



OXFORDSHIRE ARCHAEOLOGICAL UNIT NEWSLETTER INCLUDING
OXFORDSHIRE PARISH SURVEY NEWS

Vol VIII, No. 3 - May 1981

Anyone wishing to send contributions to the Newsletter should send details to the above address before Friday, 19th June.

OXFORDSHIRE

Ashbury, Alfred's Castle

Richard Hingley reports that a few Iron Age sherds were collected during field examination of this hill-fort. These sherds are in addition to the 41 Early Iron Age and Roman sherds found during field work on this site in 1980.

Checkendon, The Devil's Churchyard

Mrs. Cynthia Graham-Kerr reports that with the onset of better weather SOAG have recommenced their excavation across the outer earthwork of this Iron Age monument.

Didcot, Link Road

Richard Chambers reports that work is now beginning on the construction of the Didcot Link Road. Members of the Didcot & District Archaeological & Historical Society will be maintaining a watching brief during the soil stripping phase under the direction of Dr. Alan Briggs. About twenty members spent a Sunday morning at Dorchester to gain experience under the conditions imposed by road construction.

Didcot, The Rectory

An early-mid Iron Age settlement has been uncovered during trial excavation by the Didcot and District Archaeological & Historical Society in the grounds of the redundant rectory. The bulk of the pottery recovered comprised coarse handmade wares with the exception of one rim sherd from a straight-sided vessel decorated with an incised herringbone pattern. Although a Romano-British occupation site excavated several years ago lies only 200 yards to the east of the Rectory (adjacent to the parish church) only a thin scatter of Roman period sherds were recovered. The presence of medieval pottery was also expected with the site located so close to the parish church and the assumed centre of the medieval village. Surprisingly only a thin scatter of pottery was found including three fragments of 13-14th century decorated jug or pitcher fragments.

Dorchester, Abbey

Richard Chambers has inspected a low masonry bench against the north wall of the

Chapel of St. Birinus. The bench was revealed whilst moving the organ to the new organ loft. Although there is architectural evidence for several alterations to the fabric of this part of the church there was no clue as to the date of the bench. The plaster covering the bench will be repaired.

Dorchester, By-Pass

Excavation of the cursus and associated prehistoric monuments continues under the direction of Richard Chambers. Mechanical topsoil stripping has now finished and four sites have been uncovered. The largest site, described in the last Newsletter, contains the terminal ditch of the cursus overlain by the southern edge of the Queenford Farm Romano-British cemetery. There is a circular ditched feature inside the interior of the terminal of the cursus but not centrally placed. This feature has a western entrance and may also have an opposed eastern entrance. Eleven cremations have been found scattered within the interior of the feature and around the perimeter of its ditch. Over fifty graves belonging to the Roman cemetery have now been excavated. With the exception of one east-west burial all the burials were west-east (heads west) supine inhumations. Only a few graves contained indications of coffins having been used in the burial rite. A composite bone comb was found beneath the skull of one adult burial. This comb had probably been worn as a hair ornament. The comb suggests that burial took place sometime during the last half of the 4th century AD.

Excavation on the cemetery, the cursus and three associated monuments within the cursus to the south-west of the Dorchester-Drayton road will probably continue for another two months. Volunteers are welcome. Enquiries to Richard Chambers, tel. Oxford 511216 in the evenings.

Dorchester, 51 High Street

Excavation within this former builder's yard has revealed the inside lip of the main town ditch which surrounded the Roman town wall. Little pottery was recovered. Richard Chambers, who directed the excavation, would like to thank the volunteers from Dorchester and Abingdon who carried out the work and with a special acknowledgement to Jeff Wallis who supervised the excavation.

It is anticipated that further work will be undertaken in July to establish the alignment of the south wall of the Roman town defences.

Ducklington, Parish Church

On Sunday, 2nd August 1981 2p.m. - 6p.m. the P.C.C. of Ducklington are staging an Exhibition of "OLD DUCKLINGTON" depicting various facets of village life through the ages.

Exhibits will not be restricted to Ducklington. If anyone has any interesting items they would be prepared to lend us could they please contact Mrs. B. Farrar, telephone Witney 4200.

Faringdon

Mrs. Church reports that the Faringdon and District Historical & Archaeological Society has been busy during the winter months transcribing and indexing the parish register of All Saints, Faringdon. This task is three-quarters completed and hopefully the first copy will be bound and placed in the church during the summer. As the warmer weather

comes the society will be continuing with the recording of gravestones in two graveyards, one of which is threatened with clearance.

In the autumn the Society hopes to survey two hill-forts in the locality. To enable this to be done the Society needed funds to buy some surveying equipment so it applied to the Lloyds Bank Fund for a grant to help it. The Society was very pleased to hear that it has been awarded a grant of £80 and it looks forward to purchasing the equipment and using it.

Fencott, Ivy Farm

Investigations by Richard Chambers near Fencott in 1979 showed that the bridge that carried the Roman road across a stream was supported by oak piles about 2 metres high, driven into the mud. The piles were separate trees sawn to about 0.4m square. Sections were cut by Stewart Brown from two piles after their extraction and taken to the Research Laboratory for Archaeology at 6 Keble Road, Oxford in the hope that they might be tree-ring dated. The shortness of the two sequences of annual growth rings (71 and 3 respectively) would have made this unlikely a few years ago even had a suitable chronology been available (which was not the case). Now, however, the 71 ring sequence derived from measurements along three pieces of the section from Pile A has been dated by John Fletcher to the years 10 to 80 A.D. With sapwood absent he deduces use "After 95 A.D." indicating that the road was built within a few years of 100 A.D. The reference chronology used was that from Roman timbers on the waterfront at London, themselves recently dated by the publication in 1980 of Hollstein's oak chronology from 250 A.D. back to 700 B.C. for trees in central and western Germany. The ability to date the short sequences of the Otmoor piles requires the approximate date (say to within a bracket of a hundred years) to be known, e.g. from historical evidence or radiocarbon dating. Thus the date given above is based on the assumption that the piles are of Roman origin. The trees were identified as Quercus petraea.

Great Coxwell, Badbury

Richard Hingley reports that 71 sherds were found on the western rampart of this hill-fort during field examination. 128 sherds have now been discovered at this site over the last two years. Early Iron Age sherds are most common but some Romano-British sherds have also been recorded.

Hatford, Hatford Sand Pit

Iron Age pottery and animal bones have been excavated by Richard Hingley from two further features exposed in the face of the pit. The results of the last year's excavations at Hatford are being written up.

Kingston Bagpuize, Kingstonhill Farm

Mr. Christensen has mentioned a new site on clay land in the north of the parish. Field-work by Richard Hingley indicated two stony spreads (?buildings) on a terrace above the Thames. Medieval/post-medieval pottery (kindly identified by Maureen Mellor), burned stone, some tile and a piece of iron were collected on the site.

Kingston Bagpuize, Parish Boundary

The northern section of this earthwork, the eastern parish boundary of Kingston Bagpuize

parish, was examined by David Miles and Richard Hingley in an attempt to find a suitable location for sectioning the earthwork. The excavation should take place in the next two months.

Launton, Housing Development

Members of the Launton Local History Society are keeping an eye on land clearance for house building by the rectory in Launton. Foundation work may provide further evidence for the siting and extent of the medieval village and possibly evidence as to the extent and nature of the nearby Iron Age and Roman period settlement sites discovered a year ago.

Long Wittenham, Northfield Farm

In January trial excavation was undertaken to evaluate the archaeological implications of a proposed land drainage scheme affecting the scheduled cropmark site at Northfield Farm, Long Wittenham. Four exploratory pits were excavated by members of the Unit's Youth Opportunities Programme under the supervision of Richard Chambers. As a result of the excavations it appeared that the land drainage scheme would not inflict undue damage on the archaeology of the scheduled monument. It has been recommended to DoE that a watching brief be maintained whilst the land drains are being laid.

Oxford, Frewin Hall

John Blair and Brian Durham have been watching the refurbishing of the twelfth-century undercroft. In January the builders allowed us to dig a small hole below the ground floor down onto the top of the vault. There were about seven clay floors presumably from the medieval life of the building, but yielding no dating evidence. Their relationship to the medieval wall was obscured by a remarkable fissure going down into the vault structure, which must have resulted from settlement. Altogether it looked as if the probe might be a disappointment until the last layer, just above the vault, which yielded eleven sherds of twelfth-century pottery, including a glazed sherd probably from Andenne. Further study may improve on the dating of this small group, but provisionally it seems to be around 1150, at the late end of the date range adduced from architectural evidence.

At the west end of the undercroft the contractors' excavation for a new stair exposed medieval footings apparently conforming to the line of the former parish boundary, and therefore possibly related to the conjectural cloister of St. Marys College.

Oxford, High Street Sewer

A curious discovery, as reported by Mark Robinson, was made in a 19th century cast iron water main cut by the sewer trench. It was filled with a mass of shells of the zebra mussel (*Dreissena polymorpha*). This species was first noticed in England in 1824 in the Surrey Commercial Docks. By 1840 it was present in canals and rivers throughout much of Britain.

The zebra mussel has minute free-swimming larvae which would have enabled it to pass through filter beds into the water pipes. These larvae then attach themselves by byssal threads and metamorphose into small mussels. The mussels are very efficient filter-feeders and would have been able to feed on impurities in the water. In the 19th century zebra mussels caused considerable problems by blocking water mains or dead individuals polluting water supplies when they decayed.

Oxford, Turl Street, New Foul Sewer

From the steamy heat of an unventilated tunnel, occasionally running with live sewage our correspondent writes that there is evidence that Turl Street is now more bent than it once was. The original rammed pebble metalling of the Saxon street heads towards the tower of All Saints Church, and it is assumed that westward extension of the medieval church caused the line to be deflected.

An observation on a previous phase of this work now begins to make sense. A cellar with plastered walls was exposed last October at the junction of Turl Street and the High Street. It had been lined with a second stone wall built against the plaster face. There is no record of a tenement in front of the church, and a possible conclusion is that this was a basement within the tower of the medieval church, relined for support during one of the periodic attempts to prevent it collapsing.

Oxford, 92 St. Aldates, New Main Water Valve

Excavation by the Thames Water Authority to put a new valve in the 18 inch water main showed that the road here, 16m outside the line of the City wall, is founded on mortared ragstone rubble like that of the Grandpont causeway. It was too deep to be mere metalling, and too extensive to be the footing of the south gate, so presumably it is part of a short causeway in front of the gate, crossing the enlarged Trill Mill stream.

Sandford-on-Thames, Village Hall

The new village hall occupies a position on the west side of the Sandford-Oxford road. The area between the road and the Norman parish church was until recently covered by earthwork remains of the medieval village (Top. Oxon., 21, 1976-7) since when the majority were levelled during the construction of the playing field.

Mechanical soil stripping by building contractors on the site chosen for the new village hall has now revealed medieval debris. Fragments of 13-15th century pottery, animal bone, shell, fire ash and traces of a cobbled surface have been revealed by Richard Chambers.

Spelsbury, Cote Deserted Medieval Village

A survey of about nine acres of earthworks representing the entire medieval village of Cote, near Spelsbury, has been completed in one weekend by an OUDES course under the supervision of Trevor Rowley, James Bond and Richard Chambers. The survival of the earthwork remains of this deserted medieval village is threatened by a change of land use.

Thomley, Deserted Medieval Village

Mechanical excavation of a drainage ditch across the site of the deserted medieval village of Thomley has been inspected by Richard Chambers. Several sherds of medieval pottery have been recovered.

WILTSHIRE

Broad Blundsdon

Richard Hingley has extended his survey into Wiltshire as part of his research project

based at Southampton University. He has found 68 sherds on the southern side of the rampart during fieldwork. 27 sherds were found at this site in 1980. The sherds are mostly in red shelly fabrics, some with external burnishing. A few sherds have linear incised decoration. All the pottery appears to be of early Iron Age date.

STAFF NEWS

We are pleased to announce the arrival of our Page one girl, Samantha (8lbs 5oz). The first "all-Unit" production was staged by Wendy and Phil on Maundy Thursday and her Mum and Dad think she's lovely.

Any startled readers who may have seen Tom Hassall walking the streets of Oxford on Saturday and Sundays wearing full academic regalia and preceded by a bedel will be reassured to know that this is not the final onset of megalomania, but fulfilling his office of pro-Proctor for the current academic year.

LENDAR

Combe Mill Society demonstrate the unique working STEAM BEAM ENGINE, built in 1852, at Combe Mill, Near Woodstock, Oxon. Steaming Dates for 1981 : Spring Bank Holiday (24th & 25th May); August Bank Holiday (30th & 31st August); Sunday, 18th October - 10 a.m. to 6 p.m.

Manor Farm Museum, Cogges, Nr. Witney, Oxon. Opening times for 1981 : April 18th - September 27th, Every Day 11 a.m. - 6 p.m. Throughout the summer there will be Demonstrations of Blacksmithing, Lace Making, Sheepshearing, Beeswax Candle Making etc. Details can be obtained from Oxfordshire County Council Department of Museum Services, Fletchers House, Woodstock (811456).

Oxfordshire County Museum, Woodstock (811456). Open May-September Tuesday-Friday at 10 a.m. - 5 p.m., Saturday at 10 a.m. - 6 p.m., Sunday at 2 p.m. - 6 p.m. October-April Tuesday-Friday 10 a.m. - 4 p.m., Saturday 10 a.m. - 5 p.m., Sunday 2 p.m. - 5 p.m. Special Exhibitions, Events, Children's Activities, Local Art Exhibitions (Details from the Museum).

Abingdon Museum, County Hall, Abingdon (23703). Open Daily 2 p.m. - 5 p.m. Special Exhibition, Village Walkarounds (Details from the Museum).

Museum of Oxford, St. Aldates, Oxford (815569). Open Tuesday-Saturday 10 a.m. - 5 p.m. Special Exhibitions, Children's Activities (Details from the Museum).

Wantage Museum, Civic Hall, Portway, Wantage (66838). Open Wednesday 2 p.m. - 5 p.m., Saturday 10 a.m. - 12.30 p.m. & 2 p.m. - 5 p.m. Special Exhibitions (Details from Museum).

Banbury Museum, 8 Horsefair, Banbury (59855). Open May-September Monday-Saturday 10 a.m. - 5 p.m., October-March Monday, Wednesday-Saturday 10 a.m. - 4 p.m. (closed Tuesdays). Special Exhibitions, Local Art Exhibitions, Events, Children's Activities (Details from Museum).

ABINGDON AREA ARCHAEOLOGICAL & HISTORICAL SOCIETY, Lecture Programme 1981

14th May Mr. George Speake - Anglo-Saxon Jewellery

11th June Open Evening

CHINNOR HISTORICAL & ARCHAEOLOGICAL SOCIETY, Programme for the 1981 Session (Meetings are usually held on the first Friday of each month at the Adult Education Room, Chinnor Library, Station Road, Chinnor at 8 p.m.)

5th June Reports from the Work Parties and General Society Business

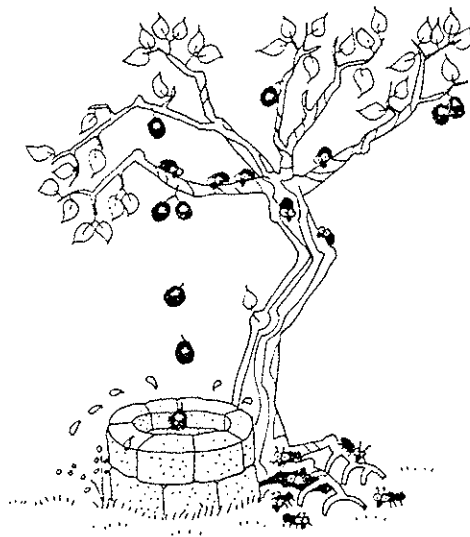
3rd July Open Air Meeting, details to be confirmed later

For details of membership, please contact the Hon. Sec. : John Bell, 71 Oakley Road, Chinnor (Tel. K. Blount 52459)

WEEKEND AND DAY SCHOOLS, Organised by Oxford University Department for External Studies, Rewley House, Wellington Square

15th-17th May Urban Archaeology - in association with Oxfordshire Archaeological Unit

As our final offering this month Chris Unwin, an In-Service Trainee, has been reading the Farmoor Report. She has provided an interpretative illustration for the second edition :



'the plum tree overhanging well 1060
may have had an ants' nest in its roots
and mites in its branches'

BRITISH ARCHAEOLOGICAL AWARDS
1981

(For work in the United Kingdom carried out or partially carried out in the years 1979-1981)

GENERAL INFORMATION - these awards have been considerably broadened this year .

1. BBC 'CHRONICLE' AWARD For the best project carried out by volunteers but please note that professional technical help is permitted.
2. COUNTRY LIFE AWARD For the best project by a professional (or mixed professional/voluntary) team or unit e.g. a public body, a local authority, a trust or archaeological unit.
3. ILLUSTRATED LONDON NEWS AWARD For the best sponsorship of archaeology judged both on the level of sponsorship provided and the archaeological results achieved.
4. LLOYDS BANK SCHOOLS AWARD For the best project by a school.
5. BRITISH GAS YOUNG RESCUE AWARD For the best project by a child or children.
6. THE LEGAL & GENERAL 'SILVER TROWEL' AWARD An open award for the greatest initiative and originality in archaeology.
N.B. All entrants in Awards 1 - 5 will be considered for this award but additional entries may be entered direct.

CLOSING DATES

<u>For preliminary approval of</u>	Lloyds Bank Schools	31st May 1981
	British Gas Young Rescue	1st June 1981
<u>Final closing date for</u>	BBC 'Chronicle'	15th May 1981
	(Country Life	
	(Illustrated London News	
	(Lloyds Bank Schools	1st September 1981
	(British Gas Young Rescue	
	(The Legal & General	

ENTRY FORMS

For the Lloyds Bank Schools and British Gas Young Rescue Awards apply to the C. B. A. 112 Kennington Road, London S. E. 11 6RE

For all other Awards apply to The British Archaeological Awards, 15A Bull Plain, Hertford, Herts SG14 1DX

NOTES - Projects which have won an award or which were finalists in a 'Chronicle' competition in 1979 - 1980 are not eligible.

The Presentation has been provisionally arranged for early 1982 at a venue in London.

Entries may be made directly by the competitor or alternatively a competitor may be nominated by someone else with his consent.

N. B. WOULD ALL ARCHAEOLOGISTS PLEASE CONSIDER NOMINATING ENTRIES THEY CONSIDER WORTHY