



OXFORD ARCHAEOLOGICAL UNIT
46 Hythe Bridge Street
Oxford OX1 2EP
Telephone Oxford (0865) 243888

OXFORD ARCHAEOLOGICAL UNIT NEWSLETTER INCLUDING

OXFORDSHIRE PARISH SURVEY NEWS

Vol X, No.3 - September 1983

Contributions to the next Newsletter should be sent to the above address not later than Monday, 14 November 1983.

Gloucestershire

FAIRFORD: CLAYDON PIKE - David Miles and Simon Palmer

The excavation of the central settlement area at Claydon Pike is now about completed and the gravel pit looms close.

An outlying, circular shrine, 7m in diameter has been examined mainly by the members of the Unit/Oxford University Department of External Studies Training Excavation supervised by Gerry Wait. The flag floored interior produced about 200 coins of 3rd - 4th century date, a complete beaker and a bronze votive leaf. The broad limestone foundations were set into marshy ground. A stone path on a gravel causeway led northwards from the shrine across the marsh to the Roman road.

In the main occupation area two more items of military metalwork have recently been found. Five buildings have been excavated ranging in date from the early 2nd to late 4th century. The earliest is a two-roomed timber building lying at right angles to the street. It has a sleeper beam construction. A contemporary aisled building with massive stone-packed post pits lay at right angles to the sleeper-beam structure. The stone footings of a later building were constructed across the post pits. Some of the pits were covered with stone slabs, rather like man-hole covers, which had cracked as the pits settled. A three-roomed, L-shaped building with a hypocaust system was in use probably in the 3rd century. The latest building had two large sunken chambers inside it. These went below the water table and their purpose is uncertain. A similar chamber outside the building had animal skulls and box leaves on the base.

The buildings sat inside an enclosure which was ditched and/or walled at various phases. The enclosure was entered through two complex gateway systems. The first gateway opened onto the large open space at the centre of the site. Behind it a side street ran down the southern side of the building enclosure. A second gateway led into the enclosure. In one phase an enclosure wall terminated in a small gatehouse with an internal triangular buttress.

Excavation has continued on the rectangular shrine to the south of the central open space. It appears to have been established in the 1st century, possibly on the site of an area reserved in the Iron Age. Three stone pillars and part of a carved capital have been found. There are few obvious votive finds. More rolled lead sheets have appeared, about ten bone pins,

and much glass and amphorae. Pits in the centre of the shrine appear to belong to a late phase of Roman activity and contain much burnt material including coal. The boundary ditch of the shrine was cobbled over and used as a path in the later Roman period. Only slight traces of walls survive as the area has suffered from thorough robbing.

An Iron Age ditch has been found beneath the line of the Roman road apparently indicating a pre-Roman trackway. The ditch was systematically backfilled with gravel and cobbled over in the central open area of the Roman settlement. Further late Iron Age features have been located across the site including a number of small circular gullies, thought to demarcate haystacks. Around them are large oval and rectangular enclosures, perhaps animal corrals and only two small areas of domestic activity.

Excavation is continuing to the west, along the line of the Roman road until the end of September. Volunteers and visitors are welcome.

Oxfordshire

ABINGDON, THE FORMER MG CAR FACTORY - Claire Halpin

A watching brief south of the new road, Blacklands Furlong, and east of Muffield Way produced few more Roman and Iron Age archaeological features. Field ditches and areas of pit digging were more clearly defined.

NORTHMOOR: WATKINS' FARM - Tim Allen

A first phase of salvage excavation has been completed at the new Middle Iron Age site whose discovery was reported in OAU Newsletter X, No.2, p.4. The excavation confirmed the preliminary assessment of the site that it was a sub-circular enclosure, 70m across, with NE entrance and 'antennae' ditches. The topsoil stripping by ARC had removed all but the deepest features, but those that remained have been planned and dating material and samples for carbonised grain and waterlogged remains have been recovered.

There was evidence for an entrance on the south side which had been blocked off. Skulls of horse and cow were found towards the inner terminals of the 'antennae' ditches. There were inner enclosure ditches on the E and W side of the large enclosure reminiscent of the double ditched enclosure at Mingies Ditch, Hardwick. There was a further small enclosure which may have been occupied.

SW of the main enclosure was a further enclosure defined by an interrupted ditched boundary or pit alignment. It was probably also of mid Iron Age date. W of the main enclosure was a series of 3 linked small enclosures. These may be of early Roman date.

N of the main excavation area were several linear ditches running roughly E-W, including a Roman trackway. S of this trackway was a domestic enclosure.

There are slight traces of earlier prehistoric occupation. Much of the remainder of the site will be stripped prior to gravel extraction in the

autumn and it is hoped to extend the excavation at that time.

RADLEY: BARROW HILLS - R A Chambers and Claire Halpin

Excavation has continued at this famous cropmark complex. Working at weekends the Abingdon Area Archaeological and Historical Society, with Claire Halpin, have continued the excavation of Barrow I. In July Richard Chambers began the excavation of the inhumation cemetery and the Anglo-Saxon settlement with labour financed by the Manpower Services Commission. An area 70m x 40m has been cleared.

The excavation of Barrow I is almost complete. From the primary silt of the ring ditch there have been no additional finds to the single flint blade mentioned in the June Newsletter. From an upper silt, however, c. 20 decorated Saxon sherds and two fragments of cremated bone have been recovered. Secondary burials dating to the Saxon period are recorded for barrows 2 and 5 of the cemetery (Oxoniensis, XIII (1977) and XIII (1948), respectively).

Despite considerable plough damage to the barrow the central burial pit has been excavated with good results. A dense heap of cremated bone was found in association with three grave goods: a bronze dagger. In poor condition, of late early Bronze Age date, bone 'tweezers' and a bone pin. The latter are well preserved. Fragments of leather with punched and geometric decoration may indicate a bag in which the cremation was placed. Lying separate from these finds were charcoal and ash deposits which will produce a radiocarbon date.

There are more features to be excavated within the vicinity of barrow 1, some predate the barrow and may represent tree clearance.

Excavation of a small ring ditch which lies close by to barrow 1 has started, and later in the season it is envisaged that some section work will be undertaken on barrows 12 and 13.

In the inhumation cemetery area a line of prehistoric cremation pits have been discovered. One of these contained a Bronze Age collared urn.

The cemetery itself was thought to be Saxon, however, it now appears to be Roman. Burial appears to have begun in the 1st century AD with a series of cremations focussed on a small, square enclosure. A series of rectangular, north-south inhumation graves reflect the change in fashion to inhumation burial in the Roman world during the 2nd - 3rd centuries. These graves reflect many of burial customs prevalent at the time including decapitation and prone burial. Several graves have contained grave goods including hobnail boots, Oxford product coultour-coat beakers, bracelets and glass beads.

The cemetery appears to have continued well into the 4th century or beyond with a series of west-east supine inhumations none of which have so far produced grave goods.

Many post-holes and several grubenhauser (sunken featured buildings) from the Saxon settlement have been revealed beneath the topsoil.

In September Richard Bradley with archaeology students from Reading University will excavate the Neolithic monuments to the north and south of the present main excavation. The week-end work on the present phase of the Bronze Age area should end at the end of September. The Roman cemetery will be completed by the end of August. The continuation of the Anglo-Saxon settlement will be excavated early in 1984. During the winter the Abingdon Area Archaeological and Historical Society will begin a field walking project centred on the barrow cemetery. Volunteers for all this work are always welcome.

There will be an Open Day on the site on Sunday, 25 September.

SALFORD - R A Chambers

During an evening class field trip to Salford members of the Salford Local History Group pointed out previously unrecognised earthwork terraces, medieval pottery scatters and an unmortared limestone wall foundation. The remains lay in an area on the eastern side of the present village. The area is shown as being devoid of buildings on an 18th century estate map belonging to the Fawdry family. The remains suggest this area is a deserted part of the medieval village.

SHRIVENHAM BY-PASS - R A Chambers and Chris Scull (Institute of Archaeology, Oxford)

Much material of archaeological importance has been discovered during the initial stages of the construction of the Shrivenham by-pass.

Mr Jon Simpson, assisted by other members of the Shrivenham Local History Society, has recorded extensive remains of a Roman period settlement west of the Highworth Road. Pits, ditches, cobbled areas and areas of dark soil have all yielded much pottery. A extensive spread of large limestone rubble indicated the presence of a substantial stone building or, or just beyond the edge of the by-pass. Several Roman coins have been recovered for the OAU by members of the Wyvern Metal Detector Club.

An important 5th-6th century Anglo-Saxon cemetery has been discovered at the northern end of the by-pass in Watchfield parish. The site has also provided a collection of Neolithic-Bronze Age flintwork, possible Bronze Age pottery and an array of early-mid Iron Age settlement features.

The cemetery was discovered when the mechanical excavation of a roadside drainage-ditch revealed the remains of four human skeletons. One of these four graves contained an adult male buried with a shield, sword, spear, knife and bronze bowl. The excavation team working at Barrow Hills, Radley was transferred to the by-pass for six days to excavate and record the remains within the area affected by the by-pass. The County Council and the contractors kindly made this time available.

The conditions under which the graves were excavated were far from ideal. Previous to the discovery of the cemetery heavy machinery had removed the top

soil. The immense weight of the machinery had cracked and crushed the underlying skeletal material although metal objects survived remarkably intact.

The existence of Iron Age and possibly earlier features in the subsoil made the identification of graves in the heavy and clayey loam a difficult and time consuming task.

A total of twenty-seven inhumations of early Anglo-Saxon date, aligned west-east and north-south, were excavated. Unstratified finds indicate that this was not the original number of burials in the area, and it is possible that a considerable number of graves was destroyed before the nature of the site was recognised.

The earliest burial excavated may date from the first half of the 5th century AD, but most are of the later 5th or 6th century. These include the grave of a woman buried with a pair of gilt-bronze saucer brooches, and iron cloak-pin, a pair of bronze tweezers and a string of amber beads, and that of a warrior buried with his sword, spear, shield, knife and a bronze cauldron which may have been made in the Rhineland. Another male burial contained an iron knife and iron shield-boss, an elaborate bronze belt buckle and fittings, and a balance inside the remains of a leather and bronze case which also contained weights and Roman coins.

Other finds include a wooden bucket with bronze bindings and an iron handle, and a second bronze cauldron. The quality and quantity of the grave goods indicate that this was the burying ground of a wealthy and important community. Unfortunately, we do not know what proportion of the original cemetery is represented by the excavated burials, and this places severe constraints upon interpretation of the site.

The OAU would like to thank Oxfordshire County Council, the engineers and contractors for allowing excavation to take place and for providing machinery.

The OAU would also like to thank the local volunteers who helped with the excavation and those who maintained a watch over the site whilst the road cutting was machined. The OAU is also grateful to Guy Grainger and to Kevin Harvey, Sally Jones and Gwen Pedder of the Unit's Manpower Services Scheme for working until after dark to complete the excavation.

WATCHFIELD - See Shrivenham By-pass

WENDLEBURY, FACENDA CHICKEN FARM SITE - Sebastian Rahtz and Trevor Rowley

Prompted by the construction of a chicken farm and associated drainage activities, small-scale excavation has taken place from mid-July on a Roman site approximately a quarter of a mile north of the town of Alchester. The area in question lies to the north side of the probable line of Akeman Street, close to where it is presumed to intersect the Alchester-Towcester road. The work has been carried out by T Rowley (Oxford University Department for External Studies), assisted by M Steiner, C Jones, S Rahtz and for the last week by P Rooke with a small team from the Oxford Archaeological

Unit.

The available area for excavation consisted of two one-metre machine trenches, the machine-dug deepening of a stream and three deliberately trenched areas cleared by machine and excavated by hand. Apart from a considerable quantity of Roman pottery and extensive pits and ditches in the area the investigation centred on the various courses of the stream in Roman times, which was dredged or canalized several times but finally filled up with at least half a metre of silt over a large area. A series of stone revetments appear to have been constructed to contain redeposited silt possibly in the vicinity of a bridge for the north-south roadway running from Alchester to Towcester. A large pit in the stream contained a well-preserved 1.5m x 0.25m wooden plank and early Roman pottery. One of the revetments was also supported by wooden piles sunk into the natural silt. To the north of the area available, a large hearth for some form of industrial activity has been found. Pits containing charcoal and carbonized seed have been sampled.

At the time of writing final excavation is taking place, hoping to elucidate the precise course of the road, the nature of the stream crossing and its relationship to Akeman Street.

FURTHER EXCAVATION PROGRAMME (SUBJECT TO ALTERATION)

VOLUNTEERS WILL BE WELCOME

- August Claydon Pike, Lechlade/Fairford (6 days per week)
Barrow Hills, Radley (7 days per week)
Rollright Stones (last 2 weeks of the month)
- September Claydon Pike, Lechlade/Fairford (6 days per week)
Northmoor (5 days per week, early part of the month)
Barrow Hills, Radley (week-ends)
Stanton Harcourt, Gravelly Guy, (5 days per week, later part of the month).

Oct - Dec Stanton Harcourt, Gravelly Guy (5 days per week)

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

15. September Unit display in the Agriculture Tent at Thame Show
25. September Open Day at Barrow Hills, Radley

