



OXFORD ARCHAEOLOGICAL UNIT NEWSLETTER INCLUDING  
OXFORDSHIRE PARISH SURVEY NEWS

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Berkshire

READING: Business Park - John Moore and Gerry Wait

Work was well in hand on the second stage of excavation when a rise of 2' in water-table prevented any further progress on the main area. More circular huts, four-post structures and rubbish pits of the later Bronze Age period had been revealed on the periphery of the settlement alongside an old water channel. Not enough of the area had been cleared to be able to say anything about the layout of the settlement. A crouched burial was located on the north side of the settlement area. Finds are few, especially in comparison to the settlement site already completed in 'Long Ground' to the south-east.

Two areas 200m and 300m to the north of the old water course have been sampled. Parts of the Bronze Age field system were revealed in the form of pit alignments and interrupted ditches. Work will recommence in spring.

Gloucestershire

FAIRFORD: Thornhill Farm - David Miles and Simon Palmer

Excavations ran from June to October with a small MSC and volunteer workforce. Further stripping revealed more of this diffuse 'native' settlement (dated c. 0-100 AD) which lies c. 1km west of Claydon Pike.

The main trench (c. 120m x 120m) is characterised by a sequence of oval enclosures (10-20m across) interspersed with waterholes or wells. Environmental evidence (analysis by Mark Robinson) indicate that the enclosures were stock corrals - periods of intense use

followed by periods of neglect. The enclosures continually shift onto 'clean ground' giving the impression of an extensive settlement. Domestic activity is occurring round the enclosures but no structures have been defined.

A new trench (60m x 60m sq.) was opened up to the west where a slight gravel island covered by darker soil indicated more intense occupation. Work has not yet started here but a series of gullies and pits filled with occupation debris may indicate the centre of the native settlement.

A series of boundary ditches to the west define the 'island'. These continue south-east and delimit the stock enclosures. The organisation of the settlement is thus slowly emerging.

A rapid series of spot dates on the pottery by Sarah Green suggests activity continued into the early 2nd century before the Roman road transected the site.

#### Oxfordshire

ASTON TIRROLD: Fairmile - John Hedges

The Unit has recently been involved in an unusual, and possibly hitherto unique, use of its archaeological skills. The County is at present in legal contention with a farmer over the width of an old drove road, since it considers it to be a right of way which has been encroached upon. The Unit was asked to investigate the matter archaeologically and John Hedges and a team spent two weeks digging the site, just as they might have a barrow, cemetery, or whatever. A report was quickly filed and both it and its author are due to appear at the High Court in London after Christmas. The outcome will be of some interest.

FENCOTT with MURCOTT: Roman Road - R A Chambers

Since their 1st edition 25" map was published in the late 19th century, the Ordnance Survey has shown the Dorchester-on-Thames to Alchester Roman road deviating to the west of Fencott from an otherwise straight line, to pass through a point where Roman pottery had previously been found. However the position of a late 1st century timber bridge (Oxoniensia LI (1986) pp. 31-6) recently discovered crossing the river Ray suggests that the road does not deviate to the west but continues in a straight line. During the installation of a sewerage scheme this autumn, the topsoil was stripped in advance of pipelaying on the southern side of the Fencott to Charlton-on-Otmoor road across both proposed Roman road positions. There was no trace either of metalling or of side ditches in either position although the side ditches may not have been visible in this particular clay subsoil. It was not possible to observe the pipe trench. No Roman period pottery was found.

FRILFÜRD: Noah's Ark Inn - Gerry Wait

The UAU conducted a small assessment on the site of the well-known Romano-Celtic temple complex in advance of a proposed extension of the Noah's Ark Inn. Both the square and circular temples, whose exact positions were ambiguous (within an error of 10-15m) were located, and a series of trenches assessed the area of proposed development and an access route.

To the north of the temples archaeological layers have been disturbed by quarrying in relatively recent times, though a few features such as pits and ditches survive cut into the natural onlite and sand. Another trench failed to locate a large enclosure ditch visible on air photographs, indicating that the ditch must terminate before entering the area proposed for development.

GOODSTOW: Nunnery Field - David Wilson (PRN 167B)

Medieval occupation material has been found in spoil from a cable trench in meadowland just outside and parallel to the boundary fence of Godstow Lock, 130m from Godstow nunnery wall. The finds came from the entire 25m length of the trench, which was only 25cm wide and 60cm deep. There was a thin rubble layer 15cm below the modern turf line, probably scatter from the digging of the lock-cut in the 18th century. Medieval material came from the loamy soil beneath. Stratification could not be investigated. Spoil finds comprised two tile fragments, 9 oyster shells, 16 cattle/pig bone fragments and 36 sherds, mostly very abraded. These have been classified by Maureen Mellor as late 12th to mid-13th century, mainly Brill jugs.

During garden work, medieval sherds and bone fragments have also been recovered from a 1m half section through the eastern ditch of the rectangular earthworks which run under the north-west corner of the lock house garden.

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

The foundation of the south aisle has been exposed in a new drainage trench west of the south door. No archaeological material was revealed.

OXFORD: Worcester College (Hythe Bridge Street) - Brian Durham

#### A Christmas Tale.

Mark Robinson has looked at a sample of peat from the channel reported in our last issue, and says that it is so decayed that nothing is recognisable. The result is that we cannot yet be sure whether it was Norman or prehistoric. However, the archaeology of the area is moving forward as a result of a hand excavation into the upper fill of this channel by members of the OUAS.

The project was organised by Andrew Millard, who had, at great expense, been able to enlist the services of a guest celebrity Supervisor. The identity of the Supervisor was a well kept secret, indeed to those volunteers whose morning labours ended at 12 noon, his identity may still be unknown. But those who were able to stand the strain into the heat of the afternoon sun will know him as, wait for it, Roger . . . Ainslie!

If the Supervisor was a well-kept secret, it was nothing to the archaeology. A passing digger driver had been hailed to 'take the top off', and this slice looked as if it had contained the best of the stratigraphy. Sandwiched between two layers of garden soil had been a layer of . . . gravel! and associated with this was an exceptionally comminuted assemblage of blue-transfer ware, from the period known to the experts as mid-Victorian. Not dismayed by this devastatingly destructive over-machining of the site, the Director was heard to protest that the lower garden soil was 'very interesting'. It had pottery sherds within it which were all lying 'horizontal', proving something incredibly significant which the rest of the team tried hard to understand, but eventually admitted defeat.

Down and down they went, feverishly collecting horizontal sherds, until at last, stones! Stones almost in a circular shape . . . could it be the remains of Plato's Well, so clearly marked on the local maps? Er, no. Never mind, they were significant, forming almost the shape of a tatty wall. And by now the pottery was late 13th- early 14th century. Could it be that we had found one of the tenements referred to in the St. Thomas's Hundred Roll of 1279? The team held its breath, which was just as well, because a fortnight of heavy rain began to submerge the discoveries as soon as they had appeared.

The team began methodical preparations for a final weekend, with the words of the Director ringing in their ears, 'it's bottom or bust lads!' Christine Peters, the President of the OUGs, blushed a little as she continued to practice her shovelling technique from the bottom of the 5' deep trench, under the expert tutelage of the Director, the Excavation Secretary and the guest celebrity Supervisor. Could it be that we had now dug out all the floors of the building, with the fire-reddened hearth, and we were now recovering early 13th century pottery from its platform?

Down and down into the mire went Christine (she is President, after all) with only the slurping of the pump to keep the rest of us awake. Then it happened, the guest celebrity Supervisor was seen to be descending the ladder, trowel in hand, and he pronounced the discovery of 'clay'. Bottom it was, and the team all thought their innermost thoughts on what had been an enthralling and unforgettable moment. They settled down for a late sandwich, while the Director, bloated from his meat and two veg., started the work of backfilling the hole.

Yes it had been worth it. We knew that the peat was somewhere between the Ice Age and the 13th century, we had found a wall which

might belong to a building which might have floors too, and we had discovered where Plato's Well wasn't. We only await the report of the guest celebrity Supervisor, which he promises will be the quickest (and shortest?) ever. Happy Christmas.

STAMFORD-IN-THE-VALE: Bowling Green Farm - Gill Hey

Excavation has commenced at Bowling Green Farm in advance of quarrying by Hills Aggregates Ltd. The site is situated on a ridge of Corallian sand. An area 170m x 80m has been stripped of topsoil with trenches 2m wide radiating from it across the field. The remains are Iron Age and Romano-British in date.

The Iron Age occupation is concentrated on, and to the south, of the brow of the hill in Hill field, probably extending into the next field to the east. There is a hut circle, 11m in diameter, with an internal arrangement of post holes not yet fully examined. To the south lies a scatter of pits and post holes. In the top of one of the pits was the crouched inhumation of an adult. Another adult skeleton and a baby burial are now being excavated.

The majority of the remains currently under excavation form the western edge of an extensive Romano-British settlement which stretches at least 400m along the ridge and maybe associated with a villa some 800m to the east. The remains are mostly situated on the brow and the north slope of the hill which runs down to the Frogmore Brook.

So far two rectangular buildings with stone footings have been cleaned, one with internal posts and associated ovens externally, and the other with remains of a clay floor and hearth at the south end. Other structures are more elusive and are almost certainly post built but have extensive areas of cobbling either internally or externally probably as hard standing. A considerable amount of cleaning is necessary to fully elucidate the plans of these buildings.

A large area of cobbling has been exposed south of a boundary wall. The cobbling could be associated with a well. Several successive surfaces are present, some with wheel ruts. Two drying kilns are also being excavated and there is a scatter of ovens and hearths over the whole site. Two Romano-British cremations have been found. To the north a 4th century roadway through the settlement is marked by a substantial accumulation of dark soil rich in discarded domestic rubbish. Excavation continues and emphasis is being placed now on recovering environmental data.

STEEPLE BARTON - R A Chambers

A complex of stone foundations centred some 100 yds south of the parish church has been revealed during the recent reinstatement of a field briefly used as a temporary pond. The foundations are currently being cleared and planned by members of the local history

control. Little work has been done in this field.

The Inca fort of Huilica Raccay was continuously occupied from about 600 BC by a small community of farmers. This season we were able to isolate an occupation horizon of Early Intermediate period date (c. 200 BC) for the first time. A small oval building with a well-preserved floor surface sat on its own terrace, associated with external surfaces, a stone compound and many pits and post holes. This was buried by later terraces and a house platform related to at least 3 buildings of pre-Inca date. Work will continue here as the Early Intermediate period building sealed earlier contexts which appear rich and complex.

On the tableland behind the fort work continued at the south-east end of a large stone built enclosure with houses leading from it. This is believed to be Middle Horizon in date (c. 500 AD). A series of terraces and activity related to stone clearance from the fields was investigated.

The Inca town of Pataallacta was found to be built on earlier terracing created over an old river terrace. There are signs that there was occupation on the river terrace from c. 500 BC - c. 1,000 AD.

As can be appreciated a project of this nature poses considerable logistical problems in the setting-up of a base camp and the feeding of at least 50 hungry mouths. Whilst Gill Hey and Leigh Turner struggled with the stratigraphy on the fort, Debi Duncan played a crucial role in combating these administrative difficulties.

#### Director's Note

#### Hello and Goodbye

Our new Administrative Secretary, Samantha Hatzis, joined us at the beginning of November, after a difficult interregnum following Sally Quiney's departure in July and the resignation of Mrs Minal after only three weeks. Jackie Wilson, our typist, held the fort admirably in the interim, but we are glad to welcome Sam among us. She is already showing an ability to bully people to produce material for the Newsletter.

Wendy Page, our Chief Illustrator, is leaving at Christmas after 14 years with the Unit. Wendy has made a great contribution to the Unit over the years and will be greatly missed. It is unlikely that anyone will in future be able to match her ability to consume such enormous amounts of food and yet stay so slim, but we are not making this a qualification for the replacement. All the best, Wendy.

group. A series of buildings are represented with the surrounding soil yielding both medieval and post-medieval pottery. A little barn is thought to have occupied part of the site. Other remains may represent part of the deserted medieval settlement.

#### THOMLEY: Deserted Medieval Village - R A Chambers

At the request of the farmer, Mr Peter Rousell, a further visit has been made to this settlement site. In a 6 ha field under cultivation since the late 1960's and thought to contain the core of the medieval settlement, fresh ploughing has revealed stone and cob spreads. In places these spreads mark the outlines of buildings and intervening roads exceptionally clearly. On a subsequent visit, Dr John Blair recognised an area in the centre of the settlement which was clear of buildings suggesting a village green. A bronze strip from a 16th century purse bearing the inscription LANS TIBI SOLI was found in an adjacent field.

#### Somerset

#### CHEDDER: King's of Wessex School - Gerry Wait

The OAU returned to Somerset for a brief assessment of the area to the west of the well-known Anglo-Saxon royal palace, in advance of proposed extensions to the King's of Wessex School, which now covers part of the site. Seven trial trenches were excavated by hand, locating one of the major western boundary ditches of the palace complex, and a scatter of postholes further west.

Features survived only where cut into the natural gravels, with a considerable depth of disturbed soil overlying the gravel. Although few artefacts were recovered, all the features probably belong to the palace complex. The postholes and pits west of the boundary ditch may represent the previously unlocated domestic buildings which must have accompanied the more formal palace buildings.

#### DEPARTMENT OF CUSCO, PERU

#### CUSICHACA VALLEY, June - September 1987 - Gill Hey, Leigh Turner and Debi Duncan

The Oxford Archaeological Unit was strongly represented on the 8th campaign of the Cusichaca Project in a remote Andean valley. Gill Hey, Leigh Turner and Debi Duncan were vital members of the team and a prolonged and much appreciated visit was paid by Mr Tim Allen.

The lower valley was very much altered by the Incas when they took control in the 1450's. They built a fort and a large town with impressive agricultural terraces and a sophisticated irrigation system. Work in recent seasons, however, has concentrated on trying to understand the nature of the pre-Inca occupation of the valley spurred by the discovery that many of the canals pre-dated Inca

### Planning and Archaeology

A more effective approach to the more systematic protection and recording of sites affected by mineral extraction has come a step closer. In close co-operation with the County Museum, we have been urging the Oxfordshire County Council for some time to adopt policies for mineral extraction which will deal much more firmly with the threat that this poses to archaeological landscapes. The County has now produced draft policies which, if they survive the criticism they will probably receive from the industry and the DoE, will a) exclude important sites from extraction, b) require developers to present an archaeological evaluation report on areas they propose to operate, c) ensure that rescue excavation is properly funded by the developer in advance of extraction. This will bring Oxfordshire into line with Berkshire as one of the most forward-looking planning authorities in the country as far as mineral extraction is concerned.

### **WANTED: A Volunteer**

Do any of our readers fancy spending a few days a month helping with our financial work? We need someone who likes money, isn't afraid of computers, who has a clear head, and who could spare some time to help us. Please let Ian Burrow know if this is you.

