

ARCHAEOLOGY IN OXFORD

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

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 July OCCAF update with normal service levels being maintained.

National Planning Policy Framework related field work in Oxford

Christ Church, Peckwater Quad

Between October 2019 and July 2020 an archaeological watching brief and historic building recording was undertaken by Keevill Heritage Ltd during the refurbishment of Staircase 9 in Peckwater Quad. The below-ground impacts comprised new drainage work in the basement and externally outside the east elevation of Staircases 9 and 1, also foundation works for a new graded access on the south side of Staircase 9. Internally, medieval rubbish pits and layers were recorded, like those previously noted in the basement of Staircase 1 in 2020. Outside, a stone surface to the south of Staircase 9 was probably a remnant of a medieval road, most likely St Edward Street, or a courtyard immediately to its east, while masonry east of Staircase 2 appeared to be part of a medieval building that had been previously observed and recorded in 2005-7 by John Moore Heritage Services.



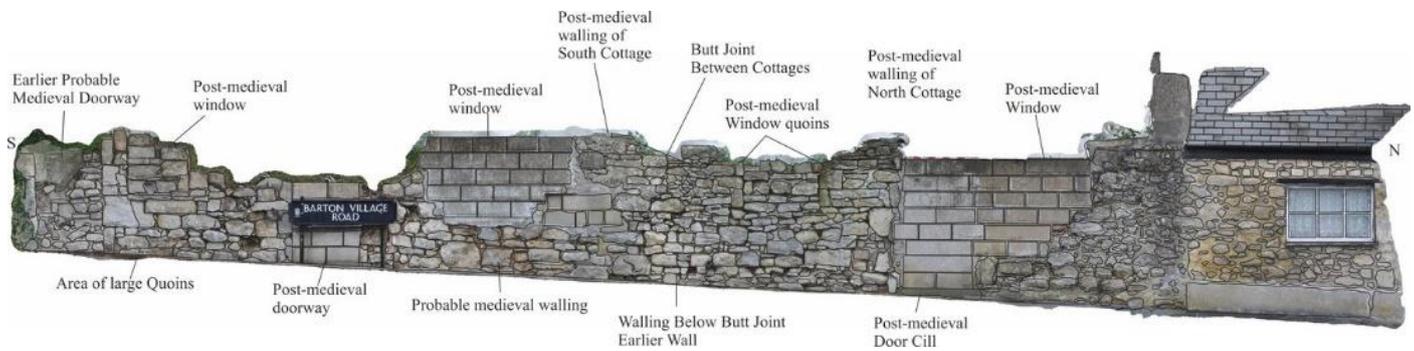
Right: Stone surface (centre left) exposed in Peckwater Quad, Christ Church. Image: Keevill Heritage Ltd

The remnant of a staircase associated with a previous layout of the ground and first floors within Staircase 9 was observed. This is documented on plans in the Christ Church archive. The historic fabric remains intact and was boxed in for protection.

Land adjacent to 7 Barton Village Road

Between March and July a targeted watching brief and historic building recording of a likely medieval wall exposed by development works was undertaken by John Moore Heritage Services. The work was undertaken in mitigation of the failure of the developer to comply with conditioned recording works. The excavation of a foundation trench to the rear of the new property revealed the continuation of a previously identified ditch, a substantial boundary of medieval date.

An information leaflet has been produced detailing the archaeological interest of the site and the wider settlement of Barton. This can be downloaded [here](#).



Above: The frontage wall at land adj to No 7 Barton Village Road. Image: John Moore Heritage Services.

Oxford North

In July extensive trial trenching was undertaken by Oxford Archaeology on land north of the Wolvercote Roundabout. This was the third phase of trenching at the Oxford North development site. No significant archaeological remains were recorded. An earthwork survey was also completed to add to existing LiDAR data and provide a contour survey of the upstanding ridge and furrow in the field south of the Park and Ride. Two orientations of ridge and furrow were identified, these potentially of different date. Eight test pits were dug through the furrows to identify any manuring spreads and collect any other information that might supplement our understanding of these features. The test pits identified three agricultural layers; topsoil, former plough soil and subsoil, but with no evidence of significant manuring spreads. Finds recovered from the test pits were mostly of later post-medieval date apart from a few fragments of possibly medieval ceramic building material and pottery.

Oxford North A40 Pill Box

During vegetation clearance for the Oxford North development a type 26 Pill Box (fw3/26) was uncovered next to the A40. This has now been subject to a Level II survey by the Environmental Dimension Partnership Ltd. The report has informed discussions regarding the future retention and interpretation of the Pill Box.



Right: Type 26 Pill box next to the A40: Image EDP Ltd.

Northgate House, Cornmarket St.

In August Oxford Archaeology undertook further recording work at the Northgate House site on Cornmarket Street. A small area of land to the rear of the 1960s basement proved to contain a large Norman waste pit. Further recording work is programmed at this site to record service runs into Market Street.



Right: A Norman pit at Northgate House, Cornmarket St. (Jesus College in the background).

Wadham College, JCR Quad

In August a watching brief was undertaken by Oxford Archaeology during landscaping works in JCR Quad. No significant archaeological remains were recorded. The report is forthcoming.

City of Oxford College, Oxpens Road

In August and September Pre-Construct Archaeology undertook archaeological trial trenching at the City of Oxford College prior to the construction of a new link extension at the Ash and Brent buildings. The trenching sought to investigate the line of a drainage channel and possible causeway shown on post-medieval maps that has been speculatively identified as a possible route for the original mid-late Saxon western approach to Oxford (See Alan Crossley's [article](#) in *Oxoniensia*). The site was heavily disturbed by service routes, however the likely post-medieval drainage channel was observed. A watching brief on further works was programmed, the report is forthcoming.

St Edmund Hall, Front Quad

In September a watching brief was undertaken by Oxford Archaeology during the excavation of a sub-base for a new access ramp to St Edmund Hall's Dining Hall. Garden soils were revealed along with a small area of cobbled surface. The report is forthcoming.

Hertford College Electrical Trench

In September a watching brief was undertaken by Oxford Archaeology during the laying out of new electrical services at Hertford College. The report is forthcoming.

No 4 Beaumont Buildings

In September a watching brief was undertaken by Keevill Heritage Ltd during underpinning works at No 4 Beaumont buildings, located within the projected precinct of the Royal Beaumont Palace (The Kings Houses) and subsequent Carmelite Friary. No significant archaeological remains were observed.

Previously unreported fieldwork

St Peter's College, Castle Hill House, New Road

A sample taken from the bottom of the castle bailey ditch during a borehole survey by Oxford Archaeology at Castle Hill House in January 2020 has produced a 11th-12th radio carbon date, suggesting that, for this part of the circuit at least, the base of the ditch was not cleared out or recut in later periods. The proposed development at this site involves piled foundations designed to bridge across the laminated basal deposits of the ditch to secure preservation-in situ.



Right: Borehole samples from the castle bailey ditch. Image: Oxford Archaeology.

The Tinbergen Building, South Parks Road

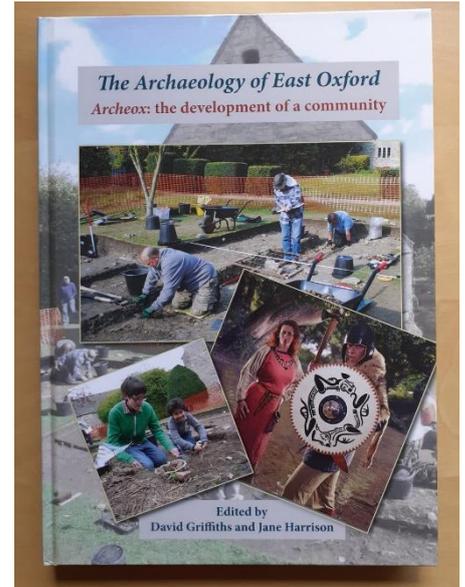
Between January and February 2020 Oxford Archaeology undertook a watching brief of the proposed relocated Chemistry Teaching Laboratory Fume Extract Plant Room and Flues for the Tinbergen Building on South Parks Road. The watching brief observed five test pits and an area of 15m by 15m stripped for the laying of a pile mat. The site was located in an area that had the potential to contain significant archaeological deposits relating to the Royalist defences of Oxford during the Civil War. However, no archaeological deposits of significance were excavated during the watching brief.

Other news

The East Oxford Community Archaeology and History Project (Archeox) Monograph

The results of the Archeox project, which ran between 2011 and 2015 and involved a wide range of volunteers from across east Oxford undertaking surveys, excavations, test pits and local historical research, has been published. The volume, edited by David Griffiths and Jane Harrison, can be viewed and downloaded on the [ADS website](#).

The monograph tells the story of East Oxford, presented for the first time as an integrated archaeological and historical study. The project brought professional archaeologists and academics from Oxford University together with hundreds of local residents. It trained and involved a wide cross-section of East Oxford's diverse community in carrying out the investigations and won the 2016 Oxford University Vice-Chancellor's Award for Public Engagement with Research, and was runner-up for the 2012 British Archaeological Award for Best Community Engagement Project.



New Westgate Information Board

A new information board has been erected at the Westgate Centre by Land Securities providing further information about the previous 1960s-70s and 2015-16 archaeological excavations at the site and linking to the [archaeological trail](#). Further outreach material is planned.



Right: The new information board at Greyfriars Place, Westgate.

Port Meadow

In September Roger Ainslie (Abingdon Archaeological Surveys) undertook a geophysical survey at Port Meadow to locate the remains of the former WWI airfield and its infrastructure on behalf of the local WWI Airfield Project run by Peter Smith. The results have yet to be released, but are very exciting- watch this space!

Peter Smith has a book out about the use of Port Meadow as a runway: 'Oxford's Lost Aerodrome: The untold story of Port Meadow and the Royal Flying Corps 1916-1919' (Oxford Folio 2019) and you can listen to Peter's podcast about the fatalities that resulted from this activity [here](#).



Right: Geophysical survey work at Port Meadow: Image: Abingdon Archaeological Geophysics.

Viking aDNA studies

A major new study on Viking aDNA was published in the journal *Nature* in September. It features results from the 2008 St John's College excavation in Oxford. As noted in a previous city OCCAF report the study shows that that one of the victims of the Oxford massacre had a close Danish relative (half-brother or similar). The Oxford data also contributes to the observation that later Viking war bands/raiding parties were comprised of people from a wide variety of backgrounds not just one local area.



Right: Burials from the 10th-11th century mass grave at Kendrew Quad, St John's College. Image: Thames Valley Archaeological Services.

A selection of links:

<https://www.nature.com/articles/s41586-020-2688-8>

<https://edition.cnn.com/2020/09/16/europe/vikings-blond-scandinavian-study-scn-scli-intl-gbr/index.html>

A separate study has examined a young male skeleton from the St John's mass grave to help demonstrate that smallpox dates back at least to the Viking period and that Danish raiders may have helped spread it:

<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2020/07/23/viking-raiders-bought-smallpox-virus-britain-cambridge-study/>

<https://www.joh.cam.ac.uk/vikings-had-smallpox-and-may-have-helped-spread-worlds-deadliest-virus>

The Oxford remains (Burial VK143 -TVAS burial SK1951) have also contributed to a study looking at the Parvovirus:

<https://www.pnas.org/content/115/29/7557>

“By sequencing the earliest-known strain of the killer virus, we have proved for the first time that smallpox existed during the Viking Age”

Land Adj Littlemore Hospital Information Leaflet

An information leaflet has been produced by Thames Valley Archaeological Services about the Iron Age and Roman features excavated at Land adjacent to Littlemore Hospital in 2019. A digital version is available and physical copies have been distributed to the Littlemore Local History Society.

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