A Sites and Monuments Record for the Oxford Region

By Don Benson

FOLLOWING the establishment of the Oxford City and County Museum in 1965 one of several problems facing newcomers to the problems of the history and archaeology of the region was the lack of any locally accessible and comprehensive index of sites and finds. From time to time over the following two years the scope and requirements of such an index were considered, and various methods of data processing and information retrieval were investigated. As an interim measure copies were made of the Ordnance Survey Archaeology Division's index cards and record maps. Eventually, an overall system was devised and put into operation. It is a measure of the nature of the problem that although considerable progress has been made, this paper is still only a progress report.

Little could have been achieved without the efforts of a devoted group of volunteers—the 'Study Group'—meeting almost every Tuesday evening over several years.[1] A great debt is also due to successive Assistant Field Officers at the Museum, Miss C. Sibbitt, Mrs. S. Wade-Martins (née Everett) and Mr. M. Aston.

The objectives of the Sites and Monuments Record are several. It aims to bring together divers and diverse sources of information about the physical remains of man and his activities in the Oxford Region into one manageable index ; it aims to provide a short cut to all other records whether these are held locally or nationally. In this latter aspect for example it aims to make locally available relevant information contained in the two principal national topographical archives, the National Monuments Record (including the Air Photograph Unit)[2] and the index maintained by the Archaeology Division of the Ordnance Survey.[3] If record material held elsewhere cannot be duplicated then an attempt is made to provide some sort of index to it. The Record also exists to provide a centre to which information can be sent and to make available information on a variety of topics at a variety of levels for a variety of purposes.

The geographical area covered by the Record was originally intended to be the City and County of Oxford, and the scope is now being extended to embrace the region designated as Area 33 under the proposed local government reorganization. At present, only those records covering the County of Oxfordshire could be considered more comprehensive than could be singly obtained elsewhere ;

records for the Oxford City area are in process of compilation, whilst the documentation of sites and finds for what is still north Berkshire has not yet seriously begun, although certain parts of this area, for example that around Abingdon, are reasonably well documented for certain periods.

The type and form of record material can be illustrated by describing its organization. Since this system or variants of it have been adopted elsewhere, the details of the organization may not be without interest. The record material is divided into a number of separate units (most of which are also separate physical storage units) consisting of : one set of index cards, a set of record maps, a unit containing large manuscript plans and sections, drawings and plans, a documents file unit ; a slide unit ; units for ground photographs and aerial photographs ; and finally, a cross-reference unit based on punched feature cards.

The link between all these units is that every site or solitary find is given a unique number called the *Primary Record Number*. With the exception of aerial photographs, all records within each separate unit are arranged in straight numerical sequence irrespective of the type or period of the site or find. In other words, none of these record units is subdivided on a typological, period, or topographical basis. Thus, for example, Primary Record Number 296 represents a mill in the parish of Combe. The index card (the *Primary Record Card*) is numbered 296, this number is marked on the Record Map in the appropriate position, any drawn plans of the site are numbered 296 and stored in the Manuscript Plan unit, any correspondence about the site will be numbered 296 and put into the Document File unit, all slides and ground photographs of the site will be numbered 296 and so on. The number given to a site or find is simply the next available number. If new material relevant to a site which already has a number is added to any of the units, then this material is simply fitted into the numerical sequence in the appropriate storage unit.

This system can be extended to cover material finds, which can be stored in the same numbered sequence. With large collections of material, however, it would be difficult to maintain this numbered sequence without wasting storage space and the material would require periodic re-sorting to make room for additions within the sequence.

The *Primary Record Cards* call for little comment. The format has been revised several times in the light of experience and the present one is now unlikely to be altered. Cards are freely available for anyone who wishes to send in information to the Field Department. The procedure adopted for quoting authorities for statements made on the card follows that used by the Archaeology Division of the Ordnance Survey.

The *Record Maps* are a vital part of the Record and here again, in marking these maps those conventions are employed which are used by the Archaeology Division to denote the varying degrees of accuracy within which a site or find can be plotted. These procedures are not extravagant technical refinements ; there are many instances where the location or extent of sites or finds cannot be adequately described except on the map. The Record Maps thus contain a certain amount of unique information.

The basic Record Map is the 6 in. (1 : 10,560 or 1 : 10,000 metric). A complete set is maintained for the county and this will shortly be extended to cover Area 33. In some cases this scale map is too small to be able to distinguish individual sites and thus 25 in. (1 : 2,500) maps are used as the basic Record Map. Most urban sites and finds are plotted on this latter scale and these maps are also used for plotting areas of dense cropmarks. Eventually, it is hoped to have a complete set of 25 in. maps for the area but so far these have only been bought as needs have dictated. The use of maps on this scale as Record Maps is complicated by the current revision being carried out by the Ordnance Survey in selected areas within the region. As new metric maps are published on a National Grid basis the old 25 in. county series are withdrawn. This may make it necessary to maintain two sets of maps.

Only for Oxford itself do 50 in. (1 : 1,250) maps exist (these are also on a National Grid basis) and these are being used for compiling information for the City. It is also intended that the 1874 edition on the scale of 10 ft. to 1 mile will be used since these maps are particularly useful for recording medieval and post-medieval sites and monuments.

The Documents File or the *Detailed Records Files* contain more detailed information than can be conveniently included on the record cards. In these files are kept correspondence, detailed descriptions of sites, small sketches and drawings and so on. They also contain photographs where the negatives are not held in the Museum. A separate photographic collection exists within the Museum. Relevant photographs in this index are cross-referenced with the Sites and Monuments Record.

The Detailed Records File also contains details of ' linear antiquities '— roads, linear earthworks, canals, etc. Following once more the practise of the O.S. Archaeology Division, folders with 1 in. strip maps to show the extent of the feature, 6 in. strip maps to show the detail, together with a general account of its course and history and detailed description of short stretches accompanied by lists of authorities, are all maintained.

The *Manuscript Plan Unit* contains not only the original plans and sections of surveys and excavations carried out by the Museum staff, but also originals or copies deposited by other workers in the region. The Museum is anxious to offer a permanent home for material of this sort, be it original material or copies.

The *Slide Unit* contains a small but rapidly growing collection of some 1,000 slides of 300 different sites, excluding 1,000 slides of the Ascott-Under-Wychwood long barrow excavations. Apart from slides of sites and monuments with Primary Record Numbers, there is a collection of slides made available by the Bodleian Library, of all line drawings in *Oxoniensia*, vols. i–xxix/xxx. Slides in the Primary Record Number sequence cannot normally be borrowed but copies can be obtained.

In most of these units there is as yet insufficient material to necessitate subdivision of one Primary Record Number. Where the amount of material contained under one record number becomes unmanageable, however, secondary indexes can be compiled with their own cross-reference index if necessary.

Secondary indexes exist at present only within the Slide Unit, for large collections of slides grouped at a primary level of indexing under a single Primary Record Number.

The *Cross Reference* system adopted is one based on punched feature cards.[4] In other manual systems the problem of retrieving information about, for example, all Roman period material or all material from a particular parish is generally solved by arranging duplicate cards in a series of classified indexes. The use of punched feature cards avoids duplicating index cards and enables a greater range of features or characteristics to be isolated. The system reduces to a minimum the number of index cards or other records which have to be sorted to obtain information. The individual punched card represents not an individual site or find, but a feature or characteristic and the holes punched in the card represent those sites or finds which have that feature or characteristic. One card provides an index to all the sites and finds in, for example, the parish of Combe. Another may represent all the sites and finds of the Roman period contained in the index. By combining these two cards, optical co-incidence provides an index to all sites or finds of Roman date in the parish of Combe. Theoretically, all sorts of find or site can be compared. Where numerical enquiries are involved the answer can be given simply by counting coinciding holes. The range of punched cards (which also indicates the various types of site or find about which information may be available) is listed in the Appendix. This list is not intended to be complete. The grouping of sites and finds under the headings indicated is one dictated purely by convenience and can easily be reorganized.

Aerial Photographs, for various reasons, cannot be ordered on a Primary Record Number basis. They are therefore indexed on a National Grid basis, that is to say, ordered by kilometre square, following the practise of the National Monuments Record Air Photography Unit. Details of the grid reference, location, subject, date photographed, photographer, original negative number and source, and the Primary Record Numbers which apply to the sites on the photograph are all written on the back of the print. Copies of the index to the Allen and Riley photographs in the Ashmolean Museum are also available.

Over such a wide range of subject matter, the level of indexing in some fields is of necessity superficial For example, detailed stylistic or typological groupings of types of find are not at present retrievable, although the indexing system is capable of being developed to achieve this. The emphasis so far has been placed on ensuring that the main types of site or find are retrievable. In some fields the lack of depth in the information available may simply reflect the lack of investigation into the subject matter. For topographical information, however, the Record is the most comprehensive single index for the region. It duplicates

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[4] The particular type of punched card used is a 10,000 capacity card. These cards and other equipment were obtained from J. L. Jolley and Partners Ltd., Westbourne House, Westbourne St., High Wycombe, Bucks. For a useful account of the use of punched feature cards see G. D. Lewis, ' Obtaining Information from Museum Collections and Thoughts on a National Index ', *Museums Journal*, 65 (1) (1965). Also, R. G. Van Gelder and S. Anderson, ' An Information Retrieval System for Collections of Mammals ', *Curator*, x, No. 1 (1967), 32–42.

the main elements of the O.S. Archaeology Division's index up to 1967 and although there is now a need to correlate recent data there is likely to be little in the Division's index since 1967 of which we are unaware.[5] Since the Division's index utilized all the main published and unpublished sources, information from early surveys, for example the Manning Manuscripts and the Victoria County History inventories is covered together with information from national and local periodicals. Systematic searches through museum accession registers and collections are needed to ensure complete coverage, although much of this ground has been covered by Ordnance Survey card compilers. Where this material already figures on the Division's record cards, the Sites and Monuments Record already provides something of an index to material in other museums' collections.

Earlier recorded archaeological sites and finds are thus well covered, although it is surprising how much new information is being gleaned from local parish or village histories. For the Prehistoric, Roman and Saxon periods a wealth of new data has come from aerial photographs ; much new material exists for Medieval sites, thanks to the work of Mick Aston ; Post-Medieval sites and monuments—not previously covered by any index held nationally or locally— make an important contribution to the record. The basis of material of this period in the index was laid by combing the first edition of the O.S. 25 in. maps for the county.

One important weakness in the numbered record material is vernacular architecture, including those buildings listed of Architectural or Historic Interest under various Town and Country Planning Acts. Because of the problems of indexing several thousand buildings under this heading, they are only given Primary Record Numbers if they are of additional interest, for example, mills, workhouses, toll houses, churches, or 16th century and earlier buildings. For the present, information on listed buildings can be derived from the Statutory and Provisional Lists compiled by the old Ministry of Housing and Local Government and copies of these lists are housed separately in the Record. More accessible information is, however, contained in an index of historic buildings compiled by P. S. Spokes between 1948 and 1960. This index, which formed the basis of the Statutory and Provisional Lists and was also compiled for the benefit of the Victoria County History is not yet integrated into the main Record. It covers all the leading printed and manuscript sources and is held as a separate index on edge-punched object cards coded for some 50 characteristics. Accompanying it is a list of all those buildings with date-stones throughout Oxfordshire.

Aerial photographs require special mention. The collection includes copies of the Allen and Riley photographs of local sites, copies of the extensive surveys by Arnold Baker and also by the National Monuments Air Photograph Unit. A selection of the Fairy Aviation survey of Oxfordshire is included, but this is a somewhat patchy selection. Numerous collections of vertical photographs by commercial firms and also by the Ordnance Survey are not represented in the

[5] The county revisions being undertaken by the Division have not yet included Oxfordshire.

Record.   The emphasis is on obliques but the photographs by Dr. St. Joseph or even an index to them is at present a major omission.

A useful contribution to the documentation of archaeological sites in the region is the plotting of cropmarks onto the various Record Maps.   On the 6 in. Record Maps have been plotted cropmarks recently discovered by Baker, the National Monuments Record (Hampton) and St. Joseph in the Upper Thames Valley west of Oxford.   This project, carried out by Nicholas Clayton, is currently being extended to embrace the area south of Oxford.   All previously known areas of cropmarks, as for example at Stanton Harcourt, Standlake and Eynsham, have now been plotted by Study Group members onto 25 in. Record Maps and all excavated areas and finds have been indicated.   It is thus now possible to gain an overall picture of what has been done in such areas and to determine more easily than previously which sites or parts of sites may still be available for further work.   As an adjunct to the 6 in. Record Maps, two further sources of information are maintained.   These consist of two sets of transparent overlays for each 6 in. sheet on which are plotted surviving ridge and furrow field systems in the region and also field names.   These are in no way comprehensive records at present, but a start has been made.

On a geographical basis, the content of the Sites and Monuments Record is, as one might expect, uneven.   This is a reflection not only of the lack of fieldwork in certain areas, but also of the state of knowledge of documentary sources and for example, the rate of publication of the Hundred Volumes of the Victoria County History.   Some parishes have been well covered, for example those parishes west of Oxford surveyed by the Oxford University Archaeological Society in recent years, but much of the post-medieval material needs more detail.   Parishes on the east side of the county, on the line of the M40 motorway, have received much attention recently, but many more intensive surveys of this kind are needed in other areas within the region.

Whether the research has been done by individuals or groups, the Field Department is only too willing to accept any card indexes, copies of theses, or any lists of any type of site or object from the Oxford Region.   The information is transferred onto the main index and the original index or source material can be kept intact if the donor wishes.

The index now contains over 5,000 numbered sites, monuments and find spots and the punched card system enables an even greater number of individual finds to be retrieved.   The basic indexing system has proved sound but the data retrieval techniques using punched feature cards cannot be considered adequate for the likely long term requirements of the region and beyond.   At a time when computer-based systems are being developed for museum collections and also for various aspects of Local Government administration, the requirements of archaeological and historical records also need to be considered.   Moreover, since the local Planning Authorities in the Oxford Region are currently investigating and developing computer-based systems for planning purposes, coding of information for archaeological and historic sites will have to be worked out in order to include these aspects in planning processes, notably development control.

Whatever systems are adopted, however, collection and collation of the basic data presents the largest single problem.[6]   The sheer volume of data which requires feeding into the index is beyond present resources of time and staff,[7] although the situation has been eased somewhat by the appointment of a Field Department Assistant who will have special responsibility for the Record. Users of the Record, however, may find that some information fed into it in the earlier stages of its establishment may not be satisfactorily documented.   This is partly due to the lack of precision in techniques then employed.   Information in the Record is under continuous revision, but the problems of archaeological taxonomy are such that classifications in some cases may not be up-to-date in relation to current developments in certain subjects or periods.[8]

Nevertheless, in its present form the Sites and Monuments Record at least provides a starting point for many aspects of research.   It can also provide essential information to determine priorities in rescue work, whether for field survey or excavation.   It can indicate those geographical areas where more work is needed and also topics which require attention.   It plays an essential role in answering enquiries whether from members of the general public, local archaeological and historical societies or professional archaeologists and historians. Whilst it is no substitute for publication it serves as a vital intermediate stage in making information about the region available.   The information which the Record contains reflects to a very large extent the state of archaeological and historical work in the region and its utility will continue to depend upon the amount of support given to it by those who are involved in this work.

APPENDIX

SITES AND MONUMENTS RECORD

PUNCHED FEATURE CARDS

STORAGE UNITS   Air Photographs
                       Museum Negative Index
                       Detailed Records
                       Plans/Sections
                       Slides
                       Photographs—Records File

[6] Cf. R. Hislop, ' Information Retrieval and Computer Printed Indexes ' (a paper given at a Colloquium on Information Retrieval for Museums, Sheffield 1967), *Museums Journal*, 67 (2) (1967), 94.

[7] One thinks, for example, of the need to register in the Record the details of the Taunt Collection and other photographs currently being indexed by Malcolm Graham at the City Reference Library.

[8] For some brief comments on the problems of cataloguing see C. Renfrew, ' The Requirements of the Research Worker in Archaeology ', *Museums Journal*, op. cit., 113.

PROCESSING   For *Oxoniensia*
                      For Accessioning
                      For Drawing

FORM   Building
                      Other Structure
                      Finds Only
                      Site of
                      Cropmark
                      Earthwork

CONDITION   Site Destroyed

STATUS   Scheduled Monuments
                      Guardianship Monuments
                      Listed Buildings
                      Sites/Houses Open To The Public

HISTORY   Excavated
                      Surveyed
                      C 14 Date
                      Environmental Samples

COLLECTIONS   Ashmolean Museum
                      British Museum
                      Oxford C & C Museum
                      Oxford University Museum
                      Other Museums
                      Private Collection
                      Banbury Museum
                      Reading Museum

TOPOGRAPHY
   Parishes   262 Parishes Listed

PERIOD   Prehistoric : Period Uncertain
                      Palaeolithic
                      Mesolithic
                      Neolithic
                      Bronze Age
                      Iron Age
                      Roman
                      Saxon
                      Medieval
                      Civil War
                      Post Medieval
                      Date Unknown

DESCRIPTIVE TYPES   Enclosure Circular
                               Irregular
                               Oval
                               Penannular
                               Rectangular
                               Sub-Rectangular

DESCRIPTIVE TYPES—*continued.*

Square
Trapezoid
Unspecified
Linear Work
Long Mound
Round Mound
Indeterminate/Uncertain Mound
Megalith
Stone Foundations

CLASSIFIED SITES

' *Industrial Sites* '
Agricultural Implement Maker
Bakery
Bell Foundry
Blanket Factory
Boat Builder
Brewery
Brick Kiln
Brick and Tile Works
Cement Works
Clay Pit
Clay Mill
Corn Mill
Corn Drying Kiln
Drain Pipe Works
Dye Works
Engine House
Engineering Works
Food Processing
Foundry
Fulling Mill
Gas Works
Glass Works (Oven incl.)
Glove Factory
Gravel Pit
Hurdle Maker's Shop
Ironstone Quarry
Iron Works
Lime Kiln
Malthouse
Mill Pond
Mine (Adit)
Mine (Shaft)
Ochre Mill
Ochre Pit
Paper Mill
Plush Factory
Pump
Pumping Station
Pottery
Pottery Kiln
Printing Works

Reservoir
Rope Walk
Sand Pit
Saw Mill
Saw Pit
Smithy
Steam Engine (Stationary)
Steam Mill
Stone Mason's Works
Stone Quarry
Tan Yard
Tenter Frame
Textile Mill
Textile Factory
Tile Kiln
Water Mill
Water Tower
Water Works
Wheelwright's Shop
Wind Mill
Wind Mill Tump

' *Domestic* '
Air Raid Shelter
Bailey
Baths
Bee Boles & Bee Hives
Castle
Cockpit
Dewpond
Domestic Building
Dovecote
Deserted, Shrunken and
                Migrated Settlements
Fish Pond
Formal Garden
Folly
Forts
Hill Fort
Hut
Hypocaust

CLASSIFIED SITES—*continued*.

Ice House
Landscape Gardening
Laundry
Manor House
Maze
Mansion (Stately House)
    Hall—open roof
Moat
Motte
Palace
Park
Passages (underground)
Pill Box
Pillow Mound
Pit
Pit Alignment
Roof Tiles—Stone
Roof Tiles—Clay
Settlement
Town Defences
Villa
Well

' *Religious/Ritual* '
Abbey
Barrow
Causewayed Camp
Cemetery—Christian
         Pagan
Cell
Chapel—Baptist
       C of E
       Congregational
       Methodist
       Pre-Reformation
       R. Catholic
Church
Cross
Cursus
Friary
Friends Meeting House
Grange
Henge
Memorial
Mission Hall
Monastery
Mortuary Enclosure
Priory
Rectory
Salvation Army
Temperance Hall
Temple

Tithe Barn
Tympanum

' *Transport/Communications* '
Bridge (road)
Canal Bridge
Canal Dock
Canal Lock
Canal Maintenance Yard
Canal Wharf
Causeway
Drove Road
Flash Lock
Fish Weir
Fords
Greenway
Goods Shed
Pillar Box
Milestone
Railway Bridge
Railway Crossing House
Railway Siding
Railway Station
Railway Turn Table
River Lock
Road
Saltway
Sign/Guidepost
Signal Box
Swing Bridge
Toll Board
Toll House
Toll Road
Turnpike Road
Tramway
Weigh Bridge
Weir

' *Agriculture* '
Agricultural Building
' Celtic ' Fields
Other Field Systems
Strip Lynchets

' *Social Monuments* '
Almshouse
Asylum
College

CLASSIFIED SITES—*continued*.

Entertainment
Guildhall
Hill Figure
Hospital
Lock Up
Market Hall
Orphanage
Pest House
Pound

Prison (Gaol)
Public House
School
Stocks
Town Hall
Workhouse

' *Historical* '
Battle Site

CLASSIFIED FINDS

Finds: Period Specified
       Type Unspecified
Implements : Type Unspecified
Implements : Material Unspecified
Implements : Type Specified
Adze
Altar
Armlet
Armour
Arrowhead
Awl
Axe
Bead
' Beaker '
Bell
Bodkin
Bowl
Bracelet
Brooch
Brooch—Disc.
Buckle
Bucket
Burial Unspecified
Cauldron
Clay Pipe
Coffin
Coin
Comb
Core
Cremation
Currency Bar
Dagger
Disc
Earring
Figurine
Fibula
Gouge
Hanging Bowl
Hammer
Helmet
Hoard

Hone
Inhumation
Knife
Key
Loom Weight
Macehead
Microlith
Mirror
Mosaic
Nail
Necklace
Net Sinker
Ornament Unspecified
Palstave
Pick
Pin
Plough
Pottery
Rubber
Quern
Razor
Ring
Scabbard/Chape
Scraper
Sculpture
Shield
Slag
Sling Stone
Spear
Spindle Whorl
Spoon
Spur
Sword
Tesserae
Tesselated Pavement
Tile: Floor
      Roof
      Unspecified
Wall Plaster
Wall Painting
Weapon—Unspecified

MATERIAL

Material Unspecified
Amber
Antler
Bone
Brick
Bronze
Copper
Enamel
Faience
Flint
Fired Clay
Glass
Gold
Horn

Iron
Ivory
Jet
Leather
Lead
Mortar
Pewter
Quartzite
Silver
Stone
Textile
Tin
Wood