

## Oxford City and County Archaeological Forum Oxford City Report June-October 2016

### National Planning Policy Framework related field work in Oxford

#### *Westgate- Main phase of works*

Between June and October an intermittent watching brief was maintained by Oxford Archaeology at the Westgate development site during the installation of new service routes and works around the old Westgate building to facilitate the construction of a new façade. No significant remains were recorded, these areas already having been subject to extensive disturbance during the construction of the Westgate Shopping Centre in the 1970s.

One small additional piece of work was undertaken within the footprint of the 1970s Westgate where the southern end of the shopping precinct has been demolished. A trial trench was excavated to establish whether any trace of the late-Saxon burh defences or medieval town wall survived to the west of the former Franciscan church. Remarkably a small section of wall was exposed, sandwiched between the service basement of the 1970s Westgate and truncation caused by improvements to Castle Street to the west. The depth and character of the unmortared foundation suggests that it formed part of the late-Saxon defences, however the structure was disturbed by later pits and a Victorian cellar and did not produce any conclusive dating evidence. The proposed nearby pile cap was rotated to preserve the section of wall in-situ.

In August the result of the British Archaeological awards were announced at the British Museum and I am very pleased to report that the Land Securities funded [excavation](#) by Oxford Archaeology at the Westgate was presented the award for Best Archaeological Project. Thanks are again due to all the staff at OA and all the volunteers that worked so hard to make this such an exciting and rewarding dig and outreach project. Watch this space for further developments.

Further outreach work around the



*Above: A section of the town wall located west of the Franciscan Friary.*



*Above: Representatives of Land Securities and Oxford Archaeology join Oxford City Council Heritage Champion Cllr Colin Cook and hosts Julian Richards and Bettany Hughes at the award ceremony. Photograph by Oxford Archaeology.*

Westgate project over this period has included a talk to the friends of Oxfordshire Museum at Woodstock on the results of the excavation and a further outing for the Westgate pop-up museum at the Oxford Castle Education Resource Centre during Oxford Open Doors in September.

#### *Nos 114–119 St Aldate's*

Between June and late August a second phase of excavation by Oxford Archaeology took place to the rear of the former Blacks outdoor clothing store at Nos 114–119 St Aldate's. The archaeological work was targeted along the edges of the new building where previous basement construction had left small strips of ground at a higher level and also within the existing basement where a water attenuation tank was required.

The lifting and replacement of the existing basement floor slab also offered the opportunity of cleaning and recording the top of archaeological remains at this level.

The work on the east-west boundary between the former Blacks store and the City Council Offices produced a surprising amount of archaeology given the scale and character of the surrounding buildings. This included an east-west medieval wall with holes in the masonry to support a suspended wooden floor. This was covered by medieval garden soil through which was cut a post-medieval stone lined waste pit and later boundary wall. The pit was notable for containing dumps of 'tavern waste' from the nearby establishments that fronted onto St Aldates, including very well preserved clay pipes, pottery from drinking vessels and glassware carrying the stamp of the 17<sup>th</sup> century Mermaid Inn.

The Mermaid was formerly the Swindlestock Tavern famous for its role in the St Scholastica's Day confrontation between townsfolk and clerks (students) from the University.

Another surprise was the survival of floor layers and the remains of a stone relieving arch foundation for a medieval building fronting onto Queen Street which survived in the small space between the



*Above: Medieval floor surfaces and foundations being excavated south of Queen Street. Photograph by Oxford Archaeology.*



*Above: The remains of a late-Saxon cellar pit. Photograph by Oxford Archaeology.*

basements of Blacks and former properties fronting onto Queen Street. The excavation of the attenuation tank hole was also very productive, revealing a late Saxon cellar pit, containing spindle whorls and late Saxon pottery, which itself cut an earlier cellar pit which contained charcoal deposits which have been sampled for radio-carbon dating.

The site was visited by local academics and again by the Oxford Jewish Heritage Committee and filmed by the BBC for a local programme on Underground Oxford. A temporary window display with some of the finds from the site has been maintained in the St Aldates shop frontage and a handling session, talk and public leaflet will take place in Oxford Town Hall, hosted by the Museum of Oxford, on the [15<sup>th</sup> October](#).



Top right: A mermaid design on a glass bottle recovered from a post-medieval waste pit. Above left: Slots for floor joists in the medieval wall. Above right: medieval and late-Saxon finds. Photographs by Oxford Archaeology.

### *New College Music Room, Saville House, Mansfield Road*

Between June and September an archaeological excavation has been undertaken by Oxford Archaeology on land between Saville House (New College) and Mansfield College on Mansfield Road. The project involves the restoration of the upstanding Royalist Civil War rampart next to Saville House and the creation of a new sunken Music Room on the footprint of the old garages and stores that previously occupied the site. The intention is to mark



*Above: The reddish loamy make-up of the bank at Saville House, with features sealed by the bank visible on the right.*

the location of the rampart with a stone plaque in the pavement and allow the rampart to be viewed from the public space to the side of the building, thus bringing this part of the Civil War defences back into the public realm.

The footprint of the music room is being excavated in strips and this work has exposed more of the bank of loam located below the later 17<sup>th</sup> century earthwork rampart that was previously discovered by evaluation trenching. The evaluation results indicated that the Royalists had re-used the existing bank and an OSL (Optically Stimulated Luminescence) sample for the loam produced a surprising 9<sup>th</sup> – early 11<sup>th</sup> century date. The current dig has recorded a series of irregular pits and possible post-holes directly below the loam bank, the top soil having been stripped. A Neolithic leaf shaped arrow head and Roman pottery sherd have been recovered from the make-up of the bank and further OSL samples have been taken to try and conclusively date this large east-west feature. The report is forthcoming.

#### *No 26 Mill Lane, Iffley*

In June a building assessment was undertaken by Oxford Archaeology of the No 26 Mill Lane, Iffley, a grade II listed building. The assessment noted that both the 1830s enclosure map and an 1837 GWR railway map failed to show the building and no primary internal 18<sup>th</sup> century features could be identified, thus the 18<sup>th</sup> century date of the listing can be revised to mid-19<sup>th</sup> century.

#### *Merton Street Cobbles*

In July a watching brief was undertaken by the Graham Keevill Consultancy during trenching by the Southern Gas Network in Merton Street in order to record the depth and composition of the street make up below the Grade II listed cobbles. The report is forthcoming and will aid future management of this vulnerable asset.

#### *Tom Quad Steps Christ Church*

In July a small area of the steps within Tom Quad were lifted under the supervision of the Graham Keevill Heritage Consultancy in order to assess subsidence and resolve health and safety issues. The Great Quadrangle or Tom Quad was mostly constructed in the 1520s and completed in the 1660s. The RCHME Inventory for Oxford records that the present form of the walkway dates to 1842 but that it encompasses the base of the arcade walls of an intended cloister as initiated by Cardinal Wolsey in the 1520s on the south and east sides. The precise date of the formation of the walkway remains unclear, however it was absent in 1578 (as shown on Agas' 1578 map) present by the late 17<sup>th</sup> century (Loggan's map of 1675). Further recording work is planned.



*Above: Opening up work to investigate the character of the steps in Tom Quad—the top 'step' returns north and appears to be bonded with the buttress. It is possible that some of this fabric is Wolsey's original build, adapted in 1841 and again in the early 1870s. Photograph by Graham Keevill.*

### *Keble College New Lift*

In July a watching brief was undertaken by Oxford Archaeology during the excavation of a small lift pit at Keble College. The edge of a ditch was recorded that had some similarities to the character of the late Neolithic henge ditch previously identified at St John's College. Whilst slightly off the projected route of the henge ditch it is possible that the monument's shape was irregular and that this feature may be it, although the results in this confined space were inconclusive. The report is forthcoming.

### *Land adjacent to No 30 Holywell Street, Harris Manchester College*

Between July and August a watching brief was undertaken by Cotswold Archaeology during the erection of a new building in the yard adjacent to No 30 Holywell Street. The footprint of the building had already been subject to significant disturbance and no significant remains were reported. The report is forthcoming.

### *Merton College new lift to the Hall and Senior Common Room*

Between July and August a small excavation was undertaken by Oxford Archaeology adjacent to the Hall and senior common room of Merton College prior to the excavation of a new Lift pit and bin store. The excavation revealed pits of Norman and later date and identified re-used column base of presumed post-medieval date within the foundations of now demolished Victorian structures. The report is forthcoming.



Above: Investigation of the ground prior to the construction of foundation pads for the new bin store. Re-used column base bottom left.

### *Merton College St Alban's Quad Music Practice Rooms*

Between July and August a small excavation was undertaken within the eastern range of St Alban's Quad at Merton College prior to the shallow reduction of the floor to create new music practice rooms. The site encompasses part of the building footprint and yard belonging to the medieval St Alban's Hall. A number of post-medieval pits were encountered and recorded. The report is forthcoming.

### *Corpus Christi, Cloister Quadrangle*

In August three test pits were excavated within the cloister of Cloister Quad at Corpus Christi by Oxford Archaeology prior to the installation of new service trenching. The work revealed the depth of burial vaults within the stone paved cloister. A watching brief was subsequently undertaken during the construction of a new electrical trench. The report is forthcoming.

### *Oxford Flood Relief Channel*

Between August and September a programme of geophysical work, borehole transects and localised test pitting have been undertaken within the Oxford floodplain

to further assess its archaeological potential in advance of the proposed Flood Alleviation Channel. The report is forthcoming.

*Former Acland Hospital site, Keble College, Banbury Road*

Between August and September Oxford Archaeology have been undertaking a further phased excavation of the full extent of the new basement at the former Acland Hospital site, now part of Keble College. The excavation has revealed steep-sided pits containing likely Roman debris, an arrangement of medieval ditches including terminals suggesting an entrance to a paddock or field, also post-medieval gravel quarry pits. Further work is programmed.



Further work is programmed.

*Left: Steep-sided pits containing small amounts of pottery and bone at the former Acland Hospital site. The material is provisionally dated as Roman.*

*New Social Hub Building, Kellog College, 62-64 Banbury Road*

In September a strip and record excavation was undertaken on the footprint of a new garden building at Kellog College by John Moore Heritage Services. A previous geo-technical test pit within the footprint had produced the remains of an inhumation burial and pottery of Bronze Age date. The strip and record excavation identified a later pit but no trace of the remaining burial or any enclosing ditch thus the origin of these bones remains a mystery.

*St John College New Library.*

In September an excavation was undertaken by Oxford Archaeology on the footprint of the new library building at St John's College. To date the excavation has revealed a 5m wide east-west ditch of possible Late Saxon origin and a series of inter-cutting quarry pits and rubbish deposits that date back to the establishment of the college. The pits represent an early phase of quarrying for sand and gravel used in its construction and later expansions of the college. These holes were later in-filled with rubbish and other materials to



*Above: The site of the new St John's College library extension.*

help level the ground. This is providing a source of early post-medieval objects that are providing an insight into life at the early college.

The date for some of the other potential later quarry pits indicate that although the Sprott Wall divided the Presidents' and Fellows' Gardens, these locations continued to be a sources of building aggregate, at least in to the mid-part of the 17th century when the College underwent significant expansion, and before the formalised gardens were established as first shown on Logan's Map of Oxford in AD 1675.



*Above left: Part of a 17<sup>th</sup> century 'Bellarmine' or "Bartmann" jug was found within one of the pits. The jug is stamped with the face of bearded man. The image of the bearded face is believed to have originated in the mythical wild man creature, popular in northern European folklore from the 14th century onwards. The alternative name the design "Bellarmine" is recorded from the early 17<sup>th</sup> century and is in popular tradition associated with the cardinal Robert Bellarmine (1542-1621), a fierce opponent of Protestantism in the Low Countries and northern Germany.*

*Above centre: large east-west ditch that had been recut on many occasions and produced pottery of likely late-Saxon date.*

*Above right: Lower half of a tin-glaze earthen ware medicine jar (or albarello) dating between AD 1580 -1650, found within one of the pits. Photographs by Oxford Archaeology.*

*David Radford, Archaeologist  
Oxford City Council*