



OXFORDSHIRE ARCHAEOLOGICAL UNIT NEWSLETTER INCLUDING
OXFORDSHIRE PARISH SURVEY NEWS

No 8 - August 1979

Anyone wishing to send contributions to the Newsletter should send details to the above address before the last Tuesday of each month.

OXFORDSHIRE

Asthall

Richard Chambers reports that repairs to a burnt water main within the villa enclosure at Foxhole Bottom (Worsham) have exposed a soil and rubble filled feature cut into the underlying limestone. Although there was some wood charcoal and fire ash in the fill of this feature, o pottery could be found.

Aston Rowant

Richard Chambers reports that the erection of a bungalow close to the moated manor in the deserted medieval village of Copcourt provided an opportunity to examine one of the ploughed out medieval house platforms. However, apart from several small fragments of medieval coarseware pottery from the top soil the sections provided by the building foundations and service trenches only confirmed the earthwork as a building platform constructed on the sloping hill side. Remnants of a chalk founded floor covered a part of this platform but lumps of coal and brick gave this floor a secure post-medieval date.

Blewbury

Richard Chambers reports that during the construction of the new vicarage at Blewbury, the contractor recovered fragments of five human skeletons, three adult, one immature and one infant. Three fragments of medieval pottery collected from the site were identified by Maureen Mellor. The age of the skeletons remains unknown.

Chalgrove, Harding's Field

A second season of excavation has begun on the moated medieval manor house at Chalgrove. Volunteers are welcome, those interested should contact Phil Page at Abingdon 27856 in the evenings.

Checkendon

The South Oxfordshire Archaeological Group reports that the excavation of the first two sections across the bank and ditch of the enclosure known as the Devil's Churchyard continues. Several more small ppt sherds have been recovered but unfortunately none can be closely dated.

Cumnor

Richard Chambers reports that Mrs Carter of Henwood Farm, Cumnor, has picked up fragments of Romano-British grey-wares from a field on the

eastern side of Henwood. The site lies on high ground 1 km to the north of Boars Hill. No cropmarks are visible in the corn. Previously only Mesolithic material has been found in the area.

Didcot

The Didcot Society have commenced a short excavation in Hospital Field, Didcot to section and record a boundary ditch and bank which surrounds a 3-field system documented in the 18th century. The line of the boundary ditch can still be seen on aerial photographs with ridge and furrow running up to it on either side. The section of the boundary ditch in Hospital Field is to be destroyed by future building development.

Drayton

More land is now being stripped of soil at Drayton in advance of gravel extraction. There are several cropmarks showing on aerial photographs and Richard Chambers in conjunction with the Abingdon Society is keeping a watch on the work.

Kidlington, Moat Cottage

The short excavation aimed at recovering information about the medieval occupation of this site has just commenced with the setting out of a grid of 1 m square trial pits, which if necessary may be enlarged later on. The excavation is still at the top-soil removal stage. A more detailed report will appear in the next newsletter.

Kidlington - Parish Churchyard Extension

Following the fulfillment of the requirement to raise the ground level of the extension to the Parish churchyard at Kidlington, the top soil has now been replaced giving an opportunity to see what residual material remains from the earthworks destroyed by the churchyard extension (see July Newsletter).

North Leigh Roman Villa

Various members of the Unit helped to supervise the recent reinstatement and landscaping work carried out on behalf of the Inspectorate of Ancient Monuments at the well-known villa site. A low mound has been constructed over the north-west range and along the north-eastern entrance wall to protect the features but indicate the outline of the villa building. It is worth pointing out that all published plans of North Leigh seem to be wrongly orientated by about 90°. The dining room mosaic with its protective shelter lies at approximately the southern corner of the building.

A drainage ditch has recently been machine dug around the field to the north-east of the villa between it and the River Evenlode. It appears to have cut through at least three Roman stone buildings or boundary walls and a waterlogged feature containing organic deposits. The coherence of the site would obviously be improved if this field were brought within the Guardianship area; this would also allow access to the River Evenlode and make the site more attractive to visitors.

A custodian has now been reappointed at North Leigh after a period of austerity measures left the villa unsupervised. It is also intended to open a small museum in the cottage on the site sometime in the hopefully not too distant future. (D Miles)

Oxford, 33 St Aldates

A sewer connection for this site required a trench most of the way across the main road, and the opportunity was taken to see how the road had developed, bearing in mind that 150 m to the north it is apparently founded on a Mercian causeway. By this point the route is clearly contending with early river channels which now seem to be more or less continuous from 65 St Aldates southwards (see Newsletters 2 and 3, 1979). So it was not too surprising to find that the middle lane of the modern road is built on a rough faced mortared ragstone rubble causeway 14 ft wide, standing originally at least six feet high, and surviving to within 15 inches of the modern tarmac surface. It must link the arches of whatever bridges crossed the local channels and its remains must have been encountered every time new service trenches have been put in here during the last hundred years. This probably accounts for the widely held assumption that the great bridge of Oxford built just after the Norman Conquest was of stone. But if so it would have been at least a century ahead of its time (Rigold Med. Arch 19 (1975), 49) and I regret to say that the condition of the stone facing suggests that the causeway was fairly new when a building was put against it in about the fourteenth century. There must of course have been earlier bridge works here, but they may well have been timber, and a huge pointed oak stake pulled out from beneath the edge of the masonry is probably a survivor of an earlier bridge. It is hoped to get a tree ring date from this. (B.G.D.)

Oxford, 24 New Inn Hall Street

The coin from the lowest road surface (Newsletter 7, July 1979) turned out not to be Mercian after all, but to be Edward the Elder of Wessex who inherited Mercia in 911, and Edward continued the Alfredian system of fortified towers built to resist the Danish army. Historians have always assumed that with Edward's acquisition of Oxford in 912 the town was fortified for the first time and many of its streets laid. The coin find from New Inn Hall Street clearly supports this view. There remain, however, a few tantalising pieces of evidence which suggest that there was a settlement here previously, and the search for a Mercian fortress will go on. (B.G.D.)

Oxford, The Hamel

Don Bramwell (now with an honorary doctorate from Sheffield University) has identified 22 bird species including new records of gadwell duck, whooper swan and ruff. Winter visiting species are quite common but this probably reflects bird migration patterns rather than the hunting season. Water and meadow birds are well represented perhaps because these are most edible or, as a reflection of site resources.

The proportion of goose to fowl declines and possibly the inhabitants kept geese during the early medieval period. This fits with finds of sheep keels and two sheep burials as indicators of temporary or permanent animal keeping i.e. formlike activities at the edge of the

town. However, few rural elements are indicated by insect remains except those from the earliest 12th century ditches (July Newsletter).

Thrupp near Abingdon - G Jones and J Wallis

Members of the Abingdon Archaeological Society are continuing their weekend excavations of the Iron Age "Thrupp House Farm Site C". Remains of a penannular enclosure and three further possible circular hut gullies and traces of other occupation areas are all thought to be late Iron Age. There is also a ring ditch 7 m in diameter which suggests a small Bronze Age barrow. Crossing and in three cases cutting these features are a series of shallow parallel ditches, apparently the remains of more recent ridge and furrow. A small bronze buckle and sherds of medieval pottery were recovered from a section cut through one of these features.

Most activity so far has been confined to the penannular enclosure. Several sections have been cut across this and show that the ditch had been twice recut. A bronze coin of Tasciovanus from the Camulodunum mint has been recovered from one of the gullies together with numerous Iron Age sherds, bones, flint flakes and a large Neolithic end scraper.

Remains of a crouch burial have been located in the fill of another of the possible hut gullies but has been damaged by ploughing.

So far no underlying indications of Neolithic occupation have been found on the site.

A resistivity survey of the site is being carried out by Basil Turton. The results are negative so far.

Wroxton

Richard Chambers has been assisting the Banbury Police with their enquiries into human bones found at Wroxton, near Banbury.

A collection of human bones representing a minimum of three persons was found scattered in the floor make-up in a barn which forms the west end of a range of farm buildings now being redeveloped for domestic occupation. The bones seem to have been redeposited there after having been disturbed and removed from their original burial place which remains unknown.

BERKSHIRE

Caversham (Reading)

Mr and Mrs Just report that they are continuing to visit the Redlands gravel pit at Caversham where more gravel is being exposed by topsoil stripping. As yet no archaeological features have been exposed although several small flints have been discovered in the topsoil.

CALENDAR

1 September - Thame Historical Society visit to Petersfield. For details contact Mr G R Southern, 5 Oxford Road, Thame.

29 September - Thame Historical Society visit to High Wycombe including visit to Chair museum. For details contact Mr Southern (see above).

VOLUNTEER HELP REQUIRED at the moated medieval manor house at Chalgrove. Those interested should contact Phil Page at Abingdon 27856 in the evenings for details.