

Simon Cass, Sarah Coles, Stephen Hammond, Tim Havard, Erlend Hindmarch, James Lewis, Jennifer Lowe, James McNicoll-Norbury, Danielle Milbank, David Platt, Steve Preston and Andy Taylor, *Roman and Post-Medieval landscape features at Manor Farm, Kempsford, Gloucestershire*, Thames Valley Archaeological Services Occasional Paper 18 (Reading, TVAS 2017). vii + 107pp., 46 figs., 18 pl., 4 tabs., 6 charts. Cardcovers, £7.00 [ISBN: 9781911228158]. **Reviewed 05.2018**

This volume, which very much does what it says on the tin, reports on the Thames Valley Archaeological Services and Cotswold Archaeology excavations at Manor Farm, Kempsford. The excavations were undertaken ‘over many years’ presumably in the early 21st century (the volume does not say), in advance of gravel extraction to the north-west of Kempsford Village, between the Rivers Thames and Coln, on the first (floodplain) terrace of the Thames. The volume is produced in A4 format and is pleasingly slight, with a functional but not unpleasant cover depicting a nice colour reproduction of part of Christopher Saxton’s map of Gloucestershire from 1577. The text is printed on decent quality paper and contains abundant colour photographs and many illustrations mostly in black and white, with occasional elements of colour. The illustrations are often crowded with context labels and many could have done with better keys, but they do the job of representing the archaeology and the fact that many of them show the distribution of finds is useful.

The area of gravel quarrying that the excavations were designed to mitigate was very large, extending over approximately 48 hectares from the north-eastern outskirts of Kempsford Village towards the River Coln. The archaeology revealed was almost exclusively Roman and post-medieval date and related to the agricultural use of the landscape, comprising trackways, field-boundaries, hedge-lines and drainage ditches. Very little in the way of material culture was recovered and almost no environmental remains, with the exception of a large collection of mollusc shells probably dating to the post-medieval period. Consequently the excavated features were very difficult to date and this has understandably turned the experience of phasing the site into a very frustrating one, a fact which sometimes results in a rather negative take on the results. Typographic errors are plentiful and the frustrations of trying to untangle groups of poorly dated field boundaries seem, sometimes to have influenced the structure of the writing, which is difficult to follow in places.

Chapter 1 presents a brief but competent introduction to the history of the excavations, topography, geology and archaeological background of the area, along with the excavation methodology and an outline of the phasing. Four decent maps setting the site in its local context could really have done with more comprehensive keys. Chapter 2 describes the results of excavations in the south-western area of the site including the work carried out by Cotswold Archaeology. A possible Iron Age enclosure ditch, two phases of Roman field system, a post-medieval field system and a probably Roman inhumation burial were excavated, with the latest Roman phase incorporating part of a trackway that seems to have run the length of the site from south-west to north east. Chapter 3 describes the results of the excavations in the north-western part of the quarry where two more, possibly Iron Age, boundary ditches were excavated along with more of the post-medieval field system described in chapter 2; which here included a curious lattice work arrangement of ditches interpreted as part of a water meadow.

Chapters 4 and 5 deal with the results of excavations in the north-eastern half of the site, which seems to have produced a less dense arrangement of features. Further possibly Iron Age ditches in these areas perhaps influenced the alignment of a system of small Roman enclosures and paddocks on the south-eastern limit of the excavation. However, later post-medieval field boundaries seem to have followed a largely different layout. Chapter 6 describes the excavation of two relatively small areas lying between the southern and northern halves of the quarry at the south-western end, which had been used to store topsoil during earlier phases of excavation. Here elements of the post-medieval field systems, a modern well and stone lined features interpreted as silos were revealed. Chapter 7 incorporates necessarily brief but high quality reports on the finds and environmental remains, including pottery, lithics, metalwork, human remains and the extensive assemblage of molluscs. Finally Chapter 8 provides a brief discussion, which usefully provides phase plans and attempts to set the results of the excavations in the wider, extensively excavated landscape.

A brief Google search demonstrates that a PDF of the report is available online (on the TVAS website) and this means that the inclusion of a context register and pottery and brick and tile catalogues at the back of the volume are rendered an important resource, as they can be downloaded, scanned and incorporated into research databases by researchers and the interested public. This is to be applauded, although it is a shame that the volume is apparently not yet on the Archaeology Data Service website, where csv files of the data tables would be even more useful. Overall this volume represents a worthy and useful contribution to the literature on the archaeology of the Upper Thames Valley.

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