

Introduction

This book is the culmination of eight years' work on a PhD thesis. It seeks to shine a light on the reasons communities came together in the Late Bronze Age (1250–750 BC) to construct on these hilltops and try and establish a deeper understanding of these under-researched sites. A key aspect of the research was to concentrate on areas outside of central southern England, areas that until recently have been poorly understood and much less studied. Therefore, the geographical spread concentrated on Wales and the Marches and southwest England (Fig. 1.1). I felt that not only was it important to shine a light on what was happening in these areas, but also it gave me an opportunity to conduct research that would be adding, in a significant way, to our knowledge of these regions in the Late Bronze Age (1250–750 BC)

Throughout this book, the sites examined will be referred to as hilltop enclosures and not hillforts. It has become more apparent in recent years that Late Bronze Age hilltop enclosures and Iron Age hillforts, whilst often built on the same site and showing superficial similarities, are far from being comparable structures and are, in fact, very different classes of monuments that served different purposes within their communities. Historic England provides brief definitions of both monument classes:

‘Hilltop enclosures are defined as sub-rectangular or elongated areas of ground, usually between 10ha and 40ha in size, situated on hilltops or plateaux and

surrounded by slight univallate earthworks. They date to between the Bronze Age and Early Iron Age (eighth–fifth centuries BC).’

(Historic England 2002)

‘Hillforts are defended places, surrounded by one or more circuits of banks and ditches, generally placed on hilltops, ridges, spurs or promontories. They were built and occupied during the period from about 900 to 100 BC.’

(Historic England 2018)

1.1. Aims and research questions

Upon first reading of the definitions above, it would be tempting to class some Late Bronze Age hilltop enclosures as comparable structures to Iron Age hillforts. Some, such as well excavated examples like The Breiddin, Powys or South Cadbury, Somerset, (Musson 1991; Barrett *et al* 2000) do superficially look very much like hillforts in many respects. However, there is a growing body of evidence that Late Bronze Age hilltop enclosures played a very different role in society than Iron Age hillforts. The central tenet of this book, therefore, is to examine in as much detail as possible, all the available evidence from Late Bronze Age hilltop sites to ascertain what the rationale was behind their construction. The main aim is to explore *why* communities started to come together during the Late



Figure 1.1. Geographical extent of the study area.

English counties	Welsh counties
Cheshire	Denbighshire
Shropshire	Flintshire
Worcestershire	Conwy
Herefordshire	Anglesey
Gloucestershire	Gwynedd
Bristol	Powys
Somerset	Ceredigion
Devon	Pembrokeshire
Dorset	Carmarthenshire
Cornwall	Monmouthshire

Bronze Age to create these impressive monuments. By examining these hilltop sites in terms of where they were built, how they were settled and utilised, and what they were being used for once constructed, it is my intention to arrive at a more complete understanding of the social drivers behind their construction and the role they played within Late Bronze Age society. This is not an exercise to merely classify the different types of evidence present, but to contextualise this information to throw light on how hilltop sites were being utilised. Considerable effort was expended by farming communities to create these hilltop enclosures, therefore the social imperatives that drove their creation would have been significant. This brings me to the second main research question – were these hilltop enclosures being created as a result of the possible influence of climatic change? There is increasingly compelling evidence being produced of a climatic downturn taking place during the Late Bronze Age, therefore it is important to examine whether these sites were being created by communities grappling with what this would mean for them.

To create the dataset used in the research presented here, an initial list of over 1000 potential sites was examined, initially using the Historic England and National Monument Record of Wales online catalogues of archaeological sites. Further scrutiny of each site, using various sources such as HER databases, county archaeological trusts and unpublished reports in the grey literature finally led to 40 sites (26 in Wales/Marches and 14 in SW England) being selected for analysis (details of these sites can be found in Chapter 4). Whilst fully acknowledging the varying levels of data quality (discussed later in this work), all sites used here either have Late Bronze Age evidence present or are believed to be Late Bronze Age because of typological similarities to nearby sites dated to this time period. These 40 sites are not an exhaustive list of all Late Bronze Age hilltop sites in these areas. Since this dataset was created, work carried out on the Llyn peninsular in NW Wales has shown that ten probable Late Bronze Age double ringwork enclosures exist in this area (only two of which have been excavated). Whilst one of these sites, Castell Odo, was included as it was excavated and published in the 1950s, the much more recently excavated site of Meillionydd was not, as its excavation and publication did not happen in time to be included in the dataset. It is interesting to note, however, that the evidence at Meillionydd mirrors that at Castell Odo (K. Waddington pers. comm. 2021). Also in NW Wales, a group of promontory hillforts exist on Anglesey that are unexcavated but similar in form to those found in SW Wales and SW England included in this book. They have not been included here, as they have no dating evidence and no typologically similar sites with dating evidence nearby, however their existence is worthy of mention as another possible grouping that could add to the overall number of Late Bronze Age sites (K. Waddington pers. comm. 2021). As investigations continue on the Llyn peninsular, as well as at many other locations, the list of Late Bronze Age hilltop sites will continue to expand.

1.2. The research context for Late Bronze Age settlement

Hilltop enclosures were only one settlement type occurring at this time. In order to be able to analyse their place in society, it is important to understand Late Bronze Age settlement as a whole. Settlement patterns were changing during this period, with a greater range of new settlement types. During the Middle Bronze Age, settlement evidence suggests that the majority of sites were ‘diffuse and non-intensive’ (Halstead 2011, 64), consisting mainly of small clusters of two to five roundhouses with the accompanying domestic and agricultural features (Brück 1999; Ellison 1981; Pope 2015). These settlements have been characterised as individual households, possibly single-family units, involved in mixed farming and small-scale exchange set within formalised field systems, and were a relatively uniform site type throughout the Middle Bronze Age (Brück 2007, 25; Burgess 1980a; Lawson 2000, 271). Whilst this settlement type certainly continued into the Late Bronze Age, a greater diversity of settlements can be seen developing. When Brück (2007, 25) examined the character of Late Bronze Age settlement in southern Britain she used a random sample of 68 LBA settlement sites, taking in the period *c.* 1150–600 BC. These sample types were diverse; 17 hillforts, 11 ringworks, 11 other enclosed settlements, four midden sites, two timber platforms in wetland locations, and only 28 open settlements similar to their MBA predecessors. Interestingly, although the range of site types had greatly increased, the percentages of enclosed sites (58%) to unenclosed sites (42%) had changed little from the Middle Bronze Age – 54% enclosed to 46% unenclosed (Brück 1997). Alongside this increase in site types, the Late Bronze Age also saw an upsurge in their scale and specialisation. Whilst it is certainly true that many settlement sites continued to be small-scale, family-based units, for example Furze Platt, Berkshire (Lobb 1980), some sites begin to show evidence of large-scale, community-level events not seen in the preceding Middle Bronze Age period (Brück 2007, 26; Lawson *et al.* 2000; McOmish 1996; Needham *et al.* 1996).

1.2.1. Late Bronze Age lowland landscapes: Midden sites and timber platforms

Midden sites primarily occur in southern Britain, with a few northern outliers (Fig. 1.2). These sites are a Late Bronze Age development, traditionally dating from the 10th to the sixth/seventh centuries BC, however recent work done by Waddington *et al.* (2019) has pushed the end date forward to the mid-late fifth century BC. Middens show evidence of significant numbers of people regularly gathering together, possibly for social events which included feasting. The site at Potterne, in the Vale of Pewsey in Wiltshire, is huge in scale; over 3.5 hectares in size and 2m thick. Excavations of around 1% of the midden area yielded a faunal assemblage of more than 130,000 bone fragments (Madgwick *et al.* 2012). Faunal remains at Runnymede Bridge show evidence of a large proportion of pig bones, specifically roasting joints, as well as sheep

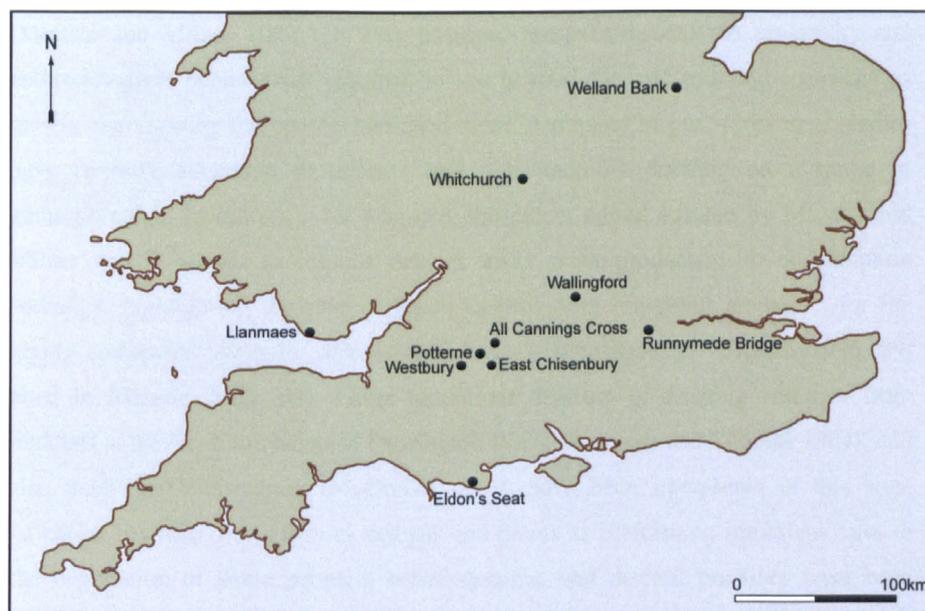


Figure 1.2. Key Late Bronze Age / Early Iron Age midden sites. Reproduced courtesy of K. Waddington (2009).

carcasses being cooked whole (Brück 2007: Needham and Spence 1996: Serjeantson, 2007). Pottery fabrics from the lower levels at Potterne were overwhelmingly of local manufacture, but the upper levels showed 20% of the assemblage came from non-local sources (Morris 2000, 166; Waddington 2009, 162) The pottery evidence from East Chisenbury, a site that has yielded 65,000 cubic metres of original mound material, includes many large and unabraded sherds, leading McOmish (1996) to propose this was the result of episodic feasting activity for a large number of people, seeing such sites as ‘one end product of ritual activity’ (McOmish 1996, 75). Strontium isotope analysis was carried out on five samples of pig bones from the Late Bronze Age midden site at Potterne, Wiltshire, and one pig was found to have travelled a significant distance to get there (Madgwick *et al.* 2012). Similar analysis at the Late Bronze Age / Early Iron Age midden site of Llanmaes, Glamorgan has shown that three pigs were not local, and whilst it is difficult to ascertain where exactly they were from, it was a substantial distance (>20 km), well beyond the expected range of the site (Madgwick and Mulville 2015, 636). This recurrent, deliberate and concentrated deposition at sites throughout southern and middle England shows not only a physical change to settlement patterns but also a conceptual development within the LBA landscape. It is not yet truly understood if these midden sites were permanently or periodically occupied by a reasonable sized population or had a small permanent population that swelled at specific times of the year by a much larger, temporary influx of people (Lawson 2000, 269; Waddington 2008). However, many LBA settlements were identified at the base of the midden deposits. It therefore seems likely that the communal feasting that created these sites of monumental scale had their genesis in a societal development that was

a marked change from what can be seen in the previous Middle Bronze Age (Waddington *et al.* 2019).

This change can also be seen in other settlement types. Timber platforms, many with associated trackways, have been discovered at a number of wetland sites such as Willington Levels, Sussex (Greatorex 1997), Flag Fen (Pryor and Bamford 2010) and Must Farm, Cambridgeshire (Knight 2016; Taylor and Pryor 1990). Buildings were constructed on timber platforms, which had been placed on posts driven into peat and marine clay (Greatorex 1997, 14; Taylor and Pryor 1990, 426), and radiocarbon dated to the Late Bronze Age. Whilst they sit in wetland landscapes that had been settled since the Neolithic (Knight 2016), these LBA platforms formed a new phase of occupation within their environment. Due to the exceptional preservation of the artefacts found at these sites, including a large range of organic material, they give a rare glimpse into the activities being carried out there. Whilst the range of domestic items indicated people did live there, it had been argued that their impressive construction and lack of human parasite ova, which should be present at intensively occupied sites, meant that these were special or ritual sites (Harding and Healy 2007; Taylor and Pryor 1990, 431). However, the recent, remarkable discoveries at Must Farm have led to a rethink of these sites as ‘cult’ centres, with access and control of watercourses and their attendant possibilities for contact and exchange seeming to be more likely (Knight 2016). The discovery of six Bronze Age boats, deliberately scuttled over the period 1300–700 BC in the watercourse adjacent to the Must Farm site strengthens the argument that usage and ‘control’ of the surrounding watercourses was central to this community’s existence (Gibson *et al.* 2012). This ties in with the development of settlement and extensive artefact-rich midden deposits

on eyots and islands in the Thames at such sites as Runnymede Bridge (Needham 1991) and Wallingford (Cromarty *et al.* 2006). Therefore, it is possible that whilst the form of occupation was different, with structures built directly over the wetland instead of adjacent to it, the need to directly access watercourses was a development seen across a number of Late Bronze Age landscapes.

1.2.2. Late Bronze Age lowland enclosures: Ringworks

Enclosed settlement sites have existed since the Neolithic, with Pounds and Tor enclosures, found exclusively in the upland areas of SW England being the earliest form. Small, embanked enclosures existed throughout the Middle Bronze Age, and are the most frequently seen type of enclosed Bronze Age settlement (McOmish 2018). However, two other forms of enclosed settlement seem to have been a mainly Late Bronze Age development: hilltop enclosures, the subject of this book, and ringworks, which date from the 13th to the 8th centuries BC. Ringworks have a restricted geographical spread being mainly found on the eastern side of England and generally close to major riverine networks like the River Thames (McOmish 2018, 3). They have a clear-cut circular boundary including a bank and external ditch and their size can vary from a diameter of just 40 m at Mucking North Ring, Essex to over 120 m at Thrapston, Northamptonshire (Bond 1988; Hull 2001). Some ringworks have multiple entrances, and the interior generally has a small number of post-built structures, sometimes with one large, dominating building at the centre (McOmish 2018, 4). They generally contain copious amounts of artefacts, including fine pottery and metalwork, as well as metalworking evidence. The nature of these sites and the quality of the artefacts found within them, combined with their locations close to major watercourses would suggest that they were a development within Late Bronze Age society, similar to the timber platform sites detailed above; important sites within their surroundings, influencing the landscape in which they lie.

What has become clear is that the Late Bronze Age saw a period of rapid extension of land use and the expansion of scale and variety of settlement types. Settlements within existing landscapes were changing and developing, such as timber platforms in wetland areas and hilltop enclosures in the uplands. The traditional household-level upland landscapes of the Middle Bronze Age were being replaced in many areas by the intensive communal-level development of lowland environments between the 12th–10th centuries BC. Settlement types unknown in the Middle Bronze Age were emerging, ones that demanded community-level co-operation and resources such as the construction of linear boundaries, or sites of large-scale gatherings and deliberate deposition such as middens. This suggests that society was fundamentally changing, and these developing settlement types are reflections of this societal change. It is no coincidence that all these developments occurred in the Late Bronze Age, as depositional activity at this time was also changing and intensifying. What is beginning to emerge from the

archaeological record is that during the Late Bronze Age from the 12th century BC onwards, there was a time of great development and even upheaval. Climatic shifts saw changing agricultural practices, lowland areas were becoming more extensively exploited and settlement types were changing and developing to take advantage of this. It is within this framework of changing settlement patterns and intensive exploitation that I am going to examine the evidence for the settlement of hilltop sites in the Late Bronze Age.

1.3. A history of the study of Late Bronze Age hilltop sites

People have always been aware of the existence of monumental hilltop sites. During the Middle Ages, they were believed to belong to folk heroes – for example Julius Caesar, King Arthur or Alfred the Great – or to be the product of Roman or Viking encampments; with early names given to these monuments reflecting this belief, such as Caesar’s Camp in Surrey and Hampshire and Dane’s Camp in Northamptonshire (Cunliffe 2003, 9; Harding 1974, 54). However, the 17th century saw the first mentions of hillforts within antiquarian writings and the beginning of academic musings about their origins. By the 18th century, opinion was divided about the origins of hillforts. Daniel Defoe believed that hillforts such as Chiselbury (Wiltshire) were of Roman origin (Defoe 1769, 327), whilst Stukeley first postulated that they might have had native British origins. He believed that the hillfort was used by the community for sheltering cattle and was the first to associate a hillfort with the surrounding ‘Celtic’ fields system (Lynch and Lynch 1968, 38; Stukeley 1724). Therefore, by the end of the 18th century the first attempts had been made to place hillforts within a recognisable chronology, with some, such as Stukeley going beyond this and postulating about their possible uses.

The early 19th century saw more attempts to place hillforts within a prehistoric context. Shortt (1841) argued against assuming that every camp was Roman, as he observed that Roman camps were square (Shortt 1841, 3–12). In 1842, he visited Cadbury Castle (Devon) to survey the site, planning a cross section of the hillfort believing it to be too small to be Roman. Therefore, by the mid-19th century there had been important steps in establishing the chronology of hillfort building, with the first attempts at dating them to specific prehistoric periods. During the second half of the 19th century, the belief that began in 1734 with Stukeley that hillforts were not built by Romans or Danes but had a more ancient origin was becoming more universally examined and accepted. In 1865, William Barnes looked at the names of various ‘British earthworks’ in Dorset and ascribed such meanings as Cadbury – from Cad, meaning a battle, and Banbury, from Ban, meaning high or a prominence, attributing both to the pre-Roman indigenous language (Barnes 1865, 285). The idea of hillforts having a prehistoric origin came to a more national attention with Col. Augustus Henry Lane Fox (later known as Pitt Rivers) who was a hugely important figure in archaeology as a

whole, and specifically in tracing the origins of hillforts, identifying that these monuments had a pre-Roman origin, calling the time he believed they came from a ‘remote period’ (Lane Fox 1869, 30). During his discussion of Ditchling hillfort (Sussex) he said that ‘the discovery of Roman coins in their vicinity, though it certainly implies Roman occupation, does not necessarily prove them to be of Roman construction’ (Lane Fox 1869, 40). His excavations at Caburn Camp (Sussex) in 1877 and 1878, during which he found artefacts including Celtic coins, cemented for him the idea that these structures had been built during the Iron Age (Lane Fox 1881), therefore it is only in the later 19th century that the identification of hillforts as having prehistoric origins occurred with some certainty.

The late 19th and early 20th centuries saw preoccupation with questions of race and responsibility for the technological and monumental advances being seen in the archaeological record. Many academics believed that the origins for these advances, including hillfort building, lay in the more civilised Mediterranean and had been introduced into this country (Allcroft 1908; Boast 2009; Dawkins 1880; Evans 1896; Munro 1897). Others, whilst not dismissing this theory, sought at least to question it. A. Hadrian Allcroft perceptively noted that differences of hillfort types do not necessarily mean differences in race (Allcroft 1908, 34; Harding 1974, 54). He believed that hilltop enclosures were first built to protect stock from predators and that ‘there is no question that the hill-top camps are, as a class, the finest and the most elaborate of all. From what has been said, it would follow that some of them are also amongst the oldest and so far as they have been examined, this appears to be the fact’ (Allcroft 1908, 33). He believed them to be pre-Belgic invasion (i.e. pre 4th century BC), but did not attempt to date them further.

Maud Cunnington first suggested the possibility of hillforts as having origins as far back as the Bronze Age after her Oliver’s Camp excavation. In 1911, she described Knap Hill Camp as ‘of great antiquity’ (Cunnington 1911, 56), considering it to have possible Bronze Age artefacts, distinguishing the ‘old camp’ with a single rampart and non-continuous ditch, from the later ‘celtic’ settlement.

Cunnington was certainly an early pioneer in the dating of hillfort origins, with an interest in establishing a workable chronology for these monuments, however she seemed to be convinced that hillforts were Iron Age in date. Even when evidence existed for an earlier date, such as at Figsbury Ring and later when early Hengistbury pottery (then dated to the Hallstatt period) was found at Lidbury Camp, she dismissed it as ‘not safe to assume that the occupation at Lidbury ... is as early as that claimed for this type of pottery’ (Cunnington 1917, 21). This conviction that hillforts dated solely to the Iron Age was a bias that persisted throughout hillfort studies for many years.

In the early 1930s, Christopher Hawkes set out to try and put hillforts into some kind of historical and archaeological context. Hawkes, taking on the new approach of ‘culture history’ (Johnson 2010, 17) being championed by the eminent Australian archaeologist V. G. Childe (Childe 1925, 1928, 1929), put both a geographical and typographical methodology into hillfort studies, trying to assign individual hillforts to specific time periods in the Iron Age and more specifically, to different peoples or cultures (Hawkes 1931). He used evidence mainly from material culture, specifically brooches and decorated pottery as well as typological similarities between hillforts, as the basis of his work (Hawkes 1931, 77). He envisaged hillfort building to be the result of waves of invasions coming from continental Europe from the 4th century BC onwards, with these in-comers being responsible for the most large and complex monuments (*ibid.* 88). Hawkes (1931) developed the ABC system, basing his work on hillforts that had been excavated and dated, acknowledging that this consisted of only a fraction of the number of hillforts as a whole (*ibid.* 61). He described three main movements of peoples into Britain that gave rise to the three phases of the British Iron Age (Fig. 1.3).

‘That invasion must have let loose bands of Celtic warriors from across the Channel over large parts of the south country, and against them the A2 inhabitants had to undertake the great work of building these hillforts and settlement defences.’

(Hawkes 1940, 333)

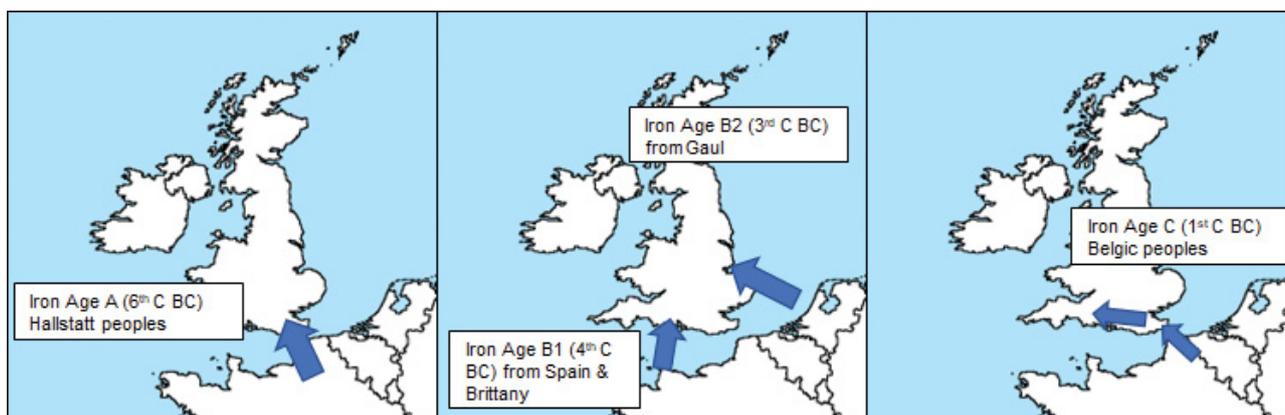


Figure 1.3. The Hawkes ABC system of Iron Age invasions (after Hawkes 1931).

Whilst Hawke's ABC system was accepted by the majority of scholars, there were some who disputed this view. Maud Cunnington queried whether the second Belgic invasion had actually occurred at all, questioning whether the introduction of bead-rimmed pottery was not the result of an invasion, but merely the introduction of a new technology - the potter's wheel (Cunnington 1932; Cunliffe 2005, 11). Hawkes, however, successfully challenged her criticism and from then on, the second Belgic invasion was accepted (Hawkes and Dunning 1932). This ABC system worked well for hillfort studies and was to remain the main theory for the next thirty years (Cunliffe 2003, 14). It complemented the social context of the time, which as the 1930s went on was becoming both more militaristic, and more fearful of powerful nations overseas. Hillforts were seen in this country to be akin to Roman camps or Norman castles (Collis 2010, 30), and the view that these hillforts had been the last outposts of native resistance against aggressive foreign invaders, appealed to both the public and archaeologists alike.

The 1930s had been a particularly exciting time for hillfort archaeology, but it was the 1940s that saw a real attempt to understand Iron Age society better, both in terms of settlement and chronology. Starting in the late 1930s with Gerhard Bersu's excavation of Little Woodbury settlement, excavations were undertaken to 'uncover systematically a complete settlement and to discover as much as possible about it as a social and economic organism' (Bersu 1940, 30). At the time when ramparts were still the main preoccupation for hillfort archaeology, settlement archaeologists were methodically working to understand how non-hillfort settlements functioned as a complete entity. At the same time, a start was being made to really put together a chronology for hillfort development. Peggy Piggott advanced the idea of the development of hillforts from early palisades, through univallate to multivallate forts, generally known as the Hownam Sequence after her excavation at Hownam Rings in the northern Cheviots in 1948 (Fig. 1.4). This sequence has played an important role in hillfort archaeology, and whilst a number of sites have been shown to not conform to it, it is generally believed to provide a good chronology for hillfort development.

Molly Cotton published a comprehensive article looking at British hillforts with timber laced ramparts in 1954, categorising them on a regional basis, and looking at the existing evidence for their construction and dating. However, in her examination of the hillforts, which she was still looking at in terms of Iron Age A, B or C, most were given dates no earlier than 200 BC. Where they did seem to have an early date, for example at Almondbury (Gloucestershire) and Eddisbury (Cheshire), they were described as being Early Iron Age (Cotton 1954, 86, 89). This shortened chronology dictated by the invasionist theory was creating huge issues within the field as a much longer one was now being suggested by excavation. Archaeologists such as Cotton were struggling to reconcile the evidence that excavations were producing with an absolute belief in invasionism. This reliance on

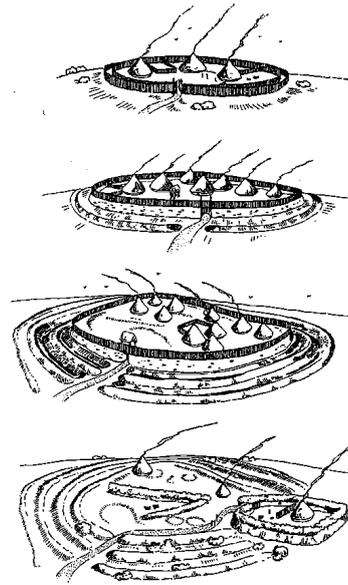


Figure 1.4. The Hownam model; a simplified version of the sequence. Reprinted by permission from Armit and McKenzie (2013).

an historical narrative by the majority of archaeologists could be argued to have actively hindered the development of hillfort studies, as it effectively stifled creative debate about the possible origins of these monuments.

It was not until the 1960s that hillfort studies made any significant shift of direction. By this time, it had become obvious to many that the Hawkes ABC system did not work. It was the increasingly vocal critics of the Hawkes ABC system, along with a combination of the increased use of radiocarbon dating and a realisation that the invasion theory was too simplistic to explain the emerging chronologies of more complex hillfort development, which led to its abandonment. The great age of some hillforts, with origins much earlier than originally anticipated, meant that to many the Hawkes system just could not be correct. This was the start of a move away from a reliance on history and seeing invasion as the main means of cultural exchanges. In 1966, Graham Clark effectively took apart the invasionist model in an article in *Antiquity*. These combined attacks had a profound effect on British archaeology; even Christopher Hawkes himself was questioning whether it was invasion that had resulted in similarities of artefacts being seen either side of the Channel in the Late Pre-Roman Iron Age, or whether it could have been something else (Hawkes 1968, 14).

This dismissal of invasionism also corresponded with a theoretical shift within archaeology as a whole, with the rise of 'Processual' or 'New' Archaeology which dismissed the Culture-Historical method as one concerned merely with data collection. This general theoretical change led to a change of direction within hillfort studies. Previously, the main areas of hillforts excavated had been the ramparts and gateways so the sequence of construction could be established and evidence for waves of invasion found. With

the focus shifting towards ‘cultural evolutionism’, there was a move towards excavating hillfort interiors to find out more about the social and economic roles of hillforts (Collis 2010, 31). This change in hillfort archaeology was also partly influenced by work previously done on Iron Age settlements by archaeologists such as Bersu at Little Woodbury in the late 1930s and 1940 (Bersu 1940). By learning more about patterns of development and how the occupants of hillforts actually lived, it was hoped that a more comprehensive understanding of the origins and complicated history of hillforts could be built up.

Therefore, once the popularity of Culture-Historical theory gave way to Processual theory, the emphasis shifted from ramparts to interiors. The influence of the Little Woodbury excavation cannot be underestimated, as it quickly became an ‘idealized settlement module (roundhouse + 4 post granaries + storage pits)’ (Evans 1989, 445). This desire to understand settlement archaeology in a hillfort setting can be demonstrated when we look at the differences between the positions of trenches being excavated in the 1930s and those of the 1960s/70s. This can be clearly illustrated when we compare the positions of Varley’s trenches in his excavation of Old Oswestry between 1939–1940 with those of Alcock’s excavation of South Cadbury hillfort between 1966–1970 (Fig. 1.5). The contrast could not be starker. Only four of the Cadbury trenches were opened on the ramparts, the other twelve being in the interior of the hillfort. The differences in theoretical approaches made a direct and very real difference to the excavation strategies adopted by the archaeologists in the 1960s and beyond. This in turn has affected how we now understand hillforts and their origins, with a more comprehensive overview of the hillforts in the round, how they were built and how they were lived in, not just a picture of successive ramparts.

Theories about the possibility of Late Bronze Age origins for certain areas of the country gained traction from the late 1960s onwards, although, as already shown, the possibility

of a much earlier origin had been postulated since the mid-19th century. Bill Varley, writing in 1964 believed that some of the hillforts in Cheshire could also have had an early beginning. He noted that whilst hilltops had probably been enclosed by palisades as far back as the idea of having property to enclose, ‘one no longer need to be shy about claiming an early date for our early forms (of hillfort)’ (Varley 1964, 85; 86). In 1968, Jobey questioned whether some palisaded enclosures in Northumberland and southern Scotland could be Late Bronze Age, but he could not come to a firm conclusion due to the plateau of the calibration curve which meant firm Late Bronze Age dates were difficult to accurately obtain. He later looked at the Late Bronze Age assemblage of tools at Traprain Law, which seemed to him to again suggest Late Bronze Age occupation at this site (ScARF 2012; Jobey 1968; Jobey 1976). However, although time frames were starting to be pushed back from the fourth century BC, for the vast majority of archaeologist’s hillforts remained a purely Iron Age phenomenon.

Despite the large-scale digs of the first few decades of the twentieth century, actually very few hillforts had been investigated. The 1960s saw large scale, planned excavations at a number of sites which increased the knowledge that played a significant part in ending a theory seemingly based on trying to prove classical sources correct. However, even though there was an increase in the number of hillfort excavations, most of them were of a similar typology: multivallate hillforts, many of them in downland locations. So, although the increasing knowledge from these excavations helped move the discipline on, there was little in the way of typological development at this time with hillforts still being seen as a homogeneous type of monument.

At the end of this decade excavations began at Danebury under the aegis of Barry Cunliffe (Cunliffe 1984). Despite a number of large-scale digs, ‘ten years later most archaeologists had realised that, while the theoretical approaches still held their excitement, the scraps of

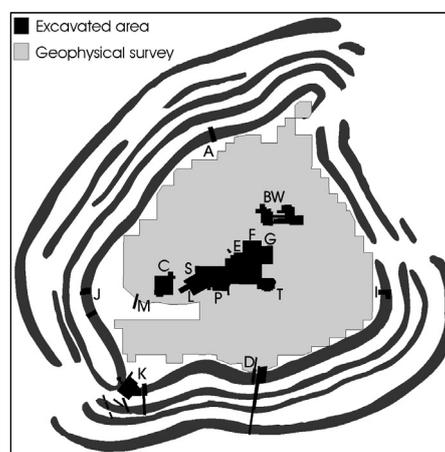


Figure 1.5. Positions of trenches during Varley’s 1939/40 excavation of Old Oswestry. (Reprinted by permission of H. Rothwell) and the excavated area of the 1966/70 South Cadbury hillfort excavation (Reprinted by permission of the South Cadbury Environs Project).

evidence they were forced to use, amassed haphazardly over a century or so, were just not good enough to support or test the theories' (Cunliffe 2003, 21). This realisation led to Danebury being excavated from 1969 until 1988, and it is one of the most extensively studied hillforts in Europe, with 57% of its 5ha interior having been excavated (Cunliffe 2003, 28). Much of the theories of hillfort development of the next few decades came from the extensive evidence discovered during this seminal excavation.

The study of hillforts and their origins had made great strides forwards during the 1960s, and the theoretical changes wrought during that decade were still being felt during the next. The 1970s saw a phase of hillfort archaeology where the need to list, classify and index hillforts as a category of ancient monument was strong. Discussion about whether the origins of hillforts could be traced back to the Late Bronze Age also moved on apace in the 1970s. In 1971 Savory was a vocal proponent of early origins and wrote that 'so well established has become the view that hillforts in Britain are a pre-eminently Early Iron Age phenomenon that many prehistorians working today would need to be reminded how firmly their predecessors of two generations ago believed in the Bronze Age date of most of them' (Savory 1971a, 251), tracing this change back to Hawkes and the introduction of invasionism. He suggested a Late Bronze Age date for Dinorben in Denbighshire (Savory 1971b) and in 1974 Dennis Harding discussed whether or not a Late Bronze Age winged axe found at Ivinghoe Beacon could be an Late Bronze Age throwback that just happened to be in the same place as a later hillfort:

'The alternative would be to grasp the nettle firmly and declare them contemporary with the occupation of the hillfort itself, with the pottery that occupation produced. The concept of Late Bronze Age hillforts in Britain, in fact, would no longer be regarded as excessively controversial; though formerly they were seen as a phenomenon of the Iron Age exclusively, there is now sufficient evidence for hillforts on the Continent extending back into the Urnfield period to render their absence in Britain in the later Bronze Age increasingly implausible'.

(Harding 1974, 132)

The Breiddin hillfort in the Welsh Marches near Welshpool was extensively excavated between 1969–1976 by Christopher Musson. This is an imposing hillfort, and the excavation showed large-scale occupation of the site in the Late Bronze Age, which included ramparts, occupation evidence and large-scale craft working. This was one of the first hillfort excavations that conclusively revealed evidence for a substantial, functioning hillfort on the site dated firmly to the Late Bronze Age (Musson 1991). Excavation of Moel y Gaer, Rhosesmor hillfort in the early 1970s also suggested a Late Bronze Age early phase of occupation (Guilbert 1973, 1975). Both Musson and Guilbert had learnt their trade from Leslie

Alcock who had understood the importance of studying the settlement evidence within hillforts. Taken together, these excavations advanced the idea of a Late Bronze Age origin for hillforts immensely through actual excavated and securely dated evidence; a significant step up from the musings of previous generations of archaeologists.

Once the Danebury hillfort excavation itself had finished, the project moved on to looking at the local area, and the Danebury Environs Project was established. Between 1989 and 1996, a team excavated locations close to the hillfort to try and understand its place within the landscape in which it stood. Using the Danebury Environs to test theories he had first developed in 1974, Cunliffe developed a theory of Iron Age society, in particular the role of the hillfort within that society which held sway for nearly 20 years. He constructed a 'central place' theory to explain the place the hillfort had in Iron Age 'Celtic' society (Fig. 1.6). He believed that the hillfort was the residence for the king and the elite and was supported by a network of farmers in the surrounding area supplying it with food. The hillfort was used to dominate an area and act as a focus for exchange and ritual, all tightly controlled by the elite with the field systems he discovered around Danebury supporting this (Cunliffe 2003, 160).

Barry Cunliffe's vision of the Iron Age held sway throughout British Iron Age archaeology from the late 1960s to the late 1980s. It was with the publication in 1989 of J. D. Hill's article *Re-thinking the Iron Age* that his views began to be seriously questioned. His article was explosive as he had effectively taken apart Cunliffe's theories of the British Iron Age, and the role hillforts played within this society which had dominated for 20 years. This re-examination of hillfort theory also came at a time of developing archaeological theory, from 'processual' to 'post-processual' (Hodder 1991). Where the processual archaeologist had looked to understand the cultural and environmental processes that would underpin a society, post-processual archaeologists were more interested in looking beyond this, that it was 'a rediscovery of the concept of culture as a source of cross-culturally idiosyncratic variations in human belief and behaviour' (Trigger 2006, 444). This re-evaluation of the place of hillforts within society was very much part of the post-processual movement as Hill was looking at how people might have felt about, moved in and used hillforts, rather than a strict definition of the place they had in Celtic societies.

The discussion of Late Bronze Age origins for some hillforts continued during this period. In 1980, Burgess saw hillfort building in Wales beginning during the Penard Period (c. 1050–850 BC), citing Dinorben, Ffridd Faldwyn and The Breiddin as his main examples (Burgess 1980, 270). This Penard Period dating was echoed in 1994 with the date of the construction of the first phase of hillfort building at Rams Hill (Harding 2012, 155; Needham and Ambers 1994, 235). Yet at this time, there were also dissenting voices: 'The very early dates, back into the Bronze Age, will not stand up to close scrutiny' (Avery 1993a, 106).

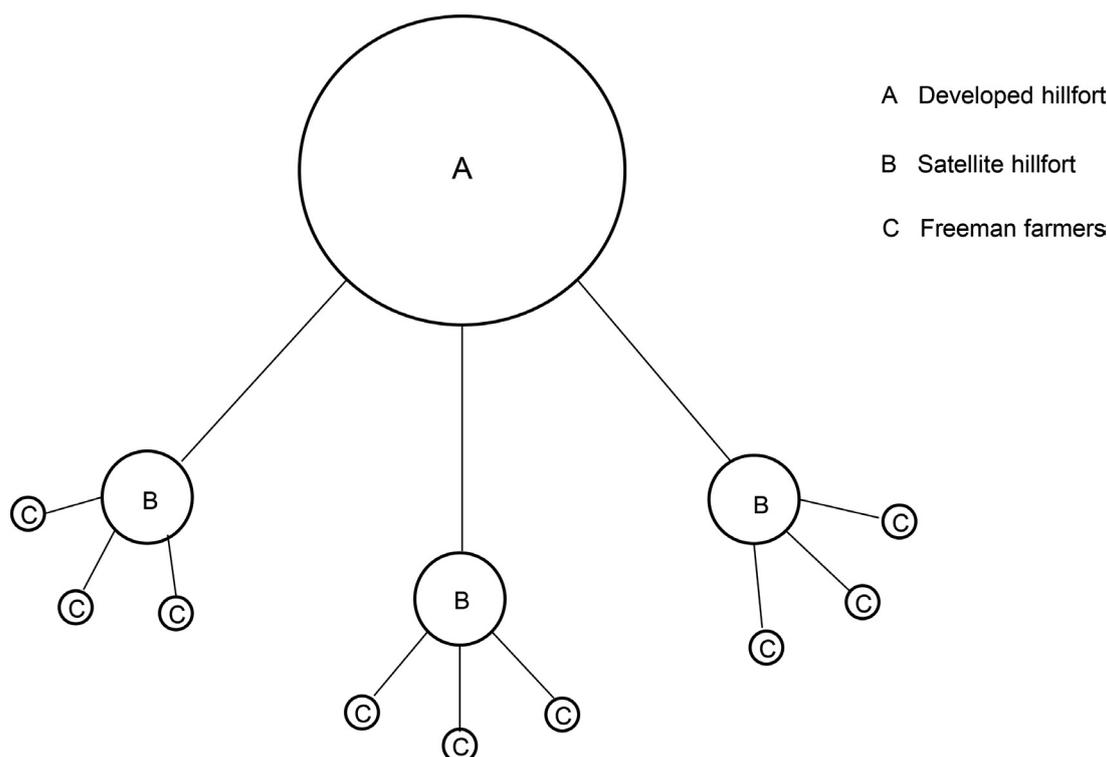


Figure 1.6. Cunliffe's interpretation of the structure of Iron Age society (simplified from Cunliffe 2003).

He believed that only a very few hillforts could be shown to have begun before the very end of the Bronze Age and earliest Iron Age. Excavations at this time were showing Late Bronze Age dates for the earliest development of hillfort sites, for example Balkerne Camp (Hampshire) (Wainwright and Davies 1995, 53), The Breidden (Powys) (Musson 1991), and Beeston Castle (Cheshire) (Ellis 1993). In 1990, Cunliffe refined his theories still further. He looked at the time before he believed the majority of hillforts were built, the Late Bronze Age, and examined why some hilltops were becoming enclosed at this time. He believed that at the end of the second millennium BC, a large programme of land division had taken place, with linear ditches being built, some of tremendous length. He believed that these linear ditches were a result of a considerable community effort that must have involved some kind of a coercive authority and had influenced the building of the earliest hillforts (Cunliffe 1990, 334). However, despite Cunliffe looking 'before hillforts', Hill was still placing hillforts firmly within the Iron Age, with no mention of the theories of Late Bronze Age origins that had begun to circulate in the 1960s with Varley and Jobey. His 1989 paper had concentrated on the Early and Middle Iron Age of southern England, only saying hillforts marked the end of a long tradition of enclosure. It seems apparent that Hill was more interested in looking at the theories of why hillforts were created and used than by the nitty-gritty of establishing chronologies for these monuments. Therefore, during the late 1980s and 1990s, whilst work was being done on establishing a firm chronology for the earliest hillforts, the main discussions continued to be centred on their function rather than their date.

The 2000s, however, saw chronological questions being reevaluated, with Late Bronze Age origins being placed firmly at the forefront. An important article by Hamilton and Manley in 2001, looking at hillforts mainly in southeast England, postulated three distinct phases of hillfort construction, each with different cultural motivators: 1. Late Bronze Age hillforts as landscape coordinators, 2. Middle Iron Age hillforts as symbolic centres, 3. Late Iron Age hillforts as places of empowerment (Hamilton and Manley 2001, 31–33). This was an interesting approach, encompassing as it did elements of both Hill's vision of hillforts as places for society to come together, as well as Cunliffe's view of hillforts as evidence of elites within Iron Age society. This was a real attempt to acknowledge that the reasons for building hillforts may have changed within the millennia in which they were being constructed and utilised, and that they cannot be viewed as a homogeneous type of monument. They believed that there were distinct hillfort using societies that had different and long-lasting traditions of hillfort building based on time, place and regionality (Hamilton and Manley 2001, 34). This was one of the first real attempts in recent years to develop a new chronology and typology within hillfort studies, looking at both when and why they were built and used, that put the start of hillfort development firmly in the Late Bronze Age. Brück (2007) also placed hillforts as occurring in the Late Bronze Age, examining 17 such monuments when looking at the nature of Late Bronze Age settlement in southern Britain (Brück 2007, 25). She saw them as foci for their communities, a 'monumental expression of attachment to place' (Brück 2007, 30). Driver (2013, 31–33) prefaced his work on Iron Age hillforts in Ceredigion with a

detailed account of the increasingly numerous examples of hillforts within this area that began in the Late Bronze Age, e.g. Bryn Maen Caerau (Williams 2001); Caer Cadwgan (Austin *et al.* 1984–6; Austin *et al.* 1987) and Berry Hill (Murphy and Mytum 2012). Brown's 2009 book *Beacons in the Landscape* included a substantial discussion about Late Bronze Age hillforts. Therefore, by the 2000s describing hillforts as having a Late Bronze Age origin was unremarkable, indeed mainstream. This is in marked contrast to Harding's statement that the concept of Late Bronze Age hillforts in Britain was 'excessively controversial' (Harding 1974, 132).

As this account has shown, the focus for much of the twentieth century has been on the rich archaeological landscape of central southern England. Important excavations have taken place in other areas such as the Welsh Marches and Scottish Borders as far back as Willoughby Gardner at Dinorben in the first decade of the twentieth century. Many of these have resulted in important developments, such as Piggott's Hownam Sequence and Jobey's early ideas about the origins of hillforts during the Late Bronze Age in the Cheviots. However, the main theories of hillfort development were driven by work done on sites in central southern England. The importance of studying hillforts outside of this core area is becoming more critical in trying to understand this phenomenon on a national scale, especially as we are now beginning to see a broader picture of the early development of hillforts on both a regional and a national level.

1.4. Recent work in Ireland

Whilst this book is concerned primarily with Late Bronze Age hilltop sites in Atlantic western Britain, one important area of comparison is that of Ireland. Geographically close, being in the same Atlantic zone, and with a significant hillfort tradition, Ireland forms an important comparator for this study that will be investigated further during the course of this book. The same terminology is used slightly differently in Ireland than Britain. The Irish usage of the term hillfort refers only to monuments on or near hilltops, cliff edges and spurs, generally over 1ha, with approximately 108 such sites recorded (O'Brien and O'Driscoll 2017, 22). These hillfort sites were subdivided by Raftery (1972) into Class 1 – Univallate hillforts, Class 2 – Multivallate hillforts and Class 3 – Inland promontory forts (excluding coastal promontory forts). Anything smaller than 1ha is termed a 'hilltop enclosure', with approximately 73 prehistoric ones recorded (O'Brien and O'Driscoll 2017, 22). What complicates this is the phenomenon of 'ringforts'. This type accounts for over 47,000 surviving sites, with many more believed destroyed. However, recent developer-led work has confirmed that these site types date exclusively to the Early Medieval period (Clarke 2002; Clarke and Carlin 2008; Kinsella 2008). There are 274 reported coastal promontory forts in Ireland, of which a significant proportion will date from the medieval period. However, as very few have been excavated, this is difficult to confirm, and at least one,

Dunbeg (Co Kerry) has yielded a Late Bronze Age date when excavated (O'Brien and O'Driscoll 2017, 22). The last type of site that could be argued to be hillforts are the large 'royal' enclosures such as Rath na Rioga, Tara (Co Meath), Dún Ailinne (Co Kildare), Rathcroghan (Co Roscommon) and Navan Fort (Co Armagh). Of these, three have been securely dated to the Iron Age; Dún Ailinne (Johnson and Wailes 2007), Tara (Roche 1999) and Navan Fort (Mallory 2000). Therefore, whilst there are differences between the description and classification of hillforts between Britain and Ireland, there is enough similarity for comparison to be a worthwhile exercise. More important however, is establishing the chronology of Irish hillforts as this could illuminate what was happening in the Atlantic west of Britain at this time.

The question of hillfort chronology in Ireland has greatly benefitted from a project commenced in 2011, financed by the Irish Research Council, entitled *Hillforts, Warfare and Society in Bronze Age Ireland* (O'Brien and O'Driscoll 2017, 8). Led by Prof William O'Brien from University College, Cork, this project has significantly increased the understanding of the development of Irish hillforts, which prior to this was complicated by the fact that, as already described, there are several types of hilltop enclosures, many of which show evidence for multi period extended occupation. The earliest hilltop enclosures date from the Neolithic – early/middle 4th millennium BC, for example Lyles Hill (Co Antrim) (Evans 1953; O'Brien 2016; Simpson and Gibson 1989) and Donegore (Co Antrim) (Mallory *et al.* 2011; O'Brien 2016). There is no evidence for these monuments being continuously occupied from the Neolithic to the Bronze Age, however there are examples of Bronze Age hillforts being built on hills already occupied by older monuments, for example Rathcoran (Co Wicklow), Knocknashee (Co Sligo) and Freestone Hill (Co Kilkenny) (O'Brien 2016, 222). Examples of such landscape genealogies are also found on sites within my study area and are more fully examined in Chapter 4. Hillfort building in Ireland emerged during the Middle Bronze Age (1400–1100 BC), accelerating during the Late Bronze Age (1100–700 BC), with palisades, ditches and stone walls (O'Brien 2016, 222). The project examined eight hillforts, using Bayesian analysis of radiocarbon dates where possible, to investigate the construction dates for these sites. The main findings of the project for Class 2 (multivallate) hillforts are as follow:

There is much evidence for a Late Bronze Age apogee of hillfort building outside of this project. Rathgall (Co Wicklow) is a 7.3 ha site with four concentric rings. The inner most ring is almost certainly Early Medieval (Becker 2010), however evidence from the rest of the structure shows it to be a high status Late Bronze Age hillfort site with metalworking and a funerary complex. Radiocarbon dates lie between *c.* 1200–1000 BC, which matches the Roscommon phase metalwork recovered (Raftery 1972; 1976; O'Brien 2016, 222). Haughy's Fort (Co Armagh) has three concentric bank and ditch enclosures, with radiocarbon dates showing a long period of settlement

Table 1.1. Probable construction dates for Class 2 hillforts examined by the *Hillforts, Warfare and Society in Bronze Age Ireland Project* (modified from O’Brien and O’Driscoll 2017)

Name	Location	Period	Construction Dates
Hughstown	Co Kildare	Early Neolithic	3694–3533 <i>cal</i> BC
Rathnagree	Co Wicklow	Middle Bronze Age	1417–1135 <i>cal</i> BC
Ballylin	Co Limerick	Late Bronze Age	1258–1059 <i>cal</i> BC
Clashanimud	Co Cork	Late Bronze Age	1240–1080 <i>cal</i> BC
Glanbane	Co Kerry	Late Bronze Age	1118–927 <i>cal</i> BC
Formoyle	Co Clare	Late Bronze Age	1108–917 <i>cal</i> BC
Tinoran	Co Wicklow	Late Bronze Age	1155–980 <i>cal</i> BC
Toor More	Co Kilkenny	Late Bronze Age	1270–1050 <i>cal</i> BC

from *c.* 1300–900 BC. There is, however, also evidence of a pre-hillfort occupation phase as well as Iron Age occupation (Mallory 1995; Mallory *et al.* 1996; O’Brien 2016, 222). Dún Aonghasa (Inishmore, Aran Islands), is an imposing, cliff top structure with chevaux-de-frise and an enclosed area of 5.7 ha. Radiocarbon dates the first settlement to *c.* 1300 *cal* BC, the earliest phase of the hillfort building being *c.* 1100 *cal* BC with evidence for a further phase of occupation *c.* 800 *cal* BC (Cotter 2012; O’Brien 2016, 222). Whilst Class 2 (multivallate) hillforts have traditionally been seen as belonging to the Late Bronze Age, a fact borne out by dating (Table 1.1), other types of hilltop enclosures are also beginning to be seen to have a Late Bronze Age date. Knockhu (Co Antrim) is a Class 3 (inland promontory fort) with evidence for Late Bronze Age construction (McNeary 2014; O’Brien 2016) whilst a number of Class A (univallate) hillforts, normally seen as Iron Age, have had Late Bronze Age pottery found there; for example, Freestone Hill (Co Kilkenny) (Raftery 1969; Ó Floinn 2000; O’Brien 2016) and Clogher (Co Tyrone) (Warner 2009; O’Brien 2016). However, unlike Class 2 sites, which seem to be a mainly Late Bronze Age phenomenon, these other sites also have significant settlement evidence from the Iron Age through to the Medieval period (O’Brien 2016, 224). There is therefore an increasing amount of evidence for a major hillfort building phase, beginning during the Middle / Late Bronze Age transition, with fully developed, high status sites being created. What is now important to understand is the possible reasons for this intensification of an already existing building tradition.

Questions of the rise in hillfort building in the Bronze Age are intimately entwined with that of Irish identity. Mallory (2013) links this Late Bronze Age hillfort building phase with that of the origin of the Irish language. He views hillfort building as part of the rise of a warrior elite with links to similar traditions in Europe and Britain, bringing a new language (proto-Irish) and sword warfare to Ireland (Mallory 2013). Swords, specifically of a rapier type, were first used during the Middle / Late Bronze Age transitional phase and soon dominated (O’Brien 2016, 241; O’Brien and O’Driscoll 2017, 406; Ramsey 1993). 660 bronze

swords have been discovered in Ireland, with a recorded density of 7.6 finds per 1000km², one of the highest in Europe (Eogan 1995; O’Brien and O’Driscoll 2017, 406; Mallory 2013). O’Brien and O’Driscoll (2017) see the whole basis for the increase in hillfort building in the Late Bronze Age to stem from warfare and warrior culture; the title of their project - *Hillforts, Warfare and Society in Bronze Age Ireland* illustrates this well. Mallory (2013), O’Brien (2016) and O’Brien and O’Driscoll (2017) all link this Irish phenomenon with an increase in hillfort building during the Late Bronze Age in Britain and the Continent. This book seeks to understand the Late Bronze Age hilltop sites and early hillforts of the Atlantic west of Britain to a greater depth than has been attempted before. This knowledge will be central in assessing whether this Irish view of the links between their hillfort building tradition and our own stands up to scrutiny.

