



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, 24th July .

OXFORDSHIRE

Astall Leigh

Richard Chambers reports that several features have been exposed some 400m north-west of the Roman villa at Worsham. The features uncovered by Ken Betteridge in his garden, contained fine ash and animal bone but no dating evidence. Mr Betteridge has recorded cropmarks of boundary ditches on the land immediately surrounding his home and field walking has provided a scatter of Romano-British pottery. However the features uncovered in the garden may belong to post-medieval agricultural buildings that previously occupied part of the site.

Asthall Leigh, Fordwells

Richard Chambers reports that excavation for a soak-away has revealed Roman period pottery and animal bones on what is presumed to be the edge of a spring in the bottom of the valley at Fordwells. It is hoped that the excavations of further service trenches will confirm this. There is a Romano-British settlement site on the hill top overlooking the valley. Whether or not this pottery represents detritus from permanent domestic occupation in the valley bottom by the spring is unclear. Building work adjacent to the present find spot did not reveal anything.

Cholsey

A human skull cap and some animal bones have been recovered from the garden of a house in Cholsey. There was no clue to the archaeological context of this find.

Didcot, The Rectory

Richard Chambers reports that building work has now begun on this site and also in the paddock to the north. Mr Bob North, excavations secretary of the Didcot and District Historical and Archaeological Society has undertaken the supervision of a small area excavation to the east of the Victorian rectory. So far the excavation has revealed a sequence of boundary ditches, several of

which contain Iron Age domestic debris. The D. & D.H. & A.S. and the OAU are extremely grateful to the contractors' David Herring Ltd., for allowing further excavation to take place and for their help with the loan of mechanical plant. The results of this excavation will be reported on in the next newsletter.

Faringdon, Wickleshamlodge Farm

Members of the Faringdon Local History Society have recently carried out a rescue survey of a pair of late medieval or early post-medieval fishponds which were being bulldozed as part of an unannounced land reclamation scheme. Although destruction had begun prior to the arrival of the survey party a basic record of the earthworks was obtained to the credit of the Faringdon Society.

The earthworks comprised two linear ponds, arranged end to end in the bottom of a valley immediately below a spring line. Their siting and construction reflected the recommendations for fishponds given in 16th and 17th century manuals on animal husbandry. In these manuals fish culture was recommended for boggy badly drained land, of little use for arable.

The fishponds at Wickleshamlodge Farm were only discovered about two months ago by members of the Faringdon Society whilst engaged in pre-survey fieldwork in the area. Richard Chambers described them as the best known example of their type surviving in the county and their loss, without a thorough record is to be regretted.

Marcham, All Saints Parish Church

At the parish church of All Saints, Marcham, near Abingdon, a watch was kept over reflooring work in the north-western quarter of the large Victorian nave. In order to concrete over the floor beneath the north-west block of pews, the floor level was reduced by some 35cm. This did not affect any archaeologically important levels. Victorian stone floor supports and building rubble was removed for the floor foundation. Several trial holes were excavated to a depth of some 60cm by Richard Chambers. These holes revealed that the whole of the area opened up had previously been disturbed from the 18th century onwards by the insertion of brick burial vaults. These vaults had disturbed earlier burials.

The only part of the medieval church to survive the Victorian rebuilding was the 13th century bell tower. A drawing made by J. Buckler in 1819 portrays the intact medieval church from the south and shows the tower placed axially at the west end of a small nave. Today the tower stands at the south-west corner of the much wider Victorian nave. An octagonal pillar, later adapted to form a door jam for a north door was exposed in the southern edge of the excavated area. This suggested that the medieval nave had once possessed a north aisle which was later demolished and the arcading blocked-up. Faint traces were noted of what may have been medieval "block-work" painted onto the north side of the pillar.

The building rubble removed by the developers was from the Victorian demolition of the medieval church. The demolition rubble had been used to form a foundation from the floor of the Victorian nave. A small quantity of

faced stone was found in this rubble. None of the stone was carved or bore distinctive moulding. The only painted wall plaster was of black paint on whitewash and presumably post-reformation. None of the fragments showed any trace of medieval painting beneath the later whitewash. None of the fragmentary floor tiles found need be any earlier than the later medieval period.

Milton-under-Wychwood

The Wychwoods Local History Society has begun a churchyard survey.

Oxford, Osney Abbey

It sometimes comes as a surprise to realise that the cemetery visible as the London train pulls out of Oxford Station conceals one of the ten greatest religious houses of medieval England. The church lies towards the northern end, with plenty of space for conventual buildings to the south and west beneath a small industrial estate towards the river. Most of the area is not seriously threatened, but a proposal to build single-person housing on a triangular plot of rough ground to the south gave the opportunity to establish the limits of the abbey buildings in this direction.

The situation was immediately complicated by the discovery of a stone-fronted river-channel about 30m east of the mill stream. This was clearly a major feature of the medieval topography, and the abbey seems to have extended south along the water-front. The buildings were constructed on a platform of dumped silt 1-2 feet thick, the material apparently having been dug from an area to the rear. The quarried area was separated from the platform by a buttressed wall perhaps the precinct wall, and preliminary pottery dating suggests that this had all occurred by the mid thirteenth century. The quarry is adjacent to some depressions which have been suggested as fish ponds, and it seems likely that it was used for this purpose in the early life of the abbey.

Three phases of building were discernible on the platform, the first in the thirteenth century (provisional). The final phase seems to have been a building at least thirty metres long with a massive foundation 1.3m wide, extending back from the river channel and possibly forming the southern limit of the abbey buildings. It seems to be too far from the church to be a conventual building, so it might be the 'great barn' (88 feet long) or more likely the 'long stable' (no dimensions survive). On provisional dating it was built in the 14th-15th centuries, and demolished and robbed in the 16th century.

Radley

Mrs Groser has begun a churchyard survey.

Stanton Harcourt, Blackditch Diversion

The boundary fences for this new road are now in place. Some preliminary field work will be undertaken by the OUAS during the next few weekends. Topsoil stripping in advance of road construction is currently scheduled to begin in June this year.

Wallingford, 56 High Street

This is a frontage site on the main east west axis of the town, and the developers, Trident Construction Ltd, kindly dug a small 'sondage' at the front to allow Brian Durham to look at the stratigraphy. A medieval ditch had carved through this particular area, and although there were burnt and ashy layers on both sides, it did not seem to be the 'vintage' site we are always hoping for in Wallingford. One or two Roman sherds came from a contractor's trench at the rear, sealed by more early medieval burning. Further footings to be dug at the north edge of the site may perhaps produce fragments of Holy Trinity Priory.

Witney, 27 Market Square

Excavation on this market frontage site has now revealed a complex of open hearths and a somewhat fragmentary medieval building redevelopment sequence. Richard Chambers reports that the Witney Society will continue to work on this site in order to produce as clear and accurate a chronological framework as possible. The preservation of archaeological levels on this site is better than was originally envisaged.

GLOUCESTERSHIRE

Fairford/Lechlade, Claydon Pike

Excavations at Claydon Pike have been given a recent impetus from the British Army. The Continuation Training Platoon of the Light Infantry Depot, Shrewsbury, spent eight days on site and excavated and trench dug with the speed and discipline expected from last years visit.

Work since the end of March has seen the completion of the 'aisled barri'. This was 17m long by 11.5m wide and had three main bays with half bays at either end. An entrance 2m wide was set in the middle of the southern long axis. Aisle widths were also 2m. A Savernake storage jar was set into the ground on the line of the aisles and traces of cobbled floor survived and underlying features.

Excavations have started on the main buildings at the front of the platform. Two more wells were located and sampled., The later one 1.5m square with stone steps leading down to it surprised all concerned by producing a silver halfpenny of Edward IV (dated to 1474). The earlier well, believed to be late Roman, was 3.5m in diameter.

Both wells cut through two separate phases of robbed stone buildings. These buildings were also cut through by a rubble filled enclosure ditch which seems to have been an earlier but small version of the D-shaped enclosure which defined the platform in the late Roman period.

Lengths of the D-shaped enclosure ditch have been removed to reveal a continuous length of dry stone walling set on its inner edge. Its construction suggests that it was designed as an impressive facade rather than for any utilitarian purpose.

Set inside this late enclosure and assumed contemporary is a rectangular building 13.5 x 11.8m. Its walls robbed out on three sides but survive at

the front. Foundations here are 0.5m wide with a wall 0.4m wide surviving to two courses on top.

Amongst the recent finds has been part of a column, 20cm diameter, and its moulded base on a square plinth which stand 0.8m high. This was recovered from a late Roman pit cutting into the open space of the heart of the settlement.

OTHER NEWS

Country Life Award

The Unit has won the Country Life Award for the best series of excavations by a professional archaeological Unit in 1981. The Unit's entry related to the Unit's work on Iron Age and Romano-British rural settlement in the Upper Thames Valley. The Award, a cheque and a statuette was presented to Tom Hassall by Mr Neil Macfarlane, DoE Under Secretary of State at the 1981 British Archaeological Awards ceremony held on 20 April at the British Museum.

The Unit and Information Technology

Observant readers of this edition of the Newsletter will have noticed that the right hand margins are justified. This technological breakthrough has been achieved, because of the acquisition by the Unit, courtesy of the DoE of a Research Machines 380Z micro-processor. This machine is being used for word-processing by the Unit Secretary, Jocelyn le Petit while Phill Page (who actually understands the machine) with the help of the Central Excavation Unit is beginning to machine process site data starting with Claydon Pike.

