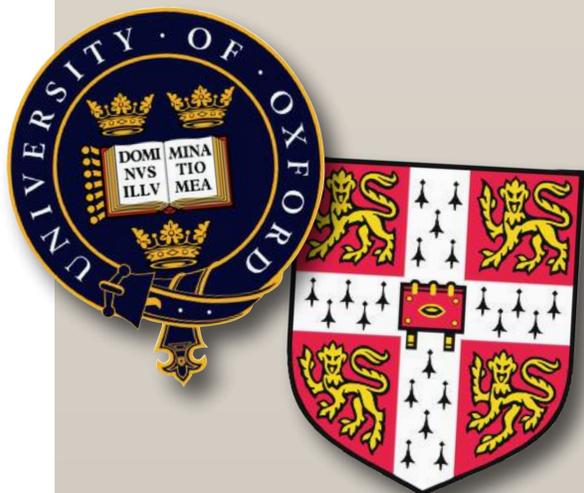




Out of the Mud

Archaeology in Milton Keynes

Burying the Hatchet



"PEACE" BETWEEN 'VARSITIES CEREMONY AT VILLAGE PUMP

Oxford and Cambridge undergraduates swore eternal friendship yesterday round the village pump of Sherington, a Buckinghamshire village midway between the universities.

The editors and members of the staffs of the four undergraduate journals met to settle their differences, to swear friendship, and to protest against the statement of Sir Michael Sadler that the two principal universities were being superseded by London.

Hundreds of people from miles around watched the meeting. The parties met just outside the village and, following introductions, they converged on the village green from four points.

Dove Symbol

The chief actors were Mr. Michael Asquith, grandson of Lord Oxford and editor of the "Isis"; Mr. Frank Harvey, a relative of Sir John Martin Harvey and editor of the "Gownsmen"; Mr. F. Stauiland, editor of the "Granta"; and Mr. Michael Barsley, editor of the "Cherwell."

Headed by Mr. N. E. W. Sutton, of Cambridge, who was master of ceremonies, they marched in procession to the pump. Mr. Sutton rang a bell for silence and then read a Latin prayer.

Then followed speeches by the editors, and a Latin invocation, after which the four editors advanced to the pump, laid their right hands on the top and swore friendship, and to preserve the unity between the two universities.

After they stepped back Mr. Peter Dwyer released a dove to symbolise the termination of their differences.

Gloucester Citizen, 25 February 1935

To *bury the hatchet* usually means to end a quarrel or conflict and become friendly.

In the 1930s rivalry and bitterness between the university towns of Oxford and Cambridge had reached a stage where even physical attacks were being made so something had to be done.

Sherington was equidistant between them and so just before mid-day on Sunday 24th February 1935 representatives of both universities met on the Knoll near the village pump.

A latin prayer was read and the four editors of the university magazines each read a speech followed by the release of a dove of peace.

Water from the pump was washed over the papers the speeches were written on to wash away bitterness and unite them against the threat of the new 'Red Brick' universities.

The event made the front pages of the national newspapers next day.

So this piece of Milton Keynes' heritage didn't mean digging a hole and burying a small axe to be excavated at some later time but a truce which lasts to this day!

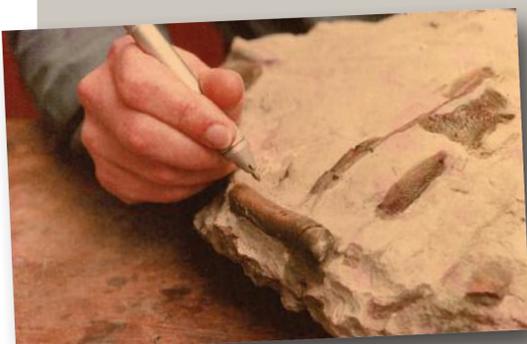




Out of the Mud

Archaeology in Milton Keynes

The Caldecotte Monster

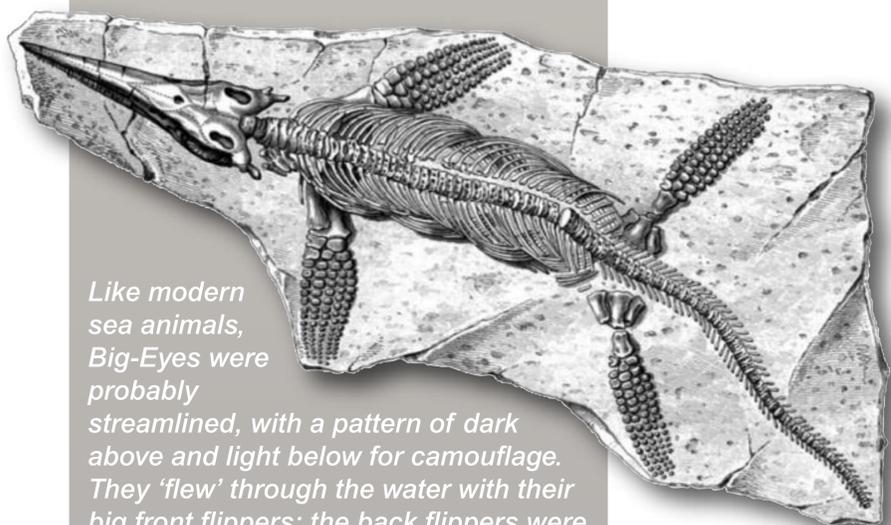


In September 1982 excavations for Caldecotte Lake had got down to Oxford clay. Lying on the bared surface, smeared with mud and jumbled together, a fossil skeleton was discovered.

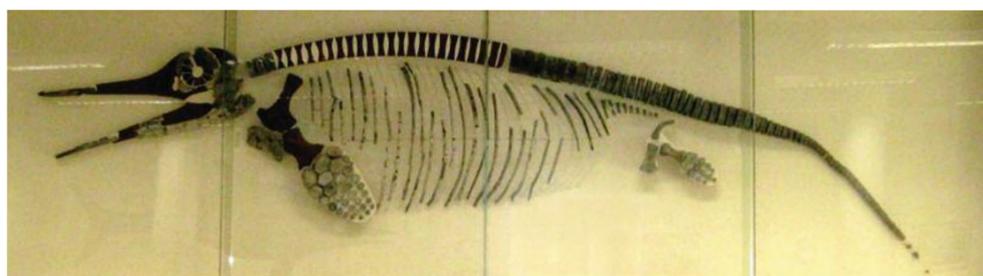
Milton Keynes Development Corporation called in experts from Leicester University's Geology Department. Days of painstaking work followed. First the skeleton was carefully mapped and the position of each bone was recorded; then the whole skeleton was lifted, bone by bone, and taken to Leicester for conservation.

The skeleton was that of a kind of Ichthyosaur, an extinct sea creature which lived in a warm sea that covered this area more than 165 million years ago.

Each bone was cleaned and repaired. Some of the skeleton was found encased in hard limestone, and this had to be sawn and split to reveal the bones. Finally, the skeleton was assembled in its proper order, mounted and cased for display in Milton Keynes Library.



Like modern sea animals, Big-Eyes were probably streamlined, with a pattern of dark above and light below for camouflage. They 'flew' through the water with their big front flippers; the back flippers were stabilisers while the tail was used as a rudder and for extra power.





Out of the Mud

Archaeology in Milton Keynes

Iron Age Log Ladders



One of the notched ladders being excavated from the bottom of the pit



Carefully lifting the newly excavated ladders out of the pit

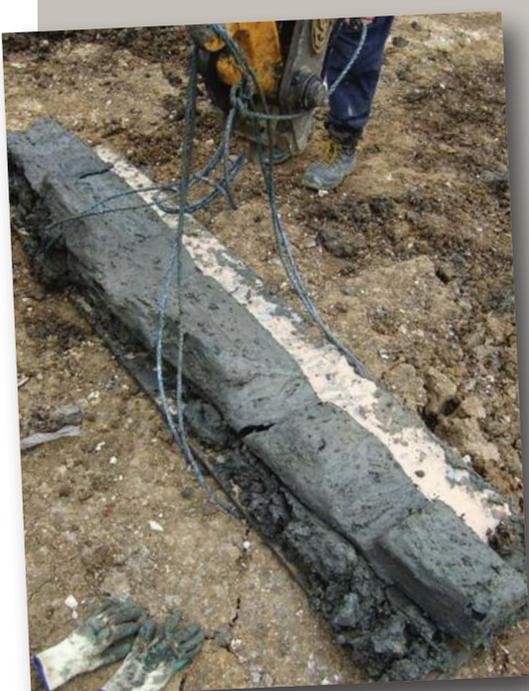


Two perfectly preserved notched log ladders as well as remains of round houses and enclosures dating back to the early Iron Age period were found by Wardell Armstrong Archaeology while carrying out open area excavations on farmland to the western side of Milton Keynes in what is now the new parish of Whitehouse near to V4 Watling Street.

After trial trenching had revealed Iron Age and Romano British remains, excavation work concentrated on a large circular cone-shaped pit measuring around 7m in diameter and 2.5m in depth. The two Iron Age timbers of around 2.5m in length were found in the base of the heavily waterlogged pit which had provided the perfect anaerobic (oxygen-less) conditions for preservation.

Very few examples of notched log ladders have ever been found in Britain, and it appears that these two examples may be the largest yet discovered and are therefore of national importance. They seem to have been used as steps down to the base of the pit as the sides would have been far too steep and slippery to negotiate without them. It is thought that the Iron Age people would have extracted clay from the pit for building, lining or waterproofing purposes, rather than using it as a well for drawing water. The clay could have been dug from the bottom of the pit and then carried or dragged back up the ladders in baskets or wooden buckets.

Wardell Armstrong Archaeology carefully removed the log ladders which were then transported to the York Archaeological Trust who specialise in the conservation of timbers of this size. The process took around 18 months to complete and now that the remains are stabilised, it is hoped that they can be put on display in a local museum. The timbers could date to between 800BC to 100AD, but the use of dendrochronology (tree ring matching) has yet to establish a more precise date.



The retrieved ladder safely at ground level



Out of the Mud

Archaeology in Milton Keynes

The Milton Keynes Hoard



Before construction of the city began, every area in Milton Keynes was subject to detailed archaeological investigation. Doing so has exposed a rich history of human settlement since Neolithic times and has provided a unique insight into the history of a large sample of the landscape of north Buckinghamshire.

On 7 July 2000, Michael Rutland and Gordon Heritage were metal detecting in a field in Monkston, Milton Keynes at the invitation of local archaeologists who were closing a nearby dig, when they discovered the hoard.

“When I first looked into the hole, I knew it was exciting, but I lifted out the first of the bracelets and realised how heavy it was, I swore. It was amazing.” says Mike’s detectorist partner, Gordon Heritage.

The hoard consisted of two torcs, three bracelets, and a fragment of bronze rod contained in a pottery vessel. The inclusion of pottery in the find enabled it to be dated to around 1150–800 BC.

Weighing in at 2.020 kg, the hoard was described by the British Museum as **“one of the biggest concentrations of Bronze Age gold known from Great Britain”** and **“important for providing a social and economic picture for the period”**. The hoard was valued at £290,000 and now resides at the British Museum.

The metal detectorists who found the hoard were rewarded with 60% of the value.



BBC Four’s popular ‘Detectorists’ comedy series has boosted interest in the hobby nationwide





Out of the Mud

Archaeology in Milton Keynes



The Secret Garden



The site in Wolverton was formerly occupied by four villas built by the London & Birmingham Railway Company in the 1840s to house some of the important members of the management of the Railway Works. The houses were demolished in the late 1960s, and the area had become neglected.

In 2003, Year 7 children from the local Bushfield Middle School compiled the history of the villas, through researching maps, plans, documents, photos and carrying out interviews with former residents.

The children and members of the community excavated one of the villas – formerly the Stationmaster's House – under the supervision of a professional archaeologist.

Whilst the site does not have the archaeological significance of other areas in Milton Keynes, the excavation was conducted as a professional dig, with finds being properly contexted, washed, marked and bagged. The aim was to recover evidence of the old building materials and map the foundations of the villa with its wall divisions. Some of the finds included oyster shells and mini champagne bottles next to the Chief Accountant's house. Perhaps he had helped himself to some of the provisions for the Royal Train!

The 'footprint' of the Stationmaster's villa and its neighbour in the excavation was then marked with bricks reclaimed from the site and a formal garden planted to mark the spot.

On Sunday 17th July 2005 the Secret Garden was officially opened.

To find out more about the site visit: www.wolvertonsecretgarden.co.uk.btck.co.uk

MILTON KEYNES
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Out of the Mud

Archaeology in Milton Keynes

Wulfhere's Tun



Silver necklace with glass, amethyst and shell beads from a female burial



Silver workbox with Runic inscription 'BUGI', possibly the owner's name



Fighting knife or seax



The new housing now on the site of the dig



'Wolverton' is an Old English language word, and means 'Wulfhere's estate'. It was recorded in the Domesday Book of 1086 as Wluerintone.

Wulfhere's Tun, now Old Wolverton, was probably settled by the 5th Century but Wulfhere and his people were not the first to live here. Excavations have shown that late Iron Age and early Romano-British people lived along the river valley and around Manor Farm. Subsequently the Normans built a Motte and bailey castle next to where the Holy Trinity church is now located (originally Saxon) and the ridges and furrows of the medieval field system can still be seen nearby. Later the Victorians built a whole new railway town nearby that we know as Wolverton.

But it is the archaeological excavations in the early 21st Century, undertaken before the new housing was built near the Radcliffe School in Wolverton, from which many wonderful finds came.

A large mid-Saxon cemetery c.500m away from their main enclosure and dating from the 7th Century AD was the burial ground of the last pre-Christian Anglo-Saxons who occupied the Wolverton area. It is the largest cemetery of its period excavated in Milton Keynes and Buckinghamshire to date.

As well as over 80 burials, finds included small knives, a spearhead and other weapons, a silver necklace with glass, amethyst and shell beads, five antler combs and a small leather bag containing miniature tweezers. One grave had a padlocked leather bound wooden box in it.