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**Excavations at Lower Mill Farm, Somerford Keynes,  
Gloucestershire, 2001.**

by Mark Brett and Annette Hancocks  
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## Excavations at Lower Mill Farm, Somerford Keynes, Gloucestershire, 2001

By MARK BRETT and ANNETTE HANCOCKS

This report summarises the results of two phases of archaeological excavation carried out during 2001 by Cotswold Archaeological Trust (now Cotswold Archaeology) at Lower Mill Farm, Somerford Keynes, Gloucestershire (centred on OS Nat. Grid SU 40251940). A full detailed stratigraphic account appears in the archive. The site lies approximately 0.5 km to the south-east of the village of Somerford Keynes, and immediately to the south-east of Lower Mill Farm, a late 19th-century building that incorporated a farmhouse and mill. The excavation occurred on a strip of land within the extensive complex of lakes that make up the Ashton Keynes section of the Cotswold Water Park (Fig. 1).

When a planning application was submitted for residential development Cotswold district council requested that a programme of field evaluation be carried out given the known archaeological potential of the Cotswold Water Park, in particular the proximity of the Romano-British site at Neigh Bridge to the north-west (Fig. 1). Following an initial desk study Cotswold Archaeological Trust undertook a trial trench evaluation which revealed a number of Roman and post-medieval features in the northern part of the site (CAT 2000). In the light of these results a condition was attached to outline planning permission requiring the full excavation of a narrow wedge-shaped strip of land, 210 m in length and up to 40 m wide, situated between the course of the river Thames to the north and the race associated with the former mill to the south (Fig. 1). The site is flat with an underlying geology of gravel of the First Terrace river gravels associated with the Thames, overlain by areas of alluvium (IGS 1974).

The site was excavated in two phases, topsoil and subsoil being removed by mechanical excavator onto the surface of the underlying gravels, under archaeological supervision. Following selective hand-cleaning, a sampling strategy was employed whereby 20 per cent of each linear feature and at least 50 per cent of all other features were excavated, with the proviso that these proportions would be increased if deposits of special importance were discovered. Deposits potentially relating to burial, cremation and domestic or industrial activity were fully excavated. Recording was by a single context system. Each feature or deposit was photographed and planned at a scale of 1:100, and sections drawn at either 1:10 or 1:20. The project archives and finds will be deposited with Corinium Museum at Cirencester.

### *Excavation Results*

Archaeological features were found throughout the site, which had been subject to extensive truncation from ploughing. Stratigraphic analysis, together with the limited artefactual evidence, suggested that four periods are represented. For ease of reference each major feature, or group of features, has been assigned unique code letters, i.e. A–HH (Fig. 2). In some instances, generic numbers have been assigned to individual features within these groupings.

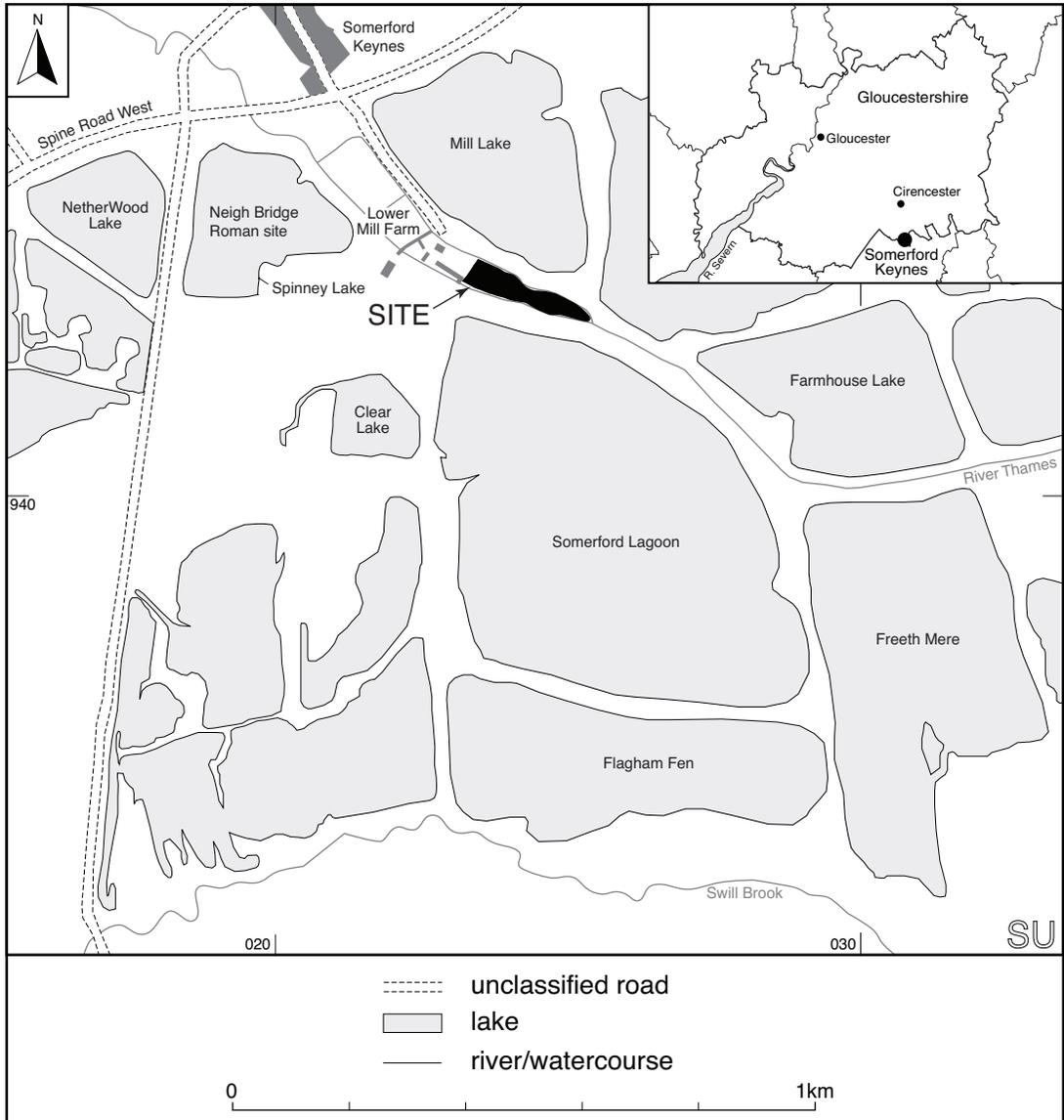


Fig. 1. Lower Mill Farm: site location.

### Period 1: Roman

Two shallow, irregular palaeochannels were identified towards the north-western end of the site. Palaeochannel A contained a small amount of pottery broadly datable to the Roman period. Palaeochannel B produced no dating evidence, but was cut by a number of post-medieval ditches. A recut ditch line (F) crossed the site on a NE–SW alignment. Ditch G lay at right angles and was truncated by early modern Ditch CC. Ditches G and F conceivably formed part of a field



Fig. 2. Lower Mill Farm: multiphase plan.

system. Ditch 2339 was recut at least twice, with two sherds of Roman pottery and a probable Roman tile fragment recovered from the later recut ditch (2340). A single sherd of Roman pottery dated oval pit Y to this period.

### **Period 2: medieval**

A small, circular posthole (X) was dated by a single undiagnostic sherd of medieval pottery. The possibility that this material is intrusive or residual, and that the posthole may be associated with the Roman or post-medieval phases of activity, cannot be dismissed.

### **Period 3: Post-medieval (17th to 18th century)**

The earliest deposits associated with post-medieval activity on the site indicate that the area was subject to episodes of flooding, from either the Thames or the mill race or from a combination of both. A large area of alluvium (AA), up to 0.1 m thick, lay along the southern edge of the site. Investigation of this deposit recovered a small group of post-medieval artefacts, including a copper-alloy ring and a horseshoe. Alluvial deposit 2322, further to the east, may also be associated with this episode of inundation. Rubble layer R overlay alluvium 2322 and comprised a layer of limestone fragments laid in an attempt at consolidation at the south-eastern end of the site.

Subsequently, a series of small plots or fields defined by shallow ditches C, D, E, H, J, L, M, BB and FF was established. Those ditches in the south-eastern half of the site were recut by ditches K, N, GG and HH. Pottery and tile from both the original ditches and the recuts date principally to the 17th to 18th centuries, but also include residual Roman and medieval material.

At the south-east end of the site, recut ditch HH was cut by a large amorphous quarry pit (S). The pit contained at least two fills, representing different episodes of deliberate backfilling. The earlier fill (2292) appears to represent domestic waste. This deposit was waterlogged and comprised highly organic material, including a possible timber post. It contained a large amount of artefactual material, including over 150 sherds of pottery dating to no earlier than *c.*AD 1660, animal bone and fragments of 17th-century glazed ceramic roof tile. A small number of fragments from a probable Venetian glass beaker, an iron knife which retained part of its wooden handle, and two iron single loop buckles were amongst the more notable finds recovered from this deposit. The later fill (2291) produced many finds dated to the period *c.*1670–1700, including 54 sherds of pottery, animal bone, roof tile, fragments of plaster, vessel glass similar to that from context 2292 and a number of clay pipe stems. An iron reaping hook of possible medieval date was also recovered from this context. The significant assemblage of post-medieval Ashton Keynes ware recovered from the pit is reported in detail elsewhere (McSloy 2006).

The relatively accurate dating of Pit S, together with that of material recovered from the ditch fills themselves, therefore implies a 17th-century date for the creation of the field system.

### **Period 4: Modern (19th century)**

Ditch CC followed the same alignment as the Roman ditch series F and G and contained a highly organic fill dated by pottery to the 18th to 19th centuries. The ditch may have represented a former boundary depicted on the Somerford Keynes inclosure map of 1807. Several features were found to be devoid of any dating evidence, and analysis of their spatial distribution or other characteristics was unable to resolve from which period they originated. Details are described in the archive report.

*Discussion*

In 1986 an important Roman site was investigated at Neigh Bridge, approximately 300 m to the north-west of the excavation area. That site has now been largely destroyed by the construction of Spinney Lake (Miles *et al.* 1986; Miles *et al.* 2007). The current excavations show that intensive Roman activity did not spread as far eastwards as the Lower Mill farm site given that only a single ditch was found.

The Somerford Keynes inclosure map of 1807 depicts a mill on the site of Lower Mill Farm, which is now a largely late 19th-century building. The excavations have produced good evidence of occupation adjacent to the site in the 17th century and indicate that a mill was presumably in existence by that date.

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