

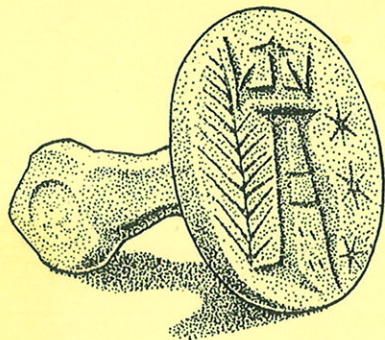
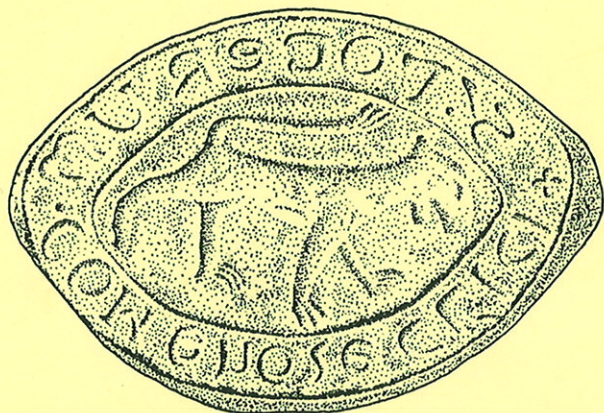
NEWS

The quarterly newsletter of the Oxford



Archaeological Unit

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Smc

SPOTLIGHT

THE CASE OF THE LOST SEAL

It is more than ten years since the Unit excavated a major medieval domestic site in Oxford. The Hamel in 1976-77 was a partially deserted street frontage on the road to Osney Abbey west of the Castle, and it showed how the suburb of St Thomas had been established on the Thames flood plain in the early 13th century. The former Halls Brewery site in Park End Street, not far from the Hamel, has now revealed exceptionally well preserved structures.

The Halls Brewery bottling plant occupied a large area of medieval St Thomas. The two principal street frontages have been excavated ahead of office and residential development by Grosvenor Square Properties, who provided financial support.

Most of the historical detail in this area comes from the Cartulary of Osney Abbey, which owned enough property to give a representative picture. For instance, on the east side of Holly Bush Row opposite the old Frank Cooper marmalade factory H E Salter identified three properties, all given to Osney Abbey in 1265 by Roger of Comenore.

The Royal Commission recorded the recent buildings here (demolished c 1960s) as 17th century, but our excavation made it

Figure 1: the Halls Brewery site during excavation



I am indebted to Martin Henig for pointing out a similar crowned 'A' on a brooch carried by the prioress in Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* where it is followed by the words 'amor vincit omnia' - 'love conquers all'. We ought to read this as the love of Christ, but the prioress is depicted as a lady of refinement who liked her home comforts, and Chaucer is probably hinting that she was prepared to treat her brooch as a love token.

The second seal could have been one of many medieval seals relating to love and friendship with which the owner could close a letter and be fairly sure that the sentiment would not be obvious to everyone.

One seal lost by a prosperous solicitor in his stone house, the other by a loner in a mud hut!

Brian Durham

BERKSHIRE

BINFIELD: PARK FARM

An assessment was undertaken in June/July 1989 on behalf of Bryant Homes and Beaver Homes to provide information for an application for residential development, a hotel, golf course and distributor road. The site occupies approximately 85 hectares, and comprises deposits of London Clay and Plateau Gravel.

Most of the non-wooded parts of the application site had been fieldwalked as part of the East Berkshire Archaeological Survey. Three concentrations of lithics indicated that at least three prehistoric activity centres existed. Sherds of Roman pottery hinted at the possibility of a small Roman site existing in the area.

The assessment was carried out by a combination of intensive shovel

test pit sampling and machine cut trenches.

The shovel test pit sampling did not conclusively confirm the fieldwalking results. If the findings of the sampling in the three areas of lithic concentrations found during fieldwalking were taken to confirm prehistoric activity, then prehistoric activity could also have been said to have occurred in three further areas in which fieldwalking had failed to identify any signs of activity. No features were found associated with the artefacts. The remains of apparently small scale prehistoric activity were located by trenching. The bottoms of three small pits were found within 70 m of each other. Two pits had been filled with burnt flint fragments.

Two parallel Roman ditches c 15 m apart with pits and postholes were found. The ditches produced a small quantity of pottery dating from the 1st or 2nd century AD. One of the striking aspects of this Roman site was the lack of finds in the pits and the modern ploughsoil. The activity may have been of low status, centred on a small enclosure.

Various problems were encountered during the assessment, most notably those resulting from working in a field of 6 foot high broad bean plants. To find an excavated area it was necessary to stand on the machine, take a bearing and set off in the general direction of the trench, hoping to find it by stumbling into it. Working in such a crop can produce a feeling of total isolation, until suddenly a plant talks, revealing the presence of a colleague standing only two feet away.

Excavation of the Roman site and two of the prehistoric areas will begin in April and continue to about the end of June. The other prehistoric areas will not be disturbed by the development.

J Moore & A Parkinson

BURGHFIELD: MOORE'S FARM, PINGEWOOD

On behalf of Sheraton Securities International plc the OAU carried out an assessment in September/October 1989 in advance of an application for gravel extraction. The area of approximately 32 hectares lies in an area of known archaeological activity. Excavations at Pingewood carried out by the Berkshire Archaeological Committee between 1977 and 1979 in an area about 500 m to the north-west uncovered a Bronze Age settlement and Roman occupation, and one kilometre to the north-east at the Reading Business Park the OAU's own excavations have located an area of extensive Late Bronze Age settlement with associated field systems.

The assessment revealed a zone of Late Bronze Age occupation, defined by both the underlying archaeological features and the results from topsoil sampling, covering an area c 150 m x 135 m. Across the rest of the application site more dispersed activity was recorded, principally of Late Bronze Age date, but sherds of pottery from the Early Bronze Age and Neolithic period were recovered. Several features of Roman date were also located.

David Jennings and Andrew Parkinson

DONNINGTON: SHERRARD'S NURSERY

An assessment was undertaken in November 1989 on behalf of Mrs S J Sherrard for a proposed residential development. Sherrard's Nursery is situated on the Wantage Road just north of Donnington. Immediately to the south, two circular structures made of flint and filled with ash were discovered in 1885. A quantity of Roman pottery was found. The situation of these structures on the crest of the hill overlooking the line of the Roman road from Silchester to Cirencester led to speculation that they were signal beacons associated with the road.

Four trenches were excavated in the 1.5 hectare site. At the extreme southern edge an ancient watercourse was located, separating this site from the area containing the circular structures. No archaeological activity was found within the assessment site.

J Moore & R Whiteman

YATTENDON: ST PETER AND ST PAUL'S

The replacement of the wooden decking beneath the pews in this medieval church revealed two tiled areas, one on either side of the central aisle in front of the screen.

Each area was floored with reused tiles from the 13th to early 14th centuries, later printed tiles and 18th century bricks laid flat. South of the central aisle the tiles were laid round a grave ledger, originally inlaid with a medieval brass; now only the incised silhouette of the brass survives. Excavation confirmed that this grave ledger marked the original medieval floor level. The church, well known for its timbered roof, is thought to have been built on open ground in the later 13th or 14th century and no evidence was seen to suggest otherwise. Towards the west end of the nave, extensive spreads of white lime mortar appear to have resulted from the early 20th century renovation of the church and were liberally covered with impressions of hobnailed boots. Apart from the replacement of the brick sill walls which supported the decking, the floor level will be left as it was following the restoration. The tiled areas have been left untouched. A plan and photographs of these two areas of floor will be exhibited in the church for future reference.

R A Chambers and Naomi Hutchings

KENT

DOVER: RUSSELL STREET CAR PARK

The Russell Street site lies in the shadow of Dover's famous Castle Hill on the edge of what, in the Roman period, was the broad estuary of the River Dour. The site is to be redeveloped as a multi-storey car park by Dover District Council, who accordingly commissioned an archaeological assessment. This was carried out by the OAU in January and showed that the area is, as has always been suspected, of great importance to the history of the town.

The results of the assessment trenches have been combined with those from a borehole survey, demonstrating that the car park sits on top of a stratified sequence which is over six metres deep. Datable material (so far only recovered from the top four metres) goes back at least to the 12th and perhaps to the early 11th century, with the possibility of earlier (perhaps Roman) material below. The medieval pottery recovered so far shows not only the development of local wares, but also a range of regional (Canterbury, London, Surrey) and international (Germany, France, Low Countries) imports, which reflect the status of Dover as a trading port.

This is, however, only half of the story, for it seems that the area, being so close to both the sea and the tidal river, was occasionally overtaken by natural events. Layers of clean beach gravel, sand and silt all appear within the sequence, interrupting the archaeological deposits and demonstrating that when a storm was sweeping up the English Channel this was not the place to be. Study of this aspect of the site's history is being greatly aided by close co-operation with the staff of the Institute of Archaeology in London, who are currently carrying out a palaeoenvironmental survey of the Dour Valley catchment.

In general, the assessment of the site has been successful, not only because it has demonstrated the nature of the archaeology, but also

Figure 2: Dover 1989, the Heritage Centre site. Excavation for a lift shaft: the massive piling rig stands in the background (see Newsletter xvii (June 1989), 3-4 for details).



because it has demonstrated the site's potential - namely, to tell the story of this part of Dover, from bedrock to modern car park, in terms of both human and natural agencies.

Dave Wilkinson

LONDON

SOUTHWARK: ALBANY ROAD

A one week assessment carried out at the beginning of February 1990 on behalf of Thames Property Development Ltd proved most successful in confirming the early topography of the Walworth/Bermondsey district of south-east London.

Four 5 x 5 m trenches were excavated, revealing that the dense Victorian housing that formerly occupied the site had destroyed much of the early stratigraphy. Despite this, however, it was possible to conclude that the site was part of a prehistoric landscape which was predominantly waterlogged, with mud flats and silts. In one trench, a once-submerged prehistoric sand bank complete with preserved remains of marsh reed was discovered. At some time, possibly during the Iron Age, an attempt had been made to drain or at least regulate the swamp by digging a small gully which when excavated proved to contain many fragments of well-preserved twigs. This attempt at drainage failed, the gully became overwhelmed and silts were deposited over a large area.

During the Roman period another attempt was made to drain the marshland. This also failed, creating further waterlogged levels. A crude path of rubble and pottery was laid to gain access across the marsh; it was set into one of the upper layers of silt, and is probably of mid to late Roman date. Remnants of the Roman gully may have formed the 'Earls Sluice', a narrow stream recorded on a map by Roque as late as 1746, when the area was fertile land.

The fact that the assessment was successfully carried out within its short time span despite appalling weather conditions is due to the co-operation and good humour of the assessment team. My thanks go to them all, both for their work in Albany Road and Redcross Way.

Martin J Hicks

SOUTHWARK: REDCROSS WAY

The prospect of discovering exciting Roman finds was provided by a three week assessment undertaken on behalf of City Gate Estates Plc.

The project involved the excavation of two 5 x 5 m trenches. Trench 1 was located in an area formerly called 'The Cross Bones Burying Ground'. Twenty eight inhumations were systematically excavated, recorded and lifted, and a number of miscellaneous bones were retrieved. The constant process of burial had disturbed or destroyed 16 layers which consisted of various deposits of silt overlying sand. This sequence suggests that trench 1 was located within a channel or area of waterlaid influence, possibly a tributary of the Thames which formed part of a pre-Roman landscape of marshland and isolated inhabited areas of dry ground.

The archaeology in trench 2 was markedly different. All post-Roman levels had been removed by modern basements which directly overlay a Roman graveyard containing six semi-complete human skeletons, one adorned with a penannular brooch dated to between the 2nd and 4th centuries AD. Several occupation levels survived beneath this Roman cemetery and produced a variety of pottery from the 1st and late 2nd centuries AD, representing activity in a 'suburb' of early Roman London.

Martin J Hicks

OXFORDSHIRE

BANBURY: INNER RELIEF ROAD

The construction of stages II and III of the Banbury Inner Relief Road provided an opportunity to examine the date and character of the development at the very east end of the medieval town. The work has been split into two phases; an initial excavation lasting four weeks, from January to early February, and a watching brief which has yet to happen. The excavation examined those areas on either side of the carriageway where a watching brief would be ineffectual, but where the archaeology would have been destroyed by subsequent service trenches and development. The archaeology beneath the carriageway will be recorded during the watching brief. The work is being funded by Oxfordshire County Council.

The excavations lay within a triangular site between the Oxford to Birmingham canal and the north side of Bridge Street at the foot of the causeway leading up to the bridge across the Cherwell flood plain. Two arches of the medieval stone bridge, c 14th century, remain visible, showing that the medieval crossing is encapsulated within the core of the modern road bridge. To the west, the site was bounded by properties along Mill Lane.

The site is best known locally for the canalside warehouse featured on the cover of the current telephone directory. The warehouse was demolished in December last year, just one month short of the bicentenary of the construction of the last part of the Oxford-Birmingham canal, the length from Banbury to Oxford. This warehouse and the former fire station became surrounded by a complex of small industrial units during this century, causing much ground disturbance, but enough survived below ground to demonstrate the earlier history of the site.

The south-western two thirds of the site occupied higher ground which fell away quite sharply along its north-eastern side into the

river Cherwell floodplain. The first medieval buildings on the site were built at an angle to Bridge Street and the later property boundaries. These buildings, represented by rubble built foundations from two separate structures, were surrounded by soil containing medieval pottery which with the occasional exception begins in the 13th century. Later a linear boundary ditch was dug from Bridge Street north to the edge of the floodplain. This probably represents a growing need to increase the density of settlement in this part of the town, which had gradually expanded as far east towards the bridge as it could while keeping to the dry higher ground. By the early post-medieval period the ditch had been replaced with a wall. This wall included much re-used weathered stone and some non-local ashlar masonry, which suggests that it was built with material robbed from the castle after the Cromwellian Civil War. The line of this property boundary remained unaltered until the present, having been incorporated into the 19th and 20th century industrial units including the canalside warehouse, now demolished.

The red brick properties numbers 59 and 60, which were built about the turn of the century and which fronted onto Bridge Street, were also demolished last December. Subsequent excavation revealed that the earlier underlying structures, built in the local mellow iron-stone, were post-medieval but lay over a medieval building of which the central, undated open hearth was all that remained. Several pits showed that this frontage was open ground for at least part of the medieval period. The lack of walls which could be directly associated with the open hearth suggests either that the medieval foundations had been reused for the later houses or that the open hearth was directly replaced with the central chimney stack and its back-to-back hearths, enabling a second floor to be inserted into the shell of the medieval building. The position of the medieval street frontage was not discovered. Either it had been destroyed by the turn of the century housing or it lay further out into Bridge Street.

The medieval properties backed northwards onto the edge of the flood plain which was gradually silting up and providing a convenient dumping ground for medieval rubbish. After the canal had cut across just below the edge of the flood plain, the intervening depression was

infilled with large amounts of Victorian rubbish and soil before being built upon by the end of the period.

R A Chambers

BICESTER: FISHPONDS

At the end of January 1990 these fishponds were bulldozed away as the site was cleared for a new building development. The ponds were almost certainly built for Bicester Priory on what was originally marshy ground. The fact that they survived to be recorded on the First Edition of the Ordnance Survey suggests that they continued to be maintained and stocked after the dissolution. This is not particularly surprising as fresh sea fish would only have become available with the arrival of the railway in the mid-19th century.

R A Chambers

BICESTER: TESCO SUPERMARKET SITE

This site fills the corner north-east of the junction between the A412 Oxford-Bicester road and the new southern bypass. During the construction of the southern bypass in 1989, a fragment of a sword from a Bronze Age smith's hoard was found immediately to the south of the present site. The underlying clay and brashy limestone have been only partially cleared of topsoil for the access road which is bedded on Terram. It is highly unlikely that any underlying archaeological features could be seen in such conditions. The topsoil contained nothing except an occasional post-medieval pottery sherd.

R A Chambers

CHARNEY BASSETT: ST PETER'S CHURCH

This small church, which comprises a rectangular chancel, nave and north aisle, lies immediately south of the surviving medieval manor house. In early February a gully between 0.6 m and 1.0 m deep was cut round the west, north and east sides of the church. As has already happened on the south side of the church, this gully will contain a drainage pipe and gravel infilling in an attempt to reduce the rising damp which is affecting the walls inside the church.

Little of archaeological merit was exposed by this trench except on the north side at the west end of the nave. Here the present nave wall overlay a short 2.4 m length of rubble built foundation aligned at a slight angle to the present wall. Inside the church the wall plaster conceals any architectural evidence for an extended nave and the junction between the nave wall and the west end of the unusually short north aisle was destroyed by the insertion of a 19th century brick flue. This earlier foundation suggests the north wall of a small square building originally occupying the ground immediately west of the end of an earlier short nave. The function and precise date of this structure remains unknown, but it is tempting to view it either as a bell tower or as a tomb or shrine. The foundations are too massive for it to make sense as a cell for a religious recluse or vicar's house.

R A Chambers

EYNHAM: EYNHAM ABBEY

Excavation of the first 400 sq. m of St Leonard's churchyard extension began in January and has, as expected, revealed very little of the fabric of the medieval abbey except for robbed foundation trenches filled with powdered mortar and some small rubble. The

few pieces of moulded stonework which were overlooked by the workmen clearing the site probably all belong to the period from 1280 to 1320. No Norman architectural work has yet been found. It is now clear that the robbing affected the majority of the floors in this area.

The disposition of the buildings within the later abbey is only gradually becoming clear. It is hoped that foundations at the northern end of the churchyard extension will prove to represent the cloister alley. This interpretation is now possible as it has become clear that the facsimile of the drawing purporting to have been drawn by Anthony Wood in 1657 (*Oxoniensia* XLIII 1978, 103-4, Pl. IV), on which the cloisters are clearly marked on the north side of the abbey church, is actually a copy with alterations made by Brown Willis (Bodl. MS Willis 46, fol. 96). The drawing by Anthony Wood (Bodl. MS Wood E I, fol. 45) shows only that the north wall of the Norman nave contained an arcade, and this is consistent with architectural practice at that period.

Beneath the medieval abbey lies a range of earlier buildings tentatively interpreted as part of the previous Benedictine abbey founded by Aethelmaer, Earl of Cornwall and confirmed by King Aethelred the Redless in 1005. These buildings lie on a different alignment from that of the later abbey, but as they are only coming to light at the time of writing they will be reported on in the next newsletter.

Earlier Saxon occupation also underlies the abbey buildings. Early Saxon pottery has been recovered from dark earth deposits over the site and a probable sunken featured building has been revealed in section. In order to strengthen the dating evidence for any well stratified later Saxon deposits which may be associated with the minster known to have been present by 864 AD all such levels are being subjected to routine metal detection.

The only possible evidence for later Saxon activity of some importance is a ditch which cuts the possible sunken featured building mentioned above. Boundary ditches on early-mid Saxon

settlements are almost unknown in the Upper Thames Valley except in association with major buildings. This boundary ditch may be a part of the minster boundary, but as it inevitably contains residual Saxon pottery the picture will only become clear upon complete excavation.

R A Chambers

GREAT CHESTERTON: ST MARY'S CHURCH

The replacement of the suspended floors beneath the pews in St Mary's has confirmed that both the north and south aisle arcades rest on the foundations of an earlier rectangular nave. Little was seen of the wall foundation beneath the transitional Norman north arcade, but beneath the early English south arcade a substantial mortared wall foundation survived. The decking beneath the pews had been installed during the Victorian period. The ventilation cavities below the decking extended 0.5 to 0.6 m below the level of the aisles and the medieval floor levels appear to have been dug away. The present re-flooring was a direct replacement of the existing wooden decking beneath the pews and no excavation was necessary.

R A Chambers

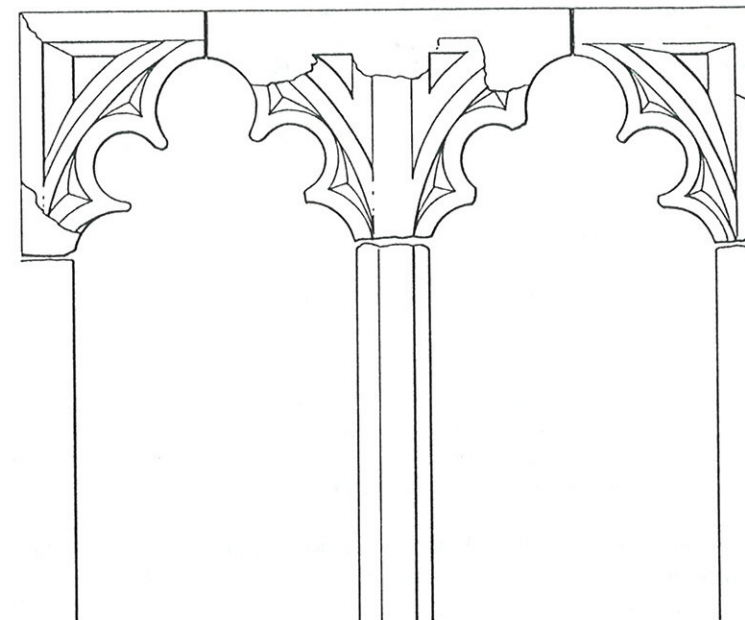
HENLEY: CHAPEL WELLS, PISHILL WITH STONOR

This modern house is reputed to be on the site of a manor of Robert D'Oiley for which a chapel is recorded in 1406. The adjoining barn has earlier masonry forming a very un-barn-like window splay in its south gable, which could have been part of a manorial building. It was therefore interesting to see the corner of a stone and flint cellar with brick dressings exposed when the owners dug trenches for a

new kitchen extension north-east of the barn. Unfortunately it was not possible to confirm previous reports that the cellar had a tiled floor without disrupting the foundation design.

Brian Durham

Figure 3: Minster Lovell Great Hall: window tracery



MINSTER LOVELL: THE GREAT HALL

On the 19th, 20th and 22nd of February, building recording was carried out prior to repair work at the Great Hall on behalf of English Heritage. Despite very windy weather analytical scale drawings of the interior and exterior surfaces of three windows in the upper part of the Great Hall were completed, along with sections and scale records of the mouldings. Only one of the windows had all its tracery remaining although it was in a very worn state. In most cases the stonework was very weathered and crumbly, especially over the interior arches, where it was only possible to record a complete section in one or two places. Seven views were recorded in all, accompanied by relevant photographs.

Leigh Turner and Rob Bourne

OXFORD: POLICE STATION - PHASE II

Our project to study the Saxon Shire Lake at Oxford has been running for three years, and the last item was to look at the site of the new accommodation block at the police station. It took us as close as practicable to the core of the Saxon bridge bed which has been predicted from the curving slope of the channels.

A stone waterfront was found, the most substantial wall to be seen on the north side of the old river here. It seems to have been functioning in the 13th Century, and from its alignment it can be assumed to have passed between two of our previous trenches, being a straightening up of the curving timber waterfront seen in 1987.

The levels to the rear of this structure were sampled for pottery and seemed to be getting earlier in date, but it looks as if any

substantial Saxon activity was further north still, and has been lost to the large existing boiler house basement.

Brian Durham

SUTTON COURTENAY: OTNEY GRAVEL PITS

Further assessment was carried out for the proposed extension to the gravel pit of J Curtis and Sons Ltd. The site comprises some 7 hectares of first terrace gravels adjacent to the river Thames. Aerial photography has revealed two enclosures at Otney and two prehistoric monuments east of the Drayton B cursus. Roman field boundaries and trackways associated with the small Roman settlement immediately to the south-west of the present plant site of Curtis & Sons are also clear on the aerial photographs.

The northern enclosure at Otney was defined by a shallow ditch, while the north-eastern side of the other enclosure was found to have been formed by a series of five ditches, perhaps successive phases. These ditches were very shallow. No features were found in the interior of the enclosures. Further ditches were located in the assessment trenches but only one sherd of pottery (Roman coarse ware) was recovered. There were no finds from the enclosures.

While the character of the enclosures suggests a Romano-British date, there was a total lack of surface finds of this period. There was also a surprising absence of prehistoric activity; only one flint was found on the ploughed surface during the work on the site.

Extensive gravel quarrying had been carried out during the post-medieval period. This, coupled with the modern ploughing, has led to a poor state of survival of the archaeology in this area.

A Neolithic long enclosure is known from aerial photographs. It is

parallel to the Drayton B cursus and has a sub-rectangular enclosure some 15 m to the south. One of our assessment trenches defined the precise location of the northern terminal of the long enclosure while trial excavation by AAAHS further south through the east ditch revealed that the ditch originally had almost vertical sides and a near flat base (Gledhill and Wallis 1989, 'Sutton Courtenay: a Neolithic long enclosure', *South Midlands Archaeology* 14, 58).

Pits and possible postholes indicated activity external to the enclosure along the main axis of the two monuments. This type of activity has also been found at West Cotton, Northants. (Windell 1981, 'The Raunds area project: second interim report', *Northants Archaeol* 21, 9).

Excavation of the northern end of the long enclosure and the external features will take place later in the year. More limited work will be carried out on the enclosures at Otney.

John Moore

SOULDERN: SOULDERN MANOR

Service trenches have now been cut along the line of the west to east hollow way which will soon be dug out and metalled to provide access to the property from the west. The tennis pavilion is now under construction. The foundation trenches for this building did not reveal any clear medieval structural evidence.

R A Chambers

THAME: THE PREBENDAL

Thame church became a prebend of Lincoln Cathedral in 1234 and

much of the architecture of the house is attributed to that period. It is now a comfortable mansion owned by Mr and Mrs Gibb, who would like to make it more coherent by building a 'hall' to replace the ruin which was taken down in 1837, and thereby to link the existing 15th century house to the now free-standing 13th century chapel and solar. The site of the new building was accessed archaeologically for traces of its medieval predecessor.

In this idyllic situation it was depressing to find modern services, an infilled concrete ornamental pond and a large 18th century well! It was clear, however, that there are thin medieval floors and that the foundations of the old building survive, and this may be all that is needed to explain the function of the former building. It does not have the accumulation of ash which is often associated with an open-hearth hall, and it does not appear to have pier-bases of a stone undercroft, which leaves the possibility that it had a timber floor and did not in fact function as the main hall, rather as an additional solar or an antechamber.

This is an interesting new angle on a very important medieval house, and it is hoped that the development proposals will allow it to be investigated.

Brian Durham

UPPER THAMES VALLEY: AERIAL SURVEY

Several archaeological features highlighted by floodwater were photographed during a short reconnaissance flight along the Upper Thames Valley from Wallingford to Bampton on February 9th this year. Of particular interest were the relict water channels in the valley floor, heavily silted and difficult to recognise at ground level without excavation or expensive surveying techniques. At Eynsham the floodwater revealed channels on either side of a newly discovered Bronze Age settlement, confirming at a glance the results of earlier archaeological fieldwork. At Dorchester-on-Thames flooding did not

affect the interior of the Iron Age valley fort at a bend in the river behind the massive bi-vallate linear earthwork known as Dyke Hills. Although the interior remained dry, floodwater filled the surviving part of the defensive ditch between the banks, illustrating the full defensive potential of this well defended site. At Oxford, the floods across Port Meadow emphasised much of man's past intervention. Of particular note were the circular banks of two Bronze Age barrows standing several centimetres above the flooding. These photographs will continue to be of value in the coming years as more and more assessment work is undertaken along the Upper Thames Valley. Unfortunately the survey stopped near Bampton at the edge of a cold front marked by dense low cloud. Perhaps the most interesting view of all was of a well-known field near Bampton with its Iron Age settlement portrayed in fine detail as cropmarks in winter wheat - in mid February!

While we were crossing West Oxon., the low early morning sun picked out the continuing loss of earthwork evidence for past settlement activity, particularly medieval. The general impression is of a landscape which over the past 15 years has lost much of its visual aerial interest.

R A Chambers

WALLINGFORD: FORMER CATTLE MARKET, WOOD STREET

The District Council is extending a surface car park up to the line of Wood Street, which is known from previous excavations to have the only 10th century deposits so far found in Wallingford and is therefore an indicator of the centre of settlement within the Alfredian burh.

Only in one place were the contractors' excavations deep enough to show early deposits on Wood Street; there was a series of ashy and

gravel occupation surfaces with a small group of Oxford Fabric B pottery underneath. The implication is that these were floors of the earliest building from Wallingford, and that they are an indication of what may be a few inches beneath the clearance level over the rest of the site. This is confirmed by typically 11th century group of St Neots-type ware from a pit cutting through this level.

The Unit is grateful to South Oxford District Council for a grant towards the cost of this watching brief and to Sandor Balazs, agent for the contractors Amery Construction.

Brian Durham

WATERSTOCK TO WENDLEBURY: M40

Although the carriageway is now well advanced and offers little further scope for archaeological prospection, this contract continues to destroy adjacent archaeology. An illegal stone quarry opened up by McAlpines at Merton removed 200 m of the line of the Dorchester to Alchester Roman road including the approach to the late 1st century AD timber bridge whose piles surface in the silted river channel. A complex of Neolithic and Bronze Age occupation and burial monuments at the west end of the quarry has been badly damaged. The assessment and excavation of these are dealt with elsewhere in this newsletter.

R A Chambers

WENDLEBURY: WENDLEBURY HOLT

This building plot lies directly above the projected line of the Roman road running east from Alchester. Site clearance has not provided any recognisable evidence for a roadway, but the variable nature of

Roman period roads often makes the recognition of their former presence difficult in the best of conditions.

R A Chambers

WEST HANNEY: ST JAMES THE GREAT

During January the rotten wooden decking beneath the pews in this parish church was replaced. This provided an opportunity to inspect and record any exposed foundation work and earlier surviving floor levels. The Victorian restorers rebuilt most of the nave and their ground-works had removed all of the medieval floor levels. Even the aisle columns within the nave were rebuilt on deep brick and stone mortared foundations. No traces of an earlier nave were seen. The ventilation cavities beneath the pews were 0.50 - 0.60 m deep and were floored with mixed soil and Victorian construction waste.

However, the Victorians had retained the brick built burial vaults which dated principally to the 18th - early 19th centuries. These had been let into the floor of the unrestored medieval nave and the protruding crowns of the vaulted roofs gave an indication of the pre-Victorian floor level. The roof arches of nine brick built burial vaults were found within the nave. None could be related to wall plaques or otherwise directly dated. Bricks were removed from three vaults in order to view the integrity of the structures inside. One vault was only 1.7 m deep from the present floor level whilst a second, double vault was significantly deeper and flooded with ground water from the high water table. The vault showed the poor quality of the locally made bricks; as at nearby Charney Bassett this almost certainly reflected both the quality of the local clay and the firing technique employed during manufacture. The dividing wall between two vaults had already collapsed and crumbling brickwork was evident all round. One vault was seen to contain the collapsed remains of a confined burial. The coffin, edged with domed upholstery nails, had borne the embossed arms and family

monogram. Now rusted and half disintegrated, the arms had presumably been brightly painted. Of particular note within the remains of this coffin of one of the wealthy landed gentry was the distribution of large clenched iron nails, mirroring the irregular nail scatter frequently found in confined Romano-British graves. It seems the quality of the joinery had not changed!

R A Chambers

YARNTON: WORTON RECTORY FARM

Excavation has recently commenced at Worton Rectory Farm, Yarnton, a site which lies within ARC's new Cassington gravel extraction pit. The work is being funded by English Heritage.

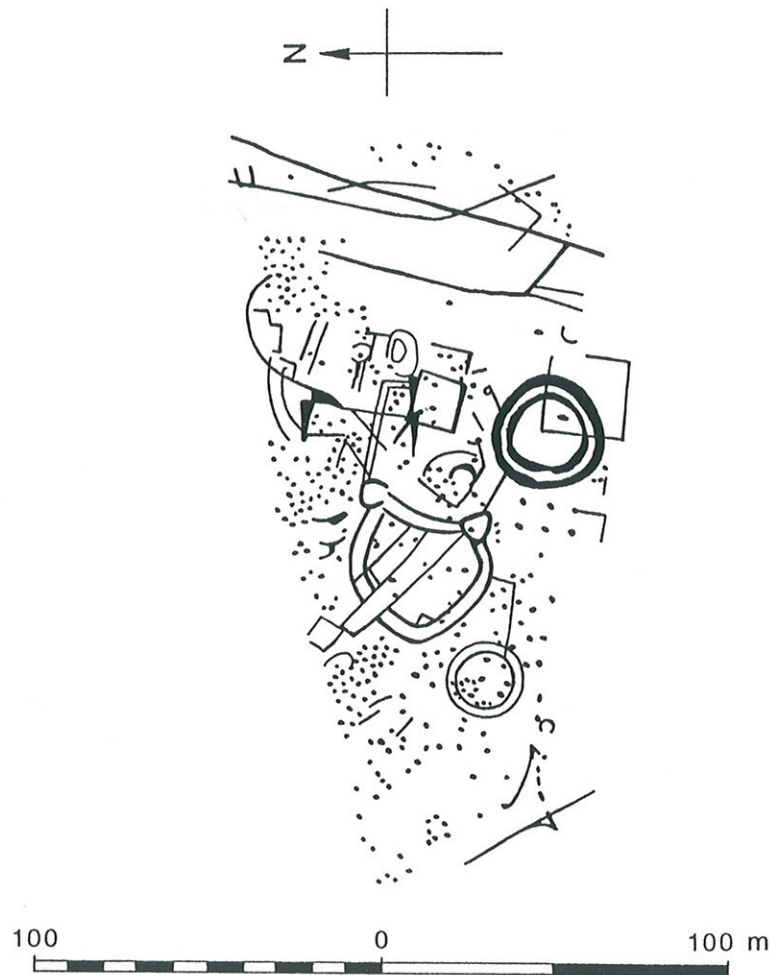
The cropmarks illustrated here are plotted from aerial photographs taken in the 1960s and show the site to have a great density and variety of archaeological features. Two small, circular enclosures, as well as a large number of intercutting ditches of rectangular and sub-circular enclosures, linear features, a mass of pits and some possible gullies are all visible. A limited assessment carried out in September 1989 revealed the site to be an early to late Iron Age settlement with a later Roman field-system laid out on top.

An area roughly 120 m square has been stripped by machine and is being cleaned by hand to expose the plan of the settlement. Already this has shown that the archaeology is more complex than we had expected and early Roman occupation has been exposed in the north-east of the site.

Our strategy is to establish the nature and extent of each phase of occupation by the end of March.

Gill Hey

Figure 4: Cropmarks at Yarnton

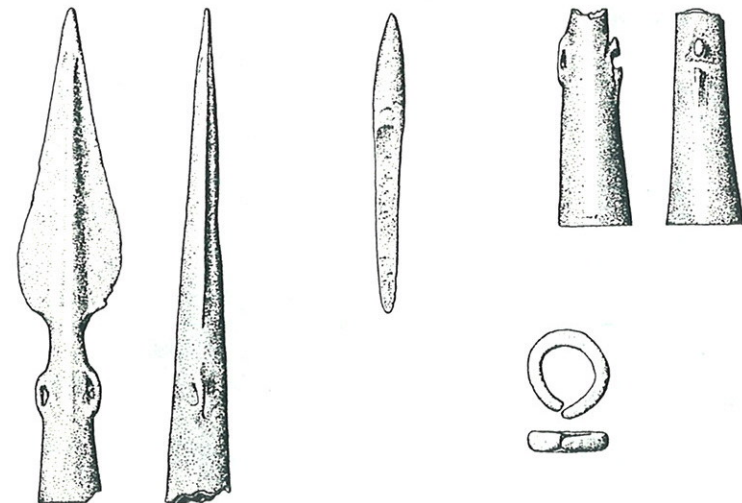


ENDNOTES

ARCHAEOLOGY AND METAL DETECTORS

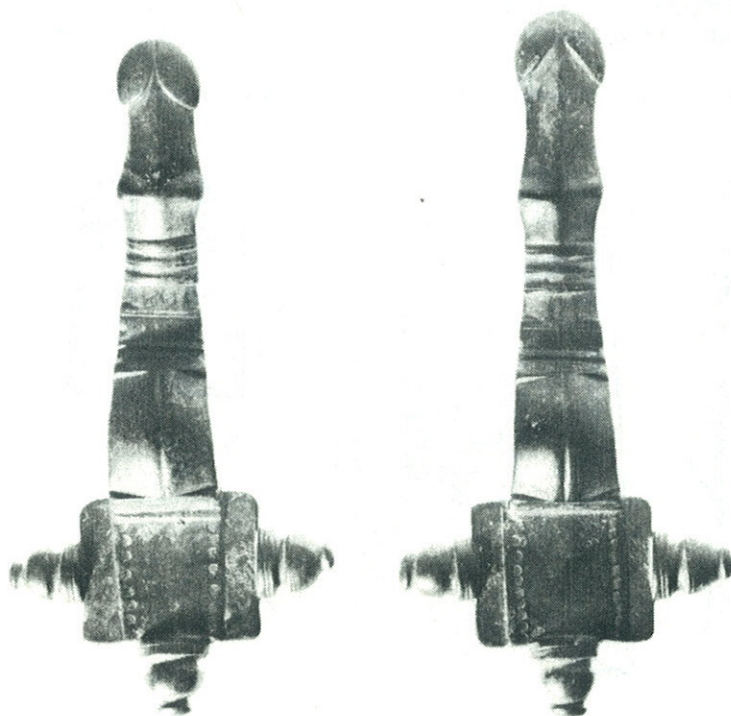
There have been a number of important recent discoveries by metal detector users in Oxfordshire: a Merovingian equal-armed brooch of about AD 800 was found near the Challow Roman villa site and a Visigothic brooch from near the Little Merton villa, and an important Anglo-Saxon cemetery has been discovered at West Hendred. Finds from at least six graves have been donated to the County Museum.

Figure 5: Recent metal detector finds from Oxfordshire



Metal detector clubs and users from Oxford, Swindon and Cirencester are assisting the Unit on sites at Eynsham and Yarnton. In our recent Cotswold Water Park excavations all fifteen Iron Age coins have been found by metal detector. The relationship between metal detector clubs and archaeologists can be a very fruitful one when we take the trouble to communicate and work to agreed standards.

Figure 6: Anglo-Saxon brooches from the cemetery at West Hendred



WHAT ARE WE THERE FOR?

The rapid growth of the Unit in the past year (we now have 60 employees) has emphasised the need for regular training to establish and maintain standards of work. A seminar has been held on Saturday 17th February at Rewley House in which the staff met to thrash out everything from health and safety to recording methods and the meaning of life. Most people seemed to enjoy this cathartic experience and begged for more. A repeat event is planned for 17th March. In the near future a new Unit manual will emerge. Thanks to the Department for External Studies for the use of Rewley House.

Another seminar on the production of excavation reports is planned for 9th March with Professor Barry Cunliffe as the discussant.

PEOPLE

Several staff have joined the Unit since Christmas. Dr Ellen McAdam has taken up the new post of publications manager. Ellen read British and European archaeology at Edinburgh and has a DPhil in Near Eastern archaeology from the University of Oxford. She previously worked as a group manager in the Greater Manchester Archaeological Unit.

Martin Hicks has joined us as a Senior Archaeologist from the Canterbury Archaeological Trust where he directed the massive St Gregory's site. Martin came into archaeology from a career in the army, and previously worked mainly in Italy with the British School at Rome.

Graham Keevil has also taken up the post of Senior Archaeologist from 26th March. Graham has been working as the archaeologist to Carlisle Cathedral and is a graduate of Leicester University.

Congratulations to Martin Jones, quondam environmentalist with the

Unit, who has been appointed to the new George Pitt-Rivers Chair of Archaeological Science at Cambridge University.

BEQUEST TO THE UNIT

The Unit has been left £41,153 from the estate of the late Mr Anthony Willford Pullen of Southmoor Oxfordshire.

EVENTS

Institute of Field Archaeologists, South Midlands Branch: Meeting - 14 March 1990, 8 pm at Rewley House. All members and associates are invited to this meeting. Archaeologists who have not yet joined IFA are welcome to come along to find out why membership is worthwhile.

Environment and Economy in Anglo-Saxon England: a conference - 9th to 10th April 1990, at the Museum of London. For details, contact Lesley Hannigan, CBA, 112 Kennington Road, London, SE11 6RE. Registration fee £25.

Archaeology/Local History: a summer school - 4-18th August 1990, at Rewley House.

The Nineteenth Century Country House: a weekend school - 19-20th August 1990, at Rewley House.

Arts and Crafts and the English Garden: a weekend school - 23-25th March 1990, at Rewley House.

Air Photography and Archaeology: a weekend school - 17-18th March 1990, at Rewley House.

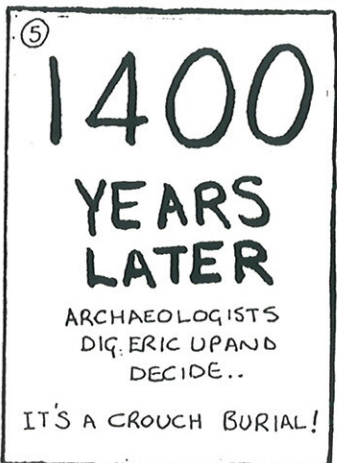
The Arab Influence upon Medieval Europe: a weekend school - 6-8th April 1990, at Rewley House.

Lollards and Catholics: a day school Saturday 5th May 1990, at Bulmershe College, Woodlands Avenue Woodley, Reading.

Details of courses from Oxford University Department for External Studies, Rewley House, 1 Wellington Square, Oxford OX1 2JA.

ERIC THE BAD

AN
ALTERNATIVE ARCHAEOLOGICAL THEORY



HISTORICAL AND
ARCHAEOLOGICAL
TERMS EXPLAINED
No. 1

VOLUNTEERS

We are always 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 would like to lend a hand you are most welcome. Please contact Leigh Turner at the Unit (tel Ox. 243888).

SUBSCRIPTIONS

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

If anyone outside the Unit - local societies, archaeological enthusiasts, or other professional groups working in Oxfordshire - wishes to make use of these information columns they are most welcome.

Please send contributions for the next newsletter to Samantha Hatzis at the Oxford Archaeological Unit, 46 Hythe Bridge Street, Oxford OX1 2EP.

Cover Illustrations: The seal of Roger of Comenore (top) and a seal with a crowned letter A, both found at the former Halls Brewery site.



HAZEL DOMINATING THE WOODLAND

LECTURES

Thanks to Petra Day for a very interesting talk at the Unit on February 5th, about her recent work on pollen samples in the Shotover area.

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