
* SOUTH OXFORDSHIRE *
* ARCHAEOLOGICAL GROUP *

Bulletin No 34

September 1978

WANTED

Volunteer(s) with car to visit Woodstock with Cynthia, to check the information on Clive's maps and general sort-out for Oxfordshire Survey.

Editorial

You will all be wondering why there has not been a Bulletin out earlier this year. The answer is simple, my appeal for help went entirely unheeded. Our original Editor, Gareth was away working in Northamptonshire and was quite unable to do his usual vast amount of work on the Bulletin so it was left to the unfortunate President to pick up the pieces, and the tireless Heather to do all the typing, and to try and get it put together between them.

So, fellow Soags, more Bulletins- more help please. We need, firstly, contributions - or anything however faintly Archaeological, including holidays.

- Then a) A business mind or two to organise the work.
b) Editing and sorting contributions.
c) Printing - a different method?
d) Putting it together, 3 or 4 people for about half an hour, compiling and stapling.
e) Deliveries organised.

The Bulletin is to keep us all together so the more we can issue, the closer the Soag family will be in touch with each other and our Archaeological news.

2.

Notes and Notices

Most Soag's will by now have received their new Membership Card. This is a new institution that has met with much approval and we hope next year to be able to issue the cards at the AGM, - in exchange for the annual subscription - then one will know one has paid and be up to date with Soag affairs.

Attendances are creeping up, with this years' exciting and varied programme we hope for even better response - your Committee has really gone to town with visits to Butser and a journey by narrow boat.

Bernards' Records Group has also proved successful and we hope by the time this is published to have survey groups in operation for Oxfordshire survey work. If everyone will do their little bit we shall soon collect information and learn all sorts of surprising and interesting bits about our locality. This all makes daily dog walking and travelling from A to B more interesting.

Annual General Meeting 1978

The 10th AGM was held at Langtree on March 12th. Twenty Soags attended. They heard an interesting talk from Mr. Paul Woodfield on his work as Conservation Officer for Milton Keynes.

New Members

Since the 1977 AGM the following new members have been welcomed: Dr. Marshall Barr, Ernest and Ruth Just, Timothy Stevens, Allan Duggins, Charles and Helen Nankivell, Bell, Ulle and Jeanette Rankin, Rita Good, Roy Snelling, Mary Kent, Charles and Mrs. Phillips, Gabrielle Fitzgeorge-Parker, Elaine and Philip Degg, Lady Simeon and Sue Wright. We hope you will have happy and interesting days in the SOAG family.

Chalgrove - the Oxfordshire Unit's Current Dig

This extremely interesting C13 medieval moated manor house offers excavation work to any interested Soags during the week until the end of September.

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Philip Page is one of those excellent Directors who really allow one to participate and understand what is happening around the site in relation to one's own little hole. I have, personally, learnt a great deal as the Unit is not only as friendly as ever, but finds time and patience to teach those who wish to acquire new skills in digging and drawing and all the attendant jobs which arise on a big dig. The site itself is varied and interesting with plenty of goodies and pottery to be found. We hope to see more Soags taking this unusual opportunity of a dig within easy reach and PLEASE REPORT your attendance to the President for the Logbook records. This is absolutely vital.

C.G.K.

Excavations 1977-8

Silchester

In September and October 1977 Dr. Mike Fulford excavated the South West corner of the Basilica at Silchester with the help of Reading University Students and local volunteers. The building had been badly damaged by ploughing which has now been stopped. A deep trench revealed Iron Age ditches and gullies below the Roman levels. Amid a blaze of TV, radio and press publicity a plan was announced to sell the town in 800 small plots. One third of the purchase price would be used to finance archaeological work, but even if all the plots were sold only short summer seasons would be possible, not the full time team such a project demands. There was a small University training dig in May this year, but none of the plots have been sold.

The main Oxfordshire Unit dig in 1977 was at Hardwick in the West of the County. The site had not been ploughed so Iron Age hut floors survived. The dig was finished this year as a training school for Certificate Students. Mounts Farm, Berrinsfield (Upper Thames Survey Map 38) was due to be run as a training school for local groups last summer, but D.O.E. funds were not forthcoming. From September an area of about two acres were excavated by a Job Creation team without local help. They revealed a complex of ditches and burials missed by Myreas digging before the war.

4.

The main effort in Berkshire is Pingwood (Middle Thames Survey Map 11). Hoveringham Gravels have given £18,000 for this dig to the Berkshire Archaeological Committee. Originally it was planned to employ a team of twenty full time with local helpers as weekends. In October and November three ex-students followed the Scraper, plotting features and collecting material. It was decided to start formal excavations on 27th November. Several SOAG and RUAS volunteers came to help. Some Roman features were excavated before heavy gullies were cut, but geological drilling confirmed that the water rose out of the gravel rather than falling from the sky. On 16th January the Committee decided to abandon the western half of the site. The Manpower Services Commission has given a grant of £21,359 for twelve unemployed to work until December. There are still six places vacant. Volunteers are also wanted on weekdays at D.O.E rates.

Work resumed in April, the area available expanding as Hoveringhams stripped further areas of top soil and dug a soakaway. A complex of trackways and field boundaries has been uncovered together with a flintlined well, a cremation and pits of uncertain use. Three cwts of pottery mostly Roman 1st-4th centuries AD has been found together with some timber, but it is uncertain if this yet proves continuous habitation.

Julian Richards who's survey of the Berkshire Downs is in the press is planning a long term programme of excavations and fieldwork as a follow up to his survey. He plans to dig at Streatley Warren, and on plough damaged barrows near Lambourne. Please ring Reading 595751 for details. No experience necessary DOE rates available for those who can work full time.

G.T.

The Mapledurham Parish Survey

During the winter we have been researching as much documentation as possible and have consulted Parish papers at the Bodleian and also taken notes from a book and a thesis written about Mapledurham. These last were researched when the Mapledurham papers were in the

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Bodleian.

In the last year we have concentrated mainly on the fields of the estate. We have field walked them and studied the documentation and compared the field names over a long period. We now know quite a number of the medieval names and have found where these fields were. We have worked from a Tithe award map from the Parish Chest of 1841 and know the names of that period. Various names remained the same from an early period, such names as Ham field, Hemfield, Pages and Drovers etc., being the same from the 13th century onwards. To quote an example a collection of fields called Page's round, square, upper and lower etc., date from 1270 when a William Page owned 1 Virgate of land in that area. Incidentally on the O S map there is a piece of woodland in this area known as Page's Shaw. Various other instances of names surviving through 5 or 6 centuries have come to light. In the next week we are hoping to get the modern field names from the farm manager of the estate and do further comparisons.

Another task we have set ourselves and have started is the tracing of the various woodland banks. The woods appear mostly to be old in that dogs mercury and bluebells abound and certainly the boundaries of some do not appear to have changed since the estates have been in existence. Bandolf's wood (modern name) takes its name from the fact that it was the dowry of one Amice Bandolf in 1381. Green Dean wood which still exists is mentioned in the same document.

There is still a great deal to be done including writing up cards etc., and recording some of the buildings but we soldier on -

On April 22nd twelve SOAG's toured part of the Parish including the deserted village of Noke End abandoned this century.

6.

Butser Iron Age Farm

Between Petersfield and Horndean, Hants., lies Butser Hill and on this cold hilltop Peter Reynolds has re-created the elements of a farm in the Iron Age. Information from numerous sites has enabled the archaeologists to reproduce an Iron Age hut of timber and thatch, 42 feet in diameter, containing household goods such as a loom, pottery, cow hides, a quern, a fireplace with firedogs and most exciting a cone shaped clay oven in which they cook excellent cakes and other foods - this also acts as central heating for the hut!

Outside are different kilns and an R b smelting furnace, hay stacks and a hut for the goat. Dexter cows (the nearest to Iron Age cows), highland cattle, Soay sheep and game cock chickens live around about, and some acreage is given to growing emmer and spelt wheats, chuckwheat, woad, poppies and cornflower etc. There is also a special weather station.

Peter Reynolds, Director, took us all round the site himself and explained everything. In conversation we discovered two things: that at one point he was working for no salary; and that he would welcome wild cornflower and other seeds (list to come).

This is a truly Archaeological project and I worked out that if every SOAG (this means each of you!) gave 4p a year we could become "Friends of Butser" and be able to go to the special open days and receive an annual news letter as well as having the satisfaction of doing our bit for archaeology. Dare we ask you for 4p SOAGs?

The second project is to point out that Oxon is favoured by still growing wild cornflowers so please could SOAGs carefully save some seed when they see it (not all - we must keep our flowers going) and also the other seeds, when we have the lists? The contribution to be a Friend of Butser is £2.50 a year, at least; so anything more will be most welcome to Peter, who gave us freely of his time and knowledge, and provided us with a truly archaeological day - his open air lectures on farming and the smell of those delicious Iron Age cakes will long remain with me.

7.

P.S. A pity so many of you were unable to come: Twenty-eight families were telephoned and NONE had arranged to come - most disappointing for the organizer - Ed.

Kennet & Avon Canal Boat Trip

On Sunday, July 9th, the SOAG's twenty-five strong, took to the water, not, however, in pursuance of marine archaeology but for a boat trip on the Kennet & Avon Canal.

There were, no doubt, some misgivings during the previous week, as the weather was consistently dull, depressing, and chilly, but Sunday, to everyone's relief and delight turned out to be ideal boating weather, warm and sunny. The river in sunlight is one thing, the river in rain quite another story, as the author of Three Men in a Boat made clear in the final chapter of that Thames classic. Happily we were spared the discomforts of J -, George and Harris, (to say nothing of the dog!) As a matter of fact we were accompanied by what was presumably the "Ship's dog", an altogether more sedate animal than Montmorency, fortunately.

The trip took 1½ hours each way, passing through four locks and affording us views of countryside still unspoilt by motor-ways, housing developments and factories. In fact, it was quite an experience to pass through scenery so near to all those things and yet seeming still as quiet, remote and serene as the landscape of the age when the canal was built.

The boat itself was blessed - I feel sure that's the right word - with a small but well-stocked bar, providing pretty well everything from tea to whisky, which apparently can gaily ladle out alcoholic drinks at any time provided it's away from the bank, (an interesting sidelight on the licensing laws). I forgot to ask whether the Captain can also marry people between locks!

On the return journey some of the more energetic passengers, - all SOAG members of course - left the boat and trotted briskly along the tow-path to the next lock in a determined effort to shame those of us lounging happily with our third (or fourth etc.) glasses of beer. They

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were magnificent, they nearly got there before the boat, and those watching from the vicinity of the bar were pleased to see how fit some, at least, of our archaeologists are when put to the test.

I feel sure that I echo everyone's feelings in saying that the trip was an unqualified success in every way, and that our Secretary, Mrs. Marion Fallowfield, who organised it, deserves our congratulations for having arranged such a pleasant afternoon's entertainment.

C.N.

Medieval Sculpture

"The Sculpture of Reading Abbey" was the title of a lecture given at Henley Town Hall by Eric Stanford on 8th February. Mr. Stanford with the aid of slides explained that he did not intend to talk about the Abbey's inner gate, a Victorian gothic reconstruction, nor about the remaining walls, really only the rubble fillings; all must be familiar to local residents. His talk would be about a small number of carved stones known to come from the Abbey that had been found at Shiplake and in various other places. These highly decorated stones were all capitals from the columns forming the cloisters.

The carvings were important because Reading Abbey was a royal foundation of 1121, the sixth largest and richest Abbey in England and the cloisters were built in about 1130. The shattering effect of the Norman invasion of 1066 was starting to wear off at the beginning of the 12th century and the masonry showed a resurgence of the Anglo-Saxon style. Since Reading Abbey was founded by Henry I, the best available architects would have been used and the Anglo-Saxon influences did not arise because Reading was a backwater.

Mr. Stanford as an art historian at Reading Museum left us to make up our own minds about the beauty of the carvings and concentrated on the historic influences at work on the masons. All the capitals except one he described were different and told a story which progressed round the stone. Even the stone that had the same pattern all over was thought to have been based on oriental silk and if the four sides had been "opened out"

a fabric pattern would be seen.

One of the capitals showed the influence of illuminated manuscripts with a lion mask in the centre of the pattern and with lions facing each other aside. The association was made with the great Abbey at Cluny not only because Henry I ruled part of South West France but also because the first Abbot at Reading came from the Abbey at Lewes which was under cluniac influence.

Another, enigmatic, capital, showing two figures with wings sprouting from their halos, was shown via a carving in Payerne, Switzerland, and Godwin's ivory seal to be a portrayal of the Trinity. This was a particularly attractive, if somewhat weathered, carving which cleverly overcame the difficulty of showing figures seated when the stone face was at an angle that would have tipped normal people out of their chairs. It held another interest for the pattern on the abacus recalled a mosaic at Silchester and Silchester was known as a contemporary document seeks, but fails, to deduce its Roman name.

Mr. Stanford, from this and other continental examples, was able to demonstrate that the romanesque style was aptly named; all the major sites of high romanesque were close to the remains of Roman towns.

A capital which to me seemed different in style to the others, but which was securely dated to about 1130 depicted the coronation and assumption of the Virgin. For Christian iconographers this is important as it predates all similar continental carvings of the same subject and reinforces the importance of Abbot Hugh who in the early 12th century took a leading part in placing festivals of the Virgin in the Christian calendar.

Finally a capital from Avebury, but securely connected to Reading, displays what was initially thought to be St. George thrusting something down the throat of a mystical dragon. Research, involving a veterinary surgeon, indicated that the device was based on a Norse saga where the only way to kill a mystical wolf was to disembowel it by pulling at the tongue.

10.

Mr. Stanford told us in conclusion that only about 16 of a possible (so the archaeologists said) 130 capitals were known and some of these could be seen in Reading Museum. He lamented the lack of art historical knowledge of or interest in the 12th century, something that might be overcome if more of the Reading Abbey stones were found.

The C.B.A. Annual Report

The 8th annual meeting was attended by about fifty people, including six SOAGs - fewer than in previous years.

The eighteen speakers were divided into four sessions, one dealing with each county within the group's area.

Mike Farley described his gas pipe survey in Buckinghamshire which resulted in the discovery of a Welyn type Belgic burial.

Tom Hassall described geophysical and top soil sampling techniques developed at Mountsfarm near Berinsfield and stressed the need for co-operation between the Unit and part time groups.

There were also inconclusive discussions about future policy for excavation and field work within the region.

North Oxfordshire

On 17th September a SOAG trip was planned to the North of the County. Unfortunately due to uncertainty over the meeting place various people went their own ways. We visited the lovely ruins of Minster Lovell Hall with its dovecote and 14th Century church. At North Leigh J.J. West is still digging and conserving a large Roman villa. The D.O.E. published a guide map in 1975. At Woodstock we saw the new archaeology display in the City and County Museum, the display includes a reconstructed burial chamber with the bones of a man killed by a flint arrow. There are many long labels which are difficult to read due to the small print. Some of the party visited local churches including Stanton Harcourt.

11.

The Oxfordshire Local History Conference

The Conference was held on Guy Fawkes day, Tom Hassall described the work of the Unit. There were then short talks by many groups and individuals, including an interesting and audio-visual presentation by the Blewbury Historical Society featuring many "then and now" photos of local buildings.

Conserving the Historic City - A case study of Oxford

This Conference, to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of the Oxford Preservation Trust, held on 12th to 14th December, was mainly attended by professional Planning Officers. There was a lecture by Tom Hassall who led a guided walk round the City. Ian Heggie of the Friends of Old Heddington showed us his converted barn home and other aspects of the Village before lecturing on the work on an amenity society. The highlight of the Conference was Sir Colin (Traffic Towns) Buchanan on "Living with the Motor Car".

Wallingford

The Wallingford Historical and Archaeological Society has been very active in 1977. Early in the year they published a walk round guide to the town at 50p. During the early summer they excavated a small plot behind the market place revealing medieval rubbish pits beneath a high build-up of garden soil.

On Jubilee day the outer bailey of the Castle was open to the public for the first time. Landscaping and the fencing off of Sir John Hedge's house was completed by May 21st this year in time for a grand permanent opening ceremony. The full story of the saving of this site is given in Planning and the Historic Environment 2. For a week in June the Town Hall housed the Royal Wallingford Exhibition. There were models of the Castle and of the town in the 16th Century, and also a continuous automatic slide show. Many visitors signed a petition asking for a permanent museum in the town.

12.

In October "the Book of Wallingford" was published by Barracuda Books compiled by Judy and Stewart Dewey. There are 148 well illustrated pages between hard covers but at £8.75 sales will probably be slow, surely a cheaper paperback would better publicise the history of the town.

Abingdon

In June the Abingdon Archaeological Society held an exhibition in the Abbey buildings. There were many air photographs, finds from Berinsfield, Barton Court, Ashville, Thrupp and Corporation Farm and a model of the Abbey. The Society was working on a small dig near St. Helens Church. The exhibition coincided with the Air Show and it was possible to photograph the Barton Court dig from a pleasure flight.

Ufton Nervet

SOAG's visited this village twice in 1977. In June we looked at a moated site and Grims Bank perhaps an outer defence of Silchester. We also saw the sites of two demolished churches at Sulhampstead Bannister Upper End. In October we returned to visit Ufton Court, a sprawling mansion now used by Berkshire County Council as a residential centre for school children. It was built in the 1450's and extended in 1576. We were shown priest holes where the Catholic Perkins family hid Jesuits. We also saw wall paintings in an Oratory and the Nanny's room, but heavy rain prevented us seeing the gardens and fish ponds.

The History of Reading Society

This Society was formed at an inaugural meeting on 3rd February 1978. About fifty people joined including several SOAG's. The subscription is £2 for individuals and £3 for families. It is planned to hold meetings on different evenings to allow members with commitments to go to some.

13.

Anglo Saxon Archaeology

This day school was held at the new Aylesbury Civic Centre on 14th January 1978. Several SOAG's attended among a crowd of perhaps 200 in a room with poor acoustics. Mike Farley spoke on Early Settlement and Cemeteries, Trevor Rowley on Village Development, Tom Hassall on Towns and Arnold Baines on Charters. The main attraction was Dr. R. Bruce Mitford of the British Museum on "Sutton Hoo with reference to the Taplow Burrow". He spoke for 1½ hours with slides comparing the two richest burials in Britain. When Sutton Hoo Studies are completed the team will move on to the long awaited full publication of the Taplow Finds. The lunch break allowed a visit to the Buckinghamshire County Museum with its new display of Rural Bygones.

G.T.

Middleton Stoney Excavations 1970-77

By Trevor Rowley 16 pages for 50p. describes the 8 year research programme in which many SOAG's have participated. Finds from the Bronze Age, Iron Age, Roman, Anglo-Saxon and Medieval periods were made. An early Roman farm building was found in the courtyard. The tree covered mound turned out to be the stump of a square stone keep. It is a pity funds are not available to uncover and preserve the ruins.

Archaeological Excavations 1976

Published by H.M.S.O. £3.00 for 194 pages and 4 plates it is to be the last in a series of annual reports produced since 1961. It describes the work of the D.O.E's Central Unit and lists grants for excavations to 77 bodies including 26 Committees and Units, 23 Museums or local Councils, 13 Societies, 5 Universities, 4 Trusts and 4 Development Corporations. 112 bodies received grants for post excavation work and publication. There are brief descriptions of all excavations and watching briefs financed by the D.O.E. It is unfortunate that comparable information will no longer be available.

14.

Butser Publications

All SOAG's will have heard of and many will have visited the Ancient Farm Project at Butser on the A3 South of Petersfield. In 1977 the Project Director, Peter Reynolds, published 3 works of interest:

"Farming in the Iron Age" published by Cambridge University Press at £1.10 for 48 illustrated pages and a colour cover, is perhaps aimed mainly at school children.

"Butser Ancient Farm Project Information Pack" sold on site at £1.10 includes about 20 information sheets describing features of the demonstration area including reconstructed ovens and cropping plans, and a series of postcards.

Slides and seed samples are also sold at the site. Peter Reynolds also contributed an article to John Collis's "The Iron Age in Britain - a Review" published by Sheffield University at £2.50 including postage for 66 illustrated pages. For those unable to visit Butser the Thames TV Series "Warrior Queen" has given a general idea of its appearance. Peter Reynolds was historical advisor for the series.

Archaeology and Agriculture by George Lambrick, jointly published by the C.B.A. and the Oxfordshire Unit at £1.69 for 46 illustrated pages is a catalogue of the sodbusters, chisel ploughs and other destructive instruments of modern agriculture.