

Project methodology

The project set out to bring together several different types of information:

- Original contemporary documents
- Previous investigations by others
- Fieldwork
- Map-based and tabular analysis

Contemporary documents

Using such powerful search aids as Access2Archives, documents relating to Onley were discovered in archives all over the country. These included such diverse locations as the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust, Birmingham City archives, the Northamptonshire Record Office, the Berkshire Record Office, the Warwickshire Record Office, The National Archives at Kew, and the Northamptonshire Sites and Monuments Record.

In addition, Gren Hatton's full-text transcripts and analyses of 550 early west-Northants wills (see elsewhere on this site) yielded a good range of wills for Onley and Barby, covering the period from 1500-1700 and giving a wealth of personal details about the families who lived and worked at Onley both prior to and after its desertion.

Previous investigations

Results of earlier archaeological investigations documented by Professor Beresford and his group, and by the Royal Commission for Historic Monuments, were collated with the information from the contemporary documents; and there was also input from the results of a small dig carried out within the area of Onley Prison under the direction of the University of Warwick's History Department. Finally, the RAF's 1940s overhead reconnaissance photographs of the site were integrated into the database.

Fieldwork

Several visits were made to the DMV site, and many photographs were taken at ground level, to supplement the information given by the aerial photographs. In addition, interviews were conducted with all available farm managers and others who had worked in and around the site over the last 30 years or so - and this yielded some extremely useful items of information, especially in relation to the stream that flows through the middle of the site and the house-platforms on the west side of the stream where Victorian steam-ploughing had destroyed visual evidence. Evidence was also collected from farmer's C20th detailed scale maps of their farms (this was invaluable in tracing fieldnames and exact acreages, for comparison with older documentary records from C16-19).

Map-based and tabular analysis

Computer-based graphics software (CorelDraw) was used to integrate the data from maps and fieldwork, using the modern 25,000:1 Ordnance Survey map as the reference basis. This allowed a composite picture to be built up from the varied data that had been collected - modern photographs from Google, older aerial photography, archaeological maps, the Barby C18th enclosure map, early maps from Victoria County History and other sources, data gathered from modern fieldwork, and data gathered from early documentation.

Another technique that proved extremely valuable was the construction of a "land-ownership table", showing who owned the various fields at different periods. This technique was especially helpful in locating the various parcels of land referred to in early documents, by comparing acreages given in the early documents with later acreages and/or by tracing individual field-names.