



Book Reviews

RIVERSIDES: NEOLITHIC BARROWS, A BEAKER GRAVE, IRON AGE AND ANGLO-SAXON BURIALS AND SETTLEMENT AT TRUMPINGTON, CAMBRIDGE BY CHRISTOPHER EVANS, SAM LUCY AND RICKY PATTEN

CAU Landscape Archives: New Archaeologies of the Cambridge Region 2, McDonald Institute for Archaeological Research, 2018, 484pp, 231 B&W and colour figs and pls, 118 tables, hb, ISBN 9781902937847, £45.00

This hardback book, well produced and printed on good quality paper with clear illustrations and photographs, is typical of the monographs produced by the Cambridge Archaeological Unit (CAU), it reports on excavations at Glebe Farm and Trumpington Meadows in the Cam valley south of Cambridge. It is a companion to an earlier volume, *Borderlands* (Evans *et al* 2008); both books being part of a series 'New Archaeologies of the Cambridge Region' specifically designed to reference Fox's 1923 study of the Cambridge region. The *Riversides* volume follows the familiar format of CAU monographs, broadly the traditional approach to excavation reports, an introduction, period by period accounts of the excavated evidence with full finds reports and a concluding discussion, but informed throughout by a lively awareness of wider issues and the fundamental importance of interpretation. The text is further enhanced by short essays in text boxes which explore slightly tangential issues often on historiographical themes, interesting in themselves and always in some way pertinent to the main thrust of the book.

The Introduction sets out the background to the excavations, outlines other archaeological work in the area and presents key themes. The evidence from the excavations reported in this volume relate largely to the Neolithic, Beaker, Iron Age and Saxon periods. Awareness of the results of fieldwork from elsewhere in the vicinity, which has yielded evidence of other periods, enables a fuller picture to be presented. As the Introduction notes 'It is the dead that provide one of the site's main long-term themes, as extraordinary burials were a feature of all of its main periods'.

That is certainly true for the Neolithic where settlement evidence was slight, indeed the discussion of this phase notes '...just how little of the period's usage is actually represented by its cut-feature evidence and that most of it evidently only occurred as surface spreads...' in that context it is worth recalling that at the Stumble, a surface intact Neolithic settlement site, 95% of the pottery (by weight) came from the surface deposits (Wilkinson *et al.* 2012, 45). By contrast burial evidence is prominent, two ring-ditches, the remains Neolithic barrows, excavated at

Trumpington Meadows provided ‘...a statement of intent: an anchoring of a group to a specific point in the landscape’. Despite being severely plough damaged, Monument I revealed three phases and subsequently a fourth Early Bronze Age redefinition of the ring-ditch. The first phase was the interment of the remains of three adult males in a pit probably provided with a timber chamber. Monument II seems to have had a central burial though no articulated skeleton was present and both human and animal bone were recovered from the rather amorphous burial pit. About 400 m north of these ring-ditches a remarkable Beaker grave was excavated containing two individuals, one a young adult male the other a young adult female buried toe to toe and each with a Beaker at their heads. Looking at the photograph of this neatly arranged burial it is impossible not to be touched by the long ago deaths of these two people and wonder what their relationship was.

The main phase of the excavation and certainly a substantial part of the text relates to the Iron Age. The excavations at Glebe farm included, pits, wells, burials and linear features, interpreted as an Early Iron Age farmstead. The pottery report, is particularly important, the assemblage is the first assemblage from southern Cambridgeshire to have clearly associated radiocarbon dates. The report, by Matt Brudenell, is well illustrated clearly, presented and discussed; although it seems a bit peevish and pedantic, I can’t help pointing out that the reports on pottery from Maldon Beacon Green and Slough House Farm are by me, rather than Owen Bedwin and Steve Wallis and Mags Waughman as the citation in text suggests. As the report notes the radiocarbon dates support a post-600 BC date for the Chinnor-Wandlebury style. The absence of the highly distinctive, almost standardised, angular bowl form characteristic of the Darmsden-Linton style is certainly notable quite possibly because those bowls are rather earlier in date.

The core of the Iron Age evidence comes from the Trumpington Meadows site and is described and interpreted in a chapter entitled *Iron Age Settlement, Burials and ‘Ritual Logic’*. Here, settlement was characterised by very dense groups of pits, and a series of burials 12 inhumations, 2 in formal graves, 10 in pits. Numerous pieces of human bone were recovered from other deposits across the site. The two Neolithic barrows had an important role in structuring the landscape; both the formal graves were placed in the vicinity of the barrows, which were separated from the densely settled area to the west by a major linear boundary. As sometimes happens with modern excavations where development takes place in phases, contiguous sites can be excavated by different organisations. In this case part of the Iron Age settlement was excavated by another team in advance of construction of Park and Ride facilities. Although the Park and Ride site is as yet unpublished, it is clear that it and Trumpington Meadows were interpreted in a radically different way. The former was apparently regarded by its excavators as primarily a ritual site, with enclosures interpreted as shrines or mortuary enclosures, four posterns as excarnation platforms, pits infilled largely with purposefully

structured deposits and placed human bone. By contrast Trumpington Meadows is interpreted as essentially a domestic site with ritual components. The careful consideration of the filling of the pits assisted by the clear and detailed finds reports supports that interpretation, with human bone incorporated incidentally amongst material cleared into pits having initially been deposited as surface middens. The recovery of four pieces of human bone worked in much the same way as animal bone is striking. The prodigious animal bone and charred plant assemblages allow detailed consideration of the farming economy, and the pottery report together with the report on the Glebe Farm material will make this volume an essential reference for pottery specialists.

Gaps in the dense pit scatters are interpreted as locations of roundhouses, whilst the four-post structures, which cluster between rather than within the pit clusters, are regarded as granaries. As the authors suggest these densely clustered structures would have had a striking visual impact, perhaps proclaiming the community's arable wealth. That is another demonstration that even when performing a primarily practical function, such structures could also have symbolic or ritual roles, something I was reminded of in reviewing the publication of another recently excavated Iron Age site with an intriguing array of four-post structures (Brown 2015, 386). The primary function of the Trumpington Meadows pits was also considered to be for grain storage, with the suggestion that the pits were used for long-term storage presumably of seed corn, the more easily accessible four-post structures holding grain for day to day use. The authors convincingly apply their interpretation of Trumpington Meadows to other sites in the region characterised by dense clusters of pits.

The last major phase of activity at Trumpington Meadows is part of an Anglo-Saxon settlement and accompanying cemetery, whilst technically by no means prehistoric, the nature of the evidence does mean that it has to be treated in much the same way as the earlier periods. The settlement which appeared to have been at least partly located with regard to a possible small barrow over the Beaker burial comprised a post and wall slot hall, a scatter of sunken featured buildings, pits and linear features. It seems likely that this only represents part of the settlement which probably extended to the north beyond the excavated area. The cemetery comprised a row of four inhumation burials. All four burials seem to have been young adults, and of the two which could be identified to a particular sex, both were female. Grave 1 contained a remarkable bed burial, with gold and garnet cloisonné cross, gold and garnet linked pins and a variety of other grave-goods with textile remains of fine clothes and bed coverings; the other graves had far fewer grave-goods. Radiocarbon dating was crucial to the understanding of this cemetery and showed that all the burials belonged to the 7th century AD. The richly furnished grave 1, which might have been thought to be the focus of the cemetery, was in fact the latest burial. The evidence is placed in its local context; it appears that Anglo-Saxon settlements regularly occur

in any major excavation in south Cambridgeshire, much as they do in south Essex, as the authors, informed by their work on publishing the Mucking excavations, note.

Much of the discussion and interpretation is integrated into discussion sections in the main text. The final chapter 'Discussion – Border Country' draws together some of the themes considered earlier and sets the site in its local and regional context. The 'Border Country' epithet seems justified by the numerous distinctions the authors note between the archaeology of south Cambridgeshire and the Cam valley and the evidence from further north. There is an extended discussion of field-walking evidence which demonstrates both the usefulness of this data and the difficulties in its interpretation. The Trumpington Neolithic barrows are part of a landscape with many monuments including an unusual density of causewayed enclosures. Consideration of the wider area allows the nature of settlement in periods not well represented at the Trumpington sites to be discussed, notably the extensive Middle Bronze Age fields-systems and enclosures at Addenbrookes. For the Iron Age a local community is convincingly identified. Particularly striking is the discussion of three Iron Age ring-works, Wandlebury, Arbury and the War Ditches, which are quite distinctive and characteristic of the area. These forts together with the relatively frequent occurrence of evidence violent injury on the Iron Age burials from Trumpington indicate that warfare played a key role at this time; the authors suggest that the violent destruction of the primary phase of the War Ditches may have been a catalyst for construction of Wandlebury and Arbury.

Many good excavation reports have been published recently, the CAU monographs in general and the *Riversides* volume in particular, are exemplars; comprehensive, detailed, shot through with interpretation and discussion, and interesting to read.

References

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*The views expressed in this review are not necessarily those of the Society or the Reviews
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Archaeologists in Cambridge thrilled to discover grave with body of young woman on a bed with an ornate gold cross. Pectoral crosses from the dawn of Christianity in England, and bed burials - where the body was laid on a real bed, now traced only by its iron supports, centuries after the timber rotted - are both extremely rare. Facebook. Twitter. Pinterest. At Trumpington the evidence suggests the bed was lowered first into the ground, and then the body, uncoffined, laid on it. Scraps of textile found under the chain may reveal what she wore when she went to her grave. The same Anglo-Saxon word, leger, can mean either a bed or a grave. The fields had already yielded a wealth of iron age and earlier material but the Anglo-Saxon finds were a complete surprise.