

# Archaeological Work in Oxfordshire, 2016

The County Archaeological Services, having undergone minor changes as a result of council reorganisation, is now part of the Planning and Place Team within the Communities Directorate. Our work continues as normal and, despite the economic climate, we were consulted on approximately 1,700 planning applications between May 2015 and April 2017. In addition, the service scanned-in the region of 9,700 applications and appraised a further 820 applications from the weekly planning lists. The service also produced seventy-one design briefs for archaeological work including thirty-six for archaeological evaluation. Not all archaeological contractors request a design brief and many produce a written scheme of investigation directly and therefore the number of investigations is slightly higher.

## SELECTED PROJECTS

### *Bridge Farm, Sutton Courtenay*

Monitoring and recording was undertaken at Bridge Farm in advance of gravel extraction by Oxford Archaeology (OA). This revealed evidence of the Romano-British settlement extending north of Appleford Road to the west of the railway line. This is a continuation of the settlement excavated in 1973. The monitoring identified Romano-British enclosures, pits, postholes and trackways contiguous with Roman features previously excavated north of the road. A Romano-British cemetery was identified west of the settlement, and further west a small Romano-British cemetery with thirty-nine burials was excavated. Twenty-one early Anglo-Saxon sunken-featured buildings were also recorded.

### *Dewars Quarry Ardley*

Monitoring and recording by OA was undertaken in advance of mineral extraction at Dewars Quarry. More than seventy Anglo-Saxon inhumations were identified and recorded although many were very truncated. A number contained grave goods, including beads, knives and buckles. Significantly, two graves contained bed burials, similar to those found in Suffolk and Cambridgeshire. These two burials appear not to have contained any high-status objects, although a head board stay and rings and cleats associated with a bed frame were recovered. It is unclear at present whether in each case the entire bed was within the grave and therefore it will be interesting to compare these examples with others from Wessex and East Anglia. These are the first examples to date within Oxfordshire. Elsewhere on the site three four-post Iron-Age structures were revealed along with other structures and pits containing Iron-Age pottery.

### *Furze Platt, Blenheim Park*

An archaeological evaluation was undertaken by OA across the line of Akeman Street within Blenheim Park. The Roman road was found to survive relatively well with two distinct layers of rubble forming a raised agger with a roadside ditch on the south side. An adjacent building shows evidence of subsidence. This is where the northern ditch would be expected to be located

### *Blenheim Hill, Harwell*

Recent investigations by TVAS either side of Blenheim Hill identified an area of Romano-British settlement. An initial evaluation south of Didcot Road revealed an extensive spread of features that were subsequently excavated. The features include pits, ditches and postholes along with a corn drier. Initial spot dating suggested a later Roman date. An evaluation

north of the road, at Kilnwood, revealed ditches, gullies, pits, postholes and a truncated human inhumation burial. The evidence suggests a similar date to the area south of the road. A further site north and east of Kilnwood was subject to a geophysical survey. The survey revealed rectilinear and multi-sided enclosures and linear features or trackways. These would appear to form part of the larger Romano-British settlement.

*Land North of Didcot Road, Harwell*

A geophysical survey and archaeological field evaluation commissioned by CgMs revealed a number of enclosures and linear features. The evaluation, undertaken by JMHS, also revealed a number of inhumation burials. In the south-western part of the site concentrations of features indicate an area of settlement. The substantial northern enclosure appears to have been abandoned in the later second century AD. After this the activity is concentrated in the south where both settlement features and burials were identified. One burial was in part examined and the pottery suggests a date from the mid third century to the fourth century or possibly later. Several burials of a similar date were excavated to the west, at Kilnwood, but one containing a knife is possibly early Saxon in date. Given that a ditch in the south part of the site appears to contain early Anglo-Saxon pottery then it is not implausible that some at least of the burials are early Anglo-Saxon and were interred during the last phases of settlement. It is also likely that these features are part of a wider settlement including Kilnwood and the development site to the south where further Romano-British features have been revealed.

*Kilnwood, Harwell*

This site lies immediately to the west of the above site. Archaeological evaluation and excavation undertaken by TVAS revealed settlement in the form of ditches and pits dating to the Romano-British period. Several burials were also found. One contained a knife, suggesting a potential early Anglo-Saxon presence.

*Land North of Grove*

Geophysical survey and archaeological evaluation were undertaken north of Grove by CA. The evaluation demonstrated that the majority of the site, with the exception of the north-east corner, has been utilised in some form since the Iron Age. There were numerous ditches and gullies across the site that could be securely dated to the Iron-Age, Roman and medieval periods. To the west of the site these appeared to have been for the purpose of field division and drainage. In the south-central part of the site the ditches became larger and more prevalent, and were likely to have been used for stock enclosures. Material recovered from these ditches indicated usage across the Iron Age and Roman period. Evidence of settlement activity was also found east of the brook on slightly higher ground. A number of features including ring gullies, storage pits, postholes and ditches indicated settlement there developed in the Iron Age and continued through into the later Roman period. Pottery was recovered dating to the third and fourth centuries AD, suggesting a prolonged usage of this area. There were also indications of higher-status activity. Within the Roman contexts a number of fragments of roof tile and box flue tile, along with Gaulish Samian pottery and a brooch fragment were recovered. Two small wall fragments were partially exposed which also appeared to be of possible Roman date.

*St Helen's Avenue, Benson*

A geophysical survey and a trenched evaluation were undertaken on a site south of Benson. The geophysical survey, by Stratascan, recorded a dense array of anomalies including enclosures and linear features. The evaluation, undertaken by OA, recorded that the majority of these features were Roman in date and included a stone-lined well and a chalk foundation. Box flue tiles and roofing tiles were recovered suggesting that a building of some status existed

in the vicinity along with a number of enclosure ditches, postholes and pits. Preservation of environmental remains was particularly good.

At least eight graves were recorded in the north-eastern part of the site, an area mainly devoid of other features. An iron knife was recovered from one of the graves and a radiocarbon sample taken from one burial returned a mid Anglo-Saxon date. Further burials were recorded in three other trenches within the general area which were on a different alignment and it is thought that these may be of an earlier, Roman, date.

#### *Littleworth Road, Benson*

An archaeological excavation has been undertaken by TVAS on a site on the north side of Littleworth Road, Benson ahead of development. The site was previously subject to an archaeological evaluation which recorded a number of undated linear features. The excavation recorded aspects of a Roman field system across the site with a larger, more substantial ditch to the south of the site probably representing the line of a Roman track. A large pit containing a number of Roman vessels, bronze brooches and a plate are probably the remains of a relatively high-status burial (Fig. 1). The plate was found with two semi-articulated series of animal bones in situ on its surface suggesting that it was buried with two joints of meat. Very little dating evidence was found for the other features on site.

#### *Bicester Priory*

A new care home has been proposed on the site of Bicester Priory and a targeted evaluation was undertaken by Headland Archaeology to determine the preservation of archaeological remains on the site. The evaluation showed that the foundations of the church and parts of the cloister survive including undisturbed sections of the south cloister wall and the possible chapter house. It is clear from the evaluation results that an understanding of the layout of the priory can be gained from the remains and Historic England has indicated that the remains are of national importance. A redesigned foundation layout has been prepared to preserve the majority of the remains in situ.



*Fig. 1. Remains from a Roman burial at Littleworth Road, Benson.*

*Bicester Gateway, Alchester*

A geophysical survey, commissioned by CA, was undertaken on a site immediately north of the scheduled Roman site of Alchester. The survey identified a number of possible anomalies along with evidence of ridge and furrow. Evaluation trenches targeted on these anomalies revealed a dense area of Roman settlement. A thick, black, deposit containing Roman pottery along with pieces of plaster overlay a complex array of features including postholes. This area is likely to be a continuation of the extra-mural settlement recorded during the widening of the adjacent A41 in the early 1990s.

*Thame Site F, Phase 2*

Following the excavations undertaken last year, a phase of evaluation has been undertaken on the remaining area of Site F at Thame. The earlier excavation identified a previously unrecorded causewayed enclosure along with Iron-Age through to Anglo-Saxon settlement. A geophysical survey recorded the continuation of the inner circuit of the causewayed enclosure and further settlement evidence. The evaluation confirmed these results and also identified the outer circuit of the enclosure.

*Duns Tew Solar Farm*

An archaeological evaluation was undertaken by CgMs on a site north of Duns Tew ahead of the construction of a solar farm. A geophysical survey highlighted a number of possible archaeological features consisting of ring ditches and enclosures along a trackway following the valley bottom. The evaluation showed that the geophysical survey was successful in identifying the archaeological features. The enclosures and possible roundhouses have been tentatively dated to the Iron Age but a more precise date will be obtained once the post excavation work is completed.

*Milton Road, Adderbury*

An excavation on land to the north of Milton Road was undertaken by CA to investigate two areas of archaeological interest identified by a geophysical survey and a trenched evaluation. The excavation recorded a number of possible prehistoric features including a posthole structure and a possible henge. The posthole structure consisted of several large post pits, approximately 1 metre wide, with large post pipes, arranged in a circle roughly 15 metres in diameter. The post pipes contained a considerable amount of charcoal. A large pit was located on the southern edge of this circle which contained three large 'planks' of wood reduced to charcoal. A circular enclosure 25 metres in diameter was recorded adjacent to this which had two opposing entrances and is therefore tentatively recorded as a possible henge. A third circular enclosure was recorded on the southern edge of the site.

*The White Hart Hotel, Dorchester-on-Thames*

A two trench evaluation was undertaken by OA on a site to the east of the White Hart Hotel in Dorchester ahead of the determination of a planning application. The site is located along the line of the suggested Roman defences close to the north-eastern corner of the walled town. The evaluation identified two features possibly representing walls which have been robbed of stone. One of these corresponds closely with the conjectured alignment of the northern defences of the Roman small town. A further programme of archaeological investigation will be required should the proposal be granted planning permission.

*Oxford Flood Alleviation Scheme – Old Abingdon Road*

A number of trenches were excavated along the line of the Old Abingdon Road to investigate the line of a causeway, a continuation of the Grandpont (a Norman causeway), preserving the medieval and possibly Anglo-Saxon southern approach to Oxford. A number of stone culverts related to this causeway form a scheduled monument and the evaluation was partly

undertaken to identify if further culverts survived on the proposed route of the new flood channel and partly to assess the survival and significance of the causeway itself. The evaluation identified a further collapsed culvert along with good evidence of a medieval causeway. A roadside ditch was also identified dating to the twelfth or thirteenth century. The evaluation also showed that the road underwent considerable modification and reworking in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

## HISTORIC ENVIRONMENT RECORD

The Historic Environment Record (HER), the county's archaeological data base, was consulted by contractors, consultants, and county council colleagues. These consultations comprised requests for data used in projects ranging from desk-based assessments, residential or other development, as well as footpath diversions, research-based work, and large infrastructure projects (such as HS2). More than 170 consultations were made, a clear increase over the previous year and a reflection of the rate of growth in Oxfordshire.

The ongoing digitisation project begun in 2015 by OA has now ended, with informative Detailed Record File (DRF) material either scanned for inclusion in the HER or set aside for in-house scanning. The poor-quality, illegible and duplicate material has been discarded, and other material was given to other Oxfordshire County Council services. In addition to the DRF material, most of the PRN (Primary Record Number) cards have been scanned, as have approximately half of the original OS (Ordnance Survey) record cards. We are appreciative of the hard work done on this project by OA staff (especially Nicola Scott and Simon Palmer). The next phase of the digitising project involved the linking of DRF data with the digital HER records.

In advance of the archaeology team's move to County Hall in July 2016, an intensive sort of HER source material was required because of the limited storage space available in the new offices. Most of the HER resources held by County Archaeology are now digital or have been transferred to a more appropriate repository in the county. Several types of material were given to the Oxfordshire History Centre (OHC), including sets of aerial photographs, slides and other photographs, historic notes, heritage based theses and books, as well as oversize drawings. A catalogue of the HER material given to OHC is planned. Field archives and notes were given to the Museums Resource Centre (MRC) at Standlake.

The Oxfordshire Historic Landscape Characterisation project was due for completion in July 2017. An online interactive map showing the landscape in the late eighteenth, late nineteenth, and early twenty-first centuries can be found by following the link on the project webpage ([www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/historiclandscape](http://www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/historiclandscape)); extracts from the report and downloadable maps can also be found there.

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