

# Archaeological Work in Oxfordshire, 2014

The County Archaeological Services was consulted on approximately 1,800 planning applications between April 2014 and April 2015. In addition, the service scanned a further 6,253 applications from the weekly planning lists. The service also produced seventy-two design briefs for archaeological work including thirty-eight for evaluation ahead of the determination of a planning application.

## SELECTED PROJECTS

### *Langford Lane, Wendlebury*

A programme of archaeological evaluation and excavation was undertaken by OA ahead of the construction of a new bridge and road south of the Roman town of Alchester. A number of archaeological features were recorded, notably in areas either side of two Roman roads. The first area, located immediately south of the town, included part of the surface of the main southern road across Alchester as well as a number of enclosure ditches and pits. A second area, to the south-east of the town, contained the surface of a possible earlier road as well as a number of buildings foundations along the line of the road (Fig. 1).

### *Thame, Site F*

An archaeological evaluation by JMHS on the north-west side of Thame recorded Iron-Age and Roman settlement along with inhumations from the Iron Age and Roman periods (Fig. 2).



*Fig. 1. Roman building foundations at Langford Lane.*



Fig. 2. A Roman well in Thame.

A subsequent excavation by Nexus Heritage is currently underway which has recorded a series of Iron-Age pits, enclosures and roundhouses, and a large number of Roman ditches and enclosures. A number of Saxon sunken-featured buildings have also been recorded.

#### *Brook Farm, Arncott*

An evaluation and subsequent small excavation was undertaken on this site by CgMs ahead of the construction of a solar farm. The evaluation recorded a number of Roman linear features within a discrete area of the site which were not identified by geophysical survey. Subsequent mitigation identified the remains of a Romano-British ditch system dating to the mid first to second centuries AD. The ditch system is probably the remains of a small farming settlement on the edge of the floodplain of the River Ray.

#### *Land East of Bodicote*

A geophysical survey undertaken on a site to the east of Bodicote recorded a number of anomalies of possible archaeological origin. These included a continuation of a possible cursus recorded further south from aerial photographs, as well as a number of possible enclosures and trackways. An archaeological evaluation recorded features mainly dating to the Iron Age and Roman periods, although Bronze-Age features were also identified. No dating evidence was recovered from the possible cursus feature.

#### *Southam Road, Banbury*

A number of areas of excavation have been undertaken on this site ahead of a housing development. Part of a holloway from the deserted medieval village to the south was shown



*Fig. 3. A slot through the Bronze-Age enclosure ditch in Banbury.*

to have cut a complex of prehistoric features. Later prehistoric ditches were found associated with field boundaries and enclosures, and a small number of Neolithic pits were recorded. A large Bronze-Age enclosure ditch, over 70 meters in diameter, was initially identified during the geophysical survey of the site (Fig. 3). The ditch enclosed a number of roundhouses and other features. A series of Neolithic pits were also recorded in the immediate vicinity. Archaeological features from this period have been traditionally very rare in this part of the county so this is a particularly interesting and significant excavation.

#### *Land off Grove Road, Harwell*

A geophysical survey and an archaeological field evaluation identified evidence of later prehistoric settlement on the south side of Grove Road in Harwell. Further investigation was undertaken by Wessex Archaeology in advance of development. This revealed extensive and well-preserved settlement dating from the Neolithic to the Anglo Saxon periods. The greater part dated to the later prehistoric and Romano-British periods, with a hiatus in occupation between the early and middle Iron Age and the third century AD. The settlement area covers at least two hectares and includes ten roundhouses, several hundred pits and post holes and

four inhumation burials. A weaving comb was retrieved from the fill of a pit that cut a middle Iron-Age ditch. Whilst such objects are found sometimes with geometric patterns incised into them, this example features a carved human face. An archaeological evaluation off Orchard Way to the south identified further contemporary settlement, suggesting that the occupation area was very substantial. However, evaluation north of Grove Road has revealed almost no activity of that period, indicating that the road, which is a distinct holloway, formed its northern boundary.

*Land adjacent to Farways, Cassington*

Archaeological excavation of a number of crop marks, including a bowl barrow and several linear features, was undertaken by JMHS in advance of development on the west side of Yarnton Road in Cassington. The features excavated dated from the later Neolithic or early Bronze Age to the later Romano-British period. A pit, containing beaker pottery, with associated post holes formed the earliest phase of the site. Whether this was contemporary with the initial phase of the ring ditch is unclear. The excavation did not reveal a primary burial within the inner part of the barrow. The barrow itself did not survive as an earthwork, although the presence of eroded material on the inside suggest that it once did. The ditch had silted up by the start of the Iron Age. Two inhumation burials were found within the fill of the ditch, including a seated burial, and in total eleven cremation burials were found.

*Land off Station Road, Uffington*

Subsequent to an archaeological evaluation, a programme of excavation was undertaken by Cotswold Archaeology. The evaluation identified two distinct areas of activity within the later prehistoric and Romano-British periods. Middle and late Iron-Age features were identified in the south-west of the site. These included a round house and at least three four-post granary structures within an enclosure. This was followed by limited activity during the early Roman period, but during the third and fourth centuries there appears to have been a reorganisation of the landscape with a series of successive boundaries and settlement enclosures being constructed. In another part of the site an area containing a relatively dense spread of smelting slag was also examined. It is possible that this relates to a series of quarry pits where clay containing iron ore appears to have been extracted. Given however that no remains of smelting furnaces were found this has to be related to nearby smelting activity. A moderate assemblage of Roman brick, CBM, tegula, imbrex, and flue tile was recovered across the site. This material and the presence of industrial activity and building waste suggest the presence of a higher-status Romano-British farmstead or villa in the vicinity.

*Westerfield Farm, Shilton*

Archaeological monitoring and recording was undertaken during the construction of a solar farm. Surface stripping for the compound revealed a number of archaeological features of Iron-Age and Roman date. These included a small rectangular post-built structure, a possible circular structure and a rectangular stone building. The post-built structure was associated with an area of scorching. Three broaches were found, two of them diminutive examples. However, whilst such broaches are often associated with religious sites, they can be associated with military activities. That this site is adjacent to Akeman Street, which formed the early frontier of the province, and that there is evidence of a marching camp and cemetery to the north-east may therefore be significant. It is also more usual to find greater concentrations of votive objects, broaches and coins on temple sites than seems to have been the case here. Other finds include a bill hook, a stylus, an ear spoon and tweezers. The rectangular post-built structure appears to be a workshop and has tentatively been dated to the Iron Age. Such a building and some of the other finds appear to be more indicative of a later prehistoric and Romano-British farmstead.

*Land off Sutton Road, Milton*

A predetermination evaluation in advance of development revealed a number of inhumations. As a result a programme of investigation of the site has been undertaken. The earliest activity within the site included a number of dispersed pits and post holes. These were dated through the presence of early Bronze-Age beaker pottery. Over forty graves were revealed in the western part of the site. Although they are currently undated it would appear that they form a continuation of an Anglo-Saxon burial ground that was recorded to the west. The full extent of the latter was not defined but this appears to represent its easternmost point. The evaluation and an ongoing watching brief did not reveal any burials further east. The burials were consistently orientated on an east–west axis. Most were in a supine position with the head at the western end of the grave cut. Two metal knives and a degraded metal object were found in association with three burials but overall there was a paucity of grave goods. The preservation of the burials was variable, with the deeper burials being well preserved and the shallower burials truncated by ridge and furrow and modern ploughing.

## HISTORIC ENVIRONMENT RECORD

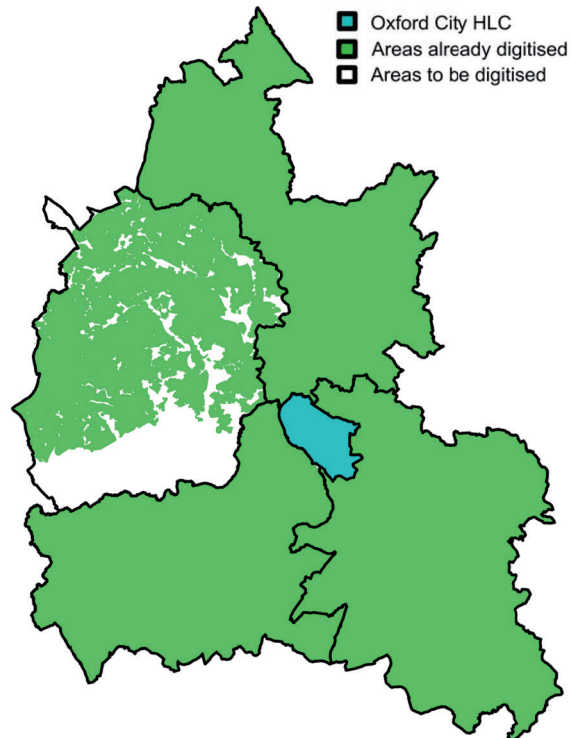
The Historic Environment Record (HER) is the county’s archaeological and historical database. Following on from last year’s record number of consultations, there was a similar total in 2014, with 128 requests for information coming from contractors, solicitors, consultants and internal colleagues for projects ranging from desk-based assessments, heritage plans, local environmental projects to footpath diversions. This sustained rate of consultations clearly indicates the level of development within the county. The HER Officer also provided information for the development of Neighbourhood Plans in several parishes to help communities produce their own plan for development. There were also several large data requests from Thames Water and from the HS2 Project. Academic requests include checking data on Oxford University’s ‘The Past People of Oxfordshire’ project, as well as provision of data for a number of dissertations and theses both in England and abroad.

This is the second year of the merged UAD–HER database, which has resulted in a combined resource of more than 48,000 records of monuments, buildings, events (archaeological activities), finds and sources, and now means that the HER completely covers the county. The combined UAD–HER dataset has been uploaded onto the Historic England (previously English Heritage) hosted website, known as Heritage Gateway ([www.heritagegateway.org.uk/gateway](http://www.heritagegateway.org.uk/gateway)). The dataset holds data from other HERs as well as national databases. The Oxfordshire HER data has both text and mapped information, updated every six months, and is designed for use by researchers, members of the public and students, but not for contractors. Data on the County Council’s internal database Heritage Search ([www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/heritagesearch](http://www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/heritagesearch)) was last updated in 2010, with no foreseeable update in the future.

The first part of a major project to digitise hard copies of HER reports and data has been completed. All of the 3,000+ development control reports of archaeological work done in the county now exist in digital form, and are linked to event records. This project was carried out by OA as was the pilot project to digitise the supplemental material in the HER Detailed Record Files. The success of both these projects has meant that OA has been commissioned to complete the digitising of the Detailed Record Files. This will enable HER data to be held in a more secure state, more easily available to users, and in line with the county policies of remote working.

## HISTORIC LANDSCAPE CHARACTERISATION PROJECT

The Oxfordshire Historic Landscape Characterisation (HLC) project, funded by Historic England (formerly English Heritage), is focused on mapping the current and past character



*Fig. 4. Progress of HLC digitisation.*

of the landscape by identifying traces of historic land use surviving within the present landscape. Completed at this stage are the districts of Cherwell, South Oxfordshire, and the Vale of the White Horse, as well as approximately half of West Oxfordshire. The HLC data from the Chilterns AONB and the North Wessex Downs AONB have also been integrated into the HLC database. The map above (Fig. 4) shows coverage of the county to date, green indicating what areas that have been digitised, white indicating areas not yet digitised, and blue reflecting Oxford City HLC data which will be integrated into the database.

A large portion of the project time has been spent characterising the landscape through the creation of GIS polygons and a linked database. This data set identifies the different landscape types present in Oxfordshire and explores how past land use has shaped the present environment. The final stages of the project will focus on analysing the HLC data and disseminating the results of the project. Consultation between local government officers and a range of project stakeholders continues in order to determine how HLC data can best be used once the county's characterisation project is complete.

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