

The Site of Stephen Stone's Saxon Cemetery at Standlake

By DAVID BROWN

THE archaeological sites on Standlake Down have been famous since the excavations of Stephen Stone between 1857 and 1863. The ring ditches which he planned from their cropmarks are clear for all to see on Allen's air photographs (PL. xvii), but the Saxon cemetery and the groups of Iron Age storage pits which he excavated in such a pioneering fashion by opening up large areas and recording in plans and models, do not show on the air photographs, and without any large scale plan, they cannot be precisely located.

The centres of Allen's air photographs (PL. xvii) are dominated by a disused gravel quarry bordering on the north side of the Witney road. It was then, in July 1933, overgrown and uncultivated. The same area appears in the same way on editions of the Ordnance Survey maps back to the first editions of the 6 inch and 25 inch maps which were based on surveys of 1875/6. The Ordnance Survey labels the quarry as the 'site of British Village' and, therefore, as the site of Stone's excavations. In the earlier editions the lettering actually stands to the east of the quarry, but obviously refers to the quarry; more recent editions (e.g. 2½ inch, 1960) mark the quarry itself, with an up-to-date interpretation, as 'Iron Age settlement'.

Writing in 1942, J. S. P. Bradford realized that there was no such certainty about the site of Stone's excavations. 'The exact situation of the large 60 × 62 ft. area opened in February 1858 remains uncertain, but it is likely that it lay between the crossroads and the gravel pits opened in 1857 (i.e. the old quarry), and away from the band of dark soil visible both from the air and on the ground'.¹ Why Bradford sought to place the 1858 excavations outside the quarry and the 1857 ones within it remains a mystery, for the quarry measures some 130 yards in each direction and could easily have contained all the excavations of both years.

As it happens, the point is immaterial, for the quarry was already in existence before Stephen Stone began his excavations in 1857. It is shown as a gravel pit on the Tithe Award map of 1839,² where it covers exactly the same area as is still marked on the Ordnance Survey maps. It is labelled 'parcel 1612' and listed in the accompanying document along with 'roads, wastes and other public areas'. Yet earlier, the quarry is referred to twice in describing various strips in the survey of the Magdalen College estates undertaken in 1767 and 1768.³ Had any part of the quarry not been stripped and exploited for gravel at the time of the Inclosure in 1853, it is likely that the land would have been taken over for

¹ *Antiq. J.*, xxii (1942), 204.

² Bodleian Library, Tithe Map 355.

³ Magdalen College Library, *Survey of Sundry Estates belonging to the President and Scholars of Magdalene College, Oxford*, 182 and 187.

cultivation by the new owner. As it was, the land remained uncultivated indicating that the whole area had already been exploited before that date, and long before Stephen Stone came on the scene.

Where, then, did Stephen Stone's excavations take place? Allen's air photographs (PL. xvii) show extensive areas of gravel digging in the land around the quarry, immediately alongside on the south-east, and sporadically further south-east along the Witney road, or further north-east in the opposite corner of the field (the position favoured by Bradford), or across the track to Underdown Bottom and south of circles 18 and 21.⁴ All these areas were in cultivation at the time of the Inclosure as they were when Allen's photos were taken, but almost any one of them could have been explored by Stone in the meantime, for the process was not one which left an open quarry. Gravel digging was winter work for the farm hands on the fallow fields; twice in his reports Stone refers to backfilling and making good again.⁵

Casual references by Stone to the farmers or owners of the land on which he was digging make it possible to tie down the positions of most of his sites, particularly by reference to the details given in the Inclosure Award.⁶ For this reason the air photos (PL. xvii) are overprinted with the boundaries of the fields as they were in the 1850s and the fields are labelled with the numbers used in the Inclosure document. Field 75 was allotted to Thomas Pinnock, and it was from Thomas Pinnock (owner and occupier) that Stone and J. Y. Akerman obtained permission to dig circles (1, 3, 4, 7, 9, 11) here in 1857.⁷ Field 110 was allotted to Thomas Brown; this field contained circles 13 and 14, both planned by Stone, but neither excavated.⁸ Field 80 was allotted to Asenath Dutton (*née* Pinnock) and John Giles (husband of Eleanor Pinnock), but was being farmed by Carey Pinnock,⁹ and it was from Carey Pinnock that Stone and Akerman obtained permission to dig circles (15, 16, 17, 19) here in 1857.¹⁰ Fields 108 and 109 were allotted to Magdalen College who leased them to Thomas Pinnock. Thomas Pinnock had a son, John James Pinnock.¹¹

Stone's excavation of 1858, the only one of his Iron Age sites for which he mentions the owner of the land, took place in a field of which 'Thomas Pinnock was the proprietor and John J. Pinnock the owner.'¹² This is obviously not field 80 which contains the old gravel quarry; it could be fields 108 and 109, or possibly field 75. Stone and Akerman together in 1857, and Stone by himself in 1858, carried out extensive excavations in field 75 on the ring ditches and early Bronze Age inhumations and the later Bronze Age urnfield without encountering either Saxon graves or Iron Age pits, and without mentioning either in the immediate vicinity;¹³ it therefore seems unlikely that Stone's 1858 group of

⁴ I use Riley's numbering of the circles, *Oxoniensia*, xi/xii (1946/7), 27-43.

⁵ *Proc. Soc. Ant.*, ser. 1, iv, 71; *Archaeologia*, 37, 366.

⁶ 1853. Maps and documents now in the County Record Office, Oxford.

⁷ *Archaeologia*, 37, 364.

⁸ *Archaeologia*, 37, plan opposite page 364.

⁹ Details of the Inclosure Award supplemented by information from Brigadier F. R. L. Goadby.

¹⁰ *Archaeologia*, 37, 366.

¹¹ Details of the Inclosure Award supplemented by information from Brigadier F. R. L. Goadby.

¹² *Proc. Soc. Ant.*, ser. 1, iv, 216.

¹³ *Archaeologia* 37, 363-370; *Proc. Soc. Ant.*, ser. 1, iv, 217-19.

Iron Age pits was excavated in this field. Fields 108 and 109 on the other hand fit the bill very well, for here the air photos (PL. XVII) show that there has been extensive gravel digging in the south west part of the fields, and here Bradford and Riley located Iron Age pits during wartime gravel quarrying.¹⁴

Although Stone does not mention the farmers of the land on which he excavated pits in 1857, there seems every reason to believe that it was in the same fields as his 1858 excavations. For it was the experience gained in 1857 which

SKETCH PLANS OF GRAVEL PITS EXCAVATED BY STEPHEN STONE AT STANDLAKE.

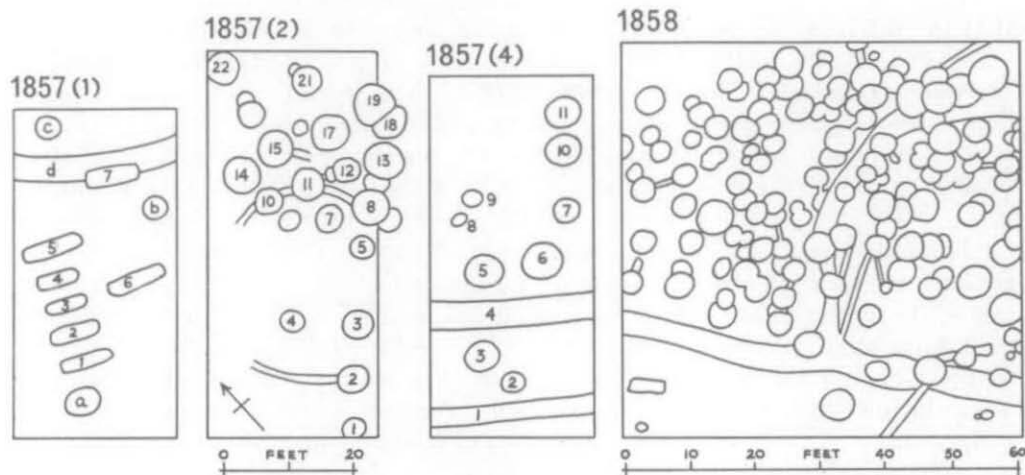


FIG. 1

Sketch Plan of Stone's Excavations :

1857 (1) inferred from Stone's description.

1857 (2) copied from Stone's plan in *Proc. Soc. Antiq.*

1857 (4) inferred from Stone's description.

1858 copied from Bradford's plan made from Stone's model.

led him to undertake the more extensive excavation of 1858, and what more likely than that they should have been in nearby plots ? In 1857 Stone excavated three pits in this area, those which he numbered 1, 2 and 4 ; these, with the larger pit of 1858, make four pits all located in fields 108 and 109. With the aid of Stone's descriptions it is possible to place these four pits approximately in position on a plan.¹⁵

Pit 1857 (2) was published with scale and north point in the Society of Antiquaries' *Proceedings*. Pit 1858 was planned by Bradford from Stone's scale model now in the Ashmolean Museum. The description of pit 1857 (2) shows that the work of digging gravel advanced in a direction from south-west to north-

¹⁴ *Antiq. J.*, xxii (1942), 208 ; and information from D. N. Riley.

¹⁵ *Proc. Soc. Ant.*, ser. 1, iv, 93-7 and 215-17.

east, which is along the line of the strips in field 108. Obviously the old strips were controlling the direction and probably also the width of the pits. If the pits 1857 (1) and 1857 (4) were dug in the same way—as seems likely—then rough plans can be drawn for them on the basis of Stone's descriptions, the work being assumed to advance along the strips towards the north-east, and left and right being interpreted accordingly.

The most significant feature in all four pits is the portion of a circular ditch at the north-east end of pit 1857 (1). Stone describes this as part of a circle some 30–40 yards in diameter—a size which corresponds well with the diameter of circle 21, estimated at 100 feet from the air photos. The ditch of this circle is now visible in two places where it cuts the line of the hedge. In both places it measures about 10 feet wide by 5 feet deep; but the southern section shows that the ditch at this point was filled on one side with a wedge of clean gravel which reduces the width of the soil filling to about 5 feet. This reduced width corresponds well with Stone's dimensions of 4 feet wide and 5 feet deep. Therefore, both diameter and section suggest that Stone's circle and circle 21 are the same; equating them gives a position for the pit 1857 (1). The other two pits of 1857 can then be put in position: 1857 (2) was situated about 50 yards south-east of 1857 (1), and 1857 (4) was situated alongside 1857 (1) but started a little further south-west. There remains the pit of 1858. This I have placed next to 1857 (2) for both these two pits were filled with a dense scatter of Iron Age pits while 1857 (1) and 1857 (4) had only a thin scatter. The dense scatter seems to link up with a cropmark which may indicate the extent of the Iron Age pits to the east and south. Stone records that they were visible as a cropmark.¹⁶ This placing of the four pits ties in well with the area which the air photos show to have been disturbed, and it is not contradicted by other information.

The new layout is of little significance for the Iron Age, merely confirming what has been more ably demonstrated at Stanton Harcourt nearby;¹⁷ but for the Saxon cemetery the new position is of considerable significance for it shows that all the Saxon graves come from a fairly confined area. On the plan (FIG. 2), the positions of Stone's graves and of all those found since are plotted together.¹⁸ Stone recorded that more than 50 other graves had been found before and at the same time as his excavations; these must have come from the disturbed area around Stone's pits and to the south-west of them. The total extent of the cemetery is therefore likely to have been contained within an area approximately 100 yards each way with the single outlier of Riley's grave of 1943. All the finds from these graves are consistently those of the so-called 'Christian' Saxon cemeteries such as the nearby Yelford, Northleigh and Chadlington. All the objects, including Stone's finds which have recently come to light, will be published in full in my forthcoming catalogue of *Anglo-Saxon Graves and Gravegoods in the Upper Thames Valley*.

A single group of finds attributed to Standlake falls outside this group.

¹⁶ *Proc. Soc. Ant.*, ser. 1, IV, 100.

¹⁷ See now D. W. Harding, *The Iron Age in the Upper Thames Basin* (1972), 11–21, pl. 28.

¹⁸ Riley 1943 = *Oxoniensis*, VIII/IX (1943/4), 199; Riley 1945 = notes in Ashmolean Museum; Catling 1954 = this volume, 239–257; Brown 1971 = recent find in the face of the gravel pit.

SKETCH PLAN OF STEPHEN STONE'S SITES AT STANDLAKE

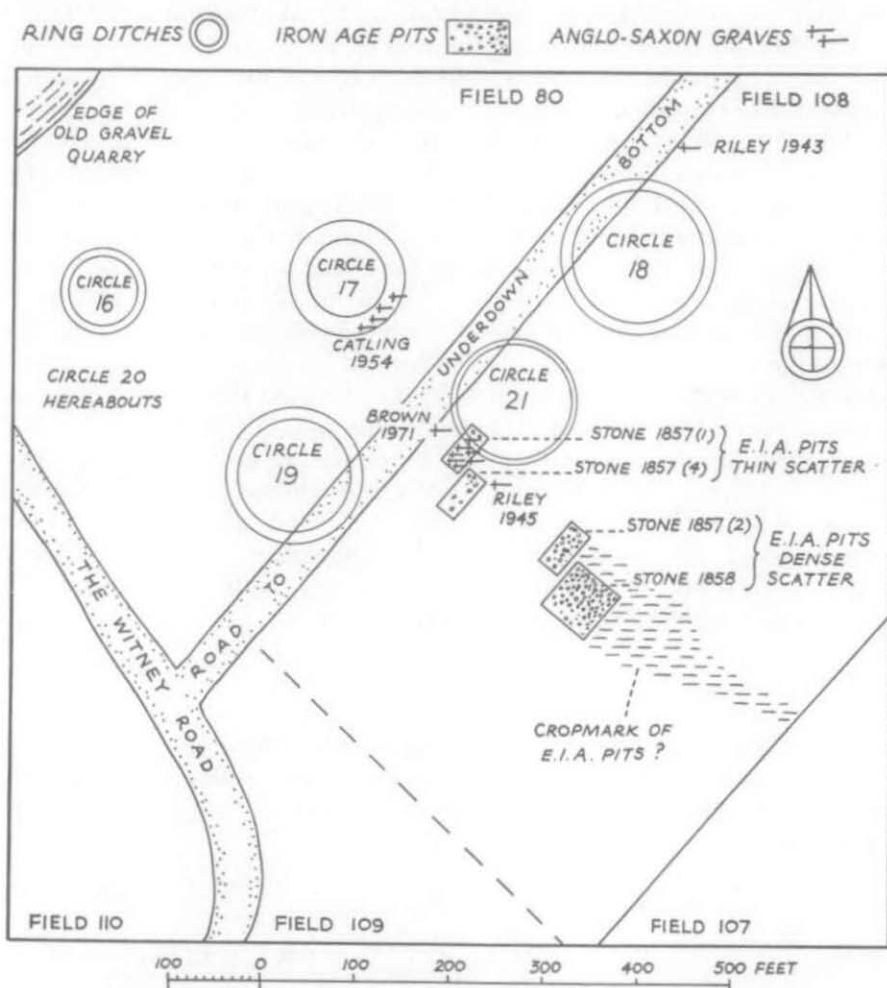


FIG. 2

Sketch plan showing probable positions of Stone's Excavations in 1857 and 1858.

This is P. Manning's group of objects of 1897.¹⁹ Manning's record is uncertain in a number of details. He states that he had acquired the objects from a labourer who had dug them up in a grave on Standlake Downs. In his published account, Manning places this grave 'just to the east of the British cemetery' which may be interpreted as somewhere east of the late Bronze Age cremation cemetery overlying circle 1, and south of the road to Witney. In his manuscript notes,²⁰ Manning places the grave 'near the site of the British village', i.e. the old gravel

¹⁹ *Berks, Bucks, Oxon. Arch. Journ.*, IV, 39-40.

²⁰ Manning MS, in Ashmolean Museum.

quarry on the north side of the Witney road. There is, therefore, uncertainty as to the site of the grave. Further, the group of finds includes objects from at least one man's grave and two women's graves, and Manning must be wrong in saying that they all come from one grave. The third point is that Manning's group of finds is typical of the latest sorts of graves of the 'pagan' cemeteries, graves dateable to the late 6th and early 7th centuries; graves with such objects would be quite out of place amongst the remainder of the Standlake graves.

It seems fairly certain, therefore, that Manning's group of objects should not be added to the rest of the Standlake finds. At the same time it remains uncertain as to where exactly the finds were made. Stone, in the late 1850s, and Riley, in the 1940s, explored extensive areas south of the road without recording evidence of any Anglo-Saxon burials,²¹ and I have argued above that none can now be attributed to the area of the old gravel quarry on the north side of the road. Somewhere the site is to be sought; but whether it was really on the Downs or not, must now be uncertain. It seems quite possible that the labourer concerned may have excavated a grave on the Downs, as he says, but that the objects came from some other site in the parish. For example, the group of objects would be perfectly at home among the contents of the Brighthampton cemetery which actually lies within Standlake parish, and not half-a-mile from the Downs. There are few such late-pagan objects from Brighthampton, and the addition of Manning's group would fit in well . . . but this is stretching the evidence which merely indicates the uncertainty of Manning's record.

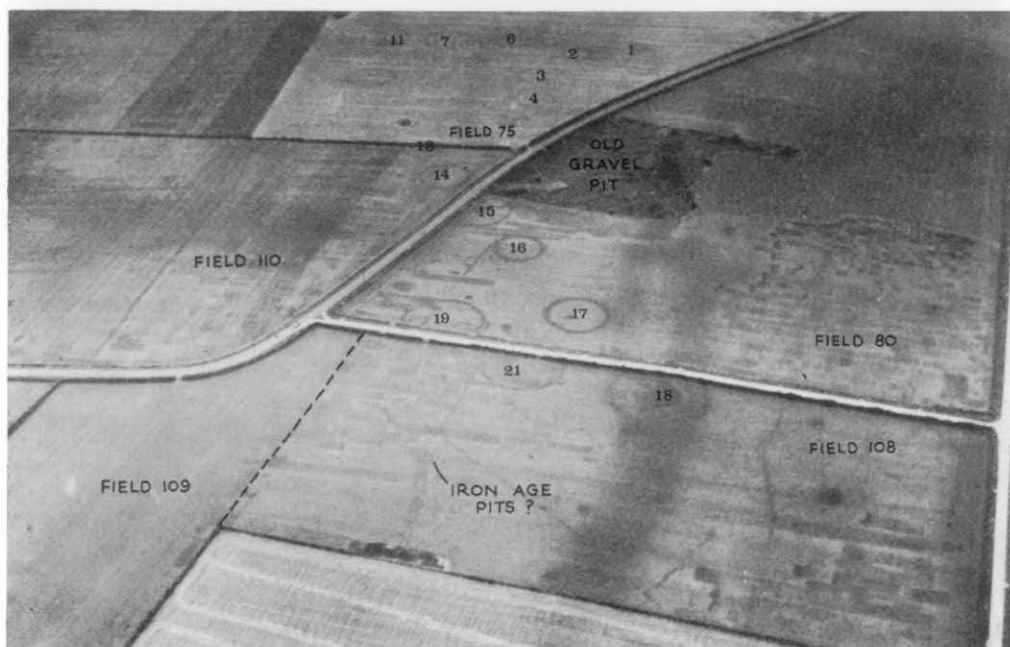
I am grateful to Brigadier F. R. L. Goadby and Mr. D. N. Riley for the help they have given me in preparing this paper, and to the staff of the County Record Office, the Bodleian Library Map Room, and the libraries of Magdalen and Lincoln Colleges for searching out documents for me.

²¹ *Archaeologia* 37, 363-9; *Proc. Soc. Ant.*, ser. 1, IV, 217-19; *Oxoniensia*, XI/XII (1946/7), 27-43.

PLATE XVII



A



B

Major Allen's Air Photos of the Sites on Standlake Down : A, from the South ; B, from the East.
The field numbering is that of the Inclosure Award of 1853.

Phh. : Ashmolean Museum