

## Preface

Since its formation in 1973 the Oxford Archaeological Unit has carried out major excavations on sites in the Thames valley ranging in date from the Neolithic to the Early Modern period. Several of these, for example the excavations at Ashville, Barton Court Farm, Abingdon, and the Farmoor Reservoir, were published by the Council for British Archaeology.

As the scope of our investigation increased it was decided to launch a new series, *Thames Valley Landscapes*, in cooperation with English Heritage and the Oxford University Committee for Archaeology. In this way it is hoped that the complex story of human activity in the Thames valley will emerge.

The reports are grouped into various sub-regions, such as the Cotswold Water Park and the Thames/Windrush confluence. In the case of the latter area recent important volumes include *Excavations at Devils Quoits, Stanton Harcourt, 1972-3 and 1988* by Barclay, Gray, Lambrick (1995) and *The Prehistoric Landscape and Iron Age Enclosed Settlement at Mingies Ditch* by Allen and Robinson (1993).

In both of these cases specific type-sites (a henge monument and an enclosed Iron Age pastoral farmstead) were identified by aerial photography and selected for planned investigation in advance of gravel extraction. Not all projects have been so carefully considered. The larger excavation reported here, of the Anglo-Saxon burial ground at Berinsfield, represents the best and worst of heroic archaeology, when we still rescued the past from beneath the bulldozers. The admirable aspect was the way in 1973 that dozens of volunteers immediately came forward to salvage the Anglo-Saxon graves which suddenly came to light one Friday afternoon in a gravel pit. Over three weeks, working almost round the clock, with the cooperation of the gravel company, ARC, the team of volunteers, OAU and Ashmolean Museum staff managed to excavate the entire cemetery. The downside came afterwards. After the excitement of discovery, the long haul of publication.

In the 1970s archaeologists were good at 'fire-fighting', less good at planning post-excavation programmes. So I am particularly pleased that the OAU post-excavation staff have now relieved my conscience of this nagging burden. All archaeologists detest a backlog; unfortunately most of us accumulate one.

My advice to a young archaeologist who wishes to keep up an unblemished publication record would be: do not find an Anglo-Saxon cemetery on a Friday afternoon.

The Didcot Power Station excavation belongs to a new generation of archaeological projects: sites found during evaluation. As a result of PPG 16 and evaluation in advance of development, we are less often taken by surprise and the post-excavation analysis proceeds more smoothly. Less adrenalin perhaps, but a more professional and speedy result in the end.

*David Miles*

Director  
Oxford Archaeological Unit