

ARCHAEOLOGY IN OXFORD

Oxford City report to the Oxford City and County Archaeological Forum February-June 2020

The impact of Covid 19 on archaeological work in the city

The Urban Design and Heritage Team has been working remotely from home since the advent of the Covid 19 outbreak in mid-March but otherwise near normal service has been maintained, subject to the constraints of childcare provision. Archaeological fieldwork has been impacted and other than a handful of small watching briefs this tailed off from March through to early June. Contracting archaeological units have been implementing new risk assessment procedures and there are a number of fieldwork projects lined up for mid-June. A number of outreach projects and initiatives have been put on hold because of the outbreak.

National Planning Policy Framework related field work in Oxford

Corpus Christi College

In February small scale geotechnical test pitting along the line the historic route of Oriel Street (formerly Shidyerd Street, now a yard within Corpus Christi College) was subject to a watching brief by Oxford Archaeology. One test pit identified a stone surface that may represent the last medieval resurfacing of Shidyerd Street.

Northgate House, Cornmarket and Market Street, Jesus College

In February excavations by Oxford Archaeology at Northgate House continued, located between the existing large modern basement fronting onto Cornmarket and the 17th century west range of Jesus College Inner Quad. Remarkably the relatively narrow space between the basement wall and the massive stone foundations of the west range preserved the limestone walls and floors of a building of likely 15th-16th century date, containing number of brick-built hearths or ovens. This building was set well back from the street frontage, and between it and the street were the well preserved remains of a limestone yard with contemporary stone well. A provisional interpretation would be that the building was some kind of artisan's workshop - potentially for metal-working, however further post-excavation analysis will be needed to more confidently establish its function. Although the bulk of the Northgate House site was truncated by the construction of the 1960s basement a watching brief is currently being intermittently maintained on peripheral areas of the site.



Above: Late medieval or early post-medieval ovens and well at Northgate House

New College School, Savile Road

In February, March and June further excavations and a watching brief took place by Museum of London Archaeology on the site of the former New College School building at Savile Road, located over the line of the Royalist Civil War rampart. The micromorphology report for a buried layer of loam under the tipped gravel that makes up the bulk of the rampart suggests that this was originally comprised of a stack of cut turves. Whilst one explanation could be that the turf base of the rampart is simply a 17th Royalist construction contemporary with the gravel tips above, the failure of the excavation to produce any post-medieval material from this layer (which contained residual Roman and post-Conquest pottery) is surprising and careful analysis of the results will be required.



Right: The site the former school building just after the mass concrete foundations have been skilfully removed by the enabling works contractors Austin Newport, leaving an exposed section of the rampart base and Roman layer below.

Barton Manor

In March further recording took place at land adjacent to Barton Manor on Barton Village Road where a new house has been constructed. A detailed survey of the frontage stone wall prior to its reconstruction was undertaken by John Moore Heritage Services. The report suggests that the lower part of the wall may have been medieval in origin with 17th century cottages later built into it. The north gable wall of the structure still stands as a boundary wall along the northern perimeter of the plot although this is currently in a state of disrepair. A survey of the northern wall is forthcoming.

The Mitre

Between March and June Oxford Archaeology have maintained intermittent recording at The Mitre Inn on the High Street during internal refit and the construction of a lodge building in the rear yard facing Turl Street. The ground works in the yard revealed a medieval oven associated with floor levels and probably associated with a building fronting onto Turl Street. Small lengths of stone walling, probably also of medieval date have also been recorded.



Right: The remains of a partially excavated medieval oven.

No 8 Hollybush Row

In May John Moore Heritage Services carried out archaeological monitoring at Hollybush Row, Oxford, during excavation for a short foundation trench. A series of post-medieval to modern made ground layers were observed. Further trial trenching is programmed for this site.

*David Radford
Archaeologist*