

Cover photo: Site of north-eastern hillfort entrance from Iron Age storage jar from Salmonsbury (height 270mm)

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For the general Greystones Farm leaflet, with fuller information and the Meadows Walk routes, please phone or visit our website.

Charity No. 232680

Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust

Conservation Centre, Robinsons Hill Country Park

For information please phone 01452 383333

or visit our website:

www.gloucestershirewildlifetrust.co.uk

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Rarely do you find a nature reserve of great importance for wildlife that is also an outstanding archaeological site. Yet Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust's Greystones Farm Nature Reserve is just that – partly wonderful hay meadow habitat and the remainder an important Scheduled Ancient Monument, a focus of human activity for nearly 6000 years!

In the panorama above, peaceful fields descend over ditches, believed to be Neolithic, and then rise to the ramparts of the late Iron Age hillfort. It is a privilege to invite people to enjoy and learn from this wonderful place, absorbing the sense of antiquity and awareness of the lives of our remote ancestors.

Salmonsbury has fascinated people for a long time but real understanding began with Dr. G C Dunning's excavations in the 1930s, and the later work of Mrs Helen O'Neil. Geophysical surveys in 1994 and 2004 have now revealed far more – the latter as part of a Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust project carried out by Cotswold Archaeology to increase understanding and protection of this outstanding site. However it does tell us that despite centuries of ploughing and other development much evidence survives below ground. Unfortunately gravel extraction in the 1960s destroyed much of the annexe, together with evidence in that area.

The Trust's present task, with the advice of English Heritage, is to avoid any further destruction of evidence and increase understanding by re-visiting existing evidence, including quantities of pottery from the 1930s excavations.



Part of Iron Age currency bar or sword blank from the Salmonsbury hoard (length 770mm)

The Salmonsbury story so far...

1. A strange Neolithic meeting place

From 11,000 years ago the practice of farming developed in the Near East and around 4000 BC aspects of this Neolithic lifestyle appeared in Britain. People cleared woodland, grew wheat and kept domesticated cattle and pigs, perhaps in a small way at first – still semi-nomadic, and dependent on wild foods. They made pottery, and their impressive monuments soon appeared across southern Britain – magnificent Cotswold long barrows, and the strange, often circular features known as causewayed enclosures.



Hand-made Neolithic Peterborough Ware pottery was fired at low temperatures.

Remarkably a causewayed enclosure has been tentatively identified within the Iron Age hillfort at Salmonsbury – one of only 7 discovered in Gloucestershire! In the 1930s Dr Dunning identified ditches filled with red clay and found sherds of Neolithic Peterborough Ware pottery. The geophysical surveys have now revealed the fuller picture – an incomplete circuit of concentric ditches, divided into varying lengths by undug "causeways".

But what was it for?

Over 5000 years ago a group chose this place – perhaps as a meeting ground before there were permanent settlements. Like many similar sites in lowland Britain it is located on dry, gravelly ground close to rivers and marshland. It seems they were often sited on the edge of areas of human activity, perhaps between territories.

Other excavated examples seem to have fulfilled a range of functions – cattle enclosure, regional fair, trading centre, settlement or ritual centre with ceremonies for the dead. Human bones and infant burials are often found in the ditches, together with broken pottery and animal bones, possibly from feasts and perhaps linked to ritual offerings to the Earth's fertility.

Archaeologists are working to understand these sites, constructed so long ago by people whose view of the world and beliefs were almost certainly complex and alien to our way of thinking. It is easy to misinterpret through modern eyes, which is why archaeology insists on firm evidence!

A section of the 2004 geophysical survey

This section relates to the above panorama, revealing a rich, confusing tapestry of features from different periods. Among dense Late Iron Age settlement features you can detect segmented ditches, thought to be part of a Neolithic causewayed enclosure.



by permission GSB Prospection Ltd

PLEASE NOTE

It is illegal to use metal detectors, or to disturb or remove soil or artefacts of any kind in this Scheduled Ancient Monument.

Please stay on the waymarked walk routes, keep dogs under control and leave gates as you find them, open or closed.

Did people live on the site?

Evidence surviving in the ground of Neolithic settlements is often scarce after 5000 years. However a Neolithic and Bronze Age settlement was found in a quarry 1/2 mile north of here, and Neolithic pottery was discovered at the later prehistoric settlement at Bourton-on-the-Water Primary School not far from here.

2. Slow change in the Neolithic and Bronze Ages

It is hard for us today to comprehend the interval of over 3000 years before the construction of the hillfort! Farming developed during this period, resulting in more regular sources of food, and people settled down in land-owning communities. The settlement excavated at the nearby Primary School showed signs of occupation from the Neolithic period to the Iron Age – a period of around 3000 years! Perhaps during the Bronze Age the inhabitants continued to use and respect the ancient causewayed enclosure nearby.

From 3000 BC long barrows gave way to round barrows, often containing single burials and surrounded by a ring ditch. Here two groups of possible Bronze Age ring ditches were found south and east of the causewayed enclosure, and one outside the western hillfort entrance.

From 2500 BC bronze was a sign of high status, and its trade was in the hands of a powerful social class. Much effort went into the creation of sacred landscapes. (The area around Stonehenge is our most striking example, with many round barrows).



Iron Age barrel-shaped jar from Salmonsbury (height 150mm)

3. The building of a magnificent Late Iron Age hillfort

Iron came into use around 700 BC, gradually replacing bronze for tools and weapons. At the same time society seemed to change and after 600 BC the early hillforts were constructed, including Crickley Hill and Uley Bury on the Cotswold edge. By the Late Iron Age however these had declined and major tribes controlled the landscape of Britain, in this region the Dobunni tribe.

This fine hillfort was built around the first century BC in the Late Iron Age. The double ramparts, ditches and gateways, enclosing 23 hectares of low-lying land, are described further in the Archaeology Walk section. It was constructed unusually late in the Iron Age and is perhaps a type known as an enclosed 'oppidum' – after the early hillforts but before the more town-like sites. It was clearly designed for prestige and convenience rather than defence – perhaps intended as a trading centre or regional sub-centre for the Dobunni tribe.

In 1860 a remarkable hoard of 147 iron currency bars (or possibly sword blanks) were unearthed in the hillfort, suggesting a high-status site. The excavations and geophysics revealed huge numbers of round houses and enclosures, ditches, storage pits, burials and quantities of pottery.

Who lived in the hillfort?

The thriving Iron Age settlement at the Primary School site appears to have been abandoned in the first century BC, suggesting they may have moved to the new hillfort – dry, secure, well-resourced, and probably an envied showpiece in the region! It was a prosperous Late Iron Age community whose people had a range of possessions and pottery reflecting the complex social and economic systems of Late Iron Age Britain.

The hillfort in the Roman Period

According to a contemporary writer the British exported "grain, cattle, gold, silver, iron, hides, slaves and hunting dogs" – resources attractive to the expanding Roman Empire. The first invasions failed but the second succeeded in AD 43, partly through alliances with British tribes. Here the takeover was peaceful, and the army soon established a frontier across Britain that would become the Fosse Way, passing close to the hillfort.

For nearly four centuries the Romans would foster agriculture and rural life to support the imperial armies and administration. The British benefited from increased market for their products, and adopted their conquerors' customs and elegant pottery and housing styles.

Here in the hillfort masses of pottery, coins and Roman buildings suggest intensive occupation of the western section throughout the Roman period. Part of a grand building with under-floor heating system was found in Bourton cemetery and a Romano-British cemetery at Burghfield House.

However the main focus of settlement shifted out of the hillfort towards the Fosse Way, presumably benefiting from trade on one of Roman Britain's busiest routes.

Saxon invasion and lasting settlement

Events on the Continent forced the Roman withdrawal by 420 AD, leaving the inhabitants open to invading Saxons in the 5th-6th centuries. A number of Saxon burials have been found in the ramparts but they settled outside the hillfort, possibly where Bourton is now. Some Saxon place-names refer to the hillfort: the name 'Salmonnes burg' (the ploughman's fortified enclosure) is first found in a charter of AD 779. The name Bourton is probably derived from 'burn' (fortified enclosure) and 'ton' (settlement).

Furthermore under the new Saxon system of local administration the Hundred Court met in the hillfort at the Salmonsbury Stone, close to the northern rampart (until the 19th century). Evesham Abbey later claimed to have held this land from Saxon times.

Medieval times and later

At present the reserve's medieval and later history is only partly understood and a future investigation is planned to extend the Salmonsbury story!

Key people at Salmonsbury

We owe much to Dr John Moore's detailed records in the 18th-19th centuries and to Dr G C Dunning's skilled excavations in the 1930s that led to the site's designation as a Scheduled Ancient Monument in 1934. Dr. Dunning was assisted by Helen Donovan of Camp House in the hillfort. As Helen O'Neil she became a prominent archaeologist, recording threatened sites, liaising with the Sites and Monuments Record and excavating in the hillfort (neatly attired in dress and hat!). Her connection is doubly special to Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust as one of our founder members in 1961.



The 1930s excavations

Late Iron Age fine ribbed jar from Gaul, found at Salmonsbury (height 175mm)



Acknowledgements and publications

Cotswold Archaeology
Archaeological surveys for Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust, Oct 2004, CA Report 04084 (with particular thanks to Gail Stoten)

English Heritage for their support and funding

Cheltenham Museum and Art Gallery for kind permission to reproduce photographs of finds

GSB Prospection Ltd for kind permission to reproduce the 2004 geophysical survey section

Dr. G C Dunning, 1976 Salmonsbury, Bourton on the Water, Glos. in Harding, D.W.(ed) Hillforts: Later prehistoric earthworks in Britain and Ireland

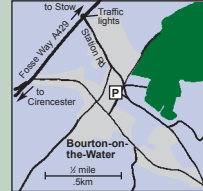
Mrs. Helen O'Neil, 1977 Salmonsbury, Bourton on the Water, TBGAS 95

A. Marshall (1994 Geophysical Survey)

J.R. Timby, 1998 Excavations at Kingscote and Wycomb, Glos, Cotswold Archaeological Trust (includes gazetteer of finds)

How to find Greystones Farm Nature Reserve

O.S. Grid ref. SP 173209
At traffic lights approx 3 miles south of Stow-on-the-Wold on the A429 Fosse Way, turn to Bourton-on-the-Water on Station Rd. Follow Station Rd for approx 1/2 mile and go round right hand bend.



Park in the Station Road public car park on your right behind the garage (for small charge). N.B. there is no visitor parking at the farm. For those with limited mobility please phone the Trust for information.

From there the farm is a 5 minute walk. Cross Station Rd. and turn left along pavement. Turn right shortly onto the narrow lane between two houses (with "no through road" sign), and immediately left to the farm along Greystones Lane (signed Private Road). For other footpath entrances to the farm please see map.

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