

Notes

MEDIEVAL POTTERY FROM THE WYCHWOOD

Professor Jope and Mr Threfall's excavation in the 1950's at Ascott D'Oilly produced a quantity of medieval pottery, some of which could be paralleled with wasters from the centre of the village. These wasters led Professor Jope to believe that pottery had been manufactured in the village during the 13th century.¹ Recent documentary research would support this, for John le Poter of Estcote is mentioned in the Forest Proceedings in 1272.² The Forest Pleas also mention Richard le Poter and Nicholas le Poter, who were both fined 12d. for 'wholesale and persistant taking of the King's wood' at Leafield³ and it is possible that the Forest at Wychwood was capable of supporting several potters working independently of each other.

Recently medieval and post-medieval finds were collected from the garden of a house in Courtlands Road, Shipton-under-Wychwood⁴ and brought to the Oxfordshire Archaeological Unit for identification. The medieval pottery was extremely interesting for not only did it include some Brill-type jugs, the base of a probable baluster-type and a jug which paralleled one from the collection at the Oxfordshire County Museum at Woodstock,⁵ but the majority of the domestic coarse wares were unknown from excavations at Banbury and Oxford.

The pottery, Fabric CX, was very leached with coarse, irregular voids, sparse, coarse, irregular limestone and occasional iron ore and quartz sand. It was hand-made, with occasional splashes of glaze. It was fired in oxidising conditions to give a reddish-brown hue. The vessels were ample in volume including cooking pots both globular (Nos 1-4) and straight-sided (Nos. 5-7), storage jars, dishes (No. 9) and a wide variety of handles, probably from pitchers (Nos. 8 and 10). Some of the forms were very reminiscent of the wares from Minety, Wiltshire. The origins of the straight-sided cooking pots can be found in the 11th- and 12th-century types (Oxford Fabric AC), which were widely distributed across the north of the County and were also present at Ascott D'Oilly Castle in the adjoining parish.⁶ The recognition of this new ware led to a search amongst the Oxfordshire Department of Museum Services collection for parallels, and the results are illustrated in the distribution map (Fig. 2). The distribution of these wares seems to reflect the extent of the Forest⁷ but by far the largest collection was recovered from Ascott under Wychwood and included forms (Nos. 12 and 14) and handle styles (Nos. 15-17) not recognised amongst the Shipton under Wychwood material. Another type of vessel with strap handle and partially glazed green internally was found at Hailey (No. 19). It

¹ E.M. Jope and R.I. Threfall, 'The twelfth century castle of Ascott D'Oilly, Oxon. Its history and excavation' *Antiq. Jnl.* xxxix (1959), Fig. 19 nos. 1-7, and 249.

² I am very grateful to Elizabeth Leggatt and Beryl Schumer who drew my attention to this (P.R.O. E 32/137, m.2).

³ Mrs Wickham Steed's collection 'The Pleas of the Forest' in the care of the Field Department, Oxfordshire Department of Museum Services, Woodstock.

⁴ We would like to thank the owner, Mr. Ridgeway, for presenting the finds for study.

⁵ Oxfordshire Department of Museum Services, Woodstock, jug from St John's College, Oxford (Acc. no. 78).

⁶ Jope op.cit. note 1, 'standard fabric', 245.

⁷ Frank Emery, *The Oxfordshire Landscape*, Fig. 7, 82.

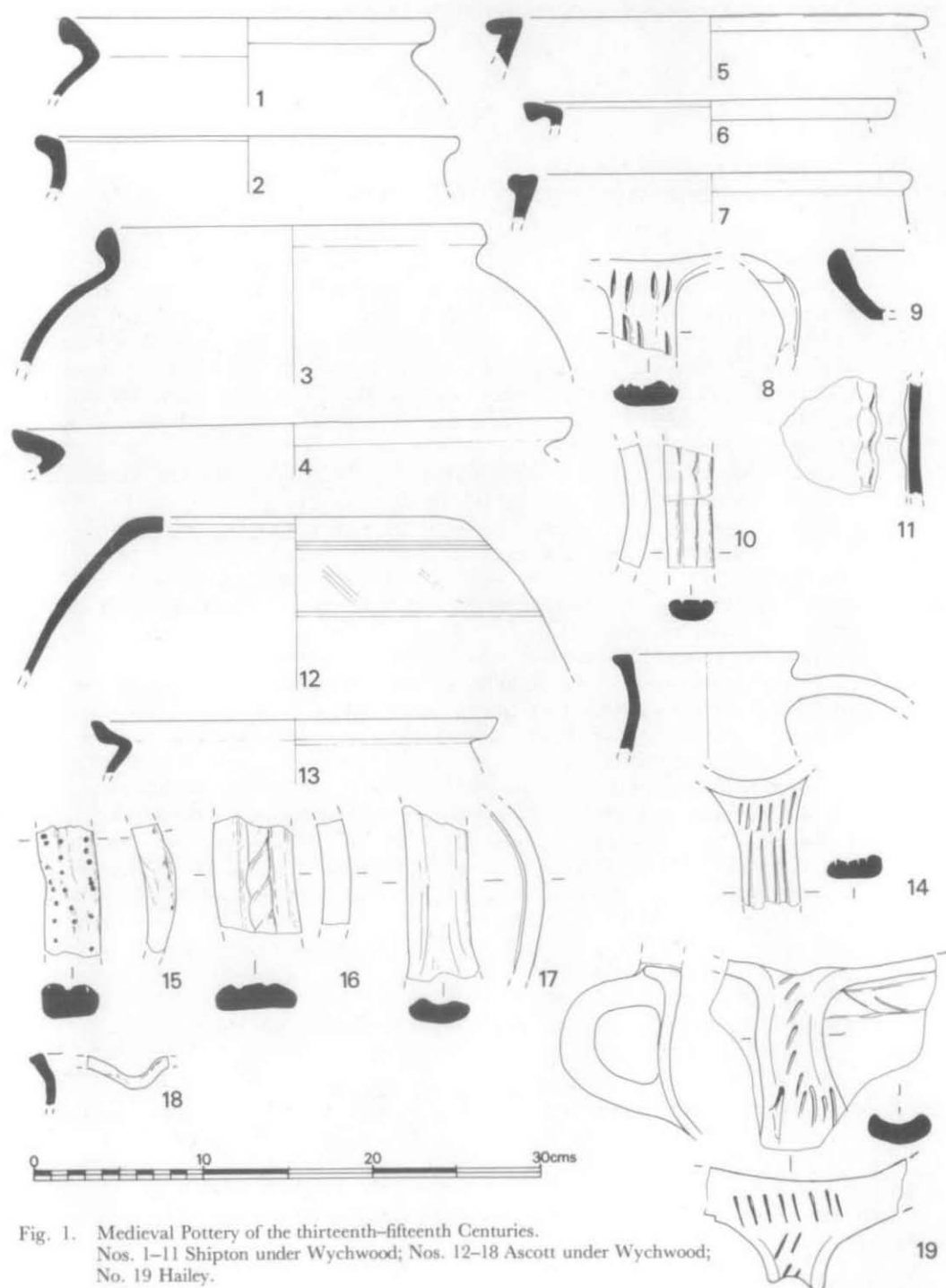


Fig. 1. Medieval Pottery of the thirteenth-fifteenth Centuries.
 Nos. 1-11 Shipton under Wychwood; Nos. 12-18 Ascott under Wychwood;
 No. 19 Hailey.

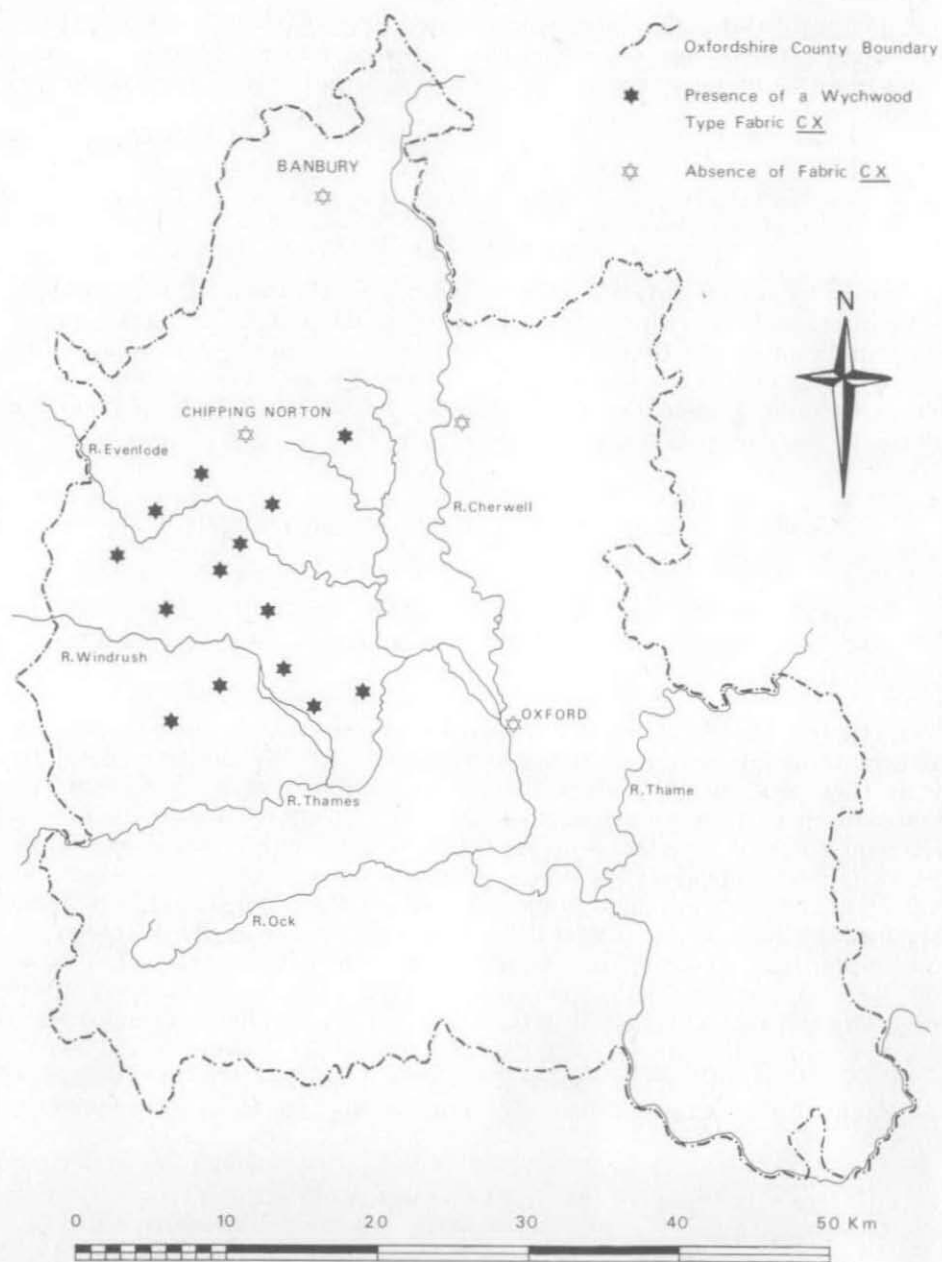


Fig. 2 Distribution map showing presence and absence of Fabric CX in north west Oxfordshire.

was then realised that this was probably the same pottery tradition identified by Professor Jope some 30 years ago, but which has not yet been deposited with the Museum.

Closer dating for this ware must await a stratified deposit in the north west of the County.

MAUREEN MELLOR

THE FESTUM OVORUM

Many pointers to the early history of Oxford lie concealed in the University Diary, and a comparison with its Cambridge counterpart would provide instructive indications of different customs and developments in the two institutions. Among feasts that have figured in the Oxford calendar from Tudor times is *Festum Ovorum*, which always denominates the Saturday preceding Shrove Tuesday, but which will be found in no Cambridge almanac, nor indeed in any other calendar. In 1582 a university statute ran:¹

Statutum autem est in posterum vt nulli, a die vulgariter *Eggsaterdaye* appellata, ad determinandum illa quadragesima presentarentur, nisi speciali aliqua de causa per conuocationem approbata.

'It is decreed that henceforth none should be presented to determine in Lent after the day commonly known as Egg Saturday, unless for some special reason approved by Convocation'.

Henceforth *Festum Ovorum* is regularly given as the last day on which bachelors would be allowed to determine (i.e. to complete the exercises for the degree of B.A.) during the University year, though Andrew Clark, who describes in full the procedure at Determination, gives a long list of dispensations.² The university statutes in 1590 include a Decretum prescribing a fee of 'decem drachmas bonae et legalis monetae Angliae' to be paid by every Batchelor 'qui solenne illud convivium, quod *ovorum* dicitur, secundum antiquam et laudabilem huius academiae consuetudinem tempore et locis consuetis non apparasset'.³ None of the Ancient Kalendars edited by Christopher Wordsworth includes this secular feast, though in describing the 'Differentia of Oxford Calendars' he notes that the Saturday before Quinquagesima was marked as *Festum Ovorum* in the modern calendars and that as late as 1822 the rule about determining was printed opposite this day.⁴ According to Antony Wood, the 'collectors' of the determining bachelors gave the entertainments traditionally associated with this day as late as 1679.⁵ He says nothing of the origin of the custom, but under the date February 20 (Sat.), 1664, *Festum Ovorum*, he remarks:

This feast I have heard Mr <John> Wilton say, that when he came to the University [I Jacobi 1603], all the Bachelors that were presented to determine did after their presentation goe to every College where there were determining <Bachelors> and there make a feast for the senior Bachelors, viz. of muscadine and egges; figges,

¹ S. Gibson, *Statuta Antiqua* (1931), p. 423.

² *Reg. Univ. Oxf.* ii (O.H.S. x), 51, 54-63.

³ Gibson, *Statuta Antiqua*, pp. 441, 451.

⁴ *Ancient Kalendar of the University of Oxf.* (O.H.S. xlv), 14.

⁵ *Life and Times of Ant. Wood*, ii (O.H.S. xxi), 601.

reasons, and almonds, sack, and such like; which expense afterwards was put down and the money given to the Library. It was an ancient custome.⁶

That it was indeed an ancient custom is indicated by the account of the determination feast of Lord Richard Holland, 21 and 22 February 1395.⁷ A nephew of Richard II, Holland might be expected to provide a memorable feast. The record is described as 'Compotus magistri Gyles de diversis expensis factis et impositis circa determinaciones Ricardi filii domini Thomae de Holand comitis canciae . . . factis Oxoniae'. John Gyles had been a fellow of New College.⁸ He was Holland's tutor and acting on his behalf. Whether the feast was mandatory in his day cannot be determined. It may have had a status similar to that of the Inception feast for M.A.s mentioned in the earliest extant statutes (? pre-1350), of which it is said: 'Quod si incipiens festum teneat magistris in suis hospiciis, quatenus sui intersint incepti, debet similiter supplicare'⁹ i.e. if an incipiens gave a feast in his lodgings he had to invite the masters beforehand. A Wycliffite tract, *De Officio Pastoralis*, asserts that 'in makynge of thes maystris ben pore mennus godis ofte wasted, and the kyng of pride is hied [exalted]'; and Matthew, in his note on this passage, cites a similar reference in manuscript to 'sumptuosas spoliaciones pauperum ad inceptiones ac graduaciones'.¹⁰

It might be thought that an Oxford custom of this kind would have a precedent in Paris. There the costs of an inception banquet were a considerable part of the expenses of a degree, and determining, which began before the Wednesday after the first week of Lent, included similar festivities,¹¹ and at Oxford the prior of a religious college paid as much as £10 as commutation for such a banquet,¹² but Astrik Gabriel informs me that he has found no mention of a *festum ovorum* in Paris records. Rashdall noted that 'Responsions' at Paris took place during Carnival and Lent and that banquets at them were forbidden:¹³ the prohibition suggests that such banquets may once have been held, but it does not specify a particular day. The only analogous reference that I have so far found in a French source is in a passage cited in Ducange who, after noting that eggs were offered in church by the faithful at various seasons of the year (including Palm Sunday), adds:

'Haud ita recens usus ova etiam scholaribus iunioribusve pueris erogandi, ut discimus ex veteri Codice MS. eccl. Camerac. Cambrai: Qualiter laudes puerorum fiunt in Quadragesima. In media Quadragesima scolares accipiunt lanceas cum vexillis et tintinnabulis; prius faciunt laudes ante ecclesiam, deinde eunt per domos cantando, et accipiunt ova pro beneficio illius laudis. Sic antiquitus faciebant'.¹³

'There was also an ancient custom of scholars and younger boys asking for eggs, as we learn from an old MS. from the church of Cambrai: 'How the boys perform their lauds in Lent: in mid-Lent the scholars take staves with banners and bells. First they sing lauds in front of the church and then go round from house to house, singing and collecting eggs as a reward. This they used to do in times past'.

⁶ Ibid. 5.

⁷ Described in Merton Coll. Record 4465, printed by J.E.T. Rogers, *Hist. of Agriculture and Prices in England* (1866), ii. 643-7.

⁸ Not of Merton: cf. A.B. Emden, *Biographical Register of the University of Oxf.* ii (1958), s.n.

⁹ Gibson, *Statuta Antiqua*, p. 37.

¹⁰ *English Works of Wyclif* (E.E.T.S. lxxiv), pp. 428, 530.

¹¹ H. Rashdall, *The Universities of Europe in the Middle Ages*, ed. Powicke and Emden, i. 455, 488.

¹² Ibid. 450; cf. R.S. Rait, *Life in the Medieval Universities* (1912), p. 40.

¹³ *Glossarium Mediae et Infimae Latinitatis* (ed. of 1840), s.v. *ovum*.

The document evidently describes a practice of the scholars of the ancient college of Cambrai, and suggests that at *mi-carême* there was some relaxation of the Lenten fast, similar to that observed in England on Mothering Sunday, when veal, pancakes and simnel cakes might be eaten and visits with such offerings were made to the mother-church of the diocese.

That commencement feasts were held at Cambridge in the 13th century may be inferred from a passage, apparently about Robert the Bruce, in the Chronicle of Robert Mannyng, which, in Hearne's text, runs:

'Of arte he had the maistrie, he mad a corven kyng
In Cantebrige to the clergie, or his brother were kyng . . .
Robert mad his fest, for he was thore that tyme
And he sauh alle the gest, that wrot and mad this ryme.'

For 'corven kyng' A.B. Emden proposed to read 'commencyng', viz. an inception feast.¹⁴ We know nothing of their date or nature, but we do know that the Comitia Priora for the conferment of the bachelor's degree began on Ash Wednesday in St. Mary the Great, with a sermon, Mass, and disputations;¹⁵ it is some indication of the nature of pre-Lenten festivities that on Ash Wednesday Johnians were given a shilling as 'Physic Money'.¹⁶

Festum Ovorum must have served a similar purpose to Shrove Tuesday, which it preceded by only two days: it would be an occasion for indulging in the egg-meat that the rules of Lenten fasting proscribed.¹⁷ February 21 was the latest day on which Lent could begin, so *Festum Ovorum* might fall well before that date. The first of the two references to 'Egg Saturday' given in *O.E.D.* is from the St. John's MS. *The Christmas Prince* (1607-8) and runs: 'On the sixt of February, beeing egge satterday, it pleased some gentlemen schollers in the town to make a dauncing night of it . . .' The passage concludes: 'After all the sport was ended the prince entertayned them very royally with the good store of wine and a banquet where they were very merry and well pleased all that night';¹⁸ but it mentions no academic exercises. The second citation, from Sir Richard Baker's *Theatrum Triumphans* (1670), is less illuminating: 'One such he seems to have learned . . . from Egg Saturday in Oxford, to make diversity of meats with diversity of dressing'. But the association with Oxford is also found in a passage from Hampton's *Medii Aevi Kalendarium*¹⁹ to the effect that the Saturday preceding Lent is called by common people, especially in Oxfordshire, Egg Saturday; in fact the only quotation Joseph Wright could provide in the *English Dialect Dictionary* was from Brand's *Popular Antiquities* ('. . . the Egg-feast formerly at Oxford, when the scholars took leave of that kind of food . . .').

Possibly customs similar to those chronicled at Cambrai once obtained at Paris (or other French universities) and were transferred to Oxford, where the original motive became blurred as the day became associated primarily with regulations for determining, and (after the Reformation) the habits of Lenten fasting weakened. The feast still held at Oriel (and perhaps at other colleges) on the third Saturday of Lent evidently has no

¹⁴ Peter Langtoft's *Chronicle*, ed. T. Hearne (1725), ii. 336-7; A.B. Emden, *Biographical Register of the University of Cambridge to 1500* (1963) s.n. Bruce.

¹⁵ G. Peacock, *Observations on the Statutes of Cambridge University* (1841), pp. vi, xv.

¹⁶ *The Eagle*, 1903/4, 118.

¹⁷ Cf. North Country 'Collop Monday', referring to bacon and eggs consumed on the day before Shrove Tuesday.

¹⁸ *The Christmas Prince* (Malone Soc. reprinted 1922), 197.

¹⁹ Cited in *Notes & Queries* 8th ser. xi. 247.

academic significance. It is noteworthy, however, that the practice of begging for eggs before Easter survived in Oxfordshire until White Kennett's day. He describes gangs of boys who went round begging for gifts from house to house (much like the scholars of Cambrai) and quotes a rhyme that they would shout out if no gift were forthcoming after they had sung their song.²⁰

The connexion of feasts and examinations long persisted. At Trinity, Cambridge, candidates for scholarships and fellowships were obliged, until Bentley abolished the practice, to keep hospitality during the days on which they were examined.²¹ In the early years of the 19th century Oxford graduands chose their examiners and invited them to a dinner given before the ceremony of examination.

J.A.W. BENNETT

SOME CAPPED TOMBS

Since the so-called 'bale tomb' is said to be characteristic of Cotswold churchyards, a survey was undertaken during 1981 to determine the extent of their distribution. This appeared to be centred on Burford, and so all the churches within about 10 miles, and as many as possible at a greater distance from this town were visited. Ninety eight bale tombs were located at 42 places.

The bale tomb is a variant of the widespread chest tomb, which is a rectangular stone box with a flat ledger on top, and with inscriptions and more or less decoration on the sides and ends. What characterises it is the presence of a hemi-cylindrical cap stone, or bale, lying on the ledger. This stone is often plain (35 per cent) but may have various forms of decoration, which, in what may be regarded as a typical bale, consists of large ridges and grooves running across it (49 per cent). These ridges and grooves vary somewhat in size, and almost always are smoothly rounded. Forty eight ridged bales were found, and in 51 per cent of these the ridges ran obliquely across the stone, in 30 per cent they ran obliquely in opposite directions on the two halves, and in 9 per cent they were transverse. Flat narrow bands running transversely may occur (26 per cent) at each end and at the middle of the bale. These are finely ridged and occasionally decorated. Two bales were seen with a longitudinal dorsal band, and 3 with dorsal bands and panels on the sides. At Westwell there is a unique tomb in which the cap stone is bell-shaped, not semicircular, in cross section. Otherwise it is a normal bale, with oblique ridges and a band at each end. There is another abnormal type of bale to be seen at Alvescot, Bourton on the Water, Lower Slaughter, Stow on the Wold and Wyck Rissington. In this there is a flat dorsal area from which grooves radiate outwards along the sides and ends. The ends of bales may be plain (37 per cent), occasionally rounded. When they are decorated the commonest form (40 per cent) is a hollow scallop shell containing a skull or a scroll. At Asthall there is a plain bale with bands at each end and at the middle, and on top of each is a large ornate knob or urn, one now missing. There are 2 similar tombs at Burford, only one knob remains but the iron dowels for the attachment of the others are visible. Bibury has 2 double tombs. These have large square chests on top of each of which lie 2 bales. The ridges on one pair, dated 1675 and 92, run obliquely, and on the other transversely. At Ardington there appears to be a double tomb, but, as there is no

²⁰ I. and P. Opie, *Love and Language of Schoolchildren* (1959), 232 n. 1.

²¹ J.H. Monk, *Life of Bentley* (1830), 24.

chest and the ledger is made of several stones, it may have been reassembled. There are 2 bales each made of 2 stones. They are of different lengths, have different transverse bands and the ridges on one run obliquely in one direction and on the other in opposite directions on the two halves.

The bale tomb is often held to represent a bale of wool or cloth encircled by cords, but this seems doubtful. Only half have grooves around them, and of these only 9 (19 per cent) have the grooves running transversely. Oblique binding of a soft bale seems impracticable, and representations of wool bales, as on the 14th century brasses at Northleach, show these to be square sacks. Bale tombs do not occur in cloth-producing areas such as Stroud. All but 7 of them are found within 10 miles of Burford, and half of them within 5 miles of that town. The most distant outliers are at Blockley, Ardington and Letcombe Basset. Burford did produce wool, but in view of the fact that in this same area another form of capped tomb occurs it seems best to regard these tombs as a local fashion.

Churchyard memorials are very difficult to date not only because of the weathering of the inscription but because several dates may be given. Dates were legible on 45 tombs, and, using the earliest date, 24 per cent of these fell in the period 1650-99; 55 per cent in 1700-49 and 15 per cent in 1750-99. The notable tomb at Asthall has legible dates 1729-1730 and 1731, and in the inscription the words "J Humphrey fecit". The earliest date observed was 1662 at Fairford.

While surveying the bale tombs it soon became evident that there is also a different capped tomb in which the stone on top of the ledger is a triangular prism with hipped ends, not a hemi-cylinder. Two hundred and thirty of these were examined. The cap stone is moulded along the sides and at the ends, and 38 per cent of them have a small roll along the ridge while 20 per cent are rounded at the top. In about half of them the moulded stone rests on a low plain slab. Sometimes there are 2 moulded stones upon the slab, making a three-part cap.

These capped tombs have a somewhat wider distribution than the bale tombs, 62 per cent of them being in Gloucestershire as compared with 44 per cent of the bales. It is, however, a circumscribed area more or less centred on Burford. The only notable outliers which were found are at Brackley, one dated 1739. Here the upper stone is gadrooned and the lower one coved. Of the total caps 163 could be dated, and they were slightly more recent than the bales 0.6 per cent in 1650-99; 13.5 per cent in 1700-49; 46 per cent in 1750-99 and 37.4 per cent in 1800-49.

W.R. Elliott, in his important paper ('Chest Tombs and "Tea Caddies" by Cotswold and Severn', *Trans. Bristol & Glos. Arch. Soc.* xcv. 68-85.), points out that the early bale tomb at Fairford belongs to Valentine Strong, a mason from the Burford area, and that there is another at Burford belonging to John Kempster, also a quarry owner. The distribution of the bale and capped tombs supports the view that the idea of this type of tomb originated near Burford.

The places where bale tombs were found, and the numbers, are as follows: Alvescot, 1; Ardington, 2; Ascott under Wychwood, 3; Asthall, 2; Aston Blank, 1; Bibury, 7; Bledington, 2; Blockley, 1; Bourton on the Water, 4; Brize Norton, 2; Broadwell (Glos.), 8; Broadwell (Oxon), 2; Burford, 13; Chipping Norton, 6; Cricklade, 1; Eastleach Martin, 1; Fairford, 3; Faringdon, 1; Fulbrook, 3; Idbury, 1; Kempford, 1; Latton, 1; Lechlade, 1; Letcombe Basset, 1; Little Barrington, 1; Lower Slaughter, 1; Meysey Hampton, 1; North Leigh, 1; Oddington, 1; Quenington, 2; Shilton, 2; Shipton under Wychwood, 1; Southrop, 1; Standlake, 1; Stow on the Wold, 3; Swinbrook, 7; Taynton, 1; Westwell, 1; Windrush, 2; Witney, 2; Wyck Rissington, 1; Yanworth, 1.

B.J. MARPLES

THE OXFORDSHIRE ARCHAEOLOGICAL COMMITTEE IN 1981

A full description of the Committee's Unit's work in 1981 can be found in the Unit's Annual Report published in CBA Group IX *Newsletter*, 12 (1982), 115-193. The Unit produces a Newsletter which appears approximately bi-monthly. It can be obtained from the Oxford Archaeological Unit, 46 Hythe Bridge Street, Oxford OX1 2EP. During the year work by the Unit and others took place at a number of sites including the following:-

1. *Surveys*

Chadlington: Prehistoric and Roman finds
Chalgrove: Medieval earthworks
Charlbury: Finds and sites of various dates
Charlbury, Walcot: Medieval earthworks
Finstock: Medieval moated site
Oxford Prison, St George's Tower: Structural survey
Oxfordshire: Archaeology of sites of Special Scientific Interest
Spelsbury: Roman pottery
Thames floodplain Survey
Rollright: Rollright Stones
Harefield, Middlesex: Parish survey

2. *Excavation projects and observations*

Abingdon: Late Iron Age and Roman features and finds at the former MG Car Factory
Asthall: Roman bronze brooch
Charlbury: Saxon burials
Checkendon: Iron Age earthworks at the Devil's Churchyard
Churchill: Roman burial in a stone coffin at Churchill Grounds Farm
Didcot: Middle Iron Age site at the Rectory
Dorchester Abbey: Masonry bench at the Abbey
Dorchester: Neolithic cursus and henges, Bronze Age ring ditch and Roman cemetery on the line of the by-pass
Dorchester: Roman defences at 51 High Street
Drayton: Neolithic cursus
Frilford: Roman amphitheatre at the Noah's Ark
Hanborough: Roman pottery
Hardwick: Roman pottery
Kiddington: Iron Age settlement at Tomlin's Gate
Oxford: Roman pottery kiln at Between Towns Road, Cowley
Oxford: Medieval water front at Floyd's Row
Oxford: Medieval bastion at Corpus Christi College
Oxford: Late Saxon and Medieval Street surfaces and the 'Kennel' in the High Street and Turl Street
Oxford: Medieval vault at Frewin Hall, New Inn Hall Street
Oxford: Post medieval pit at the Provost's Lodgings, Oriel College
Oxford: Rewley Abbey
Oxford: Late Saxon ford at 65 St Aldates
Radley: Neolithic and Bronze Age flint at Barrow Hills
Radley: Neolithic and Bronze Age flint and Iron Age pottery at Thrupp Farm

Sandford-on-Thames: Medieval finds

Thomley: Medieval pottery

Witney: Medieval pottery from 27 Market Square

Witney: Possible Iron Age ditch and medieval finds at Newland Mill

Fairford/Lechlade, Gloucestershire: Iron Age and Roman settlement at Claydon Pike

3. *Reports in progress*

Berinsfield: Pagan Saxon weapons from the cemetery at Wally Corner

Chalgrove: Medieval moated manor house at Harding's Field

Oxford: Post medieval pottery from St Ebbe's sites