
SOUTH OXFORDSHIRE
ARCHAEOLOGICAL GROUP

Bulletin No. 25

September 1974

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During the summer months, S.O.A.G. members have assisted in rescue excavations.

On the Abingdon site, a large circular ditch, of Iron Age date, was uncovered; also shallow pits, probably storage pits, and a stone-lined Roman well, with seeds preserved at a high level.

At Dorchester, more recently, prior to gravel extraction, a rich Anglo-Saxon cemetery was uncovered.

Field work has continued along the proposed route of the Reading-Henley road. An aerial survey revealed a possible causewayed enclosure on Span Hill, a ring ditch to the east of the Flowing Spring Public House, and two further ring ditches to the south of the White Hart Public House at Shiplake.

The Oxford Archaeological Unit cut two trenches over the (causewayed?) crop mark, with negative results.

Our Field Director was asked by the Oxford Unit to investigate the partial destruction of the mound on the "Mount" at Bix. With the assistance of S.O.A.G. and the Berkshire Field Group, a section was cleaned and drawn. We concluded, from the composition of the mound, that it was a landscape feature of fairly recent times.

The Oxford Archaeological Unit works in conjunction with amateur groups. Assistance in rescue operations is often required. If you have not already contacted our liaison officer, Mrs. Pat Woodford, Tel. Goring 2107, and are willing to help, please do so now.

REPORTS

Wittenham Clumps 21 - 6 - 74

At 7.30 p.m. a party of 12 members of S.O.A.G, under the leadership of Clive Hart, assembled in the car park below the clumps. The party then walked up into the hill fort, via the southern entrance. The fort is a univallate structure, dated to the end of the Iron Age, and is likely to have been used as a defensive enclosure, able to withstand a local attack, but not a long siege. On the Northern side the ground falls away very steeply from the rampart and ditch towards the River Thames.

The party passed out by the N.E. corner of the fort, took the footpath down the hill to Little Wittenham Church, crossed the river to the area of land bounded on the W. and S. by the bend of the Thames and on the E. by the River Thame, and cut across by the earthworks known as Dyke Hills. These are believed to have been constructed in the late Iron Age to form a defended town. The Dyke Hills are best preserved on the E. side, near to the River Thame. Those to the W. have been ploughed out and otherwise levelled during past centuries. They consist of two large banks with a wide ditch in between which may have been filled with water. After some discussion the party dispersed.

D.F.

Gloucestershire 13-7-74

On Saturday, 13th July, we made a day trip to Gloucestershire, visiting Coln Rogers Saxon Church, Chedworth Roman Villa, Belas Knap Long Barrow, and Deerhurst Saxon Church.

The Church of St. Andrew, Coln Rogers, in the quiet valley of the

Coln, about six miles N.E. of Cirencester, has a well preserved late Anglo-Saxon nave and chancel. The most striking thing was the typical sloping sides to the arch of the porch; there were two scratch dials, and pilastering (strips of stonework like buttresses) on the outside walls. On the north side was a blocked door with a mixture of styles of decoration, and a tiny window cut in a single block of stone. Inside was a fine font, and another unusual arrangement - a fire-place and chimney!

We then proceeded to Chedworth Villa, with its fine mosaic pavements and hypocausts. There was an interesting assortment of finds in the little museum.

We stopped for lunch at Belas Knap. This is a long barrow with a funnel-shaped forecourt and an inner false entrance. To the side and rear lie burial chambers into which we were able to crawl.

After a long and beautiful drive through the Cotswold stone villages we arrived at Deerhurst and visited Odda's Chapel. This has a simple nave and square-ended chancel, divided by a solid chancel arch. Earl Odda was a kinsman and friend of Edward the Confessor. Odda died on August 31, 1056, shortly after the consecration of the chapel, erected in memory of his brother, Elfric.

C.G.-K.

Deerhurst Saxon Church 13-7-74

While at Deerhurst we had the good fortune to meet Dr. H.M. Taylor, the authority on Anglo-Saxon architecture, who was kind enough to give us a conducted tour of the church.

The Anglo-Saxon Priory church of St. Mary at Deerhurst, Gloucestershire (S0871299), is one of the major monuments of the early church in southern England.

Phase I The earliest visible church is of rectangular plan, without any adjoining parts. It is thought by some to be as early as the 7th century A.D. We shall very soon know! In the course of our visit we were able to handle some carbonised wood which was found in the putlog holes behind plaster, now being stripped off gradually from the interior, and revealing more of its history.

Phase II The next development of the church shows a western, two-story porticus added, and it is probable that the southern porticus of one story is contemporary. The sculpture, now in the porch, of the Virgin and Child probably belongs to this period (08).

Phase IIA A northern porticus is built to two stories, and the southern is heightened to the same level. The western two-story porch is raised to three stories, and has the splendid double triangular-headed windows with fluted square pillars cut through into the nave.

Phase IIB The east wall of the chancel was cut through for a round Apsidal extension. Only the footings survive today. The cylindrical 9th century font, ornamented with double trumpet, spiral and vine scroll might fit in here.

Phase III The church seems to have suffered from a fire, thought by some to show the troubled signs of the early 10th century. As a result of this, extensive restoration and rebuilding took place. The porch was raised further to form a tower, and further portici were added, extending N.W. and S.W. These were partially lit by small internal triangular windows, cut through the second storey of the original nave walls. The round apse was demolished to its footings, and a grander polygonal apse, complete with strip-work pilasters and string course, was constructed.

Not just content with a rebuild, the church is endowed with forcefully sculptured panels of angels. One remains in situ on the remaining wall of the apse, and a further one was found re-used in the tower roof in 1973. The polygonal apse was almost completely demolished in 1540.

Phase IV Around 1200 A.D. part of the N.W. wall of the church was rebuilt, as seen externally by the masonry and Norman-style base plinth. The S.W. portici walls were cut open, and arches inserted to form a clear arcade. The arches were supported on trumpet-scalloped capitals.

C.R. Hart.

General Meeting 30-8-74

A General Meeting was held at Langtree School on Friday, August 30. Mr. David Cowley, one of our members, spoke to the group on Cahals of the Midlands and Southern England. His excellent slides illustrated the many aspects of canal activity during its period as an important highway, and, more recently, as the haunt of the peace-seeking tourist.

Notes relating to chair bodging; collected by C.R. Hart for Oxford City and County Museum.

Stoke Row The Old Crooked Billet Public House

Silas William Saunders started work as a bodger at the age of 11 and continued until his death, Christmas 1960. He turned plain "church" and "windsor" legs and stretchers and occasionally the odd rolling-pin or bowl to order. According to his daughter (now resident in Poole) Silas employed upwards of 6 men in the 1930's.

On their side (or "pitch") in the woods ("thinnings") the bodgers worked in a "hovél". This structure was made from corrugated iron and sacking, infilled with shavings, with a piece of calico over the top to allow the light to reach the lathe. Bodgers worked for 12 hours or more each day. Youths were taken into apprenticeship until just prior to the Great War.

Stages of Production

1. Felling and carting - November to March when the sap was down in the tree.
2. Lengths split, then chopped with the grain on separate blocks; sawn into 18" lengths for windsors.
3. Trimmed with side axe, then shaped with draw knife held in a shaving horse.
4. Turned on the lathe.

Percy Stallwood of the Cherry Tree Public House, Stoke Row, claims to hold his father's collection of tools. "For every 4 gross legs, 3 gross stretchers; stretchers made nothing and were considered a nuisance. Mr. Stallwood's father employed a Mr. Carter who, prior to death, lived at 'The Grubbins', Newlands Lane. Mr. Carter started work at 6 a.m. He returned home for breakfast at 8 a.m. (20 minutes), then back to work till 6 p.m. Mr. Stallwood, the chair bodger, took the legs and stretchers by horse van to Meeting Bros. of West Street, High Wycombe, a distance of 20 miles each way, and a return journey of 12 hours. The journey from Stoke Row went over the hills via Nettlebed, Christmas Common and Stokenchurch. Two horses were used up to Nuffield, and thereafter a single horse. The return journey from Wycombe was through Henley and Rotherfield.

Massingham makes reference to a turners shed on the right of the Fox and Hounds Public House, Christmas Common. In June 1974 the present publican stated that he had found many legs scattered around the barn, but had since burned them.

The lathes and tools at the Crooked Billet were photographically recorded in August 1974 by the Oxford City and County Museum. It is interesting to note that many of the items are in the same positions as they were in 1956, when recorded by staff from Reading University Rural Life Museum.

References H.J. Massingham - The Chiltern Country
J. Geraint Jenkins - Traditional Country Craftsmen
Ivan G. Sparkes - The English Country Chair

The President's Definition of a S.O.A.G.

Soags may be found all over the southern area of Oxfordshire. One frequently spots them on field walks, along hedges and in woodland, with a scatter of sherds about them. They also occur on most rescue sites, usually in the crouch position, in a trench together with small metal implements and pottery. Some date back a considerable time, others are so small they are difficult to spot, but all show signs of great activity. They used to be rather scarce, but more and more are being discovered, often in unlikely places, and the whole group is co-ordinated and correlated at Langtree School.

C.G-K.

Further contributions please to A. Hart.

Calendar of Events.

Thursday, Oct 10th - S.O.A.G. Committee Meeting.

October 11th to 13th - Oxford Weekend Conference - Archaeology of Ancient Agriculture.

Sunday, 20th October - Oxfordshire Field Work Day, Churchill, Oxford.
Trevor Rowley

Friday, 25th October - Lecture, Langtree School, Woodcote, 7.30 p.m.
Crispin Paine - The New Oxford Museum.

Friday, 22nd November - Lecture, Langtree School, Woodcote, 7.30 p.m.
Richard Bradley - Excavations at Rams Hill 1972 - 73.

Tuesday, 10th December - S.O.A.G. Wine and Cheese Evening, The Oratory School, Woodcote. Please detach slip at bottom, and send to Mrs Fallowfield with remittance of 75p. if you wish to attend.

January 3rd to 5th - Oxford Weekend Conference. The Small Towns of Roman Britain.

March 1st, 2nd - C.B.A. Region 9. Local Archaeology Weekend.

I wish to attend the Wine and Cheese Evening on 10th December.
I enclose 75p per person.

Names: