

ARCHAEOLOGY IN OXFORD

Oxford City Report to the Oxford City and County Archaeological Forum February – May 2019

Bracegirdle Road, Headington

In February an archaeological evaluation was undertaken by Oxford Archaeology on land to the rear of Bracegirdle Road. The remains of ridge and furrow earthworks running east west across the site were the only archaeological features recorded. The work was requested because of the proximity of the Dorchester-Alchester Roman Road.

No 43 St Giles, Garden of the Quakers Meeting House

In February an evaluation was undertaken by Thames Valley Archaeological Services in the garden of the Quakers Meeting House on St Giles. The trench stratigraphy showed several episodes of made ground containing pottery and clay pipe of post-medieval date (17th-19th centuries) and some residual medieval and early post-medieval sherds.

Iffley Academy

Between February and March Oxford Archaeology undertook a trial trench evaluation at Iffley Academy. The investigation sought to examine historic close boundaries associated with the post-medieval and potentially medieval village, however modern disturbance was encountered and no significant archaeological remains were recorded.

No 26 Mill Lane, Iffley

In March an evaluation was undertaken by Keevill Heritage Ltd at 26 Mill Lane. A single trench was dug to a depth of 0.7m where the natural geology was encountered. No significant archaeology was recorded.

Osney Power Station, Arthur Street

In March an archaeological evaluation was undertaken by Oxford Archaeology to the south of the old Osney Power Station building in Arthur Street. The site is located within the projected extent of the Osney Abbey. Four trenches revealed floodplain deposits overlaid by thick makeup layers probably associated with Osney Abbey. Structural remains contemporary with the abbey included a substantial robber trench (where a wall has been dug up and its stone reused), a shallow wall foundation and a stone drain, together with evidence for gravel surfaces. The finds included roof and floor tiles from a structure or structures of likely utilitarian character also a scrap of leather, herring bones and evidence for 15th-16th century horn cores. Previous work on the abbey precinct has suggested that this area may be associated with the abbey farm.

Right: Evaluation trench south of Osney Power Station revealing the robbed out wall of a likely medieval building within the abbey precinct, probably a utilitarian structure, perhaps associated with the abbey farm.



Kitchen Yard, Magdalen College

In March a watching brief was maintained by Oxford Archaeology during geotechnical investigations within Magdalen College Kitchen Yard. The site is of interest because of the potential for remains to be preserved relating to medieval hospital of St John the Baptist and the later college which was established in the 15th century. The trial pits revealed the massive stepped foundations of the 15th century range to the north and the foundations of the 17th century range to the west which appeared to reuse an earlier medieval wall.

The wall extends well above the levels of the medieval Infirmary floors recorded during excavations in the 1980s and could be a surviving internal wall of the infirmary.

Site of proposed ISRM building, Old Road Campus, Headington

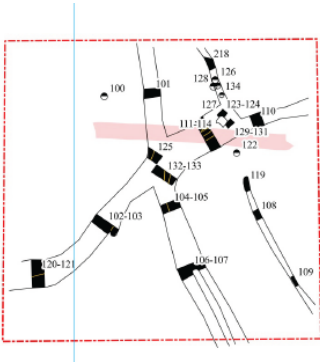
In April an evaluation was undertaken by Oxford Archaeology at the site of the proposed IDRM Building, Old Campus Road. Five undated features were uncovered, consisting of a ditch and four shallow pits. The evaluation was requested because of the potential for Roman activity in the vicinity.

Undergraduate Centre and Access Centre, Wadham College

In April additional shored test pits were excavated prior to the installation of a piled crane base at Wadham College. Previous investigations had identified remains associated with the medieval Austin friary including burials in the immediate vicinity. No further burials were encountered. The report is forthcoming.

Land adjacent to Littlemore Hospital

In April an excavation and watching brief was undertaken at land to the rear of Littlemore Hospital by Thames Valley Archaeological Services. Previously evaluation work at this site had identified a locally rare example of an Iron Age banjo enclosure and the new development has been designed to preserve this in open green space. A geophysical survey had suggested that the enclosure was located within a larger field system and the excavated targeted the corner of the field to examine its character and evolution. A series of Iron Age ditches were sampled. The report and further outreach material is forthcoming.



Above left: The intersection of Iron Age field boundaries that were investigated. Centre: A sherd of Iron Age pottery. Right: TVAS at work sampling the Iron Age ditches.

Simon House, Paradise Street

In April an archaeological borehole survey was undertaken by Oxford Archaeology to the rear of Simon House in Paradise Street on the location of the castle bailey ditch. The report is forthcoming.

The Harlow Centre, Raymond Road, New Marston (The new Swan School site)

Between April and May an excavation was undertaken by Cotswold Archaeology at the site of the proposed new Swan School in New Marston. The excavation revealed enclosures and driveways associated with Middle and Late Iron Age settlement that were subsequent reworked and added to in the Roman period.

One well defined Roman enclosure contained a well preserved 3rd century mortaria kiln. Because of the significance of the kiln and the development impact it was 100% sampled and the features around it were subject to bulk sampling. A public open day was held in May and further outreach material is planned.



Above left: The archaeological open day at the Swan School site (Image courtesy of Cotswold Archaeology). Centre: A sherd of Roman mortaria from the kiln. Right initial sample slots through the kiln firing chamber.

Gibbs Crescent, Osney

In May Oxford Archaeology undertook an archaeological evaluation at Gibbs Crescent. Trenches were excavated through alluvial and ground make-up deposits associated with the medieval Osney Abbey. The remains of a potential hearth were identified along with other potential structural remains belonging to the abbey. The whole area was covered in deep make up deposits relating to the construction of the nearby railway.

Master's Field, Balliol College

In May a second phase of trial trenching was commenced by Oxford Archaeology on the site of the Balliol College Master's Field Development in the vicinity of the Martin building. The work was designed to test for the survival of Merton College's sizable medieval tithe barn complex which is known to have survived here into the 19th century. The trenching revealed the walls of the barn, however as anticipated the bulk of the barn footprint was extensively truncated by post medieval and Victorian quarry pits. The work is ongoing.



Above right: Victorian pottery and glassware recovered from the large quarry pits near the Martin Building. Right: Large stone foundation belonging to the Merton College's large tithe barn located in the suburb of Holywell.

Other news

Civil War Plaque, Mansfield Road

In May New College held an unveiling ceremony for a new plaque marking the line of the Royalist Civil War defences on Mansfield Road. The plaque is located outside the new Music Room building which was designed to sit back from the line of the rampart (replacing previous garages and sheds) and open up a view of the remnant rampart which runs east-west through the grounds of Savile House and Mansfield College behind. The rampart can be viewed from in front of the gated access located to the side of the building, however at present it will remain unseeded and un-landscaped until the ongoing redevelopment of New College School is completed.



Above left: The plaque being unveiled by the current Lord Mayor and Heritage Champion Cllr Collin Cook. Centre: Civil War armour from the New College collection. Right: The newly opened New College Music Room.

Civil War Oxford on Channel 4!

A new episode of the 'Britain's most historic towns' series fronted by Alice Roberts will look at Oxford's role in the English Civil War. The programme will be broadcast at 8pm on Saturday 8th June, hopefully the series will include some CGI reconstructions of the Civil War defences based on recent archaeological work.

<https://www.channel4.com/programmes/britains-most-historic-towns/episode-guide>

Oxford Museum Roman Kiln

The large Roman kiln that was lifted from the Churchill Hospital site in the 1970s and reconstructed in the Town Hall Museum was dismantled in March to facilitate the redisplay of the museum with the reluctant help of the original excavators. It was subject to a 3d scan so that an accurate record of it can be retained and a sample section was retained by the County Museum Service. Further pieces were handed to Cheney School which maintains its own accredited museum.

The Oxford City Council Conservation Team Photograph Archive

The collection of historic building photographs built up by Oxford's Conservation Officers over the years has now been transferred from the City Council Offices to Oxford History Centre for safe storage and eventual cataloguing and scanning.

Oxford Historic Environment Record Audit

A small grant has been obtained from Historic England to undertake an audit of the Historic Environment Record and Urban Archaeological Database. This will then lead to the creation of a forward plan setting out tasks to secure appropriate management and enhancement of the record going forward.

The Central Oxford (City and University) Conservation Area Appraisal

Following a short public consultation a newly expanded central conservation area is being proposed as part of the ongoing development of an appraisal document by Baxter's Heritage Consultants in cooperation with the Urban Design and Heritage Team of the City Council. For local press coverage see:

<https://www.oxfordtimes.co.uk/news/17658608.citys-conservation-area-set-for-critical-expansion/>

Current Archaeology report on excavations at Nos 114-119 St Aldate's and Nos 4-5 Queen Street

Readers may wish to track down a copy of this May's Current Archaeology to read more about the exciting discoveries from Oxford's Jewish Quarter, made during excavations at to the rear of Queen Street and St Aldates in 2016. <https://www.archaeology.co.uk/issues/current-archaeology-350.htm>

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