

Thornhill Farm, Fairford, Gloucestershire

An Iron Age and Roman pastoral site in the Upper Thames Valley

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Summary

Between 1979 and 1989 the Oxford Archaeological Unit (now Oxford Archaeology) undertook extensive excavations of a late prehistoric and Roman cropmark complex at Claydon Pike and Thornhill Farm, Fairford, Gloucestershire. The excavation of the western element of the complex, Thornhill Farm, forms the subject of this report. The excavations were implemented with the co-operation of the Amey Roadstone Corporation (ARC) and formed part of a co-ordinated archaeological response to the threat posed by gravel extraction during the creation of the Cotswold Water Park. The work at Thornhill Farm involved the excavation of numerous evaluation trenches, four open area excavations and extensive salvage operations over a total area of approximately 40.5 ha.

The excavations recovered an unusually complete plan of a highly specialised agricultural unit consisting of a dense palimpsest of paddocks and larger enclosures, which appear to have been designed for the effective control and management

of livestock. Environmental evidence confirmed that the immediate landscape was characterised by rough pasture which was grazed by large herbivores including horses and cattle. Ceramic evidence suggests that the earliest enclosures were dug during the middle Iron Age, and that the site continued to develop and be remodelled along similar lines through to the early Roman period.

Evidence for human occupation was recovered in the form of relatively large amounts of domestic waste consisting mainly of pottery, burnt limestone and animal bone. Although a number of roundhouses were revealed, the precise spatial organisation of the settlement proved difficult to discern, largely because of the relatively high degree of truncation and the ephemeral nature of the structural remains.

The site was radically reorganised during the early 2nd century AD when the tightly knit group of paddocks and enclosures which had characterised earlier periods was replaced by a series of newly constructed trackways.

Zusammenfassung

Zwischen 1979 und 1989 unternahm die Oxford Archaeological Unit (nun Oxford Archaeology) ausgedehnte Grabungen eines durch Bewuchsmerkmale gekennzeichneten spätvorgeschichtlichen und römischen Komplexes bei Claydon Pike und Thornhill Farm, Fairford, Gloucestershire. Der vorliegende Bericht befasst sich mit der Ausgrabung an der Thornhill Farm, dem westlichen Teil des Gesamtkomplexes. Die in Zusammenarbeit mit der Amey Roadstone Corporation (ARC) durchgeführten Grabungen waren Teil einer koordinierten archäologischen Reaktion auf die Bedrohung der Bodendenkmäler durch die Kiesgewinnung im Rahmen des Aufbaus des Cotswold Water Park. Bei der Thornhill Farm wurden zahlreiche Suchschnitte angelegt und vier Flächengrabungen sowie umfangreiche Rettungsgrabungen in einem Gesamtgebiet von rund 40,5 ha durchgeführt.

Die Grabungen förderten einen ungewöhnlich vollständigen Grundriss einer hochspezialisierten landwirtschaftlichen Anlage zutage, die aus einem dichten Palimpsest aus Koppeln und größeren Einhegungen bestand, die offenbar der effektiven

Kontrolle und Verwaltung des Viehbestandes dienten. Umweltfunde bestätigten, dass die unmittelbar angrenzende Landschaft durch Rauweiden gekennzeichnet war, auf denen große Pflanzenfresser grasten, darunter Pferde und Rinder. Aus den Keramikfunden lässt sich schließen, dass die frühesten Einhegungen aus der mittleren Eisenzeit stammen und dass die Stätte bis in die frühromische Zeit hinein am Vorhandenen orientiert weiterentwickelt und umgestaltet wurde.

Die menschliche Besiedlung wurde durch relativ umfangreiche Hausabfälle belegt, die hauptsächlich aus Töpferware, gebranntem Kalk und Tierknochen bestanden. Obwohl etliche Rundhäuser gefunden wurden, war es schwierig, die genaue räumliche Anordnung der Siedlung zu bestimmen, und zwar hauptsächlich wegen des relativ hohen Zerstörungsgrads und der kurzlebigen Natur der baulichen Überreste.

Die Anlage wurde im frühen 2. Jh. n. Chr. radikal umstrukturiert, als die engmaschige Gruppe von Koppeln und Einhegungen aus den davor liegenden Perioden durch eine Reihe neu angelegter Wege ersetzt wurde.

Résumé

Entre 1979 et 1989, l'Oxford Archaeological Unit (maintenant Oxford Archaeology) entrepris les vastes fouilles d'un complexe de traces fossiles d'époque préhistorique tardive et romaine, à Claydon Pike et Thornhill Farm, Fairford, Gloucestershire. La fouille de la partie ouest de cet ensemble, Thornhill Farm, fait l'objet de ce rapport. Les fouilles furent réalisées avec la coopération de l'Amey Roadstone Corporation (ARC) et font parties d'une opération archéologique organisée en réponse à la menace posée par l'extraction de graviers durant la création du Cotswold Water Park. Les travaux à Thornhill incluent les fouilles de nombreuses tranchées d'évaluation, quatre aires de fouilles dégagées et des opérations de sauvetage à grande échelle couvrant une superficie totale de 40.5 ha.

Les fouilles mirent au jour le plan, exceptionnellement complet, d'une unité agraire hautement spécialisée, qui se composait d'un palimpseste dense d'enclos et de plus larges enceintes, lesquelles semblent avoir été conçues pour le contrôle et l'exploitation efficace du bétail. Les données environnementales confirmèrent que le paysage

environnant se caractérisait par des pâtures où paissaient de larges herbivores y compris chevaux et bovins. Les indices fournis par l'étude céramique suggèrent que les enceintes les plus anciennes furent établies vers le milieu de l'âge du fer et que le site continua de se développer et d'être réorganisé sur un alignement similaire jusqu'au début de l'époque romaine.

Des preuves d'occupation humaine furent découvertes sous la forme de quantités relativement importantes de déchets domestiques consistant essentiellement de poterie, de pierre calcaire brûlée et d'ossements animaux. Bien qu'un certain nombre de maisons circulaires furent découvertes, l'organisation dans l'espace précise du site d'habitation s'avère difficile à décerner, en grande partie parce qu'il fut ultérieurement sévèrement tronqué mais également en raison de la nature éphémère des restes structurels.

Le site fut radicalement réorganisé au cours du début du 2ème siècle après JC lorsque l'ensemble serré d'enclos et d'enceintes qui caractérisait les époques précédentes fut remplacé par une série de sentiers nouvellement construits.

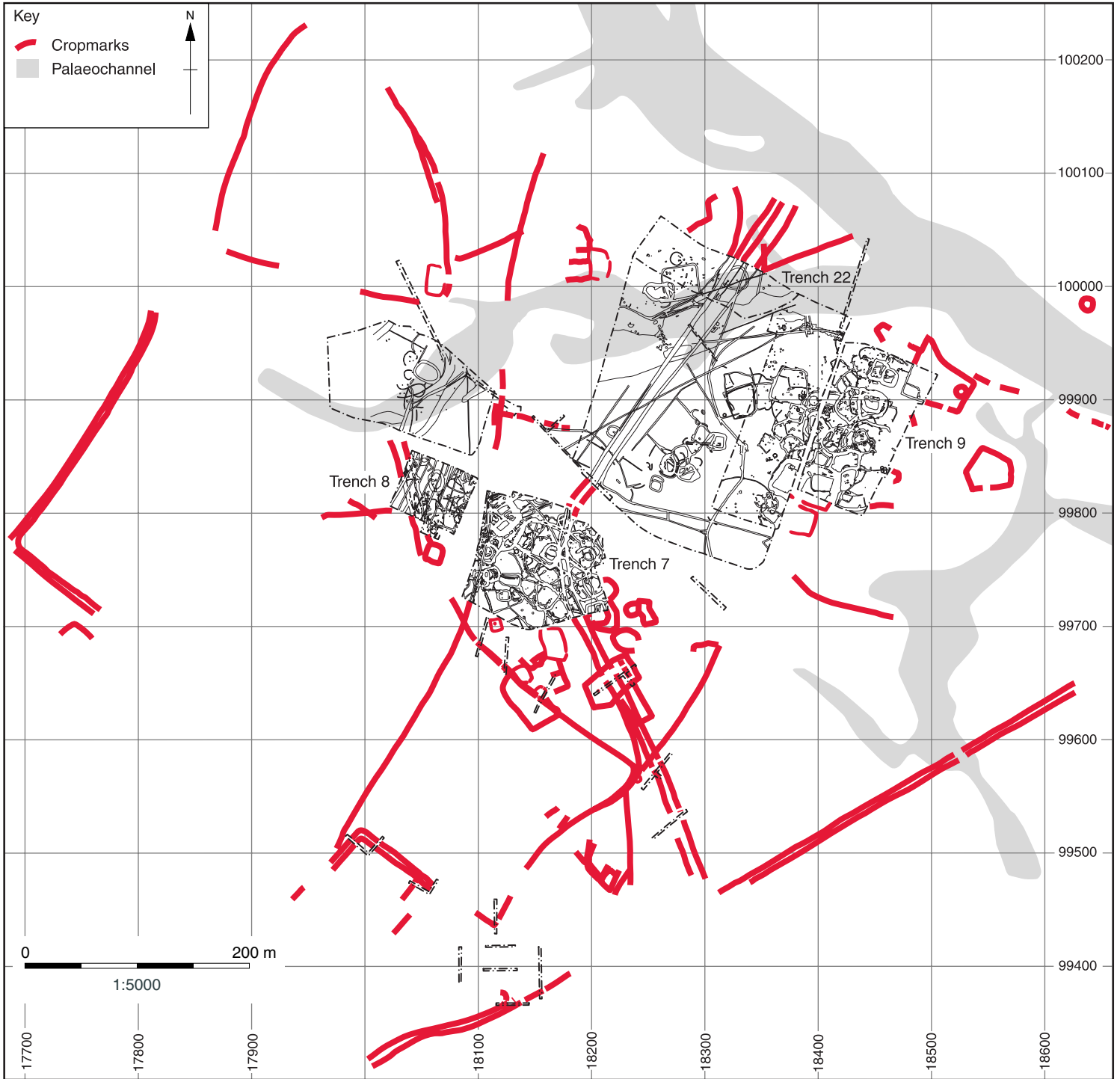
Acknowledgements

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End Plan: Plan of all excavated features and cropmarks at Thornhill Farm