



OXFORDSHIRE ARCHAEOLOGICAL UNIT NEWSLETTER INCLUDING  
OXFORDSHIRE PARISH SURVEY NEWS

Vol VIII, No. 5 - September 1981

Anyone wishing to send contributions to the Newsletter should send details to the above address before Friday, 23rd October.

OXFORDSHIRE (please see end of site reports for notes on a Saxon Burial at Charlbury)

Didcot, Link Road

Richard Chambers reports that members of the Didcot & District Historical & Archaeological Society are continuing to maintain a watch over the construction of the Didcot Link Road. Richard Chambers, accompanied by Dr. Alan Briggs, has examined several ditches exposed in a roadside drainage gully. The archaeology is confused by many natural peripheral and other subsoil structures. Cropmarks suggesting an area of Romano-British settlement have been buried beneath an embankment without having the topsoil removed. Other parts of the Link Road have provided a thin scatter of Romano-British and medieval pottery sherds.

Didcot, The Rectory

Following the discovery of early-middle Iron Age pottery on this site members of the Didcot & District Historical & Archaeological Society supervised by Dr. Alan Briggs have now opened up a further small area. Richard Chambers reports that as with previous trenches the modern garden soil rests upon an almost featureless grey clayey subsoil. Several post-holes indicated by stone packing have been uncovered along with a range of modern, medieval and Iron Age pottery sherds. Ownership of the Rectory and garden has now passed from the Church into private hands. The archaeology of this site will be written up after residential building development has taken place in the near future.

Dorchester, By-pass

Topsoil stripping has now begun along the line of the Dorchester by-pass. Richard Chambers will maintain a watch in order to record any further archaeological material revealed by this work.

Dorchester, Land adjacent to No. 4 Samian Way, Bridge End

This site lies over the site of the rampart directly behind the assumed line of the Roman town wall. Richard Chambers has maintained a watching brief over the ground work for a new bungalow and garage currently under construction.

Before building work began the ground surface stood well above the levels of neighbouring properties. The level of the site was mechanically reduced to provide a level platform for building purposes. Varying depths of between 1m-1.75m of soil were removed. The north wall to this property is all that remains of a former row of cottages, which were demolished soon after the First World War. Soil stripping revealed the foundations of these cottages buried beneath 1m of soil. Apparently the soil had been brought in to

landscape the site. The former cottages had possessed shallow foundations laid partly on topsoil. Demolition rubble from the cottages incorporated much burnt material. The ground surface was finally reduced to the pre-cottage subsoil surface. All of this soil was disposed of a quarter of a mile away at Queenford Farm. Later, further mechanical excavation for the footings of the new bungalow and garage revealed several more pockets of demolition debris from the cottages.

Although residual Romano-British and Late Iron Age-early 1st century AD pottery was recovered from the site, no features were seen which were any earlier than the Post-Medieval period. No new information on either the Roman town wall or the rampart was recovered.

#### Enstone, Tomlins Gate

Richard Hingley reports that a 'banjo enclosure' was investigated via field work and excavation. Field work located a scatter of pottery/burnt stone/daub over the enclosure of the cropmark complex. Excavation located the enclosure ditch on its eastern side. Two parallel enclosure ditches may indicate two phases of construction and the outer ditch appears to have a phase of recut. Silting of the outer ditch may indicate that a bank existed on the inside of the outer ditch. Pottery from the top of the ditch and from plough soil over the enclosure is middle-late Iron Age in date.

#### Long Wittenham, Northfield Farm

A land drainage scheme which incorporated part of the scheduled Romano-British settlement site at Northfield Farm, Long Wittenham has now taken place. The affected part of the scheduled site contained no known cropmarks. The site had also previously been tested by the excavation of a series of archaeologically barren trial trenches. Richard Chambers has inspected the land drainage trenches and has confirmed the absence of recognisable archaeological features in the affected areas.

#### Newington, Great Holcombe Farm

Over the last few years building work has revealed that the area covered by the cattle yards and outbuildings at Great Holcombe Farm cover an area previously occupied during the medieval period. The latest evidence for this has come to light during major structural repair work to the timber-framed farmhouse. The base of a hearth of roof tiles set on edge has been found beneath part of the timber framing of what was originally probably an outside wall. The tiled hearth extended over an earlier, solidly built, lime mortared stone wall. The wall foundation had been set into a mixed layer of clay and building debris about 30cm thick. This mixed layer sealed an even earlier spread of green/grey mottled clay itself at least 30cm thick. This clay contained grains of carbonised bread wheat and mid-medieval pottery sherds.

#### Oxford, Corpus Christi College

Last winter's work on the City defences at the southeast corner of Corpus Christi College has been resumed. Our In-Service Trainee, Eleanor Forfang, has under the eye of Brian Durham been examining the problem from the other side of the wall. The kind co-operation of Christ Church, Dr. Macquarrie (in whose garden excavation is now underway), and Corpus Christi has enabled us to open a trench along the south wall of the Corpus Christi president's shed.

The ground plan and elevations demonstrate that from the bastion, the city wall moves directly south. The trench was designed to find either the continuation of the wall southwards or possibly a jamb in the shed wall where the road passed through a gate. The shed wall, however, was soon to be recognised as being built on a post-medieval dividing wall and unrelated to the defences.

Footings of the city wall were identified running south along the same alignment as the president's shed wall, but they are not continuous with it, and as the standing wall shows considerable evidence of rebuilding at its south end, this gap could imply an east-facing opening. Perhaps the road turned eastwards. Possibilities of a south flanking bastion are presently under examination.

#### Oxford, Oriel College Front Quad

A call from the Conservation Officer about a 'narrow stone chamber' exposed beneath the college promised to be just the latest in a predictable series of drainage channels, soakaways, blocked vaults etc. But this one had some unusual features: 25 ft. long and 3 ft. wide, it was beneath the line of a section of outside wall, and beneath a three-storey stone chimney stack. It was roofed, not with a vault but with huge stone lintels laid side by side on edge, as would be needed to take the weight of the structure above. It was keyed into the rest of the building and had no opening apart from the area of thin slabs where the modern builders had broken into it. There was a conspicuous 'tide line' on the walls showing that it had contained two feet of water, but no openings or pipes for it to come in or out. The floor was a thick carpet of fibrous chocolate brown material, instantly recognisable to cognoscenti as decayed faeces. So it was a cess pit of the second half of the seventeenth century, probably used by the Provost's household according to the V.C.H. account. But why the fortress-like construction? The answer may be that this range was built in the late 1630's, shortly before the Civil War, and a prudent college might have predicted the need for a concealed vault accessible only to the Provost, and built in a position where it would take a skilled surveyor to prove that it was anything more than just good thick foundations for the wall and chimney stack. The college has only three items of pre-Civil War plate, the "Founders Cup", the Cocoa-nut Cup and the Mazer Bowl, but no doubt there were other items of value which might have required concealment in times of trouble.

The use of the chamber as a cess pit is likely to have been secondary therefore. Mark Robinson has sieved a small sample of the contents and has furnished a detailed report of the animal and plant remains which speak volumes on the household using it. The diet was exceptionally rich, including grapes, raspberries, wild strawberries, plums, figs, mulberries and a walnut, everything having passed through the alimentary canal (apart from the walnut, which was entire!). The more worrying aspect was that, in a chamber whose only opening was into the house, there were sufficient fly pupae to say that for every seed that went down, one fly came up. Presumably the opening was covered, but whenever it was used there must have been a buzz of flies to add to the 'hum' of an unventilated latrine! This report was made by Brian Durham.

#### Sutton Courtenay, Amey Roadstone Gravel Pit

A tooth and a four foot long section of a woolly mammoth's tusk have been recovered from the base of the gravel deposits at Sutton Courtenay reports Richard Chambers.

#### Tackley, Weaveley Farm - T.W.A. water main

David Miles and Richard Chambers have walked the route of a new water main following

topsoil stripping of the way-leave. Part of the route taken by the pipe line passes immediately to the west of the Roman villa discovered several years ago north-east of the A34 Bladon roundabout which was found by aerial reconnaissance. No archaeologically significant features were seen anywhere along the pipeline route. Unfortunately it will be impossible to maintain a watch over the whole of the trench digging operation which will last until Christmas. Once the trench has been cut the pipes will be laid and the trench back-filled almost immediately.

#### Watlington, 24 High Street

Richard Chambers has inspected the construction trenches for a new bungalow to the rear of No. 24 High Street. Two small pits were exposed in the foundation trenches. One contained animal bones and a piece of modern plate window glass. A service trench excavated from the rear of No. 24 to the bungalow exposed an accumulation of soils nearly 1m deep. These soils covered the rammed chalk floor of a previous outbuilding that had been erected against the boundary wall forming the western edge of the site. Very few fragments of pottery were found even in the topsoil. None of this pottery was necessarily any earlier than the eighteenth century. There were no medieval or earlier wares. It is thought that the buildings erected along the High Street represent an easterly expansion of the town. Several of these buildings, including No. 24 date to before 1700 AD. The paucity of post-medieval finds on this part of the property suggests that this site does not provide a reliable reflection of the archaeology of the development of this part of the town.

#### Witney, 27 Market Square

Work has now begun on an archaeological excavation to record traces of medieval buildings that once faced onto Market Square, Witney. The site which is being excavated was later occupied by an eighteenth century inn that has now been demolished. Richard Chambers reports that the work will be undertaken for the OAU by members of the Witney Historical Society. The majority of the work will take place at weekends during the next two months. This excavation presents the first major opportunity to examine a medieval site in Witney in any detail. However this opportunity is tempered by the fact that the medieval remains as revealed by a trial trench in 1979 may not survive over the whole of the western half of the present site.

Charlbury, Saxon Burial - This report handed in late by Brian Durham who has had a lot on his mind recently (see Staff News)

Mr. Piper, Assistant Agent for Cornbury Park Estate, reported that a burial had been exposed by his workers when clearing stones from a field on the estate. George Lambrick and Brian Durham went out and did a rather hurried clean-up and lifting job before the end of the day. The most conspicuous feature was a 0.38m long iron spear-head of sixth to seventh century date, which lay in front of the face. The body had been laid on its right side with the knees drawn up slightly, possibly to avoid the need to dig a full length grave in the very hard and stony ground. In addition to the spearhead, there were two iron knife blades probably on a belt round the waist.

A few days after the Unit's visit Tim Copeland reported that the large stone which lay close to the Saxon burial had finally been pulled out, and beneath it was an infant burial. Does this make it a graveyard?

## STAFF NEWS

The Other Wedding took place on Saturday, 22nd August when Maureen Mellor and Brian Durham finally got themselves hitched. The bride was radiant, the groom was handsome, the guests were smartly dressed (even the ones from the Unit), but the star of the show was undoubtedly the CAKE which was very professionally baked and iced by Brian and Maureen themselves, should they ever give up archaeology they clearly have a great future in the catering trade. It was a lovely wedding and we hope they will enjoy married life.

## CALENDAR

The booklet listing the various courses in Archaeology and Local History in the county is now available from Rewley House, 3-7 Wellington Square, Oxford OX1 2JA.

### Weekend and Day Schools - Rewley House, Wellington Square

9-11 October 1981	Medieval Exchange Systems
Saturday, 17th October	Wychwood Day School (to be held at Woodstock)
31 Oct. - 1 Nov. 1981	Local History Certificate Weekend
Saturday, 7th November	Elementary Education Day School
13-15 November 1981	Late Saxon Settlement
20-22 November 1981	Roman Army in Britain
Saturday, 5th December	Field Names Day School
Saturday, 12th December	Census Day School (to be held at Reading University)
8-10 January 1982	The North Sea Province (to be held at New College)
9-10 January 1982	Studying the History of the Family
Saturday, 16th January	Publishing Local Studies (day school to be held at Bulmershe)
Saturday, 16th January	Buckinghamshire 1600-1900 (day school to be held at Aylesbury)
16-17 January 1982	Archaeology Certificate Weekend
22-24 January 1982	The English Medieval Village
Saturday, 30th January	Enclosure Day School I
Saturday, 13th February	Berkshire 1600-1900 (day school to be held at Bulmershe)
13-14 February 1982	Local History Certificate Weekend
27-28 February 1982	Archaeology (M. Henig weekend - subject to be decided)
27-28 February 1982	Archaeology Certificate Weekend
Saturday, 6th March	Enclosure Day School II

12-14 March 1982	Archaeology of the Country House
Saturday, 20th March	CBA Group 9 Annual Report Conference
26-28 March 1982	Roman Burial Practice (to be held at New College)
23-25 April 1982	Hedges and Woodlands
26-29 April 1982	Planning and the Historic Environment
7-9 May 1982	Etruria and the Etruscans
14-16 May 1982	History of the River Thames

Further details of all these courses are available from the Course Secretary, Oxford University Department for External Studies, Rewley House, 3-7 Wellington Square, Oxford OX1 2JA (Oxford 52901).