

Daniel Bray, Steve Ford, James Lewis, Danielle Milbank, Jo Pine, Steve Preston and Sean Wallis, *Dryleaze Farm Quarry, Siddington, Gloucester: Archaeological Excavations, 2007-2019: Thames Valley Archaeological Services Monograph 35*. (Reading, Thames Valley Archaeological Services 2020), 207pp, colour and b/w ill maps, plans, A4 Paperback, £20 [ISBN:978-1-911228-45-5]

Kyle Beaverstock, *A Bronze Age Triple Ditch Barrow and a Middle Iron Age Settlement at Wetstone Bridge Quarry, near Marston Meysey, Gloucestershire: Thames Valley Archaeological Services Monograph 38* (Reading, Thames Valley Archaeological Services 2020), 90pp, colour and b/w ill maps, plans, A4 Paperback, £15 [ISBN:978-1-911228-47-9]

As demand for aggregate has increased in the last 40 years, gravel extraction in the Upper Thames Valley has intensified and resulted in the potential destruction of rich archaeological deposits identified by aerial photography since the 1930s. There is a litany of 'rescue' excavations first carried out by the Oxford Archaeological Unit at Claydon Pike, Roughground Farm and Gravelly Guy and moving through the Upper Thames Valley. These interventions were funded by the Department of Environment with labour from the Manpower Commission in the form of Youth Opportunity Schemes and physical help from the developers with the moving of spoil heaps and ensuring that any archaeological recording would be given 28 days' notice of the commencement of their works. Publication of reports took decades to fund. The projects reviewed here, two km apart, can be added to the list of significant interventions but were undertaken in the very different archaeological climate of developer funding with the publication being achieved in one and three years respectively. Both interventions were undertaken by the same archaeological contractor with many of the expert reports sharing the same author.

At Dryleaze Farm Quarry 50 ha. were excavated in 2007-19, with individual features spread over a wide area. They were typical of the Thames Valley: a small Bronze Age cemetery with ploughed-out barrows, settlement with enclosures and round houses and an Iron Age pit alignment. The exceptional discovery was evidence, in the form of pottery, flint and a crucial radiocarbon date, for a possible neolithic structure, as previously it was thought there was a highly mobile population in the region. Nine burnt mounds of the Bronze Age, infrequently found in southern England, were identified by their crescentic contours around a trough. Being close to a paleochannel it was suggested that they used water for cooking, bathing, brewing, or dyeing. The main use of the land would appear to have been pastoral and a trackway complex originating in the Iron Age appears to have influenced the layout of medieval agriculture.

Although the excavation at Wetstone Bridge Quarry, between May 2016 to December 2017, was almost 18 ha, it was contiguous with the c.50 ha of the Roundhouse Farm to its east, thereby presenting a large area of this part of the gravel terrace for investigation. In the Early Bronze Age a triple ditched feature, although only to the depth of gullies, was constructed and recut on occasions. If it was a barrow, then the excavator suggests that a mound would probably have been confined to the inner ring. However, he also suggests that since it was on a gravel spur surrounded by waterlogged ground it may have been an impressive point in a flat landscape and should probably be more akin with timber circles and henges seen as a 'ritual space' for a community. The Wetstone Bridge location had been most populated in the Middle Iron Age when from the sixth to the first centuries 22 houses were constructed on slightly higher ground above a paleochannel, their gullies being re-cut two, three or even four times on the same axis probably once in a generation and that at most five would be in contemporary occupation forming a community. Fauna from the site suggested it was mainly of a pastoral nature and cereals were imported from the Roundhouse site where the evidence suggested production and storage. Presumably this indicates that separate settlements specialised in activities such as iron working in other parts of the Upper Thames, or in ecological zones beyond.

Throughout these reports radiocarbon dating has been crucial to the understanding of these sites; something that was expensive and sparsely used previously before the advent of developer funding, is now affordable. At Dryleaze Farm Quarry radiocarbon dating has been highly significant in the case of the burnt mounds demonstrating the sequence they were built and that they were frequently visited over a wide period of time, perhaps four centuries. It has also thrown up a major issue of using of pottery fabrics for dating features which do not produce sherds with decoration on them, and the need for pottery typologies to be revised informed by radiocarbon sequences.

Producing maps and plans of these sites was challenging. At Wetstone Bridge in a compact area of 350m by 750 m the density of sequent occupation produced an extended chronology of the round houses. At Dryleaze Farm Quarry it is the opposite problem with the site being 1,250m long and 300m at its widest and the density of the structures being low and many of the features being isolated postholes. Each had to be recorded using 11 'areas' with much unoccupied space. However, both sites have produced accessible overall site and period plans that make the conclusions accessible without reading through the highly detailed archaeological evidence sections. It might be seen as facilitating comparison of the sites by having a 'house-style' of the same-coloured key and legend. However, the different chronological character of these sites would make this unrealistic. In the Dryleaze report there is an image of a burnt mound 'with the steaming misty landscape'.

Archaeological projects are much more than just retrieving information and it would be satisfying if more of these environmental characteristics were recorded!

Developer funding has given unparalleled access to the archaeology of the Upper Thames Valley gravel terraces and these reports demonstrate what can be achieved. Through the excavation of parcels of land, the possibilities of studying the social and economic landscapes of the settlement's individual periods have been brought to a new level, giving the most detailed coverage from the whole of the UK and possibly Europe. However, there are threats to the archaeology with the possible new planning process making development simpler and, if successful, greatly damaging the opportunities for further exploration in the Upper Thames Valley when there is so much more to discover.

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