



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 September.

OXFORDSHIRE

Benson, Fifield Manor

Richard Chambers and Gordon Miles report that trenching by the owners to form a herb garden at the rear of the manor house has revealed a post-medieval out-building. The remains consisted of a lime mortared, chalk rubble and roof-tile foundation for a chimney breast sealed by 40 cms of mixed topsoil and building rubble. The hearth within the chimney breast was seen in the edge of the trench. It was heavily burnt, and was made of pitched clay-roof-tile. No dateable material was found in direct association with the foundations. Neither was it clear precisely when this out-building was demolished.

Externally Fifield Manor dates to the late 18th and 19th centuries but recent restoration work has revealed that a substantial part of a c.14th century, two storey, stone built hall survives intact. No traces of medieval service buildings have yet been found.

Several earthworks survive to the east of the house. Although some of these earthworks are clearly modern others may represent part of the medieval village first recorded in the 13th century.

Checkendon, The Devil's Churchyard

A replanting scheme to replace dead elms in an area of woodland close to the Devil's Churchyard will take place during the next few months. Removal of the present undergrowth will allow any further boundary earthworks leading away from this site to be identified.

Cherbury Camp, Oxfordshire. (SU3796)

Additional fieldsurvey by Richard Hingley on this valley-fort produced sherds of an angular nature (probably of early Iron Age date). It would seem that the middle Iron Age date proposed for this enclosure after excavation in the 1940's may have to be reassessed. The fort is probably early and middle Iron Age in date and may have multiple phases of fortification.

Cummnor, Hurst Hill

During fieldwalking by Jeff Wallis in March on land adjacent to and south east of Cummnor Hurst a large scatter of Iron Age sherds were found in ploughsoil. An area from the Hurst boundary downhill was gridded and walked. The occupation is confined to areas above the greensand. A transect was walked to clay in the valley bottom and was found to be devoid of settlement

evidence.

Further indications of an Iron Age occupation here were encountered during clearance of scrub for the placement of rabbit fence in May. Fragments of clay tuyere were discovered in disturbed soil from uprooted bushes.

Didcot, The Rectory

Richard Chambers reports that excavation on this site in advance of house building has now been completed. A small area excavation revealed a sequence of boundary ditches containing Iron Age pottery. Although at least three phases of enclosure were seen their relative chronology could not clearly be determined by excavation. The ditch fillings were homogeneous and identical in appearance so that the stratigraphic relationship at the intersections was not clear. Interpretation was further hindered as the majority of ditch intersections involved three ditches. All of the ditches contained domestic refuse. An isolated cremation was found buried in a shallow pit without any dateable artifacts.

A later trench close to the Victorian rectory provided evidence of an early post-medieval kitchen with a clay floor and brick-built bee-hive shaped oven at floor level against one wall. This arrangement was similar to the ovens in the medieval kitchens excavated at Harding's Field, Chalgrove. A quantity of ash had been allowed to accumulate on the oven floor.

The enclosure trench shows that the Victorian rectory replaced an earlier rectory which stood along the north side of the present property. This earlier rectory is believed to have been built in the 16th century. The newly discovered kitchen building with its oven may represent a detached kitchen to this early rectory.

Dryaton, The Cursus (Sutton Courtenay Parish)

Since the last note in November 1981 Newsletter excavation of the east ditch and surrounding features has been constant at weekends by Jeff Wallis with members of Abingdon Archaeological Society. The Neolithic ground surface has been excavated and traces of occupation soils with Neolithic sherds identified sealed under cursus ditch upcast. Pottery of a similar nature have been recovered from the base silts of the cursus together with Peterborough ware sherds. A Beaker rim and base sherd were found in clay alluvium almost at the lip of the ditch suggesting that alluvium had inundated part of the ditch by the late Beaker period. An area of burnt bone and charcoal at a similar level was located some 20m north of the Beaker find which will hopefully back up the date of alluviation here.

Over 70 pits stretching for 180m east of the cursus have been half sectioned at the level of stripped gravel. Most are ovoid in plan approx. 1m long and an average of 30-40cm deep. Their fill is of similar nature to the soils of the old ground surface and are believed to be contemporary with the cursus. They are sited on the edge of a suspected silted early river channel (the origin of alluvial deposit) to the south of the quarry. The pits suggest a domestic settlement adjacent to the cursus. Only a few contained artifacts. Fragments of possible undecorated Beaker, shell temper sherds and sherds similar to those from the cursus plus three large chalk flint cores and gladlets from one pit.

Other features encountered are Iron Age or Roman and include a field system utilising the cursus. A small gully runs parallel and cuts the cursus for at least 180m with boundaries running to it. A sub rectangular enclosure 50m long cut into a sand dune to the east of the cursus may be Iron Age.

Great Coxwell, St Giles Parish Church

Richard Chambers reports that the floor in front of the blocked south door has now been lifted and the levels beneath excavated down to natural. This work revealed a continuation of the Norman and medieval earth floor excavated last year. This concludes the excavation programme within the church.

Holwell Henge, Oxfordshire

Fieldwork by T. Darvill and R. Hingley indicated that a small wall enclosure, about 50m in diameter is probably a henge (SP2108). This site was first photographed by Major Allen in the 1940's when it survived as an unploughed earthwork. The site has since been ploughed over but survives as a clear earthwork on the ground.

Hook Norton, All Saints Parish Church

In 1981 plaster was stripped from the bottom 2m of the chancel walls in All Saints parish church, Hook Norton. Three blocked recesses were revealed.

In April 1982 the OAU was asked to examine these recesses before the walls were replastered. Large areas of the chancel walls had been replastered in the 19th century and in many places only the surface of the tough Victorian plaster had been removed in 1981. Careful removal of much of the remaining plasterwork by the church architect Mr John Marshall and Richard Chambers revealed a series of blocked features within the north, east and south walls. Mrs E. Baker visited the church on each of the five days that work was in progress to check for traces of wall paintings both on the plaster and on the newly exposed cleaned stonework.

Describing these previously unknown features in a clockwise direction, 1-1m from the chancel arch, wall cleaning revealed a Norman doorway. A blocked arch in the east wall of the north transept suggested a former chapel to which this door provided access from the chancel. The chancel door was later blocked. The upper half of the entrance was converted into a lime-washed recess probably fitted with doors to judge from the rebates cut into the arch and jambs. This may have acted as an ambry for the storage of holy vessels. Later the interior of the recess was painted indicating a change of use. This recess was blocked and plastered over in the 19th century.

East of the Norman doorway, within the present sanctuary, two blocked recesses were revealed, one cutting the other. Nothing remains of the stone surround to the earlier recess. The later, rectangular recess retains a stone sill and may have replaced the suggested early ambry in the blocked Norman north door.

An arched recess in the centre of the east wall behind the altar was unblocked to reveal a plain plastered interim. An extension of the sill and lower jambs had been cut away. A recess in this position is likely to have

housed and provided security for a holy relic.

Work on the south side of the sanctuary revealed a twin-bowled piscina and a two seat sedilia. The eastern sedilia appears to have been incorporated into the window splay. The western sedilia hood was cut off during the enlargement of the Norman east window in the c.14th century. Presumably the piscina and sedilia were blocked-in at this time. The medieval window arch proved unsound and the window was subsequently blocked-up. A smaller window was constructed in the blocking. This small window was also blocked up presumably during the Victorian church restoration when the Norman window of which only the east jamb then remained, was reconstructed in its present form.

All of the features described above were tentatively dated to the early-mid 12th century by John Blair. In c.1128 the church was given to the newly founded Augustinian abbey at Osney. Many of the surviving late Norman features in the chancel may have been inserted at this time for the convenience of visiting canons from the Abbey.

Langford, Oxfordshire (SP2400)

Fieldsurvey by Richard Hingley on this interrupted ditch system indicated that the site lies in a gravel terrace between two streams. No artifactual material was located.

Langford, Oxfordshire (SP2601)

Quantities of Roman pottery were found by Richard Hingley on the site of an enclosure previously located through aerial photography.

Merton

A quantity of mid and late medieval pottery has been collected by Mr. M. Malin and R.A. Chambers from cultivated ground some 350m west of the parish church at Merton. There are no earthworks remaining in the adjacent pasture field that might indicate the extent of the former settlement. Surviving earthworks suggest that much of the later medieval and early post-medieval village lay much closer to the church.

A second century Roman bronze coin has been discovered on a neighbouring property. The coin does not appear to mark an occupation site as no contemporary domestic debris has been found in the vicinity. Romano-British pottery was found some 300m to the west in 1978.

Oxford Between Towns Road, Roman kiln site

Brian Durham has been watching a progressive development of this asrea (see Newsletter July 1981). The 1982 development is on very massive foundations dug with a huge machine, and gave little scope for archaeology. Nevertheless it is clear that the abundance of Roman pot in the topsoil dwindles to the west of the original site, and it was therefore a great surprise to find the stokehole and part of the furnace chamber of a kiln, out on its lonesome. The great machine had gobbled up most of the structure, but it was probably a smaller version of the Trench VI kiln at the Churchill Hospital. Sarah Green notes that the pottery is late third/fourth century and contains a high

understanding of the local pottery dating, the area must have been inundated in the tenth century, but whether we can push it back into the middle Saxon period depends on further study.

The water must have been shallow during at least the summer, because a succession of gullies fringed with wattle fences were stratified in the peat. These may have been parcelling up the area for the harvesting of reeds, or alternatively some sort of fish trap. The depth of water will be difficult to assess, but however shallow it presumably never dried out enough for the peat deposits to decay. A gravel path revetted by a strong wattle fence was perhaps an attempt to give access along the edge of open water.

The marsh was reclaimed around the middle of the eleventh century by dumping about a foot depth of soil. This layer seemed to cover most of the area of our trenches, but logic demands that it did not extend right across the channel, and that its south edge would be formed by the timber or stone revetment of a waterfront on the now constricted mill stream. It is hoped that there will be a chance to look for this edge when demolition is complete.

The fourth phase of the site was the twelfth century industrial domestic usage of the reclaimed area, now effectively dry land. Features include gullies and pits or wells and in screening the spoil from one of the latter our metal detector produced an exceptionally well-preserved iron key with silver inlay, alternating with gold leaf.

Radley, Home Farm, Tuckwells Pit

During topsoil stripping in preparation for a new quarry at SU5214 9780 a section of curving gully a straight ditch and four pits of early Iron Age date have been discovered and recorded by Jeff Wallis. All features had been cut through a calcereous sand and loam that directly overlay 1st terrace gravel. One pit had been totally destroyed by dragline and its contents spread on spoil heaps. The other pits and gully have been excavated and sampled. Finds all appear to be contemporary and include Angular Bowl sherds, fragments of slag and a part of a grit conglomerate quern.

Sutton Courtenay see Drayton Cursus

Wallingford, 56 High Street

Following the report of some Roman activity on the frontage (see last Newsletter) the back area has predictably been showing lots of medieval burials. The Benedictine priory of Holy Trinity clearly had a large graveyard, and it is well known that any digging in this area will produce bones. Several were in cists of the local clunch stone.

Despite several visits by Brian Durham and active interest by the contractors, there is still no evidence of any kind of wall structures from the priory or its ancillary buildings.

Witney, 27 Market Square

Richard Chambers reports that the excavation and recording of this site has now been completed by Charles Gott and members of the Witney Historical

proportion of red/brown colour coats.

Oxford Trinity College

Brian Ward-Perkins and John Blair have been investigating the basement of the fifteenth century east range of Durham quad, survivor of the monastic Durham College. They suggest that staircase bays on the east face of the range may be original, rather than 1687 as recorded by RCHM. Their conclusion comes from the lack of straight-joints at basement level, and the situation becomes more intriguing because a small arched opening in the basement seems to communicate with a 'space' outside the northern staircase bay. Perhaps it was an early sanitary arrangement?

Oxford 65 St Aldates New Crown Courts

Within the first week of the new Trill Mill Stream site (see below) the search for Saxon wharfeage suddenly changed direction. The lift shaft on the Crown Court site was the only major deep excavation (apart from our own), and the contractors suddenly started pulling out large timbers. George Lambrick and Brian Durham sacrificed one lunch hour to risk their lives cleaning up a section, which showed a wattle revetment and a later timber revetment both running north south. There was virtually no dating evidence, but this looks like a waterfront at the rear of the late Saxon causeway properties. It seems that the Blackfriars Mill Stream has been pushed westwards to its 19th century line, and with hindsight this is perhaps a more promising site than the Trill Mill Stream for the town's early commercial waterfront.

Oxford 89-91 St Aldates, the Trill Mill Stream

For a long time it has been known that there was a big river channel just outside the south wall of Oxford. It had been seen in engineers test bores, in excavations around Littlegate Street and in David Sturdy's work at Christ Church.

The main problems were: why was the channel so wide; when and in what sequence was it infilled; was it even deep enough to be navigable by river boats? Brian Durham and friends got permission from Christ Church and its tenant to dig an area near the south bank of the stream prior to redevelopment, and listeners to Radio Oxford will have followed the weekly blow-by-blow account of civil engineering and mud, short-lived euphoria and thinly-veiled retractions! The ultimate, definitive and incontrovertible truth is (provisionally) as follows.

Things seem to have started with a natural river channel which had silted up almost completely and probably dried out to a water meadow by the Roman period. Then there was a change to black peaty deposits, which presumably means that the water level had been raised to create a marshy area. Three possible dates suggest themselves, and only a full study of the pottery plus some radio-carbon dates will clarify these. Firstly, the priority of St Frideswides may have needed a supply of fresh water or mill power as early as the eighth century; secondly the bridgeworks attributed to the reign of Offa may have merited an artificial water defence for a settlement on the Mercian bank of the flood plain; thirdly, the successful establishment of a West Saxon burh in 911-12 would have required both water defence, mill-power and possibly also a close access for shallow draught boats. According to our

Society. The excavation has revealed a sequence of medieval hearths and floor levels cut by later, undated, substantial stone founded walls, all of which pre-date the inn built on the site in the 18th century.

The present town plan and associated historical evidence strongly suggests that Witney originated as a planned medieval town. The excavation has provided archaeological evidence which appears to confirm that the frontage of the market place has remained constant since it was first laid out.

GLOUCESTERSHIRE

Down Ampney, Gloucestershire (SU1096)

Field survey on this interrupted-ditch system by T. Darvill and R. Hingley demonstrated that the site is located on a low gravel terrace above a small stream. Field work produced a few flints and a few sand and gritty, black (?Iron Age) sherds.

Eastleach, Gloucestershire (SP2106)

Field survey on this interrupted ditch system by T. Darvill and R. Hingley indicated that the site is located on a hill slope above a dry valley, just below the crest of the hill and with fairly good views in most directions. Field work indicated that artefactual material was fairly common in the plough-soil. Some flint, small quantities of (? prehistoric) pottery and a stone 'pounder' of possible Neolithic date were found.

Fairford/Lechlade, Claydon Pike

Over the past five weeks large scale excavations have progressed at Claydon Pike, Fairford with an average of forty volunteers. The training excavation organised jointly with the Department of External Studies also took place from 2 August-6 August.

The work has concentrated on two trenches, one across the Fairford-Lechlade parish boundary where it intersects the Roman road and one of about 0.8ha in the centre of the Romano British settlement.

The parish boundary excavation was possible because the stream which normally forms the boundary has dried up, probably because of dewatering by the gravel pits. The purpose of the trench was to investigate the Roman road in a marshy area, to look for a bridge across the stream, to investigate post-Roman flooding and the development of the parish boundary. No bridge was in fact found because in the Roman period there was no stream.

A series of ditches, probably originating in the 17th century predated the parish stream. These were dry and only in the final, present dry ditch did a stream develop - possibly with the introduction of piped field drainage. The metalled Roman road crossed a wide marshy area and its ditches were permanently waterlogged. Oak timbers revetted the road in parts. Probably in the fifth century the extensive system of drainage ditches became blocked, the road was flooded and buried by alluvium.

The road was constructed in the later first century at the same time as the Romano-British settlement. A system of streets and enclosures was laid out

directly over a late Iron Age settlement. The streets may have in part respected the pre-existing Iron Age ones. A bronze vine leaf medallion suggests a military presence at this time

A pair of fine trumpet brooches also have parallels in a military context. A bronze decorated with a leaf pattern and red and yellow enamel inlay may be from a horse harness.

Fragments of first century buildings have substantial masonry foundations and opus signinum floors. A carved limestone column and its base probably originated in an early building.

By the late third century the regularly laid out settlement had gone out of use and a farmstead or small villa was constructed on the site. The main building at this period is a winged corridor house with two rooms in each wing, a pair of small rooms in the centre and a corridor added on the east side. The house sits inside an oval enclosure surrounded by a pair of ditches. The inner ditch was rapidly infilled with masses of early building material. The outer ditch remained open throughout the life of the farmstead. It was revetted on the inside with a low wall and was eventually infilled with flood deposits.

Several wells and many ditches have now been excavated all containing waterlogged material but few artefacts. The evidence from Iron Age and Roman contexts points to a pastoral economy with textile production.

In post Roman times the site is thought to have been mainly used for summer grazing. A disturbed area in the late Roman building has produced a coin of King Alfred dating to about 875. A few metres away was a coin of King Baldred of Kent, minted in Canterbury about 825. This area will be excavated over the next few weeks, but so far no other Saxon material has been found.

The excavation will continue until late September. Volunteers are urgently needed. (9.30 - 5.00 every day except Saturday). The site is 1 1/2 miles west of Lechlade on the Fairford road, turn left (south) into the Claydon Pike Gravel pit, also signposted Bowmoor Sailing Club. 150 yards on the left is the entrance to the excavation field.

An open day is planned for September 26, 10.30 - 4.30.

Icomb, Gloucestershire

Field work and work on aerial photographs by T. Darvill and R. Hingley suggests that the former interpretation of this enclosure as an Iron Age hill-fort is probably incorrect (SP2023). It seems more likely that the site represents a Neolithic interrupted ditch system, possibly with two circuits of ditch. A linear dyke of possible later prehistoric date has also been located on the hill-top.

CALENDAR

OXFORD ARCHAEOLOGICAL UNIT Seminars organised by Oxford University Department for External Studies and given by the Staff of the Oxford Archaeological Unit

This course is intended to introduce students to some of the current research and methods of the Oxford Archaeological Unit. Topics to be covered will be Neolithic ritual sites, Iron Age and Roman settlement, the water defences of late Saxon and early medieval Oxford, micro-computers in archaeology, the analysis of medieval bricks and tiles and the preparation of archaeological drawings.

Fridays 7.30-9.30 p.m. 24 September. Fee of £5.50 payable to Oxford University Department for External Studies.

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

9-10 October 1982 Recent work on the Medieval Castle

22-24 October 1982 Hedges and Woodlands

12-14 November 1982 Archaeology and Evolution. A Darwinian Centenary Celebration.

19-21 November 1982 Roman Trade and Industry

Saturday 27th November Brewing and Drink (day school to be held at Rewley House)

8-9 January 1983 The Great Rebuilding

Saturday 29th January 1983 The English Country Parson (day school to be held at Rewley House)

University Extension Lectures 'The Origins of English Towns' by Professor Martin Biddle (Director of the Winchester Research Unit) to be held at The Lecture Theatre, St. Cross Building, Manor Road, Oxford 7.30 - 9.30 p.m.).

Friday 22nd October Romano-British Towns in Late Antiquity

Friday 5th November Continuity in Romano-British Towns: Myth or Reality?

Friday 12th November Trading Places on Coast and River: the first Anglo-Saxon Towns

Friday 19th November The Fortified Town: Mercia and the Burhs of Wessex

Friday 26th November Viking Towns or Viking Settlement in Towns?

Friday 3rd December

The Re-Conquest of the Dane Law: the expansion of the Burghal System

Friday 10th December

Towns in Late Anglo-Saxon England

Friday 17th December

Anglo-Saxon Towns: Explanation and Prospect

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).