

REVIEW

George Lambrick and Mark Robinson: *Iron Age and Roman riverside settlements at Farmoor, Oxfordshire*, Oxfordshire Archaeological Unit Rept. 2 (CBA Research Rept. 32), Oxfordshire Archaeological Unit and Council for British Archaeology, 1979: paper covers: £18.00.

The site of Farmoor lies on the floodplain of the Thames, some 6 miles upstream from Oxford, where the river flows north around Wytham Hill. At first glance this report may seem to be a very expensive publication of a rather unprepossessing gravel site, not dissimilar to many others in the Thames valley with occupation of the later prehistoric and Roman periods. Such a view would be very mistaken, for the report contains extremely valuable biological information that has enabled its authors to provide a considerably interesting and well-integrated interpretation of the way in which the occupation of the Farmoor floodplain developed from the Iron Age onwards. Exceptional preservation of plant remains (pollen, seeds, etc) and insects has given us an extraordinarily vivid and detailed picture of that occupation. In the mid-Iron Age phase, for example, the absence of

some common perennial plants such as elder and stinging nettle suggested to the authors that each farmstead was used for no more than about five years. Of overriding importance however is the way in which the biological evidence identifies the pastoral character of the economy. This continues into the Roman period, despite changes in the layout of fields and the fact that no actual farmstead was identified within the area excavated. Once again further fascinating details are elucidated: the presence of box, for example, suggests gardens enclosed by box hedges; the type of seeds associated with the carbonised grain indicates that cereals were brought in from outside the floodplain. Supported by excellent reports on the animal bones and the various classes of artefacts, this is a report of outstanding quality. It should be essential reading, not only for those with an interest in the application of biological sciences to archaeology or in the archaeology of the Thames Valley, but also for the prehistorian and Roman archaeologist at large.

Michael Fulford