

ARCHAEOLOGICAL NEWS

The quarterly newsletter of the Oxford



Archaeological Unit

vol. xviii no. 4 December 1990



SPOTLIGHT

YARNTON, WORTON RECTORY FARM

The history of archaeological research in the area of the Thames/Evenlode confluence has not been happy. Gravel extraction, roads and railway construction have taken a heavy toll. Between 1930 and 1952 occupation and burial sites of the Neolithic, Bronze Age, Iron Age, Romano-British and Saxon periods were all destroyed with only piecemeal recording and some salvage excavation. In particular, the last known remains of the impressive late Iron Age valley fort at Cassington Mill were finally eaten away in 1952.

Work in the ARC pit at Cassington and Yarnnton is attempting to redress the balance. We have been fortunate enough to uncover a settlement with at least 1,200 years of continuous occupation, from the early Iron Age through to the Saxon period (600 BC - AD 600). Finds on the site of a Neolithic greenstone axe, a pit containing late Neolithic Mortlake Ware and many flint implements and flakes show that there was human activity in the area long before the Iron Age.

We excavated the centre of the early Iron Age to early Roman settlement in February to June this year with English Heritage funding and found Iron Age buildings, fence lines,

grain storage pits, a possible workshop structure and animal pens. Pottery was produced on site in the early Roman period and two pottery kilns were discovered near a domestic building (see reconstruction in June newsletter). Part of the site was used as a cemetery in the late Roman period.

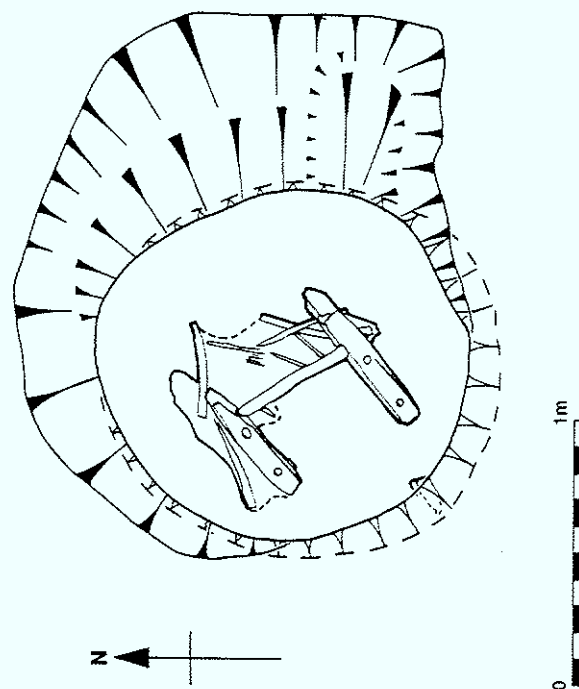


Figure 1: Yarnton, timber structure

Recent assessment shows that this site was much more

extensive than previously imagined (see below, Yarnton assessments), and English Heritage has now provided money for an extension to our work. Excavation is concentrating on the Saxon settlement and during the last phase of work nine sunken featured buildings or *grubenhäuser*, a probable timber building, gullies and fence lines were examined. The area is dotted with postholes representing the remains of rectangular timber structures and six more sunken featured buildings have been found. A reconstruction of part of the settlement appears on the front cover.

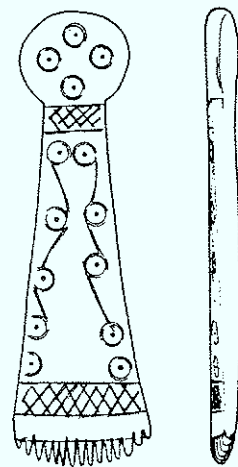


Figure 2: Yarnton, bone comb

Scale 1/2

Waterholes at the end of the site, where the ground slopes down to the floodplain of the Thames, are providing good environmental information. Waterlogged seeds and insect remains have been recovered along with wooden and leather items including a wooden object (a framework resembling the bottom of a ladder) which has been lifted and is being conserved at the Ancient Monument Laboratory in London. The Saxon features cut into an impressive rectangular ?late Roman enclosure with associated pits, ditches and gullies.

We are looking not just at the settlement but at the way its inhabitants were using the landscape. The site lies within reach of the floodplain, Second Gravel Terrace, clay and Fourth Gravel Terrace, which meant that good pasture, arable land and woodland were available. We are fieldwalking on all these types of soils, looking not only for new sites but also for the pottery and other domestic refuse which reached the fields with manure. We have undertaken assessments through an old river channel which ran along the bottom edge of the site to obtain waterlogged plant and animal remains and pollen samples which will help us to reconstruct the local environment.

Gill Hey

GLOUCESTER

FAIRFORD: THORNHILL FARM

The main excavation on this Celtic ranch ended last year but the clearance of new areas before gravel extraction has led to more salvage work. The site extends over up to 10 hectares, of which only half has been extracted. The OAU has carried out a programme of selective excavations which have unravelled the structure of the site, which forms an extensive but relatively short-lived horse and cattle farm on the low-lying meadows by the Thames.

The central nucleus comprises a small number of structures, and areas of larger enclosures and pens also occur. This year's salvage work just W of the site nucleus has been in an area of larger enclosures and paddocks and has confirmed their 1st-

century date. Possible indications of the origin of the site have also appeared in a small scatter of pits of probable middle Iron Age date next to a small round house. Excavations to the E at Claydon Pike indicated that the First Gravel Terrace in this area was settled with isolated farms in the middle Iron Age, with more specialised settlements appearing in the later Iron Age.

Simon Palmer

LECHLADE: GREAT LEMHILL FARM

The Great Lemhill Farm area just N of Lechlade is surrounded by a series of major sites: Rough Grounds Farm villa, Butlers Field Saxon cemetery, the Lechlade henge and cursus complex and the Great Lemhill Farm Roman villa on the banks of the Leach. Recent survey and assessment work as part of an environmental impact statement for ARC has gone some way to clarify the history of the area.

The most interesting discovery has been the identification of later prehistoric land boundaries like those beneath Rough Ground Farm and at Butlers Field, where they were associated with pit alignments. They seem to be late Bronze Age - early Iron Age in date. Evidence of land management over an extensive area between the Thames and Leach has thus been documented at an early date.

Another Roman settlement, although poorly preserved and of low status, has been discovered just S of Great Lemhill Farm itself and this part of the assessment also produced Saxon pottery in the vicinity of the modern farm. Documentary evidence indicates a medieval manor which may have had

Saxon antecedents.

An area of well preserved water meadows adjacent to the river Leach was also surveyed and a series of stone sluices and a small dry stone bridge over the main feeder channel recorded. The Great Lemhill Roman villa survives as an earthwork on the edge of these meadows, but is suffering severe erosion from badgers and cattle.

Simon Palmer

SOMERFORD KEYNES: SHORNCOTE GRAVEL PIT

On three separate occasions over recent months the OAU has carried out salvage excavations on the remains of a Bronze Age barrow cemetery in advance of gravel extraction. The potential of the area was identified by aerial photography and an assessment by Gloucester's County Council Archaeological Section confirmed the presence of three of the potential ring ditches seen on the aerial photographs.

The most northerly ring ditch had a narrow causeway to the N and had been recut on the inside. Within the ring were 11 urned cremations; there was no central cremation and the largest deposit was in an inverted biconical urn with horseshoe handles. No grave goods were found accompanying these cremations, or with the three on the outer edge of the ring, and extensive ploughing meant that very little pot survived. Two inhumations were located outside the ring, both crouched burials without grave goods; an unurned cremation was cut into the top of the S grave.

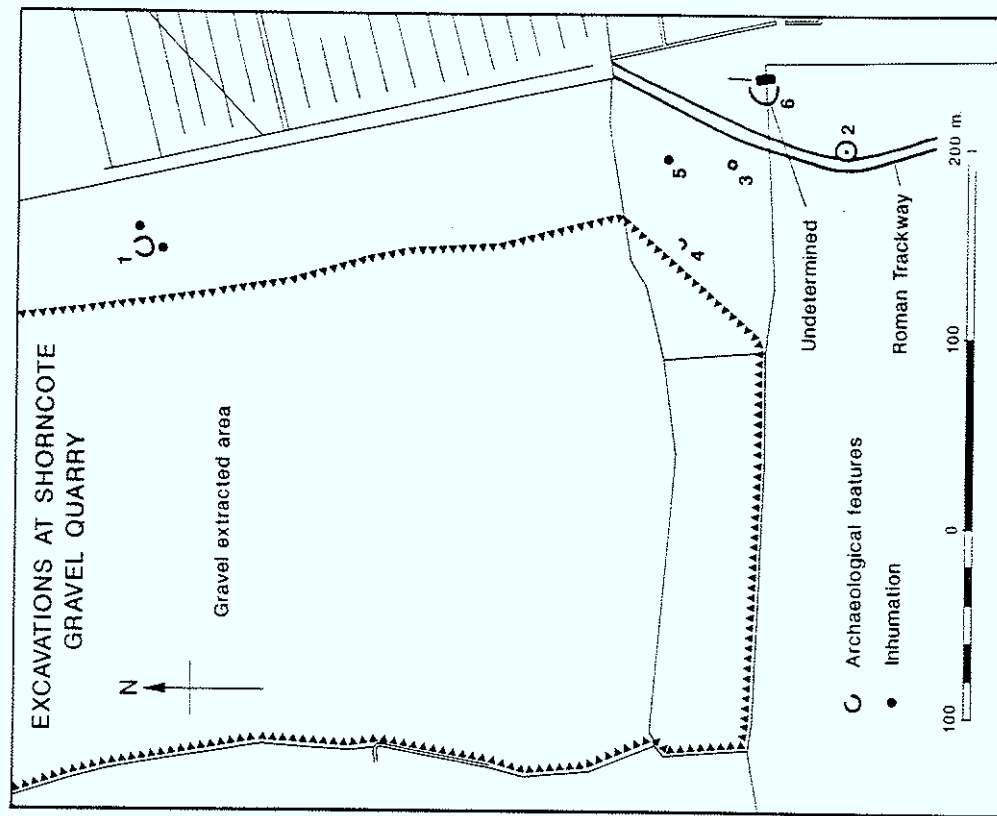


Figure 3: Excavations at Shorncliffe

Other features in this area may be part of a field system or systems, as yet undated. Finds from this area consisted mainly of Deverel Rimbury Bronze Age pottery. An antler pick was recovered from the ring ditch during the assessment, and an arrowhead was found in the western terminal of the ring ditch.

To the S, another ring ditch yielded exciting results in the form of a coffinless rectangular grave which held a badly denuded crouched skeleton (orientated NNW-SSE). A very late decorated Beaker had been placed next to the head and there were three flint implements - an arrowhead, a knife and a dagger - by the feet. The dagger is of particularly high quality, and dates from the end of the early Bronze Age.

Cutting the outer western edge of the ring ditch was a trackway, surviving as two parallel ditches, which appears to curve around the ring ditch, clipping its edge as if part of the mound was still extant when the track was constructed. Given the amount of Roman activity in the vicinity it is possible that the track connected two rural communities. Other features included a handful of pit/postholes which were devoid of artefacts, and therefore undatable. This area was also criss-crossed with plough furrows.

During salvage work by Mark Roberts in the area to the W of the trackway a small ring ditch (only 4.0 m in diameter) was uncovered (no. 3). No burial was associated with it though there were traces in the centre of a shallow feature which may have been a ploughed-out burial. All that was left of another small ring ditch was a semicircle. Three grave-shaped features were located during this salvage, but only one contained a crouched inhumation accompanied by the remains of a long-necked late Beaker, a large flint scraper and a wide bronze bracelet with ridged decoration, which is currently being

conserved.

The excavated area to the E (no. 5) had originally been assumed to be a ring ditch. It turned out to be a semicircular ditch, the northern arm of which had been extended at some time during the Bronze Age in an uneven manner. Both terminals of this rough semicircle appeared to respect a rectangular feature 11 m long and approximately 1.0 m in depth, with sides at an angle of about 45°. The feature was devoid of artefacts and its function is as yet undetermined; it may have been a quarry. The only cremation in this area was outside the semicircle to the NW; there was no urn. Other features included four pits, two of which contained Iron Age pottery.

Helen J Glass

OXFORDSHIRE

CHARLBURY: QUEEN'S OUN

More human bones have been found on the S side of Queen's Oun while digging the footings for an extension. The remains consisted mainly of the long bones and skulls from at least four adults, and represent the reburial of graves disturbed in antiquity, probably during the construction of the original cottage. The cottage, which had already been much enlarged before the present work, was originally very small and bears no date stone; it probably belongs to the 17th or 18th century.

Before the Conquest, Charlbury was the centre of a large episcopal estate whose minster church almost certainly stood either on or perhaps immediately to the N of Charlbury's

present parish church. St Mary's is a large medieval church with a Norman north arcade surviving from an earlier building. No Anglo-Saxon work is evident. The burials around Queen's Oun are 30 m beyond the northern limit of the present churchyard and are therefore likely to belong to the late Anglo-Saxon graveyard of a minster church lying to the N of the present building. The fact that the original cottage was not built facing W onto Church lane but was set back facing S suggests gradual encroachment onto the ancient churchyard, which had survived into the post-medieval period as open ground.

R A Chambers

COGGES: MOATED ENCLOSURES

The last grave to be dug in the now full churchyard at St Mary's, Cogges, cut deeply into the heart of the northernmost part of two moated islands. In the mid 17th century Anthony Wood recorded that this area, then called Castle Yard, was where 'oftentimes great thick foundations [were] dug up'. Cogges was the *caput* of the Arsic barony throughout the 12th century, and the moated enclosures are likely to mark this site of their defended manor house.

The recently dug grave revealed 1.6 m of overburden overlying a massive, solidly mortared limestone foundation which extended beyond the sides of the grave pit in every direction. Although undated, the foundation is likely to be Norman and is more substantial than any other Norman work so far found on the site.

R A Chambers

EATON HASTINGS AND GREAT FARINGDON: CAMDEN FARM

The vigilance of Mr Paul Haskins has revealed a concentration of Neolithic flintwork and a knapping floor on the edge of the present Thames flood plain.

Flintwork had not been seen in the ploughsoil until a pipe trench was excavated across the field, which is of particular significance because the Neolithic land surface appears to lie preserved beneath a layer of alluvium.

There is much active interest from the farming community in the archaeology of this area. Several farmers to the E of the Clanfield-Faringdon road are still examining photographs of the exceptional cropmarks seen in August, in every case on farms where little or no archaeology was previously known. Mr Haskins' farm on the opposite side of the road did not produce a single cropmark, although it contains major Neolithic, Roman and medieval sites!

R A Chambers

EYE AND DUNSDEN: A DENE HOLE AT DUNSDEN GREEN SU 740769

The Unit was asked by the County Archaeologist to investigate a report of a shaft which had opened up on cultivated land at

Dunsden Green Farm near Reading. The subsidence had been open for six months, covered with a piece of plywood, and the farm staff had asked for information about its function before infilling it. They had been down the 9 m to the bottom of the shaft, but not into the two galleries - this honour was reserved for the writer, equipped with helmet, safety line and a strictly limited knowledge of what might be in store.

From the foot of the shaft there was a scramble down a steep ramp to the chambers, which were about 5.0 m high, with barrel-shaped roofs and a floor width of 3.0-4.0 m. Caked silt on the chamber floors had come in from a newish plastic land-drain which the farm staff thought could have been the cause of the collapse. The silt concealed the floor of the E chamber, but there was a pile of loose chalk in the W chamber. In the walls and across the roof were horizontal veins of chalk nodules at intervals of about 1.0 m.

As an urban archaeologist and former Silbury Hill miner the writer was firmly convinced that the only reason for digging this deep into chalk was to recover large flint nodules. I am therefore grateful to Professor Richard Bradley for enlightenment. He tells me that the clay-with-flints overlying the Chiltern chalk has plenty of high quality nodules and there was no need for flint mines like those at Grimes Graves in Norfolk. He also points out that mining flint produces very low galleries which follow the seams without removing any more chalk than necessary.

If the object of the exercise was chalk not flint, it would explain the damaged nodules in the walls and the seam of flints forming the roof, but why dig through at least 6.0 m of chalk to get there? Dene holes are usually explained as a form of marl pit, dug at any time from Roman to the 20th century, the chalk being used to sweeten an acidic sand or heavy clay

soil. The reason for going so deep at Dunsden Green may have been that land was at a premium close to the village, and the owner of a strip field, not wanting to sacrifice agricultural land, dug his two chambers to a depth at which would be self-supporting and aligned them within the boundaries of his strip.

Brian Durham

EYNHAM: EYNHAM ABBEY

The Unit carried out an assessment of the S half of St Peter's churchyard in October 1990. This was part of a review of research priorities connected with grant applications to English Heritage. An H-shaped trench was excavated, covering 70 square metres and sampling two distinct hollows in the ground surface, one of which turned out to be a post-medieval gravel quarry. The other represented a sequence of very large pits; one pit contained cess, and they may have been garderobes. A stone-lined drain was associated with them. The most spectacular find lay immediately to the E of the pits. A 6.5 m length of wall was found, standing to a height of at least 0.5 m. The masonry incorporated a blocked-up doorway, against which slates had been stacked. New walls had been added to the N and S of the E door jamb, and more masonry was found immediately to the N. The most tantalising information, however, was in the N face of the wall, where we found the springing for one side of an arch; the other side lay beyond the edge of the trench. The arch had been blocked while the building was still in use. The position of the head of the arch would be consistent with the existence of a cellar or undercroft.

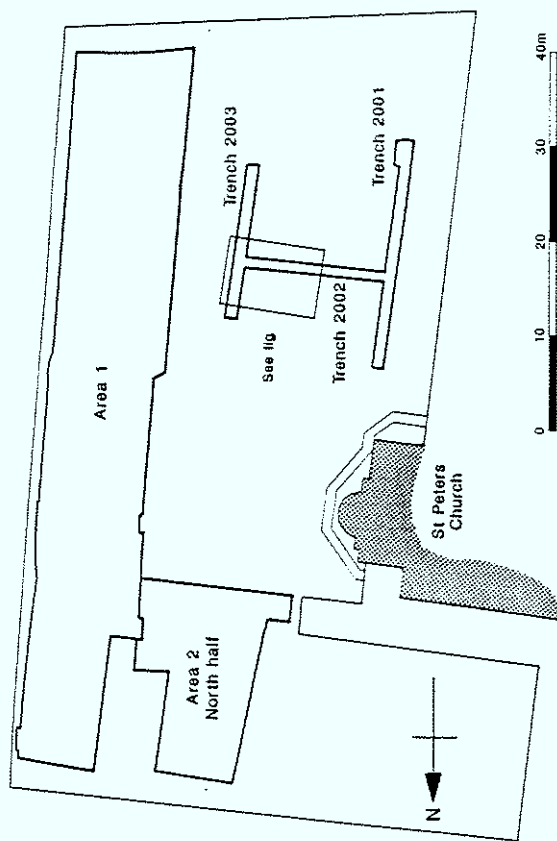
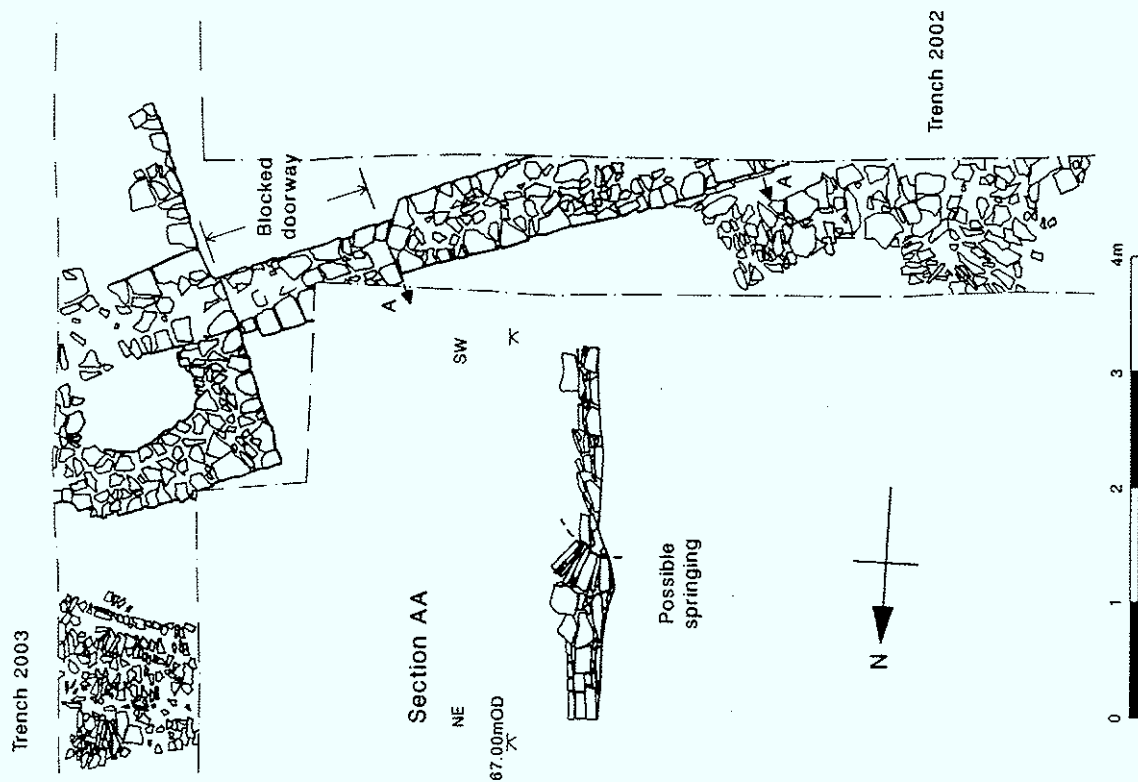


Figure 4: Eynsham, location of trenches

This building is obviously of considerable significance; here at last was a structure which survived as more than just robber trenches! The implication is that the building continued to be lived in after the Dissolution and thus escaped the wholesale robbing which happened elsewhere in the abbey. We know the Abbot's Lodging was used as a manor house well into the 17th century. We now have two good candidates (see the September Newsletter) for the lodging!



The assessment also produced more evidence for Saxon activity. The dark earth revealed in St Leonard's churchyard continued into St Peter's. Several large postholes or pits cut the dark earth, and early to mid Saxon pottery was recovered, including two fine, stamp-decorated sherds.

Graham Keevill

FAWLER: BARN COTTAGE

A large drystone culvert 4' wide by 4' high with an arched drystone roof has been discovered while digging a small pond in the garden on the N side of the present house. This 'tunnel' runs N-S along the top edge of a steep slope parallel to the highway.

Built during the 19th century, it probably carried spring water southwards from the higher ground to former farm buildings now partly incorporated into Barn Cottage. Although the culvert leads from the general direction of the 19th-century iron workings and Boulton Brothers' brick and pottery manufactory, it is almost certainly part of agricultural, rather than industrial, archaeology.

R A Chambers

MEDMENHAM: DANESFIELD CAMP

Following the assessment of Danesfield Camp (September

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Newsletter), further work has been done on the non-scheduled part of the hillfort, where an underground car park is being built. Not that it is actually being *built* underground - that would be too easy! The car park is being built above ground in the normal way; it will then be buried in chalk rubble to make it underground. This, of course, has considerably reduced the archaeological impact of the work; only features which lie within the foundations of the walls and columns of the car park will be destroyed.

The first phase of the current work involved cleaning and planning the archaeological deposits as they were exposed during machine stripping. A few shallow features which lay above this level had to be excavated. The W end of the area had been thoroughly worked over by RAF building works during the Second World War; stripping did not intrude into archaeological levels in the E end.

This only left the centre of the car park to look at, but fortunately there were plenty of pits, postholes, ditches and gullies here. It looks as though the hillfort was intensively occupied, although we do not know the dates of these features because of the non-intrusive nature of the work done so far. Pottery from the assessment was mainly of middle Iron Age date. We hope to get more evidence when the foundation trenches for the above/below-ground car park are dug!

Graham Keevill

ROAD SCHEMES

The Unit is currently engaged in work on a variety of road

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schemes in Oxfordshire. The projects are:-

A421 Wendlebury-Bicester dualling

A new 3.6 km carriageway will pass within 300 m on the NW corner of the defences of the Roman town of Alchester and is likely to destroy part of the extramural occupation area as well as cutting Akeman Street. Several ring ditches, identified from the air, lie close to the proposed line and probable prehistoric features have been located in engineers' trial holes close to Wendlebury.

A420 Kingston Bagpuize bypass

This road passes N of the present village and will cut through a Saxon linear boundary, Aelfrith's Ditch, situated just E of the village. Concentrations of Neolithic and Bronze Age flints are known from an area adjacent to Aelfrith's Ditch and sites represented by this material are likely to be affected by the new road.

A40

The whole line of the A40 between Witney and Wheatley is due to be improved and in places rerouted. Planning of the Witney-Cassington stretch, including a new line N of Eynsham and a new spur road to Cassington village, is now well advanced. The former passes close to the important early Saxon site at New Wintles Farm. E of the river Evenlode it is possible that some parts of the Cassington 'Big Enclosure' complex, an extraordinary concentration of archaeological features ranging in date from Neolithic to Saxon, which may have survived intensive gravel quarrying from the 1930s onwards, will be affected by the dualling of the existing road. The works related to the Cassington spur road will destroy parts of two cropmark complexes of Iron Age-Roman date, one of which may also have associated Saxon settlement. Planning of the new road line to the E of Cassington is less well

advanced and the archaeological implications have yet to be assessed.

It is hoped that assessment work on the A421 will start early in the new year. English Heritage have agreed in principle to fund such work. Proposals for evaluation of the A420 and A40 Witney-Cassington stretch are in preparation at present.

The question of funding of such projects has yet to be resolved. At present the Department of Transport allocates £500,000 a year to English Heritage for archaeological work on road schemes. English Heritage takes the view that the Department of Transport should fund archaeological work on road schemes directly. A recent English Heritage survey, prepared in response to the Department of Transport's document 'Trunk Roads, England: Into the 1990s', assesses the cost of recording the impact on archaeology of those schemes in the present trunk road programme at in excess of £70 million at 1990 prices, and the true costs in the light of the potential for further discoveries would undoubtedly be much higher (Roads for Prosperity: the Archaeological Impact, English Heritage 1990).

Paul Booth and George Lambrick

SWALCLIFFE: SWALCLIFFE BARN

The larger of the two medieval barns on the W side of the manor house is now sheeted in corrugated iron and scaffolding. Half of the roof timbers have been stripped of their Stonesfield slates, allowing conservation and restoration to begin. Unfortunately, the northern porch was underpinned before the OAU was notified and the reason for the subsidence

remains unknown; it was probably induced by archaeological features that could have had a bearing on the earlier function and layout of this area of the Norman manorial curtilage.

R A Chambers

UFFINGTON: WHITE HORSE HILL

Recent visitors to Uffington Castle will have noticed that the unpleasant scar on the NE side has now been repaired. This was the site of the OAU excavations in 1989 which were to determine the date of the breach through the rampart. The initial uncertainty concerning date presented various options for restoration work - if the cutting was recent the rampart might have been totally restored. However, excavation and documentary research show that this breach and a similar one to the SE are at least Roman in date and hence form part of the historic landscape. The OAU's restoration has therefore left the entrance intact and English Heritage will consolidate the track.

Work has also continued on the results of the excavations in the White Horse. Samples were taken for optically stimulated luminescence dating (OSL) by the lab in Keble Road. One sample from the colluvial soil beneath the earliest phase of beak (see Newsletter June 1990 for the multiple beaks) has produced a prehistoric date; this dates the soil beneath the Horse rather than the Horse itself, but it does indicate that the technique is viable and promises interesting results in the future.

Plans for the final excavation season are now well under way with more work programmed on the Horse, the interior of the

fort and the area of burial mounds to the NE.

Simon Palmer

WALLINGFORD: ST JOHNS ROAD, NEW SEWAGE PUMPING STATION

Thames Water have been constructing a new pumping station just outside the line of Wallingford's Saxon defences. Andy Mudd visited the work, and noted that beneath layers of modern fill there was the profile of a ditch running roughly parallel to the defences. Was this just a roadside ditch, or was it part of the defences? Wallingford was a defended town from the late 9th century through to the 17th-century Civil War, and a ditch of these dimensions might have played a role at any stage. It was 17 m outside the rampart, clear of the cut of the existing ditch, and in the zone where it has been suggested that Saxon burhs may have multiple concentric ditches. Dating evidence was unfortunately absent, and indeed the ditch profile itself was only seen in the sides of the contractor's pit as they lowered the concrete sections of the manhole by progressively excavating beneath them.

The message of this watching brief is that future investigations in this area should watch for a ditch which was extant in the medieval period, which might be the remains of a multiple defence of the Saxon period.

Brian Durham

WITNEY: THE WEAVERS, 'PALACE FARM'

'Hence at Witney we see that the Black Death marks the change between a barter economy and a coin economy'

Paul Vinogradoff was writing in 1916 about the economic revolution brought about by three years of epidemic in the 14th century. The effect on the demesne farming which accounted for about a third of the revenue of Witney estate was most dramatic. Tenants had to spend three days of each week working on the land of their lord, in this case the Bishop of Winchester, in return for the right to work their own land for the rest of the week. The fruits of this unpaid work led to huge farming profits for feudal lords all over England, and the demesne farm at Witney would have had a barn which was bulging with this produce.

The manor house at Witney is the group of Romanesque buildings excavated in 1984 which has come to be known as Witney Palace. Where then was the bulging storehouse? The implication of the manorial rolls and the local placenames is that it was on the adjoining site in Farm Mill Lane, where until recently there was the biggest of the blanket mills, Mount Mills. Tarmac Provincial Properties have acquired the site for a complex of landscaped offices, and the Unit carried out a watching brief on the first phase of development down towards the banks of the river Windrush.

Phase 2 of the development includes the area adjoining the terrace of the medieval palace with its surrounding ditch or moat, and also a good length of Farm Mill Lane. This was the subject of our assessment in September. Parts of the site prove to have been stripped down to bedrock to provide level ground for the blanket mill, and this may have spoiled the

chance of getting a complete plan of the palace farm, which survives quite well along Farm Mill Lane. Here there are buildings with internal floor surfaces and hearths, and nearby a large furnace chamber sunk into the ground which must have been a lime kiln. Finds suggest it all belonged to the 12th and 13th centuries, so like the palace site next door it is comparatively unaffected by later developments. In the case of the palace this may be because the early bishops had built so well that very little structural replacement was ever needed, but at the farm site it may reflect the collapse of the demesne economy in the later 14th century as noted by Vinogradoff.

The new discoveries at Witney have impressed the developers, but in the present state of our 20th-century economy they are thinking in terms of preservation rather than excavation, so we may not learn much more. This is especially regrettable because the site promised to show something which the palace site never did: the Saxon beginnings of Witney. Amongst the medieval pottery of the farm buildings were a significant number of sherds of St Neots-type ware, typical of the 10th and 11th centuries in Oxford but scarcely known in the Witney area, and again at the back of the site close to the palace defences was a field ditch with more of the same. It is a mystery how and when this site was chosen for the manor house, and if things change in the wider world of the property market we may still see an excavation which would sort this out, as well as providing physical evidence for the rise and fall of demesne farming to which the fortunes of Witney Palace were so closely tied.

Brian Durham

YARNTON: WORTON RECTORY FARM

River channel assessment

To the S of the main Yarnnton excavation an ancient river channel is known to have run W-E along the floor of the gravel terrace. An auger survey in the field immediately SW of the excavations earlier this year revealed the possibility of good organic preservation within the channel, and a trench was put across it to obtain environmental data complementary to the site. This work was funded by English Heritage.

The trench revealed a layer containing waterlogged organic material, probably Iron Age. From within this layer a pointed wooden stake and several fragments of cut wood were recovered, suggesting possible Iron Age or Roman use of the river bank. Overlying the waterlogged layer on the N side of the channel was a deposit containing hillwash material, indicative of late Saxon or early medieval intensification of agriculture on the gravel terrace above. The sections were sampled for waterlogged plant and insect remains by Dr Mark Robinson and a column was taken for pollen analysis.

Two trenches on the top of the gravel terrace in this field exposed pits, gullies and postholes containing Iron Age and Roman pottery, demonstrating that the settlement continued at least 50 m W of the excavated area. This was confirmed by the findings from the Cresswell Field assessment.

Gareth Williams

Cresswell field assessment

Further work within ARC's Cassington Pit site has involved 24 machine trenches, concentrating on an area of

approximately 10 hectares N of the disused railway.

This work, funded by English Heritage, has revealed more of the Iron Age settlement excavated last summer (Newsletter June 1990). The settlement continues along the gravel terrace and Iron Age pottery can be seen eroding from the bank where the disused railway cuts it.

Aerial photographs showed ditches and a large spread of pits, some of them also visible from the ground. The trenching confirmed the existence of large pits and postholes on the higher ground to the east. The pottery has yet to be examined in detail but it suggests that the features are Iron Age. Roman features are notable by their absence. Rumours of a villa in the field were contradicted when a stone-filled feature produced clay pipes and glazed pottery.

The edge of an ancient river channel which ran NE-SW across the field and silted up before the area was occupied revealed an interesting stratigraphic sequence. Iron Age hillwash 0.45 m deep sealed pits and was cut by a later Iron Age ditch. The ditch was buried beneath an accumulation of soil which had eroded from the higher ground and probably indicates intensified Roman arable farming. To the W the deep V-shaped ditch of a rectangular enclosure, gullies and postholes seemed to be related to farming activities on the lower ground.

The assessment gives a clearer picture of the layout of the Iron Age settlement and its land divisions, with fewer of the complex, superimposed features encountered on the main site to the southeast. It demonstrates that the Iron Age occupation extended over 2 hectares to the top of the slope overlooking the old river channel.

Andrew Parkinson and Gareth Williams

ENDNOTES

UNIT NEWS

1990, like the curate's egg, has been good in parts. After a period of unprecedented activity in the building industry, which stimulated expansion in profession archaeology, we have rapidly entered a period of recession. This go-stop scenario makes medium and long term planning difficult for archaeological units which are increasingly dependent on developer funding and buffered by local and national government support only to a limited extent.

Fortunately the OAU has protected itself from the worst of the recession by diversifying its activities, particularly into archaeological and environmental assessments and conservation and presentation. A useful and, I think, impressive summary of recent OAU work has recently appeared in *Current Archaeology* 121, followed by the Redlands Farm Villa in *Current Archaeology* 122.

The good news is that 1990 has seen some of the most significant archaeological discoveries in the Unit's history. In Abingdon, the Vineyard excavation directed by Tim Allen and funded by the Vale of the White Horse District Council has located an Iron Age oppidum under the town. A massive defence appears to enclose a promontory within which is a dense concentration of round houses, similar to Dyke Hills at

Dorchester. In his lecture after the laying of the foundation stone for the new Council Offices, Tim Allen suggested that Abingdon could arguably claim to be the oldest continuously occupied town in Britain, and this led to a gentlemanly form of Civil War in the press between Abingdon, Colchester and other claimants to the title.

Meanwhile, another major urban discovery has been made at Eynsham. Beneath the late Saxon and medieval abbey well preserved remains of the middle Saxon minster have been found in excavations by funded English Heritage and directed by Richard Chambers. The minster overlies a pagan Saxon settlement and there is tentative evidence also for a late Bronze Age, possibly fortified, site beneath the Abbey.

In Oxford there have not been any such fundamental revelations, but a particularly interesting excavation at the Halls Brewery Site funded by Grosvenor Square Properties and directed by Brian Durham revealed the medieval tenements built by William of Cunnor complete with his personal seal.

Gravel extraction has not succumbed to the recession and OAU continues to be busy in its traditional stamping grounds, the quarries of the Thames Valley. A major focus has been the land between Yarnton and Cassington (see Spotlight, this issue) where Gill Hey has excavated one of the largest continuously occupied settlements in the Thames Valley.

Work has also continued in the Lechlade area, which the OAU has been investigating for ten years. Tim Allen has added to the picture of the Rough Grounds Farm Villa (originally excavated by Margaret Jones in the 1950s and 60s) with the discovery of a large 2nd-century aisled building, converted into an unusual apsidal aided structure. This excavation was

possible as a result of the financial support of the developers ARC and Westbury Homes, on whose land the new Roman building was discovered, supported by English Heritage.

Further west, closer to Cirencester, the OAU has also excavated a Bronze Age cemetery in the Shorncliffe pit of Hills of Swindon, who funded the investigations. This site provides an interesting contrast with the Unit's other extensive Bronze Age cemetery excavation at Barrow Hills.

OAU has carried out many archaeological and environmental assessments as far afield as Yorkshire, Dorset, Bristol, Kent and London. The largest project continues to be the Channel Tunnel Rail Link which George Lambrick and Julian Munby are co-ordinating on behalf of British Rail. The most impressive excavation has been at Stanwick South, Northamptonshire, where Graham Keavill uncovered the remarkably well preserved Redlands Farm Villa. This began life as a water mill and in its latest phase the gable ends of the villa were deliberately pushed over, leaving an entire wall from foundation to roof lying horizontally on the ground. The excavation was funded by ARC who have now entered into negotiations with English Heritage and Northamptonshire County Council to preserve the site.

Conservation and presentation have been a growing part of OAU work this year. At the Dover White Cliffs Experience Dave Wilkinson and his team uncovered barrack blocks and the defensive wall of the fort of the Roman fleet inside the basement of the new theatre. Next year visitors to Dover's new heritage centre and museum will be able to walk through these excavations.

At White Horse Hill, Uffington, research continued on behalf of the National Trust and English Heritage in order to

improve the presentation and management of the site. The most notable discovery was that the White Horse is a complex beast formed not by scouring natural chalk, but by filling a trench with layers of chalk. This provides an opportunity to date the beast and clarify its earlier shapes.

In Oxfordshire the Unit continues to provide a watching brief service for the local authorities. Both Oxford City Council and Oxfordshire County Council reassessed their relationship with the Unit in the light of the changing situation in archaeology, notably the expansion of developer funding. Both councils agreed to continue their support of the Unit, for which we are grateful. The Unit finds there is increasing demand from schools and other bodies for displays, open days and talks. In 1990 the Unit co-operated with the education section of the county's Museums, Arts and Libraries Department to put on an open week at White Horse Hill and also took part in the Young Archaeologists' National Day of Archaeology with an open day at Eynsham Abbey.

The publication of major excavation reports continues to be one of the Unit's major and most problematic commitments. In order to improve the management of post-excavation projects Dr Ellen McAdam has been appointed as publications manager and over the year several reports have inched their way painfully towards the printer; the Iron Age and Romano-British enclosed settlement at Watkins Farm, Northmoor, won the race but Rough Ground Farm, Barrow Hills, Mingies Ditch, Chalgrove, Reading Business Park, Butlers Field and Berinsfield are in more or less hot pursuit. With the exception of Reading Business Park these will appear as volumes in a new series, Thames Valley Landscapes, produced in co-operation with the Oxford Committee for Archaeology and English Heritage.

New appointments to the field staff of the Unit this year include Paul Booth from Warwick, Martin Hicks from Canterbury, Graham Keavill who joined the Unit from Carlisle and Julian Munby, who is now responsible for building recording. Georgina Griffiths has left to pursue her career on the stage and has been replaced as secretary by Sarah Boddington who joins us appropriately enough from the Institute of Archaeology in London, and the Finds Department is losing the valued services of Elizabeth Waite.

1990 has seen a record number of offspring produced by Unit staff - four in the past few months. Congratulations to the Allens, Booth-Lisks, Keavills and Moores.

Finally, as the year draws to a close, I would like to thank all those who have supported the Unit's work morally, practically and financially: the many developers and landowners who have funded excavations, Oxfordshire County Council, Oxford City Council and other local authorities, the staff of the County's Museums, Arts and Libraries Department, English Heritage, (notably A J Fleming and Brian Davison), Oxford University's Department for External Studies, the Institute of Archaeology, the Ashmolean Museum and Library, the Laboratory for Art and Archaeology and Mark Robinson of the Environmental Section of the University Museum. We are grateful for the co-operation of many County archaeologists and other archaeological bodies who have provided us with information. I must also thank our Chairman, Professor Peter Salway and Hon. Secretary, Louise Armstrong for their continuing support. And a Happy Christmas to all our readers.

David Miles

VISITORS FROM BULGARIA

Three archaeologists from Bulgaria, Dr Kouzmanov, Mrs Skokoskam and Mrs Vladkova visited the Unit as part of their study tour of Britain organised by the British Council. Readers of Current Archaeology 121 will see their account of *Nicopolis*, the project on which our visitors are co-operating with Nottingham University.

David Miles

ROUGH GROUNDS FARM: A CLASPED EDGE KNIFE

Among the finds from the recent excavations at Rough Grounds Farm (reported in the last newsletter) was a beautifully carved clasp knife.

The blade is 78 mm long and 12 mm wide, with a slightly curved cutting edge which closes against the bone handle as with a modern penknife. The handle is carved in the form of a panther leaping from a calyx of ?acanthus leaves, its forepaws extended. The paws are turned down at the end to encase the sharp point of the blade. The blade back is straight and flat, and has a flange on one side to help in opening the knife. The blade is attached to the bone handle by means of a simple hinge: the butt of the handle has a central channel for the tang, and is covered and strengthened by a thin iron 'sheath'; the sheath, handle and tang are secured by a rivet around which the blade rotates. The sheath ends against a bone 'collar'.

Several decorated clasp knives are known from Roman Britain,

POTTERY SEMINARS

In response to a request from site staff two pottery seminars were held on Friday afternoons in October, and were attended by most of the Unit's diggers and supervisors. The seminars were intended to provide a very general view of technical and stylistic developments in pottery from the Neolithic to the medieval period. They were illustrated with sherds of all periods drawn from recent excavations and from the Unit's small teaching collection. Judging by the length of the question sessions the seminars fulfilled a widely felt need, and it is hoped that it may be possible to follow them up with meetings treating the pottery of particular sites or periods in more detail.

Paul Booth and Alistair Barclay

ROADS AND THE CULTURAL HERITAGE CONSULTATION PROCEDURES WITH THE DEPT OF TRANSPORT

The Dept of Transport has undertaken a review of their environmental assessment consultation procedures in relation to their road schemes, and OAU is acting as sub-consultant to the landscape architects, Chris Blandford Associates, who have been commissioned to re-appraise these procedures. To this end the OAU has examined current good practice standards and environmental statement guidelines. County archaeologists have been consulted for their opinion of the situation as it stands in the various county systems. These

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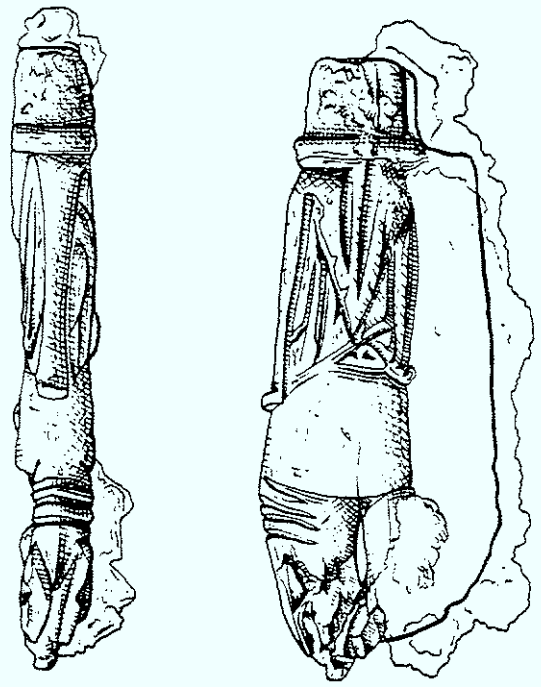


Figure 6: Rough Grounds Farm, Roman penknife

and a particularly close parallel, with a handle carved as a tiger emerging from a cup of leaves in the act of eating something between its forepaws, comes from an early 2nd-century context at Wroxeter. Martin Henig believes that the floral calyx is a stylized representation of life itself, and perhaps the springing beast/calyx of life motif is a metaphor for the springing action of the knife blade.

Tim Allen and Robin Brunner-Ellis

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results are still being compiled and promise to be illuminating. The first stage of good practice standards has been completed.

It is becoming an increasingly important feature of archaeological work that the full impact of any major development on the environment is examined in full. In the case of road schemes many details must be born in mind when considering the cultural heritage; archaeological sites, known and unknown, listed buildings and historic landscapes can all be effected. With careful study, preparation and liaison between the relevant bodies problems can be prevented before they occur. Where conflicts are inevitable there are ways to find a solution through mitigation methods, providing the standards and guidelines are adequate.

Helen Glass

A ROMAN RELIEF FROM GILL MILL, DUCKLINGTON

This relief showing a genius, or protective household deity, was the most important individual object to be recovered during the recent work at Gill Mill (see September Newsletter). The two pieces of the relief were found separately, at the northern end of the excavated area. The following description of the stone has kindly been supplied by Dr Martin Henig.

The surviving part of the sculpture, of oolitic limestone, is in two pieces but the breaks are ancient. The upper part of the relief, probably a pedimented shrine, is lost, and with it the head of the god. There is some modern damage to the front of the figure.

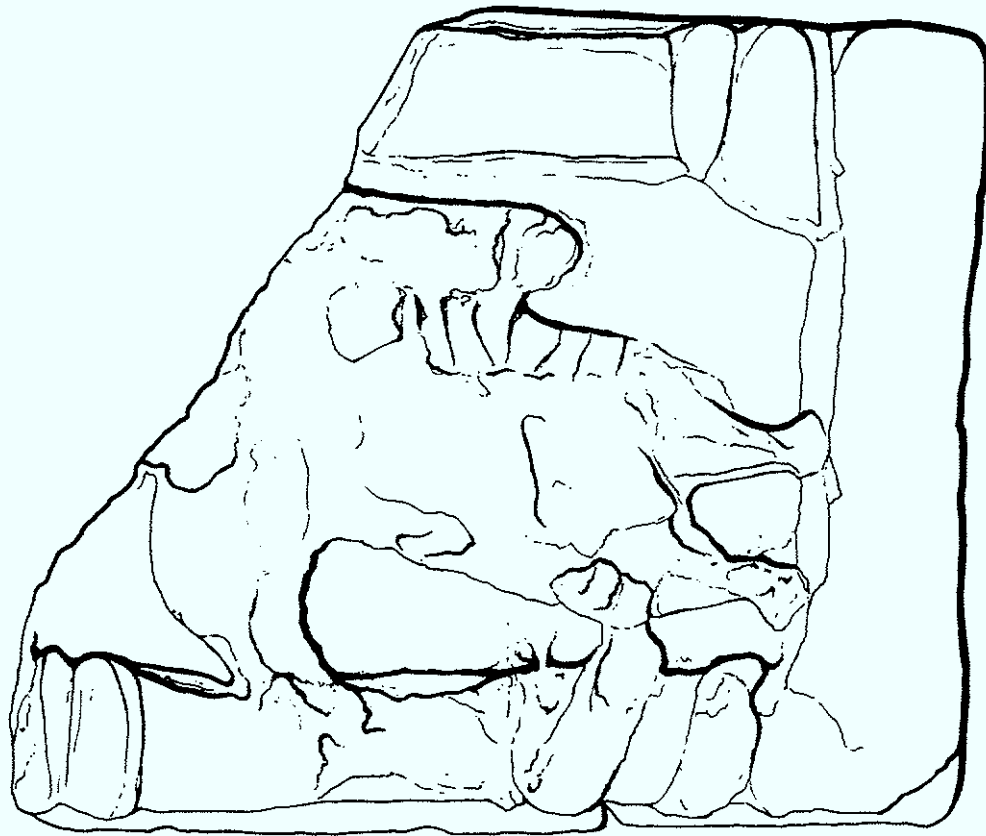


Figure 7: Gill Mill altar fragments Scale 1/4

made up for in charm and a brilliant social programme, with live bands and parties every night!

The programme was necessarily diverse and I attended papers in the following sessions: Contemporary developments in the archaeology of Latin America and the Caribbean, Communication and Information Technology, Landscape and the Management of Cultural Heritage, Sacred Sites and Tropical Agriculture. Sebastian Rahtz gave a joint paper with Tim Allen on computer publication of Rough Grounds Farm Roman Villa.

The conference served to underline the yawning gap between First World and Third World archaeology, both in technique and concept. A constant theme was the lack of availability and exorbitant cost of both books and computers in the Third World, which means that the gap is widening. However, this emphasises the need for conferences of this type where there is a meeting ground for the exchange of ideas, where Third World archaeologists have some access to our information and where we can learn to appreciate their problems.

Gill Hey

DOUBLE GROOVED BONES

George Lambrick first drew my attention to the bones of the title, pointing out their peculiarities and saying that at present nobody knew their function. They had been found on several Iron Age sites, often in areas that contained loom weights.

The bones in question are sheep metatarsals approximately 110 - 120 mm in length and do not appear to have been

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The genius stands to the front within the recess of an aedicula shrine. The sides are defined by Roman Corinthian columns on bases, but only the capital on the left side of the stone remains. Evidently the genius wears a mantle which reaches down to just below his knees. His right arm is outstretched and held a patera. Below and set against the column is an altar around which a serpent is curled. In his left hand he holds a cornucopia. The base of the relief is flat and tooling is visible here and on the back.

The type is paralleled particularly closely by a relief from Chedworth Manor, and a votive altar portraying a similar genius was found in the Thames at Bablock Hythe in about 1932. The Gill Mill genius could have occurred in a household context and need not indicate the presence of a larger temple or shrine. The type is not closely datable.

Paul Booth

WORLD ARCHAEOLOGY CONGRESS

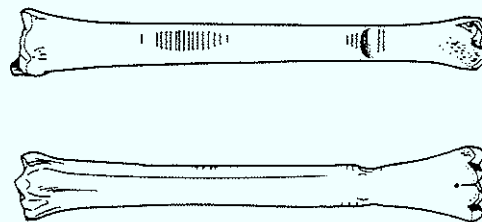
From 4-8 September I attended the Second World Archaeology Congress in Barquisimeto, Venezuela. WAC is a coming together of archaeologists from all over the world and the emphasis is very much on encouraging the participation of those from the Third World.

The conference was somewhat disorganised. A last minute shift of venue to the Museum of Barquisimeto from the battlefields of war-torn Columbia had left the administration struggling to cope with the chaos of S American bureaucracy. However, what the museum staff lacked in efficiency they

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modified before use. On the shaft of the bone are two deep grooves about 60 - 70 mm apart and there may also be other, shallower grooves between and beyond the deeper grooves. All the grooves are wide, polished U-shaped depressions which seem to have been produced by wear, rather than deliberately cut sharp V-shaped notches. The grooves are present on opposing faces, the other two faces remaining unmarked.



Scale 1/2

Figure 8: double-grooved bone from Yarnton

It occurred to me that a possible explanation could be that the bone had been inserted between the upper and lower warp threads of a loom, and I went to the Pitt Rivers Museum to look for parallels. By good fortune the guide to whom I spoke had been a weaver for 30 years and was able to identify the

objects from my description as leaze or laze rods. The deep double grooves would have been caused by friction at the points where the weft was returned through the warp, the shallower grooves by the lesser friction of the remaining warp threads.

A horizontal loom with the leaze rods held in their correct position by the warp is on display in the museum; the loom is about 18 inches wide and 3 foot long and produces a strip of cloth about 6 - 7 inches wide. The museum also contains a 19th-century mechanical loom on which close examination reveals grooves worn into the wooden rod like those on the bone objects. It seems likely that the double grooved bones were used as leaze rods on small looms on which narrow strips of cloth for use as belts, sashes, carrying straps and so on were woven.

Kay Proctor

HELP WANTED!

The OAU is looking for volunteers to help in its friendly and ever-busy Finds Department with the processing of material from excavations. This involves the washing and marking of pottery and bone from a wide range of sites of all ages. Grab a chance to learn about finds the practical way - hold the past in your hands! Anyone interested should contact Cecily Cropper on 0865-794779.

GOOD NEWS FOR SUBSCRIBERS

In the course of the last year weighty deliberations have been taking place on the cost, form, content and aims of this newsletter. As a result, it has been decided to replace it with an annual publication which will appear in June, supplemented by a newsheet in March, September and December.

The annual report will still be called **Archaeological News** and will be in A4 magazine format, with articles on subjects of general archaeological interest, more illustrations and photographs, as well as a summary of the Unit's work throughout the year. The newsheet will bring you up to date news and notes on the Unit's discoveries as they happen. No title has been decided for the newsheet as yet, and suggestions are welcomed. I'm afraid **The Groauniad** is out of the question.

...AND NOW THE BAD NEWS

The new subscription rate, covering both the Newsheet and the annual report, will be £5 per annum. If you wish to renew or take out a subscription please make cheques payable to the Oxford Archaeological Unit at this address:

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MERRY CHRISTMAS & BEST WISHES FOR 1991 🎁

*Published by the Oxford Archaeological Unit, 46 Hythe Bridge
Street, Oxford OX1 2EP*

ISSN 0954-1616