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OXFORD ARCHAEOLOGICAL UNIT NEWSLETTER INCLUDING  
OXFORDSHIRE PARISH SURVEY NEWS

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OXFORDSHIRE

ABINGDON: Ashville Trading Estate - R A Chambers

Building work on the current phase of the development of this industrial estate has uncovered a possible Roman period interment. Unfortunately, the remains were not noticed until heavy rain had washed a skull from the spoil which by then had been tipped on a neighbouring building site. The burial appears to have been skimmed when the M.G. factory car park was originally laid out over agricultural land. The present redevelopment has resulted in the removal of both the car park and the underlying archaeological features.

ABINGDON: Bridge Street - R A Chambers

A 0.6 m. deep pipe trench to the rear of the Crown and Thistle hotel, Bridge Street, Abingdon, revealed several pieces of human bone, apparently from a single skeleton. All the breaks in the bone were fresh and the trench appeared to have cut across a previously undisturbed inhumation of unknown date. The burial appears to have been narrowly missed by two shallow, post medieval cess pits. No further burials were reported from the continuation of the pipe trench. This burial may belong to the extensive Romano-British settlement beneath Abingdon, remains of which have been found nearby.

BEGBROKE: Begbroke Church - Jonathan Sharpe

Further work at this 12th-century church, between Woodstock and Oxford, has shown that external wall-plaster survives between the eastern tower wall and the west nave wall. Of the various historic finishes seen at the church, this is the one most likely to be medieval in date. Since the tower seems to have been built by the 14th century, the plaster should date between the 12th and 14th centuries and may be the original external finish over the rubble walls.

Investigation of the suggested north door showed that the jambs contained reused mouldings set to face the wall interior. The door was extant until at least the 18th century. The putative jambs should now be most convincingly associated with the installation of a heating-chamber in the early 19th century. Presumably, a substantial part of the north wall was rebuilt then

and this work could date to the extensive restoration in the 1820's. If this is so, the two different setting mortars seen in the nave walls suggests the likelihood that the restoration involved demolition of the north and south walls to a level below the window jambs. One of the more curious features of Begbroke Church is the marked difference in masonry technique between the nave walls and those of the tower and chancel when the same family of masons is known to have worked on the restoration of all three. A partial rebuilding of the nave would be an explanation of this.

BICESTER: Land north of Bicester House - R A Chambers

This site covers some 2 ha. (5 acres) between Queens Avenue to the north-west and Lower Home Close to the south-east of the site. To the north-east lies the river Bure which is now no more than a stream. There is a local tradition that Bicester House which lies to the south, marks the site of the medieval manor house owned until the reformation by the Nuns of Markyates in Bedfordshire. In 1979 the development of Lower Home Close revealed medieval settlement remains continuing to the west. An earth work survey and trial trenching undertaken in 1983 (Newsletter, Vol. X, Nos. 2 and 3) revealed further extensive medieval building remains. Several of the foundations were similar in build to those of the 12th-century manor house at Chesterton. It is possible that this first trial trench had revealed part of the Nuns of Markyates manor house or an associated structure.

Housing development has now begun on this site and ground work will continue for about six months. A watching brief will be maintained during this period.

CUMNOR: Dean Court Farm - T G Allen  
SP 475 060

Salvage work east of the farm in the new housing development has revealed a large wall bounding wide silt-filled channels of 14th century date. Mark Robinson has identified aquatic molluscs in the silts and has suggested that they were stream-fed. It seems very likely that these were medieval fishponds; the field name, Fishers, may also recall these.

Tidying up and small-scale excavation around the farmhouse has added much new information. The east wall of the bake-and-brewhouse continued south to butt up against the medieval hall. The upper courses of the north and east walls of this hall have been exposed all the way along. Two highly burnt areas on the outside of the north wall suggest that there were hearths up against it, and the bake-and-brewhouse was probably only the north half of a square kitchen built against the hall. Entrance to the hall was at the west end.

Foundation trenches just east of the farmhouse have revealed more of Building XII, which can now be dated securely to the 14th century, together with the kitchen, chamber block and hall. The original building was demolished in the 16th century and rebuilt; the rebuild overlaid the footings but extended further south.

Weekend work by the OUVAS on Site A by the by-pass has concentrated on the western part of Building III. The footings of the substantial west and north

walls have been uncovered. In contrast, the south wall was completely robbed and appears to have been slight; possibly this was an agricultural building open on the south side. The building cut through a large drain and a sequence of earlier ditches, from which groups of late 12th- and early 13th-century pottery have been recovered. One of these is a specialised assemblage of shallow wide dishes used for dairying.

FARMDOOR: Swindon Water Pipe Line - R A Chambers

From Farmoor this major water pipe line follows the higher ground along the edge of the Thames Valley before rising up into the Cotswolds. The route offers a rare opportunity to view a major transect across the higher ground to the south of the Thames Valley and its associated gravel terraces. With permission from the Thames Valley Water Authority, field walking the length of the pipe line is being undertaken with help from Jeff Wallis and Roger Atinslie. Excepting an extensive flint scatter on Kingston Hill, so far field walking has only served to confirm known sites. However, much of the pipe line remains to be walked and that in an area of the Vale of White Horse which has previously received little archaeological attention.

MARSH BALDON: St. Peter's Church - Jonathan Sharpe

St. Peter's Church had its origins as a Saxon chapelry, dependent on Dorchester Abbey, and a sundial over the south door has been suggested as an example of Saxon work. Accordingly, it is a building of considerable potential interest. Recent work to strip the external render provided an unusual opportunity to record the masonry and to search for the traces of earlier historic finishes.

On the south nave wall all the survivals of plaster overlay the jambs of windows whose insertion in the 18th century is well-dated. However, at the west nave wall there were traces of external plaster underlying the putative 18th-century layers.

The structural evidence exposed showed that the chancel and south wall had been extensively rebuilt. Four main building phases were noted in the nave and two in the chancel. Unusually, there is no chancel arch but work inside the building exposed a massive truncated beam which may have formed part of a rood-screen, sealed below post-medieval plasterwork.

Where the foundations were partially exposed, no traces of Saxon masonry techniques were seen. The occurrence of medieval tiles in the south wall below the modern ground level suggests that part of the wall may be derived from the rebuilding attributed to Peter de la Mare in 1341. Other evidence seen suggested that the 14th-century tower is of one build with the foundations of the western nave wall and that wall is itself of a build with the lower part of the south nave wall. Taken as a whole, the exposed walls provided good reason to date the upstanding structure from the 14th century and no earlier. This does not preclude the existence of a Saxon structure and the narrowness of the nave in relation to its length could be interpreted as the fossilisation of an earlier plan in the later church.

M40 EXTENSION: Birmingham to Waterstock - R A Chambers

The M40 will travel north through 25 miles of Oxfordshire. The route traverses large areas of the county which, having not previously lent themselves to detailed archaeological assessment, remain archaeologically blank. The motorway will provide a unique opportunity to help redress the balance of our knowledge of the Oxford region. Of special importance is the opportunity to view the archaeological heritage of the Cherwell Valley and the North Oxfordshire Uplands east and north of Banbury.

Between the unusually late harvest and the growth of the new corn crop, Derek Elliot and Leigh Turner undertook a six week programme of field walking. Nine of the 20 miles of the approved route between Wendlebury and Mollington crossed non-arable land and was not available for field walking. The remaining eleven miles of the motorway corridor was walked with field walkers spaced 20 m. apart. Only one major new site was located, a scatter of flint artifacts in Aynho parish. These results appear to follow the pattern observed on previous road schemes. Only when the top soil has been removed is field walking relatively successful. At that stage of construction one new major archaeological site may be expected for every half mile of road. A second programme of field walking will be instituted for the newly announced, approved route south from Wendlebury to Waterstock.

STANDLAKE: Eagle Farm - T G Allen  
SP 4003

This Iron Age and Romano-British cropmark complex covers three fields, of which one is due to be extracted by Aney Roadstone over the next few years. Aney's have kindly provided us with a machine and dumpers to strip an area for excavation over the winter and next year.

A fieldwalking programme covering the other two fields has been started by the OUAS at weekends. The area has been gridded into 20 m. squares, each of which is walked for half an hour. This has dated a series of enclosures with waterholes to the later Roman period, and is now recovering prehistoric pottery, as well as Roman pottery of the 1st and 2nd centuries AD.

STANTON HARCOURT: Gravelly Guy - G Lambrick

Excavations on this major Iron Age and Roman site have been progressing well. The first halves of the Iron Age features have been excavated and sampling for carbonized plant remains is now under way prior to the completion of the excavation. Recent finds include a very fine small, curved iron knife or sickle and part of a shale bracelet. Some useful groups of early Iron Age pottery have been found. Further 'ritual' animal burials have been discovered including the body of a horse which lacked its head, front legs and lower hind legs. Other pits and ditch terminals have produced horse and cattle skulls, one example being a group of three skulls (two horse, one cattle) buried together at the end of a ditch. There have been a couple of examples of severed legs of horses being buried. There has been one adult human burial, but fewer infants than previously.

In the Roman area a coherent pattern of small paddocks and enclosures has emerged. Another 3 m. deep ramped well has been found. The 'ramped hollows' referred to in the last Newsletter remain enigmatic though their characteristics have been clarified, particularly through the discovery of several smooth compacted surfaces associated with their use. The hollows take the form of flat, sunken platforms, surrounded by ditches except for their narrow entrance ramps. The trampled surfaces extend into and over the surrounding ditches which have been recut many times. In two cases in this year's area these features have been recut with the spoil being thrown up to form banks which were revetted with crude walling or turves. It has been difficult to think of any purely utilitarian function for these hollows which explains all their characteristics. We now have four on the site, three of which have been heavily recut. Ideas for what these features might be range from animal pens to threshing floors via dog or cock fighting pits! Unfortunately the finds from them provide no indication of their function, and until we can find examples of similar structures elsewhere we may be none the wiser.

Salvage work revealed a beaker burial and a number of Neolithic pits have been found. No dating evidence has been recovered for the big pre-Iron Age post ring referred to in our last issue. Work continues until Christmas.

WALLINGFORD: St. John's Farm - Brian Durham

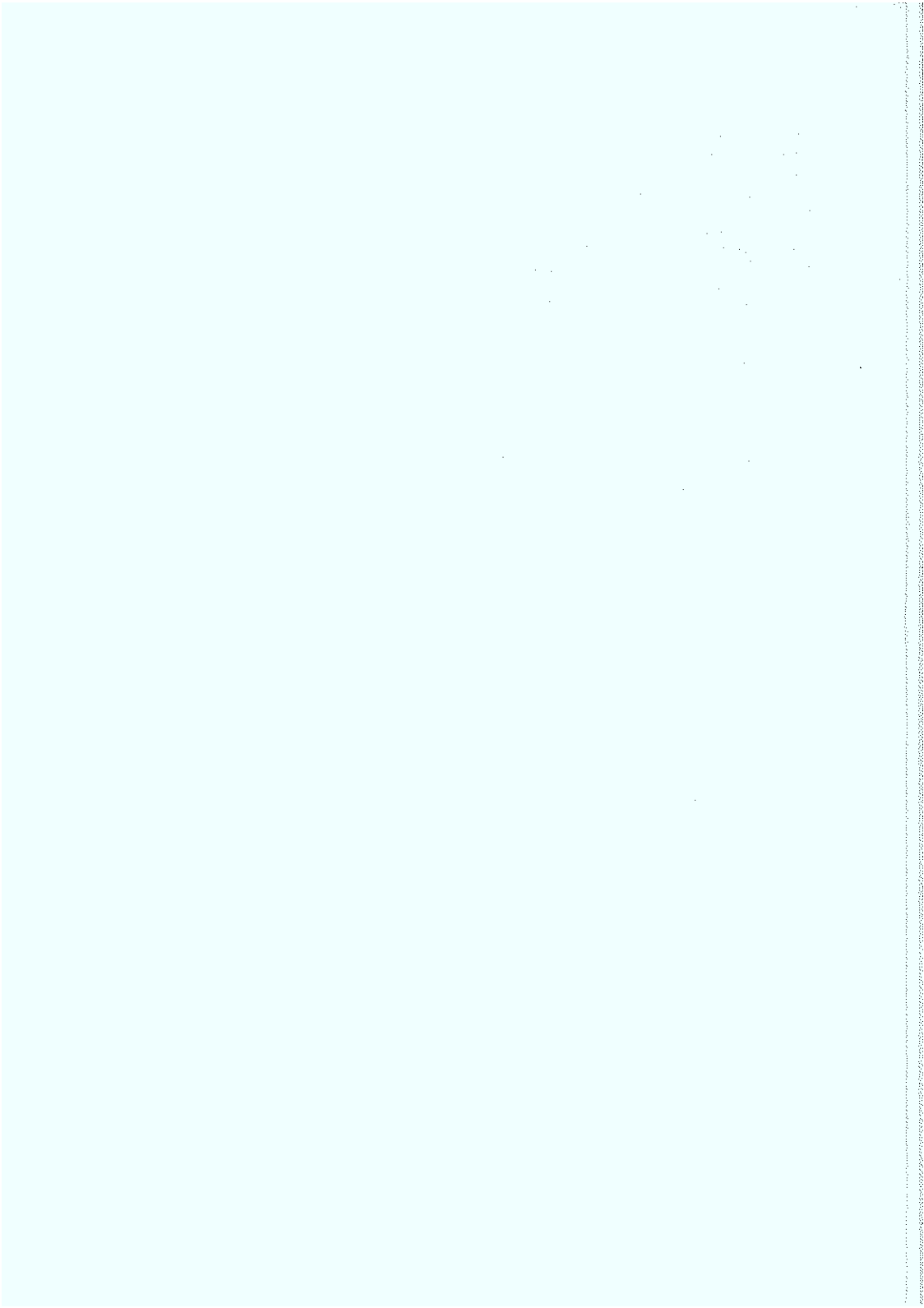
The site lies about 100 yards from the pagan Saxon cemetery found in 1974. There was no great optimism about finding burials at this distance, but since one had been offered access on generous terms by Messrs. Trencherwood, it would have been churlish not to do some trial trenching. After all we might have come back when they started building to find Saxons all over the place and too late!

70 m. of trenches were dug in a day. There were two potentially 12th-century features and a hard-standing or farmyard of c. 19th century, and an awful lot of very clean natural gravel!

UNIT NEWS

Tom Hassall, director of this Unit since its foundation 12 years ago, will be leaving at Christmas, to take up his new post as Secretary for the Royal Commission on Historic Monuments in London. Tom will be greatly missed by the Unit staff and by many people in Oxford and the County. We wish him the best of luck for his new job. His successor, Dr. Ian Burrow from Somerset, will take up the Directorship in the early Spring of 1986.

Claire Halpin, field officer in this Unit for the last 5 years, is also leaving at Christmas to start a new job with the Central Unit based at Portsmouth. We wish her lots of luck.



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