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OXFORDSHIRE ARCHAEOLOGICAL UNIT NEWSLETTER INCLUDING
OXFORDSHIRE PARISH SURVEY NEWS

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Anyone wishing to send contributions to the Newsletter should send details to the above address before Friday, 9th April.

OXFORDSHIRE

Abingdon, Ex-MG Car Factory Site. (N.F.R. SU484973, P.R.N. 13,016 (Iron Age), 13,017 (Romano-British).

Excavation is in progress at the ex-MG Car Factory site, Abingdon, and will continue until 6th March, 1982.

Modern warehousing developed around the factory when it was operative, and now that the factory has closed the site is to be infilled with more warehouses and associated roads and services. The developers are Standard Life Assurance who are being extremely helpful.

Immediate interest in the site was inspired by the fact of its location as it directly adjoins the excavated site of Ashville Trading Estate. This site, excavated by Michael Parrington on behalf of the O.A.U. during 1974-1976, produced two bronze age ring ditches and associated cremations, evidence of early -middle iron age settlement, and late iron age and Roman field or enclosure ditches (published, 1978, C.B.A. Research Report no.28). The present development and associated excavation programme therefore provides an opportunity to study a potentially interesting and unknown area, (the MG site, having been used for car parking and therefore covered with tarmac, has long been inaccessible to any form of archaeological survey). Archaeological features in the form of cropmarks were noted from the air, though not photographed, prior to the laying of the tarmac. Further, eleven Roman inhumations of suggest fourth century date were disturbed during building works in 1974, c 200m south of Ashville, on the MG site.

Broadly, the aims and expectations of the present site are to determine the southern and eastern (the filter beds have been bought up by Standard Life and will be available for study) limits of the early-middle iron age settlement of the Ashville site. To study further the late iron age and Roman field ditches. To locate and determine the nature of the Romano British settlement which finds at Ashville (two Roman wells) and the above mentioned inhumations, suggest that it is within MG. Finally, to recover evidence of the late iron age settlement.

No open area excavation is envisaged, that is to say the archaeologists are working in advance of building works and within the confines of road corridors, foundations trenches, service trenches etc. Standard Life Assurance, the developers, are highly cooperative in this respect, and indeed are paying for archaeological coverage.

The present excavation trench is within an east/west road corridor and when machining is completed will measure c 300m x 8 m. It lies c 80m south of Ashville. Initial response is surprise at the density and extent of the archaeological features uncovered so far. Visitors to the site who excavated on the Ashville site say it is reminiscent of the areas of most compact features recorded there. As we are in the early stages of excavation only a few generalisations are possible. Obviously we assume that the features relate in the main to the anticipated late iron age and Roman settlement for the narrow north/south trench dug in Summer 1981, suggested that the settlement evidence recorded at Ashville had run out in the southern half of the trench. Along with many interesting pits, features appear to comprise of linear ditches, and hut gullies, and a possible well.

Banbury Castle, The Marks & Spencer Development Site

Site clearance to make way for the new Marks & Spencer store began in November last year. The site is bounded on the west by the Castle Shopping Centre, to the north and east by Castle Street and by the Market Place to the south. This site lies over the south-western corner of the outer defences of Banbury Castle, demolished soon after the Civil War. A watch is being maintained over the ground work from the Marks & Spencer store in order to confirm the line of the castle defences. This should also increase our knowledge of the castle gained in 1973-4 prior to the building of the Castle Shopping Centre. The Unit is extremely grateful to Mr. Jakeman who has maintained a continuous watch over the groundwork.

Following the closure of a street and the demolition of existing 18th and 19th century properties the ground level has been reduced by machine. This only involved the removal of a small amount of soil along the southern edge of the site but the overburden steadily increased to a depth of 2m in the southern corner. Almost all of the soil removed had been dumped on the site of the castle since the late 17th century. The ground reduction was generally too shallow to reveal any more than indistinct indications of the line of the bailey moat and of the former stream bed to the south-east of the castle.

In late November a site inspection by Mr. Jakeman and R.A. Chambers did reveal an amorphous scatter of local ironstone building rubble in the area thought to have been occupied by a corner tower serving the outer bailey. Although the northern corner of the site had been reduced to the subsoil beneath the medieval ground surface it was not possible to provide confirmation of the source of this rubble. Immediately to the south of the rubble, a series of adult, human burials were discovered buried on the berm between the castle wall and the moat. The total number of burials could not be determined. The minimum of ten individuals were counted although there may have been in excess of twenty. Burials were found in similar situations during the 1973-4 excavations. The relationship these individuals had with the Castle, if any, remains unknown.

During the next few weeks the excavation of sleeper-beam trenches to provide foundations for the new store will provide a further chance to view the archaeology of this site.

Checkendon, The Devil's Churchyard

Work has now finished on this Iron Age site. The results will be written up during the first quarter of 1982.

Dorchester, Green Acre, Bridge End

A human skeleton has been excavated and recorded by Richard Chambers on the above property which lies some 240m south of the walled Roman town. The burial was discovered at the bottom of a post hole dug during the erection of a shed. As required by law, the Coroner was informed of this discovery by Mr. Nudd, the owner of the property. In view of the burial being of some possible archaeological importance the Coroner informed the O.A.U.

The burial was an adult, laid supine and orientated west-east with the head to the west. The grave had cut into the edge of an earlier, Romano-British pit or ditch. There were no grave goods obviously associated with the burial. From the style of burial and the absence of post-Roman period material within the grave filling it has been assumed that burial took place in the later Romano-British period.

A second skeleton was reported to have been found several days later. This skeleton lay in line with the first burial and was also orientated west-east. However this burial was left unexcavated and re-buried in-situ.

Dorchester, 51 High Street

Richard Chambers reports that excavation has confirmed the line of the south wall of the Roman town. The work was undertaken by the Abingdon Area Archaeological Society and more recently by the Oxford University Archaeological Society.

Two trenches on the south-side of the former builder's yard revealed the inside lip of the main town ditch. A third trench across the southern half of the property sectioned the line of the former town wall. This trench also revealed the continuation of the smaller inner ditch occupying the berm between the main town ditch and the wall as discovered by Professor S.S. Frere in his excavations across the western defences. The north wall had been constructed directly on the surface of the underlying gravel. The wall had been entirely robbed of its stone leaving only the impressions of foundation rubble in the gravel surface. This indicated a wall at least 1.8m wide. Although one edge of the robber trench was clearly defined by the soil ramport to the rear of the wall the soil covering the berm had been heavily disturbed. No stratigraphic relationships survived between the wall, the inner ditch and the main town ditch.

Little Coxwell, Ringdale Manor

Mrs. Church reports that the Faringdon and District Historical and Archaeological Society have begun an earthworks survey of a possible hillfort at Ringdale Manor. This has been made possible by a grant from the Lloyds Bank Fund for the purchase of surveying equipment.

Little Milton, Ditch End Farm

Human remains were discovered last autumn during the construction of a new pig unit at Ditch End Farm. Some bones from a single adult burial, reputedly found face down, were collected by the workmen and given to Thame Police. Richard Chambers visited the site but nothing remained to be seen. The burial possibly belongs to the adjacent Romano-British settlement, part of which, a small villa was excavated some years ago.

Oxford, 65 St Aldates, Former Morris Garages

The object of this four-week excavation was to look at the frontage buildings adjoining the river channel and bridge abutment seen in 1979. The later buildings had to be sacrificed owing to shortage of time, but structures were found representing the sixteenth century back to the first buildings of the early thirteenth century. They had been constructed on a platform of dumped rubbish 1 metre thick apparently overlying the silting of an old river channel. Imagine the surprise when we had removed about a metre depth of this silt and came upon a metalled stone surface! It was too deep to be a road because it would have been below river level; hence it had to be a 'ford'. The pottery from its surface was late eleventh century, about the time that we are suggesting Robert D'Oilly built the great stone bridge of Oxford, i.e. Grandpont. We only recovered the upstream edge of the ford, the rest running beneath the modern road, but there were one or two sherds of ninth-tenth century pottery in the thickness of the stone bed which suggest it could have been constructed by the time of first mention of the name 'Oxford' in 911. It would make perfect sense if this was the late Saxon Ox Ford, perhaps widened or repaired on its upstream side, and abandoned to the river when D'Oilly built his bridge immediately alongside it.

What does this mean for the Mercian causeway excavated to the north in 1971? This ford is probably the sort of thing we should have expected where the roadway crossed the braided channels of the Thames. It is slightly ironic that it should turn up on an old British Leyland site, but it underlines the fact that Oxford is not necessarily the home of lost causeways.

Oxford, South Parks Road, Ring ditch and cremation

Contractor's excavations for the new laboratory of Enzymology and Immunochemistry exposed four ditch sections which looked suspiciously like a Bronze Age double concentric ring. George Lambrick and Brian Durham did some advanced geometry and came to the conclusion that the centre should be close to the Observetory building, and lo and behold there was a burnt pit with a cremation. This was excavated by in-service trainee Simon O'Connor Thomson who showed the picture to be slightly more complicated. The cremation seems to have been a later insertion in the pit, so it might be just one of many secondary deposits in the barrow mound. The pit on the other hand seemed to have been burnt twice and thoroughly cleaned out. It might therefore be the site of a pyre used for previous cremations.

There are three or four single ring ditches of similar size about 150m to the north under the cricket pitches in the University Parks, so this begins to look like a major barrow field.

Stanton Harcourt, Dix Pit

Several linear features have been partially uncovered by topsoil stripping in advance of continued gravel extraction. Several of these features may be due to ridge and furrow. A watch will be maintained on this site and the remainder of the features plotted and excavated when further topsoil stripping takes place.

Witney, 27 Market Square

Richard Chambers reports that little excavation by the Witney Society has taken place on this site during the past two months due to the poor weather. However the original exploratory trench has now been expanded to allow a closer examination of the clay floor surface reported on in the last Newsletter. The burnt clay patch in the floor represented a re-furbishing of an earlier pitched limestone open hearth. A substantial stone wall has been uncovered on the western part of the site running back from the present Market Square. Further excavation will be required before the relationship between the hearth the clay floor and the wall can be established.

GLOUCESTER

Fairford/Lechlade, Claydon Pike

The Christmas break and the bad weather considerably affected the programme of work at Claydon Pike.

Work has been concentrated at the back of the main platform in the farm yard. Removal of the rubble scatters and hard standings is revealing intense late Iron Age and early Roman activity. The 1st century A.D. date for the main layout the settlement is confirmed but with major changes soon after expanding this particular platform to the south and east.

The work force at present is at Ashville but excavation here should be resumed in late March.

FORTHCOMING EVENT

29 March - 1 April 1982 — 'Late Medieval Pottery', a conference by the Medieval Pottery Research Group at Worcester College Oxford.

'The transition from medieval to post-medieval pottery forms during the late Middle Ages has been recognised for some time. Recent evidence has shown that the date when this change took place was not consistent over the whole country. Contributions to the conference will examine the social and economic influences on this change and review the varying regional differences in the pottery. Recent work elsewhere in Europe has shown that similar changes were taking place during the later medieval period, and some of the evidence from northern Europe will be examined.

In recognition of Gerald Dunning's major contribution to medieval archaeology and the study of medieval pottery in particular, the Group has established an annual memorial lecture. Each lecture will form the introduction to the annual conference and will consider a major theme current in medieval pottery studies. The inaugural lecture is to be given at the Oxford conference by John Hurst and will assess Dr. Dunning's contribution to medieval archaeology.

The full residential fee including all meals, accomodation etc is £58.00. The non-residential fee is £7.00, lunch is £2.42 per day extra.

Further details can be obtained from Maureen Mellor at the Archaeological Unit.

CALENDAR

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

13-14 February 1982	Local History Certificate Weekend
Friday, 26th February	The Analysis of Neolithic Flints (O.A.U. Seminar)
27-28 February 1982	Archaeology (M. Henig weekend - subject to be decided)
27-28 February 1982	Archaeology Certificate Weekend
Saturday, 6th March	Enclosure Day School II
12-14 March 1982	Archaeology of the Country House
Friday, 19th March	Roman Burial Practice: The Archaeological evidence (O.A.U. Seminar)
Saturday, 20th March	CBA Group 9 Annual Report Conference
26-28 March 1982	Roman Burial Practice (to be held at New College)
23-25 April 1982	Hedges and Woodlands
26-29 April 1982	Planning and the Historic Environment
7-9 May 1982	Etruria and the Etruscans
14-16 May 1982	History of the River Thames

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 (Oxford 52901).