



**OXFORD ARCHAEOLOGICAL UNIT**

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10 September 1987

Dear Newsletter Subscriber,

The Oxford Archaeological Unit is pleased to announce its latest publication Oxford The Buried City.

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Berkshire

READING: Business Park - John Moore and Gerry Wait

The first stage of this large scale site has expanded greatly since the last Newsletter (June 1987). Excavation has been completed in the southern three fields, an assessment of the northern three fields (170 acres) has been completed and excavation has started in this latter area to clear the way for the flood relief channel due to be started spring 1988.

An island of middle/late Bronze Age settlement has been completely excavated in Long Field. An area 95 x 55m contained round houses, rubbish pits, above-ground storage structures and possible fence lines. Five phases of occupation are indicated by at least 12 hut sites.

Two areas in The Commons, the field to the west of Long Fields, were examined. Various field systems of Roman date were found along with a concentration of occupation refuse including tile and brick. Trenching radiating away from this concentration failed to locate any further evidence for a building. Parts of a Bronze Age settlement were also found but to a large extent it had been destroyed by the Roman field boundaries.

The assessment in the northern fields revealed six areas of prehistoric activity, from late Neolithic/early Bronze Age to late Bronze Age. At this stage a small area has been stripped over one of the occupation areas revealing two round huts, several 4-post structures, and several rubbish pits. Excavation is continuing.

COOKHAM: Riverdene House - Andy Mudd

Five assessment trenches in advance of proposed development were dug in the garden of Riverdene House which is situated on the south bank of the River Thames approximately 50m north of Holy Trinity Church and 40m west of Cookham Bridge.

The only archaeological feature encountered was a (?drainage) gully or ditch running north-south at the southern end of Trench A, on the eastern side of the field, containing medieval pottery. This underlay a considerable build-up (1.8m at the south end of the trench and deepening northwards) of later deposits, indicating medieval and later made ground and alluviation in a former river channel or backwater. These deposits contained some redeposited mid-Saxon sherds which are presumably related to settlement to the east and/or south of this assessment area.

In the southern part of the garden, natural gravel was reached c. 1.0m below ground surface. In the central-west and north-west parts the trenches were excavated to 1.5m without encountering natural, indicating that the medieval waterfront ran from north-west to south-east across the southern part of the garden.

OXFORD ARCHAEOLOGICAL UNIT NEWSLETTER INCLUDING  
OXFORDSHIRE PARISH SURVEY NEWS

Vol. XV, No. 2 - September 1987

New Publication

OXFORD: THE BURIED CITY

With this edition of the Newsletter you will find details of our offer to send you copies of this new book post free. This is the latest in our series of popular publications (Dean Court and Invested in Mother Earth are still available too).

Oxford: The Buried City has been designed by John Rhodes of the County Museum, and he and Brian Durham have interspersed Tom Hassall's text with a series of 'picture essays' on specific sites and aspects of the archaeology of the city. This book is a real bargain at £2.95 and makes an excellent (and cheap to post) Christmas present. If you don't want to trust the GPO come and buy it direct from the Unit. But hurry - we have already sold 700 copies.

OLD WINDSOR: The Grange, Church Road - Andy Mudd

An archaeological evaluation was carried out in a 2 acre paddock adjoining The Grange, Old Windsor in advance of proposed housing development.

The paddock is c. 250m west-north-west of the church of St. Peter and St. Andrew, which occupies the site of Anglo-Saxon and early Norman royal palace of Old Windsor.

Evidence of 12th century occupation was found in the form of a ditch in the eastern part of the field (running south-north and then curvilinear), 6 large pits in the central, north-east and south-west areas, and several gullies and postholes in the southern and eastern areas. 2 sections through the ditch produced large quantities of iron slag indicative of blacksmithing and small-scale smelting, as well as worked bone and large quantities of pottery and animal bone. The pits were largely unexamined and their dimensions remain unknown although one was excavated to 0.8m below ground surface without being bottomed.

At the northern end of the paddock were encountered two further ditches, running east-west, though they remain undated. Large quantities of ?medieval tile suggest a building in this area, though no structural evidence was found.

Very little was encountered in the western half of the paddock where the natural geology was clay. The soil profiles suggest that this was a headland in medieval and post-medieval times.

There was no evidence of pre-12th century occupation and little later material. It is not known whether the cropmarks in the field adjacent to the east are related to the archaeology in this paddock.

#### Gloucestershire

LECHLADE: Thornhill Farm - Simon Palmer

This summer's big offensive at Thornhill started at the beginning of the month. The present trench is being extended to the north and west revealing more of the Celtic settlement and an overlying Roman field system (associated with the Roman road that bisects this area).

A further area to the west, on a slight platform, is also being stripped of topsoil. Cropmark evidence here suggests a paucity of features but this belies the true density of archaeological activity. It is hoped that structural evidence will be forthcoming that will pinpoint the nucleus of this late Iron Age settlement.

The increasing size of the principal trench is beginning to show patterning and organisation of stock enclosures and other agricultural related features. A long stratigraphic sequence of ditched enclosures within a short time-span is indicative of the frenetic ditch digging which is also found on other sites of this period, particularly Claydon Pike and Somerford Keynes.

DORNEY: Eton College Rowing Course - Andy Mudd and Tim Allen

Three weeks were spent with a JCB and a hand-picked team assessing archaeology along the proposed line of an international-sized rowing course for Eton College, next to the Thames at Dorney.

Cropmarks cover most of the area, and include an extensive field system, a causewayed camp and several ring-ditches.

The object of this first assessment was to date these cropmarks and to find out how well-preserved they were; as the area is low-lying and now part of the Thames floodplain it was hoped that waterlogged environmental remains would be extensive.

The work was paid for by Eton College prior to submitting a planning application.

Parts of the area were still under crop, so the trenches were restricted to the western half of the proposed course. The trenches were laid out to try and include the field system, other prominent cropmarks such as possible wells/waterholes, small enclosures and pit groups, and also to test blank areas. In addition several trenches ran into wide bands of presumed alluvial material separating the gravel terrace outcrops.

The field containing most of the cropmarks is enormous, 1400m x 750m, and it proved difficult to locate specific features accurately from the cropmarks. The field system proved to be middle-late Bronze Age, and other ditches were of Roman date. Several large pits were partly excavated, but only one waterlogged deposit was found, and the site is clearly much drier than anticipated. In general finds were few, and though there were occasional postholes no clearly domestic areas were encountered. The alluvial areas were mostly of late Pleistocene origin, much earlier than the cropmarks, but features were usually dug deeper across these silty areas, and so had survived ploughing better than the features cut into gravel. There were some large hollows filled with alluvial clays, and some of these contained charcoal and finds suggesting that they were open contemporarily with occupation of the site. Extensive investigation of these might uncover midden deposits.

A second phase of assessment is planned for early spring when the remaining crops are off.

## Oxfordshire

### **BAMPTON:** Calais Farm Redevelopment - R A Chambers

Houses are now fast appearing on this site which was subject to trial excavations last spring (Newsletter XV, no. 1 - March 1987). It has proved difficult to provide the level of groundwork inspection that is desirable on a site of this nature but occasional visits appear to confirm that the archaeology had chiefly been destroyed by the construction of the previous farmyard.

### **BANBURY:** Sainsbury redevelopment, Calthorpe Street - R A Chambers

This extensive site lies between Marlborough Street and Calthorpe Street and until recently was occupied by a garage, a derelict printing works and housing. The northern end of the site impinges upon the historic core of the town and the southern end lies against and possibly included part of the medieval curtilage of Calthorpe House and manor. It is possible that Calthorpe Street (formerly Calthorpe Lane) formed part of an earlier settlement prior to the laying out of the medieval town in the 12th century. Any surviving archaeology is therefore of prime importance to the understanding of the historical development of the town.

In July 1984 an evaluation of the site was carried out by the Unit for J Sainsbury PLC. The results of four machine and hand-dug trenches revealed that previous development had destroyed much of the archaeology. However the northern-most trench located to the rear of properties fronting onto the High Street confirmed that the town had extended along the southern side of the High Street by the 13th century. The southern end of this trench revealed modern garden soils with residual medieval pottery, some of which was of a fabric (Banbury Fl) manufactured during 11th-13th centuries. Towards the northern end of the trench lay a medieval pit with a filling of clay, ironstone rubble and domestic refuse. The pottery comprised Potters Pury and Brill wares of the 13th-14th century. There were no building remains. This trench appears to have lain at the rear end of a medieval burghage plot established by the 13th century, and the area subsequently occupied until the later 20th century, as would be expected of a prime trading position in this part of the town.

The development of this site will involve considerable earth moving and this will be watched for further archaeological material.

### **CHARNEY BASSETT:** St. Peter's Church - R A Chambers

During the renewal of the floor on the north side of the nave, a rapid excavation revealed that the foundation of the former north wall of the nave had been robbed out, probably to recover building materials during the construction of the north aisle. The outline of the robbed foundation trench was clearly visible cutting

through the earlier medieval earth floor.

### **CHASTLETON:** Lower Brookend Farm fishpond - R A Chambers and C Parry

A linear fishpond terraced into the side of a shallow valley has been discovered during woodland clearance adjacent to the site of Lower Brookend Farm, Chastleton. The pond which is nearly 200m long, survives as a prominent earthwork.

A stream still flows through the pond in a deeply-cut channel before emptying into a second pond in the valley floor. Little is currently known about Lower Brookend Farm except that it was demolished 20 or 30 years ago. The building plan recorded on the 1885 edition OS 25" map suggests a farm house haphazardly extended with outhouses and barns over a period of several centuries. The pond may have been associated with an early phase of this farm but by 1842 the pond had been drained and the land converted to coppice.

The site is now part of Wells Folly Farm. The earthworks have been recorded by Mr C Parry.

### **COGGES:** Churchyard and Paddock - Ian Burrow, Michael Pinkney and Mark Roberts

The second season of our research and training programme at Cogges has produced exciting new information about both the deserted village site and the layout of major 12th century buildings on the moated site known as 'Cogges Castle'.

Part of the moat island was incorporated into the churchyard in the 19th century. In recent years, gravedigging has revealed the existence of substantial wall footings beneath the ground. In response to a request from the vicar of Cogges, we removed a 19th century iron fence from within the churchyard, and also demolished a 10 year old boundary fence and carried out excavations beneath their lines in advance of new grave digging and construction of a new drystone wall boundary.

The results confirm that there are truly major buildings on the moat island. Two parallel walls were defined, probably delimiting a building some 7m (23 feet) wide. The northern wall had an opening through it, the southern side of which was graced with a chamfered ashlar jamb. Between the walls was an extensive and multi-phase stone flagged hearth and much patched mortar flooring. A third wall located to the east was on the same alignment (west-north-west - east-south-east). We may be dealing with the hall or kitchens of the Arsic family manor house.

In the paddock, west of Cogges Manor Farm, an 11-strong team of adult students learned excavation techniques in two trenches laid across earthworks thought to form part of the medieval village.

The earthworks in fact appear to be post-medieval in origin. They conceal beautifully preserved foundations and cobbling from 18th - 19th century agricultural buildings.

Beneath them, however, we found tantalizing evidence for medieval occupation. A very complicated area of burning, rammed pebbles and dumped daub and clay appears to be late medieval in date. It was not possible to investigate this fully, but we are clearly dealing with domestic activity either inside or close to a building.

We are already planning the 1988 season, which it is hoped will be expanded to two weeks if suitable sponsorship can be found. Work this year was greatly helped by an additional grant from the County Council as well as our usual support from the Department for External Studies.

**FARINGDON:** Former Garage site in Church Street - R A Chambers

This site bounded by Swan Lane to the south-east and Church Street to the north-west occupies high ground opposite the churchyard.

Site clearance and removal of up to 1.3m of black garden-type soil revealed an undated, circular drystone-lined well and two extensive limestone pavements which also remained undated. At the base of the deep post-medieval soils some patches of undisturbed medieval soil with pottery and animal bone survived. Of the medieval pottery recovered from the site, most belonged to the 12th-14th centuries with wares from Brill, Minety and a less well defined Wiltshire based ware (identified by M Mellor). Two sherds may be Iron Age and one grass-tempered sherd was probably Anglo-Saxon.

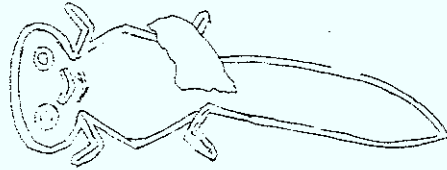
**LITTLE COMPTON:** St. David's Church - R A Chambers

Replacement of rotted floor boards on the south side of the present nave against the foundations of the bell tower unfortunately did not provide any information on the possible development of this unusual church plan.

**M40 Extension - R A Chambers**

Construction of the route from Wendlebury northwards will begin in January. That section of the motorway which passes through Oxfordshire has been divided into four sections, the construction of each section will be put out to tender separately. Although DoT have offered to provide access to specific sites for archaeological investigation prior to construction, neither DoT or HBMC have yet agreed to finance any work.

**NETTLEBED:** The Case of the Carved Skull - R A Chambers



A human skull has been discovered in the grounds of the H M borstal at Huntercombe. Not that surprising given the location you may think! However the skull bore a carving, not the initials of an in-mate scratched into the bone, but a lizard-like animal portrayed across the skull cap from the forehead to the back of the neck. The carved skull almost certainly belonged to a primitive tribal cult and was brought back to this country as a collector's item before being discarded and buried at Huntercombe. It is hoped that the skull will be given to the ethnographic collections at the University Museum.

**OXFORD:** Gloucester Green - Brian Durham

The biggest earthmoving operation in Oxford for 15 years has been completed, forming an underground car park beneath the new bus station. Unlike the Westgate and County Hall in the 1970's, important discoveries were not expected however, because our sample excavation in 1984 had shown the medieval levels to be cut about by gravel quarrying. Nevertheless there was a chance of finding the boundary of Beaumont Palace to the north, the royal house outside Oxford's walls, where Richard Lionheart was born and which subsequently became the Oxford Carmelite Friary.

The good news is that the quarrying prediction was correct, so that we missed nothing by not mounting a full excavation. In fact it went so deep that it would have obliterated almost anything predating it; the bad news is that it extended to within 15m of the presumed line of the palace wall, and any medieval defensive ditch was inseparable from the north edge of the quarry. Nevertheless something had acted as a boundary on the north side, and the conclusion is unavoidable that the palace and friary were exerting some control over the extent of gravel extraction.

Quarrying seems to have been rather indiscriminate, with small and large holes cutting and recutting previous areas of infill, in what was possibly sometimes a fruitless search for clean gravel. In one or two places there were deeper features with staining around them. These could have been cess-pits from previous occupation, in this particular case facing the south wall of Beaumont. This would have

been part of the suburb in this area which disappeared after the Black Death - provisional dating of the pottery from the quarries suggests 12th to 15th centuries, but this of course reflects the date range of the spoil used for infilling, not the actual date of quarrying.

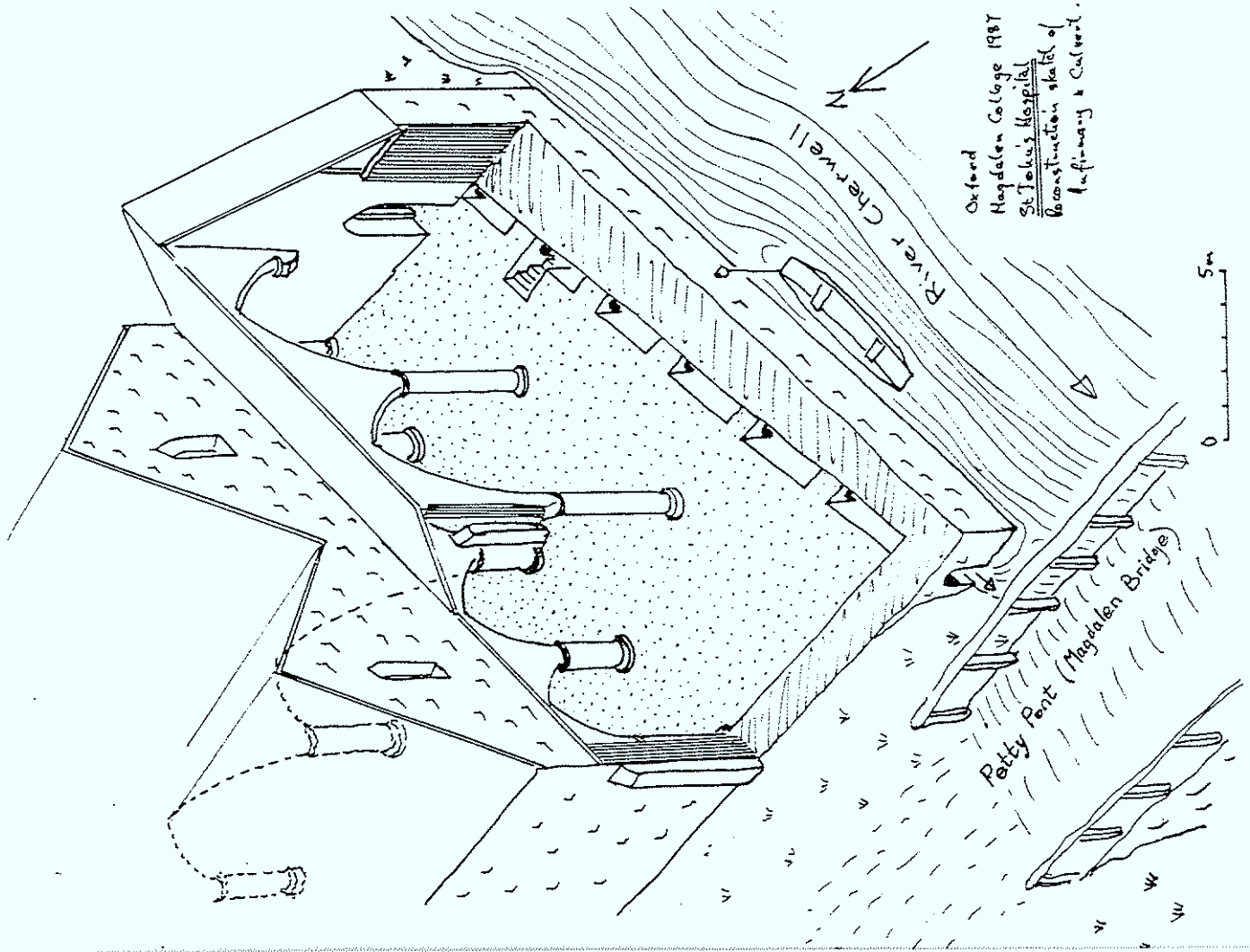
The most impressive exposure was the curtain wall and other remains of the city jail. It is difficult to imagine why the city needed a prison with an outer wall 5 feet thick and 8 feet deep, because in its 100 year life it was seldom full, and yet it was subject to all sorts of complaints of poor conditions. Nothing new was learnt about the building itself; its octagonal shape does not seem to have included below-ground cells, and the foundations were not so massive as the outer wall, which was clearly the main line of security.

OXFORD: Magdalen College, St. John's Hospital - Brian Durham

The building contract is now well underway for new college kitchens, and the unusual method of foundation chosen by the college's engineers has provided the essential clues to the shape of the hospital infirmary.

Briefly, we knew of a high quality building jutting out into the medieval Cherwell, surprisingly provided with its own internal water supply. Equally surprisingly it seemed to have two parallel arcades, one lightweight at 6m centres and the other massive with piers at 4.5m centres. We were beginning to accept that it must be two separate buildings side by side, but there was no intervening wall. The truth was almost stranger. The building is in fact lying east-west, parallel with the bridge and the High Street, rather than lying along the river. This was shown by a big north wall which corresponded with the bay-spacing of both arcades. The arcades are therefore across the building. But why should any building require two such different supporting systems. We need to look first at hospital infirmary halls in a wider context.

Many infirmary halls were within monasteries and had a conventional aisled structure ie effectively a 'nave' and two aisles. The classic examples are Christ Church, Canterbury and (though not monastic) St. Mary's almshouses at Chichester. The aisles at Chichester form convenient cubicles for the inmates, which have since been converted into self-contained almshouses. The second type of infirmary has twin halls separated by a single arcade supporting a valley between paired roofs, as at St. Nicholas, Salisbury and St. John's, Winchester. I have found no opinions on the merits of this second type, but two could be suggested. Firstly for a given overall span, the roof carpentry could be much simpler, with tie-beam trusses on each side resting on the central arcade. Secondly it would have a practical advantage that the hall could be conveniently divided in two by a central curtain, for comfort or for privacy between men and women patients.



Magdalen College, St. John's Hospital infirmary, sketch for reconstruction.

Within a few years of the foundation of the Oxford hospital came another royal foundation, the hospital of St. Mary Ospringe in Kent. Here the excavation of G H Smith in the 1970's showed a twin hall arrangement with an internal water supply down the length of one side. St. Johns, Oxford must be different in plan but may have the same broad design. The heavier piers could have supported the east gables of the twin halls, with the lighter piers carrying a separate cross-roof at the east end, forming an elaborate washing place at the end of the infirmary.

This elaborate reconstruction is based on salvage work done by George Lambick in July, in the teeth of the contractor's excavator. It may seem improbable, but it solves many of the problems thrown up by the controlled excavation. The continuation of the infirmary would take it into the small quadrangle north of Magdalen Tower, where perhaps one day it may be confirmed.

OXFORD: Worcester College, New Quadrangle - Brian Durham

The college is building new student accommodation on the Hythe Bridge Street frontage. A sewer diversion trench shows 0.7m of peat accumulation starting at a level 0.6m lower than the local flood plain surface (about 56.3m at Rewley Abbey). The situation is generally similar to the Trill Mill Stream half a mile further down the river valley, where peat developed over a wide expanse of spring-line deposits which had been inundated by the raising of the mill stream level. The Worcester College peat presumably also arose from the ponding-up of water in a blocked channel - possibly this was an old meander, but in the circumstances it is equally likely to result from the creation of the Castle Mill itself. Unfortunately there are no datable finds to confirm this, nor indeed to date the gravel layers which overlie it in the area close to the modern bridge ramp. It is hoped that a hand-dug trench nearby will produce pottery from later deposits.

SHIPTON-UNDER-MYCHWOOD: Prebendal House (SP 280180) - Brian Durham

The house occupies a strip of land between Shipton church and the Evenlode. It is presently a picturesque 17th-century Cotswold mansion with a large late medieval tithe barn alongside. The particular interest lies in the fact that the church, and presumably also a large ecclesiastical estate, was made a prebend of Salisbury Cathedral in the early 12th century (1107-1116) and at this time it was valued at 45 marks. This would make it an immensely valuable living, and given that it was the main church of the royal vill of Shipton, it is argued that it would have been aminster church with a community of secular priests. None of the standing buildings of the prebendal house are of this period, but one range exhibits several fragments of Romanesque architecture, and the new owners Mitrecraft were prepared to pay for an excavation to investigate the below-ground deposits, to enhance the history of the house as it is converted to sheltered accommodation. We were grateful for the assistance of the Wychwood Local History

Society in the digging.

There was good stratigraphy of a c. 14th century domestic building partly beneath the courtyard, for which a complete plan could be reconstructed. The present hall range showed no medieval deposits however, and the 13th century date is based on its architecture alone. Even more perplexing was the Romanesque building however, which as it stands is only 3.5m x 4.5m and is used as a passageway from the courtyard to the barnyard. The early features include a chamfered impost, a round-headed arch and a 12th-century door jamb all apparently reset in later walling. John Blair had however identified two pilasters on the north face which did look suspiciously early, except that they were not attached to a wall but to the side of 0.61m square stone piers. The standard architectural dating cannot be applied to these unique structures, except to say that piers with pilasters are more likely to be Romanesque than Gothic. What were they supporting anyway? Our best suggestion is that it was a granary raised to head height on several rows of these piers, and the remains of the first floor timbers still survive built into the stonework. So it is likely that the prebendary had an elaborate granary in the late 12th - early 13th century to store the generous tithes from his estate.

WYTHAM: Seacourt Deserted Village - R A Chambers

A land drainage scheme has been completed on that part of the site which lies to the west of the dual carriageway. The work consisted of mole drains at 3m intervals leading into plastic land drains backfilled with gravel. The work revealed that the part of the scheduled area to the west of the dual carriageway contained substantial remains of the medieval settlement, including spreads of dark soil and building rubble associated with medieval pottery in the vicinity of the two hollow ways.

SOMESET

GLASTONBURY: The Abbey - Ian Burrow and Humphrey Woods

Proposals by the Abbey Trustees to improve entrance facilities at the Abbey necessitated trial excavations in August. The Abbey is, of course, one of the most important monastic sites in western Europe and we were very pleased to be asked to excavate here. Two small trenches were examined, one to the west of the small late medieval St. Patrick's chapel, and the second sectioning a prominent north-south scarp running northwards from the chapel of St. Mary, the site of the 'Ancient Church' (Vetusta ecclesia) mentioned as far back as the 8th century.

The first trench produced an interesting sequence from the 12th century onwards. The earliest levels encountered were silts filling the upper part of an east-west ditch of unknown width and depth, and containing a quantity of late 12th - early 13th century

pottery and several quill pens. A small mortar floored building had been built into the top of these silts, and this in turn was succeeded by a deeply rutted metalled road. Above this were ephemeral remains of Abbot Bere's almshouses of the late 15th - early 16th century. Of these features the ditch is the most interesting and tantalizing. Large ditches have now been observed at several points around the abbey, and some at least belong to the earliest phases of the history of the site in the 6th or 7th centuries. Is this ditch of this date, and only finally filling up in the aftermath of the great fire of 1184?

The second smaller trench encountered a north-south wall at the base of the scarp, the wall being on the projected alignment of an unexplained late medieval wall fragment standing just to the north of St. Mary's chapel. A mortar floor contemporary with the wall lay to the west of it, while to the east all subsequent layers were post-Dissolution.

- OPEN DAY -

#### READING BUSINESS PARK

The site will be open to the public on Sunday October 11th, 11.00 - 4.30 with guided tours and an exhibition with archaeological specialists in attendance to talk about their work.

Entry £1.00 per person, 50p children/DAP  
£2.00 per car load  
Free car parking

For further information contact David Miles or Danyon Rey on Oxford (0865) 243888.

The site is signposted from Junction 11.

