

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

Alistair Marshall



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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**

Two Iron Age enclosures at The Park and Bowsings, near Guiting Power in the Gloucestershire Cotswolds, have been clearly defined by geophysical survey, and representative areas excavated, with the remainder conserved under long-term pastureland.

At The Park (SP 08325 25865), a non-defensive farmstead of mid Iron Age date, about 0.4ha in area, divided into clear functional areas, was operational between the 5th/4th and 2nd centuries BC. This site was superseded in the 2nd century BC by a ditched stronghold enclosure, constructed nearby, at The Bowsings (SP 08580 25865), similar in area, but showing less agrarian emphasis, and interpreted as a defensive enclosure of higher status. Decay, or slighting, of the rampart at The Bowsings in the latest Iron Age, or early Roman period, possibly associated with some abandonment, was followed by a final phase of intensive Romanised farmsteading.

The material assemblage, almost entirely of mid Iron Age type, persists, relatively unmodified, until the early Roman period. The two Iron Age sites cover a period of significant social and economic change which, in terms of the major tribal grouping apparent in the region, may be termed proto-Dobunnic and Dobunnic.

Structures at the sites have also been used for experimental investigation of grain storage.

**Keywords:** Iron Age, Roman period, ditched enclosures, settlement, storage pits, geophysical survey, experimental archaeology.

## **SECTION 1: LOCATION OF THE SITES**

### **TOPOGRAPHY (FIGS X1-X8; PLATE P1)**

The site, located about 1.5 km NW of Guiting Power village (Glos., UK), around SP 084 258, lies between 170 and 200m OD, over the gently sloping top of a narrow, steeply-sided spur, formed by the confluence of two headwater stream valleys of the River Windrush, a tributary of the upper Thames. The area is located high on the dip-slope of the Cotswolds, in an upland valley situation sheltered by surrounding hills, which rise around it to about 250m. For further details of location see Section 7: Supplementary information and sources/ maps.

### **GEOLOGY**

The stream valley has cut down through the more massive, bedded Inferior Oolitic limestones, which form the surrounding hills, to expose the poorer rock strata outcropping at their base, which consist locally of fragmentary limestone, containing thin veins of clay and sand, all heavily disturbed near the surface by periglacial action. The rock type at the sites is the Cleeve Cloud member of the Birdlip Limestone Formation, and is off-white to pale brown, well-sorted to very coarse-grained ooidal limestone, locally sandy or shell-detrital (Barron *et al.* 1997).

Topsoil of mid-brown, silty clay, typically 30cm thick, directly overlies bedrock, and is almost stoneless where forming old, unploughed pastureland, as at The Park and Bowsings. Shallow (10-35cm deep), clayey, brown rendzinas of the Sherbourne Association, usually lime-deficient (Finlay 1976), with clays, brown earths, and clayey brown colluvial earths of the Didmarton Series, occur on lower slopes of the stream valley, with deeper cover in dry valleys from erosion of the higher slope. Where they remain beyond anthropogenic contamination, natural bedrock, clay and soil are of low magnetic susceptibility (10-30 SI units vMS), and are of low phosphate level (<<5mg/100g sample). For further details of geology and soils see Section 7: Supplementary information and sources/ maps.

### **LANDUSE AND STATE OF PRESERVATION (FIGS X2, X6)**

The spur is divided into two fields, The Bowsings (OS field 6095; 3.685 hectares) which includes the end of the spur, and The Park (mainly OS field 2300; 7.523 hectares), which is adjacent to it, but lies further upslope, where the sloping neck of spur begins to merge with surrounding limestone upland. The area of the sites lies under old pastureland, conserved for grazing, and as an amenity area, which has not been ploughed within living memory, but shows some signs of former cultivation, as ridge and furrow over The Park, with plough-scoring appearing over bedrock, and inferred within geophysical images at both sites. Plough-scoring at The Park appears linear, and more modern, than at The Bowsings, where clear signs of scattered, criss-cross plough-marks indicate light, ardbased cultivation (FIG B7), perhaps around the adjacent medieval village at Castlett.

Three adjoining fields around The Park and Bowsings, about 15ha in total, are all that remain of relatively old pastureland in this sector of the valley, most other areas on its flanks and base, and any sites under them, being under intensive cultivation (FIG X6). Except for some former cultivation, the sites appear undamaged, although The Park is crossed at its margins by a minor modern road, and across its centre by the backfilled slit-trench for a water pipe, each of which has caused some localised disturbance.

### **STRATEGY FOR PUBLICATION AND RESEARCH**

Although the project deals with two structurally-separate sites, a farmstead at The Park, and an adjacent, later enclosure at The Bowsings, their joint study as an integrated complex was an obvious choice.

## **INTERPRETATION OF THE PLACENAME 'BOWSINGS'**

The name 'Bowsings' may be derived from the Saxon term '*bosig*', which indicates a cattle pen. The field is located next to a stream, and the occurrence of marshy areas, where the end of the spur levels out, and merges with the valley bottom, make it highly suitable for watering cattle, and for grazing, since the area is also sheltered, and the vegetation suitably rich. The placename may have originated from activities around the early medieval settlement nearby at Castlett, but it is possible that it also refers to a more traditional use of the locality, perhaps even with its origins in activities at the Roman farmstead, and Iron Age enclosure on the site. Cattle were well represented amongst the assemblage of animal bones associated with both sites, with evidence that their skulls were perhaps buried occasionally as part of some ritual.

## **DISCOVERY OF THE SITES**

### ***The Park***

The site at The Park was first reported in 1971 by Mr Arthur Harding, manager of Guiting Manor Farm at that time, who noticed the darker fill of a rock-cut pit in the side of a construction trench dug to carry a water pipe up slope to Wood House (FIG P4). The pit was immediately investigated by Mr. P.E. Gascoigne, and shown to contain Iron Age pottery, animal bone, slag, flint, and an infant inhumation (Gascoigne 1973). On the basis of this published note the site was selected by the author (A.J. Marshall) as a starting point for investigation. The existence of a site here, as opposed to a single pit, was soon established by gradiometer survey over the entire area (FIGS P1, P2).

### ***The Bowsings***

Since The Bowsings area lay about 300m downslope from the known Iron Age farmstead on The Park, over the level, and well-sheltered end of the spur, close to a stream junction, it appeared to be a likely location for some kind of archaeological site, and this speculation alone prompted prospection. Aerial photography, and detailed ground-survey over the spur failed to detect any archaeological structures, but examination of the pastureland, especially at the eroding flank of The Bowsings, did produce sherds of pottery, mainly Roman, but with some undiagnostic fragments of possible Iron Age date. It was not clear at the time, however, whether these were from an adjacent site, or were part of some more generalised scatter surrounding other settlement in the area. Consideration of these preliminary indications led directly to a gradiometer survey of The Bowsings which resulted in clear, and detailed resolution of a ditched enclosure with internal features (FIG B1).