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OXFORD ARCHAEOLOGICAL UNIT NEWSLETTER INCLUDING
OXFORDSHIRE PARISH SURVEY NEWS

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GLOUCESTERSHIRE

LECHLADE: Butler's Field Anglo-Saxon Cemetery -
David Miles, Simon Palmer and John W Hedges

Post excavation work is now in progress on the rich and varied material from this successful site. John W Hedges has recorded an unprecedented amount of preserved textiles which, in due course, will give valuable information about both weaving and clothing. Analysis of all metal artefacts and the glass are being carried out, respectively, by Catherine Mortimer and Julian Henderson of the Archaeological Research Laboratory, Oxford. A special booklet about the site written by David Miles and Simon Palmer is to be published soon. The contents of four of the graves have been chosen by the British Museum for an exhibition illustrating the best of British Archaeology.

OXFORDSHIRE

ASTON: A development of fifty houses - R A Chambers

This housing development is centred some 200m. south-east of the present parish church. To the south-west of the site there is an extensive area of cropmarks. The spine road and the footings of the first few houses have not revealed any archaeological remains.

BESSELSLEIGH: Rowleigh, Cothill Fen - Jeff Wallis and Sandra Evans

Fieldwork on the corallian ridge is proving productive. During the autumn several assemblages of flint have been collected from localities in Marcham and Besselsleigh Parishes. A field adjacent to Rowleigh House contains a probable late neolithic settlement site. A scatter of approximately 3 flakes per 10m. is contained in a sandy loam on the flat top of a rise between a spring draining into Cothill Fen and Sandford Brook. Finds recovered from a 20m. grid include a sherd of Peterborough (Mortlake) ware, greenstone axe fragment, a large sample of scrapers, retouched flakes, a piercer, knives and a barb and tang arrow. Some of the flint is white patinated, blade based with twin opposed platform cores and may group together with three Mesolithic microliths.

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

A cluster of 13th century sherds are seen in the north part of the field nearer the Sandford Brook, which flows through a series of dams or fishponds at this point which may also be of medieval origin.

BICESTER: Housing development at Priory Road - R A Chambers

The majority of this development is sited on the eastern bank of the river Bare adjacent to the presumed south-east corner of the medieval Augustinian priory precinct wall. Immediately to the north stands 'the Priory', a Victorian building named after the former monastic establishment.

Until 1985, the site was occupied by a series of buildings and the ground used in conjunction with a rag and scrap metal business. An arm of the river Bare passes through the property and there is an unproven association of this site with a medieval mill.

Inspection of this site and of foundation trenches in January 1986 revealed gross land disturbance down to the underlying Cornbrash limestone some 0.6m. - 1m. below the present surface. This disturbance had destroyed any evidence of medieval occupation and the position of the medieval mill was not confirmed. A watch will be maintained during the recutting of the river channel and the development of a small piece of land on the western side of the river.

BICESTER: Queen's Avenue development (land to the north of Bicester House) - R A Chambers

The development of this site between the river Bare and 'Bicester House' (Newsletter No. 4, December 1985) has now begun. The majority of the groundwork has been completed, revealing several spreads of medieval pottery and associated domestic and building debris. The remains corresponded closely with the earthworks. Several areas of rough cobble, presumably from yard surfaces, had been exposed. Excepting occasional rubbish dumps just north of Bicester House the site was remarkably devoid of post-medieval pottery. The often incomplete way in which the top soil had been stripped from various parts of the site made tracing ditches almost impossible. The western extent of the medieval stone quarries recorded in 1980 during the development of Lower Home Close (CBA 9 Newsletter 10 (1980), 170, Fig. 46) was revealed. Although the south-west corner of the present development lay close to the assumed late Anglo-Saxon settlement nucleus at King's End, no associated material was recovered. However, building work on this part of the site did not provide a clear archaeological view.

BUSCOT: The parish church - R A Chambers

Renewal of the floorboards beneath the pews in the nave did not involve any excavation of the underlying levels and consequently no information was recovered about the original size and development of the nave.

The final phase of excavation at Dean Court will take place from March - April on the site of the 12th and 13th century grange next to the bypass, when Thames Water lay a new pipeline. Thames Water have very generously offered to fund much of the excavation costs.

In the meanwhile, with the sponsorship of the developers McLean Homes and J Rendell, the Cumnor Parish Council and Historical Society and (hopefully) Oxford University, a booklet tracing the history of the Medieval grange is being produced, designed by John Lange. Having a reconstruction drawing for the cover, and there are plans, photographs and drawings of the finds to illustrate the text. We hope to have this published by March 8th, and copies will be available from the Unit at a modest price.

DORCHESTER: Former school, Queen Street - R A Chambers

Excavations supervised by John Moore with labour supplied by the Manpower Services Commission has begun trial trenching in advance of housing development. The area lies within the Scheduled area of the Roman town to the east of the present High Street, in an area where the line of the Roman town wall has not been confirmed. This excavation may also lie within the grounds of the medieval abbey.

FARMOOR: Swindon-Far Moor water pipe-line - R A Chambers

Jeff Wallis and Roger Ainslie have continued to walk the route of this pipeline and have recorded a series of new prehistoric sites. Work will continue.

FRILFORD: Millets Fruit Farm - Jeff Wallis and Sandra Evans

White patinated waste flakes and cores were found on spoil heaps during topsoil stripping. No features seen in corallian sand subsoil. A Mesolithic microlith and flint flakes were found in a field opposite at Collin's Farm. This area is very near Iron Age sites photographed on a flight in the dry summer of 1976 by David Miles.

KIDLINGTON: Moat Cottage - R A Chambers

After 10 years of intermittent archaeological investigation and recording the work programme on this site has finally drawn to a close. 'Moat Cottage' is the surviving remnant of a large, early post-medieval, country house almost completely demolished in the 19th century. This house had replaced a medieval manor house and both establishments may have been moated.

The most recent discovery is of ashlar blocks and stone mouldings incorporated into the quoin-work of the cottage and external chimney breast. Several pieces of stone moulding were recovered when the upper half of the chimney stack was rebuilt. Presumably much of the stone came from the

previous manor house and the medieval mouldings agree with the archaeological record in that the manor house was a substantial, stone built structure.

Inside 'Moat Cottage' several phases of post-medieval fireplace correspond with the raising of the floor level. This surviving part of the former great house appears to have undergone two major alterations since the house was built.

MARCHAM: Amej's Sand Pits - Hitchcops - Jeff Wallis and Sandra Evans

Cores, scrapers, borers and fabricators have been recovered from spoil heaps and from a field at Amej's sand quarries extracting corallian sand. Topsoil removal showed no evidence of any features in broken brashy rubble and sand subsoil. This suggests that many of the Mesolithic and late Neolithic flint scatters on this soil type exist as surface sites only.

This group is within a quarter of a mile of the Cothill Fen site and may be part of a continuous spread of waste and occasional implements.

Sites appear to be more plentiful on the outcrops of sand especially near watercourses such as Sandford Brook, these watercourses being used as access from the lowland of the Ock basin.

MARCHAM: - Jeff Wallis and Sandra Evans

A resident in the village reports the find of a flint knife. The implement was recovered in the summer of 1976 from the side of a well which was being cleaned out. This artifact is probably late Neolithic, made on a 4cm. blade retouched on one edge. It is iron stained and in mint condition. Possibly the only recognised artifact in a group disturbed from a pit. The finder states that he may have seen other flints.

NORTHERMOOR: Watkins Farm - Tim Allen (not for the squeamish!)
SP 410035-427022; PRN 8312-8320, 8322-8327

An Iron Age burial in a waterlogged pit or well from this site, which was accompanied by a wooden board and traces of leather, also had more grisly company. Mark Robinson has found a small group of carrion beetles in the waterlogged samples which may shed new light on Iron Age burial practices. These beetles apparently do not like a fresh corpse, and their presence suggests that the body was already well dried out and in an advanced state of decay when it was buried. Since the body was arranged round the side of the pit, and the objects found with it also suggest a deliberate burial, it is not likely that the body was simply slung into the pit and left to rot. This may therefore be evidence that corpses were deliberately left exposed, as still happens in other parts of the world such as Thailand today, before the partly dismembered limbs were collected and buried. This individual was largely complete, but was missing one lower leg and one arm. Odd bones are commonly found on Iron Age sites in the region, but complete burials are comparatively rare, and exposure has long been suggested as a possible explanation. Unfortunately only very rarely are burials, complete or otherwise, found in waterlogged contexts that preserve these charming

bedfellows.

OXFORD: 26 Cornmarket Street (Zacharias) - Peter McKeague

Continued observation of the builders trenches in the former Zacharias buildings has added significantly to our understanding of the medieval courtyard inn. A well made cobbled surface was found beneath the late 14th century courtyard and it was shown to predate the present Ship Street range. It is possible that the main north-south stone wall was built against this earlier courtyard and that the two windows on the 2nd floor would have faced onto that yard. There would then have been a free standing building on the Ship Street frontage to the east of the courtyard entry. On construction of the present Ship Street range the more northerly window would have faced into it and the other into the gallery.

There was also slight evidence for earlier activity on the site as a small stone-lined furnace, dated to the 14th century by the pottery, was located beneath the lower courtyard.

OXFORD: St. Michael at the Northgate - Brian Durham

Work has started on converting the tower, Oxford's oldest building, into a treasury with a bell and clock museum and a rooftop viewing platform. The church kindly arranged for the render to be stripped from the lower two floors so that Tim Morgan could complete his internal survey. The spectacular results of the first phase of the survey were summarised in our September 1985 Newsletter.

New evidence has come from the stripping of the south wall, where the blocked outline of a doorway has been exposed at first floor level. It has the distinctive impost and 'non-radial' arch construction of all the other original openings, and must therefore be itself original. It was shown on 19th century illustrations as a blocked outline, but only now can it be appreciated that it is a doorway, and larger than either the ground floor Cornmarket Street door, or the second floor north door. The north door was suggested as opening onto the newly-built stone defences, and would therefore have been an outside door. Perhaps the larger size of the south door means that it opened into an adjoining building, ie an internal door. Logically this would have been a building associated with the church, perhaps one of the two houses owned by the priests of St. Michaels in Domesday. Alternatively, however, it could have been the church itself, and this opens up a fruitful area of speculation.

Provisionally, it seems most likely that the church was indeed on the corner of Ship Street and Cornmarket Street, tight up against the earth rampart, and that in the late 11th century it was wealthy enough to have the rampart removed, a new stone wall built further out, and a bell tower built at its north-west corner, with an opening from a gallery into a bell ringing chamber on the first floor. The fact that the two other doors of the tower were apparently unrelated to the needs of the church may mean that the tower was a cooperative effort with the town authorities, giving the ground floor to the gatekeeper, and access from the wall-walk to the upper floors for observation purposes.

of postholes suggest fences alongside some of the ditches. Adjacent to this enclosure was a large pit over 2m. deep with a ramped entrance and gravel conglomerate lumps from a rough revetment round the edge. The bottom 0.5m. of this was waterlogged, and it was probably a well. These tadpole-shaped wells are now common in the area; smaller ones have been excavated at Watkins Farm, Northmoor and Farmoor, and much larger ones at Gravelly Guy. This one contained part of a fish.

Other peat deposits have been found in the bottoms of ditches across the site, and it looks as if Eagle Farm will provide the environmental background that has been missing on other nearby sites of the same period, which have been drier. A few prehistoric sherds have been found, but so far in residual contexts; one possible prehistoric enclosure lies further down the field, and will be investigated in the next season's work.

The evidence both from fieldwalking and excavation suggests that the late Roman settlement lies on the other side of the trackway; this will also be looked at next year.

SUNNINGWELL: The parish church - R A Chambers

Re-roofing and preparation for re-lime-washing the interior of the 15th century entrance porch has revealed a dense, dark red ochre wash beneath the present flaking lime-wash. Investigation in the north and south transepts, chance and have revealed that the whole of the interior of the church had been colour washed probably as part of the extensive Victorian refurbishment. The ochre wash will be left intact and the interior of the porch will be re-lime-washed.

UNIT NEWS

David Miles has been Acting Director of the Unit in the period between Tom Hassall's departure and the arrival of Ian Barrow, who took up his post on 1st March. We are grateful to David for keeping everything running smoothly. Ian was County Archaeologist for Somerset County Council for seven years. Before that he was a field officer in Shropshire from 1975 to 1979. He read History and Archaeology at Exeter University and did a Ph.D. at Birmingham on the Dark Age reoccupation of hillforts. His archaeological interests include hillforts (some of which he is prepared to accept may be Iron Age!), the Celtic West in the Dark Ages, medieval monasticism and 'fringe' archaeology (ley lines, ancient astronauts ect., and arguments against them). He is convinced that the Unit has excellent prospects for the future, and is gradually getting to grips with the geography, archaeology and politics of this (to him) terra incognita.

Congratulations are due to Mark Robinson (the environmental archaeologist at the University Museum) and his wife, Jenny, on the birth of their first child, Alexander, born on 24th March.

Other work in the tower has included a survey of the timber-work of the second floor. The crude pegged construction was similar to the 11th century belfry floor of West Mersea church in Essex, and it seemed possible that this was an original floor reset on corbels. This now seems less probable, but samples of the timber have been kept for dendrochronology.

RADLEY: Barrow Hills - R A Chambers

Post-excavation archive work and report writing is well underway for this site. Although the majority of the specialist reports will not be completed for another month or two, some interesting results are already appearing, particularly from the Anglo-Saxon settlement. Dr. Robinson has reported that a preliminary examination of the cereal remains suggest that there was no continuity between Romano-British and early Anglo-Saxon cereal production. In contrast to the Romano-British period almost all of the early Saxon cereal grains are of bread making types. As this site was not contaminated with residual Romano-British settlement detritus the cereal remains suggest a high possibility of cultural change.

On the prehistoric side, the radiocarbon dates will almost certainly have to wait until the British Museum has moved its laboratory. The move to a new location beneath the Metropolitan underground railway system is designed to reduce the background radiation level and enhance the accuracy of the radiocarbon measurements.

STANDLAKE: Eagle Farm - Tim Allen
SP 4003; PRN

An area 60 x 30m. has been opened up in this large Romano-British cropmark site threatened by gravel extraction to assess the date and character of occupation and the potential for waterlogged and other environmental remains. The excavation has been carried out entirely by the MSC team supervised by John Moore and Andy Mudd.

The cropmark consists of a series of trackways flanked by large and small enclosures situated on low-lying ground between the two arms of the river Windrush, immediately north of their junction at Rack End and just east of Standlake. The threatened field contains one large rectangular enclosure with a series of small rectangular or oval enclosures both inside and outside it, all lying alongside a trackway. There are ditches of smaller fields or enclosures criss-crossing the area, which were thought to be earlier.

Excavation has sampled one oval and one rectangular small enclosure, the trackway and the big enclosure, plus many of the features inside it and outside to the south. The smaller fields are indeed earlier than both the small and large enclosures, which seem to be contemporary. The date of the occupation is Early Roman, beginning in the mid 1st century AD and continuing, at least until the end of the 2nd century AD.

The oval small enclosure produced little pottery and probably did not surround a house, but the ditches of the rectangular one, are filled with burnt soil and pottery. There are as yet no traces of a building inside it, but elsewhere on the site there is one four-post structure, and other lines

