

Archaeology in Oxford

Oxford City report to the Oxford City and County Archaeological Forum

February-June 2021

The impact of Covid 19 on archaeological work in the city

The Urban Design and Heritage Team has continued to work remotely from home since the February OCCAF update with normal service levels being maintained.

National Planning Policy Framework related field work in Oxford

Armstrong Road, Littlemore

Between January and May further intermittent archaeological excavation was undertaken around the site of Busy Bees Nursery on Armstrong Road by Oxford Archaeology. A number of pits of Early/Middle Iron Age date were recorded, forming part of a domestic settlement.



Above: Early Iron Age pits recorded at Armstrong Road. Images courtesy of Oxford Archaeology.

Warneford Hospital

In February an evaluation trench was excavated by John Moore Heritage Services on land to the south of Warneford Hospital. The trench was required in advance of a hospital extension because of the potential Roman remains in this area, no significant archaeological remains were noted

Old Road Campus Plot B1

In February trial trenching was undertaken by Oxford Archaeology prior to the construction of new University buildings at Old Road Campus. The work was required because of the general potential for prehistoric and Roman remains in this location. No significant archaeological deposits were noted.

St Peter's College Castle Hill House,

In February historic building recording was undertaken at Castle Hill House by Oxford Archaeology. The 19th century house is due to be demolished as part of the redevelopment of the site by St Peter's College. The location of a documented 18th-19th century tunnel running under Bulwark's Lane was confirmed (visible as a semi-circular damp patch in Bulwarks Lane) and recorded. The tunnel, its blocked up entrance and the northern stone wall of Castle Hill House are to be retained in the new building scheme.

Churchill Drive, Headington

In February a watching brief was undertaken at Churchill Drive at the Churchill Hospital by Oxford Archaeology. The work was required because of the potential for Roman remains associated the local pottery industry in this location. No significant archaeological deposits were noted

Boswells Department Store Broad Street

In February targeted test pitting and observation of geotechnical work was undertaken by Oxford Archaeology within the basement of the former Boswells department store in advance of targeted excavations for new lift pits and localised foundations within the current basement. The initial work proved very successful in identifying the depth and profile of the Late Saxon town ditch and medieval town ditch. This part of the town defences is distinctive because here the defences were extended northwards, perhaps in the 11th century, to create an enclosure around St Michael at the Northgate church. This means that a section of the late-Saxon town ditch was infilled and therefore protected from later recuts, making it a potentially well-preserved repository for Late Saxon rubbish. A programme of recording, encompassing historic building recording, an oral history and targeted excavations is programmed prior to the conversion of the former basement department store into a hotel.

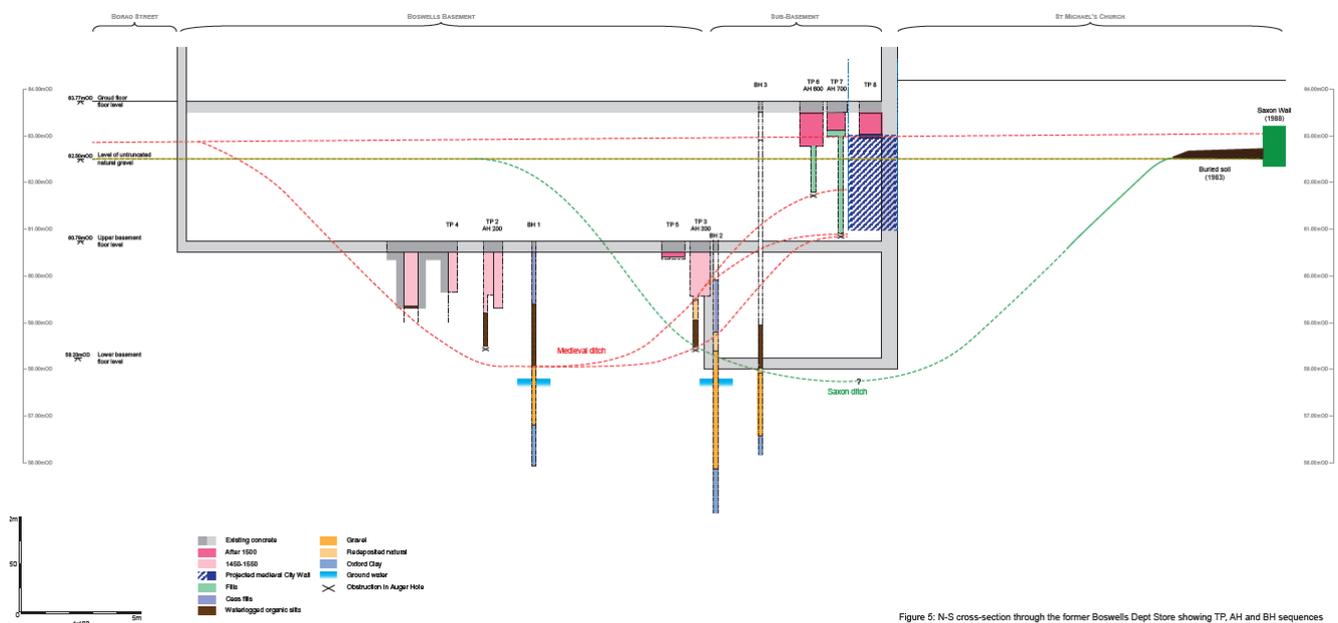


Figure 5: N-S cross-section through the former Boswells Dept Store showing TP, AH and BH sequences and suggesting profiles for the Saxon and Medieval defensive ditches

Image above: Working profile of the Late Saxon town ditch (to the right in green) and the later Norman (?) ditch to the north (to the left- in red) (Image courtesy of Oxford Archaeology).

Bartlemas Farm House

In March a watching brief was undertaken by Prof David Griffiths during the construction of new house foundations adjacent to Bartlemas Farmhouse. The work was required because of the potential for remains related to the nearby medieval Leper Hospital. The works were very small scale and no significant remains were noted.

No 19 Kingston Road

In April a watching brief was undertaken by John Moore Heritage Services at No 19 Kingston Road. The work was required because of the potential for prehistoric burials in this location. No significant remains were recorded.

No 12 St John Street

In April a watching brief was undertaken by John Moore Heritage Services at No 12 St John Street in April during the construction of a rear extension. The watching brief was required because the site is located

within the precinct of the Royal Beaumont Palace and later Carmelite Friary. No significant remains were noted.

Lucy Faithfull House, Speedwell Street

Between March and June intermittent excavations were undertaken at the former Lucy Faithfull House site by Museum of London Archaeology on the site of the medieval precinct of the Oxford Blackfriars. Thanks are extended to George Lambrick, the previous excavator of this important site in the 1970s, who pointed out inconsistencies in the evaluation report with the result that there was a significant last minute increase in the level of recording undertaken. The phased excavation programme is ongoing and has to-date revealed part of a buttress belonging to the western extension of the medieval Blackfriars church, floor make up layers, walls, robber trenches and associated rubbish pits.

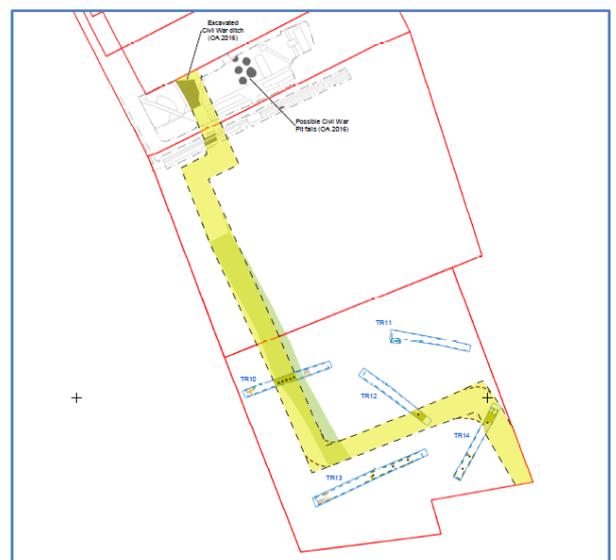


Above left: the robbed out walls of the west range of the Dominican friary (Blackfriars) and right: Medieval floor tiles recovered from the backfill of the 16th century robber trenches.

The Life and Mind Building (Tinbergen Building), South Parks Road

In April Oxford Archaeology undertook an archaeological evaluation on the site of the proposed redevelopment of the Life and Mind Building (formerly the Tinbergen Building), on South Parks Road. The evaluation examined the area of a proposed northern basement extension and also the extensive area of the site compound to the south because of concerns that construction works might compact archaeological remains below the former sports field.

The evaluation on the basement area demonstrated only that un-truncated natural gravel was present. The trenching to the south and careful angering by Oxford Archaeology has allowed the clear identification of the route of the Royalist Civil War defences thorough this area. Post holes and ditches of possible late Iron Age or Roman features were also recorded



Right: the newly established correct line of the Royalist defensive Civil War ditch located to the south of the Tinbergen Building. (Image courtesy of Oxford Archaeology).

Whilst the basement evaluation was undertaken by condition the compound works were deemed permitted development and the archaeological work in this area was very generously voluntarily funded by the University of Oxford. Thanks are due to both the University Estates Department and the main contractor Wates who have gone out of their way to ensure sensitive development in this location in line with best practice. The targeted archaeological works have allowed for a sensitive approach to preservation and reinstatement, involving building up the ground surfaces during compound works and an agreement on rotation depths for the reinstatement of the sports field, that are designed to ensure that the below ground remains are protected.

Northgate House, Cornmarket

In May Oxford Archaeology undertook further excavation work at the Northgate House site on Cornmarket following a minor amendment to the proposed substation design. An excavation of the proposed sub-station extension footprint revealed a series of medieval (and potentially a late-Saxon pit) pits cut into the natural gravel, revealing pottery, bone and fragments of daub.

St Peter's College, Castle Hill House

In May a trial trench was excavated by Oxford Archaeology on the site of a proposed attenuation tank within the grounds of Canal House on New Road. The trench revealed the well preserved partially demolished remains of a building associated with the 18th-19th century canal basin. The report is forthcoming.

The Clarendon Centre, Queen Street

In May a series of test pits were excavated within the units of the Clarendon Shopping Centre for geotechnical and archaeological purposes and were monitored by Pre-Construct Archaeology. The initial result suggest a pattern of deeper modern disturbance that previously indicated by PCA's 2012 excavation within the H&M store. The results of the survey will be used to scope out requirements for archaeological excavation across phase 1 development if planning consent is forthcoming. Three development phases are proposed. The final phase is likely to involve a significant basement excavation on the Cornmarket frontage, partially revisiting archaeological work undertaken at Nos 55-58 Cornmarket in 1962.

Nos 1-3 George Street

In May a watching brief was undertaken by Pre-Construct Archaeology during geotechnical works at Nos 1-3 George Street. Made ground recorded from 50cm below ground level to at least 3.50m may represent the sequential infilling of the town ditch. Natural gravel was not reached and no significant finds were recovered.

Previously unreported

St Frideswide's Farm, Cutteslowe

In November 2020 an archaeological evaluation was undertaken by Oxford Archaeology on the site of a proposed residential development at St Frideswide's Farm, Cutteslowe. A geophysical survey of the 3.6ha site carried out prior to the works starting detected a small number of geophysical anomalies of possible archaeological origin. The trenching failed to identify any significant archaeological features, however one shallow feature may correlate with north-east to south-west aligned linear geophysical anomaly. More extensive trenching has been undertaken in adjacent fields beyond the City Council boundary.

Hill View Farm, Old Marston

In November and December 2020 TVAS undertook an archaeological evaluation on land at Hill View Farm. No significant archaeology was recorded.

Hill View, Mill Lane, Old Marston

In November and December 2020 Cotswold Archaeology carried out an archaeological evaluation on land at Mill Lane. The evaluation recorded a series of furrows belonging to the former open field system. There was no evidence for archaeological activity pre-dating the ridge and furrow.

Court Place Gardens, Iffley

In January 2021 Cotswold Archaeology carried out an archaeological evaluation of Land at Court Place Gardens, Iffley. An early Roman ditch was identified along with two undated ditches of similar character. The ditches were of different alignments and may represent sequences of agricultural field systems or agricultural/domestic enclosures located near the high ground at Iffley Church. One ditch produced animal bone and large pieces of Roman pottery suggesting domestic activity in the immediate vicinity.

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