

## Preliminary Note on the Early Anglo-Saxon Settlement at New Wintles Farm, Eynsham

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THE site (SP/432108) is on the gravel ridge west of the River Evenlode, about a mile north of Eynsham village centre and half a mile south of the archaeological complex, mainly prehistoric but including a few Anglo-Saxon pits, previously explored as the result of gravel working north of City Farm, Hanborough.<sup>1</sup> Commercial exploitation of the Upper Thames gravels has in the past led to the discovery of many sites of early Anglo-Saxon habitation, but this new one at Eynsham is the first to have been recognized before destruction had actually begun. The credit for this goes to Mr. B. V. Arthur and Mr. D. G. Benson of the Oxford City and County Museum, who found it when reconnoitring land freshly stripped for a new gravel pit, and who, with other part-time helpers from the district and the Oxford University Institute of Archaeology, assisted with the subsequent rescue excavations. These took place during three weeks in May 1968, under the direction of Mrs. Hawkes, and dealt with the northern part of the area included in the plan (FIG. 1), which at that time was demarcated by a fence—between points A and B—from the larger southern area excavated during October–December of the same year by Mrs. Gray, ably assisted by Mr. G. Lewis and Miss F. Berisford, on behalf of the Upper Thames Archaeological Committee. Mrs. Gray was able to supervise the mechanical stripping of topsoil from the southern part of the site, and also to undertake thorough hand cleaning of the surface of the gravel, with the result that here a very detailed plan of the settlement was recovered. In the northern sector, however, where uneven mechanical stripping had taken place already, and where there was insufficient labour to clean up after it, recording was perforce less complete. Major features such as post-structures, huts, pits and palisade trenches, are unlikely to have escaped notice, but less definite traces, such as the north-east continuation of the muddy trample and strained gravel of the main trackway, may well have been overlooked. It should also be noted that the dark-filled furrows remaining from medieval strip cultivation, which the plan

<sup>1</sup> *Oxoniensia*, xxxix/xxx (1964–65), 1 ff.

## SONIA CHADWICK HAWKES AND MARGARET GRAY

shows for the southern sector only, were observed to the north too, though circumstances made it impossible to plan them.

The buildings and other features associated with the Anglo-Saxon settlement sprawl over at least 7 acres. It seems probable that the deep palisade trench (16, 187, 370, 385) parallel with the present hedge, marked the site's boundary on the east side, and the well-defined post-holes in its fill indicate that this was the emplacement for a stout fence. In the south-east corner of the excavated area this palisade makes an acute-angled turn, apparently to join a second north-south fence (353) which continues south under the present spoil dump. This south-east corner has so far only been trial-trenched, but the behaviour of the two palisades, the fact that two well-marked paths lead into the enclosure so formed, and the certainty that part of the enclosed area lies further south again, makes further excavation here a matter of top priority. There is no independent dating for these palisades, but their integral relationship to the layout of the settlement, and the way in which the pathways respect them, puts their contemporaneity with one or more phases of the Anglo-Saxon occupation beyond reasonable doubt. The main palisade comes to an abrupt end some distance short of the northern limit of excavation, level with the most northerly of the huts : beyond this there are few features of any kind, and none certainly Saxon, so we may well have the northern boundary of the inhabited area. On the west side the mechanical digger sectioned what appears to have been another hut (94) underneath the modern hedge, so here the site may continue into the next field.

The highest and best-drained piece of ground within the settlement is occupied by two post-built structures (122 and 130) alongside the main trackway which leads diagonally through the inhabited area. 122 appears to have been a long-house, 12 × 6 m. in size, with an internal partition abutting the north wall, but interpretation of it is complicated by the wide gap without post-holes in the south wall, and by the intrusive huts 123 and 124, which appear to overly it. 130 must have been a stoutly built house approximately 5 m. square, with a central post and perhaps an entrance in the west side. The third, less regular, post-built structure (255) occupies the angle between the main palisade and another shorter fence which joins it, midway along its length, at an angle similar to that of the southern corner. 255 is roughly rectangular, with a possible north end but no trace of a south end : unless it antedates the fence and was partly destroyed by it, the fence must have made the fourth wall. South-east of 122, and across the track from it, are the slight, undated, traces of what appears to have been a sleeper-beam construction, length indeterminate, width 4 m., with internal partitions (212). This is too flimsy to have been a dwelling-house—the slots are too narrow to have carried heavy timbers and

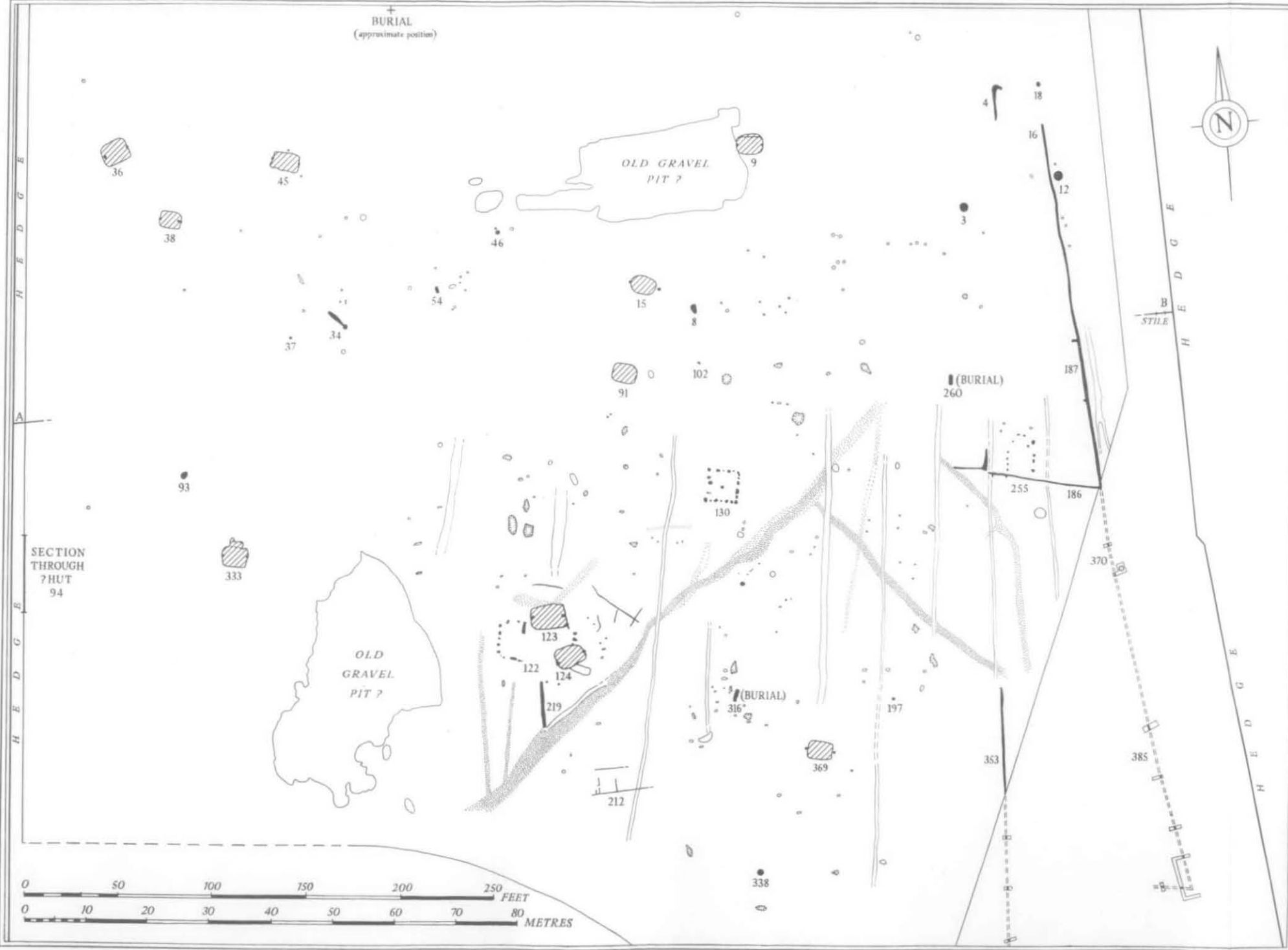
## NOTE ON THE EARLY ANGLO-SAXON SETTLEMENT AT EYNSHAM

there are no major post-holes—but it may conceivably have been a sheep-pen. Apart from a few small pits, many random post-holes, and some patches of disturbed ground possibly caused by trees, the other chief features on the site are the 11 huts of familiar dug-out (*Grubenhaus*) type. These, widely separated both from each other and from the post-built structures and palisades, account for the large extent of the area occupied. The largest (123) measured  $5.5 \times 4$  m., the smallest  $3.5 \times 2.5$  m. (38), and the depths to which their floors had been dug into the gravel varied considerably, but all had had their roofs supported by a single substantial post at either end of their long axis: a few yielded traces of the stakes which had supported wattle and daub outer walls and inner revetment. Two of the huts contained the emplacements for an upright warp-weighted loom (15 and 123): a great dump of loomweights from the burnt debris of hut 15 was found in a nearby pit (8), while in 123, as also in 9 and 124, fragments of loomweights were found in the huts themselves, along with pin-beaters for use on the loom, needles and spindle-whorls. Such huts may have been weaving sheds, therefore, but the function of the remainder was not clear from the surviving finds, though the presence of food bones suggests that most had had some general domestic use. Finally, a somewhat surprising discovery in the settlement area, there were two inhumation graves, one (260) of a woman buried with disc brooches datable to the 6th century. A third skeleton was dug up by the mechanical excavator at the extreme edge of the stripped area to the north of the settlement, and it is possible that there is a cemetery in this direction.







In dating the occupation at Eynsham we cannot at present be very precise. Everything depends on whether the groups of plain domestic pottery recovered from the huts and pits can be sorted into a chronological sequence with the aid of datable objects of domestic and ornamental use found associated with them, and of comparable material from local cemeteries. Work on this has been started by Miss F. Berisford as part of a project leading to an Oxford B.Litt. thesis, and it would be improper to anticipate her results here. But it was clear from the beginning, both from the nature of the finds and the relationship between structures 122-4, that not all the buildings were in use at one time. Huts 38 and 91 appear to be the earliest and to date from the 6th century, while huts 36, 123 and 124, which are on a different alignment, are certainly later and to be ascribed to the 7th century. Hut 9 contained a decorated metal object of great interest which could date it as late as the early 8th century. The long-house (122) probably belongs to the earlier phase of occupation, and the square house (130) to a later. Once it is seen that habitation on this site, lasting for a century and more, must be divided between two or more phases within that time, it is clear that its dwellings, though dispersed so widely, represent a

SONIA CHADWICK HAWKES AND MARGARET GRAY

community of quite small size. It is tempting to suggest that the settlement was not a village but a single farmstead with scattered cottages or outbuildings. This remains to be tested against what further excavation, in the southern quarter especially, may reveal.



EARLY ANGLO-SAXON  
SETTLEMENT  
NEW WINTLES FARM, EYNSHAM

- KEY :
-  DUG-OUT HUT (GRUBENHAUS), SAXON
  -  PALISADE TRENCH, PROBABLY SAXON
  -  PIT OR POST-HOLE, SAXON
  -  . . . . . UNDATED
  -  TREE DISTURBANCE
  -  TRACKWAY OR PATH, PROBABLY SAXON
  -  PLOUGH FURROW, MEDIEVAL
  -  LIMIT OF EXCAVATION

