



OXFORDSHIRE ARCHAEOLOGICAL UNIT NEWSLETTER INCLUDING
OXFORDSHIRE PARISH SURVEY NEWS

Vol VII, No. 4 - July 1980

Anyone wishing to send contributions to the Newsletter should send details to the above address before Friday, 15th August 1980, for inclusion in the next issue.

OXFORDSHIRE

Abingdon, Checker Walk

Excavation is near to conclusion and another fortnight will see sections through Iron Age and Roman features completed and drawn. A very successful open day on Saturday, 7th June attracted approximately 300 visitors despite showery conditions.

Godfrey Jones, Roger Thomas, Jeff Wallis - Abingdon Area Archaeological and Historical Society.

Abingdon, Nuffield Way Allotments

Following the discovery in 1976 of Romano-British burials a few yards inside the M.G. car factory compound, a trial excavation was undertaken in May this year to test whether the cemetery extended south onto the former allotments in Nuffield Way. The excavation by Richard Chambers and members of the OAU STEP Scheme was undertaken in advance of industrial development. Two trial trenches, each 30m long by 1m wide were dug down 1m-1.20m to the natural sand and gravel. Neither trench showed any trace of burials.

The reddish-brown alluvial subsoil contained several Romano-British pot sherds, animal bone and a quern fragment. Two shallow parallel furrows from the principally Medieval open-field agricultural system were seen in section cutting through the presumably Roman period soil.

Barford St. Michael

Richard Chambers reports that a small quantity of medieval pottery has been recovered by workmen whilst digging a sewerage-pump pit as a part of the watermill restoration work. The village plan has changed much since the medieval period and the pottery found by the mill may well belong to village occupation rather than that of a medieval watermill.

Chinnor - new meeting place

The Chinnor Historical and Archaeological Society would like to announce that the society is meeting regularly at the Further Education Room, Chinnor Library, instead of at members' houses. Details of the society's lecture programme are given in the calendar at the end of this Newsletter.

Chorley, Manor Farm

Recent ploughing has exposed a pebble metalled pathway across the wet part of a field some 200m south-west of the parish church. No date could be assigned to the pathway.

During a site visit by Richard Chambers it was noticed that some 200m east of the church the edge of the former village still survives as a series of earthworks with ridge and furrow butting up against enclosure banks. Mr. Bitmead the farmer has found medieval pottery in the same field as the earthworks, but closer to the church. Mr. Bitmead also described the discovery several years ago of three adult human burials exposed by a drainage trench in the pasture field adjacent to the north side of the churchyard.

Didcot, The Rectory

A trial excavation supervised by Alan Briggs of the Didcot and District Historical and Archaeological Society has shown that the Roman period settlement known to lie some 150m to the east does not extend over the land occupied by the Victorian rectory and its garden.

Drayton

Recording is completed on a Roman ditch containing 2nd-3rd century pottery. This ditch is part of a trackway and one of two enclosures adjoining. Two further sections of the Cursus were cleaned and recorded. Unfortunately no dating evidence has yet been recovered. Further excavation is anticipated in September when more topsoil is to be removed from over the Cursus to the south of this site.

Godfrey Jones, Roger Thomas, Jeff Wallis - Abingdon Area Archaeological and Historical Society.

Goring Heath, Bensgrove Farm

Recently the OAU were asked if they would look into a hole that had opened up in a pasture field at Goring Heath. Richard Chambers and John Hazeldon (a geologist with the Soil Survey for England and Wales) inspected the pit. The beehive-shaped void was some eleven feet deep and opened out in an irregular fashion below the small surface hole, to about twelve feet across at the widest point. The hole appeared to have resulted from ground slumping into a natural, water formed solution hole at an unknown depth in the chalk bedrock below. The void created in the chalk had gradually, perhaps over a period of several centuries, by means of a series of roof collapses, travelled up through the Clay-with-Flints and Plateau Drift deposits that overlie the chalk, until the final roof collapse brought the hole to the surface. Several similar solution pipes, carrot-shaped pipes, some

penetrating upto sixty feet into the chalk and long since filled with overlying deposits were sectioned during the excavation of the M40 motorway cutting through the Chiltern escarpment in 1972.

Horley

A human skull has recently been recovered from the rear of a property in Horley. The find was reported to the OAU by the Banbury Coroner's Officer. The skull was found buried in silts just downstream of the now demolished watermill. It was not possible to determine where the skull had originally come from.

Leafield, Roustage Barrow

Richard Chambers has identified approximately 7kg of pottery collected by field walking in the vicinity of Roustage Barrow (originally two tumuli). The assemblage contained both late Iron Age wares and also much Romano-British coarse ware none of which was necessarily any later than the third century AD.

Marcham

P.C. Astell (Coroner's Officer, Abingdon) accompanied by Richard Chambers visited the site where a human jaw bone had recently been discovered on a newly built housing estate. The jaw had been found whilst clearing building debris from garden topsoil. Although it was clear that the jaw had come from a burial somewhere in the vicinity, topsoil movement during house building had concealed the exact location of the burial and in consequence any further archaeological information.

Radley, Barrow Hills

A watching brief is in progress in advance of any work on the Radley Relief Road which may disturb Roman and other features at the Wick Hall/Daisey Bank complex.

Godfrey Jones, Roger Thomas, Jeff Wallis - Abingdon Area Archaeological and Historical Society.

Radley, Lower Radley

A series of JCB sections were noted at Lower Farm cutting through an old channel of the Thames. Peat deposits were cut through to a depth of half metre. Romano-British sherds and Neolithic flint scatters have been found on and around this area during field walking last autumn.

Godfrey Jones, Roger Thomas, Jeff Wallis - Abingdon Area Archaeological and Historical Society.

Stanton Harcourt

Harold Mytum with the Oxford University Archaeological Society assisted by Geoff Williams and by members of the Abingdon Area Archaeological and Historical Society have continued excavations after topsoil stripping by ARC. The features currently being examined are Bronze Age barrows and a Late Iron Age/early Roman enclosure.

Thrupp

Another season has begun on this late Iron Age riverside settlement. We hope to finalise excavation and section drawing on the largest penannular feature on the site in the next month. Work will then begin on investigating the other 4 ring ditches. A new area for investigation is also planned for this season to locate further features indicated from air cover and ditches seen cutting a gravel haulage track. The site is not now under threat of destruction by gravel quarrying so new areas may be cleared by hand and the site treated as a training dig for new members of the Society. Visitors and diggers welcome.

Godfrey Jones, Roger Thomas, Jeff Wallis - Abingdon Area Archaeological and Historical Society.

Wallingford, Brewery Site, Goldsmiths Lane

Following a report from Maureen Page of the Wallingford Historical and Archaeological Society that foundation trenches at the southern end of this site were providing good sections of the underlying deposits, Brian Durham and Richard Chambers inspected the site. The sections had exposed chiefly (where dateable) Post-Medieval layers and pits but for the first time on this site a small section of an undisturbed Medieval soil layer containing much pottery was seen. It appears that the absence of medieval stratigraphy on this site is due almost entirely to its destruction by Post-Medieval activity.

GLOUCESTERSHIRE

Lechlade/Fairford, Claydon Pike

Work restarted in mid-April continuing the excavations in the field adjacent to the Roman settlement. Two Iron Age circular and impinging enclosures situated on a gravel 'island' surrounded by relic stream channels, have been extensively sampled.

The earliest enclosure, c. 15m diameter and with the entrance to the east, with at least three recuts produced some slight structural evidence. This was in the form of sundry postholes and a gully apparently draining from inside a house (?) into the enclosure ditch. The later enclosure, again extensively recut gave no indication of habitation whether by structural evidence or rubbish survival.

Traces of Iron Age settlement features cutting the earlier enclosure prompted the stripping of an area c. 80 x 50m by scraper. Despite the coarse nature of topsoil removal even the shallow features appear to have been preserved. Within the trench and now under process of excavation are two large structures each defined by recut penannular gullies and a series of smaller huts, annexes and or annular pens demarked by further lengths of gully. To the east a series of large semi-circular enclosures seem also to define further house sites.

Continued topsoil stripping by the gravel company south of this trench has revealed at least five more huts and a four post structure; a complete plan of this Iron Age settlement should be retrieved when the rest of the 'island' is exposed next month.

A trench c. 30 x 15m has been opened on one of the platforms within the Roman settlement. Despite large spreads of stone rubble no structures have been defined. A Roman well, a curving gully possibly also Roman in date and a spread of defined pits await excavation.

Excavations should continue into the early summer at least; interested volunteers should either contact David Miles on Woodstock 811772 or Simon Palmer on Oxford 44748 in the evenings.

Oxfordshire Parish Survey News

The Fields of Emmington C.H. & A.S., Occasional Paper No. 5 (1980)

Following in quick succession to their last publication, the Chinnor Historical and Archaeological Society has now produced its fifth paper which is a detailed record of the unusually well-documented history of the fields in Emmington parish. In the early Medieval period Emmington possessed an open field system but, possibly as early as 1200 enclosure of arable land was being undertaken to create more pasture. By 1697 the open fields had all been divided up and enclosed and at this date the first of a series of surviving estate maps was drawn up. These maps and their accompanying gazetteers constitute what is nationally an unusually large body of surviving information detailing farming development in a parish. Following the introduction the paper is divided into seven sections, five detail acreage, usage, tenant and field names where available at various periods from 1697 to 1979 and each of these sections is accompanied by a map. Section six suggests possible meanings for some of the field names and the paper is concluded with a list of those crops grown in the parish which were mentioned in 16th century wills.

Upper Thames Valley Survey

Forty-six sites have now been field surveyed as part of the Upper Thames Valley Project. Amongst these are many hill-forts and a number of crop-mark sites. Part of an extensive middle Iron Age site at Hatford (which has yielded material during sand quarrying over a period of 40 or so years) has been examined in advance of quarrying.

Many sites remain to be field walked. If any individual or local group wishes to carry out field work (examination of ploughed fields for pottery) this summer or autumn whether autonomously or under tuition I would be pleased to advise them on suitable sites for examination, and also, if necessary, on field walking techniques. I can be contacted via the Unit. The Survey area covers most of Oxfordshire and parts of Gloucestershire and Wiltshire and crop-mark sites of interest exist in most areas. The primary aim of the Upper Thames Valley Survey is to examine Iron Age sites but earlier prehistoric and Roman sites are also being surveyed in the course of the project.

Richard Hingley.

CALENDAR

Chinnor Historical and Archaeological Society - Programme for the 1980/81 Session

(Meetings are usually held on the first Friday of each month at the Adult Education Room, Chinnor Library Block, Station Road, Chinnor at 8.0 p.m.)

Sept 5 Evelyn Gibbs : Oral History in Chinnor

Oct 3 Richard Chambers : After the Romans - a Dark Age Landscape?

- Nov 7 Eric Harmsworth : Chinnor in the Past
- Dec 5 Reports from the Work Parties and General Society Business
- Jan 9 Malcolm Graham : The Local History Department of the County
Library
- Feb 6 John Bell : Symon Howlett, Yeoman of Emmington
- Mar 6 ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING followed by Reports from the Work
Parties and the film "24 Square Miles"
- Apr 3 John Blair : Some Recent Work on Medieval Buildings in
Oxfordshire
- May 1 John Davis : The Australian Connection
- June 5 Reports from the Work Parties and General Society Business
- July 3 Open Air Meeting, details to be confirmed later

For details of Membership, please contact the Hon. Secretary
John Bell
71 Oakley Road
Chinnor tel. K. Blount 52459