

Iron Age and Roman Settlement in the Upper Thames Valley

Excavations at Claydon Pike and other sites within the Cotswold Water Park

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Preface

The Oxford Archaeological Unit, (now Oxford Archaeology) was established in 1973 with the intention of developing research opportunities out of what was then conventionally called rescue archaeology. 'Rescue' had some unfortunate connotations – of grabbing archaeology at speed from the teeth of the bulldozers; of recording for recording's sake; of reaction rather than direction. As a result the Unit's founders deliberately left the word out of its title and consciously promoted a problem-orientated research agenda for the Thames Valley and the towns of the region.

In the 1970s massive areas of land were being consumed by urban and suburban expansion in the Oxford region, notably around Abingdon, Bicester, Witney, Didcot and Oxford itself. Gravel extraction was also a major agent of archaeological loss and landscape change. These developments presented opportunities, however. The archaeological agenda was set by a series of surveys, notably of historic towns and the river gravels. *The Upper Thames Valley: an archaeological survey of the river gravels* (Benson and Miles 1974) mapped fifty years of aerial photographic evidence for the first time, revealing the palimpsest of historic landscapes and the sheer extent and variety of archaeology, mostly flattened by centuries of ploughing, but visible in startlingly clear images as cropmarks, and captured by a small number of dedicated aerial photographers. The Upper Thames Survey was also a homage to another work, the RCHM(E)'s *A Matter of Time* (1966), a pioneering attempt to draw attention to the enormous losses from quarrying in our river valleys and the potential of aerial archaeology.

Unfortunately, instead of pursuing this mission to influence environmental conservation and management the Royal Commission retreated into its stately survey volumes. One such, launched in 1976 and composed over the previous decade or more, was *Iron Age and Romano-British Monuments in the Gloucestershire Cotswolds* (RCHM(E) 1976). This was a typical grand volume, produced with care and precision, yet oblivious to the sordid issues of land-use, and the impact on the sites which were so lovingly recorded. No reader then or now would guess that many of these monuments were in the process of being ploughed away or gobbled up by draglines. For since the 1950s most of the upper reaches of the Thames Valley were being transformed into the Cotswold Water Park. The work of RCHM(E) did, however, map the cropmarks which criss-crossed the area, and a follow up to the Benson and Miles survey, *The Upper Thames Valley in Gloucestershire and Wiltshire* by Robert Leech (1977)

graphically illustrated the extent of archaeological loss and the ongoing transformation of the landscape. With the evidence presented with such clarity the case for action was, frankly, easily made. Local authority planners, minerals operators and the Department of Environment and its Inspectorate of Ancient Monuments (as it then was) rapidly accepted the need to respond.

Through the seventies from the aerial evidence, we built up a hierarchy or network of prehistoric and Romano-British settlements in the region, modelling their economic roles and inter-relationships. In particular environmental sampling was systematically built in to investigations of specific site types, ranging from in the Iron Age, for example, mixed farms with an emphasis on arable production such as Ashville (Abingdon) and Gravelly Guy (Stanton Harcourt) to seasonally occupied pastoral settlements in the floodplain such as Farmoor.

It was against this background that our attention was drawn to Claydon Pike between Lechlade and Fairford (Glos). Here one of the largest complexes of cropmarks covered much of 2 square kilometres which in 1979 had received planning permission for gravel extraction. Not surprisingly archaeology had failed even to register on the local planning authority radar. The *Cotswold Water Park* (Cotswold Water Park Joint Committee 1969) had set out future proposals for gravel extraction in the Gloucestershire and Wiltshire Thames Valley. It scanned issues such as hydrology, recreation, transport and wildlife conservation but failed to register any interest in the rich archaeological heritage of the area. So for a decade the destruction continued with no archaeological investigation (in spite of the valiant appeal by Chris Gingell in *A Penny for your Past* (1972).

Attitudes were changing in 1979, not least in the minerals industry itself. The initial evaluation work at Claydon Pike – an early example of what is now a standard procedure in archaeology – was funded by ARC (Southern). This confirmed the late prehistoric and Roman-British dates of the site, and the relatively good state of preservation of both archaeological and biological deposits. The settlement complex ideally fit the research framework of the time: at least three distinct settlement areas of different character linked by trackways and water-courses and with relatively well-defined boundaries. The project offered the opportunity to examine landscape change through time and the relationship between topologically different settlements and their land-use. The intention was to

investigate on a macro-scale, and not to use limited resources to unravel every aspect of micro-stratigraphy. We also targeted specific areas to maximise data gathering, for example intersections of cropmark complexes.

Initially the entire cropmark complex was referred to as Claydon Pike. When expenditure rules necessitated Treasury approval for each new phase of the ongoing project a division was drawn between the east and west site, with the latter renamed as Thornhill Farm (Published in Jennings *et al.* 2004). Conceptually however, Claydon Pike and Thornhill Farm were approached as one coherent project.

While excavations were being undertaken at Claydon Pike itself fieldwork (including systematic metal-detecting) was carried out in surrounding areas. Other sites were also located in advance of gravel extraction. The most significant of these was Neigh Bridge, Somerford Keynes. With the support of the then current job creation schemes funded by the Manpower Services Commission excavations

were undertaken to complement the Claydon Pike investigations. Inevitably given the limited resources these excavations were limited in scope. However, they have, I believe, added substantially to our knowledge of the wider landscape – and thanks to English Heritage support they have been included in this volume.

As with all good projects we learnt from our mistakes at Claydon Pike; and from our ambitious attempts to work on such a scale. Our first on-site computers were in use from 1980 but these did little more than generate lists. However, from this experience came the much more sophisticated approaches used in later projects. Partly because of the problems of data handling we have taken longer to produce this report than, ideally, should have been the case. Nevertheless its completion is an achievement and a record of a significant phase in the archaeology of the Thames Valley.

David Miles November 2005

Summary

The Cotswold Water Park Project is a landscape study centred upon parts of the Upper Thames Valley in the southern and eastern hinterland of the Roman town of Cirencester, within what is now the Cotswold Water Park. The report is based upon four key excavated sites.

Excavations on the 1st gravel terrace at Claydon Pike between 1979 and 1983 revealed two areas of settlement, ranging from the middle Iron Age to the medieval period. The middle Iron Age settlement appears to have shifted across three gravel islands over time. The inhabitants were pastoralists with a subsistence led mixed animal economy. In the early 1st century AD a nucleated settlement was established about 120 m to the south at Longdoles Field, characterised by a series of large and intensively recut enclosures, gullies, pits and substantial boundary ditches. Within the site was identified a number of activity areas associated with domestic habitation, small-scale metalworking, and stock management. It appears to have operated a largely subsistence economy associated with cattle ranching. The early 2nd century saw dramatic changes, with the enclosures, gullies and ditches of the earlier phase being replaced by two large rectangular enclosures, a substantial aisled barn and an aisled house. The economic basis of the site incorporated the management of hay-meadows, probably on a commercial basis to sustain the needs of growing local population centres such as Cirencester. At some point during the early 4th century AD, there appears to have been deliberate and widespread clearing of the site, which was undoubtedly connected with the establishment of a modest masonry footed villa on the site comprising two separate structures, the southern of which incorporated a hypocaust room. A small inhumation cemetery and circular shrine were also part of the wider complex. The final abandonment of the villa at Claydon Pike is unclear, but there is some evidence to indicate activity of some kind until the start of the 5th century. A small group of inhumation burials cut through the villa building, three of which were radiocarbon dated to the middle Saxon

period. Further intermittent activity took place on site in the medieval period.

A series of salvage excavations between 1986 and 1988 at Neigh Bridge, Somerford Keynes revealed part of a late Iron Age and Roman settlement. A late Iron Age/early Roman farmstead was replaced by a system of trackways and ditched enclosures and a large aisled building in the early 2nd century AD. The building was associated with a large quantity and variety of tile, and there are some indications that it may have been at least in part a tile depot. Sculptural fragments of the Capitoline triad point to an official religious presence. No features can be securely dated much beyond the end of the 2nd century AD, although a substantial number of late 3rd and 4th century coins and small finds suggests late Roman activity of some kind.

Three archaeological investigations were undertaken at Whelford Bowmoor in 1983, 1985 and 1988. The earliest features revealed during excavations comprised a regular system of sub-rectangular enclosures, dating to the early/mid 2nd century AD. The enclosures were probably used for livestock management. A rubble building platform and associated 'midden' deposits, date from the later 2nd to early/mid 3rd century AD, when many of the earlier enclosures had gone out of use. There is no evidence for late Roman activity.

Archaeological evaluation and excavation took place at Stubbs Farm, Kempsford from 1991 to 1995, specifically targeting a multi-ditched circular and rectangular enclosure known from cropmark evidence. The two enclosures would seem to relate to separate phases of activity, with the circular feature having a very tentative Iron Age/early Roman date. The rectangular enclosure clearly belongs to a later phase of activity, in the 2nd and 3rd centuries AD. The overall character of this phase is indicative of a low status rural farmstead operating a largely pastoral economic regime amidst the grasslands of the lower gravel terrace and floodplain. The settlement appears to have gone out of use by the second half of the 3rd century AD.

Zusammenfassung

Das Cotswold Water Park Project ist ein Landschaftsforschungsprojekt, das sich auf jene Teile des oberen Themse Tals im südlichen und östlichen Hinterland der römischen Stadt Cirencester konzentriert, die heute den Cotswold Water Park bilden. Der vorliegende Bericht beruht auf den vier wichtigsten Grabungsstellen.

Zwischen 1979 und 1983 brachten Ausgrabungen auf der ersten Schotterterrasse in Claydon Pike zwei Siedlungsabschnitte zutage, welche von der mittleren Eisenzeit bis ins Mittelalter datieren. Die Siedlung der mittleren Eisenzeit scheint sich im Laufe der Zeit über drei Schotterinseln verlagert zu haben. Die Bewohner waren Hirten mit einer auf den eigenen Unterhalt ausgerichteten gemischten Tierhaltung. Im 1. Jh. n. Chr. entstand etwa 120 m südlich davon, in Longdoles Field, ein Siedlungskern, der durch eine Reihe großer und intensiv instand gehaltenen Einfriedungen, Rinnen, Gruben und ausgeprägten Grenzgräben charakterisiert ist. Innerhalb dieser Fundstelle wurde eine Reihe von häuslichen Arbeitsbereichen festgestellt und in geringem Umfang Metallverarbeitung und Vorratshaltung. Es scheint vor allem Subsistenzwirtschaft, verbunden mit Viehhaltung, betrieben worden zu sein. Im frühen 2. Jh. fanden drastische Änderungen statt. Die Einfriedungen, Rinnen und Gräben der früheren Phase wurden durch zwei große rechteckige Einfriedungen, einen beachtlichen mehrschiffigen Stall und ein mehrschiffiges Haus ersetzt. Die wirtschaftliche Grundlage der Anlage bildete unter anderem die Unterhaltung von Heuwiesen, wahrscheinlich auf einer kommerziellen Basis, um die Bedürfnisse der wachsenden lokalen Bevölkerung von Zentren wie Cirencester zu befriedigen. Im Verlauf des frühen 4. Jh. n. Chr. scheint eine absichtliche, breit angelegte Bereinigung der Anlage stattgefunden zu haben, die zweifelsohne in Verbindung mit der Errichtung einer bescheidenen Villa mit gemauerten Fundamenten stand. Die Villa bestand aus zwei separaten Teilen, der südlichere davon hatte einen mit Hypocausten versehenen Raum. Ein Grabgruppe mit Körpergräbern und ein kreisförmiger Schrein waren ebenfalls Teil der Anlage. Zu welchem Zeitpunkt die Villa in Claydon Pike letztendlich aufgegeben wurde ist unklar, aber die Befunde deuten auf nicht näher bestimmbar Aktivitäten bis in den Beginn des 5. Jh. n. Chr. Die Villa wird von einer kleinen Körpergräbergruppe geschnitten, von der drei Gräber in die mittlere sächsische Periode

C14-datiert wurden. Eine weitere sporadische Nutzung der Fundstelle fand im Mittelalter statt.

Eine Reihe von Rettungsgrabungen zwischen 1986 und 1988 in Somerford Keynes Neigh Bridge brachte Teile einer späteisenzeitlichen und römischen Siedlung zutage. Ein späteisenzeitlicher Hof wurde im frühen 2. Jh. n. Chr. durch ein System von Wegen, Gräben und ein großes mehrschiffiges Gebäude ersetzt. Im Gebäude kam eine große Menge und Typenvielfalt von Dachziegeln zum Vorschein, und es gibt Hinweise darauf dass es sich dabei, zumindest teilweise, um ein Depot für Dachziegel handelt. Statuenfragmente der Kapitولينischen Trias deuten auf eine Präsenz der römischen Staatsreligion hin. Keine der Strukturen kann sicher über das Ende des 2. Jh. n. Chr. hinaus datiert werden, aber eine bemerkenswerte Anzahl an Münzen aus dem 3. und 4. Jh. n. Chr. lässt auf eine unbestimmte Weiternutzung in spätrömischer Zeit schließen.

Drei archäologische Untersuchungen fanden 1983, 1985 und 1988 in Whelford Bowmoor statt. Die frühesten Befunde stellen ein regelmäßiges System von annähernd rechtwinkligen Einfriedungen dar, die in das frühe bis mittlere 2. Jh. n. Chr. datieren. Die Einfriedungen wurden wahrscheinlich zur Viehhaltung genutzt. Eine Gebäudeplattform aus Bruchstein und damit verbundene Abfallschichten datieren in das späte 2. und frühe/mittlere 3. Jh. n. Chr., d.h. in eine Zeit als viele der früheren Einfriedungen nicht mehr genutzt wurden. Es gibt keinen Nachweis für eine spätrömische Nutzung.

Die archäologische Evaluierung und die Ausgrabungen in Stubbs Farm fanden von 1991 bis 1995 statt und zielten speziell auf eine mehrfache kreisförmige und eine mehrfache rechteckige Grabenanlage ab, die bereits durch Bewuchsmerkmale bekannt war. Die zwei Anlagen beziehen sich auf zwei unterschiedliche Nutzungsphasen. Die kreisförmige Anlage kann mit Vorhalten in die Eisenzeit/frühe Römerzeit datiert werden, während die rechteckige Anlage eindeutig zu einer späteren Nutzungsphase, im 2. und 3. Jh. n. Chr. gehört. Der allgemeine Charakter dieser Phase weist auf einen ländlichen Hof von niederem Status, der hauptsächlich Viehwirtschaft im Grasland der unteren Schotterterrasse und im Auegebiet unterhielt. Die Siedlung scheint in der zweiten Hälfte des 3. Jh. n. Chr. aufgelassen worden zu sein.

Résumé

Le projet de Cotswold Water Park est une étude de paysage centrée sur des parties de la vallée supérieure de la Tamise dans l'arrière-pays sud et est de la ville romaine de Cirencester, au sein de ce qui constitue maintenant le Cotswold Water Park. Le rapport se base sur la fouille de quatre sites majeurs.

Les fouilles sur la première terrasse de gravier à Claydon Pike entre 1979 et 1983 ont révélé deux zones de site d'habitation, dont la datation s'échelonne depuis l'âge du Fer moyen à la période médiévale. Le site d'habitat de l'âge du Fer moyen semble s'être déplacé à travers les trois îles de gravier au cours du temps. Les habitants pratiquaient un système de pastoralisme avec une économie mixte de subsistance dominée par la production animale. Vers le début du I^{er} siècle ap. J.-C., un site d'habitats groupés fut établi quelques 120 m au sud de Longdoles Field, qui se caractérisait par une série de larges enceintes s'entrecoupant les unes avec les autres, des petits fossés, des fosses et des fossés substantiels de délimitation. Un certain nombre de zones d'activités furent identifiées au sein du site, associées en particulier avec les habitats domestiques, le travail du métal sur une échelle réduite et la gestion du bétail. Il semble qu'il ait opéré largement une économie de subsistance associée avec l'élevage de bovins. Le début du II^{ème} siècle ap. J.-C. vit des changements dramatiques avec le remplacement des enceintes et fossés de la phase la plus ancienne par deux larges enceintes rectangulaires, une grange à nef substantielle et une maison à nef. La base économique du site inclut la gestion de prairies de foin, qui s'inscrit probablement dans un contexte commercial destiné à subvenir aux besoins des centres de populations locales en plein essor, tel que Cirencester. Au cours du début du IV^{ème} siècle ap. J.-C., le site semble avoir été délibérément déblayé de manière extensive, ce qui fut sans nul doute associé à l'établissement d'une modeste villa sur fondation de maçonnerie. Celle-ci comprenait deux structures distinctes, dont celle du sud qui incorporait une pièce à hypocauste. Une petite nécropole à inhumation ainsi qu'un sanctuaire circulaire faisaient également parti du complexe dans son ensemble. L'abandon final de la villa à Claydon Pike est incertain, mais il existe des traces d'activité jusqu'au début du V^{ème} siècle. Un petit groupe de sépultures à inhumation recouvrait le bâtiment de la villa. Trois d'entre elles furent datées par radiocarbone au milieu de la période saxonne. D'autres activités intermittentes eurent lieu sur le site au cours de la période médiévale.

Une série de fouilles de sauvetage, conduites entre 1986 et 1988, à Somerford Keynes Neigh Bridge, ont révélé partie d'un site habitat de la fin de l'âge du Fer et de l'époque romaine. Une ferme datée de la fin de l'âge du Fer/début de l'époque romaine fut remplacée par un système de chemins et d'enceintes à fossés ainsi que par un large bâtiment à nef vers le début du II^{ème} ap. J.-C. siècle. Le bâtiment était associé à une quantité importante et variée de tuiles, et d'autres indices semblent indiquer qu'il s'agissait au moins en partie d'un dépôt de tuiles. Des fragments sculptés de la triade capitolienne indiquent une présence religieuse officielle. Aucun fait archéologique ne put être daté de manière sûre au delà de la fin du II^{ème} siècle, bien qu'un nombre important de pièces de monnaie et d'autres mobiliers isolés datés de la fin du III^{ème} et IV^{ème} siècles suggèrent une activité de quelque sorte vers la fin de l'époque romaine.

Trois fouilles archéologiques furent entreprises à Whelford Bowmoor, en 1983, en 1985 et en 1988. Les faits archéologiques plus anciens révélés au cours des fouilles comprenaient un système régulier d'enceintes pseudo-rectangulaires et daté du début ou du milieu du II^{ème} siècle ap. J.-C. Les enceintes étaient probablement utilisées pour la gestion du bétail. Une plate-forme de bâtiment en gravats associée à des dépôts d'ordures est datée de la fin du II^{ème} au début ou milieu du III^{ème} siècles ap. J.-C., alors que nombre des enceintes d'époque plus précoce étaient tombées à l'abandon. Aucune trace d'activités de la fin de l'époque romaine ne fut mise en évidence.

Des opérations de diagnostic et de fouilles eurent lieu à Stubbs Farm entre 1991 et 1995, qui ciblaient en particulier deux enceintes à fossés multiples, une de forme circulaire et une rectangulaire, connues à partir d'indices phytographiques. Les deux enceintes semblent être rattachées à des phases distinctes d'activités. L'enceinte circulaire fut datée très approximativement à l'âge du Fer ou au début de l'époque romaine. L'enceinte rectangulaire appartient de manière certaine à une phase d'activité plus tardive, vers les II^{ème} ou III^{ème} siècles ap. J.-C. Les caractéristiques générales attachées à cette phase indiquent une ferme rurale de bas statut qui fonctionnait largement à partir d'un régime économique pastoral parmi les prairies de la terrasse de gravier inférieure et de la plaine d'inondation. Le site d'habitat semble avoir été abandonné vers la seconde moitié du III^{ème} siècle.

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David Miles

CD-Rom

The CD-ROM accompanying this volume contains detailed archive reports on the stratigraphy, finds and environmental evidence for the four key Cotswold Water Park sites and the survey sites. Digital Section 1 is an introduction to the Project. Digital sections 2 to 4 contain archive reports for Claydon Pike, along with a comprehensive set of illustrations and full context and finds tables for this site. The remaining sections (5 to 8) contain the archive reports and supporting material for the

other Cotswold Water Park sites, including Kempsford, Multi-Agg Quarry. The latter site has been included in the digital volume only.

All of the data within the CD is intended to support the interpretations and discussions outlined within this print volume. However, both sections are designed to be consulted independently of each other.

A guide to the CD-ROM may be found within section 1 and its contents are listed below.

The volume is accompanied by a CD-Rom, 'The Eagle In The Landscape', which contains the digital archive report for the key Cotswold Water Park sites. These web-based digital archives have been developed to enable readers to have access to more data than would be possible in a traditional publication.

A full version of this CD is available at the Archaeology Data Service website <http://ads.ahds.ac.uk> and Oxford Archaeology's website thehumanjourney.net.

A full version of this book available as a pdf is also available at thehumanjourney.net

Instructions for running the CD:

1. Insert the CD-Rom in your CD Drive
2. If Autoplay is enabled then the CD will start.

Otherwise double-click on the CD-Rom Drive letter in My Computer or select Autoplay from the right click pop-up menu.

System requirements:

The website is designed to run on a minimum screen resolution of 800 by 600 pixels using a suitable web browser

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