

Archaeology in Oxford

Oxford City report to the Oxford City and County Archaeological Forum

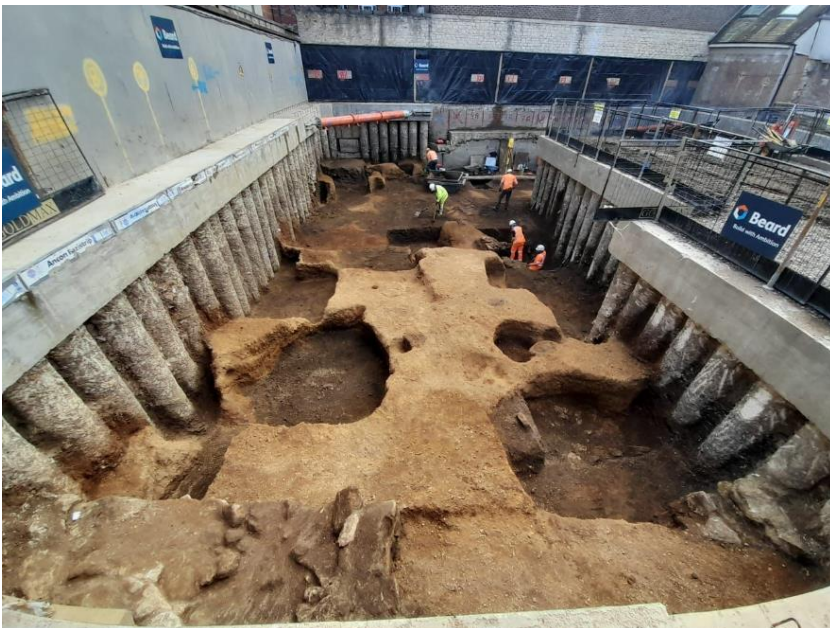
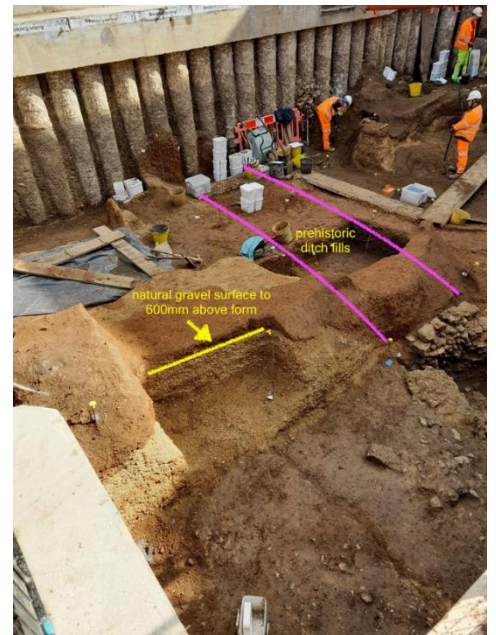
National Planning Policy Framework related field work in Oxford February – June 2022

Brasenose College, Frewin Hall, New Inn Hall Street

Between February and March excavations by Oxford Archaeology continued at Frewin Hall on New Inn Hall Street with intermittent follow up work on service trenches continuing into May. The site produced late-Saxon evidence in the form of a semi-celled building with probable evidence of destruction from fire. Subsequently several medieval stone buildings were established across the site including kitchens and a large stone built celled building. At the north end of the site a large well-built stone foundation was revealed that is likely to be the southern wall of the quadrangle of the 15th-16th century Augustinian St Mary's College.

As the site progressed a remarkable discovery was made in the form of the remains of a previously unrecorded 'upstanding' barrow mound and ditch. This had been cut by later pits and slowly covered over by make-up layers and garden soils in the medieval period. The current interpretation is that the barrow is of Late Neolithic-early Bronze Age date. Human remains recovered from one pit are likely to represent a peripheral rather than a central burial and it is hoped that radio-carbon dating will demonstrate whether the burial is prehistoric or a later insertion.

In February a very successful open day was held that attracted over 500 people. The handouts produced for the day by Oxford Archaeology can be accessed [here](#). As part of the outreach work filming was undertaken and it is possible that later in the year the project will feature in national BBC TV programme 'Digging for Britain' presented by Dr Alice Roberts



Above right: The base of the barrow mound after exaction and the heavily truncated barrow ditch. Above left: The site exposed down to natural gravel. Above right: A human jaw bone from a pit cut into the barrow (images courtesy of Oxford Archaeology).

Castle Hill House, New Road

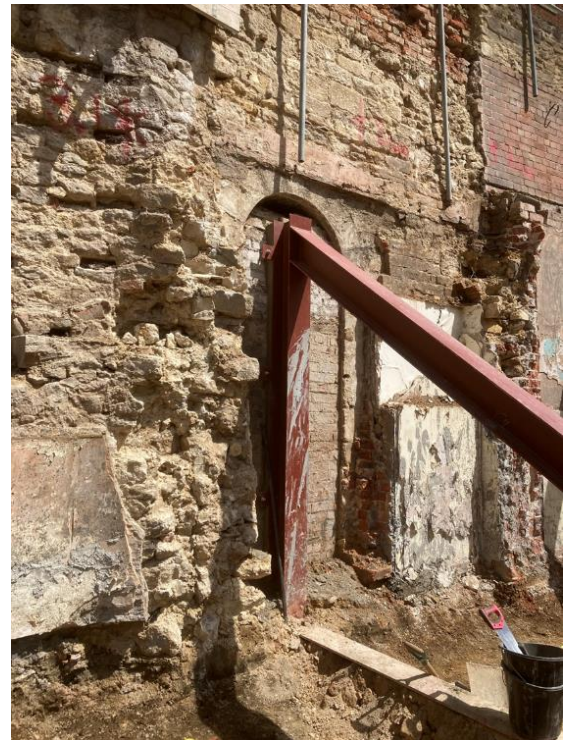
Further to the last OCCAF report excavations continued at Castle Hill House into March and intermittent recording work has continued through into June with the monitoring of underpinning works and a second phase of investigation in the area of a new attenuation tank.

The main excavation area revealed a deep feature underlying the Norman Castle Bailey ditch, which given its orientation and character is a strong candidate for the primary late-Saxon burh western defensive ditch. The initial spot dates from the pottery suggest that the ditch was infilled during the Late Saxon/Norman transition. The borehole records for this part of the site are currently under review.



Further features were recorded to the east of the ditch however careful assessment of the recovered finds will be required before these can be confidently interpreted. At the south-east corner of the site an area of remnant bank material, interpreted as part of the west facing slope of the bailey ditch/bank, was examined, this feature will be substantively preserved below the new building.

In the final stages of the work at the southern end of the site an infilled late 18th/early 19th century tunnel was revealed running under Bulwarks Lane. This was known to exist from documentary sources but the precise location had proved elusive. The tunnel linked two properties owned by Daniel Harris who became the first governor of Oxford prison in the 18th century and who himself was a keen archaeologist responsible for excavations across the castle site. The tunnel had been sealed with brick and will be preserved behind the new build.



Above right: Fills of a large North-South feature underlying the Castle Bailey ditch. Right: The infilled tunnel under Bulwarks Lane.

The Yard, Brookes University Campus, Headington Hill

Between February and March a geophysical survey was undertaken by Magnitude Surveys and a watching brief was undertaken by Oxford Archaeology during geotechnical investigations at The Yard at Brookes University. The work was required because of the general potential for prehistoric and Roman activity on the crest of Headington Hill and because of the specific potential of remains of the Parliamentarian siege camp surviving in this area. Minor geophysical anomalies were identified and further work is planned.

Deaf and Hard of Hearing Centre, Littlegate Street

Between March and April Oxford Archaeology undertook a second phase of evaluation at the Deaf and Hard of Hearing Centre on Littlegate Street. The works were designed to further investigate the area previously identified as part of the cemetery and church of the medieval Blackfriars to ensure that potential pile locations could be designed to avoid human remains.

The investigated remains included substantial limestone foundations (heavily robbed in places) forming the western wall/foundation of a small internal space interpreted as the porch of the friary church. This structure also formed the eastern wall of an adjacent space - potentially an Anchor House. Gravel surfaces (probably external) survived in patches to the west and north of these structures. A significant number of often intercutting, east-west orientated graves were distributed throughout the single opened trench, some clearly cutting the stone foundations/robber-trench backfill of the aforementioned wall/foundation, indicating demolition and remodelling with a change in use of the area probably associated with the rebuilding of the west end of the Church.

Godstow Bridge and Godstow Weir

Between April and May Oxford Archaeology undertook recording work of exposed sections of Godstow Bridge and Weir and of the early 19th century garden features on Trout Island in advance of the construction of a new fish pass and weir replacement. The report is forthcoming.

Trinity College, Plant room and cellar west of Durham Quad

Between April and May Thames Valley Archaeological Services undertook a watching brief during initial test pitting within a basement located west of Durham Quad, revealing post-medieval infill material. Historic building recording was also undertaken during refurbishment works within the west range of Durham Quad in advance of the forthcoming kitchen and hall redevelopment. Further excavation and building recording is programmed.

North Bailey House, New Inn Hall Street

In May a watching brief was undertaken by Pre-Construct Archaeology during the breaking out of concrete for a new sump in the basement of North Bailey House on New Inn Hall Street. A small number of medieval pits were investigated which produced an impressive collection of pottery, some worked horn core and some slag. The report is forthcoming.

Right: Medieval hand-made and wheel thrown pottery from the North Bailey House site. (Images courtesy of Pre-Construct Archaeology).



New College Gradel Quad, Mansfield Road

In May a watching brief was undertaken by Oxford Archaeology during the excavation of a shallow utility trench along the line of the truncated Civil War rampart on Mansfield Road, no significant archaeology was observed.

Osney Power Station

In May a watching brief was undertaken by Oxford Archaeology during consolidation works to the river wall adjacent to the Osney Power Station site which is located within the precinct of Osney Abbey. No significant archaeological remains were noted.

No 11 Beaumont Buildings

In May a watching brief was undertaken at No 11 Beaumont Buildings by Keevill Heritage Ltd during the excavation of new wall foundations. The site is located within the precinct of the former Royal Beaumont Palace and later Carmelite Friary. Two residual pieces of medieval pottery were recovered and late post-medieval stone foundations were noted.

Corpus Christi College, New Archive Building

Between May and June a watching brief was undertaken by Oxford Archaeology during demolition and enabling works for the new Corpus Christ Archive building which is located on the historic route of Shidyerd Street. At the time of writing no significant remains had been observed beyond details of the foundations of early-modern fire places and the adjacent Christ Church precinct wall. Further works are planned.

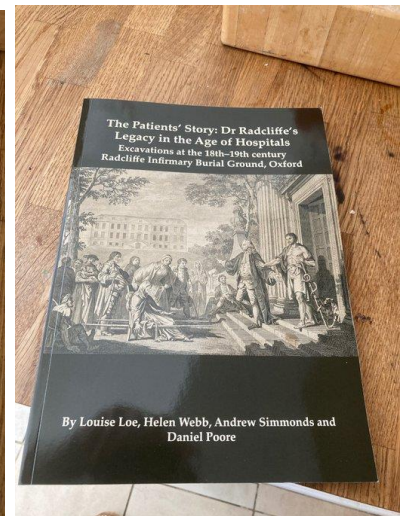
Other News

The Radcliffe Infirmary Burial Ground

An important monograph on the results of excavations of the Radcliffe Infirmary Burial Ground has been published by [Oxford Archaeology](#). It reports on the largest assemblage of individual burials yet recovered from an 18th-19th century hospital site in Britain. The book provides insights in to the health of the local labouring and middle classes (representing individuals not reclaimed for parish burial). This was an industrialising population with high rates of trauma and disease.

I am pleased to report that the Chancellor of the Oxford Diocese has graciously agreed a ten-year extension to the faculty requiring reburial of the remains so that this nationally significant assemblage can be studied further under the curation of Durham University.

Right: The new Oxford Archaeology monograph of the Radcliffe Infirmary Burial Ground.



WWII Bunker in North Oxford

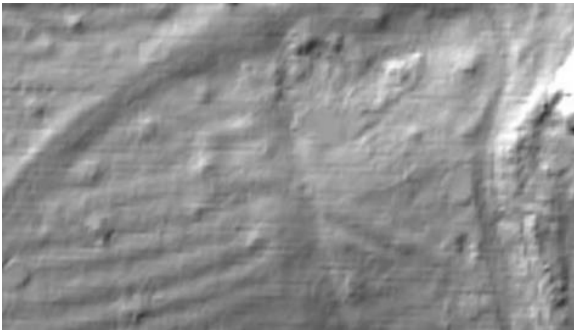
Works by Wolfson College at 14 Chadlington Road have revealed what appears to be a remarkably high quality WWII air raid bunker. A further survey is planned so that the structure can be added to the Historic Environment Record.

Right: the exposed top of the bunker at Chadlington Road. (Image courtesy of Wolfson College)



Headington Hill Park Civil War Redoubt

An examination of Lidar coverage of Oxford by Civil War specialist Sam Wilson has identified the likely position of a Parliamentary redoubt shown on De Gomme's 1644 map of Oxford in Headington Hill Park. This is the first confident location of the Parliamentary siege line. I am pleased to have been invited to talk to the Friends of Headington Hill Park group about the find at their AGM and also to visit the site with members of the group.



Above left: The Lidar image showing the redoubt. Above centre: Jan Wyck's painting of the siege line. Above right: On site with members of the Friends of Headington Hill Park

The Archaeology of the medieval University

A successful day school was held at Rewley House in May discussing the archaeology of the medieval University. [Link for details](#)

Jericho Residents Association AGM Talk

I was pleased to be invited to the Jericho Residents Association AGM in June to talk about 'Digging up Oxford: from Saxon kings to lost colleges'.

David Radford, Oxford City Council Archaeologist