

# Chapter 2

## Excavations at Claydon Pike: an Introduction

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### INTRODUCTION

Claydon Pike was excavated between 1979 and 1983, as part of a landscape based research programme that was originally laid down in the mid 1970s in response to increased gravel extraction in the region (see Preface and Chapter 1). This area of the Upper Thames Valley was chosen for archaeological investigation because of the presence of major complexes of cropmarks which revealed whole settlements, field systems and trackways, thought to be of Iron Age and Roman date (Fig. 2.1; see below). Claydon Pike was the major site to be excavated within the project, although its relationship with the nearby settlement at Thornhill Farm, lying c 800 m to the west, was realised as being of crucial importance at an early stage. The excavations were funded by the Historic Buildings and Monuments Commission (HBMC(E)) with further assistance from the Amey Roadstone Corporation (ARC), now Hanson, while much of the labour force was provided by the Manpower Services Commission and soldiers from the Light Infantry Depot at Shrewsbury.

The investigations at Claydon Pike, which covered some 40 ha, revealed two zones of settlement (Fig. 2.1). To the north in Warrens Field (Fig. 2.2), a middle Iron Age settlement spread across three gravel islands, while c 100 m further south in Longdoles Field (Fig. 2.3) was a settlement which was established in the early 1st century AD and seemingly occupied continually until the end of the Roman period. Within this sequence there were three very distinct phases of occupation which were linked to changes in economy and social structure. Altogether, the settlement at Claydon Pike has proven to be of fundamental importance in understanding the character and development of Iron Age and Roman settlement in this part of the Upper Thames Valley.

### SITE LOCATION

The site is situated between Lechlade (2.5 km) and Fairford (3.5 km) in Gloucestershire, with the two areas of settlement lying either side of the parish boundary (Fig. 2.1; NGR SU 190996). It is near to the confluence of the rivers Coln and Thames and is now part of the eastern Cotswold Water Park.

### GEOLOGY, TOPOGRAPHY AND LAND USE

Both the Warrens Field and Longdoles Field sites occupied the First Gravel Terrace of the Upper Thames Valley, and lay approximately 1 km north of the River Coln floodplain, at an average height of c 74-5 m OD (Fig. 1.3). The main settlements were situated upon well drained raised gravel islands which were surrounded by relict water courses and marshy areas. 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 oolitic limestone uplands.

Documentary evidence indicates that the area was mainly pastoral in the medieval and post-medieval periods. Two farms were established close by in the 17th century but ploughing only began on the Roman-British settlement in the late 1950s and ceased in 1979.

### AERIAL PHOTOGRAPHIC SURVEYS

The investigations of Claydon Pike and Thornhill Farm were initiated thanks to the detailed information provided by aerial photography accumulated intermittently over some twenty years between 1957 and 1977 by Cambridge University's Committee for Aerial Photography and the Royal Commission on Historical Monuments (England) (HBMC(E)).

A detailed account of the history of photography in the area is provided in Miles (1983) and so will only be summarised here. What is clear is that in this area of First Gravel Terrace, fragmented by relict palaeochannels, the most detailed and useful images were produced in the hot dry summers such as 1969, 1975 and 1976 when soil moisture deficit was at its most extreme. The value of intensive aerial survey in such years is self-evident from the images reproduced here (Pls 2.1-2.7).

It seems likely that ongoing gravel extraction in the Cotswold Water Park and the ponding of ground water in the expanding area of lakes also resulted in the lowering of the water table and drier soil. As the archaeological excavations progressed into the Thornhill Farm area cropmarks appeared with increasing clarity – ironically only months before they were consumed by the advancing gravel pits.

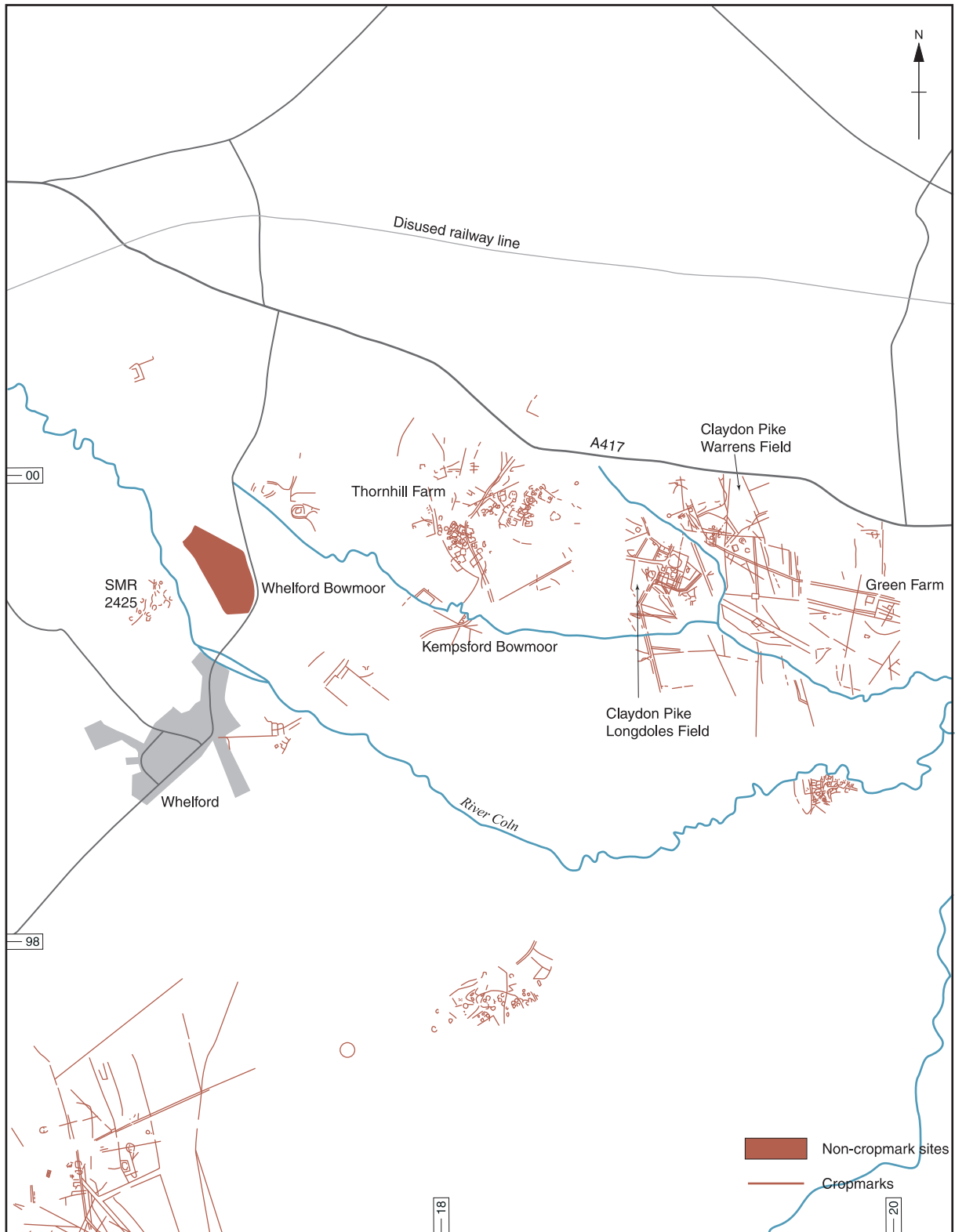
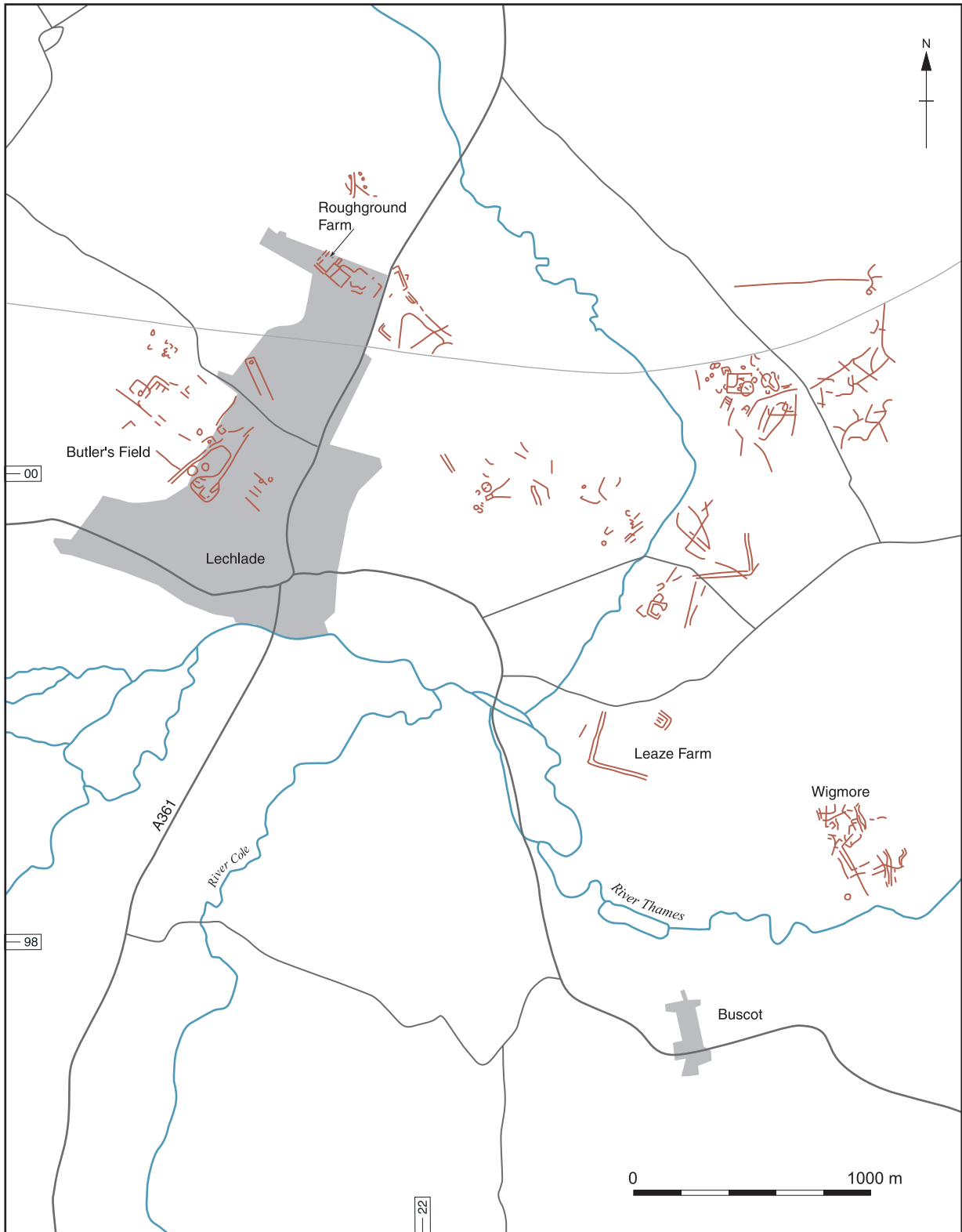


Fig. 2.1 Location of Claydon Pike in relation to local cropmarks





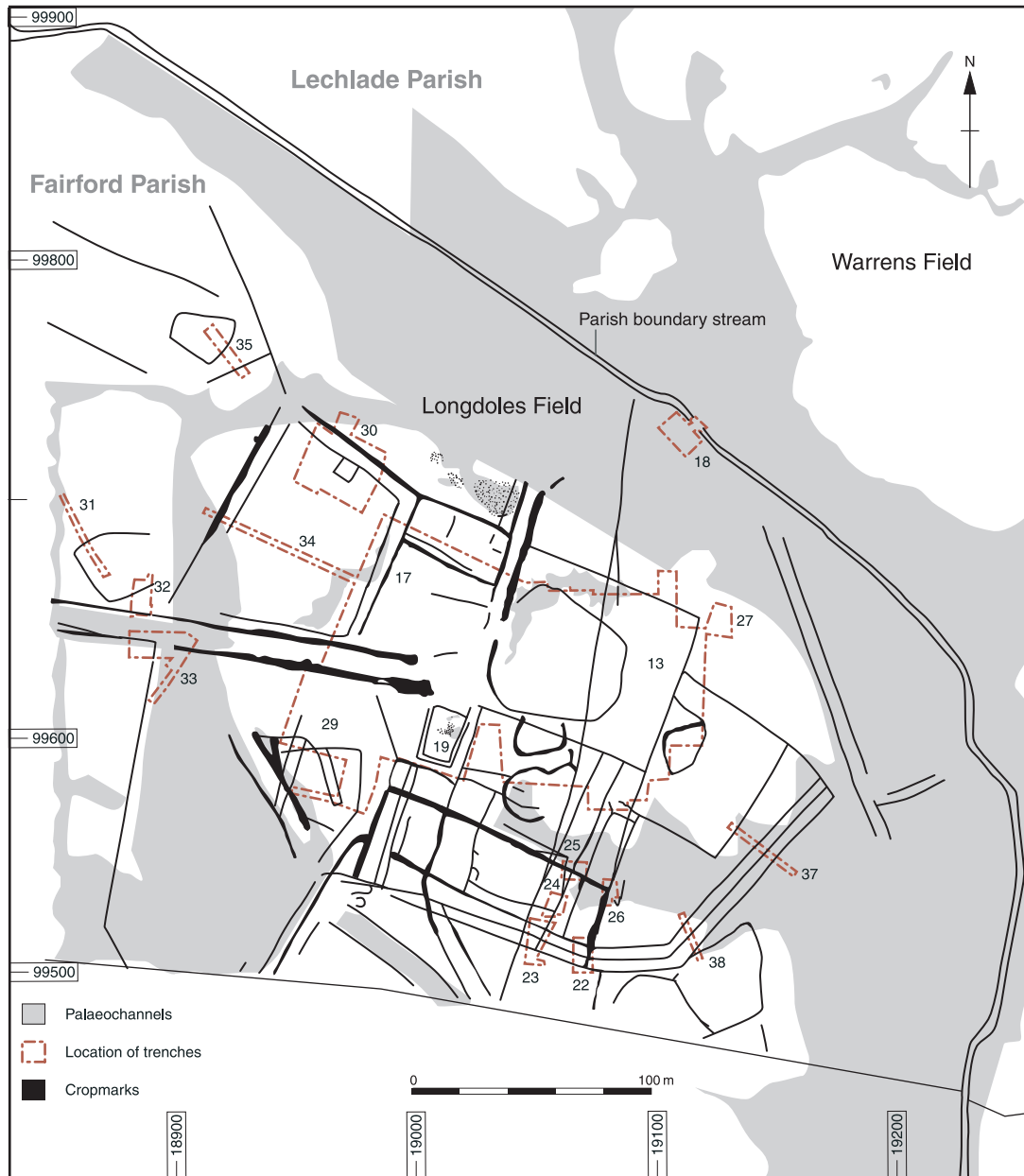


Fig. 2.3 Trench plan of Longdoles Field

Facing page: Fig. 2.2 Trench plan of Warrens Field





*Plate 2.1 Aerial photograph looking west showing palaeochannels, gravel islands and cropmarks at Claydon Pike Warrens Field, taken in July 1959 (© Cambridge Collections)*

The Claydon Pike/Thornhill Farm cropmarks (centred at SU 191996 and SU 183998) covered an area of approximately 1500 m (E-W) by 1000 m (N-S) straddling the parish boundary of Lechlade and Fairford, with a Romano-British trackway (as confirmed by excavation) running across the Fairford-Kempsford parish boundary to the south.

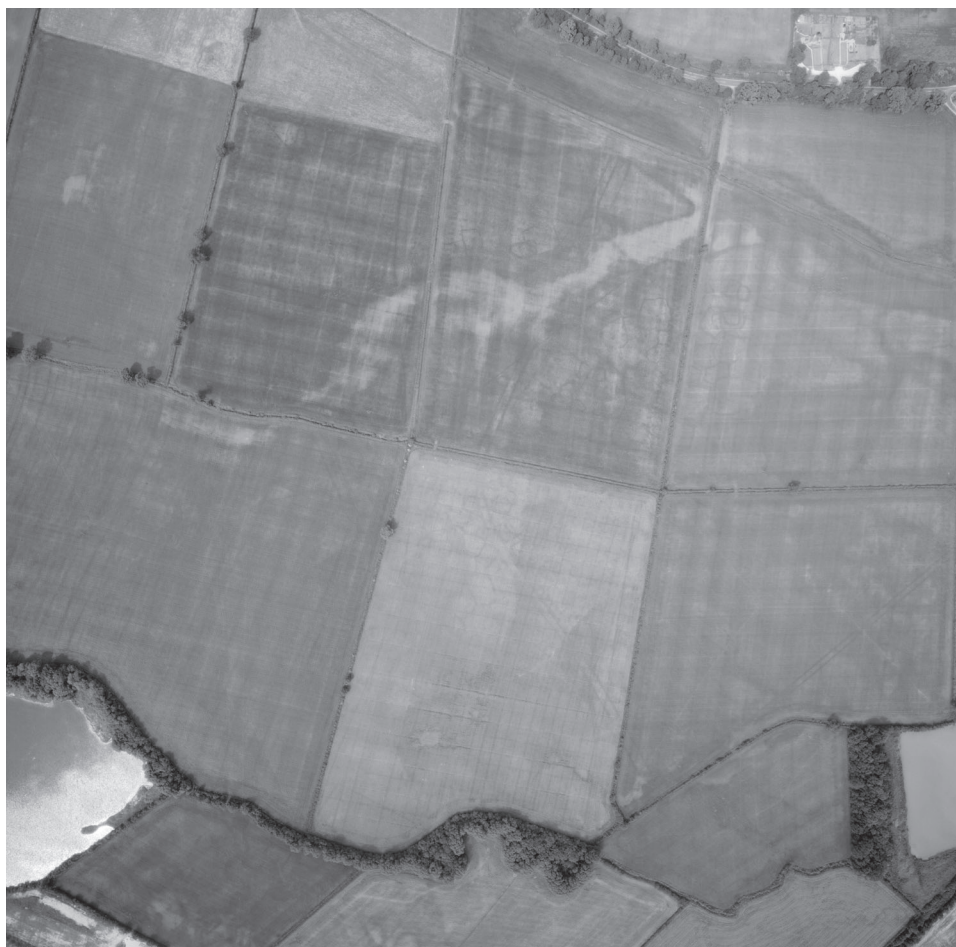
The area was plotted in detail and published by the Royal Commission on Historical Monuments (1976, 55, 73) and also in Leech 1977, map 4 and fig 5. This mapping was completed without the benefit of the more detailed images provided by aerial surveys undertaken in the exceptionally hot summer of 1976. The excavators were, however, able to take advantage of these spectacular images.

On the basis of cropmark analysis three settlement areas were defined:

1. In the east, in Warrens Field, Lechlade there were a number of oval enclosures occupying dry islands or peninsulas of gravel, first seen clearly in aerial photographs taken in 1957 and

1959 (Pl. 2.1). These were interpreted, correctly, as Iron Age crop circles. Fieldwalking provided virtually no confirmatory dating evidence. For a comparison of the best cropmark image of the hut circles and the excavated plan see Plate 2.6 and Figure 3.1. Three distinct groups of hut circles could be identified from aerial photography. The identification of these influenced the excavation strategy and, as a result of area excavation (Figs 3.2, 3.3, 3.5) approximately twice as many hut circles were revealed. The principal factor which influenced the visibility of hut circles was the size of the surrounding drainage gullies. It was only as a result of excavation and the analysing of the horizontal stratigraphy that the number and sequence of hut circles could be clarified.

A complex network of enclosures was also visible in Warrens Field. In 1978 Colin Bowen of RCHM(E) and the present author visited the site areas with the aerial photographs in order to try to separate out the various field systems which



*Plate 2.2 Aerial photograph showing trackways and enclosures at Thornhill Farm, west of Claydon Pike, taken in July 1969 (© Cambridge Collections)*

overlapped in the cropmark evidence. It is fair to say we were not very successful. From the earliest (1957) photographs it was possible to identify early-modern boundaries which had subsequently been removed, and appeared as cropmarks on the later photographs. There were other cropmarks which indicated the regular enclosures and field tracks of the early modern enclosure system. This interpretation was confirmed shortly afterwards by the analysis of a 19th-century estate map held at Thornhill Farm. Trench 8 (Fig. 3.3) of the excavation was sited to test this interpretation and confirmed the position on the map of a small copse defined by boundary ditches. Alongside the eastern boundary a wider ditch, visible on the July 1976 photographs (Pl. 2.6), proved to have been dug to bury domestic animals.

Excavation confirmed that a regular Romano-British field system also covered Warrens Field which in part reflected a less clearly defined system of Iron Age enclosures. These often ran alongside the palaeochannels and can be difficult to see on the aerial photographs. With the benefit of the excavation data the Romano-

British system is clearly visible on the 1976 aerial photographs and traces of the Iron Age fields are also detectable.

The palaeochannels were not plotted on the RCHM(E) plans yet these are fundamental to the interpretation of the settlements and fields. These clearly influenced the siting of round houses and of drainage ditches. Excavation across these features produced the best organic deposits in which environmental data survived. Structural evidence, for example of the Roman road which cut across Warrens Field, survived best in these silt-filled waterlogged hollows. In other words if linear features visible as cropmarks can be projected into alluvial deposits (where no cropmarks are visible) then this may be the most appropriate place to find the highest quality structural and biological evidence.

2. The central settlement in Longdoles Field Fairford Parish consisted of a dense concentration of rectangular enclosures divided by a wide central street and others which branched off it (Pl. 2.5).





*Plate 2.3 Aerial photograph of Claydon Pike Longdoles Field and Warrens Field, taken in July 1969 (© Cambridge Collections)*



*Plate 2.4 Aerial photograph of Claydon Pike and land to the east, taken in July 1969 (© Cambridge Collections)*





*Plate 2.5 Aerial photograph showing features in Claydon Pike Longdoles Field, taken in July 1975 (© Crown copyright)*



*Plate 2.6 Aerial photograph of Claydon Pike Longdoles Field and Warrens Field, taken in July 1976 (© Crown copyright)*

A system of triple drainage ditches seemed to define the settlement on the east and south side, and the cropmarks suggested a regularly laid out Romano-British settlement. Fieldwalking confirmed this interpretation as the enclosures survived as low platforms and the streets as slight hollows. Fieldwalking produced large quantities of Roman pottery and building material from the surface. Unlike Warrens Field it seems that Longdoles Field had not been frequently or deeply ploughed up to 1979 (according to the farmer the land was only intermittently ploughed during the previous twenty years).

The essential layout of the regular Romano-British settlement (see Fig. 5.1 for the excavated site) is visible on the 1969 and 1976 aerial photographs (Pls 2.3 and 2.6). The aisled buildings and later stone-based buildings were not detectable on the aerial photographs, though the oval enclosure of the 4th century villa was (compare the 1969 and 1976 aerial photographs with Fig. 6.1).

The topography of gravel islands and palaeochannels clearly influenced the layout of the settlement, the main Roman road and the Romano-British fields in Warrens Field, north and north-east of the main settlement. The Romano-British circular shrine about 40 m east of the villa enclosure (Trench 27; Fig. 2.3) lay within the palaeochannel and was, like the Roman road, masked by silt deposits. The shrine was located by systematic metal-detecting, which located the coin deposits (see Chapter 6). In contrast the late Roman cemetery to the west of the main settlement was found as a result of persistent examination of the aerial photographs. Although the cropmarks had been accurately plotted it soon became apparent that the plot was no substitute for the continuous observation of the photographs themselves. Towards the end of the excavation programme no cemetery had been found. In search of one we placed an exploratory machine-dug trench across the small square enclosure visible as a cropmark just under 90 m north-west of the villa enclosure (Trench 30; Fig 2.3) and this proved to be a small cemetery site (see Chapter 6).

The cropmark evidence in Longdoles Field suggested some phasing of settlement activity, though principally indicated a coherent plan. It was only with the benefit of excavation evidence that it was realised that some of the oval and apparently natural marks in the centre of the site represented a phase of late Iron Age/early Roman settlement enclosures similar to those visible to the west at Thornhill Farm. In the central area of Longdoles Field these early settlement features were partly masked by the surviving stratigraphy of the later Roman settlement (see Fig. 4.1).

3. The western settlement of irregular cell-like enclosures at Thornhill Farm, apparently linked to the 'regular' Longdoles Field settlement by a trackway or road system (Pl. 2.2). On the basis of cropmark morphology the date of this settlement was uncertain though clearly it was more 'native' than Roman in character. The palaeochannel system continued into this area and appeared to influence the settlement layout. This area had been subject to more intensive arable farming than in Longdoles Field and fieldwalking provided no convincing dating evidence.

In June 1990 (Pl. 2.7) aerial photographs revealed better defined cropmarks than in any previous year, possibly as a result of a lower water-table caused by gravel extraction. The relationships of the cellular enclosure groups to each other and to the major linear trackway or road were not obvious from the aerial photographs. Clearly some enclosures and the road intercut each other, but equally the road also appeared to act as a central artery to the settlement. Excavation revealed a complex series of phases with the road representing a major second century reorganisation of the landscape following the abandonment of the native settlement (see Jennings *et al.* 2004, 15-19).

On the basis of the aerial photographic evidence the Claydon Pike/Thornhill Farm complex was selected for large-scale excavation. The site offered three distinct settlement areas of different character – clusters of Iron Age hut circles, dense native cellular groups of enclosures and a rectilinear 'Romanised' layout with associated field systems. These were likely to be in part contemporary and in part sequential. The boundaries of the settlements and fields were clearly influenced by the topography of marshes and palaeochannels, which offered the possibility of biological preservation. These channels and the trackways which crossed the entire area appeared to link the settlements.

As a result of cropmark analysis, supplemented by fieldwalking, geographical survey and phosphate analysis, a strategy of selective trenching and open-area excavation was developed. Subsequently the entire area was stripped of topsoil before gravel extraction took place. In retrospect this careful excavation based upon aerial photography proved highly productive and allowed resources to be focussed on the most valuable areas, and on specific features and intersections of cropmarks which helped to untangle the whole. For this observer the main lesson to be learnt was that no matter how long one scans these aerial images there is always new information and insights to be gained.

The National Mapping programme, undertaken by English Heritage staff based at Swindon has re-mapped the Thames Valley in recent years and Figure 2.1 represents the most up-to-date mapping



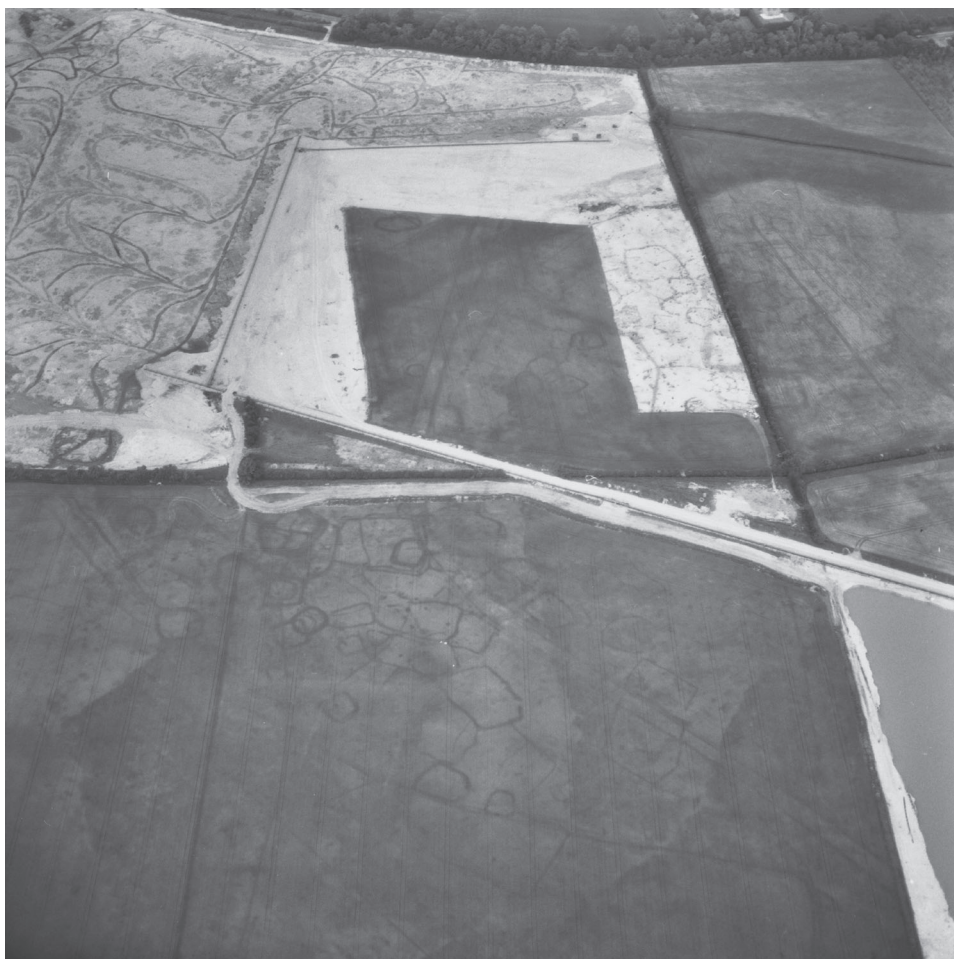


Plate 2.7 Aerial photograph of Thornhill Farm, taken in June 1990 (© Crown copyright)

of the area, much of which now consists of restored lakes following gravel extraction between the 1950s and 1990s.

#### LOCAL ARCHAEOLOGY

The Thornhill Farm settlement was excavated by OAU subsequent to Claydon Pike, and it was revealed as an open pastoral site dating from the middle Iron Age until the early 2nd century AD, with many distinct sub-phases (Jennings *et al.* 2004). Later in the Roman period, a series of trackways and field boundaries ran across the site, with one of the trackways leading south-west through a small Roman settlement at Kempford Bowmoor, part of which is revealed by cropmarks (OAU 1989a). About 1 km further west lay the 2nd- to 3rd-century settlement at Whelford Bowmoor with a further series of cropmarks extending over 2 hectares on the opposite western bank of the River Coln (see Chapter 10). Lying just over 600 m to the east of the main Claydon Pike settlement in Longdoles Field was a further area of Roman activity at Green Farm revealed by cropmarks (SMR 3191) and briefly investigated prior to gravel extraction in the mid

1970s (Fig. 2.1; see Chapter 12). On the Second Gravel Terrace 1 km to the east of this site was an extensive series of cropmarks at Butler's Field (Boyle *et al.* 1998) and Roughground Farm (Allen *et al.* 1993) to the east and north of Lechlade, both of which were subject to detailed excavation. At Butler's Field, aside from the main early Anglo-Saxon cemetery, there is substantial evidence for late Bronze Age/early Iron Age activity, while Roman trackways clearly led to an enclosure revealed by cropmarks to the south of the excavated area. To the north-east at Roughground Farm, further early Iron Age activity was uncovered, but the main occupation of the site commenced *c* mid 1st century AD with a series of stock enclosures, pits and domestic material. This was replaced in the early 2nd century by a villa building, and occupation of the villa continued until the latter half of the 4th century. Another villa lies 2 km further north at Great Lemhill, just to the west of the River Leach (SMR 311). Various excavations in Lechlade itself have revealed features dating to the early and middle Iron Ages in addition to Roman trackways and field systems which probably relate to the Roughground Farm villa (eg Little London, OA 2001; Sherbourne

House, CAT 1996). A possible small domestic focus was located during construction work in the south-west of the town (SMR 3170), which revealed ditches, Romano-British pottery and notable concentrations of fired clay daub. Cropmarks are particularly intensive to the east of Lechlade, although most are undated. One exception is the series of cropmarks at Wigmore just to the north of the River Thames, which would seem to be of Iron Age and Roman date (Fig. 2.1; see Chapter 12).

### **EXCAVATION METHODOLOGY**

The aim of the overall research project in the late 1970s was to examine the whole area of land use at Claydon Pike with the minimum of bias and the maximum range of inter-disciplinary techniques, incorporating aerial photography, phosphate analysis, targeted excavation and extensive environmental sampling. Data was recovered so that results were comparable not only across the site, but also with other sites in the region and beyond. Prior to excavation detailed examination and plotting of aerial photographs was carried out (see above), followed by large-scale contour survey, examination of surface scatters of artefacts, phosphate analysis and geophysical survey. Selective trenching was carried out in 1979 before the commencement of larger scale work in order to examine questions such as the extent of waterlogging, the survival of structures and the chronological range of the cropmark complexes. The two main areas of excavation at Claydon Pike were centred upon the middle Iron Age site at Warrens Field and the late Iron Age-Roman site at Longdoles Field (Fig. 2.1; Pl. 2.8).

A variety of excavation tactics were used in the course of the project, including small-scale selective excavation of particular features and intersections of cropmark complexes and larger scale excavation of selected activity areas. In both of these techniques random sampling procedures were carried out in order to minimise excavation but enable the distribution of material (bones, pottery etc.) to be studied over the whole area. Random trenching was also carried out in order to minimise any bias that may have occurred as the result of the targeted excavation techniques, and topsoil stripping and salvage excavation took place within areas not covered by other methods. Coarse water sieving was carried out on site as a control on artefact recovery rates, with finer sieving done at a later date. Most artefacts were plotted in relation to a site grid of 5 m squares tied into the national grid. It should be noted that the height above Ordnance Datum (OD) was not routinely recorded on site and therefore many of the section drawings reproduced here do not have this information on them.

The location of the main excavation trenches and salvage areas in Warrens Field and Longdoles Field is shown in Figures 2.2 and 2.3.

### **POST-EXCAVATION METHODOLOGY**

The post-excavation programme of Claydon Pike followed on from the fieldwork and continued up until the end of the 1980s, funded by HBMC(E) now (English Heritage). Substantial progress was made, particularly in stratigraphic phasing and on the analysis of finds assemblages and environmental data. Matrices were produced and a phasing scheme for the site was developed, with large



*Plate 2.8 Excavations at Claydon Pike*



numbers of detailed plans and sections prepared for publication. Digital archives were created, specialist reports were produced, and interim reports were published (Miles and Palmer 1983; Miles and Palmer 1990).

However, financial constraints ensured that the final publication was never completed, and in 2000 a project design was put forward to English Heritage for the current landscape study of the Upper Thames Valley, which would incorporate Claydon Pike (see Chapter 1). A comprehensive assessment of the existing data revealed the necessity for extensive updating and revising of the stratigraphic, environmental and finds reports. In particular, the existing phasing system for the Longdoles Field site was problematic in that it was not explicitly tied to all areas and structures, which led to difficulties in trying to create an overall site narrative. The main reason was the differential quality of stratigraphy within different parts of the site, with much of it being very shallow and truncated, but with large numbers of inter-cutting features (Fig. 2.4). This is a problem that faces many excavated sites on the Upper Thames gravel terraces, including the nearby Thornhill Farm (Jennings *et al.* 2004). Nevertheless, the stratigraphy of the area with most intense activity (Trench 13) was reasonably intact and well recorded, resulting in a well-defined major sequence of occupation. The absolute dating of this sequence was more difficult in that much of it was initially established on the basis of pottery spot dates which were very broad, primarily because of problems of residuality and/or intrusiveness. In order to counter this, many of the pottery groups from key stratigraphic contexts across the site were extracted and re-analysed together with other datable material in order to provide a more accurate chronological measure of the phase boundaries. This methodology significantly altered many of the primary phase dates, and established a detailed chronological framework for the whole site (see phasing summary below). Certain pottery assemblages from other major features across the site that were not securely tied into the stratigraphic sequence were also examined at this time, in order to tie them in with the main phasing scheme. Where there was no reliable finds or stratigraphic data, features were either assigned to a phase on the basis of spatial patterning, or left as unphased. It has been through a combination of spatial patterning, stratigraphic relationships and finds dating, that a phasing sequence has been produced across the whole site with a reasonably high level of confidence.

All of the original finds and environmental reports have been fully updated and revised to take into account the new phasing information. The small finds have been re-analysed by Hilary Cool, and this had led to certain previous interpretations of the site (ie military origins for Phase 3) being discarded and new theories presented (see Cool, Chapters 4, 5 and 8).

## SUMMARY OF MAIN PHASING

### Phase 1 (middle Iron Age)

The earliest activity at Claydon Pike was discovered in Warrens Field, approximately 120 m to the north-east of Longdoles Field. It comprised a series of round house gullies and enclosures, plus ditches and pits, dating to the middle Iron Age. The environmental evidence suggests a largely pastoral agricultural regime was practised at the site. The settlement features were located on three gravel islands separated by tributary palaeochannels. Ceramic analysis has indicated that the settlement shifted from west to east during this period, with Island 3 representing the earliest occupation, and Island 1 the latest.

### Phase 2 (c early 1st century AD to early 2nd century AD)

During the early 1st century AD, a new area of occupation was established at the Longdoles Field site, approximately 120 m south-west of the middle Iron Age settlement. Virtually all activity of this phase was located within Trench 13, and comprised a nucleated area of enclosures, gullies and pits partly defined towards the end of the phase by a substantial boundary ditch along the western side. The finds indicated domestic occupation and industrial activity, while the environmental evidence suggests the primary economic basis of the settlement was cattle grazing upon the floodplain.

### Phase 3 (c early 2nd century to early 4th century AD)

The early 2nd century saw a radical re-organisation of the settlement pattern at the Longdoles Field site, possibly linked to it becoming an agricultural estate associated at least in part with the cultivation of hay meadows. Distinct zones of activity belonging to this phase were observed within the main excavation trenches (13, 19, 17, 29), with a number of north-south and east-west trackways running between them. Two aisled buildings were constructed within the main eastern compound, and a large area of open space existed in the centre of the complex, at least until the later 3rd century AD. Within this phase were many structural developments.

### Phase 4 (c early to late 4th century AD)

At some point during the early 4th century, a modest masonry footed villa and associated building were constructed, which seemed to form the centre of a small estate probably operating a mixed agricultural economy. It appears that the primary domestic focus at this time was confined to the area of Trench 13, although a small cemetery was sited c 100 m to the west (Trench 30) and a circular shrine c 70 m to the east (Trench 27).

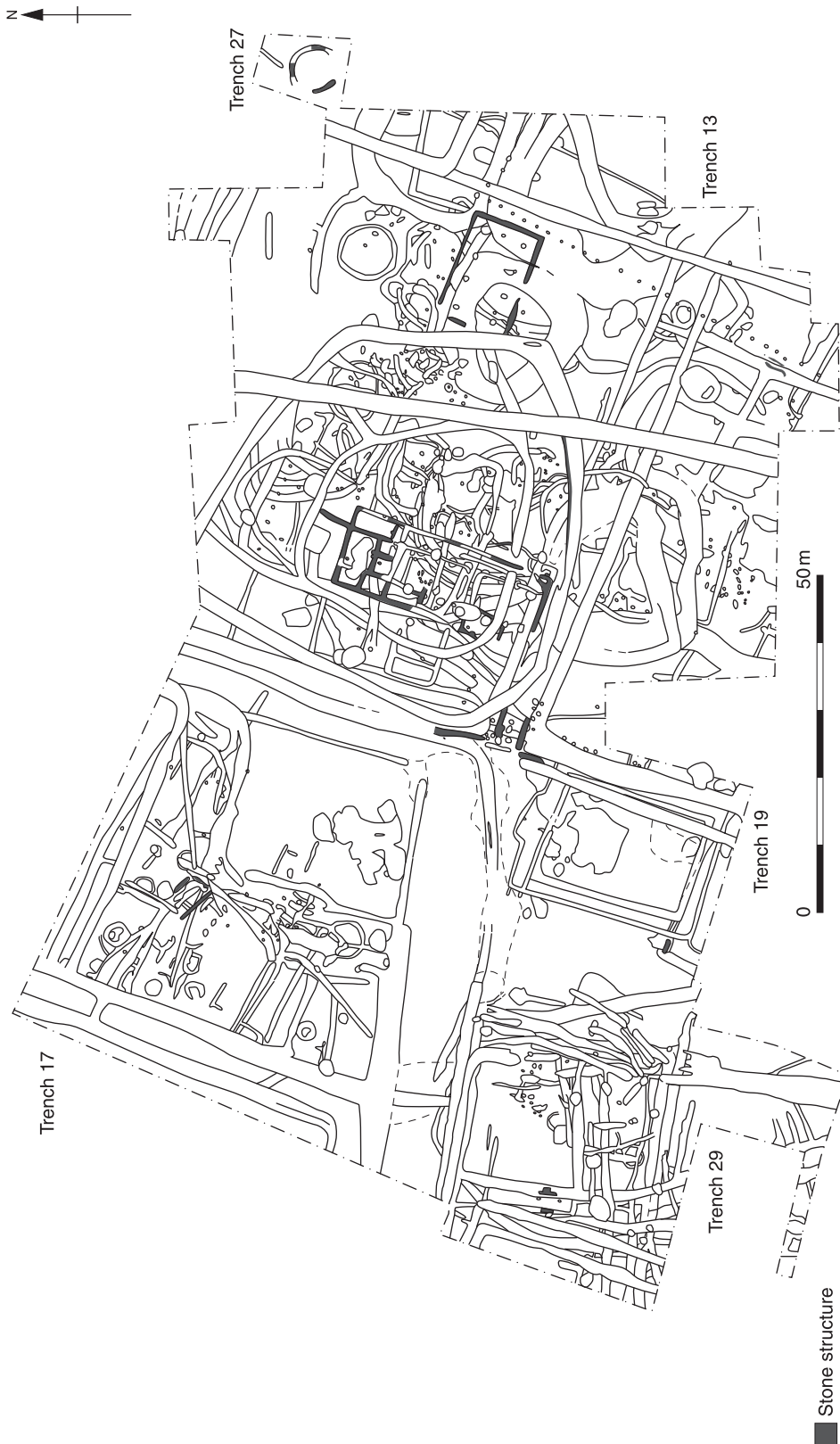


Fig. 2.4 Composite plan of main excavation trenches in Longdoles Field

**Phase 5 (mid Saxon and medieval)**

A small group of east-west burials cut through the late Roman villa, and three of them were radiocarbon dated to the mid-late Saxon period (8th-9th century; see Chapter 7). No associated settlement

was located. Further very low key activity occurred in the medieval period (11th-15th centuries), when the surrounding gravel terraces and floodplain largely comprised hay meadow.

