

The Thames through Time

The Archaeology of the Gravel Terraces of the Upper and Middle Thames

The early historical period: AD 1–1000

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Contents

Figures.....	vii
Preface.....	xii
Acknowledgements.....	xiii
Summary.....	xiv
Picture credits.....	xvi

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

THE STUDY AREA.....	1
The geological character of the study area.....	6
THE FIRST MILLENNIUM AD.....	8
A chronological overview.....	8
THE NATURE OF THE EVIDENCE.....	10
THE RESEARCH BACKGROUND.....	13

CHAPTER 2: THE THAMES AND CHANGING ENVIRONMENTS IN THE RIVER VALLEY

THE PALAEOHYDROLOGY OF THE THAMES AND ITS FLOODPLAIN.....	17
The late Iron Age and early Roman period (AD 1-250).....	17
The late Roman period (AD 250-410).....	18
The early Saxon period (AD 410-650).....	19
The middle to late Saxon period (AD 650-1000).....	20
THE VEGETATION AND ENVIRONMENT OF THE THAMES TERRACES AND FLOODPLAIN.....	20
The late Iron Age and early Roman period (AD 1-250).....	20
<i>The Upper Thames Valley</i>	21
<i>The Middle Thames Valley</i>	24
The late Roman period (AD 250-410).....	26
The early Saxon period (AD 410-650).....	29
The middle to late Saxon period (AD 650-1000).....	30

CHAPTER 3: SETTLEMENT PATTERNS ON THE THAMES GRAVELS

THE LATE IRON AGE AND EARLY TO MID ROMAN PERIOD.....	33
The end of the Iron Age.....	33
The early to mid Roman period (c AD 43-late 3rd century).....	36
<i>Military activity, infrastructure and the pattern of major settlements</i>	36
<i>Rural settlement</i>	42
THE LATE ROMAN PERIOD (LATE 3RD TO 4TH CENTURY AD).....	69
Late Roman urban centres.....	69
Late Roman rural settlements.....	75
<i>Settlement transformation in the late 3rd and early 4th century AD</i>	75
<i>Later development of rural settlement</i>	77
THE SUB-ROMAN PERIOD (EARLY 5TH CENTURY AD).....	80
THE EARLY SAXON PERIOD (5TH TO 6TH CENTURIES AD).....	81
The early Anglo-Saxon period: the 5th century.....	81
The late 5th and 6th centuries.....	83
<i>The pattern of settlement</i>	83
<i>Characteristics of early Anglo-Saxon settlements</i>	83
<i>The Upper Thames Valley</i>	88
<i>The Middle Thames Valley</i>	98

THE MID SAXON PERIOD (7TH TO 9TH CENTURIES AD).....	99
Royal centres	100
The church	103
Rural farmsteads	104
<i>The extent and nature of the evidence</i>	104
<i>Excavated settlement sites</i>	105
<i>Rural settlement in the 8th to 9th centuries: the Yarnton-Cassington project</i>	110
THE LATE SAXON PERIOD (C 850-1066).....	111
Rural settlement	114
<i>Background</i>	114
<i>Late Saxon estates</i>	116
<i>The archaeological evidence</i>	120
Late Saxon towns.....	132
<i>The towns of the Burghal Hidage, Cricklade, Oxford and Wallingford</i>	134
<i>Other towns</i>	139

CHAPTER 4: THE PEOPLE OF THE THAMES VALLEY

INTRODUCTION (THE MAIN THEMES).....	143
LATE IRON AGE	143
THE ROMAN PERIOD	145
People	146
<i>Military personnel - reading and writing</i>	146
<i>Dressing</i>	150
<i>Eating and drinking - you are what you eat (off)</i>	152
<i>Settlement and housing</i>	156
<i>Living and dying</i>	160
FROM ROMAN TO 'ANGLO-SAXON'.....	164
THE ANGLO-SAXON PERIOD	171
Population.....	171
<i>Osteological evidence</i>	173
Culture and identity in the 6th and 7th centuries	176
<i>Grave goods and ethnicity</i>	176
<i>Changing culture and identity in the 7th century</i>	185
<i>Grave goods in the 7th century</i>	186
<i>5th- to 6th-century settlements</i>	193
<i>The evolution of a more stratified society</i>	194
<i>Collective identities</i>	195
The 8th to 11th centuries	195
<i>Individual identity</i>	195
<i>Specialised communities</i>	197
<i>Material culture</i>	200
<i>Collective identity</i>	201
<i>The material culture of everyday life</i>	201

CHAPTER 5: RITUAL AND RELIGION IN THE THAMES VALLEY

THE LATE IRON AGE.....	205
Shrines.....	205
River finds	208
Late Iron Age burial	209
RELIGION IN THE ROMAN PERIOD	209
Sacred space and ritual deposition	210
Continuity of ritual practice	216
<i>River and water finds</i>	217
Religious imagery	220
Christianity in the Thames Valley.....	222

Contents

ROMANO-BRITISH BURIAL IN THE THAMES VALLEY	224
Early-mid Roman burial	224
Burial in the late Roman period.....	225
<i>Burial ritual in the later Roman period</i>	228
<i>Age and gender in late Roman cemeteries</i>	229
RITUAL AND RELIGION IN THE EARLY ANGLO-SAXON PERIOD.....	231
Differing traditions.....	231
River finds	231
Continuity of belief?	234
Early Anglo-Saxon beliefs.....	235
Burial practice in the 5th to 7th centuries	238
RITUAL AND RELIGION IN THE MID SAXON PERIOD	239
The conversion to Christianity.....	239
Beliefs	246
The minster churches of the Thames Valley	247
THE LATE SAXON PERIOD	258
The late Saxon church	258
Burial from the 8th century onwards	263
<i>Minster and urban cemeteries</i>	265
<i>Rural burial grounds</i>	270
<i>Viking burials</i>	272
CHAPTER 6: PRODUCTION, TRADE, TRANSPORT AND COMMUNICATION IN THE THAMES VALLEY	
INTRODUCTION.....	275
THE LATE IRON AGE.....	277
Agriculture	277
<i>The middle Iron Age agricultural background</i>	277
<i>The late Iron Age</i>	278
Trade.....	279
THE ROMAN PERIOD	280
Agriculture and horticultural developments.....	280
<i>Agriculture in the early Roman period</i>	280
<i>Agriculture in the late Roman period</i>	292
Trade and industry	299
<i>Pottery production</i>	304
<i>Other crafts</i>	307
<i>Communications and trade</i>	313
<i>Use of the river</i>	317
THE EARLY ANGLO-SAXON PERIOD	317
Agriculture from the early 5th to the mid 7th century	317
Crafts	322
Trade and exchange.....	324
THE MID TO LATE SAXON PERIOD.....	325
Management and economic use of the river	325
Agricultural economy.....	329
<i>Major crops</i>	330
<i>Local specialisation?</i>	330
<i>Arable intensification: the evidence from Yarnton</i>	331
<i>Animal resources at Yarnton</i>	336
<i>Yarnton in the late Saxon period</i>	337
<i>Flax cultivation</i>	337
Fishing, hunting and trapping	338
Clothing, footwear and personal accessories	343
<i>Textiles</i>	343
<i>Footwear and leather</i>	345

<i>Jewellery and clothes fasteners</i>	345
Tools and trades	347
<i>Metalworking</i>	347
<i>Other crafts and trades</i>	353
<i>Construction and carpentry</i>	355
The church	358
Trade	359

CHAPTER 7: THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF POWER AND POLITICS

THE LATE IRON AGE	365
Kings and politics - the evidence from literature and coins	365
The archaeology of power	367
THE ROMAN CONQUEST AND CLIENT KINGDOMS	371
THE THAMES VALLEY WITHIN THE ROMAN PROVINCE	374
THE LATER ROMAN PERIOD	376
THE EARLY SAXON PERIOD	378
The 5th century	378
<i>British and Anglo-Saxon power relations</i>	379
The consolidation of Anglo-Saxon settlement: the late 5th and 6th centuries	380
Socio-political hierarchy in early Anglo-Saxon communities	381
<i>Evidence for the evolution of kingship from the late 6th century</i>	382
<i>'Princely' burials</i>	384
THE MID TO LATE SAXON PERIOD	390
The Mercians	390
The Vikings	396
The Thames Valley in the late Saxon period	399
<i>National and local government</i>	399
<i>Land ownership</i>	400
The return of the Vikings	403

CHAPTER 8: CONCLUSIONS

A SUMMARY OF THE EVIDENCE: THE STATE OF KNOWLEDGE TODAY	407
The late Iron Age	407
The early-middle Roman period	407
The late Roman period	408
The 5th century	409
The Anglo-Saxon period	410
THE LIMITATIONS OF THE EVIDENCE	413
Chronology and archaeological science	414
EMERGING THEMES AND PROBLEM AREAS FOR FURTHER WORK	414
Diversity	414
The river, trade and settlement patterns	415
Agriculture, population and land tenure	416

Appendix: Anglo-Saxon cemeteries in the Thames Valley region	418
--	-----

Abbreviations	431
---------------------	-----

Bibliography	433
--------------------	-----

Index	455
-------------	-----

Figures

CHAPTER 1

1.1	The project area	1
1.2	The Thames Valley and surrounding region showing topography and major rivers, with major historic settlements	2-3
1.3	The terraces of the Upper and Middle Thames	4-5
1.4	Cropmarks at Thornhill Farm, Fairford, Glos.	11
1.5	A typical gravels landscape under excavation at Horcott Pit, Fairford, Glos., July 2006	12
1.6	Antiquarian investigations: a later 5th-century cremation urn found at Upper West Field, Shepperton, Surrey during gravel digging in 1812	14

CHAPTER 2

2.1	Roman Upper Thames Valley grassland and arable Coleoptera	23
2.2	Roman coriander seed; Roman brassica seeds; Roman box leaf; a dung beetle	25

CHAPTER 3

3.1	Late Iron Age and Roman settlements and the Roman road network	34-5
3.2	Feature: The Roman town of Staines	40-1
3.3	Plans from a selection of excavated late Iron Age and early Roman sites in the study area	44-5
3.4	Feature: Thornhill Farm and Claydon Pike	46-9
3.5	Little Lea Park, Berks: the Iron Age and Roman settlement	50
3.6	Somerford Keynes, Neigh Bridge, Glos; the early to mid 2nd-century settlement	51
3.7	Roman settlement at Horcott, Glos.	51
3.8	Early Roman settlements: Appleford and Barton Court Farm, Oxon.	52
3.9	Feature: Roughground Farm, Glos: the villa estate	54-6
3.10	Plans of selected villas and other masonry footed buildings in the study area	57
3.11	The local landscape of Little and Long Wittenham, Oxon	58
3.12	Plans of selected non-villa buildings in the study area	61
3.13	Feature: Hambleden villa	62-5
3.14	Reconstruction of a post-pad building from Eton, Bucks.	67
3.15	Plans of Thorpe Lea Nurseries and Hengrove Farm Surrey	68
3.16	Feature: Dorchester	70-3
3.17	Somerford Keynes, Cotswold Community, Glos: the development of the settlement during the late Iron Age and Roman period	76
3.18	Claydon Pike, Glos: ditch and wall surrounding the late Roman villa	78
3.19	Anglo-Saxon sites	82
3.20	Feature: Sunken huts	84-5
3.21	Feature: Post-built halls	86-7
3.22	Early Anglo-Saxon settlements: Oxford Science Park, Littlemore, Oxford	89
3.23	Early Anglo-Saxon settlements and cemeteries in the Abingdon-Dorchester area	90
3.24	Early Anglo-Saxon settlements: Radley Barrow Hills, Oxon.	92-3
3.25	Drayton/Sutton Courtenay: the settlement excavated by E T Leeds, and the large halls evident from cropmarks	94
3.26	Cropmarks of Anglo-Saxon settlements and halls	95
3.27	Early Anglo-Saxon settlements: Benson and Prospect Park	97
3.28	Cookham and Old Windsor	101
3.29	Kingston-upon-Thames, general plan with location of Anglo-Saxon archaeology	103
3.30	Early to mid Saxon rural settlements: Sherborne House, Lechlade, Glos; Black Bourton, Oxon; Hurst Park, East Molesey, Surrey	106
3.31	Anglo-Saxon buildings at Somerford Keynes, Cotswold Community	107

3.32	New Wintles, Eynsham, Oxon: overall site plan and detail of the 7th-century settlement	108-9
3.33	The Yarnton project area, Oxon	111
3.34	Feature: mid Saxon Yarnton	112-3
3.35	8th-century settlement at Yarnton Cresswell Field	114
3.36	8th-century settlement at Yarnton Worton	115
3.37	The study area and surrounding region by 1086, showing Domesday manors	116-7
3.38	Chiltern-edge parishes in the Middle Thames	118
3.39	The 1005 boundary of the Eynsham estate	119
3.40	Nucleated settlement in the study area at Brighthampton, Oxon	121-2
3.41	Late Saxon settlement at Manor Farm, Drayton, Oxon.	123
3.42	Late Saxon settlement at Yarnton	124
3.43	Dispersed settlement in the study area. An estate map of Dorney, Bucks, 1821.	125
3.44	Historic land use in the Middle Thames at Dorney, Boveney and Eton	126
3.45	Saxon and medieval settlement at Lot's Hole, Dorney	127
3.46	Saxon and medieval settlement at Lake End Road, Dorney	128
3.47	Anglo-Saxon settlement at Wraysbury	129
3.48	Saxon settlement at Shepperton Green.	130-1
3.49	Late Saxon towns: Cricklade	134
3.50	Late Saxon towns: Oxford	135
3.51	Late Saxon towns: Wallingford	137
3.52	Late Saxon towns: Reading	138
3.53	Late Saxon towns: Abingdon.	140

CHAPTER 4

4.1	Late Iron Age-early Roman 'Belgic' pottery from Yarnton.	144
4.2	Military identities: early Roman military buckle from Ashton Keynes, Wilts	146
4.3	Military identities: middle Roman military pieces from Claydon Pike	147
4.4	Reading and writing: (1) wooden writing tablet (near Claydon Pike); (2) three styli (Claydon Pike); (3) seal box (Appleford)	147
4.5	Graffiti on pottery from Hambleton and on pewter vessels from Appleford	148
4.6	Medical men: collyrium stamp from Staines and graffito naming a ?mule doctor from Amerden.	149
4.7	Changing faces: brooches from Somerford Keynes (above) and Thorpe Lea Nurseries (below) and toilet set from Claydon Pike	151
4.8	Cornelian intaglio with Minerva carrying a spear and shield. From Cassington.	152
4.9	New Roman pottery types.	153
4.10	Late Roman glass vessels from Dorchester.	154
4.11	Locally made early Roman fine wares from Abingdon	155
4.12	Ceramic indicators of site status: the proportion of fine and specialist pottery fabrics in selected Oxford region assemblages	156
4.13	Mosaic pavement from Basildon	158
4.14	Wall painting: reconstruction of panel from Dorchester.	159
4.15	Keys and latchlifters from Barton Court Farm	159
4.16	Grave goods and a 'standard' late Roman inhumation, from Coldharbour Farm, Crowmarsh	161
4.17	Decapitated prone burial from Stanton Harcourt	162
4.18	Late Roman 'official' metalwork. Belt sets from the East London cemetery, Dorchester Dyke Hills and Blewburton Grave 20	167
4.19	Early Saxon pottery from the cemetery at Saxton Road, Abingdon.	169
4.20	Early Saxon brooches from Abingdon, Berinsfield and Sutton Courtenay	170
4.21	The Anglo-Saxon cemetery at Wally Corner, Berinsfield under excavation in 1974	170
4.22	Domesday population distribution in the study area	172
4.23	Mixed rite cemeteries: Abingdon Saxton Rd and Wallingford	177
4.24	Male 6th-century weapon burials.	178
4.25	A reconstruction of a 6th-century female burial from Butler's Field, Lechlade	180
4.26	Female 6th-century burials.	182-3
4.27	Family burial plots at Berinsfield?	184
4.28	The 7th-century cemetery at Didcot Power Station.	186

Figures

4.29	7th-century cemeteries re-using Bronze Age barrows: Standlake, Burghfield Field Farm and Stanton Harcourt	187
4.30	A male 7th-century burial from Lechlade Butler's Field	188
4.31	An isolated 7th-century female burial from Eton Rowing Course, near Boveney, Bucks	189
4.32	Female burials of the 7th century from Lechlade Butler's Field	190-1
4.33	Peasants cutting and loading wood, from an 11th-century manuscript	196
4.34	King Edgar with St Dunstan and St Aethelwold	199
4.35	Whalebone weaving sword from Wallingford with owner inscription	200

CHAPTER 5

5.1	The Iron Age 'temple' at Heathrow, Middlesex	206
5.2	Possible Iron Age shrine at Smith's Field, Hardwick with Yelford, Oxon	207
5.3	Double horse burial from Farmoor, Oxon	207
5.4	Iron Age sword from the Thames at Long Wittenham, Oxon	208
5.5	Feature: Prehistoric and Roman Frilford, Oxon	212-3
5.6	The Roman sanctuary at Weycock Hill, Berks	214
5.7	The Roman circular temple at Claydon Pike, Gos	215
5.8	Probable Roman temple at Hailey Wood Camp, Sapperton, Gos	216
5.9	A miniature scythe and a small ardshare from Gatehampton Farm, Goring, Oxon	217
5.10	Possible ritual finds assemblage from Leaze Farm, Oxon	219
5.11	Nest of five Roman pewter plates from Shepperton Ranges, Surrey	218
5.12	A late Iron Age or early Roman pedestalled beaker from Abbey Meads, Chertsey, Surrey	219
5.13	Roman altar showing a <i>Genius</i> (local deity) found at Bablock Hythe, Oxon	220
5.14	Eagle and shield sculptural fragments from Somerford Keynes Neigh Bridge, Gos	221
5.15	Copper alloy plaque with Christian images, from an Anglo-Saxon cemetery at Long Wittenham, Oxon	222
5.16	A lead tank found in a late Roman waterhole at Perry Oaks, Heathrow, under excavation	223
5.17	A 2nd-century burial at Roughground Farm, Lechlade, Gos	224
5.18	Finds from a <i>bustum</i> burial at Staines	226
5.19	Plan of excavations at Queensford Mill, Dorchester, Oxon	227
5.20	The late Roman cemetery at Radley Barrow Hills	228
5.21	Roman burials in a late Neolithic/early Bronze Age ring ditch at Cotswold Community	229
5.22	Mid 4th-century burial in lead coffin from Abingdon Vineyard, Oxon	230
5.23	Feature: Saxon and Viking finds from the Middle Thames	232-3
5.24	Possible placed animal deposits from Yarnton	236
5.25	A silver cross and necklace of silver wire rings from Grave 187 at Lechlade, Butler's Field	237
5.26	Feature: Burial practice at the 5th- and 6th-century cemetery at Wally Corner, Berinsfield	240-1
5.27	Feature: Burial practice at the 5th- to early 8th-century cemetery at Lechlade, Butler's Field	242-3
5.28	Dorchester-on-Thames: the location of excavations and the Anglo-Saxon features from excavations at the Beech House Hotel	244-5
5.29	Cirencester: the 9th-century minster church	249
5.30	Bampton: the probable minster enclosure, and late Saxon burials	250
5.31	Feature: Eynsham: the 8th- to 10th-century minster	252-4
5.32	Staines: the post-Roman settlement pattern and excavations at Duncroft	257
5.33	Abingdon: the medieval and Anglo-Saxon abbey church	258
5.34	Feature: Eynsham: the reformed Benedictine monastery of 1005	260-2
5.35	Chertsey Abbey demesne manors and the date of church provision	263
5.36	The late Saxon tower of St Michael at the Northgate, Oxford	264
5.37	Late Saxon burials at Christ Church and St Aldate's Church, Oxford	266
5.38	Late Saxon burials from St Martin's Church, Wallingford	268
5.39	Burials from the 10th- to 12th-century cemetery at Chimney	269
5.40	Yarnton: the 9th-century cemetery	270
5.41	Late Saxon burials from a rural cemetery at Lewknor	270
5.42	One of a small group of burials of the 8th and 9th century overlying the ruined villa at Claydon Pike, Gos	271
5.43	Viking stirrups from the bank of the river Cherwell at Oxford	272

CHAPTER 6

6.1	The Didcot hoard	276
6.2	Plan of Old Shifford Phase 3 settlement	285
6.3	Dodecahedron from Gill Mill	286
6.4	Ploughmarks from Drayton, Oxon.	287
6.5	Roman ploughs	288
6.6	The rectilinear timber building at Hengrove	289
6.7	Corn dryers from Gatehampton Farm, Goring, and Somerford Keynes Cotswold Community.	290
6.8	Roman scythes from Farmoor, Hardwick and Appleford, Oxon	294
6.9	Graph of cumulative cattle mortality at a sample of Upper Thames Valley sites compared by period	296
6.10	Feature: Barton Court Farm	300-2
6.11	Quern stones from Abingdon and Eton Rowing Lake	303
6.12	Millstones from Barton Court Farm, with hand querns from Appleford and Staines.	303
6.13	Early Roman pottery kiln from Yarnton	305
6.14	Early 2nd-century lead glazed bowl	306
6.15	Feature: the Roman pottery industry at Oxford	308-11
6.16	Late Roman Oxfordshire pottery	312
6.17	Woodworking tools from Dorchester and Barton Court Farm	312
6.18	Roman cart components and reconstruction	314
6.19	Map locating major regional sources of pottery supply and local production centres	316
6.20	Shepperton, Surrey: a late Roman or early Saxon fish weir.	318
6.21	Domesday mills on the Thames	325
6.22	Artist's reconstruction of the mid Saxon bridge at Oxford	327
6.23	Waterfronts at Staines and Oxford	328
6.24	A possible waterwheel paddle from the late Saxon Trill Mill Stream at Oxford	329
6.25	Feeding hogs; from an early 11th-century calendar	331
6.26	The resources of medieval Yarnton and neighbouring townships	332
6.27	Mouldboard ploughing at Drayton	334
6.28	Activities of the agricultural year from an early 11th-century calendar	335
6.29	Flax preserved by waterlogging at Yarnton	337
6.30	Domesday fisheries.	338
6.31	Fishing and hunting equipment	339
6.32	Hunting with the falcon, from an early 11th-century calendar	340
6.33	Late Saxon and Viking horse equipment.	342
6.34	Textile equipment	343
6.35	Mineralised textiles from the 7th-century cemetery at Field Farm, Burghfield	344
6.36	Late Saxon wooden and leather objects from the Thames crossing in St Aldate's, Oxford.	346-7
6.37	Mid and late Saxon jewellery and belt fittings.	348
6.38	The late Saxon smithy from Yarnton	350
6.39	Iron objects from mid and late Saxon sites	351
6.40	The Yarnton seax	352
6.41	8th-century combs from Dorney.	353
6.42	Mid to late Saxon decorated comb handles	354
6.43	Woodworking: (above) detail of a possible wooden sluice gate from Burghfield; (below) a wooden frame from a well at Yarnton.	356
6.44	Woodworking: the construction of the wooden frame from Yarnton.	357
6.45	A 10th-century carved cross shaft from St Aldate's Church, Oxford	359
6.46	Imported pottery from the 8th-century at Dorney, with a reconstruction of a Tating ware vessel	360
6.47	Rim fragment from a mid Saxon glass palm cup or funnel beaker from Dorney	361

CHAPTER 7

7.1	Map of approximate distributions of three major Iron Age tribal coin groups in relation to the Thames	366
7.2	Iron Age gold coin (stater) of the Dobunnic tribe minted by a ruler called BODVOC. From Ebrington, Glos.	367

Figures

7.3	Dorchester Dyke Hills	368
7.4	Plan and section through South Oxfordshire Grim's Ditch	369
7.5	Map of forts and linear dyke systems in Oxfordshire in relation to coin distribution	370
7.6	Roman cavalry helmet from Staines	372
7.7	Civitates of south-eastern Britain	374
7.8	<i>Beneficiarius consularis</i> altar from Dorchester	375
7.9	Coin of Domitianus (c AD 271) found at Chalgrove in 2003	376
7.10	Late Roman provinces in southern Britain	377
7.11	Kentish connections	383
7.12	Princely burials: Cuddesdon	385
7.13	Princely burials: Asthall Barrow	386-7
7.14	Princely burials: Taplow	388
7.15	Princely burials: Lowbury Hill	389
7.16	Kingdoms and peoples of the Thames Valley in the 7th century	392
7.17	The possible meeting site at Dorney, Bucks	394-5
7.18	The Viking wars in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle	397
7.19	The rampart and ditch at Wallingford	398
7.20	Administrative and ecclesiastical boundaries in the study area in the late Saxon period	400
7.21	Artist's reconstruction of the North Gate of Oxford as it may have looked on the eve of the Norman Conquest	401
7.22	The ivory seal matrix of Godwine the minister (Wallingford c 1040)	402
7.23	Feature: The execution cemetery at Staines	404-5

APPENDIX

Map	Early Anglo-Saxon cemeteries in the Upper Thames Valley region	419
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Preface

The gravels of the river Thames have seen some of the most intensive archaeological activity in England. Discovery in this region has been closely (although not exclusively) linked to aggregates extraction, with the size and depth of gravel quarries providing opportunities for investigation of multi-period remains over unusually large areas. As a result, the Thames Valley now offers an exceptionally rich resource of archaeological data.

Excavation remains at a high level in the region. The publication of individual site reports continues on an ongoing basis, but much of the existing synthetic work for the area was either undertaken some time ago, or covers only parts of the valley rather than the valley as a whole. As the bibliography for the present volume bears out, information tends to be dispersed between a large number of different sources. Consequently intellectual access to archaeological information, even from such a relatively well studied and published region as this, has remained laborious and on the whole restricted to those specialising in this area.

This volume has been designed to address these shortcomings by providing a new overview of the late Iron Age, Roman and Anglo-Saxon archaeology of the valley as a whole, comprising the Upper Thames from the source of the river to the Goring Gap, and the Middle Thames from the Goring Gap to the start of the tidal zone at Teddington Lock. Beyond this point the story becomes very largely that of London, which is not considered in detail. For the most part, we have drawn on existing published sources, and reports on major sites that are either being prepared for publication, or remain unpublished. It has not been possible, within the scope of the present project, to undertake detailed research to the level of individual Sites and Monuments Records or findspots. New discoveries are occurring all the time, and in time will undoubtedly modify the picture presented here.

The volume has been structured around a number of themes, rather than taking the more conventional approach of chronological narrative or gazetteer. Our aim was to avoid a rigid focus on the form, location and dating of individual sites, and to explore how far other kinds of evidence can support interpretation at a broader level. Inevitably this has led to a rather longer volume than would otherwise have been the case, and to some repetition of information between chapters, although we have tried to keep this to a minimum.

We hope that the volume will provide a useful resource for archaeologists excavating, researching, curating, teaching and studying the archaeology of this region for some years to come. At the same time, we have attempted to make the volume accessible to readers beyond the specialised archaeological community, by including a certain amount of general contextual and background information, and particularly through the use of a number of detailed Features that display key information about important sites and topics.

The project has been made possible by a grant from English Heritage from the resources of the Aggregates Levy Sustainability Fund. Here, as elsewhere in the country, the resources of the fund have provided a welcome opportunity to review archaeological results from the region at a broader level than is generally possible within the development-led excavation environment.

Further volumes currently in preparation in the Thames Valley Landscapes monograph series will present overviews of the prehistoric evidence from the same study area.

*Anne Dodd, Editor
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Summary

The gravel terraces of the river Thames have revealed a wealth of archaeological information about the evolution of the landscape of the region, the development of the settlement pattern, and past human occupation. Much of this has come to light in the course of gravel quarrying, which has been so extensive that the Thames Valley now provides one of the richest resources of archaeological data in the country.

This volume provides an up to date overview of the archaeological evidence from the valley for the late Iron Age, Roman and Anglo-Saxon periods, broadly speaking the first millennium AD. The area studied in detail comprises the Upper Thames Valley, from the source of the river to the Goring Gap, and the Middle Thames Valley, from the Goring Gap

to the start of the tidal zone at Teddington Lock.

A summary of evidence for the character of the river and the vegetation and environment of its floodplain is followed by a detailed account of the evolving settlement pattern as currently understood from archaeological evidence. The authors then consider what archaeology can reveal about the late Iron Age, Roman and Anglo-Saxon populations of the valley, and their changing lifestyles, culture, identities and beliefs. This is followed by a review of the evidence for production, trade, transport and communication, and the archaeology of power and politics. The volume concludes with a discussion of the state of knowledge today and its limitations, and emerging themes and problem areas for future research.

Zusammenfassung

Die Schotterterrassen der Themse haben eine Fülle an archäologischer Information über die Entstehung der Landschaft dieser Region, die Entwicklung der Siedlungsräume, sowie vergangene menschliche Tätigkeiten hervorgebracht. Vieles davon kam im Zuge von Schotterabbau ans Licht, und der großflächige Abbau machte das Themse Tal zu einer der reichsten Quellen für archäologische Daten landesweit.

Dieser Band präsentiert eine aktuelle Übersicht der archäologischen Befunde des Tales für die späte Eisenzeit, die Römische und die Angelsächsische Periode, also allgemein gesprochen für das erste Jahrtausend n. Chr. Der genauer untersuchte Bereich umfasst das obere Themse Tal, von der Quelle bis zum Goring Gap, und das mittlere Themse Tal, vom Goring Gap bis zum Beginn der Gezeitenzone am Teddington Lock.

Die Eigenschaften des Flusses, sowie der Vegetation und Umwelt seines Überschwemmungsgebietes, werden zusammenfassend dargestellt und gefolgt von einem detaillierten Bericht über die Entstehung von Siedlungsräumen, basierend auf dem gegenwärtigen Stand archäologischer Quellen. Die Autoren erläutern die Aussagen der Archäologie über die spät Eisenzeitliche, Römische und Angelsächsische Bevölkerung des Tales und deren wechselnde Lebensführung, Kultur, Identität und Glauben. Darauf folgt ein Überblick über die Befunde für Produktion, Handel, Transport und Kommunikation, und eine Besprechung dieser Quellen in Bezug auf Macht und Politik. Der Band schließt mit einer Diskussion des heutigen Wissensstandes und seiner Grenzen, sowie neu aufkommender Themen und Problembereiche für zukünftige Forschungsprojekte.

Résumé

Les terrasses de gravier du fleuve de la Tamise ont révélé une abondance d'informations archéologiques concernant l'évolution du paysage dans la région, le développement des types d'habitats et l'occupation humaine passée. Une grande partie de ces dernières ont été mises au jour lors de l'extraction de gravier, qui a été tellement vaste que la vallée de la Tamise constitue désormais une des ressources les plus riches de données archéologiques du pays.

Ce volume fournit un compte-rendu actualisé des preuves archéologiques de la vallée de la Tamise pour les époques de l'âge du Fer tardif, des périodes romaines et anglo-saxonnes, ou bien approximativement le premier millénaire de notre ère. La région étudiée en détail comprend la vallée haute de la Tamise, depuis la source du fleuve jusqu'à Goring Gap, et la vallée moyenne de la Tamise, depuis Goring Gap jusqu'à l'entrée de l'estuaire à Teddington Lock.

Un résumé des preuves disponibles concernant le caractère du fleuve ainsi que la végétation et l'environnement de la plaine d'inondation est suivi par un compte rendu détaillé de l'évolution des types d'habitats tels qu'ils sont actuellement interprétés à partir des traces archéologiques. Les auteurs considèrent ensuite ce que l'archéologie permet de révéler sur les populations de la fin de l'âge du Fer, romaines et anglo-saxonnes dans la vallée ainsi que l'évolution des modes de vie, de la culture, des identités et des croyances. Cette section est suivie d'une étude des preuves concernant la production, le commerce, le transport et la communication ainsi que l'archéologie du pouvoir et des politiques. Le volume conclut avec une discussion sur l'état des connaissances aujourd'hui et ses limitations, ainsi que les thèmes émergents et les problèmes à considérer pour la recherche future.

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