

Anyone wishing to contribute to the Newsletter should send details to 46 Hythe Bridge Street, Oxford OX1 2EP (Tel: Oxford 43888) before the last Tuesday of each month.

65-69 St Aldates, Oxford (former Morris Garages)

Seven years of patient negotiation seem to have borne fruit at last, with an agreement for two small trial trenches on the forecourt area this winter. Final details still need to be agreed with all parties, i.e. the G.P.O., Property Services Agency, Oxford City Council, and the D.o.E., but it looks as if it will be possible in the next few months to confirm or reject the idea that 'Offa's causeway' was the reason why Oxford became such an important place in late Saxon England. The trial trench, incidentally, should go through the floors of 'The Old Wheatsheaf' (1883), 'The Wheatsheaf' (Anthony Wood, 1660's) and possibly 'le Berehouse' (1489).

CHALGROVE

Since the last issue of the Newsletter the landscape at the Chalgrove site has changed considerably. Two spoil heaps have been removed from the interior of the largest of the moated islands and what remained of the topsoil in this area has been machined off. All this earth moving activity has revealed the stone foundations of a number of, what are assumed to be, large farm buildings, associated with the manor. One of these has up to three phases of construction and the clearing and planning of this and the other buildings is proving very time consuming.

The manor building has further extensions to the west and north.

While the earthmoving machine was at our disposal a number of sections were cut with it through the arms of the moats. These indicate that the smaller rectangular moat was stocked with freshwater mussels (possibly either *Anodonta cygnea* or *Anodonta anatina*).

DIDCOT

Mrs Joyce Hall of the Didcot Archaeological & Historical Society reports that work has begun on digging the foundations for several houses to be built on Blagrove Farm caravan site. The site is suspected to be part of a Romano-British settlement and Mrs Hall is inspecting the foundation trenches daily.

LITTLE FARINGDON (Purton to Brize Norton Oil Pipeline)

Richard Chambers reports that the Ministry of Defence is currently replacing a corroded section of the oil pipeline supplying the R.A.F. aerodrome at Brize Norton. Unfortunately a lack of communication between the Property Services Agency and the Department of the Environment has resulted in the pipeline cutting across an important scheduled area of cropmarks on the river gravel in the North East of the parish of Little Faringdon. Aerial photos taken by J K St Joseph in July 1959 show a complex of cropmarks, the earliest of which belong to the Bronze Age. The present excavation has been rapidly organised to record the parts of features which will be destroyed by the cutting of the new pipe trench. Although normally the whole of the easement (approximately 50 ft wide) is stripped of top soil, within the limits of the scheduled area, the topsoil will be left in situ to protect the archaeological features beneath from damage by contractors vehicles.

The pipe trench itself has now been stripped of topsoil to a width of 3 ft and in consequence a part of the labour force engaged at Chalgrove has been transferred to this site in order to excavate the complex of features exposed. So far only Iron Age and Roman period pottery has been found.

Other sites along the Oxfordshire portion of the pipeline will be recorded as the contractors expose them.

THAME

A meeting has been arranged between John Seabrook of Lord Williams Grammar School, Gerald Southern of the Thame Archaeological & Historical Society and Richard Chambers of the Oxfordshire Archaeological Unit, to organise the winter's field walking activities in the area.

X40 (Oxford to Birmingham new road)

Trial pits continue to be dug along the proposed route of the X40. At present the contractors are working in the Otmoor region but as yet no archaeological material has been revealed.

OTHER NEWS

Publications

Martin Jones: Sampling in a Rescue Context: A Case Study in Oxfordshire; Sampling in Contemporary British Archaeology, Edited by J F Cherry, Clive Gamble and S Shennan (BAR British Series 50, 1978).

M A Robinson: A comparison between the effects of man on the environment of the first gravel terrace and floodplain of the Upper Thames Valley during the Iron Age and Roman periods.

A comment by David Miles on the Upper Thames Valley survey

It is now almost five years since the publication of the Upper Thames Valley survey (Benson & Miles 1974) by the embryo Oxfordshire Archaeological Unit. The aims of the survey were fairly precise:

1. To map almost 50 years accumulation of aerial photographs residing inaccessibly in various records.
2. To monitor current and future land use which would affect archaeological sites.
3. To make recommendations for the direction that archaeological work should take.
4. To advise planners in order to conserve archaeological evidence and mitigate the effects of development and to create an awareness of the problems particularly among gravel quarrying firms.
5. To complete the publication within 6 months in view of the emergency facing archaeology on the gravel terraces of the Upper Thames Valley and the limited funds available for survey work.

Since 1974 the Oxfordshire Archaeological Unit has concentrated on building up a team consisting of field archaeologists, botanists, a zoologist, finds researchers, draughtspersons and an efficient administrative back-up. The broad problems demanding solution in a regional context make a team with wide expertise essential in order to sample the variety of potential evidence from pottery to beetles to plant remains. A team also minimises the idiosyncratic decision making of one person with limited interests.

In the past 2 years increasing attention has been paid to the selection of sites for excavation culminating in the production of research designs and the application of probabilistic sampling techniques. But as excavation becomes more sophisticated one area in particular remains neglected.

The Upper Thames Valley survey was seen by the authors at least as the first stage in a survey programme. The publication itself was limited in scope: it relied

solely on cropmarks, no fieldwork was carried out, medieval features such as ridge and furrow were not plotted and only noted in the gazetteer. Most important of all the survey was limited to the gravel terraces. Since 1974 archaeological surveys have come into fashion and gone out again. Surveys have been discredited because so many were ill-considered, aimless and expensive. All too often they were carried out by young, inexperienced archaeologists lacking guidance and working outside any institutional framework.

But just because the bathwater is murky does not mean we should chuck out the baby. If such empty phrases as 'it should be possible to record the minimum viable sample necessary for meaningful reconstruction of the past!' are to mean anything then we need a reanalysis of what we want from survey work.

In the Upper Thames Valley we still hear the cliché that the gravel terraces 'were favourable for settlement'. But do we know? Admittedly the gravel terraces are favourable for aerial photographers but what the settlement pattern is on the limestone uplands and in areas such as the Vale of the White Horse we do not know. Recent ad hoc work in two parishes on the Corallian Ridge and in the Vale suggests that both areas were densely settled at least from the Iron Age onwards.

The study of the Thames Valley is biased by the accessibility of cropmarks and by the concentration of excavation on the gravel terraces. If our work is to have any useful context a rigorous programme of field survey in the valley as a whole, including the higher ground, is essential.

CALENDAR

Oxford University Archaeological Society Meetings

Wednesday 18 October: Introductory Meeting at 8.15 pm in the Morley-Fletcher Room, Worcester College.

All other meetings are held in the Ashmolean Museum at 8.15 pm on Monday evenings. Admission by Card only. Membership cards are obtainable through G Lambrick at the Unit.

23 October: Prof D Oates - Recent Excavations in Northern Mesopotamia

30 October: Stanley Chapman - The Arkwright Mills: Revolution or Evolution

6 November: Malcolm Norris - Who Made the Brasses?

13 November: Dr Tim Champion - The Origins of Iron-Working in Prehistoric Europe

20 November: Dr Roger Ling - Wall-painting in Roman Britain

27 November: Prof A M Snodgrass - The Heroic Age-birth of an idea

4 December: The President - Sybaris - from fiction to faction

Oxfordshire Architectural and Historical Society

Lectures in the Ashmolean Museum at 8.15 p.m.

Wednesday 18 October: 'The buildings of Norwich - the results of recent investigations', by Mr A Carter MA FSA, Director, Norwich Survey.

Wednesday 6 December: 'The Tradescants and the Ashmolean Museum', by Mr Martin Welch MA, the British Museum.

Oxford University Department for External Studies

Weekend and Day Schools

20-22 October: Medieval Parks and Forests
Weekend school to be held at Easthampstead Park, Wokingham

21-22 October: Certificate Weekend I - Environmental Archaeology
(closed course)

27-29 October: Coins and the Origins of Currency in Northern Europe
Weekend conference in association with the Institute of Archaeology

16-17 November: Environmental Archaeology
(DoE closed course)

24-26 November: Medieval Field Systems
(closed seminar)

Further details of these courses are available from the Course Secretary, Oxford University Department for External Studies, Rewley House, 3-7 Wellington Square, Oxford OX1 2JA

The Oxfordshire Archaeological Unit are holding an Open Day of a Medieval moated manor house at Chalgrove on Sunday, 19 November 1978 from 11 am to 4.30 pm. admission is 20 p for adults and 10 p for children and parking is available on the south side of Chalgrove High Street.

OBITUARY

It is with deep regret that we report the death of Bill Fowler. Bill was a tower of strength for local archaeology through his work with CBA Group IX, his membership of the Oxfordshire Archaeological Committee and that Committee's South Oxfordshire Advisory Committee as well as his own Watlington Group. The Unit sends its condolences to Bill's family.