



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

OXFORD ARCHAEOLOGICAL UNIT NEWSLETTER INCLUDING  
OXFORDSHIRE PARISH SURVEY NEWS

Vol. XIV, No. 3 - September 1986

**GLOUCESTERSHIRE**

**FAIRFORD:** Thornhill Farm - Simon Palmer and David Miles

Major excavations started, at the begin of September, on the next phase of the Unit's landscape project in the Cotswold Water Park. This site at Thornhill Farm lies adjacent to Claydon Pike and is on the same Roman road network.

The focus of the excavation this year is a settlement area defined by a series of irregular and circular enclosures running along side an offshoot of the Roman road. Its superficial appearance is of a ribbon-developed village.

Little as yet can be said with topsoil stripping still in progress, its date however is clear 1st century BC/1st century AD contemporary with the earlier phases of Claydon Pike. The interest lies in the relationship of this overtly native settlement and the 'official-looking' depot phase of Claydon Pike.

Phosphate transects have been put across the site to help pinpoint areas of more intense activity; as it is in this period that buildings are notoriously difficult to locate.

As at Claydon Pike it is clear that there is an early phase of occupation predating the formalization of the road-line by road side ditches. It is hoped over the coming months that a more detailed development pattern of settlement and road will be elucidated.

**LECHLADE:** Hambridge Lane - Simon Palmer and R A Chambers

A human skeleton was discovered in a builder's foundation trench in Hambridge Lane, Lechlade in July. The prone, west-east inhumation lay well below the accumulations of occupation debris from the present 18th century cottage. There was no associated dating evidence. It is likely to have been an outlier from either the Rough Ground Roman villa or the Saxon cemetery at Butlers Field.

## OXFORDSHIRE

### ABINGDON: New Printing Works - R A Chambers

Jeff Wallis and R A Chambers will maintain a watch over this development which at the time of writing has just commenced.

### BAMPTON: Calais Farm Redevelopment - R A Chambers

The demolition and redevelopment of Calais Farm for housing has provided an opportunity to examine the extensive underlying Iron Age and Roman settlements. Up to the present, information about the nature and extent of this settlement has been gathered in a piecemeal manner. Although much of the present site has been lost to farm building construction, a 19th century decoy pond and gravel quarrying, trenches along the northern and eastern extremities of the site have revealed intense Roman settlement activity and early Iron Age settlement debris. At the time of writing work is still in progress.

### CHARLEBURY: Human Remains at Queen's Own - R A Chambers

Parts of a human pelvis and thigh bone have been discovered by workmen repairing a drain at the rear of a property in Church Lane, immediately north of the Churchyard. The present house is probably in part 18th century although the owner said part was reputed to be 17th century.

The find spot lies immediately north of the churchyard. Extra-mural burials around medieval churchyards are frequently found during house building but never dated. The bones may belong to a deceased person who did not qualify for burial within the limits of the churchyard, for example, a suicide. These bones may, therefore, be medieval or early post-medieval assuming the ground north of the churchyard was unoccupied and available for burial at that time.

Undated human remains are also reputed to have been found when the sewer was inserted into Church Lane some years ago. The presence of a Roman brooch south of the church suggests Roman period settlement. The human remains beneath Church Lane are more likely to be Romano-British or Anglo-Saxon as the road may have come into existence during the medieval period. The present find may belong to a body buried at any time from the Roman period to the 16th century.

### CHOLSEY: Parish Church - R A Chambers

Stonemasons have been repairing the crenellations to the tower. This is well above the Anglo-Saxon work.

### CHURCHILL: The medieval parish church - R A Chambers

All Saints parish church was rebuilt in 1826 on a new site at the top of the village at the expense of James Langston. This unusually fine early

Victorian church was the product of an architect, James Plowman, who incorporated architectural features from several Oxford Colleges.

The previous parish church which had provided a focus for the medieval village stood at the bottom of Hastings Hill. In 1825 the nave and aisles were demolished and the chancel remodelled as a mortuary chapel. The present west door which replaced the chancel arch is set within a reused 'Early English' (c. 13th century) arch and jambs whilst an east lancet window of 1869 by the architect C C Rolfe is set in the blocked arch of a larger window. The square headed, mullioned side windows were inserted in the 16th-17th century. A view of the old church in Skelton's Antiquities of Oxfordshire shows windows in the south aisle with good late 13th-mid 14th century tracery. The south porch was probably of similar date. However Skelton's drawing shows the aisle and nave rafters decayed with the stump of a collapsed central tower. Little else is known of the medieval building.

In 1915 the chapel was made redundant with a proposal to demolish. Following the launch of an appeal to restore this last upstanding fragment of the medieval village, essential drainage work has been undertaken with the help of the Manpower Services Commission. The construction of soak-a-ways either side of the chancel has revealed the inside south-east corner of the south aisle and the north-east corner of a presumed south aisle.

A vault occupied the south-east corner of the south aisle. Roofed with undressed limestone bonded with the local subsoil, the vault was accidentally breached during the excavation of the southern soak-a-way. Still intact, with the remains of seven or eight lead bound coffins, the vault will be re-sealed with concrete. This is presumably the family vault of the Walter family resident in the village during the 17th and 18th centuries and who are recorded as buried in the south aisle.

The north-east inside corner of the north aisle continues below ground level for more than 1.5m. and is of a similar facing to that present in the vault in the south aisle. This suggests that there was an opposing burial vault incorporated in the north aisle and later filled with debris from the demolition of the church.

The central tower indicated in Skelton's drawing suggests that the church either developed from a late Anglo-Saxon or Norman cruciform plan or that the tower and later church was built onto the west end of an early, small nave, itself later rebuilt as the medieval chancel. This site would merit further archaeological examination if the opportunity arose, particularly to establish the form and date of the earliest church.

### CHURCHILL: Parsonage Gardens - R A Chambers

Garden earthworks have been tentatively identified to the south and west of the graveyard at the bottom of Hastings Hill. The graveyard surrounds the site of the medieval parish church (see above) and a previous parsonage. A small, possibly 18th century monumental arch from the entrance to the parsonage garden survives to the south-east of the present redundant chapel.

Foundation trenches for an extension at the rear of the public house has not revealed anything of archaeological importance. Built on a gravel terrace, garden soil up to 1m. deep cut into the terrace. The disturbance decreased towards the rear of the original building. Bottoms of cess pits survived beneath a late 19th or early 20th century brick built extension. There was no pottery. There was nothing to suggest that the present building was not the first structure to occupy this site.

DRAYTON: The Cursus - George Lambrick and John Moore

Excavation continued until the end of the first week of August. The 25% sample of the area was completed with other parts being excavated where there were concentrations of finds. Very few man-made features were located.

A number of tree throw pits were excavated and finds recovered indicated that tree clearance (by man or natural forces) was occurring in the Neolithic, Beaker and Roman periods. The large number of finds of the earlier two periods around some of these features suggest that fallen trees became the temporary focus of domestic activity (possibly just picnicking but perhaps involving a tent-like affair hung over the upended roots of the trees). One such feature was found beneath the re-excavated eastern bank of the cursus. The ditch running across the line of the cursus reported as 'possible Iron Age' in the last Newsletter is now thought to belong to the Bronze Age acting as some sort of boundary. Relatively little flintwork etc. was found south of this ditch.

Rather more flintwork and pottery was found outside the area of the cursus than within it. Some Neolithic flintwork was recovered from two small trial trenches c. 150m. west of the line of the cursus. It is hoped that some salvage work may take place when the rest of the field is stripped.

The Roman field system produced an interesting stratigraphic sequence. The c. 10cm. thick ploughsoil respected a boundary running parallel to the edge of the floodplain. It sealed a criss-cross pattern of scratch-plough (ard) marks in the gravel subsoil at the higher end of the site and alluvium close to the boundary. The field was later divided by a ditch, alongside which there was a gravelled track leading down to the floodplain. The boundary running parallel to the floodplain was maintained. Subsequently, after further alluviation, the upcast bank from this ditch was mouldboard ploughed just once - probably to break up the compacted gravel bank to enable the grass to grow better. Pastoral land use is indicated from waterlogged samples obtained by the Abingdon Society in 1981. The whole sequence was covered by further alluvium.

Drayton is most unusual in having presented this opportunity of relating a full depth of Roman ploughsoil with underlying ploughmarks to a sequence of associated field boundaries and subsequent land use. The most significant point perhaps is that the sequence demonstrates that arable land was so short that ploughing was not only taking place on gravelly eminences in the floodplain but that it was actually extending onto the land subject to contemporary flooding.

The present manor house is arranged around three sides of a square courtyard, open on the east side. The south wing contains a medieval chapel. The chapel, dedicated to St. Amand and St. John the Baptist was erected c. 1260 as a private domestic chapel for the manor house. Although such chapels were quite common at that period, very few examples have survived to the present day. St. Amand's is one of these rare survivals. During August, major repair work to the walls, windows and floor afforded an opportunity to record the architecture and archaeology of the building.

The removal of the floor revealed that the chapel had virtually no depth of foundation and the walls lay directly on the Greensand bedrock. The floor level had been lowered during the Victorian restoration of 1866 with the consequent loss of the medieval floor levels.

Removal of the external rendering allowed a close inspection of the fabric of the building. The walls were originally of chalk rubble and lime mortar. The core of the north and south walls appear to be original to a height of c. 3m. in places. The quoining in the south-west corner indicates that the building may have originally been freestanding. Several putlog holes which anchored the wooden scaffolding used during the construction of the chapel, were seen in the south wall. In one hole the remains of the sawn-off scaffold pole survived in a much decayed state. The rest of the chapel has been rebuilt over the last four centuries.

Both the north-east and south-east corners show evidence of subsidence and subsequent repair with softer, lighter coloured chalk. Of the windows, the south lancet is substantially original while the north lancet has been much repaired, the original stone-work being in local Greensand.

It is possible that the walls were heightened to incorporate the now blocked rectangular north and south windows. In the north-west corner an unglazed mullioned oak window was inserted and later plastered over. This may belong with the insertion of the Tudor gallery and possibly the present wing of the house connecting with the chapel.

The east wall had been encased in brick probably during the 18th century, whereas the brick buttresses are later. The substantial restoration of 1866 included the insertion of three windows in the south wall predating the north and south porches, the insertion of a quatrefoil window in the blocked south oval window, the blocking of a similar window in the north wall and a trefoil window in the upper east wall to replace an earlier window.

FARINGDON: Camden Farm - R A Chambers

Fieldwalking by members of the Faringdon History group has continued to examine the settlement patterns along the south side of the Thames flood plain. A trial trench has also been excavated to record the precise nature and extent of an earthwork thought by the writer to be the outline of a post-medieval building, but shown to be the result of open-field cultivation over Romano-British settlement features. The Society is extremely grateful to Mr and Mrs Haskins for allowing access and for their enthusiasm and help. Work will continue.



OXFORD: Corpus Christi College - Brian Durham

The college is converting the disused sheds enclosed by the bastion into a music room (with toilets), and this has enabled the Unit to add further detail to the medieval stonework recorded by Eleanor Forfaing in 1981. The shape of a third enclosure, looking east, corresponds with the narrow slit known previously only from stones surviving in the external face. The contractors foundation trenches were watched, but were all too shallow to show medieval stratigraphy. Indeed most of what came to light appeared to be the infill of post-medieval cess pits, suggesting that the bastion has echoed to a different kind of music in the past! What we had hoped to find was road surfacing of the street which had existed here to the early 13th century, and rejoiced in the name of 'Shidyerd' Street. Before our readers leap to the obvious conclusion of continuity of usage, the word apparently means 'rampart'.

OXFORD: Merton College City Wall - Brian Durham

British Telecom has been laying a comprehensive network of cable links between all parts of the university. Most trenches were comparatively shallow, and the only place where the system was likely to affect archaeological levels was on the line of the city wall south of Merton College. Mark Collard watched the digging and recorded a section. It was narrow and deep, and very complex. Taylor's map of 1750 shows a broad opening through the city wall here, and the new trench clearly went down the west side of this opening, exposing the flanking wall. The opening is not shown by the 16th and 17th century maps, but the trench showed contrasts between the east and west sections even at medieval level. It is tentatively suggested therefore that the medieval college had a postern here, which was the ancestor of the 18th century opening.

With these complexities it is not surprising that there was no sign of an early earth rampart, or indeed a coherent story of the development of the stone wall.

OXFORD: 4 Queen Street - Mark Collard

Demolition of the latest property to be redeveloped on the south side of Queen Street allowed the Unit to excavate a small trench close to the city centre at Carfax. Removal of the concrete cellar floor revealed the late Saxon/early Medieval levels, some 2m. beneath present pavement level.

A series of gravel metalled road/market surfaces, similar to those recovered in 1985 from No. 7 Queen Street, proved that in its original 10th century form, the south frontage of Queen Street lay some way back with a wide market place to the north. Evidence for 11th century encroachment onto this market space has been found elsewhere, and here it was represented by the construction of a well with an associated cellar annexe, the two connected by a short passageway, the only such arrangement so far found in Oxford.

During the infilling of the well it was used as a cess pit, and it is not surprising that the gravel yard surfaces laid over the top had subsided spectacularly with the settling of the unstable well fills beneath.

Despite the minute area available for excavation, the site produced useful information about the topography of 10th and 11th century Oxford, and, importantly, provided a stratified sequence of late Saxon pottery.

OXFORD: Rewley Abbey Assessment - Brian Durham

Our last Newsletter gave a full-scale and slightly speculative statement on the work then in progress, but the story was generally borne out by the last few weeks of the project. A third trench on the City Council's land confirmed the alignment of the abbey church, but no solid evidence of a south cloister was recovered. Having recognised the church however, it was possible to review some work done by Nicholas Doggett from the Christ Church archives. He noted a plan of 1775 which showed the north cloister buildings, and identified part of the north range as a 'chapel'. There is no obvious reason why an abbey should have a chapel in addition to a church, but a chapel in this position could well have been provided for the benefit of an independent house of studies. This would conform to the general plan of many of Oxford's secular colleges, for example New College and All Souls. It had a fundamental difference from most of the colleges in that it was a true cloister rather than a quadrangle, with an undershot cloister walk as shown by the triple footings of the east range. This was perhaps because it was built as a monastic institution, and does not seriously dent the claim that it is Oxford's earliest purpose-built college.

All we know of the church is the position of four pier bases and the north and south walls. Is it the nave or the choir? One thing is certain, it is very small for a Cistercian church, and the dimensions of the nave and aisles suggest that it could be a half-scale replica of Halles Abbey, built 35 years earlier by the founder's father. Rewley could therefore be a study in miniaturisation of the monastic plan.

The assessment report has been passed to the British Rail and the City Council, who as owners and developers provided the funding. It is hoped that the layout of the abbey as presently understood can be incorporated into the design of any new developments, and the Unit is co-operating on this. We particularly hope that there will be more excavation, so that our more outrageous claims can be put to the test!

OXFORD: 41 St. Clements 'The Desk Shop' - Brian Durham

Elizabeth Leggett has been watching repair work on the facade of this building. She reports that it is constructed of stone rubble with side walls taken to about 2m. depth. This is typical of buildings on this frontage, as seen in Nos. 31 and 34 in 1980, where there were deep narrow cellars. It seems likely that No. 41 had a cellar which was partially infilled when it became too wet, then used as a coal cellar and finally infilled almost completely.

The house has a blocked door in its west party wall, and another at first floor level in its east wall. These will be watched as the work progresses.

STANTON HAR COURT: Gravelly Guy - George Lambrick and John Moore

A three week season took place in August with the MSC team. Part of the Roman area originally excavated in 1983-4 was finished. A complete sequence of enclosure recuts was sorted out and additional information was gained about one of the enigmatic arena-type features first identified at Gravelly Guy. The remainder of the excavation consisted of an assessment of the north-east half of the field not yet under imminent threat. A barrow complex lying at the north-eastern end of the field was partially examined. The complex consisted of a ring ditch with a later annexe to the south and an earlier complex barrow which was eventually enlarged to cut the ring ditch. The only burials were associated with the original barrow.

The earlier barrow started life (or death) as a small turf-built platform or mound surrounded by a gully containing reverting posts. This in turn was surrounded by a ditch with a narrow gap in its north-west side. In the later phase a further ditch was dug and a mound built sealing the silted up of the inner ditch. This barrow was a favoured resting place having had at least three inhumations and two cremations in the centre burial pit. The primary burial did not survive other than one piece of skull recovered from the back fill of the secondary inhumation.

The secondary inhumation was laid in a coffin formed by four planks laid in a rectangle, with a lid over the body. Two further planks had been placed in the cut at a higher level along the sides.

The crouched burial was accompanied by several grave goods. Placed beside the head was a copper alloy dagger with bone pommel with the badly decayed remains of a scabbard. Behind the back of the skeleton was a small very fine beaker while by its feet tucked in the corner of the coffin were a collection of implements; a whetstone, a wrist guard, a copper alloy pin and two small flint tools.

The tertiary inhumation was accompanied by a large Beaker pot and a bronze pin while at a higher level two separate cremations had been inserted. These were not accompanied by vessels.

To the west of the barrows a suspected Iron Age pit scatter proved to be natural ice-wedge features providing useful (if negative) evidence with regard to interpreting the distribution of Iron Age features around the settlement from air photographs. A suspected Roman ditch also proved to be natural. A small trench across part of a large 'blob' type cropmark showed it to be yet another of the Roman 'arena' features bringing the total for the site to seven. The purpose of these features and the reason for there being so many remains unclear. It is possible (though not proved) that this example was later recut to form one of the ramped wells also characteristic of the site.

The excavations at Gravelly Guy have now come to an end, having begun in 1981, and writing up will be continuing apace from the autumn onwards. The spectacular barrow group was a fitting climax on which to end the diggings; it was just unfortunate that it was too complicated to finish in the original two weeks resulting in the site director missing the most exciting bit having already arranged a holiday!!

THAME: Moated site at More End Lane - R A Chambers

This moat and three associated fishponds were partly excavated in 1973 (*Oxoniensis*, XL (1975) 238-46). Neither were firmly dated. Current research by the writer and others suggests that the ponds at least, were post-medieval. The moat now lies within a housing estate at the junction of 'Harrison Place', 'Cromwell Avenue' and 'The Moats'. Since 1973 the majority of trees and shrubs on the island have been removed and the ditch partly infilled including the loss of the north-east corner to building Cromwell Avenue.

In August the Unit kept a watching brief over the insertion of surface water drainage in the northern part of the moat and the pond included on the island. The connection trench to the main sewer in Cromwell Avenue showed modern made-up ground down to the natural clay. The drain trenches showed that since 1973 the moat had received some 0.4m. of soil infilling to allow the whole site to be grassed over. The black, waterlogged, woody detritus at the bottom of the moat contained post-war rubbish showing that the moat was last cleared out sometime during the earlier part of this century. This is consistent with the island garden with its pond, summerhouse and shrubs which, in a decayed state, still occupied the site in 1973.

WALLINGFORD: By-pass - George Lambrick

With the help of members of the Wallingford Archaeological Certificate course, a further small assessment excavation has been completed at the late Bronze Age site lying on the centre-line of the preferred route for the proposed Wallingford By-pass where it crosses the Thames.

Previous work by the Unit has shown that the site was probably on a long thin eyot (island) in the river, its eastern side being the present river (possibly eroded away at its northern end), the western side being a buried channel in which timber piles were found last year. The current excavation successfully provided a section across the island and the buried channel, despite the very rapid inflow of water from the river a few yards away. This included a larger area round the timber piles in the bottom of the channel.

A substantial ditch, along the middle of the island, was a surprising discovery, and it may substantially predate the late Bronze Age occupation as two post-holes were cut into its uppermost fill. The post-holes provided evidence that there were structures on the island, but it is not clear what they were. The bank of the island alongside the buried channel had been reverted by a continuous palisade of posts. In the bed of the channel 16 timber piles were located. It is likely that others may exist beyond the edge of the excavation, but their plan at present seems most likely to represent a jetty about 1.8m. wide sticking out into the channel with narrow catwalks coming out at right angles. A great deal of cut and charred timbers, coppice rods and drift wood had accumulated around the piles. These included two pieces with notched joints at their ends. Domestic rubbish, including an almost complete pot and a bronze pin, was concentrated in the edge of the buried channel beside the island. Excellent carbonized and waterlogged biological samples were recovered. A magnetic dating and small sample column was taken through the river silts and alluvium.

Two measured profiles and a systematic (but unproductive) search of part of the present river bed were kindly made by Colin Fox and members of the Oxford branch of the British Sub-aqua Club.

There are less than half a dozen possibly comparable sites known in Britain and only Runymede Bridge (discovered and partly destroyed by the building of the M4) has been excavated to any extent. The Wallingford site is the first proper timber waterfront of any period to be discovered in Oxfordshire. If the by-pass scheme does go ahead in 1991 a major excavation will be essential.

#### WHEATLEY: Castle Hill - R A Chambers

An undated skeleton has been unearthed on Castle Hill, Wheatley. The skeleton, in a good state of preservation, was of a teenager or young adult. A second lower jaw from an older individual was found on the surface nearby which suggested that this was the site of a cemetery. No grave goods accompanied the west-east supine inhumation. These remains lie immediately south of the Roman villa buildings unearthed in the 1840's but considering the hill top location the human remains are most likely to belong to either the Roman or an Anglo-Saxon settlement.

#### WILTSHIRE

##### SWINDON: Wanborough Roman Town - David Miles and Richard Chambers

The Unit has recently completed what is arguably the first piece of Contract Archaeology in Britain. The Unit was invited by the Barton Willmore Planning Partnership of Reading, with the approval of English Heritage to tender for this project which involved an archaeological assessment of part of the northern suburbs of the Roman town of Durocoronium (Scheduled Monument No. 888). The owners of the land wished to know if any of the Scheduled Area had potential for housing development.

The Unit's tender was accepted and a three-week programme of non-destructive excavation took place in August. The results were remarkably unambiguous. Along the western side of Ermin Street a 0.3m. deep layer of black Roman occupation (1-4th century) was found running northwards for 600m. This was 60m. wide and ended on a precise line, probably a rear boundary ditch. Beyond this line there were traces of only a few scattered features cut into Kimmeridge Clay. There was no evidence of stone wall foundations in the occupation area but pads of sarsen stone may indicate the bases of timber structures as suggested by previous excavations.

The Unit's report on the site has now been submitted to the Barton Willmore Planning Partnership and is being used as a basis for discussion with English Heritage.

