

OXFORDSHIRE ARCHAEOLOGICAL UNIT NEWSLETTER

INCLUDING OXFORDSHIRE PARISH SURVEY NEWS

No.1 - January 1978

Anyone wishing to send contributions to the Newsletter should send to 46 Hythe Bridge Street, Oxford OX1 2EP (Tel: 43888) before the last Tuesday of each month.

Subscriptions for the 1978 issues of the Newsletter are now due and if these have not already been paid we should be grateful to receive your cheque for £1.00 in due course.

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ABINGDON, BARTON COURT FARM

Mark Robinson has now begun work on the sample from the Saxon well at Barton Court Farm. The preliminary results are very interesting as it contains many fragments of flax seed capsules and barley chaff. It is hoped that the sample will be reliable evidence for the types of cereal in use on the site for the Saxon period as all the carbonised cereal remains recovered so far from Saxon deposits could be residual Roman material.

ABINGDON, SPRING ROAD

Christmas/New Year digging by the Abingdon Society has retrieved 10 part or whole skeletons from the line of a drainpipe trench in Spring Road, Abingdon. The graveyard was discovered last July. It is likely to have been associated with a small chapel on the site. Documents refer to Trinity and Shippon chapels but these are probably the same even if this is some distance from modern Shippon. Its use may span the period between 1284 and 1655 but it was in ruins by 1733. The land passed from Abbey property to St Helens church parish and later to the Borough. The origin and function of the chapel is puzzling, it seems rather close to the medieval town to be a chapel of ease. It is known too that in the late 14th century at least some people from Shippon were being buried in Abingdon as if burials at the chapel had ceased or had not begun. Excavation uncovered shallow and deep graves of man, woman and child, two graves sparsely decorated with a few flat stones but more containing finds useful for dating.

BERINSFIELD, MOUNT FARM

Topsoil stripping has now been completed after much difficulty with some of the machinery. The multiplicity of new features uncovered should prove interesting. It has been found that very careful stripping by JCB is very nearly as effective as hand stripping. Some areas were stripped by a bulldozer, however, in these all of the very shallow features (of which many survive elsewhere) have been lost. Work has continued on the early-middle Iron Age features in the area of the Bronze Age ring Ditch and there have been several finds of human remains of this date, including a second crouched burial. This area is nearing completion now, and with the labour force no longer partly involved in topsoil stripping, resistivity surveying and salvage work elsewhere on the site, it should now be possible to speed up the excavation rates for the extensive areas of the site still to be examined.

FAWLEY

Richard Chambers reports that whilst inspecting a suspected ice-house at Fawley with Mr Derek Humphries of the Henley Archaeological and Historical Group the owner of the site reported finding two Roman coins (both Vestasian) from a findspot which has hitherto remained unrecorded. The ice-house turned out to be a large and well disguised cesspit broken into whilst gardening.

OXFORD, 79-80 St Aldates - The musical instrument maker

Since we went to press in Oxoniensia with the claim that someone had been making stringed instruments on the site in the fifteenth century, Christopher Page of Jesus College has produced documentary evidence which corroborates this in a remarkable way. He has kindly allowed Brian Durham to see a paper, to appear in the next Galpin Society Journal, which shows a great concentration of medieval English harpmakers in Oxford. What is more, one of his harpmakers, who could not be ascribed to any particular town, seems to have been paying rent at No.79 St Aldates fifteen years previously. The name, Thomas Briker or Thomam Brikar, is sufficiently unusual to be fairly sure that there were not two people of that name with instrument-making associations in England at that time, and that he must have been responsible for some of the excavated tensioning pegs. His name appears on a royal commission for arrest for counterfeiting the King's money in 1467, and Nicholas Mayhew tells me that the Heberden Coin Room has an apparently-forged Edward IV great from Broad Street, Oxford, which could just possibly be more of Briker's handywork!

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CALENDAR FOR JANUARY/FEBRUARY 1978

18th January 1978

Abingdon Area Archaeological & Historical Society present a talk by Mr A Shishtawi on 'The Conservation of Museum Objects' - Contact Judy Thomas, Tel: Abingdon 20238

25th January 1978

Oxfordshire Architectural and Historical Society present a lecture given by Prof C Thomas on 'Christian Archaeology and the Cult of Relics'. For details contact Mrs J Young, Tel: Oxford 46170

28th January 1978

Abingdon Day School - practical day school on aspects of local archaeology. For details contact OUDES, Tel: Oxford 52901

15th February 1978

Abingdon Area Archaeological & Historical Society present a lecture by Mr G Lambrick on 'Excavations at Farmoor'. For details contact Judy Thomas, Tel: Abingdon 20238

PARISH SURVEY MEETING - 27TH NOVEMBER 1977

HELD AT THE OXFORDSHIRE ARCHAEOLOGICAL UNIT

R A Chambers: Oxfordshire Archaeological Unit
J M Steane: Oxfordshire County Council, Department of
Museum Services

officiating.

Apologies

Apologies were received from Mr W Fowler for the Watlington Group and from Mr G Miles for the Bensington (Benson) Society.

1. Mr & Mrs Eustace spoke about their Non-Conformist Chapel: Survey which they have been doing for the OCC DMS. Mr Eustace mentioned that he made a start by listing the 200 chapels in the Sites and Monuments Record. He added to these a further 200 from the 1852 list in the Bishops Register. He added a further number from the Directories available at the County Record Office. A further source was the 1851 religious census. He mapped this information and came to the conclusion that there were, in fact, over 400 chapels and ex-chapels in the County. To date, he and his wife have visited and written reports on 60 chapels. He explained the methods adopted. These included an architectural description of the building or buildings. A note of its position in the village (the chapel builders had to be content with odd plots since they came late into the village infilling). They describe the furnishings, transcribe the memorials and gravestones, note photographs of old worthies, inspect the Bibles which frequently have genealogical information inscribed in them. When they cannot contact villagers who know about the use of the Chapel they leave a stamped and addressed envelope so that they may be contacted. They have concentrated so far on the remoter chapels in the rural areas and move fast when they are alerted by J M Steane, in the Museum, that an application has been made to demolish or alter the internal arrangements of a Chapel. Margaret Eustace described how she engaged herself with the more human side of chapel recording. She first of all enquired where the key to the Chapel was kept and this often led to cups of tea and a discussion of the history of the Chapel. She recalled that at Little Tew, a 95 year old lady, as bright as a button, described how three or four hundred people would fill the Chapel on Sundays, singing hymns and saying prayers and listening outside to the Reverend Edith Gates, a woman preacher. This all happened some thirty years ago. The Chapel now is no longer used as a sacred building.

A suggestion from the floor was made that perhaps a network of evangelical preachers could be traced and it was emphasised that with the decline of non-conformity and with the rationalisation of organisation, archives were being centralized and it was no longer as easy to undertake local research based on local records.

2. Mrs Elizabeth Leggatt spoke about the Ditchley area and described how her group has walked the woods, boundaries and trackways of the Ditchley Estate. She explained that the woodland is under threat and is being cut down. Cleared areas are bulldozed, destroying any earthworks and boundary banks before being replanted with conifers and beeches. In the early stages of growth such woodland rapidly became impenetrable. She spoke about the evidence of forest clearance before the Iron Age Grim's Ditch was dug in her area. She looked forward to the fifth volume of the Shakenoak Report which would have a reconsideration of Raleigh Radford's Ditchley villa excavation report.

Beryl Schumer and Mrs Leggatt have also been investigating park boundaries on the northern limit of the estate which seem to be connected with the 1605 licence to empark.

3. Finstock

Mrs Margaret Rogers reported that her group is recording buildings, hedges and ironstone mines, in particular, the latter and that they are carrying out fieldwork in Topples Wood. She emphasized that owing to pheasant shooting this cannot be done properly until February.

4. Shennington

Mrs Clifton reported that they had been carrying out field-walking in the parish but had not found very much although David Hall's survey of the parish for the OAU and OCC DMS located a Romano-British settlement and also the site of Sugarswell deserted medieval village.

5. The Baldons

Mr Whitfeld reported that the Baldon group had largely dissolved but that he had been field-walking in the Horspath area on a site whose place name suggested a pagan shrine. A quantity of Roman pottery and a mesolithic flint had come from this site.

6. Cropredy Historical Society

Mr Jones stated that the group had just started under the active leadership of Mrs Keegan. They were proposing to start off by a house to house survey along the lines of the Brunskill Recording Scheme and helped by the example of the Lewknor Hundred Historical Society.

7. The Witney Historical Society

Mrs F Best explained how the Society was divided into small study groups including one on Anglo-Saxon boundaries, one on Ducklington between 1900 and 1914 (mainly oral recording of half a dozen elderly people), the blanket industry from the 18th century onwards, the population of Witney and Medieval Witney. It was emphasized that the Society was preparing a series of historical papers for their Journal which was to be published under the name "Record of Witney" in four quarterly issues.

8. The Lewknor Hendred Historical Society

Mrs Bindoff reported that monthly meetings were well attended As a result of Oliver Rackham's Day School they were proposing to look at hedges and woods. They have also helped at the Chalgrove excavation run by Richard Chambers and have also looked at a possible moated site behind Lewknor Church. They are now trying to get their village centre designated as a conservation area and are planning to survey the smaller churchyards in the parish. They produce an A4 news sheet which they circulate through all the doors in the village.

9. Burford Society

Mr Moody reported that his area included Taynton, Fulbrook and Widford. They were interested in boundaries e.g. why was Northmoor part of the Taynton Estate. They had reconstructed a map of 1770 and were also looking at the tenure of houses and land and had produced a card index of leases from 1300 to 1850. They were surveying a local churchyard and have staved off an attempt to move the stones. They were proposing to do a local survey of houses in Upton and Widford.

10. Yarnton

Rod Smith spoke about the way in which they are forming a historical society. He said that the surviving documentation covered the church, the school, the manor with its link with Eynsham and also the practise of lot drawing for the Yarnton meadows. He spoke about possible conflicts of use between the village which wishes to maintain the old traditions and the Nature Conservancy who wish to preserve the interesting flora.

11. Thame

Mr G R Southern spoke of the difficulties of getting his members out into the field but he was trying to build up an awareness of local history in the town by displaying finds from a local Iron Age Romano-British site, in a showcase in the town library.

12. Mrs Fallowfield of Mapledurham speaking for the South Oxfordshire Archaeological Group mentioned that her group had taken photographs of Chasey Farm which was one of two manors at Mapledurham. The group had begun to work on hedgerows and woods and had noted the different sizes of boundary banks and possible areas of primeval woodland. They were compiling a card index of field names from the Tithe Apportionment Map.

13. Mrs Armstrong spoke of the work of the Standlake Society. Here they were pursuing a documentary history of all the houses over one hundred years old. Copies are being deposited in the Museum, The National Monuments Record and one of their own archives. Documentary record was based on the census records, the parish records and the manor court roll. Their earliest record dated back to 1476 and from 1520 onwards when Magdalen College acquired

the Manor the record becomes rich. She described how one of the members makes a card index of all the people mentioned in the leases and another has to transcribe the parish registers. Their survey, as yet, lacks an interior architectural investigation and surprisingly a map which ought to show where the houses are. She also mentioned that she is engaged in looking at cropmarks in two places in the parish. Finally, the group had advertised for photographs in the Parish Magazine and large numbers of people brought these out of their drawers. They have all been listed.

14. Tackley Society

Jennie Harrington spoke about the work of the Society which was in some disarray owing to the departure of Don Benson. The hedges, gravestones and date-stones were being recorded. A survey had been made of the DMV at Whitehill. They were also reducing or enlarging maps of the village to a common scale 6" to 1 mile. The earliest of their maps dated from 1605. They were maintaining two indexes, one of place names or field names and one for people but they were defeated by the immensity of the task from the 19th century onwards.

15. Bensington Society (Benson parish)

A letter from Gordon Miles was read out in which he described that at present the society had walked 13 fields (some of which are very large) and had retrieved material from 5 holes dug for other purposes throughout the parish. They have been plotting their fieldwork results, along with known sites from the Oxfordshire County Museum records and the Ashmolean and settlement patterns are now beginning to emerge.

The most interesting site to be discovered to date was a Neolithic and Bronze Age settlement.

16. Watlington

Mr W Fowler reports that he is going to try and revive interest within the parish to form a group whose aims will be orientated towards practical work including recording material for the parish survey, rather than a group that orientates around a lecture programme.

Richard Chambers spoke in brief about some of the societies/groups which were not represented. These included the groups from the following areas, Asthal, Bicester, Chalgrove, Chinnor, Didcot, Henley, Kidlington, Steventon and Wallingford.

Day-Schools for 1978/9

There was general approval that there was need for more day-schools, especially on the following topics: (1) Geology and soils of Oxfordshire and their effects on the interpretation of aerial photographs; (2) The identification of flint implements; (3) Documents for the local historian and (4) Post Medieval pottery.

Richard Chambers will ask Trevor Rowley of the OUDES if these schools can be arranged.