

ARCHAEOLOGY IN OXFORD

*Oxford City report to the Oxford City and County Archaeological Forum
September 2019- February 2020*

National Planning Policy Framework related field work in Oxford

Trinity College Gardens

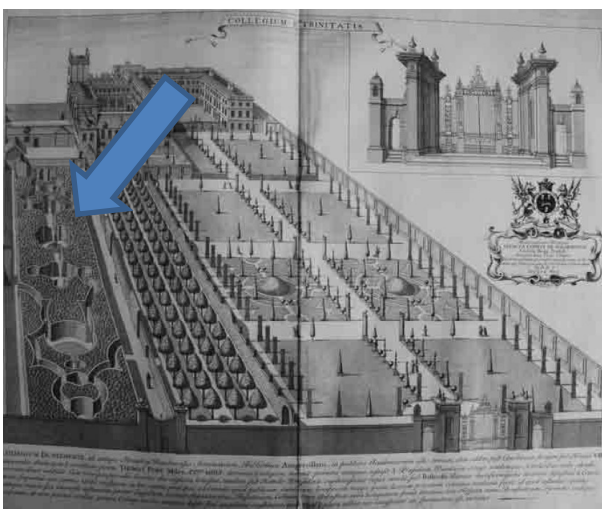
Between September and January three phases of archaeological excavation were undertaken by Oxford Archaeology in the gardens of Trinity College on the site of a proposed post-graduate building. The new building is being constructed in the formerly wooded part of the garden known as the Wilderness. The excavation, which was located away from the street frontage, revealed a medieval oven, pits and plot boundaries associated with the rear areas of poorly understood medieval tenements that formerly fronted onto Parks Road (formerly Beaumont Road).

Right: Finds have included a medieval crucible lined with copper alloy residue.

Evaluation trenching prior to the college obtaining planning permission demonstrated that the 'Wilderness' area had been extensively quarried for gravel in the post-medieval period removing evidence of earlier activity. However this part of the garden is known to have formed part of a formal Dutch style garden from the early 18th century through to the early 19th century, as shown by an engraving by William Williams made in 1733.



During the excavation Oxford Archaeology recorded traces of the serpentine paths from the formal garden and remarkably uncovered the remains of a large circular clay and stone-wall lined water feature with a massive stone lined bottle-shaped soakaway or well beneath, which is likely to relate to the feature (possibly a fountain) visible in Williams' illustration.



Above left: The engraving by William Williams showing the Dutch garden at Trinity College. Above right: The clay lined garden feature.

The art historian Dan Cruickshank has produced a short report on the significance and background of the garden for the college. He notes that in 1687 King James I threatened to turn Magdalen College in Oxford

into a Catholic Seminary and the shocked University reacted by showing support for William of Orange, by raising the orange colours over the High Street. This was followed by a number of colleges adopting the formal garden designs popular in the Netherlands. No less a figure that Christopher Wren may have had a hand in the planning of the Trinity College garden which was created in the 1700s, comprising three elements a maze or labyrinth, avenues of limes and a more open area of grass. The three elements may represent the Holy Trinity or perhaps the enlightenment journey from darkness to light (this remains unclear). As student numbers dwindled at Trinity in the 18th century the garden may have been reduced in complexity to save the cost of maintenance and by the early 19th century it was replaced by a more naturalistic design. The patterning of quarry pits (containing opportunistically discarded waste) may help clarify the history of this process.



Above left: College Fellows visit the excavation. Above right: Finds include a wine bottle seal from The King's Head, dated 1697, with the initials R. W. for Richard Walker, the landlord 1687-1704. The King's Head was originally at Nos 24 and 25 Cornmarket, but in 1696 Walker acquired a site at No. 12 High Street, where he transferred his tavern. It remained in the High Street until the mid-18th century.

St Catherine's College

In September a watching brief was undertaken by Oxford Archaeology during the clearing out of a ditch adjacent to the raised causeway north of the college. The causeway has been speculatively associated with a medieval crossing point over the Cherwell to the east and potentially with the Civil War defences. The work was requested to ensure no archaeological deposits were damaged by the works to reinstate this historic landscape feature.

The Toll House, Folly Bridge, Oxford

In October historic building recording was undertaken by Asset Heritage Consulting Ltd at the Old Toll House at Folly Bridge prior to conversion work. The Toll House was erected in 1844 by the Oxford-based builder James Gardiner.

Tumbling Bay Fish Pass

Between October and November a watching brief was undertaken by Oxford Archaeology during the excavation of a new fish pass near Tumbling Bay swimming place. Features related to the Victorian swimming place were recorded. The report is forthcoming.

St Ebbe's Church

In October a watching brief was undertaken by Oxford Archaeology during the excavation of new services to the west of St Ebbe's Church. The service trenches were of limited depth and mainly revealed modern deposits. The only significant observation was part of a human skull that was revealed (whether chanel or articulated is unknown) - its position noted but otherwise left in-situ.

Paradise Square

Between October and December Oxford Archaeology undertook a targeted excavation at Paradise Square prior to the construction of a new hotel. Situated almost immediately south of the site of the medieval West Gate, and previously considered to have limited potential due to later truncation, this location is within an area known to be the site of the relocated St Budoc's Church as well as the short-lived home of the Friars of the Sack. It is also located within a poorly understood area of land between the town's defences and the Thames (Trill Mill Stream). Evaluation by OA in late summer 2019 found that the medieval preservation was actually excellent beyond the positions of the existing foundations and indicated a substantial accumulation of medieval settlement evidence protected under a thick layer of later medieval and post-medieval garden soils.

The original design for the new hotel had foundations would have had a significant impact upon this important buried resource and would have required a very substantial archaeological excavation. With the help of OA the developer was able to redesign the foundations to secure substantive preservation in-situ of the threatened remains. A much smaller excavation was therefore required targeted on the area of a new lift pit and a compensatory buffer zone around it.

The excavation revealed a fascinating 11th-14th century sequence, in some places over 1m thick, of partially revealed buildings (with an initial timber phase evolving into a substantial stone building which had undergone significant remodelling - with additions and removals of walls). Multiple positions for internal hearths were noted - in the ashes of one of these was an intact bone gaming counter. Evidence for an internal stone-built drainage channel may indicate some form of artisan production/process took place within the later phases of use. Associated with these buildings were a series of pits containing excellently preserved bone and ceramic evidence, and large amounts of charcoal. This significant site will be analysed and published together with the material recovered from the recent Westgate excavations (as well as the Brewer Street investigations in 2010), allowing a wide swathe of South-west extra-mural Oxford to be studied together.



Above left: Staff from the Urban Design and Heritage Team being shown a 12th century jug from the excavation by OA project manager Ben Ford. Middle: A medieval gaming token. Right: The excavation site.

No 4 Beaumont Buildings

In November historic building recording and trial trench excavation were undertaken by Keevill Heritage Ltd at No 4 Beaumont Buildings prior to the construction of an extension. The site is located within the precinct of the 12th century Royal Beaumont Palace and later medieval Carmelite Friary. The building also has local interest as part of a row of distinctive 1820s-40s houses built by St John's College and has a historical association with then cultivation of chrysanthemums as the former occupant Mr Isaac Wheeler, gardener and later porter at St Magdalen College, is credited as being the first person in England to grow them from seeds. The single small trench recorded a rough surface of re-used brick and tile and a stone well, cistern or ice house underlying the south wall of the house (the house foundations incorporated a

brick relieving arch to span over this). These features are likely to have post-medieval in date perhaps relating to a nearby farm building or house recorded on historic maps. Further recording is planned.

University Science Area, Biochemistry Bike Sheds

In November a watching brief was undertaken by Oxford Archaeology during the construction of new Bike Sheds at the Oxford University Science Area. The recording was requested because of the proximity of Bronze Age flat grave and later double ring ditch near the Rex Richards building, however the foundation design was amended to reduce the impact depth and no significant remains were noted.

Rewley Swing Bridge

In November historic building recording was undertaken by Oxford Archaeology prior to conservation repairs being undertaken on the Rewley Swing Bridge. Further work is planned. The swing bridge was designed by Robert Stephenson & Co in c.1850-1 to carry the railway over a navigable waterway (The Sheepwash Channel) on the approach into Oxford from the north. In 1890 the bridge was heavily reconstructed with a new steel deck although it is believed that the carriage and much of the rotating mechanism were retained from Stephenson's bridge.

Between Towns Road (former petrol station site)

In November an archaeological evaluation was undertaken by Museum of London Archaeology at the site of the former petrol station on Between Town Roads following a geophysical survey of the area. The evaluation identified a series of pits and ditches of Roman date that are likely to be associated with the pottery manufacturing zone previously identified to the south (near the old Conservative Club).

University College, Main Quad, Staircase 1, Room 1:3

In November historic building recording was undertaken at University College by John Moore Heritage Services during minor alterations to staircase 1. The report is forthcoming.

Littlemore Park

Between November and December phase 1 of an archaeological excavation was undertaken at land near Armstrong Road (Littlemore Park) by Oxford Archaeology prior to the development of the area for housing. Arrangements of well-cut early Iron Age pits and concentrations of Roman features were recorded.



Right: Early Iron Age pits excavated at Littlemore Park (South of Armstrong Road).

New College School, Savile Road

Between November and February an intermittent excavation was undertaken by Museum of London Archaeology at New College School on Savile Road. The footprint of a former school building built on the line of the Royalist Civil War defences was investigating revealing Roman features and a likely medieval 'bank' sealed below the Civil War rampart. The bank of loamy soil in this location has proved difficult to characterise and date. A mid-late Saxon scientific date retrieved from the middle of the thick loamy soil does not neatly correspond with re-deposited late 11th century pottery recovered from the same feature. A working hypothesis is that the build-up of loamy soil may be a boundary or headland that formed in the late 11th or early 12th century. However further exaction and soil analysis is to be undertaken.



Above left: the loam layers that were sealed below the former school building. Centre: Development project managers and archaeologists from Oxford Archaeology and Museum of London Archaeology join New College alumnus Emeritus Professor Esmonde-Clearly on-site to discuss the origins of the bank. Right: A coin of the Roman Emperor Constantine (4th century AD).

No 84 St Aldate's

In December a shallow strip and record excavation was undertaken by Oxford Archaeology to the rear of No 84 St Aldate's on the footprint of the 17th century rear wing which was previously recorded and dismantled and awaits reconstruction on site. A stone built well and foundations were recorded along with miscellaneous finds including a sign advertising horse drawn Hackney Carriages and a silver shilling of 1816. The report is forthcoming.

Christ Church, Peckwater Quad, Staircase 9

In December historic building recording and an archaeological watching brief were undertaken at Staircase 9, Peckwater Quad, Christ Church by Keevill Heritage Ltd. A number of likely Saxo-Norman pits were recorded containing pottery and animal bone and a probable rotary quern fragment. The report is forthcoming.

Christ Church Cathedral School, Merton Field Pavilion

In December an evaluation was undertaken by Keevill Heritage Consultancy at Merton Field, on the edge of Christ Church meadows, prior to the construction of a new sports pavilion. The work was required because of the proximity of the Royalist Civil War defences and the general interest of the area however no significant remains were recorded.

The Mitre Hotel, High Street

Between September and February Oxford Archaeology have undertaken an intermittent watching brief and historic building recording during comprehensive up-grading works on the Mitre Inn (a 17th century coaching inn with 13th century cellars). The development scheme involves the replacement of many of the services in the rear yard and the construction of a new Porters Lodge. Archaeological observations during initial investigation works plotted the line of pre-existing service runs, and the presence and height at which significant archaeological remains are encountered. This has allowed the new services (especially the foul water mains) to re-use the former pipe-trench, and for some redesign of the Porters Lodge foundations. All this work has enabled maximising preservation in-situ of the archaeological remains that do survive, which have included stone walls, occupation deposits (incl. a very young juvenile burial - probably below an internal floor), and yard surfaces. Many of the observations have come from close examination of the 'free-sections' offered up by former truncations. The works are ongoing.

The Trout Inn, No 195 Godstow Road, Godstow

In January historic building recording was undertaken by the Jessop Consultancy during repair works to the 17th century Trout Inn. Further work is planned.

No 18 Osler Road

In January a watching brief was undertaken at No 18 Osler Road by Foundations Archaeology. The work was requested because of the presence of isolated early-Saxon burials from nearby Stephen road that suggest the presence of a dispersed cemetery in this area. No significant archaeology was recorded.

Jesus College, Northgate House

Between January and February a strip and record excavation was undertaken by Oxford Archaeology prior to the construction of an attenuation tank and soakaway between Jesus College precinct and the new retail development on Cornmarket. Post-medieval to early-modern layers and pits were encountered including evidence for horn working. The work is ongoing.

Not previously reported

Lucy Faithfull House

In September 2018 an evaluation was undertaken at Lucy Faithfull House by Museum of London Archaeology. The site is located within former walled precinct of the Oxford Blackfriars, which was of particular importance as a *Studium Generale* (place of higher education) for the order. The evaluation established that the footprint of the former Lucy Faithfull House was heavily disturbed when the building was constructed but that well-preserved walls and burials related to the friary church and adjoining buildings survive in the northern part of the site. The evaluation also recorded a pit full of cattle horn providing evidence for the use of the site for industrial processes, possibly tanning, following the dissolution of the Friary in the 16th century. The applicant has proposed a pile supported raft to bridge across the northern part of the site to avoid damaging below ground remains however a row of piles and caps will be required which will require careful archaeological excavation.



Right: Medieval walls belonging to the friary (image by Museum of London Archaeology).

Other News

Current Archaeology awards

Congratulations to Oxford Archaeology who have been shortlisted for two Current Archaeology awards for their publication on Oxford Castle and the excavations of the Oxford Jewry at Queen Street. This means that the full article on the Queen Street excavation can now be read online:

<https://www.archaeology.co.uk/articles/you-are-what-you-eat.htm>

<https://oxfordarchaeology.com/our-projects/oxford-castle>

<https://www.archaeology.co.uk/issues/current-archaeology-359.htm>

Top 5 digs of 2019

My top five archaeological digs/finds from Oxford in 2019 can be viewed on twitter at:

https://twitter.com/DavidRadford_ox

Annual Monitoring Statement 2018

The Archaeological Monitoring Statement for 2018 is now available online:

https://www.oxford.gov.uk/downloads/download/483/archaeological_annual_monitoring_statement

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