
* SOUTH OXFORDSHIRE *
* ARCHAEOLOGICAL GROUP *

Bulletin no.24

May 1974

President: Mrs. C.A. Graham-Kerr, The Thatched Cottage, Whitchurch Hill. (Pangbourne 2901)
Hon. Sec.: Mrs. C. Perdue, Tall Beeches, Hardwick Rd., Whitchurch (Pangbourne 2009)
Field Director: Mr. C.R. Hart, 2 Goddard Close, Shinfield, Reading (Reading 882454)

Immediately forthcoming happenings

Sun. 12 May A double fixture for enthusiasts - meet at 11 am. at Checkendon SU665830 for a field survey with Clive Hart, and then those who wish may go to Oxford, Rewley House, for the meeting, to be addressed by Professor Charles Thomas, at which it is hoped to launch the Oxfordshire Survey. This meeting begins at 2.30.

** Sun. 19 May ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING at Tall Beeches, Hardwick Road, Whitchurch, **
** by kind invitation of Mr. and Mrs. R. Perdue. Please bring drinking mugs, some cakes and some folding chairs. **

3 p.m. Business meeting, followed by tea and social interval.

4.30/5 p.m. Dr. J.N. Fletcher, who is a leading authority on vernacular architecture, will speak on "Cruck Houses of the Region"

PLEASE COME TO THIS MEETING - AND URGE OTHER MEMBERS TO DO LIKEWISE

REPORTS

Two monthly meetings have been held, on 22 Mar. at Goring, when we enjoyed the hospitality of our Treasurer and Mrs. French, and on 26 April at Langtree, when the heating failed to provide much comfort. At the former, member Peter Summers fascinated and informed us, with slide illustrations, on some aspects of Heraldry, with particular reference to those later manifestations, hatchments. At the latter, member Gareth Thomas astonished us with the variety of his slides. Beginning in Wessex, we then saw the progress of the Grims Ditch, fieldwork in various places, glimpses of Domesday geography, and various features of medieval and early modern Reading, including the tile floors of Reading Abbey.

The reports which follow record members studying on their home ground, and visiting afield. It must also be noted that no fewer than a baker's dozen attended the CBA9 Report Conference at Oxford on 30/31 March, and the Group was again represented at the social occasion for visiting Dutch archaeologists at Oxford on 18 April. Clive Hart was one of the contributors to the former, and took a large part in entertaining the latter guests. In more "down to earth" activities some members helped on the Grims Ditch excavation, while the President and two spent one Sunday helping on the medieval site at Hanwell, just N. of Banbury.

Course on Post-Roman Archaeology at Langtree F.M. Centre

This ended on 4 April after 8 interesting and informative lectures, by Mr. Rodwell, of the Oxford Institute of Archaeology. These were well attended by 20+ people, both from S.O.A.G. and outside. Because of the great interest, the WEA has decided to extend the course and to continue in September. The next series of lectures will begin with the post-Saxon period and extend through the Medieval period, including the archaeology of churches. If Mr. Rodwell is not available owing to other commitments, he assured us that a suitable replacement would be found.

Mr. Rodwell treated us to a most interesting course - he invited class participation and got it - and held everyone's interest at all times. The whole class hopes that he will be able to continue in September.

J.C.P.

Local History Group

Peter Trout has formed a local history working group which meets at Langtree on Friday afternoons, when we try to disentangle Woodcote's complex past. This has been running for some time - we would welcome more members - and consists of about half a dozen members of S.O.A.G. Because of this, and because the work is complementary to our fieldwork, we thought we might as well be a group under the SOAG umbrella. This provides an opportunity for those who would like to take part in field walks but are unable.

We have visited the Record Office at Oxford and traced the 1853 Enclosure Award map. We have a copy of the 1818 Christchurch map, and copies of many other relevant documents. Peter has access to material otherwise difficult to obtain, and we have also found and questioned Old Inhabitants. Jo Stewart has done a great deal of visiting, including one old lady who knows about sawpits!

We should be grateful to Peter Trout for the vast amount of work which he has put into this in his own time, and may I thank him from us all, and urge that other members will come and support this essential "backroom" part of our main work of survey.

C.A.G-K

REPORTS(contd)

The Exploitation of River Gravels, Past, Present and Future

The principal aim of this conference, attended by 119 people at Oxford, was to promote "The Upper Thames Valley: an archaeological survey of the river gravels", by Don Benson & David Miles, with C. Balkwell & N. Clayton (£2.50 from the OX. Arch. Unit, 3-5 Luther Terrace, Oxford OX11RJ) The authors have plotted all crop marks shown on air photographs between Lechlade and Goring: they point out the lack of coordination in recent work, the need for research and better legislation, leading to the graded preservation of elements in the ancient landscape.

The secondary purpose of the conference was to show what nice people Aney Road Stone Corporation Ltd (a member of the Gold Field Group) really are. They give every facility for excavations, freely lending equipment and paying the salaries of two professional archaeologists to work on the Oxford gravels.

The conference claimed to be serving all interested in the gravels, but of the non-archaeological speakers only Dr. Bruce Campbell of Radio's "The Living World" really fulfilled his brief.

John Hampton showed that crop marks do not show all the features all the time - much depends on a succession of observations, land use, climate and subsoil. Even where a large number of photographs are plotted, many features can only be located by large scale excavations, not as at Dorchester by digging only features shown in photographs. One or two Mucking (Essex) type excavations of whole "ancient landscapes" are needed to allow the interpretation of salvage operation results or photographs of areas totally destroyed. It is hoped that an area in undeveloped W. Oxfordshire may be preserved.

Very little environmental work has been done on the gravels, but it appears to have carried a mixed oak forest on a deep red soil before Man interfered; during the Late Neolithic and Middle Bronze Ages there seem to have been dust storm phases depositing a stoneless snailless soil. This was seen at the Devil's Quoits, Stanton Harcourt, a site similar to Avebury both in original appearance and medieval destruction, which it may be possible to preserve as an island in a gravel pit lake.

Maybe the conference could inspire someone with a spare year to continue the survey eastward round the bend in the Thames!

G.K.T.

The Welsh Folk Museum, St. Fagans, nr. Cardiff.

Two members recently visited this, which consists of the old house and gardens, and 80 acres of parkland in which buildings which would otherwise have been destroyed have been re-erected. There are several farmhouses, a cottage, a tollgate house, a cockpit, a tannery, a chapel, a forge and a woollen mill worked by water power. All have been sited, with appropriate immediate surroundings, in as nearly similar locations as possible to their original situations. Each is furnished with items from many parts of Wales - and there is a Welsh speaking guide.

Of the original medieval St. Fagans castle only the 13C curtain wall survives. The present building was put up between 1560 and 1580 within this site and extensively repaired in the 19C. It is a pleasant gabled house, whitewashed as was the Glamorgan custom, and stands above some lovely terraces and fishponds. It contains a valuable and interesting collection of items from many parts of Wales.

As well as the house, there is a museum and craft exhibits. On weekdays a wood turner and cooper can be seen working, and in the Summer the woollen mill is in operation, with hand weavers making blankets from wool spun in the mill. There is at St. Fagans more than can be covered in one visit.

M.P.F.

Romano-Celtic Temple Architecture.

Dr. D.R. Wilson, of Cambridge University, gave a paper on this subject to the British Arch. Assoc. in London on 27 March, which was attended by at least one of our members.

The Celtic temple was initially square, with an ambulatory, the outer boundary of the enclosure defined now by a series of post holes. It is not known what materials were used either for the boundary or for the interior wall coverings. By reference to examples in France and Germany the influence of Rome was shown to consist of a change of form from square to rectangular and, following this, some decoration in the form of two pillars at the entrance, and the building of inner walls to form chambers in the sanctuary itself. Lastly an apse appears in the wall behind the sanctuary. The opening to the Keller, or inner sanctuary, was usually on the S. or E. side of the temple, both in Celtic and Roman examples. At no time did the plan show any affinity with the Basilica type.

In discussion it was said that there was no evidence for the roof being tiled, and it was suggested that it was possibly of wood, and was replaced every twelve months.

W.A.G-K

BOOKS

Projected series on the regional archaeology of Roman Britain (Duckworth)
The first of these, the Regni, by Barry Cunliffe (£1.60 paperback) should be of interest since the cantonal capital was at Chichester and, to quote the review in Current Archaeology no.41 p.182, the area is "Cunliffe home territory, where as an undergraduate he began excavating both Fishbourne and Portchester"

Keith Branigan, Town and Country: Verulamium and the Roman Chilterns (Spurbooks £2.95)
It is clear from the map of the Roman Chilterns, rather confusedly showing modern roads but not Roman, why our S. Oxfordshire area has few Roman sites. Roman influence from Verulamium ^{is not} ~~is~~ S.W. along the N.W. and S.E. edges of the Chilterns. The nearest sites on the former/are at Bledlow and Saunderton, on the latter at Hambleton, Harpsden and Mapledurham, where settlement had reached the Thames and was following the valley. Other sites away from the river may be discovered, but it looks as if the wooded uplands of our area were not penetrated. There was no Roman road across, even that from Verulamium to Silchester was late.

(A copy of this book will be available in the Group library) WJF

Those who know C.W. Ceram's "Gods, Graves and Scholars", and others will enjoy L. Duell's Flights into Yesterday (Penguin 80p.) For a review v. Current Arch. no.41 p.184 WJF

English Landscapes. How to read the man-made scenery of England (BBC 75p.) This, in the best sense, is the book of the film shown on TV in 1972 and Dec. 1973. It "summarises a lifetime's work in local history. It should be read and inwardly digested by all interested in the development of the landscape" GKT

Excavations in W. Kent 1960-70 Brian Philp (Kent Arch. Rescue Unit, CIB HQ Dover Castle, Kent. £5 for 242 pp. 21 plates, 61 figs.)

This shows what can be done by a large group of 300+ with a work centre and small grants, and should stand as a moral to groups which claim that they have not time to publish. GKT

Man made the Land 16 essays in English historical geography, edit. A.R.H. Baker & J.B. Harley. (David and Charles £5.25)

This is poor value for money, probably due to the lavish scale of illustrations. Some such as St. Joseph's of cropmarks at N. Stoke, Oxon (fig. 18) are useful, but the book is best used as a picture book to the more solid "Historical Geography of England. before 1800" edit. H.C. Darby, reprinted 1972 from the original edition of 1936. GKT

ENVOI

This bulletin, the last to be produced by the present Editor, offers comparisons with the first, no. 13, which reflect a widening of interests and activities in the Group which is all to the good. Then we reported the AGM on 9 May 1971 when, significantly in view of what has happened since, Mick Aston preached the gospel of fieldwork and survey, and in the Bulletin Clive Hart was able to report that "a beginning was made (with fieldwork) on 12 May when Beech Wood, Whitchurch Hill was visited". But other members seem mainly to have been concerned with excavations at Berins Hill and Lilley Farm although some had been to the CBA Report Conference. Berins Hill led nowhere, and Lilley Farm, ~~all the work~~ has proved frustrating: it will be finished this season. This bulletin shows a different ~~story~~ but one springing from what was noted three years ago.

Another most pleasing feature is that the bulk of this number has been contributed by members, and painlessly without exhortation. It remains to wish good fortune to my successors and to hope that these twelve numbers have contributed something to the interests of the Group and to Archaeology generally. WJF

Postscript

From the Oxfordshire Archaeological Unit Newsletter no. 3 (published monthly and received by the Group)

Abingdon Ashville Trading Estate. Members of the Abingdon Arch. Soc., assisted by the Wallingford Soc., have continued to trench the site, finding I.A. and Roman ditches. Volunteers for week-end work are still required and they should contact John Carter at Abingdon 1102.