

The Later Saxon and Early Norman
Manorial Settlement at Guiting
Power, Gloucestershire:
Archaeological investigation of a
Domesday Book entry

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This book is one of three by the present author that cover work done at and near Guiting Power, Gloucestershire:

Excavation, Analysis and Interpretation of Early Bronze Age Barrows at Guiting Power, Gloucestershire

The Development of an Iron Age and Roman Settlement Complex at The Park and Bowsings, near Guiting Power, Gloucestershire: Farmstead and Stronghold

The Later Saxon and Early Norman Manorial Settlement at Guiting Power, Gloucestershire
Archaeological investigation of a Domesday Book entry

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ABSTRACT

Excavation and survey over the settlement area of the manor at Guiting Power (Glos., UK; SP 094 247), has produced evidence for a rectilinear later Saxon enclosure, with perimeter bank and ditch. This enclosure contained the area of the earliest manor building-complex, of later Saxon date, over its SE side, with the rest of the interior subdivided internally into a lattice of sub-enclosures marked by banks and gullies, one of which was shown to contain a rectangular hut site. This main area of the enclosure probably contained a dependant work-force, together with areas of supporting craft-, and agrarian activity.

The Domesday entry indicates that Guiting Power was a royal holding, leased to the county sheriff as its last Saxon tenant, and maintained as the centre of a larger estate in the area. After the Conquest, the estate was reallocated to Norman ownership, as part of the widespread programme of land-seizure which followed.

During the early Norman period, the site was remodelled, with movement of the manor buildings to a new site within the enclosure, refurbishment of the main perimeter, and establishment of a small apsidal church. This church was fully excavated, including removal of all masonry, and its surviving base was reconstructed as a standing field monument.

Dating evidence from the site indicates domestic activity from the 9th century, through the Norman Conquest, to the full medieval period, covering the transition from later Saxon 'manorial' complex, to establishment of the Norman manor, and development of the medieval village.

Keywords: later Saxon, Norman, manorial enclosure, apsidal church, longhouse

SECTION 1: INTRODUCTION TO THE SITE, OBJECTIVES, AND METHODS OF INVESTIGATION

LOCATION OF THE SITE (FIGS 1-3; PLATE 1a)

Guiting Power is located on a river terrace, around SP 094 247, in the valley of the upper Windrush, one of the streams which drain the dip-slope of the Cotswolds, and join ultimately with the upper Thames. The village area is in a sheltered position, at about 185m OD, and is surrounded by limestone hills, which flank the valley, and rise to about 250m OD. In the village area, the sector of the valley is more open, around a stream junction, and provides an excellent site for settlement, with archaeological evidence for activity, and occupation, since the mesolithic period. Further details of topography, geology, and soils are given in Section 6: Supporting information and sources/ maps).

GEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

The area is located on the Cotteswold Sands, strata which lie below the more bedded limestones of the Inferior Oolite (Maps: IGS 1975; Barron *et al.* 1997). The bedrock in the village area consists of fragmented, buff-yellow limestone rubble (Leckhampton member of the Birdlip Limestone Formation), which contains brown clay in its upper levels, as a slight interstitial matrix. The surface of this limestone, and localised depressions within it, are overlain by natural brown clay of periglacial origin, in a layer varying from a few centimetres to almost a metre in thickness. The limestone bedrock in the immediate area of Guiting Power is too poor for any building purposes, and such stone must be brought in, from ready sources in the surrounding hills.

LANDUSE (FIGS 2, 3)

Much of the manorial settlement lies in an area of long-established pastureland, and light orchard, reserved as a grazed amenity area around the Old Manor and parish church, shows no signs of modern plough damage, and remains largely beyond the area covered by housing in the village. This part of the site occupies two pasture fields, Upper Home Ground (OS field 6163; 2.256ha), and Lower Home Ground (OS field 6446; 1.656ha). However, modern development of the Old Manor and its outbuildings, also of the parish church and cemetery, which lie within the early manorial area may well have covered, or destroyed key structures within it. By contrast, the earliest manor building-complex lies on Parson's Piece (OS field 8156; 3.386ha), which has been ploughed annually for some years.

PUBLISHED INFORMATION ON THE SITE

There is no published archaeological information on the early manor site at Guiting Power.

GENERAL OBJECTIVES OF THE PROJECT

Since the early medieval period, the basic social and economic unit of rural settlement in the Cotswolds has been the village, with its surrounding hamlets and farmsteads, and a broad distribution of such fully-developed villages clearly existed by the 13th century.

The northern Cotswolds, an area long supporting varied and productive agriculture, has many such villages, but despite the abundance of sites available for archaeological excavation (Aston and Viner 1984) the number which have been investigated is low (examples: Baldwyn and O'Neil, 1958; Hilton and Rahtz 1966; Rahtz 1969). Consequently a number of basic questions remain unanswered, particularly those which relate to the origins, and earliest development of such villages in the area, and the factors which led to their emergence from the more dispersed pattern of settlement, which appears to dominate the preceding Roman period, and Dark Age/Saxon transition.

In order to address such problems clearly, using more substantial data than generally available, an existing programme of excavation and fieldwork within the upper Windrush area, mainly concerned with the pre-Roman period (Marshall: various analyses) was extended to include certain sites of early medieval date. In view of this background of earlier material, the project places strong emphasis on questions of origins, and development, within the regional setting.

The upper Windrush valley, around which the study area is located, is one of a series of stream valleys which dissect the limestone upland, and flow down the Cotswold dip-slope to join with the upper Thames. Settlement of prehistoric, and Roman periods, is dense in the area, and the source of much current investigation (Marshall: unpublished survey). Although far less is known about the post-Roman to Saxon period than settlement before, the general area has considerable potential for study, since it contains appreciable later Roman settlement, including many rich villas, and is flanked by larger Roman sites, such as Salmonsbury and Wycomb, these latter of small town status. The area is also on the fringes of the upper Thames valley, where increasing Saxon penetration into the upper Windrush area, is seen around Bourton-on-the-Water, and at other sites (Heighway 1984, 1987), and occurred from the 6th and 7th centuries onwards, allowing several centuries of Dark Age survival and transition.

How far the Roman pattern of villas, and lesser farmstead settlements, persisted beyond the early 5th century, and how indigenous rural traditions in the area adapted over the early and middle periods of Saxon immigration, are not known at present. Neither the background to, nor the immediate reasons for, the emergence of nucleated villages are understood, whether a sudden Saxo-Norman, manorially-inspired departure from the native pattern of dispersed farming units, or a more organic, indigenous growth of organised village-type nucleation in response to economic, and other pressures, during the troubled centuries leading into the early medieval period.

Research at Guiting Power, at the early medieval manor, and on earlier sites in the area, has been carried out to help provide an archaeological context within which such general questions can be addressed for the region.

METHODS FOR INVESTIGATION OF THE SITE

Topographical survey (FIG 3)

Work on the area of Guiting Power village started in 1990, with a complete plan, and contour survey of all surface remains in Home Ground, Lower Home Ground, and Parson's Piece, fields immediately to the south of the present village, and which showed indications of subdivision into banked enclosures.

Home Ground was seen to contain the following features: a large mound (later shown to be a Bronze Age barrow), a separate, far smaller mound (later shown to be the early Norman apsidal church), a pronounced linear bank (the Saxo-Norman manorial perimeter), and a series of other banks, and small embanked enclosures, broadly distributed over the area within the main perimeter bank. Lower Home Ground contained a sunken way, with building platforms on its upslope side, and also areas enclosed by banks, possibly small fields, gardens, or paddocks, down-slope from it. Parson's Piece produced large hollows, and low banks, possibly indicating ploughed-out enclosures of some sort.

Geophysical survey (FIG 4)

The entire area of the topographical survey was investigated by magnetometer (gradiometer) survey, with the area of the manorial perimeter further covered by detailed resistivity survey.

-Home Ground

In the northern part of this area, resistivity survey located a round barrow, named as 'Guiting Power 3', with a revetted clay mound 20m across, berm, then ringditch some 39m in maximum diameter, all later excavated separately. Crossing this ringditch, and corresponding with the bank visible at the surface, was a linear, high-resistance feature, later shown to be the early Norman revetment to the refurbished manorial perimeter. To the south of this perimeter bank, a series of high-resistance areas represented, for the most part, undulations in bedrock, but contained evidence for a small building, under a small mound and adjacent disturbed ground, later shown to be the apsidal church (FIG 11).

Gradiometer survey produced little to supplement the data from resistivity, the fills of features not being sufficiently magnetically-enhanced (these shown by later excavation to be of low magnetic susceptibility) to provide clear contrast against bedrock. The line of the perimeter bank showed up as a weak, linear, magnetic anomaly marking its bank, but with no trace of the ditch-line, as later clearly established by excavation. To the S of this main perimeter bank, a linear ditch was detected, clipping the area of the apsidal church, and running approximately parallel to the banked perimeter. The remainder of the enclosure was divided by very indistinct linear anomalies, perhaps indicating gullies, into a mesh of sub-enclosures, fading in magnetic intensity with increasing distance from the perimeter bank. The area of general magnetic enhancement decreased visibly beyond the perimeter bank to the N, and suggested some containment of general scattering of debris within the manorial compound. The area produced some evidence for plough-scoring beyond the main perimeter bank at the N, suggestive of medieval cultivation.

-Lower Home Ground

Resistivity survey produced very little coherent detail, but suggested the possible existence of buildings to the N of the sunken way, which was later confirmed by excavation.

-Parson's Piece

Gradiometry revealed a series of lightly ditched enclosures, which contained pitting and other anomalies, suggesting an area of direct settlement. A small elongate enclosure, contains plough-scoring, lies on the N side of this habitation enclosure, and may represent an adjacent garden area. The S margin of the habitation zone is defined by a multiple ditch-line, running parallel to the perimeter bank in Upper Home Ground, perhaps forming part of the main, rectilinear manorial enclosure. This ditch-line, probably of later Saxon origin, was later excavated, and shown in its mid fill to be of early Norman date. A scatter of early medieval pottery on part of this field further suggests early medieval domestic activity.

Magnetic susceptibility (MS) survey

A full MS survey of the area was not carried out after initial results indicated that definition was not coherent, and that contamination from the village area would mask any results relating to the early medieval manor. MS was determined, however, up through the fills of ditches, where data could be confidently assigned to the early medieval period.