

Chris Hayden, Rob Early, Edward Biddulph, Paul Booth, Anne Dodd, Alex Smith, Granville Laws and Ken Welsh, *Horcott Quarry, Fairford and Arkell's Land, Kempsford: Prehistoric, Roman and Anglo-Saxon settlement and burial in the Upper Thames Valley in Gloucestershire* Thames Valley Landscapes Monograph 40 (Oxford, Oxford Archaeology 2017). xxx + 552pp., 259 figs., 134 tabs. Hardback, £25.00 [ISBN: 9781905905386].

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This volume in which Oxford Archaeology reports on its excavations at Horcott Quarry, Fairford and Arkell's Land, Kempsford is the latest in a series of Thames Valley Landscape Monographs through which our understanding of the archaeology of the Thames Valley has been transformed beyond recognition. It is a magnificent volume; produced to the highest standards on high quality paper, full of rich empirical detail, lavish illustration and photographs, detailed scientific analyses and concise, scholarly, highly informed and fascinating discussion. It measures approximately 30cm by 21cm and weighs enough to stun a badger! Few will therefore be slipping it into their hand luggage in anticipation of devouring it on the beach during the course of their summer holidays, and partly for this reason, I doubt that many, apart from reviewers and editors, will ever sit down and read the book from cover to cover. I think that this is a shame as it contains important and interesting work. Some will no doubt object that archaeological monographs are meant as repositories of information, not narrative entertainments and others will counter that the dissemination and circulation of empirical and scientific information is (partly) what the Internet is for. This reviewer falls into the latter camp and this point (of which more later) constitutes my only really substantive criticism of the volume. Typographic errors are present, as is inevitable in a work of this scale and if that sort of thing bothers you, then you will probably have chewed all the way through the stem of your tobacco pipe by the time you have reached the end of the volume. However, I don't propose to say any more about them in this review. Apart from a brief general introduction (Chapter 1), which situates the two sites geographically and topographically and summarises the archaeological background of the Upper Thames Valley the volume is really two books, one on the excavations at Horcott Quarry and the other on those at Arkell's Land. Although geographically close, they are not contiguous sites and the remainder of this review will therefore consider them separately, starting with Horcott.

The excavations at Horcott Quarry (by Hayden, Booth, Dodd, Smith, Laws and Welsh) were carried out in advance of gravel quarrying in 2007 and 2008, just to the south of Fairford and to the west of the River Coln on the Second Gravel Terrace of the Thames. The excavation area was very extensive measuring over 100m both east to west and north to south, with a palaeochannel running the length of its eastern edge that appears to have silted up by the Middle

Iron Age, or Roman period at the latest. The sheer size of the excavations, as is by now to be expected on Upper Thames Valley gravel quarry sites, have therefore afforded the investigation of a palimpsest of settlement and burial stretching from the early Mesolithic period until the 7th or 8th centuries AD. Mesolithic activity consisted largely of a discrete flint scatter, preserved in a natural hollow in the north-west corner of the site, although a low density background scatter of residual Mesolithic flints across the remainder of the site hints at wider and longer term occupation. Two Late Neolithic pits near to the palaeochannel and containing grooved ware, show that occupation continued in the Neolithic period and a further three pits and a ditch, also close to the eastern limit of the excavation area represent the early Bronze Age/Beaker period. The palaeochannel, which is argued to represent an open stream/channel at this time, continued to form a focus for activity in the Middle Bronze Age, when a burnt mound and a waterhole were constructed in its vicinity. Further to the west an inhumation burial and a small group of cremation burials also date to this period. The earliest evidence for permanent settlement dates to the early Iron Age period and is represented by an enormous swathe of postholes, which occupied much of the centre of the site and appear to have been fiendishly difficult both to interpret and to separate from early Anglo-Saxon settlement activity. In simple terms the settlement consisted of discrete groups of post-built roundhouses with the palaeochannel to their east and two large swathes of four-post structures largely to west of the houses, although with a few scatters of four-posters between and among the houses. By the Middle Iron Age the settlement had shrunk to a small group of enclosures and pits, with two associated inhumation burials in the south-eastern corner of the excavations. Roman settlement probably started after AD100 and continued until the end of the 3rd century at least, with Roman activity again comprising settlement, including a stone-footed building, and burial including an extensive 3rd to 4th century inhumation cemetery within an enclosure on the eastern side of the site. In addition there were groups of enclosures and a trackway of probable agricultural function. Early Anglo-Saxon activity largely dating to the fifth and sixth centuries, consisted at a minimum of 34 sunken-featured buildings distributed across the centre of the excavation, a post-built hall and two corn driers, although there may have been many more post-built halls (three possible examples are identified), which proved impossible to disentangle from the earlier early Iron Age settlement. A discrete group of burials within the "late Roman" cemetery enclosure, the northern burials, were dated by radiocarbon to the 5th to 7th centuries and were therefore contemporary with this phase of settlement, although their burial rites seem continuous with those of the late Roman group.

The excavations at Horcott are published with such a wealth of detail that it is really impossible for a review to do them justice. The following will therefore be restricted to specific points and disagreements, without any pretence of covering everything in the text. Chapter 2 consists of nicely concise introduction to the project recapping the location, geology and topography of the site and detailing the history and methodology of the excavation. A more detailed location map showing the relationship of the site to its immediate landscape would have been welcome here, although aerial photographs of the site are splendid. Chapter 3 deals with chronology, particularly the very extensive radiocarbon dating programme and especially the radiocarbon dating of the Roman and early medieval burials. The chapter aims to establish the chronology of the major groups of burials, the chronology of the settlement evidence and the chronology of the environmental evidence. Bayesian statistical modelling is used to refine the chronology of the radiocarbon dates and the chapter therefore contains a clear and succinct summary of the stratigraphic sequence, which is very helpful in coming to terms with the volume as a whole. A figure (Fig. 3.1) near the beginning of the chapter is very useful for understanding the sequence, but lacks some important labels, for example the 'western burials' and the Beaker pits and ditch. One major reservation about the Bayesian modelling deserves comment, as the authors themselves flag it up. The model in question, described as speculative in the text, refines the chronology of the Roman and Anglo-Saxon burials and the authors state that "Information derived from the (radiocarbon) dates is being used to constrain the dates themselves, and the model is thus methodologically flawed." The authors go on to state that the model is only a hypothetical demonstration of what the date ranges of the burial groups would be like, if they could have been shown to form a stratigraphic sequence. This reviewer is not qualified to comment on Bayesian modelling, however, the absence of a secure stratigraphic sequence makes the model highly challenging by the authors own admission, and it would perhaps therefore have been best left out.

Chapter 4 deals with the Mesolithic, Late Neolithic and Bronze Age activity outlined above and this is described in good balanced detail, with excellent illustrations in both plan and section and good photographs. Some confusion over the relationship of the Beaker activity and Bronze Age burnt mounds to the palaeochannel is, however, created by a seeming contradiction between the illustrations and the text. Fig. 4.1 shows the western edge of the palaeochannel to the west of the Bronze Age features and on Fig 4.9 they are shown overlying the palaeochannel fill within a Roman enclosure constructed after the palaeochannel had silted up. Meanwhile the text suggests that the channel was still active in the Bronze Age, not silting up until the Middle Iron Age at the earliest. Chapter 5 deals with the Iron Age settlement, mostly focusing on the

earlier Iron Age and is a difficult chapter to read, no doubt reflecting the process of untangling the early Iron Age sequence itself. The text is again well illustrated and contains an interesting attempt to refine the chronological development of the settlement into a sequence of discrete house clusters. However, it also contains some very in-depth statistical analyses of features. For example, the circumference of post-rings in relation to the mean width of postholes, which could have been put online or spun off into separate papers, and the whole chapter would perhaps have benefitted from fiercer editing. Chapters 6 and 7 describe the Roman settlement and cemetery and are models of clarity, again well illustrated, with plans sections and photographs and a comprehensive grave catalogue, with several good photographs. Chapters 8 and 9 deal with the Anglo-Saxon settlement and cemetery, again in lavish detail and with admirable clarity, including detailed plans and sections of each sunken-featured building and another comprehensive grave catalogue.

Chapter 10 contains what are within the context of the volume succinct finds reports on all the major categories of finds, including worked flint, pottery, small finds, coins, fired clay, and ceramic and stone building material. These are nicely illustrated, with a combination of extensive line drawings and high quality photographs and include all the appropriate quantified data and comprehensive discussions. Chapter 11 constitutes a brisk report on the human remains, including comprehensive analysis of pathologies and an interesting analysis of evidence for decapitation. It would have been nice if it could have been provided with more of a discussion. Chapter 12 incorporating reports on animal bone, charred and waterlogged plant remains and wood charcoal constitutes an analysis of environmental and economic evidence and is like the finds chapter comprehensive and contains all of the appropriate quantified data, along with good contextualising discussions of the material. As with all of the chapters dealing with finds and biological evidence it would have been good if more space could have been found for it, perhaps at the expense of some of the very long stratigraphic descriptions and statistical analyses earlier in the volume.

Chapter 13 is the final chapter dealing with the Horcott Quarry excavations and comprises an overall discussion. This is by far the most interesting chapter, in which the wide-ranging knowledge and impressive scholarship of the authors is finally allowed to come to the fore. My only quibble is that it could have done with a figure recapping the site plan and also placing Horcott Quarry into the context of all the other sites discussed in the text; as it is the poor reader has to turn back through nearly 400 pages of text for orientation. The discussion of the prehistoric period, presumably by Hayden raises some interesting and novel interpretations of the wider Upper Thames Valley sequence, including the idea of a 'dispersed taskscape' in the

Middle Bronze Age with a change from a shifting dispersed settlement pattern in the Middle Bronze Age, to a stable expanding pattern in the Early Iron Age. A discussion of the nature of crop storage based on the evidence of the four-post structures and the idea of 'staple finance' based upon grain stores as the main driver in the apparent increasing stability of settlement are fascinating. However, perhaps too much space is given to the earlier prehistoric elements, given their relative significance, particularly the eight pages spent discussing eight Neolithic and Early Bronze Age pits, and the nature of Neolithic deposition practices more generally, which could probably have been spun off into a separate paper. The discussions of the Roman settlement and cemetery by Booth and Smith respectively are, like the respective descriptive chapters, very clear and put the evidence from Horcott Quarry into context through very comprehensive, but somehow lightly expressed discussions of the wider Upper Thames sequence, while integrating and contextualising the specialist reports. Booth's discussion of the Late Roman cemetery, its wider context and the details of the burial rites and landscape setting is particularly subtle and interesting whilst also very full of detail. Similarly Dodd's discussion of the Anglo-Saxon settlement and cemetery is comprehensive and contextualises the evidence particularly well in the context of the Upper Thames. Her discussion of the relationship between the 5th and 6th century settlement and "Late Roman" cemetery at Horcott in the context of the contemporary "Anglo-Saxon" cemetery destroyed in the 19th century at West End Gardens 1km to the north is particularly interesting.

The excavations at Arkell's Land (by Early, Biddulph and Welsh) were carried out again in advance of gravel extraction, this time over a longer period, between 2006 and 2011, within the eastern part of the Cotswold Water Park, immediately to the south of the already extensively excavated sites at Claydon Pike, Thornhill Farm and Coln Gravel. The excavations were again very extensive, this time occupying the first terrace of the Thames, due East of the site at Horcott Quarry and about 3.5km south-east of Fairford. The archaeology revealed was in this case more chronologically restricted, representing settlement, field systems and a major trackway dating to the Roman period, with only a slightly unusual Middle to Late Iron Age cremation burial representing activity before this date, and no evidence for substantive post-Roman activity, possibly because of increasingly damp conditions on the Thames floodplain. The earliest activity, apart from the cremation, comprised an Early Roman boundary ditch and curvilinear ditch, perhaps representing an enclosure. There were also a number of small annular 'stack ring' ditches, which could also have been early Roman in date. In the middle Roman period there was an extensive settlement enclosure on one side of a substantial trackway, with enclosed fields on the other side, and at the southern end of the trackway a strange trapezoidal

palisaded and ditched enclosure, interpreted as a stock enclosure of some kind. By the late Roman period the extent of occupation had declined and the site was dominated by a very large double ditched enclosure, part of which was also excavated at Coln Gravel, immediately to the north.

The major value of the excavations at Arkell's land lies in their contribution to our wider understanding of the Roman landscape of the Cotswold Water Park as whole and this is brought out in the excellent concise discussion, complete with contextualising illustrations, which makes clear the physical connections between this site and those at Claydon Pike, Thornhill Farm and Coln Gravel to its north. One thing that could perhaps have been brought out more is the possible relationship between the Roman trackways, and boundaries in the modern landscape, hinted at in the larger scale illustrations. In particular the kinks in the trackways leading south from Claydon Pike and Thornhill Farm and that in the modern road from Whelford Bowmoor to the A417 to their west. The Arkell's Land report is like that on Horcott Quarry extremely well produced, with clear high quality descriptions, illustrations (this time in black and white) and photographs, comprehensive finds and environmental reports and informed discussion.

A brief Google search reveals that none of the material discussed above can be found online, including on the Archaeology Data Service (ADS) website and this brings me back to my only substantive criticism stated in the first paragraph of this review. The wonderful wealth of knowledge contained in this volume demands to be disseminated to researchers and the wider public in a way that both facilitates wider understanding and the easy use of the data for further research. Numerous elements of this volume, for example, fig. 5.3 titled "summary of attributes of four-post structures" (a double page spread) would have a more fruitful existence as csv files online, where they would be easily incorporated into research databases and free up space in the text for more of the excellent discussion. However, this is a quibble, although in my opinion an important one and the volume as a whole is tremendous, and at £25 a bargain.

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