

# **OXFORD ARCHAEOLOGICAL RESEARCH AGENDAS 2011**

## **6) NORMAN (1066-1205)**

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## **6. Norman Research Agenda**

*This document sets out an archaeological research agenda for Oxford covering the Norman period (for the purposes of this document 1066-1205 AD). The document should be read in conjunction with the period resource assessment for the City (Oxford City Council forthcoming) and the Thames Solent Regional Research Agenda (2010).*

### **6.1 Overview**

Oxford has exceptional potential for the study of urban development during the Norman period, including the evolution of cellar pit construction from Late Saxon forms, tenement plot evolution, the development of stone houses and other architectural forms. Oxford is notable for the patterns of investment and patronage both in the urban area in the form of the nationally important Grandpont Causeway and Castle, but also for the Royal Palace at Beaumont Street, the collegiate Chapel of St George and early religious institutions. The Local Authority Area (LAA) also presents opportunities to further study the relationship between the town and its hinterland, especially patterns of hinterland investment in the form of hospitals, churches and other institutions. There is considerable scope for further waterlogged material from the Castle ditch, and also from floodplain channels and crossings, to contribute to our understanding of material culture and diet during this period.

### **6.2 Zones of potential**

The LAA has been divided into five broad landscape zones based on surface geology and relief (please note the geological areas have been simplified and are not intended to be used as a guide to local geology):

**A** The North Oxford Terrace (Summertown-Radley and Wolvercote Gravel Terrace)

**B** The Thames floodplain and gravel islands

**C** The Cherwell floodplain (with pockets of gravel)

**D** The alluviated stream valleys of the Corallian Ridge

**E** The Corallian Ridge

Some research questions provide an assessment of potential for the zones listed above; these are referred to in terms of high potential (e.g. the zone has already demonstrated its ability to contribute to this agenda) or general potential based on comparison with similar landscapes. (In addition, a simplified zone potential map for the city is included. The city has been divided into several broad zones:

The Norman town (Areas E; F; G; H; I; J)

The town defences and Castle (Areas A; B; C)

The suburbs (Areas K; L; M; N; O; R)

Religious precincts (Areas D; Q)

Reclamation activity (Areas O; P)

### **6.3 Chronology**

In the past chronology was established on the basis of pottery identification. Increasingly the use of stratigraphic sequences and scientific dating techniques has enabled more exact and refined chronologies to be prepared.

1. Scientific dating of well stratified sequences, at an intensity sufficient to provide secure insights into phasing, is a high priority at sites where pottery sequences cannot be expected to provide the same level of resolution and confidence. The

Thames Crossing at St Aldates and the Castle ditch are likely to have further high potential in this regard.

2. Can detailed research into the pottery assemblage of the Oxford region help us to understand the interaction between Castle, town, gown, village and monastery in the Norman to medieval period (Mellor 1994)?
3. Regarding the use of Saxo-Norman fabrics, there may be opportunities to enhance Mellor's type series as new stratified assemblages are recovered. This may involve the consideration of whole assemblages, not just the pottery, and utilisation of scientific dating techniques. For example the dating of OXAC has recently been refined using stratigraphical relationships at the Castle. Further work is required to refine distribution maps of fabric types.

#### **6.4 Settlement and activity**

This section focuses on questions relating to evidence of human activity in the area, how features are investigated and interpreted.

1. The evidence currently points to economic expansion during this period, with new streets being laid out and suburban growth (at least by the end of the period). To what extent can the intra- and extra-mural growth be further characterised and understood?
  - *City Zone potential: The Norman town High, The suburbs High, Religious precincts High, Reclamation activity High*
2. How did village cores, field patterns and woodland management evolve during this period? To what extent did patterns of investment and development in the hinterland reflect changes in the town? Evidence from Seacourt suggests that the open fields may have grown to their fullest extent during this period. Is this pattern replicated elsewhere?
  - *Zone potential: A General; B High; C General; D General; E High*
3. What was the character and extent of settlement along Worcester Street, Banbury Road and Woodstock Road at this time? E.g. dispersed farmsteads or small short lived hamlets?
  - *Zone potential: A High*
4. There is limited evidence for settlement activity outside later historic cores (e.g. at Littlemore). Are these isolated farmsteads? What is the relationship between these sites and the development of nucleated settlement?
  - *Zone potential: A High; B General; C General; D General; E High*
5. The character and extent of the Templar Preceptory at Temple Cowley and its relationship with the development of the village is of interest.
  - *Zone potential: E High*
6. Is there any evidence for a manor on Osney Island pre-dating the foundation of Osney Abbey? The character and extent of early manorial holdings and their subsequent development is of particular interest in relation to understanding suburban and hinterland development.
  - *Zone potential: B Medium*
7. To what extent did the Conquest affect the town form in terms of tenement divisions, street layout and density of settlement?
  - *City Zone potential: The Norman town High, The suburbs High, Religious precincts General, Reclamation activity High*

8. Why were so many properties in Oxford recorded as waste in Domesday considering the town was not obviously affected by warfare? Can the patterning of occupation and waste in different quarters of the town and along the principal and side streets be further identified? Can we link houses to specific manors?
  - *City Zone potential: The Norman town High; The town defences and Castle General; Suburbs General; Religious precincts High; Reclamation activity General*
9. Can the impact of major Norman building schemes (e.g. the Castle and the Grandpont Causeway) on the economy and development of the town be further studied?
  - *City Zone potential: The Norman town High; The town defences and Castle High (C); Suburbs High (O); Religious precincts General; Reclamation activity General*
10. Can further evidence for the evolution of Late Saxon cellar forms and their replacement with vaulted undercrofts be identified?
  - *City Zone potential: The Norman town High*
11. The spread of stone houses in the late 12<sup>th</sup> century suggests a period of economic prosperity. What can the distribution of stone houses and cellars tell us about commercial and domestic activity in the centre of the town? Can we establish how interior spaces were utilised?
  - *City Zone potential: The Norman town High*
12. Can we further understand how intra-mural space was utilised; how extensive was gardening and areas of waste?
  - *City Zone potential: The Norman Town High*
13. The Kings Houses (Royal Beaumont Palace) site is of great historic and archaeological interest. Further documentary work and assessment of pictographic evidence may be fruitful.
  - *City Zone potential: Suburbs High*
14. What evidence is there for settlement and activity during the period of Jewish occupation on St Aldates? Can comparisons between material culture from this area and from elsewhere in the town give an indication of distinctive diet or cultural practices? Can distinct 'stone houses' related to this community be identified?
  - *City Zone potential: The Norman town High (F)*
15. What was the character and extent of the 'Garden of the Jews' or Jewish Burial Ground; can related structures, paddocks or burials be identified?
  - *City Zone potential: The Norman town General; Suburbs High (K)*
16. Can other ethnic or cultural affinities be identified in the archaeological record – i.e. Danish settlement in St Clement's, Cornish and Breton mercenaries perhaps associated with the dedication St Budoc's at the Castle?
  - *City Zone potential: Suburbs High; Religious precincts General; Reclamation activity General*
17. What was the pace and character of suburban development around the walls during the Norman period?
  - *City Zone potential: Suburbs High; Religious precincts High; Reclamation activity High*

18. How did the process of land reclamation south and west of the burh develop in the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> centuries?
  - *City Zone potential: Suburbs High; Religious precincts High (Q); Reclamation activity High*
19. Can the examination of structures and material culture provide further insights into the character of the apparent 12<sup>th</sup> century revival of the town?
  - *City Zone potential: The Norman town High; The town defences and Castle High; Suburbs High; Religious precincts General; Reclamation activity General*
20. At what point was St Thomas' Street established, what was the character of activity in the area preceding this?
  - *City Zone potential: Suburbs High (N)*

### **6.5 Craft and trades**

1. The location and study of workshop spaces has great potential to enhance our understanding of craft industries, the social relations of production, social practices and production techniques.
  - *City Zone potential: The Norman town High; The town defences and Castle General; Suburbs General; Religious precincts General; Reclamation activity High*
2. What can further investigation of charcoal deposits tell us about how fuel was sourced for the town? Can further field survey and investigation shed light on woodland management practices in the hinterland?
  - *Zone potential: A High; B General; C General; D General; E High*
3. Is there evidence for the early supply of building stone to the city from local sources?
  - *City Zone potential: The Norman town General; The town defences and Castle General Suburbs General; Religious precincts General; Reclamation activity General*
4. Can continuity of Late Saxon manufacturing and commercial patterns be demonstrated? How did these change in character. Can areas of specialised production or commerce be identified?
  - *City Zone potential: The Norman town High; The town defences and Castle General; Suburbs High; Religious precincts General; Reclamation activity High*
5. The potential of cess pits, Thames channels and the Castle precinct to preserve further evidence for leatherworking, woodworking and cordwainery should be highlighted.
  - *City Zone potential: The Norman town High; The town defences and Castle High; Suburbs High; Religious precincts General; Reclamation activity High*

### **6.6 The development of teaching**

1. Can archaeological investigation provide any insights into the early development of academic schools or halls? Can distinctive assemblages be identified and associated with educational communities (e.g. styli, lamps, marked pottery, patterns of food and drink consumption from environmental remains and pottery vessel types)?

- *City Zone potential: The Norman town High; Suburbs General; Religious precincts General; Reclamation activity General*
2. The development of Oxford as a clerical centre from the late 12<sup>th</sup> century is of great interest. The 12<sup>th</sup> century religious precincts may preserve evidence for teaching either in the form of material culture or in structural forms.
    - *City Zone potential: Religious precincts High*

### **6.7 Ceremony and religion**

1. Cemeteries are playing an increasingly important role in identifying population movement, health, and ethnicity; scientific investigation of skeletal material, in particular dating, stable isotope and DNA investigation should be prioritised for previously excavated and new skeletal material. The status and health of children, adolescents and women within such populations is of particular interest.
  - *Zone potential: A High; B General; C General; D General; E High*
2. What was the impact of the Conquest on church architecture? (See Munby 2008.) Can further detailed building surveys and fabric investigations provide more information about the surviving resource?
  - *Zone potential: A High; B General; C General; D General; E High*
3. What was the scale and character of investment into founding and enhancing parochial churches?
  - *Zone potential: A High; B General; C General; D General; E High*
4. What was the character and extent of the St Frideswide's precinct prior to and post is re-foundation?
  - *City Zone potential: The Norman town High; The town defences and Castle General; Suburbs General; Religious precincts High; Peripheral activity General*
5. The character and extent of the early religious precincts are of considerable interest.
  - *City Zone potential: Religious activity High*

### **6.8 Hospitals**

1. The character and extent of the early hospitals are of considerable interest. St Bartlemas has notable potential because the site remains relatively undisturbed.
2. Can further evidence for controlled water supplies to the hospitals be identified?
3. Can any distinctive patterns of consumption, diet and lifestyle be identified from hospital assemblages? How were hospitals organised; what quality of life was provided; how did the composition and status of inmates change over time?
4. What can hospital burial grounds tell us about diet, health and medical practice, social status and the role of children, adolescents and women in society in particular?
  - *Zone potential: A General; B General; C High; D General; E High*

### **6.9 Material Culture**

1. How did patterns in material culture change after the Conquest, in what way was Norman culture influential? Can the impact of Norman production or decoration techniques be identified and studied?
  - *Zone potential: A High; B General; C General; D General; E High*

2. To what extent is economic prosperity reflected in changing patterns of pottery use, the increase in the volume of pottery in assemblages and the development of a 'display culture' for pottery in addition to utilitarian considerations? Can this process be further mapped between different intra-mural, suburban and hinterland areas?
  - *Zone potential: A High; B General; C General; D General; E High*
3. How is the late 11<sup>th</sup> century and 12<sup>th</sup> century growth of the town manifested in changes to domestic assemblages? Can further LAA assemblages be identified relating to royal holdings, ecclesiastical sites, high and low status intra-mural domestic sites, specialised manufacturing and commercial sites, or low status extra-mural occupation?
  - *City Zone potential: The Norman town High; The town defences and Castle General; Suburbs High; Religious precincts High; Reclamation activity General*

#### **6.10 Diet and nutrition**

- 1 What can bone assemblages and environmental samples tell us about the urban economy, diets and nutrition during this period (including evidence for social status and variations in cultural practice)? The status and health of children, adolescents and women within the population is of particular interest.

#### **6.11 Transport and Communications**

1. What was the character and extent of settlement along the route of the Grandpont causeway? (e.g. Eastwyke Manor, Whitehouse Farm)?
  - *Zone potential: B High*
2. Was the Old Abingdon Road a continuous causeway or a series of stone bridges between islands?
  - *Zone potential: B High*
3. What was the scale of investment into the Grandpont and its continuation along the Old Abingdon Road? Further work is required to establish the phasing and extent of the causeway.
  - *City Zone potential: Suburbs High*
4. What is the extent and significance of stylistically 'Late Saxon' architectural features within the causeway (e.g. The Mitre headed arch)?
  - *City Zone potential: Suburbs High*
5. What enhancements to watercourses were undertaken during this period?
  - *City Zone potential: The Norman town General; The town defences and Castle High; Suburbs High; Religious precincts High; Reclamation activity High*
6. Can the character and extent of Norman town planning be established? What happened to the street grid close to the Castle precinct?
  - *City Zone potential: The Norman town High; The town defences and Castle High; Suburbs High; Religious precincts General; Reclamation activity General*
7. Can evidence for trade or wharf infrastructure be identified in the area of the 'hythe' at Hythe Bridge?

8. How was the water transport system and mill infrastructure amended during this period? Can the presence of a channel linking the Castle moat and the Trill Mill stream be confirmed? Can the presence of a retaining bank along the Castle Mill Stream (The Wareham Bank) and potentially the Trill Mill Stream, be confirmed?

### 6.11 Military and defences

1. The character and extent of the early Norman Castle precinct and its impact on the west end of the burh require further investigation. How did the Castle precinct develop?
  - *City Zone potential: The Norman town High; The town defences and Castle High; Suburbs General; Religious precincts General; Reclamation activity General*
2. Can the extension of the walls around St Michael in the Northgate be more closely dated? Are there further 12<sup>th</sup> century phases of wall enhancement to be identified along the circuit or was work confined to the extension? Is the Ship Street cellar arch from this phase?
  - *City Zone potential: The Norman town General; The town defences and Castle High; Suburbs General; Religious precincts High; Reclamation activity General*
3. Can further evidence for siege works be identified in the vicinity of the Castle? (E.g. on the site of Nuffield College and the former 'Jews Mount'.)
  - *City Zone potential: The Norman town High; The town defences and Castle High; Suburbs General;*

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**For full acknowledgements please see the online Oxford Archaeological Plan Introduction document.**

### Bibliography

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*Thames Solent Regional Research Agenda 2010. Available at [http://oxfordarch.co.uk/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=564](http://oxfordarch.co.uk/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=564) (accessed 24/10/11)*



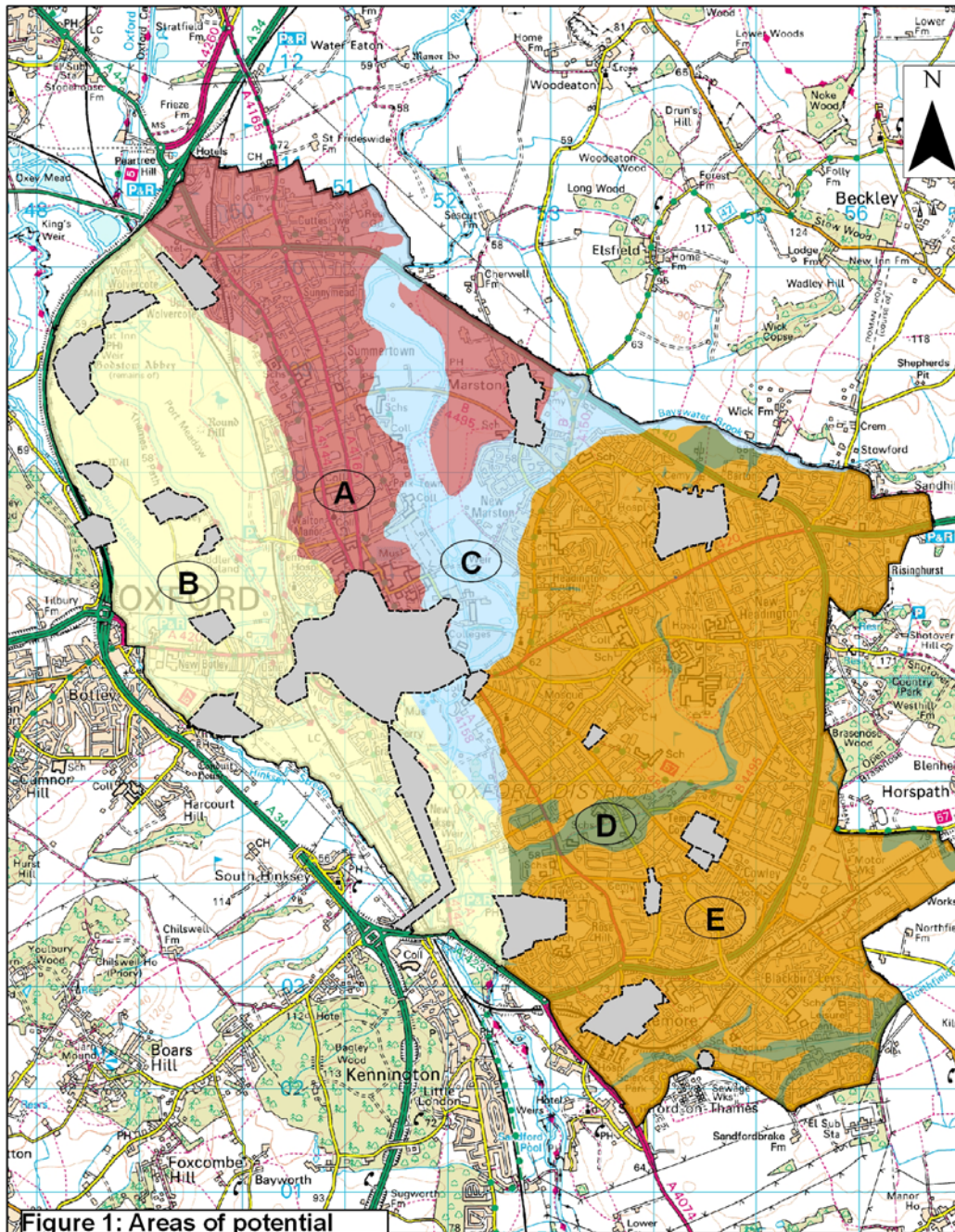


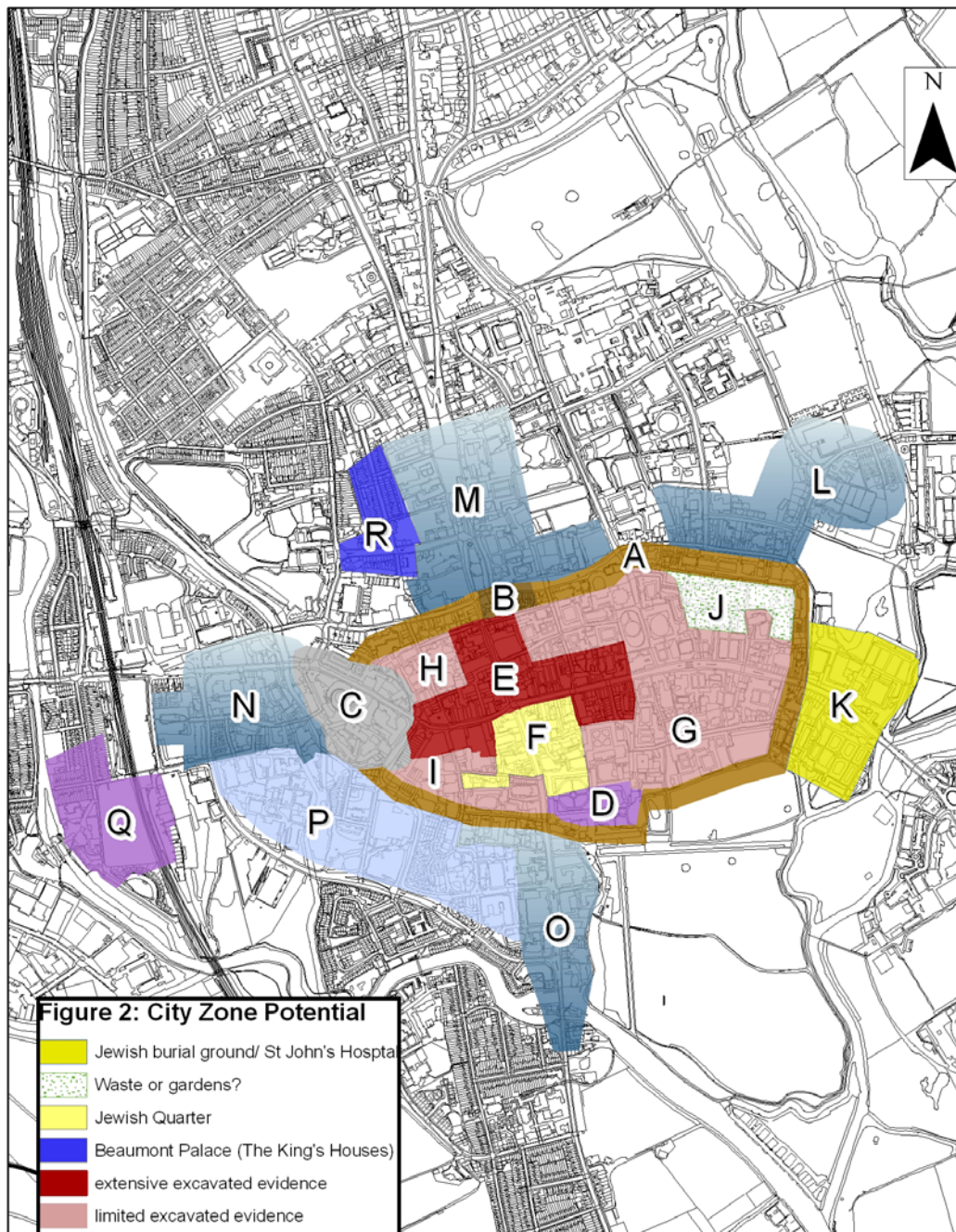
Figure 1: Areas of potential

- A 2nd-3rd Gravel Terraces
- B Thames Floodplain and gravel islands
- C Cherwell Floodplain
- D Stream Valleys
- E Corallian Ridge
- Medieval Areas of known interest

Scale: 1:47,577

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