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OXFORD ARCHAEOLOGICAL UNIT NEWSLETTER INCLUDING
OXFORDSHIRE PARISH SURVEY NEWS

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Anyone wishing to send contributions to the next Newsletter should send details to the above address before Monday, 6 June 1983.

ABINGDON: former MG Car Factory - Claire Halpin
(PRN 13,016-7; SU 484973)

Two large areas (94m x 135m, and 43m x 84m) lying south of the newly constructed road (Blacklands Furlong) are to be affected by tarmac and soil stripping. 13 archaeological trial trenches (1m x 20m) were excavated during the last week of January 1983.

Contrary to expectations little archaeological material was revealed. Though within 10m of the road corridor no continuation of the dense scatters of Iron Age and Roman features (predominantly pits), located within the corridor, were seen. It appears that these features were bounded by enclosure ditches and hence they did not extend southwards. Similarly, though within 4m of the 11 Roman inhumations recorded on the south side of the site, only a single child burial was revealed. Further lengths of enclosure ditches dating to the late Iron Age or Roman period were recorded. Two 1m sections were excavated but these produced very few finds.

The trial trenches demonstrated that the proposed site stripping in advance of warehouse construction will expose the upper surface of the natural gravel, and therefore archaeological features. No useful area which warranted excavation was defined and therefore future work within this phase will be confined to a selected watching brief (estimated to occur in late April). Due to extensive modern disturbance around the area of the Roman cemetery the information from the watching brief is likely to be confined to infilling the pattern of enclosure ditches.

Finally this year's work indicated the importance of the area to the north of Blacklands Furlong. It is across this area that archaeological material recorded within the road corridor extends. In addition the south-eastern boundaries of the early and middle Iron Age settlements sites recorded at Ashville are located here.

BERINSFIELD/LITTLE BALDON: (Area centred SU 571 980 to SU 574 980)
S Laurie-Lynch

During the Winter of 1982 fieldwalking was begun to try and locate any prehistoric/Romano-British monuments not visible on aerial photographs with priority being given to the north of Berinsfield.

A flint scatter has been discovered which consisted of waste flakes, retouched blades, core fragments and one transverse arrowhead. There is a considerable absence of both prehistoric and Romano-British pottery even though the Golden Balls Romano-British pottery kiln site is near by.

A programme of fieldwalking and geophysical surveying is now planned for other fields in the vicinity of Berinsfield which may take 2 years to complete.

ENSTONE: Old Close Cottage, Chapel Lane, Neat Enstone - Tom Hassall

Dr Shuyler Jones of the Pitt Rivers Museum submitted medieval pottery for identification found behind his cottage. This was identified by Maureen Mellor and included one sherd of organic tempered ware which must be early-mid Saxon, 4 sherds of late Saxon pottery including St Neot's type wares and the rest range from the 12th to the 13th centuries, including sherds of the type manufactured in the Wychwood area and a sherd of British type.

EYNHAM: St Leonard's Parish Church - Nicholas Doggett

Plaster stripping to an average height of 1.15m to 1.50m around the interior walls of St Leonard's Church for the insertion of a damp course revealed the following architectural features. Beneath the piscina (on the south wall of the chancel) a straight joint ran 0.66m below the sill of the present bowl. No similar joint is visible on the east side and it is possible that the joint represents the western jamb of a doorway, later blocked and with the piscina inserted in its upper part.

The three windows in this wall all formerly had sills at a lower level than at present (still visible externally in the south-west window). These have been raised to their present level by the insertion of rubble masonry and the building of the existing sills. The purpose of these former recesses is uncertain but they may have contained tomb effigies, while the eastern one may have incorporated a sedilia, of the type recently located at St Peter's, Hook Norton.

On the east wall of the chancel, flaking of the plaster revealed traces of wall painting, part of the scheme uncovered in 1936 (E T Long, *Oxoniana II* (1937, 204). Unfortunately, however, it seems likely that the painted dado revealed at this time, but subsequently replastered, was destroyed before the present recording took place.

In the south aisle to the east of the 15th century doorway, traces of a blocked doorway were uncovered.

The church is first recorded in 1197 as a chapel of the nearby Benedictine Abbey. It is not certain at what date it became the parish church but this probably occurred in late 13th century / early 14th century, the re-building of the chancel (with which the piscina, wall paintings and the windows in the south wall are contemporary) perhaps taking place as a result of this change in status.

OXFORD: Blackfriars - George Lambrick

Excavations prior to redevelopment by the British Legion Housing Association have revealed part of the Nave of the church and the north walk of the cloister and the cloister garth. The position of the walls is as expected from previous excavations, but the excavation has revealed details of construction, such as divisions between sections of footings which would have been necessary in overcoming problems of groundwater. Numerous burials have been found in the South Aisle, fewer in the body of the Nave and the cloister walk. Those in the walk may have been friars. The cloister garth is free of burials. A step from the cloister walk gave access to a path obliquely crossing the cloister to the east, perhaps heading for the Chapter House in the east range.

When the priory was built (1236-1261) the ground level was raised, partly by dumping the clay dug out of the foundation trenches, but also by bringing in soil from the town, probably produced by the digging of rubbish and cess pits, which frequently cut through earlier filled-in pits containing domestic rubbish. One layer of rubbish rich soil at Blackfriars actually contains lumps of old topsoil from the higher part of the town which is quite distinct from the alluvium which the priory was built on.

Only scanty remains of pre-priory activity, a horizon of rough stones embedded in the upper layers of alluvium, have been found. The alluvial deposits themselves are being examined as part of the sequence of alluvial deposits on the Thames Floodplain in connection with the Floodplain Survey.

There is little evidence of the later history of the priory other than the many burials: floor layers and the upper parts of walls were thoroughly destroyed and disturbed after the dissolution. From the sequence of post dissolution deposits it is apparent that after initial gutting the buildings or at least the church was left as a sturdy ruin for some time while the land was turned over to gardens divided up by drainage gullies. The walls were not finally removed until after these gullies had become backfilled, but this may have been by the end of the 16th century, and gardening certainly continued in the 18th century until the area was developed for housing in the 1840's.

OXFORD: 52 Cornmarket Street, former Woolworths - Brian Durham

The former Woolworths shop is being remodelled as the first stage in a 'musical chairs' operation which will end up with a new arcade through to Queen Street. The site was excavated by Jope, Pantin et al in the mid 1950's when the Clarendon Hotel was demolished, with immensely important results from the Late Saxon levels (see *Oxoniana* 1958). David Sturdy was involved as an undergraduate at that time, and the Unit is very grateful for his help in identifying particular objectives in a hastily organised investigation.

The most important new trenches lay between Jope's B1 and B2 and between C1 and C2. The former cut through the 12th century vault previously surveyed in 1955, and a good section was recorded showing its relationship to the surrounding layers. There were some major

differences from the previous observations. There was no sign of any stonework of the smaller early vault found by Jope, but the construction trench suggested that the wall was built in two phases, the earlier perhaps before 1100, with the existing vault added around 12th-13th century. In the intervening period the ground level outside had risen 1.60m with layer upon layer of floors of the adjoining building. This is perhaps therefore an example of the type of half-sunken vault which in time becomes a fully-sunken cellar with the rise in ground level, but here the speed of accumulation was dramatic. If it reflects the general situation in Cornmarket Street, it means that two-thirds of the build-up happened in the 12th and 13th centuries, with levels rising only 0.65m since then. The situation was exemplified in Jope's Figure 23, which showed gravel metalling of a 'forecourt' abutting medieval laminated floors. The second new trench this year, called C1a, showed what must have been the rear continuation of these floors but, as with Jope's experience, it proved impossible to recover any pottery with which to establish a chronology.

The speed of modern building techniques means that time to make a proper section drawing is quite a luxury. At Woolworths the contractors were working only at night to avoid disturbing office workers, with the result that Brian Durham had a complete day to study these trenches.

It has been a reminder that good stratigraphy can survive in the frontage areas, and also an opportunity to see the complexity which confronted the excavators 28 years ago, and to confirm the general findings with respect to the Clarendon Hotel vault.

OXFORD: High Street, Sewer Works - Brian Durham

The one and only occasion when the original ground surface has been seen at Carfax, Oxford's focal cross-roads, was in the last century. Herbert Hurst reported that it was a prodigious 3.95m below the modern surface (Oxford Topography (1899) 57-8), but this has been regarded with an element of suspicion because in the adjoining streets the rise in levels has been much less, ie Cornmarket Street 2.5m High Street up to 2.5m; St Aldates up to 2.6m; Queen Street 3.1m. The recent foul sewer repairs in the High Street have enabled Brian Durham to make a series of observations which show that the gravel is getting deeper towards Carfax, right on target for Hurst's observations. It also shows that whilst Carfax is presently the highest point in the City, this was not so when Oxford was founded. The highest point along the High Street would have been in front of the Covered Market, and Cornmarket Street would have been rising gently towards the North Gate.

OXFORD: 89 - 91 St Aldates - Brian Durham

We have had a number of complaints from readers that they are getting confused by the number of 'river channels' that we claim to have found running beneath St Aldates between the medieval town and Folly Bridge. To avoid totally blowing our credibility therefore, Brian Durham has decided to keep quiet about a c. 16th century channel running north south behind No 91 St Aldates, which he thinks may be distributing the flow of the Trill Mill Stream beneath the various arches of Trill Mill Bow.

OXFORD: 90 Windmill Road, - possible Roman kiln site - Brian Durham

The site adjoins the north boundary of the Nuffield Orthopaedic Hospital where Roman pottery making is suspected. It was 'field-walked' by Brian Durham after partial stripping of topsoil, and a range of Oxford wares were recovered on the side facing the hospital. However there was no concentration of ash, and no fired clay suggestive of a kiln, so the pottery is assumed to be dispersed from a kiln to the south..