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OXFORD ARCHAEOLOGICAL UNIT NEWSLETTER INCLUDING
OXFORDSHIRE PARISH SURVEY NEWS

Vol X1, No 4 - December 1984

Contributions to the next Newsletter should be sent to the above address not later than Monday, 25 February 1984.

Gloucestershire

FAIRFORD; Claydon Pike - David Miles and Simon Palmer

Post-excavation analysis has continued on the stratigraphical details and phasing of the Roman site. The whole site record is now computerised and proving to be a considerable time saver, especially at this stage, in supplying details to specialists. The preliminary analysis of the pottery has been carried out by Sarah Green and the data are being managed on the University Mainframe ICL (2988) using PDS. It is becoming apparent that the area of peasant cottages and yards on the western side of the settlement and the central 'shrine' were demolished by the early 3rd century AD.

The central 'shrine' has since its discovery presented problems of interpretation. A further clue to its character has emerged in the analysis of the pottery, with the identification of an incense cup from the coal and charcoal filled central pit. Along with the coal and umbrella pine cone the cup suggests that there may have been an altar inside the ditched temenos area.

Bob Wilson has recently begun the analysis of the animal bones and John Giorgi will commence sorting the carbonised samples in December.

SOMERFORD KEYNES - David Miles and Simon Palmer

As part of the field walking programme in the Cotswold Water Park, in connection with the Claydon Pike excavations, Mark Maillard has discovered a Roman settlement immediately south of Somerford Keynes, on the south bank of the stripling River Thames.

An aerial photograph, taken in September 1984, for the first time shows as soil marks a pattern of regular, rectangular enclosures separated from the river by a quadruple ditch system. A trackway leads into a large oval, corral-like enclosure. The field is ploughed but features are detectable as earthworks in adjacent riverside meadow.

The central area of the settlement has produced prolific quantities of early Romano-British finds: a Dobunnic quarter stater, a silver Republican coin, several coins of Claudius and Vespasian and about sixty other Roman coins. There are also three pieces of probable military metalwork, a bronze bowl, over eighty predominantly early Roman brooches and decorated Samian.

A concentration of flue tiles may indicate the presence of a bath-house.

This site about 6km south of Cirencester could be of key importance in testing the theory emerging from Claydon Pike of Roman military involvement in an intensively exploited pastoral landscape.

The area is owned by ARC and has planning permission for gravel extraction.

Oxfordshire

BICESTER: St. Edburg's church - Brian Durham
(SP 583222)

The church is gradually taking up its pews in preparation for reflooring in York stone. The building has developed from an aisleless cruciform plan which Sherwood and Pevsner date to the 12th century on the evidence of a zig-zag-moulded string course. The main archaeological interest was to look for evidence of a Saxon church, and secondly to explain why the easternmost bay of the north aisle is rather wider than the rest - was this a chapel?

The results can be told briefly. The Victorian boiler-house has destroyed any evidence relating to a north-aisle chapel. The third trench in the aisle showed densely packed brick burial vaults, and a trench in the north transept showed what must be another late burial. This degree of disturbance is not unusual in an important town church. More relevantly the Victorian restorers seem to have lowered the floor throughout to make an air space beneath the pews. Their concrete screed is laid at a level 0.32m below the bottom of the 12th-century plinth in the north transept which means they must have dug out any surviving medieval floors, and probably any Saxon floors also. The only features which could possibly survive are foundations, and those of the north transept are unimpressive. They may be 'stone-saving' footings of the type found in many late Saxon churches, such as Aylesbury and Hadstock, in which gravel or hoggin with a minimum of stone was rammed into the foundation trenches.

It may be possible to confirm these ideas when the nave pews are taken up.

CUMNOR: Dean Court Farm - Tim Allen
(SP 4760 0595 - 4740 0615; PRN 10795, 10796, 10797, 12983)

Using contingency money from HBMC, a 6-week excavation was planned at short notice to rescue the area in the field west of the farm. This is due for housing development this autumn. Two main areas were involved, the house platform at the south-east corner of the field that was trenched earlier this year (Newsletter Vol.xi, No.3) and a long strip north of this, where the access road for the houses is planned.

Part of the access road overlay medieval ridge and furrow, but at the

east end was a late-Medieval stone building, with a yard bounded north and west by ditches. The building, probably mid-late 14th century in origin, had an entrance at the north end of the west side leading out to the yard, with door-jamb on both sides and a door-hinge on the north. Inside the floor was flagged at the north end. In the yard was a circular area, a small hearth and a rectangular stone-lined feature, whose purpose is still unclear.

Trenches have been opened both east and west of the original one across the house-platform to recover more of the plan of the late-Medieval buildings. The main block is an east-west range of several rooms, with a large cobbled yard to the south. A silver coin in very good condition has been recovered from just above the floor in one room; this is probably 15th century, which fits well with the provisional pottery dating from the building. North of the main range a small timber building with stone ground-sill has been discovered, also late-Medieval.

A large area just north of these buildings has been stripped down to earlier occupation beneath, and this is at present being excavated.

NEWINGTON: Manorial Site - R A Chambers
(Centred SU 611962)

The South Oxfordshire Archaeological Group under the leadership of Mrs Graham-Kerr, has completed this year's field walking over the site of a high status medieval building complex discovered last autumn (OUA Newsletter, x.No.4,p.4). Comments on the finds analysis will appear in a future Newsletter.

NEWINGTON: Newington House - R A Chambers
(SU 608963)

Members of the South Oxfordshire Archaeological Group under the supervision of Mrs Graham-Kerr have continued excavating the medieval metallised yard surface reported in the last Newsletter. Traces of foundations from one or more buildings beneath the yard surface will be examined this year, weather permitting.

NORTHMOOR: Watkins Farm - Tim Allen
(SP 410035 - 427022; PRN 8312 - 8320, 8322 - 8327)

In early summer a new area was stripped south of the main Iron Age and Romano-British enclosures, and one or two days were spent salvaging this. Part of a new trackway was found running up to the group of stock-enclosures excavated last summer (Newsletter Vol.xi, No.1), and the southern half of the enclosure bounded by an interrupted ditch was excavated. Unfortunately no dating material came from either. A number of pits was also investigated, two of which were waterlogged at the bottom. One of these produced Iron Age pottery; all the previous examples where dateable have been Romano-British. The remaining part of the main Iron Age enclosure has now been stripped, and will be excavated in December.

OXFORD: Exeter College, the North Ditch - Brian Durham
(SP 514064)

Exeter College is preparing to build new student accommodation in what they call Dustin Quad, and the initial work included a new sewer connection into Broad Street. The trench was amazingly deep, and where we expected to see early road surfaces of Broad Street, there was black gunge of a great ditch. The pottery was 17th century, and it must mean that the south ditch at the time of the Civil War extended out to the middle of what was then Horsemonger Street. This is a conundrum, because Hollar's map of 1643 shows houses along the south side of the Horse market, backing onto the city wall. Were these houses demolished for the seige, and then rebuilt by 1675 when Logan's map was made? Or were they left standing, and the Civil War ditch dug down the Horse market in front of them? The answer should be provided by Exeter's redevelopment, because we will see whether the college is built on medieval fill or on a 17th century ditch which is 45m wide.

A little spice was added to the story by the discovery of a mid 13th century pitcher spout in the shape of a man, with his anatomy proudly displayed (see back page). The fabric is typical of local tripod pitchers, and it must have been made in the dying gasp of this industry, before it was replaced by products from Brill. The Ashmolean is said to have had a similar piece in a Brill fabric, but it has not been traceable in the reserve collection. Maureen Mellor says the nearest parallels are from Nottingham, where similar spouts appear on 'knight jugs'. She intends to write a note for Oxoniensis.

RADLEY: Barrow Hills - R A Chambers
(Area Centred SU 515983; PRN 2903, 8380 - 998403, 8721)

Excavation of this multi-period cropmark site began again on 19th November. An agreement with Kibswells Builders Ltd who already own part of the site has resulted in an offer of machinery to strip the remaining topsoil in the field south of the former Wick Hall Drive. A progress report will appear in the next Newsletter.

STANTON HARCOURT: Gravelly Guy - George Lambrick
(SP 403054; PRN 8281-6)

Excavations at Gravelly Guy have now finished for the year, having begun at the end of July. The second halves of almost all the Iron Age features examined last year were excavated. A programme of sieving was undertaken to establish some control on recovery notes for finds. No spectacular finds were made though two dog burials were recorded. Two large areas not dealt with last year which appeared to have little in them, were fully examined and as expected produced only a scatter of post-holes and the odd pit. One more four-post structure emerged from this together with a possible house site though the only evidence for this is a pair of large post holes suggesting door posts. Further work was also carried out on the complicated series of ditches surrounding the deep Roman well-pit discovered last year.

One piece of salvage work begun last year was also completed. This was the excavation of a series of ploughsoils interstratified with alluvium and sealing the original ground surface on the Windrush floodplain. Since most of the ploughsoil was stratigraphically earlier than the alluvium, any finds

within it would indicate the earliest possible date for the alluvium to have started to accumulate. The ploughsoils contained Iron Age pottery and they and the alluvium must thus date from this period or later (the absence of later finds is not significant). This agrees with the dating of alluvium elsewhere in the Thames valley. On the old ground surface beneath these deposits a transverse flint arrowhead and one or two sherds of possible Neolithic pottery were found. These fit well with the presence of a small henge monument nearby excavated last year, a number of casual finds including a fine greenstone axe, and a couple of small domestic pits found nearby in recent salvage work.

The main effort this year was the excavation of another large area (100 x 60m) adjoining last year's and again kindly stripped for us by the gravel company, Smith and Sons of Bletchington. As with the 1983 area the site was sharply divided into an Iron Age half and a Roman half separated by shallow ditches marking what was obviously an important land division in both periods. The Iron Age settlement was tightly confined to a linear strip following the same pattern of dense pits respecting small penannular enclosures which probably mark the positions of houses. In this case there was a ditched boundary to the pits which in one phase turned to cut across the general scatter dividing it into two blocks, similar to the pattern found in last year's area though not so clear cut. This division was later superseded as the area of pits spread as the undisturbed ground diminished. The very clear division in the blocks of pits found last year was re-emphasised by the discovery of another large post built house (c. 10m in diameter) on the line of the division immediately adjacent to one of last year's houses.

As with last year's excavation the pits on the whole produced only moderate amounts of domestic rubbish. Loom weights and quern stones for grinding corn seem to be common on the site, while bone tools are surprisingly scarce compared with the sites at Ashville, Abingdon or Mount Farm near Dorchester. The site is also exceptional in the area for the number of animal burials, almost all of them dogs. This is particularly true of this year's area where a further ten ritual dog burials have been found, including two double burials. Both long and short tailed breeds are represented. The burials were associated with layers of stones and the presence of other bones possibly suggests the provision of food for the after life. Horse and sheep skulls have also been found, and so has a severed foreleg of a horse. Two adult human burials were found, one with a bone toggle, the other with a fine shale spindle whorl, probably brought to the Thames valley from Kimmeridge in Dorset. Over half a dozen new-born babies have also been found. Among the most interesting finds were two fine brooches, one an early La Tene iron type, the other a middle La Tene bronze penannular brooch similar to one from Maiden Castle.

Although the general pattern of the pits respecting small enclosures was maintained, one late development in the Iron Age settlement was the creation of another small enclosure, surrounded by a much deeper ditch than is usual for such features, which overlapped one of the gully enclosures and part of the pit scatter. At its most impressive the surrounding ditch was sharply V-shaped and about six feet deep. At this stage the enclosure had two entrances, one to the east and one facing north-west. The terminals of the ditch on this side contained a concentration of domestic refuse probably from a house enclosure immediately next door which was excavated last year. It is doubtful whether the large enclosure surrounded a house though there were some post holes within it. However, there was not an obvious concentration of domestic rubbish at the eastern entrance as would be

the head of the pond now lies beneath houses to the NE. The earthworks of what was presumed to be the remains of the demolished NE dam have now been shown to be extensive domestic rubbish dumps deposited during the 19th and early 20th centuries, presumably within the pond.

The positions of the entry and exit sluices which controlled the rate of flow of water through the pond are no longer visible.

The section showed that the base of the pond was level. During this century much earth and building material had been dumped over the whole of the pond area to a depth of several feet in places. This rubble sealed 0.3m - 0.5m of buff, silty clay which covered the bottom of the pond. This bottom deposit was examined by Dr Mark Robinson who found that only 4% of the molluscs present were aquatic species. The terrestrial molluscs suggested damp, shaded conditions. Such an assemblage might have occurred in a drained and derelict pond overgrown with coarse herbage or scrub. The high percentage of terrestrial molluscs was inconsistent with the deposits accumulating in a water-filled fish pond.

WITNEY: Mount House and Mount Mills - Brian Durham
(SP 356093)

Following the discovery of the Bishop of Winchester's palace at Mount House, the owners of the adjoining blanket factory, Early's of Witney, asked the Unit to do a rapid survey. The pretext was a public inquiry which was to hear their appeal against planning refusal for a Tesco super-store.

Early's naturally hoped there would be no archaeology on their side of the wall. We did our best to disappoint them, digging five trenches in the most propitious places. In fact, the site was as clean as a whistle, the only feature being a rock cut moat extending out to 15m from the wall of Mount House. The most interesting feature was the wall itself, which showed pairs of straight joints 4.2 and 4.8m apart, with quoins on the inside edges. These look like the faces of projecting towers, perhaps generally similar to those on the shell keep of the bishop's castle at Farnham. This adds a new dimension to our ideas of the defensive terracing on the palace site.

Concerning the Mount House site itself, there is steady progress towards providing the developers with a satisfactory deal so that the ruins are protected. English Heritage is considering taking the site into Guardianship, provided that the local authority can purchase it. A price which would satisfy the developer is much higher than West Oxfordshire would pay, but there may be room for manoeuvre. The Unit is principally concerned that a mutually satisfactory deal can be worked out before frost damage starts to affect the stone-work and floor surfaces.

OBITUARY

Readers of the Newsletter will be saddened to hear of the death of John Shingleton of the Dorchester Archaeological and History Group. John was a member of the Unit's South Oxfordshire Archaeological Advisory Committee and a good friend of the Unit.

expected for a house site. One part of the ditch did contain a concentration of slag, the only instance so far of evidence for metal working being significant.

It still seems likely that this settlement had a predominantly arable agricultural economy whereas the sites at Minglies Ditch, Hardwick (half a mile to the west) and at Watkins Farm, Northmoor (currently under excavation, 1.5 miles to the east) were lower lying, enclosed pastoral farms. Following Rumphrey Case's suggestion for vicarage field (across the road from Gravelly Guy) it seems likely that these dense linear pit scatters mark boundaries between large fields or groups of fields. The dating evidence suggests occupation from around 600-500 BC perhaps till the Roman Conquest, and the layout of the site reveals very strict continuity of functions and layout throughout this period, with settlement features including the numerous pits used for storing grain crammed into a narrow strip not encroaching on the fields either side.

In the Roman period one of the adjacent fields was used for paddocks and other features peripheral to an unlocated settlement, while the area of Iron Age occupation was abandoned. This year only part of the Roman area was examined. A fairly neat, largely rectilinear layout of small paddocks was found within the large square enclosure, the corner of which was excavated last year. Another large gravel pit, well or ritual hole, possibly similar to one or other of the somewhat inexplicable features of this type excavated last year, has been uncovered, but there was insufficient time to do more than establish that it is Romano-British. It will require excavation next year. The only probable Roman features within the Iron Age half of the site (none were found last year) were two graves with extended burials, one with coffin nails.

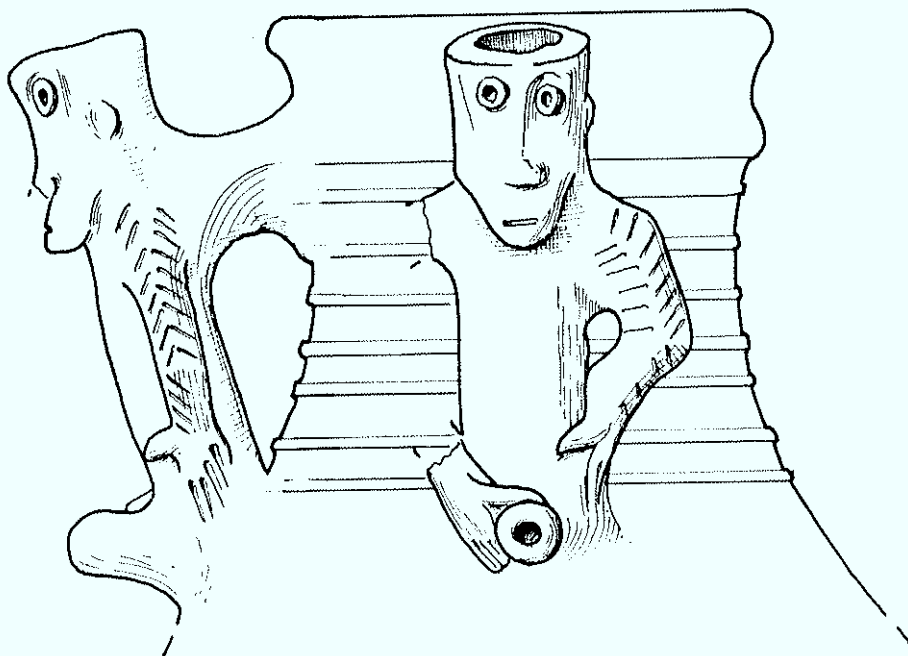
Although no formal open day has been held at the site, several school and college groups were shown round as well as a number of individual visitors. We also had the pleasure of having the assistance of two Rumanian archaeologists, who worked at Gravelly Guy for three weeks, having had a week's archaeological tour round Britain with Tim Allen, who visited Rumania the previous two summers. They seem to have greatly enjoyed their visit and it added much to the success of the exchange.

WITNEY: Cogges Medieval Fishpond - R A Chambers
(PRN 4602; SP 3632 0980)

The first known reference to a fishpond at Cogges dates to 1232 or 1233 when a pond was described as belonging to the Lords of Cogges. Ten years later another document also mentions the pond but this time in greater detail. This has enabled Dr John Blair to define precisely its position as that of a site previously identified as a possible fishpond from earthwork evidence.

In September, the fishpond was sectioned across its width in advance of house building. This revealed that a medieval fishpond in this position would not have been rectangular as previously thought, but trapezoidal in plan. The pond was apparently created by constructing two dams across the flood plain of the Madley Brook. Also a bank was constructed along the south-eastern edge of the flood plain to match the height of the north-western edge. The Madley Brook was diverted along a leat which passed to the north of the fish pond. This leat, broadened and deepened in recent times, still carries the brook.

Further survey work has revealed that the dam which presumably formed



HAPPY CHRISTMAS !