

Archaeology in Oxford

Oxford City report to the Oxford City and County Archaeological Forum National Planning Policy Framework related field work between June-October 2026

Nos 43-48 Wellington Square

Between May and June a watching brief and historic building recording was undertaken by Oxford Archaeology during the excavation of test pits and opening up works at Nos 43–48 Wellington Square. The Victorian building is located just to the north of the walled precinct of the Royal Beaumont Palace and Carmelite Friary and just to the south of the site of the former post-medieval workhouse at Wellington Square. The opening up works revealed original softwood floorboards, areas of lath-and-plaster and former hearths. The test pits revealed details of the foundations and earlier post-medieval soil horizons, also foundations that may have related to the workhouse.



Image above: Early 20th century wallpaper recovered from the roof space at Nos 43-48 Wellington Square (Image courtesy of Oxford Archaeology)

Mansfield College Central green and car park area

In July a watching brief was undertaken during geotechnical work at Mansfield College by Museum of London Archaeology. Eight slit trenches were opened and no significant archaeological features were recorded. Multi-period archaeological remains have previously been recorded in the near vicinity. Natural gravel was revealed at an average of 0.95m below ground level. The report is forthcoming.

Nos 37-42a Hythe Bridge Street (including the former Boatman's Chapel at No 42a).

In July historic building recording was undertaken by Landgag Heritage at the Nos 37-42 Hythe Bridge Street (1930s buildings due for demolition) and on the Victorian former Boatman's Chapel at No 42a (to be refitted). The report is forthcoming.

High Street Nos 10-15, All Soul's College

Between July and September Oxford Archaeology have continued intermittent recording at the All Soul's College High Street site, investigating Late Anglo-Saxon and medieval remains. Recent plaster removal from the basement walls has revealed evidence for post medieval brickwork suggesting that more extensive vaulted cellars of this date were removed by later rebuilds, also further details of the 17th century (?) cellars openings have been revealed. Further work is programmed.



Image above: Ben Ford, Oxford Archaeology Senior Project Manager, examines the brickwork in the cellar of No 12 High Street.

Clarendon Centre, Cornmarket and Queen Street

Between July and October John Moore Heritage Services have intermittently monitored geotechnical work at the former Clarendon Shopping Centre site. The work is aimed at mapping the extent of modern made ground to inform future mitigation of the proposed new development here, which will involve the extensive re-use of existing foundations. The work is ongoing.

All Soul's College Kitchen

In August an evaluation was undertaken by Oxford Archaeology at All Soul's Kitchen. Two small test pits identified a likely Late Anglo-Saxon feature containing sherds of St Neot's Ware, a burnt surface deposit (again potentially Late Anglo-Saxon) and a likely 13th-15th century cess pit that contained a fragment from a decorative lead openwork panel, probably designed to decorate a box or chest. The cess pit may be associated with a property formerly fronting the High Street, either that of "Gilbert the Stacioner" or a tenement formerly occupied by the Rose Inn.



Image above: A medieval decorative lead openwork panel, probably designed to decorate a box or chest, recovered from a cess pit linked to a former tenement on the High Street.

Oxpens Bridge

In September a watching brief was commenced by Oxford Archaeology to observe works for the new bridge over Thames at Oxpens Meadow. The works have been designed to protect the Royalist Civil War sconce (fort) in the meadow and are ongoing.

Littlemore Asylum Chapel, Armstrong Road

In September trial trenching was undertaken by Oxford Archaeology at the Littlemore Asylum Chapel site on Armstrong Road. A substantial ditch feature, provisionally identified as prehistoric, was recorded along with a several finds of pottery and bone. The report is forthcoming.

Green Templeton College

In September phased trial trenching was commenced at Green Templeton College by CFA Archaeology near the old greenhouse prior to the construction of a new café building. The initial trial trenching recovered late medieval pottery and a very large undated mortared limestone wall foundation that does not relate to any known structures recorded on historic maps. The report is forthcoming and further work is planned.



Image above: A wide mortared limestone wall of indeterminate date revealed at Green Templeton College.

No 106 Walton Street

In October John Moore Heritage Services intermittently monitored groundworks at No 106 Walton Street during building works. The recording was requested because of the proximity of the buildings works to the likely historic core of the settlement of Walton. To date no significant remains have been noted to date, the work is ongoing

Previously unreported

Churchill Hospital Chemical Biomanufacturing Facility

In January and February 2026 Oxford Archaeology undertook a controlled strip and watching brief at the Churchill Hospital Chemical Biomanufacturing Facility prior to building works. The site was known to have been previously disturbed and to contain modern contaminated materials, nevertheless a Romano-British ditch and part of a probable pottery kiln were identified. Both features correspond to features recorded in the previous 1970s excavations at the site. A ditch terminus containing several sherds of Roman pottery, including mortaria, was also revealed during the works.

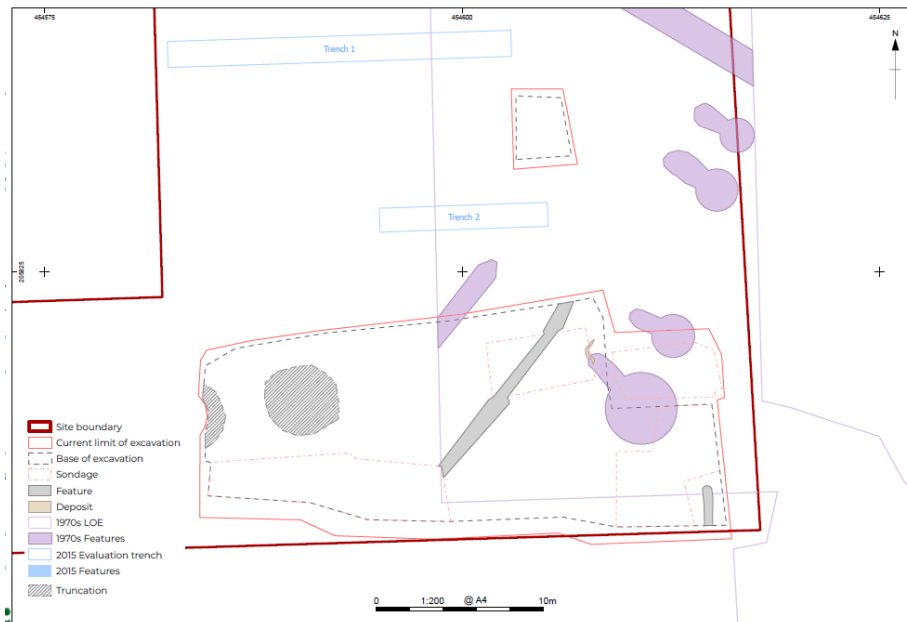


Image above: A plan of the previously excavated and recently excavated Roman features forming part of a Roman pottery manufacturing compound at the Church Hospital.

Corpus Christi Archive Building (The Spenser Building)

The report for the excavations undertaken by Oxford Archaeology in 2021 and 2024 on the site of the new Corpus Christi Archive building was issued in July 2026 and includes details of a series of metalled trackways/road surfaces dating back to the beginnings of Oxford. Several well-preserved phases of late Anglo-Saxon and medieval road metalling were recorded, each sealing waste deposits thrown onto the road by nearby occupants. The surfaces belong to the former 'Shidyerd Street', now renamed Oriel Street and partly enclosed by Corpus Christi College.

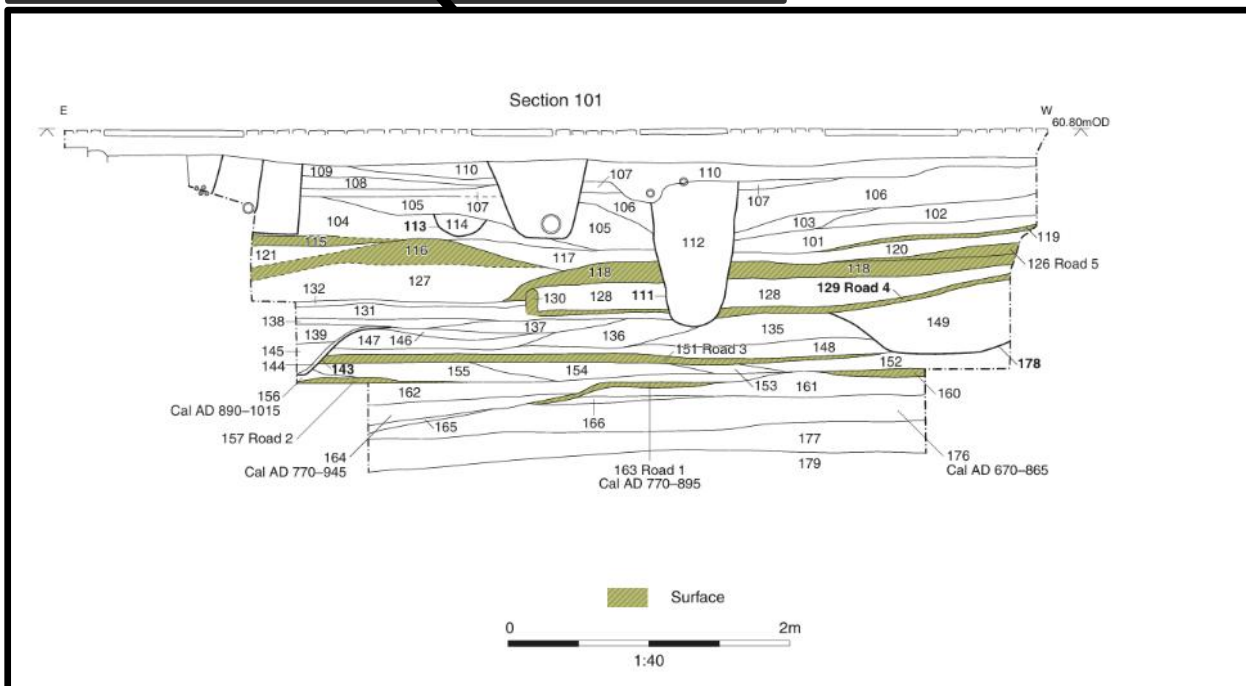
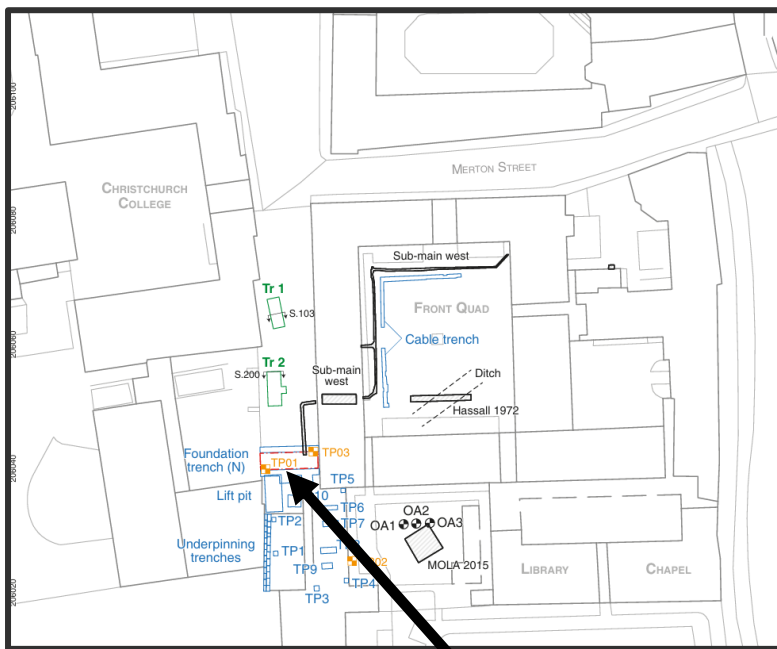


Image above: The stratified road sequence at Corpus Christi College (Image courtesy of Oxford Archaeology).

A series of radio-carbon dates from burnt grains thrown onto these surfaces has produced a dating sequence which pushes the earliest part of the sequence back into the Mercian period (i.e. before the Kingdom of Wessex, ruled by King Alfred, extended its control over this area). The earliest metalled surface sealed a soil layer and stake holes that produced finds of pottery and animal bone. Subsequent layers of street metalling sealed further trampled waste deposits.

If Bayesian dating is applied (Bayesian dating is a statistical method that combines scientific dating results with prior contextual knowledge, such as archaeological stratigraphy, to more accurately estimate the age of past events) then the sequence starts with activity sometime between the 8th and mid-9th century. Thus preceding the expansion of Alfredian control over the Oxford area in the 880s. The first metalled track also appears to be pre-Alfredian in date, followed by a track that may date to the rule of Alfred or his son Edward the Elder. This is the first confident identification of a Mercian period trackway within the historic core of the city and may suggest an early routeway heading towards a religious centre or Minster located under what is now Christ Church.

The route of Shidyerd Street was blocked by Merton College in 1321 before the land passed to Corpus Christi on its foundation in 1515. Evidence for occupation either side of the north-south road was also revealed, including traces of medieval stone buildings on the east side and pits of late Saxon and medieval date along the western edge. The foundations forming part of the Presidents Lodgings of the college were also revealed, constructed between 1598–1600.



Images above: A plan of the areas investigated between Corpus Christ College and Christ Church and a section drawing showing the sequence of road surfaces identified, with the radio-carbon dates annotated (Images courtesy of Oxford Archaeology).

Types of fish being supplied and consumed from Late Saxon phases (from retrieval of fishbones discarded onto the road surfaces):

- Phase 1: 8th to mid-9th century - Eel & pike.
- Phase 2: 9th century - Eel, pike, herring, salmon or sea trout, roach (?)
- Phase 3: late 9th to 11th century - Eels, roach, pike, perch, burbot.

Other heritage related activity

Slade Camp

In September volunteers from Shotover Preservation Society were involved in the further investigation of the remains of the WWII army camp and subsequent temporary housing platforms at Slade Camp/ Slade Park within Shotover Park.

With the help of Oxford Preservation Trust a film about the families who lived at complex after the war has been made and a book produced with the help of local historian Liz Woolley. The book and film were launched at a successful on-site event as part of Oxford Open Doors.

Watch the film about the camp on You Tube here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qCn2dxkiySc>



Image above: New signage explaining the history and location of the WWII army camp at Shotover County Park.



Image above: the recent publication about the post war housing and its occupants at Slade Cam



Image above: the launch meeting for the book and film in September.

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