

OXFORD ARCHAEOLOGICAL RESEARCH AGENDAS 2011

5) SAXON AND VIKING

Version: 28/1/2012

5. Anglo Saxon and Scandinavian Resource Assessment

This document sets out an archaeological research agenda for Oxford covering the Saxon period. The document should be read in conjunction with the period resource assessment for the City (Oxford City Council forthcoming) and the Thames Solent Regional Research Agenda (2010).

5.1. Overview

The Oxford Local Authority Area (LAA) forms parts of a wider landscape of early Saxon settlement along the Upper Thames and has significant potential to contribute to our understanding of this landscape, especially because of the capacity of both the floodplain and the stream valleys of the Corallian Ridge to preserve significant environmental remains from this period. The city is notable for its well-preserved deposits relating to the Mid-Late Saxon crossing across the Thames floodplain at St Aldates and environmental remains in the city have rich potential to provide further information regarding the local economy, manufacturing, trade and patterns of consumption and diet. Oxford has considerable potential to contribute to our understanding of Late Saxon urban development and the foundation and evolution of defensive burhs, including the role of manorial holdings and minster foundations in this process. The Late Saxon town is notable for containing two distinctive and simultaneous traditions of pottery use in the 10th century which may have much to teach us about the cultural identity of the inhabitants. Furthermore there is good potential to further investigate aspects of Late Saxon town planning, tenement development, urban structures and the material culture of urban, suburban and hinterland zones. The city is also notable for its potential to contribute to the further study of early churches, early monastic institutions and burial grounds. Furthermore there is great potential to further study patterns of communication across, and utilisation of, the Thames and Cherwell rivers and related floodplains and islands, including long established traditions of grazing land and hay making.

5.2. Zones of potential

The LAA has been divided into five broad landscape zones based on surface geology and relief (please note the geological areas have been simplified and are not intended to be used as a guide to local geology):

- A** The North Oxford Terrace (Summertown-Radley and Wolvercote Gravel Terrace)
- B** The Thames floodplain and gravel islands
- C** The Cherwell floodplain (with pockets of gravel)
- D** The alluviated stream valleys of the Corallian Ridge
- E** The Corallian Ridge

Some research questions provide an assessment of potential for the zones listed above; these are referred to in terms of high potential (e.g. the zone has already demonstrated its ability to contribute to this agenda) or general potential based on comparison with similar landscapes. In addition, simplified broad zones for the city are provided. These are intended to provide a general visual guide not as definitive areas (Figure 2:). A series of zones are mapped to provide a broad guide to activity areas:

Early Saxon (Area A)

Mid-Saxon Pre-Burh activity (Areas B, C)

The Burh (Areas D, E, F, G, K)

Late Saxon extra-mural settlement (Areas L, M, N)

Peripheral activity (Areas H, I, J)

A number of key research themes can be identified for the Anglo Saxon-Scandinavian period.

5.3. Chronology

In the past, chronology was established on the basis of type series. Increasingly the use of stratigraphic sequences and scientific dating techniques has enabled more exact and refined chronologies to be prepared.

Scientific dating of well stratified sequences, at an intensity sufficient to provide secure insights into phasing, is a high priority at sites where pottery sequences cannot be expected to provide the same level of resolution and confidence. The Thames Crossing at St Aldates is likely to have further high potential in this regard.

Of particular importance would be sites offering the opportunity to apply radio-carbon dating to unaccompanied inhumations that do not lie within known medieval cemeteries, seeking to establish whether these are of late Roman, post-Roman, or Mid-Late Saxon.

There may be opportunities to enhance Mellor's type series of Late Anglo-Saxon fabrics as new stratified assemblages are accumulated. Further work is required to refine distribution maps of Late Saxon fabrics at a local to regional level.

Refining the chronology of three of the four main Late Saxon pottery types is of great importance (St Neot's ware, Cotswold ware and Medieval Oxford ware), particularly in terms of how early they appear in Oxford.

1. In the wider LAA the date and character of sub-Roman settlement remains of interest; can the date of the earliest Anglo-Saxon settlement be established? (See Crawford 2010.)
 - *Zone potential: A High; B General; C General; D General; E High*
2. Refining our understanding of the chronology and character of Mid-Saxon activity Oxford and subsequently the date and phasing of the Late Saxon burh and its extensions remain of great importance to our understanding of the origins and development of the town.
3. Sites providing evidence for Late-Saxon regionally-imported pottery are of particular interest. The study of the quantity and distribution of Late-Saxon regional pottery imports is likely to provide important information about the development of the town and help test theories of cultural practice. Current evidence suggests two concurrent and parallel traditions of pottery use within the town in the 10th century pointing to different approaches to the preparation and consumption of food. Can these cultural identities be linked to ethnic and or political affinities (e.g. Mercia and Wessex)?
 - *City zone potential: Middle Saxon General; The Burh High; Suburbs High; Peripheral Activity High*

5.4. Landscape and land use

1. Can evidence for agricultural innovation earlier than the 10th century be identified in the LAA, noting the emergence of evidence elsewhere in the Upper Thames Valley for the Mid-Saxon development of hay meadows, new ploughing regimes etc.?
 - *Zone potential: A General; B General; C General; D General; E General*

2. The regeneration of woodland in the Late Saxon period is suggested by pollen core data. What is the evidence for Late-Saxon managed woodland beyond documentary references to woodland at Binsey and Shotover? There is considerable potential for environmental data (especially pollen sequences) to allow further assessment of the degree of landscape change between the late Roman and post-Roman periods.
 - *Zone potential: A General; B General; C General; D High; E High*
3. Is there evidence for agricultural intensification in the 10th century around Oxford? Can physical evidence for pre-conquest open fields be identified? How can further dating evidence be recovered (e.g. spit excavation and plotting of manuring scatters)?
 - *Zone potential: A General; B General; C General; D General; E High*
4. The possible relationship of mill sites to the intensification of agriculture and establishment of open fields should be considered; can we identify the mills mentioned in Domesday? (See Crawford 2010.)
 - *Zone potential: A High; B High; C High; D General; E General*
5. What was the function of well-managed channels like the Trill Mill Stream? What was the balance between milling, fish management and use of the river for transport and how did this balance evolve? Was there a defensive function for these channels?
 - *City zone potential: Middle Saxon General; The Burh General; Suburbs High; Peripheral Activity High*
6. Can the well-studied north-south cross section of the Thames Floodplain at St Aldates be further enhanced? Can geotechnical data be collated across a east-west axis to help model the extent of islands and channels? Can a similar cross section be developed for the western approach?
 - *City zone potential: Middle Saxon General; The Burh General; Suburbs High; Peripheral Activity High*
7. The potential for the Thames flood plain channels (particularly in the vicinity of St Aldates) to preserve evidence for manufacturing, trade and domestic life from the Middle Saxon period onwards is specifically recognised.
 - *City Zone potential: Middle Saxon General; The Burh General; Suburbs High; Peripheral Activity High*

5.5. Settlement

This section focuses on questions relating to evidence of human activity in the area, how features are investigated and interpreted.

Early Saxon

1. The 5th-6th century settlement and material culture within the LAA needs to be understood in the context of dispersed rural settlement along the Upper Thames to the north and south of the LAA, of which it forms part.
2. What further evidence is there in the LAA for resettlement following the Roman to Saxon transition? Re-use of Roman pottery has been noted in the pottery production zone on the Corallian Ridge but not on the 2nd gravel terrace. Also continuity or reuse of Roman manufacturing or agricultural landscapes/boundaries has not been demonstrated (with the potential

exception of the oval enclosure at Binsey). Evidence for the character and rapidity of decline and reorganisation is therefore of considerable interest.

- *Zone potential: A High; B General; C High; D General; E High*
3. What is the relationship between early Saxon settlement and the relict Late Neolithic-Early Bronze Age monumental landscape?
 - *Zone potential: A High; C General*
 4. What was the extent and longevity of early settlement on the Corallian Ridge?
 - *Zone potential: D General; E High*

Middle-Late Saxon

5. Can the archaeological record tell us anything about the period of Mercian control in the Oxford area?
6. Aside from the area next to the Thames crossing at St Aldates, a number of other potentially significant Middle-Late Saxon activity centres have been suggested in the LAA (e.g. Royal Estate at Headington, a trading wic at Eastwyke Farm, a monastery at Binsey, the recovery of Ipswich ware from two Beaumont Street sites but not elsewhere in the town). The further investigation of these sites/areas is therefore of considerable interest.
 - *Zone potential: A General; B High; C High; D General; E High*
7. What is the relationship, if any, between early settlement sites and later village cores? What happened between the 6th century settlement evident at Walton Street (Radcliffe Infirmary) and the appearance of Walton in the late Saxon period?
 - *Zone potential: A High; B General; C General; D General; E High*
8. The study of early church or Minster sites may be of particular importance for understanding the development of Oxford, notably the axis of churches running west from St Frideswides (St Ebbes, St Aldates, St George at the Castle), the possible Minster churches (St Peter in the East) and the later gate churches (see Blair 1994).
 - *City Zone potential: Middle Saxon General; The Burh High; Suburbs General; Peripheral Activity General*

Late Saxon

9. The date and character of village and open field formation is of considerable interest (village cores in the LAA have not been subject to significant investigation to date).
 - *Zone potential: A High; B General; C General; D General; E High*
10. How is village development related to the process of woodland clearance and establishment of commons, greens and field systems?
 - *Zone potential: A General; B High; C General; D General; E High*
11. Can village cores be further categorised using morphological and artefactual evidence (e.g. the potential of test pitting proposed by East Oxford Community Archaeology Project)?
 - *Zone potential: A General; B High; C General; D General; E High*
12. What was the relationship between Oxford and its hinterland in terms of food and wood supply?

- *Zone potential: A General; B High; C High; D General; E High*
13. The character of pre-burh settlement and its relationship with The Mercian and Wessex kingdoms (commercial, religious, defensive) is of considerable interest. To date only ephemeral traces of pre-burh street grid structures have been recorded. Such deposits are therefore of great interest. Can the presence of an enclosed trading settlement or minster pre-dating the burh be demonstrated?
- *City Zone potential: Middle Saxon High; The Burh High; Suburbs High; Peripheral Activity High*
14. There is a suggestion that early activity in the proposed primary or first burh was concentrated within its western half; can this be further defined?
- *City zone potential: Middle Saxon General; The Burh High; Suburbs High; Peripheral Activity General*
15. Is there evidence to support the idea that a Late Saxon manor in the western quarter (incorporating St Georges Tower) may pre-date the Norman precinct?
- *City zone potential: Middle Saxon General; The Burh High; Suburbs High; Peripheral Activity General*
16. The area of the proposed eastward extension of the primary burh (or foundation of a second eastern burh) remains of particular interest for the potential to compare the character of settlement, material culture, street surfacing and defensive structures with the proposed primary burh.
- *City zone potential: Middle Saxon General; The Burh High; Suburbs High; Peripheral Activity High*
17. The evolving character and distribution of Late Saxon cellar pits off the major commercial frontages is of interest in plotting the urbanisation and commercial development of the settlement. Can we learn more about plot/structure density and form?
- *City zone potential: Middle Saxon General; The Burh High; Suburbs General; Peripheral Activity General*
18. Can the study of pit assemblages help further establish domestic/agricultural/commercial/manufacturing character zones within the settlement?
- *City zone potential: Middle Saxon General; The Burh High; Suburbs High; Peripheral Activity General*
19. Can we learn more about the laying out and development of early property division within the town? Can the character and extent of pre-conquest estates and properties held in within the burh be identified?
- *City zone potential: Middle Saxon General; The Burh High; Suburbs High; Peripheral Activity General*
20. What can material culture tell us about the role of the town as an administrative and commercial centre?
- *City zone potential: Middle Saxon General; The Burh High; Suburbs High; Peripheral Activity General*
21. Can further investigation of standing Saxon architecture produce more insights? A comparative study of construction techniques of St George's and St Michael at the Northgate towers may be productive.

- *City zone potential: Middle Saxon General; The Burh High; Suburbs General; Peripheral Activity General*

22. Can evidence for Scandinavian settlement be located at St Clements or elsewhere? What evidence is there for Scandinavian influence in terms of material culture?

- *City Zone potential: Middle Saxon General; The Burh High; Suburbs High; Peripheral Activity High*

5.6. Social organization, economy and subsistence

1. Crawford (2010) notes the evidence for patterns of travel and exchange between the Cotswolds and the Thames, and the direct link for continental trade northwards through Hamwic to the Thames Valley. In the case of Oxford Londonwic appears to be the Mid Saxon trading partner for continental imports; however by the late 10th century such imports are no longer sourced through this route. What can the recovery of imported goods from sites in Oxford tell us about supply routes and the development of the Late Saxon economy in the LAA?

- *Zone potential: A High; B General; C General; D General; E General*

2. The location and study of workshop spaces have great potential to enhance our understanding of craft industries, the social relations of production, social practices and production techniques.

- *City Zone potential: Middle Saxon General; The Burh High; Suburbs High; Peripheral Activity High*

3. Evidence from material culture or human remains that might provide greater insights into the nature of life during Infancy and adolescence and the character of education and recreation during this period would be of particular interest.

4. The region has a significant part to play in understanding middle Saxon economy and exchange, through looking at the distribution of sceattas and evidence for trade along the Upper Thames, including the transportation of salt (cf. recent work by John Maddicott on links between Droitwich and London and the rise of the kingdom of Mercia: see Maddicott 2005).

5. Can higher status urban residences be identified from the examination of building remains and material culture in the Late Saxon burh (e.g. numbers of glazed vessels, joints of high quality meat, evidence for metal smelting)?

- *City Zone potential: Middle Saxon General; The Burh High; Suburbs General; Peripheral Activity General*

6. Some variation in Late Saxon bone assemblages have been noticed (e.g. the composition of cattle and sheep). Can further evidence be found for variations in disposal strategies perhaps relating to the location of different industries associated with carcass processing? What can bone assemblages and environmental samples tell us about the Late Saxon urban economy and diets (including evidence for high status diets)?

- *City Zone potential: Middle Saxon General; The Burh High; Suburbs High; Peripheral Activity High*

7. Can further evidence for manufacturing and commerce (horn working, leather off cuts, butchery waste) help us build up a pattern of specialist activity areas in the burh?

- *City Zone potential: Middle Saxon General; The Burh High; Suburbs High; Peripheral Activity General*

8. Where and when were mill streams and mills established? Is there further evidence for a retaining southern bank along the Castle Mill Stream (the Wareham Bank) and Trill Mill Stream? The potential for the retaining banks of these channels to preserve buried land surfaces should be noted.

- *City Zone potential:; Peripheral Activity High*

5.7. Ceremony, ritual and religion

1. Crawford (2010) notes that cemeteries are playing an increasingly important role in identifying population movement, health, and ethnicity; scientific investigation of skeletal material, in particular dating, stable isotope and DNA investigation should be prioritized for previously excavated and new skeletal material. The status and health of children, adolescents and women within such populations are of particular interest.

- *Zone potential: A High; B General; C General; D General; E High*

2. The recovery of the mass grave from St John's College places emphasis on the need to undertake more scientific examination of contemporary burials (stable isotope analysis etc.) to compare diets and therefore potential origins. See Crawford (2010).

- *Zone potential: A High; B General; C General; D General; E High*

3. Can we further establish the date, character and extent of potential early-middle Saxon cemetery areas (North Oxford; Stephens Road, Headington) and their relationship, if any, with late Roman cemeteries?

- *Zone potential: A High; B General; C General; D General; E High*

4. Can the date, character and extent of potential early monastic activity at the oval enclosure Thornbury (Binsey) be further determined?

- *Zone potential: C High*

5. Can we further establish the date, character and extent of Middle-Late Saxon burials within the early or pre-burh settlement (noting the charcoal burial tradition evident at St Frideswides and St Aldates)?

- *City Zone potential: Middle Saxon High; The Burh High; Suburbs High; Peripheral Activity High*

6. Can we establish the date, character and extent of significant activity relating to the precinct of St Frideswide's such as the evolution of precinct boundaries?

- *City Zone potential: Middle Saxon High; The Burh High; Suburbs High; Peripheral Activity High*

7. What was the role of a minster or minsters in the formation of the town? Can the presence of potential early minsters at St Peter in the East and St Frideswides be confirmed?

- *City Zone potential: Middle Saxon General; The Burh High; Suburbs General; Peripheral Activity General*

5.8. Transport and communication

1. Parallel north-south routes across the gravel terrace pre-dating the burh have been hypothesised by Blair (1988); similarly a projected east-west route-way

along the edge of the 2nd gravel terrace is proposed. Can evidence for these routes be identified? Can other fording points be identified?

- *Zone potential: A High; B General; C General; D General; E General*
2. Can we further define the character and extent of the Thames crossing in the Middle-Late Saxon period; the pattern of channel management, the extent of gravel islands, the materials and form of structures employed to bridge and retain channels and landing areas etc.?
 - *Zone potential: A High; B General; C High;*
 3. Can further evidence for primary burh street surfaces be identified, particularly in the southern half of the burh where evidence is lacking? What was the extent of metalled street surfaces outside the primary burh? Can we further define the street grid in the west end? Stone metalling seems to have been removed from some earlier street surfaces and re-used, with the noticeable exception of St Frideswide's Lane under Tom Quad; how can this be explained?
 - *City zone potential: Middle Saxon General; The Burh High; Suburbs General; Peripheral Activity General*
 4. What was the origin and extent of the 'kennel' central road drain; did it define property limits?
 - *City zone potential: Middle Saxon General; The Burh High; Suburbs General; Peripheral Activity General*
 5. Can we further explain the irregularities in the alignment of High Street and Queen Street?
 - *City zone potential: Middle Saxon General; The Burh High; Suburbs General; Peripheral Activity General*
 6. Why and when was Cornmarket re-aligned in the late Saxon to Norman period?
 - *City zone potential: Middle Saxon General; The Burh High; Suburbs General; Peripheral Activity General*
 7. Is there any evidence for a landing place on the Castle millstream or its predecessor suggested by the presence of Hythe Bridge (Munby and Rhodes 2008: 8).
 - *City zone potential: Peripheral Activity High*

5.9. Material culture and artefact studies

1. Lack of sizable Late Saxon bone assemblages from the town puts a premium on recovering well preserved assemblages. Do the small assemblages of bone from Late Saxon Oxford accurately reflect low meat consumption during this period in contrast to the post-Conquest period or simply reflect a smaller population size?
2. Evidence for the working of precious metals (minting), military hardware and imported goods (e.g. pottery, Scandinavian/Mercian influenced material) is of particular interest.
3. Understanding Late Saxon patterns of fish consumption has become of greater interest since the discovery of the St John's mass grave. There is a need for greater emphasis on the recovery of small bones from assemblages to assess dietary patterns. Greater emphasis on isotopic investigation of human remains is also likely to be of great value in determining patterns of

protein intake and mobility. Such studies allow greater insight into ethnic and cultural identity, social practices, migration and social status.

4. Two distinct ceramic traditions are evident in 10th century pottery assemblages currently believed to be a unique pattern amongst comparable English towns suggesting two distinct ways of cooking and eating amongst the resident population. Can this pattern be further mapped and explained?
5. How did attitudes of food and drink preparation and consumption vary within the burh and hinterland?

5.10. Warfare, defences and military installations

1. Can the date of the primary burh and its proposed eastern (and potentially western) extension be established archaeologically? Can the variously proposed defensive lines be tested? Excavations at the Castle have demonstrated the continuation of the burh defences to the west but have not definitively resolved the matter of whether these were primary or part of a westward extension of the burh that may have originated with a more conventional rectilinear pattern with the original western line of defence following the break of slope close to New Inn Hall Street. Interventions into this area will therefore present opportunities to resolve this matter.
 - *City Zone potential: Middle Saxon General; The Burh High; Suburbs High; Peripheral Activity General*
2. What role did the various gravel islands and reworked Thames channels south and west of the town play in terms of the defensive circuit?
 - *City Zone potential: Suburbs High; Peripheral Activity High*
3. Can we learn more about the elements of the Saxon burh defences (Rampart, ditch and intra-mural road) and how these features were altered over time?
 - *City Zone potential: Middle Saxon General; The Burh High; Suburbs High; Peripheral Activity General*

Compiled by Ruth Beckley and David Radford

For full acknowledgements please see the online Oxford Archaeological Plan Introduction document.

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Fig 1: Simplified geology map (areas of gravel island and Amphthill Clay have been amalgamated and are not shown, please see introduction document for a detailed surface geology map).

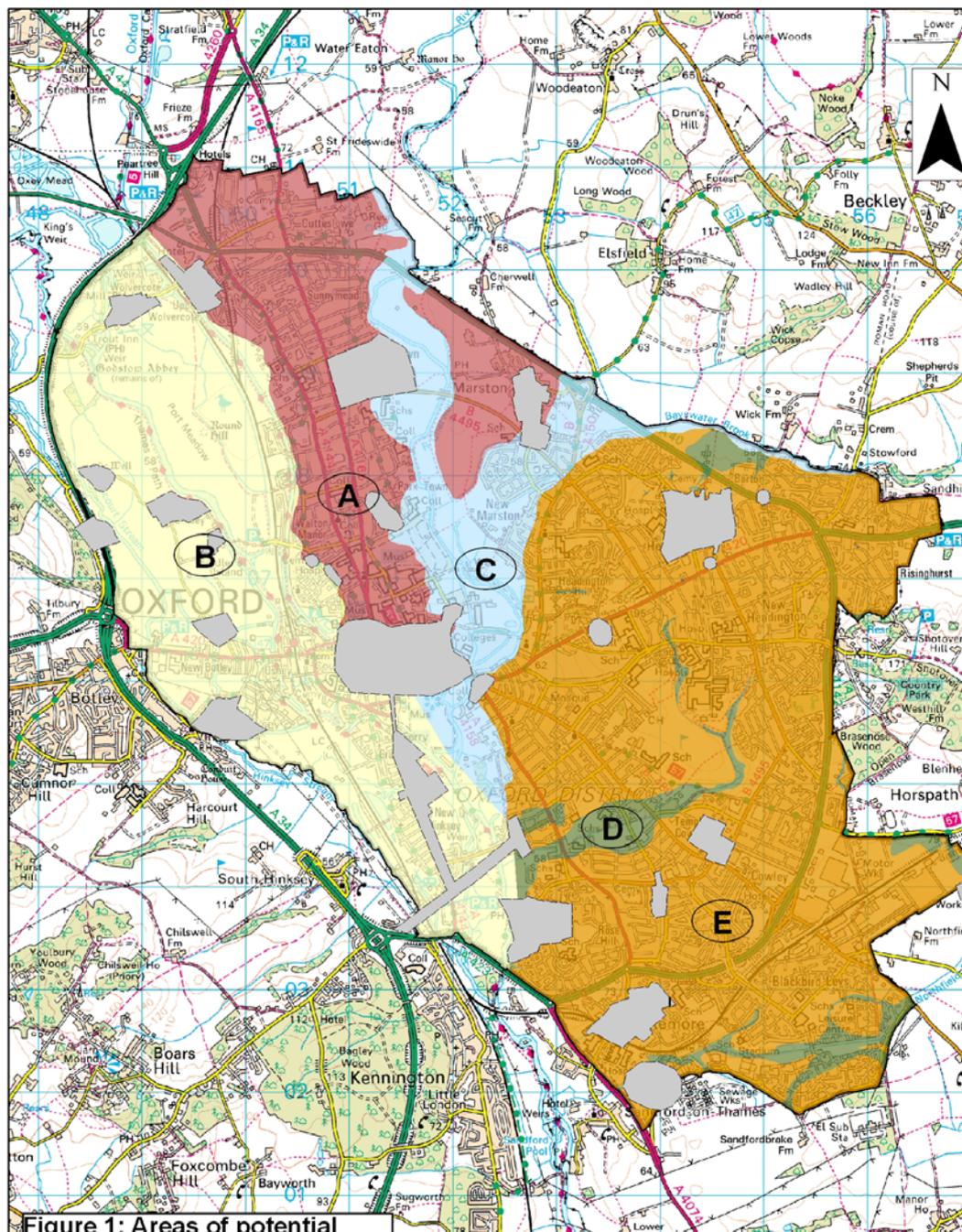


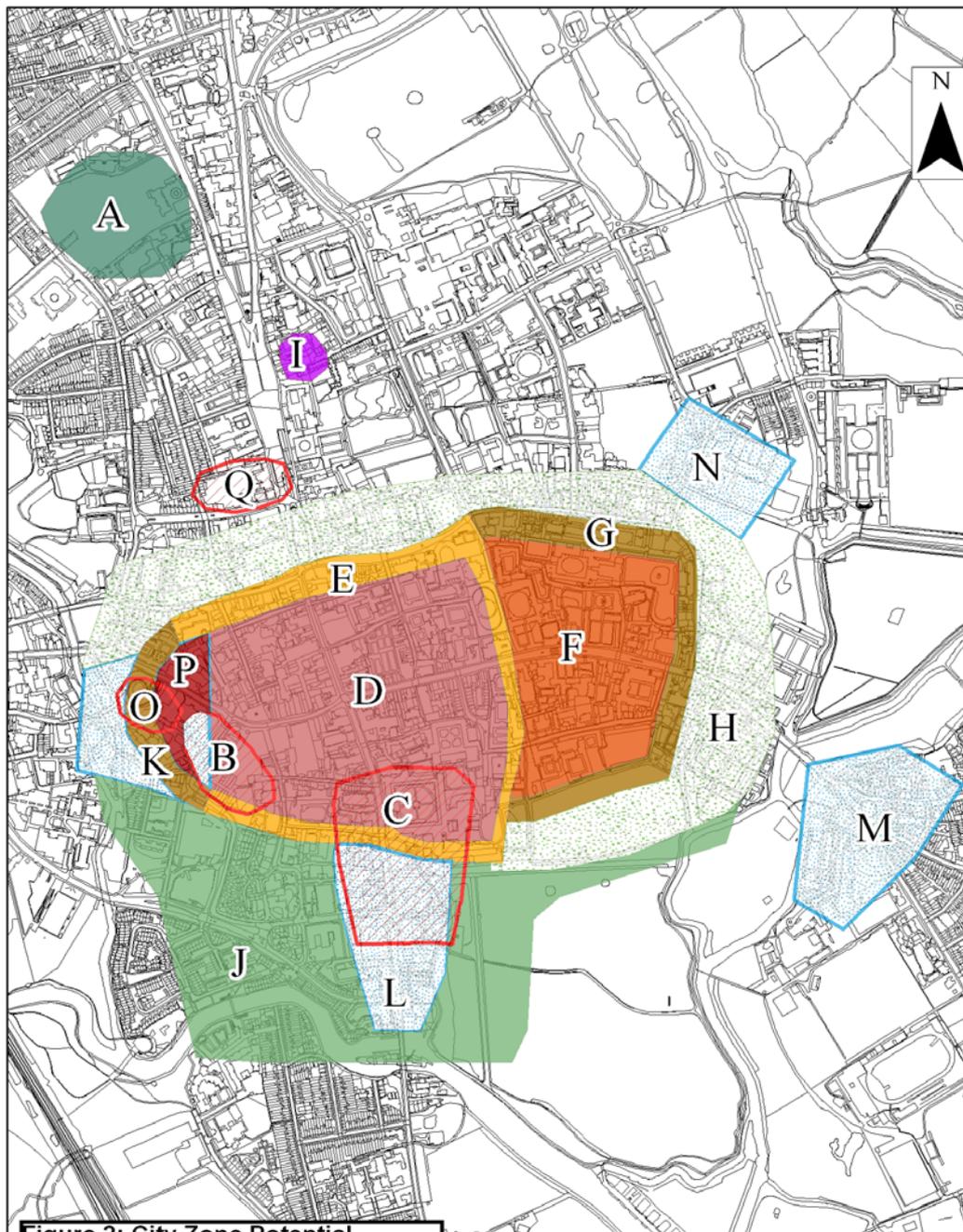
Figure 1: Areas of potential

- A 2nd-3rd Gravel Terraces
- B Thames Floodplain and gravel islands
- C Cherwell Floodplain
- D Stream Valleys
- E Corallian Ridge
- Anglo Saxon Areas of known interest

Scale: 1:47,577

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Scale: 1:8,870

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Figure 2: Zones of interest within the historic core of Oxford (Saxon and Viking)