

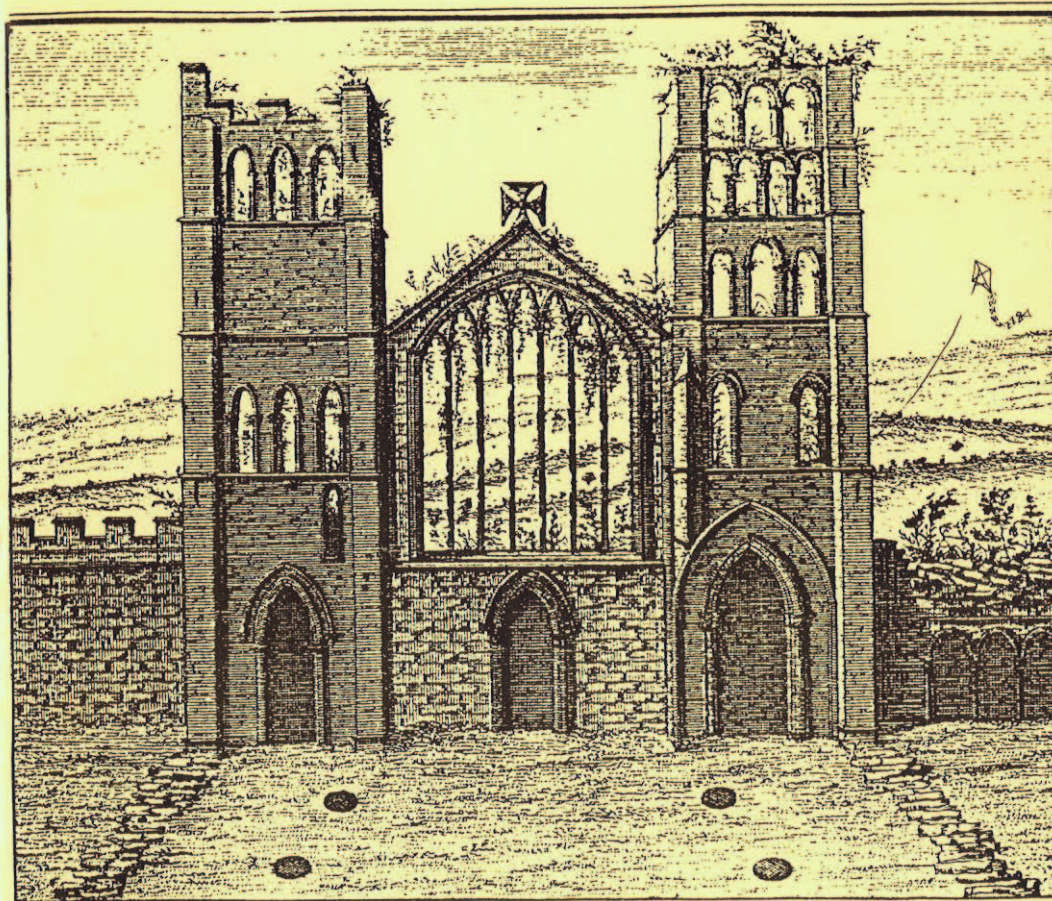
ARCHAEOLOGICAL NEWS

The quarterly newsletter of the Oxford



Archaeological Unit

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THE EAST VIEW OF THE INSIDE OF EYNSHAM ABBY

SPOTLIGHT

RECENT WORK BY THE OAU

The past three months have seen the OAU working on a wider range of sites than at any comparable period in its history: the royal tennis court in Oriel College, Oxford, Anglo-Saxon settlements at Yarnton and Abingdon, the barrack blocks of the Roman fleet in Dover and a Roman riverside settlement in the Nene Valley in Northamptonshire. The most newsworthy discoveries, however, are those on our own doorstep, at Eynsham and at Oxfordshire's most famous archaeological symbol, the White Horse of Uffington.

Work at the White Horse this year was due to start, appropriately enough, on St George's Day, St George being the site's patron saint. We were delayed because official permits did not arrive in time. This was probably just as well, as the Hill was closed off on St George's Day and the weekend before by the unlikely combination of the police, the National Trust and English Heritage - united against a predicted invasion of New Age Travellers (a.k.a. hippies) planning to use White Horse Hill to celebrate Dragon Day, a new festival in the alternative calendar.

This proved to be a good time to visit the White Horse, as the blockade meant that cars were banned from the Hill and alternative transport had to be used. The resulting peace and

quiet were worth the effort of the extra walk.

The White Horse investigations eventually started a week later than planned. The discovery of an equine layer cake - at least four layers of chalk-filled trenches - attracted enormous attention from the media, a constant stream of local schoolchildren and many visitors to the open days. Simon Palmer reports in detail later in this Newsletter. This horse will run and run.

At Eynsham the discoveries are more for the archaeological aficionado but none the less important for that. Suspecting that the modern graveyard was damaging archaeological deposits - particularly the Anglo-Saxon and medieval Abbey - the OAU carried out an assessment to prove the point. This is an example of what in the jargon of the 90s is called 'being proactive'. Fortunately it worked. Middle Saxon deposits were found and English Heritage agreed to back the project. The subsequent results are even better than expected (see the report by R A Chambers below).

The medieval and late Saxon abbey buildings overlie the middle Anglo-Saxon minster predicted by John Blair, a pagan Anglo-Saxon settlement and a major prehistoric enclosure (possibly later Bronze Age) predicted by no-one. The Eynsham Abbey site is beginning to take shape as one of the most significant excavations the OAU has ever carried out. We hope to have the latest work open to visitors later in the summer and early autumn.

David Miles

BERKSHIRE

BINFIELD : PARK FARM

The Newsletter for March 1990 reported an assessment carried out in June/July 1989 at Park Farm, in the course of which three areas of archaeological activity were identified. In Trenches 1 and 2 of the assessment two small posthole-type features had been located, but no finds were recovered, and although further assessment trenches were dug no more features were found.

Four more trenches were dug this year to locate the elusive archaeology, but only one more 'posthole' containing some prehistoric pottery was found. Two flint flakes and another unidentifiable small sherd of presumably prehistoric pot were recovered by hand cleaning the trenches, but whatever the surviving archaeology had represented had been ploughed away.

During the assessment, shovel test pits were dug and the soil sieved to complement field walking done as part of the East Berkshire survey. In Area B a restricted scatter of Mesolithic, early Neolithic and late Neolithic flints was located by both methods. As flint scatters and evidence for Mesolithic or Neolithic settlements tend to be ephemeral at best, the strategy adopted for excavation in the ploughed areas included intensive field walking and shovel test pitting with trenches located on the areas of highest artefact density. Some 300 flints were recovered, of which about 50 pieces were worked. George Lambrick suggested on the basis of the statistical grouping of the flints that one small charcoal-filled feature would be found in the area of the scatter, and during excavation a small feature of this type was in fact discovered. The flints had been extensively disturbed by ploughing and comparing the distribution of the flints with the distribution of a load of modern brick used to break up the heavy clay soil produced an almost identical location plot. The

Mesolithic/Neolithic activity centre had indeed been ploughed away.

In Area E of the assessment, two ditches and five pits were found. The sieving produced some tile and brick, suggesting that there had been a small Romano-British enclosed settlement near a relict stream course. This is unusual on clay subsoil, and excavation began. The features turned out to be almost the same colour as the natural clay subsoil; the entire site was bright yellow! However, because of the limited scope of the assessment the full extent of the settlement was not established.

There is a series of large circular enclosures at the S end of the site with rectangular enclosures aligned NE-SW ending at a large boundary ditch aligned NW-SE. To the W of this ditch is a field system, to the S is a large field and to the N small rectangular enclosures. Just W of the large boundary ditch is a possible aisled building of unknown length (the postholes are very difficult to spot), which could range from 6.0 m to 20 m. On the S edge of the site, inside and facing the entrance of one of the rectangular enclosures W of the boundary ditch, is an 11 m diameter roundhouse. The finds recovered so far include many loomweight fragments and early Romano-British pottery, but the soil is too acidic for bone to survive.

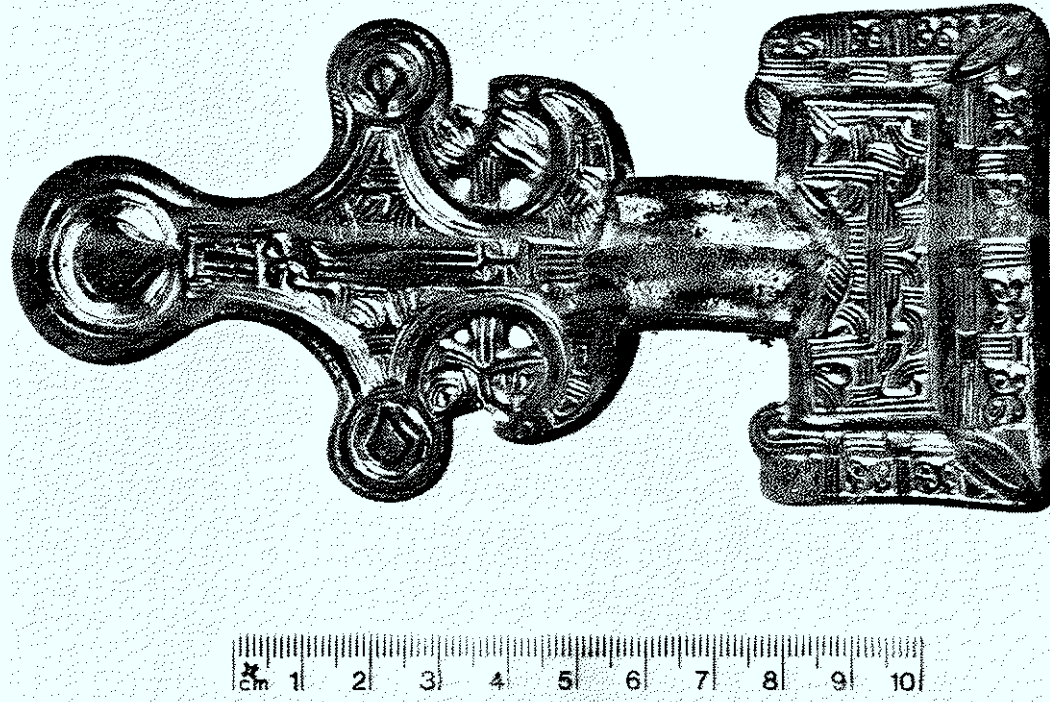
Mark Roberts

GLOUCESTERSHIRE

LECHLADE : BUTLER'S FIELD

The sheltered housing built after the Unit's 1985 excavation of this Saxon burial ground is due to open. At the opening there will be an exhibition about the cemetery at

Figure 1: Gilt bronze great square-headed brooch from Butler's Field Anglo-Saxon cemetery. Length 152 mm



the site, organised by Corinium Museum.

Preparation for publication is in progress, with various specialist reports and the finds catalogue nearing completion. The results of studies of organic remains on the iron tools and weapons and of the composition of copper alloys from the site have been submitted this spring, as well as an analysis and discussion of the pottery. Dr Heinrich Härke is at present studying the weapons and knives for inclusion in the report, which should be published early in 1991.

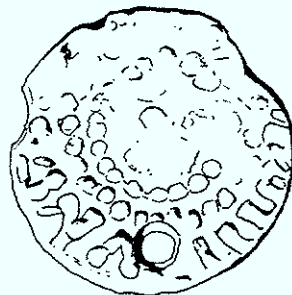


Figure 2: Imitation sceat from Butler's Field Anglo-Saxon cemetery

Examination of the coins by Dr Cathy King has led to the identification of a single Anglo-Saxon coin. Like most of the Roman coins from the burials, it was found in a woman's grave and pierced as though for use as an ornament. According to Dr Michael Metcalf's report, the coin is a copper imitation of a sceat of the last quarter of the 7th century. At this period silver coinage had just begun to circulate in Kent, but its use had not yet spread as far as the Upper Thames. The Lechlade coin is lighter than a normal sceat, and appears not to have been intended as a forgery for monetary use. This interesting find is yet another indicator of the site's potential as a fruitful field for research.

Claire Bland

OXFORDSHIRE

ABINGDON : SPRING ROAD CEMETERY

Bill Skellington, the aptly-named former Superintendent of the Town Cemetery, has been turning up finds of every date from Neolithic to Saxon ever since he began grave-digging here. His successor John Bell, whose daughter Linda spent the summer at the Vineyard processing finds for us, is continuing to record findspots and encouraged the Unit to undertake an assessment of the remaining undisturbed part of the graveyard. The site lies along a huge N to S medieval headland, which led us to hope that preserved Saxon and earlier occupation layers might be found underneath.

Five machine trenches spread over the whole site were dug. Little was found at the NW and S edges of the cemetery, but in the middle, under the headland, was a dark Saxon occupation layer from which were cut pits, ditches and postholes. A line of regularly-spaced postholes crossing two trenches must belong either to Saxon timber buildings or

fences like those found at Barton Court Farm by David Miles.

This Saxon settlement, N of the river Ock beside the Larkhill stream, is probably associated with the large cemetery excavated in the 1930s at Saxton Road. The surviving occupation layer means that fine structural detail and other information about the use of the buildings may be preserved, and the Unit is at present discussing with English Heritage and the Town Council, who funded the assessment, the possibility of a larger excavation to record the site before grave-digging destroys it.

Tim Allen

***** ABINGDON : VINEYARD REDEVELOPMENT PROJECT

The Unit has been called in since building work began to watch the stripping of a new area outside the main site, just N of the former line of the river Stort. Two important discoveries were made in this small area. The continuation of a large Roman boundary ditch seen running N-S in the main excavation cuts across early Roman ditches, turns a 90° corner and heads off E within the new area. This is interesting because the ditch encloses land on both sides of the Stort, showing that the river was not a property boundary during the late Roman period.

A few metres N of the enclosure lay the southern edge of a very large feature, at least 9.0 m across and 3.0 m deep, apparently also running E to W. This had waterlaid silts at the bottom, and its backfilling included much late 1st century AD pottery. If this is a linear feature, could it have been a Late Iron Age defensive ditch surrounding the settlement alongside the river, like Dyke Hills at Dorchester? We should have the opportunity to trace this mystery feature as

the development progresses, so watch this space!

Tim Allen

BANBURY : INNER RELIEF ROAD

The construction of this new road has now begun. Following the demolition of several more properties fronting onto the N side of Bridge Street, a small area of street frontage became available for further excavation between the cellars of No. 63 and No. 64. The cellar of No. 64 was in fact our first discovery - once the demolition debris had been laboriously shovelled away. It had stone-built walls and appeared to have been backfilled in the early part of the present century. In the limited (1.0 m wide) area between these cellars, evidence was found of a well-made stone pathway and stone foundations, possibly of the 18th century. These sealed a small stone- and clay-lined well with evidence of a barrel lining at its bottom (2.0 m beneath current ground level). A pit cut by the well contained 16th/17th century pottery.

Mike Napthan

DUCKLINGTON: GILL MILL

A small Middle Iron Age farmstead was identified at Gill Mill during assessment trenching in 1988. This excavation revealed its plan, consisting of a single house site and a series of attached animal pens or enclosures (Figure 3). Two main phases are discernible. There was very little domestic rubbish and the farmstead was probably not occupied for very long. Some of the ditches were still waterlogged and the site had been covered by alluvium; it may have been

subject to flooding when it was in use, and occupied only seasonally.

The form of the site is typical of low-lying summer grazing camps of the kind excavated by the Unit at Farmoor and Claydon Pike. Three such sites (also sampled by the Unit) still survive as earthworks on Port Meadow, and the preserved plant remains from their ditches reflect exactly the modern flora of Port Meadow, which is known to have been common grazing land for at least 800 years.

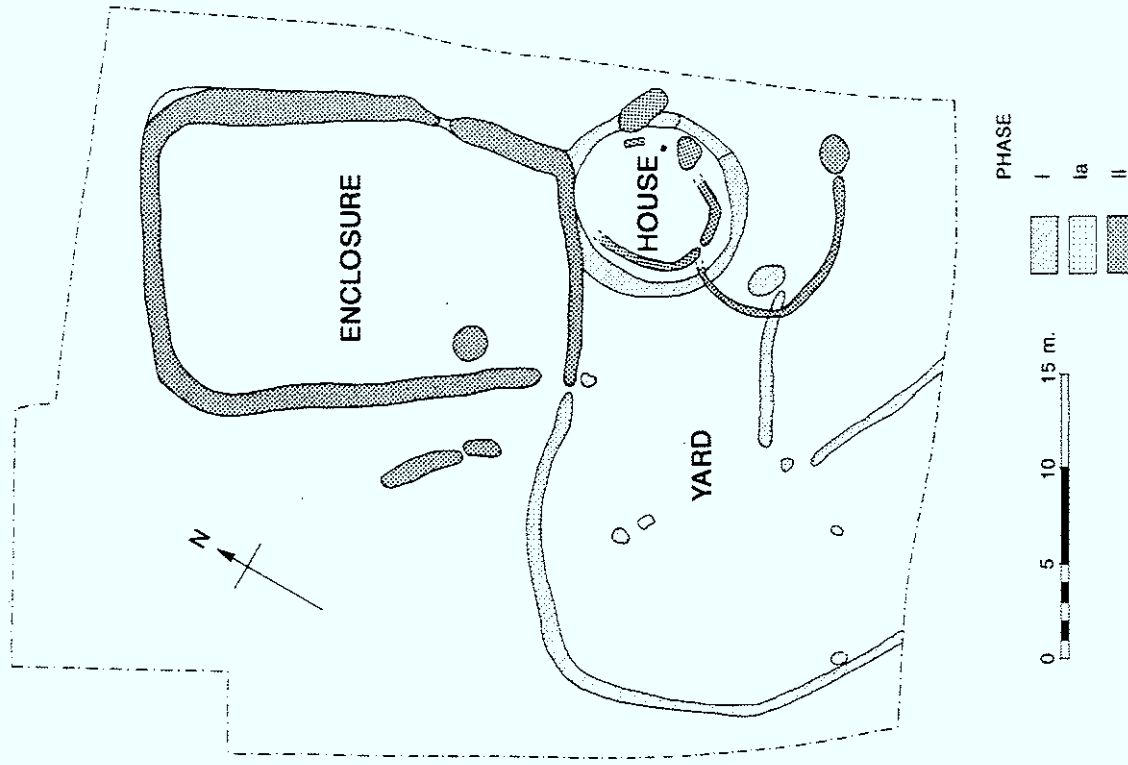
The Gill Mill site dates from the same period (c 200-50 BC) and again waterlogged plant remains are likely to provide evidence of its environment. A preliminary inspection by Mark Robinson has already revealed the presence of bracken, which occurs at other sites and was probably used for animal bedding.

Gill Mill fits neatly into the pattern of Iron Age settlement in the lower Windrush Valley. The Unit's intensive work on sites in this area like Gravelly Guy, Mingies Ditch and Watkins Farm, together with earlier discoveries, is making it one of the best understood areas of Iron Age rural settlement anywhere in Britain. Not only is it clear how different types of site occupied specific topographical and environmental niches, but it is also becoming apparent how they developed through time and how in economic terms the settlements complemented each other, reflecting their strong social links.

The excavation at Gill Mill was carried out in February and March on behalf of J Smith and Sons.

George Lambrick & Geoff Tann

Figure 3: Plan of excavations at Gill Mill



EYNHAM : ROYAL CENTRE, MINSTER AND ABBEY

The Unit was concerned that the last opportunity to explore and record the heart of this Saxon royal and monastic centre and later medieval abbey might be lost to cemetery expansion, and a trench was excavated in 1989 to assess the quality and quantity of the archaeological remains. Favourable results led to large-scale excavation, and we now know that the remains from each period are of exceptional interest. Eynham is emerging as the key site for the archaeology of the Anglo-Saxon period both within the Upper Thames Valley and regionally.

The 1989 assessment was funded from the Oxfordshire County Council annual grant (Newsletter xvii, No. 4, December 1989). On the basis of the evidence recovered during this assessment English Heritage decided to fund the total excavation of those areas of the Church of England and Roman Catholic churchyards where grave-digging will eventually destroy the archaeology.

Excavation since January has shown that the remains of the late Anglo-Saxon Benedictine abbey survive below the larger medieval abbey. There are also the remains of substantial early and middle Saxon buildings which apparently represent the domestic elements of the middle Saxon minster and earlier royal centre. For the first time in the Oxford region there is an opportunity to recover pottery from securely dated middle Anglo-Saxon deposits. A coin-dated well represents the first deposit excavated in the Oxford region which can be dated with confidence to the mid 8th century, and some pottery and faunal and environmental material have already been recovered from the domestic debris with which it was partially backfilled. In addition, a fragment of wall face from the above ground structure of a major timber-framed building has been found, for the first time in England. Finds reflecting the status of the late Anglo-Saxon

monastic site include a fragment of a finely carved elephant ivory panel from a casket and a walrus ivory figure of a saint, originally from a crucifixion scene (Figures 4a and b).

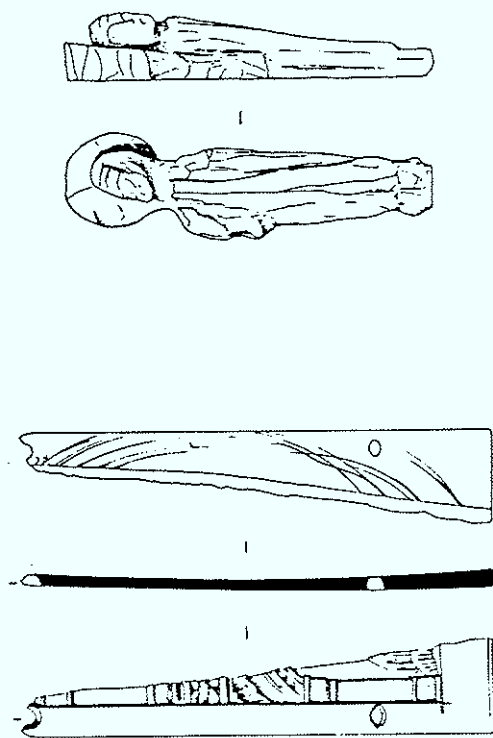


Figure 4a: Fragment of decorated elephant ivory panel from Saxon casket, probably of continental origin
Figure 4b: walrus ivory figure of saint, originally part of crucifixion scene

Comparatively little survives of the Norman and medieval Benedictine abbey founded at the end of the 11th century on the site of its late Anglo-Saxon predecessor. After the Dissolution in 1539 there followed three centuries of methodical robbing of all reusable building materials, from stonework for house-building to floor tiles for road mending. Even the massive wall foundations were quarried for their stone.

SUMMARY OF PHASES OF OCCUPATION (Figure 5)

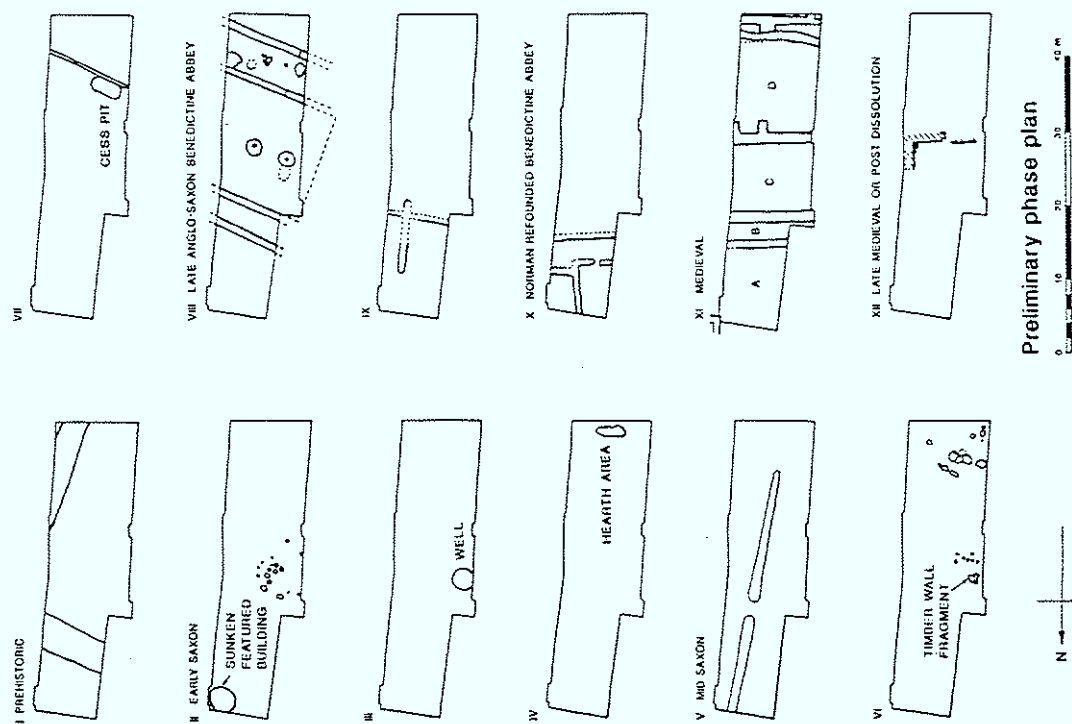
Although residual Neolithic flint blades have been found on the site, the early E-W ditch (4.0 m wide and 2.0 m deep) probably represents part of a substantial Bronze Age monument (Phase I). A second large, possibly Bronze Age, ditch was discovered beneath the E edge of the excavation. After the ditch sides had stabilised and become overgrown, Late Bronze Age-Early Iron Age domestic debris from an adjacent but as yet undetected settlement accumulated. The area was not occupied again until the early Saxon period, but two Roman coins and several sherds of 1st-4th century pottery show that occupation was not far away. A general pre-Saxon spread of gravelly homogeneous soil suggests cultivation, either Iron Age or Roman period.

A sunken featured building and some post pits 15 m to the S belong to the early Saxon reoccupation of the site (Phase II). This building, backfilled with domestic waste, was later cut by a N-S palisade trench of Phase V. There was no trace of the structure against which the southern end of this boundary stopped. The well (Phase III) whose backfilling is dated to the mid-8th century by an imitation *secat* minted AD 720-730 is almost certainly later than the Phase II post pits.

An extensive and long-lived hearth area (Phase IV) comprising many individual hearths beside or overlying each other lay on almost undisturbed cultivated soil, suggesting an earth-floored building with a central hearth on an exact W-E alignment of which no other trace was found.

The precise relationship between the N-S boundary trench (Phase V), the hearth area (Phase IV) and the well (Phase III) is unclear. The 8th-century well filling settled to leave a depression into which a section of the daub superstructure of a timber building collapsed (Phase VI); the impression of

Figure 5: Eynsham abbey, Oxfordshire: phase plan to April 1990



Preliminary phase plan

the timber framing survived within the daub, which was of mortar rather than clay. The building represented by this wall face may be associated with a short alignment of possible post pits and several larger pits to the S, and may also be associated with the N to S boundary ditch in Phase V.

By the later Anglo-Saxon period building remains had become more substantial. A timber building left a cill beam trench and a large cesspit (Phase VII). It is conceivable that this building was a lean-to against the inner wall of the S range of the next building phase (Phase VIII), although the beam slot was not parallel to the S wall.

The late Anglo-Saxon Benedictine abbey, whose foundation received royal confirmation in 1005, appears to be represented by a range of substantial stone buildings, some of which were rendered inside and out and sealed with a buff lime wash (Phase VIII). The bases of two circular mortar mixers similar to three from middle Anglo-Saxon levels in Northampton were used in the construction of these buildings (Figure 6).

Following the Conquest in 1066, the abbey was initially deserted and later translated to Stow in Lincolnshire. This move was quickly reversed by the next Bishop of Lincoln. The abbey then passed through an unsettled period before Henry I confirmed the re-endowment of the abbey in 1109. At this time, the abbey was clearly still not rebuilt and lay in ruins (*dissipatam et desolatam*).

The early 12th-century rebuilding of the abbey appears to have begun in earnest with the shallow foundations of temporary, possibly timber, buildings to the S of the church (Phase X). The preceding phase of building (Phase IX) is difficult to interpret but may represent a first attempt to reoccupy the abbey during the unsettled period following Bishop Bloet's decision to re-establish Eynsham Abbey in 1093.



Figure 6: Reconstruction of late Anglo-Saxon mortar mixers used in building the early 11th century Benedictine abbey.

Although a sketch made by Anthony Wood in 1657 seems to show only alterations and additions to the Norman abbey church, we now know from excavation that at least some of the buildings to the S were demolished and replaced during the medieval period. Phase XI represents medieval abbey buildings which appear to have been built or rebuilt in the late 12th-early 13th century. Little can be concluded about the foundation plan of these buildings until a more comprehensive picture is produced by further excavation to the W later this year. The area A is no longer thought to

be the great cloister because of a building discovered in the NE corner of the present excavation, and the walk B and substantial building C buttressed on its S side are open to interpretation. D was a garden throughout the life of the medieval abbey and a curving path led through it against the N side of another range of buildings. Little of the fabric of the medieval abbey was left in the excavated area, which had been thoroughly robbed of all usable stone, tile and flooring materials.

The plan of Phase XII shows the remnant of an area of stone paving within a shallowly founded drystone-walled building. This may be a small post-Dissolution agricultural building built within the robbed remains of the medieval structure.

Although the excavation of some 400 sq m of St Leonard's churchyard was originally planned to finish in March, the Saxon remains are so extensive that work will continue in the present area until August and on the next area until the end of the year. English Heritage have agreed to provide some additional funding for this first phase of the work.

R A Chambers

AELFRIC OF EYNHAM

Eynsham's eminent position among Benedictine houses of the later Anglo-Saxon period is underlined by the fact that one of the greatest of Anglo-Saxon writers, Aelfric, was invited to become Abbot of Eynsham when the abbey was founded in 1005. Born around 950, Aelfric was educated at the revived school at Winchester, and won both an early reputation for scholarship and a circle of powerful friends. In 989 he was sent to the new foundation at Cerne Abbas in Dorset, where he wrote most of his considerable output, including sermons, Lives of the Saints, Bible translations and commentaries, a treatise on ecclesiastical chronology and astronomy (to enable

his colleagues to grapple with the complex formulae for calculating the date of Easter and other festivals), pastoral letters, the first Latin grammar in any vernacular tongue and the colloquy for which he is now best known.

The moral and educational content of the homilies may not appeal to the modern reader, but Aelfric's ability to combine common sense and scholarship made him popular with his contemporaries - one of his sermons survives in 16 copies. Like his sermons, his Lives of the Saints 'whose festivals are observed by the English' were intended to foster a moral revival of the English at a time of foreign invasion, but were perhaps intended for private reading; in keeping with the monastic tradition, they emphasise virgin saints such as Saint Agatha, combining sound theological debate, gruesome martyrdoms and inspiring miracles.

Aelfric's duties as Abbot of Eynsham seem to have left him little time for writing, but he kept up old contacts. On one occasion we hear of him lending books to the Oxfordshire *thegn* Wulfgeat, while on another he rebukes his host, Sigeward, for pressing him to drink too much on his last visit to East Heolon - two small but telling insights into life among the great and the good in the later Anglo-Saxon period.

E McAdam

From Aelfric's sermon on the Epiphany:

We should also realize that there were some heretics who said that every man is born according to the position of the stars and that his destiny befalls him as a result of their course; and they advanced in support of their error the fact that a new star sprang up when the Lord was corporeally born, and said that the star was his destiny. May this error depart from believing hearts, that there is any destiny except for the Almighty Creator, who provides life for every man according to his merits. Man is not created for the stars, but the stars are created for men as a light in the night-time.

(From M Swanton, Anglo-Saxon prose.)

MERTON: BORROW PITS

The huge limestone quarry being dug to provide roadstone for the new M40 (reported in our last newsletter) threatened to destroy two Bronze Age ring ditches and a possible Iron Age enclosure. Vigilance by the County Museum Services prevented their destruction in the nick of time, and in January and February an excavation was commissioned by the contractors, Sir Alfred McAlpine, to fulfil the County's planning requirements. An adjacent field which was to be landscaped was also assessed.

The site lies very close to the river Ray, just upstream from the Dorchester-Alchester Roman road crossing. Readers will recall that this spring saw some of the most extensive floods for many years and at one point almost the whole area was under water, which severely hampered work. Eventually, however, the water retreated and the project was successfully completed.

The two ring ditches were very typical, one 24 m in diameter with a ditch 3.0 m wide and 1.0 m deep, the other similar in size but with a shallower ditch. The southern ring produced five cremations, three of them in urns (one at least a small collared urn with twisted cord decoration), which were found just inside the ditch in its SE quadrant. There was no central burial, and it is not clear what form the barrow took: it may have been a bowl barrow with a central mound or a disc barrow with an external bank. The ditch was largely devoid of finds, except for an interesting cluster of 56 flint flakes which probably represent primary knapping debris.

The second ring ditch also had no central burial, and the

only cremation, again with a small urn, was in the bottom of a very large shallow pit, 4.0 m x 5.0 m but only 0.3 m deep. This had been filled with stone. This ring ditch contained several pieces of pottery including a fragment of a decorated urn.

The ditch cut the end of the small rectangular enclosure which was confirmed to be Middle Iron Age. The only other possible Iron Age features in this excavation were a large pit (possibly for grain storage) and two much smaller pits and a few postholes with burnt stone in them. Unfortunately these did not add up to positive evidence for a house.

The assessment of the next field revealed an area with more evidence of Iron Age activity, mostly of a low density, and this is to be preserved in the landscaping proposals.

George Lambrick & Mick Parsons

OXFORD: BARTLEMAS HOUSE AND CHAPEL

This 14th-century chapel, a relic of Oxford's best-known leper hospital, is set back from Cowley Road and is not seen by the average commuter. Stuart and Sally Jeffery have taken a close interest in the history of the property which they have recently purchased from Oriel College. When they excavated a pool in the garden, NE of the chapel, they found a stone wall and called the Unit. A visit established that although the wall need not be medieval in its present form, it has a ditch running parallel to it with 15th century pottery in the upper fill.

If the wall and ditch constitute a medieval boundary, it is not aligned with the house or the chapel, but it does match the line of the old road to Horsepath which until 1825 used to run through St Bartholomew's land just S of the chapel,

OXFORD : OXEY MEAD

Until the 1930s, when the A40 was constructed between N Oxford and Eynsham, OxeY Mead formed part of the haymeadows on the floodplain of the Thames. These meadows are in full bloom in June and the beautiful display of wild flowers in the fields upstream from Godstow is well worth a visit.

Haymaking is known from the Roman period, but its origins are obscure. An opportunity to investigate this problem was presented when ARC started to extract gravel from OxeY Mead, which lies within the Cassington Pit, and an environmental assessment was mounted by the Unit.

A plan of 1936 shows OxeY Mead divided into strips which are a survival of haymaking plots, as distinct from grazing pasture. There are medieval records of the meadsmen of Yarnton and Begbroke parish drawing lots for these strips each year using marked wooden balls, which still survive.

An ancient river channel was found running approximately around the N and E boundaries of the field. This channel, formed at the end of the last Ice Age, would have run along the N edge of the floodplain and it has been possible to document its subsequent infilling by alluvium. Two phases when organic material collected in the channel were detected, one prehistoric and the other probably Saxon. These were separated by a phase of more rapid alluviation, probably reflecting increased arable agriculture upstream in the Late Iron Age and Romano-British Period.

A few worked flint flakes and several preserved fragments of twigs and thin branches exhibiting signs of cutting or preparation, including one crudely pointed stake *in situ*, were found in association with the prehistoric deposit. Evidence of early flax retting has also been discovered, in the form of the remains of bundles of flax which were immersed in

although it is now diverted (Barracks Road). This suggests that we may have one element of a medieval plot, perhaps part of the six acres which were granted to the Hospital by Henry I.

There are several corollaries to this, however. It would mean that the present Bartlemas House itself was outside this boundary, and may therefore be no older than 1649, when the whole complex had to be rebuilt after being almost 'ruinated to the ground' by both sides in the Civil War. Curving ditches to the E could easily be landscaping of a later date, and the only medieval survival would be the chapel (14th century as it stands) and perhaps its general relationship to the site of the farm to the W.

St Bartholomew's is one of those small medieval survivals which enrich the built environment of Oxford but could so easily be overwhelmed by residential development. We have seen how little survives from which we can reconstruct its curtilage. If the newly discovered boundary is really medieval, then the chapel is at such a skew angle to it that we should now forget about trying to fit it into a regular hospital courtyard plan: it looks as if the chapel was built strictly EW, irrespective of the shape of the plot, and was probably therefore in an isolated plot of its own.

So where is the leper hospital? It may be under the orchard S of the chapel, or it may extend into the surrounding allotments. Study by future generations will be complicated by a new and totally arbitrary boundary, a rectangular 'rood' of land reserved around the chapel when Bartlemas House was sold, one more overlay in the changing land pattern of this tiny patch of medieval Oxford.

Brian Durham

water to facilitate separation of the fibres.

Samples were taken from the channel for pollen analysis, examination of waterlogged plant and insect remains and snail analysis. It is also hoped to get radiocarbon dates for these deposits.

Further watching of the gravel extraction has revealed a great density of archaeology between the area assessed and the A40. A number of ditches and gullies, and a few pits have been briefly glimpsed and plotted. All were covered with alluvium and in the absence of any pottery are tentatively dated to the Roman period, contemporary with nearby activity at Yarnton, reported below.

Geoff Tann

OXFORD : ORIEL COLLEGE

A 16TH CENTURY LEISURE AMENITY?

In the last issue we described the early stages of this investigation of the real tennis court at Oriel College, and the Unit has recently been looking at the floor deposits inside the building before they are disturbed by underpinning work. It has been piecemeal work, because although the court is 100 feet long overall it is now split up into six rooms, and at this stage we are working on only three of them. Greg Campbell has done an impressive job in marrying up the stratigraphy here, and we now have a clear historical story for the period when tennis was being played.

Before the late 16th century, most of the surface now covered by the existing building seems to have been part of the garden of a property on the High Street (Nos. 104-5), and the excavation has shown the debris from a wall

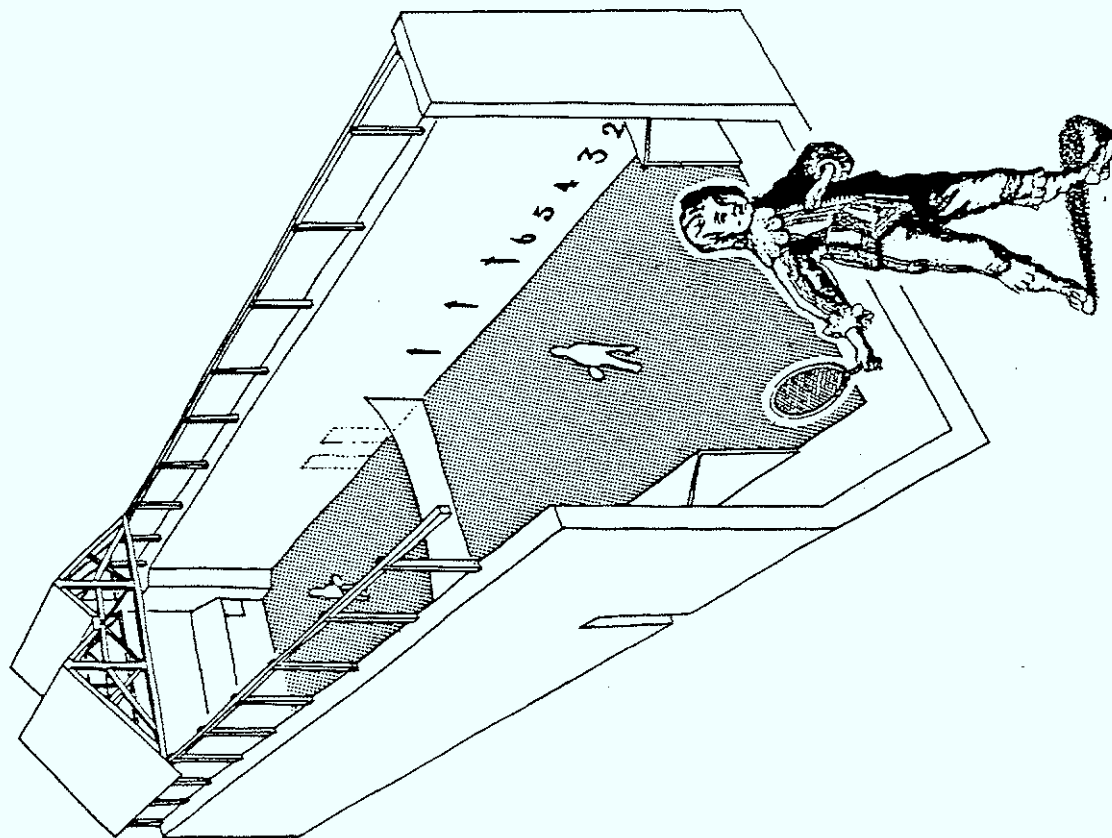
collapsed over a gravel path down its E side. This garden was used in a small way for the disposal of household refuse in pits, but the principal features of the period were two large squarish hollows, unlike anything seen in Oxford before. This is perhaps because there has never been a site where the back end of one of these long burghage plots has been so well preserved, and we are tentatively suggesting that the hollows had a horticultural purpose.

The end wall of the medieval plot should lie within the tennis court area, but we have not found it yet. It could still be under the line of one of the Victorian partitions, but it is also possible that it was not physically marked, because it would have been dividing a college property from land of St Thomas Chantry, and the Chantry property in the 15th century was administered by the college.

The garden or gardens became a 'tennis play' by 1572; this seems to have been roofed by about 1600, the date of the pottery from a silt-filled pit. The reasoning is that this was one of four pits under the court with similar clean silty fill, and at least two of them were fed by a drain from just outside the W wall, which must have been run-off from a roof. The existence of a roof is not improbable, because real tennis requires a firm surface with a clean bounce for the hard balls, and it is clear that in the English climate many courts were roofed (Figure 9).

The first of a series of mortar floors dates from this time, and subsequent refloorings evidently included areas of tile paving. In the later 17th century a large number of the later type of tiles appear to have been reused in the final phase of soakaway and its associated drain. A floor of stone slabs was laid around the beginning of the 18th century and this still survives. As the slabs extend over the entire width of the building it must mean that all the internal fittings of the court, including the ashlar walls of the penthouse, had been temporarily removed. In 1833-6 the building was used as the first of Oxford's four 'New' Theatres, with doorways cut

Figure 7: Oriol College real tennis court: reconstruction



through the playing surface of the E wall. This was subsequently reinstated to a playable standard before tennis was finally abandoned c 1860.

A real tennis court, bigger in floor area than most college halls but dedicated to the use of only two players at a time, must have been easily the most elaborate leisure amenity of Tudor times. This work at Oriol is giving some basic information on the sort of maintenance problems that the proprietor would have faced, and it looks as if the college accounts will include some references to capital outlay, and perhaps also to the way in which costs were recovered from the users.

So we may have the basis for a study on Oxford's first generation of leisure centres, to compare with those sprouting in educational institutions around the city in the present day.

Brian Durham

THAME : ST MARY'S CHURCH

Trenches inside and outside the N aisle of Thame Church have shown medieval floor levels and burials back to the 12th century, with more underneath.

The church lies in the oldest part of the town, in Priest End, opposite the 13th-century Prebendal House, close to the Thame Bridge and next door to the presumed site of the Bishops' Court. It is a big cruciform church, with aisles added in the 13th century, but built on the sort of site which might have been the focus of a pre-Conquest settlement, perhaps even the site of the 'altar of Thame' on which Wulfhere swore in the 7th century.

We have seen from John Blair's recent digs at Bampton that a large minster churchyard can have important archaeology underneath it, and when it became known that Thame Church was planning to build a new underground church centre it was clear that significant new discoveries could be made. Sure enough, excavation found sherds of late Saxon pottery for the first time in Thame, and the lowest tier of burials excavated (as opposed to those left in place) had stone 'ear-muffs' to support the head, typical of the 12th century. In all 30 burials were lifted, and calculations indicate that there may be at least another 1000 in the area of the proposed undercroft. Assuming the development proceeds, this will be a major section of Thame's medieval population, perhaps with Saxon features beneath in some places. The Unit is very grateful to the church authorities for allowing this preview of what may be in store.

Brian Durham

UFFINGTON: WHITE HORSE HILL PROJECT

The Uffington Hill figure, the White Horse, has begun to reveal some of its long-hidden secrets during the last few weeks. Like all thoroughbreds it has a long pedigree, stretching back in documents to the 12th century; none of the other surviving horse figures can claim a date earlier than the 18th century.

The Uffington Horse has been the centre of a controversy in recent centuries over its exact date, with two opposed schools of thought. Its stylised outline, reminiscent of figures on Celtic coins, has been taken as firm evidence for it being an Iron Age creation.

There is, however, a view that its present shape is purely an accident and that time, erosion and successive scourings have

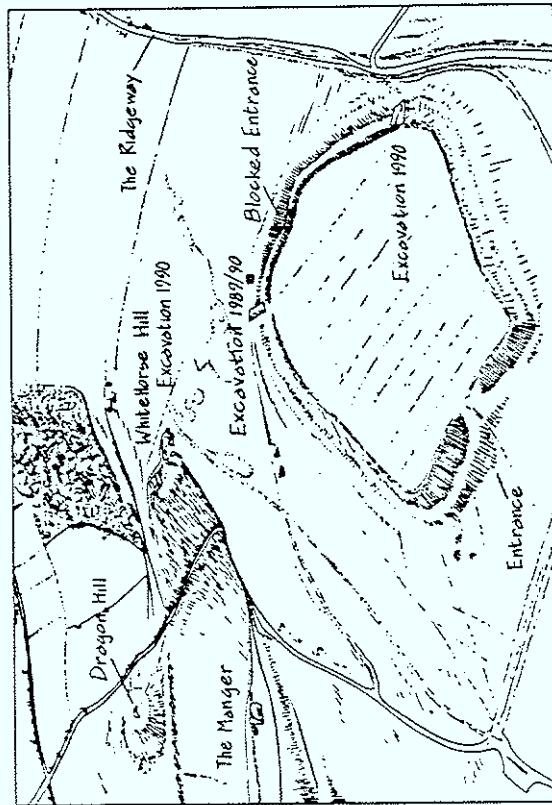


Figure 8: White Horse Hill: topography

had their effect and gradually changed the shape. This school of thought sees it as Saxon and thus possibly a thousand years younger.

This year's exercise, again undertaken with the backing of English Heritage and the National Trust, is an attempt to clear up this mystery not only by investigating the Horse's changing shape but also by attempting to date the silt deposits interstratified with the Horse. The new technique of optical (OSL) dating developed by the Keble Road laboratory is crucial here.

The Horse was extensively restored after the war and the

opportunity was taken then to excavate a trench adjacent to the beak-like projection from the head of the Horse. The results of this work were never published but were nevertheless important. They showed two successive phases of beak, separated by hillwash and positioned some way above the chalk bedrock.

This trench has been reopened in the last few weeks and has now revealed four successive beaks - an earlier beak which was missed in the post-war investigation and a later one which has formed since the 1952 restoration. The beak certainly has a long history and has kept its shape and position with only minor variations, despite completely disappearing at times.

Another trench has been placed down the hill from the belly of the horse to see how much this bottom edge has moved - was it once a more natural-looking animal rather than the present, somewhat outré, beast? This has shown clearly that the horse was mainly of a packed chalk construction and that the original edge was never more than 2.0 m further down-slope. It appears always to have been stylised, but work is still continuing and the last word on the Horse's original shape has yet to be written.

At the same time work has continued on the hillfort, Uffington Castle. Last year an area of rampart that had been cut through by a breach was investigated. Documentary evidence (in the form of Saxon boundary charters) indicated that this breach on the NE and a similar breach on the SE were extant in the 9th century AD. Last year's section was continued through the outer ditch and across the counterscarp bank, giving a complete section of the fortifications.

The SE breach was investigated this year. To our surprise and relief this gave the same sequence as last year's excavation - a box rampart with backing bank, succeeded by a dump rampart with a large V-shaped ditch. Sarsen stones

were again encountered in the middle layers of the later ditch, adding weight to last year's surmise that there had been a Sarsen 'parapet' wall which had been slighted. The infilling of the ditch seems to indicate that the cutting of the breaches may have occurred at the same time. The only dating evidence for the slighting is from the layers above, from which quantities of Roman pottery were recovered. These breaches in Uffington Castle therefore seem to have at least 2000 years of antiquity to their credit and as such will now remain as permanent features of the monument.

Little was recovered this year in the way of dating evidence for the initial construction of the fort - an early Iron Age date was indicated last year.

Last year the interior of the fort was subjected to a geophysical survey; this year it is being sampled for magnetic susceptibility and phosphates. Results to date do not seem to suggest a long-term, densely occupied site. Later this year, the Ancient Monuments Laboratory's geophysics team will survey the top of Dragon Hill - the flat-topped chalk outlier beneath the White Horse. The main interest here is the reference to an *Ecclesia* in a Saxon charter - could there be a Saxon church on this site? The area between the fort and the horse will be subjected to magnetic and resistivity surveys at the same time to help identify the various barrows (Bronze Age to Saxon) excavated here in the 19th century.

The Manger, the deep dry valley below the fort and Horse, has also been investigated this year. The accumulation of silts has been trenched in an attempt to document landuse history on top of the downs by the study of snails and other environmental evidence. Similar exercises on colluvial deposits on the South Downs have been successful. Just under a metre of colluvium has built up at the head of the manger but with up to 2.0 m of chalkwash beneath. Most of this hillwash appears to be Roman or post-Roman in date and seals an earlier soil horizon, now buried.

The geomorphology of the area has been elucidated by this exercise. The terrace or 'bench' around the head of the manger has its origin in an early post-glacial scree deposit, loose chalk blocks piling up at the bottom of the slope.

By the time the next newsletter comes out, the results of all these exercises should have been interpreted, and perhaps the true date of the horse will be known.

Simon Palmer

WATLINGTON : St LEONARD'S CHURCH

Shallow burials and a wall foundation have been revealed by workmen enlarging the drainage trench around the E and S walls of the church. The original Norman building was heavily refurbished and extended in the 14th century. Apart from the W tower, the church was almost completely rebuilt in 1877. Several W-E burials, some clearly disturbed in antiquity, have been found close to the wall of the 14th century S aisle. Originally only 0.6 - 0.8 m deep, none can be dated with precision, although several coffin nails appeared to be associated with one burial.

A length of chalk rubble wall foundation extends S from the SW corner of the 15th-century chapel. The Norman building may have followed a cruciform plan and the newly discovered foundation suggests an early extension to the S transept, suppressed when the 15th century chapel was built.

The Unit will continue to monitor this work.

R A Chambers

YARNTON : WORTON RECTORY FARM

Excavation continues at Worton Rectory Farm, the Early Iron Age (c 600 BC) to Saxon site first reported in the March newsletter which lies within ARC's Cassington Pit. The site is urgently needed by ARC for their plant. The area opened for excavation is about 1 hectare in size, with a further 3 hectares being stripped by ARC, and the work, which is funded by English Heritage, is being dealt with as a salvage operation.

Excavation has proved to be much more complex than originally envisaged, partly because the density of features is so great (covering 70% of the site). However, we have been able to establish the nature and limits of each phase of settlement and to target areas of special interest for further examination. Shortage of time and money have forced us to adopt a selective excavation strategy.

The W part of the site has already been released to ARC. In this area a Middle Iron Age (c 350 BC - 50 BC) ditch enclosed an area 15 m in diameter, inside which were the postholes of a circular timber house (Figure 9). This replaced an earlier circular building with entrance posts, which was probably Early Iron Age in date. Other postholes in the enclosure probably represent the remains of animal pens and fence lines. An annexe on the N edge of this enclosure contained the postholes of a semicircular structure, probably a workshop, and slag from metalworking has been found in the backfill of the ditches nearby. Other features of Middle Iron Age date, especially pits, have been found elsewhere on the site.

An area of Early Iron Age (c 600 BC - 350 BC) activity will be examined in the NW of the site. Many grain storage pits survive and these will be sampled. Traces of at least two circular postbuilt houses have already been observed, as have



Figure 9: Worton Rectory Farm: roundhouse

a fence line and gullies which may represent land division. The Early Iron Age occupation can be traced across the N part of the site and into the salvage area to the E, and remains of other structures and pits have been recorded. Later activity has disturbed and confused the layout of the settlement to the E, except in the salvage area where we can already see the plan of two buildings and many grain storage pits.

Several ditches of Late Iron Age date (c 50 BC - AD 50) have been investigated. These were probably the ditches of animal enclosures but two smaller, circular enclosures with good collections of pottery could have had a domestic function. Work is continuing in this area.

The focus of early Roman occupation lies to the E of the excavation. The remains of a building (now under

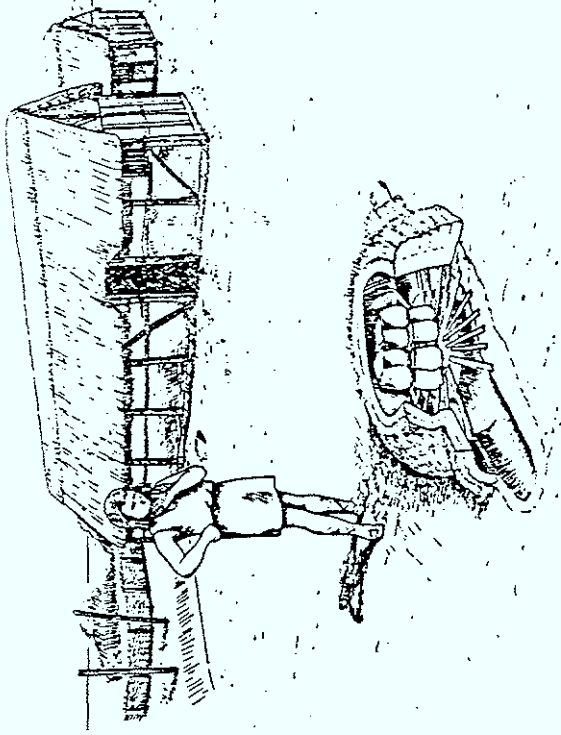


Figure 10: Worton Rectory Farm: reconstruction of kiln

investigation) contains a corn (or pot?) drying oven which is surrounded by a compact floor. Two pottery kilns have been exposed a little to the E, within the salvage area. These small, clay-lined, oval kilns both have a double flue and a central pedestal for supporting the racks on which the pots would have been fired (Figure 10). Wasters from a pot which broke during firing have been found in one of the kilns.

A stone-lined, T-shaped corndrier has been excavated on the W edge of the site and several charred seeds, probably of wheat, were recovered from the flue. Another (robbed-out) corndrier has been uncovered in the E where the remains of circular postbuilt houses lying within enclosures, which could also be early Roman in date, are being examined.

A small, late Roman cemetery has been discovered, lying mostly within the salvage area. Unfortunately, few grave

goods have been found with the bodies. Fifteen of the burials appear to be pagan and lie N-S; two were decapitated before being buried and another was buried with a dog. A further seven, which seem to lie E-W, have been exposed a little to the NE. Could these document the change to Christianity in the late Roman period?

Other late Roman features appear to be mostly field boundaries and paddocks, and it is strongly suspected that a villa lies in the field to the NW. However, the remains of a possible yard surface and three post pads within the excavation suggest that the area was not entirely turned over to fields. On the E edge of the salvage area rows of large, rectangular postholes have been found, regularly spaced in threes. Late Roman pottery has been recovered from two of the postholes of this unusual building, which may have been a granary.

The size of the Saxon settlement on the site increases daily! A *grubenhaus* 4.30 m x 3.70 m was found within the excavation area. It was terraced into the slope and had a trampled earth floor on which several circular loomweights were found and 1.0 m

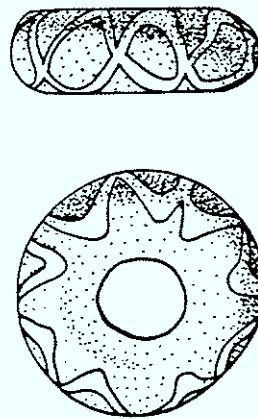


Figure 11: Anglo-Saxon bead

deep post holes to N and S. Six further *grubenhäuser*, two of which contained signs of having been replaced, have so far been discovered in the salvage area, and a decorated glass bead came from one of these houses (Figure 11). The postholes of a rectangular timber building lay next to one of the *grubenhäuser*. The concentration of occupation lies to the E of the site towards the Anglo-Saxon cemetery which was discovered during gravel extraction and railway building in the last century. We hope to recover more evidence of

this when ARC strips the rest of the field after this year's harvest.

Gill Hey

ITALY: CASTEL PORZIANO

Following previous work carried out by the British School at Rome, a survey was carried out within the grounds of the President of Italy's private estate N of Rome. The aim of the project was to carry out a full survey of the remains of a complete Roman town buried deep within the forest of the estate. The Roman town was called the *Vicus Augustanus Laurentium*, and was an early imperial settlement located on the coast between Rome and its port of Ostia.

Most of the town wall survives to a height of 2.0 m and many mosaic floors are intact. One of the houses surveyed opened off the forum and had a complete marble lined *impluvium* within the *alluvium*, with a mosaic-floored antechamber to the side. During clearance of the vegetation from one building, the author and the field officer for the British School at Rome discovered a hoard of 83 3rd-century coins on the threshold of what might have been a large bath house. Two other members of the team found marble fragments of a large inscription, possibly dating to the reign of the Emperor Tiberius.

The area so far included within the survey is approximately 3.0 km in length, and centres on the forum area of the vicus. The full extent of the town is as yet unknown and there is a possibility of further work next year, involving members of the Unit.

Martin J Hicks

ENDNOTES

THE PLEASURES OF PLANNING APPLICATIONS

For many years, planning applications in Oxfordshire have been monitored jointly by the Unit and the County Museum. Recently, changing planning policies have resulted in the emergence of two distinct roles for archaeologists: the *curator*, responsible for the care and management of the historic heritage, and the *contractor*, the archaeologists carrying out consultancy, assessments and excavations funded by developers. The OAU fits into the latter slot.

As a result, the OAU no longer formally monitors planning applications on behalf of the County Council. Searching through planning lists is not the most amusing job in the world but it can have its light-hearted moments. Here are a few of the more memorable applications which we have noted over the years.

- : Ministry of Defence extension to amenity centre to provide a married quarters exchange store.
- : Application at Charlbury for change of use of geologist's office to dental practice.
- : Application to install clear glass instead of frosted glass in bathroom window.

- : Shrivenham Parish Council for erection of whipping post and stocks.
- : Erection of beer and spirits store at Wantage Police Station.
- : Application for change of use from egg grading and packaging to processing of poultry droppings.
- : Change of use of Bicester Congregational Church to private snooker club.

THE ORIGIN OF THE UNIT LOGO

In 1958 a Romano-British farmstead was excavated at Bishop's Court, between Dorchester and the river Thames. The upper levels of its ditches contained Saxon pottery, but there was also a more unusual find: a small bronze object in the form of a pair of bearded human heads.

In Oxoniensia 1977 Professor David Wilson, Director of the British Museum, wrote: 'One can only say in the circumstances that the object is unparalleled in style and form and although it obviously has Germanic-Celtic affinities, its precise place in archaeology cannot be defined'. It was this mysterious object, now in the Ashmolean Museum, which the Oxford Archaeological Unit adopted as its symbol.

The bronze double head is scarcely more than two centimetres long and is hollow, with a pair of sockets in the back. It was probably originally part of the lock on a Saxon casket or box.

Naturalistic representation of human figures is rare in early Saxon art, but the portrayal of the hair, eyes, nose and beard

bears a strong resemblance to those on heads in the treasure from the 7th-century royal ship burial at Sutton Hoo. A large gilded brooch from the pagan Saxon burial ground at Berinsfield was also decorated with bearded human heads not unlike these. It seems likely then that the Bishop's Court bronze belongs to the early Saxon period.

The double head stares unblinkingly in two directions; forwards and backwards, into the past and into the future. This must be a Saxon portrayal of the Roman god Janus. The double-faced god was the guardian of boundaries, doorways and public gates (*ianuae* in Latin); more sinisterly, he watched over the gates to the underworld. A lock mount in Janus' image would be appropriate as his attribute was a key, to give entry through the gate. His other symbol, in contrast, was the stick (*virga*) carried by porters to bar the passage of intruders.

As the guardian of doors, Janus watched over houses to keep out evil spirits; Janus Patulcius looked after the opening door and his twin Janus Clusivus took care of the closing door. Janus was also associated with arrival and departure and hence with travel. To the Romans he was the god of harbours, and was said to have invented navigation. Ovid says that he was credited with the creation of the world.

As the father of the gods, Janus was carried at the front in religious processions and appeared first, even before Jupiter, in lists of the gods. At a more human level, Janus the god of beginnings was associated with enterprise and initiative.

Janus' main temple was at the very heart of the Empire, the Forum in Rome. According to Roman tradition the gates to this temple were kept open in time of war and only closed in time of peace. In the centuries of Roman history the gates were shut less than a dozen times.

We know Janus best from Roman coins. He usually appears as a mature, bearded man, sometimes wearing a laurel

wreath. Characteristically, only the heads are shown: so far as I know there is no Roman statue of Janus showing the full figure.

This portrayal of the heads alone may well have made Janus an attractive deity to the Celts and Germans, who had a powerful cult of the severed head. The pre-Roman sanctuary at Roquepertuse in France is one of the clearest manifestations of the importance of the head in Celtic religion: its stone built niches each contain a human skull guarded by a carved bird.

Confirmation that the Celts adopted the Janus idea comes from Holzgerlingen in the Rhineland. Here a crudely sculptured, full-length stone statue of Janus has been found.

More often, though, such Celtic sculptures are of the double-head only. Janus even appears on Celtic coins, where he is shown as mature and bearded.

We know little of the meaning of the Janus symbol to the Celts, but evidently his image was a powerful one across Europe in the centuries before and after Christ. It is hardly surprising that it should turn up in Dorchester about the time that St Birinus arrived from Italy to convert the 'very pagan' W Saxons to Christianity. In spite of Birinus' success this god of boundaries, contrasts and enterprise still remains with us - not only on the letterheads of the Oxford Archaeological Unit, but also in the name of the first month of the year, when like Janus we look backwards and forwards.

A GREENSTONE AXE FRAGMENT FROM DRAYTON ST LEONARD

A fragment of greenstone prehistoric battleaxe has been found in the parish of Drayton St Leonard. Only two other axe fragments in this material are known from Oxfordshire, one from the river Isis above Folly Bridge in Oxford, the other from Jeff Wallis's excavations at Thrupp Farm, Radley.

The Drayton fragment has been thin-sectioned by Fiona Roe and identified as a Group XVIII quartz dolerite from Whin Sill in the north of England.

S Laurie-Lynch



Figure 12: greenstone axe
fragment from Drayton St
Leonard
1/2 scale

PUBLISH OR PERISH!

Field Officer Tim Allen's report on the Iron Age and Romano-British settlement at Watkins Farm, Northmoor, has recently been delivered to the publisher and is expected to be on sale this autumn. Author and editor (Ellen McAdam) appear slightly stunned, as if they had thought perishing the likelier option.

WHITE HORSE HILL OPEN DAY

On Sunday 20th May, hundreds of people attended the Unit's Open Day at White Horse Hill. Guided tours of the Iron Age hillfort and the White Horse itself were given by the

excavation team. A marquee was also set up, housing a display and information desk. The day proved to be a great success and perhaps next year we will be more ambitious and revive the old 'scouring pastime', complete with prizes for squinting through horse-collars! Our thanks go to everyone who helped and all the people who attended. Our congratulations also go to the winners of our White Horse Hill Competition. Lucy Scholes won first prize and the runner-up was Richard Coggins.

SCHOOLS DAY AT WHITE HORSE HILL

Schools from all over the Vale area were shown around the excavations at White Horse Hill on Wednesday 16th May. This proved to be not only a pleasant but also an informative day for both the children and site staff! Our thanks go to all concerned, but particularly to Carol Anderson, the museum's education officer for organising it and volunteering her services on the day.

DAYLIGHT FLIT

Over the last year the Unit's expansion has brought increasing pressure on space at 46 Hythe Bridge Street. We have now negotiated a lease on Unit 6 at the Oxford Business Park (off Becket St), which will in future house the Finds section. Some Field Officers will also be moving in from 20 June. The new premises are highly visible to travellers to and from Paddington.

ABINGDON OPENING

The official laying of the foundation stone for the new Vale of White Horse District Council offices takes place in Abingdon on Saturday 30 June at 11.30 am, followed at 12 pm by an illustrated talk to councillors in the Abbey buildings by Field Officer Tim Allen on the OAU excavations on the Vineyard site.



EVENTS

Archaeology/Local History Summer School: 14-18th August 1990, at Rewley House.

Details of courses from Oxford University Department for External Studies, Rewley House, 1 Wellington Square, Oxford, OX1 2JA.

The Oxford Historical and Architectural Society Annual General Meeting takes place on 26 June at 4.15 in the Music Room of Corpus Christi, followed by strawberries in Corpus gardens.

The Unit will be mounting a display about recent work on the White Horse over the August Bank Holiday (August 26-27th) at the White Horse Show at Uffington.

Lectures:

David Miles on the Anglo-Saxon cemetery at Butler's Field, Lechlade: 13 September at 2.30 pm in the sheltered housing development at Butler's Field.

David Miles on the North Leigh villa and the Roman settlement of the Cotswolds: 21 June at 8 pm, Stonesfield Village Hall

The Unit will be taking part in the National Archaeology Day for young people on 18 August by holding an open day at the Eynsham excavations.

MAIL ORDER

Limited edition **White Horse Hill T-shirts** (blue and green on a white background: XL only) - £5.99
Navy blue sweatshirts with the Unit logo in white (XL only) - £9.00

Oxford: the buried city by Tom Hassall - £3.50
Invested in Mother Earth (about the Anglo-Saxon cemetery at Butler's Field, Lechlade) by David Miles and Simon Palmer - £2.00

All prices include packing and postage. This form can also be used for subscriptions to Archaeological News.

Cheques should be payable to: The Oxford Archaeological Unit

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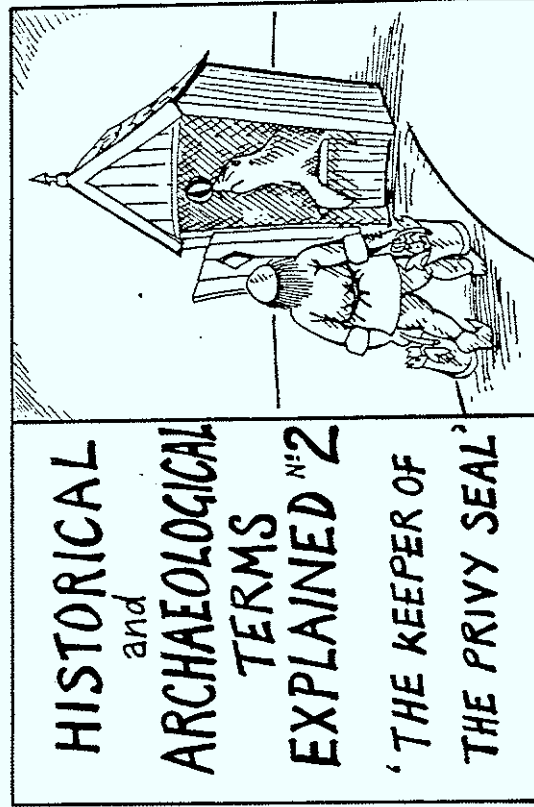
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HISTORICAL and ARCHAEOLOGICAL TERMS EXPLAINED N°2 'THE KEEPER OF THE PRIVY SEAL'

VOLUNTEERS

We are always looking for volunteers to help wash and mark finds - either on site or here in the Unit. If you have a spare day or even just an afternoon and would like to lend a hand you are most welcome. Please contact Leigh Turner at the Unit (tel. (0865) 243888).

SUBSCRIPTIONS

The OAU Newsletter is issued quarterly. The subscription is £3.00 per annum. Please make cheques payable to The Oxford Archaeological Unit.

If anyone outside the Unit - local societies, archaeological enthusiasts, or other professional groups working in Oxfordshire - wishes to make use of these information columns they are most welcome.

Please send contributions for the next newsletter to Samantha Hatzis at the Oxford Archaeological Unit, 46 Hythe Bridge Street, Oxford, OX1 2EP.

Front cover: Samuel Buck's romantic and fanciful engraving of the interior of the ruinous W end of Eynsham abbey church set against Wytham Hill (which in fact lies to the E).

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