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OXFORD ARCHAEOLOGICAL UNIT NEWSLETTER INCLUDING  
OXFORDSHIRE PARISH SURVEY NEWS

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Contributions to the next Newsletter should be sent to the above address not later than Tuesday, 29 May 1984.

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BLEWBURY: London Road (SU 531856) - Claire Halpin

In the week before Christmas 1983 a telephone call was made by John and Ivan Beer reporting that they had uncovered two pits during the construction of a new garage for a recently completed house adjacent to Yew Tree Cottage, London Road, Blewbury. Permission was given to excavate these pits, and also for the finds to be deposited in the Ashmolean Museum.

The pits lay c. 32m back from the road line, each was c. 1m in diameter and c. 0.3m deep. Many pieces of antler, bone, flint flakes and split quartzite pebbles lay on the surface. The flint was seen to be in remarkably fresh condition and on excavation each piece was wrapped separately to avoid damage. The animal bone had evidently been deposited as joints as articulated shaft and knuckle bones were apparent. All the soil was retained for wet sieving and a bucket sample from each pit was recovered for flotation.

Preliminary examination of the material has produced good results and indicates it is potentially a highly interesting assemblage. The fill of each pit was exactly similar and cross joins of flint flakes and pottery from each pit, probably from the same vessel, indicate that the pits are precisely contemporary.

About 300 large pieces of waste flint flakes and many tiny spalls were recovered. It is knapping debris which, given its sharpness and lack of edge damage, was deposited soon after its production. Casual attempts at refitting flakes demonstrate that it is conjoinal and that extensive refitting may be possible. Clearly this material may be expected to produce information about lithic technology and similarly microwear analysis on selected pieces may be appropriate. Recognised tool types include snapped or 'D-shaped' scrapers, long end scrapers, and denticulated and serrated flakes. Until the pottery fragments can be identified or a radiocarbon date produced, a transverse arrowhead (chisel-type) provides the dating evidence (late neolithic) for this assemblage. About six fragments of pottery were recovered. It is buff coloured, flint tempered and one piece has an incised decoration. It is either Peterborough or grooved ware.

The environmental evidence is of the same high interest as the flintwork. About 100 animal bones were recovered and include cattle and pig. Small bones have also been retrieved eg. those of a mouse. Flotation has produced sizeable quantities of material and seeds of cereals and hazelnuts have been recognised. An important aspect of this sealed group is the diversity of material represented and its quantity is sufficient to permit some statistical analysis. A worked bone point was also recovered.

The nature of the material suggests that it is a domestic assemblage. The numerous split pebbles and the fact that some of the flint flakes are burnt suggests that it may be the sweepings from a hearth.

About 2m south of the pits twenty or more medieval sherds dating to the 12th century were recovered from the section of a foundation trench. Their context was unclear.

HENLEY: Henley Rectory - Brian Durham

The rectory occupies two-thirds of an acre of riverside just upstream of Henley Bridge, with a frontage on the main street (Hart Street) opposite the church. The Oxford Diocesan Parsonages Board are building a new house for the rector in the garden of the existing 18th century building, and the Unit has joined with the Henley Archaeological and Historical Group to investigate this focal area in the medieval town.

A plan of c. 1830 shows the layout of the complex, indicating the newly demolished rectory and a large tithe barn. Given the need to avoid damage to the many protected trees, a series of trenches was planned to investigate both buildings. The barn may be dismissed briefly; no more than an area of stone-metalling could be traced and it must be assumed that it was of timber with no substantial foundations. The site of the old rectory was much more productive, with stone and flint walls and an outside cess pit, but an absence of internal floors. By following the building plan to the west, away from the river, part of a medieval building of two phases was located, and the structural succession suggests that this was a continuously occupied range being extended progressively towards the river.

Henley is first mentioned in 1179, when Henry II bought land to make houses. By 1199 it was a 'town' in a grant of John. There is at present no way of dating the earliest levels of the rectory site, but it is possible that when the pottery has been studied it may prove to be within the first 50 years of Henley's existence. The earliest structure was a shallow burnt pit, possibly within a building but none could be defined. It was built over by a strong foundation of flint and clunch which was subsequently realigned. The 5m south frontage of this building makes it rather smaller than the 15th century Old Rectory at Winford, Somerset, which was the smallest such building identified by Pantin (Medieval Archaeology, Vol I 1957). It might in fact be the gable end of a house aligned north-south, or it may have been the stone-founded portion of a larger timber dwelling. To the east was a large shallow depression which drained through a ditch towards the river, and it was over this area that the house was to extend, probably in the later medieval period.

The rectory which survived to the 1820's is illustrated in a pencil drawing in the manner of J C Buckler. The medieval end had by then disappeared, leaving a twin roofed rear wing behind the hall wing facing the river. Extensive foundations of the rear wing were exposed, showing it to have a 6.5m span with a 2m span added in the 18th century. This is rather different from Buckler's depiction of two fairly equal roofs, and it must be assumed that some internal reorganisation had taken place.

The third objective of the excavation was to look at the Hart Street frontage, which should have been commercially valuable on the approach to the bridge. No buildings were found, only a 'roadside' ditch. Perhaps the rectory was so well endowed that it need not rent this frontage, but alternatively there may have been buildings further forward, ousted when the road was moved to allow the church to enlarge. The latter would explain the presence of a pit producing 14th-15th century pottery. Amongst other finds from this feature were ten amber beads of two sizes, perhaps from a rosary, and a gold charm brooch inscribed IESUS NAZARENUS.

Such talismanic brooches are not uncommon in bronze and silver, but John Cherry writes that he knows of only one other English example in gold with this inscription. Subject to treasure trove inquest, it is hoped it will be deposited with the Oxfordshire Department of Museum Services.

KIDLINGTON: Moat Cottage - R A Chambers

Moat Cottage is all that remains of a large, partly moated, early post-medieval house built to replace a medieval manor house. The site was excavated during the late 1970's in advance of the building of a new housing estate. The excavations indicated that the cottage stood above and possibly just beyond the western edge of the medieval domestic building range.

In January this year an inspection of the foundation trenches for two extensions to Moat Cottage confirmed that the post-medieval moat continued beneath a former 20th century kitchen extension on the north side of the cottage. Foundation trenches to the south and east of the cottage did not reveal any significant stratigraphy. The ground had been made up by several feet in places and a redundant post medieval stone-lined drain had destroyed any medieval stratigraphy where the foundation trenches had been dug more deeply. However, several broken medieval decorated floor tiles were recovered from the made-up ground.

NORTHMOOR: Watkins Farm - Tim Allen

The possible earlier prehistoric occupation hinted at in the last Newsletter was not properly confirmed; a linear soilmark cut by Iron Age features produced one flint flake, but this may have been a chance loss in a periglacial hollow.

In January a week's salvage was carried out on features north of the main enclosure, when topsoil was stripped prior to gravel extraction. The northern 'antenna' just outside the entrance proved to be one side of a small enclosure, and a second linked enclosure disappeared beneath the area under crop on the west. There was no trace of occupation with the enclosure, and the ditches had very few finds. However a dupondius of Trajan came from the top fill of the antenna, and the antennae may be part of the 1st century AD

occupation, not Iron Age as previously suggested.

Cutting across this enclosure and into the top of the main enclosure ditch was a straight ditch in line with the trackway, probably 2nd century AD, further south (Newsletter Vol X No. 2 June 1983, P4). This was probably part of the system of extensive regular field boundaries that seems to have replaced the 1st century AD use of the enclosure.

Further salvage of the area stripped by JCB and excavated in October was also carried out as the site was bulldozed, and recovered more finds and samples.

RADLEY: Barrow Hills - R A Chambers

Following an autumn break, excavation recommences on this site on 4 January with labour financed by the Manpower Services Commission. So far this year excavation has been directed primarily towards the Anglo-Saxon settlement and the systematic cleaning, excavation and recording of the settlement features has progressed well. In addition to week day working several sunken-featured buildings (grubenhauser) have been excavated at weekends by members of the Oxford University Archaeological Society under the supervision of Chris Scull and Phil Carstairs.

A supplementary grant from the DOE has permitted further areas of the site to be stripped of topsoil including three barrows. It is estimated that 1.66 ha (4 acres) will have been cleared by the end of February.

As well as Anglo-Saxon and prehistoric features topsoil stripping has revealed a previously unsuspected group of west-east inhumation graves which now await excavation. A further two graves which lay a little to the south-east have already been excavated. Both are probably Roman. All of these graves are set well apart from the Roman inhumation and cremation cemetery excavated last summer.

More post-built structures and grubenhauser belonging to the Anglo-Saxon settlement have been excavated since work commenced in January. Of particular note was an unusually large grubenhauser measuring 5.6m x 4.4m and 1.1m deep (originally at least 1.4m deep from the original ground surface). As with all of the grubenhauser so far excavated on this site, there was no evidence of floor surfaces and this building must also have been equipped with floor boards. As well as a principle post at each end a third large post hole was discovered in the centre of the building presumably to support the floor if not the roof.

WITNEY: St Mary's Church - R A Chambers

Contractors installing new rainwater drains and soak-aways at St Mary's parish church, Witney, have recovered several fragments of decorated floor tile.

The church was extensively rebuilt in the first half of the 13th century when north and south transepts were added. Part of the nave and north porch of the previous Norman church were incorporated in the rebuilding.

The south transept has received extensive alterations since the 13th century, one of which is the blocked arch which formerly led to a chapel on the east

side (J. Sherwood and N. Pevsner, Oxfordshire (1974), 845). The excavation of a pipe trench and new soak-away immediately east of the blocked archway revealed several fragmentary, decorated medieval floor tiles. These tiles appeared as a thin layer of rubble over the presumed site of the former chapel floor of which nothing was seen. The chapel floor may have comprised floor tiles laid directly on the raw, natural clay subsoil. No trace of the chapel foundations were seen.

A watching brief will be maintained over the remaining drainage works.