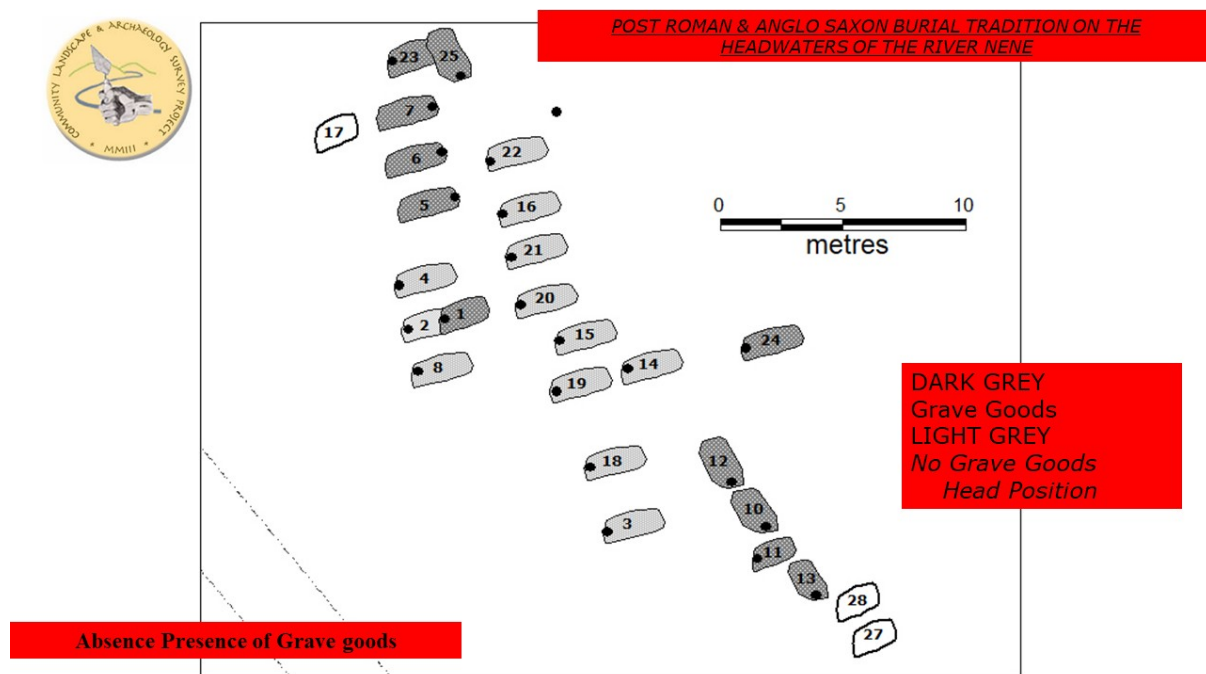


Anglo Saxon Cemetery, Nether Heyford – the story so far

A few years ago, ploughing at Whitehall Farm unearthed the remains of 2 skeletons. CLASP undertook some exploratory fieldwork and has since been excavating 2 separate cemeteries on the site covering 2 distinct time periods separated by perhaps 100 years, with the majority of graves dating from 5th century AD and at least 4 others dating from late 6th to early 7th century AD.

The last season's excavation in 2019, revealed several new graves, of which 9 were excavated. The total number of known complete inhumations is now 28, although the skeletal evidence indicates bone evidence for 35 people. Most of the burials explored formed part of linear rows of graves aligned roughly on a north/south axis adjacent to a trackway previously observed through geophysical survey and confirmed by excavation.



This implies a level of organisation well beyond the needs of a family cemetery. There would appear to be 4 or 5 linear rows containing between 8 and 10 inhumations per line suggesting the presence of a sizable community within the locality and the probability that many more graves remain to be identified. The position of the individual graves also appeared to be evenly spaced along the row, respecting the overall pattern of the graveyard. Amongst the inhumations were some really interesting examples with one grave containing a young woman complete with perinatal foetus who had probably died in child birth whilst another contained our first instance of a deviant burial. Laid into the grave face down the skeleton was also minus its feet which may have been cut off prior to death.

A further individual was interred with a range of grave goods, suggesting a person of status within that specific social grouping. The grave goods include a spear, shield boss and a copper alloy strap end with associated belt clasps located on the hip and shoulder. Both the

spear and shield boss are consistent with a 5th century AD date and are completely different from the examples retrieved from later contexts.

We also appear to have a new variety of interment where the head is located at the west end of the grave but the burial also includes grave goods which is contrary to previous experience. These changing or different funerary expressions are perhaps indicating a multiplicity of approaches to belief and belief systems that are far more complex than previously thought. A further burial aligned north/south associated with late 6th to early 7th century interments was also excavated. This skeleton was male and had been buried with a spear and shield boss as had been recorded in the other burials of this date. A total of 4 burials from the late 6th to the early 7th have now been excavated but further work will be needed to establish the overall distribution of these burials. Interestingly they all appear to be laid in one linear row, head to foot, possibly across the entire burial ground. We are observing something significant in burial practice but its meaning remains obscure.

Initial examination of the bone samples by the School of Archaeology at Oxford indicates that one of the individuals probably came from Scandinavia.

This year we hope to establish the final number of inhumations associated with the site and the overall layout of the burial rows within the Post Roman and Earlier Migration period cemeteries. Hopefully we will recover more evidence of the different burial traditions to be found at the site and a greater understanding of the development of the cemetery.