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OXFORD ARCHAEOLOGICAL UNIT NEWSLETTER INCLUDING
OXFORDSHIRE PARISH SURVEY NEWS

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ABINGDON: Ex MG Car Factory - Claire Halpin
(SU 484973; PRN 13,016-7)

Trenching between the site of Ashville and north of Blacklands Furlong revealed a continuation of the early-middle Iron Age settlement and a neolithic pit.

ABINGDON: Faringdon Road - R A Chambers and Bill Fuller

A human skeleton has been discovered at the rear of a house in Faringdon Road, some 75m away from the junction with Spring Road. The prone inhumation was buried with its head to the north-east. This method of burial contrasts with the supine west-east inhumations in the cemetery immediately to the west and may not be associated with the cemetery (*Oxoniensia*, XLVI (1981), 56-61). The house on the site has suffered slight damage from subsidence. It is possible that the house was built over a ditch, either a boundary ditch enclosing the cemetery to the west or possibly a prehistoric barrow ditch.

BAMPTON: Bampton Parish Church, Vestry Floor - John Blair

The boarded floor of the vestry (an early 13th-century 'lean-to' structure along the north side of the 12th-century chancel) was lifted and replaced with concrete during 11 - 12 February 1985. Under the planks was a layer of loose earth c.10 cm. thick; this contained many human bones and finds of medieval to modern dates, including a 12th-century potsherd, two small pieces of coloured window-glass, two plain bronze belt-plates (perhaps late medieval), two 17th-century clay pipe bowls, and fragments of a small bronze bell (probably Victorian). Beneath was a hard-compacted earth floor, which was not removed; it buried both the original external chamfered plinth of the chancel wall and a foot-worn step in the doorway between chancel and vestry, so must have been higher than the original vestry floor-level. The finds will be deposited with Oxfordshire Department of Museum Services.

HENLEY-ON-THAMES: Grey's Court - Derek Elliot
(SU 725.834)

A watching brief was maintained on work carried out by the National Trust involving removal of a quantity of brick/flint/stone/chalk building rubble piled against a brick wall in the garden. The 4m high wall, built between the Cromwellian Stables (tea-room) and the original curtain wall of the courtyard contained a bricked-up archway blocked on one side by the pile of rubble, but with an attractive medieval garden on the other side: the object of the work was to expose the archway, remove the brick filling and allow access to and from the medieval garden.

A short length (2.5m by 1m deep) of substantial brick and flint foundation wall was exposed adjacent to the Cromwellian building, also signs of a mortared-brick floor and other footings near to the archway. The pile produced some mixed pottery and glass of post-medieval date and several large pieces of worked stone, but there was insufficient evidence to form any positive conclusions regarding dates, origins or positions of earlier buildings.

No further work is planned.

HENLEY-ON-THAMES: Henley Bridge - Brian Durham

An arch of the medieval bridge was exposed by contractors on the Berkshire bank. It matches the arch in the basement of the Angel on the town side, showing that the medieval bridge was on the upstream side of the existing bridge built in 1782-86. John Steane of the County Museum recorded the structure, with Mr Andrews of the County Highways Department. Moves were started in Henley and the Berkshire Planning department to have it protected as an extension of the existing bridge, which is a Grade 1 Listed Building. At the site meeting called to decide this point, Paul Drury of HBMC immediately recognised the structure as Romanesque. It is a segmented vault of shattered flint rubble, with a span of 5.3m. The ashlar voussoirs are of two orders, giving the appearance of a 0.6m wide pedestrian arch added to the upstream and probably also downstream sides of the main arch. These facings are diagonally tooled, a technique which seems to be virtually diagnostic of a date earlier than c. 1200. Considering the overall shape and construction of the arch, Mr Drury had no doubt the bridge was 12th century, and he therefore associated it with the first documented existence of Henley, when the king acquired land to build houses in 1179.

The 12th century date is somewhat controversial in Henley. A segmental arch of this span would be very unusual at this early date, and Brian Durham has been trying to get some corroborative dating evidence. There are hints that the arch formed part of a steadily rising ramp. It is possible therefore that all the arches of the bridge were of a standard radius of curvature, those in the centre being fully semicircular, with a span of c. 20ft those on the ramps being progressively more truncated. This would explain the segmental profile, which on John Steane's evidence appears to be original. Even if this was considered to be an impossibly advanced design for the postulated date however, there is clearly something very exceptional about it which does not conform to any obvious medieval bridge typology. If it is truly c. 1179, it is the second oldest surviving bridge arch on the Thames (after Folly Bridge), and we must be very grateful to J M Jones Ltd and Henley Regatta for their efforts to preserve it.

OXFORD: Gloucester Green - Brian Durham

The redevelopment of Gloucester Green will be the biggest earthmoving operation in the city since the Westgate Centre was built. The archaeological is likely to be considerably less impressive however, being a suburban area between the town, the castle and Beaumont Palace, Whitefriars. The Unit nevertheless proposed a scheme to keep a watching brief on the main dig, together with a formal excavation in the area considered most likely to produce medieval evidence. The area selected was the corner of George Street and Worcester Street, which in the medieval period would have been the route from the Northgate to the hythe and Hythe Bridge. Tenancies are recorded for the 13th to mid 14th centuries, and it was hoped that excavation might corroborate ideas of a desertion at the Black Death. This was the tentative conclusion for tenements in a similar suburban location on the site of the New Bodleian Library. At Gloucester Green our proposal was to do some trial trenches before committing ourselves to a full excavation, but this was bypassed and we were presented with a large cleared site. It was not an ideal situation. The recent building was on nearly 1m of fill dumped in 1947, which in turn concealed a Second World War air-raid shelter. The pre-cast shelter structure was roughly where we predicted, but it seems to have been a replacement for a much larger brick structure which we had not even suspected, with concrete strip foundations every 3m across the site. The archaeology had to be winkled out from between these monstrosities. It was possible to piece together part of the plan of a stone building on the street corner, evidently that built in the late 17th century and which survived to at least 1926.

Beneath and between the 17th-century footings were 14th-century pits. They were comparatively shallow, of irregular shape, and filled with dark loam. By analogy with similar medieval pits at the Littlegate site excavated in 1971, they are probably to be seen as gravel quarries rather than latrine pits. This may mean there were no tenements here at all, but taking account of the documentation it seems likely that this was in fact the area beneath a building, the structure of which had been swept away with the quarrying. So it is possible we had the right spot, but 500 years too late! It tends to show that archaeological digging in Oxford's medieval suburbs is chancy, except in the low-lying areas of St Thames' and St Aldates'.

OXFORD: 7-8 Queen Street - Brian Durham

Over the past ten years the south frontage of Queen Street has undergone progressive redevelopment, first with Marks and Spencer, then nos. 11-12, and recently nos. 9-10. Prudential pensions are now about to demolish the next in the sequence, and have allowed the Unit four weeks to excavate the cellar.

No. 7 in particular has a shallow cellar, and beneath the brick floor we were straight onto 12th century levels. The area available is miniscule, but it shows an amazingly colourful sequence of yellow and red clay floors with occupation layers sandwiched between them. The layers are subsiding into a large pit which must be an earlier cellar, perhaps of the first half of the 11th century like those at All Saints, the Clarendon Hotel etc. Most interestingly, the whole series of building levels overlies a series of gravel layers which must be the metallurgy of a wide market place.

This 'keyhole' has therefore shown that the bulging south frontage at the east end of Queen Street is the result of encroachment in late Saxon times. Presumably the north frontage was fixed by St Martin's Church. So it seems that late Saxon Queen Street was even more offset from the line of the High Street than it is now. The name Carfax, which is derived from the French Carrefour or crossroads, ought really therefore to have been jambe de chien!

OXFORD: 24A St Michael's Street - Brian Durham

In the latest volume of Oxoniensia the Unit published a report on several excavations on the 'Northern Defences'. It served to show that, while we can be fairly certain about the 13th century and later defences were like, we know painfully little about the system of earth ramparts which enclosed the town for the first three centuries of its existence. The most positive piece of evidence was Professor Jope's recognition that strips of land immediately inside the wall line were the ground area of the banks. What was needed was a chance to study a property on this line. The redevelopment of Mallams, the auctioneers on St Michael's Street, was the perfect opportunity. It fronts onto the intra-mural street and extends out over part of the ditch, so straddling the defensive line. Moreover it seemed to have been relatively untouched by buildings in the past. Such good auguries would normally be a recipe for an archaeological disaster, but this time the fates were with us. Mallams had agreed to an eight-week pause between demolition and building. The mechanical clearance showed immediately that there was a 1.7m depth of redeposited gravel and topsoil, the remains of the rampart.

The original scale of the embankment can only be estimated, but there was plenty of evidence as to how it was constructed. First there must have been a timber palisade with earth-fast posts and lacing to the rear. There is some doubt as to whether the posts were really the front face of the defence, since some of the embankment material had bulged out in front of them, but there seems no other rational explanation at the moment. The fill of the rampart included gravel from the digging of the ditch, together with local reddish loam topsoil and a distinctive greenish brown silty loam. The latter was perhaps brought from the flood-plain about 300m away from Hythe Bridge. The Oxford bank is unusual amongst burghal defences in being built by tipping from behind. It must mean that openings were 6ft in the palisade for cartloads of fill to be brought from the ditch excavations through to the intramural street and thence to where it was needed. It must then have been heaped into the bays between the lacing timbers coming to rest against the front planks. It was noticeable that the loamy material was concentrated at the front, but there was certainly no turf wall to back up the timberwork. Perhaps the loam was intended to perform the function of turves as a strong secondary face, but it was inconsistent, with gravel reaching the front in one area.

The general impression of Oxford's first defence is that it was an organised project which was weakened by the use of comparatively lightweight timbers, and a poor apology for turf which was used in an undisciplined way. In the absence of datable finds, these tenuous impressions may be all we have to distinguish between the obvious dates, i.e. Alfred c. AD 880-90, or Edward the Elder c. 911-12. The writer feels it is a bit 'shoddy' for an Alfredean burh in what was traditionally Mercia, but might well fit with a fortress of Edwards on his way to establish similar burhs at Buckingham and Bedford.

A second impression is that the bank could only have lasted ten to twenty

years as an effective defence, before needing refacing. The new front was massively built with a ragstone wall 1.5m thick in front of the old timber. The implication is that here, and probably elsewhere, the medieval city wall stood on 10th century footings.

The first excavation across Oxford's rampart has therefore given a lot of comparative detail. Beneath the bank was a plough soil, the first real evidence of agriculture beneath the city, with mainly Roman pottery. Beneath that again was the distinctive profile of a Bronze Age ring ditch, to add to those of the Science Area and Logic Lane. All we need now is a small Neolithic pit and questions will be asked as to why the Unit has put so much energy into digging a particular field in Abingdon!

RADLEY: Barrow Hills

Excavation on this site recommenced in November last year. Kibswells Builders Ltd kindly stripped the two remaining acres of topsoil and moved a spoil heap to allow the completion of the excavation in the field south of the former Wick Hall Drive. It is expected that excavation will be completed in this field by mid February.

On 4 February topsoil stripping began in the field to the north of the present site. Developments in this field will be reported on in the next Newsletter.

Prehistoric - Claire Halpin

The spoil tip which was moved ran the length of the western side of the field. Two isolated bronze age burials were found - an urned cremation and, in the south-west corner of the field, a Beaker inhumation. The latter was adjacent to an excavated area identified as gravel quarrying and therefore may originally have been covered by a mound. The inhumation grave proved to be exceptionally fine. Beyond the foot bones a beaker, two flint flakes, a barbed and tanged arrowhead and an antler point were grouped. Close by the head was a decorated bone point and bronze razor.

Beneath the remaining two acres on the east side of the field a line of four inhumation burials and two circular pits containing pottery - probably accessory vessels - are in the process of being excavated. The skeletons are unusually very poorly preserved. A Saxon burial (described below) lay adjacent.

The Anglo-Saxon Settlement - R A Chambers

The last two remaining acres of this site revealed a further 4 certain and 2 probable sunken featured buildings. Several post built structures have also been located but these are still being explained. A single semi-crouched inhumation has also been excavated. The body lay in a shallow grave and appears to have been buried fully clothed. A small knife, an iron belt buckle and a late Roman style cloak-pin suggested a late 5th or early 6th century date for this burial.

之。其所以然者，蓋以中國之政體，與西國不同。西國之政體，以法律為根據，而中國之政體，則以人情為根據。西國之法律，以權利為根據，而中國之法律，則以義務為根據。西國之法律，以平等為根據，而中國之法律，則以階級為根據。西國之法律，以自由為根據，而中國之法律，則以束縛為根據。西國之法律，以公義為根據，而中國之法律，則以私利為根據。西國之法律，以進步為根據，而中國之法律，則以保守為根據。西國之法律，以科學為根據，而中國之法律，則以迷信為根據。西國之法律，以民主為根據，而中國之法律，則以專制為根據。西國之法律，以法治為根據，而中國之法律，則以人治為根據。西國之法律，以憲法為根據，而中國之法律，則以皇帝為根據。西國之法律，以議會為根據，而中國之法律，則以官僚為根據。西國之法律，以公民為根據，而中國之法律，則以士大夫為根據。西國之法律，以個人為根據，而中國之法律，則以家族為根據。西國之法律，以社會為根據，而中國之法律，則以國家為根據。西國之法律，以世界為根據，而中國之法律，則以天下為根據。西國之法律，以人類為根據，而中國之法律，則以萬物為根據。西國之法律，以自然為根據，而中國之法律，則以神靈為根據。西國之法律，以真理為根據，而中國之法律，則以虛偽為根據。西國之法律，以正義為根據，而中國之法律，則以不義為根據。西國之法律，以和平為根據，而中國之法律，則以戰爭為根據。西國之法律，以繁榮為根據，而中國之法律，則以凋敝為根據。西國之法律，以進步為根據，而中國之法律，則以退步為根據。西國之法律，以光明為根據，而中國之法律，則以黑暗為根據。西國之法律，以希望為根據，而中國之法律，則以絕望為根據。西國之法律，以奮鬥為根據，而中國之法律，則以妥協為根據。西國之法律，以犧牲為根據，而中國之法律，則以苟且為根據。西國之法律，以責任為根據，而中國之法律，則以逃避為根據。西國之法律，以誠實為根據，而中國之法律，則以虛偽為根據。西國之法律，以勇敢為根據，而中國之法律，則以懦弱為根據。西國之法律，以堅強為根據，而中國之法律，則以脆弱為根據。西國之法律，以果斷為根據，而中國之法律，則以猶豫為根據。西國之法律，以果敢為根據，而中國之法律，則以畏縮為根據。西國之法律，以果毅為根據，而中國之法律，則以怯懦為根據。西國之法律，以果斷為根據，而中國之法律，則以猶豫為根據。西國之法律，以果敢為根據，而中國之法律，則以畏縮為根據。西國之法律，以果毅為根據，而中國之法律，則以怯懦為根據。