

REVIEWS

BERRYFIELDS: IRON AGE SETTLEMENT AND A ROMAN BRIDGE, FIELD SYSTEM AND SETTLEMENT ALONG AKEMAN STREET NEAR FLEET MARSTON, BUCKINGHAMSHIRE

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This volume from Oxford Archaeology presents the results of fieldwork carried out in advance of construction of the Berryfields Major Development Area (MDA), primarily a housing estate and parkway station, on the outskirts of Aylesbury. The 195-hectare site was subject to a multi-event approach of evaluations, survey and excavation between 2002–2016, in accordance with planning policy, as well as both casual and organised metal-detecting. Berryfields sits close to the Roman road of Akeman Street, which runs between *Corinium* (Cirencester) and *Verulamium* (St Albans), via the fort and town at Alchester. It is located within a complex later Prehistoric and Roman landscape, including the probable Romano-British ‘small town’ at Fleet Marston and the Iron Age hillfort in Aylesbury itself.

In 2019, Berryfields gained media attention when it was announced that archaeologists had found a unique cache of chickens’ eggs in a waterlogged Roman deposit, potentially a votive pool. This was not the only significant discovery: an extensive Middle Iron Age (MIA) settlement and field system, a Roman ladder settlement and roads, and the possible timbers of a crossing over the River Thames, are all highlights of this report. The volume follows a standard structure for site reports, with introductory chapters to the site and its archaeological background followed by specialist reports on the finds, human remains, environmental evidence and, lastly, a synthetic discussion.

The finds reports are detailed and well-illustrated. The lithics show that only sporadic

visits were made to the area in earlier prehistory. Both the settlement evidence and the finds suggest a hiatus in the Late Iron Age (LIA), which may be due to a certain amount of ‘lumping’ together in the ceramic typology. The pottery is mainly of local and regional production, with some imports of samian and *amphorae* during the Roman period.

The metal small finds date from the early years of the occupation, including several brooches, a mirror and a bracelet fragment (*armilla*) which may have been a military award. Much of the metalwork was recovered from a marshy area adjacent to the pool, interpreted as a locus for ritual deposition. Numerous coins came from the pit fills associated with the pond, including a higher proportion of 1st and 2nd-century types than elsewhere on site. Otherwise, the coinage profile is similar to other minor roadside settlements in the region, consisting of mostly 3rd and 4th-century CE issues.

The bulk finds reflect Berryfields’ location on the fringes of a larger settlement or industrial area, presumed to be centred on Fleet Marston, although no nucleus has yet been determined. Small proportions of brick/tile and nails suggest simple or lower-status occupation in the Romano-British period, with only occasional finds of reused material from a higher-status building or buildings along Akeman Street. The excellent waterlogged preservation of the pond fills and related pits allowed detailed environmental analysis, evocatively recreating a sense of place. The human skeletal remains date to the Roman period, the absence of Iron Age burials reflecting wider patterns in Britain. However, the lack of isotopic or DNA analysis leaves some questions unanswered. Faunal remains are notable for the high proportion of equine bones in the MIA and Romano-British periods. These show little evidence of butchery, implying horse-rearing for transport, which may have been central to the local economy for generations. The authors discuss the relationship between the multi-period settlement and the road, considering supply links to the Roman army/cavalry and

the possible location of a *mansio* or *mutatio* at Fleet Marston.

There are only a few minor quibbles in what is otherwise a reasonably priced report which coherently presents results from diverse interventions over more than a decade. Maps showing the wider landscape of sites and roads (figs 6.2, 6.3) do not appear until the final chapter. These surely belong in the archaeological introduction, as they provide crucial orientation, and result in much flicking back and forth. There are occasional omissions and typos: e.g. 'foul' for 'fowl' on the inside cover. The appended catalogue of largely unstratified coins is lengthy and could instead have been made available online via the Archaeology Data Service (ADS).

The report concludes with a consideration of

Berryfields' place within the broader archaeological landscape. This provides a good opportunity to set the future research agenda: does Berryfields sit on an earlier route dating back into the MIA? Was there really a LIA hiatus, or is this period represented by the concentrated geophysics results somewhat surprisingly left *in situ* within the housing estate? Was Fleet Marston a 'small town', or was it a dispersed, polyfocal settlement, even a group of villages? Whatever your opinion of the HS2 rail project, this part of Buckinghamshire is about to be massively disrupted by its construction, which may well reveal new insights into these themes.

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