



OXFORDSHIRE ARCHAEOLOGICAL UNIT NEWSLETTER INCLUDING
OXFORDSHIRE PARISH SURVEY NEWS

Vol IX, No.6 - November 1981

Anyone wishing to send contributions to the Newsletter should send details to the above address before Friday, 8th January 1982.

Bicester, Skimmingdish Park, Boston Road

Construction has now commenced on this site. The surrounding area has furnished cropmarks which suggest the presence of Bronze Age barrows and an Iron Age Romano-British settlement. Members of the Launton Local History Society will be keeping a watch over foundation work and service trenches as they are dug.

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

Richard Chambers has viewed the pipe trench where it cut across the western edge of the known villa site just north-west of the Bladon roundabout south of Woodstock. The pipe trench was dug 2m deep through 0.6m cornbrash limestone over light grey calcareous clay. No features were seen in section.

Cassington, Sewerage main

Mrs J. Randall has reported that mechanical trenching 400m west-south-west of Manor Farm has revealed a scatter of Roman roof tile. A short distance south of this tile scatter a single sherd of black,grasstempered pottery was recovered from the pipe trench spoil heap.

Church Hanborough

Excavation of a one metre square post-pit dug to repair a horse shelter has yielded several kilograms of Romano-British pottery. Subsequent excavation within the pit by Richard Chambers has revealed a once recut ditch running north west-south east beneath the animal shelter. Pottery collected whilst digging the post-pit suggests that the ditch dates to the first half of the Roman period.

Of more interest was the remains of a large storage jar which had been set into the later Roman ground surface. Buried to a depth of 0.45m the mouth of the jar had originally stood 10-15cm proud of a rough limestone cobbling laid over the earlier ditch filling. The pit in which the vessel was set cut through the ditch filling into the natural gravel below. The base of the jar had received a wrapping of yellow clay apparently to provide protection from the gravel. The inside of the jar gave no clue as to the use to which this arrangement was put.

A similar partially buried pot was uncovered during excavations at Hardwick in 1980 although in this instance the base of the pot had been removed prior to it having been set in the ground.

Churchill Grounds Farm, Church

In July 1981 a stone coffin was discovered during ploughing of old pasture at Churchill Grounds Farm, 3km south-west of Chipping Norton. The site was excavated by David Miles and Duncan Brown,

The plough had broken the lid of the coffin into two parts. The lid was of roughcut limestone 2.04m long 0.70m wide and 0.15m thick. The surface of the lid was only about 0.05m below the surface of a ridge in the ridge and furrow system which survived in the field.

The coffin was 0.36m deep and one long side was curved so that the whole had a flattened D shape. The coffin contained the body of an adult lying extended on its back with the head to the north east.

No grave goods were found and the date of the burial is uncertain, however Roman pottery and building material including a possible tessera were found in the plough soil around the burial. Surface evidence suggests that a Romano-British farmstead or villa lies in the field immediately to the north-east.

Dorchester By-pass

Top soil stripping along the line of the by-pass has now been completed as has excavation of the roadside drainage gullies. A watch was kept over all of this work in order to record any further archaeological features. Although the mechanical top soil stripping never penetrated through the reddish-brown subsoil to the underlying gravel an extremely close watch maintained along the line of the cursus between Queenford Farm and the Mount Farm filling station proved that no new prehistoric sites remained to be discovered.

Over the whole of the by-pass only one new feature was recorded. This was a ditch crossing the by-pass half way between Queenford Farm and the River Thames. South-east of the Thames no significant features were recorded. For the Dorchester by-pass aerial photographs appear to have disclosed all of the major surviving archaeological features.

Following the top soil stripping the whole of the by-pass was field-walked revealing a concentration of worked flint in the area between the end of the cursus at Queenford Farm and the River Thames. This flint scatter contrasted with the area enclosed by the cursus to the north-west of Queenford Farm where very few flints had been recovered both before and after topsoil stripping had taken place.

Topsoil stripping over the Roman cemetery at Queenford Farm was too shallow to yield further information. However the insertion of a "french" drain did section the side ditches of the Roman road beside which the Roman cemetery enclosure had been laid out.

The Roman main road which joined Dorchester to Alchester was sectioned by a drainage gully. The section demonstrated that the bridlepath to Berinsfield follows the previous road line exactly. Tip lines were visible from soil dumped to create the raised foundation for the road. The original road metalling has not survived. The road appears to have remained a right-of-way since the end of the Roman period and was probably open and unfenced before the 19th century. Hawthorn enclosure hedges were planted. The original roadside ditches had been recut at least once during the 19th century.

Dorchester, 51 High Street

The Oxford University Archaeological Society are currently excavating a trial trench across what is thought to be the line of the north wall of the Roman town.

Drayton, The Cursus

The eastern ditch of a probably Neolithic cursus has been found in a remarkable state of preservation in a gravel pit at Drayton. The Abingdon Area Archaeological and Historical Society has begun an exploratory excavation to assess the archaeological potential of the cursus. J. Curtis and Sons Ltd whose gravel quarrying operations will eventually destroy the cursus are keen to see that a full archaeological record is made. Quarrying operations have been altered to allow the excavations to take place.

The cursus appears in two parts in aerial photographs the cropmarks seperated by a gap of 0.7km. Although it has been assumed that the two parts join, the cropmarks may of course represent two seperate monuments. Only future excavation will decide the issue.

Currently excavation is concentrated on the eastern arm of the northern section of the cursus. Topsoil stripping by dragline revealed that the ditch shown on aerial photographs as a cropmark extended south across a shallow flood plain which now carries a small stream. At this point the cursus ditch is preserved with remains of the ditch upcast spread over a Neolithic ground surface. The cursus, the pre-cursus ground surface and several smaller features are all buried beneath two thirds of a metre of alluvium. Cutting the lower part of the alluvium is a Roman ditch which had been sealed by further alluviations. Excavation of the buried Neolithic ground surface has provided fragments of bone and weathered pottery tentatively identified as Peterborough ware. Mark Robinson has identified waterlogged organic material from the bottom of the cursus ditch as comprising chiefly of hazelnuts.

Work will continue on this site during the winter.

Enstone, Ley's Farm

Fieldwork by Richard Hingley on the site of a "Banjo Enclosure" (SP 3826) produced burned stone, a couple of possible middle to late Iron Age sherds and a couple of Roman sherds.

Fencott and Murcott, Ivy Farm

The preliminary result from the wood sample submitted to A.E.R.E. Harwell for radio-carbon dating has confirmed the dates derived for two piles from the Roman timber bridge. Dr. John Fletcher of the Research Laboratory for Archaeology and the History of Art at Oxford has calculated the felling dates for the oak trees from which the two piles were made as soon after 95 AD. (OAU Newsletter VIII no.3, May 1981). A summary of recent advances in Roman and Saxon dendrochronological dating techniques which includes Dr. Fletcher's work on the Otmoor Bridge has been published in Current Archaeology no. 76, p.150-2.

Frilford/Marcham, The Noah's Ark Inn

Trial trenching by Richard Hingley of a suspicious crop-mark/earth-work structure 200m to the east of the temple and on the edge of the Roman "minor town" produced evidence of a Roman date. The structure appears to be an amphitheatre, and is about 65m in diameter. The arena of the amphitheatre has been excavated into the ground to provide material for the bank on which seats for spectators would have been set. Trial trenching produced evidence for a stone walled phase in the construction of the amphitheatre; in this phase the bank of the amphitheatre was revetted on its inner and outer faces with a stone and mortar wall. Excavation also provided evidence for a small rectangular chamber set into the bank at the south of the structure. Aerial photographs indicate possible entrances to the amphitheatre on the east and west of the structure.

There are parallels for the association of temples and theatres/amphitheatres in Britain although such parallels are rather scarce. The presence of this major "public building" is evidence that the Noah's Ark formed a major ritual centre in the Roman period. The date of the amphitheatre is uncertain; three coins from the excavation include a coin of the third century Emperor Decentius, and a barbarous copy of the same coin and also a possible "minim". Some later Roman pottery also came from the excavations. All this material is residual and the date of the construction of the amphitheatre is unclear.

Between the temple complex and amphitheatre lie a series of Roman buildings examined by fieldwork over the last three years. Several stone walled, tile roofed buildings are represented and these probably represent structures associated with the temple (? Priests houses, a bath house and guest houses). This major temple complex with associated structures can be paralleled on only a few sites in this country (the best parallel is Gosbecks near Colchester).

Also associated with the temple complex is a minor town with an associated late Roman/early Saxon cemetery. The full extent of Roman discoveries at the Noah's Ark Inn appears to be about 30 ha (72 acres).

Two additional Roman building spreads were located during fieldwork to the east of the c 30 ha Roman "minor town" (SU 4396). The building spreads consisted of stone, some tile and small quantities of Roman pottery. These buildings were south east of the temple and on a terrace above the river Ock.

Fieldwork produced tile, glass and pottery from a spot 300m to the east of the Noah's Ark Inn on a terrace above the river Ock. The pottery appears to be mostly of C 18-19 AD in date. Thanks to Maureen Mellor for identifying this material.

Kiddington, Pump Copse

Detailed fieldwork by Richard Hingley over the site of a rectangular enclosure, (SP 4620) the site of a supposed Roman villa, produced small quantities of tile and some early Roman pottery. Some of the pottery from this enclosure could be of later Iron Age date.

Oxford Prison, St. Georges Tower

The Prison is in process of putting a new ground floor in the Tower, and as an in-service training project Duncan Brown made a survey of the timber to be removed. A series of circular grooves in the floor appear to have been made by prisoners operating a 'gin' a large capstan on a vertical shaft. The shaft seems to have been driving some sort of machine in the basement of the tower, where there was a large timber frame and a base stone with mountings for the shaft bearing.

There is no reason why this should be much older than the rebuilding of the prison in 1786, and the mention of a 'crank' in addition to the treadmill may mean that it was still in use in 1857. At that time the prisoners labour was 'entirely thrown away', which would mean that the subframe in fact supported only a brake; according to a warden this was tightened with a 'screw', hence his common name. Report by Brian Durham.

Oxford, Corpus Christi College

Eleanor Forfang's trainee project on the medieval defences was concluded in September with the completion of two small trenches on the Christ Church side of the wall line in Dr. Macquarrie's garden. As trial trenches on an 'unthreatened' site, squeezed between standing buildings and the canopy of the beautiful Oriental Plane tree, and with other garden plants to be protected, the trenches had to be literally minute.

This made it difficult to interpret the stratigraphy at a depth of about four feet, which is where the town wall footings were located. Eleanor was nevertheless able to show that the town wall ran due south from the existing location and this immediately reinforces the problem of why the bastion was needed at all on this inside angle of the defences (February Newsletter).

The logical conclusion is still that it was protecting a gate, but as indicated in our last Newsletter, there is no sign of a jamb in either the standing masonry or in David Sturdy's excavation here in 1960. As another line of approach, Eleanor's Trench II was extended to search for a second flanking location on the south side of the protecting gate.

The well had been comprehensively robbed, and its trench backfilled with non-descript loam and small stones so that it was impossible to follow.

In the east section however it was clear that a late medieval disturbance with similar fill to the robber trench had cut into early medieval stone-free loam. If this was the edge of the robber trench the wall had indeed turned east again perhaps for a bastion. There are still problems with this interpretation however, because the 'bastion' would have had footings much shallower than the 'gate'.

Within our lifetimes we are unlikely to know where the wall goes from here because it is all beneath the great tree. It might be traceable south of the tree: it would certainly be interesting to know whether it goes back onto the line of the cathedral precinct wall, and whether there was an earthen rampart behind it.

In the meantime Brian Durham would like to express the Unit's gratitude to Christ Church and Corpus Christi, and particularly to Dr. Macquarrie and Dr. Wild respectively, for allowing us to excavate and record the defences on their property.

Marcham, Cow Lane

Fieldwork by Richard Hingley on an extensive crop mark site (SU 4697) near Marcham has produced much artefactual material; including three possible Neolithic polished stone axes and several flints. Iron Age pottery was prolific over the whole area of the crop marks and included early, middle and possible late Iron Age wares. Some Roman pottery, and small quantities of tile formed a discrete scatter over the south east of the site.

Steventon, Manor Farm

Land reclamation work has taken place in a field centred 200 metres north of the medieval parish church at Steventon. The field surface has now been raised 0.6-0.9m using surplus material from the Didcot Link Road. The field lies on the eastern side of the causeway leading to Mill Farm. The field formerly comprised permanent marshy pasture. As some concern had been expressed to the OAU over the archaeological potential of this site Richard Chambers visited the field whilst work was in progress. The initial bulldozing of the site did not reveal any archaeological material. The irregular surface of the former permanent pasture was the result of centuries or millennia of periodic flooding leading to the erosion of natural surface drainage channels.

Stonesfield, Callow Hill

Fieldwork by Richard Hingley cf. SP 4119 east of the Roman villa and north of the road from Ditchley gate to Charlbury produced some possible middle-late Iron Age pottery from west of the western spur ditch of the Grim's Ditch.

Wallingford, Bridge House Old Peoples Home

Excavation of the foundation trenches for the laundry extension at Bridge House has revealed a substantial wall foundation of unknown date. Richard Chambers recorded a 0.9m wide wall foundation constructed of chalk and flint rubble set in lime mortar. The foundation lay at a depth of 0.6m from the present ground surface. A smaller 0.45m wide mortared chalk rubble wall foundation had been set on top of this first substantial wall footing. However the later footing only appears in one side of the present trench and it appears not to be directly related to the foundation beneath.

Historically this site lies inside the later Anglo-Saxon town defences, situated to the south of the medieval castle. The current building work has revealed an accumulation of occupation levels that continue down beyond the deepest point reached by the foundation trench at 1.5m. No pottery was found.

Witney, 27 Market Square

Rain and dark evenings have slowed down progress on this site which is currently being excavated by the Witney and District Archaeological and Historical Society. Excavation began in September with a 2m wide trench laid out across the centre of the site from the Market Square frontage back to the rear of the property. Removal of some 0.4m of modern building debris in the trench has revealed a heavily burnt clay surface. To discover the extent of this surface excavation is now being concentrated in a second trench set at right angles to the initial excavation. The floor will be removed at a later stage in the hope of recovering some dating evidence.

Witney, Newlands Mill Housing Development

Geoff Williams continues to maintain a watch for archaeological features on this housing estate. Excavation for cellars and home foundations continues to expose sections of a substantial ditch some 3m. wide and 2m. deep. The ditch has now been traced for a distance in excess of 70m, travelling in a straight line approximately north-eastwards (35° E. of mag.north) away from the edge of the Windrush valley. Several pieces of 11th century A.D. pottery have come from the top of this ditch but there has been no dateable material from the bottom primary filling. It is possible that the ditch was dug in prehistoric times.

Gloucestershire

Fairford/Lechlade: Claydon Pike

During the past six months excavations have continued at the Claydon Pike complex, between Lechlade and Fairford. A third gravel 'island' has been uncovered, surrounded by marshy areas containing peat deposits.

The island (c 100 x 60m) was enclosed by middle Iron Age drainage ditches and also subdivided by them into three rectangular areas. Ten round houses were found on the island. Nine of these had entrances facing south-east and diameters averaging 8m. Most were stake built with substantial door posts set about 1m inside a drainage gully. One house was of the Pimperne type with a circle of post-holes and a porch. Nine houses contained clay-lined pits packed with burnt stones - possibly cooking holes or storage pits for water.

One house (gully diameter 11m) faced north-west and was immediately opposite a smaller (8m) south-east oriented house - the two possibly associated with each other. Most houses were rebuilt two or three times. The settlement included a four-post structure.

The Middle Iron Age ditches surrounding the round houses were associated with a field system which has been traced over about 6ha. of the gravel terrace.

The waterlogged, marshy areas sampled by Mark Robinson provided the best sequence of evidence for change in the landscape. Peat deposits including the stumps of trees, seem to have stopped growing in the middle Iron Age. At that time ditches were dug along the edge of the road and gravel banks thrown up and over the peat. In the Roman period more drainage ditches were dug in the same area and fields covered the adjacent gravel terrace. In post-Roman times but at an uncertain date, the Roman ditches and low-lying areas were inundated with flowing water and covered by alluvial deposits up to 0.7m deep.

Alluvion also buried and preserved a road which formed the main street of the Romano-British settlement currently under excavation. The road has been traced by aerial photography over about 4 Km, linking several settlements along the gravel terrace. The road has been uncovered where it crosses the stream which forms the parish boundary between Fairford and Lechlade. In this marking area the road is metalled, c.4m wide with a ditch on either side. The foundation of the road is of irregular limestone blocks covered in gravel to a depth of 0.15 - 0.20m. The road surface is formed of smaller flat and rounded limestone fragments. It is uncertain as yet whether a bridge carried the road over the stream or whether conduits carried the stream under the road.

About 1ha of the Romano-British settlement has now been uncovered including a complete platform or 'toft'. Geoff Mees has also carried out extensive phosphate sampling prior to topsoil removal. The platform is enclosed by ditched lengths of wall and fences. The toft includes several phases of domestic building

on the street front with plaster floors, a well and aisled barn. Beneath the platform late Iron Age settlement has been traced over the whole 1ha area. Finds from the Roman settlement include a stack of bronze bowls, about forty third and fourth century coins, several bronze brooches an iron spear and a cattle goad. Neolithic flint and a fragment of a polished stone axe have also been found on the Romano-British settlement.

Fieldwork has located a second Romano-British settlement surviving as slight earthworks south-east of Lechlade.

Silver Replica Jewellery

A limited number of the Oxfordshire Archaeological Unit Logo have now been reproduced in sterling silver using the ancient lost wax casting technique. It is available as a pendant at £8 (without chain) or as a brooch at £10.

Eight other replicas are available as orders through the Unit: Saxon Saucer brooches £18 - £22; Saxon cruciform type brooches £18. Bow Brooch £17; Roman Spoon £20.

Contact J. Wallis via O.A.U.

Seeds for Sale

The O.A.U. is offering packets of ancient varieties of wheat at 15p each for newsletter readers to grow. Each packet also contains growing instructions. The varieties available are emmer, the main Neolithic and Bronze Age wheat, and spelt, the main Iron Age and Roman wheat.

Either collect them from 46 Hythe Bridge Street or send 15p in stamps for each packet (plus a S.A.E. or a request to put them in your next newsletter envelope).

STAFF NEWS

Lindsay Donaghy the Unit's Secretary has recently left to have a baby. She has been replaced by Jocelyn le Petit.

1982 Newsletter subscriptions. There will be an increase in the Newsletter subscription this year. Please send £2.00 to the Secretary, Oxfordshire Archaeological Unit, 46 Hythe Bridge Street, Oxford OX1 2EP. Please would anyone wishing to cancel their subscription inform the Secretary of the Unit as soon as possible.

CALENDAR

CHINNOR HISTORICAL & ARCHAEOLOGICAL SOCIETY? Programme for the 1981/82 session (meetings are usually held on the first Friday of each month at the Adult Education Room, Chinnor Library Block, Station Road, Chinnor at 8.00p.m. Visitors are always welcome.)

4th December	Reports from the Work Parties and General Society Business
8th January 1982	Pictures of the Past - Members slides
5th February 1982	Judy Crockett: Victorian and Edwardian Watlington
5th March 1982	Annual General Meeting followed by a slide show "Thame old and new" by Norman Waters
2nd April 1982	Malcolm Airs: The Small Post-Medieval House in Oxfordshire

7th May 1982 Private Research - short talks by members

4th June 1982 Reports from the Work Parties and General Society Business

For details of membership, please contact the Hon. Secretary: 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

20-22 November 1981 Roman Army in Britain

Friday, 27th November Medieval moated sites (O.A.U. Seminar)

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
Alyesbury)

16-17 January 1982 Archaeology Certificate Weekend

22-24 January 1982 The English Medieval Village

Friday, 29th January Pots and Men (O.A.U. Seminar)

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

Friday, 26th February The Analysis of Neolithic Flints (O.A.U. Seminar)

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

Friday, 19th March Roman Burial Practice: The Archaeological evidence
(O.A.U. Seminar)

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).

FINALLY ALL THE MEMBERS OF THE OXFORDSHIRE ARCHAEOLOGICAL UNIT WOULD LIKE TO WISH ALL THE READERS OF THE NEWSLETTER A VERY MERRY CHRISTMAS AND A HAPPY NEW YEAR