

Bedfordshire Archaeology, 1973-1975

Compiled by DAVID H. KENNETT

The summaries below are designed to serve as a guide to current fieldwork, excavations and museum research into the archaeology of Bedfordshire. Important isolated finds and museum acquisitions are also included. The present summaries are material submitted to the compiler by 1 March 1975. The compiler wishes to thank all those who have contributed notes to this section and hopes that future work and finds will be brought to his notice for inclusion in subsequent issues of the *Bedfordshire Archaeological Journal*.

AERIAL PHOTOGRAPHY SURVEY

On 21 July 1974, an aerial survey was carried out over approximately 168 square miles of Bedfordshire by Hunting Surveys Limited for the National College of Agricultural Engineering, Silsoe.

The main survey was in conventional black and white at a scale of 1:12000, each photograph being overlapped to enable a stereoscope to be used. Simultaneously with this run a considerable part of the area was photographed within selected colour bands, i.e., infra red, red, orange and green. These were at a scale of 1:18000 printed together to facilitate easy cross reference.

The Ampthill Archaeological and Local History Society are very fortunate to be allowed to study these photographs in the laboratory of the College and under the leadership of K.J. Fadden are in the process of recording all crop marks on a card index. The information on this index will eventually be analysed and fed into the Bedfordshire Sites and Monuments Record. It will also form a basis for future field walking by the Society.

The survey is of particular value to archaeology as it was taken at the end of a very dry spell of weather and for the photographic techniques used. The results to date are very encouraging with a number of new sites and many crop marks requiring investigation.

BEDFORD: Newnham Marina TL974494

Work was resumed by Angela Simco for Bedfordshire County Council, Bedford District Council and the Department of the Environment, in May, 1974 on the Romano-British and prehistoric crop-

mark site at Newnham, south-east of Bedford after a break caused by winter flooding.

A yard area was examined to the north of the hypocaust excavated in 1973, and produced evidence of domestic activity of the Roman period. A rubbish pit, 400 by 300cm, produced a considerable quantity of pottery. The presence of an oven was suggested by a feature of clay, 190 by 70cm, with a stoke-hole on the long axis. The whole feature was filled with dark loam containing much ash and charcoal, as was another feature two metres to the east. This latter comprised a depression, 350cm in diameter, and up to 30cm deep; three steep-sided gullies ran into it from the south, and the evidence of burning in them gave them the appearance of stoke-holes. There was another, shallower, gully to the north. The fill of the depression contained pottery, bones and shell from domestic refuse, and a few pieces of light porous slag; there were also several pieces of unworked limestone, but no stone structure remained. A row of four post-pits below the depression, and filled with the same material, may represent a structure associated with it, but may be earlier. The feature is possibly connected with some kind of domestic industry. This yard area also contained several stone-packed post-pits, some of which are aligned, but no building plan has yet been identified. An Early Iron Age and a Belgic ditch are stratified beneath the Roman layers.

An area forty metres to the south-west and fifteen metres square, produced further evidence of the Roman building plan. Well-laid cobbled surfaces were defined by regularly aligned pitched limestone footings, one metre in width and forty centimetres deep. Up to seven rooms were represented, but the limits of the building were not established, and it is possible that some areas of rougher cobble were external surfaces. Two rooms were completely excavated, and were 650 by 250cm and 650 by 650cm. The floor of the largest room, at least 750 by 750cm had been renewed on two occasions, once with a similar cobbled surface, and later with a surface of small pebbles set in a hard mortar matrix.

The function of this range of rooms is not yet certain, though the cobbled floors suggest a

utilitarian emphasis. The thin occupation layer was almost sterile, but a single samian sherd on a related external cobbled surface in the trench now being excavated indicates use in the second century. The floor make-up layers, up to 25cm deep in places, produced no finds as a terminus post quem.

BEDFORD: 10 Midland Road TL049499

Trial rescue excavations by Andrew Cooper in July 1973 on the edge of the forthcoming Harpur Centre area development showed evidence for medieval structures and ample occupation remains including pottery.

BEDFORD: 6-8 Midland Road

Two adjacent trenches were excavated within the 1.5 basement excavation for the Harpur Centre. A medieval occupation layer overlaid various early medieval features: these included traces of timber buildings fronting onto Midland Road, a hearth, several large rubbish pits, three of which were wood-lined at the base and a floor level consisting of compacted layers of wattle and straw. The excavations were directed by Jane Hassall (as 10 Midland Road) for Bedford District Council and Bedfordshire County Council.

BEDFORD: Cauldwell Street TL050493

Excavations in 1973 on the site of St Mary's Rectory showed early medieval rubbish pits cut up to the present street front, like those seen on adjacent sites in earlier years. No Saxon material was recovered. Evelyn Baker for Bedfordshire County Council and the Department of the Environment.

BEDFORD: St. John's Street TL051491

Three large areas were stripped on a redevelopment site in the angle of St John's Street and Kingsway, close to the Kings Ditch in the south-west part of the town, by Jane Hassall for Bedford District Council, Bedfordshire County Council and the Department of the Environment. Traces of at least two late-Saxon timber buildings were found, following the axis of St John's Street. Medieval features included rubbish pits, many postholes, some lime and iron smelting pits, a small stone-built bread-oven set in a paved hearth pit, and a large circular kiln about 8m in diameter with opposing flue and stoke hole. Pits excavated furthest away from the St John's Street frontage were mostly large rectangular, straight-sided and post-medieval in date.

BEDFORD: Castle TL052497

The examination of an early medieval lime kiln within the outer bailey of Bedford Castle was continued by Jane Hassall for Bedfordshire County Council, the Borough of Bedford and D.O.E. A roughly circular stone built feature formed of solid lime stone blocks and approximately 5 metres in diameter was uncovered. It was some 3 metres deep, curving towards the base which was circular and had a cruciform pattern of gullies, in which a large amount of processed lime was found. There were two small arched air vents opposite one another near the base of the kiln. Its fill consisted of a large number of loose lime stone blocks in the lower part with much domestic debris, indicating that the kiln had been used as a large rubbish pit after it had gone out of use. Pottery finds of St Neots type ware suggest that the kiln was functioning during the life span of the Castle, which was demolished after a siege in 1224.

BOLNHURST

D.H. Kennett and T.P. Smith have continued work on a general survey of the buildings of Bolnhurst, complementing their work on Mavourn Manor (reported *Beds. Arch. J.* 8, 1973, 140). In connection with this D.H. Kennett has prepared a typescript on 'The Francklins and Bolnhurst: the tenurial history of a Bedfordshire estate', which covers the individual tenement histories of the farms now known as Mavourn Farm, Crowhill Farm, Blacklands, and Brook End Farm, together with 'The Old Plough' public house. Copies of this may be consulted at Bedfordshire County Record Office, Bedfordshire County Library Local History Collection, Luton Central Library and Luton Museum. It is hoped to be able to prepare further tenement histories of the buildings of Bolnhurst.

CHURCHES

A number of Bedfordshire Churches have been declared redundant at different dates in the past thirty years. Most recently this has been the case with St Mary's Church, Bedford, the earliest work of which was examined by T.P. Smith in 1970 (see *Beds. Arch. J.* 9, 1974, 95-99). Churches closed much earlier and now ruinous are Segenhoe, in Ridgmont parish, and Clophill Old Church. Both of these have been examined by J.M. Bailey, who has prepared full measured surveys of the plan, the architectural details and also the remaining portion of the roof at Segenhoe church.

FELMERSHAM: Radwell Gravel Pits TL010575

D.N. Hall and J.B. Hutchings have continued examination of the archaeological features present at the Radwell Gravel Pits (first report *Beds. Arch. J.* 8, 1973, 67-92). Continued gravel extraction has revealed two more ring ditches. The first was circular, 34ft diameter, with a ditch 7ft wide and 4ft deep. Just off-centre was a cremation buried in an inverted collared urn with a plough-damaged base. Amongst the bones was a small bronze (toiletry?) article similar to an awl, a few small bone objects, and beads of jet and orange glass with at least two spacers. A date of about 1500BC is suggested.

A large oval 'ring' ditch of axes 84 by 96ft yielded no finds except a posthole 9in diameter containing some cremated bone.

Between the ring ditches was an Early Iron Age hut. The palisade gully, 18in wide and 20in deep, encompassed an arc completing a semicircle of radius 34ft. Along the diameter was a slightly off-centre posthole 14in wide and 16in deep. There were three hearths made of burnt pebbles set in clay. Outside the hut was a rubbish pit which yielded a good group of pottery.

GENERAL SURVEY

Three Survey programmes have been in progress during 1974, apart from routine development control and public queries, in the work of the Conservation Section of the Planning Department, Bedfordshire County Council.

1 *Listed buildings parish surveys*

These investigations are designed primarily to identify buildings of historical importance with a view to gaining statutory protection. Interior inspections are not always made. Riseley, Stevington, Shillington, Barton, Harrold, Turvey and Carlton have been covered.

2 *Historic Towns survey*

Annette Edwards has compiled the archaeological, historical, and topographic evidence for Biggleswade, Harrold, Luton, Sandy, Potton, Ampthill, Dunstable, Woburn, Shefford and Leighton Buzzard. This will provide a basis for the assessment of development proposals. Jane Haßall and David Baker have completed a similar survey for Bedford (*Beds. Arch. J.* 9, 1974, 75-94).

3 *Rural sites survey*

Angela Simco has commenced a pilot survey of sites and earthworks in seven representative parishes, with special reference to destructive agencies beyond planning control. The parishes are Card-

ington, Houghton Conquest, Milton Ernest, Stanbridge, Staploe, Steppingley and Streatley.

GREAT BARFORD

David H. Kennett has continued work on the rural society, as exemplified by Great Barford, 1660-1850. In the course of this an extensive survey of the buildings of the parish is being conducted with particular reference to a correlation between the buildings and two types of muniment, the hearth tax returns of 1671 and the surviving window tax returns for Great Barford in 1750, 1753 and 1758. The results will, it is hoped, be published in a paper on 'Hearth Tax, Window Tax and Extensive Survey', (*Beds. Arch. J.* forthcoming). Other parishes with surviving window tax returns are Keysoe for 1731 and Old Warden for 1770.

HARLINGTON

David H. Kennett has continued work on the buildings of Harlington, and in particular the provision of rural housing in the nineteenth century. The surviving buildings are being related to a sale catalogue of 1867 whose attached map shows all the then extant houses of the parish. This research will be presented in a paper on 'The Provision of Housing in Rural Parishes in the Nineteenth Century'. Evidence from other Bedfordshire parishes, including Eversholt, Great Barford and Thurleigh, will also be used.

LEIGHTON BUZZARD: Grove Priory SP923227

Rescue excavations in advance of sand quarrying were commenced upon the alien cell of Fontevrault, which existed from the mid twelfth century to the early fifteenth century, by Evelyn Baker for Bedfordshire County Council and the Department of the Environment.

A full survey of extensive earthworks was carried out by Peter Woodward, and excavations in 1973-74 located two complexes of buildings. One consisted of several periods of stone footings; while these were not identifiable from their plan form, they may represent the main monastic buildings.

The other consisted of barns and outbuildings associated with the Priory. Beneath the medieval occupation, and on top of the natural boulder clay, lay several groups of slots and post holes, and a group of large pits with associated post holes. The latter produced pottery provisionally dated to the mid-late Saxon period.

The barn was at least 34m long and 7m wide, with rubble footings and clay packed post pits set into and along the sides of the walls. There were at least 3 cross walls. The barn was modified twice and was associated with a cobbled yard. Finally, it seems to have been deliberately dismantled.

Other structures in the area included a series of post pits and fragmentary remains of at least two more buildings with sleeper footings of stone and pebble.

LITTLE BARFORD: Rowe's Cottage

J.M. Bailey has made a measured survey of the cottage in which the early eighteenth century Poet Laureate, Nicholas Rowe, is reputed to have been born in 1674. The structure is a surviving portion of an originally more extensive row of sixteenth-century jettied cottages. (*Beds. Arch. J.* forthcoming).

LUTON

In the course of a series of inter-locking research projects on the history of Luton, David H. Kennett has accumulated a considerable amount of information on the documentary history of individual messuages of the old township, basically the seven streets – Manchester Street (formerly Tower Hill), Upper George Street (formerly Dunstable Lane), George Street, Chapel Street (formerly Hog Lane), Castle Street, Church Street and Park Street (formerly Sheep Street) – which were described in 1782 as “a long, dirty market town of one street, meanly built, and forming off like a Roman Y from the Market Place, and then again to the Church north, and by a Pond south to Lord Bute's house”. Using old photographs, in Luton Museum, the Bedfordshire County Record Office, and elsewhere, it has proved possible to identify many of the buildings of the former township. Their tenorial history has been traced from a variety of documentary sources, principally the admissions register of the Court Book of the Manor of Luton and its sub-manors, 1732-1939 (*Beds. C.R.O.* documents X 312/1-3) which give a detailed record for some ninety-five messuages, c. 1700-1845. This has been related to the Luton tithe surveys of 1842 and 1844, to the former of which a large scale map, showing even the smallest outhouses is appended. Additional documentary evidence has been culled from the wills proved in the Archdeaconry of Bedford, 1750-1857, and these have been calendared for

Luton. Additional calendaring of the wills, concentrating on the period 1670-1749, is in progress partly in an attempt to help collate the Hearth Tax of 1671 to specific buildings. Little work, except that which has incidentally come to light from miscellaneous collections of deeds in the Bedfordshire County Record Office, has so far been done on the period before 1670, and the deeds held by the Borough Secretary's Office of Luton Borough have yet to be researched. It is hoped that these will provide additional information on the earlier history of the various properties of the town.

These researches have confirmed the veracity of Frederick Davis' statement in his *History of Luton*, 1855, 137, that “Luton, a little more than half a century ago, was a dirty town, with streets narrow and low, so that there were but few places in which carts could pass each other . . . the houses were generally very low, built with stud walls, and overhanging in front about two feet, many of them thatched”.

It has also been possible to note that between 1800 and 1855 “many of the houses have been taken down, and others new-fronted with bricks, and raised”. It is hoped to present a map showing this phase of the rebuilding of central Luton. Using Thomas Cooney's map of 1870, the series of photographs taken by Frederick Thurston in 1906, together with more recent photographs and personal observation, it is further hoped to present a series of maps showing the progressive building loss between 1842 and the present day. The 1842 map will be used as a base and five surveys will be presented: 1870, 1906/1914; 1939, 1970 and 1975.

For a much earlier period, information about the location of the sources, particularly the documentary material, is being collated. This is in connection with David H. Kennett's projected book on *Tudor Luton*, which will cover the period 1475 to 1628/1640, but will have also a number of chapters on the late medieval background. In respect of the last named, a critical look has been taken at the building history of Luton Parish Church, which presents a number of unresolved problems. Using the printed taxation returns for 1297, 1309 and 1332, the effect of the Great European Famine of 1315-17 is being considered and with the aid of what surviving fourteenth century deeds there are the effect of the fire of 1336 and the Plagues of 1348-9 and 1361-2 are also being considered. It would seem probable that it will be possible in



Plate 1 Brick Cistern at Stopsley

due course to show conclusively, rather than as at present tentatively, that the street plan of Luton is the result of the rebuilding of the town after the 1336 fire.

LUTON: Stopsley TL106244

Construction of a car-park for the Stopsley Sports' Centre beside the Butterfield's Green Road during 1973, revealed a subterranean vault measuring some 3m square. Entirely constructed and floored with local hand-made bricks, it was roofed by an elliptical arch vault, 70cm above the floor at the sides and 120cm high at the centre (pl 1). There was a man-hole like opening in the roof about 60cm square, at the eastern end, whilst an opening 90cm wide on the west of the chamber had been bricked-up with more recent, though still hand-made, bricks. At the base of this opening were three timbers, all badly charred, that had supported the more recent blocking work. Half-way along the south side of the room some of the floor bricks had been removed to reveal what seemed to be a water-filled drain or soak away. The room seems to have been a water cistern, and

probably dates from the early nineteenth century. The man-hole like opening would have accommodated pumping machinery, whilst the blocked-up opening either allowed for the entry or overflow of water. It is known that the Manor of Hayes once stood on the site, and was probably replaced by a farmhouse, which was the forerunner to the present Manor Farm which stands a hundred metres to the north.

Since the discovery the vault has been filled with rubble to preserve it, and the hole has now been covered by the tarmac of the car-park.

ODELL: SP956568

Investigation of an extensive and complex spread of cropmark features in the south-western corner of Odell parish began in autumn 1974 in advance of gravel extraction, by Brian Dix for the Bedfordshire County Council and the Department of the Environment. The site should be regarded as part of the intensive occupation pattern of the Ouse gravels around the present-day settlements of Carlton, Harrold and Odell and lies close to

where prehistoric and seventh century Anglo-Saxon material has previously been discovered. (*Beds. Arch. J.* 5, 1970, 17-55).

Aerial photography has revealed 'positive' crop-marks of two distinct concentrations of enclosure possibly separated by a trackway or road running north-south. In layout they appear to represent farmstead element of late prehistoric and Romano-British date and initial discoveries over an area of 2.6 ha. confirm this. Whilst some ditches were obviously dug as field boundaries, others were intended to enclose occupation areas and exhibit several phases of re-cutting. The material evidence so far obtained indicates a probably continuous activity from the late Iron Age until at least the early third century AD, with perhaps an intensification in the second century.

A little to the north of the enclosure groups a small Saxon well was excavated. Its bottom lay some 2.10m below the present-day ground surface, at which point a timber framework, just over 1m square, had been constructed around four oak piles which had been driven into the underlying gravel. Upon abandonment all accessible timbers appear to have been removed and the whole deliberately infilled. However, the framework and silting of the lower levels, which would formerly have been under water, survived virtually intact and two phases of construction could be distinguished. Pottery evidence suggests an early/middle Saxon date for the structure and it is hoped to corroborate this with a radiocarbon determination from one of the piles.

Work continues at the site.

OLD WARDEN: Warden Abbey TL121439

Rescue excavations were occasioned by the ground works associated with the restoration of the ruined late-monastic and post-monastic mansion fragment on the site. They were directed by Evelyn Baker for Bedfordshire County Council and the Department of the Environment.

The tile mosaic pavement uncovered by Rudd and West in 1962 was re-excavated for further study: it was not possible to locate it within the monastic ground plan, though the limited evidence suggests the area of the crossing and south transept in the fourteenth century extension to the church. Another large area of mosaic tile pavement was found N of the ruin, possibly in a late Abbot's house: this was in much better condition, with slip and glaze largely intact. Tiles include examples with lions heads, parts of garments and background

fillers, all individually shaped: several had graffiti on their sides and backs, both words and symbols. Both pavements, which are provisionally dated by Mrs Elizabeth Eames to the early fourteenth century, have been lifted and given to Bedford Museum on permanent loan by the Southill Estate. Two other small fragments of pavement were found in other groundwork trenches around the building. Other discoveries included medieval and post medieval footings and other features, though the limited scope of these excavations has made it difficult to understand their full significance.

In connection with this work, J.M. Bailey has prepared a full measured survey of the surviving portion of the sixteenth century brick building. The restoration work in 1974 permitted details of the original structure to be revealed by the stripping of plaster and demolition of modern walls has allowed an accurate reconstruction of the original form of the manor house to be made.

ROXTON: TL158535

The last two of five ring ditches at the junction of the Ouse and Ivel were excavated by Alison Taylor and Peter Woodward for Bedfordshire County Council and D.O.E. before destruction by gravel quarrying. Both had been heavily eroded by ploughing and there was no buried ground surface. Both had been cut by the River Ouse. One ring ditch had an external diameter of 28m. The central pit contained an upright Collared Urn with a cremation and a smaller identical vessel lying on its side. Parts of the ditch had been refilled very soon after construction.

The second ring ditch had an external diameter of 30m. The central burial consisted of two conjoining pits filled with top soil containing burnt fragments of a Collared Urn and much cremated bones. The lower half of an inverted urn covered by a crude cairn of stones was found cut into the primary ditch fill. There was a flexed beaker-type burial in a pit just outside the ring ditch and a Roman burial with an iron knife had been laid on the filled in ditch.

Earlier occupation of both sites was represented by post holes sealed beneath the mounds, and large quantities of flint flakes and tools of Neolithic and Early Bronze Age type. Iron Age and Roman ploughing in the field completed the filling of the ring ditches.

WILLINGTON: 'The Docks' TL113502

See above, pp 25-40.