

OXFORDSHIRE ARCHAEOLOGICAL UNIT NEWSLETTER

INCLUDING OXFORDSHIRE PARISH SURVEY NEWS

No.12 - December 1977

Anyone wishing to send contributions to the Newsletter should send copy to 46 Hythe Bridge Street, Oxford OX1 2EF (Tel: 43888) before the last Tuesday of each month.

ABINGDON - The Vineyard

A watching brief reveals many features being destroyed by house construction. About half of the features are modern pits and post-medieval ditches. A few features, on the street frontage are medieval and the remainder are likely to be R-3 or earlier in date. The Abingdon Society has recovered most of a skeleton discovered by workmen. Full marks too, to the reporter from (!) Reading who wanted a big story but the skeleton lacked associated finds. It lay east-west, head to the east, and may predate an adjacent feature in which a nearly complete flagon of 1st-2nd century AD was found amid carbonized debris.

APFLETON

Charlie Chambers inspected the building work in progress on a site thought formerly to have been occupied by a church. The building work involved the repair and extension of a cattle barn and no archaeological material was exposed. However, the adjacent field to the west showed vestiges of earthworks under a crop of winter corn.

ASTHAL

Charlie Chambers reports that he has spent a very useful evening with two people who are concerned with recording the historical and archaeological material in the Asthal region. So far Mr Ken Betteridge and Mr Chris Walker have worked mainly on the enclosure history and Roman settlement in the district. Apart from continuing these studies and field work, they are now listing all the archaeological and historical evidence in the Parish for the Sites and Monuments Record. The ordering and listing will be a useful first step to the analysis of a large amount of varied and important material. Seven aerial photographs of the Asthal area taken by Charlie Chambers in July 1976 have proved extremely useful in checking groundwork. Mr Betteridge and Mr Walker have also plotted the Roman villa enclosure at Worsham.

BERINSFIELD - Mount Farm

The excavation of the Iron Age House site is now completed, and a small post built house was found to one side of the surrounding penannular enclosure. It seems to have had an east facing porch, although the penannular enclosure faced west. The distribution of finds in the topsoil above this enclosure shows a remarkable correlation with the features beneath, suggesting that centuries of ploughing has caused very little movement in the scatter of topsoil finds. The furrows of earlier ridge and furrow have been located and the survival of an Iron Age occupation layer (probably the site

BERINSFIELD - Mount Farm (Contd/...)

of another house) between two such furrows suggests that the ridge afforded some protection to the underlying features. These deposits are now being excavated. Salvage work on the western half of the site has revealed very few features, but in addition to the large Saxon pit (not a grubenhaus as first thought) a well preserved Saxon timber-lined well has been discovered.

Work has continued in assessing techniques for coping with gravel sites: the general distribution of finds from the topsoil is being mapped by computer from 50 randomly selected sample holes, these results are to be compared with the distribution of features revealed by a complete resistivity survey of the area and eventually its complete stripping. Substantial areas of the site will have been stripped by hand, by JCB and by box-scraper and the relative effectiveness of these methods will be assessed.

CHALGROVE

Now that excavation of the Hardings Field moated site has finished for the winter, attention has turned to sorting the finds. All the finds have been cleaned, marked, bagged and boxed by members of the Chalgrove History Group under the guidance of Charlie Chambers. Inspection of some of the finer pieces of pottery, namely a 14-15th century bottle and an equally finely made face mask forming the handle of an aquamanile jug, are similar in fabric to Oxford late medieval ware. They are both very well executed pieces and they display manufacturing techniques superior to the majority of the late medieval Oxford fine wares. A probably late 15th century jug forms the only near complete example yet from the Oxford region and is an important addition to our knowledge of local Tudor type wares.

EYNESHAM

The site of a new surgery, in Conduit Lane, Eynsham, was inspected by Charlie Chambers. There was only approximately 9" of soil covering the underlying gravel at this point. Two large holes not yet backfilled by the contractor did not reveal anything.

HARDWICK - Mingies Ditch

Mark Robinson has spent most of the past month working on a sample from one of the enclosure ditches at Mingies Ditch, Hardwick. The preservation of organic remains was reasonable and a large quantity of twigs, seeds and insects were recovered from it. These confirm the impression gained from preliminary work, that there was scrub present around the site. The seeds included sloe, hawthorn, rose, purging buckthorn, guelder rose, hazel, blackberry, field maple and elder. The presence of field maple would suggest that there had been scrub or woodland in the vicinity of the site for a long period before it was occupied.

OXFORD - Church Street - erratum

Contrary to the impression given in Newsletter No.11 (November 1977) we have not produced evidence that Oxford Castle Mound was erected in the tenth century! The sentence should have read: 'It would seem that Church Street began to be occupied at about the time of building of Oxford Castle c.1071.

OXFORD - Paradise Street

A second exploratory trench has been completed by Jane Fox and the OUAS. They have shown two successively earlier stone river-walls on the Castle Mill Stream, the earlier being provisionally dated to the fourteenth century. The mill is probably one of those mentioned in Domesday, and the members of the Society are already proposing another trench in a less restricted position where it might be possible to trace a late Saxon waterfront.

Rescue Threat

At a certain site building foundation trenches were machine dug beside a substantial eight foot high stone wall. The trench sections were archaeologically interesting and were recorded. After the concrete footings had been poured the substantial eight foot high stone wall collapsed over the foundations during the night. DO NOT EXPECT BUILDING CONTRACTORS TO ASSESS CORRECTLY ALL SAFETY RISKS TO ARCHAEOLOGISTS (or anyone else).

Parish Survey Information

The Autumn progress meeting held in the offices of the Oxfordshire Archaeological Unit on Sunday 27th November was well attended. From the reports given by group representatives, from discussion, and from selected examples of material that were brought along, it is very clear that the effort put into the survey by the Oxfordshire Archaeological Unit, the Oxford University Department for External Studies and the Oxfordshire County Museum is certainly worthwhile and is providing much new historical and archaeological data for the County. Also the participants are gaining more experience all the time and are becoming increasingly interested in their activities as results materialize.

The minutes for the meeting will be circulated with the January copy of this newsletter. R A Chambers.

CALENDAR DECEMBER/JANUARY

12-14 December 1977

Urban Conservation - Organised in association with Oxford Polytechnic
Details from OUDES, Rewley House,
Wellington Square, Oxford. Tel:
Oxford 52901.

16-18 December 1977

Techniques of Church Archaeology
Weekend School at Rewley House,
Wellington Square, Oxford. For
Details Tel: Oxford 52901

19 December 1977

A speaker from the History Workshop
Group on "Oral History". The Group
is led by Raphael Samuel of Ruskin
College. Arranged by Oxfordshire
Family History Society. Meeting
to be held at British Council
Building, 1 Beaumont Place, Oxford
(off St John Street) from 8.00 p.m.
to 10.00 p.m.

6-7 January 1978

Roman Art 100 BC-400 AD - weekend
school. Details from OUDES, Rewley
House, Wellington Square, Oxford.
Telephone: Oxford 52901