

FIELD VISIT TO NORTH FARM, STONESFIELD, OXON

In response to a call by Mr Hunt of North Farm, Stonesfield, concerning a mysterious hole in his field, the OAU were asked by the County Archaeologist to make a site visit in case the feature proved to be of archaeological interest. The visit was made in the afternoon of Tuesday 25th May.

The feature lay in a field to the E of Stonesfield, about 300 m north of the Coombe road and about 100 m from the hedge line which marks the course of Akeman Street. It was very close to the site of a known Roman villa.

The field was in the process of being ploughed after having been set aside for a year. The ploughing had been started at the top of the hill and had stopped on reaching the hole which had materialised as the ploughsoil collapsed into a void. According to the 1:50 000 OS map, the villa lay slightly further down the slope and was, at the time of the visit, still covered by grass. There was no Roman pottery or other finds visible in the ploughed area.

The hole was 0.55 m in diameter and almost a perfect circle. It had quite well-defined sides undercutting all the way round, thus forming the top of an apparently 'bell-shaped' pit. It was investigated to a depth of about half a metre without anything being found. It appeared to have been cut from just below the ploughsoil and the loose fill (collapsed ploughsoil) formed a clean edge with the clayey brown subsoil. At about 400 mm deep a browner and more compact (though still relatively loose) fill was encountered, and under this fill was a darker loamy soil which was seen around the edge of the feature.

The origin of this hole is still quite mysterious. It had never been encountered before although the land has been ploughed quite regularly for a number of years. It was concluded that it was probably relatively modern both because of the loose nature of the lower fills and because it seemed to have been cut from just below the ploughsoil. Mr Hurst thought that it might be an old quarry shaft, but this seems unlikely in view of its small opening and the absence of evidence for quarry stone nearby.

Despite the location of the feature near a Roman villa it is thought unlikely to be Roman. The feature did not appear to be lined, although admittedly it might have been part of a rather larger feature (eg. a well) whose true edges were not defined. It was considered that the nature of the feature would not be elucidated without more extensive excavation which was not thought to be justified. Mr Hurst was intending only to infill the hole. The site is likely to be a Scheduled Monument. Mr Hurst said that it was visited on occasions, and he had been asked not to plant trees (along Akeman Street?), although he was unaware that it was scheduled. He had no intention of disturbing it further.

ANDY MUDD/OAU/26.5.93