the formation of some large distinctive and possibly aggregated pit-dominated settlement sites (e.g. Harston Hill and Trumpington Meadows) and the building of some of the region's hillforts (e.g. War Ditches and Wandlebury). This coincided with an explosion in the construction of small, ditched enclosed farmstead-type sites with eaves-gully defined roundhouses, the widespread and permanent settlement of the region's claylands, and the emergence of a more restricted ceramic repertoire dominated by either plain sandy wares or scored shelly wares.

The details of these shifts in settlement morphology, material traditions and the wider social geography of the region's landscapes requires further definition, with aspects of these changes deserving of much closer dating.

Social organisation and tribal polities

Explicit references to the broader organisation of Late Bronze Age and Early to Middle Iron Age society remain rare. Whilst there is a general consensus that societies were hierarchically organised in the period, varying somewhere along the spectrum of 'big man' societies to chiefdoms, fleshing out the details of these social systems and wider societal relations has proved difficult. Progress on this front is therefore hard to pinpoint.

In the settlement record the evidence for hierarchy is at best ambiguous. In the Late Bronze Age, enclosed settlements such as the ringworks have been interpreted as high-status 'aggrandised' sites or defended, elite residences. The link between these sites and bronze metalworking, salt production and large-scale consumption has led to suggestions that they acted as local centres or foci for group gatherings, with redistribution and feasting being two of the principal vehicles for creating and maintaining social and political authority.

Similar activities have been interpreted as a driving force behind the formation of community identity as well as social hierarchy in the Iron Age. A sense of wider community is glimpsed, sometime implicitly, in discourse on settlement construction, and through the recognition that labour beyond a resident household or farmstead was needed to build most enclosures in the period. Here there is a tacit acknowledgement that construction forms one medium through which larger social collectives were made and defined; building providing the mechanism for creating and enacting broader networks of social relationships. This is especially so for the construction of the region's hillforts or aggrandised enclosures, where the labour requirement was significant, and necessitated the mobilisation of substantial work forces over prolonged periods of time.

Given the nature of most archaeological work, and the character of the majority of the small Late Bronze Age and Iron Age sites routinely excavated, it is perhaps too ambitious to expect any easy wins on the subject of broad brush social organisation. For the most part, archaeological work is focused on the investigation of small, rural homesteads, as part of local farming communities. Future questions about the social should therefore be pitched

to better understand these contexts as the basis for familial and community organisation, as opposed to addressing more abstract concepts of social hierarchy or tribal identity in this period.

More tangible traces of larger Iron Age social units have been glimpsed in the excavation of large, and often sprawling, Early to Middle Iron Age sites. These aggregated settlements are of a different magnitude to most sites commonly labelled 'farmsteads', and may have been occupied by multiple household groups. In other settings, such as at Colne Fen, Cambridgeshire, patterns of paired enclosures have been recognised from the excavations, the consistency of which suggest that these units, as opposed to single household enclosures, were for a basis for social/familial organisation (Evans. et al, 240).

Regional difference

The concept that regional difference underlies the character of Iron Age archaeology in Eastern England is well established. Where focus has fallen on broader geographic patterning in the last decade, studies have highlighted differences in the character of the material record at varying sub-regional scales (Davies 2011). The distinctive character of Norfolk's Iron Age archaeology, for example, has continued to be highlighted (Davies 2011), as have aspects of Essex's Iron Age archaeology (Sealey 2015). There are signs of intra-regional differences in the form, frequency and scale of settlement enclosure in the Middle Iron Age (see above), with enclosed occupation sites being comparatively scarce in parts of Norfolk, Suffolk and possibly Hertfordshire. There are also differences in the occurrence of features such as pit alignments and pit-dominated sites.

Patterns are certainly beginning to emerge in the Iron Age settlement record, especially in areas which have seen extensive excavation, and where projects have focused on particular landscape zones (e.g. particular sections of river valley, the fen-edge, blocks of clayland, or other coherent landscape windows). Regional differences will be most apparent when we look across these major projects, though the challenge will be finding the means and support to do this comparative work, and to pitch any such studies at meaningful scales. Progress on this front has therefore been slow. There may be widespread acknowledgement that things are different between areas, but the details have not been formally articulated or committed to paper.

On a more positive note, geographic differences in Iron Age pottery styles have come into sharper relief. A discussion of patterns developed across a number of reports, for example, have built towards a clearer understanding of where the heartlands of the distribution of Middle Iron Age Scored Ware rests. Similarly, the distribution and content of different Early Iron Age pottery-styles zone has been defined more closely, and more critically, than before (Sealey 2015; Brudenell 2011; 2012).

There is also increasing recognition that regional differences extend back into the Late Bronze Age, and are not just the hallmark of the following period. Late Bronze Age enclosures, for example, appear to be a more consistent component of the settlement geography in the south of the region, notably along the Thames Estuary and Stort and Lee Valley (see above). Adding to this, there is mounting evidence that field systems continued to be constructed in these same areas during the Late Bronze Age, whereas elsewhere, coaxial boundary construction ceased in the Middle Bronze Age.

Finds studies

The reporting of prehistoric metalwork has continued to rise through the Portable Antiquities Scheme (PAS), underlining that the East of England is one of the major centres of metal deposition in this period. Published estimates now suggest that around a third of all Bronze Age gold items and bronze hoards have been found and reported within the last twenty years (Murgia, Roberts & Wiseman 2015), with the overwhelming majority being made by metal-detectorists. Striking differences now exist between the distributions of PAS-recorded material and earlier plots, with newly-identified concentrations of metalwork, but also unexpected gaps (R. Wiseman pers comm.). The potential of these finds, and the PAS as a large accessible data source, however, is now well established, and continues to underpin important artefact-based studies for the period (e.g. Barrowclough 2013; Boughton 2015; Lawson 2014; West 2014).

Other advances have been made in ceramics and lithics studies. County ceramics sequences have been summarised for Norfolk (Brudenell 2011) and Essex (Sealey 2012), whilst aspects of the date, character and distribution of the region's Late Bronze Age and Early Iron Age pottery traditions have been explored in-depth (Brudenell 2012). In addition, recent works have examined vessel volumes of Late Bronze to Middle Iron Age pots (Brudenell *et al.* 2016), as well as ceramic technologies in later Iron Age Eastern England (Sutton 2018). The flint industries of the period have also been subject to review (McLaren 2011).

Settlement types

Excavated Late Bronze Age and Early Iron Age settlement sites are now much more widely recorded across the region. Primarily registering as unenclosed scatters of pits, postholes, and structural remains, where located, large-scale excavation has often been required to expose sufficient of these settlements to obtain comprehensible plans. These have now been achieved for varying parts of the region, to the extent that basic gaps in the settlement record have been filled, with each county having examples of these site forms to hand (see above). Other types of earlier first millennium BC settlement, such as enclosures, ringworks and large agglomerated pit dominated sites, are more geographically and temporally restricted. The relationship between these and the more common open-settlement of the period requires further study, and may reveal intra-regional differences in the character of settlement geography.

The range of settlement types now documented for the Middle Iron Age is extremely broad ranging. On the one hand, the long established pattern that settlement forms move from being largely unenclosed to enclosed from c. 350 BC onwards still holds true for most parts of the region. On the other, it is now clear that this is far too simplistic, and that settlements vary considerably in the details of their size, form configuration and even duration. Different 'types' of sites may be more characteristic of a particular area or county (see above), but very often there is as much variation *within* each area, as there is between them. Tempting though it is to generalise about open or enclosed settlement, organic versus rectilinear enclosures, or small single farmstead versus agglomerated sites etc., the settlement landscape is more complex and interconnected, with multiple types of settlement now being found on the same site in large projects.

The agrarian economy

Archaeo-botanical and archaeo-zoological studies continue to enhance our understanding of agricultural regimes in the period. The multitude of site-by-site studies, some of which have detailed vast individual faunal and plant remains assemblages, have afforded important insights into the agrarian economy and land use at specific sites and settings. Whilst these are all valuable in their own right, a few stand out as especially significant owing to their comparative approach and success in integrating different strands of evidence to reveal wider patterns in agricultural practice.

Of note are Stevens (2013) and Higbee's (2013) analysis of the later Iron Age plant and animal remains from the Colne Fen excavations, which draw on results from a range of local and regional sites, to enrich context and explore pattern and variability. Similar approaches have been carried forward in the analysis of remains from Barlecroft Farm/Over (Evans 2016) and Bradley Fen (Knight and Brudenell forthcoming), Cambridgeshire, adding further depth to the understanding of agrarian regimes around the Lower Ouse Valley and the Fen-basin more generally. These examples are obviously aided by the levels of preservation afforded by the sites, but demonstrate the value of comparative studies that iteratively build toward a picture of agrarian practice at appropriately framed and meaningful landscape scales. Some of the key findings of the studies are the variability in species representation, notably the relative ratios of cattle and sheep. Also apparent from the faunal record is that most fen-edge Iron Age settlements are characterised by a paucity of wetland species, despite the obvious 'economic' benefits of such locations and the potential for fishing, trapping and wildfowling.

Manufacturing and industry

There is now widespread evidence for the continued working of flint in the period, particularly in the Late Bronze Age and Early Iron Age (McLaren 2011). Large assemblages of worked flint have been recovered from a range of sites and well-dated contexts, with patterns established in the character and composition of assemblages. The extent of flint working in the Middle Iron Age, however, is less well understood, and may well vary across the region.

By contrast, ferrous slag, hearth bottom fragments, hammerscale and cinder are not uncommon finds from Middle Iron Age settlements in the region. Though rarely recovered in any great quantity, the growing number of sites yielding these residues indicates that some aspects of ferrous metalworking, such as smithing, were widespread and probably organised at a local level by the mid first millennium BC. The picture is far less clear for the Early Iron Age. Concrete evidence for iron smelting is also fairly scarce, but a furnace dated to the Middle Iron Age, and pottery-associated features filled with slags and furnace conglomerates have been excavated from Bradley Fen, Cambridgeshire (Knight and Brudenell forthcoming). Iron smelting has also been recorded at Broom Quarry Bedfordshire (Tabor 2014b)

Evidence for copper alloy casting has been steadily growing, with crucibles and moulds/clay refractories recovered from a range of contexts. Of note is the full publication of the clay refractories from Springfield Lyons (Needham and Bridgford 2013). This has significantly enhanced the understanding of sword casting and production in the

Late Bronze Age, with discussion providing a summary of other assemblages from across Britain, including seven sites from the region.

A study of the evidence for Iron Age salt production in the coastal regions of Essex has been published together with a gazetteer of Bronze and Iron Age briquetage finds (Kinory 2012). The publication of the Mucking excavations also has added further to the understanding of salt production in Late Bronze Age Essex, with large quantities of briquetage recovered, and two salt production zones identified (Barford 2016). Some of this material may even date to the Early Iron Age. Furthermore, an important Middle Iron Age salt production site has been published from the Stanford Wharf on the Thames Estuary (Biddulph *et al.* 2012), Essex, just c. 1km east of Mucking. Elsewhere across the region, securely dated evidence for salt production in this period is scarce, although a Middle Iron Age salt working has recently been excavated at Ormesby St Margaret, Norfolk (K. Anderson pers. comm.).

Future research topics

Many of the research topics identified for this period in the 2011 Regional Research Framework remain relevant and should be considered alongside those proposed below. The same is true of themes discussed in Historic England's *Research Strategy for Prehistory* (2010) and *Understanding the British Iron Age: An Agenda for Action* (Champion *et al.* 2001).

Field boundaries and field systems

Whilst it is now acknowledged that ditch-defined field systems were widely constructed in the region during the Middle Bronze Age, the later history of these features requires further investigation. How long did Middle Bronze Age boundary systems continue to structure the organisation of the early to mid-first millennium BC landscapes? Further work is also needed to define if, where and when earlier field systems were actively maintained, or establish whether new systems were constructed. Although evidence for boundary maintenance beyond the Middle Bronze Age appears to be absent from most of the region, it should not be assumed that this pattern is universal, since Late Bronze Age field systems have been recorded from parts of Essex and Hertfordshire. Intra-regional variation might therefore be anticipated, but the evidence for late systems requires careful scrutiny.

Hillforts, ringworks and other 'aggrandised' enclosures

Eastern England is home to a heterogeneous of groups of defensible 'hillforts', ringworks and other 'aggrandised enclosures'. The origins, history and status of all these sites requires further investigation. Given that opportunities to excavate are likely to be rare, there is a need to revisit existing archives, review stratigraphic sequences, and construct new scientific dating programmes using any suitable samples and curated finds from previous investigations. An outline chronology based on scientific dates is needed for each of the region's hillforts if we are to properly understand their function and relationship to surrounding sites and one another.

The study of Late Bronze Age ringworks has been significantly enhanced by the recent publication of Springfield Lyons and Mucking South Rings. However, this wider category of site would still benefit from further review and

study. With the exception of Springfield Lyons, none of the ringwork ditches has high-precision scientifically dated sequences. Programmes of absolute dating are needed to establish the origins and duration of activity at these sites. This should attempt to secure the dating of the upper enclosure fills from which the vast majority of the finds associated with these sites are derived. This is especially crucial since ringwork ditches have yielded some of the only large stratified sequences of pottery that straddle the Bronze Age-Iron Age transition. Were these sites still in use in the Earliest Iron Age, and if so, did their role and function change across the Bronze Age-Iron Age transition?

The form, size and configuration of settlements

Further analysis is needed to explore the range of settlement forms in the Late Bronze Age to Middle Iron Age, and establish their patterning and distribution. Work is needed to define more closely the different types of settlement and enclosure evident, and explore how they vary over space and time. This may require the creation of new systems of categorisation to assist in the description of different settlement forms, sizes, and configurations. Categorisation would not be the end goal, but the means of establishing a common language to aid comparison and analysis of variability. Attempts should be made to correlate patterns with the quantity and range of finds to try and benchmark different types of sites. Is there a correlation between enclosure forms and economic signature from animal bone retrieved, or the ceramic repertoire recovered? Are all types of find found across all types of site, or is there patterning in the content and composition?

Relationships between settlements

Whether the product of single large-scale excavations, or the accrual of numerous small investigations in the same area, fieldwork has now revealed vast swathes of particular landscapes in the region. Excavations are no longer just framing single settlements, but are revealing multiple areas of occupation and settlement, plus the various spaces in between. Further work is needed to explore the connections between adjacent sites thought to be contemporary. How did they relate, physically, socially and economically? Beyond proximity, can we trace other physical and material links between these sites? Clues may be found in the details of the content and composition of their artefact repertoires or faunal signatures etc.. Are these more alike on adjacent sites than those from those further afield? Equally, differences may be revealing of relative status, or the adoption of different but linked economic strategies.

Clayland settlement and exploitation

It is now apparent that many areas of the region's claylands were extensively occupied by the end of the Middle Iron Age. Further work is needed to understand the processes of permanently settling these heavy soils, and how they unfolded over the course of the period. To what extent can 'pioneering' phases of occupation be recognised, and when did these give way to widespread permanent settlements? The character of clayland occupation in the Late Bronze Age and Early Iron Age require closer definition. Does this occupation differ to that on the gravels or other geologies? Is there any evidence that specific activities were being conducted on the clay? How did agrarian regimes on clayland sites complement or contrast with those on other geologies, and what was the

relationship between such sites. And are there any signs that a distinct clayland community identity emerged in any part of the region during this period?

The characterisation, production, distribution of artefacts

Artefact studies are deserving of greater investment and prominence in discourse on later prehistory in Eastern England. The distribution and patterning of most basic artefact categories requires further study and synthesis, e.g. pottery, querns, briquetage, loom weights, spindle whorls, worked bone and antler, bronze and iron dress accessories, tools and weapons. Are there differences in the geographic pattern of particular artefacts or artefact attributes (form, material, decoration etc)? If so, do these distributions correlate with particular sites types, the distribution of other artefacts, for example pottery-styles zones? At what scales do these pattern resolve themselves, and what might they mean in social terms?

The existing typologies for most artefacts types requires critical review and renewal. Many have not been updated for decades. Technological studies are also needed to establish how artefacts were manufactured, and the different processes and raw materials involved in their production. These are basic questions, but need to be addressed to understand how material tradition persisted and changed. In many instances, scientific analysis will be required to properly characterise (and potentially provenance) raw materials and examine production techniques. These need to become more routine. Were artefact that are typologically or visually similar always made in the same way, or are there underlying difference in technological tradition?

Crucially, in all cases, analysis must be pitched at appropriate geographic and contextual scales, which may not always chime with the site specific nature of archaeological work in the region. Further resources and support are therefore required to characterise and investigate the broader patterning of artefacts in space and time.

Burial and the treatment of human remains

Late Bronze Age cremations and a smaller number of Early Iron Age examples are now being widely identified in the region as consequence of the more regular application of radiocarbon dating. It can no longer be assumed that unurned cremations are of Middle Bronze Age date in Eastern England. These cremations are being found in varying contexts and locations, as isolated burials, small groups, as or as part of larger cemeteries. Further work is needed to understand the nature and extent of this funerary tradition, and the degree of continuity with practices from the Middle Bronze Age. At present, dates achieved for Late Bronze Age cremations appear to cluster between c. 1200-1000 BC but the chronology requires further resolution. Can changes in Late Bronze Age cremation practice be recognised over time? Some Early Iron Age examples have also been recorded suggesting continuity into the earlier first millennium BC.

Routine radiocarbon dating of cremations will be crucial. Isolated cremations should be dated, and the extent of dating programmes for cemeteries will need careful consideration on a site by site basis to address the issues above. The same is true for isolated, often flexed, inhumations, which have yielded dates covering the whole of the late second and first millennium BC.

Overall, an undercurrent of variation in burial practice is apparent in the Late Bronze Age, and this becomes much more prominent and pronounced in the Early and Middle Iron Age. Excavation has now uncovered a vast number of Iron Age human remains, and these display a wide spectrum of treatments both in the context and manner of their interment. Practices range from the formal burial of complete bodies to the interment of partially articulated and disarticulated remains. In the case of the latter, these appear to grade in respect to the degree of consideration afforded to specific elements (e.g. skull fragments) and the context of burial: some appear to have been purposefully selected, possibly curated, and carefully placed, whilst others appear to be caught up amongst a generalised matrix of material refuse. There is also growing evidence for the deposition of human remains in rivers and watery contexts in some parts of the region.

Further work is needed to establish patterns in burial practice and the treatment of human remains. To what extent can different burial traditions be identified, and do they vary over time and space in the region? Are there patterns in the age and sex profile of human remains, and do these differ in relation to treatment in burial? Is there patterning in the selection and deposition of disarticulated body parts? Further work is also needed to examine the modification of human bone. Worked and sometimes polished human remains are increasingly being identified. What was the status of these bones and how were they used?

Work is also needed to examine grave-goods in more detail. Formal burial of complete bodies often contain grave-goods, particularly items of personal adornment, or more rarely, pots. Is there any patterning in which objects were selected for burial, or where we find them? How common is this practice, and what might it tell us about the construction of identity and personhood?

Depositional practices

Work is needed to explore the wider nature of depositional practice on sites. Discussions on this theme have tended to focus on overtly formal acts of 'structured' or 'ritual' deposition. These are important, but interpretation must move beyond definition and identification if it is to continue to further the understanding of these practices.

Crucial is the recognition that material entered the ground in a variety of different ways, and for a variety of different reasons, grading from the largely unconsidered disposal of refuse at one end of the spectrum, to overtly and explicitly symbolic acts of deposition at the other. All require analysis to understand routine practice and its changes over time. Ultimately, frameworks are needed to explore these differing pathways with the aim of examining the treatments afforded to materials in them. Unpicking these processes will require careful analysis of the condition and configuration of material assemblages, and a consideration of spatial patterning. In particular, work on this topic should address the issue of refuse maintenance and the formation of middens or surface refuse heaps within settlements, as these pre-depositional contexts are often inferred from the analysis of material patterning. Is it possible to track to how middening within settlements changed in this period? Are there differences in the configuration, location and scale of middens?

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