



ANGLO-SAXONS...

After the Bronze Age, there is little evidence for any activity on the site for a long period of time beyond a background Iron Age and Roman presence in the form of a few scattered sherds of abraded pottery mixed into a soil layer.

It is not until after the withdrawal of Roman control over Britain (c AD 410) in the Anglo-Saxon period that we have solid proof of people directly using and living on the site.

During the building of the original infirmary (1760–70), two Anglo-Saxon burials (one containing a possible shield boss) were uncovered by workmen. No more burials were found in the recent excavations, but other evidence of Anglo-Saxon life was found.



Close to Walton Street we found evidence of where the Anglo-Saxons of Oxford lived and worked.

Here (above) the archaeologist is working on a sunken featured building (or SFB, outlined in dots) which may have been a work hut, store or small house.



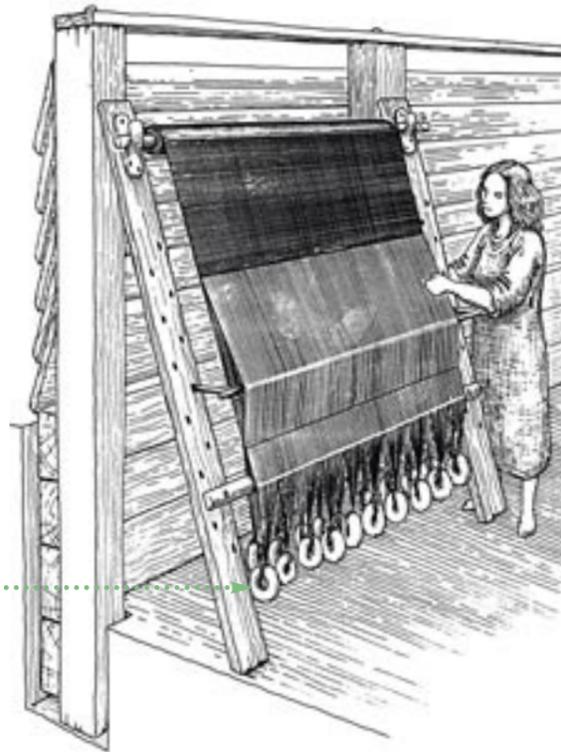
Associated with this was a tiny sherd of 6th-century, decorated pottery (left, shown at actual size). The decoration would have been applied using specially carved wooden or bone stamps before firing when the clay was still soft.

The SFB also contained much burnt timber, suggesting it had been destroyed by fire – a constant risk for a building constructed predominantly of wood and thatch, and heated and lit by flame.

A reconstruction of what an Anglo-Saxon house may have looked like is shown above, top.

Nearby, in a pit, we also found evidence for weaving, an activity often carried out in SFBs, in the form of several complete, clay loom weights.

Shaped like doughnuts, these objects would have been tied to the bottom of the warp threads on a vertical loom used to produce fabric for clothes and blankets. The weights would have kept the warps under tension while the weaver wove the weft threads in and out – a technique which changed little until the invention of machine looms in the industrial revolution of the 18th century.



To the north of the SFB was a well which contained further Saxon pottery and across the site were a series of field ditches indicating that farming was also well established.

The Anglo-Saxons here may also have feasted on delicacies such as suckling pig: we found a deposit of piglet bones, dumped in a large pit, which has been radiocarbon dated to cal AD 890–1020, although most of the pottery indicates the bulk of activity to be slightly earlier. Descriptions of feasting appear in the classic work of Anglo-Saxon literature, *Beowulf*, which survives in a manuscript dated c AD 1000 based on a story passed on by oral tradition from the 6th century AD.

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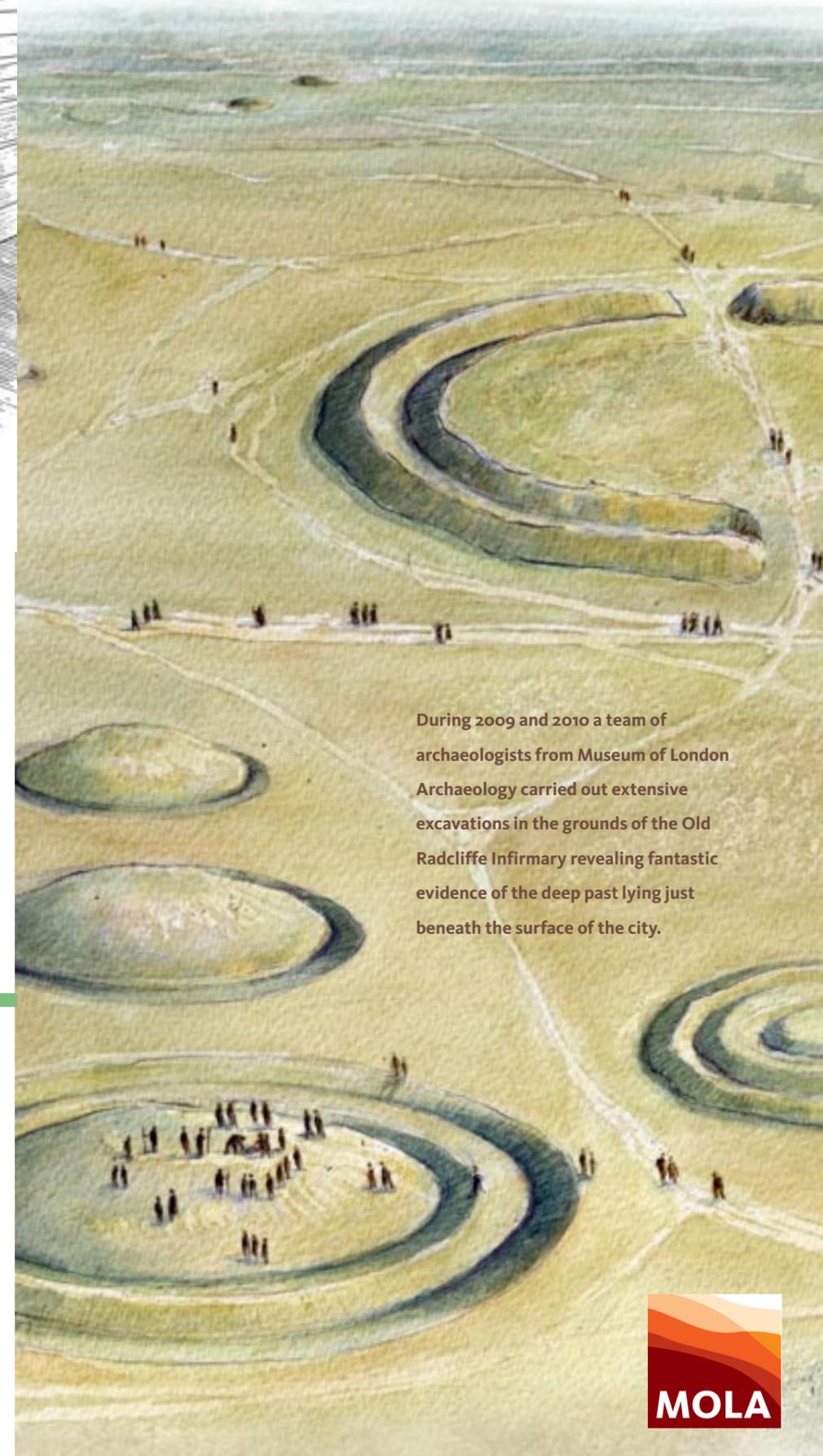
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Excavations at the Old Radcliffe Infirmary, Oxford

now the University of Oxford Radcliffe Observatory Quarter



PREHISTORY TO THE SAXONS



During 2009 and 2010 a team of archaeologists from Museum of London Archaeology carried out extensive excavations in the grounds of the Old Radcliffe Infirmary revealing fantastic evidence of the deep past lying just beneath the surface of the city.



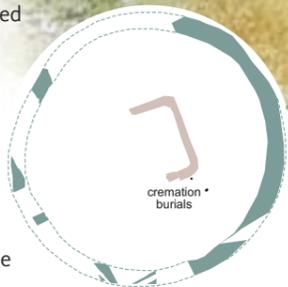
BEFORE OXFORD, BEFORE HISTORY...

The remains of four vast circular ditches were excavated in the grounds of the old Radcliffe Infirmary. They ranged in size from 20m to 58m in diameter and one of them consisted of two concentric ditches of roughly 40m and 20m diameter respectively. The shape and location of these monuments are thought to have great ritual significance to prehistoric people and are frequently associated with burials.

To the east of the site, further circular features have been observed in the University Parks using air photography. These appear to align directly with our Infirmary ring ditches which, together with other monuments, including a large henge found under part of St John's College (top right), expand this part of north Oxford into a spectacular ritual landscape. A place of worship, wonder, reverence and ancient mysteries; just below your feet in the depths of the past ...

Found within the largest of the Infirmary ring ditches (58m across) was an even more ancient monument: part of a Neolithic square enclosure ditch, radiocarbon dated to 3520–3360 BCE, making it over 1600 years older than the ring ditch which was dated to 1890–1690 BCE.

Whether the memory of this Neolithic structure survived those years cannot be known but it was still visible in the landscape of the Bronze Age, it was even observed by the 17th century writer Dr Robert Plot, and this arrangement, the engulfing or embracing of one monument by the other, does at least hint at the possibility of some continuity of the sacredness of this place or perhaps of domination, where the new practice seeks to overwhelm the memory and power of the old.



NOW: In a landscape dominated by the buildings of a modern city, cast your mind back ...
THEN: Here, was a great space, revered since time immemorial
 Set across a finger of land, between two glittering rivers: huge man-made circles
 From the vast depths of time, the memories of what they were and meant to our ancestors
 Call quietly to the present.

This artistic recreation represents a possible scene in Bronze Age north Oxford nearly 4000 years ago and is based on some of the archaeological evidence found over the last few years. Here we show a funeral in progress (bottom, left): a family lays to rest the cremated remains of one of its own, while the smoke from another pyre curls into the air behind them (centre right). Beyond them (top, right), a ritual is being performed inside a large henge monument, incantations and offerings are being made to ancient and now long forgotten gods ...



Only two burials, both cremations, were found and radiocarbon dated to 2030–1870 BCE; others from the site were probably destroyed by historic and modern landscaping and building. The remains shown left appear to have been interred in a bag or other organic container that has completely rotted away, leaving nothing more than a few handfuls of ash and burnt bone.

