

FORGOTTEN LANDSCAPES, HIDDEN LIVES

THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF THE COTSWOLD WATER PARK



THE COTSWOLD WATER PARK

IS ONE OF THE MOST RAPIDLY CHANGING LANDSCAPES IN BRITAIN. THIS PART OF THE THAMES VALLEY overlies EXTENSIVE RESERVES OF SAND AND GRAVEL AND, SINCE THE 1920S, UP TO 2 MILLION TONNES HAS BEEN QUARRIED EACH YEAR TO PROVIDE AGGREGATES FOR THE CONSTRUCTION INDUSTRY.

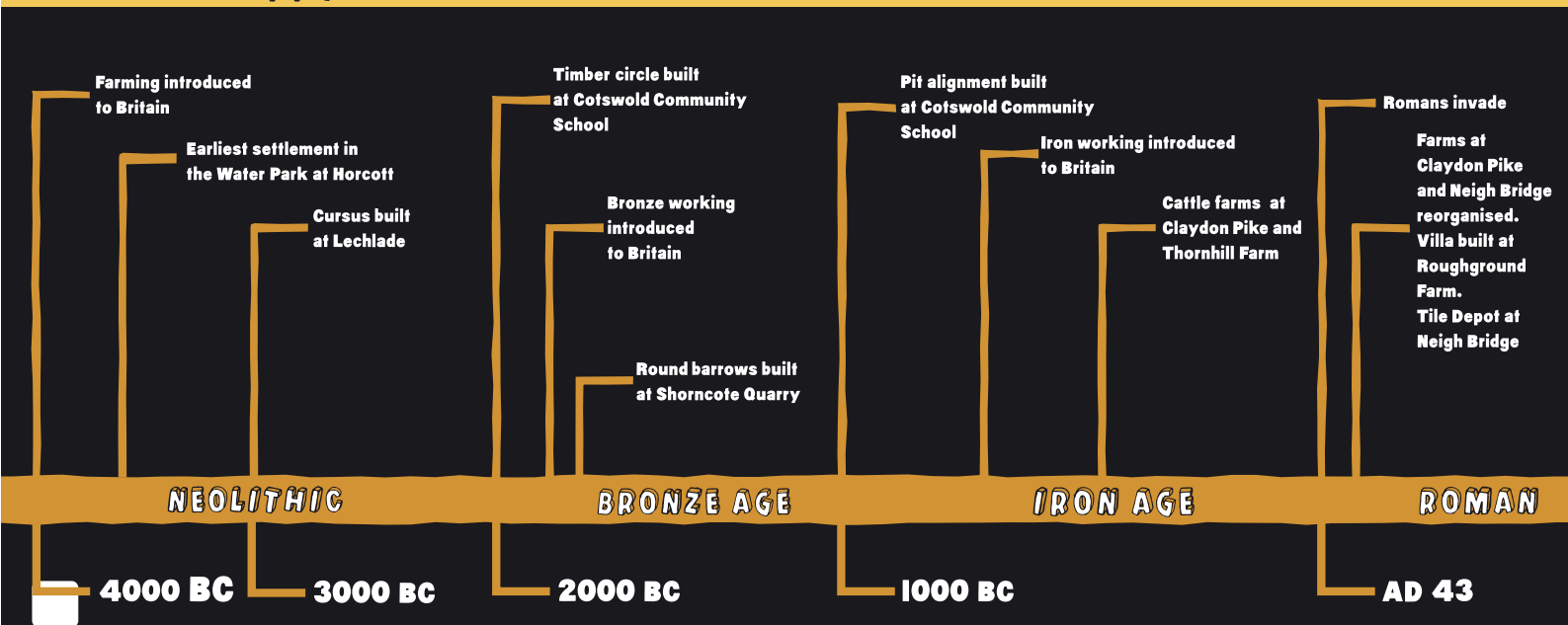


Discoveries in a changing Landscape

Quarrying has left 130 disused gravel pits, covering an area of almost 1,000 hectares. These are now flooded, transforming farmland into the landscape of large lakes visible today. Since the late 1950s an enormous amount of archaeological research has taken place in the Water Park in advance of gravel extraction, and it is now one of the most investigated archaeological areas in Britain. This booklet summarises evidence from these excavations to show how successive generations have inhabited the area since the earliest times.

▲ HEXAGONAL CROPMARK UNDER EXCAVATION ON THE ROUTE OF THE A419/A417 SWINDON TO GLOUCESTER TRUNK ROAD

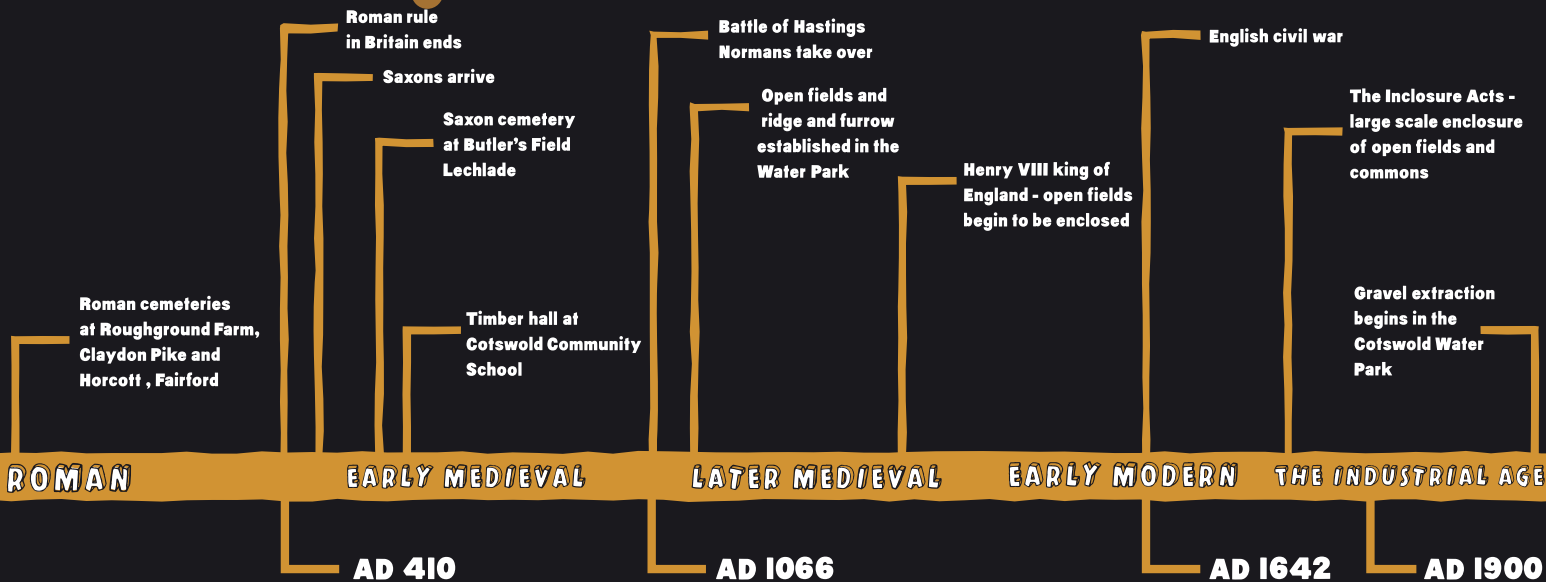
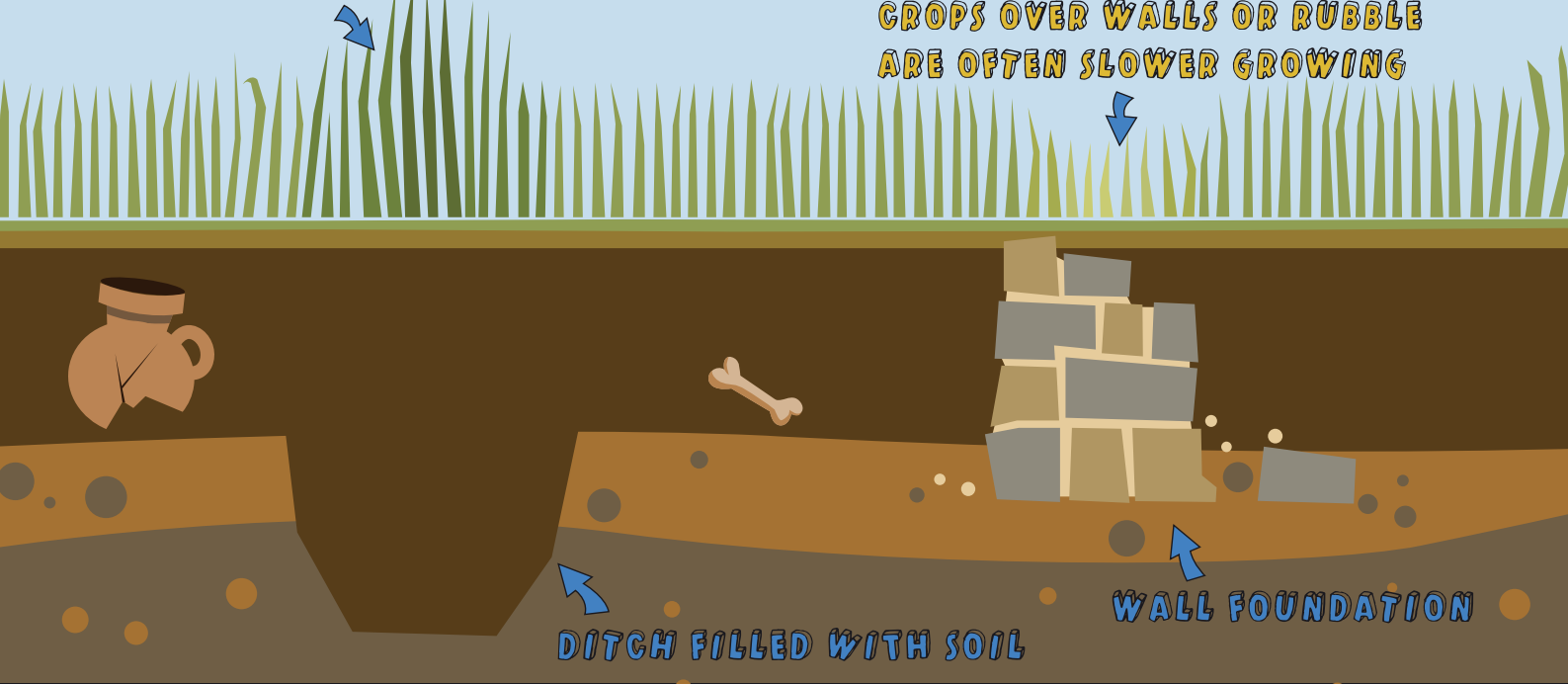
Although excavations have examined large areas, these only represent a small proportion of the Water Park. At certain times of year the remains of walls, ditches or pits, invisible on the ground, show up as cropmarks where differences in soil thickness cause crops to ripen at different speeds. These are most visible from the air and aerial photography has found many new sites, helping archaeologists fill the gaps between their excavations and recognise where gravel extraction threatens archaeological remains.



HOW A CROPMARK IS FORMED

CROPS GROWING ABOVE THE DITCH
ARE MUCH DARKER AND MORE LUSH

CROPS OVER WALLS OR RUBBLE
ARE OFTEN SLOWER GROWING



RECENT CHANGES IN THE WATER PARK **LANDSCAPE** ARE JUST THE LATEST PHASE IN A CONTINUING PROCESS, WHICH HAS BEEN GOING ON SINCE THE ARRIVAL OF HUMANS IN THE EARLY PREHISTORIC PERIOD



300,000 YEAR OLD STONE AXE
© WINCHESTER CITY COUNCIL MUSEUMS,
COURTESY OF THE PORTABLE ANTIQUITIES SCHEME



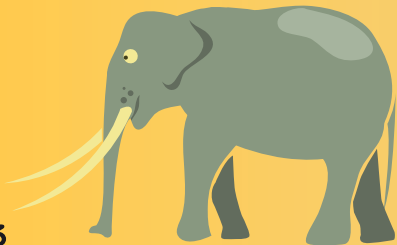
▲ THE COTSWOLD WATER PARK ABOUT 400,000 YEARS AGO

When early humans first arrived 500,000 years ago, the River Thames followed many small temporary channels through a landscape of sand banks and gravel islands with reed swamp and deciduous woodland. The climate was warmer than today and they shared their environment with elephants, rhinoceros, lions, sabre-toothed tigers and fallow deer.

70,000 years ago it began to gradually get colder with the approaching ice age, and over thousands of years the landscape changed into treeless arctic tundra similar to northern Siberia. Until about 25,000 years ago when Britain became too cold for permanent habitation, small bands of early humans lived by hunting woolly rhinoceros, mammoth, bears and reindeer.

GOTSWOLD CREATURES

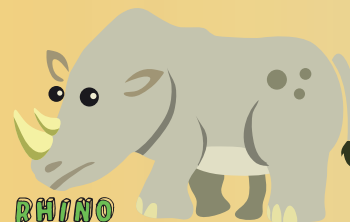
ELEPHANT



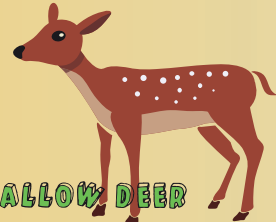
SABRE-TOOTHED TIGER



500,000 YEARS AGO



RHINO



FALLOW DEER



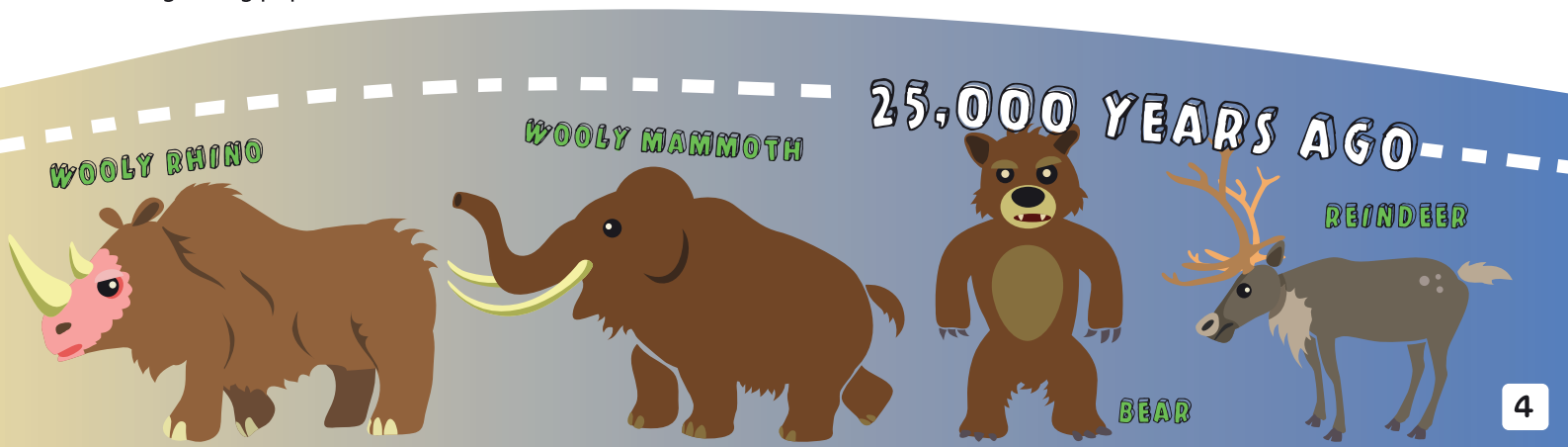
▲ THE COTSWOLD WATER PARK ABOUT 50,000 YEARS AGO

As the great thaw began about 14,000 years ago, pine and birch re-colonised the barren landscape. Over hundreds of years the climate became warmer and wetter and these forests were replaced with dense deciduous woodlands teeming with deer, boar and wild cattle. Humans returned to Britain and began the slow process of clearing woodland, modifying the landscape to suit their needs.

For thousands of years this would have had little impact, but things began to change about 6,000 years ago when people started to grow crops and keep animals. These early farmers only made small clearings, although over the next 4,000 years more woodland was cleared to create farmland to feed the growing population.



◀ 50,000 YEAR OLD
MAMMOTH SKULL FROM A
MORTON & CULLIMORE
GRAVEL PIT NEAR
ASHTON KEYNES
© COTSWOLD WATER PARK
SOCIETY



THE WAY THIS LANDSCAPE LOOKS **TODAY**
IS THE RESULT OF HOW PEOPLE HAVE
USED IT OVER THOUSANDS OF YEARS
(AND IT IS STILL CHANGING)



▲ THE BOUNDARY MARKED BY PITS AT COTSWOLD COMMUNITY SCHOOL
ABOUT 3,000 YEARS AGO IS STILL USED AS A PARISH BOUNDARY

Prehistoric land boundaries

Towards the end of the Bronze Age, about 3000 years ago, as the climate grew colder and wetter and the population continued to rise, land became more and more scarce. People began to mark out their territories in ways which had not been seen before, and lines of large pits, known as “pit alignments” were sometimes used to define boundaries. A double line of pits, which dated to the Late Bronze Age/Early Iron Age, has been found at Cotswold Community School. These coincide with the modern Parish boundary between Somerford Keynes and Ashton Keynes, a boundary that may have been in use for nearly 3000 years.

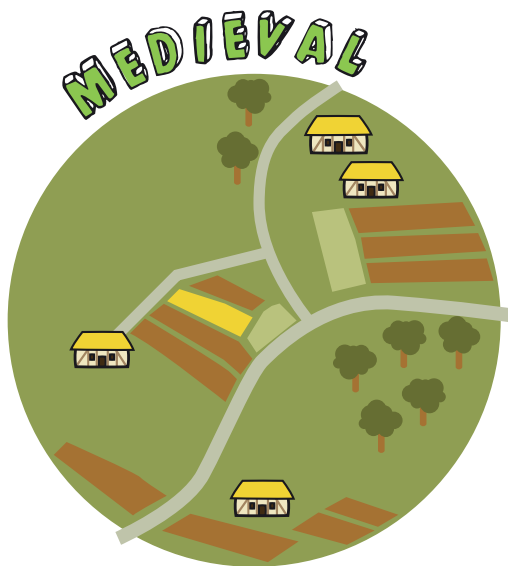
The Roman landscape

By the arrival of the Romans in AD43, the Water Park was already a mosaic of farmsteads, trackways with small fields, patches of woodland and large areas of open pasture. Little changed for 70 - 80 years, until the influence of the emerging Roman new town of Cirencester, less than five miles to the north, stimulated the local economy and new field systems, roads and buildings began to appear across much of the Water Park. Over the next 300 years the landscape continued to evolve and by the end of the Roman period much of the Water Park consisted of large pasture fields, arable and some hay meadow.



The post Roman landscape

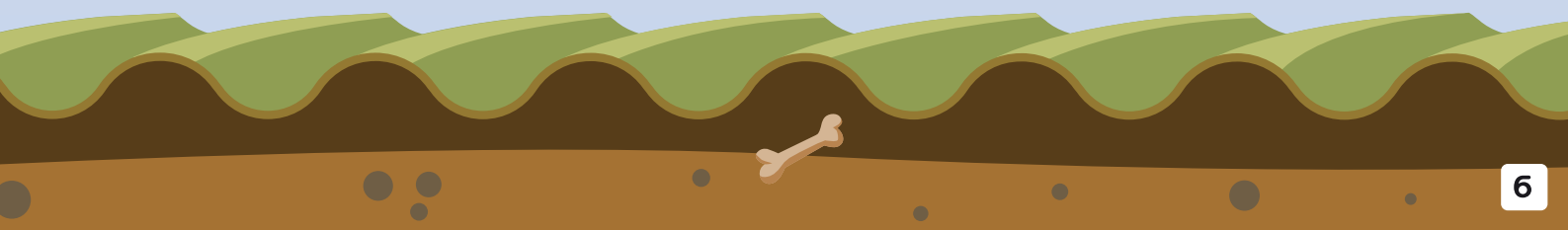
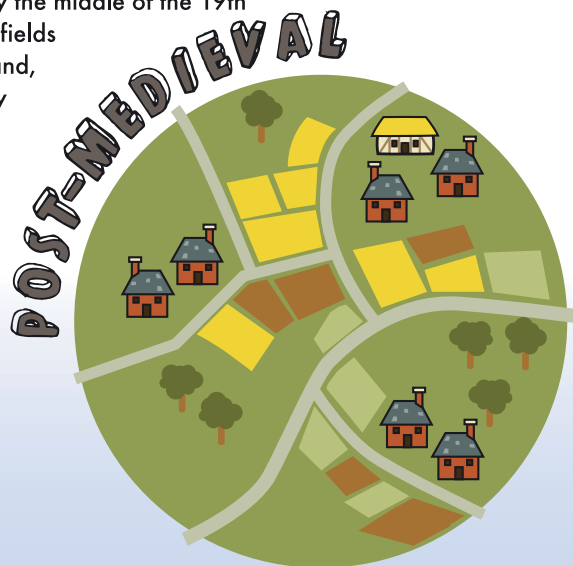
The arrival of the Anglo-Saxons in the late 5th century AD brought new changes. These were not immediate, but within 800 years the modern settlement pattern of the Water Park had been established and large open fields, with their distinctive patterns of **ridge and furrow**, were common. From the 16th century these large fields were gradually divided into smaller plots, and by the middle of the 19th century the landscape of arable fields with some small areas of woodland, which pre-dated the 20th century gravel quarrying, was in place.



RIDGE AND FURROW

What is ridge and furrow?

Ridge and furrow is the name given to the banks and hollows found in many fields in parts of the English countryside. During the middle ages each family grew their crops in long thin strips within large common fields. Each strip was ploughed from the centre outwards, always turning the soil upwards towards the middle. This gradually built up a ridge of soil along the centre of the strip whilst leaving a hollow, or furrow, between each ridge.





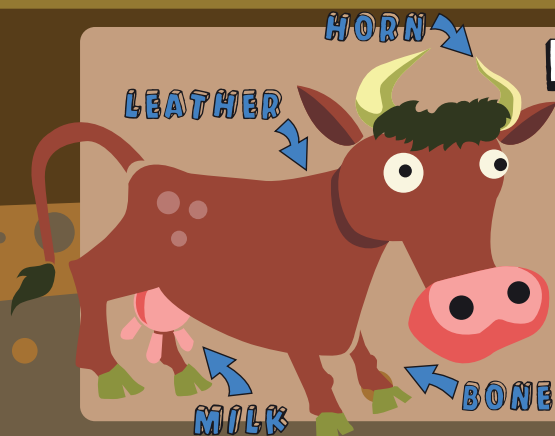
▲ **STONE AXE TRANSPORTED TO THE WATER PARK FROM CORNWALL 5,000 YEARS AGO**

The first farmers

About 6,000 years ago new ways of living appeared in Britain as people began to grow crops and keep animals for food. The earliest known farmers in the Water Park lived at Horcott Pit, Fairford and kept pigs, cattle and sheep. Most of the pigs were slaughtered for meat, although cattle tended to be kept to produce milk or as draught animals. They also grew wheat, known as Emmer, which had been introduced from the Middle East where it had been used to make bread and beer. They were the first people to make and use pottery in the Water Park. They did not live permanently at one site but divided their time between grazing land and their crops. Although they produced some of their food, they also hunted red and roe deer and ate wild fruit like crab apples and hazelnuts. Early farming communities were widespread in the Water Park, and although the landscape was still heavily wooded, rivers were major trade routes for commodities like flint and stone axes. These were transported long distances. Stone axes made in Cornwall have been found at Somerford Keynes and Cotswold Community School, and another from Wales was found at Butler's Court, Lechlade.

Iron Age and early Roman ranchers

From the middle of the Iron Age (about 400BC) open grassland was common in the Water Park and some people lived by herding cattle and sheep. Farmsteads at Claydon Pike, Thornhill Farm, Lechlade and Neigh Bridge, had rectangular or oval enclosures for corralling stock, and circular fodder stands. Animals were kept mainly for meat, but milk, leather and wool were produced on a smaller scale.



MAKING THE MOO'ST OF IT

Most of us now only associate farm animals with food. The Iron Age farmers in the Water Park would be able to find a use for nearly every part of the animal.

Can you guess which parts of the cow made which of the following things?

- CHEESE**
- DRINKING VESSELS**
- SHOES**
- KNIFE HANDLES**

Answers on back page



▲ ROMAN HAY MAKERS AT CLAYDON PIKE

Upwardly mobile Romans at Claydon Pike

Wholesale reorganisation of the Water Park countryside may have begun within about 70-80 years of the Roman conquest. The farmstead at Thornhill Farm was abandoned, new fields were laid out at Stubbs Farm, Kempsford Bowmoor and Horcott, and the sites at Claydon Pike and Neigh Bridge were completely transformed. Some people did well out of the new system. At Claydon Pike, grazing was still practised, but more animals were kept for milk or wool, and they had diversified in other ways. They produced hay, and grew wheat and barley which they dried in heated shelters known as corn dryers.

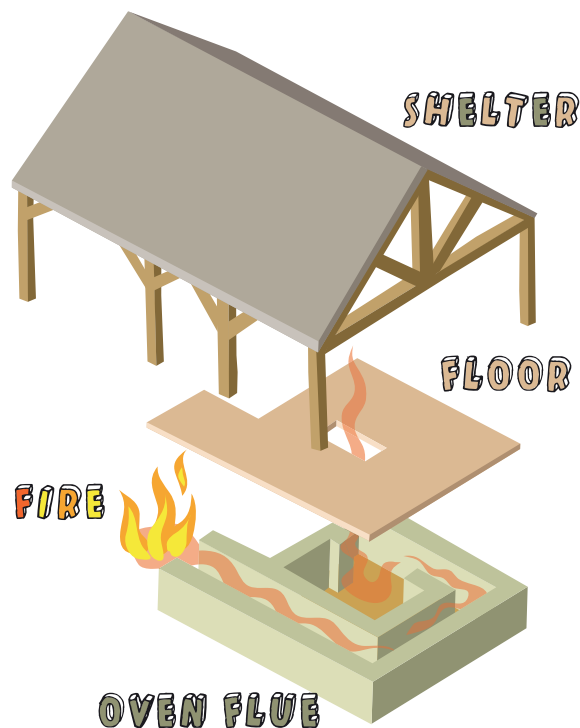
A Roman Tile Depot

Farming wasn't the only occupation in the Roman Water Park. At Neigh Bridge the remains of a large stone barn-like building was found with vast quantities of different types of Roman roof tile, some of which appeared to have been deliberately stacked as if for storage. Tile production was a big industry in the Roman world, and kilns in Minety in Wiltshire (4km to the south) provided tiles to the Thames Valley, the Cotswolds and beyond. Neigh Bridge may have been a large tile depot distributing tiles by river, or along the network of roads and tracks in the area. Military equipment has been found at the site, and the Roman army may initially have been involved in organising or policing this enterprise.

ROMAN ROOF TILE ►
© FISHBOURNE ROMAN
PALACE AND THE SUSSEX
ARCHAEOLOGICAL SOCIETY



**STONE LINED FLUES, ORIGINALLY BELOW ▲
THE FLOOR OF A ROMAN GRAIN DRYING
SHELTER AT GOTSWOLD COMMUNITY SCHOOL**



**▲ A ROMAN GRAIN DRYING SHELTER. HEAT FROM
THE FIRE PASSED THROUGH THE FLUE,
DRYING THE GRAIN ON THE FLOOR ABOVE**



PRE-ROMAN CLOTHES

People have used wool to make cloth for thousands of years and special weights for looms, over 2,500 years old, have been found at Claydon Pike, and bobbins, weaving combs and needles of the same date have been found at Gravelly Guy. At this time yarn was spun from wool by hand using a short stick, known as a spindle, with a small weight attached to one end to improve the spinning motion. This weight is known as a spindle whorl and pre-Roman examples have been found at Horcott Pit, Fairford. We cannot be certain what colours and styles were used but by the 1st century BC cloaks and other items of clothing were fastened with distinctive decorated brooches. Some of their clothing would have been just as fine, and people clearly cared about their appearance.



▲ TWO VIEWS OF A CERAMIC SPINDLE WHORL

ROMAN STYLE

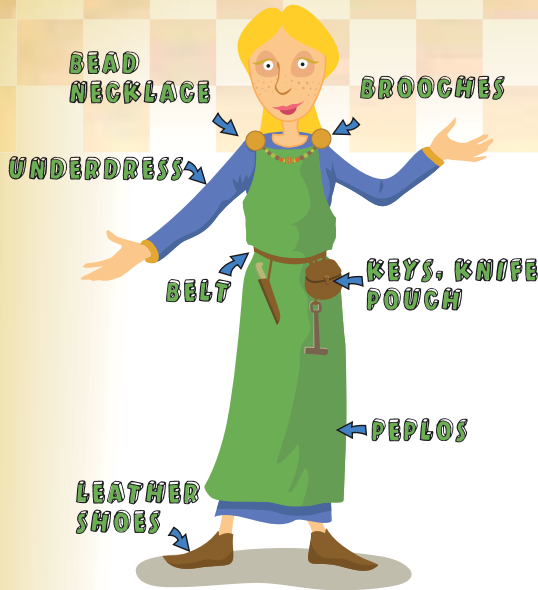
Most people in the Water Park were slow to adopt Roman fashions, although 70-80 years after the Roman invasion the upwardly mobile farmers at Claydon Pike were flaunting their Roman lifestyle in the way they dressed. The women wore a long loose fitting woollen tunic known as a tunic, over which they draped a rectangular shawl, a palla, secured with a bronze brooch. The men would have worn a shorter tunic and in cold weather men and women wore a cucullus, a thick wool cloak, which had a hood. The women styled their hair after the Roman fashion using hairpins and both sexes wore Roman style shoes soled with hobnails. They were also conscious of personal hygiene and appearance and used small toilet sets with tools to remove unwanted hair, care for fingernails, and clean out their ears.



AN ARCHAEOLOGIST EXCAVATES AROUND THE HOBNAILS OF A ROMAN SANDAL AT BOURTON-ON-THE-WATER ▼



SAXON FASHION



An early Saxon cemetery at Butler's Field, Lechlade has told us a lot about the way people dressed in the 5th and 6th centuries AD.

Wealthy women wore a loose fitting tubular dress, known as a peplos. This was fastened at the shoulder with a pair of circular bronze saucer brooches decorated with spiral or star designs, or more ornate brooches encrusted with semi-precious stones and shell. It was gathered at the waist with leather belts fastened with bronze or iron buckles. Leather or cloth bags, suspended from ivory rings or iron frames, hung from the belt and contained a range of personal possessions, trinkets and tools including combs, tweezers, keys, strings of beads or small knives. Sometimes other household tools were also hung from the belt. For warmth they wore cloaks and one particularly well-dressed lady fastened hers over her left shoulder with a fine square-headed brooch.

They wore a range of jewellery including strings of amber, glass or crystal beads, which they hung from their brooch pins, and silver or brass finger rings. They also had pendants made from cowrie shell, beaver tooth, Roman coins or decorated gold discs set with glass or garnets. Men were dressed less decoratively, although some had belts fastened with ornate buckles or with decorated bone fittings. Only one pair of simple iron brooches, probably used to fasten a cloak, were found and although two men were buried with glass or amber beads, neither had enough to form a necklace, and these may have been carried as talismen rather than worn as jewellery.

ONE OF THE MANY ANGLO-SAXON SKELETONS FOUND AT BUTLER'S FIELD, LECHLADE.



SAUCER BROOCHES LIKE THIS FASTENED THE PEPLOS AT THE SHOULDERS



SQUARE-HEADED BROOCHES LIKE THIS WERE USED TO FASTEN CLOAKS

PEOPLE HAVE LIVED IN THIS AREA FOR **THOUSANDS** OF YEARS BUT THE PLACES THEY CALLED **HOME** HAVE CHANGED CONSIDERABLY

PREHISTORIC



For much of the period before the Roman invasion of AD43 many people lived in large circular houses. These varied in design, but in the Water Park were often surrounded by a circular ditch, about 10m in diameter, to collect rainwater from the roof. Houses were about 8m across and their outer walls were made from turf, cob, or daub spread over wattle hurdles. Each house had a conical roof thatched with reeds, or turf, and a single entrance with large timber doorposts. Some houses also had an external porch. The central part of the house had most light and would have been used for public activities like cooking and eating, with more private space in the darker areas nearer the walls.

ROMAN



Most people continued to live in the same types of houses as their forebears after the Romans took control in AD43. Within 70-80 years, however, the wealthy had begun to adopt new styles of building in the Water Park.

At Roughground Farm a comfortable farmhouse, or villa, was built with painted plaster walls, a dining room with a curved wall, designed to take best advantage of the view, and a room with underfloor heating where hot air circulated through spaces under the mosaic floor.

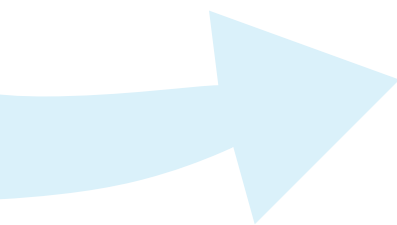
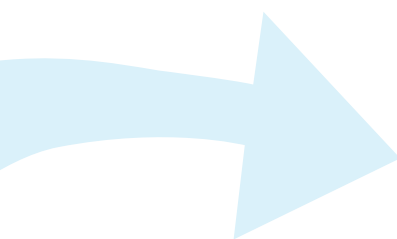
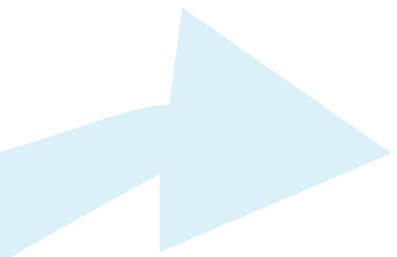
At about the same time two large rectangular buildings were built at Claydon Pike. One of these was a large barn, but the other had decorated plaster walls and was clearly a house.

ANGLO-SAXON



Many Anglo-Saxons lived in large rectangular timber halls, and one of these has been excavated at Cotswold Community School.

These halls had half-timbered walls with wattle and daub panels set between vertical uprights and their roofs were either thatched or tiled with wooden shingles. They usually had two doorways on opposing sides of the long walls. These were communal dwellings which housed whole families along with their retainers and dependants. Some may have been a single large room, although others had internal divisions of some kind. Some halls had a separate annex which would have provided more privacy.



FROM THE EARLIEST TIMES PEOPLE HAVE HELD RELIGIOUS BELIEFS AND TAKEN PART IN RITUAL CEREMONIES TO MARK THE SEASONS, CELEBRATE SIGNIFICANT EVENTS IN THEIR LIVES AND CEMENT SOCIAL BONDS

Neolithic public monuments

One of the earliest ritual sites from the Water Park was a long rectangular enclosure, known as a cursus, built by early farming communities near Lechlade about 5,000 years ago. Ploughing has levelled the site, but cropmarks tell us that it was about 50m wide and at least 150m long, although it may originally have been longer, running towards the River Thames less than 1km to the south. There are many other cursus in Britain, but no one is sure what they were used for or what beliefs they represented. Local communities probably gathered at the site to observe religious festivals that may have included ritual processions along the cursus which acted as a routeway linking other sacred monuments or important natural features in the landscape. These ceremonies did not just meet the spiritual needs of the community, but would have been a way of cementing social bonds and the site itself was a way of marking their identity on the landscape.

About 1,000 years later another sort of ritual monument was built at Cotswold Community School. This consisted of a circle, about 20m in diameter demarcated by a number of upright wooden posts set in large pits. We do not know whether this had originally been a roofed building or a ring of free-standing posts similar to a timber version of the later stone circles which are more common in other parts of Britain.

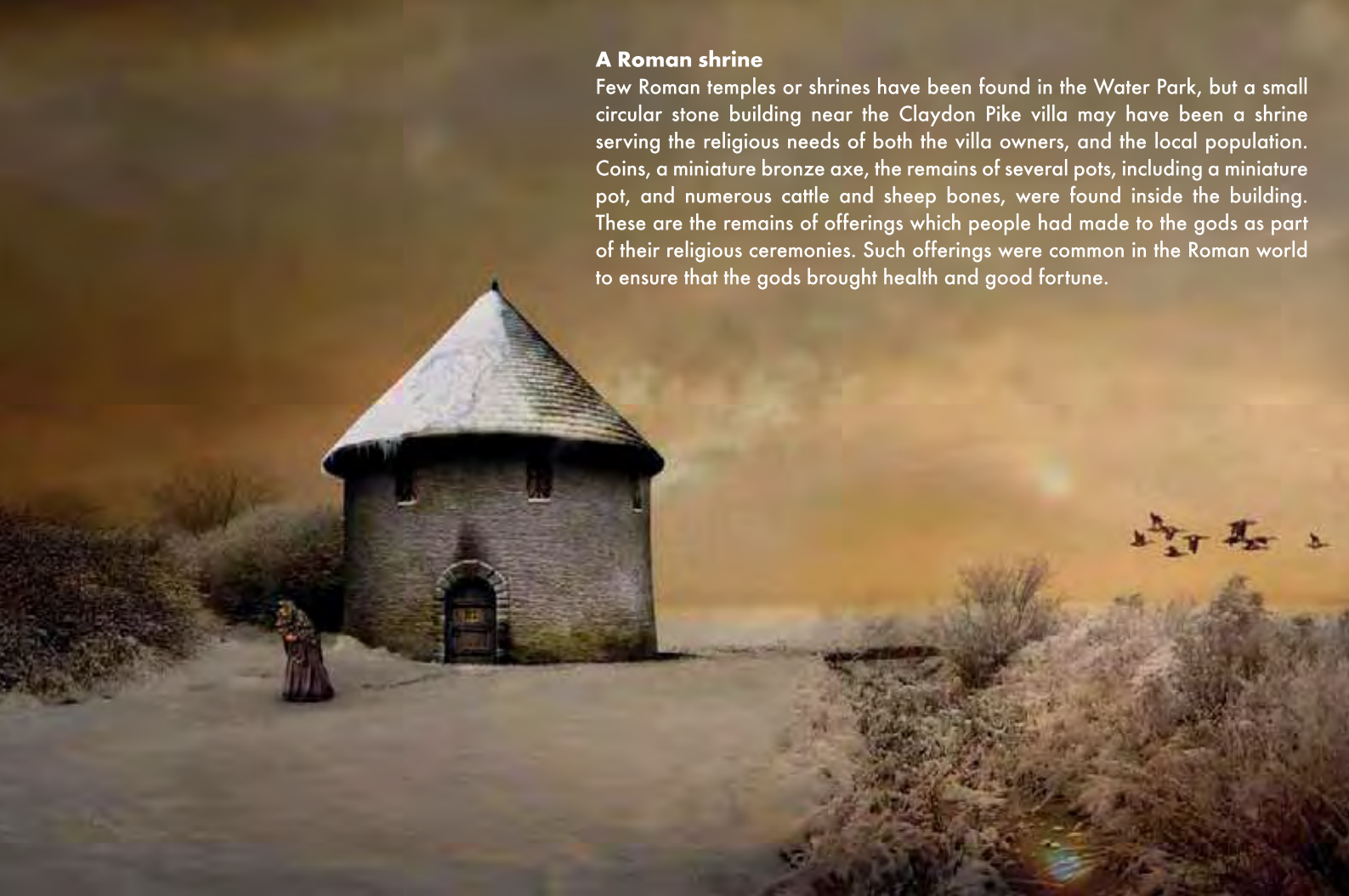
Known examples of timber circles are quite rare, with only a few others in central and southern England, although as their remains do not survive above ground, it is very likely that many more await discovery. Archaeologists are not really sure what these sites were used for. They do not appear to have been burial sites, although they may have been associated with burial rituals in some way, and were probably used as the focus of a number of public rituals and ceremonies. Pig bones have been found at Durrington walls, a timber circle near Stonehenge in Wiltshire, showing that feasting was part of the celebrations which took place at that site.



▲ THE TIMBER CIRCLE FROM COTSWOLD COMMUNITY SCHOOL AS IT MAY HAVE LOOKED 4,000 YEARS AGO

A Roman shrine

Few Roman temples or shrines have been found in the Water Park, but a small circular stone building near the Claydon Pike villa may have been a shrine serving the religious needs of both the villa owners, and the local population. Coins, a miniature bronze axe, the remains of several pots, including a miniature pot, and numerous cattle and sheep bones, were found inside the building. These are the remains of offerings which people had made to the gods as part of their religious ceremonies. Such offerings were common in the Roman world to ensure that the gods brought health and good fortune.



◀ THE SHIELD ▶

By Juno!!!

Although no religious buildings have been found at Neigh Bridge, two fragments of Roman sculpture, carved from Cotswolds Limestone, have been found at that site. These depict an eagle and a shield, motifs which show that they were originally part of a statue of Jupiter, Juno and Minerva, three of the most important gods of the Roman world. This statue would have been housed in a shrine on the site.



THE EAGLE ▶

THE METHODS USED TO DISPOSE OF THE DEAD CAN SAY A LOT ABOUT A SOCIETY'S BELIEFS



Bronze Age burials

Between about 1800BC and 700BC (the Bronze Age), many people were buried under round barrows and 80 of these are known in the Water Park. These have all been levelled by ploughing, and are only recognised in excavations or as cropmarks. They range in shape and size but most would have been a small mound surrounded by a circular ditch, about 15m in diameter. A single burial, either a crouched body, or an urn filled with ashes, was buried in a pit beneath the mound. Barrows are often found in groups, and these cemeteries continued to be used long after the barrows were built. Seven barrows, each with an urn filled with ashes, were found at Shorncote Quarry. At a later date five cremations and five burials were placed in, or just outside, the barrow's ditches.

Iron Age and early Roman burials.

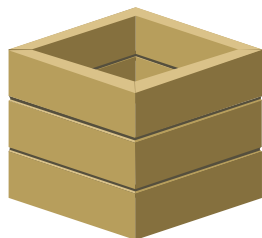
There is very little evidence for Iron Age or early Roman burial practices in the Water Park, although an unusual early Roman burial was excavated at Roughground Farm, Lechlade. An urn containing a single cremation was placed in a wooden box and buried in a pit surrounded by a square ditch. This could have been covered with a small mound, although four posts around the pit may have supported a wooden shrine or memorial.



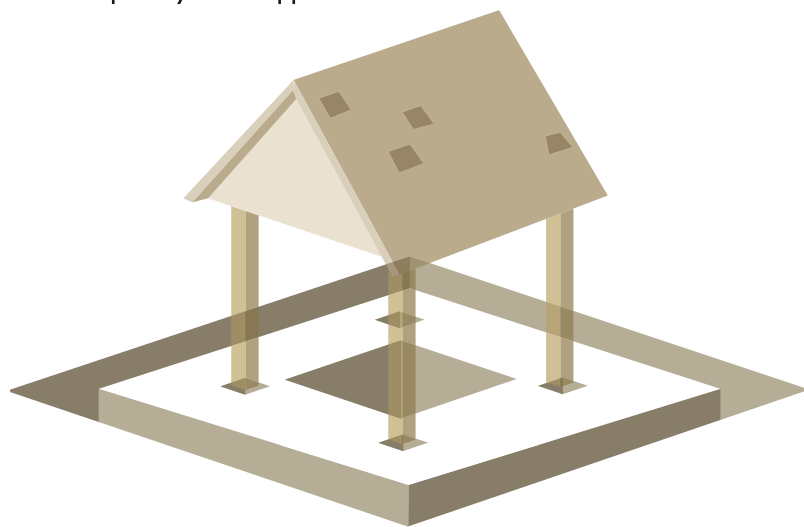
CREMATION



URN



BOX



Roman cemeteries

About 200 years after the Roman conquest, burial of the dead was more common, and cemeteries have been found near the villas at Roughound Farm and Claydon Pike and also at Horcott, Fairford. Burial practices varied with some people buried in wooden coffins, others in shrouds, and one child from Horcott was in a lead coffin. Most lay on their backs or sides, although a few were buried face down, and hobnails found in the graves show that some people were buried in their shoes. A few of the bodies had been decapitated shortly after death. This ritual was not unusual in late Roman Britain, and may have been used to release the life force which the Romans believed resided in the head.

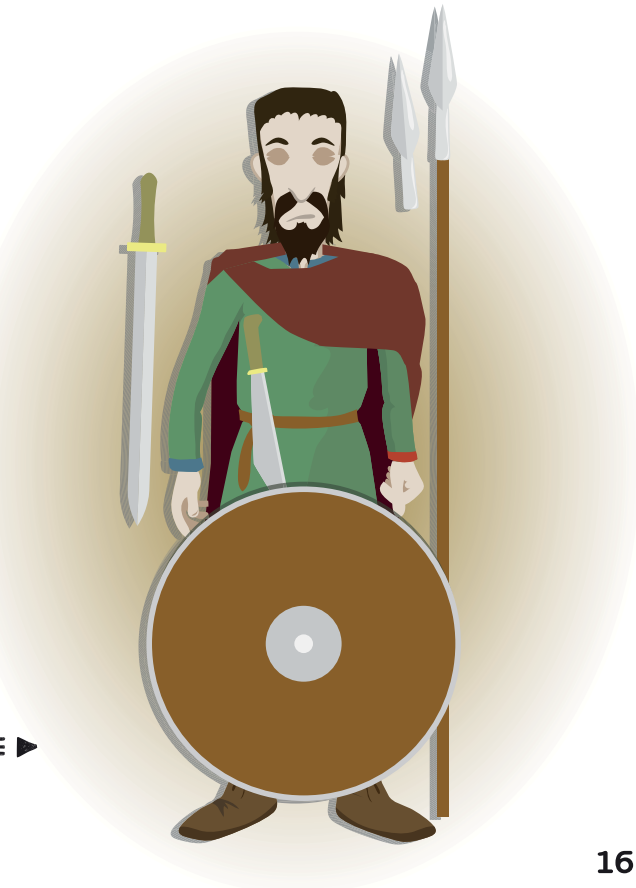


▲ DECAPITATED ROMAN BURIAL FROM HORCOTT

Saxon burials

Part of a large Saxon cemetery at Butler's Field, Lechlade, contained the remains of over 200 men, women and children, many of which dated to the 5th and 6th centuries AD, the earliest phase of Saxon occupation in the Upper Thames Valley. Some of the women were dressed in their finest clothes and jewellery and were equipped with the things they would have used in everyday life, such as spindle whorls, knives, combs, keys and even buckets. Some of the men were buried with swords, shields or spears, although none was fully equipped with everything they would have needed in a battle. It is difficult to know exactly what these burial practices meant to the people of the time, but they were probably symbolic of the role and status that the deceased had in life, and ensured that they were recognised and suitably welcomed in the afterlife. Some of the jewellery buried with the women also sheds light on early Saxon beliefs. Their amber beads, and pendants made from animal teeth or cowrie shells, were not just for decoration but may have been amulets providing the wearer with good luck, protection against misfortune, or ensuring their fertility.

**SOME EARLY SAXON MEN WERE
BURIED WITH THEIR WEAPONS ►**



THE STORY OF THE COTSWOLD WATER PARK IS NOT OVER

Gravel will continue to be quarried and managing this rapidly changing landscape presents archaeologists with both challenges and opportunities. More excavations will take place as quarrying increases and the results of this research will add to our knowledge of the archaeology of this fascinating area.

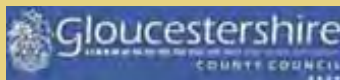




Forgotten landscapes, hidden lives

Forgotten landscapes, hidden lives tells the story of some of the ways people have lived, worked and died in the Cotswold Water Park since the earliest times. They often left no historical records, but over the last 40 years, archaeologists working ahead of gravel quarrying have been able to piece together the evidence they did leave behind and rediscover details of their lives and the landscape they inhabited. This booklet was produced by Gloucestershire County Council Archaeology Service and Oxford Archaeology. It was funded by grants from the Aggregates Levy Sustainability Fund administered by English Heritage, and the Cotswold Water Park Society.

£2.50



For more heritage walks go to the
Cotswold Water park website.

WWW.WATERPARK.ORG



MAKING THE MOO'ST OF IT

Answers: Horn - Drinking Vessels, Milk - Cheese, Leather - Shoes, Bone - Knife Handles