

The Archaeology of Banbury Flood Alleviation Scheme, Oxfordshire

Neolithic and Roman occupation in the Cherwell Valley

by Andrew Simmonds

with contributions by

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Summary

This volume presents the results of a programme of archaeological investigations that were undertaken by Oxford Archaeology on behalf of the Environment Agency between 2003 and 2011 in advance of construction of the Banbury Flood Alleviation Scheme, Oxfordshire. The investigations comprised a programme of geophysical survey and field evaluation which was followed by an excavation at the site of a borrow pit, designated Field RA6, from which clay was to be quarried for use in constructing the embankments for the flood defences. Watching briefs were maintained during construction of the embankments and other groundworks and associated landscaping, in addition to which a metal detector survey was carried out on an area of the project that encroached within the limits of Cropredy Bridge Registered Battlefield. Substantial geophysical surveys of two other areas revealed dense concentrations of buried archaeological remains which were subsequently removed from the scheme and so did not require further archaeological mitigation.

The excavation at Field RA6 uncovered a multi-period landscape that included a regionally significant Neolithic occupation site, as well as remains dating from the middle Bronze Age, late Iron Age and Roman period. Three tree-throw holes may have been of Mesolithic date. The Neolithic remains comprised a total of 35 pits as well as a complex of intercutting pits. Some residual early Neolithic flint was present in these and later features, but most of the pits dated from the middle Neolithic period and contained Peterborough Ware pottery, producing the largest assemblage of this ware from any site in Oxfordshire apart from Yarnton. A single pit contained Grooved Ware and two pits contained Beaker pottery. One pit had a rare instance of

Peterborough Ware and Grooved Ware found in association.

The excavation also revealed a substantial but rather enigmatic ditch that extended for only 30m before terminating abruptly at either end. Radiocarbon dating indicated that the ditch is likely to be middle Bronze Age in date, and a radius from an aurochs that was recovered from it, which yielded a similar radiocarbon date, is one of the latest examples of this species in Britain.

Occupation during the 1st century AD was represented by an oval double-ditched enclosure, beside which were a small number of pits and postholes. Evidence was found for crop processing, animal husbandry and domestic occupation. Although the enclosure ditch may have been recut on two occasions, occupation of the enclosure was apparently short-lived and the settlement was succeeded during the second half of the century by a linear boundary ditch, adjoining which a low-status rural farmstead was constructed toward the end of the century. The settlement appears to have been home to a single household and was redeveloped during the 2nd century before finally being abandoned early in the 3rd century. Artefactual and palaeoenvironmental assemblages, as well as the spatial arrangement of the settlement, provided evidence regarding the economy, status and social organisation of the community and the volume also includes a consideration of the results of the project in the context of Iron Age and Roman settlement of the Cherwell Valley.

The presence of ridge and furrow earthworks within the site and the surrounding fields amply demonstrated use of the area for cultivation during the medieval period, when it formed part of the fields associated with the adjacent hamlet of Hardwick.

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