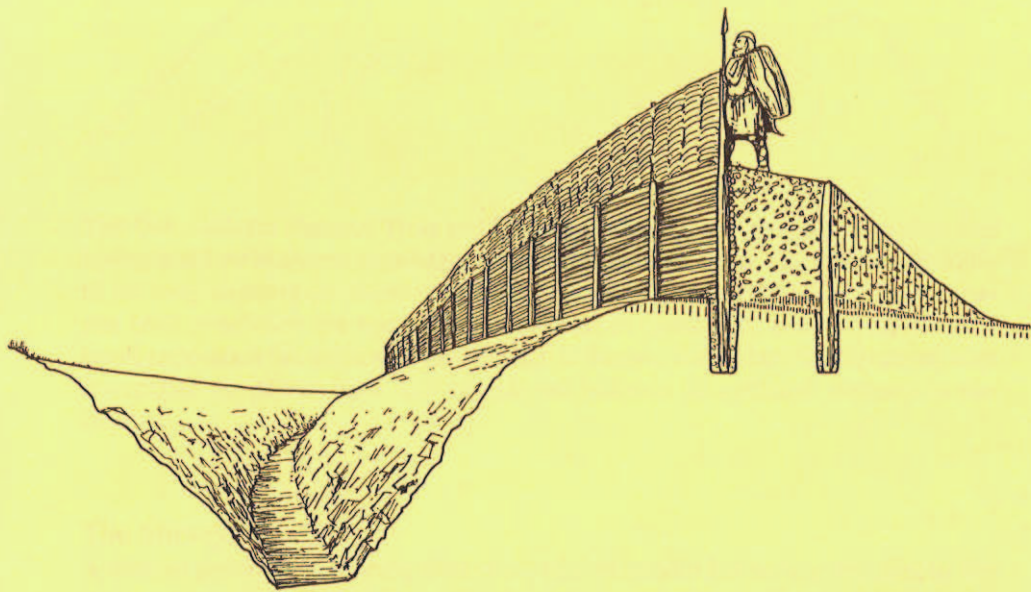




ARCHAEOLOGICAL NEWS



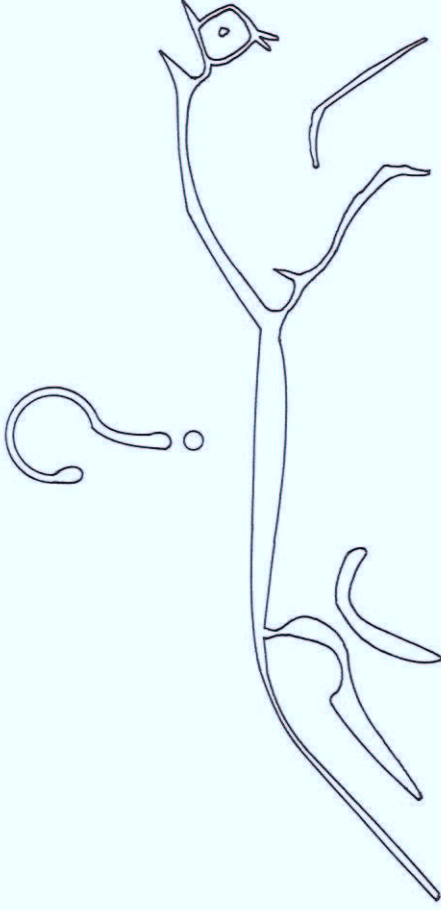
the quarterly newsletter of the Oxford Archaeological Unit
vol. xvii no. 2 june 1989



SPOTLIGHT

Whitehorse Hill Project

Whitehorse Hill is one of the region's most spectacular areas combining natural land forms and archaeological monuments. The combination of the hillfort of Uffington Castle, the eponymous chalk figure of the White Horse, with the narrow and deeply cut coombe (the Manger) and the flat-topped Dragon's Hill below attract many thousands of visitors each year.



The Unit, with the National Trust and English Heritage, has begun a joint project this spring to aid the management and presentation of the area, but not least to answer some of the long-standing questions of this little researched landscape. Work this year has just been completed: the fort and its immediate environs have been surveyed and a small excavation has sectioned the Iron Age defences. Next year the programme is to investigate the Horse itself and sample the hillwash or colluvial deposits in the Manger.

The Survey

A detailed geophysical investigation of the hillfort interior has been undertaken by the Ancient Monuments Laboratory. Initial results seem promising but the full picture is awaiting computer enhancement. Pits (?storage) are already showing and it is hoped

that houses and roads will be clearly outlined.

Students from the Archaeological In Service-Scheme, supervised by R A Chambers, have surveyed the fort interior, plotting the ridge and furrow. An area between the fort and the White Horse was also surveyed using an EDM (Electronic Distance Measure) to provide a detailed contour survey. This area contains several known burial mounds; one opened in the nineteenth century produced a collection of Roman burials. A more pronounced mound may be a later pillow mound, probably used as a rabbit warren.

The Excavation

The fort has not been archaeologically investigated since the 1850's when Martin Edward Atkins carried out what must have been one of the first hillfort excavations in the country. A breach through the rampart on the north east side of the fort was in need of consolidation. This provided the opportunity for an archaeological section. The plan was to date the breach, investigate the form of the Iron Age defences, date their construction and sample any buried soils.

Archaeologically, only a period of use could be shown for the breach (18th century onwards) although it was clear that it postdated the Iron Age. Documentary sources indicate that it was associated with a parish boundary up to the late eighteenth century.

The rampart itself showed at least three separate phases, although the exact nature of the earliest phases was equivocal. Two parallel fence lines 1.70m apart lay at the front with the earliest chalk rubble dump behind the rear line. This rear line was the more substantial with posts every 0.60m with alternating large and small posts. The first line was less regular with posts every 1.20-1.50m apart. Behind the primary chalk dump lay a 'gravel' path. It is unclear whether the filling between the two fence lines was later than the chalk dump behind simply because of the order of dumped material, or whether it represented two separate construction phases. The former interpretation would give a small 'box-style' rampart with contemporary rear bank (Cumliffe's Hollingbury style), while the latter could be seen as two successive palisade lines revetting the main rampart (Cumliffe's Poundbury style).

The original Iron Age ground surface could be clearly seen as a chalk-free horizon beneath the rampart, which indicated a grassland landscape prior to the fort's construction. A concentration of flints hinted at the possibility of earlier settlement.

Two separate phases of additional dumped material clearly separated by a turf line were added at the top and back of the original rampart. The latest phase of dumped

material was revetted by a substantial chalk wall (0.65m wide) on the inner side of the defences.

A half section was also excavated through the ditch which indicated three probable phases of activity. A small, flat-bottomed ditch was replaced by a much larger cut on the outer side. After the fills in this late cut had stabilised a large quantity of sarsen stones appears to have been thrown in. No evidence survived of sarsen walling on the front of the rampart in the excavation area but a fort close by, at Alfred's Castle near Ashbury, is recorded as having an outer face of sarsen. It is possible that the latest phase at Uffington was similarly revetted.

Dating evidence was slight but some diagnostic Early Iron Age sherds were recovered from the old ground surface beneath the rampart.

Future Work

Next year the White Horse will be looked at in detail. The possible changes in the horse's shape will be investigated and an attempt will be made to solve the controversy over its date (Late Iron Age or Saxon ?) by investigating the buried soils now known to exist beneath it.

The colluvial accumulation in the Manger is also to be sampled; this should provide useful information about the changing landuse on top of the downs. It may also be possible to pick up the initial cutting of the White Horse from the large amount of soil washed into the Manger that must have occurred at that time. Watch this space!

Simon Palmer

Berkshire

Reading: Shinfield Road SU732692 - John Moore and Jeff Wallis

A small assessment in advance of a proposed planning application was carried out on behalf of Development Planning and Design Services. Part of the application area lies adjacent to a moated site. Documentary evidence reveals that it was a moated site until 1702, the house being demolished in 1804. To the south is a deserted medieval hamlet. Earthworks and aerial photographs show probable house platforms.

Trenching immediately to the west of the moated site, and north of the area of earthworks associated with the hamlet, uncovered dumped deposits probably arising from the demolition of the house on the moated site. Underlying the dumping was a pebble surface associated with the post-medieval phase of the moated site. Medieval

deposits in the form of a pebble surface and two post holes were located immediately to the west of the moat.

Gloucestershire

Drybrook - R A Chambers

A proposed 10 hectare quarry extension was subjected to an archaeological assessment during April on behalf of ARC. Twenty-four machine dug-trenches across the crest of the hill and the valley bottom revealed traces of surface quarrying for iron ore.

Although there were no deposits of archaeological significance, several unstratified sherds of pottery suggested possible agricultural activity associated with nearby settlements during the Iron Age-Roman period. None of these settlements appeared to be within the proposed quarry extension.

Kent

Channel Tunnel Rail Link - George Lambrick

The OAU is becoming a major operator in the field of environmental assessment of impacts on the cultural heritage. We have just won the contract for carrying out the assessment of the historic and cultural impacts of the proposed Channel Tunnel Rail Link. The collection of basic information on historic buildings, landscapes and archaeological remains has now begun prior to field visits and the evaluation of sites, impacts and possible mitigation measures.

Northamptonshire

Stanwick: Redlands Farm SP963707 - John Moore and Mark Roberts
On behalf of ARC the OAU carried out an assessment in advance of a planning application for gravel extraction near Stanwick. This area of c.85 hectares is immediately to the south of where the Central Excavation Unit is carrying out excavation of the Stanwick Villa. CEU and Northamptonshire County Council Archaeology Unit have been working in the parishes of Raunds and Irthlingborough over the past few years as part of the Raunds Area Project.

A group of late Neolithic and Early Bronze Age ceremonial monuments has been excavated along the valley bottom. It has been shown that colonisation of the heavier soils on the clay land occurred between the Early Iron Age and the Late Iron Age. Settlements of the Roman period were located close to those of their Iron Age predecessors. The Stanwick Villa and its settlement overlies a series of Iron Age enclosures and houses (English Heritage: the Raunds Area Project. A Re-assessment of the Research Design. January 1989).

The OAU assessment revealed and tested a further two barrows, a double concentric ring ditch and two large circular prehistoric enclosures. An area of early prehistoric settlement was located in the valley bottom. At the foot of the valley side an area of Iron Age settlement was located. Away from this three discrete areas of Roman activity were found adjacent to a valley-side road, dating from the late 1st century to early 4th century. Buildings and enclosures of the 2nd to 4th centuries, arranged in a linear pattern across the valley floor, suggest a road crossing the valley. Rubble in a palaeochannel indicates that there was some form of a river crossing during this period.

Oxfordshire

Abingdon Vineyard - Tim Allen

Two new trenches have been opened up, one encompassing the south east corner of the Civil War cemetery, the other, east of the Parks Department, across the medieval lay cemetery. Over 50 more graves are visible in the Civil War cemetery, and more than 70 skeletons have been uncovered in the lay cemetery; there are likely to be more than 100 bodies in this trench alone. Unlike the Civil War cemetery, where there was only one layer of graves all respecting one another, the medieval graves frequently intersect, and charnel deposits, jumbled bones dug out from earlier burials and thrown back in on top of later ones, are common.

The medieval burials overlies a stone building of two phases. This is as yet undated, but the numbers of loose tesserae in the graves suggest that it may prove to be Roman. North of the burial ground is an area of Roman pits and ditches, which are producing more coins and Roman small finds than in previous trenches. This also suggests a Roman building nearby. At the north end of the trench the ground drops away towards Station Road, which we believe to follow the course of the River Stort before it was diverted down a culvert beneath Stert Street. Our trench does not, however, extend as far as the river's edge, but the area is criss-crossed by Roman

ditches into which were dumped masses of domestic rubbish, as is often the case at the periphery of settlement areas. These deposits date to the 1st and early 2nd centuries AD.

Bampton Day School - R A Chambers

A day school organised by OUIDES on the history and archaeology of Bampton encouraged several people to bring along artefacts including a polished flint Neolithic hand axe recovered from nearby farmland. This and other information gathered during the course of the day made for a useful interchange of information and ideas.

Bicester House Cottage - Mark Roberts and R A Chambers

A small excavation in May in advance of house building on the 0.9 acre site was funded by the developer, Landsdown Homes Ltd. This site lay less than 100m to the north of the site of the medieval grange of the nuns of Markyate (Hertfordshire) and earthwork remains of its attendant settlement. To the west the site was bounded by Queen's Avenue, a modern road built along the line of the Roman road that runs north from Alchester. Excavation was restricted to four trenches which covered the length and breadth of the property. A ditch running parallel to Queen's Avenue contained several sherds of Roman pottery and may have bounded the Roman road. A depressed area within one trench suggested a former, possibly medieval, hollow way running parallel to the Roman road. A shallow ditch with a spread of later medieval pottery to the east appeared to mark the western limit of domestic activity within the nuns of Markyate's Kings End Manor and its associated settlement.

Bicester House - R A Chambers

Bicester House is thought to stand on the site of the manor house which formed the focus of the manor of King's End held throughout the medieval period by the nuns of Markyate (Hertfordshire). In mid December 1988 advance groundworks for a sheltered housing scheme in the garden surrounding Bicester House substantially destroyed any remaining archaeological evidence for the manor house and its out-buildings. This was the last remaining prime archaeological site that may have shed light on the early development of the town. There was no opportunity for archaeological investigation.

Bicester: Southern Bypass - R A Chambers

The construction of this new trunk road has now begun. The Bicester-based field work group will maintain a watch over the earth-moving for archaeological material.

Dorchester-on-Thames: Willoughby House - R A Chambers

A watch was kept over the foundation trenches for a dwelling and two garages in the grounds of Willoughby House which lies beside the presumed line of the Roman road some 200m north of the north gate of the Roman walled town. The foundation trenches revealed ditches and disturbance from past settlement activity, but very little pottery. There was also much post-medieval disturbance over the site and this had occasionally reached the gravel terrace at a depth of approximately 1m. The lack of either in situ or residual Romano-British pottery suggests that if the underlying features were Roman they were not necessarily primarily connected with domestic activity. No further observations could be made of the nature of the settlement along this side of the Roman road.

M40 - R A Chambers

Construction of the M40 north of Wendlebury is progressing rapidly. On Contracts 3 and 4 the majority of the ground-work has been completed and no further major sites or extensive artefact scatters have been found. There is still some major earth-moving to take place on Contract 1 where topsoil stripping and ditch cutting continues to be monitored by the Bicester based field work group.

Oxford: 44 Queen Street, "Saxon Saxone" - Brian Durham

Queen Street is reputed to have some of the highest property values in this part of England and so the townscape is always changing. Recently it has affected the south frontage close to Carfax, and we were able to say at Nos. 7-8 that the Saxon street was much wider. Was this true on the north side, or had the street line been stabilised by the presence of St Martin's church?

Sears Retail Properties are developing the former Saxon shop, and gave the Unit a grant to excavate trenches in the basement near the street front to check the frontage line. The results were clear cut. The modern cellar floor was about 50cm above original ground surface, and the archaeological levels in between included

finely laminated clay and gravel floors. At one point there was even a suggestion of a "cob" (mud) wall. These floors were cut away in many places by later pits, but enough survived in both cellars to show that the early buildings were up to the modern frontage and probably well in front. This is because the earliest floors were subsiding into a pit which must have extended 1.5m under the pavement.

What does it mean? In the OAU Newsletter Vol 12 for March 1985 we noted that the opposite frontage seemed to have moved forward by at least 8m, and I argued that this was a wide market place which had been slimmed down by the encroachment of buildings before the Norman Conquest. The new evidence makes it more than ever certain that however much town planning there was in late Saxon Oxford, Queen Street and the High Street did not meet as a crossroad. It tends to support the assumption that the Saxon planning was respecting pre-existing property boundaries, the faint echoes of a Mercian settlement which is otherwise so hard to find.

Oxford: South Parks Road, Glycobiology Building - Brian Durham

A "ditch" reported in our December 1988 issue turned out to be the intersection of two smaller ditches, part of an undated field system. This began to focus interest on the new building proposal, and the University Surveyor gave permission for a trench to look at the ditches of the known Bronze Age barrow.

Andrew Millard of the University Society supervised the excavation with the help of members of the Abingdon Society. Both barrow ditches were found, making it possible to confirm that the cremation pit found in 1982 was very close to its true centre. The most interesting feature was in the upper new fill of one of the ditches, a small pit with a layer of buff clay in the bottom, and a number of sherds which George Lambrick identified as Early Iron Age.

This is an isolated pit, but it is interesting in the context of the field system mentioned above because it indicates a date by which this particular part of the barrow ditch had been almost filled in. Part of the infilling would be by natural erosion, but this would leave the ground uneven. There must be a real possibility that this part of the ditch was deliberately levelled up, and even if this was only as a result of intensive ploughing it implies population pressure already nibbling away at the barrow field by the beginning of the Iron Age.

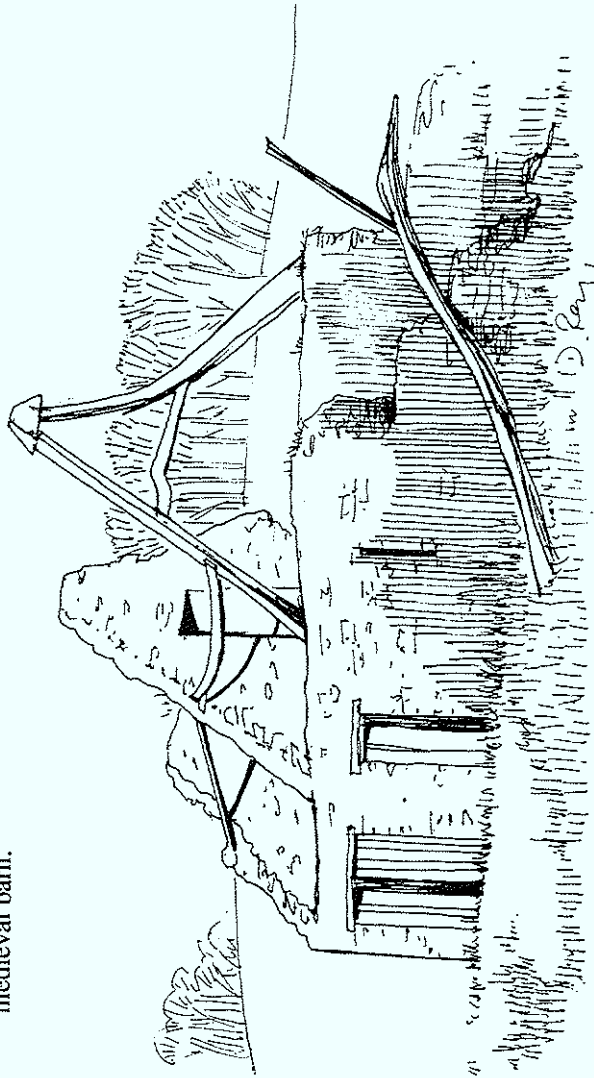
Stanford-in-the-Vale: Bowling Green Farm - R A Chambers

A second well has been recorded on the site of this extensive Romano-British

settlement. The 4th century settlement obliterated the remains of a 2nd - 3rd century villa of which a substantial rectangular enclosure containing domestic debris and a dump of painted plaster was all that survived. This latest well shaft, some 7.4m deep, was originally wood-lined, possibly using barrels. The well was back filled with substantial amounts of ash and domestic debris; it appears to belong to the 2nd century and possibly served the villa then on the site. A small 4th century coin hoard of some 80 low-denomination copper alloy coins has been recovered while monitoring recent top soil stripping on this site. The coins were probably held in a bag or pouch which had decayed.

Swalcliffe Barn - R A Chambers and G Tann

Immediately to the west of the parish church stands Swalcliffe manor house which retains much of the fabric of its medieval hall including the cross passage. West of the manor house lies a later farmyard retaining two late medieval cruck-built barns, one in a ruinous state. The farmyard has recently been purchased by the Oxfordshire Buildings Trust to ensure the preservation and repair of the remaining upstanding medieval barn.



The smaller of the two late medieval cruck-built barns, Swalcliffe.

As future renovation and building work will seriously damage or destroy any below-ground medieval remains within the farmyard, English Heritage funded a brief excavation comprising trenches across the open yard area and through the floors of each of the medieval barns. These trenches revealed that, prior to the building of the two barns in the later 14th or 15th century, the site to the west of the manor house was open land indented with a series of small stone quarries. The precise date of this quarrying is not known and stone may have been taken over a period of several centuries, perhaps supplying the building of the church and the medieval rebuilding of the manor house. The infilling of one of the quarry hollows contained quantities of medieval domestic rubbish, presumably from the manorial kitchen.

The M40 Saga Continues

One of the most unsatisfactory episodes in Oxfordshire Archaeology in recent years has been the construction of the M40 extension.

In the early 1970's the M40 across the Chilterns and into Oxfordshire was monitored and a string of sites excavated and published. This work was funded by the Department of Environment.

In the past year North Oxfordshire has been sliced by road schemes on an unprecedented scale. Yet there has been virtually no funding for archaeological observation. This is in part because of a battle between the Ministries: the Department of Transport claiming that archaeology is the responsibility of the Department of Environment (a.k.a English Heritage). English Heritage on the other hand has been actively promoting the concept that the polluter should pay; in other words, in the case of motorways, the Department of Transport.

This unsatisfactory situation was reflected in the comments of the Inspector at the public enquiry held in Bicester between 8 September and 22 January about the latest M40 section between Waterstock and Wendlebury.

We print here the response from the Departments of Environment and Transport circulated in a letter of 13 March 1989 which clarifies the government view. In the meantime construction of the new M40 section is scheduled to start in two months.

Rescue Archaeology

191. Oxfordshire County Council expressed concern about possible Roman and medieval remains on the line of the published route and sought an undertaking that any necessary archaeological investigations would be funded by the Department of Transport. The Inspector considered the statements of Govern-

ment policy indicating that the responsibility for funding rescue archaeology rested with English Heritage to be ambiguous, and he encouraged the Department, the County Council and English Heritage to strive for a working arrangement (13.131-13.132).

192. The Secretaries of State are satisfied that there is no ambiguity about Government policy in respect of rescue archaeology. English Heritage are wholly responsible for allocating all Government support. This is consistent with the principle that the developer should contribute to the costs of rescue archaeology. The Government is the developer of motorway and trunk road schemes and contributes to the costs of rescue archaeology by funding English Heritage which has sole responsibility for allocating support for rescue archaeology and the necessary knowledge and expertise to ensure that claims are properly assessed. Since 1987, the Government has increased its grant to English Heritage by providing additional funding of £100,000 per annum for the specific purpose of funding more rescue archaeology related to motorway and trunk road schemes.

193. The Secretaries of State are satisfied that the existing arrangements for keeping archaeological interest informed of progress and for funding investigations are adequate. Should early access to sites affected by the scheme be required by archaeologists, the Department will endeavour to facilitate this. The costs of any delay or disruption of the construction programme consequent upon archaeological excavations will also be borne by the Department of Transport.

Archaeology and Planning in Oxfordshire

Oxfordshire has one of the best reputations in Britain for its protection of the historic environment through planning policies. During the 1970's these ensured that archaeologists were provided with access and time to sites due to be developed. However, time and access are of little use without funds. These days English Heritage backs approved projects; it does not often support the rash of sites requiring watching briefs. During the past two years the most environmentally aware local authorities have started to produce new and more positive policies which put the onus for assessing the archaeology of a site onto developers.

Several district councils have now followed the lead of the Oxfordshire County

Council in putting such policies into place. We print here the relevant section of the most recent local plan from South Oxfordshire District Council which is typical of the new policy statements.

These new policies inevitably put more work onto hard pressed local planners and onto the County Archaeologist in the County sites and monuments record in Woodstock. Local archaeological societies know their own areas better than anyone. They should ensure that planning applications are monitored through the newspapers and planning departments. Then make your views known!

Central Oxfordshire Local Plan April 1989

4.5 ARCHAEOLOGY

Policy Con.11

The council will not normally permit development which is likely to have a destructive effect on sites of major archaeological importance.

Policy Con.12

In order to determine proposals affecting sites and areas of archaeological potential, the council may require the developer to provide additional information in the form of an assessment of the archaeological or historic importance of the site or structure, and the likely impact of development.

Policy Con.13

Where appropriate, the council will impose conditions on planning permissions or seek legal agreements requiring the developer to avoid or mitigate the impact of the proposals on archaeological or historical sites or structures either by preservation or by independent and professional investigation and recording before and during development.

FORTHCOMING EVENTS

Sunday 18th June

Open Day at Abingdon Vineyard Excavation, the Old Cattle Market off Station Road.

In conjunction with Abingdon Archaeological Society 21st Anniversary celebrations.

From 11.00 am to 5.00 pm

Guided Tours - admission: adults 50p, children free.

VOLUNTEERS

We are still looking for volunteers to help wash and mark finds - either on site or here in the Unit. If you have a spare day, or even just an afternoon, and you would like to help us with our ever-increasing mountain of finds, please contact Leigh Turner at The Oxford Archaeological Unit.



SUBSCRIPTIONS

The OAU Newsletter is issued quarterly. The subscription is £3.00 per annum. Please make cheques payable to The Oxford Archaeological Unit.

Please send contributions for the next Newsletter to Clare Venables at the Oxford Archaeological Unit, 46 Hythe Bridge Street, Oxford OX1 2EP.

Published by the Oxford Archaeological Unit, 46 Hythe Bridge Street, Oxford OX1 2EP.

Typesetting and production by Old Malthouse Publishing. (Tel: 0865 790446)

ISSN 0954 - 1616.