

# Chapter 1 Introduction

*by David Jennings, Jeff Muir and Alex Smith*

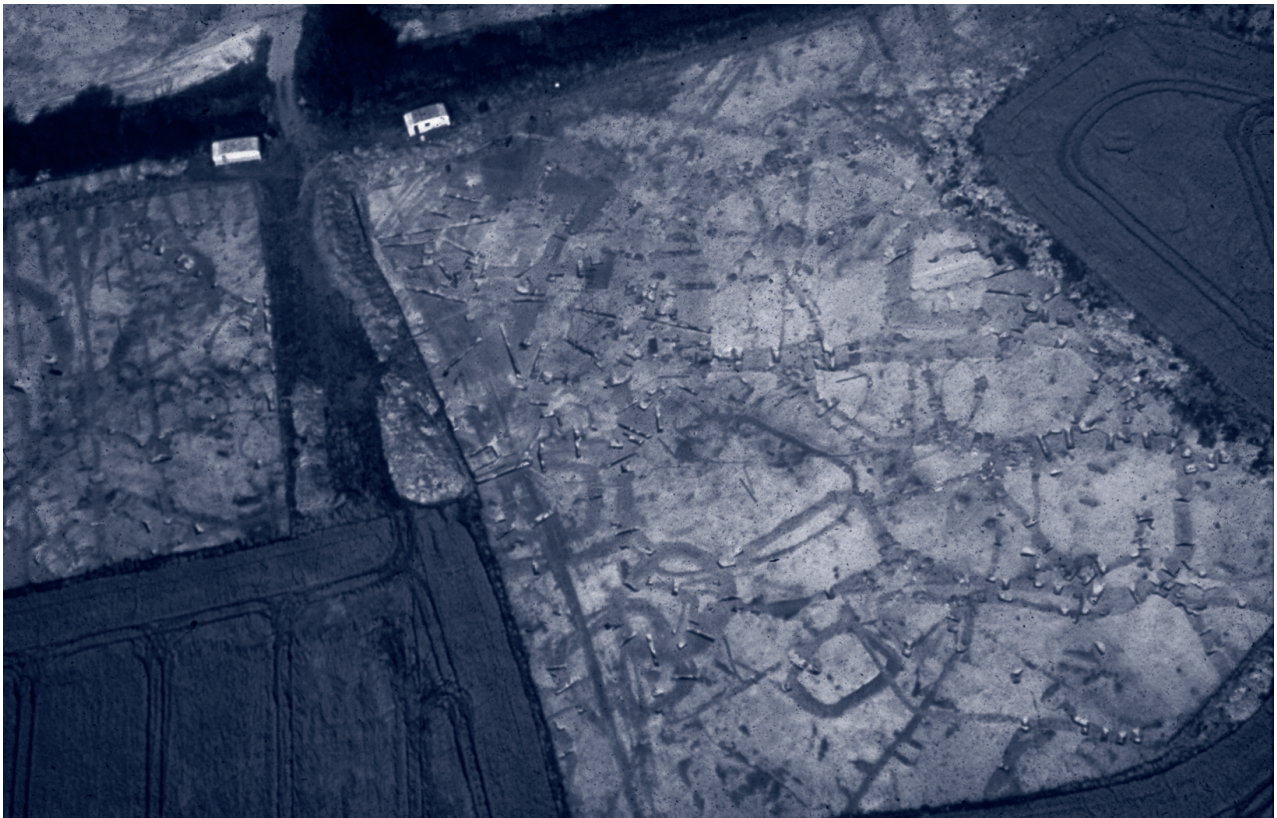
## HISTORY OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL RESEARCH

The Gloucestershire Upper Thames Valley has a long history of piecemeal gravel extraction stretching back over centuries. In the last fifty years a boom in the construction industry caused demand for raw materials to rise to record levels. Increased production meant that for the first time, whole archaeological landscapes became threatened as the industry expanded to meet demand. The Claydon Pike Landscape Research Project was initiated by the Oxford Archaeological Unit (OAU, now Oxford Archaeology) as an emergency response to help mitigate that threat. The result was not simply a series of rescue excavations but a co-ordinated programme of intensive aerial photography combined with targeted evaluation, open area excavation and salvage operations. The results were combined with landscape and geophysical survey in an attempt to evaluate the impact of the Roman conquest on the native population and the developments subsequent to it.

The centrepiece of the project was the extensive excavations at Thornhill Farm and Claydon Pike, Fairford. Here, exceptionally detailed aerial photographs revealed an intensively occupied landscape rich in the remains of what was assumed to be late prehistoric and Roman archaeology (Plates 1.1 and 1.2).

The excavations at Claydon Pike revealed a complex history of occupation from the middle Iron Age through to the late and possibly sub Roman period. The earliest settlement (at Warrens Field) consisted of a series of circular houses and associated paddocks on small gravel islands separated by low-lying wet areas. By the late Iron Age the focus of settlement had shifted (to Longdoles Field) several hundred metres from the location of its middle Iron Age predecessor, demonstrating a degree of discontinuity subsequently noted elsewhere in the Upper Thames region (Lambrick 1992, 83–4).

At some point in the early 2nd century AD, Claydon Pike altered radically. Two large aisled buildings were constructed within a rectangular



*Plate 1.1 Aerial photograph of Thornhill Farm Trenches 7 and 8, showing intercutting enclosures.  
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Plate 1.2 Aerial photograph showing cropmarks along the lower gravel terrace around Claydon Pike and Thornhill Farm. (Cambridge University Collections: copyright reserved)

enclosure or compound with a gated entrance. A rectangular enclosure lay adjacent on a crossroads and is interpreted as a possible religious precinct. The ceramic and small finds assemblages indicate a highly Romanised status.

The results of the Claydon Pike excavations are part of a forthcoming Oxford Archaeology publication on Iron Age and Roman settlement in the Upper Thames Valley (Miles *et al.* forthcoming). This is due for publication in 2005/6, although detailed interim stratigraphic, finds and environmental reports are currently available on the following website: <http://www.oxfordarch.co.uk/cotswoldweb/index.htm>.

#### LOCATION, TOPOGRAPHY AND GEOLOGY

The Thornhill Farm excavations (Fig. 1.1) were located close to the confluence of the rivers Thames and Coln, approximately 3.5 km to the south-east of Fairford and 3 km to the west of Lechlade, Gloucestershire (SU 183997, County Monument 459).

The site straddled the First Gravel Terrace of the Upper Thames Valley approximately 1 km to the north-east of the Coln floodplain at a height of 76 m OD (Fig. 1.2). In prehistory the terrace was dissected

by relict water courses and marshy areas, but islands and tongues of gravel provided well drained sites which were dry enough for settlement. To the south of the site, inliers of Oxford Clay and river gravels give way to the alluvium of the valley floor before rising up to the sand and limestones of the Corallian ridge in the direction of Swindon. To the north, the gravel terraces rise to meet the clay and cornbrash of the Cotswold dip slope and limestone uplands.

The topographical variation from floodplain to uplands forms a landscape of considerable ecological diversity, rich in resources which would have been exploited from the time of its first settlement. Evidence for arable production on the higher gravel terraces abounds throughout the Upper Thames Valley and is well documented at later prehistoric sites such as Ashville and Gravelly Guy (Parrington 1978; Lambrick and Allen forthcoming). Evidence for the prehistoric exploitation of grassland on the First Gravel Terrace and floodplain has also become increasingly apparent in the last three decades, and has led to a complete reappraisal of the importance of so-called 'marginal' land prior to the Roman occupation (Lambrick and Robinson 1979; Lambrick 1992).



Fig. 1.1 Site location plan



Thornhill Farm, Fairford

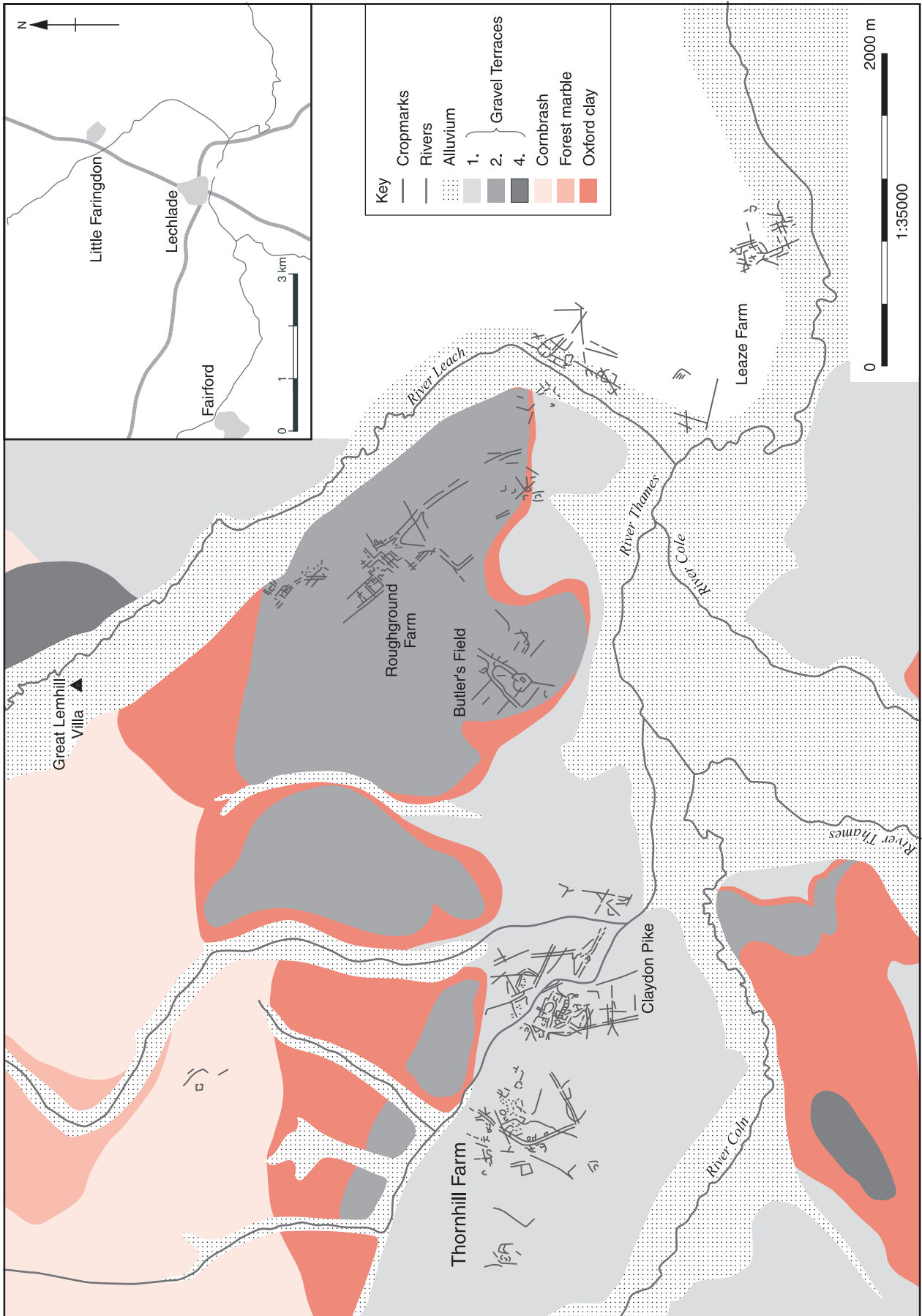


Fig. 1.2 Local geology and selected cropmarks

## ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

The archaeological background to the region and to the study area in particular has recently been published in detail with reference to the excavations at Butler's Field, Lechlade (Boyle *et al.* 1998) and the A419/A417 Swindon to Gloucester Road Scheme (Mudd *et al.* 1999). This description draws heavily from both publications, along with the detailed archaeological surveys of the region conducted in the 1970s (RCHME 1976; Leech 1977). It will concentrate largely on the settlement evidence of later prehistory and the Romano-British period, the two periods most pertinent to the site at Thornhill Farm.

### Earlier Prehistory

#### *Mesolithic*

Since the area's first settlement, the Jurassic Ridge which forms the spine of the Cotswolds has been used as a corridor for trade and communication. The earliest evidence for occupation comes in the form of Mesolithic flint scatters which are mostly concentrated on the higher ground of the limestone uplands, and are known from over 40 sites in Gloucestershire (Mudd *et al.* 1999, 6–7).

#### *Neolithic and Bronze Age*

Until fairly recently research into the Neolithic and Bronze Age occupation of the region has tended to concentrate on the monumental classes of evidence such as chambered tombs, barrows and ring ditches (Darvill 1987). Non-monumental sites and find spots are increasingly well-known, but are still relatively rare, particularly away from the limestone uplands. Where they have been located, the majority of such finds have been made by chance as part of investigations aimed at later, more visible settlements. This suggests that the dearth of early prehistoric sites may be more apparent than real. Neolithic settlement evidence in the form of pit clusters has been located at a number of sites in the Lechlade area, including the Lodors (Darvill *et al.* 1986), Roughground Farm (Allen *et al.* 1993, 9–15) and Gassons Road in Lechlade itself (King 1998, 269–271).

To the south of Cirencester the remains of an extensive late Bronze Age settlement have been uncovered at Shorncombe Quarry, Somerford Keynes (Hearne and Adam 1999). Although only a single settlement, the discovery may go some way to refute the suggestion that the region became more sparsely occupied at the expense of the Middle Thames during this period (Barrett and Bradley 1980).

### Later Prehistory

In 1976 the RCHME survey of Iron Age and Romano-British monuments in the Cotswolds described the

evidence for Iron Age occupation in the area as lying 'chiefly in earthworks'. As with earlier prehistory, the majority of interest and research has been expended on the more monumental kinds of evidence such as the hillforts. More recently, however, a growing number of excavations have extended our knowledge of Iron Age land use and settlement patterns both on the limestone uplands and on the gravels of the Upper Thames Valley.

#### *Late Bronze Age–early Iron Age*

In the immediate area of Thornhill Farm extensive excavations have been carried out on the Second Gravel Terrace close to Lechlade. Evidence of large scale land division dating to the late Bronze Age–early Iron Age has been found at Butler's Field (Boyle *et al.* 1998), Gassons Road (King 1998, 269–271) and Roughground Farm (Allen *et al.* 1993). Despite the relatively large scale of the excavations, evidence for domestic dwellings is sparse with single roundhouses being located at both Butler's Field and Roughground Farm. At Gassons Road a subrectangular posthole arrangement was found but has been interpreted as a fenceline or possible stock enclosure rather than as a house. The apparent scarcity of domestic dwellings does not, however, mean that the surrounding land was not being fully utilised. As Jennings points out 'models of early Bronze Age society in this region envisage an economic system based on pastoralism, and there is little to suggest that a similar regime was not still predominant in the late Bronze Age/early Iron Age' (Jennings in Boyle *et al.* 1998, 34).

Evidence for early Iron Age settlement on the Cotswold uplands remains relatively rare apart from the hillforts, and is mostly known from stray finds (Darvill 1987, 132–133). The apparent scarcity of early settlement has been underlined by the recent excavations along the A417–A419 road scheme which revealed important middle and late Iron Age remains but no settlement dating to the early Iron Age (Mudd *et al.* 1999).

#### *Middle Iron Age*

The Upper Thames Valley in east Gloucestershire and west Oxfordshire was densely occupied during the middle Iron Age, a period characterised by increased diversification in settlement type. Excavations at Claydon Pike, Fairford and Shorncombe Quarry, Somerford Keynes (Hearne and Adam 1999) have confirmed that many of the cropmarks discovered during the intensive aerial surveys of the 1970s belong to this period, indicating a pattern of dispersed settlement along the gravel terraces. Another rural settlement of this period in the region was excavated prior to gravel extraction between 1984 and 1990 at Cleveland Farm near Ashton Keynes (Coe *et al.* 1991). Further down the Thames Valley in Oxfordshire increasing numbers of middle Iron Age settlements have been discovered,

including the temporary encampment of transhumant pastoralists at Farmoor (Lambrick and Robinson 1979), a number of nucleated mixed farming settlements at Abingdon (Allen 1991, 1997) and the enclosed specialist pastoral settlement at Watkins Farm (Allen 1990).

### Later Iron Age

Although most excavated middle Iron Age sites in the Upper Thames Valley showed some kind of continuity into the late Iron Age and early Roman period, in many instances the nature and form of occupation altered. At Claydon Pike, the mid to late Iron Age transition (*c* 1st century BC/AD) was particularly striking, as the settlement shifted to another gravel island to the south, and changed from an un-nucleated mixed farmstead to a specialist pastoral settlement with associated stock enclosures. An increase in site specialism, along with other developments such as changes in house types and the abandonment of storage pits, was characteristic of the region during the late Iron Age (Allen 2000, 21). At Roughground Farm, approximately 3 km from Claydon Pike, a similar settlement was established during the early 1st century AD, with individual stock and occupation areas, although this site appears to have been operating a mixed farming economy (Allen *et al.* 1993, 180). Other nearby sites from this period include Cleveland Farm, Ashton Keynes (Coe *et al.* 1991), Stubbs Farm, Kempsford (OAU 1993) and two sites at Somerford Keynes (Neigh Bridge; Miles *et al.* forthcoming, and Shorcote Quarry; Hearne and Adam 1999), and it is clear that occupation along the Upper Thames Valley was quite dense. This settlement was part of an organised agricultural landscape, with the higher terraces being used for arable and the floodplain and part of the first terrace being primarily open pasture (Robinson 1992a, 56).

Further north into the Cotswolds, the late Iron Age extensive dyke complex at Bagendon may have dominated the landscape. It has long been regarded as the tribal seat of the Dobunni despite the fact that its status, function and chronology are far from well-understood.

### Roman

The Roman conquest signified no immediate changes to settlement patterns or functions in the region, although a cavalry fort was established at Leaholm near Bagendon in *c* AD 50, and a town at Cirencester (Corinium Dobunorum), 15 km west of Thornhill Farm, which came to dominate the region during the Roman period. At Claydon Pike, the pastoral settlement continued with relatively little sign of Romanised material culture until the early 2nd century AD, when the layout of the site was altered radically, with the imposition of a series of rectangular enclosures and aisled buildings. It

was originally suggested that the site became an official Roman depot or even military estate (*saltus*), associated with the cultivation of hay meadows (Miles and Palmer 1990, 23), although any direct official involvement is difficult to substantiate (see Chapter 5). At approximately the same time, a similarly radical reorganisation occurred at Roughground Farm with the construction of a masonry villa complex, and at Somerford Keynes, Neigh Bridge, with the erection of an aisled timber building which may have been a tile depot. Indeed, the settlement pattern across the Upper Thames Valley and beyond appears to have been significantly disrupted during the early 2nd century AD, with many of the sites established in the late Iron Age going out of use, and new sites being established (Henig and Booth 2000, 106).

The Roman period as a whole saw a dense concentration of occupation, estimated at one site per kilometre, in the Upper Thames Valley (Miles 1989). Aerial photographs along the gravel terraces have revealed a dense series of settlements and field boundaries, many of which have proved to be of Roman date, such as that near Leaze Farm, *c* 5 km east of Thornhill Farm (Leach 1977, 17). In general it appears that agricultural patterns of the Iron Age continued into the Roman period, with the floodplain and part of the first terrace being used for the raising of domestic stock, and the higher terraces having settlements operating mixed farming economies. The Roman period did however herald the first introduction of managed grassland, with evidence for hay meadows at Farmoor (Lambrick and Robinson 1979, 83–87) and Claydon Pike (Miles *et al.* forthcoming). Some of these farmsteads on the gravel terraces developed into villas (eg Roughground Farm), although the number of villas in the Upper Thames Valley is much lower than in the Cotswolds further north and to some extent towards the Berkshire Downs to the south. Towns were also very scarce within the Upper Thames Valley, with one of the very few examples being Cricklade which lay along Ermin Street, to the south of Cirencester. Ermin Street was the only major Roman road to pass through this region, and ran south-east from Cirencester (Corinium) through Wanborough and on to Silchester. Nearby was also Akeman Street, which ran *c* 7 km north of Thornhill Farm along the south edge of the Cotswolds in an easterly direction towards Alchester. Recent work has highlighted how much work and effort went into the construction and maintenance of Ermin Street in the 1st and 2nd centuries (Mudd *et al.* 1999, 279), almost certainly involving a military presence at least during the earliest period. Maintenance of the road appears to have declined somewhat in the 3rd and 4th centuries (*ibid.* 279–280). Aside from the major roads, there appears to have been quite a comprehensive network of minor roads and trackways, which no doubt connected settlements across the Upper Thames Valley. Many examples have

been found, such as at Claydon Pike (Miles *et al.* forthcoming), Kempsford Quarry (OAU 1998), Thornhill Farm and Somerford Keynes Cotswold Community (OA 2003).

The Upper Thames Valley in the Roman period would therefore appear to have been a well organised landscape, with numerous farmsteads and a small number of villas operating a variety of agricultural economies, and connected by a system of small roads and trackways.

Evidence for late Roman activity in the region often occurs in the form of finds (specifically coins), although there were also many 3rd and 4th century settlements in the area. The villa at Roughground Farm for example was occupied until the latter half of the 4th century AD, and a modest 4th-century villa and shrine were excavated at Claydon Pike. Activity at the latter site may have continued into the early 5th century. During the later Roman period, the area would have been incorporated into the new province of Britannia Prima, probably centred on the provincial capital at Cirencester. This seems to have been a period of great prosperity in at least part of the region, with a marked increase in villa building and expansion, seen most vividly in the Cotswolds (see Chapter 5).

### Anglo-Saxon

When compared to the wealth of evidence for Roman activity in the Gloucestershire Upper Thames Valley, that for Anglo-Saxon occupation is very slight indeed, and, as with much of the country, it is nearly all confined to burials. A cemetery containing at least 180 burials plus an undetermined number of cremations was found at Fairford in the 1850s (Smith 1852), dated to the mid 5th–6th century (Dickinson 1976, 105). Another cemetery was excavated in 1985 at Butler's Field near Lechlade, with over 200 inhumations of men, women and children (Boyle *et al.* 1998). The mass of grave goods confirmed that the cemetery was of mid or late 5th–7th century date. Aerial photographs revealed a possible settlement nearby, with 6th- to 8th-century pottery being recovered from fieldwalking. Anglo-Saxon material has also been found at The Lodgers in Lechlade (Darvill *et al.* 1986), and at Great Lemhill Farm, about 1 km to the north-west. There is little evidence for continuity of settlement from the late Roman to the Anglo-Saxon period, although the sub-Roman activity at Claydon Pike could be broadly contemporary with the earliest Butler's Field burials, and stone robbing occurred at the Roughground Farm villa at this time.

### Medieval

The later medieval settlement pattern in the Gloucestershire Upper Thames valley was similar to that of today. The origins of Lechlade and Fairford can be traced back to the late Saxon period

in documentary sources, and they were granted markets in the early 13th century. Prior to this, the earliest record in which Fairford is named is dated AD 850, when two hides of land were transferred to the Abbess of the Church of Gloucester. Domesday Book noted of Fairford that there were 21 hides of land with 56 villeins, 9 bordars with 30 plough-tillages, a priest and three mills.

The towns of Fairford and Lechlade were located too close together for either to develop at great pace, although the position of Lechlade at the highest navigable point of the Thames ensured a significant amount of waterborne trade and traffic (Finberg 1975, 73). By the 15th century the manor of Fairford was held by the earls of Warwick and it was at this time that the town and parish began to flourish, with a new church being financed by the wealthy wool merchant John Thame (Finberg 1955, 73). A medieval roadway called the White Way or Salt Way ran from Droitwich to Lechlade.

### ORIGINAL RESEARCH AIMS

The original research questions at Thornhill Farm were formulated against a background of intensive work carried out, largely by the OAU, over the preceding decade. The work culminated in the intensive excavations at Claydon Pike, which began in 1979 and continued to the mid 1980s. Both the evaluation and photographic evidence suggested that Thornhill Farm was of a quite different character. Where Claydon Pike was an intensive, nucleated site which had clearly become highly Romanised, the Thornhill Farm cropmarks sprawled over some 30 to 40 ha with few obvious foci. Fieldwalking, however, suggested that the sites may have been at least partially contemporary.

Thornhill Farm was selected for excavation for a number of reasons:

The narrow spatial and chronological spread of the Thornhill/Claydon settlements offered the opportunity to study social and economic change in the critical years preceding and following the Roman conquest.

The area itself lay at the junction of two contrasting settlement patterns (the Cotswolds and the Upper Thames Valley) in both the late prehistoric and Roman periods.

It was believed that the marginal nature of the land at Thornhill Farm (low-lying gravel terrace prone to flooding) might prove a good indicator of change in society, as such areas are likely to be affected first by expansion or regression of settlement.

The area's proximity to Cirencester, Roman Corinium, and the disputed late Iron Age tribal centre at Bagendon, offered a rare opportunity to study the effect of major economic and political foci on a rural population. In particular, the documentation of the complex effects of Romanisation on native British culture was seen as a principal aim.



It was against this background that the specific excavation objectives for Thornhill Farm were set. These were threefold, incorporating environmental, structural and relational considerations.

### **Environmental**

*The history of land exploitation and adaptation to the low-lying environment of the first gravel terrace*

At the inception of the Thornhill Farm excavations, little was known of late prehistoric land use or exploitation of the lower gravel terraces and floodplain of the Upper Thames. An earlier study of the same period at Farmoor, Oxon., suggested that in some areas at least, the utilisation of floodplain grassland had considerable economic and probably also social significance. The specialised nature of the site, implicit in its seasonal and short-lived occupation, raised many questions concerning the organisation of society (Lambrick and Robinson 1979, 134–5). Further research was hampered by the masking qualities of thick alluvial silts, which covered large areas of the Upper Thames floodplain, making sites difficult to locate. Surviving earthworks at Oxford's Port Meadow, however, suggested that Farmoor was not unique.

The excavations at Thornhill Farm offered the chance to shed further light on the nature and scale of organised exploitation of low-lying grasslands, and to draw valuable comparisons with sites along the Oxfordshire stretch of the Thames.

### **Structural**

*The economic and social basis of the site*

One of the principal aims was to investigate the economic and social basis of the site. Aerial photography had clearly demonstrated that the surviving archaeology was extensive, but it was unclear whether the apparently dispersed nature of the site was genuine or the result of settlement shift over time. Could a chronological sequence be established and if so was it possible to extrapolate identifiable activity zones from the phasing? In particular, was there a domestic focus to the site, and what relationship did it have with the extensive palimpsest of subrectangular enclosures clearly identified from aerial photographs? Enclosure function was likely to prove key in understanding the economic basis of the site and was, therefore, one of the most intensively investigated questions.

### **Relational**

*The relationship with surrounding settlement, and in particular the adjacent Claydon Pike complex.*

The location of Thornhill Farm, between the contrasting settlement patterns of the Cotswolds and the Upper Thames Valley, meant that the excavations were potentially well placed to investigate the relationship between the two areas.

It was also important to understand what

relationship Thornhill Farm had with the more local surrounding settlement, and in particular with the highly Romanised site of Claydon Pike (Figs 1.2 and 1.3). The chronological framework of the site offered an outstanding opportunity to study the impact of the Roman conquest and what effect the subsequent urbanisation at Cirencester had on a native rural settlement.

### **REVISED RESEARCH AIMS**

Following a pre-MAP 1 assessment of the site, the original research aims were fully appraised and revised as appropriate.

### **Environmental**

Environmental and archaeological evidence from Thornhill Farm was used to identify a sequence of changes in land use from the middle Iron Age through to the early medieval period. The sequence includes a changing pattern of pasture, arable, and hay meadow. The revised research aim was to assess the principal factors that influenced these economic shifts.

### **Structural**

The scale of the excavations meant that a coherent plan was produced and different areas of activity were identified, all within a tight chronological framework. The arrangement of enclosures and pens appeared to have been a coherent development and a functional response to a short-lived social and economic situation. It was felt that all of the original research questions were still attainable and could be further enhanced by the careful analysis of artefactual and faunal remains.

### **Relational**

The relationship between Thornhill Farm and Claydon Pike is clearly capable of definition, and changes in emphasis can be documented through time. The relationship is an invaluable key to the late prehistoric economy and settlement pattern of the region, and the impact that the Roman conquest had upon them. It is possible to define real differences between the two landscape areas of the Cotswolds and Upper Thames Valley, but perhaps more importantly to gauge the effects that Roman urbanism at Cirencester had upon its hinterland.

### **EXCAVATION STRATEGY AND HISTORY**

The work at Thornhill Farm investigated an area of approximately 40.5 ha through a combination of trial trenching of cropmarks, planning of large areas of salvage (with selective excavation of features), and area excavation (Figs 1.3 to 1.5). This has provided opportunities to analyse the



developments and changes in the use of the landscape from the middle Iron Age through to the late Roman period. Inevitably the area excavations, which covered about 4.5 ha in total, provided the opportunity to develop the most detailed understanding of the site, while the salvage recording (c 4 ha) and cropmark trenching provided successively less detailed information. This has had important ramifications in the development of the proposed chronological framework for the site, in that the most complex phasing sequences are seen in the excavation areas, with which, in a number of cases, the cropmarks and salvage evidence can be integrated only at a less certain level of confidence.

However, the logistical and financial constraints of the project would have made it impossible to examine all of the area at a comparable level, and given the dating problems (see below) it was felt that questions regarding the specific phasing of individual features could not have been adequately resolved in every case. In addition, in terms of the project's history, a large number of the cropmarks to the south of Trenches 7 and 8 (End Plan) only became visible in 1990. This was a year after the final season of excavation, when extensive gravel extraction in the immediate vicinity of the site substantially reduced the level of the watertable, further accentuating the differentiation between the ditch fills and the natural gravel.

## POST-EXCAVATION METHODOLOGY

Aside from the varying intensity of archaeological investigation, the character of the site required that three strands of evidence be considered in detail to produce a coherent sequence of phasing for the site. These were the stratigraphy, the spatial patterning of the features and the site formation processes, with particular reference to an assessment of the levels of finds redeposition.

While these factors always need to be taken into account during post-excavation analysis, the large-scale, poor to moderately stratified nature of the site means that, as with the majority of rural sites, spatial patterning and site formation processes have an enhanced role to play in understanding the development of the site. This is principally because the 'stratigraphic strings' are limited and tend to separate at relatively early stages, producing matrices with great lateral extension but little depth. For instance in Trench 7, the northern and southern halves of the trench cannot be related stratigraphically beyond the first phase. Therefore while the matrix is the primary core of the post-excavation analysis, it does not provide a sufficiently extensive series of relationships (unlike those on many urban excavations) to establish any coherent phasing for the whole site. This can only be achieved through a detailed consideration of the site's layout and the site formation processes.

While these factors have been apparent to many writers of excavation reports, they have only been addressed in passing or been taken as being implicitly understood. However, the scale of the Thornhill excavations requires a more explicit acknowledgement of the methodologies employed, as the complexity of arguments makes it impossible to present a full discussion of the series of decisions which have influenced the placement of a feature in one phase as opposed to another. There were four main types of argument used to construct the phasing, although because of potential problems with the matrix, the finds data and the spatial patterning were sometimes used to overturn the recorded stratigraphic relationships (see below):

- 1 - The stratigraphic relationships are accepted and finds dating is used to provide an absolute chronology (when the limits of this mode of argument are reached the reasoning adopted is as in 3)
- 2 - The stratigraphic relationships are rejected on the basis of the finds evidence and the spatial patterning
- 3 - Where there is no stratigraphy (or the stratigraphy is rejected) the finds and the spatial patterning are used in isolation
- 4 - Where there are no finds the stratigraphy and spatial patterning are used in isolation.

The complexity in the argumentation arises from several factors. First, the 'data' being utilised are already relatively high-level abstractions. As a consequence, arguments in terms of 'data'-theory conflicts are less sensitive, as the degrees of confidence in descriptive interpretations and analytical interpretations are less clearly differentiated. This results in frequent stages of assessment where judgements between different interpretations are required on the basis of the balance of probabilities. Secondly, in phasing the site all four types of argument are used in conjunction, with variable levels of confidence. These two factors result in a cat's cradle of multiple options, where the large number of elements can be interchanged to create different phases. Therefore, the ultimate preference of one option over another relies on notions of the best-fit for the totality of the phasing of the site as a whole.

In terms of presentation, it is not possible to present all of the 'blind avenues' which were entered during the analysis of the site. This stated, it is not the intention to present the phasing without justification but to restrict explanation to the key elements of each phase. It is hoped that reference to the matrices will provide adequate reasons for aspects of the phasing. In addition a number of the discarded hypotheses are presented and discussed in note form in the site archive.

The foundations on which the phasing was constructed required that the matrix be compiled and assessments be made of the site formation

Thornhill Farm, Fairford



Fig. 1.3 Trench location plan in relation to cropmarks and palaeochannels at Thornhill Farm and Claydon Pike

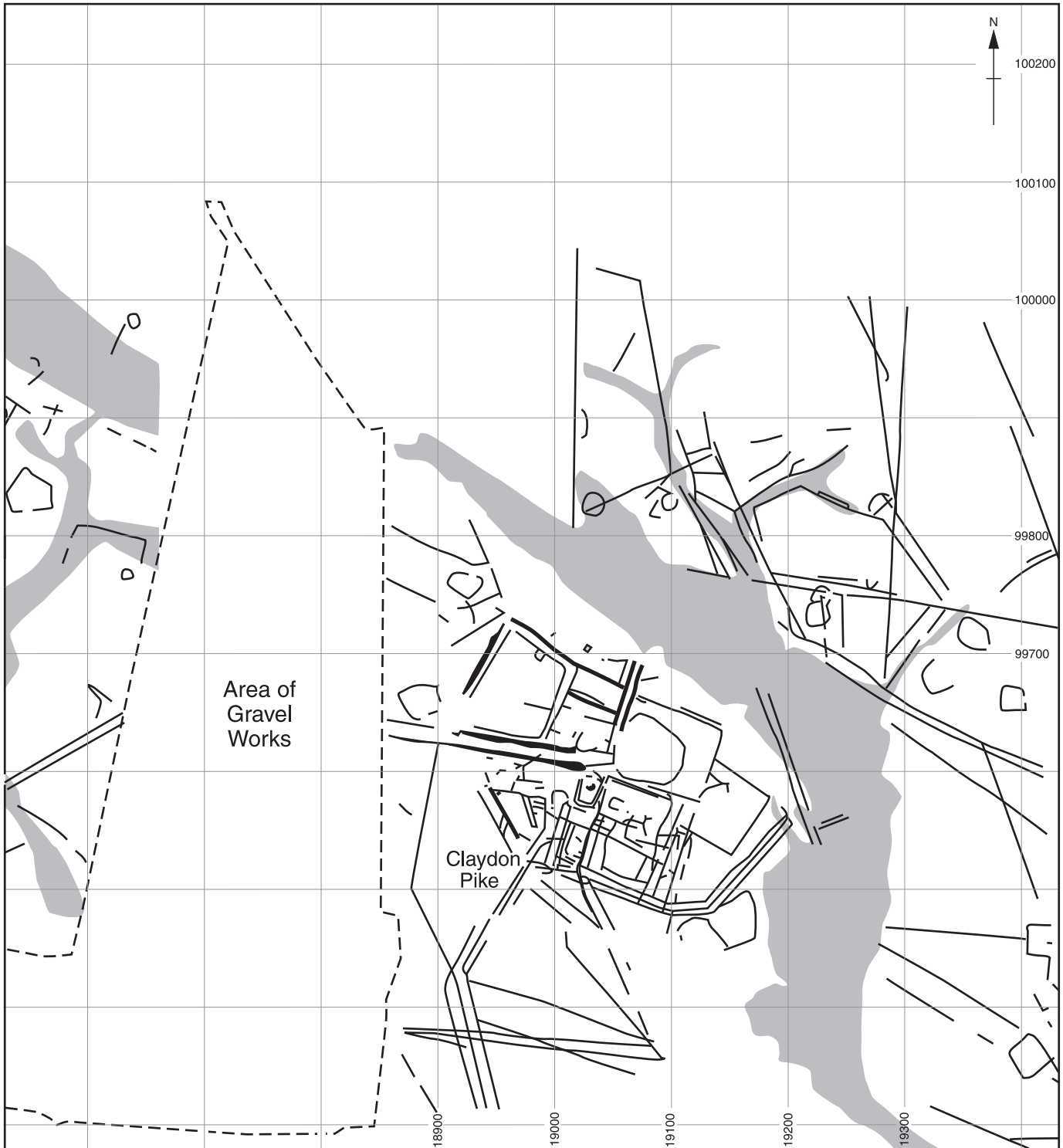






Fig. 1.4 Northern Area – Trenches 9, 22 and Salvage Area



Fig. 1.5 Southern Area – Trenches 7 and 8

processes prior to the evidence being used to phase the site. The obvious consequence of these activities is that assessments are made of the reliability of the 'evidence' (the third strand, spatial analysis, requires little pre-analysis utilising a set of loose concepts founded on the notion that we can recognise structured patterns, using concepts like features respecting each other, enclosing, being parallel to or perpendicular to one another).

In terms of the stratigraphy, assessment is done at a relatively unconscious level, in that stratigraphic 'problems' are resolved in order to form a coherent matrix. In reality this involves recognition that there are errors in the recording of the stratigraphic relationships. This, in turn, draws attention to the potential faults in the matrix. At Thornhill Farm the problems in the stratigraphic record can be ascribed to several factors: the longevity of the excavation programme, the use of

a large number of excavators with differing levels of expertise, and the difficulty of distinguishing the different fills and recuts given that the fills were derived from the same parent soil. An awareness of these factors introduces a degree of latitude in our reliance on the matrix, although this is difficult to quantify in any precise form. In practice it means we permit the other strands of evidence – the finds data and the spatial patterning – to be used to overturn the relationships recorded in the matrix during the process of phasing the site (see arguments 2 and 3 above). Given the essentially unquantifiable character of the uncertainty levels surrounding the matrix, the decision to use the other evidence in preference to the matrix is one obviously founded on an assessment of the reliability of the other evidence (see below), and an assessment of the balance of probabilities based on detailed knowledge of the site. This last factor

relies to an extent on the experience, expertise, and ability of the analyst.

A consideration of the site formation processes is most pertinent in relation to the datable artefacts, in that prior to phasing there has to be an evaluation of the reliability of the date provided by them. Therefore, a primary element of this analysis is to consider redeposition, which allows us to judge the potential weaknesses of the dating evidence derived from small pottery assemblages. This stated, the process adopted at Thornhill was to consider the dating evidence, however meagre, but to acknowledge its weakness in the context of the conclusions arrived at concerning the site formation processes.

Given the analytical primacy of the matrix construction and the appraisal of the site formation processes the results of these tasks need to be presented before we can discuss the phasing. The matrix compilation followed the orthodox methodology and the matrices are to be found within the site archive.

## **STRUCTURE OF THE REPORT**

The structure of the report has been partly determined by adherence to traditional methods of presentation and partly by practical considerations peculiar to the nature of Thornhill Farm. No attempt has been made to incorporate all of the detail recovered from the site into the report, as the sheer volume of data would have made a coherent account impossible. That stated all information has been considered in compiling the interpretation and discussion, and the full archive is available for consultation.

## **LOCATION OF THE ARCHIVE**

All of the original site records, including the finds and material generated during post-excavation analysis have been deposited at the Corinium Museum, Cirencester. A copy of the paper archive is also held on microfilm by the National Monuments Record, Swindon. In addition, a digital record of the site plans is held at Oxford Archaeology, Janus House, Osney Mead, Oxford.