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OXFORD ARCHAEOLOGICAL UNIT NEWSLETTER INCLUDING

OXFORDSHIRE PARISH SURVEY NEWS

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Gloucestershire

LECHLADE: Butler's Field - David Miles and Simon Palmer

Excavations have progressed at this scheduled site on the north-west fringe of Lechlade for the past six weeks. The original proposal was to conduct a three-week excavation in advance of a housing development, funded by the site owners, the Cotswold District Council. Cropmarks revealed a small ring ditch (part of a linear group of larger ring ditches), a linear boundary ditch (believed to be a continuation of a Late Bronze Age ditch excavated 1km to the north at the Roughground Farm Villa in the 1960's) and converging Romano-British trackways and enclosures. An unexpected dimension which led to the extension of the excavation was the discovery of a large Anglo-Saxon cemetery.

The Ring Ditch

A relatively small ring 15m in diameter, with a ditch 1.5m deep and 2m wide, surrounded a central cremation in a shallow scoop. Also inside the ring was a large pit 1.5m deep and bell shaped. A cremation was found near the bottom. The pit is probably a secondary feature related to the Late Bronze Age/Early Iron Age boundary into which the cremation fell as a result of erosion on the sides of the pit.

Fifty metres north-east of the ring three further cremations were found in small pits. Only flint debris was found in association with them. These cremation pits were not within ring ditches but they were aligned on the ring ditch group.

Late Bronze Age/Early Iron Age Boundary

The linear boundary has been traced for 500 metres on aerial photographs, bisecting the plateau of the second gravel terrace at Lechlade. The V-shaped ditch was 1.5m deep. The boundary was found to be complex with several elements parallel to the large ditch on the west side was a narrow slot and on the east side a series of large pits, up to 1.5m deep and two metres apart. Several of the pits were bell-shaped and one was lined with clay. West of the pit alignment was a parallel line of post holes and beyond them a further narrow slot. Shell-gritted pottery in small quantities was found in several of these features.

Director T.G. Hassall M.A., U.S.A.

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The Romano-British ditches

Sections were cut across several ditches but produced no dating evidence.

The Saxon Cemetery

About 200 graves have so far been uncovered and about 140 excavated of which about 30 were cremations in pots.

The cemetery was segregated into zones; females and children in the north-west area, cremations predominantly in the north-east. The earliest burials date to about 500AD and the cemetery appears to have been used for at least 150 years. Most of the women had saucer or disk brooches, amber and glass beads. The men occasionally had knives, spearheads and shield bosses. The richest female grave was lined with worked stone including a fragment of a Roman altar. As well as a pair of gilded saucer brooches there was a large square headed brooch and over 500 amber and glass beads. The woman had silver spiral rings on several fingers. By her head was a wooden vessel decorated with bronze plaques, a bone spindle whorl and a bone comb. An ivory bag ring hung from her waist with a pair of girdle hangers.

A second stone lined grave adjacent to the rich female contained five bodies: two adult females and three children with brooches, beads and an ivory bag ring. A third stone lined grave contained three bodies: an adult male with a shield decorated with silver discs, a woman with a spindle whorl and a male with a spear.

Several female graves belonged to the mid 7th century and contained silver jewellery and garnets; three also had cowrie shells. One of these female burials contained a silver necklace, two silver pins with garnet heads, three iron linen heekles, a long thin pair of shears, and an iron bound box containing a cowrie shell and a circular bronze 'needle-case'.

Two burials also contained gold bracteates, one with a central garnet and garnets in each quarter. With this second bracteate was an iron weaving sword.

Excavation is continuing at the site and the limits of the cemetery have still to be reached. Conservation is being carried out at Corinium Museum and the Institute of Archaeology. A programme of metal analysis using X-ray fluorescence is being undertaken at the Research Laboratory for Art and Archaeology.

We would like to thank all members of the excavation team who worked on into the evenings in all weathers to complete the day's work.

Oxfordshire

ABINGDON: Stert Street - R. A. Chambers

Redevelopment of the site formerly occupied by nos. 57-59 Stert Street and the printing works to the rear provided an opportunity to attempt to locate the western boundary of the medieval abbey. A 3m deep pipe trench excavated from the rear of the site through to Stert Street revealed that the ground was disturbed to a depth of 2m-3m by medieval and later rubbish pits. The

presence of the rubbish pits suggests that this land had always lain outside the abbey grounds.

BAMPTON: Beam Cottage, Coal Pit Lane - RA-Chambers
PRN 13,710; SP 3210 0343

The remains of several shallow east-west supine inhumation burials have been recovered from the garden on the south side of Beam Cottage, Bampton. The cottage lies some 60m to the east of the centre of Bampton, in the centre of an area currently being developed for houses. Romano-British settlement remains have previously been found in the area between Beam Cottage and Bampton. The inhumations appear to represent part of a small cemetery on the eastern edge of the Roman settlement. None of the inhumations so far discovered have been associated with dateable artifacts.

The cottage garden has also yielded several sherds of Roman and medieval pottery. A single sherd of early Saxon grass tempered pottery has also been recovered.

BAMPTON: The new vicarage, Church View - RA-Chambers

The construction of a new vicarage some 70m north-east of St. Mary's church, Bampton, offered the possibility of investigating part of the late Saxon settlement. In particular the site might have revealed part of one of a succession of vicarages which served the manster church from the later Saxon period onwards. Unfortunately the foundation trenches for the new vicarage revealed a series of large post medieval cess pits, soakways and pipe trenches cutting into soft gravel and running sand. None of the artifacts discovered predated the 16th century except for one sherd of medieval pottery. Any medieval or earlier structures had been obliterated by post medieval development.

BEGBROKE: St Michael's Church - Jonathan Sharpe
(SP 468139)

A parochial scheme was initiated in February to improve the drainage and to repair damage by damp to the external rendering of this 12th century church. The work involved removing areas of pebble dash render, and underlying mortars, as well as the digging of a 2m wide trench around the church. Despite the archaeological potential of this exposure of the fabric, the work did not become known to the Unit, nor to the HBMC, by the normal advisory procedures. Subsequently, the drainage work having been completed and backfilled, emergency recording and survey of the exposed fabric was commissioned by the HBMC.

The church consists of a single-cell nave and chancel with a western tower. Survey has revealed three phases of chancel construction and suggests that the 12th century chancel may have been built around a vault or crypt. Examination of the north nave wall has shown that a north door existed opposite the present 12th century south door. The north door seems to have been blocked by the mid 19th century and the mouldings removed and incorporated in a rebuilding of the churchyard and wall.

Comparison of 19th century drawings with the present fabric shows that the present 14th century style windows were inserted in the course of a

substantial renovation programme between 1820-1830. These windows are sealed by the modern render and key mortar but documentary evidence shows that the entire fabric has been rendered since at least the early 18th century. Of particular interest were traces of medieval external plastering which suggest that the loose rubble-wall construction of the fabric was originally plastered to seal the surface against weathering. Similar medieval external plastering has been noted at Brize Norton and Minster Lovell churches.

Above the well-preserved 12th century south door, drawings and eye witness accounts demonstrate that a bas-relief sculpture of St Michael, survived until the 18th century. This seems to have been destroyed or removed when a small porch was built against the door.

A watching brief continues at Begbroke as it is expected that further areas of the fabric will be exposed. It is intended to complete a full survey of the tower, which may incorporate the original west door of the church, and to investigate more fully the relationship between the church and earthworks in the field lying immediately to the north of the churchyard.

CUMNOR: Dean Court Farm - Tim Allen

Since February this year excavation has been continuing on and off in and around the farmhouse. A team of employees on the Manpower Services Commission Community Programme, supervised by Andy Mudd, uncovered the whole of the building just behind the farmhouse whose discovery was reported in Newsletter Vol XI, No. 3. This was extremely well-preserved and had a succession of circular and then rectangular ovens at the east end. Half way along the north wall was a paved stone area, highly burnt, possibly the base for a fireplace.

The west end of the building had a large circular pit in it, backfilled with rubble. Alongside the west wall on the outside was a V-profiled channel made of angled stone slabs, which ran into a series of 3 stone-lined tanks along the south side of the building. Shallow grooves and lips had been made in the stone slabs at the west end of the first two tanks to facilitate flow, and a V-shaped channel with a slot for a sluice-gate had been cut into the slab dividing the second and third tanks. The third tank was much larger and deeper than the first two, and ran out into a drain beneath the east wall of the building.

Since the latest oven within the building had the characteristic shape of a malting oven, perhaps this building was the bake-and-brewhouse. The tanks may have been connected with soaking the grain to help it sprout prior to roasting, and the pit at the west end may even have held the vat! Carbonised samples of the charred material from the ovens have been taken and these should tell us whether barley was a significant proportion of the grain being burnt.

East of this building was another much larger one, aligned north-south. Only an outline plan of this was recovered; it was approximately 15m long x 7m wide.

The interior of the farmhouse has now been stripped out, and we have confirmed that the blocked late 13th century windows of the east wing in situ. Two further windows have been found, one on the opposite wall to the first floor and one on the south wall on the ground floor. Flanking these dug along the main farmhouse floor east-west, revealed over a

successive mortar and clay floors with occupational debris upon them, and showed that the standing farmhouse, built in the late 16th or early 17th century, is sitting on the walls of an earlier Medieval building. This is likely to be the original hall of the grange, as the late 13th century was built onto it. The farmhouse seems to be sitting almost exactly over the hall, and west of this is a narrow passage.

To the south-west in the farmyard trial trenches revealed a circular dovetail of 2 phases, c. 8m across, with a cobbled floor and a central post pad. It seems to have survived well into the post-medieval period, but was demolished by the mid 18th century.

Another building has just come to light east of the farm on the McLean Homes development and has been salvaged in 5 days. This is probably of several phases, and in its final form seems to have been long and very narrow, with a wide entrance across the middle of both sides. It overlay several ditches, which unfortunately could not be bottomed due to the high water table. This north-south building may be shown on Rocque's 1760 map of Berkshire, although the pottery would suggest that it went out of use before that time. Occupation seems to have begun by the early 14th century at the latest.

CURBRIDGE: Coral Springs - R.A.Chambers
(P.R.N. 8880-1; SU 337089)

The still expanding Burwell Farm housing estate has now encroached upon the northern side of the area occupied by the Roman period settlement and cemetery at "Coral Springs". Unfortunately in this area the land is being built up with waste soil. This has effectively prevented any recording of the northern limit of the Romano-British settlement which was discovered in 1974 during the construction of the Witney by-pass.

This is another example that demonstrates that the excavation and recording of a site of this nature is often more effectively undertaken during road construction than during subsequent adjacent development.

OXFORD: Christ Church, the Cathedral cloister - B G Durham

The college proposes to improve the appearance of the cloister by landscaping the grassed area as a medieval garden. The Unit has been asked to investigate the enigmatic stone footing in the shape of a cross of Lorraine, which lies in the centre of the cloister and which would have to be reduced and grassed over for the garden. We have never refused the chance to leave our mark on an Oxford College, and Peter McKeague has dug a trial trench. He confirms David Sturdy's findings of 1958, that the stonework is rather tatty and 15th-16th century in date. Furthermore it seems to enclose a beaten floor in the centre of the cloister which has produced 16th century pottery.

Our provisional thoughts are that the 'buttresses' are far too big for a chantry chapel or lavatorium within the priory cloister, because they would have cut out so much light from the cloister walks. We also discount the idea of an abortive stone bell tower of Cardinal Wolsey's time, because it could not have carried the weight. The best suggestion comes from Peter Gilbert Scott, great great grandson of the architect who originally exposed the stonework. He suggests it carried a timber belfry, which would be lighter in weight and would not cut out the daylight to the cloister.

The remaining question is which bells it carried. Wolsey had the bells taken out of the priory church, some would say preparatory to demolishing it. Perhaps he needed somewhere to hang them until a new bell-tower was ready. Alternatively there is the 'romantic' option. The priory church was not in fact demolished, and in 1546 it became the cathedral of Oxford, taking over from the church of the former Osney Abbey. In the same year the Osney bells were brought to Christ Church, including Great Tom, the six-ton bell which in recast form still hangs in Tom Tower above the college gatehouse. It is unlikely that a bell of this size could immediately be housed in the cathedral belfry, and an external timber belfry might have seemed a temporary solution. It is however unlikely we could distinguish between the 1520s and 1540s archaeologically, and Martin Biddle points out that it will need a very careful reading of the college accounts to get the answer.

The centre of the cloister is very disturbed by late medieval pits, but the east side has produced two burials in mortared stone cists characteristic of the 12th century. We hope to see more of these and perhaps some early conventual structure in a more extensive excavation in July.

OXFORD: 89 St Aldates

The building at No. 89 has now been demolished, following the successful appeal by Christ Church against refusal of planning permission. The building was recorded by an in-service trainee, Leigh Turner, under the guidance of Julian Munby, who with John Ashdown kept a close watch on the demolition. The main structure seems to have been of the first half of the 17th century, with fragments of decorated stone fireplaces on two floors, and the remains of large stone windows in the front elevation. In the glazing groove of one of these windows was a lead glazing strip bearing the date 1673, probably either 1643 or 1673. Julian Munby believes this to be replacement glazing hence the building should be earlier. However, there is clay pipe from the floor make-up, so the date deduced from the structure is generally confirmed. Beneath it there seem to be floors of an earlier building, and it may be that there is a long stratigraphic sequence back into the medieval or late Saxon period.

To the rear of the site we have dug a trench down to the waterlogged levels to continue the section of the Trill Mill Stream excavated in 1981. The picture seems much the same as the previous trench, a 19th century marsh. The difference is that this area was apparently not reclaimed until the late 12th century. Why was such a prime site just outside the south gate kept as a marsh for so long. The most likely explanation is that it functioned as an effective water defence, however shallow, and that it had a commercial value as a reed-bed. Both would be good reasons for keeping it clear of rubbish.

ROTHERFIELD GREYS: Grey's Court - Derek Elliott

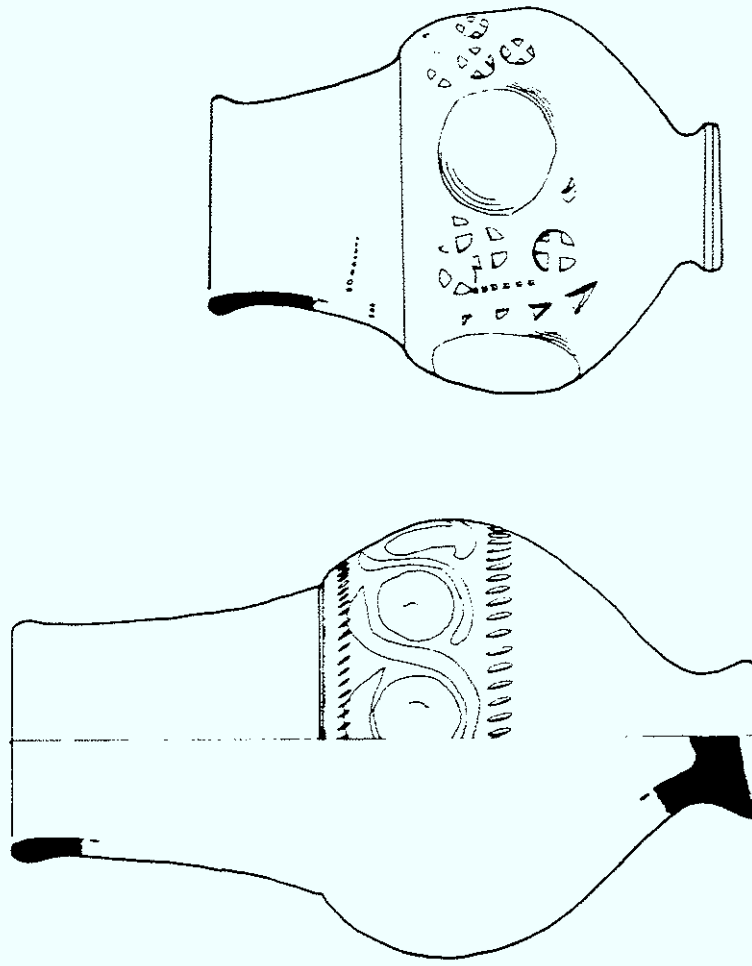
Although no further work at this site was anticipated when the last Newsletter went to press, a second phase was authorised by the National Trust early this year, and a watching brief was maintained by the Unit.

The work involved the removal of a large portion of the previously retained rubble bank to provide a lower and gentler slope. A length of the perimeter wall was uncovered revealing a large repaired area in which various materials

including chalk and dressed stone blocks had been used. One piece of worked stone showing decorative moulding was removed for further inspection.

Previously it had been suggested that the bank may be sited over the remains of an earlier building. Further support for this suggestion now comes from the discovery that what had been thought of as a mortared floor proved to be substantial footing of and at least 17 brick courses below ground level.

The possibility of uncovering any more evidence seems very unlikely in the foreseeable future.



4th century colour-coat beakers from a recently excavated Romano-British inhumation cemetery at Barrow Hills, Radley

