

8.0 Conclusion and Recommendations

8.1 Achievement of Research Project

This research has successfully revealed new information and insights about the organisation and technology of salt-production in southern Britain and has achieved the aim and objectives defined for this project. This has been achieved by using new approaches, which have enabled the creation and application of new definitions. These two achievements will be summarised below.

8.1.1 New Approaches to the Study of Salt-Production

The importance of deconstructing the archaeological evidence for Iron Age and Roman salt-production in southern Britain by separating the evidence into basic components has been emphasised throughout this research project.

Due to the ambiguity of much of the recorded archaeological evidence, it was important to uncover the true state of the evidence, which involved emphasis on the methods used to investigate, record and interpret these sites. Therefore a holistic, data-responsive, flexible approach was adopted from the beginning, and this was key to gaining a better understanding of the evidence, and provided the basis upon which discussions about the significance of salt-production could be carried out.

This approach has proved successful, and has shown that despite fragmented datasets, much can still be achieved. The main features of this new approach are listed below:

New Approach:

1. Critique of modern perceptions and influence on site recording/interpretation
2. Re-balancing study by placing more emphasis on whole site
3. Holistic and data-responsive
4. Emphasise on technique
5. Emphasis on the individual and small groups

8.1.2 New Insights into Salt-Production in Southern Britain

The holistic approach to the evidence, has meant that new definitions could be applied to the dataset, and important questions about the nature and significance of salt-production could be answered.

Two of the most significant results of this research, has been the development and application of modes and a better understanding about the use of space, that has produced deeper knowledge of the organisation and management of salt-production through time. Resolving chronological issues has also been important in the contextualising of salt-production in Britain as a whole during the Iron Age and Romano-British period.

It is hoped that the creation of the new modes, as well as the provision of basic 'guides' and 'typologies' to those investigating these sites (included in Appendix 10.6) will lead to better identification and more consistent recording of these sites in the future. The creation of a site gazetteer has also provided a new resource to the salt-production sites recorded in the study area.

New Information/Insights:

1. Site Gazetteer
2. New definitions of technology based upon technological choice
3. New chronological overview of salt-production in southern Britain
4. Defining 'use of space' as a tool for the comparison of sites
5. New definition of working areas
6. New definition of site organisation and management (Modes)
7. Regional evaluations and identification of key areas of activity
8. Re-positioning of the significance of salt-production in southern Britain
9. Re-balancing old viewpoints about the significance of salt-production in Britain

8.2 Salt-Production in the Archaeological Record: An Overview and Recommendations for Future Research

Assessing the geographical distribution of sites has clearly shown that not all areas of the study area were exploited heavily for salt.

Iron Age and Romano-British salt-production sites within the study area are most concentrated within Somerset, Dorset, Hampshire and Kent and *therefore there is a greater likelihood of discovering more sites in these areas in the future*. The lack of salt-production sites in Devon and East Sussex shows that not all apparently suitable areas were exploited for salt, even accepting that they may not have been as well-preserved.

The categorising of sites by topography also provided insights into the most likely locations to discover sites, and locations that perhaps best preserve sites. This research showed that *most salt-production sites are found within areas of marsh and reclaimed land (c.54%)*.

This research has shown that the *most basic techniques of archaeological investigation remain the most useful when locating new salt-production sites. Salt-production sites are most likely to be discovered using simple non-invasive techniques (82%)*. This has usually involved targeted field observation which includes walking through a landscape/waterscape and observing visible archaeological features and exposed remains. This is closely followed by more formal recorded fieldwalking surveys which provide a natural progression from simple field observation.

Perhaps surprisingly, unlike most other types of archaeological site, *salt-production sites have not been predominantly revealed by commercial PPG16 investigations (6% of all investigations), but by research and rescue investigations (83%)*. However, this does not mean to say that commercial archaeology does not, and has not had, a significant potential for revealing much more about salt-production in Britain despite somewhat continuing pessimistic opinion from some academic sources. The excavations at Lydd Quarry are testament to this, as is the extensive work of Tom Lane in the commercial sector within Lincolnshire.

Most investigations of salt-production sites to date have been the result of academic research and work by amateur archaeology groups. Therefore it is not surprising, that this commonly involves simple non-invasive techniques, as excavation and formal surveys can be expensive, and also accumulate large quantities of finds and archive material, which requires processing and storing.

In many ways this is a positive result, as this means that sites can be investigated over longer periods, with more time to contextualise the archaeology. However, this can also mean that information and data are harder to access, if not shared with Historic Environment Records, instead creating archives that are buried away in sheds and attics. When accessed, these archives can prove to be extremely helpful and contain more detailed information than some commercial archaeology allows.

These non-invasive techniques are useful for plotting potential new sites. However, confirming that these sites were associated with salt-production is more difficult. Disturbed briquetage still remains the main method of identifying a site associated with salt-production. However, it does not accurately determine whether it is definitely a single 'salt-production site', as it is possible that they represent the remains of debris deposition from another buried working area.

Therefore, site excavation, although invasive and destructive, remains the best method for investigating, contextualising and interpreting a prehistoric-Roman salt-production site.

It is not enough to simply accumulate locations for potential sites. It is their nature, the archaeological remains, the technology employed, the use of space and technique, which provide context and deeper knowledge. This issue was explored by assessing 'site labelling' and the way sites had been previously interpreted and recorded.

This exercise clearly showed that the discrepancies between archaeological remains and their interpretation and categorisation were often linked to modern 'technocentric' perception. There was a variety of regional preferences for terms used to record sites. This emphasises the need for clarity when categorising a site based upon the archaeology. It also highlighted the way in which perception of time, technology and industry can also affect the terminology used to define a site. This is linked to understanding organisation, scale and ultimately modes of production. Many new definitions were used within this research project. However, it is also important to remember that these new definitions require constant scrutiny and updating, according to new approaches and newly

discovered sites. A suggested list of consistent terminologies is provided within the guide in Appendix **10.6**.

Finally, two areas identified as being in particular need of further formal research and investigation are the Central Somerset Levels and the Medway Estuary, Kent. This due to the large number of concentrated and already known sites, and the potential these areas have to produce more sites. This is addressed further shortly.

It is hoped that this research project can be used to fill a previously large gap provided by the general unpopularity of this subject area when compared to other areas. This could perhaps also apply to other production processes that also similarly require more work. Despite the somewhat negative opinion of some in this subject area (see below), there continues to be great research in mainland Europe in this subject area, and hopefully studies in Britain will follow suit in time.

It appears that prehistoric salt production research in Britain is headed into another quiescent period (Kinory, 2012: 25)

It is hoped that the next decade and beyond will continue to reveal significantly more about this research area and integrate it further into discussions of the development of Britain through prehistory and beyond.

8.2.1 Achieving the Research Objectives

In conclusion, this research project has successfully achieved the aim and five objectives detailed in **1.0**. These objectives are listed again below, alongside 'signposts' summarising where in this thesis they were addressed.

1. Ascertaining the nature and extent of the salt-production process

This objective was achieved in two main ways. The first was to evaluate the methods used to investigate the archaeological remains of salt-production and the second was to evaluate the nature and extent of the archaeological remains.

The evaluation of the way in which these sites are investigated and perceived proved a significant part of this research, and showed how sensitive the

archaeological record is to methods and interpretation. Exploring the ways in which the remains have been investigated has provided a guide to the further investigation of sites in the future.

The nature of the salt-production process was fully explored and discussed in Chapter 4.0; with Chapters 5.0-6.0 providing good opportunities to explore regional variations in technique and technology. Chapter 4.0 included a detailed deconstruction of the main stages required for salt-production, and the archaeology associated with each stage. The techniques available to salt producers have been fully explored in 4.4, 4.8 and 6.6.3, and the archaeology of salt-production presented in detail throughout Chapters 3.0-7.0.

Evidence for shared technological trends was particularly significant and this was also explored in Sections 5.3.2, 6.5.4, 6.6 and 7.4. Evidence for shared trends with other UK areas as well as France was explored within 7.4, proving that despite the diversity observed across sites, there are some shared technological choices over time.

Chapters 5.0-7.0 explored the extent and significance of salt-production in southern Britain and beyond. Chapter 7.0 explored the evidence further, by focusing upon evidence for the organisation of salt-production, and applying new modes of production.

2. Evaluating the location of sites within the modern and ancient landscape

The many decisions required in locating a salt-production site were presented in Section 4.1. The current distribution of sites was plotted in Chapter 3.0 (3.1) and the impact of their modern setting was presented. Sites were therefore successfully evaluated in their ancient and modern landscapes.

The location of sites in relation to the organisation of trade networks was further considered in Chapter 7.0.

3. Contextual assessment of the evidence through time

A general contextual assessment of the study area evidence was provided in Chapters 5.0, 6.0 and mainly within Chapter 7.0.

Evidence for chronological trends was first presented in Chapter **3.0 (3.1.2)**, and then explored further for Kent, Somerset and then the study area and beyond, in **7.3**. The development of salt-production across the study area was similar to many other UK areas in that there was a significant increase in the 1st century AD and then a significant decline in sites during the 2nd century AD, which the exception of Somerset, and perhaps Essex (**7.3**).

However, comparison of site quantities was not useful at this stage, given that the use of Site Type as a key definition, has shown that the number of sites alone does not provide a comprehensive understanding of salt-production (**7.2.2**).

4. Regional evaluation of key areas of activity (case studies)

Chapters **5.0** and **6.0** provided a good opportunity to explore the nature and extent of salt-production within specific regions of the study area in further detail (Kent and Somerset respectively). These regions had a distinctive and contrasting 'character' of salt-production and site distribution.

These two chapters also provided the opportunity to explore evidence for technology further, including analysis of both features and briquetage. For Kent, important 'Working Area' formations were identified (**5.3.1**), and in Central Somerset, new exploration into the formation of debris mounds and working areas proved particularly innovative and insightful (**6.6**).

The fieldwork carried out in the Central Somerset Levels proved essential to instigating a meaningful discourse on the significance, nature and chronology of salt-production in this region. The success of this fieldwork firstly, revealed a new site, and also showed that well-established archaeological investigation types could be used successfully. However, a new approach to mound formation, and the sieving of briquetage to look for fragmentation rates directly inferring mound creation and use proved one of the most innovative and useful techniques for understanding these sites.

The use of geophysical survey, alongside coring and small-scale excavation proved invaluable, and it is hoped that further similar investigations can be carried out in the future. The Central Somerset Levels requires a *large environs project for this particularly important, unique and well-preserved salt-production*

landscape, with an approach to investigation that is not only sensitive to the environment and landowners, but also is carried out with prior detailed knowledge of the archaeology of salt-production. It is possible that such a large-scale project could be a forerunner for similar salt-producing environs projects. This approach is completely dependent upon approaching the area from a holistic viewpoint, and as a Mode 4 complex site.

Chapter 5.0 particularly highlighted the richness and potential of the environs within and surrounding the Medway Estuary in Kent as a *salt-production landscape*, similar to the Central Somerset Levels. This area of Kent has only been revealed to be so important due to the particularly hard work of Ian Jackson and his team of volunteers. It is hoped that this already successful and important work can be further supported and enriched in the future, in the design of a large-scale environs project, similar to that suggested for Central Somerset, which in the case of Kent, would also incorporate the study of pottery production.

The Medway Estuary and surrounding environs particularly have the potential to inform on the *nature of shared production landscapes* (primarily salt and pottery production). Mode 5 was defined in order to address this type organisational framework, and it is hoped that further research in this region would help to test the suitability of this definition further.

5. Developing an innovative approach to the study of salt-production

The significance of the innovative approach used for this research project was outlined in 8.1.1 and the resulting insights were summarised in 8.1.2.

This was the most important factor in the completion of this research, and has proved that with a sound background knowledge and a flexible, holistic approach, so much more can be gleaned from even the most apparently limited of datasets.

The evaluation of Kent and Somerset has proved that with particular attention to, large salt-producing landscapes can be revealed and understood, incorporating fieldwork and desk-based research. It is hoped that this research has shown the potential of salt-production sites to inform on 'production landscapes', and is just as important a technology as other production processes.