Archaeology in Oxford

Oxford City report to the Oxford City and County Archaeological Forum

National Planning Policy Framework related field work in February – June 2023

Winchester Road
In February Oxford Archaeology undertook an archaeological evaluation on the site of a proposed student residential development in the rear gardens of properties facing Winchester Road, Bevington Road and Banbury Road. No archaeologically significant features were encountered, although a series of 18th-19th century quarry pits and larger-scale quarry areas were recorded. Localised areas of undisturbed gravel terrace overlain by brickearth-type or 'supra-natural' deposits were present within the northern part of the site.

No 19 Between Towns Road, Cowley Conservative Club
In February John Moore Heritage Services undertook a building record of the Cowley Conservative Club prior to its demolition. The Conservative Club was built in 1924 and . The original building was a two storey pavilion with flanking single storey wings of red brick with limestone detailing.

Gibbs Crescent, Osney
Between February and May Oxford Archaeology have intermittently undertaken trenching and strip and record excavation at Gibbs Crescent. The works have identified the line of the abbey precinct wall and an area within the wall comprised of surfaces and walls representing buildings and working areas that seem to have been abandoned in the 14th century and replaced by fishponds, presumably because the low lying land next to the Thames was considered too liable to flooding. The excavations to date have been hampered by heavy rain and a further progamme of excavation is planned over the summer.
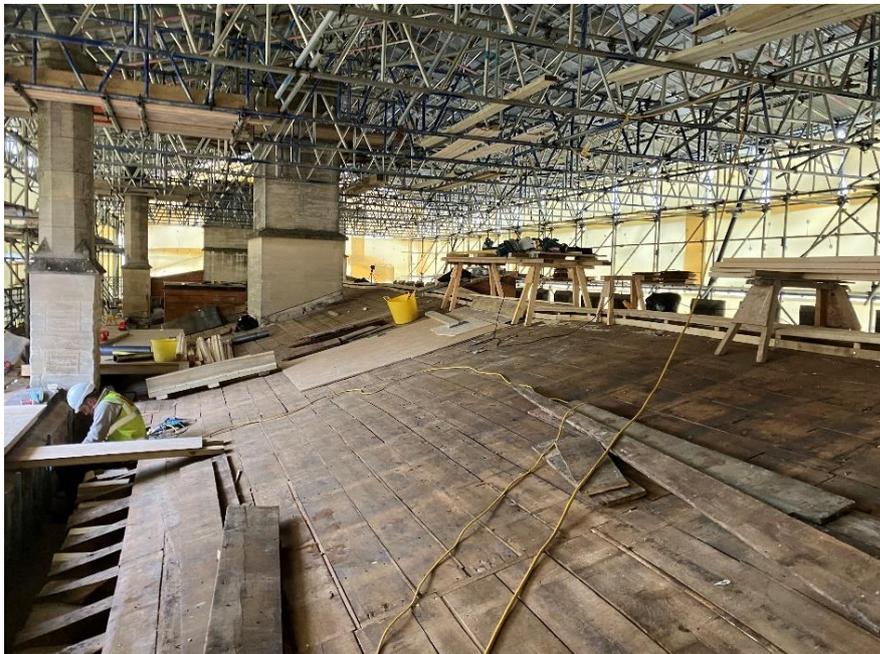

Above left: The substantial precinct wall of Osney Abbey. Above right: An area of surfaces and structures inside the southern precinct that was later given over to fish ponds, possibly in the 14th century.

Littlemore House, Littlemore Park

In March further evaluation work was undertaken by John Moore Heritage Services in the grounds of Littlemore House. The work was requested by the applicant to reduce the risk of Roman remains being identified during development of a large new basement. No significant archaeological remains were recorded.

The Deanery, Christ Church,

In April and May building recording work was undertaken by Graham Keevill the Cathedral Archaeologist during renovation works to the Deanery roof at Christ Church. The works revealed an unexpected void and curving wall of well-cut ashlar that encased the remains of a previously unknown Tudor polygonal tower. The working theory is that the northern end of the 16th century eastern range of Tom Quad extended further north than previously thought and was finished off with two small polygonal towers before Tom Quad was finally completed in the 17th century with the addition of the Deanery and northern range. The illustration of crenelations on the northern gable of the east range in later versions of the 16th century Agas map may support this interpretation. However, the reason for the identified void being enclosed by such a fine ashlar wall remains unclear. Previously this part of the Deanery and east range was considered to be wholly 17th century in date.

Above left: The outer wall of the Tudor polygonal tower. Above right: The roof of the Deanery (looking south). Right: The void containing the polygonal tower.

Brookes The Yard

In April AOC Archaeology returned to The Yard at Brookes University during development works to assess and produce a rapid salvage record of a number of horse burials, these were established to be of likely 19th century date and relate to the nearby stables of Headington Hill Hall.

Littlemore House, Littlemore
In May a historic building record was undertaken by Donald Insall Associates on the non-listed Littlemore House prior to its conversion to a science research facility. The building was built in 1902 as an extension for Littlemore Hospital, the Oxford County Pauper Lunatic Asylum.

Other News

CBA South Midlands talk
The City Council Archaeologist gave a talk at a successful day conference on the 'Archaeology of Oxford' at Cherwell School, organised by the South Midlands Group of the Council for British Archaeology in May.

The HIAS project
The Urban Design and Heritage Team has been successful in obtaining a grant from Historic England to accession the historic data held by the National Monuments Record (NRHE) onto the Oxford Historic Environment Record. The transfer of data will take two years. For more information on the national project follow this link.

Archaeological Monitoring Statement 2021
The Archaeological monitoring statement for 2021 is now available on the council website:

The Oxford Blackfriars
A public archaeology project involving skeletal analysis, isotopic analysis and aDNA sampling, partially funded by OX Place in relation to their developments at Between Towns Road and Lucy Faithfull House, has commenced. Skeletal analysis of an initial sample of burials from the Oxford Blackfriars excavated in the 1960s-70s is being undertaken by Oxford Archaeology. Isotopic analysis is currently being undertaken by Oxford University. The project hopes to retrieve information of on the diet, health and origins of the Blackfriars, their benefactors and the lay community that used the priory church. Further funds will need to be raised to complete the work before the remains are returned to the Blackfriars by the County Museum Service for internment in an ossuary.

Above right: Professor Amy Styring and Emily Woolhouse from Oxford University making an initial assessment of the third molars of the assemblage.

Boswells Department Store
As part of the package of recording undertaken in relation to the conversion of the Boswells department store to a hotel Chronicles Storytelling have compiled a series of over 50 interviews with staff and customers capturing the social history of the well-loved Oxford store. The interviews can be listened to here: https://vimeo.com/showcase/7841250

David Radford, Oxford City Council Archaeologist