



OXFORD ARCHAEOLOGICAL UNIT

46 1/2 by the Bridge Street, Oxford OX1 2EP telephone (0865) 243888

OXFORD ARCHAEOLOGICAL UNIT NEWSLETTER INCLUDING  
OXFORDSHIRE PARISH SURVEY NEWS

Vol. XV, No. 1 - March 1987

**Gloucestershire**

LECHLADE: Butler's Field Post-excavation - Mary Harman

Work on the human bones is progressing and over half the skeletons have now been looked at and details noted. On the whole they are well-preserved and a very promising group to work with; there are enough people to provide some really useful information about the Anglo-Saxon in this area. Ages range from very young, probably newly born babies to elderly people whose age can only be guessed: probably well over fifty. They have lost most of their teeth some time before death and a few have lost so much bone from the jaws through natural recession that their chins would almost have met their noses! For most adults it is possible to decide whether they were male or female from features of the skeleton: looking at them 'blind' without knowing what they were buried with, is a useful cross check - assuming that beads, brooches and bangles are buried with women, swords, spears and shields with men - and if that's the case, so far the bones give the same answer as to the sex of the person. Various features such as extra bones in the joins of the skull and some more unusual anomalies such as irregularities in the first neck vertebra and last two lumbar vertebra may, in combination, provide evidence of family relationships.

On the whole teeth are in much better condition than in Britain today, very few of the children have holes in their teeth and though they may become worn as a result of a tougher and grittier diet most people kept more of their teeth for longer than many do today, though some must have suffered severe pain from abscesses round the roots.

Some people had bad backs; one man in his thirties may have had tuberculosis of the spine; part of the backbone has collapsed and the vertebrae have joined so that he would have been bent over prominently at the waist. There are people with fractured ribs and fractured collar bones, a few with breaks in the lower arm: most of these are probably no more than one might expect in an average community; a man with a cut through his skull just above the left ear; there may have been other associated flesh injuries, at any rate,

he did not survive, but another had an area of bone skimmed off his skull near the top, rather like slicing off the top of an egg; he must have escaped death by a hair's breadth as the cut edges have healed, proving that he did survive. A third man suffered a severe blow on the right side of the face, leading to multiple fractures which have healed, but he must have lost the sight of his right eye.

While these individuals help to sustain interest as the routine work progresses, the really exciting part will be in the final analysis - establishing average heights, age at death for the whole group, incidence of disease and injuries, and the fun part, colouring in cemetery plans to show men, women and various anomalies to see if there are any significant spatial distributions.

#### **Oxfordshire**

**ABINGDON:** New Printing Works - R A Chambers and J Wallis

A watch maintained over the development of this site revealed an extensive modern rubbish dump. Any earlier remains had been dug away previously. Trial trenching in the adjacent railway station coalyard site suggests that this new development is either on or just beyond the periphery of the Romano-British settlement known to lie beneath Abingdon.

**ABINGDON:** Vineyard Redevelopment, Archaeological Assessment - R A Chambers  
J Moore

A programme of trial excavations, consisting of both machine and hand-dug trenches, have been completed in the Vineyard, Abingdon. The results will be used to formulate a future excavation policy to record the complex archaeology of this part of the town in advance of redevelopment.

Trial trenches were excavated in five principle areas. A single trench within the Vineyard car park revealed a series of medieval rubbish-filled pits at the rear of properties fronting onto Sturt Street. This area should be subject to more extensive excavation to examine the buildings that line this street, to date the expansion of the town in this direction and to understand something of the occupations of these former residents. As the buildings fronted on to the main road to Oxford, it is possible that the later medieval buildings lie above earlier urban development. A lack of medieval urban remains in a trench on the site of the GWR railway station was consistent with this site lying within the medieval abbey precinct.

That part of the town's population either employed by the abbey or otherwise within its jurisdiction, was buried in the lay cemetery to the north-west of the abbey church. A trench in the Council nursery revealed intensive inhumation burial interrupted by a thick deposit of medieval building rubble and painted wall plaster presumably dumped during a phase of rebuilding within the abbey. The size of the cemetery remains unknown but if properly excavated would provide a wealth of information on the medieval population of the town.

Extensive trenching on the site of the railway sidings and a further trench behind the Guide Hut confirmed the former course of the Sturt which is still reflected in the topography of the area. Several sherds of 10th and 11th century pottery from beneath the railway sidings suggests nearby late Anglo-Saxon domestic activity. The sherds occurred in horizons either affected by or comprising deliberately dumped soil. The source of this soil is not yet known.

Roman pottery was recovered from every trench excavated but the overall impression was that settlement activity was less intensive beneath and north of the railway sidings than to the south and south-east. However the forthcoming redevelopment will provide an unparalleled opportunity to examine the character of settlement around the edge of a minor, unwallied Roman town. It will be important to establish the relationship of the settlement to surrounding land use. Early - mid Iron Age pottery from beneath the GWR station suggests that sufficient remains may survive to demonstrate the development of the landscape in the centuries preceding the growth of the Roman settlement.

The one area which was not subjected to trial trenching was the cattle market which remains in use. A trench immediately to the north revealed 2 m. of archaeological deposits. The cattle market covers a substantial area of archaeological material from both the medieval abbey and the Roman settlement.

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

The demolition of the farm buildings belonging to Calais Farm situated on the north side of the Bampton-Aston road has provided an important opportunity to further examine the extensive underlying Iron Age and Romano-British settlements already known to be present in the area. It is thought that Bampton marks the site of an extensive, unwallied Roman period settlement or small town. Up to the present, information about the nature and extent of this settlement has been gathered in a piecemeal manner. Although much of the Calais Farm site has been lost to farm building construction and gravel quarrying, trenches along the northern and eastern extremities of the site revealed intensive Roman settlement activity and Early Iron Age settlement debris.

More importantly, the present excavation has recovered early Anglo-Saxon pottery including grass-tempered wares indicating nearby domestic occupation sometime between the 5th and 8th centuries AD. The development of a medieval market town in the 13th century does not imply a continuity of function during the 800 years which intervened between the end of the Roman period and the growth of the medieval town. However the Anglo-Saxon pottery and a previously discovered burial dated from a cloak pin to the later 7th or early 8th century, indicates that settlement continued after the Roman period at least at a rural, self sufficiency level.

Several sherds of later medieval pottery were also recovered from a trench at the northern extremity of the site beside the path leading into Bampton from 'The Beam'. At present little more can be said of this.

**BAMPTON:** The Beam - R A Chambers and J Blair

Several west-east inhumation burials discovered at 'The Beam' in 1985 have now been radio-carbon dated at Harwell to 930 ± 80 yrs; 1060 ± 80 yrs and 1080 ± 70 yrs. These raw, uncorrected carbon dates suggest the burial ground surrounding this former chapel originated in the late Anglo-Saxon period. This suggests that the present cottage may stand, in part, on the site of a pre-Conquest chapel or church and appears to confirm that 'The Beam' was in existence sufficiently early to have provided the later town with its distinctive name.

**CUDDESDON:** Bishop's House - Ian Burrow

Proposals for an extension to the Bishop's House at Cuddesdon prompted a small evaluation led by our Ir-Service student Alan Palmer. In the mid 19th century an important group of artifacts and burials of the early 7th century AD were found in the area suggesting a 'Princely' site of early Wessex. Our excavations, some 100 ft from the 19th century finds, found that the ground was very disturbed by Victorian building and landscaping. No more Anglo-Saxon princes were found.

**DORCHESTER:** Martin's Lane Archaeological Assessment - R A Chambers

An archaeological assessment of a 0.3 ha field east of Belcher's Court, on the north side of Martin's Lane has provided more information on the extent and nature of the Roman town. The assessment was funded by the developers, Beecheroff Developments Ltd.

The site is centred some 200 m. north of the walled area of the Roman town and lies within the fork between the principle Roman road leading out of the town to the north and the minor road leading to one of the major cemeteries serving the late Roman urban population.

A series of linked trial trenches 1.6 m. wide revealed a complex of intercutting features, chiefly boundary ditches and pits which represented development and redevelopment of the area from the late 1st/early 2nd century - 4th century AD.

At least one substantial stone-founded building stood on the site, although the majority of the buildings would probably have been timber framed. Although heavily disturbed by ploughing during the later medieval period, traces of cobbled yard surfaces, lumps of stone and roof tile (tegula) from a substantial building were revealed at the bottom of the accumulated ploughsoil 0.6 m. - 0.8 m. beneath the field surface.

The presumed decline of the market and administrative functions of the town in the 5th century may have led to a decline in the urban population and a contraction of suburban settlement. There was no evidence from the trial trenches to suggest otherwise. However such evidence is generally less obvious than that left behind by Roman settlements and late medieval ploughing may have destroyed any traces of early Anglo-Saxon settlement.

The much decayed upper leg bones from a child burial lay amongst the building rubble in the northern trench. Certainly pre-medieval, such burials appear characteristic of the declining years of suburban occupation around other late Roman towns.

A medieval gravel quarry with 13th - 14th century AD pottery in its backfill lay at the edge of the southern trial trench.

A watch is currently being kept over the development of this site.

**GREAT FARMINGTON:** Sandpit Extension - R A Chambers

An assessment of the archaeological potential within the proposed extension to the existing sand quarry has been undertaken by the Oxford Archaeological Unit at the request of Hills Aggregates Ltd.

Several circular marks recorded on an aerial photograph were investigated as part of an extensive series of both hand and machine dug trial trenches backed up by field walking. The cropmarks proved to have a natural origin. No other archaeological features were found.

**GREAT ROLLRIGHT:** Great Rollright Church - Ian Burrow

A watching brief on drainage works around the south aisle recorded an earlier phase of foundations, perhaps 12th century.

**GREAT HASELEY:** Rycote Parva - R A Chambers

Today Rycote is well known in the county for the 15th century chapel with its exceptional 17th century interior. Little remains of the great house to which the chapel belonged and much of the surrounding park is now farm land. Few people who visit Rycote chapel, some 10 miles east of Oxford and 2.5 miles west-south-west of Thame, realise that to the east of the present buildings lies the deserted site of the medieval village of Rycote Magna. By the 13th century a subsidiary settlement of Rycote Parva had developed. First mentioned in Edward I's tenorial survey of 1279 it was recorded with 13 tenants. By the early 15th century it appears to have been in decline and tax returns were incorporated with Rycote Magna.

The site of Rycote Parva remained unknown until February this year when earthworks were spotted to the north of Rycotelane Farm by neighbouring farmer, Mrs Thomas. Until two years ago part of the village had lain beneath permanent pasture. Recent shallow ploughing has so far done little damage to the earthworks but has brought some pottery (dating evidence) and building stone to the surface. Field walking has shown that the village stops abruptly against the present parish boundary which is marked by a narrow band of woodland called Cottage Brake.

It is hoped to undertake further recording on this site in the autumn. The Unit is grateful to Mr M. Hedges of Rycotelane Farm for allowing access to the site.

HARWELL: Loctons Farm - R A Chambers and Michael Pinkney

The Unit has excavated the floor in the remaining bay of a cruck built structure incorporated into a later barn at the former Locton's Farm, Harwell. Interest in this structure was heightened by a suggestion that it might represent the remains of a late medieval detached kitchen. Excavation revealed that this bay most probably belonged to a domestic structure with the floor level cut down into the Greensand bedrock perhaps some 30 cm. below the outside ground surface. This bay appears never to have possessed a hearth.

HOOK NORTON: St. Peter's Church - R A Chambers

Recently, major repair work to the north transept has revealed that St. Peter's church originated in the late Anglo-Saxon period and is perhaps a century older than the early-mid 12th century Norman architecture previously led people to believe.

The distinctive long and short quoin work recently revealed beneath external Victorian rendering at the junction between the chancel and the north transept survives to a height of some 4 m. and represents the north-east corner of the original nave. Close examination of a narrow gap in the render at the junction of the chancel and south aisle shows corresponding long and short work standing to just over a metre.

The need to lower the ground surface at the junction of the chancel and north transept, to reduce the problem of rising damp, has resulted in a small archaeological excavation. The excavation has shown that the buttress on the east side of the north transept has reused part of the foundations of a small cell or annex in the angle between the north transept and the north wall of the chancel. This foundation of local ironstone rubble was laid after the arch in the north transept east wall had been blocked. Presumably the door through the north wall of the chancel provided access. In 1982 the discovery of painted wall plaster showed this doorway had been blocked before the end of the medieval period and presumably the room beyond demolished.

In 1180, Osney Abbey acquired two acres of land at Hook Norton which 'include of Hokenorton unto his death held in alms'. This suggests that at that time there was a man living in a building or cell annexed to the church, with a door or opening allowing his participation in services and a view of the altar. It is just possible that the rough ironstone foundation represents the remains of this cell. A grave-shaped west-east pit cut into the floor of the cell immediately in front of the chancel door is revetted along one side with a rough ironstone rubble wall similar to the cell foundation. This pit was filled with soil in Victorian times and may be a stone-capped grave damaged and infilled during Victorian renovation work.

The unusually high ground surface along the northern side of the chancel mark a dump of building refuse at least partly from a Victorian refurbishment of the church. The majority of the waste is from the medieval fabric of the church and includes lime mortar and plaster, inlaid floor tile fragments from the 13th or earlier 14th century, limestone roof tile and decorated clay ridge tile. The latter suggests that at least part of the church was formerly roofed with stone peg tiles and a tiled ridge.

As an appendix to this issue of the Newsletter we are reproducing the summary recommendations of the House of Commons Select Committee on the Environment's report on ancient monuments and historic buildings. The DoE is due to make comments on the report in about a month's time. The report raises important issues regarding the protection of our heritage, and we have asterisked some of those most directly relevant to the Unit's work.

THE ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE

XIV

## SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

### Chapter IV

#### The Listing System

1. We recommend that, as in Scotland, there should be a rolling cut-off date whereby all buildings over 30 years old should be eligible for listing. (Para 33)

#### Mechanics of Listing

2. We recommend that English Heritage should always, as a simple courtesy, notify owners when it is intended to inspect a property. (Para 36)

3. We recommend that English Heritage should design a brochure for the owners of listed buildings telling them what listing means and what obligations it puts upon owners, what grants are available to owners, and giving them a description of why their building has been listed. (Para 38)

4. We recommend that there should continue to be no right of appeal against the listing of a building. (Para 43)

5. We recommend that English Heritage should take over responsibility for listing from the Department of the Environment. (Para 44)



#### *Access to Lists*

6. We recommend that the Department should commission a study into how to computerise its lists, and to assess how, once put onto computer, these lists or analyses prepared from them could be made generally available. (Para 49)

7. We recommend that all Government Departments should conduct surveys similar to that undertaken by the Department of Health and Social Security of their stocks of historic buildings and ancient monuments. (Para 50)

#### *Building Preservation Notices and Building Repairs Notices*

8. We recommend the power to serve a Building Preservation Notice should be transferred to English Heritage. (Para 51)

9. We recommend that Building Repairs Notices should, in future, be served by English Heritage, who should be given the necessary powers in default. In addition we recommend that owners should be given a right of appeal to the Courts if they dispute the repairs to be necessary. (Para 53)

10. We feel it consistent that English Heritage be empowered to serve repair notices in respect of all listed buildings, even if they be in public ownership and recommend accordingly. (Para 54)

#### *Listed Building Consent*

11. We think there would be advantage in transferring from the Department of the Environment to English Heritage, the functions of the former with regard to Listed Building Consent appeals, but not call-in powers nor the holding of public inquiries, and we so recommend. (Para 59)

#### *The Scheduling System*

12. We recommend that the resources be provided forthwith for a speeding up of the scheduling enhancement programme, as envisaged by English Heritage. (Para 63)

13. We recommend that the responsibility for scheduling of monuments be transferred from the Department to English Heritage. (Para 64)

14. We recommend that Salisbury Plain should be promptly and intensively resurveyed, and that English Heritage and the Army should co-operate to produce maps of the area and its monuments and to produce signs in a form which makes them useful to the drivers of military vehicles. (Para 67)

#### *Scheduled Monument Consent*

15. We recommend that the Secretary of State's power to determine applications for works on or near scheduled monuments should in future be exercised by English Heritage, with a right of appeal for the applicant to the Secretary of State. (Para 71)

#### *Conservation Areas*

16. We recommend that planning control in conservation areas should be extended to cover the external alteration or change in appearance of the facade of a building. We also recommend that the responsibility be placed upon the contractor as well as the property owner to ensure that the client has necessary consents before work is carried out or be liable for making good any restoration which becomes necessary. (Para 74)

17. We recommend that the Secretary of State considers ways of providing better protection of group values in rural areas. (Para 75)

#### *Parallel Systems: Listing and Scheduling*

18. We recommend that the listing and scheduling systems should remain separate. (Para 78)

#### *Are Listing and Scheduling going ahead too far and too fast?*

19. We recommend that a study of how English Heritage should finance the projected increase in the numbers of scheduled monuments be put in hand forthwith. (Para 81)

#### *CHAPTER V*

##### *The Budget of English Heritage*

20. We recommend that English Heritage should be much more flexible in its approach to the use of modern materials in repairs and in the value of what needs to be retained. (Para 90)

21. We recommend that the "outstanding" criterion for receiving grant should be dropped or severely qualified and that all Grade I buildings should automatically be regarded as eligible for grant from English Heritage. (Para 94)

22. We recommend that the resources available to English Heritage should be increased by more than enough to keep them constant in real terms. English Heritage, for its part, should have greater regard to increasing revenue generated by visits to historic buildings and ancient monuments, and be more flexible in the conditions it imposes on restoration work. (Para 95)

##### *Public Access*

23. We recommend that English Heritage should publish, annually, a booklet describing buildings which, because their owners have received grant towards their maintenance, are thereby statutorily open to public inspection and detailing when and how. (Para 97)

##### *Local Authorities*

24. We believe, that the general cost of providing grants to maintain historic buildings in a conservation area should be borne by local authorities, not English Heritage, with the exception of Grade I buildings, and we so recommend. However, such a responsibility would be dependent upon adequate resources being made available to local authorities to enable them to carry it out. (Para 99)

##### *English Tourist Board*

25. We recommend that the English Tourist Board should be encouraged, and financed, to make more liberal use of their existing powers for the conservation of our historic buildings and ancient monuments. (Para 100)

##### *National Heritage Memorial Fund*

26. We recommend that the Government prepare a full report of the history of the National Land Fund and publish it as part of their reply to our present Report. (Para 104)

27. We recommend that in future cathedrals should be eligible for assistance from the NHMF in cases of exceptional need. (Para 105)

##### *Taxation—General*

28. We recommend that money spent upon the maintenance of a listed building should be treated as a tax allowance against all income of the owner. (Para 108)

##### *Value Added Tax*

29. We recommend that owners of listed buildings should be able to recoup 15 per cent of all repairs and maintenance bills, either through the tax system under our recommendation in para 108 or where there is no income sufficient to sustain the tax allowance, by means of grants from the Exchequer. We recommend that appropriate provision should be made as soon as economic conditions allow. (Para 116)

#### *CHAPTER VI*

##### *Cathedrals*

30. We believe that the major importance of cathedral buildings, and the need to ensure their conservation, justifies their eligibility for grant from public funds from now on, and we so recommend. (Para 134)

31. We recommend that:

- (a) all cathedrals should introduce a recommended, but not compulsory admission charge of at least £1 per head with children, students, and old age pensioners at half price, with regular reviews;
- (b) all the revenue so produced should be used to finance programmes of regular repair and maintenance, before any call could be made upon public funds;
- (c) the revenue surplus to the requirements of the cathedral which raised it should be paid into a common fund from which the cathedrals incurring deficits may draw.

However, we stress that we see no reason why, despite our recommendations, cathedrals should not be able to continue to provide free access for worshippers. (Para 134)

#### CHAPTER VII

##### *Amenity Societies: Statutory Work*

32. We recommend that the amenity societies should either receive grants commensurate with the assistance they are required to give Government or alternatively be paid an appropriate fee for each planning application referred to them, in order to enable them to employ the necessary full-time staff to do this work. (Para 136)

##### *Areas of Archaeological Importance (AAIs)*

33. We recommend that the Secretary of State should initiate consultations with local authorities with a view to establishing further AAIs. (Para 139)

34. We recommend that consideration should be given to extending the statutory cover for burial grounds to all developments, especially those in conservation areas. (Para 141)

35. We recommend that Government Departments should, as a matter of course, fund archaeological work when making developments in areas of archaeological interest and in conservation areas. (Para 142)

36. We recommend that English Heritage should be given funds to enable it to grant-aid archaeology. (Para 144)

##### *Deficit Properties*

37. We recommend that Government should make more funds available to the National Trust for the maintenance of deficit properties. (Para 145)

##### *Gardens*

38. We recommend that the Department of the Environment should allocate English Heritage additional funds to enable it to grant aid historic gardens. (Para 149)

##### *Regionalisation of English Heritage?*

39. We recommend that English Heritage should continue to give its inspectors responsibility for particular areas, and should continue to operate from London. (Para 151)

##### *Non-Occupied Royal Palaces*

40. We recommend that English Heritage should assume full responsibility for the maintenance and general care of the non-occupied royal palaces. (Para 152)

##### *Acid Rain*

41. We recommend that English Heritage and the Cathedrals Advisory Commission conduct a survey of historic buildings to ascertain the extent of and cost of making good acid rain damage and advise the Department of the Environment accordingly. (Para 154)

##### *A National Heritage Commission?*

42. We recommend that the Secretary of State consider the possibility of merging the Royal Commission on Historical Monuments and English Heritage into a single body. (Para 156)

In c.1128 the church was given to the newly founded Augustinian Abbey at Osney (near Oxford). Many of the surviving Norman features discovered in the chancel in 1982 may have been inserted at this time for the convenience of visiting canons from the abbey. The abbey was also almost certainly responsible for the floor tiles which were manufactured in the east of the county or in Buckinghamshire, and which contrast with the products of Gloucestershire Cotswolds tileries which would normally be expected in this area. Work continues.

OXFORD: St. Aldates  
New Routes to the Oxfenford - Brian Durham

Recent proposals for the waterside area of Oxford promise a new flavour for what was once a mercantile and communications hub of central England. A thousand years ago Oxford was a fortress town, trading down river with London, and at the same time it was the focus of travellers crossing the Thames between the Midlands and southern England. A London developer is about to build on the Saxon river channel just below the original Oxfen Ford, and two other developments proposed for nearby sites look as if they will show parts of the earliest crossing and the Saxon trading wharves.

The Unit is watching these proposals as part of its continuing study of the Thames crossing down the ages. We are just completing the excavation of part of the Saxon river, which has been dry land for at least 600 years. The Oxfen Ford itself lies underneath the front of the Crown Courts and will probably not be seen again in our lifetime. But when the ford was replaced by a Norman stone bridge (Grandpont), this arm of the river began to choke up, and it is the silling of this Saxon channel which is being studied now.

We are seeing signs that the area was split into separate plots, perhaps the backyards of houses on the bridge. The new tenements drove great stakes into the river bed, and dug pits which were ultimately infilled with rubbish, leather shoes, lots of plum stones and pottery of the 12th and 13th centuries.

This quickie excavation is almost complete, but the same developer is negotiating for an area on the opposite side of the street at 57 St. Aldates. This site promises to take the story back three centuries, to when Offa was consolidating the boundaries of his Midland kingdom, and building the first major crossing which established Oxford as a frontier town. Rosehaugh PLC has indicated that a proper study of this area can be programmed into their development later this year.

Finally there is the police station. The new buildings proposed by the County Council are likely to be directly on top of the timber wharves from which we supplied Saxon London with 90% of its pottery.

If the Oxfenford is now buried, there are many alternative ways of learning what it meant for the town named after it.

## OXFORD: Magdalen College

The Medieval Hospital of St. John at Oxford - Brian Durham

As one of the principal towns of central England, medieval Oxford would have needed somewhere to care for its sick. There was a leper hospital well outside the town at Cowley, but this was effectively an isolation hospital which would be unsuitable for people suffering from short term illnesses and injuries. Most sickness would have been cared for at home of course, with the support of the parish, and there were small hospitals in three of the parishes, St. Clements, St. Giles and St. Peters. But in the 13th century the town was beginning to attract students to its university, and there were probably many poor people and travellers who would need charitable help. The principal and most long-lived institution providing these services was the hospital of St. John the Baptist, near Magdalen Bridge.

A hospital of St. John existed outside the Pastgate in 1180, probably mainly a hospice for travellers to stay. In 1231 it was refounded on a nearby site belonging to the king, where Magdalen College now stands. Despite the dedication it had no direct connection with the Order of St. John, the Knights Hospitallers, who were a military order caring for pilgrims and crusaders throughout Europe. With St. Mary Magdalen and St. Lazarus, St. John was a common dedication for the sort of charitable hospital being founded all over England at this time. As institutions they may indeed have been inspired by people returning from pilgrimages with stories of the Islamic tradition of hospitals in the Holy Land.

The Oxford hospital was to be under the control of a warden or master, with enough brothers and sisters to wait on the sick, all under monastic vows. The brothers were to wear a black woollen robe with a white overgarment, and a cross either on the shoulder or the chest. This sort of information is available from the foundation charters, but virtually nothing is known about the buildings in which the sick, the poor scholars and other miserable persons were to be housed. Most of our knowledge comes from keen observations in the last century.

John Buckler, architect and architectural historian of Oxford, made detailed records of building works when the college was undergoing repairs. He recognised the chapel and undercroft of the hospital within the High Street range, he found a sanitation system in the north range which he believed to belong to the hospital, and he noted lancet windows in the kitchen which must also predate the college. These buildings were spread over an area of more than two acres. The chapel is now indistinguishable, and its undercroft or 'charnel' exists only as an air space with medieval wall shafts beneath college rooms. Of the sanitation system, more below. The kitchen still survives, but its 500 year service to the college is coming to an end thanks to the Public Health Inspector. The new kitchen is to be just south of the old one, and it seemed a good chance to see whether modern excavation techniques could add substance to Buckler's ideas.

The college has co-operated enthusiastically with the dig. They pulled down the old bath house to clear the site several months early, and have provided half the funds for the archaeology. They have been rewarded with large expanses of high quality ashlar masonry of a 13th century building of exceptional quality. It appears that the college kitchen was originally part of an aisled infirmary hall with its outer wall built along the bank of the

Cherwell. A column base of the east arcade lies 11 feet back from the wall, and between them is a 22 inch wide culvert along the inside of the wall. Only one pier base is visible at present, but opposite there is evidence of a small relieving arch over the culvert, which perhaps took the weight of a corresponding wall shaft. Four similar arches along the culvert suggest that the infirmary was split up into bays 11 feet wide, each forming a cubicle for a bed. Most interestingly, there is stone stair down into the culvert in the fifth bay.

The culvert and the access stairs were certainly not provided as latrines like those found by Buckler alongside the north range. The Cherwell ran just outside the wall here, and would have been much more suitable for taking waste away. It seems much more likely that the internal culvert was provided for washing, and this presupposes that the water was clean and kept separate from the effluent from the north range. The hospital in 1246 had an aqueduct from Crowell, at the corner of Longwall and Holywell Streets 400m. north-west of the hospital, and there must have been a complex distribution network in order that clean water could reach this opposite corner of their buildings. If the system was so elaborate, it is perhaps small wonder that the culvert had been abandoned by the early 14th century.

Was this high quality accommodation provided for the poor and miserable of Oxford? Possibly, but there was another class of inmates. Having founded the hospital as a charitable institution, the king kept his own representative there as almoner, and during the early years there seems to have been some conflict as to whether he was the warden, or whether it was the priest elected to be head of the brothers. At any rate, the king used the connection to install his servants in the hospital when they were too old to work, or when they had been injured in his service.

Students of medieval medicine agree that there was very little curative work in a hospital such as this. It seems likely that the sick were nursed and fed, but that if they could walk at all they were expected to attend chapel services in what was effectively an offshoot of the monastic system. This was certainly the case at the leper hospital in Cowley, when the eight recorded leper patients were expected to have taken monastic vows. The medicine was therefore aimed at the soul rather than the body, and the stairs down into the cold and draughty culvert at St. Johns may have been designed more for purging the soul than the body. We have not yet found another example of this sort of internal water supply in the descriptions of any other English hospital.

Magdalen college's architect has offered the opinion that if he had designed this medieval building he would have been sacked! It is a clear example of squandering high quality workmanship in the substructure of a building, and it poses the question of how the upper parts were treated. The outer walls must have been stone, as we have shown surviving on our imaginative 16th century view from Angel Meadow. We are however advised that the pier base is rather too small to take a stone column, and it may be that the arcading was done in timber made to look like stone, in the contemporary fashion. This does not explain the elaborate relieving arches over the culvert however, and it may be that there were indeed decorative stone shafts on the wall.

The high quality of the architecture suggests royal patronage at the outset, but the hospital would have needed a steady income to maintain itself. In



the 14th century it was receiving rent from 148 tenements in Oxford, one of the largest landowners in the town. In addition to this sort of revenue, it had a right to any goods forfeited in the market of Oxford. This had the bizarre result that from time to time the hospital was the lucky recipient of bad food, including bad fish and meat. Readers will be relieved to know that it was not necessarily fed to the patients however! - bad fish and meat would be ideal food for the hospital fish ponds.

The recent work has added enormously to our understanding of how medieval Oxford cared for its sick and infirm. What happened to them after the hospital was suppressed in favour of Magdalen College in 1456 we cannot tell. We are nevertheless enormously grateful for the co-operation of the college in revealing a corner of its own heritage, and hope that there will be further opportunities to fill out the picture in time to come.

**RADLEY: 82-4 Lower Radley - R A Chambers**

With the restoration of the pair of c. 17th century cottages nearing completion the foundation trenches for a single garage and attached living unit to the rear of the cottages have been excavated. This involved cutting back the edge of the presumed prehistoric burial mound known locally as Radley Barrow.

The great size and shape of this mound suggests that it may be one of a series of late Pleistocene sand dunes known in the area. None of the groundwork involved with the extension of nos. 82-4 or that for the present unit have provided any archaeological features other than late post-medieval rubbish deposits. However, if Radley Barrow is a natural sand dune, and there is no conclusive evidence either way, it is likely that this mound has attracted late burials in the same manner as many prehistoric earthworks elsewhere in the area have done.

**SIDDINGTON - David Miles and Simon Palmer**

In the week before Christmas work funded by IBMCS was completed on the site adjacent to Siddington Church and the scheduled medieval tithe barn.

A walled trackway was traced running eastwards from the Siddington - Cirencester road and under the present churchyard. It had been constructed along a medieval headland. These walls ran parallel to the tithe barn. Beyond the wall to the north were two fragments of medieval buildings. South, in a yard area adjacent to the tithe barn, the ground was peppered with 19th century rubbish some containing debris (tiles, stonework and fragments of human bone) from the refurbishment of the church.

No Romano-British features were located but 19 roman coins of the late 3rd - 4th centuries were found.

**STANDLAKE: Eagle Farm - J Moore**

During January the MSC team completed the excavation of the area stripped of topsoil in the previous year. More of the same (Newsletter Vol. XIV, No. 1)

was recovered.

We await the removal of topsoil and deep alluvial deposits in the south end of the field before a decision is made about further work on this site.

**STEPHLE BARTON - R A Chambers**

Several medieval coffin lids/grave slabs bearing crosses have been located in the churchyard at Steeple Barton by members of the local history group. The slabs are presumed to be the same as those mentioned in the last century and whose location was subsequently lost again. Those slabs which have remained beneath the grass have survived well but one, dumped at the side of the churchyard has weathered badly. Probably dating from the 13th or 14th century. Very few grave slabs have survived in this region which makes the present 'rediscovery' all the more important.

**WITNEY: Cogges Orchard - Ian Burrow**

The Unit's training excavation last July was carried out at Cogges, near Witney. Cogges is a remarkable medieval complex of church, priory, manor house, moat and medieval village. Our work was aimed at the latter, and was directed towards three locations in the orchard where new trees were to be planted. No positive evidence for the DMV was found, but we confirmed the existence of prehistoric and considerable late Saxon occupation in the area.

**Director's Note**

This Newsletter comes at the end of two years: the Unit's financial year and my own first year with the Unit. The main thing that has struck me about the Oxford Archaeological Unit is the amazing amount of work it carries out. Since last April we have been involved in over 50 projects. Throughout most of the year we have maintained a staff of over 20 archaeologists as well as our 30-strong Manpower Services Commission team. Our budget for the year is over £ 360,000.

Times are changing fast in archaeology. This year we have found ourselves operating in Gloucestershire, Wiltshire, Berkshire and Somerset, as well as in our heartland of Oxfordshire. More and more we are finding it necessary to seek funding from private developers as English Heritage budgets become too stretched to help us. The problem of course is that we do not yet have the legislation making rescue archaeology essential, and so we face a future which is both uncertain and challenging.

**New Publications**

Look out for two popular publications which will be appearing soon:

Oxford: The Buried City - a totally revised, revamped and updated version of Tom Hassall's 'Oxford: The City Beneath your Feet' of 1972.



Time Flows: the Archaeology of the Upper Thames - an account of all the discoveries on the Thames Gravels, by David Miles, who has probably seen more gravel than anyone!

We think these will be a great success and will be the first of a whole series of popular productions. They will cost ab out  $\pounds$  2.50 each and will be available from us and from all discerning booksellers.



St Johns Hospital Infirmary circa 1500?