

SKELETAL REMAINS FROM A FIELD NEAR WARDINGTON, OXFORDSHIRE

by

A Boyle and P Blinkhorn

OXFORD ARCHAEOLOGICAL UNIT

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### 1 *Introduction*

On Monday the 24th August 1997 the Oxford Archaeological Unit (OAU) was contacted by Detective Sergeant Steve O'Farrell regarding the discovery of a quantity of bones which were believed to be human. After examination of the material it was decided that a visit to the findspot would be required in order to determine its likely date. This report details the result of the site visit by Angela Boyle and Paul Blinkhorn of the OAU, and the results of the examination of the skeletal material by the former.

### 2 *Location*

The material was found adjacent to a 'live' badger set located in a field, currently under cultivation, on the border between the counties of Oxfordshire and Northamptonshire (NGR SP 497 467 approx.). The bones were discovered by a rambler whilst out walking.

### 3 *Results of site visit*

A layer of recently excavated soil approximately 0.06 m in thickness was identified in the immediate vicinity of the badger set. The layer was fully excavated and was found to lie directly on top of the present day field surface. Further fragments of human bone, along with two waste flint flakes of probable prehistoric date were recovered from the layer. In addition a fragment of pottery identified as part of a Creamware tea bowl (AD 1760-1850) was recovered. The pot sherd was recovered from the very base of the layer, and it is thus highly likely that it was actually lying on the surface of the field and therefore not contemporary with the human bone. Close examination of the adjacent chamber of the badger set revealed what has been tentatively identified as a human long bone protruding from the wall at some depth below the surface. The badger set was seen to extend below the existing field boundary which is formed by a wide, shallow bank with trees growing on its surface.

### 4 *The human bone*

The material recovered has been identified as the skull of an adult male of perhaps 25-35 years. Assessment of sex is based on skull morphology and the age estimate is based on the degree of dental attrition on the molars. In addition three cervical vertebrae, a fragment of left proximal tibia and the proximal head of a radius were present. The presence of these fragments of long bone suggests that a complete burial has been disturbed.

### 5 *Discussion and conclusions*

The badger set, as noted, extends below the county boundary bank. This is the old shire boundary and is medieval (*c.* AD 1100-1550) in date. Clearly then, the burial, being sealed by the bank, is medieval or earlier in date. The Sites and Monuments Records for both Oxfordshire and Northamptonshire were consulted, and produced no evidence of any archaeological activity in the immediate vicinity before the post-medieval period. A brief examination of the cultivated field in the area of the set yielded only modern finds.

It seems likely that the badgers will continue to disturb the burial further and it is therefore recommended that the site should be visited over the next few weeks for the purpose of recovering any further fragments of bone or associated artefacts.

Angela Boyle *MA (Hons), MA*

Angela graduated from Glasgow University in 1987 with an honours degree in archaeology. She then went on to study for a masters degree in osteology at Sheffield University from 1987-1989. She has worked for the Oxford Archaeological Unit since June 1990, and although her main role is as Unit osteologist she also undertakes other aspects of post-excavation analysis including stratigraphic analysis and the identification and analysis of artefacts. In addition Angela has lectured on the subject since 1992 and has been teaching aspects of osteology at the Oxford University's Department of Continuing Education since November 1996. She has written a wide range of bone reports many of which are published in journals and monographs. She is currently researching Neolithic and Bronze Age burial in the Upper Thames Valley for a doctorate at University College London. She is a member of the Osteoarchaeological Research Group, the Association for Environmental Archaeology and the Palaeopathology Association.

Paul Blinkhorn *BTech (Hons)*

Paul graduated from Bradford University in 1982 with an honours degree in Archaeological Sciences. After two years continuous employment in field archaeology at various locations in England, he then joined the Suffolk Archaeological Unit in Ipswich as a pottery analyst, where he was employed until 1989. He then took up a similar post at the Northamptonshire Archaeological Unit until six months ago, at which point he became an employee of the Oxford Archaeological Unit. During the time at Northampton, he was also involved in fieldwork projects in Spain, Italy and Ireland, as well as directing small-scale evaluation excavations. His position at Oxford is mainly concerned with ceramic analysis, although there are some project management and fieldwork elements to the post. Paul has published numerous papers and articles on archaeological pottery, and this year will see the publication of two books by him on related topics. He has also lectured widely on the subject, is a visiting lecturer at the University of Leicester's Department of Archaeology, and an occasional contributor to week-end schools at the University of Oxford's Department of Continuing Education. He is a member of the Council of the Medieval Pottery Research Group.



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