



OXFORDSHIRE ARCHAEOLOGICAL UNIT NEWSLETTER INCLUDING
OXFORDSHIRE PARISH SURVEY NEWS

No 7 - July 1979

Anyone wishing to send contributions to the Newsletter should send details to the above address before the last Tuesday of each month.

OXFORDSHIRE

Checkendon

Excavation of the first two sections by the South Oxfordshire Archaeological Group across the bank and ditch of the enclosure known as the Devil's Churchyard continues. Several small fragments of a very coarse fabric Iron Age pottery have come from the bottom of the ditch and it is hoped that further finds of pottery will give a clearer picture of the occupation life of this enclosure.

Kidlington, Moat Cottage

Development of this Medieval moated site, first examined in 1977, has been scheduled to take place in two phases, the first phase probably commencing in the autumn. There will be a three week excavation during the summer from 21 July to 12 August to examine the Medieval remains in more detail. The excavation will rely solely on local volunteer labour for both weekday and weekend working. Anybody who is interested in helping will be welcome but it will be preferred if they do not come for less than half a day. Previous experience will not be necessary. If you are interested please contact Richard Chambers either at the Unit (Oxford 43888) or at Oxford 511216 (evenings).

Kidlington - Parish Churchyard extension

An extension of the Parish churchyard to the north of the church is at present underway. Several members of the Kidlington Society are keeping a watch over the topsoil stripping which in this case is necessary before raising the ground level sufficiently above the water table with material brought in from elsewhere.

This site is of two-fold interest because of the presence of a Roman period well found in 1840 during quarrying operations some 30 m to the east and also because of low earthwork platforms noted several years ago lying adjacent to the north wall of the churchyard. So far, R A Chambers has walked the site and found one sherd of Medieval sandy-ware cooking pot and one fragment of Medieval ridge (roof) tile.

Oxford, 18-24 New Inn Hall Street

Redevelopment by Brasenose on the corner of New Inn Hall Street and Shoe Lane has given the opportunity of some salvage excavation and recording.

Nos 22 and 24 New Inn Hall Street have been left standing and will be conserved. Small trenches dug within failed to positively affirm or refute the theory that these are a Late Medieval survival of St Mary's College. Evidence from trenches outside seem to agree with this theory.

Mechanical excavation for foundation trenches outside the building has produced a section extending back from the Shoe Lane frontage, revealing the medieval street surfaces and the tenement frontages (cob-walled?). Saxon pot (St Neots ware) was recovered from the bottom of this trench, probably from a pit.

Further foundation trenches cut back from the New Inn Hall Street frontage have shown a frustratingly large amount of undisturbed and complex stratigraphy of tenements predating St Mary's (founded 1435).

Digging out of foundation trenches will continue over the next few weeks.

At the front of the site some close-packed cobbling was found on the surface of the old topsoil, in a position suggesting it was the original metalling of New Inn Hall Street. Such metalling occurs at the base of many of Oxford's streets, and suggests a concerted process of laying out the town plan. This has always been assumed to date from the early tenth century when the first recorded mention of the town's name is in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle for 911. But on the surface of one of these cobbles lay a very corroded coin. It will take skilled conservation to recover any detail from its surface, but Dr Metcalfe of the Heberden Coin Room has suggested that from the style of lettering and the baseness of the metal it might be a coin of Burgred, king of Mercia in the third quarter of the ninth century.

Oxford, Paradise Street and St Aldates

We are in the middle of the busiest flurry of building activity for several years, with major earthmoving on two sites and deep foundation trenches on a third. It has been very valuable to have Simon Palmer as an extra pair of hands and as a second opinion in the salvage recording. He has been chiefly involved with the New Inn Hall Street site (report above).

The new hostel for the Simon Community in PARADISE STREET has all its piles in place now, and the basement excavation is just about to start. This should give a sight of the fill of the castle ditch, and there is just a chance that there may be evidence of a wall linking the castle defences with the west gate of the city under Paradise Street.

At 33 ST ALDATES the city is building flats on the car park opposite the end of Thames Street. They are to be founded on three rafts of compacted P.F.A., the waste fly-ash from Didcot Power Station, and this involved digging out all the material within the area of the buildings to a depth of two metres. Prior excavation was not requested here because it was assumed that the Medieval frontage line would be under the modern road. Not surprisingly, however, there are back-yard levels exposed in the builder's trenches which from the pottery can be dated to the 11th century and earlier. It is hoped to dig a small trench below the builder's level to see whether the Mercian causeway is present.

Oxford, The Hamel

Examination of insects from the waterlogged deposits at the Hamel has begun. Two interesting points have emerged. As might be expected, a pit from the earliest phase of 13th century buildings within the excavated area contained an urban fauna with, for example many Anobium punctatum (woodworm) beetles. However, similar faunas were recovered from the latest 12th century 'pre-building' phase of small ditched enclosures suggesting that the area had already been built up but that the trench had missed the houses. A one-day excavation was undertaken to obtain samples from the earlier 12th century phase of ditches. The fauna in them proved to have stronger rural elements and need not be urban.

The second point of interest is that a pit within the later 12th century enclosure contained many puparia of the sheep ked (Melophagus ovinus). It is a degenerate fly which is an ectoparasite of sheep. Their presence in quantity suggests that the enclosure was used for some type of ovine activity such as washing wool, preparing skins for parchment or penning of sheep, perhaps on their way to market.

Thame

A one day class on earthwork survey techniques was held on 27 June on a series of fishponds only recently recognised by members of the Local Historical Society. The day-school was held for a dozen people, some from Lord Williams's School and some from the Thame Historical and Archaeological Society.

During the day the reasons for and techniques of surveying were both discussed and put into practise. The students also had the opportunity to learn how to level in topographical sections across the site.

The fishponds lie between the Oxford-Thame road and the Spring Path on the narrow flood plain of the Cuttle Brook, at the bottom of a steep slope from which several seepages and a spring rise. Although the pond banks have been breached in more recent times to assist land drainage, several ponds may still be discerned although the leat system is no longer traceable. It is these ponds that presumably belonged to the Priestend Manor as no documentary reference to any fishery in this end of Thame has yet been found.

Thame by-pass

Work on the Thame by-pass is now underway and earthmoving has commenced at the eastern end of the route. So far nothing of archaeological value has been seen but the Thame Historical and Archaeological Society will be keeping a watchful eye on the topsoil stripping during the next few months.

X40 (Oxford to Birmingham New Route)

The last of the X40 trial pit contracts has now finished. Although this last contract involved digging pits in an area where several sites, both Prehistoric and Romano-British were known to exist, again nothing was found except ubiquitous Post-Medieval pottery. The next stage in the archaeological survey of this route will be a field walking programme.

CALENDAR

14 July 2.30 pm: Thame Historical Society receive Petersfield Area Historical Society (Contact Mr G Southern, 5 Oxford Road, Thame for details).

Abingdon Area Archaeological & Historical Society invite you to join their Guided Tours of Historic Abingdon. Commences at 2.30 pm every Sunday Afternoon from 3 June until 23 September. Starting from County Hall, Market Place for a walk around Abingdon's Ancient Town Centre taking about 2 hours. Cost: Adults 40p, Children free.

VOLUNTEERS NEEDED

Urgent help needed to record Thrupp Site C. For further details ring G Jones on Abingdon 20688 or Jeffrey Wallis on Oxford 47856.

Volunteers needed for weekday and weekend working at Moat Cottage, Kidlington for a three-week excavation during 21 July to 12 August. Previous experience not necessary. For further details contact Richard Chambers on Oxford 43888 during the day or Oxford 511216 during the evening.