The return to hill forts in the Dark Ages:

what can this tell us about post-Roman Britain?

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Master's Degrees by Examination and Dissertation

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Summary

After being abandoned for nearly 400 years, some of the ancient Iron Age hill forts were re-occupied and re-fortified in the later fifth and early sixth centuries. Interestingly, some 'new' hill forts were also erected at this time. I believed that a study of this phenomenon might shed light on social and economic conditions in post-Roman Britain. I focused on three recently excavated and well-documented hill forts that were occupied at various times during the early medieval period: Dinas Powys, South Cadbury and the Mote of Mark. I explored the commonalities and differences between these forts to see if there was any common purpose behind their re-occupation.

These sites have been interpreted as the 'high status' residences of British kings and princes. This view was fuelled by the discovery of pottery sherds from imported amphorae and drinking glass, fine metalworking and possible large 'feasting' halls. However, this is not the only possible interpretation of the evidence. Indicators of status are also discussed and a new model for occupation suggested, using the words high *value* rather than high *status*.

There is evidence to suggest that the occupants of the hill forts may not all have been British. 'Germanic' and Irish immigration appears to have been well advanced and many of the artefacts found at hill forts suggest trading and interaction between these groups and the British population.

I have tried to discover who lived in these hill forts, why they should have chosen to do so and what purpose they might have had for the forts. Although I was unable to uncover a single common purpose for the re-fortifications, I believe I have been able to shed some light on the cultural and social changes in this archaeologically 'dark' period.

Contents

Introduction

"Out of monuments, names, words, proverbs, traditions….and the like, we do save
and recover somewhat from the deluge of time." (Lord Bacon)

There are around 2000 known hill forts in Britain, with some 1300 in England, another 600 in Wales and the remainder in Scotland. The overwhelming majority of these hill forts had their heyday in the Iron Age and were abandoned by the end of the first century. There is, however, evidence of a much longer period of use at many forts, stretching back as far as the Neolithic. Some of these forts were also re-fortified during the fifth to seventh centuries, in the post-Roman or early medieval period. Interestingly, some new forts, such as that at the Mote of Mark, seem to have been built during this time. This 'occupation' appears to have come to an end in the late seventh century.

Since Leslie Alcock's excavation of the hill fort at Dinas Powys in the 1950s, his interpretation of these sites as the 'high status' residences of British kings and princes has been widely accepted.[1] This view was based on the archaeological evidence of extensive fortifications, luxury imports, fine tableware and possible 'feasting halls' found at these sites. However, I believe that this is not the only possible interpretation of these finds. My research questions ask who may have re-occupied these hill forts, why they might have done this and what the hill top locations may have been used for. I believe that answers to these questions could shed some light on conditions in post-Roman Britain.

This dissertation is based on a comparative case study of three well-documented excavations of hill forts: Dinas Powys in Wales, South Cadbury in Somerset and the Mote of Mark in Scotland. I chose these sites because, although the latter two were investigated as early as 1890, all three have seen relatively modern excavations which have been published and discussed in great detail in the literature. Dinas Powys and South Cadbury were excavated by Alcock in the 1950s and late 1960s, respectively. The Mote of Mark was thoroughly re-excavated by Lloyd Laing and David Longley in the 1970s. In addition, all three sites are within the 'Irish Sea Province' on the western side of Britain and have access to sea trading routes. All

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[1] Leslie Alcock, *Dinas Powys: an Iron Age, Dark Age and Early Medieval Settlement in Glamorgan* (University of Wales Press, 1963), (p. 55).

three forts are known to have been re-fortified in the fifth and sixth centuries. I believed that an in-depth study of the similarities and differences between the three sites might indicate a common purpose for re-use.

As well as the excavation reports from my chosen sites, I have studied the literature on post-Roman Britain, particularly environmental changes, such as possible flooding and cooling. I also made a study of the near contemporary literary sources of Gildas[2] and Patrick.[3]

Post-Roman Britain

As the focus of this dissertation is on what the return to hill forts can tell us about post-Roman Britain, this historically 'dark' period is explored briefly in Chapter 2: The Ruin of Britain?

Social and economic conditions in post-Roman Britain are a contentious subject, about which there has been enormous debate. The 'high status' re-occupation model of hill forts fits well with scenarios of post-Roman Britain that favour an early fifth-century catastrophic collapse of society, following the removal of Roman administration. These scenarios posit consequent civil disorder and decimation of the population through famine and plague, barbarian raiding, flooding and emigration. In such models, having re-fortified the hill forts through *necessity*, aristocratic Britons lived there in 'appropriately heroic surroundings'[4], feasting in large rectangular halls and riding out to battle invading Saxons.

Some scholars, such as Ken Dark, prefer to place Britain firmly within a Late Antique world where *Romanitas* continued, at least in a social context, with the use of Latin and, presumably, Roman attitudes to family and sanitation.[5] The re-occupation of hill forts by petty kings, feasting surrounded by their war band, fits less well with the Late Antiquity Paradigm than their possible use as civic centres of administration.

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[2] M. Winterbottom, (ed. and trans.), *Gildas: The Ruin of Britain and Other Documents. Arthurian Period Sources vol. 7* (Chichester: 1978)

[3] St Patrick's Confession, Royal Irish Academy translation http://www.confessio.ie/etexts/confessio_english#; St Patrick's Letter to the Soldiers of Coroticus, Royal Irish Academy translation http://www.confessio.ie/etexts/epistola_english#

[4] J. R. Maddicott, 'Review of Cadbury Castle, Somerset. The Early Medieval Archaeology by Leslie Alcock', *The English Historical Review*, 112, No. 446 (1997), 424-5.

[5] Ken Dark, *Civitas to Kingdom: British Political Continuity 300-800* (Leicester: 1994a); Ken Dark, *Britain and the end of the Roman Empire* (Tempus, 2000).

There is archaeological and literary evidence for elements of both models, however, one often contradicts the other. The timing of these re-fortifications, starting in the later fifth century, is problematic but may be linked to the rise in kingship. Artefact evidence does suggest that Irish and Germanic immigrants had begun to arrive in the west of Britain during the fifth century. However, it is unclear what their role was with regard to the hill forts. Their presence may have prompted the re-fortification, they may have been mercenaries employed in the forts' defence or they may have been the driving force in their re-occupation. These issues are explored more fully in Chapter 2.

The Sites

The early medieval archaeological evidence from all three sites is described in Chapter 3: The Sites: Commonalities and Differences. This evidence includes Mediterranean and Continental fragments of amphorae that may have contained 'exotic' imports, together with sherds of fine tableware and glass drinking vessels. From two of the sites, there is evidence of metalworking, including in gold and silver, and possible leather crafts. All sites have post holes and drip gullies that might indicate contemporary rectangular buildings. At South Cadbury, the fifth-century fortifications were massive and complex and would have taken many months' labour, a great deal of wood and organisation. Even the smaller forts have several ramparts built during different phases of occupation. Many of the artefacts found in all three sites are of Germanic or Irish origin or styling.

We believe that the hill forts were abandoned around the end of the seventh century because, after this date, there are no later pottery deposits. [6] However, we do not know why they went out of use. Alcock saw the sites primarily as prestige residences, receiving luxury goods from import 'centres' such as Tintagel. He suggests that there was a relocation of luxury trade to western Gaul from the Mediterranean which led to the by-passing of these centres. However, this does not wholly explain the abandonment of hill forts that had been expensively built, re-built and re-fortified only a few decades earlier. Rather, the process of state-building which occurred in seventh and eighth-century England may have led to a situation of

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[6] There are no artefacts that can be dated to later than early seventh century at South Cadbury.

peace and stability where an inconvenient, though eminently defensible, hill fort was no longer necessary.

Possible Uses

Chapter 4: Uses of Hill Forts explores the possible functions the forts in this study could have served. Buildings and structures may have multiple purposes which are difficult to divine from the archaeology alone. For example, many Roman buildings, automatically referred to as 'villas', may have been purpose-built for other very specific functions, such as industrial sites, prisons, schools, monasteries, administration or storage buildings, as well as large, comfortable country houses. In the same way, possible large buildings at the hill forts could have fulfilled many functions more plausible than as 'feasting halls'. Extensive middens, containing rotting animal bones, seem to have built up around the 'halls' and inside the ramparts. Although the presence of such middens is not consistent with aristocratic dwelling, these piles of bones have been interpreted as the remains of 'feasts'. They might equally suggest a market or abattoir although there is a preponderance of bones from edible parts. The amphorae of wine and oil could have arrived as 'ballast' in ships returning with the heavier cargo of slaves.

There is also some archaeological evidence of post-Roman ritual use at hill forts outside those in my study.

The 'occupation' of these hill forts may not have been continuous throughout the entire the late fifth to late seventh century period. In fact, there seem to be distinct 'phases' of re-fortification and, therefore, possible use.

High Status

The arguments relating to the possibility that hill forts were 'high status' establishments are explored fully in Chapter 5: Appropriately Heroic Surroundings? Weight has been added to Alcock's interpretation of hill forts as princely residences by the apparent agreement found within 'Celtic' legal sources. However, these sources may not be relied upon as they are removed from post-Roman British society by time and geographical distance.

Although several indicators of material wealth, such as luxury imports, have been excavated at hill forts, the main problem with their interpretation as 'high status' residences arises from the 'heroic surroundings' themselves. We have no alternative,

post-villa, model for elite occupation at this time in British history but it seems unlikely that, after nearly 370 years of Roman occupation, during which time the values, lifestyle, economy and sanitation of the elite in society changed completely, British aristocrats would *choose* to live in the 'unredeemed squalor'[7] of a hill fort. However, if Iron Age loyalties, religion and practices either remained strong[8] or were re-introduced as a reaction to the failure of Roman institutions, this choice is more plausible. The re-occupation of forts such as South Cadbury might have been seen as a symbolic separation from Roman authority and a link to the Iron Age past rather than as a response to external stresses like civil war or climate change.[9] The building and re-fortification of these strongholds may have aided the rise to power of petty kings. This view is strengthened by the building of apparently 'new' hill forts at Dinas Powys[10] and the Mote of Mark. However, it is somewhat weakened by the erection of rectilinear, rather than traditionally round, buildings within the ramparts.

Christopher Bowles offers a possible answer to this criticism. He argues that the failure of Roman institutions, in the Bristol Channel area at least, led to a re-imagining of what it was to be British. He suggests a hybridisation of material culture, with some influences from the Roman Imperial past but also a reversion to a 'Celtic' identity that manifested itself in the re-fortification and construction of hill forts.[11] The work of Colin Renfrew on systems collapse may be used to explain such a reversion to earlier ways of life.[12]

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[7] Charles Thomas, 'The context of Tintagel: a new model for the diffusion of post-Roman Mediterranean imports', *Cornish Archaeol.,* 27 (1988), 7-25 (p. 9).

[8] For peasants at least, a great deal of continuity of 'Iron Age' practices, in roundhouse living, religious ritual and agriculture can be demonstrated.

[9] John Davey, 'The Environs of South Cadbury in the Late Antique and Early Medieval Periods', in R. Collins and J. Gerrard, pp. 52-3; Bowles, *Rebuilding the Britons*, pp. 165-7.

[10] Leslie Alcock, 'Refortified or newly fortified? The chronology of Dinas Powys', *Antiquity,* 54 (1980), 231-232, (p. 231).

[11] Christopher Bowles, *Rebuilding the Britons :the postcolonial archaeology of culture and identity in the late antique Bristol Channel region*, *BAR British series 452* (Oxford: Hedges, 2007), (pp. 165-7).

[12] Colin Renfrew, 'Systems Collapse as Social Transformation: Catastrophe and Anastrophe in Early State Societies', in *Transformation – Mathematical Approaches to Culture Change,* ed. by C. Renfrew and K. L. Cooke, (London: Academic Press, 1979) (pp. 196-7) (as cited and extended by Philip Rahtz, 'Celtic Society in Somerset A.D. 400-700', *Bulletin of the Board of Celtic Studies,* 30 (1983), 176-200, (p. 179)).

A major problem in identifying new high status sites is a circularity of argument. This arises from the selection of indicators of 'status' from those present in excavated sites that have already been deemed to be of high status. [13]

Conclusion

There are many problems with a model of the early medieval re-occupation of hill forts that relies heavily on a disputed theory of catastrophic economic and social collapse arising from the removal of Roman administration. In addition, the timing of re-fortification and *continued occupation* is troublesome if the hill forts had a purely defensive role.

Artefact evidence from the hill forts, such as brooches in an amalgamation of styles, suggests that, rather than being 'at war', there may have been closer links between Britons and early Germanic or Irish immigrant or mercenary groups than once thought.

There may have been a reversion to a 'Celtic' identity, following the failure of Roman administration, that prompted a return to hill fort occupation or, at least, use.

The interpretation of hill forts as 'high status' establishments relies on artefactual evidence of 'objects of high status' and documentary sources that are removed temporally and geographically from post-Roman Britain.

Hill forts may have been used for a variety of purposes and a high status residence is not the only possible interpretation of the evidence.

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[13] John E. Davey, *The Roman to medieval transition in the region of South Cadbury Castle, Somerset.* (Oxford: BAR, 2005), (p. 11).

Chapter 1: Literature Review

The study of hill forts has suffered from the swings of opinion towards and away from 'historical archaeology'. At one time, the meagre material evidence was seen as the 'handmaiden of history'. There was a backlash against this traditional stance in the 1980s which proposed ignoring the historical evidence completely.[14] More recently, however, 'historical archaeology' has been seen as a discipline in its own right with an emphasis on the integration of archaeological and historical sources. In line with this trend, I have included pertinent secondary literature that discusses the ancient primary sources, such as Gildas and Patrick. I have divided the works into categories that reflect the structure of this dissertation. In assessing each piece, consideration was given to provenance, objectivity, persuasiveness and value. I have made full use of previous syntheses, such as that of Ian Burrow[15], Ewan Campbell[16] and Andrew Seaman[17] and the excellent report on the Mote of Mark by Laing and Longley[18].

Hill Forts

The earliest indications that some hill forts had been re-fortified in post-Roman Britain came from Cissbury in Sussex and from Mortimer Wheeler's excavations at Lydney.[19] In the late 1930s, Radford found imported Mediterranean pottery at Tintagel.[20] He originally interpreted the structures he excavated as a monastery, however, by the late 1950s, high quality metalwork and imported pottery from a

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[14] D. Austin, 'The 'proper study' of Medieval Archaeology', in *From the Baltic to the Black Sea: Studies in Medieval Archaeology*, ed. by L. Alcock, and D. Austin, (London, Unwin Hyman, 1990)

[15] Ian C. G. Burrow, 'Aspects of Hillfort and Hill-Top Settlement in Somerset in the First to Eighth Centuries A.D.' A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Faculty of Arts, University of Birmingham, (October, 1979).

[16] Ewan Campbell, 'Imported Goods in the Early Medieval Celtic West: with special reference to Dinas Powys'. A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, University of Wales, Cardiff, (1991).

[17] Andrew Seaman, 'The Roman to Early Medieval Transition in South-East Wales: Settlement, Landscape and Religion', A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for a PhD in Archaeology, University of Wales, Cardiff (2010).

[18] Lloyd Laing and David Longley, *The Mote of Mark: a Dark Age Hillfort in South-West Scotland* (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2006).

[19] Mortimer Wheeler, 'Roman Buildings and Earthworks on the Cardiff Racecourse'. *Transactions of the Cardiff Naturalists' Society,* 55 (1922), 19-45.

[20] Ralegh Radford, 'Tintagel: the castle and Celtic monastery', *Antiq. J.,* 15 (1935), 401-419.

number of other sites had been examined which led to the interpretation of these sites as the dwellings of 'kings' and petty local rulers.

Roman Britain: the debate about the end?

Andrew Seaman writes that, if we want to understand the emergence of post-Roman social structures, we must first examine the process by which Romano-British administration ended.[21] This is a difficult and contentious issue, however, and the two major schools of thought seem irreconcilable. Notable contributions to the debate have been made recently by Ken Dark[22], Collins and Gerrard[23]; Neil Faulkner[24] and Richard Reece[25].

The first model that attempts to 'explain' the demise of 'Roman-ness' in Britain argues that state administrative infrastructures, urban life, the cash economy, mass produced pottery industries and villa occupation had disappeared by about 430. Within this paradigm, Michael Jones examined evidence for climatic change and the effects that such changes may have had on the rural economy, to explain the 'fall' of Roman Britain. His data showed that Britain had experienced a significant climatic downturn starting in the late fourth century. He concluded that harvest failure, famine, changes in settlement patterns and migration brought about by fourth and fifth-century climatic deterioration contributed to the political instability of the first decade of the fifth century which led to the fall of Roman Britain around 410.[26] Other environmental data, such as Petra Dark's pollen sequences[27], Baillie's study of tree ring events[28] and the South Cadbury Environs Project's (SCEP) work suggest that this climatic downturn was probably rather later, in *c.*500-700. The famous 'year without sun' lasted from 535-6 and is recorded in the Annals of Ulster as 'a

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[21] Seaman, 'The Roman to Early Medieval Transition', pp. 36-38.

[22] Dark, *Civitas to Kingdom*; Dark, *Britain and the end*.

[23] R. Collins, and J. Gerrard, (eds.) *Debating Late Antiquity in Britain AD300-700. BAR British Series 365* (Oxford: Archaeopress, 2004).

[24] Neil Faulkner, *The Decline and Fall of Roman Britain.* (Stroud: Tempus, 2000); Neil Faulkner, 'The Case for the Dark Ages' in R. Collins and J. Gerrard, pp. 5-12.

[25] Neil Faulkner and Richard Reece, 'The Debate About the End: A Review of Evidence and Methods', *Archaeological Journal,* 159 (2001), 59-76.

[26] Michael E. Jones, *The End of Roman Britain*. (London: Cornell University Press, 1996), (p. 240).

[27] Petra Dark, *The Environment of Britain in the First Millennium A.D.* (London: Duckworth, 2000).

[28] M. G. L. Baillie, 'Tree-Rings Indicate Global Environmental Downturns that could have been Caused by Comet Debris', in *Comet/Asteroid Impacts and Human Society: An Interdisciplinary Approach*, ed. by Peter T. Bobrowsky, and Hans Rickman (Berlin: Springer-Verlag, 2007), (pp. 105-122).

failure of bread'. This may have been caused by an atmospheric dust veil from a volcanic eruption in the tropics.[29]

The second model is part of the Late Antique Paradigm recently developed further by Ken Dark[30]. While acknowledging that Britain was no longer part of the Western Roman Empire after 410, Dark argues that it was not in decline in the late fourth century. Instead, he believes that a distinctive Christian 'Late Antique' culture emerged throughout southern Britain in the early fifth century which lasted until the seventh or early eighth century. Under this model, urbanism, *civitas* level state structures, Christian culture and a cash economy survived well beyond 410.

Dark's model emphasises continuity. However, Philip Rahtz sees another form of continuity – that of the pre-Roman Iron Age. Using archaeological evidence and some historical, literary and place name evidence, Rahtz, extending Renfrew's work on systems collapse, argues that post-Roman Somerset may have reflected some facets of pre-Roman society.[31]

Christopher Bowles' work on 'Rebuilding the Britons' offers a slightly different perspective.[32] Bowles argues that the Late Antique Britons of the Bristol Channel were 'actively engaging with material culture as a source of identification in an uncertain, post-Roman, social world'. He posits that the collapse of Roman administration forced a collective identity crisis so that the Britons amalgamated elements of their recent Romano-British past, ancestral heritage and the material cultures of groups such as the Germanic, Irish, Mediterranean and Frankish peoples. This amalgamated culture was mainly architectural but there were also pottery styles and personal artefacts that show a resistance to Roman culture. This new identity was based on more indigenously 'Celtic' material and intertwined with folk tales and myths about the past. The re-occupation and construction of hill forts may have been an attempt to recreate the world of such dimly remembered events as the resistance to the Romans. At the same time, there may have been a return to Celtic pagan religion.

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[29] L. B. Larsen, et al., 'New ice core evidence for a volcanic cause of the A.D. 536 dust veil, *Geophys. Res. Lett.* 35 (2008), p. 4.

[30] Sheppard Frere, *Britannia: A History of Roman Britain.* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1967), (pp. 353-375); Ken Dark, *Discovery by design: the identification of secular élite settlements in western Britain A.D. 400-700, Volume 237 of BAR British series* (Tempus Reparatum, 1994b); Dark, *Britain and the end.*

[31] Rahtz, 'Celtic Society in Somerset A.D. 400-700', p. 179.

[32] Bowles, *Rebuilding the Britons*, pp. 165-7.

These newly emerging identities were strengthened by contact with competing Germanic and Irish ethnic groups. The Britons of the south west built their own 'barbarian' identities, rooted in the distant past, and looking to other sources of 'Celtic' identity, such as Cornwall and Ireland. Bowles speculates that there was a degree of overlap between British and Germanic culture and, possibly, greater interaction than previously thought.

John Davey concludes that the two extreme positions in the 'end of Roman Britain' debate are both untenable and that the reality of the situation lies between the two poles of opinion.[33]

Dinas Powys

The evidence from hill fort sites in Wales and north and west Britain was discussed in Alcock's 1963 report, *Dinas Powys: an Iron Age, Dark Age and Early Medieval Settlement in Glamorgan.* This was the first full publication of material from a western British site and included a discussion of the social, economic and political background of the site by drawing on a wide range of archaeological and historical material (fully discussed in Chapter 3). Alcock interpreted the site of Dinas Powys thus:

> 'The evidence of domestic and industrial activities at Dinas-Powys can best be reconciled if we interpret it as the *llys* or court of a local ruler, with its *neuädd* or hall .... surrounded by subsidiary buildings of stone and timber, and forming the centre of a variety of agricultural, industrial and domestic pursuits.' [34]

In addition to imported pottery and glass, Alcock believed that he had found evidence of large, hall-like structures, one of which he interpreted as a feasting hall for around 30 to 40 individuals. This view has been generally accepted, however, Seaman argues that Alcock's building evidence is no more than groups of gullies and post holes which may be open to a number of different interpretations.[35]

Large quantities of animal bones were found in the excavations at Dinas Powys. However, Alcock's collection strategy of only retaining large bones and skulls may have biased the sample.[36] Roberta Gilchrist re-appraised a new sample of bones to

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[33] Davey, *The Roman to medieval,* p. 133.

[34] Alcock, *Dinas Powys,* p. 55.

[35] Seaman, 'The Roman to Early Medieval Transition', p. 206.

[36] Seaman, 'The Roman to Early Medieval Transition, pp. 211-12.

challenge Alcock's interpretation of the site as a 'princely stronghold' receiving food renders. She concluded that the bone assemblage denoted a system of local exchange based on animal by-products, such as milk and wool and that dairying was taking place at the fort.[37] Gilchrist's conclusions were based on the relative absence of the bones of very young cattle, leading her to believe that fully adult cows were being brought to the fort rather than bred there. However, Clare Randall, who studied the bone assemblages of South Cadbury, believes that there may have been a survival and selection bias that ensured the smaller, more friable bones were not collected.[38]

The site of Dinas Powys and its finds have been reassessed by Edwards and Lane[39], Graham-Campbell[40], Ken Dark[41] and, most significantly, by Ewan Campbell.[42] Campbell undertook a detailed re-examination of the finds and site sequence and created a revised chronology that did away entirely with Alcock's proposed 'Norman' period. His study covers a large material assemblage of fifth to seventh-century imported pottery and glass from this site and elsewhere in western Britain and Ireland.

Many of the metalworking and glass artefacts from Dinas Powys showed Irish and 'Germanic' influences. Despite these suggestive archaeological finds, Alcock dismissed possible occupation of Dinas Powys by 'Teutonic' elements, suggesting that all such Germanic 'intrusive elements' had arisen through trade, exchange or 'booty'.[43] However, studies by Eagles and Mortimer show that there were Saxon burials and artefacts in the west of Britain as early as the fifth century.[44]

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[37] Roberta Gilchrist, 'A Reappraisal of Dinas Powys: Local Exchange and Specialized Livestock Production in 5th- to 7th-Century Wales', *Medieval Archaeology,* 32 (1988), 50-62.

[38] Clare Randall, *pers. comm.*

[39] N. Edwards and A. Lane, *Early Medieval Settlements in Wales* (Cardiff: University of Wales, 1988), pp. 58-61.

[40] J. Graham-Campbell, Dinas Powys Metalwork and the Dating of Enamelled Zoomorphic Penannular Brooches. *Bulletin of the Board of Celtic Studies,* 38 (19), 220-232.

[41] Dark, *Discovery by design,* pp. 67-72.

[42] Ewan Campbell, 'A blue glass squat jar from Dinas Powys, South Wales', *Bull. Board of Celtic Studies,* 36 (1989), 239-45; Campbell, 'Imported Goods', pp. 25-49; Ewan Campbell, *Continental and Mediterranean Imports to Atlantic Britain and Ireland, AD 400-800.* (York: Council for British Archaeology, 2007a) and Appendices.

[43] Alcock, *Dinas Powys*, p. 56.

[44] For a summary, see B. Eagles and C. Mortimer, 'Early Anglo-Saxon artefacts from Hod Hill Dorset' *Antiq Journal,* 73 (1993), 132-40.

Gresham, in reviewing Alcock's *Dinas Powys*, described the very small site as a 'squalid and inconvenient eyrie'. He further suggested that the site was a 'nest of robbers' occupied by Irish pirates who had settled down as immigrants.[45] The possibility of early Irish immigrants to Wales is part of an on-going debate centring on the presence of barbarian troops in later Roman Britain. These arguments were effectively summarised by Mytum[46] and discussed by Charles Thomas[47] and Philip Rance[48]. Campbell and Lane have speculated that the kingdom of Dyfed might have been derived from Irish federate settlement in the late fourth century.[49] Campbell used the archaeological evidence of Irish influences on metalwork to suggest an Irish craftsman's presence at Dinas Powys. This view was supported by Dark, who went further to suggest that the fort was the royal homestead of a 'sub-king of Irish origin within a British over-kingdom'.[50] There is some E ware pottery at this site, which might indicate Irish links. However, there is little evidence of Irish occupation in south east Wales at this time. Furthermore, Irish or Germanic artefacts do not necessarily indicate the actual presence of immigrants.

Although Alcock's chronology and the Norman period of occupation of Dinas Powys were rejected, his general interpretation of the socio-economic aspects of the early medieval occupation has been broadly accepted.[51] This interpretation was, however, predominantly inferred from literary sources, such as poetry from a much later period, in which peripatetic bards and metalworkers were maintained in such a 'heroic' setting. In such a scenario, local petty-kings could support themselves by drawing surplus from groups of free clients and dependent bondmen. Seaman comes to a similar conclusion about the occupants of Dinas Powys and uses Welsh Law on the creation of monumental defences to support his view.[52] He sees the building and re-fortification of early medieval hill forts in terms of the rise (and demise) of petty

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[45] C. A. Gresham, 'Review of *Dinas Powys', Antiquaries Journal,* 45 (1965), 127-128.

[46] Harold Mytum, *The Origins of Early Christian Ireland*, (London: 1992), pp. 30-35.

[47] Charles Thomas, 'Irish Colonists in South-West Britain', *World Archaeology,* 5, No. 1, Colonization (June, 1973), (pp. 5-13).

[48] Philip Rance, 'Attacotti, Déisi and Magnus Maximus: The Case for Irish Federates in Late Roman Britain', *Britannia*, 32 (2001), 243-270.

[49] Ewan Campbell and A. Lane, 'Excavations at Longbury Bank, Dyfed, and Early Medieval Settlement in South Wales', *Medieval Archaeology,* 38 (1994), 15-77 (p. 21).

[50] Dark, *Discovery by design,* p. 193.

[51] Wendy Davies, *Wales in the early Middle Ages* (Leicester University Press, 1982), (pp. 23-24); Campbell, 'Imported Goods', pp. 224-8.

[52] Seaman, 'The Roman to Early Medieval Transition', p. 278.

kingship. His work combined the large corpus of early medieval charters, such as those in the twelfth-century Book of Llandaff, with archaeological excavations, to explore how the Roman *civitas* of the Silures, including Dinas Powys, may have broken up into several 'petty kingdoms' in the early fifth century and then consolidated into the kingdom of Glywysing in the early eighth century. It was, at this time, Seaman notes, that the tradition of the re-occupation of hill forts in south-east Wales seems to have come to an end.[53]

South Cadbury

Leslie Alcock was also in charge of the excavations at South Cadbury, between 1966 and 1973. He published a number of interim reports and a popular account[54] based on these investigations. South Cadbury did not fit the model of the smaller hill forts and, in 1982, Alcock published *Cadbury-Camelot: A Fifteen Year* Perspective, in which he suggested that the fort might have been a local administrative centre.[55] The final report on the post-Roman material was not released until 1995.[56]

There had been some limited investigation of the hill fort in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century when a number of trenches were dug near the south western entrance.[57] In the 1950s, pottery and glass sherds, that had come to the surface through ploughing, were recognised by Ralegh Radford as similar to those recovered from Tintagel. This material was considered to provide 'an interesting confirmation of the traditional identification of the site as the 'Camelot of Arthurian legend' and led to the formation, in 1965, of the Camelot Research Committee, to promote the large scale excavation of the site.[58] Although it would appear that the Committee was only interested in King Arthur, Alcock's excavation uncovered the

[53] Seaman, 'The Roman to Early Medieval Transition', pp. 3 and 212-3.

[54] Leslie Alcock, *By South Cadbury is that Camelot…The excavation of Cadbury Castle 1966-1970* (Aylesbury: Thames and Hudson, 1972).

[55] Leslie Alcock, 'Cadbury-Camelot: A Fifteen Year Perspective', *Proceedings of the British Academy,* 68 (1982), 355-388.

[56] Leslie Alcock, *Cadbury Castle, Somerset – The Early Medieval Archaeology* (Cardiff, 1995)

[57] J. A. Bennett, 'Camelot', *Proceedings of the Somerset Archaeological and Natural History Society*, 36, No.2 (1890) 1-19; The earliest artefacts included over 700 pieces of Mesolithic flintwork, comprising blades, microliths, flakes and cores, recovered from the surface of the hill fort in about 1890; H. St. G. Gray, 'Trial excavations at Cadbury Castle, S. Somerset, 1913', *Proceedings of the Somerset Archaeological and Natural History Society,* 59, No.2 (1913), 1-24.

[58] Leslie Alcock, 'A Reconnaissance Excavation at South Cadbury Castle, Somerset, 1966,' *Antiq Jour,* 47 (1967), 70-76 (p. 71).

entire chronology of the hill fort.[59] His detailed investigation only covered around six per cent of the interior, which is a fairly typical excavation in terms of scale.

As at Dinas Powys, Alcock found some rows of post holes on the summit which Richard Tabor reluctantly agreed may represent a large building.[60] John Davey, writing about the Roman to medieval transition around South Cadbury, pointed out that a statistical analysis of the excavated post holes revealed no structural similarity to those pertaining to the 'hall'. Also, he noted that attempts to link the distribution of pottery sherds with a particular building 'have proved troublesome'. Even so, he finally agrees with Alcock that the interpretation of a 'high status fifth to sixth-century habitation cannot reasonably be denied'.[61]

Ian Burrow, writing in 1979, explained the Somerset hill forts, including South Cadbury, in relation to their archaeology and local conditions alone rather than in terms of the (inadequate) historical record.[62] Without entirely dismissing Alcock's social/economic model, Burrow suggested alternative models to explain the re-occupation of the hill forts and classified them by their political/social, religious and economic functions. These are dealt with in detail in Chapter 4.

More recently, Richard Tabor has intensively studied the landscape around South Cadbury. SCEP uses geophysical survey, systematic plough-zone sampling, test pits and excavation to understand how the hill fort developed within its context. [63]

Christopher Bowles included South Cadbury when exploring the Late Antique Bristol Channel region in his thesis on the hybridisation of post-colonial culture and identity arising from the collapse of Imperial Roman institutions.[64]

Clare Randall has analysed the animal bones from the Neolithic to the Iron Age from South Cadbury.[65] She is now in the process of analysing the 6290 fragments of animal bone, including a huge red deer skull (minus its antlers), found in the early

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[59] The pre-early medieval material has been published as a separate report: J. C. Barrett, P. W. M. Freeman, and A. Woodward, *Cadbury Castle Somerset: the later prehistoric and early historic archaeology*, (London: English Heritage, 2000)

[60] Richard Tabor, *Cadbury Castle: the Hillfort and Landscapes* (The History Press, 2008), (pp. 170-1).

[61] Davey, *The Roman to medieval,* p. 1.

[62] Burrow, 'Aspects of Hillfort', p. 224.

[63] Tabor, *Cadbury Castle.*

[64] Bowles, *Rebuilding the Britons*.

[65] Clare E. Randall, 'Livestock and landscape: exploring animal exploitation in later prehistory in the South West of Britain', a thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of Bournemouth University for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, Bournemouth University, (August, 2010).

medieval context. Preliminary results indicate a much higher proportion of beef cattle than from the earlier contexts, which corresponds to bone analyses from the Romano-British farm near the foot of South Cadbury. Earlier contexts on the hill top contained a higher proportion of sheep and goat bones.[66]

The Mote of Mark

In 2006, the study of early medieval hill forts was progressed further with the publication of Laing and Longley's report into the 1970s excavations of the Mote of Mark in Scotland.[67] Apart from the attention paid to the site by early antiquaries[68] and the discovery of a sherd of E ware in the early 1890s, the earliest serious excavation was by Alexander Curle in 1913.[69] He found a great deal of metalworking and occupation debris, including clay mould fragments, crucibles, metalwork, wheel-made pottery and Continental glass. Curle interpreted the site as having two phases of rampart construction, from the early centuries AD to a main period of occupation in the ninth century. This interpretation stood until the 1950s when the glass finds were re-dated to the sixth/early eighth century and the pottery sherds were recognised as early medieval.[70]

The site was re-excavated in the 1970s to uncover its chronology, using evidence from radiocarbon dating and the stratigraphical association of artefacts. The excavators found evidence of metalworking, imported pottery and glass, possible rectangular buildings, 'Anglian' influence and a large quantity of domestic animal bone.

Although the fort at the Mote of Mark is very small and suffers from outcrops of rock that reduce any habitable area further, Laing and Longley concluded that the

[66] Clare Randall, *pers comm.*

[67] Laing and Longley, *The Mote of Mark.*

[68] R. Riddell, 'Account of Ancient Modes of Fortification in Scotland…in a letter to R Gough, Esq, Director', *Archaeologia*, X, (1790) 99-104.

[69] A. O. Curle, 'Report on the Excavation in September 1913, of a Vitrified Fort at Rockliffe, Dalbeattie, known as the Mote of Mark', *Proc Soc Ant Scot*, XLVIII, (1914), 125-168.

[70] D. B. Harden, 'Glass vessels in Britain and Ireland', in *Dark Age Britain: Studies presented to E T Leeds*, ed. by D. B. Harden (London, 1956) 132-167, (p. 151); Ralegh Radford, 'Imported Pottery found at Tintagel, Cornwall', in *Dark Age Britain: Studies presented to E T Leeds,* ed. by D. B. Harden, (London, 1956), 59-70, (pp. 63-4); Charles Thomas, Imported Pottery in Dark Age Western Britain, *Medieval Archaeology*, 3 (1959), 89-111, (p. 109).

evidence of the defences and feasting (if not the buildings) implied lordship. They felt that this site was the workshop and home of a master craftsman of high status.[71]

Heroic Surroundings?

We do not know where the elite of Roman Britain went to live after the demise of villa occupation. John Davey suggests a general pattern of settlement with continued occupation of Roman sites into the fifth century and then a settlement shift to hilltop sites in the latter part of the century.[72] Alcock's interpretation of these sites as 'high status' residences has been generally accepted. However, such interpretations are, to some extent, subjective. Because of this, attempts have been made to establish a series of criteria for the definition of 'high-status', for Ireland by Warner[73], for Wales by Dark[74] and for south west Britain by Alcock[75]. Laing and Longley provide a table of indicators of high status for the Mote of Mark which I have attempted to extend to my other two sites.[76]

In *Discovery by Design*, Dark attempted to identify early medieval defended high status settlements by constructing models of site location and morphology from already excavated sites. He then compared his model to a large number of unexcavated hill forts in England and Wales and was able to identify type sites which he argued were typical of high status settlement.[77] The main problem with both the Mote of Mark and Dark's analysis appears to be a circularity of argument. The indicators of 'status' in both cases are those factors present in excavated sites that have already been deemed to be of high status. Davey reminds us that his team made an extensive study of regional survey methods before embarking on SCEP, in order to avoid these very pitfalls. He called them 'interpretative feedback loops' where the interpretation of archaeology is guided by previous subjective interpretations by earlier researchers.[78]

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[71] Laing and Longley, *The Mote of Mark*, p. 174.

[72] Davey, *The Roman to medieval,* p. 1.

[73] R. B. Warner, *The archaeology of Early Historic Irish kingship*, in *Power and politics in early medieval Britain and Ireland*, ed. by S. T. Driscoll, and M. R. Nieke, (Edinburgh: 1988), pp. 47-68.

[74] Dark, *Discovery by design.*

[75] Leslie Alcock, *Cadbury Castle Somerset, The early medieval archaeology*, (Cardiff, 1995), (pp. 143-8).

[76] Laing and Longley, *The Mote of Mark,* p. 169.

[77] Dark, *Discovery by design*, p. 135.

[78] Davey, *The Roman to medieval,* p. 11.

Further work and other approaches

It is possible that the areas where Romanisation was most complete suffered more severely when the economy collapsed. Those areas with a very light Roman imprint probably continued much as they had since the Iron Age and may not have suffered a power vacuum. To test whether there is any link between the degree of Roman control and post-Roman re-fortification, it would be necessary to see whether hill forts in areas outside Roman control were re-fortified. In Ireland, for example, only Rathgall has possible occupation in the period under review. For completeness, a study should also be made of those fully Romanised areas where hill forts were *not* re-fortified. Such a study would be aided considerably by a new atlas project which is now underway by Gary Lock and Ian Ralston who intend to identify and classify all British and Irish hill forts.[79]

It would also have been interesting to research the possible long distance trade routes that such a fort might control, including the exports, such as tin, salt or slaves that could have been exchanged for the imported amphorae of wine and oil. Owing to space and time considerations and the excellent work already carried out on this subject by Jonathan Wooding[80], I have merely touched on long distance trade under the section on possible function models.

Another topic for future research might be the close links that early medieval hill forts appear to have had with Christian establishments in the area. Dinas Powys seems to have had links with an ecclesiastical centre at nearby Llandough.[81] Sherds of late Roman amphorae found in grave fills in the contemporary Christian cemetery are similar to those found at the hill fort. Seaman argues that the household at Dinas Powys may have been responsible for the foundation of the ecclesiastical centre by granting the lands of the former villa estate at Llandough to the early Christian Church.[82] At another site, glass from the Mote of Mark is similar to that found at Whithorn.[83]

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[79] Gary Lock, *pers. comm.*

[80] Jonathan Wooding, 'Communication and Commerce along the Western Sealanes AD 400–800', *BAR International Series 654,* (Oxford: 1996).

[81] N. Holbrook, and A. Thomas, 'An Early-medieval Monastical Cemetery at Llandough, Glamorgan: Excavations in 1994', *Medieval Archaeology,* 49 (2205), 1-92.

[82] Seaman, 'The Roman to Early Medieval Transition', p. 230.

[83] Campbell, 'Imported Goods', p. 107.

Other possible approaches to this question might involve more use of Renfrew's work on the collapse of systems, more or less reliance on archaeological evidence and a concomitant reliance on historical documents, the study of burial practices, the post-Roman environment, early Germanic languages, genetics and isotopic[84] and metallurgical analysis.

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[84] P. Budd, A. Millard, C. Chenery, S. Lucy and C. Roberts, 'Investigating population movement by stable isotope analysis : a report from Britain', *Antiquity,* 78 (2004), 127-141.

Chapter 2: The Ruin of Britain?

The purpose of this dissertation is to explore what the re-occupation of hill forts can tell us about post-Roman Britain. If we knew who had lived in or used the forts and what purpose they had for doing so, this might give us a greater understanding of the social and economic conditions of the time.

Background

There are two basic schools of thought concerning the 'end' of Roman Britain: catastrophic collapse *vs.* continuity. Both paradigms have strengths and weaknesses, however, they are difficult to compare because they define what it was to be 'Roman' differently.

One model, exemplified by the work of Neil Faulkner and Richard Reece, uses narrow definitions such as urbanism, coinage[85], mass-produced culture and stone buildings to define the Romano-British state which 'ended' when the archaeological record tells us that these things ceased.[86] This model is often extended to include the social and economic consequences of this 'fall' of Roman Britain: the 'catastrophic collapse' scenario. Such a scenario includes a dramatic fall in population because of economic disaster, famine and plague, barbarian raiding and emigration and visions of a post-apocalyptic chaos that could have prompted the defensive re-fortification of the hill forts. However, when we look at the evidence for these factors, it is often found to be contradictory. For example, although there may have been reduction in population across many Roman provinces,[87] it is clear from the massive re-fortification works at South Cadbury that there was sufficient manpower available to undertake such projects. It is also clear that there was someone in charge, at least locally.

As far as plague is concerned, the Annals of Ulster record that the Justinian Plague arrived in the British Isles in 544 or 545, in Ireland.[88] This plague is

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[85] Richard Reece, *The coinage of Roman Britain.* (Stroud: Tempus, 2002), (p. 62).

[86] Faulkner, 'The Case for the Dark Ages', in Collins and Gerrard, p. 8.

[87] Jones, *The End of Roman Britain*, pp. 261-263; Wendy Davies (2004, p. 214) has suggested that, in the early Middle Ages, the Welsh population may have been somewhat lower than 100,000. Even if the population was restricted to the fertile coastal areas, population densities would still have been extremely low.

[88] The Annals of Ulster (translated) http://www.ucc.ie/celt/published/T100001A/

estimated to have killed as many as 100 million people across the world and caused Europe's population to drop by around a half, between the years 550 and 700. However, the Annals were not a contemporary record and there is no archaeological evidence that plague reached Britain or Ireland at this time.[89] The sixth-century writer, Gildas, certainly mentions famine (20.2) and plague (22.2) but he inserts these into his narrative before the arrival of the Saxons, i.e. before the early 440s.[90]

Although there is no archaeological evidence of emigration at this time, there are indications from documentary sources that some of the (Christian) aristocracy did leave for Gaul. Again, it is Gildas who tells us that many 'made for lands beyond the sea' (25.1). Michael Winterbottom, in his notes to Gildas' *De Excidio et Conquestu Britanniae*, proposes a total émigré population of as many as 50,000.[91] Gildas himself goes on to say that 'others held out….trusting their lives with constant foreboding to the high hills, steep, menacing and fortified…' (25.1) It is possible that he was referring to hill forts although N. J. Higham notes that mountains were an important element of Gildas' deployment of Biblical imagery.[92]

In addition, the timing of the re-fortification work, starting in the middle of the fifth century, is problematic. Even the fort at South Cadbury, re-fortified around 470, would have been too late to protect against the revolt that threw off Roman administration (*c*.410) or the Saxon 'invasion' of the early 440s.[93] If the hill forts were a response to worsening environmental conditions starting in the sixth century, they would appear to have been re-built too early.

Gildas does write about a period of upheaval and possible fighting that he describes as a 'notable storm' (25.3).[94] This 'storm' claimed the lives of the parents of one Ambrosius Aurelianus, the victor over the Saxons at Gildas' battle of Badon Hill, *c*.500. It is tempting to imagine that the hill forts were re-fortified as a defence against this upheaval, however, there is no archaeological evidence at all for warfare between the Britons and the Saxons. More plausibly, the beginnings of dynastic kingship also arose during the second half of the fifth century which may have been

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[89] Malcolm Todd, '*Famosa pestis* and Britain in the 5th Century', *Britannia,* 8 (1977), 319-325.

[90] Winterbottom, *Gildas*, pp. 23 and 25.

[91] Winterbottom, *Gildas,* pp. 150-1.

[92] N. Higham, 'Literary Evidence for Villas, Towns and Hillforts in Fifth-Century Britain', *Britannia,* 25 (1994b), 229-232 (p. 230).

[93] S. Muhlberger, 'The Gallic Chronicle of 452 and its Authority for British Events', *Britannia,* 14 (1983), pp. 23-33.

[94] Winterbottom, *Gildas.* p. 28.

accompanied by an increase in civil war. Indeed, Gildas also tells us that these civil wars were still a factor in the middle of the sixth century. He writes that 'external wars may have stopped, but not civil ones' (26.2).

The other model that seeks to describe post-Roman Britain, the Late Antique Paradigm, places more emphasis on social and cultural aspects, including the use of Latin and a 'Christian' culture and, possibly, some form of cash economy and urban life that could have persisted well into the fifth century.[95] Although towns do appear to have decayed in the fourth century, it seems that the political and social structures of Decurions, magistrates and the council, had not. Patrick, living at the end of the fourth and in the first half of the fifth century,[96] mentions that his father was a Decurion. There are indications of large-scale continuity, at least amongst the learned classes, of some survival of Roman-style bureaucratic administration, law, weights and measures and schooling. Indeed, Gildas is using scholarly Latin, as late as the mid-sixth century. In the middle of the time when hill forts were re-occupied, he writes that there have been past troubles but also of 40 years of recent peace (26.1) and 'the calm of the present' (26.3).

However, Gildas also tells us that, since the time of Maximus, the island was still Roman in name, but not by law and custom (13.1). Furthermore, we have the fifth-century writings of Patrick, for whom Latin appears to be almost a second language and one he is not very good at. Neither Gildas nor Patrick, the only near-contemporary observers we have, seem to consider themselves to be *Romans*.[97]

Christopher Bowles argues that there was more than just 'dissatisfaction' with the failed Roman administration and values and this lead to a cultural movement that may have seen a return to a 'Celtic' identity and a hybridisation of material culture. Such a movement may have manifested itself in the re-fortification and construction of hill forts.[98]

Colin Renfrew's systems framework[99] seeks to explain the collapse of central administrative organisation, the traditional elite class, a centralised economy and

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[95] Dark, *Britain and the end,* pp. 48-54.

[96] According to the annalistic entries. See David Dumville, 'The death-date of Patrick', in *Saint Patrick, 493-1993,* ed. by D. N. Dumville, (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 1993), 29-34 (p. 29).

[97] Jones, *The End of Roman Britain,* pp. 123-4.

[98] Bowles, *Rebuilding the Britons*.

[99] Renfrew, 'Systems Collapse', pp. 196-7.

settlement and population which is followed by an 'aftermath'. He argues that romantic dark-age myths might develop as new power groups attempted to legitimise themselves with genealogies that linked them to the former state or related to deeds by which invaders achieved power through battle. Renfrew also identified the tendency for early chroniclers to personalise historical explanations, individual deeds, battles, invasions and decline which would be attributed to hostile powers. He suggested that there would also be little archaeological evidence after the collapse and a tendency among historians to accept traditional narratives as evidence. Another 'aftermath' relates to a possible Celtic re-emergence, with the survival of religious elements as folk-cults or beliefs. Renfrew postulated that the collapse would take about 100 years with human dislocation in the earlier part of the period. There would be no single obvious cause for the collapse. This model, although not constructed to explain the British post-Roman situation, offers much insight into it.

Environmental pressures

Any population decrease caused by economic disaster, plague or famine, would have been aggravated by environmental changes, such as a relative cooling and flooding. Climatic evidence appears to suggest that a downturn in average annual temperatures took place around 500-700. Mike Baillie has undertaken a survey of tree ring data which indicates a catastrophic environmental event around 540, possibly caused by cometary debris.[100] The Annals of Ulster describe 535 as a 'year without bread'.

These environmental conditions may have led to famine in the post-Roman period, however, the overall picture is far from straightforward.[101] Although a survey of pollen sequences does show an agricultural crisis in the north of Britain following the withdrawal of Roman administration, the same survey showed this not to be the case in western Britain.[102] There, pollen sequences indicate widespread landscape continuity and, possibly, agricultural intensification, during the fifth to seventh centuries. On the other hand, SCEP did not find much evidence of farming layers above the Roman levels in Somerset, other than those associated with very rare Saxon finds. There would appear to have been a marked downturn in the rural economy of Somerset at this time, with little sign of recovery until the late ninth or

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[100] Baillie, 'Tree-Rings', pp. 105-122.

[101] Seaman, 'The Roman to Early Medieval Transition', pp. 38-43 and 54.

[102] Dark, *The Environment of Britain.*

tenth century. During the fifth century, ditches appear to fill and structures collapse without replacement.[103] A build-up of alluvium in the Yeo Valley at Ilchester suggests that arable cultivation may have declined there also.[104] There was no subsequent regeneration of the woodlands and this may mean that the land was turned over to pasture. Such a strategy would be consistent with a fall in the population as it takes only one herdsman to look after cattle or sheep but many workers to bring in crops. Some literary evidence can be found in Gildas, when he writes, 'the cities of our land are not populated now as they once were.' (26.2)

Michael Jones postulated a post-Roman cooling of the climate, together with localised flooding.[105] Gildas' appeal to Aëtius (20.1) certainly suggests that, in some parts of the country at least, there was widespread flooding:

> "To Aëtius, thrice consul: the groans of the British." Further on came this complaint: "The barbarians push us back to the sea; the sea pushes us back to the barbarians; between these two kinds of death, we are either drowned or slaughtered."

Environmental factors appear to have been regional, with farming becoming more marginal only in some places. In addition, economic conditions may not have been the same everywhere. Areas that were more firmly Romanised may have suffered more from the removal of Roman administration than their upland counterparts. Hill fort re-fortification began in the later fifth century and environmental factors, whilst a possible contributory factor, cannot offer a complete explanation for this phenomenon.

Kingship

Seaman argues that the removal of the superstructure of Roman society created a crisis within elite power systems and craft and organised production. The establishment and maintenance of power may have been achieved by forging systems of clientship based on gift-exchange, marriage, fosterage, violence and religious ideology. Evidence from fifth and sixth-century Gaul shows that post-Roman aristocratic power was re-negotiated in a number of ways. Some appear to have drawn upon the ideology of the Empire to establish themselves as local rulers (hence

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[103] Tabor, *Cadbury Castle*, p. 168.

[104] Davey, *The Roman to medieval,* p. 133.

[105] Jones, *The End of Roman Britain*, pp. 197-200.

the proliferation of inscribed stones from west and north Wales). Others sought the assistance of barbarian groups, such as the Saxons, or armed rebel groups, such as the *Bacaudae*, to acquire positions of leadership and authority independent of the legitimacy of Rome.[106]

Dynastic kingship appears to have emerged during the period 440-470, just prior to the re-fortification of the hill forts. In upland areas and the 'military zone', where the Roman state appears not to have completely replaced native power structures, this may have happened considerably earlier.[107]

Gildas, writing in *c.*540, confirms that Britain had kings (27). It also appears, from his writings, that some sort of political authority higher than the *civitas* was operating in the fifth and, possibly sixth, century. Gildas writes of Vortigern's council (23.1) and the position of one Ambrosius Aurelianus as a leader (25.3). Indeed, by about 475, the distribution of imported Mediterranean pottery would appear to show that the Roman administration had been replaced, at least at Tintagel, by a post-Roman polity centred on the south west peninsula.[108]

Saxons and Irish in hill forts

There is some evidence to suggest that the hill fort occupants could have been immigrants or mercenaries. Many of the artefacts that are found on the hill forts are of Irish, Germanic, 'Saxon' (or 'Frankish') or, in the case of the Mote of Mark, 'Anglian' origin or influence. In addition, the evidence for buildings within the ramparts indicates large, rectilinear 'halls'. These factors may indicate trading links with Anglo-Saxons to the east or a possible desire to incorporate their stylistic influences into British art.

At Dinas Powys, the occupants may have been Irish immigrants although Philip Rance writes that they were not in south east Wales at this time.[109] There are

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[106] Seaman, 'The Roman to Early Medieval Transition', p. 60.

[107] Indeed, the earliest signs of renewed occupation of the hill fort at the Mote of Mark date to around 350, a decade or two after the removal of Roman legions from this 'military' area.

[108] R. C. Barrowman, C. E. Batey, and C. D. Morris, *Excavations at Tintagel Castle, Cornwall, 1990-1999.* (London: Society of Antiquaries of London, 2007), (pp. 329-30).

[109] Philip Rance, 'Attacotti, Déisi and Magnus Maximus: The Case for Irish Federates in Late Roman Britain', *Britannia* 32 (2001), 243-270, (p. 267).

certainly Irish styles of jewellery being made on site[110] and the appearance of large timber halls at this time might have been influenced by Irish buildings.[111]

Frank Stenton, taking his dates from the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, stated categorically that there were no Saxons as far west before 577.[112] However, Eagles and Mortimer list many fifth-century 'Saxon' artefacts that have been found in Dorset, Wiltshire and Hampshire, particularly in hill forts.[113] The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle is often at odds with archaeological evidence. For example, Cynric is credited with the capture of Old Sarum in 552 although the area had already been settled by Saxons, with an established nearby Anglo-Saxon cemeteries dating back to the early fifth century. Eagles and Mortimer suggest that British kings in the region employed Germanic mercenaries and that these troops acted as a magnet for further immigrants.[114]

There is also a possibility that Saxons were instrumental in re-fortifying the hill forts for their own purposes. The rectilinear buildings, proposed by Alcock as 'feasting halls', would fit with either a Saxon or Romano-British style of construction. Indeed, recent research on excavation data from Anglo-Saxon burial sites reveals a widespread and frequent practice of reusing monuments from earlier periods, between the late fifth and early eighth centuries. Howard Williams argues that this practice was central to the symbolism of Anglo-Saxon burial practices and was important for the construction and negotiation of origin myths, identities and social structures.[115] However, the evidence from graves is far from clear. For example, at South Cadbury, the hill fort is overlooked by the 'Anglo-Saxon' cemetery on the higher ground at neighbouring Hicknoll Slait.[116] This cemetery,

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[110] Seaman, 'The Roman to Early Medieval Transition', p. 224.

[111] Lloyd Laing, 'Timber halls in Dark Age Britain - some problems', *Trans Dumfriesshire Galloway Natur Hist Antiq Soc,* 46 (1969), 110-27, (p. 125).

[112] Frank M. Stenton, *Anglo-Saxon England* (Third ed.)(Oxford: University Press, 1943; Reissued 2001) (p. 29).

[113] For a summary, see B. Eagles and C. Mortimer, 'Early Anglo-Saxon artefacts from Hod Hill Dorset' *Antiq Journal,* 73 (1993), 132-40; B. Eagles, 'Britons and Saxons on the Eastern Boundary of the Civitas Durotrigum', *Britannia,* 35 (2004), 234-240 (p. 236).

[114] Eagles and Mortimer, 'Early Anglo-Saxon artefacts', pp. 138-9.

[115] Howard Williams, 'Monuments and the past in Early Anglo-Saxon England', *World Archaeology,* 30, No.1, *The Past in the Past: The Reuse of Ancient Monuments* (1998), pp. 90-108, (p. 90).

[116] Somerset Historic Environment Record 53778, (http://webapp1.somerset.gov.uk/her/details.asp?prn=53778); R. F. Taylor, 'An Anglo-Saxon Cemetery at Compton Pauncefoot', *Somerset Archaeology and Natural History,* 111 (1967), 67-69.

described as 'contemporary' with the occupation of the fort, [117] contained inhumation burials, with associated grave goods, which appeared to be those of 'Saxon' immigrants.[118] However, isotopic analysis of teeth shows that these individuals were raised locally.[119]

It is important, when discussing these issues, to realise that 'Saxon-ness' may have involved a replacement of *culture* rather than a wholesale replacement of *people*. In fact, there is doubt about the scale and nature of the migration to Britain as a whole. Studies of isotopic and genetic material from burial sites across Britain have not provided conclusive answers.[120]

Michael Jones studied the logistics of a possible Saxon 'incursion' and concludes that the cost of boat construction and the manpower required for rowing would have limited numbers of immigrants to a few thousand fighting men.[121] Furthermore, Anglo-Saxon poetic literature depicts going to sea as the province of lonely wanderers, exiles and thanes without a lord.[122] For these reasons, Jones argues that the Roman fleet may have been used to transport federate troops to Britain, following a revolt that successfully fought off the Saxon 'incursion' described by the Gallic Chronicles for *c*.408-411. Gildas tells us of a 'not unfamiliar'[123] rumour that the Britons' 'old enemy' was returning, 'bent on….settlement from one end of the country to the other' (22.1). If this 'old enemy' was the Picts and the Scots, as usually assumed, they would have been attacking from the north and the north-west. Gildas tells us that Vortigern positioned his 'Saxon' troops (against all geographical logic) in the extreme south-east of the country. It would appear that the 'enemy' was coming from mainland Europe.

It may be that 'Vortigern's' federate troops were in fact imposed on Britain by the Roman Empire, either as a 'punishment' for treachery or as a force to defend the

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[117] One of the graves was radiocarbon dated to 535-660.

[118] John Davey, 'Hicknoll Slait 2001', in *South Cadbury Environs Project: Interim fieldwork report, 1998 – 2001,* ed. by Richard Tabor, (2002), (pp. 80-99).

[119] Davey, *The Roman to medieval',* pp. 116-7.

[120] P. Budd, A. Millard, C. Chenery, S. Lucy and C. Roberts, 'Investigating population movement by stable isotope analysis: a report from Britain', *Antiquity,* 78 (2004) 127-141 (p. 140); S. Oppenheimer, *The Origins of the British* (London: 2006).

[121] Jones, *The End of Roman Britain*, pp. 66-7.

[122] Jones, *The End of Roman Britain*, p. 87 and see Crossley-Holland, Kevin, *The Anglo-Saxon World: an Anthology,* World Classics (Oxford: University Press, 1982).

[123] The words 'not unfamiliar' imply that this rumour had been in circulation for some time.

borders.[124] Aëtius himself is known to have settled barbarians in Armorica in 436 to crush the *Bacaudae* revolt. This might explain why the Gallic Chronicles believed Britain to be under the sovereignty of the Saxons by 441 and why Britain might have been appealing to the same Aëtius, in the middle of the fifth century, to remove the troops who had become troublesome. Having been given the ultimate authority of Rome and an absent British aristocracy, there would have been little to prevent the Saxons from assuming kingship in Britain. There is certainly no archaeological evidence of a struggle for power and, despite Gildas' vivid descriptions, it would appear that no cities were razed to the ground and there is no evidence that the British population was slaughtered.[125] Gildas was not a contemporary observer and neither was he writing objectively as a historian. However, one of the main thrusts of his polemic was listing the number of times Rome had sent troops and aid to the (sinful) Britons. On this occasion, he is quite clear that they had no further interest in the province.

Conclusion

Very few of the surviving sources which relate to the period under review were written in their original form during that time. Even the near-contemporary works of Patrick and Gildas are not reliable. Deductions concerning social change and organisation in Britain based on other source material are liable to impose concepts from later centuries onto the archaeological data.

   The re-fortification of the hill forts may indicate a complete and swift collapse of Roman material culture, population and society with the subsequent removal of British elites to these fortified strongholds. The occupants of such a hill fort may have been war lords or tyrants. Alternatively, the remnants of the Romano-British *civitates* may have used the larger forts, such as South Cadbury, as administrative centres. It would appear that the use of these ancient monuments may have indicated more of a *choice* that conferred prestige and power on the occupants than a *necessity* imposed by economic or environmental conditions. Hill fort sites may have been chosen for occupation for cultural reasons, tightly linked to the ending of Roman administration in Britain. However, artefact evidence suggests that the re-fortifiers or later re-occupiers of hill forts may not all have been Britons.

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[124] Bryan Ward-Perkins, *The Fall of Rome and the end of Civilisation*, (Oxford: 2005).

[125] Stephen Oppenheimer, *The Origins of the British* (London: 2006).

Finds from the excavations can tell us a little about post-Roman life. They indicate an element of multiculturalism, particularly in jewellery styles and decoration and a thriving import/export trade. Specialism, in metalworking at least, had not disappeared with the Roman economy. The finds of large quantities of animal bones also demonstrate the existence of quite 'modern' farming practices and the dietary preferences of people for beef. Building styles were also changing with dry stone walling in preference to Roman-style mortar and a possible new fashion for rectilinear buildings with rounded ends. When we look at the numbers of people who must have been involved in building the rampart at South Cadbury, it would appear that the population estimates of catastrophists have been too low. This is borne out by the literature. Although Gildas bemoans the return to paganism and demise of the towns, he also writes about an 'unlooked for recovery' (26.2). The timing of the re-fortifications, long after the 'fall' of Roman Britain and the Saxon incursions of the early fifth century, indicates that it is in the context of this 'recovery' that we must understand the hill forts.

The massive fort at South Cadbury, re-fortified in the later fifth century, appears to have gone out of use in the later sixth century, as no E ware pottery was found on the site. The two smaller forts were built in the early to mid sixth century, right about the time that Gildas was believed to have been writing. It is tempting to think that South Cadbury fell into disuse because it was no longer needed in this time of 'recovery' and peace. The trade from the Mediterranean appears to have ceased around this time and the new forts built to take advantage of goods coming from the Continent instead. Whether the Justinian Plague, possibly occurring after Gildas had completed his works, had any effect on the trade or directly on the forts, is not known.

Chapter 3: The Sites: Commonalities and Differences

This chapter provides a survey of the three hill forts under study. All three sites contained sherds of imported pottery, fragments of glass and artefacts which were used to date the phases of fortification and presumed occupation. All the sites also delivered large quantities of (mainly beef) bones, evidence of postholes that might indicate the footprint of large rectilinear buildings and the presence of 'Anglo-Saxon' or Irish style artefacts. The differences between the hill forts may reflect the proposed purposes for their use or geographical and economic variations. At the end of the chapter, I have provided a table setting out commonalities and differences between the forts.

Dinas Powys

This hill fort was excavated by Alcock between 1954-58. He called the fort 'Dinas Powys' because that name was recorded for the nearby village in the late twelfth century.[126] The fort itself appears on a map from the eighteenth century as '*A Danish Camp*'. In Welsh, *dinas* means 'fortress, fort, stronghold, fastness' and *powys* may derive from the Latin *pagēnses,* 'dwellers in the district or province'.[127] It is also possible that the name means 'fort of the pagans'.[128] The hill fort stands in Cwrt-y-Ala Park.[129] This means 'court of either a 'herd of cattle' or 'wealth'. In early Wales, wealth was measured in numbers of cattle and huge numbers of cattle bones were found in the excavations.

   After some late Bronze Age activity on the site, the fort appears to have been unoccupied until the early sixth century. Iron Age material recovered from the excavations was represented by some flints and pottery which underlay the old ground surface beneath the early medieval ramparts.[130] Occupation appears to have lasted until the late seventh century.

   The fort at Dinas Powys is quite small with a roughly oval enclosure of around 800 square metres, with a broad ditched rampart with a palisade on the north side.

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[126] Alcock, *Dinas Powys,* p. 1.

[127] Seaman, 'The Roman to Early Medieval Transition', p. 205.

[128] Dark, *Britain and the end,* p. 143.

[129] alaf [-oedd, elyf, m.] (n.) herd of cattle; wealth *'f' is a weak ending and is often dropped.*

[130] Alcock, 'Refortified or newly fortified?' p. 232.

There are three additional lines of ramparts, some with stone-revetting and timber-framing. There is a second defended enclosure, called the Southern Banks, 130 metres away on the southern edge of the hilltop.

The excavated pottery can be broadly divided into two types, indicating possible dates of early medieval occupation.[131] The early sixth century is represented by at least four fine tableware vessels from western Turkey, four from Carthage and six storage vessels. This 'Mediterranean' pottery phase coincided with the enclosure of the northern end of the ridge within a bank with an entrance to the south-east. It is possible that Southern Bank A was also built at this time.[132]

Around 550, the Mediterranean trading system was coming to an end and a second trading system developed with traders from the Continent. Examples of this trade found at Dinas Powys are at least nine reduced black-slipped grey-wares, which include mid and later sixth-century plates, bowls, cups and *mortaria* from places like Bordeaux. The main period of Continental imports is represented by at least thirteen coarse ware jars, bowls and jugs made from a distinctive gritty fabric from France. This pottery, known as E ware, appears to have been imported to Britain between the late sixth and late seventh centuries but flourished in the early seventh century.

Associated with the use of this Continental imported pottery was the construction of a massive bank over earlier midden deposits which actually reduced the useable area of the fort by about half. At this time, the entrance was also moved to the top of a steep slope and appears to have been flanked by two large posts[133], designed to impress. This new bank was constructed after the introduction of the earliest E ware, perhaps in the period *c.*575-600.[134] Southern Bank B may have been constructed at this time and could have served as a safe outside storage area, such as an animal corral.[135]

During the late seventh century, there was a final phase of building, that included two further banks and a possible stockade. After this, there is no datable material on the site.[136]

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[131] Campbell, *Continental and Mediterranean,* pp. 14-16, 18-24, 27-52.

[132] Campbell, 'Imported Goods', p.97; Ewan Campbell, *Appendix 9: Reinterpretation of the phasing of Dinas Powys*, (York: Council for British Archaeology, 2007c), (p. 6).

[133] Alcock '*Dinas Powys',* pp. 78-79.

[134] Campbell, 'Imported Goods', p. 95.

[135] Campbell, 'Imported Goods', p. 100; Campbell, '*Appendix 9*', p. 6.

[136] Campbell, '*Appendix 9*', p. 6.

In addition to the pottery, there are also glass vessels, including the fragments of two Germanic claw beakers and a blue squat jar from the mid sixth/early seventh century.[137]   There were also 'Atlantic tradition' glass sherds representing two bowls and at least twenty cone beakers, from dates spanning the Mediterranean and Continental import systems.   Campbell showed that, although broken vessels may have been used in craft activities, the glass fragments represent whole vessels that were originally brought to the site intact.[138]   The occupants of Dinas Powys appear to have been drinking from glass beakers.

There is a good deal of evidence of metal-working at Dinas Powys, including excavated hearths, large quantities of smithing slag and a number of distinctive lidded crucibles containing evidence of copper-alloy, gold and silver working.[139] Fused glass, glass rods and the brooch die suggest specialist jewellery production. Bone needles, polishing stones, spindle-whorls (some made from recycled Samian pottery) and a range of iron tools including a possible *stylus* indicate craft activities such as leather working.

A fragment of a lead Irish-style zoomorphic penannular brooch die suggests the presence of an Irish craftsman or residents.[140]   Dark went further to suggest that Dinas Powys was the royal homestead of a 'sub-king of Irish origin within a British over-kingdom'.[141]   He pointed to the large quantity of E ware that may have carried Irish associations in Britain.

Alcock found groups of gullies and post holes that he interpreted as evidence for three rectangular stone buildings inside the defences.   The largest was 15 by 8 metres.   He posited their round-ended shape from the curved drainage gullies and supposed that the stone from their construction had been deposited on the rear of the innermost bank.[142]   As the drainage gullies were designed to carry water away down the hill, they need not have followed the walls so it is difficult to tell what shape the buildings actually were.   As at Wroxeter, the structures could have been timber-

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[137] Campbell, 'A blue glass squat jar', pp. 239-45; Campbell, *Continental and Mediterranean*, pp .60-61, 68.

[138] Alcock, *Dinas Powys*, pp. 52-53; Campbell, *Continental and Mediterranean*, pp. 92-96.

[139] Ewan Campbell, *Appendix 6: Catalogue and reassessment of unpublished metalwork and other finds from Dinas Powys*, (York: Council for British Archaeology, 2007b), (p. 13).

[140] J. Graham-Campbell, Dinas Powys Metalwork and the Dating of Enamelled Zoomorphic Penannular Brooches,' *Bulletin of the Board of Celtic Studies,* 38 (1991), 220-232.

[141] Dark, *Discovery by design,* p. 193.

[142] Alcock, *Dinas Powys*, pp. 28-33.

built.[143] There may have been similarly-shaped post-Roman buildings at Caerleon and Caerwent.

The very large quantity of excavated domestic animal bones and midden material could have provided valuable information as to diet and lifestyle, however, Alcock's selection technique biased the sample.[144] On the basis of a much smaller, more complete sample, Roberta Gilchrist suggested that the occupants of Dinas Powys were keeping and, possibly, exchanging, dairy cows and sheep, primarily for their milk and wool.[145] The most common animals eaten appear to be young pigs.

I carried out a site visit to the Dinas Powys hill fort on 12 May 2012. I found the fort to be much more strongly defended than the impression given by the excavation reports. It is situated on a high hill, defended on three sides by the steepness of the slopes. The view that would be afforded, if the tree cover was not so dense, would be about 290° of the surrounding arable countryside. Below the fort, there are two streams, both very slow moving, one of which has routinely flooded the very flat pastureland. It is possible that, before the reclamation of the coastline between here and Sully Island, the sea was considerably closer to Dinas Powys than it is today.

The proximity of Llandough to the present coastline at the mouth of the Ely River and the similarity in pottery remains suggests that this may have been the first point of contact for long distance trade, rather than Dinas Powys allowing some of its goods to 'filter down' to the contemporary ecclesiastical centre at Llandough.

South Cadbury

South Cadbury (or Cadbury Castle) is a very large multivallate hill fort, situated five miles north east of Yeovil on the southern edge of the Somerset Levels. It stands on the summit of the steep-sided Cadbury Hill, some 150 metres above sea level. The fort occupies a huge total area of around 18 acres, including the terraced earthwork banks and ditches.

There is archaeological evidence of Neolithic, Bronze Age and Iron Age activity and occupation at South Cadbury as well as subsequent Roman, post-Roman and

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[143] Campbell, 'Imported Goods', pp. 104-6.

[144] Seaman, 'The Roman to Early Medieval Transition', pp. 211-12.

[145] Gilchrist 'A Reappraisal of Dinas Powys', pp. 61.

Late Saxon use.[146] The surrounding landscape contains evidence of settlement contemporary with the various phases of activity on the hill.[147]

Re-fortified in the later fifth century, this very large enclosed area may have served as an early medieval military fort or acted as a '*burh*'. That this fort had a long history as a regional administrative centre is suggested by its continuing use as a *burh* and mint in the eleventh century and by abiding royal interest. Local legend[148] places King Arthur's Camelot at Cadbury Castle and there is evidence to indicate that a link between South Cadbury and the Arthurian story goes back at least to the early thirteenth century. It would appear that the fort's identity was of profound interest to both Edward I and Edward III.[149] Alcock reveals the somewhat earlier possible interest of King John who paid 40 marks for 'unspecified *opera* at *castrum de Cadebi*', in 1209.[150]

A report in the 1890s by J. A. Bennett related many of the Arthurian folk tales attached to this fort. There are, however, a few points of interest hidden within the rambling descriptions of abandoned fairy gold, silver horseshoes and buried iron gates.[151] Bennett's account tells us that the writer, John Leland, mentions foundations visible on the summit and that local people had carried off 'much dusky blew stone'. Also interesting are the lynchets surrounding the hill, below the lowest rampart. These bear the uniform name of the 'Whale' or 'Wale' which may be a rare survival of the Celtic word, '*gwâl*', meaning 'cultivated country'.

Alcock was in charge of the modern excavations at South Cadbury, between 1966 and 1973, which included trenches on the summit, at the south western gateway and across the ramparts.[152]

The fort's innermost Iron Age defences were re-built in the fifth century, providing a defended site double the size of any other known early medieval fort. A

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[146] The hill fort was re-fortified as a temporary Saxon mint between 1010 and 1020.

[147] Tabor, *Cadbury Castle.*

[148] In the sixteenth century, local people told the writer, John Leland, that Arthur 'much resorted' to Cadbury and that Roman coins and a silver horseshoe had been found there.

[149] Caroline Shenton, 'Royal Interest in Glastonbury and Cadbury: Two Arthurian Itineraries, 1278 and 1331', *The English Historical Review,* 114, 459 (1999), 1249-1255 (p. 1249).

[150] Leslie Alcock, 'Excavations at South Cadbury Castle, 1968: A Summary Report, *Antiquaries Journal,* 49 (1969), 30-40 (p. 40).

[151] J. A. Bennett, 'Camelot', *Proceedings of the Somerset Archaeological and Natural History Society*, 36, No.2 (1890) 1-19, (pp. 3-7).

[152] Leslie Alcock, *Cadbury Castle, Somerset – The Early Medieval Archaeology* (Cardiff, 1995), (pp. 6-9).

huge rampart was constructed which was between four and five metres wide and encompassed the whole perimeter of the fort, nearly 1200 metres long, with a wide wooden walkway at the top. The new defences were equipped with a stone breastwork and rear revetment laced with 1000 metres of vertical and horizontal timbers. The south western gateway was also an impressive affair with four large posts set in a rough three metre square, with timber sills between the front and back pairs to support twinned-leaved gates. Four-post gates, extended up as towers, are well known from Roman auxiliary forts, mostly of the first century AD.[153]

This 'phase' of occupation at South Cadbury was dated using around 20 imported pottery vessels from the late fifth/early sixth centuries which were found clustered around the gateway and a possible 'hall' building on the summit.[154] Some were of Mediterranean origin and comprised bowls of Phocaean and African Red Slip Wares and amphorae similar to those found at Dinas Powys. There were also grey-ware goblets and bowls from the Bordeaux region. No E ware was found at this site, indicating a possible end to occupation before the early seventh century.[155] The actual number of pottery fragments is also meagre compared with smaller sites, like Dinas Powys.

Alcock's excavations revealed rows of post holes that he interpreted as another substantial 'Great Hall'. The dimensions of this hall have been reconstructed as 19 metres long by 10 metres wide, with slightly tapering ends. This construction is similar to those interpreted for Dinas Powys and Doon Hill. The internal area was divided, in the ratio 2:1, into hall and end chamber. There is another rectilinear building measuring four metres by two metres, lying about four metres from the northern door of the hall. This may have been a kitchen.[156] In common with other similar sites, there was a large quantity of domestic animal bones. Clare Randall has assessed these for the Iron Age and Romano-British periods.[157] A preliminary analysis of the post-Roman material (6290 fragments) noted that they comprised a

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[153] Alcock, 'Fifteen Year Perspective', pp. 364-8.

[154] Leslie Alcock, 'Cadbury-Camelot: A Fifteen Year Perspective', *Proceedings of the British Academy,* 68 (1982), 355-388, (pp. 357-8).

[155] However, absence of evidence is not completely evidence of absence.

[156] Alcock, 'Fifteen Year Perspective', pp. 374-7.

[157] Clare E. Randall, 'Livestock and landscape: exploring animal exploitation in later prehistory in the South West of Britain', a thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of Bournemouth University for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, Bournemouth University (August, 2010)

high proportion of beef bones, from animals that were being reared, butchered and eaten on site. Randall has now studied a smaller sample, K432, more intensively. This sample comprises just 100 fragments of bone and was likely to have been rapidly deposited, as there were very few loose teeth. The sample is dominated by cattle bones, with a clear emphasis on the meat-bearing parts of the animal. Apart from a large red deer skull, missing its antlers, there is one roe deer bone.[158]

Although the proposed hall building was a large one, set in a dominant position on the top of Cadbury Hill, Alcock points out that concentrations of pottery fragments and bones are usually archaeologically associated with middens or slums, not noble houses. He explains this anomaly by saying the fragments might have fallen through gaps in a wooden floor.[159]

Occupation at South Cadbury appears to have continued into at least the later sixth century, when the metalled road through the south western gateway was renewed. Within this new surface, Alcock found the possibly deliberate deposit of a Romano-British axe hammer and a mid-late sixth-century Saxon ring/buckle.[160] The decoration is similar to Saxon brooches from the upper Thames Valley, dating from the mid to later sixth century. It is tempting to view this deposit as evidence of co-operation between Britons and Saxons. Further evidence of Saxon 'contact' during this period may be provided by another artefact, a gilt button brooch, decorated with a design in relief of a warrior's helmeted head.[161] Such brooches are characteristically found in pagan Saxon women's graves and this one is of a distinctive type dated to the two decades either side of 500.[162]

The Mote of Mark

The fort at the Mote of Mark is the most extensively excavated secular site in south-west Scotland with sixth and seventh-century occupation.[163] The Mote itself is a granite boss rising 45 metres above the eastern shore of Rough Firth where the Urr enters the Solway, in what is now the Dumfries and Galloway Region. Although

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[158] Clare Randall, *pers. comm.* Clare Randal suggests that the antlers were removed, by sawing, for craft working purposes.
[159] Alcock, 'Fifteen Year Perspective', p. 376.
[160] Alcock, 'Fifteen Year Perspective', p. 379.
[161] Alcock, 'Fifteen Year Perspective', p. 378.
[162] Tabor, *Cadbury Castle,* p. 170.
[163] Laing and Longley, *The Mote of Mark,* p. 157.

early medieval Galloway was isolated from mainland Britain, there was access to Ulster (35km to the west) and the Isle of Man (30km to the south) and the entire western seaways.

The summit of the Mote of Mark comprises a central hollow between two raised areas of rock, defended by a stone and timber rampart enclosing one third of an acre. The seaward approach is precipitous with rocky slopes falling virtually to the shoreline. The landward gradient is more gentle and was possibly more strongly defended in the past. The hill fort gives a view of the entire estuary and its coastline and all the way across the Solway to the Cumbrian coast. Inland, the view is restricted by the rising ground of Mark Hill and Grennan Hill.[164]

The site was excavated by Curle[165] in 1913 and, again, by Laing and Longley,[166] in the 1970s. The earliest activity on the Mote of Mark may be represented by evidence of metalworking and some animal bones under the north rampart, constructed in the first half of the sixth century.[167] A charred timber from the base of this rampart gave a radiocarbon date of around 350 AD. The south rampart was built in the second half of the sixth century.

Sherds of imported pottery included part of a D ware *mortarium*, close to the base of the sequence, pieces of an early-sixth century Mediterranean amphora and part of an E ware beaker, from the later sixth (or seventh) century. A single, large fragment of imported continental glass is from a vessel of sixth/seventh-century type. There is evidence of high quality non-ferrous metalworking and jewellery manufacture, including objects in gold and silver.[168] This trade was carried out within the defences of the fort until the mid to later seventh century.[169]

The latest glass on site is similar to material in later seventh-century contexts at Whithorn and the two sites may have been supplied at the same time by the same merchants.[170] It is likely that occupation continued into the second half of the seventh century at the Mote of Mark, with the incidence of both glass and pottery at its highest during this latest phase of occupation.

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[164] Laing and Longley, *The Mote of Mark*, p. 1.

[165] Curle, 'Report on the excavation'.

[166] Laing and Longley, *The Mote of Mark.*

[167] Laing and Longley, *The Mote of Mark*, pp. 22-4.

[168] N. Swindells, and L. Laing, 'Metalworking at the Mote of Mark, Kirwabright in the 6th-7th centuries A.D' in *Aspects of Early Metallurgy* (1977), (pp. 121-128).

[169] Laing and Longley, *The Mote of Mark*, pp. 24-5.

[170] Campbell, 'Imported Goods', p. 107.

The 1913 excavation found evidence of two drystone huts, however, by the 1970s, Laing and Longley only found evidence of a single, rather small, structure, measuring about 8.5 metres by 4 metres, and constructed using post-pads.[171] Most recently, in 2009, Tom Welsh explored the ridge north west of the fort and identified possible cross-walls, foundations and other walling remains and also an 11 metre diameter hut below the eastern end of the fort. [172]

The animal bones uncovered in the original 1913 excavation were backfilled securely and could be recovered in the 1970s.[173] There are more than 7500 fragments, weighing a total of over 80kg. The majority of the bones were from rather small cattle (74%), with a considerable amount of 'sturdy' pig and some Iron Age-type horned sheep (or goats). There were two bones of domestic fowl, a fragment of roe deer and a find of white-tailed eagle. No horse bones were found. It is interesting to note that the cattle kept at the Mote of Mark were small and do not seem to have benefited from the widespread Roman improvement in cattle sizes. The small sheep were of a good age, with a few kept longer for their wool. Most of the animals appear to have been killed for food as near-adults, with a few living longer for breeding purposes.

It does not appear that shellfish were being eaten in large quantities although these can be collected from the shoreline today. There was only one fragment of roe deer although the area is wooded and would have been good for deer.

Fire appears to have destroyed the fort's defences and the ramparts were deliberately demolished in the mid to later seventh century. However, this debris appears to have been subsequently cleared from the central hollow, suggesting some continuing occupation. The hill seems to have been abandoned before the end of the seventh century.

The high quality metalworking within the defences of the fort shows 'Anglian' influence or inspiration on certain items produced on site. There is also a certain late seventh-century Anglian runic inscription on a fragment of bone, a second very uncertain runic inscription on a fragment of sandstone and a rock crystal bead of a

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[171] Laing and Longley, *The Mote of Mark,* pp. 171-2.

[172] T. Welsh, 'Mote of Mark, Dumfries and Galloway (Colvend and Southwick parish), field visit', *Discovery Excav Scot, New,* vol.10 (Wiltshire: Cathedral Communications Limited, 2009).

[173] Laing and Longley, *The Mote of Mark,* pp. 133-6.

type usually associated with 'Anglo-Saxon' burials.[174] The runic inscription was found outside the ramparts. A sixth-century brooch was found less than five miles from the Mote of Mark and a seventh-century gold filigree bracteates was found in a midden at Tynron Doon.[175] These finds might indicate close personal relationships between members of the British and Northumbrian royal houses and their entourages or, at the very least, trade between the two groups. There is no evidence for a military campaign resulting in take-over by the Angles. The annexation of south west Scotland may have been a gradual process achieved as much by increasing encroachment as by battle.[176]

Conclusion

Table 1 (overleaf) shows that Dinas Powys and the Mote of Mark share more commonalities than either does with the much larger, originally Iron Age, South Cadbury. The two smaller forts are 'new builds' with much evidence of metal-working and jewellery-making which may have been the major trade of these establishments. South Cadbury may have acted as a military base or as a '*burh*'. Occupation at this hill fort appears to have come to an end nearly 100 years earlier than at the two smaller forts. This may be because the purpose for which it was re-fortified was no longer valid. Such a huge fort would have been expensive to maintain and protect. The lack of E ware sherds at both South Cadbury and Tintagel may imply that they were part of the same trading route or political structure, which also came to an end in the later sixth century.

   A major difference between the Mote of Mark and both Dinas Powys and South Cadbury is one of political geography. The Mote of Mark was in the Roman 'military' zone, surrounded by army forts. It was situated in the old territory of the Selgoviae, who had strongly resisted Roman occupation. At the Mote of Mark, we find small, unimproved cattle and a very early date of possible occupation. The other two forts were situated in areas of good farmland, in the 'villa' zone of Roman Britain. In such an area, 'Roman-ness' may have continued for longer and the rise in kingship may have been more delayed.

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[174] Laing and Longley, *The Mote of Mark,* p. 167.

[175] J. Williams, 'Tynron Doon, Dumfriesshire: a History of the Site with notes on the finds, 1924-67', *Trans Dumfriesshire Galloway Natur Hist Soc*, XLVIII, (1971), 106-20.

[176] Laing and Longley, *The Mote of Mark,* pp. 166-8.

Building work at these forts appears to have been carried out in discrete phases because it has been dated using artefactual evidence. However, there is no reason to suppose that occupation was not continuous.

Table 1: Commonalities and Differences between the Forts

	Dinas Powys	**South Cadbury**	**Mote of Mark**
Enclosed area (00sq^m)	50	730	4
Type of Area	Villa zone	Villa zone	Military zone
Iron Age fort	Late Bronze Age	Yes	No
Fortifications	Strong	Formidable	Weak
Mediterranean vessels	14	14	1
Continental vessels	21/22	1	13
E Ware	Yes	No	Yes
Glass	36	10	18
Animal bones	Yes	Yes	Yes
'Anglo-Saxon' artefacts	Saxon	Saxon	Anglian
Irish influence	Yes	Not found	Possible
Rectilinear 'halls'	Possible	Possible	Possible
Metalworking	Yes	Not found	Yes
Dating of occupation	Early to mid C6th Mid C6th – early C7th Late C7th	Late C5th – early C6th Later C6th/possibly C7th	Pre-rampart from *c.* 350 Early – Late C6th Late C6th – mid/late C7th

Source: This table has been adapted from Campbell[177]

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[177] Campbell, *Continental and Mediterranean*; *Appendix 6*; *Appendix 9*

Chapter 4: Uses of Hill Forts

This chapter sets out the possible uses of hill forts. The traditional view, proposed by Alcock and supported by a selective interpretation of archaeological and document evidence, was that small sites, like Dinas Powys, were the high status residences of British aristocrats.[178] This view has been widely accepted although it does not fit the circumstances of the much larger fort at South Cadbury, as noted by Alcock himself. South Cadbury may have been re-fortified to create a secure administrative centre to replace the Roman town of *Lindinis*.[179] The Mote of Mark is thought to have been the workshop and home of a master craftsman of 'high status'.[180]

A move to a hill-top location could have been a response to a number of pressures, such as threat of attack, a religious belief attaching importance to hill tops, a society that expected its elites to reside in such places, an overt denial of Roman lifestyle and values or a desire to avoid such environmental hazards as flooding and disease.[181] The symbolic re-fortification of ancient seats of power, ritual or influence may have been an important factor in the rise to power of petty kings.

Political/Social Function

Alcock's *llys* model assumes that the main function of the sites was to act as the defensible dwelling place of local rulers and their immediate following, together with the provision of a rudimentary political administration for the surrounding area.[182] South Cadbury does not fit this model. Given that an enclosed area similar to that at Dinas Powys could easily have been fortified on its summit,[183] the re-fortifiers must have had some other purpose for it. One possibility to Burrow's *burh*, 'tribal-centre' or urban model. A *burh* represents a place of safety for the local population and their animals. A 'tribal-centre' derives from Iron Age studies and offers the same functions as a *burh* but with a more permanent occupation by some of its inhabitants.

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[178] Alcock, *Dinas Powys.*

[179] Alcock, 'A Fifteen Year Perspective', p. 384.

[180] Laing and Longley, *The Mote of Mark,* p. 174.

[181] Burrow, 'Aspects of Hillfort', p. 224.

[182] Burrow, 'Aspects of Hillfort', p. 234.

[183] Leslie Alcock, *Cadbury Castle, Somerset – The Early Medieval Archaeology* (Cardiff, 1995), (p. 237).

Such a site would have a strong defensive capability, be relatively large and be organised to accommodate sudden influxes of people and, probably, livestock.[184]

The political functions of the Iron Age 'tribal-centre' were largely taken over by Roman towns. The subsequent collapse of towns as administrative centres in the fifth century may have moved operations to a large, defended hill fort like South Cadbury.[185] Recent excavations at Ilchester (*Lindinis*) have provided evidence that the outer areas of the town were abandoned during the late Roman period. Flooding of the surrounding area may have occurred after the fourth century, causing a settlement shift and transfer of civic functions to South Cadbury, as we know happened in the early eleventh century.[186]

Another possible use for South Cadbury was as a military fort. The archaeological evidence, in the shape of the huge rampart, massive south western gate and broad walkway, would appear to support this model and warfare and violence may have been common aspects of early medieval society.[187] Indeed, the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle lists two sixth-century battles at or near hill forts only a short distance east of South Cadbury. However, there is no archaeological evidence for these battles and none for a specialised military function at this fort.[188] It has also been estimated that South Cadbury would have required 900 men to defend its vast perimeter. This would have been a huge army in the fifth century, all of whom would have had to be sheltered and fed.

It is more likely that the fort acted as an administrative centre, sheltering its citizens and those from the immediate neighbourhood, whilst keeping a small standing army and cavalry. Richard Tabor believes that there may have been an external threat from Saxon 'raiding parties', a few days' striking distance from their settlements in the upper Thames Valley.[189]

Alcock's suggests that South Cadbury may have been a *villa regalis* or centre for the organised administration of the surrounding area. He points out similarities

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[184] Burrow, 'Aspects of Hillfort', p. 237.

[185] Burrow, 'Aspects of Hillfort', pp. 240-1.

[186] Burrow, 'Aspects of Hillfort', pp. 241-2.

[187] Leslie Alcock, *Arthur's Britain: History and Archaeology AD 367-634* (Harmondsworth: Pelican, 1971); Stuart Laycock, *Warlords: the Struggle for Power in Post-Roman Britain* (Gloucestershire: The History Press, 2009).

[188] Burrow, 'Aspects of Hillfort', pp. 238-9.

[189] Tabor, *Cadbury Castle,* p. 170.

between South Cadbury and Bede's *villae regales*: Yeavering and Milfiel, both in rectangular building design and comparably large enclosed areas.[190]

Religious Function

This covers a whole range of activity, from occasional visits to sacred areas to the establishment of Christian monasteries.

Dinas Powys, in common with several other high status secular settlements in the early medieval west, was associated with a nearby ecclesiastical centre, the former villa at Llandough.[191] Grave fills at Llandough contain pottery from the late-fifth or sixth centuries[192] that are similar to those found at Dinas Powys, suggesting a close relationship.[193] There appears to have been a similar close relationship between the Mote of Mark and nearby Whithorn.[194]

South Cadbury does not appear to have any early links and Christian activity cannot be demonstrated, unless the crosses on the bottoms of the 'A' ware vessels had religious significance for the inhabitants.[195] Rather, this hill fort and its environs appear to have been a pagan ritual site, possibly since the Bronze Age. Iron Age activity included the possible use of South Cadbury as a ritual 'sky' burial site[196] and SCEP excavated cattle, dog and human skulls plus the skeleton of a complete lamb on the east side of an enclosure on an old Bronze Age track way at nearby Sigwells. On the west side of this enclosure, a complete raven was found, weighed down by stones.[197] In the Roman period, it is possible that a temple or porched shrine was built at South Cadbury, which is at the same height above sea level as nearby

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[190] Alcock, 'A Fifteen Year Perspective', p. 384.

[191] J. Knight, 'From Villa to Monastery: Llandough in Context', *Medieval Archaeology,* 49 (2005), 93-108.

[192] N. Holbrook and A. Thomas, 'An Early-medieval Monastical Cemetery at Llandough, Glamorgan: Excavations in 1994. *Medieval Archaeology,* 49 (2005), 1-92.

[193] Seaman, 'The Roman to Early Medieval Transition', p. 230.

[194] P. Hill, et al., *Whithorn and St Ninian, The Excavation of a Monastic Town*, *1984-91*, (Stroud: 1997), (pp. 13-14).

[195] Burrow, 'Aspects of Hillfort', p. 250.

[196] South Cadbury was believed to have been a Durotriges fort that was violently cleared by the Romans in the first century AD. Excavation of the south western gate area found the scattered bones of many individuals that had been slaughtered. It appeared that the bodies had been piled up in the gate area and a fire set. However, more recent work on these bones by Susan Jones, from Bournemouth University, has challenged this assumption, arguing that the state of the bones indicates a possible site for sky burials. See Clare Randall, citing Susan Jones' unpublished PhD thesis in *pers. comm.* See also Tabor, *Cadbury Castle*, pp.156-162.

[197] Richard Tabor, *pers. comm.*

Lamyatt Beacon and Brean Down. Temples on these hills may have been possible centres of a local deer cult and dedicated to Mars/Cernunnos.[198] A cemetery at Lamyatt Beacon dates from the mid sixth to late eighth century. Randall also notes a big red deer skull, with the antlers sawn off, from South Cadbury.[199] At Cadbury Castle, Devon, Frances Griffiths and Eileen Wilkes report Late/post-Roman ritual deposits of bracelets and rings in a 'well' on the hill top from the mid-fourth to mid-fifth centuries.[200] However, there is no evidence that any kind of ritual activity was being carried on at the hill forts under study in the post-Roman period.

Economic Function

Burrow notes that hill forts appear to have been rather inconvenient bases for subsistence farming although animals were raised for meat, milk and wool inside South Cadbury and (presumably) outside the ramparts at the smaller forts. However, there is no evidence for the collection and storage of crops and no specialist agricultural buildings or implements.[201] Furthermore, South Cadbury and Dinas Powys are surrounded by good arable land which may have formed part of a 'farm'.[202]

   Markets held at hill forts would allow surrounding communities to barter their own surplus goods. Although we would no longer expect to find any small denomination coinage or evidence of perishable goods, there do appear to be localised distributions of materials that had been broken, lost or discarded.[203] The market model fits tolerably with all our three hill forts but probably best with the much larger South Cadbury. At the two smaller sites, there are localised distributions of metalworking areas and possible tanning and leatherwork at Dinas Powys. At all three sites, animals may have been brought to market and slaughtered on the spot. Food stalls and halls may have added to the midden of bones and rubbish piling up by the ramparts and around the buildings. These middens, metalworking pits and possible tanneries pose a problem with Alcock's *llys* model of

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[198] Roger Leech, et al., 'The Excavation of a Romano-Celtic Temple and a Later Cemetery on Lamyatt Beacon, Somerset', *Britannia,* 17 (1986), 259-328 (p. 272).

[199] Clare Randall, *pers. comm.*

[200] Frances Griffith and Eileen Wilkes, paper forthcoming.

[201] Campbell, 'Imported Goods', p. 105.

[202] Seaman, 'The Roman to Early Medieval Transition', p. 254.

[203] Seaman, 'The Roman to Early Medieval Transition', p. 257.

high status occupation as they should have been kept well away from residential areas.

The presence of imported pottery on hill forts does not in itself demonstrate that these locations were acting as 'primary' centres for long distance trade and the place where pottery was first off-loaded from ships. The great quantity of Mediterranean imports found at Tintagel[204] would suggest that this was the primary centre until around *c.*550.[205] High value goods, arriving there as gifts for local rulers, could have been distributed to the hill forts.[206] Alcock argues that the diversity of the pottery vessels, compared with actual wine cargoes found on Byzantine wrecks, would mitigate against a pattern of normal trade.[207]

South Cadbury had a long history of controlling trade between the north and south coasts of the West Country in the Iron Age. It had been a Durotriges fort, an extension of their bases at Maiden Castle in Dorset and Ham Hill towards the Severn Estuary. This was a major strategic route for the salt trade and South Cadbury was well placed to control it. Long-distance sea-borne trade requires sites close to the coast or to navigable rivers, with a safe anchorage. Although South Cadbury appears to be some distance from a navigable waterway, if the Roman sea defences were not maintained, the Somerset Levels would have flooded. This would have made the fort, at 150 metres above sea level, an island promontory, accessible from the Severn. Indeed, we know that, by the early medieval period, the Somerset Levels possessed intertidal marshes towards the coast and extensive freshwater peat lands in the lower-lying backfens and many local places could be reached by boat from Glastonbury.[208] Dinas Powys is close to the River Ely and the Mote of Mark is on the Urr adjacent to the Solway Firth. It is likely that all forts had access to the western seaboard, in the area known as the Irish Sea Province.

Evidence for metal-working indicates the manufacture of high quality jewellery or utensils. However, no such items have been recorded from sites on the postulated trade routes to the Mediterranean. The presence of small fragments of Anglo-Saxon metalwork and glass at all three sites may indicate long-distance exchange, overland

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[204] Barrowman, et al., *Excavations at Tintagel Castle,* pp. 316-8 and 329-331.

[205] There is no E ware at Tintagel. Seaman, 'The Roman to Early Medieval Transition', (p. 74).

[206] Burrow, 'Aspects of Hillfort', pp. 258-9.

[207] Alcock, 'Fifteen Year Perspective', p. 361.

[208] S. Rippon, 'Making the most of a bad situation? Glastonbury Abbey and the exploitation of wetland resources in the Somerset Levels', *Medieval Archaeology,* 48 (2004), 91-130, (pp. 92-3).

from eastern England, or merely imply contact with populations with a 'Germanic' material culture. Such populations were perhaps only a few miles to the east of South Cadbury and the Mote of Mark by the sixth and seventh centuries.[209] Burrow states that we cannot rule out 'the presence of an actual intrusive element in the population.'[210]

It is difficult to envisage many exchange goods, except perhaps slaves or salt, valuable enough to pay for the regular import of luxuries to the hill forts.[211] Slavery was the norm[212] in Roman society and it persisted in post-Roman times. Gildas tells us that conditions were so bad in Britain that people offered themselves up to the Saxons as slaves to avoid starvation (25.1). Patrick was himself carried off to Ireland with many thousands of people (including his father's servants).[213] He writes that they were 'scattered among many nations'. Patrick's attack on the British slaver, Coroticus, shows us that this trade was universal and that the slavers did very well out of it. By its very nature, the slave trade was a long-distance one with slaves being sold to distant peoples, best of all overseas.[214] It is possible that the imports of amphorae arrived in Britain as ballast, as 'china' and mahogany did into later England. The return journey might have been made with a much heavier human cargo, paid for in gold. In his *Epistola,* Patrick writes that the slave trader, Coroticus, was a rich, popular, local figure.[215] He begs all Christians not to feast or drink or joke with Coroticus' men, not to flatter them and not 'to receive their alms'. The perimeter at South Cadbury could just as well keep people *in* as out, which may suggest a vast slave market.

Another commodity that had been in high demand was tin, a resource in which the south west peninsular was particularly rich.[216] Tintagel may have been the primary export centre for this commodity. The extinguishing of long distance trade is one of the reasons given for the eventual abandonment of the hill forts.

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[209] Eagles and Mortimer, 'Early Anglo-Saxon artefacts', p. 132.

[210] Burrow, 'Aspects of Hillfort', p. 260.

[211] Burrow, 'Aspects of Hillfort', pp. 260-1.

[212] A slave was called a '*caeth*' in Brythonic.

[213] E. A. Thompson, 'Saint Patrick and Coroticus', *Journal of Theological Studies,* ns 31, (1980), 12-27, (p. 18).

[214] Thompson, 'Saint Patrick', p. 21.

[215] Thompson, 'Saint Patrick', p. 27.

[216] Campbell, 'Imported Goods', pp. 25-49; Campbell, *Continental and Mediterranean,* p. 13; Barrowman, et al., *Excavations at Tintagel*, p. 331.

The hill forts may have been centres for receiving tribute. However, the earlier interpretation that fully grown cattle were arriving at the site as food renders may not be accurate. Livestock appears to have been born and bred at the forts.

There is evidence of specialist crafts at Dinas Powys and the Mote of Mark.[217] At Dinas Powys, the metalworking activities appear to have completely taken over the small fort, leaving no room for any other kind of activity. Document sources, such as the ninth-century story, *Culhwch and Olwen*, suggest that the activities of smiths and, especially, of jewellers were traditionally associated with the ruling elements in society and that individual craftsmen were peripatetic, undertaking work at centres where they obtained the best rewards.[218] This has fuelled the interpretation of sites with evidence of fine metalworking as 'high status' ones.

I have combined Burrow's 'uses' with Ewan Campbell's work at Dinas Powys to create the table below.

Table 2: Possible Uses of the Hill Forts in my Study

Models	Dinas Powys	South Cadbury	Mote of Mark
Political/Social Function			
'Llys'	√	X	√
'Burh'/'Tribal-centre'/Urban	X	√	X
Military Fort	Too small?	Partial?	Too small?
Religious Function			
Pagan Shrine/Settlement	X	Possible	X
Christian Shrine/Settlement	At Llandough	X	At Whithorn
Economic Function			
Subsistence Farming	Livestock	Livestock	Livestock
Local Trade/market	Possible	Possible	Possible
Long Distance Exchange	Jewellery/leather/Exotic imports	Slaves/Exotic imports	Jewellery/Exotic imports
Centre for tribute and reciprocal gift-giving	Possible	Possible	Possible
Specialised Craft/Industrial Centre	Fine metalworking	None found in area excavated	Fine metalworking

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[217] Laing and Longley, *The Mote of Mark*, p. 174.

[218] Burrow, 'Aspects of Hillfort', p. 262.

Conclusion

Leslie Alcock's political/social function has dominated attitudes, however, this is not the only possible interpretation of the finds. Although there is no evidence for a contemporary religious function at these sites, various economic models (with the exception of subsistence arable farming) offer alternative possible uses as trading or craft centres.

In nearly all respects, the hill fort at South Cadbury was different. It was very large, had been a defended Iron Age fort, had no metalworking (that was found), much less pottery than other, smaller sites and a continued use, folklore and royal interest throughout history. South Cadbury was most likely to have been a *'burh'*, offering protection to the local population and their animals in times of trouble. There may have been an administrative aspect, moved here from *Lindinis*, and some possible military use.

Although a common *usage* for hill forts remains elusive, it seems that they would have been good places to keep high value items, like metalworking supplies and valuable cattle, safe. It also seems to me that these were places for 'action', whether that was trading or manufacturing or praying. The smaller forts seem too small and squalid to have been private residences and South Cadbury is far too big. These factors are discussed further in the next chapter.

Chapter 5: Appropriately Heroic Surroundings?

Hill forts in the early medieval west have been described as 'high status' establishments. However, we need to consider what is meant by status, whether it can be distinguished from wealth and what the material manifestations of status might be.

Evidence for social structure in early medieval Britain is limited and so writers are forced to fall back on the documentary evidence of a later period in Wales and the comparative evidence of adjacent societies in Ireland and Anglo-Saxon England. This documentary evidence would lead us to believe that status was primarily derived from birth and, secondly, from having a certain number of *clients* who were freemen and who paid fixed and regular food renders and other services. In Ireland, the seventh-century legal tract, the *Crith Gablach*, notes that the construction of ramparts at a king's fort was a labour due expected from royal clients.[219] In Wales, the (possibly tenth-century) [220] *Welsh Law of Hywel Dda* states that construction work at the king's *llys* was part of the tenure of the king's bondmen.[221] These documents also set out the laws relating to the use of gold and silver (found as metalworking at some sites). Such social distinctions would have been equally familiar to a seventh-century Anglo-Saxon.[222] In seventh-century Dalriada, dues and military service were listed in the *Senchus fern Alban*[223] which has similarities to the Anglo-Saxon Tribal Hidage and the *cantref* system in Wales.[224]

If we can accept the documentary evidence as valid, the control of labour to construct ramparts indicates the presence of clients at all three forts. As well as providing defences, the earthworks appear to have been part of the process by which the settlement and community which dwelt within it were defined. The bank and ditch would have served to differentiate those who dwelt within the enclosure from those without and enhance the prestige of the settlement and its inhabitants. The hill

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[219] Seaman, 'The Roman to Early Medieval Transition', p. 214.

[220] The earliest manuscripts which have been preserved date from the early or mid thirteenth century.

[221] D. Jenkins, *The Law of Hywel Dda*. (Llandysul: Gomer Press, 1986), (p. 125).

[222] T. M. Charles-Edwards, *Kinship in Early Wales and Ireland*, (Oxford: 1993), (p. 364).

[223] J. Bannerman, *Studies in the History of Dalriada*, (Edinburgh, 1974), 27-157 (pp. 154-5).

[224] Laing and Longley, *The Mote of Mark,* p. 160.

fort ramparts may have served as a form of social aggrandisement rather than for defence.[225]

At South Cadbury, however, the re-fortification work was of a different order of magnitude. This was the largest engineering project of the second half of the fifth century in Britain, with the possible exception of the long 'dykes'.[226] It would have required huge natural resources (wood and stone) and manpower, as well as capable planning and administration. However, such authority and control do not *necessarily* point to the fort being occupied by a prince, warlord or local chieftain.

Material Wealth

The material manifestations of wealth from the three forts have been discussed in Chapter 3. In brief, these include imported fine tableware and the presence of specialist craftsmen. There is also evidence of imported luxury goods which would have been precious and expensive and denoted high status for anyone who possessed them. They appear to represent the elements of fine dining with glasses to drink from. However, the remains of the fine dining, in the 'embarrassing quantities'[227] of beef bones, represent (to modern eyes) very ordinary fare indeed.

Another manifestation of wealth is the appearance on some sites of gold and other precious metals.[228] There is abundant evidence in the early Irish Law Tracts that gold and silver were to be associated only with the highest grades of society. For example, the *Crith Gablach* notes that one of the attributes of a lord is a brooch of precious metal. There is also (later) literary evidence, such as the ninth-century story of Culhwch and Olwen that demonstrates that the patronage of smiths was a lordly enterprise. However, the evidence also suggests that individual craftsmen may have been peripatetic.[229]

Feasting Halls?

The possible presence at the sites of large, rectangular buildings has fuelled the idea of high status establishments because Leslie Alcock believed that these might have

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[225] Niall Sharples, *pers. comm.*

[226] Tabor, *Cadbury Castle,* pp. 169.

[227] Gilchrist, 'A Reappraisal of Dinas Powys', p. 51.

[228] Campbell, 'Imported Goods', p. 153.

[229] Burrow, 'Aspects of Hillfort', p. 262.

been 'feasting' halls. It is at this point that we must ask whether the assumption of high status occupation would have been considered at all without the wealth of suggestive 'heroic' literature, none of which mentions hill forts. These stories were written anachronistically, several centuries later, in English, relating early 'barbarian' rather than post-Roman British practices. The best description of such a feasting hall comes from *Beowulf,* an English poem, written about fifth-century Denmark, and no earlier than the eighth century.

Lloyd Laing argues succinctly against the possibility of a 'return to barbarianism' that seems to be implied by Alcock's *llys* model:

> 'the large timber hall denotes a type of social organisation that was essentially barbarian, tribal and localised, and which did not exist in Roman Britain. It was the adjunct of a society where the basic unit was not the family but the group.'[230]

Furthermore, the *quality* of the accommodation, defined by archaeological evidence, would appear to mitigate against elite occupation. Unlike the earlier villas, the large rectilinear hall at Dinas Powys had no internal divisions and the hall at South Cadbury had only one. If the suggested 15 to 20 people were living at Dinas Powys, there would appear to have been no distinction of rank between them. This suggests a barracks or lodging house rather than the grand hall of a prince and his retinue. There would certainly have been little space outside the buildings and the middens at these sites were not located far from the presumed dwellings.[231] Dirty and smelly crafts, such as metalworking and tanning for leather work were not only carried on under the patronage of the noble lord but were likely to have taken place under his very window.

The sites of the Mote of Mark and Dinas Powys are really very small, particularly the former, where outcrops of rock make a proportion of the enclosed area unusable. Indeed, Dinas Powys has been described as 'a nest of Irish sea robbers' rather than a royal *llys*. However, Campbell argues that small sites such as these may have been only one of several within a kingdom which could have been visited in a royal progression.[232]

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[230] Laing, 'Timber halls', p. 118.

[231] Campbell, *Continental and Mediterranean,* pp. 99-100.

[232] Campbell, 'Imported Goods', p. 171.

The Feasts?

The food eaten at 'feasts' can be presumed from the excavated animal bone assemblages. It would appear that, contrary to poetic ideals, there was little or no evidence of deer or game birds and hardly any fish or shellfish were eaten (even at the Mote of Mark). However, our modern idea of hunted game animals as aristocratic food may not have applied in the years following the famine that Gildas describes: '…the whole region came to lack the staff of any food, apart from such comfort as the art of the huntsman could procure them.' (19.4) When there is no food, hunting ceases to be the 'sport of kings'.

All three sites provided evidence of domestic animal consumption. Roberta Gilchrist re-studied the bones from Dinas Powys and concluded that fully adult cows and sheep and young pigs were being butchered and eaten on site. Her interpretation was that the sheep and cows were exchanged locally, primarily for their by-products, although the pigs may have been reared on-site. This did not refute Alcock's suggestion that Dinas Powys was a 'princely stronghold' but did question the original idea that the animals were food renders to a passive consumer site.[233] At the Mote of Mark, there is evidence of a specialised cattle herd, sheep and 'sturdy' pigs.[234] Beef cattle formed the major part of the assemblage at South Cadbury.

Laing and Longley tabulate a number of characteristics as indicative of 'high-status', specifically royal, status. I have extended their analysis to cover the other two forts.

Table 3: Indicators of High Status

Categories of evidence	Dinas Powys	South Cadbury	Mote of Mark
Location/Topography			
Locally prominent	Yes	Yes	Yes
Hierarchical use of space	None	Not known	Not certain
Small but defensible	Yes	No	Yes
Coastal, estuarine or on line of communication	Yes	Yes	Yes

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[233] Gilchrist, 'A Reappraisal of Dinas Powys', p. 61.

[234] Laing and Longley, *The Mote of Mark,* p. 141.

Function			
Collection site for renders	Not certain	Not certain	Not certain
Craft centre. High quality metalwork	Yes	Not found	Yes
Evidence of administrative function (carved stones or symbols of inauguration)	No	No	No
Ritual association, as, for example, mound	No	No	No
Locational associations			
Part of a complex of sites	No	No	No
Strategic and economic associations	Possible	Possible	Possible
Major early Christian site in immediate vicinity	Llandough	No	Whithorn
Later Medieval castle on site	Nearby	No	No
Defences (military activities or fire)			
Multivallation	Yes	Yes	Possible
Fort built by clients (evidence of clientship)	Possible	Possible	Possible
Sieges, burning of defences	No	No	Yes
Structures			
Size of house. Large – possibly circular for a king	Not certain	Yes	No
Material culture			
Wealth, fine quality artefacts	Yes	Yes	Yes
Items indicative of tribute	Yes	Yes	Yes
Exotic items (imports)	Yes	Yes	Yes
Feasting an important adjunct	Possibly	Possibly	Possibly
Prestige attached to horses and horsemanship	No horses eaten	No horses eaten	No horses eaten
Economy			
Consumption of food indicative of renders (clientship)	Possible, bones poorly analysed	Possible, bones have not been analysed yet	Possible

Men of skill present	Yes	Yes	Yes
Presence of many crafts and skills (mixed industrial waste) may differentiate the house of a king from that of a master craftsman	Yes	No	No
Historical/documentary associations			
Reference in annals and other documentation indicative of high status, for example, sieges and burnings	No	No	No
Other 'high status' indications			
Middens located away from buildings	No	No	No

Source: from Laing and Longley, *The Mote of Mark*[235]

Conclusions

The general assumption of 'high status' occupation at these sites is partly supported by the archaeological finds, the control of persons and resources for rampart building, the ability to conduct long distance trade (or at least enjoy a share of it) and patronise craftsmen such as smiths and jewellery makers. However, this is not the only possible interpretation of the artefactual evidence. Feasting halls may have actually been barns and high value items may be present because they are being sold at market.

It seems that much of this assumption rests on documentary evidence that is removed from post-Roman Britain by time and geography. Another major problem in the identification of 'high status' indicators is that they appear to be chosen primarily from already excavated 'high status' sites where that particular designation relies on interpretation or documentary evidence alone.

I would therefore propose a new model for the use of hill forts, substituting the word 'value' for status. Hill forts were re-fortified to protect items of high value, such as fine metalworking supplies and products, cattle and, possibly, people.

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[235] Laing and Longley, *The Mote of Mark*, p. 169.

Conclusion

The title of this dissertation asks what the return to hill forts in the Dark Ages can tell us about post-Roman Britain. I believe that some answers lie in my research questions. Who re-fortified the hill forts? Why did they feel the need to do this? What did they use the hill forts for?

We do not really know who re-fortified Dinas Powys, South Cadbury or the Mote of Mark. Traditional explanations involve British petty kings and local rulers moving from Roman villas to more easily defended hill top sites in the fifth century. These people may have been or may have employed Germanic or Irish settlers or mercenaries. They may have had a hybridised Romano-British/'Celtic' identity that assimilated material culture from eastern Britain. Whoever the re-fortifiers were, they were able to summon labour resources from the surrounding area. This implies a person or *people* of some social standing and influence. I do not think that we can rule out petty kings but we should not overlook the possibility, in south western Britain at least, that the local *civitates* may still have had a role in government in the fifth century.

When perfectly acceptable wooden (or even stone) houses could be built amongst good farm land, at sea level, why should anyone choose to occupy a hill fort? There have been many explanations, involving the 'nasty, brutish and short' version of post-Roman history, environmental catastrophe, famine, plague and civil war. There are also explanations using evolving identities, fond backward glances at a dimly remembered 'heroic' Celtic society and a wish to remain separate from the common people. However, the most likely reason is that the occupiers wished to keep something of high value safe. Re-fortification was a lengthy, expensive business that was not carried out on a whim. Such things of value could have been slaves for export, salt, tin, lead, fine gold and silver jewellery, cattle or, possibly, weapons. It may also have been someone's family.

Leslie Alcock recognised that the hill forts were used in different ways. He saw Dinas Powys as the *llys* of a British aristocrat and South Cadbury as a military fort/administrative centre. The Mote of Mark was regarded by Laing and Longley as the home and workshop of a master craftsman. However, these are not the only possible interpretations of the evidence. Unlike South Cadbury, these smaller forts

were 'new builds' and both showed evidence of metal-working and jewellery-making as a major activity. It is tempting to suggest that the primary purpose for their occupation was to make and sell fine jewellery, in the area of the Irish Sea Province and close to the sea or a navigable waterway. Their fortified status would serve to protect precious supplies from casual attack. However, the real value of the fortifications, facing, as they did, an approach from the sea, was to impress. The huge totem-pole style posts indicated by post-holes at Dinas Powys were also designed to make a statement.

South Cadbury did not need to *look* impressive – it really was. The fort is massive and defended by a vast rampart, gates and wooden walkway. It seems implausible that this was erected, at huge cost, unless it was needed to serve some defensive purpose. It would have been a simple matter to enclose an area the size of, say, Dinas Powys, on the summit of Cadbury Hill, rather than the full 18 acres. A really large area must have been required. This indicates that South Cadbury may have been a *'burh'*, acting as protection for the local people and their animals in times of attack or, as is often the case near the Levels, flooding. The item of high value kept safe at South Cadbury was the people and their animals.

The picture that these conclusions offer is of a western Britain where long distance trade with Byzantium and the Continent continued long after the 'fall of Rome'. Domestic animals were being farmed and some fields tilled. There was no need to hunt game animals for food. There had been foreign wars and civil ones. There were kings but they were not all cruel tyrants. The removal of Roman administration had caused terrible suffering and decimated the population. However, this shortage of labour made each surviving person more valuable.

By 540, in the middle of the period of re-occupation of hill forts, Gildas tells us that there was such peace and plenty that the younger generation were able to take it all for granted. The Roman government had been gone for 130 years and there had been no battles with the 'Saxons' since their grandparents' time. Although Latin was still spoken, a new language was taking root, together with a new material culture.

We do not know why the hill forts were abandoned around the end of the seventh century. If we did, this would tell us much about early medieval Britain. The old trade routes in the Irish Sea Province may have switched to 'Saxon' ports such as Hamwich. It may have been that the postulated tiny kingships based around hill forts

were amalgamated into larger kingdoms. At this time, Bede wrote, in his Ecclesiastical History, that Britain was a veritable paradise, rich in crops and trees, with good pasturage and a climate that grew vines. Whatever conditions or opportunities had prompted the fifth-century Britons to re-fortify the hill forts, they had long ceased to exist.

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