This book is very important for two main reasons. Firstly, in the reviewer’s opinion, it is a near-perfect example of how a straightforward modern excavation monograph should be presented, and secondly the nature of the sites considered are of great significance to our current understanding of Iron Age settlement processes in England. The two settlements considered, Beaumont Leys and Manor Farm, Humberstone, lie 5km apart on either side of the River Soar in the claylands immediately north of Leicester. They were excavated between 2001 and 2007 by University of Leicester Archaeological Services. Beaumont Leys was an open settlement of c.1.25 ha while Manor Farm comprised a complex of large enclosures and linear settlement elements. The latter site formed part of a much larger site, covering at least 13 ha, another part of which, Elms Farm, Humberstone, had been excavated previously by another unit. Key details concerning the results from the Elms Farm site have been incorporated neatly within the current volume. Both sites contained roundhouses, probable rectangular structures, four post structures, pits and stock pens, and were associated closely with major linear boundary ditches. Beaumont Leys dates from the Early Middle Iron Age and the Humberstone sites from the Early Middle Iron Age through to the Late Iron Age in the 1st century BC or early 1st century AD. A clear research agenda for both sites was developed and the strategy included a sensible sampling strategy for excavation of the house ring gullies (such that the results could be compared with those from other recently excavated sites in the east Midlands), and the digital plotting of finds distributions. The site narratives, presented in Chapters 2 and 3, are concise and readable, with very clear line illustrations throughout. On the basis of stratigraphic relationships it was possible to define four successive phases of activity in part of the Manor Farm site.

Chapters 4 to 7 describe the finds from the sites. The pottery and animal bone assemblages are some of the largest collections from Iron Age sites in the east Midlands. The report on the pottery is succinct and systematic, with clearly laid out illustrations. There are also some very useful distribution plots, although it is a shame that these did not indicate the proportions of pottery from the various contexts. Most of the pottery, with granitic inclusions, was made locally, if not on the site itself, although some of the vessels with inclusions of shell may have derived from the Trent valley or even the Yorkshire Wolds, and one was probably traded from the south, perhaps Northamptonshire. These conclusions were confirmed by thin section and chemical analysis and it is very pleasing to see the publication of colour photographs of selected fabrics in thin section. Slight variations in the occurrence of different types of scored surface treatments has not contributed to any close internal phasing of the sites, but one La Tène decorated fragment, similar to such pottery from Northamptonshire or Lincolnshire, dates from the later phases of activity at Manor Farm. Both sites produced relatively large assemblages of querns and rubbers. These were mainly made from the locally obtained Mountsorrel granodiorite or other materials available in the local Boulder Clay; most are saddle querns but some rotary examples derived from the later phases of settlement at Manor Farm. Once again the distribution plots provided are illuminating. Small finds were few, but included some important items: a shale bead and an unworked fragment of shale, a blue glass bead and a potin coin of the type...
made in Kent, probably between the 2nd and mid-1st centuries BC. Some evidence for high-temperature activity suggested some concentrations of iron smithing, which are indicated in a further site plan for the two Humberstone sites.

The report on the animal bones, well illustrated with a series of useful charts, suggests that cattle were the most common species represented at both sites, and in proportions rather greater than those deduced for other local sites such as Enderby. There were however relatively more sheep in one area at Manor Farm. Analysis of charred plant remains, some waterlogged remains and snail shells indicates that evidence for domestic food preparation only at Manor Farm contrasted with evidence for arable and grain storage activities at Elms Farm. Overall the results add to the growing evidence for agricultural expansion in the later Middle Iron Age of the east Midlands. The wide-ranging discussion places the results in a regional context and beyond. One outstanding aspect of the monograph is the presentation of the results from 17 radiocarbon determinations. Chapter 8 combines Bayesian analysis of these dates will all the available stratigraphic and finds evidence in order to show that activity at Beaumont Leys probably ceased before that at Humberstone began and that the Humberstone sites, with later querns, pottery assemblages and the potin coin, continued to the end of the Iron Age, but not into the Romano-British period.

The final discussion, presented in Chapter 9, provides a very thorough treatment of all aspects of the sites and compares key characteristics with those from other sites in Leicestershire and the east Midlands. The stimulating text is illustrated with an extremely useful set of plans which summarise internal site data and comparanda from other regional sites. Thus we have summaries of site phasing and layouts for the three main sites, and pages of comparative plans for sites and hillforts, roundhouses and four post structures, followed by a map displaying the sources of the various exotic raw materials and objects obtained from as far away as Cheshire (salt containers), Dorset (Kimmeridge shale) and Kent (the potin coin). All these topics are thoroughly discussed, and space is also devoted to the careful consideration of the varied evidence for different modes of deposition. This includes the definition of midden areas, and the description of various possible foundation and closing deposits associated with houses and selected boundary locations.

This brings us to the second main strength of the volume, which is a concluding consideration of the possible function or functions of the large aggregated settlement sites described. In size, the settlements contrast strongly with the contemporary single homestead enclosed sites previously known from the region. However, the large sites do appear to be made up from a series of individual modules, each of which may have functioned as an individual homestead. It is not always clear how many such modules may have been in contemporary use. For Humberstone it is suggested that five or six may have been in use at any one time, in comparison with the similar site at Crick, Northamptonshire where, in a peak period, 19 modules may have been concurrent (Woodward and Hughes 2007). Thus the settlements are not ‘villages’ but result from frequent small-scale shifts of multiple activity clusters through time creating ‘a palimpsest of overlapping phases’. The aggregated settlements do not appear to have been high status sites, on the basis of the low numbers of exotic finds recovered, but do demonstrate clear zoning of activities such as metalworking, bone working and the processing of products from arable or pastoral agriculture. This suggests that the potential pooling of labour may have provided cooperative benefits, as well as a means of maintaining the associated land boundaries. The sites may have provided foci for social gatherings such as fairs or markets, and the bias towards cattle remains may be associated with such social functions, or even suggestive of higher site status, with the cattle providing an indicator or wealth. Whatever the detailed function of these fascinating lowland sites may have been, the contrast with the contemporary Middle Iron Age hillfort phenomenon in southern England, the Pennines and points west is profound. It is very fitting that this finely
presented volume has brought this important contrast to the fore, and it should be recommended reading for all those interested in the British Iron Age.

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**References**


*The views expressed in this review are not necessarily those of the Society or the Reviews Editor.*