

**Oxford City and County Archaeological Forum**  
**Oxford City Report January – May 2015**

National Planning Policy Framework related field work in Oxford

*The former Ruskin College site, Exeter College, Walton Street*

Between April 2014 and February 2015 Oxford Archaeology undertook an archaeological watching brief during rebuilding work at the former Ruskin Building on Walton Street. Most of the site had been subject to heavy truncation both from the original construction of the Ruskin College building in 1912 and from subsequent redevelopment of the site in the 1930s, 1960s and 1980s. However, this truncation was less severe in two areas of the site to the rear of the buildings fronting Walton Street and Worcester Place. The watching brief on these two areas revealed a c 4.5m wide roughly east-west aligned ditch which almost certainly corresponds with a section of the 17th century Civil War defences depicted by Bernard de Gomme on his contemporary map of the fortifications around the city.

The lower fills of the ditch were waterlogged and contained organic inclusions which were indicative of fluvial deposition of sediment in the base of the ditch. This may reflect the location of this feature on the edge of the flood plain, and it may have originated as one of a series of drainage channels shown on a number of cartographic sources pre-dating the construction of the defences in the mid-17<sup>th</sup> century. The remaining deposits encountered reflect the use of this site as a timber yard in the 19th century until the construction of Ruskin College in the early 20th century.

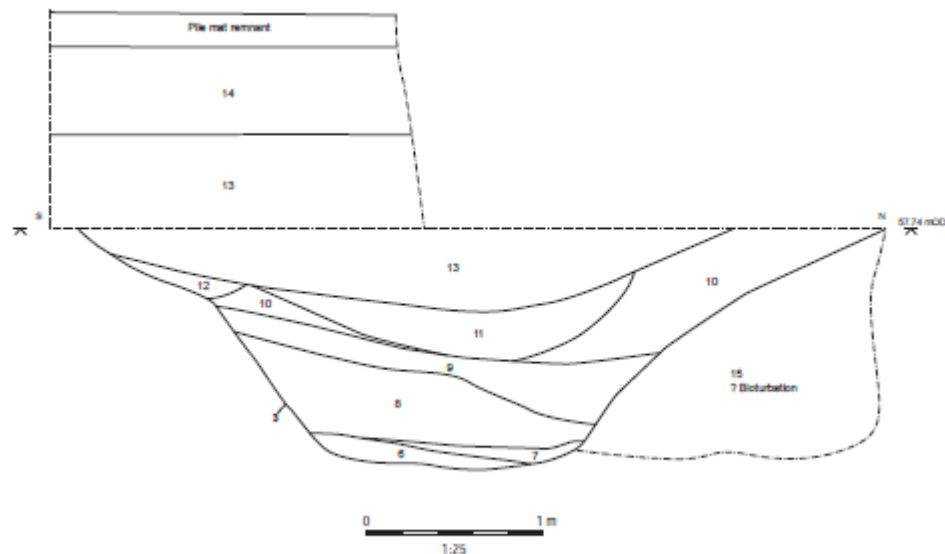


Figure 3: Profile of ditch 3 + overlying deposits

*Above: Section across Civil War ditch at Walton Street (Copyright Oxford Archaeology)*

*The Big Data Institute, Old Campus, Headington*

Between October 2014 and February 2015 Oxford Archaeology carried out an evaluation and watching brief as part of the on-going programme of development at the Oxford University Old Road Campus site, Headington. A 50m evaluation trench was located within the footprint of a new accommodation block and a watching brief was maintained during the construction of new services through the former Park Hospital site. Other than an 18<sup>th</sup> century rubbish pit no significant archaeological features were recorded. The work was requested because of the potential for Roman remains in the vicinity.

*The New Library, Magdalen College*

Between January and April Oxford Archaeology continued their excavation within the New Library at Magdalen College. Further evidence for floors, walls and hearths belonging to medieval properties fronting onto High Street (formerly Bridge Street) were recorded, including a thick walled stone-built industrial building on the corner of Longwall Street that is likely to be a forge. A large east-west ditch and associated features and finds including burnt daub were recorded below the medieval structures and may relate to Late Saxon extra-mural activity along what was probably the main road between the burh to the west and the Cherwell crossing point to the east.

*The Old Cloister, Brasenose College,*

In January a small scale excavation by Oxford Archaeology continued inside The Old Cloister at Brasenose College. Here the internal floor of the 17<sup>th</sup> century Old Cloister was examined prior to the infilling of burial voids within the floor and the refurbishment of the structure. Compacted floor make-up and occasional patches of stone flooring were observed between the grave cuts. Three jetons were recovered from beneath the floors which narrow the likely date range for the structure or structures represented to c1586-1650.

*New Waste Building, University Science Area, South Parks Road*

In January Oxford Archaeology undertook an archaeological watching brief during the ground works associated with the construction of a new University Science Area Waste Store sited adjacent to the Old Observatory and Observation Tower and abutting University Parks. The depth of impact was such that archaeologically significant layers were not exposed. The work was requested because of the close proximity of recorded prehistoric remains.

*No 19 Between Towns Road, Cowley (Cowley Conservative Club)*

In January Oxford Archaeology undertook evaluation trenching to the rear of the Cowley Conservative Club (19 Between Towns Road) in advance of determination of a planning application for redevelopment of the site. The site lies immediately adjacent to one of the known foci of the nationally important Oxford Roman pottery industry, and the presence of possible kilns and other features within the site was suggested by an earlier geophysical survey. Three trenches were excavated, of which only one trench, targeted specifically on key geophysical anomalies, contained a pit of Roman date. The pit had been heavily truncated by modern features. The small pottery assemblage from this feature included a rare white ware flagon face mask.

The contents of the pit were consistent with nearby pottery manufacturing but there was no evidence for kiln structures or related material and the evaluated area may lie towards the margins of the Cowley production site.



*Above: Roman white ware flagon face mask (Photograph by Oxford Archaeology)*

#### *New Waitrose Store site, Botley Road*

In January evaluation trenching was carried out at the site of a proposed Waitrose Store on Botley Road by Wessex Archaeology. No significant archaeological features or deposits were recorded. The evaluation was required because of the potential for prehistoric remains in the vicinity.

#### *The Goodhart Building, High Street, University College*

Between January and February Oxford Archaeology undertook a watching brief during the construction of an extension to the Goodhart Building at University College, High Street. A number of post-medieval and early modern features were recorded included walls and pits associated with the Angel Inn a coaching inn, formerly located on the High Street, which was substantively demolished during the construction of the University Examination Schools in 1876. The report is forthcoming.

#### *The Westgate Redevelopment, Enabling Works*

Between January and February the excavation of four 19<sup>th</sup> century tenement plots was undertaken within the former Westgate surface Car Parks by Oxford Archaeology as part of the Enabling Phase of works for the Westgate Shopping Centre redevelopment. The former Bull Street (New Street) plots both revealed impressive high quality limestone house foundations (below) and an outhouse structure backing onto the Trill Mill Stream with the Friar

Street plots being of lower quality with perhaps different builders responsible for each plot. At Friar Street more evidence for backyard dumping was recovered in the form of shallow pits containing pottery and refuse and a well which also produced a sizable finds assemblage.



*Above: Excavations of the 1820s tenements on Bull Street (Later New Street). (Photograph by Oxford Archaeology).*

The enabling phase of works has also involved a targeted borehole survey of various palaeo-channels and their historic successors that cross the site; plus a targeted watching brief during service construction works. In April the ground reduction for the Trill Mill Stream diversion along Abbey Place exposed a stone lined channel that would have carried water to the reredorter (toilet) of the nearby Franciscan friary (below).



*Left: A stone lined channel at Abbey Place.*



A more comprehensive programme of excavation and outreach is to follow in the summer of 2015 prior to the main phase of development. The first in a series of public talks about the history and archaeology of St Ebbes and Greyfriars will begin on 21<sup>st</sup> May with local historian Malcolm Graham talking about *The Forgotten History of St Ebbes*. The talk will be at 5.30pm at the Key Learning Centre, Oxford Castle.

#### *Ornamental Lake Extension, Worcester College*

In February John Moore Heritage Services undertook trial trenching on the site of the proposed extension to the ornamental lake at Worcester College, related to the construction of a new lecture theatre and other facilities in the grounds of the college. This was followed by archaeological borehole survey by Quest Ltd that sought to establish whether prehistoric peat deposits and or a palaeo-channel might be present in this location, on the boundary between the 1st and 2nd Thames gravel terrace. The borehole results did not correspond to the results of earlier geotechnical investigation which had suggested the presence of peat deposits, nor was a palaeo-channel identified, nevertheless the report provides a useful addition to the available modelling data for the floodplain.

#### *Former WHS site, Peterley Road, Cowley*

In February an evaluation was undertaken by John Moore Heritage Services prior to the construction of a new building on the site of the former W.H. Smith Ltd depot, Unit 24 Peterley Road, Cowley. A single a shallow ovoid pit of unknown date was recorded. The work was requested because of the presence of recorded Roman remains in the near vicinity.

#### *New Library, St Anne's College, Woodstock Road*

In February a watching brief was undertaken at St Anne's College during construction works for a new Library. A small number of archaeological features were recorded, including likely quarry pits of potentially medieval date, although the finds may have be re-deposited. The report is forthcoming.

#### *St Cross College, St Giles*

Between February and March Oxford Archaeology undertook recording of a number of stone built boundary walls followed by an area excavation in the garden of St Cross College prior to the construction of a new accommodation, lecture theatre and library block. The boundary ditch to the former northern precinct of the 12<sup>th</sup> century Royal Beaumont Palace and later Carmelite Friary was examined and a number of 18<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> walls and waste pits were recorded. A surprise discovery was the grave of a young woman ([Oxford Mail Link](#)). Two 17<sup>th</sup> century coins were recovered which may have been placed over her eyes or mouth, including a silver half groat of Charles I. The burial could perhaps represent the burial of someone of Catholic faith who died during the siege of Oxford. Consideration is being given to further scientific study of the remains to test for traces of pathogen in DNA samples in order to establish whether typhoid fever can be identified through this technique. The burial will also feature as part of the Ashmolean Live Friday event on May 15th.



*Above: Burial of a young woman at St Cross College, St Giles (Photograph by Oxford Archaeology)*

#### *The Porter's Lodge, Pembroke College*

In March a watching brief was undertaken by Oxford Archaeology during the excavation of geotechnical pits within the Old Quad and during floor reduction work within the Porters Lodge at Pembroke College. The report is forthcoming.

#### *Thames Water Emergency Sewer Repair, Turl Street*

In March salvage recording was undertaken by Oxford Archaeology following the identification of pottery and horn cores in a spoil heap from an emergency Thames Water sewer repair in Turl Street. The report is forthcoming.

#### *The Provost's Garden, The Queen's College,*

In March Oxford Archaeology commenced an excavation in the Provost's Garden at The Queen's College prior to the construction of an underground library extension. The excavation to date has exposed areas of Late Saxon metalled surfaces and associated cellar pits and post holes which may provide important information about the character of Late Saxon settlement in the eastern part of the defended settlement or 'burh'. The site was an orchard and garden through much of the post-medieval period but also appears to have been used for gravel extraction and dumping at this time. A successful public open day was held on 18<sup>th</sup> April with over 750 attending. The excavation will continue into May.



Above: The excavation at the end of April. (Photograph by Oxford Archaeology).

#### *The East Range, Christ Church Cathedral*

Between March and May a watching brief was undertaken by Graham Keevill Associates during works to the East Range of Christ Church Cathedral. A dendrochronology date was taken of an exposed timber by Dr Dan Miles. The report is forthcoming.

#### *Summer Fields School, Mayfield Road, Summertown*

In April a salvage record was undertaken by Warwickshire Archaeology at Summer Fields School when a human burial was encountered during the excavation of a service trench. The report is forthcoming

### **Information not previously in the public domain**

#### *Savile House, New College, Mansfield Road,*

In September 2014 Oxford Archaeology undertook an archaeological evaluation and topographical survey of the 17th century civil war defences at Savile House, Mansfield Road. The evaluation revealed the sand gravel of the second (Summertown-Radley) gravel terrace truncated by a single undated post hole. The fill of the post hole and the natural gravel were directly overlain by a possible trample deposit associated with the construction of an earth bank. The bank formed part of the inner civil war defences constructed around Oxford in the 17th century. No evidence for the loessic subsoil which overlies the gravel terrace was recovered in-situ, although the composition of the deposits which created the bank was predominantly re-deposited loess overlain by a very compacted layer of re-deposited sand and gravel.

The Savile House profile differed from the composition of the rampart of the more substantial outer defensive circuit recorded at Manor Place to the east

of the site, although it was very similar to evidence recovered for the composition of another section of the inner bank during ground works for the construction of The New Oxford University Clubhouse on the east side of Mansfield Road.

The topographical and stratigraphical evidence from the evaluation indicated that an earlier feature in the landscape - represented by the re-deposited loess - may have influenced the location of the inner defences, and possibly been incorporated into them when a ditch was excavated to the north of the feature and the resulting spoil used to raise the top of the bank - represented by the compacted sand and gravel.

During the evaluation OSL (Optically Stimulated Luminescence) samples were taken. The results of the dating of one of the OSL samples from the re-deposited loess suggested a date of AD 880-1045 for the deposition of the original bank material, indicating that a pre-existing Late Saxon bank (perhaps an agricultural feature) was re-used by the Royalists in the 17<sup>th</sup> century.

### ***Others news***

#### *Assessing and Mapping Significant Heritage Assets in a Medieval University City*

As mentioned in the last OCCAF report Oxford Archaeology and the Oxford City Council Heritage Team have been working jointly on an English Heritage (now Historic England) funded project looking at the assessment of non-designated but potentially nationally significant archaeological assets and providing a series of case studies. The report will be made more widely available via the Archaeological Data Service website shortly.