



OXFORDSHIRE ARCHAEOLOGICAL UNIT NEWSLETTER INCLUDING
OXFORDSHIRE PARISH SURVEY NEWS

Vol VIII, No. 2 - February 1981

Anyone wishing to send contributions to the Newsletter should send details to the above address before Friday, 24th April.

OXFORDSHIRE

Aston, Bampton and Shifford

Roman material has been collected by Richard Hingley on the site of a rectangular enclosure south of Aston.

Aston, Bampton and Shifford

Iron Age and Roman material has been collected by Richard Hingley on the site of a complex enclosure system south-east of Cote.

Buscot, Bury Hill

A probable hill-fort has been located by Richard Hingley on this hill top. Heavily ploughed ramparts are clear on two sides of the enclosure, and much vitrified material was collected from one side of the rampart.

Chalgrove, Manor Farm

Phillip Page and Duncan Brown (an In-Service Trainee) excavated a small trench within the buttery of the fifteenth century manor house at Manor Farm, Chalgrove. It was hoped to try and establish whether there was an earlier building beneath the standing structure. A building was referred to in a survey of 1336, and was therefore contemporary with the manor excavated at Hardings Field, Chalgrove.

Beneath the initial quarry tiled floor there was evidence of another similar tiled surface, of which only the mortar bed survived. When this was removed the remains of a beaten chalk floor were found. The trench was adjacent to the cross passage wall and its ground sill was revealed to be resting on a low brick wall with expanded footings which were sealed by the chalk floor. This wall was presumably intended to keep the sill off the floor and out of the damp but subsequent floor levels have brought the floor up to the level of the sill, causing it to rot.

Unfortunately there was not pottery associated with these layers, although there were the stems of clay pipes, suggesting a date after the seventeenth century. The

brick wall was laid directly on top of a stone wall and the latter cut a thick layer of loam, well mixed with a large amount of plaster fragments. This layer contained fifteenth century pottery and overlay the natural subsoil.

The excavated material thus tends to confirm the date of the standing buildings and there is some evidence of the demolition of an earlier structure. The owners of Manor Farm, Mr. and Mrs. Jacques, have kindly agreed to further trenches being excavated through the hall and parlour during renovations to the house and these may provide evidence of earlier structures on the site.

Dorchester By-Pass

As a result of Professor Richard Atkinson's work in the 1950's the Dorchester Neolithic complex is one of national importance. Most has now been consumed by gravel-pits to the north of the present town. The cursus, a typical elongated ditched rectangle running for 1.6km is the outstanding surviving feature. This will soon be built over by the proposed Dorchester By-Pass.

Interest in cursuses has been stimulated recently by the excavation of the terminal of the example at Springfield by archaeologists from Essex County Council. A semi-circle of post-holes was found there - possibly half of a circular timber structure and the first such discovery in a cursus.

Over the past few weeks members of the Unit and the Abingdon Area Archaeological and Historical Society have been fieldwalking the line of the new road, especially with a view to plotting flint scatters. The opportunity exists to uncover a larger part of a cursus than has ever before been investigated in Britain. Excavation under the direction of Richard Chambers has just begun on the site, concentrating on a number of ring ditches within the cursus and the cursus terminal. The site is also of importance in the Roman period. The cursus terminal is cut by the north-western corner of the Queenford Cemetery, one of Dorchester's main late Roman burial grounds. Part of the cemetery was excavated in 1972 by Trevor Rowley and Brian Durham. Air photographs show that, burials extend to the west beyond the cemetery's main ditched enclosure and into the line of the new road.

Excavation will continue for the next few weeks at least and volunteers are welcome. Enquiries to the Unit.

Garford, Nor Brook

Field work by Richard Hingley has indicated an extensive early and middle Iron Age pottery spread in proximity to the Roman villa fieldwalked in 1978.

Great Baldon, The Golden Balls

Roman material mostly of late date has been collected by Richard Hingley near the site of a rectangular enclosure north-east of the junction at The Golden Balls.

Great Faringdon, Bradbury Hill

Richard Hingley has collected 28 extra sherds from the west side of the ramparts. These sherds include black burnished, coarse shell gritted finger tip jars and one possible haematite coated sherd. All sherds are early Iron Age.

Hatford, Hatford Quarry

Richard Hingley has excavated several pits during two further visits to this site.

Langford

Much Roman material was located by Richard Hingley on the site of a rectangular enclosure north of the village.

Long Wittenham, Sinodun Hills

Richard Hingley has collected several sherds, including Romano-British and middle Iron Age globular bowl sherds from the ramparts of the hill-fort.

Oxford, Corpus Christi College

Eleanor Forfang, one of our In-Service Trainees, has been studying the gardeners' shed in the south-west corner of the College. It is an L-shaped structure with a queen-post roof, partly of the seventeenth century. It is built into a bastion jutting out from the line of the city wall, alongside a rectangular block which is partly of the same build. The reason for looking at this building is that part of the stone facing of the bastion is being forced out by the weight of earth in an arched cavity in its wall, fairly clearly an embrasure with an arrow slit. The College wanted the earth dug out so that their masons could repair the splits, but it was obviously worth looking carefully to see whether this was an original feature of the tower, which seems to be the case. Although much broader and less splayed than any of the New College embrasures, there seems no reason to doubt that it is thirteenth century. There are at least two more arrow slits on the same level and the bastion itself is the longest anywhere in the town circuit. The whole thing is the more strange because this is an inside angle of the defences, and on the least approachable side of the town. Why was it built? The answer may lie in the rectangular block beside it. There is a general consensus that the line of Oriel Street continued down to what Anthony Wood thought was the site of a postern through the wall here. The medieval name for this road was Shidyerd Street, possibly meaning 'rampart street'. The postern must have been blocked by the fourteenth century, and certainly there is no sign of an opening now. The general arrangement resembles that of the Water Gate at Southampton however, and it may be that we have here the remains of a major medieval chambered gatehouse, the last to survive in Oxford.

The reason for a gate in this position is not immediately obvious. Stephen granted St. Frideswides a gate in the town wall circa 1140 which could conceivably have been here, at the east end of their church. This raises the possibility that this was a pre-urban trackway converging on the priory which was preserved as a right of way. However it adds a new joker in the game of 'find-the-Saxon-defences' in this part of Oxford.

Oxford, High Street - new surface water drain

The newest recruit to the Drainage Department, honorary sewerman Brian Durham, reports that the traffic chaos in the High Street is nearing an end. The main trench down the middle of the street was put in at blistering speed, and archaeology was

confined to work breaks. Nevertheless it gave a valuable new perspective on the Saxon and medieval street scene. Surface water would always have been carried away by a central gutter or 'kennel', shown now to have been a trench three feet wide, between three and four and a half feet deep, with vertical sides which suggest a planked lining. Furthermore it ran a zig-zag path down the street making a slight offset in front of All Saints church, and various wriggles further down. This may mean that it takes a precise mid line between opposing frontages, giving the tenants roughly equal areas of roadway to keep up.

It is interesting to consider what effect this channel would have had on street life. Traffic would have been effectively 'dual carriageway', avoiding the centre. Younger people could jump a three foot gap but there would have to be planks for the old and infirm. Perhaps it was entirely covered with planks? Mark Robinson has sieved a sample which yielded a few seeds of aquatic and waterside plants which may have been growing there, but equally may have been imported from elsewhere. By the fourteenth century the centre line of the street was apparently used twice a week for market traders selling earthen pots, cobs and straw. The kennel must have been covered by this time, but clearly some traders were not averse to lifting the planks and dropping bones, even a whole horse skull, to add to the burgesses' problem of keeping the drains working.

Oxford, Rewley Abbey

The slightly 'academic' exercise of exposing part of the abbey has been completed. The north wall, as predicted, seems to rise out of a substantial river channel, and this may explain why the associated pottery was fourteenth-fifteenth century. Presumably the original wall of circa 1281 had been undermined by the river and had to be replaced from the footings upwards. If the site is redeveloped and if the abbey area is to be built on and if there is finance available to strip the metre depth of Victorian rubbish, there is a substantial structure here to be excavated. There will certainly be more post medieval modifications than on the Blackfriars and Greyfriars, and we are suggesting to British Rail that their programme should include a nine-month pause for archaeology.

Oxford, Turf Street Foul Sewer

Ugh! See next Newsletter!

GLOUCESTERSHIRE

Fairford/Lechlade, Claydon Pike

In January and February work at Claydon Pike has concentrated on the 50m² trench over the largest of the Romano-British building platforms. The area is proving to have a complex development over 4-5 centuries, observable in a compressed vertical stratigraphy within the platform of only 0.1/0.15m. Four basic phases have so far been observed within the platform :

1. Late Iron Age - penannular gullies and post-holes spread over about 10m² cut into the gravel and spreading under the platform build up.
2. Early Romano-British (first century AD) - an oval enclosure cut by phase 3 ditches.

14th May Mr. George Speake - Anglo-Saxon Jewellery

11th June Open Evening

CHINNOR HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL SOCIETY, Programme for the 1981 Session
(Meetings are usually held on the first Friday of each month at the Adult Education Room, Chinnor Library, Station Road, Chinnor at 8.0 p.m.)

6th March ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING followed by Reports from the Work Parties and the film "24 Square Miles"

3rd April John Blair - Some Recent Work on Medieval Buildings in Oxfordshire

1st May John Davis - The Australian Connection

5th June Reports from the Work Parties and General Society Business

3rd July Open Air Meeting, details to be confirmed later

For details of membership, please contact the Hon. Secretary : John Bell,
71 Oakley Road, Chinnor (Tel. K. Blount 52459)

WEEKEND AND DAY SCHOOLS, Organised by Oxford University Department for External Studies, Rewley House, Wellington Square

13th-15th March Archaeology of Mycenae

21st March CBA Group 9 Annual Report Meeting - day school

28th March Local History Linked Day School IV

3rd-5th April Medieval Water Management

24th-26th April Industrial Archaeology

27th-30th April Planning and the Historic Environment

15th-17th May Urban Archaeology - in association with Oxfordshire Archaeological Unit

Further details of all these courses are available from the Course Secretary,
Oxford University Department for External Studies, Rewley House, 3-7 Wellington Square, Oxford OX1 2JA

OXFORDSHIRE ARCHITECTURAL & HISTORICAL SOCIETY

11th March Excavations in Oxfordshire 1980 - Tom Hassall

Please see enclosed poster for details.

Oxfordshire Archaeological Unit



Annual Report 1980

The Unit's Annual Report has just been published. It contains 64 pages with 22 figures and describes the Unit's survey, excavation and post excavation projects in 1980. The cost is £1 to Newsletter subscribers. Your order will be despatched with your next Newsletter.

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To : Oxfordshire Archaeological Unit,
46 Hythe Bridge Street,
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price £1. I am enclosing a cheque/postal order for

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