

Section 12 Research agenda

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Cross-references to Digital Supplement in red
Cross-references to Printed Synthesis in brown

The research agenda developed as possibilities unfolded during an initially reactive and ultimately long-running project with endemically insecure and often inadequate funding. At the outset, the project was seen as an opportunity to 'collect' one of the best-preserved examples of a small group of monastic houses belonging to a relatively obscure and little-understood alien order. How far would planning conform to standard medieval monastic claustral arrangements? What could be ascertained about auxiliary buildings within the monastic precinct, a topic largely neglected by earlier work on the sites of the greater monastic houses?

Three assumptions were made initially: that time for excavation was short, that relatively simple structural evidence might be expected from a small house with a life of less than three centuries, and that consequently machinery could be used extensively in its examination. By five years into the project, all three assumptions had been negated. The prospect of 'collecting' a near-total site remained, but the task became more complex as it emerged that the plan was non-standard and extensive, and as awareness of manorial and royal usage increased. Comprehensive excavation did collect very large amounts of data, but it is clear in retrospect that the results reported here could not have been obtained from the most inspired set of targeted interventions or sampling strategies. Even so, there are still significant uncertainties and unresolved problems, and gaps in the evidence are discussed in [9]. The La Grava project, when its product is compared with more constrained or limited projects such as Writtle (Essex), South Witham or Goltho (both Lincolnshire), offers a strong argument for total investigation rather than partial excavation or sampling.

During the initial post-excavation work, six main academic aims were defined (Baker 1988):

- (a) to determine changes of status from royal manor to alien priory, reversion to royal manor, and subsequent decline;
- (b) to define the agricultural buildings in relation to the economy of the site and manor;
- (c) to explore the idea of the royal manor of Leighton as the possible centre of an early Saxon estate;
- (d) to define the post-medieval farm and later manor;
- (e) to describe the prehistoric activity;
- (f) to explore and describe the antiquarian interest in the site.

These aims were reviewed in 1999; the updated project design (Baker *et al* 1999) followed MAP2 procedures and responded to growing interest in the archaeology of landscape and settlement. It took account of the potential for enhancing the contribution from sequences of stratified structures by spatial analysis of layout planning for individual buildings and the overall settlement [6]. It was also more selective: aim (e), prehistoric activity, unrelated to the main site history, was

detached for separate publication; aim (f), antiquarian interest in the site, was absorbed into the discussion of documentary issues.

The 1999 revision produced the five groups of interdependent aims, based upon an overall statement of intent, *to assess the impacts and influences of royal and monastic uses upon the physical planning and operational functionality of a medieval manorial site*. The five issues are listed in Section 11, together with an assessment of their usefulness in the light of analysis and the discipline of report preparation.

Issues of interpretation

Issues that cannot be answered easily or definitely for lack of precise dating evidence are outlined below.

- 1 Was the initial layout Romano-British in date? [2.02]
- 2 Was the layout set within a wider planned landscape? [2.02, 6.01]
- 3 Did the planned Anglo-Saxon settlement reflect continuity from at least the late Romano-British period; could it be a 'latter-day *mansio*'? Does it represent the origins of the royal manor? [2.02, 52]
- 4 Was the possible middle-Saxon or mid-11th-century planned layout new or an extension of the initial layout? [2.02, 6.07]
- 5 Is some of the ceramic and building-type dating sufficiently ambiguous to retain the possibility of some continuity between Periods 3 and 4 as a putative middle-Saxon period? [2, 6, 11]
- 6 What was the relationship of the 'outliers' with the planned settlement? [11.04]
- 7 What did the earthworks at *Yttingaford* represent? [5.22]
- 8 Was La Grava the administrative centre of a late Saxon estate extending into Buckinghamshire, with Wing as its ecclesiastic counterpart? [3.07]
- 9 Was La Grava a Danish settlement for part of its existence, with the River Ouzel used as the Danelaw border? Was this the reason for the location of the 906 treaty at *Yttingaford*? [3.01, 3.02, 3.03]
- 10 If there was a more extensive late Saxon estate, was its division into two by the definition of the county boundary the occasion for separating the Bedfordshire part from the minster at Wing and establishing the church at Leighton? [3, 6]
- 11 Did the royal estate once include other land along Watling Street? [3.07, 3.08]
- 12 Where was the Domesday manorial centre? Was it La Grava, placed on the border and close to *Thiodweg*? If not, where was it? Could it have been at the other, then apparently subsidiary, court at *Hech'* (Heath), documented in 1220?
- 13 If La Grava was not the site of the Domesday manorial centre, what was it, and what was its economic and political significance?
- 14 Was La Grava the 1155 manor that was substantially restocked/rebuilt along with other royal manors in 1156? If not, where is that site? Could it have been at *Hech'* (Heath)?

- 15 Was La Grava the site restocked by Fontevrault in 1164? If not, where is that site?
- 16 Who financed the major expansion around 1200 at a time when the mother house was in debt; could it have been Queen Joanna of Sicily? If not, who? [8]
- 17 Are there relevant documents in the Papal Archive?
- 18 What modern scientific processes or other work could enhance the La Grava data and analysis, such as:
 - work on the skeletons to determine country of origin or fraternity
 - tooth wear pattern
 - were the muscular male skeletal remains French lay brothers? [60]
- 19 Has it been possible to differentiate the material culture of the secular and religious inhabitants? [8, 9]
- 20 Was the medieval demesne dispersed, but concentrated within the western half of the royal manor? [6.04, 6.05, 6.06, 65]
- 21 Did the consolidated demesne block undergo the changes postulated in [6.05, 6.06] before reaching its final form in c 1480?
- 22 Did King John visit La Grava/Leighton? The relevant documents have not been examined. [8]
- 23 What date is the late medieval manor house complex S63, and who built it – the Duchess of Suffolk c 1446, the College of Eton, or Princess Cecylle in c 1480? [5, 6]
- 24 Was there an estate purchasing policy to explain the dearth of St Neots-type wares?
- 25 Could a research programme identify provenance and date of C60 and other mineral-tempered fabrics? [57, 58]
- 26 What would analyses on pottery residues say about cooking and other activities including the probable use of some pots as chamber pots? [58]
- 27 Would integrating the specialist reports on mortar and plaster samples shed more light on the buildings?
- 28 What might a systematic and detailed survey, including fieldwalking and geophysics of the royal manor of Leighton, complementing and extending Coleman's work, add to our knowledge? [65-67]
- 29 What could a research excavation on the Grovebury site reveal about the medieval priory and manor? [5]
- 30 La Grava was subjected to near total excavation, yet only a fraction of the original building materials and finds can be shown to have remained on site. What does this imply for the value of sampling excavations and evaluations that recover an even smaller fraction of an already greatly depleted whole?