

Bulletin

SOAG



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Articles, accompanied by illustrations if appropriate, and book reviews are invited for publication in the next issue of the *SOAG Bulletin*. Authors are referred to the *Notes for Contributors* inside the back cover.

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Cover illustration: *Glass beads and comb from Test Pit B28 at Blewbury.*
See article on page 26.

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Chairman's Report

Dave Carless

Given at SOAG Annual General Meeting 26 April 2015

Introduction

Having taken over as Chairman shortly after the last AGM, I have come to realise what an active society SOAG really is. But perhaps more importantly it is a group where people are able to work well together to produce excellent results whilst having lots of fun. Onwards and downwards!

Membership and Finance

It is the policy of the society that core activities should be funded primarily through member's subscriptions and that, in general, projects are responsible for raising their own funds. However, for the sixth year running, membership declined, by a net six members to 124 - but with 18 new members and a much lesser decrease than in 2013. Members' use of the Gift Aid scheme contributed nearly £300 and has enabled us once again not to have to increase subscriptions. Clearly we would like to recruit more new members and I hope present members will do all they can to attract them.

In addition to core and project funds, we have been very fortunate in recent years in receiving two substantial legacies from former members. The committee is keen that these funds should be applied to activities that will make a real difference – to do something that otherwise would not be possible. Over the course of the coming years we will give consideration to specific projects but first we are developing guidelines on how the funds should be used. We aim to publish these guidelines in 2015.

Publications

In 2014, ten issues of our newsletter, *SOAG Messenger*, were published under the editorship of Mike Green. *SOAG Messenger* depends, of course, on contributions from members. We would urge you all to let us know of any interesting archaeological events, discoveries or findings, preferably with a local interest, that can be included. The latest edition of our annual journal, *SOAG Bulletin*, was once again produced by the editorial team of John Hefferan and Janet Eastment and they are already working on the next. The SOAG website continues to be maintained by Mike Green as our main channel of communication with the outside world. In addition to our own publications, we also publish results of our research projects to a wider audience through the CBA South Midlands Archaeology annual report.

We have recently started a new project to safeguard our old paper archive. SOAG's archives include:

- Copies of almost every edition of *SOAG Bulletin* and

SOAG Messenger produced since the founding of SOAG in 1969

- The detailed logbooks maintained by our founder, SOAG Cynthia Graham Kerr, during her 30 or so active years
- The supporting paper documentation from many SOAG field projects between 1969 and 2000

Nearly all these documents exist in paper form only and continue to be held on behalf of SOAG by a longstanding SOAG member. A project has been initiated to determine possible methods of:

- Securing them in the long term
- Making them available for study by future historians and archaeologists both inside and outside SOAG

A variety of approaches is likely, including "crowd sourcing" the scanning of some documents using the computing resources of SOAG's own members, a technique we have recently field-tested. Invitations to SOAG members to participate in this exercise will follow.

Lectures and events

The SOAG lecture season ran from January to March and from September to November and featured a wide range of seven very interesting speakers and topics, the attendance ranging between 25 and 35. An innovation this year was the additional lecture in November devoted to the researches of our own members, this time featuring SOAGs Anna Ellis and Tom Walker. This was well received and there is a consensus that this should become an annual feature of our lecture season. However, Nancy Nichols, our lecture organiser, emphasizes that for this to happen, and also to maintain the high standard of our lecture series, she really is dependent on suggestions from SOAG members.

Our AGM meeting in April 2014 was, as usual, accompanied by a review of SOAG archaeology undertaken in the previous year. In recent meetings, this review has become over-long and detailed, unnecessarily so given the many other mechanisms by which SOAG members are kept in touch with our activities. Starting with the 2015 AGM we plan to keep this part of the meeting to an hour or so and to focus more on plans and activities for the coming season.

The SOAG summer visit for 2014, also organised by Nancy, was a well-attended guided tour of Abingdon. In addition, at short notice, a visit was arranged to see the excavation of a late Romano-British cemetery

at Dorchester-on-Thames. The parties at the end of our November and April meetings, together with the pub lunches organised as part of the SOAG summer outings, continue to be an important part of the SOAG social calendar. In addition to these SOAG events, our project leaders continue to give lectures to other archaeological organisations promoting our activities widely.

Fieldwork and Research

2014 was a very active year with a good mix of continuing projects and some new ones. It looks as if 2015 is going to be equally busy and hopefully just as rewarding.

At **Brightwell Park** we have now been contacted by the studio of the new owner (the sculptor Anish Kapoor) to suggest a future dig date, but it seems likely that if permitted, this could not be until 2016. There was no work at Ascott Park in 2014 and none planned for 2015, but we are hoping for an update on research by Ian Clarke later in 2015.

Exlade Street: In the 1980s, SOAG's founder, Cynthia Graham Kerr, did a great deal of work on the history of Exlade Street. Ken Hume has restarted this research, and during 2014 SOAG provided him with access to Cyn's papers in our archives, and also undertook a limited geophysical survey of some interesting features in local woodland. But this collaboration is only likely to develop further if more SOAGs take an interest in the work on offer.

High Wood: In 1909, during excavations in a garden of Harpsden Wood House, remains of a Roman bathhouse were exposed. Further evidence of the villa was found and excavated in 1921. Subsequent excavations in the area suggest dates in the late 3rd/4th century. During the late 1970s, Henley Archaeological and Historical Group (HAHG) investigated a nearby mound, believed to be the base of a windmill. No structure was located, but large quantities of Roman pottery shards, wall plaster and 17 very worn 2/4th century coins were found. This activity, spanning several years of part time excavation, unfortunately attracted the attention of illegal metal detectorists who caused much damage to the site. The pottery recovered by HAHG has been lost, but we have obtained the site records of their work. It has also been suggested that a Roman mausoleum might be on the site. SOAG has now picked up the investigation under the leadership of Site Supervisor Roelie Reed and Director David Nicholls. After extensive undergrowth clearing, preliminary geophysical surveys were undertaken during early 2014. From March until early July during 2015 we are undertaking excavations to establish the nature and extent of probable structure(s).

Gatehampton continues to be a popular project, lead by our President, Hazel Williams. Participation was good in 2014 and although there were fewer diggers

than in 2013 most were SOAG members bringing their usual expertise and enthusiasm. The Open House day in September was again a success with almost 80 people on site on the day, including a group of children excavating a specially prepared area. Work continues in both the large trench in the site field and in the new trench in the adjacent car park. The focus is now on the eastern end of the building, on the possibility that this section of the villa may be a separate and earlier build, and on showing how the rest of the building relates to this earlier phase. Good progress was made in both trenches. In the field trench there was confirmation that a wall divides the western and eastern parts of the building and evidence of several building phases west of the wall. In the car park trench, it does appear that the eastern end of the building has been discovered, with several pits outside the building. A surprise discovery was that the enclosure ditch appears to end close to the end of the building. Plans are in place for 2015 to link the current trenches across the line of the field hedge; to extend the car park trench; and, if there is time, to explore further beyond the end of the building, to see if the enclosure ditch or other features can be found.

Blewbury: Within the village itself, there are a number of open spaces (Play Close, Hall Barn Close, the Manor and the Rectory) that are large enough to accommodate a geophysical survey. These were undertaken in 2014, using both a resistivity meter and a gradiometer, and have identified a number of very interesting anomalies, which are the targets of excavations in 2015. In addition, the Big Dig test pit programme continued in 2014 and should be completed in 2015.

As I reported last year, at a number of sites dispersed though the village we have found organic tempered pottery dated to the early/mid Saxon period. In 2014, one test pit produced not only a large quantity (over 180 sherds) of organic tempered pottery but also a few sherds of decorated pottery and a rich deposit of small finds including glass beads, bone comb fragments, metal objects, fossil fragments and Roman pottery reshaped into discs. All of this material is consistent with a date around the 6th century AD. The site was further investigated by geophysical survey, auger survey, metal detecting survey and further test pits. These suggest that the rich deposit lies in a small area of a few metres square. It is not yet clear if this is a burial site or a redeposit in a settlement site though the latter is looking more probable. Further investigation will be undertaken in 2015 by excavating a larger area.

Thanks

Finally, I am very grateful to the committee for efficiently running the Group, to our project leaders for driving the research forward, to our support teams for making us comfortable, and to all our members for their continued support.

Lectures, Events & Visits in 2014

Lecture Series

23 January

Dr Karen Wickes (University of Reading)

**When the weather became too wild:
The impact of the abrupt 8.2 ka cold event on
the Mesolithic population of western Scotland**

27 February

Dr Jennifer Foster (University of Reading)

Who were the Celts?

27 March

Dr Stuart Brookes (UCL Institute of Archaeology)

**Anglo-Saxon landscapes of South Oxfordshire:
some new perspectives**

27 April

45th AGM and Review of SOAG Archaeology

25 September

Dr Sally Crawford FSA (Institute of Archaeology,
Oxford)

**A forgotten archive: early photographs of
archaeology in Oxfordshire from the late
19th and early 20th centuries**

23 October

Dr Vivienne Larminie (Senior Research Fellow:
History of Parliament Trust, and Oxford University)

The use of pollen analysis in archaeology

27 November

The SOAG Graduates:

Anna Ellis

**Garden Cemeteries and the cult of mourning
in the Victorian era**

Tom Walker

**Sand at Gwithian, Cornwall:
palaeoenvironment, molluscs and archaeology**

Events and Visits

6 August

**Visit to the TVAS excavation of a Roman
cemetery in Dorchester-on-Thames**

20 August

**Private guided tour of: The historic sites of
Abingdon (am) followed by Tour of Abingdon
Museum (pm) or Guided walking tour of
pre-history in Abingdon**

28 September

**Open Day at Gatehampton Archaeological
Excavation**

Organiser: Hazel Williams

SOAG summer visit to a Roman cemetery excavation in Dorchester

Report by Mike Green

At fairly short notice, Steve Ford, director of Thames Valley Archaeological Services (TVAS), invited SOAG to visit a TVAS dig in Dorchester-on-Thames where a Roman cemetery was in the process of being excavated in a private garden, prior to a small housing development. Accordingly, on Wednesday 6th August, eighteen SOAG members were privileged to see about a dozen skeletons in situ at the site of the cemetery. (Fig. 1)

Dorchester is well known for having continuous occupation, much of it visible, from the Iron Age (the impressive dykes on the river nearby), through Roman, and into early Anglo Saxon - the Abbey there was founded in the early 7th century, the first in England outside Kent. Our guide, David Platt from TVAS, explained that we were just south of the Roman town and close to the line of the assumed Roman road to Silchester. The purpose of the excavation was to find the limit of a cemetery that had originally been discovered in the garden of the house next door. A dozen or more skeletons were on perfect display as we were fortunate to be there just a day before they were due to be lifted for further analysis elsewhere. The graves were all aligned E-W, evidence of Romano-British Christianity, but the graves contained a few personal ornaments, suggesting a clinging on to some pagan customs. Particularly poignant was an armband that was found still in place on an adolescent female. (Fig. 2) Most of the skeletons uncovered so far were children, adolescents or young adults, some being buried directly on top of others, leading our guide to speculate whether there had been a singular event such as disease or starvation to account for it.

The visit was succeeded by a pleasant SOAG lunch in the White Hart nearby, after which some members took the chance to revisit the adjacent Abbey and town museum.



Fig. 1: Skeletons in situ



Fig. 2: Armband on adolescent female

SOAG summer visit to Abingdon

Report by Mike Green

On a sunny Wednesday 20th August, seventeen SOAGs gathered in Abingdon for the Society's 2014 summer visit. The format of our visit was a walking tour of the town in the morning, guided by Judy White of AAAHS (the Abingdon Area Archaeological and Historical Society), followed by a pub lunch, and then an afternoon tour of the town's museum guided by Matthew Stevens and Jane Bowen. We were joined there by Jeff Wallis, also from AAAHS (Fig. 1).

Abingdon is best known as the site of one of the largest and wealthiest abbeys in England, but later in the day we were to learn that it also has claim to be the earliest continuously occupied town in the country. There was certainly extensive settlement here at the start of the Iron Age: the line of the surviving ditch and rampart system was pointed out to us from the viewing area at the top of the County Hall Museum. Recently a Beaker style pot has been discovered, which may push the continuity back to the late Neolithic.

Whilst the Abbey no longer exists, beyond the remains of some arches in the Abbey Grounds Park, the associated Abbey Buildings nearby are a fortunate survival. A range of domestic buildings adjacent to the Abbey millstream, the Long Gallery and part of the Checker (the name probably derives from exchequer, its mediaeval function) have been restored to their medieval condition. That the Checker, in particular, exists at all is particularly fortunate. In the early 20th century it had become three slums and planned destruction was only avoided by the advent of World War 2, at the end of which the Abingdon Society took ownership and began the long process of restoration. Part of the Checker is now home to the successful Unicorn Theatre. After exploring the interior rooms, we moved outside to the adjacent millstream that was originally cut by Ethelwold and his monks in the 10th century - milling finally ceasing only in the 1960s.

We then took a short walk along the river to the old County Gaol. Attempts to convert this into a community arts centre have failed and it is currently being converted into flats. After pausing in the market place, now the site of a fine 1678 building housing the town's museum, we continued along St. Helens Street in which can be seen buildings of every phase of Abingdon's development from medieval onwards.



Fig. 1: The SOAG team outside the medieval Abbey Building

Our guide paused here to tell us something of Abingdon's role in the Civil War. King Charles stayed in Abingdon until an attack was threatened by the parliamentarians, at which he fled to Oxford. In the ensuing attack, counter attack and alternating occupation, Abingdon suffered badly, including famine when food either ran out or was seized by occupying forces. Whilst continuing our walk along the Thames, below the medieval bridge towards the river Ock – near which the Wilts and Berks canal emerged in the late 18th Century – we also learned about Abingdon's extensive industrial past, much of which industry has only recently ended. Perhaps most famously MG sports cars were made here until the mid 1980s.

We then passed two of Abingdon's many surviving almshouses, all of which are architectural gems, before finishing our morning tour at St Helens Church. On entering the church, expectations are confounded. It appears to be square with none of the usual alignments and features of a medieval church immediately obvious. In fact, it is a set of five parallel aisles. The most northerly one was the original nave and each time expansion was required another full-length aisle was added to the south. It is said to be the second widest church in England! But the most surprising and valuable treasure in the church is the Jesse Ceiling at one end of the second aisle (Fig. 2). Painted in 1391,

it is a set of 52 7ft x 1ft portraits of alternating prophets and kings (conveniently all labelled). The style and beauty of the paintings is unique and their survival, especially in a town occupied by Cromwellians in the Civil War, is remarkable. For lovers of medieval art the day was probably worth it for this alone.

After lunch at the Kings Head and Bell, most SOAGs stayed for an afternoon in the Museum. This is only its second season after a major restoration of both building and contents. An open arcaded area at ground level to accommodate the market is topped by two storeys in grand classical style designed by a pupil of Christopher Wren. Unfortunately he forgot to design in a staircase, which was added as an afterthought and which consequently somewhat disturbs the symmetry of the building. Recent attempts to add a lift for visitors to the museum have unfortunately fallen foul of the hawkeyes at English Heritage so it is not disabled-friendly. Originally the day was planned to include a tour of prehistory in and near to Abingdon by Jeff Wallis from AAAHS. Instead Jeff joined us to introduce many of AAAHS's most valuable finds, now beautifully displayed in the museum. The day ended with a short climb to the roof of the Museum which, being the tallest building in Abingdon, gave a fine overview of everything we had explored earlier.



Fig. 2: Jesse Ceiling, St Helens Church

Open Day at Gatehampton 2014

Hazel Williams

The annual Gatehampton Open day was held on Sunday 28 September 2014 and was another successful event with nearly 80 people on site, including 26 SOAG members. The day was warm and sunny, allowing the trenches to be fully open. Visitors were able to see and appreciate the size and scale of the building, with the wall footings, floors and other features of more than five rooms in the main trench, Trench 7. The outline plan of the villa, over 40 metres long and 15 metres wide, was marked out on the site field and this also showed the link with the substantial walls of the eastern end of the building in the newly extended Trench 16 in the car park area. There was the usual display of the latest finds, the CBM, the photos and plans of the site along with site information and guided tours of the trenches. A small group of visitors, including several children, were able to join our diggers in the trench to try some trowelling and also to help with finds washing. Tea and cake served under the gazebo completed the afternoon.

Note that 2014 was probably the last year when we could show a sizable area of the villa in one trench. By the beginning of 2015, half of Trench 7 has been backfilled and, although we have opened more areas, these are split between four smaller trenches.

We are always pleased to have visitors to the site, they are often as enthusiastic as we are about Gatehampton and we have the opportunity to show the trenches at their best and to explain what we have done in the past year. Our thanks to the site owners who provide access to the site and practical support for these events. My sincere thanks also to all the Gatehampton team, both those who worked so hard to make it such a successful day and those who did so much excellent work on site in the months before.



Display of finds and site information



View across Trench 7



The Open Day team:

Back row, standing: Ken Houston, John Hefferan, Tom Walker, Dave Jobling, Edmund Palka, David Cox, Nancy Nichols, Derek Greenwood, Penny Kay

Front row (kneeling and sitting): Becky Morrisson, Hazel Williams, Pamela Parfitt, Roelie Reed, Viv Greenwood, Mike Green



Discussing Trench 16



The display of CBM



Visitors enjoying tea at the villa

Reports and Articles

Gatehampton Farm Roman Villa Excavation

Interim Report 2014-15

Hazel Williams

Introduction

During 2014 and 2015, the SOAG Gatehampton excavation project continued the investigation of the layout and development of the Gatehampton Roman villa. The project was also designed to encourage and facilitate participation in excavation by our own members and by other volunteers, many of them new to archaeology.

A substantial part of the western part of the 3rd and 4th century building has already been excavated. The conclusions drawn so far regarding the development

of the building suggest that the eastern section of the villa building (Rooms 9, 10 & 11 to Trench 16) is the earliest phase and may represent more than one stage of building, probably dating from the mid-3rd to early 4th century but perhaps even earlier. A difference in building style and materials, and in the layout of rooms, is seen in the rest of the building that was most probably extended westwards in the early to late 4th century.

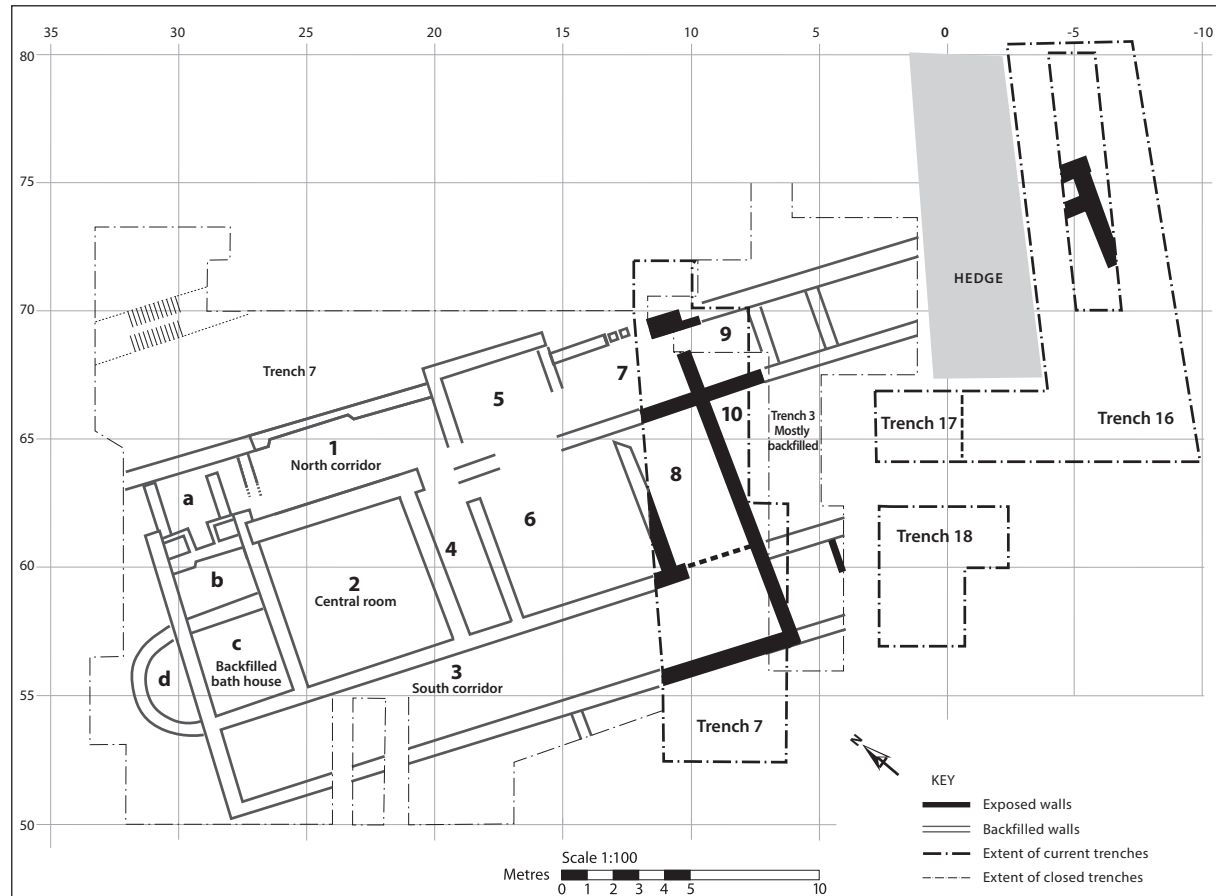


Fig. 1: Site Plan 2014-15

Plan for 2014-15

The project plan for 2014 consisted of three elements; the first being to complete the excavation in Trench 7 of Rooms 5 to 7 before the planned backfilling of that side of the trench at the end of 2014. Much work had already been done on these rooms but some earlier levels were still unexplored and it was hoped that these would provide some insights as to the sequence of building and hopefully, the dating of that part of the building. Two features in Room 6, the hearth and the furnace, were also still to be fully investigated. It was important to complete this area before the focus of the excavation moved eastward and a large part of Trench 7 was backfilled. In this report the work in these areas is described in more detail and after that there is a briefer account of what has been found in the rest of Trench 7 and a brief mention of the new trenches opened early in 2015.

The second part of the plan was to continue investigating the eastern end of the building in Trench 16 to answer questions raised during the excavation in 2013 of what was a quite narrow slot trench that included the end wall of the building. Trench 16 was more than doubled in size giving access to an area outside the end of the building and more of the building to the west and south. The area outside the building proved very productive with many bone objects discovered and these are described in a separate report by Dave Jobling. The results of the 2014-15 excavation of Trench 16 is outlined by Dave Jobling below in this report and will be fully reported in the next *Bulletin*.

Finally, it was hoped that the high level of participation in the excavation by SOAG members and new volunteers achieved in 2013 could be continued during 2014. The opportunity was taken to open an additional small section of the south corridor, immediately south of Room 6. This would provide both a further look at the enclosure area outside the building and a suitable area of trench for young diggers in particular to participate in the excavation.

Excavation

Trench 7

When excavation began at the end of May 2014, Trench 7 covered an area of approximately 17 by 12 metres. The trench was extended by a four metre square area across the South Corridor Room 3 and the enclosure. The trench was also extended by one metre along the east side to link up with the edge of the old Trench 3.

Wall foundations in Rooms 5 and 6

During 2014 we took a closer look at wall foundations in Rooms 5 and 7 to get a better understanding of how that part of the building was constructed. What emerged is that there appears to have been an opening 2 metres wide, between Rooms 5 and 6, with no wall foundation beneath. Both rooms have a mortar floor and an underlying levelling layer of sandy silt that was also subsequently found under the floor of Room 7 and 8 in slightly varying composition. There is a shallow, rubble filled depression beneath the floor surface between rooms 5 and 6; it is less than 30cms deep with a rounded base and measuring 1.5m by 0.6m. The fill was entirely of rubble, including a few fragments of CBM, and explains the odd building rubble found previously. There was no indication of what the pit might have been used for; it could have been outside the building originally before the villa was extended westward and was filled with available building rubble before the sub floor was laid.

Earlier phase of building in Room 7

Excavation of the wall footings of Room 7 during 2014 has shown evidence of two phases of building; an early phase when Room 7 was probably a simple barn with an earth floor attached to the building and a later stage when Room 5 was built and Room 7 had a laid mortar floor surface (Fig. 2). Investigation of the wall gully alongside the part wall 7415 on the west side of Room 7 showed clearly that the foundation layers of 7415 and of 7423 were built at the same time; they form a right angle enclosing the north west corner and appear to be an earlier phase of this part of the building, perhaps a small barn or workshop attached to the earlier part of the building to the east (Fig. 3). A further deposit of flints closer to the south side of the room may also relate to this earlier phase of construction but were looser and could simply be demolition debris. Shallow hearth areas comprising burnt sooty deposits with some pottery fragments are associated with this phase when the 'barn' probably had a simple beaten earth floor. The second and later phase of building occurred when Room 5 was built and this was done by simply starting the new exterior wall 7294 next to 7415 and this explains why Room 5 projects 0.5m, the width of a wall, out from the building line along the north side of the villa. The method used to connect the walls was a simple one; a layer of mortar 15cms thick was laid across 7415 (presumably partially demolished) and onto the new exterior wall, 7492. This layer of

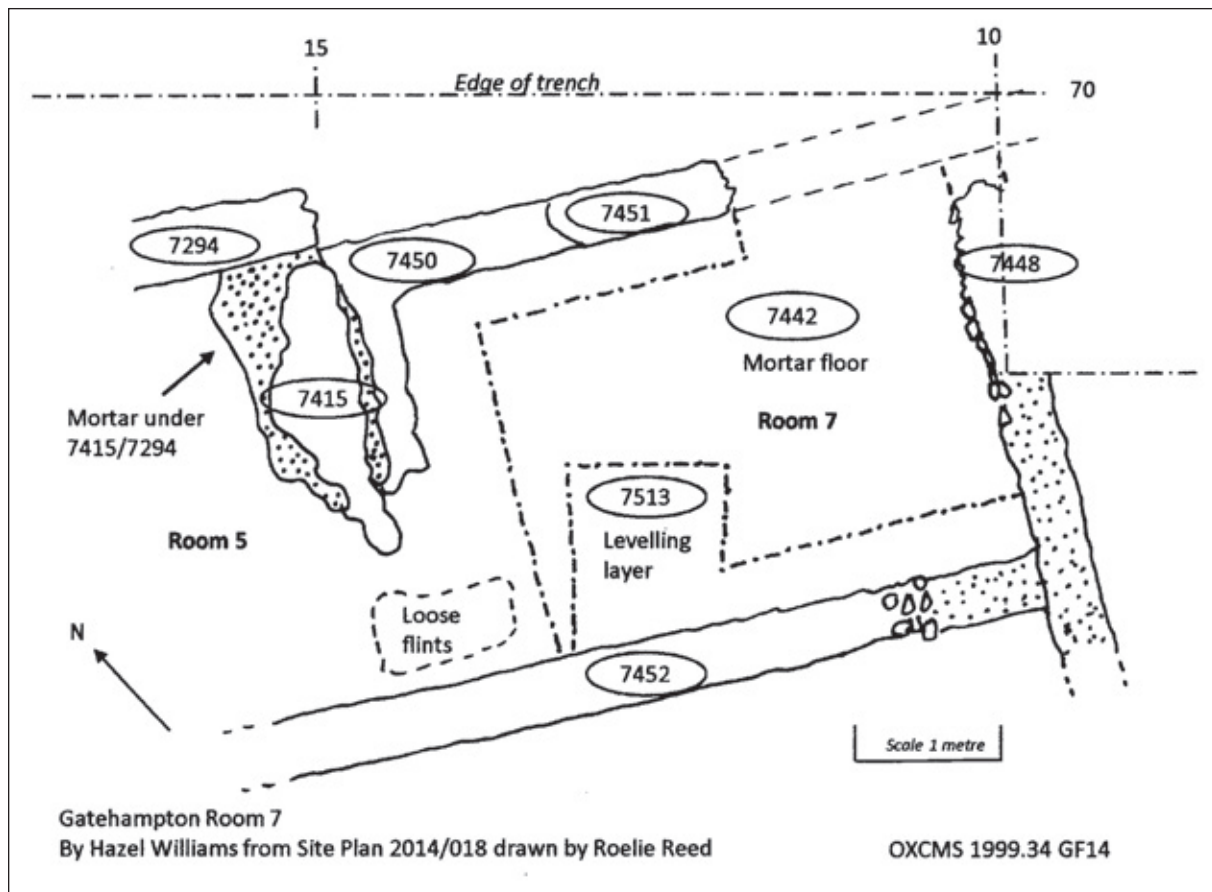


Fig. 2: Plan of Room 7

mortar is very distinctive and clearly seen on both edges of 7415 and across 7294. The new wall 7294 was then continued westward forming the exterior wall of Room 5.

Room 6

The whole floor surface of this room was excavated in 2013 and reported in *Bulletin* 68, 2014 page 13. The premise was that this was another large room that began as a working area and was transformed into living accommodation at a later stage. There were large quantities of painted wall plaster, including some in situ on the east wall and a smooth mortar floor surface in parts of the room that indicated a later phase as a living space. The presence of the furnace and hearth features suggested that it had been used for more industrial purposes as well and there appeared to be an earlier surface beneath the floor with burnt deposits indicating combustion processes. In 2014 the furnace was half sectioned and the adjacent clay hearth area investigated. A series of small sondages were also made across the floor surface of the room to ascertain the sequence of building and usage.

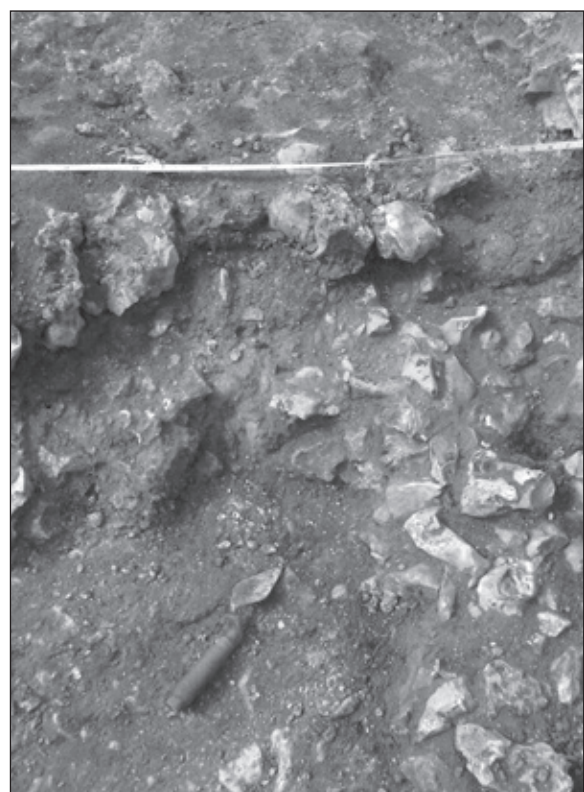


Fig. 3: North west corner of Room 7; early foundation and mortar layer



Fig. 4: Furnace; detail of tile construction

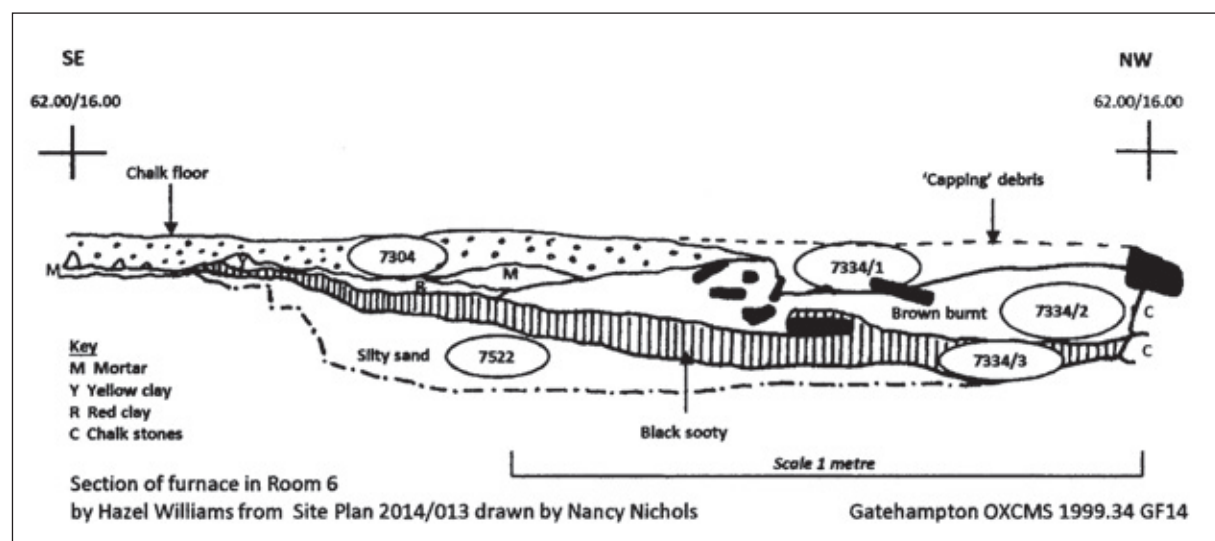


Fig. 5: Section across furnace (Drawn by Nancy Nichols)

The furnace 7334 is just over a metre in length and just under 40cms at its widest point, narrowing to a width of 30cms along the flue (Figs. 4 and 5). The 'bowl' of the furnace is rectangular with a slight dip in the base. The flue extends upwards to floor level at an angle of about 20 degrees. The feature is cut into the silty sand levelling layer 7522 below the mortar floor, just touching the underlying stony natural layer at the lowest point. It is positioned with the wider hot area against the west wall of Room 6 with the flue extending out into the room.

The hot area is rectangular, the three sides fairly roughly constructed using broken re-used ceramic tile including fragments of *tegula* and *imbrex*. A black sooty deposit 7334/3 lines the base of the furnace; it is 7-10cms deep, reducing to a few centimetres where the end of the flue meets the later chalk covering. Above the black is a dark brown layer, 7334/2, comprised of burnt deposits mixed with soil and fragments of tile, presumably fallen from the adjacent structure after the furnace went out of use. Above this, the furnace was sealed by a 'cap'

of material 7334/1 that appeared at first to be quite solid but was a mixture of compacted demolition debris; small fragments of wall plaster, mortar, chalk and CBM that had filled the space between the remaining tile surround. It is likely that the tile structure was originally higher; a layer of burnt tile several tiles deep was found in the demolition rubble 7256 over this feature. Hammer scale and a piece of slag were found on the heat reddened area 7512 of the mortar floor 7506 around the furnace. The chalk deposit 7304 appears to have been a late re-surfacing of this part of the floor, covering an area approximately 2 metres by one metre. The crushed chalk was laid over the flue but was laid up to and around the rectangular end of the furnace, rather than completely covering the whole feature. A lack of burnt deposits on the chalk floor suggests that the furnace was out of use at this stage.

Right next to the furnace feature is a hearth 7441 that in common with the furnace flue is cut into the silty sand levelling layer 7512 under the mortar floor 7506. The hearth was also, like the furnace, overlain by the chalk floor surface 7304. The hearth consists of blocks of yellow clay each about 50cms by 28cms across and 4cms thick, laid end to end around the periphery of the feature which is 1.20cms square. The parts of the clay closest to the centre of the hearth are coloured deep red (Munsell Soil Chart 10YR/2.5YR) presumably due to partial baking of the clay (Fig. 6). Despite this the clay was soft and malleable when first exposed but became dried and cracked after exposure to the sun. At the south end of the hearth, just outside the line of the clay blocks, there is a 10cm diameter hollow, 10cm deep, which contains many charcoal fragments. There is no evidence of a post pipe but perhaps it held the post of some kind of grate or door to the hearth.

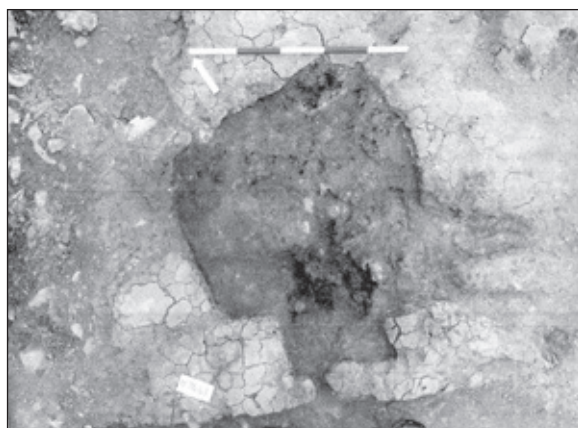


Fig. 6: Hearth 7441 showing darker burnt deposits in centre.

The furnace and the hearth appear to be contemporary; both cut into the same floor deposits and eventually covered by the same chalk patching. It makes sense for them to have been used together and it may be possible that the hearth was used for some rudimentary and very small scale iron smelting and the furnace used to fashion the finished product but this will need more research to confirm. Other similar features were found in Trench 3 (*Bulletin* 54, pp. 10) and the Central Room 2 (*Bulletin* 66, pp. 22) and a review of all these and their use could be instructive. The villa was likely to have been the hub of a large farmstead with both arable farming and animal husbandry so the demand for making and maintaining basic equipment must have been high and most easily met on site.

In contrast to the 'industrial' nature of the hearth and furnace areas, the east side of Room 6 had painted wall plaster still in situ along the east wall and a mortar floor surface 7506 that was quite well preserved in the south east corner with small red fragments of tile and white chalk and a smooth surface in places. A series of small sondages were dug across the room, starting with one directly against the wall plaster on the east side and continuing across the room to the hearth area. It was expected that this would show the sequence of floor levels and the changing use of the room. The results however were not what we expected. The wall plaster on the east wall 7490 extends down 20cms below the mortar floor level into the underlying silty sand deposit. So the room appears to have been planned as a living area and not a workshop at an early stage. The plaster from this room, whilst not that decorative, does have lines and v-shaped patterns in three colours, not really utilitarian. However, the sondages showed that the same mortar floor that butts the plaster also appears to be present and made reddish with heat close to the hearth area. So in Room 6 there does not appear to be a clear division between the use of the space for 'industrial' activity involving the hearth and furnace and a later living space with decorated plaster on the wall. One possible answer to the puzzle posed by Room 6 is that only the western half of the room was built and used as a workshop area, perhaps before the room was enclosed on the south and east sides. However, the consistency of the mortar floor surface and the underlying levelling layer running across the room make this unlikely. It may be that this room was initially constructed

and planned as a living space but was used, perhaps for a short period, for industrial activity. Once this finished, the floor was repaired using a layer of chalk laid over the reddened floor, the hearth and around the furnace covering the flue and leaving only a rectangular tile surround above floor level that may have been put to use as a plinth.

South Corridor Room 3 south of Room 6

A small area of just over four square metres was opened across the corridor south of Room 6. This was a late opportunity to excavate more of the corridor but also to access a small area of the enclosure before backfilling of the western half of Trench 7. It was also seen as an ideal area for new diggers, especially children, to work on during Open Day. A small area of chalk floor was exposed and a small patch of laid terracotta tesserae with many loose tesserae in proximity. In contrast to the 'veranda' area of the south corridor, less than a metre to the west (Bulletin 67), where much pottery was discovered, there were very few finds. The line of the south exterior wall was traced but not fully excavated except for two half metre long sections at the east and west ends of the trench. This confirmed previous impressions that this was probably a dwarf wall, there was just a small amount of demolition rubble and as seen before this had collapsed into the corridor. The foundations were also quite shallow with only two courses of small flint stones below the surface level of the reddish silty natural outside the building. A patch of flint rubble outside the wall attracted attention as this was unusual and was excavated. This turned out to be a small wall extending southwards into the enclosure at 90 degrees to the exterior wall of the building. In the time available only a half metre long section was excavated. At only 40cms wide with a shallow foundation layer it appears to be a garden or lean to wall. No other similar feature has been found along the south side of the building. This discovery and the fact that the excavation was moving out of the western side of the site field prompted us to do a resistivity survey of the area south of the villa. Using the RM15 Resistance Meter, two 10 metre grids were surveyed; the first based on grid marker 55,10 and the second further west and overlapping previous trenches along the south corridor of the building. The new wall found did not show up in the survey plot, supporting our impression that it does not extend very far into the enclosure. One part of

the survey has sparked our interest however and may be worth looking at in the future. It is an area south of Trench 7, about three metres beyond the current trench and the south side of the building and we know very little about the enclosure area. Much of the survey area south beyond the edge of the villa building and trenches has an extra layer of topsoil up to 40cms thick that was dumped there when foundations for a nearby greenhouse were dug to a depth of nearly a metre in 1998 and this extra layer of soil does show up in the survey. The trench for the unused greenhouse frame is still there and is just over 10 metres south of the current trenches. No archaeological evidence was found during a watching brief in 1998 by Oxford Archaeology.

Summary of Trench 7

The aim in 2014 was to learn more about the development of the northern side of the villa building in Trench 7 and an early phase has been discovered with some insight into how the building was extended westward; Room 7 may have originally been a small attached workshop or barn and the north side of the building subsequently extended further east to form Room 5. There are still questions about how this part of the building developed as Room 6 does not appear to fit the typical pattern of working area to living space seen elsewhere in the building and the assumption that the villa building was simply extended westward by the adding on of workshop areas converted to living rooms. Further work in Room 8 and the area to the south may provide a clearer view of the sequence of construction in this part of the building. The hearth and furnace features in Room 6 are similar to others seen in the Central Room 2 and in the old Trench 3 in Rooms now labelled 9 and 10. It seems logical for a villa of this size to have supporting workshops, industrial activity has also been found outside the eastern end of the building (see below) and it will be useful to look further at how these were used. The discovery of the small exterior wall found on the south side of the building is a reminder that the villa did have a large enclosure around it and that there are likely to be outbuildings and garden features south of the building.

Room 8

With the focus mainly on the other rooms much less was done in Room 8 and the adjacent area of the south corridor in 2014. One important discovery was of a

flint wall across the south corridor Room 3, south of Room 8. Excavation of this feature continues in 2015. It is a further extension of the north to south wall line between Rooms 7 and 8 to the west, and Room 9 and 10 to the east. This wall appears to be significant because it is the only one that runs right across the building. Is this because it was once the end wall of an earlier building? Differences in building style and materials in the building to the east seem to support this theory but a closer look at the construction of the wall and the adjacent rooms will be necessary before it can be confirmed and this is in progress in 2015 and 2016. Early in 2015 a large area of Trench 7 was backfilled and is now only six metres wide and 15 metres long, over parts of Rooms 7, 9 and 10 (Fig. 7), Room 8 and the area south of Room 8. Two new trenches (Trenches 17 and 18) were opened early in 2015 between the old Trench 3 and Trench 16, over an area that was somewhat ambiguous in the geophysical survey of the area (*Bulletin* 66 p. 14). So the focus of the excavation has shifted eastward and work in 2015 in Trenches 17 and 18 (and in Trench 16 see later) are beginning to show a differences in

layout and building style. A substantial amount of flint building rubble has been found in Trench 17 with a chalk floor surface beneath, but as yet no walls and probably not a repeat of the pattern of alternating wide and narrow rooms seen so far. In Trench 18, an inner chalk wall and exterior flint wall are appearing with plenty of CBM from the collapsed roof; this appear to be of more substantial construction than the South Corridor Room 3. It is hoped that excavation during 2015-16 will result in a better understanding of the quite extensive eastern section of the villa building.

Trench 16

Since the report on Trench 16 published in *Bulletin* 68, excavation conducted in 2014/15 has revealed many new details of the eastern end of the villa, and we are able to answer some of the questions asked in that earlier report.

The trench has been extended significantly to the east, west and south, increasing in area from 15 square meters in 2013 to approximately 40 square meters in 2015.



Fig. 7: View of trench 7 after the partial backfill

The 2014/15 work has reinforced the impression that Trench 16 contains the oldest parts of the villa. It can be seen that walls I6002 and I6018 (see Fig. 1 on page 21) are indeed separate. The former does seem to be the eastern end of the villa, while the latter is believed to be an earlier phase of construction, perhaps partially removed to make way for a later build that defined the line of the northern façade of the whole complex.

A series of, as yet, poorly understood mortar contexts suggest surfaces and structures that could precede wall I6018.

While it was understood that wall I6002 was an extension of the northern façade and therefore links up with walls already excavated to the west, it is not known how far wall I6018 extends westwards under the hedge.

Wall I6002 has been further excavated. It is very finely built along its entire length, and up to four courses of dressed flint survive. Its north-south extent is obscured by as yet enigmatic hard, packed chalk deposits at the southern end of the trench, and by damage caused by the interment of two modern dogs (I6027) and a modern post hole (I6029). It is possible that there was an entrance into the villa in the area of the dog burials, as the dressed flint construction is replaced by looser material that is probably demolition. This has yet to be confirmed.

The most impressive feature in I6002 is a tile-lined drain or sluice in the east-west wall (see Fig. 1 on page 21), clearly an integral part of the construction rather than a later addition. It is presumed that it was an exit point for water, which was channelled into the space between I6002 and I6018. The tiles are stacked seven deep on both side, and there is a tile lintel supporting an additional course of flint construction. The seventh layer of tile extends out to the corner of the wall to the east. Outside (in the space between I6002 and I6018), deposit I6003 overlies a surface (I6042) that includes a mortared-in limestone feature that seems designed to channel water flowing out of the drain to the east of the building. (The limestone feature appears just above the blackboard in the photo of the channel in wall I6002, see Fig. 8.)

Still not yet resolved in trench 16 is the question of the construction of the villa's north corridor. Elsewhere in the villa, this is well defined between

the northern façade and an inner wall about three meters to the south. Apart from the area of Rooms 5 and 6, this inner wall runs the entire length of the villa. Extrapolating it into trench 16 gives a clear idea of where it should be. It is, however, missing, suggesting that the well-defined layout of northern corridor, then a range of central rooms, then a southern corridor does not continue into this older part of the villa.

In the previous report, it was suggested that a channel-like construction (I6007) projected eastwards from the corner of wall I6002. Extension of the trench has revealed that this "feature" was no more than a suggestive collection of demolition, and that no structure in fact existed in that area.

However, the mortar deposits (I6022 and I6037), thought to have been dumps of excess building material, now seem to be more substantial, and are thought to be the "walls" shown by geophysics to extend eastwards as far as the path across the carpark. Their relationship to the walls is not yet understood, nor is it known what these features are, but it is planned to dig test pits across that area in coming years, to test whether they do extend that far.



Fig. 8: Sluice feature in wall I6002

The area enclosed by 16037 and the east façade of wall 16002 is filled by deposit 16025 (which is itself filled with ants' nests which make trowelling uncomfortable). This context contains much charcoal, hundreds of shards of broken pottery and fragments of bone, and numerous small finds. It is evident that this context documents a working area, and there are significant collections throughout 16025 of the red and yellow clay that seems to be associated with metal-working furnaces. One of these, 16051, measuring more than a meter in length and up to 10 cms in thickness, was presumably a deliberately-sited stockpile for industrial use.

Many of the roof tiles found in the trench have a different signature to those in the rest of the villa. Whereas those to the west of the hedge show concentric circles, in Trench 16 the tiles are deeply scored with zig-zagged parallel lines such as would be produced by a comb. They are also of markedly poorer preservation.

Among the numerous small finds excavated from 16025 are a dense collection of more than 30 iron sandal studs, pieces of glass, a copper alloy cylindrical object resembling a ferrule, nails, unidentifiable pieces of iron, and the butcher's knife and eight bone pins documented elsewhere.

Also of note was a copper alloy *follis* coin from the 330s AD, found lying up against the southern face of wall 16018, and with a hole punched through the emperor's face, from obverse to reverse. This may

have been a way of decorating a necklace rather than a political gesture.

Above the southern mortar feature (16037) and enclosed by context 16025, human skeletal remains were discovered (HSR6), consisting of a single adult male lower jaw containing two molars. No other remains have been found.

Under 16025 is another working surface, 16021. Although it contains far fewer instances of pottery and bone and no charcoal or clay, its upper layers produced two of the bone pins. It also encloses a pile of broken roof tiles (16048) that may have been intended for turning into *tesserae*. In any case, it is certain that they are not demolition because they were found under the working surface 16025.

Participation

After a record year for participation in 2013, 2014 saw fewer numbers involved but there were still nearly 40 volunteers, most of them SOAG members, but also many newcomers, with frequent visitors viewing work in progress (Fig. 9). Wider participation was achieved through the annual Open Day (reported separately) and through talks presented by Hazel Williams to the Benson Historical Society and the Henley Archaeological and Historical Group. My particular thanks to the team of SOAG diggers who do such a good job of excavation as well providing a warm welcome, help and guidance to new diggers. My particular thanks to Dave Jobling who has made an excellent job of supervising Trench 16 'over the



Fig. 9: Volunteer diggers at the excavation



Fig. 10: Sarah & Roger Edmunds in the Central Room in 2010

hedge' and for his work on the bone objects. We have been very fortunate at Gatehampton to have generous landowners who give us time and space to work on the archaeology and to provide the setting for others to join in. Grateful thanks to Bob and Liz Jones and the folks at Daisytown and to Robin Cloke for continuing to take an interest in what we are doing.

Tribute and thanks to Roger and Sarah Edmunds

May 2015 was a busy month at Gatehampton and in one sense the end of an era as we removed our equipment from the Edmunds' polytunnel and had the JCB on site for backfilling the trenches on their part of the site field. Sarah and Roger came into the project late in 2007 when they purchased the western half of the site field that at the time included all our trenches (Fig. 10). Not knowing what the new owners might think about archaeology, we went back on site in a chilly November and December to complete the records and quickly work on some queries. As it turned out, we need not have worried, we could not have asked for more supportive and

encouraging landowners. They have taken a great interest in our progress and provided a great deal of practical support too. Our grateful thanks to them both for everything they have done to help with the project over the last seven years. They made it clear from the beginning that the archaeology would be given priority and allowed us plenty of time and space to open more trenches. Sarah was particularly keen that we involved as many people as possible and encouraged us to resume our annual Open Days, with the result that this has become a popular autumn event. Our grateful thanks to them both for everything they have done for SOAG and for all the diggers and visitors to Gatehampton, over the last seven years. Of course we are still just over the fence and they continue to take a keen interest in our progress.

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Bone-related artefacts found in Gatehampton's Trench 16

Dave Jobling

Introduction

During the digging seasons of 2014 and 2015, a number of closely spaced carved bone pins were found at the eastern end of the Roman Gatehampton villa (Trench 16). They join the one pin found in 2013 (Jobling 2014) to give a total of eight. Found in the same area of the villa in 2014 was the largely intact blade and handle socket of a Roman butcher's knife. Contexts in this area contain heavy concentrations of animal bone and charcoal, and other signs of industry.

All of the finds discussed here were found outside the building, in close proximity to the easternmost walls. The pins are of varying degrees of completeness of manufacture, and of some variation in dimension, design, decoration and condition. The knife blade has substantial surface accretions of corrosion but is otherwise complete.

In addition to describing these finds, this paper will present a brief review of how Roman bone pins have been categorized, and even dated on that basis.

The bone pins

The bone pins found at Trench 16 are hand-carved (there is no evidence of a lathe being used), and of the type used to secure long hair into the complex designs often found in Roman portraiture. Janet Stevens (Stevens 2008), in addition to explaining the normal usage of such pins and depicting the highly complex hair designs that can result, reminds us of less standard usage. Apuleius tells the tale of the

widow Charite who wreaks revenge on Thrasylus, her husband's killer, by gouging out his eyes with a hair pin.

H. E. M. Cool (Cool, draft online, date unknown) suggests that hairpins were generally made of metal in the earlier stages of the Roman occupation. Only later did they revert to bone, it is assumed because of regional material hardship caused by geopolitical events, extending up to the terminal decline of empire. Of course, the use of bone instead of metal could also be a result of decline at the level of an individual estate, or, more time-independently, it could be the result of a single penniless worker wanting to make his wife, daughter or sister a present at no cost. One of the most personal of finds, it is to be doubted that something as intimate as a pin for sculpting a daughter's hair would always follow regional and historic economic trends. However, this does not necessarily invalidate the following categorization of Roman bone pins, as craftsmen and artists of any sort are influenced by their peers in ways that cause demonstrable design trends at the macro level.

The bone pins found in Trench 16 at Gatehampton can, in part, be categorized according to a schema proposed by Nina Crummy (Crummy 1979, Crummy 1983), and used today, for example, by the Museum of London to describe their almost one thousand Roman bone pins (Museum of London, online collection).

| Type | Description | Age |
|------|--|--------------------------------------|
| 1 | Plain conical head that does not extend beyond the line of the shaft of the pin. | 70 to 200/250 AD |
| 2 | Plain conical head separated from the shaft of the pin by parallel grooves around the "neck" of the pin. | 50 to 200/250 AD |
| 3 | Spherical or ovoid head. | 200 to late 4th/early 5th century AD |
| 4 | Cuboid head, faceted at each corner. | 250 to late 4th/early 5th century AD |
| 5 | Conical or ovoid head separated from the shaft of the pin by parallel "reels". | 250 to late 4th/early 5th century AD |
| 6 | Reel-headed or reels separated by a conical head. | 200 to late 4th/early 5th century AD |
| 7 | Individually headed pins, often highly decorative. | Not dateable |

Table 1: Bone pins categorisation and dating scheme

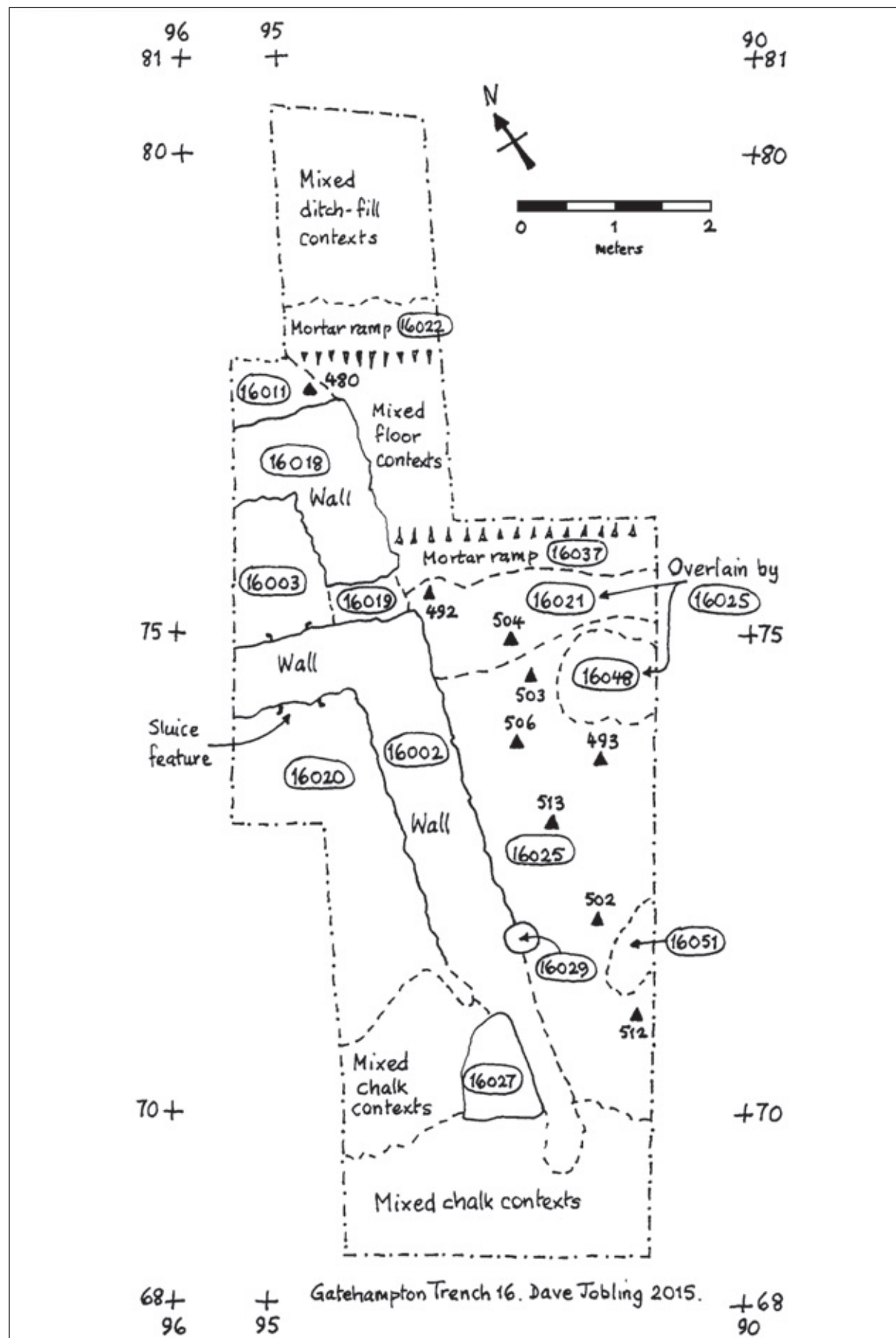


Fig. 1: Trench 16 contexts associated with bone-related artefacts and industry

Types 1 and 2 in Table 1 are often combined by date into Group A: types 3 to 6 into Group B. Gatehampton's dating, as a 3rd to 4th Century villa, would lead us to expect the pins described here to be of types within Group B. Assigning a pin to a type requires the pin's head to be present, not always the case with the Gatehampton specimens. Three of the eight can be assigned with assurance, as expected, to Group B. One is a blank, lacking any finalized form. Four defy classification due to damage.

In terms of morphology, pins are likely to demonstrate a swelling shaft (where the middle of the pin is thicker than the neck or point), and faceting (where cuts made by a knife are clearly visible) or polishing (which generally, but not always, eliminates faceting). Heads can be rounded, conical, ovoid, cuboid, spherical, globular and cylindrical. There may be grooves (incisions) or reels (disc-like forms, often proud of the rest of the pin's surface), and the head between the reels may be reduced to a bead. The Museum of London's collection (Museum of London, online collection) illustrates the full range of variation.

Table 2 describes the pins found in Trench 16.

Two of the Trench 16 finds (SF493 and SF503) are clearly pins at preliminary stages of manufacture. The former shows heavy faceting, while the latter is a blank with no features yet completed.

The most complete and expertly crafted pin is SF480, the only one found in context 16011, and at the uppermost level of all the finds. Three pins (SF506, SF512 and SF513) and the knife (SF502) were found in the most heavily industrialised context, 16025. Two pins (SF503 and SF504) were uncovered in context 16021 and two (SF492 and SF493) at the boundary between the topsoil (context 16099) and the underlying 16025.

The total difference in level is 39cms, across all finds and all source contexts. See Fig. 1 for the horizontal distribution of these contexts. Excluding the earliest find, SF480, the vertical range drops to just 17cms, while the four finds in context 16025 (pins and knife) have a vertical range of only 8cms.

| Small find | Context | Grid reference (see Fig. 1) | Spot height (m) | Length (mm) | Max width (mm) | Notes |
|------------|---------|--------------------------------|--------------------|----------------|-------------------|---|
| SF480 | 16011 | 94.00, 77.60 | 7.52 | 68 | 4 | Crummy type 3. Ovoid head, slightly swelling shaft. No decoration. Found in 2013, and reported in Ref 1. |
| SF492 | 16099 | 93.40, 75.50 | 7.27 | 95 | 5 | Missing head and tip. Lightly faceted, polished. Two concentric lines inscribed at top, as decoration. 2014. |
| SF493 | 16099 | 91.55, 73.57 | 7.30 | 63 | 5 | Missing head and tip. Clearly knife faceted length-wise, incomplete crafting. No decoration. 2014. |
| SF503 | 16021 | 92.25, 74.60 | 7.23 | 75 | 9 | Crudely cut bone "blank", pre-crafting. 2014. |
| SF504 | 16021 | 92.50, 74.99 | 7.23 | 73 | 4 | Missing head. Polished. No decoration. 2014. |
| SF506 | 16025 | 92.40, 73.80 | 7.17 | 62 | 4 | Crummy type 3. Spherical head, swelling shaft, polished. Missing tip. No decoration. Head flat on one side (probably damage, not design). 2015. |
| SF512 | 16025 | 91.00, 71.10 | 7.14 | 88 | 4 | Crummy type 3. Ovoid head, swelling shaft, polished. No decoration. Complete except for missing tip. 2015. |
| SF513 | 16025 | 92.00, 73.10 | 7.21 | 51 | 3 | Missing head and tip. Knife faceting length-wise. No decoration. 2015. |

Table 2: The Trench 16 bone pins

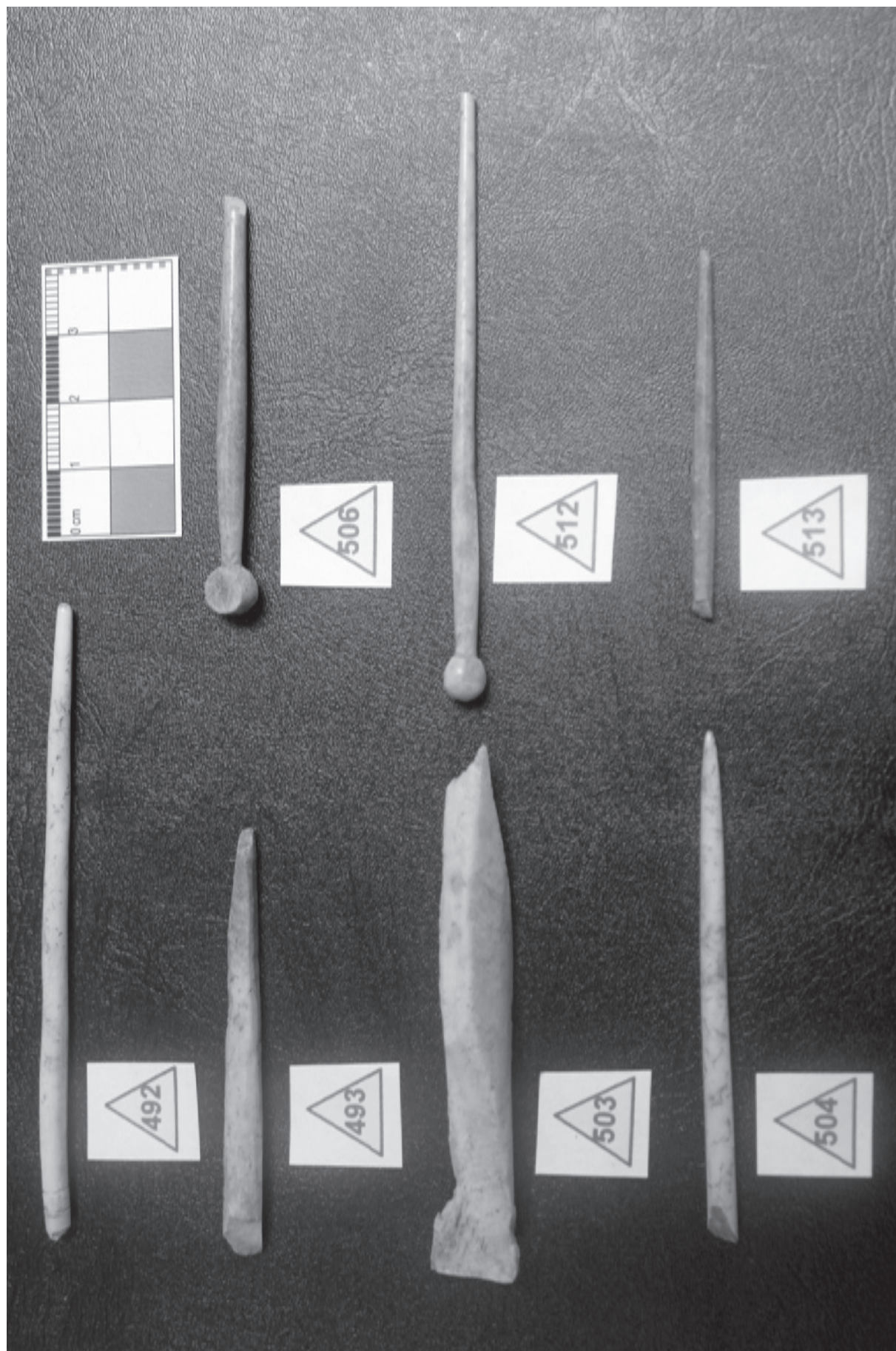


Fig. 2: The Trench 16 bone pins

photo Jack Jobling

The butcher's knife

Reproduced in Fig. 3 is an illustration from the classic "Roman Era in Britain", by John Ward, now in the public domain online (Ward 1911). Item F in the illustration is identified as a butcher's knife. Ward writes, "Large knives with triangular blades of the shape of F have tangs or sockets, and there is a good example of the former with a bone handle from Arncliffe in the British Museum. They are probably butchers' knives, and this is corroborated by the fact that the knives carved on altars, with other sacrificial implements, are of this shape."

Compare item F in Ward's illustration with the Gatehampton small find (SF502) shown in Fig. 4. They are close to identical, SF502 showing the same sort of truncation and damage to the socket, though we are fortunate to have the broken-off end of SF502's socket (missing in Ward's drawing). While Ward makes reference to bone handles, the Gatehampton knife had a wooden handle. We know this because within the socket there is evidence of the same process of iron replacement of wood fibres shown on the nails and hinges found further to the west of the villa (Jobling 2011 and 2013).

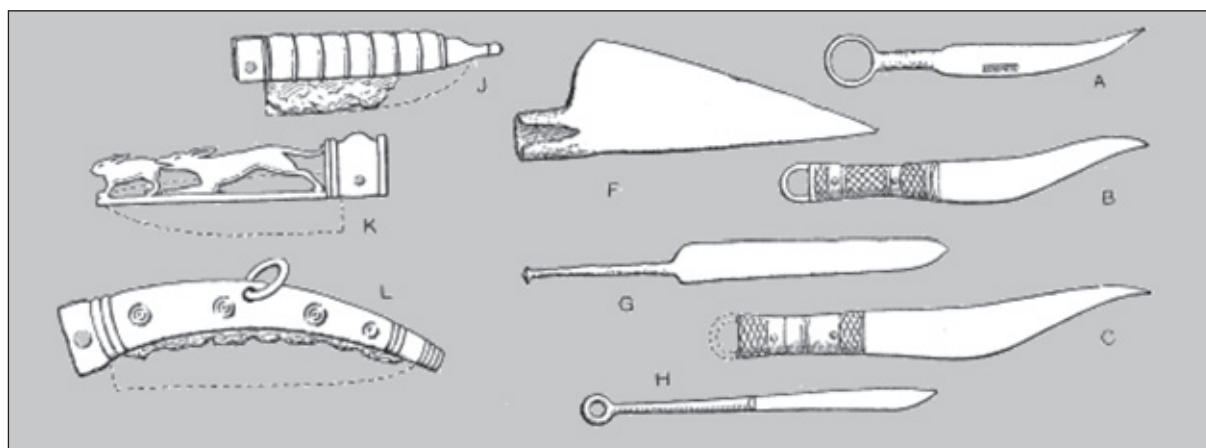


Fig. 3: Reproduction of John Ward's depiction of a Roman butcher's knife (item F)

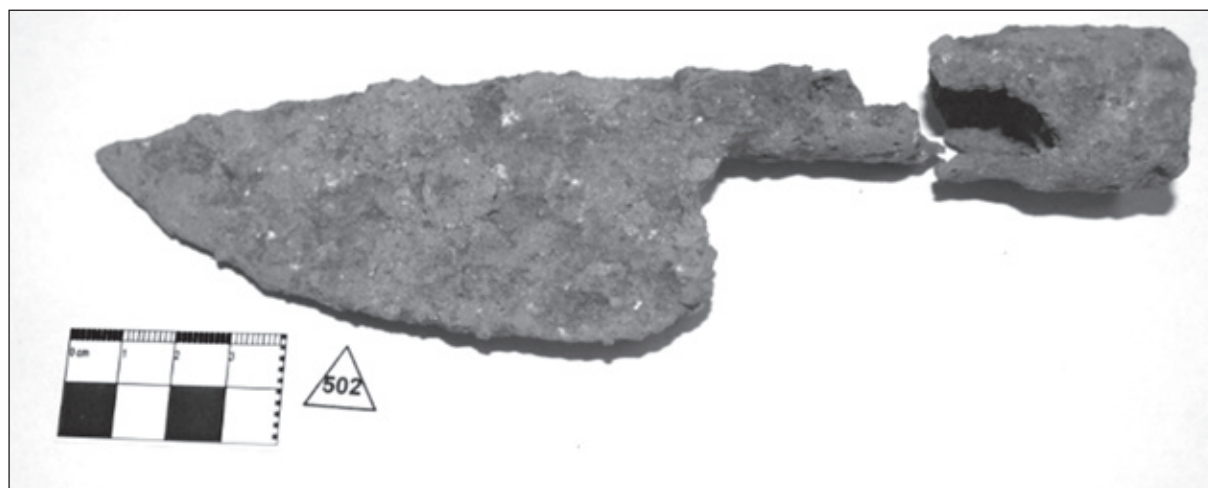


Figure 4: SF502, the Gatehampton knife blade with socket for handle

photo Jack Jobling

| Small find | Context | Grid reference | Spot height (m) | Length (mm) | Max width (mm) | Notes |
|------------|---------|----------------|-----------------|--|--------------------------|--|
| SF502 | I6025 | 91.50, 72.10 | 7.13 | blade: 100; socket: 85; total: 185 | blade: 52; socket: 29 | Butcher's knife. Blade (intact) and socket (damaged). Evidence of wooden handle. |

Table 3: The Trench 16 butcher's knife

Evidence of industry

Butchery and bone-related craftsmanship were not the only activities to leave their mark at the eastern end of Gatehampton.

Alongside the whole of eastern wall 16002 (but not 16018) is a deposit, 16025, showing heavy concentrations of charcoal and the highly malleable yellow or red clay often associated with iron-making furnaces. Also in this area are dense accumulations of broken pottery and animal bone, suggesting that it was acceptable to discard rubbish around this end of the building, which presents a different picture to that seen at the western end, where the higher-status rooms and the bath facilities were located.

Also present, under the heavy charcoal and clay deposits (16025), is a neat pile of broken roof tiles (16045), perhaps destined for recycling into tesserae, or perhaps just dumped.

In 2014 (Jobling 2014), approximately thirty brown, white and red micro-tesserae were also found in this area. In the absence of any known mosaic at Gatehampton, no explanation has so far been found for the presence of these. In light of 2015's extensive finds indicating crafts and industry, it could be that the micro-tesserae were simply being made here, and given their very small size, a number escaped their maker. There was likely to be local demand for the raw materials, even if the craftsmen who designed and laid the mosaics may have come from further afield. For example, the villa found at Lower Basildon, just across the Thames from Gatehampton, had fine mosaics, in one fortunate case recorded before being destroyed by the construction of the Great Western railway (Ford, 2004).

The classic Roman working man's lunch is also in evidence. A number of oyster shells have been found in the working deposits alongside the eastern wall.

Conclusion

The dense accumulations of charcoal and clay suggestive of ironmongery, the masses of broken pottery, and the possibility of tesserae and micro-tesserae manufacture, all support the contention that the eastern end of the villa was a heavily used working area. It seems highly probable that this scruffy end of the villa also included a cottage industry in bone pin-making, probably a spin-off of the butchery-related activities clearly indicated by the masses of animal bone and the butcher's knife. None of the bone pins found here are of high quality craftsmanship, and decoration is absent or clumsy. Was this an ironworker or a butcher, in his spare time, discarding his oyster shells while trying out a new skill?

This one sign of artistry stands out at the eastern end of the Gatehampton villa, while all the other evidence suggests that the villa's dirty work was more normally carried out there.

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Acknowledgements

Thanks to Jack Jobling, who photographed the bone pins and butcher's knife for Figs. 2 and 4.

Blewbury Local History and Archaeology Groups

Blewbury Big Dig – 3rd Interim Report

Dave Carless

Introduction

The Blewbury Big Dig project continues to run as a very successful partnership between SOAG and Blewbury Local History and Archaeology Groups in which both parties provide equipment and members of both can take part.

Over the last year or two, the project has evolved from being just a programme of test pits to include geophysical surveys and, moving into 2015, larger excavations. We have, however, continued to dig test pits, though fewer in number than in previous years and more focussed on specific locations and our research questions:

- What evidence is there of early occupation in the Nottingham Fee Manor (a small manor dating back to the Domesday Book, entirely surrounded by the Great Manor of Blewbury)?
- What are the early Saxon origins of Blewbury? Is there evidence of a possible minster church?
- Where were the historic boundaries between village and fields?

We have now completed 37 test pits and expect only a small number will be needed in future years to complete the programme. Recent pits have served to confirm our earlier understanding of the spatial and temporal pattern of settlement in the village and so detailed results are not presented here but will be reported when the programme is complete.

One of our 2014 test pits, however, produced a spectacular quantity and quality of early Saxon material. This finding led to a short investigative programme to evaluate the site, described below (see page 29).

But first we will describe the geophysical programme at various sites across the village.

Geophysical Surveys

Within the village itself a number of open spaces have been identified, each of which is large enough to accommodate several 20m x 20m grid surveys. Fortunately, these open spaces lie in locations that may help answer our research questions.

Both a resistivity meter and a gradiometer have been used to investigate these spaces, and test pits are also being dug to complement the surveys. In 2013 a training exercise took place in the smallest of the sites (the Play Close) and work on the others was completed in 2014. Fig.1 shows the location of the sites surveyed.

The Play Close

This small close is owned by the church and is used for public recreation. It has had its present name since at least the 17th century and there have been no buildings on it since, at the latest, 1805 (the date of the Enclosure map). The survey was undertaken to see if there was any evidence of earlier structures on the site.

A number of long linear features were found but these are thought to be either paths or drainage pipes. No evidence of buildings was found.

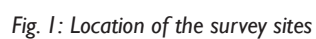
Hall Barn Close

This close was the site of the farm at the centre of the Nottingham Fee Manor (later known as Hall Barn Manor) and the location of farm buildings is shown on the 1805 Enclosure map. The aim of the survey was to see if any earlier buildings could be identified.

No new structures were found but the outline of the 1805 buildings and farm walls could be seen in the resistivity plot. By overlaying the plot with the 1805 map in a GIS programme we were able to confirm that the 1805 map is very accurate and can therefore be relied upon for other investigations. Further evidence of this accuracy came from test pit B25 in which we located large chalk blocks forming the footings of a farm wall that was shown on the map.

The Rectory

This site had been part of Parsonage Farm – the seat of the Prebendal Manor, and lies immediately adjacent to the churchyard. The house was built in 1979 and during its construction the remains of five humans were found, suggesting that the churchyard may once have included this land.



The resistivity survey (see Fig. 2) identified a linear feature with high resistance running east-west. Strong magnetic signals were seen to the north of it (Fig. 3). It was thought that the feature might be a path or a collapsed wall and so an excavation was planned for 2015 to determine which, if either, it was and to extract any available dating evidence.

Postscript: the excavation has now taken place but processing and analysis has yet to be undertaken. All we can say at present is that the linear feature was a path.

The Manor

This large site has been the seat of Blewbury Great Manor for centuries – probably back to Saxon times. It is roughly circular and surrounded by a water-filled ditch fed by the Millbrook. Number 16 on the 1805 Enclosure map (see Fig. 4) shows the farm in the southwest quadrant and the house in the northeast. In the southeast are three sides of a roughly square moat.

The geophysical survey included the northwest corner (now an orchard) and the area to the south and east of the house, (Fig. 5) including the land within and around the moat (now a formal garden). The orchard area revealed a path to the fields but little else as the area had been heavily disturbed in recent years.

The resistivity plot for the area south and east of the house is shown in Fig. 6. Two features stand out:

- A strong high resistance linear feature running north-south. This may be a track from the road (off plot to the south) to the front door of the house, in which case it presumably pre-dates the moat
- A possible building, which would pre-date the 1805 map, to the east of the house

It is planned to investigate both of these features by excavation, probably in 2016.



Fig. 2: Resistivity plot. 10m grid

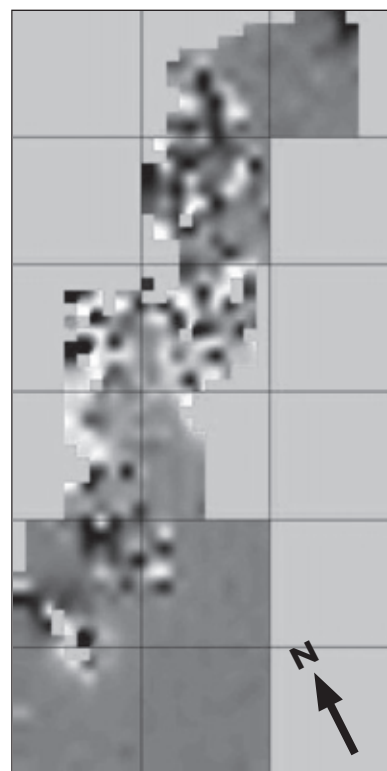


Fig. 3: Magnetometry plot

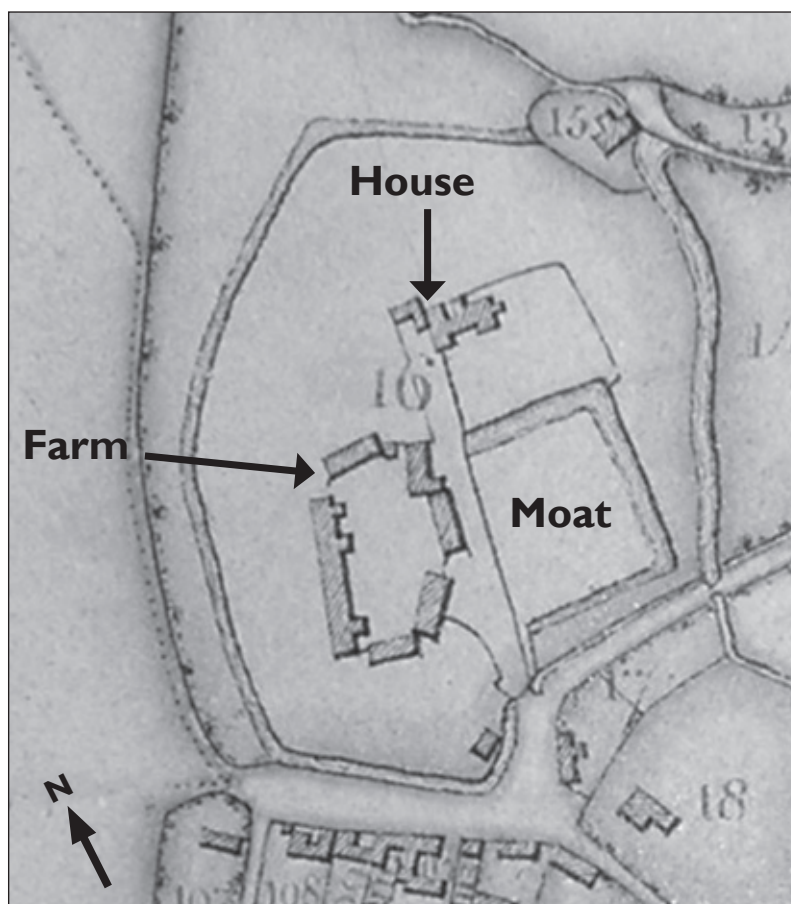


Fig. 4: Part of the Enclosure map showing the Great Manor



Fig. 5: Manor House with owner Mark Blythe helping out with our resistivity survey

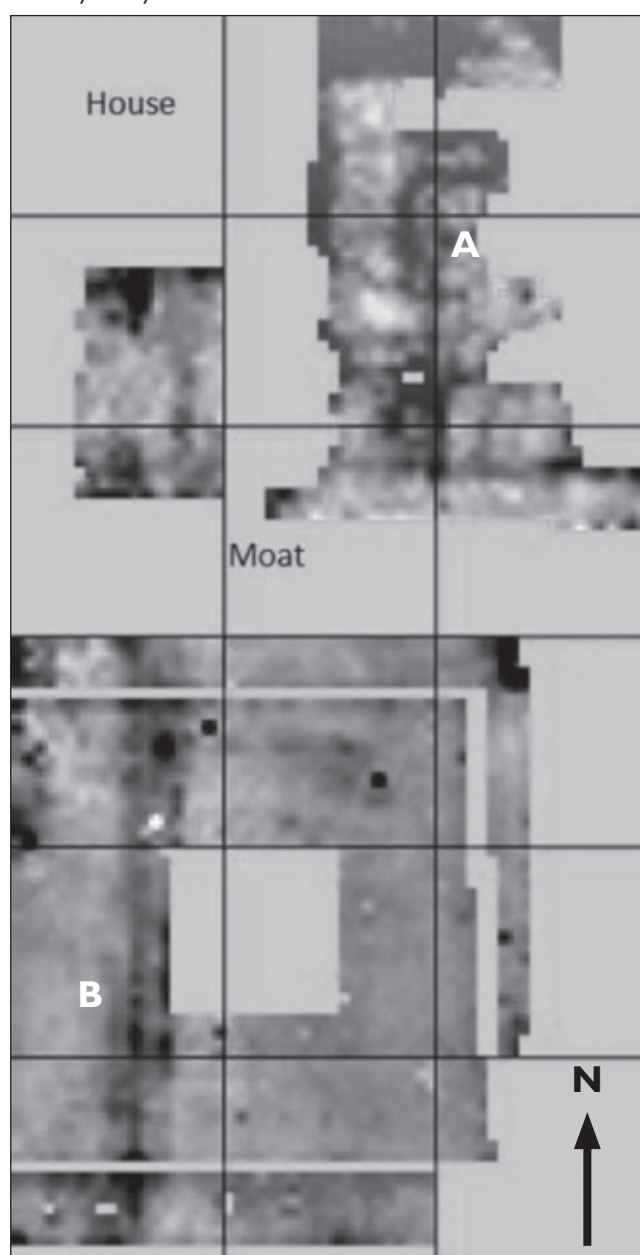


Fig. 6: Resistivity plot. 20m grid showing a possible building (A) and a linear feature (B)

Early Saxon Site

Overview

As part of the test pit programme and the particular focus on the Nottingham Fee Manor, a routine test pit (B28) was dug in a large garden. It had been expected, from the landowners' knowledge and from similar pits in the village, that the depth of the pit to natural chalk would be in the range 300mm to 400mm. However the soil and sub-soil went down to a depth of 650mm and produced a large amount of Saxon material including a range of apparently high status pottery and finds believed to be from around the 6th century (see details in the Test Pits B28 and B30 page 30).

In addition, the landowner had recently excavated two small trial pits in advance of planned building work approximately 10m from our pit. In the light of our finds it was decided to metal detect over the partially backfilled spoil from this and a small bronze Saxon brooch of similar 6th century date was found. These finds suggested that the site could possibly be a Saxon cemetery and so it was decided to investigate further.

The key questions were:

- What was the nature of the overall site?
- What was the extent of it?
- Was the site likely to be harmed by the planned building work?
- What was the nature and origin of the material in the test pit?

To address these questions, the following work has been done:

- A geophysical survey using resistivity and magnetometry has been completed over three partial grids of 20m x 20m
- A metal detector survey over the same area has been completed
- A depth to natural survey using an auger, concentrating on the area close to the planned building work and the area around the test pit, has been completed
- The original test pit has been extended by digging another (B30) immediately adjacent to it
- The two landowner's pits (designated B31 and B32) have been re-excavated and the material sieved
- Three further test pits (B29, B33 and B34) have been excavated on the site

The provisional conclusions from this work are:

- The site is probably not a cemetery
- The area of deep soil is probably restricted to a single patch of approximately 3m x 3m
- Rich finds were only found in the two adjacent test pits in this patch (B28 and B30) Although much bone has been found in these pits none of it is thought to be human
- A few small pieces of burnt bone have been found but not enough to suggest a cremation
- The site would not be damaged by the planned building work

Four hypotheses were put forward to explain the findings. The deep area could be:

- An isolated burial (yet to be located) possibly in a pre-existing pit
- The remains of a prehistoric barrow in which a pagan burial (yet to be located) has taken place
- The remains of a sunken featured building in which a pagan burial (yet to be located) has taken place
- The remains of a sunken featured building in which secondary or tertiary deposit of 6th century material has taken place

The last of these is considered the most likely.

The Test Pits

Test Pits B28 and B30

Material from pits B28 and B30 has been sorted, counted, weighed and (pottery and small finds) washed, and is summarised below:

Pottery:

Approximately 10 decorated and 350 undecorated pot sherds we found in the two pits.

Small Finds:

| B28 | B30 |
|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Glass beads (2) | Glass bead |
| Amber bead | Iron brooch or mount |
| Iron pin or handle | Iron annular brooch |
| Gaming piece (Roman pot sherd) | Gaming piece (Roman pot sherd) |
| Bone comb fragments | Yellow pigment |
| Roman pot fragment | Roman pot fragment |

Test Pits B29, B33 and B34

Far less Saxon pottery was recovered from these pits compared with B28 and B30. No significant small finds were present.

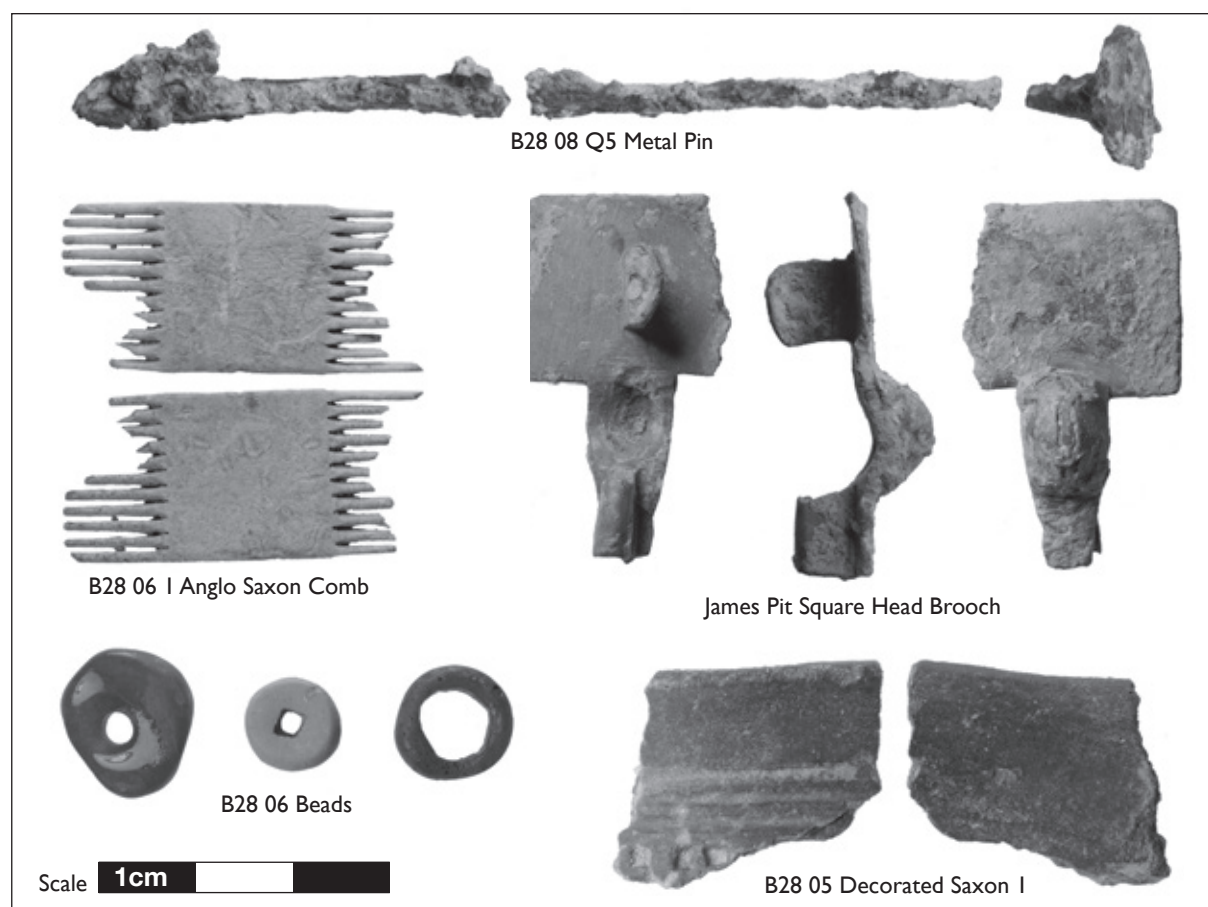


Fig. 7: Small Finds

Test Pits B31 and B32

These re-excavations were not extended to normal test pit size (1.0m x 1.5m) but left at a significantly smaller size as originally excavated by machine bucket. Far less Saxon pottery was recovered from these pits compared with B28 and B30. No significant small finds were present.

The geophysical survey

After B28 had been backfilled, a survey using both resistivity and magnetometry was undertaken across the site, using 20m squares. The magnetometry revealed a number of spikes assumed to be due to stray ferrous material on the site but no archaeology. The resistivity plot is shown in Fig. 8.

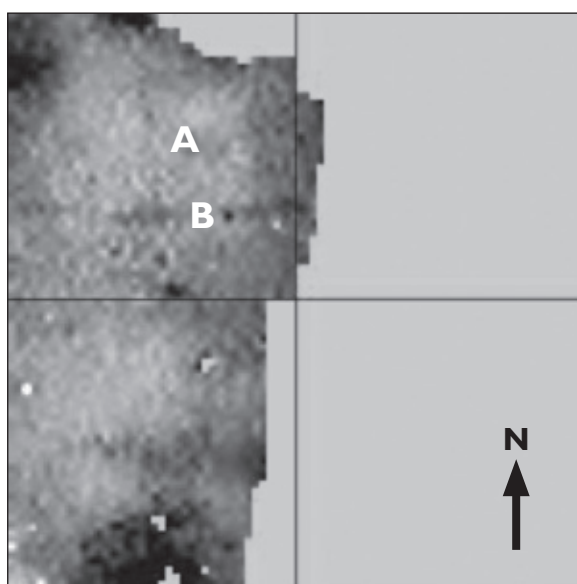


Fig. 8: Resistivity plot. 20m grid showing test pit B28 (A) and a linear feature (B)

In summary, the only significant feature identified from this work is a broad line running approximately east-west across Grid I. This has subsequently been associated with a track, shown on the 1912 ordnance survey map, which was probably used for movement of cattle from farm and stream to fields.

The metal detector survey

In order to see if there were any significant clusters of metal objects across the site that could be used as a guide to positioning further test pits, a metal detector survey was carried out using the same grid as the geophysical survey. Locations of non-ferrous signals were marked with flags and then plotted onto the survey grid. Although apparent clusters were identified, no significant archaeological artefacts were found and these signals are thought to be from modern materials in the top soil.

The auger survey

Auger samples were taken at approximately 3m spacing over the site to establish the depth to the natural chalk. This was to determine if there were other places where the depth was significantly greater than normal, which might signify further potential areas of rich finds. Other than the area around B28 and B30 no deep soil areas were located.

Samples were also taken at points around the two test pits (B28 and B30). From this auger survey the potential extent of the deep area was determined to be between 3.0m and 6.3m N-S and between 2.1m and 4.6m E-W.

Postscript

A full excavation of the area around the rich test pits (B28 and B30) has recently been undertaken (2015) and has confirmed that the deep ground is indeed the base of a sunken featured building. Processing and analysis of this excavation has not yet been undertaken but will be reported next year.

The Forward Programme

The Blewbury Big Dig continues to be a success as a community archaeology project. We continue to have enthusiastic participation of local garden owners and willing diggers and pot washers from within the village and the surrounding area, including the extensive collaboration of other local archaeology groups.

The Blewbury Big Dig programme continues to surprise us and present opportunities for further investigation and so the test pit programme and the excavations will continue through the 2015 and 2016 seasons. Barring further unexpected events it is anticipated that this phase of the work within the village will then be largely completed, but there remain many potential targets in the parish to investigate!

Acknowledgements

Once again we are immensely grateful to all the people who have offered their gardens and given up their time to survey, dig, sieve, wash, sort, count, weigh and report.

The programme has been undertaken with the kind support of TWHAS (The Wallingford History and Archaeological Society) who loaned us equipment and, in the guise of Gerard Latham, provided much needed support and guidance to get us going. We are greatly indebted to June Strong for help in dating the pottery and to Geoff Deakin for use of his gradiometer. I would also like to acknowledge the major contributions of Lindsey Bedford as co-director of the project, Mike Green for leading the geophysical surveys, and Richard Miller, our photographer. We are also most grateful for generous financial support from Sustainable Blewbury.

Preliminary report on the initial investigations into Highwood Roman site in 2014

David Nicholls

Background

The Highwood Roman site at Harpsden, Henley-on-Thames, lies in mainly deciduous woodland on the Phillimore estate, at an altitude of 92m. The site covers about 1 acre (0.4 hectares) with the core area at SU 75017951 (Fig. 1).

The geology is Rassler/Harefield beds of Older River Gravels with pockets of clay. The underlying chalk is at a depth of probably no more than 2m. Very large quantities of flints have been found, scattered on the surface and some of these are of exceptional size.

This report briefly describes the work undertaken in 2014 to prepare for an excavation in early 2015 of the site. Season's activities at this site are limited to permitted occupation times due to game bird rearing close by the site. The digging season is, practically, late February until the end of June.

In recent history, the site has been the subject of extensive interference by metal detectorists, resulting in huge quantities of soil moving.

During the 1970s, a proposed new road link between Henley and Reading prompted a field and route walking exercise, with limited aerial surveying, under the field directorship of one-time SOAG member C.A. Hart. A brief report and sketch of the proposed

route by him listed several potential sites, including – where Highwood Roman site is located – a Roman mausoleum. Efforts to establish why such an important feature was suggested have so far been in vain.

On the edge of the area under investigation, Henley Archaeological and Historical Group (HAHG) carried out limited excavation of what was initially believed to be the base of a windmill mound. Over an intermittent period from May 1977 they recovered a quantity of Roman pottery, plaster, tile, bone and 17 worn coins dating from the early 1st to late 4th century. No stratification was observed. Limited resistivity geophysical investigations during this period provided no positive imaging of features.

Dowsing within Highwood in 2013, undertaken by J Sharp, C Francis, and P Carter, revealed much disturbance of ground conditions and, when further extensive walking over the site was undertaken, large quantities of Roman tile and pottery shards were observed on the surface, along with considerable quantities of flints from masonry structures.

Work in 2014

In March 2014, permission was obtained from the Phillimore Estate to clear light woodland and extensive undergrowth. This opening up revealed the

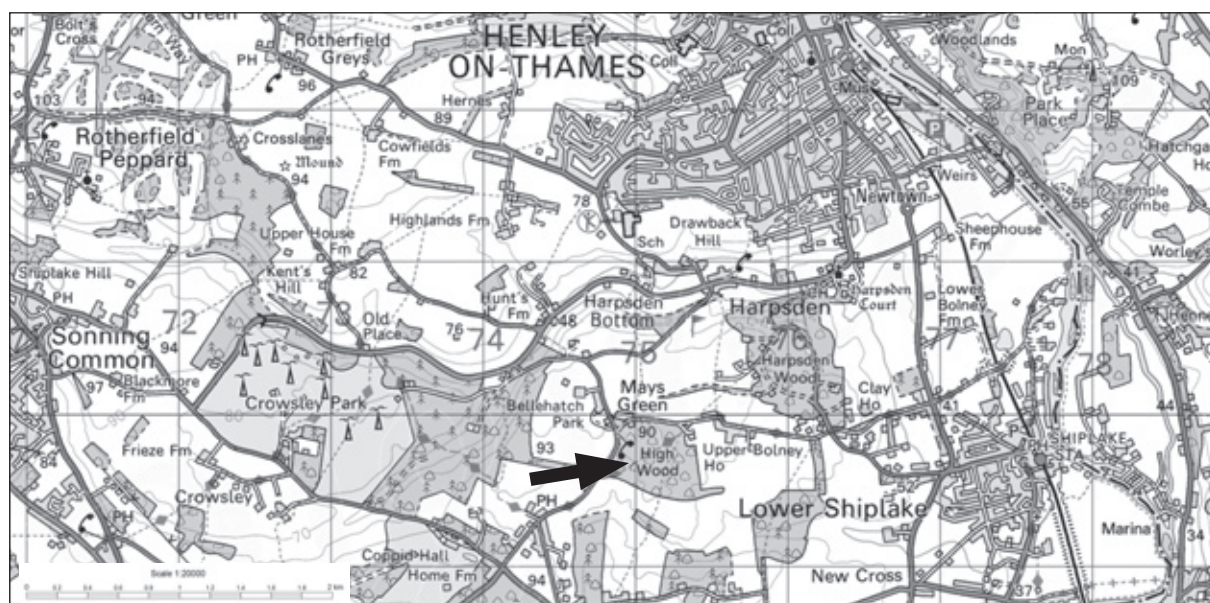


Fig. 1: The site location © Crown copyright Ordnance Survey. All rights reserved

huge extent of disturbance over the years, covering most of the area now being investigated. Clearing the undergrowth also showed wide variations in ground level.

It was decided to test trench this intriguing site to investigate further, and perhaps confirm the suggestion that it contained a Roman mausoleum.

With the help of Jerry Anderson, from Sandbergg LLP, a baseline was established for future surveys and trenches on an offset north-south axis (35/215 degrees) where siting could be achieved. This baseline covered a length of 60m with a zero point established at the middle point of the baseline. Levels were also established with the base datum of 92m OD.

The excavations planned for 2015 would be centred on a series of continuous test pits to the east of, and at a right angle to, this baseline, with a further separate grid of 3m x 4m to the south of this, covering a suspected masonry wall. The overall area under potential investigation was contained within a 30m x 30m square.

Following all the extensive clearance work we were anxious to maximise investigation time and the initial task was to try to obtain information on possible structures by geophysical surveying and terrain profile surveying. Therefore, late in 2014, an invited team led by R. Korzsinsky, formerly from Reading University, was invited to carry out a GPR survey over the core area together with a levelling survey. Unfortunately, no useful information was obtained due to the massive extent of soil moving (ground disturbance) in the past.

Just after that, a separate magnetometry survey was undertaken, by invitation, by D. Thornley also of Reading University. This survey covered two separate areas. The first was an area of 10m x 10m, to the west of the baseline from midpoint, to ensure that this area was clear of features so that we could use it for the excavations spoil heap. The second was an area of 10m x 15m to the east of the baseline from centre point. This was an area away from the proposed trench and was positioned where features visible on the surface suggested wall remains. The data yielded from the imaging was – again – weak but possibly showed short linear features.

In addition, before closing down for the 2014 season, I was anxious that the site would not suffer from further metal detecting. Accordingly, after obtaining approval from the estate (who have a blanket forbiddance of metal detecting) Rob Wadley and his small team from the Oxford Blues Metal Detecting Group accepted our invitation to scan the entire site in late June. In a



Fig. 2: Gold quarter stater of Cunobelinus

one-day period, an exceptional and unexpected find was made of a gold quarter stater of Cunobelinus, 10 to 40 AD (Fig. 2). This was a very small coin located just off the baseline at a depth of 175 mm. Five other Roman coins of 3rd/4th century date were also found. These were generally in a very worn condition.

All the finds from this site have been taken into storage on the Phillimore estate where we shall be working on them during the next few months. A very good facility has been kindly provided by the estate.

The full results of the SOAG Highwood investigations, including digging commenced in mid-March 2015, will be covered in a separate article in the next *SOAG Bulletin*, with analysis of the geophysics surveys and analysis of finds.

Summary

I believe that this site, although massively disturbed, will prove to be of particular interest, and the possibility of a mausoleum may yet be proved despite the extent of robbing that has occurred.

1. To date, very little structural evidence has been found although this is very early in the investigations of this site as a whole
2. The extensive disturbance of this site has caused loss of, and has probably destroyed, most of the valuable context evidence
3. Important finds have been made that could throw some light on reasons for the construction of a building or buildings on this site.

Adequate funding has been raised to enable SOAG to continue for at least another season.

Acknowledgements

Thanks to all those who helped, in whatever way, to achieve a good project, which has included the members of many local Groups and Societies, university staff and students, and several experts. They will be acknowledged properly in next years report.

Particular thanks to Lord Francis Phillimore for his generous permissions and interest.

The SOAG archives digitisation programme

Mike Green

Introduction

SOAG was founded in 1969 and from its very beginning was thorough in documenting its activities: field projects were recorded in detail, reports produced, logbooks kept, and newsletters and journals published. Until the turn of the century all of this was paper-based, not electronic, and the society is fortunate that almost all of it has survived. This archive has value in its own right as the heritage of our society, but it also documents a significant portion of all archaeological and historical research undertaken in South Oxfordshire during this period. SOAG are therefore custodians of a resource that has great potential value to a wider community.

All historical research and all archaeology begins with a survey of what has been done before, and it is therefore important that our records are available to future researchers. And that is where our problem begins. Whilst many SOAG documents and records have indeed been lodged in appropriate repositories, much of it has not, and we therefore hold the only copies of much potentially valuable material. The problems with the current situation are defined as the following:

- *Accessibility*: the contents of the archive are only partially catalogued, and then only at very high level. The archives' detailed contents are essentially unknown and can only be identified via laborious manual searching
- *Security*: most of the documents exist only as single copies and as such are vulnerable to loss or destruction.
- *Availability*: The archive is held in box files in the attic of a retired SOAG member, who cannot provide easy access to researchers, and who cannot be expected to hold the archive indefinitely

We could simply pass the archive over to other authorities such as museums and libraries which may be better able to solve the above problems. However most of them have handover standards that we cannot meet without significant preparatory work on our part. Whilst this is a daunting prospect we are encouraged by a number of relevant

recent developments:

- Digital technologies for preserving and disseminating documents are increasingly available and affordable
- Many organisations similar to SOAG are facing the same problems, and we should be able to learn from their experiences

In autumn 2014 the SOAG committee therefore initiated the SOAG archives digitisation programme, which was launched at the SOAG AGM in April 2015. This report describes the programme and progress up to that time.

Contents of the SOAG archive

There are four main categories of documentation:

Archive of SOAG Bulletins

These documents are the formal record of SOAG's activities. They also form the first port of call for any historians or archaeologists who wish to continue research initiated by SOAG. The complete set (minus two editions) exists for 1969 to 2014. The most recent editions (2000-2014) exist in digital form and are already available on the SOAG website, but all earlier editions exist only as single copies of paper documents, and these are in a variety of formats and sizes (Fig. 1).



Fig. 1: Samples from the SOAG Bulletin archive

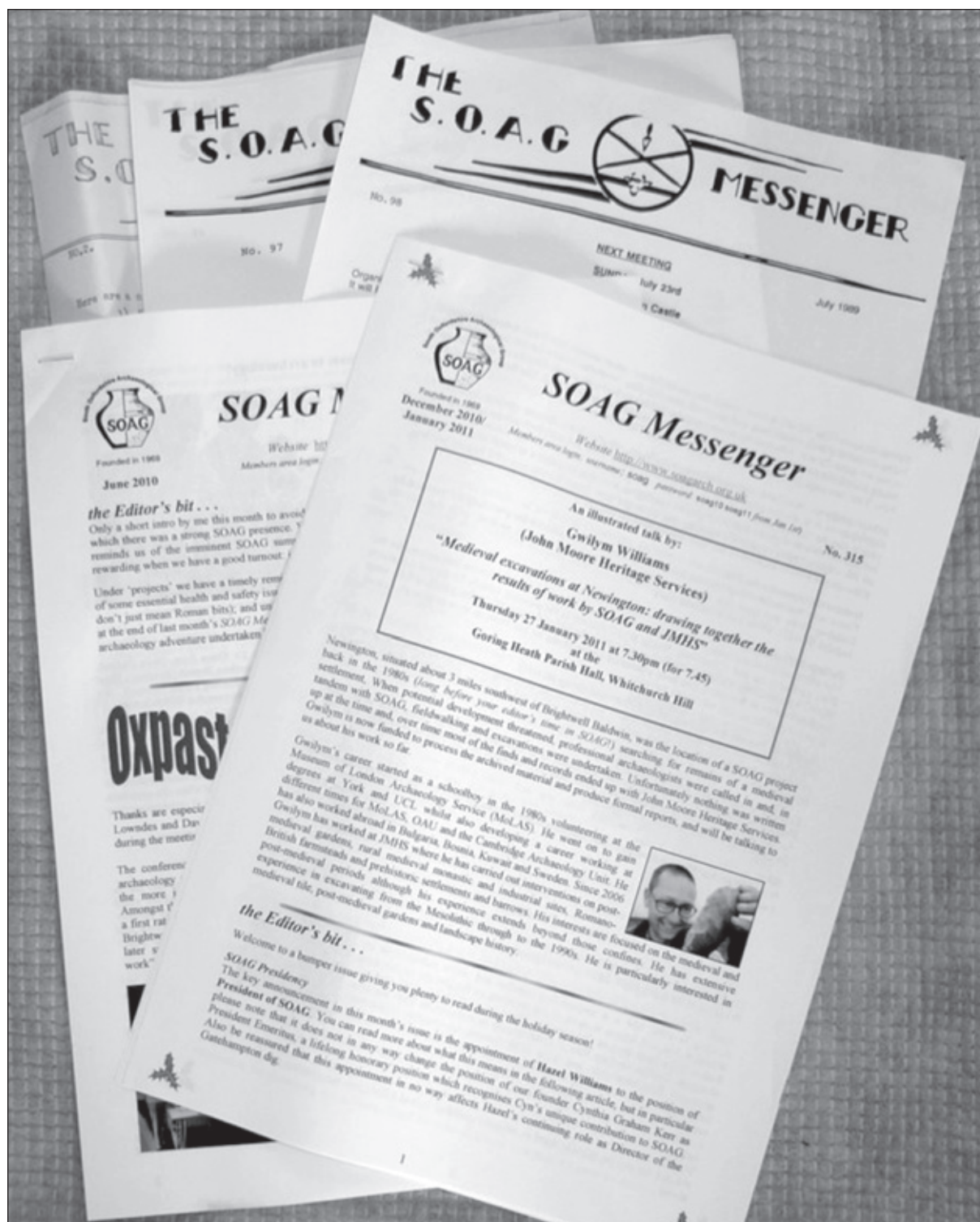


Fig. 2: Samples from the SOAG Messenger archive

Archive of SOAG Messengers

In the early days SOAG Bulletin served the dual purpose of newsletter and report journal. In 1977 these functions were split and SOAG Messenger was initiated as SOAG's regular newsletter. All editions exist from 1977 to 2014. From 2003 they exist in digital form and these are already available in the members area of the SOAG website (Fig. 2).

Cynthia Graham Kerr's notebooks

From the beginning, our founder kept meticulous handwritten logbooks recording, in diary form, almost everything that SOAG did. They contain much detail that is valuable and unpublished elsewhere. They span the period 1969 to 2007 and amount to about 1000 pages in foolscap format (Fig. 3).

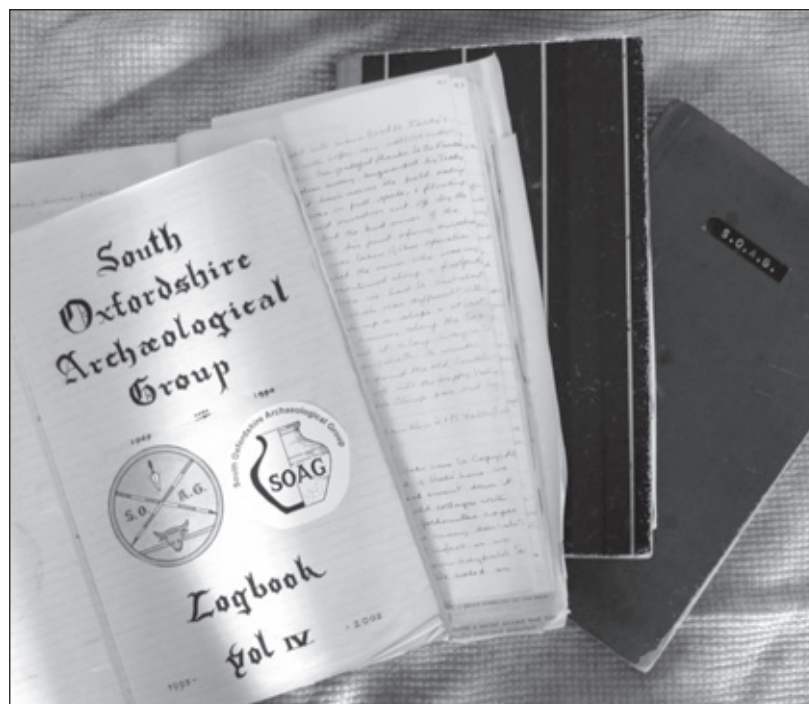


Fig. 3: Some of Cynthia's logbooks

Project papers

The paperwork underlying many significant SOAG projects undertaken between 1969 and 2000, especially those led by Cynthia herself, have been preserved. Examples include survey datasets, diagrams, photos, drawings, notes, interim reports etc. Most of it has not been previously published and we have recent local evidence that it can be of great value to new researchers. The volume is several hundred pages in a wide variety of paper types and sizes, and very variable image quality (Fig. 4).

The SOAG archives digitisation programme

In late 2014 the SOAG committee decided that the first step should be a programme to digitise all the above documents. The first benefit is that this will tackle the security issue since the digital versions will form a backup of the paper documents thereby rendering their contents secure in the event of loss or destruction. Digitisation is also a necessary step on the road to making the documents available electronically.

Digitisation embraces a number of techniques which vary according to the nature of the source materials and the outputs required. For example high quality typeset can often be scanned such that not only is the image of the document captured but its textual content can be captured as well using Optical Character Recognition (OCR). This facilitates subsequent content searching within individual

documents and potentially across complete document sets. For other document types this is not possible but capturing the documents as images (jpegs) at least enables them to be viewed electronically and printed. Domestic PCs and scanners and low cost software can achieve some of the above but in many case professional quality equipment and services are required to achieve satisfactory results.

The SOAG programme is therefore in two phases, the first phase being evaluation and testing of different approaches using real samples from our archives, and the second phase

being full implementation. It is expected that the full programme may take several years to complete.

Phase 1: 2014-2015

Phase 1 Evaluation and Testing will run from 2014 to 2015 and includes the following:

- Testing professional digitisation services using samples of our document sets.
- Testing 'crowd sourcing' as an approach: i.e. testing the capabilities of SOAG members own kit such as PCs and low-cost scanners.
- Evaluating publishing routes for the digitised documents. These include, for example, in-house publishing via the SOAG website, and using external services. This phase will also address key accessibility issues such as content indexing and search capabilities.
- Evaluating possibilities for long term archiving of the paper documents. This will include deciding what, if anything, will continue to be held by SOAG (including location and custodian responsibilities), and evaluating the use of external agencies.
- Developing contacts with, and learning from, other archaeology groups who have similar problems.
- Deciding budgetary requirements for Phase 2.

Phase 2: 2015 onwards

Phase 2 embraces implementation and will run from 2015 onwards.

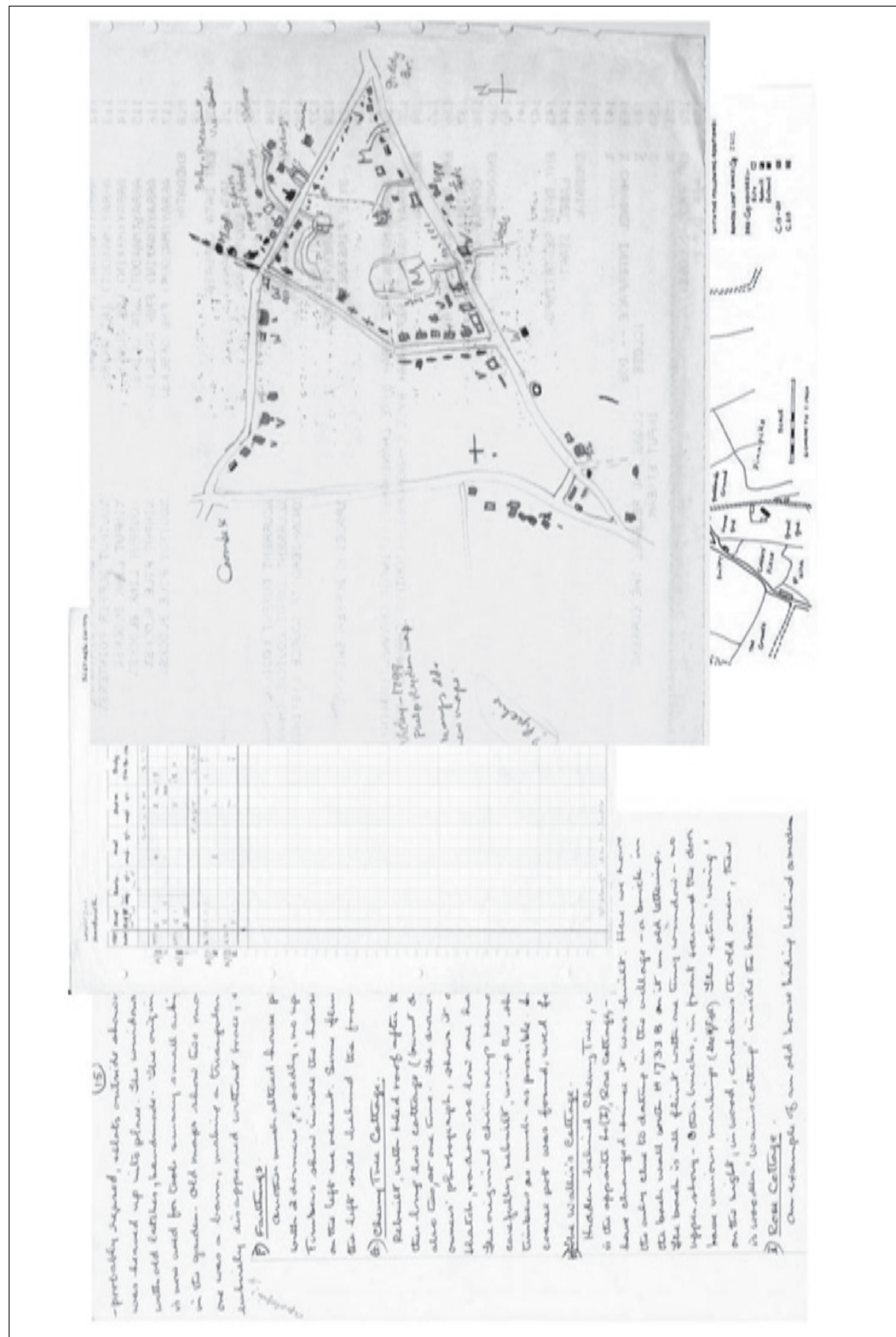


Fig. 4: Sample project papers

Progress

By April 2015 the following activities had been achieved:

SOAG Bulletins

We have test-scanned sample documents with a local commercial company, the results from which are very satisfactory. The results are image scans of the document which can be read online and/or printed, and the contents were also fully OCR'd making them potentially text searchable. The general accuracy was significantly higher than we could achieve using typical domestic computing equipment and the projected costs were lower than expected.

Cyn's logbooks

These are almost entirely handwritten so they can only be scanned as images, not as text searchable documents. A trial of scanning them in-house essentially failed. It is a difficult process technically as the books are foolscap in format and don't fit onto a domestic flatbed scanner. A test was undertaken with a commercial company that has appropriate scanners, and the output was broadly satisfactory. It has been decided to scan them all this way, although there is a considerable amount of pre-processing to be done within SOAG in order to remove and label the many loose inserts.

SOAG Messengers.

Similar tests to those for SOAG Bulletin are being undertaken. It is expected that the quality of output and costs will be similar.

SOAG project papers

An audit of these showed a very high degree of variability in quality and paper sizes. It would require a significant sorting and manual indexing effort before they could be sent out-of-house, and labour intensive processing by a commercial company is likely to be expensive and error prone. Furthermore OCRing would not work on most items. Accordingly, a pilot project of the crowd-sourcing method was run, in which four SOAG members undertook to scan elements of selected project documentation on their personal domestic equipment, working to a set of pre-defined standards, and then return them to a SOAG controller for checking and integration into deliverable electronic documents. The test was very successful, and has encouraged us to go down this route using additional SOAG volunteers, thereby saving potentially significant costs on what is perhaps the trickiest part of the whole archive.

Electronic publishing routes

The first publication channel will be SOAG's own website, which will be a straightforward and low-cost process. This will secure the documents and make them available electronically. However at this stage they will not be indexed or easily searchable. The variety of approaches to tackling this are still under evaluation.

We have also begun to evaluate the Archaeology Data Service (ADS), an online electronic publishing service for the archaeology community, in particular by talking to other groups with experience of this route.

Budgetary requirements

It was always intended that part of the Cynthia Graham Kerr Bequest would be used to cover external costs, as preservation of her documentation legacy was one of her estate's stated preferences for use of the funds. At the time of writing a budget of £1,000 has been allocated by the committee to cover likely Phase 2 costs in 2015-2016.

Summary

At present much of what is in the SOAG archive might as well not exist. Whilst its main components have been listed at a high level most of its content is unknown, and it is also inaccessible to researchers. We have recent direct evidence of the difficulties when a researcher into the history of a local village requested access to material thought to be in our archives. The required material was eventually located and after much effort material was identified in all four sections of the archive. Copies were provided, but the experience proved that we are in no position to provide such a service on a regular basis.

The programme described in this article is therefore a key step in the process of SOAG discharging its responsibility not only to its members but also to the wider community. It is hoped that the process will culminate in the provision of fully indexed and searchable access to the fruits of 45 years of historical and archaeological research by SOAG in South Oxfordshire.

The Dark Ages

John White

Introduction

I must admit that at school I never liked History. However I did not, as is claimed for Henry Ford, think that 'History is bunk', but then I do not believe that he did either as he could not have run his business successfully without knowing the history of its performance. Similarly he would not have decided that his customers could have any colour car as long as it was black if the history of paint trials had not shown that black paint dries fastest.

My problem was not really with the subject but with the content and presentation of the lessons. History just seemed to be dates, dates, dates of battles and of kings, without any intriguing details that would have given them some life. If only we had been told, for example, that William Rufus was probably not a redhead but was only described as England's Barbarossa because the witchcraft of the time required it. The theory that his death was not a hunting accident or even a political assassination but a pagan sacrifice for the new millennium would at least have made history seem less dull. The only light relief I found in history lessons was when the teacher mentioned the 'Dark Ages', which for this little boy conjured up pictures of times when battles had to be fought by torchlight.

It was only much later that I started to find History more interesting. As a member of SOAG I discovered how archaeology provided the stage and props to illustrate the past. I realised that instead of just one Dark Age there were many, popping up all over the world whenever recorded history was scarce, providing the settings for inventive minds to populate with heroes like King Arthur.

My own creative output has been limited to writing articles for the *SOAG Bulletin*, but I have still managed to find oddities that interested me. For example while comparing the Metric and Imperial measurement systems and finding ways by which accuracy could be increased I found some measures that were absolutely indeterminate. Surprisingly the context is horseracing, where at first one would have thought precision of measurement would have been vital. However here races are won by 'lengths'. For horses there are subdivisions of 'necks', 'heads' or even a 'short head', but nothing that a number could be put to. In rowing too, races are won by 'lengths' and even the rules use this as a measurement. Here also there is a subdivision, a 'canvas', which is the length of the part of the boat, the sharp end, front or back, which

is covered by fabric to prevent water from splashing in. Again there are no numbers associated with the measurement. But I digress....

Recent years have had military anniversaries, of First and Second World War events, but many families will have found that they have their own 'dark age', a time in their family history about which nothing was known. Both my parents were at school during the First World War, but the only first-hand report I had was from my mother who had been let out of class to see Zeppelins flying over London without realising the dangers they brought. Her siblings, all older, were more involved. Her sister had a boy-friend who never returned from France, but when my aunt died seventy years later I found the Royal Flying Corps buttons and badges that she had kept. My mother also had a brother who joined the army at the age of 16 and then spent four years in France as a medical orderly, an experience so horrible he never ever spoke about it. By comparison, when he was demobbed from the Second World War as a Major in the Royal Engineers he brought the family home souvenirs from India. Mine was a model native boat. I still have it, but its source is a problem – it is almost identical to one I have seen in the Pitt-Rivers museum that is labelled as being of native South American origin.

Although I was not quite seven when the war ended I do have some of my own memories. I am the little boy in this photo (below) of our VE Day bonfire. My strongest memory, however, is of being very, very, very sick! My birthday was a week after peace was declared and all my relatives seem to have decided to blow their sweet ration on buying me chocolate. Fortunately I have now managed to like milk chocolate but even today I still cannot eat the dark variety.



Another unpleasant memory I have of shortly after the end of the War is coming home from school and being shouted at by neighbours' children because my family had been evacuated but theirs had not. Because of this I never asked 'Daddy, what did you do in the war?'. I knew my father had not been in the army because he was a schoolteacher, which was a 'reserved occupation'. I had so many happy memories of family life involving my father being present that I was almost ashamed of my happiness in what for others was a 'dark age'. My father taught me to ride a bicycle, and to shoot – I have a clear memory, at the age of no more than six, of blasting holes in a newspaper target with my mother's little four-ten shotgun. However since my father's death I have looked again at his wartime activities and have decided that my first conclusions were wrong. It was true that my father's service was 'deferred' several times, until the war ended. He was instructed to hand his call-up papers to the head of the school as soon as they arrived, and then a few days later notice of his deferment would be sent through.

What I now know about the head of the school gives clues about how and why my father got his deferment. A few years before he was appointed High Master of St Paul's School, Walter Oakeshott was teaching at Winchester College and was cataloguing the college library when he made what was described as the academic discovery of the century, Malory's manuscript of *Morte d'Arthur*. This led to some political posts before he joined St Paul's, where his first task was to supervise the wartime evacuation of the school to Crowthorne in Berkshire. My father, as well as teaching chemistry, managed the school's laboratories, so his continued presence at the school would have been of considerable help to the High Master who continued his diplomatic work early in the War with a visit to America by submarine. After the War Walter Oakeshott returned to Winchester College as Headmaster, and then became Rector of Lincoln College, Oxford and Vice-Chancellor of the University. It can therefore be claimed that my father owed his wartime deferment to King Arthur!

St Paul's School had been mainly a day school, so when the teaching was evacuated down to Berkshire boarding houses had to be provided for the students during term-time. (Holiday time they had to take their chances and return home to London!) My father's duties, with teaching chemistry and managing the school's laboratories, included running one of these hostels for about 20 students aged from 12 to about 18. Our house, which was 'borrowed' from and in the grounds of Wellington College, was built of white brick and so shone like a lighthouse on a moonlit night. This meant more work for my father, who as an A R P warden frequently had to extinguish the marker flares

dropped by enemy bombers looking for Sandhurst, the neighbouring village. Although the London buildings of the school had been requisitioned by the Army he also had to check periodically the laboratories there, which he did by cycling up to London from Crowthorne in the morning then cycling back home in the evening.

It was these trips up to the laboratories in London that first made me think there was something we had not been told. The requisitioned buildings of the school were used by General Montgomery (an 'old boy' of the school) to brief the military leaders about D-Day (he left the maps on the walls). The school must then have been one of the most guarded places in London, so how could an ordinary teacher jump onto his bicycle and just ride in through the back gate? With his experience of chemistry and making explosives my father would have ticked all the boxes for the British Auxiliary forces. He never said anything but I do have two clues. When I was only about three years old my father fitted his bicycle with a small seat for me on the crossbar and would take me out for rides through the countryside. I have a very hazy recollection of being out with him one day and finding our way blocked by an advancing column of tanks. Instead of turning and cycling away as fast as we could, we got off the bicycle and jumped into a ditch, and waited for the tanks to go over the top of us. It is only a hazy memory, but now I think I had been on one of my father's training exercises.

Many years later, just before he died, my father was sitting on his bed when he pointed to the plain grey carpet and said 'You see those lines there. You must not let them cross or we could unexpectedly explode.' Those did not sound like his words. My immediate thought was that age was causing a hallucination, but I now believe it was a flashback to secret wartime sabotage training. Unlike the records for the Coleshill Auxiliaries in Oxfordshire there appears to be no similar information for Berkshire. It may be that with the location of Windsor this is still considered too secret to release. The result is there is no way of proving that this is not just my inventive mind filling my 'Dark Age'.

So much for past Dark Ages. Much more worrying are those still to come. Modern technology is making all communications and records go electronic. Then it will just take a very active sunspot or solar storm to disrupt electricity distribution here on earth, destroying collective digital memory stores. Our civilisation and all my articles for the *SOAG Bulletin* will then just fade away.

NOTES FOR CONTRIBUTORS

Contributions are invited for the next issue of the *SOAG Bulletin*. Articles should preferably describe original field or documentary research undertaken by the author and priority will be given to items relevant to South Oxfordshire. Short reports of SOAG visits and other meetings are also invited.

Authors are reminded that copies of the *SOAG Bulletin* are sent to the six legal deposit libraries in the United Kingdom, to local libraries and Universities, Oxford Archaeology, the Institute of Archaeology (Oxford) and the Oxfordshire Museums Service. The reputation of SOAG therefore rests largely on the quality of the *SOAG Bulletin*.

In order to ease the burden on the editorial and production team, it would be appreciated if potential authors would also bear the following points in mind:

- Articles are accepted at the discretion of the Editor, who reserves the right to edit material prior to publication.
- Contributions should ideally be between 500 and 2000 words in length. With the agreement of the author, shorter articles may be published in the *SOAG Messenger*. Longer items may be accepted depending on the availability of space.
- Articles should not have been previously published elsewhere.
- Any quoted material should be inside quotation marks and sources, including material freely available on the internet, should be given. If your information comes from a website you must cite the full www address and the date you consulted it.
- Articles should be submitted in Microsoft Word format, preferably by email. However, cleanly typed and/or clearly handwritten articles may be accepted. When sending copy by email, please ensure that you include 'SOAG Bulletin' in the email title and include a few lines of text in the message: unidentified attachments will not be opened.
- Please be as concise as possible, omit non-relevant material and avoid needless repetition.
- Illustrations are welcomed, if appropriate. Drawings and photographs are also invited for consideration for the front cover. Maps, drawings and photographs may be submitted in paper or electronic format as separate attachments. Photographs and original artwork will be returned to authors after publication if requested.

- The use of footnotes is discouraged.
- The text should be single-spaced; the title and author name(s) should be included at the beginning of the article. Numbered figure captions should be placed in the text to indicate the approximate position of illustrations, and the source of the illustration included where appropriate.
- Metric units must be used where feasible. When imperial measurements are used, as in documentary studies, the metric equivalents should be added in square brackets if appropriate.
- Pounds, shillings and pence need not be converted into pounds and new pence.
- The Harvard System should be used for references whenever possible but the author's principles will be followed when items do not lend themselves to this system, subject to discussion.

e.g. Articles from journals and magazines:

Margary, I. D. (1943) Roman roads with small side ditches. *Antiquaries Journal*, 23: 7-8.

e.g. Books:

Henig, M. and Booth, P. (2000) *Roman Oxfordshire*. Stroud, Sutton.

e.g. Chapters from edited books:

Karali, L. (1996) Marine invertebrates and Minoan art. In: Reese, D. S. (ed.) *Pleistocene and Holocene fauna of Crete*. Wisconsin, Prehistory Press. pp.413-419.

- To assist Oxford County Archaeological Services HER database collection, and with landowners approval where appropriate, please include a National Grid Reference (NGR) with any site information.

Contributions before 28 February for publication in that year to the *SOAG Bulletin* Editor John Hefferan, 41 College Road, Reading, Berks. RG6 1QE. Email: bulletin@soagarch.org.uk.



Patron: Prof. Malcolm Airs

SOAG was established in 1969 and now has over 120 members. The aims of the Group are to promote an active interest in archaeology and its allied disciplines, particularly in South Oxfordshire. It works in close cooperation with the County Archaeologist and Oxford Archaeology, is a member of the Council for Independent Archaeology and is affiliated to the Council for British Archaeology South Midlands Group.

- Monthly meetings are held from September to April when lectures by professional speakers and members are given in an informal atmosphere
- There are opportunities for members to take part in excavations, fieldwalking, surveys and post-excavation work. Visits are made to places of interest in the summer – sometimes to sites not open to the public
- Members receive the annual *SOAG Bulletin*, which contains reports of the Group's activities and original articles focused on South Oxfordshire, and the monthly *SOAG Messenger*, which carries details of forthcoming events and brief news items
- Experts and complete beginners of all ages are warmly welcomed as new members.

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