

Archaeology in Oxford

Oxford City report to the Oxford City and County Archaeological Forum

National Planning Policy Framework related field work between October 2024 and February 2025

Gibbs Crescent

The targeted excavation of parts of the southern precinct of Osney Abbey by Oxford Archaeology at Gibbs Crescent was concluded in October. A striking find towards the end of the project was a gold ring with opposing serpent heads, retrieved from the muddy fill of one of the stone-lined water channels belonging to the abbey.



Above: A gold medieval ring, found in an abbey drain. It displays open-mouthed beasts from the shoulders of the finger ring, like hooded snakes, separated from the hoop by small double-studded collars (Images courtesy of Oxford Archaeology).

Oriel College Kitchen

Between October and December Oxford Archaeology undertook further small-scale excavation work prior to the construction of a new kitchen at Oriel College (on the Magpie Lane frontage). A trench within the 17th century east range of Main Quad revealed floor layers likely belonging to the previous medieval college range.

The archaeological work at this site has produced major new information on the development of the late Saxon town, however the use of screw piles on the development raised a number of logistical and technical problems. The City Council Archaeologist has briefed the ALGAO Southeast committee, ALGAO Urban Committee and the Historic England Regional Science Advisory group on the drawbacks of this technique in historic urban locations.

Hertford College Library

Between October and February intermittent excavation work has been undertaken by Oxford Archaeology at Hertford College prior to the building of a new basement to house parts of the college library and archive. So far the excavation has revealed walls and ditches likely defining medieval tenements that fronted onto Catte Street and a well-preserved medieval stone-lined drain belonging to one of these tenements. A significant number of book clasps have also been recovered from this area.

A number of the tenements along Catte Street and Schools Street are known to have been occupied by trades linked to the of the University (bookbinders, parchment makers, copyists etc.) in the medieval period, thus creating a zone or north-south 'spine' of artisan trades that were distinct from the sellers and producers lined along the principal market streets (Cornmarket, High Street). The excavation is ongoing.



Above: A medieval drain belonging to a tenement fronting onto Catte Street.

Trinity College Ground Source Heat Pumps

Between October and January Thames Valley Archaeological Services undertook an excavation in the north-east garden of Trinity College prior to the installation of a ground source heat pumps. The bulk of the archaeology investigated comprised of post-medieval gravel and waste pits containing pottery, tile and clay pipe relating to college activity in the 17th and 18th centuries, with limited number of features related to the early 18th formal Dutch garden which seems to have been heavily truncated by later pitting in this area.

When the trenching reached the area closest to Parks Road a well-preserved zone of medieval features was encountered adjacent to the road, likely related to 12th-14th century tenement activity. This settlement appears to form a continuation of the 'artisan spine' along Catte Street mentioned above, that is to say a zone a tenements partially populated by specialist trades serving the needs of the University. The zone adjacent to the road Trinity College forms a remarkable area of preservation that seems to have escaped intensive excavation for gravel and waste pits seen to the west. TVAS have put a short summary of the results on the [TVAS website](#).



Above: Finds from Trinity College garden: From top right: A medieval book clasp, medieval green glazed pottery from Brill in Buckinghamshire, a medieval ring and decorative belt buckle (Images courtesy of TVAS).

Bartlemas Farm House, Cowley Road

In November John Moore Heritage Services completed an intermittent watching brief during groundworks for a new house within the garden of Bartlemas Farmhouse. No significant archaeology was observed. The work was required because the site is located within the grounds of the medieval St Bartholomew's Leper Hospital.

The Ellison Institute of Technology campus

Between December and January an intermittent watching brief has been maintained by John Moore Heritage Services during the excavation of a large new basement east of Littlemore House (to the rear of the former Littlemore Asylum site). The work has been requested because of the potential for Roman remains in this vicinity, however no significant archaeology has been recorded to date.

St John's College Accommodation Block, Pusey Lane

Between November and February Oxford Archaeology have been undertaking an excavation at Pusey Lane prior to the construction of a new accommodation block for St John's College. The excavation has recorded a neatly cut circular pit, likely a tree planting pit associated with the former minor Royal Palace that occupied this site in the 12th-13th century, known as the Kings Houses or Beaumont Palace. The dig has also recorded three features that have the character of prehistoric monuments, including a substantial linear ditch with an irregular scalloped base and a large east-west ditch that has produced medieval pottery from its upper fill. These have been subject to OSL sampling and subject to additional shored excavation which on-going.

Another significant discovery is a possible cellar or quarry pit (reused as a waste pit) that has produced a rich assemblage of pottery and tile. Finds include a near complete Brill jug and multiple fragments of moulded stone. The richness and quality of the finds is unusual and the feature may yet reveal more information about the architectural detail of the either the Royal Palace or the later Carmelite Friary buildings that took over the site in the 14th century.



Above top left: OA site supervisor Emma Winter holds a medieval jug from the 'cellar' like feature. Dr Jean-Luc Schwenninger from the University of Oxford taking Optically Stimulated Luminescence dating samples from a possible prehistoric feature at Pusey Lane. Above right: Bottom left: A medieval decorated floor tile.

Wolfson College New Building

In January and evaluation was undertaken at Wolfson College by Wessex Archaeology prior to the construction of a new building. A small number of undated and likely post-medieval or modern features were noted. The work was undertaken because of the potential for prehistoric activity in this area. The report is forthcoming.

Nos 14 and 15 High Street

Between January and February a further sequence of test pits have been excavated in the basement of Nos 13-15 High Street by Oxford Archaeology prior to a major rebuilding project by All Souls College. The pits have uncovered a sequence of Late Saxon features similar to those recorded at No12 last year, but also a number of metaled surfaces that may relate to early lanes or yards.

BMW Min Plant Logistics Centre and Body Shop

Between January and February a watching brief was undertaken by Oxford Archaeology during groundworks related to extensions to Logistics Centre and Body Shop at the BMW Mini Plant, Cowley. No significant features have been reported to date. The recording was requested because of the proximity of the Alchester-Dorchester Roman Road and related activity.

Nos 76-78 Banbury Road

In February a watching brief by John Moore Heritage Services was commenced during building work at 76 Banbury Road. The work was required because of the potential for prehistoric and Roman archaeology in this area. No significant finds have been reported to date.

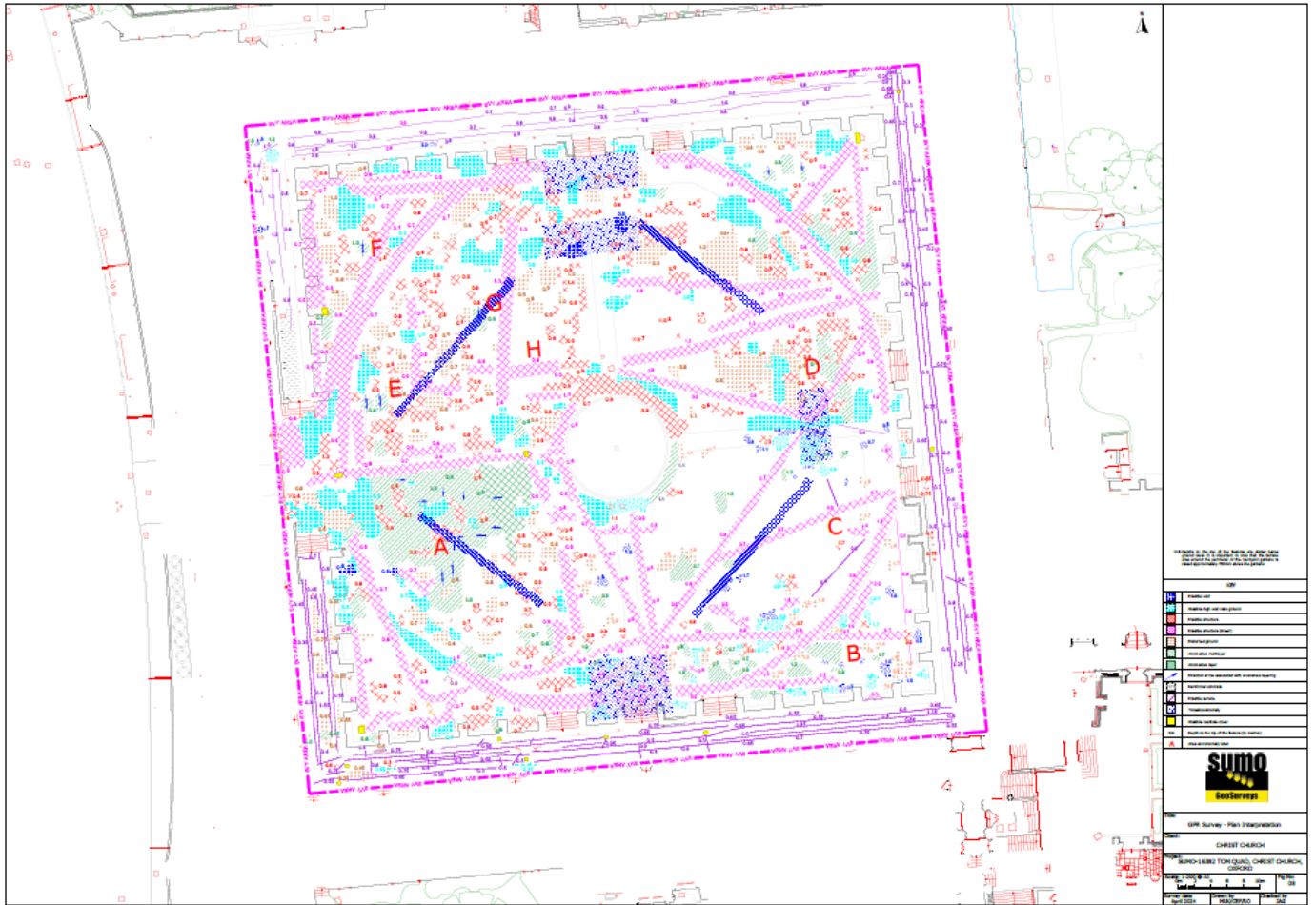
Former Conservative Club Site, Between Towns Road, Cowley

In February Southampton Archaeology undertook further work at the development site on the former Conservative Club footprint at Between Towns Road. The site has produced significant quantities of Roman pottery and features related to a pottery manufacturing compound, the focus of which is located just offsite to the west. The report is forthcoming.

Previous work not reported

Christ Church Radar Surveys

Two radar surveys were undertaken at Christ Church by Sumo Geo-surveys in May and June 2024 covering the area of the Cathedral and Tom Quad. The surveys were undertaken to inform ongoing management of these sites. The Cathedral survey identified several likely foundations, vaults, and burials. The Tom Quad picked up a number of features, including the likely route of St Frideswide's Lane, possible burials and earlier pathways belonging to the 16th century Quadrangle. Notably the survey of Tom Quad does not identify any continuation of a large primary burh ditch speculatively suggested by David Sturdy following his investigations of the Latin Chapel of the Cathedral in 1962-3.



Above: The SUMO radar survey report on Tom Quad (© Courtesy of SUMO GeoSurveys and Christ Church)

Other news

Heritage Information Access Simplified- Transfer of National Record of the Historic Environment data onto the Oxford Historic Environment Record.

This two-year project funded by Historic England has now been completed. In total 1873 records have been completely accessioned (mostly duplicate records). The project resulted in 169 new monument records and 89 new event records. Many on the new monuments relate to an attempt by the NRHE to categorise National Mapping Programme parch marks and many of the new events relate to Desk-Based Assessment not previously considered worthy of inclusion.

Annual Archaeological Monitoring Statement 2023

The 2023 Annual Archaeological Monitoring Statement for Archaeological Assets is now online on the [City Council website](#).

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