

Lecture Reports

Brian Little et al.

Thursday 8th December 2005

Excavations at Eynsham Abbey – Graham Keevil

This was a lively and well-illustrated talk about how archaeologists have contributed significantly to our understanding of this abbey and its related features.

Graham Keevil quickly established that surface geology had been a major factor in continuity of settlement at Eynsham. Unlike the Cherwell at Banbury, the river valley at Eynsham has well drained gravels that have encouraged site development since the Neolithic age.

Oxford Archaeology worked here in the early 1990s and dug several trenches. These revealed a Bronze Age enclosure but also provided evidence for a Saxon Minster that may well have been the key focal point of a pattern of religious buildings. The role of the minster ensured that Eynsham was at the time more important than Oxford, a status that owed much to its position close to a good fording point of the Thames.

The minster excavations yielded some exciting finds, notably a rubbish pit that had been a food dump and two silver coins in excellent condition. The buildings of the mediaeval abbey, which were partly erected over this rubbish pit, enabled the minster to turn into a monastery by 1005. This gradual process resulted in a close relationship between church and cloister and it was the aim of the archaeologists to explore the transition from what had become a ramshackle minster. Their efforts culminated in insights into the domestic life within the cloister, especially washing and cleaning.

One useful aspect of Graham's talk was that he did not focus exclusively on Eynsham but instead drew parallels from elsewhere in Britain and Europe. Some of these references shed light on the kitchen activity that generated some of the waste discovered by the Oxford archaeologists. This was in the form of well-preserved fig seeds and cherry stones.

Eynsham Abbey appears to have reached its greatest occupancy levels during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Some 30-40 monks resided there but in succeeding centuries the numbers tailed away and monastic life was never the same again.

Thursday 12th January 2006

Buckinghamshire in the Civil War – Julian Hunt

The inspiration for this talk came from a 2005 exhibition of portraits that was staged in Aylesbury and designed to reveal Buckinghamshire's role in the events leading up to the English Civil War and the War itself. Charles' marriage to the French princess Henrietta Maria, the 'Eleven Years' tyranny, John Hampden and the ship money case, the Grand Remonstrance, the conduct of the war and the strategic importance of Newport Pagnell were among the wide range of topics covered.