

Introduction

The site at Hardings Field, Chalgrove, (SU 6350 9682), was discovered in July 1976 by R.A. Chambers (Oxford Archaeological Unit) during aerial reconnaissance, when the moats were revealed as cropmarks in the pasture.¹ The field, which is owned by Oxfordshire County Council Education Department, was acquired from Magdalen College in 1971 with the option of building additional school premises or using the field as playing fields. In October 1976 an earthworks survey of the site was made by J. Bond (ODMS) and R.A. Chambers (see below page).² In November of the same year the Education Department decided to use the field as a playing field and to level it by dumping topsoil, which would have effectively sealed the earthworks. As a response to this three mechanical trenches (IA, II and III) were excavated by R.A. Chambers with the help of a local farmer, Mr Adrian Nixey, to confirm the nature of the site.³

In the spring of 1977 the Education Department was forced to change its plan. Owing to the lack of availability of topsoil the site was to be levelled and drained by reducing the height of the earthworks, thus destroying the site. The Oxford Archaeological Unit and ODMS felt that further excavation was desirable but the Department of the Environment confirmed that no major funding was available, while making a token grant of £200. This lack of resources meant that R.A. Chambers was able to undertake only a small excavation in June 1977 using an entirely volunteer labour force. Trench IA was expanded into trench I as a small area excavation and a further six trenches (IV to IX) were excavated mechanically. Also in June 1977 the County Council recut the line of the northern moat with a narrow ditch. In September 1977 the entire field was stripped of its topsoil by the County Council. A 'drot' with a 4-in-1, 1.5 yard capacity bucket and another front-loading tracked machine with a 4 cubic yard bucket were used in extremely wet conditions. A watching brief was carried out by R.A. Chambers. Owing to waterlogging of the site further levelling was postponed until the spring of 1978 and the field was left open.⁴

In the spring of that year the Oxford Archaeological Unit was able to persuade Oxfordshire County Council to defer levelling to allow rescue excavation to take place. As there was still no Department of the Environment funding available the labour force was provided by a Manpower Services Commission job creation scheme with supervision paid for by Oxford Archaeological Unit private funds. Excavation began in May 1978 directed by Philip Page and was discontinued in December at the end of the Manpower Services Commission scheme. During this excavation the Department of the Environment had inspected the site and confirmed that no money was available for total excavation. The site was once again left exposed over the winter. In the spring of 1979, as a result of the work carried out by the Oxford Archaeological Unit, the Department of the Environment recommended the scheduling and preservation of the site. Negotiations began between the Department of the Environment and Oxfordshire County Council to have the site buried, with the Department of the Environment meeting a proportion of the costs and funding limited further excavation. Between July and October 1979 there was a further season of excavation using another Manpower Services Commission labour force, directed by Philip Page, to 'round off' the previous year's work and prepare the site for burial. The site was vacated by the Oxford Archaeological Unit in October 1979. In March 1981, following the County Council's negotiations with the Department of the

Environment, the larger of the moated islands was covered with a layer of gravel. In the following August the gravel was covered with a layer of topsoil and grass-seeded with the intention of putting two football pitches onto the field.

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