

OXFORD ARCHAEOLOGICAL RESEARCH AGENDAS 2011

7) MEDIEVAL (1205-1540)

Version: 28/1/2012

7. Medieval Research Agenda

This document sets out an archaeological research agenda for Oxford covering the medieval period (for the purposes of this document 1205-1540 AD). The document should be read in conjunction with the Norman period resource assessment for the City and the Thames Solent Regional Research Agenda (2010).

7.1 Overview

Oxford was a medieval town of national importance with particular significance for its role in the development of collegiate and university life in England. It is also exceptional in terms of the extent of its medieval documentation and the level of synthesis undertaken on this material. The archaeology of medieval Oxford has exceptional potential to provide further insights into patterns of urban change and the evolving relationship, and disparities of wealth and lifestyle, between 'town and gown', between college institutions and religious institutions. The city and its hinterland offer exceptional opportunities to further understand changing patterns of river management and communications along the Upper Thames; also developments in domestic, commercial and military activity and changing patterns of cultural identity, status and consumption. There is good potential for further well-preserved organic remains to survive in association with the Thames Crossing, floodplain channels and the Castle ditch.

7.2 Zones of potential

The Local Authority Area (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
- 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 ([Figure](#)). The city has been divided into several broad zones:

The medieval town (Areas C; D;)

The 13th-15th century colleges and open spaces (E; F; G; H)

The town defences and Castle (Areas A; B)

The suburbs (Areas O; P; Q; R; S; T)

Religious precincts (Areas I; J; K; L; M; N)

Bridges and causeways (Areas U; V)

7.3 Chronology

1. Whilst the basic pattern of pottery use and principal sources of supply have been established, further work can be targeted on specialist assemblages and the identification of unusual imports; also the pace and character of changing fashions.
2. Further use of dendro-chronology and archaeo-magnetic dating may be desirable to help refine site chronologies.

7.4 Landscape and land-use

1. Can earthwork survey and targeted excavation tell us more about the role of Shotover Forest in the medieval period: its boundaries, topography and service buildings?
 - *Zone potential: A General; B General; C General; D General; E High*
2. Can the investigation of field banks and hollow way banks tell us anything about the evolution of the rural hinterland?
 - *Zone potential: A General; B General; C General; D General; E High*
3. The phasing and extent of open fields across the LAA, their expansion and contraction over time and patterns of piecemeal early enclosure are of considerable interest.
 - *Zone potential: A High; B High; C General; D General; E High*
4. The character and extent of water management along the Thames and Cherwell rivers and related meadows is of considerable interest.
 - *Zone potential: B High; C High*
5. What was impact of the medieval mills and mill leats along the Thames and Cherwell channels? To what extent did this infrastructure alter the hydrology in the medieval period?
 - *Zone potential: B High; C High*
6. How and where were the rivers utilised for other purposes such weirs, fishponds, dumping waste etc.?
 - *Zone potential: B High; C High*
7. What is the evidence for navigation, trade and the movement of goods along the Thames channels? Can landing areas be identified archaeologically?
 - *Zone potential: B High; C General*

7.5 Settlement and activity

1. The archaeology of medieval Oxford has exceptional potential to clarify apparent patterns of economic expansion of the town in the 12th-early 13th century and the subsequent contraction and decline in the later 13th-15th centuries. To what extent can this pattern be refined with relation to geographical areas, trades and specific communities and institutions? Can the assumed drivers of wealth creation in the wool and cloth trades be archaeologically identified? Can the subsequent apparent shift to service industries supplying the collegiate market be likewise identified? Are these proposed patterns of change reflected in the hinterland villages?
 - *Zone potential: A High; B High; C General; D General; E High*

2. 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: Urban Area High; the town defences and Castle High; suburbs High; religious precincts General; reclamation activity High*
3. The development of hinterland villages around Oxford is poorly understood. Less well-developed village cores may provide the best opportunities to study patterns of expansion and contraction and obtain representative rural assemblages.
 - *Zone potential: A High; B High; C General; D General; E High*
4. What was the pattern and character of dispersed farms or crofts around Oxford (e.g. along the Grandpont, along the Banbury and Woodstock Roads and on the Corallian Ridge)?
 - *Zone potential: A High; B High; C General; D General; E High*
5. Can we identify evidence for 'squatter dwellings' by commons and wastes, particularly in the Headington Quarry area (Munby 2008)?
 - *Zone potential: A High; B General; C General; D General; E High*
6. Can the character and extent of the Templar Preceptory at Temple Cowley be further identified?
7. Within the urban and suburban area can further urban patterns of tenement subdivision or alteration be identified?
 - *City zone potential: the medieval town High; the town defences and Castle General; the colleges High; suburbs High; religious precincts General; bridges & causeways General*
8. Can we identify structural evidence or culture material that can be associated with the Jewish community? What was the character and extent of the Jewish cemetery?
 - *City Zone potential: the medieval town High; the town defences and Castle General; the colleges General; suburbs High; religious precincts General; bridges & causeways General*
9. The Hospitals of St John and St Bartlemas are of great interest for studying the development of such institutions and their relationship with urban populations.

7.6 The built environment

1. Can the end of the hall house in mid-16th century be tracked in the archaeological record and can we define more closely the period during which open halls were floored over? What was the chronology of the end of open halls and start of continuous jetties? Noting that continuous jetties appear in other towns and village contexts as unheated buildings or with rear-wall stacks, so there is not a simple transition between these two types.
 - *City Zone potential: The medieval town High; The town defences and Castle General; The colleges General; suburbs High; religious precincts General*
2. Can we further record patterns of changing building techniques in timber, stone and brick; chronology and distribution of different materials (Roof tiles, floor tiles, earliest use of brick)? What can the quality of building materials (e.g. cobb, wattle

and daub, stone), framing/roof types etc tell us about class/status in medieval Oxford (Munby 2008)?

- *City Zone potential: the medieval town High; the town defences and Castle General; the colleges General; suburbs High; religious precincts General; bridges & causeways General*
3. Can we further record patterns of cruck and box frames; chronology and distribution of framing types?
 - *City Zone potential: the medieval town High; the town defences and Castle General; the colleges General; suburbs High; religious precincts General*
 4. Can we further establish the chronology and distribution of roof types; change from crown post to queen post? Can examples of the crown strut as a possible intermediate type between the crown-post and the queen-post be identified in Oxford (noting the presence of this type in the 1430s in Ewelme and Henley).
 - *City Zone potential: the medieval town High; the town defences and Castle General; the colleges General; suburbs High; religious precincts General*
 5. Can we further establish the character and ranking of town houses (Munby 2008)? What can patterns of rebuilding and growth tell us about patterns of changing wealth, agricultural change, new requirements, comfort, privacy etc (Munby 2008)?
 - *Zone potential: A High; B High; C General; D General; E High*
 6. Can we further establish the origins and development of urban housing types (plan, gables and ridges in relation to roads)?
 - *City Zone potential: the medieval town High; the town defences and Castle General; the colleges General; suburbs High; religious precincts General; bridges & causeways General*
 7. How did kitchen spaces evolve? Did every dwelling have a hearth? Was cooking usually done in the house, and if not when did it move to detached buildings on the plot, and then when did it move back into the main dwelling? Were local cookshops prevalent in Oxford?
 - *City Zone potential: the medieval town High; the town defences and Castle General; the colleges General; suburbs High; religious precincts General; bridges & causeways General*
 8. Can we relate the dating of buildings as guide to chronology of change (e.g. recovery from Black Death)?
 - *City Zone potential: the medieval town High; The town defences and Castle High; the colleges High; suburbs High ; religious precincts General; bridges & causeways General*

7.7 Religious institutions

1. The plan-form of a number of friaries and abbeys have been archaeologically investigated; can we learn more about the daily life within religious institutions – the diet and health, daily routine?
 - *City zone potential: religious precincts High*
2. There were several failed friaries in Oxford; can these be identified in the archaeological record?

- *City zone potential: the medieval town General; the town defences and Castle General; the colleges General; suburbs General; religious precincts High; bridges & causeways General*
3. There is good potential for the sites of religious houses located on reclaimed land in the floodplain to preserve environmental evidence for diet, land-use and water and fish management.
 - *City zone potential: suburbs High; religious precincts High*
 4. Do the early ecclesiastical sites preserve any material culture or structural elements that can be associated with the development of learning (styli, book clasps, lamps, libraries etc)? Such features and objects would be of particular interest.
 - *City Zone potential: suburbs General; religious precincts High*
 5. Can the material culture and architecture of the friaries and abbeys tell us more about the relative wealth and functions of rival orders?
 - *City zone potential: suburbs General; religious precincts High*

7.8 Military and defence

1. Are the suggested moats at Eastwyke, Old Marston and Binsey defensive or water management features?
 - *zone potential: B High; E General*
2. How was the town wall managed in terms of intra- and extra-mural space, repairs and posterns? When was the Saxon rampart slighted and removed?
 - *City zone potential: the medieval town General; the town defences and Castle High; the colleges General; suburbs General; religious precincts High; bridges & causeways General*
3. Can we further identify patterns of rebuilding and repair in the extant and buried fabric of the medieval town wall and its bastions?
 - *City Zone potential: the town defences and Castle High; the colleges General; suburbs General; religious precincts General; bridges & causeways General*
4. The concentric defence was an innovative form of military architecture invented on the continent and is its use in Oxford is exceptional in an English urban context. Why was a second defensive wall added in the northeastern part of the walled circuit in the later 13th century?
 - *City Zone potential: The medieval town General; The town defences and Castle High; The colleges General.*
5. There is a pressing need for a comprehensive drawn survey of the extant walls and synthesis of the available information.
 - *City Zone potential: the town defences and Castle High; the colleges General*
6. Can the line of the medieval city ditch be confirmed south of Eastgate? What are the implications if it is not present here?
 - *City Zone potential: the town defences and Castle High; the colleges General; suburbs High*

7.9 Crafts and trades

1. Can the pattern of tile use, typologies and sourcing of tiles be further developed?
2. 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.
3. There is some suggestion that Beech firewood was imported during the medieval period. Can this pattern be further understood? 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 General*
4. Can water management features along the Thames and Cherwell channels be further understood (water meadows, leats, mills, fishponds and fisheries; weirs, bridges, canals and revetted channels). What can these features tell us about the economy of the town?
 - *Zone potential: B High; C High*
5. What evidence is there for the medieval guilds and specific trades in intra- and extra-mural zones?
 - *City Zone potential: the medieval town High; the town defences and Castle General; the colleges General; suburbs High; religious precincts General; bridges & causeways General*
7. The development of commercial activity outside the universities jurisdiction at St Clements is of particular interest. Can this be demonstrated archaeologically?
 - *City Zone potential: suburbs High*
8. Can we further record and map the sources of building stone supply during this period?
 - *Zone potential: A High; B High; C General; D General; E High*
9. Cloth production was a major element in town early economy, but its archaeology is hard to identify whether for dying, fulling (mills) or tenter fields. More should also be discoverable of tanning processes in and around towns (e.g. at Littlegate).
 - *City Zone potential: the medieval town High; the town defences and Castle General; the colleges High; suburbs High; religious precincts General; bridges & causeways General*

7.10 The university and colleges

1. What parallels are there for college structures and material culture in England and the continent? What can other early medieval foundations tell us about developments in Oxford?
2. What evidence is there for the daily lives of the scholars and students? For diet and material culture? Can we further understand the provision of ancillary services to educational establishments for example was cooking for students undertaken in academic halls or elsewhere?
 - *City Zone potential: the medieval town High; the town defences and Castle General; the colleges High; suburbs General; religious precincts High; bridges & causeways General*

3. What can the study of the 13th century postgraduate colleges (Balliol College, Merton College, University College) and 13th century monastic colleges (Durham and Gloucester) tell us about the evolution of the college system? How did early college forms evolve?
 - *City Zone potential: the medieval town High; The town defences and Castle General; the colleges High; suburbs General; religious precincts General; bridges & causeways General*
4. What can structural evidence, artefacts and ecofacts tell us about the lifestyle and function of early colleges and the comparative wealth and status of institutions?
 - *City Zone potential: the medieval town High; the town defences and Castle General; the colleges High; suburbs General; religious precincts General; bridges & causeways General*

7.11 Transport and communications

1. How and where was the street grid amended and repaired during the medieval period?
 - *City Zone potential: the medieval town High; the town defences and Castle High; the colleges High; suburbs High; religious precincts General; bridges & causeways High*
2. Can we reconstruct the western road into the city? Where should we focus archaeological activity to identify this road and help with potential modelling?
 - *City Zone potential: the town defences and Castle General; suburbs High*

7.12 Material culture

1. The updating of the tile type series would be productive.
2. Re-examination of older ceramic assemblages using the county fabric and form series would be of value (Mellor 1994).
3. The updating, upgrading and maintenance of existing metallurgical databases would be valuable.
4. Mapping of environmental and ecofactual evidence; what can distributions of animal bone tell us about medieval domestic and industrial life?
5. What can the patterning of waste disposal tell us about the wealth and specialisms of different urban and suburban areas?
 - *City Zone potential: the medieval town High; the town defences and Castle General; the colleges High; suburbs High; religious precincts High; bridges & causeways General*

Compiled by Ruth Beckley and David Radford

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

Bibliography

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Fig 1: Simplified geology map (areas of gravel island and Amphthill Clay have been amalgamated and are not shown, please see introduction document for a detailed surface geology map).

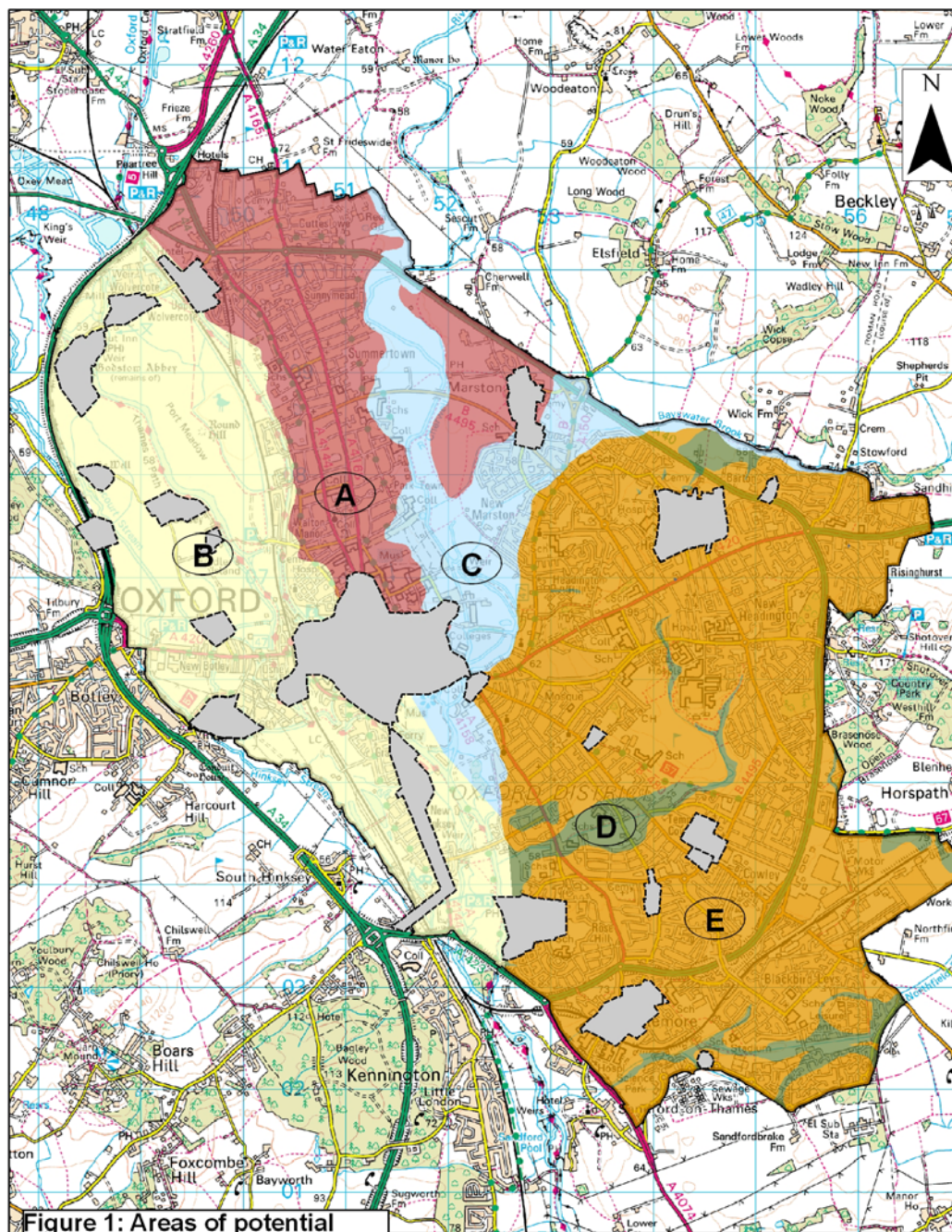


Figure 1: Areas of potential

- 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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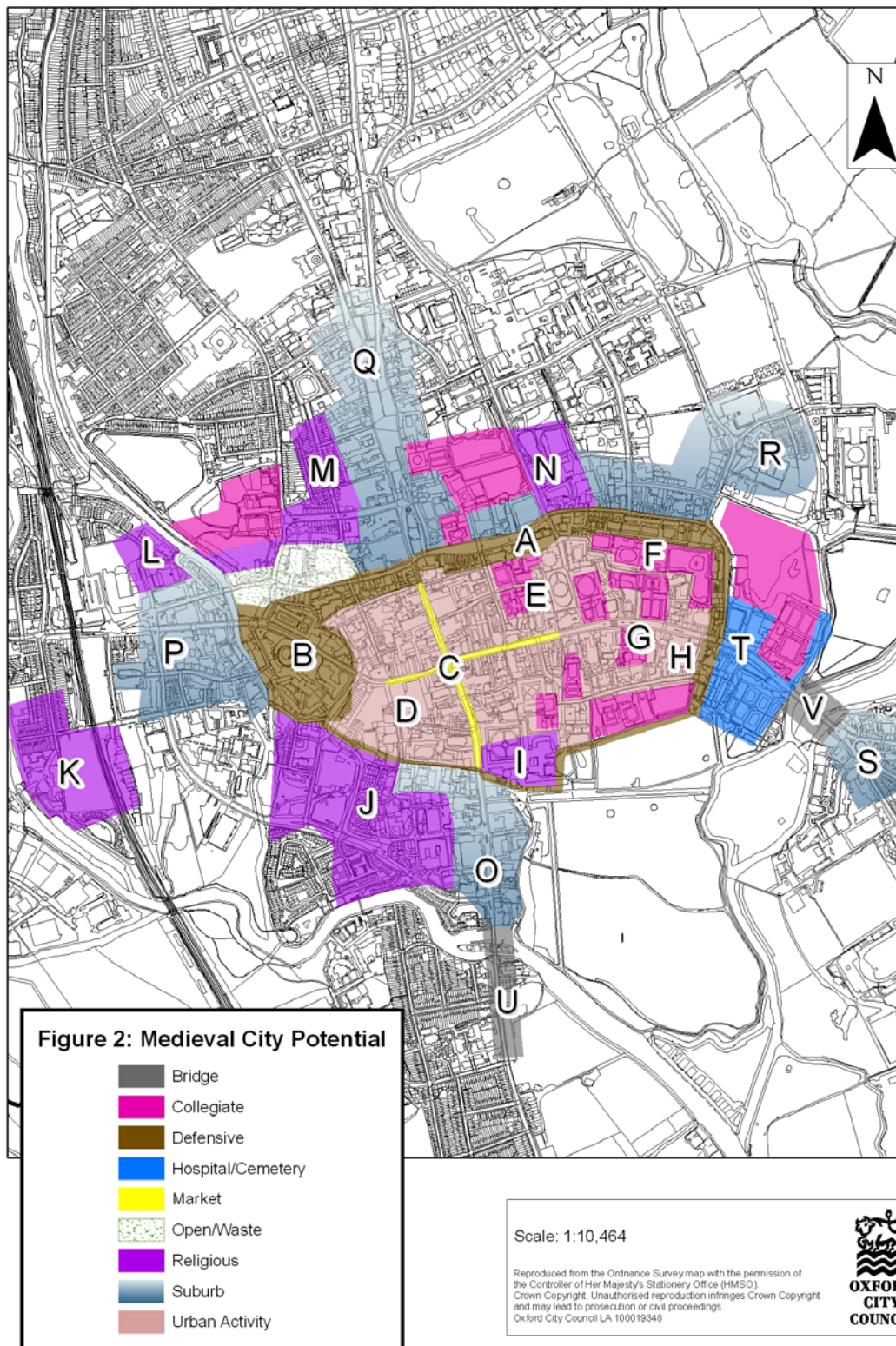


Figure 2: Zones of potential across the medieval town